

Preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan

Planning Practice Note | 31

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This practice note provides a guide for the preparation of Green Wedge Management Plans and sets out the general requirements that should be met. The practice note covers the policy context and basis for the plans, their content and status.

There are 12 green wedge areas in the municipal districts of 17 councils. There is substantial variation in the land management conditions and circumstances in each green wedge. The preparation of each Green Wedge Management Plan (GWMP) will need to recognise those variations including the area involved, the level of information available, the resources available, the range of land uses, the condition of the natural resource base and the needs of the local community.

What is a Green Wedge Management Plan?

A Green Wedge Management Plan is a council adopted strategy that identifies a vision, objectives and actions for the sustainable use and development of each green wedge. The plan will identify the values and features of each green wedge, the preferred future land use, environmental and natural resources that should be protected, and the needs of the local community. Green wedges, like any other place are dynamic and constantly evolving. Changes identified through the preparation of GWMPs may embrace new productive land uses, investments and developments consistent with state policies for green wedges, environmental enhancement and sustainable resource management initiatives.

To ensure the sustainable management of green wedges, a GWMP should include a broad range of implementation tools that include regulatory and non-regulatory measures. For example, regulatory actions may encompass changes to existing local planning schemes to encourage and facilitate land uses and developments that protect and enhance each green wedge. A GWMP should also provide non-regulatory actions focusing on education and incentive programs aimed at encouraging landowners to adopt sustainable practices. Achievement of sustainable land uses and land management practices are the critical elements in the development of GWMPs.

Why prepare a Green Wedge Management Plan?

Green wedges will experience change over time. In many cases the condition of their environment and natural resource base needs considerable improvement. A GWMP provides a framework managing change and the actions that will facilitate it. The preferred direction for future change and improvements and how this will be managed is an essential element of the planning for the future of Melbourne's green wedges.

A GWMP provides the opportunity to clearly articulate the kinds of development or activities that are likely to be supported in the green wedge. It will provide clarity and greater certainty for all stakeholders, including landowners.

What is expected for green wedges?

The green wedges accommodate agricultural and recreational uses, as well as a variety of important functions that support Melbourne. These include major assets such as airports, sewage treatment plants, extractive industry and landfill sites – uses that support urban activity but which cannot be located amongst normal urban development. The green wedges include areas that have strong environmental, landscape, built and Koori heritage value for Victorians – many of which are of state, national or international significance. They provide important resources for recreation and tourism. Each green wedge has unique features and will require a management approach that promotes and encourages its diversity.

Collectively, green wedges have a broad range of purposes. This means that each GWMP will need an individual, tailored approach to establish the clear role, purpose, objectives and related actions for each area. To ensure a metropolitan and regional approach, a GWMP can be prepared either by an individual council or by a group of councils where appropriate.

A series of actions have been undertaken to establish and protect green wedges that includes:

- application of the Urban Growth Boundary around Melbourne and townships within the green wedges (this has been implemented)
- new planning measures including new green wedge zoning and the Core Planning Provisions at Clause 57 (this has been implemented).
- new legislation that ensures protection of green wedges (this has been implemented)
- development of individual action plans for each green wedge – the Green Wedge Management Plan (this is being implemented)
- management of residential development in green wedges (this is being implemented and will be further enhanced through the preparation of GWMPs)
- management of the outward growth of Melbourne
- identification of key features and related values for each green wedge (The GWMP will provide an opportunity to further identify and refine key features and related values).

Opportunities in the green wedge include:

- agricultural uses, such as market gardening, viticulture and broad acre farming, as well as forestry and land-based aquaculture
- assisting the preservation of rural and scenic landscapes
- ensuring the conservation of important environmental assets close to where people live
- managing renewable and non-renewable resources and natural areas (such as water supply catchments)
- providing and safeguarding infrastructure sites that support urban areas (for example, sewage treatment plants)
- allowing industries such as sand and stone extraction to operate close to major markets
- providing opportunities for tourism and recreation
- recognising and conserving heritage features.

What are the aims of the Green Wedge Management Planning process?

The key task of a GWMP is to articulate the type, scale and form of change in the green wedge and how those changes will be managed and facilitated. Many councils have already undertaken strategic planning, policy and resource management studies, projects and action in their green wedges. This work will provide a relevant basis for the finalisation of the plan.

In summary, a GWMP should:

1. Develop a vision, role and purpose for the green wedge. This should be determined through community consultation and research.
2. Identify the values and features within the green wedge that are to be protected and enhanced. This should be based on a detailed environmental and land use inventory and community consultation.
3. Establish a strategic direction for land use and development within the green wedge that is consistent with government policies and strategies that will protect and enhance the values and features identified within the green wedge. This should be based on identification of key opportunities and constraints identified through research.

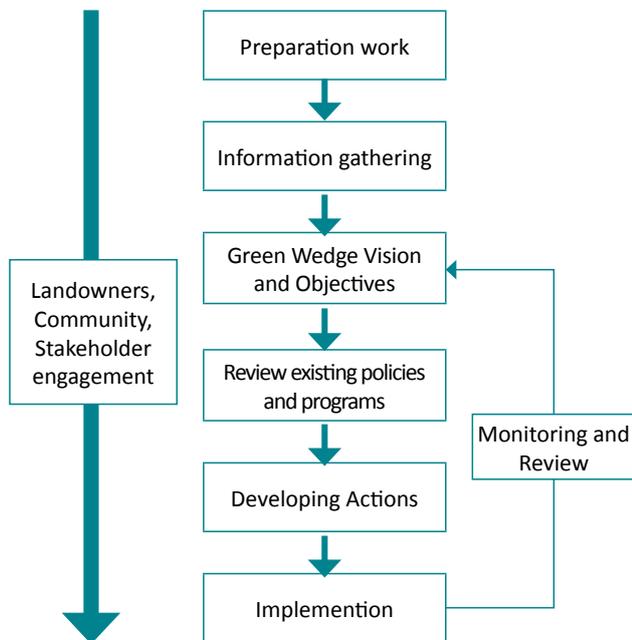
4. Articulate the strategic direction for the green wedge through the relevant planning scheme. This should involve:
 - ensuring the vision, role and purpose of the green wedge is identified in the Municipal Strategic Statement
 - confirmation of the green wedge zoning and the schedules to these zones
 - ensuring identified values, environmental assets and resources are appropriately identified and protected by the planning scheme by such tools as planning scheme overlays and local planning policies
 - consideration of the need to provide further guidance in relation to discretionary uses and developments within the green wedge through the Local Planning Policy Framework.
5. Establish a framework to encourage sustainable land management practices and appropriate resource management. This should involve:
 - reviewing the adequacy of resources and programs
 - assessing the effectiveness of existing incentive and education programs
 - developing new initiatives aimed at encouraging sustainable land management practices
 - identifying and supporting sustainable land use options
 - consideration of relevant plans and strategies related to natural resource management including fire management plans, catchment management plans and stream flow management plans.
6. Identify the needs of green wedge landowners and the wider community. Issues that should be examined include demographic considerations, economic sustainability, employment opportunities, sustainable land use options, community facilities and other required levels of infrastructure.
7. Establish a clear monitoring and review process to ensure the plan remains relevant and its performance can be measured. This should involve determining appropriate indicators and a commitment to review the plan in five years.

Broadly, the plan should focus on the following:

- support or incorporate existing plans, strategies and activities that align with green wedge policies, such as Regional Catchment Strategies, Regional Management Plans and Natural Resource Plans
- reflect Government policies and strategies
- examine opportunities for agricultural and alternative land use options
- involve key stakeholders and landowners in developing the plans, to reflect a range of expertise and knowledge
- promote community participation and ownership of the values and actions for the green wedge
- promote environmentally sustainable development and land management
- integrate resource development and management with fire management and protection plans
- have a monitoring process for actions built into the management process
- develop and expand land management programs and support mechanisms for landholders in achieving improved land stewardship
- develop new, and expand upon current, environmental enhancement initiatives
- identify and set priorities for investment in land use and development consistent with government policies and strategies.

What is the process for preparing a Green Wedge Management Plan?

Each green wedge is different. The nature of land uses and developments are diverse, the number of landowners and stakeholders varies. The level of knowledge about the quality of the natural resource base and the resource levels of each council also varies. These differences will influence the scope and detail of the process to be used in the preparation of each GWMP. The following diagram provides a typical model for preparing a GWMP.



Preparation work

Determine the key stakeholders, project teams, consultation methods, scope of tasks and resources.

Information gathering

Explore existing information, the policy context, identify gaps, undertake research and identify community views and issues.

Green Wedge Vision and Objectives

Develop a vision that outlines the preferred future direction for the green wedge. Determine objectives that will achieve the vision. Explore key indicators that will be able to measure whether the objectives are being achieved.

Review existing policies and programs

Review the existing policies and programs that apply or influence the green wedge. Will they deliver the vision and objectives? Do they need to be changed, enhanced and/or better resourced?

Developing Actions

Develop a series of actions that are designed to achieve the vision and objectives. Various options may need to be explored and tested with key stakeholders before arriving at the preferred actions.

Implementation

This process will identify responsibilities, priorities and time lines and required resources. It should identify whether additional work is required such as future planning scheme amendments.

Monitoring and Review

This process should be twofold. Firstly it should establish a mechanism to measure the progress of implementation. This may involve establishing an annual reporting process to council. Secondly, it should establish a process to review the GWMP to ensure the plan remains relevant and to measure the success of the plan in achieving the agreed vision and objectives.

Principles that should underpin preparation of a GWMP

Five principles have been developed that should underpin the preparation of a GWMP. These principles will ensure that a GWMP is consistent with government policy and it has been prepared using a collaborative and inclusive approach.

Consistency with Victorian State Government policies and strategies

- A GWMP should be consistent with relevant state government policies and strategies.

A common basis for the preparation of plans

- A GWMP should be prepared in partnership with government and councils, in their role as the funding agencies implementing government policies, and with landowners and the community, in their role as the custodians of the area who have a duty of care for the resource base.

A well informed, inclusive plan preparation process

- A GWMP should reflect the regional and local circumstances and needs of each green wedge, as well as the circumstances and needs that are shared with other relevant green wedge areas. It should provide a clear purpose that council is able and willing to implement and defend.
- Preparation of a GWMP should take into account the varying levels of knowledge about each green wedge area shared between the relevant councils, government departments and agencies, community groups and organisations, landowners and the general public.
- Previous relevant work that is consistent with the strategic and policy intent of state government policies and strategies can be included in the process and can provide a useful basis for the preparation of the plan.

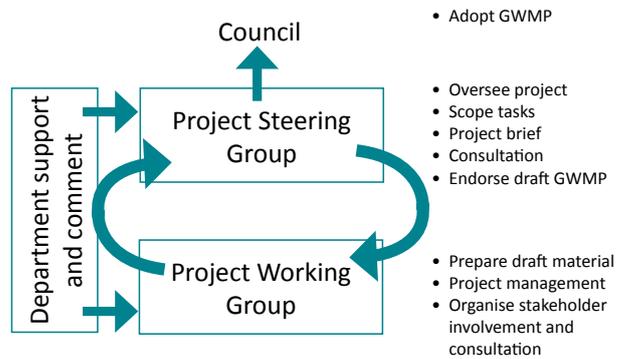
- Information held by government sources can be made available to assist the preparation of the plan. A range of external information sources, such as Regional Catchment Strategies, Regional Management Plans, and ABS data can inform development of the plan.
- The process for the preparation of a GWMP should involve a process of active engagement with the full range of stakeholders to assist commitment to long term resourcing and implementation of the plan. This may include groups of councils where values and attributes are shared.
- The processes used in the preparation of a GWMP should demonstrate transparency, inclusiveness and consultation and seek to build partnerships and shared ownership.

A common approach to the preparation of GWMPs

While the circumstances of each green wedge area will vary, the points below set out the core components expected to be used in the process. This is summarised in the figure below.

- Council should establish a project steering group (chaired by the council), with representatives from key stakeholders to oversee the preparation of the plan. The project steering group should provide support guidance and oversight of progress and would have the following roles:
 - provide input into the preparation of a project plan
 - endorse key milestones of the GWMP
 - oversee publicity and promotion about the preparation of the GWMP and the process to be used
 - oversee project briefs for tasks to be undertaken to assist in the preparation of the GWMP
 - ensure relevant and practicable levels of engagement and consultation to assist in research and preparation of the GWMP
 - oversee a publicised program of public display of draft plans and formal input to the development of the GWMP.
- Council should establish a working group to assist the project steering group in preparing the GWMP.

- Council should identify the required actions to implement the GWMP, such as partnership agreements with organisations, agencies or community groups and any other necessary mechanisms.
- Council should formally adopt the GWMP.
- Council should identify appropriate mechanisms to oversee, monitor and evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of the GWMP.



Involvement of stakeholders and landowners

The development of the plan is not intended to re-open debates regarding existing government policies and strategies. While there are divergent views regarding green wedges, an important element in preparing a GWMP is to ensure that representatives of all relevant stakeholders including landowners have been identified and effectively engaged. There is great diversity in green wedge areas in the number and range of landowners and the groups and organisations with direct and indirect interests in the ongoing management and future direction of particular areas and attributes. It is essential that these groups are informed and that realistic and meaningful measures have been implemented to engage them in the process. Any previous relevant consultation should be reflected in the final plan.

How will Green Wedge Management Plans be implemented?

Each GWMP will set out a series of actions and measures that need to be undertaken, and identify resource requirements, roles and responsibilities, time lines, outcomes and evaluation. This implementation program will include council, government departments and agencies, relevant organisations, landowners and the community. A range of partnership agreements, memorandum of understanding and implementation tools may be utilised.

Status of Green Wedge Management Plans

A GWMP should be adopted by Council. Where relevant, it is anticipated that aspects of the plan will be included or referenced in the Local Planning Policy Framework and will provide the strategic basis for reviewing existing planning provisions of the green wedge. Any proposed changes to a planning scheme will require a planning scheme amendment which involves separate consultation processes and other requirements specified under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. Similarly, any proposed changes to a council's municipal laws will also require statutory processes required under the *Local Government Act 1989*.

Preparation of a GWMP consistent with the practice note will enable government departments and agencies to recognise and reference it in their ongoing programs. As GWMPs are also likely to be recognised and referenced in other relevant land and resource management plans, such as Regional Catchment Strategies.

Role of the department

Department officers are available to assist councils in the preparation of a GWMP. The department will provide support and assistance to councils by:

- participating in the project steering and working groups as needed
- liaising with councils and groups of councils
- contributing to partnership arrangements or funding programs where possible.

It is anticipated that the department will be involved in the development of each GWMP and be provided with an opportunity to comment on the draft GWMP prior to it being adopted by Council.

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