



**MITCHELL SHIRE.**  
*Statutory Planning  
Unit – Action Plan*  
February 2016



## Introduction

Mitchell Shire Council is committed to improving the service it provides across a range of areas. To understand the issues in the Statutory Planning function, Council conducted a series of workshops with the community in December 2015. The workshops were designed to understand the frustrations customers were experiencing with the system and to identify opportunities for improvement.

A 'Feedback Report' with a snapshot of the outcomes from the workshops was circulated to all participants in December 2015.

## Issues

The 'Feedback Report' identified a wide range of issues which were canvassed in the forums. On analysis, the issues seem to fall into one of three categories:

- A range of concerns relating to communication ('**Communication**').
- Processing of applications ('**Processing**').
- Possible changes to the Mitchell Planning Scheme ('**Planning Scheme**').

Council committed to further consider the ideas raised at the forums and to provide the following **Action Plan**.

## Communication

Throughout the workshops there were a number of people who highlighted challenges with communication from or on behalf of the Statutory Planning Department. This included both a lack of information, inconsistent information, the lack of presence within the foyer section of the Wallan Office, a lack of 'people skills', lack of responses to emails or phone calls, negativity, a lack of information in relation to VicSmart, and a feeling that the Statutory Planning Department are making it difficult for people to provide opportunities in the municipality.

To address these concerns a number of actions are proposed that will help improve communication between the Statutory Planning Department and the community. It will also help reinforce the message that Mitchell Shire Council is supportive of appropriate development and will help develop a rapport between the Council and the Community.

The Planning Team have already implemented a number of actions including improvements to the website, a new team charter and a process for returning phone messages and emails. This will continue to be monitored to ensure it is effective.

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Date
Physical set up at Wallan office uninviting for customers	Improve reception area including layout and re-design of floor space/furniture, helpful brochures and useful information.	Manager Planning and Compliance	May 2016
	Implement a system of having a 'customer service person at the Wallan front desk'	Manager Planning and Compliance	May 2016
Lack of information available	Ensure availability of planning brochures in other customer service areas	Manager Planning and Compliance	June 2016
	Implement a complaints management and grievance procedure for any problems arising with name and contact details and the escalation process	Manager Planning and Compliance	May 2016
	Investigate opportunities for the installation of a computer base at all customer service points to enable viewing information on Council's website and advertised plans online in conjunction with an online application product	Manager Planning and Compliance	August 2016
	Improve information available on website including an overview of a typical planning application process and more practice notes	Manager Planning and Compliance	Completed/monitor effectiveness

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Date</b>
Phone messages and emails are not being responded to	Continue to maintain the recently introduced return-phone message protocol	Manager Planning and Compliance	Completed and monitor effectiveness
	Implement first point of contact improvements including shared planning and building phone interactions to improve direct initial contact and associated improvements/changes to the phone system	Manager Planning and Compliance	May 2016
	Investigate the introduction of an on-line planning permit system such as 'Greenlight' or similar	Manager Planning and Compliance Director Sustainable Communities	August 2016 Business case developed
	Investigate 'alert' mechanism for email messages beyond a specified time	Statutory Planning Coordinator	June 2016
Lack of access to Planning Officers in areas other than Wallan	Continue to offer meeting facilities in Broadford, Kilmore and Seymour and schedule appointments with customers at those locations	Manager Planning and Compliance	Completed
	Contact applicant in all instances of site inspections	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	April 2016
	Implement a formal process for when planners are going on leave	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	June 2016
	Investigate an online booking product to enable booking of pre-application meetings	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	August 2016
Everyone needs to be on the same page	Conduct planning principles and education forum for Community	Manager Planning and Compliance	June 2016
	Conduct planning principles and education forum for Councillors	Manager Planning and Compliance	June 2016

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Date</b>
	Implement revised and improved 'supergroup' for relevant council staff to enable education and an understanding of principles	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	June 2016
	Seek interest for providing training and education with relevant internal departments	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	June 2016
	Regular (quarterly) report to Council and Community on planning department issues and monthly discussions to Councillors at briefing sessions	Manager Planning and Compliance	June 2016
	Annual stakeholder forums to update community on planning issues and obtain feedback on performance	Manager Planning and Compliance	April 2016
	Review layout, content and language of all templates and correspondence to adopt clear 'Plain English' and more positive approach.	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	July 2016
	Keep and record minutes of all meetings and distribute to stakeholders	Statutory Planning Coordinator	May 2016

## Processing

The workshops revealed issues that applicants, objectors and consultants were having in the way Council has been processing applications including inconsistent decisions and advice, changes in staff dealing with applications, lack of understanding of the local conditions and customers not being kept apprised of the status of their application. Discussions with Council indicated that staff turnover had declined over the past couple of years and as such there is a greater consistency in the Planning Team. This will result in a greater understanding of local conditions and less of a likelihood of dealing with multiple planners in the one application.

While a number of actions within the communication section will address some of the issues there are also specific actions that can be undertaken to address the concerns that were raised. These actions are listed below.

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Date
Similar applications are being treated differently resulting in inconsistent decision making	Regular file audit to ensure accurate planning assessments	Manager Planning and Compliance	June 2016
	Investigate effectiveness and cost of on-line electronic systems to ensure a transparent and accurate application/objection trail.	Manager Planning and Compliance Director Sustainable Communities	August 2016 Business case developed
	Continue to undertake a bi-weekly officer file allocation and permit discussion meeting.	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	Completed - monitor effectiveness
	Investigate the option for an internal tracking system for jobs that 'red flags' applications that are not moving	Manager Planning and Compliance	July 2016
Applicants are not being kept apprised of the status of their application	Investigate the possibility of a weekly text message or email to applicants to update on status of applications.	Manager Planning and Compliance	August 2016 business case developed
Inconsistent advice is being provided to applicants who deal	Initiate immediate meeting of parties in the event of contradictory advice and communicate early in the process why a position may have changed from the initial advice referring to the record of any initial meeting	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	March 2016

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Date</b>
with multiple planners	Continue to adopt a 'case manager' type arrangement where Planning Officers follow through on the permit from pre-application to completion where possible and communicate where not possible	Manager Planning and Compliance	March 2016
Documents are being asked for on numerous occasions due to them being lost or misplaced	Ensure all documents are recorded and person submitting the document receives a 'receipt' to indicate the document has been received	Manager Planning and Compliance	May 2016
	Investigate the option of an on-line system where documents are lodged and receipted electronically	Manager Planning and Compliance	August 2016 Business case developed
	Implement an interim fast track process for straightforward applications in the Salinity Management Overlay	Manager Planning and Compliance Statutory Planning Coordinator	May 2016

## Planning Scheme

Throughout the workshops and in discussions with Planning Officers it became clear that there were a large number of applications for planning permits that were being triggered by overlays and zoning requirements within the Mitchell Shire Planning Scheme. Overlays such as the Salinity Management Overlay (SMO) and Environmental Significance Overlay (ESO) cover significant sections of the rural area and may no longer be required in some areas. By reducing the permit triggers in these areas it will result in less applications and allow landowners to undertake the work required on their land.

The actions outlined below are aimed at reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of elements of the Mitchell Shire Planning Scheme.

Issue	Action	Responsibility	Date
Outdated planning overlays are resulting in permit triggers that are not required	Liaise with DELWP to investigate the complete or partial removal of the Salinity Management Overlay (SMO)	Manager Strategic Planning	Dec 2016
	In the event that parts of the Salinity Management Overlay remain, include permit exemptions within the schedule	Manager Strategic Planning	Dec 2016
	Include further permit exemptions within the Environmental Significance Overlay schedules	Manager Strategic Planning	Dec 2016
	Investigate all other schedules with a view to including exemptions	Manager Strategic Planning	Dec 2016
Farming Zone is too restrictive and hinders the ability for appropriate development	Undertake review of the FZ and Include further permit exemptions within the Farming Zone (and other rural) schedules	Manager Strategic Planning	Dec 2016



BEVERIDGE, WALLAN, UPPER  
ENTY, CLONBINANE, HEATHCO  
UNCTION, WANDONG, BYLAND  
RBES, KILMORE, KILMORE EA  
TERFORD PARK, SUNDAY CRE  
DRANDING, WILLOWMAVIN, HI  
AMP, NULLA VALE, GLENAROU  
SUGARLOAF CREEK, HILDENE  
LAROOK, TRAWOOL, WHITEHE  
REEK, SEYMOUR, PUCKAPUNY  
IGHLANDS, TARCOMBE, NORT  
THWOOD, TOOBORAC, GLENH  
HOPE EAST, MIA MIA, HEATH  
TH, BROADFORD, WALLAN, IF

**MITCHELL SHIRE COUNCIL**

113 High Street, Broadford 3658

Ph: (03) 5734 6200

Fax: (03) 5734 6222

E: [mitchell@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au](mailto:mitchell@mitchellshire.vic.gov.au)

[www.mitchellshire.vic.gov.au](http://www.mitchellshire.vic.gov.au)

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