CONTEXT

Golden Plains Shire has a total area of 2,705 square kilometres and is located south of Ballarat, north west of Geelong and approximately 70 kilometres south-west of Melbourne. The Shire shares a boundary with the Shires of Colac Otway, Corangamite, Pyrenees, Moorabool and Surf Coast and the Cities of Ballarat and Greater Geelong. Ballarat and Geelong play an important role as the service centres for the north and south of Golden Plains Shire.

The Shire is included in two regional planning areas in the Planning Policy Framework. Land in the south of the municipality falls within the G21 Region and land in the north falls within the Central Highlands Region.

The Shire contains rich and diverse environmental, cultural and scenic landscapes including granite outcrops, deeply incised river valleys and wide open volcanic plains. These landscapes include post contact features including goldfields and station homesteads.

The Shire is home to the Enfield and Linton State Forests, Steiglitz Historic Park, Inverleigh Nature Conservation Reserve and part of the Brisbane Ranges National Park. The Shire also contains nationally significant roadside native grasslands and grassy woodland plains that are home to the endangered striped legless lizard and spiny rice flower.

The Shire is characterised by agricultural land used predominantly for grazing and cropping as well as other activities including intensive animal industries and wind farms. There are a large number of small townships as well as extensive natural forested areas, bushland areas and riverine gorges in the municipality.

In 2018, Golden Plains Shire had a population of just over 23,000 people (Victoria in Future, State Government of Victoria, 2019). The population is growing, with many young families and retirees moving to Golden Plains Shire, some as a result of the Geelong Bypass Ring Road, which has opened up a new catchment from the western suburbs of Melbourne.

Since the late 1990s, the Shire has consistently experienced some of the highest population growth rates in percentage terms of any municipality outside of the Melbourne metropolitan area. The high rate of growth is influenced by the Shire’s proximity to Melbourne, Geelong and Ballarat. Recent population projections indicate that the population will continue to grow at current rates in the future.