

# STRUCTURE PLANNING FOR ACTIVITY CENTRES

*This Practice Note provides a guide to the activity centre structure planning process. It covers the rationale for structure planning of activity centres, the policy context, and possible outputs of the process.*

*Supporting material including more detailed information on what is expected of the tasks outlined in this Practice Note, the statutory planning tools available to implement structure plans, and project brief examples, is available through the Structure Planning for Activity Centres Resources web page [www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning).*

*This advice is designed specifically for Principal and Major Activity Centres, however, the structure planning process can be applied to all types of centres.*

## WHAT IS STRUCTURE PLANNING?

Structure planning is the process of developing a framework for the integrated development of an activity centre.

Structure plans will guide the major changes to land use, built form and public spaces that together can achieve economic, social and environmental objectives for the centre.

The aim of structure planning for activity centres is to give effect to the policies and objectives set out for activity centres in *Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth* and to provide effectively for changing community needs.

The process should produce both a framework articulating how the centre will develop, and the actions needed to realise that framework.

A structure plan will usually require a planning scheme amendment as one of its implementation mechanisms.

## WHY DO A STRUCTURE PLAN?

Principal and Major Activity Centres identified in *Melbourne 2030* are likely to experience significant change over time as Melbourne moves to a more sustainable future. Other activity centres are likely to emerge as Melbourne develops a more compact form.

Structure plans will provide the foundation for activity centre change by defining the preferred direction of future growth and articulating how this change will be managed.

DECEMBER 2003

## WHAT DOES MELBOURNE 2030 EXPECT FOR ACTIVITY CENTRES?

The *Melbourne 2030* vision for more than 100 Principal and Major Activity Centres is for multifunctional, vibrant centres that provide a focus for services, employment and social interaction. These activity centres will be locations for significant change.

Activity centres are places where people shop, work, meet, relax and live. Increasingly, they will be well-served by public transport. They range in size and intensity of use and include strip shopping centres, major education and employment centres and centres focused on regional malls.

Most directions in *Melbourne 2030* are relevant to the planning of activity centres. Direction 1 – a more compact city is of most relevance. It envisages activity centres as locations where new development will be concentrated, including new commercial development and a range of housing forms and densities. They will be places of high quality urban design and will be linked by an improved and expanded public transport network. Direction 8 (*Melbourne 2030*, p. 46) provides details on how better transport links will be achieved.

*Melbourne 2030* discourages new development or expansion of activities away from activity centres unless it can be convincingly demonstrated that the proposal is of net benefit to the community and the region served by the proposal.

It also seeks to ensure the more efficient use of and investment in infrastructure, protection of Melbourne's green wedges and protection of the character of existing suburbs through the concentration of major change around the network of activity centres.

As a consequence, activity centres will make an important contribution to maintaining development opportunities to accommodate housing, office and retail development growth over the next 30 years.

The key objectives in *Melbourne 2030* for all activity centres are to:

- *broaden the mix of uses appropriate to the type of centre and the needs of the population served*
- *encourage economic activity and business synergies*
- *improve access by walking, cycling and public transport to services and facilities for local and regional populations*
- *provide focal points for the community at different geographic scales*
- *support the development of the Principal Public Transport Network (PPTN)*
- *reduce the number of private motorised vehicle trips by concentrating activities that generate high*

*numbers of (non-freight) trips in highly accessible locations.*

Overall, these objectives seek to improve the urban environment for all.

Activity centres must be planned and developed to maximise their potential and to create opportunities for investment and growth based on their capacity. Each council has a responsibility to provide for population and economic growth.

This must be balanced with careful consideration of the existing conditions of the centre and what is valued by the community. For example, *Melbourne 2030* recognises that heritage places and values need to be protected. This must be taken into account in any structure planning process.

Structure planning can show how these issues will be managed.

## WHAT ARE THE AIMS OF THE STRUCTURE PLANNING PROCESS?

The key task of the structure planning process is to articulate the type and quantity of change in the centre and how the impacts of that change will be managed.

Structure planning should:

- set the strategic framework for the use and development of land in and around the centre, and give clear direction to investors about preferred locations for investment
- support the roles and functions for the centre that will result from its classification, housing intensification and the development of the public transport network
- outline the scale and direction of development that will meet the future needs of the community. This will need to be outlined in three dimensions for key precincts within the centre, and, depending on the extent of change anticipated, may need to occur for the whole centre
- support greater transport choice and provide for adequate transport and traffic management
- identify the need for new street and pedestrian connections
- encourage the enhancement of the public environment
- promote development which is environmentally sustainable
- reflect *Melbourne 2030*'s performance criteria, policies and objectives for activity centres
- provide greater certainty for developments that are consistent with the structure plan.

## Performance criteria for activity centres, *Melbourne 2030*

Activity centres best meet *Melbourne 2030's* vision, principles and key directions when they fulfil the following integrated performance criteria. Over time, the performance of each centre in the network will be assessed against these criteria and other relevant standards to provide a benchmark for determining the direction and magnitude of changes required to improve the network of centres.

### Social

- improve the liveability (safety, convenience, comfort, aesthetics) of the area
- increase opportunities for social interaction and provide a focus for the community
- contribute to the area's natural, cultural and historical heritage
- make a wide range of services and facilities more accessible to all
- relate well to surrounding development, land uses and landscapes
- meet the needs of all segments of the population
- maintain or improve transport choice for all
- maintain or improve public health

### Economic

- contribute to economic competitiveness of the network of centres that provides wide community benefit

- promote urban forms that minimise overall land and transport requirements
- ensure more efficient use of land and provision of infrastructure
- improve freight movement and business logistics
- improve business and employment opportunities

### Environmental

- encourage the development of urban transport systems that will limit pollution from fossil fuels and reduce greenhouse gas emissions
- improve energy-efficient building design and layout
- limit the amount of waste generated for disposal off-site
- increase water conservation, including water-sensitive urban design
- control noise emissions to achieve reasonable levels near sensitive uses.

### WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR STRUCTURE PLANNING?

Consultation with stakeholders throughout the process is essential for a structure plan to become a reality. Community engagement is a key element at all stages of preparing a structure plan.

The plan must also give effect to the State and local planning policies for the area, including the Municipal Strategic Statement (provided it is consistent with *Melbourne 2030*).

Any structure planning process will include a number of stages. Each stage will need specific stakeholder engagement and community consultation mechanisms.

The model that is used will depend on the context, such as what processes have worked in the past and are familiar to stakeholders and whether work has already been done to guide the development of the centre.

The process should be clearly understood and agreed to by the stakeholders, achievable within the resources and time limits, include community and stakeholder engagement at each step, and be appropriate for achieving the specified outputs.

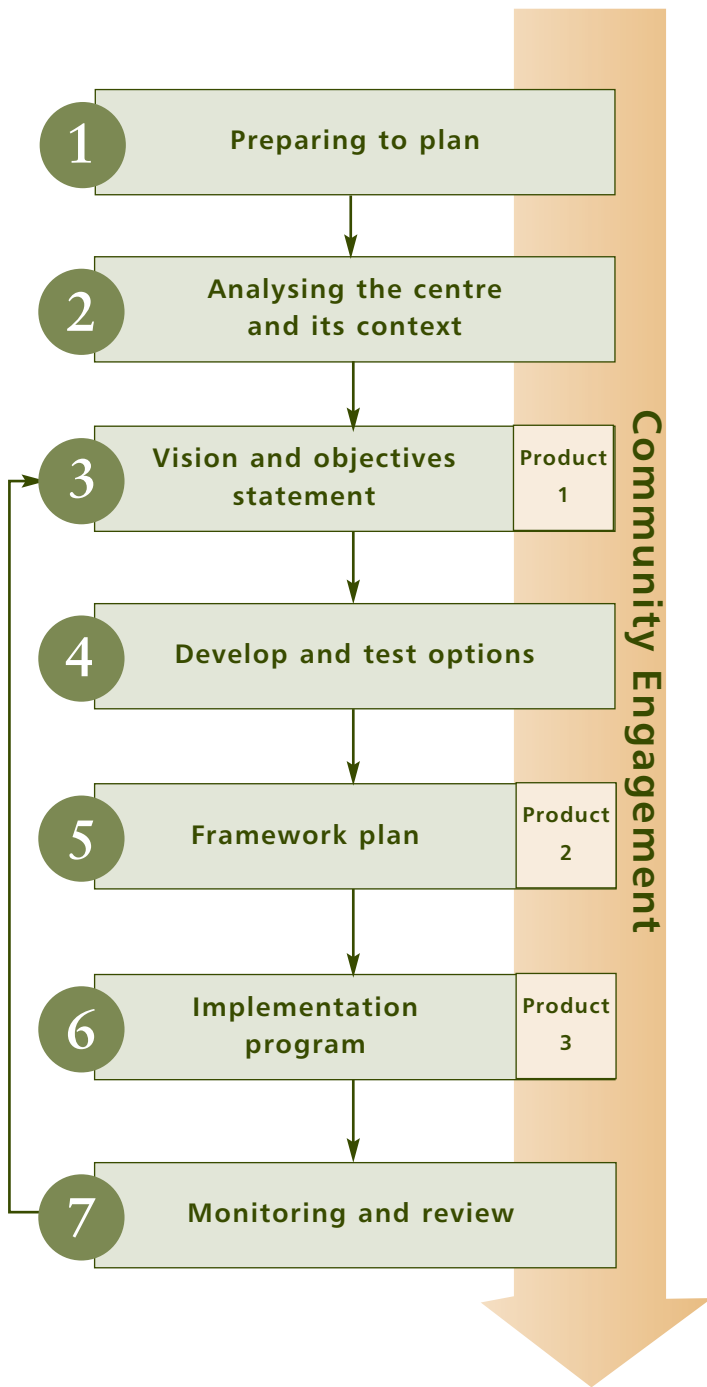
A typical process could include the steps and key tasks illustrated in the following model.

The model identifies three key 'products' that result from steps in the process. These products, when combined, make up a 'structure plan'. These products will be important vehicles for consultation. They are:

1. a statement of the vision and objectives
2. a framework plan
3. the implementation program.

Other steps will also have outputs for discussion and consultation, such as reports of research or draft scenarios.

# Structure Planning Model



## Step 1. Preparing to plan

- Review any existing strategic work for the centre and assess the extent to which it achieves, or can achieve, objectives for activity centres in *Melbourne 2030*.
- Identify the stakeholders - who are the key players?
- Identify relevant data sources including maps and aerial photographs.
- Identify potential implementation mechanisms.
- Establish the project team and consultation processes.

## Step 2. Analysing the centre and its context

- Scope the issues facing the centre and the processes for addressing them.
- Identify community values and issues.
- Establish what *Melbourne 2030* means for the growth of the centre, taking into account all nine directions of the Strategy.
- Identify the role and function of the centre within the network of centres around it (see [www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning) for further details). This may be based on an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT).
- Define the study area. It should be large enough to allow for growth and manage impacts beyond the centre. The study area may therefore be larger than the activity centre.

## Step 3. Vision and objectives statement

This step should produce a vision and objectives statement that outlines the preferred future for the centre, sets measurable objectives and answers the following questions:

- What is the preferred future for the centre? What are the principles and aspirations that will guide this change?
- What are the needs of the current and future community? In this context ‘community’ refers to both the local community and the broader community.
- What are the broad land-use goals?
- What are the opportunities for growth in the centre? This should be informed by the outcomes of the Regional Housing Working Groups as they become available.
- What and where are the main activity nodes within the centre?
- What is the preferred type of urban form?
- What urban design aspirations will guide the development of the centre?
- What land-use changes will be needed to meet the objectives for the centre?
- How will the vision and objectives, when realised, achieve the objectives of *Melbourne 2030*?

Measurable objectives should be included for all the major changes that will be needed in the centre (such as increased housing, employment or retailing provision or changes in road, parking and public transport provision). For example, objectives could specify:

- how many additional dwellings are needed
- how much retail will be needed for local and regional functions
- what service and facility upgrades will be needed
- what new access routes will be required.

The vision and objectives statement must be consistent with *Melbourne 2030* and will need to take into account councils' responsibility to provide for population and economic growth and change.

#### Step 4. Develop and test options

In this step, physical options for the future development of the centre (based on the vision and objectives statement) are explored. Their economic feasibility, community impacts, heritage impacts and design practicalities are tested with the community and other key stakeholders.

For example, if one of the objectives for the centre is to increase the number of dwellings in the centre by x amount, this process might look at different options to accommodate this additional housing.

The information from this step can then feed into the development of the framework plan.

#### Step 5. Framework plan

The framework plan gives effect to the vision and objectives for the centre. The framework plan must be detailed enough to be translated into a clear implementation plan for the centre, including statutory and other actions. It may identify particular precincts that need more detailed planning.

The framework plan should show:

- the boundaries of the centre
- suitable locations for various forms of development and opportunities to increase the mix of uses in the centre
- the form of future development. This should be shown in three dimensions for key precincts within the centre, and in some cases, for the whole centre
- the street and pedestrian movement network as well as the main changes to vehicular access and movement, parking, public transport, walking and cycling provision
- how the quality and design of the public environment will be enhanced
- changes to physical infrastructure, services and community facilities
- how heritage places will be managed

- how interface issues with adjacent areas will be addressed
- how development will contribute to environmental sustainability
- how the plan will help meet the performance criteria for activity centres in *Melbourne 2030*.

(See [www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning) for further details on these issues.)

The framework plan may also identify sub-areas, precincts or development sites that require more detailed planning over time. Once the structure planning process is completed, precinct plans can then be developed as necessary for these sites.

Feedback from the community and other key stakeholders is required during the development of the framework plan.

#### Step 6. Implementation program

The implementation program shows the actions and strategies necessary to implement the framework plan. It should include:

- an action plan showing responsibilities, time lines and resources, the priority projects, the sequence for achieving them and who is responsible
- potential funding sources to implement initiatives outlined in the framework plan (such as infrastructure improvements, provision of open space, etc.)
- the governance arrangements for the centre and the management of the plan
- any planning scheme changes needed
- non-statutory implementation measures, such as land exchange or site consolidation, public/private partnerships, marketing and centre promotions
- an indication of what precinct plans, if any, need to be developed, what these will cover and when they are expected to begin
- indicators to measure progress in meeting the objectives and implementing the plan, including who reports on these indicators.

(See [www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning) for further details on these tasks.)

#### Step 7. Monitoring and review

This step establishes processes to monitor progress towards achieving the vision and objectives for the centre and for the regular review of the products of the structure planning process.

Regular reviewing of the products generated by the planning process is key to ensuring that they remain current and relevant.

As the work of the Regional Housing Working Groups progresses and local housing strategies are developed, the outcomes from this work will need to inform the review of the structure planning process.

Likewise, once a structure plan is completed for a centre, this will in turn assist in the monitoring and review of other initiatives such as the Regional Housing Working Groups.

#### FURTHER ASSISTANCE

DSE will provide ongoing support to councils in their structure planning work. We are involved in:

- steering committees
- growth area planning
- transit cities
- amendment processing.

We can also provide early feedback on the consistency of your structure plan with *Melbourne 2030*. This is particularly important at the vision and objectives statement stage and the framework plan stage.

Please contact the Port Phillip Regional Office to discuss DSE's involvement in your structure planning projects.

More detailed information on what is expected of the tasks outlined in the structure planning model is available at [www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning](http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/melbourne2030/structureplanning).

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ISBN 1 74106 778 2

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