



Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme Review - Summary Document

Background

- Councils are responsible for administering and enforcing the planning scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (PE Act).
- All planning schemes follow a standard structure required by the State Government and must include standard State and regional policies and provisions.
- A council is responsible for updating the scheme to insert 'local policy content' that is relevant to the local area., Council can also set zoning and overlays that control land use and development.
- Councils are required to review their planning schemes every four years following the adoption of the municipal Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan. Council adopted its latest Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan – “[Shaping the Ranges 2025-2035](#)” in October 2025.
- The frequency of the review provides an opportunity to undertake a periodic 'health-check' - to examine if the scheme is up-to-date and contains accurate and efficient tools to guide decision making.
- Council last completed a planning scheme review in 2019. A copy of this review can be accessed [here](#).

A planning scheme review

The Planning Scheme Review will include:

- Examining the local content of the scheme to ensure it reflects Council's plans and strategies including the Council Plan – Shaping the Ranges 2025-2035.
- An audit of the strategic work that has been completed or carried out since the previous planning scheme review.
- Identifying three to four 'priority areas' or key strategic themes and develop an action plan to guide a four-year future strategic work program.
- Identifying improvements to streamline decision making and reduce the complexity of statutory processes.
- Identifying advocacy and regional partnership opportunities.
- Engagement with key stakeholders about how the planning scheme works, the process by which to improve it and the identification of proposed changes

The review does not include the preparation of new policy or planning provisions. It also does not include recommendations for land use matters that fall outside the Victorian planning framework and planning legislation.

The Planning Scheme Review is a high-level strategic analysis that will look at the big picture of land use planning in Macedon Ranges Shire. It is a high-level check of how well the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme is working overall, and where improvements might be needed.

It cannot change the content of standard planning rules set by the Victorian Government planning provisions such as the head clause of a zone or overlay. It also will not focus on zone or overlay changes to individual properties.

Furthermore, the Planning Scheme Review:

- Will not make changes to zones or overlays on specific properties, the review is strategic, not site-specific. If site specific zoning errors or anomalies are identified, these will be referred to a future errors, anomalies and minor changes amendment for further consideration.
- Will not fundamentally change the planning scheme content but will focus on improvements to the existing planning scheme.
- Cannot contradict State Planning Policy directives and must align with State Government planning reforms.

Impact on property

The Planning Scheme Review does not make any immediate changes to planning controls or policy affecting property. It provides a high-level overview of planning issues affecting the Macedon Ranges Shire and identifies a range of recommendations and/or further work for Council to undertake to address issues over time.

Any proposed changes to the planning scheme often require further investigation and community consultation and can only be implemented through a separate formal planning scheme amendment process.

Planning context of the review

The State Government is currently reforming the planning system. This includes the introduction of the [Plan for Victoria](#), the [Victorian Housing Statement](#) and the [Planning Amendment \(Better Decisions Made Faster\) Act](#). There have also been changes to various planning requirements.

There have been several significant events including the Covid-19 pandemic, floods and bushfires which have also influenced planning controls for recovery from these events. Fast track mechanisms such as the Priority Projects / Development Facilitation Program (DFP) have also been introduced in Victoria.

Other significant changes include a new [Town House and Low-Rise Code](#) which introduced “Deemed to Comply” residential standards designed to codify planning standards rather than relying on subjective grounds around things such as neighborhood character.

Key Findings and Themes of the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme Review 2026

Some key themes have emerged from the initial work undertaken for the 2026 planning scheme review. A breakdown of these themes and outcomes is provided below.

1. Streamlining the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme

The Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme must become clearer, strategically focused and simpler if Council is to manage growth, respond to changes from the State government's reforms and protect the Shire's valued character.

Simplifying planning controls and permit requirements will help Council better manage future growth, improve decision-making timeframes and prepare for the significant planning reforms being introduced by the Victorian Government. The need is identified for the following reasons:

- Council is preparing for significant residential growth in Gisborne, Kyneton, Riddells Creek, Romsey and other townships which is increasing pressure on Council's planning resources.
- The Planning Amendment (Better Decisions Made Faster) Act reforms will require quicker permit decisions within tighter statutory timeframes. Council needs to ensure that it is 'future ready' to appropriately manage the full extent of the planning reforms.
- Current permit processing performance is below the average of comparable peri-urban councils.
- More than half of planning applications require referral to external authorities, significantly above the Victorian average.
- The complexity of the planning scheme contributes to assessment delays and increased workloads.
- Some overlays trigger permits for minor or low-risk matters that provide limited planning benefit but increase cost and timeframes to both applicants and Council.
- Opportunities exist to reduce unnecessary permit triggers, simplify controls and improve assessment efficiency.
- The Planning Policy Framework has gaps and inconsistencies that will need further work. This includes:
 - minor form and content corrections such as outdated references to DELWP or outdated land use terms such as intensive animal husbandry.
 - identified gaps such as local policies missing objectives (which requires further strategic work).
 - Content errors in schedules to overlays

Zoning mostly complies following recent amendments C131macr and C150macr, but targeted reviews are required which will be guided by strategic work mentioned below.

These findings suggest there is a strong opportunity to focus planning resources on matters that genuinely influence planning outcomes while reducing unnecessary regulatory burden for applicants, Council and referral authorities.

2. Improving Planning System Performance

The review found that Council's planning performance is affected by a combination of planning scheme complexity, high planning referral requirements, application quality and organisational processes. Planning performance will not improve unless the scheme, referral processes and decision-making process becomes clearer and more efficient.

While some factors sit outside the context of a planning scheme review, several improvements can be supported through clearer policy and simpler controls. The findings are based on:

- Permit application volumes (in relation to standard applications, amendments and VicSmart) have generally declined but assessment timeframes have not improved during the review period.
- Planning applications are becoming more complex and often require significant further information requirements.
- Referral requirements and internal referral processes add time to decision making, even for minor applications.
- Clearer policy guidance could reduce uncertainty and improve decision consistency for both Council and applicants.
- Simpler planning controls could reduce workloads for both Council and referral authorities in the context of meeting tighter decision timeframes.

Internal review and improvement of internal processes at Council are also currently underway separate from the Planning Scheme Review project.

Improving efficiency will help Council meet future statutory deadlines while maintaining a focus on high-quality planning outcomes for the greater good of the community.

3. Strategic Policy Gaps and Improvement Priorities

The review has identified several areas where additional strategic work is required to ensure the Planning Scheme remains current and provides clear direction for future growth and development while protecting valued characteristics of the Macedon Ranges Shire. Major projects identified include:

- Implementation of the Gisborne and Romsey Structure Plans.
- Updating heritage policy and design guidelines as per the Macedon Ranges Heritage Strategy 2024-2034.
- Introducing protected settlement boundaries around Gisborne and Romsey.
- Need for a Rural Land Strategy to modernise Council's rural planning policy and protect agricultural and environmental values. Council is still waiting on State Government's rural planning reforms but planning scheme review work to date has still found a need for an updated strategy and policy.
- Review of the Significant Landscape Assessment Study to strengthen landscape protection and resolve bushfire policy conflicts.
- An Industrial and Commercial Land Strategy is needed to support employment growth policy and manage land use conflicts.
- A new Housing Strategy to replace the 2007 strategy and address contemporary housing needs, including affordable housing.

- Review and update of the Neighbourhood Character policy to align with current State planning policy requirements.
- A signage policy to guide policy, particularly around billboard signage at key entrances of towns
- A review of the Design and Development Overlay Schedules, Development Plan Overlay Schedules and Environmental Significant Overlay schedule controls.
- Environmental Risk work still required includes:
 - Investigating the need to apply the Erosion Management Overlay (also reviewing existing EMO).
 - Investigating the need to apply the Salinity Management Overlay.
 - Working with Flood Plain Management Authorities to undertake/resolve flood studies and implement overlays.
- Undertaking the Statement of Planning Policy review required in 2029.
- Shire wide review of civil and community infrastructure provision and planning
- Development Contribution Plan Overlay Schedule and incorporated document review.
- Incorporate Open Space Strategy into planning scheme policy
- Update the Walking and Cycling Strategy
- Macedon Ranges Shire Infrastructure Design Manual finalisation and implementation.

These projects will provide a stronger strategic basis for future planning decisions and reduce uncertainty for both Council, the community and development industry.

4. Housing, Employment and Community Growth

Managing growth effectively will require coordinated planning for housing, jobs, services and infrastructure. The review highlights the need for updated strategies that respond to changing community expectations and State Government policy directions. These findings are based on:

- Population growth will increase demand for housing, employment land and infrastructure.
- Affordable housing considerations should be incorporated into future policy development.
- Employment land needed for local jobs and services.
- Neighbourhood character objectives need to be balanced with housing growth requirements outlined in state government direction.
- Identified need to better plan for civil and community infrastructure needs.

5. Landscape, Heritage and Environmental Protection

Protecting the environmental, landscape and heritage values of the Macedon Ranges remains a core planning objective. The review found there is scope to improve the effectiveness of planning controls while maintaining strong protection outcomes. These include:

- Implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy (Adopted 2026 version).

- Review of the Significant Landscape Assessment Study (2019) to identify how key views and landscapes can be appropriately protected through the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme, while resolving inconsistencies with State bushfire protection policy that have limited its full implementation.
- Continue implementing the Macedon Ranges Heritage Strategy 2024-2034.
- Environmental overlays such as the Environmental Significance Overlay should be reviewed to ensure they remain effective and not causing unnecessary permit triggers.
- A review of the Vegetation Protection Overlay schedules is required particularly regarding weedy exotic species triggering permits and external referral requirements.

Future work should focus on creating planning controls that are clear, practical, evidence-based and aligned with State policy.

6. Planning for Smaller Towns

There has been significant strategic work completed for larger townships in the Shire, some which still needs to be implemented. The review has identified a need for updated planning guidance for smaller settlements across the municipality. Small towns include Newham, Tylden, Carlsruhe, Darraweit Guim and Clarkefield.

Separate work includes a separate review of the Malmsbury and Lancefield structure plans as well.

Further work would include:

- Updating planning policy and strategic direction.
- Reviewing settlement boundaries and updating where necessary.
- A review of zoning and overlay controls which reflect the individual characteristics of each township.

This work will help ensure planning decisions follow state direction but respect local character while providing greater certainty for residents, businesses and landowners.

Conclusion

The review identifies a clear need to simplify some areas of the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme, improve planning system efficiency and deliver a stronger strategic policy framework for the future.

Council needs to better respond to the growth expected and reforms via resourcing of staff, having adequate policy direction and implementing these policies into the planning scheme.

By reducing unnecessary complexity, updating key strategies and focusing resources on achieving meaningful planning outcomes, Council will be better positioned to manage growth, respond to planning reforms and protect the valued characteristics of the Macedon Ranges.

Frequently Asked Questions

Project overview

What is a Planning Scheme?

- A planning scheme is a statutory document that sets out objectives, policies, provisions and guidelines for the use and development of land and waters in each municipal area in Victoria.
- Councils are responsible for administering and enforcing the planning scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Planning and Environment Act 1987.
- All planning schemes follow a standard structure drawn from the Victoria Planning Provisions and contain standard State and regional policies and provisions.
- A council is responsible for updating the scheme to insert 'local content' that is relevant to the local area, such as planning controls, maps and guidelines that affect land use, development and conservation activities within the municipal boundary.

What is the Planning Scheme Review project?

- All Victorian councils are required to review their planning schemes every four years.
- This review project is being prepared by the Macedon Ranges Shire.

Why undertake a planning scheme review?

- Councils are encouraged to review their planning schemes every four years following the adoption of the municipal Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan.
- The frequency of the review provides an opportunity to undertake a periodic 'health-check' - to examine if the scheme is up-to-date and contains accurate and efficient tools to guide decision making.
- If the review identifies issues or opportunities to improve the scheme, an action plan is developed that lists priority tasks required to update the scheme, to be completed over the next four years.
- The review also involves consultation with council staff, Councillors and planning scheme users. These may include planners, statutory referral agencies, government agencies, Registered Aboriginal Parties, and private citizens.
- The key output of a review is a Planning Scheme Review Report, which is to be adopted by the council and provided to the Minister for Planning.
- The Planning Scheme Review Report includes recommendations for future changes to be made to a scheme but does not involve a planning scheme amendment to

implement these changes immediately, this implementation work follows a separate process.

What will the Planning Scheme Review involve?

The Planning Scheme Review will include:

- A review of the state and local planning policy and strategies, including State Government reforms since the last review.
- An audit of local schedules to Zones, Overlays, Particular Provisions, General Provisions and Local Reference Documents.
- A review of Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal decisions and Panel Reports since the last review.
- A review of strategic work commenced or completed and recommended in the last review from 2019.
- Consultation with key stakeholders including the community and referral authorities of the planning scheme.

What is not covered by the Review?

The Review is a high-level strategic analysis, meaning that it will look at the big picture. It is a high-level check of how well the Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme is working overall, and where improvements might be needed. It cannot change the content of standard planning rules set by the Victorian Government (known as the Victorian Planning Provisions) such as the head clause of a zone or overlay. It also will not focus on zone or overlay changes to individual properties.

What can't a Planning Scheme Review do?

A Planning Scheme Review:

- Will not make changes to zones or overlays on specific properties, the review is strategic, not site-specific.
- Is not a rewrite or new planning scheme and focuses on the existing Macedon Ranges Planning Scheme.
- Cannot contradict State Planning Policy directives and must align with State Government planning reforms.

Will the Planning Scheme Review affect my property?

No. The Planning Scheme Review does not make any changes to planning controls or policy affecting your property. Instead, it provides a high-level overview of planning issues affecting the Macedon Ranges Shire and identifies a range of recommendations and/or further work for Council to undertake to address these issues over time.

Any proposed changes to the planning scheme often requires further investigation and community consultation, and can only be implemented through a separate formal planning scheme amendment process.

What can the community and other stakeholders influence in this review?

Community and other stakeholder input is an important component of the Planning Scheme Review process. It allows individuals, community groups, businesses, and other stakeholders to provide feedback, suggestions, and concerns about the planning scheme. Your input can influence things like:

What can the community and other stakeholders influence in this review?

Community and stakeholder feedback can influence:

- whether the review has identified the right strategic planning themes
- whether any important policy gaps have been missed
- which future strategic planning work should be prioritised
- how planning information is explained and made easier to use
- whether there are errors or anomalies in planning policies, ordinance or mapping that Council should check

Community feedback cannot directly:

- rezone individual properties
- change overlays or planning controls on specific land
- decide individual planning permit application outcomes
- override State planning policy or legislation
- replace a future planning scheme amendment process