We acknowledge the indigenous history of Moorabool Shire. The land was traditionally occupied by and connected to a number of indigenous communities, most notably the Wathaurong Tribe in the South and West and the Wurundjeri in the East.
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1.0 DOCUMENT BACKGROUND

The Bald Hill Activation background paper and scoping document has been produced by Council staff via a notice of motion raised by Councillor Bingham at an Ordinary Meeting of Council on the 6th of December, 2017.

The resolution was as follows:

OMC - 06/12/2017 - Item 13.2 Cr. Bingham: N.O.M. No. 269– Bald Hill Future Planning.
Crs. Bingham/Toohey.

That Council Officers prepare a report which includes:

• A scoping document for the project outlining potential uses i.e. scenic lookout, horseriding trails, walking tracks, picnic areas etc. and opportunities for the site and the potential resultant benefits for Council and the wider community.
• Investigate potential funding streams with Sports and Recreation Victoria, RDV and other funding bodies.
• An investigation into any portions of land at Bald Hill that could be sold.

This resolution has guided the following investigations.

2.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bald Hill is a 120ha reserve located on the western edge of Darley in Bacchus Marsh, Victoria. It is characterised by significant gullies and ridge lines and provides a green western edge backdrop to the residential areas of Bacchus Marsh and Darley and provides great views to Port Phillip Bay, Melbourne, the surrounding farming land and the Lerderderg State Park.

The reserve is easily accessible to local Bacchus Marsh residents, via both the local road and shared path networks, and is well connected to the Western Highway and the Bacchus Marsh Train Station.

Since 2001, there has been a significant effort made by Moorabool Shire Council to rehabilitate the site to assist in the control of serrated tussock, rabbits and erosion. This has involved the planting of trees and shrubs both for ecological and commercial purposes via State Government funding. Approximately 70ha of the reserve is leased to assist reduce Council’s management costs. This lease will expire in 2027, with approximately 60% of the planted vegetation on the reserve to be harvested for commercial purposes.

Despite its close proximity to the residential area of Darley and regionally to Melbourne, Ballarat and Geelong, Bald Hill is currently underutilised as a community recreational space for activities such as walking, cycling and horse riding by locals and visitors. Due to the lack of passive surveillance, the reserve has become a location for illegal dumping of building and household rubbish, trail bikes and shooting.

It is estimated that over a three year period between 2015 and 2017, Council spent between 9 and 13.5 days investigating and responding to resident complaints relating to these activities on Bald Hill.

The Bald Hill Activation Scoping report, investigates future regional growth impacts, current and emerging trends, regarding exercise amongst Victorians and examples of similar sites across Victoria.

The report found that:

• The site has various topographical, access and planning control constraints that make development for residential and organised sport difficult, however, the site is well suited for a range of alternative uses.
• By 2031 Moorabool will grow to a population of 40,000 and the directly surrounding region will have a population exceeding 1.7 million people.
• Active Victoria - A strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria 2017–2021, found that adult Victorians spend 736 million hours a year on physical recreation, exercise and sport. 80% of these hours are spent in active recreation (leisure time, non-competitive or co-ordinated, physical activity).
• The most popular active recreation activities for Victorians include walking, cycling and running.
• There is a growing market within Victoria and Australia of day visitation for mountain biking and trail running, with visitors estimated to spend on average $77 per person per day.
• The State Government has provided funding for the development of similar sites in Harcourt ($2 million) and Creswick ($2.56 Million) in response to the trends in active recreation aimed at attracting higher visitation to these towns.
• One of the two key objectives of the State Governments Biodiversity 2037 strategy is to actively seek and promote opportunities for Victorians to engage in the environment.

The Bald Hill Activation Scoping Report is divided into two sections. Section 1 outlines the current status of the reserve and comprises of three chapters:

- Policy Context;
- Current use; and
- Site limitations.

Section 2 investigates the potential future uses of the reserve in response to current trends in recreation and tourism and the development of similar sites across Victoria.

- Opportunities:
- Compatible potential uses;
- Benefits; and
- Recommendations.

In summary the report found that:

1. The site has the potential to become a Regional Level facility for active recreation through the development of two active recreation precincts which should be considered for further investigation:
   - Shared trails that consider universal access for walking, running, horse riding and cycling trails that include:
     - Art and interpretational signage;
     - Trail, higher intensity running and fitness;
     - Lookout and viewing locations; and
     - Lower intensity cycling options.
   - Mountain Bike Facility.

2. Potential for the northern edge of the reserve adjacent to Swans Road to be considered for inclusion in the future non-urban investigation area, identified as a key action in the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework.

3. Development of the project is proposed to be undertaken in a series of stages, commencing with seeking funding to complete a Feasibility Study (including community consultation) in 2018/19.

4. Funding for the development of the Feasibility Study, Master Plan and construction of the tracks, trails and lookouts may be provided by funding sources such as:
   - Regional Development Victoria;
   - Sports and Recreation Victoria;
   - Developer Contribution Plans (DCPs); and
   - Council Capital and Recurrent budgets (to compliment alternate funding sources).

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Above: Image 03 Bald Hill at dawn.
3.0 INTRODUCTION

3.1 SITE DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

Bald Hill is an underutilised, large (120ha) reserve located on the western edge of Darley (map 1) in Bacchus Marsh, Victoria. It is easily accessible to local Bacchus Marsh residents, both via the local road and shared path networks. In addition, it is well connected to the Western Highway and the Bacchus Marsh Train Station.

60ha of the reserve is currently managed by Council, while the remaining 70ha is leased by Council to a local business conducting forestry activities on the site. The ‘peppercorn’ ($1/year) lease expires in 2027.

In early 2000, 70Ha of the 120ha reserve was planted as a Sugar Gum plantation by the tenant which have achieved coverage to most of the leased area. This plantation has the potential to be harvested before the lease expires in 2027.

More recently, within the 60Ha managed by Council, revegetation plantings with local tree species have been undertaken to further reduce long-term management costs associated with managing pest plants and animals while enhancing the environmental values of the reserve; providing suitable habitat for native birds and koalas.

As identified in the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework Bald Hill provides a scenic hill-scape and helps frame the western edge of Bacchus Marsh.

At the summit, there are impressive views to Port Phillip Bay, the You Yangs, Melbourne the surrounding farm land to the west and to the north, Lerderderg State Park and Pyrites State Forest (images 5 and 6).

The Korkuperrimul Creek runs along and forms the western boundary of the reserve. The surrounding land use includes:

- Farming (primarily broad acre grazing);
- Residential development (rural living and higher density residential); and
- Crown Land (Council Trench).

The steep terrain of the land makes developing it by conventional means, such as large scale residential development or for sporting fields, difficult or impractical. The reserve is covered by the Farm Zone (FZ) and the development potential of the site is also limited by existing planning controls— including but not limited to:

- Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO1) – Scenic Hilltops and Ridge Line Areas;
- Heritage Overlay (HO200) – Bald Hill Quarry; and
- Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO).

The topography and soil profile also make it unsuitable for farming. Constraints relating to the development potential of the site are further outlined in Section 2.4. The steep topography however, whilst limiting to conventional development, offers a significant asset for some public recreation activities, including cycling, trail walking/running and sightseeing.
4.0 POLICY CONTEXT

The following Local and State Strategies were reviewed and would support the reuse of the site.

4.1 LOCAL STRATEGIES

Council Plan 2017-2021:
- **Context 4A: Health & Wellbeing:**
  - Action 3: Develop a plan to improve, update and beautify our neighbourhood, passive, recreation and other open spaces.

Moorabool Planning Scheme:
- 21.02-2 Non Urban Landscapes:
  - Protect the landscape and scenic qualities of forested hill slopes, rural landscapes, and bushland setting of the Shire’s rural and urban areas.

Health and Well Being Plan 2017-2021:
- Increased proportion of adults, adolescents and children who are sufficiently physically active:
- Recreation facilities including parks improve multi-use capabilities to encourage active recreation.
- All children and youth have access to sporting clubs and other physical activity.

Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework:
- Protect and enhance natural assets and landscape features such as the Long Forest Nature Conservation Reserve, waterways and escarpments (Bold Hill is an identified escarpment).
- Preserve and manage important heritage assets in the district including places of significance for Aboriginal people, the Avenue of Honour and town centre.
- Provide for an integrated network of parks, open space and trails to connect residents and visitors with the natural assets of the district.

- Action 3: Develop opportunities for informal and spontaneous play for people of all ages and abilities through their infrastructure developing (including urban design in public places), facilities, programs and services.
- Action 6: Ensure that play spaces are planned in consideration of the surrounding environment (built and natural) to integrate and complement the existing landscape.
- Action 8: Continue to recognise that high quality play spaces have potential value to the Shire from a tourism and economic development perspective.

Hike and Bike Strategy (2014):
- Action 18: Promote health and wellbeing through the promotion of walking routes using brochures/maps, signage and school and community promotion and events.

Bacchus Marsh Housing Strategy:
- Actively discourage residential development outside of the clearly defined township boundary except if consistent with Councils Urban Growth Framework (under preparation) unless exceptional circumstances apply where rezoning of non-urban land for urban purposes can articulate the rezoning through demonstrating.

Moorabool Sustainable Environment Strategy (2016-2021):
- Action 3.4: develop policies that preserve landscape significance and integrate these into planning scheme, that align with South West Landscape Assessment Study.

4.2 STATE STRATEGIES

Active Victoria – A strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria 2017-2021:
- **Direction 1:** Meeting demand:
  - High-capacity regional sport and active recreation facilities and infrastructure complementing local community facilities.
  - Maximised use of existing spaces (for example, Parks Victoria land, school land, government surplus land, tracks, trails, paths and roads).
  - Support for new sports and active recreation opportunities, including those involving emerging technologies.
  - Investment in new sport and recreation infrastructure at the same time we plan for residential and community development.
- **Direction 3:** Additional focus on active recreation:
  - More focus on active recreation from all levels of government, to improve active recreation opportunities, programs and infrastructure.
  - Increased capacity of stakeholders to respond to demand with a wide range of safe, accessible and high-quality active recreation opportunities.
  - Planning for active recreation infrastructure connected to other community uses and urban development.
  - Connecting planning and development of outdoor recreation to nature-based tourism opportunities, with particular emphasis on potential benefits to regional economies.
  - Maximising the potential of existing spaces to be used for active recreation.
  - ‘Incidental’ use for active recreation of other infrastructure (such as footpaths, roads, tracks and trails) considered in the planning of that infrastructure.

Protecting Victoria’s Environment Biodiversity 2037:
- **Priority 4:** Increase opportunities for all Victorians to have daily connections with nature.
- **Priority 5:** Increase opportunities for all Victorians to act to protect biodiversity.
- **Priority 8:** Better care for and showcase Victoria’s environmental assets as world class natural and cultural tourism attractions.
- **Priority 16:** Build capacity to increase Aboriginal participation in biodiversity management.

Central Highlands Regional Growth Plan:
- Maintain the character and form of a distinct regional settlement, separated from Melbourne’s western growth corridor.
- Encourage the development of Bacchus Marsh to protect surrounding regional environmental, heritage, landscape, resource and agricultural assets and consider natural hazards.

South West Landscape Assessment Study
- Encourages the protection of the landscape views to and from Mt Blackwood, Lederderg State Park, Brisbane Ranges and Rowsley Scarp, Bacchus Marsh Agricultural Valley and Werribee Gorge.

Plan Melbourne (refresh):
- **Action 110:** Value capture and creation opportunities:
  - coordinating government efforts to facilitate development of land, including surplus and underutilised government land.
5.0 CURRENT USE

Currently only a small number of walkers, horse riders and cyclists utilise the site. However, there is no formal count data on current visitation.

The lack of promotion of the site as a public reserve and or a lack of suitable infrastructure, (such as formalised tracks/trails and signage or facilities), potentially limits wider public utilisation of the reserve.

Unfortunately, as the site has low visitation and low associated passive surveillance, illegal and or undesirable activities such as rubbish dumping (both household rubbish and vehicles), shooting, trail-biking and 4WD-ing are regularly occurring on what is the edge of urban residential land.

Between 2015 and 2017 Council has received 18 formally logged resident complaints relating to these activities at the reserve. Council staff from a range of areas have also received numerous informal complaints over the same period.

It is estimated that the investigation of each of these complaints, each repair to damaged sites and or removal of dumped rubbish takes between 4 to 6 hours to resolve. Since 2015, this equates to between 9 and 13.5 days of staff time.

Rotary and Landcare have raised concerns on several occasions with staff from Strategic Planning and Development about the illegal activities that have been occurring on the site. In the conversations both the individuals and groups have expressed a desire for the reserve to be developed, promoted and utilised for activities that have a positive impact both socially and environmentally.

In addition to impacts on local residents and the cost to Council, activities such as trail biking and 4WD, are not only a nuisance in terms of noise to nearby residents, but facilitate the continued degradation and erosion of the site, while shooting in such close proximity to residential areas presents a significant risk to the general public, contractors and Council Staff.
6.0 SITE LIMITATIONS

6.1 TOPOGRAPHY
Bald Hill assists to define the western edge of the residential development of Darley. The summit rises to 340m while the lowest point of the reserve is located along the Korkuperrimul Creek at 180m above sea level. While most of the site would be described as steep, this is particularly noticeable throughout several steep gullies, cliffs and slopes.

The topography of the site may limit the potential for residential development and active sporting facilities but it does provide excellent opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding trails. Coupled with the excellent views of the wider landscape, the steep topography offers a point of difference from other recreational spaces in the local area.

6.2 OVERLAYS
Bald Hill is covered by several planning overlays that are outlined in the following sections.

6.2.1 HERITAGE
Heritage Overlay (HO200) covers an area around the old disused sandstone quarry located at the end of Tramway Lane. (Map 04)

The citation describes the elements of significance as follows:

An abandoned quarry developed in the 1840s, producing building stone used in the Treasury Building, Spring Street (1857-62), the Parliament House Library (1860) and said to have been used in the Customs House, Flinders Street (1856), as well as dressings at St Andrew’s (1865) and Holy Trinity (1876-7) Churches, Bacchus Marsh.
The formation of the former horse-drawn tramway from Cordons Lane is visible. The quarry and tramway formation are of local historical significance for demonstrating an association with an important use and the effect of government action, in commissioning the use of the stone in two significant Melbourne public buildings.

The site has scientific significance for its archaeological research potential.

While a heritage overlay does not preclude future re-use it will need to be considered in any proposal going further. The site is also listed on the Victorian Heritage Register and any heritage place which is included in this register is also subject to the requirements of the Heritage Act 2017.

**6.2.2 SIGNIFICANT LANDSCAPE**

The Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO1) covers the eastern half of the site. The intent of the overlay is to protect the views to the escarpment edge around Bacchus Marsh via limiting and managing development within its boundary. [Map 05]

While not preventing development of built structures, any proposed works within the overlay would need to demonstrate that it does not have a detrimental effect on the wider landscape character or that will be negatively impact views to and or from the location.

[Image 14] Photo of Bald Hill taken from Bacchus Marsh Grammar (Maddingley).

[Map 04] area covered by Heritage Overlay (HO 200) shaded yellow.

[Map 05] area covered by Significant Landscape Overlay (SLO 1) shaded blue.
6.2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE

The objective of ESO 2 is to protect the health of the waterway, and to ensure that any development within 100m of the waterway does not have a negative impact on the habitat values of the surrounding vegetation, prevent pollution and surface runoff and to conserve the existing flora and fauna habitats close to waterways and to encourage generation and regeneration of habitats. (Map 06)

Any development within this overlay would require evidence as to how buildings and works will not have a detrimental impact on the waterway and/or why these works cannot be constructed elsewhere.

6.2.4 DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OVERLAY

The Design and Development Overlay (DDO2) aims to enhance the visual amenity of built and natural environment of the Shire, primarily through the appropriate use of building materials, such as non-reflective materials. (Map 07)

If any development of the reserve was to proceed for passive recreational activities, such as walking trails and lookout tower, or construction of dwellings, this may be a consideration in the choice of construction materials, but should not have a significant impact on the development potential of the site.
6.2.5 BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT OVERLAY (BMO)

All of the reserve is currently covered under the Bushfire Management Overlay, formerly the Wildfire Management Overlay (WMO). (Map 08)

This overlay does not restrict the current uses of timber plantations or revegetation activities. However, in undertaking further investigations regarding the development of the site for recreational or non-urban residential would need to be considered, including design to facilitate fire access, maintenance and limiting access to the public on high risk fire days.

6.3 APPROVED DEVELOPMENT / SUBDIVISIONS

Bald Hill is currently zoned farm zone (FZ).

The land surrounding the reserve is zoned:
- Low Density Residential Zone (LDRZ);
- General Residential Zone (GRZ1 and GRZ 3); and
- Farm Zone (FZ).

The current land use zones are shown on map 09.

Council and State strategies do not recommend any further residential development close to the ridgeline on the eastern edge of the reserve above Halletts Way.

Future development of above Gabriel Grove, should consider appropriate controls to reduce the potential encroachment into the reserve and protection of existing values such as the Grey Box forest, which is an environmental offset for the Summerhill Estate (map 10 page 14).

The land to the north, south and west is covered by the Farm Zone.

The Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework does identify the potential for future non-urban land use investigation for the area north of Swans Road, it is possible that the northern area of the reserve could be included in this investigation area.
6.4 ABORIGINAL CULTURAL HERITAGE SENSITIVITY AND RECORDED SITES

Aboriginal cultural heritage overlays are present on Bald Hill. All named waterways in Victoria have an Aboriginal Cultural Sensitivity Overlay placed on them as these areas are the most likely to contain artefacts and significant areas ("Sites"). No Sites have been recorded along this section of the Korkuperrimul Creek, however detailed assessments would be required prior to undertaking any works in the area covered by this overlay. (Map 10)

Two registered sites have been documented on Bald Hill, where specific artefacts or significant areas have been identified. The locations of these two sites are shown as the two green circles on map 10. Knowledge of the nature of these Sites is held in the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register.

Since significant Sites have been found on the reserve, and given the topography and location of Bald Hill, it is likely that further sites are located on the reserve but have not yet been documented.

As it is a breach to the Aboriginal Heritage Act, to knowingly or unknowingly damage heritage sites, detailed archaeological assessments will be required on the site prior to undertaking any works on the reserve. Any construction that is to be undertaken in the reserve will require a formal survey and a Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP) is likely to be required.

6.5 NATIVE VEGETATION AND FAUNA

The portion of the reserve currently under Council management contains a mix of vegetation types, both remnant and revegetation. These vegetation types support a variety of animals including Koalas (Phascolarctos cinereus), Short-beaked Echidnas (Tachyglossus aculeatus) and many birds of prey including the iconic Wedge-tailed Eagle (Aquila audax).

6.5.1 NATIVE FLORA

While little remnant native vegetation remains on the site, what is present is significant. Notably, two large grey box (Eucalyptus microcarpa) persist on the southern slopes of the hill, below the quarry rim. Several more mature grey box and yellow gum (Eucalyptus leucoxylon) also remain in the south-east corner of the reserve, on the ridgeline.

Depending on the results of an ecological assessment, this patch of grey box woodland may be protected by both the State Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988 (FFG Act) and/or the Federal Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act) environmental legislation. At a minimum, removal of any of the remnant vegetation will require a permit under clause 52.17 of the Moorabool Planning Scheme.

Revegetation of the site has occurred at least twice – 2003 and 2017. The majority of the site was revegetated in 2003, creating a canopy comprising a mix of locally indigenous and Australian native species. This planting also included the Sugar Gum (Eucalyptus cladocalyx) plantations which are further discussed in Section 6.6.

This revegetation is nearing maturity and will naturally thin over the coming years. They currently assist in weed management on the site by shading out the ground layer and blocking the spread of wind-born seed. Areas of revegetation on the site would benefit from more native shrubs and ground covers.

Under Clause 52.17 of the Moorabool Planning Scheme, a permit would be required to remove any of the planted Victorian native vegetation as it was funded by State Government grants specifically for the purposes of land protection (management of erosion and noxious weeds) and/or to enhance the biodiversity values on the reserve.

As the Sugar Gums were planted for the purposes of timber harvesting no permit would be required to remove them, however, there may be community concern regarding the loss of the green western backdrop of Bacchus Marsh and the loss of habitat for local bird and mammal species that is currently provided by the trees.

The quality of the vegetation on the leased land is largely unknown, however, State Government databases do indicate areas where significant flora and fauna may exist.

Map 10 Areas of Indigenous Cultural Sensitivity and recorded sites on Bald Hill.

Image 15 remnant Yellow Gum
6.5.2 NATIVE FAUNA

Species known to use the reserve include Koalas (Phascolarctos cinereus), Short-beaked Echidnas (Tachyglossus aculeatus) and many birds of prey including the iconic Wedge-tailed Eagle (Aquila audax).

While Bald Hill has a history of environmental degradation, fauna records show that management over the past decade has improved the environmental function of the site. Seventy-six native fauna species have been recorded at the site and it is likely that, if formal surveys were undertaken, more would be discovered.

Any future formal assessments undertaken should include targeted surveys for individual EPBC listed species including the Growing Grass Frog, Striped Legless Lizard and the Golden Sun Moth. These assessments should be undertaken in accordance with Federal requirements.

Due to its location close to the residential areas of Bacchus Marsh, the reserve provides an excellent opportunity for residents to easily engage and interact with nature.

6.6 LAND USE AGREEMENTS (INC TIMBER HARVESTING AND OFFSETS)

Currently Council manages and maintains 60ha of the 120ha reserve which aside from providing a treed visual backdrop, returns very little value for local residents.

In 2027, the remaining 70ha will become the responsibility of Council to manage, once the Sugar Gum plantations, which cover approximately 60% of the leased area, have been commercially harvested.

Harvesting of the leased area is expected to commence in 2026 and completed by June 2027 leaving a landscape similar to those shown in the images from 2001. Once harvested, this lease agreement will be complete and Council will have full management responsibilities for the 120ha reserve. It is expected that with the high disturbance related to the harvesting of the trees, there will be a flush of weeds and the potential for increased erosion due to the loss of the canopy trees.

A plan will need to be devised between Council and the Tenant for how this transition is handled and how the site is utilised by council into the future. It would be beneficial to conduct this planning prior to the lease ending so that harvesting activities can be managed in line with future plans.

Furthermore, many small scale plantations are being found to be non-financially viable to harvest. Investigation into the viability and likelihood of harvesting being carried out by the current lessee should be undertaken.

In addition to the timber plantations, a small 1.9 ha offset exists on the eastern slope of the reserve (map 12). The offset was established for the removal of remnant vegetation required as part of the surrounding subdivision.

The offset is to be managed by the developer for a period of ten years, and managed as per an approved Offset Management Plan prior to it being handed over to Council, who will be responsible for the on-going management of the reserve to protect the ecological values.

As per the requirements of the established offsets, any removal of vegetation offset for ecological purposes requires a doubling of the offset values.
6.7 EROSION

The site has historically had areas of severe erosion. While a natural process, erosion at the site has been accelerated by the historic clearance of vegetation and importation of loose soils.

To manage the erosion occurring on the site, efforts have been made through a range of interventions such as revegetation, land forming and engineered solutions with varying levels of success. Any future development of the site would require geotechnical assessments to ensure appropriate measures are undertaken to limit further erosion.

6.8 PEST PLANTS AND ANIMALS

Bald Hill has major and ongoing issues with weeds. Heavy infestations on several Regionally Controlled species occur at the site including African boxthorn (Lycium ferocissimum), serrated tussock (Nassella trichotoma), artichoke thistle (Cynara cardunculus) and Patterson’s curse (Echium plantagium).

These species degrade the environmental values of the site, impact surrounding landowners and restrict its use as a community venue.

The budget available for ongoing management of the site allows for only minimal control of these infestations, with an aim of restricting the expansion of infestations as opposed to eradication. This approach however creates issues for the wider landscape as the site becomes a source of weeds to spread onto neighbouring properties.

Longer-term management costs for weed control are reduced by increasing native vegetation coverage. An intact canopy of native species restricts the spread of weed seeds and limits their growth by shading out the understory.

Rabbits have been a long-term issue on Bald Hill. Owing to the topography, soil conditions and management actions of neighbouring properties, the rabbit population of the reserve has been extremely high.

Following notification from the State Government’s Department of Primary Industries in 2012, Council began undertaking a strategic rabbit control program on the site; a program that it continues to implement on an annual basis and which has significantly reduced the rabbit population on the site.

Management must consider the ongoing annual costs associated with pest plant and animal management on this site (both in the Council reserve and the area under lease). The costs for regular maintenance are far lower than occasional major interventions and therefore without ongoing management, the investments made in this area over the past 10 years will be lost. Failing to adequately manage these issues will also see a breach to the Catchment and Land Protection Act (1994) and pose a legislative risk to Council.

If development and promotion of the site was to occur, community awareness and expectations regarding the control of pest plant and animals at the reserve would be likely to increase. This would require Council to invest further financial resources into the management of these issues, although grant funding would likely be available to assist Council. The increased awareness of these issues may however see increased community action and the establishment of a community volunteer group, such as Landcare or a ‘Friend Of’ group, to assist in the control of these issues.
7 OPPORTUNITIES

7.1 LOCATION

Bald Hill is strategically located from a number of perspectives.

Within Bacchus Marsh, the reserve is highly accessible to vehicles for local visitation via Halletts Way, Swans Road and Tramway Lane (Map 13).

The reserve is also connected via a green corridor and shared paths running east-west from Darley Park, allowing for good pedestrian and cycle access to Darley residents. The potential construction of the SRW Channel link would also allow for improved pedestrian and cycle access to Maddingley into the future.

The reserve also forms part of the Great Dividing Trail which runs from Bacchus Marsh to Daylesford, through the Lerderderg State Park 3km north along Swans Rd.

The reserve is also accessible to the Merrimu residential investigation area via Buckleys Road.

In the wider region, Bald Hill is located between 50km to 60km of the major population centres of Melbourne CBD, Ballarat and Geelong and is on the doorstep of Western Melbourne’s growth front. Bald Hill is located close to the Ballarat train line (5km from Bacchus Marsh Station) and adjacent to one of the Western Highway’s interchanges (30,000 vehicles a day) providing excellent access to the site.

7.2 POPULATION GROWTH

The Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework identifies that the town is expected to grow to a population exceeding 40,000 by 2041. With this growth there is a growing need to provide opportunities for a variety of passive recreation activities such as walking and cycling.

Beyond the projected growth of Bacchus Marsh, an opportunity exists for the site to be available to day visitation from the surrounding regions, especially those within a one hour drive of Bacchus Marsh such as western Melbourne, Ballarat and Geelong all of whom are also experiencing explosive growth over the same period.

Between 2015 and 2051, Plan Melbourne estimates that Melbourne’s population is estimated grow by 3.4m people from 4.5m in 2015 to 7.9m by 2051. Victoria in Future projects Victoria’s total population to exceed 10m by 2051.

Victoria in Future 2016, expects that the population of Mooroobool and the surrounding regions will exceed 1.7m people by 2031.

Western Melbourne (Councils including Brimbank, Melton, Hobsons Bay, Moonee Valley and Wyndham) are poised grow from 690,000 people in 2011 to 1.1 million by 2031, with approximately 56% (627,400) to be living in Melton and Wyndham alone.

It is expected that an extra 430,000 people will be living in Geelong and Ballarat and an additional 110,000 people within the surroundings areas 100km of Bacchus Marsh by 2031 (Figure 1).

This growth, both local and external will increase demand for a range of open space and passive recreation options.

Bald Hill has the potential to provide a unique offering not only to the residents of Bacchus Marsh but also, in conjunction with the existing network of State managed reserves including Brisbane Ranges National Park, Wembee Gorge State Park and Lerderderg State Park, could increase the number of visitors to the Shire for nature based recreation that is lacking in other municipalities.
7.3 OPEN SPACE NETWORK

Bald Hill represents a large percentage of available open space within Bacchus Marsh and is comparable in size to the Bacchus Marsh Racecourse Reserve (125ha) located to the south of the Township (Map 14).

Bald Hill is connected into other reserves via public space links providing potential future linkages into the populated area of Darley. This linkage would be further strengthened should a shared path be constructed as part of the upgrades to the Southern Rural Water irrigation channel.

Bald Hill has the potential to play a complementary role with the existing National and State Parks located around Bacchus Marsh; namely the Brisbane Ranges National Park, Werribee Gorge State Park, Long Forest Conservation Nature Reserve and Lenderderg State Park. These State managed reserves currently see approximately 550,000 visitors per year primarily for bushwalking, but do not allow mountain biking or horse riding. The Wombat State Forest located further northwest, provides 4WD and Trail bike opportunities (map 15).

Regionally, only the You Yangs Regional Park, Brimbank Regional Park and Macedon Regional Park provide a location similar that of Bald Hill. However none of these are on the Western Highway or Ballarat Rail corridor - which places Bald Hill at a strong competitive advantage.
Active Victoria - A strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria 2017–2021 recognises that more Victorians, both male and female, participate in active recreation, such as walking and cycling, than in organised sport.

Page 24 of Active Victoria - A strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria 2017–2021 states:

Adult Victorians spend 736 million hours a year on physical recreation, exercise and sport. 80% of these hours are spent in active recreation (leisure time, non-competitive, physical activity) and 20% in sport (structured, competitive activity). The three most common activities – walking, fitness and gym, and jogging or running – make up 44% of all recorded sport and recreation activity (figure 2).

Figure 3 shows a breakdown of the most popular activities by gender that Victorians undertake.

This scoping report identifies that Bald Hill has the capacity to provide infrastructure that allows a variety of options for four of the six most popular activities favoured by Victorians (female and male combined):

- Fitness/Gym (41% of respondents);
- Walking for exercise (35%);
- Cycling / BMXing (12%); and
- Jogging / Running (7%).

As the Bacchus Marsh Racecourse Reserve is being developed to provide for the growing demand for organised sporting facilities in Bacchus Marsh, Bald Hill will provide a good opportunity to meet the needs of 80% of the community by providing for a range of active recreation opportunities.

When removing the sports provided for on other local reserves, it is clear to see the high participation by both genders in walking for exercise, fitness activities and cycling.

As identified in the Moorabool Recreation and Leisure Strategy (Vol 3.) 2014, it is essential that well utilised play spaces are inclusive and accessible to all members of the community, provide an inviting, welcoming and stimulating atmosphere and balance safety with risk taking opportunities.
9 VIEWS

As Bacchus Marsh is located in the valley formed by the Werribee and Lerderderg Rivers and their tributaries most of the views that residents and visitors experience are those looking up towards the surrounding escarpments. Bald Hill is one of the few public spaces in the area that provides opportunities to look over the surrounding area, into the city skyline and longer views to Port Phillip Bay.

With the establishment of the walking trails and lookouts, these views could be utilised to assist in providing park visitors a unique opportunity to view the surrounding landscape not currently provided in the local area.

Views and viewing platforms/areas provide good motivation for people to utilise walking tracks and trails and create destination points within a larger network of tracks.

As Bald Hill has slopes that traverse the hill on almost all sides' views can be found in almost 360 degrees of the site from various vantage points.

Image 20 Looking east over Darley towards the Merrimu plateau, with Mount Cottrell in the distance.

Image 21 Looking west over the quarry towards the Pentland Hills.

Image 22 Melbourne’s city skyline views.

Image 23 Looking south towards the You Yangs.
Image 24 Looking east from the top of Bald Hill.
10 COMPATIBLE POTENTIAL FUTURE USES

As outlined, the reserve is constrained by topography, existing land use planning controls and environmental values.

However, each of these constraints provides opportunities to address key aspects of local and state strategies relating to increased participation in active recreation, connection of open space and the protection and increased interaction with the local environment.

Bald Hill provides the potential to be developed into three separate areas:

1. The site has the potential for development of three active recreation activities:
   - Shared trails (walking, running and cycling trails) that include:
     - Lookout and viewing locations;
     - Trail, higher intensity running and fitness;
     - Art and interpretational signage; and
     - Lower intensity cycling options.
   - Mountain Bike Facility; and
   - Horse Riding Trails.

2. Potential for approximately 20ha of the reserve adjacent to Swans Road should to be considered for inclusion in the future non-urban investigation area identified as a key action in the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework.

3. Environmental enhancement.

10.1 SHARED TRAILS (WALKING, CYCLING AND RUNNING TRAILS)

The Moorabool Hike and Bike Strategy 2014 identifies walking, running and cycling as three of the four highest participation activities in Moorabool. Due to its accessibility to local residents, development of walking trails on Bald Hill and improved connection to the shared path network in Bacchus Marsh will assist more local residents in being more active.

Currently within Bacchus Marsh most walking and running occurs at two locations, Peppertree Park and Moon Reserve. These open space reserves are not sporting grounds and seem to attract people undertaking ‘social recreation’.

These reserves provide opportunities for residents in Maddingly and Bacchus Marsh. Bald Hill has the potential to provide an alternative shared path network for Darley residents and utilises the topography and views for a different experience.

This network could include options to accommodate for a variety of different walking and running experiences as well as encourage local residents to experience their local environment, whilst increasing and encouraging visitation from surrounding areas and increased local tourism.

A recreational walking circuit could be developed that includes lookouts, interpretation and art trails and follow the natural contours of the hill allowing for an easier walking experience. These trails should be designed to allow for universal access and lower intensity cyclists which may be more suited to families.

Given the size and topography of the reserve however, the majority of the site appears to suit higher difficulty, more technical trails to be developed accommodating people seeking higher intensity exercise options for example Trail running and Mountain Biking.

This trail network may also allow for engagement with the local Indigenous community, and could include interpretational signage to increase awareness and understanding of their connection to the site and wider landscape.

A well-used example of a technical trail located on similarly steep site would be the Kokoda Memorial Walk (1000 steps) located in the Dandenong Ranges National Park (see case study below).

40km east of Melbourne it is a popular intensive running and walking fitness trail. There is the potential that such a trail on Bald Hill could be a component of the ANZAC Way which has been promoted by the Bacchus Marsh Tracks and Trails Advisory Committee.

Case Study: Kokoda Track Memorial Walk (1000 STEPS).
Dandenong Ranges National Park

The Kokoda Track Memorial Walk is a popular location to recognise the soldiers who served in World War II and as an exercise trail.

The 3km trek one of the most popular spots in the Dandenong Ranges National Park. Its steep terrain is not to be underestimated, but this suits many who are often preparing to undertake the real ‘Kokoda Track’. Plaques along the trail depict the lives of the soldiers who fought and died on the real Kokoda Trail in Papua New Guinea, during World War II.

The steps represent the ‘Golden Staircase’, a name given by Australian soldiers to the 2000 steps cut by the Australian Army Engineers and others into the track between Uberi and Imita Ridge.

While the vegetation and history provides some of the attraction, most are drawn to the challenge of ascending 200m over 1.5km. A trail starting from Halletts Way and running along the Bald Hill Linear Reserve could replicate a similar experience and elevation change at Bald Hill.
10.2 CYCLING – MOUNTAIN BIKING

The terrain, topography, accessibility, and views to Melbourne and further afield make Bald Hill a good fit for Mountain biking.

The Draft Grampians Region Cycling & Trails Infrastructure, Business and Masterplan has identified Bald Hill as a site of significant potential for Mountain Biking. It has the potential to increase the day visitation market to Moorabool and act as a tourism gateway to the broader Grampians region.

Bald Hill is located close to the Ballarat train line (5km north of the Bacchus Marsh Station) and the Western Highway (30,000 vehicles a day) providing excellent access to the site for the day trip mountain bike market.

The addition of a quality Mountain Bike course at Bald Hill would complement the national BMX facility planned for the Bacchus Marsh Racecourse Reserve and the National Road Championships held annually at Mt Buninyong, and may form part of a targeted tourism campaign to attract more cycling visitors to Moorabool.

In the wider region, Bacchus Marsh is well situated as a central location from three of Victoria’s four major population centres of Melbourne CBD (56km), Ballarat (60km) and Geelong (57km). Bendigo is within a 1.5 hour drive (136km) from Bacchus Marsh and is still easily accessible for day visitation.

Situated only 56km from the Melbourne CBD makes Bald Hill comparable in distance with two of Melbourne’s other key Mountain Bike facilities, The You Yangs (62km) to the south west and Lysterfield (43km) in the east (figure 18).

Due to their distance from Melbourne, the You Yangs and Lysterfield both have high day trip visitation and it would be expected that Bald Hill would attract a similar market share. This is supported by State Government data from 2016, which shows that there were nearly three times as many day visitors (1.8 million) to this region than overnight visitors (568,000).

Lysterfield has 20km of trails and an estimated yearly usage of 140,000 visitors (2014). The You Yangs has approximately 40km of trail and attracts upward of 125,000 (2014) dedicated mountain bike visitors annually (approximately half of total You Yangs visitation).

Harcourt (approx. 100km from Melbourne CBD) has received State funding ($2m) and is currently under construction. The reserve is a similar size to Bald Hill and 34km of Mountain bike trails are being built. Models estimate that these trails will attract 100,000 visitors per year and it is although these will primarily be overnight visitation.
It is expected that a quality trail network within a similar distance to Melbourne’s CBD, such as that which could be achieved on Bald Hill, would attract a similar volume of users.

Domestic day trip Mountain Bike visitors at the You Yangs and Lysterfield have been estimated to spend $77 per trip.

Using a conservative visitation of 50,000 per annum against an average spend of $77 per user, it is estimated that approximately $3.85 million dollars could be generated annually from mountain bike visitors alone (Table 1).

At Harcourt, it was estimated that in year 1 $2.4 million would be spent in the local area and by year 5 the return to the area was estimated at $9.8 million dollars annually. The estimated cost of construction of the site was estimated at $2 million dollars.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Visitation</th>
<th>Annual local economic return</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>$3.85 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>$6.16 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>$7.7 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>$11.55 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Estimated economic return for day trip Mountain Bike visitation (based on estimates from Warburton Mountain Bike Feasibility Study, 2013).

Case Study: Creswick Mountain Bike Facility

In 2016, Hepburn Shire Council received a planning grant from Sports Recreation Victoria to undertake the development of a Master Plan for the Creswick Mountain Bike Facility.

The 100 kilometre purpose-built mountain bike trail will create 30 new jobs, and importantly put Creswick on the map as a mountain bike destination of choice.

The project received a further $2.56m to begin construction of the 100km trail network utilising both new and upgrading existing trails.

More than 100 kilometres of purpose-built mountain bike trails will connect unofficial tracks near Creswick to the town itself.

State government figures estimate the Hepburn Shire town is expected to see 80,000 visitors annually by 2022 when the project is finished.

10.3 HORSE RIDING

Currently there is evidence of limited horse riding occurring within the reserve, most likely from residents along Tramway Lane as the site does not currently provide good access for vehicles and horse floats.

With the improvements to the horse riding facilities at the Bacchus Marsh Recreation Reserve, demand for such trails are unknown, however there may be potential for the development of trails along the western boundary of the reserve along the Korkuperrimul Creek and along Tramway Lane. Any development for horse riding should be done in consultation with the Bacchus Marsh Pony Club.

10.4 NON-URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Residential development has crept towards Bald Hill from the east and now occupies most of the suitable land.

Beyond the land currently zoned for residential development, the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework or the Bacchus Marsh Housing Strategy do not identify the need for further residential development of Bald Hill.

However, a key action of the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework is to undertake a Land Use Investigation Project for non-urban development for the area north of Bald Hill.
10.5 ENVIRONMENTAL ENHANCEMENT

To ensure the protection of some of the more sensitive areas of the reserve where the topography and soil type do not facilitate the development of trails and potentially non-urban development, it is recommended that further revegetation is undertaken to:

- Limit access to sensitive areas (both environmental and Indigenous);
- Stabilise soils to minimise further erosion; and
- Engage the community in increasing their awareness of the local environment through community revegetation projects, potentially held in partnership with the Pentland Hills Landcare Group.

It is expected that funding for continued revegetation to protect further degradation of sensitive areas will be provided via Grow West, Melbourne Water and State Government grants.

Map 16 indicates the potential value that Bald Hill provides as a large patch of native vegetation on the western edge of Bacchus Marsh providing a large refuge for bird and mammals moving through the landscape between Lerderderg State Park and the Werribee Gorge along the waterways, and connection to Telford Park via the Bald Hill Linear Reserve. These ‘biolinks’ then provide opportunities for connections to the surrounding areas of Melton Reservoir, Long Forest and back to the Brisbane Ranges.

10.6 LOOKOUTS, INTERPRETATION AND ART

There is excellent potential for various engagement elements such as lookouts, artwork and local interpretation.

The views could be framed and capitalised upon via formalised lookout platforms at locations across the site. These lookouts would be good locations to incorporate interpretation signage and artwork related to stories of the local area.

There are many successful combinations of these elements in similar locations across the country with Canberra’s Dairy Farmers Hill lookout within the National Arboretum.

The Dairy Farmers Hill lookout incorporates local stories and geographical interpretation with a large eagle sculpture and is a popular location to enjoy the sweeping views from.

A lookout or lookouts incorporated into track and trail networks would also provide destinations along the walk or ride that the user could seek out and enjoy.
11 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

To assist in the development of the reserve, encourage increased participation and visitation by local residents and visitors, it is recommended that this is undertaken through three stages:

1. Feasibility Study;
2. Master Plan; and
3. Construction.

Sports Recreation Victoria and Regional Development Victoria have indicated that State Government funding opportunities exist for the progression of each of these stages and that they are willing to work with Council to assist in identifying and applying for grants.

It is important that alternate opportunities are also explored such as seeking support from the private sector to assist in the development of the site.

In addition to funding opportunities for the investigation and potential implementation of construction of tracks and trails on the reserve, funding is also available for the continued control of pest plants and animals and revegetation on the site. This funding is available to Council through the Grow West, Melbourne Water and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

In addition to Council applying for funding directly to these organisations and agencies, continued collaboration with the Rotary, Moorabool Landcare Network and Pentland Hills Landcare Group may also result in additional funding and community engagement opportunities for Council.

12 POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF INCREASED ACTIVATION

- Increased opportunities for recreation
- Engagement with local community
- Increased awareness of local heritage (European and Indigenous)
- Protection of landscape values on western edge of Bacchus Marsh
- Retention and expansion of revegetation
- Management of erosion
- Increased visitation to Bacchus Marsh
- Day visitation spend per person $77
- Potential to leverage visitation to promote other experiences in Moorabool
- Recognition of Local Indigenous connection with landscape
- Engagement with Wurundjeri people
- Protection of European heritage (quarry)
13 RECOMMENDATIONS AND TIMELINES

Bald Hill is currently an underutilised Council asset that is the site of illegal and non-compatible activities, such as shooting, trail bikes and the dumping of household rubbish. Over the last three years a total of, between 9 and 13.5 days of Council staff time has been lost investigating and responding to complaints.

There is the potential for the formal development of the reserve to encourage further recreation uses such as walking and cycling to create and space that local residents and visitors can enjoy, as well as protecting the local landscape.

Similar projects undertaken across Victoria has seen significant funding provided by the State Government aimed at increasing and assisting increased participation in active recreation, as well as tourism and economic benefits to the local areas.

The site has potential for:

1. A Regional Level facility for active recreation through the development of three active recreation precincts all of which should be further investigated:
   • Shared trails that consider universal access for walking, running, horse riding and cycling trails that include:
     • Lookout and viewing locations;
     • Trail, higher intensity running and fitness;
     • Art and interpretational signage; and
     • Lower intensity cycling options.
   • Mountain Bike Facility.

2. The northern edge of the reserve adjacent to Swans Road should be considered for inclusion in the future non-urban investigation area identified as a key action in the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework.

3. The development to be undertaken in a series of stages, commencing with and seeking funding to complete a Feasibility Study (including community consultation) in 2018/19.

4. Funding of the Feasibility Study, Master Plan and construction of the tracks, trails and lookouts to be provided by funding sources such as:
   • Regional Development Victoria;
   • Sports and Recreation Victoria;
   • Developer Contribution Plans (DCPs);
   • Council Capital and Recurrent budgets (to compliment alternate funding sources); and
   • Public/Private partnerships.

The timeline outlined in table 2 below provides the potential staging for the development of Bald Hill.

Timelines and costs are indicative only and may vary subject to the development of project brief.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Action</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Expected outcome</th>
<th>Timeline</th>
<th>Year Committed</th>
<th>Year Complete</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Funding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feasibility Study</strong></td>
<td>Detailed assessment of the potential benefits of the development for:</td>
<td>Assessment how development of tracks and trails would:</td>
<td>9-12 months</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
<td>State Government Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Increased participation in active recreation;</td>
<td>1. Lead to increased participation and a more active local community;</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Short and long term economic benefits for local businesses and region</td>
<td>2. Expected economic benefits that may result during and post construction;</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(e.g. jobs during construction, tourism, local traders); and</td>
<td>3. Protect and enhance environmental values and culturally sensitive areas; and</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Engagement with Local Indigenous Group and residents.</td>
<td>4. Identify funding interest from public and private sectors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Consultation</strong></td>
<td>Engagement with local community, potential user groups, industry and government agencies to raise awareness of the reserve and to assist Council in advocating for external funding.</td>
<td>Provide guidance to Council regarding the interest of the local community and relevant stakeholders regarding the potential development of Bald Hill.</td>
<td>6 weeks</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>2018/19</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Master Plan</strong></td>
<td>Outlines staged development of the site including construction and maintenance costs.</td>
<td>Detailed plan outlining trail networks, expected economic returns, visitation, potential investment.</td>
<td>12-18 months</td>
<td>2019/20</td>
<td>2020/21</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
<td>State Government Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes preliminary geotechnical, cultural heritage and flora and fauna surveys to guide potential infrastructure placement to avoid significant areas.</td>
<td>The report should also investigate potential management models and income generation opportunities for Council.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Considers potential impacts (positive and negative) of non-urban development on the functionality of the reserve.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Design and Construct</strong></td>
<td>Undertaken in alignment with the Master Plan.</td>
<td>Final design and construction of the trails and required infrastructure.</td>
<td>2-5 years</td>
<td>2021 onwards</td>
<td>Subject to final design and funding</td>
<td>$2-3m estimate but subject to design and staging of construction</td>
<td>State Government Council</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Would include detailed geotechnical, cultural heritage and flora and fauna surveys.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Urban residential investigation</strong></td>
<td>Inclusion of 20ha area into the non-urban investigation area identified in the Bacchus Marsh Urban Growth Framework.</td>
<td>Formal assessment of the development potential and constraints of the development of the identified parcel of the reserve.</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>2021/2022</td>
<td>2022/2023</td>
<td>Costs associated with the land use investigation</td>
<td>Council</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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