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Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme Review
City of Greater Bendigo
PO Box 733
Bendigo Central Vic. 3552

Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme Review 2018 - submission

Dear City of Greater Bendigo,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme Review and draft report. The Junortoun Community Action Group provides the following written submission to the review.

About the Junortoun Community Action Group

The Junortoun Community Action Group (JCAG) is a volunteer, not-for-profit community representative association for residents of Junortoun. The Action Group was formed in 2012 and became incorporated in 2014. JCAG has produced two community plans for Junortoun and has been effective in implementing and achieving many of the objectives identified in those plans. The group is widely recognised for its representation and advocacy for Junortoun. The Group communicates with the community of Junortoun through a quarterly newsletter, a Facebook page and a website.

The Action Group focuses its work in two areas:

- Building a stronger sense of community among residents of Junortoun, through events, activities and effective communication.
- Advocating for improvements to facilities and services including transport, sporting, recreation, environmental and other infrastructure.

JCAG has a track record of successful lobbying, having in recent years achieved: a playground, a cycling and walking track between Junortoun and Strathfieldsaye, improved bus services, and Mclvor Highway safety improvements. For several years it has led a nest box construction project involving students from Catherine McAuley College. The Action Group has close working relationships with local organisations including Junortoun CFA, Strathfieldsaye and District Community Enterprise, the Friends of the O'Keefe Rail Trail, and Bike Bendigo.

What is important to the Junortoun Community?

The Junortoun Community Action Group values the bushland in which we live.

The Greater Bendigo National Park, Wellsford State Forest, O’Keefe Rail Trail, Knul-doorong Woodland, Strathfieldsaye Bushland Reserve and Manning Reserve are all important features of our community. These areas are homes to trees, other plants, mammals, birds, reptiles and insects; they are spaces for recreation, exercise, active transport and quiet retreat; their presence provides balance to the built environment in a community which is substantially car-dependent.

JCAG’s recognition of the natural environment is reflected in its Rules of Association and in the motto of our organisation.

- Our statement of purposes includes: *to achieve a friendly, safe and peaceful, semi-rural environment, with a sense of community and a focus on families.*
- Our Group’s motto “Our Home in the Bush” reflects not just the historical connection with Homebush, but also our Group’s intention to recognise and respect the land which we call home.

We are especially honoured to have Knul-doorong Woodland located within Junortoun. This site is of special significance to Dja Dja Wurrung people. Its presence should be recognised and further protected in the strategies of the City of Greater Bendigo.

The “residential character” of Junortoun

JCAG believes that everything possible should be done to maintain Junortoun’s contribution to making Bendigo the “world’s most liveable community.”

JCAG argues for preservation of existing trees and vegetated areas across Bendigo, and particularly in Junortoun. Once trees are removed for housing or industry they can never be returned to the land, and our environment and local amenity suffers as a result.

A ‘Home in the Bush’ implies a leafy environment, where a significant number of mature trees, preferably Australian, can flourish. This requires sufficient area for them to be established, even in residential developments such as Junortoun. Closely-settled urban neighbourhoods cannot offer this amenity, and a nature reserve inside such a community is an inadequate substitute.

JCAG would like to develop a Neighbourhood Character Overlay and Significant Landscape Overlay specifically for the Junortoun area to recognise, support and protect neighbourhood character, cultural identity, and sense of place. As part of this development a vision for Junortoun could be documented, incorporating community values and the residents current and future desired characteristics for the area.

The O’Keefe Rail trail is a critical public asset for Junortoun and for the City

The Rail Trail is an asset used for walking, running, cycling and more. It links neighbourhoods along the trail and provides the opportunity to travel between homes, work and schools.

Junortoun values the links and pathways that have been created between estates and corridors.

Examples of these corridors and links include:

- Cassowary Way (linking Homebush Estate to O’Keefe Rail Trail)
- Ridge Road to Lorikeet Drive
- Heritage Court to Cockateal Close
- Callistemon Close (link to O’Keefe Rail Trail)
- Jacaranda Court (link to O’Keefe Rail Trail)
- Cootamundra Place (link to O’Keefe Rail Trail)
- Kalinda Drive (link to O’Keefe Rail Trail)
- La Valla Court (link to O’Keefe Rail Trail)

Such links provide valuable opportunities for recreation and active transport and are sadly lacking from more recent developments. For instance, Domenica Drive is a missed opportunity to provide a human accessible connection to Knotts Lane and the Wellsford State Forest.

JCAG contends that future sub-divisions across Bendigo should identify opportunities for providing linking connections. These promote a sense of neighbourhood and community, and support human interaction and physical activity.

Junortoun is a unique community

Junortoun is not quite a suburb of Bendigo, but nor is it a rural town. As a consequence, the planning needs of Junortoun and its residents are sometimes overlooked.

Like other areas of Bendigo, Junortoun is experiencing strong residential growth. Services and infrastructure are slowly following to meet the needs of the growing residential population.

The Urban Growth Boundary extends a small way (by area) into Junortoun, with land in this area zoned General Residential Zone (GRZ). Although small in area, this section accounts for a greater proportion of houses in Junortoun. The remainder of the community is zoned Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ) essentially south of the O’Keefe Rail Trail; or Low-Density Residential Zone (LDRZ) essentially north of the Rail Trail.

The community is divided by, and sometimes isolated by, the Mclvor Highway which passes west - to-east through Junortoun. This major state highway (B280) carries an increasing volume of traffic

between Bendigo and other destinations including Melbourne, Axedale, Heathcote and the Hume Highway. It is also the major local arterial route for Junortoun residents to travel to and from central Bendigo.

The impacts of the traffic volume and speed on Mclvor Highway include:

- Conflicts between local traffic and faster moving through traffic, which have been well documented.¹
- It is difficult for residents to cross Mclvor Highway on foot or using active transport. The following crossing locations are of particular concern: St Vincents Road; O'Keefe Rail Trail / Baptist Church; Popes Road / Homebush Drive (west); and Domenica Drive / Homebush Drive (east)
- Vehicle safety is of major concern for Junortoun residents. Collisions along Mclvor Highway Junortoun are frequent. These commonly involve collisions between turning vehicles and through traffic. The intersections of Pratts Park Road and Mclvor Highway, and Somerset Park Road and Mclvor Highway are common locations for vehicle collisions.
- Problems associated with left and right turning vehicles either exiting or entering Mclvor Hwy continue in the 100 km/h zone between Cashen Rd. and Jean Alice Drive. There are no turning lanes for the following roads-Cashen Rd, Hectors Lane Wilkie Rd, Manning Court, Atlas Rd, Somerset Park Rd, Jean Alice Drive. All of these roads take a considerable amount of traffic on a daily basis.

Residents of Junortoun are substantially car dependent.

- Until recently bus services for Junortoun residents have been sparse. Even with recent changes to bus services barriers to usage remain. The service is not integrated into the Bendigo Bus Network, it does not accept Myki, it has no route number and at least two additional bus stops are required in Junortoun.
- There are no designated, segregated, well-signposted bicycle routes between Junortoun and central Bendigo.

The Junortoun community has no primary school, no public secondary school, no public sports facilities, no major retail precinct, no kindergarten, no maternal child centre, no medical practice, no pharmacy, no petrol station. Many residents say that they like it this way, and would resist further development, especially medium-large scale retail development. However, the transport and access needs of residents to travel to these facilities elsewhere in Bendigo should be considered when reviewing planning in Bendigo.

¹ See JCAG report to VicRoads November 2017, available on request.

General comments relating to the planning scheme review

The following comments are applicable to land use and planning across Greater Bendigo.

Promote walkable communities by insisting on footpaths in all new subdivisions

JCAG supports the aspirations of the City of Greater Bendigo to build walkable communities. To achieve this the construction of footpaths in residential areas is vital. Footpaths allow for people to leave their homes and walk their neighbourhoods. They promote community interaction, and physical activity, and support access to public transport and active transport options.

Particularly poor recent examples in Junortoun, where footpaths have not been provided in a subdivision, include: Botany Drive, Floreate Drive, Dino Court, Domenica Drive, Wild Drive, and Karella Court.

JCAG believes the City should insist that footpaths are provided whenever land is subdivided for residential use. This should apply no matter what the zoning of the land. It should apply in areas of LDRZ, RCZ, and RLZ as well as to areas of GRZ.

The City should also prioritise the retrospective construction of footpaths within 500m radius of playgrounds, schools, bus stops and train stations across the municipality.

Speed limits in residential areas should also be chosen to support walkable communities. For instance the speed of 70km/h in Domenica Drive Junortoun is too high for a local street which is exclusively residential. Such vehicles speeds discourage local cycling and walking.

Maintain conservation values in Rural Conservation Zones

JCAG notes the comment in the review document of the importance of assessing conservation values in areas zoned RCZ. Our Group is concerned about the implications of the statement.

We trust that this means: "Where conservation values have been lost from areas of RCZ then education and remediation actions should be taken."

Rather than: "Where conservation values have been lost from areas of RCZ then these areas should be considered for rezoning to a status that provides lower conservation status."

We support the rezoning of suitable land to RCZ where this would provide for the conservation of native flora and fauna.

Enforce rules and permits on clearing vegetation and undertakings to replant

With Greater Bendigo's growth there is demand from land owners to remove vegetation to provide for housing. This results in the loss of habitat and impacts on the liveability of a suburb or community. JCAG believes:

- Greater restrictions should apply to landowners to prevent removal of trees from properties.

- Greater monitoring and enforcement should occur to prevent, identify and prosecute unauthorised clearing.
- Where a land-clearing activity or sub-division requires the replanting of trees, the number of trees planted should be more vigorously monitored and enforced, including the maintenance of the health of the plants into their third year.
- Where it is necessary to provide offsets for land clearing these should be obtained from within Greater Bendigo and ideally from the same suburb or neighbourhood.

Enforce rules that address dangerous and unsightly land

JCAG believes there should be greater enforcement of existing laws concerning “Dangerous or Unsightly Land” (clause 2.5 of the Community Local Law). This is more than just a matter of neighbourhood or civic pride; it helps to build an expectation that landholders should maintain their property for safety, for aesthetics and for the natural environment which they share.

Support of need for Environmental Significance Study

The Junortoun Community Action Group endorses the recommendation of the Review to undertake an Environmental Significance Study. JCAG believes that such a study is required to identify the importance and need for native vegetation management. We particularly support the intention that native vegetation offsets must be sourced from within Greater Bendigo.

In response to the call to identify and protect biolinks, we submit that an ideal nature corridor can be created by connecting the O’Keefe Rail Trail, Knul-doorong Woodland, Honeyeater Reserve and the Strathfieldsaye Bushland Reserve. This is discussed further below.

Act to prevent damage and erosion in Greater Bendigo National Park

Bendigo is fortunate to be surrounded by substantial areas of National Park, however this land is at risk from damage and erosion from non-permitted activities, in particular trail bike riding, private motor vehicle use, and tree-felling.

- Greater enforcement activities should be undertaken by relevant authorities, (e.g. Parks Victoria, Police) to identify and prevent damage to the National Park.
- Penalties for damage to National Parks and the natural environment should be increased.
- Community members should be encouraged to provide passive surveillance of illegal activities and to report breaches to a rapid-response team.
- Where damage has occurred to the Park this should be remediated without delay through fencing and replacement planting.
- Where housing developments meet areas of National Park or State Forest the interface between housing and parkland should be managed carefully. Good examples of this interface are Turners Road Junortoun, and Mclvor Forest Drive (southern section of Mclvor Forest Estate).

Plan for improved safety and support for bicycles throughout Greater Bendigo

The City should promote cycling, and make it safer for riders by planning for:

- Physically separated bicycle routes throughout Greater Bendigo.
These should be planned into new developments and whenever a roadway is upgraded or resurfaced. These should also be retrospectively constructed along key bicycle routes.
- Bicycle priority at road crossings using wombat crossings. For example, along the length of the O'Keefe Rail Trail.
- Grade separation at major road crossings. E.g. Installation of underpasses at O'Keefe Rail Trail at Mclvor Highway, and at Napier Street.
- Safe navigation options for cyclists at roundabouts, especially at Chapel St / Lyttleton Tce / Myers St / Mclvor Hwy; and at Williamson / Sternberg / Townsend / Somerville / Miller Streets.

City planning should anticipate the likely rise in micromobility – electric scooters and bicycles – which have great potential to 1) replace private motor vehicles for commuting to schools, universities and work, and 2) extend the range from which residents can comfortably commute.

Junortoun specific concerns and issues

The Junortoun Community Action Group asks that the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme Review considers and addresses the following Junortoun specific issues and concerns.

Unbundle Junortoun from Rural East and from Strathfieldsaye in i.d. planning, reference and resource documents

As noted previously, Junortoun is a unique community, unlike Strathfieldsaye and certainly unlike other areas of Bendigo's "Rural East".

It is disappointing therefore that much of the demographic information used when making decisions about planning, services and infrastructure in Junortoun does not recognise the unique character of Junortoun.

For many years Junortoun has been bundled in the .id Community Profile area of "Rural East"². This suggests that the demographic profile of Junortoun is analogous to that of Longlea, Sedgwick or Kimbolton! This has led to erroneous decisions being made about Junortoun's needs.

In the recent Open Space Strategy Junortoun was bundled with Strathfieldsaye, yet the needs of Strathfieldsaye swamped the needs of Junortoun to such an extent that Junortoun was ignored.

² <https://profile.id.com.au/bendigo/about/?WebID=250>

As previously noted, Junortoun has no primary school, no sports facilities, no substantial retail services, no infant or early childhood services, no medical services; yet it is only 8-10km from central Bendigo. The needs of the residents of Junortoun are substantially different to those of Strathfieldsaye.

Resist changes to the Urban Growth Boundary

Greater Bendigo is growing at a substantial rate and demand for land for housing is high. This is having a lasting impact on the remaining native vegetation across Greater Bendigo. It is important to preserve existing native vegetation in order to maintain biodiversity, provide homes for animals, birds and insects, and as a community response to climate change.

The Junortoun Community Action Group argues that our City's existing areas of trees and native vegetation should be retained and preserved. Housing growth should be confined to areas already identified (i.e. the current Urban Growth Boundary). Infill projects closer to central Bendigo and in existing General Residential Zones should be encouraged.

JCAG opposes any extension of the Urban Growth Boundary eastwards into Junortoun – this would contribute to substantial and irreversible loss of vegetation and amenity in our community.

Maintain current areas of Rural Conservation Zone and Low-Density Residential Zone in Junortoun. No additional areas of General Residential Zone.

The neighbourhood character of Junortoun is best described in the motto of our Association – Our Home in the Bush. Residents choose to live in Junortoun because of the opportunity to live in harmony with an urban bushland environment.

The Junortoun community rejects the high-density residential development which would occur if land was rezoned as General Residential. This would change the neighbourhood character of Junortoun and is not the desire of Junortoun residents.

Identify the future role of Mclvor Highway

The future role and development of Mclvor Highway should be identified for planning purposes, and this information should be shared publicly.

- Will the road be duplicated? And, if so, when will this occur?
- How far east will duplication occur?
- What impact will the duplication have on the character of Junortoun and "our Home in the Bush"?
- Will the duplication contribute to barriers and division in our suburb, or will it reduce or overcome barriers caused by this major highway?

Mclvor Highway is a major barrier for Junortoun residents to cross using active transport. It effectively divides the community of Junortoun, and isolates residents on one side of the highway from community assets on the other side.

Road safety along the highway is a current major safety concern, with traffic accidents common, especially at Pratts Park Road, and at Somerset Park Road.

The recent speed limit reduction to 80km/h is welcome, but should be extended further west to Bennetts Road. In addition, a speed limit of 60km/h should apply during school hours adjacent to Catherine McAuley College, consistent with speed management at Big Hill Primary School, Calder Highway, Big Hill.

Safe and accessible crossing points are vital along the highway to reduce isolation, promote use of infrastructure and connections, and allow for access to bus stops. These are particularly needed at St Vincents Road, the O'Keefe Rail Trail, Popes Road/Homebush Drive (east), and Domenica Drive/Homebush Drive (west).

Active transport options along the route are essential. These should include a segregated cycling and walking path along the Highway, and an underpass of the O'Keefe Rail Trail.

Planning strategies and responses should recognise the challenges that residents face when they need to cross major highways on foot or bicycle. Our Action Group is concerned that a major upgrade of Mclvor Highway to four lanes will have a divisive impact on the residents, the local mobility, and the residential character of Junortoun.

The Junortoun community has no desire for retail development

Retail development in Junortoun would also substantially change the character of Junortoun and is not desired by local residents.

Junortoun residents are content to travel to East Bendigo, Kennington or Strathfieldsaye for our shopping needs, and to access petrol stations along Mclvor Highway or at Strathfieldsaye.

Identify a location for a future state primary school in Junortoun

As Junortoun has no state primary school, we believe a site should be identified for the future location of a state primary school in our community. This would provide for future growth in Junortoun and is necessary to be undertaken at this time, even if construction of a school is many years away. It is too late once all the land is gone.

Commission a structure plan for Junortoun

Previous discussions between the Junortoun Community Action Group and Trevor Budge (2016), and with a delegation of Councillors and Council officers (2018) have identified the desirability of a Structure Plan for Junortoun. Such a plan would provide certainty and clarity for local residents, developers, infrastructure providers and decision makers.

Identify a location for a larger and upgraded CFA station in Junortoun

The current size and site of the CFA station in Popes Road Junortoun is not suitable for a growing community. We note the commitment³ from Jacinta Allan MP to build a new CFA station for the Junortoun community. We understand that the CFA is currently looking for alternative sites; this quest is supported by JCAG.

The planning impact of the relocation of the Junortoun CFA should be considered. As should the potential integration of community facilities into a new station site, or the transfer of the former station site to the Junortoun community for community use.

Support the initiatives of the Junortoun Community Action Group to preserve and protect Honeyeater Reserve

Honeyeater Reserve is the name selected for the former gravel pits located between Binks Road and Somerset Park Road Junortoun, south of Honeyeater Reserve. This land forms an important nature and wildlife corridor from the O'Keefe Rail Trail to the Strathfieldsaye Bushland Reserve.

The Junortoun Community Action Group is adamant that this land should be preserved. No development should occur in this parcel of native vegetation.

The intentions of JCAG for Honeyeater Reserve are to:

- Obtain Committee of Management status for the land.
- Formally rename the land as Honeyeater Reserve.
- Develop a management plan for the reserve.
- Obtain funding that will allow for effective management of the reserve including:
 - Fencing
 - Tree-planting
 - Erosion control, vandalism control and littering control
 - Pathways, seating and interpretive signs
 - Extension of the JCAG nestbox project.

JCAG calls for this land to be protected in planning documents, and for the intentions of the Junortoun Community Action Group to manage and protect this site to be recognised in City planning schemes.

Expand and protect Knul-doorong Woodland

Knul-doorong Woodland is a culturally important site located in Junortoun, protected by a Trust for Nature covenant. With Honeyeater Reserve (see above) and the Strathfieldsaye Bushland Reserve it represents an important wildlife corridor that connects to the O'Keefe Rail Trail. Initiatives

³ 2018 Victorian State Election campaign promise

undertaken at this site should be closely coordinated with local Dja Dja Wurrung community members. JCAG believes the following actions are possible at this location:

- Purchase the adjacent privately-held land (Lot 2 LP119983) and expand Knul-Doorong Woodland (effectively doubling the size of the Woodland).
- Protect the expanded Knul-doorong Woodland with the highest possible environmental covenants.
- Establish fencing or other barriers around Knul-doorong Woodland to protect the site from motor vehicles.
- Undertake native planting of grasses, shrubs and trees at the Woodland to restore natural vegetation.
- Install walking paths to encourage park users to remain on tracks and minimise erosion and damage to native flora.
- Erect additional nest boxes at the expanded Woodland.
- Promote water capture in the dam to encourage presence of water at the site year-round.
- Consider development of a Dja Dja Wurrung sculpture park at the Woodland.
- Consider establishing a centre for indigenous ecology within the expanded Woodland.
- Provide historical, natural and interpretive signage.

Maintain the O’Keefe Rail Trail and develop connections between it and neighbouring streets

The O’Keefe Rail Trail is a vital recreational and active transport corridor through Junortoun. It has unused potential as an active transport corridor between Longlea and central Bendigo. Its use would be enhanced by the following actions:

- Construct an underpass at the current at-grade crossing of Mclvor Highway.
- Improve signage and links from local streets onto the trail, e.g. Cassowary Way, Callistemon Close, Jacaranda Court, Cootamundra Place, and Kalinda Drive.
- Beautify the O’Keefe Rail Trail particularly around Murphy Street, East Bendigo.
- Provide priority crossings for rail trail users (wombat crossings) at road crossings along the length of the trail.
- Construct an underpass for the Rail Trail at Napier Street (Midland Highway) Bendigo to encourage its use as a commuter route and for school access.

Connections to public space are required for residents on the northern side of Mclvor Highway Junortoun

This document has earlier noted the value the Junortoun community places on the existing links between estates and between estates and public land such as the rail trail. It has also documented the challenge of crossing major highways such as Mclvor Highway,

Residents in estates north of Mclvor Highway (e.g. Domenica Drive, Dino Court, Atlas Meadows Estate) are now isolated from community infrastructure on the south of the highway. Initiatives to address this include:

- Construct a playground or recreational space in this area.
- Construct a northern Junortoun Access Trail to link the Bendigo Bushland Trail through the Wellsford Forest, e.g. via Hoctors Lane and Knotts Lane, or via Wellsford Road.
- Ensure safe crossings of Mclvor Highway are designed into future safety improvements of the Highway.

Address the safety of Junortoun Road

Junortoun Road is a narrow road with no footpaths, no bicycle lanes and no sealed shoulders. Its signposted speed is 80km/h and it carries an increasing volume of traffic due to nearby residential growth and its use as a thoroughfare to Strathfieldsaye. The road has blind crests and blind intersections. It is risky for residents who live along Junortoun Road to leave their homes by foot, this makes them effectively car-dependent.

Junortoun Road should be made safer by: installing a separated cycling and walking track, reducing the speed limit to 60km/h, adding sealed road shoulders and installing signage warning of the blind crests and intersections.

Conclusion

The Junortoun Community Action Group thanks the City of Greater Bendigo for the opportunity to contribute to review of the Greater Bendigo Planning Scheme. We request to be kept informed of its outcomes and any associated actions, priorities or related strategies.

Yours faithfully,



Kevin de Vries
Secretary – Junortoun Community Action Group.