Council Plan 2025-2029

Incorporating the Health and Wellbeing Plan

Surf COAST SHIRE

Acknowledgement of Country

Surf Coast Shire Council acknowledges the Wadawurrung People, and Gulidjan and Gadubanud Peoples of the Eastern Maar, their Elders and leaders past, present and emerging as the Traditional Owners of the skies, land, waters and sea country across our municipality.

We acknowledge their care and custodianship for more than 60,000 years, which continues today. We walk with them as we respectfully care for and tread lightly on these lands.

We also extend that respect to all First Nations people who are part of the community.

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Meet the Councillors

The Surf Coast Shire municipality comprises three wards: Otway Range, Torquay and Winchelsea. Each ward is represented by three Councillors.

The current nine-member Council was elected on 8 November 2024 for a four-year term. Cr Mike Bodsworth was elected Mayor for a one-year term on 14 November 2024. Cr Libby Stapleton was elected to the position of Deputy Mayor, also for one year.

Otway Range ward

Mayor Cr Mike Bodsworth
mbodsworth@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0427 337 558

Deputy Mayor Cr Libby Stapleton
lstapleton@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0400 271 574

Cr Leon Walker
lwalker@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0417 650 391

Torquay ward

Cr Paul Barker
pbarker@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0409 626 614

Cr Rebecca Bourke
rbourke@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0417 252 503

Cr Liz Pattison
lpattison@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0402 328 546

Winchelsea ward

Cr Joel Grist
jgrist@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0417 155 465

Cr Tony Phelps
tphelps@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0409 822 123

Cr Adrian Schonfelder
aschonfelder@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
0400 169 741

Mayor's Message

Development of a Council Plan is a critical part of every new Council's first year. Soon after being elected and forming a Council, we get this precious chance to connect with local communities and develop a plan for the Council term that's unique to this place and its people and reflects our heritage while also looking to the future.

To this end, we embarked on an extensive community engagement campaign under the banner of Our Focus Our Future. Step one involved a survey and pop-up engagement sessions at local markets and gathering spaces. Between November 2024 and February 2025 we received more than 1,000 responses, with people telling us what was important to them and where Council should place its priorities.

Next, a group of 43 randomly selected members of our community met between late February and late March to consider Council and community priorities in depth. It was exciting to watch people of all ages and all walks of life working together on what were some pretty challenging themes. At times there was doubt and even disagreement, but our panel members rose to the challenge, learnt from each other, and reached consensus on their final report.

It was a privilege to watch them working over three long Saturdays in March. I saw senior members advocating for the interests of young people, I heard the group urging for strong leadership and creativity in a time of rapid social and environmental change and I saw the passionate concern people held for our beautiful natural environment.

The panel built on the work of a similar group who met four years earlier to determine a 10-year Community Vision for our municipality. This vision remains the guiding light for the new Council Plan.

Having heard what was important to a cross-section of our community, Councillors then undertook a similar exercise – to identify and refine what outcomes would best place Council to deliver the Community Vision.

In keeping with all effective collaborations, the result is greater than the sum of its parts. Through this Council Plan we have the foundation of our work for the next four years. One that will keep us steady when there is doubt, one that will guide us when tough decisions must be made, and importantly, one that reflects the views of the community we are entrusted to serve.

Yes, there are some challenges, but I reflect on the words of one of the community panelists who in presenting their final report to us, encouraged Council to be bold. With this encouragement, and the clarity of direction this Council Plan provides, we have all we need to turn those challenges into great opportunities.

Cr Mike Bodsworth

Mayor, Surf Coast Shire Council

CEO Message

It's something of a cliché but true nevertheless. Only by looking back do we see how far we have come and how things have changed. In preparing this message I revisited the introduction to the Council Plan of 2021-2025. Back in 2021 our community was still in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

That's not to say other matters weren't on our radar. Housing affordability and the impact of climate and extreme weather were definitely of concern but fair to say the pandemic cast a long shadow at the time.

Four years on it might feel like the pandemic is in the rear vision mirror but for our business community, especially tourism operators, recovery is still less than complete. And since then, the shortage of affordable housing has been compounded by a widespread cost of living challenge. We know our community is resilient, resourceful and adept at helping themselves – however there are those within Surf Coast Shire who are in need and all of us, Council included, has a part to play.

That said, there is much to be positive about. My short journey into the past was a reminder that we are a community that does meet these challenges and does so compassionately and collaboratively.

The Mayor has written about the enthusiasm and generosity of the community panel who contributed to the development of this plan. I would add that this same level of enthusiasm is demonstrated in each of our township communities and at a municipal level.

One of the challenges we set the community panel, as well as our survey participants, was to ask them how Council could remain in a sustainable long term financial position given our revenue constraints and cost pressures. Creating space for community to lead its own projects and solutions was the most popular response.

This is entirely in keeping with how the Surf Coast Shire community functions - as a partner not a follower - and on behalf of Council I'm both grateful and excited for such a partnership. The Community Vision is a bold and ambitious statement of what we collectively aspire to for our towns, our environment, our economy and our lives and it is by moving forward together that we can fully realise what is so beautifully articulated in this vision.

With a clear direction and a commitment to collaboration we are set up well for the next four years. And whilst history tells us there will be some unexpected twists and turns, we can move forward with confidence knowing we have such a capable and passionate community walking alongside us.

Robyn Seymour

CEO, Surf Coast Shire Council

Community Vision

“From the hinterland to the coast, from the First Peoples to the children of the future, we are an active, diverse community that lives creatively to value, protect and enhance the natural environment and our unique neighbourhoods. We will leave the Surf Coast Shire better than we found it.”

The 10-year Community Vision, adopted by Council in 2021, was developed by a representative sample of Surf Coast Shire community members, with input from the broader community.

About the Surf Coast Shire

The Surf Coast Shire is located in southwestern Victoria, 1 hour from Melbourne, 20 minutes from Geelong and includes the official start of the iconic Great Ocean Road.

The landscape is a mix of coast, natural forest, urban settled areas and rural environments including land dedicated to agriculture.

Surf Coast Shire comprises many individual townships, including Aireys Inlet, Anglesea, Bambra, Bellbrae, Deans Marsh, Fairhaven, Jan Juc, Lorne, Moriac, Freshwater Creek, Torquay and Winchelsea.

Each of these townships has a keen sense of community, a unique identity and a strong desire to protect and nurture the environment.

The Surf Coast is a major lifestyle and visitor destination that is among the fastest growing regional municipalities in Victoria and has undergone significant change over the past 15 years.

Population
39,928
(Estimated Resident Population 2024)

Size
1,553
square kilometres

Number of dwellings
20,634

Median age
42

About this Plan

The Council Plan 2025-2029 sets out Surf Coast Shire Council's strategic direction for the next four years. The guiding light for the plan is the 10-year Community Vision which was developed by a representative sample of community members four years ago, to articulate the aspirations, achievements and outcomes that matter most to our community.

A new community panel was convened in March 2025 to give advice to this term of Council on how to work towards achieving the Community Vision. In particular the 2025 panel gave guidance to Council on what to weigh up when making decisions, noting there are often competing demands to be considered.

The result is a Council Plan that sets a strategic direction across five themes:

- Assets and Infrastructure
- Climate and Environmental Leadership
- Community Wellbeing
- High Performing Council
- Sustainable Communities

For each theme, a series of strategic objectives are listed. The strategic objectives describe the desired future state, that combined across the five themes, move us toward the Surf Coast Shire vision. Priorities are identified to illustrate the work that Council will undertake to achieve the strategic objectives.

Council will report on progress through the life of the Council Plan and will continuously review the strategic objectives and priorities to ensure our efforts remain focused and effective.

The Council Plan incorporates our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan which details the health and wellbeing goals Council will focus on. The Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires Council to consider the priority areas identified in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

A separate 10-year Financial Plan and 10-year Asset Plan are companions to the Council Plan. These two plans give specific guidance on Council's long term strategic approach to managing financial sustainability and our approach to maintaining community assets.

Strategic Framework

This diagram shows how the Council Plan links to the Community Vision and its relationship to Council's other strategic documents.

Under the Local Government Act 2020, Councils are required to develop a number of strategic documents which together comprise an Integrated Strategic Planning and Reporting Framework (ISPRF).

In addition to the Local Government Act 2020, these strategic documents are guided by other pieces of state legislation including the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, the Climate Act 2017, the Gender Equality Act 2020 and the Planning and Environment Act 1987.

The context for this plan

This plan seeks to address several key challenges facing our shire. Information about these challenges was provided to the community panel to guide the panel members' thinking and recommendations. The questions in the Our Focus Our Future survey were also shaped by the challenges. More information about the panel and survey is provided in the section on community engagement.

Whilst the four-year time span of the Council Plan is too narrow to fully address these challenges, important progress can and should be made.

A collective response combining the efforts of Council, community, government and other partners will be necessary to ensure Surf Coast Shire remains a sustainable, healthy and prosperous place to live, work and visit.

Our Finances

Council works hard to maintain financial sustainability. This is challenging in what is an increasingly constrained economic environment. Persistent inflation and the cumulative effects of the rate cap have combined to create ongoing financial pressures. Our long term financial planning indicates we will need to make changes if we are to avoid a future deficit.

Councils are inherently complex organisations and legislative change over time has increased the range and depth of responsibilities that fall to local government to deliver.

The introduction of rate capping has significantly constrained revenue for local government authorities. Council must carefully consider the allocation of its financial resources in this environment and continue to pursue important efficiency reforms. To this end we set ourselves an annual savings target and have structured programs aimed at improving productivity.

We also regularly review fees and charges and look for alternative revenue where appropriate. Whilst we will need to do more of both to continue to deliver services in-line with community expectations, it's a complex equation given local households have themselves been experiencing widespread cost of living challenges.

Our Services

18 core service areas	**59** service activities	**284** service functions

Councils are unique organisations. We provide not just a large number of services, but services of considerable diversity, from childhood immunisation to road repairs. Additionally, much of the services we provide are required by legislation.

Some services are specifically mandated by legislation, such as waste management, road maintenance and animal management. Then there are services that are linked to a mandated outcome – meaning legislation requires a Council to achieve a certain outcome for its community and leaves some discretion to the Council on how best to achieve the outcome. In other words, Councils can choose which services best meet the outcome for a given community.

Finally, there are some services that don't need to be delivered by a Council because they are open to other providers - childcare and kindergartens fall into this category. Typically Councils do deliver these services in areas where there isn't a diverse enough commercial market to provide a viable alternative.

Over time the number and complexity of services delivered by Councils have grown. Surf Coast Shire Council delivers more than 280 individual service functions spread amongst 18 core service areas.

To remain financially sustainable, Council will increasingly need to focus on alternative revenue options to deliver its services, including fees and charges.

Assets and Roads

Council manages and maintains $1.6B of assets

1,100 kilometres of roads	**253km** of footpaths and cycleways	**8,000** open space and recreational assets

Our asset base is growing, driven by the demands of population growth, seasonal population and legislative changes. As a result, Council's funds are stretched more thinly across a greater number of assets.

Extreme weather events have had a significant impact on assets such as roads, bridges and drains. Council will need to find the means to not just repair the assets but retrofit them to enable them to withstand more frequent and more severe events in the future.

It can be a complicated equation as the creation of new facilities to support a growing community limits the amount of funding to maintain and renew existing assets. Yet newer facilities are likely to require less ongoing maintenance, at least for a period of time.

A related challenge is whether Council should seek to recover more of the cost of maintenance from the users of a facility. Currently the fees payable are set well below the cost of the upkeep and comparatively lower than those charged by other councils.

Climate and Environment

43,000 hectares of natural areas

30 rivers	**6** major wetlands	**5** estuaries	**30** nature reserves

Surf Coast Shire can expect harsher fire weather, longer fire risk seasons, and increased extreme storm and wind events. This has a cascading effect on public and private infrastructure, emergency services, public health, and community resilience. Meanwhile, biodiversity loss and habitat degradation further undermines ecosystem resilience.

Nationally, the direct costs of extreme weather events will exceed $35 billion by 2050 according to the Insurance Council of Australia.

Given our mix of coastline, grassy plains and dense native forests, our municipality is disproportionately impacted, being rated one of the highest risk bushfire locations in Australia, and susceptible to inundation, erosion and flooding.

Surf Coast Shire has many areas of high environmental significance, including grasslands, forests, river, estuarine and coastal habitats.

It's these features that prove such a drawcard for residents and visitors, who desire to have close access to areas of environmental importance and yet also wish for these locations to be protected and preserved. Achieving the right balance between these aims is challenging given the complex nature of local ecosystems.

Economy and Tourism

ANNUAL VISITORS: 2.6 MILLION

42% of residents live and work locally

12,500+ local jobs

2,151 additional jobs required by 2031

Job creation is essential to maintaining Surf Coast Shire's prosperity and lifestyle. A diverse range of local jobs reduces the need to travel for work, sustains communities, attracts new families and provides more opportunities for young people to stay in their home towns.

The tourism sector is Surf Coast Shire's largest job provider. Visitors typically spend over $593 million each year. In the summer months more than 75% of expenditure in Surf Coast Shire is attributed to visitors.

A strong tourism season can be the difference between a local business surviving the off season or not. Small permanent populations mean many local businesses rely on visitors and tourists to sustain them through the peaks and troughs of the year.

Surf Coast Shire's proximity to Melbourne and Geelong, and its outdoor recreational opportunities, major events, and natural environment make it a major drawcard for visitors, however not all visitation is equal.

Multi-day stays are beneficial to the local economy, whereas day trips tend to generate little if any revenue for local business operators. The growth of Geelong and the west Melbourne corridor will increase the risk of Surf Coast Shire becoming primarily a day trip destination. In ten years it's estimated 1.66 million people will live within one hour of Surf Coast.

Population and Housing

ANNUAL GROWTH RATE 2013-2023: 3.4%

Growth prediction to 2026 of up to **1.8%** per annum

Government housing target of **8,000 new dwellings** by 2051

The state government has released housing targets for each of Victoria's 79 councils with the aim to deliver 2.24 million new homes by 2051. The target set for Surf Coast Shire Council is 8,000 new dwellings by 2051.

Winchelsea is identified as the focus for longer term growth in Surf Coast Shire, due to the declining capacity of Torquay, and the constraints of the other townships.

As well as a growing population, there is a need for a greater diversity of housing and more affordable housing options. Increased density in targeted locations can deliver diversity of housing, including more affordable options but this must be balanced with the need to protect the unique character of townships.

Currently 93% of housing stock in the shire is made up of larger detached houses. We have a mismatch in current trends for larger houses against a forecast growth in one to two person households.

A lack of affordable housing (including rental accommodation) and rising house prices are well documented challenges. Business operators in coastal towns struggle to attract and retain essential workers and those working in the tourism sector. Key workers are critical not just to local economies but to the vibrancy of local communities.

The challenge of retaining essential workers is compounded by the high vacancy dwelling rates in the coastal towns due to use as holiday homes and high demand for short-term tourist accommodation, which reduces housing supply to the market for local residents.

Community Engagement Our Focus Our Future

The Our Focus Our Future engagement project was launched to seek diverse and meaningful community input into the development of a series of strategic documents, including a new Council Plan and Health and Wellbeing Plan.

This plan is underpinned by contributions from more than 1,000 community members, community groups, students, businesses and local organisations.

The engagement process included a participatory engagement phase designed to seek broad community input, and a deliberative phase to encourage a deeper dive into a range of complex topics.

Phase 1: Participatory Engagement

To encourage a high level of participation during phase 1, consideration was given to the different ways people may wish to contribute their views. Online, hard copy and township based in-person options were made available, as well as school and kinder sessions, and direct liaison with local township community and trader groups.

858
Survey responses

83
Youth surveys

KINDER SESSIONS
80
children across
5
townships

16
Pop-up events (over 1,000 interactions)

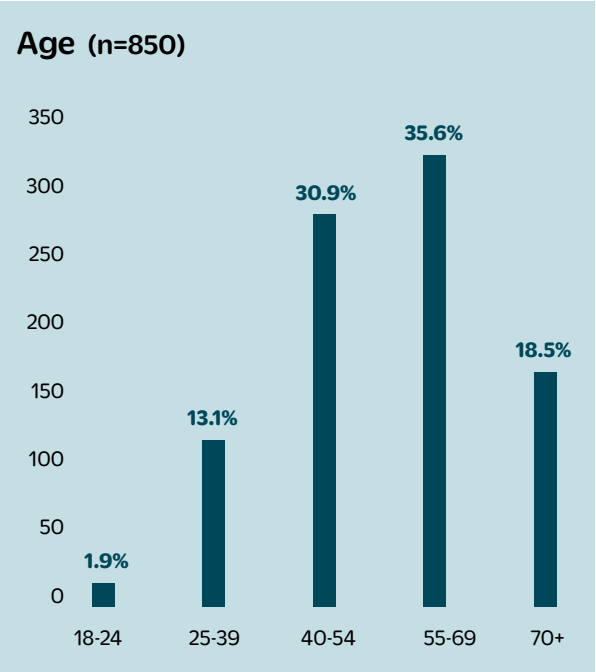
16
Group submissions from community groups and organisations

2,753
Website visits to the project page
6,069
Total web page views

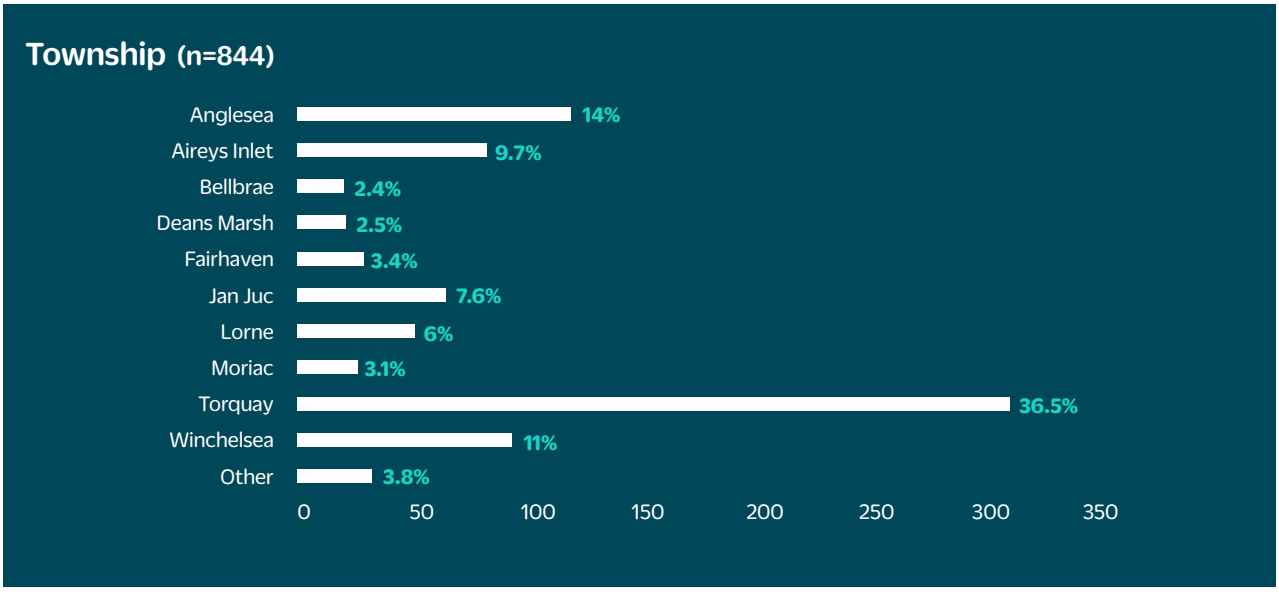
What we heard and who we heard from

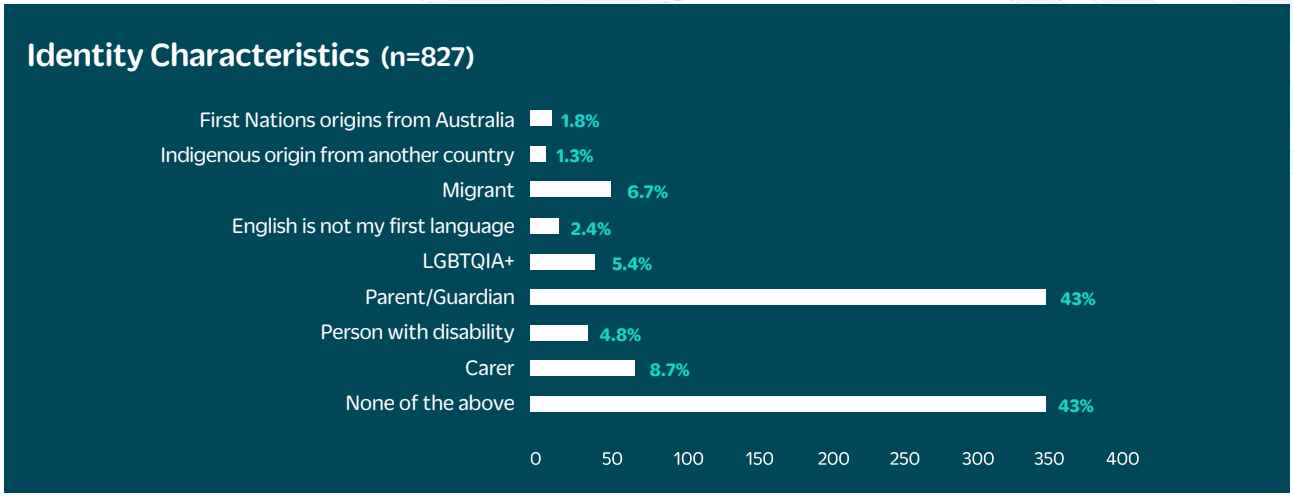
During this phase we received feedback on community needs and priorities, and people's experiences in their communities. The engagement revealed a highly invested community with clear priorities, including:

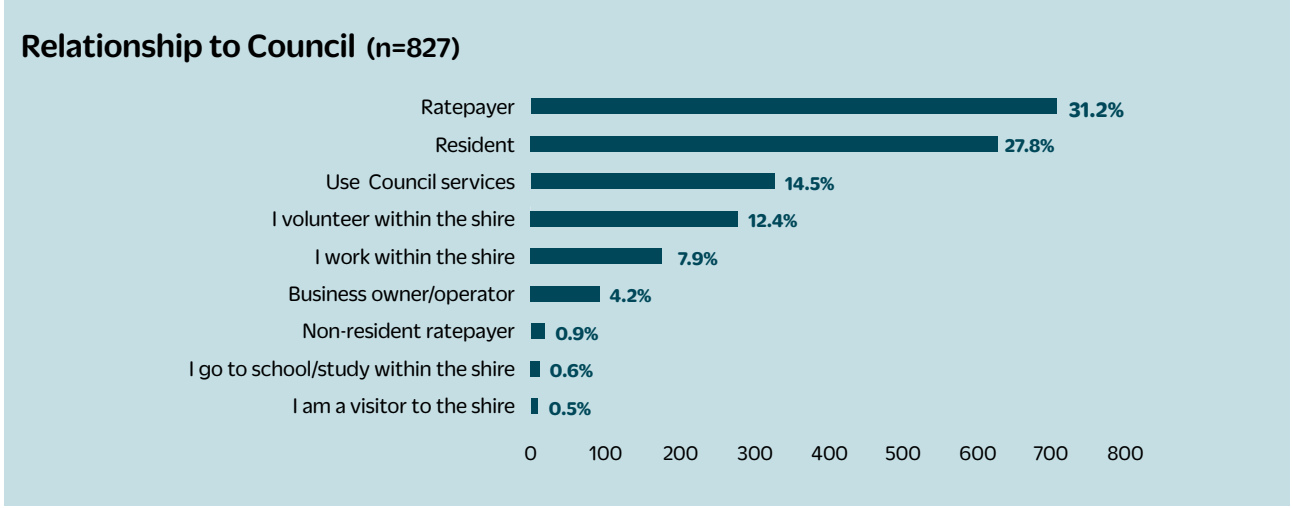
- **Environmental protection and sustainable growth** – Strong community desire to protect natural spaces and prevent overdevelopment.
- **Cost of living and housing affordability** – Housing shortages and rising living costs are major challenges.
- **Infrastructure and transport** – Focus on core infrastructure and services. Concerns about public transport limitations, road safety, and cycling/ pedestrian accessibility.
- **Tourism and local impact** – Seasonal overcrowding and its effect on infrastructure requires careful management.
- **Health and wellbeing** – Mental health concerns, family violence, and substance abuse were identified as issues.



Note: an additional 83 people under 24 years completed a youth-specific survey.







The Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report is available as Appendix 1.

Phase 2: Deliberative Community Panel

To achieve a representative sample of Surf Coast Shire communities during this phase, an independent process including an expression of interest and random selection was used to establish a Community Panel.

Potential barriers to participation were addressed, and a group of 43 people of different ages, genders, backgrounds and from different localities were invited to join the Community Panel.

Feedback from panel members indicated a strong growth throughout the panel process in, trust in Council, belief in authenticity of the process, and interest in participating in civic affairs from the first meeting to the final session.

The Community Panel Principles:

- Community engagement
- Financial sustainability
- Community equity
- Environmental impact
- Meeting our future needs
- Health and wellbeing
- Building trust through transparency
- Environmental leadership

The Community Panel Report is available as Appendix 2.

Community Panel Snapshot

TOTAL

43
Participants

GENDER

22 Women
20 Men
1 Prefer not to say

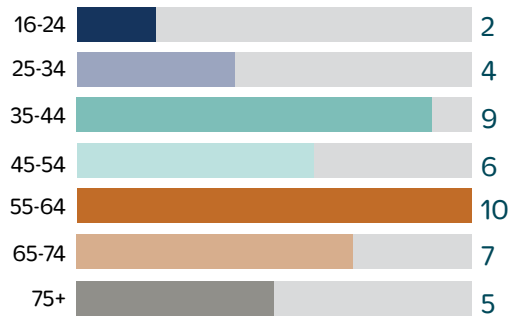
HOUSING TENURE

33 Homeowner
6 Renter
1 Non-residential ratepayer
3 Prefer not to say

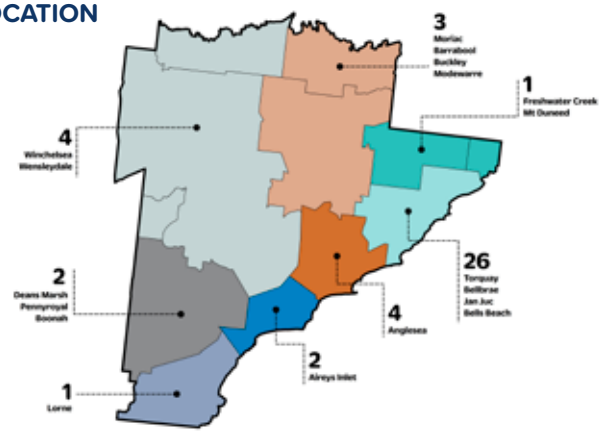
HOURS INVESTED

3.5 days (25.5 hrs) of workshop time
1080 collective participant hours

AGE



LOCATION



"As a panel, we've reflected on the dilemmas Council faces and what matters most to our community now and into the future. Together, we've developed a set of principles that aim to support Council in balancing community needs with long-term financial sustainability."

Phase 3: Feedback on draft plan

The Phase 3 review process was an opportunity for a final check of strategic directions in the draft plan, which was developed based on community input from earlier phases.

During a period of 6 weeks, 33 submissions were received, more than 600 people accessed the webpage, and 583 people downloaded the draft Council Plan document, indicating community awareness of the plan and the opportunity to provide feedback.

Analysis of community feedback from the 33 submissions highlighted diverse perspectives, that are generally in line with community sentiment expressed across the detailed engagement conducted during Phase 1.

The Phase 3 Our Focus Our Future Engagement Report is available as Appendix 3.

Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan

Overview

The Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) is a plan developed by Council to support the health, wellbeing, and quality of life of everyone in our community. It is a requirement under Victoria's Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, and helps us understand local health issues, set priorities, and take action. Its purpose is to guide coordinated actions that improve community health and wellbeing through prevention-focused programs and policies.

Council has chosen to integrate its Health and Wellbeing Plan into the Council Plan as many priorities address strategic objectives across both plans.

Our role

Council plays a vital role in creating environments where people can live healthy, fulfilling lives. Our focus is on improving health at the population level by addressing the social determinants of health - the non-medical factors that influence a person's health and wellbeing. These include the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age.

We work collaboratively with health services and community organisations to coordinate our efforts, share resources, and deliver more effective health outcomes for the community.

Our approach is based on primary prevention at a community wide level, taking action to prevent disease and health problems before they occur, by addressing the root causes of ill-health and promoting healthy behaviours, rather than treating illness. This incorporates a broad spectrum of activities undertaken by Council to build healthy communities, such as:

- Healthy public policy - considering the health impacts of Council decisions across a wide range of areas.
- Promoting healthy lifestyles - encouraging behaviours such as physical activity, healthy eating and smoking reduction through community programs and initiatives.
- Providing services - delivering essential public health services including the regulation of food and health premises, disease control (e.g. immunisations), child and family health services and kindergartens.
- Social and community support - strengthening community connection, education and access to resources to support overall wellbeing.
- Shaping the built environment – designing and maintaining infrastructure that supports healthy living, such as walkable neighbourhoods, access to green spaces, safe transport options and recreational facilities.
- Community safety - ensuring public spaces such as parks, playgrounds and community areas are safe, and supporting emergency services.
- Addressing health inequalities - targeting efforts through an equity approach to support vulnerable populations and reduce health disparities by addressing the social determinants of health.
- Advocacy – represent community health interests by advocating to other levels of government and stakeholders for policies, funding, and services that promote health and wellbeing.

Through these diverse roles, Council helps shape healthier, safer and more equitable communities.

Partnerships

Positive health and wellbeing outcomes cannot be achieved by Council alone. Partnerships are essential in public health primary prevention because they broaden reach, enhance impact and ensure a coordinated approach to addressing complex health issues.

Our key partners include:

- Government agencies including the Victorian Department of Health, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and our G21 regional Council partners.
- Health and community services including Great Ocean Road Health, Hesse Rural Health, Barwon Health and Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West.
- Peak bodies including the Municipal Association of Victoria, VicHealth, Alcohol and Drug Foundation, Safe and Equal and Cancer Council Victoria.
- Department of Education and early years providers including primary schools, secondary schools and kindergartens.
- Community organisations and groups including Community Houses, men's and women's sheds, libraries and sporting clubs.

Council also recognises that communities are the experts in their own lives and have the knowledge, skills, and capacity to drive change. By supporting residents to lead collective action on the issues that matter to them, we foster local leadership, resourcefulness, and a shared responsibility for positive change.

Our Commitment to Equity

Council is committed to equity and inclusion for all. We value the diverse skills and perspectives that people bring to our community because of their personal attributes and life experiences. We are committed to walking alongside our community to learn and continue to create a more inclusive community. We stand against racism and discrimination of any kind. Through the delivery of our Gender Equality and Diversity Action Plan, Council works to create safer, more welcoming and inclusive places, spaces, programs and services for all. 'An equitable approach to health means that everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health and wellbeing, and that the causes of inequity are addressed' (www.health.vic.gov.au).

Health and Wellbeing Priority Areas

Our health and wellbeing priority areas are determined by:

- Analysing locally relevant health data (see Appendix 4).
- Engaging with our community (Phase 1 Engagement Summary Report Appendix 1 and Community Panel Report Appendix 2)
- Consulting with our key health and community service partners.
- Aligning with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (see Appendix 4) and relevant legislation.

This has resulted in the development of five health and wellbeing priority areas, which set the direction over the next four years.

A Health and Wellbeing Action Plan detailing specific goals, strategies and actions will underpin these priority areas, and guide our approach to implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Health and wellbeing actions are also integrated across other Council strategies and plans including the Positive Ageing Strategy, Accessible and Inclusive Strategic Plan, Youth Strategy, Community Development Action Plan and Gender Equality and Diversity Action Plan.

Our Health and Wellbeing Plan features five priority areas:

Increase Healthy Eating and Active Living

Increased awareness and understanding of the health implications of healthy eating and physical activity

Improved access to safe, affordable and nutritious food (food security)

Accessible and inclusive spaces and programs that support everyone to be active

Advance Gender Equity and Address Family Violence

Increased awareness and understanding of gender equity, intersectionality and primary prevention initiatives

Inclusive spaces and programs where everyone feels safe and supported to participate

Improved access to family violence support services locally

Improve Mental Health and Social Connection

Increased opportunities for meaningful social connection

Improved access to mental health support services locally

Increased understanding of mental health protective factors (healthy eating, physical activity, strong social support networks)

Reduce Harm from Alcohol and Vaping

Increased community awareness on the safe consumption of alcohol

Increased education and initiatives targeted at reducing rates of vaping

Improved access to alcohol and smoking/ vaping cessation programs locally

Tackle the Impacts of Climate on Health

Improved understanding of how climate can affect health, particularly for higher risk groups

Increased access to sustainable food production systems

Resilient communities that can better prepare for and recover from extreme weather events

Measuring our progress

As per the requirements of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008, Council will work with our key partners to evaluate the success of our collective actions annually, and amend the Plan as required. Monitoring and evaluating our progress will allow us to measure the success of activities, identify areas for improvement and make any necessary adjustments, ensuring a commitment to continuous improvement.

The following symbols are embedded within the Council Plan to identify how the Strategic Objectives support the health and wellbeing priority areas:

- Increase Healthy Eating and Active Living
- Advance Gender Equity and Address Family Violence
- Improve Mental Health and Social Connection
- Reduce Harm from Alcohol and Vaping
- Tackle the Impacts of Climate on Health

2717
3259
145KM
60KM
GREAT OCEAN

How we incorporated the work of the Community Panel

Overview

The 43 member Community Panel was recruited to give guidance to Council on the Council Plan, Health and Wellbeing Plan, Asset Plan and Financial Plan.

The panel, which comprised a representative cross-section of the Surf Coast Shire community, were given a specific challenge, or remit:

How can Council balance the priorities of our community and meet legislative obligations, whilst remaining in a financially sustainable position?

The remit recognised that Council is regularly faced with dilemmas that require trade-off decisions. This is especially so when it comes to financial capacity. The rate cap, and cost of living pressures being experienced in the community, place notable restrictions on Council's revenue.

The panel spent three Saturdays in March 2025 grappling with this challenge and ultimately produced a report with eight principles and two minority reports. Principles were determined subject to achieving an 80 percent level of support from the panel. Minority reports were topics still held to be important but that received a lower level of support.

On the following page, Figure 1 illustrates how the eight Community Panel Principles aligned to inform Council Strategic Directions. Figure 2 shows how they form a framework to support Council decision making.

Figure 1. Community Panel Principles

This chart shows which Community Panel Principles have informed the Council Strategic Directions.

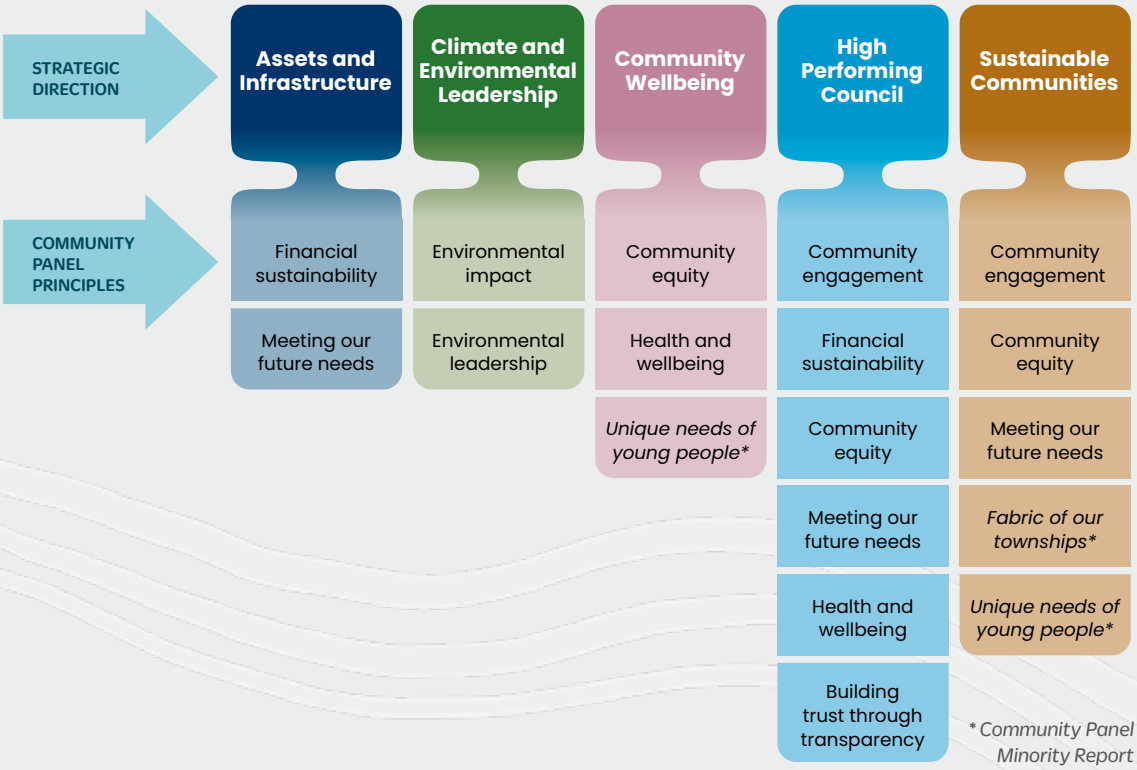


Figure 2. Decision Making Framework

This chart shows how the Community Panel Principles will guide Council decision making.

The Plan

Strategic Directions	Assets and Infrastructure	Climate and Environmental Leadership
Strategic Objectives	Infrastructure is fit-for-purpose and service levels provide the best balance between ongoing maintenance costs and longer-term replacement cost	Local natural ecosystems are thriving and biodiversity is protected
	We are building safe, active transport networks that connect communities	Communities are prepared ahead of emergencies, supported during them and resilient in their aftermath
	Infrastructure reflects township character whilst meeting future needs	Council operations and infrastructure are adapting to the impacts of extreme weather events
	The social value of infrastructure and facilities is understood and informs decision making	Council is progressively eliminating emissions from its operations and supporting community to reduce emissions
	Local roads are safer for all users	Council decisions are weighted towards long term positive environmental impacts
		Circular economy principles are being applied to reduce waste

The five Strategic Directions are listed alphabetically. The order therefore does not infer priority.

Community Wellbeing

- Increased social connection to support physical and mental wellbeing
- Inclusive community that recognises and values diverse perspectives
- Equitable access to services, social infrastructure and opportunities to participate in community life
- Communities are empowered to meet their own needs and goals
- The needs of younger and future generations inform decision making

High Performing Council

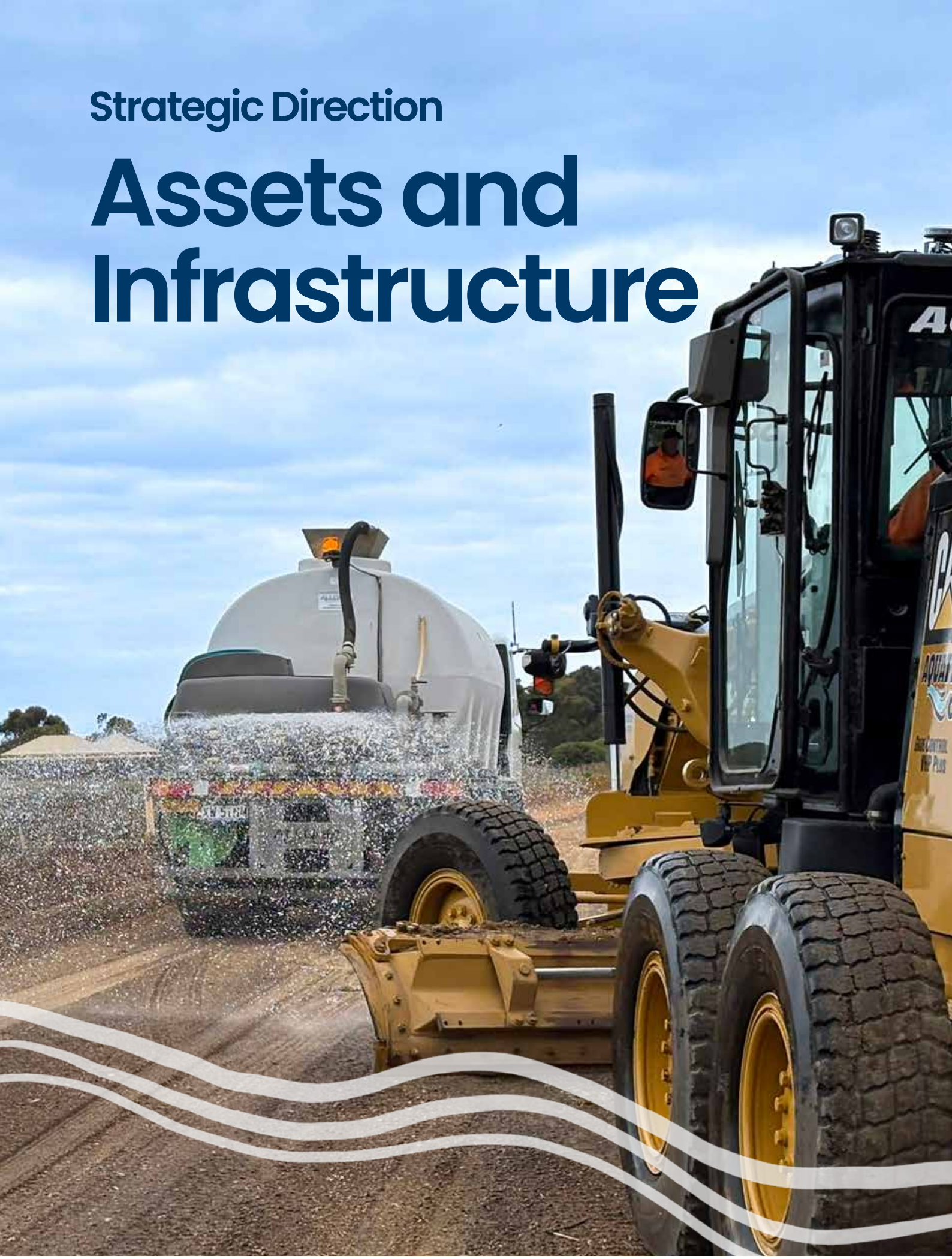
- Council delivers long term community benefit
- Trust in Council is built through decisions that are aligned to the Community Vision and adopted strategies; openly made, based on credible evidence; and thoroughly explained
- Council is financially viable over the long term
- Council revenue collection is equity based
- Community cost of living impacts are considered when Council makes financial decisions

Sustainable Communities

- Planning for a diversity of housing to support different needs and life stages, including young people and those wishing to age in place
- The uniqueness and character of townships, places and significant landscapes are recognised and preserved, even where such places grow and evolve
- Individual township economies and communities are sustainable
- The economy across the shire supports sustainable and diverse local employment
- Tourism supports local communities and delivers more consistent economic and social benefits year-round
- Community liveability is increased through reducing car dependency

Strategic Direction

Assets and Infrastructure



The important role assets play in our community will be given specific recognition. Investment in assets will be equitable and evidence based. Road condition and function will be a focus whilst Council also broadens options for non car-based travel. Maintenance levels will be calculated to achieve the best balance of cost and amenity over time.

Strategic Objectives:

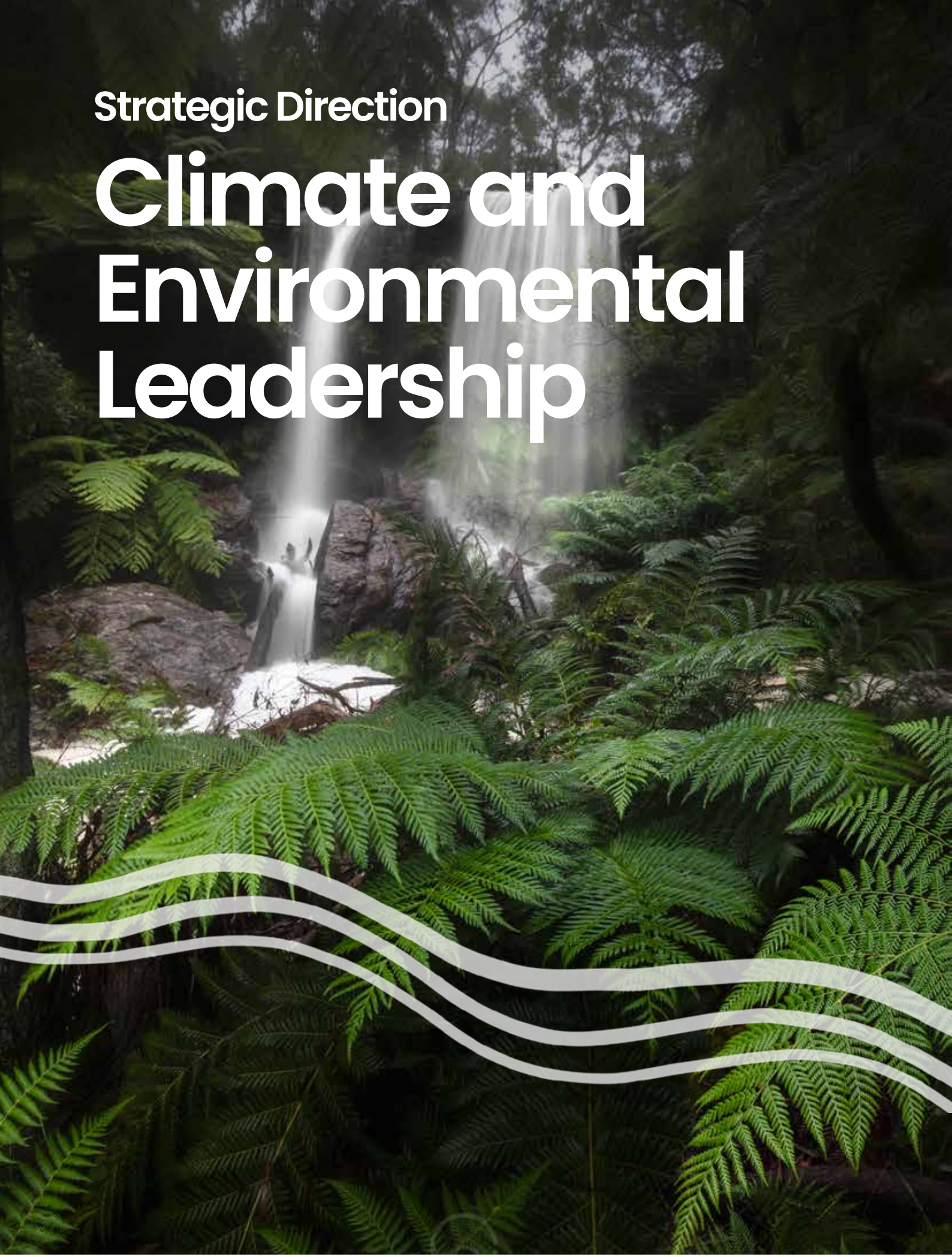
Infrastructure is fit-for-purpose and service levels provide the best balance between ongoing maintenance costs and longer-term replacement cost	💙💜💗
We are building safe, active transport networks that connect communities	💙💜💗💚
Infrastructure reflects township character whilst meeting future needs	💙💗
The social value of infrastructure and facilities is understood and informs decision making	💗
Local roads are safer for all users	💙💜💗

Priorities:

- Prioritise investment in maintenance and renewal of assets
- Review service strategies and intervention levels to best balance community expectations and expenditure
- Asset renewal anticipates and adapts to future impacts including changing usage patterns and the need for greater climate resilience
- Develop a strategy to determine the right combination of sealed and unsealed roads across the network

Strategic Indicators:

- Percentage of assets in very poor condition
- Number of serious crash incidents on local roads
- Delivery of identified active transport links



Strategic Direction

Climate and Environmental Leadership

Council will ensure its own operations are adapted to climate and weather events and build and renew assets with future needs in mind. It will play a leadership role within the community and continue to advocate for more upfront investment in resilient assets and mitigation actions. Areas of environmental significance will be valued and a high priority placed on preservation and conservation.

Strategic Objectives:

Local natural ecosystems are thriving and biodiversity is protected	💚
Communities are prepared ahead of emergencies, supported during them and resilient in their aftermath	💜💗💚
Council operations and infrastructure are adapting to the impacts of extreme weather events	💚
Council is progressively eliminating emissions from its operations and supporting community to reduce emissions	💙💚
Council decisions are weighted towards long term positive environmental impacts	💚
Circular economy principles are being applied to reduce waste	💚

Priorities:

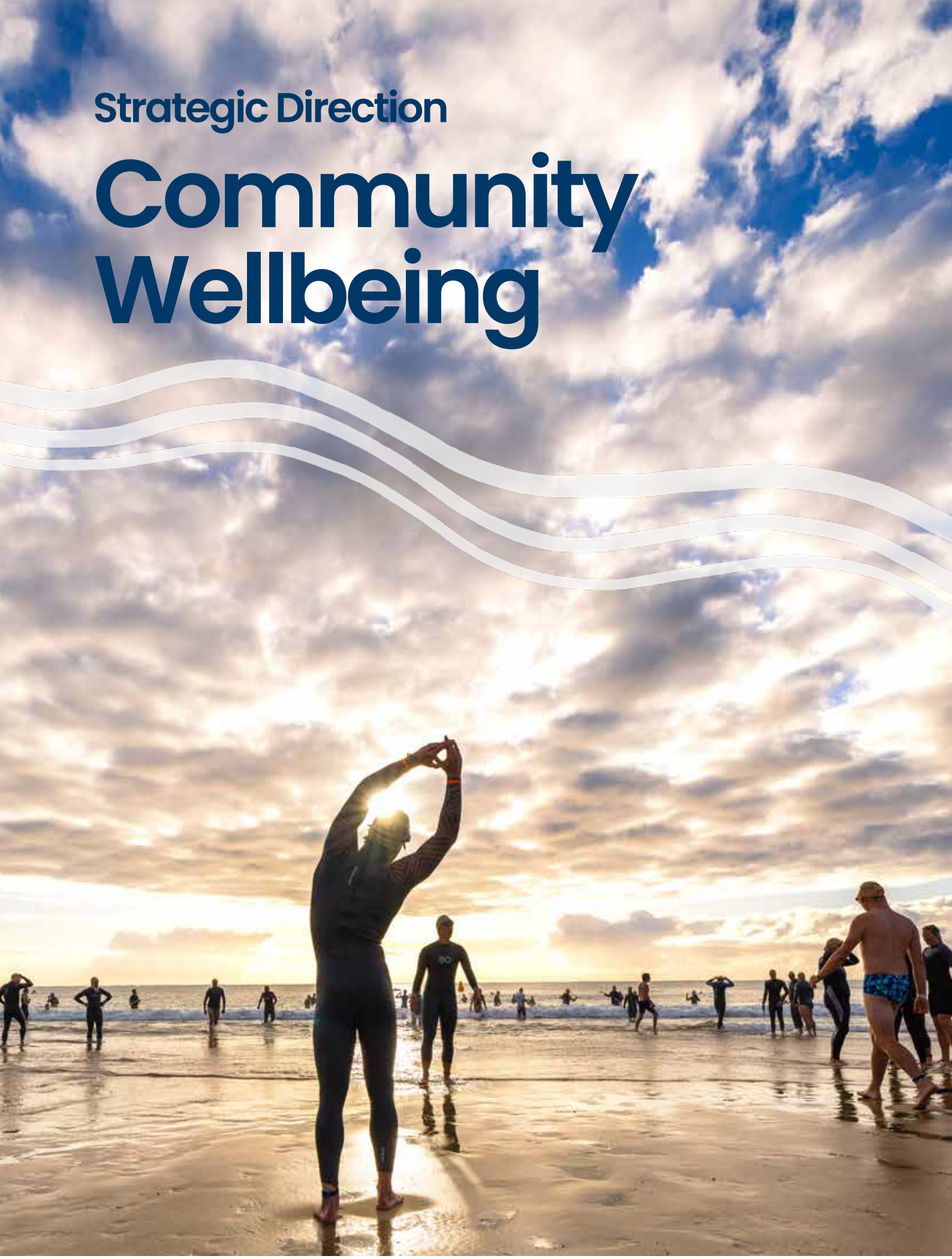
- Advocate for investment in climate-resilient infrastructure from state and federal governments
- Prioritise local nature-based initiatives, such as wetlands, green corridors and urban forests
- Consider climate risk analysis and environmental sustainability in all relevant decision making
- Recognise the Traditional Owner approach to Caring for Country in Council's environmental management systems and practice
- Identify and work toward the best strategic outcome for the closure of the Anglesea landfill

Strategic Indicators:

- Waste diverted from landfill
- Corporate emissions

Strategic Direction

Community Wellbeing



Council seeks to increase community participation and empowerment and will favour projects being led by community where possible. Council will foster healthy active living and community connections for all age groups that improve wellbeing and are equitable and inclusive. The needs of younger and future generations will be prioritised given Council's role in planning for the future.

Strategic Objectives:

Increased social connection to support physical and mental wellbeing	💙💜💗💛💚
Inclusive community that recognises and values diverse perspectives	💜💗
Equitable access to services, social infrastructure and opportunities to participate in community life	💙💜💗💛💚
Communities are empowered to meet their own needs and goals	💙💜💗💛💚
The needs of younger and future generations inform decision making	💙💜💗💛💚

Priorities:

- Value and strengthen relationships with First Nations communities
- Encourage community led projects and initiatives
- Support community art and culture including opportunities for cultural celebration and community events
- Deliver social infrastructure, public spaces and community services that best supports health and inter-generational social connection
- Support the evolution of the library service
- Foster volunteerism
- Advocate for improved access to mental health support in local communities

Strategic Indicators:

- Participation of young people in community engagement activities
- Number of community led projects supported by Council
- Community contribution to Council grant funded projects
- Percentage of people who undertake physical activity
- Proportion of population who was able to get help from family or friends when required

Strategic Direction

High Performing Council

Council decisions are made based on evidence and with an emphasis on long term community benefit. Council is trusted and collaborative. It manages its finances prudently and works innovatively to deliver the best value. Revenue options carefully consider people's capacity to pay.

Strategic Objectives:

Council delivers long term community benefit	♥♥♥♥♥
Trust in Council is built through decisions that are aligned to the Community Vision and adopted strategies; openly made, based on credible evidence; and thoroughly explained	♥♥♥♥♥
Council is financially viable over the long term	♥
Council revenue collection is equity based	♥
Community cost of living impacts are considered when Council makes financial decisions	♥

Priorities:

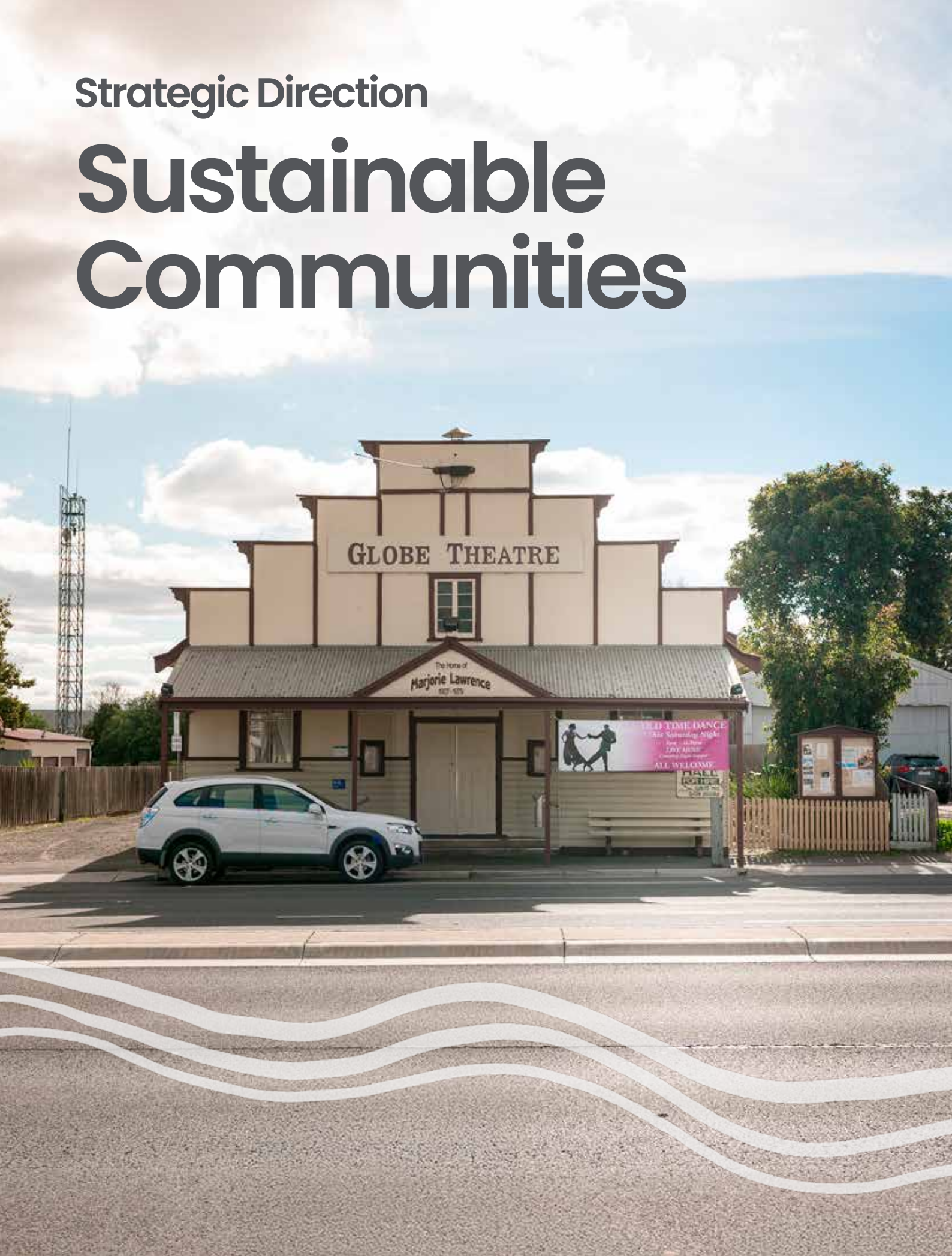
- Develop additional revenue streams whilst maintaining discipline on spending
- Invest in two-way multi-channel communication that promotes understanding and builds civic trust
- Service reviews and a culture of continuous improvement utilised to achieve cost efficiencies and deliver services that meet community expectations
- Collaborate closely with community when progressing major future focused activities such as place planning
- Focus on user pays and cost recovery initiatives that are based on equity principles
- Advocate for greater funding support from state and federal governments

Strategic Indicators:

- Capacity to meet short term financial obligations
- Future Cash Fund Reserve
- Meeting annual savings target
- Delivery of capital program

Strategic Direction

Sustainable Communities



The qualities that make a place liveable, sustainable and functional will be understood and enhanced. Community members will be central to this work and in the specific growth areas of the shire, Place Plans will guide design and development to build communities that are vibrant, welcoming, sustainable and less car dependent. Tourism will be an important element but not at the expense of local amenity or environmental values.

Strategic Objectives:

Planning for a diversity of housing available to support different needs and life stages, including young people and those wishing to age in place	♥ ♥
The uniqueness and character of townships, places and significant landscapes are recognised and preserved, even where such places grow and evolve	♥ ♥
Individual township economies and communities are sustainable	♥
The economy across the shire supports sustainable and diverse local employment	♥
Tourism supports local communities and delivers more consistent economic and social benefits year-round	♥
Community liveability is increased through a reduction in car dependency	♥ ♥

Priorities:

- Plan and facilitate growth according to placemaking principles, enabling diverse housing types and less reliance on car travel
- Foster local primary production and preserve land for farming and landscapes of significance
- Create opportunities and address barriers to support innovation, economic growth, and job creation, having regard to the distinct needs of coastal and hinterland communities
- Support local creative industries to thrive
- Foster an increase in long-term affordable housing for key workers in coastal townships, to support the viability of local economies and communities
- Foster slow and regenerative tourism that is respectful of the local environment, values local communities and maximises local yield and revenue
- Advocate for and invest in active and public transport

Strategic Indicators:

- Length of stay for domestic visitation
- Per capita gross regional product
- Increase in urban street tree planting

Appendices

Appendix 1

Our Focus Our Future Community Engagement Report February 2025

Appendix 2

Surf Coast Shire Community Panel Report March 2025

Appendix 3

Our Focus Our Future Phase 3 Engagement Report

These documents can be found on the Surf Coast Shire Council website at www.surfcoast.vic.gov.au

Appendix 4

Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan context

Aligning our Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan with other regional health plans

Council aligns its Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and other regional Health Plans to ensure consistency across the region, and a collective impact approach to achieving positive health and wellbeing outcomes for our community.

Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2027

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan is a state-level strategic framework guiding health initiatives across Victoria. It emphasises primary prevention, reducing health inequities and collaboration, ensuring 'all Victorians can enjoy the highest attainable standards of health, wellbeing and participation at every age'. The plan identifies ten priority areas that are key drivers for ill-health across the lifespan. These priorities represent areas where sustained action can have the biggest impact on health and wellbeing. Councils must have regard for, and show alignment to, the priorities of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

For more information you can view the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023-2027

Barwon South West Public Health Unit Catchment Plan 2023-2029

The Barwon South West Public Health Unit (BSWPHU) has developed the Barwon South West Population Health Catchment Plan (the Catchment Plan). The Catchment Plan was informed by population health needs, equity assessment and priorities for place-based health promotion,

primary prevention and early intervention, including measures of impact aligned to outcomes frameworks, and will extend over a six-year period (2023–2029). The Catchment Plan supports the goals and objectives of the overarching Barwon South West Public Health Unit Strategy.

For more information you can view the Barwon South West Public Health Unit Catchment Plan Executive Summary

G21 Geelong Region Plan

The G21 Geelong Region Plan is a sustainability plan for the region that looks toward 2050. It identifies and addresses the challenges the region will face in the areas of environment, settlement, land use, community strength and economy as well as the need for change in the way we make things happen.

For more information you can view the G21 Geelong Region Plan

Health Snapshot

21.9% sought professional help for a mental health related problem (Vic 20.1%)

20.6% experienced loneliness (Vic 23.3%)

15.4% experienced high or very high psychological distress (Vic 19.1%)

24.5% consumed sugar sweetened beverages daily (Vic 34.4%)

17.8% have fair or poor dental health (Vic 22.5%)

42.8% met recommended daily fruit intake (Vic 35.2%)

9.9% met recommended daily vegetable intake (Vic 5.7%)

52.9% classified as overweight BMI over 25 (Vic 54.4%)

18.1% classified as obese BMI over 30 (Vic 23%)

9.9% did not do any moderate to vigorous physical activity (Vic 16.8%)

21% spent more than 8 hours sitting (Vic 27.9%)

12.6% smoke tobacco or vape (Vic 18.5%)

17.7% are at increased risk of alcohol related harm (Vic 13.1%)

15.2% self-rated their health status as fair/poor (Vic 20.9%)

*Data is sourced from Victorian Population Health Survey 2023, and is specific to adults living in the Surf Coast Shire.

For more detailed health statistics you can view the Victorian Population Health Survey

Health Priority Areas Overview

Increase Healthy Eating and Active Living

Healthy eating and regular physical activity are essential for overall health and wellbeing. They help prevent chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers, while also enhancing mental health, boosting energy levels, reducing social isolation, strengthening social connections and supporting growth, development and a healthy immune system.

Less than half of Surf Coast Shire adults meet the recommended guidelines for daily fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. Physical activity is declining in children, and recreational screen time is increasing. Increasing active living was the top priority identified by our community in the Our Focus Our Future community engagement survey. Healthy eating and active living are also priorities in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Barwon South West Public Health Unit Plan and for the G21 region.

Advance Gender Equity and Address Family Violence

Preventing violence against women requires tackling all forms of harmful behaviour by addressing the underlying causes of disrespect and inequality. By promoting gender equity and working to prevent violence, we help create safer, healthier communities where everyone is respected, valued, and supported to thrive.

Violence, specifically men's violence against women, is a significant social issue that continues to do profound harm. Data produced by Safe and Equal in 2023 shows that almost 1 in 4 women and almost 1 in 14 men have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15. The Gender Equality Act 2020 requires all Victorian Councils to take action to reduce family violence and promote gender equality. Council will focus on tackling the drivers of violence against women and girls by promoting and progressing gender equity through the actions detailed in our Gender Equality and Diversity Action Plan. In the Our Focus Our Future survey, gender equity and preventing family violence was identified as one of the top three health issues. Preventing all forms of violence is also a priority in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Barwon South West Public Health Unit Plan.

Improve Mental Health and Social Connection

Good mental health supports decision-making, productivity and healthy relationships, and can prevent mental health conditions including anxiety and depression. Strong social connections protect and enhance mental health and reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation which are risk factors for poor mental health.

In 2023, 21.9% of adults living in the Surf Coast Shire sought professional help for a mental health related problem. Improving mental health and social connection is a priority in the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, the Barwon South West Public Health Unit Plan and in the G21 region, and was the second highest priority identified by our community.

Reduce Harm from Alcohol and Vaping

Excessive alcohol consumption and vaping are major contributors to preventable illness and death in Victoria and are linked to serious health issues including heart disease, stroke, certain cancers, and mental health challenges. They also contribute to broader social harms, including injury, road fatalities, crime and family violence. Preventing harm involves reducing risky use, preventing addiction and minimising exposure. Education and harm reduction strategies empower individuals to make safer and more informed choices, ease pressure on healthcare systems, and support healthier, safer communities.

In 2023, 17.7% of adults across the Surf Coast Shire were identified as being at an increased risk of alcohol related harm, which was significantly higher than the Victorian average. Whilst tobacco smoking rates are declining, rates of vaping have tripled, undermining years of progress from tobacco-related harm. Preventing and minimising harm from alcohol consumption and vaping, particularly among young people, will be a focus for this plan. Reducing harmful alcohol and e-cigarette use is also a priority of the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and Barwon South West Public Health Unit Plan.

Tackle the Impacts of Climate on Health

Climate change affects health both directly, including illness and death resulting from extreme weather events such as heatwaves, floods, droughts, and bushfires, as well as indirectly, through changes to land-use and the environment including declining air, food, and water quality. In addition, climate-related disasters can cause job loss, housing insecurity and financial hardship, which increases stress in households and is a known risk factor for family violence.

The *Climate Change Act 2017* requires Councils to have regard to climate change when preparing a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. In

2019 Surf Coast Shire Council declared a climate emergency in recognition that climate change is a real and significant threat and urgent action is needed globally and locally. Council will focus our actions on climate mitigation, adaptation and mobilisation, as well as supporting our community to be more resilient during and after extreme weather events. Tackling climate change and its impacts on health was a top five priority identified by our community, and is a priority within the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Barwon South West Public Health Unit Plan and for the G21 region.

SURF COAST SHIRE COUNCIL
1 Merrijig Drive (PO Box 350)
Torquay Victoria 3228
e. info@surfcoast.vic.gov.au
p. 03 5261 0600
surfcoast.vic.gov.au