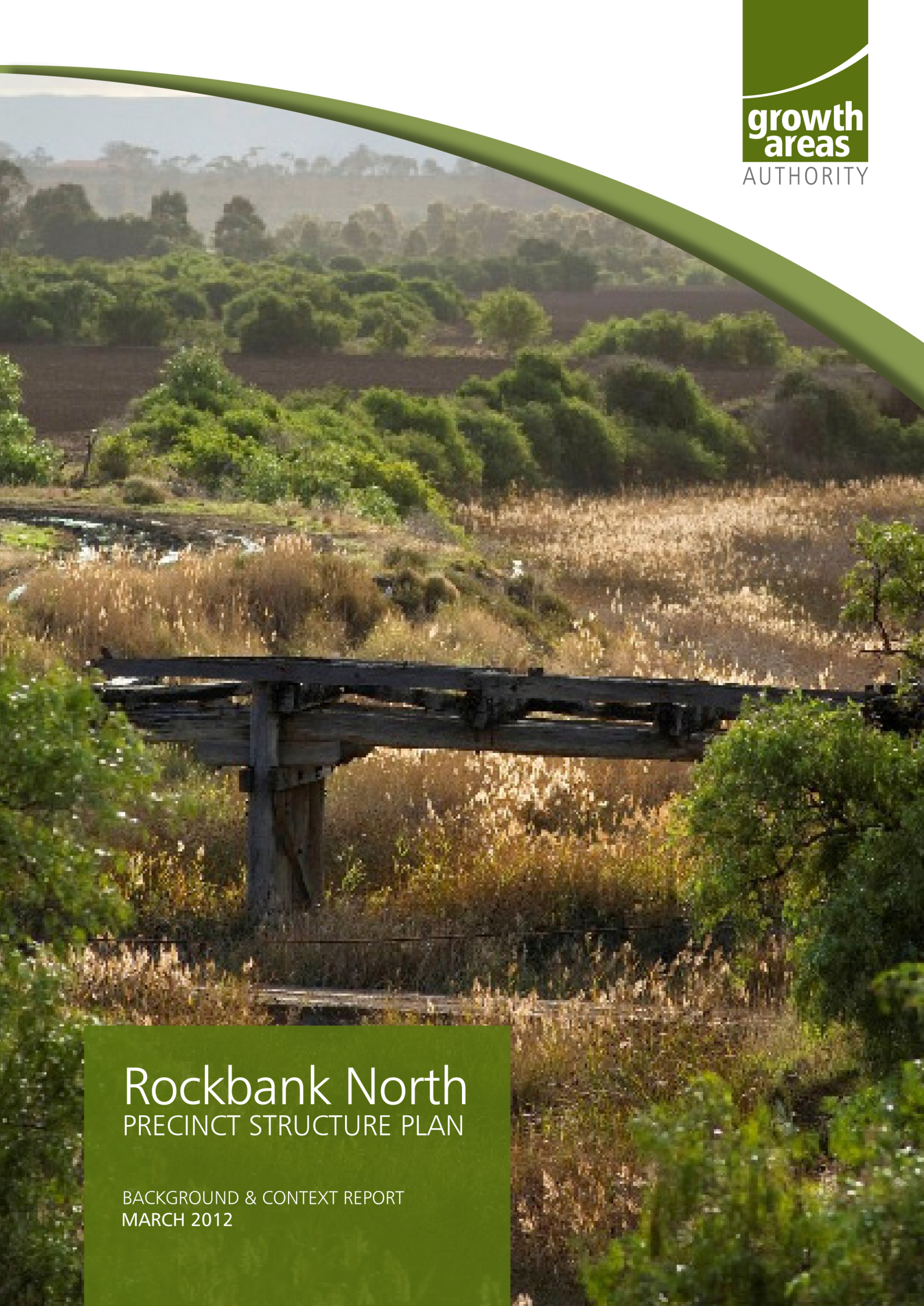
growth areas AUTHORITY



Rockbank North
PRECINCT STRUCTURE PLAN

BACKGROUND & CONTEXT REPORT
MARCH 2012

BACKGROUND REPORT - ROCKBANK NORTH PSP

CHAPTER 1 LOCAL CONTEXT AND SITE DESCRIPTION

1.1 Metropolitan and Regional Context

The Rockbank North Precinct is located 28km west of the Melbourne CBD, centrally located in the heart of the Melton – Caroline Springs growth corridor *(refer to Appendix 1)*.

The Melton Growth Area extends from Caroline Springs in the east through to Melton Township in the west, following the alignment of the Western Freeway and Melbourne-Ballarat rail line. The corridor is bound by Melton Highway in the north and extends southward to Boundary Road, encompassing the existing Rockbank settlement on Western Highway and a major planned new suburb at Toolern, south east of Melton Township. The development of the growth area will see the satellite town of Melton join the metropolitan area to form a continuous corridor of urban development west of Melbourne. The urban growth areas of Wyndham and Melton will also converge with new metropolitan road and rail infrastructure supporting their strategic connection.

The Melton-Caroline Springs Growth corridor is expected to accommodate an additional 65,000 new dwellings (including Toolern) over the next 20-30 years, with a corresponding growth in population of around 180,000 people. Employment projections indicate around 85,000 new jobs will be generated in the Melton Shire over this period to accompany the planned growth in population. The Melton Shire overall is expected to cater for a population in the order of 280,000 people.

Major investment in new transport infrastructure in the form of the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road (OMR) and the Regional Rail Link (RRL) will underpin the corridor's urban growth and accessibility. Together the OMR and RRL will deliver important metropolitan connections and open up strategic employment routes that link Melbourne's south west to its north. Upgrades to the Melton rail line and new train stations at Toolern and Paynes Road are also planned. In addition to attracting increased employment to the region, the improved transport facilities will also boost access to services and liveability for residents in Melbourne's west.

The Melton Growth Area:

- Is a key gateway to Ballarat and western Victoria, anchored by the Melbourne – Ballarat rail line which is planned for future electrification and new station developments within the Growth Area.

- Has two existing growth fronts 12km apart, advancing the growth of the corridor from the east (Hillside) and west (Toolern).

- Supports a series of existing and planned regional employment hubs, including the existing Melton Industrial node, proposed Toolern Business Park and major industrial nodes to the south-east of the corridor focused around Laverton, Truganina, Ravenhall and Deer Park.

- Supports significant biodiversity assets including redgum woodlands, the Kororoit Creek, Kororoit Grasslands and the Deanside wetlands, that accommodate a wide variety of native fauna and includes growling grass frog habitat.

- Has important landscape features including Mt Cottrell and Mt Aitken.

The Western Corridor Plan which covers the cities of Melton and Wyndham introduces a new strategic plan to guide the growth of the corridor. The Corridor Plan:

- Supports significant residential and employment growth in the corridor, and provides for the strategic integration of new urban areas with the existing suburbs of Caroline Springs and Melton 'bookending' the corridor.

- Facilitates the long term connection of the new urban area with expanding growth fronts to the south-east in the Wyndham Growth Area.

- Recognises that the corridor contains a number of major transport corridors that may constrain local permeability (including the OMR, Western Freeway and Melbourne-Ballarat Rail line), and provides for a strongly balanced distribution of community facilities, activity centres and open space amenity.

- Extends the western industrial node and connects it to a new freight terminal and the metropolitan transport network.

- Provides for the protection and enhancement of the Kororoit Creek corridor and its adjacent habitat environments as a regionally significant recreational and biodiversity asset for the corridor.

- Creates new public transport and arterial road connections that will join the corridor with existing neighbourhoods at Hillside and Caroline Springs, and beyond to the Sydenham Rail Station, Water Gardens Principal Activity Centre and Caroline Springs Rail Station.

- Establishes a trail network which will extend through the growth corridor area, principally along the Kororoit Creek.

- Creates opportunities for transit oriented development around the Rockbank Rail Station.

1.2 Rockbank North Precinct

The Rockbank North Precinct occupies a central position in this corridor, immediately north of the Rockbank Rail Station and existing Rockbank Township. The Precinct comprises some 786ha of land, bound by the Western Highway to the south, Leakes Road to the west, the reservation for the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road to the east, and various farming properties to the north. The land is characterised by a mix of open farm land dotted with rocky outcrops, major wetland and creek environments, and a prominent stand of red gum woodland.

(Refer to Appendix 2).

1.3 Local Context

1.3.1 History

The Wurundjeri people of the Kulin alliance have inhabited the Western Plains of Melbourne for 40,000 years. At the time of European contact the region surrounding the Rockbank PSP lay within the traditional lands of people from the Woi wurrung language group.

Today the descendants of the Woi wurrung are represented by the Wurundjeri Tribe Land and Compensation Cultural Heritage Council Inc. The Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation and the Boon Wurrung Foundation Ltd. are also recognised as being traditional owners of land in the region that includes the Rockbank area.

The Rockbank area was settled by the late 1830s and early 1840s due to the suitability of the grassy plains in the region for grazing, particularly for sheep. The pastoral practises on the land has dramatically altered the landscape at Rockbank including the clearing of vegetation and ploughing, as well as, the construction of roads, fences, dams, houses and outbuildings.

Land in the Rockbank district was first privately sold at auction in 1854, and at this time was divided into large blocks which were subdivided in the early 1900s. By the 1880s the township of Rockbank was established and included a railway station, post office, school, blacksmith and hotel. After European settlement the Rockbank North Precinct has been subject to extensive pastoral activities including repeated ploughing, stock grazing and native tree clearance.

1.3.2 Surrounding Neighbourhoods

The majority of population growth in Melton Shire over the last 20 years has occurred in the eastern part of the municipality in the growth suburbs of Caroline Springs, Burnside, Taylors Hill and Hillside. Significant land release has occurred in these suburbs over the past two decades and has been accompanied by the provision of major community infrastructure, and the upgrade of transport infrastructure such as the completion of the Deer Park Bypass.

While the land immediately surrounding the Rockbank PSP largely comprises undeveloped farming land, key surrounding neighbourhoods in the local and broader context include:

Rockbank

The existing Rockbank settlement is located to the south of the Western Freeway and north of the Melbourne-Ballarat rail line, and is home to around 1300 residents. The community is supported by a local primary school, hall and Baptist Church, Maternal and Child Health centre, general store and rail station. Since its settlement in the 1880s, Rockbank has remained a small, somewhat isolated hamlet surrounded by farming and green wedge land. The area is planned to undergo major residential growth and expansion with the opening up of urban growth opportunities surrounding the township as a result of the expanded UGB.

Toolern

Toolern is situated immediately east of the existing Melton Township and is planned to accommodate approximately 55,000 residents over the coming decades. A PSP for the area was approved in early 2011 and the first stages of residential development are expected to commence in late 2011. The PSP envisages around one –quarter of the Toolern area will be developed for employment purposes, with a Major Activity Centre (MAC) planned around the proposed Toolern Rail Station and a large employment zone extending along the Western Highway.

Caroline Springs

Caroline Springs is situated approximately 8km east of Rockbank and is home to over 25,000 residents. Since its commencement in 1999, it has grown to become one of the most popular and successful greenfield communities in Australia, and a major flagship project for Delfin Lend Lease. Today, Caroline Springs supports a Major Activity Centre, significant health and education facilities and a rail station is under construction.

Taylors Hill West

Taylors Hill West is an emerging suburb situated immediately north and west of Caroline Springs and Hillside, providing a logical westward extension of these suburbs between Beattys and Taylors Roads. The Taylors Hill West PSP was approved in July 2010 and envisages a further 2400 dwellings in the PSP area, supported by community facilities, open space and a convenience retail centre.

1.2.3 Transport and movement

Road Infrastructure

The Melton Growth Area benefits from strong east-west connectivity, afforded by the Western Freeway, Ballarat-Melbourne rail line and Melton Highway. The Western Freeway has a strategic role as the principal road link between Melbourne and Adelaide, and carries over 70,000 vehicles per day, of which 10% are heavy vehicles. This is expected to increase as more land is urbanised and will need to be serviced. The region has a relatively high car dependency, based on its limited public transport provision and high employment commuter patterns (4 out of 5 Melton residents currently travel outside Melton to work).

The corridor's accessibility has been boosted through the recent completion (2009) of the Deer Park Bypass, which is a four lane freeway extending from the Western Freeway to the Western Ring Road in Sunshine West. It has eased traffic flow through the Deer Park region and provides direct links to the developing industrial precincts of Ravenhall, Derrimut and Truganina.

Further regional accessibility improvements will be achieved through the construction of the Outer Metropolitan Ring Road, which immediately borders the Precinct's eastern boundary. The OMR/E6 Transport Corridor is being planned to accommodate a 100 kilometre long high-speed transport link for people and freight in Melbourne's north and west, creating the opportunity for new road and rail transport links through the Werribee, Melton, Tullamarine, Craigieburn / Mickleham and Epping / Thomastown areas. The OMR will be strategically important to the development of the Melton Growth Area and the Rockbank North Precinct itself, establishing new linkages that will connect Rockbank to the residential and employment growth areas in the north and south west of Melbourne

and to key regional destinations including the Avalon Airport, Melbourne Airport and Hume Highway corridor.

Within Rockbank's more immediate transport context, surrounding road networks of Leakes Road, Hopkins Road, Taylors Road and Beattys Road provide important north-south and east-west connections across the corridor, as an alternative to the higher order freeway/highway routes.

Public Transport

The Melbourne–Ballarat line is presently served by V-Line inter urban services, with a limited frequency of service. The timing of future electrification of the line to Melton Township is uncertain due to capacity constraints on both the western line and through inner Melbourne. The closest station on the electrified rail network is at Sunshine, with the Caroline Springs Station the next planned station for delivery. Region wide, public transport patronage is at a relatively low level and is served by regional bus routes. Gaps exist in local services and there is a strong desire for service levels to be increased.

1.2.4 Employment and Activity centres

Activity Centres

A network of existing and planned activity centres operates in the suburban areas surrounding the Melton-Caroline Springs Corridor. The centres of most relevance include Principal Activity Centres at Sydenham, Sunshine and Toolern and Major Activity Centres located at Caroline Springs (approximately 6km to the east), Brimbank Central (10km to the east), Deer Park Central (11km to the east), Toolern MAC (6km to the west), Melton (8km to the west) and the Melton Woodgrove/Coburns Road centre (10km to the west).

The proposed Rockbank Major Town Centre (MTC), together with the Principal Town Centre at Toolern, will provide a major focus for new retail and employment growth in the region. A broad range of high order health, education, community and commercial services along with residential uses will support the growth of these centres as important services hubs for the community. The co-location of these major centres at key public transport nodes (including a new rail station at Toolern a bus interchange at Rockbank North) will support their broad regional accessibility.

Other major town centres within the corridor are proposed at the Rockbank Train Station, south of the Western Freeway, as well as to the east of the OMR. The Major Town Centres within the corridor will perform slightly different roles dependant on their locational attributes and catchments.

Industrial and Employment land

The Melton Growth Area is served with an excellent supply of existing and planned employment land. In the broader regional setting, there is a state significant industrial node located to the southeast of the Melton Growth Area where the Western Ring Road meets the Princes Freeway. This includes approximately 2,164 hectares of industrial land in the Western Region (UDP, 2008). Growth of this industrial node is expected to continue, particularly in Ravenhall, Truganina and Derrimut with the recent completion of the Deer Park By-Pass where there is nearly 1,000 hectares of industrial land available.

Within the corridor itself, the Melton Industrial Node, which includes the proposed Toolern Business Park, will provide up to 250 hectares of industrial land. Significant areas for new office and commercial development are also planned as part of the Toolern Major Activity Centre, to encourage a stronger diversification in the employment base of the region and support a higher share of white collar employment.

The Melton Growth Area Corridor Plan designates significant new employment precincts in the south-east of the corridor, focused primarily around Hopkins Road and the alignment of the OMR. These employment precincts will take advantage of the excellent transport accessibility afforded this area with the completion of the OMR and RRL, in the form of mixed use, commercial use, as well as, more traditional industrial employment uses.

1.2.5 Community Facilities

The Melton – Caroline Springs corridor supports a good range of social, health and community infrastructure. Most of these are located in the existing Melton Township or around the Caroline Springs Activity Centre. Key facilities include:

A number of key facilities are provided within Caroline Springs:

- Community & Early Learning Centres
- Library
- Neighbourhood House

A number of key facilities are also planned for Toolern Principal Town Centre:

- A justice precinct including Magistrates courts, police and emergency services.
- A Library and Civic Space which may accommodate the Melton Shire Offices
- An Aquatic Centre
- A Performing Arts Centre
- A number of local facilities including early learning and family meeting spaces

CHAPTER TWO ROCKBANK NORTH PRECICNT FEATURES

2.1 Heritage

Cultural heritage studies of the Precinct have revealed some 28 Aboriginal archaeological sites. Many of these sites are isolated artefact and the spread of the sites indicates that they are likely to be large artefact scatters that extend over large areas.

It is expected that sub surface testing will reveal numerous Aboriginal stone artefacts across the Precinct with the most significant sites being concentrated within 200 metres of Kororoit Creek and on the margins of the former swamps in the south east.

Post settlement heritage values are also present in the Precinct. Rockbank Inn (H1933) comprises three ruinous bluestone structures, believed to be a hotel, a store building and a stable, dating from the 1860s. The ruins are located next to the remains of Beatty's Bridge on the Kororoit Creek, on Beatty's Road, formerly one of the main roads from Melbourne to Ballarat. The Inn is a partially intact two roomed bluestone building. The ruins have collapsed due to a fire, however, some areas of slate roof and plastered interior remain. Currently blackberries and peppercorn trees are growing inside and around the remaining structure, destroying the fabric.

The Rockbank Inn site is archaeologically significant for its demonstrated ability to provide information about the occupation and usage of the Inn during the nineteenth century. The site has a high potential to produce artefacts relating to its mid to late nineteenth century occupation. The Rockbank Inn is historically significant for its associations with diggers on their way to the gold fields around Ballarat, and with the soldiers involved in the suppression of the Eureka rebels in December 1854 (Heritage Victoria 2010). (The Precinct also includes a number of dry stone walls, most of which are located proximate to the creek and heritage buildings. Some of the walls are in good condition and have retained their form while others have been degraded over time).

The Victorian Heritage Inventory identifies five sites within the PSP that are of significance. These include:

- Rockbank Inn (H7822-0257), which is also listed on the Victorian Heritage Register.
- Rockbank Bridge (H7822-0258), which comprises a timber road bridge ruin, former road cutting and cobbled section of Beattys Road that leads to the Rockbank Inn.
- Gidney Farm (H7822-0300), which comprises the remains of farm buildings, including a dairy and an open sided hay shed, peppercorn and cypress trees, a well, cobbled areas, a consumption wall and a tank.
- Radio Mast Sites (D7822-0299), which comprise a number of concrete foundations and mast bases from the Rockbank Radio Base. The masts and aerials have been removed; however the concrete bases, cable stay anchors and remnants of the cable housing remain.
- Rockbank Service Centre Stone Wall (D7822-0876), which comprises a low stone wall and fence acting as a boundary marker, and is of local significance.

2.2 Biodiversity

Flora
Vegetation over the majority of the site has been modified by agriculture and is mostly dominated by exotic species. However, there are remnants scattered throughout the Precinct which are largely restricted to low lying areas or rocky outcrops which have avoided the plough.

The Rockbank Precinct contains areas of rich biodiversity value that are home to locally, regionally and nationally significant flora and fauna. In particular, there are a few waterbodies in the precinct and sites along the Kororoit Creek that sustain a habitat for the Growling Grass Frog, which is a nationally threatened species.

The key areas of Vegetation are:

- A patch of remnant River Red Gum exists towards the western boundary of the Precinct. With the exception of several isolated trees, this woodland remains the only significant stand of indigenous River Red-Gums in the area. Apart from this woodland vegetation most native vegetation is associated with wet areas (Deanside Wetlands and Kororoit Creek) or rocky outcrops. Isolated outcrops are typically degraded and, until recently, were dominated by a dense cover of Serrated Tussock Nassella tricotoma.

- Remnant of Lignum Swamp adjacent to Leakes Road has State significance for biodiversity. It makes a significant contribution to the biodiversity of the Victorian Volcanic Plains and is therefore important in a state-wide context.

- Two large wetlands in the south east of the Precinct and the adjacent areas of Plains Grassland are of State conservation significance largely due to the fauna and fauna habitat attributes this area supports.

- Remnants of the endangered EVC Creekline Grassy Woodland of State conservation significance along the drainage line to the north of Beattys Road.

2.3 Topography and Landform

The Precinct is generally flat and is characterised by a mix of open farmland with scattered rocky outcrops, wetlands, flood plain and a stand of red gum woodlands. The Kororoit Creek enters the site in the north eastern section of the Precinct and flows in a south easterly direction, exiting on the eastern boundary. The Creek meanders through an extensive low lying flood plain in the north west, transitioning into a more incised corridor as the creek progresses to the east. The Deanside Wetlands are located in the south east corner of the site and comprise of two shallow freshwater marshes. The wetlands are ephemeral in nature and remain dry for extended periods of time.

The site elevation ranges between 89 m above Australian Height Datum (AHD) and 107 mAHD. The highest area is a central ridge in the south east of the Precinct

space - with the topography generally sloping down to the Deanside Wetlands in the south east corner. The lowest portion of the site is located where the Kororoit Creek exits the Precinct to the east.

2.4 Catchments and Drainage

The Precinct is located centrally within the Kororoit Creek catchment which is a major waterway in Melbourne's north-west region. The upper reaches of the Creek are around Sunbury and it runs south through Melbourne's western growth corridor before entering the established western suburbs and discharging into Port Philip Bay between Altona and Williamstown.

Within the Rockbank region, the Kororoit Creek catchment is characterised by a number of large natural depressions such as the Deanside Wetlands, which are typical morphologic characteristics of the basaltic plains in this area. These depressions are intrinsically linked to the ecosystem and hydrology of the Kororoit Creek and act as "storages" to regulate the volume and amount of stormwater that would naturally enter the waterway via baseflow or surface flow.

The Kororoit Creek enters the Rockbank North Precinct in the north west corner and meanders through flood plains before moving into a more incised channel and exiting the Precinct on the eastern edge. Large external drainage catchments enter the Precinct from the northern, southern and western sides and discharge into the Creek or the Deanside Wetlands.

The hydrologic regime of the western plains provides relatively low rainfall and this, together with the geological constraints requires careful consideration of Water Sensitive Urban Design within the catchment and Precinct.

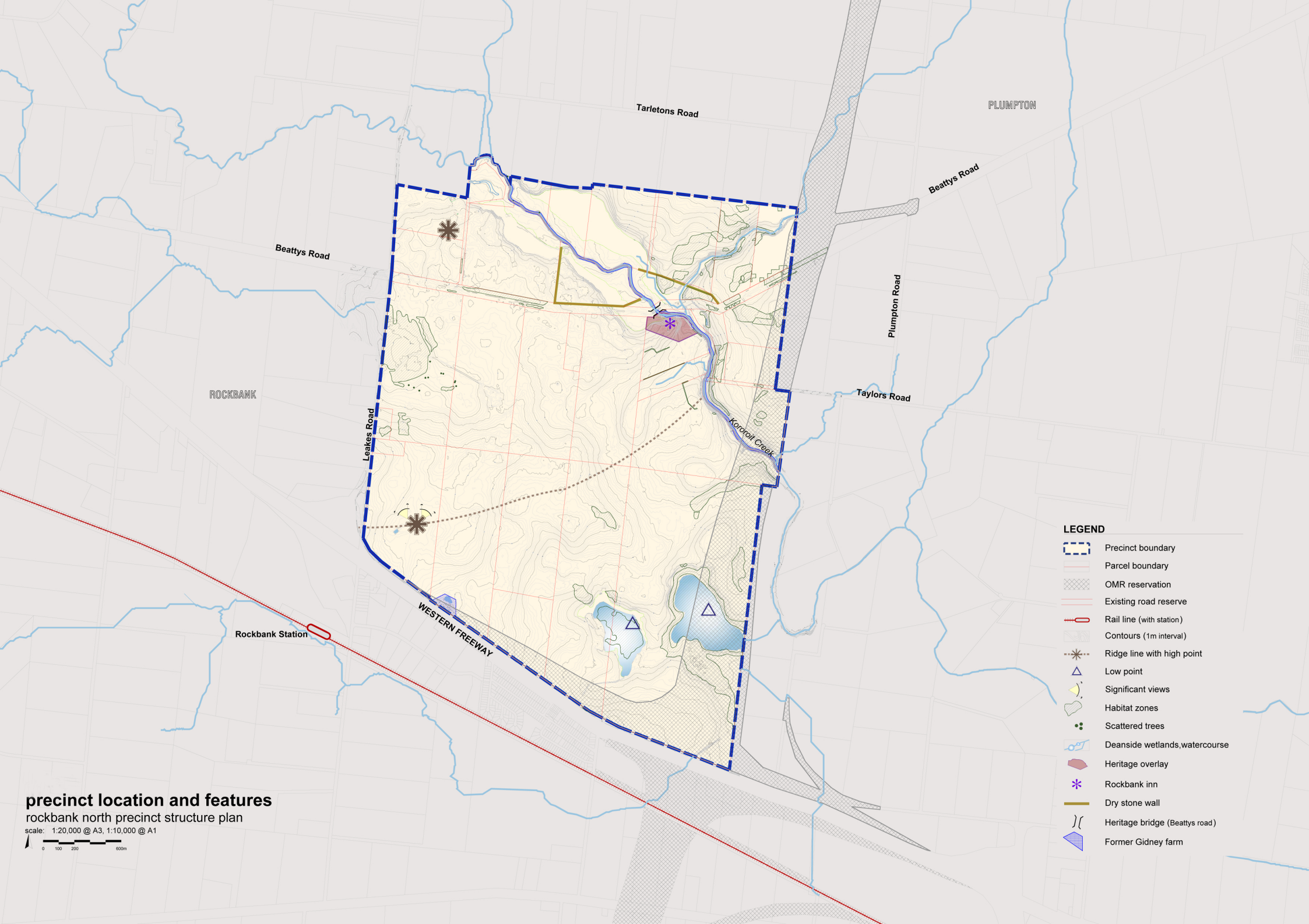
CHAPTER THREE BACKGROUND STUDIES

The Precinct Structure Plan for Rockbank North has been informed by a number of background studies as follows:

- Features and Levels Survey – CPG Australia (July 2011)
- Utilities & Servicing Assessment - CPG Australia (October 2011)
- Drainage & Hydrology Assessment - CPG Australia (February 2012)
- Cultural Heritage Standard Assessment – Ecology Australia (October 2011)
- Biodiversity Assessment – Biosis (October 2010)
- Higher Order Community Facility Assessment – ASR Research (November 2011)
- Economic Assessment – Essential Economics (October 2011)
- Transport Assessment – GTA Consultants (February 2012)
- Environmental Site Assessment Phase 1 and Phase 2 (part of Precinct) – Lane Piper (November 2011)
- Development Contributions Plan – Construction Costs (February 2012)

metropolitan & regional context

rockbank north development contributions plan



precinct location and features

rockbank north precinct structure plan

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