



NORTH WEST GROWTH AREA

# West Schofields – State-led rezoning

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Update Report

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# 1. Introduction

The West Schofields (the Precinct) is one of 16 precincts within the North West Growth Area (NWGA). The NWGA was established under *State Environmental Planning Policy (Sydney Region Growth Centres) 2006* (Growth Centres SEPP) as an area for greenfield urban development.

The southern half of the Precinct was released for planning in two stages. The first stage, the southern part of the Precinct (south of South Street), was released in August 2016 under the NSW Government's 'Precinct Acceleration Protocol' (PAP) and the remainder of the Precinct was released in May 2017. CSR Limited is the landowner/proponent subject to the PAP for the southern part of the Precinct.

A draft Precinct plan, prepared by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment (the Department) was exhibited August to September 2018 and included amendments to the Growth Centres SEPP (now *State Environmental Planning Policy (Precincts - Central River City) 2021*) (Central River City SEPP) and associated amendments to the Blacktown City Council Growth Centre Precincts Development Control Plan (DCP) and Blacktown Local Environmental Plan 2015 (BLEP 2015).

A total of 156 submission were received from the public and government agencies. The key issues raised are summarised in Section 3 of this report.

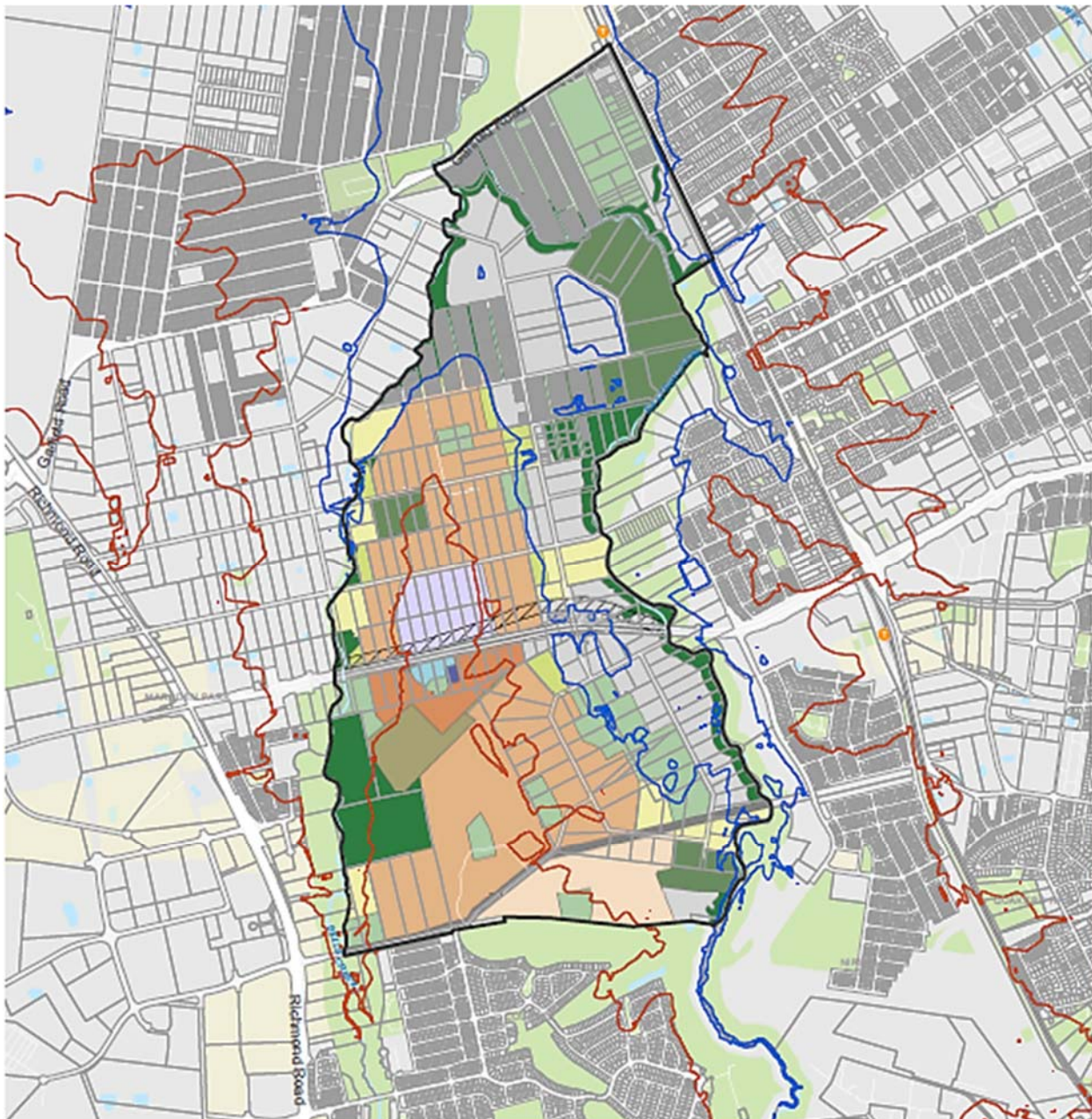
Following exhibition of the draft Precinct plan major flooding occurred across widespread areas of Western Sydney, including parts of the Precinct, and further analysis was undertaken with respect to flood evacuation route capacities, flood levels and flood risk management.

The Precinct is within the Hawkesbury - Nepean River floodplain, which is one of the highest risk floodplains in Australia, and where there is a known existing risk to life in an emergency flood event. The site is impacted by the 1 in 100 year flood<sup>1</sup> (also known as the 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) flood) and the Probable Maximum Flood<sup>2</sup> (PMF). Refer to **Figure 1** overleaf.

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<sup>1</sup> The 1 in 100 chance per year flood is a flood event that has, on average, a 1 in 100 chance of being equalled or exceeded in any given year.

<sup>2</sup> Probable Maximum Flood is the largest flood that could conceivably occur at a particular location. The PMF defines the extent of flood prone land, that is, the floodplain



**West Schofields Precinct**

- West Schofields
- 1% AEP flood line (approx)
- PMF line (approx)
- B2 Local Centre
- B4 Community Facility
- E2 Environmental Conservation
- E4 Environmental Living
- R2 Low Density
- R2 Low Density
- R3 Medium Density
- RE1 Landfill
- RE1 Local Parks
- RE1 Playing Fields
- RE2 Landfill
- RU6 Transition
- SP2 Drainage
- SP2 Roads

0 200 400 600 m  
 Intended Map Size: A4  
 Publication Date: 23/05/2023  
 Coordinate System: GDA 1994 MGA Zone 56

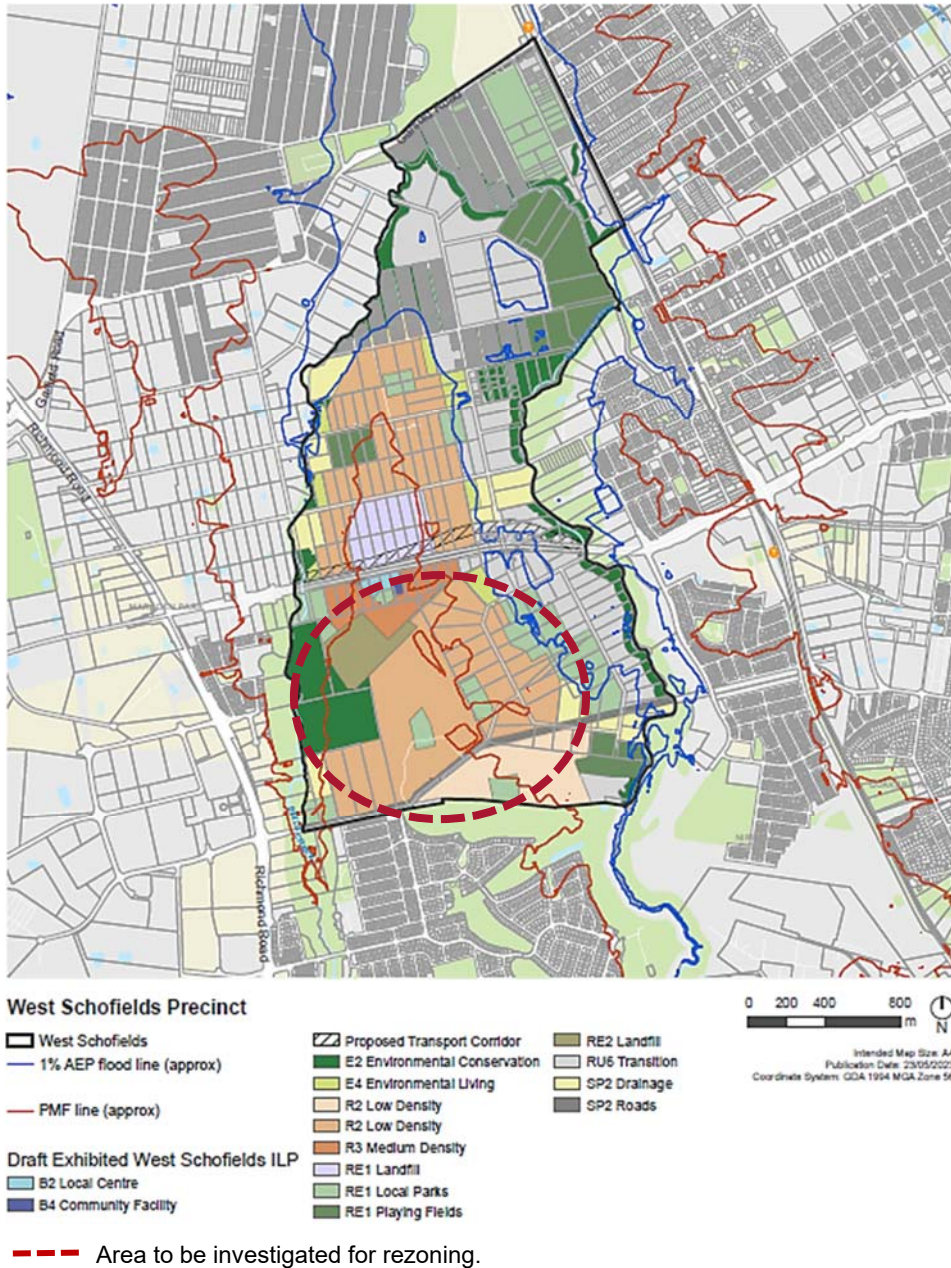
**Figure 1 West Schofields draft Land Zoning plan with 1 in 100 and PMF extents**

Major flooding throughout NSW in 2022 led to the establishment of the [2022 NSW Flood Inquiry](#) which made a series of recommendations, including several that are particularly relevant to planning and development within the Hawkesbury – Nepean Valley (the Valley). The Department’s response to the Flood Inquiry included the creation of a Flood Advisory Panel to consider ‘high risk’ proposals, including the draft Precinct plan.

This report documents the exhibition of the draft Precinct plan, summarises the issues raised in submissions and discusses a number of flood risk considerations.

Due to potential significant increases to flood related risk to life and property, **the Department proposes a part rezoning at this stage**. The area being investigated for rezoning is the area south of South Street and above the PMF. Refer to Figure 2, below. Following further investigations, some or all of this area may be rezoned.

Other parts of the site may be investigated for rezoning following future flood modelling and policy, which is being undertaken by the NSW Reconstruction Authority. Refer to the Next Steps section of this report.



**Figure 2 West Schofields draft Land Zoning plan, showing area being investigated for a partial rezoning**

## 2. Exhibition Details

### 2.1 Exhibition Period

The draft Precinct plan was exhibited from 31 August to 28 September 2018.

### 2.2 Exhibited Materials

The following documentation was exhibited:

- West Schofields Precinct Exhibition Discussion Paper
- draft Indicative Layout Plan
- draft amendments to the Growth Centres SEPP (now Central River City SEPP)
- draft DCP amendments
- supporting technical studies

### 2.3 Exhibition Venues

The draft Precinct plan was available to the public at the following locations:

- Blacktown City Council, 62 Flushcombe Road, Blacktown
- Riverstone Library, 1st Floor, Riverstone Village, corner of Market Street and Riverstone Parade, Riverstone
- at community information sessions (listed below)
- online at the Department's website - [www.planning.nsw.gov.au](http://www.planning.nsw.gov.au)

### 2.4 Public Notice and Media Release

Notices were placed in the following newspapers advising details of the public exhibition:

- Blacktown Advocate
- Rouse Hill Times
- Hawkesbury Courier

A media release announcing the start of exhibition was issued on 31 August 2018.

### 2.5 Landowner Notification

The Department notified landowners within the Precinct of the draft precinct planning package. This included a letterbox drop of postcards summarising key information about the exhibition to all properties within the precinct.

## 2.6 Key Stakeholder Notification

The Department advised a wide range of key stakeholders of the exhibition of the draft Precinct plan, including local councils, NSW Government agencies, and environmental, community and development interest groups.

Email notifications were also circulated to contacts on the Department’s West Schofields and North West Growth Area subscriber databases. An initial notification was sent to 647 contacts on the first day of exhibition and on 13 September 2018 a follow-up email was sent to 232 contacts who did not open the first email.

## 2.7 Information Sessions

The Department hosted 2 information sessions at the Riverstone – Schofields Memorial Club. The sessions were held on:

- 12 September 2018 from 4:00pm - 7:00pm
- 15 September 2018 from 10:00am - 1:00pm

The sessions were an opportunity for members of the public to meet with the project team and discuss the draft Precinct plan. Sydney Water, Transport for NSW and Blacktown City Council were also represented at the sessions.

# 3. Submissions Summary

## 3.1 Submissions received

156 submissions were received as result of exhibition of the draft Precinct plan.

A summary of respondents grouped into major stakeholder groups is provided at **Table 1**.

**Table 1: Summary of respondents**

| Respondent  | Number of submissions |
|---|-----------------------|
| State Government Agencies (including Council)       | 19                    |
| Landowners within the precinct                      | 93                    |
| Landowners (External) and community/interest groups | 44                    |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>156</b>            |

The Department acknowledges and thanks all those who made a submission.



## 3.2 Issues Raised in Submissions

The main issues raised in submissions included:

- zoning and associated planning controls, such as lot size and dwelling densities
- proposed RU6 Transition Zone and associated permitted land uses
- proposed location of open space, existing native vegetation (ENV) and drainage lands
- flood affectation and the proposed flood related development controls
- flood evacuation
- the amount of ENV to be retained and protection of ENV on private land
- Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage
- traffic impacts and management
- the future of the “Scheduled Lands”<sup>3</sup>
- landfill sites
- timing of land acquisition and value of compensation
- infrastructure delivery.

While the issues raised in the submissions have informed post-exhibition consideration of the draft Precinct Plan, the Department’s primary focus has been on understanding and responding to the flood risk management considerations addressed in Section 4.

## 4. Flood Risk Management Considerations

### 4.1 Flood Affectation

The Precinct is subject to flooding from the Hawkesbury River, Bells Creek, Eastern Creek and localised flooding.

The draft Precinct plan proposed no new dwellings below the 1 in 100 chance per year flood level and an upper limit of 2000 dwellings for land generally between the 1 in 100 chance per year flood level and the PMF. The 2000 dwelling upper limit was based on the Department’s understanding of regional flood evacuation capacities at the time of preparation of the draft Precinct plan.

In March 2021, late February/early March 2022 and July 2022 major flooding occurred throughout the Hawkesbury - Nepean River floodplain. These floods inundated widespread areas of Western Sydney, including parts of the Precinct.

The 2022 floods reached heights (at Windsor) of 13.8m Australian Height Datum (AHD) and 13.9m AHD respectively and were marginally higher than a 1 in 20 chance per year flood level (13.7m AHD).

The March 2021 flood reached a height (at Windsor) of 12.9m AHD and was approximately half-way between the height of a 1 in 10 chance per year flood level (11.9m AHD) and a 1 in 20 chance per year flood level.

<sup>3</sup> The Scheduled Lands are a group of small and narrow properties throughout the Precinct. The properties were created from the 1880s and under current planning controls dwellings cannot be built on these lands.

## 4.2 2022 NSW Independent Flood Inquiry

In March 2022, the NSW Government commissioned an independent expert inquiry into the preparation for, causes of, response to and recovery from flood events across the state of NSW that occurred in early 2022.

The Inquiry was led by Professor Mary O’Kane AC and Michael Fuller APM. The Inquiry’s report was published in July 2022 and can be accessed at <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/projects-and-initiatives/floodinquiry>.

The Inquiry was asked to consider and, if warranted, make recommendations on:

- the safety of emergency services and community first responders
- current and future land use planning and management and building standards in flood prone locations across NSW
- appropriate action to adapt to future flood risks to communities and their surrounds
- coordination and collaboration between all levels of government.

The Inquiry included a review into planning rules for developing on flood-prone land and highlighted the importance of NSW taking a greater proactive, risk-based approach to flooding and land use planning decisions.

The Inquiry identified the Valley as one of 8 high risk catchments and recommended the preparation of disaster adaptation plans discouraging or prohibiting development in disaster likely areas and review of existing flood planning levels. The Inquiry recommended this work be undertaken by the NSW Reconstruction Authority and, in the case of high-risk catchments, be completed by July 2025.

Implementing these recommendations may result in different flood planning levels across catchments with the higher risk catchments likely to be subject to increased flood planning levels and reduced areas suitable for urban development.

In response to the Inquiry, the Department has applied an enhanced risk-based approach to considering development of flood prone lands with greater assessment of proposals in high risk locations. To assist with this the Department established the Flood Advisory Panel (FAP), comprising Department staff and independent experts, and advised by a Technical Advisory Group comprising relevant state agencies. The findings of the FAP are discussed in Section 4.4 of this report.

## 4.3 Flood Evacuation

The Valley covers approximately 500km<sup>2</sup> of floodplain in Western Sydney and comprises 3 main floodplains – Wallacia; Penrith/ Emu Plains; and Richmond/Windsor (including backwater flooding in South Creek and Eastern Creek). These floodplains are highly interconnected, with flood events occurring almost simultaneously.

Floods pose a serious risk to life in the Valley because many areas are low-lying areas which can become surrounded by floodwaters during a flood event. As floodwaters rise, these areas become isolated when low lying roads are cut, creating flood islands. Some of these islands may then become fully submerged as the waters continue to rise, putting many lives at risk. Additionally, major flooding events can result in a widespread 'inland sea' many kilometres across, with the potential for waves up to 1-2m high under storm conditions. These factors combined mean that shelter in place is not an option and the safest option for people during a flood event is to evacuate by car before roads are cut by floodwaters.

Evacuating during a flood event and planning for these potential events to occur can be challenging because the evacuation road network is shared across multiple communities in the Valley. Evacuation often needs to occur at short notice, meaning that large numbers of people may try to evacuate via the same roads, often around the same time. The primary regional evacuation route for West Schofields is Richmond Road to the M7. This route is also the evacuation route for other nearby suburbs, including Bligh Park, Windsor Downs and Marsden Park.

In response to these evacuation challenges, Infrastructure NSW and Transport for NSW have developed a flood evacuation model (FEM) to assess the cumulative impact of growth across the Valley on risk to life associated with evacuation.

The FEM does this by evaluating the capacity of the evacuation road network to evacuate existing and future populations across the Valley and models how different road and development scenarios change the flood risk to life based on the NSW SES evacuation timelines and arrangements. Modelling was undertaken for existing and committed development (referred to as “baseline” development) and potential development (including West Schofields) for the years 2018, 2026 and 2041. The proposed development within the Precinct was included as a potential development scenario.

The results of the FEM show that:

- the Valley’s evacuation road network is highly interconnected and growth in one area can have significant consequences on risk to life for other populations across the floodplain
- the capacity of the evacuation road network to enable evacuation of the Precinct in a major or extreme flood event is a key barrier to potential development
- up to 2300 dwellings in the Precinct below the PMF (including existing dwellings) produced a similar risk to life outcome to the baseline risk to life. This scenario relied on a package of significant and costly road upgrades including upgrades to Richmond Road and established that this development cannot proceed without these road upgrades.

The FEM approach is consistent with the Flood Inquiry’s proposed approach to understanding and managing catchment specific risk. Work on the FEM is ongoing and is forecast to be updated based on the results of the 2021 census and finalisation of an updated Hawkesbury – Nepean River flood study. The update to FEM may result in further reductions to possible development in the Precinct.

## 4.4 Flood Advisory Panel

In response to the recommendations of the 2022 Independent Flood Inquiry the department established Flood Advisory Panels (Panel) to provide advice regarding flood risks associated with selected development proposals in high-risk areas. The Panel's review of the proposals was intended as an interim measure pending the establishment of the NSW Reconstruction Authority and completion of the disaster adaptation plans and revised flood planning levels referred to in section 4.2.

The Panel consulted with Blacktown City Council, Transport for NSW, Infrastructure NSW, the NSW State Emergency Service and the Precinct's major developer group. The Panel was supported by a Technical Advisory Group consisting of independent experts.

The Panel considered the draft Precinct Plan, against the findings of the FEM and the interim results of updated Hawkesbury - Nepean River flood modelling (Draft *Hawkesbury - Nepean Flood Study – Interim Results*, Infrastructure NSW, April 2022).

Of particular relevance to the Panel's considerations was advice that the interim results of the updated flood modelling show an increase in flood levels across the Precinct and most significantly a possible 3.9m increase in the PMF level.

The Panel advised that the department could proceed with rezoning the Precinct under the following conditions and in the following sequence:

- proceed with rezoning for up to 2300 dwellings above the currently defined PMF, as there is a low risk to development (both risk to life and property) from a flood perspective. This aligns with the evacuation capacity findings of the FEM.
- to progress additional dwellings beyond the 2300, a revised PMF must be adopted from the Interim Results/revised Hawkesbury Nepean Regional Flood Study. Once the new PMF has been determined, updated flood modelling and hazard analysis must be undertaken for a range of flood events (including 1% AEP, 0.2% AEP, 0.02% AEP) to inform a risk-based approach to the location and density of any additional dwellings.
- this would ensure that the provision of additional dwellings beyond the 2300 interim cap, and below the revised PMF, would be subject to updated flood modelling, and hazard and evacuation capacity analysis.

## 4.4 Department's Response

In considering whether to proceed with the draft Precinct plan, the Department must be satisfied that future development is appropriately located with respect to flood hazards and that the capacity of the evacuation road network will not be exceeded.

The Department accepts the Panel's findings that increases in flood heights and extents forecast by the interim results of updated Hawkesbury - Nepean River flood modelling creates significant uncertainty regarding future flood hazard areas and the capacity of the evacuation road network to enable evacuation of existing and future populations. Increases in flood heights and extents will result in an increase in the baseline number of people requiring evacuation.

Due to potential increases to flood related risk to life and property it would not be prudent, at this stage, to rezone the entire Precinct. The Department is however committed to finalising planning for the Precinct and therefore proposes:

- a staged approach to the rezoning with stage 1 focusing on land in the south of the Precinct that is above the current Probable Maximum Flood level (**Figure 2**). This area has been selected because it is above the current and Interim Results PMF levels, and there is a

larger landholding in the area that presents an opportunity for the feasible forward funding of lead-in road and utility infrastructure.

- further rezoning of the Precinct resulting in additional dwellings beyond stage 1 is to be subject to further flood modelling and evacuation capacity analysis.

## 5. Next steps

The Department will investigate a part rezoning of the precinct (Stage 1) for not more than 2300 dwellings on land in the south of the Precinct that is above the current Probable Maximum Flood level.

Further rezoning of the Precinct resulting in additional dwellings beyond Stage 1 is to be subject to further flood modelling and evacuation capacity analysis.