

Stakeholder Workshop Summary of Key Findings

Merrimu PSP



March 2021

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

On 10 December 2020, the Victorian Planning Authority (VPA) undertook a stakeholder engagement workshop. Key Government stakeholders, agencies and landowners, provided input into the technical studies and planning work undertaken to date for the Merrimu Precinct Structure Plan (PSP). The outcomes of this workshop will enable VPA to start testing potential outcomes with value add from key stakeholders.

The purpose of the workshop was to review the findings of the background technical work and to begin the next phase of planning – the preparation of a Place Based Plan.

This report presents the key findings from the workshop.

1.2 Project context

1.2.1 Merrimu PSP

The VPA is working with MSC to prepare a Precinct Structure Plan (PSP) and Infrastructure Contributions Plan (ICP) for 20,000 residents and 1,800 jobs at Merrimu in Bacchus Marsh.

Merrimu is a large land ensemble with relatively few constraints. It has potential for self-sufficient residential development, accommodating growth to 2041 and beyond whilst integrating landscape values. Merrimu will also provide local job opportunities.

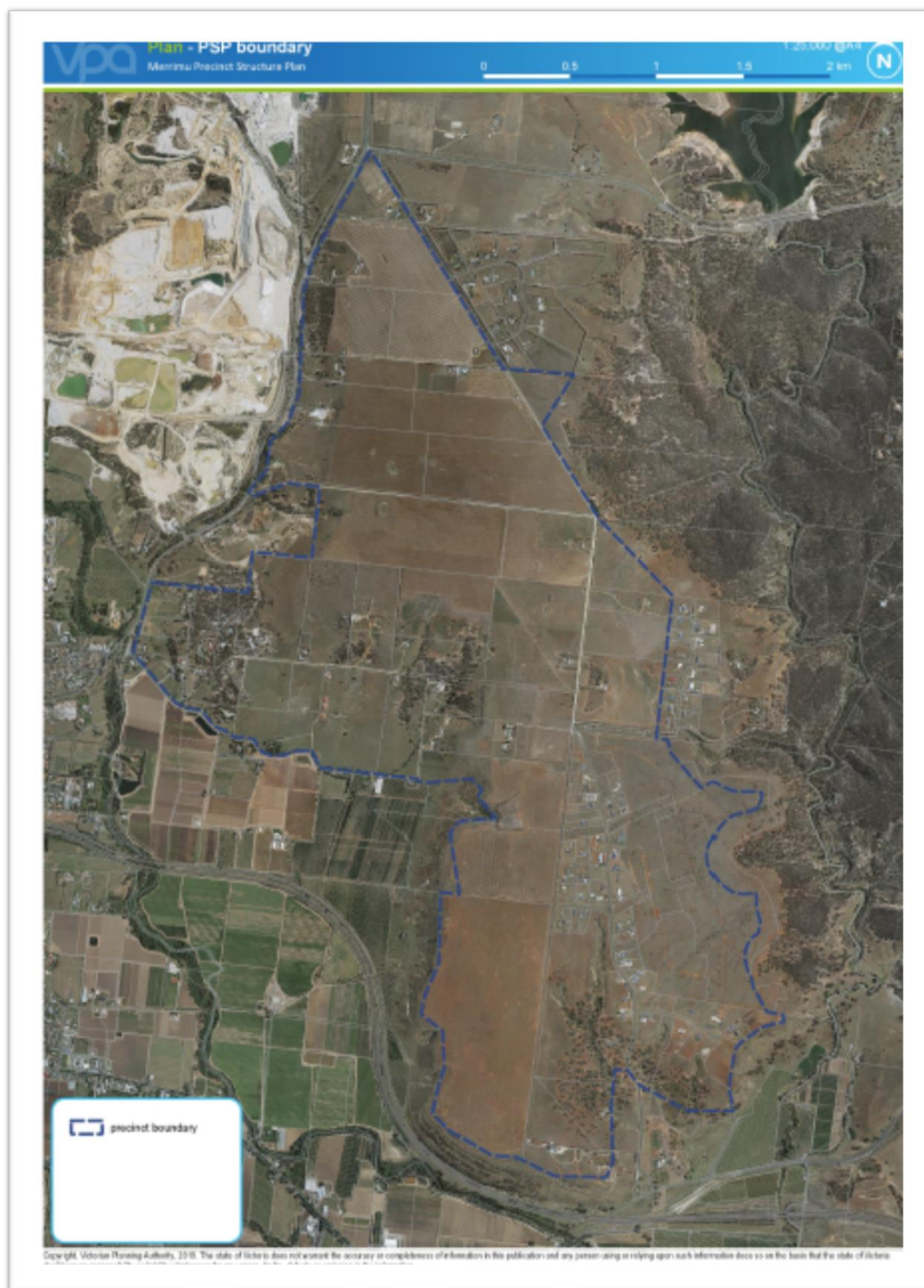


Figure 1 - Merrimu PSP boundary

2 STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOP

2.1 Workshop format

The workshop was broken into 2 x 2 hour sessions. The first half concentrated on the Parwan Station PSP while the second half was focussed on the Merrimu PSP. Results from the Parwan Station session are presented in a separate report and will not be discussed further in this document.

Zoom and Jamboard were used to bring people together, workshop ideas and provide feedback around the concept urban structure put forward by Ethos Urban. Ethos Urban are working on behalf of a consortium of landowners in the precinct.

A VPA facilitator introduced the day, followed by a short presentation from project manager that details the key issues for the precincts and words from MSC. There was then an opportunity for participants to ask questions in a whole group setting after which the consultants presented their ideas for the concept urban structure.

The Jamboard tool was explained to participants who were then broken out into small breakout rooms. Each group had no more than 7 participants. Senior VPA staff were able to jump into (and out of) the breakout rooms as required to ensure that the discussion was progressing well or to offer expert advice where required. 25 minutes was given for small group discussions with a report back to the whole group at end of each activity to summarise the key discussion points emerging from each group.

2.2 Invitees

The VPA invited a range of stakeholders to provide diverse and vital contributions to the discussions (see appendix A). Attendees were divided out into the breakout room discussions to ensure a diversity of perspectives was captured in every group.

Stakeholder organisations that were invited to the session:

- Aboriginal Victoria
- Bacchus Marsh Developments (BMD)
- Country Fire Authority
- DELWP – Forest, Fire and Regions
- DELWP - Planning
- Department of Transport
- DJPR – Extractive Resources
- Regional Roads Victoria
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Ethos Urban
- Heritage Victoria
- Melbourne Water
- Moorabool Shire Council
- Rain Consulting
- Southern Rural Water
- Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation
- Western Water

2.3 Key points presented

The workshop included three main components:

- Presentation and discussion of key issues
- Presenting the concept urban structure put forward by proponents
- Small group discussions seeking initial feedback on the key issues and concept urban structure

Key issues that were covered included Arboricultural assessment, biodiversity, Aboriginal and historic heritage, land capability, Eastern Link Road (ELR) alignment, buffers, retail and economic assessment, and Integrated Water Management (IWM).

Specific issues included:

- Prevalence of sodic soils as well as IWM and how it pertains to management of run-off and erosion
- Biodiversity assessments of land not already surveyed
- Managing buffers especially clarification of appropriate buffer to the quarries
- Access, transport & connectivity especially as it relates to the ELR alignment
- Urban design and visual impact from escarpment and to existing rural lifestyle residential properties

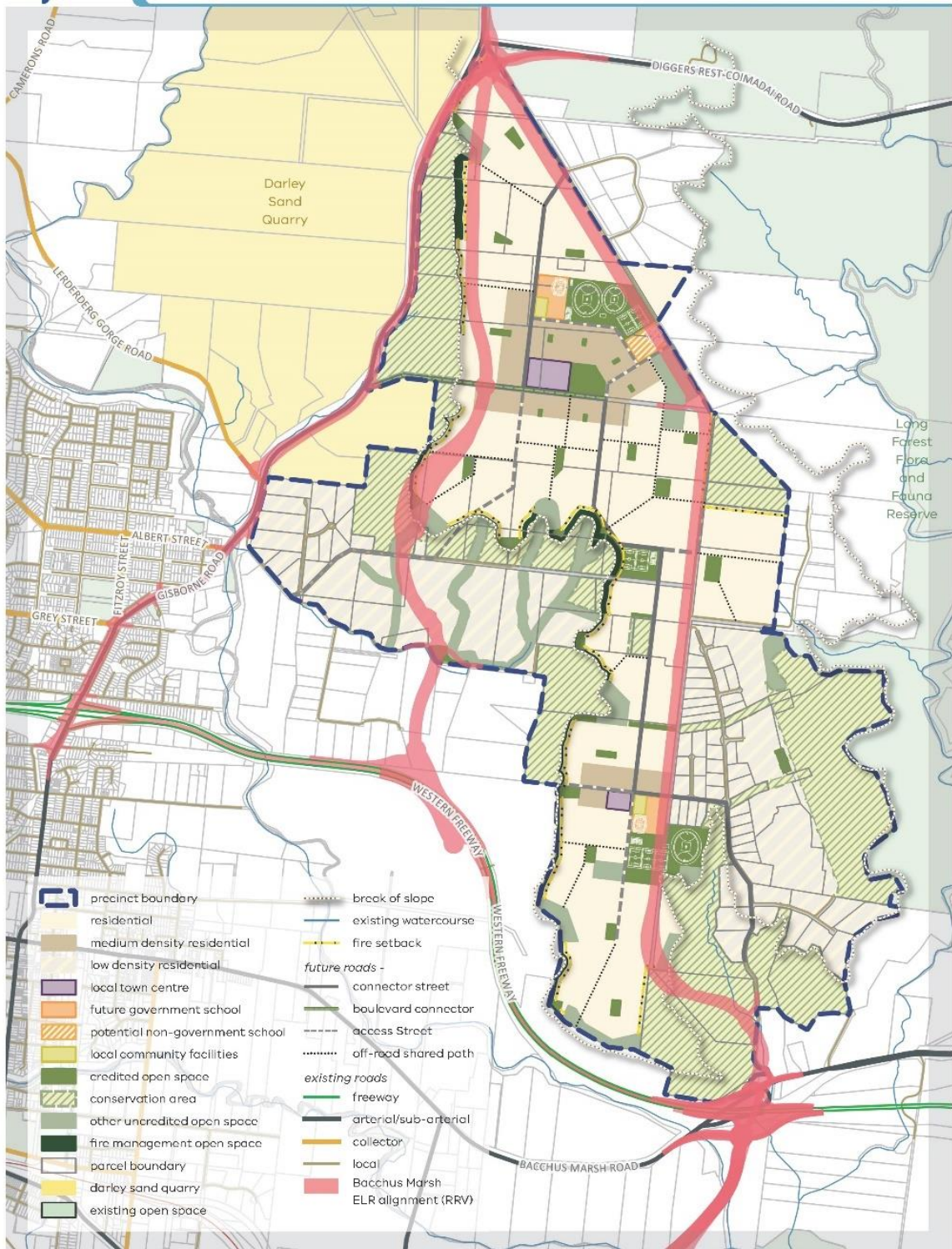


Figure 2 - Developer concept urban structure

2.4 What we heard

Discussions during the breakout room sessions focussed on answering four questions about the concept urban structure for the precinct. The questions were essentially a SWOT analysis:

- 1) What works? (Strengths)
- 2) What doesn't work? (Weaknesses)
- 3) What would you like to see? (Opportunities)
- 4) What don't we know? (Threats)

The VPA set up an interactive online platform called Jamboard for each group. The slides originally contained the concept urban structure as an image in the centre, with the four questions written on "sticky notes" in the corners (see Appendix B). However due to technical difficulties, the image had to be deleted. Participants placed sticky notes on the slides to note down their responses. A summary of comments is presented in section 3.

3 RESPONSES FOR MERRIMU

1) What works? (Strengths)

- Comments related to **built form** were most frequent, citing strengths such as the lower density development on the lower plateau, diverse housing types and good clustering of facilities such as school and retail.
- Comments relating to the **location or context** of the precinct were also common such as the precinct's proximity to Bacchus Marsh and the unique **landscape** and **biodiversity** it is situated within.
- Other key strengths of the draft Plan were related to **liveability** and **walkability** such as the green link corridors, 20 minute city vision and the community garden which were generally seen as positive additions to the plan.

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Comments

2) What doesn't work? (Weaknesses)

- The most common concern was the alignment of the **ELR**, which was anticipated. Participants expressed that the current alignments would divide the future community, impede walkability, work against the 20 minute neighbourhood vision and impact the irrigation district and regional character of the area.
- The next most common comment was about other **transport**-related issues. The precinct was seen as being isolated from public transport and the lack of good active transport connectivity to Bacchus Marsh risks creating a car-dominated precinct.
- The issue of **sodic soils**, erosion and **water management** was also discussed especially as it pertains to impacting the availability of developable land.
- Other concerns were **bushfire** risk, **buffers** and ensuring vulnerable uses are located away from identified hazards.

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Comments

3) What would you like to see? (Opportunities)

- Opportunities seemed to be a key direction the discussions took as different stakeholders explained what they anticipate for the precinct.
- **Water management** was the most frequently mentioned theme with 12 comments made in relation to it. This includes aspirational permeability targets, implementing best practice water capturing and closed loop system, passive irrigation innovations and use of alternate water.
- **Transport** was also seen as a key opportunity for Merrimu. Examples of comments include introducing frequent or on-demand bus services, active transport connections into Bacchus Marsh and Darley, and inclusion of walking and cycling tracks along the escarpment.
- **Land use** and **built form** opportunities also arose frequently such as ensuring **integration** between the north and south of the PSP, considering high density apartments near commercial areas, protecting **views** from the escarpment and highlighting connections to Long Forest Reserve.
- Other opportunities include the potential for Merrimu to be a regional **tourism** destination, thinking of new **office/ co-working** spaces and creating **biodiversity** links and green corridors.

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Comments

4) What don't we know? (Threats)

- Uncertainty surrounding the **ELR** alignment was clearly the issue of greatest concern with comments citing the big impact the road will have on the final outcomes of the PSP and having a well-integrated precinct.
- Another gap that was identified was a greater understanding of **bushfire** risk and the impact on development – once the Place Based Plan is developed.
- The impact of **sodic** and dispersive soils not being fully understood was also mentioned as well as the potential impact on the ability to supply services.
- Responsibility and payment for **service infrastructure** was identified as another unknown.
- Other comments questioned if **canopy trees** can work in the area, if the **quarry buffer** will restart operations and associated **land use** implications, the influence of land owners, **economic impacts** on primacy of Bacchus marsh as a result of commercial hubs, and unknowns related to contaminated land.

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Comments

4 ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

4.1 Actions

A number of issues were identified as currently unresolved and have been identified for future consideration. They include:

- VPA will continue to work closely with RRV and resolve alignment of ELR
- Transport will form a key focus moving forward including integrating active transport options and public transport within the precinct and in connection to Bacchus Marsh town centre
- Continuing discussions with DJPR and buffer operators regarding buffers and land use
- Completing outstanding studies, especially related to sodic soils, bushfire, biodiversity, servicing and land capability
- Careful consideration of built form and urban design to ensure an integrated precinct
- VPA will continue to collaborate with MSC on water management issues to ensure a good outcome for the precinct
- Explore and consider opportunities that were suggested such as tourism, office spaces, green corridors and canopy trees
- A retail study is nearing completion which includes consideration of the economic hierarchy of commercial centres in Bacchus Marsh and the new precincts

4.2 Next steps

The VPA has resolved to undertake a Co-Design workshop with relevant stakeholders and landowners once all the relevant background technical studies have been completed, and a draft Place Based Plan has been prepared, prior to formal exhibition of the PSP. This is expected to occur in mid 2021.

VPA will continue to involve key stakeholders for their input at various stages of the project.

APPENDIX A

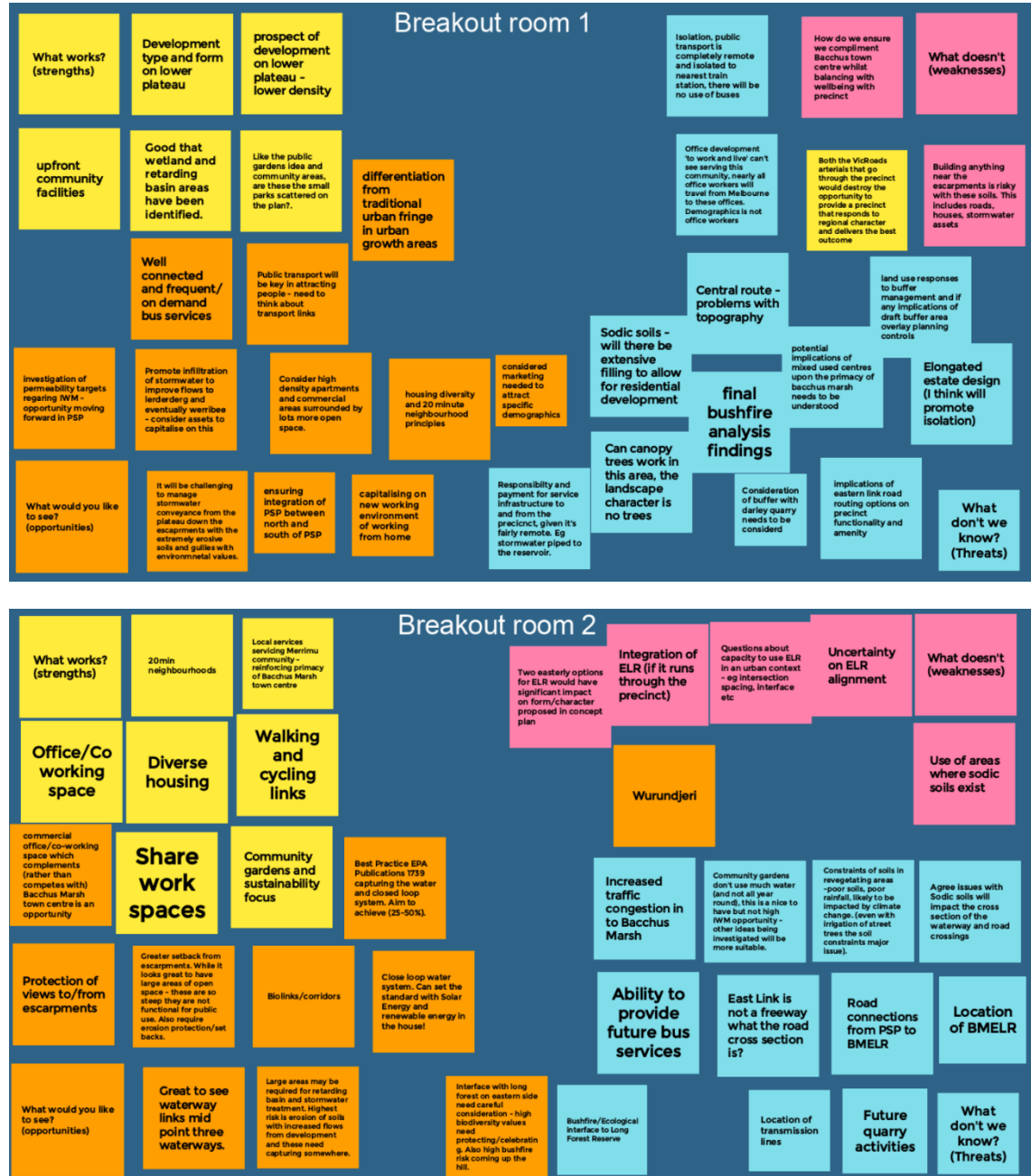
Table 1 - List of invitees

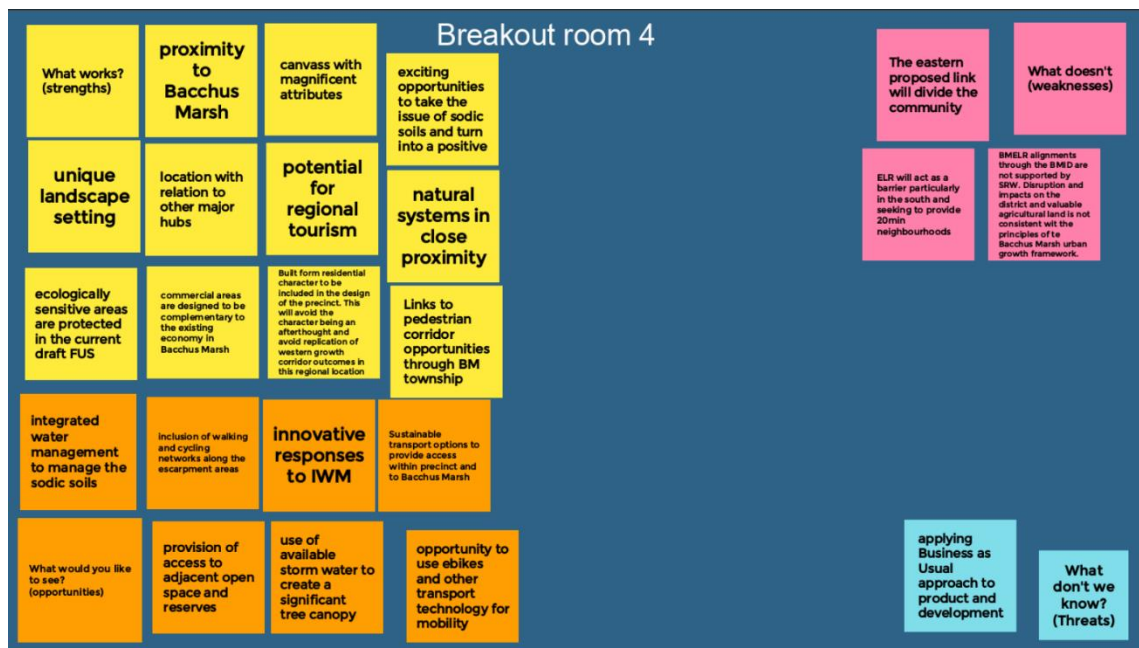
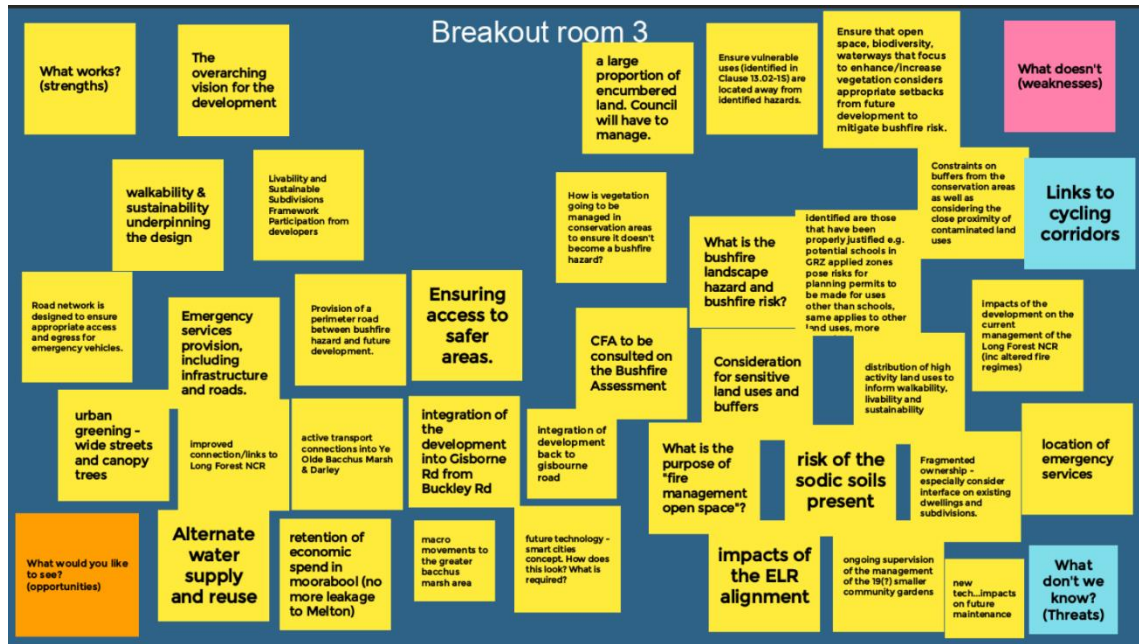
Name	Organisation
Adrian Burrow	Aboriginal Victoria
Nick Parthimos	Bacchus Marsh Developments
Henry Wallis	Bacchus Marsh Developments / Ethos
Jessica Buckley	Bacchus Marsh Developments / Ethos
Tim Pegg	Bacchus Marsh Developments / Ethos
Mike Day	Bacchus Marsh Developments / Roberts Day
Murray James	Bacchus Marsh Developments / Roberts Day
Anne Coxon	Country Fire Authority
Ezaz Sheikh	DELWP
Nathan Macdonald	DELWP
Stewart J Dekker	DELWP
Vernon Yen	DELWP
Angela Daraxoglou	Department of Transport
Chris J Banger	Department of Transport
Daniel Zaslona	Department of Transport
Danita K Tucker	Department of Transport
Katrina L Hynes	Department of Transport
Marinko Vojvodic	Department of Transport
Trisha Brice	Environmental Protection Authority
Elizabeth Wright	Insight Planning
Jason Black	Insight Planning
Anthony Battaglia	Insight Planning / Patch
Chris Gardner	Moorabool Shire Council
Ewen Nevett	Moorabool Shire Council
Henry Bezuidenhout	Moorabool Shire Council
Justin Horne	Moorabool Shire Council
Jyoti Makan	Moorabool Shire Council
Joe Morgan-Paylor	Moorabool Shire Council
Liam Prescott	Moorabool Shire Council
Mitchell Cunningham	Moorabool Shire Council
Matt Keane	Moorabool Shire Council
Mark Lovell	Moorabool Shire Council
Phil Jeffrey	Moorabool Shire Council
Rod Davison	Moorabool Shire Council
Rob Fillisch	Moorabool Shire Council
Sally Jones	Moorabool Shire Council
Sarah Kernohan	Moorabool Shire Council
Digby Richardson	Melbourne Water
Hugh Wallace	Melbourne Water

Katy Marriott	Melbourne Water
Laurence Newcome	Melbourne Water
Mia Meng	Melbourne Water
Stephen Miller	Melbourne Water
Luke Cunningham	Rain Consulting (Merrimu)
Rianda Mills	Rain Consulting (Merrimu)
Gilbert Richardson	RRV
Julie Fortuna	RRV
Anni O'Donnell	VPA
Conrad Mazurkiewicz	VPA
Jamie Sheehan	VPA
Jeff Tait	VPA
John Tinkler	VPA
Kingsley McGlew	VPA
Mat Garner	VPA
Matthew Hallett	VPA
Monique So	VPA
Naba Alsaffar	VPA
Naomi Oosting	VPA
Peter Murrell	VPA
Rachel Wilton	VPA
Sandra Bevenja	VPA
Tina Webb	VPA
Verity Miles	VPA
David Jones	Wadawurrung Traditional Owners
William Gielewski	Western Water

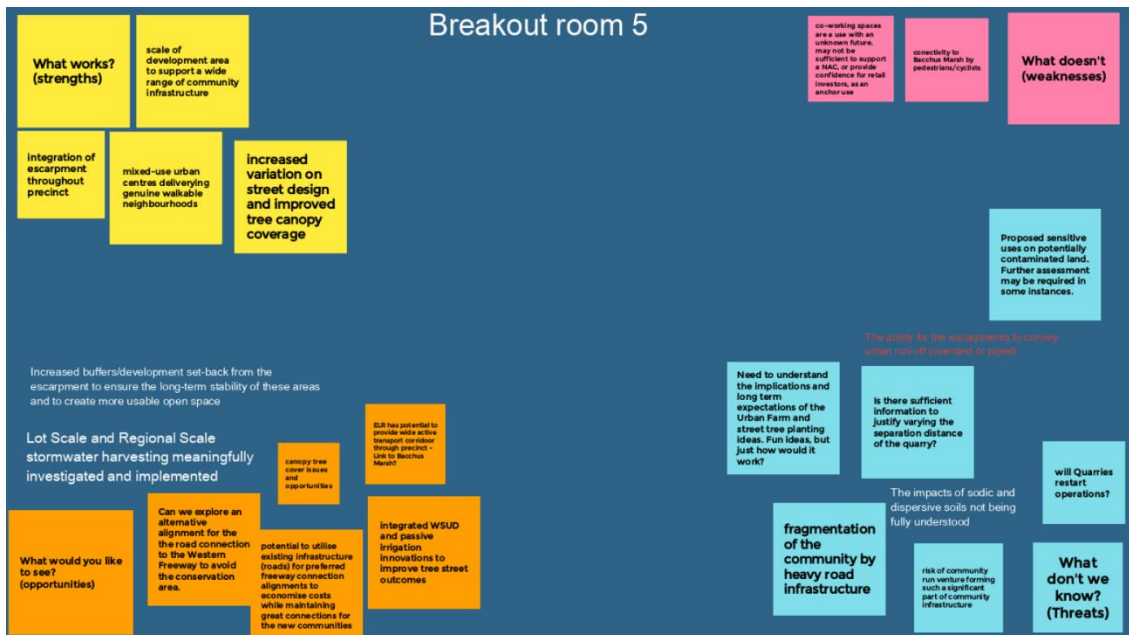
APPENDIX B

Merrimu Jamboards





Breakout room 5



Breakout room 6

