

RURAL STRATEGY

The Hills Shire Council | October 2019



THE HILLS
Sydney's Garden Shire



The *Rural Strategy 2019* was adopted by Council on 22 October 2019, Minute No.565.

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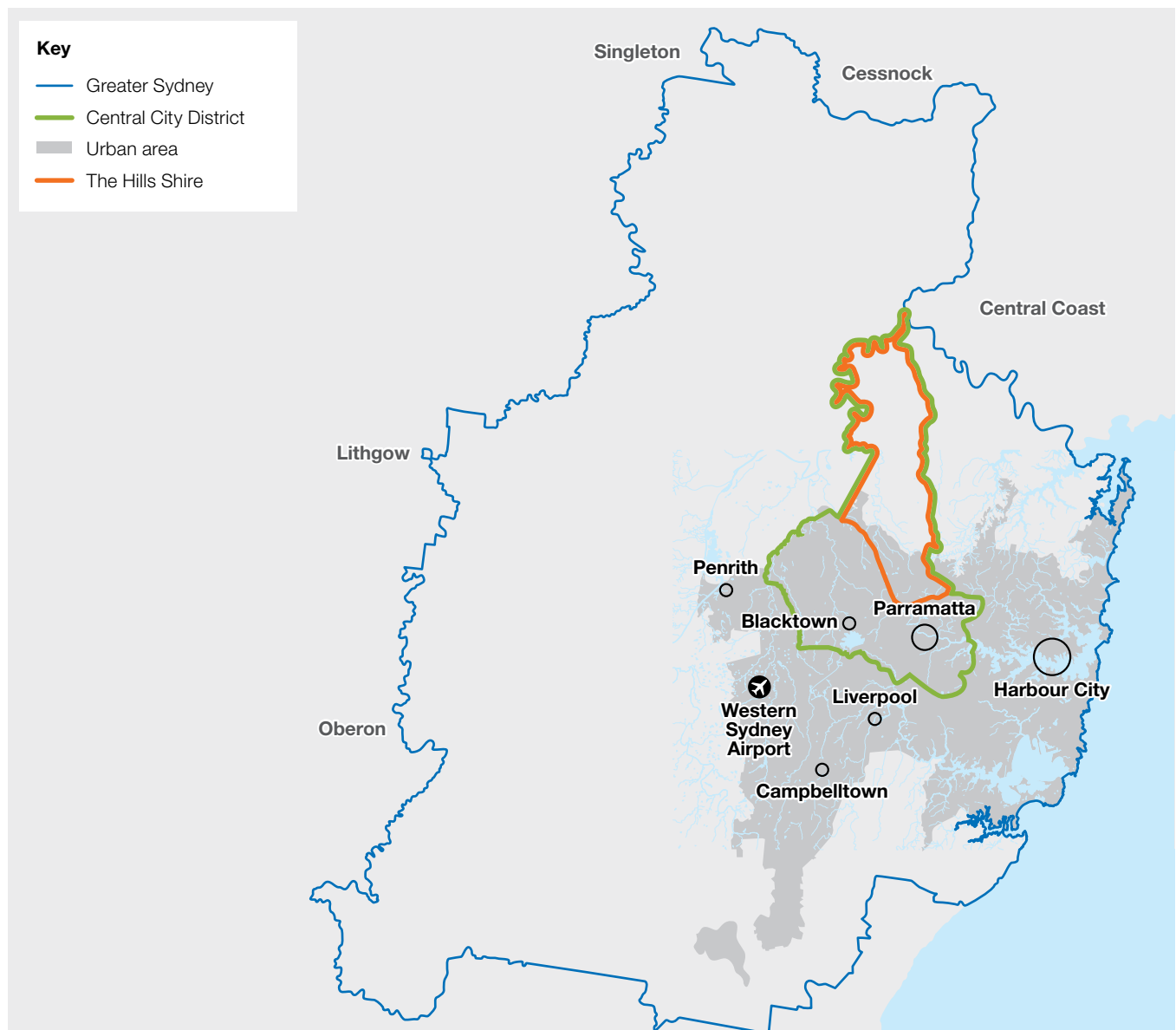
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The Hills Shire is a local government area (LGA) in the north west of Greater Sydney, around 30 kilometres from Sydney CBD. Spanning 38,500 hectares, it forms part of the Central City District, along with the Blacktown, Cumberland and City of Parramatta LGAs. The Shire includes land between Baulkham Hills and West Pennant Hills in the south, to Wisemans Ferry in the north.

The Hills Shire was home to approximately 162,500 people in 2016. We are planning for an 80 per cent increase in population by 2036, with the population of 290,900 people needing a mix of housing, access to services, shopping and public transport, and opportunities to connect with each other, with nature and with the rest of Greater Sydney.

While connected to the Central River City, centred around Parramatta, The Hills has strong links to the Eastern Harbour City and will grow connections to the future Western Parkland City and the Aerotropolis around the planned Western Sydney International Airport.





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Executive summary

The rural lands of The Hills Shire have long been integral to its identity as the 'Garden Shire'. From its early years providing fruit for the burgeoning Sydney colony, the Shire's rural area continues to provide fresh produce and building materials to Greater Sydney. The Shire's rural villages offer a desirable alternative to urban living within easy reach of established strategic centres.

The Hills has more than 27,600 hectares of rural zoned land, making up 70 per cent of the local government area (LGA). The Shire is the only LGA in the Central City District that contains land in the Metropolitan Rural Area, which is defined by the Greater Sydney Commission as being outside the established and planned urban area and is used for a range of rural and lifestyle purposes.

Expected population growth across the Shire to 2036 and increases in density of the Shire's urban areas will place pressure on rural lands, especially land at the edge of the rural area. This Strategy considers priorities and actions to manage land use conflict, enhance rural productivity, grow a viable tourism sector and services that support rural industries, and plan for any growth in rural villages to be sympathetic to each village's local character.

To protect, manage and enhance the Shire's rural land, we have identified existing opportunities and constraints through our land use planning and decision-making framework. All approaches must preserve the rural values and characteristics that are important to the community for the enjoyment of future generations.

We have developed this *Rural Strategy 2019* around four planning priorities that are reflected in the planning priorities of our Local Strategic Planning Statement, *Hills Future 2036*. These priorities are:

- **manage and protect the rural-urban interface** through the establishment of an Urban Growth Boundary and by working with partners on a framework that discourages seniors' housing developments in the rural area
- **renew and create great places and facilitate housing in the right locations**, taking a place-based planning approach that involves the community in defining the future of rural villages, including in the rural villages of Kenthurst, Annangrove and Glenorie
- **retain and manage the Shire's rural productive capacity** by focusing on intensive horticulture, rural connections and sensible development in rural villages
- **encourage support activities and tourism in rural areas**, to optimise the area's economic potential.

The *Rural Strategy 2019* provides an overall strategic context for management and protection of the Shire's rural land. It also supports the commitments in our Community Strategic Plan, as expressed in the Hills Shire Plan, as well as the objectives of the higher-level *Central City District Plan* and *Greater Sydney Region Plan*.



INTRODUCTION

The *Rural Strategy 2019* focuses on the 70 per cent of The Hills Shire which is in the Metropolitan Rural Area – the land that is the green backdrop to the urban area of north west Sydney.

It builds on the 2003 *Rural Lands Strategy*, which was independently reviewed in 2005. It has also been prepared within the context of the *Greater Sydney Region Plan*, *Central City District Plan* and *Future Transport 2056*.



Purpose

The *Rural Strategy 2019* establishes the basis for strategic planning of rural lands in the Shire to 2036. It informs the planning priorities and five-year actions contained in *Hills Future 2036*, our Local Strategic Planning Statement. It provides additional detail about how we will manage the unique rural area so that the community can enjoy and benefit from it now and well into the future.

To shape exceptional living, working and leisure places where expected growth brings vibrancy, diversity, liveability and prosperity for the Hills.

Vision – Hills Future 2036

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Achieving the vision will require collaboration with, and commitment from, all stakeholders including the community, the NSW Government, business and development industry to provide the housing and infrastructure needed for new communities.

Our aim is to create a Shire in which the rural area is valued and protected, so that it can contribute to the local economy and provide green open spaces for residents and the wider Central River City to enjoy. We will encourage residents and the wider community to visit The Hills rural area to appreciate its scenery and tourist facilities.

The *Rural Strategy 2019* addresses issues identified by The Hills community – that green spaces and nature are valued, and that the community should be active and healthy with a keen sense of community involvement.

Developing the Strategy

This *Rural Strategy 2019* complements the Hills Shire Plan, including the Community Strategic Plan, and will contribute to the themes of shaping growth, building a vibrant community and prosperous economy, valuing our surroundings and proactive leadership.

The Strategy was informed by an understanding of the broader strategic context, prevailing trends, and likely demands on the Shire's rural lands, including the rural and urban interface, as well as likely economic opportunities in rural areas.

In developing the Strategy we:

- reviewed NSW Government policies including the *Greater Sydney Region Plan* and *Central City District Plan*
- reviewed the *Rural Lands Strategy 2003* to confirm work undertaken and determine any outstanding matters
- forecast population growth and assessed likely implications for managing and protecting rural land
- reviewed the productivity of rural industries
- reviewed existing zoned rural land including the potential for appropriate expansion of rural villages.

Additional documents supporting this Strategy and *Hills Future 2036* are available from www.thehills.nsw.gov.au



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STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Understanding the strategic context ensures effective implementation of priorities and actions.

We have a legislative obligation to implement the objectives and vision of NSW Government strategic directions and other policies, as well as an obligation to The Hills community to create a place where people want to live, work and play.



2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

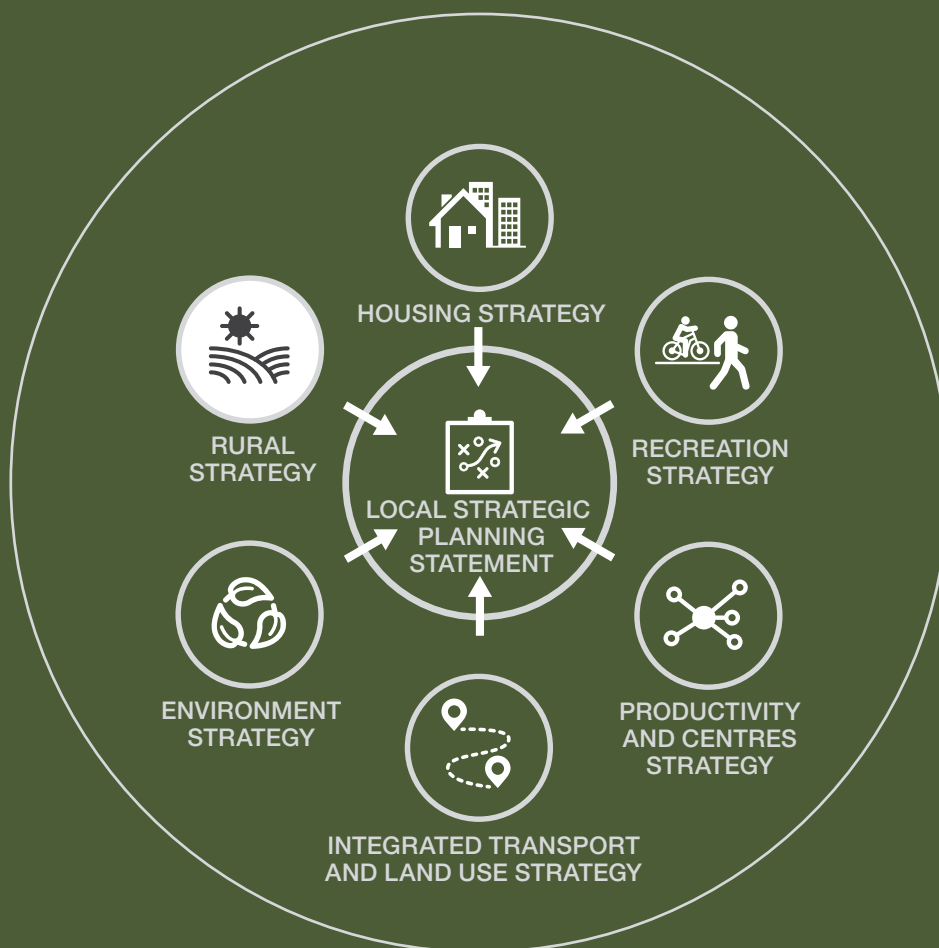
Figure 1: Links to the region and district plans



Hills Future 2036

communicates how we will address the priorities and actions of the Region Plan and District Plan at a local level. It is supported by background strategies, including this one, undertaken in key areas to provide the vision for the future of The Hills Shire.

Figure 2: Hills Future 2036 and supporting strategies



We have reviewed the State and local strategic planning framework and recognise that The Hills Shire will be integral in Greater Sydney and will feature places for people, accessible and walkable neighbourhoods and a diverse supply of new housing. The key documents in this framework are:

State level

- *Greater Sydney Region Plan*
- *Central City District Plan*
- State planning instruments
- North West Rail Link Corridor Strategy.

Local level

- *Hills Future 2036*
- Hills Shire Plan, including the Community Strategic Plan
- The previous Hills Local Strategy
- The Hills Corridor Strategy
- Local planning instruments.



THE HILLS SHIRE'S RURAL LANDS

The *Greater Sydney Region Plan* recognises the importance of the Metropolitan Rural Area as a location where agricultural production, processing and sales contribute to prosperity.

Making up 70 per cent of the Hills Shire, this land is rich in biodiversity, scenic and productive qualities. Its proximity to Greater Sydney facilitates the efficient provision of fresh produce and construction materials.

Activities undertaken in the rural area range from agriculture, mining and forestry; to tourism and recreation. Most rural production within the Shire is found within the RU1 Primary Production and RU6 Transition zones. While the RU2 Rural Landscape zone supports fewer productive uses, it has distinctive landscapes and high biodiversity value.

Rural uses within the Shire are largely contained within two distinct clusters – Middle Dural to Glenorie and Maroota – and cover a range of activities including fruit and vegetable production, poultry, the operation of nurseries, and grazing of animals.

The Hills is the highest contributor to the state's cut flower industry, and second highest to the state's nursery industry. Extractive industries are located in Maroota in the north of the Shire and produce sand and materials for the construction and landscape supply industries. The combined economic output of rural industries (agriculture, forestry and fishing, and mining) in 2017–18 was \$303.3 million, which accounted for approximately 1.5 per cent of the total economic output of the Hills Shire.

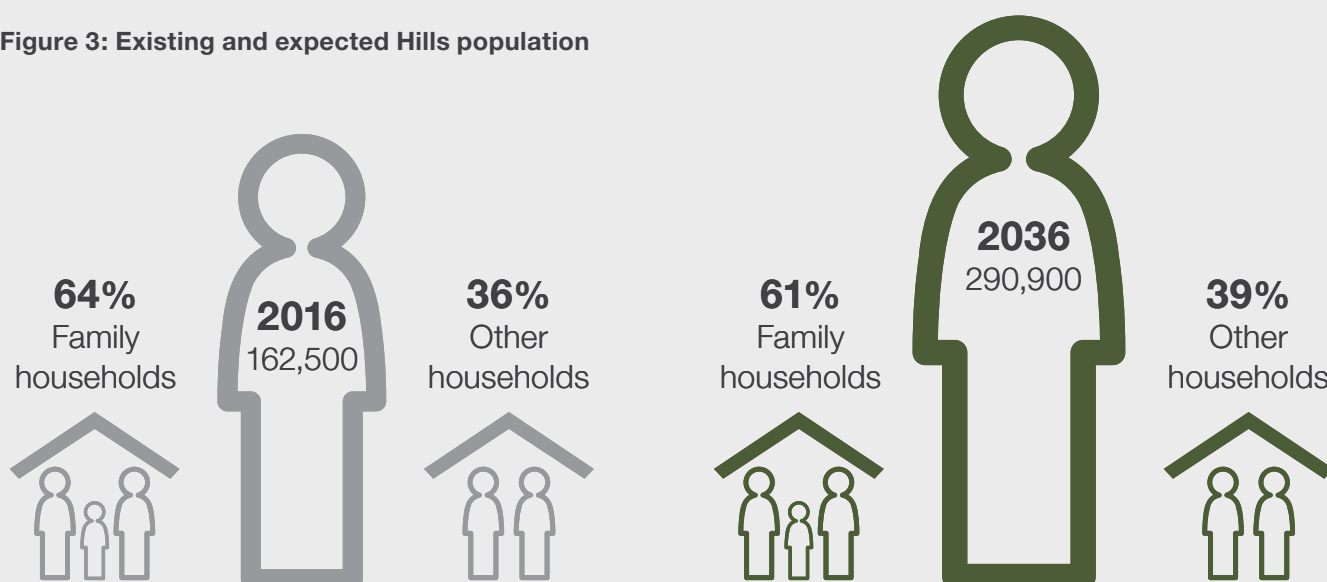
Beyond production, the rural areas contribute to The Hills Shire's diverse mix of housing. Development in rural areas including secondary dwellings and rural cluster subdivisions provides an alternative to city living; rural villages offer the opportunity for a rural lifestyle at the same time as being close to services.

Despite having sufficient capacity within existing urban areas to accommodate expected growth to 2036 and beyond, we continue to receive proposals to increase dwelling capacity in and adjacent to the rural area. The past several years have seen an increase in seniors' housing developments along the urban fringe, due to cheaper land and the attraction of living within quieter rural areas.

Growth in The Hills 2016 to 2036

POPULATION

Figure 3: Existing and expected Hills population



Source: NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment population forecast

In 2016, the rural areas of The Hills were home to around 15,500 people, making up approximately 10 per cent of residents Hills residents. By 2036, the rural population is projected to be around 17,400 and will account for around six per cent of the Shire's total population. This reduced proportion of the wider Hills population will be a result of focused growth in existing urban areas.

As is the case across the Shire, the population of the rural area is getting older, with the average age of residents just under 45 in rural suburbs, higher than the average age of 38 for residents of the Shire. Between 2011 and 2016, the proportion of people aged 70 to 84 increased across the rural area, particularly in Glenhaven and Annangrove-Nelson-Maraylya.

This shifting demographic increases pressure for residential subdivision as older residents seek to capitalise on their real estate assets to support their retirement. The differential in age may be attributed to the development of seniors' housing at the interface between the rural and urban areas, especially within Glenhaven, where the average age is 53, some 15 years older than the Shire average.

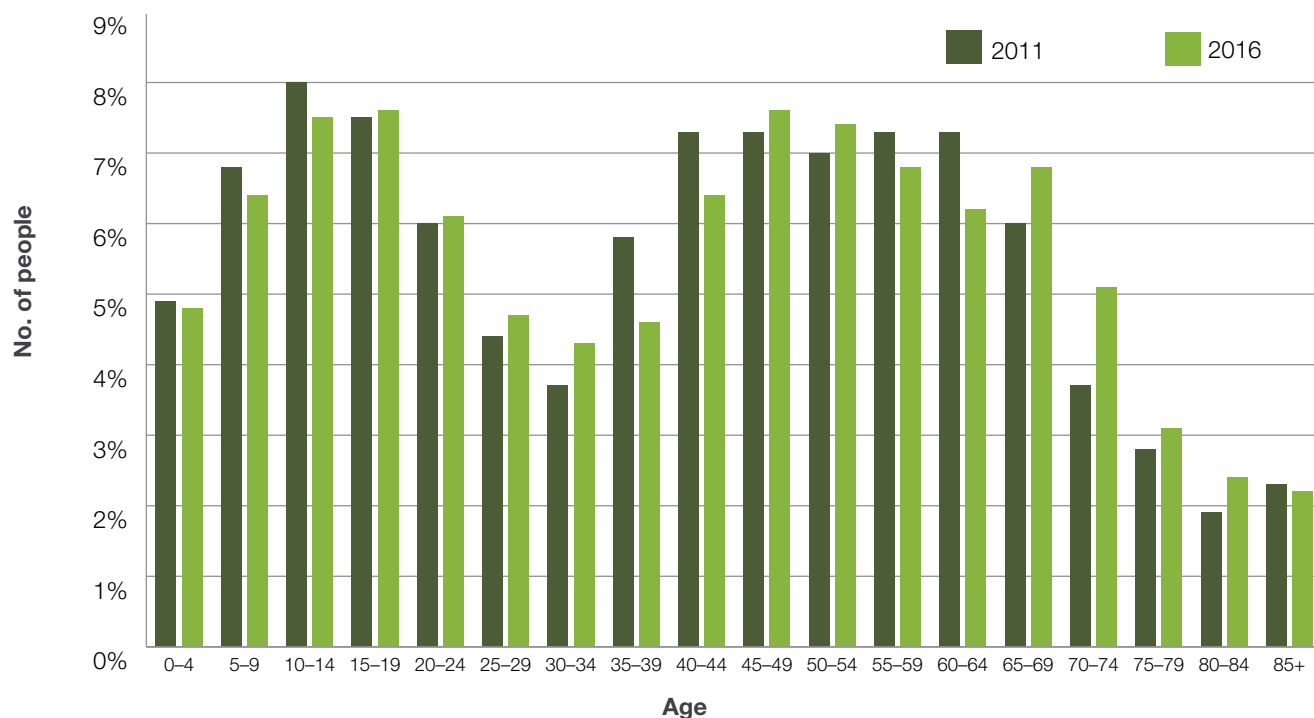
Population of The Hills rural area

2016: 15,500

2036: 17,400



Figure 4: Age structure of rural areas in the Hills Shire 2011–2016



Source: profile.id 2019

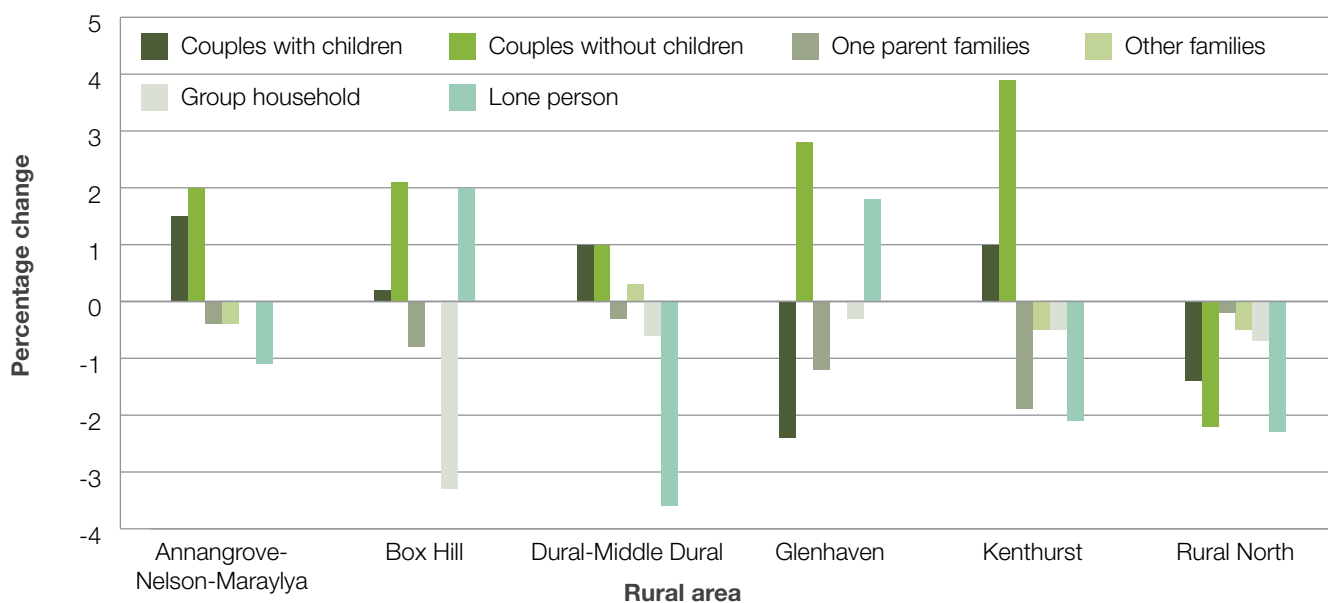
Household structures within the rural area are also changing. Shire-wide, the only household type to grow between 2011 and 2016 was couples with children (1.1 per cent); in the rural area there was minimal growth, or a decline, in this type of household. The exception to this was Annangrove-Nelson-Maraylya, which experienced a 1.5 per cent rise in couples with children households.

Notable increases in household types in the rural area were ‘couples without children’ and within selected areas, ‘single person households’. This may be attributed to the growing number of retirees moving into rural suburbs.

Significantly, the only household type to decrease in the rural area between 2011 and 2016 was the one-parent family. This may reflect the fact that house prices in The Hills are higher than both the Greater Sydney and NSW averages, limiting affordability.

3. THE HILLS SHIRE'S RURAL LANDS

Figure 5: Percentage change in household composition within rural areas in the Hills Shire 2011–2016



Source: profile.id 2016

People living in the rural areas on average earn lower incomes than the Shire average, with a greater proportion of the rural population earning a weekly wage of between \$0 and \$999 per week. By contrast, the rural area also hosts a greater proportion of Hills residents earning \$3,000 or more per week.

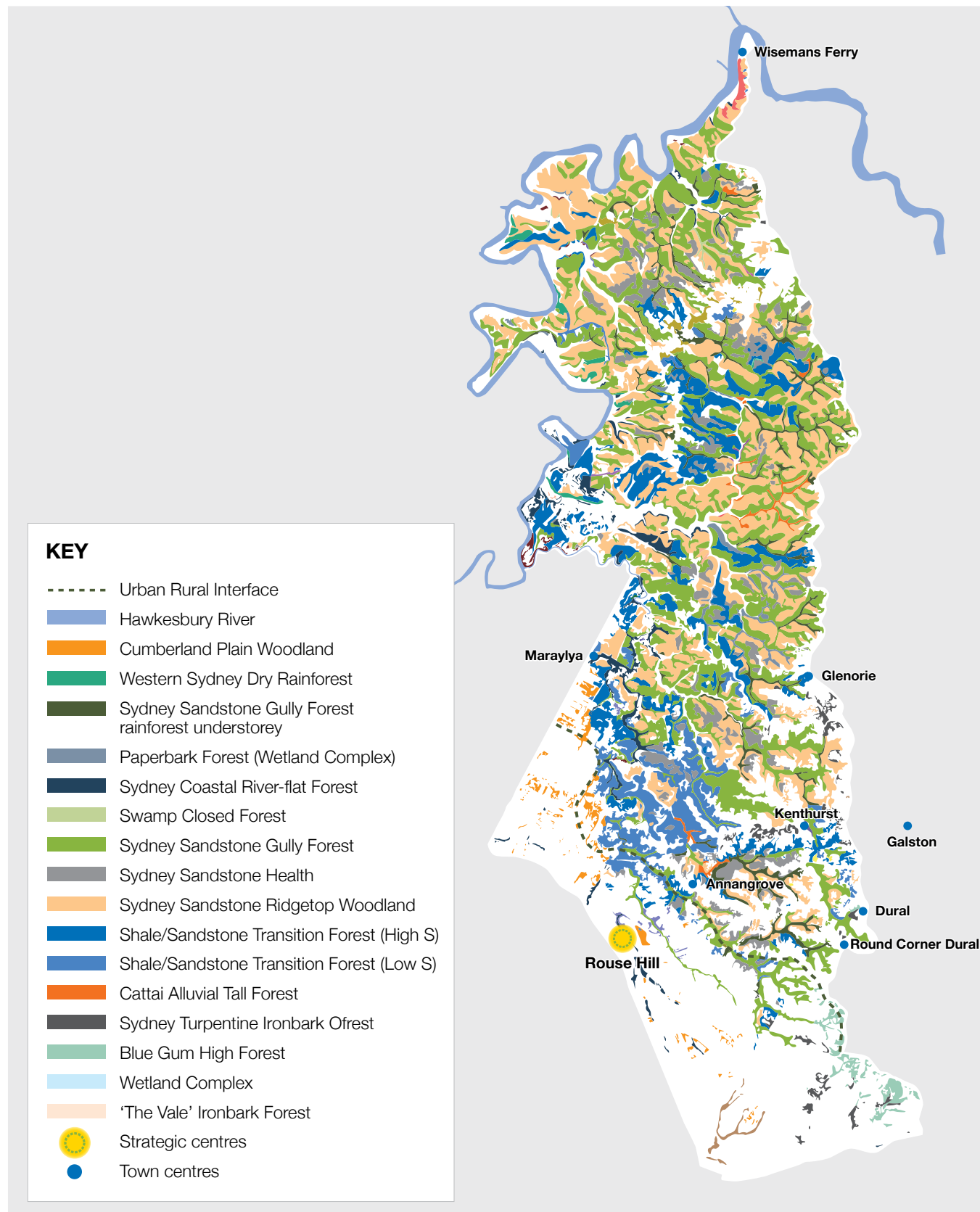
Environment

Many environmental factors and features influence the Shire's rural lands. Although these elements combine to constrain development, they are intrinsic to the identity and function of the Shire within Greater Sydney. They provide a green, open and natural backdrop to the urban area of Greater Sydney.

The Hills Shire is home to a variety of vegetation, some of which is widespread and some, such as Blue Gum High Forest, Cumberland Plain Woodland and Shale-Sandstone Transition Forest, which is critically endangered.



Figure 6: Vegetation communities within The Hills Shire



3. THE HILLS SHIRE’S RURAL LANDS

Given the heavily vegetated nature of the rural area, bushfire risk is high. This risk limits the potential uses of this land.

Most of the rural area is constrained in some form, with limited amounts of productive land available. Rural land that is relatively unconstrained is already in use. In the long term, land in the north of the Shire currently used for extractive purposes will be rehabilitated and, depending on the resulting condition of the land, may be able to be used for productive agricultural purposes.

Protection and management of the environmental values of rural land is a challenge that requires careful planning and proactive leadership. These challenges are outlined further in the *Environment Strategy 2019*.

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Bushfire risk in the Shire’s rural area is managed through land use controls that limit growth in these areas.”

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Figure 7: Bushfire risk within The Hills Shire

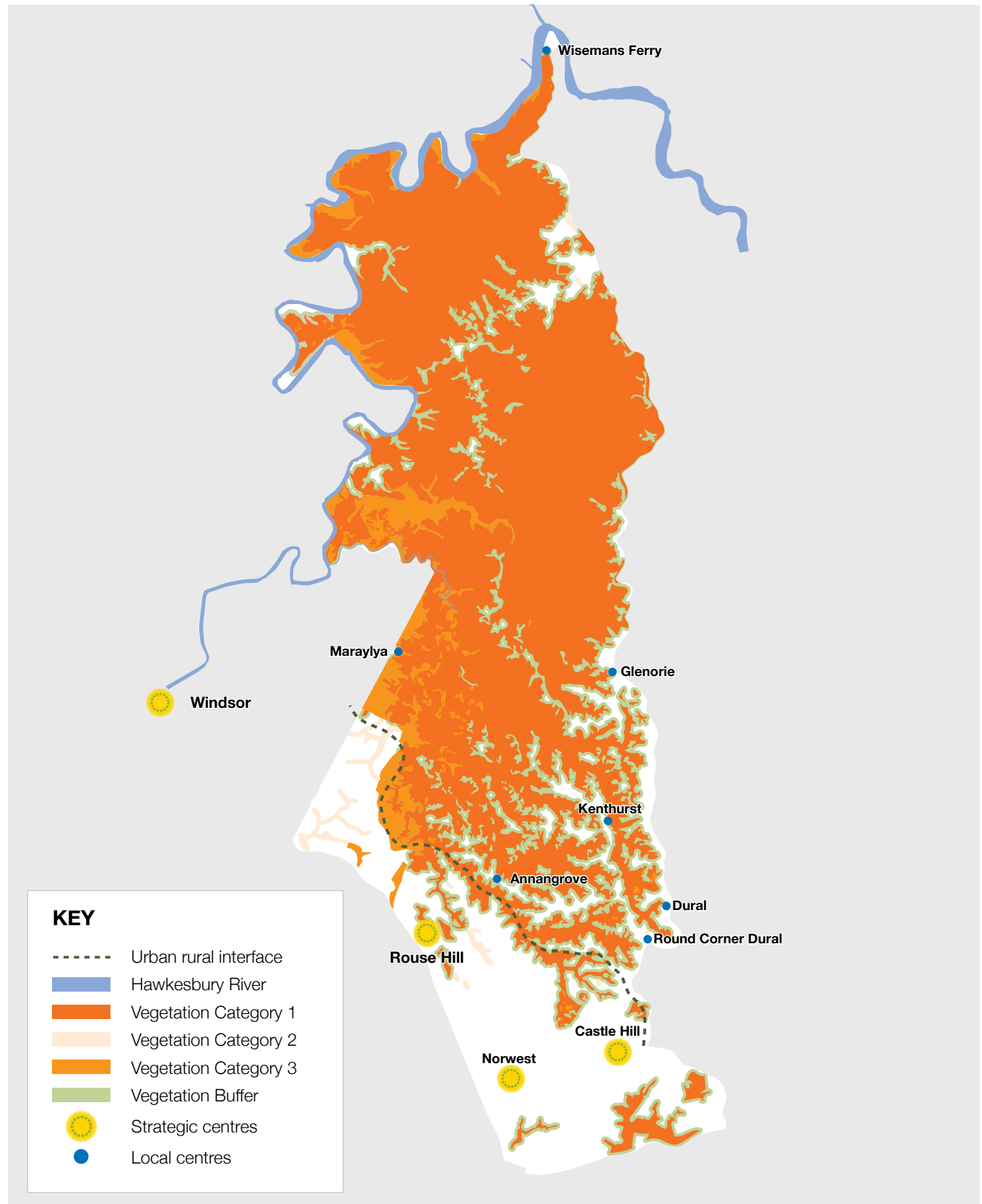
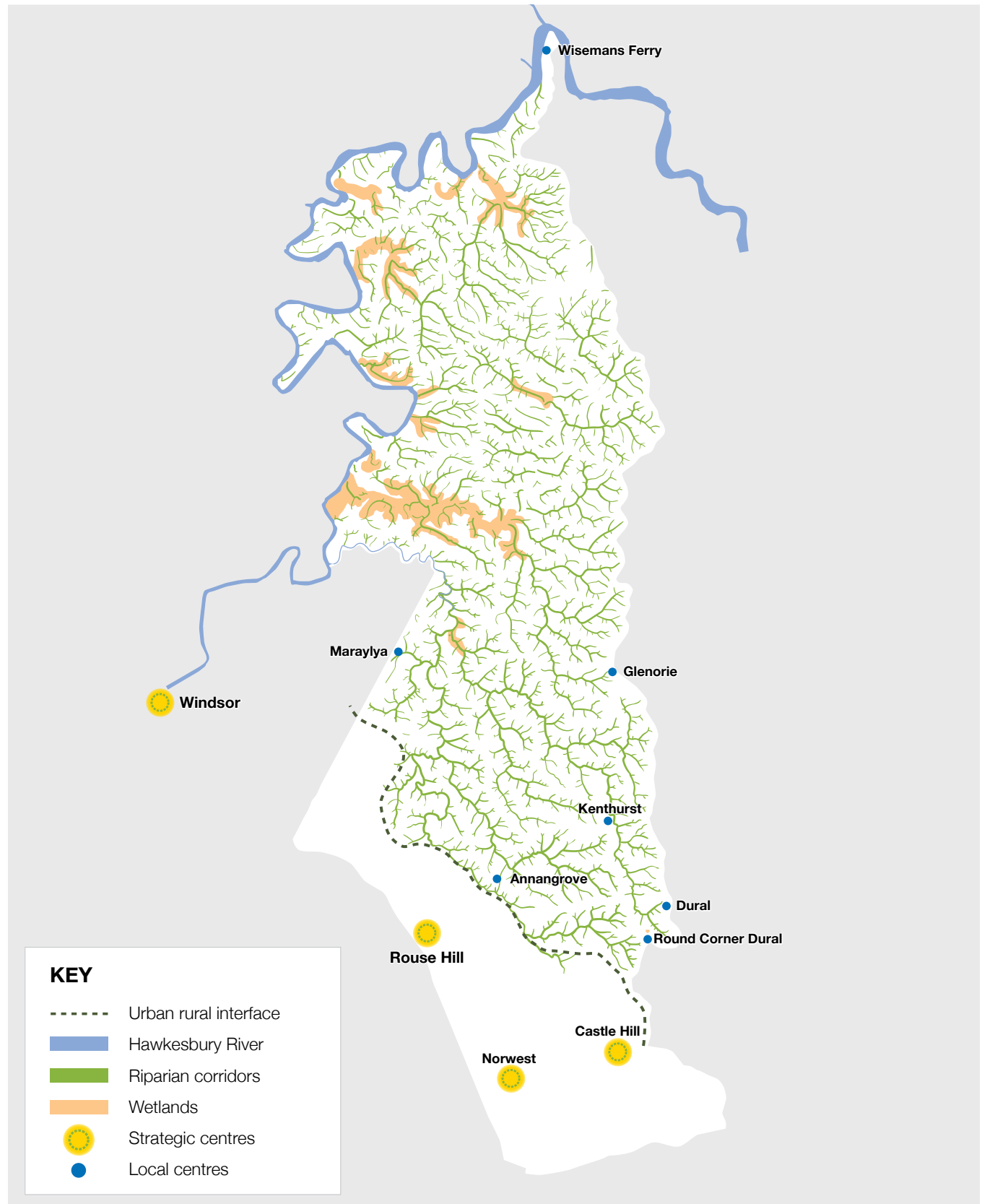


Figure 8: Riparian areas within The Hills rural lands



Managing growth and local character

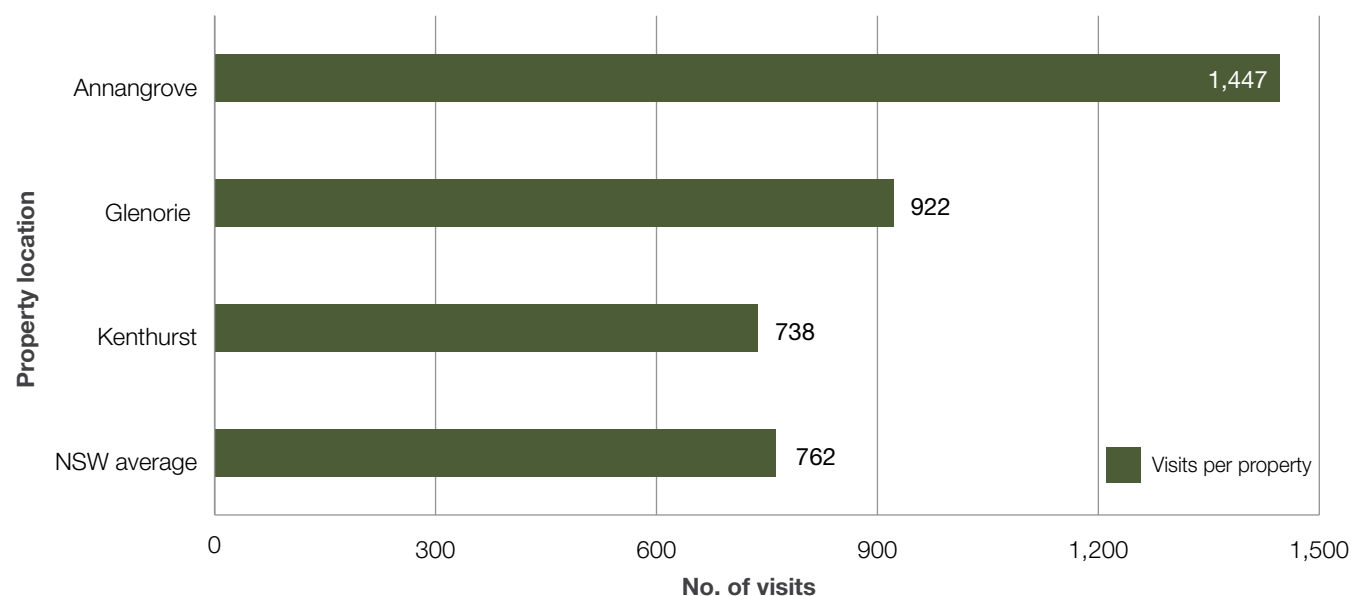
Over the last 10 to 15 years, the urban edge has crept north, with otherwise productive rural land rezoned to urban uses and subsequent housing development in the release areas of Box Hill and North Kellyville. This has reduced the availability of suitable land for rural activities, which is forcing agriculture into areas of marginal value, impacted by steep topography, high bushfire risk and the inability to remove vegetation due to the presence of endangered ecological communities in particular areas.

As an example, suburbs like Annangrove on the urban-rural fringe see high rates of housing interest as people seek a semi-rural lifestyle close to the strategic centres of Rouse Hill and Castle Hill.

Rural residential uses conflict with productive land uses, particularly with the increasing scale and intensity of agricultural businesses. Many who seek a rural lifestyle for its open and undeveloped character often have unrealistic expectations in regards to the realities of productive rural uses, for example noise, odour, dust and the 24-hour nature of rural activities.

The resulting land use conflict could further reduce rural productivity as farmers seek to avoid risk. In response, the NSW Government has introduced 'right to farm' legislation that seeks to limit land use conflict and support farming businesses as long as they employ management practices as defined in the legislation.

Figure 9: Number of online visits per property advertised



Source: www.realestate.com.au

3. THE HILLS SHIRE'S RURAL LANDS



Aged care facility in Glenhaven
Source: Nearmap July 2016

As noted earlier, there are new seniors' housing developments at the edge of the rural area, particularly in Glenhaven and Dural. Usually seniors' housing providers look for access to urban services; however, providers are attracted to land at the urban-rural interface due to cost. This type of development is restricted to land that adjoins an urban zone. Assessment pathways mean Council has little power to curtail the cumulative effects of piecemeal seniors' housing developments that gradually shift the urban edge and decrease the size and aesthetic qualities of the rural area.

This incremental development creates higher density and greater levels of site coverage than are normally allowed in rural areas, detrimentally affecting the performance of infrastructure. Issues also arise due to the incompatibility between the scale and density of these developments and the prevailing open and undeveloped character of the rural area. The last decade has seen approximately one third of all seniors' housing developments applied for within the rural area (RU6 Transition zone) under the State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing for seniors and people with a disability) 2004, particularly in Glenhaven and Dural.



Rural villages

Rural villages such as Kenthurst and Glenorie offer a quieter and more open setting. These villages serve as a focal point for the surrounding rural land, providing services such as a supermarket, primary school, medical facilities and recreational space. These villages are in most cases physically defined and constrained by environmental and scenic features that limit potential for growth.

Our previous *Rural Lands Strategy* identified a limited growth option for rural villages that would manage expansion while preserving and promoting rural enterprises. A limited amount of rural residential development provides some housing capacity, while retaining the existing mix of rural uses including agriculture, home businesses and tourism.

Although the rural population is not growing as quickly as the urban population, some growth is occurring. Beyond seniors' housing developments, most growth is concentrated around rural villages. Therefore, any future growth must be sympathetic to the desired character of these villages, and must be managed sensibly and efficiently.

Outside of rural villages, the *Rural Lands Strategy* and planning framework facilitated moderate residential growth in rural areas through rural cluster subdivisions, dual occupancies and secondary dwellings. Rural cluster subdivision controls will continue to enable limited development in rural areas while protecting valuable vegetation.



Rural cluster subdivision controls

enable limited development and protect valuable vegetation

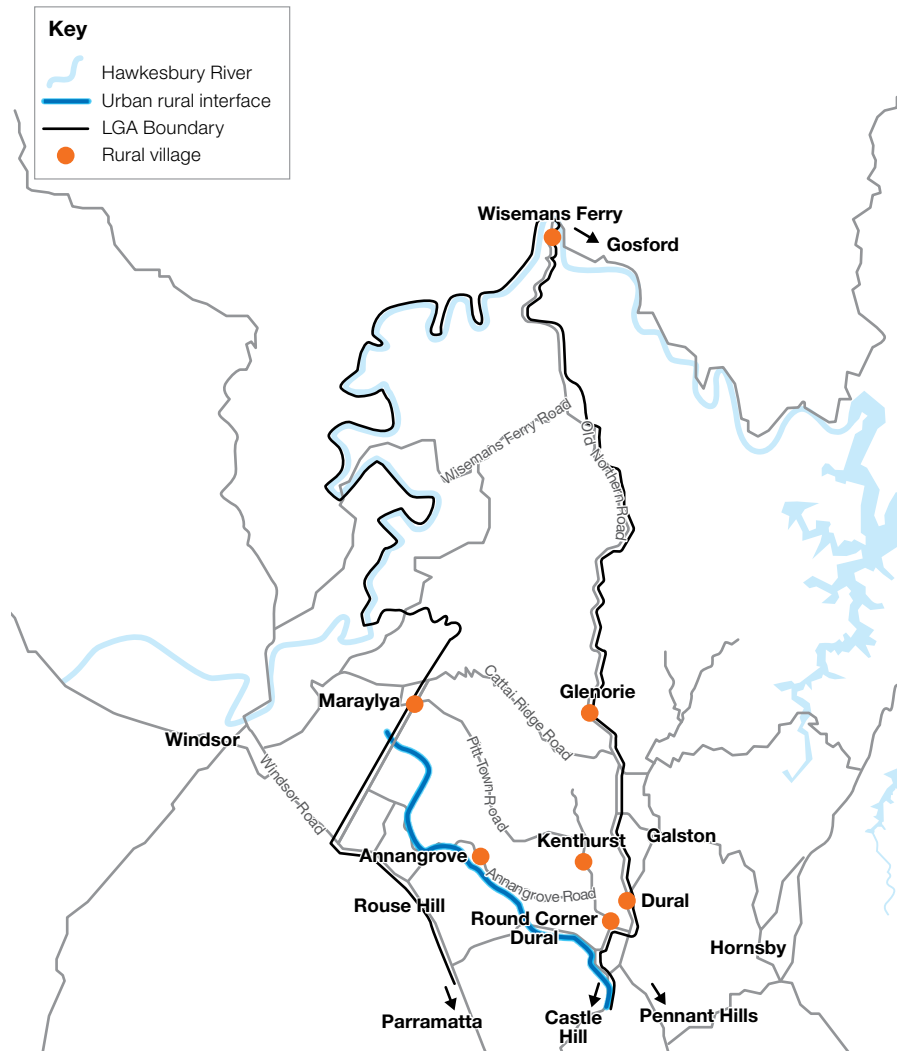
Rural lifestyle living

The Hills includes large acreage lots that accommodate large homes close to Castle Hill and Rouse Hill. This style of living is not widely available within Greater Sydney, and is desirable among certain sections of the market.

These areas have largely been zoned RU6 Transition under *The Hills Local Environmental Plan 2012* (Hills LEP) as this zone provides a transition or buffer between urban areas and the environmental characteristics of the RU2 Rural Landscape zone. The RU6 zone has also been used to avoid potential land use conflict between rural residential development and agriculture.

As a result, the RU6 Transition zone has developed an identifiable character, which, if properly defined and enforced, will assist in the management of the rural-urban interface and the renewal of rural villages.

Figure 10: Rural villages



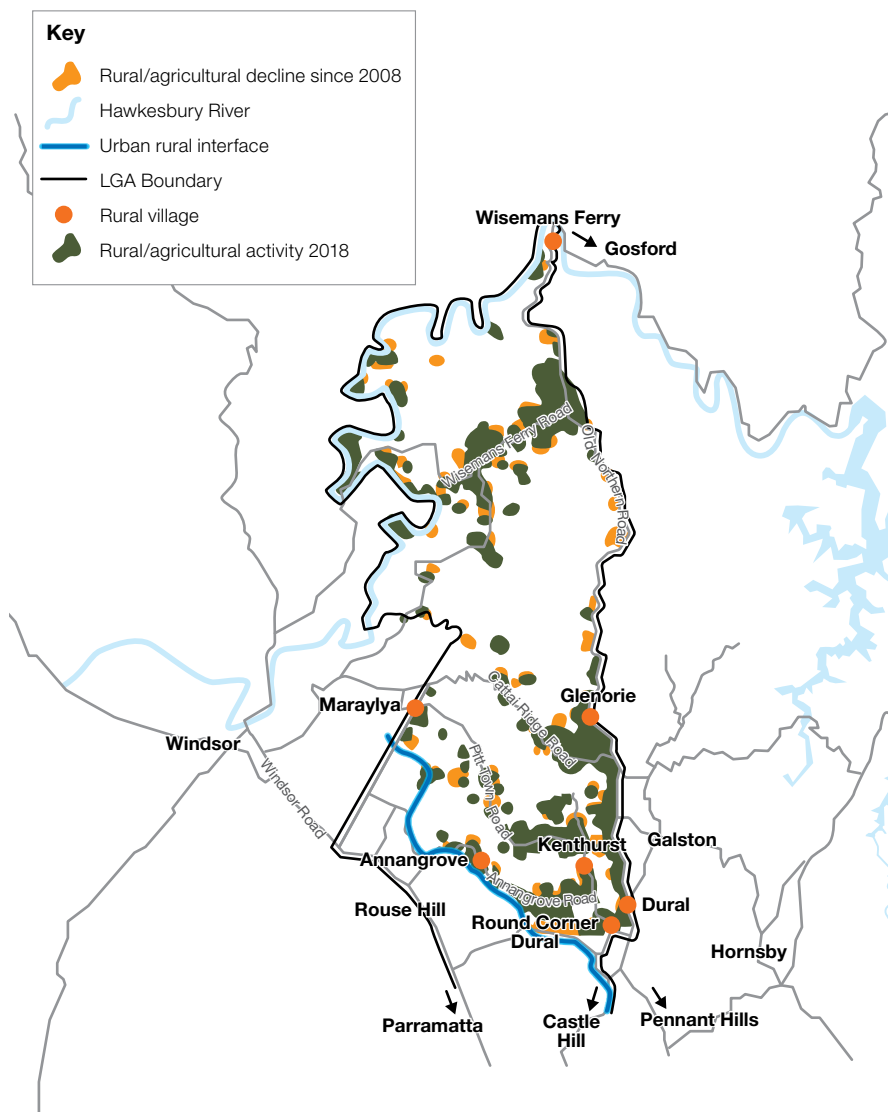
Economy

Rural uses within the Shire are largely contained within Middle Dural to Glenorie and Maroota. They cover fruit and vegetable production, poultry, nurseries and a small amount of livestock. The Hills contributes heavily to the State's cut-flower and nursery industries. Extractive industries are located in Maroota in the north of the Shire and produce sand and materials for the construction and landscaping industries.

The combined economic output of rural industries in 2017–18 was \$303.3 million. This accounted for approximately 1.5 per cent of the total economic output of The Hills Shire. Between 2012–13 and 2017–18, mining grew while the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector declined.

In physical terms, the amount of land occupied by orchards and market gardens is decreasing. Reasons for this decline include economic changes following the global financial crisis in 2008, an increase in seniors' housing on productive agricultural land, and losses resulting from the development of land in greenfield areas at the rural-urban interface. There is also a move towards intensive horticulture, utilising greenhouse and hydroponics facilities rather than requiring the use of soil for agricultural production.

Figure 11: Rural/agricultural activity decline 2008–2018

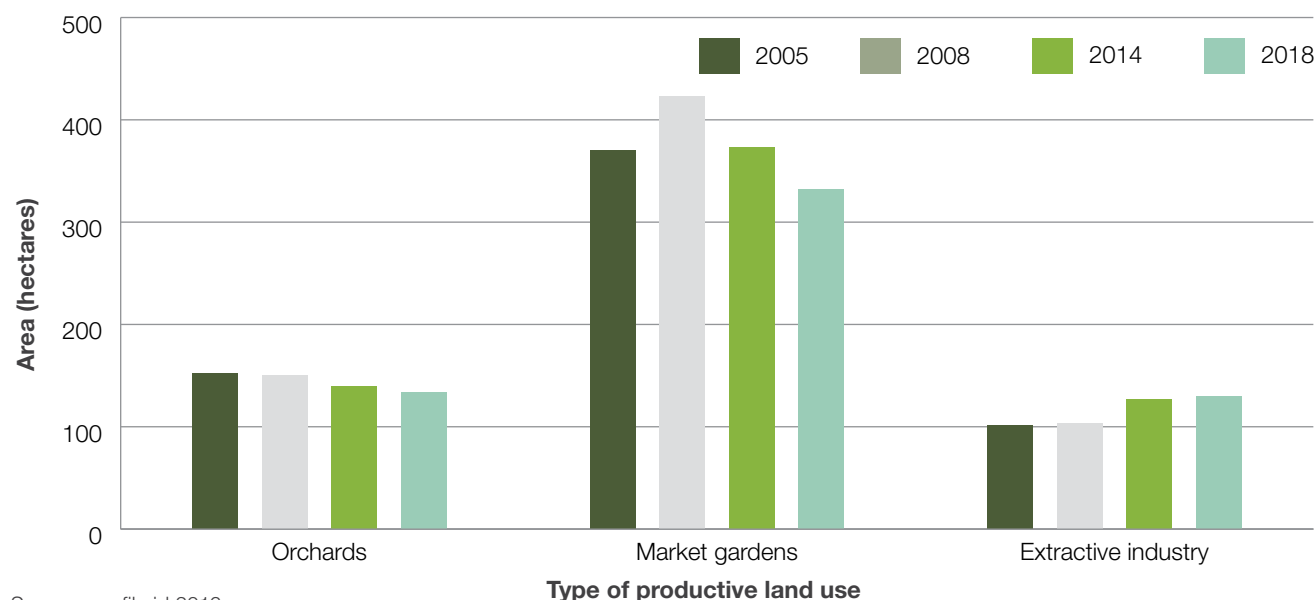


Land used for extractive industries has increased, reflecting the need for construction materials to satisfy the demands of Sydney's construction industry.

Viewing this decline in the amount of land used for agriculture in isolation does not reflect the change to intensive horticulture, which has seen the Shire's agricultural output increase over the last decade. This is also reflected in growing employment levels in the agricultural sector.

3. THE HILLS SHIRE'S RURAL LANDS

Figure 12: Land used for rural/agricultural activities

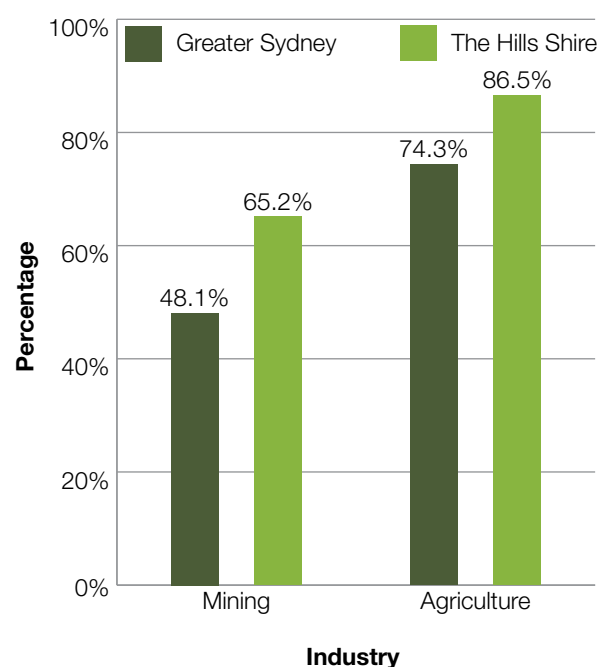


Source: profile.id 2016

Despite a reduction in productive land area and the challenges of fragmented land ownership, agriculture in the Shire is evolving and becoming more efficient through technological advances. Greater reliance on data and automation are delivering more and better-quality produce. This means a change in employee roles and the part of the production in which they are employed, rather than a loss of jobs. These advances are evidenced by the increased use of greenhouses and intensive horticulture.

Most agricultural and extractive output from the Shire's rural areas is sold locally – within the Shire and Greater Sydney Region.

Figure 13: Proportion of output sold locally 2018



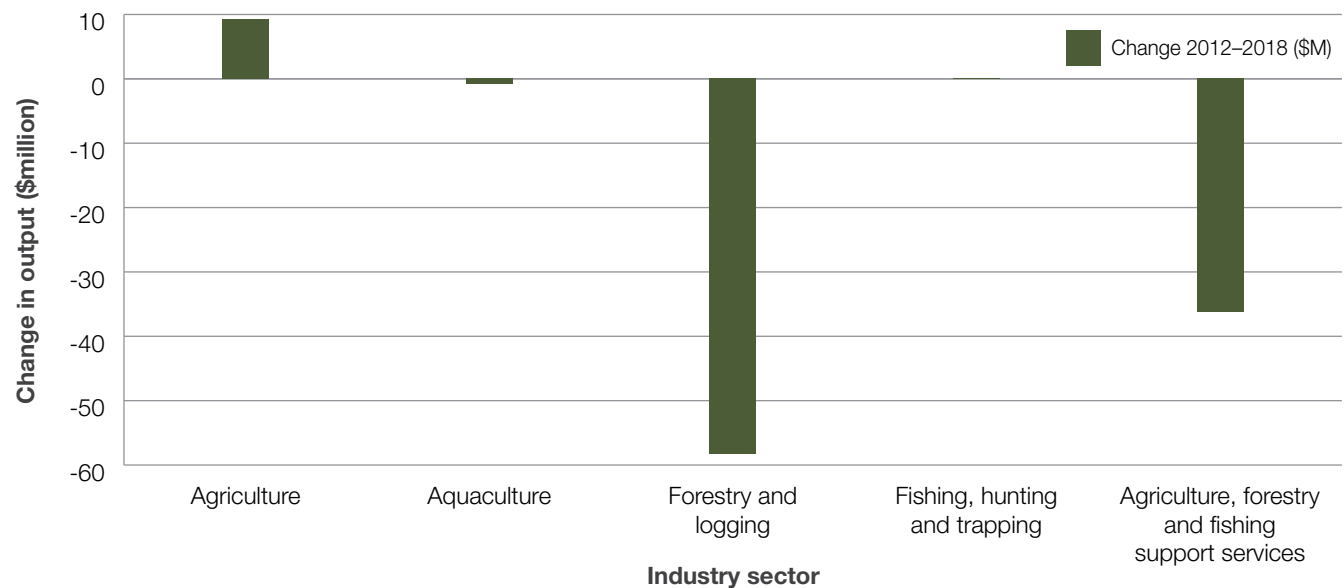
Source: profile.id 2018



Agriculture

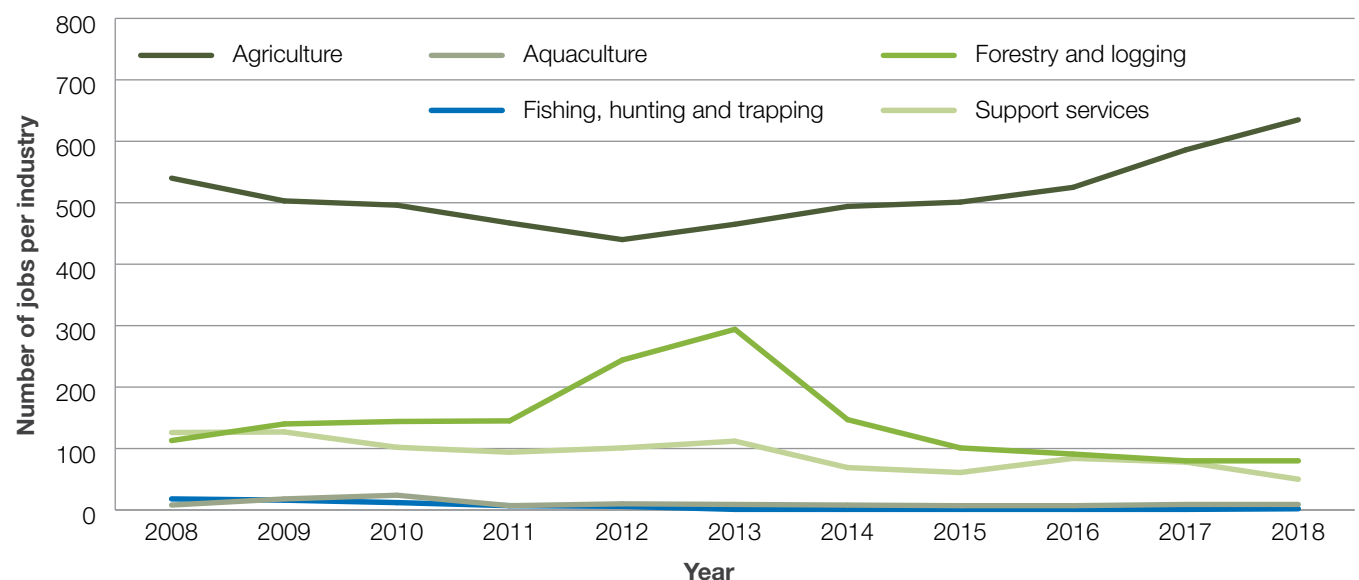
The agriculture industry in The Hills has actually grown in terms of output and number of jobs since 2012.

Figure 14: Change in output (\$million) in agriculture, forestry and fishing sector in The Hills 2012–18



Source: profile.id 2018

Figure 15: Breakdown of jobs in agriculture, forestry and fishing sector 2006–18



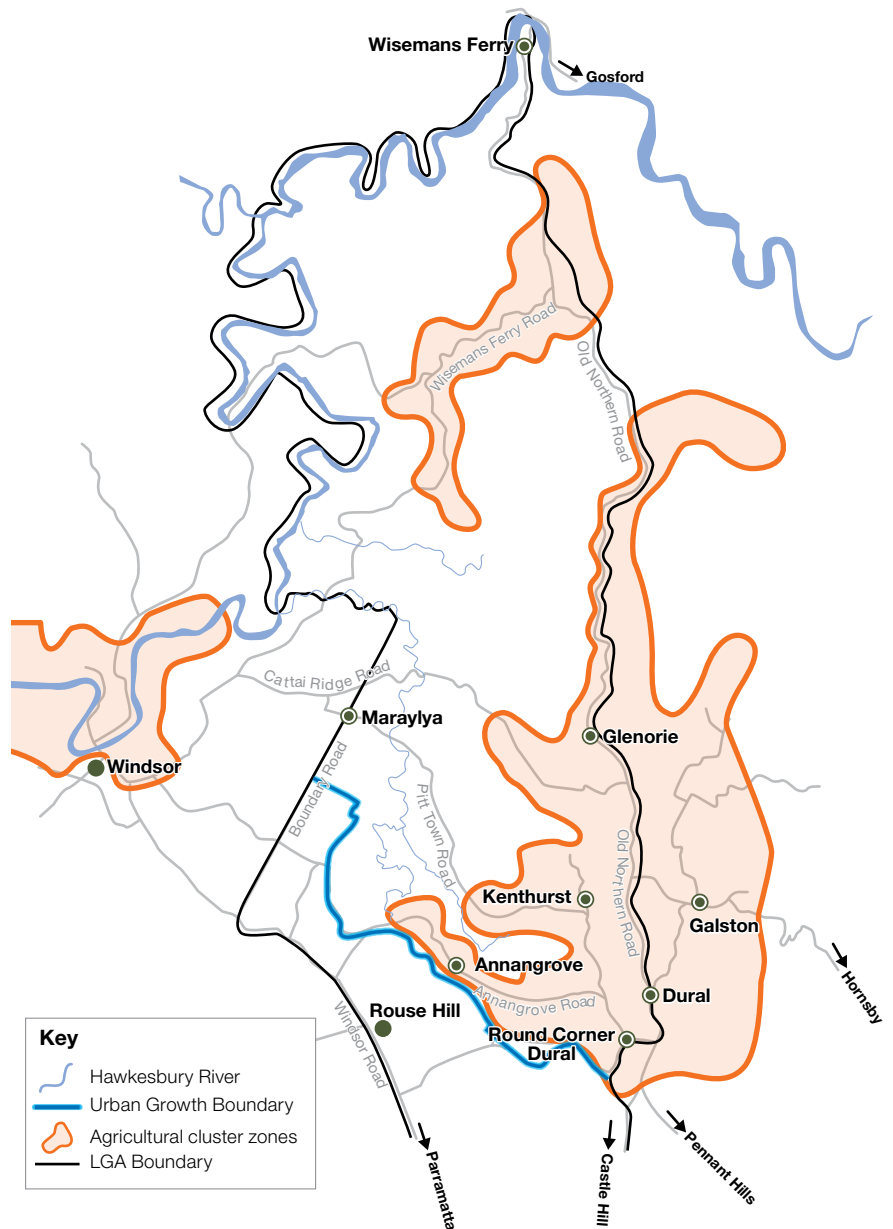
Source: profile.id 2016

3. THE HILLS SHIRE'S RURAL LANDS

Two large agricultural clusters around Wisemans Ferry Road in Maroota in the north of the Shire, and along a large part of the eastern boundary around Middle Dural, Galston and Arcadia (also forming part of Hornsby LGA) focus on horticulture (growing vegetables and tree fruits such as nectarines and peaches).

The most valuable economic contributors are cut flowers and nurseries, which account for approximately three quarters of the total value of agricultural production in the Shire. The Hills is NSW's number one producer of cut flowers, providing 21 per cent of the State's cut flowers, and second highest contributor to nursery-related production. Mushrooms and stone fruit production are the next highest individual contributors to the Shire's agricultural economy.

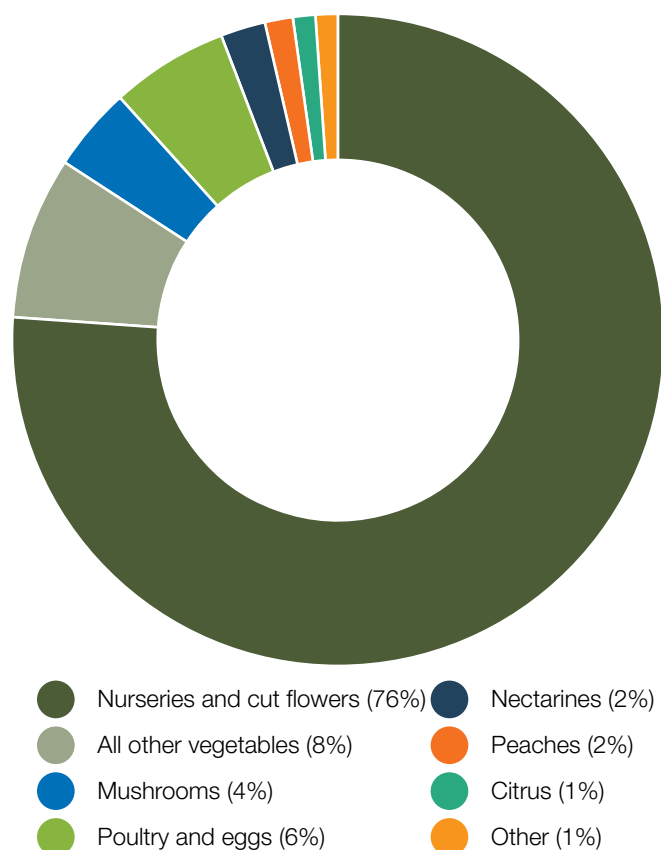
Figure 16: Agricultural clusters – north west Sydney



Source: Combined Hills Shire land use data and Ag Econ Plus report 2017



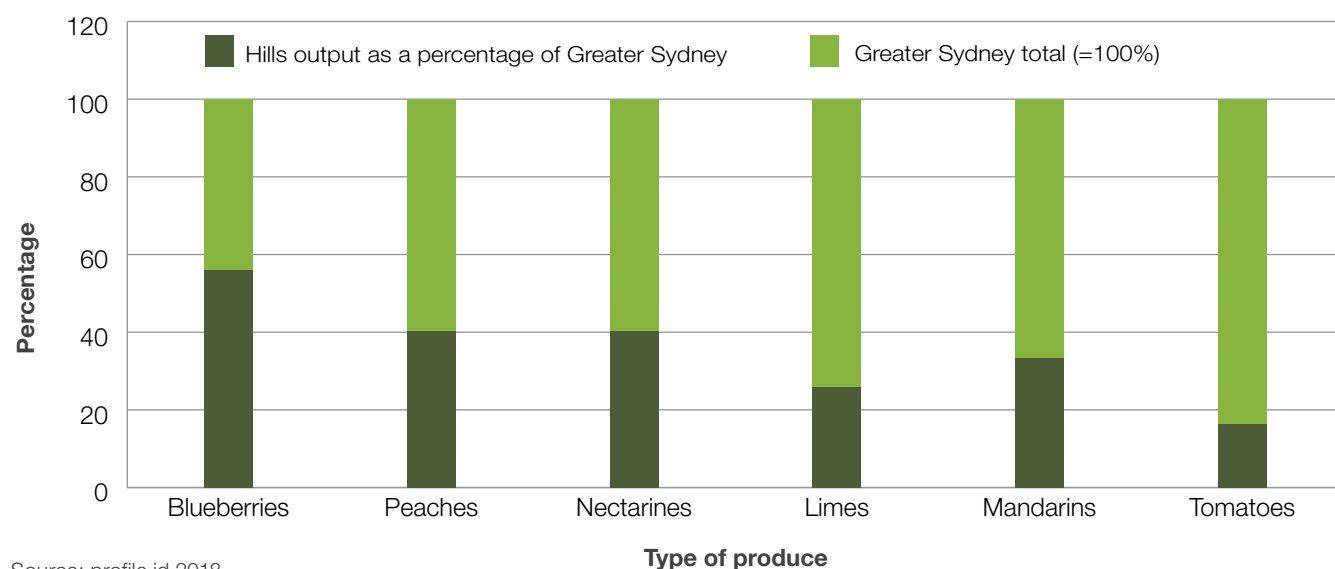
Figure 17: Agricultural production in The Hills Shire 2015–16



The Shire also contributes to Greater Sydney’s agricultural production. For example, blueberry production in The Hills accounts for less than one per cent of the value of agricultural produce of the Shire, yet contributes more than 50 per cent of the overall production of blueberries in Greater Sydney. Similarly, The Hills contributed approximately 40 per cent of the output of Greater Sydney’s peaches and nectarines in 2015–16.

Source: profile.id 2018

Figure 18: Top contributors to Greater Sydney agricultural produce value 2015–16



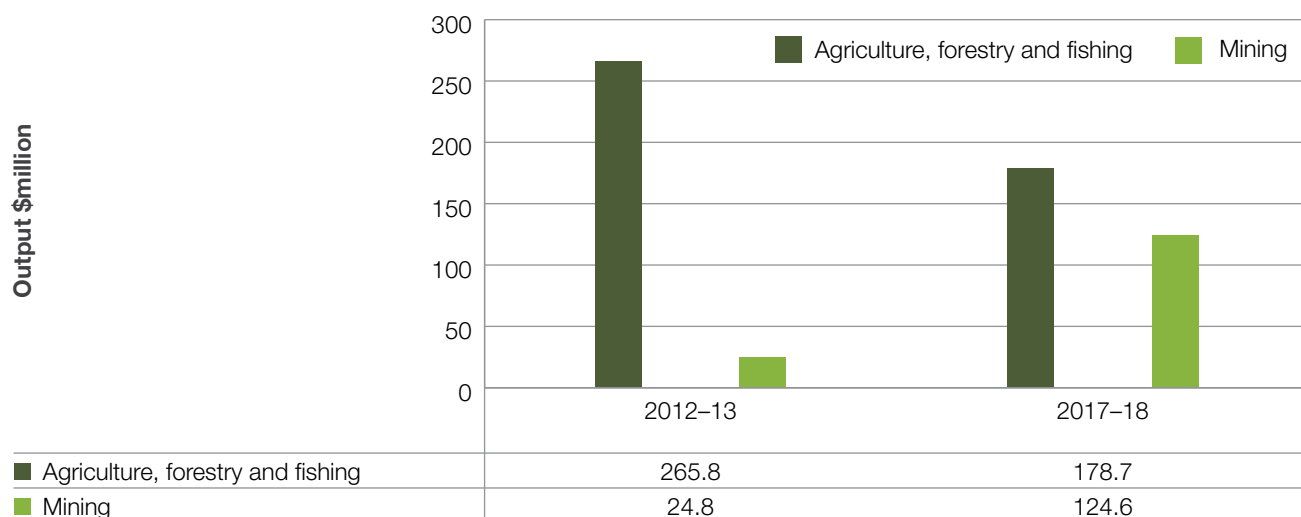
Source: profile.id 2018

Mining

Growth in mining can be attributed to the increase in construction in Sydney, as extractive industries supply raw materials for building and construction. While this benefits the local mining industry, market fluctuations in the construction sector have potential to negatively impact extractive industries.

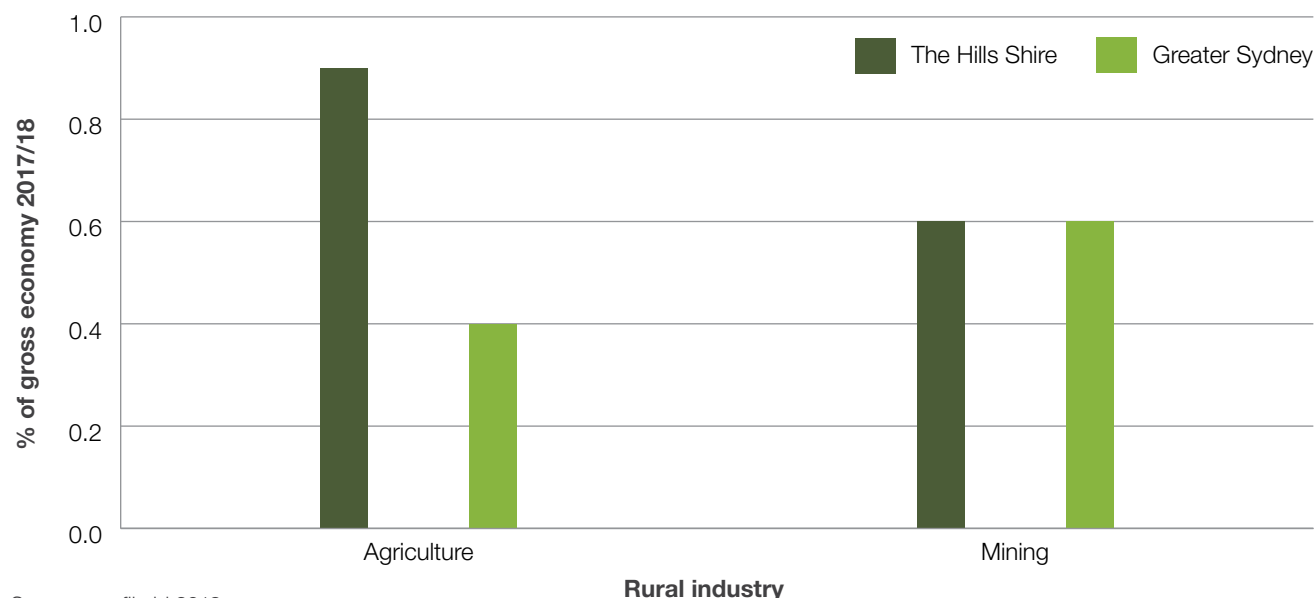
Figure 20 shows that the mining industry contributes the same amount to the Shire's local economy as it does to Greater Sydney's. Agriculture, however, contributes more than double the proportion to the local economy as it does to the Greater Sydney economy, indicating its significance to the Shire.

Figure 19: Economic output for major rural industries in the Hills



Source: profile.id 2018

Figure 20: Percentage of rural industry output compared to Greater Sydney 2017-18



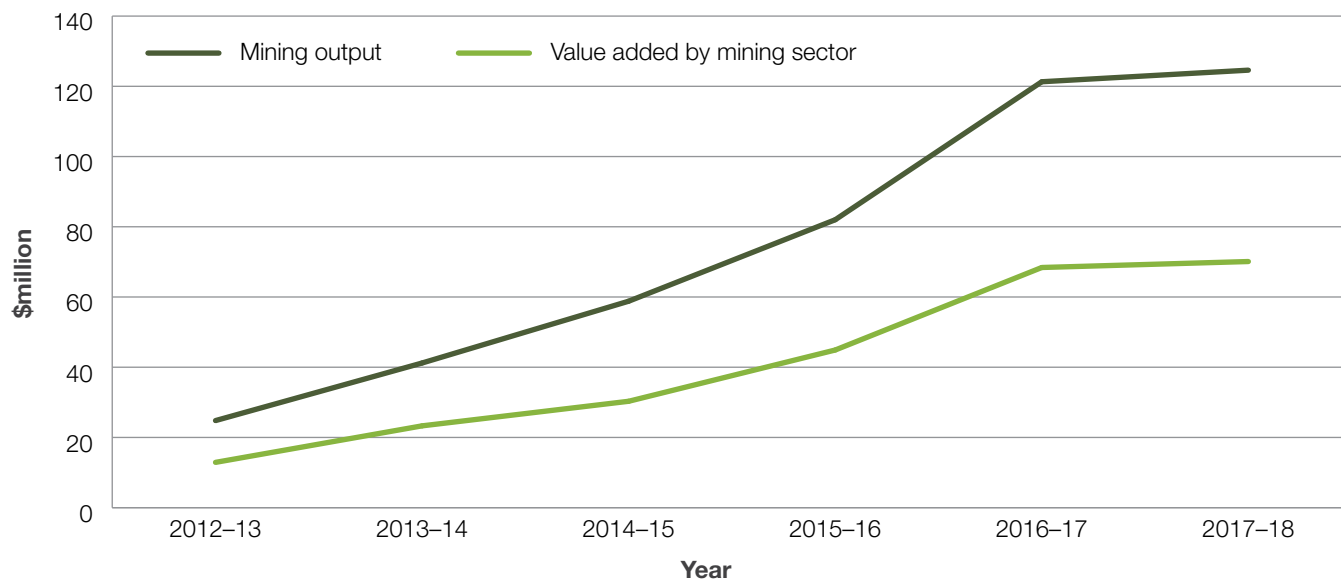
Source: profile.id 2018



Between 2012–13 and 2017–18, mining output increased five-fold, and mining’s value-added contribution increased by almost five and a half times (from

contributing \$12.9 million to The Hills economy in 2012, to \$70.1 million in 2018).

Figure 21: Mining output (\$ value) and value-added contribution to The Hills economy 2012–18

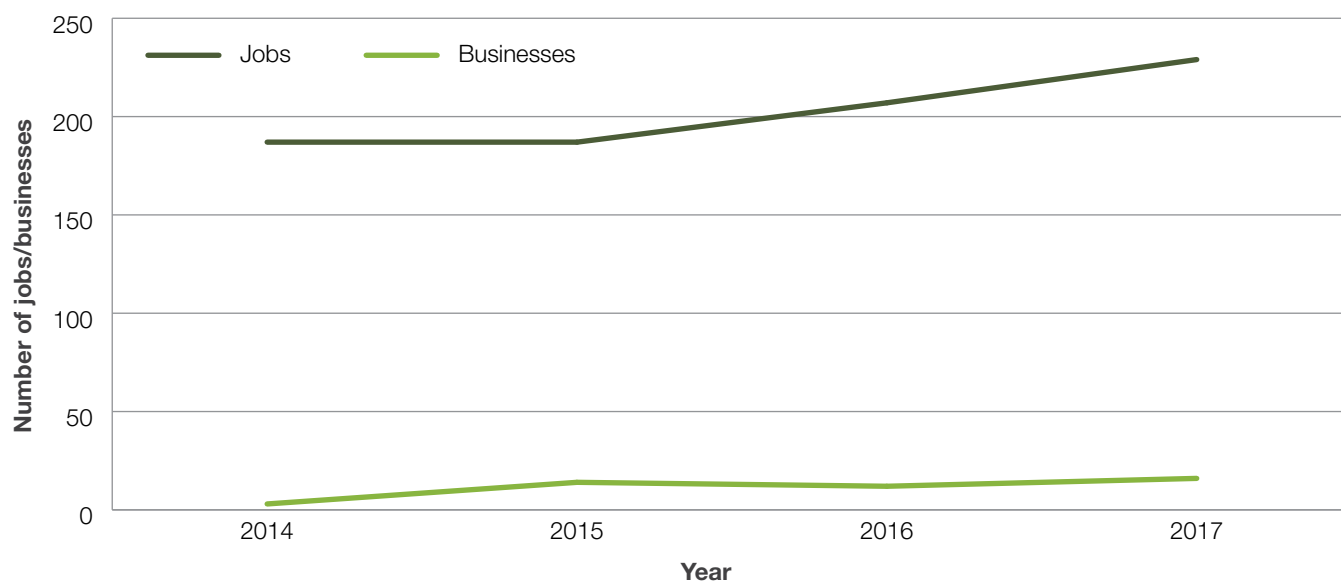


Source: profile.id 2018

Employment opportunities in the mining industry in the rural north of the Shire are concentrated in the RU1 Primary Production zone along Wisemans Ferry Road

in Maroota. The number of mining jobs has increased, as has the number of mining businesses, from three in 2014 to 21 in 2017.

Figure 22: Number of jobs and businesses in the mining industry 2014–17



Source: profile.id 2018

Tourism and rural support services

Tourism and services that support rural industries are significant contributors to the functioning of the rural area and the rural economy's success. Tourism added around \$235 million to the Shire's economy in 2017–18, and comprises more than 10 per cent of local employment — well above the average for NSW (see Figure 24).

Figure 25 shows that the value of tourism to the overall local economy has increased steadily over in the last few years.

Major components of the Shire's tourism industry are located in or based around the Shire's rural area. Farm-gate sales, farmers' markets, eco-tourist facilities, and recreation on the Hawkesbury River combine to offer a rural experience on Sydney's doorstep. Notable tourist facilities and destinations include Riverside Oaks Golf Resort in Cattai and Wisemans Ferry at the northernmost point of the Shire.

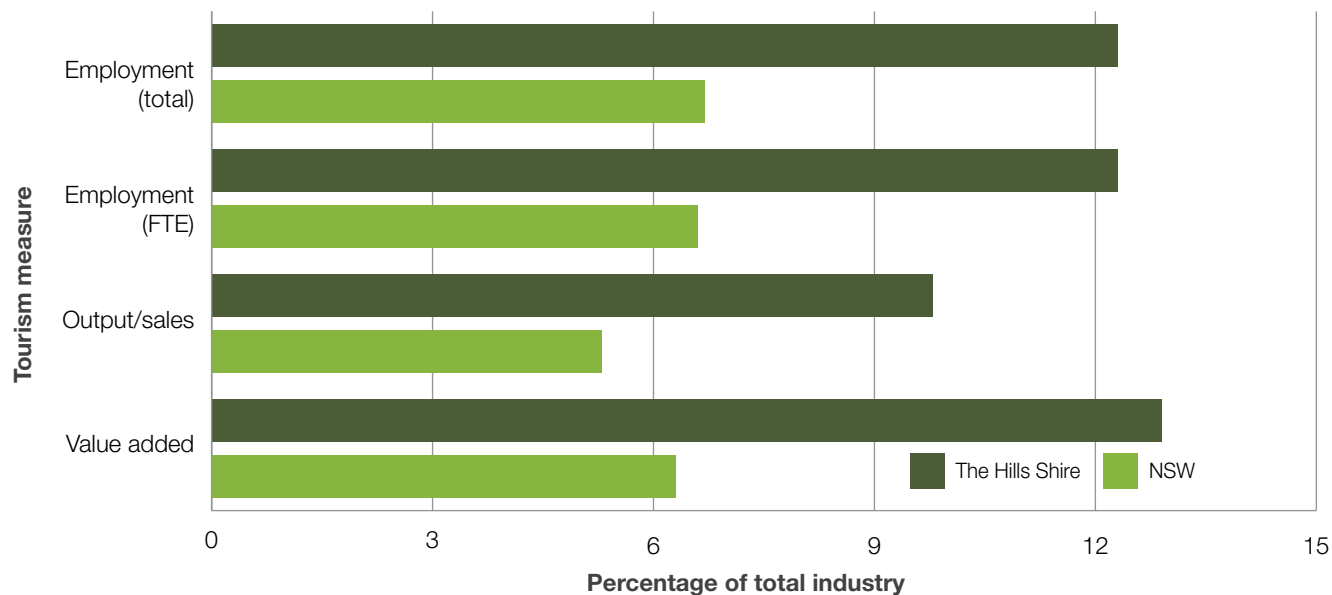
The proportion of international visitors is growing, and, in general, these visitors stay for around 33 days on average and travel to the Shire to visit family. By contrast, domestic overnight stays and day trips are decreasing.



Tourism added around \$235 million to the Shire's economy in 2017–18.”

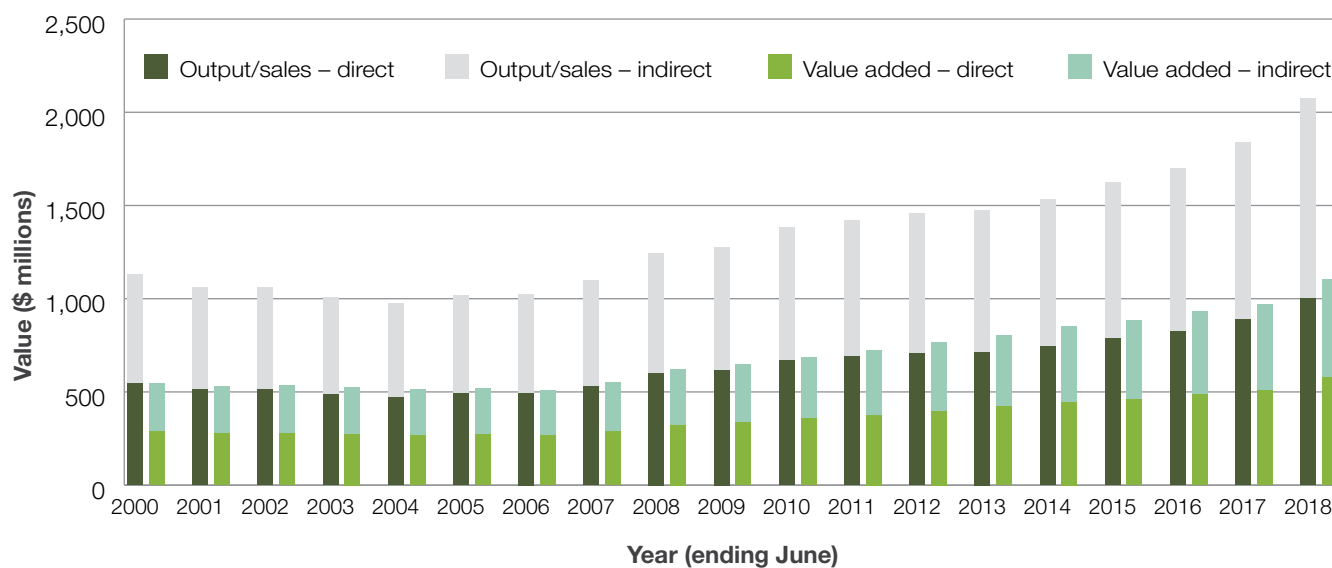


Figure 24: Value of tourism and hospitality to The Hills and NSW economies 2017-18



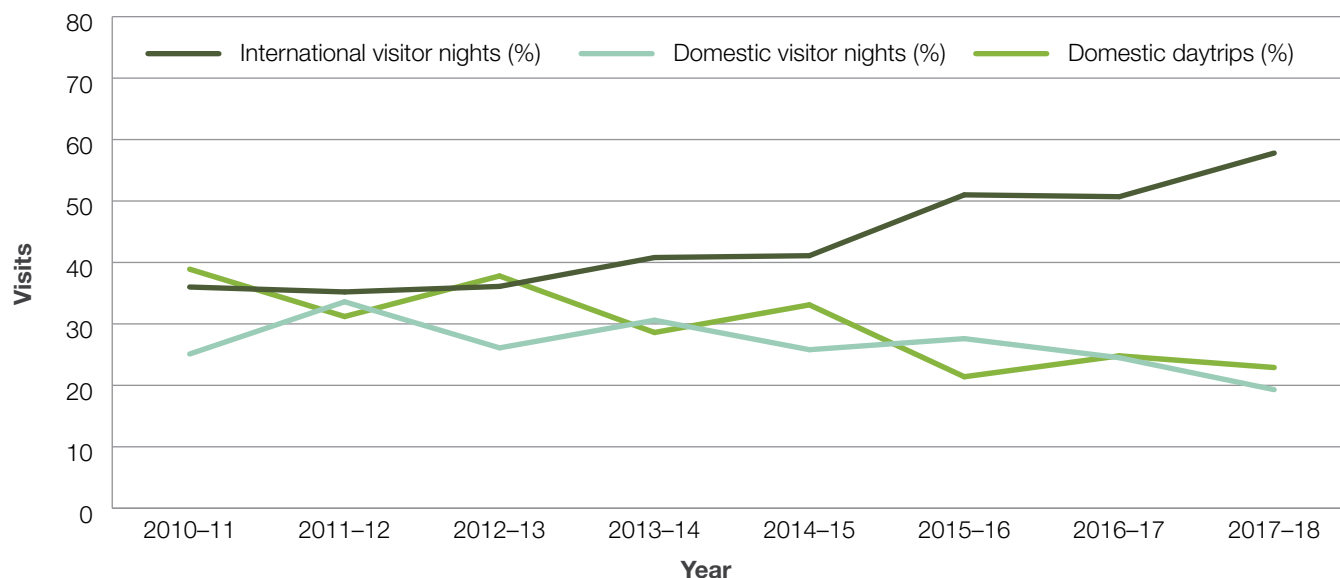
Source: profile.id 2019

Figure 25: Value of tourism and hospitality to The Hills Shire



Source: profile.id 2019

Figure 26: Tourist visits to The Hills Shire



Source: profile.id 2019

A portion of Wisemans Ferry was zoned SP3 Tourism in 2012. As yet, this specialised zoning has not translated to increased tourist activity as private ownership and land fragmentation prevent access to the river.

Along most of the Hawkesbury River foreshore within the Shire, land is in private ownership. While this enables the proliferation of private water-ski enterprises in some areas, it largely prevents public access to the waterfront.

Water quality also affects water-based tourism along the Hawkesbury River. Water quality is affected by aquatic life, temperature, flow rate and what takes place on land within the wider catchment. Increased run-off from residences, farms and industries, as well as treated effluent from sewage treatment plants combine to detrimentally affect water quality.

Physical attributes of the rural area also pose challenges for the growth of tourism. In particular, steep topography and vegetation cover render some parts of the Shire inaccessible to people or are at high risk of bushfire.

Minimal local road connections and scant public transport access also limit visitation to tourist destinations in the rural and northern extremities of the Shire. Travelling by public transport from Castle Hill to Wisemans Ferry for example, will require up to 2.5 hours

and will require changing bus routes or transport modes to get there. Frequency is also poor – currently Transport for NSW indicates just two opportunities to undertake this trip each day.

The Hills Shire lends itself to eco-tourism, with a small number of eco-tourism providers offering boutique accommodation in scenic areas.

Rural support services

Equally important to the growth of the rural economy is the ability of services that support rural industries to be located near productive areas. Rural industries and rural supplies provide opportunities for farming equipment to be repaired or maintained; or for goods or materials used in farming and primary industry production to be purchased. They also provide some opportunities for local employment.

Currently access to these services is limited, since rural supplies businesses are not permissible within the RU6 Transition zone, and rural industries businesses are not permissible in the RU1 Primary Production zone. Rural industries towards the north of the Shire may benefit in future from a rural services hub that would cater for these requirements.







4

PLANNING PRIORITIES

This section outlines our priorities for rural lands and how we will achieve these priorities. The planning priorities will guide how we will manage the unique rural area so that the community can enjoy and benefit from it now and well into the future. The priorities are:

- manage and protect the rural-urban interface
- plan for housing in the right locations and renew and create great places
- retain and manage the Shire's rural productive capacity
- encourage support activities and tourism in rural areas.



Manage and protect the rural-urban interface

This relates to Planning Priority 16 in *Hills Future 2036*.

Rationale

Our previous Rural Lands Strategy outlined a growth management philosophy to balance growth with protection of rural land. With the exception of NSW Government-led planning for growth area precincts and a small number of other developments, we have generally limited urban development to the Shire's existing urban area.

Given the significant amount of existing residential zoned land available, there is no need to convert rural or environmental zoned land to residential uses.

The Greater Sydney Region Plan states that urban development should be limited to the urban area (Strategy 29.2), and that "rural-residential development is not an economic value of the Metropolitan Rural Area".

To support this, we will implement an urban growth boundary, largely based on the formal boundary between the metropolitan urban and metropolitan rural areas. The boundary will protect rural lands for productive uses and scenic values, avoiding levels of development more suited to urban areas.

An urban growth boundary will:

- respond to directions within the region and district plans to protect the Metropolitan Rural Area
- reinforce the existing land use zoning system
- assist in reducing pressure on environmentally sensitive lands within the rural area
- refocus on the scenic and productive values of the Shire's rural lands
- signal to property speculators that the rural area is valued for its productive and scenic qualities, and is not urban land in-waiting
- give property owners in rural areas greater certainty about the future of their land.

Future reviews of the *Greater Sydney Region Plan* may identify the need for additional urban areas as part of a structured and carefully planned approach to managing the long-term growth of Sydney. If this occurs, we will work with the NSW Government to select appropriate areas for consideration.



Figure 27: Urban Growth Boundary



Secondary dwellings and seniors' housing

Making planning controls for secondary dwellings and seniors' housing clearer and easier to understand for land on the rural-urban fringe will reduce pressure on rural land and lead to an appropriate level of development.

We are reviewing secondary dwelling controls for rural land use zones. Residents with more modest established homes in rural areas have indicated a desire to see the permissible floor space of secondary dwellings increase from the current limit of 60 square metres. Rural sites present fewer constraints in relation to the siting of a secondary dwelling. Larger land areas mean that both the principal and the secondary dwelling benefit from private open space and fewer negative impacts such as overlooking or overshadowing within the site and to adjoining sites.

In circumstances where the potential for negative impact is low, a secondary dwelling might be supported with a floor area larger than 60 square metres, regardless of the size of the principal dwelling.

We are working with the Greater Sydney Commission and other stakeholders in relation to seniors' housing developments under the *State Environmental Planning Policy (Housing for seniors and people with a disability) 2004*. Rural locations are not appropriate for older people

who require ready access to services, particularly for medical and health-related needs. Lower levels of public transport in rural areas also limit easy movement around the community.

A revised approach to Site Compatibility Certificates under this SEPP could reduce the instances of inappropriate levels of development at the rural-urban interface.

Council will:

- Implement an urban growth boundary that largely follows the boundary of the RU6 Transition zone.
- Not support planning proposals or development applications seeking to intensify urban land uses above the urban growth boundary.

Actions

- Apply the outcomes of Greater Sydney Commission working group in relation to seniors' housing in the rural area.



Plan for housing in the right locations and renew and create great places

This relates to planning priorities 7 and 9 in *Hills Future 2036*.

Rationale

Place-based planning will facilitate limited, sympathetic residential and commercial growth in rural villages, helping them to renew as vibrant and welcoming places while maintaining their character.

Place-based planning examines locations in their entirety – land use, function, look and feel, design of buildings, environment – and plans and manages them as places for people rather than simply locations. It takes into account an area's existing character as well as its desired future character, which in large part is informed by its community.

Community involvement lends legitimacy and weight to any policy outcomes and inevitably serves to increase community confidence with the planning system.

Rural villages

Place-based planning requires any application for the expansion of rural villages to fit within criteria developed in consultation with the potentially affected communities.

In addition to satisfying criteria identified by the community, future proposals for the expansion of rural villages would be required to satisfy the criteria listed in Table 1, with an emphasis on infrastructure provision, environmental protection and avoiding bushfire risk.

Coordinated village expansion and renewal will be limited on fragmented land. Consolidated larger lots create scope to plan on a wider scale rather than on a site-by-site basis. This also allows more efficient infrastructure provision, especially for services such as drinking water and electricity.

Local character

The Department of Planning, Industry and Environment is considering character overlays as an option within Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan (LEP) mapping to protect areas of exceptional local character. Mapped overlay areas could be linked to character statements or area-specific development control plans, bestowing greater weight on the desired future character of these areas. Given the importance of maintaining the rural character of The Hills, character overlays may be useful to the planning for the renewal of rural villages.

We will consult with the community to formulate a local character statement for the RU6 Transition zone, especially in Annangrove, Glenorie and Kenthurst. This statement will link to mapped character overlays in The Hills LEP and will inform place-based planning.

We require additional zone objectives and a review of permissible uses to further recognise the rural and scenic character of the RU6 Transition zone, and the need for land uses and intensity of development to be compatible with this character. The features of this area are significant enough to warrant specific objectives that promote land uses compatible with the scenic landscape and dominant rural residential character.

Table 1: Planning proposal criteria for rural village expansion

Criteria	New proposals must demonstrate
1. Infrastructure provision	Timely provision of utilities, transport, open space and communication infrastructure
2. Access	Access to a range of transport options that allow efficient travel between homes, jobs and services
3. Housing diversity	Provision of a range of housing types
4. Employment lands	Provision of employment opportunities or access to employment areas
5. Avoidance of risks	Land use conflicts are avoided and safe evacuation routes are available (flood and bushfire)
6. Natural resources	Responsible use of natural resources and minimisation of development footprint
7. Environmental protection	Protection and enhancement of biodiversity, air quality, heritage and waterways
8. Quality and equity in services	Access to health, education and other essential services

Preliminary investigation areas

The rural villages of Kenthurst, Annangrove and Glenorie would benefit from revitalisation and a modest amount of residential and commercial growth. Following a place-based and consultative approach, the preliminary investigation areas as detailed on the following pages will be examined further.

All preliminary investigation areas are confined to the RU6 Rural Transition zone and are located on land that is relatively free from constraints such as sensitive vegetation, steeply sloping land and creek lines.

Defining the scope for the limited expansion of rural villages presents opportunities for us to maintain the character of the villages and articulate a desired future character.

These three rural villages already contain a number of essential services (Table 2).



We have a very significant rural-urban interface that requires our intervention and our protection.”

Mayor of The Hills Shire, Dr Michelle Byrne



Table 2: Preliminary assessment of provision of essential services in rural villages

Service	Annangrove	Kenthurst	Glenorie
Primary education	✓	✓	✓
Secondary education	✗	✗	✗
Post office	✗	✓	✓
Rural fire station	✓	✓	✓
Medical centre	✓	✓	✓
Community facility	✓	✓	✓
			(Hornsby)
Sporting field	✓	✓	✓
			(Hornsby)
Petrol station	✓	✓	✗
			(DA under assessment)
Reticulated water	✓	✓	✓
Reticulated sewerage	✗	✗	✓
Cafe or restaurant	✓	✓	✓
Grocer	✓	✓	✓

We have identified locations that could potentially support increased residential growth in Kenthurst, Annangrove and Glenorie. A greater degree of housing diversity may appeal to a wider variety of potential residents, and may provide housing options for younger people or families who would like to remain in the area yet cannot afford a larger home, or downsizers seeking a more manageable property in the same area. Young professionals and families are increasingly leaving the rural area of the Shire; there are a variety of reasons for this, however high median house prices and limited choice are contributing factors.

The consultation process to develop a character statement for the RU6 Transition Zone will also clarify the priorities that communities within and around rural villages have for the renewal and limited growth of these places. These priorities will inform the place-based development criteria that any proposal to expand these villages would be required to satisfy. Any proposal to change planning controls in these areas would need to include a holistic plan for the entire area, not just a few less-constrained sites.

Glenorie

Glenorie village on Old Northern Road straddles The Hills and Hornsby LGAs. Residents benefit from a full-sized supermarket and other specialty retailers, a medical centre and pharmacy, post office and rural fire station. We will collaborate with Hornsby Council regarding growth in Glenorie, due to the location of important social infrastructure within the Hornsby LGA.

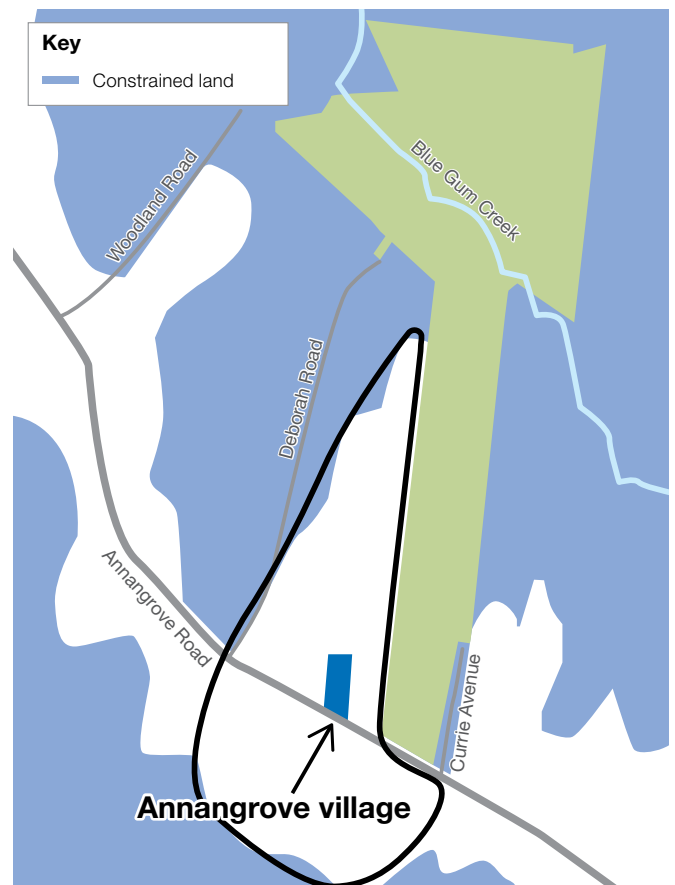
Figure 28: Preliminary investigation area – Glenorie village



Annangrove

The small commercial centre of Annangrove on Annangrove Road lies mid-way between Kenthurst and Box Hill. While no residential zoned land surrounds the centre, it provides nearby rural residents with a grocer, butcher, bottle shop, petrol station, cafe and restaurant. The Imam Hasan Islamic Centre is located between the commercial centre and Annangrove Park, with Sydney Plant Market on the southern side of Annangrove Road.

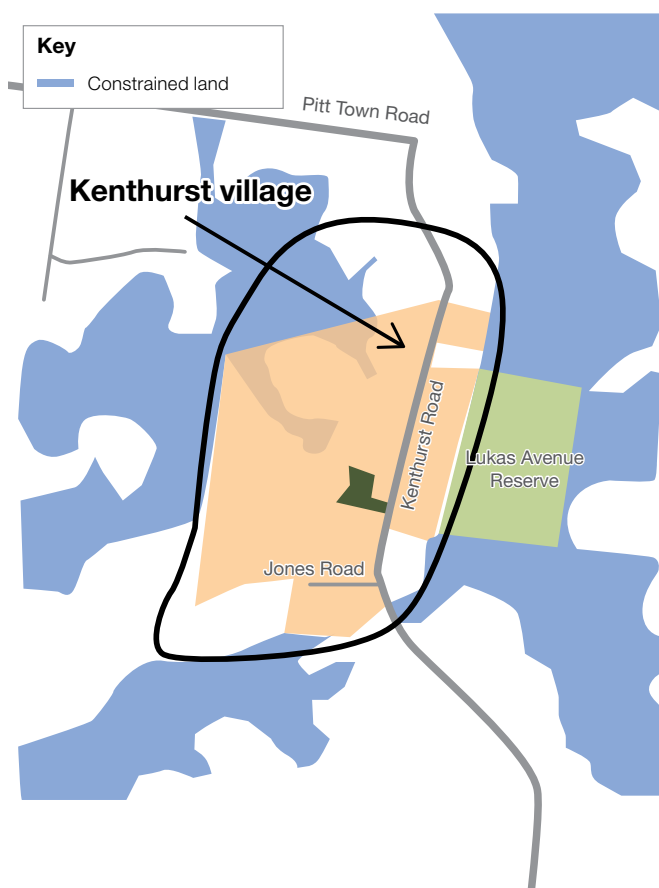
Figure 29: Preliminary investigation area – Annangrove village



Kenthurst

Kenthurst is on Kenthurst Road and consists of a small commercial area, low-density residential zoned land, large residential lots on the western side of Kenthurst Road and Lukas Avenue Reserve. There is also a seniors' living complex at the southern end of the village.

Figure 30: Preliminary investigation area – Kenthurst village



Council will:

- Limit residential growth to within the existing and planned residential zoned areas below the urban growth boundary.
- Work with the community to extend local character mapping to identified areas of significant local character, and develop local character statements to guide development in these areas.

Actions

- Investigate opportunities for limited residential expansion in rural villages in line with the criteria recommended in the *Rural Strategy 2019*.

“

A greater degree of housing diversity may appeal to a wider variety of potential residents.”

Retain and manage the Shire's rural productive capacity

This relates to Planning Priority 4 in *Hills Future 2036*.

Rationale

Increasing the intensity and efficiency of productive rural industries and improving rural connectivity will allow operators to grow their businesses.

Certainty surrounding the protection of these lands will encourage growth in the agricultural and extractive industries sectors, providing greater levels of assurance around the future uses of the land.

Intensive horticulture

Horticulture in The Hills is moving towards more intensive modes of production such as hydroponics within greenhouses, as there is limited supply of productive agricultural land within the Shire. To assist in this evolution, we will review site coverage and hours of operation controls for agricultural land in the Hills Development Control Plan (DCP). This may enable agricultural operators to maximise their efficiency in instances where the surrounding uses are similar and where it is not likely to have an adverse noise impact.

Given this shift in focus, intensive horticulture activity in the Shire could benefit by forging links with Western Sydney University's Greenhouse Research Education Training Facility at its Hawkesbury Campus. This facility aims to "help Australian growers tap into the latest research and practices within greenhouse crop production to make their operations more efficient, and meet the increased demand for fresh food that can be delivered quickly to markets." (Western Sydney University)

Partnering with tertiary institutions to explore best-practice in intensive horticulture will increase our capacity to facilitate the best land use outcomes for this industry. It may also enable local rural businesses to introduce new technologies and practices with confidence.

Our *Economic Growth Plan* outlined in the *Productivity and Centres Strategy 2019* will target key rural industries and articulate how greater regional connectivity will be able to assist in the growth and development of existing businesses as well as attracting new businesses to the Shire.

Council actively assists small business and will extend this to rural businesses. By identifying trends within agricultural production such as modular farming and vertical greenhouses and determining where these new methods could be most appropriate, we will be able to attract new operators to base their operations within the Shire.

Example of intensive plant production in greenhouse



Source: Western Sydney University 2018



Rural connectivity

The size of the Shire and relatively small number of road and public transport connections within the rural area poses supply chain challenges for producers in the agricultural and mining industries. This limited connectivity reduces the opportunities to expand into new markets, curtailing the growth prospects of rural businesses.

Producers must be able get their products to market quickly and efficiently, and have opportunities to expand into new markets. Currently, geographical constraints limit the supply of agricultural produce and extractive materials to destinations to the south, east and west of the Shire. Coupled with higher density urban areas and increases in congestion, better ways of accessing markets and distribution points are essential.

We are seeking clarity surrounding the location of the Outer Sydney Orbital between north west Sydney and the Central Coast. The Orbital would also provide a direct road and freight link to the Central Coast and the future Western Sydney International Airport, creating potential for new market opportunities and greater supply chain efficiencies. *Future Transport 2056* identifies the north west Sydney to Central Coast section of the orbital as a visionary initiative for investigation beyond 20 years; however, we believe this is of such strategic importance that investigations should be brought forward.

New ways of farming

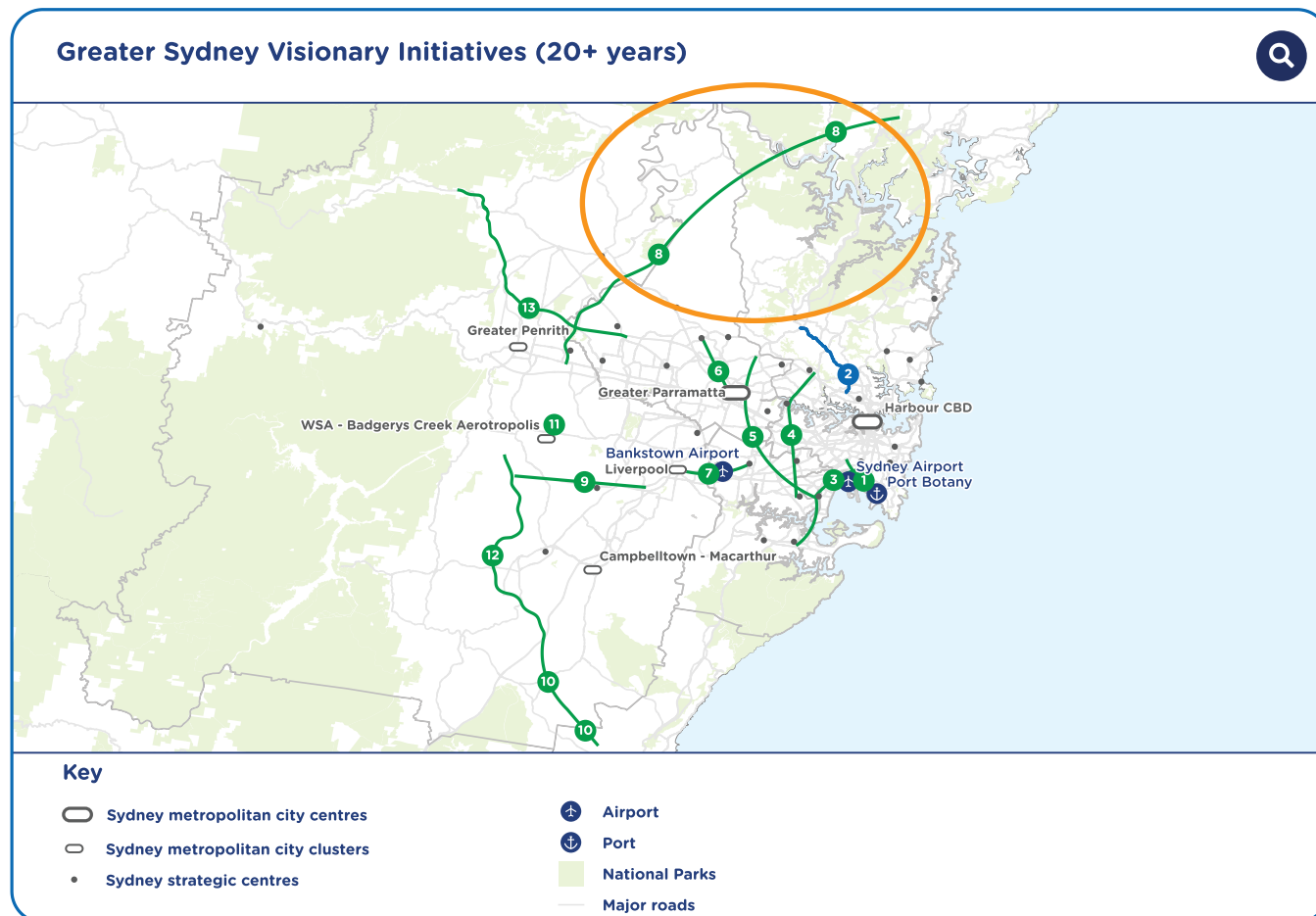


Source: Modular Farms Co. 2019



Limited connectivity reduces the opportunities to expand into new markets.”

Figure 31: Greater Sydney visionary initiatives (20+ years) – Outer Sydney Orbital

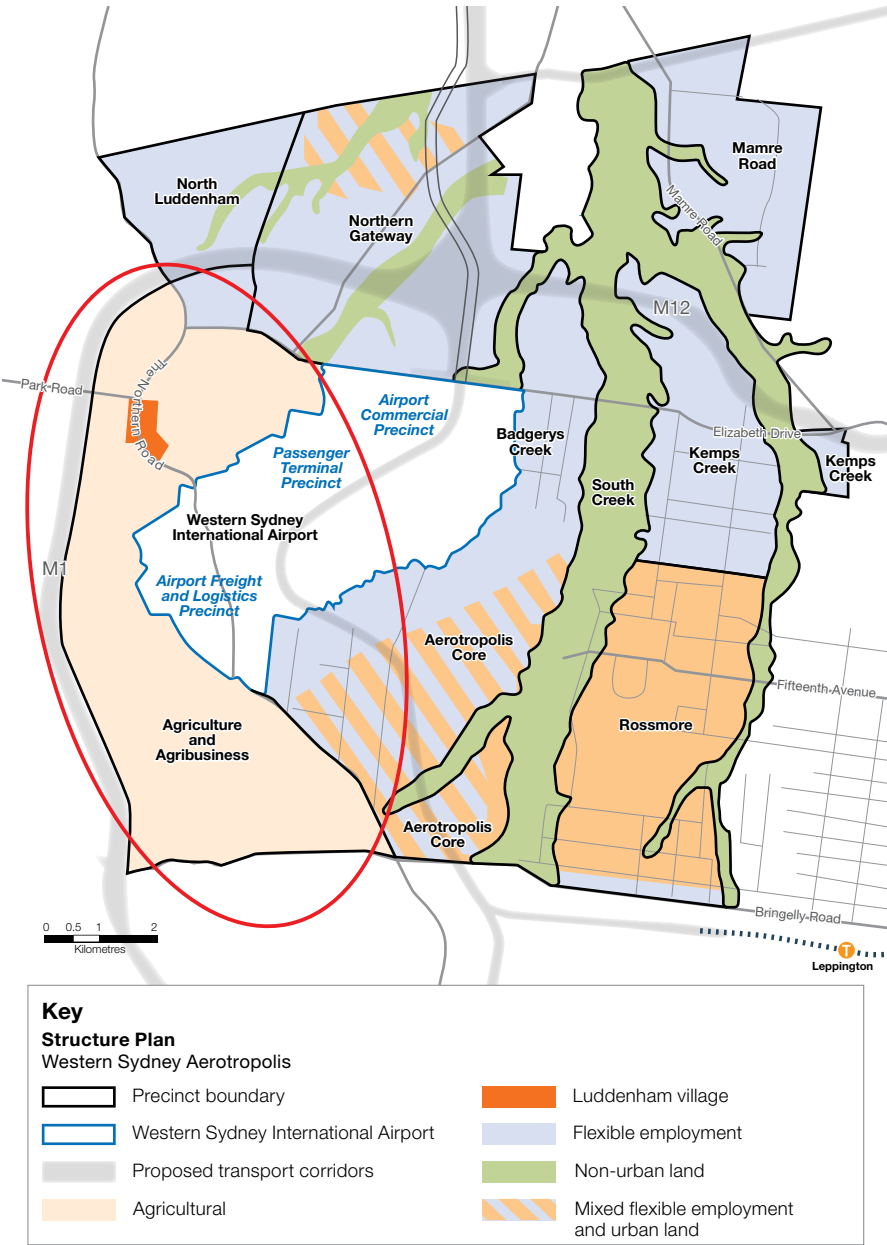


Source: *Future Transport 2056*

In addition, certainty surrounding the Outer Sydney Orbital alignment will assist in the Shire's rural productive industries alongside the planned future agriculture and agribusiness precinct within the Western Sydney Aerotropolis (Figure 31).



Figure 32: Western Sydney International Airport Stage 1 Plan – Structure Plan



Source: NSW Department of Planning and Environment 2018

Rural residential development and village expansion

Rural residential development contributes to housing diversity in the Shire, although environmental, social and financial costs are often higher in rural areas compared to urban residential areas and must be managed to avoid conflicts with productive rural and environmental uses.

Future rural residential development or village expansion needs to consider the efficient and sensitive provision of services and infrastructure and minimise impacts on rural production and environmental values. Where this is not possible, rural residential development will not be considered. The criteria in Table 1 would need to be satisfied in order to allow further rural residential development.

Rural cluster subdivision will continue to facilitate limited rural residential development within the RU2 Rural Landscape and RU6 Transition zones in conjunction with protecting environmentally sensitive lands.

Recent amendments to the Standard Instrument LEP include a clause 5.16 that seeks to “minimise potential land use conflict between existing and proposed development on land in the rural, residential or environment protection zones concerned (particularly between residential land uses and other rural land uses)”.

4. PLANNING PRIORITIES

This clause enables Council to consider “whether or not the development is likely to have a significant impact on land uses that, in the opinion of the consent authority, are likely to be preferred and the predominant land uses in the vicinity of the development”. It opens some opportunity to identify the importance of productive rural land uses and will be considered for inclusion as part of the Hills LEP.

Limiting residential development in rural areas retains productive rural land remains for agriculture and provides certainty to rural landowners and producers.

Council will:

- Protect productive agricultural lands across the Shire from land uses that may create land use conflict.
- Forge links between The Hills Shire producers and Western Sydney University’s Greenhouse Research Education Training Facility at Hawkesbury and encourage intensification of horticulture activity, including hydroponics and greenhouses.
- Encourage better ways to access markets and distribution points to benefit agricultural and extractive materials producers.
- Work with the NSW Government to preserve land for, and build, the section of the Outer Sydney Orbital between north west Sydney and the Central Coast to open new markets and supply chain efficiencies for agricultural and extractive industries.

Actions

- Review our planning controls and permissible uses in rural zones to minimise land use conflict and maintain desired character.
- Investigate using the optional Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan clause 5.16 to ensure consideration of existing rural uses when assessing applications for rural subdivision and dwellings.



Encourage support activities and tourism in rural areas

This relates to Planning Priority 5 in *Hills Future 2036*.

Rationale

Tourism

The Shire's rural landscape and Hawkesbury River foreshore provide opportunities to develop tourism, particularly caravan parks, campgrounds, and bed and breakfast, farm-stay and eco-tourism accommodation and facilities in appropriate locations. The existing SP3 specialist tourist zone could form part of the way forward in growing the tourist economy. Improvements and expansions of public wharves along the Hawkesbury River could also help to revitalise tourism along the foreshore.

While farmers' markets are typically found in urban areas where they can reach a larger number of customers, productive rural lands are vital in their survival. The ability to locate these markets close to where the goods are produced ensures efficiencies in the supply chain.

Encouraging tourist facilities to comply with recognised national guidelines for eco-tourism and to become certified eco-tourist providers will not only boost the local profile of these facilities, but contribute to sustainable development outcomes in sensitive environmental areas.

Our *Economic Growth Plan* will focus on tourism. The marketing and development of tourism opportunities requires ongoing collaboration with numerous stakeholders including other levels of government, adjacent local councils – Hawkesbury and Hornsby – and chambers of commerce.

Rural support activities

Recent changes to the Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan allow small-scale intensive livestock agriculture in appropriate rural areas without development consent. Small farms that can accommodate relatively low numbers of livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs or poultry) can operate under this clause. We will work further to identify areas within the

RU1 Primary Production zone where these uses could take place as part of our *Economic Growth Plan*.

To provide adequate support services for rural industries, we will review the permissibility of *rural supplies* and *rural industries* uses in the RU1 and RU6 zones. In addition, we will work with stakeholders to investigate the feasibility of and potential locations for a future rural services hub in the north of the Shire. Identification of a preferred centralised location for these uses provides certainty to potential services that support rural industries as well as potential rural industry operators and producers.

Council will:

- Value the contribution that rural industries make to Greater Sydney's economy and protect productive agricultural land from development pressures, particularly along the rural-urban fringe.
- Discourage planning proposals which seek to rezone viable agricultural land for residential purposes.
- Investigate ways to grow tourism in the Shire.

Actions

- Identify potential locations for a rural services hub in the Shire's north.
- Review planning controls and permissible uses in rural zones to facilitate land uses that will support and serve rural industries and encourage tourism in appropriate locations.

Future work

- Investigate aligning planning controls for eco-tourism facilities to guidelines for eco-certification.
- Investigate potential for appropriate expansion of or improvements to public wharves along Hawkesbury River.
- Increase collaboration with Hawkesbury and Hornsby councils in the promotion and marketing of recreation on the Hawkesbury River.



IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REVIEW

Implementation and delivery

The actions within this Strategy will be implemented in accordance with the Implementation Plan supporting *Hills Future 2036*.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders who will help us to deliver the actions include:

- residents
- developers, local businesses and chambers of commerce
- surrounding local councils
- State agencies including the Greater Sydney Commission, Department of Planning, Industry and Environment, NSW Environment Protection Authority and Transport for NSW.

Planning instrument

The *Rural Strategy 2019* flags a number of potential changes to planning controls following further investigations. It is anticipated that any identified changes will be completed by the next five-year review.

Proposed amendments that do not warrant further investigations will be included in the pending review of the Hills LEP, intended to be completed before June 2020.

Monitoring and review

The *Rural Strategy 2019* will be monitored annually and a report made to Council to inform future review programs. We expect to review, exhibit and re-adopt the Strategy every five years so it best reflects community concerns and aspirations as well as best practice in land use planning for responsible rural lands management.

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- *Western Sydney Aerotropolis Stage 1 Plan* August 2018
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Nearmap <http://maps.au.nearmap.com/>

profile.id <https://profile.id.com.au/the-hills>

Realestate.com <https://www.realestate.com.au/neighbourhoods>

Transport for NSW

- *Future Transport 2056*
- Trip Planner

Western Sydney University

- The Health of the River System https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/harwest/harwest/the_health_of_the_river_system
- Greenhouse Research Education Training Facility https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/research/centralised_research_facilities/greenhouse_facility



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