The Hills Shire is a Local Government Area within the Greater Metropolitan Area of Sydney and forms part of the Central City District, along with the Blacktown, Cumberland and Parramatta Local Government Areas. It is unique within the district, being the only LGA that extends into the Metropolitan Rural Area (MRA). Approximately 70% of the land area of the Hills is within the MRA, with the remaining 30% spanning urban areas of varying densities and characters. For the foreseeable future, development within the Shire will be constrained to this urban area.
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Executive Summary

The Hills rural lands have long been integral to the identity of the Garden Shire. From its early years providing fruit for the burgeoning Sydney colony, the Hills rural area remains a valued provider of fresh produce and building materials to the Sydney basin. The Shire’s rural villages also offer a desirable alternative to urban living within easy reach of established strategic centres.

Significant expected growth in population across the Shire to 2036 and necessary increases in density in the Shire’s urban area will place increasing pressure on our rural lands. Land at the edge of the rural area is under pressure from urban development, creating challenges in the management of land use conflict, enhancement of rural productivity, sympathetic growth of our rural villages and growth of a viable rural support and tourism sector.

The Hills approach to the protection, management and enhancement of rural lands is based on clear identification of existing opportunities and constraints through our land use planning framework and decision making. Our rural lands are integral to our identity as the ‘Garden Shire’. Rural lands management must ensure that the rural values and characteristics that are important to our community are preserved and protected into the future for the enjoyment of future generations.

This Strategy is based around the following Planning Priorities to guide the planning, delivery and management of rural lands in the longer term as well as Council’s actions over the next 5 years:

- Manage and protect the rural/urban interface;
- Retain and manage the Shire’s rural productive capacity;
- Renew and create great places; and
- Encourage support activities and tourism in rural areas.

The Rural Strategy provides an overall strategic context for planning for management and protection of the Shire’s rural lands. It supports the commitments contained in Hills Future Community Strategic Plan (CSP), specifically the outcomes of ‘shaping growth’, ‘building a vibrant community and prosperous economy’ and ‘valuing our surroundings’. Further it supports the commitments contained in the Central City District Plan towards a city of great places, jobs and skills for the city and a city in its landscape.
Introduction

Council has been well served by the previous Rural Lands Strategy which has guided planning and management of rural lands within the Shire since 2003. The Strategy was independently reviewed in 2005. This document refreshes and replaces the Rural Lands Strategy within the context of a new strategic planning framework, including the Greater Sydney Region Plan, Central City District Plan and Future Transport 2056.

Purpose of the Strategy
The purpose of this document is to clearly establish the basis for strategic planning of rural lands in the Shire to 2036. It is the evidence base that informs the planning priorities and 5 year actions contained in our Local Strategic Planning Statement. It provides the finer detail about how we will achieve our vision and manage our unique rural area so that our community can enjoy and benefit from it now and well into the future.

To shape exceptional living, working and leisure places where expected growth brings vibrancy, diversity, liveability and prosperity for the Hills.
Vision - Hills Future 2036 Local Strategic Planning Statement

Council is committed to creating a Shire in which our rural area is valued and protected, so that it can contribute to our local economy and provide green open spaces for the enjoyment of our residents as well as the Central River City community to enjoy. We aim to encourage our residents and the wider community to take advantage of opportunities to visit our rural area to appreciate its scenic and tourist values. The Rural Strategy 2019 supports the delivery of these broad aims and addresses key issues identified by The Hills community – that our green spaces and nature are valued, as well as growing a community that is active and healthy, with a keen sense of community involvement.

Developing the strategy
In developing the strategy the following has been completed:

- A review of State Government policies including the Greater Sydney Region Plan and the Central City District Plan;
- a review of the Rural Lands Strategy2005 to confirm the status of work undertaken and determine any outstanding matters;
- forecast of population growth and assessment of likely implications for managing and protecting our rural lands;
- a review of rural industries; and
a review of existing zoned rural land including the potential for appropriate expansion of existing rural villages.

The findings have been brought together in this document to provide an evidence base for the future priorities and actions that will guide the protection and improvement of environmental assets in The Hills.

Additional documents supporting this strategy and Council’s Local Strategic Planning Statement may be found on Council’s website www.thehills.nsw.gov.au
The Hills has over 27,600 hectares of rural zoned land, making up 70% of all zoned land which is rich in biodiversity, scenic and productive qualities. The Hills is the only Local Government Area in the Central City District that contains land in the Metropolitan Rural Area (MRA). The significance of the rural lands in the context of wider Sydney cannot be underestimated, as their close proximity to the urban areas of Sydney facilitates the efficient provision of fresh produce and construction materials to the public. The Greater Sydney Region Plan recognises the importance of the Metropolitan Rural Area as a location where agricultural production, processing and sales contribute to our economy.

Activities undertaken in the rural area range from agriculture, mining and forestry to tourism and recreational facilities. Most productive rural uses within The Hills are found within the RU1 Primary Production and RU6 Transition land use zones. Whilst the RU2 Rural Landscape zone supports fewer productive uses, it is home to distinctive landscapes with high biodiversity value and unique environmental features which play an important role in The Hills and in Greater Sydney.

Rural uses within the Shire are largely contained within two distinct clusters - Middle Dural to Glenorie and Maroota – and cover a range of activities including fruit and vegetable production, poultry, the operation of nurseries, and grazing of animals. The Hills is the highest contributor to the state’s cut flower industry, and second highest to the state’s nursery industry. Extractive industries are located in Maroota in the north of the Shire and produce sand and materials for the construction and landscape supply industries. The combined economic output of rural industries (agriculture, forestry and fishing and mining) in 2017/18 was $303.3 million, which accounted for approximately 1.5% of the total economic output of the Hills Shire.

Beyond their productive purposes, the rural areas contribute to The Hills Shire’s diverse mix of housing. Sensible growth in the rural areas including secondary dwellings and rural cluster subdivisions provide an alternative to city living whilst still being in close proximity to services.

Despite having sufficient capacity within urban areas to accommodate expected growth to 2036 and beyond, Council continues to receive proposals to increase dwelling capacity both in and adjacent to the rural area. The past several years have seen significant growth in numbers of senior’s housing developments along the urban fringe, due to cheaper land and the attraction of living within quieter rural areas.
People

In 2016, the rural areas of The Hills had a population of around 15,500, making up approximately 10% of Hills residents. By 2036, the rural population is projected to be around 17,400 and will account for around 6% of the Shire’s total population. This reduced proportion of the wider Hills population will be a result of containing growth within the existing urban area.

As is the case across the Shire, the population of the rural area is aging, with the average age of the population of rural suburbs higher than the average age for the Shire. Between 2011 and 2016, the...
The seniors cohort (70-84 years of age) consistently saw the largest increases across the rural area, particularly within the statistical areas of Glenhaven and Annangrove-Nelson-Maraylya. Aging of the rural community has brought further pressure for residential subdivision as older residents seek to capitalise on their real assets to support their retirement.

Due to the growth in numbers of older residents, the average age of the rural population (just under 45 years of age) is significantly older than the Hills shire average of 38 years. However, this may be attributed to the growing numbers of senior’s living developments locating within the interface between the rural and urban areas, especially within Glenhaven where the average age is 53, being 15 years older than the Shire average.

Household structures within the rural area are also changing, reflecting the aging population. Shire-wide, the only household type to experience growth between 2011 and 2016 was couples with children (1.1%). In contrast to this, the majority of the rural area experienced a smaller degree of growth in this household type, or even had a decline. The exception to this was Annangrove-Nelson-Maraylya, which experienced a 1.5% rise in this household type.

Notable increases in household types in the rural area are within the ‘couples without children’ group across a majority of rural suburbs and ‘lone person households’ within selected areas. This may be attributed to the growing number of retirees moving into our rural suburbs.
Significantly, the only household type to experience a decrease across the entire rural area between 2011 and 2016 was the one parent family. This may reflect the fact that across houses and apartments, housing values in the Hills are higher than both the Greater Sydney and NSW averages, limiting the ability of these households to afford living in those areas.

The majority of those living within the rural areas earn lower incomes than the Hills average, with a greater proportion of the rural population earning a weekly wage of between $0 and $999. The rural area also hosts a greater proportion of Hills residents earning $3,000 or more.

**Environment**

The Shire’s rural lands are influenced by many environmental factors and features. Although these elements combine to pose constraints to development, they are intrinsic to the identity and function of the Shire within the wider Greater Sydney context. It is within this context that they contribute to the Garden Shire identity of the Hills and provide a green, open and natural backdrop to the urban area of Greater Sydney.

The Hills Shire is home to a wide variety of vegetation communities, some of which are widespread and some critically endangered, such as Blue Gum High Forest, Cumberland Plain Woodland and
Shale-Sandstone Transition Forest. The following figure illustrates the distribution of the different species of vegetation.

Given the undeveloped and heavily vegetated nature of the rural area, the overall bushfire risk within the rural area is high. This risk significantly limits the potential uses that may be able to be carried out on this land.

As can be seen from the following maps of the Shire, most of the Metropolitan Rural Area is constrained in some form, with very limited amounts of productive land actually available. Rural land that is relatively unconstrained is already in use within existing agricultural clusters. In the long term, land in the north of the Shire currently used for extractive purposes will be rehabilitated and may again be able to be used for productive agricultural purposes depending on the resulting condition of the land.

Protection and management of the unique environmental values of our rural land is a challenge that requires careful planning and proactive leadership. These challenges are outlined further in the Environment Strategy 2019.
Figure 5: Vegetation communities within The Hills Shire
Figure 6: Bushfire risk within The Hills Shire
Figure 7: Riparian areas within The Hills rural lands
Economy

As well as contributing to the identity of the Shire, agriculture and extractive industries are important contributors to the local economy. Close proximity of our rural area to the urban areas of Sydney facilitates the efficient provision of fresh produce to the public, a key objective of our rural land use zones. Businesses producing construction materials from our extractive industries also benefit from the area’s proximity to Sydney’s urban area. This is manifest in the majority of output from both agricultural and extractive uses within the Hills being sold locally as outputs from both land uses are distributed to local markets at significantly higher levels than outputs across Greater Sydney.

![Proportion of output sold locally 2018](image)

**Figure 8:** Proportion of output sold locally 2018

The combined economic output of rural industries (Agriculture, forestry and fishing and Mining) in 2017/18 was $303.3 million, which accounted for approximately 1.5% of the total economic output of the Hills Shire. Between 2012/13 and 2017/18 Mining grew significantly whilst the wider Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing sector experienced an overall decline.

The significant growth within the mining industry can largely be attributed to the increase in construction across Sydney over the past several years, as the Hills extractive industries supply raw materials for building and construction supplies. Whilst this is currently benefitting the local mining industry, market fluctuations within the construction sector equally have potential to negatively impact our extractive industries.
As shown in the following figure, the mining industry contributes the same amount to our local economy as it does to that of Greater Sydney. Agriculture however, as the main contributing industry within the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector, contributes more than double the proportion to our local economy as it does to the Greater Sydney economy, indicating its significance to our Shire.
Agriculture
As indicated above, the agriculture industry sits within the broader agriculture, forestry and fishing sector. Despite an overall decline in this sector since 2012/13, the agriculture industry has actually grown in terms of output and number of jobs.

Figure 11: Change in output ($m) in agriculture, forestry and fishing sector 2012-2018

Figure 12: Breakdown of jobs in agriculture, forestry, fishing sector 2006-2018
Two large agricultural clusters stretch across the rural area of the Hills, both of which focus on horticulture (growing vegetables and tree fruits such as nectarines and peaches). These areas are found around Maroota in the north of the shire, and along a large part of the eastern boundary around Middle Dural, Galston and Arcadia. This second cluster is shared with Hornsby.

Source: Combined Hills Shire Land Use Data & Draft North West Sub-Regional Strategy 2006

Figure 13: Agricultural Clusters - North West Sydney
By far the most valuable agricultural contributors are the cut flower and nursery industries, which account for approximately three quarters of the total value of agricultural production in the Shire. Across NSW, The Hills is the number one producer of cut flowers, providing 21% of the state’s cut flowers. The Hills is the second highest contributor to the State’s nursery-related production. Mushroom and stone fruit production are the next highest individual contributors to the Hills agricultural economy.

Figure 14: Agricultural Production in the Hills Shire 2015-2016

The Hills rural area also makes a valuable contribution to agricultural production across Greater Sydney. As an example, blueberry production in the Hills accounts for less than 1% of the value of agricultural produce of the Shire, however this contributes over 50% of the overall value of blueberries in Greater Sydney. Similarly, the Hills contributed approximately 40% of the value of Greater Sydney’s peaches and nectarines in 2015/16.
Mining
Mining and extractive industries grew significantly between 2012 and 2018. This has coincided with the increase in construction activity across Sydney and the necessary requirement for the convenient supply of building materials. Between 2012/13 and 2017/18, mining output increased 5 times, and mining’s value added contribution increased by almost 5 and a half times (from adding $12.9M to the Hills economy in 2012, this industry sector added $70.1M in 2018), indicating an overall increase in efficiency within this period.

Figure 15: Top Hills contributors to Greater Sydney agricultural produce value 2015-2016

Figure 16: Mining output and value added contribution to the Hills economy 2012-2018
In response to the heightened demand that has been placed on the Shire’s extractive industry by Sydney’s construction industry in recent years, the number of mining jobs has grown. The number of mining businesses has also increased significantly, from 3 in 2014 to 21 in 2017.

![Graph showing number of jobs and businesses in the mining industry 2014-2017](source: Profile iD 2018)

**Figure 17:** Number of jobs and businesses in the mining industry 2014-2017

Employment opportunities in the mining industry are located in the Rural North of the shire, concentrated in the RU1 Primary Production zone in Maroota.
Figure 18: Location of mining jobs in the Hills
Over the past 10-15 years, the urban edge has crept north, with the rezoning of otherwise productive rural land to urban uses and subsequent housing development in the release areas of Box Hill and North Kellyville. This has reduced the availability of suitable land for rural activities, which is forcing agriculture into areas of marginal value, impacted by steep topography, high bushfire risk and the inability to remove vegetation due to the presence of endangered ecological communities in particular areas.

As an example, suburbs like Annangrove on the urban/rural fringe are seeing particularly high rates of interest, as people seek a semi-rural lifestyle in areas that are open and fairly undeveloped, but at the same time enjoying proximity to the strategic centres of Rouse Hill and Castle Hill.

The increased use of rural land for rural residential lifestyle purposes also results in conflict with productive land uses, particularly with the current trend for increasing the scale and intensity of agricultural businesses. Many who seek the rural lifestyle for its open and undeveloped character often have unrealistic expectations in regards to the realities of productive rural uses, for example noise, odour, dust and the 24 hour nature of rural activities. The resulting land use conflict has the potential to reduce the productivity of rural lands as farmers seek to avoid risk. In response to this the NSW Government has introduced ‘Right to Farm’ legislation that seeks to limit land use conflict and support agricultural operators to carry on their farming businesses as long as they are employing good management practices.
In addition, recent years have seen seniors’ housing developments proliferate at the edge of the rural area, particularly in Glenhaven and Dural. Despite being a use that requires access to services at a level present within urban areas, providers of this housing type have been attracted to land at the urban/rural interface as it is offers a more economical alternative to purchasing land within the urban area at higher prices. Even though this type of development is restricted within rural areas to land that adjoins an urban zone, assessment pathways mean Council has little power to curtail the cumulative effects of piecemeal senior’s housing developments that gradually shift the urban edge and decrease the size and scenic qualities of the rural area.

Cumulative impacts of these developments can detrimentally affect the performance of infrastructure due to inappropriate density and greater levels of site coverage than are normally allowed in rural areas. Issues also arise due to the incompatibility between the scale and density of these developments and the prevailing open and undeveloped character of the rural area. The last decade has seen approximately one third of all Senior’s Housing developments applied for within the rural area (RU6 Transition zone) under the Seniors Housing State Policy, particularly in Glenhaven and Dural.

Source: Nearmap July 2016
Aged care facility in Glenhaven
Rural Villages

Rural villages within the Hills are emblematic of the garden shire identity that has developed over many years. Villages such as Kenthurst and Glenorie provide an alternative housing choice to that available in the Shire’s urban area, offering a good degree of amenity in a quieter and more open setting. These villages serve as a focal point for the surrounding rural land, providing essential services such as a supermarket, primary school, medical facilities and open space. These villages are desirable places to live and are in most cases physically defined and constrained by environmental and scenic features that limit potential for growth.

Council’s previous Rural Lands Strategy identified a limited growth option for rural villages that would manage their expansion while preserving and promoting rural enterprises. A limited amount of rural residential development provides some housing capacity for people who wish to move into the area, whilst ensuring the continuation of the existing mix of rural uses including agriculture, home businesses and tourism.

Although our rural population is not growing as quickly as our urban population, some growth is occurring. Aside from growth due to the proliferation of senior’s housing developments, most of this growth is concentrated around our rural villages. It is therefore appropriate to plan for this, and ensure that any future growth is sympathetic to the desired future character of these villages, and that growth is managed sensibly and efficiently.

Outside of rural villages, Council’s previous Rural Lands Strategy and Rural Development Control Plan have facilitated moderate residential growth in the rural areas through rural cluster subdivisions, dual occupancies and secondary dwellings. Rural cluster subdivision controls will continue to be used to enable small amounts of development in rural areas whilst protecting valuable vegetation in these areas.

Rural Lifestyle Living

Council’s previous Rural Lands Strategy used the term ‘rural living mixed uses’ to identify the southern rural areas which include Glenorie, Middle Dural, Dural, Glenhaven, Kenthurst, Annangrove, Nelson and Box Hill. With the aim of providing a level of certainty to the people who live in the rural area, the strategy included preserving the open rural landscape and protecting the amenity of residents.

These areas have largely been zoned RU6 Transition under The Hills Local Environmental Plan 2012, as this zone provides a transition or buffer between urban areas and the environmental characteristics of the RU2 – Rural Landscape zone. The RU6 zone has also been used to avoid potential land use conflict between rural residential development and more intense agricultural or productive land uses.

A significant element of the identity of the Hills area is connected to the unique lifestyle available at the urban/rural interface within this land use zone, with large acreage lots that accommodate very large homes in relatively close proximity to the strategic centres of Castle Hill and Rouse Hill. This
style of living is not widely available within Sydney, and as such is sought after amongst certain sections of the market. As a result, the RU6 Transition zone has developed an identifiable character, which if properly defined and enforced, will assist in both the management of the rural/urban interface as well as the renewal of our rural villages to ensure they remain great places to live.

Figure 20: Rural Villages
Managing and protecting the rural/urban interface

This section relates to PP16 in The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement

Council’s previous Rural Lands Strategy outlined a Growth Management Philosophy that sought to balance growth within the Shire with appropriate levels of protection of the values of rural lands. With the exception of State Government led planning for growth area precincts and a small number of other developments, Council has generally succeeded in limiting urban development to the existing metropolitan urban area.

Given the significant amount of existing residential zoned land available, there is no identified need to convert rural or environmental zoned land to residential uses.

The 2018 Greater Sydney Region Plan states that urban development should be limited to the urban area (Strategy 29.2), and that ‘rural-residential development is not an economic value of the Metropolitan Rural Area’. In support of this, Council will implement an urban growth boundary. The proposed urban growth boundary is largely based on the formal boundary between the metropolitan urban and metropolitan rural areas. Such a boundary would ensure rural lands are protected for productive uses and scenic values, avoiding inappropriate levels of development more suited to urban areas.

An urban growth boundary will:

- respond to directions within the Region and District Plans to protect the Metropolitan Rural Area;
- add weight to Council’s existing land use zoning system;
- assist in lessening the pressure on environmentally sensitive lands within our rural area;
- signal a renewed focus on the scenic and productive values of the Shire’s rural lands;
- signal to property speculators that our rural area is valued for its productive and scenic qualities, and is not urban land in waiting; and
- give property owners in rural areas greater certainty about the future of their land.

It is recognised that future reviews of the Region Plan may identify the need to examine additional urban investigation areas as part of a structured and carefully planned approach to managing the long-term growth of Sydney. Should future reviews of the Region and District Plans identify the need for additional urban investigation areas, Council will work with the State Government to select appropriate areas for consideration. Two potential locations for investigation may be land on the eastern side of Janpieter Road in Box Hill, and an area near Mills Road in Glenhaven. Due to the Greater Sydney Commission’s position on retaining the boundary of the metropolitan rural area and sufficient existing capacity within our urban area for expected population growth to 2036, these investigations would be carried out with a view to additional areas potentially being required in the longer term.
Secondary dwellings and senior’s housing
Careful and responsible planning for land on the rural urban fringe will reduce the pressure on rural lands and work towards an appropriate level of development by making planning controls for secondary dwellings and senior’s housing clearer and easier to understand.

Council is in the preliminary stages of reviewing secondary dwelling controls for rural land use zones and will modify these controls where necessary, to assist in the delivery of a responsible level of growth within the rural area. For residents with more modest established homes in rural areas there is a desire to see an increase in the permissible floor space of secondary dwellings from the current limit of 60m². Rural sites present fewer constraints in relation to the siting of a secondary dwelling. Larger land areas mean that both the principal dwelling and the secondary dwelling benefit from improved opportunities for private open space and fewer amenity impacts such as overlooking or overshadowing both within the site and to adjoining sites.
In such circumstances where the potential for negative impact is low, it is considered reasonable that a secondary dwelling might be supported with a floor area larger than 60m², regardless of the size of the principal dwelling.

Council is also working with the Greater Sydney Commission and other stakeholders to improve outcomes in rural areas in relation to Senior’s housing developments carried out under the Seniors Housing State Policy. Rural locations are not appropriate for a cohort that requires ready access to services, in particular for medical and health related needs. Lower levels of public transport provision in rural areas are also not conducive to easy movement around the community.

It is envisaged that a revised approach to the issuing of Site Compatibility Certificates under this State Policy will reduce the instances of inappropriate levels of development at the rural/urban interface.

**Council will:**
- Implement an Urban Growth Boundary that largely follows the boundary of the RU6 Transition zone.
- Not support planning proposals or development applications seeking to intensify urban land uses above the urban growth boundary line

**Actions:**
- Apply the outcomes of Greater Sydney Commission working group in relation to Seniors Housing in rural areas

**Renewing and creating great places and facilitating housing in the right locations**

*This section relates to PP7 and PP9 in The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement*

Place based planning will facilitate limited, sympathetic residential and commercial growth in rural villages, contributing to their renewal as vibrant and welcoming places and maintaining their character.

**Place Based planning for rural villages**

There has been a growing emphasis at the State level on place based planning. This approach examines locations in their entirety – land use, function, look and feel, design of buildings, environment – and to plan and manage these locations as places for people rather than simply locations. It is an approach which takes into account an area’s existing character as well as its desired future character, which in large part is informed by its community.

In the context of limited expansion of rural villages, this approach would require any application for the expansion of rural villages to fit within criteria developed in consultation with the potentially affected community. Greater community involvement in setting the criteria against which village expansion is
measured, lends legitimacy and weight to these standards and inevitably may serve to lessen community dissatisfaction with the planning system.

In addition to satisfying criteria identified by the community, future proposals for the expansion of rural villages would be required to address and satisfy the criteria listed in Table 1, with an emphasis on efficiency of infrastructure provision, environmental protection and avoidance of bushfire risk.

It is noted that sympathetic and coordinated village expansion and renewal will be better facilitated where there is less fragmentation of land. Consolidated larger lots enable better place outcomes as there is greater scope to plan on a wider scale rather than on a site by site basis. This also allows greater efficiency of infrastructure provision, especially for services such as potable water and electricity.

**Local Character**

Given the importance of maintaining the rural character within The Hills, careful consideration must be devoted to implementing the best methods of doing so. At the time of writing, the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is considering the merits of including character overlays as an option within Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan mapping to further protect areas possessing exceptional local character. Mapped overlay areas would be able to be linked to character statements or area-specific Development Control Plans, bestowing greater weight on the desired future character of these areas. The use of character overlays may potentially be of assistance to planning for the renewal of our rural villages as they could clarify the desired future character and require any future proposals for village expansion to be in keeping with that strategic direction.

Council will consult with the community to formulate a character statement for the RU6 Transition zone, with particular focus on the rural villages of Annangrove, Glenorie and Kenthurst. This statement will link to mapped character overlays in The Hills Local Environmental Plan and will inform place based planning for these rural villages, facilitating their enhancement and renewal alongside limited growth.

To further recognise the rural and scenic character of the RU6 Transition zone and the need for land uses and intensity of development to be compatible with this character, additional zone objectives are required, as well as a review of permissible uses within this zone. The features of this area are significant enough to warrant specific objectives that promote land uses compatible with the scenic landscape and dominant rural residential character.
The rural villages of Kenthurst, Annangrove and Glenorie have been identified as locations that would benefit from renewal and revitalisation, and within this context a very modest amount of future residential and commercial growth could be supported. Following a place based and consultative approach the preliminary investigation areas outlined below would be subject to further detailed investigation to determine their suitability for development. All preliminary investigation areas are confined to the RU6 Rural Transition land use zone and are located on land that is relatively free from constraints such as vegetation, steeply sloping land and creek lines.

These three rural villages already contain a number of essential services that are required by a concentrated population. Table 2 below provides a brief analysis of available services and infrastructure at these locations.

The following figures show possible locations that could potentially support increased residential growth. A greater degree of housing choice and diversity within rural villages may increase their appeal to a wider variety of potential residents, and importantly may provide a housing option for younger people or families who would like to remain in the area yet may not be able to afford a larger home. Numbers of young professionals and families are increasingly leaving the rural area of the

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Table 1: Planning proposal criteria for rural village expansion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>New proposals must demonstrate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Infrastructure Provision</td>
<td>Timely provision of utilities, transport, open space and communication infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Access</td>
<td>Access to a range of transport options that allow efficient travel between homes, jobs and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Housing Diversity</td>
<td>Provision of a range of housing types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Employment Lands</td>
<td>Provision of employment opportunities or access to employment areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Avoidance of Risk</td>
<td>Land use conflicts are avoided and safe evacuation routes are available (flood and bushfire)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Natural Resources</td>
<td>Responsible use of natural resources and minimisation of development footprint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Environmental Protection</td>
<td>Protection and enhancement of biodiversity, air quality, heritage and waterways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Quality and equity in services</td>
<td>Access to health, education and other essential services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preliminary Investigation Areas

The rural villages of Kenthurst, Annangrove and Glenorie have been identified as locations that would benefit from renewal and revitalisation, and within this context a very modest amount of future residential and commercial growth could be supported. Following a place based and consultative approach the preliminary investigation areas outlined below would be subject to further detailed investigation to determine their suitability for development. All preliminary investigation areas are confined to the RU6 Rural Transition land use zone and are located on land that is relatively free from constraints such as vegetation, steeply sloping land and creek lines.

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The following figures show possible locations that could potentially support increased residential growth. A greater degree of housing choice and diversity within rural villages may increase their appeal to a wider variety of potential residents, and importantly may provide a housing option for younger people or families who would like to remain in the area yet may not be able to afford a larger home. Numbers of young professionals and families are increasingly leaving the rural area of the
Hills; there are a variety of reasons for this, however high median house prices and limited choice are contributing factors.

Defining the scope for the limited expansion of rural villages presents opportunities for Council to ensure that the character of the villages is maintained, and that a desired future character is articulated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Annangrove</th>
<th>Kenthurst</th>
<th>Glenorie</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Education</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Education</td>
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<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>Rural Fire Station</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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<td>Community Facility</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>(Hornsby)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(Hornsby)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✓</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Hornsby)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reticulated Water</td>
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<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>✗</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocer</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Preliminary assessment of provision of essential services in rural villages

As mentioned above, Council will consult with the community to develop a character statement for the RU6 Transition Zone, with a focus on these three villages. The consultation will also seek to clarify the priorities that the communities within and around these rural villages hold for the renewal and limited growth of these places. These priorities will inform the place based development criteria that any proposal to expand these villages would be required to satisfy.

**Glenorie**

Glenorie village is located on Old Northern Road and straddles The Hills and Hornsby local government areas. Residents currently benefit from a range of services including a full-size supermarket and other specialty retailers, a medical centre and pharmacy, post office and rural fire station. Council will collaborate with Hornsby Council in investigations regarding growth within Glenorie Village, due to the location of important social infrastructure within the Hornsby LGA.
The small commercial centre of Annangrove is located on Annangrove Road, approximately mid-way between Kenthurst and Box Hill. Whilst there is no residential zoned land currently surrounding the centre, it provides surrounding rural residents with a grocer, butcher, bottle shop, petrol station, café and pizza restaurant. The Imam Hasan Islamic Centre is located between the commercial centre and Annangrove Park, with Sydney Plant Market on the southern side of Annangrove Road.
Kenthurst

Kenthurst village is located on Kenthurst Road and consists of a small commercial area, low density residential zoned land, large lots within an Environmental living zone and Lukas Avenue Reserve. There is also a seniors living complex at the southern end of the village.

![Map of Preliminary Investigation Area – Kenthurst Village](image)

**Figure 24:** Preliminary Investigation Area – Kenthurst Village

**Council will:**
- Respond to any proposals for change in identified opportunity areas in line with place-based criteria developed in consultation with rural communities.
- Review zone objectives and permissible uses in the RU6 Transition zone.

**Actions:**
- Prepare Local Character Statements for rural character areas and investigate the benefits of including character overlays in the Local Environmental Plan.
- Investigate opportunities for limited residential expansion in existing rural villages in line with the criteria recommended in Table 1 of the Rural Strategy 2019.
4 Managing our Rural Economy

Despite a decline in recent years in the availability of productive agricultural land as the edge of the urban area has crept north, our rural economy is growing. Productive rural land in the Hills is important to our Shire as well as Greater Sydney. In addition to providing a scenic backdrop to our urban area, rural lands play an important role in the functioning of the wider city by providing land for industries such as plant nurseries, cut flowers and stone fruit production. Northern parts of the Hills Shire also contain valuable areas for the extraction of sand and materials integral to the production of building supplies. The proximity of these lands to more densely populated areas contributes to their current and future value.

Certainty surrounding the protection of these lands will encourage growth in the agricultural and extractive industries sectors, as business operators and land owners will enjoy a greater level of assurance around the future uses of their land. This will allow them to plan better for the future growth of their businesses.

In physical terms, productive agricultural land within the Shire has declined over the past decade, with the amount of land occupied by orchards and market gardens decreasing. Reasons for this decline include economic changes following the global financial crisis in 2008, an increase in seniors living developments in the rural area, and losses resulting from the development of land in release areas at the peri-urban interface. There is also a move towards intensive horticulture uses, utilising greenhouse and hydroponics facilities rather than requiring the use of soil for agricultural production.

Land used for extractive industries has grown however, reflecting the increased need for the production of construction materials to satisfy the recent heightened demands of Sydney’s construction industry.

Viewing this decline in the amount of land used for agriculture in isolation does not reflect the change to intensive horticulture that is currently being experienced within the Shire, which has seen the Shire’s agricultural output increase over the last decade. This is also reflected in the growing employment levels within our agricultural sector.
Figure 25: Rural/agricultural activity decline 2008-2018
Despite a reduction in productive land area, and the challenges posed by very fragmented land ownership, agriculture in the Shire is evolving and becoming more efficient through technological advances. Greater reliance on data and automation are delivering more and better quality produce. This does not mean a loss of human involvement in production, but rather a change in employees’ roles and the part of the production process with which they have contact. These advances are having the greatest impact in the Shire through increased use of greenhouses and intensive horticulture.

Critical to our Shire’s agricultural productive capacity is accessibility and connectivity. The size of the Shire and relatively small number of road and public transport connections within the rural area of The Hills poses supply chain challenges for producers in both the agricultural and mining industries, as they seek to get their products to market quickly and efficiently. This limited connectivity reduces the opportunities to expand into new markets, curtailing the growth prospects of rural businesses.

**Tourism and rural support services**

Tourism and rural support services are significant contributors to the functioning of the rural area and the success of the rural economy. Tourism added around $235 Million to the Hills economy in 2017/18, and generates a significant amount of local employment - well over the average for the State. The following graph illustrates the comparison between the value of tourism and hospitality to the Hills and NSW economies:
Figure 27: Value of tourism and hospitality to The Hills and NSW economies 2016/2017

Figure 28: Value of tourism and hospitality to The Hills Shire
As the foregoing figure shows however, the last few years have seen somewhat of a plateau in the value of tourism to the overall local economy. In order to contribute to the rural economy and ensure growth in this industry, Council has an important role in promoting the Shire as a destination for new businesses and visitors.

Major components of the Shire’s tourism industry are located in or based around the Shire’s rural area. Farm gate sales, farmer’s markets, eco tourist facilities, scenic visits to water based recreation on the Hawkesbury River all combine to offer a country experience on Sydney’s doorstep. Notable tourist facilities and destinations in the Hills rural area include Riverside Oaks Golf Resort in Cattai and Wisemans Ferry at the northernmost point of the Shire, as well as other private providers such as Tobruk Sheep Station in Maroota in the Shire’s north.

Over the past several years there have been changes in who is visiting the Hills and how long they are staying for. The proportion of international visitors is growing and in general these visitors stay for extended periods of time (around 33 days on average) and travel here to visit their families. This is in contrast to both domestic overnight stays and day trips, which are decreasing. The downward trend of domestic daytrips indicated in the following figure suggests this is an area which needs targeted attention. The Hills offers many opportunities for these type of tourist activities such as farmers markets, fruit picking, ‘country experiences and even a small number of cellar doors. These opportunities should be leveraged so as to maximise their potential benefit to the economy.

![Figure 29: Breakdown of tourist visits to The Hills Shire](image-url)
The marketing and development of tourism opportunities requires ongoing collaboration with numerous stakeholders including other levels of government, surrounding local councils – Hawkesbury and Hornsby – and Chambers of Commerce.

In recognition of the tourist potential of Wisemans Ferry, a portion of the village was zoned SP3 Tourism in 2012. As yet however, this specialised zoning has not translated to increased tourist activity. This is largely due to the high level of private ownership and fragmentation of land in this area, preventing access to the river for water based recreation pursuits.

Along most of the Hawkesbury River foreshore within the Shire, land is in private ownership. Whilst this has enabled the proliferation of private water-ski enterprises in some areas, it serves to largely prevent public access to the waterfront.

Water quality also affects water-based tourism along the Hawkesbury River. Water quality is affected by in stream processes such as aquatic life, temperature and flow rate, however it is also significantly affected by what takes place on land within the wider catchment. Increased runoff from residences, farms and industries, as well as treated waste from sewage treatment plants combine to detrimentally affect water quality where levels of chemicals and nutrients entering the waterways are not monitored and controlled. It is vital that Council takes all possible action within its means to ensure water quality is protected, so that residents and visitors can safely enjoy our waterways. The health of our waterways is discussed further in Council’s Environment Strategy 2019.

Physical attributes of the rural area also pose challenges for the growth of tourism. In particular, steep topography and vegetation cover render some parts of the Shire inaccessible or at high risk of bushfire. These constraints limit possible opportunities for the development of safe tourist facilities that seek to locate in bushland settings for example. Minimal local road connections and scant public transport access also serve to limit the ability of residents and visitors to travel efficiently to tourist attractions or destinations in the rural and northern extremities of the Shire. Visitors wishing to travel by public transport from Castle Hill to Wisemans Ferry for example, will typically require up to 2.5 hours travel time and will need to change bus routes or split their trip between bus and train travel to get there. They are also significantly limited in the number of travel opportunities per day – currently Transport for NSW travel information indicates just two opportunities to undertake this trip by bus per day.

Wider tourism trends across Australia also indicate the growing popularity of eco-tourism. The Hills Shire lends itself to this type of tourist use, with vast tracts of environmentally sensitive land within our rural area that have particular scenic and or ecological value. A small number of eco-tourism providers already operate within the Shire, offering boutique accommodation amongst scenic areas.

Equally important to the growth of the rural economy is the ability of rural support industries to locate within convenient proximity to productive areas of the Shire. Significant land uses that support the rural economy are rural industries and rural supplies. These uses facilitate the smooth and efficient
functioning of our agricultural and extractive industries by providing locations and services at which farming equipment can be repaired or maintained, or where goods or materials used in farming and primary industry production can be purchased. They also provide some opportunities for local employment.

Currently opportunities to access these services are limited, since rural supplies is not permissible within the RU6 Transition zone, and rural industries is not permissible in the RU1 Primary Production zone. Rural industries towards the north of the Shire may benefit in future from a rural services hub that would cater for these requirements.

Retaining and managing the Shire’s rural productive capacity
*This section relates to PP4 in The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement*

Increasing the intensity and efficiency of our productive rural industries and improving rural connectivity will allow operators to grow their businesses.

**Encouraging Intensive Horticulture**
Horticulture in the Hills is moving towards more intensive modes of production such as hydroponics within greenhouses, as there is limited supply of productive agricultural land within the Shire. To assist in facilitating this evolution, Council will review site coverage controls as well as hours of operation for agricultural land uses within the rural section of The Hills Development Control Plan. This may enable agricultural operators to maximise their land use efficiency in instances where the surrounding uses are similar and where the agricultural use is not likely to have an adverse noise impact on immediately surrounding areas.

Source: Western Sydney University 2018

Example of intensive plant production in greenhouse
Given this shift in focus, intensive horticulture activity in the Shire could benefit by forging links with Western Sydney University’s Greenhouse Research Education Training Facility at its Hawkesbury Campus. This facility aims to ‘help Australian growers tap into the latest research and practices within greenhouse crop production to make their operations more efficient, and meet the increased demand for fresh food that can be delivered quickly to markets.’ (Western Sydney University)

Partnering with tertiary institutions to explore best-practice in intensive horticulture will increase the capacity of Council to facilitate the best and most efficient land use outcomes for this industry. It may also enable Hills rural businesses to access a knowledge and evidence base that will allow them to utilise new and emerging technologies and practices with confidence.

Council’s Economic Growth Plan outlined within the Productivity and Centres Strategy 2019 will target key rural industries and articulate how greater regional connectivity will be able to assist in the growth and development of existing businesses as well as attracting new businesses to the Shire.

Whilst Council is able to boast a strong record of assisting small business across the Shire for many years, extending this to target rural businesses will also assist in their growth and success. Identifying trends within agricultural production such as modular farming and vertical greenhouses and determining where these new methods could be most appropriate, Council will be able to target new operators with the aim of attracting them to base their operations within the Shire.

Source: Modular Farms Co. 2019

New ways of farming
**Improving Rural Connectivity**

Key to the management of our Shire’s productive capacity is ensuring our producers can get their products to market quickly and efficiently, as well as being able to take advantage of potential opportunities to expand into new markets. Currently, geographical constraints limit the supply of both agricultural produce and extractive materials to destinations to the south and east of the Shire, as well as to the west. Coupled with higher density urban areas and potential increases in congestion, better ways of accessing markets and distribution points are essential for the growth of our rural industries.

To this end, Council is currently seeking clarity surrounding the location of the Outer Sydney Orbital between North West Sydney and the Central Coast. Not only would the orbital road link The Hills to the Central Coast, it would also provide a direct road and freight link to the Western Sydney International Airport. The potential for new market opportunities and greater supply chain efficiencies that the Outer Sydney Orbital would create for our Shire cannot be underestimated. As shown in the following figure from Future Transport 2056, the North West Sydney to Central Coast section of the orbital is identified as a visionary initiative for investigation beyond 20 years. This timeframe is not indicative of the strategic importance of this link to The Hills or to Greater Sydney.

![Greater Sydney Visionary Initiatives (20+ years)](image)

*Source: Transport for NSW 2018*

**Figure 30:** Future Transport 2056 - Greater Sydney Visionary Initiatives 20+ years
In addition, certainty surrounding the Outer Sydney Orbital alignment will assist in our rural productive industries remaining viable and competitive in the face of the planned future agriculture and agribusiness precinct immediately west of the Western Sydney International Airport (refer area circled in red in following figure).

**Figure 31**: Western Sydney International Airport Stage 1 Plan – Structure Plan

**Limiting rural residential development and village expansion**

Rural residential development is part of the Shire’s approach to providing housing diversity and choice. However, the environmental, social and economic costs are in many cases higher than those within standard urban residential areas and must be managed with care, so as to avoid land use conflicts with productive rural uses as well as ensuring responsible management of valuable environmental areas.
Opportunities for future rural residential development or village expansion need to consider the efficient and sensitive provision of services and infrastructure that will provide an attractive setting and high level of amenity, whilst minimising potential impacts on productive uses and surrounding environmentally sensitive lands. Locations where this cannot be shown to be possible will not be considered for further rural residential development. The approach outlined in section 3 provides criteria that would need to be satisfied in order to allow further rural residential development.

Rural cluster subdivision will continue to be utilised within the RU2 Rural Landscape and RU6 Transition zones to facilitate very limited rural residential development in conjunction with the protection of environmentally sensitive lands.

Amendments to the Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan present Council with an option to include a clause that seeks to ‘minimise potential land use conflict between existing and proposed development on land in the rural, residential or environment protection zones concerned (particularly between residential land uses and other rural land uses)’. In considering applications for the subdivision of land for dwelling houses or the erection of dwelling houses in rural land use zones, this clause enables Council to consider ‘whether or not the development is likely to have a significant impact on land uses that, in the opinion of the consent authority, are likely to be preferred and the predominant land uses in the vicinity of the development’. This clause provides some opportunity to identify the importance of productive rural land uses in the rural area and can be considered for inclusion as part of Council’s Local Environmental Plan review.

By limiting residential development in rural areas, productive rural land remains available for agricultural uses. The greater level of certainty afforded to rural landowners and producers regarding the future use of rural land may better enable them to make decisions regarding the future of their businesses.

**Council will:**
- Protect productive agricultural lands across the Shire from land uses that may lead to land use conflict.
- Forge links between The Hills Shire producers and Western Sydney University’s Greenhouse Research Education Training Facility at its Hawkesbury Campus and encourage intensification of horticulture activity including the use of hydroponics and greenhouses.
- Encourage better ways of accessing markets and distribution points that are essential for the growth of our rural industries, both agricultural produce and extractive materials.
- Work with State Government to facilitate the preservation of a corridor and delivery of the section of the Outer Sydney Orbital between North West Sydney and the Central Coast to facilitate growth of agricultural and extractive industries by opening up new market opportunities and supply chain efficiencies.
Actions:
- Review our planning controls and permissible uses in rural zones to minimise land use conflict and maintain desired character.
- Investigate use of the optional Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan clause 5.16 to ensure consideration of existing rural uses when assessing applications for rural subdivision.
- Implement a planning proposal policy to clearly articulate where planning proposals are actively discouraged to prevent loss of productive resource land.

Encouraging support activities and tourism in rural areas

This section relates to PP5 in The Hills Local Strategic Planning Statement

The rural landscape of the Shire and the proximity to recreation locations like the Hawkesbury River provide opportunities to further develop tourism in the rural area, particularly caravan parks and camping grounds associated with water-based recreation. Bed and breakfast, farm stay accommodation and eco-tourism can also be encouraged in appropriate locations, as can tourist facilities that utilise rural land. Opportunities to capitalise on existing specialist tourist zones (land zoned SP3) will form part of the way forward in growing the tourist economy.

While farmers markets typically set up in urban areas where they can reach a larger number of customers, productive rural lands play a vital role in their ongoing survival. The ability to locate these activities close to where the goods that are sold are produced ensures efficiencies within the supply chain for these producers.

The growing popularity of ecotourism across NSW and Australia indicates the future value that this type of tourist activity could have. Encouraging tourist facilities to comply with recognised national guidelines for ecotourism and to become certified eco-tourist providers will not only boost the local profile of these facilities, but contribute to sustainable development outcomes in sensitive environmental areas.

Council plays an integral role in the promotion and marketing of tourist opportunities within the Shire. Advances in technology provide opportunities to refine existing approaches to the way local tourism offerings are promoted by Council. In addition, continued close collaboration with Hawkesbury and Hornsby Councils will benefit tourism providers across The Hills and further afield.

Council’s Economic Growth Plan will pay particular attention to growing tourism and seek to attract investment in tourism opportunities in the rural area of the Shire. The marketing and development of tourism opportunities requires ongoing collaboration with numerous stakeholders including other levels of government, surrounding local councils – Hawkesbury and Hornsby – and chambers of commerce.
Recent changes to the Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan allow small scale intensive livestock agriculture in appropriate rural areas without requiring development consent. Small farms that can accommodate relatively low numbers of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs or poultry) can operate under this clause. Further work will be undertaken to identify areas within the RU1 Primary Production zone where these uses could possibly take place. Promoting the use of this clause will be considered within Council’s Economic Growth Plan.

To facilitate the adequate provision of support services for our rural industries, Council will review the permissibility of rural supplies and rural industries uses in the RU1 and RU6 land use zones. In addition, Council will work with stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of and potential locations for a future rural services hub in the north of the Shire. Identification of a preferred centralised location for these uses provides certainty to potential rural support businesses as well as potential rural industry operators and producers.

Council will:
- Value the contribution that rural industries make to Greater Sydney’s economy and protect productive agricultural land from development pressures, particularly along the rural-urban fringe.
- Discourage planning proposals which seek to re-zone viable agricultural land for residential purposes.
- Investigate ways to grow tourism in the Shire.

Actions
- Identify potential locations for a future rural services hub in the Rural North of the Shire
- Review planning controls and permissible uses in rural zones to facilitate land uses that will support and serve rural industry and encourage tourism in appropriate locations

Further work
- Investigate aligning planning controls for ecotourism facilities to guidelines for eco-certification.
- Investigate potential for appropriate expansion of or improvements to public wharves along Hawkesbury River.
- Increase collaboration with Hawkesbury and Hornsby Councils in the promotion and marketing of recreation on the Hawkesbury River.
Implementation and Delivery
The actions contained within this Strategy are to be implemented in accordance with the Implementation Plan supporting the Local Strategic Planning Statement.

Stakeholders
There are a number of stakeholders who will assist in the delivery of the actions outlined in this strategy, including:

- Residents;
- Development Industry, local businesses and Chambers of Commerce;
- Surrounding local council; and
- State Agencies including the Greater Sydney Commission, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, NSW Environment Protection Authority, Transport for NSW.

Planning Instrument
This strategy flags a number of potential changes to planning controls following further investigations and master planning work. It is anticipated that these master plans and subsequent planning proposals will be completed by the next 5 year review.

Proposed amendments that do not warrant detailed master planning or further investigations will be included in the pending review of Local Environmental Plan 2012, intended to be completed before June 2020.

Monitoring and Review
The Rural Strategy will be monitored annually and reported to Council to inform future review programs. It is anticipated that the Rural Strategy will be reviewed, exhibited and re-adopted on a five yearly basis so it best reflects community concerns and aspirations as well as best practice in land use planning for responsible rural lands management.
References


Department of Planning and Environment
- 2016 NSW State and Local Government Area Population Projections
- Western Sydney Aerotropolis Stage 1 Plan August 2018
- Draft North West Sub-regional Strategy 2006

Greater Sydney Region Plan March 2018

Central City District Plan March 2018

Nearmap http://maps.au.nearmap.com/

Profile id https://profile.id.com.au/the-hills


Transport for NSW
- Future Transport 2056
- Trip Planner

Western Sydney University
- The Health of the River System
  https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/harwest/harwest/the_health_of_the_river_system
- Greenhouse Research Education Training Facility
  https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/research/centralised_research_facilities/greenhouse_facility
The Rural Strategy was adopted by Council on xxxxxxx Minute No.xxx.

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