Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017
8 - Officers reports for determination  Item 8.2 - Document B

NATURE ON YOUR DOORSTEP
Planning for the Wodonga Hills

OCTOBER 2017
## Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017

8 - Officers reports for determination  

### Item 8.2 - Document B

**CONTROLLED DOCUMENT**

Planning for the Wodonga Hills Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Version</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V1</td>
<td>17 November 2016</td>
<td>Mock up for format review only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V2</td>
<td>29 November 2016</td>
<td>Draft for review, after CoW comments on format (V1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V3</td>
<td>11 January 2017</td>
<td>Revised draft, incorporating CoW comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V4</td>
<td>27 February 2017</td>
<td>Revised (Final) Draft, incorporating further CoW comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V5</td>
<td>20 July 2017</td>
<td>Revised for exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V6</td>
<td>10 October 2017</td>
<td>Revised for adoption</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prepared by: Alan Ginns and Pamela Fletcher
Specialist: MapInfo, design, mapping & graphics input by: Pamela Fletcher, Registered Landscape Architect
Masterplan preparation by: Pamela Fletcher, Registered Landscape Architect
Reviewed by: Andrew Ginns and Alan Ginns

Issued by: Alan Ginns

This Planning for the Wodonga Hills Strategy for Wodonga Council was prepared by:

*Gondwana Consulting Pty Ltd*

P.O. Box 505
Narrabeen, NSW 2101
Phone: (02) 9913 3720 or (02) 9944 6263
E-mail: admin@gondwanaconsulting.com.au

gondwanaconsulting.com.au
Wodonga Council acknowledges the traditional owners of this land on which we stand and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future, for they hold the memories, the tradition and the culture of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.
CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION .............................................................................................................. 6

1. BACKGROUND ........................................................................................................ 11
   1.1 Background ........................................................................................................ 12
   1.2 Why Prepare a Strategy for the Wodonga Hills? .................................................. 14
   1.3 The Wodonga Hills – Location and Land Tenure ................................................. 16
   1.4 The Wodonga Hills – Values and Context .......................................................... 22
   1.5 Planning for the Wodonga Hills – this strategy and related documents .............. 30

2. OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES ......................................................... 33

3. ACTION PLAN FOR ALL OF THE HILLS ................................................................. 41
   3.1 Actions for all the Wodonga hills ....................................................................... 42
       3.1.1 General ....................................................................................................... 44
       3.1.2 Biodiversity and Bushland Management ..................................................... 45
       3.1.3 Fire Hazard Management and User Safety ................................................. 47
       3.1.4 Access, Information and Orientation .......................................................... 48
       3.1.5 Track and Trail Planning and Management ............................................... 49
       3.1.6 Managing for Users .................................................................................. 51
       3.1.7 Events and Tourism .................................................................................. 52
   3.2 The “Four Hills Trail” – a flagship initiative ....................................................... 54

4. FIVE HILLS - DISTINCT BUT UNIFIED ............................................................... 57
   4.1 Klings Hill - Rugged High Points and Habitat ..................................................... 58
   4.2 Federation Hill - Local Leisure and Fitness ...................................................... 62
   4.3 Beara Hill - Short Woodland Walks .................................................................... 66
   4.4 Huon Hill - Lookouts and Loop Walks .............................................................. 70
   4.5 Mahers Hill - Quiet, Steep, Rewarding Views ................................................... 74

5. IMPLEMENTATION .................................................................................................. 79
LIST OF FIGURES
1. The six Wodonga hills that make up the strategy's "study area" .................................................. 17
2. Hunchback Hill Complex – land tenure ......................................................................................... 17
3. Bears Hill – land tenure .................................................................................................................. 19
4. Huon Hill – land tenure .................................................................................................................. 20
5. Clearing of native vegetation communities in the city of Wodonga, 1750 to 2005, and the five Wodonga hills (all tenures) .................................................................................................................. 24
6. Planning for Wodonga hills Vegetation offset sites ........................................................................ 25
7. Residential estates, under development or with approved development plans, in proximity to the Wodonga hills .................................................................................................................................................. 27
8. Potential open space links, as identified by the Wodonga Growth Strategy .................................... 29
9. Planning for the Wodonga hills - document hierarchy .................................................................. 31
10. Potential “Four Hills Trail” (indicative route only) ....................................................................... 56
11. Assessment and approval process for works .................................................................................. 82

LIST OF TABLES
1. Wodonga hills - Land Tenure (City of Wodonga Lands Highlighted) ............................................. 18
2. Recorded Threatened Flora and Fauna Species ............................................................................. 23
INTRODUCTION

The Planning for the Wodonga Hills strategy and masterplans are a set of guiding documents to govern the co-ordinated and considered approach to the management of the hills that provide the unique and scenic backdrop to our city.

The strategy aims to realise the long-term potential of the Wodonga hills for both their environmental and community significance.

The Wodonga hills are an intrinsic part of the city's character and sense of place, setting it apart from other regional centres. They are a wonderful scenic, environmental and economic asset to the city, offering a key lifestyle element, with significant potential to protect and support environmental and recreational outcomes.

Much of the land that makes up the Wodonga hills was transferred into public ownership in 2000.

Since then, the council has moved to implement planning controls that prevent and discourage encroachment of residential development into the hills. This ensures that these valuable assets are protected from urban development for current and future generations.

Since 2000, as the population of the city has increased, so too has the demand for recreation and access to these hills. A variety of activities currently occur across the hills including walking, running, cycling and mountain bike riding, sightseeing and athletics and fitness training events. There is unfortunately also an element of misuse, with antisocial behaviour and vandalism common across most sites.

The council is responsible for maintaining and protecting some, but not all, of these hilltops, however, overall policy, planning and strategic direction for the future use and collective management of the hills - both council-owned and that of other stakeholders - has not occurred.

The aim of the strategy is to manage and encourage enjoyment by the community of the Wodonga hills in a manner that is sustainable, accessible and protects and enhances their recognised biodiversity, cultural heritage, scenic and recreational values.

The development of the strategy was more than 12 months in the planning, as set out in the diagram on the next page.

The strategy outlines objective, principles and actions to guide the management and enjoyment of the hills. It does not replace or usurp documents already in place that govern the planning controls over the hills, like the Wodonga Planning Scheme.

While it recognises user, neighbour and community safety as a key focus area, it is not the key document to provide guidance on emergency management of the hills which are separately covered in detailed fire management plans that sit over the hills as well as the Municipal Emergency Management Plan.
8 - Officers reports for determination

Item 8.2 - Document B

HILLS STRATEGY AND MASTERPLANS

GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Sustainable use and management
- Biodiversity and habitat values
- Aboriginal cultural heritage values
- User, neighbour and community safety
- Landscape and scenic values
- Accessibility, connection and integration
- Leisure, recreation and tourism
- Awareness, appreciation and understanding

OVERALL STRATEGY AREAS
- General
- Biodiversity and bushland management
- Fire hazard management and user safety
- Access, information and orientation
- Track and trail planning and management
- Managing for users
- Events and tourism

Final draft

Presented to council meeting
If adopted
Commence implementation plan (assessments)

Informs

Annual budget process
Informs

Implementation of individual and specific projects. Each project would be subject to the relevant regulatory planning, environmental and cultural controls

CONSULTATION POINTS

July-September 2016
- Online forums
- 4 x information sessions

March 2017
- Online forum
- 8 x workshops
- Community forum

August- September 2017
- 4-week exhibition period
Objectives

Eight objectives are articulated within the strategy at Chapter 2 and the council will continue to engage with hill users, neighbours, stakeholders, other land managers, and the wider communities to ensure in the planning for these hills, these are met.

The objectives are:

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

Assessment and approval process

Chapter 5 of the strategy sets out a process for the implementation of new initiatives that includes undertaking any necessary assessments and approvals such as environmental or cultural heritage assessments.

Such assessments and approvals will inform the final design and layout of any new initiatives and will further assist in building up biodiversity knowledge to inform management.

The final section within the main Planning for the Wodonga Hills document sets out an indicative assessment and approval process for major projects.

This diagram (on the next page) clearly represents the steps to be followed in scoping and prioritising new projects, consulting with the community, seeking all necessary approvals and funding for these projects.

This would typically apply to actions involving construction or works to create significant new features (such as a new car park or lookout platform, or larger facilities). It would generally not apply to routine management actions, the maintenance or minor upgrade of existing features, or the installation of minor new features (such as seating or a low-key picnic site).

It is proposed this strategy, and the individual masterplans for each hill, will be revised periodically as required by changing circumstances having implications for the hill’s enjoyment, protection and management. These revisions would also provide the chance to review the actions already implemented and their effectiveness. Importantly, the review and preparation of these documents would enable further opportunities for user, neighbour and community involvement and input into the future of the Wodonga hills.
ASSESSMENT AND APPROVAL PROCESS FOR WORKS

Engage relevant stakeholders where required (e.g. potentially adjoining residents, traditional owners, user groups, emergency management agencies). Refine designs and include exhibition stage for community feedback as appropriate.

Action identified as a priority in the Planning for Wodonga Hills Strategy or specific masterplan, or acknowledged as an opportunity or option of a new initiative warranting implementation

Project justification and preliminary design and cost estimates

Identification of required approvals (e.g. council approval, planning permit, cultural heritage assessments, external agency concurrence or approval). Liaison with affected land managers as required.

Confirm funding - internal and/or external

 Undertake required site, environmental and planning assessments

Obtain any formal approvals. (If internal council approval only, ensure evaluation against the guiding principles set out in the strategy)

Obtain external agency concurrence or approvals as required (e.g. Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; or Aboriginal Victoria)

Undertake detailed design, including requirements or conditions arising from approvals.

Implementation
1. BACKGROUND
1.1 BACKGROUND

The Wodonga hills are one of the “great legacies” of the Albury Wodonga Development Corporation (AWDC). Today the ring of hills that form an amphitheatre or backdrop to much of the Wodonga urban area and surrounds are highly valued scenic, conservation and community assets.

The Wodonga hills comprise a loose ring of four hills to the south, west and east of the Wodonga CBD as well as two more outlying “hills” to the south-east (at the end of the Baranduda Range and beside Lake Hume).

The hills were acquired by the AWDC during the 1970s, for “landscape protection,” as part of planning and development of the Albury Wodonga Growth Centre. The concept of the hills forming part of a major regional parkland – offering open space, landscape, recreation and conservation benefits – gathered popularity during the mid-1990s. In November 1997, the Wodonga community reasserted its strong support for retaining the undeveloped character of the hills for their scenic qualities and community benefit.

Consequently, Wodonga Council and the AWDC negotiated the transfer of selected areas to council ownership and management. In June 2000 much of the lands now making up the Wodonga hills were transferred to Wodonga Council. The AWDC also “gifted” some areas to the Crown, with these Crown lands under the care of Parklands Albury Wodonga (PAW) as the appointed Committee of Management. PAW is a community-based not-for-profit organisation focused on undertaking recreation, conservation, and heritage projects across both the Albury and Wodonga areas.

Over time, as subdivision and land development has progressed adjacent to the hills, additional areas have also been reserved and added to the hills estate.

Commonwealth land, managed by the Department of Defence, and a small area managed by Parks Victoria also make up part of today’s hills lands. Some areas also remain in private ownership.

The council’s approach has been to protect the hills from urban development and loss of visual amenity by placing planning controls on the height to which development can occur along the toe and lower slopes of the Wodonga hills. This pioneering policy approach has been successful in protecting the landscape dominance, biodiversity values and scenic contribution of the hills, as well as safe-guarding their recreation and leisure potential.

The conservation value of several hills has also been reinforced by the council’s proactive approach to protecting remnant "environmental lands" and ensuring the retention of vegetated corridors during the land development planning and subdivision process – notably through native vegetation offset schemes and the Wodonga Retained Environment Network (WREN) Strategy. The
hills themselves contain significant remnants of native vegetation now cleared from much of the surrounding Wodonga area, provide habitat for threatened species and are key links or refuges in a reserve network providing connectivity across the wider landscape.

Today the Wodonga hills are also valued as a fundamental part of the city’s character, and contribute much to its sense of place and identity. They offer numerous recreational and leisure opportunities, and add to the city’s suite of attractions and lifestyle for residents and visitors alike.

While they are valued by the community by comparison planning for community access and use of the hills has been limited. For the most part, the hills have very little in terms of formalised access, recreation or community facilities. People using the hills usually do so by taking advantage of other management infrastructure, such as service tracks. There are limited opportunities to venture beyond the urban edge, and many users do not.

The council’s management activities and investment has been primarily focused on vegetation and fire hazard management - with fencing, management access, weed control and scattered revegetation efforts to date taking precedence over measures to support or encourage recreation and visitation. FAW has placed a higher emphasis on providing for recreational use of the lands they manage, primarily working with user groups to initially develop facilities, but with sometimes sporadic or limited follow-up management. In places some uses of the hills are unplanned or unmanaged, with this often having negative impacts on an area’s biodiversity, scenic or other values.

However, the overall policy, planning and strategic directions for the future management and use of the hills, as a group and individually, by all managers could be improved.

The hills include Aboriginal cultural heritage values and locations of Aboriginal cultural sensitivity.

The Murray River at Albury-Wodonga is shared by the Wiradjuri and the Dhudhuroa peoples. As such, the Wodonga area has a rich Aboriginal heritage which stretches from present day back many thousands of years.

Wiradjuri territory is to the north of the Murray River, while Dhudhuroa territory is south of the river through to the high country. The Wodonga area - including the hills but particularly the Kiewa River and its valley - has a history as an important route for seasonal travel, particularly in summer, when several tribes - including both Wiradjuri and Dhudhuroa people - would meet at an annual gathering upstream from Albury in preparation for the long trek to the high plains where Bogong Moths could be collected and eaten. Historically, this Bogong Moth annual gathering, trek and feast supported tribal interactions and ceremonies including corroborees, story-telling, marriage arrangements, trade and the settling of disputes.

The present day Aboriginal heritage of the Wodonga area, as in the past, continues to benefit from the bringing together of different tribes. These days the Albury-Wodonga Aboriginal community consists of Aboriginal people from diverse regions and tribal backgrounds due, in part, to Albury’s selection in 1972 to be part of the Families Resettlement Scheme. The exchange of ideas, coupled with acknowledgment of local traditional owners has seen increased visibility of cultural traditions in the wider community.

Aboriginal cultural sites and artefacts are an important contributor to the identity and culture of the local Aboriginal community today.
1.2 WHY PLAN FOR THE WODONGA HILLS?

The Wodonga hills are an intrinsic part of the city’s character and sense of place, setting it apart from other regional centres. They are highly valued scenic, conservation and community assets, recognised as a key lifestyle element for the city, with enormous capacity to support biodiversity and recreational experiences.

Six hills form a ring around our city – on our west we have the Hunchback Hill complex, to the south is Federation Hill, Bears Hill and Baranduda Range and on the east is Huon Hill. Further out to the east is Mahers Hill, on the banks of Lake Hume.

Much of the land that makes up the Wodonga hills was transferred into public ownership in 2000 by the AWOs - who acquired it during the 1970s for “landscape protection” as part of planning for the growth of the region. Today this land is managed by multiple land managers, including council, Parklands Albury Wodonga, Department of Defence, Parks Victoria with some remaining in private ownership.

Since 2000 a pioneering planning policy approach has been successful in protecting the landscape dominance, biodiversity values and scenic contribution of the hills, as well as safeguarding their recreation and leisure potential, in the context of significant urban growth.

In this time the conservation value of several hills has also been reinforced by the council’s pro-active approach to protecting remnant "environmental lands" and ensuring the retention of vegetated corridors during the land development process - notably through native vegetation offset schemes and the Wodonga Retained Environment Network (WREN) Strategy.

However, the overall policy, planning and strategic directions for the future management and use of the hills, as a group and individually, by all managers could be improved.
As the population of the city has increased so too has the demand for access to the hills. A variety of activities currently occur across the hills including walking, running, cycling and mountain bike riding, sightseeing and athletics and fitness training events.

For the most part, the hills have very little in terms of formalised access, recreation or community facilities. People using the hills usually do so by taking advantage of other management infrastructure, such as service tracks. There are limited opportunities to venture beyond the urban edge. As such, many uses of the hills are unplanned or unmanaged, often having negative impacts on an area’s biodiversity, scenic or other values. There is also an element of misuse, with antisocial behaviour and vandalism commonly observed.

Managing natural environments on the margin of urban areas presents a host of challenges - especially where these places are extremely accessible, subject to increasing usage pressures, contain high conservation value features, are very prominent in the landscape, and present seasonal fire risks. Recognising and balancing these sometimes competing values, uses and risks is the challenge of the Wodonga hills.

The council has recognised that careful, thorough and co-ordinated planning is required to identify strategic directions to fully and responsibly realise the hills’ potential for community enjoyment while protecting and enhancing these valuable areas into the future.

Setting the Wodonga hills aside from development was an act of great foresight by the AWDC, and has created a lasting legacy for the community and the council. This legacy was, and continues to be, built on through the many revegetation efforts and other environmental initiatives which have enhanced several of the hills’ landscape, scenic and biodiversity values.

Providing improved and sustainable access and infrastructure for community enjoyment of these areas will be the next great step forward in management of the Wodonga hills that will generate ongoing benefits for the local and wider community, both now and into the future.
1.3 WODONGA HILLS - LOCATION AND LAND TENURE

The subject lands encompass those areas owned and managed by Wodonga Council across five of the six Wodonga Hills. These are, as shown on Figure 1 (from west to east):

- Klings Hill (adjoining Mcfarlane's Hill and Swainson Reserve, all of which are colloquially referred to as the Hunchback Hill Complex);
- Federation Hill;
- Bears Hill;
- Huan Hill; and,
- Mahers Hill.

Klings Hill (within the Hunchback Hill Complex), and Federation, Bears and Huan hills, rise from the Murray and Kiewa floodplains. They ring the town to the south, from west to east.

Mahers Hill is located further afield to the east, adjacent to Lake Hume.

The north-eastern end of the Baranduda Range is located to the south-east of Bears Hill, as also shown on Figure 1. This area is Crown land managed by PAW.

These latter two hills are beyond the current, continuous urban area. However, the Lenawa-Baranduda urban growth area will ultimately abut the north-western side of the Baranduda Range.

The majority of Bears Hill is not owned by the council. However, together with the north-eastern end of the Baranduda Range, these two areas have been included within the broader study area - as also shown on Figure 1.

Assessments of the values, assets and other attributes of each of the six Wodonga hills - within the study area - have helped shape this strategy's, and the related masterplans, directions.

Of the six Wodonga Hills only Federation Hill and Mahers Hill are entirely owned and managed by Wodonga Council. Several other tenures occur, to varying extents, across the remaining four hills - as shown in Table 1.
The Hunchback Hill Complex is split between council land and Crown land, as shown on Figure 2 (also see Table 1). This area of Crown land is administered by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning but managed by PAW as the appointed Committee of Management.

The north-eastern end of the Baranduda Range is popularly recognised as one of the six “Wodonga hills”. Almost all of this “hill” is Crown land with PAW, the appointed Committee of Management. Only a few narrow corridors of lower-lying Wodonga Council lands connect the surrounding urban areas to the base of the range (see Table 1).

Should the volume or nature of usage Baranduda Range change these council-managed areas may become important gateways to the range. Collaborative planning for future entrance and access need in this location will be vital.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hill</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Wodonga Council</th>
<th>Crown Land (managed by Parklands Albury Wodonga)</th>
<th>Commonwealth Land (Dept of Defence)</th>
<th>Parks Victoria</th>
<th>Private</th>
<th>Size (Total Hectares)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Killings Hill - Hunchback Hill Complex</td>
<td>West Wodonga - approximately 5.5km west of the Wodonga CBD</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>358.85 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>358.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McFarlanes Hill and Swainsons Crown land - Hunchback Hill Complex</td>
<td>West Wodonga - approximately 5.5km west of the Wodonga CBD</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>‍</td>
<td>228.67 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>228.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation Hill</td>
<td>Wodonga - approximately 4km west / south west of the Wodonga CBD</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>345.7 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>345.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beears Hill</td>
<td>Leneva - approximately 2.5km south / south east of the Wodonga CBD</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>37.12 Ha</td>
<td>19.92 Ha</td>
<td>131.89 Ha</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>107.77 [37.12]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huon Hill</td>
<td>Bandiana - approximately 2.7km east of the Wodonga CBD</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>387.27 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td>28.26 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td>415.90 [387.27]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baranduda Range - north-eastern end</td>
<td>Baranduda - approximately 8.5km south-south east of the Wodonga CBD (beyond current urban area)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>‍</td>
<td>432.59 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>432.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baranduda Range - links to range (urban open space corridors and WW1 lands)</td>
<td>Baranduda - approximately 8.5km south-south east of the Wodonga CBD (beyond current urban area)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>39.97 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>39.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahons Hill</td>
<td>Eldan - approximately 1.2km east / south - east of the Wodonga CBD (beyond current urban area)</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>390 Ha</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>390.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL BY TENURE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1568.91 709.44 131.89 5.4 107.77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Wodonga Hills - Land Tenure (Wodonga Council lands highlighted)
Bears Hill has the most varied tenure of all the Wodonga Hills, as shown on Figure 3 (also see Table 1). Nearly half this hill, mostly the central section, is Commonwealth land (managed by the Department of Defence). A sizeable area of the south-eastern portion of Bears Hills is, at present, in private ownership. These private lands are included within the Leneva-Baranduda urban growth area and are identified as future Wodonga Retained Environment Network (WREN) lands which will ultimately come into public ownership.

Planning for the Commonwealth Crown and private lands has not been addressed in this strategy. However, the values, constraints and opportunities potentially offered by these areas have been evaluated to provide context for the council's landholding on Bears Hill as well as in planning for the wider hills.

The pivotal or central location of Bears Hill (as a whole) relative to the other Wodonga Hills and urban growth area, and its future potential, has also been recognised.

Figure 3: Bears Hill - Land tenure
Huon Hill is predominantly Wodonga Council-owned and managed land, as shown on Figure 4 (also see Table 1). A smaller, irregularly shaped, area of Crown land extends east-west along the upper section of the access road and also runs north-south in a wider band across the hill's higher peaks. This area is administered by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and managed by PAW, as the appointed Committee of Management.

The summit access road and visitor facilities are split across both Wodonga Council and PAW-managed areas. Recognising the importance, and on-ground practicalities, of managing the Huon Hill summit as a single integrated whole, this strategy and the Huon Hill Masterplan outline a collaborative approach to this summit area.

Many of the directions or actions to guide the future management of this area are "cross-boundary" actions, also requiring a holistic approach regardless of tenure or management responsibilities.

Liaison and collaboration with DELWP and PAW in relation to planning and management directions, or specific management activities, for these areas will continue to be of high priority.
1.4 WODONGA HILLS – VALUES AND CONTEXT

Planning for the Wodonga hills must be based on a sound understanding of the hill's inherent assets and values, as well as the context within which the hills' future community use and sustainable management will occur.

In overview, the key assets and values and planning context considerations for the hills as a whole include the following:

**Biological and Habitat Values**

In terms of environment, the municipality of Wodonga straddles two bioregions – areas defined by their environmental attributes, such as climate, geology, soil and vegetation. Native vegetation within the Victorian Riverina and Northern Inland Slopes Bioregions is considered moderately to highly cleared and some of the largest patches of the municipality’s remaining native vegetation is within the hilltop reserves (across all land tenures) – as demonstrated in Figure 5.

As a consequence the Wodonga hills are strategically important conservation assets within the broader landscape context.

Woodlands are the dominant vegetation types within the Wodonga area. More specifically, there are 19 different vegetation types or communities, known as Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVCs), within the city (see Figure 5). Most of these are considered either endangered or vulnerable.

Much of the native vegetation that remains in Wodonga may also meet the definition (depending on its quality) of the threatened vegetation community "White Box – Yellow Box – Blakely's Red Gum Grassy Woodland and Derived Native Grassland", listed under the Commonwealth’s Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.
Endangered grassy woodland communities are found widely across all five Wodonga hills - including larger areas on Kings, Huon and Mahers hills. As a result of the area's past grazing and other land uses, this remaining vegetation varies significantly in quality and can largely be considered a modified or a recovering ecosystem.

Despite this partial or remnant vegetation cover, the hills retain a variety of biodiversity and habitat values and features rarely found elsewhere in the regional landscape - including across those parts of the hills that appear to have been heavily modified. Especially significant are areas that retain much of the natural condition, including an intact and varied understory.

A unique environmental asset in this region are the extensive areas of tree plantings. A program known as "Forward Tree Planting" was undertaken by the Albury Wodonga Corporation between 1976 and 1996. It sought to improve environmental values in response to increasing urbanisation. Over time these plantings have been found to provide habitat for many species, most notably threatened species such as the Regent Honeyeater and Squirrel Glider. Areas of Kings, Federation, Huon, Bears and Mahers hill include such AWC plantations.

Sites subject to agreed Vegetation Offset Management Plans occur across parts of Kings, Federation, Bears and Huon hills – as shown on Figure 6. These are areas of conservation priority that provide for the protection of native vegetation as well as requiring active revegetation, or natural regeneration. These areas seek to achieve environmental gains to compensate for loss of vegetation and habitat associated with development elsewhere in Wodonga.

Nineteen terrestrial fauna species and four Flora species listed under the Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 have been recorded within Wodonga Council area. Five of these are also listed under the EPBC Act, including several considered critically endangered. Several of these threatened Flora or Fauna species have been recorded within those parts of the Wodonga hills under council's management – as listed in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wodonga Hills</th>
<th>Flora Species</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Fauna Species</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kings</td>
<td>Narrow-leaved (Euphorbia ciliata)</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Eastern Whistler (Sittellus saccularis)</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>slender stick (Eucalyptus tereticornis)</td>
<td>P</td>
<td>Brown Butterfly (Aglais urticae)</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yellow bell (Calotropis gigantea)</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Diamond Firetail (Stenoplectron galleri)</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hooded Robin (Melanodryas capilla capilla)</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lace Monitor (Vaccaria varia)</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation</td>
<td>Umbrella grass (Sphagneticola trilobata)</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>Lace Monitor (Vaccaria varia)</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bears</td>
<td>Jack in the Pulp (Ipomoea edulis)</td>
<td>V</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Recorded Threatened Flora and Fauna Species
Figure 5: Clearing of native vegetation communities in Wodonga, 1750 to 2005, and the five Wodonga NPs (all tenures) (Source: Wodonga Council, using data from the State Government of Victoria)
The hills offer potential habitat for many other threatened flora and fauna species and targeted biological surveys can be expected to identify further plant and animal species of significance.

A diversity of more common native wildlife, such as Eastern Grey kangaroos and echidnas as well as a range of woodland birds, are readily seen across all hills. Due to its more continuous vegetation cover Bears Hill is known to have an abundant birdlife, including notable woodland species.

As well as providing wildlife habitat, the hills also play an important wildlife and habitat connectivity role, and being larger vegetated or “refuge” areas they contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the broader ecosystem, particularly the WREN lands. Preserving vegetation, habitat and wildlife corridors will also become increasingly important as most hills become increasingly surrounded by residential development.

The Wodonga hills characteristic grassy woodlands - typically large remnant trees, as grand lone specimens or in groups, and areas of regrowth over an understorey of native and exotic pasture grasses - also contribute significantly to the hills’ value as a visual asset and recreation setting.
Aboriginal cultural heritage values

The hills’ heritage values include areas of Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitivity (as mapped by the Office of Aboriginal Victoria) within or on the margins of Federation and Huon Hills. Additionally the council has established a geographical database of Aboriginal sites to assist in the management of local Aboriginal cultural heritage. However, the absence of recorded sites (listed in the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register) or mapped areas of sensitivity does not mean that Aboriginal cultural heritage locations or values do not occur elsewhere across the hills. Development can pose a significant threat to Aboriginal cultural heritage values and can impact on Aboriginal objects at sites where objects are visible, as well as below the ground surface where they are not readily evident. A precautionary approach is warranted to the assessment and approval of “high impact activities” including compliance with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006.

The hills’ current environment attests to a history of grazing and other rural uses. However, the area’s historic heritage values are not well documented, although parts of the hills are known to have a varied land use history worthy of further investigation.

Landscape and Scenic Values

The hills’ significant landscape and scenic values are fundamental attributes underpinning the initial reservation of these areas and must be recognised, protected and enhanced when encouraging community access and enjoyment of these assets. Native vegetation and the scenic and landscape values of the hills play a fundamental role in attracting both locals and visitors, and enhancing their enjoyment of these areas. People who may rarely, if ever, visit the hills also still appreciate their beauty and value as Wodonga’s scenic backdrop. Protection of key visual elements, such as the hills’ remaining well vegetated slopes and avoiding the further fragmentation of these areas by facilities or developments, are central considerations. The Wodonga Planning Scheme includes controls intended to protect the scenic qualities of an area from urban development and ensure that buildings and works are sensitive to landscape values and maintain and enhance important vistas and panoramas.

Leisure, Recreation and Tourism

The Wodonga hills offer an attractive nature-based leisure, recreation and tourism setting for both local residents and visitors to Wodonga. However, opportunities to provide for and encourage sustainable community enjoyment of the hills have only been partially realised to date and have largely been undertaken in an unplanned and disjointed manner across the hills as a whole.

The Wodonga Physical Activity Strategy identifies considerable unmet demand for greater recreation and leisure access to and enjoyment of the hills. Wodonga has a young population with a high proportion of families, and consistent with this the town’s residents are on average slightly more active than other Victorians. Resident surveys have identified walking (61 per cent) and cycling (40 per cent) as locals’ top two forms of informal physical activity, with hiking and bushwalking (18 per cent) the seventh most popular activity. However, the facilities to meet these desires are limited at present.

Domestic visitors, both day and overnight, dominate Albury-Wodonga’s tourism profile with approximately half of all day visitors typically coming for holiday or leisure reasons, and many others to visit friends and relatives. Nature-based recreation activities and recreational cycling are two of the five quality experiences or key product pillars identified in Wodonga’s tourism vision. The Wodonga hills are now a largely unrealised tourism asset. They have the potential to be a major contributing attraction in the city’s nature-based recreational and recreational cycling tourism offerings. The importance of nature-based tourism to north-east Victoria is also recognised in the Hume Regional Growth Plan. In this wider regional context Albury-Wodonga also acts as a gateway to surrounding tourist destinations, offering facilities and accommodation that are not available in nearby smaller regional towns (such as Bright, Bright,)
Mount Beauty, etc.). Considering both local residents and tourists, the probable users of the Wodonga Hills are likely to fall into the following four broad categories, grouped according to the activities they want to undertake and the locations or settings they are seeking.

- Leisure seekers - chiefly people walking for leisure or fitness, dog walkers, and casual or leisure cyclists
- Fitness and training users
- Mountain bikers (a distinct but varied user group)
- Tourists - mainly independent sightseeing travellers and people visiting friends and relatives

**Awareness, Appreciation and Understanding**

Managing community awareness and tourism promotion of the hills - including information available about the attractions, experiences and activities on offer at different locations within, and between, the hills - will be an important tool in managing users and their interactions and impacts. Information and interpretation of the hills and their values is largely absent at present across all sites.

Increasing residents' and visitors' awareness, appreciation and understanding of the hills and their values can add an extra layer of attraction, as users learn and appreciate more about the special values of a place. It can also be used to modify user behaviours to better protect a destination as well as to generate support for the hills and their sustainable management.

**Accessibility, Connection and Integration**

Compounding the demand for more informal outdoor recreation and leisure opportunities, Wodonga is one of the fastest-growing regional cities in Victoria. The projected population by 2030 will be 54,000 people (from 39,600 in 2015). Residential development is mainly occurring in large housing estates, dominated by detached dwellings, on the town’s flatter or gently sloped areas, many of which are located adjacent to the hills. All the Wodonga hills (excluding Menvers Hill) have housing estates - either under construction, with approved Development Plans, or in the planning stages - on part(s) of their perimeters (as shown in Figure 7).
Huon Hill in particular will ultimately be entirely ringed by housing estates. This will result in a significant increase in the resident population “on the doorstep” of many hills. There is the opportunity to improve the hills’ accessibility, connection and integration with these surrounding urban areas. This includes: betters links between the open space and access and pathway networks of these new estates and a hill’s existing, or proposed, entry points and track and trail networks.

Wodonga already boasts a well-planned and well-maintained urban open space system of attractive landscaped parklands, open space corridors along major drainage lines, and floodways which are often developed with footpaths or shared pathways. However, few if any of these connect fully or effectively with the hills, and very few large landscaped or developed parklands adjoin the hills. The Wodonga Growth Strategy recognises quality, diversity and accessibility of open spaces is key to fostering healthy, vibrant, resilient communities. The importance of linking all the Wodonga hills through a series of “potential open space links” (as shown in Figure 8). Wodonga’s existing, and proposed, bicycle network will be a key asset to allow leisure and recreation users to readily access and potentially to connect between the hills. At present only Federation Hill is reasonably connected to the urban bicycle path network.

User, Neighbour and Community Safety

The proximity of the hills to residential and urban areas also raises some important management issues - chiefly in relation to user, neighbour and community safety.

Fire hazard management along the residential-hill interface will continue to be a major issue. The grasslands, woodland and forest areas around Wodonga are subject to a seasonal summer fire risk each year. There is a history of bushfires that have started to the west and burned eastward toward the city’s western outskirts, with “spolding” ahead of the fire front. A further risk. Recent analysis in the Wodonga Environmental Lands Bushfire Management Strategy identifies all the Wodonga hills as high priority reserves for detailed bushfire management planning in recognition of the bushfire risk and the complexity of fire management in these areas. The Wodonga Planning Scheme’s “Bushfire Management Overlay” identifies much of Klinge Hill and parts of Federation, Bears and Huon hills as areas where consideration of bushfire risk is of high priority due to the expected level of bushfire hazard. The council employs a range of measures to address the fire risks, based on regular liaison with the Country Fire Authority and other land managers.

Managing and controlling visitors’ use of fire, as well as protecting visitors and facilities from the threats posed by wildfires, will be another important aspect of maintaining safety within and around the hills. Users must be adequately informed of other potential risks when entering or enjoying the hills, including easily accessible and interpreted orientation and wayfinding information regarding the track and trail network, to enable them to safely enjoy their visit.

As numbers increase, it will also be important to ensure a balance is maintained between the sitting of visitor access or activities and the privacy or amenity of those people living along a hill’s boundaries. Bushland and facilities on the edge of urban areas can be a venue for vandalism and anti-social activities. The siting and design of facilities, and the management of after-hours vehicle access, will need careful attention to minimise these risks.

Sustainable Management and Enjoyment

Realising greater sustainable management and enjoyment of the Wodonga hills has the advantage of a being able to use and
build on a large existing asset base, chiefly the network of former farm tracks which provide the backbone of the hills’ current management track system and also function as shared paths for walkers and mountain bikers or cyclists. In places, notably Huncan Hill, the council and PAM have upgraded public access roads, provided limited visitor facilities, established walking tracks, and installed signage. All this provides a solid foundation on which to sustainably realise leisure, recreation and tourism opportunities offered by the hills. However, access and use facilities and other major works will require careful site assessment, location, design and construction to avoid impacting a hill’s landscape qualities, views or biodiversity or heritage values. Some initiatives are likely to require formal assessment and approvals processes.

The effort and resources that will be required to more sustainably enjoy and manage the Wodonga hills is analogous to managing a small urban or peri-urban national park. Together all council lands across the five hills total 1,568 hectares. This is comparable to or larger than the following national or regional parks - as examples - located in or around Melbourne or Sydney (although visitor numbers and the level of infrastructure at these comparison examples would be much greater, in most cases).

- Dandenong Valley Parklands (Melbourne) at 1,906 hectares
- Yarra Valley Parklands (Melbourne) at 1,300 hectares
- Churchill National Park and Lysterfield Park (Melbourne) at 1,668 hectares
- Lane Cove National Park (Sydney) at 372 hectares.

It must be acknowledged that expanded people, facilities or infrastructure and resources management across the five hills will require a substantial commitment of capital and other resources.
1.5 PLANNING FOR THE WODONGA HILLS - THIS STRATEGY AND RELATED DOCUMENTS

A planned approach to greater community enjoyment and more sustainable management of the Wodonga hills is presented over a suite of documents - as illustrated in Figure 9.

This overall Planning for the Wodonga Hills - Strategy document:
- Gives the background to the project;
- Provides a very brief snapshot of the key values and planning context relevant to the hills;
- Identifies seven over-arching objectives and a set of guiding principles to follow in planning for the Wodonga hills;
- Describes a set of “overall” actions to apply across all five Wodonga Hills with an accompanying implementation plan; and
- Summarises the vision for each of the five hills, as a set of distinct but unified attractions.

To support the realisation of the strategy, a masterplan has been prepared for each of the five Wodonga hills. These more detailed reports explain the rationale behind the role and management directions identified for each hill, within the framework of the over-arching Wodonga Hills Strategy.

Each masterplan details, in both text and as illustrated masterplans, a suite of actions to deliver greater community enjoyment and improved sustainable management of the hill in question.

Many of these actions are site-specific, and will be supported by an implementation plan as a guide to the orderly staging and realisation of a hill’s potential. Future options or opportunities to build, support or enhance these initial actions are also outlined.
This version of the strategy and masterplans builds on earlier drafts of these documents exhibited for public feedback in 2016 and 2017 and responds to the many comments received from the Wodonga community.

To assist in the implementation of the strategy and masterplans, an interpretation plan will be prepared to identify and guide measures to improve the understanding and appreciation of all the Wodonga hills among visitors, neighbours and the wider community.

Key supporting documents
The following are the key council policies and plans that will support, inform and enable the implementation of the Wodonga Hills strategy and plans:

- Municipal Fire Prevention Plan
- Physical Activity Strategy
- Vegetation Offset Management Plans
- Wodonga Aboriginal Reconciliation Action Plan
- Wodonga Destination Plan
- Wodonga Environmental Lands Fire Management Strategy and associated fire management plans.
- Wodonga Retained Environment Network Strategy and associated management plans.
- Wodonga Planning Scheme
- Wodonga Growth Strategy
2. OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES
The aim of this strategy can be described as follows.

To provide for and encourage enjoyment by the community of the Wodonga hills in a manner that is sustainable, accessible and protects and enhances their recognised biodiversity, cultural heritage and scenic values.

To expand this aim, and to help shape actions for its realisation, eight objectives have been identified to guide planning for the Wodonga hills.

In pursuing these objectives, the council will continue to engage with hill users and neighbours, stakeholders, other land managers, and the wider community to ensure that planning and management of the Wodonga hills meets community expectations for the protection, accessibility, enjoyment and sustainable management of these significant assets.

The actions as set out in Section 3.2 for the Wodonga hills overall, and in the accompanying masterplans for each of the five hills, provide a set of directions or specific actions for greater community enjoyment and enhanced sustainable management of the Wodonga Hills.

However, it is not possible - or practical - to identify all feasible actions for the hills’ future use, facilities and management (due to data limitations, unforeseen issues, changing values, or other factors). Neither is it possible to predict precisely what future issues, pressures or opportunities may arise in the planning and management of the hills.

Therefore, the objectives are supported by guiding planning and management principles to:
- Guide the formulation of the actions presented in the accompanying masterplan for each hill; and,
- Provide a “decision framework” against which to consider future decisions and new or altered directions in the hills’ management.
1. Sustainable Management and Enjoyment

To ensure that leisure, recreation and tourism facilities and activities can be developed, managed, resourced and enjoyed without adverse impacts on the hills’ biodiversity, cultural heritage and scenic values or the experiences of other visitors.

- The hills will be managed consistently with the best practice principles of sustainable environmental, recreation and financial management.
- Information and promotion regarding the hills should be used as a management tool to direct visitors to certain hills or specific locations to satisfy visitor requirements and assist in managing visitor pressures. Activity profiles and “identities” should be applied and promoted for each hill where this continues to assist in directing and managing visitor activities and numbers.
- Facility or infrastructure proposals within the hills will be subject to the appropriate levels of planning and environmental assessment, including Aboriginal cultural heritage investigations and approval.
- User facilities should be designed and constructed on the minimum “footprint” practicable, employ ecologically sustainable design principles, use materials that are in keeping with their setting and are robust and fit for purposes, and be reversible (as far as possible).
- Particular expertise and care should be focused on the planning, alignment, design and construction of recreational tracks and trails to avoid environmental and visual impacts, provide quality user experiences, and minimise maintenance requirements.
- Implementation should be staged according to demonstrated demand and consistent with the resources available to the council.

2. Biodiversity and Habitat Values

To maintain and enhance the hills’ natural vegetation, habitat and biodiversity values and wildlife corridor connections to the surrounding landscape.

- Special protection will be given to significant natural values or features such as offset areas, areas of relatively intact vegetation and large hollow bearing trees. This will include restricting recreational use in some areas.
- Further fragmentation of vegetation remnants should be avoided.
- Measures will be taken to reinforce and connect habitat remnants within the hills and to the surrounding landscape, particularly links into the Wodonga Retained Environment Network.
- The protection and enhancement of native vegetation communities, should include continual review of grazing regimes to ensure the best environmental and bushfire safety outcomes are being achieved.
• Environmental management programs will be reviewed as recreational access and use increases, particularly weed control programs that may need to be focussed to target areas of high use.

• Decisions relating to environmental management programs must give regard to the council’s bushfire mitigation and community safety.

3. Aboriginal cultural heritage values

To identify, conserve and protect Aboriginal historical and archaeological cultural heritage and values.

• Special protection will be given to significant Aboriginal cultural heritage sites and artefacts to recognise, protect and promote the cultural heritage value. These Aboriginal cultural heritage places, sites and artefacts objects, including sacred trees, provide an insight into Aboriginal society, land use and chronological changes in how the landscape and resources were used and are valuable in sustaining Aboriginal identity.

• Compliance with the cultural heritage approval processes associated with the Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 relevant to any future development in the hilltops is of paramount consideration before undertaking any works.

• Cultural heritage assessments, as required, will be undertaken to determine Aboriginal cultural heritage values and culturally appropriate management and mitigation strategies within the identified hilltops.

• Implications on Aboriginal cultural heritage values to be established prior to activities occurring and recommendations provided on appropriate mitigation and management strategies.

4. User, Neighbour and Community Safety

To ensure that visitors can enjoy the hills with a reasonable degree of safety and security and that management of the hills minimises risks to neighbours or adjacent assets, particularly bushfire risks.

• User, neighbour and community safety will continue to be high priorities in the hills’ management.

• The council will continue to liaise with emergency service agencies, particularly the Country Fire Authority, regarding planning and management of the hills, especially in relation to bushfire risks and biodiversity enhancement or vegetation management, and changes in usage patterns.

• In accordance with existing planning policy, new residential estates adjoining the hills should be encouraged, or required, to provide for perimeter roadways, managed open space, detention basins or other managed zones along the hill interface to establish fuel reduced zones and contribute to managing fire risks along these boundaries.

• Emergency management, including safe egress, refuge for visitors and access for emergency services will be considered in the siting and design of any facility sites located away from a hill’s margins.

• The ability to restrict visitor access to the hills, especially vehicular access, during high risk periods or at other times to manage anti-social or inappropriate activities should continue or be introduced as and where required.

• The council should employ Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in the siting and design of larger visitor facility sites, especially those in close proximity to residential areas.
5. Landscape and Scenic Values

To protect and enhance the hills' landscape and scenic importance as a backdrop to the Wodonga urban area and a central element of the town's character that is greatly valued by residents and the wider community.

- Protecting and enhancing the hills' value as the scenic backdrop to Wodonga will continue to be a paramount management priority. The council will continue to acknowledge that off-site appreciation of the hills, as a visual or scenic asset, by people who may never physically access the hills is an important aspect of the enjoyment of these areas.

- Particular expertise and consideration will be given to built elements, including parking areas, to ensure they do not intrude on skylines, or major views to or of the hills, or major internal vistas.

- The grazing and agricultural heritage of the hills should be recognised and elements of this history retained in the landscape.

- Tree planting should avoid obstructing major vistas.

- The type and character of user facilities should be appropriate and suited to their setting. Overall, most of the hills' facilities should be low-key and in keeping with natural settings, while more urban-style facilities may be more suitable on hill margins.

6. Accessibility, Connection and Integration

To increase the accessibility of the hills and their connection to the wider Wodonga open space and pathways networks, including greater emphasis on making locations and experiences accessible to disabled or less mobile visitors.

- All-abilities access and facilities should be provided at significant attractions or larger facility and activity sites, as well as a sample of key attractions, across the hills where feasible.

- To encourage access at practical, desirable and suitable locations, a hierarchy of access and entry points to the hills should be established. These should be connected to, or readily accessible from, the wider Wodonga road and pathways network.

- User facility and activity sites, and any vehicle access, should preferably be located on the periphery of the hills, unless capitalising on significant assets and attractions (such as significant vantage points).

- The location and provision of entry points and peripheral visitor facility and activity sites should be cognisant of any access and parking constraints imposed by the surrounding street network as well as potential impacts on adjoining residents.

- Visitor vehicle access within the hills will be limited to a few designated routes and locations and will only extend beyond the periphery of the hills margins to capitalise on significant assets or if it facilitates improved all abilities access to a site. Designated access points and roads should be able to be closed and locked when required for safety or management purposes.

- Significant attractions, visitor facilities and activity sites and entry points should be interconnected by suitable walking or shared use tracks, and linked to the urban pathway network if practical.

- As adjoining residential areas are developed they should integrate or connect the hills into the surrounding open space and pathway networks. Suitable flatter or more gently sloped areas at the margins of hills should be incorporated as locations for
future peripheral facility and activity sites and entry points. Particular emphasis should be placed on ensuring the road layout of adjoining development provides direct, convenient access to suitable entrance locations.

7. Leisure, Recreation and Tourism

To improve and diversify activities and experiences offered across the Wodonga hills, as a whole and within each hill individually, with particular preference to:

- Quality nature-based or natural-setting visitor use opportunities which are in keeping with the underlying values of a site, and:
- Community and special events and suitable organised or commercial activities, at suitable locations within the hills.

- User monitoring, surveys, targeted data collection and other research measures should be used to assist in planning for leisure, recreation and tourism use of the hills.

- Shared use of the hills' management track network should generally be encouraged in preference to the establishment of new tracks (unless warranted for safety, or specific recreation requirements/experience reasons).

- Priority will be given to nature-based leisure and recreation activities, and those informal outdoor recreation activities, that are enhanced by a natural setting. Preferred activities should be compatible with the hills' natural settings and landscape values, and within the council's management capabilities.

- Use of some hills for casual leisure and fitness activities, which may not be entirely reliant on an area's natural or landscape values but are more "activity focused" (such as jogging or fitness training), should be acknowledged and accommodated to encourage community health and well-being. This may often be the case for those hills, or parts of a hill, that are more directly accessible from adjacent urban areas, now and in the future.

- As a baseline level of service all hills should, ultimately, offer entry or visitor facility and activity sites at accessible locations on their margin as well as a diversity of walking tracks and shared use management tracks. Beyond this the hills may be developed with other suitable user facilities to differentiate each hill in terms of the settings and experiences it offers or where demand warrants. Any development beyond the baseline level of service, must consider the existing availability of comparable opportunities or potential settings elsewhere in the Wodonga-Albury region and elsewhere within the Wodonga hills.

- Recreation opportunities should generally be dispersed throughout the hills, and visitors encouraged to enjoy the hills' landscapes, natural environments and views. Unless clustering in particular locations assists in containing negative impacts, avoiding conflict between users, or the more effective provision and management of infrastructure.

- A variety of walking opportunities should be offered across the hills, in terms of landscape position (foothills, mid-slope or summit), environmental settings, experiences offered, length and difficulty, and loop or one-way walks.

- Motorised recreation activities - such as trail bike riding or four-wheel driving - will not be permitted within the hills due to the risks and impacts of these activities for other users and the environment, and the management issues they can present.

- Use of suitable locations within the hills for “special events”, community activities and other organised social or cultural
events should continue to be supported and assessed on a case-by-case basis taking environmental and community impacts into account. However, such events or their impacts should not be allowed to unduly limit or diminish independent and unstructured visitor enjoyment of the hills.

- Commercial leisure, recreation or tourism use or other exclusive uses of the hills should be considered for suitable activities and in carefully considered locations. However, commercial or exclusive activities should not be allowed to unduly limit or diminish independent and unstructured visitor enjoyment of the hills.

- The suitability of the hills (or specific sites) to accommodate the many less common or more specialised leisure and recreation activities, or new or emerging leisure and recreation activities, should be evaluated in terms of consistency with an activity's reliance on the hills' natural setting, likely impacts on the hills' values and the experiences of other users, other possible locations or settings that could accommodate an activity, and the management demands likely to be generated.

8. Awareness, Appreciation and Understanding

To increase visitors', and residents', awareness, appreciation and understanding of the hills, the leisure and recreation opportunities they offer, and their values.

- Understanding and appreciation of the hills by users, neighbours and the wider community will continue to be promoted.

- Awareness and pride in the hills and their natural, cultural, landscape and recreation values and active participation in their management will be encouraged.

- Interpretation across the hills should be consistent with the council’s Wodonga Interpretive Signage Style Guide to provide a consistent user experience and to minimise possible visual impacts associated with signage.

- Traditional owners and local Aboriginal people should have the lead role in presenting and interpreting the hills' Aboriginal cultural heritage values and stories, wherever possible.

- Schools, tertiary institutions and community groups should be encouraged to use the hills for educational purposes.

- Digital technologies should be used wherever practical and beneficial to support the delivery of interpretive content.

- Visitors should be supported to enjoy the hills through the provision of appropriate information and advice including pre-visit or promotional materials as well as entry, identification, orientation, wayfinding, interpretation, regulatory and emergency information.
3. ACTION PLAN FOR ALL THE HILLS
This section sets out “overall” actions to apply across all five Wodonga Hills:

- Klinga Hill (within the Hunchback Hill Complex)
- Federation Hill
- Bears Hill
- Huon Hill
- Mawers Hill

The following 45 actions have been identified for all five Wodonga hills (under the council’s ownership and management) to provide overall directions or guidelines to address key planning and management challenges or issues that are likely to be common across all hills. As such they apply, and should be implemented or followed, in addition to the individual actions specifically identified in the accompanying masterplans for each hill.

As the majority of these overall actions provide guidelines or direction or require continuing action (rather than site-specific on-ground works), most are ongoing actions to be implemented and applied throughout all stages of the strategy’s, and associated masterplans’, realisation.

An Implementation Plan will be prepared, regularly reported on and reviewed to prioritise the implementation of actions in accordance with community views, demand and resource availability.

3.2
OVERALL ACTIONS
FOR ALL THE
WODONGA HILLS
Emerging and specialised uses

Many of the following overall actions, as well as those identified for individual hills (as presented in the accompanying masterplans), focus on those leisure, recreation and tourism uses already occurring or exerting pressure on the hills. Foreseeable demands, usage patterns and pressures that may become evident across the hills, as well as the unrealised community enjoyment potential of each hill, have also informed the identification of actions.

However, the range of outdoor leisure and recreation activities that are undertaken, or sought, across the diverse sets of interest found within any community is enormous. New activities are also constantly emerging or gaining popularity, such as the growth of mountain biking in the 1980s, the advent of stand-up paddle boarding after 2000 and the current growth in the recreational use of remote-controlled drones.

Expansion of the hills’ tracks, trails and facilities will make these areas more accessible to a range of these unseen, less heavily patronised, unconventional, or more specialised outdoor leisure or recreation activities. Some may be focused on the hills’ values, such as bird-watching, orienteering, landscape painting or nature photography. Others may be less dependent on the natural settings, such as geocaching, piloting drones, or using the hills as thunderstorm or astronomy vantage points.

Many of the proposed actions relating to improving or establishing user access, car parking, user facilities and promotional material will indirectly facilitate these more specialised or niche activities. However, the suitability of these less heavily patronised (but nevertheless valued) activities and the potential locations where they can appropriately be accommodated, cannot be addressed at the strategy level. The guiding principles for management (set out in Section 2) provide a framework against which to assess these activities or demands if or when, and where, they arise.
3.2.1 General

The following actions relate to the planning, operational management, administration, stakeholder engagement and marketing of the five Wodonga hills as a group.

**ACTION 0.1 - Field Services Support (ongoing)**

Support the on-ground management of the hills with suitable co-ordination, planning, "field-services" and administrative actions and resources. These support services would assist across a range of requirements or tasks as the overall Wodonga strategy is implemented. Priority tasks in the short term would include:

- Determining a single set of official place names to apply to each hill, and to any key areas/locations or features within individual hills;
- Establishing and maintaining an up-to-date database (preferably GIS linked) of the hills’ values and assets to support and inform management directions and decisions;
- Ensuring all tracks and trails data and the associated infrastructure (such as signage, seats and shelters) is collected, collated, mapped and maintained in formats accessible to management staff as well as, potentially, to intending users and the public; and,
- Applying accepted standards for the definition, description and difficulty classification of tracks and trails such as the Australian Walking Track Grading System or the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) Australia Trail Difficulty Rating System in both track provision and maintenance as well as in all promotional material and on-site information/orientation.

**ACTION 0.2 - A Wodonga hills “brand”**

Develop a brand identity for the Wodonga hills that will identify and promote the hills to the community and potential users as a unified set of nature-based attractions offering landscape settings and a range of leisure, recreation, tourism and educational experiences that are not generally available elsewhere in Wodonga’s open space and reserves system. (Short term)

**ACTION 0.3 - Liaison and Collaboration with other Land Managers (ongoing)**

Establish a structured and scheduled process for regular liaison between the council, DELWP, Parklands Albury Wodonga and other public land managers, to discuss visitor use planning and management across the Wodonga hills. If appropriate, formalise the collaborative management of "dual-tenure" hills (especially Huon Hill and the Hunchback Hill Complex).

**ACTION 0.4 - Liaison with Users and Stakeholders (ongoing)**

Regularly liaise with all users of the hills to seek their views and inputs, assess satisfaction levels, identify unmet demands or desires, identify emerging leisure and recreation and other usage trends as well as to discuss management issues and responses (and to seek users’ cooperation and assistance in managing the hills where feasible and appropriate). This engagement will extend beyond known recreational and special interest groups, to include measures to engage with independent and casual and informal leisure and recreation users, as well as liaison with the tourism sector.
ACTION 0.5 - Liaison with relevant Aboriginal stakeholders such as traditional owners, registered Aboriginal parties and the Aboriginal community (ongoing)

To ensure adequate identification and protection of places of Aboriginal cultural significance and in recognition of the opportunities to promote and share the knowledge of local Aboriginal culture, an appropriate forum for ongoing consultation with traditional/registered parties and the local Aboriginal community should be identified.

It is crucial that Aboriginal communities are involved in cultural heritage management planning. The relevant Aboriginal people must be consulted about proposed activities early in the planning process and be given an opportunity for meaningful input.

ACTION 0.6 - Assessment and Approval Process (ongoing)

Implement an assessment and approvals process for proposed projects within the hills that exceed a specified size or impact threshold (including visual impacts), or may significantly affect other users or neighbours, have emergency management implications or exceed other triggers. This would typically apply to actions involving construction or works to create significant new features (such as a new car park or lookout platform, or larger user facilities). It would generally not apply to routine management actions, the maintenance or minor upgrade of existing features, or the installation of minor new features (such as seating or a low key picnic site). Where required, this process will include third party concurrence or approval from other agencies (such as the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) consultation with neighbours, public exhibition of proposed designs, and other steps.

3.2.2 Biodiversity and Bushland Management

The Wodonga hills protect extensive areas of endangered vegetation communities which, despite most being highly modified by past grazing, are of conservation significance within the broader regional landscape. Where these communities are less disturbed, and still harbour intact understoreys or remain on steeper better vegetated slopes, they are of even greater value in biodiversity conservation or landscape value terms, or both. A number of threatened or regionally significant species, have been recorded across the hills. In addition to the biodiversity conservation importance of these assets, the hills’ vegetation has significant scenic and landscape values as well as playing a fundamental role in attracting users and enhancing their enjoyment of the hills. The following overall actions aim to protect and enhance the hills’ biodiversity, as well as increase the knowledge base and effective management of these values.

ACTION 0.7 - Biodiversity Knowledge and Monitoring (ongoing)

Continue to build a more detailed understanding of the biodiversity values of the Wodonga hills overall, and of each hill or specific sites as required. Establish monitoring programs (which include specific targets or indicators) to track the progress of habitat restoration, revegetation, pest/weed control or other environmental management programs to inform management directions and decisions. This may include targeted survey to better understand the presence of abundance of key native or pest species.

ACTION 0.8 - Continue and Expand Current Land Management Program (ongoing)

Continue annual environmental works program, including targeted revegetation and restoration.
works, pest plant and animal control, and implementation of offset and WREN management plans. This should include proactive measures to limit the damage from emerging threats, such as goats, deer and cats. Community participation in this program should be encouraged. This program will need to adapt and expand as use of the hills changes, as adjoining residents increase in number and as additional biodiversity information becomes available.

**ACTION 0.9 - Native Vegetation Offset Scheme**

The feasibility of reinstating the native vegetation offsetting scheme should be considered. Such a scheme, if carefully designed, could be a way of externally funding land management activities and securing local biodiversity outcomes. Should the scheme be reinstated, appropriate resources must be made available to identify suitable sites, establish a funding model that is cost neutral and to meet the additional administrative requirements associated with offset management.

**ACTION 0.10 - Monitor and Manage Grazing Regimes (ongoing)**

Regularly evaluate and, as necessary, revise the current grazing management regimes in force across the hills to better protect and enhance identified environmental values while adequately managing bushfire risks to users, neighbours, and infrastructure. Alternative measures to manage fire risks if grazing is removed or reduced will be developed in accordance with applicable Fire Management Plans and/or in consultation with the Country Fire Authority.

**ACTION 0.11 - Identify High Conservation Value Areas for Users (ongoing)**

High conservation value areas within the hills may be sign posted at points most likely to be encountered by users - such as at major entries, along perimeter fire trails or on more heavily used tracks and trails. This signage need not necessarily be complex (or regulatory) and may simply be a graphic or symbol that could be further explained as part of a hill's wider information or interpretation displays.

**ACTION 0.12 - Manage Residential-Bushland Interface Impacts (ongoing)**

Monitor and manage the suite of typical residential-bushland interface impacts on the biodiversity and aesthetic values, fire hazard and management, and user safety within the hills. Priority will be given to managing these activities and incursions located in high conservation value locations. Some activities may be tolerated - especially those that foster children's appreciation of nature - where, outside priority conservation zones, do not cause unacceptable impacts to a location, or compromise user safety. Awareness raising and education should generally be favoured over regulatory or enforcement actions.

**ACTION 0.13 - Responsible "Bush Neighbour" Program (ongoing)**

Implement a responsible "bush neighbour" awareness and environmental education program in the residential (and rural residential) areas adjoining the hills. This program would be aimed at increasing neighbours' awareness of the value and role of a hill (or the hills overall), as well as providing information aimed at minimising adverse impacts and supporting management.

**ACTION 0.14 - Involving Community or Volunteer Organisations (ongoing)**

The council will continue to work with the community to extend the existing very strong
network of community or volunteer organisations and user groups that are actively involved in the management of public land across the hills. These community programs and volunteer involvement will be guided by the directions, actions and priorities as set out in this strategy to ensure project outcomes are consistent with the overall directions for the hill or area in question, and the Wodonga hills more widely.

3.2.3 Fire Hazard Management and User Safety

Managing user and neighbour safety, and the potential bushfire hazard presented by the hills, will be ongoing priorities across the Wodonga hills.

ACTION 0.15 - Fire Management Plans (ongoing)

Develop and implement detailed fire management plans for all hills (or sites) identified as high priority in the Wodonga Environmental Lands Bushfire Management Strategy. All plans should be reviewed in response to changes in reserve/site usage and/or condition.

ACTION 0.16 - Consultation with Country Fire Authority (ongoing)

The Council will consult with the Country Fire Authority regarding bushfire risk assessment, planning and mitigation or management measures across the hills as well as fire-fighting strategies, requirements and emergency response procedures.

ACTION 0.17 - Hazard and Emergency Management Warning and Advisory Signage (ongoing)

Improve hazard and emergency management warning and advisory signage - especially fire hazard warnings signs (as consistent with the requirements of Fire Management Plans) - across the hills. Prioritise hazard and emergency management signage at the major entry points to each hill and at strategic locations along perimeter fire trails (where these are in place or as developed) in order to capture users who may have entered via minor access points.

ACTION 0.18 - Fire Danger and After-hours Closures (ongoing)

Close the hills to public access on total fire ban days or other periods of extreme fire danger (as consistent with the requirements of Fire Management Plans). Given the permeability of the hills’ edges, physically preventing access will not be practical - other than where lockable vehicle gates can be installed on existing and proposed publicly accessible entry roads. An after hours gate locking regime will also be implemented on existing, and proposed, publicly accessible entry roads to reduce the risk of arson, vandalism and other antisocial behaviours.

ACTION 0.19 - Restricting the Use of Fire (ongoing)

Users will not be permitted to have open fires anywhere on the hills except where specifically approved by the council (such as under an approved event, commercial activity or other permit) or potentially at larger facility nodes in more landscaped and managed open space settings on a hill’s margin (where solid fuel barbecues may be permitted). Any barbecues provided within the hills will be gas (or electric) only.
ACTION 0.20 - Emergency Response Planning (ongoing)

Work with relevant agencies to prepare and regularly update an emergency response plan, including medical access and retrievals, to identify the range of likely user emergencies that may occur on the hills and effective emergency response procedures commensurate with the levels and nature of use.

3.2.4 Access, Information and Orientation

The following actions are focused on ensuring that users are aware of how to reach the Wodonga hills (at the intended access and entry points) and have sufficient information to know what leisure or recreation, tourism or other opportunities are available to them, and how to safely experience the hills. Timing the provision of additional access and orientation information will be important. It will be critical not to promote a destination or encourage greater use until the infrastructure and management resources are in place to safely and sustainably manage the likely increased user numbers and their potential impacts.

ACTION 0.21 - Access Signposting (ongoing, as new entry points are provided)

Access routes and links to each hill will be signposted in the surrounding areas to assist intending users to locate and access designated entry points. The type and extent or coverage of this access signposting, beyond the boundary of each hill, will vary with the scale and nature of the access or entry points in question - from connections to the arterial road network and existing public vehicle access (such as Huon Hill), major links from the surrounding open space links, larger trailheads, low-key entry points off adjoining residential streets or shared driveway access.

ACTION 0.22 - Access and Entry Point Identification and Orientation Signage (ongoing, progressively)

Identification and orientation signage should be provided inside all hill access and entry points to provide essential site identification, location and safety information for users. A hierarchy of identification and orientation sign types is warranted, matched to the type or standard of entry point. As a minimum this will provide the hill name, management agency, access and entry name or location, and track and trail name or orientation to the nearest major feature (such as a facility site, major track, attraction, etc.).

ACTION 0.23 - Trailhead Orientation Signage and Information (ongoing, progressively)

Trailhead signage (and pre-existing track and trail information) will include key information for intending users such as track name and type (single purpose, shared, management track, etc.), distances and suggested times, loop or one-way route, track junctions, grades and steepness (including steps), facilities en-route, highlights, etc. Information should be sufficient to encourage safe use by people unfamiliar with the hills. Track identification and orientation information will principally be internalised to each hill (addressing each hill as a contained track/trail experience and not referencing remote and off-hill sites).

ACTION 0.24 - Track and Trail Wayfinding (ongoing, progressively)

Ensure all tracks and trails are adequately signposted with distance and direction and other
wayfinding information en-route (in addition to trailhead signage). For walking tracks this will be at all junctions, as a minimum, as well as reassurance wayfinding en-route and at major activity nodes or attractions. Mountain bike routes could be more selectively signposted, however, difficulty ratings will be important information to provide. Wayfinding should predominantly be internalised to each hill as a contained track and trail experience (and not reference remote and off-hill sites).

**ACTION 0.25 - Aboriginal cultural heritage interpretive signage**

Interpretive signage provides the opportunity to recognise, promote and share Aboriginal cultural heritage. Signs interpreting Aboriginal sites, artefacts, stories, historical events and/or special cultural features should be developed in consultation with the Aboriginal community. However, it is important that signage does not reveal locations of places, sites or artefacts that might be culturally sensitive.

### 3.2.5 Track and Trail Planning and Management

Tracks and trails are the centrepiece and a pivotal part of most visitors’ use of the hills - from short walks accessing a lookout, to longer walks or fitness training on management tracks, to longer mountain bike circuits. Management of the track and trail network and the provision of a variety of new track and trail experiences - for walkers, mountain bikers and cyclists, and in places horse riders - is central to enhancing community use of the Wodonga hills. The hills’ track and trail network will also connect seamlessly with Wodonga’s wider pathway and cycleway network, including in adjacent developing residential areas.

However, tracks and trails also require careful siting, alignment and design as well as needing ongoing management and maintenance effort (including the management of informal or unauthorised routes) in order to offer a reasonable level of user safety, minimise conflicts between user groups, meet a range of user expectations and ensure that environmental impacts are within acceptable thresholds.

Track and trail opportunities will be in place prior to, or expanded in parallel with, the promotion of a hill for greater access and use so as to offer the desired experiences as well as to safely and sustainably manage the likely user numbers and their potential impacts.

**ACTION 0.26 - Shared Use of Management Tracks (ongoing)**

Unless otherwise indicated (such as for user safety, environmental impact or management reasons), all management tracks across the Wodonga hills will be managed and available as shared routes for both walkers and cyclists. Cyclists are to be restricted from routes intended, managed/ maintained and signposted as walking tracks.

**ACTION 0.27 - New Track and Trail Planning and Assessment (ongoing)**

All proposed new, or upgraded, recreational tracks and trails will undergo a thorough planning, assessment and approval process. This process should include consideration of all relevant factors including demand and justification, site and alignment assessments, identification and mitigation of potential impacts, application of accepted track and trail design standards, user...
safety issues, potential for conflicts with other users or impacts on neighbours, and management capabilities and resourcing. Current industry standards or “best practice” guidelines such as the Users’ Guide to the Australian Walking Track Grading System (DSE) or the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) Australia Trail Difficulty Rating System should be referenced during track and trail assessment, planning, design, and construction.

**ACTION 0.28 - Management of Unauthorised Tracks and Trails (ongoing)**

Regularly monitor for the creation of unauthorised tracks, short-cuts, "tramp trails" and other unplanned tracks and trails. Close and rehabilitate these unauthorised tracks and trails as they are developed and found. Alignments persistently targeted by the creation of tracks may indicate a strong "desire line" and may warrant assessment (using the considerations set out in Action 0.26 above).

**ACTION 0.29 - Walking Track Clearance Standards (ongoing)**

All walking tracks, and especially those in high tourist-use locations, must be cleared of grass and other obscuring vegetation and offer a safe, visible and well-defined stable walking surface.

**ACTION 0.30 - Managing Track and Trail Information and Promotion (ongoing)**

Visitor information material (previsit and on-site, and across all media) will only include approved and managed tracks and trails which exist and can be readily followed on the ground. Do not show informal and unauthorised tracks, planned or proposed tracks, possible links, potential routes, tracks under construction, and permanently closed tracks. Current media should be vetted to remove such non-existent tracks.

**ACTION 0.31 - Resourcing Track and Trail Management (ongoing)**

Dedicate adequate resources and on-ground effort to track and trail management to ensure intended track standards are maintained, the identified user experiences and safety standards are achieved, and emerging usage and environmental issues (such as track braiding or short-cutting, erosion, the creation of unauthorised tracks, weed spread, etc.) are quickly addressed.

**ACTION 0.32 - Linking Urban Pathways to the Hills (ongoing)**

Ensure the concrete or hardened pathways providing access to perimeter fire trials (for existing and proposed links and trails) are more completely and effectively linked with the perimeter fire trail surface, allowing for a continuous and unimpeded connection.

**ACTION 0.33 - All-abilities access**

Undertake an investigation of suitable locations to provide all-abilities access beyond the margins of the hills. This will need to consider barriers to access (such as kissing gates), access to and from sites (either via urban paths or vehicles) and trail standards (such as maximum gradients and surface materials).
ACTION 0.34 - Liaise with Developers regarding Open Space and Pathway Connections (ongoing)

Collaborate and negotiate with the developers of adjacent residential estates to connect major hill access and entry points (especially those with user facilities) with a future estate's open space and urban pathway network to provide “feeder” routes for walking or cycling access to a hill, as well as the potential for shared open spaces and facilities (including car parking, on and off street) on a hill’s perimeter. Estate road layouts should allow for legible and reasonably direct routes to major hill vehicle access and entry points.

ACTION 0.35 - Linking Klinge, Federation, Bears and Huon Hills

 Undertake a feasibility study and route and corridor identification (including elements of the urban path network), and if supported by these investigations prepare a subsequent action plan, for possible establishment of an extended walking route linking Klinge, Federation, Bears and Huon Hills (and possibly connecting to the Kiewa River shared path). (Refer to Section 3.3 for further discussion.)

3.2.6 Managing for Users

Managing people in a natural landscape requires a significant commitment of financial and other resources for capital works and ongoing maintenance efforts related to user infrastructure, for safety management, as well as for people and resources management. It is imperative that maintenance and management commitments do not exceed the resources and capabilities that are realistically available to meet these commitments.

However, information can also be used as a powerful management tool to ”get the right visitor to the right place”, maximise the quality of user experiences, minimise conflicts between users, reduce environmental impacts and help limit management and resource demands.

ACTION 0.36 - Differentiate the Hills as Distinct Attractions (ongoing)

Promotional and present information for the Wodonga hills should differentiate the character, attractions, facilities and experiences offered by each hill to present each hill as a distinct or individual attraction and assist intending leisure, recreation or tourism visitors in selecting the destination and activity that best meets their needs.

ACTION 0.37 - Advise Users regarding Potential Hazards (ongoing)

Previsit and entry orientation information for users will include advice regarding potential hazards that may be encountered across the hills such as the presence of stock, shared tracks, snakes, bushfire risks, heat, limb fall in high winds, and so on as well as advising toilet locations (on the hills and/or in the surrounding areas) and the need to carry water.

ACTION 0.38 - Implement Wodonga Hills Interpretation Plan (ongoing)

Implement the Wodonga Hills Interpretation Plan to improve the provision of information to users and the wider community about the hills’ values, management and sustainable use. Regularly
update this document as additional destinations, opportunities and activities become available across the hills.

**ACTION 0.39 - User Code of Conduct (ongoing)**

Promote a code of conduct for all users of the hills regarding the use of management tracks and shared paths, as well as environmentally responsible and safe activity within the hills. Include the code of conduct in any on-site information shelters at major activity areas or entry points.

**ACTION 0.40 - Adjust Fencing and Paddock Arrangements in High Use Zones (ongoing)**

Progressively adjust the fencing and paddock arrangements across the Wodonga hills to enable stock to be excluded from larger facility sites and activity zones (as when/where developed) as well as those tracks and trails subject to high levels of use (especially those regularly used by people from outside the Wodonga-Albury area). Prior to the implementation of such changes, alternative measures to manage fire risks across these areas will be developed in accordance with applicable Fire Management Plans and/or in consultation with the Country Fire Authority.

**ACTION 0.41 - Survey and Monitoring of Community Use (ongoing)**

Undertake the ongoing survey and monitoring of leisure, recreation, tourism and other use of the hills collecting both quantitative data (such as user numbers, locations, timing and duration of use, etc.) as well as qualitative data (such as user origins and characteristics, experiences sought, motivations, degree of satisfaction, etc.). A range of survey and monitoring techniques will be required (traffic counters, track and trail monitoring, intercept surveys, etc.).

**ACTION 0.42 - Resourcing Management for Community Use (ongoing)**

Dedicate adequate resources and ongoing effort to the staged provision and ongoing maintenance of user infrastructure (in addition to track and trail maintenance, see Action 0.30 above) as well as for supporting and managing users, monitoring, managing and remediating the impacts of use, and ensuring a regular on-site management presence (for user contact, patrols, closures, enforcement, etc.). The degree of management presence at a site can be a large determinant of users’ experience/satisfaction, and so should be tailored to the role and character of each hill or location and the intended experiences.

### 3.2.7 Events and Tourism

Due to their location and accessibility parts of several of the Wodonga hills are already used for numerous community events. The following guidelines will promote further use of suitable sites for community events as well as the management of commercial tourism and recreation activities while not unduly displacing other users, impacting on the hills’ underlying values or placing an impost on the council as the land manager.

**ACTION 0.43 - Proactively Manage Events and Tourism (ongoing)**

Proactively manage commercial recreation and tourism use of the hills through the preparation of assessment criteria to employ in the evaluation of any applications for possible commercial.
activities, and by identifying potential locations across the hills and possible suitable commercial activities (as a guideline and/or prospectus for potential applicants). Commercial recreation and tourism activities that preclude access and use by other users, or impact neighbours will be strictly limited in both location and duration. Commercial use will only occur with the council’s prior approval and a permit system, with appropriate fees and conditions, will be developed and applied (as and when required) in regulating commercial recreation and tourism use of the hills. Preference will be given to commercial uses that are founded on or relate to the hills’ values and activities that degrade the hills’ environment will not be permitted.

**ACTION 0.44 - Manage Community Events (ongoing)**

Prepare and apply guidelines for the assessment, approval and management of community events within the hills such as community or fun runs, “challenge” hill climbing events, mountain bike endurance events or competitions, charity walks, triathlons or duathlons, tree-planting days, fundraising and promotions or similar - with a focus on those hills where a designated major event space has been identified as a venue or “hub” for larger community events. Identify other locations within the hills that may be suitable for community events, preferably for smaller events, on a more ad hoc or on application basis, as well as assessment criteria to employ in the evaluation of any applications.

**ACTION 0.45 - Manage Community Arts and Culture Events (ongoing)**

Cater for community arts and culture events at suitable locations within the hills. These more structured events could potentially range from landscape painting weekends with invited local (and other) artists, through to temporary sculpture installations or art, light and sound walks, to major performances (such as jazz on the hilltop). Only a few locations in the hills would be suited to these uses which would generally require vehicle access, facilities (or space for temporary facilities) and sufficient usable area.
### 3.3 THE FOUR HILLS TRAIL - A FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE

An exciting flagship initiative can often be used to raise the profile of a project or create community interest and support.

The Wodonga hills offer the potential for such a flagship initiative, in the form of a possible multiday walking and cycling route that would connect four of the five hills as a single united attraction.

Such a walk would link the four hills on the outskirts of the main Wodonga urban area - Kings Hill (within the Hunchback Hill Complex), Federation Hill, Bears Hill and Huon Hill - as shown, indicatively only, on Figure 10. The Four Hills Walk is only a draft or working title for this concept which, if progressed, warrants a more appealing and marketable name.

This multi-hill route could be readily established in the short term - using the existing management tracks and walking tracks on each hill, and connecting between these four hills using the existing urban pathway network (with some additional connections to establish an entirely off-road route, with safe road crossings).
Action 0.35 proposes progressing the Four Hills Trail concept through the preparation of a feasibility study and route and corridor identification and, if supported, a subsequent action plan for the project's staged establishment. Such an action plan would address a range of issues, such as:

- A preferred track standard;
- Determination of a final route, including identifying any missing links or necessary track and trail upgrades;
- Key connections through other tenures (such as those parts of the hills managed by Parklands Albury Wodonga and other agencies) and possible alternative routes if required;
- Access points, and segmentation of the route for walkers with differing capabilities;
- Trailhead facilities, and facilities en-route (especially drinking water and toilets);
- Possible locations for low-key walk-in backpack camp sites at selected points along the route, and the particular management requirements of such sites (permit-based use, restrictions on the use of fire, impact management, etc.);
- Implications for, and managing interaction with, other leisure and recreation opportunities and use of the hills;
- Safety issues, and seasonal or periodic closure;
- A staged works program; and,
- Anticipated maintenance and management requirements, and an indicative management regime.

Fitter walkers could accomplish the Four Hills Walk in a single day. For many it would be at least a two-day walk, or it could be tackled over a series of shorter days and return trips. If provided with low-key walk-in campsites it would also offer a "novice" overnight backpacking experience close to the security of the urban area.

There is also the potential to continue this multi-hill route east or south east from Bears Hill to Maher's Hill (using the High County Rail Trail) or to the Baranduda Range (via possible pathways along future WREN lands). However, final walking track connections to these outlying hills would need to be better defined.

A similar long distance cycling/mountain bike touring route, would also be easily possible. Such a route may be able to be defined even more quickly using the hills' existing management tracks, the existing urban bike path and shared path network, and the road system where necessary. Again this route could be extended (to connect to Maher's Hill (again via the High County Rail Trail), and to the Baranduda Range (partly as an off-road cycleway along the Baranduda Link Trail, and partly on-road).

The expansion, greater access and connectivity of the walking tracks, shared paths and mountain bikes tracks as proposed in this strategy and accompanying masterplans would also allow the components of these multi-hill route - both the walking and mountain biking routes - to be realigned and improved over time.
Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017

8 - Officers reports for determination

Item 8.2 - Document B

Figure 1.0: Potential "Four Hills Trail" (indicative route only)
4. FIVE HILLS - DISTINCT BUT UNIFIED

This section gives an overview of the key concepts in terms of the role and character for each hill, management focus, and factors that have shaped the masterplanning for each of the five Wodonga hills.

More detailed directions for sustainable use and management of these areas are described in the accompanying individual masterplans for each hill.
4.1 KLINGS HILL
RUGGED HIGH POINTS AND HABITAT

High ridgelines and vantage points offering a range of nature-based experiences.

Planning for Klings Hill (comprising the council-owned and managed lands on Klings Hill and the northern face of McFarlanes Hill – see Figure 11) is largely driven by the hill's elevated and rugged landscape, the existing use of the Hunchback Hill Complex as a whole, safe access issues, the significant biodiversity conservation assets of the complex overall, its prominent landscape and scenic values. Klings Hill presents unique opportunities for more remote and challenging recreation, within the setting of some of the best views and habitat quality habitat in Wodonga.

The key character of this area is retained...
as a place where more strenuous walking or mountain biking is rewarded with striking scenic views or exhilarating rides, in a quieter natural setting.

The following are the key advantages and assets and limitations that should shape the future use and management of Klings Hill into the foreseeable future.

Advantages and Assets

- Sweeping views from much of the area, including the major vantage point on Klings Hill summit offering fabulous regional views.
- The area appeals as a quiet but stunning natural landscape with few other users or facilities helped by the more challenging climbs and terrain that limit visitor numbers.
- Prominent scenic views of the area's northern and north-eastern slopes from many parts of the urban area, and from the Hume Highway to the north.
- A number of potential access and entry points, including links to and through the adjacent Parklands Albury Wodonga managed lands and from the north-east.
- Stands of attractive shady trees and scenic line trees on the grassed ridges and slopes.
- Scenic vegetated slopes and vegetation communities of high conservation value, including larger areas with relatively intact understoreys uncommon around Wodonga.
- The Central Management Track provides a direct route to a lower (relatively) elevated mid-point of the council lands, enabling access both west to Klings Hill and east to McFarlanes Hill.
- The area's current management track network and the established mountain bike single track accessed from it.
- A number of flatter locations are potentially suitable for the provision of visitor facilities, such as picnic or activity areas and trailheads, both on the elevated saddle and ridgelines and adjacent to the lower slopes in the north-east.
- Potential links or possible track/trail routes, including the option of connection to the tracks and trails on the adjacent Parklands Albury Wodonga managed Crown land.
- Potentially accessible directly from the Hume Highway.

Limitations

- No direct vehicle access to council land from open and made public roads.
- A significant climb is required to access the area's central saddle and major ridgelines, from both the north and south sides.
- Limited potential for greater (conventional) vehicle access into and within the area.
- Current access to the Central Management Track from Felltimber Creek Rd is dangerous, with limited area for car parking.
- Very poor connections to the west Wodonga urban area, for Klings Hill (and the Hunchback Hill complex as a whole), with the hill not connected to the town's shared path network.
- Felltimber Creek Rd is hazardous for cyclists and walkers using it to access the Central Management Track.
- Current lack of visitor facilities and no on-site orientation and activity information for users.
- Potential for conflict between users (mountain bikers and walkers).
- The ridgelines are very open, mostly lack sheltering vegetation, and can be windswept, discouraging use.
- The area's western side, north-west, and much of the northern and north-eastern boundaries are bordered by private...
property allowing no (or limited) public access.

- Prioritising biodiversity values, including the importance of retaining area of intact, less disturbed vegetation communities and offset sites, and the protection landscape and scenic values will influence and constrain the location and type of facilities and activities in some places.
- Areas of weed infestation, especially along larger drainage lines.
- Areas of active erosion and land slips and slumps.
- Very few flatter sites, especially lower on the council lands, are available for facilities or activity areas. The more rugged terrain and steep slopes, including areas of instability and land slips are unsuitable for sitting facilities and a deterrent for many uses.
- Limited access to the area's north-western and northern sectors, proximity of the rifle range to the hill's north-west potentially limits activity in this area.
- Very limited passive surveillance, given the area's elevation and mainly rural and rural residential setting.

The following are key considerations and future directions for the sustainable use and management of Klings Hill. These, and other actions, are detailed in the Kings Hill Masterplan.

Klings Hill’s biodiversity and landscape values are important considerations. The hill protects large areas of the endangered Grassly Woodland community including an extensive area in the north-east which is especially significant due to retaining much of its natural condition, including an intact and varied understorey, which is rare in the Wodonga area. There are several small offset sites across Klings Hill that have been permanently protected to compensate for biodiversity losses associated with development activities elsewhere in Wodonga. Interspersed among these high value areas are more disturbed but often still attractive open and cleared spaces, usually dominated by pastoral vegetation. It is these areas proposals involving any works should be located, to avoid impacts on high value biodiversity assets.

At present Klings Hill is not directly accessible to the public from any road. Significantly, the areas of Crown land immediately north of Felltimber Creek Rd limit access to Klings Hill which is located upslope to the north. Users wishing to reach Klings Hill from either Felltimber Creek Rd or Coyles Rd are faced with a long and very steep climb along the Central Management Track or (if from the south) via the track and trail network through the Parklands Albury Wodonga managed area.

The need for collaborative management of the overall Hunchback Hill Complex - between the council, Parklands Albury Wodonga and DEWP - must be acknowledged. This is essential to provide sustainable high quality (and “tenure-blind”) experiences for users, manage the impacts of leisure and recreation activities, provide a consistent standard of tracks and facilities, achieve biodiversity conservation and landscape/scenic outcomes, and manage fire risks.

This limited access is a major consideration in planning for the use and management of Klings Hill. However, this, along with the area’s more challenging climbs and terrain (as well as the absence of signage), is also largely the reason underlying the majority of the reserve’s appeal as a quiet but stunning location. The overall guiding principles for sensitive siting and design of any new facilities will ensure Klings Hill remains an attractive and quieter natural and semi-rural destination suited to users seeking a degree of challenge, as well as retaining the amenity of adjoining semi-rural residents and the hill’s scenic landscape qualities.

Access between West Wodonga and the Hunchback Hill Complex overall is also
Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017

8 - Officers reports for determination

Item 8.2 - Document B

limited. Unlike other hills it is not directly connected to the town’s shared path network.
This requires users to travel via the narrow Felltimber Creek Road which presents serious safety issues for cyclists, walkers and drivers alike. Priority should be given to provide cyclists and walkers with safer access to the hill from the south-east.

At present, this area provides the only formal mountain biking opportunities in Wodonga. Mountain biking at this site is focused on the varied mountain bike tracks and facilities developed by Parklands Albury Wodonga, with the aid of user and community groups, in the Crown land reserve. Informal or unmanaged mountain bike tracks are also common. The mountain bike tracks within the Crown land reserve are being independently audited for environmental impacts, safety and viability. Parklands Albury Wodonga and DELWP will use this audit to inform decisions about the future of mountain biking at this site.

Therefore, the extent of mountain biking opportunities on Kings Hill, beyond the existing track, will largely be dependent on the outcomes in the adjoining reserve. With this in mind, there is potential to complement and diversify mountain biking opportunities overall. These would not duplicate the existing track types, riding experiences or intensity of development. Sustainability and safety of all users will be priority considerations in the management of mountain biking on Kings Hill.

Land managers’ collaboration will also be essential to realise the potential of the Ridge Walking Trail as a link, for walkers, between Kings Hill and West Wodonga. The summit of Kings Hill is one of the premier vantage points in all the Wodonga hills, with panoramic regional views in almost every direction. There is potential to make this standout experience more accessible to walkers without altering the current low-key appeal of this high point.
4.2 FEDERATION HILL - LOCAL LEISURE AND FITNESS

A readily accessed, convenient, natural setting for every day leisure and recreation use.

Planning for Federation Hill is founded on it being an easily accessible attraction on the edge of suburban convenient for short duration leisure, recreation and fitness activities. At present and into the immediate future, Federation Hill has the closest, and largest number of, adjacent or nearby homes of all the Wodonga hills. Many people already use the hill for leisure walking, fitness training, dog walking, casual or adventure play, cycling, and similar leisure or recreation pursuits. One of the hill's major assets is its extensive management track network, allowing easy entry from the surrounding residential streets and ready access to many parts of the hill. It also offers easily accessible scenic viewing points.

The vision for Federation Hill capitalises on the high degree of accessibility to, and within, the area and builds on the hill’s existing popularity. Federation Hill is envisaged as a convenient everyday destination offering an appealing natural setting for informal leisure and recreation uses before or after school or work, as well as for extended activities or uses on weekends and holidays.

The following are the key advantages, assets and limitations that should shape the future use and management of Federation Hill into the foreseeable future.
Advantages and Assets

- The surrounding public road network, mainly minor residential roads along the northern and eastern boundaries plus a single public road accessing the hill’s south side.
- Multiple existing access and entry points, for pedestrians and cyclists.
- A large, mostly flat to gently sloped, area of managed open space: Wattle Park located roughly centrally along the hill’s northern base.
- The area’s extensive management track network, including a Perimeter Fire Trail along the hill’s northern and eastern base, which offers a major access asset and easy walking or cycling route.
- Numerous areas of scenic vegetation, and spectacular old lone trees or attractive groups of mature trees.
- Multiple vantage points, potential lookout and major views to and from the area.
- Contrasting views from the ridgeline: urban to the north and rural to the south.
- An easily traversed broad rounded ridgeline, offering easy walking and many opportunities for potential movement routes or possible track and trail connections.
- Quieter setting of the less heavily used, but attractive, western ridgeline.
- A less steeply sloped north-western face enabling less challenging access to the ridgeline.
- Multiple locations potentially suitable for the provision of visitor facilities such as picnic or activity areas, entry nodes, trailheads or vantage points.
- Low-key “rustic” seating at existing vantage and rest points.
- High levels of passive surveillance, along the northern edge and eastern ridge, due to the proximity of housing and higher levels of user activity.

- Varied areas of native vegetation, as well as several revegetation and offset sites established across the hill (particularly in the Lily Valley) enhancing biodiversity, habitat connectivity and scenic values.
- Abutted by a wide corridor of Wodonga Retained Environment Network (WREN) lands to the south west.

Limitations

- Vehicle access to the hill’s northern and eastern boundaries is limited and confusing and only available via the circuitous local road network.
- Although the hill’s northern and eastern boundaries abut residential areas, access to the hill is generally not clearly marked, and many minor entries appear as private access.
- Connection with the urban path network is poor and pedestrian or cyclist feeder networks within the adjacent residential areas are not signposted to indicate Federation Hill entry points and/or experiences.
- There is limited access to the hill’s north-western edge from the adjoining residential area, with larger housing blocks.
- User parking, along most of the hill’s northern and eastern edge, is limited to the surrounding residential streets.
- The hill’s western and southern boundaries are bordered by private property allowing no (or limited) public access.
- There is only a single vehicle access point available from Huon Creek Rd to the hill’s southern boundary.
- There is no (conventional) public vehicle access into and within the area.
- Access to the ridgeline is limited to a few steep management tracks on the northern and eastern slopes and a single management track to the south, and requires a degree of fitness.
- Potential for conflicts between walkers...
and mountain bikers (travelling at speed) is possible on steeper, downhill management tracks.

- Limited flat curtilage is available for facilities or activity areas, and constrains the siting of facilities.
- Despite the high levels of use there are almost no existing visitor facilities and very limited on-site orientation and activity information for users.
- The hill has no clearly identifiable and established entry point for users.
- There are no dedicated walking tracks anywhere on the hill, and no mid-slope tracks (along or across contour) to offer easier walking or staggered ascent/descent routes.
- In many places the Perimeter Fire Trail is located adjacent to the rear of residential properties, allowing views into private areas and/or allowing roofs lines and housing to block users’ views.
- There are no (on-site) opportunities for disabled or mobility impaired users to access or enjoy Federation Hill.
- There is very little passive surveillance over the hill’s northern slopes, due to the adjacent scattered rural residential land uses.
- Prioritising biodiversity, landscape and scenic values, and supporting vegetation offset sites, will influence and constrain the location and type of facilities and activities in some places.

The following are key considerations and future directions for the sustainable use and management of Federation Hill. These, and other actions, are detailed in the Federation Hill Masterplan.

- Directional signage and better connection to the urban path and open space network will make access to Federation Hill from the adjoining residential areas easier and more apparent.
- A significant initiative is the provision of a picnic and activity area and trailhead on the hill’s northern margin, at Wattle Park. This location is easily accessed from the road network with parking already provided along McCulloch Crescent, and will act as a focal point and gateway for intending users, as well as a day use attraction in its own right.
- There will be little alteration to the hill’s low-key character and attractive natural setting that is central to the area’s appeal.
- However, to diversify the leisure and recreation experiences offered, a new extended walking track is envisaged midway up the hill’s northern and eastern slopes. This route will access more diverse and better timbered terrain, with regular views, complementing the walking experiences available (on management tracks) along the hill’s base or ridgeline. It would also offer a less challenging but longer route up and down the hill’s steep northern face.
- The extensive management track network will continue to be available to both walkers and cyclists, including mountain biking. Seating and other low-key facilities will be provided, or upgraded, at several vantage points along the hill’s crest to capitalise on views as well as to help disperse users.
- The hill’s biodiversity values, including endangered vegetation communities, and landscape qualities will continue to be protected and enhanced. Further revegetation
efforts will reinforce existing replanted or bushland areas, improve vegetation connectivity, support vegetation offset sites, increase biodiversity values, and in places assist in erosion control. The irregularly vegetated Lily Valley will be reinforced, with additional bushland areas established to connect into the adjacent Wodonga Retained Environment Network (WREN) lands in the south-east. However, all these measures will be balanced with the priority requirement to manage bushfire risks and safety in this near-urban location.

Federation Hill’s northern face is an important visual backdrop to much of western Wodonga, and measures to protect this - including screening the eastern end of the Carex Track - are also envisaged. The exceptional old trees which are a feature of Federation Hill will be retained and protected.

Planning for Federation Hill also takes a long-term view. Possibilities for dedicated walking tracks, improved all-abilities accessibility, new vantage points, or further perimeter access points can all be identified as warranting further consideration in the future.
4.3 BEARS HILL - SHORT WOODLAND WALKS

Short walks and local views on a woodland covered hill. A pivotal hill with the potential for more nature-based enjoyment in the future.

Planning for the council-managed lands on Bears Hill is largely driven by the comparatively limited area of the hill as a whole that is under council’s management (see figure 12), the developing residential estates to the north and south of this area, its conservation values, limited direct vehicle access to the hill’s perimeter, the area’s existing developments, and the adjoining proposed WREN lands.

The main Wodonga Council owned and managed lands occur in the west of Bears Hill, as well as two smaller parcels in the east which are “land-locked” and at present inaccessible to the public. The protected status of offset sites and WREN area limit the type and extent of recreational
proposals. Within the comparatively limited available area, the western end of Bears Hill is envisaged as a conventionally accessible natural woodland area offering a variety of short walks and modest vantage points, that can be appreciated without great exertion and an area primarily enjoyed by the growing numbers of surrounding residents. Access to impacts on the Defence land - with its strict security protocols - will need active management.

With much of Bears Hill not under council’s management future planning for this pivotal hill will largely depend on potentially changing scenarios - particularly around land tenure or public access - that will warrant subsequent planning and community/stakeholder engagement efforts in the future.

The following are the key advantages/assets and limitations that should shape the future use and management of council’s portion of Bears Hill in the short to mid term.

**Advantages and Assets**

- Proximity to, and easy access from, surrounding established and developing residential areas.
- Surrounding existing (and under development) minor residential road and path network, offering a number of existing (and potential) access and entry points for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Two endangered vegetation communities, and existing protected WREN and offset areas, with the potential for further native vegetation and biodiversity enhancements.
- Abundant and readily observed birdlife, and a resident kangaroo population.
- Scenic open woodland vegetation and some more mature trees, but generally open vegetation allowing for relatively easy movement.
- The area’s current management track network which enables relatively easy access to the hill’s western crest (from the south-west) and includes a perimeter fire trail along the southern residentia-lhill interface.
- Low-level vantage points and potential lookout.
- Potential track and trail links or corridors.
- Locations potentially suitable for the provision of low-key user facilities such as trailheads, rest stops, picnic or activity areas, or entry nodes.
- Connection to a planned narrow WREN corridor along the southern toe of Bears Hill, offering a potential future movement and access link on this developing (and planned) urban interface, in addition to biodiversity landscape enhancement.
- Potential connection to an existing stock route along the northern toe of Bears Hill, offering an access and movement link past those areas of the hill now not open to public access, high levels of passive surveillance along the residential-hill interface.
- Potential for additional council land holdings, or management, and greater public access across Bears Hill in the future including future WREN lands.

**Limitations**

- The limited size of the council owned and managed land in the hill’s western end severely restricts leisure and recreation use initiatives in the foreseeable term.
- The council’s two other land parcels in the centre and east of Bears Hill are small, irregularly shaped, and surrounded by other tenures with no public access at present.
- Public vehicle access to the council-managed western end of Bears Hill is only available via the circuitous (and confusing) local road network and is severely restricted; there are no direct vehicle access points to the majority of the hill’s western perimeter.
Lack of a perimeter road bordering the adjacent residential areas limits opportunities for users to park vehicles adjacent to the hill, with visitor parking limited to the surrounding narrow residential streets.

The main management track entry point to the western hill is a private driveway, which may deter some intending users, and is not signposted.

Connection with the urban path network is very poor, pedestrian and cyclist feeder networks within adjacent residential areas west and south-west of the council-managed lands are not signposted with details of Bears Hill.

No existing user facilities (other than management tracks).

No existing on-site orientation and activity information for users.

Very little flat curtilage is available for facilities or activity areas, and constrains the siting of facilities.

The steeper northern and southern hill slopes present constraints for track and trail access and limitations on facility provision.

North East Water’s tanks and facility breaks up the council-managed lands, is visually intrusive, and diminishes the appeal of the surrounding areas.

Providing for the protection or enhancement of biodiversity, landscape and scenic values, will limit the location and type of facilities and activities in places.

The stock route along the northern toe of Bears Hill, north-east of the council lands, is an unappealing route, with potential users further discouraged by the adjacent military barracks. Uncertain lease and licence arrangements over part of the stock route may limit public access and use, and its value as a potential linkage.

The Bandiana Military Area to the hill’s north and north-east prevents access from this direction.

Bears Hill’s biodiversity values are important planning considerations. The council lands support two endangered vegetation communities - Grassy Woodland to the north and Grassy Woodland and Valley Grassy Forest Mosaic to the south. These communities include a number of threatened plants and woodland birds (the Tickeridge Plant, Diamond Firetail and Spotted Warblers) known to occur across Bears Hill as a whole and the hills. Frequent storm rises are important habitats for reptiles. All of the council-managed land here are either protected as an offset site, meaning they are conservation priority areas permanently protected to compensate for biodiversity losses associated with development activities elsewhere in Wodonga or as part of the MREON. This reservation priority will influence the type, extent and location of any works here.

Although modified, and sparse in places, the hills natural vegetation plays both an important conservation and scenic landscape role. These natural areas are also a fundamental part of the area’s appeal for users.

The western end of Bears Hill abuts an established area of housing but one separated from much of the Wodonga urban area by larger roads. There are at present no formalised, and only a few readily identifiable, user entry points to the hill. The surrounding road network is narrow and mostly circuitous, residential streets. Other than a management track accessing the water tanks and Defence lands, as well as a southern perimeter fire trail, there is no management infrastructure that could also support leisure or recreation use. There are, at present, no dedicated walking tracks anywhere on the hill. North East Water’s large tanks facility also “breaks up” the more accessible and usable part of the council-managed lands, and somewhat diminishes their appeal as a natural area.

These factors, combined with the limited area that is publicly accessible, have meant that Bears Hill at present receives comparatively little leisure or recreation use. Users predominantly come from the surrounding local, small.
catchment to undertake activities such as leisure walking, fitness training, dog exercising and adventure/bush play (and, in the past, informal BMX activity).

However, the White Box Rise Estate is rapidly developing along the northern edge of the council lands, as well as the Wattle Glen and Wattle Views Estates along the hill’s southwestern margin. In addition to providing a scenic backdrop to these areas, Bears Hill will become an increasingly valuable leisure and recreation asset for the growing local catchment of potential users.

In response to these challenges and opportunities, the vision aims to provide improved access to the hill from the adjacent existing and developing residential areas, particularly for walkers and, in places, cyclists. To reinforce the hill’s accessibility, there should be a marked upgrade of signage to Bears Hill from within the surrounding area.

The existing management tracks and gentler slopes along the hill’s southern face can support a shared use path - for walkers and cyclists - which will complete a small loop route to one of the hill’s higher points.

Although the council managed lands are at the lower western end of Bears Hill, they still offer attractive low-elevation views over the surrounding urban areas and are vantage points that users can quickly reach without too much exertion. A single track network that offers, for the first time, a through route for walkers up- and-over Bears Hill is envisaged.

The vision for the hill responds to the biodiversity and landscape values of the site and seeks to preserve them through measures to support existing replanting areas as well as new revegetation efforts to reinforce existing breed- and bushland areas, increase biodiversity values, improve vegetation connectivity (including with adjacent WREN lands), and enhance landscape values. Balancing these measures with the need to manage bushfire risks, as well as neighbour and user safety; in this near-urban location will be important in the masterplan’s implementation. Proposed facilities should be low-key and sensitively sited and designed, to ensure the long-term viability of the hill’s off-site and to maintain the area’s natural setting and appeal.

Planning for the council lands on Bears Hill also takes a longer view. This includes the opportunity to connect the area’s walking tracks with an existing stock route running along the northern base of the hill. This connection would be a very important link in any “Four Hills Trail” to enable users to “bypass” those parts of the hill not open to the public. Eventual council acquisition of the WREN lands flanking Bears Hill also holds potential for increasing access from open flanking roads or fire trails.

Future council acquisition of other landholdings across Bears Hill, or agreed public access to these areas, would be a very significant change that would warrant the preparation of a new vision for Bears Hill.
4.4 HUON HILL – LOOKOUTS AND LOOP WALKS

The premier and most central attraction among the Wodonga hills, offering vehicle access to day-use facilities and stunning lookouts plus a variety of well-marked short and longer loop walks.

Planning for Huon Hill is largely driven by the hill’s existing role as the best serviced and most accessible of the Wodonga hills and an established destination for visitors. It is the only hill to offer public vehicle access to a high point, and the only hill containing established (day use) facilities. Building on Huon Hill’s existing profile as a tourism attraction and a popular destination among locals, and capitalising on the summit as the hill’s primary destination and facility and activity area for users, will be key. Measures to expand the activities and experiences offered across the hill, including greater walking and scenic viewing opportunities, to enable and support people to experience more of Huon Hill, will add to the area’s appeal. Protected vegetation offset areas on the southern and eastern parts of the hill will influence the type and extent of activities in these locations, providing opportunities for landscape and environmental enhancement. Planning for future leisure and recreational use of Huon Hill also takes a long-term view, recognising that the hill will, ultimately, be completely surrounded by residential areas and a large population of potential users.

Huon Hill is predominantly Wodonga Council-owned and managed land, as shown on Figure 4 (also see Table 1). A smaller, irregularly shaped, area of Crown land extends east-west along the upper section of the access road and also runs north-south in a wider
band across the hill’s higher peaks. This area is administered by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and managed by PAW, as the appointed Committee of Management.

The summit access road and visitor facilities are split across both Wodonga Council and PAW-managed areas. Recognising the importance, and on-ground practicalities, of managing the Huon Hill summit as a single integrated whole, this strategy and the Huon Hill Masterplan outline a collaborative approach to this summit area.

The following are the key advantages and assets and limitations that should shape the future use and management of Huon Hill into the foreseeable future.

**Advantages and Assets**

- The existing public vehicle access road, existing visitor facilities and lookouts.
- The surrounding (developed) public road network.
- The existing walking track and management track (shared use), networks.
- Numerous existing and potential access and entry points (pedestrian and bicycle).
- Links to and from adjacent attractions (notably the Murray and Kiewa river corridors).
- Vantage points and major views to and from the area.
- Potential links or possible track/trail corridors, especially on the hill’s more gently sloped eastern face.
- Areas of scenic vegetation and trees, and other features of interest.
- Locations potentially suitable for the provision of visitor facilities such as picnic or activity areas, entry nodes and facility sites, trailheads or vantage points.

- Native vegetation varying from scattered mature trees to densely vegetated slopes and wildlife corridor connections to surrounding landscape.
- Prominent and scenic views of Huon Hill from the urban area and major carnageways.

**Limitations**

- The only public vehicle access is via a circuitous route and the road surface quality and safety varies.
- The vehicle entry point is on the opposite (eastern) side of the hill from the main Wodonga urban area, with very limited opportunities for other vehicle entry points.
- Pedestrian feeder networks within the adjacent residential areas are not supported with details of Huon Hill tracks and facilities.
- Limited trailhead facilities are available to inform potential park users of available tracks and facilities.
- Absence of attractions and facilities that are accessible to disabled or mobility impaired visitors.
- The existing walking tracks are of varying standards, and often have limited wayfinding.
- Lack of easy and moderate extended walking routes.
- The hill’s steeper southern face limits access options along this edge.
- Issues related to inappropriate activities occurring in areas accessible after hours.
- Growing pest animal populations, especially deer and cats.
- Large areas protected as vegetation offset sites.
The following are key considerations and future directions for the sustainable use and management of Huon Hill.

The summit should continue to be the focus for most users with improvements to the access road and summit picnic and parking areas.

Significant new initiatives for the summit include providing a one-way road and all-abilities path to the existing eastern lookout, improved access for disabled and less mobile visitors, better linking existing and planned attractions on the summit and a new all-abilities accessible lookout offering striking views over the Wodonga CBD and beyond.

Design of all new or upgraded facilities will be careful to retain the summit’s attractive semi-natural and revegetation setting. The council and Parklands Albury Wodonga will also cooperate to ensure that visitors enjoy a high quality experience, regardless of the summit’s split-tenure.

There are opportunities to expand the activities and experiences on offer across the hill, particularly increased walking opportunities, which can draw people away from the centralised facilities of the summit to experience more of Huon Hill. Huon Hill offers greater landform variety and interest than other hills, with gentler slopes (especially on the eastern side) and the scenic appeal of the Hidden Valley area, allowing for a range of potential tracks or links and visitor facility or activity locations.

Realigned, improved or new walking tracks radiating from the summit will allow users to enjoy short hilltop loop walks or connect to the wider track and trail network. Improved signposting and new seating or picnic tables will entice walkers to shady rest stops in attractive groves of mature trees or at impressive vantage points, including views over the Murray River which are a feature of Huon Hill, scattered along these longer tracks and trails.

Walking track and shared path connections east to the Kiewa Trail and the developing Riverside Estate will greatly improve accessibility and use of the hill’s eastern slopes.

In light of Huon Hill’s central location, popularity, profile and existing visitor facilities the area has potential to support events and larger organised or community activities.

Measures to control after hours access, to ensure user safety and reduce the risk of vandalism or anti-social behaviours on the summit and elsewhere will need to be implemented and reviewed as usage changes.

The hill’s biodiversity values, including endangered vegetation communities, and landscape qualities will continue to be protected and enhanced. Revegetation or regeneration measures at several locations will protect vegetation offset sites, improve habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors, reinforce scenic values (especially along the hill’s striking western face which dominates views from the Wodonga CBD) or improve land stability.

Planning for Huon Hill also takes a long-term view. Residential development is progressing or planned around the south-west to south-east margins and all other areas abutting the hill are zoned for residential development. The future Huon Hill will be surrounded by a large population of potential users. Recognising these several possibilities for future entry points, facility sites, walking track or shared path links, and other usage sites can be identified for further consideration.
A quieter destination, where visitors tackling its steep challenging tracks are rewarded with stunning panoramas and a place for environmental gains.

Planning for Mahers Hill is founded on this site’s greater distance from Wodonga and far more limited accessibility, the area’s significant biodiversity conservation values, the challenges of ongoing weed control and gradation, its current low levels of leisure or recreation use and lack of any well-established use patterns or pressures, and the hill’s landscape values and rugged topography but spectacular scenic viewing opportunities.

The endangered Grassy Woodland community occurs in sizeable patches across Mahers Hill and, although affected by continued grazing pressures, the hill’s native vegetation has the potential to be restored as a stronghold for this endangered community. The vision for Mahers Hill prioritises conservation, land management and landscape enhancement measures.

Despite a variety of activities – including walking, scenic viewing, mountain biking, horse riding, fitness training, bush picnicking, birdwatching and nature appreciation – overall leisure and recreation use of Mahers Hill is very low. Consistent with its modified natural setting and more rugged landscape Mahers Hill is envisaged, in the short or medium term, as a quiet low-key destination that will continue to appeal to independent self-reliant and more capable visitors seeking a more physical challenge with few other users and few facilities. However, some simple initiatives are also planned to capitalise on the hill’s location adjacent to High Country Rail Trail and its many breathtaking vantage points.
Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017

8 - Officers reports for determination

Item 8.2 - Document B

Mahers Hill is not expected to come under pressure from increased usage levels or nearby residential development in the foreseeable future. This will allow for a conservative, or precautionary, approach to the area’s planning. Slower and low-key management for increased leisure, recreation or tourism use of Mahers Hill will allow the council to focus on improvements to the area’s vegetation, biodiversity and landscape. As well as delivering environmental gains these measures will enhance the hill’s future leisure and recreation appeal.

The following are the key advantages/assets and limitations that should shape the future use and management of Mahers Hill into the foreseeable future.

Advantages and Assets

- The hill’s significant vantage points, potential lookout and major views from the area – including spectacular 360-degree views from the summit (sweeping views over Lake Hume, the Wodonga region and to the distant Victoria alpine peaks).
- Rugged landscape and steep central spine offering stunning views and challenges for more adventurous visitors.
- More gently sloping western hill face, and areas of flatter land along the site’s western margin.
- Sizeable areas of the endangered Grassy Woodland community, especially on spurs and valleys of the hill’s south-western face.
- Varied, readily observed and interesting bird populations.
- Areas of scenic vegetation and attractive stands of trees.
- The area’s existing management track network, as well as several navigable routes potentially suitable for a variety of recreational uses and providing access to summit and ridge line vantage points.
- Proximity to the Murray Valley Highway and High Country Rail Trail along the hill’s eastern side.
- Proximity to existing day use facilities and car parking on the foreshore of Lake Hume – Ludlows Reserve and Elden Reserve.
- Existing and potential access and entry points (pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle) including via an unmade road reserve now connecting to the hill’s north-east corner.
- Potential links or possible track and trail corridors.
- Locations potentially suitable for the provision of low-key user facilities such as picnic or rest stops, vantage points, activity areas, trailheads or entry nodes.
- Rural setting offering a landscape character and land use setting different to the other Wodonga hills.

Limitations

- Located away from the main Wodonga urban area and distant from the other Wodonga hills with no local user catchment (all intending visitors would have to drive to the site).
- Not obvious as public land or inviting user access and entry presents a rural property largely undifferentiated from those around it.
- Largely land locked by surrounding private property with only two functional access points – to the hill’s boundary at the end of Lees Lane in the north-west, and non-motorised access only along a narrow corridor off the Murray Valley Highway in the south-east.
- A potential entry point in the north-east – along an unmade road reserve – has been fenced off by the adjacent landholder and is not, at present, physically accessible to the public.
• No connections with the urban path network although the High Country Rail Trail passes close to the east.
• No existing user facilities (other than management tracks).
• No existing on-site orientation or activity information for users.
• Parts of the management track network, and many section of the navigable routes, may be hazardous for recreational use (steep, loose surface, limited maintenance, etc.).
• Steep to very steep slopes (especially on the eastern face), and the rugged central ridge line, limit access routes and links through the site.
• Very limited potential for (conventional) vehicle access into and within the area.
• Very little flat curtilage is available for facilities or activity areas on the hill’s eastern side and constrains the siting of facilities.
• Limited on-site management presence and potential safety/emergency response issues associated with increased visitor use.
• Tree density and native vegetation cover and condition reduces towards the north of the hill where grazing impacts are more concentrated due to developed water points.
• Considerable blackberry infestations.
• Providing for the protection or enhancement of biodiversity, landscape and scenic values, will influence the location and type of facilities and activities in places.
• Several areas of eroded drainage line, mainly along the western boundary.
• Small quarry or borrow pit located within and across the hill’s north-eastern boundary.
• Very limited passive surveillance (surrounded by rural blocks).

The following are key considerations and future directions for the sustainable use and management of Mahers Hill.

The vision for Mahers Hill is strongly focused on improving the environmental condition of the hill. The area’s biodiversity and landscape values will be protected and enhanced, and its appeal as a natural setting for leisure and recreation reinforced. Ongoing weed control efforts (especially targeting blackberry), the extensive regeneration or revegetation of endangered Grassly Woodland vegetation communities (particularly across the hill’s less heavily vegetated northern half), and creekline stabilisation and revegetation measures at a number of locations will be a primary focus.

Intentionally limited and low-key set of leisure or recreation proposals for Mahers Hill are considered appropriate, capitalising on the hill’s existing management track network to continue to offer walking, cross-country or touring mountain biking, and horse riding opportunities across the area’s challenging terrain and rural landscapes. The emphasis being on providing for independent use with minimal, if any, supporting facilities and few encounters with other users. Planning also acknowledges the possible need to restrict mountain biking and horseriding in some locations for safety, environmental or management reasons. For these reasons the masterplan also does not provide for four-wheel-driving or trail bike riding as independent activities on Mahers Hill.

The most notable leisure or recreation initiative on Mahers Hill envisages linking each end of the existing management track along the high narrow ridge line and over the summit to the High Country Rail Trail to the east. Requiring some sections of new walking track, notably along the unmade road reserve connecting to the hill’s north-east corner, this would offer a challenging but very rewarding loop walk. Minor improvements at the hill’s summit would provide a low-key rest stop and a safer scenic viewing experience at the trig...
station lookout.

Should usage pressures or demand warrant in the future, the masterplan also identifies the most suitable location for a possible small vehicle access and facility site (at the Lees Lane access point in the north-west) to serve as the main entry and hub for most users driving to Mahers Hill. Similarly, if demand warrants, a new walkers-only track extending much of the way from this entry almost to the hill’s summit and main lookout could also be provided.

Master planning for Mahers Hill could be revisited if or when usage or demand levels markedly increase, nearby residential or rural and residential development occurs, additional knowledge emerges regarding the area’s biodiversity or other values, or other circumstances affecting the area’s use and management change.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 8.2 - Document B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8 - Officers reports for determination</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. IMPLEMENTATION
Realising greater sustainable community enjoyment of the Wodonga hills is a significant undertaking. This strategy, and the accompanying masterplans for each of the five hills, contain a substantial list of individual actions.

Some of these - such as the most of the overall actions in this document - are management guidelines. They provide directions for future decision-making for the Wodonga hills’ enjoyment and management. Many are ongoing actions to be applied or operate during all stages of the strategy’s, and associated masterplans’, implementation. Some are specific tasks that will require funding and resources.

However, most of the actions proposed - notably the majority of those in the individual masterplans - are physical actions, works or other on-site initiatives that will require the commitment of funds and/or resources - such as staff or volunteer time - by the council. Many will also generate ongoing management or maintenance obligations.

The council does not have the capacity to undertake all of these, more resource-intensive, management actions in the foreseeable future. Implementation of this strategy will be reliant on, and largely determined by, the funding and resources available to the council. Funding for various elements of the strategy will be evaluated against the other priorities of the council and determined by the budget allocations assigned in the council’s rolling delivery programs and operational plan. The council will also compete for grant funding, and other external programs, to support the strategy’s implementation.

Nor is the immediate or rapid increase in leisure, recreation and tourism use across all hills desirable. It is far preferable to stage the provision of greater visitor access and enjoyment opportunities and facilities allowing for new usage patterns to be established, user preferences to be elucidated, changing demands emerge, unforeseen environmental impacts to be identified and managed, new management programs or regimes to be established, and resourcing commitments to be assessed. In addition, some actions or initiatives will only become necessary as residential development proceeds around the margins of certain hills.

Recognising this the masterplans for each hill focus on those actions that would present the greatest opportunity for, or most cost-effectively deliver, the strategy’s aim of enabling greater community enjoyment of the hills without significantly impacting, and where possible enhancing, their biodiversity, scenic and cultural heritage values. Even then the strategy’s implementation will be a staged process.

Staging the strategy’s, and masterplans’, implementation will realise planned and orderly increases community access and enjoyment of the hills, while also allowing for the effective management of the hills’ biodiversity, scenic and cultural heritage values and recognition of likely resourcing demands. Importantly, it will also allow for an “adaptive management” approach to providing for enhanced community enjoyment of the Wodonga hills.

The masterplans for each hill also broadly outline “future opportunities” or additional options that could further enhance
sustainable community enjoyment and environmental management at each hill. These are not proposed for realisation in the foreseeable future. Such opportunities would require detailing in future revisions of a hill’s masterplan or through a separate site planning and design process including any necessary assessments, public exhibition, and approvals considered appropriate (as shown in Figure 11). They may also be reliant on the completion of preceding actions or works, require a demonstrable demand or anticipated usage levels, address and emerging management or environmental issue, or other justification.

However, recognising that funding or resources may come from many sources – such as specific-purpose grant funding, corporate sponsorship, volunteer programs, or community initiatives and contributions, to cite a few – a degree of flexibility is warranted in the strategy’s implementation to capitalise on funding and resource opportunities should they arise.

As such individual masterplan actions, or selected future opportunities (subject to required assessments, justification, planning and approvals) may potentially be progressed as funding or resources become available. Where warranted, this may require further detailed assessments (demand assessments, project justifications, site assessments, or others), user or community engagement, public exhibition, and appropriate formal approvals. An indicative assessment and approval process is shown in Figure 11. This would typically apply to actions involving construction or works to create significant new features (such as a new car park or lookout platform, or larger facilities). It would generally not apply to routine management actions, the maintenance or minor upgrade of existing features, or the installation of minor new features (such as seating or a low-key picnic site).

It is proposed this strategy, and the individual masterplans for each hill, will be revised periodically as required by changing circumstances having implications for the hills’ enjoyment, protection and management. These revisions would also provide the chance to review the actions already implemented and their effectiveness. Importantly, the review and preparation of these documents would enable further opportunities for user, neighbour and community involvement and input into the future of the Wodonga hills.
Ordinary meeting – October 16, 2017

8 - Officers reports for determination

Item 8.2 - Document B

Engage relevant stakeholders where required (e.g., potentially adjoining residents, traditional owners, user groups, emergency management agencies). Refine designs and include exhibition stage for community feedback as appropriate.

Action identified as a priority in the Planning for Wodonga Hills Strategy or specific masterplan, or acknowledged as an opportunity or option of a new initiative warranting implementation

Project justification and preliminary design and cost estimates

Identification of required approvals (e.g., council approval, planning permit, cultural heritage assessments, external agency concurrence or approval). Liaison with affected land managers as required.

Confirm funding - internal and/or external

Undertake required site, environmental and planning assessments

Obtain any formal approvals. (If internal council approval only, ensure evaluation against the guiding principles set out in the strategy)

Obtain external agency concurrence or approvals as required (e.g., Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning; or Aboriginal Victoria)

Undertake detailed design, including requirements or conditions arising from approvals.

Implementation

Figure 31: Assessment and approval process for works