



Addendum to Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy



Gunnedah Shire Council



NSW GOVERNMENT
Department

Addendum to the Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy

Intent

This document is an addendum to the Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy prepared by EDGE Land Planning, March 2007 and details Council's position on the future strategic management of rural land in the Gunnedah Shire having regard to the recommendations contained in the Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy

Background

EDGE Land Planning was commissioned to prepare the Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy in March 2005. The purpose of the Rural Strategy is to provide a future direction for rural areas of the Shire. Its preparation was designed to supplement the information provided in the Local Environmental Study prepared by Planning Workshop in 2003. The specific aims of the given brief for the Rural Strategy were:

- To identify suitable locations to be included in the Rural 1(a) and Rural 1(b) zone of the Draft Gunnedah Local Environmental plan 2004.
- To identify appropriate areas within the Rural 1(a) zone which may be suitable for further subdivision and potential closer settlement
- To provide outcomes formulating appropriate strategic planning provisions in the Rural 1(a) and Rural 1(b) zoned land
- To consider strategic implications in the Rural 1(a) zone of relaxation of the 'Existing Holding' provisions
- To examine the current settlement patterns in the Rural 1(a) and Rural 1(b) zone
- To examine the land management units in relation to good quality agricultural land
- To consult stakeholders in the decision making process.
- To examine the implications of fragmentation of agricultural land.

The draft Gunnedah Rural Strategy was considered by Council in early 2006 following exhibition of the draft document and receipt of 22 submissions. The Council accepted the general thrust of the strategy and the majority of the recommendations with the exception of Recommendation 3 that related to minimum lot size provisions and minimum areas for dwellings in rural zones.

Recommendation 3 from the draft Rural Strategy is detailed below:

Implementation Strategy	Policy Action
3. Identify minimum lot sizes that will enable the continuation of the use.	3.1 Adopt the following lot size minimum for the corresponding land use designation: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Agriculture 400ha• Rural Landscape 40 ha• Rural Fringe 6,000m2 average of 1.2ha

Council's major concern was that the application of a 400 hectare minimum in the Agriculture zone was extremely restrictive. It also was of the opinion that it did not, simply on the basis of area, necessarily result in improved agricultural outcomes and that the existing 200 hectare minimum applying in the Rural 1(a) zone had achieved a balanced result in terms of appropriate protection of the agricultural productivity of prime agricultural land and the capability for subdivision to meet the ever changing demands of agriculture. Council also noted that since the introduction of the 200 hectare standard in the Gunnedah LEP 1998 that there had been limited subdivision activity or fragmentation of land in prime agricultural areas.

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As a consequence, Council resolved at Council's Ordinary Meeting on 15 March 2006 that:

The draft Gunnedah Rural Lands Study & Strategy be endorsed subject to the following variations:

- a) *That the minimum subdivision area in the Rural 1(a) zone be remained at 200 hectares, and*
- b) *Council forward the document to the Department of Planning for comment having regard to the terms of the Memorandum of Understanding under the Planning Reform Funding.*

Following referral of the Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy to the Department of Planning, the Department highlighted an inadequacy in the Strategy having regard to the analysis of the Rural 1(b) zone. It was also noted that as a result of this inadequacy, there was a need to incorporate within the strategy staging processes for the release of rural life style land to ensure development patterns and infrastructure demands are addressed.

The Strategy was revised by the consultant and the final draft Rural Strategy presented to Council in March 2007 with the addition of changes to the Rural 1(b) zone to the south west of Gunnedah (ref: 7.4.2 Rationalisation of Rural 1(b) Zone Boundaries – GSRS 2007)

Council was again unable to accept the totality of the recommendations of the revised draft Rural Strategy particularly with regard to minimum lot size for primary production having regard to the following recommendation:

Implementation Strategy	Policy Action
3. Identify minimum lot sizes that will enable the continuation of the use.	3.1 Adopt the following lot size minimum for the corresponding land use designation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Production 600ha • Rural Smallholdings 10 ha • Large Lot Residential 6,000m2 average of 1.2ha

Council has subsequently workshopped various options having regard to variations to the minimum subdivision and dwelling capability standards to apply to the various rural zones.

Objective

To provide an acceptable variation to allow establishment of a minimum rural lot size that will enable the continuation of the use.

Variation

Council is of the opinion that Recommendation 3 of the Gunnedah Rural Strategy should read:

Implementation Strategy	Policy Action
3. Identify minimum lot sizes that will enable the continuation of the use.	3.1 Adopt the following lot size minimum for the corresponding land use designation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Production 200ha • Rural Landscape 40 ha • Rural Smallholdings 10 ha • Large Lot Residential 6,000m2 average of 1.2ha

Justification – Primary Production

Generally

The Gunnedah Local Environmental Plan 1998 provides for a minimum lot size in the Rural 1(a) Primary Production Zone of 200 hectares. Council was of the opinion that the application of the methodology that was used in the draft Strategy to justify a 600 hectare standard was flawed having

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regard to the variables that need to be considered in rural farming practices. Council also questioned the exclusion of off farm income from the methodology to determine the viability of holdings. It was noted that most agricultural operations had a varied income stream, much of which may be drawn from off farm sources. In many instances this income was used to maintain the continuity of the farm operation by providing mechanisms to overcome unfavourable farming conditions such as drought.

Subsequently, Council determined it would wait until the outcomes of the Central West Rural Lands Inquiry had been presented before finalising its position on the draft Rural Strategy. The Central West Rural Lands Inquiry gave particular attention to balancing the protection of agricultural lands with other competing interests including, but not limited to, subdivision and rural residential development. This was in response to concerns raised by Councils and local communities over the future of agriculture in the Central West.

The Central West Rural Lands Inquiry key recommendations were:

1. A new rural lands State Environmental Planning Policy (SEPP) be prepared and implemented.
2. The standard LEP template recognise the changing face of agriculture and incorporate the provisions of the new SEPP.
3. Establish an Independent Hearing and Assessment Panel (IHAP) to advise councils on development applications, which fall outside of normal planning, controls but may be subject to exceptional circumstances.
4. To recognise the changing face of agriculture by; the use of education, the recognition of off farm income, and having flexible planning controls.

In analysing the issue of rural land management in Gunnedah Shire, Council had regard to the key recommendation of the Central West Land Inquiry and formed the opinion that the existing 200 hectare minimum has not been compromised and is serving the purpose of limiting fragmentation of prime agricultural land. As such it is considered that there is no need to increase the minimum area for subdivision and dwelling capability in the primary production zone. Council also considered that other specific subdivision types should be introduced to permit sufficient options and flexibility in rural zones for other purposes.

The Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy suggests an average existing holding size of 340 hectares in the primary production zone. Subdivision history suggests that the existing 200 hectare standard has sustained the average, despite being below it. With this in mind and having regard to the report and the response by the Department of Planning, Council has chosen to retain the existing minimum lot size of 200 hectares for primary production land.

Justification – Rural Landscape

Generally

The Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy identified there is an oversupply of land within the zone Rural 1(b) as zoned under the Gunnedah Local Environmental Plan 1998. Council viewed the loss of the 40 hectare area as a loss of flexibility for lifestyle lots. To keep the 40 hectare provisions would align with intent of Central West Review Panel Recommendations. It would allow for flexibility of lot size between 200 ha & 10 ha.

Recognising the oversupply of land, an area has been identified as being suitable for the retention of a 40 hectare minimum lot size. This area is a reduction of the current rural 1(b) zone. In Appendix One, a plan is attached showing the extent of the proposed 40 hectare minimum lot size area.

The 40 hectare area has been divided into two separate sectors by the Environmental Management Zone.

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The south-eastern sector:

- Follows established subdivision pattern.
- Allows for three holdings to have subdivision potential.
- Road infrastructure (Wandobah Road) is suitable for road access to any new lots.
- The soil type is Class 2 & 3 but further fragmentation will not effect agricultural potential as the land is already fragmented.

The north-western sector:

- Road infrastructure (Barlow Road) is suitable for road access subject to upgrading
- Allows for three holdings to have subdivision potential.
- This land has been heavily undermined, and building envelopes would need to be identified. This issue would be dealt with by establishment of a Development Control plan over the area.

The proposed changes to zoning and lot size will not compromise existing development capability. Any existing allotments that do not meet new minimum area standards for a dwelling, will be protected by a sunset savings clause that preserves existing minimum standards.

Justification - Environmental Management Zone

Generally

The Draft Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy identified that Gunnedah has two distinctly different landscape forms which are :

- *“Flat open plains to the west and north with some small vegetated hills*
- *Steep and undulating , mostly vegetated land in the northeast, east and south*

The flat open plains are characterised by a mixture of cropping and grazing whilst the hills are mostly heavily vegetated with some cleared land that is used for grazing of sheep and cattle.

The broad scale visual catchment of the Shire is limited to the east and south by the steep escarpment of the Great Dividing Range. The north-eastern limit is defined by the Melville Range. The northern and western boundaries are not defined as this land is characterised by flat open plains with no defined edges.

The varying topography is the dominant feature of the landscape as it provides a framework for other elements such as vegetation, agriculture, viewpoints and the location of major transport and communication corridors. The topography also defines the broader visual catchment of the Shire, which is generally enclosed to the east, north-east and south by hills.

The predominant rural character of Gunnedah Shire is created by the numerous rural activities, large lot sizes, vegetation and expansive views. The landscape changes with the varying topography of the Shire - it is open and flat in the south and in the north has some hills which create different landscapes. The unique landscape character of the Shire is a visual resource as it generates tourism, development and environmental management. The visual resource also pays an important role in promoting environmental awareness and well being for residents and visitors. This varies from steep land associated with the ranges to simplicity of grazing lands and formal patterns of agricultural cops.”

To protect the integrity & natural values & features of the rural landscape, the Strategy identified an area around Blackjack Mountain as being a scenic landscape that requires protection via the use of

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an environmental management zoning. Council believes that as a natural extension to this the protection of all significant hill-scapes in the Shire must be considered.

To establish the methodology by which a suitable definitive measurable line could be identified, an analysis of the most appropriate contour line used for the draft Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy was has been used. The 450m contour was applied given that all significant ridges and the density of trees are contained within this contour. The contour line also excludes general agricultural activity. Appendix 3 contains a detailed plan showing the increasing contours over the shire. Appendix 4 highlights that this area is mostly dense tree coverage.

By applying this Environmental Management Zone, Council will ensure that existing agricultural activities are not affected, yet recognise the importance of the landscape and have a mechanism to maintain its integrity.

Conclusion

The Gunnedah Rural Strategy contains a number of important initiatives that are supported by Council.

In its analysis of the strategy document, Council has been mindful of ensuring that agricultural production is protected and that flexibility is provided to allow for appropriately located rural small holdings. In this regard it is Council's opinion that a variety of holding sizes should be available.

Council is also conscious of the need for flexibility within the primary production zone and that the minimum area for subdivision and dwelling capability should be realistic. There is no evidence that the 200 hectare minimum subdivision area provision under the Gunnedah Local Environmental Plan 1998 has lead to fragmentation or loss of production of agricultural land.

Analysis suggests that this minimum as been extremely successful in protecting the viability of agricultural land yet allowing appropriate subdivision and dwelling development for the benefit of the agricultural sector.

In terms of land for Rural Smallholdings development, Council believes that the area to the south-west of Gunnedah township is the most appropriate. This area will provide the opportunity for development of quality smallholding subdivisions. It is proposed that a Development Control Plan will be established to manage subdivision of this area with a commensurate contributions plan established to deal with infrastructure demands.

The review of the Rural Strategy has also highlighted the need to protect the scenic significance of the hillscape throughout the Shire area. The Rural Strategy specifically recommends the controlling of the Blackjack Mountain area with an Environmental Management Zone. Council is satisfied that there is justification to expand this proposition to other significant scenic topographical features across the Shire. The backdrop the Melville Range affords to the Breeza Plain is of importance to the landscape of the area.

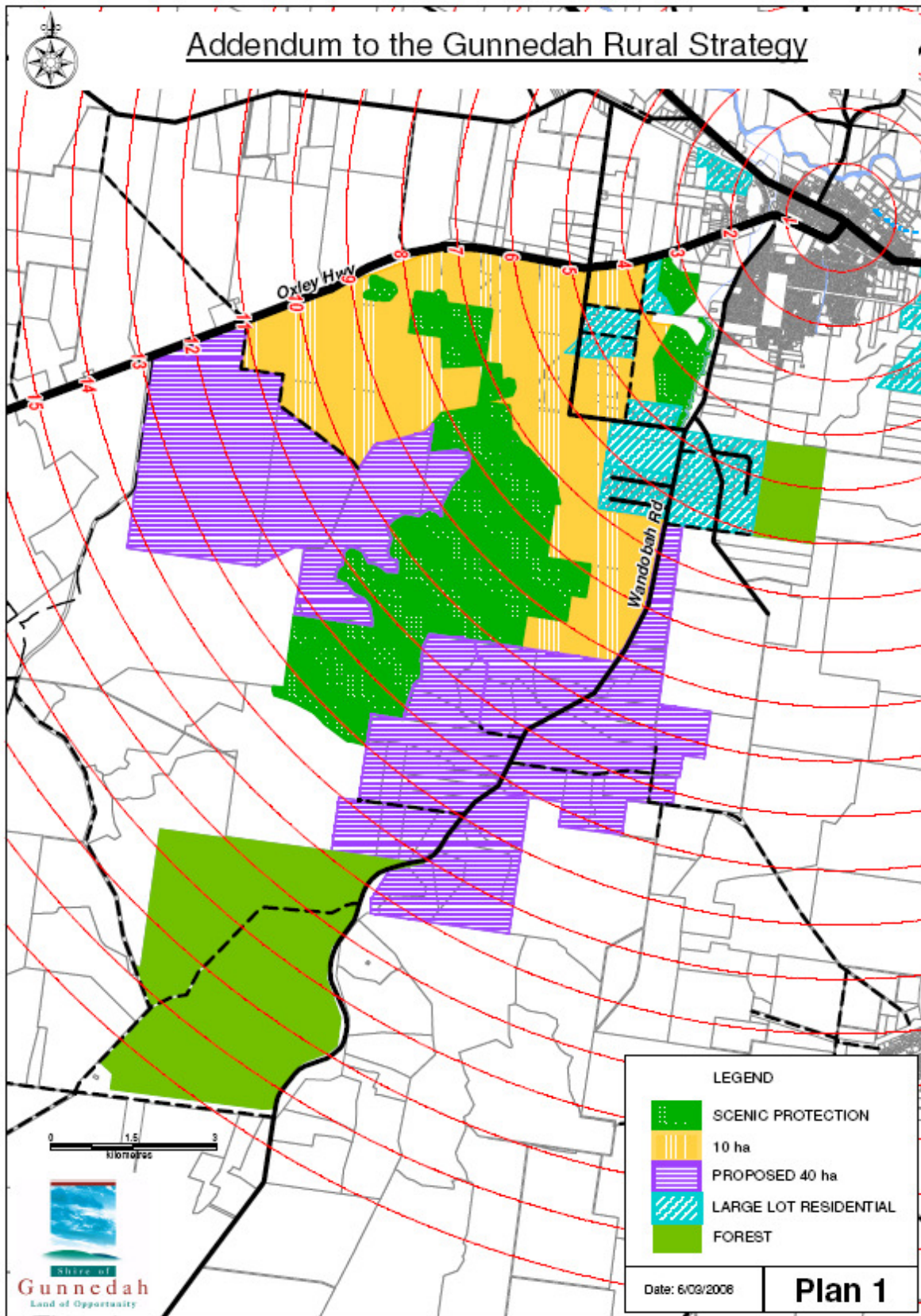
Similarly, the mountain ranges to the north of the Shire are visually significant to the Kelvin and Keepit areas. Accordingly Council believes that special attention should be paid to these landscapes above the 450 metre contour.

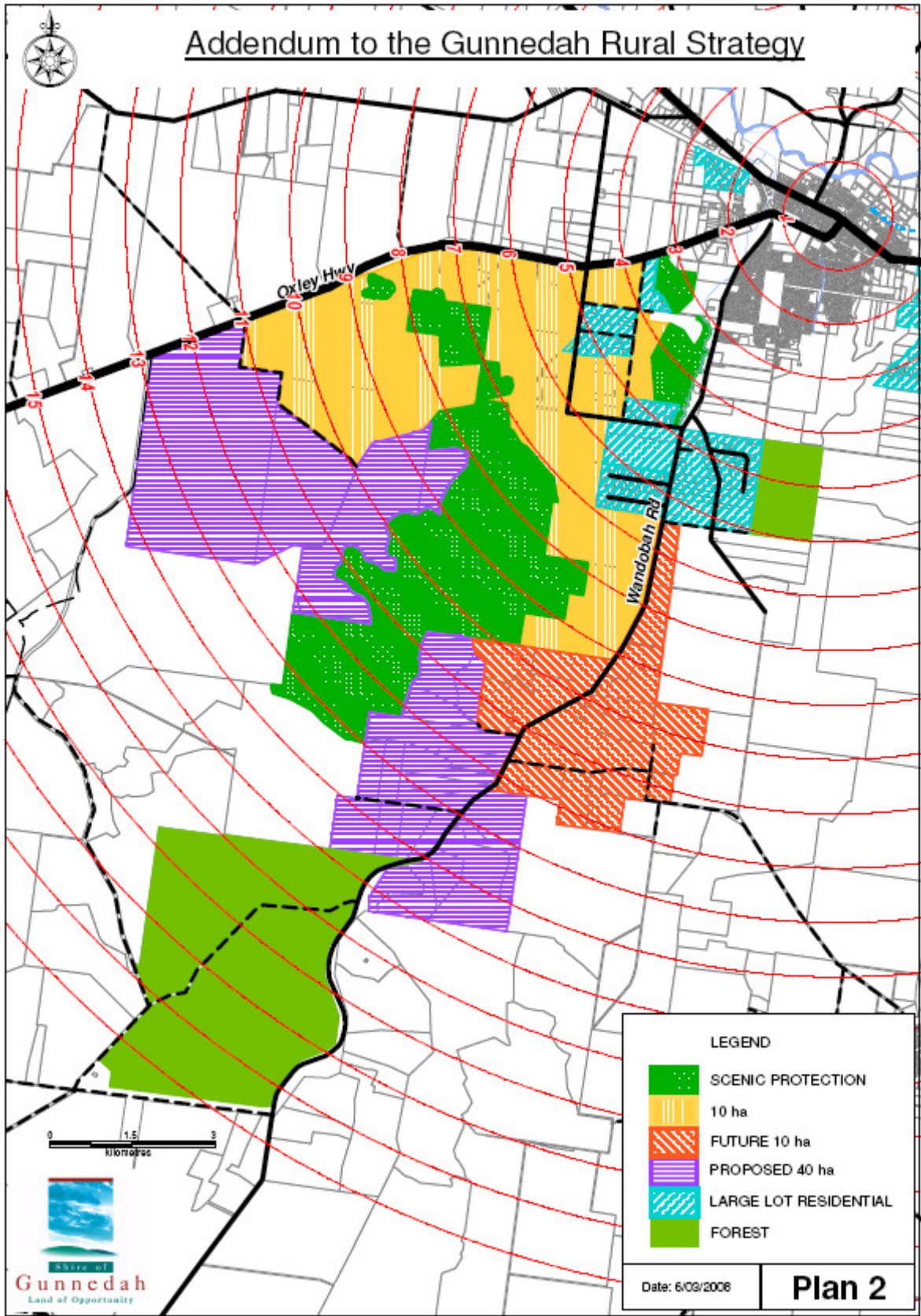
The variations outlined in this addendum provide a balance between agriculture, the environment and rural living consistent with the objectives of the Gunnedah Shire Rural Strategy for the benefit of all citizens of Gunnedah Shire.

Appendixes

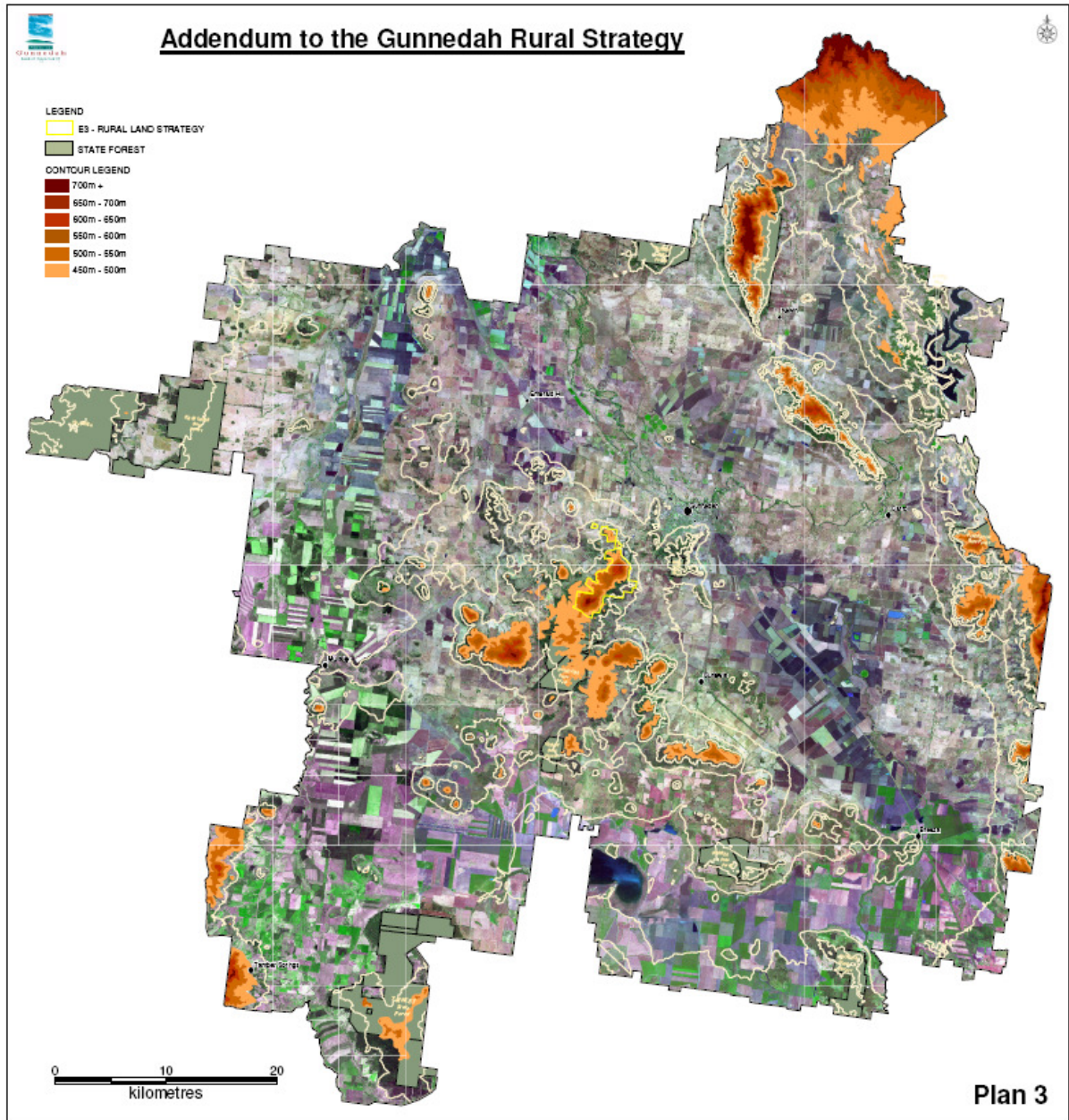
Appendix 1	Plan 1 – Proposed 40 hectare Minimum Lot Size Area
Appendix 2	Plan 2 – Future 10 hectare Area
Appendix 3	Plan 3 – Contour Plan Shire Wide
Appendix 4	Plan 4 – Contour Plan showing Satellite Imagery of Tree Coverage

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