

APPENDIX 23: SOUTHERN GATEWAY SAP PROJECT REPORT

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Contents

1	Introduction	2
2	Background	2
3	Proposal.....	8
3.1	Methodology.....	8
3.2	Southern Gateway SAP.....	9
3.3	Standards	10
3.3.1	Visual Impact	10
3.3.2	Vegetation.....	11
3.3.3	Signage.....	12
4	Analysis and Recommendations	13
4.1	Schedule 1 Objectives of LUPAA	14
4.2	Northern Regional Land Use Strategy (NRLUS)	16
4.3	Existing Uses.....	17
5	Conclusion	17
6	References.....	18

1 Introduction

It is the Tasmanian government's policy for a single planning scheme for Tasmania, known as the Tasmanian Planning Scheme (TPS) to provide consistent state-wide provisions. The TPS consists of State Planning Provisions (SPPs) which were endorsed by the Minister of Planning and Local Government on the 22 February 2017. Local councils are required to prepare their Local Provision Schedules (LPSs) in accordance with Guideline No. 1 Local Provisions Schedule (LPS): zone and code application.

Part of the LPS includes the provision of Specific Area Plans (SAP) to cover individual features of specific locations. This report considers the creation of a SAP to protect the visual amenity and landscape character of the southern approach into Launceston.

2 Background

The Midland and Bass Highways are classified as Category 1 - Trunk Roads. State Growth states:

Trunk Roads are the State's major highways and are crucial to the effective functioning of Tasmanian industry, commerce and the community. They carry large numbers of heavy freight and passenger vehicles and are the key links supporting future economic development in Tasmania.

Trunk Roads facilitate:

- *inter-regional freight movement; and*
- *business interaction.*

The Trunk Roads connect the largest population centres, major sea and air ports, and key industrial locations.

For the majority of the highways, they are two-lane, two-way rural roads with overtaking lanes at regular intervals. In the vicinity of Launceston, the roads transition into four-lane, dual carriageway highways with grade separated interchanges (see Fig. 1).

The Midland Highway connects between Launceston and Hobart, and is the main entryway into Launceston city and municipality. The highway has an average annual daily traffic (AADT) of 25,860 in 2011, with a compound growth of 2% over 5 years. It is heavily trafficked by locals and tourists. Roughly 8.5% of traffic on the road is via commercial vehicles, mainly trucks transporting materials between the north and south of Tasmania. Buses also travel between Launceston and Hobart several times a day.



Figure 1: Map showing applicable road sections.

The land rises sharply as the road exits Launceston, creating a key vista to traffic entering the city, where the land falls away revealing the city sprawl and rural hills in the background. This section of the road is also known as the Southern Outlet. The steep slopes and mature native vegetation alongside the highway has assisting in protecting the view from intrusive development (see Fig. 2 and 3). This landscape character contributes to the arrival experience into and from Launceston to the south. It is important to Launceston to maintain the scenic character of the highway. To do this, the foreground needs to remain clear of large structures or bold additions.



Figure 2: View heading into Launceston City.



Figure 3: View of Southern Outlet heading out of Launceston.

The Bass Highway connects between the Midland Highway, Launceston, and the north-west coast of Tasmania. It connects onto the Great Western Tiers Tourist Route, and is used by tourists arriving via the Launceston Airport to access attractions such as Mole Creek Karst National Park, Cradle Valley and Mount Ossa. The highway has an AADT of 18,639 in 2010, with a compound growth of 1.5% over 5 years. Roughly 8.8% of traffic on the road is via commercial vehicles. While lesser trafficked than the Midland Highway, the Bass Highway is still a section of the entryway into Launceston. It is currently surrounded by large swathes of native trees (see Fig. 4). If the trees were removed, the landscape character of the highway would be greatly diminished.



Figure 4: View of the Bass Highway.

The Kings Meadows Connector has an AADT of 9,220 in 2013, with a peak of 1,020 vehicles per hour. It links the Midland Highway with the Kings Meadows shopping strip. Connector Park is a large industrial subdivision at the western end. The buildings are setback from the road at least 50m to allow for a landscaped area. The Kings Meadows Rivulet runs through this area, with large trees, a dam and landscaping creating a visual barrier and softening the impact of the buildings.

The southern side of the Kings Meadows Connector across from the subdivision is buffered by a line of large trees, with open paddocks behind. Moving eastward the land beside the road rises and is covered with bushland, before the land retreats to reveal Kings Meadows and the connection to Hobart Road.

2.1 Existing Provisions

Currently the Bass Highway and part of the Midland Highway are classified as a Scenic Road Corridor in the Launceston Interim Planning Scheme 2015 (LIPS). The Scenic Management Code (SMC) describes a scenic road corridor as:

- a) *the area of land within 100 metres measured from each frontage to a scenic road shown on the planning scheme overlay maps; or*
- b) *where there is no frontage, the area of land within 120 metres of the edge of the carriageway of the scenic road nearest the site.*

Clause E7.6.1 A1 of the LIPS requires that development must not be visible when viewed from the scenic road. Clause E7.6.1 A2 requires that subdivisions must not alter any boundaries within the scenic road corridor. Development that does not meet these standards are subject to performance criteria that require that the visual impact of development on views from the scenic road be minimised. Currently 195.63ha surrounding the highways are covered by the scenic road corridor standards.

In addition, the southern sections of the Western Hillside Precinct covers land adjacent to the Midland Highway, Bass Highway and Kings Meadows Connector (see Fig. 5). This assists with the protection of long distance views from the highways, as well as limiting intrusive development along the Kings Meadows Link.

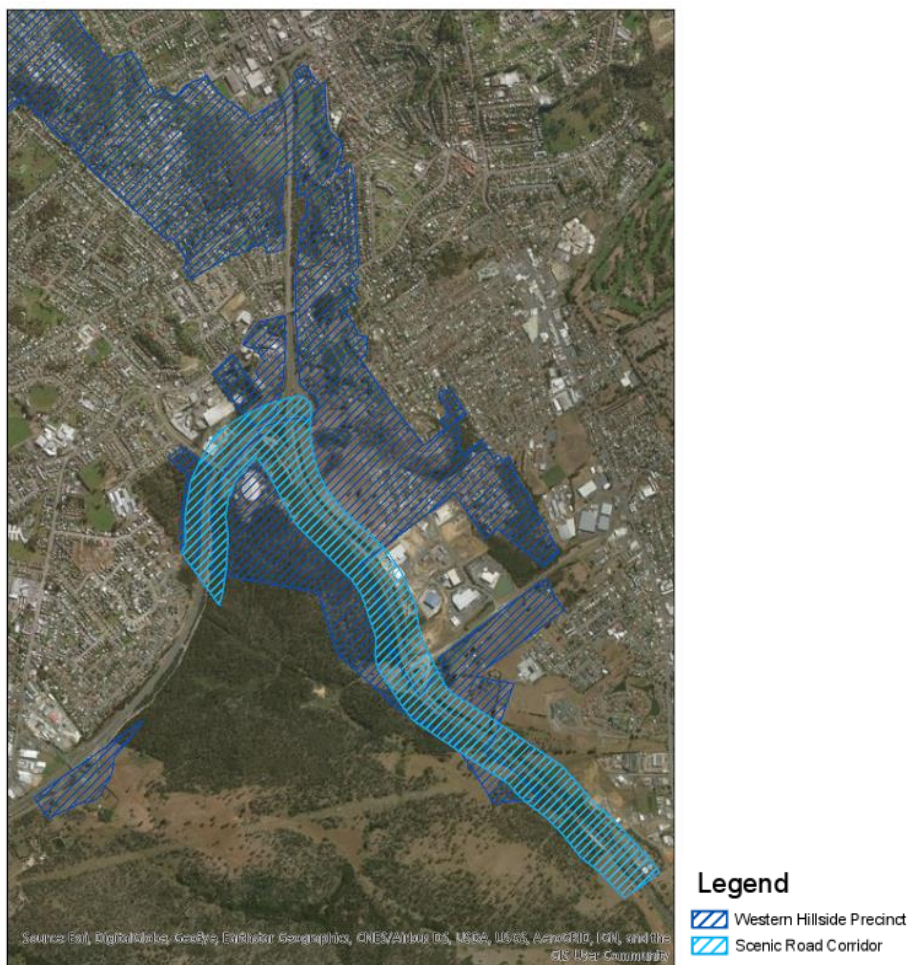


Figure 5: Map of the existing Western Hillside Precinct and Scenic Road Corridors.

2.2 Scenic Protection Code

The state wide planning scheme contains a Scenic Protection Code (SPC) that includes standards addressing Scenic Road Corridors however, this code is limited to the following zones:

- (a) Rural Living Zone;
- (b) Rural Zone;
- (c) Agriculture Zone;
- (d) Landscape Conservation Zone;
- (e) Environmental Management Zone; or
- (f) Open Space Zone.

The area surrounding the southern approach is a mix of General Residential, Low Density Residential or Utilities. This results in only 57.32ha of the existing area being covered under SPC scenic road corridor standards (see Fig. 6).

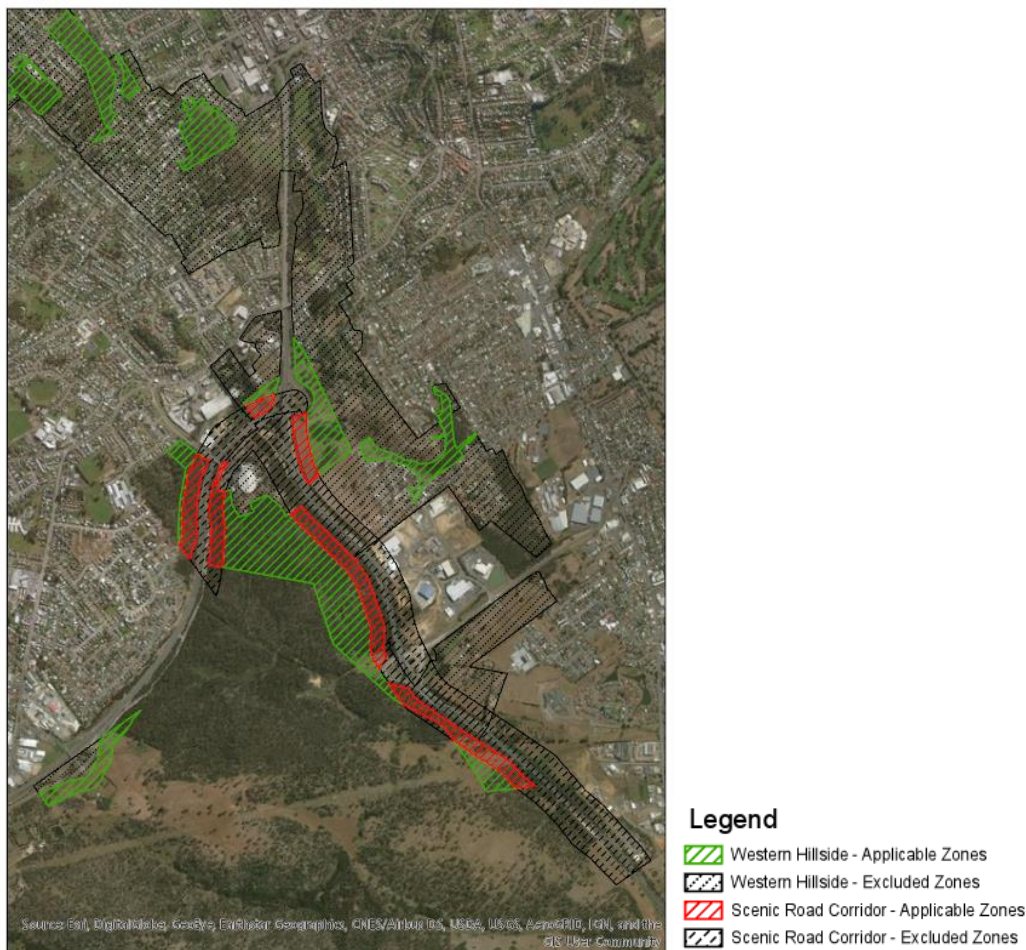


Figure 6: Map of applicable zones in the Western Hillside Precinct and Scenic Road Corridors.

The area is significant for its key scenic contribution to providing primarily the treed and rural vistas character to the southern approach into Launceston and the central Launceston area. Using the SMC setback from the roads encourages development to focus on portions of the site that is not visible from the highways.

Without the SMC, there is limited capacity to encourage development to be built further back from the highways from a visual perspective. There are no controls to appropriately manage vegetation removal and replanting, or manage inappropriate development in regards to design and materiality. Due to the variety of uses adjoining the highways, it would be difficult to utilise zoning to provide a consistent set of standards in terms of development.

It is considered that removing the scenic management overlay from this area will have significant detrimental impacts including:

1. Limited ability to encourage inevident development through the use of setbacks and permitted pathways;
2. The inability to control and manage inappropriate development such as design and materiality; and
3. The inability to manage vegetation removal and vegetation succession within the area.

As such, it is proposed that a new SAP be created to cover the area surrounding the Midland Highway, Bass Highway and Kings Meadows Connector to protect existing scenic and landscape values.

3 Proposal

3.1 Methodology

The existing SMC precincts and road corridors were assessed in relation to the excluded zones, in terms of existing scenic value and the potential risk of inappropriate development. This involved discussions as to the qualities that were valued and how they could be protected, while also allowing for inevident development through permitted pathways. The study area was identified as having scenic qualities that require protection and limited ability to do so under the SPPs.

Standards for similar codes in existing schemes were analysed to determine what was achievable in terms of the SAP. The first draft standards were produced. Initial desktop analysis was conducted through the use of 3D modelling and consideration of standards of the associated zones and overlays.

It was determined that setbacks should be based on the centreline for the roads, due to the variation in title boundaries for the associated highways. Draft maps were produced, with overlays showing a setback at 120m and 500m. The 120m setback was based on the existing setbacks of the SMC and the proposed setbacks of the SPC. The 500m setback was based on the definition of the immediate foreground from existing landscape analysis procedures.

Photographic studies of each area were then conducted and the draft standards were refined. The initial setbacks were realigned based on what was visible from the highways in terms of the foreground. During mapping of the areas, consideration was given for the ease of boundary determination. Where it was considered possible, the SAP areas align with title boundaries to prevent confusion. However, it is acknowledged that landscape character does not abide by straight and regular boundaries. Therefore

boundaries for the areas were also considered in relation to zoning boundaries and contours. Refinement of the standards also allowed for the areas to be clearly defined without requiring discretionary applications for development considered unobtrusive. Internal and external peer reviews assisted with final provisions of the SAP.

3.2 Southern Gateway SAP

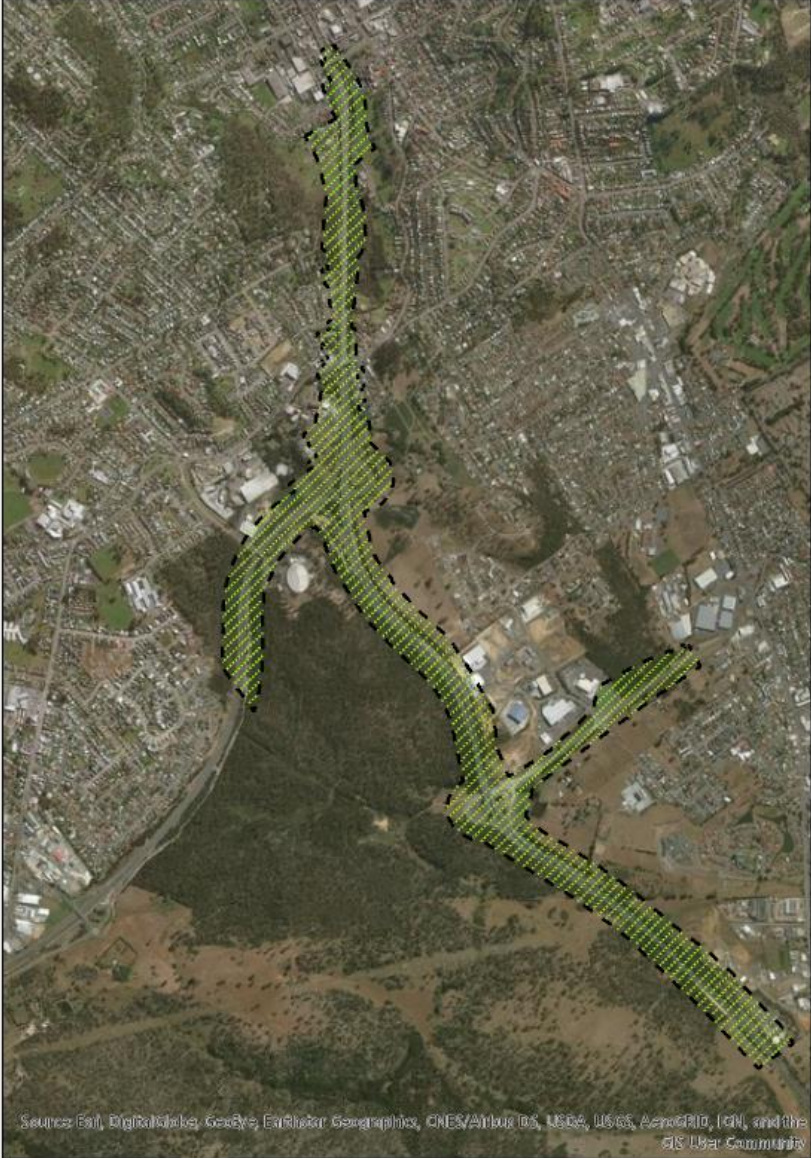


Figure 7: Map of proposed Southern Gateway SAP.

The proposed SAP varies from 150m wide to 500m wide, and covers approximately 246ha (see Fig. 7). The northern section involves the residential development and steep slopes framing the final descent into the city (see Fig. 8). The Bass and Midland Highways frame the Kate Reed Reserve, with bands of native vegetation and steep slopes dominating the western sides. To the east of the Midland Highway, the SAP covers the mature trees screening a multitude of developments, including residential, commercial and industrial uses. The southernmost edges of the SAP cover the trees defining the edges of large rural properties.



Figure 8: View of the Midland Highway.

A secondary extension covers approximately 50m from the centre line on either side of the Kings Meadows Link. It covers the landscape buffer for the industrial uses to the north and the mature trees screening the potential residential development land to the south.

3.3 Standards

The standards for SMC and SPC scenic road corridors refer to development that is visible from the road. Works that are in evident from the highway would not impact on the landscape character. It is therefore considered that the SAP will not apply to works or development that are not visible from one of the associated roads. Excluding these proposals from the SAP will reduce the level of regulation associated with development, whilst maintaining the level of management and protection required to protect the southern entry into, and exit from, Launceston.

3.3.1 Visual Impact

Even in areas of significant scenic value, existing provisions under the SMC are overly restrictive. Currently, all development (that is not exempt from the planning scheme) within the precincts is subject to a discretionary development application. While the scenic road corridor provisions are more lenient, any development that is visible is discretionary.

This is despite the fact that low-scale and minor development to established buildings is unlikely to cause a significant impact on the existing landscape character, particularly when observed from medium to long distance vantages. Currently these development

applications are more often than not, approved, with little weight given to the development standards of the SMC. The provision of permitted pathways in the SAP for minor additions would eliminate the need for these applications. Therefore it is proposed that the standards for visual impact include acceptable solutions, to provide a permitted pathway for minor development.

3.3.2 Vegetation

Currently, any vegetation removal in the SMC requires an exemption or a discretionary planning application. This often requires the applicant to obtain a report from a suitably qualified arborist that identifies the health of the tree and the justification for its removal. This enables CoL to determine whether the removal of the tree is necessary and if so, enables suitable conditions to be applied requiring replacement species to be planted in order to protect the character of the area. Outside of the SMC there are limited provisions in relation to the removal of significant vegetation.

However, the SMC standards includes the removal of plants that residents have previously planted themselves and that have little impact on the views from the highways. This is overly burdensome and creates a view that there is equal value in large mature trees and small garden shrubs.



Figure 9: Mature trees providing vegetative screening.

In the context of the highways, development has largely been hidden from view by mature trees or screening shrubs in the foreground (see Fig. 9). This has also provided the opportunity for key vistas, where the land falls away and the middle ground and background are visible. It is important to maintain the scenic character of the highway.

It is therefore proposed that standards regarding vegetation focus on the protection of prominent trees and screening vegetation, while providing a permitted pathway for removal of smaller trees and shrubs.

3.3.3 Signage

Currently the Signs Code prohibits third-party signs. The Signs Code in the SPPs allows a discretionary pathway for third-party signs, and includes a new sign type: billboard sign. Signage on the Bass and Midland Highway is currently limited to regulatory signage or temporary signs. Most businesses do not have direct access from the highways, and so proposed signage would be considered third-party signs.

The introduction of third-party signs in the area would be considered detrimental to the scenic values of the entry into Launceston. Billboards would block the vegetative screening and negate the softening effect of the vegetation on the landscape. It would disrupt scenic views and negatively impact on the existing landscape character. This can already be seen where billboards that were approved under previous schemes are located (see Fig. 10).



Figure 10: Existing third-party billboard.

The signs are also unattached to a site, meaning that it will need to include information that directs drivers to the business. This creates an increase in the potential for visual clutter and disconnects the sign from its surrounds. The Signs Code also does not take into account visual clutter in terms of different businesses. It is worth noting that, if the sign is approved, it is likely other businesses will request similar signage in the area in order to compete. In this instance, it would be unreasonable to allow such a sign for one business and refuse it for others.

In relation to the Kings Meadow Connector, existing advertising signs are in close proximity to the associated businesses. Due to the nature of this subdivision, businesses have limited scope to advertise their location to passing vehicles. Potential customers are unlikely to enter the subdivision if they have not been previously alerted to the location of a business. The provision to allow third-party signage in the area has the potential to be detrimental to the existing businesses, and cause confusion to motorists.

In terms of illuminated signs, any illumination is currently discretionary, and this will not change in the new code. Launceston has recently seen an increase in the number of LED screen or digital signs within the city. This increase is in part due to the rise of new and more affordable technology. Austroads reviewed the extant literature on the distraction risk associated with roadside advertising. Several studies found that drivers took longer glances at illuminated signs in comparison to non-illuminated signs, and that animated signs reduced the ability of drivers to maintain a constant speed and lane position when compared to static or no advertising. The highways are also used regularly by tourists, who may never have been to Launceston previously and thus are not used to the layout of the road. Illuminated signs increase the risk of driver inattention and accidents.

Finally, illuminated signs stand out and would disrupt the scenic qualities of the SAP. It is considered that due to the high traffic and scenic values of the southern entry, third-party, billboard and illuminated signage should be prohibited in the SAP.

4 Analysis and Recommendations

In relation to the creation of a new SAP, Section 32(3(b) and 4) of LUPPA states that:

32. Content of LPSs

(3) *Without limiting subsection (2) but subject to subsection (4), an LPS may, if permitted to do so by the SPPs, include –*

(b) a specific area plan, being a plan consisting of –

(i) a map or overlay that delineates a particular area of land; and

(ii) the provisions that are to apply to that land in addition to, in modification of, or in substitution for, a provision, or provisions, of the SPPs;

(4) *An LPS may only include a provision referred to in subsection (3) in relation to an area of land if –*

(a) a use or development to which the provision relates is of significant social, economic or environmental benefit to the State, a region or a municipal area; or

(b) the area of land has particular environmental, economic, social or spatial qualities that require provisions, that are unique to the area of land, to apply to the land in substitution for, or in addition to, or modification of, the provisions of the SPPs.

It is well documented that Tasmania benefits socially and economically from a "clean and green" image. In the 2016-2017 financial year alone, the total tourism and hospitality sales in Launceston totalled \$821 million. Tasmania's popularity as a tourist destination is not limited to the landscape character protected in national parks or reserves. It also a result of the variety and abundance of scenic landscapes that extend into its rural and urban areas. For example, Launceston is classified as a city, but has the benefit of being in close proximity to natural and rural landscapes. It is becoming increasingly rare in Australia and across the world that tourists and locals can have access to urban facilities while enjoying natural amenities.

Over 710,000 international, national and local tourists visited northern Tasmania in 2018. Approximately 360,000 came through Launceston Airport, up 5% from the previous year. Around 100,000 passed through Launceston city, while 560,000 listed it as a destination during their 2018 trip in the corresponding Tasmanian Visitors Survey.

The majority of these tourists will use the Midlands Highway to enter into Launceston city, and to access the northernmost municipalities. The entryway into Launceston is one of the first views seen by visitors from the south or the airport. The land adjoining the highways is located in the near foreground, which is considered the zone of greatest visual influence in regards to scenic amenity. It will set the scene for their experience in the city and surrounds. Due to Launceston's growing tourism sector, it is important to maintain the scenic character of the highway.

The roads are also regularly used by locals, providing access to the immediately adjoining municipalities, and a quicker route through to the south-eastern suburbs via the Kings Meadows Connector. Initial consultation in 2017 has indicated that the community value the character and landscape qualities of the existing SMC precincts and road corridors. The area is considered to as a transitional space between the urban edges of the city and the rural landscape to the south. In particular, the vegetated areas located within prominent positions along the Bass and Midlands Highways are considered to have significant landscape character qualities that greatly contribute to the arrival experience into Launceston and soften existing adjoining development within the landscape. These significant environmental and spatial qualities therefore require specific provisions that are unique to this area, which are in addition to the provisions in the SPPs as provided for under s.32(4)(b) of LUPAA.

4.1 Schedule 1 Objectives of LUPAA

Part 1 of the Schedule 1 lists the objectives of the Resource Management and Planning System of Tasmania as:

- a) to promote the sustainable development of natural and physical resources and the maintenance of ecological processes and genetic diversity; and*
- b) to provide for the fair, orderly and sustainable use and development of air, land and water; and*
- c) to encourage public involvement in resource management and planning; and*
- d) to facilitate economic development in accordance with the objectives set out in paragraphs (a) , (b) and (c) ; and*

- e) *to promote the sharing of responsibility for resource management and planning between the different spheres of Government, the community and industry in the State.*

The proposed SAP provides permitted pathways for minor development and promotes the retention of screening vegetation, in accordance with (a) and (b). This provides certainty to developers, which enables and encourages the potential for economic development in accordance with (d). The provision of performance criteria, provides the opportunity for the community to provide input on proposals in relation to (c) and (e).

Part 2 of the Schedule 1 lists the objectives of the Planning Process established by this act as:

- a) *to require sound strategic planning and co-ordinated action by State and local government; and*
- b) *to establish a system of planning instruments to be the principal way of setting objectives, policies and controls for the use, development and protection of land; and*
- c) *to ensure that the effects on the environment are considered and provide for explicit consideration of social and economic effects when decisions are made about the use and development of land; and*
- d) *to require land use and development planning and policy to be easily integrated with environmental, social, economic, conservation and resource management policies at State, regional and municipal levels; and*
- e) *to provide for the consolidation of approvals for land use or development and related matters, and to co-ordinate planning approvals with related approvals; and*
- f) *to promote the health and wellbeing of all Tasmanians and visitors to Tasmania by ensuring a pleasant, efficient and safe environment for working, living and recreation; and*
- g) *to conserve those buildings, areas or other places which are of scientific, aesthetic, architectural or historical interest, or otherwise of special cultural value; and*
- h) *to protect public infrastructure and other assets and enable the orderly provision and co-ordination of public utilities and other facilities for the benefit of the community; and*
- i) *to provide a planning framework which fully considers land capability.*

The proposed SAP provides a clear set of permitted and discretionary pathways for development in a prominent visual location, in accordance with (b) and (i). It encourages suitable development through allowances for minor additions. The standard relating to vegetation encourages development that protects prominent trees and screening vegetation. This is considered to be in accordance with (c), (f) and (g). The SAP takes guidance from the existing SMC and the proposed SPC in regards to location and provisions. It is considered to work in conjunction with the TPS in accordance with (a) and (d).

4.2 Northern Regional Land Use Strategy (NRLUS)

The Regional Environment Policy in the NRLUS is relevant to consideration of the creation and application of the new SAP. Policy LSA-P01 states that there needs to be consideration of the scenic and landscape amenity qualities of key tourism routes and local surrounds, and lists three main areas of focus. The first is on the importance of scenic landscapes when viewed from major roads and tourist destinations, due to their contribution to economic basis of the tourism industry as well as local visual amenity. The second is on the importance of native vegetation in contributing to scenic values of rural and coastal areas in general. The final is on the protection of skylines and prominent hillsides from obtrusive development. Policy LSA-P02 states the need to protect topographical or natural features of significant scenic or landscape value.

The corresponding actions are LSA-A01 through to LSA-A04. LSA-A01 requires the identification of tourism routes as scenic corridors via a planning scheme overlay. While not directly defined as tourism routes, the highways are considered to be used regularly by local, interstate and international tourists to enter Launceston city. The Bass and Midland Highway were previously considered scenic corridors for this reason.

LSA-A02 requires the development of a regionally consistent approach to determining scenic corridor overlays around tourism routes. This would suggest including the southern gateway in the new SPC overlay. However, as the SPC only applies to specific zones, it would not provide a consistent set of standards over the area. The new SAP considered the standards for scenic corridors in the SPC and where relevant incorporated them in the resulting provisions.

LSA-A03 requires that performance criteria for the development within scenic corridor overlays consider the following:

- a) *the impact of development on skylines, ridgelines and prominent locations;*
- b) *the establishment and/or retention of existing vegetation to provide screening in combination with other requirements for hazard management;*
- c) *the bulk and form of buildings and earthworks and the ability of development to blend with the landscape;*
- d) *the impact of materials, finishes and colours of buildings on the landscape setting; and*
- e) *whether existing native or significant exotic vegetation within the corridor is managed to retain the visual values of the tourism route.*

All of the proposed performance criteria related to the Development Standards for Building Work in the SAP provide reference to the management, establishment and retention of existing vegetation, in relation to (b) and (e). Performance criteria P1 and P3 criteria also refer to the impact of development on prominent locations, the bulk, form and materiality of proposed buildings and the extent of proposed earthworks, in relation to (a), (c) and (d).

LSA-A04 states the planning schemes may identify visually significant topographic, natural features and landscapes in an overlay. This may include objectives and performance criteria that relate to the visual impact of potential use and development.

The proposed SAP's objectives are to protect the visual amenity of the prominent southern entry into Launceston city and municipality.

4.3 Existing Uses

The proposed SAP does not prevent the continuation of any existing use or development on a site, as required under section 12 of the Act.

5 Conclusion

The consideration for a Western Hillside SAP has been undertaken in accordance with Guideline No 1, issued by the Tasmanian Planning Commission, considering the existing character, land constraints, existing and desired density and provision of services within the area. The spatial distribution of the SAP has been applied across the City of Launceston based on the analysis within this report.

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