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Macedon Ranges Open Space Strategy

Volume 1

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For

Macedon Ranges Shire Council

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SPORT AND
RECREATION
VICTORIA

Macedon Ranges Open Space Strategy

Volume 1 Main report

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Photographs: Robin Crocker (Cover: Five Mile Creek, Woodend)

Note: *This volume includes the context for the plan and the vision, goals and strategies developed. Supporting material is included in volume 2.*

Planvol1

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Summary

This strategy was commissioned by the Macedon Ranges Shire Council to develop a shared vision, principles, goals and strategies for the sound future management of open space in the Shire. The study covers areas ranging from regional, town and local parks to trails, botanic gardens and undeveloped open space.

The strategy was prepared by consultants working with staff from the Shire and Sport and Recreation Victoria, and the local community. The planning process included field assessment of most open space areas and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. Issues and trends were reviewed, management options identified, goals, strategies and priorities developed and management and monitoring requirements determined.

Issues identified included vegetation management, improvements to waterways, access and links, the existence of surplus land, and management resources.

The **key goals** identified for the study area are to:

- 1. Use this plan as the basis for management and resource allocation*
- 2. Focus on key open space areas*
- 3. Enhance open space provision in towns*
- 4. Protect natural values, improve waterways and undertake revegetation*
- 5. Ensure quality open space and access in new subdivisions*
- 6. Promote community involvement and use of open space*

Major strategies include the following.

- Develop parks on waterways in main towns with improved facilities, settings and access.*
- Develop footpaths and on- and off-road trails in towns linked to open space and community facilities.*
- With community agreement, dispose of surplus open space and use the proceeds to acquire land or improve existing open space.*
- Survey areas with high conservation values and protect from adverse impacts.*
- Undertake systematic weed control and replacement with locally indigenous species, particularly along waterways.*
- Upgrade skills of people involved in open space development and management.*

The planning process led to the development of a positive **vision** for open space in the Shire:

Residents and visitors using open space in the Macedon Ranges Shire in 2010 will find diverse opportunities for informal recreation and personal fulfilment.

Each main town has a leafy, safe park with its own character and identity and quality facilities providing delightful settings for socialising, picnicking and relaxing. Compatible activities and events are conducted regularly and attract many locals. The parks also provide accessible places for teenagers to meet and burn up energy, and a range of play settings for younger children.

The main town parks feature attractive waterways planted with mostly indigenous species; they are now known as Jacksons Creek Parklands (Gisborne), Five Mile Creek Parklands (Woodend), Campaspe River Parklands (Kyneton) and Romsey Parklands (Romsey).

The town parks are linked by accessible paths to sporting reserves, town centres, cafes, information centres and other community facilities, encouraging people to

park their cars and explore on foot. An extensive tree-planting program has provided attractive visual links between the parks and town centres.

Well marked shared trails wind along waterways and provide opportunities for a range of linked short and long walks or rides.

The network of open space in the Shire is a source of pride to local people and increasingly popular as a destination for visitors to the area. Combined with the area's heritage character and scenic landscapes, open space makes a major contribution to the Shire's attractive setting and enjoyable lifestyle.



1 Introduction and purpose of strategy

Located less than one hours drive north west of Melbourne, the Macedon Ranges Shire provides a pleasant living environment for its 33,000 residents and an attractive setting for outdoor recreation and relaxation (figure 1).

The Shire covers 1,747 square kilometres and has a budget of about \$22million. It includes four towns with populations of 2-4000 people: Gisborne/New Gisborne, Kyneton, Woodend and Romsey. The population is growing and is expected to exceed 46,000 by 2022. An estimated 450,000 day visits were made to the Shire in 1997-98.

Open space makes an important contribution to the outdoor lifestyle of residents, attracts visitors, protects important natural values and is a major component of the attractive rural landscapes and topography in the Shire. Open space ranges from major parks such as Macedon Regional Park and Hanging Rock Reserve to smaller town and local parks, botanic gardens, nature reserves, streamsides, trails and sporting grounds.

1.1 The need for a strategy

The Shire Council recognises the value of strategic planning to analyse existing and future demand for services and help determine future provision and priorities.

A range of strategic plans have been produced since the Council was formed in 1995; it is now recognised that an open space strategy is needed to identify future directions and help Council assess competing demands for its scarce resources. Organised groups can mount strong cases for Council to commit funds to specific projects and it is difficult to respond to these without a framework to help decision-making.

Preparation of this plan was identified as a priority in Council's 1998-2000 corporate plan.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The brief for this plan sets out the purpose and process to be followed in developing the strategy (see copy in volume 2).

In summary, the purpose of the project is to:

- review existing reports and information on open space provision and trends
- analyse and review existing Shire open space and expand Council's inventory
- identify the complementary role of open space on Crown land in the Shire, eg regional parks and State forests
- involve the community and identify needs and expectations
- determine principles for development and management of open space
- develop a 10-year plan with strategies and priorities for resource allocation, including trails and open space in major towns, acquisition and disposal to provide for equitable distribution, and procedures for setting aside open space in new developments

In achieving the above purpose it is not possible within the confines of this study to examine in detail all parcels of open space and the issues surrounding those nor will the provision of sporting facilities be considered as these were examined in the Leisure Strategy Plan. In essence the study aims to provide the strategic direction and framework for consideration of specific open space and issues by Council at a later date.

To remain relevant, the plan should be reviewed formally every two to three years and any appropriate changes approved by Council.

1.3 The planning process

Council commissioned consultants to work closely with a project steering committee to develop the plan (appendix 1). Key steps in the process were:

Stage 1: Review of existing information

- Collect, review and summarise existing reports and recreation research.
- Seek comment from key stakeholders and initiate questionnaire survey to assess community needs.
- Plan production of newsletters and publicity on project.

Stage 2: Resources, needs and issues analysis

- Examine existing and expected needs for open space.
- Inspect and assess existing open space areas and document.
- Seek community input on open space provision.
- Document key issues and prepare issues paper.
- Publicise progress on project in local community.

Stage 3: Options, strategies and priorities

- Conduct forums with Councillors and local community.
- Identify requirements to achieve a balanced open space system.
- Identify opportunities for waterway enhancement, trails and linkages.
- Review developer contributions and other funding options and develop criteria for additional open space.

Stage 4: Preparation of draft strategy

- Synthesise information into initial draft strategy, including mapping.
- Review with steering committee and Councillors and revise.
- Arrange for community input on draft plan.

Stage 5: Preparation of final strategy

- Review feedback on draft plan and make revisions.
- Prepare final plan and gain Council approval.

1.4 Policy background

Many policies and other documents produced at the State, regional and local level influence planning and management of open space in the Shire. These include:

Macedon Ranges Shire Environment Strategy, Draft 1999

Includes strategic directions to:

- Prepare and implement management plans for reserves and roadsides.
- Promote wildlife corridors and sound waterways management.
- Support surveys of flora and fauna and control of pest plants and animals.
- Facilitate safe walking and cycling in urban areas.
- Protect remnant native vegetation, trees and watercourses.
- Introduce design guidelines to achieve complementary townscapes.

Macedon Ranges Shire Planning Scheme and Municipal Strategic Statement, Draft 1999

Includes:

- Objectives to provide safe, accessible and easily maintained open space, integrated networks of paths and walkways along watercourses, concentrating future development in major centres, designing to respond to environmental constraints and character.
- Objectives to protect landscape values and natural features, and strategies to protect Black Gum areas and prepare an inventory of significant vegetation.
- Overlays to cover development areas, Black Gum areas and ridges and escarpments.
- Township structure plans show growth boundaries and strategic directions.
- Objectives – ‘To protect and maintain useable and significant open space ...’ and ‘To ensure the provision of new open space through subdivisions’.

Leisure Strategy Plan for Macedon Ranges Shire Council, Garry Henshall and Associates, 1996 (reviewed 1998)

Includes 59 recommendations for implementation over 5 years including some related to open space:

- Develop an open space strategy plan.
- Develop concept master plans for all open space areas.
- Continue development of Five Mile Creek Track at Woodend.
- Extend walking/cycle pathways in Gisborne through Jacksons Creek reserve.
- Extend walking track in Malmesbury.
- Audit playgrounds and upgrade equipment.
- Develop Quahlee Reserve through a master plan process.

Other important strategies and studies included:

- *Corporate Plan 1998-99 to 1999-2000, Macedon Ranges Shire Council*
- *Macedon Ranges & Spa Country - Regional Tourism Development Plan, 1997, KPMG*
- *Street Tree Study (Draft), 1998, Chris Dance Land Design*
- *Roadside Management Plan for the Shires of Newham, Woodend, Kyneton and Romsey, 1994*
- *Woodend's Framework for the Future, Draft 1999*
- *Jacksons Creek Valley Landscape Study Gisborne, 1987, Tract Consultants*
- *Campaspe River Kyneton, Landscape Concept, 1994, Chris Dance Land Design*
- *Active For Life: Promoting Physical Activity in Victoria, Draft, 1999, Sport and Recreation et al*
- *Leisure Participation Victoria in 1996, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1997, Canberra*

A summary of relevant parts of these documents is provided in volume 2.

A list of references reviewed for the plan is included in section 8.



2 Use and benefits of open space

Open space in the Shire caters for diverse uses and provides a range of important social, health and environmental benefits.

2.1 Importance of open space in the Shire

Picture this Shire with no open space - no parks, reserves, playgrounds, sporting fields, avenues of trees, trails or bushland areas. The importance of open space to the community starts to become apparent.

Open space makes a major contribution to the attractive landscapes of the Macedon Ranges Shire, provides pleasant settings for socialising, relaxing, play and other recreation activities, and helps ensure conservation of natural and cultural values.

Hanging Rock Reserve and other popular open space areas also make a substantial economic contribution, helping to attract visitors to the Shire.

2.2 Demographic trends

A demographic profile for the Shire, based on 1996 ABS data, was prepared recently (TBA Planners 1998). Relevant findings include:

- Parts of the Shire readily accessible to Melbourne have grown in recent years. The fastest growing areas in the 1991-96 period were Gisborne/New Gisborne (28%), and Romsey (15%). Kyneton declined by 5%.
- Four towns had populations of more than 2000. The largest towns in 1996 were Gisborne/New Gisborne (4047), Kyneton (3737), Woodend (2983), Romsey (2332), Macedon/Mt Macedon (1,921) and Riddells Creek (1,375).
- In 1996, 18,251 people lived in towns and 14,116 in rural areas.
- Increasing proportions of young people were present particularly in southern growth areas. There has also been noticeable growth in the 45-65 age group.

A detailed analysis of demographic information for the Shire has not been undertaken for this study as comprehensive research by Melbourne Parks & Waterways has demonstrated that the open space preferences of the adult population are relatively consistent. For example, parents of young children request playgrounds, but grandparents also rate playgrounds highly as places where they can take their grandchildren.

Separate ABS data show an aging of the Australian population, suggesting the need for more accessible, safe and secure recreation opportunities. The data show that the average family now has 1.8 children compared with 2.9 in 1971. By 2020, based on current projections, there will be more people over 60 in Australia than children (Collins 1999, The Age 1999a). In growth areas, however, eg Gisborne/New Gisborne, there will continue to be a high proportion of young families with needs for playgrounds and informal open space for children's play.

The main implication for open space in the Shire in the next 10 years is likely to be continuing growth in the towns near Melbourne and increased demand for informal open space in these areas. There is also likely to be increasing demand for open space accessible to people with disabilities such as limited mobility.

2.3 Use and benefits of open space

Use

Considerable research has been undertaken in Victoria over the last 5-10 years to assess community use and satisfaction with open space (see volume 2). Much of this work has relevance and can be applied to this municipality. The findings show clearly that passive

recreation is the dominant use and should be given a high priority when setting priorities for resource allocation. Examples of relevant findings are:

- A survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1997) of leisure participation in Victoria found that the most popular physical activities were walking for exercise (43% of the population), swimming (14%), golf (9%), fishing (9%) and cycling (9%). The most popular team sports were undertaken by about 4% of the population (ABS 1997).
- Surveys for Melbourne Parks and Waterways in 1994-95 showed that the most popular activities in parks were (in order) walking, picnicking, socialising, sightseeing and supervising children's play (volume 2).
- A survey in the City of Whittlesea (Context 1997) found that walking, picnicking, socialising, relaxing and supervising children's play were the most popular activities.
- In the City of Hume (Jeavons 1999), the most popular activities were walking, supervising children's play, walking the dog and socialising.

Comparable patterns of use are highly likely in Macedon Ranges Shire.

Benefits

The benefits of open space are considerable and include:

- Providing settings for socialising with family, friends and groups, and community programs and events.
- Improved health and well being. The recently developed *Active for Life* program (SRV 1999) promotes the documented health benefits of moderate exercise such as brisk walking and recreational cycling. Structured sports are also encouraged, but it is recognised that most people prefer unstructured recreation, eg in a local park or bike path.
- Enhancing visual amenity throughout the Shire.
- Conserving natural and cultural values and providing wildlife corridors.
- Enhancing tourism and associated economic benefits.

2.4 Trends in open space needs and use

Open space development and management involves long-term resource commitments so it is essential that decisions are based on a sound understanding of current needs and future trends.

As indicated in section 2.2, informal use of open space for socialising, relaxing and passive recreation is now substantially more popular than use of open space for organised sports. Will this trend continue or will new priorities develop?

Trends identified in the last few years include:

- Increasing diversity of leisure activities, providing competition for people's time, eg shopping, the cinema, videos, eating out, Internet and computer use and travel. A recent ABS survey found that people are spending less time playing sport (young women averaged only seven minutes a day) and more time watching TV, videos etc and eating and drinking. (The Age 1998)
- An aging population (see above).
- Increased development and use of linear trails for walking, cycling, access to community facilities and passive recreation.
- More events and promotional activities aimed at attracting people to outdoor settings.
- Packaging of attractions - including parks and trails - and facilities in tourist promotions.
- Greater emphasis on equitable access and user safety.
- Increased interest in natural and cultural values and conserving flora and fauna.

- Greater community involvement in local government activities including monitoring of maintenance and development.

These trends are considered further in sections 5 and 6.



3 Current provision of open space

The municipality has a diverse range of open space sites ranging from large regional parks to small undeveloped lots in residential areas. Several agencies and organisations have responsibility for the planning and management of these areas.

3.1 Management and funding

This strategy focuses on open space under Council control, but recognises that other agencies have an important role to play in open space provision:

- Parks Victoria manages Macedon Regional Park and a range of conservation reserves.
- The Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE) manages several state forests and oversees the management of various Crown land reserves through delegated committees of management.
- Coliban Water and Western Water manage several reservoir reserves.
- VicRoads manages road reserves along several main roads.

The Shire manages many open space reserves, either directly or, for 17 mainly more formal reserves, through local committees of management. Community groups also play a valuable role in helping to look after open space, particularly Friends, conservation and Landcare groups.

Responsibilities within the Shire are detailed in section 6.1.

The Council's budget for open space in 1998-99 was \$758,818. This represents 4.3% of the total operating budget.

3.2 Types, distribution and quality of open space

Public open space across the Shire was assessed for this plan to identify current and potential value. A field assessment sheet was completed at each site (volume 2) and a photograph taken. Information recorded included the specific type of park or reserve, access, current and potential use, the adequacy of development and recreation facilities, vegetation, linkage values and other comments as appropriate.

The information compiled in the field assessment sheets was entered into a database linked to Council's Geographic Information System. The categories of open space used in the field assessments were later modified slightly as set out in section 6.

Open space in the municipality ranges from large regional parks to small suburban reserves. Distribution varies but most residents have reasonable access to a range of open space settings. Categories range from Crown land reserves in rural areas to parks, trails, sporting reserves and playgrounds in towns.

Rural open space

The municipality includes a large number of parks and reserves on Crown land managed by Parks Victoria, NRE, the Council, Western Water or Coliban Water. These include:

- State and regional parks (Lerderderg, Macedon and Hanging Rock)
- State forests (Wombat, Pyrete, Mt Charlie and Cobaw)
- Mt Macedon Memorial Cross Reserve
- Small bushland, streamside and flora reserves (Conglomerate Gully, Black Hill, Lauriston etc)
- Reservoir sites (Upper Coliban etc).

The Council also manages a range of bushland and conservation reserves such as Black Hill, Bald Hill, Stanley Park and Barringo.

These areas are distributed across much of the Shire and provide for nature conservation and a range of outdoor recreation activities including walking, sightseeing, picnicking, horse

riding (some areas) and nature appreciation. The reservoir sites include domestic water supply catchments.

Most residents have adequate access to a range of these rural sites (although some are not promoted) in addition to access to developed open space located in or close to existing towns.

Open space in towns

The assessment indicated that open space in towns varies considerably in quality. For example, many 'pocket parks' are simply slashed, have no or few facilities and have very little use. Conversely, some parks along waterways are attractive and attract a wide range of users. In summary:

- Many opportunities were identified to improve visual amenity and provide additional shade and shelter and facilities such as seats, picnic facilities and signs.
- Weeds are a major problem, particularly along waterways, and increased weed control and revegetation are needed.
- Playgrounds often lacked diversity and opportunities for informal and creative children's play.
- Shared pathways have become popular in recent years but many of the existing trails are poorly signposted and are not adequately linked to residential areas and community facilities.
- Overall, there was a high proportion of undeveloped land set aside for open space. Opportunities were identified to rationalise the distribution of open space including the sale of surplus land.



4 Issues and opportunities

Strategic planning usually includes a review of the current situation, involvement of interested parties ('stakeholders'), identification of important issues and opportunities, development of a vision and goals or objectives for the future, and identification of strategies that will help achieve the vision. This process was followed in developing this plan.

This section summarises stakeholder input into the plan and issues and opportunities identified.

4.1 *Input of community and other stakeholders*

Community and stakeholder consultation undertaken for this plan included the following.

- Distribution and analysis of a questionnaire provided to over 200 community groups and individuals. A total of 49 completed replies were received (see below).
- Publicity and advertisements about the plan inviting input.
- Two community forums inviting comments and suggestions.
- Two forums with Councillors.
- Discussions with a range of staff and interested groups and individuals.
- Liaison with other local and State government agencies.
- The draft plan was discussed at the second community forum and distributed for public review and comment before finalising.

Individuals were invited to contribute to ensure that people using open space informally were represented in the consultation process.

Examples of publicity material are included in volume 2.

Analysis of 49 completed questionnaires indicated that **the most important items to improve or provide were general maintenance, trees and shrubs, shade and shelter, seats, natural bushland, cleaner toilets, safety/security, signs and walking tracks.** These findings were generally similar to other open space surveys.

A second question asked respondents to vote on the priority for expenditure on different types of open space. **The highest priorities for expenditure were, in order: footpaths, walking/cycling paths, botanic gardens and playgrounds** (see volume 2 for further details).

A wide range of comments were received in the initial stages of the project. These were documented and considered by the consultants and steering committee in drafting the plan. Written comments were made on the draft plan by 30 individuals or organisations. These were reviewed in detail by the steering committee and a series of agreed changes incorporated in this final plan.

4.2 *Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints*

Consultation and site inspections identified the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and constraints of Council open space. There is some overlap between the categories.

Strengths:

- Diverse range of open space settings and locations
- Community interest in open space
- Hanging Rock Reserve - major attraction
- Larger parks provide for socialising, picnicking, relaxing and children's play
- Good walking and cycling opportunities and pleasant views in waterway parks.
- Local knowledge and commitment to some areas by Committees of Management and residents
- Good access to some sites

Weaknesses:

- No clear long-term vision for future
- Inadequate footpath system
- Variable provision and quality visitor facilities, signs and services
- Trails of inconsistent quality
- Maintenance and management uneven
- Community-based projects not always successfully implemented
- Equestrian use uncoordinated
- Some sites poorly located, undeveloped and little used

Opportunities:

- Linked and expanded trail system, including bushland reserves trail
- Upgraded town parks with additional events and activities
- Creation of town park in Romsey
- Enhancement of botanic gardens
- Promotion of open space values, opportunities and health benefits
- Improved access and facilities for people with disabilities.
- Enhanced flora and fauna and increased shade and shelter
- Improved facilities, signs, information and visual amenity
- Tendering process emphasising quality maintenance and conservation
- Cooperative arrangements between the CoM's, Shire, NRE, Parks Victoria and local community
- Increased resource allocation to open space
- Sale of surplus land and use of proceeds on key open space initiatives

Threats/constraints:

- Many previous local strategies and plans not implemented due to lack of resources
- Lack of focus on key priorities
- Limited funding; sports facilities often favoured over informal open space
- Weed invasion and vegetation loss
- Lack of knowledge of natural values
- Inadequate land management expertise
- Maintenance program spread thinly over many sites
- Botanic gardens maintenance basic
- Lack of formal process for determining open space in new developments
- User safety / risk management
- Local pressure for development of additional open space areas
- Vandalism

4.3 Key issues and opportunities

Major issues and opportunities identified were:

- *Commitment of Council to long-term implementation of strategic plan*
- *Adequate resources for open space management and development*
- *Linked and expanded trail system and footpaths*
- *Upgraded town parks including new town park in Romsey and rationalised open space*
- *Improved shade and shelter, facilities, signs, information and maintenance*
- *Improved provision for people with disabilities such as limited mobility*
- *Weed control and revegetation*
- *Enhancement of botanic gardens*
- *Sale of surplus land and use of proceeds on key open space initiatives*
- *Operations program emphasising quality maintenance and conservation*

These and other issues were reviewed during the development of the plan and are discussed further in section 6.

5 Vision, goals and principles

A vision is a useful word picture of the way we would like the future to turn out; the light on the hill we are aspiring to.

A set of goals and guiding principles can help us focus on ways of achieving the vision and provide a framework to develop strategies (section 6).

5.1 Open space vision for 2010

Residents and visitors using open space in the Macedon Ranges Shire in 2010 will find diverse opportunities for informal recreation and personal fulfilment.

Each main town has a leafy, safe park with its own character and identity and quality facilities providing delightful settings for socialising, picnicking and relaxing. Compatible activities and events are conducted regularly and attract many locals. The parks also provide accessible places for teenagers to meet and burn up energy, and a range of play settings for younger children.

The three main town parks feature attractive waterways planted with mostly indigenous species; they are now known as Jacksons Creek Parklands (Gisborne), Five Mile Creek Parklands (Woodend) and Campaspe River Parklands (Kyneton).

In Romsey, a town park (Romsey Parklands) has been developed along Five Mile Creek, providing a much-appreciated open space focus for residents. Intensive revegetation work is transforming the creek banks into an attractive and popular setting.

The town parks are linked by accessible paths to sporting reserves, town centres, cafes, information centres and other community facilities, encouraging people to park their cars and explore on foot. An extensive tree planting program has provided attractive visual links between the parks and town centres. Well marked shared trails wind along waterways and provide opportunities for a range of linked short and long walks or rides.

The heritage values of Kyneton, Woodend, Malmsbury and other towns are widely appreciated and feature in heritage walks linked to the shared trails. The historic botanic gardens at Kyneton and Malmsbury are well interpreted and linked with other features, and have become popular destinations for residents and visitors.

New residential developments include attractive open space with green links providing safe access to the town park and other community facilities. A well-planned footpath system provides for safe walking in new and established residential areas.

People with disabilities are considered in all open space development and access and facilities are carefully planned to meet a wide range of needs.

Accessible small local parks provide basic facilities including shade and shelter, seats, paths and play equipment in smaller towns and in residential areas distant from the main town parks.

Where appropriate, surplus open space has been sold and the proceeds used to enhance local and town parks and trails. Through careful planning and design, maintenance costs and energy use in open space are minimised and water quality in waterways improved.

At the regional level, Macedon Regional Park, Hanging Rock Reserve and several State Forests continue to provide diverse recreation opportunities including bushwalking, picnicking and horse riding where appropriate. Conservation reserves are also better known and more widely appreciated for their natural values.

The local community, including local businesses, cultural groups and schools is actively involved in caring for municipal open space and works closely with Council to achieve common goals. The network of open space in the Shire is a source of pride to local people and increasingly popular as a destination for visitors to the area. Combined with the area's heritage character and scenic rural landscapes, open space makes a major contribution to the Shire's attractive setting and enjoyable lifestyle.

5.2 Key goals

The following broad goals have been developed to help achieve the vision:

- 1. Use this plan as the basis for management and resource allocation**
- 2. Focus on key open space areas**
- 3. Enhance open space provision in towns**
- 4. Protect natural values, improve waterways and undertake revegetation**
- 5. Ensure quality open space and access in new subdivisions**
- 6. Promote community involvement and use of open space**

5.3 Guiding principles

The following principles provide guidance for the future planning, design and management of Council open space. They have been developed from other open space studies and strategies and emphasise diversity of user experience, quality of settings, equity of access and conservation (or sustainable management) of natural values. Doolan (1998) and other researchers have identified these as key factors in open space planning and management.

Diversity, quality and design

- Open space should be designed to build on local character and provide a diverse range of attractive settings for informal recreation.
- Design, layout and facilities should be of high quality and provide for safe and enjoyable use.

Access and equity

- All developed open space should provide good access to facilities for the whole community including people with disabilities.
- Access should be provided to a range of settings and activities for different age groups, males and females, and other groups in the community.
- Pedestrian and cycle access should be provided to all open space located in or close to towns.
- Surplus open space should be sold and the proceeds used to acquire or develop higher priority sites.

- The location and opportunities available at major sites and the benefits of open space use should be promoted.

Management and maintenance

- Adequate management, technical and funding resources should be provided to achieve a successful open space system that meets community needs.
- Maintenance should meet community and conservation objectives, within budget constraints.
- The community should be involved in planning, development and care of open space.

Conservation

- Significant natural and cultural sites should be identified and protected from damage by recreational activities.
- Priority should be given to control of invasive weeds in town parks and areas with high conservation values or high use.
- Locally indigenous species should be used in revegetation and tree planting projects except where exotic tree species are an important element in urban or cultural landscapes.

Photographs: (1)

Open space in the municipality ranges from large regional parks at Hanging Rock and Macedon Ranges (top) to historic botanic gardens at Kyneton (bottom).

Photographs: (2)

Future directions for open space in the Shire include the development of town parks and trails along waterways (Woodend, top, Romsey, centre), and systematic weed control (bottom).



6 Strategies to achieve the goals

This section discusses issues in more detail and sets out the strategies required to achieve the key goals. An overall implementation program is shown in section 7.

6.1 Use this plan as the basis for management and resource allocation

Open space and Council commitment

A large number of plans and strategies for open space and land management have been produced for local and state government agencies in Victoria in the last 5-10 years. The most critical issue with many plans has been the level of political and management commitment to implementation.

This project involved a review of many plans and strategies previously prepared for the Macedon Ranges area (volume 2). Many of the recommendations or actions in these have not been implemented and, in some cases, development or resource allocation has occurred at variance to the plans.

If this plan is to be successful, it must be accepted as the framework for Council decision making on open space. In other words, the plan should be incorporated in corporate planning and form the basis for setting priorities and determining capital and recurrent budget allocations for open space for the life of the plan (up to 10 years). The plan should also form the basis for monitoring of performance (section 7.3).

The goals, principles and key strategies in the plan should be retained unless there is compelling evidence of the need for variation. Any changes to the plan should be approved by Council and appropriate senior managers.

The plan should also be used to help set priorities for community-based open space projects.

Management skills and responsibilities

The Shire manages and maintains many open space reserves, either directly or through Committees of Management.

The present organisational structure of Council provides a number of staff with part responsibilities for open space management and maintenance:

Client Group

Parks, Recreation & Culture

- Manager, Parks Recreation & Culture
- Recreation Development Officer
- Hanging Rock Ranger

Planning & Development Services

- Planners
- Environmental Planner

Infrastructure

- Infrastructure Management Officer
- Technical Officer (Buildings)

Contract Management

- Contract Managers

Provider Group

Parks & Gardens

- Co-ordinator, Parks & Gardens

As a result of this spread over different program areas and groups the management and maintenance of open space is often fragmented, reactive and not focused.

For example, despite the best intentions by staff, Contract Managers concentrate on adherence by the maintenance service provider to Parks & Gardens Contract Specifications, but are not required to consider non-contract issues such as potential improvements and developments.

The staff responsible for planning and development of open space (ie. Manager, Parks Recreation & Culture, Recreation Development Officer) are somewhat removed from day to day park management issues and not always in a position to make valid judgements on developments and improvements. These staff also do not have a full range of technical skill in environmental management, particularly weed control and revegetation, which resides in yet another part of Council (ie. the Environmental Planner).

This fragmented approach means that no staff have the full capabilities, resources, responsibility and accountability to effectively manage and develop the open space in the Shire. For example, many community efforts (ie. Campaspe River improvements) are not supported fully and become misdirected because they require the assistance of various parts of Council of which there is only a part-time capacity and limited resources.

Council should consider the adoption of an organisational structure that enables the implementation and achievement of the key goals and outcomes of this plan including proper open space and vegetation management and planning, visitor services, promotion and community liaison. This could be through the provision of a single position with appropriate open space management and technical skills that would pull together the roles of open space management, planning, maintenance monitoring, community liaison, support for Friends and similar groups, asset management and environmental care.

This position would be similar to the existing specialist positions of Recreation Development Officer, Cultural Services Officer, Youth Officer and Environmental Planner, providing client side responsibility for open space management, provision, maintenance, planning and development.

An examination of Council's structure indicates the possibility of establishing such a position within existing staff numbers.

It is recommended that Council give consideration to the appointment of a specialist client side position in open space planning and management, including maintenance.

Improved systems, including computer programs, could be developed further, eg to assist with monitoring of assets and maintenance, mapping and promoting community use. Improved records management is also recommended.

Management arrangements / partnerships

The Shire, Parks Victoria and NRE have responsibility for managing or overseeing the management of most open space in the Shire. There is overlap in the types of open space managed by each agency, and there are varying levels of management expertise.

Opportunities to rationalise management responsibility should be considered and stronger links between agencies supported. Small Parks Victoria reserves with limited conservation value should be considered for management by the Shire, particularly where they provide for informal recreation near towns.

Regular contact between the management agencies would assist in exchanging information, developing joint programs and increasing the effectiveness of conservation management. For example, a pest plant strategy developed for Macedon Regional Park could have application for areas managed by the Council.

Partnerships between local communities and councils are currently being promoted as useful ways of improving performance (section 6.6).

Strategies

- 1. Use the approved open space strategy to determine program and budget priorities and allocations in the Shire.**
- 2. Consider the introduction of a specialist client side position responsible and accountable for open space planning, development, management, maintenance and community liaison, including the implementation of this plan.**
- 3. Ensure adequate in-house skill in environmental management to oversee Council and community open space works.**
- 4. Consider long-term management responsibilities for small Parks Victoria reserves near towns.**
- 5. Establish a small liaison group between the Shire, Parks Victoria, NRE and community organisations to exchange information, develop joint programs, eg weed control, and develop skills.**
- 6. Include conservation management tasks and environmental quality standards in future open space contracts.**
- 7. Use this plan as the basis for monitoring performance (section 7.3).**
- 8. Introduce improved systems and records management to ensure that relevant information is used in decision making.**

6.2 Focus on key open space areas

The municipality has a diverse and widely distributed network of open space. Resources are not available to manage all this land to an acceptable standard, and Council needs to identify and focus on the most important Shire areas.

6.2.1 Open space distribution and provision in rural areas

The Shire manages relatively few open space areas away from existing towns and there appears to be little justification for the acquisition of additional rural land for this purpose unless an area has high landscape and/or heritage values, eg a high point or an accessible waterway with significant vegetation.

There are opportunities for the Shire to work cooperatively with land management agencies and Landcare and Friends groups to improve open space opportunities in rural areas (section 6.6).

Strategies

9. Encourage Parks Victoria, NRE, Western Water and Coliban Water to continue to provide for nature-based recreation in the region, and Landcare groups to continue to enhance environmental values.

10. Promote the availability of nature-based recreation sites in the region to residents.

6.2.2 Open space distribution and provision in towns

An assessment of open space in towns (section 3.2) indicates that most localities have substantial areas of land set aside as open space. This ranges from large reserves along waterways at Gisborne, Woodend and Kyneton to sporting reserves in towns such as Romsey, Lancefield and Riddells Creek, several botanic gardens, numerous small local parks and numerous undeveloped areas.

Open space is distributed unevenly with many isolated parcels of land located away from town centres. Most of these sites lack natural values and recreation facilities, are not linked to other places and attract few users.

The provision for recreation varies substantially - some parks have picnic facilities, toilets, seats, paths, shade and shelter while other areas have no facilities.

The quality of facility design varies markedly. There are opportunities to develop standard designs for facilities such as shelters, tables, seats, signs, barriers, fences etc to improve visual amenity and function. These standards should be applied to all future development including those undertaken by service clubs and community groups.

Access to some areas is difficult for people with limited mobility or wheeling strollers etc. Open space areas and trails should be designed to maximise access and use, in accordance with existing guidelines.

There are opportunities to rationalise both the distribution of open space and the provision of recreation settings and facilities. Research indicates that the demand for passive open space is increasing while participation in some organised sporting activities has declined. Participation rates for walking, socialising, relaxing and supervising children's play far exceed rates for organised sports. The projected increase in over 60 year-olds in Victoria will also contribute to increased demand for passive open space at the expense of active sport (section 2).

Footpaths are an important component of open space, providing for walking for pleasure and/or exercise and pedestrian access to community facilities. Footpaths are lacking in many towns, discouraging walking and necessitating on-road walking.

Benchmarks for open space

How much open space should be provided in the Shire? Recreation planners in Australia have adopted various benchmarks for open space provision although there is debate about the relevance of these for particular communities. Benchmarks relevant to this study include:

- Provision of about 3ha of sporting and informal open space per 1000 residents (Context 1997, p9).
- Provision of some open space within 500m of all residents in built-up areas (Context 1997, p9).
- Provision of a neighbourhood park for a population of up to 5000 people (Jeavons 1999, p26).

These benchmarks have been developed primarily for urban areas but are considered to provide a reasonable starting point for the Shire. Current and proposed provision in the Shire far exceeds the 3ha/1000 people provision. An accurate assessment of present provision in the municipality can not be made until the Council develops a detailed parks assets inventory.

In response to the local situation, the following main types of open space are proposed for council responsibility in the Shire (see section 6.3 for details):

- A **town park** based on a waterway in each major town (Gisborne, Kyneton, Woodend and Romsey) to provide a high quality focal point for informal recreation.
- **Local parks** with an area of at least 0.5 ha and a basic level of facilities, within 500m of intensively developed residential areas, ie. areas with lot sizes less than 0.2 ha.
- **Linear trails and footpaths** to maximise access and opportunities for off-road walking, cycling and enhancement of waterways, and to link open space areas and vegetation corridors.
- **Play areas** located primarily in town and local parks
- **Historic botanic gardens** in Kyneton and Malmsbury. Managed for conservation of garden features and increased compatible recreation and tourism.
- **Sporting reserves** with consolidated shared facilities, linked to town parks by pathways and with improved amenities for passive recreation. Easy access to be provided, and facilities for passive use to include planted areas, seats, shade, shelter and water. Sporting areas with low projected levels of use may eventually be converted to passive open space or to agreed alternative uses.
- **Bushland and roadside conservation reserves** managed for conservation values with provision for compatible recreation, eg walking where appropriate.
- **Other**, eg roadsides in towns, providing visual amenity, shade and pedestrian access.

Strategies

- 11. Commission preparation of a facilities and signs manual and use as the basis for all future facility development.**
- 12. Adopt the proposed open space framework and give priority to town parks, local parks, footpaths, linear trails and botanic gardens.**
- 13. Ensure that adequate access to open space is provided for people with limited mobility,**
- 14. Identify opportunities to enhance sporting reserves for informal recreation, and to consolidate and maximise use of existing infrastructure (refer to Leisure Strategy).**

The key types of open space for informal recreation are discussed further below.

Town parks

One high quality town park in each major town will provide a focal point for walking and cycling, socialising, relaxation, picnicking and compatible events and activities. The park would have safe and attractive off-road access paths linked to the town centre, residential areas and community facilities.

Facilities would include shade and shelter, pathways (main paths sealed, 2.5m wide), tables, barbecues, toilets, water, signs, interpretation, parking, lighting and play facilities catering for a range of needs. Provision for people with disabilities would be given a high priority.

To encourage sustainable practices, rubbish bins would be phased out except for special events. Some other municipalities and committees of management are removing bins from open space and Parks Victoria has adopted a 'no-bins' policy with signs requesting visitors to take their rubbish home. The policy has been designed to encourage recycling and reduce maintenance costs. An education program and signs would be used to encourage users to take their rubbish with them and use (more effective and efficient) domestic garbage and recycling services. A system would also be introduced to encourage safe disposal of dog droppings.

Each park should be given a name to establish its identity and be used in promotion (section 6.3). Signs for park names, directions, trails and regulations should be combined where possible, and conform with Council guidelines. Existing non-conforming signs should be progressively replaced, commencing with major town parks and trails.

Some of the works set out in this plan can be implemented in the short-term, but it is desirable to prepare master plans to guide long-term development. This applies particularly to the main parks in the largest towns.

Strategies

15. Prepare basic management plans for proposed town parks along waterways in Gisborne, Woodend, Kyneton and Romsey, building on previous plans.

16. Progressively implement strategies in this plan and the park management plans, when prepared (section 6.3).

Local parks

Small local parks with an area of at least 0.5ha and a basic level of facilities will be provided in smaller towns, and in major towns within 500 m of houses in residential areas. The parks will have safe footpath or off-road access.

Facilities would include plantings, shade, shelter, seats, water (where cost-effective), signs and appropriate play opportunities. Rubbish bins would be phased out.

The nominated parks have been selected from existing open space areas based on an assessment of existing settings and facilities and access to residential areas.

Strategies

17. Adopt as a priority the small parks shown as strategic open space on figures 2-9 and progressively implement improvements listed.

Trails in towns

Extensive networks of paths and trails are proposed in towns in response to the increasing popularity of open space along waterways and the opportunity to provide for walking and, to a lesser extent, cycling.

The suggested alignments for each town (figures 2-9) focus on providing loop routes, linking and upgrading existing trails and footpaths and providing for on-road cycling where appropriate. Trail routes provide access through open space along waterways wherever possible.

There are opportunities to link these routes with existing heritage walks in Woodend, Gisborne and Kyneton (see *A Woodend Walk* (1995), *A Walk Through Old Gisborne* (1993) and *Historic Kyneton Guidebook and Map with Walking Tours* (1993)).

Strategies

18. Progressively implement the trails proposed for each town in accordance with design guidelines (volume 2).

19. Integrate the trails with heritage walks in the main towns.

Footpaths

The community questionnaire indicated that improvements in the footpath network are a very high priority. Issues include safety, improving links to community facilities, providing for walking and reducing reliance on cars. In particular, linking town business areas with parks

and community facilities is vital. Adequate provision of footpaths is also essential in all new developments (section 6.5).

Many residents have developed nature strips (owned by Council) as part of their property, making pedestrian access difficult

Strategies

20. Complete an assessment of footpath provision, determine priorities and develop and progressively implement a construction program.

21. Discourage residents from developing nature strips in ways that impede pedestrian use.

Play areas

Many of the parks and open spaces in the Shire have some form of children's play structure or equipment. Most offer similar experiences and cater for a limited age group, ie junior (2-4 y.o.) and intermediate (4-7 y.o.). Play opportunities are not often provided for senior children (7-12 y.o.), adolescents or teenagers. Some play structures and equipment are in poor repair and do not appear to comply with Draft Australian Standards.

Typical equipment includes a sea-saw, slide, swings and/or climbing structure, however some new equipment has been provided recently as part of a program to provide a greater diversity of play experiences.

There has been a trend to homogenise children's play experience in municipal parks in Victoria, providing play structures from propriety-brand playground equipment manufacturers.

There is a continuing loss of 'wild' and 'natural' places across urban areas in the townships of the Shire. Opportunities for unstructured play for a wide range of children's ages, capabilities and experiences are frequently a casualty of modern engineering and urban development. Yet with careful thought and planning, children's play opportunities in a wide range of settings, and for a diversity of ages and capabilities, can be retained, designed or built into new developments projects as development proceeds.

Detailed information on provision of play facilities is available in a range of sources, eg Jeavons (1999).

Strategies

22. Design and progressively install accessible, safe play experiences for a wider range of age groups in each town park. Include elements such as paths, logs, rocks, seats, planting and opportunities for creative play.

23. Provide basic playgrounds in local parks where demand is sufficient to justify provision. Include climbing structure, swings, slides and related equipment. Remove under-utilised and unsafe equipment.

24. Ensure compliance of all play equipment with the Draft Australian Standards for Playground Construction.

Botanic gardens

The community questionnaire indicated that the community regards botanic gardens as important, providing pleasant settings for peaceful relaxation. The Malmsbury and Kyneton gardens have potential appeal to visitors but lack orientation and information for visitors, could be maintained to a higher standard and are not promoted. Maintenance of the gardens requires specialist horticultural skills.

The Kyneton gardens are important at the State level. They include important trees planted in the nineteenth century and have historical, architectural and aesthetic interest (Bick 1990). The caravan park next to the gardens detracts from the gardens, adversely affects mature trees and complicates access from the river trail. However, there are significant social and economic reasons for retaining the caravan park and the Council has decided to retain it in the medium term.

The Malmsbury gardens were developed in 1863 and are of considerable aesthetic significance (National Trust Report). A detailed conservation and management plan has

been produced for the gardens (Gilfedder 1988) but many actions have not been implemented.

The New Zealand theme adopted in the Gisborne Gardens does not relate to the town's heritage and the gardens are likely to require substantial capital and operational expenditure to achieve the original vision. There are opportunities to enhance the core area with its New Zealand theme and develop the remainder as low maintenance woodland using species compatible with the character of Gisborne.

Botanic gardens and arboreta are easy to conceive but expensive to develop and maintain. No more botanic gardens or other high maintenance horticultural developments should be considered in the Shire. Emphasis should be placed on sustainable, low maintenance development and management of open space.

Strategies

- 25. Review and progressively implement the 1988 conservation and management plan for the Malmsbury gardens and promote as a key attraction in the town. Provide shelter, seats, water, signs, interpretation and marked walking routes.**
- 26. Prepare and implement a conservation and management plan for the Kyneton Botanic Gardens and promote as a key attraction linked to town trails. Provide shelter, seats, water, signs, interpretation and marked walking routes.**
- 27. Screen the caravan park from the Kyneton gardens and consider long-term relocation.**
- 28. Develop special contracts for appropriate maintenance of the historic botanic gardens.**
- 29. Revise the short to medium term plan for the Gisborne gardens to focus on consolidating the New Zealand planting, surrounded by low maintenance woodland.**
- 30. Ensure that any future horticultural developments focus on sustainable, low maintenance management.**

6.2.3 Longer distance trails

Off-road trails

Macedon Ranges Shire does not have any established long-distance walking, cycling or horse trails passing through or within the Shire. There are also no 'rail trails' located in the Shire which could be developed. The O'Keefe Rail Trail is located between Bendigo and Axedale but skirts the northern boundary of the Shire.

The Dry Diggings Track, which is part of the Great Dividing Trail, runs from Castlemaine, Fryerstown, Vaughan, Mt Franklin, Hepburn and Daylesford with plans to connect to Ballarat. This trail skirts the north west boundary of the Shire but could be a destination from the Shire.

There are trails in the Shire within the major parks and state forests such as Lerderderg, Macedon, Hanging Rock and Wombat. These trails may be closed in wet periods but normally provide good opportunities for day trips of up to about 30km, eg the Macedon Ranges Walking Trail. No opportunities have been identified for a long distance walking trail in the Shire. Promotion of the existing trails is likely to lead to increased use.

A shared walking and cycle trail has been proposed linking Romsey and Lancefield and some funding gained. The trail would provide a safe off-road link between the towns although links to other towns appear unlikely. The cost of a sealed trail would be high and use limited. A park with trails along Five Mile Creek in Romsey is seen as a higher priority.

An opportunity has been identified to provide a trail link from Gisborne Station to Macedon and Woodend Stations along Norton Road, Middle Gully Road and other roads and the rail reserve. This trail could be established at low cost, link with other trails in Macedon Regional Park and be promoted as a tourist attraction.

Strategies

31. Promote existing off road trail opportunities at major parks and forests in the Shire.

32. Investigate the preferred route for a trail between New Gisborne and Woodend along the rail reserve and adjacent roads and develop if appropriate.

On-road trails

Several on-road trails exist outside towns at present and other opportunities have been identified.

The AUSTROADS guide advises that road treatment for cycling may not be required if:

- the traffic volumes are less than 3000 vehicles per day,
- there are not many inexperienced cyclists present,
- it is not a collector or arterial road,
- there is not a significant commercial vehicle content,
- the road is not part of a significant bicycle route.

There is therefore considerable scope to develop on-road routes for racing, touring and recreation cyclists within the Shire. These routes, however, would not be suitable for walkers and mountain bike riders who would be looking for a different experience.

There is also scope to develop a major bicycle route link through the Shire on the new Calder Freeway development as it is VicRoads policy to include bicycle lanes on the sealed shoulders of rural freeways.

There could also be an opportunity to develop a cost-effective on-road route along the 'old' Calder Highway between Gisborne, Woodend and eventually Kyneton, when the Freeway opens, as traffic volumes and traffic lane requirements will be considerably reduced. The road lanes are fairly wide and areas could be repainted to create bicycle lanes.

The connection from Woodend to Hanging Rock, along the Romsey Road, has some potential as a bicycle route although vehicle speeds and traffic volumes on busy days may deter many riders. The installation of bicycle route identification signs and "Caution Cyclists" signs may assist and future road widening should be investigated. A separate bicycle and walking trail beside the road would entail expensive works and is not supported for the likely level of use.

A series of five attractive touring rides has been developed, leaving from the Woodend information centre. These are on-road and travel to destinations of interest in the shire such as Hanging Rock, Mount Macedon, Black Hill and Coliban Reservoir. Other opportunities for touring rides could be developed based on environmental and cultural features.

A review of the VicRoads accident statistics has shown a total of 27 bicycle accidents in the Shire since 1990 of which nine were serious, with one fatality on the Romsey Road. Seven of the nine serious road accidents were on country roads. The number of accidents is low compared to other municipalities but the number on country roads is unusual. Accidents generally occur within townships.

VicRoads provides funding for bicycle facilities, but requires a bicycle strategy for an area to justify any funding bids. It is prepared to fund 50% of the cost of the strategy to encourage completion. VicRoads is also focussing on commuter cycling and is interested in school cycling and other safety issues. Funding support is offered for the employment of Bicycle Coordinators (see volume 2 for details). Given past, present and future community aspirations for bicycle trails it is strongly recommended that a bicycle strategy be developed.

Developing a bridle path along Couangalt Rd to the I R Robertson Reserve has been suggested. This has a low priority and protection of vegetation is important.

Strategies

- 33. Prepare a bicycle strategy for the Shire in association with VicRoads, based on this plan, to enable further funding opportunities to be developed.**
- 34. Identify road links to major destinations and approach VicRoads for funding support to develop safe cycling routes using signs. Give priority to the Woodend-Hanging Rock route.**
- 35. Negotiate with VicRoads to ensure that bicycle lanes are provided on the new Calder Freeway to provide a major bicycle link through the municipality.**
- 36. Negotiate with VicRoads to ensure that bicycle lanes are provided on the old Calder Highway when traffic reduces as a result of Freeway opening.**

6.2.4 Acquisition and disposal of open space

The field assessment of open space in the Shire identified parcels of open space that are of a strategic nature. Conversely, a range of areas with limited value or potential as open space was also recognised.

The assessment included consideration of:

- Location: Is there sufficient demand to justify ongoing management as open space? Is there similar open space in the area?
- Development: If undeveloped, is development justified?
- Area: Is the site large enough for successful use as open space?
- Links: Can the area be linked to other open space and community facilities?
- Values: Does the area have moderate or high natural, cultural or landscape values?
- Suitability: Is the area safe, accessible and appropriate for open space use?

In many cases some areas nominated as open space had no evident natural or cultural values, were isolated, had very low levels of use and incurred maintenance costs eg for slashing. For many sites, nearby areas provide adequate recreation opportunities to meet foreseeable needs.

Consideration on the retention of surplus land can lead to community concern and any proposed rationalisation or disposal should follow a clear process including assessment of natural and cultural values and potential uses, and community consultation. Strategies for disposal have been documented by See (1997), and a successful process at Manningham outlined by Jackson (1998).

Surplus open space review

For any site identified in the assessment process as surplus public open space, the following process should be followed:

1. Review existing records and document potential values for: nature conservation, cultural heritage, drainage or stormwater management, and access. Areas with significant values would not be considered for sale.
2. Assess for flooding potential.
3. Calculate ongoing maintenance costs at current management standard.
4. Identify any proposed development or improvement proposals.
5. Estimate any future capital development and associated maintenance costs.
6. Consider leasing if this will provide a benefit to the Shire greater than alternative outcomes.
7. Advertise and consult with interested parties including adjacent landowners, site users and local organisations.
8. Recommend to Council one of the following:
 - Re-allocation for other public use

- Retention for potential future open space development although this study has not identified such land as strategic
- Lease
- Sale of all or part of site

9. Implement decision including Planning Scheme amendment if necessary.

The proceeds from sale of surplus land must be used to acquire new open space or improve the management of existing open space and not as revenue for Council's general budget.

The assessment of open space opportunities undertaken in the planning process also identified several blocks which should be considered for acquisition or exchange at Romsey to establish a town park along Five Mile Creek.

Strategies

37. Adopt a formal process for assessment of potential surplus open space for sale including a community consultation phase.

38. Progressively implement the process for reviewing surplus open space. Use proceeds of any disposal for open space acquisition or management in accordance with priorities set out in this plan.

39. Progressively purchase or exchange land proposed for acquisition as open space at Romsey.

6.2.5 Equestrian use and facilities

The Shire is recognised as a popular area for equestrian activities both for residents for whom lifestyles are enhanced and for visitors who bring economic benefits into the municipality. For example, the Wombat State Forest provides excellent riding opportunities and some estates at Riddells Creek incorporate horse trails.

The Shire's Leisure Directory lists seven pony clubs, five adult riding clubs and eight other community equestrian clubs and organisations. Most of these organisations are based in Bullengarook, Gisborne, Kyneton, Lancefield, Macedon, Riddells Creek or Woodend.

While equestrian activities are popular with a segment of the population, the overall participation rate appears to be relatively low. Henshall (1996) found that only 1.7% of the population rode horses for recreation and 0.6% participated in pony club/eventing activities. These findings indicate that the allocation of Council resources to equestrian use needs to be considered against demands for more popular forms of recreation.

Areas currently used include:

- Bullengarook Recreation Reserve.
- Barringo Reserve - used by Pony Club. Possible impacts on natural values; gate deters other users.
- Lancefield - trotting track use by group; public access limited.
- I R Robertson Reserve, Gisborne South - part used for dressage and other activities.
- Rollinson Reserve, Kyneton (north of Freeway) - used by Adult Riders group (and 4W motorbikes). Possible impacts on natural values.
- Riddells Creek - Pony Club use.
- Woodend racecourse (old) - some conflict between Pony Club use, sporting activities and walkers.

The number of sites allocated for exclusive use by equestrian groups may be excessive and a review of needs and uses is desirable. A management plan for the Rollinson Reserve should be considered in the proposed equestrian strategy.

Equestrian activities can also adversely affect natural values, eg by spreading weeds and damaging fragile soils. Given that equestrian users currently have access to relatively large areas of Council land, use of areas with natural values should be restricted where necessary to provide long-term protection of these areas. Assessments of values and possible impacts are needed, particularly in bushland areas, before equestrian use is approved for the mid- to long-term (section 6.2.4). Sport and Recreation Victoria may part fund an equestrian strategy.

In some cases equestrian groups make use of sporting ovals from time to time which can damage sports surfaces. This use should be discouraged.

Rationalisation of equestrian activities should also be pursued to ensure that the most appropriate areas are set aside for equestrian use, and bushland areas protected from disturbance and made accessible for walking, picnicking and minimal impact uses. Facilities funded or subsidised by Council should be shared wherever possible.

Trail riding is well catered for on Crown land in and adjacent to the Shire, particularly Wombat and Cobaw State Forests and Macedon Regional Park. Roadside trail riding is considered dangerous where reservations are narrow and should not be encouraged in these situations.

Strategies

40. In liaison with users, review equestrian activities and develop an equestrian strategy including centralising of activities at one site near each main town, where achievable. Include management and business plans to guide future equestrian activities. Give consideration to participation rates in setting priorities for Council resource allocation.

41. Ensure equitable community access to open space used for equestrian activities.

6.3 Enhance open space provision in towns

The assessments undertaken for this plan identified many opportunities for improvements and revised priorities, particularly the need to focus on enhancing key open space areas in towns. These are discussed broadly in section 6.2 and the main strategies and actions identified are shown in figures 2 to 9 and summarised below.

High priority tasks include the preparation and progressive implementation of management plans for major parks, the development of loop trails in towns and the review and disposal of surplus land. Any development in flood-prone areas should be appropriate for the nature and extent of flooding.

The exercising and walking of dogs in open space is a major issue in Melbourne and along the coast but was not identified as important in the Shire. Conflicts may develop in the future, however, and the situation should be monitored in the main towns and policies developed if necessary. This may include provision of dog-running and no-dog areas.

6.3.1 Gisborne

The main initiatives in Gisborne are enhancement of parkland along Jacksons Creek, development of loop trails and links, rationalisation of small areas of open space and modification of the botanic gardens development.

The opportunity to provide a trail circuit around Gisborne is not obvious, however a series of connecting trails to Jacksons Creek, and the use of footpaths, would provide recreation access for most parts of the town.

Gisborne and other major towns in the municipality have a series of park and open space areas along their waterways and the term 'Parklands' is suggested to provide a collective name for these related areas.

Strategies

42. Progressively implement the strategies and actions identified, giving priority to enhancing the town park along Jacksons Creek and providing improved links and trails (figure 2).

Priority actions

Management and development

- 1. Prepare a basic management plan for Jacksons Creek. All work to be undertaken only within the context of the Management Plan. Progressively develop open space along Jacksons Creek as 'Jacksons Creek Parklands' (section 6.2.2)*
- 2. Establish a weed removal program and revegetation/creek enhancement program along Jacksons Creek in liaison with the present activities of the Friends of Jacksons Creek.*
- 3. Establish shade and shelter at Dixon Fields.*
- 4. Formalise parking at Brantome Street and at Dixon Fields. Control vehicle access, provide shade and designated parking spaces*
- 5. Upgrade and improve provision of informal recreation facilities in Gardiner Reserve (in the context of a master plan).*
- 6. Improve vehicle entry to Sankey Reserve. Manage vehicles on site and formalise parking*
- 7. Prepare a management plan for Bullengarook Reserve to ensure natural values are protected as recreation activities and development proceed.*

8. *Revise short to medium term development of Gisborne Botanic Gardens (section 6.2.2).*
9. *Provide for a local park of at least 0.5ha in future subdivisions in the Wyralla-Carinya precinct.*

Trails and links

10. *Develop a network of trails around the town and link with a heritage walk (section 6.2.2, figure 2).*
11. *Review and complete linkages and the shared pathway network through the parkland along Jacksons Creek: the 'Jacksons Creek Trail'.*
12. *Complete the shared pathway connections from Dixon Fields, along the Bacchus Marsh–Gisborne Road, to the town centre.*
13. *Establish a pathway link from Skyline Road, down the Jacksons Creek escarpment, to link with Gisborne township, along Jacksons Creek. Consider a pedestrian crossing over Jacksons Creek to Dixon Fields. Plan paths on the north side of the creek in this vicinity.*
14. *Ensure that new subdivision development at Jacksons Creek Estate establishes shared pathway links to the township via Sankey Reserve.*
15. *Ensure development of shared pathway linkages to the township from the new estates at Carinya Dr, Fowler Crt/The Willow and Brooking Road, as subdivision development proceeds preferably via the existing waterway.*

6.3.2 Kyneton

The Campaspe River valley and Botanic Gardens are the key strengths of open space in Kyneton. Initiatives proposed for the town include upgrading and extension of the river trail to provide an attractive loop circuit around the town, and enhancement of parklands along the river and the botanic gardens (section 6.2.2). The proposed trail includes a route around the racecourse and along Brocklebank Drive and Post Office Creek.

Strategies

- 43. *Progressively implement the strategies and actions identified, giving priority to enhancing the town park along the Campaspe River and providing improved links and trails (figure 3).***

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Prepare a basic management plan for the Campaspe river within Kyneton township including a work program and priorities. All work to be undertaken only within the context of the Management Plan. Progressively develop open space along the Campaspe River as 'Campaspe River Parklands' (section 6.2.2).*
2. *Continue revegetation and weed removal works along Campaspe River.*
3. *Investigate acquisition of land with river frontage north west of Mill and Jennings streets for the river trail.*
4. *Prepare and progressively implement a heritage conservation management plan for the botanic gardens (section 6.2.2).*
5. *Consider relocation of the caravan park in the long-term (section 6.2.2).*

6. *Prepare a basic management plan for Rollinson Reserve to guide all expansion, development and management works, and to ensure natural values are protected.*
7. *Prepare a site development plan for Tower Street Reserve. The plan is to include informal recreation facilities in and ensure community involvement in the design/planning process.*
8. *Establish a weed removal program and revegetation/creek enhancement program along Post Office Creek and encourage formation of a community group, eg Friends of Post Office Creek.*
9. *Establish a tree maintenance, deadwood removal and pruning program for significant trees in, Chisholm Reserve and Kyneton Botanic Gardens.*
10. *Establish a seed collection and propagation program for staged replacement of senescent and dying significant trees in Chisholm Reserve and Kyneton Botanic Gardens.*
11. *Liaise with the Anglican Church regarding provision of irrigation for lawns and trees at St Pauls Reserve (Piper Street). Remove play equipment.*

Trails and links

12. *Develop a network of trails around the town and link with a heritage walk (section 6.2.2, figure 3).*
13. *Complete and progressively upgrade trail linkages, boardwalks and bridge crossings along the 'Campaspe River Trail'. All trails, boardwalks and bridge crossings to eventually be constructed to shared pathway standard, minimum 1800mm wide and of a suitable material to ensure accessibility and ease of maintenance.*
14. *Establish a shared pathway link along Post Office Creek with possible extension to river.*
15. *Investigate land tenure and possible adverse possession of the road easement between Barton Street and Wheatley Street, with a view to establishing a pathway linkage.*

6.3.3 Woodend

Substantial areas of open space along Five Mile Creek at Woodend can be linked and consolidated to provide an attractive setting for informal recreation and opportunities for walking and cycling. There are also opportunities to extend trails and link the parkland with the information centre and other community facilities. Significant grassland and Black Gum communities should be protected.

Strategies

44. ***Progressively implement the strategies and actions identified, giving priority to enhancing the town park along Five Mile Creek and providing improved links and trails (figure 4).***

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Prepare a basic management plan for Five Mile Creek within the township of Woodend including the racecourse. The plan should include a work program and priorities. All work to be undertaken only within the context of the management plan. Develop Five Mile Creek as 'Five Mile Creek Parklands' (section 6.2.2).*

2. *Establish a weed removal program and revegetation/creek enhancement program along Five Mile Creek*
3. *Improve car parking, vehicle management and amenity values at the Black Gum Reserve/Tennis Club/Pool complex*
4. *Plan for two-way vehicle access to the tourist information centre and improve the visual amenity of the area.*
5. *Formalise car parking and control vehicle access at the Nicholson Street frontage to the Bowls Club.*
6. *Investigate partial sale of Quahlee Park to enable development of the remainder and establish tree planting program (within the context of the current master plan) to improve amenity and provide shade and shelter.*
7. *Remove or upgrade playground facilities at Christian Reserve. Restrict vehicle access into the Reserve.*

Trails and links

8. *Develop a network of trails around the town and link with a heritage walk (section 6.2.2, figure 4).*
9. *Complete and upgrade the shared pathway along Five Mile Creek - the 'Five Mile Creek Trail'.*
10. *Provide improved pedestrian links from the tourist information centre to the town centre and to the creek trail.*
11. *If possible ensure no renewed or future lease of Gregory Street (next to Racecourse Reserve).*

6.3.4 Romsey

Romsey has a range of areas allocated for open space but most of these lack facilities and space and are under-utilised. There are opportunities to develop a town park along Five Mile Creek to provide a setting for informal recreation including walking and cycling with links to on-road trails.

Strategies

45. ***Progressively acquire land along Five Mile Creek, prepare a basic management/master plan and develop a town park ('Romsey Parklands') along the creek (figure 5).***

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Prepare a management/master plan for Five Mile Creek within the township of Romsey. All future works to be undertaken within the context of the plan. The plan should include a work program and priorities. Progressively develop a town park along Five Mile Creek (section 6.2.2).*
2. *Investigate purchase of land at the north end of Polhman St, adjacent to Five Mile Creek, to complete the linkage along Five Mile Creek west of Lions Park.*
3. *Establish a weed removal program and revegetation program along Five Mile Creek from Couzen Lane to Melbourne-Lancefield Rd*
4. *Confirm the extent of open space available for revegetation works along the Five Mile Creek frontage in the block between the Lancefield-Melbourne Road*

and William Streets. Establish a weed removal and revegetation program and formalise pedestrian linkages through this area.

5. *Investigate land tenure and/or leasing arrangements for the inaccessible block of 'open space' in the block bounded by Murphy Street, William Street, Palmer Street and Rogers Road. This is non-strategic open space. Negotiate ownership/ use arrangements as appropriate.*
6. *Investigate land tenure for the narrow linkage between Palmer Street and Bentley Court. If Council owned open space, establish a pedestrian link.*
7. *Remove playground equipment at Coleraine Drive Reserve in view of potential risk. Coleraine Drive Reserve is non-strategic open space.*
8. *Consult with the Romsey Recreation Reserve Committee of Management and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to facilitate preparation of a basic master plan to guide future development and management of Romsey Recreation Reserve.*

Trails and links

9. *Establish a shared pathway along Five Mile Creek (Couzen Lane to William St/Palmer St) - the 'Romsey Trail'.*

6.3.5 Macedon/Mt Macedon

Macedon and Mt Macedon have a diverse range of open space. There are opportunities to enhance and rationalise open space provision and distribution (figure 6).

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Investigate risk potential at Stanley Park waterfall access and children's play equipment. Remove surplus play equipment. Revise existing management plan.*
2. *Prepare a visitor information strategy for Macedon/Mt Macedon area (potential use of Mt Macedon Hall site as information centre linked to Centennial Park).*

Trails and links

3. *Establish on and off-road pathways and trails to connect the open space network in Macedon and Mount Macedon. Construct footpaths and establish on-road signed trails to link Tony Clark Reserve, Clifford Reserve, Stanley Park and Centennial Park. Construct an off-road pathway along the railway easement to link the pathway network with Norton Road Reserve.*

6.3.6 Riddells Creek

There are opportunities to improve the recreation reserve and access to the creek, and develop links to nearby reserves, eg via Wybejong Park (figure 7). Other opportunities identified include improved facilities, planting at Walter Smith Reserve and the Water Reserve and the replacement of willows with locally indigenous species. NRE has prepared a draft management plan to guide enhancement of the Riddells Ranges reserves.

Priority actions

Management, development and links

1. *Establish a tree planting program to provide shade and shelter at Riddells Creek Recreation Reserve.*

2. *Consult with the Riddells Creek Recreation Reserve Committee of Management and with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to investigate potential use and sale of the roadside frontage land along Racecourse Road. Manage and control vehicle access to this parkland.*
3. *Manage vehicle access to creek frontage and provide designated parking areas.*
4. *Further investigate and support opportunities to develop links to the historic Smith's nursery, T Hill Flora Reserve and other reserves.*

6.3.7 Lancefield

The recreation reserve is the most important open space reserve in Lancefield. The area suffers from limited resources and lack of a strategic plan for the future. There are opportunities to enhance the area and increase its appeal for informal recreation as well as sporting activities (figure 8).

The main street is an important focal point in the town and could be improved with better layout and amenity.

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Consult with the Lancefield Recreation Reserve Committee of Management and the Department of Natural Resources and Environment to facilitate preparation of a management/master plan to guide future development and management of the entire reserve, including the trotting track. Investigate and incorporate potential heritage values.*
2. *Establish High Street as a principal visitor node. Plant trees, upgrade visitor amenities and remove redundant structures in the median strip.*
3. *Undertake tree planting program to provide shade and shelter and improve amenity values at Price Court.*

6.3.8 Malmsbury

The botanic gardens, roadside reserves and heritage features are important elements of the Malmsbury landscape and open space. Enhanced management of the botanic gardens will improve its value for informal recreation (section 6.2.2), and improvements to the Village Green (main road reserve) will also increase visitor and resident use of the area. Use of the sports ground is limited.

A 5km-loop walk around the town has been suggested taking in the botanic gardens, railway bridge, viaduct, causeway, cemetery and main street. This proposal has merit and the potential to be established at low cost (figure 9).

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Establish a management program to upgrade the botanic gardens, including replacing senescent trees.*
2. *Establish visitor information and picnic facilities on the village green opposite the shops. Include off road parking picnic tables, information board etc.*
3. *Investigate ongoing viability of Malmsbury Sports Ground and remove hazardous structures*
4. *Investigate land tenure on the land between the Malmsbury Sports Ground and the Coliban River (north and west of Sports Ground) with a view to establishing*

a weed removal and revegetation program, and formalising public access to the river.

Trails and links

5. *Establish a sign-posted loop walking route - the 'Malmsbury Heritage Walk' - encompassing the botanic gardens, railway bridge, causeway, cemetery and Main Street.*

6.3.9 Tylden

Improvements to the hall area are proposed.

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Establish appropriate uses and prepare site development plan for Tylden Hall site (including tennis courts and associated buildings). Provide designated parking and restrict vehicles access on site.*

6.3.10 Darraweit Guim

There are opportunities to improve environmental values and develop a walking track along Deep Creek, with the assistance of the local community. The town has substantial existing open space and a recent Council study recommended that a maximum of 5ha be retained for recreation development. A master plan for the area and a local Committee of Management were also recommended.

Priority actions

Management and development

1. *Remove weed species, protect remnant riverine vegetation and establish tree planting/revegetation program along creek frontage. Encourage participation of the local community.*
2. *Encourage formation of a local Committee of Management and prepare a masterplan for recreation development.*

Trails and links

3. *Investigate development of walking track along Deep Creek linked to footpath along Bolinda Road.*

6.4 Protect natural values, improve waterways and undertake revegetation

There is strong Council and community support for protection and enhancement of natural and cultural values in the Shire. The Municipal Planning Scheme and Draft Environmental Strategy (1999) both identify strategies to support environmental conservation.

Community consultation demonstrated support for improved environmental management particularly an ongoing weed control program in open space areas. This is an urgent priority in highly visible areas such as Five Mile Creek in Woodend, Jacksons Creek in Gisborne and the Campaspe River in Kyneton. Systematic programs are needed to progressively replace weeds with locally indigenous species and improve vegetation and wildlife corridors between open space areas.

While the Shire of Macedon Ranges is actively involved in catchment issues, an integrated catchment management approach is desirable to tackle problems of pollution and loss of in-stream habitat values in waterways. This could include education programs, wetland construction and silt and litter traps on drains entering waterways.

Although most of the areas of high conservation value in the Shire are in parks and reserves managed by (or for) Parks Victoria or NRE, Council is responsible for a wide range of areas with important flora and fauna values. Conservation management should be based on a sound knowledge of the significance of, and threats to, flora and fauna. Surveys should be encouraged, in conjunction with NRE and Parks Victoria, where significant species in open space areas may be at risk, and monitoring introduced to track change over time. A detailed assessment of bushland reserves was not undertaken for this strategy and formal assessment and identification of management requirements is needed. Parks Victoria is undertaking flora and fauna surveys in its parks.

Detailed research has been undertaken on Black Gum (*Eucalyptus aggregata*), a threatened species occurring along Five Mile Creek and elsewhere at Woodend (Yugovic 1994). Management recommendations include woody weed control, fencing and removal of exotic trees to encourage regeneration.

There are valuable remnant habitats along roads and streams that warrant more active management. Many roadsides in the shire are suffering from invasive weeds particularly gorse, blackberry, cape broom and English broom. A 1994 roadside management plan identified areas of conservation value and priorities for weed control. This plan has not been implemented and indigenous vegetation is seriously threatened by weed invasion. Weed control on much of this land is the responsibility of adjacent landowners and there are opportunities to encourage better management practices.

Fire protection is an important issue in the municipality and protection measures should be planned in conjunction with NRE and the CFA. Fire protection works must be balanced with conservation goals.

Compulsory tendering of open space operations appears to have led to emphasis on basic activities such as grass mowing which is easy to specify and monitor. Habitat improvement, eg through effective weed control and revegetation, is more complex and appears to have been largely omitted in the process. There are opportunities to reassess priorities, prepare tenders with an emphasis on quality outcomes and contract organisations with the necessary skills.

Strategies

- 47. In conjunction with NRE and Parks Victoria, undertake flora and fauna surveys in open space and bushland areas where significant species may be at risk from recreation (including equestrian) use, or other threats.**
- 48. Develop systematic long-term weed control and revegetation programs for Shire open space (in conjunction with Environment Strategy). Give highest priority to waterways in the main towns and natural areas at risk.**
- 49. Work with the community to improve in-stream habitats and water quality.**

- 50. Work with Parks Victoria, NRE and Landcare groups to encourage landowners to undertake weed control along roadsides and streams. Give highest priority to invasive weeds including gorse, blackberry, cape broom and English broom.**
- 51. Support other relevant environmental initiatives in the Shire's Environmental Strategy including protection of Black Gum, stormwater treatment and development of wildlife corridors.**

6.5 Ensure quality open space and access in new subdivisions

New residential development is proposed in the Shire particularly in towns close to Melbourne eg Gisborne/New Gisborne and Romsey. There are opportunities for Council to set out clear guidelines to developers and work closely with them to ensure sound future provision for useable open space. Developers should negotiate with Council at an early stage of design to determine open space needs, opportunities and preferred locations, and options for cash payments in lieu of land.

Given the expansive areas of rural land and extensive existing open space reserves in the Shire, developer contributions of a minimum of 5% of developable (unencumbered) land, or equivalent cash contribution for open space development, appear to be adequate. This is in accordance with the provisions of Sections 18 and 19 of the *Subdivision Act 1988*.

Where the need for a local park has been established, natural or cultural values are to be protected or off-road pathways are needed, developer contributions should be made in land to achieve these outcomes. Cash is acceptable where alternative open space areas or facilities have a higher priority.

Council may require open space provided in subdivisions to be landscaped, planted and fenced at the cost of the developer as a planning permit condition. Any structures and facilities should conform to standards set by Council. Examples of design guidelines for open space development and trail links are included in volume 2.

The major requirement for new open space in subdivisions is to meet key criteria:

- Based on a detailed site analysis, incorporate and protect natural, cultural and landscape values (eg viewing points, rock outcrops, creeks and indigenous vegetation).
- Locate to provide convenient and safe off-road access and use and informal surveillance (eg boulevard housing layout and wire mesh fences adjacent to open space).
- Locate near major circulation routes and medium rather than low-density development where possible.
- Identify and include floodway land in public open space where possible.
- Provide pathways and links to other community facilities and open space and to off-road connections to the town centre.
- Develop linear parks along drainage easements where practical.
- Provide facilities and settings appropriate for a local park, ie including paths, shade, shelter, seats, signs and appropriate play opportunities.
- Plant locally indigenous species except where exotics are a strong positive element in the locality and are judged appropriate for open space.
- Conform with Local Area Planning requirements.
- Meet Council requirements for sporting facilities (refer Leisure Strategy).

Council could develop a portfolio illustrating good design principles related to integrated residential and open space development, to assist in discussions with developers.

Strategies

52. Adopt proposed criteria to guide open space provision in new residential areas.

53. Initiate early discussions with developers and ensure proper consideration of key criteria, open space opportunities, requirements and provision. Develop a good design portfolio to assist in discussions.

54. Ensure that outline development plans clearly define open space provision and provide for footpaths and linked off-road trails through each development.

- 55. Require at least 5% of developable land contribution by developers, as land or cash (paid into an open space development fund), in accordance with Council criteria.**
- 56. Require basic development of local/linear open space in subdivisions by developers in accordance with Council guidelines, ie protection of indigenous vegetation, planting, tracks, seats and bollards or fences.**

6.6 Promote community involvement and use of open space

Partnerships

Community groups already play an important role in the planning, management and development of open space (see also section 4.4 of Draft Environmental Strategy). Council should support these activities - particularly in major parks - and ensure that groups have adequate skills and follow approved management and development plans. To ensure quality outcomes, no development works or vegetation management should be undertaken by volunteer groups without Shire review and approval. NRE can also provide advice on indigenous vegetation.

New partnerships between Council and community individuals and groups could be developed to provide a stronger focus for development and management, particularly of town parks and linear trails, and for grant applications. Existing Friends groups for Jacksons Creek and Hanging Rock are successful models.

An open space committee of management for each major town, or for each major town park, may be a successful option. Committee members could be selected based on expertise, eg in land management, conservation, recreation, tourism and financial management. Alternatively, increased support could be provided for Friends and other groups via the proposed Parks Officer.

Promotion and information

The health benefits of open space use are well established and there are also social and environmental benefits from increased use of trails and other open space (section 2.3).

There are opportunities to promote trails and town parks more actively and encourage more compatible events in major parks. As town parks, trails and botanic gardens are improved there will be increasing opportunities to promote them as tourism assets.

Elements include upgraded and standardised site and direction signs (volume 2), renaming some reserves as parks, naming main trails, and producing low-cost leaflets and maps. The adoption of standard symbol signs used by Parks Victoria would assist users and improve visual amenity.

Interpretation


Interpretation is an informal education activity designed to increase community understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of natural and cultural features. Successful interpretation can lead to an increased commitment by individuals to conserving environmental values and sustainable use.

Opportunities in the municipality include guided walks, activity programs, exhibits in community buildings, interpretive shelters, signs and publications.

Community involvement in the provision of these services is desirable and should be encouraged and supported.

Strategies

- 57. Consider options for improved support for Friends and other groups, and collaborative arrangements for open space management, particularly for main parks, trails and botanic gardens.**
- 58. Support and assist in grant applications and skill development of community groups involved in open space management and monitoring, giving priority to groups working on major parks, linear paths and waterways.**
- 59. Ensure that future community-based works in open space conform with Council quality standards and approved plans.**
- 60. Progressively upgrade signs in the open space network giving priority to main trails and town parks. Follow Council guidelines including use of name and logo and adopt Parks Victoria standard recreation symbol signs.**

- 61. In conjunction with other Council programs, develop and implement a promotion strategy for open space including printed guides and trail maps, publicity and an event calendar.***
 - 62. Encourage and support community groups to assist in provision of interpretation services particularly in town parks and trails.***
- 

7. Implementing and monitoring the plan

This section sets out an overall implementation program for open space, discusses resource requirements and lists measures for monitoring performance.

7.1 Implementation program

Major strategies and priorities are set out in table 1. The strategies are to be progressively implemented through annual Council budgets and programs for open space.

High priority strategies are to be implemented first, followed by medium and low priority strategies.

High priority tasks include:

- *Develop parks on waterways in main towns with improved facilities, settings and access.*
- *Develop footpaths and on- and off-road trails in towns linked to open space and community facilities.*
- *With community agreement, dispose of surplus open space and use the proceeds to acquire land or improve existing open space.*
- *Survey areas with high conservation values and protect from adverse impacts.*
- *Undertake systematic weed control and replacement with locally indigenous species, particularly along waterways.*
- *Upgrade skills of people involved in open space development and management.*

The rate of implementation will be dependent on the availability of internal and external resources. A broad 3-year implementation program is shown in table 2.

7.2 Resources for implementation

Many strategic plans recommend high levels of expenditure to improve community facilities and services. The Shire has limited resources, however, and proposals in this plan must be realistic.

Fortunately, the municipality already has substantial areas of open space and a wide range of facilities. On the other hand, many areas need better land management and improved facilities and services to provide quality settings for informal recreation.

The major responsibility for funding the development and management of open space will remain with Council, but grants and programs funded by the state and federal governments provide opportunities for additional resources. For example, VicRoads provide funding for bicycle strategies and trail construction (volume 2). Several sources help fund environmental projects, e.g. the Natural Heritage Trust. These external sources should be actively pursued to help fund strategies identified in this plan.

The inventory of open space undertaken for this plan identified potential surplus land which could be sold following review and consultation. The revenue raised should be used for acquisition of key open space, and improvements in facilities and settings.

Additional sources of funding include development contributions, employment programs, user fees, e.g. from events and sports grounds, sponsorship by local businesses and joint ventures. These should also be actively sought although staff resources would be necessary to enable this.

It is recommended that Council commit 5 to 6% of its annual budget to open space to assist in the implementation of high priority tasks identified in this plan. The current allocation is 4.3%. Capital works allocations are also proposed to achieve the 3-year program.

Table 1: Priority action program

Goal	Strategy	Priority	Cost \$ ***
1. Use this plan as the basis for management and resource allocation	1. Use the approved open space strategy to determine program and budget priorities and allocations in the Shire.	O	-
	2. Consider the introduction of a specialist client side position responsible and accountable for open space planning, development, management and community liaison, including the implementation of this plan.	H	-
	3. Ensure adequate in-house skill in environmental management to oversee Council and community open space works.	H	-
	4. Consider long-term management responsibilities for small Parks Victoria reserves near towns.	L	-
	5. Establish a small liaison group between the Shire, Parks Victoria, NRE and community organisations to exchange information, develop joint programs, eg weed control, and develop skills.	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	6. Include conservation management tasks and environmental quality standards in future open space contracts.	H	\$2,000 - 10,000
	7. Use this plan as the basis for monitoring performance (section 7.3).	O	-
	8. Introduce improved systems and records management to ensure that relevant information is used in decision making.	H	\$2,000 - 10,000
2. Focus on key open space areas	9. Encourage Parks Victoria, NRE, Western Water and Coliban Water to continue to provide for nature-based recreation in the region, and Landcare groups to continue to enhance environmental values.	O	-
	10. Promote the availability of nature-based recreation sites in the region to residents.	L	-
	11. Commission preparation of a facilities and signs manual and use as the basis for all future facility development.	H	\$10,000-50,000
	12. Adopt the proposed open space framework and give priority to town parks, local parks, footpaths, linear trails and botanic gardens.	H	-
	13. Ensure that adequate access to open space is provided for people with limited mobility.	H	\$10,000-50,000
	14. Identify opportunities to enhance sporting reserves for informal recreation, and to consolidate and maximise use of existing infrastructure (refer to Leisure Strategy).	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	15. Prepare basic management plans for proposed town parks along waterways in Gisborne, Woodend, Kyneton and Romsey, building on previous plans.	H	\$10,000-50,000
	16. Progressively implement strategies in this plan and the park management plans, when prepared (section 6.3).	H-M-L	\$50,000+
	17. Adopt as a priority the small parks shown as strategic open space on figures 2-9 and progressively implement improvements listed.	M-L	\$50,000+
	18. Progressively implement the trails proposed for each town in accordance with design guidelines (volume 2).	H-M	\$50,000+
	19. Integrate the trails with heritage walks in the main towns.	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	20. Complete an assessment of footpath provision, determine priorities and develop and progressively implement a construction program.	H-M-L	\$50,000+
	21. Discourage residents from developing nature strips in ways that impede pedestrian use.	H	-
	22. Design and progressively install accessible, safe play experiences for a wide range of age groups in each town park. Include elements such as paths, logs, rocks, seats, planting and opportunities for creative play.	M	\$50,000+
	23. Provide basic playgrounds in local parks where demand is sufficient to justify provision. Include climbing structure, swings, slides and related equipment. Remove under-utilised and unsafe equipment.	M-L	\$10,000-50,000
	24. Ensure compliance of all play equipment with the Draft Australian	H	\$2,000 - 10,000

Goal	Strategy	Priority	Cost \$ ***
	<i>Standards for Playground Construction.</i>		
	25. <i>Review and progressively implement the 1988 conservation and management plan for the Malmsbury gardens and promote as a key attraction in the town. Provide shelter, seats, water, signs, interpretation and marked walking routes.</i>	H-M	\$10,000-50,000
	26. <i>Prepare and implement a conservation and management plan for the Kyneton Botanic Gardens and promote as a key attraction linked to town trails. Provide shelter, seats, water, signs, interpretation and marked walking routes.</i>	H-M	\$10,000-50,000
	27. <i>Consider the long-term relocation of the caravan park at Kyneton.</i>	L	-
	28. <i>Develop special contracts for appropriate maintenance of the historic botanic gardens.</i>	M	-
	29. <i>Revise the short to medium term plan for the Gisborne gardens to focus on consolidating the New Zealand planting, surrounded by low maintenance woodland.</i>	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	30. <i>Ensure that any future horticultural developments focus on sustainable, low maintenance management.</i>	O	-
	31. <i>Promote existing off road trail opportunities at major parks and forests in the Shire.</i>	L	-
	32. <i>Investigate the preferred route for a trail between New Gisborne and Woodend along the rail reserve and adjacent roads and develop if appropriate.</i>	L	\$2,000 - 10,000
	33. <i>Prepare a bicycle strategy for the Shire in association with VicRoads, based on this plan, to enable further funding opportunities to be developed.</i>	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	34. <i>Identify road links to major destinations and approach VicRoads for funding support to develop safe cycling routes using signs. Give priority to the Woodend-Hanging Rock route.</i>	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	35. <i>Negotiate with VicRoads to ensure that bicycle lanes are provided on the new Calder Freeway to provide a major bicycle link through the municipality.</i>	H	-
	36. <i>Negotiate with VicRoads to ensure that bicycle lanes are provided on the old Calder Highway when traffic reduces as a result of Freeway opening.</i>	H	-
	37. <i>Adopt a formal process for assessment of potential surplus open space for sale including a community consultation phase.</i>	H	-
	38. <i>Progressively implement the process for reviewing and selling surplus open space. Use proceeds of sale for open space acquisition or management in accordance with priorities set out in this plan.</i>	H	(\$50,000+)
	39. <i>Progressively purchase or exchange land proposed for acquisition as open space at Romsey.</i>	H	\$50,000+
	40. <i>In liaison with users, review equestrian activities and develop an equestrian strategy including centralising of activities at one site near each main town, where achievable. Include management and business plans to guide future equestrian activities. Give consideration to participation rates in setting priorities for Council resource allocation.</i>	M	\$2,000 - 10,000
	41. <i>Ensure equitable community access to open space used for equestrian activities.</i>	O	-
3. Enhance open space provision in towns	42. <i>Gisborne: Progressively implement the strategies and actions identified, giving priority to enhancing the town park along Jacksons Creek and providing improved links and trails (figure 2).</i>	H-M-L	\$50,000+
	43. <i>Kyneton: Progressively implement the strategies and actions identified, giving priority to enhancing the town park along the Campaspe River and providing improved links and trails (figure 3).</i>	H-M-L	\$50,000+
	44. <i>Woodend: Progressively implement the strategies and actions identified, giving priority to enhancing the town park along Five Mile Creek and providing improved links and trails (figure 4).</i>	H-M-L	\$50,000+
	45. <i>Romsey: Progressively acquire land along Five Mile Creek, prepare a</i>	H-M-L	\$50,000+

Goal	Strategy	Priority	Cost \$ ***
	<p>basic management/master plan and develop a town park along the creek (figure 5).</p> <p>46. Progressively implement the actions identified for Macedon / Mt Macedon, Riddells Creek, Lancefield, Malmsbury, Tylden and Darraweit Guim.</p>	H-M-L	\$50,000+
4. Protect natural values, improve waterways and undertake revegetation	<p>47. In conjunction with NRE and Parks Victoria, undertake flora and fauna surveys in open space and bushland areas where significant species may be at risk from recreation (including equestrian) use, or other threats.</p> <p>48. Develop systematic long-term weed control and revegetation programs for Shire open space (in conjunction with Environment Strategy). Give highest priority to waterways in the main towns and natural areas at risk.</p> <p>49. Work with the community to improve in-stream habitats and water quality.</p> <p>50. Work with Parks Victoria, NRE and Landcare groups to encourage landowners to undertake weed control along roadsides and streams. Give highest priority to invasive weeds including gorse, blackberry, cape broom and English broom.</p> <p>51. Support other relevant environmental initiatives in the Shire's Environmental Strategy.</p>	H H-M H O O	\$10,000-50,000 \$50,000+ \$2,000 - 10,000 - -
5. Ensure quality open space and access in new subdivisions	<p>52. Adopt proposed criteria to guide open space provision in new residential areas.</p> <p>53. Initiate early discussions with developers and ensure proper consideration of key criteria, open space opportunities, requirements and provision. Develop a good design portfolio to assist in discussions.</p> <p>54. Ensure that outline development plans clearly define open space provision and provide for footpaths and linked off-road trails through each development.</p> <p>55. Require at least 5% of developable land contribution by developers, as land or cash (paid into an open space development fund), in accordance with Council criteria.</p> <p>56. Require basic development of local/linear open space in subdivisions by developers in accordance with Council guidelines, ie protection of indigenous vegetation, planting, tracks, seats and bollards or fences.</p>	H O O O O	- - - (\$50,000+) -
6. Promote community involvement and use of open space	<p>57. Consider options for improved support for Friends and Landcare groups, and collaborative arrangements for open space management, particularly for main parks, trails and botanic gardens.</p> <p>58. Support and assist in grant applications and skill development of community groups involved in open space management and monitoring, giving priority to groups working on major parks, linear paths and waterways.</p> <p>59. Ensure that future community-based works in open space conform with Council quality standards and approved plans.</p> <p>60. Progressively upgrade signs in the open space network giving priority to main trails and town parks. Follow Council guidelines including use of name and logo.</p> <p>61. In conjunction with other Council programs, develop and implement a promotion strategy for open space including printed guides and trail maps, publicity and an event calendar.</p> <p>62. Encourage and support community groups to assist in provision of interpretation services particularly in town parks and trails.</p>	H H O H-M M O	- \$2,000 - 10,000 - \$10,000-50,000 \$10,000-50,000 \$2,000 - 10,000

** H: high, M: medium, L: low, O: ongoing

*** \$: \$2,000 - 10,000, \$\$: \$10,000 - 50,000, \$\$\$: \$50,000+

Table 2: Three year program*

Goal **	Strategy	2000- 01	2001- 02	2002- 03
1	• <i>Ensure in-house skills and a dedicated officer responsible for open space planning, development and management and to enable implementation of this plan</i>	✓		
	• <i>Include conservation management in maintenance contracts</i>	✓		
2	• <i>Commission preparation of facilities and signs manual.</i>	✓		
	• <i>Prepare management plans for Gisborne, Kyneton, Woodend and Romsey parklands</i>	✓		
	• <i>Progressively implement proposed town trails</i>	✓	✓	✓
	• <i>Progressively provide high priority footpaths</i>		✓	✓
	• <i>Upgrade Malmsbury and Kyneton Botanic gardens</i>		✓	✓
	• <i>Review and sell surplus open space (with community support)</i>	✓	✓	✓
	• <i>Acquire land to add to open space along Five Mile Creek in Romsey</i>		✓	✓
3	• <i>Progressively implement parkland management plans and priority actions in towns</i>		✓	✓
4	• <i>Undertake flora and fauna surveys in areas at risk</i>	✓		
	• <i>Develop and implement weed control and revegetation programs particularly along waterways</i>	✓	✓	✓
5	• <i>Apply agreed criteria to open space provision in new residential developments</i>	✓		
6	• <i>Provide technical and other support for community groups involved in open space management and development</i>	✓		
	• <i>Name main parks and trails and install corporate signs</i>	✓		

* Some of these activities can be commenced in 1999-2000 if resources allow.

** See table 1

7.3 Monitoring success

Monitoring is essential to determine the success of open space provision in the Shire.

Some managers of high-use parks and open space have developed comprehensive performance measures related to costs, visitors, environmental management, liability and other factors (Grimwade 1998). For the Macedon Ranges Shire Council, relatively simple measures are recommended to ensure that staff concentrate on achieving agreed outputs, not laboriously measuring complex indicators.

Greater use could be made by staff of a relational database, eg *MS Access*, to record data on assets, conditions, risk management etc. Specialised software for open space management should be considered in future.

As set out in section 6.1, this plan should become the framework guiding open space development, management and priorities until the plan is fully reviewed and revised, probably in about 10 years time.

Monitoring should therefore focus on assessing progress towards implementing this plan and meeting community needs for diverse experiences, quality settings and services, equitable access, ecological sustainability and efficient management.

Proposed monitoring framework:

Plan implementation

- % achievement of strategies in strategy (based on target of agreed number of strategies in annual program)
Target: 10% of plan achieved each year

Users and facilities:

- Satisfaction of users with settings, services, access and environmental management (by simple survey)
Target: 70% satisfied or very satisfied after 2 years (need baseline figure)
- Increase in visitor use of open space (by simple survey)
Target: 5 to 7.5% pa

Environmental:

- % locally indigenous plant cover established in nominated areas, eg main waterways
Target: 75% cover in 5 years
- Area of land identified as having significant species, protected from adverse impacts.
Target: to be determined



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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants in the plan

Participants involved in discussions of issues and preparation of the plan included:

Steering Committee

Rod Clough, Shire - Chair
Jacqui Dowsett, Shire
Simon Aalbers, Shire
Mick Hassett, Shire
Nigel Higgins, Shire
Jenny Dyer, Regional Manager Sport and Recreation Victoria

Councillors

All current Councillors of the Shire

Other agencies and municipalities

Parks Victoria
NRE
VicRoads
Sport and Recreation Victoria
CFA
City of Greater Bendigo
City of Hume
Hepburn Shire
Mitchell Shire

Community organisations and individuals

A range of residents, Friends and Landcare groups, committees of management, equestrian groups and historical societies also contributed to the plan,