

Aireys Inlet to Eastern View Planning for the Future



UNDERSTANDING PLACES

Phase 1 Background Report - Summary

Final, April 2015

Surf Coast Shire would like to thank all residents, visitors, traders and community groups for their input into the process and acknowledges the broad range of views on many matters raised during the first phase of community engagement for this project.

This document is a summary of the Aireys Inlet to Eastern View - Planning for the Future Phase 1 Background Report. A full version of the report is available at www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au or by contacting the Strategic Planning Unit on 5261 0535.

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1. Introduction

Background

Located on the world renowned Great Ocean Road between Torquay and Lorne, the townships of Aireys Inlet, Fairhaven, Moggs Creek and Eastern View are celebrated for their unique natural features and relaxed coastal village lifestyle.

Aireys Inlet to Eastern View - Planning for the Future seeks to prepare a new Structure Plan for the towns to guide future land use and development to ensure the low key coastal character, natural values and distinct qualities of the towns are preserved and enhanced for current and future generations of residents and visitors. It will look into housing, community and recreation facilities, environmental protection, commercial development and tourism, and infrastructure requirements to plan for and respond to community needs and aspirations. The plan will serve as a policy document to guide decision-making by Council and a range of government agencies, service providers, landowners, developers and the general public.

The current Structure Plan for Aireys Inlet to Eastern View was adopted in 1993 by the former Geelong Regional Commission and Barrabool Shire Council. A number of key drivers provide the impetus for developing a new plan. These include:

- The need to reconfirm, or otherwise, the current vision and planning policy framework for Aireys Inlet to Eastern View.
- The need to respond to current and future community needs and aspirations, e.g. around housing, community facilities, open space and infrastructure.
- Growing visitation to the Great Ocean Road Region.

“Surf Coast Shire Council has embarked on a review of the Structure Plan for the townships to ensure they remain great places to live, work, play and visit into the future.”

The project will also develop an urban design framework (UDF) for the two commercial centres in Aireys Inlet, guiding appropriate development and public realm improvements.

Aireys Inlet to Eastern View - Planning for the Future embraces a placemaking approach to ensure the values, needs and aspirations of the local community are reflected in the plan and inform local, site specific solutions that foster and build on the towns’ strong sense of community and identity. Whilst some further growth and change can be expected, no outward expansion of the existing town boundaries is contemplated.

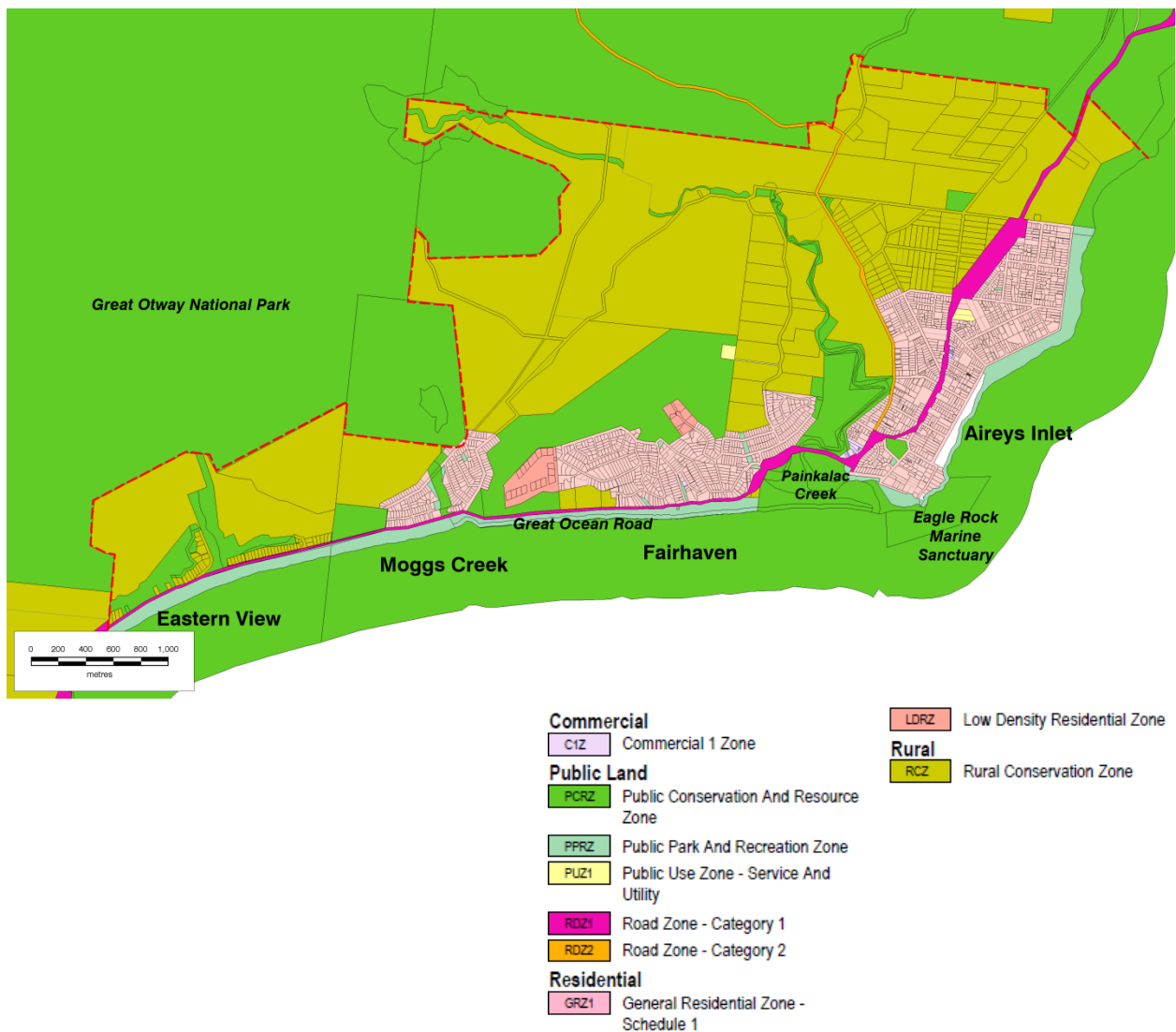
Purpose of this report

This report provides a summary of the outcomes of Phase 1 of the project - Understanding Places. It is the culmination of comprehensive background research, including review of relevant reports, plans, strategies and data; site, context and situation analysis; and community and stakeholder engagement. The report presents a snapshot of the towns’ profiles and strengths and unearths challenges and opportunities for future planning.

The findings set the scene to develop a shared vision and guiding principles for the towns (Phase 2), and inform the drafting of the Structure Plan and Urban Design Framework (Phase 3).

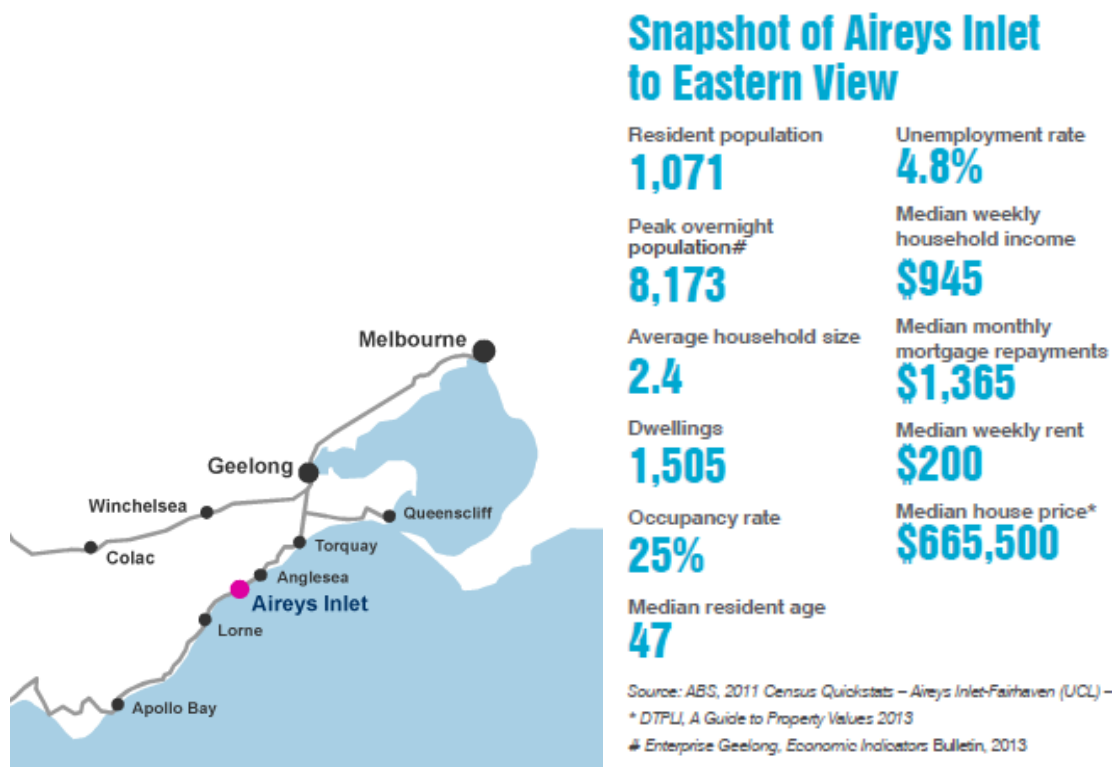
Study area

The study area is shown on the map below. It includes the settlements of Aireys Inlet, Fairhaven, Moggs Creek and Eastern View and the immediate hinterland, which includes many large bush blocks held in private ownership.



2. Aireys Inlet to Eastern View at a glance

The coastal settlements of Aireys Inlet, Fairhaven, Moggs Creek and Eastern View are situated along the Great Ocean Road between Torquay and Lorne – approximately 120km south-west of Melbourne and 45km from Geelong. The settlements are enclosed by dense bushland and spectacular coastline, nestled between the Great Otway National Park and Bass Strait. The towns have a relatively small permanent population, but are very popular as a holiday destination.



Key features

- The towns had a combined population of 1,071 in 2011 (ABS, 2011 Census). In the summer holidays the population swells to over 8,000 (Geelong Economic Indicators, 2014). As such, tourism is the primary economic driver of the town. The large majority of the peak population stay in holiday homes, with only a minority in holiday/tourist accommodation.
- The towns have a distinctive low density, non-suburban vegetated coastal character and together with the surrounding hinterland and coastal reserves support a vast range of threatened flora and fauna species. The open landscape of the Painkalac Creek Valley separates the timbered hillsides of Aireys Inlet and Fairhaven.
- The sensitive coastal and environmental setting of the townships provides natural boundaries to growth. As a result, population growth is likely to be limited to small scale infill development and the transition of part-time residents to full-time residents, i.e. holiday home owners who decide to live full-time in Aireys Inlet.
- Retailing in Aireys Inlet comprises two small local centres, locally known as the ‘Top Shops’ and ‘Bottom Shops’, which provide convenience retailing to local residents and visitors, and to those travelling to other destinations along the Great Ocean Road. Residents and visitors staying in Aireys Inlet need to travel to larger centres further afield (such as Anglesea, Lorne, Torquay, Waurin Pond, Geelong, etc) for their weekly grocery shopping requirements and higher-order purchases (e.g. clothes, homewares).
- The Split Point Lighthouse at Aireys Inlet and the Great Ocean Road Memorial Arch at Eastern View are recognisable landmarks and popular tourist draw cards. Aireys Inlet is becoming vastly

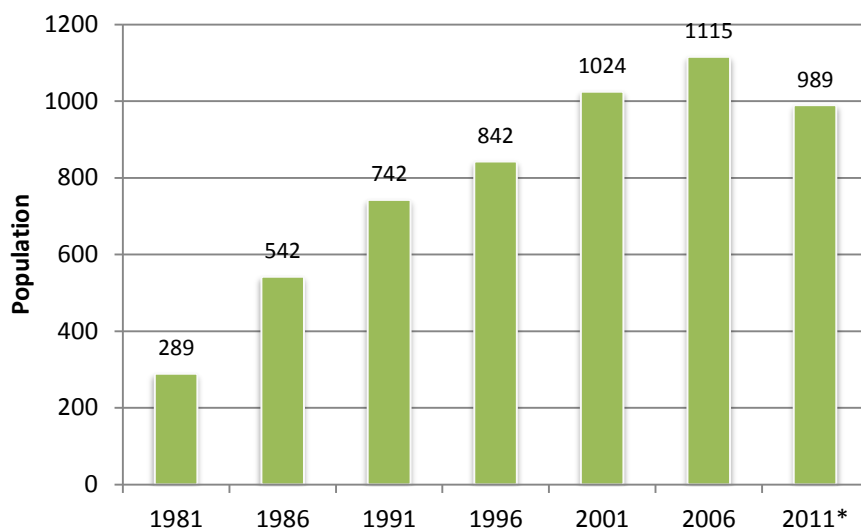
recognised as a flourishing live music and literary hub, with events such as the Festival of Words and the Open Mic Music Festival.

- Like many small towns within Regional Victoria, Aireys Inlet to Eastern View is predominantly reliant on private motor vehicles for transport with limited public transport options. Public transport is limited to V/Line bus services that run between Geelong and Apollo Bay.

The 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires were a defining moment in the towns' history. The fires all but destroyed the townships. Much of the building stock was lost and has since then been rebuilt. The redevelopment that occurred after the fires signalled an accelerated population growth, and the traditional small holiday resort began to grow in popularity as a permanent settlement, attracting families with children. Many of the older style holiday homes were replaced by more substantial homes.

The growth trend reversed when the population decreased between 2006 and 2011. No population counts are available for the towns since 2011 so it is unclear if this trend is continuing.

Population Aireys Inlet-Fairhaven-Moggs Creek, 1981-2011



Source: DTPLI, Towns in Time 2011. * Enumerated population from 2011 Census. The 2011 statistical boundary excludes 16 dwellings on Bimbadeen Drive, Fairhaven compared to 2006. Note these figures vary from those published by the ABS.

Analysis of service age groups shows that there was a lower proportion of people in the younger age groups (0 to 17) and a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (60+) compared to Surf Coast Shire. Overall, 22.9% of the population was aged between 0 and 17, and 29.3% were aged 60 years and over, compared with 25.3% and 21.2% respectively for Surf Coast Shire. Since 2006, all age groups under 50 have experienced losses, whilst the number of people aged 50 years and over has increased (*Profile.id*). This reinforces the notion of an ageing population profile.

Given the small size of the permanent population, it is difficult to make accurate projections of the future population size and composition. Future growth will depend on unpredictable variables such as:

- The number of holiday houses that are converted to permanent residences (i.e. the occupancy rate);
- The number of persons per occupied dwelling (i.e. the average household size); and
- The level of infill development (development on vacant lots and subdivision).

Relatively slow growth is forecast in the larger area of Lorne-Aireys Inlet-Deans Marsh to 2031: 0.8% average annual growth rate – an increase of 498 people in total (from 3,055 in 2011 to 3,553 in 2031) – versus 2.7% in Surf Coast Shire for the period from 2011 to 2031 (*Forecast.id*). Based on this growth rate, the population of the Aireys Inlet district will be around 1,245 in 2031.

3. Local Snapshot

Population

1,071 permanent residents live in the towns (ABS, 2011).

The population swells to over 8,000 people during the peak holiday season.

The population is expected to grow slowly to 2031.

Compared with Surf Coast, residents are older and live in slightly smaller households. The ageing of the population is set to continue.

Housing

There are around 1,500 houses within the towns. Only 25% of houses are permanently occupied, compared to 66% for Surf Coast.

96.3% are separate houses and 1.9% are medium density housing such as units and townhouses. The average number of bedrooms is 3.1.

There are just over 200 vacant lots.

Opportunities for residential development are restricted by the surrounding natural environment, high bushfire risk and vegetated character of the towns.

The area has become one of the most unaffordable by comparison with the other townships in the Shire. The median house price in 2013 was \$665,500 in Aireys Inlet and \$781,500 in Fairhaven compared to \$587,000 for Surf Coast Shire overall.

Employment

Industry

7.1%

Construction

6.9%

Education

6.0%

Accommodation

Occupation

29.9%

Professionals

15.9%

Technicians

and Trades

Workers

15.7%

Managers

Transport

The Great Ocean Road is the main arterial road through the towns and is at capacity during peak periods.

A limited V/Line bus service connects the towns with Geelong and Apollo Bay.

Walking trails provide opportunities for an active lifestyle and access to natural features.

Barwon Water has approved the construction of a pipeline connecting Aireys Inlet and Fairhaven to the Geelong water supply network via Anglesea, replacing the existing 25-year-old water treatment plant, which has reached the end of its operational life. The Painkalac Reservoir will be taken out of service but will be maintained for firefighting purposes and to ensure continued environmental flows into Painkalac Creek. Barwon Water will establish a community and agency group to consider potential future public uses of Painkalac Reservoir.

Community and Recreation

The towns have a basic range of community facilities, including a primary school, multi-purpose community hall, tennis courts, church, medical centre, community garden, surf lifesaving club, skate park and three playgrounds.

Much of the public open space is based around coastal reserves, beaches, waterways, and conservation and nature reserves. Areas for active recreation and organised sports are limited. Aireys Inlet is the only town in the Shire without a formal recreation oval.

Community, recreation and sports facilities unavailable in Aireys Inlet are typically accessed in Anglesea, Lorne, Torquay or Geelong.

Economy

The local economy is strongly focused on tourism. It is estimated that 20% of retail sales comes from residents and 80% from visitors. The Top Shops in Aireys Inlet have a predominantly local focus, while the Bottom Shops have a visitor and tourism focus.

There is 2,575m² of retail space. The existing centres, in particular the Bottom Shops, can accommodate demand for future commercial space by development of vacant or under-utilised parcels.

There is a high level of escape expenditure to larger centres (Anglesea, Torquay, Geelong).

Natural Environment

Assets: Surf and family beaches, sand dunes and cliffs, Painkalac Valley with the creek and estuary, Great Otway National Park, Eagle Rock Marine Sanctuary, indigenous vegetation cover, native fauna.

Risks: High bushfire risk, coastal processes related to climate change (inundation, erosion), weeds, pest animals.

“Since 2008, over \$100 million worth of building activity has been approved in the towns of Aireys Inlet to Eastern View. 70 per cent was attributable to new dwelling constructions.”

4. Town Strengths

Phase 1 of the community engagement process provided insights into what permanent and non-permanent residents, visitors and traders value most about the towns and what their aspirations are for the future. Over 500 people participated in the process through informal conversations, meetings, workshops, interviews and surveys. For a summary of the consultation findings refer to the **Phase 1 Understanding Places: Summary of Findings Report** by AXOS Urban. Following is a snapshot of what people said they love about their towns.

Coastal village atmosphere

The townships are loved for their informal coastal village atmosphere and natural setting, affording a relaxed coastal lifestyle within a small, quiet, unspoilt settlement with a few basic urban amenities. People appreciate the sense of community and friendly feel and love how the natural environment and landscape dominate over the built form. Other valued characteristics are the low profile buildings nestled in vegetation, space around properties, a coastal building style, views of the ocean and surrounding landscape features, the dark night sky, informal roads and a lack of fencing.

Many people wish to see the towns remain relatively unchanged and not expand beyond their existing boundaries, with only limited development and incremental improvements. Any necessary development or infrastructure should be high quality, low key, sensitively built and have minimal impact on the environment.

Natural environment and landscape setting

The towns' strong visual and physical connections to the surrounding natural environment are highly valued - the beaches, ocean, coast, bush, creek, estuary, valley, national park. These significant natural and landscape assets frame the settlements and define their identity and sense of place, providing lifestyle, recreation and tourism opportunities. They make a significant contribution to biodiversity and the liveability that attracts residents and visitors.

The open spaces are valued for their natural and relatively undeveloped state and the role they play in providing opportunities for informal nature and water based recreational pursuits (e.g. surfing, swimming, walking, cycling, horse riding, kayaking, rock rambling, fishing), contributing to health and wellbeing, and connecting the community (e.g. as a place to meet, interact and socialise with other people).

Services and activities

Community feedback indicates that people are generally satisfied with the level of services and facilities in the towns - the shops, cafes and restaurants, community hall, community garden, primary school, tennis courts, medical centre, SLSC - and are quite happy to travel to nearby towns for services that are unavailable, although some people would appreciate a small supermarket or food store to provide a better range of fresh food and groceries at more affordable prices. There is no clear consensus on the need for and desirability of an active recreation space (see page 12 for further discussion on this topic).

People also love the different activities and events throughout the year, bringing a mix of locals and visitors together and enlivening the towns (e.g. Open Mic Festival, Literary Fest).

“What I love about Aireys Inlet is the quiet small community atmosphere and the informal character of the town..., the gravel roads and the dominance of landscape features and vegetation over built form. I also love the proximity of the town to the beach, Painkalac Valley, National Park and other public spaces that provide opportunities for informal outdoor nature based recreation.”

5. Key Issues and Opportunities

Through a combination of background research and community engagement a number of key issues and opportunities have been identified that should be carefully managed to help shape the future of the towns in a way that respects their valued character and fits with community needs and aspirations.

Maintaining the coastal village look and feel

Maintaining the low key coastal village character of the townships is essential to the community – avoiding inappropriate development; not becoming another Lorne or Anglesea; as well as keeping the individual identity of the towns. A threat to the character emanates from older style holiday homes being replaced by more substantial homes with little space for the retention or planting of trees and vegetation to soften their appearance and to maintain the established landscape character.

“Not too much change just incremental beautification as we love this area the way it is.”

Consideration should also be given to managing the threat of bushfire, whilst protecting and enhancing the natural environment and vegetated landscape character of the

towns and surrounding hinterland. Trees and vegetation contribute to the attractive town character, but are in conflict with fire safety. This risk should be balanced.

Supporting living towns

The towns are experiencing an ageing population, declining household size and a decreasing proportion of permanently occupied houses. This affects the demand for commercial and community facilities, puts pressure on the viability of community, sporting and volunteer organisations, and can cause social isolation for permanent residents in the quieter months. A large proportion of holiday homes also reduces opportunities for affordable long-term rental. Some people would like to see a better balance between occupied and unoccupied houses to enable people to live in and be part of the community.

Managing visitor demand

The benefits to the local economy from tourists and part-time residents are seasonal and casual, but can carry businesses through the slower months. Conversely, increasing visitor numbers and the swelling of the population at peak periods of the year has the potential to have a substantial impact upon the area’s natural environment, valued landscapes and liveability, and puts pressure on existing services and infrastructure (e.g. roads, parking, water supply, waste collection, emergency services).

There are two significant tourist destinations where mitigation of visitor impacts is felt necessary to protect the natural environment and residential amenity of nearby residents. The Memorial Arch at Eastern View is one of the signature experiences of a journey along the Great Ocean Road for many national and international visitors. Visitors take a photo of the archway and the diggers statue, read the historic bronze plaque and learn about the Great Ocean Road and its status as the world’s largest living war memorial. There are no public toilets and rubbish bins at the site, resulting in pollution from toileting and littering. The high visitation by large coaches, mini buses and other tourist vehicles also causes traffic safety issues within the car park and on the road. These significant issues need to be acknowledged and addressed through careful planning and management. Council’s role in dealing with these issues is limited, as GORCC manage the car park and VicRoads manage the Great Ocean Road. The issue is recognised in GORCC’s *Draft Fairhaven to Eastern View Master Plan 2015-2020*, however no immediate solution is proposed. Council could adopt an advocacy or lead role to work with the responsible agencies on a pro-active approach to find acceptable solutions. The Lighthouse precinct is another area which lacks visitor amenities, with the nearest toilets provided 400m downhill.

Another issue associated with large part-time and visitor populations is emergency management in the event of a bushfire. Visitors are often unfamiliar or oblivious to fire prevention and evacuation

procedures and the large number of people combined with limited road access and traffic congestion makes evacuation difficult.

Some people suggested identifying ways for visitors to contribute financially to the provision, renewal and maintenance of facilities and amenities so that the local community does not bear an unfair cost to service tourist-specific amenities, or experience excessive adverse impacts from large visitor numbers. One suggested approach was licensing or registration of tour buses that include a visit to the Great Ocean Road in their tourism offer to provide an opportunity to leverage a financial contribution. That would also enable restrictions to be applied on access on critical fire risk days. Whether this is something that Council could realistically pursue or advocate for would need to be further explored, as Council does not manage the Great Ocean Road or foreshore areas.

Providing a diversity of housing

There is a need to provide a variety of housing choices, in particular suitable housing options for older persons to enable them to downsize and age in place. The analysis of dwelling typologies highlights that the town has a limited range of housing options, with a strong presence of separate, family sized dwellings (96% versus state average of 77%). In light of the projected demographic change, there will be a need to provide a broader diversity of housing types and sizes, in particular smaller, low maintenance and more affordable dwellings to meet the needs of smaller and ageing households. The Council owned site at Fraser Drive has long been identified as a potential location to provide older persons and/or social housing.

Providing an appropriate range of community facilities and recreational opportunities

The community highly values the relatively undeveloped nature of the towns and the limited urban amenities. To ensure the needs of both the permanent and visitor population are met, a limited range of community services and facilities should continue to be provided while maintaining the low key nature of the towns. As facilities unavailable in Aireys Inlet are typically accessed in Anglesea, Lorne, Torquay or Geelong, it is considered important to improve public transport to increase connections to these centres for those less mobile and to reduce car dependency.

An ageing population creates specific service demands, particularly around health care services, social and community facilities and transport, and mobility and accessibility needs. While the vast majority of retirees will have many active years, older age can increase the likelihood of health or mobility constraints. While the towns may be attractive for active retirees, reduced mobility and higher service needs associated with frail old age may necessitate a move to a larger centre. For some, this may involve financial challenges or the breaking of social bonds and networks.¹

The Community Garden 3231 at Fraser Drive is a valuable community hub - a shared space for people fostering learning skills, physical activity, mental wellbeing, access to fresh local produce and healthy eating, and supporting friends and neighbours. Being part of a community can improve wellbeing, health and happiness. The Community Garden has a temporary agreement with Council to use the land as the site has been identified for future housing development, as mentioned above. Council has been liaising with the garden committee to find an alternate site, including at Lialeeta Road in Fairhaven, but discussions and investigations have not yielded an outcome yet. The community engagement for the structure plan has indicated strong preference from the garden members and other residents for the garden to stay at its current location. The garden could exist alongside any future housing and would be a great and complementary asset to such housing especially if that is to be at higher densities and for older persons, it is felt. The amenity and social benefits afforded by the garden would allow a more intensive development of the remainder of the site. It is ideally located in a central area, within walking distance from the shops and community hall. The proposed alternate site in Fairhaven put forward by Council is deemed inferior and not central, meaning members would have to drive to it. More

¹ DTPLI, 2013

investigation and discussion is required into how, and whether, the garden could integrate with any future housing development.

Some people have raised the idea of expanding facilities at the community hall and school, e.g. an indoor recreation facility for multi-purpose activities, public toilets (as an alternative to providing toilets at the Top Shops), and fire shelter or refuge.

Walking towns

Walking, and to a lesser degree cycling, is the most popular recreational activity in the towns². The community prides itself strongly on the opportunities for and love of walking and would like to see the towns branded as a “walking destination”. This is supported by an extensive network of scenic pathways that enable access to and appreciation of the natural environment and scenic landscapes, for example along the clifftops, inlet, creek reserve and the Great Ocean Road between Aireys Inlet and Fairhaven. Walking and cycling provides an effective way to support community health and wellbeing, interaction and cohesiveness³, for both residents and visitors. The network could be further improved by providing continuous and well maintained pathways, and extending the network to link with other destinations. It will be important that the various land management agencies - Surf Coast Shire, GORCC, Parks Victoria and VicRoads - ensure that pathway networks within their areas of management are linked together and consistent infrastructure standards are applied.

Suggestions put forward by the community for new or improved pathways include a continuous path along the Great Ocean Road between the Top and Bottom Shops, a safe pedestrian crossing between the Bottom Shops and the playground / skate park, a pathway from the Bottom Shops via the laneway and River Reserve Road to Bambra Road and continuing on to the National Park and a pathway along the banks of the Painkalac Creek. Access to Fairhaven Beach and Surf Lifesaving Club will be improved with the planned construction of an underpass under the Great Ocean Road.

The pathway network is progressively being improved through implementation of Council’s *Pathways Strategy* (2012). The Strategy provides an overview of proposed footpaths, bicycle routes and shared paths throughout the towns to encourage more walking and cycling, improve safe crossing of the Great Ocean Road and provide better access to facilities and open space.

Investigating the need for an active recreation space

Aireys Inlet is the only township in the Shire without a designated active recreation reserve (i.e. sports playing field), mainly due to the lack of a suitable location acceptable to the community and the low levels of local demand for competitive sports. The local community relies on the sporting facilities provided in the nearby towns of Torquay, Bellbrae, Anglesea and Lorne for their competitive sporting needs.

Investigations into the feasibility of an active recreation reserve to meet local football and cricket training and competition needs have been ongoing since 1983 and have proven to be arduous. Several specific proposals for an oval and recreational facilities were considered in the 1980’s, but each proposal was abandoned following community opposition. The need for an active recreation reserve was again discussed in the 1993 Structure Plan. A Public Discussion Document (1991) that preceded the Structure Plan considered six sites in the Aireys Inlet-Fairhaven district. The assessment concluded that a perfect oval site simply does not exist and if the community is to be provided with adequate and accessible sporting facilities then compromises must be made. The exhibition of the discussion document at the time failed to provide a clear indication of community attitudes towards the preferred site. A final decision on a site could therefore not be made as part of the Structure Plan process. The Structure Plan

² The 2007 Recreation Infrastructure Strategy identified walking as the most popular activity with a participation rate of 81% across all age groups.

³ The health benefits and importance of walking have been well established; see for example *Healthy by Design: a planner’s guide to environments for active living*, National Heart Foundation, 2004.

did rule out the Painkalac Valley as a suitable site due to its significant environmental and visual qualities.

In 2006 Council became the land manager for a parcel of Crown land on the corner of Gilbert Street/Boundary Road, which was identified as a potential site for the development of an active recreation reserve. Stage 1 of the *Aireys Inlet Recreation Strategy* assessed the suitability of the site and concluded that this site was not suitable due to the cover of significant native vegetation and fauna habitat (including old growth trees), an unfavourable topography (requiring significant earthworks) and limited size. It was considered that the site's potential lies more with informal use and passive recreation such as walking trails and nature appreciation. The study also considered possible sites adjacent the skate park and the existing oval at the primary school, however these sites were discounted on the basis of various unsuitable characteristics including being too small and unsuitable topography.

The *Aireys Inlet Recreation Strategy Stage 2 Report* (2008) looked into alternative locations for an active recreation reserve and identified four sites in the Painkalac Valley as potentially suitable. A number of unsuccessful efforts have been made to secure a suitable site following this study.

In April 2013, Council received a petition from the Aireys Inlet Eels Football Club to provide a recreation reserve for their use in training and playing home games in the Football Geelong competition. In response to this petition, Council Officers provided a report to Council on the development of an active open space in Aireys Inlet.

Analysis by Council Officers showed that the demand for facilities for organised sport in Aireys Inlet is limited based on current and future demographic trends and sport participation rates. Aireys Inlet could only sustain a junior cricket team in the long term. In addition, it needs to be recognised that the Aireys Inlet community currently acts as a feeder for football and cricket teams in Anglesea and Lorne. The creation of a team and formal recreation oval in Aireys Inlet could lead to football, cricket, netball and other sporting teams operating out of the adjacent townships becoming unviable.

Industry benchmarking suggests that 1 oval should be provided for every 3,000 - 5,000 people⁴. With a permanent population of just over 1,000 people, the town falls well short of meeting this standard.

The Painkalac Valley is environmentally sensitive and within a designated floodplain. The whole of the valley is within an Aboriginal cultural heritage sensitive area, is likely to contain acid sulphate soils and, although the site recommended in a past Council report is on private, modified land (introduced pasture used for grazing), it has previously been found to have significant flora and fauna within and adjacent to the site⁵. The development of an open space reserve, if it was to proceed, would have to be sensitively sited and designed with regard to the environmental, floodplain, landscape and cultural values and include environmental works and ongoing management to mitigate any adverse impacts, including the rehabilitation of natural values, particularly in the form of revegetation, creek bank restoration and protection of water quality. Any buildings and infrastructure would need to be low-key and compatible with the surrounding environment and landscape values as much as possible.

The first phase of community engagement for *Aireys Inlet to Eastern View Planning for the Future* has sought to define the level of community need and interest in an active recreation space in the Painkalac Valley. There are strong views in the community opposing a reserve in this location based on the environmental and visual impacts of an active recreation space, the perceived lack of viable local demand levels to sustain any sports teams and the fear that a reserve would bring with it the necessary structures, fencing, car parking, lights etc. and become a precedent for other development in the valley. Equally, there are many strong views supporting a reserve citing community, social and health benefits,

⁴ E.g. Baw Baw Shire Council, *Shaping the Future: Community Services Planning Discussion Paper*, 2012

⁵ Painkalac Creek Wetlands and Floodplain Environmental Study, 1990

opportunities for younger generations to be physically active and not having to drive to other towns for training and competition. It was also felt that an active open space reserve could be used as a community gathering space for a number of activities other than sport, such as passive and social recreation including walking, events and unstructured play. Having a local facility could increase the percentage of children and adults who participate in sport and active recreation. Use of the site as a much needed Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSF) was also seen as a welcome opportunity (subject to assessment and approval from the Country Fire Authority).

More detailed analysis of the risks, benefits and costs is required before confirming whether Council should proceed with securing an active recreation facility. Significant further design work and investigations would be required to determine whether a workable solution is possible, including flood and water quality modelling, a detailed flora and fauna survey, soil and geotechnical analysis and cultural heritage assessment of the area, and the land would need to be compulsorily purchased. Total project cost could be between \$1.9 – 2.9 million.

Beautifying and activating the shopping centres

There is general consensus that the Top and Bottom Shops provide sufficient services and do not need to expand. The year round viability of businesses is a concern, with shops and cafes often closed several days a week in the off season. There are opportunities for beautification and other improvements, such as the planting of trees to soften the built form and provide shade, improved pedestrian connections between the shops and the creek reserve and across the Great Ocean Road to the playground, active pedestrian frontages along the laneway and creek reserve, addition of seating areas, undergrounding of overhead powerlines, signage that identifies the centres, a toilet at (or near) the Top Shops, and provision of (tourist) accommodation. There is also an opportunity to improve pedestrian connections between the two commercial precincts and to the pub.

Some people expressed a desire for aesthetic improvements to the appearance of the shopping areas - a cohesive approach to shop facades, colours and materials and low key signage to establish a more attractive, unified and characterful image. There were also comments about the type of shops that people would like to see. Most people prefer authentic, local, fresh, gourmet, boutique products and experiences as opposed to national retail chains and generic goods.

Access and parking at the shopping centres have been raised as ongoing problems by traders and community members. Council has previously investigated options and implemented measures to improve access and parking conditions⁶. Studies indicate that there is ample supply to accommodate demand for most of the year and that capacity issues predominantly arise during peak holiday periods. Most residents accept the temporary inconvenience of a lack of parking and appreciate that parking supply is fine throughout the rest of the year. Development of the larger, currently underutilised parcels in the Bottom Shops provides an opportunity to consider future parking supply.

Protecting the hinterland

The hinterland provides an attractive environment for accommodation, ecotourism and other forms of tourism enterprises. The larger parcels of private land surrounding the towns however serve as a buffer between the residential areas and the National Park and have significant conservation value, extremely high bushfire risk and limited access to infrastructure. The relaxation of the provisions of the Rural Conservation Zone by the State government in 2013 creates pressure for more intensive (tourist) developments in the hinterland. Permitted uses under the zone include restaurant, bed and breakfast, residential hotel, group accommodation, rural industry, landscape gardening supplies, primary and secondary school and winery. Uses and developments that are likely to have an adverse impact on the environmental values of the hinterland areas and abutting National Park should be strongly discouraged.

⁶ The most recent car parking study was undertaken in 2013 and Parking Management Plans for the Top and Bottom Shops were prepared and partially implemented in 2014. Further consultation will be undertaken with stakeholders such as the local traders, AIDA, VicRoads and Public Transport Victoria.

Managing transport, access and traffic

Traffic through the towns during busy weekends and peak holiday periods is becoming extreme, with traffic delays/queuing on peak days and the usual congestion between Aireys Inlet and the Anglesea roundabout⁷. The popularity of the coastal areas will only increase as Geelong, Melbourne and the state's population continue to grow and as access to the coast gets better through improvements to the Princes Highway, Geelong Ring Road and Great Ocean Road. Compounding the issue of traffic management is that the busiest periods often coincide with high fire risk days. Emergency evacuation is a major concern with the limited capacity of the Great Ocean Road and lack of an alternative exit route.

The Great Ocean Road provides a challenge for pedestrians wishing to cross the road. There is a lack of safe crossing points for pedestrians, particularly around the commercial centres and community facilities within desire lines. Providing improved connectivity between destinations and safe crossing points are a priority.⁸

Sustainability should be at the heart of transport strategies - walking, cycling or public transport should be people's first choice for short trips to reduce car use and travel congestion. Limited public transport services make it difficult for residents to access services and employment in other towns unless they have a car. V-Line bus services operate along the Great Ocean Road between Geelong and Apollo Bay (with further connections to Warrnambool and Melbourne), providing four daily services each way on weekdays and two daily services on both Saturdays and Sundays. If greater use of public transport is to be encouraged, there will be a need for improved public bus transport along the Great Ocean Road with increased frequencies and better timetabling. Improving local facilities will reduce the need to travel to other centres to shop or recreate.

Parking and access around Split Point Lighthouse and Inlet Crescent has been the subject of ongoing investigations. In February 2009 Council endorsed the *Split Point Lighthouse Precinct Master Plan* following several previous studies and in 2010 a traffic management plan and a list of actions was endorsed, which have since been implemented, including redevelopment of the skate park car park, streetscape works in Federal Street to prevent vehicles parking on the side of the road, provision of parking in Inlet Crescent South and provision of signage prohibiting long vehicles from entering Inlet Crescent South and the lighthouse precinct. Redevelopment of Step Beach car park as proposed by GORCC in 2012 was not supported.

Investigations into parking for long vehicles (e.g. coaches, mini buses, RV's and vehicles with trailers, boats and caravans) were recently undertaken through the *Surf Coast Shire Long Vehicle Strategy* (2014). The Strategy notes that there is no dedicated long vehicle parking at the Top Shops. In peak periods long vehicles have been observed parking in the bus stops and on the side of the road. Long vehicle parking is provided on the Great Ocean Road next to the bus stops between the Bottom Shops and Bambra Road. Parking for vehicles in the Inlet Crescent car park is restricted to vehicles with a maximum length of 6 metres. Buses are also not permitted to access the Split Point car park due to restrictions on the surrounding roads. Dedicated long vehicle parking is not provided in Fairhaven either. Parking takes place on the verge of the Great Ocean Road and in the off-street parking area on Yarringa Road, which provides access to the beach and Surf Life Saving Club.

The community has expressed a strong desire to maintain the informal character of the towns - unsealed roads, lack of formal drainage and kerb and channel, limited formal or paved pathways and lack of roadside footpaths in residential streets, gravel car parks and limited street lighting to preserve the night sky. This view is consistent with the findings of the *Aireys Inlet to Eastern View Neighbourhood Character Study* (2004). There are however calls from some residents for roads to be sealed to increase

⁷ VicRoads traffic counts recorded a peak of 15,876 vehicles on the Great Ocean Road between Anglesea and Aireys Inlet on 2 January 2015.

⁸ A pedestrian crossing point/refuge at the Bottom Shops is included in Council's Capital Works Program for 2017/18. Aireys Inlet to Eastern View Planning for the Future | **Background Report Summary**

safety and to reduce dust and maintenance requirements. Previous road and drainage schemes proposed by Council for various precincts in Aireys Inlet and Fairhaven encountered strong community opposition, mainly due to the scale and nature of the works and costs involved, however the recent sealing of Pearse Road was seen by many residents as a good example where the need for improvement has been balanced with retaining the informal character of the neighbourhood. Any request for road sealing would require majority property owner support for Council to seriously entertain a proposal. It will be important to ensure that where roads are to be sealed or where footpaths are provided this occurs in a manner that retains the informal appearance of the area, with an emphasis on retaining vegetation within the road verge and alternatives to concrete kerb and channel drainage (e.g. soft edges, swale drains).

Coordinating land management

In addition to Council, a number of other land management agencies are responsible for the management and maintenance of land within and surrounding the towns, including Great Ocean Road Coast Committee (GORCC), VicRoads, Parks Victoria, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP), Barwon Water and Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (CCMA). It is important that the agencies regularly talk to each other and coordinate activities to ensure a consistent approach to land management.

Council is in the process of reviewing and renewing its Open Space Strategy. A key focus of the new Strategy is enhancing integration between land managers. This is particularly important when considering that over 98% of public open space in the Aireys Inlet-Fairhaven District is managed by organisations other than Council.⁹



⁹ Issues and opportunities for public open space in the Surf Coast Shire, Open Space Strategy 2015-2025 Discussion Paper, February 2015
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6. Planning for the Future

The Structure Plan will provide a strategic framework to help manage land use and development within the townships over the next 20 to 30 years. It aims to develop strategies to ensure that this will happen in a well-planned and positive manner that fits with community values and aspirations. The Structure Plan will need to address the key issues outlined in the previous section and provide directions around housing, environmental management, economic development and tourism, community and recreation facilities, and transport and infrastructure, to ensure the area remains a great place to live, work, play and visit.

Based on the findings of the background analysis and outcomes of the community engagement process so far, a number of significant directions have emerged. These will be further tested and refined through the structure plan process.

Coastal village character

- Protect the individual character of the townships as small coastal villages located within a sensitive natural environment and significant landscape setting.
- Contain the townships within their existing settlement boundaries.
- Ensure the scale, intensity and design of all development is sympathetic to the landscape character and natural environment.
- Retain the existing low-key, informal character of development and infrastructure.

Protection of the natural environment

- Protect and enhance, and where appropriate, provide access to, the natural environment so that it can be enjoyed by all both now and into the future.
- Balance bushfire protection and vegetation clearance to maintain the ecological integrity and visual quality of the townships and surrounding landscapes.
- Maintain appropriate environmental buffers between the townships and the Great Otway National Park.
- Ensure development is well set back from areas affected by coastal processes, including flooding, erosion and sea level rise.
- Protect views to the surrounding landscape, natural features and cultural landmarks.
- Protect and enhance the open, natural character of the Painkalac Creek Valley.

Housing

- Encourage sympathetic infill development that complements the coastal village character and vegetated bush setting of the townships.
- Ensure future housing development provides for a variety of housing sizes and types. In particular encourage increased housing diversity within walking distance (400 metres) of the shopping precincts. Such development should be balanced with neighbourhood character and environmental objectives.
- Ensure development allows for the protection of significant vegetation and/or planting around buildings and has minimal impact on roadside vegetation.

Economic development and tourism

- Consolidate commercial activity and development within the two existing shopping precincts to create viable and sustainable activity centres, while supporting existing non-conforming land uses between the two centres such as the hotel, motel and restaurant.
- Improve the quality of pedestrian access to and public spaces within both shopping centres.
- Encourage a mix of uses that supports tourism and economic activity within the shopping centres.

- Facilitate economic development opportunities consistent with the character of the townships (e.g. small scale tourist offerings, eco-tourism, nature-based recreational activities).
- Manage visitor demand to reduce adverse impacts on residents and the natural environment.
- Promote Aireys Inlet to Eastern View as a year round tourist destination through local events.

Community and recreation

- Encourage the provision of quality, accessible community services and facilities as relevant to the needs of the resident population.
- Maintain and enhance quality open space areas, appropriate recreation, play and sporting facilities, and accessible physical activity programs to cater for the passive and active recreation needs of all ages.
- Consider access and inclusion for all abilities in order to promote a healthy and active community.

Connectivity (Access and movement)

- Plan for an improved network of safe and accessible pedestrian and cycle pathways throughout and between the townships and linking with the foreshore, creek valley and hinterland.
- Enhance access to open space areas, natural features and walking and cycling trails (e.g. Surf Coast Walk).
- Protect the character of the informal streetscape treatments.
- Ensure the efficient provision and management of car parking within and adjacent to the shopping centres and near tourist attractions and recreation destinations, allowing for long vehicle parking (caravans and trailer vehicles) in appropriate locations.
- Facilitate improved public and community transport services to adjacent townships.



“I love Aireys and surrounding areas as they are and am loathe to see too much more development or ‘grooming’ of our townships. We are not Torquay, Anglesea or Lorne, and should not aspire to be.”

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