Settlement

The Colac Otway Shire Strategic Framework Plan (at Clause 02.04) illustrates the location of the towns and settlements in the Shire.

Council seeks to manage growth in the towns by:

- Encouraging development within the major towns of Colac and Apollo Bay.
- Focusing development within existing town boundaries.
- Providing zoned and serviced land for housing, employment, recreation and open space, community facilities and related infrastructure.
- Limiting the development of old and inappropriate subdivisions including those in the localities of Cressy, Pirron Yallock, Gerangamete and Irrewillipe.

Colac is the primary town in the Shire and has a population of about 12,000. Colac is located about 75 kilometres west of Geelong, 140 kilometres south west of Melbourne and 100 kilometres south of Ballarat. Colac is the major regional centre in the Shire for residential, service and manufacturing industry, retail, office services, recreation and education facilities.

Council seeks to facilitate the development of Colac by:

- Supporting major industrial and commercial development particularly in east Colac.
- Retaining and enhancing heritage assets.
- Providing a secondary commercial node to cater for the growing area of Elliminyt.
- Increasing recreational linkages between key activity areas including Lake Colac.
- Protecting Lake Colac from adverse impacts of industrial development.
- Increasing the amount of public open space.

Apollo Bay (including Marengo) is a large coastal town with a population of about 1,300 people and is located 75 kilometres south of Colac along the Great Ocean Road. The town provides a range of entertainment and recreational related facilities including swimming, fishing, golf, cafes and restaurants and is experiencing increased development pressure for both permanent and short-term accommodation.

Council seeks to facilitate the development of Apollo Bay and Marengo by:

- Encouraging economic development opportunities and ecological sustainability.
- Encouraging a diversity of housing that supports long and short-term accommodation.
- Retaining the natural beauty and distinct coastal character of the town, including its seaside fishing and working harbour history.

Birregurra is located about 20 kilometres east of Colac and about 6 kilometres to the south of the Princes Highway. The town offers a village lifestyle in an attractive rural setting. The town has a relatively compact form based on an attractive and connected network of grid streets and open space links and sits discreetly within its rural surrounds.

Council seeks to facilitate the development of Birregurra by:

- Consolidating the commercial town core and community nodes.
- Protecting exotic and native vegetation particularly on the southern side of the town.
- Preserving heritage buildings.

Forrest is located 32 kilometres south east of Colac and is positioned at the foothills of the Otway Ranges. Tourism will play a primary role in the town’s future growth and development.
Council seeks to facilitate the development of Forrest by:

- Supporting outdoor recreation, rural residential and tourism use and development.

**Skenes Creek, Kennett River, Wye River and Separation Creek** are small residential towns located along the Great Ocean Road at the base of the Otway Ranges. The towns are defined by their informal, open and spacious character, have a low growth capacity and exhibit a range of environmental constraints including land slip, bushfire threat, coastal inundation and erosion, storm water management, water supply and effluent disposal. There is a sense of openness to the towns created by the spacious siting of buildings and expansive views to the coast and hillsides.

Council seeks to manage the development of Skenes Creek, Kennett River, Wye River and Separation Creek by:

- Retaining the distinct coastal character of the towns that are characterised by low scale buildings below the predominant tree canopy height.
- Minimising the impact of development on the natural environment.
- Providing a diverse range of housing for permanent residents and short-term holiday users.

**Carlisle River, Gellibrand, Barwon Downs, Alvie, Cororooke, Beech Forest, Beeac, Cressy, Lavers Hill, Pirron Yallock, Warrion and Swan Marsh** are small towns that have development opportunities that can assist to improve the presentation of these towns. Effluent disposal is a major problem in smaller towns.

Council seeks to facilitate the development of small towns by:

- Supporting tourism and rural lifestyle opportunities.
- Protecting the local character of each town, particularly those located within the Otway Ranges.
- Encouraging development to proceed in a manner that contributes to the economic development of these towns, responds to environmental constraints and protects the broader landscapes.

### Environmental and landscape values

The Shire contains landscapes that are important for their environmental, cultural, social and economic significance as well as diversity of ecosystems.

The landscape character types within the Shire include:

- Western Plains.
- Volcanic Plains and associated Cones and Lakes.
- Otway Foothills, Valleys and Uplands.
- Otway Forests and Coast.
- Localised flatlands.

The saline lakes of the Volcanic Plain north of Colac are of international significance because of the number of threatened species and migratory species that depend on the sites.

Council seeks to manage environmental and landscape values by:

- Protecting significant landscapes and features that contribute to the amenity of the Otway Ranges and coast such as declared water supply catchments, the coast, forested public land, rivers and water courses, lakes and major geological features.
- Retaining the dominance of the landscape between towns.
- Enhancing views of the landscape from road corridors.
- Protecting the scenic landscape of ridgelines and landforms from incompatible built form and removal of vegetation.
Environmental risks and amenity

The Shire is affected by an array of environmental risks including landslips, bushfire, salinity, flooding, erosion and water quality. Landslips are a hazard in the southern half of the Shire associated with steep slopes and high rainfall including the:

- Otway Ranges from Marengo to Wye River.
- Slopes of the Barham River and Gellibrand River valleys.
- Hordern Vale – Glenaire area.
- Lavers Hill – Johanna River area.
- Kawarren – Yeodene area.
- Irrewillipe area.

Salinity is an issue, particularly in the northern half of the Shire. Flooding is a threat north of the Otway Ranges and is particularly associated with the Barwon River and the lakes system of the Volcanic Plains. Water quality in rivers, streams, lakes and wetlands has declined since European settlement due to increasing salinity and reduced flow regimes.

Council seeks to control environmental risks and amenity by:

- Managing landslip risk especially along the coastal areas.
- Ensuring development responds to environmental risks such as bushfire, flooding, erosion and salinity.

Natural resource management

The protection of agricultural industries is critical to the economic and social wellbeing of the Shire. The need to protect arable land will intensify as the Shire’s significant landscapes continue to attract those seeking a rural/coastal lifestyle. Protection will also be necessary as farmers seek to relocate or diversify their business, and as farming land in other areas of the State becomes increasingly vulnerable to harsher climactic conditions.

Rural land traditionally used for farming is increasingly being used for lifestyle purposes. This is causing problems associated with increasing property values inhibiting farm growth, servicing, provision of infrastructure and conflict with adjoining land uses and has the potential to undermine the protection of the agricultural base of the Shire.

There are distinct areas that offer different agricultural land use opportunities in the Shire:

- The north-western area contains ‘Farmland of Strategic Significance’ that has ‘high’ agricultural capability due to soil type, climatic conditions and larger land parcels.
- The north-eastern area is identified as having ‘medium’ agricultural capability with primary land use for production of beef.
- The southern area including the Otway Ranges are characterised by rolling hills and heavily vegetated forests with pockets of cleared farmland.
- Along the coast there is a mix of mainly medium and low agricultural capability land interspersed with areas of medium and high agricultural capability.

Plantations are located primarily in the southern area of the Shire with higher rainfall. Jobs associated with management, harvesting and processing of the forestry resource are mainly located in Colac.

Water quality of rivers and streams north of the Otway Ranges is generally poor due to the impacts of land clearing and development.
Lake Colac is a freshwater lake formed through volcanic activity. Water quality in Lake Colac has suffered from blue-green algal blooms and sediment build up. Some of the main causes of poor water quality in the lake have been associated with development close to the lake, particularly industry, nutrients and pollutants from creeks, through runoff and through leachate from the former tip site.

Council seeks to manage its natural resources by:

- Protecting high quality agricultural land.
- Limiting rural residential development that impacts viable agricultural land.
- Supporting grazing and cropping farming practices as preferred land uses in areas designated as ‘Farmland of Strategic Significance’.
- Supporting farm consolidation and expansion.
- Supporting agricultural diversity and sustainable forestry and timber industries.
- Supporting the growth and operations of existing timber processing.

**Built environment and heritage**

The Shire has buildings, streetscapes, sites and precincts that represent a significant asset and resource for the Western District of Victoria. Protecting heritage assets is important in maintaining the Shire’s character and sense of place.

Council seeks to improve the built environment by:

- Conserving significant pre and post contact heritage resources.
- Encouraging development of heritage places in a manner sympathetic to their significance.

**Economic development**

The Shire provides diverse employment opportunities through a range of primary industries, tourism and commercial and community services.

Manufacturing industries are closely linked to the agricultural and forestry resource base. The Shire also sustains many competitive, small industry-service firms.

Council will promote economic development by:

- Encouraging employment focused use and development.
- Supporting the growth of timber, meat and dairy processing facilities.
- Supporting Apollo Bay harbour as a fishing and recreational boating location.
- Encouraging economic development in the Otway Ranges by supporting tourism uses and development.

**Tourism**

The Shire contains some of Victoria's most significant tourist attractions including the Great Ocean Road, the Otway Ranges as well as old volcanic plugs, craters and lakes.

The local tourist industry has an increasing emphasis on eco-tourism, cultural tourism and experiential tourism. These sectors and the Shire’s proximity to Geelong and Melbourne have consequential demands for accommodation and facilities for people interested in short-stay visits.

The range of attractions in the Shire and surrounding region also provide opportunities to attract longer stay and low season tourists: a market segment that contributes more to the economy.

Council seeks to facilitate tourism by:

- Supporting tourism that contributes to the economic growth of the Shire.
- Managing tourism growth to protect the environmental and landscape assets that attract tourists and new residents.
- Allowing limited opportunities for tourist related activities in the Apollo Bay hinterland, around Forrest and in the Otway Ranges.
- Diversifying tourist attractions that result in all-year round activities.

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Transport
The Shire is located along three key vehicle routes - Princes Highway, Hamilton Highway and the Great Ocean Road - and has excellent access to the Melbourne and Avalon Airports. Colac is centrally positioned along the Melbourne to Warrnambool regional train line. This transport network provides the Shire and its industries excellent access to both domestic and international markets. Council seeks to improve transport by:
- Supporting Colac as the location for an intermodal rail terminal between Melbourne, Geelong and Warrnambool.
- Supporting industry-related facilities and support services.

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Infrastructure
The Shire is well serviced by existing water and power infrastructure and is well placed to extend the natural gas grid, although it is noted that there are some localised infrastructure constraints throughout the Shire. Colac is well located to capitalise on the associated benefits of wind farm projects, as well as bio-fuel projects.

The Infrastructure Design Manual (IDM) prepared by the Local Government Infrastructure Design Association has been adopted by Council and includes guidelines for the design and construction of infrastructure within the municipality, including (among other things) roads, drainage, stormwater, car parking, landscaping, access, earthworks, public lighting and intersection infrastructure. The IDM complements the objectives and standards of Clause 56 for residential subdivision applications. Council seeks to improve infrastructure provisions by:
- Supporting wind farm and bio-fuels opportunities close to Colac.
- Encouraging development of renewable energy and technology-based land uses in the Shire.
- Providing clear and consistent guidelines for the planning, design and construction of infrastructure.