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Background

1.1 Brief

The Council wished to undertake a built form review project that will:

- Determine desirable built form outcomes for the non-heritage areas of the City of Yarra
- Recommend changes to the Yarra Planning Scheme to implement these outcomes

A copy of the brief is included in [Appendix B](#). In commissioning the study, the Council was keen to ensure:

- Integration with current in-house projects
- Compatibility with the Heritage Overlay policy review work
- Successful statutory implementation
- Pitching the project at the right level of detail
- Nesting the project with existing council policy (eg Municipal Strategic Statement)
- Community support, including targeting of specific interest and stakeholder groups

1.2 Methodology

The brief required the study to be undertaken in four stages:

1. Review of Existing Controls & Draft Policies
2. Consultation
3. Built Form Study
4. Built Form Strategy

Review of Existing Controls & Draft Policies

Careful analysis and critical review of the context for the study.

A thorough analysis was made of all the relevant policy documents and studies referred to in the brief. Preliminary conclusions were drawn about the need to review or revise some of these policies and how they should be reflected or incorporated into the current study. A background report was tabled with the Steering Committee, which has since formed the basis for [Appendix C](#) of this report.

A meeting was held with senior Council officers on 27 November to explore expectations of the Built Form Review in relation to each of the following studies:

Urban Character Strategy
 Yarra River Corridor Urban Design Guidelines
 Punt Road/Hoddle Street Planning and Design Strategy and Guidelines
 Design Guidelines for the City's Main Roads (draft)
 Design Guidelines for Development Above Three Storeys
 SE Clifton Hill Local Area Plan (draft)

Other relevant studies/policies discussed at that meeting included:

Local Planning Policy for Mixed Use Zones (Residential Interface Study):
 six main sources of conflict have been identified
 Industrial and Business Activity study (Ratio)
 Heritage Review
 Economic Strategy
 Balconies and Public Spaces Policy
 Laneways and Residential Development Guidelines

Specific controls and policies that were agreed to need review were:

City of Yarra MSS (Municipal Strategic Statement)
 Design objectives and decision guidelines in the following:
 DDO1 Yarra River Corridor
 DDO2 Primary Boulevards
 DDO3 Secondary Boulevards

Consultation

The brief required a single series of stakeholder workshops as the consultation component of the study. The study team recommended that the consultation be extended into three stages:

1. Public workshops at the start of the project
2. Public workshops prior to preparation of a draft report
3. Informal consultation on the draft report

This recommendation was accepted. Information about the consultation is summarised in [section 1.3](#).

Built Form Study

Produces preferred built form outcomes for each category of built form type in the study area.

The methodology was based on the following steps, as outlined in the team's proposal:

- Undertake Categorisation of Urban Forms
- Identify areas in critical need of specific height/built form controls

FOR AREAS IN CRITICAL NEED OF SPECIFIC HEIGHT/BUILT FORM CONTROLS:

- Preliminary analysis of performance criteria that should influence height/siting etc
- Undertake detailed survey and create photographic library
- Refine performance criteria
- Model built form outcome options
- Evaluate built form outcome options, and agree preferred built form outcome options and refine the boundaries
- Finalise performance criteria

FOR THE BALANCE OF THE AREA:

- Document case studies of each urban form type:
- For each case study/urban form type:

Built Form Strategy

Preparation of the over-arching strategy, plus statutory implementation recommendations.

The findings for each type and area from the previous task were welded into a top-down strategy. The Categorisation of Urban Forms analysis that began the preceding stage provided the basis for the strategic approach advocated by a number of recent panel reports.

Policy and recommend control mechanisms (where appropriate) were recommended for each situation identified in the previous task. This complete Strategy Report with policies, plans, photos, maps and diagrams, includes all the reports resulting from each preceding stage.

Yarra River

Shortly after the study team was appointed, the Council commissioned the same team to undertake detailed analysis work of the section of the Yarra River between Victoria Street and Bridge Road. This work was brought forward because of an impending VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Appeals Tribunal) hearing concerning 69-75 River Street. The process followed six steps:

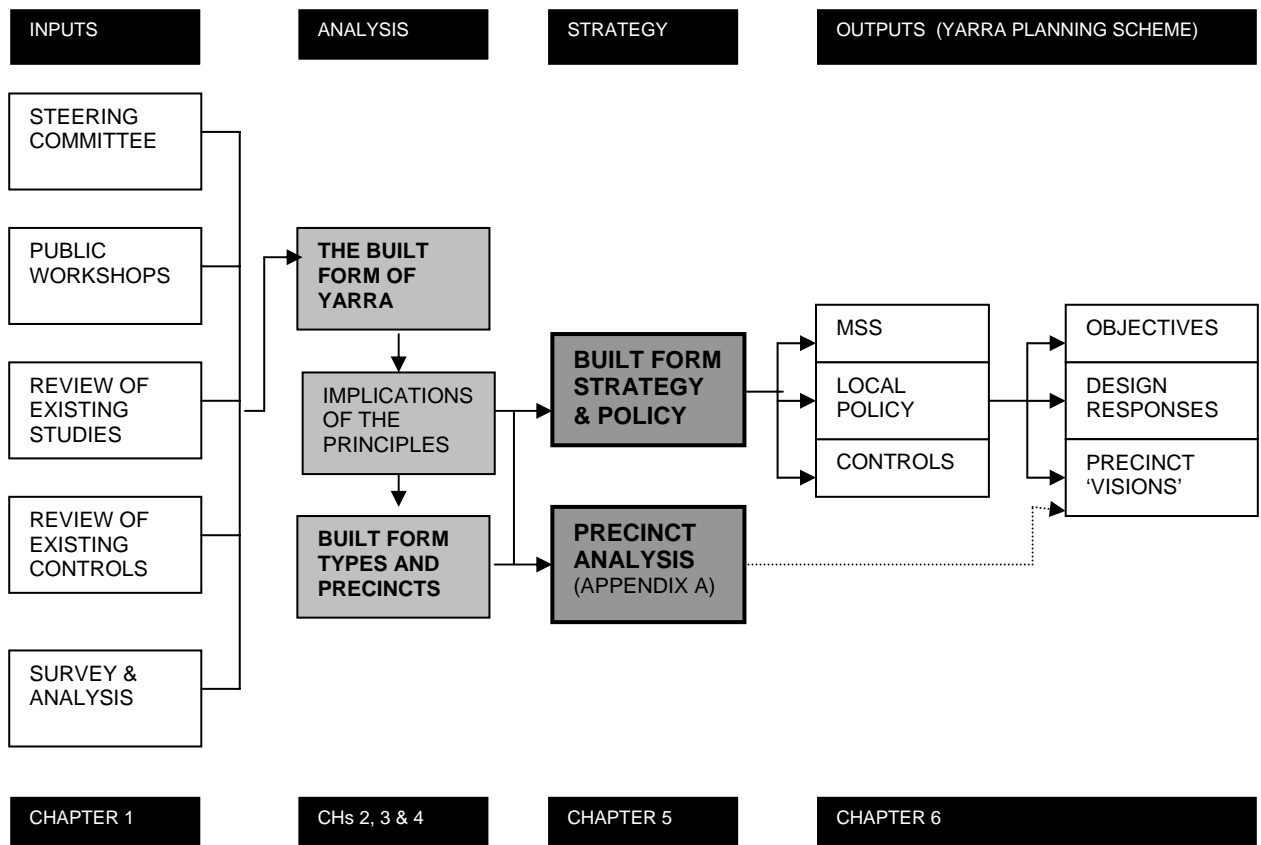
1. Preliminaries
2. Yarra River Landscape Character Assessment
3. Development Issues Assessment
4. Victoria St-Bridge Rd Case Study
5. Victoria St-Bridge Rd Design Guidelines
6. Implementation Recommendations

Shortly after the study team was appointed, the Council commissioned the same team to undertake detailed analysis work of the section of the Yarra River

After step 4 the brief was adjusted to focus on preparations for the appeal hearing, and the development of the guidelines was suspended and referred to the *Built Form Review* study for completion. The results of this work are summarised and embodied in this report.

1.3 Study Process and Report Structure

The following diagram shows the study process adopted for the Review, and the way it relates to the structure of this report:



Consultation was built around a study Steering Committee, comprising Council officers, Councillors, community and development industry representatives (full membership inside front cover), a two round series of Public Workshops, followed after completion of this report by public consultation. The Steering Committee and Public Workshop processes were as follows:

Steering Committee

Consultation was built around a study Steering Committee, comprising Council officers, Councillors, community and development industry representatives (full membership inside front cover), a two round series of Public Workshops, followed after completion of this report by public consultation. The Steering Committee and Public Workshop processes were as follows:

Steering Committee 1, 12 August

- Outline of brief, program and method
- Consultation process
- Categorisation of urban forms
- Format for Public Workshops

Steering Committee 2, 5 September

Detailed discussion of comments made at First Round Public Workshops
 Summary of comments and 'Outcomes and Response' table discussed at length
 Brief agreed for mapping and precinct analysis

Steering Committee 3, 17 October

Presentation of analysis work

- Factors influencing Built Form
- Development Types
- Precinct Delineation
- Precinct Photo Boards

Steering Committee 4, 14 November

Presentation of preliminary:

- Strategy Map
- Strategy Objectives Table
- Sample Precinct Objectives Papers

Brief for Public Workshops Round 2

Mid-December

Draft report circulated

Steering Committee 5, 29 January (reconvened 12 February)

Review of draft report.

Public Workshops**First Round Public Workshops, 22 and 26 August**

Collingwood workshop 22 August 2002; Richmond workshop 26 August 2002
 Open forum: *What kinds of issues arise with 'built form'?*

Questions for 'table discussion'

- In what types of area would you allow buildings of 2, 4, 7 more than 8 storeys?
- In what kinds of special location might you allow buildings to be higher than their surrounds?
- Why? Under what circumstances? With what conditions?

Second Round of Public Workshops, 18 and 25 November

Collingwood workshop 18 November 2002; Richmond workshop 25 November 2002
 Strategy Objectives

- Do you have any comments on any of the objectives?
- Is anything missing? What wording would you suggest?

Precinct Overview

- In which precincts (other than heritage precincts) should the built form character change the least? What aspects of this character would you keep unchanged?
- In which precincts or major sites would like to see a new built form character developed? What would be the built form ingredients of this new character?

Precinct Futures

- What development pressures exist in this precinct?
- What aspects of this precinct's built form would you:
 - Protect?
 - Strengthen?
 - Change/Improve?
- What should be the future built form character of this precinct?
- What key issues need to be addressed in achieving this character?

The workshops attracted a total attendance of around 100 local people, including a large proportion of building design professionals.

Comments made at Public Workshops

The comments made at the First Round Public Workshops were particularly useful in setting the agenda for the themes in [chapter 2](#), and in shaping the structure of the entire Review. A summary of these comments appears on the next page. At the second round of workshops, specific comments were made and recorded on the study's draft strategy objectives, and on the desired future for a number of the precincts.

The comments made at the First Round Public Workshops were particularly useful in setting the agenda for the themes in [chapter 2](#), and in shaping the structure of the entire Review.

The Steering Committee and study team accepted most of the comments made at the First Round Public Workshops, and have attempted to carry them through into the Review, with certain qualifications:

- A 'top down' and holistic approach has been adopted, within the broad confines of built form and landscape rather than land use or any other topic.
- A typological approach has been used, which provides wide scope to tailor policy outcomes to different types of area and environment.
- Size of site and proximity to residential areas are two parameters that have heavily influenced the approach.
- A broad range of built form-related topics has been covered, not just building envelopes.

Comments made at First Round Public Workshops

- A 'top down' approach is needed, that starts by looking at the entire city and its surrounds, and the broad context of urban form considerations that make a city special.
- Need a vision of the future urban form of the city: not just heights and setbacks, but also grain, street interface etc
- Most people prefer to relate the height of new buildings to the current scale of buildings in an area. They support variety of scale within this broad parameter, and seem prepared to accept that new buildings can be higher than their surrounds by a small increment. Allied to this is support for 'stepping down', angle of vision/hide the higher part policy, and respectful style of design.
- A balance needs to be found between prescription, which provides certainty, and the performance approach, which provides flexibility for good designers.
- Aim for variety of urban form – avoid the blandness of a middle suburban environment.
- Size of site impacts on the size of development that can be successfully absorbed; eg 'island sites' would have the fewest constraints.
- Residential amenity (eg overlooking, overshadowing, visual bulk) should be a prime driver of built form policy.
- Proximity to residential areas is often a constraint on building shape and size; policy can often be more relaxed in non-Residential zones.
- Two storey can be acceptable in residential areas provided it meets basic criteria.
- ESD principles are important (eg solar access).
- Factors that may influence appropriate building height include:
 - Street width
 - Topography
 - Views
 - Closeness to activity centres
 - Corner sites
 - Sites on main roads
 - The use of the building (eg a civic building, or a publicly accessible use like a restaurant, can be taller)
- 'Closeness to public transport' needs elaboration as a policy driver of increased density in a city like Yarra.
- There should be clear locations where high rise should not be allowed.
- Particularly large buildings should only be allowed where they offer tangible community benefits (eg car parking, or public open space, or decontamination).
- Skilled design can make a taller building acceptable; getting the building envelope right does not guarantee a pleasant result.

Review of Existing Studies

There are a number of significant existing studies relating to built form that the City of Yarra has undertaken over the past few years (see summaries in table below). Part

of the purpose of the Built Form Review is to review these studies and make recommendations as to their future. Each is reviewed in more detail in [Appendix C](#), and [chapter 6](#) includes a more detailed summary accompanied by a commentary and recommendations.

Summary of Key Existing Built Form Studies

Urban Character Strategy

August 1997, Mike Scott & Associates. The study is referred to in the MSS and is based around eight guidelines, six maps (mostly of consistent character areas) and twenty seven precincts (including heritage areas and non-residential areas), each with a statement of desired character, and summary of existing characteristics. It pre-dates ResCode, so lacks statutory weight, and also pre-dates the 'character precinct brochures' methodology developed by Planisphere.

Yarra River Corridor Urban Design Guidelines

September 1998, City of Yarra. Relates to the area covered by DDO1 (including Merri and Darebin Creeks). The guidelines comprise General Objectives and Guidelines (topics: built form, habitat and landscape, open space and Main Yarra Trail interfaces, and heritage). Heights and setbacks are prescribed for each of ten precincts, but without explanation or justification. The prescribed maximum heights are mostly 7.5m or 10.5m, but one or two extra storeys may be permissible, subject to viewlines and overshadowing. The setbacks follow a standard formula. The guidelines have insufficient status in the planning scheme, and have been found to allow development unacceptable to the Council.

Yarra Residential Design Guide

Prepared as a supplement to the Good Design Guide, and exhibited as Am C15, June 2000, which lapsed on 11 May 2002 as a result of the introduction of ResCode. The principles underpinning the building envelope provisions of this study are that new development of up to 2 storeys in height is generally acceptable subject to a number of caveats. One is that in streetscapes with consistent single storey residential development, the 'apparent' height must be the same as the existing dwellings. The report contains a useful section on development pressures and unique built form characteristics of Yarra.

Punt Road/Hoddle Street Planning & Design Strategy & Guidelines

January 2000, Hansen Partnership & Context CMI. Exhibited as Am C10, proposed DDO4 (lapsed). Seen as a pilot study for the Main Roads study, and reviewed by it. It defines six precincts and five junctions, each of which has detailed objectives and height and setback provisions, intended to form part of a DDO (Design & Development Overlay) schedule. Heights vary from block to block, from 2 to 4 storeys up to 4 to 8 storeys at nominated key junctions. It is understood that Am C10 lapsed because of community concern about a limited number of specific aspects of the study.

Design Guidelines for the City's Main Roads

March 2000, City of Yarra in association with Fink and McMahon Architects. The study only covers the sections of main road included in DDO2 ('primary boulevards') and DDO3 ('secondary boulevards'). Primary boulevards include Victoria Parade, Alexandra Parade, part of Church Street, the CityLink frontage, Punt Road and small sections of Nicholson Street. The 'secondary boulevards' are stated to be main roads (apart from Hoddle/Punt and the primary boulevards) that do not pass through heritage areas, shopping strips and residential areas. The product of the study includes General Design Guidelines, and 65 precincts, each with separate building envelope provisions. Prescribed heights are almost all 2 or 3 storeys (depending on existing heights) plus a further storey setback 3.5m from the primary frontage, often with conditions. There are a small number of precincts with higher prescribed heights (4-8 storeys). The study was intended to result in amended DDO schedules, but is still in draft form. Insufficient account seems to have been taken of the broader strategic context, such as land use directions and State planning policy.

Design Guidelines for Development Above Three Storeys

Hansen Partnership, reviewed by Coomes Consulting. Recently exhibited as Am C50. It includes detailed provisions on design quality/interface with the street, amenity (including residential and parkland interface), landscaping, parking and traffic. The Yarra River Corridor is referred to in various objectives. The study states that the 'primary' setback height must match adjacent buildings, except in DDO areas, and the maximum height of the 'secondary (upper level) setback' must be as for the 'dominant height' in an area, subject to certain conditions. The guidelines appear to have a continuing usefulness. The Built Form Review can add value to these guidelines by clarifying the situations in which buildings can be higher than their surrounds.

SE Clifton Hill Local Area Plan (draft)

September 2001, David Lock Associates. The study defines fourteen character areas in SE Clifton Hill, each with SWOT analysis, objective, description, and 'requirement' guidelines. As virtually the entire area is affected by a Heritage Overlay, it has less direct relevance to the Built Form Review. Typically the recommended heights are closely linked to the heights of existing heritage buildings.

Some of these documents are referred to in the current Yarra Planning Scheme, some have been exhibited as planning scheme amendments in their own right, but none of these amendments has been adopted and included into the planning scheme. Because each is a specialised study, recommended policy in these reports is developed at a greater level of detail than is appropriate in the Built Form Review. It is important for the Review to examine and assess the principles that underpin these studies, even though in some cases they are implicit, rather than overtly expressed.

Review of Existing Controls

[Appendix C](#) contains a review of the key existing controls and policies affecting the built form of the City of Yarra. All of these have influenced this Review, but the following are particularly important:

State Policies

The Ten Principles of Good Urban Design

Clause 19.03 of the Victoria Planning Provisions ('Design and Built Form'). The *Built Form Review* has been prepared explicitly to address built form related issues that are referred to in this policy.

Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth

Melbourne 2030: Planning for Sustainable Growth is a metropolitan-wide strategy that was launched in October 2002. It outlines a 30 year vision for the management of urban growth in metropolitan Melbourne. It contains policies and initiatives that will inform the Yarra Built Form Review. Theme 1 in [chapter 2](#) makes specific comment on the impact of Melbourne 2030 on the City of Yarra.

Yarra Planning Scheme

Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS)

The current City of Yarra Municipal Strategic Statement (MSS) was adopted in 1999. The three year review is now in progress. The Council is understood to be subjecting some parts of the MSS to significant alteration, to reflect changing demographics, increased development pressure and an upgraded response to some key planning issues. The release of Melbourne 2030 in late 2002 also affects the MSS in important ways.

The Built Form Review will input to the three year review, in accordance with a variety of actions recommended in the report. Major revisions will be needed to Element 1: Urban Design, Element 2: Residential Land Use and Development and Element 6: Yarra River Corridor. These revisions will include a new urban design framework map, replacement of current Objectives by the new Strategy Objectives contained in this report, and a complete overhaul of the urban design and Yarra River sections. There are also key MSS terms that need to be revised, including urban village, major gateways, major residential redevelopment sites, major renewal areas, primary and secondary boulevards. The Council may also want to make further changes, such as deleting reference to 'higher dwelling density', and strengthening the sustainability objectives.

Local Planning Policies

The following Local Policies have been examined (see [Appendix C](#)):

Clause 22.01	Discretionary Uses in the Residential 1 Zone
Clause 22.03	Yarra River Corridor Urban Design Guidelines
Clause 22.04	Retail Centres Policy
Clause 22.05	Location of Commercial/Industrial Activities

Design and Development Overlay (DDO) (Clause 43.02)

Three DDO schedules are directly relevant to the Review, and are the subject of changes recommended in [chapter 6](#):

Schedule One:	Yarra River Corridor – Inclusive of Merri and Darebin Creeks
Schedule Two:	Primary Boulevards
Schedule Three:	Secondary Boulevards

Panel Reports on Built Form

There have been important recent Panel reports that are directly relevant to built form policies. Planisphere has undertaken a review of these reports to establish any recurrent themes and attitudes to planning scheme amendments that propose height/built form controls. There is a summary of the main points of issue and recommendations in each of the Panel reports in [Appendix C](#). The major reports are:

Melbourne Planning Scheme Amendment C20	December 2001
Bayside Planning Scheme Amendment C2	August 2001
Port Phillip Planning Scheme Amendment C5 & C14	December 1999

The Council is understood to be subjecting some parts of the MSS to significant alteration, to reflect changing demographics, increased development pressure and an upgraded response to some key planning issues.

The study process needs to demonstrate a strong strategic rationale from the commencement, rather than creating a sense of the strategy being 'tacked on' at the end.

There are a number of issues that require careful consideration in the methodological framework of a built form study of this nature. The most important of these, in our opinion, is the strategic context. The study process needs to demonstrate a strong strategic rationale from the commencement, rather than creating a sense of the strategy being 'tacked on' at the end. For example, views from parkland cannot be considered in isolation of the impacts of any resulting controls on the surrounding land uses and their strategic development. In addition it should be recognised that view protection alone may not provide sufficient rationale for an acceptable built form outcome. Other justification for height controls may be needed, and overall built form outcome (eg siting, gaps between buildings) may also be important.

In addition, the consultation processes and techniques used in assessment of the built form need to be carefully designed to demonstrate an inclusive, holistic and comprehensive approach. This could add an apparent layer of complexity to the exercise. However with a well-structured and fully developed program prior to commencement, the required outcomes will be achievable.

Survey and Analysis

Much of the work involved in undertaking a study of this scope and budget has necessarily taken the form of review and research, but a survey of the City was undertaken in order to arrive at a listing of the main built form typologies, the boundaries of the precincts, and the key issues and threats. Photographs and a record of key characteristics formed part of this survey. More detailed survey work and modelling was subsequently undertaken along the Yarra River corridor, as this was agreed to be the location most in need of prescriptive built form controls.

The Built Form of Yarra

The Built Form of Yarra is described in [chapter 2](#). The chapter identifies ten themes that define the distinctive qualities of Yarra's landscape and built form character. One or more Principles are suggested in relation to each of the themes. The themes and their contents were arrived at partly from the study team's own survey and research, partly from examining previous studies, and partly from insights gained through the Steering Committee and the Public Workshops.

Implications of the Principles

[Chapter 3](#) takes the Principles developed in [chapter 2](#) and proposes responses to them, mainly in the form of objectives for the Built Form Strategy and Policy. Some Principles have implications for the Implementation proposals in [chapter 6](#). Others foreshadow the need for policy relating specifically to particular situations or types of built form. This forms the subject of [chapter 4](#) Built Form Types and Precincts.

Built Form Types and Precincts

[Chapter 4](#) presents a break down of built form typologies in the City, under the headings of Yarra River Corridor, Residential Areas, Non-Residential Areas and Transport Corridors. The study area is then divided into over sixty precincts, categorised into the built form types established earlier in the chapter. The main source of this typological and precinct analysis was the study team's own survey. The built form typologies provide the framework for most of the policy outcomes of the Review.

Built Form Strategy & Policy

The Built Form Strategy forms the centrepiece of [chapter 5](#). The strategy represents a 'top down' view of the built form directions to be followed in the City of Yarra over the medium to long term. It was arrived at by considering all the analysis work undertaken in the course of the study, and by exposing a sequence of drafts of the Strategy Objectives to discussion by the Steering Committee and the second round of Public Workshops.

Precinct Analysis

Precinct Analysis sheets have been prepared for each of the built form precincts. Each sheet contains photographs, a Description, Strategic Context, Development Pressure, Key Issues and a short Vision statement. They represent the 'bottom up' component of the Built Form Strategy, in that the Vision statements are intended to complement the city-wide and typological policy outcomes. The main source for the content of these sheets was the team's own survey and analysis work, informed to a general extent by Steering Committee and Public Workshop comments. It was not possible, in a project of this scope, to undertake detailed work at precinct level. The Precinct Analysis sheets appear in [Appendix A](#).

Outputs (Yarra Planning Scheme)

The outputs of the project, in terms of recommendations about the future of each existing study, and about the statutory implementation of the Built Form Review, are set out in [chapter 6](#).