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C51**RURAL LAND USE AND AGRICULTURE****Context:**

Agriculture is a major economic industry and employment generator in the municipality. In addition to the traditional animal grazing industries of cattle and sheep, other agricultural industries have increased in the municipality, such as viticulture in the Milawa, Oxley and King Valley areas and stone fruits in the Warby Ranges. Lifestyle farming is also prevalent in some areas.

Rural land uses other than agriculture are also major economic industries and employment generators. Other uses of rural land include tourism industries such as wineries and fine foods, rural industries and outdoor education.

The agricultural sector is essential to the economic and social performance of the municipality and the region. It is an imperative that the productivity and versatility of agricultural land is maintained, particularly for higher agricultural versatility areas.

Issues:*Rural and agricultural land use:*

- The municipality has some very productive soils and agricultural areas. The report *An Assessment of the Versatility of Agricultural Land in the Rural City of Wangaratta, April 2000* rates the Ovens River and King River valleys as 'very high' versatility and the centre and northern sections of the municipality as 'high' versatility.
- Rural activities and industries include intensive industrial uses that may generate offsite amenity issues. Similarly, rural lifestyle aspirations and practices can impact on rural and agricultural uses. Rural uses in rural areas operate on a right to farm principle, allowing existing agricultural and rural uses to legally operate and continue irrespective of adjoining or nearby uses. Potential amenity impacts need to be minimised between rural agricultural uses and rural lifestyle uses, particularly in higher agricultural productivity and versatility areas.
- The municipality has potential for intensive animal industries, such as broiler farms. There is a need to identify and secure areas for intensive animal industries.
- The municipality has considerable potential for timber production. Locational advantages for timber production in the municipality and region are enhanced by existing timber processing in the municipality, an available labour force and excellent access to major road and rail transport infrastructure. Timber production and associated activities require certainty in rural areas. Timber plantations can assist in reducing environmental problems.

Subdivision and housing:

- Although subdivision may potentially impact on the productive performance of rural land, the construction and use of housing in some areas has led to the loss of agricultural use and generated conflict between rural and lifestyle uses. Both subdivision and rural housing must provide for and retain the agricultural use of the land. Any subdivision and rural housing proposals in higher agricultural productivity and versatility areas need to be directly linked to an agricultural use, retain productive agricultural use of the land and area, protect the economic potential of the land and area for agriculture, and not be used for rural lifestyle purposes.
- Subdivision and housing in rural areas can lead to difficulty in funding, provision and maintenance of services such as roads, electricity and water supply. Infrastructure may be required or be supplemented through contributions for rural subdivision and housing. Any rural subdivision and housing proposals must assess and provide infrastructure as required, including practical and legal access for service providers if needed.
- The subdivision of land for 'house lot excision' needs to protect and be closely linked with the continuing productive agricultural use of land, particularly in higher

agricultural productivity and versatility areas. Any excision of land needs to maintain the agricultural land resource through minimising the parcel size of an existing house that is to be excised and maintaining a large vacant balance of land for agricultural purposes.

Strategic directions:

Rural and agricultural land use:

- Encourage the growth and development of environmentally and economically sustainable agricultural enterprises
- Recognise and protect agriculture and other rural uses as significant economic strengths, social capital and productive resources
- Maintain the productivity and versatility of agricultural land, particularly in higher agricultural productivity and versatility areas
- Establish the municipality as the primary centre for the wine industry in northeastern Victoria
- Minimise potential amenity impacts between rural agricultural uses and rural lifestyle uses, particularly in higher agricultural productivity and versatility areas
- Maintain and enhance the potential for viticultural use and development particularly in the Milawa, Oxley and King Valley areas
- Ensure that any subdivision and rural housing proposals in higher agricultural productivity and versatility areas are directly linked to an agricultural use, retain productive agricultural use of the land and area, protect the economic potential of the land and area for agriculture, and are not used for rural lifestyle purposes
- Encourage and protect the potential for intensive animal industries, such as broiler farms, in appropriate locations
- Support timber production and processing as locational and economic strengths of the area and region

Subdivision and housing:

- Ensure that rural subdivision and housing is provided with a level of infrastructure that is required for that use or development
- Ensure that any subdivision of land for ‘house lot excision’ maintains the agricultural land resource by minimising the parcel size of an existing house that is to be excised and maintaining a large vacant balance of land for agricultural purposes

Open space:

- Where the residential, commercial or industrial zones apply in rural areas within the municipality of Wangaratta, then the *Wangaratta Recreation Strategy and Open Space Strategy, 2012* is to be applied to determine the need for open space contributions.
- Require the creation of open space for new subdivisions in areas where an identified open space deficiency exists.
- Require a monetary contribution toward the maintenance and improvement of existing open space as a condition of the approval of new subdivisions in areas where the existing supply of open space meets community needs.

Other relevant strategies and policies:

The following issues and clauses are relevant to this strategic direction:

- Rural living:
- Refer to Clause 21.07 *Rural Townships and Settlements*
- Significant rural landscapes and ridgelines:

Refer to Clause 21.10 Environmental Management and Heritage

- Sustainability, environmental protection and rural water supply and catchments:

Refer to Clause 21.10 Environmental Management and Heritage

- Rural infrastructure:

Refer to Clause 21.11 Infrastructure and Community

The following policies are relevant to this strategic direction:

- 22.01-1 *Housing and sheds in rural areas*
- 22.01-2 *Subdivision in rural areas*
- 22.09 *Public Open Space Contributions*

Further work:

- Undertake a rural lands study to assess the agricultural, mixed farming, lifestyle farming and environmental conditions of rural land, making recommendations on the application of the Rural Activity and Rural Conservation zones
- In conjunction with the Department of Primary Industries, identify suitable areas for intensive animal industries, such as broiler farms, and consider land use planning measures to provide long term security for these industries