Halls Gap Master-Plan for Commercial Investment and Public Land Development

NORTHERN GRAMPIANS SHIRE

04/10/2016
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RE-SETTING HALLS GAP

Each year, some two million visitors enjoy the spectacular attractions of the Grampians. There is great potential to expand and deepen the tourism market, particularly with respect to the high yield ‘lifestyle leader’ market.

Halls Gap has a key role to play in unlocking this potential. It is strategically placed in the heart of the Grampians. With its dramatic mountain-side setting and its openness to Australia’s unique flora and fauna, it can develop into an unforgettable place on par with Australia’s flagship tourist towns.

Against this undoubted potential are a range of challenges. These include:

- Exposure to environmental hazards like bushfire and flood
- A complex planning environment, which may deter some investors
- Limited access to a trained hospitality workforce
- Visual clutter and poor way finding
- Limited access to basic every day supplies for independent travellers.

PURPOSE OF THIS MASTER-PLAN

Halls Gap, and the Grampians generally, have been the subject of several market research and planning studies in the past.

The preparation of this master-plan was motivated by a need to weave together what might have been different threads of action related to infrastructure, business promotion and town planning.

Its preparation also provided an opportunity to build a fresh consensus amongst the highly passionate and engaged Halls Gap community about the future of the town.

A THREE HORIZONS FRAMEWORK

The master-plan adopts a three horizons framework. The first horizon addresses those readily implemented measures which can quickly shore up Halls Gap’s tourism activity.

The second horizon looks to initiatives that leverage Halls Gap’s current customer base to create allied hospitality and tourism offerings. This would enable greater value to be extracted from the trade already passing through the town.

The third horizon looks beyond the confines of the current customer base and imagines new markets for the town, based on projects which transform the image and offer of Halls Gap.

It is important to action the objectives in each horizon; the objectives should not be pursued simultaneously rather than sequentially from first to third. Generally speaking, initiatives aimed at the second and third horizons will take longer to come to full fruition, but action to advance these objectives is required now.

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT

The evidence base for this master-plan included a synthesis of previous research and planning effort, an appraisal of the policy, geographical and social context of Halls Gap, and most importantly, insights generated by the town community itself.

Community engagement included a series of interview plus two ‘engage by design’ workshops. All of the initiatives cited in the drawings embedded in this master-plan were inspired by, or directly nominated by, community members.

The consultant team’s job was to test these ideas for practicality and value taking into account relevant tourism research, the capacity of partners to co-invest and known financial and regulatory constraints. The team then framed a cohesive visual and verbal narrative to bind the initiatives within the three horizons framework.

CREATING THE MASTER-PLAN

Events & attractions

- Brewery/Distillery
- Lake Bellfield Improvement
- Brambuk Upgrade
- Lifestyle Day Spa
- Bike Trail Upgrade
- Resort
- Conference Facility
- Art Trail
- Permanent Festival Infrastructure

Services & Development

- Improve Shire Services
- Improved Way-finding
- Interconnected Walking Tracks
- Halls Gap Entry
- Town Branding
- Maximise Views
- Roseface Main Street
- Revolt DDO
- Public WiFi Hotspots
- Power lines Underground
- Hobby Farms & Eco Tourism

Halls Gap Village

- Improved Walkability
- Regional Produce barn
- Coordinated Design
- Halls Gap Walking Loop
- Main Street Activation
- Improve Forecourt
- Stony Creek Walk
- Village Desalination

Public Open Space

- Community Hall
- Pool Shading
- Event Precinct
- Remove Walking Track
- Village Green
- Playspace
- Central Market
- Parking
- Botanical Gardens
- Commercial Opportunities
- Recycle Caravan Park

As well as addressing the three horizons, the key initiatives in the master-plan are grouped into four categories:

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Postcard from the Future
DATED 12.02.2025

Dear Oliver,

We arrived in Halls Gap yesterday – a magnificent and unforgettable place nestled in a Pioneer valley at the heart of the Grampians. The views to the mountain are exquisite. It’s a ‘walking town’ with a network of walking trails around the village.

A spectacular stone structure marks the trailhead for walks to the surrounding peaks and the coasts of the popular Pink Trail. The village is abundant with cafes, good food, a brewery and several village squares. The Wild Life OT Museum and Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre are highlights amongst many cultural and architectural. You must visit soon!

Yours, Many
The Master-Plan Process

HOW THIS DOCUMENT WAS DEVELOPED

The Northern Grampians Shire Council issued a brief for a master-plan for future commercial investment and public land development in Halls Gap (the master-plan). The objective of the master-plan as outlined in the brief is to:

"support the sustainability and expansion opportunities of existing businesses as well as provide a pathway for new investment and revitalisation of Halls Gap as a tourist resort town."

Through a process of discussions and preliminary investigations of issues, in agreement with council, it became clear that what was needed, was instead a holistic structure plan approach.

BACKGROUND ASSESSMENT

Analysis of the key demographic, economic, planning and tourism contexts of Halls Gap and the broader region was undertaken.

Key population indicators and trends:
- The population fluctuates significantly throughout the year due to tourism flows into the town.
- There are high property ownership rates but also high rates of unoccupied dwellings due to the seasonal nature of tourism.
- The majority of residents were born in Australia and speak English as a first language.
- There is a very low unemployment rate of 2.1 percent, with Managers, Professionals and Labourers the main occupations of residents.
- The population is older than the regional Victorian and Australian averages.

TOURISM MARKET ANALYSIS

The population fluctuates significantly throughout the year due to tourism flows into the town. The target market for the Grampians tourism region should be 'Lifestyle Leaders', especially the 'Inspired by Nature' sub-type. This market is characterised by high travel rates, high expenditures, willingness to disperse and try new things, and influence over choices made by other traveller segments.

- The 'Inspired by Nature' sub-type is particularly attracted to eco-tourism experiences, nature and adventure, seclusion, quality dining and accommodation.
- The priority investment opportunities for Halls Gap include: Grampians Peaks Trail®, Grampians Region Digital Project, outdoor adventure recreation destination, Grampians Region, Foundation Village Project, Grampians Ring Road, Indigenous interactive education product.
- In Halls Gap there is a pressing need to ‘improve the basics’ including knowledge of the town’s services and amenity, as well as improving quality and offer of these services and amenities.

SITE VISIT

The team subsequently visited Halls Gap taking photographs, doing sketches, walking, cycling and driving the town’s routes, speaking to locals, staying overnight and interviewing targeted stakeholders.

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Stakeholders with strategic responsibility and liability in the local tourism industry were interviewed. We sought information on their history of involvement in the region, knowledge and opinions of past actions, and current issues and potential future directions for Halls Gap. It was clear that there are many conflicting, and passionately held, views on how to best improve Halls Gap. The low level of consensus and high level of passion gave rise to the idea of a group design workshop.

STAKEHOLDER DESIGN WORKSHOP

The design workshop was presented to the broader community for comment and feedback during an afternoon long workshop. The draft project propositions were grouped under the categories of community, community, community, and community. Attendees were able to provide written, drawn and verbal feedback. Community members unable to attend were invited to provide feedback by email. Following this feedback, the master-plan was finalised.
Three Horizons

THREE TIERS OF STRATEGIC PLANNING

The Three Horizons

This master-plan utilises a ‘three horizons’ framework. Success in planning and management of places should simultaneously address opportunities across three horizons:

* Consolidating existing strengths
* Diversification through leveraging of existing strengths, but with added value
* Transformational opportunities, involving strategies to provide for new activity and reach new markets

A successful plan for Halls Gap should consider all three horizons. Focusing on ‘horizon one’ only may provide short term ‘wins’ but will not address systemic issues, and in turn fail to shift the trajectory of the region in the longer term.
The Master-Plan

A MASTER-PLAN DESCRIBED IN FOUR DRAWINGS

The Master-Plan

This Master-plan takes the form of four drawings. These drawings are designed to highlight a series of potentials, and to bring forward key possibilities as recommendations. These recommendations fall into four categories of action and three horizons of time.

The locations for each action are highlighted in the four maps and are non-metrical - locations have been loosely suggested, but exact locations will ultimately be determined via negotiation between potential project developers, local government and key stakeholders.

The drawings are divided into four scales which enable the master-plan to capture the broadest possible definition of Halls Gap, while also enabling focus on the detail of The Halls Gap Village itself. Each drawing is accompanied by illustrations and descriptive text, roughly indicating the priority or importance of the projects, what each is and how each might be approached.

The Grampians Destination Management Plan has identified the most likely potential visitors to the area as “lifestyle leaders”, and the tourism-related recommendations of this report have been orientated towards this group.

POTENTIAL PROJECTS

- Brewery/Distillery
- Lake Bellfield Improvement
- Brambuk Upgrade
- Lifestyle Day Spa
- Bike Trail Upgrade
- Resort
- Conference Centre
- Improve Shire Services
- Wayfinding
- Interconnected Walking Tracks
- Halls Gap Entry
- Town Branding
- Maxine Views
- Regional Produce Barn
- Improved Walkability
- Halls Gap Walking Loop
- Coordinated Design
- Community Hall
- Pool Shading
- Reserve Walking Track
- Village Green
- Playspace
- Central Market
- Parking

OTHER PROJECTS

- Art Trail
- Permanent Festival Infrastructure
- Resurface Main Street
- Revise DDO
- Public WiFi Hotspots
- Power Lines Underground
- Hobby Farms & Eco Tourism
- Main Street Activation
- Improve Forecourt
- Stony Creek Walk
- Village Densification
- Botanical Gardens
- Commercial Opportunities
- Relocated Caravan Park
- Tennis Precinct
These action areas identify successful businesses and events, as well as areas of opportunity and improvement to work towards a common goal of improving the appeal of the town to “Lifestyle Leaders” (Halls Gap’s target market) as well as for local residents. Strengths and opportunity areas are identified across all precincts and beyond. This is the core driver of the master-plan - to strengthen the offer of the town for both visitors and residents, with an array of activities in a unique setting. Core proposals are those which aim to strengthen the Halls Gap Village, and the public land developments in the central area, including the Village Green and Playspace.

**BREWERY/DISTILLERY**

A brewery/distillery located in the town with leveraging industrial nature. A redeveloped historic distillery offer where would provide an opportunity for branding of Halls Gap crafted around its proximity. The Springside is yet to be developed as a major winery region, as some regions have in Victoria, and the production of beer and wine could provide a strong contrast to those other regions in Victoria.

**LAKE BELFIELD IMPROVEMENT**

Lake Belfield is a significant natural asset to the town and could be better developed as a local attraction. Allowing direct local access, viewing or keeping access to the lake, and improving a jetty and other recreational services surrounding it would allow this beauty to be better utilised and evolve into a major attraction.

**BRAMBUK UPGRADE**

Brambuk is an important, but under-utilised asset for Halls Gap. Renovating the display, improving the entry infrastructure and better marketing of the reserve and its facilities. The enhancement and functionality would transform it into a better asset for the entire region.

**LIFESTYLE DAY SPA**

A day spa adjacent to St John’s, which can be something premium to render the finger economics and enhance the washback. A foot spa and massage could be a special feature in the “arking tour”. The conceived areas may choose to walk all along and enjoy to appreciate Halls Gap as a place to wash away the exhaustion and stress of their working days.

**BIKE TRAIL UPGRADE**

The bike trail should be extended to cover everything between Lake Belfield and the Halls Gap Zoo making the entire range of experiences and infrastructure around the urban areas, and providing a range of facilities for children would help attract families to walking-based tourist activities. This would link up with the Botanic Garden and provide a great opportunity for regional tourism.

**PERMANENT FESTIVAL INFRASTRUCTURE**

Halls Gap has a dedicated venue and has been developing a festivals calendar, drawing regional and local visitors and ensuring the town has the opportunity to utilise the assets of this unique area. This should commence for a robust visitor base.

**ART TRAIL**

Interesting exhibits in both walking is often difficult. Providing additional opportunities for local artists and improving the quality and presentation of artistic works located on various short walks for children would also attract families to walking-based tourist activities. This would link up with the Botanic Garden and provide a great opportunity for regional tourism.

**EVENTS & ATTRACTIONS**

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Improving the amenity of Halls Gap for residents and tourists alike will have long-term benefits for the town. This includes such initiatives as road resurfacing, continued landscaping, burying of overhead wires etc. These actions will support actions in the other three categories. A commitment to design excellence and authenticity in materials is confirmed in this master-plan. The current design and development overlay would be updated to reflect this renewed commitment to ensure that all development in Halls Gap is commensurate with the sense of grandeur and permanency that is evident in the natural surroundings.

IMPROVE SHIRE SERVICES

To better enable future projects to take place it is recommended that changes be made to existing services to allow with navigating the local state and federal government planning processes.

WAYFINDING

The method by which people learn about where they are located in relation to all that is on offer is very important in Halls Gap. The project recognises the value of the design of a graphically straight-forward, but comprehensive way finding map touching all events, attractions, and facilities of both Halls Gap and Halls Gap Village.

INTERCONNECTED WALKING TRACKS

Expand the walking network of walking trails in and around the village to improve the accessibility of the town’s amenities to its visitors and to help tell the story of Halls Gap as a town of walking trails. In addition, a town trail map should be developed to showcase the local trails, the historic trail of the Grampians Pioneer Trail, and every walk in between.

HALLS GAP ENTRY

Repel the bridge over Pyrenes Creek to allow its role as a symbolic entry to Halls Gap. The bridge should be designed and finished around the late 70's to early 80's. It will be the historic entry to the town, the threshold of the town of the Grampians Pioneer Trail and every walk in between.

TOWN BRANDING

Engage a suitable qualified brand identity designer to undertake a comprehensive re-branding exercise with the view to branding Halls Gap as a walking town to link with the many ways to tell the story of Halls Gap. This includes logo, images, words, Earn, Events, camping, scenic outlooks, and to link the town to the international appeal of the Pinnacle Trail.

MAXIMISE VIEWS

The most prominent natural amenity of Halls Gap is the geologically ancient Grampians Mountains Range. To this end views to front all the services, events, attractions and amenities should be prioritised with prejudice.

POWER LINES UNDERGROUND

Subterrane power lines is a costly exercise delivering minimal benefit to the town. The power lines are types of utility, that the town should design around. Subterranean power lines programs should be undertaken through their local authorities and benefit.

HOBBY FARMS & ECO TOURISM

By extending walking trails, and by providing access to the local state and federal government planning processes, the hobby farms and associated facilities should be developed and extend the walking trails of the town.

REVISED OVERLAYS

This project, already under consideration to give the experience of moving through the town a more coherent and cohesive feel, added a series of comprehensive overlays.

SERVICES & DEVELOPMENT

1:4000 @ A0

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Halls Gap Master-plan for Future Commercial Investment and Public Land Development

Committed to a strengthened, lively and activated Halls Gap Village means targeting future retail and commercial investment to this area, removing barriers to investment and allowing for mixed use developments. This will support the central village area to become the focal point of the town and increase business resilience. Walking Loops along Heath Street and back to Grampians Road, between Shops and along the Creek, should be encouraged. This will open up further commercial opportunities along Heath Street and further strengthen this area as the heart of Halls Gap village.
There is a need for a strong community heart to Halls Gap, a place where locals and visitors can naturally come together to participate in local events, markets and activities in the centre of the town. This vision is supported through the Master-plan by the identification of the public land development opportunity to develop a Village Green and Haypace in the Council-owned land across from the main street shops. This investment will strengthen the amenity of the Halls Gap Village main street and provide new areas for commercial and public land investment adjacent to the revitalising shopping strip. As the vacant shops become available for use and development, this space will form an additional magnet, drawing visitors and families to spend more time in Halls Gap and providing a space for the community to come together for formal and informal activities. This series of recommendations and investment opportunities will work together to create a recognisable Village Green, across the road from the main shopping strip.

**COMMUNITY HALL**

By undertaking minor renovations to the eaves of the community hall which face the main street, the part of the Halls Gap Village business, providing healthy competition for existing businesses in the street, and increasing the activation of the area in general.

**POOL SHADING**

By covering half the pool and its surrounds with a carefully designed high level shade structure the pool area would become usable in a greater range of weather conditions, by a greater range of people.

**REMOVE WALKING TRACK**

Once the location of the Grampians Peaks Trail is known, consider removing this section of walking track to provide greater priority to the linking of the Village Green and Haypace, and funnel people to the peaks trail head.

**VILLAGE GREEN**

A village green will provide a much needed central meeting place for groups to congregate, and a place to eat take-away, it should be located at the centre of Halls Gap Village with views of the mountains beyond.

**PLAYSPACE**

A play space designed around recreation, walking, and natural experiences would provide an opportunity for people to linger and spend more time in the Village Green.

**CENTRAL MARKET**

A central market for the sale of fresh produce tied in to weekly, holiday, and festival calendars could make the experience of shopping up an everyday guide one of the unique Halls Gap experiences, and provide a reason for tourists and locals alike to see the area, and accommodation to stop in the Village instead of travelling on to Stawell for their product.

**PARKING**

The current lack of demarcated parking in Halls Gap Village makes parking inefficient. Creating demarcated parking spaces, and making new spaces available on site land, would improve the usability of the Village for visitors and make it more attractive to event operators.

**BOTANICAL GARDENS**

The botanical garden is ideal for appealing to the community, not only to encourage walking around the gardens but also a venue for a diverse range of activities and events, it is a significant investment for the Village Green.
As part of planning for the Grampians Peaks Trail® project, a number of Trail Head locations are being considered based on factors such as adequate car parking, proximity to walking tracks, practicality and prominence for visitors.

It is also a regular feature of scenic walks that a natural or architectural feature be incorporated into Trail Heads to provide a photo opportunity at the beginning or end of the walk.

Parks Victoria are ultimately responsible for deciding where the Grampians Peaks Trail® Heads will be located and intend to undertake further liaison with stakeholders including the Heads-Gap community, Northern Grampians Shire Council, Grampians Tourism, and the Grampians Heads Gap Committee of Management.

Advantages

- Land may be needed for car parking for the tennis courts. (Note: Recommend to seriously consider option of relocating tennis courts to near the sports field to free this area of land for car park.)
- Good amenity given proximity to the creek.
- Adequate area for car parking available.
- Existing walking path passes directly through business.
- Visibly links the township with the adjoining park to get to start of National Park walks.
- Clearly visible from shops and road.
- Proximity to camping sites.
- Vehicular access is through caravan park.
- Proximity to walking tracks.
- Easily found from information centre.
- Visibly links the township with the adjoining park to get to start of National Park walks.
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SCHEDULE 1 TO THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OVERLAY
1.0 DESIGN OBJECTIVES
Amend the last line to read: “To ensure that buildings do not impact on views to and from the National Park and that views of the mountains from the road and public spaces are not impeded.”

3.0 ADVERTISING SIGNS
Add the following: “Permits for free standing stands, such as those of A-Frame type, sandwich boards or similar will not be granted.”

4.0 DECISION GUIDELINES
Amend the second point to read: “The impact of the proposed development on views to and from the National Park and its mountains from private property, road reserves and public spaces.”

21.07 TOURISM
OBJECTIVE 1, STRATEGIES
Add: “Promote Halls Gap Village as a ‘Walking Town’”

22.04 HALLS GAP/LAKE BELLFIELD
POLICY OBJECTIVE
Add: “To encourage the urban residential, commercial and public use densification of Halls Gap Village.”

Appendix
RECOMMENDED AMENDMENTS TO THE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT OVERLAY – HALLS GAP / LAKE BELLFIELD ENVIRONS