

**MITCHELL SHIRE
NEIGHBOURHOOD
SAFER PLACES –
BUSHFIRE PLACES
OF LAST RESORT
PLAN 2018
VERSION 2.2**

**SUB-PLAN OF THE MITCHELL SHIRE MUNICIPAL
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

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Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction and Background	7
1.1	Structure of the Plan.....	8
2.0	Flow chart Showing Process for Identifying, Designating, Establishing and Maintaining NSPs.	9
3.0	Detailed summary of steps for establishing NSPs.....	10
3.1	Overview of the Steps Associated with NSPs.....	10
	Identification of Potential NSP Locations	10
	NSP Subcommittee	11
3.2	Council Assessment of Potential NSP locations.....	11
	Factors applied by Council in assessing the suitability of a location as a potential NSP	11
	Access and Egress.....	13
	Preference of open Space over Buildings.....	13
	Maintenance of potential NSP in accordance with CFA assessment criteria.....	14
	Opening of the NSP	14
	Defendable space and fire suppression activities	14
	Defendability of Buildings	15
	Signage.....	15
	Maintenance and maintainability	15
	Disabled access	16
	Alternative Uses of potential NSP.....	16
	Communication with the community	16
	Public liability insurance	16
3.3	Responsibility of Council assessment of potential NSPs	16
3.4	Council assessment timeframe for potential NSP locations.....	17
3.5	CFA Assessment and Certification of potential NSP locations.....	17
	Responsibility for assessing potential NSPs against guidelines issued by the CFA (CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines)	17
	CFA Assessment Criteria	17
	Notification to CFA of potential NSP locations	18
	Notification of CFA Assessment Results to Council.....	18
3.6	Council Designation of NSPs	18
	Communicating a Designated NSP	18
3.7	Establishment and Maintenance of NSPs following designation.....	19
	Establishing NSPs.....	19
	Maintaining NSPs.....	19
3.8	Annual Inspections of NSPs	20
	Responsibilities for the annual review of NSPs.....	20
	Considerations when undertaking inspections.....	20
	Inspection timelines.....	20
	Decommissioning of NSPs	20

4.0	Assessment tool Council may use in assessing potential NSP locations	22
4.1	NSP Criteria – Assessment Tool	22
	Assessment Details	22
	Location	22
	Factors to consider in assessing potential NSPs	24
5.0	Neighbourhood Safer Places Signage Guidelines.....	27
6.0	Register of Designated NSP Locations Including Completed Council Site Assessments	29
	Appendices	30
	Appendix 1 Neighbourhood Safer Place – Place of Last Resort Checklist – May 2014	31
	Appendix 2 The NSP Online Business System	35
	Appendix 3 Designation of a Neighbourhood Safer Place (Crown Land Managed by a Committee of Management)	37

Authorisation

The Neighbourhood Safer Places – Bushfire Places of Last Resort Plan 2018 has been produced by and with the authority of the Mitchell Shire Council to support the general requirements of the *Emergency Management Act 1986* Section 20(1) and the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* Section 50F to Section 50O.

The Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan supports the Mitchell Shire Council – Municipal Emergency Management Plan via the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee and is endorsed by the Chair of the Committee:

This Plan:

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Signed:



Date: 28th November 2018

Cr Bill Chisholm

Chair Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee

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Version Control

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1.0 Introduction and Background

In its Interim Report, the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommended that Neighbourhood Safer Places – Bushfire Places of Last Resort, or ‘NSPs’, be identified and established to provide persons in bushfire affected areas with a place of last resort during a bushfire.¹

In response to this recommendation, the Victorian Government has introduced the *Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Act 2009* (ESLA Act) which amends the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (CFA Act) and the *Emergency Management Act 1986* (EM Act). The effect of these amendments will be to require the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to certify NSPs against the CFA’s NSP Assessment Guidelines, and Victoria’s Councils to identify, designate, establish and maintain suitable sites as NSPs in their municipal districts.

NSPs are not community fire refuges or emergency relief centres. NSPs are places of last resort during the passage of a bushfire, and are intended to be used by persons whose primary bushfire plans have failed. NSPs are places of relative safety only. They do not guarantee the survival of those who assemble there. Furthermore, there may be serious risks to safety encountered in travelling, and seeking access, to NSPs during bushfire events. Depending on the direction of a particular fire, it may not be a safer place to assemble than other places within the municipal district. At that point in time it almost certainly will be a matter for the individual’s judgment and decision as to which, if any NSP a person or persons should travel in the presence of fire.

NSPs will be assessed by the CFA as providing some protection from immediate risk of direct fire attack, but not necessarily from other risks, such as flying embers.

A potential NSP used by the CFA for operational purposes, may be assessed using the NSP assessment criteria. During the assessment, CFA will consider if those operational activities will be able to continue (to the extent practicable in the circumstances) while the site is being used as an NSP.

This Plan is a neighbourhood safer places plan for the purposes of the legislation, and contains guidelines which have been developed by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) to assist the Council in:

- identifying;
- designating;
- establishing;
- maintaining; and
- decommissioning

sites as NSPs within its municipal district.

This Plan also identifies other matters that should be taken into account in identifying, designating, establishing and maintaining NSPs within the municipality.

¹ Recommendation 8.5, 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Interim Report

1.1 Structure of the Plan

This Plan has been divided up into four distinct sections.

Section 2 contains a flow chart which summarise the process for councils to adopt in identifying, designating, establishing and maintaining NSPs within their municipal district.

Section 3 contains a more detailed summary of the steps summarised in the flow chart found in Section 1.

Section 4 contains an assessment tool for Council to utilise when considering potential NSP locations, prior to designation.

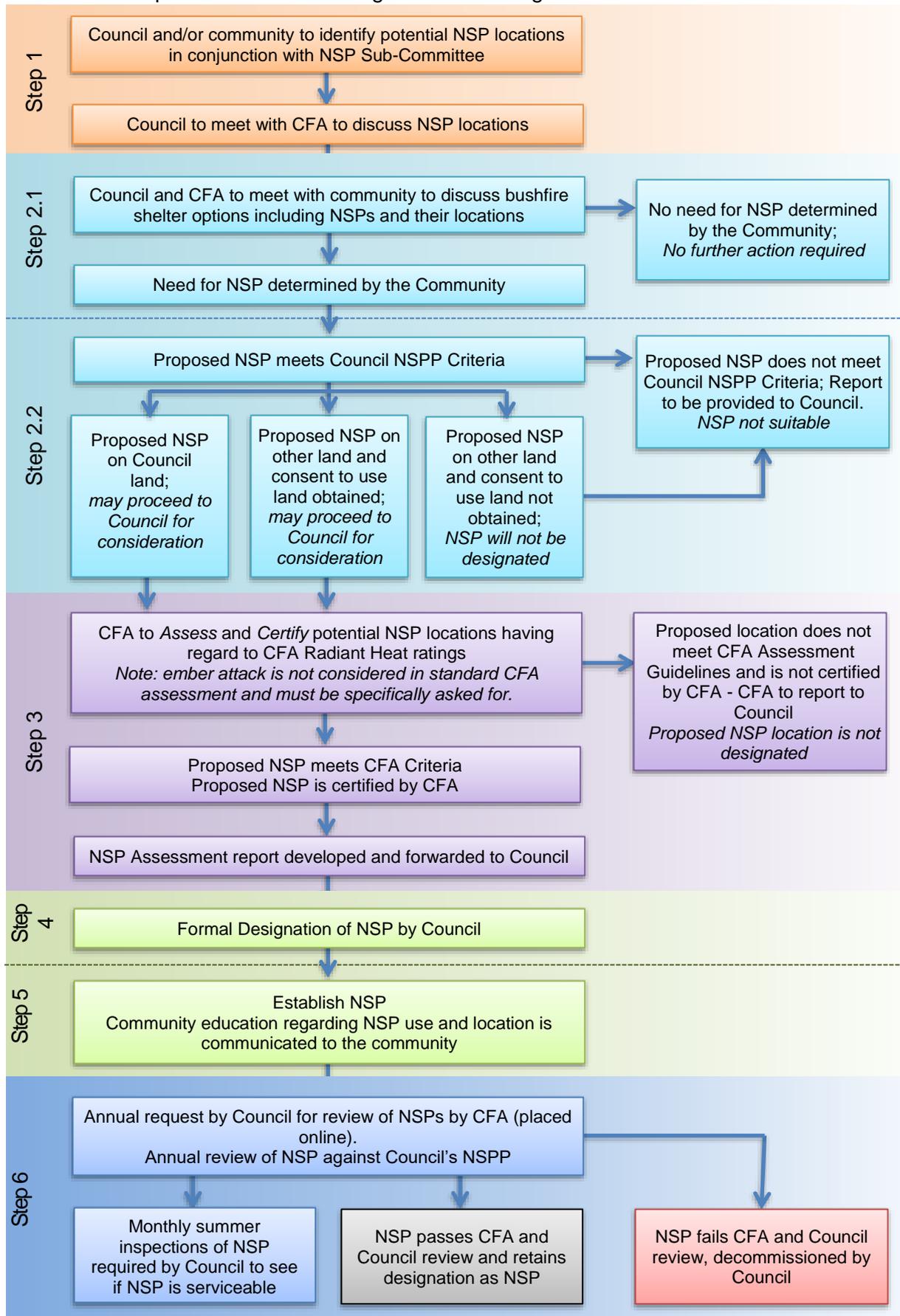
Section 5: contains details of content of signage that Council is required to erect at designated NSP Locations.

Section 6: Register of Designated NSP locations including completed Council site assessments.

Appendices: Information and processes which provides guidance when each designated Neighbourhood Safer Place - Place of Last Resort.

2.0 Flow chart Showing Process for Identifying, Designating, Establishing and Maintaining NSPs.

Overview of the process for establishing and maintaining NSPs.



3.0 Detailed summary of steps for establishing NSPs

3.1 Overview of the Steps Associated with NSPs

Identification of Potential NSP Locations

Responsibility for identifying sites as potential NSPs

Mitchell Shire Council has undertaken identification and management of the NSP process in consultation with Council and the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee. The Country Fire Authority (CFA) has assumed the responsibility of assessing the potential radiant heat flux of proposed NSP locations and ember attack assessments where required.

Ideal Identification Timing

Mitchell Shire Council will attempt to identify any potential NSP's by 30 June each year. This should allow sufficient time for:

- CFA Certification - assessment and certification of the potential NSP by the CFA;
- Council Designation - designation of the potential NSP location by the Council; and
- Establishment - subject to the outcome of the assessment and designation process including consultation with the local community, establishing the NSPs, including the erection of signage and other steps by Council.

The process of NSP identification is ongoing. Following each fire season, Council will assess whether any additional potentially suitable NSP locations can be identified within the municipal district.

Community Consultation

The community may be the 'driver' of an NSP in their community, however the CFA assessment and other factors may preclude the communities preferred site. Before council chooses locations for assessment as an NSP, community meetings should take place to consult directly with communities regarding the need for an NSP in a given area.

Engaging the community via the consultation process will ensure the community understands the outcome of the assessment process to identify, designate, establish and maintain an NSP.

Factors to be considered when identifying potential NSP locations

When identifying potential NSP locations, Council should consider matters such as:

- Community risk profile utilising data such as the Victorian Fire Risk Register (VFRR) human settlement assets identified within the municipal district. Including consideration of 'neighbourhood' catchments within identified are of risk;
- Use of open space as an NSP in the first instance before the consideration of the use of buildings;
- The environment surrounding the potential NSP;
- What other uses are made of the potential NSP, and whether or not those uses could be inconsistent with its designation as an NSP;
- Whether the land on which the potential NSP is located is Council-owned or non-Council owned land;
- Whether there are clear means of access and egress to and from the potential NSP; and
- If there is a determined need identified by the community for an NSP

Council's identification of potential NSP locations should be undertaken by the Municipal Emergency Resource Officer (MERO) and the Municipal Fire Prevention Officer (MFPO), with input from other relevant Council officers as appropriate.

Refer to section 4.0 Assessment Tool council may use in assessing potential NSP locations.

NSP Subcommittee

The NSP Subcommittee (NSPS) is a subcommittee of the Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee (MFMP) and Mitchell Shire Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC) and is responsible for the initial nomination of sites to be used as NSPs. As part of its process, the NSPS will report to the MEMPC, MFMP and Council on any proposed NSPs.

Representation on the NSPS will include committee members from:

- Victoria Police
- Country Fire Authority
- Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning
- Mitchell Shire Council.

The NSPS will coordinate community consultation as part of the NSP identification process. This will involve close liaison with the community through community meetings to identify a local 'need' for an NSP. Determining the local need for an NSP is key to the long term involvement of the community in planning for bushfire shelter options.

Refer to Appendix 1 for a copy of the Neighbourhood Safer Place – Place of Last Resort Checklist May 2014, which can be used to compliment the guidelines in this Plan.

3.2 Council Assessment of Potential NSP locations

Factors applied by Council in assessing the suitability of a location as a potential NSP

Council must assess the potential NSP in accordance with the factors outlined below to determine whether it is suitable to be designated as an NSP. Unless a potential NSP satisfies each of the criteria outlined below, it will not be designated by Council as an NSP.

The Neighbourhood Safer Places subcommittee will be responsible for coordinating the inspection process utilising the membership's expertise with the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee and the Municipal Fire Prevention Committee to assist with the audit and assessment of potential NSPs.

The factors to determine the suitability of the site as an NSP are as follows (Council NSPP Criteria):

a. Consents and rights of access

There must be appropriate land access and tenure arrangements so that Council has the right to:

- Use the site as an NSP;
- Access the site and surrounding areas for maintenance; and
- Erect appropriate signage at the NSP, which includes the approved additional NSP information.

- b. Community consultation
 - The community, through consultation with Council and CFA, understands the risks associated with a potential NSP location in their neighbourhood.
- c. CFA involvement
 - Ensure that CFA is satisfied with the location of NSPs that are placed in their brigade areas.

Council Land

If the potential NSP is on land owned or controlled by Council, appropriate rights of land access and tenure are unlikely to be an issue. However, Council will need to ensure that where Council land is leased or licensed to a third party, it must be possible to put in place appropriate arrangements on reasonably satisfactory and acceptable terms with the tenant or licensee permitting Council to use the land as a potential NSP. In taking these matters into account, Council should consider what alternative uses or arrangements may be made, whether temporarily or semi-permanently, of land under Council control or management.

Crown Land

If the potential NSP is on Crown land not owned or controlled by Council, then the consent of the Crown land manager is required. If the land has been leased or licensed to a third party, such as a caravan park operator, then the consent of the tenant or licensee to use the site as a potential NSP will also be required. In obtaining the consent of the relevant Crown land manager, it will be necessary to consider whether or not the Crown Grant or reservation authorises the site to be used as a potential NSP.

Refer to Appendix 3 Designation of a Neighbourhood Safer Place (Crown Land Managed by a Committee of Management) for designation process.

Private Land

Where it is proposed that a site on privately-owned land is to be used as an NSP, the consent of the relevant landowner (and/or occupier) is required. If the landowner (or occupier) does not consent to the site being designated and used as an NSP on terms which are reasonably satisfactory and acceptable to the Council, it must not be designated and used.

Deed of Consent

Where a potential NSP is located on non-Council land, with the result that consent and rights of access need to be negotiated with the owner and (where necessary) occupier, Council officers responsible for negotiating such consent and rights of access should provide a draft form of consent to the owner/occupier for their consideration. The form of consent will be required to be approved either by Council (through a formal resolution), or by the CEO acting under delegation.

Any amendments to the form of consent which may be requested by the landowner or occupier would need to be thoroughly considered before they are agreed to by Council. If it is not possible or appropriate for Council to agree on amendments that may be requested to the consent document, then the proposed NSP should not be designated by Council.

The form of consent may require a contractual licence. This licence may need to address issues such as responsibility for damage, and maintenance of the NSP.

Access and Egress

Council must assess whether there is sufficient access to the potential NSP which will allow:

- anticipated potential numbers of people to move to and from the site; and
- the CFA and other emergency services to attend the site for asset and personnel protection activities and operations.

Council must assess potential access and egress routes, bearing in mind the fact that NSPs are places of last resort.

As people may be seeking access to an NSP in a rushed or panicked state, a number of people could be seeking access in a relatively short time and visibility could be affected by smoke, easily navigable routes to and from an NSP are crucial.

In considering whether access and egress routes are adequate, consideration should be given to issues such as:

- The condition of the road surface.
- The proximity of the NSP to major roadways and population centres.
- The type and amount of vegetation along any access routes, and whether that vegetation could be affected by fire and pose a risk of harm to those seeking access to the potential NSP, or otherwise block access to the NSP.
- The capacity of access routes to accommodate potentially large numbers of vehicles, and to accommodate potential vehicle break-downs.
- Parking at the site, taking into account that a separate area or adequate space may need to be available to ensure pedestrians can move away from areas where vehicles may enter or park.
- Any hazards that may exist for persons accessing the NSP by foot, including in the buffer zone.
- Any relevant matter contained in Council's Road Management Plan prepared pursuant to the *Road Management Act 2004*.

If appropriate and satisfactory access and egress routes are not available, then the proposed NSP should not be designated by Council.

Preference of open Space over Buildings

When establishing an NSP, Council will in the first instance always try to nominate an open area rather than a building for use as an NSP. The preference of open spaces over buildings is predicated upon potential access and egress issues associated with entry to buildings during a fire. If for example, Council officers cannot safely travel to a NSP building during a fire to open it for community access due to fire blocking travel, this may place the community at a high level of risk if they are dependent on it in their fire plan. Therefore where possible, Council will nominate open spaces (ovals, sporting grounds etc.) preferentially over buildings.

Where a building is preferred as an NSP, consideration must be given to how the community can access the building as an NSP without the need for a Council officer to attend and open the building. Coded key locks may be an option with the key code held by the MERO or local Police station.

Maintenance of potential NSP in accordance with CFA assessment criteria

Council must ensure that the potential NSP can be maintained in accordance with the criteria taken into account by the CFA in arriving at its fire rating assessment.

If additional information is required from the CFA to understand the criteria they have considered in arriving at their fire rating assessment, Council should seek this information from the CFA. If necessary, Council may request the CFA to undertake a further assessment to provide Council with additional information.

Opening of the NSP

Council must consider:

- Whether it will be possible or practicable to open the potential NSP or otherwise make it available for use on a 24 hour basis during the declared fire danger period.
- The potential for damage to the site during times that it is open and available for use, but is not being used as an NSP.
- The potential costs to Council associated with (i) and (ii) above.
- The possibility that a potential NSP could be used for unintended purposes, such as an emergency relief centre.

Defendable space and fire suppression activities

CFA have advised that there is no guarantee that fire units will attend an NSP, and that individuals who use NSPs are doing so at their own risk. There should be no expectation that fire units or other emergency services personnel will attend an NSP during a bushfire.

Despite this, the potential NSP should be surrounded by sufficient open space to enable the CFA and other fire services to conduct asset protection and fire suppression operations around the site.

Any open space should be reasonably free of obstacles which could hinder fire suppression activities. Obstacles may include, amongst other things:

- fences;
- buildings and sheds;
- steep inclines in close proximity to the potential NSP;
- vegetation, particularly large trees;
- other land formations, including rocks, boulders or knolls which could substantially hinder fire suppression operations.

If necessary, advice should be sought from the CFA about their defendable space and fire vehicle access requirements.

When assessing the defendable space factor, Council must consider whether or not approval to clear or disturb flora and/or fauna could be required, whether under legislation such as the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth), *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* or the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. If such approval is required, then it must be obtained before the potential NSP location is designated.

If the proposed NSP does not have adequate defendable space around it, or if approval to clear or disturb flora and/or fauna is required but cannot be obtained before the NSP is required to be established, or cannot be obtained on reasonably satisfactory conditions, it should not be designated as an NSP by Council.

Defendability of Buildings

If the potential NSP is a building (see Preference of open Space over Buildings above), Council must consider whether or not it is likely to be subject to risk from ember attack.

As the CFA is not required to assess the risk of ember attack to a building in undertaking the CFA fire rating assessment when certifying NSPs, the Council should consider this issue. In considering this issue, Council may need to seek expert advice from appropriately-qualified CFA personnel.

If there is an appreciable risk of the proposed NSP being compromised by ember attack which cannot be satisfactorily defended, then the building is unlikely to be suitable as an NSP and should not be designated by Council.

Signage

Council must assess whether it will be possible to have signage at the entry to, and in the vicinity of, the potential NSP. Such signage must generally be in accordance with NSP Signage Guidelines, refer to 5.0 Neighbourhood Safer Places Signage Guidelines.

Council must refer to the NSP Signage Guidelines when considering whether or not appropriate signage can be erected. Council may also wish to provide further signage and information at the location to inform and support potential users of the NSPs.



If signage must be placed on private land, then the consent of the landowner will be required.

Maintenance and maintainability

Council must assess whether ongoing maintenance of the proposed NSP, and the surrounding area, is both possible and practical, having regard to the resources reasonably available to the Council. This factor should be considered by the Council not only in relation to the suitability of a proposed NSP, but also as to the total number of proposed NSPs that can be reasonably maintained within the municipal district. This is needed to ensure that the site remains suitable for use as an NSP during each fire season.

Specifically, the site must be capable of being maintained so as to ensure continuing compliance with the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines and the Council NSPP. If it is not possible for Council to maintain a potential NSP, then it must not be designated as such.

When assessing the maintainability of the potential NSP, both the NSP and the surrounding areas may require various maintenance activities to be undertaken on a periodic basis. The potential introduction of hazards into the surrounding areas, such as structures, animals and vehicles, should be taken into account.

There may be cases where maintenance activities can only be undertaken by, or with the consent of, an adjoining landowner. This may, in turn, require assurances from such landowners that the site, and areas surrounding it, will be maintained to a satisfactory level.

When assessing the maintainability of a potential NSP, Council must consider whether or not approval to clear or disturb flora and/or fauna could be required, whether under legislation such as the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (Cwlth), *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* or the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*. If such approval is required, then it must be obtained before the potential NSP location is designated.

If the proposed NSP is not capable of being satisfactorily maintained, then it should not be designated as an NSP by Council.

Disabled access

Council must consider whether or not there are clear means of access for disabled and mobility-impaired persons to the potential NSP.

In considering this issue, regard should be had to such matters as whether or not it would be necessary for cars or other vehicles to enter the NSP area to allow persons with disabilities to be dropped off within the site.

Alternative Uses of potential NSP

Council must consider what other uses may be made of the potential NSP which could impact upon its ability to properly function as an NSP.

Where a potential NSP which is used by CFA for operational purposes, and has been assessed by the CFA as meeting the criteria in the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines, and has been certified by the CFA, then the CFA advises that those operational activities will be able to continue (to the extent practicable in the circumstances) while the site is being used as an NSP.

If the site is used for other uses which could compromise its ability to be used as a NSP, then it should not be designated as a NSP by Council.

Communication with the community

Council must be able to communicate the location of the potential NSP to the community. There should be good community awareness of the location and purpose of the NSP, together with the risks that relate to the use of the potential NSP, and the risks associated with travelling to the potential NSP in the event of a bushfire.

Public liability insurance

As a matter of prudent risk management, Council should have regard to:

- any additional factors which are relevant to Council's maintenance of insurance coverage for legal claims relating to the identification, designation, establishment, maintenance and decommissioning of a site as an NSP, as well as travel to an NSP;
- any indemnity provided by the State of Victoria; and
- any statutory defences to claims.

3.3 Responsibility of Council assessment of potential NSPs

A report prepared by the Municipal Emergency Resource Officer (MERO) and Municipal Fire Prevention Officer (MFPO) detailing whether or not the potential NSP meets the above criteria should be prepared and provided to:

- a. the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC), where it is practicable for the MEMPC to be involved in the Council assessment process; and
- b. the Council.

The MEMPC must assess the potential NSP, taking into account the MERO's report, and make a recommendation to Council as to whether or not to designate the potential NSP.

3.4 Council assessment timeframe for potential NSP locations

Any potential NSPs certified by the CFA should be assessed by Council no later than 30 June each year, so as to allow time for the sites to be designated and established as NSPs by Council, and for any appropriate amendments to be made to the MEMP and MFPP prior to the commencement of the bushfire season.

This timing is obviously subject to the CFA assessing and certifying the potential NSP location in a timely manner and agreement with the site owner/occupier to use the site as an NSP.

3.5 CFA Assessment and Certification of potential NSP locations

Responsibility for assessing potential NSPs against guidelines issued by the CFA (CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines)

The CFA² is responsible for assessing potential NSP locations against the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines, following a request from council through the NSP Online Business System³. Assessment will be undertaken by appropriately qualified and experienced CFA personnel.

Council is not responsible for the assessment and certification of potential NSPs by the CFA.

CFA Assessment Criteria

In assessing potential NSP locations, the CFA must consider the criteria and other considerations as set out in the CFA's NSP Assessment Guidelines as issued from time to time by the CFA.

The key matters to be considered by the CFA under the current CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines are:

- (a) For open spaces
 - the appropriate separation distance between the outer edge of the potential NSP and the nearest fire hazard (Buffer Zone) should be at least 310 metres; or
 - an alternative Buffer Zone distance may be prescribed by the CFA, which will ensure that the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the site is no more than 2 kw/m².

- (b) For buildings
 - The Buffer Zone between the outer edge of the building and the nearest fire hazard should be at least 140 metres; or
 - an alternative Buffer Zone distance may be prescribed by the CFA, which will ensure that the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the building is no more than 10 kw/m².

Councils may identify a suitable NSP site in a grassland area that can only meet the assessment criteria with active management of the site, over the fire danger period, with treatments including slashing, mowing or grazing.

² Country Fire Authority Act 1958 Part IIIA Division 3 s50E

³ Refer to Appendix 2 – The NSP Online Business System for a description.

In these circumstances CFA may certify the site as meeting the assessment criteria provided that appropriate, specified and prescribed treatments are in place throughout the fire danger period. This must include prescriptions for management of the grassland secured by agreed terms entered into by the landholder. The landholder may be the council, a public authority, an agency or a private person.

CFA publishes on their website the [Neighbourhood Safer Places – Assessment Guidelines](#) which is available for public use.

Notification to CFA of potential NSP locations

Following identification of a site which may be deemed suitable as an NSP by Council, the potential NSP site is sent to the CFA for assessment. This is likely to occur shortly after identification.

Notification of CFA Assessment Results to Council

Once the assessment of a potential NSP is completed by the CFA, the CFA will certify the potential NSP if the site meets the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines. The CFA will provide a copy of the CFA certification in relation to a potential NSP to Council upon completion of certification, and a summary of the criteria and assumptions upon which the assessment is based.

Council should ensure that the boundaries of both the potential NSP as certified by the CFA, and any Buffer Zone surrounding it, are clearly defined in the CFA assessment.

For reasons of community safety, it is a requirement of the CFA Act, and it is also a requirement of this Plan, that only those sites assessed and certified by the CFA may be considered for designation as NSPs by the Council. The Council must not designate a site as an NSP unless it has CFA certification.

3.6 Council Designation of NSPs

An NSP audit and assessment report prepared by the Neighbourhood Safer Places Subcommittee detailing whether or not the potential NSP meets NSP criteria should be prepared and provided to Council.

Prior to any finalisation of a NSP designation by Council and if practicable to do so, the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee and the Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee should have endorsed the NSP.

Once such endorsement has been received Council must formally determine whether or not to designate a site as an NSP. Council should not designate a site as an NSP unless it is satisfied that the site is suitable, having regard to the Council NSPP Criteria and the CFA assessment guidelines.

An NSP may only be designated by a resolution of the Council.

Communicating a Designated NSP

When the Council designates an NSP, the community must be informed of the use and location of the NSP. Council will normally promote the NSP via the media and other means appropriate to meet community needs.

Council will include on its website the location of designated NSPs.

3.7 Establishment and Maintenance of NSPs following designation

Establishing NSPs

Following designation, Council will establish all designated NSPs within the municipal district.

To establish an NSP after its designation, Council must:

- Notify CFA of designation (through the NSP Online Business System) together with provision of Council minutes outline completion of the criteria within the NSPP, and landlord consent and agreed terms (grassland management) where applicable;
- erect appropriate signage at and near the NSP. Consideration should also be given if appropriate directional signage may be needed to assist in directing public to the site;
- undertake any necessary preparatory works, including the construction or establishment of any required infrastructure and the clearance of vegetation, so as to enable the area to be used as an NSP;
- publish the location of the NSP on the Council website; and
- update the Municipal Emergency Management Plan and Municipal Fire Prevention Plan to include the location of the NSP.

The MFPO must provide an up-to-date list of NSPs to the CFA no later than 30 September each year.

Maintaining NSPs

NSPs within the municipality need to be maintained by Council. Maintenance activities must include vegetation management, hazardous tree removal and the maintenance of infrastructure required for the satisfactory functioning of the site as an NSP. If additional works have been required to establish the NSP, then those works should be subject to periodic review.

The fuel load in the vicinity of the NSP must not increase so as to affect the fire rating of the NSP.

Council must ensure that defensible spaces, the Buffer Zone and access and egress routes are appropriately maintained.

Council must inspect the NSP, Buffer Zone and access and egress routes on a periodic basis, and in any event not less than once every month during the declared fire danger period, to ensure that the NSP continues to be capable of functioning as an NSP.

If Council identifies issues that may impact upon the functioning of the site as an NSP, then Council must:

- address the issue;
- take reasonable steps to have the issue addressed, such as requesting the owner of the land on which the NSP or Buffer Zone is located to address the issue; or
- consider decommissioning the NSP and revoking the designation of the site as an NSP.

3.8 Annual Inspections of NSPs

Responsibilities for the annual review of NSPs

Council must undertake an annual review of all designated NSPs within the municipality.

Council must also request the CFA to undertake an assessment (through the CFA NSP Online Business System) against the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines of each NSP within the municipality on an annual basis.

These reviews are intended to ensure that each NSP remains suitable for use as an NSP during the up-coming fire season.

Considerations when undertaking inspections

NSPs should be assessed annually against the Council NSPP, and CFA will assess NSPs against the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines.

If an NSP no longer meets:

- the CFA NSP Assessment Guidelines, then it must be decommissioned; and
- the Council NSPP, then Council must determine whether or not it wishes to address any of the identified non-compliances. If it does not, then the NSP must be decommissioned.

Inspection timelines

NSPs must be inspected prior to 31 August each year under. Council will also undertake fire hazard inspections of the site prior to and during the fire danger period to ensure the site is being managed appropriately.

Decommissioning of NSPs

By Council resolution:

- Council must decommission a designated NSP if the CFA assessment of the site determines it is no longer suitable.
- The Council may decommission a NSP even though it has CFA certification, if the Council is satisfied on reasonable grounds that it is not appropriate for the site to continue to be designated as a NSP.
- The Council will decommission a NSP that is not on council owned land if the occupier or the person in control of the land has withdrawn consent to the designation of the site as a NSP.

Council should only decommission a Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP) once they have gone through the decommissioning procedure listed below.

To decommission an NSP council must:

1. Receive report to decommission an NSP through a Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee meeting (can be out of session);
2. Be informed to decommission an NSP at a Council meeting;
3. Amend the council website and council community bushfire information (including relevant township protection plans) to reflect the fact that the site is no longer designated as a NSP;

4. Remove or conceal (in cases where site is being temporarily decommissioned) signage at the site;
5. Amend the Municipal Emergency Management Plan and Municipal Fire Management Plan to show that the site has been decommissioned; and
6. Notify CFA of the site's decommissioned status (through the [CFA's NSP Online Business System](#)), which removes the NSP location from the CFA website.

If an NSP receives a non-compliant assessment during the Annual Review the CFA will contact that council and discuss options.

Once the non-complaint assessment is input into the CFA NSP Online Business System the NSP will be removed automatically from the CFA website but will not be decommissioned until council formally notifies CFA of decommissioning through the CFA NSP Online Business System.

4.0 Assessment tool Council may use in assessing potential NSP locations

4.1 NSP Criteria – Assessment Tool

Assessment Details

Day:		Date:	/	/	Time:	a.m./p.m.
Assessor's Name:						
Assessor's Signature						
Agency						

Location

Place name & Specific location:					
Distance from nearest town centre (km):		Map Reference:			
Controlling (Owner) authority:					
Owner Details:					
Contact: Name / Position					
Organisation:					
Postal Address:					Post code:
Phone:	W:		M:		
Email:					
Tenant Details:					
Contact: Name / Position					
Organisation:					
Postal Address:					Post code:
Phone:	W:		M:		
Email:					

Tenant 2 Details:

Contact: Name / Position			
Organisation:			
Postal Address:			Post code:
Phone:	W:	M:	
Email:			
Location Description			
Population of Township / Locality		Open Area or Building	
Estimated NSP Site Capacity			
Reference Material Sited			

NSP Inspection Details

Officers Name:		Signature:	
Date of Inspection:		Recommendation: Insert cross into square indicating result	Designate <input type="checkbox"/> Not Designate <input type="checkbox"/>
Officers Name:		Signature:	
Date of Inspection:		Recommendation: Insert cross into square indicating result	Designate <input type="checkbox"/> Not Designate <input type="checkbox"/>

Factors to consider in assessing potential NSPs

Council NSPP Criteria	Issues to consider	Comments	Satisfied? Yes / No
Consents and rights of access	If the potential NSP is located on Council-owned land, can Council use the land as an NSP if required? Consider whether or not Council allows the land to be used for potentially inconsistent purposes, such as for farmers' markets, fetes, circuses etc.		
	If the potential NSP is on private land, or public land under the control of a Crown Land Manager (other than Council), can Council enter into arrangements which allow it to use the land as a potential NSP on reasonably satisfactory terms? Also consider whether Council has the right to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • access the site and surrounding areas for maintenance; and • erect appropriate signage at the NSP. 		
Access and egress	Do access routes to the potential NSP allow for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the anticipated potential number of people to move to and from the site; and • the CFA and other emergency services to attend the site for asset and personnel protection activities? 		
	Are access routes easily navigable, bearing in mind they could be affected by smoke? Consider the condition of the road surface, proximity to population centres and major roads, capacity of access routes to accommodate large numbers of vehicles, the availability of car parking at the site and any other relevant matters.		
Maintenance of NSP in accordance with CFA assessment	Can Council maintain the potential NSP in accordance with the criteria taken into account by the CFA in arriving at its fire rating assessment? <i>If the CFA have not provided sufficient information in relation to the criteria it has taken into account in arriving at its fire rating assessment, it may be necessary for Council to seek further information from the CFA.</i>		

Opening of the NSP	<p>Will it be possible and practicable to make the potential NSP available for use on a 24 hour basis during the declared fire danger period? This is a particular issue where the potential NSP is a building.</p> <p>Consider the potential for damage to the NSP which could result during times that it is open and available for use, but is not being used as an NSP.</p>		
	<p>What costs could be incurred by Council in making the potential NSP available on a 24 hour basis during the declared fire danger period? Are these costs reasonable, and capable of being borne by Council?</p>		
	<p>Could the potential NSP be used for an unintended purpose which could impact upon its use as an NSP (such as an emergency relief centre)?</p>		
Defendable space and fire suppression activities	<p>Is the potential NSP surrounded by sufficient open space to enable the CFA to conduct asset protection and fire suppression operations? Is that open space reasonably free of obstacles (such as fences, buildings, steep gradients, vegetation and other land formations)?</p> <p><i>Council should seek CFA advice concerning the defendability of the potential NSP and the Buffer Zone, including in relation to fire vehicle access requirements.</i></p>		
	<p>Will approval be required under legislation such as the <i>Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (Cwth)</i>, <i>Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988</i> and the <i>Planning and Environment Act 1987</i>. Can such approval be obtained before the NSP is established?</p>		
Defendability of buildings	<p>If the potential NSP is a building, has Council has sought expert advice from the CFA to determine whether the NSP is likely to be subject to risk from ember attack? If it is subject to such a risk, can that risk be safely managed?</p>		
Signage	<p>Can appropriate signage be erected at the entry to the potential NSP, and in its vicinity?</p>		

	<p>If signage needs to be placed on private land, can Council obtain the consent of the relevant landowner to the erection of the signage?</p>		
Maintenance and maintainability	<p>Is the potential NSP capable of being maintained to ensure continuing compliance with the CFA Fire Rating Criteria and the Council NSPP Criteria?</p> <p>Where relevant, consider whether adjoining land owners and occupiers will provide Council with an assurance that both the potential NSP and the Buffer Zone can be maintained to a satisfactory level.</p>		
Disabled access	<p>Are there any means of access for disabled and mobility-impaired persons to the potential NSP, including vehicle access to drop off people with disabilities?</p>		
Alternative uses of potential NSP	<p>Can Council manage alternative uses which may be made of the potential NSP so as to ensure that those uses will not compromise the function of the site as a potential NSP?</p> <p><i>The CFA has advised that where a potential NSP which is used for an operational purpose at many times meets the CFA Fire Rating Criteria, then the CFA considers that those operational activities will be able to continue (to the extent practicable in the circumstances) while the site is being used as an NSP.</i></p>		
Community Communication	<p>Will it be possible to ensure that there will be good community awareness of the location of the potential NSP, and the risks associated with using the potential NSP?</p>		

5.0 Neighbourhood Safer Places Signage Guidelines

Country Fire Authority Act 1958, s50H requires municipal councils to identify designated Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSP) with an approved standard NSP signage.

The Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner⁴ in consultation with the Country Fire Authority and the Municipal Association of Victoria, developed a standard sign for designated Neighbourhood Safer Places. The design specification came into effect on 28th September 2011.

Approved standard NSP sign:



If a municipal council determines there is a need for a directional sign in the style of a street sign, then the following words are recommended:

BUSHFIRE NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACE

Example of NSP directional sign:



VicRoads road side signage regulations require blade directional signage to be white text on a blue background.

There are no guidelines setting out the location and number of NSP signs required. As a minimum, an NSP sign is located at the entrance to the designated NSP.

Reference: Neighbourhood Safer Places – Bushfire Place of Last Report, Signage Manual; October 2015, Emergency Management Victoria

⁴ The Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner ceased to exist when the *Emergency Management Act 2014* enacted the Emergency Services Commissioner and Emergency Management Victoria (EMV).

Example of installed NSP signage which includes the warning notice and a map indicating the extent of the designated NSP area:



NSP Sign Standard Text:

WARNING

This designated Neighbourhood Safer Place (**NSP**) is a place of last resort during the passage of a bushfire. Whilst it may offer some protection from bushfire, the safety or survival of those who assemble here is not guaranteed.

Before deciding to head towards, or enter, this NSP in the event of bushfire, be aware that:

- Many houses may offer better protection than this NSP
- Travelling to this NSP when there is bushfire can be extremely dangerous. There is no guarantee that you will be safe doing so.
- This NSP may not prevent death or injury from fire, embers or radiant heat when you get here
- You should only use this NSP when your primary bushfire plan has failed or cannot be implemented
- This NSP only has limited capacity
- There is no guarantee that CFA or other emergency services will be present at this NSP during a bushfire
- No facilities are provided for people with special needs, including those requiring medical attention
- This NSP may be uncomfortable and no amenities such as food and drinks will be provided
- There is no provision for animals

VicEmergency Hotline- 1800 226 226

6.0 Register of Designated NSP Locations Including Completed Council Site Assessments

NSP Location Register
<p>Broadford Harley Hammond Reserve Oval and Car Park Area Bounded by Hamilton Street, Gavan Street and Powlett Street Broadford 3658. Enter via Gavan Street</p>
<p>Kilmore Bitumen car park Adjacent to Trackside Function Centre, Kilmore Racecourse East Street (opposite Gipps Street) Kilmore 3764</p> <p>Grassland carpark Opposite Kilmore Racing Club Corner East Street and Gipps Street Kilmore 3764</p> <p>Kilmore Racecourse J Kelly Pavilion East Street, Kilmore 3764</p>
<p>Pyalong Pyalong Recreation Reserve Building Northern Highway (near corner of West Road) Pyalong 3521</p>
<p>Seymour Chittick Park Oval Pollard Street Seymour 3660</p>
<p>Tallarook CWA Park Corner Main St (Upper Goulbourn Road) and Railway Place Tallarook 365</p>
<p>Tooborac Tooborac Recreation Reserve Public Hall Northern Highway (between Seymour-Tooborac Road and Middle Springs Road) Tooborac 3522</p>
<p>Wallan Hadfield Park (outdoors area) Bounded by Northern Hwy, Wallan-Whittlesea Rd, Windham St & Queen St Wallan 3756</p>

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Neighbourhood Safer Place – Place of Last Resort Checklist – May 2014
- Appendix 2 The NSP Online Business System
- Appendix 3 Designation of a Neighbourhood Safer Place (Crown Land Managed by a Committee of Management)

Appendix 1

Neighbourhood Safer Place – Place of Last Resort Checklist – May 2014

	Neighbourhood Safer Place – Place of Last Resort designation steps	Timeframe	Date complete
1.	<p>Adopt a Municipal Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan (MNSPP), in keeping with the <i>Country Fire Authority Act 1958</i> s50 and in order to access the policy defence in the event of the death of or injury to a person. The recommended process is outlined below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MNSPP template document (developed by the MAV) tailored to reflect local needs • MNSPP presented to MEMPC for consideration and recommendation to Council; • MNSPP presented to Council meeting for adoption and ratification of criteria; and • Council-adopted MNSPP placed on council website (to comply with CFA Act). <p>The criteria outlined in this plan should be applied to all potential NSPs.</p>		
2.	<p>Desktop exercise to be undertaken by council (MERO or MFPO – depending who is managing the process within council) and CFA to identify potential locations for further consideration. Exercise could make use of aerial photography, GIS mapping, Google maps, VFRR, and some MNSPP criteria.</p>		
3.	<p>Council (preferably with CFA, and potentially with VicPol) visit sites to get sufficient information to begin assessment including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • geographic and common place names • land ownership • access and egress • vegetation • street address, • nearest intersection • Melway or VicRoads reference • Photographic evidence of noncompliance issues 	<i>Up to four weeks</i>	
4.	<p>MEMPC meets to discuss potential sites and the MNSPP criteria. Identify any additional information required for each site.</p>		
5.	<p>Check land ownership. If the land is leased or licensed to a third party, then the consent of the tenant or licensee to use the place as a potential NSP will also be required.</p> <p>If the site is on Crown land, council to start discussions relating to consent and other arrangements with relevant committee of management and department (e.g. DELWP, DET, VicRoads), following established protocols. <u>Note: Gazettal is required before designation by Council.</u> The process, protocols and template documents are available via the MAV's online NSP toolbox.</p>	<i>Up to four weeks</i>	

	If the site is on private land, start discussions with private land owner and occupier. If verbal agreement with owner and occupier, council to start preparing the Consent and Indemnity Deed for non-Council owned land. Guidance notes and a template Deed of Consent is available via the MAV's online NSP toolbox.		
6.	Council to request CFA assessment for all shortlisted sites. To request assessment, log-on to the CFA's NSP online business system (a Quick Reference Guide to the CFA's NSP online system is available via the MAV's online NSP toolbox).		
7.	CFA complete assessment of all shortlisted potential NSPs using the CFA assessment guidelines and provide written report to council. Recommend council officer attend assessment to ensure understanding of why site does/ does not comply.	<i>Up to four weeks</i>	
8.	<p>Before designation, ensure all MNSPP criteria have been met. Recommend using an assessment team comprising Council, VicPol, CFA, and DELWP and VicRoads where appropriate - use Municipal Fire Management Planning Committee where possible. The MNSPP template includes the criteria below. Councils must consider each of the factors set out in the template, and should also consider other factors which are specific to the Council, such as resources available. Factors include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consent and access arrangements (if proposed site on non-council land). This includes Ministerial gazettal for Crown land and signing of the Consent and Indemnity Deed for private land owners, and any further steps agreed through the departmental protocols (step 5) • Sufficient access and egress to site – this may include a need for vegetation management, and this must be considered as part of the designation process • Ensuring the site can be maintained in accordance with the CFA assessment criteria • Ensuring the site is accessible by the public on a 24 hour basis • Defendable space to allow for fire suppression activities • Defendability of buildings (if applicable) • Whether or not it will be possible to erect signage • Maintenance requirements and maintainability • Disabled access • Alternative uses of potential NSP • Public liability insurance • Any additional criteria applicable to local risk and circumstances 	<i>Up to four weeks</i>	
9.	MERO/MFPO and other MEMPC members to consider CFA comments, maintenance arrangements and other MNSPP criteria for any proposed NSP site.		
10.	<p>Have signage produced according to NSP Signage Guidelines.</p> <p>Guidelines and specifications available via the MAV's online NSP toolbox.</p> <p>Consider directional signage - speak to VicRoads if necessary.</p>		
11.	MEMPC meets to consider proposed NSPs.		

12.	MEMPC makes recommendation to Council on proposed NSPs.		
13.	<p>Council makes decision to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> designate sites or delegate authority for designation decisions, OR document reasons for not designating inspected sites; i.e. failed to meet MNSPP criteria. 	<i>Allow time to resubmit to Council if required</i>	
14.	If a conditional designation is made, ensure all conditions are met before publicising NSP or advising stakeholders of designation (see step 15).		
15.	<p>MERO or MFPO provides advice of council decision, including copies of Council reports and minutes, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CFA (via CFA's NSP online business system); Municipal Association of Victoria – checks NSP designation is complete as a necessary step of the CFA's NSP online business system; the MEMPC; Owner and/or occupier (if non-Council owned land). <p>In order for the MAV to check an NSP procedure is complete on the CFA's NSP Online Business System, a copy of the council minutes designating the NSP is required which shows that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the NSP has been assessed in accordance with the council's Municipal Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan (MNSPP) landowner/occupier consent has been obtained (if applicable). 		
16.	<p>Once designated by Council:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erect signage Communicate decision to community by means outlined in MNSPP and Council report Update the Council-adopted MNSPP and post updated version on website, in keeping with the CFA Act 1958. In keeping with the CFA Act s50F (4a), list the location of the NSP site on Council's website. If possible, include photos, maps and description of individual sites. 		
17.	Update MEMP and MFMP to include designated NSPs. Replace versions on Council website (if applicable).		
18.	<p>Ensure that there are processes in place so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> each NSP is inspected and maintained (see CFA Act s50I), in accordance with the adopted MNSPP (see CFA Act s50F) if there is one; each NSP is reviewed by Council according to the NSPP including assessment by the CFA before 31 August each year (see CFA Act s50J); and the MFPO provides the CFA an up-to-date list of all NSPs by 30 September each year (see CFA Act s50K). 		
19.	<p>To decommission an NSP, a council must (in this order):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> endorse the decommissioning of the NSP through a MEMPC meeting (can be out of session) revoke the designation of the site as an NSP at a council meeting amend council's website 		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure organisations/ people listed in step 15 are notified • remove signage at the site and any directional signage • amend any community bushfire information including Community Information Guides • amend the MEMP, MFMP and if required, the MNSPP • Notify CFA of decommission through the CFA'S NSP online business system. <p>The decommissioning procedure is available via the MAV's online NSP toolbox.</p>		
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Key dates:

NSPs can be designated and established at any time, preferably prior to summer.

31 August each year – all existing NSPs must be reviewed by Council according to the NSPP, including a reassessment by the CFA

30 September each year – councils to provide the CFA an up-to-date list of all NSPs within the municipality.

Source: This checklist is sourced from the MAV Emergency Management Capability Building e-Library.

Appendix 2

The NSP Online Business System

The secure NSP Online Business System is a combined web interface (Council) and an internal customer relationship management (CFA) system.

- Acts as a singular location for consistent Neighbourhood Safer Places information (excluding the Municipal Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan).
- A NSP communication tool – Sends automated notifications (Council, CFA, MAV, and other emergency services and government agencies).
- Applies prompts in order to achieve the timeframes set out in legislation (CFA Act 1958, Part IIIA, Section 50) for certain tasks and notifications; and completes the notifications CFA and Local Councils are legislated to provide within the end-to-end process.
- Ensures a consistent approach to how CFA provide assessment information to Councils state-wide.
- Provides real time data to enable prompt and accurate reporting to government departments and emergency services on various NSP topics as requested.

System Roles and Responsibilities

Local Council

- Enter locations into the system automatically notifying CFA of sites that require CFA assessment or request reassessment.
- Notify CFA; Designation or non-designation of new sites, decommissioning of designated sites, and notifications as part of the Annual Review process on designated sites including request reassessments, decommission and confirmation of retaining designated NSPs.

CFA Regions

- Enter assessment details automatically notifying Councils of the assessment result.

MAV

- MAV confirm Councils have all steps completed in establishing the NSP and checks consents.

CFA GIS

- Confirm and update location details, align spatial data and notify emergency services of location details and spatial data of designated NSPs.

CFA HQ

- Provides overall system support, releases designated sites to the CFA website www.saferplaces.cfa.vic.gov.au and notifies heads of emergency services and government agencies of the list of designated NSPs as per legislated requirements.

System Access

- Prior to using the NSP Online Business System, Council must be registered on the system and provided with a unique log in code. Contact the CFA HQ Bushfire Shelter Options Coordinator or email nsphq@cfa.vic.gov.au.
- Link to NSP Online Business System web page:
<http://www.saferplaces.cfa.vic.gov.au/cfa/authen/default.htm> Cut and paste URL into web browser.

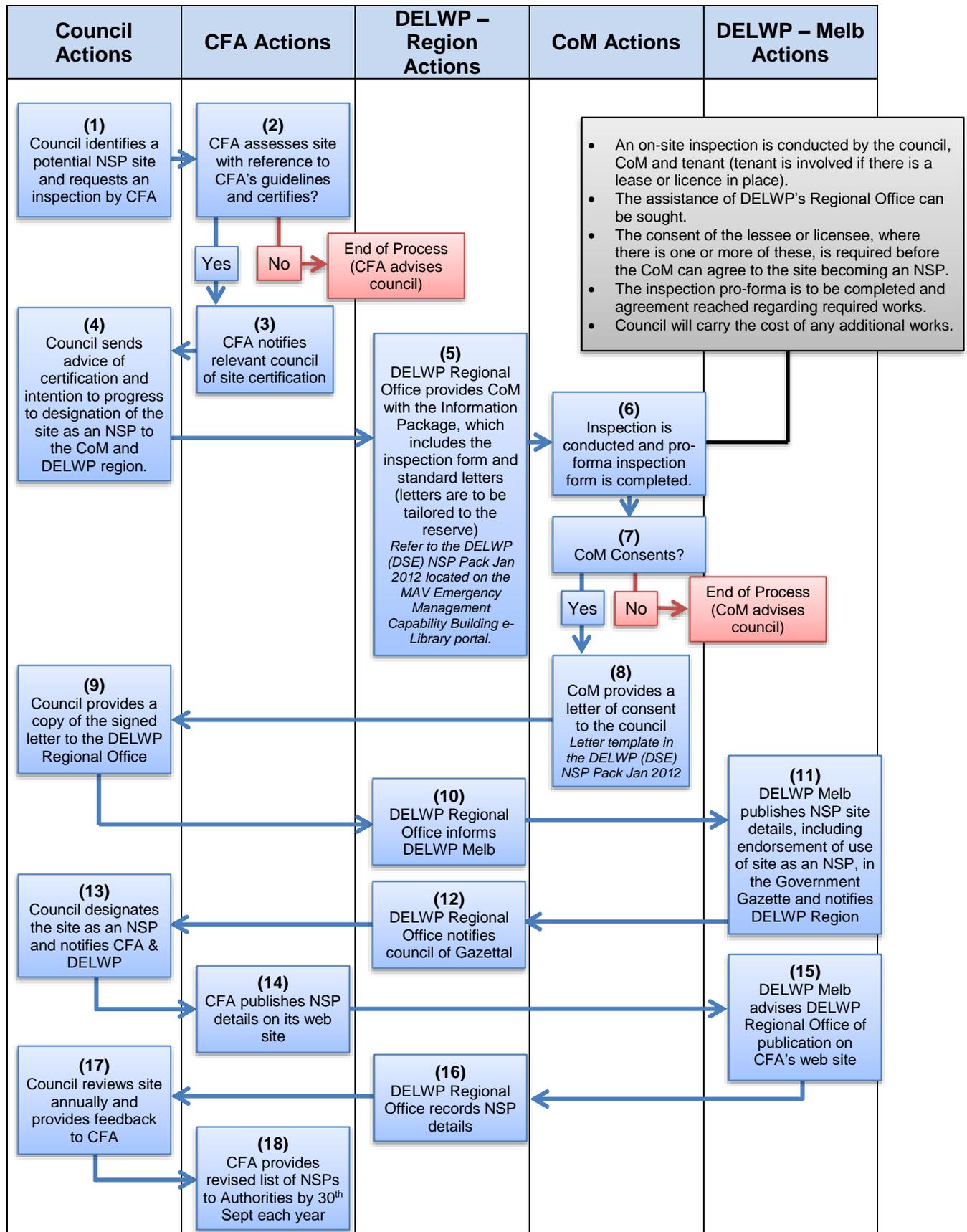
Support Process

- For support and/or provision of system user guides, please contact a CFA HQ Bushfire Shelter Options Coordinator or email nsphq@cfa.vic.gov.au.
- In the email please ensure that you include your name, contact number and a description of the query.
- If it is a system issue, please provide the detail of what process you were actioning at the time and text from any error messages and/or screen shots.

Source: This checklist is sourced from the MAV Emergency Management Capability Building e-Library.

Appendix 3

Designation of a Neighbourhood Safer Place (Crown Land Managed by a Committee of Management)



**Neighbourhood Safer Places – Bushfire Places
of Last Resort Plan 2018**