

THE CITY OF
GREATER GEELONG

STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PANEL SUBMISSION



GREATER GEELONG PLANNING SCHEME AMENDMENT C375

BARWON HEADS STRUCTURE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

Part B Submission to the Independent Panel – Structure Plan Preparation

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Table of Contents

PREPARATION OF THE BARWON HEADS STRUCTURE PLAN	4
CONSULTATION PROGRAM	4
SUPPORTING STUDIES.....	8
MOST IMPORTANT	9
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	9
HOUSES THAT 'FIT':	10
HOUSES THAT DON'T 'FIT':.....	10
FINDINGS:.....	11
CONCLUSION	13

Preparation of the Barwon Heads Structure Plan

1. The City commenced preparation of the update of the Barwon Heads Structure Plan in 2016. The Barwon Heads SP from 2010 included the following review expectation:

As with all other areas in the municipality the take-up of land and redevelopment within Barwon Heads needs to be regularly monitored. It is appropriate that a basic review of the Structure Plan, including rates of development and lot supply within the township be undertaken every five years with a full review of the Plan in ten years.

As this plan sets a Settlement Boundary it is not intended that any short term review would examine further areas for urban development. However, it must be acknowledged that the ten year review would need to examine the Settlement Boundary in the context of the State and Local policies which exist at the time.

The need and timing of a future review will also be determined in the context of any Coastal Hazard Vulnerability Assessment undertaken for Barwon Heads which would also examine impacts of stormwater flooding, asset/infrastructure impacts, the need for revised planning controls and policy and a longer term settlement planning response strategy. Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy, to be developed over 2010/2011 will provide strategic direction around the timing, nature and staging of this work.

2. Given the time that had passed since the adoption of the structure plan and the time needed to undertake the review we commenced a comprehensive review of the structure plan including the settlement boundary.
3. The Structure Plan was modelled on the City of Greater Geelong's structure plan framework to ensure consistency with other council produced structure plans. The plan includes consideration on policy context, urban growth (demographics and lot supply), settlement and housing (urban environment) infrastructure (services, access and movement and community infrastructure), natural environment (flooding, climate change and key environmental features), economic development and employment (retail analysis, industrial analysis and tourism), and rural areas.

Consultation program

4. Engagement commenced in March 2016 with referrals sent to internal council departments and external stakeholders and service providers such as Barwon Water, VicRoads, the Department of Environment Land Water and Planning and Barwon Coast Committee of Management. This provided background to key infrastructure and land use/ development issues in the town that was incorporated into an Issues Paper and Issues Paper Summary and then the final Structure Plan.
5. The preparation of the structure plan was informed by a comprehensive consultation program. The consultation program was critical due to the lack of trust of the City within the Barwon Heads community resulting from past structure plan consultation processes and that landowners requesting to develop outside of the settlement

boundary indicating that there is a silent majority of people who support the extension to the boundary but do not make submissions.

6. To maximise and encourage community participation throughout the preparation of the structure plan the City commissioned the independent consultation company Campbell & Jones to prepare an engagement and communications plan and to subsequently assist with its implementation.
7. The community were kept informed of the progress of the project through project bulletin updates. The updates provided details of the project timing, invitations to get involved in project engagement and reported on outcomes from the engagement. A number of mechanisms were used to reach out across the community:
 - **A consultation database:** Sent project bulletins and invites to be involved in consultation via email and letters
 - **Talking Heads Magazine:** Regular project updates and invitations for engagement were included in this magazine which is distributed to all Barwon Heads households on the first Saturday of every month
 - **Other Media:** Adverts for key engagement dates were included in the City News adverts for the Geelong Advertiser and Geelong Independent as well as the Bellarine Times. During the two key engagement periods media releases were prepared and also included on the Council's social media via Geelong Australia webpage.
 - **Council's website:** A project webpage is available on Geelong Australia. Project updates and all engagement documents and background reports were provided on the website.
 - **Direct contact to community networks:** Emails and letters were sent directly to a range of over 50 groups with the community to recruit groups and their members for community engagement and community leadership. This included groups involved in recreation, community interest and residents groups, government agencies and political representatives, health and education, environment and sustainability groups, landowners and developers and traders.
 - **Direct contact** - Warrenbeen Court and land north of Tait's Road landowners
8. The primary engagement activity was **Help Shape the Place**. This was the first major opportunity for the community to get involved. The Issues Paper noted above provided background information for the community. The engagement involved:
 - **Help Shape the Place Workshop:** The workshop was held on Wednesday 26 October 2016 and was open to anyone in the community and included

representatives from the community, businesses, state and local government. The workshop was facilitated by Campbell & Jones and over 60 attendees worked in groups to discuss; residential character, external issues, opportunities and challenges and where should we put our efforts and funds.

- **Help Shape the Place Drop in Sessions:** Two drop-in sessions were held on Thursday 27 October 2016. The sessions built on the workshops and the community were able to 'drop in' and ask questions of council officers. A further 60 people attended the sessions.
- **Submissions:** Any member of the community was able to make written submission on the questions in the Issues Paper or other topic, either at the engagement sessions or by email, post or online. The City received over 130 written submissions.
- In facilitating the Help Shape the Place engagement activities Campbell & Jones and Council were also supported by Hansen Partnership who were currently preparing the Barwon Heads Residential and Landscape Character Assessment.

9. A summary of the workshop outputs and submissions is available in the Help Shape the Place Engagement Report November 2016.

10. The following broad themes came from the engagement process:

- The **coastal seaside village character** is very important to the community. There is little support for growth and a view it can be provided by existing and proposed developments in neighbouring areas. Retaining the village feel means not extending the existing town boundary, limiting the Residential Growth Zone, restricting building height to two stories and applying the principles of the Barwon Heads Structure Plan 2010. To achieve this outcome many submissions supported more extensive planning controls. However there was also a view that existing levels of planning control are adequate. A few submissions were received seeking to expand the existing boundary for increased residential development.
- There is a concern that recent **infill development** is detrimental to the village character. Houses are being demolished and replaced by bigger houses with large hard surface footprints that have storm water drainage implications. Trees and gardens are being lost. There is support for development overlays to limit the block coverage, encourage and preserve vegetation and control building heights to stop overlooking and overshadowing.

- **Traffic volumes and parking shortages** are a problem at holiday times and weekends and a number of management options were suggested but not necessarily agreed. A park and ride system to take visitors from parking areas on the outskirts of the village to the town centre and the beach attracted support. Many residents seem to accept the traffic and parking issues and manage around it by cycling and walking. The improvement of **cycling facilities and walking trails** is strongly supported. **Pedestrian safety** particularly for children walking or cycling to school is also a priority but there is debate about the number and location of pedestrian crossings. The standard of the Barwon Heads Road from Geelong was not considered adequate. The location of the **bridge** as a principal cause of traffic congestion is a source of annoyance. Getting bus services to better coordinate with rail timetables would increase use of public transport.
- Protecting and expanding the **natural environment** is important to residents and visitors to Barwon Heads. One of the village strengths is its location next to the river with adjoining beaches and significant wetlands. There is concern that increased growth will further reduce native flora and fauna and threaten the wetlands. Within the village there is support for more trees forming a canopy over houses and gardens and green spaces. Soft edge footpaths and gutters are also favoured over kerb and gutter. Increased housing density and larger footprints threaten to reduce a green look and feel. Barwon Heads is vulnerable to inundation and it was suggested that work be done on the potential impacts of climate change and sea level rises.
- Generally there was satisfaction with the **village centre** and the services available in the town. Some submissions suggested there could be a greater variety of shops. The development of three story buildings, with holiday accommodation, in the village centre was not widely supported. There was support for the redevelopment of the supermarket and the refurbishment of the Barwon Heads Hotel. It was suggested the **old kindergarten** site could be better utilised as a hub for community activity. The relocation of the **library** from the primary school to the senior citizen club or old kindergarten was also raised. People accept that Barwon Heads is a small centre and not everything will be available. Ocean Grove is five minutes away and has a wide range of services and facilities.

11. The draft Barwon Heads Structure Plan was released by the City on 23 May 2017. Submissions were sought until 23 June. A 'drop in' information session was held on Wednesday 7 June.
12. Almost 1,050 submissions were received. Most of these (970) were provided by the Save Barwon Heads Alliance who set up an online response portal that was independent of the City. Of the 77 submissions that were received by Council directly, 20% did not provide an address or were located outside of Greater Geelong.
13. The Save Barwon Heads Alliance online response portal allowed respondents to choose pre-written arguments in support of Council retaining the settlement boundary. The supporting arguments related to urban growth, amenity, retaining the seaside feel, tourism, environment, climate change and risk. Of the 970 responses received 66% reside in Barwon Heads and 78% in the Greater Geelong area:
 - 642 (66%) reside in Barwon Heads;
 - 55 (5.7%) reside in Ocean Grove;
 - 723 (75%) reside in Bellarine Peninsula;
 - 754 (77.8%) reside in City of Greater Geelong area;
 - 897 (92.4%) reside in Victoria; and
 - 38 (3.9%) reside overseas.
14. The draft structure plan was referred to internal departments and external agencies and their views included in the final plan.
15. The council report from 22 August 2017 when Council adopted the final structure plan includes a detailed consideration of the submissions.

Supporting studies

16. The structure plan was informed by specialist residential character and native vegetation assessments. The key study was the **Barwon Heads Residential & Landscape Character Assessment, Hansen, 2017.**
17. The City engaged Hansen Partnership to assess the residential and landscape character of Barwon Heads. The purpose of this assessment was to determine if there is a need for new planning controls or guidelines for residential development in Barwon Heads in order protect or enhance the existing character of the town in the face of new residential development.
18. The approached included:
 - Analysis of the existing residential character statements from 2001.
 - Identify what has changed, if anything, from the character statements using site analysis observations.

- Analyse site development characteristics on private property within the study area using GIS, aerial photography, site inspections (from public land only), such as setbacks, site coverage, level of useable private open space, private vegetation cover.
- Make observations in relation to development in the area and the impacts this may have had on residential character based on land development data and trends.
- Identify the threat of continued infill development on the established neighbourhood character and the potential need for planning controls.
- Utilise existing council data on street trees such as location, species, height, age to build up a picture of how vegetation plays a role for character in the study area.
- Analyse the findings and make recommendations including potential planning controls for these areas, such as overlays, residential zone schedules, local variations or zones.

19. At the Help Shape the Place engagement consultation the planners from Hansen outlined their observations and findings on the character of Barwon Heads for feedback. The elements of residential character participants identified were:

Most important

- Landscape (lack of landscaping was a key concern, retention of trees)
- Materials (no face brickwork, weatherboard, timber)
- Site Coverage / Permeability
- Avoiding 'boxy' or 'heavy' forms
- Dominant garages and access ways
- Front setback (to allow for landscaping)

Somewhat important

- Response to context, (i.e. not houses you could find anywhere)
- Side setbacks
- Height (human scale)
- Low fences
- Informal streetscapes

20. An activity with images of houses from Barwon Heads helped us to further explore character:

Houses that 'fit':



21. Notable features of these dwellings there are no dominant garages and where these do front the street they are open; vegetation characterises many of them, and pitched roofs are also strongly represented. With one notable exception there are no fences provided.

Houses that don't 'fit':



22. These dwellings are predominantly characterised by a lack of landscaping, bulky forms or dominant garages. Interestingly, a low height or modest footprint were not sufficient guarantees of 'fit' with Barwon Heads' character from stakeholder perspectives, nor was a particular roof type.
23. Notable was the broad range of dwellings which the attendees identified as 'fitting', and the greater consistency among responses as to those which did not 'fit'.
24. Attendees were also asked to mark on a scale what level of control they would be comfortable with, from 'lots' of controls meaning a planning permit for everyone, to no change from the current controls. One attendee preferred not much control and a couple identified lots, however, the majority of attendees felt there was a need for 'some' controls but that this should be targeted to key areas only.

Findings:

25. The final Character Assessment notes that Barwon Heads has a unique coastal character that is recognised by its setting and function as a coastal 'village'.
26. The character assessment confirms that there has been significant infill occurring in Barwon Heads over recent years, however, contrary to the perceived community impression, most dwellings (75%) that are being constructed are not increasing densities, but the replacement of a smaller single dwelling with a larger footprint dwelling.
27. Hansen found that the residential and landscape character of Barwon Heads is mixed and heavily reliant on the public realm. Despite the mixed character, Barwon Heads has seen incremental erosion of its 'coastal character' over the last few decades and this trend will continue without the application of controls to manage built form.
28. As with many small coastal settlements, the study found that there is a clear 'perception' of character which differs somewhat from the actual 'existing' character. There are still examples of the 'traditional' Barwon Heads buildings but these are in the minority.
29. Whilst there are differences in the existing character of residential areas through Barwon Heads, other than for a couple of areas, the neighbourhood character is very mixed and does not warrant individual statements of future character. The majority of the town should evolve in a similar way in terms of a preferred future character. There is no need for precinct based character statements to try to retain distinctions between particular areas. The aim should be to provide high quality 'coastal' design in all parts of the township and achieve a preferred future character.

30. It is noted that at the same time that the character study was concluding the state government introduced new residential zones via VC110 which include a new 11m mandatory height limit in the GRZ, a mandatory 9m height limit in the NRZ and the introduction of mandatory 'garden areas' (noting these may be paved). As a result, the final zone controls do not directly reflect the recommendations of the Hansen work.
31. Two vegetation studies were also undertaken:
1. **Significant Residential Tree Assessment: Warrenbeen Court, Barwon Heads, Victoria, Ecology & Partners Pty Ltd, October 2016**
 2. **Rural Significant Tree Assessment: Barwon Heads, Victoria, Ecology & Partners Pty Ltd, February 2017**
 - The Warrenbeen Court area includes Warrenbeen Court and a small part of Saratoga Avenue. It is a residential area that is located within a unique vegetation and landscape setting.
 - Taits Road west of the settlement boundary is located within the Farming Zone.
 - Council commissioned Ecology Heritage Partners to conduct a significant tree assessment within private land at Warrenbeen Court completed in October 2016 and for land in rural areas north of Taits Road completed in February 2017.
 - Remnant indigenous vegetation in both areas are representative of the Ecological Vegetation Class: Coastal Alkaline Scrub (EVC 858). The area contains indigenous vegetation of State significance, listed as threatened under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 and endangered within the Otway Plain bioregion.
32. Landowners in the area were directly notified by letter as part of the engagement activities. During the draft structure plan engagement, the proposed ESO was available. This resulted in four objections being received. In summary the objections include that there is an expectation of development when the covenant restrictions are removed; there are already exemptions for removal of trees through bushfire exemptions; a VPO would be more appropriate; and there are issues with the cost of maintenance in the rural areas.

Conclusion

33. The City has undertaken a robust process to prepare the structure plan that goes beyond the engagement activities ordinarily undertaken as part of our structure planning program. All the issues are known and have been considered as part of the preparation of the structure plan.