

Green Wedge MANAGEMENT PLAN



Community Panel Response to recommendations



December 2018

NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL

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Nilumbik Shire Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the traditional custodians of the land now known as the Shire of Nilumbik and values the significance of the Wurundjeri people's history as essential to the unique character of the Shire.

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Introduction

Nillumbik Shire Council is asking the community to help it prepare a new Green Wedge Management Plan to guide the future of our iconic rural areas, the 'Green Wedge', which covers some 91 per cent of the Shire. We're asking: 'What is the best way for us to manage Nillumbik's Green Wedge, now and in the future?'

This new plan will guide decision making by Council and the community in relation to the Nillumbik Green Wedge and for this reason, needs to capture the spirit, aims and aspirations of as many people as possible. For this reason, Council has invested in an extensive program of engagement with the Shire's community to help shape the new plan. We are approximately midway through this process.

Following an extensive community engagement phase, a Community Panel sat for six days from August to November to hear about and consider the many issues impacting the management of the Green Wedge. The Panel was asked to recommend to Council what should be the vision, objectives and key actions of the new plan. To support its decision making, the Panel was independently facilitated and provided with the results of the earlier community engagement and information assembled by Council's administration. It also heard from people it nominated.

Council offers its sincere thanks to all Community Panel members for their willingness to participate and their dedication to the task. Council promised that if it did not agree with the Panel's recommendations, it would explain why.

The Panel's recommendations were presented to Council at its Council Meeting on 27 November 2018. This report is Council's response to those recommendations and it will now help shape Council's preparation of a new draft Green Wedge Management Plan.

In early 2019, Council will consider the draft plan for release to a further round of community consultation. Engagement will run for six weeks, allowing all members of the community the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft plan before it returns again to Council for final consideration.



Community Panel preamble

“This Panel came together to consider the question, “What is the best way to manage Nillumbik’s Green Wedge now and into the future?”

After considering the evidence and expert opinion presented to us, the recommendations made cover issues that we have identified as being critical, whether they are included in the existing Green Wedge Management Plan or not.

The panel acknowledges the significant amount of work and expertise that has gone into preparing the existing plan. We strongly believe that it should serve as a base from which to prepare an updated plan, and any actions that are yet to be completed should be carried over, unless specifically contradicted by our recommendations.

The panel acknowledges that while this is a majority view, not all of its members agree on all points. Minority reports have been prepared and should be given due consideration”.

COUNCIL RESPONSE: NOTE

Council notes the Panel’s advice that the existing plan should serve as a base for preparing the new draft plan but reserves its right to improve clarity and efficiency, remove redundant or duplicated clauses and fill-in any gaps.

Community Panel vision

Our vision for the Green Wedge in 2030

Management of the Nillumbik Green Wedge will lead the way in supporting a vibrant, resilient, connected and diverse community, living with the landscape to enhance the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the Shire.

COUNCIL RESPONSE: **SUPPORTED**

Council supports the Panel's vision with the alteration of "living in the landscape" rather than "with the landscape" so as to be consistent with its Council Plan. Council notes that the vision does not need to be time limited as it reflects an ongoing approach to good and comprehensive management.



Community Panel principles

The Panel reviewed the current principles guiding the Green Wedge Management Plan. All remain relevant, but the panel wish to emphasise the following:

<p>Principle 1 Collaboration</p>	<p>The commitment to collaboration between Council, community and stakeholders remains paramount. The voice of both rural and urban residents should be recognised.</p>
<p>Principle 2 Sustainability</p>	<p>A continued pursuit of sustainability is a priority for a Green Wedge community.</p>
<p>Principle 3 Leadership</p>	<p>Council has a responsibility to assume leadership; this should be demonstrated through all its actions around Green Wedge Management Plan review and implementation.</p>
<p>Principle 4 Conserve and enhance</p>	<p>The Council together with the community must recognise our stewardship responsibility to protecting our irreplaceable natural landscape.</p>
<p>Principle 5 Connectedness</p>	<p>Both urban and rural areas of our Shire have a role to play in supporting the Green Wedge.</p>
<p>Principle 6 Embrace change</p>	<p>The Green Wedge Management Plan must acknowledge ongoing policy changes and the constantly evolving context provided by climate change, a growing Melbourne, and pressure on our precious Green Wedge resources and natural assets.</p>
<p>Principle 7 Social equity</p>	<p>The Green Wedge Management Plan must balance diverse social needs, including our social mix, differing personal needs and variable access to services.</p>
<p>Principle 8 Celebrate local identity</p>	<p>Local diversity of communities within the Green Wedge must be embraced.</p>
<p>Principle 9 Precautionary principle</p>	<p>This remains fundamental to Green Wedge management.</p>
<p>Principle 10 Appreciation and enjoyment</p>	<p>The Green Wedge shall always be a special place for Nillumbik residents and the wider community.</p>

The Green Wedge Management Panel identified several other principles that the plan must address:

1. **Focus on the future:** there is a danger that short-term pragmatics compromise our stewardship responsibilities. Council and stakeholders must assume responsibility for a focus on the long term, because of the precautionary principle and the need to respect future generations.
2. **Indigenous voice:** we have much to learn from our First Peoples, particularly about caring for country.
3. **Whole of Shire approach:** the Green Wedge is a whole of shire responsibility; both urban and rural areas are co-dependent and should have a voice about the Green Wedge future.
4. **Relationship to Metropolitan Melbourne:** Nillumbik's role as the Green Wedge Shire has increased significance, as Melbourne expands within the urban growth boundaries. Nillumbik's role in protecting biodiversity and natural landscape must be supported.

COUNCIL RESPONSE: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council takes the Panel's advice that the principles in the existing plan remain relevant and that four other principles should be incorporated. Council also believes that a new principle relating to safety, well-being and resilience needs to be added to be consistent with the vision and the meanings of each principle need to be further clarified. Keeping the list at ten principles (with explanatory notes) is also desirable. With some careful rationalisation, it should be possible to incorporate and clarify all of these sentiments.

Community Panel recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1 Bushfire preparedness, mitigation and management

1. Encourage and support the use of, and further research into the impacts of, indigenous cool burning practices for ecological management and fuel reduction.
2. Promote and support community education that provides a clear understanding of risks, action, obligations and opportunities to protect people and property. This includes consideration of fire bunkers where appropriate, community safe areas, etc.
3. Council collaborate with all levels of government and residents to mitigate the risk of bushfire and resultant impacts on residents, assets and resources in the green wedge.
4. Ensure the Municipal Fire Prevention Plan is up to date, appropriate and compliant with Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations.

Rationale

- For community safety in the event of wildfire
- For the purpose of biodiversity conservation
- To ensure the two above points are not in conflict

Council response: SUPPORT

Council supports the Panel's recommendations and its positioning of bushfire preparedness, mitigation and management as an overarching issue for management of the green wedge. Council has statutory responsibilities in this area and is committed to developing a comprehensive fire mitigation strategy and expects this work to be completed in 2019.

RECOMMENDATION 2 Strengthened governance for the Green Wedge Management Plan

Governance of the GWMP should be strengthened through:

1. Commit to establish a GWMP advisory committee. Subsuming these responsibilities within Environment and Sustainability Committee has led to a reduced focus on monitoring GWMP implementation.
2. Publish an annual budget statement relating to the GWMP about resource allocation and actual expenditure in each financial year, and reasons for variation. This should be accompanied by an annual statement of performance against GWMP performance indicators.

Rationale

- The current GWMP acknowledges the importance of "...strong, active and committed governance, in particular a commitment to proactive leadership in partnership with the community...".
- A stronger demonstration of commitment to implement the plan is required, compared to what has occurred under the current plan so far. This lack of commitment was demonstrated by the need to retrospectively prepare a report on implementation actions, only after a specific request for information by the Community Panel.
- Progress on implementation would be supported by annual assessments against key performance indicators for GWMP implementation

Council response: PARTIALLY SUPPORT

Council supports part 2 of the Panel's recommendation and commits to regular reporting against the new GWMP when it is adopted. Council believes that this will assist overall management and transparency to the community. Council's capacity to differentiate its financial reports between urban and non-urban areas will be enhanced in the next few years.

Council does not wholly support part 1 because it believes that it would be more consistent with the Panel's "whole-of-shire" principle to refer the relevant parts of the new GWMP to the specialist municipality-wide committees advising Council on emergency management, economic, social and environmental issues. This will ensure that Council receives advice that is well-informed and relevant to the whole community.

RECOMMENDATION 3 Lobby state government for green wedge funding

Lobby the State Government to be recognised as a semi-rural Shire and for increased funding to support the management of the Green Wedge.

Rationale

- GW's are the 'lungs' of Melbourne
GW's provide a number of services to the whole of Melbourne
GW's differ from urban environments and need different funding arrangements

Council response: SUPPORT

Council supports the Panel's recommendation as well as continuing to seek funding from relevant state and national government programs that apply to metropolitan areas.

RECOMMENDATION 4 Biodiversity

1. Develop a broad-scale land management plan to undertake regular review of biodiversity values to protect and enhance remnant vegetation, water resources, fauna and flora, and habitat corridors, and to guide landholders on biodiversity management practices.
2. Review the placement of the Environmental Significance Overlays on private land, and appropriately fill schedules to ensure all areas of significant biodiversity are protected. These reviews should be conducted by appropriately qualified independent contractors.
3. Review Nillumbik Biodiversity Strategy to bring into line with recently revised state environment policy.

Rationale

- Arrest the loss of native vegetation (habitat and biodiversity) on public and private land.
- Identify actual and potential wildlife corridors and valuable habitat and ensure that these areas are protected.
- Ensure that biodiversity data and information is current and credible.

Council response: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council agrees that it is necessary to update the on-ground evidence of biodiversity assets to ensure that what is valuable is as accurately identified as possible. Council also recognises that the localised statutory controls that protect these assets may also have to be altered to ensure they are well directed in light of up-to-date evidence and changed state environment policy. Council notes that these are expensive and lengthy pieces of research and may need the financial and technical assistance of other levels of government and research institutions. An additional land management plan as suggested by the Panel is not needed.

RECOMMENDATION 5 Feral animals and pest species

Increase and prioritise the focus on feral animal and pest species reduction programs, and measure their effectiveness, in conjunction with other councils and State Government.

Rationale

- Increased community concerns about the impact of rabbits, foxes and deer, in terms of public safety, soil erosion, water contamination, vegetation loss and agriculture.
- Ensure management of feral animals and pest species remains a priority in the Green Wedge.
- Minimize impact of feral animals and pest species, including both fauna and flora, on areas of biodiversity.
- Minimize the impact of non-indigenous plant species.

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council recognises the importance to the community of controlling feral animals and pest species and will work with relevant agencies to expand information and incentives that support and engage landowners and managers, as well as managing land under its direct control.

RECOMMENDATION 6 Conserving the landscape

1. Conserve and enhance bush and rural landscapes to maintain the natural beauty of the green wedge
2. Complete an assessment of the Green Wedge Landscape Character and implement planning controls and other recommendations arising from this study

Rationale

- Green wedge landscape is a highly valued natural resource for all people to enjoy. Maintain natural beauty of the area in perpetuity.

Council response: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council agrees that the natural beauty of the green wedge and its bush and rural landscapes are important values to be conserved. At this point Council is not sure that the action described in point 2 is the only way to do this and will want a range of planning actions investigated, including better use of the current planning scheme.

RECOMMENDATION 7 Responding to the challenge of climate change

That Council develop action plans, within the next 3 years, for the mitigation and adaptation to climate change in its many dimensions.

Rationale

- That Council incorporate its Climate Change Action Plan in the Green Wedge Management Plan, this could include encouraging the use of water tanks, solar power, recycling initiatives, etc.
- To respond to the challenge of climate change, focus on revegetation practices as one of many dimensions (water, fire, pests, diseases, etc.)
- As part the adaptation response, encouraging and creating a culture of a community awareness of the impacts, such as checking on vulnerable people in the community during high temperature days.

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council has its *Climate Change Action Plan 2016-2020* in place with actions aimed at reducing council and community emissions. Council recognises that further work will be required to fully understand and commit to the adaptation actions necessary to respond to a changing climate that is expected to be drier overall and subject to more frequent extreme weather events.

RECOMMENDATION 8 Water planning

Increase priority from medium to high of existing GWMP actions (EN5.1, EN 5.2, EN 5.3, EN 5.4) to improve water conservation (supply, use, recycling).

Better protect stream flows in the Green Wedge by ensuring the construction of new dams on private property takes into account water conservation and sustainability.

EN5.1	Utilise water sensitive urban design in developments where this is possible
EN5.2	Investigate the appropriateness of further water extraction and diversion including dams and bores, given the incremental impact on environmental flows in waterways with reduced rainfall and climate change impacts
EN5.3	Work with Melbourne Water to improve water conservation (supply, use, recycling) in all spheres of human activity
EB5.4	Implement the Nillumbik Sustainable Water Management Plan

Rationale

- Climate change and worsening droughts.
- GWMP Background Report, Page 74-76.
- Stream flows are steadily declining.

Evidence for this recommendation - GWMP Background Report p 74-76

Council response: **SUPPORT**

In supporting this recommendation, Council notes that some detailed matters (e.g. bores and extraction licences) are regulated by other water authorities. Council also notes (consistent with its response to recommendation 7) that management of water in the landscape will become more important as the climate dries.

RECOMMENDATION 9 Light pollution

Manage light pollution in the green wedge so that visibility of the night sky is enhanced and to minimise adverse effects on nocturnal native animals.

Rationale

- Sports grounds, private tennis courts and security lights can produce excess light.

Council response: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council agrees that managing light pollution is a desirable objective but safety concerns and community activity also need to be taken into account. Sufficient techniques exist to ensure that lighting is directed to where it is needed with minimised overspill and glare where it may cause environmental degradation or nuisance. Council commits to managing light pollution on its own properties and use current planning controls to achieve appropriate outcomes elsewhere.

RECOMMENDATION 10 Regulation regarding grazing

Hoofed grazing domestic animals to be restricted to grazing/agricultural private land-holdings appropriate for livestock or properties with low biodiversity values. Grazing to be under guidance and education of a vegetation management plan, which will be *enforceable*.

Rationale

- Diminishing biodiversity is occurring due to grazing stock being introduced to bushland on private properties.
- Current planning controls are ambiguous regarding ability to restrict or police the introduction of grazing domestic animals to bushland and biodiverse areas. State government to be lobbied to remove ambiguities in the planning scheme that will make enforcement viable.
- If the grazing is for issues such as fuel reduction, this could be achieved through guidance of a Vegetation Management Plan, approved by DELWP

Council response: **PARTIALLY SUPPORT**

Council agrees with the Panel's underlying premise that the grazing of hoofed domestic animals needs to be managed responsibly, ideally on land suitable for grazing and not in places with fragile high biodiversity values. Council also recognises that the keeping of horses, especially, is an important part of the rural life of the shire and many people do exercise responsible animal management. Consistent with a number of other Panel recommendations, Council prefers to invest in information and support for responsible animal ownership and land management by landowners in preference to increasing regulation and policing.

RECOMMENDATION 11 Renewable energy

Investigate opportunities to support community-based, distributed, clean energy solutions (from Glossop report). Council to consider developing an Energy Plan.

Rationale

- Provision of clean and green local energy
- Disaster-resilient
- Lowering pollution and doing our bit for climate change
- Economic benefit

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council is already investigating the feasibility of large scale solar and is working with Clean Energy Nillumbik to progress renewable energy generation and development of an energy plan.

RECOMMENDATION 12 Improved road management

Undertake seasonal review of road conditions to improve management, and review current Road Sealing Program to ensure high use roads are prioritised.

Rationale

- It is recognised that many roads in the Green Wedge should remain unsealed, and these should be maintained in an environmentally sensitive manner.
- Reduce runoff from dirt roads; minimise silt, debris & pollution in water courses
- Improved road safety

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council agrees that many roads will remain unsealed and Council's road inspection frequency and works are contained within its municipal road management plan. Higher use and higher maintenance roads are prioritised for sealing which is considered to be of environmental benefit to reduce dust, silt and debris run-off into waterways. Council will look at ways to extend engagement with user communities and notes that roadside management is equally important for safety and environmental management reasons.

RECOMMENDATION 13 Township plans

Articulate a vision and develop a plan for each Green Wedge township, which will:

1. Be a vibrant and attractive gateway to the Green Wedge for visitors.
2. Provide support and essential services for Green Wedge residents.
3. Ensure that future development is in line with environmentally sensitive design principles.
4. Ensure that future development emphasises each town's unique characteristics and remains within existing township boundaries.
5. Increase the range of housing diversity to service the needs of visitors and specific community requirements, e.g. "aging in place".

Rationale

- Townships are the location for many services to visitors (e.g. cafes, restaurants)
- Community must feel connected to the townships they choose to live in, to encourage a thriving and resilient community.
- Design guidelines are important to provide clarity and certainty for developers AND residents while protecting the unique character of each township.

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council agrees that the townships are very important to the functioning of the green wedge and are important places where many of our community live, work and visit. Council agrees that forward plans are necessary and the Panel's five points of direction are a good starting point for discussion with each town community. Council is already committed to reviewing or preparing a variety of township strategies for St Andrews, Hurstbridge, Wattle Glen, Yarrambat, Kangaroo Ground, Panton Hill and Research.

RECOMMENDATION 14 Right to rebuild

Residents should have a right to rebuild on existing structure footprints subject to overlays and building permit approvals. This recommendation refers to rebuilding on lots that are below the zone minimum subdivision size.

Rationale

- Enabling existing homeowners to rebuild on small lots under building permits and overlay regulations.

Council response: SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE

Council supports the Panel's underlying premise that people should have the opportunity to rebuild on their property if they have unfortunately lost their home due to fire or other disasters. However, as the Panel rightly notes this is and needs to be subject to overlays and building approval considerations, including BAL requirements, so that the design and siting of replacement buildings reduce future risks to occupants, not repeat them. This applies regardless of lot size and may mean that another location on the property is a better option to deal with fire risk. Under the present planning controls created by the State, rights to re-use land for its previous purpose remain after the destructive event but planning and building permits are required to enable development. Council is a responsible planning authority and cannot provide a guarantee about its statutory response in advance of any application process. Therefore the ability to rebuild is a qualified "right". Change to a full "right" would require Victorian Government action.

RECOMMENDATION 15 Planning scheme, environmental overlays and rural considerations for GW zones

Give priority to evaluating current overlays (ESO & SLO) and schedules for applicability to actual on ground conditions i.e. flora and fauna, land usage & purposes, historical uses, environmental characteristics, for conformity to Green Wedge Management Plan objectives.

Ensure that all assessment and investigative works are undertaken by independent experts

Where overlays currently apply, actions of landowners that lead to degradation of environmental values should be addressed by Council officers.

Rationale

- To facilitate cooperation between landowners and council / government.
- To ensure that overlays are able to fulfil their purposes.

Council response: SUPPORT

This recommendation is supported in accordance with Council's response to recommendations 4 and 6.

RECOMMENDATION 16 Housing development - setting the limits

Articulate a vision and develop a plan for each Green Wedge township, which will:

1. Advocate to maintain current Urban Growth Boundary (i.e. hard boundary)
2. Monitor and regularly review existing overlays and zones.
3. Require environmental sustainable design and construction techniques in new developments to work in harmony with nature and fit the character of the town in Green Wedge townships (Panton Hill, Hurstbridge and St. Andrews)
4. Maintain consistent transparency about policy intent and approach to development outcomes within the Green Wedge

Rationale

- Urban Growth Boundary is set by the State for the mutual benefit of citizens of the municipality and the outlying country areas
- Changes to policy and Council strategy needs to be made in collaboration with the community and stakeholders.
- We recognise that Climate Change is a reality to which building and community design must be adaptive
- Population growth in the Shire needs to be encouraged to remain within the designated urban growth areas and less into the townships within the Green Wedge.

Council response: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council intends to produce a whole-of-shire housing strategy to holistically consider the strategic housing needs of the municipality. Council currently advocates maintaining the existing urban growth boundary and is obliged under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 to regularly review its planning scheme. Council can encourage environmentally sustainable design through the planning controls for the townships but if it is to require it, that will require a planning scheme amendment.

RECOMMENDATION 17 Right of tenure

Provide clear guidelines on use rights for ALL lots.

The Shire Council to be responsible for education and updating new and existing landowners.

Rationale

- Resolve confusion on use rights on lots sizes

COUNCIL RESPONSE: SUPPORT

Council recognises that the provision of accurate, up-to-date and understandable land use planning information is critical for landowners and the efficient functioning of the Shire. Whilst this happens now through a variety of channels, Council will look for ways to make this better for the community.

RECOMMENDATION 18 Small lots

1. Maintain current Local Planning Policy which governs building on small lots (e.g. RCZ3 <8ha) with a view to its increased enforcement
2. Investigate the feasibility of a buy-back/consolidation scheme in which vacant small lots are purchased by State or Council and resold where they can be amalgamated into adjoining land. Where not possible, encourage neighbouring property owners to do so

Rationale

- We endorse the intention of Action PC1.1 of the current Green Wedge Management Plan.
- Discourage further development of small lots in the Green Wedge for reasons of fire security and avoidance of suburbanisation

PC1.1	Prepare a concise paper on the small lot development to recommend actions to discourage the further rural residential development of small lots in the Green Wedge. It will be prepared in the context of the findings of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the Inquiry into Sustainable Development of Agriculture in Outer Suburban Melbourne.
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Council response: **NOT SUPPORT/SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council does not support part 1 of the Panel's recommendation. The Local Planning Policy (*Residential Use and Development on Small Lots in Green Wedge Areas*) expired on 30 November 2009 and cannot be revived without a new planning scheme amendment. Current planning controls require decisions be made one-by-one on how lots are used according to their land capability and risk.

Council supports part 2 in principle and will investigate options for encouraging consolidation and amalgamation of lots smaller than the minimum subdivision size, where it is desirable to do so. The assistance of the State will be required if this process is to include public acquisition.

RECOMMENDATION 19 Regulation, enforceability and cost

To support a better relationship between landowners and council staff, education and mediation should be preferred to regulation.

Council should be more aware of the cost of these regulations, and should strongly endeavour to lower the cost and therefore the barriers to the planning system.

Council regulations should be as far as possible

1. Practicable
2. Enforceable
3. Fair and reasonable in cost
4. Necessary

Rationale

- Poor regulations are ineffective and encourage non-compliance, and alienate landowners.
- The financial burden that some residents have faced when dealing with regulations and permit applications process.

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council agrees with the Panel's underlying premise but notes that planning fees and policy settings are largely set by the State. Council has and will continue to advocate for a simplified planning scheme and enhance information flow and guidance to landowners.

RECOMMENDATION 20 Develop trail network

Complete a purpose built trail network for walking, cycling and horse riding within the next 5 years. Refer to Recreation Trails Strategy (2001) and points 10.1-10.4 & PC 8.3 of current GWMP.

Rationale

- Completion of Recreation Trails Strategy has been delayed
- Increases tourism & boosts local economy
- Encourages a greater appreciation for our environment
- Improves quality of life for residents
- Safely segregates traffic and recreational uses

PC8.3	Expand and improve the safety of off-road bicycle routes and walking paths in the Green Wedge, particularly those linking townships and tourism destinations and strategic public transport systems. In particular, consider connections with Whittlesea's path networks providing car-free east-west links
PC10.1	Implement Nillumbik Shire Council's Recreation Trails Strategy (2001) with emphasis on the extension to the Diamond Creek Trail, Pipeline Trail (Allendale to Diamond Creek-Hurstbridge Road) and the Wattle Glen to Kinglake Trail.
PC10.2	Continue investigation into the proposed Maroondah Aqueduct Trail as an opportunity to create an iconic recreation and tourism opportunity for Melbourne.
PC10.3	Implement Nillumbik Shire Council's Open Space Strategy (2005) with particular emphasis on rural open spaces and on the development of trails networks. Include investigation of the feasibility of a park and ride scheme linked to the trails network as raised in action 8.4.
PC10.4	Investigate establishing a regional trails network – walking, riding and cycling – so that they cross the entire Green Wedge and link with adjoining green wedges and municipalities of Yarra Ranges, Murrindindi, Whittlesea, Manningham and Banyule. Include an analysis of the economic benefits including potential visitor spend (relevant also to economic objectives).

Council response: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council supports the Panel's objective of completing the trail network but cannot commit at this stage to the Panel's proposed timeframe.

RECOMMENDATION 21 Volunteers

Council should continue to encourage, support, promote and celebrate volunteering that assists the Nillumbik Shire to manage the Green Wedge.

Rationale

- Partnerships between communities, Landcare groups, volunteer groups and Council are vital for the implementation of the Green Wedge Management Plan
- Promotes opportunities for social cohesion, belonging and ownership of shared, common objectives
- Support community engagement to encourage local leadership
- Promote resilience through community connectedness

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council's support for volunteering within the community is committed in the *Council Plan 2017-2021*, *Nillumbik Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021* and *Nillumbik Volunteer Development Strategy 2015-2020*.

RECOMMENDATION 22 Ageing population / Community health

1. Better support the ageing population of Nillumbik, specifically those living within the Green Wedge. Options should include the need for aged care services within Green Wedge townships, and programs & services to facilitate people ageing in the community where they have lived for many years. Review current progress against action items in the Positive Ageing Strategy and continue to work with community to implement.
2. Provide support for ageing landholders to maintain the biodiverse qualities of their land.

Rationale

- Allow land holders to remain in place as long as possible, ensuring local knowledge is kept in place with respect to land management.
- Helps with community cohesiveness and engagement, more likely that people will get involved with local groups.

Council response: **SUPPORT/SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council supports part 1 of the Panel's recommendation and will consider the specific needs of ageing Green Wedge residents in forming its positive ageing strategy and housing strategy in 2019. Council is also currently consulting the community on *Ageing Well in Nillumbik*, covering community transport, social isolation and accessing Australian Government services through its *myagedcare* portal.

Council supports-in-principle part 2 of the Panel's recommendation but does not envisage implementation of this recommendation to be direct service delivery. Alternatively, assistance with health and well-being, land management and bushfire preparedness could be supported through the promotion of volunteer and community groups.

RECOMMENDATION 23 Supporting community facilities in the Green Wedge

Develop and better utilize existing multi-use community spaces in Green Wedge townships and identify possible gaps in terms of services and infrastructure.

Rationale

- These should offer multiple services (e.g. the model used with the Hurstbridge Community Hub) to facilitate greater community access.
- Improve community cohesion.
- Provide services not locally available to rural residents.

Council response: SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE

Council will consider this recommendation as part of its on-going service, community infrastructure and asset management planning. Implementation will be subject to resources and physical constraints.

RECOMMENDATION 24 Cultural development

Support the creation of a high quality, regional art gallery, supporting the artists of the Nillumbik Green Wedge which in turn support the importance of cultural heritage and sense of place and wellbeing.

Rationale

- Support local artists across the whole year, opportunity to display and sell their work.
- Support local tourism, create a destination that people want to visit.
Promote identify / theme of Nillumbik - "artisan hills".

Council response: SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE

Council's full support for the Panel's recommendation will be subject to Council's feasibility study into a regional art gallery, the results of which are expected in the near future.

RECOMMENDATION 25 Internet connectivity

Continue lobbying government/NBN Co. to prioritise the Green Wedge in providing internet connectivity to particularly support landowners, services and local businesses, and providing enhanced mobile phone coverage.

Rationale

- Economic imperative for business
- Safety (information for bushfires etc.)
- Staying in touch in rural areas
- Community engagement

Council response: SUPPORT

Council agrees with the Panel recommendation that internet and mobile phone connectivity is vital to the community and will work with government and telecommunications providers to overcome identified black spot areas.

RECOMMENDATION 26 Rural business activities

Support and promote supplementary rural business activities such as farm gate sales, farm stays, and other low environmental and amenity impact enterprise which are consistent with green wedge values.

Rationale

- Increase local employment in the green wedge
- Encourage tourism in the green wedge
- Improve the local economy
- Maintain the character of the area

Council response: SUPPORT

Council will give this recommendation high priority in forming its new economic development strategy in 2019 and notes that this may require some future planning scheme changes.

RECOMMENDATION 27 Right to farm

Green Wedge landholders should be able to exercise their 'right to farm' on pre-existing cleared agricultural land.

Discourage bush block conversion to agricultural or pastoral use, or any other use that would otherwise degrade/impact vegetation and biodiversity values.

Rationale

- The phrase 'right to farm' is associated with having rules that don't prevent people from farming e.g. even if someone next door to you complains about spray drift, noise etc. The Labor policy platform this election includes an intent to create a new planning provision to enshrine a 'right to farm' to maintain Melbourne's Food Bowl (pers. comm. Geoff Lawler)
- Part of Nillumbik's cultural heritage
- Supports the local food movement
- Provides a source of income for landholders
- Creates local job opportunities

Council response: **SUPPORT/PARTIALLY SUPPORT**

Council supports part 1 of the Panel's recommendation. Right-to-farm will be considered as part of Council's new economic development strategy and Council looks forward to State planning reform in this direction. Council does not fully support part 2 of the recommendation because of its absoluteness. Such matters are subject to planning controls and decision-making.

RECOMMENDATION 28 Agriculture

- A. Further fragmentation of agricultural lands to be discouraged, and consolidation of smaller lots in single ownership encouraged - council to facilitate consolidation of titles at zero cost to affected landholders.
- B. Identify opportunities to support community sustainable agriculture (as recommended in previous GWMP Action 7.1, P.48)
- C. Any proposal to change land use should demonstrate that the land is fit for purpose for the new use by preparation of a land management plan

Rationale

- Maintain viability of agricultural land by reducing risk of fragmentation.
Opportunity for community building and sharing local produce, lower carbon footprint, encourages boutique farming/agricultural industry
Inappropriate land uses can have adverse impacts on the land, both onsite and offsite.

PC7.1

Identify opportunities to support community sustainable agriculture.

Council response: **PARTIALLY SUPPORT/SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE /SUPPORT**

Council partially supports part A of the Panel's recommendation to discourage fragmentation of agricultural lands and to encourage consolidation of smaller lots in single ownership. Council can facilitate this through the planning scheme but does not see its role as being to cover the costs of consolidation of titles.

Council supports-in-principle part B of the Panel's recommendation but also wishes to encourage sustainable agriculture in general and leave open the opportunity for new forms of practice.

Council supports part C of the Panel's recommendation as it is already common practice as part of the planning permit application process.

RECOMMENDATION 29 Recognition & support for landowners maintaining land

Improve communication between council and landowners in the Green Wedge with respect to their rights & responsibilities for land management, and the support & services available to them. This information should be provided in a clear concise and accessible manner. Develop an online portal providing a user friendly one-stop-shop for everything a landowner need to know about a property.

Rationale

- Alleviate frustrations with respect to council and their engagement with landowners.
- Assist with eliminating misinformation or ignorance amongst landowners with respect to their rights & responsibilities.
- Reduce sales of land parcels within the Green Wedge where prospective owner's intended use is not suitable.
- Evidence for this recommendation - low uptake of green wedge land management incentive

Council response: SUPPORT

Council values landowners as its citizens and for their fundamental role in managing the Green Wedge and recognises that enhanced information sharing and collaboration is very important. Whilst supporting the recommendation Council does not subscribe to some of the language used in the Panel's rationale that refers to misinformation or ignorance amongst landowners.

RECOMMENDATION 30 Tourism

We recommend that council refer to the existing management plan, specifically points 3.1, 4.1, 5.1 & 5.2 (economy actions). We also recommend that council aim to implement “destination points” within the Shire to capture ‘through traffic’ where possible. We would also like council to regularly maintain and/or upgrade the existing tourist destinations, such as Watsons Creek Indigenous Trail.

Rationale

- We believe the current points in the existing management plan are viable and do not require amendment.
- Promoting the landscape we have on offer and providing tourists a rest point/ destination point is a low cost yet efficient way of promoting tourism within the shire. For example, recognising the significance of landscapes, with respect to urban settlements, creates a certain identity for each and enhance streetscapes.
- We would like to emphasise that council should aim to provide tourists with easy access to the various destinations within the shire that they can visit, for example an online portal or maps (4.1) which pinpoint certain destinations such as St Andrews Market, tourist routes or the Wattle Festival.
- The regular maintenance or upgrade of existing destinations is necessary and important. E.g. providing safe road cycling for tourists.

E3.1	Complete a sustainable tourism plan for the Green Wedge.
E4.1	Prepare a land use framework for tourism to be incorporated into the Nillumbik Planning Scheme. This will include detailed mapping of locations where tourism will be encouraged and discouraged and will include details of permitted and prohibited uses. It will also include the number, type and location.
E5.1	Assess the current level of tourism-related accommodation provision in the Green Wedge – number of beds, location etc. If a shortfall is indicated e.g. camping, youth hostel...pursue opportunities to increase appropriate tourism-related accommodation in identified Green Wedge locations.
E5.2	Explore models for ‘ecotourism’ or back-to-nature tourism, including Italy for its agri-tourism.

Council response: **SUPPORT-IN-PRINCIPLE**

Council agrees that tourism is a very important opportunity for the Green Wedge will take this recommendation into account when forming its economic development strategy in 2019.

RECOMMENDATION 31 Hobby farms

To recognise the contribution well managed “hobby farms”* can make to the beauty and biodiversity of Nillumbik and that they form a significant part of the Green Wedge. Hobby farmers should be required to maintain their land using sustainable land management practices.

Rationale

- *hobby farm; a place where some agricultural activities are undertaken but they are subsidiary to living there. More of a lifestyle than a business. No size limitation defined in the planning scheme (pers. comm. Geoff Lawler)
- 47% of the Green Wedge consists of hobby farms, rural residential & low density residential; 20% of which is agricultural land (GWMP Part 1 - background & context 2.1)

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council supports the essence of the Panel’s recommendation in that it is time to define and recognise the role of hobby farms within Nillumbik and that policy and program development is necessary to support and encourage sustainable land management and agriculture at their scale.

RECOMMENDATION 32 Public transport and related infrastructure

Improve public transport options within the Green Wedge.

Rationale

- Endorse, from the current GWMP, actions 8.1-8.4 (People & Communities)
- Advocate strongly for the introduction of smarter services, such as community buses or mini buses to service a wider area - they are more cost-effective and efficient and have greater flexibility to respond to requests as they arise
- Linking Green Wedge townships to existing railway network
- Reduce car usage
- Make travelling more accessible for those who cannot, or prefer not to use private transport

PC8.1	Work with communities to seek opportunities for expanding transport connections including car pooling, buses and park and ride schemes.
PC8.2	Advocate for more accessible public transport systems, particularly those recommended in the Victorian Government’s North East Integrated Transport Systems Strategy 2007 and Meeting our Transport Challenges (2006) as related to the Green Wedge.
PC8.3	Expand & improve the safety of off-road bicycle routes and walking paths in the Green Wedge, particularly those linking townships and tourism destinations and strategic public transport systems. In particular, consider connections with Whittlesea’s path networks providing car-free east-west links.
PC8.4	Investigate the feasibility of introducing park and ride areas which link public transport to destinations within the Green Wedge e.g. recreation trails, shops, markets and other tourism and recreation opportunities.

Council response: **SUPPORT**

Council supports the Panel’s recommendation and consistent with the Council Plan, will advocate for enhanced community transport and public transport in remote areas.

Minority Report

We have identified that the statistics between the online and in room voting signified 9% (86% online, 77% in-room) representing 1.5 persons. Resulting in the elimination of what had been a valued recommendation.

RECOMMENDATION Green Wedge Management Authority

Advocate for the establishment of a body that provides expert advice and support to both state and local government on green wedge issues.

Rationale

- Green Wedges present specific and unique challenges when compared to other areas, in terms of planning, economics, environment, local government etc.
- State-based planning department/personnel that is primarily dealing with Green Wedge issues e.g. social, economic, zoning, environmental and has coordinating oversight to address the tendency for state and local departments to operate in isolation.
- Make recommendations for state government and local council to consider
- The body could be set up like an Advisory body with the aim to bring together multiple areas of governance (planning, environment, local government).

Council response: NOT SUPPORT

Council does not support this minority report recommendation because the creation of a state based authority would result in less local control and the ability to respond to our community. Council will continue to collaborate with other local councils, state government and relevant agencies to address issues in and advocate for green wedges.



