MAHERS HILL
MASTERPLAN

PLANNING FOR THE WODONGA HILLS

OCTOBER 2017
Master planning for the Wodonga hills has been guided by the eight management objectives and related set of guiding management principles applying to all the hills. See Appendix 1. These establish the preferred approach or “decision framework” to management and use of the hills.

The actions identified in this masterplan have been formulated in accordance with these objectives and guiding principles, as well as in recognition of the hill’s particular values and other characteristics (notably proximity to residential areas and accessibility, management track network, terrain, usage patterns, current facilities, biodiversity values, fire hazard management, and management regime).

Together the site-specific actions and the overall actions identified for all the Wodonga hills, will guide the planning, use, enhancement and management of the Wodonga hills.

Individual actions are described in Section 2.2, and shown in Figure 1 (along with “typical” or “example” images illustrating each strategy).
1.1 MAHERS HILL

Mahers Hill is located at Ebden, approximately 12km east to south-east of the Wodonga city centre. It is presently beyond the current urban area.

It is located in close proximity to Lake Hume and the High Country Rail Trail and is entirely owned and managed by the council.
THE VISION
Within the context of the overall Planning for the Wodonga Hills Strategy, this masterplan for Mahers Hill is founded on the hill’s more distant location from the Wodonga urban area, with limited access and no well-established use patterns, as well as its rugged nature with a steep central spine offering stunning views and challenges for more adventurous visitors. Mahers Hill’s position adjacent to Lake Hume and the High Country Rail Trail, its largely uniform remnant vegetation type (dominated by a single endangered vegetation community) but extensive weed infestations and the need for the council to efficiently target its limited resources across all five hills are other factors that have helped shaped the directions identified for Mahers Hill.

A strong focus of the masterplan is to improve the environmental condition of Mahers Hill. In addition to securing improved biodiversity outcomes and enhancing the area’s landscape values, these measures will improve the hill’s appeal for leisure and recreation use. These measures are in addition to the overall “biodiversity and bushland management” objectives identified in the strategy. The council will liaise with the Country Fire Authority regarding mitigating bushfire risks around revegetation and biodiversity enhancement areas.

A central proposal of the masterplan is to link the high narrow ridgeline and sweeping views from the Mahers Hill summit to the High Country Rail Trail as a challenging, but rewarding, loop walk. Such a route could largely be provided using existing management tracks, with some minor new works required on the ascents and descents at each end. While the southern link to the rail trail is already in place, the northern connection would have to be established through an unmade road reserve. At the Mahers Hill summit, the masterplan envisages only minor changes, with low-key facilities for a small rest stop provided in the nearby tree grove and safer access to and at the trig station viewing point.

This loop route could, potentially, also be available for equestrian use (but not for mountain biking) depending on safety and other factors. The masterplan provides for horse riding and mountain biking on parts of the hill’s management track network.

The Lees Lane access point is proposed as the location for a possible small entry and facility site to serve as the main entry hub for most users driving to Mahers Hill, offering car parking, shelter, seating, orientation information and amenity plantings. A new walkers-only track between this point and the hill’s summit and lookout summit is also a future possibility.

The masterplan does not provide for four-wheel-driving or trailbike riding as independent activities on Mahers Hill. However, organised commercial tourism and “adventure or challenge” uses/and events - such as horse-riding tours, equestrian competitions, or “trail running” events - could be undertaken on a permit or approvals basis where consistent with the overall actions identified for all the Wodonga Hills.
FIGURE 1
Mahers Hill Masterplan

CONCEPT ONLY
Weed Control Measures (all areas)
1. ongoing weed (blackberry in arctic) and pest animal control

Horse Riding / Mountain Biking
2. use existing management tracks for horse riding and mountain biking (except where excluded for safety & environmental reasons) visitors on foot

Borrow Pit / Quarry Rehabilitation
4. rehabilitation of existing borrow pit on NE boundary

Endangered Plant Community - Regeneration and Revegetation
3. reinforce and extend existing native vegetation areas (particularly on steeper slopes)

Loop Route (with High Country Rail Trail)
5. use existing management tracks on the summit and with new links via NE and SE corners to High Country Rail Trail to create a loop track for visitors on foot (and potentially for horse riding)

Low Key Lookout and Picnic Site
6. new facilities (seating and interpretive signage) at summit, and safe lookout access

Revegetation and Creekline Stabilisation
7. new plantings to stabilise eroded creeklines

LEGEND - existing
- Management tracks suitable for shared use
- Navigable tracks
- High Country Rail Trail (offsite)
- Upgrade or amendment to existing facility or action ID #
  (refer sample photos for conceptual ideas)
- Wodonga City Council managed

proposed
- walking track
- new facility
- new facility or action ID #
  (refer sample photos for conceptual ideas)

Note:
This plan is to be read in conjunction with the supporting documentation.
Notes:
See supporting documents for photo credits and sources.

Small Entry Node & Facilty Site
8. new entry node with parking, shelter, seating and orientation information (as demand warrants)

Walking Track
9. new link to summit from Lees Rd entry (as demand warrants)

PLANNING for Wodonga Hills
MAHERS HILL Master Plan
Prepared by Gantaras Consulting / 9 OCTOBER 2017
2.2
SPECIFIC ACTIONS FOR MAHERS HILL

This masterplan proposes 11 actions to enhance the enjoyment, conservation, landscape value and management of Mahers Hill over the short to mid-term.

These actions and directions are specific to Mahers Hill, however, the 45 overall actions applicable to all the Wodonga hills - as described in the strategy - will also apply.

Actions 1 and 2 relate to Mahers Hill as a whole, while actions 3 to 11 apply to specific sites, areas or corridors within Mahers Hill - as shown on Figure 1, and including “typical” or “example” images to further illustrate the intent, appearance or scale of each of the proposed actions. Actions 10 and 11 would only be implemented when leisure and recreation use levels and/or demand warrants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION 1</th>
<th>BLACKBERRY AND OTHER WEED/PEST CONTROL PROGRAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue targeted control efforts for pest plants and animals, particularly blackberry, across Mahers Hill. (Short term, then ongoing)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION 2</th>
<th>HORSE RIDING AND MOUNTAIN BIKING ON MANAGEMENT TRACKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Management tracks on Mahers Hill will be available for shared use – for horse riding and mountain biking (or cycling) as well as for visitors on foot (walkers, joggers, etc.). Equestrian and mountain bike use of the management track network will be periodically reviewed - in terms of safety issues, conflicts with other users, environmental impacts (especially weed spread), and impacts on track surfaces and maintenance requirements, incidence of off-track riding and informal track creation, and demands on the council’s management resources. Management tracks may be identified as unsuitable, or not recommended, for mountain biking or horse-riding due to steep terrain, surface conditions, or other hazards. Provision for horse trailers will need to be made.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION 3</th>
<th>REGENERATION/REVEGETATION OF ENDANGERED GRASSY WOODLAND, NORTH-WEST SLOPES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increase the extent, continuity and condition of the endangered Grassy Woodland community along the higher sections of the northern half of the hill’s west facing slopes - via promoting regeneration (through grazing management, weed control, fire regime, etc.) supported by targeted revegetation and habitat restoration. Revegetation priority to steeper slopes. Additional fencing will be required across this areas to exclude stock and manage controlled grazing as and when required.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION 4</th>
<th>BORROW PIT OR QUARRY REHABILITATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Liaise with the neighbouring landholder to undertake rehabilitation of a large borrow pit (or quarry) excavated on/inside the north-eastern boundary of Mahers Hill - mostly within council land.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**ACTION 5**  LOOP ROUTE, HIGH COUNTRY RAIL TRAIL AND MAHERS HILL SUMMIT

Establish and signpost a loop walking route from the High Country Rail Trail to and from the Mahers Hill summit. This route would access the hill at the north-east and south-east corners, and use former vehicle tracks to ascend and descend at each end of the central ridge. Small sections of new track may be warranted at each ascent/and descent to make these routes more direct. This route would then use the management track(s) along the narrow steep-sided central ridge to and from the summit and main vantage point. An access corridor between the Murray Valley Highway (and High Country Rail Trail along the highway’s eastern side) and the base of the hill already exists in the south-east corner. However, the north-eastern access point would need to be established, using an unmade road reserve (at present “fenced-in” by the adjacent landholder). Warning signs would be required on the Murray Valley Highway on the approaches to both crossing points. Investigate the suitability of this loop also being available for use by horse riders - if gradients, track surface and other safety or impact considerations allow. Due to probable speeds on downhill sections and the potential for conflict with walkers (and horse riders), the ascent and descent sections of this track will not be open for mountain biking.

**ACTION 6**  LOW-KEY LOOKOUT AND PICNIC/REST SITE – MAHERS HILL SUMMIT

Provide limited low-key picnic and rest facilities (platform tables or seating and interpretive signage) at the summit of Mahers Hill, in the attractive copse of trees with western views located on the small bench just below (west of) the summit. Provide a clear and stable walking route to, and at, the summit and trig lookout point (now situated on a knoll of loose rocks and tall grass).

**ACTION 7**  REVEGETATION AND CREEKLINE STABILISATION - ERODED NORTH-WESTERN CREEK

Stabilise and revegetate an eroded section of drainage line downstream of the large dams on the hill's flatter north-western boundary. Revegetate using Grassy Woodland and Valley Grassy Forest community species.

**ACTION 8**  REVEGETATION AND CREEKLINE STABILISATION – ERODED CENTRAL WESTERN CREEK

Stabilise and revegetate an eroded section of drainage line (and eroded crossing by the north-south management track) in centre of the hill's flatter western boundary. Revegetate using Grassy Woodland community species.

**ACTION 9**  REVEGETATION AND CREEKLINE STABILISATION - ERODED SOUTH-WESTERN CREEK

Stabilise and revegetate a long section of eroded drainage line on the hill's flatter south-western boundary. Revegetate using Grassy Woodland community species.

**ACTION 10**  SMALL ENTRY NODE AND FACILITY SITE - LEES LANE (WHEN USE AND DEMAND WARRANTS)

When usage levels and/or demand warrants, establish a small entry node and facility site - with a defined and contained parking area, shelter, seating and orientation information - just inside the hill's north-western boundary off the end of Lees Lane, to serve as the hill's main vehicle access point for users and a hub from where people can radiate out across Mahers Hill. Provide screening and amenity plantings, and realign fencing and entry gates as necessary. Locate to allow sufficient room for possible future expansion, if and when warranted.

**ACTION 11**  NEW WALKING TRACK TO MAHERS HILL SUMMIT (WHEN USE/DEMAND WARRANTS)

Investigate a possible route for a walking track to the Mahers Hill summit from the proposed Lees Lane entry node and facility site (see action 10). Leading off the existing management track (east from the proposed Lees Lane entry node and facility site) upslope of the large dam, then heading south-east up a gentle to moderately sloped spur with open timber (through the Grassy Woodland community regeneration zone - see action 3) to rejoin the management track network just north of the summit and lookout point. This track would provide an alternative, walkers only, route most of the way to and from the summit and lookout. Establishment of this track, with signposting and supplementary amenity and screening plantings, would only progress when usage levels and/or demand warrants (and preferably in conjunction with, or following, provision of the proposed Lees Lane entry node and facility site).
3.1 SUBSEQUENT PLANNING FOR MAHERS HILL

Planning for Mahers Hill will be a long-term and ongoing process. Not all the directions or possibilities for the hill’s greater use and enjoyment, or improved protection and management, can or need to be realised in the short term or foreseeable future. Some actions (10 and 11) will only be required when there is a demonstrated increase in user numbers or demand for access to and enjoyment of Mahers Hill.

Significantly, in the short term, no major growth in the local population, or user catchment, is forecast for the areas surrounding Mahers Hill. Also this masterplan only proposes minor changes to the leisure and recreation use pattern and profile of the hill, and the provision of only a few scattered and low-key facilities.

In light of the limited likelihood of any major changes to the sustainable use and management circumstances at Mahers Hill, no additional opportunities or options have been identified that warrant possible future consideration for the hill (beyond those short to mid-term items set out in this masterplan). This is consistent with the masterplan’s intention to hold Mahers Hill “in reserve” allowing the area’s longer term use and management to be considered more closely at some future time using then more contemporary and accurate information. This future planning stage would require the preparation of a new, or substantially revised, masterplan.

However, one issue warranting further investigation in the interim is a possible former rifle range, used by the military during World War II and possibly by recreational shooters at times thereafter, which is rumoured to have been located on the western slopes of Mahers Hill. The existence and location of this possible range warrants confirmation prior to any major increases in the hill’s public access and use.
APPENDIX 1

OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Master planning of the Wodonga Hills has been guided by the seven management objectives and related set of guiding management principles applying to all the Wodonga hills.

As described in the strategy, the eight objectives that shape planning for the Wodonga Hills encompass:

1. Sustainable management and enjoyment;
2. Biodiversity and habitat values;
3. Aboriginal cultural heritage values;
4. Visitor, neighbour and community safety;
5. Landscape and scenic values;
6. Accessibility, connection and integration;
7. Leisure, recreation and tourism; and,
8. Awareness, appreciation and understanding.

Each of these eight objectives, supported by a set of guiding principles, establish the preferred approach or “decision framework” to management and use of the hills.

A set of overall actions provide directions and guidelines for key planning and management challenges or issues that are likely to be common across all hills.

These are detailed in full in the strategy.