

02.03 STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS

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02.03-1

Settlement and the Nillumbik Green Wedge

Maintaining the existing settlement pattern of distinct urban areas and clearly defined rural townships surrounded by non-urban areas is critical to the ongoing sustainability of Nillumbik as a 'green wedge' municipality. Nillumbik, located on the fringe of metropolitan Melbourne, does not form part of a designated growth corridor. Outward metropolitan development, therefore, will not be a significant feature of the municipality.

Nillumbik's key planning issue will be providing a diverse range of dwellings within the Urban Growth Boundary while ensuring that it is in keeping with neighbourhood character. Areas identified as having further growth potential for residential subdivision in existing residential zones include:

- Eltham and Diamond Creek Major Activity Centres.
- Apollo Parkways.
- Land in the Diamond Creek North Area A Development Plan and Diamond Creek Area B Development Plan to the north and north-east of the Diamond Creek Major Activity Centre.
- The Plenty Low Density Residential area.

The Nillumbik Green Wedge is of significant value to the Shire and wider region, particularly for its biodiversity, natural beauty, visitor experiences, agriculture and other non-urban values. It contains sites of environmental and landscape significance and a mix of conservation, agricultural and residential uses. Issues of land use conflict, resource use and environmental management arising from the diversity of uses must be managed through sustainable land use and natural resource management.

Strategic directions:

- Maintain non-urban breaks between existing urban areas and non-urban areas, and between rural townships.
- Focus development in the established township and urban areas to take advantage of existing infrastructure and maintain the viability of these areas.
- Protect the Green Wedge from incompatible use and development.
- Limit subdivision in rural areas to minimise fragmentation of rural land and maintain vistas.

Activity centres

The **Eltham Major Activity Centre** is one of the primary community and commercial focal points within Nillumbik, providing a diverse range of commercial activities, community services, recreational facilities and housing opportunities, as well as containing a substantial public transport hub.

The **Diamond Creek Major Activity Centre** is a shopping, service and community centre for Diamond Creek and adjoining areas. It contains a range of retail, commercial, community and leisure activities and facilities that are serviced by the Hurstbridge railway, limited bus services and a road network dominated by Main Hurstbridge Road, which forms the 'spine' of the centre.

It is envisioned that the Eltham and Diamond Creek Major Activity Centres will continue to be the focus of community life, providing a wide range of shopping and professional services and places to meet and recreate. They will also have an increased role in providing for a diversity of housing and in particular, medium density housing.

Neighbourhood Activity Centres, including Hurstbridge and Research, offer a blend of uses and the availability of public transport generally supports higher levels of business and other activities, resulting in lower car usage and enabling multipurpose trips. Rural townships of Panton Hill and St. Andrews have a strong sense of identity and provide a focus for community life and interaction.

Strategic directions:

- Promote Eltham and Diamond Creek Major Activity Centres as the main commercial and community activity areas of the Shire, supported by Neighbourhood Activity Centres, small local convenience centres, rural townships, and rural stores.
- Facilitate an expansion in the range of commercial and community services available in the major activity centres, including those that cater for a local/regional clientele.
- Facilitate increased diversity and amount of housing in the major activity centres that are sustainable and scaled to respect the surrounding topography.

Eltham Gateway

The Eltham Gateway is a precinct with cultural and landscape significance to the local community and forms the entrance to the Eltham Major Activity Centre.

The Gateway provides services for the local community with a mix of residential, small-scale office and community uses, transitioning to more predominantly residential uses south of Mount Pleasant Road.

The Gateway contains a range of historic buildings that influence the architecture of the area and an avenue of trees that commemorates the World War. Its topography allows significant vegetated views from Main Road towards the Diamond Valley. Its high levels of indigenous vegetation, which often substantially screen built form from public view, and its modest scale of development, particularly along Main Road, provides a transition from the urbanity of the suburbs to the semi-rural character of Eltham.

Strategic directions:

- Protect and enhance the cultural and landscape significance of the Eltham Gateway.

02.03-2 Environmental landscapes and values

Protection of biodiversity

The Shire contains extensive habitat links comprising of native vegetation and water courses. Given the large number of threatened native species and threatening processes occurring in the Shire, including climate change, [Climate Action Plan, pg9] planning needs to protect and conserve biodiversity, provide habitats for native flora and fauna, and control pest plants and animals. Importantly, significant remnant vegetation, conservation areas and environmentally significant areas are located on both public and private land. These areas are identified on the Faunal habitat and remnant vegetation plan in Clause 02.04.

Roadsides are an integral part of maintaining biodiversity in Nillumbik. Roadside vegetation provides wildlife with movement corridors between larger areas of habitat and can be the remaining refuge for many native floral and faunal species. In many parts of the Shire, land clearing and urban expansion have left roadsides as the only areas of relatively intact habitat where ground, middle and upper storey vegetation still remain.

Strategic directions:

- Protect and enhance areas of environmental significance and conservation.
- Protect and enhance significant remnant vegetation.
- Facilitate the establishment of large areas of native vegetation that are interconnected by a network of habitat corridors.
- Protect the habitat areas of native vegetation and fauna.
- Protect and enhance the environmental, landscape and habitat values of roadside vegetation in the Shire.

Waterways and water bodies

Nillumbik is situated in the Yarra Catchment and includes the sub-catchments of Arthurs Creek, Diamond Creek, Watsons Creek and the Plenty River. Nillumbik's environmental and social values are ascribed to areas of environmental and landscape quality in the vicinity of its waterways. The condition of rivers and tributaries in the Shire ranges from excellent in the forested northern part of the Shire to poor in the urban areas.

Use and development have the potential to affect stormwater quality and adversely affect downstream areas. Decline in water quality is associated with unsustainable land management practices, vegetation clearance, unrestricted stock access to streambanks and low flow rates associated with the proliferation of private dams and drought. Increased compacted, paved or covered surfaces result in higher volumes of stormwater run-off that carry pollutants into the waterways.

Strategic directions:

- Protect wetlands, floodplains and waterways from land use and development that will cause disturbance and pollution.
- Encourage land uses that improve water quality and maintain environmental flows.
- Facilitate ongoing and sustainable management of stormwater in development.
- Ensure land use and development avoids adverse impacts on the wider water catchment.

Landscapes

A significant element of the unique character of Nillumbik is its highly attractive landscapes and picturesque views from and of the many valleys and elevated ridge lines. These landscape vistas are highly valued by the community and visitors.

Nillumbik's undulating landscape consists of lowland hills and alluvial plains in the southern portion of the Shire, and steeper upland hills in the north.

Extensive areas of native vegetation, water courses and undulating terrain are the main features that contribute to the landscape identity of the Shire. The rural areas provide vistas of agricultural land, treed bushland, hills and watercourses with minimal urban intrusion. Indigenous vegetation is predominant in landscapes throughout the Shire.

Poorly designed and sited structures of any kind compromise the integrity of these features. Threats include locating buildings on hill-tops and along ridge-lines to take advantage of distant views, the presence of multiple buildings and the use of reflective materials.

In order to maintain the high landscape values in the Shire, threatening processes associated with the loss and degradation of the natural and built environment need to be addressed.

Strategic directions:

- Minimise adverse impacts of land use changes and development on the landscape.
- Protect and enhance rural landscape character through vegetation retention and respectful siting and design of development in rural areas.

02.03-3 Environmental risks and amenity

Climate change

Climate change is one of the biggest threats to Nillumbik's future. It is projected that warmer and drier conditions will have negative consequences for health, infrastructure, agriculture, water and biodiversity. [Climate Action Plan, pg3] Its negative impacts include:

- Harsher fire weather and longer fire seasons.
- Water shortages and droughts.
- Consequences on the health of the natural environment.
- Impacts on agriculture and land productivity.
- More frequent and extreme heat waves, storms and flooding events.
- Increase to the urban heat island effect. [Climate Action Plan, pg14]

Council has a target of net zero emissions across Nillumbik by 2035.

Strategic directions:

- Encourage use and development that mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and seek to minimise its negative impacts.
- Protect and enhance the tree canopy across Nillumbik. [Council plan pg5]

Flooding, soil degradation and bushfire

In rural areas, the need to protect habitat links and minimise fire and flood risk and erosion are important considerations in siting buildings and works. These and off-site considerations (such as ensuring that effluent does not enter watercourses) at the planning stage benefit future occupants of land and the environmental integrity of the area.

Most areas liable to flooding are located along the Diamond Creek from Hurstbridge to Eltham, along the Yarra River from Kangaroo Ground to Eltham and the Plenty River at Plenty.

The Shire is not subject to significant landslide activity except where new development alters the conditions of sites on steeper slopes. Most of the soils in the Shire are susceptible to erosion on slopes and in drainage lines. Soils in the vicinity of Kangaroo Ground have a high shrink-swell potential that can result in foundation movement and hence damage to structures and disruption to services.

Low lying areas of the Shire are prone to dryland salinity particularly in areas that have been extensively cleared. The retention of vegetation and revegetation will be critical in avoiding salinity related problems.

Bushfire risk is a significant issue in the Shire as a result of its vegetation, topography and climate. North Warrandyte, the Plenty Gorge, Christmas Hills and St Andrews have a particularly high risk due to its limited access and egress, as well as its large population concentration. [2020-2023 Municipal emergency management plan] Climate change will lead to longer fire seasons. [Climate Action Plan, pg9] Many bushfire prone areas have high environmental significance. Particular attention to fire issues is needed in the design of subdivisions, the siting and design of buildings, and use and management of land in bushfire prone areas.

Strategic directions:

- Discourage development, including vegetation removal, that degrades stormwater quality and increases potential risk of soil erosion, expansion and landslip or other hazards.
- Avoid siting development that are liable to flooding.
- Avoid intensifying bushfire risk to people and property through poorly located, designed or managed use or development.

Potentially contaminated land

Some areas in Nillumbik contain potentially contaminated soil. For example, the Plenty/Yarrambat corridor area, which has ongoing pressure for low-density residential development, was previously used for gold mining activity. As such, its soil may contain concentrations of arsenic, cyanide and mercury.

Strategic directions:

- Avoid sensitive use and development on land that contains or may contain unacceptable levels of soil contamination, unless testing and necessary remedial treatment have been undertaken.

02.03-4 Natural resource management

Agriculture

While much of the geographic area of Nillumbik is rural, there are only a handful of large scale agricultural enterprises. The majority of the rural areas have soils with low fertility that are subject to erosion, making much of the Shire unsuitable for traditional agricultural use.

Broad-scale agricultural enterprises are mostly concentrated to the north-west of the Shire where enterprises run on larger land holdings. Very high quality agricultural land exists at Kangaroo Ground and Arthurs Creek. Small agricultural enterprises are prevalent in many rural areas of the Shire.

The continual pressures of tourism and urbanisation can adversely impact on the rural environment. Conflicts may occur between agricultural pursuits, rural living and other uses. These pressures can lead to changes in the rural landscape character and increased land values, which impacts the ability for farmers to achieve economies of scale.

It may be possible to expand the production of 'high value' horticulture and intensive livestock commodities already well suited to the area. Increasing the productiveness of agricultural industries is important for the sustainability of the green wedge areas, providing the environmental significance is not compromised.

Agricultural use and development must be planned to maintain the quality and quantity of natural resources and support the sustainable management of natural systems. This may include using new production methods such as permaculture and aquaponics, adopting new technologies, alternative energy sources and crop types, reducing waste or other sustainable and regenerative agricultural techniques. [Nillumbik Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030]

Strategic directions:

- Protect and enhance agricultural land for both its productive potential and environmental value.
- Retain existing agricultural land for soil based agricultural production.
- Promote land use in rural areas in accordance with the capability and productive potential of the land.
- Promote sustainable and regenerative agriculture and land management practices that minimise adverse impacts on the primary production and environmental values of surrounding land and the catchment.

02.03-5 Built environment**Urban and building design**

The revitalisation and attractiveness of activity centres and townships are important to enhancing the viability of local commercial areas and providing inviting spaces for social interaction. The integrity of streetscapes and natural landscapes can be threatened by development that does not respond to the local characteristics of the area or incorporate design outcomes that enhance the functionality and visual amenity of the area. Additionally, there are opportunities to design places within Nillumbik (including through public art) so that its creative culture continues to be celebrated. [\[derived from arts and culture plan 2018-2022\]](#)

The Shire endeavours to ensure that all people, including those with a disability or impairment, have safe and efficient access to places and buildings.

The industrial precincts at Eltham, Research and Diamond Creek are located close to residential areas and in areas with high landscape values and vistas. It is important that development on industrial land contributes to the amenity of the area.

Strategic directions:

- Protect and enhance urban streetscapes, townships and landscapes.
- Promote urban design outcomes that retain the historical and individual characteristics of each area while enhancing its attractiveness, distinctiveness, safety and accessibility.
- Design places and development to maximise access for all users.
- Encourage development in industrial precincts to positively contribute to the visual amenity of the area, while ensuring functional layouts and use of land.

Signs

Advertising signs should aim to complement the high visual quality of the urban streetscapes and rural landscapes. The proliferation of signs and poorly designed and located signs can significantly detract from the visual amenity and character of an area as well as impact on road safety. Sign clutter can also reduce the effectiveness and visibility of individual signs.

Strategic directions:

- Encourage signs that provide effective identification of businesses and other land uses without adversely impacting on the amenity of the area.
- Site and design signs to complement and enhance, rather than dominate, the streetscape and landscape.
- Ensure road safety is not adversely affected by signs.

Neighbourhood character

The urban and township areas are characterised by a tree canopy of predominantly indigenous species resulting in vistas that are not dominated by buildings. Residential areas are generally of a lower density than in metropolitan Melbourne, providing for open spaces and retention of a bushland setting. Streetscapes generally consist of single dwellings on conventional lots with ample opportunities for canopy trees.

While most existing dwellings are of weatherboard or brick construction, there is also a strong tradition of adobe and mud-brick construction and continued interest in the use of alternative building materials and techniques such as rammed-earth and straw-bale construction.

The natural and built character of residential areas contributes to a high level of amenity and a strong sense of place for the community.

Strategic directions:

- Maintain and enhance the character, including neighbourhood character, of urban and township areas.
- Encourage the use of alternative construction materials where it adds character to the municipality and reflects surrounding development.

Energy and resource efficiency

Increasing levels of greenhouse gas emissions resulting from the increased energy consumption of non-renewable resources is an environmental threat that needs to be addressed, as a means to respond to climate change impacts, [Climate Action Plan, pg3] irrespective of whether the development is situated in a rural or urban location.

Strategic directions:

- Promote energy efficiency in land use and development, including through:
 - The layout of subdivisions.
 - The location, siting and design of buildings and places.
 - The use of renewable energy technologies. [Climate Action Plan]

Heritage

The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people are the Traditional Owners of the land Nillumbik is located on. A large number of existing Aboriginal archaeological sites that contribute to the cultural heritage of the region have been identified.

Nillumbik also has many sites that have non-indigenous cultural significance, including gold mining related historic sites, as well as original farm houses, bridges and other features that existed since early agricultural settlement. The Shire is also known for its 'environmental buildings' such as the Montsalvat Artists' Colony in Eltham and mud-brick dwellings, which reflect the Shire's artistic heritage.

Strategic directions:

- Protect and enhance places of heritage significance, including sites of Aboriginal heritage significance.
- Ensure new use and development do not impede on or detract from sites and features of heritage and archaeological significance.

02.03-6 Housing

Nillumbik will experience a reduction in household size due to an ageing population. Additionally, Nillumbik will need to accommodate an increasing number of households. Currently, there is a lack of housing diversity and the predominant form of housing may not be suitable for all residents, as household sizes decrease and the age of residents increase.

The trend of decreasing average household size and aging population provides the impetus to provide for some medium density housing and other housing models (such as social housing) as alternative housing choices. [Ageing well in Nillumbik Action Plan pg14] Consolidation of development will provide for more efficient use of infrastructure, and will assist in protecting the surrounding natural environment, significant landscapes and unique settlement pattern.

The locations most suited to medium density development are those that are close to infrastructure, including public transport scheduled stops, commercial areas, public open space and other community facilities. The Eltham and Diamond Creek Major Activity Centres and the Hurstbridge Shopping Centre provide such facilities.

Strategic directions:

- Facilitate the provision and diversification of housing to meet the projected increase in the number of smaller households and the aging population, while respecting the neighbourhood character, protecting natural and heritage values and minimising environmental risk.
- Facilitate medium density housing development that is compatible with the character of the area in identified locations that are close to infrastructure.
- Facilitate the provision of affordable housing close to infrastructure and services. [added from 16.01-2S in response to community feedback]

Rural residential development

Residential settlement in rural areas is usually based on an appreciation of the bush and often a willingness to revegetate previously cleared areas. With an undulating topography, there is also the attraction of distant views. Inappropriate historical subdivisions have created a significant number of small lots in the Green Wedge, making it susceptible to demand for rural residential development. However, rural residential development is often unsuitable in these areas as they have high bushfire risk and significant environmental values, and lack infrastructure and facilities. There is also ongoing land use conflict between agricultural and rural residential land uses and a risk that further rural residential development will fragment rural land into unviable land parcels.

Yarrambat and the northern area of Plenty are suitable in supporting a rural residential community, while North Warrandyte forms a well treed low-density residential area on the northern side of the Yarra River.

Strategic directions:

- Discourage rural residential development in the Green Wedge, unless supported by a council strategy or framework plan.

02.03-7 Economic development

Business and employment

Economic development opportunities in Nillumbik are likely to be generated by small business enterprises, especially home-based businesses. Economic development should focus on strengthening existing enterprises and facilitating new business initiatives that respect the Shire's environmental, social and economic development priorities.

The main employment locations are the Eltham and Diamond Creek Major Activity Centres, Hurstbridge Neighbourhood Activity Centre and the industrial land at Research, which provide local employment opportunities. The Major Activity Centres, Hurstbridge Neighbourhood Activity Centre and rural townships offer opportunities for increased tourism activities, including cultural and eco-tourism operations. [added from Green Wedge Management Plan 2019 and Arts & Cultural Plan 2018-2022]

For the Green Wedge, opportunities exist in agribusiness, tourism, recreation and sustainability including renewable energy. The range of tourism and commercial activities are restricted to activity centres or purposes that can be used in conjunction with agriculture, rural industry or winery. [derived from Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030]

Nillumbik has deep connections to the arts. It is home to several artist communes, including Montsalvat and Dunmoochin, and has been the centre for various art and architectural movements. Nillumbik continues to support artists across the wider creative sector. [derived from arts and culture plan 2018-2022]

Strategic directions:

- Promote economic development opportunities that build on and respect the cultural and physical characteristics and rural focus of the Shire.

- Support the economic and employment viability of Activity Centres, Town Centres and the industrial land at Research.
- Encourage tourism that showcases Nillumbik's cultural and nature-based assets and generates local employment opportunities. [added from Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030]
- Encourage use and development in agribusiness that promote innovation in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. [derived from Economic Development Strategy 2020-2030]
- Encourage use and development that grows creative and cultural industries. [derived from arts and culture plan 2018-2022]

Industry

The existing industrial precincts in Eltham, Research and Diamond Creek are close to full capacity. To facilitate new industrial uses, these precincts should be retained for industrial uses and protected from the encroachment of other uses. This is unless Council has identified the land to be rezoned or redeveloped with other uses, such as the Bridge Street Business Area in the Eltham Major Activity Centre.

Strategic directions:

- Protect industrial precincts from non-industrial use and development unless a council strategy supports rezoning or redeveloping the land with other uses.

02.03-8 Transport

Nillumbik is a commuter area with the majority of the workforce travelling to other areas for employment. Consequently, issues arise such as increased greenhouse gas emissions and traffic congestion and the need for residents to access employment and public transport services. Improving safe and easy access to sustainable transport options, such as public transport and walking and cycling, can reduce car dependency and travel related emissions. [added from Climate Change Action plan pg18] Currently, public transport consists of the Hurstbridge railway line and connecting local bus routes concentrated in the urban south-west area of the Shire. The further development of pedestrian and cycle trails to link the key activity centres is a priority to encourage safe and convenient access for residents.

Many unsealed local roads service traditional residential, agricultural or bush uses and would be unsuitable for new uses requiring significant increases in traffic movement. The Western Ring Road and Whittlesea's urban growth corridor will continue to increase demand on Nillumbik's road network and other infrastructure.

Strategic directions:

- Facilitate increased public transport usage and opportunities for walking and cycling to reduce car-dependency. [added from Climate Change Action plan pg18]
- Incorporate greater links between land use planning and transport, especially in relation to activity centres and the public transport network.
- Facilitate development that improves connectivity and accessibility, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists, within and between activity centres, public transport stations and the wider region. [added from objectives in Eltham MAC structure plan pg27]
- Facilitate safe and efficient roads and road links within the municipality and to the wider region that cater for all users.

02.03-9 Infrastructure**Open space and recreational facilities**

Nillumbik contains extensive areas of open space for the purposes of conservation. These areas are mainly connected to the major river and creek systems. The Open space and recreation facilities plan to Clause 02.04 identifies the open space and trail network and recreational facilities across Nillumbik.

In urban areas, the open space network should provide a broad range of recreational facilities and open space areas near residential areas.

In rural areas there are a number of horse riding, walking and mountain-bike trails. The emphasis is towards developing key regional and district recreational areas, enhancing and developing open space within townships and settlements, protecting native flora and fauna as well as developing a comprehensive regional based trail network.

Community facilities should be accessible to all groups, including children, youth, elderly persons and those with a disability. The dispersed population in the rural areas creates major challenges for the equitable distribution of community facilities, especially in dispersed areas where the population is heavily reliant on private transportation.

Strategic directions:

- Facilitate the provision and linking of trails, open space and local recreational facilities to form a network across the Shire, while minimising negative impacts on the natural environment.
- Encourage trails, open space and recreational facilities to be safe, equitable and accessible to all community members.
- Facilitate the provision of active and passive recreational facilities as an integral part of each township.

Development infrastructure

The dispersed nature of low-density residential areas creates difficulties in providing a full range of infrastructure services, and rural areas invariably have only limited physical infrastructure. A large part of the rural areas in the Shire rely on all-purpose effluent disposal systems as sewer is unavailable. A number of existing rural lots are unsuitable for residential development as effluent generated on site cannot be contained on-site.

The use of development contributions in the funding of infrastructure is important for designated residential areas where the existing infrastructure cannot cater for the expected density increase. This includes, the low-density housing in the Plenty/Yarrambat Corridor, new residential developments in Plenty and Diamond Creek, and in-fill development in urban areas. In particular, existing drainage arrangements in the Yarrambat area are insufficient for the further development of this area.

Strategic directions:

- Minimise infrastructure servicing demand in rural areas.
- Facilitate the consolidation of rural lots to create larger lots capable of containing effluent on site.
- Facilitate efficient provision of infrastructure to areas designated for residential and low-density residential development.