16 January 2019

Dear Community member

Thank you to everyone who provided feedback and has participated in the engagement process for the Christmas Hills Land Use Study.

The Christmas Hills area includes around 1000 hectares of land owned by Melbourne Water (and initially set aside for a potential reservoir) located within the Nillumbik Green Wedge. This land is no longer required by Melbourne Water.

Victorian Government policy requires Melbourne Water to divest land identified as surplus to government requirements on the public market. Currently, the land at Christmas Hills is zoned for government use only, so must be rezoned before it can be sold.

The Government Land Planning Service is responsible for changing these planning provisions. Melbourne Water is required to submit a planning report for consideration as part of this process.

We have been working closely with a range of stakeholders, including Nillumbik Shire Council, which has provided us with important input to date and supported our engagement on this project.

As the ‘responsible authority’ for making planning permit decisions, it is important to Council that the future planning framework to emerge from the rezoning process is sound and can be implemented.

Consultation is not normally undertaken until a later stage as part of the formal rezoning process however we undertook much earlier engagement with communities across two key phases from mid-2017 to mid-2018 to understand the diversity of community views. The feedback we have received from community has been invaluable in providing local insights to inform the development of a Draft Masterplan to outline possible new zonings for the area.

What we have heard from communities through these engagement phases is outlined in the attached Community Voices, Community Engagement Report. We recognise that, particularly where there is disagreement within the community or where planning or other ownership structures must be adhered to, not all community views can be incorporated in the emerging Draft Masterplan. We felt it would be important to capture community sentiment through the Community Voices document.

We intend to submit the Draft Masterplan to the Government Land Planning Service by the end of March 2019. This will trigger the next significant engagement phase of the project. That phase will be undertaken independently by the Government Land Planning Service.
Our feedback portal will remain open for any additional community comments up until the submission of the Draft Masterplan. Comments will be compiled and provided to inform the Government Land Planning Service process.

- To stay up to date with the project register through the Your Say portal available at yoursay.melournewater.com.au/christmas-hills-land-sale

Kind regards

Planning for the future of Christmas Hills Project team
Melbourne Water
Community Voices

Report on community engagement for the Christmas Hills Land Use Study

January 2019
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Executive Summary

In 2012 it was agreed that approximately 1000 hectares of land in Christmas Hills owned by Melbourne Water (and initially set aside for a potential reservoir), was no longer required. Victorian Government policy requires that where land like this is deemed surplus, agencies must:

- Stage 1: Notify other government agencies of our intention to divest the land through a First Right of Refusal process (Complete)
- Stage 2: Ensure appropriate zoning is in place to sell the land on the basis of its highest and best use (Underway)
- Stage 3: Undertake a public process to sell the land (expected 2020 – 2025).

When Melbourne Water undertook the First Right of Refusal process (1, above), it was agreed that we would transfer some of the land to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to extend the existing Warrandyte Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve. The remaining land will now be appropriately zoned and made for sale.

The Government Land Planning Service (GLPS) is responsible for changing planning provisions for Victorian Government land. As a land owner Melbourne Water is required to submit a planning report for consideration as part of this process.

The subject area is currently under a public use zone with a public acquisition overlay which protected the area for the potential future reservoir. This zoning is only appropriate for land owned by the crown or other government agencies and therefore the subject area must be rezoned and the overlay removed before it is sold. The final determination of zoning is undertaken by the Minister for Planning with support from DELWP under the GLPS.

What we have heard so far

In early 2017, Melbourne Water engaged an independent planning consultancy to undertake an assessment of the site and to develop a Draft Masterplan for submission to the GLPS. The GLPS recommends that consultation be undertaken with Council throughout the process. Melbourne Water has engaged Nillumbik Shire Council in this way.

Additionally, while not required under the GLPS, Melbourne Water engaged with communities across two key phases:

- Sept 2017 - Jan 2018: Communities were invited to share their aspirations for the subject area.
- Jan - June 2018: A Design Response and Land Use Options Report was then developed and on completion, seven community consultation sessions were held from May to June 2018.

The feedback received during these phases has been used to inform development of the Draft Masterplan. What we have heard from communities is outlined in this Community Voices, Community Engagement Report.
During the consultation phases we heard a range of feedback across several key themes including:

- Mixed views on the appropriate size of lots with support for smaller 20 acre blocks as well as support for minimum 40ha blocks
- Community consensus on the importance of conservation values in the area
- Mixed views around the desire to restrict or invite new residents
- Mixed views on the idea of a town centre with both support for activity that brings the community together and opposition to commercial development
- Mixed views on the appropriateness of agricultural purposes
- Community consensus on appropriate buffers and waterway protection
- Community consensus on the need to consider bush fire risks
- Community support for existing local enterprise
- Some community consensus for transferring land to other government bodies to conserve or convert into parks
- Community consensus on the need to protect the Green Wedge but mixed views on how to achieve this and on the application of planning controls
- Community concern on road use focused on the potential for additional traffic.

We recognise that, particularly where there is disagreement within the community or where planning or other ownership structures must be adhered to, not all community views can be incorporated into the plan. We also recognise that a range of community members do not wish to engage further at this stage, either because they understand that Melbourne Water has heard their views (whether or not this is applied to the plan) or because they are satisfied with the outcome to date.

**Next steps**

Melbourne Water intends to submit the Draft Masterplan to the GLPS early 2019. This will trigger the next significant engagement phase of the project.

Melbourne Water’s feedback portal will remain open for any additional community comments. Any feedback received prior to the submission of the Draft Masterplan to the GLPS, along with this Community Voices document will be submitted alongside the Draft Masterplan.

The final section of this report provides additional detail on the next steps including the consultation phases of the GLPS, which will be the next significant engagement phase of the project.

The GLPS consultation process involves:

- GLPS independently notifying a range of relevant stakeholders of the proposal (including Council, residents, interested parties and servicing authorities)
- Undertaking a six week Exhibition period where public information sessions are held and submissions are invited
• The GLPS Advisory Committee considers the submissions, holds public hearings and deliberates before providing advice to the Minister for Planning.

The process is expected to take at a minimum six-eight months from submission to the final decision by the Minister for Planning.

**In summary**

Melbourne Water intends to submit the Draft Masterplan to the GLPS early 2019. This will trigger the next significant engagement phase of the project. That phase will be undertaken independently by the GLPS.

Melbourne Water’s feedback portal will remain open for any additional community comments up until the submission of the Draft Masterplan and these will be complied and provided to inform the GLPS process.

The GLPS process will include an independent notification, information and exhibition period (including public information sessions and opportunity for submissions). The GLPS Advisory Committee consider submissions, hold public hearings and deliberate before providing advice to the Minister for Planning.

The GLPS planning outcome is not expected before the end of 2019 and would inform any subsequent land sale plan.
Project Overview

History

Following the recommendations of the 1967 Parliamentary Public Works Committee in its report *Metropolitan Water Supply Inquiry* the then Metropolitan Melbourne Board of Works purchased a significant portion of land in the 1970s for the development of a dam on Watsons Creek. Since this time and following a number of assessments and the completion of the Sugarloaf Reservoir, portions of this land have been deemed surplus and sold and around 700 hectares has been transferred to the Crown for the Warrandyte-Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve. In 2012 a review considering Melbourne’s water supply system determined that the remaining land was no longer required for future water storage purposes.

Today, approximately 1000 hectares in Christmas Hills remains in Melbourne Water’s ownership and, as this land has been deemed surplus to our operational requirements, we are required by State Government policy to divest it. This divestment process involves a number of key stages that consider the range of opportunities within the subject area that are available as a result of the land no longer ending up under water as a reservoir.

Melbourne Water is transferring land to the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) for the purpose of extending the existing Warrandyte Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve.

The remaining land was offered to other Government bodies in a First Right of Refusal process. This process notifies other organisations at all levels of government of the upcoming rezoning and sale process to identify where there might be other government interest in utilising the land for their public purposes.

With the First Right of Refusal process complete and no other areas identified by other Government agencies or departments, State policy now requires that Melbourne Water divests the land:

- At the current market price
- Through a public process to sell the land (except where identified through the Government First Right of Refusal process)
- With appropriate zoning in place.

Developing the Draft Masterplan

Under the Nillumbik Shire Planning Scheme, the subject area is currently zoned for public utility use zone (PUZ) which protected the area for the potential future reservoir. This zone is only appropriate for land owned by government utilities and therefore the subject area must be rezoned before it is sold.

Developing a Draft Masterplan requires a number of key stages to facilitate rezoning and then divestment of the subject area. As recommended in state policy, Melbourne Water has consulted with local council throughout the process. In addition, we have worked with stakeholders and invited the community to provide feedback and to outline their aspirations for the area to inform our Draft Masterplan.

As Melbourne Water is the applicant in this process, the final determination of zoning is undertaken by the Minister for Planning with support from DELWP under the Government Land Planning Service (GLPS). This service assesses the subject area to determine appropriate planning provisions and allows for further community engagement in this context. This report provides an overview of our consultations to date and the feedback we have received.
**Community Engagement Overview**

**When did we ask for community feedback?**

In early 2017, Melbourne Water engaged an independent planning consultancy to undertake an assessment of the subject area to inform a background report that outlines key considerations for the subject area in developing a Draft Masterplan.

**Phase 1 – Background and Aspirations**

The Background Report was completed in August 2017 and released. Two Community Drop-In sessions were held in October where the Background Report was presented and community members were able to discuss their values and aspirations for the subject area as well as opportunity for questions.

From September 2017 to January 2018, the community were invited to provide feedback on the Background Report and to share their aspirations for the subject area with us. This report provided a technical assessment of the area including history, topography, land features, planning controls, heritage, servicing infrastructure, bushfire and ecology.

The purpose of this engagement round was to ensure that we had identified and recognised the unique aspects of the subject area and understood the key features of the subject area that were important to the local community. It also gave us an opportunity to understand what the community wanted to achieve with the subject area which helped to inform our technical assessment with social and other considerations also included.

**Phase 2 – Land Use Options**

Following a minor delay as a result of changes to bushfire regulations, a Design Response and Land Use Options Report was finalised in April 2018. A design response and land use options to inform the Draft Masterplan were outlined for each of the seven precincts, and further community feedback was sought. Seven community consultation sessions were held from May to June 2018 was followed by a three-week submission period.

It is important to note that during these sessions a number of community members attended multiple sessions, while others only attended a single session. This, along with other factors, such as the ability for individuals to attend sessions, means that some views may have been recorded disproportionally to their representation within the community.

**How did people get involved?**

Community members were notified in a number of different ways. Tenants and lessees were contacted by telephone and face-to-face or phone meetings were held with them. Private land residents were advised via direct mail of the removal of the Public Acquisition Overlay and along with other residents, existing local networks and other stakeholders identified by Nillumbik Shire Council were invited to attend the first round of community information sessions via direct mail. A dedicated engagement page was also established on the Melbourne Water Your Say engagement platform.

Through these sessions we established a contact base and future invitations, updates and information were distributed through various channels to this list. We encouraged this to be shared as widely as possible.

Community feedback was received in a number of ways including:

- 25 face to face meetings
• 226 direct mail
• 2 community drop in sessions
• 7 enquiry by design sessions
• 102 online submissions.

Who did we hear from?

The majority of engagement participants were from the local area of Christmas Hills and Smiths Gully and from a number of members of local groups including those located in the nearby Bend of Islands and St Andrews. There was also some limited feedback from those interested in moving to the area.

Consultation process

We recognise that, while we have undertaken significant community engagement and consultation beyond that required in the GLPS process some concerns remain. Some community members felt we have done well.

"It is good to see that MW is taking a responsible and inclusive approach to the divestment of its excess land in Christmas Hills."

"Very excited about this plan. Well thought out development which factors in the community utilizing the natural assets is fantastic, I feel the area does need more development, and finding the right mix as this report suggest it will is a great initiative. Looking forward to the progress."

However, we also acknowledge that many felt we could have done better.

"The comments written at one table were mostly from one person who supported an option not supported by the rest of those at the table. The ‘facilitator’ was asked to record specific points, which supported the Christmas Hills Land Care position and did not align with the options chosen for discussion."

"The MW community consultation process did not present all the "High Value Options" of its report to the community for comment. (ie: The options presented here in this survey could be called 'sub' options of the MW High Value Option 2)."

"The future of Christmas Hills is important to me, yet the two options you provide for this/each precinct do not represent the full range of options, and do not achieve the purpose of the Green Wedge, so I am not prepared to provide comment on either until a genuine community consultation process has been undertaken."

We acknowledge the need to be clear about our intentions as well as the future process, and are committed to doing this.

The primary channel for community consultation outlined under the GLPS process is through their exhibition and submission periods. These periods occur after Melbourne Water has submitted our Draft Masterplan but before the final Draft Masterplan for the area is finalised. We recognise that GLPS is a relatively new process and that in some instances the full engagement process was not clear. The final sections of this pack outline the timeframes and next steps as well as key links for more information, how to stay up to date with the project and how to provide further feedback.
Frequently asked questions

Why is the process different to last time Melbourne Water disposed of land in Christmas Hills?

The Victorian Government Land Transactions Policy was introduced in 2015 and establishes strict requirements for Victorian Government agencies when dealing with the sale of land. The Transactions Policy also identifies the roles and responsibilities of landholding Ministers and government agencies in undertaking land transactions. Melbourne Water purchases and retains land in accordance with the Victorian Government Landholding Policy and further information on this policy is available from https://www.propertyandlandtitles.vic.gov.au/vglm

Why is Melbourne Water involved in the Draft Masterplan, isn’t that a conflict of interest?

In this instance, Melbourne Water is the landholding agency (landowner) rather than the referral authority. As the Christmas Hills land has been identified as surplus, Melbourne Water is required to divest the land on the public market with appropriate zoning to ensure its highest and best use. The current zoning is not appropriate as it applies to government uses. The rezone process must be undertaken in accordance with State Policy, which requires Melbourne Water (as the proponent/landowner) to develop a Draft Masterplan using independent planners.

The Draft Masterplan is then reviewed by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning through the GLPS (the referral authority) which is specifically designed to assess the disposal of land held by government agencies such as Melbourne Water and to consider the implications holistically. This process will include further community consultation and public hearings and can include some, all, or none of the original Draft Masterplan proposal. Melbourne Water has a limited role in this process ensuring there is no conflict of interest in the final outcome and there is an independent process.

Why is not Melbourne Water giving this land back to the government?

Melbourne Water is transferring 280 hectares to the Crown to extend the Warrandyte-Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve.

The land has also been through a First Right of Refusal process for government agencies. As part of this process government departments and agencies, including local council, are notified of the land being identified as surplus and can express an interest in obtaining this land for their purposes and to take responsibility for ongoing management of the land. The land currently occupied by the Rob Roy Hill Climb – MG Car Club is at present intended to be transferred to the Crown with the Nillumbik Shire Council to establish a Committee of Management.

Given no other interest was received at First Right of Refusal stage, in accordance with State Policy, Melbourne Water is required to rezone and dispose the outstanding land on the public market.

As a tenant, do I get first right of refusal?

In accordance with State Policy, First Right of Refusal is only applicable to Victorian Government agencies. All remaining land is required to be sold on the public market. Developing the Draft Masterplan is just the first step in the process and there will be additional opportunities for engagement through the GLPS. Once this work is complete, the land will be
sold gradually over five years. Given the expected timeframes, Melbourne Water can confirm that all existing licence and lease agreements will be offered a two-year guarantee to the end of 2020, providing certainty for current tenants.

**Will you apply Green Wedge zoning?**

The Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan outlines five zones identified as a planning controls. Rural Conservation Zoning is the predominant zone currently applied throughout the Nillumbik Green Wedge and is consistent with various planning requirements within the Green Wedge area including Planning Practice Note 62: Green Wedge Core Planning Provisions, the Green Wedge Core Planning Provisions outlined in Clause 57 in the Nillumbik Planning Scheme and the Nillumbik Green Wedge Management Plan.

**What does Rural Conservation Zone mean?**

There are six zones applicable to rural land in Victoria which prioritise different activities including residential, farming, or mixed activities such as tourism or protecting specific characteristics of the area such as heritage. The Rural Conservation Zone protects areas of environmental significance. While a range of activities are permitted these often require approval.

**What about agriculture?**

The role of agriculture (particularly grazing) in the broader landscape and its importance to the local community has been recognised throughout the Draft Masterplan process. Agricultural uses can be accommodated within the Rural Conservation Zones in appropriate places, however the primary focus of the zone is the protection and conservation of the natural environment.

**What about biodiversity and protecting flora and fauna?**

The Rural Conservation Zone has a focus on protecting environmental features including flora and fauna as well as the visual qualities of the land. It allows for other uses which support management of the land while maintaining these values.

**What about tourism?**

Tourism was considered in the early stages as an opportunity recognising that the use of land in the area for non-farming purposes, such as tourism uses, could support the long term productivity of surrounding farmland. While tourism is not prioritised under the Rural Conservation Zone it may be permitted subject to approval.

The Rob Roy Hill Climb is acknowledged for tourism opportunities.

**What is the difference between Rural Conservation Zone 3 and Rural Conservation Zone 4?**

The difference between these zones is the minimum possible lot size. For Rural Conservation Zone 3 the minimum lot size is 8 hectares and for Rural Conservation Zone 4 the minimum lot size is 40 hectares. The minimum size is not necessarily the size of the final lot so you could have a lot of 30 hectares in a Rural Conservation Zone 3.

**Are we talking about acres or hectares?**

The lot sizes are in hectares. A hectare is about 2.47 acres. So, for Rural Conservation Zone 3 the minimum lot size is 8 hectares (just under 20 acres) and for Rural Conservation Zone 4 the minimum size is 40 hectares (about 99 acres).
**Are you subdividing and creating smaller titles?**

The size of existing titles in the area vary significantly with around a third of these currently less than 5ha. Only four titles owned by Melbourne Water are currently in excess of 40ha. We anticipate almost half (46%) of Melbourne Water owned land being zoned Rural Conservation Zone 4, under a quarter being zoned Rural Conservation Zone 3 (22%) and the remaining being transferred to the Crown (27%) or zoned for public use (4%).

**Why not the Christmas Hills Landcare Group option?**

The Christmas Hills Landcare Group submission identified a range of considerations such as the 50m waterway buffer which are consistent with the independent planning advice to include a 100m waterway buffer.

We understand that there are three key differences between the planning advice and the Christmas Hills Landcare Group option.

1. Transfer of additional land to Parks Victoria to extend the Warrandyte Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve in precincts 1, 4 and 7.
2. Transfer of land to Nillumbik Shire Council for bushland reserves in precincts 6 and 7
3. Application of Rural Conservation Zone 4 (40 hectares minimum) across the entire area with no application of Rural Conservation Zone 3 (8 hectares minimum).

In regard to the first two points, Melbourne Water has identified and will transfer land to other government bodies who have expressed an interest in the land in accordance with State Government Policy. Further detail is outlined under the ‘Why aren’t you giving this land back to the government?’ question above.

The independent planning advice proposes RCZ3 in two areas: Precinct 2 and Precinct 7. A number of factors contributed to the application of this zone including for instance in Precinct 2 the nature of the surrounding zoning being RCZ3 and in Precinct 7 in response to the features of the land and the consolidation of existing small lots. We recognise that community feedback both supports and rejects the application of RCZ3. Ultimately, we acknowledge the independent planning advice that this option represents the most appropriate planning outcome.

**Why can’t Wanneroo Farm be a park?**

Parks must be held in the ownership of a public body. Melbourne Water cannot retain the land as a park because the Victorian Government Landholding Policy requires that Victorian Government agencies including Melbourne Water only hold land that directly contributes to their current or future service delivery.
Themes

During the consultation phases we heard a range of feedback across several key themes. This section outlines what we heard under each key theme, key considerations and the planning advice and provides further explanation and examples of the feedback received.

The themes we have identified are:

- Lot Sizes
- Conservation values
- Community
- Town centre
- Agricultural uses
- Waterways
- Fire and Safety
- Rob Roy Hill Climb, Ponylands and Wanneroo Farm
- Land transfer, donations and alternative ownership
- Green Wedge considerations and other planning controls
- Roads and trails

Lot sizes

- **What we heard:** Mixed views, support for a range of different minimum block sizes. It is important to note that community not only talked about different lot sizes but also in different scales with some community members talking about acres and some hectares. We have identified this as a source of potential confusion.
- **Key considerations:** Melbourne Water is required to ensure the land is appropriately zoned on the basis of its highest and best use.
- **Planning advice:** Consolidation of lots to achieve a mix of Rural Conservation Zone 3 (8ha/20acre minimum) and Rural Conservation Zone 4 (40ha/99acre minimum).

We heard a range of views from the engagement participants in regard to the most appropriate lot sizes. There was recognition that all options represent a better outcome than might have existed without the public use overlay, because the area has been protected from incremental development that could have occurred on much smaller lots than are currently being proposed.

We have heard support for smaller block sizes around 20 acres (8 ha) or smaller. Those supporting smaller lot sizes suggest this will allow for more affordable housing options that might be suitable for families to settle in the area and also that the smaller lot sizes will be easier to maintain.

"[I am] Worried about having a number of large blocks and no small ones- concerned that the community will change significantly from one that reflects people from many financial situations to one that is predominantly wealthy. Like kangaroo grounds."
"We encourage Melbourne Water to sub-divide land for sale in to 20 - 40 acres lots covered by Rural Conservation Zone overlays where families are able to build homes and settle in the district."

“A number of current property owners would like to have to ability to sub divide their properties into slightly smaller blocks say 10 acres."

We have also heard support for larger block sizes and the applications of Rural Conservation Zone 4 with a of a minimum lot size of 40 hectares (99 acres). The Rural Conservation Zone is largely supported because of the emphasis placed on protecting environmental values. The 40 hectares minimum is supported as some of the surrounding area has this minimum and as a means of limiting development of the area.

“The Zone that applies to adjacent areas is RCZ4 which provides a 40 hectares minimum lot size. This should be applied to all lands to be sold. Existing small lots could be consolidated to achieve this as part of the overall process. No small lots should be created. Lot sizes zoning should reflect the underlying 40 hectares area.”

"Apply RCZ4 across the whole area to reduce development."

"Minimise the potential for too-dense residential development by ensuring any subdivision of larger blocks to be sold does not create lots below the minimum subdivision lot size of 40 hectares applicable Rural Conservation Zone (RCZ4). Wherever possible consolidate properties to be sold currently smaller than 40 hectares to achieve lots of at least 40 hectares."

"Smaller blocks means twice as many vehicles on Clintons Rd and there is already too much wildlife being killed by vehicles (wombats, echidnas, wallabies, etc).”

"Agricultural and landscape values and future use potential would be destroyed by 8 hectare subdivision."

We also heard support for a range of mixed options including appropriate combinations of rural and bush blocks, the need to protect agricultural blocks in the north, smaller blocks being suitable in the south, the desire for consolidation of small lots and a need to consider protection against urban sprawl.

**Conservation values**

- **What we heard:** Community consensus on the importance of conservation values in the area.
- **Key considerations:** In protecting conversation values we must also align with appropriate zoning outlined in the relevant planning scheme. Almost a third of the total area will be transferred to the Crown to extend the existing Warrandyte-Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve.
- **Planning advice:** The Rural Conservation Zone(s) is recommended for the area due to their prioritisation of conservation values.

The submissions we received identified a range of important conservation values in the area. Animals identified included wombats, echidnas, wallabies, wedge tail eagles, slender-tailed dunnart, brush-tailed phascogales, barking owls and lyre birds. The wildlife corridors, their
travel paths and habitat were suggested as important considerations. Endangered terrestrial orchids were also highlighted for protection.

"Watsons Creek provides a major part of the [Warrandyte-Kinglake Habitat Corridor] but the bushlands east of Sugarloaf Reservoir and through the Bend of Islands provide a significant part of the link. The lands under consideration are an integral part of the corridor."

"Protect the larger patches of existing remnant vegetation on these properties through ... transferring the property to Parks Victoria to become part of the Warrandyte-Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve."

"The Clintons Rd area is abundant with wombats, echidnas, wallabies, feeding Wedge Tail eagles. I see them regularly on walks."

"Christmas Hills Landcare Group and other reports have highlighted the [flora and fauna] values present, including Brush-tailed Phascogale and Slender-tailed Dunnart. Appropriate zoning and other environmental constraints should be applied."

"This is an 'opportunity' to enhance the natural environment and provide habitat for the wildlife, flora and fauna of the area."

"The current strategic rezoning presents a significant opportunity for Nillumbik Shire to secure for future generations a publicly held conservation reserve within Christmas Hills for the critically endangered Round leaf Pomaderris."

The need for pest and weed management was also highlighted, as well as the need to consider appropriate types of fencing to allow native fauna to pass through the area unobstructed.

Community

- **What we heard:** Mixed views around the desire to restrict or invite new residents.
- **Key considerations:** Lots which are developable are not the same as those that may support a dwelling.
- **Planning advice:** A configuration of lots that would allow for a maximum of 18 potential additional dwellings.

Some feedback indicated a desire for no new development of any kind.

"Leave things as they are. Don't impose landscape level vandalism like this on the community."

"We choose to live in an area that has not been destroyed by the urban sprawl and don't want it here."

However, much of it was positive about the future opportunities for the area and new residents, particularly affording new lifestyle opportunities for families.

"50 or so families can come out here, can build their homes and infrastructure, and develop lifestyles that value the outdoors, grow things, raise animals and enjoy rural living within an hour of the city."
"It is exciting to think of the possibilities that are presented to a community that has been in limbo for such a period of time, waiting and planning around the construction of a dam."

There was also recognition of the opportunity to resolve and protect land around existing community facilities, particularly the hall and tennis courts.

"Additional areas such as the tennis courts could be transferred to the crown and managed under a committee of management, such as the one managing the hall. This would provide good community assets."

"It would be in the best interest of the local community to resolve the issue of the tennis courts and the Hall that are on MW land and make it possible for the community to fully utilise these facilities now and into the future."

- Note for clarity the Hall is not on Melbourne Water land.

"Consult with the Christmas Hills Mechanics Institute Hall committee about options for the land parcels upon which the adjacent tennis courts, and nearby old post office are sited."

The possible growth of the community also led to comments around the possible need to upgrade or provide new community facilities.

"With an increase to the community is there some plans to upgrade and improve the school."

"[I support] a cafe or meeting place for residents that doesn't require special permission or rental like the hall and tennis courts. Perhaps the Old Post Office could be a potential place for that."

**Town centre**

- **What we heard:** Mixed views, support for activity that brings the community together
- **Key considerations:** Proposing a Township Zone would significantly alter the use and scale of the development with the Christmas Hills area and would be inconsistent with the purpose of the Nillumbik Green Wedge.
- **Planning advice:** Rural Conservation Zone is recommended to be applied through the whole area, with no allocations for smaller (2ha) lot sizes through the Rural Living Zone.

In the initial background report, the idea of a township was proposed. This idea received a mix of views from the community.

Those in support of a township suggest that this was an opportunity to provide a focal point for generating a sense of community. A range of ideas for this were presented including adapting the old post office into a general store and relocating the school to the area around the hall/tennis courts. Some pointed to the success of surrounding businesses as an indication of the likely success of new businesses and some acknowledged that a town centre could increase accessibility for visitors.

"I love the idea of a more central hub; the area does lack a central focal point."
"I do feel too isolated at times in the area considering its location to Melbourne. A tasteful re-zoning would have my full support."

"Consider relocating Primary School buildings ... to Mechanics Hall/Tennis court precinct/War memorial/Old Post Office ... this would become the Christmas Hills village centre. Reinstate the zoning of the old Post Office to commercial to allow for the establishment of General store/ cafe without zoning dramas for business."

"The existing restaurant at Watson’s Creek and road side trading are consistently packed so it shows the people appreciate and use this kind of development."

"[I] would like to see a little community strip with perhaps a general store and maybe restaurant/food outlet."

Those that did not support the idea were concerned about the impact on the landscape and identified the range of other options locally.

"Yarra Glen with a population [of] 2,611, is an old established township relatively close some six kilometres away from the proposed ‘new township’ in Christmas Hills. Yarra Glen is already struggling to survive and so any adjacent township development will also struggle to survive."

"We do not need a Christmas Hills township - we've done without one for 50 years and don’t need one now."

"We have adequate access to township facilities in the surrounding areas of Kangaroo Ground, Panton Hill and Yarra Glen."

"[I am] really worried about the township idea. I moved here for the space and quiet. Plenty of towns around this area if you like that sort of thing. Space is rare."

Agricultural uses

- **What we heard:** Mixed views, highlighting the need to consider appropriate uses.
- **Key considerations:** Agriculture is permitted/encouraged within Green Wedge zoning to various degrees.
- **Planning advice:** Rural Conservation Zones permit agricultural uses, but these are not prioritised.

Many community members identified that the decisions about the lot size would impact decisions made about how the land was used and whether it would (or should) allow for agriculture.

"The land should remain as it is with scattered dwellings, large cleared areas for agriculture."

"It is important all sub-division maximises the flexibility of use for landowners to keep livestock."

The main concern around agricultural was the quality of the land for these uses, particularly the soil.
“The soil in Christmas Hills is not suitable for agriculture.”

“Poor quality farmland (there’s a lot of it about) is best grazed sensitively in big blocks, or better still revegetated.”

“Our area does not have landholdings large enough to sustain farming enterprises and the soil quality in Christmas Hills is not terrific, and so it is appropriate that grazing lands are sub-divided into 20 or 40 acre lots for development as rural recreational properties.”

**Waterways**

- **What we heard:** Community consensus on appropriate buffers and waterway protection.
- **Key considerations:** Melbourne Water is a strong advocate for waterway protection.
- **Planning advice:** 100m buffers and waterway protection and in some cases section 173 agreements should be applied.

The waterways were recognised for their contribution to the area. There was community consensus on the need for buffers around waterways both to protect them, for instance from stock and runoff, and due to flooding.

“**That watercourses are protected and buffer zones/reserves be established alongside them.**”

“**Protect the watercourses of Watsons Creek and Five Mile Creek by applying a minimum 50m creek reserve either side of Watsons Creek, and minimum 30m creek reserve either side of Five Mile Creek, for MW management.**”

“**Over development of the area would produce contaminated storm water run-off.**”

**Fire and safety**

- **What we heard:** Community consensus on the need to consider bush fire risks.
- **Key considerations:** We engaged fire specialists as part of the Draft Masterplan development process and have consulted with the CFA during the process.
- **Planning advice:** Defendable space areas must be consistent with the most recent standards.

Ensuring appropriate management of land, and therefore ongoing management of fire breaks and ground fuel loads was important to the community.

“**Too many large landholdings are not maintained appropriately, and areas become overgrown with weeds, rabbits, ground fuel.**”

“**Grazing lands currently provide a fire break across the district which would not be there if land is revegetated.**”

The function of roads and for evacuation was also highlighted.
"[I would] like to see O’Sheas road/One tree hill road linked to Scholls road to provide second fire escape access to properties on both those roads. These roads are single lane and often get blocked by fallen trees and trucks."

"When the need for evacuation occurs roads will be too congested to cope and lives at danger, already these are issues for current residents."

**Rob Roy Hill Climb, Ponylands and Wanneroo Farm**

- **What we heard:** Community support for local enterprise.
- **Key considerations:** Preservation of social assets in the Study Area with respect to heritage values and land for ongoing community use.
- **Planning advice:** Consider management options where possible on land which is used for community use.

There was support for maintaining the characteristics of Wanneroo Farm as a community asset. Protection from overdevelopment was highlighted but a range of lot sizes were suggested. One lot was proposed as being the most economically viable farming land, three lots was proposed to match ridge lines and five lots was proposed to ensure they are well managed. Trails between the lots were also suggested.

"Wanneroo [Farm] should include some Public Park area linked to Kinglake NP with car parking, BBQs & Toilets. Needs to be subdivided into three so no further subdivision is possible. An historic farm, with potential for lots of appropriate uses so close to Melbourne. Needs more thinking about!"

"Wanaroo [sic] farm should if possible be sold as one property and maintained as farming land."

Rob Roy Hill Climb is recognised as an important recreational asset in the area. There was wide ranging support for its protection including some level of consideration for associated noise.

"The Rob Roy Hill climb must be protected and preserved in place - it is a terrific time piece in the district."

"The potential of Rob Roy is not just limited to hill climb, but could be tailored to numerous types of rural festival activities; folk music festivals, farmers markets, etc. It is important that the current and future public amenity value of this subject area is protected, potentially through transfer as a whole to Nillumbik Shire."

"Possible issues with noise from Rob Roy hill climb."

Ponylands was also recognised for its contribution to the local area.

"This particular property has environmental and historical significance and supports recreational purposes and employment opportunities. It is a great recreational asset for tourism, outdoor activities and is an iconic part of Christmas Hills."

"While we understand that Ponylands is a privately run business, we should not underestimate the public amenity benefit that it brings to Nillumbik Shire in enabling visitors a low key but physical and intimate experience of the green wedge rural and natural environment."
Land transfer, donations and alternative ownership

- **What we heard:** Some community consensus for transferring land to other government bodies to conserve or convert into parks.
- **Key considerations:** 280 hectares of land is being transferred to the Crown to extend the Warrandyte Kinglake Nature Conservation Reserve. We are also working to transfer the land occupied by the Roby Roy Hill Climb to the Crown.
- **Planning advice:** There are strict policies and procedures that outline government land transfers which must be adhered to during this process.

Throughout the consultation process, we have heard suggestions for transfer of land to other government bodies.

"Transfer all land to the crown and retain as green wedge."

"Please give the land that the Hall currently leases to the Hall Committee."

"Transferring 280 hectares for public purposes is a minor concession to allow the inappropriate rezoning of a much larger parcel of land to be sold on the open market."

"The Christmas Hills Mechanics Institute Hall has a long history and has been greatly supported by the Christmas Hills Community with many people donating time and effort in its construction and renovations. The land on which the Hall stands and all adjacent land need to be donated to the Hall Committee for its management and community use. The Hall provides a wonderful and appreciated facility for community use."

Green Wedge considerations and other planning controls

- **What we heard:** Community consensus on the need to protect the Green Wedge, although less clear on the application of planning controls.
- **Key considerations:** There are five zones identified as a planning control applied in the Nillumbik Green Wedge. Rural Conservation Zone is identified as the predominant zone in the Green Wedge.
- **Planning advice:** Rural Conservation Zone is recommended. The Rural Conservation Zone has a particular focus on conservation.

We heard strong community support for planning to be consistent with Green Wedge policy, although the methods identified to achieve this were not always consistent.

"The lands are an integral part of the Nillumbik Green Wedge. Resolution of the lands must conform to the Green Wedge Plan and Policy."

"The Green Wedge is an important lung for the ever increasing population of Melbourne and to diminish this by over developing places like Christmas Hills is counterproductive."

"I think the sustainability of the green wedge and reducing bushfire risk in the area includes more people living here and building their homes, families and lives here and maintaining their landholdings. Too much public land in our area is not managed with bushfire in mind."
“I feel that greater development or subdivision in the Christmas Hills area will further weaken the Green Wedge, degrade the environment and make it less accessible for public enjoyment.”

“The existing planning controls that exist within Christmas Hills and the Green Wedge are the result of long-term strategic collaboration and deliberation on achieving the most appropriate and sustainable outcome, not just for the local area, but also for Melbourne and the rest of Victoria. These should not be compromised.”

Of particular difference within the feedback was the application of strict planning controls which were largely supported but also rejected by others.

"Now Melbourne Water overlay has been lifted would like to see some of the property planning restrictions lifted.”

"We support the current strict planning controls and don’t wish to see them lifted.”

"Use of this land must be consistent with the existing planning controls.”

"There must be protection of bushland by covenants on properties if land has to be sold.”

"Minimise the potential for clearing of important remnant vegetation to build a dwelling by ensuring all lots to be sold have adequate and suitable, pre-existing cleared land to accommodate a typical house and domestic garden.”

"Protect local history by maintaining existing heritage overlays. Consult with Wurundjeri to determine if any of these properties are of particular importance to them culturally, and protect appropriately (consider transfer to Wurundjeri ownership).”

Roads and trails

- **What we heard:** Community concern focused on additional road traffic.
- **Key considerations:** All lots within the Study Area must provide access to an all-weather road with dimensions adequate to accommodate emergency vehicles. Provisions for trails are outside of the scope of the Masterplan.
- **Planning advice:** Any proposal must include access to Melbourne Water land parcels.

Road use was a concern for community members in terms of the ability of the existing roads to support additional traffic likely from new residents.

"The rural road system in Christmas Hills will have limited capacity to handle increased traffic safely.”

"An increase in housing built in the area would be problematic for the rural roads which do not cope with high volumes of traffic. Residents value being able to walk, horse ride, cycle etc along the rural roads, and increases in traffic would make this more dangerous.”

"The area is not well serviced, currently there are few bitumen roads off the main road which is too narrow and many vehicle accidents occur. Dust from current unmade roads
is currently causing health and visual hazards and increased usage will only exacerbate the problem.”

There was also general support for allocation of additional trails in the area, as well as recognition of the ability to create pathways between new lots or through the national park.

“The possibility of putting in trails (or retaining and managing existing trails) for walkers, horse riders, etc. this would provide valuable off road trails. It would be great to link up some of the existing trails.”

“I support the creation of recreational roadside trails on all roadside verges to encourage walking, bike and horse riding.”
Timeframes and next steps

Consultation

The views expressed so far, and outlined in this report, have informed our Draft Masterplan process which also considers a range of planning factors including State Government policy. We recognise that, particularly where there is disagreement within the community or where planning or other ownership structures must be adhered to, not all community views can be incorporated into the plan.

We also recognise that a range of community members do not wish to engage further at this stage, because they understand that Melbourne Water has heard their views or because they are satisfied with the outcome to date.

Our intention in preparing this Community Voices document is to clearly outline our process, what we have heard and the next steps for engagement. We have aimed to respond to the questions and the feedback we have received to date.

We will continue to review any questions or feedback received through engagement channels such as the Your Say portal available at https://yoursay.melournewater.com.au/christmas-hills-land-sale

We currently anticipate submission of our Draft Masterplan to GLPS in early 2019. Further details on the range of engagement available through this process is outlined below.

Government Land Planning Service

The GLPS changes planning provisions for Victorian government land and provides a clear and transparent process to ensure that land no longer needed by departments and agencies can be sold in a fair way with appropriate zoning. In this process Melbourne Water is a landowner (not a referral authority).

Government departments and agencies can request assistance under this service and there are a number of different assessment processes that are applied depending on the nature of the subject area. In this case, GLPS will notify a range of relevant stakeholder of the proposal (including Council, residents, interested parties and servicing authorities) and also places a notice in local paper(s) outlining their consultation process.

Consultation process:

• Following the public notification, the subject area enters a six week ‘Exhibition’ period where public information sessions are held and submissions are invited.

• Once the submission period closes, the Advisory Committee considers the submissions.

• The Advisory Committee then holds public hearings.

• The Advisory Committee then deliberates before providing advice to the Minister for Planning for their consideration.

The Minister for Planning’s decision is then conveyed to the landowner, Council and individuals who made a submission to the Advisory Committee. It is also made available on the GLPS website.

The timeframe for this process is a minimum six-eight months. Assuming an early 2019 submission date, we would not expect an outcome until late 2019.

**Sale Plan**

Depending on the outcome of GLPS, the sale plan would be developed by Melbourne Water. Once completed, the sale plan will occur over a number of phases which we anticipate rolling out over a period of around five years and not concluding before 2025.