

2.3 What the Community is Saying

Consultation was undertaken with residents and community groups through a series of community forums and supplemented by workshops with government departments and agencies with an interest in the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

Despite the range of opinions expressed, a common thread can be drawn from the feedback received:

- **Many Whittlesea farmers are supportive of whole farm planning and good rural stewardship practices.** Links between existing and new farming families should be encouraged, whilst greater access to the EcoMarkets concept is required before active and broad uptake is achieved.

Refer to the *Community Views Final Report* for a detailed summary of community responses relating to the ten green wedge sub-themes.

2.4 Issues

The main areas requiring action in order for communities to actively manage and sustain the Whittlesea Green Wedge through informed land stewardship practices are:

- Ongoing support for sustainable land management practices
- Insufficient resources to enforce good land management practices for all rural properties means maintaining a property free from pest plants, animals or hazards such as erosion and salinity is made extra difficult
- Lack of knowledge regarding market mechanisms associated with ecosystem services
- Insufficient networking between new hobby and lifestyle farmers and existing farming networks to broaden the knowledge base of all
- Concern over the costs associated with biophysical hazards such as salinity and erosion and fragmented planning controls
- Limited recognition of good land stewardship practices regardless of property size
- Guidelines for Land Management Plans (LMP) are not consistently applied
- LMPs should not be viewed in isolation to the broader landscape context.

This is not an exhaustive list, but an overview of the current key issues.

2.5 Planning Provisions

The State Planning Policy Framework supports good rural land stewardship. Under the framework, planning should encourage sustainable land use in an agricultural context (Clause 14.01). Hazards such as salinity (Clause 13.03-3) and wildfire (Clause 13.05) are also addressed.

Within the Local Planning Policy Framework, the Municipal Strategic Statement refers to the values of agricultural land at Clause 21.02-01. The Local Planning Policy at Clause 22.02 relates to the 'Rural Land Character Areas, Siting, Use and Development Policy'.

Specific zones within the Whittlesea Planning Scheme that are relevant to the sustainable management of rural land include:

- *Green Wedge Zone, Green Wedge A Zone and Rural Conservation Zone.* Decision guidelines for use and/or development of land in each of these zones require specific rural, environmental and design and siting issues to be addressed, including the submission of a Land Management Plan.
- *Wildfire Management Overlay* is specifically aimed at identifying areas where the intensity of wildfire is significant and likely to pose a threat to life and property.

Map 9, on the preceding page reconciles the extent of the 7 February 2009 fire with the coverage of the Wildfire Management Overlay within the City of Whittlesea.



2.6 Planning Guidelines

Within the context of broader green wedge values, the following provides a guide for Council in its decision making regarding good rural stewardship:

- *Agricultural practices* should not contribute to any further land degradation occurrences due to the costs to the natural systems and rehabilitation costs borne by landholders.
- Tighten the approach taken to requirements for a *Land Management Plan* in order to provide policy that delivers fair, effective and useful land stewardship outcomes for landholders and Council.
- Networking between existing farmers and new farmers should be encouraged to broaden the knowledge base of all.

2.7 Incentives And Programs

Sustainable rural land stewardship is encouraged by several programs initiated or supported by the City of Whittlesea. Over a quarter of the land area of the Whittlesea Green Wedge is covered by a Council-led sustainable land management (SLM) initiative. While exact numbers vary from year to year, around one third of eligible rural properties (those 10 hectares and greater) are part of Council's sustainable rate rebate scheme.

In the 2007/2008 financial year, Council directed over \$275,000 towards SLM initiatives. These programs include:

- *Sustainable Land Management Rate Rebate Scheme* to encourage and support good land management practices on rural properties over 10 hectares (annual)
- *Environmental Works Grants* for the protection and enhancement of native vegetation on private land under 2 hectares (annual)
- Annual *weed mapping programs* now include criteria such as land use, typical stocking rates and enforcement related activities
- Introduction of a *pest plant local law*
- Support and education programs for the community, local Landcare, farmers and environment groups including whole farm planning courses and publications such as the *Land Management Kit*
- Employment of two *Sustainable Land Management Officers* available to provide onsite advice to landholders
- Support for WACMAC Landcare on an annual basis in recognition of its contribution to practical land management activities within the Whittlesea Green Wedge and beyond.

Refer to Appendix 2 for a summary of Council's rate rebate scheme.

The Port Phillip and Westernport CMA plays a key role in the coordination and administration of environmental funding within the Port Phillip and Westernport region. Refer to the website for details <http://www.ppwcm.vic.gov.au/funding-grants.aspx>.

The City of Whittlesea will continue to assist fire affected residents by whatever means possible to equip our communities rebuild.

2.8 Actions

Refer to Part 3: Action Plan for the full range of actions proposed to sustain the Whittlesea Green Wedge into the future.

In summary, key actions proposed include:

- Work in partnership with government departments to better promote and facilitate the uptake of environmental market mechanisms
- Review Council's sustainable land management programs to better support small rural properties
- Further promote Council's land stewardship programs and support for property owners in their preparation of Land Management Plans.
- Commit to funding a two year fixed term Environmental Protection Officer position. This role will focus on environmental compliance relating to planning permits and implementation of Council's Pest Plant Local Law.



3.1 Objective

The objective for this sub-theme is:

Landscape qualities and rural design objective

To conserve and enhance the rural and natural landscape character of the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

The Whittlesea Green Wedge contains the convergence of a number of Victorian landforms. The natural and cultural value associated with these diverse landscapes is to be acknowledged and respected in the use and development of land.

3.2 Features and Values

The varied landscape qualities within the municipality provide valuable environmental, social and economic benefits for residents and visitors alike through contribution to desirability and a sense of place, and delivering quality tourism/recreation experiences.

Regard must be given to the visual characteristics of the landscape and the ability to sustain change without compromising visual integrity. No one landform dominates; rather each contributes to the wider landscape. The juxtaposition between different landforms provides a focus for scenic interest.

The type of development and land use occurring in the rural areas of the municipality should respect the visual sensitivity of the landscape. In this context, visual sensitivity refers to the ability of a particular landscape to accommodate change.

Rural character should be expressed in the siting, design, built form and landscape treatments of all development in the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

3.2.1 Visual Character Area Plans

Three physical Landscape Character Units are recognised in the Local Planning Policy Framework of the Whittlesea Planning Scheme: the Plenty Valley, the Plenty Ranges and the Western Plains.

In 1999, a separate study was undertaken to evaluate and document the character and qualities of the rural areas, titled *Rural Landscape Character Assessment* (Contour Consultants 1999).

This study identified four distinct Visual Character Areas (VCA) within the rural areas of the municipality:

1. The Plenty Valley VCA
2. The Plenty Ranges VCA
3. The Hills VCA
4. The Western Plains VCA

The major difference between these two models is the inclusion of 'The Hills' as a distinct landscape character.

Map 10, over the page, demonstrates the location of the three VCAs within the Whittlesea Green Wedge and the Western Plains VCA which is only partly included within the Green Wedge. Within the VCAs, a total of ten sub-areas are further defined, based on local characteristics.

The criterion used to define these areas includes underlying landscape characteristics, geomorphologic features and location of common viewing corridors.



Roadside corridor in Eden Hills

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3. Landscape Qualities and Rural Design
4. Boundaries and Buffers
5. Extractive Industry

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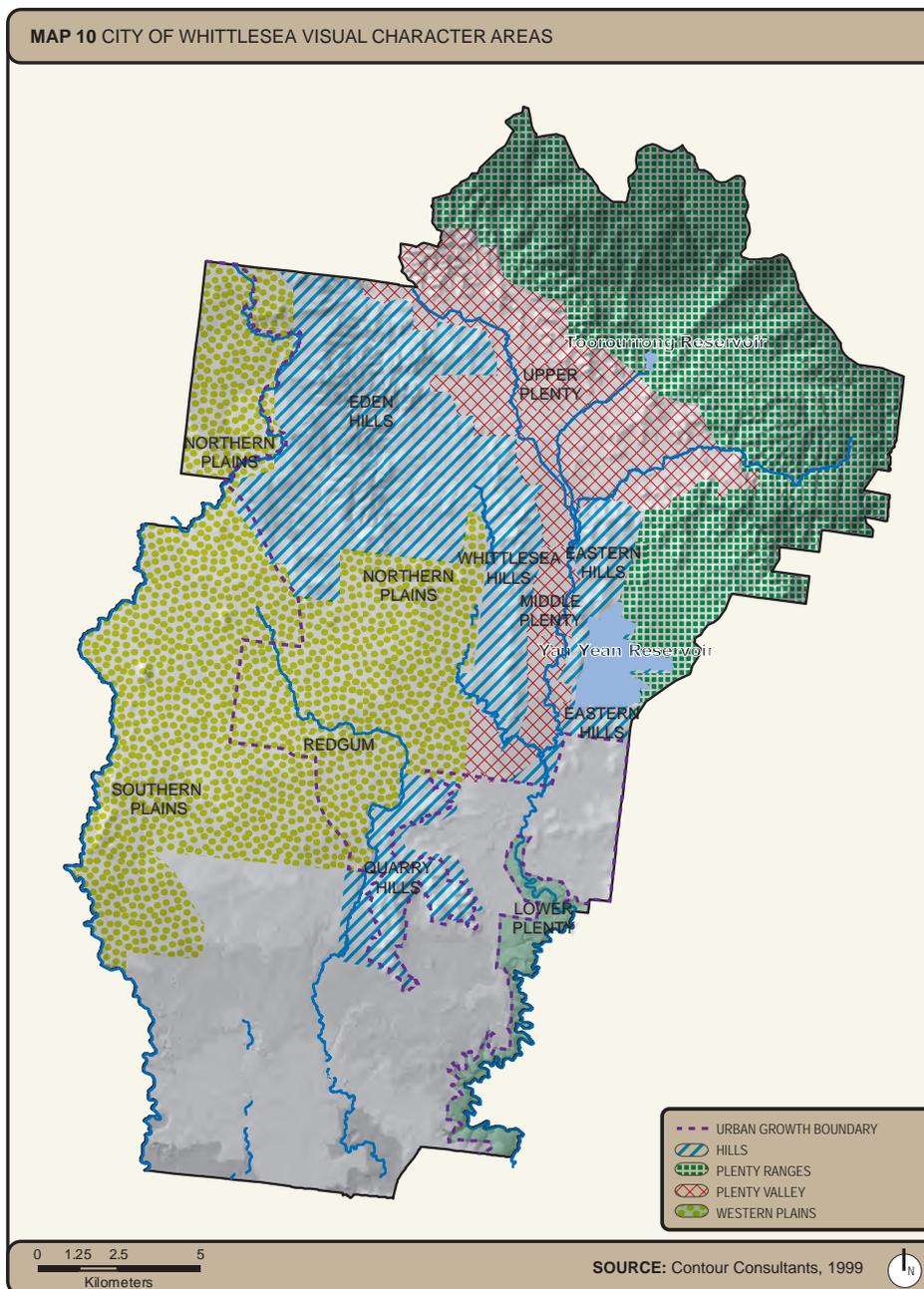


The four VCAs and their sub-areas are as follows:

1. **The Plenty Valley VCA**
 - Upper Plenty sub-area
 - Middle Plenty sub-area
 - Lower Plenty sub-area
2. **The Plenty Ranges VCA**
3. **The Hills VCA**
 - Eden Hills sub-area
 - Whittlesea Hills sub-area
 - Eastern Hills sub-area
 - Quarry Hills sub-area
4. **The Western Plains VCA**
 - Northern Plains sub-area
 - Red Gum sub-area
 - Southern Plains sub-area

Refer to Appendix 3 for details based upon the study *Rural Landscape Character Assessment* (Contour Consultants 1999).

Each VCA can be improved by landholders and community groups and guidance on how to achieve this is identified in Appendix 3. This information is also useful for Council Officers when assessing planning applications within these VCAs.





Looking towards the Eden Hills sub-area of the Hills VCA



3.2.2 Viewsheds

There are many roadsides and viewing corridors within the municipality that offer important visual access to rural and natural areas.

Significant viewsheds and visually significant roadside corridors identified in the study *Rural Landscape Character Assessment in the City of Whittlesea* (Contour Consultants 1999) include:

- Epping/Merriang Road visual line
- Donnybrook Road, especially through the River Red Gum woodland onto Barkers Creek and She Oak Hill near the Growling Frog Golf Course
- Whittlesea/Wallan Road the eastern gateway to the municipality
- Glenburnie Road
- Yan Yean Road between Whittlesea Township and Kinglake
- Arthurs Creek Road.

Two critical visual quality areas that must also be planned for protection are:

- The non-urban break between Masons Road and the Whittlesea Township along the Plenty Road corridor
- The views to the Plenty Ranges and the Great Dividing Range

3.3 What The Community is Saying

Consultation was undertaken with residents and community groups through a series of community forums and supplemented by workshops with government departments and agencies with an interest in the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

Despite the range of opinions expressed, a common thread can be drawn from the feedback received:

- ***Our rural landscape is a highly valued feature of the green wedge and should be protected from urban development and infrastructure.***
There is a real sense of place and a pride in our landscapes. Areas should remain rural in nature, without urban style housing or infrastructure.

Refer to the *Community Views Final Report* for a detailed summary of community responses.

3.4 Issues

The main areas requiring action in order to conserve and enhance the rural and natural landscape character of the Whittlesea Green Wedge are:

- Limited local knowledge of the benefits of our rural and natural landscape and the threats to these areas of visual significance and sensitivity i.e. pressures for urban-style development in rural areas
- Different value sets placed on the rural landscape from residents with an urban or culturally diverse background
- Conflict regarding farm heritage (i.e. dry stone walls or Cypress hedgerows) as it relates to rural landscape character versus environmental consideration
- Pressure for urbanisation of infrastructure such as roads and lighting in rural areas
- Strengthen planning provisions to protect the 'vistas' of Melbourne

This is not an exhaustive list, but rather an overview of the current key areas requiring action.



3.5 Planning Provisions

The rural landscape is recognised as a valuable feature of the Whittlesea Green Wedge. Within the Local Planning Policy Framework, the Municipal Strategic Statement states the wider intrinsic landscape and character qualities of these areas must be recognised (Whittlesea Planning Scheme, Clause 21.02-10).

Clause 22.02 of the Whittlesea Planning Scheme focuses on the local planning policy 'Rural Land Character Areas, Siting, Use and Development Policy. This policy provides guidance for the proper siting of dwellings and other buildings within each of the three land character areas. It reiterates the need to consider views, vistas and the environment when assessing rural planning applications.

Specific zones and overlays within the Whittlesea Planning Scheme that are relevant to the protection of rural landscape quality within the City of Whittlesea include:

- *Green Wedge Zone, Rural Conservation Zone and Green Wedge A Zone* contain controls that limit the subdivision of land to a minimum size, thus delivering rural parcels contributing to an open rural landscape. The purpose of these zones include conserving and enhancing the character of open rural and scenic landscapes and protecting the natural environment for landscape values. These zones also include the provision to request a Land Management Plan be prepared for intensification of land use or the construction of a new dwelling.

- *Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO)* has the purpose of identifying, conserving and enhancing the character of significant landscapes. The Whittlesea Hills (Schedule 1) provides a distinctive non-urban break between the Mernda growth areas and the Whittlesea Township. The Quarry Hills (Schedule 2) form a significant non-urban break between the South Morang and Mernda growth areas. These hills also provide visual relief and interest to the surrounding Western Plains.

Refer to Map 11 over the page for landscapes protected by the SLO.

3.6 Planning Guidelines

Within the context of broader green wedge values, the following provides a guide for Council in its decision making regarding landscape qualities and rural design:

- The *scenic vistas* of Whittlesea are to be conserved. The natural and cultural value associated with these landforms is to be respected in the use and development of land.
- Any *new dwelling*, associated outbuildings and accessways are to be sited below a ridgeline and should follow the contours of the land. Construction materials are to be muted, non-reflective material. Styles should include rural vernacular aspects such as verandahs and be of a low, unobtrusive design.
- New roadside viewing platforms and park amenities should be focussed in areas of *high visual amenity* in order to promote the appeal of rural and natural landscapes.



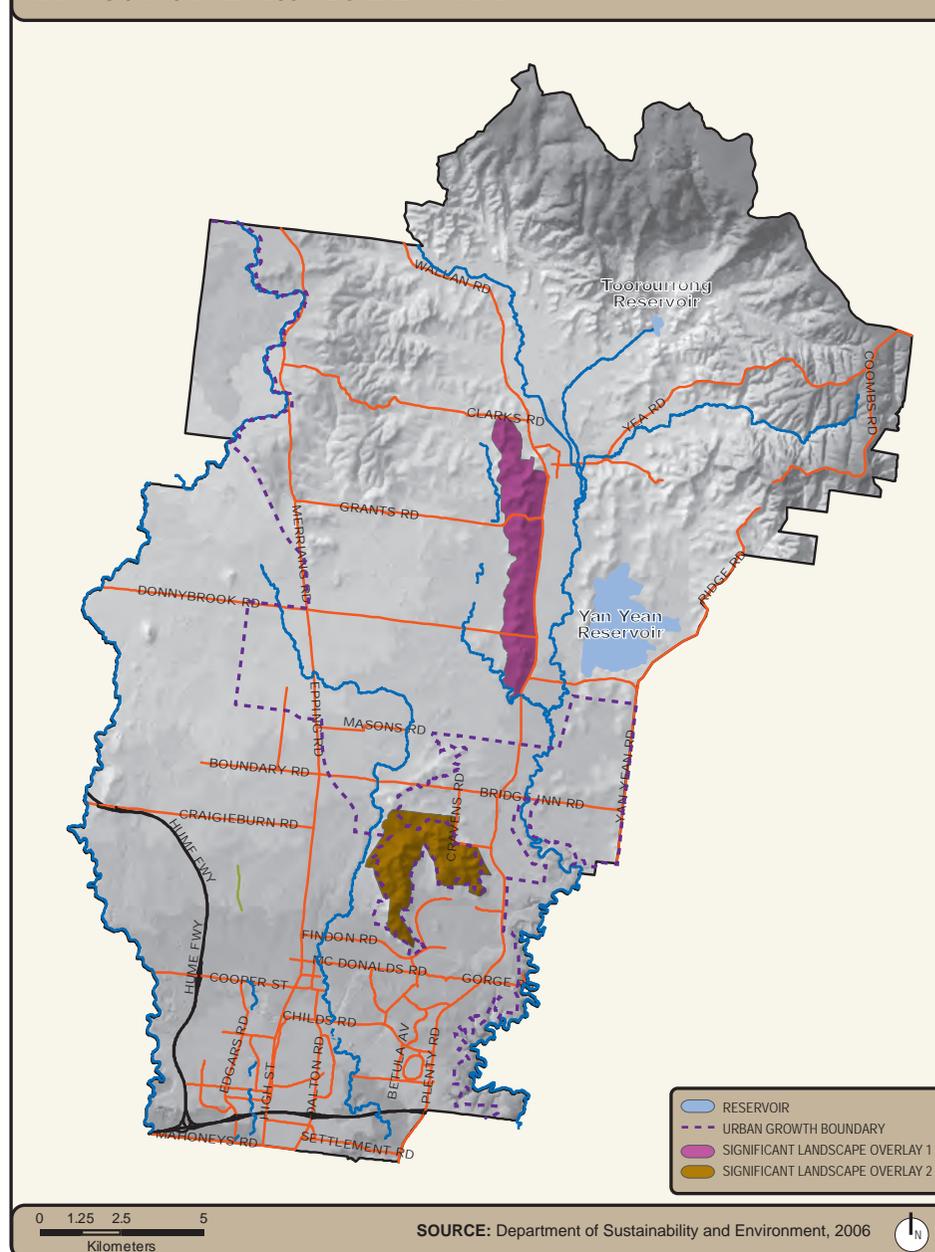
3.7 Actions

Refer to Part 3: Action Plan for the full range of actions proposed to sustain the Whittlesea Green Wedge into the future.

In summary, key actions proposed include:

- Further develop community appreciation of the rural and natural landscape character of the Whittlesea Green Wedge through development of a range of landscape exploration events
- Investigate funding arrangements to sponsor two new annual events: best rural design and best rural land management.
- Amend planning provisions targeted at protection of significant viewsapes and rural design principles during the Whittlesea Planning Scheme review process.

MAP 11 SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE OVERLAY 1 AND 2



4.1 Objective

The objective for this sub-theme is:

Boundaries and buffers objective

To ensure that the interface between the Whittlesea Green Wedge and urban and rural communities is clearly defined and planned to reduce conflict.

Boundaries and buffers are to be enduring features in order to preserve the integrity of both urban and rural areas.

4.2 Features and Values

Boundaries and buffers provide valuable environmental, social and economic demarcation for the municipality.

4.2.1 Boundaries and Buffers

The City of Whittlesea contains various edge conditions from watercourses to vegetation, natural catchments, land forms and soil types, to roads, lands uses and culturally defined boundaries.

It is recognised that edge conditions must be clearly defined, planned and managed. Separation and buffer treatments are often required at interface locations and it is important to note that all forms of development impact on and interact with adjacent and nearby land. This is particularly the case in relation to the urban-rural interface.

Identified as one of the biggest challenges faced by all green wedge areas in the 'Introduction' chapter of this Management Plan, the urban-rural interface poses many issues. This is particularly the case where significant urban growth is occurring and has been intensified through the urban growth boundary expansion.

Substantial changes to Green Wedge boundaries have recently occurred as part of the State Government's approval of an expanded UGB in the western and northern part of the municipality under Amendment VC68. These changes have reduced the extent of Whittlesea's Green Wedge areas but have increased the extent and exposure of green wedge areas to existing and proposed growth areas and the associated issues that this brings.

The extensive land within the newly defined UGB will be the subject of comprehensive planning at the local and State Government level and will be guided by a Growth Area Framework Plan (GAFP) which is now under preparation. This plan will include substantial areas of land which will not be available for development due to environmental values and other constraints such as quarries and associated buffers. The planning of these areas will be considered under the GAFP process and in more detail in the preparation of Precinct Structure Plans. These areas will need to be managed productively and sustainably until such time as they are required for urban development. A Management Plan will be necessary for land awaiting urban conversion but will not be addressed in this GWMP.

The new UGB, which now has a 93km interface to Whittlesea's Green Wedge areas, is based on the following clearly defined boundaries:

Northern Growth Area, Beveridge

An approximate 15km reach of the Upper Merri Creek now forms the northern UGB. The northern portion of the Whittlesea urban growth area is set aside for the development of an inland port (inland

freight hub) although it is not expected that this facility will commence for a number of decades. Land between the Merri Creek and Merriang Road will need to be carefully managed for its environmental, landscape and productive values.

Northern Growth Area, Donnybrook

Between Merri Creek and Merriang Road, 4km of the new UGB is now defined by the proposed E6 freeway reservation. Initially this road will be developed as an arterial road. The undulating land between the E6 and Merriang Road will need to be carefully managed for its landscape and productive values.

River Red Gum Woodland Interface, Woodstock:

The new UGB provides a 9km interface to the significant River Red Gum Woodlands in Donnybrook. The land between the new boundary and Epping Road and the E6 Freeway reservation, will need to be carefully managed for its conservation, productive and landscape values. This land forms part of an investigation area for the establishment of a River Red Gum Grassy Woodland reserve.

Masons Road to Craigieburn Road

Between Masons Road and Craigieburn Road the new UGB is defined by the E6 Freeway reservation for approximately 4km. Existing and proposed quarries and land fill operations are located within the Green Wedge adjacent to this boundary.

Quarry Hills

The Quarry Hills comprise a significant elevated landscape which adjoins three urban growth areas: Mernda, Doreen, South Morang and Epping North. The

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UGB now forms a 25km boundary to the Quarry Hills. Given the significant land use pressures likely to be experienced within the Quarry from the urban interface and from edge effects, the Council has initiated a long term proposal to bring approximately 1,000ha of this land into public ownership and management for conservation and landscape protection.

Land outside the UGB within the Quarry Hills will need to be managed for its landscape, productive and conservation values under private ownership until such time as the land is transferred and managed for public purposes.

Northern Growth Area – Mernda, Yan Yean and Doreen

Approximately 7.5km of the UGB defines the northern boundary of the Plenty Valley growth area defined by Masons Road, Hazelglen Drive, the Melbourne Water pipetrack reservation and title boundaries. A number of small inclusions to the UGB have been identified adjacent to this boundary. These initiatives also seek to reduce land use conflict along this interface.

Shire of Nillumbik Interface

Yan Yean Road forms a 49.8km UGB interface between urban growth areas in the City of Whittlesea and green wedges areas in the Shire of Nillumbik. Yan Yean Road is proposed to function as a arterial road under the management of VicRoads and is designated as a permanent UGB.

Plenty Gorge Park

Approximately 25km of the UGB now defines the Plenty Gorge Park. There is a need to ensure that this boundary is managed for its conservation values but

also recognise the high fire risk that this interface presents to existing and proposed development.

Whittlesea Township

Whittlesea Township is now the only Metropolitan Township that does not have the benefit of a UGB. While the extent of growth has historically been set out in the Whittlesea Township Local Structure Plan and under existing zones, an UGB is needed to provide long term certainty. A continuing commitment to maintaining the non-urban break between the Township and Mernda and Doreen to the south, protecting the Whittlesea Hills to the west, visually significant landscapes and catchment areas to the east and floodplains to the north and south will limit future development but ensure that the Whittlesea Township retains its unique rural character.

The boundaries of the Township under an UGB will be the subject of further separate investigations. Existing and proposed boundaries will need to be managed to ensure that productive rural enterprises can continue and floodplain capacity and quality is not compromised.

4.2.2 Buffers

Buffers present at the local scale include those adopted by specific industries such as extractive industry operations. This buffer format uses landform and vegetation to screen machinery and quarry extractions and aid in the reduction of noise and air pollutants.

At a regional level, buffers between urban and rural land have generally been defined by an absence of either rural or urban land uses. This has recently changed however due to the incursion of the urban growth

boundary into land which still functions primarily for agricultural purposes. Some of the key green breaks identified as having particular importance by the City of Whittlesea have been maintained however, specifically the green break between Mernda and Whittlesea Township.

At a catchment scale, the selection of particular land use zones and overlays complement a wider objective, such as the protection of the headwaters of river catchment, providing the necessary separation that may not be readily apparent at site level.



Conflict at the interface between urban and non-urban uses is not uncommon as land adjoining these areas is often left unmanaged in the hope of possible urban expansion.

Interfaces need to be managed from both sides. On the urban side, planning tools such as framework plans, precinct structure plans, development plans and individual planning permits should be used to ensure an integrated approach to planning for these areas. Within newly zoned urban land areas the role of identifying the boundaries of individual communities, landscape values and as appropriate, the need for discrete urban breaks and management of these breaks will be carried out through the implementation of these documents.

For the green wedge areas, development of Green Wedge Management Plans will assist to clarify key features, issues and priority actions. Both forms of planning must be engaged to effectively manage interface issues.

4.3 What the Community is Saying

Consultation was undertaken with residents and community groups through a series of community forums and supplemented by workshops with government departments and agencies with an interest in the Whittlesea Green Wedge.

Despite the range of opinions expressed, a common thread can be drawn from the feedback received:

- Greater certainty is required regarding boundaries between the urban and rural areas of Whittlesea. The Whittlesea Township lacks a boundary to delineate rural uses from the Township area. The UGB needs increased certainty to encourage investment in our rural areas.

The approval of Amendment VC68 addresses some of these concerns. However, it is envisaged that new concerns relating to the management and stewardship of land which was previously rural and is now located within the UGB may arise, which will need to be further addressed.

The Inquiry into Sustainable Development of Agribusiness in Outer Suburban Melbourne (May 2010) has informed the 'Actions' section of this Management Plan which includes additional measures to mitigate against any perceived future risks to the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the green wedge and the communities within it.

Concerns regarding the boundary of the Whittlesea Township specifically must still be addressed. Refer to the Community Views Final Report for a detailed summary of community responses relating to the ten green wedge sub themes.

