

# Planning Guidelines for the Conversion of Golf Course Land to Other Purposes

June 2020



## Acknowledgments

We acknowledge and respect Victorian Traditional Owners as the original custodians of Victoria's land and waters, their unique ability to care for Country and deep spiritual connection to it. We honour Elders past and present whose knowledge and wisdom has ensured the continuation of culture and traditional practices.

We are committed to genuinely partner, and meaningfully engage, with Victoria's Traditional Owners and Aboriginal communities to support the protection of Country, the maintenance of spiritual and cultural practices and their broader aspirations in the 21st century and beyond.

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## About this guideline

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide guidance on preparing a proposal to redevelop a golf course to ensure a net community benefit and a quality outcome is delivered

These guidelines should be used for developing a proposal to be either assessed through a planning scheme amendment process and/or a planning permit application.

These guidelines are intended as a resource for:

- proponents considering redevelopment of a golf course in Victoria,
- responsible authorities and stakeholders who provide advice and consider the appropriateness of the redevelopment of a golf course in any given location,
- any party interested in understanding the process for redeveloping a golf course in Victoria.

### Golf courses in Victoria

Golf courses are a major land use and important to Victoria's culture and liveability. Golf course land typically has a number of special characteristics including:

- being large tracts of land – often located in built-up urban environments;
- containing a number of environmental and biodiversity values;
- are large areas of open space;
- contributing to stormwater management;
- are managed either for the benefit of club members or the community;
- often limiting vehicle or sustainable movement due to the scale of the courses; and
- often containing heritage values.

Golf in Victoria is in transition as it responds to changing demographic and participation trends. Overall, traditional golf club membership is in decline and clubs are facing changing leisure patterns and increasing operating costs. Some golf clubs have been forced to merge or close. This trend has drawn interest in the redevelopment and repurposing of golf course land for other uses. Ensuring that these significant land holdings are appropriately developed to ensure positive social, economic and environmental outcomes is a primary concern of these guidelines.

### Definitions

In these guidelines:

- ***golf course*** includes land used for maintenance, clubhouse and other facilities associated with a golf course
- ***redevelopment of a golf course*** means the use or development of all or part of a golf course for another use (for example, a residential use).



## Application

These guidelines apply to:

- the preparation of an amendment to enable the redevelopment of a golf course.
- the preparation of an application for a permit, or an application to amend a permit, for the redevelopment of a golf course.

Golf courses subject to these guidelines include:

- freehold golf course land;
- golf course land owned by the Victorian Government or local government where the land ownership would permit conversion from an open space use;
- metropolitan or regional golf course land;
- the full or partial redevelopment of golf course land; and
- golf course land inside or outside a settlement boundary, including the Urban Growth Boundary.

Proposals seeking to rezone golf course land should be consistent with state and local policy objectives for particular locations. Any change to a defined settlement boundary or the Urban Growth Boundary raises policy issues not addressed in these guidelines. The process outlined in these guidelines does not supersede state and local policy objectives.

## Golf Course Redevelopment Standing Advisory Committee

The Golf Course Redevelopment Standing Advisory Committee (GCRSAC) was established by the Minister for Planning under section 151 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act) to provide advice on proposals for the redevelopment of golf courses.

The Minister may refer the following matters to the GCRSAC for advice:

- An application for the redevelopment of a golf course that the Minister has called in under section 97B, or has been referred under section 97C, of the Act.
- A request to prepare an amendment to a planning scheme to enable the redevelopment of a golf course.
- An application or request for authorisation under sections 8A or 9 of the Act to prepare an amendment to enable the redevelopment of a golf course.
- A proceeding related to an application for the redevelopment of golf course land that the Minister has called-in under clause 59 of Schedule 1 of the *Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 1998*.



# Legislative and planning policy context

## Legislation

The *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act) establishes the framework for planning the use, development and protection of land within Victoria and is implemented through the Planning Policy Framework (PPF), Local Planning Policy Framework, Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs) and local government planning schemes.

## State Planning Policy

These guidelines have been prepared in accordance with the purpose of the Planning Policy Framework (PPF) as outlined in the Victoria Planning Provisions at *Clause 71.02 'Operation of the Planning Policy Framework'* which seeks to 'ensure that the objectives of planning in Victoria (as set out in section 4 of the Act) are fostered through appropriate land use and development planning policies and practices that integrate relevant environmental, social and economic factors in the interests of net community benefit and sustainable development'.

The following state policies are considered relevant to golf course redevelopment proposals in Victoria

- **Clause 11 Settlement** – These policies seek to ensure sustainable growth and development of Victoria and respond to the needs of existing and future communities through provision of zoned and serviced land for housing, employment, recreation and open space, commercial and community facilities and infrastructure. In particular:
  - **Clause 11.01-1S Settlement** broadly seeks to deliver networks of high-quality integrated settlements that have a strong identity and sense of place and are sustainable by responding to population growth and changing environments, support resilient communities, balance strategic objectives to achieve improved land use and development outcomes, preserve and protect features of rural land and natural resources, provide appropriately located supplies of residential, commercial and industrial land and improve transport network connections.
  - **Clause 11.03-6S Regional and local places** seeks to ensure integrated place-based planning by providing specific direction for the planning of sites, places, neighbourhoods and towns and consider the distinctive characteristics and needs of regional and local places in planning for future land use and development.
- **Clause 12 Environmental and landscape values** – These policies seek to ensure planning helps protect the health of ecological systems and the biodiversity they support and conserve areas with identified environmental and landscape values. In particular:
  - **Clause 12.01-1S Protection of biodiversity** seeks to protect and conserve Victoria's biodiversity by ensuring that planning takes into account the impacts of land use and development on Victoria's biodiversity, including consideration of cumulative impacts, habitat fragmentation and the spread of pest plants, animals and pathogens into natural ecosystems.
  - **Clause 12.03-1S River corridors, waterways, lakes and wetlands** seeks to protect and enhance river corridors, waterways, lakes and wetlands by ensuring that development is sensitively designed and sited in order to respond to and respect the significant environmental, conservation, cultural, aesthetic, open space, recreation and tourism assets of water bodies and wetlands. Growth in established settlements must only be facilitated where water and wastewater can be managed.
  - **Clause 12.05-1S Environmentally sensitive areas** seeks to protect and conserve environmentally sensitive areas with significant recreational value from development that would diminish their environmental conservation or recreational values.
  - **Clause 12.05-2S Landscapes** seeks to protect and enhance significant landscapes and open spaces that contribute to character, identity and sustainable environments by ensuring development does not detract from the natural qualities of significant landscape areas.
- **Clause 13 Environmental risks and amenity** – These policies outline planning should strengthen the resilience and safety of communities, aim to avoid or minimise natural and human-made environmental hazards, environmental degradation and amenity



conflicts, ensure development and risk mitigation does not detrimentally interfere with important natural processes and should prepare for and respond to the impacts of climate change. In particular:

- o **Clause 13.01-1S Natural hazards and climate change** seeks to minimise the impacts of natural hazards and adapt to the impacts of climate change by considering the risks associated with climate change in planning and management decision making, directing population growth and development to low risk locations and ensuring siting and design of development minimises risk to life, property, the natural environment and community infrastructure from natural hazards.

- o **Clause 13.02-1S Bushfire** seeks to strengthen the resilience of settlements and communities to bushfire through risk-based planning that prioritises the protection of human life.

- o **Clause 13.03-1S Floodplain management** seeks to protect life, property and community infrastructure from flood hazard, the natural flood carrying capacity of waterways, the flood storage function of floodplains and waterways and floodplain areas of environmental significance or importance by avoiding inappropriately located use and development.

- **Clause 15 Built environment and heritage** – These policies recognise the role planning plays in delivering land use and development outcomes that responds appropriately to its surrounding landscape and character, valued built form and cultural context in order to deliver liveable and sustainable cities, towns and neighbourhoods. In particular:

- o **Clause 15.01-1S Urban design** seeks to ensure urban environments are safe, healthy, functional and enjoyable and contribute to a sense of place by requiring development responds to its context, contributes to community and cultural life by improving the quality of living and working environments, ensures the interface between public and private realm protects and enhances safety, supports access to transport and provides landscaping that supports the amenity, attractiveness and safety of the public realm.

- o **Clause 15.01-2S Building design** seeks to ensure building design outcomes contribute positively to the local context and enhance the public realm.

- o **Clause 15.01-3S Subdivision design** seeks to ensure the design of subdivisions achieve safe, attractive, accessible, diverse and sustainable neighbourhoods in new residential areas and in the redevelopment of existing areas.

- o **Clause 15.01-4S Healthy neighbourhoods** seeks to ensure neighbourhoods foster healthy and active living and community wellbeing through good design.

- **Clause 16 Housing** – These policies recognise planning should provide for housing diversity and efficient provision of supporting infrastructure, ensure long-term sustainability of new housing and provide land for affordable housing. In particular:

- o **Clause 16.01-1S Integrated housing** seeks to promote a housing market that meets community needs by increasing the supply of housing in existing urban areas, ensuring an appropriate quantity, quality and type of housing is provided, ensure housing



developments are integrated with infrastructure and services and high quality social housing is delivered.

*o Clause 16.01-2S Location of residential development* seeks to ensure new housing in designated locations offer good access to jobs, services and transport by increasing the proportion of new housing in designated location in urban areas and reduce the share of new housing in greenfield and dispersed development areas, encourage higher density housing development, ensure an adequate supply of redevelopment opportunities within established urban areas and facilitate residential development that is cost effective in infrastructure provision and use, energy efficient, water efficient and encourages public transport use.

- **Clause 17 Economic development** – These policies recognise planning plays an important role in provide for a strong and innovative economy and contributes to the economic wellbeing of the state and foster economic growth.
- **Clause 18 Transport** – These policies promote an integrated and sustainable transport system that is safe and provides access to social and economic activities, facilitates economic prosperity, contributes to environmental sustainability and coordinates reliable movements of people and goods.
- **Clause 19 Infrastructure** – These policies promote the development of social and physical infrastructure that should be provided in an efficient, equitable, accessible and timely manner, recognising social needs for a range of accessible community resources. In particular:

*o Clause 19.02-6S Open space* seeks to establish, manage and improve a diverse and integrated network of public open space that meets the needs of the community.

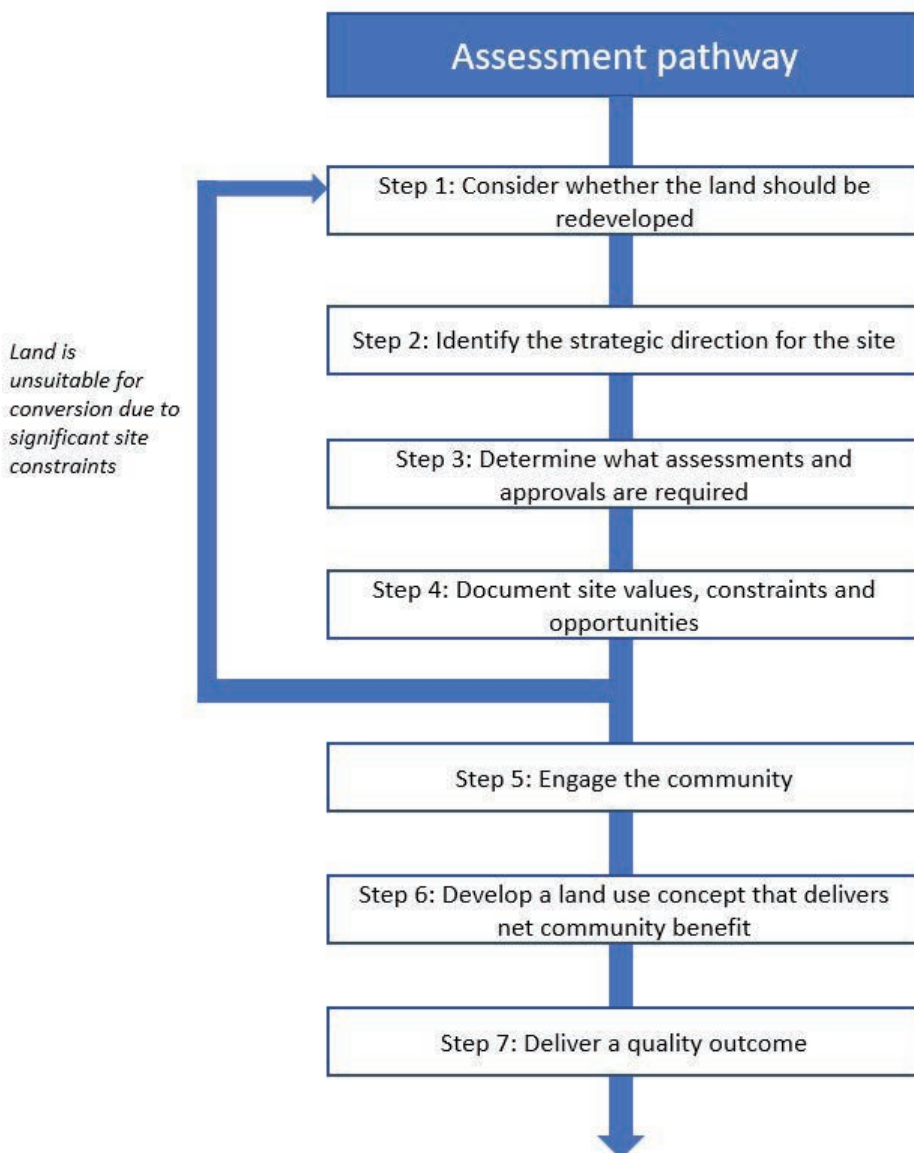




# Guidelines

When preparing an amendment to a planning scheme or application for the redevelopment of a golf course, the following steps should be followed in accordance with Figure 1.

1. Consider whether the land should be redeveloped.
2. Identify the strategic direction for the site.
3. Determine what assessments and approvals are required.
4. Document site values, constraints and opportunities.
5. Engage the community.
6. Develop a land use concept that delivers net community benefit.
7. Deliver a quality outcome



**Figure 1: Indicative assessment pathway**

### Step 1: Consider whether the land should be redeveloped

The following questions should be addressed in establishing whether golf course land should be converted to another use:

- Does the land tenure allow for conversion?
- Is the golf course surplus to golfing?
- Are there economic alternatives to conversion?
- Should the land remain as open space?

Proponents should confirm the ownership of the land and that it is available for conversion and document any title or legal restrictions on its future development.

To assess whether the golf course is surplus to the needs of golfing, a proponent will need to identify:

- Whether the course has been identified in a regional golf facility plan as a course that should remain or is a candidate for conversion to another use. If there is no relevant golf facility plan, consider:
  - the demand for golf courses in the region and whether the course is located in an area currently under-supplied or over-supplied with golf courses
  - whether there is capacity for the golf course to be improved to incorporate contemporary design standards and facilities.
- Whether the proposal delivers improved golf facilities consistent with Victoria's Golf Tourism Strategy and any relevant golf facility plan.

The proponent should commission independent economic advice on:

- whether golf is likely to remain viable at the course taking into account:
  - the course facilities and layout
  - the club patronage and financial status
- the broader economic implications of the proposal.

Golf course land, particularly in metropolitan areas, presents a rare opportunity for governments to purchase a significant land parcel for community or public use. Where golf course land has been determined as being surplus to the needs of golfing, the land should be offered at first instance for acquisition to the Commonwealth and Victorian

governments and local governments.

This involves three considerations as outlined below:

- State-owned public golf course land will be offered under the Victorian Government Landholdings Policy and Guidelines (2017). All other golf course land owners should be encouraged to make genuine effort to investigate whether any government authorities are interested in acquiring the land by engaging with local and/or state government.
- Local government planning authorities should assess redevelopment proposals in accordance with strategic planning for the local area, including identification of future public land requirements.
- Local government planning authorities should identify the public land requirements generated by the proposed urban development made allowable as a result of the golf course land conversion.

### Step 2: Identify the strategic direction for the site

Establishing the strategic direction for the site is a key step to developing a concept for the site. Any concept for the site should begin with the question: what does policy say is the best use for this site?

The strategic direction for a proposal should consider, the following:

- The level of access to transport and activity centres.
- The local open space network or wildlife network.
- Whether the proposed conversion is consistent





with relevant policies and strategies including:

- the Planning Policy Framework in the Victoria Planning Provisions or relevant planning scheme
- *Metropolitan Planning Strategy*
- any metropolitan open space strategy or regional open space strategy
- the Yarra Strategic Plan, if adjacent to the Yarra River
- any relevant waterway, catchment, or flooding strategy
- any approved council open space strategy
- any approved council housing strategy.
- Whether proposal has the potential to contribute to broader strategic priorities, such as:
  - *Active Victoria Framework*
  - *Water for Victoria Water Plan*
  - Any regional *Integrated Water Management Plan* or the achievement of water sensitive urban design principles
  - Victorian 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy
  - *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*.

### Step 3: Determine what other assessment and approvals are required

All other applicable assessment and approvals for the proposal based on the relevant legislation should be identified. Consider all relevant legislation, including:

- *Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006*
- *Environment Effects Act 1978*
- *Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- *Heritage Act 2017*

Determine:

- who are the relevant decision makers
- the level of effort and rigour required to document the site values and constraints

- the program for the preparation of documentation and engagement.

### Step 4: Document site values, constraints and opportunities

The values, constraints and opportunities at the golf course land must be clearly documented. The values, constraints and opportunities will be identified by the proponent, relying on technical studies and feedback from community engagement.

The following matters should be considered, as relevant, when identifying the values and constraints of a site:

- the environmental values of the site, including biodiversity values, habitat connectivity and the strategic biodiversity significance or role of the site in the local or regional ecosystem, including the relevant bioregion
- the community values of the site, including community facilities providing for active or passive recreational pursuits, the catchment of the community using the site, whether the site is accessible to the public
- the open space values of the site, including whether the site is accessible to the public, or if it has broader landscape values through the provision of tree coverage and green areas
- any environmental hazards including hazards that are mitigated by the way the golf course land is currently managed, such as flooding or bushfire hazard
- the cultural heritage values of the site, including aboriginal heritage values and other cultural heritage values
- any contamination, including any known or likely sources of contamination that may exist due to historical uses or through the management of the golf course land
- the site's integration with existing infrastructure, such as transport networks (public transport, road, pedestrian and bicycle routes), stormwater infrastructure, electricity transmission links
- the site's relationship to nearby residential areas, rural or green wedge areas including its interface with residential development.

The opportunities for the site should consider:

- integration with existing open space networks and recreational facilities



- restoration of environmental values, including protection of biodiversity, native vegetation, water ways, water bodies and wetlands
- opportunities to increase resilience to climate change and natural hazards, including a design response that may increase the community's resilience to bushfire and flooding events and sea level rise
- additional community facilities
- educational and health facilities
- a range of dwelling types including affordable housing
- tourism facilities
- introduction of environmentally sustainable measures and design features, such as the generation of renewable energy, water sensitive urban design, wastewater reuse, and waste reduction.

### Step 5: Engage the community

Develop a comprehensive community consultation program and commence consultation before preparing detailed designs.

The purpose of this consultation is to:

- assist the community to understand the need for the golf course land conversion
- allow the community to provide input to identification of site values and constraints
- allow the community to contribute to identification of opportunities and ideas for the golf course land conversion
- foster open channels of communication between the proponents and the community.

### Step 6: Provide a land use concept that delivers net community benefit

Proposal to convert golf course land must provide a net community benefit and a high level of sustainability.

As well as an overall community benefit the proposal should:

- deliver a net increase in public open space
- deliver improved environmental values

- deliver a net community benefit for the community surrounding any redeveloped course.

The following factors should be considered to determine if, the proposal provides a net community benefit and environmental benefit:

- whether a proposal:
  - contributes to achieving state or local government policy objectives and strategies
  - delivers improved golf facilities and whether these are accessible to the public
  - provides additional public open space, sporting or recreational facilities or makes financial contributions to improve or develop regional or local sporting facilities and open space
  - protects and enhances the wider open space network and ecological connectivity
  - rehabilitates degraded land or mitigates existing environmental risks
  - contributes to local housing priorities such as the provision of affordable or social housing, sheltered housing or crisis accommodation
  - delivers connected walking and biking paths and general improvements to pedestrian and cycling connectivity
  - delivers social or community infrastructure such as libraries, medical or education facilities
- the impacts on local transport and traffic networks
- any proposed commercial uses, and whether any potentially out of centre commercial uses are proposed
- how the proposal will integrate with surrounding land uses, infrastructure and services
- whether the proposal incorporates climate change adaptation measures for communities and the environment.

Other factors may also be relevant considerations depending on the circumstances of the golf course land and the proposal.

Proponents are encouraged to liaise closely with the planning authority in an iterative and negotiated process to arrive at a final position regarding the net community benefit of the proposal.



## Step 7: Deliver a quality outcome

Any proposal to convert golf course land must deliver a high quality outcome.

To ensure net community benefit, the redevelopment of golf course land should achieve the following:

- at least 20 per cent of the land area to be developed is set aside as publicly accessible useable open space that contributes to an integrated open space network. This land may be encumbered by easements, reservations, heritage, vegetation or other conditions and make provision for land to be used for passive or active recreation
- enhance and protect state, regional and locally significant environmental assets and biodiversity corridors
- landscaping that delivers an appropriate amount of tree canopy cover (excluding active sporting areas) to mitigate urban heat effects and is at least equivalent to, or greater than the surrounding area
- active transport links are provided into the surrounding area and must be provided on the golf course land proposed for redevelopment.

### *The strategic response*

The Planning Policy Framework (PPF) outlines objectives for land use and development in Victoria. For the redevelopment of golf course land, the strategic response must ensure it delivers on these objectives as well as addressing, where relevant, matters set out in this section.

The strategic response should address the recommendations of reports which identify the

- environmental
- ecological
- arboricultural
- landscape
- viewshed
- archaeological
- historical and cultural values and features of the site
- transport impacts with transport management proposals

The strategic response should include a site analysis and design response demonstrating a response to

site opportunities and constraints, with particular regard to:

- the physical constraints of the site.
- public open space requirements.
- the interface with adjoining uses and developments.
- identified heritage assets.

as well as any adopted policy or code for residential development and subdivision.

### *Housing*

Where a redevelopment proposal seeks to include housing development, the strategic response should encourage the provision of affordable housing, and show or make provision for:

- a range of dwelling types to cater for a variety of housing needs.
- management of amenity impacts to ensure the reasonable amenity of future residents of the site.

### *Built form*

The strategic response should include Urban design guidelines for the land including but not limited to:

- building envelopes, massing, heights and setbacks.
- treatment of car parking areas and orientation of garages.
- building orientation and location, car parking areas, public roads, vehicle access locations, pedestrian and bike paths and areas and locations of private and public open space.
- the preferred design and interface treatments to public open spaces within and adjacent to the land.
- development setbacks from internal streets.
- treatments to achieve reasonable amenity to public urban spaces, streetscapes and pedestrian and bicycle paths including overshadowing and wind tunnelling effects.

### *Open space*

The strategic response should show or make provision for the following matters, as appropriate:

- open space integrated into the site which includes not less than 20 per cent of the developable area of the site as publicly accessible useable open space that contributes to an integrated open space network. This land may be encumbered by easements, reservations, heritage, vegetation or other conditions and make provision for land to be used for passive or active recreation.
- existing trees identified in an Arboricultural report to be retained.
- a landscaping concept plan including a maintenance program.

### *Circulation and movement*

The strategic response should address matters raised in any Transport Management Plan prepared by an appropriately qualified expert addressing the following matters, as appropriate:

- the impact of the development on the arterial and local road network.
- mitigation works required on the road network.
- funding responsibilities.
- connections to adjoining land.
- road hierarchy.
- cross sections.
- proposed transport management devices.
- bicycle network.
- public transport routes.
- pedestrian links.

The strategic response should make provision for the internal road and path network for pedestrians, bicycles and vehicles to create a high level of permeability through the site by considering:

- the primary access and egress from the land for vehicles from Gumnut Highway to the standards of the relevant road authority.
- future pedestrian links into the site to connect nearby open space.
- links to public transport services.

### *Environmental Management*

The strategic response should address the requirements of any Environmental Assessment of the land, including the following matters as appropriate:

- A flora and fauna survey, which identifies existing vegetation or habitat of international, national, state, regional or local significance required to be protected and enhanced in adjacent waterways or the subject site.

### *Natural hazards*

The strategic response should address the requirements of any Natural Hazard Assessment of the land, addressing the following matters as appropriate:

- a bushfire risk assessment that identifies the bushfire risk at the landscape and site scale and identifies appropriate bushfire mitigation measures.
- flood risk assessment that identifies the risk of flooding, predicted impacts of sea level rise and identified appropriate mitigation measures.
- geotechnical hazard assessment.

### *Social Impact*

The strategic response should address the requirements of any Social Impact Assessment Report which considers the following as appropriate:

- An assessment of the adequacy of existing social and community infrastructure to serve the land.
- Any additional social and community infrastructure to be provided as part of the redevelopment.
- Any community infrastructure contribution to be made in connection with the development.

### *Heritage and Archaeological Survey*

The strategic response should address the requirements of any Heritage and Archaeological Survey and show or make provision for the following matters as appropriate:

- cultural heritage including places and objects.
- any buildings to be retained under any conservation controls.

### *Subdivision*

The strategic response should show the following:

- indicative lot layout, roads and pedestrian connections and public open space.
- any proposed staging of development including staging of infrastructure and open space delivery.

### *Planning mechanisms*

An appropriate planning control should be used to guide the development of the land to ensure a quality outcome is delivered in line with the objectives outlined in these guidelines.

Circumstances relating to each golf course site vary. There are several planning tools that can be used to ensure the development of the land achieves net community benefit and the requirements of the guidelines.

There is existing guidance about the use of planning tools that should be considered when applying a planning controls to the land, including for requirements relating to open space and infrastructure contributions.

Potential planning controls available to a planning authority include:

- a Development Plan Overlay (DPO),
- an Incorporated Plan Overlay (IPO),
- a Precinct Structure Plan (PSP),
- a Section 96A combined planning scheme amendment and permit application process.

