

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Coal Creek Strategic Plan



Charting a new direction for Coal Creek



South Gippsland
Shire Council

Background

Coal Creek Community Park and Museum, nestled in the heart of South Gippsland, stands at a crossroads. Opened in 1974 as a tribute to the region's rich coal mining heritage, Coal Creek became a much-loved gathering place for locals and visitors, enjoying its peak popularity in the 1980s. However, it has faced significant challenges, including declining visitor numbers, ageing infrastructure, and a loss of relevance as a community and tourist destination. With the COVID-10 pandemic accelerating these issues, it became clear that some hard decisions needed to be made about the future of Coal Creek. So Council initiated a major review and community engagement process to inform the development of a new strategic plan.

The Strategic Plan has been developed through extensive community engagement, including recruiting the Coal Creek Community Assembly to represent the breadth of the South Gippsland community. The feedback from the community is clear: the people of South Gippsland highly value Coal Creek and want to see it prosper. The Assembly's recommendation to Council for a "New Direction" forms the foundation of this Plan, reflecting the community's aspirations to preserve Coal Creek's heritage while embracing progress and ensuring long-term financial sustainability.

Purpose

This strategic Plan provides a roadmap for how Council and the community can work together to secure Coal Creek's future. It charts a course that protects what people love about this unique asset while setting the foundations for a new direction to ensure that it reaches its potential and provides value to the Shire.

Central to the development of the Plan has been the requirement that it be realistic and that the strategic directions it outlines can be achieved without significant additional funding from Council. Indeed, the Plan will reduce the cost to Council over time while ensuring Coal Creek provides greater value to the people of South Gippsland.

The Strategic Plan contains the following:

- **Draft vision:** A proposed new vision for Coal Creek.
- **Strategic directions:** Provide a high-level framework to achieve the vision.
- **Actions:** High-level actions that provide a roadmap for how Coal Creek can rebuild its foundations in the short term (next 3-5 years) and embark on a new direction in the long term (5 to 10 years).

This is a defining moment for Coal Creek. This Strategic Plan, born of necessity and capturing the South Gippsland community's passion, concerns, and aspirations, sets the stage for a new chapter. We invite the community to embrace the vision and work with us to make it a reality.

What we heard from the community

The community overwhelmingly supports Coal Creek and wants to see it thrive

Through all the feedback we received during the engagement process, including hundreds of surveys and conversations, the people of South Gippsland overwhelmingly reported their appreciation for Coal Creek and expressed a desire to see it thrive. There is a clear belief that Coal Creek provides significant value to South Gippsland, serving as an important tourist attraction, preserving historical significance, and functioning as a community gathering place.

Coal Creek's historical value was highlighted, with many appreciating its preservation of authentic historical buildings and artefacts, which serve as tangible connections to the past. Additionally, the park is a valued community space for cultural and social events.

Despite acknowledging the challenges of financial constraints and maintenance needs, supporters believe in the park's potential for revitalisation through enhanced attractions, improved facilities, and strategic marketing efforts to increase its appeal and sustainability.

Submissions from a broad range of community groups and individuals overwhelmingly supported revitalisation or a new direction for Coal Creek. While recognising the significant challenges and concerns about the cost to Council, the majority believe the benefits outweigh the issues. Closing Coal Creek would mean losing decades of community and Council commitment to building this unique asset, and South Gippsland would never have anything like it again.

However, some community members raised significant concerns about its future viability. They highlighted the financial burden it places on the community and Council, arguing that funds for maintenance and operations could be better allocated elsewhere. They view Coal Creek as outdated and irrelevant, failing to meet modern tourists' expectations and needing more engaging activities or attractions.

Concerns were also raised about the disrepair and closure of many buildings, detracting from the overall visitor experience. Additionally, some believe Coal Creek lacks a clear purpose, with exhibitions and events that do not align with the park's historical and cultural significance, further diminishing its appeal and potential to attract visitors.

We acknowledge that the concerns raised by some in the community are valid. We are confident that the Strategic Plan provides an achievable path to addressing these concerns and ensuring that Coal Creek once again becomes a valuable asset for South Gippsland, meeting our residents' needs and meeting today's visitors' expectations.

Who we heard from

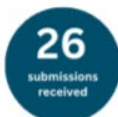
Participation snapshot

Activities

Online survey



Submissions

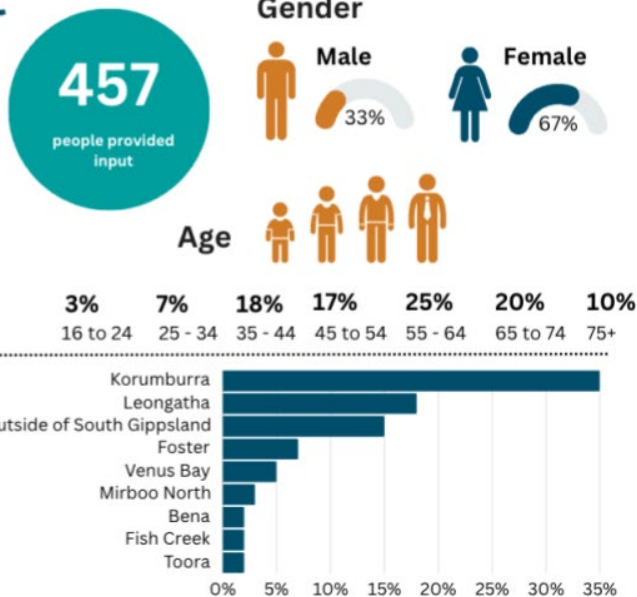


Intercept surveys



4 pop-ups around the community

- The Long Table, Tarwin Lower, 26 Jan
- Outside, Memorial Hall, Leongatha, 2 Feb
- Coal Creek, Korumburra, 2 Feb
- Foster and district Ag show, 24 Feb



Key findings

Visitation: Most respondents from both the intercept and online surveys had visited Coal Creek (96%)

Condition of Coal Creek: In the online survey, almost half of respondents rated the current condition of Coal Creek as average (47%), with 34% rating it positively.

Attractions: In the online survey, over half of respondents (60%) rated the attractions at Coal Creek positively.

Value of Coal Creek to the community: Across the intercept and online survey, a large majority of responses (84%) believe Coal Creek provides value to the community.

Value to the community

We asked respondents to describe Coal Creek’s value, and their responses revealed the following themes:

- **Tourism and economic value:** Coal Creek is a vital tourist attraction, drawing visitors to South Gippsland and benefiting local businesses. Large-scale events hosted at Coal Creek also present significant economic opportunities, boosting local employment and economic growth.
- **Educational value:** An important educational resource, particularly for school groups.
- **Historical value:** Coal Creek plays a crucial role in preserving the history, heritage, and culture of South Gippsland. Maintaining historical buildings and displaying a vast collection of artefacts allows locals and visitors to connect with the area’s past.
- **A valued community space:** It acts as a communal hub, hosting cultural and community events that bring locals together.

What people most liked

The most interesting things at Coal Creek were:

- **Historical value:** Respondents appreciate the site's authentic historical buildings, artefacts, and educational opportunities related to local history.
- **Open space:** Coal Creek's natural, park-like setting, known for its tranquillity and beauty, is a significant draw for visitors.
- **Events and activities:** A variety of events, including festivals and train rides, are popular attractions that enhance the visitor experience.

What people least liked

The least interesting were:

- **The disrepair and closure** of some buildings are major concerns, detracting from the overall experience.
- **Lack of interactivity:** The absence of interactive displays is seen as a missed opportunity for engagement and education.
- **Lack of food options:** Inadequate food and beverage services and the closure of key facilities like the cafe are notable drawbacks for visitors.

Challenges and opportunities

The main challenges identified by the community for the continued operation of Coal Creek were:

- **Financial constraints:** Funding and financial resources for maintenance and improvements.
- **Maintenance and upkeep:** Continually maintaining buildings, exhibits, and grounds.
- **Connecting with younger generations** There is a need for more attractions and activities that appeal to younger people.

The main opportunities that were identified were:

- **Tourism:** Enhancing its role as a major tourist destination that can serve as a gateway to the Shire.
- **Education:** Expanding educational offerings, such as school programs and historical workshops.
- **History:** Emphasising the preservation and showcase of local heritage and history to educate and attract visitors.
- **Increasing entertainment and events:** A diverse range of activities such as art exhibitions, festivals, music and food events.

Encouraging visitation

The community put forward the following changes or improvements:

- **More events and experiences:** Respondents want more dynamic activities, such as interactive exhibits, historical tours, and various events, including music, arts, and festivals.
- **Improved accessibility:** Better transportation options within the park for people with mobility issues or disabilities are needed.
- **Food and beverage options:** Reopening the cafe and specialty shops was frequently mentioned to enhance the visitor experience.
- **Promotion:** There was a call for improved marketing efforts to increase awareness of Coal Creek.

Feedback from community groups and interested individuals

In total, 26 submissions were received, with all but one overwhelmingly supporting the revitalisation and continued operation of Coal Creek, recognising its significant historical, cultural, educational, and economic value to the South Gippsland community. Many highlighted the park's potential to become a major tourist destination and community cultural centre, serving as a gateway to the Shire.

Despite acknowledging the financial challenges and the need for improved maintenance and facilities, the submissions emphasise the importance of preserving Coal Creek for future generations. They propose various strategies for enhancing the park's appeal and sustainability, such as involving local groups in maintenance, expanding accommodation options, hosting more events, improving signage and amenities, and seeking additional funding sources. The submissions reflect a strong community desire to see Coal Creek thrive and transform into a vibrant heritage, culture, arts, environment, and technology hub.

One submission strongly opposed the ongoing operation of Coal Creek, citing concerns over its historical financial performance and viability. The submitter argued that the facility has consistently incurred losses and failed to maintain its buildings and historical items. They highlighted the park's repeated management failures, both under Council and independently, with assets often left in disrepair. Additionally, the submission pointed out the park's remote location, which is unsuitable for year-round use due to climate conditions and its inability to attract significant visitors. The submitter emphasised the opportunity cost, suggesting that funds allocated to Coal Creek could be better spent elsewhere in the Shire. They urged Council to consider closure, stating that the closure costs would be manageable compared to the ongoing financial burden.

Coal Creek Community Assembly

The Coal Creek Community Assembly was a deliberative engagement process that placed the community at the centre of decision-making for the future of Coal Creek. This approach aimed to capture the diverse views of South Gippsland residents and ensure that the new Strategic Plan for Coal Creek genuinely reflected the community's needs and aspirations.

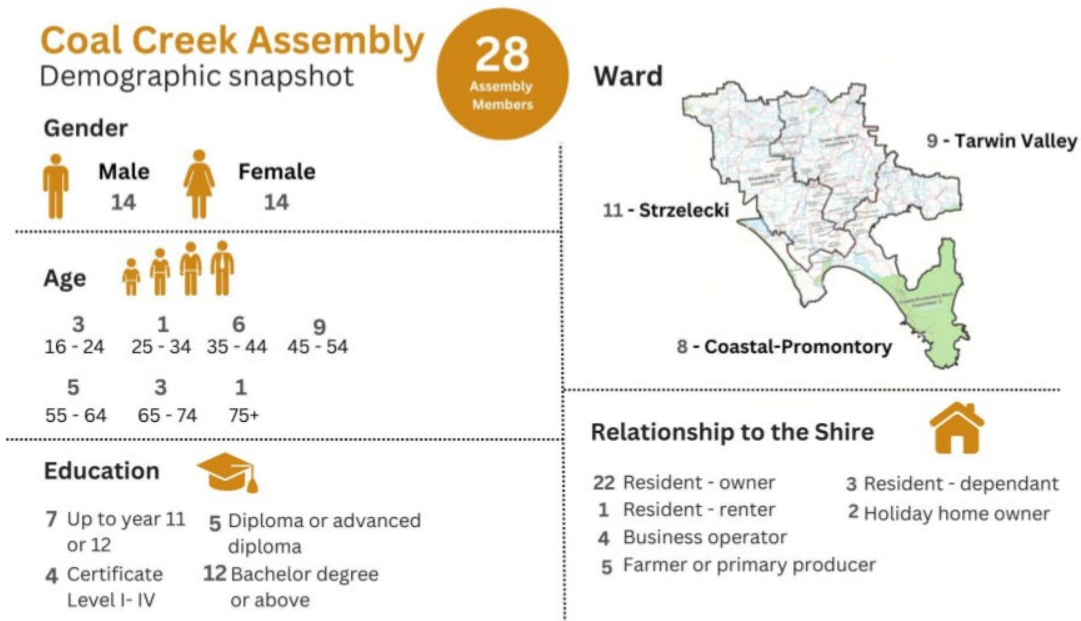
The Assembly brought together a representative group of community members, selected through a random sampling process, to collaborate in a safe and moderated environment. Participants were provided comprehensive information about the complex issues surrounding Coal Creek and given the time and resources to engage in meaningful discussions and develop considered recommendations.

The Assembly's task was to weigh the pros and cons of three potential options for Coal Creek's future: revitalisation, a new direction, or ceasing current operations. Participants had access to all available information about each option's costs, challenges, and opportunities and could request additional information as needed.

To ensure transparency and accountability, Council committed to taking the Assembly's recommendations seriously and using them as the foundation for their decision-making process. Where recommendations could not be implemented, Council pledged to provide a clear explanation to both the Assembly and the wider community.

The Coal Creek Community Assembly represents a significant commitment to community engagement and participatory decision-making. By placing the community's voices at the centre of the process, Council has demonstrated its commitment to developing a Strategic Plan that genuinely reflects the hopes and aspirations of the people of South Gippsland.

Who was on the Assembly?



Assembly recommendations

The Assembly deliberated and reached a consensus on two main recommendations: factors to guide future decisions about Coal Creek and a recommendation on which of the three options presented in the Discussion Paper they determined to support. In deciding to vote for a new direction, the Assembly explained that the Council needed to be bold and that revitalisation risked being seen as doing more of the same, replicating past failed efforts. The safeguards were essential in reaching a consensus on the recommendation.

The Assembly also put forward suggested short- and long-term priorities to achieve a new direction, which have been an important input into the Strategic Plan.

Recommendation to Council

The core task of the Coal Creek Community Assembly was to provide a recommendation to Council on behalf of the South Gippsland community regarding which of the three options outlined in the Discussion Paper should guide Council's decision on the future of Coal Creek.

The Community Assembly's recommendation, reached by consensus and drafted on the final day of deliberations, is provided below. In addition to the recommendation on the preferred option for the future of Coal Creek, the Assembly provided a clear rationale for their choice and a list of safeguards to ensure that the cherished aspects of Coal Creek are protected. The Assembly also prioritised a set of decision-making factors to guide future decisions about Coal Creek. These three elements collectively form the recommendation to Council.

We, the Coal Creek Assembly, have considered the options presented. We recommend Option 2, **New Direction**.

Our rationale for choosing this option is as follows:

- **Increased opportunity:** It expands possibilities, opening Coal Creek to fresh ideas and diversified funding sources.
- **Embracing progress:** There's a strong desire to move forward, avoid stagnation, and create a space that meets evolving community needs and interests.
- **Expanded vision:** It allows us to develop a vision that is new and transformative.
- **Financial sustainability:** It's crucial for addressing the current financial strain and attracting new revenue streams.
- **Inclusivity:** To welcome diverse groups and interests to Coal Creek.
- **Preservation with purpose:** While historical elements will remain important, they may take a secondary role, allowing for innovative use of historical sites and a focus on broader educational opportunities.

With the following safeguards in place:

- Core heritage components, including the museum and steam train, are preserved.
- Existing buildings are audited with a commitment to preserving those of high value.
- The essential character of the park is retained, including the focus on open space and nature (no roller coasters or water parks).
- Ongoing role for the volunteers and community groups like the Friends of Coal Creek.
- The revenue generated through new directions is used to support and revitalise the heritage offerings.
- All decision-making factors are retained and considered important (see below).

Factors to guide decision making

The Assembly prioritised decision-making factors to guide future decisions about Coal Creek.

<p>After much deliberation, the Assembly prioritised the decision-making factors as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community involvement and inclusion 2. Economic viability (regarding the cost to Council) 3. Environmental sustainability and access to open space 4. Contribution to the South Gippsland Economy 5. Preserving historical and cultural significance <p>While the Assembly prioritised the criteria, they consider them all important, and they all need to be considered in future decision-making.</p>	<table border="1"> <tr> <td>1st</td> <td>Community involvement and inclusion</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2nd</td> <td>Economic viability (regarding the cost to Council)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3rd</td> <td>Environmental sustainability and access to open space</td> </tr> <tr> <td>4th</td> <td>Contribution to the South Gippsland Economy</td> </tr> <tr> <td>5th</td> <td>Preserving historical and cultural significance</td> </tr> </table>	1st	Community involvement and inclusion	2nd	Economic viability (regarding the cost to Council)	3rd	Environmental sustainability and access to open space	4th	Contribution to the South Gippsland Economy	5th	Preserving historical and cultural significance
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Council's response to the recommendation

On behalf of South Gippsland Shire, we extend our sincere gratitude to the members of the Coal Creek Community Assembly for their dedication, thoughtful deliberations, and significant contribution to shaping the future of Coal Creek. Your participation, along with the contributions of hundreds of people across the Shire, has been invaluable.

At the commencement of the Coal Creek Community Assembly, Council made a commitment to take the Assembly's recommendations seriously and use them as the foundation for our decision-making. We reaffirm that commitment and will give the Assembly's recommendation the utmost consideration when the matter comes before Council for a decision.

The Assembly's recommendation provides a clear direction for Coal Creek. We appreciate the inclusion of a rationale for choosing a New Direction, the safeguards, and the factors to guide future decisions. These elements demonstrate the depth of thought and care that went into your deliberations.

Where we may not be able to fully endorse the recommendation, such as committing Council to future spending commitments, we will provide a clear explanation to the Assembly and the community.

Once the Strategic Plan has been endorsed, we look forward to the development of a detailed business case that will provide a clear financial roadmap for its implementation.

Thank you once again for your engagement and for helping shape the future of Coal Creek.

A new vision for Coal Creek

In the next three years, Coal Creek will focus on enhancing its core offerings, building on its historical significance, natural beauty, and potential as an event venue and tourism drawcard.

Over time, Coal Creek will become a vibrant and dynamic destination celebrating South Gippsland's rich heritage and the best of the region today. By enhancing current attractions, improving the visitor experience, and establishing robust financial foundations, Coal Creek will solidify its role as a community, cultural and tourism destination, setting the stage for future growth.

Central to the new direction envisioned by the Community Assembly is a bold and entrepreneurial approach to capturing the potential value of Coal Creek for the South Gippsland community, generating revenue, and reducing the cost to Council over time. It's about expanding possibilities, opening Coal Creek to fresh ideas and diversified funding sources, embracing progress, and transforming Coal Creek into a vibrant community gathering place and premier tourism destination, while preserving what people love.

Draft Vision

Coal Creek is a vibrant community asset, a place to gather and celebrate, attracting visitors from across South Gippsland and beyond. As a well-positioned gateway to the region, Coal Creek showcases the best of South Gippsland and drives tourism and economic value.

Coal Creek offers a unique blend of engaging cultural events, natural beauty and interactive heritage experiences. By reimagining its heritage offerings, forging strategic partnerships, and implementing a sustainable financial model, Coal Creek is a significant driver of tourism and economic growth for the entire region.

Coal Creek is a source of pride for the South Gippsland community - where locals gather to connect with their heritage, celebrate their culture, and share the best of their region with visitors from far and wide.

Strategic directions

The Strategic Plan aims to capitalise on Coal Creek's strengths to create a vibrant and sustainable community asset. By enhancing current attractions, improving visitor experiences, and strengthening community involvement, we will lay a solid foundation for future growth and development.

To lay the groundwork for Coal Creek to take a new direction, in the short term, we will reduce the financial cost to Council, assess and prioritise infrastructure needs, and rally stakeholder support around our long-term vision. By focusing on these short-term priorities, we aim to reinvigorate Coal Creek as a vibrant community centre, living history museum, and cultural tourism draw—setting the stage for its continued growth and transformation in the years to come.

Strategic directions

- Building community involvement and support
- Achieving financial sustainability
- Environmental stewardship and open space
- Contribution to the South Gippsland Economy
- Preserving historical and cultural significance
- Operations, marketing and resourcing

Draft

Building community involvement and support

Coal Creek today: Coal Creek is known mainly as a historical park that is a good place to visit for events and special occasions. While it hosts events and has a dedicated volunteer base, the park's activities are restricted, and it struggles to attract new visitors and foster a strong sense of community ownership.

Coal Creek in the future: In the next 10 years, Coal Creek will transform into a vibrant, inclusive community space where all people of South Gippsland can gather, participate, and celebrate. It will be buzzing with community-led activities, innovative educational programs, and dynamic cultural events.

Enhanced volunteer programs, strong partnerships with local groups, and exciting new initiatives like nature play areas and adventure playgrounds will ensure Coal Creek is a lively, engaging, and welcoming space. It will celebrate the community's diversity and heritage, creating a strong sense of ownership and pride among residents and visitors.

Coal Creek is a vibrant part of South Gippsland's cultural scene, known for its eclectic mix of events and is recognised as one of the region's premier venues for arts, culture, and entertainment.

Actions

Short Term

- **Build the volunteer program:** Strengthen partnerships with community groups to bolster volunteer support for park operations and events.
- **Support community-led activities:** Continue to support community-led activities, both large and small, to attract new visitors from across South Gippsland and foster a sense of pride and ownership amongst residents.
- **A place for celebration:** invite the community to celebrate significant milestones, such as birthdays and weddings, as well as community and corporate events, making Coal Creek a central gathering place.
- **Revitalise the education program:** By incorporating digital and interactive elements into the heritage offer and expanding the focus to include environmental and cultural experiences to enhance Coal Creek's reputation as a destination for discovery and learning.
- **Build community and stakeholder support:** Continue to engage the community and stakeholders in implementing the Strategic Plan through regular forums or a working group involving community, tourism and business representatives.

Long Term

- **A place for young families:** Introduce new experiences, such as nature play and pop-up activations, and explore the creation of an adventure playground, positioning Coal Creek as a must-visit destination for families and young visitors.
- **Broaden the educational focus:** Expand the education program beyond heritage to include diverse topics, forming partnerships with local groups such as the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people to offer enriched educational experiences.
- **Establish Coal Creek as a creative and cultural centre:** Progressively introduce opportunities for local artists and cultural organisations to exhibit, perform, and operate from the site.

I'm not interested in the past, so why would I visit?

The Strategic Plan is all about taking Coal Creek in a new direction. So, while we will always cherish its heritage, we are introducing new experiences and activities that build on Coal Creek's beautiful natural surroundings and ability to offer unique events.

I've been once and enjoyed it, but why would I go back?

Over the last 18 months, we have started restoring some of the things that people love about Coal Creek, including the lake and the rotunda. Beyond being a great place for a picnic or a day out with the kids, we're introducing new programs and events.

How can Coal Creek become a place for people from all across the Shire to connect?

It's clear from the feedback that when many people think of Coal Creek, they think of Korumburra. The reality is that Coal Creek has long been a place for tourists to visit and for people to gather. You'd be surprised how many people across the Shire have married at Coal Creek. The Strategic Plan sets out a roadmap for how Coal Creek can become a favourite day out whether you're from down the coast or Melbourne.

Draft

Achieving financial sustainability

Coal Creek today: Coal Creek relies heavily on Council funding to maintain its operations and preserve its historical and cultural assets. The park faces financial challenges, with limited revenue streams and a need for significant maintenance and upgrades. While it hosts events and activities, the financial constraints hinder its ability to expand and improve, affecting its long-term viability and ability to attract and retain visitors.

Coal Creek in future: Over the next 10 years, Coal Creek will transform into a financially sustainable community asset that generates revenue to cover an increasing share of its operating costs and fund ongoing maintenance and improvements. Visitors will feel compelled to return, knowing they can always find something new and exciting, whether it's a marquee event, a unique dining experience, or interesting retail offerings. The community will appreciate the park's ability to increasingly support itself through diverse revenue streams, including events, venue hire, commercial partnerships, and innovative ticketing models.

As Coal Creek's reputation grows, so will its financial stability, allowing the park to reduce its reliance on Council funding and secure a sustainable future. The community will take pride in Coal Creek as a thriving centre of activity that preserves the region's rich heritage while embracing new opportunities for growth and prosperity.

Actions

Short term

- **Enhance visitor experience:** Continuously improve the visitor experience to encourage repeat visits and attract new guests. This includes enhancing accessibility, upgrading signage, and improving basic amenities.
- **Increase revenue streams:** Identify and implement opportunities to increase revenue through events, venue hire, commercial partnerships, ticketing, and entry fees to cover a larger share of operating costs.
- **Marquee events to draw crowds:** Continue to build Coal Creek's reputation as a unique venue for events, such as festivals and holiday celebrations, developing a schedule of marquee events throughout the year.
- **Event capacity and partnerships:** Build Coal Creek's capacity to host events as a venue for hire, exploring partnerships with local caterers, event suppliers and organisers.
- **Restore bush tramway operations:** Reinstate the Coal Creek Bush Tramway to attract train enthusiasts and young families and use it as a basis to generate income.
- **Conduct an asset audit:** Undertake a safety and function audit of existing buildings and other assets to identify priorities for preservation and opportunities to re-purpose to support new activities and partnerships.
- **Proactively seek funding:** Actively pursue funding opportunities for maintenance, infrastructure, and visitor experience improvements through grants, sponsorships, and commercial partnerships.

Long term

- **Comprehensive infrastructure plan:** Develop and implement a comprehensive plan to address ageing assets and infrastructure, preserve heritage, and prepare for future development opportunities.
- **Introduce food and beverage options:** Attract more visitors by introducing new food and beverage offerings, including exploring a destination café/restaurant.
- **Expand retail options:** Develop new retail options that reflect Coal Creek's heritage and showcase local produce from across South Gippsland.
- **Major events hub:** Position Coal Creek as the key venue for major events and exhibitions in South Gippsland, leveraging its unique setting and facilities.
- **Film and TV partnerships:** Continue to promote the Park as an attractive location for film and TV projects, bringing wider recognition.

- **Improve transport accessibility:** Explore opportunities for better transport options to facilitate easier access to Coal Creek from across South Gippsland and Melbourne.
- **Invest in technology and infrastructure:** Continuously adapt and innovate to improve the visitor experience by investing in technology and infrastructure that meets evolving visitor expectations.

What does financial sustainability mean for Coal Creek? Does this mean it will pay for itself?

Financial sustainability for Coal Creek means reducing its reliance on Council funding and increasing its ability to generate revenue over time. Like other community assets like swimming pools or sporting fields, we don't expect Coal Creek to be completely self-sufficient—certainly not in the short term. The goal is to ensure it covers a larger share of its operating costs and is able to fund improvements and maintenance as the Strategic Plan is implemented.

Is it realistic for Coal Creek to achieve financial sustainability in the next three years?

Yes, it is realistic, and it's essential to the success of the Strategic Plan. Before COVID-19, Coal Creek generated more than \$250,000 per year without an entrance fee. With the implementation of the Strategic Plan, we are confident that Coal Creek can return to those revenue levels within three years. While we will develop a detailed business case and plan once the strategic plan is endorsed, we believe Coal Creek can produce revenue to offset the current cost to Council next five years.

As Council is not the owner of Coal Creek, can new commercial activities be introduced on the site?

Like other community assets owned by the State, like the Great Southern Rail Trail, we plan to explore the scope for introducing commercial activities over time. The Strategic Plan provides a framework for working with the State Government to implement these commercial activities.

Environmental stewardship and access to open space

Coal Creek today: As the largest Council-managed open space in South Gippsland, Coal Creek has the potential to be a significant ecological and cultural asset. The park features diverse environmental elements, including a stream, two ponds/lakes, Mountain Ash trees, and extensive canopy cover. The area is protected by Environmental Significance Overlays (ESO5 and ESO9) to safeguard against erosion and preserve the Giant Gippsland Earthworm Habitat. The lower part of the site is also recognised for its Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Sensitivity. Despite these natural assets, the park lacks a cohesive plan for environmental stewardship and community engagement in conservation efforts.

Coal Creek in the future: In the next 10 years, Coal Creek will be celebrated as a beacon of environmental stewardship and a vibrant natural sanctuary. Visitors and residents will think of Coal Creek as a model for sustainability, where innovative practices and community involvement have transformed it into a thriving ecosystem. People will feel inspired by the park's commitment to protecting local flora and fauna and its role in educating the community about environmental issues and climate change. Collaborations with the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people will enrich the park's narrative, integrating traditional knowledge and stewardship practices. Coal Creek will be known not only as a historical and cultural treasure but also as a leader in conservation, offering a healthy, biodiverse environment that future generations will continue to enjoy and learn from.

Actions

Short term

- **Build community involvement:** Encourage involvement in environmental stewardship through partnerships with environmental, community and Landcare groups, encouraging hands-on participation and a sense of collective responsibility.
- **Develop educational programs:** Collaborate with local environmental and community groups to develop educational programs and experiences focused on sustainability, conservation, and response to climate change.
- **Implement sustainability upgrades,** Including installing renewable energy systems and enhancing recycling facilities, to reduce the park's environmental footprint and set a positive example.

Long term

- **Highlight First Nations heritage:** Partner with the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people to incorporate First Nations heritage into Coal Creek's narrative and promote traditional environmental stewardship practices.
- **Advance sustainability initiatives:** Trial and implement leading sustainability initiatives to position Coal Creek as a leading model for environmental conservation and climate change mitigation.
- **Develop conservation plans:** Implement conservation plans to protect and enhance local flora and fauna, ensuring the park's biodiversity is preserved and enriched.
- **Promote climate education:** Establish Coal Creek as a hub for climate education by offering programs and workshops that teach the community about the impacts of climate change and practical ways to respond.
- **Enhance natural habitats:** Continuously enhance natural habitats within the park to support wildlife and promote ecological balance, ensuring Coal Creek remains a vibrant and healthy ecosystem.

How can we partner with the Traditional Owners to enhance the park's environmental and cultural value?

Partnering with the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people provides an opportunity to integrate traditional knowledge and stewardship practices into Coal Creek's management. This includes developing the middle lower park as an Indigenous parkland, enriching the park's cultural narrative and enhancing its environmental value.

What opportunities are there to partner with community groups and other organisations to make the most of the park's natural assets?

There are significant opportunities to collaborate with a range of community groups to enhance Coal Creek's natural assets. In fact, a number of ideas have already been put forward for us to explore, including providing greenhouse facilities for local Landcare groups, establishing native edible plant gardens, and exploring the potential for nature play and sculpture garden.

How can the community get more involved in protecting the park's environment?

The community can get involved by participating in biodiversity enhancement projects, such as the second phase of native plantings. Once the Strategic Plan is in place, we will develop a model for ongoing community involvement in environmental stewardship, ensuring that residents actively protect and preserve Coal Creek's ecosystem.

Draft

Contribution to the South Gippsland

Coal Creek today: Coal Creek primarily offers value to South Gippsland as a testament to the region's history and increasingly as a destination for major events and holiday celebrations. Its contribution to the region has declined over the years due to decreasing visitor numbers. While Coal Creek remains highly valued by the community for its history and memories of past visits, its cultural impact has increased post-COVID with the introduction of new events and activities, and its economic impact is limited but growing.

Coal Creek in the future: In the next 10 years, Coal Creek will be recognised as a vibrant gateway to South Gippsland's thriving tourism industry, playing an important role in the regional economy. Visitors will be drawn to Coal Creek's unique blend of heritage, nature, and engaging visitor experiences. The park will buzz with activity as people enjoy delicious local food and wine, diverse events, and unique cultural experiences. Strong partnerships will benefit local businesses, and the community will appreciate Coal Creek's significant contribution to regional economic development. As a premier event destination, Coal Creek will host events that attract visitors from Melbourne, across Victoria, and interstate, cementing its reputation as a must-visit attraction.

Actions

Short term

- **Reintroduce food and beverage options:** Start offering coffee and snacks at the park's entrance. During weekends and busy periods such as school holidays, a coffee cart or food truck may provide this, enhancing the visitor experience and encouraging longer stays.
- **Enhance visibility and marketing:** Improve signage and visibility from the roadway to encourage more people to stop. Increased marketing and promotion, positioning it as a gateway to the best South Gippsland has to offer, will attract more visitors.
- **Improve the visitor experience:** Offer visitor information and experiences for the region, establishing Coal Creek as the starting point for exploring South Gippsland.
- **Develop visitor packages:** Work with tourism operators and local businesses to create attractive visitor offers and packages, integrating Coal Creek into the broader regional tourism experience.
- **Host major events:** Actively pursue and host events that draw visitors from outside the region, boosting tourism and economic activity and placing Coal Creek on the map as a premier event destination.
- **Engage stakeholders:** Proactively engage with government and other stakeholders to have Coal Creek recognised as a key player in South Gippsland's visitor economy and integrate it into economic development strategies.

Long term

- **Build strategic partnerships:** Develop long-term partnerships with Destination Gippsland, Regional Arts Victoria, local businesses, and tourism operators to create a cohesive and integrated regional visitor experience and maximise economic benefits.
- **Targeted marketing campaigns:** Develop marketing campaigns to attract visitors from Melbourne, across Victoria, and interstate, leveraging Coal Creek's unique offerings.
- **Economic impact evaluation:** Continuously monitor and evaluate Coal Creek's economic impact on the regional economy, using data-driven insights to inform future strategies and initiatives. Demonstrate the return on investment and community benefits.
- **Develop signature events and festivals:** Invest in partnerships to develop significant events and festivals that will establish Coal Creek as a must-visit destination and attract visitors from across the region and beyond.

What do you mean by Coal Creek being a tourism gateway to South Gippsland?

Coal Creek's strategic location on the highway and extended weekend and holiday hours make it an ideal starting point for exploring South Gippsland. Visitors can stop to enjoy a coffee, use the facilities, explore the park, and gather information and offers for other regional attractions. We aim to create a compelling reason for travellers to make Coal Creek one of their first stops, enhancing their overall experience and encouraging further exploration of the region.

What role can Coal Creek play in tourism and the visitor economy?

Coal Creek can serve as a major attraction for young families, an outdoor event space, and a key cultural tourism destination. Increasing interest from tourism operators highlights its potential as a stop for tour buses heading to Wilsons Promontory. Additionally, Coal Creek has the capacity to host major events and unique gastronomy experiences. In the long term, we will explore opportunities to offer unique accommodation options such as glamping, accommodation pods, or tiny houses.

How can Coal Creek support the arts, culture and creative industries?

Coal Creek can significantly support arts and culture by providing opportunities for artists and creatives. This includes offering gallery space, sub-letting buildings for arts or photography studios, and creating rehearsal spaces. Larger flexible-use spaces can be used for performances and other cultural activities. By investing in these areas, we align with our arts and culture strategy and offer substantial support to residents interested in these fields with relatively little investment.

How can Coal Creek support local businesses?

As activity at Coal Creek grows, so will opportunities for local businesses. This includes partnerships with local event hire companies, caterers, and entertainers. In the longer term, there is potential to provide practical experiences for local apprentices and training in areas such as environmental stewardship. Increased visitor numbers and events will drive demand for local goods and services, benefiting the regional economy.

Preserving historical and cultural significance

Coal Creek today: Coal Creek is known and loved for its role in presenting the history of South Gippsland and for the memories of past visits. The park's authentic historical buildings, collection of artefacts, and exhibits offer a tangible connection to the region's past, preserving the stories and experiences of early settlers and coal mining pioneers. While widely perceived as valuable for education and tourism, its museum and heritage collection is static, and much is behind closed doors. Coal Creek faces significant challenges in maintaining its ageing infrastructure and buildings, many of which are no longer accessible. Despite its historical and cultural significance, the park struggles to remain relevant and engaging for modern audiences, with concerns about the lack of interactive displays, limited accessibility, and the closure of key facilities and attractions.

Coal Creek in the future: Over the next 10 years, Coal Creek will be developed into a dynamic and relevant cultural heritage site that honours the past while embracing the future. Visitors will explore the restored historic buildings, each telling a unique story of South Gippsland's history or showcasing art and produce from today. People of all ages will explore interactive exhibits and share their experiences on social media. Coal Creek is a place of learning, offering engaging educational programs that highlight the historical and cultural significance of the area. Through strong partnerships with the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people, the park will weave Indigenous heritage and traditional knowledge into its narrative, fostering a deep appreciation for the region's diverse history.

Actions

Short term

- **Strengthen community involvement:** To assist in preserving and presenting local history, ensuring Coal Creek remains a living testament to the region's heritage.
- **Maintain and restore historic buildings:** Continue the restoration and maintenance of key historic buildings and exhibits to ensure they are safe, accessible, and engaging for all visitors.
- **Enhancing rail heritage:** Continue the restoration and operational improvements of the Coal Creek Bush Tramway, further integrating it into the park's heritage narrative.
- **Establish conservation plans:** Develop and implement long-term plans to preserve buildings, assets, and artefacts with the highest heritage and historical value.
- **Showcase unique history:** Preserve and showcase Coal Creek's unique history through targeted conservation efforts, engaging interpretative displays, and repurposing buildings for new, innovative uses.
- **Collection management:** Explore new methods for managing and showcasing the museum's collection, enhancing visitor engagement and educational value.

Long Term

- **Reimagine the landscape:** Return areas of the park to their natural bushland state by removing inappropriate plantings and incorporating native and edible plants to reflect a pre-colonial landscape. This could include eco-walks and First Nations trails that tell the story of the land as it was before colonialism.
- **Strengthen engagement with Traditional Owners:** Strengthen engagement with the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people and develop opportunities for environmental and cultural partnerships to demonstrate the council's commitment to reconciliation.
- **Promote cultural heritage destination:** Position Coal Creek as a local and national cultural heritage destination to attract more visitors and enhance its role in preserving the region's history.
- **Expand educational programs:** Develop new educational programs that highlight Coal Creek's historical and cultural significance beyond coal mining.

How will Coal Creek maintain and restore its historic buildings with limited funding?

We will continue to prioritise the most critical restoration and maintenance projects to ensure safety and accessibility. To supplement Council funding, we will seek grants, sponsorships, and partnerships with heritage organisations. Engaging the community through volunteer programs and introducing new building uses will provide additional support. By focusing on high-impact projects and leveraging external funding sources, we can effectively maintain and restore Coal Creek's historic buildings despite financial constraints.

What steps will be taken to make Coal Creek's museum and heritage collection more engaging?

We will explore new methods to manage and showcase the museum's collection, focusing on interactive and interpretive displays. By repurposing buildings for innovative uses and incorporating engaging exhibits, we aim to make the heritage collection more accessible and appealing to modern audiences.

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Operations, marketing, and resourcing

Coal Creek today: Coal Creek operates with a limited budget and resources, relying heavily on Council funding and volunteer support. While it has a dedicated team and hosts various events, the park faces challenges in marketing, stakeholder engagement, and infrastructure management. The current operations, though functional, lack the strategic direction and resources needed to maximise the park's potential.

Coal Creek in the future: In the next 10 years, Coal Creek will operate as a thriving community space and cultural destination, supported by a growing team with a clear mandate for the park's development. It will have a new name and brand, and its unique tourism and cultural offerings will capture the imagination of visitors and the local community alike. Coal Creek will have a strong, positive economic impact on South Gippsland, supported by great stakeholder relationships and strategic partnerships. A thorough assessment of the park's infrastructure will have informed a long-term management plan that enhances the visitor experience, and increases revenue in alignment with the Strategic Plan. By implementing strategic conservation plans and adaptive reuse of historic buildings, Coal Creek will ensure that the region's heritage is preserved for future generations. The park will serve as a beacon of cultural significance, instilling a sense of pride and connection to the past among the South Gippsland community.

Actions

Short term

- **Review resourcing:** Review current resources and redirect efforts where possible to ensure sufficient capacity to implement the Strategic Plan.
- **Rebrand brand Coal Creek:** Review the naming and branding of Coal Creek to reflect the vision and a new direction.
- **Partner with Destination Gippsland:** To enhance marketing and promotion efforts to increase visibility and attract visitors, leveraging traditional and digital channels.
- **Strengthen stakeholder engagement:** Develop a comprehensive stakeholder engagement and communication strategy, incorporating regular updates, consultation, and feedback mechanisms.
- **Assess park infrastructure:** Conduct a comprehensive assessment of all park infrastructure to develop a long-term management plan that prioritises safety, enhances the visitor experience, and increases revenue in alignment with the Strategic Plan.
- **Communicate economic impact:** Through regular reporting, quantify and communicate Coal Creek's economic impact and contribution to South Gippsland.

Long term

- **Enhance historical and cultural narratives:** Enhance the park's historical and cultural narratives, including First Nations heritage and a focus on the future of South Gippsland.
- **Provide additional resourcing:** Secure additional resourcing to implement the Strategic Plan, focusing on community engagement, partnerships, and redevelopment efforts, funded by increased revenue from Coal Creek operations.
- **Explore alternative operational models:** To ensure long-term sustainability and growth, consider alternative options for park operations, such as commercial partnerships or leases of areas or assets.

How can you allocate new resources without additional funding?

Allocating new resources will only happen over time as the park increases its revenue and attracts funding. We will conduct a thorough review of current resources to identify areas where efforts can be redirected to support the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Without significant additional costs, we can enhance our capacity by strengthening volunteer programs, forming strategic partnerships, and seeking in-kind contributions.

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Appendix 1 - Case studies

CERES Community Environment Park

Once an abandoned landfill site along the banks of the Merri Creek in Melbourne, the land that would become CERES Community Environment Park seemed an unlikely candidate for transformation. The site was littered with rusted car bodies, overgrown with weeds, and piled with concrete slabs and bluestone rocks from its days as a quarry. But in 1982, a small group of visionary local residents saw potential amidst the degradation.

With a modest lease from the Brunswick Council and a grand vision, the pioneers of CERES set to work. They named their ambitious project the Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies, drawing inspiration from Ceres, the Roman goddess of agriculture. In those early days, the founders' goals were humble yet impactful: to create a space for community gardening, provide employment during a recession, and teach local children about the origins of their food.

The transformation began with small but significant steps. Volunteers gathered for working bees, clearing the land and creating gathering spaces. Some of the first trees planted still stand today, a testament to the dedication of those early stewards. As the land began to heal, so too did the community's connection to it.

Over time, CERES grew from a simple community garden into a thriving urban oasis. The addition of an organic farm, grocery store, cafe, nursery, and extensive education programs attracted visitors from all walks of life. The once-barren site now buzzes with activity, a vibrant example of sustainable living and community resilience.

CERES' journey has not been without challenges. Funding crises and the constant need for innovation have tested the organisation's mettle. But with each obstacle, the community has rallied, finding creative solutions and forging new paths forward. The park's success is a testament to the power of collective action and the indomitable spirit of its stewards.

Today, CERES welcomes over 500,000 visitors annually, its impact reaching far beyond the confines of its four hectares. The park has become a model for community-driven environmental initiatives, inspiring similar projects across Australia and around the world. Its social enterprises generate millions in revenue, supporting hundreds of jobs and volunteer opportunities.

But perhaps the most significant transformation is the one that occurs within the hearts and minds of those who visit. CERES offers a glimpse of what is possible when we work together to heal the land and nurture our connection to it. It is a living testament to the power of community, the resilience of nature, and the potential for hope to take root and flourish, even in the most unlikely of places.

As CERES looks to the future, its mission to cultivate love for the Earth and for one another remains at the heart of all it does. Through its ever-evolving programs, partnerships, and initiatives, the park continues to inspire and empower individuals to become agents of change in their own communities. The story of CERES is one of transformation, resilience, and the enduring power of a shared vision for a more sustainable and compassionate world.

Linden New Art

Linden Gallery had long been a beloved local art space nestled in the heart of St Kilda. However, as the years passed, the gallery found itself at a crossroads, grappling with the challenges of remaining relevant and engaging for contemporary audiences while operating with limited funding. Recognising the need for change, Linden Gallery embarked on a transformative journey to reimagine its purpose and secure its future as a vibrant cultural hub. The first step was a bold rebranding effort, with Linden Gallery becoming Linden New Art – a name that reflected its commitment to showcasing cutting-edge contemporary art and supporting the careers of mid-career artists.

Established in 1986, Linden faced the challenges common to many small arts organisations - limited funding, the need to remain relevant, and attracting new audiences. But with a clear artistic vision and deep ties to the local community, Linden embarked on a transformation that would secure its place as a leading contemporary art space.

Key to Linden's revitalisation was a focus on supporting mid-career artists, providing them with opportunities to experiment, take risks, and present ambitious new works. The gallery established dedicated spaces like the Linden Projects Space for artists and curators to test bold ideas, positioning Linden as an incubator for artistic innovation.

Community engagement also played a central role in Linden's transformation. The gallery introduced artist talks, workshops, and events that welcomed the community into the creative process. Volunteer and membership programs fostered a sense of ownership and pride, ensuring that Linden remained a valued community asset.

As Linden's reputation grew, so did its ability to attract support from a diverse range of sources. The gallery proactively sought grants, donations, and sponsorships, reducing its reliance on government funding. Strategic partnerships with organisations like the University of Melbourne and the City of Port Phillip further extended Linden's reach and impact.

Today, Linden New Art is celebrated as a dynamic platform for contemporary art and ideas. Its annual program of exhibitions, residencies, and prizes, like the innovative JUNCTURE Art Prize supporting mid-career artists, has positioned Linden as a leader in the Australian arts landscape. The gallery's transformation is a testament to the power of a clear artistic vision, community engagement, and diversified support.

But Linden's journey is far from over. As it looks to the future, the gallery remains committed to providing transformative experiences for artists and audiences alike. By continuing to champion mid-career artists, engage its community, and innovate in its programming, Linden is poised to play an even greater role in shaping contemporary art in Australia.

Linden's story is one of a historic home reborn as a vibrant hub of artistic experimentation and community connection. It's a reminder of the resilience and adaptability of art spaces, and the vital role they play in nurturing creativity, sparking dialogue, and enriching our communities.

Collingwood Yards

Once a derelict technical college in the heart of Melbourne's Collingwood, the site now known as Collingwood Yards has undergone a remarkable transformation. This former educational institution, abandoned for over a decade, has been given new life as a vibrant contemporary arts precinct, becoming a beacon of creativity and community.

The journey began with a shared vision to create a unique space that could nurture and support the arts while engaging with the diverse local community. The redevelopment was entrusted to Fieldwork, a Melbourne-based architecture and design studio, who took an approach of minimal intervention, preserving the character and patina of the old buildings while making strategic changes to enhance functionality and accessibility.

At the heart of Collingwood Yards is a commitment to providing affordable, sustainable spaces for artists and arts organisations. The precinct is home to an eclectic mix of tenants, from individual artists to larger organisations like Arts Project Australia and Liquid Architecture. By offering secure, long-term tenancies, Collingwood Yards fosters a supportive creative community where collaboration, experimentation, and cross-pollination can thrive.

But Collingwood Yards is more than just a collection of creative spaces. It's a place where art and community intersect, where creativity is visible and accessible to all. The precinct's design encourages interaction and engagement, with welcoming communal areas and a lush central courtyard that serves as a gathering space for tenants and visitors alike.

Since opening its doors in 2021, Collingwood Yards has quickly become a hub of activity, hosting a diverse range of exhibitions, performances, workshops, and events, attracting visitors from across Melbourne and beyond. The site's transformation has also contributed to the ongoing revitalization of Collingwood, reinforcing the area's reputation as a centre for creativity and innovation.

As Collingwood Yards looks to the future, it remains committed to its core mission of supporting the arts and engaging with the community. The precinct's management team is actively exploring new ways to enhance the tenant and visitor experience, foster collaboration and experimentation, and ensure long-term financial sustainability.

The story of Collingwood Yards is a testament to the transformative power of the arts. By breathing new life into a once-forgotten site, this ambitious project has not only created a home for creativity but also a catalyst for community renewal. As Melbourne emerges from recent challenges, Collingwood Yards stands as a symbol of resilience, adaptability, and the enduring importance of art in our lives. It's a reminder that with vision, collaboration, and a commitment to community, even the most unlikely of spaces can become something truly extraordinary.

Wilsons Prom Holiday Park

Once a quiet caravan park near the entrance of Wilsons Promontory National Park, Yanakie Caravan Park has evolved into Wilsons Prom Holiday Park, a key gateway and accommodation base for visitors to one of Victoria's most beloved natural areas. Recognising the potential of its prime location and stunning natural surroundings, the park embarked on a journey to enhance its offerings and redefine the visitor experience.

The transformation began with a rebranding from Yanakie Caravan Park to Wilsons Prom Holiday Park, reflecting its role as the closest accommodation to the national park entrance. Upgrades to park facilities followed a camp kitchen, and a playground, ensuring a comfortable stay for guests.

To cater to a broader range of visitors, the park introduced self-contained cabin accommodation alongside its powered and unpowered sites. Its unique beachfront location on the shores of Corner Inlet was leveraged as a key selling point, offering guests unparalleled views and easy access to the water.

Marketing efforts positioned Wilsons Prom Holiday Park as the ideal base for exploring the national park, highlighting its proximity and range of accommodation options. The park now serves as an alternative for visitors unable to secure a spot inside the often booked-out Tidal River campground.

The addition of cabins and improved facilities has attracted a more diverse visitor base, while the park's strategic location allows for convenient access to the national park's walking trails, beaches, and other attractions. The park's transformation has enabled it to play a vital role in facilitating visitation to Wilsons Prom and supporting the region's tourism industry.

Wilsons Prom Holiday Park's journey demonstrates how a caravan park can evolve to meet the changing needs of visitors and capitalise on its natural assets. By investing in upgrades, expanding its accommodation offering, and leveraging its location, the park has positioned itself as a key player in the Prom experience, supporting sustainable visitation to one of Victoria's most treasured coastal wilderness areas.

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