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Shire of Strathbogie

SHIRE OF STRATHBOGIE

AVENEL NEIGHBOURHOOD CHARACTER STUDY

FINAL REPORT

October 2009

Contents

1. Brief & Method

1.1   Brief

The Avenel Neighbourhood Character Study was commissioned by the Strathbogie Shire as part of a wider study covering the four townships of Euroa, Nagambie, Avenel and Violet Town. Planisphere was initially engaged to undertake the Euroa and Nagambie studies, and since their completion, has been appointed to complete the Avenel and Violet Town studies.

Avenel

The town of Avenel is approximately 114 kilometres north of Melbourne, between Seymour and Euroa, located west of the Hume Highway, with a population of 728 people. The town provides many services and facilities to the local community including a newsagency, primary school, bistro, recreational reserve and train station. Avenel is one of the only towns located along Hughes Creek that allows for unique creek environs.

The area was settled in during the 1830s and was named after a village in Gloucestershire, England. The township was established in 1849, with growth spurred on by the gold rush of the 1850s. During the early years, Avenel was used as a camping ground for drovers and teamsters travelling between Sydney and Melbourne. The expansion of the town was aided by the construction of the rail link to Melbourne in 1872, which continued on through to the post war years. Evidence of the township's history is still apparent in Avenel today with many intact Victorian and Edwardian buildings, such as the Royal Mail Hotel and the Harvest Home Historic Hotel.

Study Area

The Brief stipulated that the Study should cover the entire urban areas of the townships. The Study Area is shown on the map below.
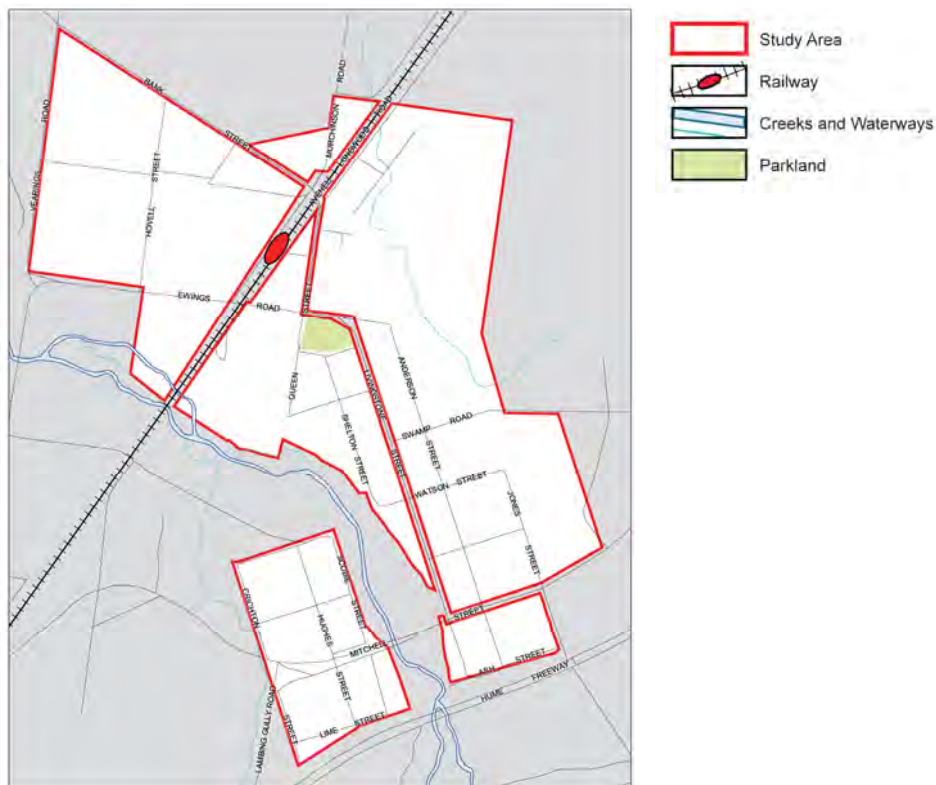
1.2 Methodology

The methodology is based on the tasks included in the Brief, elaborated and modified to include the following four stages:

Stage 1: Preliminaries

During this stage, we confirmed Council's requirements, established detailed timelines and commenced background research.

Survey and Mapping

Stage 1 involved the major site survey, which allowed to Study Team to establish the broad character types throughout the township, and identify preliminary precinct boundaries based on these character types.

An overview survey was immediately followed by a detailed survey. The detailed survey involved documentation of key elements of the existing character of areas.

Every street was surveyed, with relevant information collected, mostly in map form and aggregated to blocks or groups of properties with like characteristics. The survey focused on elements of the environment that should be incorporated into preferred future character-related planning controls, such as building height, site coverage and significant landscapes or trees.

Stage 2: Precinct Identification and Issues Papers

Precinct Identification and Issues Papers

Following the detailed survey process and community consultation in Stage 1, preliminary precinct boundaries were refined. For each precinct, an Issues Paper was prepared.

Draft Precinct boundaries were precisely mapped for the purpose of consultation, based upon community feedback and the detailed survey data collected. A draft Preferred Character Statement was also prepared for each precinct for the purpose of community consultation.

Stage 3: Precinct Guidelines and Brochures

Precinct Guidelines

The next stage of the project, following finalisation of the Preferred Character Statements, involved the preparation of Design Guidelines specific to each Precinct. These provide objectives and appropriate design responses for new residential development, including alterations or renovations visible from the street.

The Design Guidelines are framed in direct response to any mismatch identified between the potential changes to a precinct's character and the preferred future character of each precinct. The detailed content includes, for each precinct, Design Guidelines addressing the following Character Elements where relevant to that precinct:

- Existing buildings
- Vegetation
- Siting
- Height and building form
- Materials and design detailing
- Front boundary treatment
- Hughes Creek Interface
- Township edge development
- Natural landscape interface
- Properties adjoining flood and vegetation lines

For each Character Element, an *Objective*, *Design Response* and *Avoid* statement was prepared. Broad summary information was also included where relevant to address public domain treatment.

Stage 4: Implementation Recommendations

The best statutory implementation mechanisms were developed in consultation with the Council, and where relevant, the Department of Sustainability and Environment. Options that were considered included implementation through Local Policy, Overlays or changes to ResCode Standards.

An important aspect of this task was to apply a *discriminating* approach to statutory implementation, one that considered the full statutory context, including the range of existing policies and controls, and the methods of ensuring that the effectiveness of all tools is maximised.

The Study Team also broadly addressed non-statutory mechanisms such as education and encouragement and, importantly, works by public authorities, in particular road and footpath treatments and street planting usually carried out by the Council.

Monitoring and review of the Study form part of our recommendations. This may include future assessment of housing needs, capacity and take-up and issues of neighbourhood character that need to be re-examined.

1.3   Consultation

The Brief stipulated that community consultation should be an integral part of the project. A communication strategy, focusing on the three elements of communication, participation and consultation was discussed with the Council in the initial stage of the project.

Preliminary Consultation

The first phase of consultation involved a community workshop and submissions, conducted by Planit Consulting and Strathbogie Shire Council. The aim of this was to generate a list of principles for each precinct. During this initial stage the community was invited to submit feedback on how they feel about their environment and aspects of it which they find important. The submissions received provided a significant contribution and highlighted the value of continually involving the community throughout the project.

This concluded in a list of values that contributed to the unique character of Avenel and draft vision statements, which were further explored in later project stages. The Neighbourhood Character Study will only address issues relating to the physical characteristics of each place which can be translated in the available Planning Schemes. All other issues raised relating to social and community values will be documented for reference by Council in other capacities.

Consultation on Precinct Issues Papers, Brochures and Draft Report

Throughout Stages 2, 3 and 4, members of the community, stakeholders, Council officers and Councillors were provided with opportunity to comment on various products of the Neighbourhood Character Study.

During Stage 2 and 3, the Precinct Issues Papers and Brochures were distributed to the entire community of Avenel. This provided everyone with the opportunity for comment on the precinct descriptions, draft preferred character statements and draft guidelines prepared for each precinct. A summary of the feedback received is included in Appendix 2.

This Draft Report will be posted on the Council website and comment will be invited from the community, Council officers and Councillors.

2. Policy Context

2.1   State Policies

The State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) comprises a statement of general principles for land use and development planning, and specific policies dealing with sectoral issues. Planning and responsible authorities must take into account and give effect to both the general principles and the specific policies applicable to issues before them to ensure integrated decision-making.

Specifically, the SPPF seeks to:

- Encourage higher density housing development on sites that are well located in relation to activity centres and public transport.

- Ensure housing stock matches changing demand by widening housing choice.

- Ensure planning for growth areas provides for a mix of housing types and higher housing densities around activity centres.

- Ensure an adequate supply of redevelopment opportunities within the established urban area to reduce the pressure for fringe development.

- Ensure all new development appropriately responds to its landscape, valued built form and cultural context.

In Clause 13 *Settlement*, the SPPF states the following issue as being of relevance to neighbourhood character:

Planning is to anticipate and respond to the needs of existing and future communities through provision of zoned and serviced land for housing, employment, recreation and open space, commercial and community facilities and infrastructure. Planning is to recognise the need for, and as far as practicable contribute towards:

- Health and safety.
- Diversity of choice.
- Adaptation in response to changing technology.
- Economic viability.
- A high standard of urban design and amenity.
- Energy efficiency.
- Prevention of pollution to land, water and air.
- Protection of environmentally sensitive areas and natural resources.
- Accessibility.
- Land use and transport integration.

Under the Settlement section, Clause 14.01 Planning for Urban Settlement, one of the objectives is:

To facilitate the orderly development of urban areas.

At Clause 14.01-2 General Implementation the SPPF states that:

In planning for urban growth, planning authorities should encourage consolidation of existing urban areas while respecting neighbourhood character.

Under the Housing section, the objectives in relation to medium density housing as outlined in Clause 16.02-1 are:

To encourage the development of well-designed medium-density housing which:

- – Respects the neighbourhood character.
- – Improves housing choice.
- – Makes better use of existing infrastructure.
- – Improves energy efficiency of housing.

Clause 19.03 of the SPPF includes the following objectives in relation to Design and Built Form:

To achieve high quality urban design and architecture that:

- – Reflects the particular characteristics, aspirations and cultural identity of the community.
- – Enhances liveability, diversity, amenity and safety of the public realm.
- – Promotes attractiveness of towns and cities within the broader strategic contexts.

Clause 19.03-2 General Implementation states that:

Development should achieve architectural and urban design outcomes that contribute positively to local urban character and enhance the public realm while minimising detrimental impact on neighbouring properties.

2.2　Council Policies

There are parts of the Strathbogie Planning Scheme that have relevance for the Neighbourhood Character Study. A description of each policy and its implications are as follows:

2.2.1　Municipal Strategic Statement

The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) sets the local policy context of the Strathbogie Planning Scheme. It is a concise statement of the key strategic planning, land use and development objectives for the municipality and the strategies and actions for achieving the objectives.

Clause 21.03 Objectives – Strategies – Implementation

Clause 21.03 provides direction under the three different themes of Settlement, Environment and Economic Development. Under Settlement, the MSS states Council's aims to 'ensure that future residential growth and development is accommodated for in a planned manner'. Neighbourhood character and acknowledgement of built and cultural heritage are identified as common issues that need to be addressed within the four major townships of the Shire (Euroa, Nagambie, Avenel and Violet Town).

The MSS encourages consolidation of residential development in existing urban centres, new development that provides for a high quality lot layout and diversity of sizes and housing options to maintain a diverse population mix within the Shire. One of the key Settlement Strategies and implementation measures is the identification of neighbourhood character of the four main townships.

The main issues identified for Avenel under this Clause are; the need for additional land adjacent to the existing township and in appropriate areas; the lack of commercial and retail services and facilities; and the absence of a designated industrial area.

Structure Plans for the four major townships within the Shire are also included under Clause 21.03 of the MSS. The Avenel Structure Plan provides direction for some of the key land uses, proposed heritage walking trails, transportation routes, and significant town entrances. It identifies areas that could be investigated in the future for residential growth when required. All of these areas are included within the Neighbourhood Character Study boundary.

2.2.2   Local Planning Policies

Clause 22.03 Natural Landscape Protection

The Natural Landscape Protection Policy applies to all applications for new buildings and extensions to existing buildings within the Shire. The policy seeks to protect the natural landscape, and in particular areas of environmental and visual significance, from inappropriate development and also provides a basis and guideline for the sympathetic external treatment of buildings in their context. Clause 22.03 provides policy statements for the siting and design of buildings and the use of building materials and finishes. It also states that mature vegetation which provides a backdrop for any development must not be removed or lopped.

2.2.3   Zones and Overlays
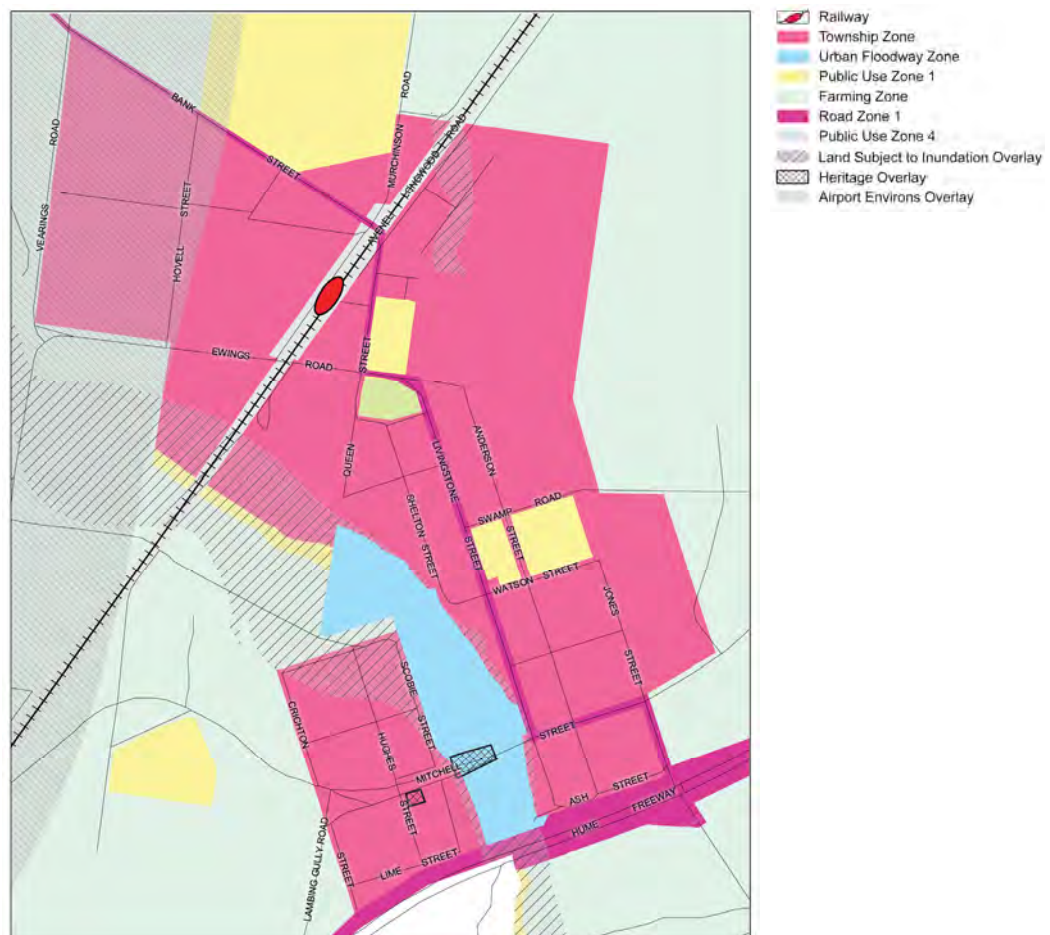
Township Zone

The Township Zone (TZ) applies to the majority of the Study Area. The purposes of the TZ are to:

– provide for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns.
– encourage residential development that respects the neighbourhood character.

The TZ requires that new developments meet the requirements of either Clause 54 (one dwelling on a lot) or Clause 55 (two or more dwellings on a lot).

Urban Floodway Zone

The Urban Floodway Zone (UFZ) applies to some limited residential lots throughout Avenel. The purposes of the UFZ are to:

– identify waterways, major flood paths, drainage depressions and high hazard areas within urban areas which have the greatest risk and frequency of being affected by flooding.
– ensure that any development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwater, minimises flood damage and is compatible with flood hazard, local drainage conditions and the minimisation of soil erosion, sedimentation and silting.
– reflect any declarations under Division 4 of Part 10 of the Water Act, 1989.
– protect water quality and waterways as natural resources in accordance with the provisions of relevant State Environment Protection Policies, and particularly in accordance with Clauses 33 and 35 of the State Environment Protection Policy (Waters of Victoria).

A permit is required to construct a building or construct or carry out works, and to subdivide land.

Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and Floodway Overlay

The Land Subject to Inundation Overlay (LSIO) applies to areas of Avenel close to Hughes Creek. The purpose of the LSIO is to, among other things, identify land in a flood storage or fringe area affected by the 1 in 100 year flood, or any other are determined by the floodplain management authority. The Floodway Overlay (FO) applies to selected residential areas within Avenel. The purpose of the FO is to, among other things, identify waterways, major flood paths, drainage depressions and high hazard areas which have the greatest risk and frequency of being affected by flooding. Both overlays seek to ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters and minimises the damage caused by flooding.

2.2.4   Other Relevant Council Policies

Strathbogie Urban Design Framework, 2003

The Strathbogie Urban Design Framework provides an Urban Design Framework (UDF) for each of the major towns within the Shire: Euroa, Nagambie, Avenel, and Violet Town. The purposes of the UDF for each township are to:

– Assist with the long-term sustainability of the township;

– Identify areas of significance;

– Provide and clarify urban design visions and strategic directions;

– Identify preferred land use and development options;

– Identify existing building or features in strategically important locations;

– Identify improvements to the visual quality of town entrances and thoroughfares;

– Identify improvements to vehicular and pedestrian routes and linkages; and

– Identify improvements to the town's functions and to strengthen the role of the township within the regional context.

Avenel

The UDF briefly describes the background of Avenel, stating the surrounding area was settled by Europeans as grazing land in the 1830s, with one of the original settlers being Henry Kent Hughes, whom Hughes Creek is named after. Development of the township began around 1949, following the establishment of popular resting and camping place for teamsters, drovers and Cobb & Co coaches beside the creek. Following an increase in goldfields traffic and construction of the stone bridge and Royal Hotel in 1859, the town prospered. Today, Avenel is a small country town, with a focus on the surrounding agricultural area, providing substantial recreational facilities but limited retail services.

The UDF proclaims Avenel does not have a legible pattern of development, which may be due to the lack of a dominant town centre, as development is dispersed between two areas along an indirect road system. This absence of an established centre, combined with irregularly landscaped features, result in a lack of definite township boundaries. The Hume Freeway is identified as an obvious boundary to the south, although this is obstructed by the Old Hume Highway which runs parallel to the Freeway and constrains development. The Old Hume Highway forms a boundary to the south-west, but this is visually weak and indistinctive as it is partially obstructed by the Hughes Creek valley. The northern boundary is slightly defined by the railway line and the golf course. The eastern and western sides of the town have no clear topographic or vegetation features that can form explicit boundaries in appropriate locations.

The Hughes Creek corridor is highlighted as a strongly vegetated, open space corridor through the town. The two centres are located near the railway station. The southern centre is based around the hotel, while the north centre is focussed in the area around the railway crossing on Queen and Bank Street.

Implications for the Neighbourhood Character Study

The UDF sets out a framework for Avenel, which provides direction under the headings of Land Use, Urban Design and Landscape, and Transport Infrastructure. Of particular importance to the Neighbourhood Character Study are the recommendations provided under Land Use. According to the UDF, there is sufficient residential land available to provide for double the number of existing dwellings, assuming the current density is maintained. Based on the current rate of growth, the available lots may cater for development into the next century.

Under Urban Design and Landscape, the UDF recommends several improvements to the town centre, as it is currently poorly defined. This area extends along Queen Street from the southern boundary of the Uniting Church, to approximately 100 metres along Longwood Road and 150 metres along Bank Street, beyond the railway crossing. A consistency in urban design elements, as well as improved planting was recommended to unify this area.

Under Community Infrastructure, it is recommended that any additional infrastructure be located within, or immediately adjacent to, the Queen Street retail centre.

3. What is Neighbourhood Character?

3.1   Neighbourhood Character Defined

The concept of Neighbourhood Character, its components and its value has been widely discussed and debated over the last ten years in the planning of Melbourne's suburbs. It has been demonstrated well that neighbourhood character is something that can have a range of meanings for different people or situations and is difficult to define. In the neighbourhood character studies that Planisphere has undertaken, we have attempted to arrive at a definition of neighbourhood character to form the basis of our study methodology. This understanding of what constitutes neighbourhood character has been developed over the course of many studies and collaboration with local communities, Councils and DSE/DPCD.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a clear understanding of Neighbourhood Character: what does it mean; how it is practically administered within the statutory framework; what are the principles of Neighbourhood Character; and what are Neighbourhood Character typologies?

What is Neighbourhood Character?

In December 2001 the former Department of Infrastructure published a General Practice Note titled 'Understanding Neighbourhood Character'. The Note contains useful information, however it fails to provide a single, all-encompassing and concise definition of neighbourhood character. Perhaps the most succinct definition is 'neighbourhood character is essentially the combination of the public and private realms'. The document suggests a number of factors as relevant, which to the reader may appear to obscure, rather than illuminate, the essence of neighbourhood character. Yet there have been useful previous statements on this subject, either auspiced by the former Department of Infrastructure, or produced by independent panels.

A more succinct and encompassing definition were included in the Draft Practice Note on Neighbourhood Character published in June 2000 as part of the first draft of ResCode:

> *Neighbourhood character is the interplay of natural, built social, cultural and economic conditions that make one place different from another.*

This definition is helpful, but it has a number of weaknesses:

- The focus does not remain on the meaning of neighbourhood character that is reflected in tools provided in the Victoria Planning Provisions (VPPs).
- The adjective 'qualitative' is excluded when using the term 'interplay'.
- The reference to 'combination of the public and private realms', which is in the current Practice Note, is not included.

It is true that people attribute widely differing meanings to the term 'neighbourhood character'. For many, character is about the people who live in the area; for others it is broad attributes of the area, such as closeness to shops or transport, how much open space or traffic there is. Because this character study has been commissioned to provide planning scheme policies and controls, it needs to be focussed on the physical planning outcomes that are capable of being influenced by planning scheme tools. Fundamentally we are aiming to answer the question: how do buildings and landscape interact? Built form, vegetation and topographical characteristics are the physical manifestation of neighbourhood character addressed in the VPPs. The former Good Design Guide used these terms in defining neighbourhood character.

The term 'interplay' in the former Practice Note comes from the 1998 Advisory Committee report on the City of Monash neighbourhood character 'local variations' amendment. Monash have Amended their Scheme to include the Monash Neighbourhood Character study, and have also made changes to the Schedule of the Residential 1 Zone.

The Monash report coined the phrase 'qualitative interplay'. Qualitative interplay refers to the way that the main distinctive components of an area's character combine to produce a particular sense of place. This concept carries important implications:

- Neighbourhood character needs to be described in a written character statement; it is insufficient to simply produce a catalogue or list of characteristics.

- Character statements must be skilfully written to describe the synthesis of qualities that make one area distinct from another.

- Character statements should make clear which characteristics are most important, and the manner in which they relate to each other.

The term 'qualitative interplay' transcends 'private and public domains', as the Monash report emphasises. The character of buildings and their grounds cannot be divorced from the character of the street scene in which they sit. For example, in the inner suburbs of Melbourne buildings often present as solid 'walls' to the street, producing a hard, urban character. In some landscape-dominated areas on the urban fringe, natural bush vegetation flows across private property and public domain alike, only stopping at the edge of the roadway. Clearing all the trees on a private allotment would completely change the character of this type of area. So would the construction of kerb, channel and footpath, or planting of street trees of an incompatible species or in a formal pattern.

Therefore, in summary, neighbourhood character is a synthesis of public and private domain characteristics, as listed in the provisions of ResCode. It is the qualitative interplay between those characteristics that make a place, town or neighbourhood distinctive. Some of these characteristics are more important than others in creating a distinctive character.

Surveying all characteristics, then listing the 'key' characteristics, is a useful analytical tool. However a written statement that explains the interplay of the character components is necessary to properly describe, assess and evaluate the character of a particular area. This is the theoretical and statutory basis for the Preferred Character Statements that have been drafted for each precinct within the study area (as detailed in section 5).

The following definition of neighbourhood character, used by a former Department of Infrastructure working party into neighbourhood character that met in late 1999, seems to us to accommodate all of these requirements. It forms the basis of the work undertaken in this Neighbourhood Character Study:

> *Neighbourhood character is the qualitative interplay of built form, vegetation and topographic characteristics, in both the private and public domains that make one place different from another.*

Neighbourhood Character Elements

In many areas, building type, era and spacing, the proportions and combined appearance of the 'walls' and 'floor' of the street space, and the amount and type of vegetation, are the key determinants of the area's character. How the buildings 'sit' in their landscape is critical. Vegetation includes street trees, front garden vegetation, and canopy trees in rear yards and public reserves forming a backdrop. Critical elements of the 'walls' and 'floor' of the street space are the height, permeability and profile of the 'walls': the depth of front

setbacks; type of garden (eg lawn and roses, shrubs and trees, or an apparent continuation of the street space planting); presence and permeability of a front fence; and the formality (or otherwise) of the street space.

Other character components can include traffic, noise, type of activity, and demographic characteristics. Members of the public often cite these as important characteristics of their neighbourhood. People often raise amenity issues such as access to open space in character consultation sessions. All of these can be argued to be an essential part of an area's character.

Focussing on planning scheme implementation options

The important question in each case is*: how relevant is this to the task in hand*? In preparing policy and controls for implementation through the planning scheme, then the focus of the study needs to be on elements that are mentioned in either ResCode provisions or overlay controls and can therefore be addressed and influenced by the appropriate statutory tools. Many neighbourhood character elements can be addressed through other mechanisms such as social development strategies or public awareness campaigns that are outside the scope of planning schemes.

Neighbourhood Character is <u>not</u>

The differentiation between different types of character area is not simply a question of architectural style or era of development. Neighbourhood character is founded on the layout and form of the areas, and the way that the built form interacts with and relates to the landscape. These factors should be the basis for the application of neighbourhood character policies. Neighbourhood character is not about the imposition of design styles. Rather it should be about recognising the distinctive characteristics of different urban forms, and their relationship to topography and vegetation. Getting this right is the best way of maintaining and enhancing the sense of place of the municipality's residential areas.

Nor is neighbourhood character about the amenity of adjoining properties or dwelling densities as such, although it has implications for both of these issues. In practical terms it does not dictate planning controls for either. For example, the recommended guidelines contained in the area papers with regard to spaciousness between dwellings may require that new buildings should be setback from both side boundaries. This may reduce the amount of buildings that can be accommodated on a site, and may also reduce potential amenity impacts from overlooking and overshadowing of adjoining properties. Front setback controls may also have a similar effect in some instances. These are secondary outcomes of the neighbourhood character guidelines, and while not the primary intent, may reduce community concerns about other aspects of new development.

Nor is character about density controls. ResCode makes no provision for density controls, and it is not considered that a policy which proposed density maximums or medium density housing saturation levels, would be supported by the Department of Sustainability and Environment. ResCode has more extensive provisions relating to amenity issues and it is likely that once these provisions become more widely implemented many amenity concerns will be reduced.

3.2   Neighbourhood Character Principles

The following principles of neighbourhood character were prepared by a former Department of Infrastructure working party into neighbourhood character that met in late 1999. They were included in the Draft Practice Note on Neighbourhood Character published in June 2000 as part of the first draft of ResCode. These form

the basis of the process and content of the work undertaken by Planisphere for Neighbourhood Character Studies. The principles are:

Community Values

The values of the local community are part of determining the appropriate response to neighbourhood character. Planning controls that aim to protect, change or improve character must draw on professional and community views.

The community should be involved in identifying the neighbourhood character measures appropriate to their area. Professionals assist in developing and translating these ideas into techniques to manage design.

Physical Focus

Character, in its broadest sense, can include environmental, social and economic factors, but the planning system is concerned with managing the physical evidence of character and related social impacts.

The planning system is primarily focussed on achieving a wide range of objectives through the physical environment. Character is not concerned only with the private domain, as much of neighbourhood character is manifested in the public street space. However, some character issues are related to social outcomes or impacts. For example, the height of front fences is a town planning issue with character implications that may be physical (does a high fence contribute positively to the 'look' of the area?) and social (how do high fences affect social interaction?).

Special Qualities of an Area

All areas have a character that can be described, evaluated and, in many cases, improved. In some areas protection of particular qualities may be warranted; but there is no distinction between areas of special character and 'the rest'.

The aim in placing greater priority on character is to improve the quality of the environment throughout Victoria's residential areas, not just in retaining or improving a few select 'special' areas that already have high amenity values. For this reason, a neighbourhood character is equally relevant everywhere. Planning controls should aim to protect identified distinctive and valued elements.

Interaction between Elements of Character

Character is about the interrelationships between various elements of an area, and so cannot be described or evaluated by considering individual elements in isolation.

Design responses need to consider the whole picture of a neighbourhood, rather than focussing upon one or two elements of the building form or siting.

Neighbourhood Character and Other Planning Policies

State and Council policies provide the rationale for decisions about whether to protect, change or improve the neighbourhood character of an area. Area-specific controls should be developed in the light of these strategic directions.

A Council's Municipal Strategic Statement will provide guidance about priorities in any particular area. Local housing issues and other Melbourne 2030 directions such as focusing higher density development around activity centres will be important considerations.

Preferred Character

Neighbourhood character descriptions and evaluations should focus on the preferred character of an area.

Descriptions of existing characteristics are an important part of the process of identifying the 'starting point', but the desired character needs to be evaluated and considered in the context of other policy priorities. It may be that some areas should be encouraged to develop a new character, just as there may be some areas where critical elements need to be protected or reflected in all new development. The concept of preferred character is discussed in detail in section 5.1.

Neighbourhood Character Typologies

There are a limited number of consistent precinct types that can be defined, and frequently appropriate policy responses can be formulated without the need for expensive studies.

The 'Responding to Neighbourhood Character' ResCode Practice Note has adopted this approach in presenting possible policy responses to three typical residential character types. This is not to say that detailed analysis can be completely avoided, but much can be gained from shared understandings. Many councils have undertaken very detailed character studies and this information may supplement the examples provided.

Site Analysis

A site analysis, specifically from the neighbourhood character perspective, is necessary whether or not a detailed character study has been undertaken.

A site analysis is a mandatory requirement of ResCode.

Character and Heritage

Character and heritage share many attributes, but there are important differences between the two concepts. Community values are a key justification for the protection of neighbourhood character. Policies to transform character may be appropriate in some areas.

Character studies evaluate the interplay of built form, vegetation and topographical qualities, with reference to styles and ages where relevant, whereas heritage studies evaluate cultural heritage significance, with some reference to built form, vegetation and topographical qualities. Heritage studies designate levels of significance for sites or precincts by assessment against established criteria and by way of comparison with other heritage places. The basis of neighbourhood character is that *every* place has character regardless of its age or appearance and community feedback is an important means by which the value of this character can be understood. (See below for further discussion.)

Character and Amenity

The difference between neighbourhood character and amenity must be recognised.

Character and amenity are terms often used interchangeably, but in ResCode factors like visual and acoustic privacy and overshadowing should continue to be treated as issues separate to neighbourhood character.

3.3   Neighbourhood Character Types

Four Neighbourhood Character Types of Victoria

Neighbourhood character is a fundamental of sense of place in residential communities. While many councils have undertaken neighbourhood character studies, little or no attempt has been made to generalise the findings of these studies into a typology of neighbourhood character types. Broadly speaking, the following neighbourhood character types have been identified across Victoria:

Built Form / Landscape Relationship	Character Type
Built form dominated residential areas	'Inner Urban'
Spacious residential areas in a garden setting (formal street pattern, generally modified grid)	'Garden Suburban'
Spacious residential areas in a garden setting (informal, generally curving street pattern with courts/cul-de-sacs)	'Garden Court'
Landscape dominated residential areas	'Bush Suburban'

Table 3: Victorian Neighbourhood Types

These four broad categories illustrate the four main types of residential areas that exist in Victoria, from an urban design perspective. The differentiation between these types is NOT based on architectural style or era of development. It is founded on the layout and form of the areas, and the way that the built form interacts with and relates to the landscape. These factors should be the basis for the application of neighbourhood character policies. Neighbourhood character is NOT about the imposition of design styles. Rather it should be about recognising the distinctive characteristics of different urban forms, and their relationship to topography and vegetation. Getting this right is the best way of maintaining and enhancing the sense of place of the state's residential areas.

An initial version of these character types, prepared by Planisphere, was included in the Draft Practice Note on Neighbourhood Character published in June 2000 as part of the first draft of ResCode. Although this Practice Note has since been superseded, it provided some useful principles about the nature of neighbourhood character. The upgraded version of the character types shown here is included in *Sense of Place: urban design principles for the Metropolitan Strategy*, a technical report on urban design prepared by Planisphere and published in October 2002 as part of the Metropolitan Strategy.

Local Neighbourhood Character Types

In establishing a system of neighbourhood character description for a particular place, these broad level definitions are a useful starting point, from which further detailed classification can follow. They form the basis for definition of local character types. In undertaking neighbourhood character studies, Planisphere first establishes a municipal-wide framework of broad character types. Within these broad areas further, finer-grained definition of character follows with the identification of precincts.

Often neighbourhood character studies identify wide variations within these broad character types, and these are important in differentiating the character of one neighbourhood from another, and in creating or strengthening sense of place.

Four distinct character precincts were identified for Avenel:

Built Form / Landscape Relationship	Character Type
Built form dominated residential areas	'Old Township'
Spacious residential areas in a garden setting (formal street pattern, generally modified grid)	'Interwar / Post War Mix'
Spacious residential areas in a garden setting (mix of formal and informal street pattern)	'Post War / Contemporary Mix'
Landscape dominated residential areas with significant interfaces	'Rural Interface / Future Residential'

These areas were defined through the interactions between the built form, street patterns and the surrounding landscape. These features were found to heavily contribute towards the valued character and nature of each precinct.

4. Neighbourhood Character in Avenel

4.1   Survey

During the initial stage of the project, a survey was undertaken to firstly determine what character types were evident throughout residential areas of the township, secondly to determine where precinct boundaries may be drawn, and finally to take note of the different character elements on a street-by-street basis.

The following character elements were noted throughout the survey:

- – Landscape Setting
- – Vegetation
- – Building Form (including Roof form)
- – Siting including Building Spacing and Setbacks
- – Design Detail and Finishes
- – Building materials and colours
- – Frontage Treatment
- – Façade Treatment
- – Car Parking and Vehicular Access

4.2   Community Values

In order to gain an understanding of what the local community values in Avenel, initial consultation with undertaken involving a workshop and opportunity to provide submissions. This proved to be useful in identifying what different aspects the community appreciates of the neighbourhood character in their township. The outcomes of these exercises are summarised below.

Community Workshop & Submissions

During this stage, participants were asked to comment on draft precincts, and to articulate elements that define neighbourhood character for them. Residents identified significant neighbourhood and community values they wished to retain or achieve in Avenel.   This information is summarised in the table below.

Summary of Avenel Community Workshop & Submissions

Likes	Dislikes	Where change could occur
Vegetation in the private and public domain	Poorly maintained buildings	More native trees could be planted in the private and public domain
		Better maintenance of overgrown trees and shrubs
Spacious and informal nature of town	Poor drainage and impervious surfaces	The integrity of older buildings could be maintained

Likes	Dislikes	Where change could occur
Low-scale buildings	Uncontrolled new development	Enhancement of town entry point / gateway
Views to trees and hills	Overdevelopment of sites	Guidelines for respectful development alongside heritage places and older dwelling
Quiet, "village-like" atmosphere of local streets	Inappropriate street trees	Better defined township edges and boundaries
Low front fencing	Lack of native vegetation	Encourage drought resistant planting, rather than unsustainable vegetation requiring a lot of water
Older, historical buildings	Non-transparent or Colorbond fencing	
Consistent building setbacks with room for private gardens	Modern suburbanisation	
Diversity of building styles and use of materials	Loss of informal roadways	

4.3   The Character of Avenel

Distinctive Qualities of Avenel

Avenel has many unique and distinctive qualities that contribute to its neighbourhood character. Through field surveys and information gathered during consultation, the Study Team was able to gain an understanding of distinguishing neighbourhood character qualities that separate Avenel from other places in Victoria. Some of these character elements exist in the private realm whilst others are visible in the public domain.

The character precincts that were arrived at during the initial stages of the Study reveal distinct differences that became separable into precincts. Prominent influences of development in the different areas within the township include historic elements, the rail line, and the natural and rural landscapes, which are evident from within and around the town. These main influences are manifested through character elements such as the presence of historic buildings, the street layouts, arrangements of properties, and streetscape treatments. These are further described in the following paragraphs.

Vegetation and landscaping are key character elements throughout all areas of the township. The older parts of Avenel contain well-maintained gardens consisting largely of exotic species. Properties towards the edge of the town are surrounded by less formal gardens that are predominantly made up of native vegetation, which flows across the streets and surrounding landscapes. In the public domain streetscape vegetation is a very important factor of neighbourhood character. The established avenues of trees that can be found closer to the town centre create a leafy, formal atmosphere which sets them apart from others. In other areas of the township dispersed roadside vegetation result in an informal atmosphere with vegetation encompassing the private and public domains.

Local landmarks and views to landscape features have an important impact to the character of streets. Landmarks closer to the town centre relate more to the built form and include historic civic buildings and churches. Further away from the town centre, views to natural and rural landscapes, such as Lovers Hill and the Strathbogie Ranges, and farming land, also create the neighbourhood character. Hughes Creek and the floodplains is a major feature of the landscape within the town, strongly influencing the streets and properties that surround it.

Streetscape treatments and natural landscape features that have been retained within these are quite important features of Avenel. Swale drains, wide nature strips with established tree, and well maintained front gardens, have a unique impact on streetscapes. These features also indicate the distinctive settlement of the township.

Avenel accommodates a very diverse housing stock, with dwellings from across many eras. These range from grand Victorian homes, such as the Harvest Home Historic Hotel, dating back to the original period of settlement, to the modest homes of the post-war era, and current contemporary styles. These dwelling styles contribute to the character of their neighbourhoods in many ways, and often where a particular era of housing dominates in an area, landscaping patterns and general streetscape treatments will reflect those typical of that period in time.

Character Precincts

Following the field surveys, individual precincts were identified. It is important to note that *preferred* character is the main criterion for precinct delineation. Character studies that attempt to delineate every variation in *current* characteristics often produce very large numbers of areas. While this approach might have some benefits in achieving a finer grain of information, it also may result in an overload of information that relates to segmented areas and this often tends to not be responsive to the community's aspirations for their area as whole.

Precincts and Preferred Character

Furthermore, preferred character should be a concept that provides a broad direction rather than prescriptive detail. Achieving an uninterrupted flow of landscape and vegetation across private and public domain might be the main aim of a preferred character statement. From this aim, numbers of policies and guidelines are derived. These are cognisant of the existing situation with boundary treatments, site coverage etc, but fine grain local variations in these characteristics today should not preclude the setting of an aim to create, in the future, a consistent character across a broader area. Town planning is, after all, about creating desired futures. Town planning policy should be arrived at after considering existing conditions. It should not necessarily be determined by them.

Precincts and Neighbourhood and Site Description

ResCode provides for a process of neighbourhood and site description, including an assessment of neighbourhood character. The preparation of a character study does not remove the need for a site assessment. Local conditions and the specific circumstances need to be assessed and considered alongside the preferred character for the area. They may also change over time. It is not necessary for a character study to provide a detailed brief for every site. The character study should provide the broad future direction, complemented by the neighbourhood and site description, which assesses detailed local conditions.
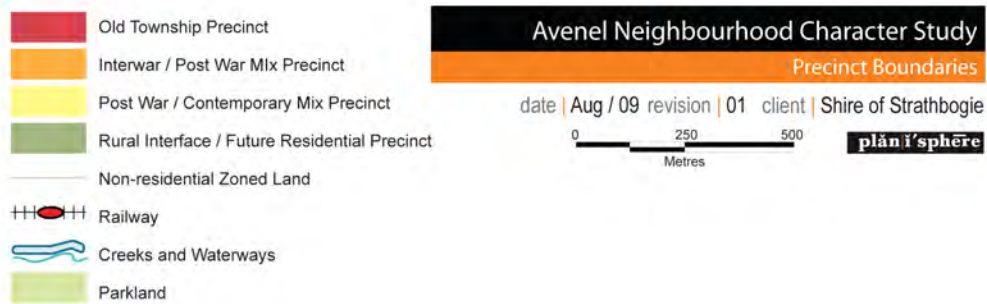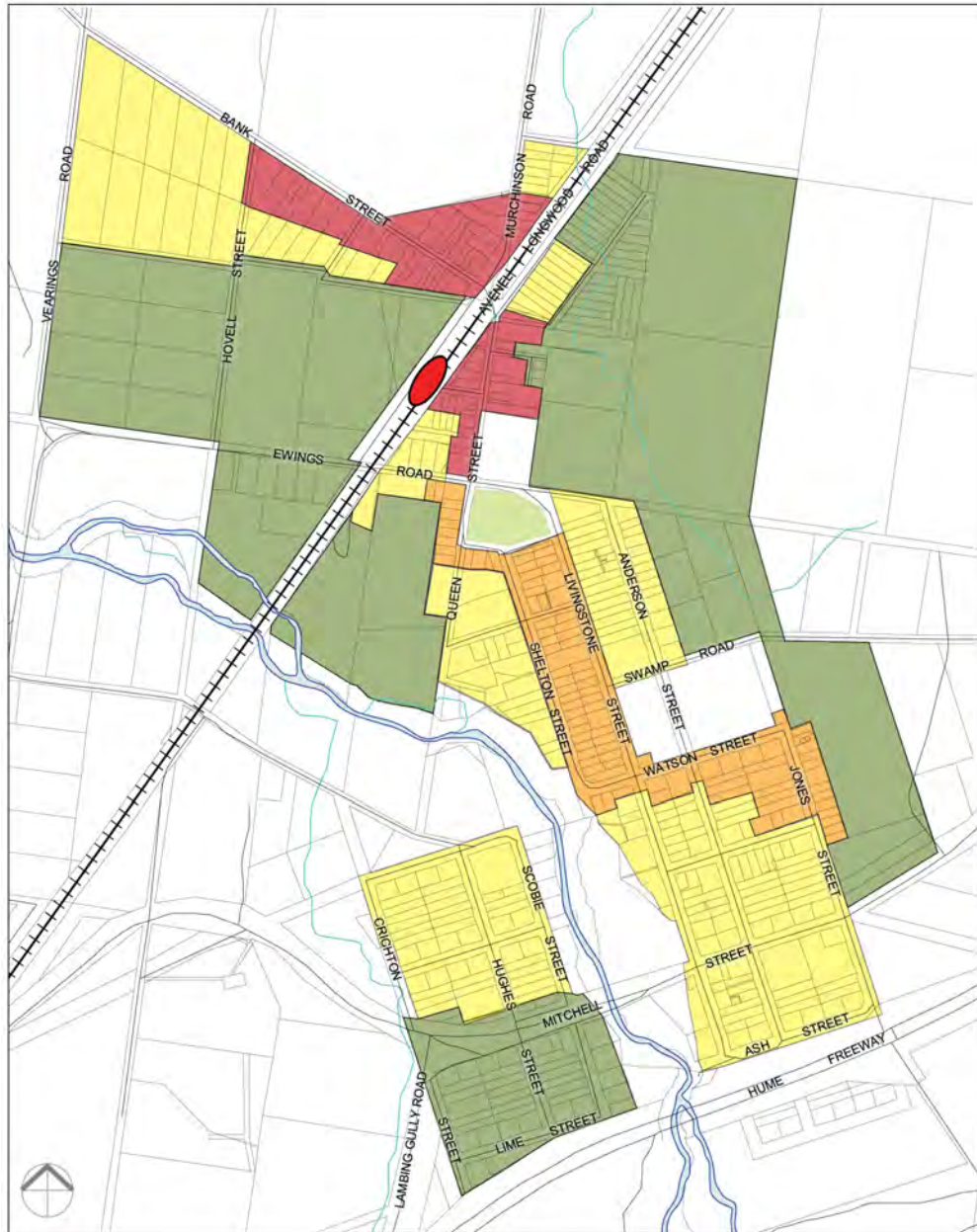
Precinct Delineation

Character area delineation is arrived at by considering a number of important factors: preferred character, similarity of characteristics and threats, and useability of the precinct definition. Some emphasis is placed on the detailed survey findings, but because the basis of delineation is preferred character, all the other factors may also be relevant. The actual boundaries between precincts are often well defined by the characteristics, and thus preferred character of an area. When this clear delineation occurs, there is always a physical separator such as a road or railway between areas. Where the characteristics change more gradually across an area, for example due to sporadic development or a gradual thinning of the tree canopy, a boundary must nevertheless be determined for reasons of useability. In these instances a road or other obvious physical element is used to provide an easily identifiable boundary between precincts.

Interface Issues

There are three situations where interface issues are of importance. The first relates to the immediate interface between two adjoining precincts. Precincts are usually delineated using identifiable physical elements such as roads. In many cases, however, the actual boundary may be slightly blurred such that the characteristics of the adjoining precinct may also apply to the land in question. Where this occurs, the adjoining precinct guidelines should be taken into account in the assessment of proposals on land adjoining another precinct. The second occasion where interface issues are of importance is in specific situations where a residential area adjoins an area outside the study boundaries. This includes public reserves, institutions, the railway or freeway corridors and commercial or industrial areas. Thirdly, the style and era of development within Heritage Overlay areas often has an influence upon the existing and preferred future character of adjoining neighbourhoods. In most cases it will be necessary for new development to pay particular attention to building and siting requirements to ensure that it is respectful of the heritage significance of the adjacent overlay area.

Precinct Map

Old Township Precinct

Interwar / Post War Mix Precinct

Post War / Contemporary Mix Precinct

Rural Interface / Future Residential Precinct

Non-residential Zoned Land

Railway

Creeks and Waterways

Parkland

Avenel Neighbourhood Character Study

Precinct Boundaries

date | Aug / 09   revision | 01   client | Shire of Strathbogie

0   250   500
Metres

plăn|i′sphēre

5. Character Directions for Avenel

5.1   Preferred Character

With the increasing emphasis of neighbourhood character theory on preferred character, it is necessary to develop a logical way to arrive at a preferred character statement. Without an explicit emphasis on preferred character, character studies tend to dwell on existing characteristics. Most of the survey work of a character study, and most of the discussions in the initial stages of the project, focus exclusively on present characteristics. Also, community members tend to be sceptical and guarded when the issue of a preferred future character is placed on the agenda. Many respond that they want 'no change', or that they have no desire to impose their view of a preferred character on others. A sound, simple process is needed to 'unlock' this subject, one that enables the participants to see the sense and logic of it. It is also important for a future Planning Panel to be able to examine an explicit process by which preferred character statements have been crafted.

The following section describes the process for arriving at preferred future character for the precincts. Draft Precinct Issues Papers were produced for each precinct to describe the existing characteristics, planning controls and strategic directions, summarise the community's values and identify issues or threats. A Draft Preferred Character Statement was included in the Issues Papers. Draft statements were based on existing characteristics; community values discussed during the initial consultation and the study team's view of the potential or need for change in each area was produced. The Precinct Issues Papers were then reviewed by Council planning officers and mailed out to the entire community of Avenel. Comments were incorporated and the Papers revised as the Precinct Brochures, which include character descriptions and Design Guidelines for each precinct.

Precinct Issues Papers

Precinct Description

The Precinct Description encapsulates all of the existing neighbourhood character features of the precinct. The interplay between existing characteristics and any unique aspects of the precinct's neighbourhood character are described. The precinct description is important because it paves the way for identifying elements that may need to be either maintained or changed within the precinct.

Key Existing Characteristics

Key Existing Characteristics that were recorded throughout the field survey are summarised in this section. The dot points provide a catalogue of information related to elements such as architectural style, building materials and garden types.

Community Values

The various methods of community consultation, including the Community Workshop and submissions gave the Study Team an understanding of what it is that the community values about specific precincts as well as the township as a whole. A summary of these values are included in this section.

Policy Context

The Policy Context identifies other relevant sections of the Planning Scheme that apply to the local area. This ensures that the Study builds on and is consistent with Council's existing directions where applicable.

Issues / Threats

Issues and threats applying to each precinct are identified within this section. These were identified through community consultation and by the Study Team. The issues may be current (i.e. examples may already exist in the precinct) or there may be potential for them to threaten the preferred neighbourhood character of the precinct in the future.

Draft Preferred Character Statement

The Draft Preferred Character Statement outlines the desirable character features for that precinct, and how they should be achieved. The Preferred Character Statement is a lead-in to the Character Guidelines, illustrating key elements for which guidelines need to be prepared.

5.2 Character Guidelines

Based on the Precinct Issues Papers and the feedback received on these, guidelines were prepared for each precinct. Together with the Precinct Issues Papers, the guidelines form a brochure for each precinct.

The Design Guidelines address the following character elements, where relevant, to the precinct:

- – Existing Buildings
- – Vegetation
- – Siting
- – Height and Building Form
- – Front Boundary Treatment
- – Materials and Design Detailing
- – Specific interfaces

Each character element is accompanied by a Design Objective, Design Response and Avoid statement. The Design Objective states the desired action relating to each character element, the Design Response outlines specific ways in which the objective can be achieved and the Avoid statement summarises design treatments to avoid when trying to achieve the objective.

5.3 Key Character Issues

In order to determine appropriate implementation methods, the key character issues applicable to the township need to be considered. These are summarised below based on the survey findings of the Study Team and through consultation.

Township Entrance / Gateway

The entrances into Avenel are unique and demonstrate the rural nature of the township. Expansive views of rolling hills emerging above the horizon, seen through flat farmlands and wide property setbacks, combined with established eucalypts and vegetation located immediately along the road verges; present the tranquil and serene character of Avenel upon entering from the Hume Highway and Avenel Nagambie Road. This significant impression is carried evidently throughout the entire township, and is an important value of the community which should be maintained.

Historical Buildings and Features

The history of Avenel is quite apparent in the many public, commercial and private dwellings that are located within the township. Public and commercial buildings are generally excluded from neighbourhood character studies, however they form a key component of overall character of the township and views to these buildings often influence the character of the precincts. Older private dwellings date back to the establishment of the township and range from smaller cottages close to the town centre to farm houses on larger allotments within the more rural parts of Avenel. The numerous older private dwellings are a very important feature of the character of the township and in some cases may require further protection, although this would be subject to a heritage assessment.

Period Reproduction Styles

Period reproduction styles are often thought of as the best design response in a street of period homes, with the intent of 'blending in' new development. Many would argue that in fact period reproduction style homes detract from the integrity of older authentic homes. In areas where period homes exist, contemporary architecture that is distinguishable from existing buildings should be encouraged, in order to add another layer to the architectural history of the town.

Building Materials

Building materials are only an issue opposite rural landscapes and natural features. Areas opposite rural landscapes should avoid reflective materials in order to prevent interruptions to the landscape when viewed from afar. Areas opposite natural features and close to rural landscapes should encourage the use of materials that blend in with the landscape, including timber and stone.

Lot Size

Historically, the pattern of lot sizes has been fairly consistent throughout Avenel. Closer to the town centre, lot sizes have been smaller, with buildings sited closer together, while further out, lot sizes have been greater. This pattern is slowly changing with new development and larger scale subdivision. Throughout consultation, many people attributed a loss of character to the changing patterns of lot sizes however there are a number of ways in which the character issues associated with lot sizes can be overcome. Often it is not lot size itself that is the core issue; it is the size, siting and design of the actual buildings being developed that contribute to the perceived loss of character. An emphasis on measures such as increased space between buildings and greater front setbacks can be used to overcome this issue.

Site Coverage

Site coverage relates to the proportion of space on a site that is taken up by both buildings and impermeable surfaces. There are a number of issues related to site coverage, including the need to allow for adequate drainage given the location of the township within flood plains as well as the need to allow space for vegetation and breaks between buildings. Areas directly affected by flooding already have specific controls that apply, however the remainder of the township still has a role to play in allowing for permeable surfaces and sustainable stormwater drainage.

Vegetation

Vegetation is a key component of the character of Avenel. Ranging from formal avenues of exotic trees to stands of native vegetation that flow across the public and private domain, vegetation has a distinct impact on the appearance of the township. Residential development often brings with it a clearance of the landscape, which is usually replaced by a combination of exotic and native vegetation. Exotic vegetation has also become a valued part of the character of the township, but there are some instances where it is recommended that native vegetation is favoured over exotic for environmental and landscape character reasons. This includes along existing flood lines, adjacent to some parts of Hughes Creek and opposite other natural features. It is also important that not only the level of vegetation throughout the township is maintained, but that certain areas, including new subdivisions, are enhanced by increased planting with careful consideration towards environmental constraints. Extensive drought conditions create significant environmental constraints and tolerant plant types need to be encouraged in areas that have insufficient recycled or rain water supplies.

Higher Scale Buildings

Avenel is a low-scale township surrounded by landscapes that can be viewed from within residential areas. Although pressure for development of higher scale buildings is relatively low, there are some locations where an increase in scale would threaten views to outside the township. The introduction of height limits would be an unnecessary imposition on new development, but careful attention should be given to ensure that the design of buildings between two and three storeys is sensitive to the retention of views.

New Subdivisions

While pressure for large-scale subdivision is low in Avenel, there are some parcels of land that have been subdivided for new residential dwellings in recent years. Areas of residentially zoned land should be allowed to be developed for such uses, but it is important that these do not appear disjointed from the remainder of the township. There is concern amongst residents that new subdivisions could potentially appear to look too suburbanised and lacking of rural characteristics. New areas should be able to develop a character of their own, but should also respond to the existing character of the township and surrounding landscapes. The Rural Interface / Future Residential Precinct Brochure provide design guidance for new buildings in existing undeveloped residentially zoned areas. Public works including road layout, streetscape treatment and landscaping should be further considered by the Council.

6. Implementation

6.1 Considerations in determining the Implementation Approach

Implementation of neighbourhood character strategies can be undertaken using statutory and non-statutory methods and this chapter examines both types. Statutory implementation is perhaps the most important as it legally binds the Council, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (VCAT) and the community to consider neighbourhood character objectives identified through a study such as this. Implementation options have been set out based on the following considerations:

Existing Character and Preferred Future Character

The types of characteristics identified in each precinct and their relative significance in Council-wide and regional terms is a starting point for determining the Preferred Future Character of an area. What is it about each precinct that makes it distinctive, and to what extent is this distinctiveness important on a local, regional or state level? The detailed survey material gathered during this study identifies the consistency and form of the various characteristics and enables comparisons across the study area. The consultants' experience in these types of studies throughout the State enables a regional and State context to be assessed. The community's aspirations for their area are the final defining element in the equation for determining the Preferred Future Character, however these must be realistic and reflect the key or valued aspects of the area. The key and valued elements are contained under the Precinct Description, Key Existing Characteristics and Community Values headings of the Brochures, and the Preferred Character Statement is the culmination of this information.

Threats

The extent of threats to the important characteristics within each precinct needs to be assessed. Each Preferred Character Statement includes an assessment of the types of threats that are possible, overlaid with an understanding of the development pressures occurring.

Community Acceptance

The likelihood of community acceptance of new controls over some forms of development will relate to the extent of community concern about the loss of particular aspects of the character of the precinct. The acceptability of controls can be assessed during the preparation of the study, through discussions with planning officers, Councillors and community representatives; however the ultimate test is the exhibition of any planning scheme amendment.

Planning Scheme

Strategies, policies and controls already contained in the Planning Scheme are considered in determining the implementation options. The strategic context has been examined in Chapter 2.

Non statutory implementation

This is an important part of the implementation program that accompanies the statutory measures. It includes implementation of neighbourhood character objectives within the public realm spaces, promotion of the study findings and raising awareness of neighbourhood character issues amongst the community, design profession and Council.

Likelihood of Approval

The likelihood of approval of any planning scheme amendment to introduce statutory controls by an independent State government appointed Planning Panel and the Minister for Planning, is an important consideration. There is little point in recommending measures to the Council that are unlikely to be approved. The most important aspect of this consideration is the need to determine which parts of the study area require additional planning controls and those which can be successfully managed with existing controls and the range of other non-statutory implementation techniques available.

There are, however, other contextual issues that must be considered such as State policy and directives, and issues raised previously by Panels in making recommendations on other similar planning scheme amendments. A Planning Panel will also examine all of the above issues in their deliberation about a planning scheme amendment. Discussion about some issues raised by previous Planning Panels is included in the following section.

What should the planning scheme implementation achieve?

The starting point for discussion of statutory implementation options is to understand exactly what we would like the planning scheme controls to achieve in terms of retaining valued aspects of neighbourhood character and setting a vision for future change.

Section 5.3 'Key Character Issues' details the key neighbourhood character elements that have been identified in Euroa and what should be considered in the approach to implementation. This discussion and analysis has formed the basis of the implementation recommendations for the study.

Practice Notes

All statutory options are guided by Practice Notes issued by the Department of Sustainability and Environment.

The Department in 2001 issued a Practice Note entitled 'Understanding Neighbourhood Character'. This Practice Note provides general information regarding the matters to be considered in implementing the provisions of ResCode that require regard for the surrounding character in development applications. It provides a list of elements of the surrounding neighbourhood that may be of relevance to the preparation of a Neighbourhood and Site Description plan and design response. In so doing, it provides some indication of the types of characteristics of an area that may be identified in a character strategy. It is by no means definitive nor exhaustive in this regard.

The Practice Note 'Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes' outlines the steps in preparing a Neighbourhood Character Study and the implementation options through the use of Neighbourhood Character Overlays and Schedules to residential zones.

Planning Panel Reports

A number of planning scheme amendments have been undertaken by other Councils to incorporate neighbourhood character objectives within the planning scheme. Planning Panels, established to hear submissions regarding the amendments and make recommendations to the Council about the submissions and the suitability of the amendment, have been held in most cases. Some of these Panel reports provide lessons for the implementation of neighbourhood character objectives.

Two previous Panel reports, for neighbourhood character planning scheme amendments in the Cities of Knox and Banyule, have highlighted the importance of addressing the strategic context of neighbourhood character. In particular the reports have highlighted the need to establish the relationship between the proposed neighbourhood character objectives and the State planning objectives for housing, and ensuring that the Council's MSS contains strategic rationale for character policy. It is important to ensure that housing strategies, such as future housing needs and locations for additional housing if required, have been clearly identified and do not conflict with the neighbourhood character policy and/or controls.

Where provisions other than a local policy are proposed, such as overlay controls or changes to the residential zone schedule, the Banyule decision also highlighted the need to demonstrate that the provisions of ResCode combined with a local policy on character, were not adequate. It is of particular importance to demonstrate that single dwellings are of equal or greater concern in achieving neighbourhood character objectives, than medium density housing, as policy can influence decisions in any case where a planning permit is required.

Panel reports and subsequent DSE decisions regarding amendments affecting Ocean Grove and Hedgeley Dene in the City of Stonnington highlight that the implementation of Neighbourhood Character Overlay controls will only be considered over small, discreet and highly justified areas with clear neighbourhood character objectives, and under demonstrated threat.

6.2   Implementation Recommendations

Summary of Implementation Recommendations

Preferred Implementation Approach

Planisphere has undertaken many Neighbourhood Character Studies and has developed a preferred approach to implementing these through Planning Schemes. In the past, a successful approach has involved the inclusion of selected parts of the Precinct Brochures into a Local Planning Policy at Clause 22. It would typically be recommended that the Preferred Character Statements and the Objectives and Design Responses from the Design Guidelines be included in a Local Planning Policy.

It is not considered at this time that neighbourhood character of Euroa required the introduction of new zones or overlays. This Study has however identified the potential for heritage or landscape overlays, subject to further study by Council.

Recent Directions from the DPCD

As part of the State Government initiative entitled *Cutting red tape in planning*, the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) has released a document called *Making Local Policy Stronger.*

Recent advice from the DPCD regarding the findings of these initiatives and their implications has been that:

- Any strategic statements such as the Preferred Character Statements should be included in Council's Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) at Clause 21 and should not be repeated in Local Planning Policy.

- Local Planning Policies should be of a minimal length and should only include elements that cannot be addressed by other VPP tools such as zones or overlays. This implies that parts of the Precinct Brochures should no longer be included in Local Planning Policy.

Coordination of Other Projects and the Planning Scheme Amendment Process

Given that Council is currently undertaking Neighbourhood Character Studies of other townships including Nagambie, Avenel and Violet Town, it is important that any implementation recommendations are coordinated for these townships and that a consistent approach is arrived at.

Matters related to the format and content of any proposed VPP tools should be resolved with the DPCD at the time of the preparation of a Planning Scheme Amendment. Any Planning Scheme Amendment involving the Neighbourhood Character Studies of the four townships may also form part of a broader LPPF Review.

MSS

The MSS (Clause 21) should be updated to reflect the broad findings of the Neighbourhood Character Studies of all four townships. For Euroa, this may include summary points of the findings set out in Section 4.3 'The Character of Euroa' and the 'Key Character Issues' detailed in Section 5.3. It is also recommended that the Preferred Character Statements are included in the MSS.

Local Planning Policy

Based on advice from the DPCD as outlined above, it is not recommended that the development of a Local Planning Policy is pursued at this stage.

Zones and Overlays

Zones

As part of the initiatives outlined above, the DPCD has also advised that a revised suite of residential zones will be introduced to better reflect state policies. A draft of these zones was released in early 2009. These are proposed to replace the existing Residential 1, 2 and 3 zones and include:

- The **Substantial Change Zone** which provides for housing growth by a mix of housing types that includes medium to higher density housing in appropriate locations.

- The **Incremental Change Zone** which allows for a variety of housing types including medium density housing provided that it respects the character of the neighbourhood.

- The **Limited Change Zone** which enables specific characteristics of the neighbourhood to be protected through greater control over new housing development.

Both residential and commercial land uses in Avenel are currently grouped under the Township Zone. Should Council wish to apply the residential and business zones to the township in the future, the zones above and their associated provisions would need to be explored. It is likely that the Incremental Change Zone would

apply to the majority of residential areas. It is not recommended that Council pursues the transition to residential and business zones until the residential zones are finalised.

Overlays

There are a number of issues outlined in Section 5.3 *Key Character Issues* that may be able to be addressed through the introduction of overlays. The VPP Practice Note 'Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes' discusses the overlay controls that could be used to protect areas of neighbourhood character significance. The appropriateness of the overlays outlined below would require further investigation and work by the Council.

Design and Development Overlay

A Design and Development Overlay (DDO) requires that a permit be obtained for all development within the area covered (some types of development can be exempted). It ensures the implementation of the detailed guidelines in the consideration of all development in that area. A DDO can control elements such as height, setback, site coverage, fences and development within certain distance of tree trunks. It cannot control demolition.

The DPCD has advised that the use of DDOs for the sole purpose of neighbourhood character implementation is not encouraged. However, DDOs are considered appropriate for areas where mandatory height limits are warranted, or change is encouraged and no other mechanism would achieve the desired outcome. The DDO may also be required to address the height and design of fences where this is a particular concern as this is not possible through the Neighbourhood Character Overlay.

The DDO should only apply to small areas where a high degree of change is anticipated and specific design outcomes are desired. This may be applicable to areas around activity centres or along the transport corridors identified in the MSS for higher density housing, or to large redevelopment sites.

Neighbourhood Character Overlay

The Neighbourhood Character Overlay (NCO) was heralded, on the introduction of ResCode, as the most specific and effective tool for applying neighbourhood character policy. The permit requirements are comprehensive and there are few allowable exemptions.

The advantages to the use of the Neighbourhood Character Overlay are that it provides the opportunity to assess all applications for new dwellings or demolition within an area. The ResCode schedule can be modified to suit the requirements for the particular NCO area and tree removal controls can be introduced.

The NCO should be applied to small, well-defined areas where there is strong justification for additional controls of this nature.

Currently, there are no locations in Avenel where the NCO would be recommended.

Vegetation Protection Overlay and Significant Landscape Overlay

A Vegetation Protection Overlay (VPO) or Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO) can require a permit for removal of trees; and it can apply to all trees, trees over a certain trunk diameter or height or to native, indigenous or exotic vegetation. The only limitation is the ease of use and enforcement of the provisions. In order for a VPO or SLO to be justifiable, the vegetation or landscape must be demonstrated to be of significance to the character of the area.

The VPO is primarily aimed at situations where the vegetation itself is of significance. The VPO must be confirmed by a parallel study that identifies the environmental significance of the vegetation. The SLO has the distinct advantage of providing the opportunity to control the type of vegetation, as well as the types of buildings and works and fences that require a permit, as necessary.

The VPP Practice Note 'Using the Neighbourhood Character Provisions in Planning Schemes' states that:

> *'Sometimes vegetation may be the only feature of neighbourhood character defining the urban area. If the principal objective is to identify and protect vegetation for its contribution to the character of an area, overlays such as the VPO and SLO can be used instead of the NCO to protect these valued aspects of neighbourhood character.'*

This study has demonstrated that vegetation is a significant feature, although not the only feature, of the neighbourhood character in Euroa. However most of this vegetation occurs on public land, in streets, or along creek beds. Other significant features of neighbourhood character such as site coverage and building setbacks will assist in achieving the retention of vegetation.

Heritage Overlay

The Heritage Overlay is not considered to be a neighbourhood character implementation tool however it can play a role in protecting neighbourhood character through the protection of significant buildings, sites and precincts. Through field work and consultation, the Study Team discovered the presence of a number of older, historical buildings, particularly in the Old Township Precinct that could be of potential heritage significance. These buildings are central to the character of this precinct and their retention is important to the character of the township.

It is recommended that the Council undertakes further heritage work to identify any buildings that may be of significance. In the instance that a Heritage Study does not find any buildings within the Old Township of heritage significance, Council may wish to pursue the option of an NCO, as outlined above. Although the NCO cannot require buildings to be retained, it can require a permit for demolition and can delay a planning permit for demolition until the design of the replacement building is approved.

Reference Documents and Incorporated Documents

Incorporated document

An alternative approach to including parts of the Precinct Brochures in Local Planning Policy is to include the brochures as an incorporated document. The Precinct Brochures would be amended for incorporation to include the Preferred Character Statement, Objectives and Design Responses. The advantage of the inclusion of the Precinct Brochures in an incorporated document is that they carry more weight, particularly at VCAT, than a Reference Document, and are considered to be an actual component of the Planning Scheme. One of the only disadvantages to this approach is that if the Council needed to make any changes to the brochures once they were included as an Incorporated Document, this would require a Planning Scheme Amendment.

Reference Document

As an alternative to including the Precinct Brochures as an Incorporated Document, the Study Report and Brochures could be included as a Reference Document. Although a Reference Document carries less weight,

it can be altered without requiring a Planning Scheme Amendment. Should the brochures be incorporated documents, it would still be appropriate to Reference the Study Report.

Non-Statutory Recommendations

Non-statutory tools can provide an important means of implementing Council's neighbourhood character objectives. The public domain, which includes elements such as street trees, roads, footpaths, kerbs and channels, parks and reserves, has a significant impact on the neighbourhood character of an area. It is not only a question of appearance, but also of location, and the desired geometrical arrangement of all the elements, and how they will relate to each other. The Council is often directly or indirectly responsible for the undertaking of these works and management of assets, and therefore is ideally positioned to maximise the achievement of character objectives.

Design Coordination

While this study was not asked to make specific recommendations about the public domain, decisions about changes or strategies will ideally have some reference to the neighbourhood context determined by this study. The key character contributions of the public domain are included in each precinct description. This generally relates to distinctive street planting, such as avenue trees or planter beds, bluestone kerbing or a precinct's location alongside a public reserve.

The best way of coordinating works in the public domain with the design principles established for each precinct by this study is, in the short term, to establish a coordination mechanism.

This could take the form of an officer group with the following objectives:

- Coordinate all aspects of design in road reserves and other parts of the public domain.
- Build up a consistent character across defined local areas (preferably the precincts defined in the Neighbourhood Character Study).

The group would comprise representatives from the design engineers, infrastructure, development approvals (both statutory planning and building), strategic planning, environment and social planning, street lighting, landscape architecture and parks services.

The group would:

- Ensure that design decisions relating to a single street, park or other facility are consistent with the various strategies.
- Resolve conflicts, overlaps or gaps in the strategies.
- Establish guidelines for the conduct of public consultation about public domain design, with mechanisms designed to accommodate pressures for divergent treatments in every location within a strategic, consistent approach.

Community Encouragement and Education

Education and encouragement, partly by means of forming partnerships, is an essential aspect of implementation.

The following strategies could be adopted:

- Education of real estate agents, developers and landowners generally.

- Education of design and building professionals.
- Encouragement schemes for 'good character' developments.

The kinds of techniques that could be used to give effect to these strategies could include:

- Information leaflets
- Workshops
- Award schemes
- Displays
- Media articles/events

The partnership aspect of this option could be fostered by bringing stakeholders with differing perspectives (eg residents and developers) together into the same forum. This may be best accomplished independently of a contentious planning application with statutory time limits.

Staff Skilling and Design Advice

It takes time to come to grips with a topic like neighbourhood character. The Council's statutory planners need continued support and skilling to make the best use of this study's recommendations. Correct approaches to site analysis, knowledge about acceptable design solutions, familiarity with architectural styles, and consistency of decisions are all important. Training sessions, workshops and review of current applications by urban design consultants are useful techniques. In addition, training may be required by other parts of the Council organisation where the recommendations impact upon public domain works designed and undertaken by engineering personnel or contractors in accordance with specifications prepared by Council staff.

Resourcing may be an issue in the implementation of the recommendations of this study, as some recommendations such as increasing controls over buildings and vegetation and more detailed assessment of design, may result in increased workloads for planning staff. The Council must be aware of this potential and monitor the effect of introducing new controls to ensure that implementation of the study is effective.

Above all, the Council must determine to 'send out the right message' to the development community through consistent decision making as well as communication techniques discussed earlier. That message must foster an expectation that good quality design is expected, and that applicants will be subject to delays or refusal if they fail to meet this expectation.

Statutory Support

The main vehicles for statutory support are the Precinct Brochures and the local policy described above. Planning controls will also provide significant help, as will the community education and encouragement initiatives referred to above. However, there are allied or associated measures that can be taken.

Possibilities include:

- Permit conditions.
- Better enforcement of planning conditions.
- Increased publicity about penalties.
- Active monitoring of works undertaken without permission (e.g. illegal carports).
- Local Laws.

The Building Regulations

There are a number of matters that impact upon neighbourhood character that require only a building permit in many instances, rather than a planning permit. These include removal of or alterations to front verandahs, fences and crossovers.

Where the neighbourhood character of an area has a particular sensitivity, these matters should be controlled through a Neighbourhood Character Overlay or Heritage Overlay.

Otherwise, the neighbourhood character study or policy may be consulted in the assessment of a building permit where the standards of Clause 54 are not met.

# 7. Appendices

1. Precinct Brochures
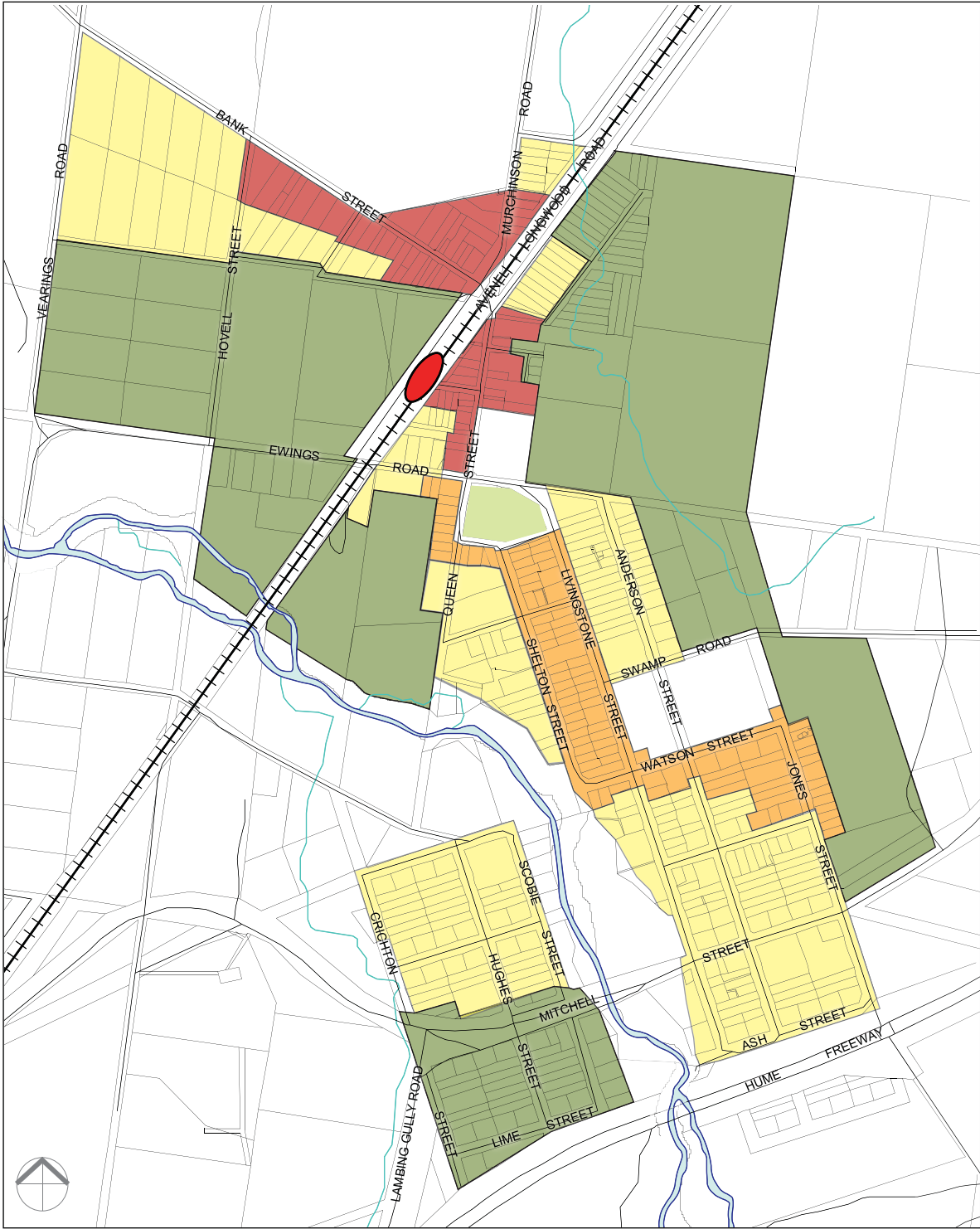
Legend

- **Old Township Precinct** (red)
- **Interwar / Post War MIx Precinct** (orange)
- **Post War / Contemporary Mix Precinct** (yellow)
- **Rural Interface / Future Residential Precinct** (green)
- Non-residential Zoned Land
- Railway
- Creeks and Waterways
- Parkland

Avenel Neighbourhood Character Study

Precinct Boundaries

date | Aug / 09   revision | 01   client | Shire of Strathbogie

0   250   500

Metres

plan|i'sphere
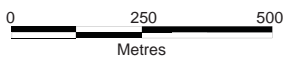
Character Description: Old Township Precinct

Precinct Description

This Precinct provides a significant entry point from the north of the township, with a strong sense of place created through landmark sites and structures. The Victorian and Edwardian buildings give this Precinct an established character that is immediately recognisable as the oldest part of the township's built environment. Commercial land uses are present, with specialty shops showcasing Avenel's local heritage and produce. Victorian and Edwardian timber or brick buildings form the dominant style, with some infill of more recent styles. Older buildings have been well maintained and are complemented by private gardens and expansive streetscapes that further enhance the distinctive feel of the precinct. Streets are wide and informal, with extensive views to locations within and outside the Precinct.

Key Existing Characteristics

- Dwellings are predominantly Victorian and Edwardian with some post-war and contemporary infill.
- Buildings are generally low-scale, with the only exception being the Harvest Home Historic Hotel.
- Building materials consist of timber and brick, with iron or tile roofing.
- Setbacks are varied, but dwellings are generally moderately set back from front and side boundaries, with the exception of some commercial buildings along Bank and Queen Street.
- Front fences are either non-existent or low, in a variety of materials such as timber and post and wire.
- Streets are wide and verges are planted with native and exotic vegetation that is either planted formally or informally.
- Garden styles are varied with well established and low maintenance gardens consisting of exotic and native vegetation.
- Roadways are generally informal with channelled or unsealed shoulders. Some areas have informal gravel pathways.

Community Values

- The informal village atmosphere of the town.
- Spaciousness of streetscapes.
- Wide, clean roadways with grassed verges.
- The informal layout of some streets.
- Diversity of building materials and variation in building styles.
- The quiet atmosphere of local streets.
- Views to open spaces, trees and hills.
- Vegetation in the private and public domain.
- Low front fencing.
- Consistent front setbacks with rooms for private gardens.

Policy Context

- The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) contains strategies that
  - ensure that future residential growth and development is accommodated for in a planned manner'.
  - encourage consolidation of residential development in existing urban centres, new development that provides for a high quality lot layout and diversity of sizes and housing options to maintain a diverse population mix within the Shire.

- The Township Zone provides for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns, whilst encouraging residential development that respects the neighbourhood character.
- The Urban Floodway Zone, Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and Floodway Overlay seek to ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters and minimises the damage caused by flooding.
- The Heritage Overlay conserves and enhances heritage places of natural or cultural significance and to ensure that development does not adversely affect the significance of these places.
- The Airport Environs Overlay identifies areas which are subject to high levels of aircraft noise and seeks to assist in shielding people from the impact of aircraft noise through noise attenuation measures.

Issues / Threats

- Loss of older buildings that contribute to the valued character of the precinct.
- Poorly maintained period dwellings.
- Loss of established trees and vegetation.
- Large areas of impervious surfaces around dwellings.
- Boundary to boundary development that block views along the side of dwellings.
- Overdevelopment of sites.
- Overgrown, poorly maintained vegetation obstructing views to dwellings.
- High front fences obstructing views to gardens and dwellings.
- Housing developments that exceed the existing low scale of streetscapes and are out of character with the area.
- Loss of informal roadways.
- Inconsistent building materials that is out of character with the area.
- Inconsistent front setbacks.

Preferred Character Statement

The distinctive old township character of this precinct will be enhanced and reinforced through the maintenance of period buildings and gardens. New development will be of a high standard and will respect the character of the built form through the articulation of facades, use of complementary materials and reflection of existing setback patterns. Front fences will remain low and open to ensure dwellings and private gardens are visible from the street.

This will be achieved by:
- Encouraging the retention of older housing stock that contributes to the valued character of the area.
- Ensuring buildings are well set back from front and side boundaries.
- Encouraging low or no front fencing.
- Encouraging planting in new developments.
- Ensuring the retention of established and mature trees.

Design Guidelines: Old Township Precinct

CHARACTER ELEMENT	OBJECTIVE	DESIGN RESPONSE	AVOID
Existing Buildings	To encourage the retention of older dwellings that contribute to the character of the area.	> Consider retaining and/or adapting older Victorian, Edwardian or Interwar dwellings that are in good condition, particularly the front section, wherever possible in new development.	*Loss of older dwellings that contribute to the character of the area.* *New development that is out of scale and character with existing dwellings.*
	To respect the qualities of older adjoining buildings that are in good condition.	> Where adjoining an older building in good condition, respect the height, building forms, siting and materials of the building/s in new building design.	*Buildings that dominate older buildings by height, siting or massing.* *Historical reproduction styles.*
Vegetation	To maintain and strengthen the spaciousness of streetscapes and to enhance the landscape character of the precinct.	> Retain large, established trees and provide for the planting of new trees and substantial vegetation, including canopy trees, wherever possible.	*Removal of large, established trees.* *Lack of landscaping and substantial vegetation.*
	To encourage sustainable vegetation and drought resistant planting in gardens.	> Select plant types that are tolerant of drought conditions in areas that are unable to supply the sufficient watering requirements.	*Inappropriate planting in drought affected areas.*
Siting	To provide space for front gardens.	> Buildings should be set back from the front boundary a sufficient distance to accommodate a front garden including trees and shrubs.	*Loss of front garden space.*
	To maintain the spaciousness of streetscapes and consistent spacing between buildings, whilst allowing for planting.	> Buildings should be set back from boundaries to create the appearance of space between buildings and to accommodate substantial vegetation.	*Boundary to boundary development.* *New development that interrupts the rhythm of side boundary setbacks.*
	To minimise the loss of front garden space, the dominance of car parking structures and the number of vehicular crossovers.	> Locate garages and carports behind the line of the dwelling. > Minimise hard paving in front yards. > Provide only one vehicular crossover per typical site frontage.	*Car parking structures that dominate the façade or view of the dwelling.* *Front setbacks dominated by impervious surfaces.*
Height and building form	To ensure that buildings and extensions respect the dominant building scale and forms.	> Respect the predominant building height and pitched roof forms in the street and nearby properties. > Articulate the form of buildings and facades through the composition of openings and setbacks.	*Buildings that appear to exceed by more than one storey the predominant height of buildings in the street and on nearby properties.* *Large, bulky buildings with flat, poorly articulated wall surfaces.*
Materials and Design Detailing	To ensure that the use of materials and design detail in new buildings complements that of the predominant building styles in the street.	> Articulate the facade of buildings through the use of a limited palette of colours and materials found commonly within the precinct, and through variations in wall surfaces.	*Large, unarticulated wall surfaces.*
Front boundary treatment	To maintain the openness of the streetscape and views of gardens.	> Front fences should be appropriate to the building era or reflect the typical fencing height and style of the street. > Provide a front fence that allows views through or over the fence to the front garden. > In streets where front fencing is predominantly absent, provide an open frontage.	*High, solid front fencing.*

Character Description: Interwar / Post War Mix Precinct

Precinct Description

The streets of this precinct are wide and verdant, with grassy nature strips and open frontages that allow generous views across large areas of dwellings and vegetation. The many established trees along the verges create an avenue feel to the area. Built form is predominantly single storey and contains a range of architectural styles, generally from the interwar and post-war eras. Low or non-existent front fencing offers views into well-maintained private gardens, further enhanced by many established native and exotic trees planted along street verges. Properties located in Shelton and Watson Streets have scenic views of Hughes Creek and the adjacent surroundings.

Key Existing Characteristics

- Dwellings are predominantly interwar or post-war brick or timber with some infill of 1960s-70s brick housing and contemporary timber or brick.
- Buildings are predominantly single storey, with some two-storey contemporary.
- Dwellings are generally set back from front and both side boundaries, with views into private gardens.
- Front fences are either low of non-existent, in timber, stone, brick or post and wire.
- Streets are wide and verges are planted informally with mostly native vegetation.
- Gardens are well established with exotic and native vegetation.
- Roadways are generally informal, and often channelled or unsealed shoulders.

Community Values

- The informal village atmosphere of the town.
- Spaciousness of streetscapes.
- Wide, clean roadways with grassed verges.
- The informal layout of some streets.
- Diversity of building materials and variation in building styles.
- The quiet atmosphere of local streets.
- Views to open spaces, trees and hills.
- Vegetation in the private and public domain.
- Low front fencing.
- Consistent front setbacks with rooms for private gardens.

Policy Context

- The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) contains strategies that
  - ensure that future residential growth and development is accommodated for in a planned manner'.
  - encourage consolidation of residential development in existing urban centres, new development that provides for a high quality lot layout and diversity of sizes and housing options to maintain a diverse population mix within the Shire.
- The Township Zone provides for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns, whilst encouraging residential development that respects the neighbourhood character.

- The Urban Floodway Zone, Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and Floodway Overlay seek to ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters and minimises the damage caused by flooding.
- The Heritage Overlay conserves and enhances heritage places of natural or cultural significance and to ensure that development does not adversely affect the significance of these places.
- The Airport Environs Overlay identifies areas that are subject to high levels of aircraft noise and seeks to assist in shielding people from the impact of aircraft noise through noise attenuation measures.

Issues / Threats

- Buildings with a high proportion of site coverage that reduce the spaciousness of the streets.
- Boundary to boundary development.
- Large areas of impervious surfaces on private property.
- Housing developments that exceeds the existing low scale of streetscapes.
- Overgrown, poorly maintained vegetation obstructing views to dwellings.
- High front fences obstructing views to gardens and dwellings.
- Loss of informal roadways.
- Use of building materials and finishes that is out of character with existing built form.

Preferred Character Statement

The spacious streetscapes and generous use of vegetation will be maintained and strengthened. Large trees will be retained where possible to preserve the avenue nature of the streetscapes. Dwellings will continue to be set back from front and side boundaries, with low fencing, allowing views through properties and along frontages. Front setbacks will continue to be extensively planted to contribute to the landscaped nature of the precinct. New development will generally occur in the form of low scale infill dwellings that complement existing Interwar and post-war housing and respond to the surrounding built form.

This will be achieved by:
- Encouraging the retention of older housing stock that contributes to the valued character of the area.
- Ensuring buildings are set back from front and side boundaries.
- Encouraging low or no front fencing.
- Encouraging additional street planting where possible.
- Ensuring the retention of established and mature trees.
- Ensuring sites are not overdeveloped to allow extensive views along the streetscape.
- Ensuring development is sited to reduce the loss of vegetation and to provide for new vegetation.

Design Guidelines: Interwar / Post War Mix Precinct

CHARACTER ELEMENT	OBJECTIVE	DESIGN RESPONSE	AVOID
Existing Buildings	To encourage the retention of older dwellings that contribute to the character of the area.	> Consider retaining and/or adapting older Interwar dwellings that are in good condition, particularly the front section, wherever possible in new development.	*Loss of older dwellings that contribute to the character of the area.* *New development that is out of scale and character with existing dwellings.*
	To respect the qualities of older adjoining buildings that are in good condition.	> Where adjoining an older building in good condition, respect the height, building form, siting and materials of the buildings in the design of new developments.	*Buildings that dominate older buildings by height, siting or massing.* *Historical reproduction styles.*
Vegetation	To maintain and strengthen the landscape character of streets.	> Retain large, established trees and provide for the planting of new trees and substantial vegetation, including canopy trees, wherever possible. > For properties adjoining Hughes Creek or existing vegetation corridors, consider the use of indigenous and native species to enhance the landscape character of these natural features.	*Removal of large, established trees.* *Lack of landscaping and substantial vegetation.*
	To encourage sustainable vegetation and drought resistant planting in gardens.	> Select plant types that are tolerant of drought conditions on properties without access to sufficient water supplies.	*Inappropriate planting in drought affected areas.*
Siting	To provide space for front gardens.	> Buildings should be set back from the front boundary a sufficient distance to accommodate a front garden including trees and shrubs.	*Loss of front garden space.*
	To maintain the spaciousness of streetscapes and consistent spacing between buildings, whilst allowing for planting.	> Buildings should be set back from boundaries to create the appearance of space between buildings and to accommodate substantial vegetation.	*Boundary to boundary development.* *New development that interrupts the rhythm of side boundary setbacks.*
	To minimise the loss of front garden space, the dominance of car parking structures and the number of vehicular crossovers.	> Locate garages and carports behind the line of the dwelling. > Minimise hard paving in front yards. > Provide only one vehicular crossover per typical site frontage.	*Car parking structures that dominate the façade or view of the dwelling.* *Front setbacks dominated by impervious surfaces.*
Height and building form	To ensure that buildings and extensions respect the dominant building scale and forms.	> Respect the predominant building height and pitched roof forms in the street and nearby properties. > Articulate the form of buildings and facades through the composition of openings and setbacks.	*Buildings that appear to exceed by more than one storey the predominant height of buildings in the street and on nearby properties.* *Large, bulky buildings with flat, poorly articulated wall surfaces.*
Materials and Design Detailing	To ensure the use of materials and design detail in new buildings complements that of the predominant building styles in the street.	> Articulate the facade of buildings through the use of a limited palette of colours and materials found commonly within the precinct, and through variations in wall surfaces.	*Large, unarticulated wall surfaces.*
Front boundary treatment	To maintain the openness of the streetscape and views into gardens.	> Front fences should be appropriate to the building era or reflect the typical fencing height and style of the street. > Provide a front fence that allows views through or over the fence to the front garden. > In streets where front fencing is predominantly absent, provide an open frontage.	*High, solid front fencing.*

Character Description: Post War / Contemporary Mix Precinct

Precinct Description

The streets of this Precinct are wide with scenic views of vegetation and hills beyond the township boundaries. The vast amount of mature trees and established gardens strengthen the natural setting of the area and complements the rural landscape. Dwellings are low scale with large front and side setbacks that allow for the establishment of private gardens and extensive planting. Front fences are often non-existent, or low and transparent, with views of gardens and buildings. Buildings generally date back to the post-war period with several contemporary styles evident or currently undergoing development. Streets have an informal appearance, with unsealed shoulders, swale drains and gravel crossovers. The south eastern section of this precinct includes the entrance to the town from the Hume Freeway, with the landmark Imperial Hotel adding to the character of the Precinct.

Key Existing Characteristics

- Dwellings are in a variety of post-war styles, with more recent contemporary infill.
- Buildings are predominantly single storey, with some two-storey contemporary.
- Building materials consist of timber, brick, masonry or rendered concrete, with iron or tile roofing.
- Dwellings are generally well set back from front and both side boundaries.
- Front fences are either non-existent or low, in a variety of materials.
- Streets are wide and verges contain generally native vegetation planted informally.
- Gardens are low maintenance and sometimes sparse, with informally established street trees.
- Roadways are generally informal, with channelled and unsealed shoulders and drains.
- This precinct also contains the Imperial Hotel along Mitchell Street.

Community Values

- The informal village atmosphere of the town.
- Spaciousness of streetscapes.
- Wide, clean roadways with grassed verges.
- The informal layout of some streets.
- Diversity of building materials and variation in building styles.
- The quiet atmosphere of local streets.
- Views to open spaces, trees and hills.
- Vegetation in the private and public domain.
- Low front fencing.
- Consistent front setbacks with rooms for private gardens.

Policy Context

- The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) contains strategies that
  - ensure that future residential growth and development is accommodated for in a planned manner'.

- encourage consolidation of residential development in existing urban centres, new development that provides for a high quality lot layout and diversity of sizes and housing options to maintain a diverse population mix within the Shire.
- The Township Zone provides for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns, whilst encouraging residential development that respects the neighbourhood character.
- The Urban Floodway Zone, Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and Floodway Overlay seek to ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters and minimises the damage caused by flooding.
- The Heritage Overlay conserves and enhances heritage places of natural or cultural significance and to ensure that development does not adversely affect the significance of these places.
- The Airport Environs Overlay identifies areas that are subject to high levels of aircraft noise and seeks to assist in shielding people from the impact of aircraft noise through noise attenuation measures.

Issues / Threats

- Large scale subdivision that results in narrow roadways and overdevelopment of sites.
- Boundary to boundary development.
- Large areas of impervious surfaces on private property.
- Housing developments that exceeds the existing low scale of streetscapes.
- New development lacking on-site landscaping or tree planting.
- Car parking structures that dominate the streetscape.
- Loss of informal roadways.
- Overgrown, poorly maintained vegetation obstructing views to dwellings and gardens.
- Use of brightly coloured or highly reflective materials or finishes that are out of character with existing built form or dominate the landscape.

Preferred Character Statement

The natural surroundings of this precinct will continue to be reflected through the retention of vegetation and the provision of space for additional planting. The informal nature of the streets will be maintained, with grass swales and unsealed shoulders. New development will continue to be low scale, with open frontages and wide setbacks.

This will be achieved by:
- Ensuring buildings are well set back from front and side boundaries.
- Ensuring sites are not overdeveloped to allow extensive views along the streetscape.
- Encouraging low and transparent or no front fencing.
- Ensuring the retention of established trees.
- Encouraging street planting in new developments.

Design Guidelines: Post War / Contemporary Mix Precinct

CHARACTER ELEMENT	OBJECTIVE	DESIGN RESPONSE	AVOID
Vegetation	To maintain and strengthen the landscape character of streets.	> Retain large, established trees and provide for the planting of new trees and substantial vegetation, including canopy trees, wherever possible. > In the vicinity of Hughes Creek and associated parkland, planting in private gardens should contribute to the unique landscape quality of the creek and its surrounds through the use of native vegetation.	*Removal of large, established trees.* *Lack of landscaping and substantial vegetation.*
	To encourage sustainable vegetation and drought resistant planting in gardens.	> Select plant types that are tolerant of drought conditions on properties without access to sufficient water supplies.	*Inappropriate planting in drought affected areas.*
Siting	To maintain the spaciousness of streetscapes and consistent spacing between buildings, whilst allowing for planting.	> Buildings should be set back from boundaries to create the appearance of space between buildings and to accommodate substantial vegetation.	*Boundary to boundary development.* *New development that interrupts the rhythm of side boundary setbacks.*
	To minimise the loss of front garden space, the dominance of car parking structures and the number of vehicular crossovers.	> Buildings should be set back from the front boundary a sufficient distance to accommodate a front garden including trees and shrubs. > Locate garages and carports behind the line of the dwelling. > Minimise hard paving in front yards. > Provide only one vehicular crossover per typical site frontage.	*Car parking structures that dominate the façade or view of the dwelling.* *Loss of front garden space.* *Front setbacks dominated by impervious surfaces.*
Height and building form	To ensure that buildings and extensions respect the dominant building scale and forms.	> Respect the predominant building height and pitched roof forms in the street and nearby properties. > Articulate the form of buildings and facades through the composition of openings and setbacks.	*Buildings that appear to exceed by more than one storey the predominant height of buildings in the street and on nearby properties.* *Large, bulky buildings with flat, poorly articulated wall surfaces.*
Materials and design detail	To use building materials, features and finishes that provides an interesting facade and complement the predominant building style in the street.	> Use building materials that are commonly found in the precinct, including a mix of brick and timber in muted tones that complement the landscape.	*Large, unarticulated wall surfaces.* *Dominant building features such as wide columns or balustrades constructed of masonry or other materials that are heavy in appearance.*
Front boundary treatment	To maintain the openness of the streetscape and views into gardens.	> Provide a front fence that allows views through or over the fence to the front garden. > In streets where front fencing is predominantly absent, provide an open frontage.	*High, solid front fencing.*
Township edge development	To create a defined urban edge that complements the character of surrounding rural and natural landscapes.	> In new subdivisions, provide a street or road edge to the development. > Encourage consistent front and side building setbacks.	*New subdivision with an internal focus delineated by high fences at the boundary.*
Properties adjoining flood and vegetation lines	To retain and complement the natural landscape features that contribute to the valued character of the area.	> Buildings should be sited away from existing green corridors along flood and vegetation lines. > New development should be designed to maintain existing vegetation and topographical features of the existing area.	*Filling of natural topographical landscape features.* *Excessive use of impervious surfaces.* *Excessive removal of native vegetation to accommodate residential buildings.*

Character Description: Rural Interface / Future Residential Precinct

Precinct Description

The open and informal nature of these streets, with long ranging views of rural landscapes, contributes to the relaxed character of the precinct. Streets are informal, with unsealed shoulders and swale drains. Development occurs inconsistently, with varying lot sizes and building types. Building styles are predominantly contemporary, in a mixture of materials and finishes, generally low scale and well set back from boundaries. There are some remaining period and post-war dwellings, often located on sites with rural land uses. Many of these lots have sporadically located mature native trees, yet there is a significantly less amount of formally planted vegetation in newer subdivisions. Fences are predominantly low and transparent, in post and wire or timber. The long-range views of rural landscapes, consisting of farmland, trees, and hills along the horizon give this Precinct a distinctly rural character.

Key Existing Characteristics

- Dwellings are predominantly contemporary, with some period weatherboards and post-war brick.
- Buildings are predominantly single storey, with some two-storey contemporary.
- Building materials consist of timber and brick, with iron or tile roofing.
- Dwellings are generally well set back from front and both side boundaries.
- Front fences are either non-existent or low and transparent, in post and wire or timber.
- Streets are wide and verges have generally native vegetation that is either planted informally.
- Private gardens are low maintenance and generally consist of native or exotic planting.
- Roadways are informal, with unsealed shoulders and drains, and often unsealed.

Community Values

- The informal village atmosphere of the town.
- Spaciousness of streetscapes.
- Wide, clean roadways with grassed verges.
- The informal layout of some streets.
- Diversity of building materials and variation in building styles.
- The quiet atmosphere of local streets.
- Views to open spaces, trees and hills.
- Vegetation in the private and public domain.
- Low front fencing.
- Consistent front setbacks with rooms for private gardens.

Policy Context

The Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) contains strategies that:
- ensure that future residential growth and development is accommodated for in a planned manner'.
- encourage consolidation of residential development in existing urban centres, new development that provides for a high quality lot layout and diversity of sizes and housing options to maintain a diverse population mix within the Shire.

- The Township Zone provides for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns, whilst encouraging residential development that respects the neighbourhood character.
- The Urban Floodway Zone, Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and Floodway Overlay seek to ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters and minimises the damage caused by flooding.
- The Heritage Overlay conserves and enhances heritage places of natural or cultural significance and to ensure that development does not adversely affect the significance of these places.
- The Airport Environs Overlay identifies areas that are subject to high levels of aircraft noise and seeks to assist in shielding people from the impact of aircraft noise through noise attenuation measures.

Issues / Threats

- Large scale subdivision that results in narrow roadways and overdevelopment of sites.
- Suburbanisation of new developments and subdivisions.
- Boundary to boundary development that constrict views between properties.
- Large areas of impervious surfaces on private property.
- Housing developments that exceeds the existing low scale of streetscapes.
- New development lacking on-site landscaping or tree planting.
- Car parking structures that dominate the streetscape.
- Loss of informal roadways.
- Use of brightly coloured or highly reflective materials or finishes.

Preferred Character Statement

This precinct will see a moderate level of change as vacant lots become developed gradually over time. New development will contribute to the existing character of its surroundings, while respecting the overall character of Avenel. Dwellings will be well set back with provision for vegetation planting along the front and side setbacks. Building materials will complement the rural setting, in muted tones and shades and articulated facades. Front fences will be low and inconspicuous, allowing views of established gardens and dwellings. Streets will remain informal and open, with unsealed shoulders and grassy nature strips.

This will be achieved by:
- Encouraging the retention of older housing stock that contributes to the valued character of the area.
- Ensuring buildings are well set back from front and side boundaries.
- Encouraging low or no front fencing.
- Encouraging street planting in new developments.
- Encouraging vegetation planting in private gardens.

Design Guidelines: Rural Interface / Future Residential Precinct

CHARACTER ELEMENT	OBJECTIVE		DESIGN RESPONSE	AVOID
Existing Buildings	To encourage the retention of older dwellings that contribute to the character of the area.	>	Consider retaining and/or adapting older dwellings that are in good condition, particularly the front section, wherever possible in new development.	*Loss of older dwellings that contribute to the character of the area.* *New development that is out of scale and character with existing dwellings.*
	To respect the qualities of heritage buildings that are in good condition.	>	Where adjoining a heritage building, respect the height, building forms, siting and materials, of the building/s in the new building design.	*Buildings that dominate heritage buildings by height, siting or massing.* *Historical reproduction styles.*
Vegetation	To maintain and strengthen the landscape character of streets.	>	Retain large, established trees and provide for the planting of new trees and substantial vegetation, including canopy trees, wherever possible.	*Removal of large, established trees.* *Lack of landscaping and substantial vegetation.*
		>	For properties adjoining flood lines or existing vegetation corridors, consider the use of indigenous and native species to enhance the landscape character of these natural features.	
		>	In the vicinity of Hughes Creek and associated parkland, planting in private gardens should contribute to the unique landscape quality of the creek and its surrounds through the use of native vegetation.	
	To encourage sustainable vegetation and drought resistant planting in gardens.	>	Select plant types that are tolerant of drought conditions on properties without access to sufficient water supplies.	*Inappropriate planting in drought affected areas.*
Siting	To maintain the spaciousness of streetscapes and consistent spacing between buildings, whilst allowing for planting.	>	Buildings should be set back from boundaries to create the appearance of space between buildings and to accommodate substantial vegetation.	*Boundary to boundary development.*
	To minimise the loss of front garden space, the dominance of car parking structures and the number of vehicular crossovers.	>	Buildings should be set back from the front boundary a sufficient distance to accommodate a front garden including trees and shrubs.	*Car parking structures that dominate the façade or view of the dwelling.* *Front setbacks dominated by impervious surfaces.* *Loss of front garden space.*
		>	Locate garages and carports behind the line of the dwelling.	
		>	Minimise hard paving in front yards.	
		>	Provide only one vehicular crossover per typical site frontage.	
Height and building form	To encourage well designed, innovative architectural responses.	>	Articulate the form of buildings and facades through the composition of openings and setbacks.	*Large, bulky buildings with flat, poorly articulated wall surfaces.* *Buildings that protrude above the tree canopy height.*
		>	Where vegetation forms an important part of the streetscape, keep new development below the established mature tree canopy height.	
Front boundary treatment	To maintain the openness of the streetscape and views into front gardens.	>	Provide a front fence that allows views through or over the fence to the front garden.	*High, solid front fencing.*
		>	In streets where front fencing is predominantly absent, provide an open frontage.	
Township edge development	To create a defined urban edge that complements the character of surrounding rural and natural landscapes.	>	In new subdivisions, provide a street or road edge to the development.	*New subdivision with an internal focus delineated by high fences at the boundary.*
		>	Encourage consistent front and side building setbacks.	
Properties adjoining flood and vegetation lines	To retain and complement the natural landscape features that contributes to the valued character of the area.	>	Buildings should be sited away from existing green corridors along flood and vegetable lines	*Filling of natural topographical landscape features.* *Excessive use of impervious surfaces.* *Excessive removal of native vegetation to accommodate residential buildings.*
		>	New development should be designed to maintain existing vegetation and topographical features of the existing area.	

2. Community Feedback Table

Community Feedback Table

	Summary of Comments & Feedback (grouped by participants and individual submissions)	Response
Preliminary Consultation: Issue & Value Identification	*"We value the educational and work prospects in the region."* Improvements can be made to: – Walking amenity; *there are no pavements up Livingstone St for pedestrians and prams.* An encouragement for walking is required. – Cycling – Train commuting; *it would be beneficial to see additional train services to Seymour and Melbourne encouraged* – Traffic Speed; need signage to emphasise 40km areas. – Tree planting and pruning; *we need improvements to existing street trees and maintenance of vegetation.* – Avenel would benefit from having an industrial zone to provide a focus for future business opportunities – Carefully monitor future expansion so that new subdivisions do not detract from the peaceful nature that is important to the area.	Future subdivisions are to be developed in a manner which will not detract from the existing character. Vegetation comments have been implemented throughout the precincts. Other comments have been noted by Council.
	The character of the town should be retained basically as an informal, spacious and rustic environment without too much regimentation but with basic planning controls to ensure that the future development is in keeping with this ideal. The town at present lacks a heart and needs a town centre. *We would like to see a focal point of entry to the town from the north and west.* Strong preference for residential areas to be developed in character with the existing environment. Do not want the area to become like Melbourne. *We would like to see any future development within the town to be restricted to these proposals and the town promoted as a wonderful place to live, rest and recreate.* We see the areas for development in the future as; north of Bank Street bounded by the golf course and Vearrings Rd and areas east of the Longwood roundabout. *We would like to maintain the feeling of spaciousness and informality of the town* Would like to maintain the open views of the wider areas beyond the town.	The informal, spacious and "rustic" values have been encouraged throughout the precinct brochures. Future development areas have been considered and adapted.
	Retain and enhance the unique family friendly character of this small, safe and cohesive community. The identification of the area east of the cemetery being the key development site is supported. *Need to encourage smarter planting and water use throughout this drought.* Would like to see the development of a new commercial retail/service centre between the cemetery and Avenel Park. Livingstone Street being designated by Vic Roads for heavy traffic is a matter of concern as it passes through the primary school. The village character of Queen Street should be enhanced. Jubilee Park could be enhanced with landscaping and tree plantings. *There needs to be measures to retain and preserve the distinctive streetscapes of areas that are primarily residential.* Develop Lambing Gully Road as an alternative entry point from the freeway. Enhance the Old Bridge/Stewart Park area for local and tourist use. *There is much potential for tree planting and streetscape enhancement throughout the area.* *The Harvest Home and old church area has a strong heritage character which should be retained and enhanced.* New development through this precinct should not impose on these older buildings. Need to raise awareness of household measures to conserve and re-use water.	Family-friendly and heritage values applied throughout the precincts. Drought resistant vegetation comments have been implemented through design guidelines. Comments on retail, parks and traffic requirements are noted by Council. Specific character elements of certain streets have been implemented. Future development areas have been considered.
	Would like to discourage the formalisation of road infrastructure; however would like to see wide green verges with residences set well back from the street. Maintenance of low front fencing, no front fences of vegetative screens. Need to development of a more unified streetscape character. A variety of housing options is required in Avenel, particularly to suit the needs of an aging population and those people who do not wish to maintain large blocks of land. Need a zoned area for the development of commercial use.	Wide verges, setbacks and fencing values have been applied. A town boundary has been applied. Stricter controls near heritage buildings have been

	Town boundaries need to be more clearly defined in the hope to avoid the edges sprawling unruly into the rural areas. Need to develop a more attractive and direct town entry from the Hume Freeway. *More strict guidelines as to the type of buildings constructed adjacent or near to existing heritage buildings.*	implemented in guidelines.
	A number of people are concerned that development occur appropriately in order to preserve the heritage and character of the town and to retain its community spirit. *Would like a dedicated community noticeboard be erected in Avenel informing people of planning applications, meetings and forums.* *The current entry point from the Hume Highway needs attention as it is.* All powerlines should be put underground. Similar street landscaping should be applied. Infill of the town should be applied, before the boundaries grow. *Ad hoc spread of development into rural areas should not be allowed to happen.* Future development should fit into the character of the town. *Houses should be set back a similar distance from the road. I also think that houses need to be a set distance not only from the road frontage, but from their external boundaries on all sides. This would ensure that we don't see the kind of development occurring in Melbourne where houses fill their blocks and there aren't any gardens anymore.* Don't like seeing concrete around new development. Retention of established, large trees is to be encouraged in all future developments. The issue of developing a sustainable community is also of great importance. *Must continually keep the community informed.*	Heritage places will be protected through extra requirements in design guidelines. Wider setbacks are implemented, to ensure room for gardens. Consistent street setbacks are encouraged where possible. Established trees are encouraged to be protected. Continual consultation with the community has been applied throughout this project.
	Transport is nonexistent – 1 train in the morning and 1 in the evening. No doctors, chemist or general store. No senior citizen gardening scheme in order to assist with tasks. No traffic humps to slow down vehicles. *I would not like to see Colorbond fencing in front of houses or along the side of the land producing a box like effect.* *I realise that we are on Stage 4 water restrictions but as I am bucketing my bath water onto my garden I don't mind the effort because I love to look at the beautiful flowers, vegetables and trees.*	These suggestions are not entirely relevant to the study, but have been noted by Council. Fencing comments have been applied.
Stage 2, 3, & 4: Draft Precinct, Issues, Guidelines & Report	*The study is sound and sets the right direction for the future development of Avenel.* *The community values as detailed are excellent, and we feel that these cannot be reinforced strongly enough. However we do not have asphalt footpaths.* *Some precincts may require further definition. In particular the Bank St / Queen St area and the heritage area in Mitchell Street from the Coach House, and old stone bridge to the Imperial Hotel.* *We believe it is vital that the village character of Avenel is maintained as the town grows and develops.*	Asphalt footpaths removed from brochures. Heritage areas have been emphasised in brochures. Village character is emphasised through the brochures.
	We feel that the point about low or no front fencing needs to be removed. Fencing of any structurally acceptable material should be permitted to be of any height and pattern.	Fencing requirements have been modified so it is less restrictive. However, allowing fencing of any material and height will severely change the character of Avenel.
	With reference to the section regarding treatment of front fences, we would strongly object to the requirement that permits view into our gardens.	Fencing requirements modified.