

PLAN HARCOURT

PROJECT BULLETIN: UPDATE ON PLAN HARCOURT

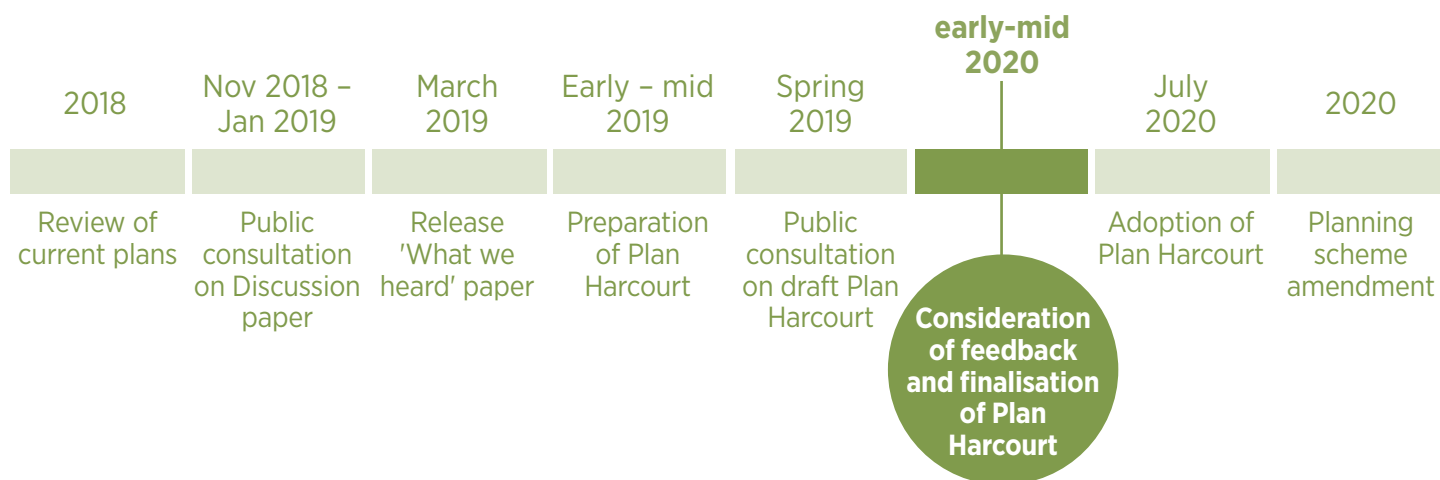
Project background

Plan Harcourt explores spatial land use planning, town centre design and activation, and local economic development initiatives across two separate but interrelated projects: (1) Harcourt Framework Plan and (2) Shine Harcourt Leanganook. A place-based approach has been taken to ensure that future change in Harcourt builds on the town's unique character and key attributes, and that development and investment occurs in a coordinated way.

Project status

The draft Plan Harcourt was released for community and other stakeholder feedback from November 2019 to January 2020. Council received a total of 16 submissions during the public consultation period, including 13 submissions from, or on behalf of, Harcourt residents/land-owners, local community groups including the Harcourt Progress Association, and a local developer. The remaining three submissions were received from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), the Department of Transport (DoT) and the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA). Feedback on the plan was also provided at two community drop-in sessions and the Harcourt Twilight Market.

Submissions have been analysed and considered by the Strategic Planning team in preparing the final version of the Plan. The team has also been liaising with government departments and other agencies, and conducting further technical planning work, to complete the plan ahead of presentation to Council.



Key considerations for the final Plan

The following revisions have been made to the Plan since it was exhibited as a draft strategy:

Planning Practice Note 91: Reforms to the Residential Zones

The draft Plan Harcourt that was released for public comment noted that the established residential areas of Harcourt would be rezoned to General Residential Zone (GRZ), except for some land within the town centre. The draft plan also proposed rezoning the future residential areas A and B from Farming Zone to GRZ.

In December 2019, DELWP released a new Planning Practice Note 91 (PPN91) on how to apply the residential zones. PPN91 introduces a new suite of considerations when applying residential zones, and also reforms the nature and application of the General Residential Zone. Principle 4 of PPN91 states that the GRZ should be applied to areas where housing development of three storeys exists or is planned for, and that it is inappropriate to apply the GRZ to areas where the existing single and double storey character of an area is to be respected.

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Considering the plan in light of PPN91, the GRZ is no longer suitable for Harcourt. Instead, the existing Township Zone continues to be the most appropriate residential zone for both Harcourt's established areas and the residential expansion areas.

PPN91 also advises that the schedules to the zones should be used to establish the preferred neighbourhood character objectives; to mandate a building height limit if the zone allows for this; and to specify variations to residential development standards if these can be strategically justified.

For Harcourt's established residential areas and the town expansion areas, it is proposed that the schedule to the Township Zone include these preferred neighbourhood character objectives, to mandate a building height of two storeys, and to specify variations to the residential development standards relating to site coverage, side and rear setbacks and front fencing. The Design and Development Overlay is therefore no longer required for these areas.

Neighbourhood character analysis

A neighbourhood character analysis of the established residential areas was conducted as part of the preparation of the Harcourt Framework Plan. Following advice from DELWP, and to help support the inclusion of schedules to the Township Zone (noted above), this has now been included within the Plan Harcourt document as Appendix 5. The analysis provides the strategic justification for the proposed schedule to the Township Zone.

Town centre urban design plan

Community feedback and further internal deliberation has highlighted the need for the list of urban design/ place activation projects to be further explored and brought together in a new town centre urban design plan. This should focus on details relating to movement and access, landscaping and the public realm, and help to coordinate future capital works programming and grant opportunities. The preparation of this plan is to be led by the Strategic Planning team with the assistance of a suitably qualified urban design consultant. It is anticipated that this will commence in the coming months, at which time expressions of interest are to be sought for a community reference group to inform the directions and content of the plan.



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Developer contributions

Since the release of the draft Plan Harcourt, the Strategic Planning team has undertaken further research on different approaches to collect developer contributions for local infrastructure. This included discussions with the Victorian Planning Authority and other local councils on planning and legal mechanisms being utilised. Following internal deliberation it was determined that, rather than using a Development Contributions Plan Overlay (DCPO), Council will utilise a mechanism available via the Development Plan Overlay (DPO).

At the time of preparing a development plan, applicant/s would be required to identify how they will make a contribution to critical infrastructure in the area (external to the area affected by the DPO), either through direct provision in line with a Harcourt Strategic Infrastructure Plan (in kind) or by way of a cash payment (at a rate defined in the Harcourt Strategic Infrastructure Plan).

The Strategic Planning team, working in conjunction with the Infrastructure team, is currently preparing the Harcourt Strategic Infrastructure Plan. This Plan will be prepared using the same methodology as a formal DCPO, which requires that we establish a strategic justification for collecting contributions; that we demonstrate a nexus between new development and an infrastructure item; and that any infrastructure costs are apportioned on the basis of projected 'share of usage'.

While this approach does not utilise the DCPO, it is thorough and will operate from the same strategic basis as a DCPO. This pathway is recommended in light of the likely intensity of development in Harcourt (significant but not warranting a full DCPO); the need to transparently collect and expend contributions; and because this approach better reflects the organisation's capacity to manage a developer contributions framework.

In light of this, the final Plan Harcourt no longer proposes to introduce a DCPO on the future residential areas. Instead, the Plan refers to the Harcourt Strategic Infrastructure Plan that is currently being prepared, and amendment documentation will now include a Development Plan Overlay with policy relating to infrastructure contributions.

Next steps

A final Plan Harcourt will be presented to Council for consideration at the Ordinary Meeting on 21 July 2020. Subject to the Plan being adopted by Council at that meeting, the Strategic Planning team will then seek authorisation from the Minister for Planning to prepare an amendment to the planning scheme to introduce the policy, zoning and overlay changes identified in the Plan.

The planning scheme amendment will be formally exhibited to the community and stakeholders, and submissions can be made in relation to any part of the proposed amendment. Submissions will be referred to an independent planning panel for its consideration.

Contact

For more information visit www.mountalexander.vic.gov.au/PlanHarcourt or contact the Strategic Planning and Economy Team by email info@mountalexander.vic.gov.au or phone (03) 5471 1700.