

The Merton Plan



Mansfield Shire

May 2023

Mansfield Shire Council acknowledges the Taungurung people as the traditional owners of the land upon which our Shire is located. We pay our respects to the Taungurung elders, past, present and future and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Mansfield Shire

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Executive Summary:

The Merton Township Plan is a comprehensive plan for sustaining the unique character for Merton going into the future with the cooperation with the community's vision and values.

The plan was developed with input from the community, Traditional Owners, and relevant government bodies. The key objectives of the plan are to protect and enhance the community, provide direction for infrastructure and capital works, preserve and enhance the character of Merton, and integrate sustainability, resilience, and biodiversity into decision making. The plan addresses the community's concerns about the recreation reserve, pedestrian and cyclist crossing, community spirit, and safety in relation to Maroondah Highway considerations.

The population of Merton, a small settlement in Mansfield Shire, is estimated to be 216 people, growing by 12.1 over the previous 5 years. The majority of the population is over 50 years old and 52.4% of families do not have children. There are 174 private dwellings in Merton. The median weekly household income is \$1,091, and the majority of houses (55.4%) are owned outright. 36% of dwellings are understood to be holiday homes. The workforce in Merton consists of 51.6% of the population, with a lower unemployment rate (2.9%) compared to the rest of Victoria (6.0%). The population of Merton who are vulnerable to housing and mortgage stresses is 44.6%, making it more resilient to externalities affecting the housing market compared to the rest of Victoria (60.7% vulnerable).

State, regional and local planning policies, plans, and reports are relevant to the planning and management of Mansfield's Townships. The State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) addresses issues of state importance, including the built environment and heritage, economic development, and transport and infrastructure. The Clause 15 of the SPPF directly applies to promoting the creation of a sustainable and liveable environment while preserving the existing natural landscape and neighbourhood character. The Hume Regional Growth Plan provides broad directions for sustainable growth in the region. The local policies, plans, and reports support the creation of a safe, healthy, functional, and enjoyable urban environment that contributes to a sense of place and cultural identity.

The centre of Merton is zoned as Township Zone allowing for the necessary development for the town of housing and business use with the Farming Zone and Rural Living Zone satisfying the other land use needs of residents of the town. Public Conservation and Resource Zone, Transport Zone 2, and Public Parks and Recreation Zone. The Environmental Significance Overlay Schedule 2 applies to areas that may pose a risk to water quality and requires development to be compatible with environmental values. Opportunities in Merton include linking community spaces with residents, improved integration with the Great Victorian Rail Trail, and connecting separated residential areas. Constraints include the lack of reticulated water and sewer, which is a significant limit to future development.

Introduction

Defining a Structure Plan

A structure plan defines the preferred future growth within an area and articulates how the associated growth should be managed (DELWP, 2019). These plans are created by combining community vision and needs, expert knowledge and data to create a powerful tool for both the community and local government.

Generally, these plans:

- ▶ Manage change to ensure the valued character of a town is both maintained and improved to ensure the area is an attractive, vibrant area to live, work and shop
- ▶ Support the community by ensuring the area develops in accordance with community vision
- ▶ Ensure economic and social vitality of the area
- ▶ Direct Council resources and focus investment to best serve the community
- ▶ Provide certainty to local communities and potential investors about expectations for the future form of development

Study Area

The main study area is shown to the right. However, the Merton plan also considers the broader context of Merton including surrounding residents and settlements.

Vision Statement

In 2024, Merton is an active community that enjoys a peaceful area, with the ability to access all the activities that the surrounding area has to offer. The centre of our small town is a pedestrian-friendly space, with easy access to the reserve, historical buildings and social spaces where we can meet and play. Our community is healthy and connected, engaging in local activities, supporting local projects and enjoying the surrounding natural landscape.

Key Objectives and Principles

- ▶ Support the community, and community values within Merton.
- ▶ Provide direction for infrastructure provision and capital works.
- ▶ Support the recreation reserve as the principal sporting activity area of Merton Township.
- ▶ Integrate sustainability, resilience, and biodiversity as an imbedded consideration to strategic decision making for Merton.
- ▶ Encourage integration of the town with the Great Victorian Rail Trail through safe accessibility.

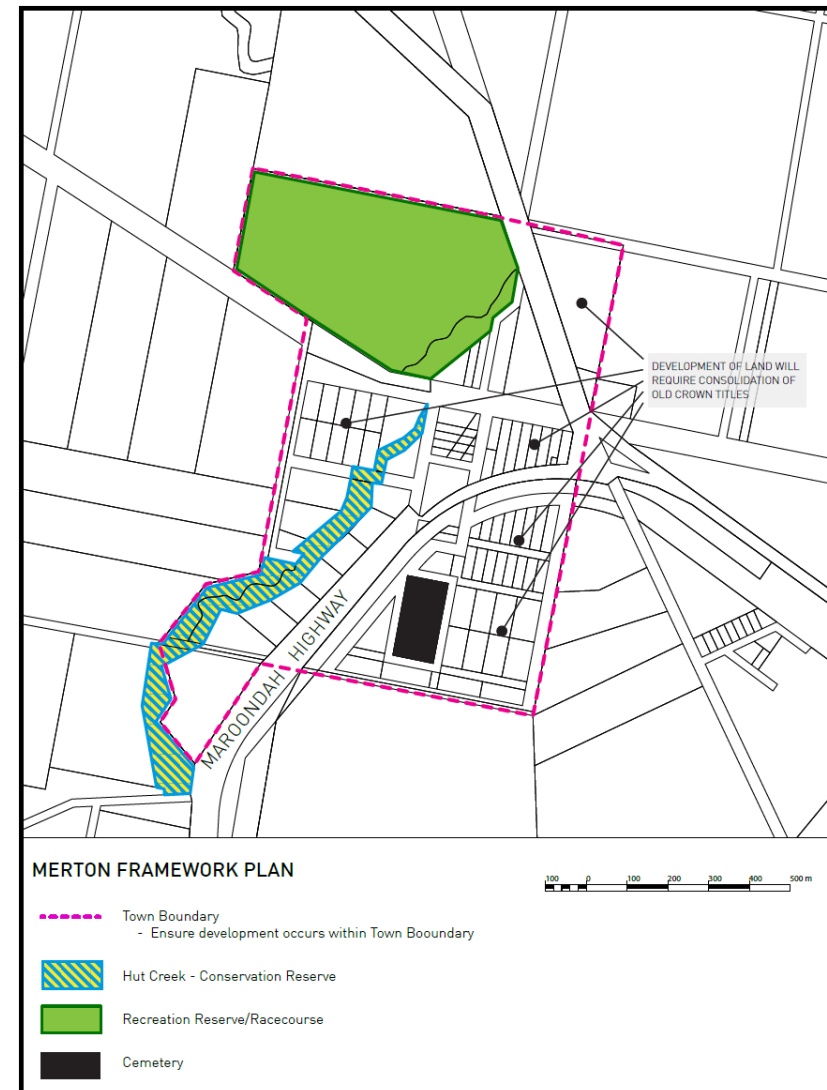


Figure 1 Existing Framework Plan

Community and Stakeholder Engagement

The Merton Plan has been prepared in collaboration with the Merton community, and relevant referral agencies and government bodies. As part of the initial engagement period, the Taungurung Land and Waters Council, and the Gadhaba were consulted directly as traditional owners relevant to the area.

Between 23 November to 23 December 2022, Council officers engaged with the community and undertook the process of generating collaborative ideas with interested parties. Throughout the public facing sessions including a workshop at the Merton Community Hall, and the Township Walk, Officers received written, verbal, and feedback submitted electronically informing the plan.

Some comments from the community included:

- ▶ The importance of the Merton recreation reserve as a central activity area within the town and the memorial hall
- ▶ The need to improve and maintain the recreation reserve and allow a variety of activities there
- ▶ The need for safe pedestrian and cyclist crossings along the Maroondah Highway to the rail trail
- ▶ A firm desire to maintain community spirit and improve connections between residents through a variety of engaging activities.

Any comments provided by government agencies have also been included within the creation of this plan. Some key points of consideration realised by referral agencies include:

- ▶ Maintaining the natural biodiversity of the area
- ▶ Ensuring that future development is appropriate, seeking to prioritise human life with regard to bushfire considerations
- ▶ Managing the interface between Merton and Maroondah Highway to ensure the safety of residents, and efficiency of the road as transport and freight network.



Figure 2 Frequent words raised by the Merton Community

Part A: Background

The *Mansfield Planning Strategy* undertook a holistic study of Mansfield Shire, examining existing and historical strategic documents. The strategy determined that Mansfield Shire requires updated structure plans for each respective town in the area to provide certainty for current and future residents and create desirable future planning outcomes to avoid ad hoc development negatively impacting the established beauty of Mansfield Shire.

Regional and Township Context

Located at the entrance to Mansfield Shire and surrounded by rolling plains, Merton has the benefit of a beautiful natural environment. The township is accessible via just under a two hour and ten minute drive from the Melbourne Central Business district and is a short distance from surrounding growing towns which allows its residents to enjoy a variety of experiences but return to the quieter setting of Merton. The town is a thirty minute drive from Mansfield, where all essential services are available, public transport to and from Mansfield to Merton is limited.

In accordance with Clause 11.01-1L-02, Merton is one of Mansfield Shire's smaller settlements, not connected to reticulated sewer which limits its ability for significant development.

Merton township's built forms are oriented to view the surrounding views of the natural landscape which comprise sloping hills and broad open fields dotted with native vegetation. This sense of openness permeates the town with large land parcels and low density structures. Any boundary fencing present is open permeable fencing which ensures that all dwellings interact with the surrounding neighbourhood.

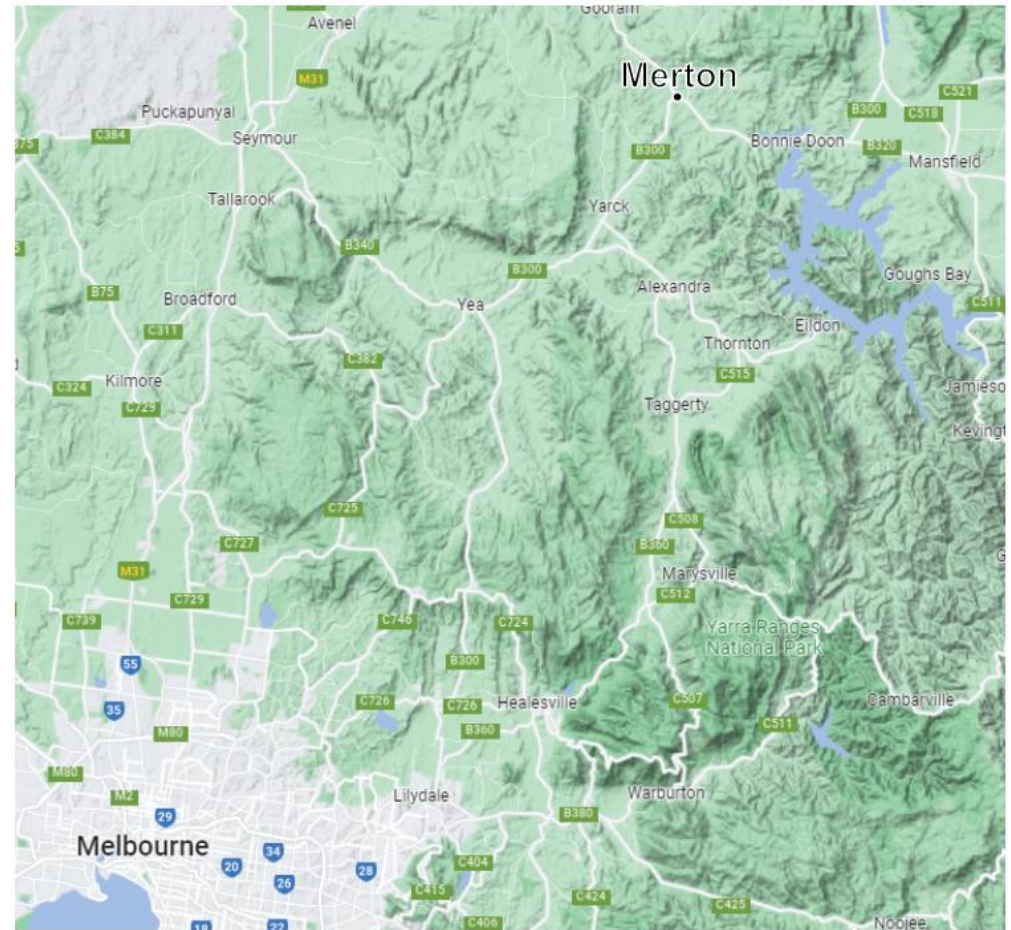


Figure 3 Merton Context

Community Profile

To allow analysis of Merton’s profile, all data has been compared to the rest of Victoria averages. The rest of Victoria is defined as the whole of Victoria but excluding the region of Melbourne given that it is the highest density urban environment in the state and therefore considered an outlier.

Key area profile data, obtained from the 2021 ABS census, and .id consultants:

- Estimated resident population: 216
- Population growth: 12.1% since previous census (2016)
- Median age: 53
- 52.4% of families do not have children
- Average Household size: 2.3 persons
- Median weekly household income: \$1,091
- 54.9% of houses are owned outright

Population

The 2021 Census recorded Merton’s population to be approximately 216 people, 57.6% of the population being male and 42.4% female.

Age Structure

Like the rest of the Mansfield Shire, Merton’s population is ageing. The most dominant age group residing in Merton is the population between 60-64 years of age, accounting for 18.2% of the population. 60.4% of Merton’s residential population is above the age of 50, 26% higher than the of the rest of Victoria, which is 34.4%

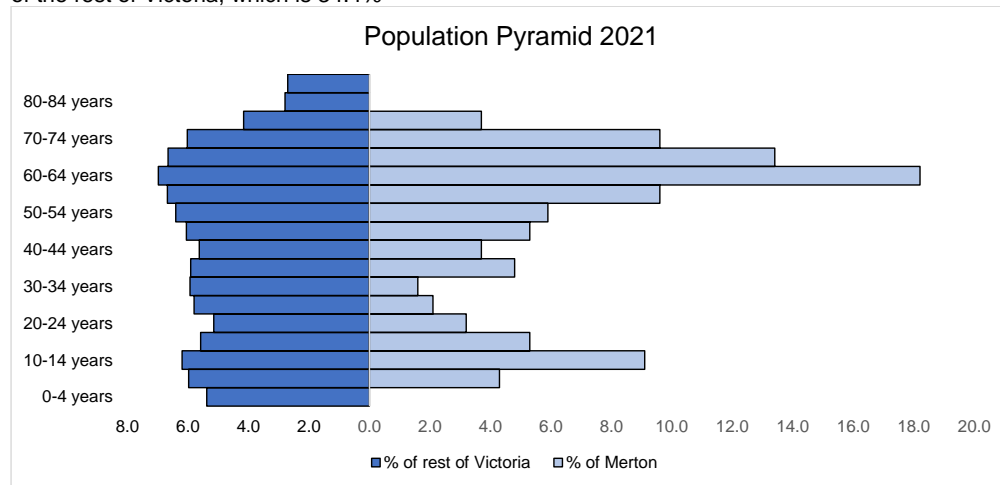


Figure 4, Population pyramid. Source: ABS 2021 census

Family Composition

The 2021 Census indicates that 61% of families in Merton do not have children, in comparison to the rest of Victoria average: 44.3%. These statistics are consistent with the population pyramid. The majority of Merton’s permanent residents are in a later stage of life, and no longer have children at home.

Labour Force

2021 Census data reports that 104 Merton residents stated that they are part of the workforce, which is 56.5% of the town’s population. The workforce at the time of the Census had an unemployment rate of 5.8%. This is slightly lower than the rest of Victoria average, 6.0%.

Weekly Household income

Median weekly household income	\$1,091
Median monthly mortgage repayments	\$1,500
Median weekly rent (a)	\$200
Average number of motor vehicles per dwelling	2.4

Source: 2021 ABS Census

The above shows that generally, most houses in Merton are not subject to mortgage or rental stresses. Mortgage and rental stress is broadly defined as the percentage of household income that must be allocated to loan, rental payments or other associated housing costs such as electricity, water etc. If a household needs to spend over 30% of their income on this, that household is considered to be experiencing mortgage or rental stress.

Housing Tenure

Merton’s composition of housing tenure types was reported in the 2021 Census to be 55.9% owned outright, 33% owned with a mortgage and 4.4% renting their home. The percentage of houses owned outright in Merton is 16.6% higher than the rest of Victoria average, 39.3%.

More generally, Merton has less rentals than the rest of Victoria, roughly the same proportion of residents with a mortgage, and a far higher portion of persons owning houses outright.

The above information shows that in general, a large portion of the Merton community are resilient to negative externalities affecting mortgage repayments and rental stresses – this includes rises in interest rates and inflation, or stagflation.

Mortgage and Rental Stress

Having reviewed tenure, approximately 45.1% of Merton is vulnerable to housing and mortgage stresses. This makes Merton significantly more resilient to externalities affecting the housing market in comparison to the rest of Victoria, which has 60.7% of its residents vulnerable to these stresses.

Heritage

According to the *Shire of Mansfield Stage 1 Heritage survey 2015*, the first inhabitants of the area were the Taungurung people of the Kulin nation. The area was originally inhabited for at least 10,000 years prior to arrival of the Europeans. The people held alliances with several other clans and language groups throughout Victoria who together are known as the Kulin Nation. Their lives were disrupted in the 1840s, subject to the arrival of European settlement in the land west of Mansfield.

Within the *Shire of Mansfield Stage 1 Heritage Survey, 2015*, there are several places of heritage value identified. These have been listed to the right of this section with the purpose of noting that these areas should be protected and considered within the realm of future development. Where future development would create negative impacts on these places of heritage value it should be discouraged unless sufficient measures are undertaken to avoid negative impacts.

Historical Timeline

1858	▶ Merton Post Office opened on 1st July
1886	▶ The 55 acres on Merton Euroa Rd reserved for the Merton Recreation Reserve and a Committee of Management (CoM) was set up to manage the reserve & clubs – Turf, Cricket, Football, Golf & Tennis
1887	▶ Merton Amateur Turf Club holds first meeting
1890	▶ The railway to Mansfield arrived from Tallarook
1892	▶ Merton Cricket Club (MCC) formed
1893	▶ Merton Football Club is formed
1895	▶ A two room timber pavilion is built at Recreation Reserve
1908	▶ Merton Tennis Club formed & court laid down
1911	▶ The land in Shaws Rd was reserved for a hall to be known as Merton Mechanics Institute
1919	▶ Picture shows are run in Merton
1923	▶ Hall constructed, completed & opened
1924	▶ First tennis club house is built, pennant flag is won
1945	▶ Mechanics Institute officially renamed Merton Memorial Hall
1951	▶ Cricket, football & golf clubs folded
1952	▶ Kitchenette & toilets added to the Hall as a tribute to returned servicemen & women

Identified Places of Heritage Value:

- ▶ Merton Memorial Hall
- ▶ Uniting Church
- ▶ Catholic Church (former)
- ▶ Merton Hotel (No longer existing)
- ▶ Merton Railway group

1964	▶ Present site for tennis club house established (golf club house moved to the site)
1966	▶ Tennis court lights installed & premiers in local competitions 1972, 73, 76, 82, 83, 93-94, 95-96
1972	▶ Merton cricket club (mcc) reformed
1977	▶ The last passenger rail service was through on 28 May
1978	▶ Merton Railway was closed
1983	▶ Dam constructed to cater for water demands
1988	▶ New concrete tennis courts constructed
2001	▶ Last competition tennis played
2002	▶ Committees of Management for Hall & Recreation Reserve amalgamate to manage land owned by DELWP (Vic Gov)
2005	▶ Incorporation of CoM under Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978
2006	▶ Bore installed at recreation Reserve
2012	▶ MCC premiers
2013	▶ Nearer Safer Place declared at Recreation Reserve
2016	▶ Restoration, renovation & addition of new kitchen & toilets at the Memorial Hall
2017	▶ MCC premiers & folds
2021	▶ MCC reforms & fields a team in a local league, making the finals

Policy Context:

Multiple State, Regional and Local planning policies, plans and reports are relevant to the planning, development and management of Mansfield's Townships. The following is a brief summary of these:

State Planning Policy Framework

State Planning Policies are the overall contents that relate to the use of land and its development throughout Victoria. In addition to following the strategic direction of *Plan Melbourne*, the framework seeks to improve the planning of key regional areas by creating regional strategies. The regional strategies applicable to Mansfield is the *Hume regional Growth Plan, 2019*.

The State Planning Policy Framework (SPPF) addresses issues of state importance that address settlement planning, residential development, environmental and landscape values including environmental risks and amenity, natural resource management, built environment and heritage, housing, economic development, transport and infrastructure.

Clause 13.02 requires that bushfire be considered in the creation of plans for residential areas within bushfire prone locations. Recommendations and assessment of this clause are included later in this document.

Clause 15 directly applies to the purpose of this plan as it covers urban design, Building Design, Subdivision Design, Healthy neighbourhoods, Neighbourhood character and Design for rural areas. The common objective within all of these sub headers is *"To create urban environments that are safe, healthy, functional and enjoyable and that contribute to a sense of place and cultural identity"*. The clause promotes the creation of a sustainable and liveable environment within a given area. Part of this clause also seeks to preserve the existing natural landscape, positioning it as a valuable asset and identifying key landmarks to also be retained and promoted within the area. The importance of the lived experience is identified within the clause and the need for a level of integration between the built, architectural form and layout, and the existing natural environment. Additional considerations promote the design of spaces that support community safety and protect the neighbourhood character of the area.

Regional Strategies

The *Hume Regional Growth Plan, 2019* provides broad directions for regional land use and development and provides detailed planning frameworks for key centres. The plan also provides a vision for long-term prosperity and sustainable growth by identifying economic environmental, social and cultural resources to be preserved and enhanced. It also identifies which areas are capable of accommodating future growth, and opportunities for supporting regional level infrastructure to ensure the long term sustainability of the region.

Local Planning Policy Framework

The Local Planning Policy framework (LPPF) comprises two key sections: the Municipal Strategic Statements (MSS) and local planning policies.

The Municipal Strategic Statement sets out the vision for Council; these recognise that the municipality is expected to experience considerable increase in population in the future and sets out key strategies for the sustainable growth of the municipality. The visioning statements are focused on providing for population growth while also maintain the rural nature of the municipality.

The current local strategy for Merton within Clause 11.01-1L-02 is as follows:

- ▶ Encourage limited commercial and retail development
- ▶ Support the consolidation of old crown titles to facilitate development of land within township boundaries.

Zones

The study area of Merton comprises the **Township Zone** within its existing settlement boundary which provides primarily for residential land use. The purpose of this zone includes:

- ▶ To implement the Municipal Planning Strategy and the Planning Policy Framework.
- ▶ To provide for residential development and a range of commercial, industrial and other uses in small towns.
- ▶ To encourage development that respects the neighbourhood character of the area.
- ▶ To allow educational, recreational, religious, community and a limited range of other non-residential uses to serve local community needs in appropriate locations.

The study area also includes other zones such as the **Farming Zone**, **Public Use Zone Schedule 5**, **Transport Route Zone schedule 2**, the **Public Conservation and Resource Zone** and the **Public Parks and Recreation Zone**.

It should be noted that the **Farming Zone** seeks to protect and promote agricultural uses, discouraging residential type development. Furthermore, the area covered by the **Transport Route Zone Schedule 2** forms part of Victoria's Principal road network and will need to be unobstructed given its importance in regard to access, freight and transport.

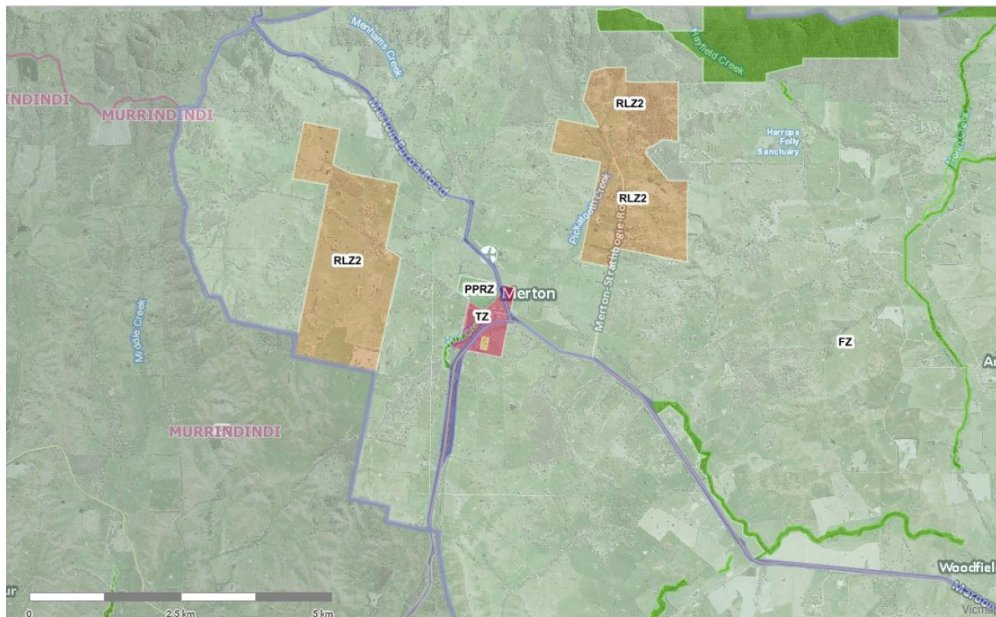


Figure 5, Current zonings in Merton

Overlays

The **Environmental Significance Overlay schedule 2** applies to areas where there are possible risks associated with water quality. The purpose of this zone includes:

- To identify areas where the development of land may be affected by environmental constraints.
- To ensure that development is compatible with identified environmental values.

Most development currently must consider this overlay given that Merton is not connected to reticulated water or sewer. The capacity for effluent treatment fields on a site is a key consideration for any future development because inappropriate treatment will create negative impacts on water quality, the environment and general amenity for inhabitants.

The **Land Subject to Inundation Overlay** applies to Merton Creek, and denotes areas prone to flood, and require development to consider flooding potential, placing constraints on development to be appropriate for future flood impacts.

The **Bushfire Management Overlay** applies to pockets of dense vegetation surrounding the Merton Township. This denotes areas that are prone to, and at risk of bushfire impacts. Any development under this overlay needs to prioritise the protection of human life and must be designed to address the potential for bushfire. Currently, the only residential zone around Merton under this overlay is the Rural Living Zone Schedule 2. In accordance with Planning Practice Note 64, the creation of new residential zones within the Bushfire Management Overlay is discouraged.

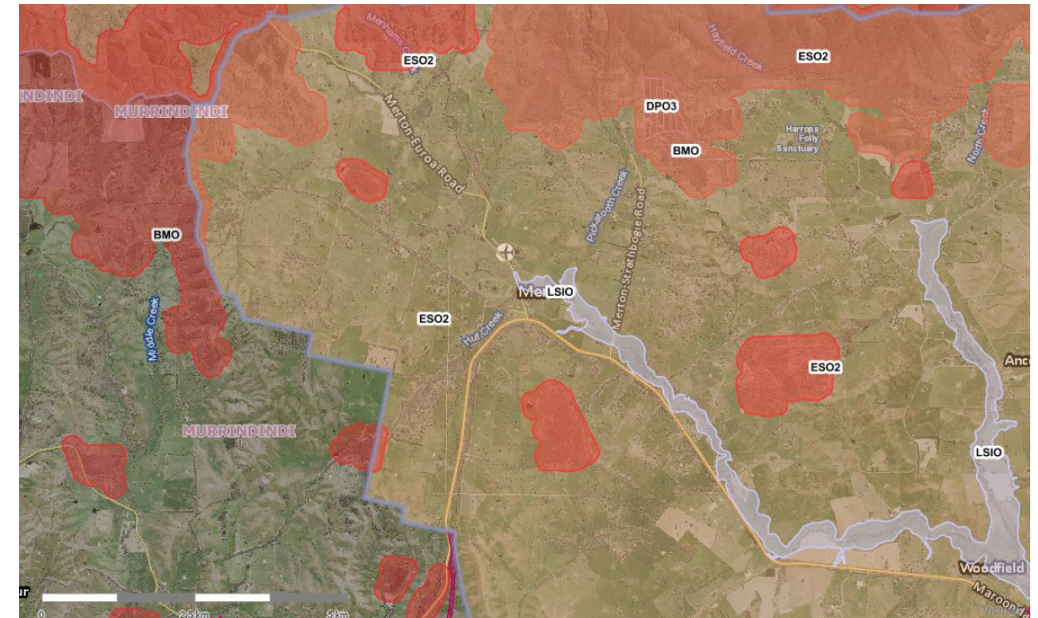


Figure 6, Current Overlays in Merton

Land Use

The following observations are made regarding existing land use and structure characteristics within the study area:

- ▶ The **Gateways** of Merton are the entrance into the Mansfield Shire and are defined by a Heavily vegetated approach with glimpses of a creek at the Western entrance, and a large open road with views of the historical railway goods shed on the eastern approach. A secondary gateway from Merton-Euroa Road links the town to Strathbogie Shire.
- ▶ The **Commercial Area** is defined by a single service station that provides fuel and essential goods.
- ▶ The **Great Victorian Rail Trail** runs along the South of Maroondah Highway which separates it from Merton township. The rail trail is generally obscured by native vegetation and limited signs demarking its location exists. Although residents and tourists alike utilise the rail trail, its integration with the Merton township is limited and made problematic by potentially hazardous crossings required to access Merton Township from the rail trail and Merton-Strathbogie road where Merton residents also live.
- ▶ The **Community Centre** acts as an integral part of community activity within Merton. Residents are informed of new projects, and community events from this centre and it enables the community to connect with each other. The centre can also be booked to hold events.
- ▶ The **Recreation Reserve** is the central activity hub for Merton, with the community having plans to construct a skatepark within the site and plans for camp drafting events to also be held on the site. The reserve comprises a horse racing track, cricket pitch, playground, several buildings associated with horse racing and a large concrete area, large open grass areas and a deteriorating tennis court. The primary activity within this area is sporting activity and sees most of its use during weekends. The area hosts horse racing every year and is also used as a free camping site and related recreational activities.
- ▶ **Underutilised land Parcels** exist along Shaws Road, and on the southern side of the Maroondah Highway. All these areas are within the Township Zone but exist as vacant and undeveloped land. Some surrounding Rural Living Zoned areas where large parcels exist but have not been developed either. Should development occur in the future, it will be encouraged that these areas aim to create a connection to the main township.

A map of existing conditions within Merton township is shown on the page below.

Activities

Council's assets and areas managed by Council in Merton proper are as follows:

- ▶ 29 Duke Street (cemetery)
- ▶ 28 Maroondah Highway

Land opportunities and constraints

Merton has a mixed of established areas, and undeveloped allotments, such as 20 Bon Crescent. The existing opportunities and constraints within Merton Township are as follows:

Opportunities:

- ▶ Link community spaces with residents
- ▶ Improved integration with the Great Victorian Rail Trail
- ▶ Connect the separated residential areas

Constraints

- ▶ No reticulated water and sewer, a significant limiter to any future development.
- ▶ Location of the arterial road (Maroondah highway).
- ▶ Distance between the main township and surrounding Rural Living Zoned areas where the majority of the Merton population appear to inhabit.

Future Potential Developments Identified from Previous Plans and Strategies

- ▶ Merton skatepark
- ▶ Redevelopment of VLine Bus Stop
- ▶ Crossing to rail trail at Merton-Strathbogie road
- ▶ Tourism signage upgrade
- ▶ Additional upgrades to Merton Common

Merton Plan Existing Conditions

Legend



Settlement Boundary



Land Use

-  Residential Land
-  Public Open Space
-  Community Centre
-  Rural Living Zone
-  Farming Zone



Movement Network

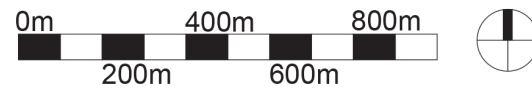
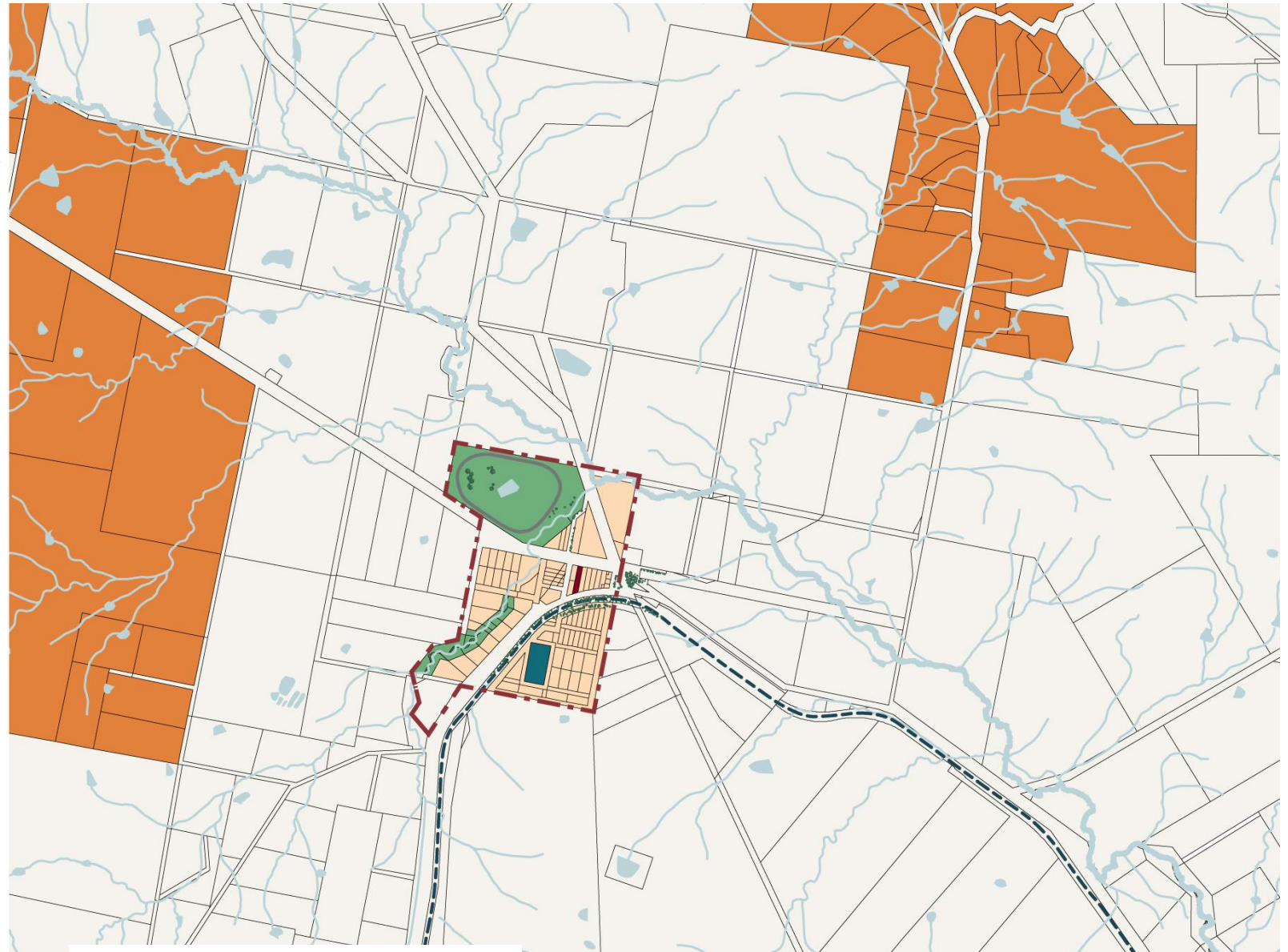
-  Paved Path
-  Gravel Path

Built Form

-  Community Centre
-  Cemetery

Natural Environment

-  Lake, Dams, Water
-  Vegetation



Built Form

Within the Mansfield Planning Strategy, 2021, The character of Merton was analysed, and a character statement was created regarding the built form and design of the area. This character statement is as follows:

Merton is a small settlement off the Maroondah Highway and the first township on the western edge of the Mansfield Shire. It has a population of around 216 people and an estimated 36 percent of dwellings are holiday homes. Merton and Hut Creeks flow through the town, which is also located alongside the Great Victorian Rail Trail. Some rural properties offer accommodation for tourists visiting the Shire. The Merton Racecourse on Merton-Euroa Road hosts turf races and holds an annual Merton Picnic Cup on New Years' Day.

Housing in Merton is characterised by a small number of houses clustered along Shaws Road and Merton-Euroa Road within the Township Zone (TZ). Some land on the south side of Maroondah Highway near the Merton Cemetery reserve is subdivided into smaller allotments between 0.2-0.5 hectares (2,000-5,000 square metres) and is currently undeveloped. Development features include:

- ▶ Generous front setbacks, generally a minimum 20 metres
- ▶ Established trees (native and exotic) planted around dwellings and outbuildings (sheds) The Water tanks and outbuildings familiar to rural lifestyle settings
- ▶ Unsealed roads and verges and driveways
- ▶ Development era and construction materials vary, with some timber construction and hipped tin roofs, while other houses are brick construction with tiled roofs.

Residential character Merton represents the Rural village typology, similar to other settlements within Mansfield Shire such as Jamieson, Maingdample and Woods Point.

Proposed Character Statement:

Rural villages are small settlements set among wider farming and rural areas, sometimes with national park close by. Vegetation in the public and private realm is a key feature of these areas, with large native and introduced trees and supporting undergrowth. In locations where topography is undulating, dwellings may have narrower front setbacks and be highly visible from roadsides.

Intermittent views of surrounding landscapes and vegetation are afforded by streets that wind across gently undulating topography. Settlements are generally laid out according to a loose grid which lends a heritage feel and may itself be oriented to make best use of topography. Views through the settlement to the surrounding rural landscape or national park are readily available along road corridors and between dwellings, given the intimate scale of these settlements.

New dwellings make use of natural materials with muted colours and tones to fit within the rural and landscape setting. Use of eaves, permeable driveway treatments, significantly recessed garaging and unobtrusive (at least 50 percent visually permeable) front fencing (or an absence of front fencing) are key features of these settlements which should be replicated in new development.

Housing

Land Supply and Demand

The demand for land for housing in Merton can be met in the existing land supply and zoned land within Merton. The Mansfield Planning Strategy identified that the remaining capacity for development within the existing zones of the Township Zone and the Rural Living Zones in Merton. These zones allow for the potential for infill development.

The 2021 ABS Census states that Merton had a total population of 216, and 174 private dwellings. In accordance with resident to non-resident ratepayer split within this area, 75 of these dwellings are reported as unoccupied. With an average household size of 2.3, all other dwellings are occupied and at capacity.

Access and Movement

The Mansfield Planning Strategy 2021 encourages walkability to the commercial core within townships. The ability to access commercial areas without needing to walk a distance greater than 400 metres is preferred, but less realistic in a regional environmental compared to an urban setting. The distances within the Township Zone are walkable. In the rest of the township and surrounds cycling or driving to the centre of Merton is more feasible. However, with Merton having limiting services car transportation of use of the VLine Bus service is needed to access services in the rest of Mansfield Shire or in nearby Shire of Murrindindi.

Landscape and Topography

The terrain of Merton township is relatively flat with Merton and is boarded by land zoned for Farming. The hilly surrounds make for an area of natural beauty enjoyed by both residents and visitors. Merton is within proximity to the Puzzle Range to the South-west and the Strathbogie Range to the North. 60% of the Mansfield Shire is public land, situated within places identified as state and national parks, state forests and nature reserves. These natural features are considered as assets to Merton Township, and the connection to these areas should be maintained, including views and accessibility to the surrounding natural environment.

Retail and Commercial Opportunities

Merton contains limited commercially zoned land and supports local level convenience needs. There is no industrial land within the area.

There is opportunity to expand the existing convenience store to provide additional services for residents and visitors. However, it is noted that for more general needs such as groceries, residents have stated that these are obtained from Mansfield Township or Alexandra within the neighbouring Murrindindi Shire.

Merton township will continue to service the convenience and fuel needs of residents and visitors. Commercial growth supporting local employment is encouraged into the future.

Community Led Initiatives – how can our community contribute to our vision

Members of the Merton community stated that there are opportunities within the town to increase the number of events within the area. Some ideas included

- ▶ Skate park
- ▶ Pedestrian and cyclist connections
- ▶ Additional sporting events within the recreation reserve
- ▶ Maintenance of the old tennis and basketball court at the recreation reserve
- ▶ A space to house and display the research that has been completed on the History of Merton
- ▶ Host cultural events at the Merton Memorial Hall.

Open Space

The primary open space within Merton Township is the Merton recreation reserve. Residents and visitors to Merton make use of the Great Victorian Rail Trail as areas for recreational activity.

Community Sustainability and Resilience

Currently, community resilience is nested with a typical standard for a regional area. Most community members indicate that they feel prepared for bushfires, or similar environmental hazards.

The town is valuable for the Great Victorian Rail Trail. This is due to the trail going through Merton on the south side of the Maroondah Highway. Allowing for safe and clear crossing along the Great Victorian Rail Trail to the centre of Merton will encourage greater connections for people along the trail.

Part B: Recommendations and Implementation

Vision for Our Community:

In 2023, Merton is a community that connects its future with its past by recognising the importance of history, environment and community in its growth and development. The centre of our small town is a pedestrian-friendly space, with easy access to reserves, historical buildings and social spaces where we can meet and play. Our community is healthy and connected, having access to adequate healthcare, good sporting facilities and natural vistas. Our economic prosperity is secure and supported by our local businesses.

Objectives

- ▶ To create clearly defined signs and opportunities to connect with the town that improve the identification and recognition of the Merton township along the Maroondah Highway.
- ▶ To promote Merton within its wider regional Hume tourism context.
- ▶ To strengthen Merton's integration with the Great Victorian Rail Trail.
- ▶ To enhance the appearance of the public realm, including primary and secondary streetscapes.
- ▶ To enhance and conserve the Merton Recreation reserve as the principle activity area of Merton Township.
- ▶ To provide clear urban and built form guidance for new, infill development and alterations and additions to existing buildings.
- ▶ To manage the facilities and public spaces at hand proactively and sustainably
- ▶ To build and expand the thriving inclusive and adaptable community in Merton
- ▶ To encourage cooperative educational, environmental sporting and group interest/social events resulting in a healthy and viable and culturally respectful Merton population hub.
- ▶ To reinstate the tennis club and its facilities
- ▶ To plan for future school needs and transport

Key Directions

Based on a review of the area, and feedback from the community, a series of key directions have been determined. These outline important initiatives to achieve the visions and objectives for the future of Merton. These key directions are:

1. Identify and improve key infrastructure services including the pedestrian and bicycle network in Merton to create safe crossings across the Maroondah Highway, connect settlement areas and enhance the town's connection with the Great Victorian Rail trail
2. Activate the entrance to Merton through beautification and improved signs denoting key features and aspect of the town.
3. Implement design and character guidelines for future development to protect Merton's identity.

The following pages contain additional details on the delivery of these key actions through a township framework plan, and concept shared pathways plan.

Urban Design Framework

Land Use

The centre of Merton is under the Township Zone, which is where the Merton Memorial Hall, Merton Service Station, CFA Fire Station and surrounds the Merton Cemetery. The Township Zone allows for a mix of housing and these commercial and community uses to co-exist with individual private dwellings in the township. The open space that are in the centre of Merton including the Recreation Reserve and along Hut Creek are zoned as Public Park and Recreation Zone and Public Conservation and Resource Zone respectively.

Access, movement, and open space

Merton has a rich connection to its history, open spaces and the natural surroundings. The way these features are interacted with by the Merton community allows for active transport to be undertaken for journeys within Merton township and the surrounds. However, to access services outside of Merton such as education, health and most commercial need require personal vehicle or VLine bus service to access. To encourage active transport safe crossings for pedestrians along the Maroondah Highway is needed. With a Maroondah Highway separating the majority of the township from the Great Victorian Rail Trail. The pedestrian crossing should not obstruct existing traffic flow given that the Maroondah Highway forms part of Victoria's Principal Freight Network. The creation of more accessible pathways helps achieve the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 which aims to *Ensure Healthy Lives and Promote Well-Being for all at all ages*. The creation of these is necessary and is encouraged into the future with future infill development allowing for contributions from developers to upgrade the existing path network.

The Merton Memorial Hall / Community Centre

Council will continue to support the prosperity of the Merton Community Centre. This includes continuing to maintain a positive relationship with the community, recognising that the community centre is integral to the resilience and continued sustenance of the Merton community, having undertaken multiple self-led initiatives to benefit the community.

Recreation Reserve and Open Space

The recreation reserve, also known as the Merton Recreation Reserve, will continue to serve as Merton's main recreational open space for sporting events. Due to the limited ability for additional open spaces with topography constraints, the recreation reserve is suited to serve the community's needs in terms of providing an area for sport, active fitness, a park for younger families and a bookable venue for social events in the centre of town. With the importance of this open space in mind, it is recommended that as development continues within Merton, future pathways be implemented to improve the connectivity of the reserve to the town's centre, the Great Victorian Rail Trail, and residential areas. This objective is consistent with SDG 11, which aims to *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable*.

Built Form and Infrastructure

Development and Character

The built form will continue to reflect the style and scale of existing development in accordance with the recommendations of the Mansfield Planning Strategy, 2021. The implementation of this character statement into the Mansfield Planning Scheme will ensure that any future development will be required to maintain the identified, desired character of the area. It is considered that the implementation of a character statement which creates policy and guidelines for development is the most effective method of counteracting any potentially adverse development that would otherwise negatively impact the amenity of the town.

Roads and Parking

Merton centre is served by the Maroondah Highway and the Merton-Euroa Road, with the Merton-Strathbogie Road also provides a key service link to the township. Merton's location as a relatively small township on these medium to major rural roads. This has resulted in Merton being well connected to road network, while also meaning that there is a high level of vehicles traveling between 80km/h-100km/h passing through and not interacting with the town. It is proposed that the speed limited along the Maroondah Highway within Merton be reduced from 80km/h to 60km/h in the interest of public safety and risk reduction.

The existing car parking infrastructure is sufficiently meeting the day to day needs of the town. However, when events or the seasonal tourism that takes places in and around Merton can see visiting vehicles parking outside of dedicated carparking areas. This can result in undermining of town facilities such as parks and public benches being inaccessible and in turn creating situations where pedestrians are forced to navigate between parked and moving vehicles in an unsafe and undefined manner. In the absence of Council's ability to create additional parking areas due to a lack of funding and topography constraints, it is recommended to make parking locations clearer and discourage inappropriate parking and beautify the entrance to Mansfield Shire.

Wastewater, Water Supply, and Water Treatment

A lack of infrastructure for sewage, water treatment and water supply present a significant constraint to the possibility of future development within Merton. It has been identified that allotments in this area are currently all serviced by individual on site effluent systems which can create issues where allotments are too small to cater for appropriate wastewater treatment.

To mitigate future effluent treatment problems, it is proposed that smaller allotments are consolidated to cater for any larger developments within and around the Merton Township.














Bushfire

Future development should seek to reduce the potential for bushfire hazards by reducing on site fuel loads. Where landscaping is provided, understorey should be setback from buildings, with trees and canopies being a preferred landscaping method to reduce the potential for bushfire. Whilst Merton is in a low bushfire prone area with limited potential for future development, proactive mitigation measures are necessary to avoid future bushfire hazards

Proposed Structure Plan

Merton Plan

Legend

-  Settlement Boundary
- Land Use**
-  Residential Land
-  Public Open Space
-  Community Centre
-  Rural Living Zone
-  Farming Zone
- Movement Network**
-  Paved Path
-  Gravel Path
-  Future Path
- Built Form**
-  Community Centre
-  Cemetery
- Natural Environment**
-  Lake, Dams, Water
-  Vegetation

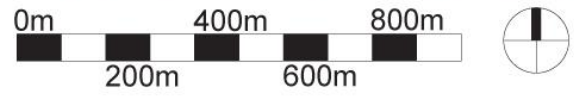
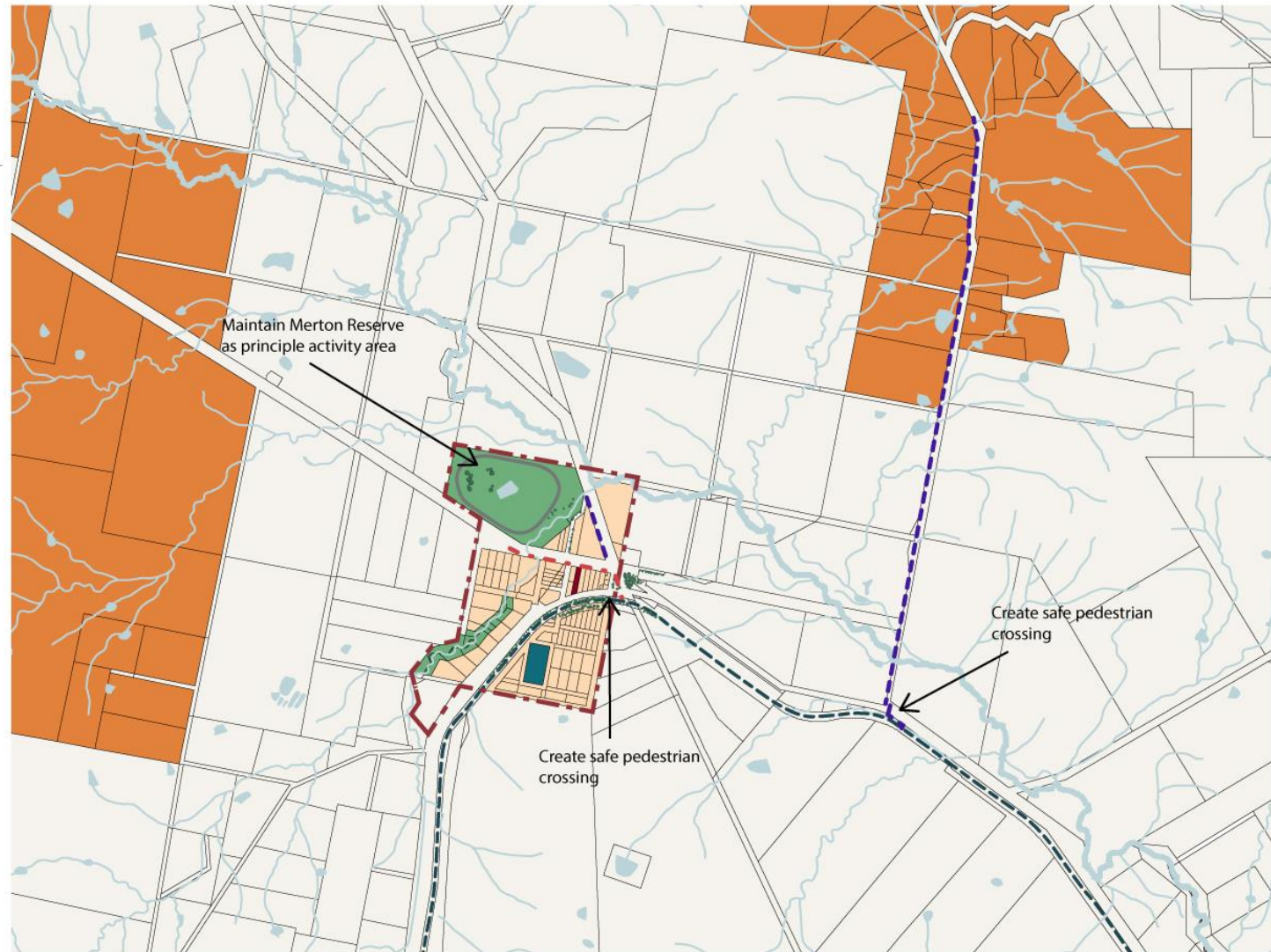


Figure 8 Proposed Structure Plan

Statutory Implementation

Planning Scheme Changes:

The following is a list of statutory changes to the Mansfield Planning Scheme relevant to the Merton Plan. These changes are presented to ensure that the Merton Plan is 'amendment ready' and easily implemented into the planning scheme. It also ensures that the proposed policy is presented to the community and interested parties exactly how it will be within the Planning Scheme.

- ▶ Amend Clause 02.03 to include a new 'Rural village character' with the following ordinance"

Rural Villages

Merton is one of the rural villages, which are small settlements set among wider farming and rural areas, sometimes with national park close by. Vegetation in the public and private realm is a key feature of these areas, with large native and introduced trees and supporting undergrowth. In locations where topography is undulating, dwellings may have narrower front setbacks and be highly visible from roadsides.

Intermittent views of surrounding landscapes and vegetation are afforded by streets that wind across gently undulating topography. Settlements are generally laid out according to a loose grid which lends a heritage feel and may itself be oriented to make best use of topography. Views through the settlement to the surrounding rural landscape or national park are readily available along road corridors and between dwellings, given the intimate scale of these settlements.

New dwellings make use of natural materials with muted colours and tones to fit within the rural and landscape setting. Use of eaves, permeable driveway treatments, significantly recessed garaging and unobtrusive (at least 50 percent visually permeable) front fencing (or an absence of front fencing) are key features of these settlements which should be replicated in new development.

- ▶ Amend Clause 11.01-1L-02 under Merton to include the following objectives:

Merton Strategies

- ▶ Improve the connection between Merton Township and the Great Victorian Rail Trail
- ▶ Support improvement of the Merton Recreation Reserve and Merton Community Hall.
- ▶ Encourage small scale commercial and retail development.
- ▶ Consolidate crown titles within township boundaries to improve development.
- ▶ Insert a new Merton Framework plan into Clause 11.01-1L-02 located on page 17 of this document.

Implementation – Funding

The following actions are listed for implementation with the timeframes of Immediate, short term (0-5 years), medium term (5-10 years) and long term (10-20 years). Some of the listed projects are subject to external funding or will be undertaken as community led initiatives.

Support type refers to how Mansfield Shire Council will play a role within the project, whether this be to **Advocate** with external actors and relevant bodies, to **Encourage** the creation of new initiatives, **Regulate** how specific projects are undertaken to ensure that they are appropriate or **Undertake** the project as a Council.

IDENTIFIED PROJECTS	SUPPORT TYPE	TIMEFRAME	FUNDING
Improve the connection between Merton Township and The Merton Recreation Reserve	Facilitate	Medium Term	Funding required
Create Taungurung Native Garden and Botanic Garden	Advocate	Medium Term	Funding required
Create a bike crossing over Merton Creek	Facilitate	Medium / Long term	Funding required
Create a bike/pedestrian crossing at Strathbogie Road	Undertake	Short Term	Funding required
Create safe crossing from Merton Township to the Great Victorian Rail Trail	Undertake	Short Term	Funding required
Redevelop the VLine Bus Stop and incorporate the School Bus stop	Facilitate	Short Term	Partial funding
Continue upgrades to the Merton Common	Facilitate	Short Term	Funding required
Create a men's shed	Facilitate	Medium Term	Funding required
Upgrade the public toilets at the Recreation Reserve	Facilitate	Short Term	Partial funding
Construct a skate park at the Recreation reserve	Facilitate	Short / Ongoing	Community grant
Upgrade tourism signage and relocate noticeboard to improve visibility	Undertake	Short Term	Funding required
Update the information signage on the history of Merton	Facilitate	Short Term	Funding required

Encourage school bus route to include Merton	Advocate	Short Term	Funding required
Improve the Tennis and Basketball court within the recreation reserve	Facilitate	Short / Medium Term	Funding required
Encourage more community events within the Merton recreation reserve	Facilitate	Short / Medium Term	Funding required
Improve the camping and caravanning experience within Merton Recreation Reserve	Regulate	Short / Medium Term	Funding required
Improve the green space between the petrol station and Merton & Euroa Road to manage traffic and create a barrier between pedestrians and vehicles.	Undertake	Short / Medium Term	Partial funding
Renovate bore at recreation reserve	Facilitate	Medium	Funding required

Background Reports Summary

The Merton Plan has been created with due consideration to strategic documents adopted by Council and applying to the Mansfield Shire. Each document is listed below with key points of consideration that relate to the Merton Plan.

Lake Eildon Masterplan, 2020

The Lake Eildon Masterplan does not mention Merton as a priority area for development or tourism. However, Merton is 18 kilometres from Bonnie Doon which equates to a 13 minute drive. Merton residents are able to gain relative ease of access to Lake Eildon which adds value to the Merton community who actively engage with this type of recreation.

Mansfield Planning Strategy, 2022 Assessment of Merton

- ▶ Approximately 36% of houses in Merton are holiday homes
- ▶ Some rural properties offer accommodation for tourists
- ▶ Includes a character statement for Merton which falls into the category of being a 'rural village', also discussed in this strategy.

Shire of Mansfield Stage 1 Heritage Survey, 2015

- ▶ Provides a brief overview of the history of Mansfield Shire, with minor mention of Merton.
- ▶ Provides a list of heritage sites, identified later in this report.
- ▶ While there is currently no assessment into the heritage value of these places, it is recommended that any future development or land use be sensitive to the above in the event that a future survey is undertaken.

Merton Community Planning Outcomes, 2022

- ▶ Includes a detailed timeline of Merton's history.
- ▶ Details multiple objectives for the town with subheadings for safety, connection, health & wellbeing and environment.
- ▶ The objectives include a number of specific goals and desires of the community for new and improved activities and areas within the town.

Economic Development Strategy, 2020

- ▶ Identified Merton as an outlying community where economic activity is less prevalent, instead this town relies on surrounding areas for essential services such as Mansfield and Alexandra, although it is not within Mansfield Shire.
- ▶ Has an action within strategy 8 on page 22 to develop community plans that set local economic aspirations for each outlying community.

Environment Strategy, 2019

Seeks to rejuvenate the Shire's natural environment and contains four focus areas, as shown below

- ▶ Waste:
 - Reduce per capita waste volume directed to Landfill.
 - 100% e-waste diversion from landfill.

- Waste education resources developed to increase waste diversion from landfill.
- ▶ Water
 - Formalise arrangements for Traditional Owner involvement in waterway management.
 - Adopt and implement Mansfield Township Integrated Water Management Plan.
- ▶ Land
 - Strong partnerships with biodiversity groups and agencies i.e., Landcare.
 - Land management agreements established with Taungurung.
- ▶ Sustainable Development
 - Increased use of renewable energy in Council and community from 2018/19 levels.
 - Climate Action Plan developed and implemented.
 - Reduce Council utility costs.

Waste Strategy, 2020

Has the strategic direction to reduce, re-use or recycle waste wherever possible and sustainably manage any residual waste and manage all of it within Mansfield Shire. Seeks to upgrade street bins, implement FOGO bins and continue to inform residents and visitors of best practice for waste to ensure that there is a net reduction of this into the future.

Onsite Wastewater Management Plan, 2022

- ▶ Merton has rich soils that have low hydraulic conductivity and relatively good nutrient uptake and pathogen attenuation properties.
- ▶ Merton is located within a minor catchment area. These are defined by ridgelines and watershed within each declared catchment and special area plan.
- ▶ Merton has been identified as a medium risk area for onsite wastewater management.

Municipal Emergency Management Plan, 2021

- ▶ Key risks include:
 - Grassfire.
 - Maroondah Highway
- ▶ Priority areas include:
 - CFA shed
 - Memorial hall,
 - Merton Recreation Reserve, as required for a staging area by NSP, CFA & DEECA

Great Victorian Rail Trail Strategic Development Plan, 2019

- ▶ There are numerous road and driveway crossings along the rail trail which are problematic.
- ▶ There is a lack of arrival experience to Merton township from the rail trail.
- ▶ The rail trail along Merton requires some maintenance

Shared and footpath strategy, 2022

- ▶ Identifies future pedestrian footpaths in Merton on page 24.
- ▶ The paths indicated by this strategy will be included within the proposed structure plan for Merton

township.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda, Sustainable Development Goals

Has overarching global goals which generally seek to promote a desirable future for humanity.

Given the density of this document and agenda, it is noted here that the main Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) relevant to this plan are:

- **SDG 3:** Good Health and Wellbeing
- **SDG 6** Clean Water and Sanitation
- **SDG 9:** Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- **SDG 11:** Sustainable cities and communities

The above goals have been considered within the creation of the Merton Plan, with a view to ensure that any proposed initiative in this document aligns with the general purpose of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

References

Below are the current references used within this plan. These will be formatted, increased and updated following the circulation of the initial draft strategy.

ABS Census of Population and Housing. (2016)

ABS Census of Population and Housing (2021)

Merton Community Plan, 2015

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning. (2019). *Structure Planning*
<https://planning.vic.gov.au/policy-and-strategy/activity-centres/structure-planning>

Goulburn Valley Water Urban Strategy, 2022

Great Victorian Rail Trail Strategic Development Plan, 2019

Lake Eildon Masterplan, 2020

Mansfield Planning Strategy, 2022

Mansfield Shire Economic Development Strategy, 2020

Mansfield Shire Environment Strategy, 2019

Mansfield Shire Shared and footpath strategy, 2022

Mansfield Shire Waste Strategy, 2020

Municipal Emergency Management Plan, 2021

Nelsen, I. (2015). *Shire of Mansfield Stage One Heritage Survey*

Onsite Wastewater Management Plan, 2022

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Urban Enterprise. (2018). *Mansfield Shire Economic Profile*, June 2018.

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