



# **Birregurra Structure Plan Review**

**Summary Report –  
Issues & Opportunities**

19 July 2024



# Birregurra Structure Plan Review Project

Colac Otway Shire Council (Council) has commissioned a review of the *Birregurra Structure Plan 2013* (2013 Structure Plan).

The primary objectives of the Review project 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.

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.

The project will focus on identifying matters important for the development of future land use planning policies in the Colac Otway Planning Scheme. It will not explore the provision of other Council services, operations or management responsibilities in detail.

## 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.

## 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.

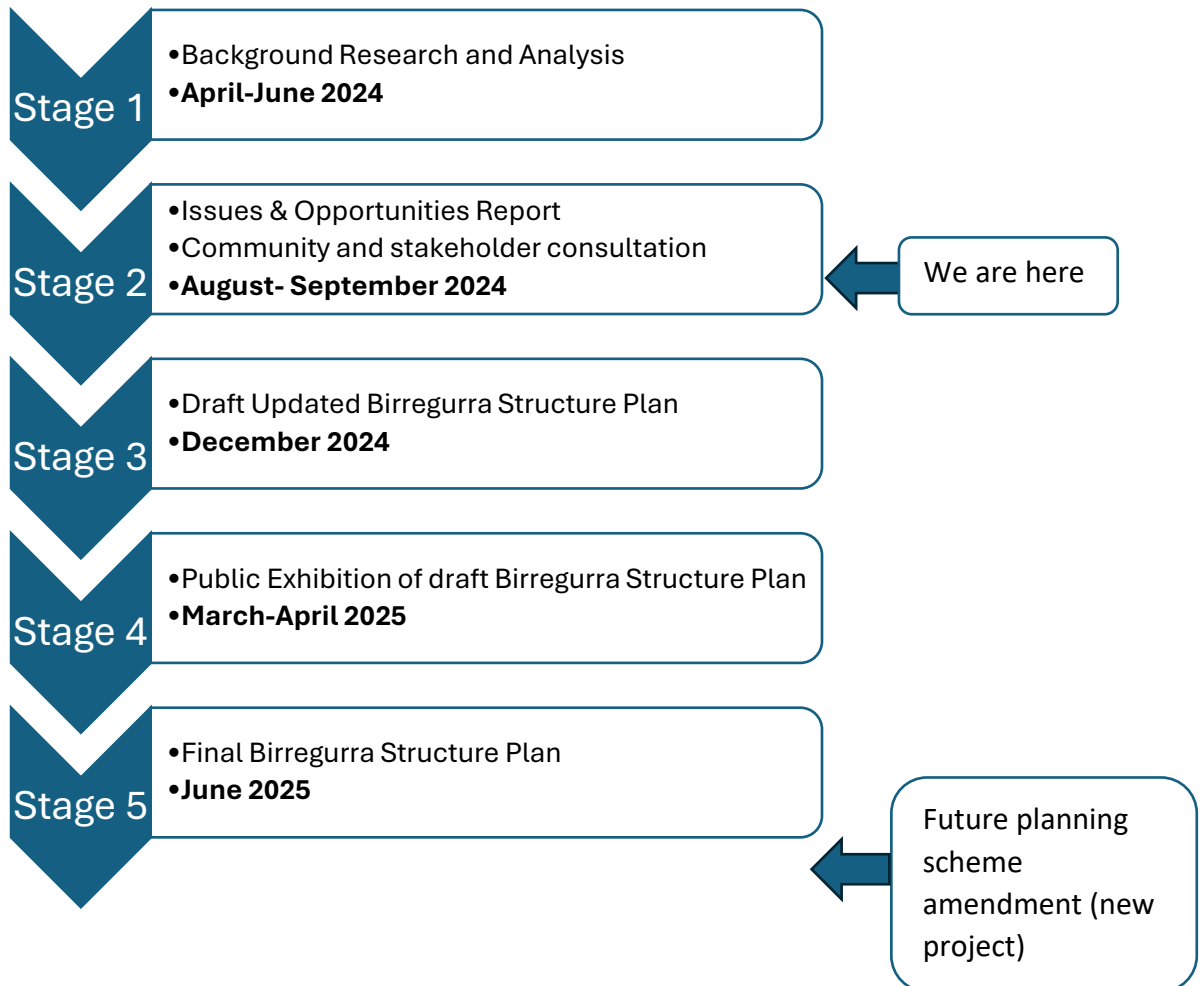




# Process and Timelines

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

## Birregurra Structure Plan Review Project Timelines

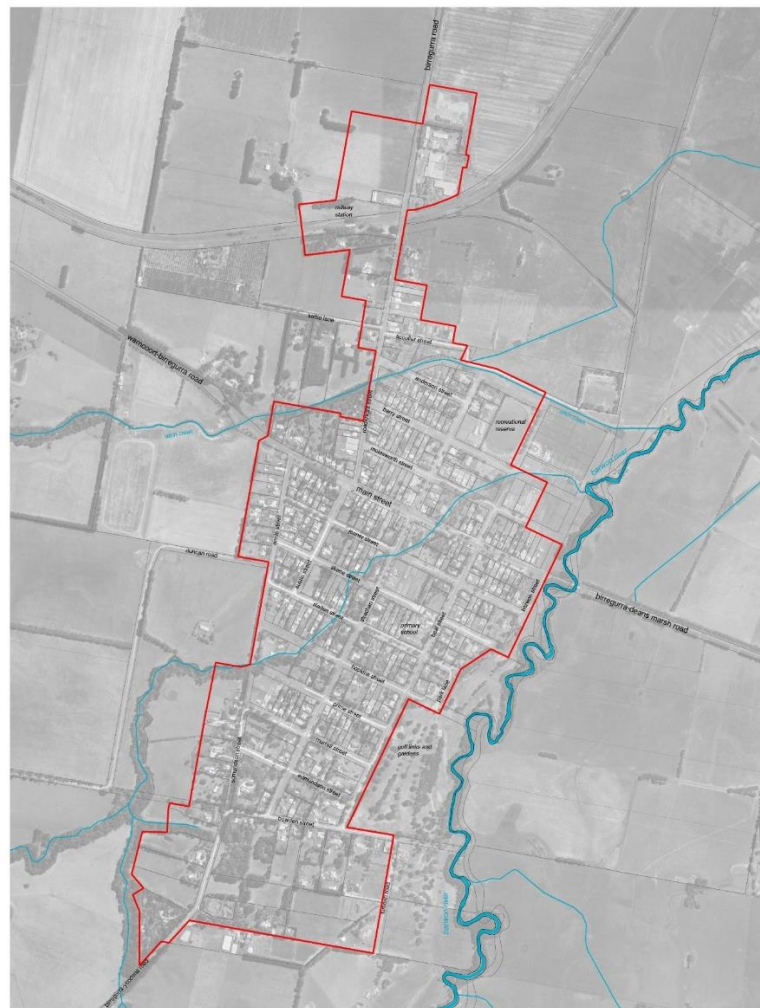


## Study Area

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.

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.



**Birregurra**  
structure plan review

Study Area Map  
Study Area

0 400 800 m  
scale: 1:12,500 @ A4  
date: 06/05/2024

Source: Spatial Investigators, May 2024

## Birregurra Structure Plan 2013

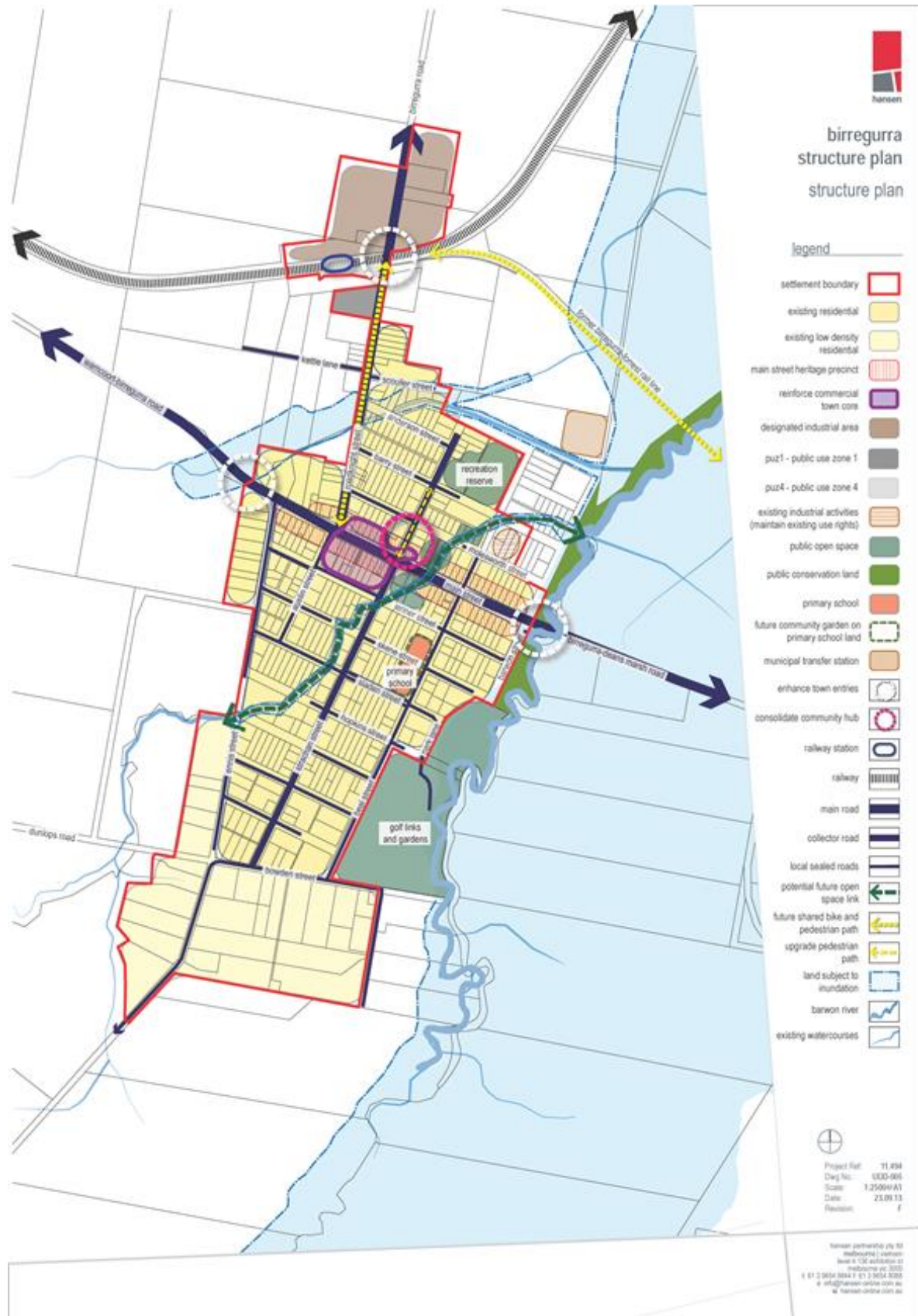
The 2013 Structure Plan is the leading planning document that currently guides the land use and development framework for the township of Birregurra and its surrounding areas.

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.

Key elements of the 2013 Structure Plan are shown on the Birregurra Structure Plan map, which was incorporated into the Colac Otway Planning Scheme in 2014.

# Birregurra Structure Plan Map



Source: Colac Otway Planning Scheme

Overall, it is considered that the policy of urban containment adopted by the 2013 Structure Plan has been very successful in promoting infill development 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:

KEY DIRECTION		UPDATE
1	Support a moderate rate of population growth and residential development over the next 20 years.	A moderate to high population growth rate was achieved in the 10 years between 2011 and 2021 Census (approx. 3.2% per annum)
2	Maintain the existing town boundary and encourage infill development to make efficient use of larger lots and the connection to the reticulated sewer system.	The town boundary as shown on the 2013 Structure Plan map was introduced into the Colac Otway Planning Scheme into 2014. Only infill subdivision has been permitted since this time.
3	Retain heritage places and consider opportunities to use heritage qualities to attract visitors.	The heritage character of Birregurra has been maintained.
4	Consolidate the town centre and expand commercial offerings within the contained retail area.	The town centre was rezoned for commercial use in 2014, consolidating its role as the primary retail centre.
5	Retain the existing industrial area to the north and encourage new and expanded uses to locate in this area.	New industrial development has located within the industrial area to the north of town.
6	Consider the opportunity to expand the community and health node to cater for the changing needs of a growing population.	Not progressed.
7	Establish a connected open space network.	Some progress has been made reserving land in Barry Street for the extension of a linear open space link.
8	Support planned improvements at the Birregurra Recreation Reserve.	Improvements made in accordance with the Birregurra Recreation Reserve Master Plan 2012.
9	Increase pedestrian activity through improved movement networks and pedestrian amenity.	New footpath along Roadknight Street connecting to the Birregurra Railway Station.



## Population Profile

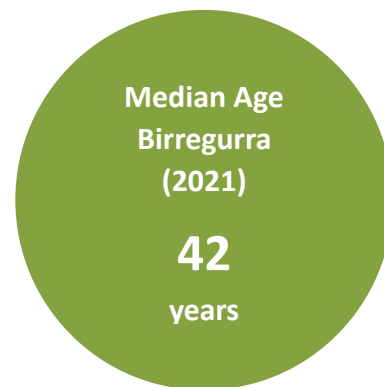


- The population of Birregurra was 628 in 2021, an increase of 153 people since 2011.
- The population in the wider Birregurra district was 942 in 2021

Birregurra has a slightly higher percentage of people within family age brackets, consistent with the perception of many families in the town. However, 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.

### Age Profile of Birregurra Residents

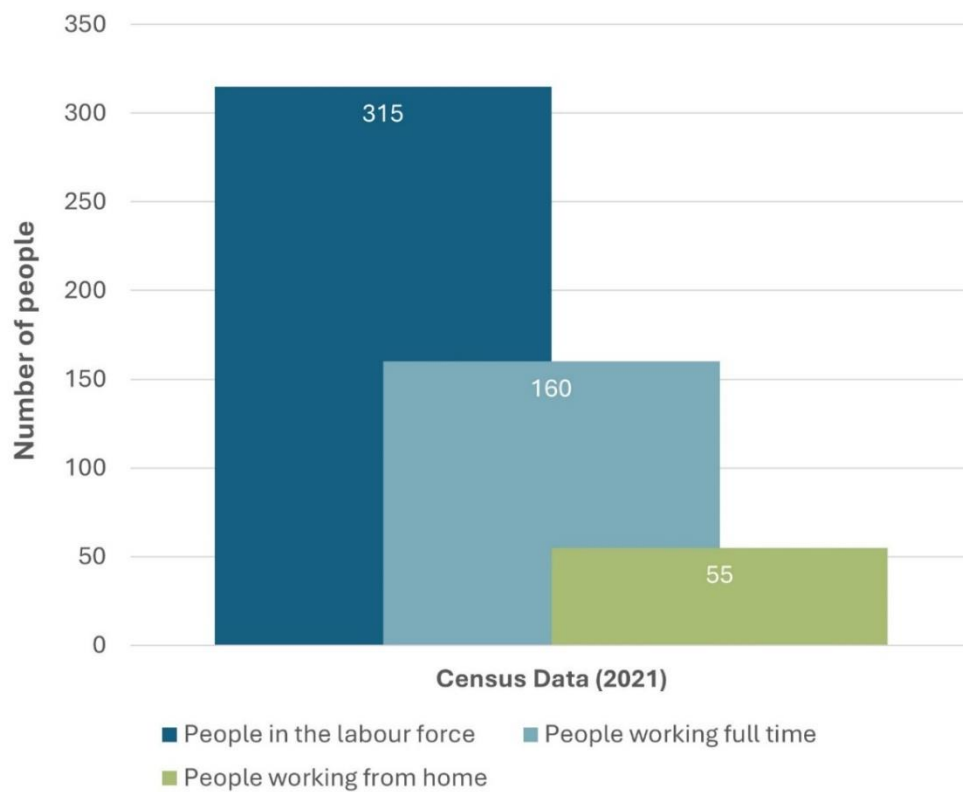
	Birregurra 2011	<b>Birregurra 2021</b>	Colac Otway Shire 2021
0-4 years	8%	<b>7%</b>	5%
5-19 years	19.3%	<b>18%</b>	17%
20-29 years	8.2%	<b>6%</b>	10.3%
35-54 years	32.6%	<b>34.6%</b>	29.2
55-74 years	25.5%	<b>28.5%</b>	28%
75+ years	6.4%	<b>6%</b>	10.2%



Source: ABS Census Data

In 2021, about half of the Birregurra population were in the workforce. 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 2021 Census. Anecdotally, we know that remote working is becoming much more popular and accepted today however, it is noted that the 2021 Census was during the COVID pandemic and this may have affected this figure.

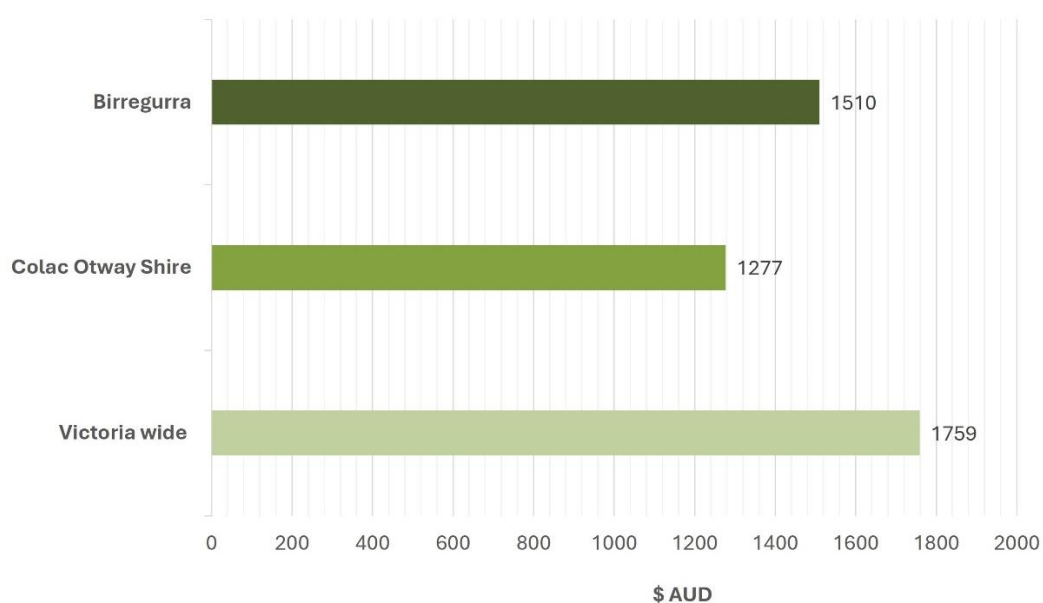
## Participation in the Labour Force 2021



Source: ABS Census data, Birregurra (L) 2021

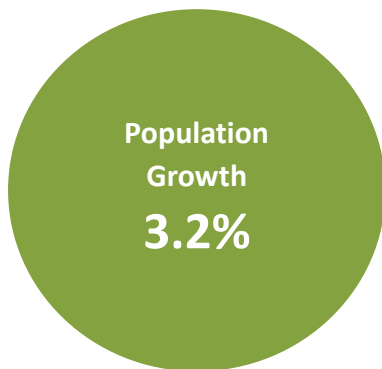
Household income data showed a median weekly income of \$1,510 for people for people living in Birregurra. This was less than the Victorian average but considerably more than the Colac Otway Shire average. A high percentage of the population had participated in voluntary work in 2021, considerably more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

## Median Weekly Household Income 2021



Source: ABS Census data, 2021

# Population Growth



- Birregurra has experienced a relatively high level of growth over the past 10 years, equivalent to around 3.22% per annum, significantly higher than the 10 years prior to the 2013 Structure Plan.
- The provision of reticulated sewer, road and rail improvements to Geelong and “tree change” lifestyle preferences were considered key drivers of

The level of growth which has occurred most closely fits with the low growth scenario envisaged in the 2013 Structure Plan. While this was presented as a low growth scenario, the rate equates to around 3.2% per year which is considered a relatively high growth rate, albeit coming from a small base population.

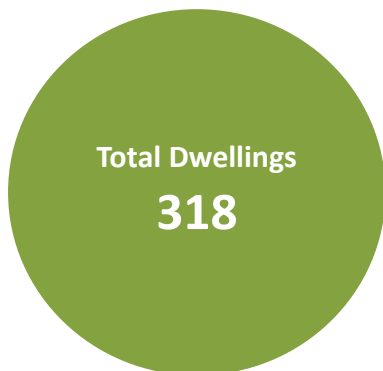
Victoria in Future 2023 (VIF2023) is the official State government projection of population growth for Victoria. VIF2023 estimates:

- 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).
- Colac Otway is expected to accommodate only a small percentage of the State’s projected growth.
- VIF2023 has also projected population growth for smaller regions in Victoria. Birregurra falls within the area known as ‘Colac surrounds’. This region encircles Colac township.
- 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 region but a decrease in other areas due to more people moving away than moving in.

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.

# Housing Profile

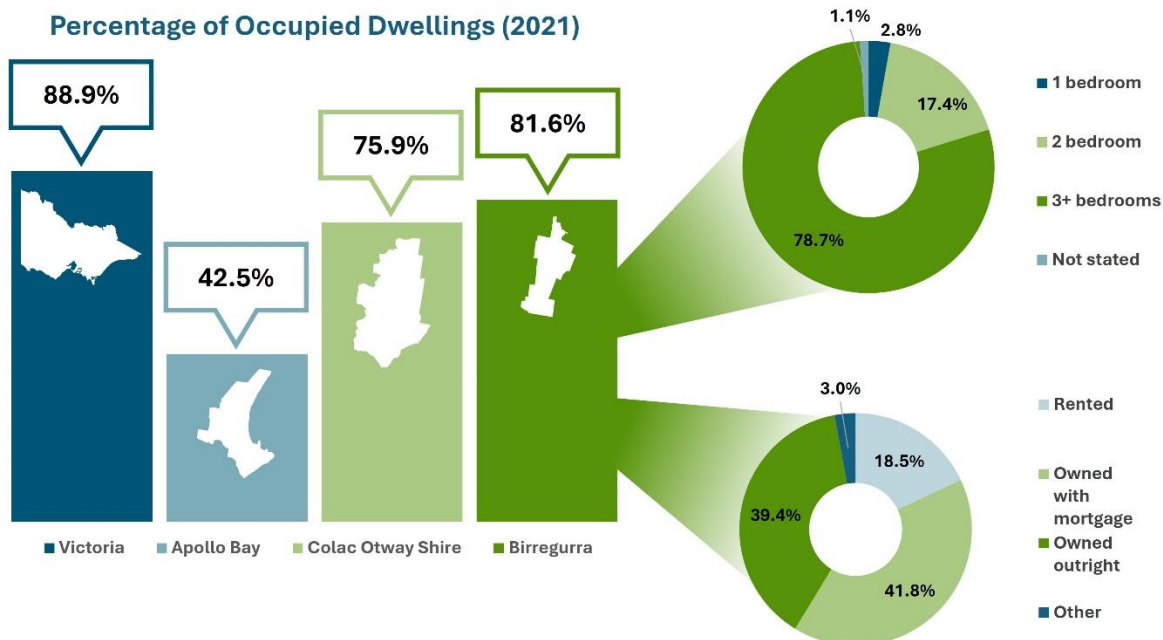


- There were 318 private dwellings in Birregurra in 2021.
- This is an increase of 79 dwellings from the 2011 Census, an average of around 8 new homes per

The occupancy rate for Birregurra at the 2021 Census date was 81.6%. The rate for Birregurra is lower than the rate for Victoria but much higher than the rate for coastal towns in Colac Otway such as Apollo Bay. 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 a 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.

All dwellings were reported as detached housing (i.e. not units or apartments) indicating very little housing diversity in Birregurra. 78.7% of dwellings had 3 or more bedrooms.

## Characteristics of Occupied Dwellings



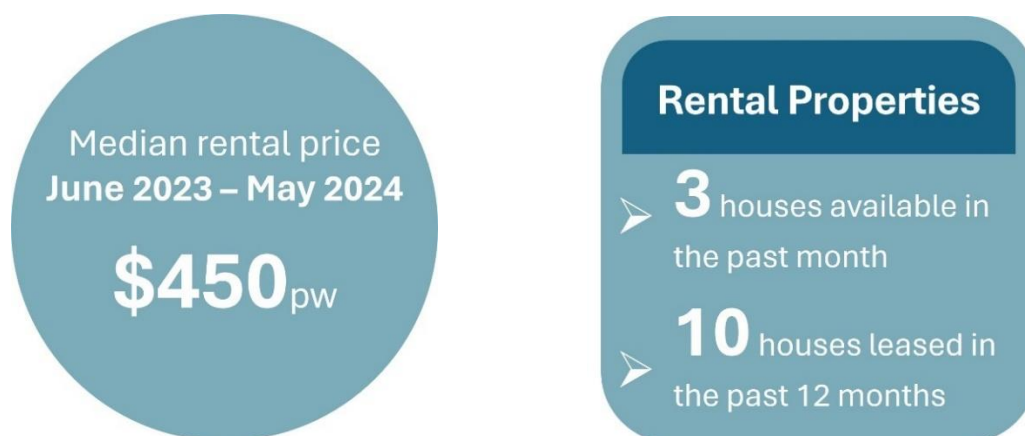
Source: ABS Census Data 2021



Most homes were owned outright or with a mortgage. 18.5% of dwellings were rentals, a lower figure than for Colac Otway and considerably lower than the Victorian figure of 28.5%.

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 households considered to be experiencing housing stress (where mortgage or rent payments are greater than 30% of household income) was lower in Birregurra than for the average across Victoria in 2021. However, interest rates have increased significantly since that time, and it is very likely the percentage of households experiencing housing stress (rental or mortgage) is now much greater.

House and land prices in Birregurra have been steadily increasing since the time of the 2013 Structure Plan. 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 pressure on prices.

Median House Price (rounded to \$,000)											
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
<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

## Demand for Residential Land

Victoria is currently experiencing a housing crisis. Housing affordability has dropped to its lowest level in 30 years and rents have been rising at record high rates.

State government policy is currently encouraging housing development. It is targeting metropolitan activity centres or regional centres where infrastructure and services are available, but also aims to facilitate housing growth across all of Victoria through measures such as the new second small home provisions.

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 and may include things such as government policy, economic factors, alternative residential options in the region, local employment opportunities, etc.

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.

The 2013 Background Report developed three potential demand scenarios. To date, the rate of growth in Birregurra has most closely aligned with the Low Growth Scenario which forecast a doubling of historic growth rates to 9 dwellings per year.

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. 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

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

Source: Conway Planning

## Residential Land Capacity and Potential Supply

The estimate of residential land capacity is based on<sup>1</sup>:

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.

Capacity estimates were worked out for each of the Preferred Character Areas set out in the Planning Scheme and for the land in the Low Density Residential Zone.

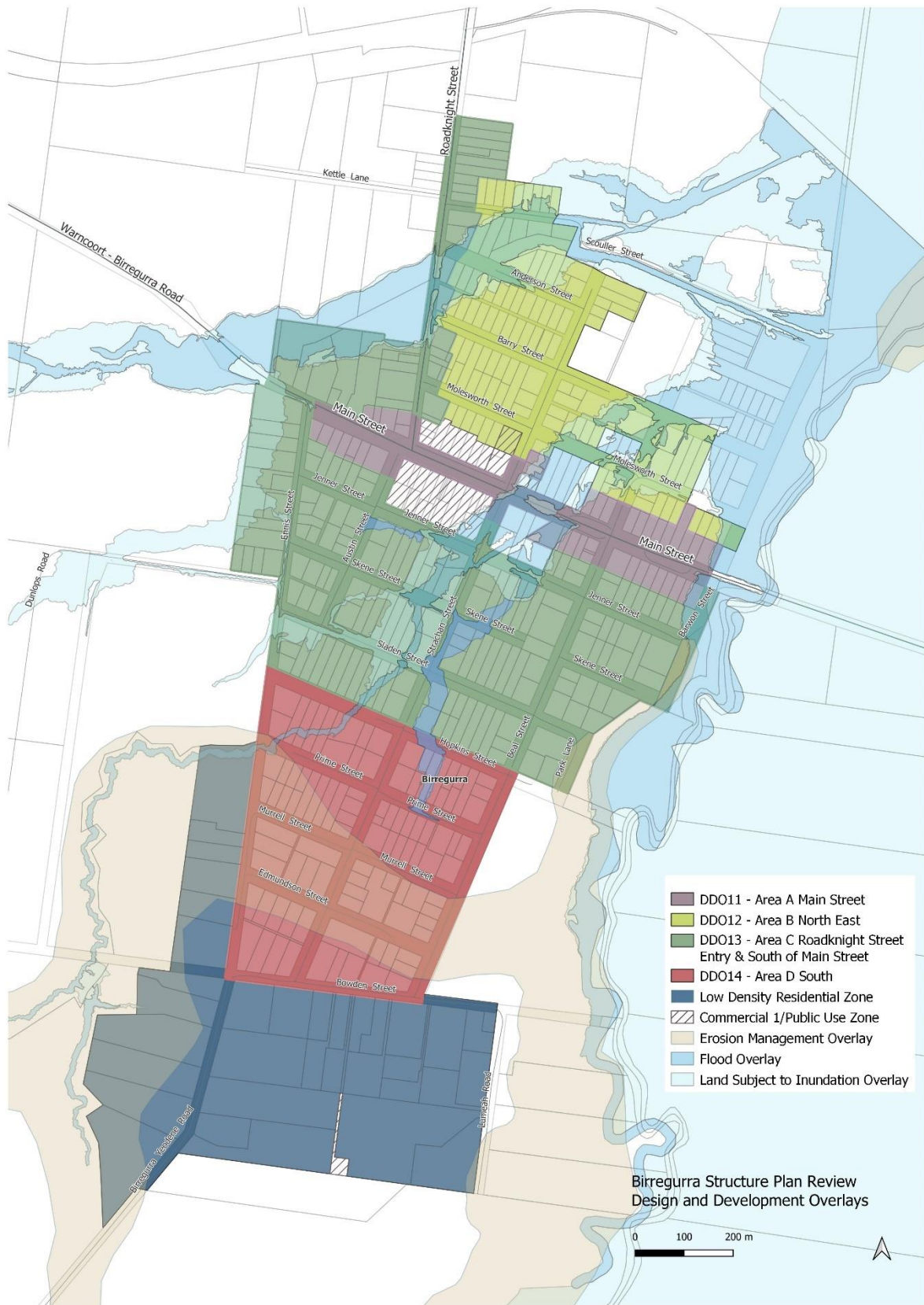
### Birregurra Residential Land Capacity

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

<sup>1</sup> Refer to the Background Report – Issues and Opportunities, 15 July 2024 for a detailed explanation of methodology and criteria used in estimating capacity.

# Birregurra Residential Precincts



Source: Colac Otway Shire Council, July 2024



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.

Two possible scenarios have been developed based on different development take up rates:

- **Higher Take Up Rate** – based on the 2013 Structure Plan rates 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 and consequently there has been more pressure for infill.
- **Lower Take Up Rate** – a more conservative estimate of rates in the order of 50% for vacant lots and 10% for developed land. This factors in individual landowners not wanting to split up larger landholdings.

### Birregurra – Potential 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:

1. Rezone greenfield land for residential purposes
2. 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.

# Birregurra Structure Plan Update – Other Matters

Other matters raised in the Birregurra Structure Plan 2013 were also reviewed. This Summary Report notes key achievements in relation to each of these and identifies ongoing or emerging challenges that may need further consideration.

## Commercial Town Centre

### Achievements

- Core town centre rezoned to the Commercial 1 Zone, thereby reinforcing the role of Main Street as the retail heart of town.
- New development has been consistent with neighbourhood character provisions, ensuring the retention of a low rise character that respects the heritage context of this area.

### Challenges

- Need 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.

## Industry

### Achievements

- The industrial area has been further consolidated with land adjacent to the Birregurra Railway Station rezoned to Industrial 1 Zone.
- New development has been consistent with neighbourhood character provisions, including landscaping to soften and screen development from public viewing points.

### Challenges

- Need to continue to direct new industry to the industrial area to ensure industrial uses are appropriately separated from sensitive land uses such as residential land.
- Further consider residential density provisions within the Birregurra Transfer Station buffer area and near to other industrial uses.

## Landscape and Environment

### Achievements

- The Farming Zone has been maintained along Main Street east and west of the town ensuring that these approaches to town continue to exhibit a rural, vegetated character.
- The application of the DDO and VPO has played an important role in protecting canopy trees and ensuring a strong landscape character continues to be evident across Birregurra.
- Updated flood mapping has been included in the Planning Scheme to better address flood risk.

## Challenges

- The potential open space link identified in the 2013 Structure Plan affects numerous privately owned properties, particularly south of Main Street. It may be difficult to provide a continuous link with a shared pedestrian / cycle path.
- Recommendations for drainage investigations are not yet funded.

## Access and Movement

### Achievements

- Reduced speed limit along Main Street.
- Construction of a footpath along Roadknight Street to the Birregurra Railway Station.
- Investigations completed for the 'Tiger Rail Trail from Forrest to Birregurra' with the section extending to Birregurra found not to be feasible.
- Project commenced to upgrade parts of Strachan Street.
- Street Tree Planting project has commenced in Birregurra (recommended as part of Wayfinding Strategies in the 2013 Structure Plan).

### Challenges

- Ageing infrastructure and securing funding for upgrades.

## Community Services & Facilities

### Challenges

- Recommendations to prepare a master plan for the community node, and to facilitate a community garden and retirement living in Molesworth Street have not been pursued.

## Recreation & Open Space

### Achievements

- Upgrades to the Birregurra Recreation Reserve in accordance with the 2012 Master Plan.

## Utilities

### Achievements

- Upgrade to the town water supply through the construction of a new underground pipeline to connect Birregurra to the Colac water supply system.
- Barwon Water led community program facilitating sustainable water use opportunities.
- Completion of the *Birregurra Flood and Drainage Strategy 2022* which recommended options for improvements the drainage network.



# Summary of Issues & Opportunities



## 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 the Review of Neighbourhood Character Provisions Report
- Explore active transport connections, particularly footpath provision, and develop an updated network plan



#### Disclaimer

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