



# Birregurra Structure Plan Review

**Background Report –  
Issues & Opportunities**

19 July 2024



# Acknowledgement

Colac Otway Shire Council respectfully acknowledge the Gulidjan and Gadubanud peoples of the Eastern Maar Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the Birregurra region.

We pay our respects to their Ancestors and Elders past, present and emerging. We recognise and respect their unique cultural heritage, beliefs and uphold their continuing relationship to the land, skies and waterways.

## Disclaimer

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Projections have been prepared based on the assumptions and methodology which have been described in the report. It is possible that some of the assumptions underlying the projections may change. Nevertheless, the professional judgement of Conway Planning has been applied in making these assumptions such that they constitute an understandable basis for estimates and projections.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

2013 Structure Plan	Birregurra Structure Plan 2013
2013 Background Report	Birregurra Structure Plan Background Report February 2013
2012 Character Study	Birregurra Neighbourhood Character Study 2012
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Act	<i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i>
Council	Colac Otway Shire Council
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DTP	Department of Transport and Planning
G21	G21 Geelong Region Alliance
Planning Scheme	Colac Otway Planning Scheme
PPF	Planning Policy Framework
PPV	Planning Panels Victoria
RAP	Registered Aboriginal Party
SSC	State Suburb Collection district (ABS)

## Executive Summary

Please refer to the Summary Document for a short overview of this report.

# 1. Birregurra Structure Plan Review Project

## 1.1 Introduction

Colac Otway Shire Council (Council) has commissioned a review of the Birregurra Structure Plan 2013 (2013 Structure Plan). The 2013 Structure Plan is the leading planning document that currently guides the land use and development framework for the township of Birregurra and its surrounding areas. It incorporated the recommendations of the Birregurra Neighbourhood Character Study 2012 and was the basis for a planning scheme amendment that introduced new planning controls across the town in 2014.

The 2013 Structure Plan is now over 10 years old, and it is considered an appropriate time to review the document to determine whether its vision and objectives continue to be relevant to the Birregurra community today.

The primary objectives and deliverables of the project as set out in the project brief are to:

- Deliver an updated analysis of land supply for future in-fill housing within the current town boundaries.
- Identify where future growth should occur if further land is required to meet anticipated demand, ensuring housing affordability.
- Review and provide recommendations on the effectiveness of planning controls over subdivision and development.
- Provide an up-to-date structure plan for Birregurra that reflects contemporary community needs.



Key factors driving the review include:

- A need for timely review of housing and residential land supply to determine whether in-fill land can accommodate expected population growth.
- To check whether improvements to infrastructure over the past 10+ years such as connection to sewerage, improved rail services and duplication of the Princes Highway, have stimulated population growth beyond forecasts.
- A perceived changing demographic (more younger families) which may require different housing needs.
- More people working from home in a way not previously contemplated.
- A need to review planning controls to check whether they have been effective in achieving the preferred built form character for Birregurra.
- Recent updated mapping of flood prone areas and whether this will affect future housing provision.
- State and regional planning policy reforms over the past ten years, including consideration of climate change.

It is understood that the Birregurra community has also raised concerns about the provision and maintenance of other infrastructure, in particular roads and footpaths across Birregurra. While the scope of this project does not include a comprehensive analysis of current road condition or footpath provision, it is anticipated that the Review project will provide the opportunity for identification of existing problems and future needs.

## 1.2 Background Reports

As a first step for the Review project, the following background reports have been prepared:

1. Issues & Opportunities Report
2. Issues & Opportunities Summary Report
3. Review of Neighbourhood Planning Provisions

Together, these reports present:

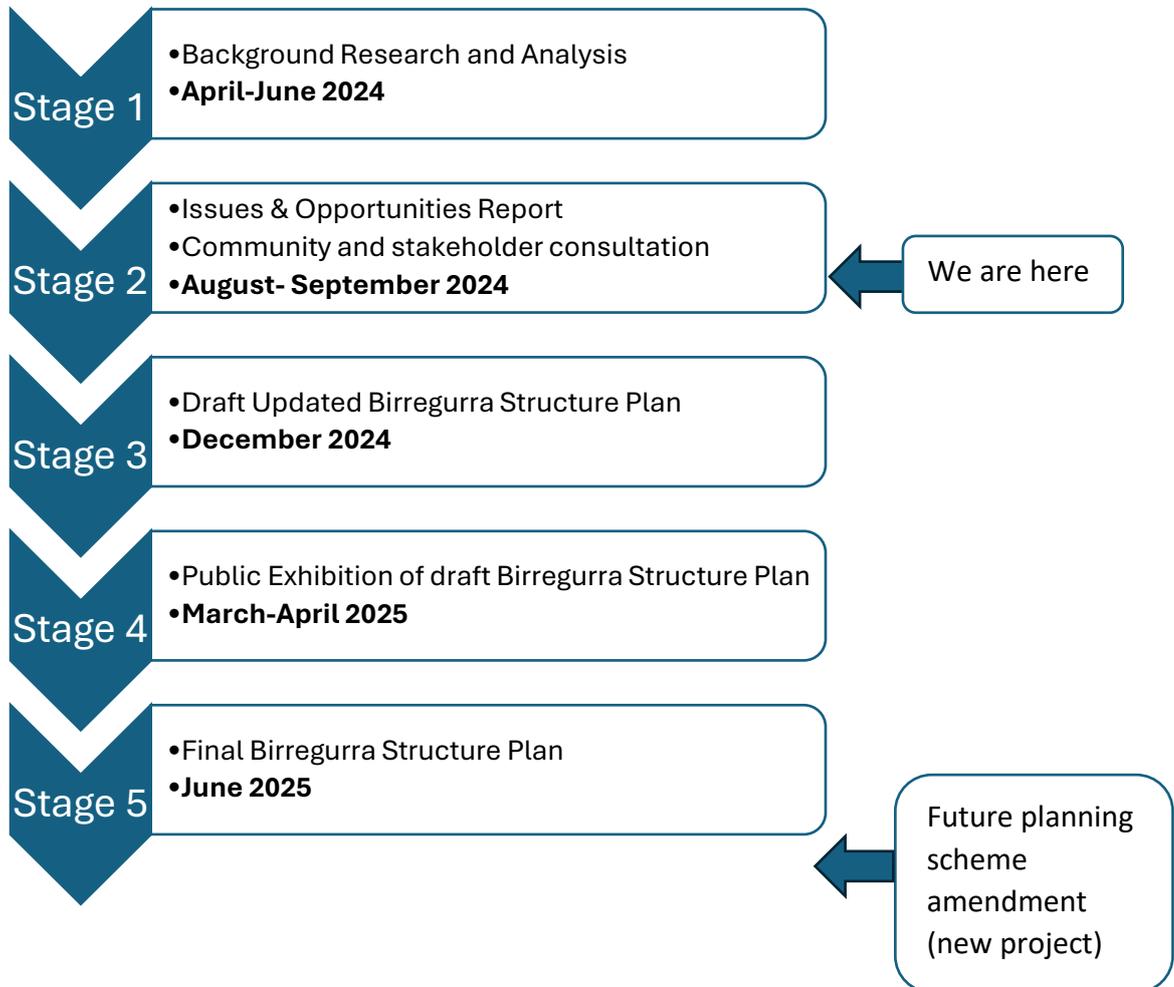
- An update on implementation of the 2013 Structure Plan.
- A current residential land supply and demand analysis.
- A summary of issues and opportunities to consider in developing the updated Birregurra Structure Plan.
- A review of neighbourhood character provisions and their effectiveness in achieving the preferred neighbourhood character for different precincts in Birregurra.

These reports are intended to be a starting point for community discussions. Council is committed to working with the community and other stakeholders in developing a revised Birregurra Structure Plan.

### 1.3 Process and Timelines

The project is expected to take approximately 12 months from inception to completion. Timelines shown in Figure 1 below are an approximate guide for each of the project stages.

Figure 1 Birregurra Structure Plan Review Project Timelines



The next step in the Birregurra Structure Plan Review is to share the findings in the Background Reports with the Birregurra community and other stakeholders.

Community input will inform development of the revised Birregurra Structure Plan.

## 1.4 Community Engagement to Date

Council officers met with Birregurra community representatives in April 2023 to discuss planning in Birregurra as part of its current Planning Scheme review. The 2013 Structure Plan was a focus of discussion.

The following were the discussion points, in no order of priority:

- There remains no great desire to extend the town boundary.
- Items listed in the structure plan to accommodate growth have not been delivered.
- The population is ageing - decisions are being made on whether to stay in the town or move on.
- There is a shift towards a younger 'family' demographic with different community needs.
- There are more people working from home now in a way that was never contemplated under the previous structure plan.
- Contemporary urban concrete and brick housing is creeping into Birregurra with no fencing controls.
- 300m<sup>2</sup> in-fill blocks promoted in the previous structure plan review are too small.
- The Birregurra Neighbourhood Character Study needs to be enforced.

These matters and others will be further analysed and explored with the community and other stakeholders through this review process.

## 1.5 Limitations of the Birregurra Structure Plan Review Project

As noted at Chapter 1.1 above, the scope of the project centres on:

- A review and update of the recommendations of the 2013 Structure Plan.
- A residential land supply analysis to determine whether additional greenfield land might be required to accommodate future housing demand.
- A review of the effectiveness of current planning controls in achieving the preferred neighbourhood character for Birregurra.

The final output will be an updated Birregurra Structure Plan.

A number of matters are not within the scope of the review and will not be investigated in detail. However they will be given broad consideration as part of the review. Existing information will be utilised to provide an update on these matters and it may be that further work in these areas is recommended as an outcome of the project. Out of scope items include:

- Commercial land supply
- Transport or car parking analysis
- Community infrastructure needs assessment
- Environmental assets or landscape assessment
- Landscape risk assessment (with the exception of a Strategic Bushfire Risk Assessment)
- Social or affordable housing analysis (high level needs will be identified but detailed solutions will not be developed through this project)
- Heritage or cultural values assessments (however engagement with the Eastern Maar will be undertaken by Council concurrently and this may lead to some additional in scope items)
- Agricultural land review
- Preparation of detailed lists of infrastructure and associated costings.

This Issues and Opportunities Report is based on information and data available at the time of writing. It is primarily a review and update of matters considered in the 2013 Structure Plan and does not identify every asset valued by the community or cover all issues that may exist.

The focus of this report is to identify matters important for the development of future land use planning policies in the Planning Scheme. It refers to other Council policies and plans but generally confines discussion to land use planning issues and does not explore the provision of other Council services, operations or management responsibilities in detail.

Community and stakeholder consultation will contribute an additional level of detail to develop an updated Birregurra Structure Plan.

## 2. Birregurra and the Birregurra Structure Plan 2013

### 2.1 Profile and Study Area

Birregurra is a small town in Eastern Maar Country on the traditional lands of the Gulidjan people. It is located in the eastern side of Colac Otway Shire, just to the south of the Princes Highway. Colac, the Shire's main administrative centre, is located 20 kilometres to the west and the regional city of Geelong is approximately 60 kilometres to the east.

Birregurra has a rural village character with a distinctive main street supporting a general store, cafes, a hotel, pharmacy and speciality stores. It is popular with both residents and tourists to the town. Main Street is part of a Heritage precinct with a mixture of public, commercial and residential heritage sites. The Barwon River runs along the eastern edge of the town and the regional Warrnambool railway line is to the north of the town, which includes a stop at the Birregurra Railway Station.

In 2021, the town had a population of 628 people and 942 people in the wider district<sup>1</sup>. The town has a good range of community facilities including a primary school, pre-school, police station, recreation reserve, Golf Club, Bowling Club, Town Hall, local parks, churches and a community health centre.

The study area for the project is based on the Birregurra township as shown in Figure 2. The red line shows the extent of the current town boundary and is consistent with the area considered by the 2013 Structure Plan.

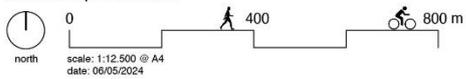
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<sup>1</sup> ABS 2021 Census Data, using the "Local area" boundary for the township and the "Suburbs and localities" boundary for the wider district.

Figure 2 Birregurra Structure Plan Study Area



**Birregurra**  
structure plan review



Study Area Map

Study Area

Source: Spatial Investigators, May 2024

## 2.2 The Birregurra Structure Plan 2013

The purpose of the 2013 Structure Plan was to:

- Guide land use and development in a coordinated manner over the next 20 years.
- Provide a long term vision and greater certainty for all stakeholders regarding Birregurra's preferred future.
- Provide direction relating to management of Birregurra's sense of place, character and identity following connection of the township to the reticulated sewerage network.
- Establish clear policy directions and important land use and development outcomes related to Birregurra's future settlement patterns, economic development, built form and heritage, natural environment and landscape, and access and movement networks.

It incorporated the findings of the Birregurra Neighbourhood Character Study 2012.

*Figure 3 2013 Structure Plan Vision for Birregurra*

### **BIRREGURRA STRUCTURE PLAN 2013 - VISION**

Birregurra is a small town offering a village lifestyle in an attractive rural setting to its diverse, creative and active community, which includes young families, couples, single people and older people.

The town has a relatively compact urban form based on an attractive and connected network of grid streets and open space links, and sits discretely within its rural surrounds.

Housing opportunities provide a range of choices that meet the varied needs of residents, including smaller dwellings closer to Main Street which allow people to retire and age in place. Housing is generally characterised by single storey dwellings on relatively generous lots with large gardens, creating a vegetated setting for houses consistent with the traditional character of the town. The size of lots and the amount of landscaping increases, and the intensity of development and potential for resubdivision decreases, moving up the hill to the south of town.

Birregurra's historic past is celebrated through its heritage buildings, main street, public art and provision of heritage information. The sense of township identity is in part defined by these elements and by the strong sense of community that is established through the range of community and recreation opportunities in the town.

Birregurra contains a consolidated commercial town core and community node that provides retail, community and health services that cater for residents' local needs and provides support to surrounding farming areas.

Tourism in Birregurra continues to grow with a range of accommodation, hospitality and other activities emerging to cater for this market.

While 20 years have not passed, it is considered a timely interim period to review the 2013 Structure Plan to check whether it is achieving its vision and purpose, and to identify any significant changes or challenges that may necessitate updating the Plan.

Key directions of the 2013 Structure Plan included:

- Support a moderate rate of population growth and residential development over the next 20 years.
- Maintain the existing town boundary and encourage infill development to make efficient use of larger lots and the connection to the reticulated sewer system.
- Retain heritage places and consider opportunities to use heritage qualities to attract visitors.
- Consolidate the town centre and expand commercial offerings within the contained retail area.
- Retain the existing industrial area to the north and encourage new and expanded uses to locate in this area.
- Consider the opportunity to expand the community and health node to cater for the changing needs of a growing population.
- Establish a connected open space network.
- Support planned improvements at the Birregurra Recreation Reserve.
- Increase pedestrian activity through improved movement networks and pedestrian amenity.

These directions are shown on the Birregurra Structure Plan map, refer to Figure 4, and are considered further in the following chapters.

The 2013 Plan also included an Implementation Table with a list of more specific recommendations for action. The primary recommendation was to undertake a planning scheme amendment to include the 2013 Structure Plan in the Colac Otway Planning Scheme (Planning Scheme). This was completed via Amendment C76 and came into effect in September 2014.

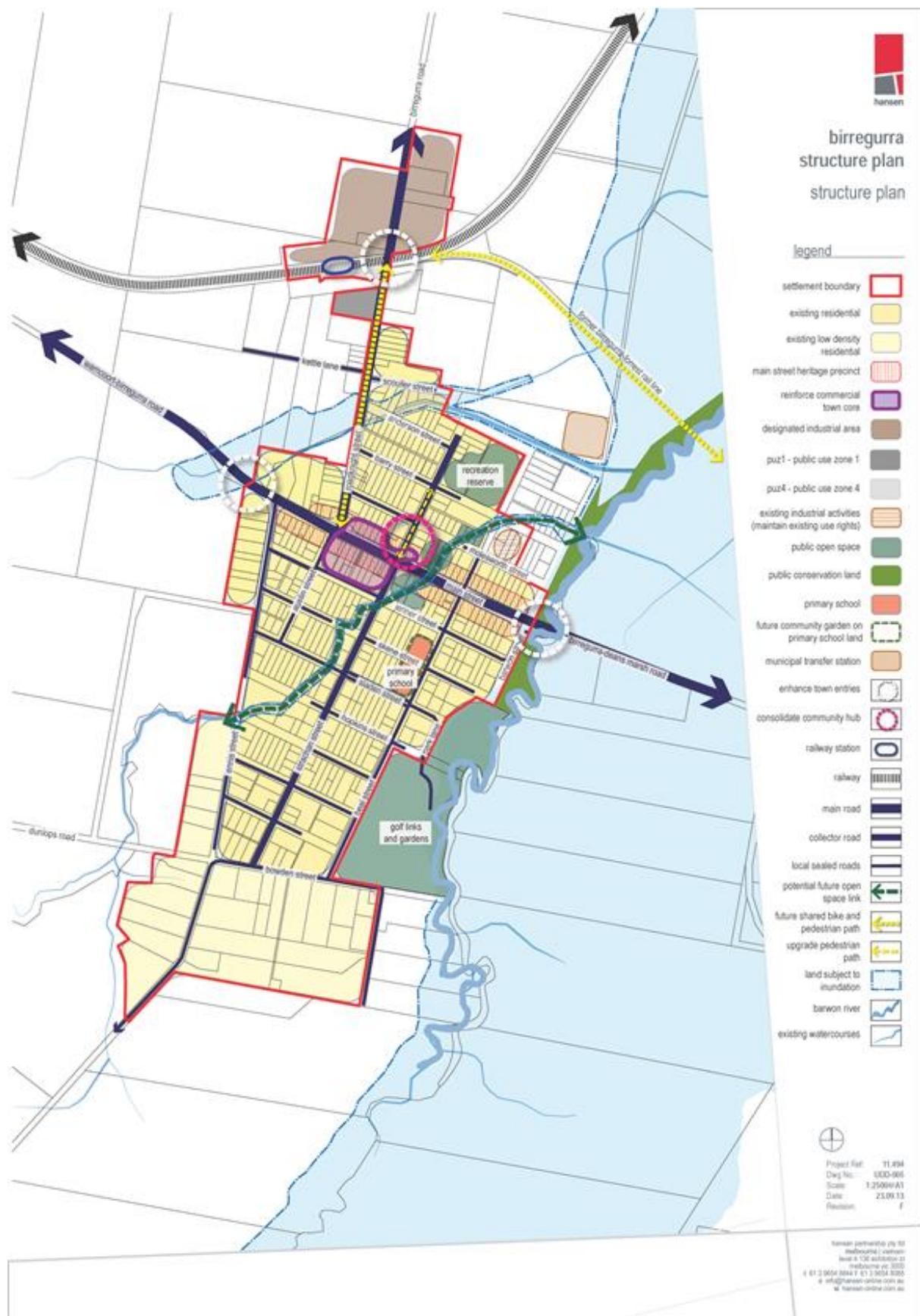
Other key achievements include:

- The preparation of a Flood and Drainage Strategy (2022) and the introduction of new flood risk provisions in the Planning Scheme.
- A reduced speed limit through Main Street.
- An investigation into the Birregurra-Forrest Tiger Rail Trail (2014), which was unfortunately found not to be feasible.
- A street tree planting program for Birregurra (in progress).

A comment on each of the recommendations in the Implementation Table can be found in Appendix 1.

The 2013 Plan recommended an ongoing monitoring program to track population growth and residential development in Birregurra. This has not occurred to date but is a focus of this current project.

Figure 4 Birregurra Structure Plan 2013 Map



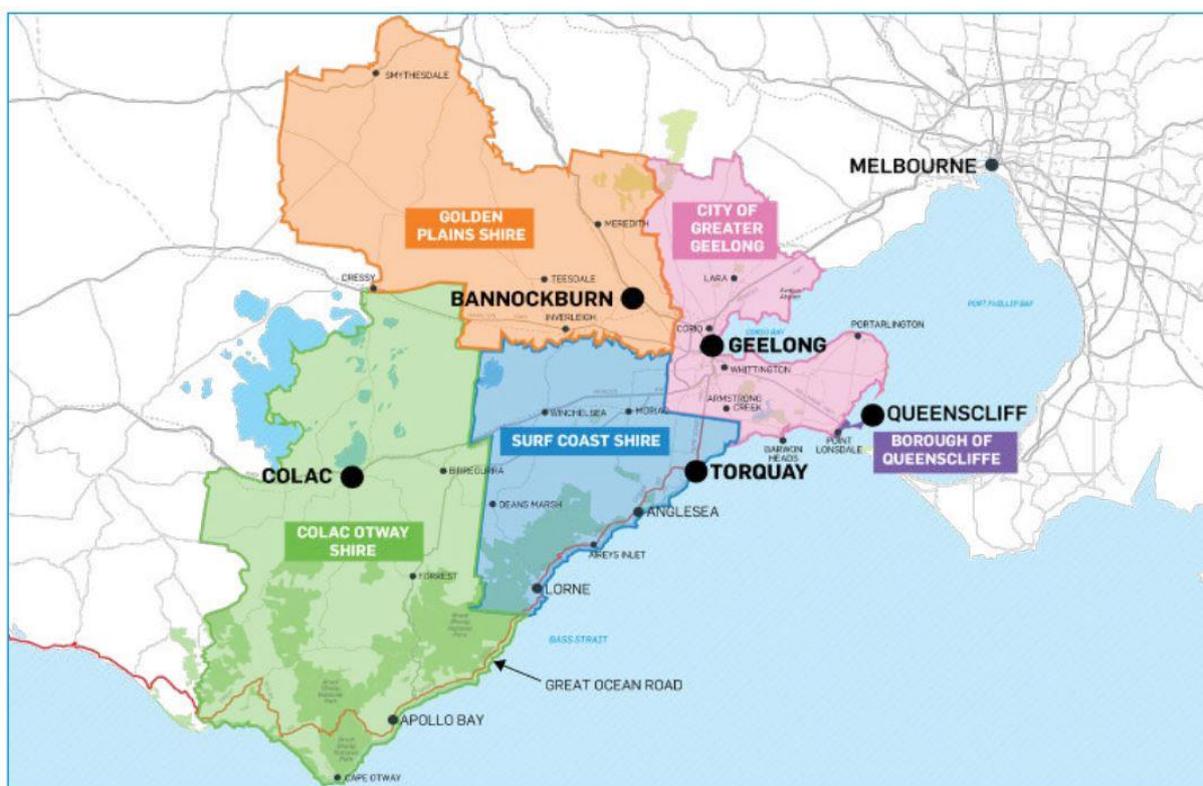
Source: Birregurra Structure Plan 2013

### 3. Regional Role and Policy Influences

Birregurra is part of the G21 region, an area which spans the five municipalities of Greater Geelong, Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Surf Coast and the Borough of Queenscliffe. At a regional level, planning for this area is coordinated by the G21 Region Alliance, who work closely with all levels of government and other member organisations to guide investment and growth in the region.

The regional role of Birregurra remains the same as it was described in the 2013 Structure Plan. It continues to be identified in regional planning documents as a small rural town with modest growth potential. Colac remains the primary designated growth area for Colac Otway Shire, and the regional centre for service and manufacturing industries, commercial and retail services, and broader health, education and recreation facilities. To the east of Birregurra, the City of Greater Geelong is the most significant focus for regional growth with planning underway to accommodate around 190,000 new residents by 2050. To a lesser extent, the rural town of Winchelsea just over 20km to the east is also identified as a growth node, albeit of a much smaller scale.

Figure 5 G21 Region



Source: G21 Region Plan 2050

Several strategies have been developed for the G21 region in recent years which contain goals and principles that will need to be considered in the update of the Birregurra Structure Plan. An overview of these is set out below.

### 3.1 G21 Region Plan 2050 (updated 2023)

In 2023, G21 released an updated region plan, the G21 Region Plan 2050. This plan is intended to lay the strategic groundwork for continued investment and rejuvenation in the region. It notes that the G21 region grew by just over 100,000 people between 2006 and 2021, but only a very small proportion of this growth was in Colac Otway (1,574 people). It identifies a large increase in jobs in the region supporting this growth but also highlights accompanying challenges including:

- Pressure on transport and housing (including a lack of key worker housing in Colac).
- Rising inequity (widening economic and wellbeing gap in the region).
- A changing climate.

Key elements of the G21 Region Plan 2050 centre on the theme of “Growing Well Together”. Several aspirations have been developed based on this theme and include programs of work and priority projects designed to realise the aspirations. These are shown in Figure 6.

Members of the G21 alliance are expected to align their strategies and plans with the six aspirations, allowing localisation where necessary but highlighting alignment wherever possible.

Some of the more relevant strategies when considering future land use planning for Birregurra include:

- Concentrating future development within current planned boundaries rather than endless sprawl.
- More diverse housing stock and affordable housing options.
- A tailored approach to density in keeping with the character of places.
- An updated Regional Growth Plan to be developed by 2027.
- Ensuring planning adopts a climate action approach.
- Engaging with traditional owners to bring a First Nations lens to the project.

Figure 6 Key Elements of the Geelong Region Plan 2050



Source: G21 Region Plan 2050

### 3.2 G21 Integrated Transport Strategy (2022)

The G21 Integrated Transport Strategy identifies key challenges ahead for the region based on the forecast increase in population to the year 2041. It demonstrates that without intervention the continued heavy reliance on car-based transport will result in significant congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, pollution and poor health outcomes in the future.

As Birregurra is not a nominated growth node, these effects will not be felt as significantly as other areas. Nonetheless, regional strategies are put forward which could benefit the town and should be considered as part of future growth planning. These include:

- Increased frequency of rail services on the Geelong-Colac line.
- Prioritising pedestrians in town centres.
- A preference for separated cycleways as an active transport option on local streets.
- Managing parking in town centres.
- Creating walkable neighbourhoods, particularly access to health services, schools and shopping areas.
- Improve infrastructure to support public transport use, such as high quality bus stops.

### 3.3 Water for Our Future Strategy (2022), Barwon Water

The Water for Our Future Strategy sets out how Barwon Water is planning to deliver water and support a healthy river system over the next 50 years to meet the needs of a growing population, in the context of the shift to a hotter, drier climate.

Birregurra is currently supplied with reticulated water (from the West Barwon Reservoir) and reticulated sewer. Included in the strategy is the proposal to build a new underground pipeline to connect Birregurra to the Colac system. Currently water is diverted from the open Wurdee Boluc inlet channel and stored in basins prior to being filtered and disinfected at a local treatment plant. During some recent summers, the treatment plant reached capacity and water had to be trucked to town to ensure supply.

This new pipeline is expected to increase water security for Birregurra, improve quality and water pressure, reduce water losses (from evaporation), reduce operating costs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Construction of the new pipeline has commenced.

The strategy also seeks to ensure that new urban development adopts an integrated water management approach.

Barwon Water recently partnered with the Birregurra community to explore opportunities to save water using smart technology. 400 digital meters were installed in residences and businesses across Birregurra to monitor hourly water use and support water efficient behaviour change. The strategy identified that the project had resulted in participants using 27% less water than previously.



## **Birregurra Sustainable Communities - Water**

Be part of our water future



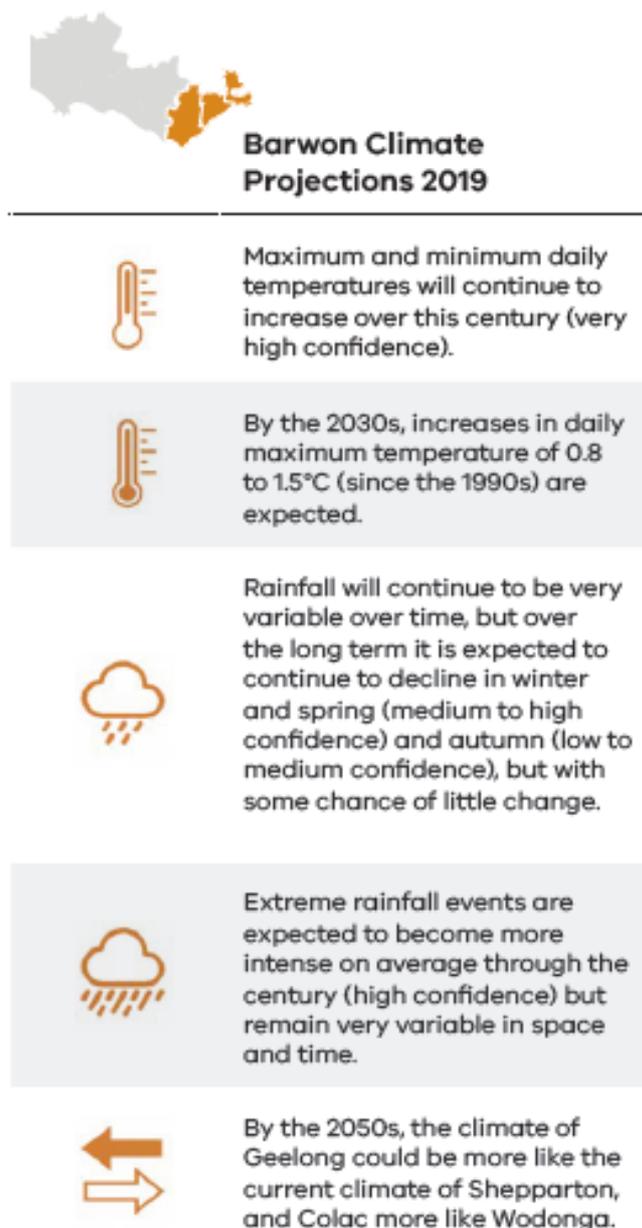
Source: Barwon Water

### 3.4 Barwon South West Regional Climate Adaptation Strategy 2020-2025, DELWP

This State Government led strategy sets out how the Barwon South West region has been preparing for climate change and plans to progress climate action into the future.

It notes that the Barwon South West region has been getting warmer and drier and that this trend is expected to continue into the future. It sets out projections for the Barwon region.

Figure 7 Barwon Climate Projections 2019



Source: Barwon South West Regional Climate Adaptation Strategy 2020-2025

The strategy identifies 12 climate adaptation focus areas. Of particular relevance to town structure planning is the focus area to upgrade urban environments to ensure liveability under climate change. It identifies upgrading cities and towns to cope with heatwaves and flash flooding, and transitioning to a circular economy as opportunities to be explored.

While it does not contain actions specific to Birregurra, the principles of equity, inclusivity, collaboration, deliberative learning and using the best available information should inform the review of the Birregurra Structure Plan.

### 3.5 Council Plan (incorporating the Health and Wellbeing Plan) 2021-2025

The Council Plan sets out the strategic directions for Council to 2025. For the first time, it included the Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan. It sets out the Community Vision:

*By 2050, Colac Otway Shire will be a destination where people come to appreciate our unique and diverse environment and friendly communities.*

*We value the wisdom of this land's first caretakers, the Gulidjan and Gadabanud peoples, and recognise all those who have cared for the land since.*

*We work to preserve what makes our place special. We focus on environmental sustainability to protect our precious natural assets.*

*We are a proud and resilient community that values our welcoming spirit. We embrace new people, new business, new ideas. Our region is a great place to learn, live, work and play.*

The Council Plan establishes four year priorities grouped under four themes:

- Strong and resilient economy
- Valuing the natural and built environment
- Healthy and inclusive community
- Strong leadership and management

There are many priorities relevant to planning for the future of Birregurra. In particular, the following objectives are relevant to this Review:

- Affordable and available housing will support our growing community and economy.
- Key infrastructure investment supports our economy and liveability.
- Grow the Colac Otway Shire's permanent population by at least 1.5%.
- We mitigate impacts to people and property arising from climate change.
- Protect and enhance the natural environment.
- Provide and maintain an attractive and safe built environment.
- People are active and socially connected through engaging quality spaces and places.

## 4. Land Use Planning Framework

This chapter outlines the planning framework governing land use and development in Birregurra. The recommendations of the 2013 Structure Plan were included in the Colac Otway Planning Scheme (Planning Scheme) via a planning scheme amendment in 2014.

### 4.1 *Planning and Environment Act 1987*

The Planning and Environment Act 1987 (the Act) establishes the framework for land use planning in Victoria. The Act guides the State and local governments in the preparation and administration of planning controls through municipal planning schemes.

### 4.2 Colac Otway Planning Scheme

The Colac Otway Planning Scheme (Planning Scheme) sets out the objectives, policies and provisions relating to use, development, protection and conservation of land in the Colac Otway Shire. All planning schemes in Victoria have a consistent format and provide policy directions at State, regional and local levels.

The purpose of the Planning Scheme is to:

- Provide a clear and consistent framework within which decisions about the use and development of land can be made.
- Express state, regional, local and community expectations for areas and land uses.
- Provide for the implementation of State, regional and local policies affecting land use and development.
- Support responses to climate change.

#### State and Regional Planning Policy

State planning policies are broad and overarching. They set the context for planning at the regional and local levels and cannot be changed by local planning authorities. In terms of planning for future growth, State policy establishes a settlement hierarchy which includes Metropolitan Melbourne and the major regional cities (including Geelong) as the primary focus, followed by regional centres (including Colac), and directing that other regions and townships should be planned in accordance with their relevant regional growth plan.

State policy for managing growth can be found at Clause 11.02 of the Planning Scheme. Key strategies relevant to planning for Birregurra include (summarised):

- Ensure that sufficient land is available to meet forecast demand.
- Plan for a 15 year supply of land to accommodate population growth on a municipal wide basis (not a township basis).
- Consider:
  - Opportunities for consolidation, redevelopment and intensification of existing urban areas.
  - Neighbourhood character and landscape considerations.
  - The limits of land capability and natural hazards and environmental quality.
  - Service limitations and the cost of providing infrastructure.

- Restrict rural residential development that would compromise future development at higher densities.
- Structure plans should:
  - Address the strategic and physical context of the location, including increased physical risks associated with climate change.
  - Provide for the development of sustainable and liveable urban areas informed by the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals as relevant.
  - Protect and enhance areas of natural and cultural significance.
  - Assist in the development of walkable neighbourhoods.
  - Facilitate the use of active and sustainable transport modes.
  - Facilitate the logical and efficient provision of infrastructure.
  - Incorporate integrated water management and urban greening.

In terms of regional policy, and as noted in Chapter 3, Birregurra is located within the G21 region. The G21 Regional Growth Plan 2013 outlines regional land use planning policy for this area. It describes Birregurra as part of the Western Gateway:

*Western Gateway*

*The area surrounding Winchelsea to Colac has a significant agricultural role and supports a number of small towns, such as Forrest, Moriac and Birregurra, which provide important housing lifestyle options and niche tourism activity. Colac plays a district town role, providing food production activity and services to settlements within the rural hinterland, including the Otways and Great Ocean Road, and is a gateway to the Great South Coast. The Princes and Hamilton Highways and freight rail lines provide connections to the west and north...<sup>2</sup>*

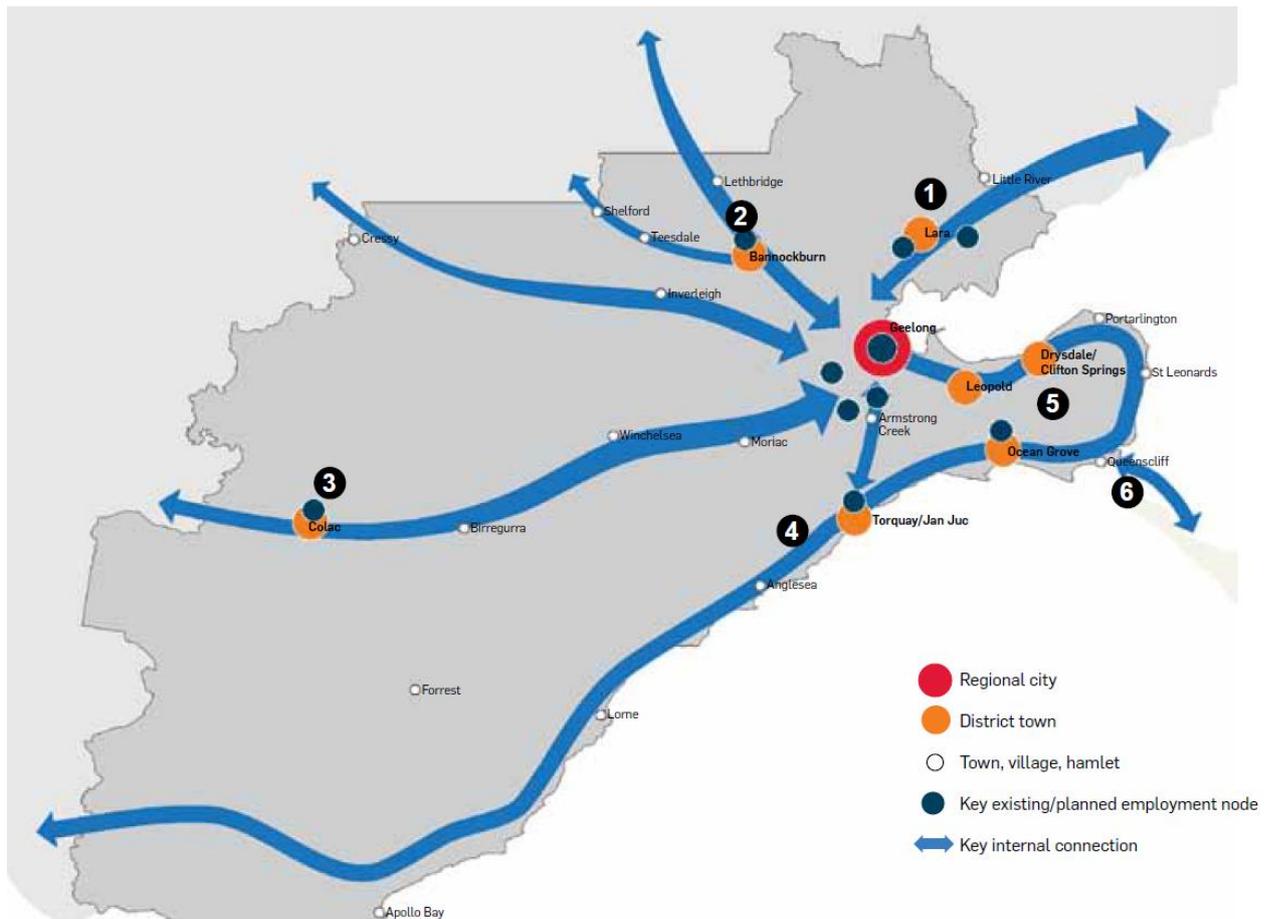
Colac and Winchelsea are the nearest towns which are identified as targeted growth nodes and are planned to accommodate significant population growth in this region. The Colac 2050 Growth Plan was subsequently developed to respond to the aspirational growth target of 20,000 people by 2050 set by the 2013 Growth Plan. It was adopted in 2019 and planning is now well underway to develop a Precinct Structure Plan for the Deans Creek growth area which could accommodate between 4,500 to 6,000 new dwellings. Growth planning in Winchelsea has also commenced with new residential estates under construction and plans in place to ensure the town is infrastructure ready by 2050 for up to 10,000 people.

Birregurra is within the ‘Town, village, hamlet’ classification and is identified as having capacity for incremental infill, limiting growth to identified structure plan settlement boundaries. Cape Otway Road, just to the east of Birregurra is nominated as a significant tourism route and the Princes Highway, 6km to the north, is a key transport corridor linking Melbourne and Geelong to the western region.

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<sup>2</sup> G21 Regional Growth Plan 2013

Figure 8 Roles and Functions within the G21 Region



Source: G21 Regional Growth Plan 2013

A refresh of the 2013 Growth Plan is due by the end of 2027.

### Local Planning Policy

The Municipal Planning Strategy (Clause 02) in the Planning Scheme contains the broad strategic vision and directions for Colac Otway Shire. The Vision includes a commitment to:

- Plan for growth in business and employment in towns and settlements.
- Promote healthy, safe environments which enhance community life and well-being.
- Manage infrastructure assets so that they are sustainable long term.
- Support long term sustainability.

Strategies for urban growth (Clause 02.03-1) include encouraging development within the major towns of Colac and Apollo Bay and focussing development in other areas within existing town boundaries.

For Birregurra, specific strategies include:

- Consolidating the commercial town core and community nodes.
- Protecting exotic and native vegetation particularly on the southern side of town.
- Preserving heritage buildings.
- Birregurra is shown as a 'Small town' on the Strategic Framework Plan.

Figure 9 Colac Otway Shire Strategic Framework Plan



Source: Colac Otway Planning Scheme

Local policy for Birregurra in Clause 11.03-6L states that the objective for Birregurra is to manage modest growth and development in a coordinated and sustainable manner that retains its rural character. This content is based on the 2013 Structure Plan and includes the following strategies:

- Protect the town's significant and contributory heritage places.
- Preserve and enhance the Barwon River corridor and connected waterways.
- Establish a connected network of accessible public open space and recreation facilities that provide a range of passive and active recreation opportunities.
- Protect the landscape character and view lines of town entrances as defining elements of the north, east and west gateways.
- Encourage infill development on vacant lots and support further subdivision of larger lots within the existing settlement boundary.
- Encourage consolidation of commercial uses in the core town centre on Main Street.
- Support commercial uses and the re-development of existing premises on both sides of Main Street between Roadknight Street and Austin Street to the west and the unnamed watercourse / Strachan Street to the east.
- Encourage adaption and re-use of heritage buildings in Main Street.
- Retain low building heights throughout the town and the single-storey built form of Main Street.
- Consolidate civic, community and health facilities in a community node on the north-east edge of the town centre.
- Support retirement/aged care living close to the community and health node, and Main Street.
- Encourage petrol stations to locate in or close to the town centre, away from the heritage core and identified town gateways.
- Encourage consolidation of industrial uses in the Industrial 1 Zone.
- Support development in the Industrial 1 Zone that reflects the rural character and visual amenity.
- Support road upgrades that retain and enhance the character and informal nature of road reserves.
- Design built form in residential areas to maintain the dominance of the surrounding landscape.

The Birregurra Structure Plan map (refer to Figure 4) is included at Clause 02.04.

Other planning policy for Birregurra is found in various zones and overlays applying to specific sites in the town. A review of the neighbourhood character planning provisions applicable in Birregurra is set out in the Review of Neighbourhood Planning Provisions Report.

### 4.3 Amendment C116 – Birregurra Flood and Drainage Strategy

In 2022, Council initiated a planning scheme amendment to implement the findings of the Birregurra Flood and Drainage Strategy, Engeny, 2022 (Flood and Drainage Strategy 2022). It included updating flood risk mapping and introducing new or amended controls into the planning scheme to improve responses to flood events in Birregurra. The flood modelling identified areas at risk from flooding from both riverine inundation and the drainage network.

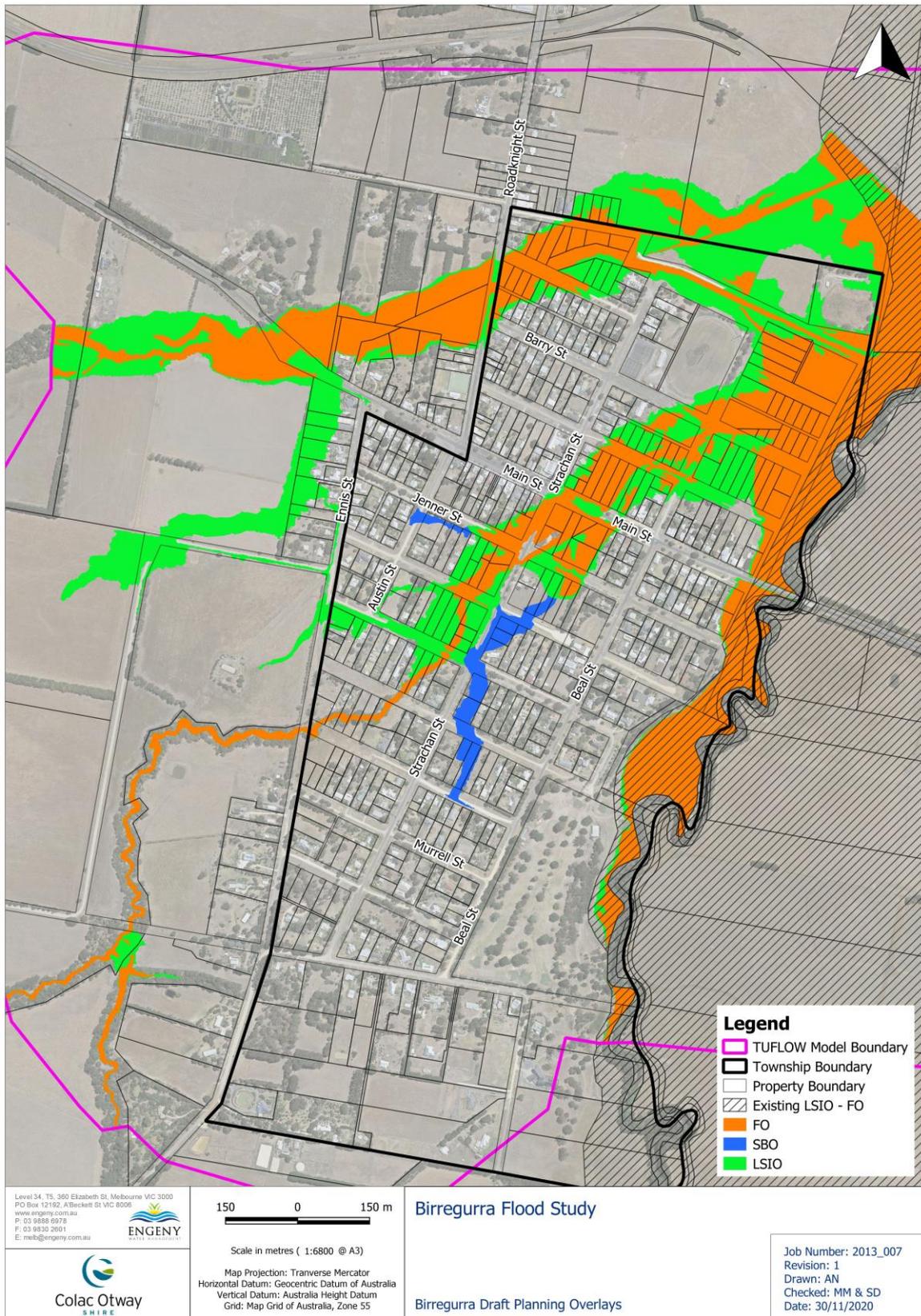
An independent planning panel appointed to review the Amendment C116 found that:

*The Colac Otway Shire Council, with Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, demonstrated the controls had been properly formulated according to information from best modelling techniques and from ground truthing following the 2016 flood event in Birregurra. It achieved this through the flood study by Engeny Water Management Pty Ltd, independent peer review of the study by Water Technology Pty Ltd and expert evidence from Engeny Water Management Pty Ltd.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> Panel Report, Amendment C116cola, Planning Panels Victoria, May 2022

Figure 10 Land affected by Amendment C116cola



Source: Birregurra Flood and Drainage Strategy, Energy, 2022

## 5. Population and Housing Analysis

### 5.1 Population

The population of Birregurra was 628 in 2021, an increase of 153 people since 2011, or an average of around 15 people per year<sup>4</sup>. 15 people identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The Census boundary for the town is shown in Figure 11.

*Figure 11 2021 Birregurra township Census Boundary*



Source: ABS Census Data, 2021

Birregurra has experienced a relatively high level of growth over the past 10 years, equivalent to around 3.22% per annum, which is considerably higher than the 10 years prior to the 2013 Structure Plan.

Table 1 shows that growth in Birregurra has been steadily increasing over the past 20 years, and more rapidly in the last 10 years. The smaller rate of growth between 2006 and 2011 is likely to be due to the amended Census boundary between those two collection periods but doesn't change the overall picture of an increasing rate of growth. In the five years between 2016 and 2021, Birregurra had an average annual growth rate of 3.26%.

This is a much higher rate of growth than for the Colac Otway Shire more broadly which had an average annual growth rate of 1.4% over the last 5 years.

The population in the wider Birregurra district was 942 in 2021 (this includes the town and nearby surrounds). Growth beyond the township has been more subdued and closer to the rate for the Colac Otway Shire overall.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 Census, using the Birregurra (L) data and Usual Place of Residence dataset.

<sup>5</sup> There have been some very minor changes to the Census district boundary since 2011 but these are not considered significant in terms of overall numbers.

Table 1 Total Population – Birregurra Township

Year	2001	2006	2011	2016	2021
Population	426	470	475	540	628
No. additional people		44	5	65	88
Av. Annual growth rate (5 years)		2.06%	0.21%	2.74%	3.26%

Source: ABS Census Data and Conway Planning

Table 2 summarises the age profile of people living in Birregurra and the Colac Otway Shire. It shows that Birregurra has a slightly higher percentage of younger people (under 20 years), and adults between 35 and 54 years, than on average across Colac Otway Shire, which is consistent with the perception of many families in the town. It is evident however that as a percentage of the total population, family age groups have remained relatively steady over the last 10 years and have not increased significantly. The percentage of young adults is somewhat less than the Shire average and could be a result of young people moving away for study or work at the beginning of their adult lives.

Table 2 Age Profile of Birregurra and Colac Otway Shire

	Birregurra 2011	<b>Birregurra 2021</b>	Colac Otway Shire 2021
0-4 years	8%	<b>7%</b>	5%
5-19 years	19.3%	<b>18%</b>	17%
20-29 years	8.2%	<b>6%</b>	10.3%
35-54 years	32.6%	<b>34.6%</b>	29.2
55-74 years	25.5%	<b>28.5%</b>	28%
75+ years	6.4%	<b>6%</b>	10.2%

Source: ABS Census Data

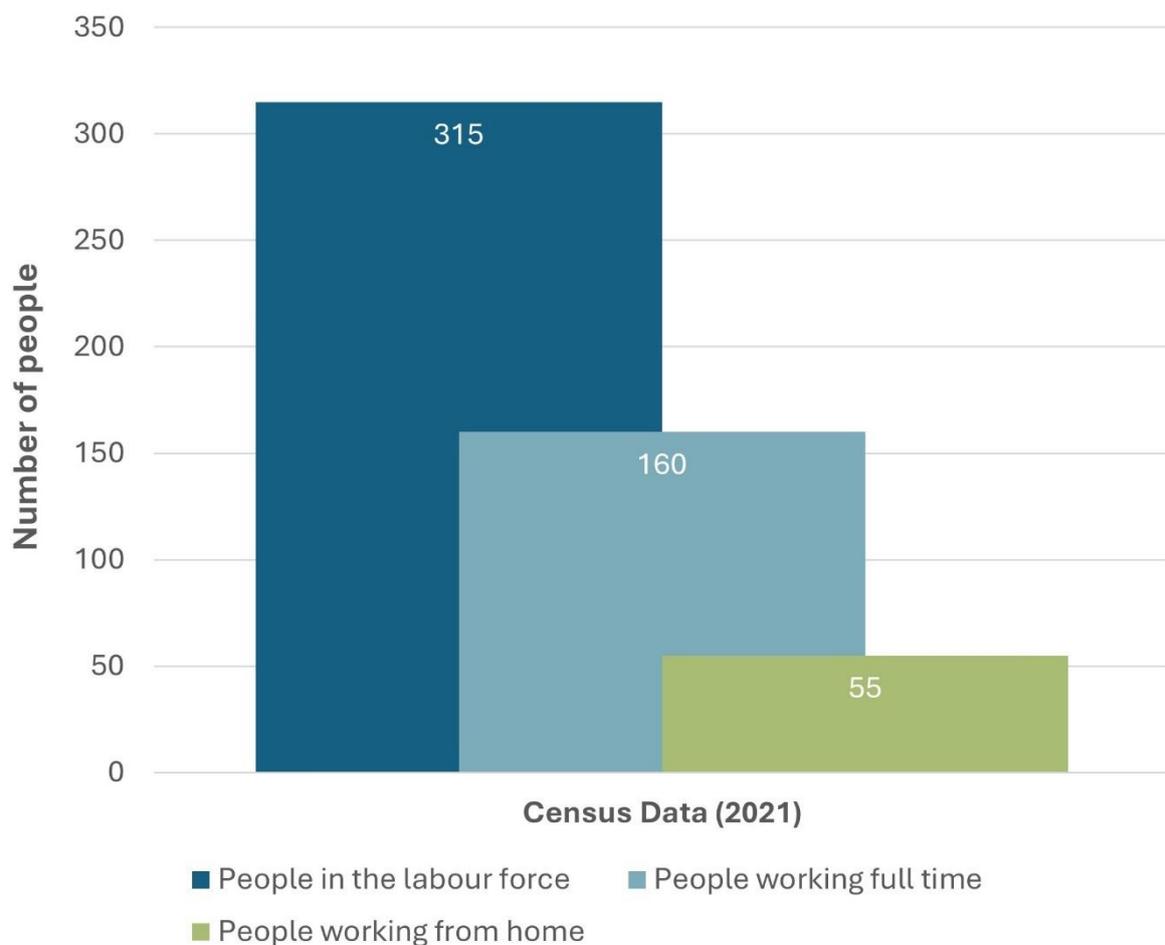


The health profile of Birregurra residents was consistent with the Victorian and national average. Around 35% of people reported that they had one or more chronic, long term health conditions.

In 2021 about half of the Birregurra population were in the workforce and of these people slightly more than half were in full time in employment. The five most common occupations remained similar to 2011, as did the top two industries of employment (refer to Figure 12 and Figure 13).

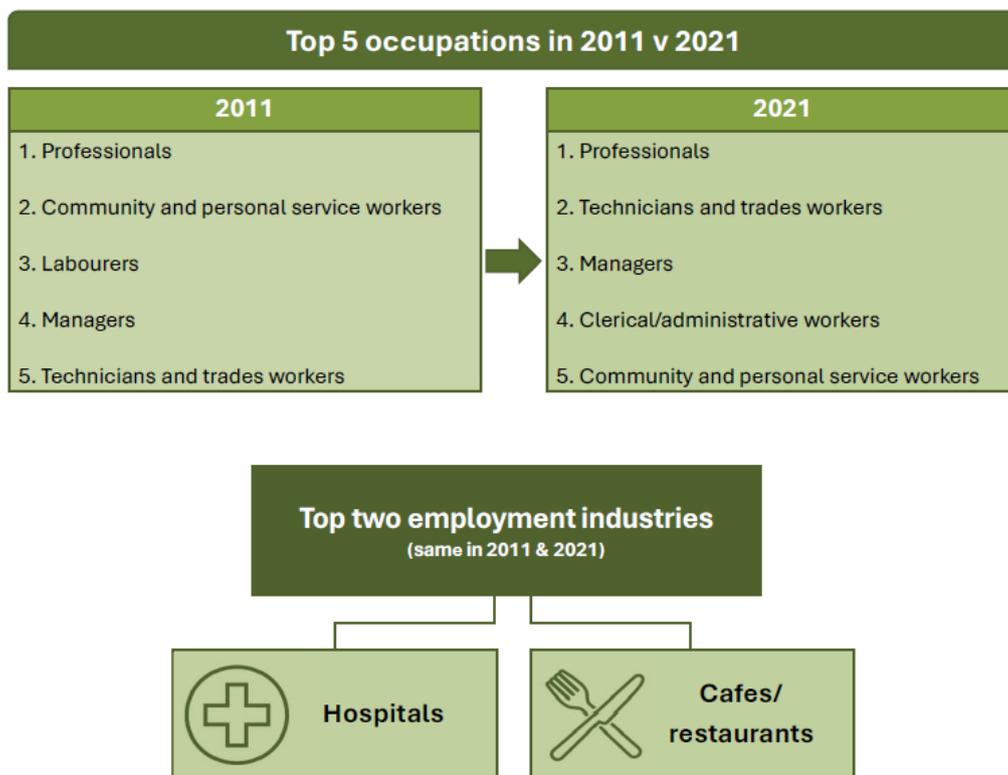
In 2021, work from home data was collected for the first time and 18% of people said they were working from home on the day of the Census. Given the existence of the Covid pandemic at that time however, it is not really feasible to use this data to accurately estimate the likely percentage of people usually working from home. Anecdotally, we know that remote working is becoming much more popular and accepted today. Improvements in technology have allowed people in certain professions to work outside the office more often. More recently, many government and private organisations have encouraged or mandated staff to return to the office either full time or using a hybrid model. It is expected the next Census collection will reveal more accurate information about the usual extent of people working from home.

Figure 12 – Participation in the Birregurra Labour Force 2021



Source: ABS Census data, Birregurra (L) 2021

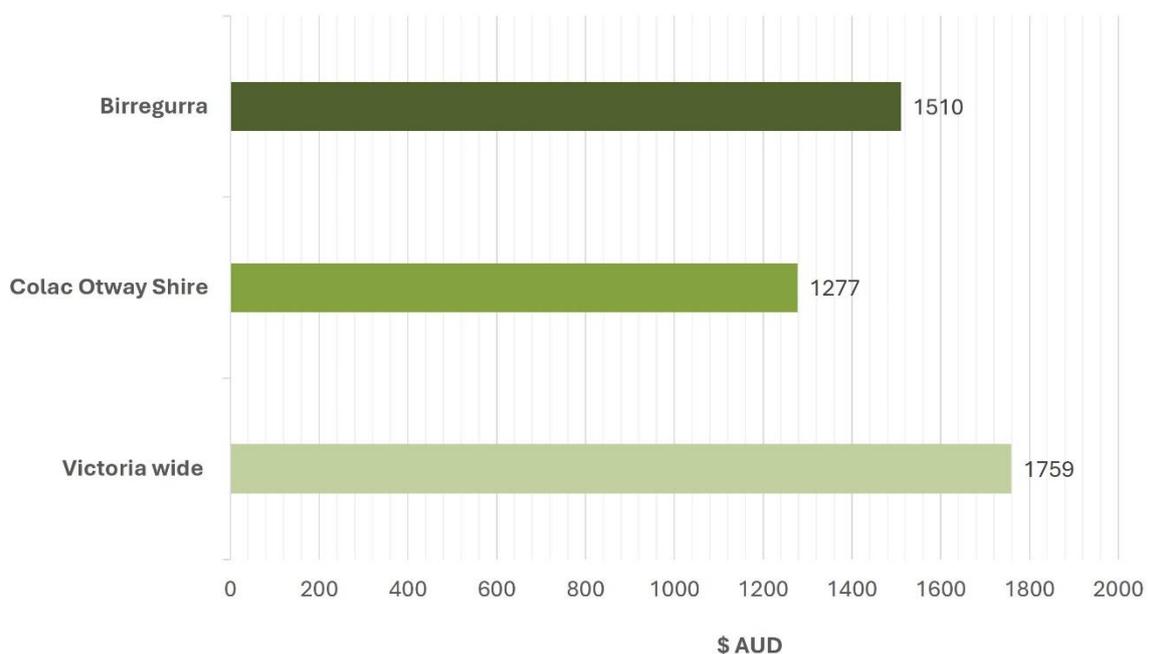
Figure 13 Birregurra Workforce Data



Source: ABS Census data, Birregurra (L) 2011 & 2021

Household income data showed a median weekly income of \$1,510 for people for people living in Birregurra. This was less than the Victorian average but considerably more than the Colac Otway Shire average. A high percentage of the population had participated in voluntary work in 2021, considerably more than the Victorian average.

Figure 14 Median Weekly Household Income 2021



Source: ABS Census data, Birregurra (L) 2021

Figure 15 Voluntary Work



Source: ABS Census data, Birregurra (L) 2021

## 5.2 Population Growth

Birregurra is described in the 2013 Structure Plan as a small rural town with modest potential for growth. The Plan presented three potential growth scenarios to 2031 based on a residential housing demand assessment<sup>6</sup>. The population was forecast to increase by between 370 and 854 people depending on whether a low, medium or high growth scenario occurred. A low growth scenario was based on a doubling of historic growth rates at the time (9 new dwellings per year). The high growth scenario assumed that Birregurra would accommodate all projected growth for the wider Colac Otway North region as anticipated through the Victoria in Futures 2012 (VIF2012) forecasts. The provision of reticulated sewer, road and rail improvements to Geelong and “tree change” lifestyle preferences were considered to be key drivers of growth.



**Birregurra Railway Station**

The 2021 Census data provides a mid-point to gauge which scenario currently reflects the rate of population growth in Birregurra. The population in 2021 was 628 people, an increase of 153 people from 2011. This level of growth would most closely fit with the low growth scenario envisaged in the 2013 Structure Plan. The low growth scenario is also consistent with new dwelling approvals over the same period (discussed in Chapter 5.3). While the 2013 Structure Plan presented this as a low growth scenario, the growth equates to around 3.2% per annum which is considered to be a relatively high growth rate, albeit coming from a small base population.

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<sup>6</sup> The detailed residential demand assessment can be found in the Birregurra Structure Plan Background Report, Hansen Partnership, February 2013.

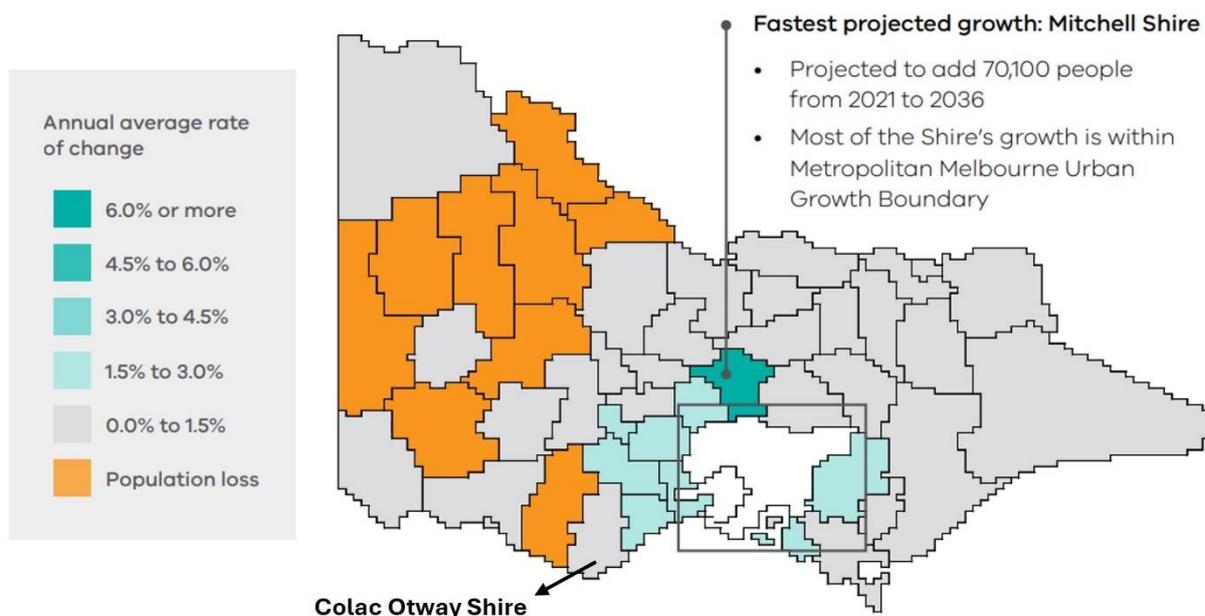
Population growth depends on two main factors: net migration and the rate of natural increase (births minus deaths). The rate of natural increase depends on mortality and fertility rates, which in turn are influenced by the age profile of a population. Net migration is influenced by many factors, which collectively affect the desirability of Birregurra as a place to live. These include things such as changing economic conditions (access to employment, work opportunities, work from home, etc), transport options, property prices, access to community infrastructure and services, and alternative options in neighbouring towns and regional cities. The extent that these factors will influence future growth is difficult to estimate at a township scale.

It is relevant to consider the forecast growth of the wider region and growth for Birregurra in this context.

Victoria in Future 2023 (VIF2023) is the official State government projection of population growth for Victoria. Projections give an indication of what may happen if current demographic, social and economic trends continue. Allocations of growth across smaller areas must add up to the estimated growth for Victoria as a whole, which is generally more accurately measurable. Projections over longer horizons and for smaller geographic areas tend to be more uncertain.

VIF2023 estimates that the population in Victoria is anticipated to increase from 6.8 million in 2023 to 8.4 million in 2036. Most growth is expected to occur in metropolitan Melbourne. Colac Otway is forecast to grow by a very modest amount, less than 1.5%, from 22,309 people in 2021 to 23,907 people in 2036 (or 1,598 people over the 15 year period). Figure 16 shows that Colac Otway is expected to accommodate only a small percentage of the State’s projected growth.

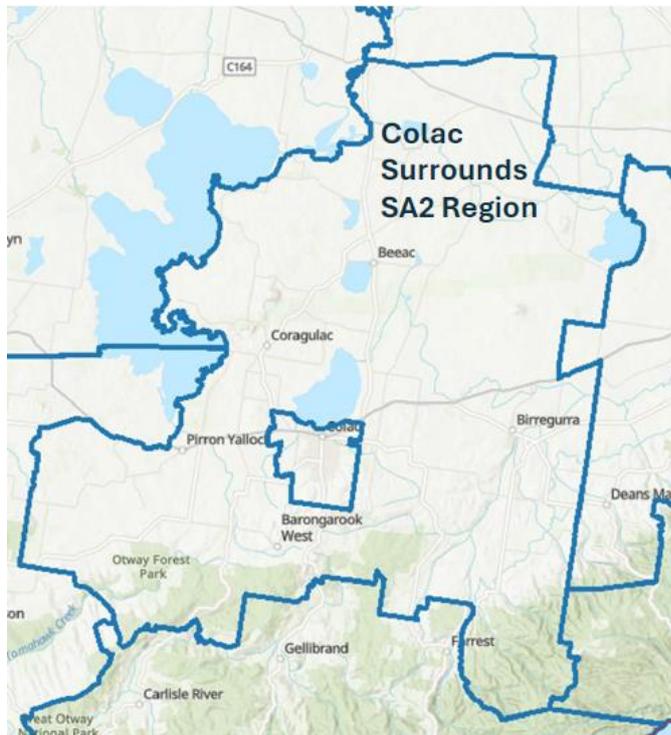
Figure 16 Average annual rate of population change, Vic Local Government Areas 2021-2036



Source: Victoria in Future 2023 Population and Household Projections to 2051 with Colac Otway highlighted

At a smaller scale, VIF2023 has projected population growth for regions in Victoria based on SA2 collection areas<sup>7</sup>. Birregurra falls within the area known as ‘Colac surrounds’ shown in Figure 17. It encircles the SA2 region of the Colac township.

*Figure 17 Colac Surrounds SA2 Region*



Source: ABS

The population for Colac Surrounds has been forecast to grow from 5,645 people in 2021 to 5,678 people in 2036, an increase of just 33 people. This may mean an increase in population for some towns in this SA2 but a decrease in other areas due to more people moving away than moving in. Growth in Birregurra should be considered with this in mind.

Colac township, which is a separate SA2 collection area, is expected to accommodate most of the forecast growth for Colac Otway Shire. This estimate takes into account that planning is underway to enable significant growth to occur in Colac, although it is still a very modest forecast and much lower than the aspirational level of growth set out in the Colac 2050 Plan.

Council recently engaged SocioLogic to provide some estimates of potential population growth for Colac using assumptions that would enable a higher rate of growth than forecast by VIF2023. Estimates were based on achieving the aspirational target of 20,000 people by 2050 foreshadowed in the Colac 2050 Plan. This involved a detailed analysis of land supply and timing to market in order to achieve a higher rate of growth. This target is significantly greater than the rate of growth for Colac envisaged by the VIF2023 forecast. To achieve this higher rate of growth would require policy interventions to generate additional demand.

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<sup>7</sup> SA2 collections areas are statistical collection areas associated with Census data intended to represent a community that interacts together socially and economically.

Facilitating the delivery of new residential subdivision and housing supply is the type of intervention that can influence growth at this smaller local level.

If growth in Birregurra continues along the 'low growth' scenario envisaged in the 2013 Structure Plan, it was estimated that there would be a population of 845 people in 2031. This would equate to an additional 217 people from the 2021 Census figure. It would require growth to continue at a rate above 3.5%. This is possible but would likely require policy intervention to stimulate demand, including the provision of sufficient land supply to enable this to be achieved. The next chapter examines housing and residential land supply.

## 5.3 Housing Profile and Demand for Residential Land

There were 318 private dwellings in Birregurra in 2021<sup>8</sup>. This is an increase of 79 dwellings from the 2011 Census, an average of around 8 new homes per year. This figure is similar to Council's building approvals register, which shows certificates of occupancy issued for 73 dwellings from the beginning of 2012 to the end of 2021<sup>9,10</sup>.

Of these dwellings, six were for land in the Low Density Residential Zone (commonly referred to as rural residential style lots). Three were in the Farming Zone but within the Study Area boundary, and on land more characteristic of rural residential style living than farming parcels. The remainder were in the Township Zone, which is the standard residential zone for Birregurra.

Table 3 shows the number of certificates of occupancy issued for the last five years.

*Table 3 Building Approvals for Dwellings - last 5 years*

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Number of Certificates of Occupancy issued</b>	10	9	8	12*	3 (an additional 7 had building permits issued but not yet a Certificate of Occupancy)

\* Including one on land in the Farming Zone but within the study area boundary.

Source Council's Building Permit Register

These figures equate to an average across the five years of 8.4 dwellings per year.

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<sup>8</sup> ABS Census Data, 2021

<sup>9</sup> Some variation is expected due to different reporting methods, definitions and timeframes

<sup>10</sup> Certificate of Occupancy is used as it most accurately measures constructed new dwellings that are fit for purpose

## Occupancy Rates and Household Size

The occupancy rate for Birregurra at the 2021 Census date was 81.6% which refers to the number of homes occupied on Census night. The rate for Birregurra is lower than the rate for Victoria as a whole (88.9%) but much higher than the rate for coastal towns in Colac Otway such as Apollo Bay (42.5%). The rate for Birregurra suggests a mainly permanent resident population but does indicate that there could potentially be several holiday homes or short-term rentals, which are not used on permanent basis. A search of online short-term accommodation providers revealed at least a dozen houses are available for short stays on a usual weekend.

Household size was calculated at 2.4 people per household, which is similar to the Victorian and national average<sup>11</sup>. It is a slight increase on the 2011 Census figure of 2.3 persons.

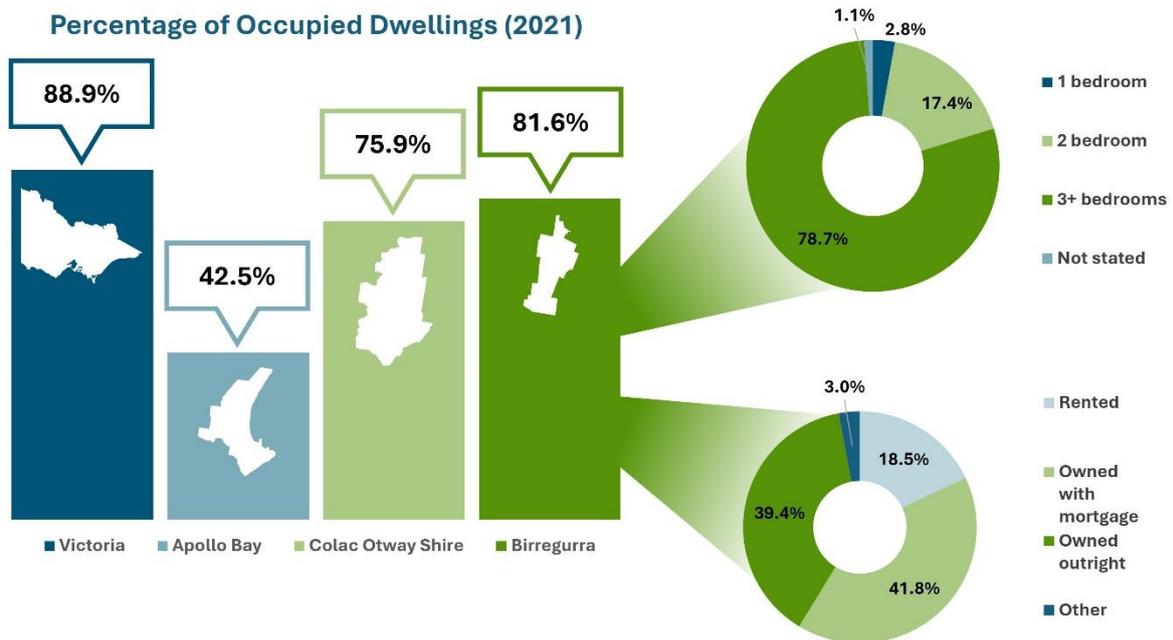


All dwellings were reported as detached housing (i.e. not units or apartments) indicating very little housing diversity in Birregurra. Housing is predominantly on the larger side with 78.7% of dwellings having 3 or more bedrooms. 30.5% of dwellings accommodated single person households.

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<sup>11</sup> Rate based on occupied dwellings

Figure 18 Characteristics of Occupied Dwellings



Source: ABS Census Data 2021

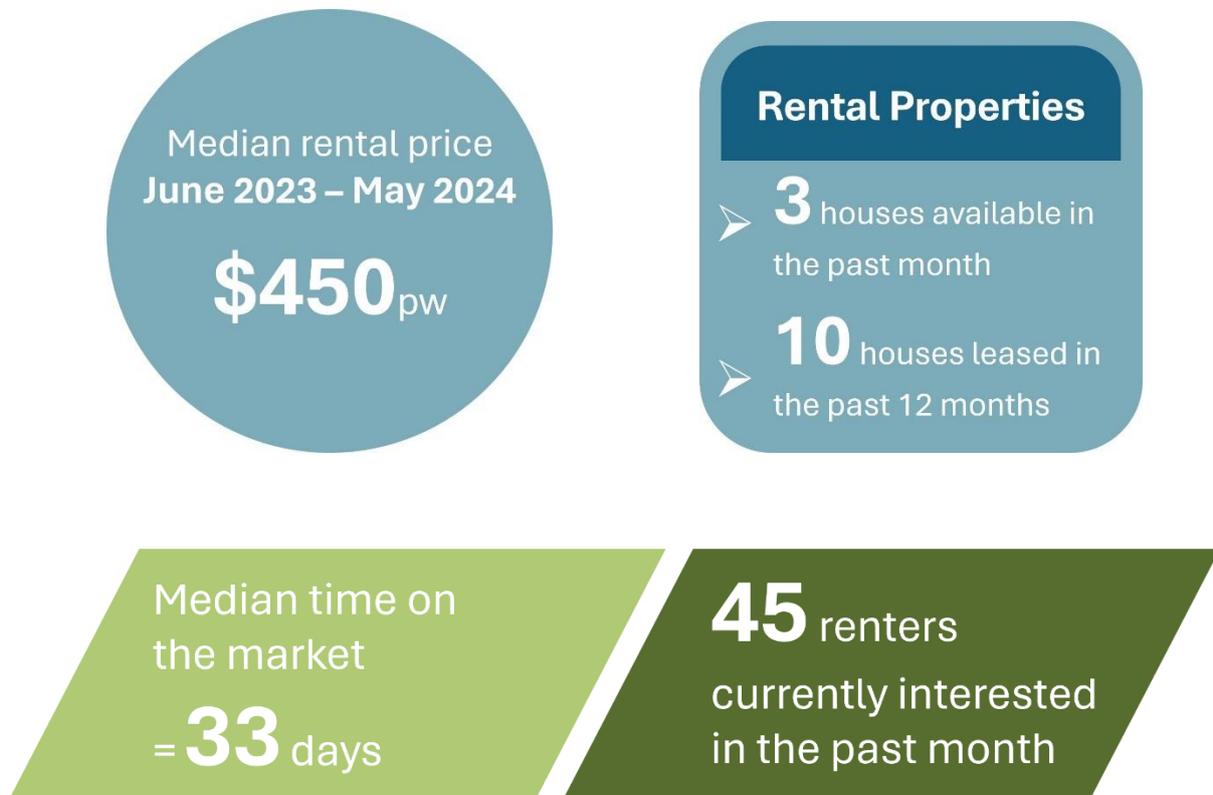
### Home Ownership and Rentals

Most homes were owned outright or with a mortgage (81.2%). 18.5% of dwellings were rentals, a lower figure than for Colac Otway more widely (21.3%) and considerably lower than the Victorian figure of 28.5%. Mortgage stress is indicated where households had repayments greater than 30% of household income and this figure for Birregurra was 7.7% compared to the Victorian figure of 15.5%.

Rent in Birregurra was more affordable than the Victorian and Australian average in 2021 at \$300 per week, compared with \$370 and \$375 respectively.



More recent data however shows that the median rental price is now considerably higher than in 2021.



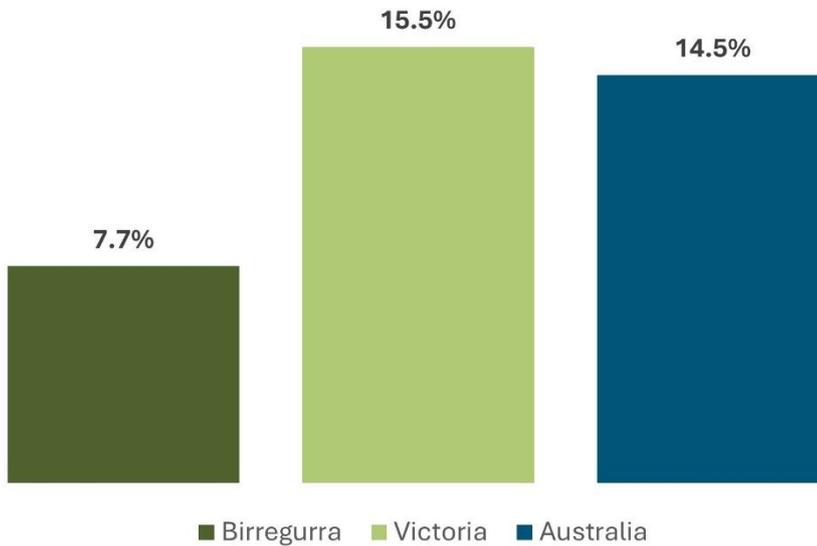
Source: realestate.com.au, June 2024

The percentage of renter households considered to be under housing stress also appeared to be lower at 23.9% compared with the Victorian figure of 30.9% (where rental payments are greater than 30% of household income).

Since the 2021 Census however, interest rates have increased significantly. It is very likely the percentage of households experiencing housing stress (both rental and mortgage) is now greater than the 2021 figure.

Figure 19 Housing Stress 2021

### Percentage of households with mortgage repayments greater than 30% of household income



### Percentage of renter households where rent payments are greater than 30% of household income

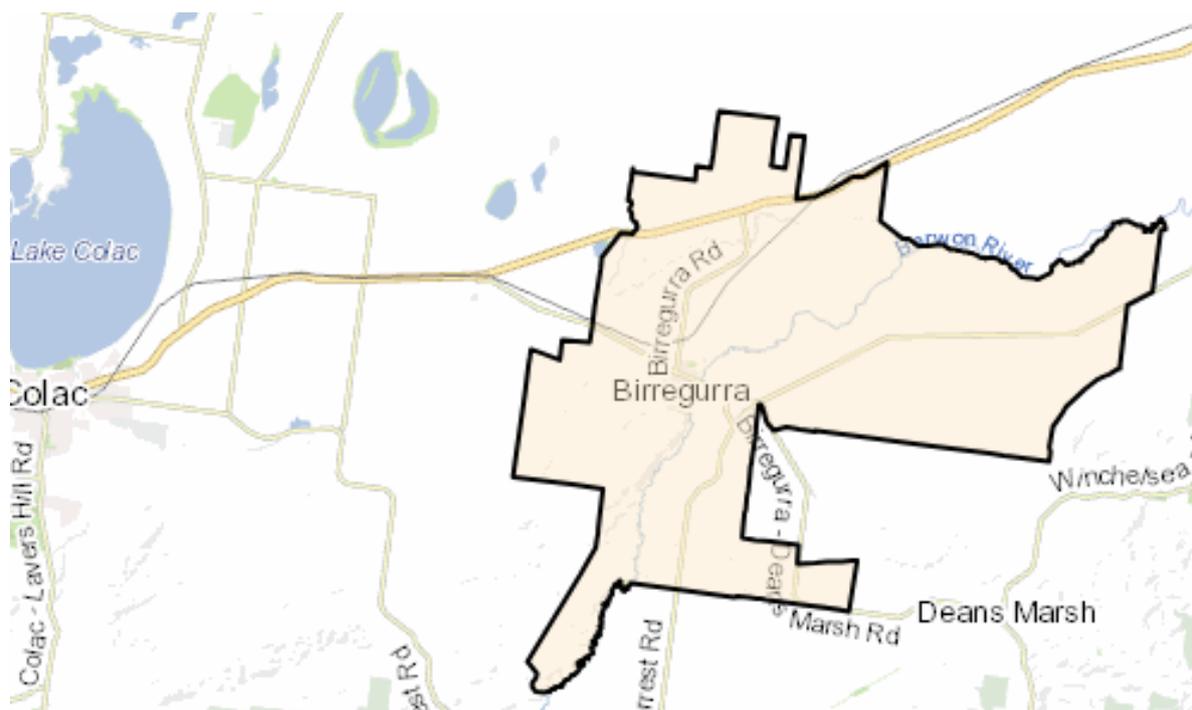


## Residential Property Values

Data on property values is obtained from the Victorian Valuer General's Office. Comprehensive sales data for houses, units, vacant residential land is available based on information lodged every time a property sale is completed.

It should be noted that the data is drawn from a wider area than the Study Area and is based on the gazetted Birregurra locality as shown in Figure 20.

Figure 20 Birregurra Locality Map



Source: Victorian State Government, LASSI – Land and Survey Spatial Information

House prices in Birregurra have been steadily increasing since the time of the 2013 Structure Plan. Table 4 compares the rise in Birregurra house prices over the 10 year period between 2012 and 2022 with house prices in Colac Otway and Country Victoria more widely. The median house price in Birregurra rose by 169% from \$260,000 in 2012 to \$700,000 in 2022<sup>12</sup>. Over that same period the median house price in Colac Otway rose by 128% to \$550,000. In country Victoria the median price rose 107% to \$580,000.

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<sup>12</sup> Median sale price is the value of the middle item when all sales are arranged in ascending order. It is considered a more accurate measure of the general level of sales prices than the mean value, where one large fluctuation can significantly influence the overall price.

Since 2019, the median price in Birregurra has been rising more quickly. This coincided with the Covid pandemic where Victoria saw an outward flow of the population into regional Victoria in 2020 and 2021 coupled with a period of very low interest rates. In more recent times, interest rates have risen quickly and significantly which is likely to dampen the pressure on prices.

*Table 4 Median House Prices 2012-2022*

<b>Median House Price (rounded to \$,000)</b>											
	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Birregurra</b>	260	255	338	303	345	383	413	463	490	693	700
<b>Colac Otway</b>	241	240	272	275	300	335	346	358	398	485	550
<b>Country Victoria</b>	280	290	300	310	320	345	365	385	420	510	580

Source: A Guide to Property Values 2022, Valuer Generals' Office

Vacant residential land prices are set out in Table 5. It shows that the median vacant land price in Birregurra has generally been higher than for Colac Otway and Country Victoria over the period between 2012 and 2022. There was a dip in 2015 and 2016 which could have been influenced by a low level of sales for the year as price sensitivity can be quite high in small towns where the number of sales is relatively low. In more recent years however, it is evident that the median vacant land price has been considerably greater than for the municipality and Country Victoria. The higher and rising prices in Birregurra point to a consistent demand for residential property in the town. They could also be partly the result of an increasingly limited supply of vacant land, albeit noting a range of other factors also influence price.

*Table 5 Median Land Prices 2012-2022*

<b>Median Land Price (rounded to \$,000)</b>											
	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
<b>Birregurra</b>	134	128	142	110	122	160	198	222	275	350	450
<b>Colac Otway</b>	116	121	120	125	135	145	175	200	210	305	340
<b>Country Victoria</b>	130	136	138	145	155	169	175	175	200	256	277

Note: Vacant land price is based on lots of less than 4,000sqm

Source: A Guide to Property Values 2022, Valuer Generals' Office

## Forecast Residential Land Demand

Many factors will influence demand for residential land and new housing in Birregurra over the next 10-15 years. These influences can be local or statewide. The 2013 Background Report identified three local influences that were expected to increase the demand for residential land in Birregurra at the time. These included:

- Upgrading of the Princes Highway between Geelong and Winchelsea (which has since been upgraded beyond Winchelsea to Colac).
- Installation of a reticulated sewerage network in Birregurra.
- Improvements to the Geelong-Warrnambool railway line and services.

These local influences are expected to continue to have a positive impact on demand for housing in Birregurra although it is difficult to estimate the extent of impact.

Other drivers of demand will include:

- Government policy
- Interest rates
- Inflation and the general state of the economy
- Alternative residential options in the region
- Housing affordability
- Local employment opportunities, including an option to work from home

These factors can have a positive or negative impact on demand, depending on which way they are trending. The availability of market ready land or housing can also have a big influence on demand. A lack of supply can result in latent demand, that is demand which is not being met due the unavailability of supply.



Victoria is currently experiencing a housing crisis. Housing affordability has dropped to its lowest level in 30 years and households earning a median income of \$105,000 could only afford around 13% of homes on the market<sup>13</sup>. Rents are also rising at record high rates reflecting the significantly rising demand for rentals.

State government policy is currently encouraging housing development in appropriate areas, generally in metropolitan activity centres or regional centres where infrastructure and services are available.

The G21 region is experiencing rapid population growth. Several areas are being targeted for growth and have received major investment in urban and community infrastructure to enable the creation of liveable, connected communities. These areas include:

- Armstrong Creek Urban Growth Area - will accommodate 22,000 homes for 60,000 residents on 2,600 hectares to Geelong's south
- Northern Geelong Growth Area - will accommodate 17,000 homes for 48,000 residents on 2,100 hectares to Geelong's north
- Western Geelong Growth Area - will accommodate 23,000 homes for 64,000 residents on 3,200 hectares to Geelong's west
- Bannockburn Growth Area - will accommodate approximately 8,500 homes for 23,500 residents in Bannockburn's south.

Colac remains the primary designated growth area for Colac Otway Shire. The substantial supply of residential land in Colac and the targeted areas above, which are not far from Birregurra, will impact on demand for housing in the town.

Very small towns such as Birregurra are not identified for targeted growth. However, the State government has recently introduced new policy to facilitate housing growth across the whole of Victoria, including new provisions which allow the building of second small homes without the need for a planning permit.

Interest rates are currently very high, which tends to have a negative impact on housing demand. However, the shortage in supply across Victoria has meant demand remains high and prices continue to rise.

Both house and vacant land prices in Birregurra are higher than the Colac Otway and the Country Victorian average and continuing to rise. This suggests that demand for housing in Birregurra remains strong.

The 2013 Background Report developed three potential demand scenarios:

- Scenario 1 Low Growth Scenario - doubling of historic growth rates to 9 dwellings per year
- Scenario 2 Medium Growth Scenario – an increase to 15 dwellings per year
- Scenario 3 High Growth Scenario – an increase to 21 dwellings per year

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<sup>13</sup> Victoria's Housing Statement, Victorian State Government, December 2023

To date, the rate of growth in Birregurra has most closely aligned with Scenario 1. As noted in Chapter 5.2 this equated to a rate of population growth of more than 3.5%, which is considered quite a high rate.

Moving forward, it is proposed to revise the potential growth scenarios based on the analysis of demand for the last 10 years and having regard to other demand drivers as outlined above. The following growth scenarios are suggested:

**Scenario 1 Low Growth** – reduced growth based on a dwindling land supply, continually increasing prices (both housing and general cost of living) and significant alternative residential options in the nearby region – 5 dwellings per year

**Scenario 2 Medium Growth** – similar demand to the current rate, which assumes a high development take up rate of new subdivision (to offset dwindling supply) and Birregurra’s ability to continue to attract residents seeking a country lifestyle option – 10 dwellings per year

**Scenario 3 High Growth** – a higher demand based on policy changes which would allow for greater supply and development opportunities within the town (i.e. release of new greenfield land or allowing increased density in the town) – 15 dwellings per year

*Table 6 Forecast Growth Scenarios*

	Low Growth	Medium Growth	High Growth
<i>No. new dwellings required per annum</i>	5	10	15
<i>No. of dwellings required in the next 15 years</i>	75	150	225

Source: Conway Planning

## 5.4 Residential Land Supply

The 2013 Background Report considered potential residential land supply based on:

- Vacant lots
- Potential for subdivision of vacant lots (based on minimum lot sizes proposed in the Neighbourhood Character Study 2012)
- Potential for subdivision of lots with existing dwellings (based on minimum lot sizes proposed in the Neighbourhood Character Study 2012)
- Potential for medium density development across all lots (based on minimum lot sizes proposed in the Neighbourhood Character Study 2012)
- An assumption that 75% of new dwellings would come from vacant lots and 25% from existing developed lots over a 20 year horizon
- Potential for subdivision of lots within the Low Density Residential Zone

From this assessment, it was found that there was potential for the following number of new dwellings over a 20 year period as shown in Table 7.

*Table 7 Total potential new dwellings in Birregurra to 2031*

	Potential new dwellings to 2031		Total potential new dwellings to 2031
	Vacant lots	Existing lots with dwellings	
Township Zone	139.5 - 219	41.25 - 84	180.75 - 303
Low Density Residential Zone	7.5	10	17.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>147 – 226.5</b>	<b>51.25 - 94</b>	<b>198.25 -320.5</b>

Source: 2013 Background Report

Referring to Council’s building approvals data, it is known that 80 Certificates of Occupancy have been issued for new dwellings in Birregurra between the beginning of 2013 to the end of 2023. Subtracting this figure from the estimated total potential for new dwellings to 2031, would calculate remaining capacity at between 118 and 240 new dwellings.

However, as there have been policy changes (such as the introduction of new flood mapping) and new subdivision that has occurred over the last 10 years it is prudent to undertake a fresh assessment.

Generally, a township land supply analysis would consider the potential for new lots by assessing the capacity of potential greenfield subdivision and development activity on large existing infill sites. Birregurra however, has been growing under a policy of containment since the 2013 Structure Plan and there is no greenfield land available for future subdivision. Nor are there any large development sites within the town. This means that future supply is currently restricted to small scale infill subdivision and development.

## Capacity Estimate

Similar to the 2013 Background Report, this analysis provides an estimate of residential land capacity based on:

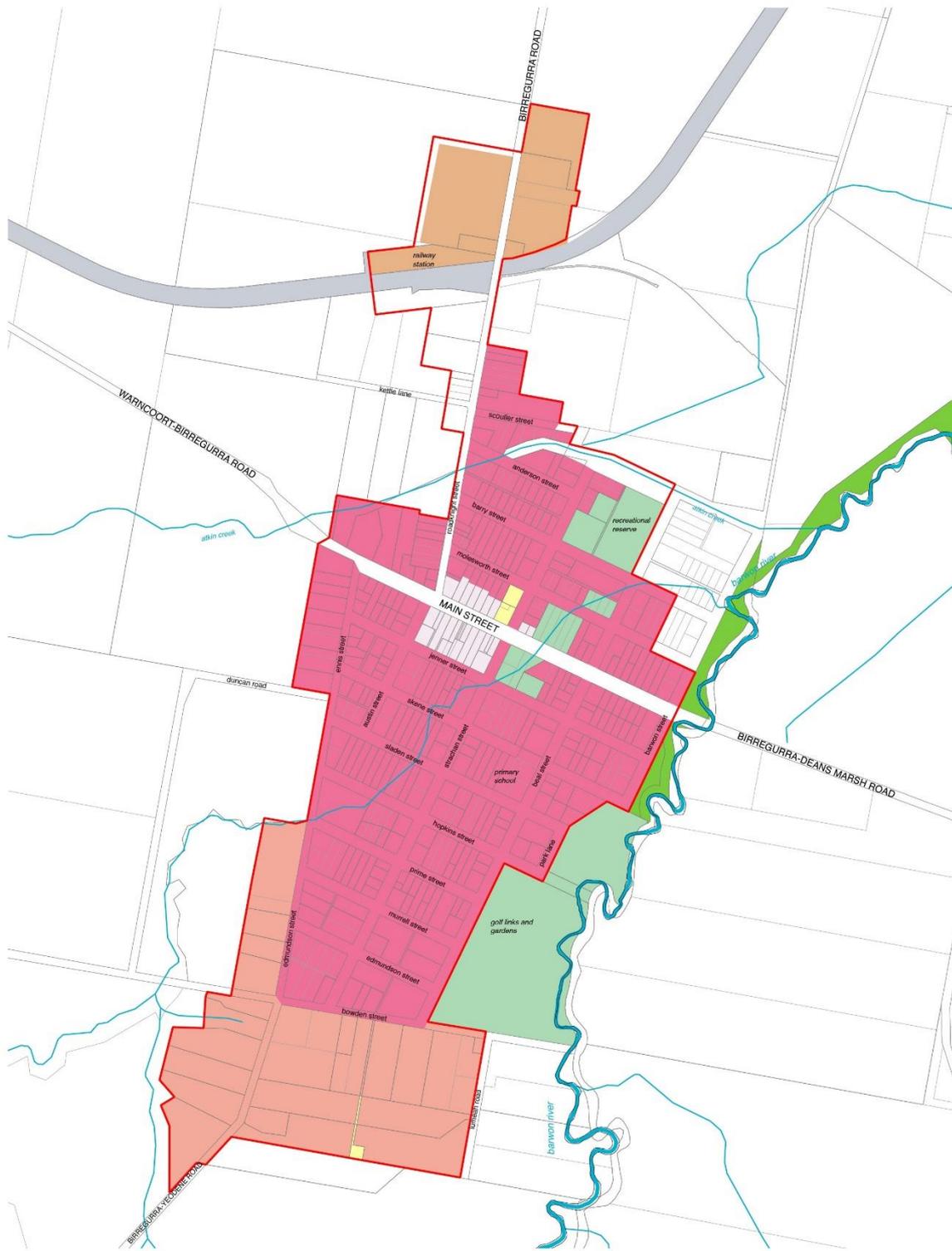
1. Existing vacant lots.
2. Potential for subdivision of vacant lots.
3. Developed lots which may have capacity to accommodate further subdivision suitable for an additional dwelling/s.

The following criteria are applied to the capacity estimate:

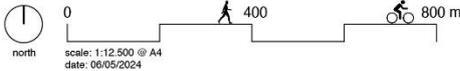
- Only land within the Township Zone (TZ) or Low Density Residential Zone (LDRZ) is included.
- Where land is partly within the TZ and partly within the Commercial 1 Zone (C1Z), only the portion of the land within the TZ will be assessed for its potential to accommodate new dwellings.
- In general, it is assumed that all vacant residential lots will be able to support a dwelling.
- Vacant lots that are part of a larger landholding will be counted individually. However, it is recognised that delivery of this type of land is much less certain, particularly where the landholding contains an existing dwelling.
- Vacant lots where building approvals have been issued for new dwellings in recent years will not be considered part of the vacant lot supply.
- Where existing developed lots are affected by different minimum lot size provisions, additional capacity will only be considered for the area where no existing development is located.
- Subdivision potential is considered at a broad level, primarily based on land size. However, it is emphasised that there are many factors influencing the ability of a land parcel to support a dwelling(s) so the following further constraints are taken into account:
  - Land affected by the Floodway Overlay (FO) has been excluded (with the exception of 5 new lots recently created in Barry Street).
  - Land affected by the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay has generally been excluded, unless only a very small portion of the land is affected by the overlay.
  - Land affected by the Erosion Management Overlay has generally been excluded, unless only a very small portion of the land is affected by the overlay.

(Note: This does not mean these sites could not support a dwelling or further subdivision. However, as the land is constrained, determining the development potential of these sites would require a level of analysis beyond the scope of this report.)

Figure 21 Birregurra Township Zone Map



**Birregurra**  
structure plan review



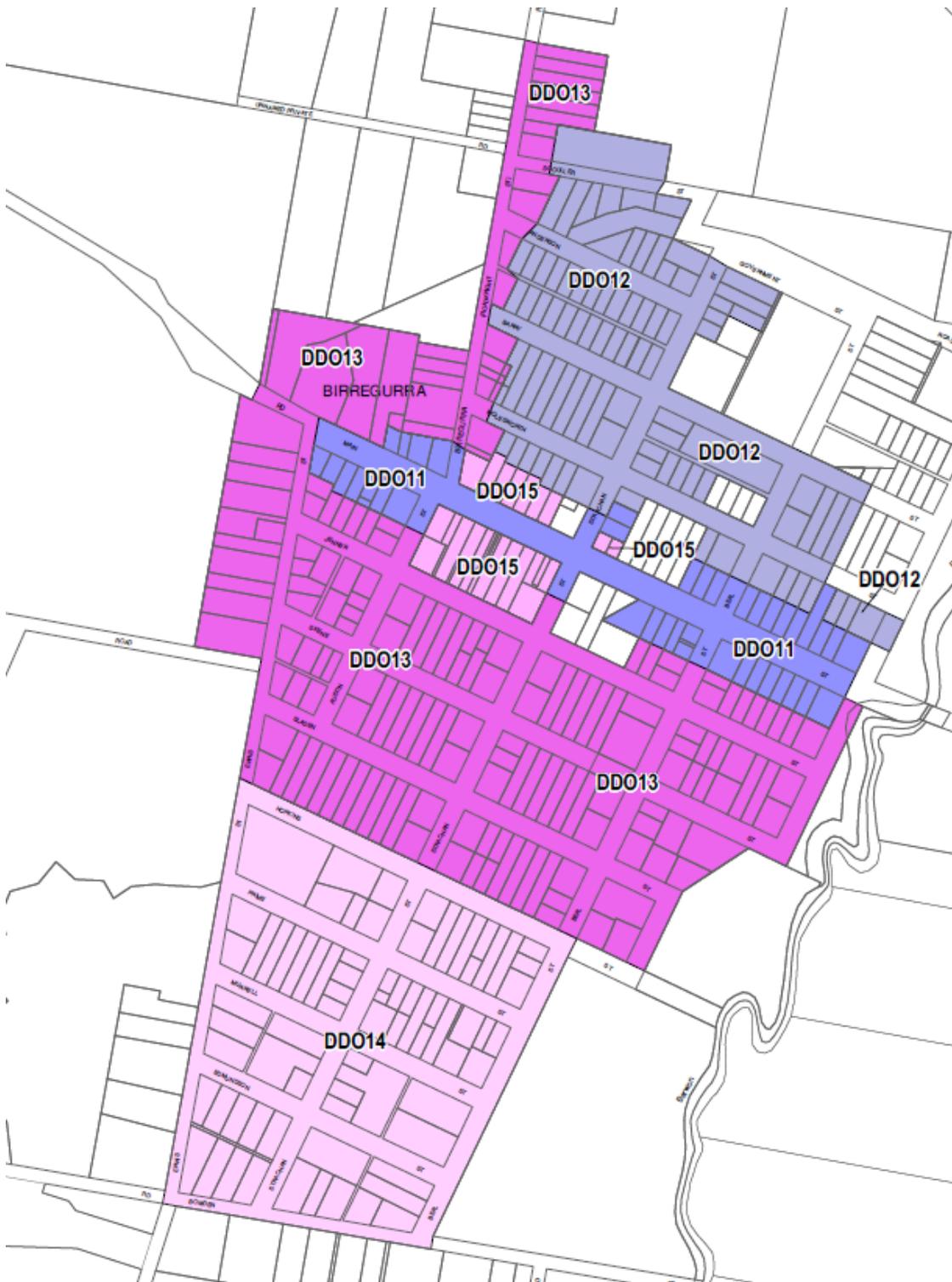
**Zones**

- |                                                                                          |                                                                                          |                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|  LDRZ |  PCRZ |  IN1Z |
|  TZ   |  C1Z  |  TRZ  |
|  PPRZ |  PUZ  |                                                                                            |

Source: Spatial Investigators, July 2024

Minimum lot sizes for further subdivision are set out in schedules to the Design and Development Overlay (DDO) in the Planning Scheme. Figure 22 shows the DDO schedule areas, which correlate to the 'Preferred Neighbourhood Character Areas' set out in the Birregurra Neighbourhood Character Study 2012.

Figure 22 Birregurra Residential Design and Development Overlay Schedule Areas

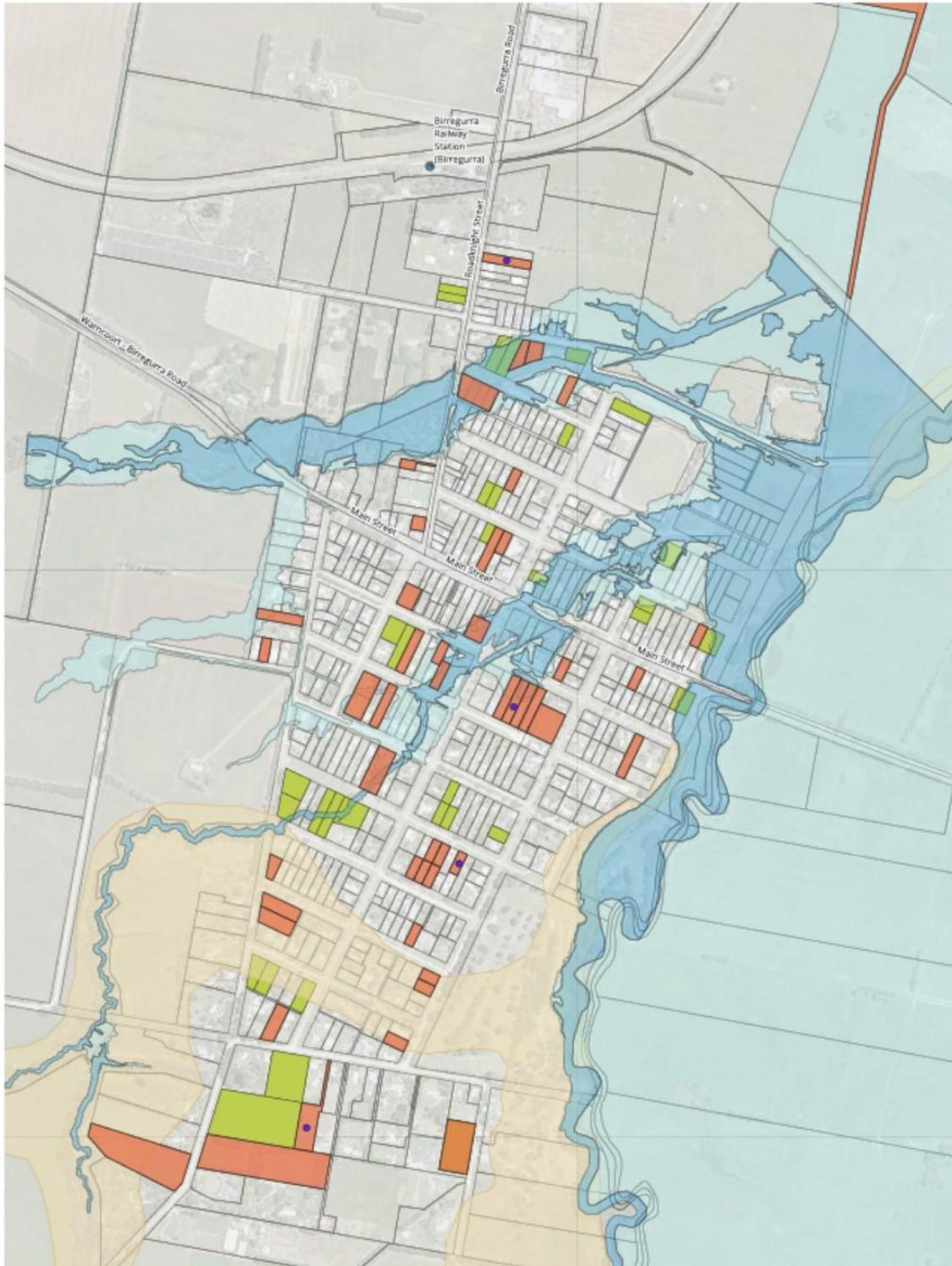


Source: Colac Otway Planning Scheme, June 2024

## Vacant Land Capacity

Figure 23 shows the distribution of vacant lots across Birregurra.

Figure 23 Vacant Lots - Birregurra June 2024



**Birregurra**  
Vacant Land Analysis

- Building Permit Issued
- Vacant Lot
- Vacant Lot (part of larger landholding)
- Flood Overlay
- Land Subject to Inundation Overlay
- Erosion Management Overlay

Source: Colac Otway Shire Council, June 2024

Table 8 shows the number of existing vacant residential lots in Birregurra. It also calculates the potential number of new residential lots that could be created if these lots were further subdivided having regard to the specified criteria.

*Table 8 Potential for Residential Lots - Vacant Lots*

<b>Preferred Character Area</b>	<b>Minimum lot size (under the DDO schedule)</b>	<b>A. Existing vacant lots</b>	<b>B. Potential for new vacant lots (if further subdivided)</b>	<b>Total = A+B</b>
<b>DDO11 – Area A Main Street</b>	1,000sqm	3	0	3
<b>DDO12 – Area B North East</b>	700sqm	22	2	24
<b>DDO13 – Area C Roadknight St Entry &amp; South of Main St</b>	1,000sqm	24	13	37
<b>DDO14 – Area D South</b>	1,000sqm	21	2	23
<b>LDRZ</b>	4,000sqm (no reticulated sewer)	5	8	13
<b>Total</b>		<b>75</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Colac Otway Shire Council mapping and Conway Planning

## Developed Land Capacity

Figure 24 shows all developed lots based on land size alone that have potential for further subdivision under the relevant DDO schedule. Not all of these lots will have potential for further subdivision because many factors influence whether a parcel of land can be subdivided. Several constraints have been mapped, including overlays based on flood risk and the Erosion Management Overlay (EMO).

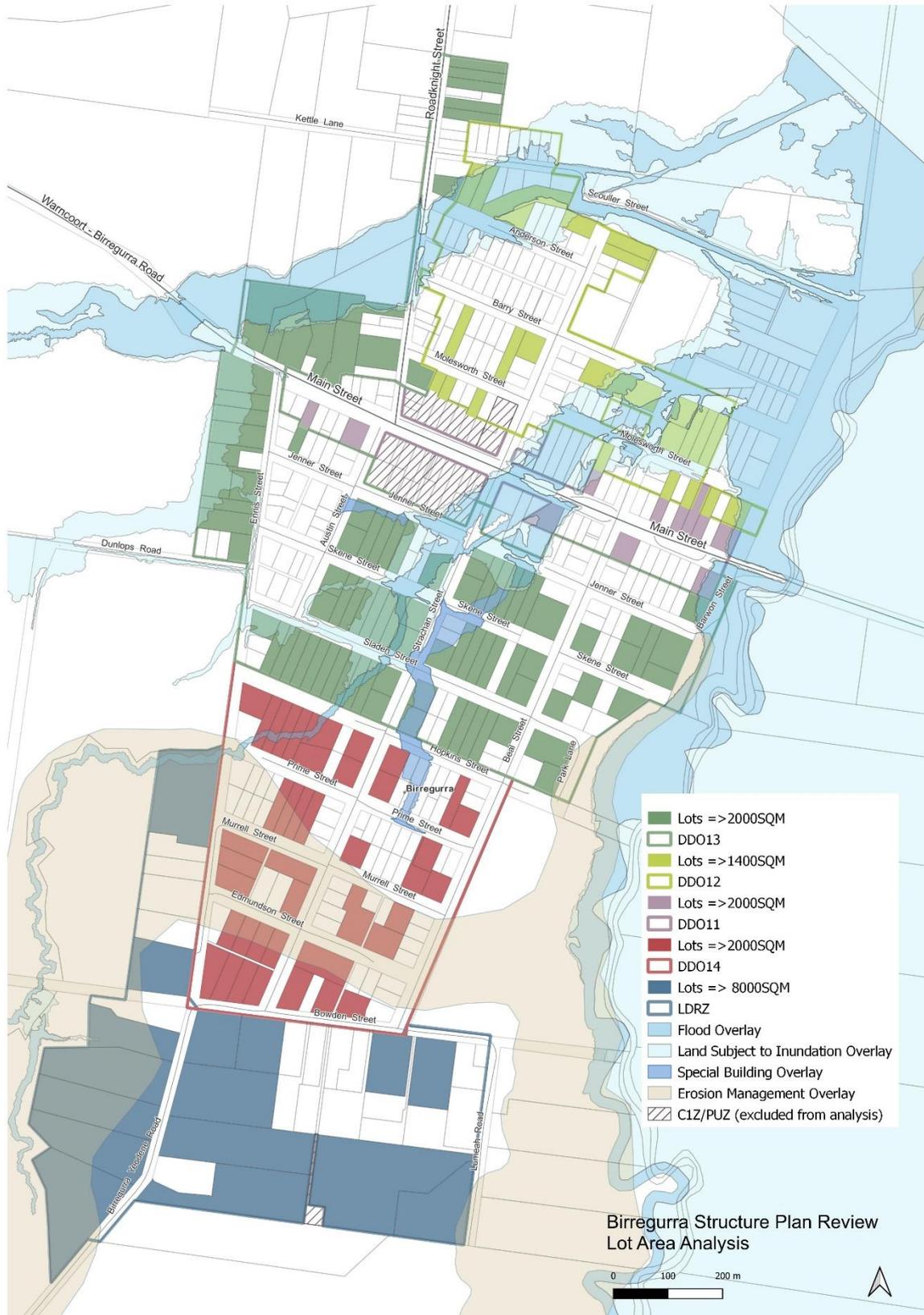
Table 9 estimates the potential for further subdivision of developed lots. The general assumptions set out at the start of this Chapter apply. In addition, aerial photography was reviewed to further refine the assessment of the potential for subdivision. The analysis does not include the potential for a second small dwelling (as defined in the Planning Scheme) or medium density style development. These are discussed separately.

*Table 9 Potential for Further Subdivision of Developed Lots*

<b>Preferred Character Area</b>	<b>Minimum lot size</b>	<b>Existing developed lots with at least twice the minimum lot size in land area</b>	<b>Potential number of new residential lots (factoring in constraints outlined in this report)</b>
<b>DDO11 – Area A Main Street</b>	1,000sqm	11	2
<b>DDO12 – Area B North East</b>	700sqm	24	16
<b>DDO13 – Area C Roadknight St Entry &amp; South of Main St</b>	1,000sqm	91	49
<b>DDO14 – Area D South</b>	1,000sqm	41	22
<b>LDRZ</b>	4,000sqm (where no reticulated sewer)	12	15
<b>Potential number of new residential lots</b>			<b>104</b>

Source: Colac Otway Shire Council mapping and Conway Planning

Figure 24 Lot Analysis by Land Size



Source: Colac Otway Shire Council, July 2024

## Medium Density Development

The 2013 Structure Plan also estimated the potential number of dwellings which could be created through medium density style development based on minimum lot size areas in the *Neighbourhood Character Study 2012*. The DDO schedules specify that the minimum lot size for multi dwelling developments are as follows:

**DDO11** – Area A Main Street 500sqm

**DDO12** – Area B North East 500sqm

**DDO13** – Area C Roadknight St Entry & South of Main St 600sqm

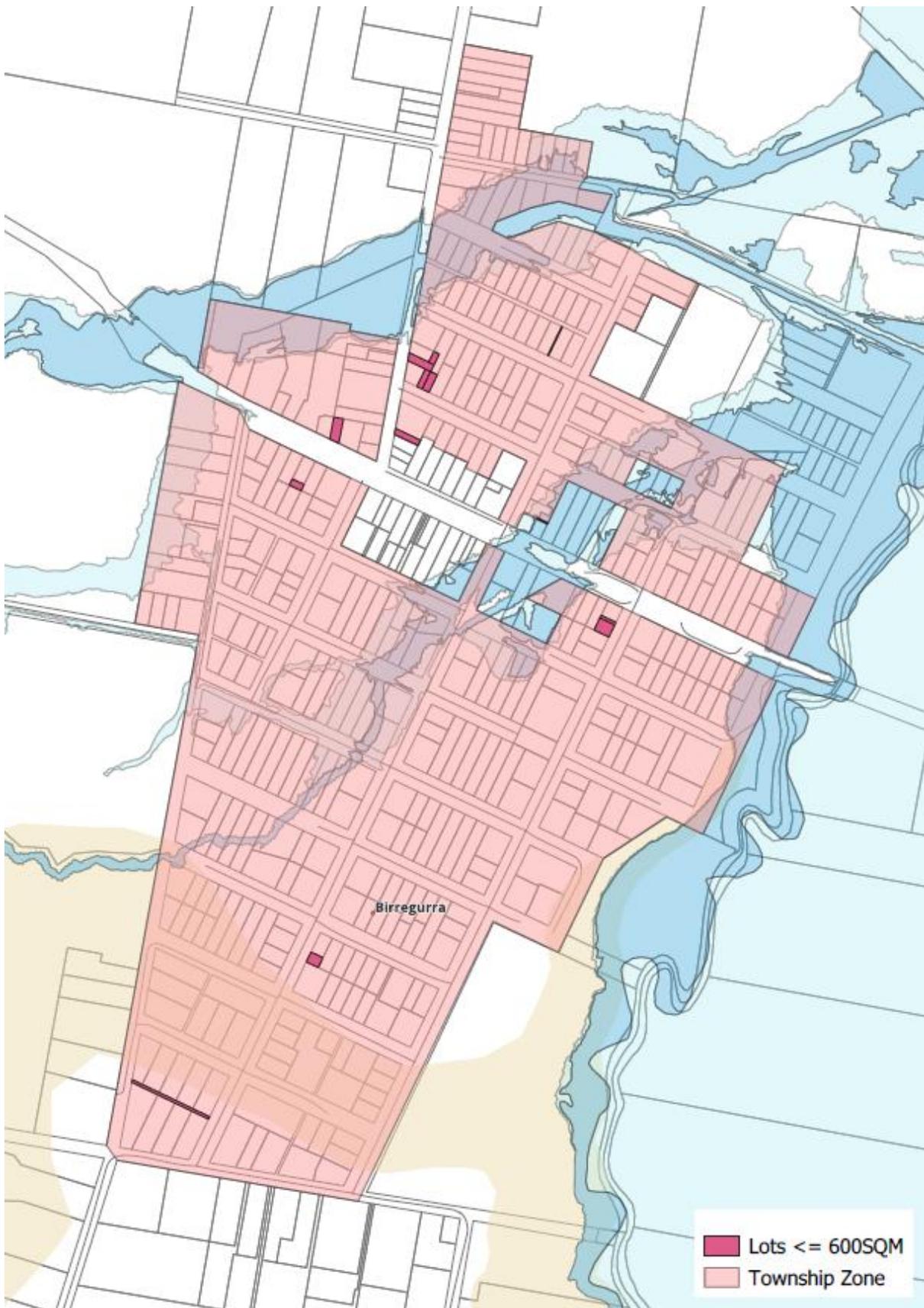
A similar provision does not apply to land affected by the DDO14 or in the LDRZ.

The 2013 Structure Plan estimated potential for 303 new dwellings based on medium density housing provisions to the year 2031. A review of planning approvals data over the past 10 years has found that there has been negligible take up of this style of development.

Figure 25 shows the number of lots 600sqm or less in area across the Township Zone in Birregurra.

There has not been sufficient development of medium density style housing in Birregurra to make a reasonable estimate of how much of this type of development might occur in the next 10-15 years. It is recognised however, that medium density provisions do enable further opportunities for new housing beyond the estimates in the land supply analysis.

Figure 25 Residential Lots 600sqm or less



Source: Colac Otway Shire Council, May 2024

## Second Small Dwellings

In late 2023, the Victorian Government introduced changes to the Victoria Planning Provisions, all planning scheme in Victoria and the Building Regulations 2018 to make it easier to build a small second home on a developed residential lot. In most cases, a planning permit will no longer be required to build a second small home up to 60sqm. It cannot be subdivided or sold off separately from the main home. It is unknown what the take up of this dwelling type is likely to be, and subdivision is not permitted so it is not included in the land supply estimate. However, it does provide some opportunity for new housing and particularly for a diversity of housing.



Source: GharPedia.com

## Overall Residential Land Capacity

Table 10 shows the total potential residential land supply by combining the vacant lot and developed lot estimates.

*Table 10 Total Residential Land Capacity*

Preferred Character Area	Potential land supply		Total potential residential land supply
	Vacant lots	Developed lots	
<b>DDO11 – Area A Main Street</b>	3	2	5
<b>DDO12 – Area B North East</b>	24	16	40
<b>DDO13 – Area C Roadknight St Entry &amp; South of Main St</b>	37	49	86
<b>DDO14 – Area D South</b>	23	22	45
<b>LDRZ</b>	13	15	28
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>204</b>

Source: Colac Otway Shire Council mapping and Conway Planning

While the total number of lots with potential capacity for new dwellings can be calculated, it is more difficult to estimate the probable realisation rate, i.e. when the land may become 'market ready'. This is particularly the case for small scale infill development where there are many different landowners and individual lots with different site constraints.

Not all of the potential land will become available for dwelling development in the next 10-15 years. Therefore, an estimate is made of the development take up rate to determine potential land supply.

The 2013 Structure Plan estimated a development take up rate of 75% for vacant lots and 25% for developed land. These rates are quite high for small residential infill development. However, Birregurra has been operating under a policy of urban containment (i.e. no greenfield subdivision has been permitted) and consequently there has been more pressure for infill.

If a policy of urban containment continues to be followed and the same development take up rate is adopted, the overall residential land supply would be as follows:

*Table 11 Estimated Residential Land Supply Scenario 1*

<b>Potential residential land supply – higher take up rate</b>		<b>Estimated potential residential land supply within the next 10-15 year period</b>
<b>Vacant lots (75% likely to be developed)</b>	<b>Existing lots with dwellings (25% likely to be developed)</b>	
75	26	101

Source: Colac Otway Shire Council mapping and Conway Planning

A more conservative development take up rate is also considered, which factors in individual landowners not wanting to split up larger landholdings. If the rate for vacant lots was in the order of 50% and existing developed lots at 10%, the following potential is identified:

*Table 12 Estimated Residential Land Supply Scenario Two*

<b>Potential land supply – lower take up rate</b>		<b>Estimated potential residential land supply within the next 10-15 year period</b>
<b>Vacant lots (50% likely to be developed)</b>	<b>Existing lots with dwellings (10% likely to be developed)</b>	
50	10	60

Source: Colac Otway Shire Council mapping and Conway Planning

Residential land capacity is estimated to be between 60 and 101 lots over the next 10-15 years.

## Future Residential Land Supply

Table 13 outlines the potential residential land supply over a 10-15 year period under a range of different scenarios.

*Table 13 Potential Years' Supply of Residential Land*

	No. dwellings required per annum	Scenario 1 - Residential lot supply (higher take up rate)	Available supply in Years	Scenario 2 - Residential lot supply (lower take up rate)	Available supply in Years
<b>Low Growth</b>	5	101	20.2 years	60	12 years
<b>Medium Growth</b>	10	101	10.1 years	60	6 years
<b>High Growth</b>	15	101	6.7 years	60	4 years

Source: Conway Planning

This analysis shows that there is limited potential supply of vacant or developable residential land to accommodate future demand.

It does not include the potential for in fill medium density development or the likely take up rate for a second small dwelling. These options do allow some further opportunity for new housing supply but are unlikely to make a substantial contribution in the short to medium term and have not been utilised to date.

On this basis, a case could be made to augment supply. At a policy level, this can be done in two ways. The first is to rezone greenfield land for residential purposes and the second is to increase density permitted within the existing town. Given that there has been little take up of medium density provisions to date, it is unlikely that the second option would result in much more supply in the short to medium term.

This challenge should be explored with the community.

## 6. Birregurra Structure Plan Update – Other Matters

This chapter considers other matters raised in the Birregurra Structure Plan 2013 and provides some commentary on achievements since the Plan was adopted. It also raises some ongoing or emerging challenges that may need further consideration.

### 6.1 Commercial Town Centre

The core town centre of Birregurra has been rezoned to the Commercial 1 Zone (C1Z) in line with the recommendations of 2013 Structure Plan. This has assisted in reinforcing the role of Main Street as the retail heart of the town and concentrated commercial uses along Main Street between Austin Street and Birregurra Park.

The Birregurra General Store remains the focal point for the town centre, alongside the Royal Mail Hotel, the post office and other cafes and speciality stores. Strategies in the 2013 Structure Plan included the support of commercial activities which build on Birregurra’s rural township character such as arts and craft, health and well being and food related tourism. These sorts of uses are evident in Birregurra, supported by the Birregurra Sunday Market held between November and May.

The town does not yet support a population or catchment to support a supermarket and the General Store continues to fulfil the role of providing food essentials.

It will be important to ensure that residential uses do not become a primary or dominant use in this precinct to preserve the ability for the commercial offering to expand as the town grows. The C1Z restricts the style of residential development permitted in the zone, and coupled with the design standards in the DDO15, should be sufficient to minimise residential intrusion into the commercial area.

New development is guided by the neighbourhood character provisions set out in the DDO15, which have ensured the retention of a low rise character that respects the heritage context of this area. Signage has not become an issue.



## 6.2 Industry

The 2013 Structure Plan set out the following objectives for industry in Birregurra:

- To encourage local jobs where possible.
- To protect the ongoing integrity of industrial activities in the Industrial 1 Zone to the north of town.
- To encourage existing industry in Molesworth Street and future industrial uses that might seek to establish in Birregurra to locate in the industrial area to the north of the town.

The industrial area has been further consolidated since the 2013 Structure Plan with land adjacent to the Birregurra Railway Station rezoned to Industrial 1 Zone. Design guidelines recommended for the industrial area have been included as decision guidelines in the Planning Scheme.

There has been little activity in the industrial estate which has required planning permission over the past 10 years. Some permits have been issued more recently for new development in the estate which is positive for economic growth in the area. Permits have included landscaping and other design requirements to ensure new development is screened or consistent with Birregurra's rural character where visible from public viewing points, particularly along the entry to town and from the Birregurra Railway Station. The developments are currently under construction and appear to sit well within the industrial area.

The established businesses in Molesworth Street continue to provide an important service for the town and have not sought to expand beyond their current site.

It would be appropriate to continue to direct new industrial business to the industrial area in future to ensure uses are appropriately separated from sensitive land uses such as residential land.

The Birregurra Transfer Station (municipal tip) is located outside the industrial area and to the north east of town. The 2013 Structure Plan included a strategy to "*ensure sensitive uses do not encroach into the Birregurra Transfer Station's EPA recommended buffer*". The buffer was shown as a 500 metre area encircling the transfer station on the 'land use and activity' map in the 2013 Structure Plan report but was not included in the Structure Plan Map that was introduced into the Planning Scheme. There was no ability within the planning system at that time to introduce this buffer area in any other manner. Thus, the situation has arisen whereby a higher level of residential density within Character Precinct Area A is encouraged but it is noted that part of this area is also within the 500 metre buffer area. It may be that the transfer station is not of a size or operates at a level of activity that would cause any concern in this regard, but it is a matter that should be given further consideration as part of the revised Structure Plan. Similar consideration should be given to the industrial area to protect the ongoing integrity of existing uses.

Since 2013, the State government has commissioned further work into industrial land use compatibility with sensitive uses. The Buffer Area Overlay has been introduced as a planning tool which can be used in certain circumstances to prevent further encroachment and intensification of incompatible use and development within the buffer areas of industrial uses which may have potential off-site amenity impacts. However, policy and zoning are still the primary and preferred tools for managing land use compatibility in the planning system.

## 6.3 Landscape and Environment

The 2013 Structure Plan set out the following objectives for landscape and the environment in Birregurra:

- To protect main road entrances to Birregurra from inappropriate and unplanned development.
- To protect key views and vistas to the rural surrounds.
- To encourage the retention of trees where possible and the planting of new canopy trees and understory vegetation.
- To preserve and enhance the Barwon River corridor and connected waterways.
- To recognise flood risks associated with the floodplain of the Barwon River and tributaries.

Strategies to achieve the objective to protect the main road entrances included retaining the existing Farming Zone on main road approaches to town and protecting landscape character and view lines along these roads. The Farming Zone has been maintained along Main Street east and west of the town. These approaches to town continue to exhibit a rural, vegetated character.

The Farming Zone has also been maintained on the third primary entrance, which is Roadknight Street, between the industrial area and the Township Zone. A number of new residential dwellings have been approved along Roadknight Street between the Railway Station and Scouller Street, both in the Farming Zone on the west side and Township Zone on the east side. A visual inspection of this entrance found that it still has a strong landscape character and vegetated appearance, particularly on the Farming Zone land where development is generally required to be setback a greater distance from the road frontage. The new dwellings along Roadknight Street on the east side, north of Scouller Street, provide a clear delineation as to where the residential area begins and new development has been low scale and consistent with Birregurra's rural township character.

A strong landscape character continues to be evident across Birregurra as outlined in Chapter 6.3. The application of the DDO and VPO has played an important role in protecting canopy trees and achieving this objective.



**Town Entry from the east**



**Town Entry from the west**

## Open Space

The 2013 Structure Plan recommended that as infill development and subdivision occurred along the unnamed waterway running south-west to north-east through the middle of town, public open space should be required to develop a liner shared pedestrian / cycling path. This potential future open space link is shown on the Birregurra Structure Plan which has been incorporated into the Planning Scheme. The potential link affects numerous privately owned properties, but it is understood that Council considers it a long term goal and a recent subdivision in Barry Street has included a reserve of public open space which could form a critical part of this link north of Main Street.

Regarding the Barwon River corridor and flood risk objectives, Council commissioned a flood and drainage strategy in 2021 which aimed to improve the understanding of flooding in Birregurra and management of flood risk. The recommendations of the study included updating flood mapping in the Planning Scheme and the Municipal Emergency Management Plan. A planning scheme amendment was approved in 2022 which implemented the new mapping. This new information is critically important in considering future housing opportunities in Birregurra.

The Corangamite Catchment Management Authority (Corangamite CMA) is the statutory authority responsible for the protection and improvement of the region's water bodies and their catchment areas. Over many years the Corangamite CMA has been working alongside the Upper Barwon Landcare Network, Birregurra Landcare Group and local landowners to improve the health of the Barwon River at Birregurra, particularly through weed removal and re-establishment of indigenous vegetation.

## 6.4 Access and Movement

The 2013 Structure Plan set out the following objectives for access and movement in Birregurra:

- To ensure roads provide safe access.
- To ensure roads are designed to provide for all road users.
- To ensure road upgrades retain and enhance the character of Birregurra.
- To provide safe and improved opportunities for walking and cycling throughout the town.
- To encourage walkable neighbourhood design in new developments.
- To maintain the informal nature of road reserves throughout Birregurra.
- To ensure appropriate provision of public transport.
- To provide a shared path to establish a walking / cycling connection to the railway station.
- To encourage way finding treatments to improve legibility and safety of the township.
- To encourage public art to create visual cues for pedestrians, cyclists and others.

Many of these objectives are generic road safety objectives that apply throughout Victoria. The 2013 Structure Plan included several strategies intended to facilitate the achievement of these objectives.

### Road Network

There has been minimal change in the road network in the last decade. Many of the strategies in the 2013 Structure Plan related to new road and street design that might occur with new subdivision. Given subdivision has primarily been small scale over this time there hasn't been new roads created, although some subdivisions have included minor upgrades to accessways or sections of road near the subject land.

Strachan Street has been the subject of numerous concerns over many years due to its degraded state. It functions as the main collector road from residential areas north and south to the town centre and Main Street. It is understood that Council has recently sought tenders for the reconstruction of Strachan Street, between Main Street and Barry Street and plans to complete works later in 2024.

The 2013 Structure Plan included a strategy to maintain the informal nature of roads by way of open grass verges and swale drains but recommended new roads should have a bitumen seal. The assessment in the more recent Birregurra Flood and Drainage Strategy, 2018 also highlighted the benefits of sealed roads in terms of reducing total suspended solids (e.g. sediment run off from gravel road surfaces).

Reducing the speed limit on Main Street to 40km/hr was suggested for further investigation in the 2013 Structure Plan. Since that time, it is noted that the State road authority has reduced the speed limit to 50 km/hr through town.

## Walking and Cycling

Strategies for walking and cycling in Birregurra included:

- Introducing shared pedestrian / cycle paths on key streets and through a future open space corridor connecting the township with Barwon River.
- Supporting the Birregurra-Forrest Tiger Rail Trail project.
- Improving the pedestrian and cycling environment generally through infrastructure such as seating, lighting, rubbish bins, bike racks.
- Encouraging the use of exposed aggregate for new footpaths to best reflect the rural character of town.

The key achievement in this space has been the construction of a footpath along Roadknight Street, between Main Street and the Railway Station. It was constructed with a width of 1.5 metres (pedestrian only) due to funding constraints. Anecdotally there has recently been strong interest from the community for additional footpath provision in Birregurra, particularly to accommodate young families with prams and young children on bikes.



In 2014 Council completed investigations into the feasibility and construction of the 'Tiger Rail Trail from Forrest to Birregurra' which would follow the alignment of the former Cape Otway Forrest Railway line which opened in 1891. Due to the complexity of establishing an agreed alignment for the proposed 'Tiger Rail Trail' and following a detailed analysis of the issues and opportunities for the proposed shared trail, Council determined not to carry out the feasibility study for the originally proposed construction of a rail trail between Forrest and Birregurra, and instead directed that a limited feasibility study for the extension of the existing Forrest shared trail to Barwon Downs be undertaken. The trail to Birregurra is no longer being pursued by Council.

Wayfinding strategies were also recommended for Birregurra including themed landscaping for key streets, heritage style lighting in Main Street and public art and street furniture that links key elements of town together.

Some progress has been made in this space. Council has begun the first phase of a Street Tree Planting program, which includes Birregurra. Some street tree planting has already been completed and planning for the next round of planting is underway for streets including Beal, Skene, Sladen and Jenner Streets.

The Birregurra Heritage Walk beginning in the Birregurra Park on Main Street does have some wayfinding signage. The community has recently applied for funding to upgrade signage associated with the trail.

## Public Transport

The frequency of public transport train services between Birregurra and Geelong has increased substantially since 2013 at which time there were only three services per day. There are now 11 weekday services from Birregurra to Geelong and 6 return services. On weekends there are 6 services to Geelong and 4 return services.

There is a bus service between Colac and Apollo Bay on Wednesdays which stops in Birregurra with 2 return services.

During the summer peak there is a bus service between Colac and Lorne which stops in Birregurra providing 5 return services each day.

## 6.5 Community Services & Facilities

The 2013 Structure Plan set out the following objectives for community services and facilities in Birregurra:

- To provide a mix of community and health related services and facilities within Birregurra.
- To consolidate civic, community and health facilities in a community node on the north-east edge of the town centre.

Civic, health and community facilities continue to be located in the community node identified in the 2013 Structure Plan. The recommendation to undertake a detailed master plan for the community node has not been pursued. Suggestions for a community garden or retirement living in Molesworth Street have also not been pursued.

## 6.6 Recreation & Open Space

The 2013 Structure Plan set out the following objectives for recreation and open space in Birregurra:

- To provide a range of passive and active recreation opportunities within the township.
- To establish a connected network of accessible public open space and recreation facilities.
- To recognise the Birregurra Recreation Reserve as the primary recreation and sporting precinct in the township.

At the time of the 2013 Structure Plan, the Birregurra Recreation Reserve Master Plan 2012 had recently been adopted. The Master Plan was to guide the future development of the Reserve's infrastructure to better meet community needs. Council supported the process by providing a community grant towards the project which was matched by the Reserve Committee's own funds. Various actions have been implemented including redevelopment of the tennis/netball courts, including installation of compliant match standard lighting for both tennis and netball and upgraded sports oval lighting to match standard 150 lux.

As noted in Chapter 7.3, Council continues to work towards the long term goal of an open space link along the unnamed waterway extending from the Barwon River in the north west of town to the south east. The section from Main Street to the north east will almost be complete with land transferring to Council as part of a recent subdivision in Barry Street.

## 6.7 Utilities

The 2013 Structure Plan set out the following objectives for physical services and utilities in Birregurra:

- To ensure an efficient and cost effective provision of physical infrastructure that addresses the ongoing needs of the community, while protecting the landscape and township character values of Birregurra.
- To ensure that necessary physical infrastructure is adequately funded and delivered in a timely fashion.

### Water and Sewer

Barwon Water are the agency responsible for sewerage and water provision in Birregurra. The town was connected to a reticulated sewerage system just prior to the preparation of the 2013 Structure Plan. More recently Barwon Water has commenced upgrading the town water supply through the construction of a new underground pipeline to connect Birregurra to the Colac water supply system. Barwon Water analysed the costs and benefits of upgrading the local treatment plan against construction of the new pipeline. The assessment found the benefits of the pipeline were more compelling and included:

- Increased water security for Birregurra without impacting Colac's water security.
- Fewer water quality risks and improved pressure.
- Reduced greenhouse gas emissions and water losses.
- Improved bushfire resilience.

- More affordable water supply.

Barwon Water has also been partnering with the Birregurra community to explore sustainable water use opportunities (refer also Chapter 3.3). To date the initiative has saved 38 million litres of water and reduced customer bills by \$81,000 since it was established in 2020<sup>14</sup>.

Colac Otway Shire Council is the agency responsible for drainage infrastructure. The 2013 Structure Plan noted that the existing local network was in poor condition. It recommended strategies to encourage consistency of drainage treatments for new development including optimising on-site stormwater collection and detention and use of Water Sensitive Urban Design (WSUD) where appropriate. In 2018, the State government introduced new initiatives into all planning schemes in Victoria (Amendment VC154) to enable the planning system to better manage water, stormwater and drainage in urban development. New subdivision and development in Birregurra is required to adhere to these policies.

Council commissioned the Birregurra Flood and Drainage Strategy in 2022 to further consider opportunities to manage stormwater quality. The Strategy noted that new developments are required to achieve Best Practice Environmental Management Guidelines (BPEMG) pollutant removal targets. As such, a range of WSUD options were investigated. It recommended that Council consider the outcomes of these assessments and consider options which might be progressed to further feasibility assessments subject to funding. To date options have not been further investigated.

## Power

Powercor is the agency responsible for electricity connection in Birregurra. Powercor will be consulted through this project to understand any issues relevant to future growth planning for Birregurra.

There is no reticulated gas network in Birregurra and it is noted that from January 2024, new gas connections for new dwellings, apartments and residential subdivisions are being phased out across Victoria.

## Telecommunications

Mobile phone service and internet provision has caused some concern in Birregurra over recent years in regard to coverage and speed. There have been a few applications for new telecommunications facilities, one of which was refused in Jenner Street due to potential impacts on the heritage values of the town centre. A separate facility was approved at an alternative location to improve services in the area.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.yoursay.barwonwater.vic.gov.au/birregurra/birregurra-community-and-barwon-water-celebrate-water-savings>, 2 May 2024

## 7. Issues & Opportunities

The policy of urban containment adopted by the 2013 Structure Plan has been very successful in promoting infill growth at a rate which has allowed the town to continue to grow in a modest, sustainable manner generally consistent with the preferred neighbourhood character. The following key directions of the 2013 Structure Plan have been achieved:

- Support a moderate rate of population growth and residential development over the next 20 years.
- Maintain the existing town boundary and encourage infill development to make efficient use of larger lots and the connection to the reticulated sewer system.
- Retain heritage places and consider opportunities to use heritage qualities to attract visitors.
- Consolidate the town centre and expand commercial offerings within the contained retail area.
- Retain the existing industrial area to the north and encourage new and expanded uses to locate in this area.
- Support planned improvements at the Birregurra Recreation Reserve.

Birregurra now has a new set of challenges to address. A summary of issues and opportunities for further exploration is presented overleaf.



## Challenges

- State growth projections for Colac Otway Shire are low
- Limited and reducing land supply
- Increasing property prices, declining housing affordability
- Increasing rents
- Little housing diversity
- Climate change pressures: warmer, drier, more extreme events (floods/bushfires)
- Ageing road infrastructure
- Limited footpath provision and an absence of cycling paths



## Strengths

- Country town character protected by planning provisions
- Vegetated landscape and open space
- Popular with families
- Strong demand for housing
- Tailored approach to density
- Active and interested community



## Opportunities

- Update the Birregurra Structure Plan to outline an approach to future growth that improves housing supply, affordability and diversity using a climate action lens (e.g. improve resilience to flooding and grassfire)
- Explore opportunities to augment housing supply through potential rezoning of greenfield land
- Refine neighbourhood character provisions to address issues raised in this report
- Explore active transport connections, particularly footpath provision, and develop an updated network plan

## Appendix 1 – 2013 Plan Implementation Table

No. / timeframe	Action	Responsibility	Completed? / Comment
1. Short term	Prepare an amendment to the Colac Otway Planning Scheme in order to implement the recommendations of this Structure Plan and the Birregurra Neighbourhood Character Study 2012.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Completed Planning Scheme Amendment C76.
2. Short Term	Establish an ongoing monitoring program to track the rate of residential development and subdivision occurring in Birregurra.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Not completed. Current review will consider rate of residential development and subdivision.
3. Short term	Prepare an integrated road and drainage strategy for Birregurra.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Partially completed A Flood and Drainage Strategy was prepared in 2022 and implemented via Planning Scheme Amendment C116.
4. Medium term	Undertake / facilitate the preparation of a master plan for the community node.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Not completed
5. Medium term	Undertake / facilitate a review of the capacity of Strachan Street as part of the 3-5 year Structure Plan Review.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Strachan Street, between Main Street and Barry Street, is currently being upgraded through a Council project funded by the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program (Federal Government Funding).
6. Medium term	Monitor population growth to determine if the need arises to undertake a recreation needs assessment to determine the appropriate provision of recreation facilities in Birregurra.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Not completed. Current review will consider population growth and its implications.

7. Medium term	Investigate the possibility of reducing the speed limit on Main Street to 40km/hr in the commercial core, between Roadknight Street and Strachan Streets, to improve community safety.	Vic Roads / Colac Otway Shire Council	Completed  Aa review was undertaken by Vic Roads. It determined to reduce the speed limit in this area to 50km/hr.
8. Long term	Prepare a wayfinding strategy for Birregurra.	Colac Otway Shire Council	Not completed.  The heritage trail does have wayfinding signage. Some of these signs are now in need of repair / upgrade. The Community has recently applied under the Tiny Towns Program to upgrade this signage.
9. Long term	Investigate the provision of an art gallery or space in Birregurra.  (Investigation / research only)	Colac Otway Shire Council	While a Council investigation into the provision of an art gallery in Birregurra has not occurred, a privately run art gallery has established in the Main Street, the Birregurra Gallery.
10. Long term	Pursue the establishment of a rail trail along the alignment of the former Birregurra-Forrest Tiger Rail Trail. A feasibility study is required to determine the viability of this project.	Colac Otway Shire Council	In 2014 Council completed investigations into the feasibility and construction of the 'Tiger Rail Trail from Forrest to Birregurra'. Due to the complexity of establishing an agreed alignment for the proposed 'Tiger Rail Trail' and following a detailed analysis of the issues and opportunities for the proposed shared trail, Council determined not to carry out the feasibility study for the originally proposed construction of a rail trail between Forrest and Birregurra, and instead directed that a limited feasibility study for the extension of the existing Forrest shared trail to Barwon Downs be undertaken. The trail to Birregurra is no longer being pursued by Council.

