

Planning for Horticultural Structures

May 2023

This practice note provides guidance about planning for horticultural structures, including advice about-responsive siting, design and land management.

The advice seeks to balance the needs of the horticultural industry with broader objectives for protecting special landscapes and environments.

The practice note may also be useful for dealing with other large rural structures, such as sheds.

What is a horticultural structure?

Horticultural structures are not defined in planning schemes. They typically comprise structures that provide a controlled growing environment for cultivating plants including plastic igloos, shade houses and glasshouses. They are usually associated with berry farms, wholesale nurseries, vegetable growing, flower growing and orchards.

Horticultural structures can be visually prominent in rural environments. The structures often stand out due to their scale or the materials used in their construction. They can create significant visual and aesthetic impacts, particularly within pristine rural landscapes, or where they adjoin residential or other urban uses.

Permit requirements for horticultural structures

Councils have limited opportunities to influence the siting and design outcomes where a planning permit is not required for a horticultural structure, which is the case in many instances. Guidelines in this practice note apply to those horticultural structures and areas of high sensitivity where a planning permit is required.

Horticultural industries will generally be located in one of the rural zones:

- Rural Living Zone
- Green Wedge Zone
- Green Wedge A Zone
- Rural Conservation Zone
- Farming Zone
- Rural Activity Zone

They may also be established in other zones.

Regardless of what zone the land is in or if an overlay applies, a planning permit is not required to construct a crop support or protection structure associated with horticulture as defined in Clause 73.03 of the planning scheme – including a trellis, cloche, net and shade cloth. This permit exemption is included in Clause 62.02-1 of the planning scheme. The exemption does not apply to a structure with a solid roof or solid wall such as a glasshouse or igloo.

Where the Clause 62.02-1 permit exemption does not apply, a planning permit is required to construct a horticultural structure on land in one of the rural zones in the following circumstances:

- The structure is associated with a section 2, permit required use – refer to the table of uses in each zone. This does not apply to the extension or alteration of an existing structure used for agriculture as defined in Clause 73.03 of planning schemes if:
 - the land is in the Green Wedge Zone or Rural Conservation Zone and the floor area of the alteration or extension does not exceed 100 square metres or the area specified in a schedule to the zone
 - the land is included in a Rural Living Zone, Farming Zone or Rural Activity Zone and the floor area of the alteration or extension does not exceed 250 square metres or the area specified in a schedule to the zone.
- The structure is sited within a setback distance specified in the zone or in the schedule to the zone.
- Earthworks (as defined in Clause 73.01 of planning schemes) will be carried out in the construction of the structure on land specified in the schedule to the zone.
- The land is affected by a planning scheme overlay that requires a planning permit to construct a building or to construct and carry out works, for example, the Environmental Significance Overlay.

This planning practice note provides general guidance. An applicant should contact the local council to obtain information about any further planning scheme requirements before undertaking any buildings or works.

Special planning scheme controls apply to land in the Shire of Yarra Ranges. Anyone proposing to construct or extend a horticultural structure in the Shire of Yarra Ranges should contact the council's planning office to confirm whether a permit is required.

In addition to the controls of the planning scheme, the Municipal Planning Strategy and Planning Policy Framework (PPF) must also be considered in the assessment of an application for a horticultural structure. A local planning policy of the PPF may also be in place to help applicants and the community understand how a council will exercise discretion on a horticultural structure application.

Developing a site-responsive design

While horticultural industries can be important to a municipality's economy, their visual impact can often be at odds with the protection and enhancement of sensitive rural and rural living environments. Horticultural structures should be designed and sited to respect the local context.

Site context planning

A responsive proposal should start with the preparation of a site and context description.

A good site and context description should identify the major environmental, visual and physical site constraints that apply to the land. A sound understanding of the features of the site will provide a good basis for a site responsive design. Key physical issues to be considered include:

- Topography:
 - Is the land predominantly flat or hilly?
 - Are there significant ridgelines on the site?
- Natural features:
 - Are there watercourses nearby?
 - Does the site contain significant vegetation, wildlife habitats, etc?
 - Where are erosion prone areas?
 - Is any part of the land subject to flooding?

- Is there a bushfire hazard?
- Where are the most exposed views into the site?
- Buildings and works:
 - Where are the existing buildings on the site?
 - Is there a potentially sensitive use or development on adjoining land?

Siting and design techniques

Once the key planning issues are identified, the relevant planning scheme provisions are understood and the site and context description has been prepared, the design response can be established.

The following siting and design techniques suggest ways to achieve good design outcomes and reduce the potential impact of large or otherwise dominant horticultural structures in their local context.

Siting of structures

Horticultural structures should be located to respond to local amenity and the site topography and other features of the land and surrounds, including vegetation characteristics, erosion prone areas, bushfire hazard areas and key viewsheds.

On flat land:

- Avoid siting structures directly in the view line of adjacent roads and dwellings unless well-screened by vegetation.
- Locate structures with sufficient setback from roadsides and adjoining property boundaries to allow a landscape screening treatment.
- Utilise existing vegetation on the site to provide natural screening. Add dense shrubs and planting as required to block close range views of work areas from the adjacent road and dwellings on adjoining land.

On hilly terrain:

- Avoid development in locations that are visually prominent or highly exposed. Areas most exposed include ridgelines, elevated land and areas that have been significantly cleared of vegetation.
- Maintain existing ridgeline planting and locate structures to avoid breaking the ridgeline silhouette.
- Avoid siting structures on very steep slopes (greater than one in five). Where structures must be sited on sloping land, the development of terraces or earth platforms should minimise unnecessary or excessive earthworks while facilitating an efficient site layout. Excavation to the height of a horticultural structure (generally up to 2.5 metres) may be appropriate in some instances, provided suitable erosion control measures are in place and efficiencies in site layout and site drainage can be demonstrated.
- Locate structures to follow the contours of the land.

Design and materials

Little variation exists in the typical design and character of horticultural structures. Most horticultural structures are simple and functional in design and consist of a metal frame of 2-3 metres in height, which is then enclosed by plastic (often reflective) or shade cloth. Regular maintenance and replacement of the cover and frames is essential to maintaining a high standard of amenity and presentation.

Opportunities exist to reduce building bulk and visual impact through the use of materials and finishes that blend with the dominant colours and textures of the surrounding environment. Use of a non-

reflective material based on the natural colours and tones of surrounding vegetation, soil, rocks or other natural features can improve the visual integration of buildings.

Massing and grouping of structures

- Where possible, mass buildings together to limit the scattering of building forms across the site.
- Discourage the proliferation of buildings directly adjacent to roadsides and dwellings on adjoining land.
- The site coverage of all horticultural or other large rural structures on the site should generally not exceed 60 per cent, except where structures can be well screened and the development does not cause any adverse environmental impacts or visual amenity concerns where there are dwellings on adjoining land.
- Provide for all ancillary facilities on site, including access ways and car parks.

Protecting views and visual amenity

- Protect and enhance the scenic quality and character of the site and surrounding area, particularly of existing view lines and vistas.
- Once the location, orientation and optimum building envelope and design are determined, the next step is to consider whether further screening is appropriate to ensure the development creates minimal visual impact.
- Protect views of attractive natural features, at least from the nearest road, when siting structures in key viewsheds.
- Maintain or enhance visual amenity for residents on adjoining land.

Landscaping and vegetation

- Use landscape treatments as the basis for achieving effective visual integration for large structures.
- Use dense vegetation and planting along site frontages and other highly exposed site boundaries to provide close range screening of the development. Although screening opportunities are often limited, views from more distant roadways should also be considered.
- Where there is an established and significant landscape character or where the land has intrinsic environmental value, development on the site should carefully avoid areas of identified sensitivity.
- Vegetation screening should not restrict solar access to horticultural structures.
- Avoid planting vegetation species that may drop branches or leaves close to structures.
- Retain existing remnant vegetation and the significant landscape features of the site when designing the siting and layout of buildings.
- If there is a dominant landscape character, take this into account when designing landscaping for the development.
- Landscape treatments should reinforce and extend the existing character and qualities of the surrounding environment.

Environmental management

Apart from siting and design issues, ecological and environmental impacts need to be considered. Impacts of development in rural environments may include:

- soil erosion and landslip as a result of vegetation removal

- deterioration of water quality as a result of untreated and uncontrolled run-off
- salinity
- infestation by environmental and noxious weeds.

The following land use and land management practices promote development compatible with environmental objectives:

- Soil and vegetation management
 - Minimise disturbance to native vegetation by grouping structures where possible and designing access roads and car parking areas to minimise removal of existing vegetation.
 - Where possible, stockpile and reuse topsoil on site to promote regeneration and minimise weed invasion.
 - Stabilise ground surfaces which are exposed to erosion during and after construction with ground cover planting to minimise erosion.
 - Any proposed removal of vegetation should have careful regard to the botanical significance of the vegetation, its role as a wildlife habitat and its contribution to the landscape character of the area.
- Flooding, drainage and water quality
 - Collect and treat all stormwater run-off from impervious horticultural structures prior to it leaving the site or entering nearby watercourses. Where appropriate, promote the construction of on-site dams for the storage, treatment and reuse of water, in line with the *Nursery Industry Water Management Best Practice Guidelines* (Nursery and Garden Industry Australia, 2010).
 - Avoid concentration of run-off onto one part of the site.
 - Where land is subject to flooding, pay special attention to its overall management and the nature of use and development within proximity to floodways. To ensure that land liable to flooding is not impaired by development, locate development to avoid drainage ways and significantly flood-prone areas.

Utilities

- Locate access roads on sites to generally follow contours and avoid steep slopes, drainage lines and areas requiring significant earthworks.
- Avoid siting power poles along significant view lines.

Suggested planning permit conditions

Planning permit conditions for horticultural structures are best established on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the nature of the proposal and the site context.

The following model conditions are provided as a guide for addressing typical issues generated by horticultural structures, with a goal to ensure a high standard of landscaping and site amenity is maintained. The responsible authority may adapt or add to these conditions as needed.

A vegetation screen must be provided to limit views of the proposed building from the roadside and from neighbouring properties. The vegetation must be capable of growing to a minimum height of two metres at maturity. The vegetation must be provided [select one of the following or edit, as needed: within the site boundary / along the frontage of the site / adjacent to the proposed development]. Appropriate plant species compatible with the local climate, soil conditions and existing vegetation in the vicinity of the site must be used to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

Once established, the landscape screen must be maintained in good condition to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

Plastic cladding of the horticultural structures must be maintained in good condition at all times. Cladding must be replaced when damaged or when it no longer provides a high standard of presentation to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

Any equipment, tools or other associated horticultural products (such as plant pots and bins) must be stored in an area that is screened from the adjacent roadside to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

Any soil stockpiles generated by the permitted development and proposed to be retained on the site must be battered to a stable slope and planted with ground cover to prevent erosion of the surface to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

All stormwater discharged from the subject land must be conveyed by means of underground drains to a legal point of discharge or absorbed on site to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

All wastewater must be treated and contained within the boundaries of the property and must not be discharge off site to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

No polluted waters or any other liquid wastes may be discharged into the stormwater system or any nearby watercourse to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

Any waste plastics or materials used in the cladding of structures must be disposed of in an environmentally sensitive manner when no longer required and must not be burned or buried on the land to the satisfaction of the responsible authority.

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