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C30**GANNAWARRA SHIRE KEY ISSUES AND STRATEGIC VISION****21.01-1**12/11/2015
C30**Snapshot of Gannawarra Shire**

Gannawarra Shire was created in January 1995 and is part of the Loddon Murray region of northern Victoria. Townships and settlements include Kerang, Cohuna, Koondrook, Lake Charm, Lalbert, Leitchville, Macorna, Murrabit, Mystic Park and Quambatook. The municipality is located approximately 300 kilometres north-west of Melbourne, on the Murray River. Travel to the surrounding regional centres of Bendigo, Echuca and Swan Hill takes approximately 1 hour by road.

Historically the area was occupied by Koori people more than 40,000 years ago. White settlement began with graziers taking up leases on the Murray River and around the lakes. The building of the railways, the river trade, land selections, irrigation development and soldier settlement all contributed to the development of the municipality and to the existing pattern of rural and urban land use.

Regional setting

Gannawarra is part of a wide area centred on the Murray River environs, and is therefore part of the Murray-Darling Basin as administered by the Murray Darling Basin Authority. The North Central Catchment Management Authority (CMA) in partnership with local councils and water authorities are responsible for the natural resource management of the basin. The Regional Catchment Strategy (RCS) is the key document for the North Central Region and is administered by the North Central CMA. The RCS provides a vision for the future landscape of the region and the management of its natural resources. The current RCS is expected to be replaced soon with a new regional strategy.

Physical Profile

Gannawarra Shire has an area of 3,736 square kilometres. It is bordered by the Murray River to the north and incorporates a variety of environments including lakes and wetlands, red gum forests and the Mallee.

With its Mediterranean climate, plenty of sunshine and magnificent natural features, the municipality is well suited to agriculture and recreation. Rainfall averages 350-400 millimetres per annum.

Social Profile

Gannawarra Shire's population trend has been an aging population and a decrease in the overall number of people. While it is predicted that this trend will continue in the long-term as young people leave the region to continue their education and pursue employment opportunities, an important challenge for Gannawarra is to reverse this trend to create a positive and sustainable future.

Ninety per cent of Gannawarra Shire's residents were born in Australia, so there is less cultural diversity than in some other municipalities.

The municipality's population was 11,650 in 2006 and 10,366 on 28 March 2013 (ABS).

The community is well-connected and resilient, but after recent floods and years of battling drought and associated economic and environmental stresses, ongoing support and economic and social development are important.

Agriculture

Gannawarra has a diverse agricultural sector which is changing in line with many internal and external impacts such as water trade, water allocations, irrigation system modernisation, world commodity markets and the input costs of farm production.

Agriculture in the municipality is worth around \$251 million annually and has been highly reliant on a strong local dairy industry and large scale grain production. While severely

impacted by drought, low water allocations and commodity prices, the dairy industry is still a major driver of agriculture within the municipality.

New agricultural enterprises are continuing to develop with major horticultural developments in stone fruit, tomato processing, corporate dairy investments, ongoing development of horticultural crops, value adding of local products and further development of the livestock industry.

Manufacturing

Manufacturing is potentially a major growth area and employer within Gannawarra Shire. Much of the manufacturing sector is linked to agriculture and involves processing and value adding of raw product such as milk, fruit and grains, and manufacturing of equipment to support the agricultural industry.

Retail, Trades and Professional

Gannawarra Shire provides a well-established service sector to support the local catchment area of some 15,000 people.

Professional services include banking and financial institutions, legal firms, accounting, business and financial advisors, design and drafting, agronomy, consulting, employment agencies and information technology.

Trades are well catered for and capable of supporting new development. These include building, electrical, earthmoving, concreting, engineering, sign writing, manufacturing, floor coverings, plumbing and hardware.

The current economic climate is placing pressure on many of the retail, trades and professional businesses as the local cash flow is reduced as a result of the agricultural downturn. It is absolutely critical that Gannawarra Shire Council continues the push for population growth to support the maintenance of current levels of business and services.

Infrastructure and Transport

Infrastructure is vital for business development and Gannawarra Shire has significant infrastructure advantages. An excellent power supply from a recent sub-station upgrade, world-class potable water supplies and access to the Loddon Valley and Murray Valley Highways make Gannawarra an ideal business location. Natural gas is currently not available.

Transport services are available across the municipality, with major road freight operators located in Cohuna and Kerang. There are freight and passenger rail services to and from Kerang, and sealed aerodrome runways at Cohuna and Kerang.

Health and Education

The Gannawarra Shire has a great range of health and educational services but, like other regional areas, sometimes struggles to retain professional medical staff. Extensive hospital, medical, dental, and aged care facilities are available, along with nursing homes and retirement centres. Northern District Community Health (NDCH) supplies a wide range of services to the region. There is significant infrastructure capacity for the region to accommodate people with a need for higher levels of health care.

Educational facilities include pre-school, primary and secondary colleges, as well as the Kerang Learning Centre, Cohuna Learning Centre and Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE.

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Key influences

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Settlement

The key influences on settlement include:

- About 55% of the population live in urban areas. This figure is increasing at the expense of population in the rural balance.

- All towns except Cohuna and Koondrook have experienced population decrease during recent years.
- The size of households has decreased over recent years and this is projected to continue.
- The municipality's towns, particularly Kerang, Cohuna and Koondrook, have significant capacity to accommodate additional population.

Environment and landscape

The key influences on environment and landscape include:

- The rivers and lakes play a key environmental, economic, social and tourism role.
- The environmental values of the Murray River corridor are of national significance and must be protected and enhanced.
- There are significant numbers of rare or threatened species in the municipality.
- The wetlands and lakes systems provide significant habitat for flora and fauna.

Environmental risks

The key influences on environmental risks include:

- Climate change is expected to lead to reduced rainfall and increased evaporation rates, which will have impacts on the natural environment as well as farming.

Natural resource management

The key influences on natural resource management include:

- Farms on both dryland and irrigated land are increasing in size to provide better economies of scale.
- The sale of water off irrigated land and the modernisation of the irrigation network impacts on farming options for the land and introduces pockets of non-irrigated land into irrigated areas.
- Tradeable water rights have diversified the horticultural base with the introduction of olives, grapes, cherries, tomatoes and walnuts.
- The Wimmera Mallee Pipeline Project and the Normanville Pipeline Project have been completed.

Built environment and heritage

The key influences on built environment and heritage include:

- Aboriginal heritage may play a role in the development of tourism.
- The renovation, repair and re-use of heritage buildings is a significant component of local economic development and adds to the attractiveness of the municipality.

Housing

The key influences on housing include:

- An ageing population will require a diversified housing stock.
- There is demand for land for rural living and rural residential development, particularly near water frontages.

Economic development

The key influences on economic development include:

- Economies of scale and improved road access are potential threats to the prosperity of smaller regional and sub-regional centres.
- Kerang and Cohuna provide a district service role. There is significant leakage of expenditure on higher order goods and services to Swan Hill, Bendigo and Echuca.

Transport

The key influences on transport include:

- The Murray Valley and Loddon Valley Highways and other major roads provide access to other regional centres and ports for the export of local produce. Within the municipality, local and regional roads complement this main road network.
- There are significant grain handling and storage facilities in the municipality.

Infrastructure

The key influences on infrastructure include:

- Water and sewerage infrastructure is provided to towns by the various water authorities.
- Community Plans have been developed throughout the municipality and should be considered in planning decisions wherever relevant.

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Key issues

The key issues facing Gannawarra are focused around nine strategic themes:

Settlement

- Flooding and stormwater management is a major consideration when planning for urban development.
- Maintaining and improving the level of business, employment and community services in the municipality's towns is an ongoing issue.
- Improvements in road access and wastewater management may allow additional land to be considered for development in the future.
- Maintaining and improving community facilities is an ongoing challenge and is important to attract new residents.

Environment and landscape

- Native vegetation coverage has reduced significantly since post-contact settlement.
- Land with water frontage (Murray River, Gunbower Creek, Kerang lakes, water courses and wetlands) is increasingly targeted for residential development. While this type of development can be facilitated, it needs to be managed to ensure environmental values are maintained.

Environmental risks

- Flooding remains a major hazard in the municipality.
- There is a significant risk of grass and crop fires throughout the municipality, and bush fire in bushland areas.
- Contamination of land from previous industrial or similar uses may not be discovered until re-development proposals are being considered.

Natural resource management

- Access to adequate good quality water is central to the ongoing growth of the farming economy. Any action to reduce agricultural water entitlements could stifle long term horticultural growth.
- Salinity levels need to be managed to ensure ongoing agricultural growth.

Built environment and heritage

The key influences on built environment and heritage include:

- The protection of Aboriginal and post-contact cultural heritage is critical to the growth in tourism and a sense of place.
- Koondrook with its wharf project, timber mill and heritage precinct has significant potential for tourism development.

Housing

- Significant new residential development in Kerang and Cohuna depends on residential land supply. Council can encourage the development of private land.
- Rural living development has the potential to attract new residents to the municipality.
- Suitable land exists for further residential and rural residential development, and its subdivision and development must be managed to ensure environmental sustainability.

Economic development

- Continuing economic development is vital to the future of the municipality. Commerce and industry provide essential economic activity and employment.
- Water frontages provide a focus and further potential for tourism development.
- Tourism, including experiential tourism, could be based on the natural environment, farming history, soldier settlement, river trade, timber processing, Aboriginal heritage and rivers and lakes.

Transport

- A well-maintained local road network is essential for access to properties and to support the agricultural and manufacturing sectors.
- Rail transport remains important for bulk commodities and in providing daily transport links to Bendigo and Melbourne.

Infrastructure

- Solar generation of electricity is a major opportunity.
- Vehicle access and water supplies are essential for fire-fighting.
- The provision of reticulated gas (currently not available) is important for value adding industries and reducing the community's carbon footprint.
- Community development is increasingly recognised as part of the attractiveness of both towns and rural districts.
- Education, health and community services are vital to the welfare of residents, and are significant generators of employment and economic activity.

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Strategic vision

Council Plan

Gannawarra Shire Council's *Council Plan 2013-2017* describes the following vision for the municipality:

"Gannawarra will become a place which is positively defined by its difference."

After considering the needs of the community, councillors, the council leadership team and the community have defined four key strategic priority areas:

- Strong and diverse economy
- Sustainable environments
- Healthy liveable communities
- Effective management and leadership

These strategic priorities have been carefully framed after considering the needs of the community, including the need to create jobs, improve liveability and maintain the natural environment.

Planning and Development Vision Statement

The following vision evolved from community consultation during the Gannawarra Strategy and Planning Scheme Review project and reflects the broad views and aspirations for planning and development in the municipality:

“The Gannawarra Shire community is aiming to increase opportunities for local employment and investment, sustainable natural resource management, protection of the natural environment and cultural heritage and a high quality of lifestyle for urban and rural residents.”

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Land use framework plan

The Gannawarra Land Use Framework Plan indicates some of the key elements that will influence land use planning and development over the next 15 years.

The Land Use Framework Plan:

- Provides a basis for the application of zones and overlays
- Identifies municipal-wide environmental and physical constraints to development and areas of environmental significance.

The Land Use Framework Plan has been influenced by the Gannawarra Urban and Rural Strategy Plan (U&RSP) of November 2007, which is a reference document in the planning scheme. The main recommendations of the U&RSP were incorporated into the planning scheme by Amendment C23.

Figure 1: Gannawarra land use framework plan
GANNAWARRA LAND USE FRAMEWORK PLAN

