

# City of Greater Bendigo Rural Communities Strategy

## Embracing and Enhancing the City's Rural Communities: Challenges and Opportunities



## **Acknowledgement of Country**

The ancestors and descendants of the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung are the traditional owners of this Country.

The City of Greater Bendigo acknowledges that they have been custodians for many centuries and continue to perform age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.

We all acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

## Contents

Acknowledgement of Country .....	2
RURAL COMMUNITIES.....	5
How are the City’s rural communities defined? .....	5
PURPOSE.....	6
Why has this Strategy been prepared? .....	6
VIEWS, OPINIONS AND IDEAS .....	7
What did our rural communities tell the Council in the community engagement process?.....	7
GOAL.....	10
Integrated liveability outcomes and indicators.....	10
PRIORITY ACTIONS .....	12
PRINCIPLES .....	12
ISSUES and DRIVERS .....	13
What are the issues and drivers that have been identified as impacting on our rural communities?.....	13
CHARACTERISTICS.....	18
What are the key characteristics of our rural communities? .....	18
CONTEXT .....	22
What is the wider context within which Greater Bendigo’s rural communities operate?.....	22
WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES? .....	28
What ideas and initiatives are taking place in our rural communities and how are opportunities being realised?.....	28
COUNCILS ADOPTED STRATEGIES AND POLICIES .....	32

How do Council’s current adopted strategies and policies apply in our rural areas and communities?.....	32
STRATEGY .....	34
Goal – Principles – Actions.....	34

### Table of Maps

Map 1. Greater Bendigo’s rural towns, settlements and areas.....	5
Map 2. Intensive animal industries in central Victoria .....	19
Map 3. Public land within Greater Bendigo .....	21
Map 4. Greater Bendigo SEIFA scores 2011.....	23
Map 5. Major services across Greater Bendigo’s rural areas .....	23
Map 6. 10 minute driving community.....	24
Map 7. Predominant land uses across Greater Bendigo 2014 .....	25
Map 8. Collaborative communities Raywood – Neilborough – Sebastian – Woodvale – Mapping of community facilities .....	31

### Table of Images

Image 1. Agri-business multiplier effect .....	20
Image 2. Axedale. Campaspe River reserve rejuvenation and platypus sculpture .....	28
Image 3. Goornong & District Heritage Trail.....	29
Image 4. O’Keefe Rail Trail .....	30
Image 5. Redesdale Community – proposed extension of the O’Keefe Rail Trail .....	30

## RURAL COMMUNITIES

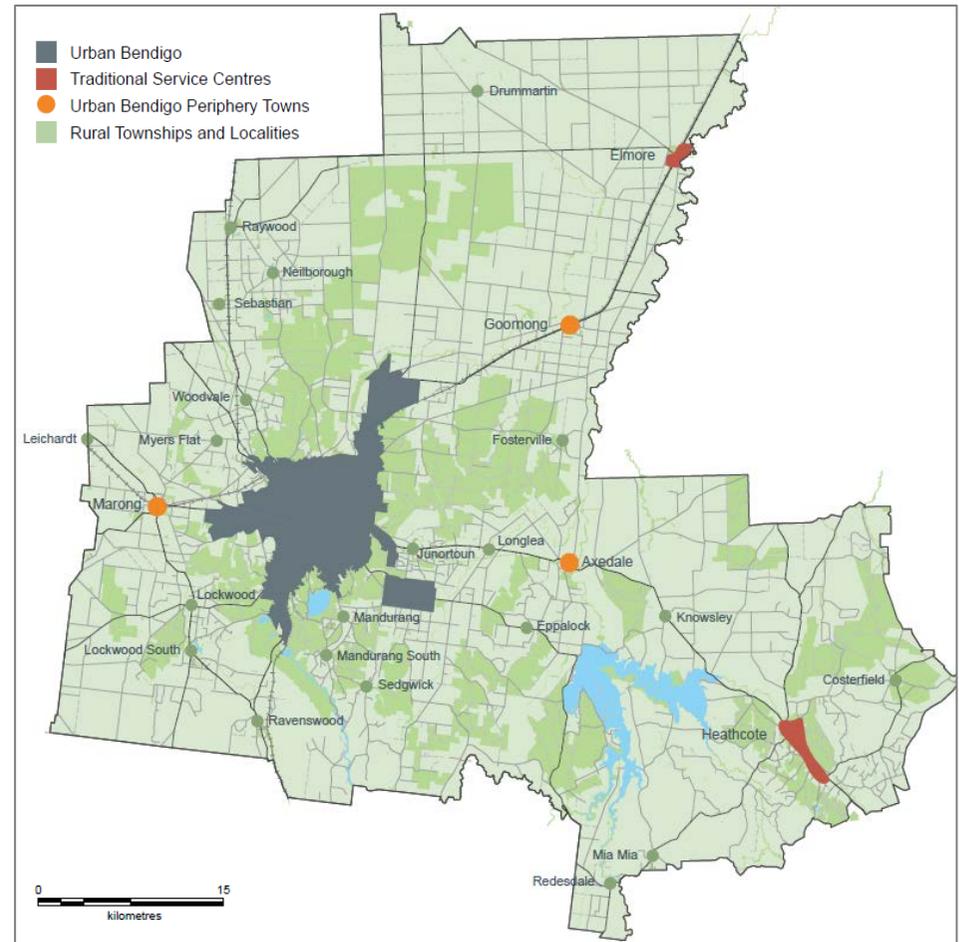
### *How are the City's rural communities defined?*

Rural communities are all those towns, settlements and areas of the City of Greater Bendigo outside of Council's adopted growth boundary for urban Bendigo. The City's rural areas and communities are shown on Map 1 opposite.

The City's rural areas include extensive areas under agricultural production, forests, numerous towns and settlements, large areas used for rural residential and rural living, and intensive uses such as mining and animal production.

The City's rural areas and communities occupy about 95% of the Greater Bendigo local government area and are home to about 15,000 people – almost 15% of the population of the City of Greater Bendigo. Significantly, about one quarter of all land in the City is public land, and most of it is forested. Map 3 on page 22 shows the distribution of public land across the City of Greater Bendigo.

Map 1. Greater Bendigo's rural towns, settlements and areas



Source: CoGB database

## PURPOSE

### *Why has this Strategy been prepared?*

The Rural Communities Strategy is designed to provide:

- Improved knowledge and understanding within Council of Greater Bendigo's rural communities,
- Better recognition of how Council's adopted strategies and policies apply to our rural communities,
- Priorities for managing and supporting transition, growth and community development in our rural communities,
- Actions and initiatives that our rural communities can undertake to respond to change and capitalise on opportunities, and
- A suite of actions that the Council and Council staff will undertake in respect to working with and on behalf of our rural communities.

## VIEWS, OPINIONS AND IDEAS

### *What did our rural communities tell the Council in the community engagement process?*

During the development of the Rural Communities Strategy an extensive and intensive process of community engagement was undertaken.

While there was no single over-riding issue that was raised during the community engagement process, various issues around some core themes were consistently heard. Many of the issues are interrelated and reflect some common agendas, however and importantly; there is a considerable diversity in views, opinions and comments across the City's rural communities. Generally the issues and concerns raised reflected, supported and confirmed similar issues identified in Council's community planning and development work with small towns and through advice from groups such as Council's Farming Advisory Committee.

There were three core themes in the issues raised:

*1. Many people and communities in the City of Greater Bendigo's rural areas feel marginalised, neglected, or overlooked.*

People in rural communities often report that they feel that the importance and role of the City's rural areas and communities are often not considered. The size of urban Bendigo overshadows them and it appears to many of them that the City's agenda is dominated by what happens in urban Bendigo. For many it feels that the Bendigo urban area is synonymous with the municipality. Residents of urban Bendigo often express a frustration with what is seen as government's lack of understanding with regional agendas. Similarly our rural communities often feel that urban Bendigo overlooks and undervalues them.

People living in the City of Greater Bendigo's rural communities often report that they feel that many people in urban Bendigo do not know much about the City's rural areas and towns. Rural communities often express the view that people in urban Bendigo do not understand or have little empathy with the impact of the range of changes that are being experienced in rural areas, with the impact of events like drought and the lack and loss of services. Further they often feel that there is little appreciation in urban Bendigo of how the assets and features of the City's rural communities add to the liveability and quality of the whole City.

*2. Communications and mobility for those who live in and do business in our rural areas and communities are vital.*

Mobile phone coverage, broadband access and speed are uneven, generally deficient and too often not present at all in our rural

communities. Access to reliable high quality services is critical for a range of business, social and emergency reasons. The poor level of service provided by mobile phone and Internet is seriously impeding jobs and investment in our rural areas and communities. It is limiting the capacity to access services and it is impacting on the lives of people. This is a huge disadvantage experienced by many rural communities compared to urban Bendigo. In terms of mobility there is a continuing need for a well connected high quality road network and for much better levels of public transport (which is generally of a very limited service), particularly for those who are aged, those without cars and importantly for young persons.

*3. The City's rural communities are diverse in their characteristics.*

Simply approaching the City's rural areas and communities as a single set of communities with common characteristics fails to realise their diversity, their individual profiles and differences. The issues in each town and that each rural community faces are often very different and have their own specific dimensions. No one would suggest that all the suburbs of Bendigo are the same; a similar situation exists in the City's rural areas and communities.

Each town and community has an agenda of issues that defines important elements of their community. Generally rural communities identify population growth (or decline), jobs for young people, tourism potential, and specific community facilities and services as important elements and opportunities.

Particular towns are concerned about topics such as safety with traffic through main streets, expansion of sewer and water, illegal dwellings and buildings such as containers and sheds blighting their town and surrounds, assistance to facilitate more development, particular public transport services, and maintenance of community facilities and so on.

Those who live in rural communities come from a wide range of social and occupational backgrounds and circumstances and have a multiplicity of reasons why they are living there. Rural communities provide attractive places to live. Rural communities comprise multi generation families and others who have shifted into them recently. Farming, agriculture and commodity production are still important components of the rural economy but there are many other reasons people choose to live in a rural community.

*Other strong themes and issues raised during the community engagement program.*

The community engagement process also identified that there is:

- a widespread understanding and appreciation in rural communities of the changes in the agricultural economy,
- a range of new and emerging opportunities in agriculture, but tackling water security, climate change, new skills, knowledge and succession planning are daunting,
- a fundamental set of changes occurring in the roles and social structure of small towns and in many cases these

changes may be more rapid than experienced in urban Bendigo;

- a range of impacts from the rate of change and that the proportion of the population affected by change in a small town or community can be significant.
- a strong sense of resilience in rural areas and communities; most have faced drought, fire or flood, and in some cases all three.

It was very evident for the community engagement process that rural communities make a major contribution to the diversity, range of opportunities and lifestyle of the whole City. Many who live in those communities have a strong belief that they are not heard sufficiently and that they need to be better embraced by the whole City.

## GOAL

The City of Greater Bendigo's is pursuing an overall aspirational goal: *'working together to be Australia's most liveable regional city'*. Council endeavours to ensure that the benefits and advantages from pursuing this goal flow equally to all those who live in the City's urban and rural communities.

### *Integrated liveability outcomes and indicators*

To measure progress towards this goal Council has adopted a set of integrated liveability outcomes and indicators. They provide an overarching and integrated approach for all Council strategies and actions. They are encapsulated in the City's 2016/17 Council Plan. Outcomes and indicators apply to the whole City but may have different applications in urban and rural areas. The overall pursuit of these improvements applies to all areas and communities but broadly there is no real distinction in how these should be pursued as applicable to all communities. The integrated liveability outcomes and indicators for the whole City are:

- ❖ **A much healthier City.** A community that places an emphasis on; children, older people, active travel options, and reducing high levels of preventable diseases.

Indicators:

- Increase the proportion of people who walk or cycle 5 times a week for at least 30 minutes

- Maintain the child immunisation completion rates to be better than the state average
- Increase the percentage of eligible children completing 15 hours/week of pre-school
- Reduce obesity
- Increase the proportion of people who meet recommended fruit and vegetable dietary guidelines

- ❖ **A fairer and more inclusive City.** A welcoming multi-cultural community where the benefits and opportunities from growth are better shared across all of urban Bendigo and its rural communities. A City where there are convenient and accessible public transport services, a more diverse range of housing for all and a high level of community wellbeing.

Indicators:

- Increase opportunities for people to use public transport
- Increase the proportion of the population who live within 400m of a bus stop
- Reduce the gap in the Socio-Economic Index For Australia (SEIFA) index of disadvantage score between areas with the highest score and those with the lowest score
- Reduce the proportion of people who report they are unable to access funds in an emergency
- Decrease the proportion of residents aged over 60 years who live alone on a low income
- Increased social connection

- ❖ **A more resilient City.** A City relating to a wider region in a globalising world. One that builds on its economic strengths and comparative advantages, works to further increase education and skills training levels, supports the creation of new jobs particularly for young people and diversifies the economic base across urban Bendigo and its rural communities.

Indicators:

- Increase the proportion of the workforce who have completed a Bachelor's Degree or higher
- Decrease unemployment, especially for young people
- Increase the proportion 17 year-olds still attending education (including school and vocational training)
- Decrease the percentage of people who are unemployed, expressed as a percentage of the labour force.
- Maintain a growth rate of the Greater Bendigo Economy that is equal to or better than Victoria, as measured by Gross Regional Product (GRP).
- Increase the proportion of residents born overseas

- ❖ **A planned City.** A City where there is an ongoing provision of land and infrastructure to support sustainable development and deliver quality design and net community gain.

Indicators:

- Increase housing choices
- Fairer access to parks or open spaces close to where people live

- ❖ **A proud and safe City.** A proud and safe City. A place that recognises and celebrates Indigenous culture and protects the outstanding built and cultural heritage and a remarkable environmental setting highlighted by 'the city in a forest'.

Indicators:

- Decrease crimes against people including rape, sex, robbery, assault and abduction
- Increase positive public perception of risk of crime in their local area
- Improve people's perception of wellbeing

- ❖ **A sustainable City.** A City where there is a more effective and productive use of all finite resources, facilities and services for the benefit of all and the coming generations.

Indicators:

- Decrease greenhouse pollution
- Increase diversion of domestic waste to resource recovery

- ❖ **A more productive, innovative, adaptive, City.** A City where governance is based on transparency, genuine community engagement and effective partnerships.

Indicators:

- Increase the proportion of people taking part in a public discussion
- Increase the proportion of the population who volunteer for a community group or activity more than once per month

- Improve community satisfaction with community consultation and engagement

## PRIORITY ACTIONS

Within an overall focus on improving liveability, health and wellbeing, and providing fairer access to opportunities for more vulnerable community members, Council has agreed that priority in 2016/17 will be given to the following three actions:

1. Improving the health and wellbeing of our community. This includes healthy active transport and the infrastructure to support that, including shared walking and cycling paths and footpaths to get around; accessible open space with networks that provide connections to community and neighbourhood facilities and services, links to bushland and forests and access to healthy food.
2. Reducing the environmental footprint through increased housing diversity, and reduced waste to landfill.
3. Supporting local employment – with a special focus on creation of jobs and careers for young people.

Each of these priority actions has particular application across and within the City's rural communities. One of the key outcomes of the adoption and implementation of the Rural Communities Strategy

will be to impact each of these priorities specifically in our rural communities and measure the progress made on them.

## PRINCIPLES

The Rural Communities Strategy sets out four principles that Council adopts to guide its work with the City's rural communities.

The four principles are:

1. Building on Our Understanding of Our Rural Communities
2. Continuing to Work More Effectively With Our Rural Communities and Advocating With and on Behalf of Our Rural Communities
3. Realising the Unique Values and the Social and Economic Potential of Our Rural Communities
4. Realising and Capitalising on Our City's Rural and Regional Leadership Potential

## ISSUES and DRIVERS

### *What are the issues and drivers that have been identified as impacting on our rural communities?*

The range of issues and drivers that impact on rural communities have been derived from a number of sources:

- What Council heard in the community engagement process undertaken in the development of this Strategy,
- Advice from Council's Farming Advisory Committee,
- Priority setting by the Community Planning Committees that work with Council on community plans for our townships,
- Observations on the trends and forces impacting on rural communities.
- Reviewing Council's own strategies, actions, infrastructure provision and service delivery and how they apply in our rural communities.
- Evaluating how the range of strategies and actions by relevant government departments and agencies impact on and influence our rural communities.

These Issues and Drivers are set out below against the relevant Principle.

### ***Principle One***

#### ***Building on Our Understanding of Our Rural Communities***

##### *Issues and Drivers*

- The City's rural communities have particular features, characteristics, needs and concerns. Some of these are shared with urban Bendigo but many are not.
- Build on and improve the distinct rural community profiles, ensuring they continue to be recognised, understood and fully considered in the development and implementation of Council's policies, strategies and in the planning for and provision of services and facilities.
- Each rural community and all rural communities as a whole need to ensure that their distinct profile, attributes, challenges and opportunities are identified and that Council continues to better understand them.

***Principle Two***

***Continuing to Work More Effectively With Our Rural Communities and Advocating With and on Behalf of Our Rural Communities***

*Issues and Drivers*

- The actions of Council need to ensure that wherever possible they strengthen the economy, community capacity, and social capital of our rural communities.
- Quality transport, phone and Internet access and infrastructure are vital for household and communities in our rural areas and for the capacity of Council to work with our rural communities.
- Council must continue improving the connection of rural communities with high quality safe roads and a well-functioning road network, and work towards regular public transport services.
- Mobile phone coverage and accessible high-speed broadband are essential for all rural communities.
- The physical and mental health and wellbeing of rural community residents can be more vulnerable because of

isolation, stress and difficulty in accessing services and facilities. Continuing support is essential to ensure equity-based service-provision.

- Council's strategies, actions and programs that relate to its rural communities need to continue to be based on a collaborative approach that supports and strengthens local leadership, resilience and capacity.
- Council advocates with and on behalf of its rural communities for planned and essential facilities and services where the responsibility for their provision is wholly or jointly with a state or federal government department or agency.
- Rural communities need to work with Council, with each other and with relevant local and regional bodies to better identify their needs and develop widely supported plans and actions to advocate for essential services and facilities where these are provided by other levels of government.

***Principle Three***

***Realising the Unique Values and Attributes, plus the Social and Economic Potential of Our Rural Communities***

*Issues and Drivers*

- The City's rural communities provide a wide range of lifestyle, community, environmental and social settings that contribute to the overall liveability of the whole of Greater Bendigo.
- The City's rural areas comprise highly valued and significant land and surface and ground water resources, important vegetation and biodiversity, prized rural landscapes, unique environmental ecosystems, major National Parks and other public land areas, and highly rated Indigenous and built heritage that all needs to be protected, celebrated, and sustainably and collaboratively managed.
- All these resources contribute important cultural, social, community, environmental and economic values for rural communities and the City as a whole. These assets and features need to be more widely known, recognised, valued and promoted by the City, Bendigo's urban dwellers and by

the communities themselves. Rural communities need to be assisted to capitalise on these diverse assets and qualities.

- Greater Bendigo's rural communities contribute significantly to the prosperity of the whole municipality.
- Rural communities are experiencing substantial change through a range social, environmental and economic forces and trends including an ageing population, climate change, and global competition. These changes are often challenging traditional approaches that may no longer be relevant or productive.
- In many cases this range of forces and trends are beyond local control and are increasingly impacting the traditional economic base of rural communities, which has largely been tied to extensive food and fibre production.
- Realising the social and economic potential of our rural communities needs to build on a realistic assessment of the changes and forces that are impacting on rural areas and capacity to respond and capitalise on opportunities.
- Climate change is a major challenge to rural communities particularly those involved in agricultural production. Securing long term water supplies and managing the water

resources that are available are critical elements for the future of all our rural communities and particularly for primary production and environmental management.

- While new ways of operating are being imposed on rural communities, they also provide opportunities for greater efficiencies and sustainability, growth and economic gain, and new forms of production.
- Population growth, local leadership, economic investment and local jobs - particularly for young people, are all critical for the sustained future of our rural communities.
- Transitioning to different modes of employment, wealth generation and supporting new endeavours all require strategies that ensure that community and individual wellbeing are not impacted and people have the opportunity to acquire new skills and education.
- The expansion of tourism, recreation and cultural opportunities in the City's townships, settlements and rural areas can provide direct social and economic benefits for our rural communities, the whole City and the wider region.
- Rural communities provide extensive choices as places to live, invest and visit. Each rural community needs to develop

their own prospectus and to work with Council to set out the advantages and opportunities they provide.

- Our rural areas provide essential components of the City's economic base, service economy and value-adding local industries. The productive use of agricultural land, appropriately sited and conditioned mining and extractive industries, and the production and processing associated with intensive animal industries are three very important sectors of the local and regional economy. These industries need to be supported with transport infrastructure and protected from encroachment by residential and other urban development through the City's planning scheme
- Planning for and the provision and development of community services and public infrastructure, and emergency and support services dealing with fire, flood, drought and the impact of climate change, are needed to support our rural communities.
- The provision of facilities and services in our rural communities needs to ensure that they make the best possible use of available infrastructure and be based on the principles of preparedness and wherever practicable shared use within and between communities.

***Principle Four***

***Realising and Capitalising on Our City's Rural and Regional Leadership Potential***

*Issues and Drivers*

- Bendigo is located in a rural region with an economy centred on food and fibre and the processing and transport of produce.
  - Bendigo's regional leadership role builds not only on the strengths, assets and capacity of our urban and rural communities but importantly on the reality and potential of the City's location in respect of central and northern Victoria.
  - Bendigo's size, facilities, services and strategic location has great potential to capitalise on the significance of agriculture in the wider region.
  - The role and capacity of Bendigo as an education, health, cultural, finance, manufacturing, processing and service centre substantially enhances one of Victoria's most productive regions and strengthens the capacity for further investment in agriculture.
- Development will need to focus on growing the regional agricultural base, transport and communications infrastructure. The scope and potential to expand the regional economic base is directly linked to the regional facility and service role of Bendigo and the capacity of the City to drive innovation, jobs and investment to benefit the whole City and the wider region.
  - Investment, growth, productivity and rural communities across the whole City and the wider region will be strengthened by Bendigo being a leading regional capital, open to ideas, inclusive and innovative.

## CHARACTERISTICS

### *What are the key characteristics of our rural communities?*

The City's rural communities fall into one of four broad social-economic settlement and land use types:

1. Traditional rural service sector townships - of which the largest are: Heathcote, Marong, Elmore, Goornong, Axedale, Raywood, and Redesdale. Between them they have a total of about 6,000 people. These towns have the infrastructure to support growth.
2. Areas where there are larger farms often associated with extensive cropping and/or grazing. They are generally located in the northern parts of the municipality and in some eastern areas.
3. Relatively large areas of rural living where people are using a property in a rural setting for residential living such as Junortoun and parts of Lockwood and Lockwood South. Larger properties may be undertaking some form of primary production but on a small scale or hobby basis, and their owners often rely on employment elsewhere for most of their income. Generally these areas are found in relatively close proximity to urban Bendigo or Heathcote,
4. Large, but mostly fragmented areas of public land, most of it forested and much of it declared National Park. In total these comprise about 25% of the whole area of the City of Greater Bendigo. They provide a significant environmental setting and

important for their values, recreation opportunities and provide a unique setting.

About 15,000 people currently live in our rural communities. The City's townships, settlements and rural areas are home to just under one in seven of the entire City's residents. The population of the rural communities is growing and currently up to 150 new houses are being built per year in our rural communities (about 900 are being built per year in urban Bendigo). The majority of housing being constructed in rural areas is in Marong, Junortoun, Heathcote, and rural residential and rural living areas in close proximity to urban Bendigo. The population of the City's rural communities is likely to grow at a similar rate to urban Bendigo, about 1.5 to 1.7% per year.

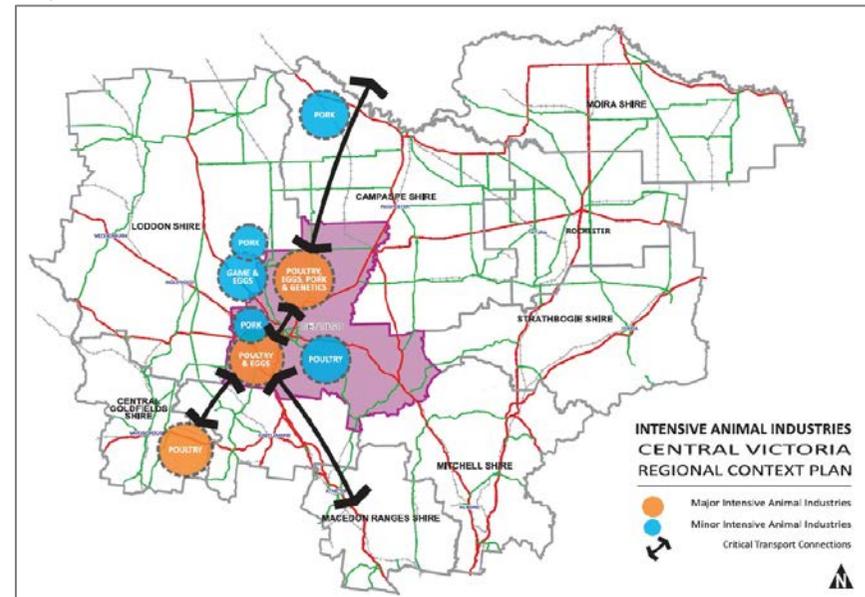
Population growth across the City's rural communities is uneven. Generally areas to the north of urban Bendigo are not experiencing the same rate of growth as the rest of the City's rural areas. Further with the continuing growth of rural communities it is anticipated that in time Junortoun and Marong, which are currently defined as part of the City's rural communities, will probably be defined as within the City's urban growth boundary as they grow in a population which is largely residential in nature. Along with continuing population growth and housing construction the City's rural communities continue to attract other investment in agriculture, horticulture, intensive animal industry production and processing, mining, tourism, transport and recreation.

The City's rural areas support a diverse agricultural base, which has traditionally been based on grazing in the southern areas of the municipality and mixed grazing and cropping in the northern half. Historically the rural base had a greater variety of production, intensive horticulture such as tomato and orchard production and took place around Bendigo, as did dairying. Some of this land was subsumed in the growth of urban Bendigo and production shifted to larger scale and more extensive areas of production in the north of the state. Extensive farming with full-scale production have tended to be confined to areas more distant from urban Bendigo as closer in areas were often consumed by rural residential and rural living development. In some cases new residents into rural areas have supported new investment in such areas as the growth of the equine industry and vineyards. Large scale grape and wine production returned to the Bendigo region in the late 1970s after phylloxera had halted large-scale production in the 1890s. Investment in grape production over the last three decades particularly in the Heathcote region has once again established Greater Bendigo as a major wine region. The Mount Camel Range, which is shared with Campaspe Shire, has emerged a leading wine area.

A particular feature of Greater Bendigo's rural areas is the very high concentration and significance of intensive animal industries (one of the largest in Australia) mostly in areas to the north and west of urban Bendigo extending to and embracing significant parts of Campaspe, Loddon and Buloke Shires. Major processing plants to the west of urban Bendigo and in Castlemaine together with sites

of production form part of a cluster of such industries. Map 2 illustrates the distribution and importance of intensive animal industry production and processing in central Victoria. Considerable local employment is linked directly to this industry while the flow on effects to transport, feed and specialised services are considerable. This industry has further production and processing expansion potential but increasingly new production is likely to occur in local government areas to the north west of Bendigo where the needed separation distances to houses can more easily be found. But the need for labour for processing will be likely to see greater levels of processing in close proximity to Bendigo.

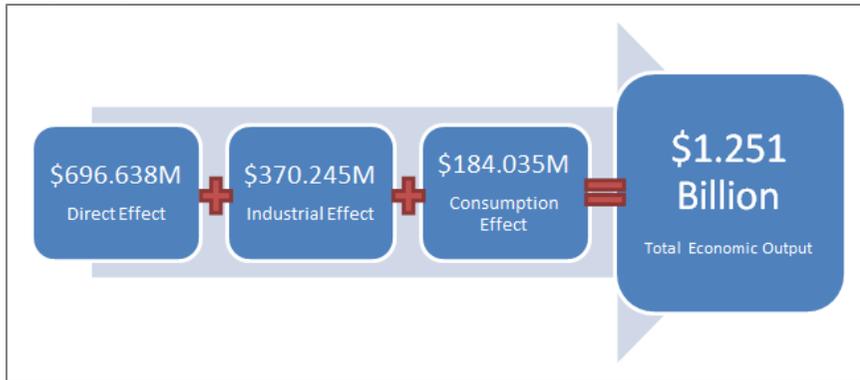
Map 2. Intensive animal industries in central Victoria



Source: CoGB Database

In terms of economic output, the Agri-business sector directly generates \$696.638 million throughout Greater Bendigo. The below flow-chart represents the multiplier effect the Agri-business sector has on the broader Greater Bendigo economy.

Image 1. Agri-business multiplier effect



Source: REMPLAN, 2014

The poultry and egg industry generates \$300 million within the southern Loddon Mallee region and provides employment to over 2,000 people in skilled and unskilled labour.

The Bendigo Livestock Exchange is located 12 kilometres north of Bendigo and is one of the largest sheep and lamb selling centres in Victoria. Annually, 1.2 million sheep and lambs are sold - a quarter of the State's throughput, together with 15,000 cattle, and 2,500 pigs. This throughput represents a sales value estimated to be \$160 million to the economy.

Other particular features of the City's rural areas provide a strong distinguishing element that sets Greater Bendigo's rural areas apart from other comparable local government areas in Victoria:

1. Lake Eppalock is one of the state's largest irrigation water storages, it is located to the east of urban Bendigo close to Heathcote, and links the City to the supply of water for agriculture and the environment in the Murray Darling Basin. While Eppalock was built for irrigation water storage, over time there has been an increasing diversity of land uses and developments that are placing further pressure on Eppalock's resources. These land uses and associated developments include farming, conservation of environmental assets, an increasing demand for rural living properties, and a strong recreation profile that supports local jobs. The capacity of the storage to support agriculture, the environment and recreation is ultimately dependent on rainfall in Eppalock's catchment and in other catchments that Eppalock is linked to by pipeline. An examination of rainfall and water flows into the storage clearly indicates that over the last fifteen years the amount of water in the storage is well below the historical levels in the years following its construction, and its capacity to sustainably support a recreation industry is increasingly questionable. Developing a recreational economy around the maintenance of high water levels is problematic if sufficient rain falling in the catchment is in doubt into the future.

2. Much of the City's rural areas are formed around the valleys of a series of generally north flowing rivers and creeks, principally the

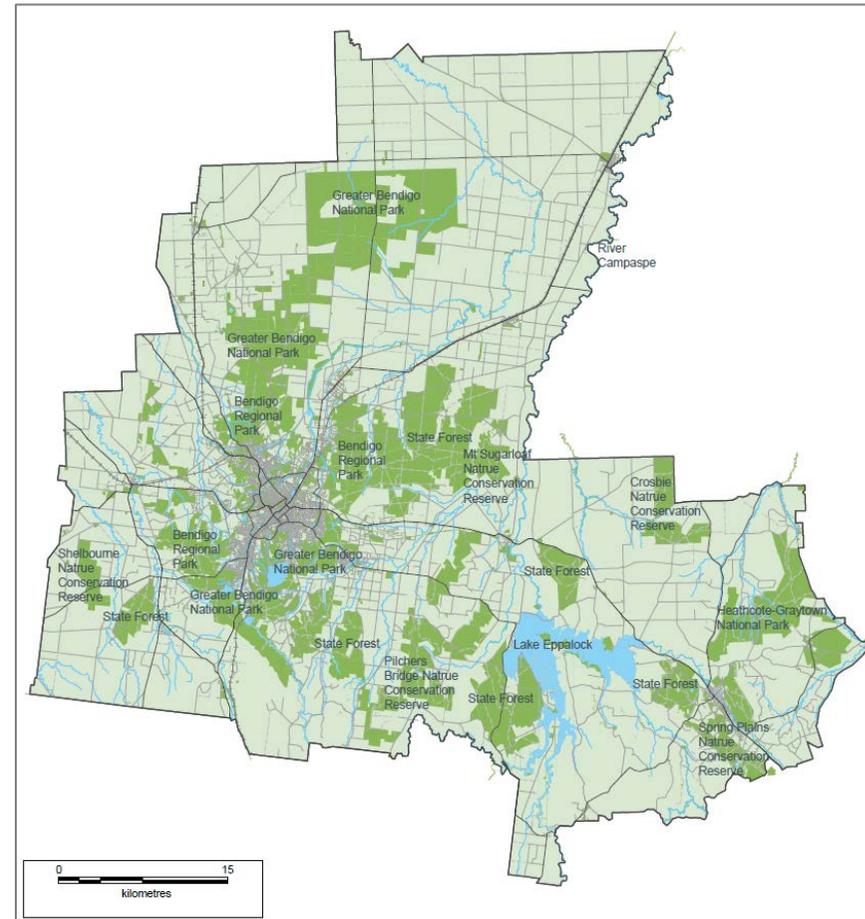
Campaspe River and the Bendigo, Bullock and Mclvor Creeks and their various tributaries which all form part of the Murray Darling Basin. The valleys of these areas generally provide the rural areas with their most productive areas. Some rural areas are supplied with water through an historic channel system and a water allocation. Water security is a critical issue to support investment.

Predicted climate change indicates that the most likely scenario is less rainfall in the growing season and hotter and drier summers. There will be increased pressure to tap those areas that have sustainable underground water sources, to change cropping and stocking rates and regimes, to look for alternative crops and products and to further examine the cost benefit of piping existing open channels.

3. The extensive Box – Ironbark and Whipstick forest types found mainly on public land across much of the City’s rural areas – one of the state’s greatest concentrations of this vegetation type, which is indigenous to Victoria and much of it held as National Park. Bendigo is identified and promoted as the ‘city in the forest’, and is particularly evident when viewed on Map 3. This feature stands in stark contrast to other regional cities across Victoria, which is usually located inside highly productive agricultural landscapes. This is a major distinguishing feature of Bendigo and it extends to many of the City’s rural communities and particularly Heathcote. This feature is not as widely known as it should be because it creates opportunities for active recreation, and particular forms of

tourism and leisure pursuits that are not possible in other regional city settings.

Map 3. Public land within Greater Bendigo



Source: CoGB database

## CONTEXT

### *What is the wider context within which Greater Bendigo's rural communities operate?*

The City of Greater Bendigo's rural communities can easily be 'under-recognised' in the context of urban Bendigo as a large, dominant rapidly growing regional centre. The continuing population growth of urban Bendigo overshadows the City's rural communities. To place this in a wider context; if Greater Bendigo's rural communities were a separate municipality they would be larger in population and area and stronger in growth than many other rural local government areas in the state.

Even though the population of the City's rural communities is increasing by about 250 people per year, most of the increase is occurring in communities in close proximity to urban Bendigo. Only Heathcote of the towns and settlements distant from urban Bendigo is experiencing sustained population increase. Parts of the municipality tied to traditional forms of agriculture are generally experiencing little population growth and in some cases decline. An ageing population in some areas is seeing the loss of services such as local schools. House construction does not necessarily represent population growth. In some areas the purchase of existing houses or the construction of new houses is being driven by people from Melbourne taking on a second home - that may in time be their permanent home.

The population profile of some rural communities demonstrates their potential vulnerability – residents are older, generally have lower incomes, have few local employment opportunities and access to services is often limited. The potential for increasing the inequalities that exist between some towns and rural areas and urban Bendigo is present unless there are deliberate strategies to maintain local facilities and services.

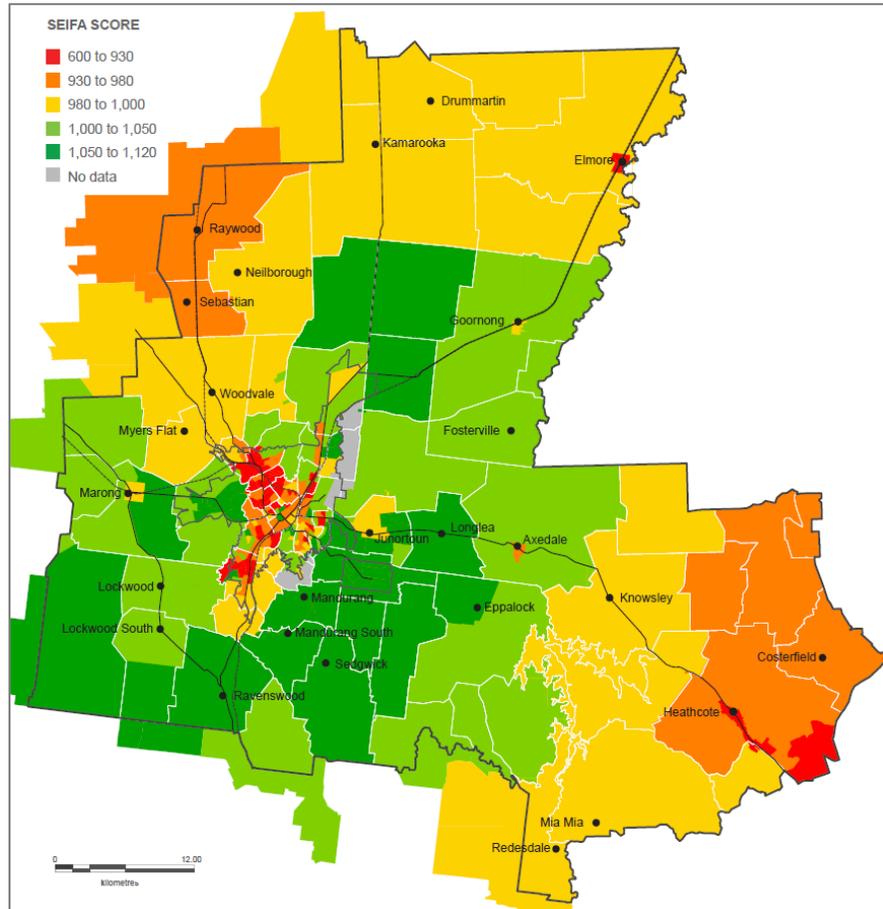
The map below (Map 4) illustrates socio-economic disadvantage and advantage for Greater Bendigo. It shows significant variation in low (disadvantage) and high (advantage) scores across the rural areas.

Similarly locations of major services, shown on Map 5, highlight the differences between local access to facilities in our rural centres and areas. Council is progressively planning the City based on what are called 10-minute neighbourhoods – communities where people can walk or cycle to a range of facilities that meet their everyday needs. This concept works well in the Bendigo urban area and in some of our small towns – but it doesn't work for most of our rural communities. Map 6 displays the concept of a 10-minute driving community for our rural areas – based around a town or one of the centres on the edge of Bendigo such as Huntly, Marong and Strathfieldsaye. This provides good coverage across most of our rural communities. The complexity of the abovementioned issues are yet another reason for a better understanding of the diverse characteristics of our rural communities and the need for them to

## City of Greater Bendigo Rural Communities Strategy

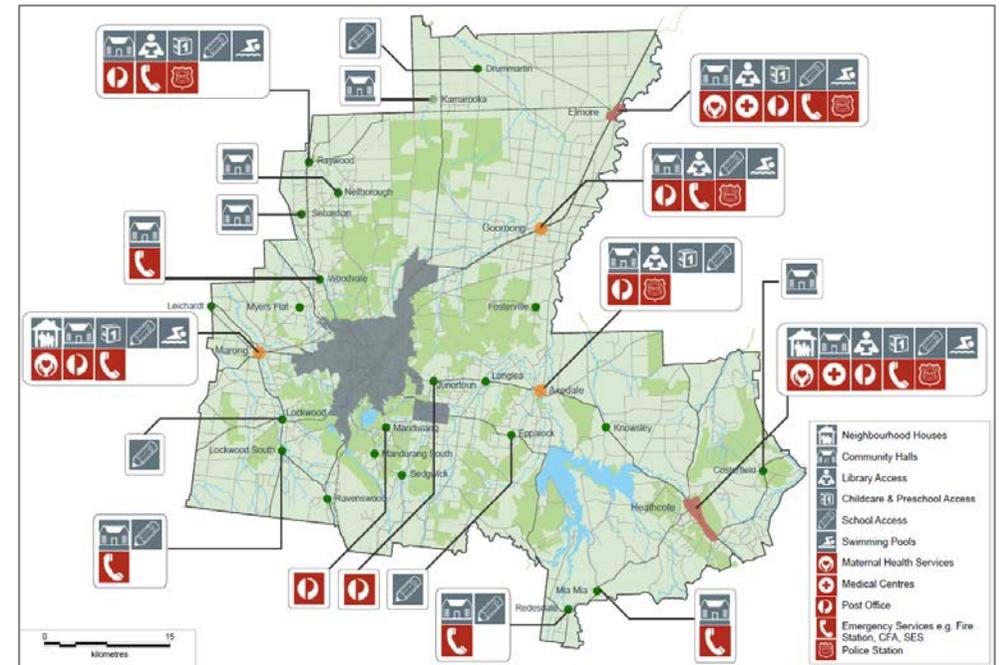
develop a stronger profile so as to demonstrate their importance to the municipality as a whole.

Map 4. Greater Bendigo SEIFA scores 2011



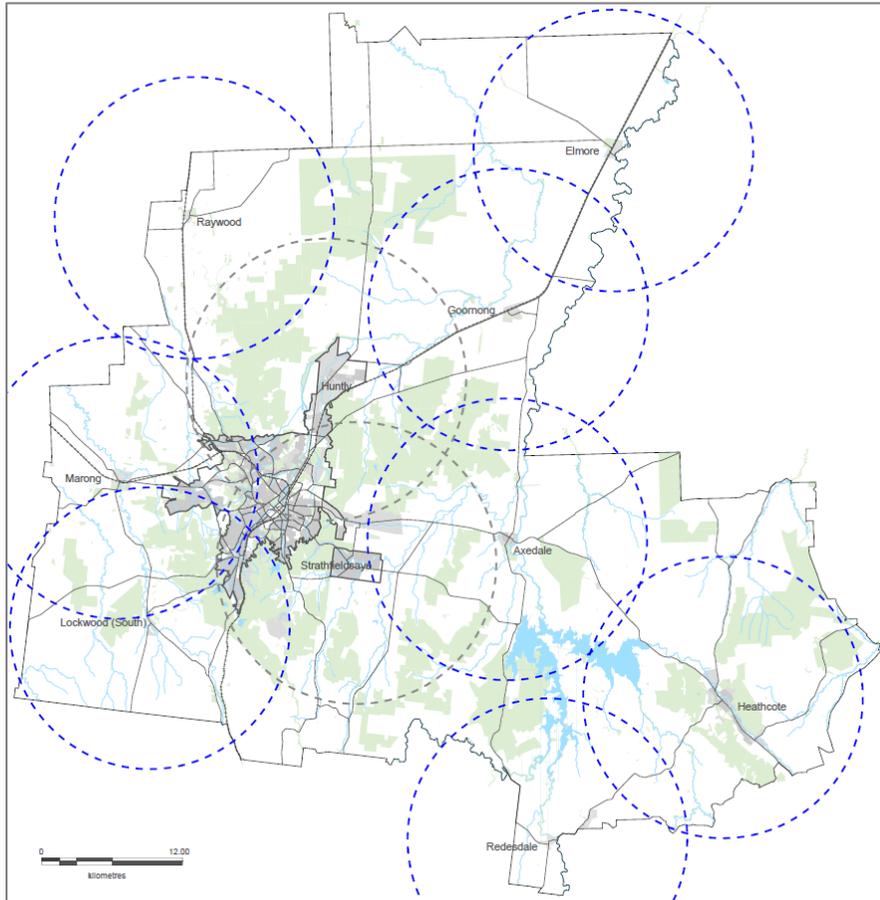
Source: ABS, 2011

Map 5. Major facilities and services across Greater Bendigo's rural areas



Source: CoGB database

Map 6. 10 minute driving community



Source: CoGB database

The rural areas of the City of Greater Bendigo with some exceptions do not generally comprise highly productive soils. However, it is access to water that is a strong determinant of production and versatility. Along major watercourses and where irrigation water has been able to be supplied there are significant areas of high productivity. The reality is that for relatively large areas farmed under traditional methods, reliance on rain fed pasture and crops may hold limited prospects with climate change, farm succession problems and low productivity. Extensive tracts of rural areas across the City may well revert to large scale rural living areas.

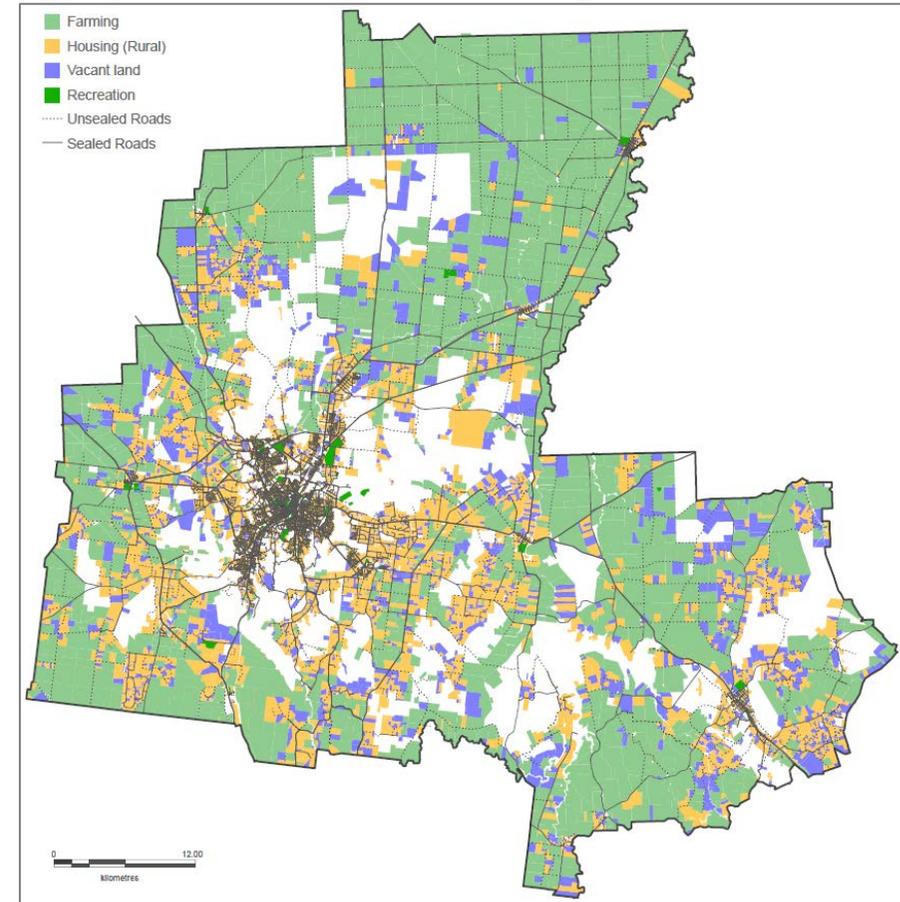
Despite this trend in parts of the City's rural areas, rural areas do support a strong rural and primary production sector partly by virtue of its strategic location, the services and facilities it offers and the capability that has been built across the community. Bendigo's rural sector base is much more extensive and much more important than just the area within the City's boundaries. Bendigo as a regional centre relates to an extensive area of production across north central Victoria and extending into significant parts of southern New South Wales. Rural production pays no attention to municipal boundaries. For example the wine industry of the Mount Camel Range embraces parts of Greater Bendigo and Campaspe Shire, Greater Bendigo's intensive animal industry with its major processing facilities is linked to suppliers from well outside the City boundaries, the Bendigo Livestock Exchange serves an area well beyond Bendigo as do the City's concentration of agricultural consulting businesses. Extensions to the state's water grid will provide greater flexibility in production and higher yields.

The reality is that urban Bendigo’s economy continues to be shaped by the rural sector across a large rural production region through processing, direct services, export to the growing Asian market, transport and logistics, and very significantly the presence of health, medical, education, arts and cultural facilities. These higher order services provide the regional backbone that encourages and supports investment in rural production across the region.

The City of Greater Bendigo comprises three distinct parts. Firstly, an urban area, which is about 5% of the total land area of the municipality but comprises about 85% of the population. Secondly, a settled rural area of about 70% of the municipal area with about 15% of the population of which about half live in towns and settlements and the other half on rural properties with a small number of full time farms, but with most being of a hobby or less than full time operation and with limited agricultural productivity. Thirdly, about 25% of the land area of the municipality is public land, almost all of it forested and much of it classified as a National Park, which is widely dispersed across the whole municipality and rather uniquely virtually encircles urban Bendigo.

Map 7 opposite demonstrates this pattern of land use and development across the rural areas of Greater Bendigo, showing land predominantly used for farming, rural housing, recreation, as well as vacant land.

Map 7. Predominant land uses across Greater Bendigo 2014



*\* This information is indicative and based on the City of Greater Bendigo rates classifications - public and charitable land, industrial and commercial land has been excluded. Where multiple land uses are occurring, such as land used for*

*farming that also contains a dwelling, only the predominant land use is shown on the map.*

This whole structure and pattern stands in stark contrast and is a different and distinct setting to all other regional cities in the state. Other regional cities are generally surrounded by much more productive agricultural land. They have little if any public land and very limited areas of forest and vegetation. This unique Bendigo setting contributes significantly to the character of the whole municipality, to Bendigo as a regional city and for its rural communities. It shapes important aspects of the City and provides challenges and opportunities that aren't provided in other municipalities based on a large regional city.

It is suggested that the distinctiveness of this setting is little understood and appreciated. It has been very important in defining a unique DNA or set of qualities. Rather than urban Bendigo residents sitting inside a surrounding agricultural landscape where they are confronted daily by the scene of rural production and the relationship of urban and rural economies, few urban dwellers experience that reminder. Because of the forest surround, the rural residential and rural living lots that generally border the forest, and the limited productivity of much of the farming land in the city, there are few places where the urban dweller is reminded of broad scale farming practices. The sort of productive agricultural or horticultural landscape which is readily evident around a regional city such as Shepparton, Ballarat, Warrnambool, Latrobe valley or Mildura is not highly visible. The continuing growth in the importance of agriculture to regional economies and the level of

investment that is taking place is often not immediately evident in the way in which it is in many other regional cities.

Further the role that Bendigo plays as an infrastructure hub with a road network between product source to the north and northwest and markets and ports to the south, via routes that traverse areas to the west and east of the urban area, is often not evident to the urban resident. The City of Greater Bendigo has been actively pursuing the development of a major business park to the north-west of Marong Township for many years. While this is designed to meet long term demands for industrial land for urban Bendigo a major factor in the strategy of pursuing this facility is to act as a distribution point for freight, logistics, storage and warehousing through its strategic location at the junction of a number of highways and major roads and the potential to link into the regional rail network. It is a similar model to the thinking behind the development of major freight centre in locations such as north of Horsham, and at Wodonga and Albury. The planned development to substantially increase the capacity of the Bendigo airport so as to handle much larger planes that can network directly to other centres across the nation is part of that long term strategy.

The emergence of industries, employment, investment and services around tourism has been a significant development in many regional economies. Bendigo heritage setting, growing cultural product, food and wine industries and central location have benefited extensively from travel and recreation expenditure. Similar trends and opportunities are being seen in some rural communities of which Heathcote is the stand out example. The

economy of towns and rural areas can be transformed over time on the back of visitors' spending money on accommodation, food and lifestyle purchases. The economy of Heathcote is very different to what it was even a decade ago and vibrancy and activity on the main street reflects much more than a local service role.

The development of networks of travel of which the O'Keefe rail trail is the best example in the City demonstrates the potential. Increasingly tourism is about regional product and markets. The City of Greater Bendigo is positioning its efforts by working with Mount Alexander and Loddon Shires. Significantly in that regional approach Bendigo and Heathcote are seen as two distinct products, albeit that as Bendigo positions itself with distinct product it now complements the experience at Heathcote. An example of this is that a visit to the Bendigo Art Gallery is linked with wineries at Heathcote as a distinct marketing product. Increasingly rural producers are identifying how they can be part of that product mix through offering farm visits, experiences and accommodation.

## WHAT IS HAPPENING IN OUR RURAL COMMUNITIES?

### *What ideas and initiatives are taking place in our rural communities and how are opportunities being realised?*

While many in our rural communities have expressed concerns about many of the changes happening in our rural communities and a sense of uncertainty about the future, the City's rural communities are also characterised by a process of re-invention, new enterprises, community based initiatives and realisation of opportunities. The following section provides a brief overview of a selected range of activities that have been observed and identified in our rural communities. It is not meant to be comprehensive list but it indicates the potential that exists and recording it is also designed to inspire rural communities to endeavour to capitalise on the many opportunities that exist.

Many individual rural communities are working in their own right or in collaboration with Council on initiatives which will build their own capacity and reposition their community, build local provide, strengthen social capital and improve facilities.

Communities working with Council to build better facilities:

- Redesdale community hub
- Woodvale recreation reserve development
- Heathcote facilities review
- Marong Structure Plan and Development Contributions Plan

Community based activities:

- Axedale - working to construct an ANZAC memorial and river reserve rejuvenation (Image 2)
- Knowsley - railway marker ('mile') posts and replica railway station name boards on the O'Keefe Rail Trail
- Elmore river walk
- Kamarooka facilities upgrade
- Axedale and Woodvale Historical markers and trails
- Mia Mia music events
- Heathcote Games
- Local Celebrations including the farmers market at Axedale, street carnival in Elmore, Christmas in July in Neilborough, Raywood Garage Sale and Woodvale Trash and Treasure.

Image 2. Axedale. Campaspe River reserve rejuvenation and platypus sculpture



Source: CoGB Database

Various activities and initiatives have the potential to link communities together:

- Goornong Barnadown Fosterville Heritage Trail (Image 3)
- The progressive development of the O’Keefe Rail Trail (Image 4)
- The Redesdale community’s proposal to provide potential links to the O’Keefe Rail Trail (Image 5)
- The work of the Junortoun community to develop a much improved bus service and to upgrade the bus services between Heathcote – Axedale and Bendigo
- Community newsletters including Roundabout Raywood, Elmore Progress Association News, Axedale Antics, Mia Mia Messenger and the Bridge Connection
- The regular meetings between the communities of Raywood – Sebastian – Neilborough and Woodvale to identify collaborative ideas where working together will strengthen all community. One of the outcomes of that project has been joint asset mapping (Map 8)

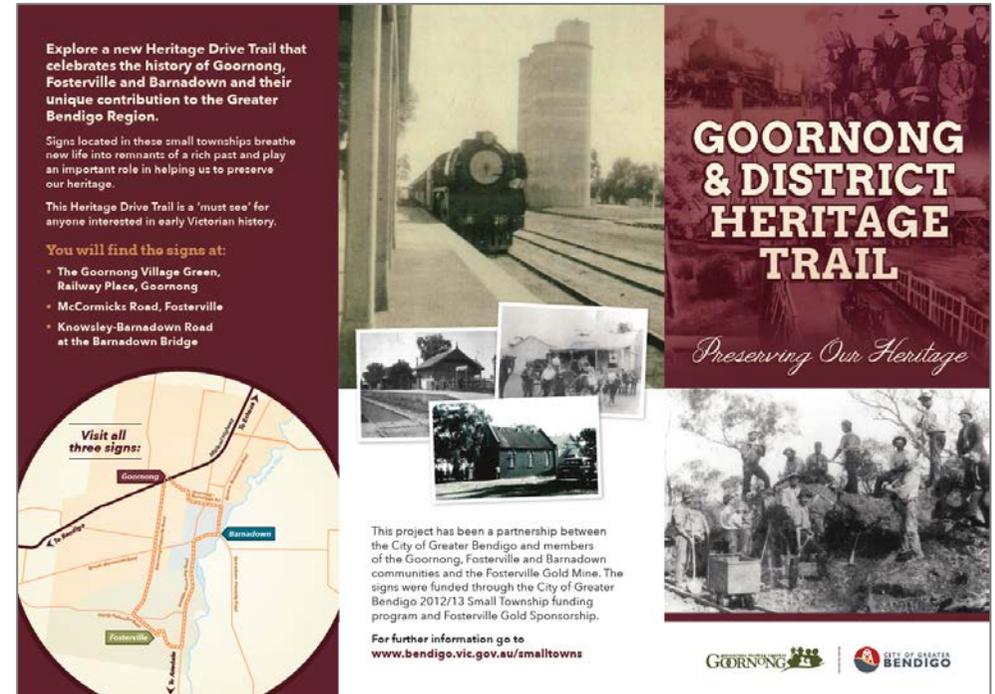


Image 3. Goornong & District Heritage Trail

Source: CoGB database

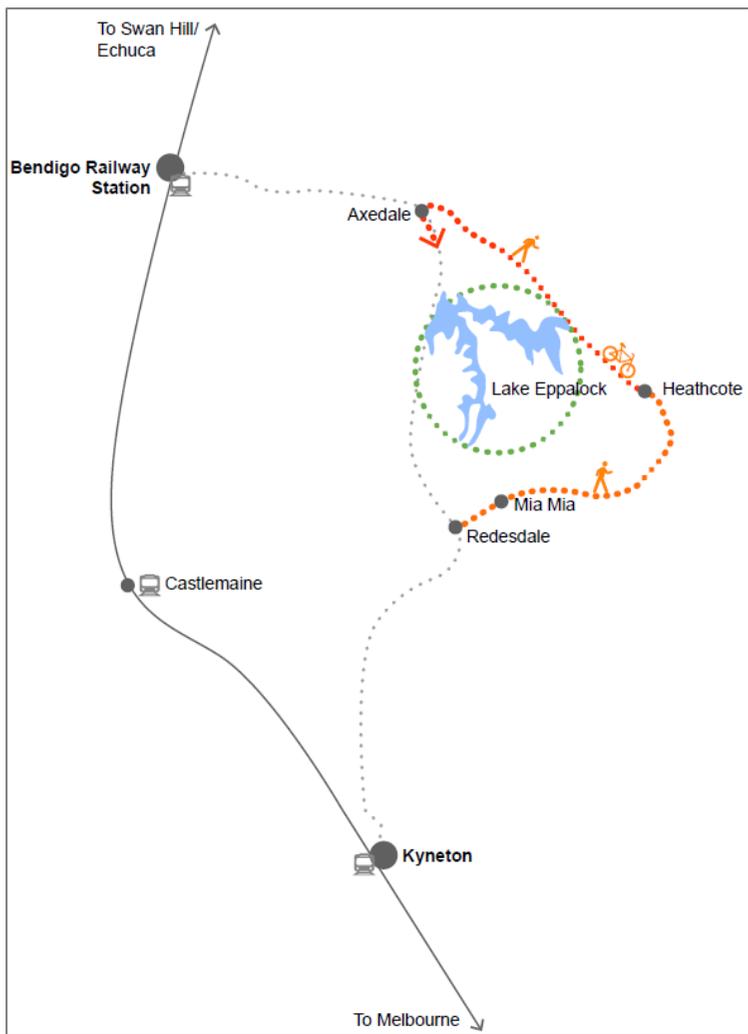
# City of Greater Bendigo Rural Communities Strategy

Image 4. O'Keefe Rail Trail

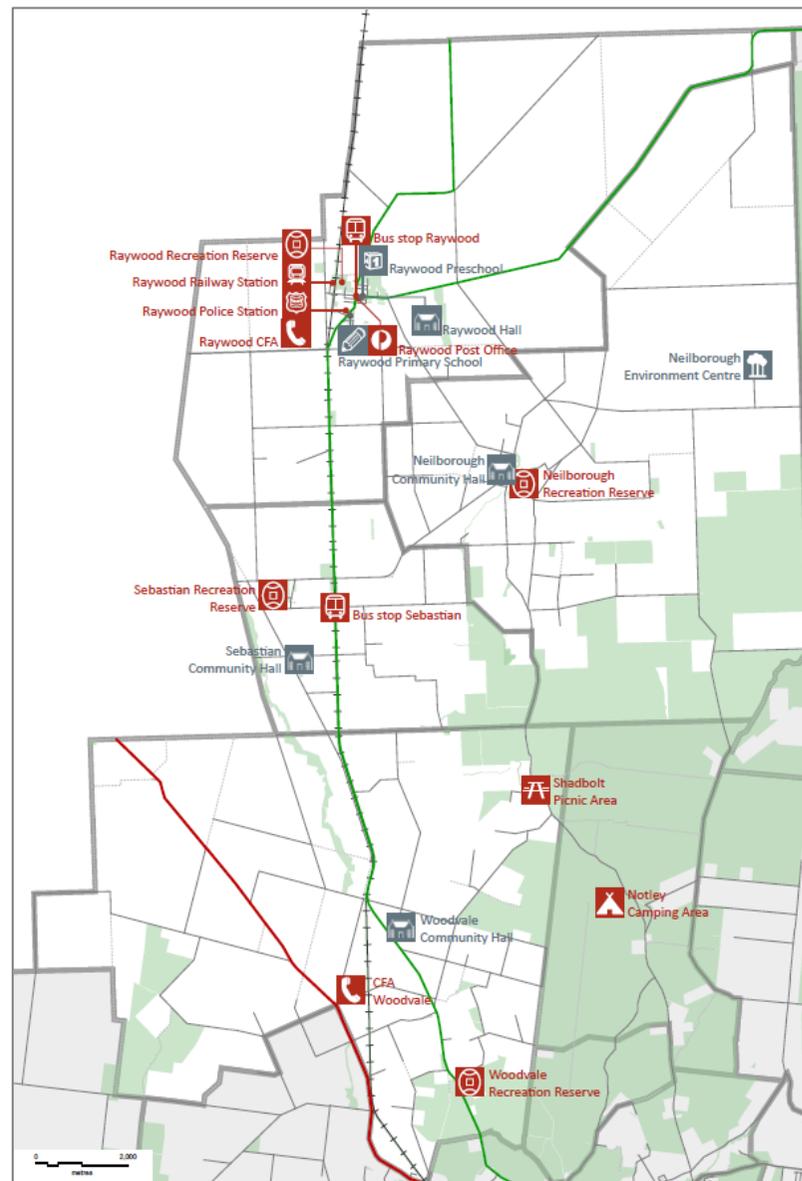


Source: CoGB database

Image 5. Redesdale Community – proposed extension of the O'Keefe Rail Trail



Map 8. Collaborative communities Raywood – Neilborough – Sebastian – Woodvale – Mapping of community facilities  
Source: COGB Database



The City of Greater Bendigo is required by the Victorian government to prepare and adopt a series of documents, principally a four year Council Plan following the election of a new Council which is then required to be updated each year during the life of that elected Council. Council's Plan for 2016-17 is due to be adopted by 30 June 2016. It includes a number of actions that relate to rural communities.

The election of a new Council in October 2016 will start the four-year cycle again and Council's plan for 2017 – 2020 will be one of the most important tasks for the newly elected members. This Rural Communities Strategy should be an important driver of that Plan's content and the actions the new Council sets out to deliver.

Council is also required to produce a new four year Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan by October 2017. This will in part link to the new Council Plan and will at the local level assist in implementing the State's Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. Both documents will be subject to a formal process of consultation and community input.

The third document that is required to be prepared by a Council is its Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS); a legal requirement to be included in each Council Planning Scheme. Council's current MSS is outdated and is currently being revised, preparatory to being formally placed on public exhibition. The MSS is required to be consistent with the adopted Council Plan.

## COUNCILS ADOPTED STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

*How do Council's current adopted strategies and policies apply in our rural areas and communities?*

Clearly Council is moving to a sequence where these three major documents are being produced in similar timelines and there is considerable scope to ensure that because of shared currency they will be complementary, mutually supportive and consistent in their intentions and action.

In developing its current four year Council Plan, the Council adopted the overall aspirational goal of ‘working together to be Australia’s most liveable regional city. Liveability can be seen as a vague and undefined term. The current Council has adopted 24 indicators that are used to assess whether Council is making substantive progress. Most of the adopted liveability indicators are directly applicable to the both the urban and rural communities of the City.

Council has in recent years adopted a series of topic and site-specific strategies and plans, which are designed to provide a clear framework for the future. These strategies and plans have varying degrees of applicability to our communities.

Council’s *Greater Bendigo Residential Strategy* provides for and encourages further residential development in the existing towns and cities, the *Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy (ITLUS)* supports a better connected communities and a stronger emphasis on public transport for our rural communities, the *City’s Economic Development Strategy* recognizes the vital role that the our rural areas play in the continuing growth of the City – but there is concern that opportunities provided by the City’s rural economy

could be more fully realised. The recently adopted *Commercial Land and Activity Centres Strategy* sets out the forecast floor area requirements by centre and township to support ongoing population growth; supply of needed additional floor space in Heathcote and Marong has been flagged.

While some strategies focus on just the City area others that Council has adopted link with the wider region and indicate that Bendigo’s future development forms part of a regional network. Examples of this include the *Loddon-Campaspe Regional Growth Plan*, regional tourism plans, and the *Loddon-Campaspe Regional Transport Strategy*. In terms of transport that strategy and ITLUS both support better public transport including more services on the Bendigo to Echuca and Swan Hill lines.

Council is currently preparing strategies that set out priorities for action relating to a number of agendas in our rural communities. These include public spaces, environmental sustainability, inclusion and early years.

In addition there are current processes in hand to examine the longer-term facilities needs of Heathcote, a Housing Strategy and the development of Marong. Council works closely with twelve towns and settlements across rural Bendigo to assist them to undertake community-planning processes and identify actions and priorities. Forward plans have been scheduled and adopted by Council to include structure plans for Heathcote, Elmore, Goornong, and Redesdale.

### **Principles**

The Rural Communities Strategy is based on the pursuit of four principles which guide Council's ongoing work and relationships with its rural communities. The principles were developed in response to the context and understanding of our rural communities and the issues and needs identified by them as part of an extensive consultation program.

### **Actions**

Against each principle is a set of actions that are designed to provide clear directions, priorities and tasks that will be undertaken.

## **STRATEGY**

### **Goal – Principles – Actions**

#### **Goal**

Council's overall goal - *working together to be Australia's most liveable regional city* encompasses the whole of the City of Greater Bendigo – our urban and rural communities.

The table below provides the Strategy actions.

<i>Principles</i>	<i>Context – Issues – Drivers</i>	<i>Actions</i>
<b>1. Building on Our Understanding of Our Rural Communities</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council needs to continue building on and improving its understanding of our rural communities, the trends, changes and forces acting on them, the implications and the opportunities that can be capitalised on.</li> <li>• There is a need to ensure a better understanding of the potential impacts and consequences of Council policies, strategies, decisions and processes on our rural communities and to ensure that their interests are fully recognised and considered.</li> <li>• As part of an ongoing program of service reviews across the organisation Council will undertake a service review of how it undertakes community planning in 2018.</li> </ul>	<p>1.1 That the Strategy and Community Partnerships Units of Council produce a ‘State of Bendigo’s Rural Communities’ report in 2017 following the release of the 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics census results. That the report be used to assist in informing Council as it continues to implement this Rural Communities Strategy.</p> <p>1.2 That all reports to Council and the annual business plans in each of Council’s units include a section titled ‘Rural Communities Issues and Impacts’ which is completed as applicable.</p> <p>1.3 That Council establish a Rural Communities Advisory Committee with membership comprising two Councillors, one of whom would be the Chairperson, and a representative from each of the Community Planning Committees operating in the City’s rural areas. The Committee would meet at least three times a year to provide ongoing advice to Council and provide an annual consolidated report and presentation to Council, which includes a list of prioritised actions.</p>

**2. Continuing to Work More Effectively With Our Rural Communities and Advocating With and on Behalf of Our Rural Communities**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Council’s strategies, actions and programs need to ensure that they continue improving the level of support for and strengthening the capacity of and the opportunities available to our rural communities.</li> <li>• People living in our rural communities need to be able to easily access Council services to overcome the disadvantages they experience through isolation, and factors such as limited public transport services, and poor or non-existent mobile phone and internet services.</li> <li>• There is a need to continue to support, provide for and assist in the coordination of emergency services as critical elements for the support of the City’s rural areas and communities and to build a high level of community resilience.</li> <li>• Sport, recreation community organisations are key community based activities in rural communities and they play an important role in supporting community facilities, health and wellbeing, social capital and engagement.</li> </ul>	<p>2.1 That Council forms a rural communities’ team comprising one Councillor from each ward and relevant Managers and Coordinators that meets at least three times a year to ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to respond to, plan for, monitor the needs of, and assist the development of our rural communities.</p> <p>2.2 Council continue to place a high priority on lobbying relevant authorities regarding improvements to mobile phone coverage and the NBN for our rural communities.</p> <p>2.3 That Council, as part of the implementation of this strategy and ITLUS, work with Transport for Victoria and DEDJTR to establish a Local Transport Forum for the rural communities of the City of Greater Bendigo in accord with the state government’s recently released Regional Network Development Plan.</p> <p>2.4 That Council continue to work with its rural communities to work with Public Transport Victoria to increase public transport services and establish a local transport forum with a particular focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the Heathcote/Axedale/Junortoun/Bendigo bus service,</li> <li>• the Marong, Goornong, and Raywood to Bendigo bus services,</li> <li>• more services on the Echuca to Bendigo railway line, and</li> <li>• the reopening of railway stations at Goornong and Raywood.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many facilities and services in rural communities are provided and maintained by other arms of government. Council needs to continue to work with our rural communities to advocate for and support improvements to high priority and community supported facilities and services.</li> <li>• The general poor quality, coverage and speed of mobile phone, internet and broadband coverage across our rural communities impacts on their social sustainability, limits their quality of life, restricts economic and population growth and investment and limits their capacity to respond effectively to emergencies.</li> <li>• There is a high reliance in our rural communities on a well-maintained road network and regular convenient public transport services and links for residents and businesses in our rural communities. Current public transport services are limited and need to be significantly extended.</li> <li>• The level of health and wellbeing including mental health of our rural communities is generally declining and convenient and affordable access to support services is often an issue for rural communities.</li> </ul>	<p>2.5 That Council reviews its level of support in the 2017/18 budget with consideration to increasing the funds for programs addressing health and wellbeing including mental health in our rural communities.</p>
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**3. Realising the Unique Values and the Social and Economic Potential of Our Rural Communities**

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural communities and businesses need support and assistance to             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• grow their population,</li> <li>• expand local employment opportunities particularly for youth,</li> <li>• increase agricultural production,</li> <li>• develop tourism opportunities,</li> <li>• ensure planned development and grow the population of towns that have existing infrastructure,</li> <li>• better secure long term water supplies,</li> <li>• improve health and wellbeing and mental health outcomes, and</li> <li>• become more vibrant, sustainable and engaged places.</li> </ul> </li>   <li>• There is a an ongoing need to support agreed essential community facilities in rural areas through a process of priority setting that supports each community but takes advantages of opportunities to share and to provide for multiple use of facilities.</li>   <li>• Local and regional leadership programs are essential to strengthen local rural communities and better realise opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p>3.1 That Council refer the appointment of a new position; a Rural Communities Officer, for consideration in the 2017- 2021 four year Council Plan and the 2017 - 2018 Budget so as to provide a resource for Council and a focus for our rural communities to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• actively support and promote population growth, services, infrastructure needs analysis and planning, employment initiatives and economic development,</li> <li>• work with Councils Economic Development Unit to develop a ‘Made in Rural Bendigo’ publication similar to the recently produced ‘Made in Bendigo’ publication promoting the city’s manufacturing businesses.</li> <li>• assist with maintaining and improving essential facilities and focus expenditure on those facilities which can be effectively developed as multi-purpose and multi-use,</li> <li>• develop a process to assist Council setting strategic priorities with regards to its decisions about allocation of resources for infrastructure maintenance and repair, and</li> <li>• work with relevant agencies in regard to the protection, management and sustainable development of assets and resources in the City’s rural areas</li> <li>• service the Rural Communities Advisory Committee (Action 1.3) and the rural communities team (Action 2.1)</li> </ul> <p>3.2 That Council undertake a renewal of its Economic Development Strategy to include a specific and major focus on</p>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is an ongoing need to protect, conserve and sustainably manage the City’s water and land resources to ensure the long-term future of farming, our rural communities and the economy and communities that depend on these resources.</li> <li>• There is an increasing need for Council and our rural communities to work collaboratively with relevant government agencies and community-based groups to mitigate the impacts of climate change, provide water security, and to change practices that contribute to adverse climate change.</li> <li>• There is an ongoing need for Council and its rural communities to work collaboratively with relevant agencies and community groups to ensure the protection and management of the City’s:-             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• vegetation,</li> <li>• biodiversity,</li> <li>• forests and public land assets,</li> <li>• Indigenous heritage,</li> <li>• built and cultural heritage, and</li> <li>• valued rural landscapes</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting food and fibre production and processing,</li> <li>• growing local jobs in our rural communities in particular employment for rural youth, and</li> <li>• collaboration with organisations such as Regional Development Victoria, the Victorian Farmers Federation, the Central Victoria Agribusiness Forum and adjoining municipalities to promote and support rural economic development and agribusiness, and education and training to support agriculture.</li> </ul> <p>3.3 That Council work with its rural communities to prepare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a series of structure plans for the following places (which have already been listed and scheduled by Council) – Marong, Heathcote, Elmore, Redesdale and Goornong, and that Junortoun and Raywood be added to the list, and</li> <li>• rural communities’ structure plans for the following areas             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lockwood/Lockwood South;</li> <li>• Woodvale/Neilborough/Sebastian/Raywood;</li> <li>• the rural surrounds of Heathcote/Mia Mia/Redesdale and Lake Eppalock;</li> <li>• Junortoun to Axedale;</li> <li>• Huntly to Goornong;</li> <li>• Lake Eppalock and surrounds;</li> <li>• the Heathcote - Mount Camel Range wine region and the Campaspe River valley north of Axedale (in conjunction with Campaspe Shire).</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>3.4 That Council receive and consider a report in 2017 setting out a</p>
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		<p>planned series of actions to address people living in illegal dwellings and substandard structures in and around townships and in our rural communities.</p> <p>3.5 That Council undertake the necessary studies to complete an inventory of the heritage assets in rural communities and ensure that these are protected under the provisions of the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme.</p> <p>3.6 That Council continue to work with the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung communities to ensure that the City’s indigenous heritage is appropriately protected, recognised and celebrated.</p>
<p><b><i>4. Realising and Capitalising on Our City’s Rural and Regional Development and Leadership Potential</i></b></p>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bendigo needs to continue to build on its role as a major regional centre in the Loddon Campaspe region, its regional development capacity and its comparative competitive position on a national and global scale.</li> <li>• Bendigo is strategically located relative to one of the nation’s most productive agricultural regions. The capacity of Bendigo to support and take advantage of the development of this region through regional scale facilities and services needs to be further developed through a collaborative approach on Bendigo’s comparative advantages.</li> </ul>	<p>4.1 That in its renewal of its Economic Development Strategy Council work in close collaboration with its rural communities and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the new Loddon Campaspe Regional Partnership,</li> <li>• Regional Development Victoria,</li> <li>• the Department of Economic Development, Jobs Transport and Resources,</li> <li>• the Department of Environment, Land Water and Planning and</li> <li>• the Loddon Mallee Regional Development Australia,</li> </ul> <p>to prepare a specific section that builds on the City’s rural and regional strengths and competitive comparative advantages.</p> <p>4.2 That Council expand its collaboration with adjoining municipalities</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Across central Victoria and in municipalities adjoining Greater Bendigo, there is a network of rural towns such as; Maldon, Newstead, Harcourt, Castlemaine, Dunolly, Maryborough, Bridgewater, Inglewood, Lockington, Rochester, Colbinabbin and Rushworth, that have close social and economic ties with towns and rural communities in Greater Bendigo as well as with urban Bendigo. The sustained growth and development of this whole region has mutual benefit for all municipalities including the City of Greater Bendigo</li> </ul>	<p>to promote and support the network of rural towns across central Victoria to assist in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• planned population growth,</li> <li>• the collaborative provision of services and facilities,</li> <li>• economic development and job creation,</li> <li>• tourism product and promotion,</li> <li>• providing housing choice and diversity and living options.</li> </ul> <p>4.3 That Council continue to work with municipalities in the Loddon Campaspe region to support the development, employment growth and innovation of the local and regional intensive animal industries and to ensure a consistent approach to protect approved industries from encroachment by residential development through relevant planning scheme provisions.</p> <p>4.4 Council continue to support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the development of the Marong Business Park to strengthen the Bendigo regional economy and the links Bendigo has with one of Australia’s most important agricultural regions,</li> <li>• a major upgrade of the Calder Highway Alternative, a Calder Highway bypass west of Marong and the road link between Marong and Epsom,</li> <li>• an expansion of the freight capacity of the regional rail network, and</li> <li>• the progressively implementation of the ten top priority actions from the Loddon Campaspe Regional Transport Strategy.</li> </ul>
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