

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Council Meeting Agenda

Wednesday 21 August 2024

Council Meeting No.497

**Council Chambers, Leongatha
Commencing at 2:00pm**



agenda



*South Gippsland
Shire Council*

Come for the beauty. Stay for the lifestyle

OUR COUNCIL VISION

We care deeply about our people, the land and future of South Gippsland.

Our vision is to support the whole Shire in creating economic, environmental and social prosperity for this and future generations.

The Council Agenda relates to the Strategic Objectives of the *Council Plan 2022-2026* indicated in this diagram:



Privacy

Council is required to keep minutes of each Council meeting. The minutes contain details of proceedings which may include personal information about community members disclosed as part of presentations, submissions and questions. The minutes of Council meetings are a public record and can be inspected by members of the public.

The Council Meeting is streamed live, recorded and published in accordance with Council's *Live Streaming in Council Meetings Policy*.

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A copy of the *Policy* is located on Council's website - [Link](#).

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Notice is hereby given that Council Meeting No.497 of the South Gippsland Shire Council will be held on Wednesday 21 August 2024 in the Council Chambers, Leongatha, commencing at 2:00pm

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Kerryn Ellis
Chief Executive Officer

1. PRELIMINARY MATTERS

1.1. LIVE-STREAMING COUNCIL MEETING DISCLAIMER

This Council Meeting is being streamed live, recorded and published in accordance with Council's Live Streaming in Council Meetings Policy.

Access to the live stream through Council's Internet is an option to view the 'open' component of a Council Meeting. Link to the Live Stream on Council's website: [Live Streaming | Live Streaming | South Gippsland Shire Council](#)

The Chair and/or the CEO have the discretion and authority at any time to direct the termination or interruption of live streaming. Such direction will only be given in exceptional circumstances where deemed relevant. Circumstances may include instances where the content of debate is considered misleading, defamatory or potentially inappropriate to be published.

Today's Meeting is being streamed live as well as recorded and published on Council's website.

Thank you

1.2. WELCOME TO THE COUNCIL MEETING

Public Questions

In accordance with *Governance Rules (C82)*, clause 56.4(d) the placement of public questions has now closed. Questions must be received prior to the commencement of the Council Meeting and placed in the receptacle at Governance Officers table. Questions received after the commencement of the Meeting will be considered at the next Council Meeting.

1.3. OPENING PRAYER

As we gather here from diverse backgrounds and beliefs, may we hold privilege with good care and trust. As we deliberate and discuss, may we be wise in our discernment, fair in our decisions and visionary in our planning. May we be guided by our common goal of a strong and united South Gippsland.

1.4. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL CUSTODIANS

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.

1.5. APOLOGIES

1.6. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

RECOMMENDATION

That the Minutes of the South Gippsland Shire Council Meeting No.496, held on Wednesday 17 July 2024 in the Council Chambers, Leongatha be confirmed.

1.7. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST FOR COUNCILLORS

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Division 2 sets out the requirements relating to Conflict of Interest. Disclosure of a conflict of interest in respect of a matter to be considered at a Council Meeting is required under section 130(1)(a) and specifically applies to a relevant person being a Councillor, member of a delegated committee who is not a Councillor and a member of Council staff.

Council's *Governance Rules (C82)* (the Rules), clause 3.0 Disclosure of a Conflict of Interest at a Council Meeting sets out the prescribed manner required to disclose a conflict of interest at South Gippsland Shire Council.

The Rules require a Councillor and/ or staff member who has a conflict of interest in a matter being considered at a Council Meeting to announce before the matter is considered and disclose this in a written notice to the Chief Executive Officer. The details included in the disclosure, explain the nature conflict of interest, whether it is classified as general or material (s.127 and s.128), the name of the relevant person(s) and their relationship to them.

Failure to comply with disclosures of conflict of interest (s.130) may be subject to penalty points and/ or other disciplinary measures depending on the nature of the conflict.

The *Local Government Act 2020* can be accessed from the Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary documents website at www.legislation.vic.gov.au.

Council's *Governance Rules (C82)* can be accessed from [Council's Policies](#) webpage.

1.8. DECLARATION OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST FOR STAFF

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), Division 2 sets out the requirements relating to Conflict of Interest. Disclosure of a conflict of interest in respect of a matter to be considered at a Council Meeting is required under section 130(1)(a) and specifically applies to a relevant person being a Councillor, member of a delegated committee who is not a Councillor and a member of Council staff.

Council's *Governance Rules (C82) (the Rules)*, Chapter 5, clause 7, 8 and 9 sets the prescribed manner required for staff to disclose a conflict of interest when:

- Preparing Reports for Meetings
- Exercise of Delegated Power
- Exercise of a Statutory Function

Council staff must immediately upon becoming aware of a conflict of interest provide a written notice to the Chief Executive Officer disclosing the conflict of interest, explain the nature of the conflict and how it will be managed. Upon becoming aware and declaring a conflict of interest, a staff member may not exercise a power or perform a function in the matter. All prepared reports will record that staff member(s) have considered a conflict of interest and include if any, the details of a disclosure.

Failure to comply with disclosures of conflict of interest (s.130) may be subject to penalty points and/ or other disciplinary measures depending on the nature of the conflict.

The *Local Government Act 2020* can be accessed from the Victorian Legislation and Parliamentary documents website at www.legislation.vic.gov.au.

Council's *Governance Rules (C82)* can be accessed from Council's Policies webpage.

Ms Kerryn Ellis, Chief Executive Officer has declared a material conflict of interest in Confidential Agenda Item 14.1. PERSONAL INFORMATION – CEO Employment & Remuneration Committee, as the matters relate directly to her role.

2. OBJECTIVE - CONNECTING OUR PEOPLE AND PLACES

2.1. FAIR ACCESS FOR RECREATION FACILITIES POLICY

Directorate:	Sustainable Infrastructure
Department:	Infrastructure Planning

Council Plan

Objective - Healthy and Engaged Communities

The sport and active recreation sector provide opportunities for enriching our communities through the promotion of respect and fair mindedness for all people, while also supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of all Victorians. This policy ensures Council is well positioned to design and implement actions that progress gender equality in community sport.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present the *Fair Access For Recreation Facilities Policy* for consideration and endorsement by Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council endorses the *Fair Access For Recreation Facilities Policy* (C96).

REPORT

The purpose of the *Fair Access For Recreation Facilities Policy* is to:

- Address known barriers experienced by women and girls in accessing and using community sports infrastructure.
- Progressively build capacity and capabilities of South Gippsland Shire Council (Council) in the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs, communications, and delivery of services in relation to community sports infrastructure.
- Establish the expectation that gender equality is considered and prioritised in all current and future planning, policy, service delivery and practice as they relate to community sports infrastructure.
- Ensure Council meets its legal obligations required under the Gender Equality Act 2020.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Internal consultation, (and external consultation via GippSport), has been undertaken in the preparation of the *Fair Access For Recreation Facilities Policy*.

Minor changes to Policy section - *Roles and Responsibilities* have been made to accommodate consistency with the Action Plan.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Councils are ineligible to access State Government community sports infrastructure funding until the Policy is adopted.

RISKS

By implementing the Policy, Council is satisfying the requirement of the Victorian Government to be eligible for funding programs that relate to community sports infrastructure. Council is required from 1 July 2024 to have a gender equitable access and use policy and action plan in place, as well as the ability to demonstrate progress against that policy and action plan.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Fair Access For Recreation Facilities Policy [2.1.1 - 4 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 4. Structure, Systems & Policies

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

{council-policy}

Legislative Provisions

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibility Act 2006

Gender Equity Act 2020

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

{regional-plans}

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL POLICY



FAIR ACCESS FOR RECREATION FACILITIES POLICY

Policy No.	C96	Adoption Date:	Council Meeting DATE
Directorate:	Sustainable Infrastructure	Department:	Infrastructure Planning
Revision Date:	Month Year		

GOOD GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

Supporting Pillar:	Pillar 4. Structure, Systems & Policies
Link to Pillar:	South Gippsland Shire Council is committed to providing gender equality in its policy, programs, communications, and delivery of services in relation to community sports infrastructure.

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the *Fair Access for Recreation Facilities Policy (C96)* (the Policy) is to:
 - 1.1.1. Address known barriers experienced by women and girls in accessing and using community sports infrastructure.
 - 1.1.2. Progressively build capacity and capabilities of South Gippsland Shire Council (Council) in the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs, communications, and delivery of services in relation to community sports infrastructure.
 - 1.1.3. Council will undertake the necessary steps towards implementation of the Policy. This Policy establishes the expectation that gender equality is considered and prioritised in all current and future planning, policy, service delivery and practice as they relate to community sports infrastructure.
- 1.2. This Policy has been developed to ensure Council meets its legal obligations required under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.
- 1.3. Council has developed a *Fair Access Action Plan* to support and to be read in conjunction with the implementation of this Policy.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. The scope of the Policy is to support Council to take positive action towards achieving gender equity in the access and usage of community sports infrastructure.
- 2.2. The Policy applies to all Council owned and operated community sports and recreation facilities, including indoor sporting centres/stadiums and aquatic facilities.



3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Introduction

3.1. Sport is a highly visible and valued feature of South Gippsland's culture and identity. The sport and active recreation sector provide opportunities for enriching our communities through the promotion of respect and fair mindedness for all people, while also supporting the physical and mental wellbeing of all Victorians. Council is well positioned to design and implement actions that progress gender equality in community sport.

Fair Access Principles

The Fair Access Principles have been developed by the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, Sport and Recreation Victoria and are based on the following six (6) principles:

- 3.2. Community sports infrastructure and environments are genuinely welcome, safe and inclusive.
- 3.3. Women and girls can fully participate in all aspects of community sport and active recreation, including as a player, coach, administrator, official, volunteer and spectator.
- 3.4. Women and girls will have equitable access to and use of community sport infrastructure:
 - 3.4.1. The highest quality available and most convenient.
 - 3.4.2. At the best and most popular competition and training times and locations.
 - 3.4.3. To support existing and new participation opportunities, at a variety of sports.
- 3.5. Women and girls should be equitably represented in leadership and governance roles.
- 3.6. Encourage and support all user groups who access and use community sport infrastructure to understand, adopt and implement gender equitable access and use policies.
- 3.7. Prioritise access, use and support to all user groups who demonstrate an ongoing commitment to gender equitable access and use of allocated community sport infrastructure.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

This Policy mitigates Council's risks as described below:

Financial

- 4.1. By implementing the Policy, Council is satisfying the requirement of the Victorian Government to be eligible for funding programs that relate to community sports infrastructure. Council is required from 1 July 2024 to have a gender equitable access and use policy and action plan in place, as well as the ability to demonstrate progress against that policy and action plan.



5. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

Human Rights Charter

- 5.1. This Policy has considered the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Gender Equality

- 5.2. The Policy complies with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, and the wider Victorian Government gender equality strategies, and aligns with the Council Plan and Council's *Gender Equality Action Plan (GEAP)*.
- 5.3. Council acknowledges:
- 5.3.1. The disadvantaged position some individuals have had in the sport and recreation sector because of their gender; and
 - 5.3.2. That achieving gender equality will require diverse approaches for women, men, trans and gender diverse people to achieve similar outcomes for people of all genders. This Policy has considered the *Gender Equality Act 2020* in its development.
- 5.4. Council will do this by:
- 5.4.1. Engaging fairly and equitably with staff, state sporting organisations, GippSport and members of our sport and recreation community, regardless of their gender, in a positive, respectful, and constructive manner. Ensuring diverse representation on Council working groups and ensuring all voices are listened to; and
 - 5.4.2. Engaging in the process of Gender Impact Assessments.

Roles and Responsibilities

Council will:

- 5.5. Ensure diverse representation on Council working groups.
- 5.6. Lead by example and promote the benefits of the Policy when working with sport and recreation clubs, committees of management and user groups.
- 5.7. Promote, and acknowledge the achievement of women and girls in sport and active recreation through social media and other Council Communication platforms.
- 5.8. Promote suitable gender equality education and training opportunities to sport and recreation infrastructure user groups, users and sporting clubs.
- 5.9. Prioritise Community Grant applications or small infrastructure projects that will address gender inequality in well-used community facilities.
- 5.10. Actively seek to address, where access to infrastructure is not inclusive.
- 5.11. Prioritise the provision of safe, welcoming and inclusive environments in the delivery of sport and active recreation capital works projects.
- 5.12. Seek to better understand local participation trends of women and girls in local community sport.
- 5.13. Require any events or sporting competitions to offer equal prize money/ equal sized trophies for activities that take place within their facilities.



5.14. Consider discounted lease/ hire charges to clubs (where they control fees and charges) that support and encourage the growth of women and girls' participation.

6. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

6.1. This Policy will be reviewed and adopted by Council on a four-year cycle.

6.2. Policies may be reviewed earlier than a four-year cycle if legislative provisions, industry or organisation requirements change.

7. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Legislative Provisions	Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 Freedom of Information Act 1982 Gender Equality Act 2020
Council Supporting Documents	Gender Equality Action Plan

8. DEFINITIONS

Gender Equality	The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men and trans and gender-diverse people. Equality does not mean that women, men and trans and gender diverse people will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on their gender.
Gender Equity	The provision of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities based on gender. The concept recognises that people may have different needs and power related to their gender and these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies gender related imbalances.
Community Sport Infrastructure	Publicly owned local, rural, regional, or state level sport and recreation infrastructure operated and maintained primarily for the purpose of facilitating community sport activities, including sporting grounds, surfaces, facilities, and pavilions.
Gender Impact Assessment - GIA	A requirement under the <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i> to be carried out on policies, programs and services which have a direct and significant impact on the public. The assessment must evaluate the effects that a policy, program or service may have on people of different genders.

9. REVISION HISTORY

Approved By	Approval Date	Sections Modified	CM9 Ref#
Council Meeting	DATE	New Review	D3970124

3. OBJECTIVE - ECONOMY AND INDUSTRY

3.1. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY ANNUAL ACTIONS IMPLEMENTATION

Directorate:	Regional Partnerships
Department:	Economic Development

Council Plan

Objective - Economy and Industry

This report relates to the major initiative in the Council Plan - Implement the annual action plan of the 2021–2031 Economic Development Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the 2023/24 annual actions implemented from Council’s South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy.

Officers have commenced or completed 97 per cent of the actions from the Strategy since it was adopted by Council.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives and notes the 2023/24 annual actions implemented from the South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy (refer Attachment [3.1.1]).

REPORT

Council developed the South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy (the Strategy) in consultation with the Economic Development Strategy Advisory Group (the Group).

The Group members included highly skilled and knowledgeable experts who provided key strategic advice and expertise in the Strategy’s development.

The Strategy is action oriented; however, also designed to be flexible to allow Council to respond to current and future demands and opportunities for South Gippsland. This was evident with the need for Council to respond to the impacts caused by recent flooding and storm events that required the provision of additional support to the community and businesses in emergency response and recovery.

The South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy was adopted by Council on 21 July 2021.

Below are highlighted actions from the Strategy that were commenced or completed over the past 12 months. A full table of actions from the Strategy with updates has been attached (**Attachment [3.1.1]**)

Economic Development Strategy

- Delivered South Gippsland Latrobe Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study.
- Significant engagement with the renewables sector, particularly regarding Offshore Wind developments and submissions to the Federal and Victorian Governments.
- Progressed development of the Industrial Land Supply Strategy.
- Ongoing delivery of Business Concierge and Better Approvals Program to assist businesses through the regulatory process.
- Advocacy on port development for renewable energy, land infrastructure planning funding (Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program), SEATs, food supply and security, freight transport, public transport and telecommunications issues.
- Supported the South Gippsland Dairy Expo, the Shire's largest trade event.
- Hosted the Annual Stakeholder Roundtable bringing together industry, education, health and service providers on the theme of preparing for growth and renewable energy development.
- Hosted second year of the successful Jobs Expo in Leongatha and supported Careers Expo in Korumburra.
- Distribution of monthly business newsletter.
- Supported small business – small business mentoring, business workshops and business bus visits, Gippsland Business Awards and Food and Fibre Awards.
- Emergency Response and Recovery – Welshpool Flood and Mirboo North Storm Events – business and community support.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Strategy's development was supported by an extensive consultation and engagement campaign that ensured the community, including residents, visitors, and other stakeholders, could provide input to help define the key themes and priorities in the Strategy.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Resourcing the implementation of the Strategy is considered as part of the annual Financial Budgets.

RISKS

The implementation of the Strategy allows Council to plan for and mitigate against the risks to our economy into the future. The Strategy has been

developed with the flexibility to create a responsive approach to the economic, natural and policy changes that will occur over the next ten-years.

Not all actions and initiatives can be funded each year. Actions are delivered within the annual budget allocations and officers will continue to seek advice and support from industry and government to deliver the best outcomes possible for the South Gippsland community.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Economic Development Strategy - Implementation Report 2023/24 [3.1.1 - 10 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Pillar 8. Monitoring & Performance Review

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Economic Development Strategy

Sustainability Strategy

Visitor Economy Strategy

Council Plan 2022-2026

Legislative Provisions

Local Government Act 2020

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Gippsland Freight Strategy 2013

Gippsland Regional Growth Plan, State Government Victoria

Gippsland Regional Plan 2020-2025



Economic Development Strategy

Annual
Implementation
Update July 2024

Economic Development Strategy

Actions 2023/24

1. Attracting and retaining investment

Objective: Growing our economy, employment and attracting investment. Ensuring South Gippsland is investment ready and recognised as a positive location to do business

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES	
1.1 Attract and grow investment to the Shire through the implementation of a targeted Investment Attraction Program.	1.1.1	Deliver a targeted investment attraction program to support, encourage and facilitate and investment attraction to the region.	Completed for 2023/24 - Ongoing – Participation in Invest Gippsland program. Focus on Offshore wind energy investment with direct engagement with a wide range of proponents.	
	1.1.2	Develop an innovative and accessible Investment Prospectus for potential investors.	Commenced – Ongoing project. New investment materials substantially developed. Project delayed to 2024/25 due to emergency response activities.	
	1.1.3	Investigate attending and conducting trade missions annually to encourage future investment in the Shire	Completed for 2023/24 Ongoing – Attended key trade events, particularly regarding new energy developments. Hosted a wide range of offshore wind proponents and Government delegations. Attended key industry trade meetings.	
1.2 Understand the opportunities and implications from development of the new energy sector.	1.2.1	Engage with the energy sector, businesses and community to achieve positive outcomes from new energy developments.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing Project – Wide engagement with energy sector including briefings to Council and direct discussions with proponents. Feasibility licenses issued for up to 12 offshore wind projects. Participated in the 2023 Gippsland New Energy Conference. Conducted Stakeholder roundtable on new energy impacts Nov 2023. Commenced community briefings.	
	1.2.2	Support the development of the Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone.	Completed 2023/24 – Discussions with Vic Grid and promotion of their community information sessions. Zone not planned to be located in South Gippsland. Lodged joint submission with Wellington Shire on REZ	

1.3 Improve opportunities for investors to develop land in the Shire: Be investment ready.	1.3.1	Develop a solutions focused Industrial Land Supply Strategy (LLSS) to support new development.	Commenced – Completed comprehensive analysis of Industrial Land Supply. Strategy progressed and consultation being undertaken for future Strategy adoption.	
	1.3.2	Work with operators to enhance retention and expansion of existing businesses.	Completed 2023/24 Ongoing – Worked with businesses, RDV, AusIndustry and LVA to assist with grant applications. Referrals to Business Concierge service.	
	1.3.3	Undertake an Advocacy Plan to all levels of government to support investment enablers in the region.	Completed 2023/24 Ongoing project – Advocacy Plan adopted by Council. Implemented Advocacy program including visit to Canberra and Spring Street. Participated in advocacy projects of other regional agencies such as One Gippsland.	
1.4 Streamline Council's regulatory processes, and facilitate external processes making it easier for businesses to invest in the Shire.	1.4.1	Continue and enhance the Better Approvals Program.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing project – 239 business enquiries received through the Better Approvals program to the end of May 2024.	
	1.4.2	Continue to provide the 'Business Concierge' service within Council.	Completed 2023/24 Ongoing – Ongoing positive feedback from businesses that have received assistance through the program. Business Concierge now a continuing permanent service. Review of program commenced,	
1.5 Seek innovation in Circular Economy Development that assists us to respond to climate change.	1.5.1	Undertake an initiative to develop the Circular economy with partners, consistent with Council's Sustainability Strategy.	Completed for 2023/24 – Member of the working group for the development of a Gippsland Circular Economy Hub. Circular economy session on dairy sector undertaken with LVA in June 2024.	

2. Supporting enabling infrastructure

Objective: Building our digital connectivity, freight and supporting infrastructure and business and community linkages.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES	
2.1 Advocate for the continuous development of infrastructure improvements to support business growth in the Shire.	2.1.1	Work with key partners to develop an integrated Infrastructure Strategy for the Shire.	Not yet commenced – Planned for future years.	
	2.1.2	Develop and implement an Annual program of Priority Projects for Advocacy to State and Federal Governments.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing. Priority projects developed and adopted by Council Advocacy program undertaken State and Federal Governments.	
	2.1.3	Conduct a digital connectivity audit to determine telecommunications needs/wants across the Shire.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing. Conducted connectivity planning with Telstra and NBN.	
	2.1.4	Advocate for better digital connectivity across the Shire.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing project –. Works commenced on NBN upgrades in Leongatha. Upgrades continuing on fixed wireless across the Shire.	
	2.1.5	In partnership with key stakeholders, investigate developing a business and community telecommunications education program.	Commenced – Discussions with NBN and Telstra on telecommunications education and information program.	
	2.1.6	Advocate for improved public transport across the Shire	Completed for 2023/24 – Department of Transport and Planning funded two new electric community buses. One for Sandy Point and the other for Venus Bay. Additional bus services for South Gippsland announced in Victorian budget.	
	2.1.7	Undertake an investigation into potential solutions for sewerage issues in Fish Creek.	Completed – RMIT study completed. Briefing to Council on report.	

3. Developing key industry sectors

Objective: Strengthening and growing key industry sectors will equip our economy for the future. Building innovation, value adding and economic capacity

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES	
3.1 Provide industry with sector specific and specialised information to maintain viability and an edge in a competitive environment.	3.1.1	Connecting industry to sector experts and relevant support in fields to support future growth.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing project – Connected businesses with industry specialists at RDV and AusIndustry, Industry Capability Network, Mentoring Services and Small Business Victoria and Industry Capability Network.	
	3.1.2	Support industry to leverage off research institutes and published statistical data/information to apply for grants and other funding opportunities.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing project – Provided statistical information, reports and economic impact statements for a range of grant applicants.	
	3.1.3	Investigate conducting an industry cluster development/Smart specialisation program in identified sectors.	Commenced Ongoing– Participated in Gippsland Smart Specialisation Program Council in conjunction with Latrobe Valley Authority.	
	3.1.4	Support Industry Trade events that support industry development such as the South Gippsland Dairy Expo.	Completed for 2023/24 – Supported South Gippsland Dairy Expo – September 2023.	
3.2 Provide our businesses with the capability, capacity and information required to successfully do their jobs.	3.2.1	Continue to offer targeted training and skills programs to local businesses.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing project – Two in person workshops delivered. Conducted Startup Gippsland Program.	
	3.2.2	Continue to deliver business communication tools and resources such as the Business e-newsletter and associated business web pages.	Completed for 2023-24 Ongoing project – 13 business newsletters circulated. Council business website pages revised and updated.	
	3.2.3	In conjunction with the Victorian Government, continue to roll out business support services such as the Small Business Bus and Small Business Mentoring Service (SBMS).	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing service. Provided monthly free SBMS sessions and hosted visits of the Small Business bus.	
3.3 Support the expansion of the speciality food sector.	3.3.1	Implement program to support the Specialty Food Sector, particularly for enhancing local Food hubs.	Completed 2022/23 program– funding provided for local food hubs	
3.4 Continue to invest in and further develop the visitor economy.	3.4.1	Implementation of the Visitor Economy Strategy.	Completed 2023/24 – Information reported separately.	

3.5 Ensure Film Friendly Support	3.5.1	Grow and promote Council's readiness for Film Friendly Approvals.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing project. Refined film application process in partnership with Screen Victoria. Ten film permits issued	
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4. Building partnerships

Objective: Collaborative partnerships with stakeholders to support business development. Developing our unique economic identity in the broader Gippsland and Victorian framework.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES	
4.1 Strengthen strategic partnerships to support economic growth.	4.1.1	Maintain and nurture partnerships with key agencies at Shire, regional and state level.	Completed 2023/24– Maintained partnerships with agencies including quarterly meetings of South East Australian Transport Strategy. The May meeting was hosted by Council. Cr Rae re-elected to SEATS Executive. Other partnerships included Invest Gippsland, GippsDairy, LVA, RDV, Agriculture Victoria and One Gippsland.	
	4.1.2	Actively participate in industry specific groups, forums and expos as appropriate.	Completed 2023/24 – Ongoing – Participated in Gippsland Dairy Industry Leadership Group, LVA Business Support Network, Mainstreet Australia and with Food and Fibre Gippsland	
4.2 Enhance our business visitation and 'business intelligence' programs.	4.2.1	Undertake and increase the number of site visits (face to face) to businesses within the Shire.	Completed 2023/24 – Nearly 170 face-to-face site visits undertaken.	
	4.2.2	Maintain and expand the Customer Relationship Management System (CRMS).	Completed 2023/24 – CRMS system in place and has improved the capacity to target information to appropriate businesses.	
	4.2.3	Expand and formalise data analysis systems to support making more informed and evidence-based decisions.	Completed 2023/24 – REMPLAN and Spendmapp data systems in place and used to assist grant applications and analysis of major events for businesses and Council.	
4.3 Provide opportunities for business networking across the Shire.	4.3.1	Facilitate, support and participate in business networking programs. Act as conduit for businesses to connect in both formal and informal settings.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing Project – Conducted two business workshop and two tender writing workshops. Heavily promoted other workshops conducted by other organisations.	

4.4 Support regional award programs to recognise and reward exceptional businesses.	4.4.1	Participate in regional awards programs: Gippsland Business Awards Gippsland Food and Fibre Awards Wine Gippsland Awards	Completed for 2023/24 – Sponsored Gippsland Business Awards, Wine Awards and Food and Fibre Awards. South Gippsland businesses were finalists at all awards	
	4.4.2	Encourage and support local businesses to enter regional and state-wide award programs.	Completed for 2023/24 – Encouraged businesses to apply for awards through direct contact and through newsletters. Award winners and finalists provided congratulatory letters	

5. Building capacity

Objective: Building the skills, training and knowledge of our current and future workforce, embracing lifelong learning and removing barriers to education. Strengthening resilience to economic and natural emergencies.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES	
5.1 Enabling/Supporting industry to access a skilled and job ready workforce.	5.1.1	Work with educational and training institutions to increase opportunities for locals to be job ready and assist retention of young people.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing project. Conducted Jobs Expo in Leongatha May 2024, 35 businesses participated and about 150 attendees. Considered the most successful event held in Gippsland. Supported Careers Expo in Korumburra in June 2024	
	5.1.2	Work with businesses to understand skills requirements and plan appropriately.	Completed – Discussions held with businesses during visits and through business associations.	
	5.1.3	Continue to support access to vocational education and training through a range of targeted initiatives including student transport.	Completed – Submission made to Infrastructure Victoria in 2022/23. Funding for transport program provided by Victorian Government.	
	5.1.4	Support the continuation of the Cows Create Careers Program.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing, supported the program financially.	
5.2 Facilitate Entrepreneurship initiatives.	5.2.1	Continue Startup Gippsland Program and initiatives to foster youth entrepreneurship.	Completed for 2023/24 – Ongoing, supported the program with three South Gippsland participants in the 2023/24 program. “Bootcamp” Workshop conducted in Mirboo North in June 2024.	

<p>5.3 Develop Business Resilience and Recovery.</p>	5.3.1	Continue and enhance Council's Business Resilience and Recovery Programs.	<p>Completed 2023/24 – Significant emergency events during the year. This required significant diversion of resources. Emergencies included flood in Welshpool/Toora district on Boxing Day and major storm event in February with particular impact in Mirboo North. This is the most significant natural disaster in South Gippsland history. These events have involved a significant recovery process and substantial requirements. This included assistance such as Small Business Mentoring Service, business visits, small business bus, RFCS. Successful with Tiny Towns grant from the Victorian Government to support energy and community resilience. Assisted with operation of Blaze Aid. Planning also conducted on exotic animal diseases with other agencies. Participated in the implementation plan for the Gippsland Drought Resilience Plan.</p>	
<p>5.4 Develop local capacity to build and retain Community Wealth.</p>	5.4.1	Continue and enhance Council's Business Resilience and Recovery Programs.	See above	
	5.4.2	Establish a working group to support and develop the implementation of community wealth building initiatives.	Planning undertaken with participation in workshops on conducting Community Wealth Building initiatives for future years implementation as program developed.	
	5.4.2	Undertake initiatives to support and build local community enterprises.	Not yet commenced – Planned for future years implementation.	
	5.4.3	Support local procurement initiatives to build capacity.	<p>Completed for 2022/23 – Ongoing - Conducted workshops Industry Capability Network (ICN) on writing tenders, to boost local procurement. Promoted ICN portal for local business to register for offshore wind projects</p>	

5.5 Create systems to support accessing grant funding opportunities for local businesses and community enterprises.	5.5.1	Maintain a website of relevant grant funding opportunities.	Completed – Continued Grant Finder website which is available from Council website and promoted in newsletter.	
	5.5.2	Develop a clear and usable process for businesses to seek and obtain support from Council for grant funding from other levels of Government.	Completed – Letter of support process developed and implemented during 2023/24. Range of letters of support provided.	

6. Enhancing towns and main streets

Objective: Building our capacity through infrastructure development and enhancing our unique towns and villages. Making South Gippsland a great place to live and move to, where population change is well managed and communities are prosperous.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES	
6.1 Support our towns, villages and main streets to grow and thrive well into the future.	6.1.1	Support infrastructure developments to enhance our main streets.	Completed for 2023/24 – Korumburra Mainstreet Revitalisation consultation completed in conjunction with Infrastructure team. Venus Bay Mainstreet redevelopment completed. Ongoing liaison during the construction period.	
	6.1.2	Work with local business associations to market main streets and town/shopping hubs e.g. Shop Local Projects.	Completed 2023/24 Ongoing– Maintained Visit South Gippsland website with free listing and promotion of businesses. Promoted grant assistance program for business associations.	
	6.1.3	Work in partnership with business associations to develop coordinated marketing and management programs.	Completed 2023/24 Ongoing Business Development Officer working with business associations. Assisted Toora with implementation of Victoria Government grant. Assisted Leongatha Business Association, Korumburra and Loch.	
	6.1.4	Investigate options to provide grass roots training and innovative initiatives for businesses and towns.	Commenced – Discussions with business associations on potential workshops and networking.	

	6.1.5	Facilitate grant funding opportunities for trader and main street improvements.	Completed for 2023/24– Provided information on grant funding for main streets. Acted as auspice for Toora for Mental Health program.	
	6.1.6	Promote new business opportunities from the expansion of the Great Southern Rail Trail and increased visitation.	Completed 2023/24– Ongoing project - Marketing Plan developed with input from local businesses.	
6.2 Target new residents and sustainable increased population to support our future economic viability.	6.2.1	Seek a partnership with Regional Australia Institute (RAI) to enhance liveability and attract future residents.	Completed for 2023/24 Participated in RAI – Regional Activators program including attending the Geelong meeting.	
	6.2.2	Participate in a targeted and collaborative marketing campaign to attract new residents to the Shire.	Commenced – New branding developed and included in investment attraction material.	
	6.2.3	Support development and implementation of the Social Housing Project.	Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness study identified housing as a key issue. Seeking funding from Federal Government to assist with planning. Discussions with housing providers.	
6.3 Leverage off the arts, cultural and heritage sectors for economic benefits	6.3.1	Continue to collaborate with the arts, culture and heritage sectors to enhance liveability and marketability of the Shire	Completed 2023/24– Worked to maximise economic impacts of festivals and events. 2024 Mirboo North Italian Festa was the largest spending day in the town.	

3.2. ARTS, CULTURE AND CREATIVE INDUSTRIES STRATEGY 2022-2026 - ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community, Customer and Visitor

Council Plan

Objective - Economy and Industry

This report relates to the Council Plan Initiative - Implement the annual actions of the Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on actions implemented in 2023/2024 to progress Council's South Gippsland Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives and notes the report on actions implemented in 2023/2024 to progress Council's South Gippsland Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy (refer Attachment [3.2.1]).

REPORT

Background

The South Gippsland Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy 2022-2026 (the Strategy) was adopted by Council on 20 July 2022.

The Strategy is intended to connect to, and support Council's adopted Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategies 2021-2031, particularly in relation to brand identity, creative economies, cultural assets and events management.

The Strategy has responded to the unique social, cultural, economic, and geographic characteristics of South Gippsland and builds on the innovative community-based approaches to arts development the Shire has established and committed to.

Discussion

A full report of actions from the Strategy has been provided (**Attachment [3.2.1] Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy – Implementation Report 2024**).

Below are highlighted actions from the Strategy that were commenced or completed over the past twelve-months.

- Commence the development of the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan.

- Community roll out of the ArtCubes at Loch, Mirboo North, Fish Creek, Meeniyan and Tarwin Lower.
- Supported the Small Halls live music program at Mirboo and Strzelecki along with a youth event at Meeniyan.
- Return of major events at Coal Creek including Southern Lights Festival, Halloween and international country singer, Charlie Crockett.
- Launch of the South Gippsland Creative Fund with 11 recipients.
- Celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Coal Creek in partnership with the community.
- Two major murals completed in Leongatha and Korumburra.
- Development of the Public Arts Policy and Arts and Civic Memorabilia Policy.
- Distribution of 27 arts newsletters to 639 subscribers.
- A total of 17 letters of support provided for funding applications from local organisations (local halls committees, galleries, artists, etc).
- The profile of the creative sector has been elevated with the production of the new South Gippsland Touring Map and two dedicated marketing campaigns in the Gippsland Life magazine.
- Successful application submitted on behalf of Lyrebird Arts Council to the Victorian Government's Creative Neighbourhood Infrastructure Support Program for the purchase of new lighting/sound equipment.
- Whole day tour of Shire arts projects undertaken with Jo Porter, CEO of Regional Arts Victoria to discuss future support and funding opportunities and directions.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Strategy included significant community, industry and stakeholder engagement in its development.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Resourcing the implementation of the Strategy is considered as part of Council's annual budget process.

RISKS

The Strategy has been developed with the flexibility to create a responsive approach to further support arts and creative industries in our community over the four years (2022-2026).

Not all actions and initiatives can be funded each year. Actions are delivered within the annual budget allocations and officers will continue to seek advice and support from the newly established Arts Advisory Committee and partner with artists, the creative industry and government to deliver the best outcomes possible for the South Gippsland community.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. ARTS CULTURE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES STRATEGY - IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2024 [3.2.1 - 13 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Arts and Civic Memorabilia Collection Policy (C69)

Arts, Culture and Creative Industry Strategy

Economic Development Strategy

Visitor Economy Strategy

Annual Budget

Council Plan 2022-2026

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan

Legislative Provisions

Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006

Disability Act 2006

Gender Equity Act 2020

Heritage Act 1995

Museum Act 1983

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Code of Ethics for Museums (ICOM 2006)

Gippsland Destination Management Plan - Towards 2030 - A Blueprint for Growth
(Destination Gippsland)

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24



Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy

Annual
Implementation
July 2024

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

THEME 1 – Connecting our People and Places

Improving visitor and community experience – roads, transport, connectivity, and basic services.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
Improving visitor and community experiences, supporting the decentralisation and diversity of the creative sector, and maximising opportunities for the arts, culture and creative industry sectors.	1.1	Advocate for the cultural benefit of high-speed, reliable internet services and communication services Shirewide.	Not yet commenced – to be undertaken in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.
	1.2	Establish and fund a recurrent Public Art Program within townships, along selected areas of the Great South Rail Trail (GSRT) and in the environment.	Work has begun to plan and implement a public art trail at key locations along the Rail Trail with two new murals completed at Leongatha and Korumburra as part of the Railway Precinct project. Funding pending for a new public artwork at the Black Spur section of the GSRT. Recurrent funding is subject to future budget allocations.
	1.3	Develop and deliver the new portable and adaptive 'ArtCubes' program across the Shire.	Three ArtCubes constructed and programmed until early 2026 . Over the last 12mths, the ArtCubes were located at Loch, Mirboo North, Fish Creek, Meeniyan and Tarwin Lower.
	1.4	Investigate potential options for shared resources with Creative Gippsland.	Action no longer valid as Creative Gippsland network disbanded. However, new conversations underway to investigate a new whole-of-Gippsland creative project.
	1.5	Engage artists to help deliver signage across the Shire.	Not yet commenced

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

Theme 2 – Economy and Industry

Growing the economy, welcoming innovation, and investment in key industries - agriculture, tourism, and the arts

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
Growing the economy, welcoming innovation and investment to redevelopment and new infrastructure projects, while supporting capacity building for creative practitioners and businesses.	2.1	Support youth focused programs that provide mentorship, training, skills development and opportunities to participate in the creative industries sector. Build on existing relationships with youth-based organisations such as the South Gippsland Bass Coast Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN).	Ongoing - We have a number of ongoing relationships / actions in place to collaborate and support youth programs, including planning for First Nations youth engagement project as part of the upcoming Toora ArtCubes project. Youth mentorship program to deliver leadlighting skills to younger artisans enabled via Creative Fund.
	2.2	Build on Council support of the FReeZA program.	Completed - Youth music event held at Meeniyan in October 2023.
	2.3	Deliver regular communications between Council and the creative sector.	27 newsletters distributed to 639 subscribers.
	2.4	Promote South Gippsland as a creative Shire, promoting the depth and breadth of the creative sector and its unique character.	Photographer/videographer/story documenter engaged to document the various activities throughout the year which has been used for promotional purposes. This has included the ArtCubes and Small Hall music program.
	2.5	Investigate models of support for the creative industries and practicing artists, including creative hubs.	Delivery of the Creative Fund, enabling a range of creative projects and initiatives across all disciplines, across the Shire. Subscription to ArtsHub. Networking beyond the Shire in terms of new creative projects and initiatives taking place. Ongoing research around creative funding streams. Ongoing advocacy to national and state arts sector organisations.
	2.6	Develop an equitable framework for art gallery support throughout the Shire.	Not yet commenced – to be developed in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.
	2.7	Engage the creative sector to market creativity in the region	The profile of the creative sector has been elevated with the production of the new SG Touring Map and two dedicated marketing campaigns in the Gippsland Life magazine.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

	2.8	Continue to support local events, event attraction and cultural tourism development. Strengthen our partnership with Destination Gippsland.	Implementation of the Events Acquisitions Fund in partnership with Destination Gippsland. Active member of Events Gippsland with support to Fishy Stories, Mirboo North Winter Festival, Mirboo Italian Festa and Fish Creek Tea Cosy Festival. Provided marketing support to the ArtConnect trail project. Ongoing funding support to local events through the Community Grants program. Currently in conversation with Gippsland arts organisations to develop a major arts-based Gippsland-wide event.
	2.9	Develop an Events Policy that supports the growth of cultural event tourism in the region.	Not yet commenced – to be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders including the Arts Advisory Committee
	2.10	Advocate for State and Federal funding for local creative projects. Support the arts sector to access external funds while maintaining relationships with major State and National arts bodies.	Successful application to the Victorian Government's Small Regional Presenters Program. Submitted an application on behalf of Lyrebird Arts Council to the Victorian Government's Creative Neighbourhood Infrastructure Support Program. Unsuccessful application submitted to Creative Australia to fund the ArtCubes program. A total of 17 letters of support provided for funding to grant programs including local halls committees, galleries, artists, etc. Whole day tour of Shire arts projects undertaken with Jo Porter, CEO of Regional Arts Victoria to discuss future support and funding opportunities and directions.
	2.11	All community proposals for upgraded and extended creative spaces investigated as part of the Community and Economic Infrastructure Blueprint 2021-2036. Proposals must be included in a reviewed Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Strategy in order to be considered by the Community Infrastructure Advisory Committee and Council.	Operational function managed by Assets Planning team. Current project includes proposal for the redevelopment of the Leongatha Memorial Hall.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

Theme 3 – Healthy Communities

Building healthy communities with a strong sense of belonging and purpose, living physical, social, and cultural active lives, investing in people, partnering with community in planning.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
Building healthy communities with a strong sense of belonging and purpose. Offering a range of arts and cultural activities and opportunities throughout the Shire to support our community to live enriching creative lives.	3.1	Align with current and new iterations of Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan and reduce barriers to participation in arts and cultural activities.	Delivery of three Small Hall music events at heavily subsidised ticket prices. Use of Leongatha Memorial Hall that allows for easy access for all as well as centralised location. Commencement of the ArtCube programming, providing access and support to creative facilities for local creatives as well as opportunity to bring art to remote and unexpected locations.
	3.2	Actively support local groups and initiatives to provide accessible services and opportunities for creatives of all abilities. Engage the disability sector in discussions and decisions around accessibility.	Support to (it's no) drama in providing a space to rehearse. Ongoing conversations regarding programming and ways to make our live music and arts projects more accessible. Retrofit of wheelchair accessible ramps to ArtCubes.
	3.3	Recognise, respect, and celebrate our cultural heritage through stronger engagement with traditional owners, and contribute to the development of a Council Reconciliation Action Plan.	Participation in initial discussions with GLAWAC around appropriate engagement of First Nations art and artists as well as local arts projects that appropriately acknowledge First Nations people and culture. Planning and design of First Nations youth arts project for the Toora ArtCubes program.
	3.4	Embed artists as key stakeholders into the early stages of development of Council cultural infrastructure projects for maximum impact.	Not yet commenced – To be included as part of the planning for the proposed redevelopment of the Leongatha Memorial Hall
	3.5	Engage young and emerging artists, through a diverse range of creative activity encompassing contemporary practice.	Reconnect Festival held at Meeniyah Town Hall October 2023. Engage the Leongatha Lyric Theatre as part of two events held at Coal Creek. Planning and design of First Nations youth arts project for the Toora ArtCubes program. Young and emerging artists supported via the Creative Fund.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

	3.6	Encourage and enable night time activation. Enable night-time activation of larger towns and community parks and attractions.	Three Music events and Southern Lights Festival held at Coal Creek. Support to Mirboo North Winterfest. ArtCubes program has featured a number of night-time events, some as part of coinciding festivals (i.e. Winterfest)
	3.7	Encourage and support local cultural activity in partnership with local organizations.	Demonstrated in the collaborative model designed for the ArtCubes programming. Takes place regularly when local creatives call for advice on managing/supporting local projects. Support for Lyrebird Arts Council in grant auspice. Support for local organisations via the Creative Fund.
	3.8	Encourage and include local providers and food producers into arts and culture festivals and events.	Demonstrated at various events including Fishy Stories, Southern Lights, Winterfest, Fish Creek Tea Cosy Festival.
	3.9	Develop a Public Art and Collection Management Policy to incorporate Council's existing arts-based policies	New Public Art Collection Policy and Arts & Civic Memorabilia Collection Policy adopted February 2024
	3.10	Support and collaborate with local libraries (My Community Library, or Myli).	Ongoing Project. This approach was successfully demonstrated by Community Support Package (CSP) project, Writers in Libraries which was completed October 2022.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

Theme 4 – Leading with Integrity

Integrity, care, good governance, accountability, outward focus, building trust with community.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
Supporting a healthier integrated environment for future generations and encouraging activities that celebrate and build a sense of awareness and care for our environment.	4.1	Engage with Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAPs) and local Aboriginal artists to develop cultural and environmental events together with non-Aboriginal art community.	Participation in initial discussions with GLAWAC around appropriate engagement of First Nations art. Engagement of GLAWAC and Wulgunggo Ngalu Learning Place in future ArtCube funding proposals and ArtCube programming. Advise local arts projects on appropriate acknowledgement of First Nations people and culture.
	4.2	Deliver art activation in towns to highlight environmental issues.	New murals at Leongatha and Korumburra both feature design content to raise awareness of endangered local fauna as well as valuing local flora. Tarwin Lower ArtCube programming highlights local environmental issues.
	4.3	Work with local artists to assist Council with environmental messaging.	Not yet commenced – to be developed in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.
	4.4	Encourage art and craft-making cultures and spaces that bring people together to create, encouraging a sense of belonging.	ArtCube programming currently engaging craft practice. Delivery of craft workshops for all ages via the Creative fund.
	4.5	Encourage projects and events that educate and engage the community about environmental values.	A range of ArtCube programming involves messaging around sustainability.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

Theme 5 – Protecting and Enhancing the Environment

A healthier integrated environment for future generations, regeneration, and revegetation, expanding biodiversity, reducing emissions, encouraging community reduction, reuse, and recycling.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
Plan for sustainable growth, advocate for external funding, protect our small-town character through cultural activity, include community connection, knowledge and experience in important change decisions and processes.	5.1	Redevelop Small Hall event promotions including the South Gippsland Small Halls website and encourage more hall committees to participate in the Small Halls Network	Not yet formally commenced – action to be revisited to determine the most practical approach. Small Halls events are able promote on the Visit South Gippsland website. Ongoing conversations with small hall committees around the value of the network.
	5.2	Develop Council's capacity to program live performance and cultural events in Small Halls throughout the Shire	Regional Arts Victoria touring events held at Mirboo and Strzelecki halls
	5.3	Use local community intelligence to plan events and activities to improve community and visitor experiences.	Ongoing project. This is embedded in all community involved arts projects.
	5.4	Develop placemaking strategies and promotions involving local creatives to establish a 'vibrant village' network	This is embedded in all community involved arts projects. Examples from this year; ArtCube programming, GSRT public art project design at Leongatha and Korumburra.
	5.5	Engage artists to collaborate with Council to deliver innovative messaging about sustainability	Not yet commenced – to be undertaken in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.
	5.6	Partner with local businesses, community associations and promoters to support and market events in small towns.	Ongoing promotion of events through the South Gippsland Arts Newsletter and on the Visit South Gippsland website. ArtCube programming in host towns promoted on a dedicated page on the Visit South Gippsland website.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

	5.7	Encourage pathways for emerging creative leaders to gain essential governance and organisational skills.	Ongoing - Process of disconnecting the partnership between (it's no) drama and Council provides good example of these actions. Currently providing support and advise to Stockyard Gallery committee as they consider their future governance structure and workings of the gallery.
	5.8	Support and promote our smaller, community run cultural institutions throughout the Shire.	Support for volunteer-run community art gallery via the Creative Fund. Support for smaller organisations ongoing through advice around funding, governance and programming. Ongoing promotions for all arts organisations via the South Gippsland Arts Newsletter and Visit South Gippsland website.
	5.9	Support small cultural organisations to attract new volunteers, including younger volunteers. Council recognises the critical role volunteers play in delivering arts and culture activities and organisations across the Shire.	Currently in discussions with Stockyard Gallery around attracting much needed younger volunteers. Ongoing conversations with local arts organisations and committees around younger volunteer attraction.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

Theme 6 – Sustainable Growth

Support the continued growth and development of the tourism sector that delivers high quality visitor experiences.
Building the skills, training and knowledge of the business community.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
Integrity, care, good governance, accountability, outward focus, building trust with community.	6.1	Establish an Arts Advisory Network to help develop and review the Strategic Actions.	Seven members appointed to the Arts Advisory Committee with a 12mth review to be provided to Councillors in June 2023.
	6.2	Maintain a clear focus on measuring outcomes and annually review the Strategic Actions from this Strategy.	Annual report to Council and review by Arts Advisory Committee
	6.3	Foster civic pride through arts and cultural activities and the community	This is embedded in all community involved arts projects. Examples from this year; ArtCube programming, GSRT public art project design at Leongatha and Korumburra, Exhibitions at Coal Creek and various music events.
	6.4	Involve artists and creative businesses in Council planning.	Not yet commenced – to be undertaken in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.
	6.5	Celebrate local successes.	The Arts Newsletter aims to celebrate all Council facilitated and community run arts events, projects and achievements. This includes media releases, features in the Council Noticeboard and various social media platforms. This is supported with professional photography, videography and commissioned story-tellers.
	6.6	Recognise, celebrate and support the work of local art sector volunteers	Ongoing work with the Small Halls Network participating committees. Direct support to volunteer-based arts organisations such as Lyrebird Arts Committee and Lyric Theatre.
	6.7	Maintain equitable support for cultural organisations, venues and projects across the Shire, in small and large townships. Encourage projects that bring creative	EOI process undertaken for ArtCube programming that is open to towns across the Shire. Delivered Live Music in Small Hall gigs in Mirboo and Strzelecki.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

		experiences to more remote locations.	Development of the public art along the GSRT in Leongatha and Korumburra. Support to Sandy Point Art Show and Leongatha Rotary Art Show via the Creative Fund.
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Theme 7 – Cultural Heritage and Infrastructure

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
7.1 Coal Creek Community Park and Museum	7.1.1	<p>The current function of Coal Creek can only be sustainable if there is new investment in the site to transition into a contemporary and significant cultural tourist attraction. This would involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Research and development of technology for arts, culture, and creative industry engagement to reactivate the site long term to drive visitation and in particular return visitation. - Multi-year increased financial commitment from Council. - A commitment to substantial upgrade and renovations. - A clear view on what the site represents and communicates a contemporary cultural tourism asset. - Investigate rebranding and renaming in line with contemporary use and function. 	Consideration as part of the development of the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan.
	7.1.2	To assist Council in deciding on the future of Coal Creek, there needs to be a rigorous business case, community engagement and a cultural impact assessment carried out as soon as possible to enable the longer-term planning for a future use of the site to be determined.	Development of the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum well advance which included an extensive community engagement process.

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

<p>7.2 Leongatha Memorial Hall as a performance space and community venue</p>	7.2.1	<p>Council will undertake a business case and feasibility study for the redevelopment of Memorial Hall that looks at current and future use, multi-use, demographics, population growth, service, service levels, heritage, redevelopment models, constraints, benchmarking with other population centres, demand, impact on small towns, accessibility, and whether operational costs can be supported and maintained. The business case should also consider the relationship between other halls and venues both within and outside of the Shire, including the Foster War Memorial Arts Centre. A strong case for State Government and Commonwealth Government support and contribution towards capital works can only be made if underpinned by a solid business case that has a forward projection extending over 25 years.</p>	<p>Council's Infrastructure Planning team to lead the development of a business case and feasibility study in 2024/2025 in consultation with relevant stakeholders including the Arts, Culture and Visitor Economy department.</p>
<p>7.3 The Great Southern Rail Trail & Korumburra and Leongatha Railway precincts</p>	7.3.1	<p>The development of a Public Art and Collection Management Policy by Council to include the input and curation by the local communities that sit adjacent to the GSRT.</p>	<p>Public Art Collection Policy adopted February 2024.</p>
	7.3.2	<p>The current planning and redevelopment of the Korumburra Railway Station Building may benefit from a creative hub for a Shire-wide public art initiative. Using the existing spaces has the potential to become a creative industries precinct.</p>	<p>Will be subject to tender of an appropriate lessee.</p>
	7.3.3	<p>Investigate other national and international models of integrated arts and creative industries development that can inform an integrated approach to the redevelopment of the Railway precinct in Korumburra, and Leongatha, the GSRT and Coal Creek</p>	<p>Ongoing action with the redevelopment of the listed locations is being developed in consultation with the Arts, Culture and Visitor Economy team. Specific projects have included the new Murals at Leongatha and Korumburra within the Railway Precincts.</p>

Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy Actions 2023/24

	7.3.4	Support South Gippsland's smaller cultural institutions, such as Port Welshpool Maritime Museum.	Regularly engagement and support undertaken by Council's Cultural Collections Management Officer. Support to the building infrastructure managed by Infrastructure Planning and Delivery teams.
	7.3.5	Investigate the project elements of Aboriginal heritage interpretation and sites of significance, along the Rail Trail to highlight rare or special environmental features and flora. Consider the option to replenish the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum site with indigenous plantings and cultural content.	Not yet commenced – To be developed in consultation with relevant internal and external stakeholders.
7.4 Small Halls	7.4.1	Recognise the ongoing contribution by Council to the costs of all halls and acknowledge those halls that are not owned by Council. Council can play a significant role in partnership with local communities and halls management committees.	Submitted a grant on behalf of Lyrebird Arts Council for equipment improvements to Meeniyan Hall. Opportunities to further support Shire small halls identified, however any works outside of standard maintenance schedules is subject to future budget allocations and/or external funding.
	7.4.2	Investigate possible flexible and adaptable models to support all halls in terms of technical requirements and programming needs.	Submitted a Creative Victoria grant on behalf of Lyrebird Arts Council for technical equipment improvements to Meeniyan Hall.
	7.4.3	Council to advocate to State Government for more support for Crown managed assets.	Ongoing – as opportunities arise.

3.3. VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY AND GREAT SOUTHERN RAIL TRAIL (GSRT) VISITOR EXPERIENCE AND MARKETING PLAN - ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATIONS PROGRESS REPORT

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community, Customer and Visitor

Council Plan

Objective - Economy and Industry

This report relates to the Council Plan Initiatives - Implement the annual action plan of the 2021–2031 Visitor Economy Strategy to encourage tourism and visitation across the Shire and to develop and implement the Great Southern Rail Trail Management Plan, including a visitation and marketing plan.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the 2023/2024 actions implemented from Council’s South Gippsland Visitor Economy Strategy and Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Receives and notes the 2023/2024 actions implemented from the *South Gippsland Visitor Economy Strategy (refer Attachment [3.3.1])*; and**
- 2. Receives and notes the 2023/24 actions implemented from the *Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan (refer Attachment [3.3.2])*.**

REPORT

Background

Visitor Economy Strategy

The South Gippsland Visitor Economy Strategy (the Strategy) was adopted by Council on 21 July 2021.

Council developed the Strategy in consultation with the Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group (the Group). The Group’s members included highly skilled and knowledgeable experts who provided key strategic advice and expertise in the Strategy’s development.

The Strategy is designed to achieve South Gippsland Shire Council’s vision that South Gippsland is a destination of choice for local and international visitors. Increased visitation in turn increases the contribution the visitor economy makes across the region.

The Strategy is action oriented but designed to be flexible to allow Council to respond to current and future demands and opportunities for South Gippsland.

Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan

The Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan (the Plan) was adopted by Council on 29 June 2022.

Council developed the Plan with significant community and stakeholder engagement.

The objective of the Plan is to support the visitor economy to make South Gippsland a year-round destination. The GSRT aims to drive visitation across all villages and towns by leveraging the trail as a key visitor experience, with year-round brand marketing.

The Plan is focused on informing projects and activities over a nine-year period from 2022-2031 to align to the Visitor Economy Strategy period. However, the Plan will be treated as a living document that is flexible enough to adapt to an ever-changing visitor and marketing landscape.

Discussion

A full report of actions (**Attachment [3.3.1]** Visitor Economy Strategy) and (**Attachment [3.3.2]** – GSRT Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan), are provided.

Below are highlighted actions from the Strategy and Plan that were commenced or completed over the past twelve-months.

Visitor Economy Strategy

- South Gippsland brand identity actively marketed through regional campaigns and activities.
- Partnerships with Destination Gippsland campaigns including development of the Walks and Rides brochure and the new Eat, Drink guide.
- Major events supported through the Events Acquisition Fund being Mirboo North Italian Festa, Mirboo North Winterfest, Fish Creek Tea Cosy, Fishy Stories and Loch Food and Wine Festival.
- Development and launch of the Visit South Gippsland marketing video.
- GAWK billboards 3-week brand promotion in Bairnsdale and Torquay.
- Marketing campaign focused this year on Tarwin Lower/Venus Bay, Toora, Mirboo North and Korumburra.
- Supported the Bicycle Network in December 2023 for the Great Victorian Bike Ride, with overnight stay at Fish Creek.
- Attended Australia Tourism Exchange Forum held in Melbourne May 2024.

- Supported Destination Gippsland with the development of a local area tourism action plan for Foster, Toora and surrounds.

Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT) Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan

- Commenced the development of a new GSRT website and upgrade of the Visit South Gippsland website.
- Successful external grant application to the Council Support Fund for the GSRT Activation Project.
- GSRT interpretative signage content development completed with contract awarded for installation.
- Increased promotion through GSRT Facebook and South Gippsland promotional material.
- Construction of the eastern extension of the GSRT from Welshpool to Alberton in partnership with Wellington Shire Council.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Both the Strategy and Plan's development were supported by an extensive consultation and engagement program that ensured the community, including residents, visitors, and other stakeholders, could provide input to help define the key themes and priorities.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Resourcing the implementation of the Strategy and Plan is considered as part of the annual financial budgets

RISKS

The implementation of the Strategy and Plan allows Council to plan for and mitigate against the risks to our economy into the future. The Strategy and Plan have been developed with the flexibility to create a responsive approach to the economic, natural and policy changes that will occur over the next ten-years.

Not all actions and initiatives can be funded each year. Actions are delivered within the annual budget allocations and officers will continue to seek advice and support from industry and government to deliver the best outcomes possible for the South Gippsland community.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. VISITOR ECONOMY STRATEGY - IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2024 [3.3.1 - 9 pages]
2. GSRT VISITOR EXPERIENCE MARKETING PLAN - IMPLEMENTATION REPORT 2024 [3.3.2 - 6 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Arts, Culture and Creative Industry Strategy

Economic Development Strategy

South Gippsland Coastal Strategy

Visitor Economy Strategy

Annual Budget

Council Plan 2022-2026

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan

Legislative Provisions

Nil

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Gippsland Destination Management Plan - Towards 2030 - A Blueprint for Growth (Destination Gippsland)

Gippsland Regional Plan 2020-2025

Gippsland Track & Trails Feasibility Study

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024



Visitor Economy Strategy

Annual
Implementation
July 2024

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

THEME 1 - Increasing marketing and promotion

Strengthen South Gippsland's appeal as a visitor destination through increased brand awareness, whilst highlighting the regional brand characteristics.

Raise the profile of South Gippsland's visitor offering by facilitating and undertaking a range of destination marketing activities to increase visitation.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
1.1 Develop and promote the South Gippsland tourism brand.	1.1.1	Develop the South Gippsland brand identity.	Finalised in October 2022.
	1.1.2	Undertake research to identify market segments.	Incorporated in the SG Brand Identity project.
	1.1.3	Develop and implement localised South Gippsland branding consistent with the Gippsland brand developed by Destination Gippsland (DGL).	Ongoing implementation with a specific campaign scheduled for Spring 2024.
	1.1.4	Increase South Gippsland's digital promotional assets (photography, video, drone footage).	'Visit South Gippsland' marketing video launched in December 2023 which has been viewed 25k and shared 224 times.
1.2 Develop and strengthen South Gippsland's appeal as a visitor destination through a range of coordinated marketing initiatives.	1.2.1	Develop a promotional website to attract visitors to South Gippsland.	Website live January 2022. Website continuously monitored and updated.
	1.2.2	Encourage visitors to use the new website via an online and print advertising campaign.	Visit South Gippsland website included in all South Gippsland promotional material. Commenced installation of new signage on public infrastructure, the initial site at the Port Welshpool Public Toilets.
	1.2.3	Develop an annual marketing campaign for the South Gippsland region drawing on support from government partners where needed.	Promotional material developed for regional publications. Regional promotion through major South Gippsland events including Winterfest, Fishy Stories, Italian Festa, Fish Creek Tea Cosy Festival and Loch Food and Wine. Advert & editorial in Gippsland Lifestyle magazine. GAWK billboards- 3-week brand promotion in Bairnsdale and Torquay

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

	1.2.4	Review existing marketing publications on an annual basis to determine if they are still required and if reprints are necessary.	Ongoing Project Is dependent on annual budget allocations.
1.3 Encourage new residents to South Gippsland via promotion of its people and places.	1.3.1	Implement a series of podcasts featuring local residents to promote the value of living in South Gippsland.	Completed in 2021/22
1.4 Raise the awareness of the region, to encourage visitation and increase length of stay.	1.4.1	Partner and collaborate with Gippsland councils to develop cross-regional marketing ideas.	Gippsland Walks and Rides Brochure renewed. Supported development of Eat.Drink Gippsland and Gippsland Walks Rides Brochure.
	1.4.2	Develop marketing initiatives to promote Gippsland drives.	Completed in 2022/23
	1.4.3	Develop a Grand Ridge Road map and promote it as a key Gippsland touring route.	Completed in 2022/23
1.5 Increase awareness of and visitation to the Great Southern Rail Trail.	1.5.1	Develop and deliver a strategic and marketing plan for the Great Southern Rail Trail.	Completed in 2022/23
1.6 Increase awareness of and visitation to South Gippsland's villages and eateries.	1.6.1	Coordinate a marketing campaign with a focus on villages and local eateries.	Marketing campaign focused this year on Tarwin Lower/Venus, Toora, Mirboo North and Korumburra. Campaign will be extended to the development of impetrative signage for the GSRT.
1.7 Support local business growth through a range of marketing initiatives		Develop Shop South Gippsland campaign to encourage support for local retail business	Completed in year one of this strategy.

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

Theme 2 - Supporting visitor economy infrastructure

Advocate for and support development of South Gippsland infrastructure that encourages new and existing visitors.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
2.1 Support the development of key tourism assets and infrastructure.	2.1.1	Advocate to Federal and State Government for key tourism projects supported by Council.	Provided letters of support for external applications from Waratah Hills Winery, Wandilla Estate, South Gippsland Gin Co. Nanjet, Kongwak Butter Factory , to various State Government funding programs.
	2.1.2	Partner with Destination Gippsland to undertake a strategic product review aimed at delivering improvements to products and experiences.	Development of the Visitor Services Strategy underway.
2.2 Identify and support the development of complementary products and experiences to capitalise on and enhance the Great Southern Rail Trail (GSRT).	2.2.1	Develop public art along the Great Southern Rail Trail	Two new large public arts projects (murals) undertaken at Leongatha and Korumburra. Future projects will be dependent on available budget.
	2.2.2	Identify additional supporting rail trail infrastructure requirements (such as additional trail connections, horse mounting yards, repair stations, shelters, toilets, car parks, interpretive signage, seat and bike racks etc). Support implementation if required.	Identified as a priority in the GSRT Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan. The Great Southern Rail Trail Management Plan is under review by Infrastructure Planning department for investigation of renewal costings and infrastructure requests.
	2.2.3	Investigate the viability of improvement works on the rail trail that would enhance the visitor experience (e.g. removal of dangerous road crossings or unsightly cattle crossings).	Commenced as part of GSRT Management and Marketing Plans. Further work required.
	2.2.4	Install wayfinding signage for the GSRT from key locations off the South Gippsland Highway and main arterial roads.	Locations identified and contractor appointed to install way finding signage for the entire trail.
2.3 Investigate sustainable infrastructure for South Gippsland to enhance the visitor experience.	2.3.1	Identify and then seek funding opportunities to implement actions from the Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Study.	Funding approved for 6 locations across the Shire.

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

2.4 Support upgrades to existing tourism infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience.	2.4.1	Complete a tourism infrastructure audit to identify redundant signage and opportunities for potential infrastructure upgrades (lookouts, tourism signage etc).	A desktop audit has commenced however new signage is subject to future budget allocations.
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Theme 3 - Diversifying and expanding products and experiences

Further develop South Gippsland's visitor products and experiences to encourage new and existing markets to visit, stay and spend.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
3.1 Attract and grow investment to the Shire through the implementation of a targeted Investment Attraction Program	3.1.1	Include tourism investment attraction as a key component of the South Gippsland Investment Attraction Strategy.	Collaborated with Economic Development team to update the Investment Attraction program with further works to develop collateral including a prospectus to be that incorporates the new South Gippsland Brand.
3.2 Identify opportunities to support events in South Gippsland	3.2.1	Determine a policy position on events and develop an event framework.	Not yet commenced – Events Policy to be developed in 2024/25
	3.2.2	Leverage from DGL's Gippsland Regional Events Strategy and Events Gippsland.	Member of the Gippsland Events Network. Supported five events through the Gippsland Events Acquisition Fund, being the Fish Creek Stories, Mirboo North Italian Festa, Mirboo North Winterfest, Fish Creek Tea Cosy and Loch Food and Wine. Supported the Bicycle Network in December 2023 for the Great Victorian Bike Ride, with overnight stay at Fish Creek.
3.3 Leverage South Gippsland's cultural assets for tourism purposes	3.3.1	Develop a South Gippsland Cultural Tourism Plan.	Forms part of the Arts, Culture and Creative Industry Strategy (AC&CI) adopted by Council in July 2022.
	3.3.2	Position Coal Creek as a key Cultural Tourism asset for South Gippsland.	The Coal Creek Strategic Plan is a Council budget initiative for 2023/24 with development well underway

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

3.4 Identify South Gippsland's accessible tourism products and experiences	3.4.1	Undertake a stock take of accessible tourism assets in South Gippsland.	Not yet commenced.
3.5 Identify opportunities to support cycling in South Gippsland	3.5.1	Support the Bicycle Network 'Riding for Recovery Hub and Spoke' weekend event.	Due to limited ticket sales unfortunately Bicycle Network had to withdraw the event.
	3.5.2	Investigate opportunities for safe cycling paths and routes.	Not yet commenced. Subject to future budget allocations.
3.6 Continue to support Art, Culture and Creative Industries in South Gippsland	3.6.1	Update the South Gippsland Art, Culture and Creative Industry Strategy.	Adopted by Council July 2022.
3.7 Develop niche products aligned to brand	3.7.1	Develop touring routes that promote the visitor experiences.	Developed the Hinterland Discovery and Strzelecki Views tours.

Theme 4 - Enhancing visitor servicing

Enhance the visitor experience by providing high quality engagement assets, which create a positive image of our region. Invest in research to understand the market and identify the gaps.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
4.1 Improve the visitor experience	4.1.1	Broaden the tourism knowledge of local businesses and create tourism ambassadors via an online training program.	Platform developed, engaged business, community and volunteers in 2022/23.
	4.1.2	Investigate the feasibility and cost of digital technology in key locations.	Not yet commenced – Long term plan, and will be subject to future budget allocations.
	4.1.3	Investigate programs that help better understand the travel patterns of visitors.	Not yet commenced – Long term plan, and will be subject to future budget allocations.
	4.1.4	Continue the operation of the Visitor Information Centre in Foster.	Operates 7 days a week except Christmas Day.
	4.1.5	Develop plans to transition the Visitor Information Centres to an experience centre.	Not yet commenced Anticipated action as an outcome of the Towards 2030: Visitors Services Strategy being undertaken by Destination Gippsland in partnership with the six Councils. Implementation will be subject to future budget allocations

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

	4.1.6	Undertake updated visitor research to better understand customer needs and expectations.	Developed as part of GSRT Visitor Experience and Marketing Plan and Brand Identity projects.
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Theme 5 - Building partnerships

To develop partnerships with stakeholders to support the development of the visitor economy in South Gippsland.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
5.1 Maintain collaborative partnerships with stakeholders to further progress the visitor economy in South Gippsland	5.1.1	Maintain and nurture partnerships with key agencies at Shire, regional and state level.	Ongoing collaboration with agencies including Destination Gippsland, Parks Victoria, Regional Development Victoria, One Gippsland and Gippsland LGAs.
	5.1.2	Actively participate in industry specific groups, forums and expos as appropriate.	Participation in Gippsland Tourism Managers meetings, Quarterly Gippsland Tourism Forums, Regional Development Victoria and Parks Victoria meetings. Attended Australia Tourism Exchange Forum held in Melbourne May 2024.
	5.1.3	Work collaboratively with Destination Gippsland under the terms of the partnership contract to ensure the best outcomes for South Gippsland.	Continued support and partnership with Destination Gippsland.
	5.1.4	Work with local business and community groups to promote opportunities for local operators.	Information disseminated through Business/Tourism associations, monthly newsletter and Visitor Information Centre updates.
	5.1.5	Engage with local artists via Council's Arts Development Officer.	Provide relevant content to the Arts Newsletter distributed fortnightly
	5.1.6	Collaborate with Parks Victoria on South Gippsland projects and marketing where opportunities exist or a need is identified.	Ongoing collaboration and meeting with Parks Victoria team including feedback to the development of the new Visitor Centre at Tidal River.
	5.1.7	Support the Visitor Economy Strategy Advisory Group to be a key adviser to Council on Visitor Economy issues.	Collaboration with VESAG to implement year one Action Plan. VESAG has not been reappointed.

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

	5.1.8	Support the development of the State Government's Local Tourism Action Plans.	A local area tourism action plan completed for Foster, Toora and surrounds
	5.1.9	Provide community groups interested in establishing free or low-cost camping with information and advice.	Ongoing project in providing information to interested community groups.
	5.1.10	Support local communities to work with relevant authorities to establish dump points if appropriate.	Ongoing project in providing to interested community groups.

Theme 6 - Providing business development and support

Support the continued growth and development of the tourism sector that delivers high quality visitor experiences.
Building the skills, training and knowledge of the business community.

STRATEGY	#	ACTION	UPDATES
6.1 Facilitate the establishment of new tourism businesses in South Gippsland	6.1.1	Continue the Better Business Approvals process to assist small/medium businesses to establish in South Gippsland.	As at 06 June, 239 business enquiries received through the Better Approvals Program.
	6.1.2	Provide strategic input into the review of Council's Municipal Statement to ensure the Visitor Economy and its importance to South Gippsland is recognised.	Visitor Economy recognised in the Council Municipal Planning Statement
	6.1.3	Continue to provide the Business Concierge service within Council.	Permanent ongoing resource allocation.
6.2 Provide opportunities for local businesses to increase their knowledge and skills	6.2.1	Promote targeted training and skills programs to local businesses.	Small Business Victoria, SBMS, education providers and independent trainers.
	6.2.2	Deliver tourism information to local businesses via communication tools such as the Business e-newsletter and associated business web pages.	12 business newsletters circulated.
	6.2.3	Support Destination Gippsland Ltd to deliver the Gippsland Digital Maze Program to South Gippsland businesses.	Completed 2022/23
	6.2.4	Establish a business auditing program with a focus on customer service.	Not yet commenced – Long term plan and subject to future budget allocations.

Visitor Economy Strategy Actions 2023/2024

6.3 Encourage local businesses to invest and implement sustainable activities and technologies	6.3.1	Provide information to local business on sustainable technologies (for example electric vehicle charging).	Not yet commenced – Long term plan and subject to future budget allocations.
6.4 Developing Business Resilience and Recovery	6.4.1	Continue and enhance Council's Business Resilience and Recovery Programs.	Supported impacted businesses in Welshpool and Mirboo North from Storm Events. Businesses included in RediCommunities sessions in Foster and Mirboo North to improve understanding of emergency risks in these locations.
6.5 Enabling/supporting industry to access a skilled and job ready workforces.	6.5.1	Work with educational and training institutions to increase opportunities for locals to be job ready and assist retention of young people.	Jobs Expo conducted in Leongatha May 2024 with 36 employers attending.
	6.5.2	Work with businesses to understand skills requirements and plan appropriately.	Discussions held with businesses as part of scheduled business visits.

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24



South Gippsland
Shire Council

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031



GREAT SOUTHERN
RAIL TRAIL

Annual
Implementation
July 2024

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24

There are six major projects we want to complete to coincide with the completion of the Trail extension from Nyora to Yarram, that will set us up for an improved, and continuously improving, GSRT visitor experience and marketing communications.

Theme 1 - BRAND & CAMPAIGN

ACTIVITY	#	DELIVERABLES	UPDATES
Strategic brand positioning	1.1	Develop GSRT brand positioning, value proposition and personality (aligned to what will be the new South Gippsland brand foundations)	Incorporated as part of the new South Gippsland brand. GSRT brand will not change
Seasonal campaigns	1.2	Align on key activities, experiences and events on offer for Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter	Not yet commenced - launch to be prepared to coincide with the completion of the extension to Yarram and installation of interpretative signage
	1.3	Develop campaign idea/story and creative assets for each season	Not yet commenced - launch to be prepared to coincide with the completion of the extension to Yarram and installation of interpretative signage
	1.4	Develop media/channels schedule for digital, outdoor/evolving signage, radio, social media and in-region/on-trail assets	Not yet commenced - launch to be prepared to coincide with the completion of the extension to Yarram and installation of interpretative signage
	1.5	Collaboration with partnered media and content creators	Not yet commenced - launch to be prepared to coincide with the completion of the extension to Yarram and installation of interpretative signage
	1.6	Media kit and business partner promotional packages	Not yet commenced - launch to be prepared to coincide with the completion of the extension to Yarram and installation of interpretative signage
	1.7	Partner with Destination Gippsland All Kinds of Wonder brand where appropriate	As part of the broader Gippsland Odyssey product.

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24

Events aligned with campaigns and social media	1.8	Collaborate with event organisers and community networks	Completed – Ongoing project. Examples include the Loch Food and Wine Festival and roll out of the ArtCubes project at Loch, Fish Creek and Meeniyan.
	1.9	Ensure events are aligned and featured in campaigns and social media content	Completed – Ongoing project as part of the South Gippsland Branding roll out.
Engagement benchmark setting and evaluation methods	1.10	Establish relevant and appropriate benchmarks and methods for evaluating level of social media engagement and successful performance according to marketing objectives	Not yet commenced
	1.11	Create evaluation schedule	Not yet commenced
	1.12	Assess need for adjustments	Not yet commenced

Theme 2 - WEBSITE OPTIMISATION

ACTIVITY	#	DELIVERABLES	UPDATES
Audience-centric content reorganisation and Adjustments	2.1	Current website content and structure audit; review against new audience profiles and develop updated content categories	New website currently under development
	2.2	Re-write/re-order content aligned to new content categories	Commenced as part of content for the new website
	2.3	Re-flow new categories and content to existing website look and feel/wireframe structure	Commenced as part of content for the new website
Develop web pages: Preparing for your visit, FAQs, needs-based itineraries	2.4	Audit website for pages that require updating, and lacking pages that need to be developed	Commenced as part of content for the new website
	2.5	Plan webpages according to audience needs and brand objectives; consider pages for FAQs, preparing for your visit or 'how to explore'	Commenced as part of content for the new website

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24

	2.6	Ensure complete information is available on webpages (do not rely on brochure uploads)	Commenced as part of content for the new website
	2.7	Develop a content engagement strategy for itineraries to address brand and marketing objectives	Commenced as part of content for the new website
	2.8	Develop a set of up to 5 x itineraries based on specific areas of interest such as culture/ art, natural wonders, culinary and local produce etc	Commenced as part of content for the new website
	2.9	Upload to website and promote publication	Commenced as part of content for the new website

Theme 3 – SOCIAL STRATEGY

ACTIVITY	#	DELIVERABLES	UPDATES
"Always On" social media content and engagement strategy	3.1	Collaboration with partnered media and content creators	Ongoing project. GSRT marketed through local media channels, Destination Gippsland, and featured in the broader South Gippsland marketing material.
	3.2	Delegate management of social accounts and responsibilities	Managed internally by Communications team
	3.3	Develop strategic audience-centric approach to responding to users and sharing user generated content	Not yet commenced - internal resourcing to be determined in management of this deliverable
	3.4	Observe public comments and feedback in Victorian trail groups, forums	Not yet commenced – internal resourcing to be determined in management of this deliverable
	3.5	Create a content calendar with regular branded social content, anchored in audience needs and wants	Not yet commenced – to be aligned with the completion of the extension from Nyora to Yarram.
	3.6	Scope for social collaboration opportunities on Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube for Victorian travel content creators	Not yet be commenced

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24

	3.7	Observe and analyse performance and feedback for adjusting content and engagement strategy	Not yet commenced – internal resourcing to be determined in management of this deliverable
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Theme 4 – SIGNAGE

ACTIVITY	#	DELIVERABLES	UPDATES
Entry signs review and update	4.1	Conduct brand strategy work to review and refine GSRT offer proposition is accurate and appropriate for long-term use (for example with trail lengths mentioned)	Signage content completed. Contract of signage installation awarded.
	4.2	If required, update signs with overprint stickers	Updated signage to be installed as part of the overall signage contract recently awarded
New/updated sign mapping research and strategy	4.3	Review and update signs (sign and sign content) for wayfinding, brand/promotional, safety and emergency signs	Signage content completed with contract for installation awarded
	4.4	Include in sign strategy brand and promotional signage in towns to ensure visitors can discover and learn about the GSRT. Consider use of QR code technology to include seasonal and updated information.	Will form part of the overall signage project.
	4.5	Plan for navigational signage in towns, on HWY, along the Trail, at all entrance points – includes distance to points of interest, nearest exist, facilities and amenities such as water, shelter, seatings, toilets, bike stations, and directions towards public transport stations	Signage content completed with contract for installation awarded.
	4.6	Install directional signage along the Hwy to ensure visitors can discover entry points along the GSRT	Signage content completed with contract for installation awarded.
	4.7	Include easy to understand and detailed safety and emergency signs at main points and along the Trail to help users feel prepared. Consider wildlife and weather hazards, injuries, road safety, and other emergencies.	Not yet commenced – to be determined as part of the service/management plan review.
Interpretative signs – physical and digital	4.8	Conduct research and/or consultation into desirability, feasibility and viability of interpretative signage. Consider where interpretative content can be integrated on navigational signage for efficiency	Signage content completed with contract for installation awarded.

Great Southern Rail Trail Visitor Experience & Marketing Plan 2022-2031 Actions 2023/24

	4.9	Trials may be conducted with QR sticker on existing signs (not recommended for long-term use as it excludes those without access or ability to use smart phone technology, or may rely on internet connection where there is none)	Signage content review in development and will be aligned to the completion of the extension from Nyora to Yarram
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Theme 5 – ENGAGEMENT

ACTIVITY	#	DELIVERABLES	UPDATES
Community inclusion	5.1	Develop a Community Inclusion Plan that identifies community members and groups to participate in future activities and projects related to the GSRT.	Not yet commenced.
Local business engagement	5.2	Media kit and business partner promotional packages	Not yet commenced
	5.3	Collaboration and/or partnership with business operator associations	Not yet commenced
	5.4	Email businesses with feedback and suggestion opportunities	Not yet commenced
	5.5	Explore opportunities for packages, events, and campaign partnerships (competition prizes, for example)	Not yet commenced
Maintenance and management communications	5.6	Maintenance and management communications will form part of the GSRT Management Plan	Management Plan currently in development by the Infrastructure Planning team.

Theme 5 – EVENTS & CULTURAL ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY	#	DELIVERABLES	UPDATES
GSRT arts and culture	6.1	The GSRT is considered in Council's Visitor Economy Strategy 2021 – 2031 and Council's Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy 2022–2026	Completed

3.4. VICGRID - DRAFT VICTORIAN TRANSMISSION PLAN GUIDELINES - SUBMISSION

Directorate:	Office of the CEO
Department:	Regional Partnerships

Council Plan

Objective - Economy and Industry

This report relates to the major initiatives in the Council Plan - Develop and implement the Advocacy Strategy including Council's Priority Projects and Implement the annual action plan of the 2021–2031 Economic Development Strategy.

Renewable energy is recognised as a strategic objective within Council's Economic Development Strategy: 1.2 - Understand the opportunities and implications from development of the new energy sector.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Councillors with a submission to consider in response to VicGrid's release of the Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines and their proposed land based Renewable Energy Zone Study Areas.

This report recommends that Council endorse a submission, which provides in principle support for renewable energy in South Gippsland in suitable locations, whilst reflecting community concerns and the need for consideration of our rural dwellings and agricultural industry.

RECOMMENDATION

[To be confirmed following completion of the submission]

That Council :

- 1. Endorses the submission to VicGrid's Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines and Renewable Energy Zone Study Areas engagement (Attachment 3.4.1); and**
- 2. Supports renewable energy development in principle, recognising the changing energy landscape. The region has natural advantages for wind energy facilities. However, the Council's support is measured, considering the need to limit negative impacts on nationally significant agricultural and tourism land uses, especially if these impacts affect the economy, local character, natural landscape, culture and environment.**

As the Victorian Transmission Plan evolves, there needs to be a greater understanding of the direct community benefits and potential offsets for

the community and impacted landholders. The Council urges the State Government to recognise the national significance of South Gippsland's agricultural production and the high density of rural dwellings outside townships, which are crucial for supporting land use and addressing current and future housing needs.

The South Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone Study Area under investigation is likely to raise significant community concerns. Council seeks to ensure that any proposed 'on land' transmission uses existing infrastructure and transmission routes to minimise impacts on existing land use and on amenity.

Council supports genuine and collaborative engagement from all levels of government and industry to build social license and address the lack of information on the direct and indirect impacts of proposed projects in or near South Gippsland. Our strong view is that our community needs to be informed and involved in a coherent way to reduce the risk of rural and regional communities being 'taken by surprise' when development is proposed and declared. Having said that, Council is committed to working collaboratively with the government through genuine, timely engagement and partnership.

REPORT

There are several strategic objectives that Council recognises that guides its understanding and planning of potential renewable energy development in South Gippsland.

Renewable energy is recognised as a strategic objective within Council's *Economic Development Strategy: 1.2 - Understand the opportunities and implications from development of the new energy sector.*

Recently, Council adopted the *South Gippsland and Latrobe City Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study 2024*, which also states several objectives for Council to pursue, primarily focused on key readiness themes that includes business supply-chains, jobs and skills, housing and accommodation and infrastructure. Although, Council does not deliver renewable energy projects, this Study helps understand what is required in preparation for their development, focusing significantly on the proposed development of an offshore wind industry in Bass Strait.

Renewable Energy in Gippsland

Gippsland enjoys natural advantages such as wind and solar.

Existing wind farms in South Gippsland are located at Bald Hills and Toora, along with proposed future developments at Delburn and on our municipal boundary at Gelliondale. There is also an existing wind farm located near Wonthaggi in Bass Coast.

The State Government acknowledges the need for Offshore Wind projects to generate the majority of Victoria's future energy needs and has energy targets of at least 2GW by 2032, 4GW by 2035 and 9GW by 2040.

Currently, feasibility licences have been granted to 12 Offshore Wind projects. Government policy supports continued investment in the renewables sector to support transition from 'old to new energy'. There are a diverse range of renewable project types proposed in Gippsland.

This includes:

- Offshore wind farms (6-12)
- Onshore wind farms (3)
- Solar farms (10)
- Battery storage (5)
- Hydrogen (3)

Council's Advocacy

One of Council's key Advocacy Priorities is supporting Renewable Energy Investment – Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony.

Specifically, Council is seeking Australian and Victorian Government policy support, and investment, to realise this once in a generation opportunity for South Gippsland. This requires support to plan and prepare for the activation of industrial and residential land to ensure commercial investment attraction, industry development and workforce accommodation in South Gippsland.

Council has also partnered with Wellington Shire Council with a funding application to the Federal Government's Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program, seeking State Government support and collaboration with regards to land and infrastructure planning.

Federal Government Offshore Renewable Energy Infrastructure Area Proposal: Bass Strait Off Gippsland

Council provided a submission in October 2022 to the Federal Government's announcement that Gippsland will be the first site in Australia to be formally examined as a new offshore wind zone.

In summary, Council endorsed a submission providing 'in principle' support towards offshore renewable energy projects, excluding the proposed zone's visual impacts, identified adjacent to southwestern coastline and bays of the municipality.

The submission also noted several caveats that needed to be addressed for any further support to be provided. For example, these included the need for more information on the direct and indirect impacts of proposed projects, addressing community interest and concerns, resourcing local government, tourism, farming and visual amenity impacts, plus more. Many of these caveats are still relevant

when it comes to considering the opportunities and impacts that land based, or 'onshore' wind farm developments may bring.

VicGrid - Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines

VicGrid is the Victorian Government Department responsible for coordinating the planning and development of Victoria's Renewable Energy Zones, the Victorian Transmission Investment Framework and working with the Australian Energy Market Operator (AEMO) to deliver major infrastructure upgrades.

On 23 July 2024, VicGrid released their Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines announcing the commencement of their state-wide community engagement.

VicGrid has stated their plan is to prepare the 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan (The Plan) to enable a smooth transition to renewables as ageing coal-fired power stations retire. The Plan aims to identify what renewable energy generation, storage and transmission projects are needed in Victoria, when they are needed and where they should be built.

A key aim is to keep the cost of energy low and attract renewable energy investment to locations where it is most productive. Energy market modelling will be used to identify the most suitable locations to host generation and transmission within the study area from an economic or 'least cost' point of view. The aim is to design a system based on efficiency, reliability and feasibility.

VicGrid states that the development of the Plan aims to provide an opportunity to meaningfully engage with landholders, local communities and industry to refine the proposed Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) to help maximise the collective benefits and minimise negative impacts.

The feedback being sought aims to help:

- Shape the method VicGrid will use to refine the broad geographical study area to draft proposed renewable energy zones
- Identify areas within the study area that VicGrid should protect and that would be suitable for renewable energy projects
- Identify factors that could influence the placement and design of infrastructure within the study area.

The Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines include information about:

- What parts of Victoria VicGrid is investigating for renewable energy generation.
- How VicGrid will determine how much energy is needed, and when.
- How VicGrid will determine what transmission projects are needed to support new energy generation.
- How VicGrid will engage with communities, First Peoples and industry.

The Draft Guidelines note that the study area is a *'starting point for further detailed analysis'*, as VicGrid looks to identify smaller areas for investigation and prioritisation for REZs.

It will consider regional characteristics and constraints in more detail, such as cultural values and impacts to agricultural land and irrigation districts.

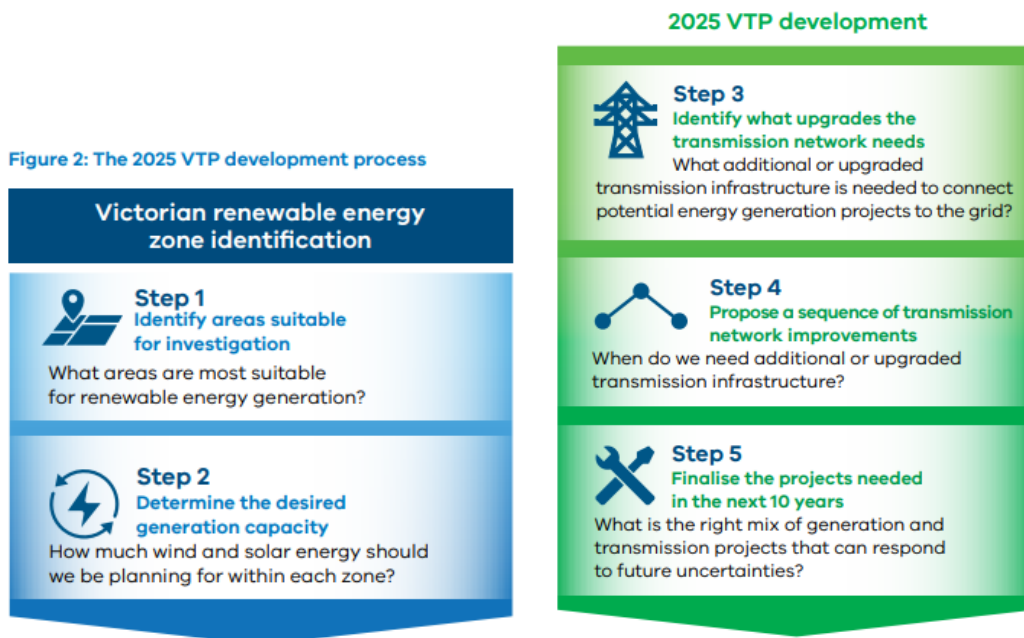
It states that it does not lock in development in any region or prevent individual projects, including other technologies, that might be appropriate outside the study area.

All proposed projects (both within and outside REZ areas) will continue to be assessed on a case by case, basis and will be subject to relevant planning and environmental approvals in Victoria. However, the declared REZs will provide benefits for communities and energy developers by improving coordination of infrastructure projects to minimise social and environmental impacts.

Victoria's new network access arrangements seek to coordinate generation into REZs to provide more certainty to communities and investors.

The full version of the Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines is available at www.engage.vic.gov.au/vicgrid

The 2025 Victorian Transmission Plan development process is outlined below:



Proposed Renewable Energy Zone (REZ) Study Area

VicGrid's Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines include an initial land-based study area for Renewable Energy Zones to investigate further for potential renewable energy development.

The initial study area is based on the findings of VicGrid's Strategic Land Use Assessment (SLUA). A study area map is attached (attachment 3.4.2).

It appears that locations for investigation are predominantly driven by the wind resource across the state as well as terrain slope and access to critical infrastructure. The assessment result shows the greatest opportunities for wind development are in the west and south-west of Victoria, as well as South Gippsland.

VicGrid states that only a portion of the study area will be needed to host new energy infrastructure. For planning, they believe it is helpful to start with a broader area and then narrow in on the most appropriate areas for renewable energy generation.

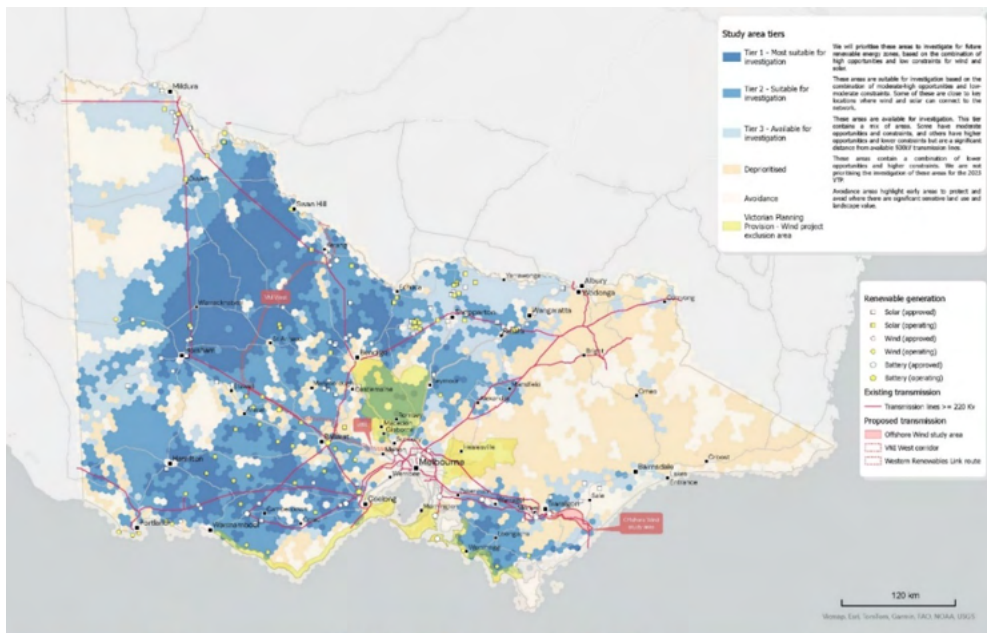
Within the study area VicGrid has identified three areas (Tiers 1 to 3) that they propose to use to prioritise investigation.

Tiers 1 and 2 areas aim to be prioritised for future investigation. VicGrid state that this is based on *'strong wind and solar generation opportunities and the likely low impact on land values such as biodiversity, agriculture and rural residences'*.

Tier 3 areas are proposed to present moderate opportunities for energy generation and more constraints. VicGrid state that, *'some of these areas may still be required to support overall reliability and security of the power system'*.

Other areas of the state have been deprioritised or avoided for reasons such as sensitive or incompatible land uses.

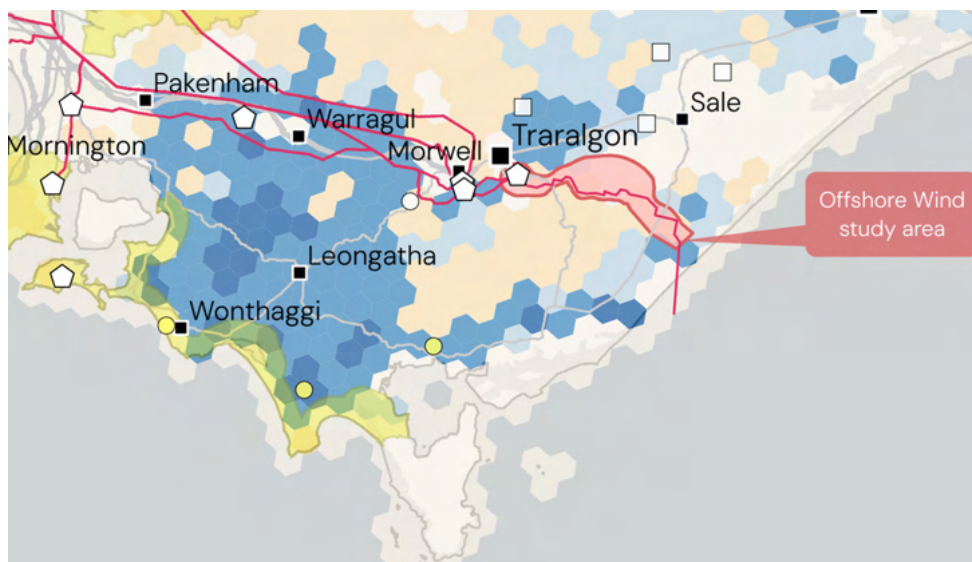
A map displaying the Victorian geographic areas for further investigation is below and attached. Also represented below is a 'zoomed in' South Gippsland version.



Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines
Geographical areas for further investigation

This study area is the first step in a process to identify Victoria's renewable energy zones, which will occupy a much smaller area. Datasets including renewables/agriculture compatibility, and detailed local and regional information and feedback, will inform final decisions.

Map by VicGrid, VicRoads, Geomatics, DSE, NCRMA, SESCS
 Date published: 17th Aug 2023 (map updated: 19th Aug 2023 10:46 AM AEST)



Wind Farm approvals and South Gippsland Planning Scheme

A planning permit is required for the use and development of new Wind Farms (Wind Energy Facilities). The Minister for Planning is the Responsible Authority for the assessment and approval of the planning permit, not Council.

Changes to the planning system in April 2024 mean applications (more than one megawatt) are assessed by the State's Development Facilitation Program (DFP).

Permit applications will be advertised, and Council and landowners can object; however, VCAT appeal rights have now been removed. The DFP process also removes the role of Planning Panels in the consideration of objections (a Panel considered the Delburn Wind Farm objections).

DFP will consider objections and make a recommendation. The assessment process has a four-month target date to decide and time commences when the application is certified as having the required information.

Appeals to the Minister’s decision can be made to the Supreme Court.

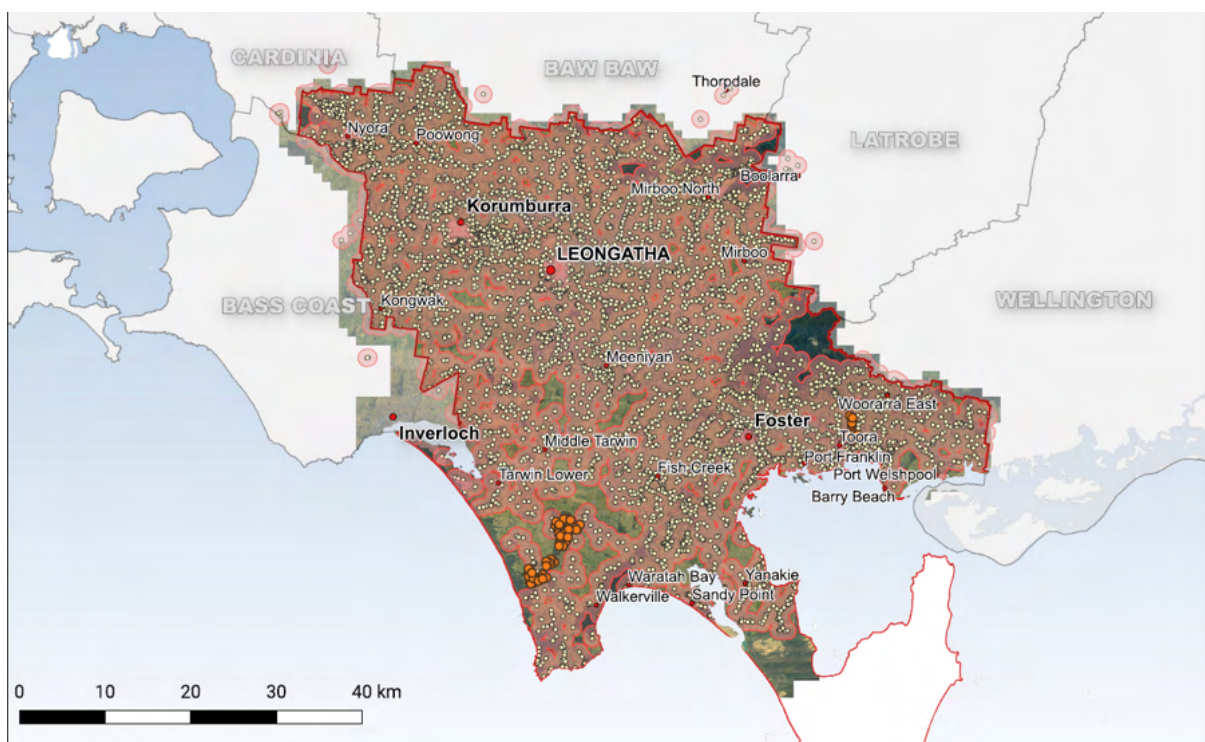
The EPA are responsible for noise monitoring and noise compliance.

One (1) Kilometre Dwelling Setback rule

The Planning Scheme requires new wind turbines to be located one kilometre or more from an existing dwelling. If an application for a new planning permit (or an amendment to an existing permit) proposes a turbine closer than one-kilometre, written consent to the turbine’s location is required from the dwelling landowner. If written consent is not provided, the planning permit application is prohibited.

The dwelling setback and landowner consent requirements cannot be varied by the Minister for Planning.

To illustrate this rule, a map of South Gippsland with the one-kilometre proximity buffer to rural dwellings is provided below (attachment 3.4.3). This shows the high density of rural dwellings in South Gippsland outside of townships and would indicate the limited locations for new wind farm developments to be considered without obtaining landowner consent.



Proposed Council Submission

Officers propose that Council consider making a submission in response to the release of the Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines and the Renewable Energy Zone Study Areas.

Officers understand the methods VicGrid has outlined to determine the most suitable locations for renewable energy investment and development; however,

are concerned with the strategic land use planning process not considering the established rural dwelling and highly productive agricultural land use prior to tiered levels being drafted.

There are areas within the study area that should be protected, or omitted for consideration, as they are not suitable for renewable energy projects due to rural dwelling proximity, high performing agricultural production and tourism values. This should influence the placement of potential projects.

Council's recent focus on renewable energy has been primarily towards preparing for the Offshore Wind industry being established in Gippsland. As stated earlier, this has included advocating on several matters that can also be considered relevant to onshore wind farm development. For example, land use planning, supportive infrastructure and avoiding conflicts or impacts to farming and tourism.

The rural dwelling data doesn't provide many areas for wind farms to be established in South Gippsland without landholder agreements or the purchase of prime agricultural land to facilitate renewable energy.

South Gippsland has the greatest number of agricultural businesses out of any Victorian municipality. The high density of rural dwellings reflects the high prevalence of agricultural economic activity and value placed on agricultural land uses.

Officers acknowledge that the initial reaction from the community may be one of concern and can raise opposition to renewable energy development, especially new wind farms in South Gippsland, when there is a lack of detail on locations and impacts, and lack of cohesion from the release of information by VicGrid.

Social license and community goodwill can be eroded through poor coordination across government and industry, and ineffective community engagement.

Proposed Council Position for inclusion in the VicGrid Submission:

South Gippsland Shire Council supports renewable energy development in-principle, recognising that the energy landscape is changing and that there is a sense of urgency to prepare and react to developments proposed in or around South Gippsland.

South Gippsland has natural advantages with regards to wind and wind energy facilities that exist in our region. Council recognises that our support is measured in consideration of limiting negative impacts to our nationally significant agricultural and tourism land uses, especially if it has adverse impacts to our economy, local character, culture and environment.

As the Victorian Transmission Plan development evolves, there needs to be a greater understanding of direct community benefits and potential offsets for our community and locally impacted land holders.

We ask the State Government to recognise the national significance of South Gippsland's agricultural production and related high density of rural dwellings that exists outside of townships in our Shire, and their importance to supporting land use and addressing current and future housing needs.

The South Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone Study Area that is under investigation has raised community concerns. We seek that any proposed 'on land' transmission utilise existing infrastructure and transmission routes to minimise the impacts to existing land use and highly valued amenity.

Council supports genuine and collaborative engagement from all levels of government and industry to build social license and address a lack of information on the direct and indirect impacts that proposed projects located in or near South Gippsland may have on the community.

The community need to be informed and brought on the journey in a coherent way to reduce the risk that rural and regional communities will be 'taken by surprise' when development is proposed and declared.

Council is committed to working collaboratively with government, through genuine timely engagement and partnership, allowing the community to be accurately represented and part of the development process of matters that may impact where they live and work.

Council Submission to include references to the following:

- Feedback to VicGrid to ensure that there is an easy to follow and coherent narrative to bring community and industry along on this journey
- Council's commitment to working collaboratively with government and genuine engagement and partnership with the community
- Objectives identified from the Council Plan/Community Vision and Council's Economic Development Strategy
- Council's position and response to the Oct 2022 Commonwealth declaration of offshore wind investigation area in Bass Strait
- The objectives identified from Council's recently adopted Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study
- South Gippsland Planning Scheme - recognition on significance of agricultural land in the Scheme and reference issues with housing and turbine proximity to dwellings in farming zone (1km buffer)
- Economic Data related to the value of agriculture
- Council's advocacy priority related to local ports and application to the Commonwealth Government's Regional Precincts and Partnership Program
- Acknowledge and reflect points made from recent submissions

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

VicGrid's Planned Community Engagement Activities

Feedback on the Draft Guidelines is open until 25 August 2024 and on the REZ Study Area Map until 30 September 2024.

Feedback can be provided by visiting www.engage.vic.gov.au/vicgrid

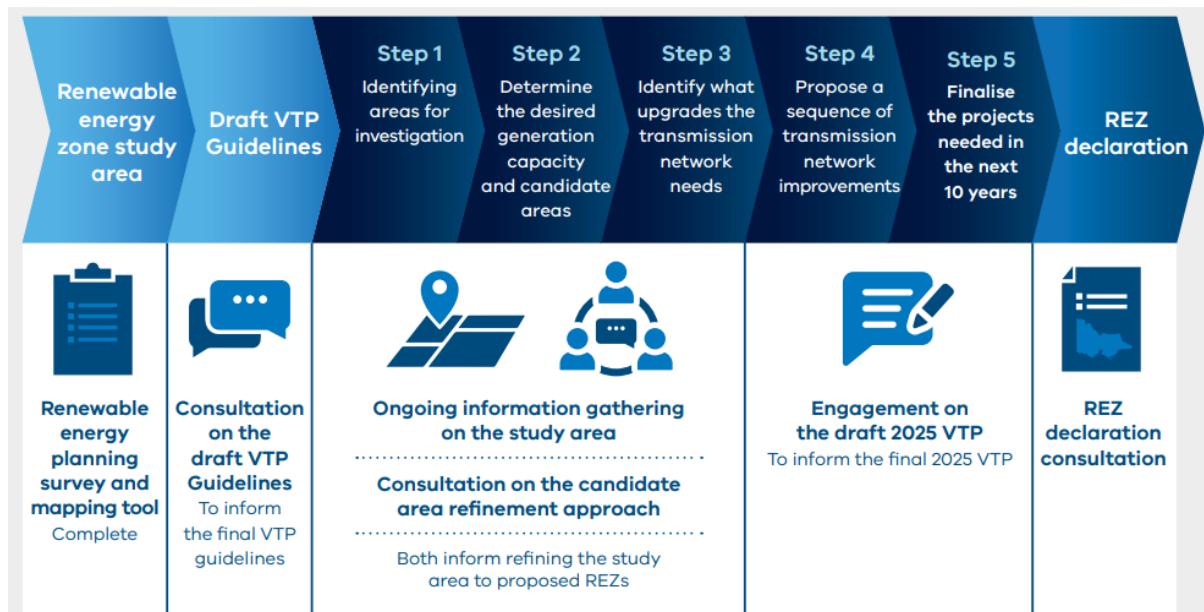
At time of drafting this report, online community information webinars were promoted to be held from 6.00pm to 7.30pm on Monday 29 July and from 1.00pm to 2.30pm on Thursday 1 August. This is a webinar format with selected questions answered via the online chat.

VicGrid have also promoted drop-in sessions at the Korumburra Community Hub from 4.00pm to 7.00pm on 14 August and from 10.30am to 12.30pm on 15 August 2024.

Following community and Council feedback, an additional drop-in session has been scheduled for Thursday 22 August, from 4.00pm to 7.00pm in Foster at the Foster War Memorial Arts Centre.

Along with a submission, VicGrid are also seeking responses through online surveys which individuals and organisations can choose to complete.

The community and industry engagement process is outlined below.



RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

There are no material implications for Council to consider at present other than the allocation of internal resources to monitor and manage Council's position. This is consistent with actions identified in the Economic Development Strategy. Further actions related to renewable energy planning and development will be considered as part of Council's annual budget process.

RISKS

The risk of not making a submission may hamper future positioning with regards to attracting the best economic and social outcomes for our community. Making a submission will demonstrate to the community and State Government, Council's interest and identified concerns with the proposed Plan and process to develop it.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Vic Grid Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines SGSC Submission - Draft [3.4.1 - 11 pages]
2. Renewable Energy Zone Study Area detailed map A 3 [3.4.2 - 1 page]
3. South Gippsland Shire Rural Dwelling 1 km Buffer and Turbines Aug 2024 [3.4.3 - 1 page]

CONFIDENTIAL ATTACHMENTS

NIL

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Economic Development Strategy

Legislative Provisions

Charter of Human Rights and Responsibility Act 2006

Local Government Act 2020

Planning and Environment Act 1987

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Gippsland Regional Plan 2020-2025

12 August 2024



VicGrid

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action**VicGrid Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines –
South Gippsland Shire Council Submission**

Thank you for the opportunity to participate and provide a submission in response to VicGrid's Draft Victorian Transmission Plan (VTP) Guidelines. South Gippsland Shire Council is pleased to provide a submission towards the development of the guidelines that will shape the way forward for renewable energy infrastructure within the State.

South Gippsland Shire Council Position

South Gippsland Shire Council supports renewable energy development in principle, recognising the changing energy landscape. The region has natural advantages for wind energy facilities. However, the Council's support is measured, considering the need to limit negative impacts on nationally significant agricultural and tourism land uses, especially if these impacts affect the economy, local character, natural landscape, culture and environment.

As the Victorian Transmission Plan evolves, there needs to be a greater understanding of the direct community benefits and potential offsets for the community and impacted landholders. The Council urges the State Government to recognise the national significance of South Gippsland's agricultural production and the high density of rural dwellings outside townships, which are crucial for supporting land use and addressing current and future housing needs.

The South Gippsland Renewable Energy Zone Study Area under investigation is likely to raise significant community concerns. Council seeks to ensure that any proposed 'on land' transmission uses existing infrastructure and transmission routes to minimise impacts on existing land use and on amenity.

Council supports genuine and collaborative engagement from all levels of government and industry to build social license and address the lack of information on the direct and indirect impacts of proposed projects in or near South Gippsland. Our strong view

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is that our community needs to be informed and involved in a coherent way to reduce the risk of rural and regional communities being 'taken by surprise' when development is proposed and declared. Having said that, Council is committed to working collaboratively with the government through genuine, timely engagement and partnership.

South Gippsland Context

South Gippsland is part of Victoria's Gippsland Region. The Shire has a population of approximately 31,000 people which is projected to rise to 36,000 by 2036. Its major towns are Leongatha, Korumburra, Mirboo North and Foster.

While hosting a relatively small population, South Gippsland has an economy of national significance regarding food production and has the most agricultural businesses of any Local Government Area in Victoria.

To describe South Gippsland's visual appeal, is to describe the rolling green hills and spectacular coastline. South Gippsland is well known for Wilsons Promontory National Park, which along with other key attractions like the Great Southern Rail Trail, brings 1.2 million visitors to the area each year.

Renewable Energy

As Gippsland enjoys natural advantages such as wind and solar, there are a diverse range of project types proposed and operating in Gippsland, including:

- Offshore wind farms (up to 12)
- Onshore wind farms (3)
- Solar farms (10)
- Battery storage (5)
- Hydrogen (3)

South Gippsland has two operational wind farms located at Bald Hills and Toora, an approved wind farm at Delburn and proposed future development near our municipal boundary at Gelliondale.

The State Government acknowledges the need for Offshore Wind projects to generate the majority of Victoria's future energy needs and has energy targets of at least 2 Gigawatts (GW) by 2032, 4GW by 2035 and 9GW by 2040. Council is proactively working with government and industry to be workforce, land and infrastructure ready to meet the new industry investment forecast in the region.



Council Direction

Government policy supports continued investment in the renewables sector to support the transition from old to new energy. Numerous Council objectives aim to also achieve this. The Council Plan 2022–26 has a strategic objective to ‘plan for and support our community to maximise the benefits of the emerging renewable energy industry’.

Renewable energy is recognised as a strategic objective within Council’s Economic Development Strategy: *1.2 – Understand the opportunities and implications from development of the new energy sector.*

In September 2022, Council endorsed a submission to the Federal Government’s Offshore Renewable Energy Infrastructure Area Proposal. This submission provided in-principle support for offshore renewable energy, while outlining Council’s concerns. These concerns primarily stemmed from our community’s feedback and a lack of information on the first and indirect impacts, including the proposed zone’s visual impacts of areas adjacent to our southwestern coastline and bays.

Council acknowledges the Victorian Planning Provision – Wind project exclusion area along the southern coast of the Shire.

Council’s Coastal Strategy identifies there are significant pressures on our coastline already, with Port Welshpool identified as a site that would benefit from a detailed coastal hazard risk assessment. The Strategy states the need to ‘proactively work with, and advocate to, the State and Federal Government for the preparation and implementation of nature-based solutions to manage the impacts of environmental coastal hazard risks’. Appropriate development needs to be carefully considered along the remainder of the Shire’s coastline.

Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines Collaboration and Community Engagement

Council believes that both state and local levels of government will need to work together on the planning, design and delivery of the Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines. We strongly advocate for VicGrid to bring community, First Nations and industry along the journey.

There has been constructive feedback on the level of engagement and the approach taken by VicGrid thus far. Unfortunately, the release of the draft



Guidelines and associated Study Area Map has created unnecessary angst and concern among the community, which is being reflected back to Council.

While the draft Guidelines state the importance of community contribution, the current breadth of engagement does not reflect this. Council supports the opportunities for engagement at each stage of the draft Guidelines development process but believes the timeframes that are set are too restrictive to achieve this in a genuine and meaningful way.

The community need to be informed and brought on the journey to reduce the risk that rural and regional communities will be 'taken by surprise' when REZs are proposed and declared.

Following Council's initial feedback on the location and number of drop-in sessions, we are pleased that VicGrid has responded with an additional session in Foster.

There is an urgent need to invest in locally driven, targeted approaches to foster widespread community awareness, and lay the groundwork for continued participation in the transition. The Victorian Government can work closer with councils and community groups in the priority study areas to achieve this.

Local councils possess a thorough understanding of community interests, concerns, and priorities regarding local development. They are well-positioned to address cumulative impact risks and contribute to long-term outcomes. All Victorian councils will be collaborating with their communities to develop new Council Plans in 2025, presenting an opportunity to engage communities on their vision for their future as part of a REZ.

Resourcing and support for councils to undertake early engagement to feed into the final VTP and draft Council Plans would be timely and strategic.

A perceived lack of leadership on regional and rural power issues by governments and energy agencies at all levels has contributed to community opposition to large-scale transmission and generation projects in some areas.

A more holistic focus on distribution grid reliability and access to affordable renewable energy for households and businesses in proposed REZ regions is needed alongside the VTP.

Communities hosting large-scale transmission and generation projects are more likely to support this development when they themselves have access to



affordable and reliable renewable energy and can see how projects are contributing to broader community benefits and regional renewal.

If a community feels excluded from the benefits of more affordable and reliable renewable energy, social license issues are likely to endure despite being asked to host major energy infrastructure projects.

A lack of coordination and collaboration can eradicate social license and goodwill with the community extremely quickly and must be avoided to ensure the transition to renewable energy is smooth and welcomed.

Council would like to see VicGrid's current engagement to be better supported and more inclusive with affected communities and landowners, ensuring successful developments in our municipality.

Council is committed to working collaboratively with government, through genuine timely engagement and partnership, allowing the community to be accurately represented and part of the development process of matters that may impact where they live and work.

First Nations Engagement

Council notes VicGrid's commitment *"To enable First Peoples to be resourced with the capacity and capability to participate in REZ discussions and make decisions."*

We support establishing relationships with Registered Aboriginal Parties and the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council. South Gippsland has two recognised parties with Bunurong Land Council and Gunaikurnai Land and Waters Council. There is also a large area of unallocated land in South Gippsland that will require further engagement.

Strategic Land Use Planning and Study Area

Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness

South Gippsland and Latrobe City Council, in conjunction with Regional Development Australia, commissioned a Renewable Energy Impact and Readiness Study (the Study) of which was adopted by Council in July 2024. The Study provides Council with the economic, social and land use evidence to ensure that key opportunities and impacts of renewable energy development are understood and prepared for.



The Study examines issues and opportunities, from the readiness of key towns to service and support renewable energy projects, to skills development and supply chain requirements.

The Study identified that there is an undersupply of industrial land in Leongatha and Korumburra, with existing industry specialisations needing to productively operate concurrent to the renewable energy sector, such as agriculture and tourism. The Study also states that 'it will be critical that specialised sectors such as agriculture can continue to operate productively and effectively alongside the emerging renewable energy sector.'

While Council does not deliver renewable energy projects, we do need to be prepared for their development.

Agriculture, Food Production and Tourism

Agricultural production is the largest industry and employer in South Gippsland. Data from the REMPLAN economic modelling system shows that Agriculture and Forestry has a total annual output in South Gippsland of just over \$1 billion or nearly 22 per cent of the Shire's economic output.

South Gippsland has over 1,500 businesses in this sector, more than any other Local Government Area in Victoria. The sector employs over 2,000 people directly in the Shire, about 18 per cent of employment. This primary production also has substantial value adding and flow-on impacts through food processing and other sectors like Transport and Wholesale trade.

A feature of much of South Gippsland is high quality soils and high average rainfall. This has meant that agricultural production is conducted more intensively than many other parts of the State.

Work undertaken by the Centre for Regional and Rural Futures at Deakin University on Agriculture Industry Transformation has highlighted the relative resilience of South Gippsland to climate change and increasing temperatures across the State. This may also mean that types of agricultural production, such as fruit and vegetables, may become more viable in South Gippsland as it becomes more challenging in northern parts of Victoria.

South Gippsland is one of Australia's key centres for dairy production with 10 per cent of Victoria's dairy farms and three significant dairy production facilities. It is an area for premium beef production, which also includes the regional cattle saleyards and a major export abattoir.



Horticulture, including snow peas, celery and potatoes has become an important sector and boutique food and beverage production, across a wide range of products, is an expanding area which is also attracting new people to the area. This boutique food and beverage production is often strongly linked to tourism development and the attractive rural landscape.

South Gippsland is well known for Wilsons Promontory National Park, which along with other key attractions like the Great Southern Rail Trail, brings 1.2 million visitors to the area each year. Vessels operating from the ports at Barry Beach service the offshore oil and gas rigs and fishing fleets operate from Port Welshpool and Port Franklin.

Council acknowledges the importance of the Gippsland region to the national economy. From our productive agriculture and energy resources to our tourism and natural environment, we have many great opportunities and challenges that are reflected in our current and future infrastructure needs.

Council acknowledges and supports many of the key themes emerging from the Strategic Land Use Assessments. This involves prioritising the protection of our natural environment and minimising land use conflicts as fundamental principles in planning for energy transmission and generation in Victoria. Specifically, we support the protection of our highly productive food production land that is the backbone of South Gippsland's economy and community.

These are critical factors to consider when choosing areas for renewable energy development.

Rural Dwelling Proximity and Impacts

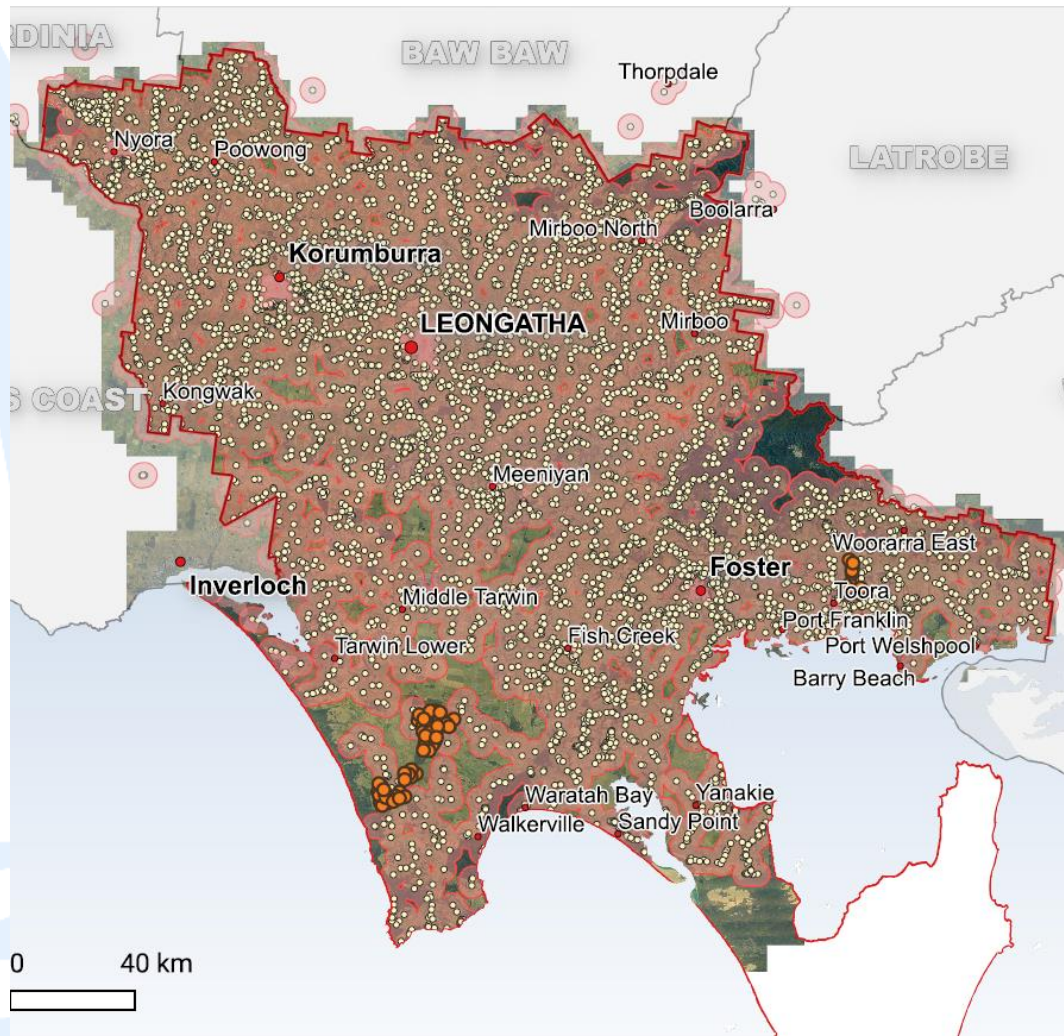
The South Gippsland Planning Scheme requires new wind turbines to be located one kilometre or more from an existing dwelling. If an application for a new planning permit (or an amendment to an existing permit) proposes a turbine closer than one-kilometre, written consent to the turbine's location is required from the dwelling landowner.

If written consent is not provided, the planning permit application is prohibited. The dwelling setback and landowner consent requirements cannot be varied by the Minister for Planning.

To illustrate this rule, a map of South Gippsland with the one-kilometre proximity buffer to rural dwellings is provided below. This shows the high density of rural dwellings in South Gippsland outside of townships and would indicate the limited



locations for new wind farm developments to be considered without obtaining landowner consent.



The yellow dots represent existing dwellings. The orange dots on the map indicate the location of existing wind turbines in the Shire.

Council is supportive of some of the methods VicGrid has outlined to determine the most suitable locations for renewable energy investment and development; however, we are concerned with the strategic land use planning process not considering the established rural dwelling and highly productive agricultural land use prior to tiered levels being drafted.

There are areas within the study area that should be protected, or omitted for consideration, as they are not suitable for renewable energy projects due to rural



dwelling proximity, high performing agricultural production and tourism values. This may also include other commercial uses, that require proximity consideration, for example Leongatha Airport and flight paths.

South Gippsland, along with the rest of Victoria is facing significant challenges in meeting current and future accommodation and housing supply and needs for our community and workforce.

By reducing access to, or permitting new rural dwellings, due to proximity of wind turbines, will intensify the pressure on housing supply across the Shire.

This should influence the placement of potential projects.

Council's recent focus on renewable energy has been primarily towards preparing for the Offshore Wind industry being established in Gippsland. As stated earlier, this has included advocating on several matters that can also be considered relevant to onshore wind farm development. For example, land use planning, supportive infrastructure and avoiding conflicts or impacts to farming and tourism.

The rural dwelling data doesn't provide many areas for wind farms to be established in South Gippsland without landholder agreements or the purchase of prime agricultural land to facilitate renewable energy.

South Gippsland has the greatest number of agricultural businesses of any Victorian municipality. The high density of rural dwellings reflects the high prevalence of agricultural economic activity and value placed on agricultural land uses. This also means that a nearly half of South Gippsland residents live in rural areas outside the urban centres of the Shire.

Given the importance of agricultural production in South Gippsland, concerns have been raised regarding the risks associated with productive and valuable agricultural land co-existing with wind farms during and after operation. It would be detrimental to the local economy if land is acquired to construct a wind farm, yet the land maintenance and productivity is reduced post-construction of the energy production infrastructure.

Beyond the agricultural significance of land in our region, other noteworthy factors must also be considered during the planning process such as the Giant Gippsland Earthworm Habitat Overlay in the South Gippsland Planning Scheme. This is a unique consideration for this region.

Advocacy



One of Council's key Advocacy Priorities is supporting Renewable Energy Investment at Barry Beach Marine Terminal and Port Anthony. Specifically, Council is seeking Australian and Victorian Government policy support, and investment, to realise this once in a generation opportunity for South Gippsland.

This requires support to plan and prepare for the activation of industrial and residential land to ensure commercial investment attraction, industry development and workforce accommodation in South Gippsland.

Council has also partnered with Wellington Shire Council with a funding application to the Federal Government's Regional Precincts and Partnerships Program, seeking State Government support and collaboration with regards to land and infrastructure planning to facilitate State and Nationally significant new energy transition.

Community benefits have been a point of focus. Ensuring the community receives benefits, with the inclusion of significantly impacted neighbours in conjunction with directly affected landholders is a priority. It's important to ensure communities have clarification on what determines community impact and how funding will be distributed to these 'impacted areas' of which host Victorian Renewable Energy Zones.

Council has also advocated for a Payment in Lieu of Rates (PiLoR) framework for offshore wind generation, alongside Wellington Shire Council. This ensures fair distribution of economic benefits and the sustainable development of Gippsland's coastal regions while hitting Victoria's renewable energy goals.

With renewable energy projects already underway, Council has repeatedly stated the necessity to ensure a measured outcome that balances the need to transition electricity generation to a renewable future, while minimising the impacts on those communities where new energy generation facilities and infrastructure are located.

There are many aspects to be considered when contemplating such large-scale projects. As a Council that is already struggling to maintain our extensive local road network, heavy vehicles and increased mass limits that may be associated with renewable energy project construction and maintenance, may have the potential to adversely impact the condition of our roads and further strain our limited resources.

Additional funding will need to be provided to local governments to help manage this impact, and more work will need to be done by the Victorian government to

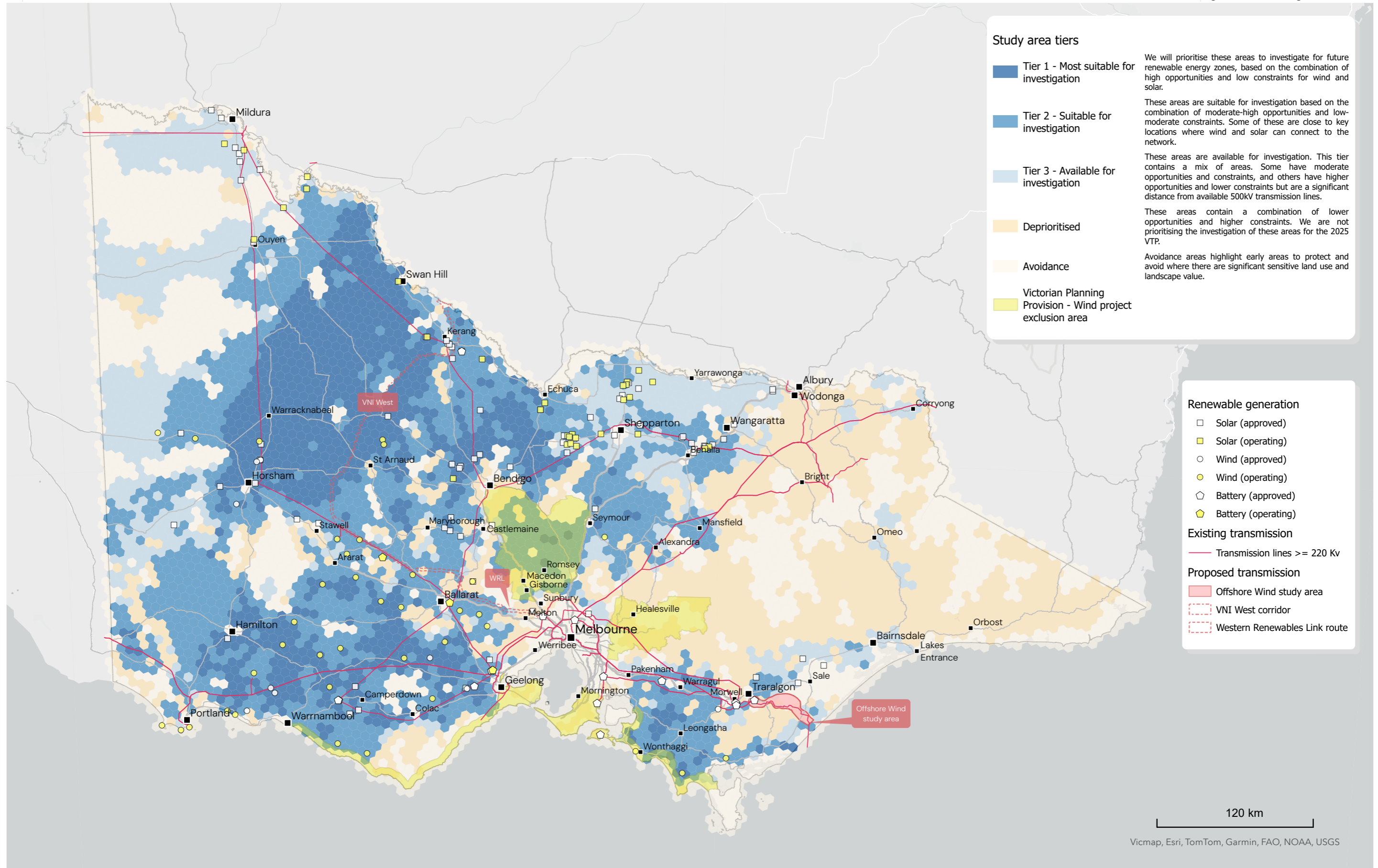


maintain arterial roads, which are the main corridors used by these larger vehicles.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment. If you would like further information, please contact Christian Stefani, Council's Manager Regional Partnerships on (03) 5662 9200 or email christian.stefani@southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Yours sincerely

Cr Clare Williams
Mayor

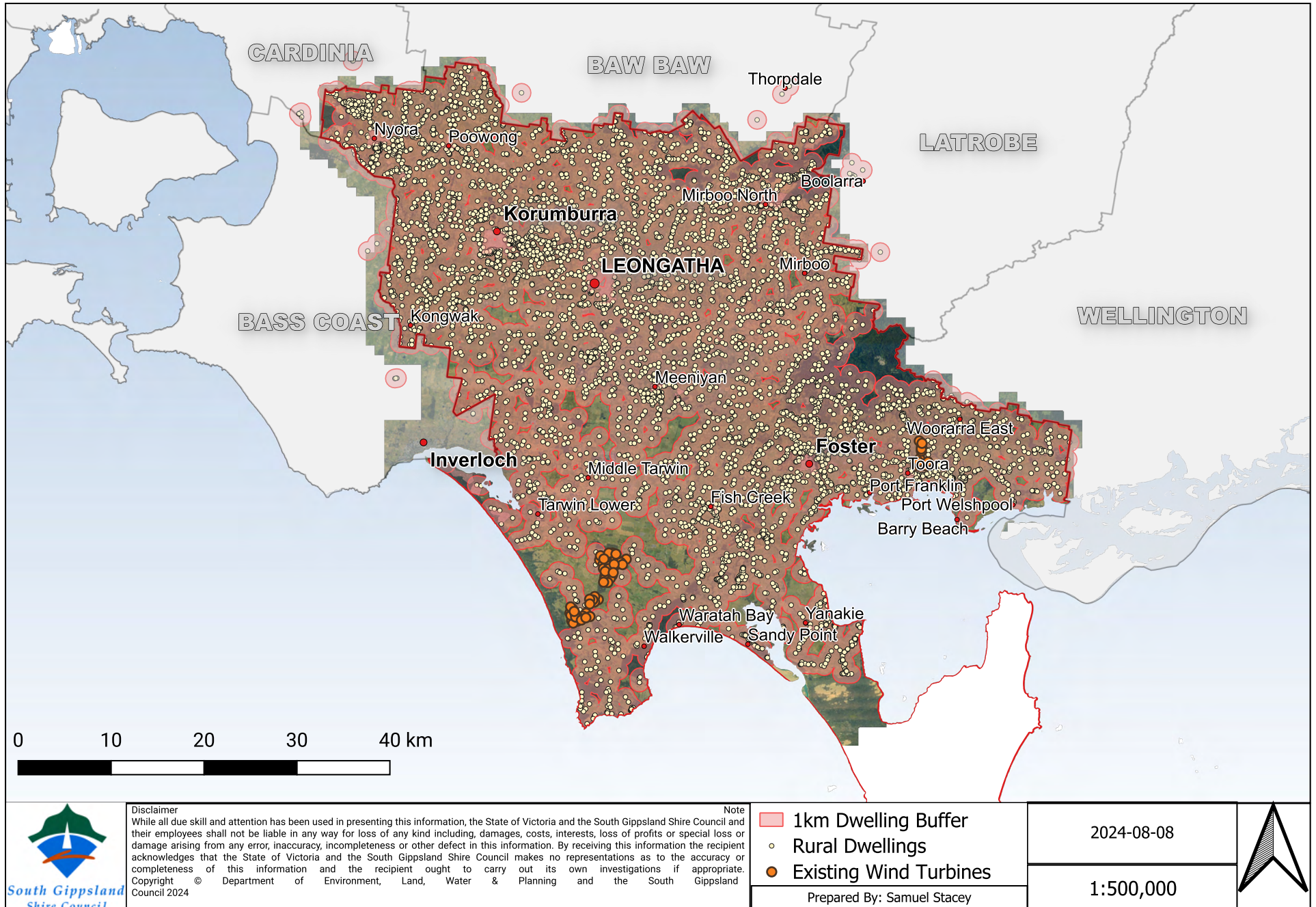


Draft Victorian Transmission Plan Guidelines Geographical areas for further investigation

This study area is the first step in a process to identify Victoria's renewable energy zones, which will occupy a much smaller area. Datasets including renewables/agriculture compatibility, and detailed local and regional information and feedback, will inform final decisions.

Map Disclaimer: This information is generated from VicGrid and Victorian Government data and may be of assistance to you. However, VicGrid does not guarantee that the publication is without flaw of any kind and therefore disclaims all liability for error, loss or damage which may arise from reliance upon it. This map shows a proposed publicly announced alignment for Western Renewables Link, VNI West and offshore wind transmission as of the date of publication. These alignments have not completed necessary planning and environmental approvals and therefore should be considered indicative only at this time.

Date published: 17th July 2024 Map projection: VicGrid GDA 2020 Scale @ A3



4. OBJECTIVE - HEALTHY AND ENGAGED COMMUNITIES

4.1. EARLY YEARS POSITION PAPER - ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community Health and Safety

Council Plan

Objective - Healthy and Engaged Communities

The Early Years Position Paper supports Council's priority to advocate for increased access to early years services including kindergarten, playgroups, childcare and for equitable access to health and social services for our community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide an update to Council on the seven initial priorities of the Early Years Position Paper (Position Paper) and the key priorities for 2024/2025. The Position Paper outlines Council's role and commitment for the provision of early years infrastructure and service levels.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Receives and notes the Early Years Position Paper and the Annual Implementation Report (Table 1 below)**
- 2. Approves the key priorities for 2024/2025, including:**
 - a. Developing pipeline projects;**
 - i. Revisit and update priority list for early years infrastructure; and**
 - b. Investigating a consistent and sustainable approach to managing early years infrastructure.**

REPORT

The Early Years Position Paper (the Position Paper) **Attachment [4.1.1]** confirms Council's footprint in Early Years services focussing on four key areas:

- direct service delivery for Maternal and Child Health, immunisation and supported playgroups;
- the provision of infrastructure to support early years' service provision;
- sector coordination and capacity building; and

- capacity planning for the service system.

The key principles underpinning Council’s role in guiding future directions and commitment for the provision of early years infrastructure and service levels include:

- evidence-based decisions;
- partnering, quality;
- strengthening the service system; and
- advocacy, and sustainable future.

These principles serve as a foundation for decision making and actions to ensure effective planning, delivery, and support of early years services in the community.

To guide the implementation of the Position Paper, seven initial priorities were identified. Of the seven priorities within the Position Paper:

- 58% (4 priorities) are 100% complete;
- 28% (2 priorities) are in progress; and
- 14% (1 priority) is ongoing and a medium to long-term focus.

Attachment [4.1.1] details the Position Paper, with **Table 1** below highlighting the key achievements and progress of priorities.

For 2024/2025, there will be a focus on two priorities, which are currently in progress, particularly the development of infrastructure priorities and pipeline projects from the Early Years’ Service Needs Assessment (**Attachment [4.1.2]**) and exploring in collaboration a consistent and sustainable approach to managing early years infrastructure.

Additionally, we recognise the importance of facilitating localised early years management as a longer-term goal, ensuring that we are prepared to support future opportunities in early years services.

Excellent progress was made on most priorities with key achievements and progress shown in the table below:

Table 1 – Annual Implementation Report

Priority	Actions	Status
1. Share the Position Paper with early years’ service providers operating from Council-owned buildings.	The Position Paper was provided to service providers and also published on Council’s website.	Complete

<p>2. Share the proposed infrastructure development projects from the Early Years' Service Needs Assessment with the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) and develop an agreed pipeline of projects for capital investment</p>	<p>This is a Priority for 2024/2025.</p> <p>The roll-out of 30 hours of Pre-prep, the State Government announcement of an early learning facility in Meeniyah and the condition of infrastructure requires the Early Years' Service Needs Assessment priority list to be revisited and updated.</p> <p>Initial discussions with Government have commenced on the Kindergarten Infrastructure Service Plan.</p> <p>A Government planning grant was received to investigate early years options in Mirboo North.</p>	<p>In Progress</p>
<p>3. Advocate to the State Government for the provision of 66 licenced places at the Korumburra Primary School to support the future need for three and four-year-old kindergarten</p>	<p>A 66 place two-room modular kindergarten has been installed and has been operational since February 2024.</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>4. Enter an interim/short-term lease arrangement with the State Government for the kindergarten facilities proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. The purpose of the short-term agreement is to provide time for Council to facilitate the establishment of an early year's management arrangement as outlined in priority 5</p>	<p>Council has signed an eight-year lease with the Department of Education and sublet to Karmai Community Children's Centre.</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>5. Facilitate the establishment of localised early years managers with the</p>	<p>Council will provide guidance when opportunities present whether it be a new facility or a current service provider</p>	<p>Ongoing Priority – medium to</p>

<p>suggested catchments including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Central – Leongatha, Mirboo North and Meeniyan b. West – Korumburra, Loch and Poowong c. East – Foster, Toora, Welshpool and Fish Creek (noting this is already in place) 	<p>expressing an interest to move towards early years management.</p>	<p>long-term focus</p>
<p>6. Continue to implement the service agreements with early years providers located in Council buildings.</p>	<p>All lease agreements have a service agreement included.</p> <p>An Early Years Facility Guide has been developed and distributed to assist committees of management and early years managers to understand their obligations with delivering a service out of Council owned buildings, and how they can partner with Council in planning for the current and future demands of early years services in South Gippsland.</p>	<p>Complete</p>
<p>7. Explore options for having a collaborative approach to managing the cost of maintaining Council-owned building supporting early years services.</p>	<p>This is a priority for 2024/2025, to develop a consistent approach to maintaining and sustaining early years infrastructure including Council’s position on early years infrastructure on school sites.</p>	<p>In Progress</p>

In summary, **Table 1** outlines the significant progress made in implementing the Early Years Position Paper's initial priorities, with the overall commitment demonstrating that through prioritising early years we will continue to have a positive impact on the community, laying the foundation for a brighter future for children and families in South Gippsland. Council will be updated on further advancements in the coming year.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Nil.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Council continues to balance the rising cost of maintaining ageing infrastructure with need to support early years' service provision.

The State Government's policy to introduce 30 hours of pre-prep will further impact Council's ability to provide and maintain adequate infrastructure for kindergarten services across South Gippsland.

RISKS

Ageing infrastructure and deterioration of facilities requiring significant works to be fit for purpose.

Access and equity for service provision in smaller and outlying communities.

Increased pressure on volunteer committees of management to implement government policy directions with limited resources whilst maintaining financial viability.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Position Paper - Councils role in the Early Years 2022 [4.1.1 - 13 pages]
2. Early Years Services Needs Assessment - Executive Summary 2022 [4.1.2 - 17 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Asset Management Policy (C04)

Leasing Policy (C62)

Children and Families - A Plan for the Future in South Gippsland

Asset Management Plan - Buildings (internal)

Children and Families Plan

Council Plan 2022-2026

Municipal Early Year's Plan

Priority Projects

Legislative Provisions

Child Safe Standards 2016

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Children, Youth and Families Act 2009

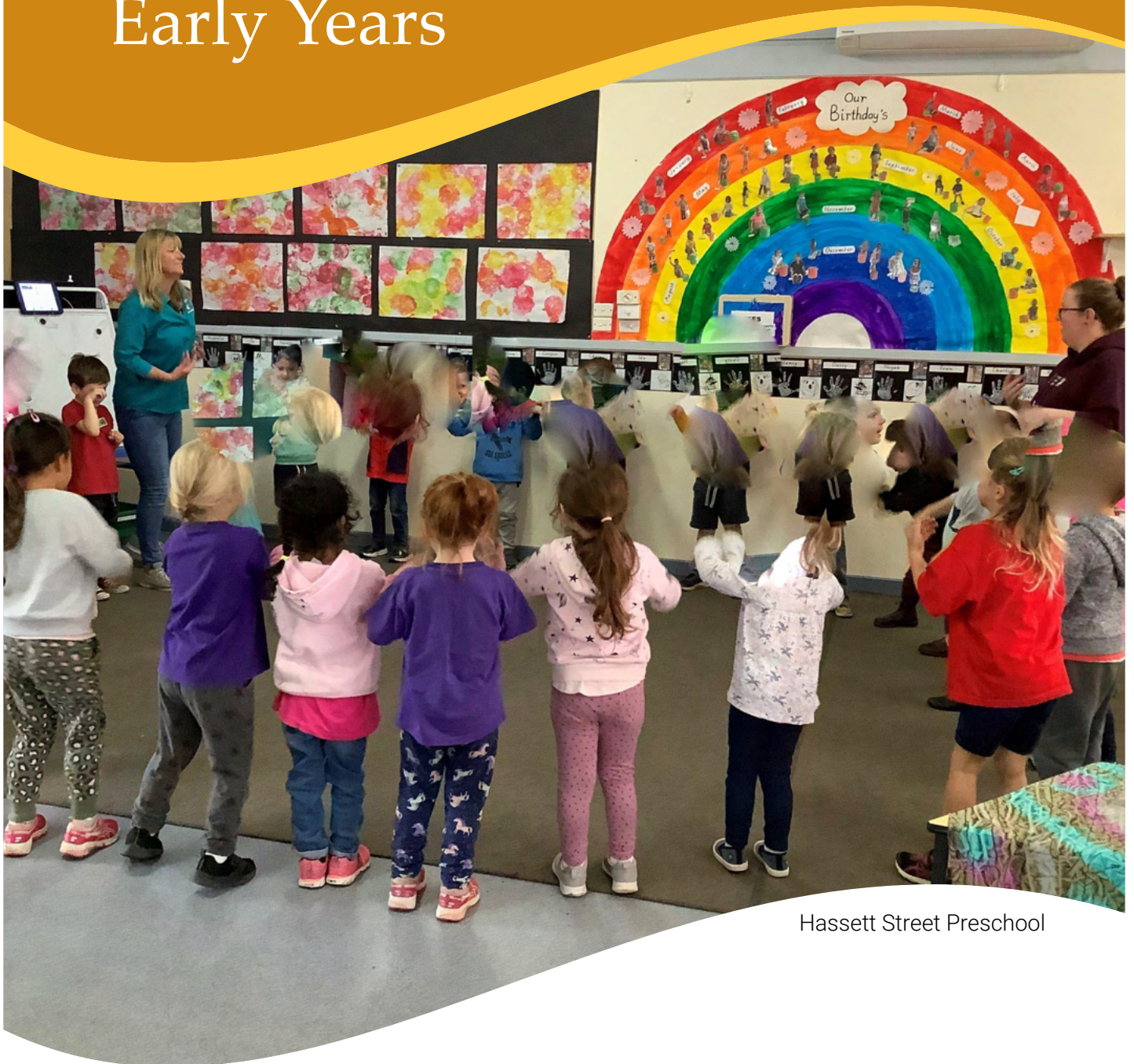
Children's Services Act 1996

Children, Youth and Families Regulations 2017
Children's Services Regulations 2020

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies
Nil

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Position Paper: Council's Role in the Early Years



Hassett Street Preschool

Prepared 25 October 2022



Purpose of the Position Paper

The purpose of this Position Paper is to define the role and level of service Council will provide in supporting early years services and infrastructure in South Gippsland Shire. The Position Paper will guide Council's decision about:

- The early years services where Council has a direct service delivery role.
- Investing in early years infrastructure.
- Seeking funding from the Victorian State Government.
- Advocating for improved early years services, infrastructure and funding in South Gippsland.



Mossvale Park

Proposed Future Direction

Council's future role in the early years will focus upon four key areas:

- **Direct service delivery** for Maternal and Child Health (MCH) (including enhanced MCH), immunisation and supported playgroup services.
- **Provision of infrastructure** to support kindergarten, childcare (Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster), Maternal and Child Health and playgroups.
- **Sector coordination and capacity building** including coordinating Kindergarten Central Registration, facilitating networking and training opportunities for services and the preschool field officer.
- **Capacity planning for the service system** to ensure the community has access to early years services in the right locations and in facilities which support the delivery of high-quality early years services.

But in recognition of the changing community, policy and financial context within which Council operates, this role will be influenced and guided by a series of principles.

Key Principles

Evidence based decisions	Support the provision of kindergarten and childcare infrastructure where there is clear evidence of community need including population size and change, the availability of other like services, changes in government policy, infrastructure age and condition, and the link between these services and the economic prosperity and liveability of communities.
Partnering	Actively pursue constructive and strong partnerships with State and Local Governments, community, and private providers to facilitate access to the right early years' services in the right location.
Quality	Facilitate and deliver quality early years infrastructure and service models. This means smaller rather than larger spaces and group sizes, providing infrastructure to complement core activities and support children and families with additional needs, and high-quality outdoor environments.
Strengthening the service system	Strengthen the capability of individual service providers, supporting them to maximise licensed capacity in response to community needs and facilitating a more collective approach between service providers.
Advocacy	Advocate to the State Government and State agencies about the needs of the South Gippsland Shire community for access to early years services, supports and infrastructure, and the community and economic impact of continued changes in policy about early years services.
Sustainable future	Take a proactive approach to attracting funding and partnering with others to support capital developments, and implement a sustainable approach to funding the ongoing maintenance of infrastructure.

Proposed Initial Priorities

1. Share the Position Paper with early years' service providers operating from Council-owned buildings.
2. Share the proposed infrastructure development projects from the Early Years Service Needs Assessment with the Victorian School Building Authority and develop an agreed pipeline of projects for capital investment.
3. Advocate to the State Government for the provision of 66 licensed places at the Korumburra Primary School to support the future need for three- and four-year-old kindergarten.
4. Enter an interim / short-term lease arrangement with the State Government for the kindergarten facilities proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. The purpose of the short-term agreement is to provide time for Council to facilitate the establishment of an early year's management arrangement as outlined in priority five below.
5. Facilitate the establishment of localised Early Years Managers with the suggested catchments including:
 - Central – Leongatha, Mirboo North and Meeniyan.
 - West – Korumburra, Loch and Poowong.
 - East – Foster, Toora and Welshpool (noting this is already in place).
6. Continue to implement the service agreements with early years providers located in Council buildings.
7. Explore options for having a collaborative approach to managing the cost of maintaining Council-owned building supporting early years services.

Community Context

Council’s Existing Role in the Early Years

Council’s existing role in the early years is focused upon four core areas:

- **Direct service delivery** for Maternal and Child Health (including enhanced MCH), immunisation and supported playgroup services.
- **Provision of infrastructure** to support kindergarten, childcare (Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster), Maternal and Child Health and playgroups.
- **Sector coordination and capacity building** including coordinating Kindergarten Central Registration, facilitating networking and training opportunities for services and the preschool field officer.
- **Capacity planning for the service system** to ensure the community has access to early years services in the right locations and in facilities which support the delivery of high-quality early years services.

Table 1 below provides a summary of where early years services and infrastructure is delivered or provided by South Gippsland Shire Council.

	Toora	Welshpool	Foster	Meeniyan	Tarwin Lower	Mirboo North	Leongatha	Korumburra	Poowong	Nyora	Loch
MCH			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Immunisation			✓			✓	✓	✓			
Supported Playgroup			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Kindergarten Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Childcare Infrastructure			✓				✓	✓			

Table 1. Summary of early years services and infrastructure delivered or provided by South Gippsland Shire Council

The Early Years Population We Support

In 2021, there were 1,437 children aged between zero and four years and a further 331 aged five years. Families with children in this age cohort are actively accessing kindergarten, childcare, maternal and child health, immunisation and playgroup services.

While there was a small decline in the number of children aged zero to four years between 2016 and 2021, forecast data suggests the population will increase between 2021 and 2031, particularly in Leongatha, Korumburra, Nyora – Poowong and the South East Central Coastal District which includes Foster, Fish Creek, Toora and Welshpool.

	Actual 0 - 4 population		Difference		Projected 0 - 4 population	Difference	
	2016	2021	Number	%	2031	Number	%
South Gippsland	1,589	1,437	-152	-9.6	1,844	407	28.3
Leongatha	391	301	-90	-23.0	473	172	57.1
Korumburra	232	270	38	16.4	336	66	24.4
Mirboo North	110	98	-12	-10.9	117	19	19.4
Nyora – Poowong	172	177	5	2.9	269	92	52.0
South East Coastal District	204	153	-51	-25.0	220	67	43.8
South West Coastal District	167	150	-17	-10.2	165	15	10.0
Rural West	108	100	-29	-26.9	127	27	27.0
Rural North East	103	102	-1	-1.0	134	32	31.4

Table 2. Actual and projected 0 - 4 population in South Gippsland by locality, 2016 - 2031

In 2022 there are 506 children accessing three- and four-year-old kindergarten in buildings owned by Council and a further 80 in non-Council owned buildings. Using the 2021 Census data as a guide, this means that 82.5 per cent of three- and four-year-old children in South Gippsland are accessing kindergarten in a Council owned building. While it is acknowledged some four-year-old children accessing kindergarten in South Gippsland live outside South Gippsland, this is a small number and is counteracted by children from South Gippsland accessing kindergarten outside the Shire.

2021 Pop.	Kindergarten Participation 2022 in Council owned buildings												Non-Council buildings
	Toora	Welshpool	Foster	Meeniyah	Mirboo North	Leongatha CC	Allora	Hassett	Karmai	Poowong	Loch	Total	
613	18	21	33	45	50	84	68	26	66	31	36	506	80

Table 3. Kindergarten participation in South Gippsland by locality in 2022



Sand Pit at Hassett Street

Key Factors Influencing this Position Paper

The Position Paper has been influenced and prompted by several factors including:

- **The significant State Government led change and reform** occurring in three- and four-year-old kindergarten including the roll out of 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten and the recently announced proposal to increase four-year-old kindergarten to 30 hours per week through a staged roll out between 2025 and 2032.

The ongoing changes to State Government policy about kindergarten are increasing expectations of local government and means it is critical Council has a clear position about its role in relation to kindergarten, has a documented priority list of projects (pipeline of projects) it will seek to partner with the State Government in delivering, and understands when advocacy for improved services, infrastructure and funding is required.

- **The urgent need to respond to a request from the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA)** for Council to be the lessee for a 44 licensed place modular kindergarten facility proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. And in addition, for Council to confirm this provision is adequate or that additional capacity is required.
- **The recently completed Early Years Services Needs Assessment** which has confirmed:
 - » With population growth and increased demand from the changes to three- and four-year-old kindergarten:
 - Additional service capacity (licensed places) is needed in the short to medium term in Korumburra, Nyora and Mirboo North to meet the demand for 15 hours of three- and four-year-old kindergarten.
 - Further capacity will be needed in multiple locations in the medium to long term to meet the demand generated by 30 hours of four-year-old kindergarten including in Leongatha, Mirboo North, Meeniyar, Korumburra, Nyora and Poowong.
 - » The age and poor condition of kindergarten infrastructure in multiple locations means infrastructure will need to be replaced in the medium to long term in Toora, Welshpool, Hassett Street (Leongatha), Fish Creek, Poowong and Loch.
 - » There are issues related to equitable access to kindergarten, in particular whether services should be retained or be provided in some communities in the medium to long term. Key locations for consideration are Tarwin Lower / Venus Bay, Loch, Toora and Welshpool.
 - » The critical role of childcare and kindergarten in supporting the liveability and economic prosperity of communities. Without reasonable access to childcare and kindergarten, communities become less attractive for families to remain or to relocate to.

- **The views and perspectives of Councillors** about the current and future role of Council in supporting families and children in the early years.

The Position Paper is also informed by *Council's Blueprint for Community and Economic Infrastructure* which has identified the most pressing need is for renewal of existing facilities, the importance of planning for multipurpose / community hub facilities as opposed to single-use facilities, and the demand for services is expected to be strongest in the growth areas such as Korumburra, Nyora, and Leongatha, AND the *2021 Early Years Infrastructure Review* which proposes a range of infrastructure changes and improvements in response to service demand, the condition of infrastructure, and the aspirations of early years' service providers.



Mossvale Park excursion

Options Available to Council

In simple terms the options available to Council for its future role in the early years are:

Option One	Maintain the same role / a similar role and service level.
Option Two	Take on a larger role e.g. directly deliver kindergarten and childcare services from Council owned buildings or sites.
Option Three	Have a smaller role e.g. maintain what is currently in place but not replace ageing infrastructure or building any new facilities OR ceasing to have any involvement providing infrastructure to support kindergarten or childcare services.

Assessing the Options

A number of impacts and factors have been considered by Council when assessing each of these options and determining Council's preferred role for the future. These factors include:

- **Access to services:** How community access early years services will be impacted. Will it be easier, will it be harder, will it be consistent? What is the likelihood other providers (private or not for profit) will step into the market to deliver early years services.
- **Financial impact:** How significant will the financial impacts and risks be for Council and service providers?
- **Strong service system:** Will the service system be strengthened? Will it support strong service providers capable of delivering quality early years services for the community?
- **Economic and liveability impacts:** Will the option support local economic prosperity and liveability?
- **Operational impacts for Council:** How will the option impact upon Council's workforce requirements? Is the option consistent with Council's skills and expertise?
- **Existing obligations:** How will Council's existing obligations in relation to leases, service agreements, funding, and sector-wide agreements be impacted?
- **Reputational impacts:** What will be the reputational impacts for Council?

Table Four below provides a summary of the assessment of the key impacts and factors for each option with a brief written description and a colour-coding system to indicate as follows:

Green = There is likely to be positive impacts and/or no negative impacts.

Yellow = There is likely to be some negative impact.

Orange = There is likely to be significant negative impacts.

It shows that **Option One: Maintaining the same role / similar role and service level** the early years space will deliver the most positive impacts and minimal to no negative impacts.

Factors	Option One: Maintain the same / similar role	Option Two: Take on a larger role	Option Three: Have a smaller role
Access to services	Access to services will be maintained and likely increased as additional infrastructure is developed in response to community need.	Access to services will be maintained and likely increased as additional infrastructure is developed in response to community need.	Access to services is likely to be reduced with no investment in additional infrastructure, and/or existing service providers unable to purchase Council property to continue operating services. The private sector is unlikely to step into the market in any great way because it is a regional location.
Financial impact	Capital costs will increase, but they will be consistent with the findings from the Early Years Needs Assessment and the funding currently nominally allocated in Council's 10-year financial plan.	The operational cost to Council will increase as a workforce will need to be employed to operate the existing kindergarten and childcare services. Capital costs will increase, but they will be consistent with the findings from the Early Years Needs Assessment and the funding currently nominally allocated in Council's 10-year financial plan.	The capital cost to Council would be reduced with no investment required in capacity building infrastructure, and if infrastructure was sold off, this would provide Council with funding for other infrastructure projects. Operational costs may be reduced if Council steps away from its role in capacity building and planning, and the direct delivery of services such as MCH, immunisation and supported playgroups.
Strong service system	The capacity of the service system will be maintained with Council continuing its role in its sector coordination, capacity planning and building. It will be strengthened as Council pursuing key initiatives e.g. service agreements with all providers in Council buildings and facilitating strong local early years managers.	The capacity of the service system will be reduced, as existing capable and viable community not-for-profit providers are obliged to step away because Council chooses to become responsible for kindergarten and childcare service delivery in Council buildings.	The capacity of the service system would likely be reduced, particularly if Council sold off early years infrastructure. Council has a critical role in sector coordination, capacity planning and building which would be diminished or lost if Council reduces its role.
Economic and liveability impact	Maintaining Council's current role in capacity planning for the service system and providing infrastructure, which is responsive to community needs, the community will retain access to quality early years services that support parents to work and families and children to thrive.	Increasing Council's role in direct service delivery may increase access to quality early years services, but it may also redirect away resources from capacity planning and building. When Council has a large footprint in direct service delivery, attention can be directed away from future service and infrastructure planning and delivery, and puts at risk Council's ability to be responsive to future community needs.	This option means there is significant risk service capacity that will be reduced or at a minimum not increased to meet changing community needs. The provision of accessible quality childcare, kindergarten and maternal and child health services is recognised as critical to the economic prosperity and liveability of all communities.

Factors	Option 1: Maintain the same / similar role	Option 2: Take on a larger role	Option 3: Have a smaller role
Operational impacts for Council	There are no new operational impacts for Council by maintaining the same or a similar role in the early years space.	The workforce planning and management issues for Council as the direct provider of kindergarten and childcare services will be significant. As noted above, this is likely to take away from future service and infrastructure planning and delivery, putting at risk Council's ability to be responsive to future community needs for kindergarten and childcare.	There may be a reduction in the staff Council is required to employ to support early years services and infrastructure, but this would depend upon the extent of the reduced footprint.
Existing obligations	Existing obligations will be honoured with service providers (lease and service agreements) and the State Government (Compact Agreement).	Council has lease and service agreements in place with many of the early years' providers located in Council's buildings. These would need to be exited or broken for Council to become responsible for directly delivering childcare and kindergarten services.	Council has lease and service agreements in place with many of the early years' providers located in Council's buildings. The ability to sell any of these buildings or sites will be compromised by the existing agreements. The Compact Agreement between the MAV (on behalf of local government) and the State Government underpins funding for MCH services and supported playgroups. This may be impacted if Council chooses to reduce its footprint.
Reputational impacts	The reputational risk for Council is minimal and the community is likely to be supportive of Council maintaining its current role. The State Government will be supportive of Council taking a proactive approach in planning for early years services and infrastructure.	The reputational risk for Council with becoming responsible for directly delivering kindergarten and childcare services is high. Existing community providers and local communities are likely to have significant concerns where the service providers are delivering a quality, viable service, that is well regarded by the community.	The reputational risk for Council with any reduction in Council's role is high, whether this be over time by not investing in existing or new infrastructure in response to service demand OR by largely exiting the early years space. The community is likely to be strongly opposed to this, and Council' reputation with the State Government is likely to be negatively impacted.

Table 4. Assessment of options for Council's future role in the Early Years

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South Gippsland
Shire Council



Early Years Services Needs Assessment

Final Executive Summary

Prepared for South Gippsland Shire Council

28 October 2022

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*South Gippsland Shire Council – Early Years Services Needs Assessment – Executive Summary***DISCLAIMER**

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VERSION CONTROL

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Definitions and descriptions

<p>Kindergarten</p> <p>Also known as Preschool</p> <p>4-year-old kindergarten is now being described by the State Govt as Pre-Prep</p>	<p>All children in Victoria are eligible to access kindergarten for 2 years prior to commencing primary school. This means each 3- and 4-year-old child is eligible to access 15 hours of kindergarten each week during the 2 years before they start school.</p> <p>Kindergarten is funded by the Victorian State Government, with families also required to make a contribution to the cost of the service through a term fee. The Victorian State Government has recently announced all 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten will be free from 2023.</p>
<p>Childcare</p>	<p>Childcare is available to all children aged 0 – 12 years.</p> <p>Long daycare and occasional care is available to children before they commence primary school.</p> <p>Outside school hours care is available to primary school aged children usually before and after school and during school holidays.</p> <p>Childcare is funded by a combination of the Federal Government Child Care Subsidy and families. All families are eligible for childcare subsidy, but the extent of the subsidy is influenced by the age of their child / children, the family’s income, how much a parent / carer works or studies.</p>
<p>Licensed places</p>	<p>This is the maximum number of children a kindergarten or childcare service is allowed to have within its building at any one time.</p>
<p>Enrolment capacity</p>	<p>This is the number of children a service can support to access kindergarten or childcare across a week. This is particularly important to understand for kindergarten.</p> <p>Each 3- and 4-year-old child is required to have access to 15 hours each of kindergarten each week. This means 1 licensed place can support 2 children accessing 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten i.e. 30 hours of kindergarten time can be provided through 1 licensed place.</p>
<p>Impact of 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten</p>	<p>The proposed introduction of 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten will increase the number of licensed places required so that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 licensed place will be required for every 4-year-old child to attend kindergarten • 1 licensed place will continue to be required for every two children attending 3-year-old kindergarten.
<p>Operating capacity</p>	<p>This is the number of licensed places a service chooses to make available. For example, several services in South Gippsland Shire have a licensed capacity of around 30 children but choose to cap their numbers between 22 and 27. They do this for several reasons including</p>

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	<p>the financial viability of the service, concerns, or preferences about service quality, and in some instances the licensed spaces cannot practically be used to support early years education.</p> <p>Council has an important role in this space to encourage and support services to operate at their licensed capacity when there is clear need / demand from the community. The Kindergarten Central Registration and Enrolment Scheme, along with lease, license and service agreements with services are key tools Council can use to facilitate this.</p>
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Cost estimates

The cost estimates outlined in this report are intended to provide a high-level indication of the likely project cost. The rates listed below are based on similar projects e.g. development of Leongatha Early Learning Centre, refurbishment of Fish Creek Kindergarten \$2019, and Rawlinsons Construction Handbook, 2022. The cost range shows the estimated cost based upon a modular solution compared with an in-situ solution. More detailed cost planning is required for individual projects.

Note: escalation is not included in the estimates.

Item	Description	Rate
Design	Site investigation, land survey, concept and detailed design, and cost plans.	8 – 10% of total project cost
Building construction	Lower rate for modular. Higher for in-situ construction.	\$3,100m2 \$4,500m2
Landscaping and play space	External and internal garden areas, play equipment, sheds, and landscaping.	\$300m2
Car parking	Staff and family parking inclusive of lighting.	\$4,500m2
Furniture	Loose furniture to be provided by tenant / service provider.	\$800 per licensed place

Timelines

Item	Description
Short term	1 – 3 years
Short to medium term	2 – 5 years
Medium term	5 years
Medium to long term	5 – 10 years
Long term	10 years or longer

Executive Summary

This Needs Assessment outlines the recommended approach to planning for early years infrastructure and services by South Gippsland Shire Council. The Needs Assessment has a strong focus upon kindergarten services and infrastructure because:

- this is where Council has a large footprint in providing facilities, and supporting the community to access services,
- of the obligations Council has under the Compact between Department of Education and Training (DET), Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH) and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) on behalf of local government about kindergarten and maternal and child health, and
- of the rapid and significant changes occurring in State Government policy about 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten.

Outlined below are the key findings from the Early Years Services Needs Assessment with tables on subsequent pages providing a summary by location and service:

- Table 1 provides a high-level summary of timelines and estimated costs by location to implement 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten
- Table 2 provides a summary of the recommended infrastructure response, priority and high-level cost estimates to implement 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten
- Table 3 provides more detailed information about the recommended approach to implement 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten
- Table 4 outlines the additional infrastructure required to respond to the proposed introduction of 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.

It is important to understand the recommended infrastructure response is based upon identified need rather than Council's capacity to deliver the infrastructure works. It is acknowledged Council's financial capacity is constrained, and this highlights the critical importance of advocacy to the State Government about appropriate funding, both for more infrastructure where there is unmet demand and to address the age and poor condition of older infrastructure.

Responding to service capacity issues

Additional service capacity (licensed places) is required in the short to medium term to address unmet demand for 15 hours of 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten in:

- Korumburra where the lease of existing facilities at Korumburra Primary School to support 4-year-old kindergarten will expire at the end of 2023. New and expanded facilities MUST be provided by the start of 2024 to ensure children are able to access 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten in Korumburra and surrounds. A total of 66 additional licensed places are recommended to address short to medium term demand.
- Nyora, where rapid population growth means families are travelling to Poowong, Loch, Korumburra and Lang Lang (Cardinia Shire) to access kindergarten services.

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- Mirboo North where there is a small amount of unmet demand.

Additional service capacity (licensed places) will be needed in multiple locations in the medium to long term to respond to demand generated by the introduction of 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten. These locations include:

- Leongatha
- Mirboo North
- Meeniyah
- Korumburra, depending on whether the private childcare service is developed. Note there is an approved planning permit for a 120-place childcare service in Korumburra. If this is not developed, additional licensed places will be needed to support 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.
- Nyora
- Poowong.

Responding to the age and condition of infrastructure

The age and poor condition of infrastructure means kindergarten facilities will need to be replaced in multiple locations in the medium or long-term including:

- Toora Kindergarten
- Welshpool Kindergarten
- Hassett Street Kindergarten, Leongatha
- Fish Creek Kindergarten
- Poowong Kindergarten
- Loch Kindergarten.

Equitable access to kindergarten

The issue of equitable access to kindergarten services means Council will need to consider:

- Whether to provide a kindergarten service in Tarwin Lower to support the communities of Venus Bay and Tarwin Lower in the long term. Currently families travel up to 30 minutes to access a kindergarten service.
- Whether a kindergarten service will be needed in Loch in the long term, due to low demand (within the catchment) and good access to kindergarten services in Poowong, Nyora, and Korumburra in the future.
- Whether kindergarten services should be retained in both Welshpool and Toora. The evidence indicates only one service is needed rather than the two currently operating.

Council's role in childcare

Childcare is a space Council can choose to be involved or can choose not to be involved. To date Council has chosen to be involved through the development of Prom Coast Centre for Children in Foster, Karmai Children's Centre in Korumburra, Leongatha Children's Centre, and Leongatha ELC, which is currently being developed. While these facilities all provide kindergarten services, they also provide childcare services which the community would not otherwise have access to because there are no private providers (Foster and Korumburra), or limited private providers (Leongatha).

In making future decisions about Council's involvement in childcare it is important to understand that access to childcare is a key liveability and economic attractor for communities. Where there is no childcare available within a reasonable catchment, families are less likely to relocate to or remain in those communities. The availability of childcare supports families where both parents are working, and is particularly important for families with children below kindergarten age (0 – 2-year-olds) and / or children attending kindergarten and require care in addition to kindergarten hours of operation.

Future decisions about retaining or expanding Council's involvement in childcare should be centred around whether the community has reasonable access to childcare (including private providers), the size of the catchment the service is likely to support, and the number of licensed places. The last 2 factors are key to the viability of childcare services.

Access to external funding

Funding from the Victorian State Government for early years services is concentrated upon communities where increased service capacity is needed because of current or future unmet service demand.

- If it is assumed 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten remains as a 15-hour program, this means it is likely Council will be able to secure funding for Korumburra and Nyora, and possibly Mirboo North.
- If 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten is implemented, it is likely funding could be secured to address unmet demand in Leongatha, Mirboo North, Meeniyan, Nyora, Poowong, and Korumburra.
- It is unlikely Council will be able to secure funding for the replacement of ageing facilities including the existing Hassett Street Kindergarten (single room), Toora, Welshpool, Fish Creek, and Loch, although it is noted, the MAV is currently implementing an advocacy campaign seeking support from the State Government to address ageing kindergarten infrastructure.

Cost implications excluding 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten

- The estimated investment required to address unmet demand (for 15 hours 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten) and the age, condition, and functionality of early years infrastructure:
 - In the short term is \$4.534m - \$6.273m, with estimated investment required by Council of \$579k - \$788k
 - In the medium term is \$3.962m - \$5.671m with estimated investment required by Council of \$2.523m - \$3.604m

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- In the medium to long term is \$3.162m - \$4.276m with estimated investment required by Council of \$1.788m - \$2.483m
- In the long term is \$4.833m - \$5.925m with estimated investment required by Council of \$3.183m - \$4.275m.
- In total the estimated investment required is **\$16.491 million** **\$22.145 million**. Based upon the current range of grant programs available to support the development of new infrastructure or refurbish existing infrastructure, the State Government contribution estimated to be **\$8.415 million** - **\$10.991 million**. The estimated cost to Council over the next 10 – 15 years is **\$8.073 million** – **\$11.150 million**.

Table 1 below provides a summary of priorities and estimated cost by location.

Timeframe	Where	Estimated cost	State Govt. Contribution	Council contribution
Short term 1 - 3 years	Korumburra Nyora Poowong	\$4.534m - \$6.273m	\$3.954 - \$5.484	\$579k - \$788k
Medium term 2 – 5 years	Toora Welshpool Mirboo North	\$3.962m - \$5.671m	\$1.438 - \$2.066m	\$2.523m - \$3.604m
Medium – long term 5 – 10 years	Leongatha – Hassett St Foster Tarwin Lower / Venus Bay	\$3.162m - \$4.276m	\$1.373m - \$1.791m	\$1.788m - \$2.483m
Long term 10 years or longer	Meeniyan Fish Creek Leongatha CC Karmai CC Poowong Loch Leongatha - Allora	\$4.833m - \$5.925m	\$1.650	\$3.183m - \$4.275m
TOTAL		\$16.491m - \$22.145m	\$8.415m - \$10.991m	\$8.087m - \$11.150

Table 1: High level summary of timelines and estimated costs by location for implementing 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten

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Service / Location	Recommended infrastructure response	Timeline	Cost estimate	State Govt Contribution	Council contribution
Korumburra	New building with 2 kinder rooms and a total of 66 licensed places to be located at Korumburra P. School	By start of 2024	\$2.216m - \$3.118m	\$2.216m - \$3.118m	Minimal / no capital contribution required. State Govt. want Council to be responsible the lease.
Nyora	New early years hub – 1 kinder room with 33 licensed places, MCH and space for playgroup.	1 – 3 years	\$1,918m - \$2.755m	\$1.438m – \$2.066m	Co-contribution required, estimated to be 25% - \$479,00 - \$688,000
Poowong Kinder	Refurbishment of existing facilities	1 – 3 years	\$400,000	\$300,000	Co-contribution required, estimated to be 25% - \$100,000
Toora Kinder	Replacement of the existing building with like for like facilities (1 kinder program room)	2 – 5 years	\$1.022m - \$1.458m	\$0	Whole amount \$1.022m - \$1.458m
Welshpool Kindergarten	Replacement of the existing building with like for like facilities (1 kinder program room)	2 – 5 years	\$1.022m - \$1.458m	\$0	Whole amount \$1.022m - \$1.458m
Mirboo North	New early years hub: 1 kinder room with 33 licensed places, MCH and space for playgroup and toy library.	3 – 5 years	\$1.918m - \$2.755m	\$1.438m – \$2.066m	Co-contribution required by Council, estimated to be 25% - \$479,00 - \$688,00
Leongatha Hassett Street	Replacement of the existing building with like for like facilities (1 kinder program room) Note: Assumes Hassett St is retained for kinder. Alternatives east of the Hwy could be considered.	5 years	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	\$0	Whole amount \$1.331m - \$1.888m
Foster PCCC	Reconfigure infrastructure to address functionality and accessibility constraints.	5 – 10 years	\$500,000	\$375,000	Co-contribution required by Council, estimated to be 25% - \$125,000
Tarwin Lower / Venus Bay	New building with 1 kinder room and a total of 22 licensed places	5 – 10 years	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	\$998,000 - \$1.416m	Co-contribution required, estimated to be 25% - \$332,000 - \$470,000
Meeniyan Kinder	Refurbishment of existing facilities	10 years	\$500,000	\$375,000	Co-contribution required, estimated to be 25% - \$125,000
Fish Creek Kinder	Feasibility Study	10 years	\$40,000 - \$50,000	\$0	Whole amount \$40,000 - \$50,000
Leongatha Children's Centre	Refurbishment of existing facilities	10 years plus	\$600,000	\$450,000	Co-contribution required, estimated to be 25% - \$150,000
Karmai	Refurbishment of existing infrastructure in the long term	10 years plus	\$600,000	\$450,000	Co-contribution required by Council, estimated to be 25% - \$150,000
Poowong	Replacement of the existing building with like for like facilities (1 kinder program room)	10 years plus	\$1.571m - \$2.217m		Whole amount, \$1.571m - \$2.217m. May be capacity to secure some funding if can demonstrate unmet demand
Loch Kinder	Replacement of the existing building with like for like facilities (1 kinder program room)	10 plus years	\$1.022m - \$1.458m	\$0	Whole amount \$1.022m - \$1.458m
Allora Kinder	Refurbishment of existing facilities Note: Assumes Allora is retained for kinder. Could bring Hassett St and Allora together east of the Hwy.	1 – 3 years	\$400,000	\$300,000	Co-contribution required, estimated to be 25% - \$100,000
Total estimated cost			\$16.491m - \$22.145m	\$8.415m - \$10.991m	\$8.073m – \$11.150m

Table 2: Summary of the recommended infrastructure response, priority, and high-level cost estimates, 15 hours of 3-year-old kindergarten

Priority Order - Recommended approach assuming 15 hours of 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten

Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Korumburra	N/A	N/A	N/A	Develop a 2-program room kindergarten with 66 licensed places. NOTE: VSBA proposing 44 places. Most feasible site is the Pony Paddock at Korumburra Primary School Build will need to be modular because of short timelines.	Short term (by 2024)	Temporary lease of existing facilities at Korumburra Primary School (44 licensed places) will cease at the end of 2023. Service demand for 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten is high and growing. Pony Paddock has space and it can be accessed quickly. VSBA is supportive of the site.	\$2.216m - \$3.118m	The VSBA has indicated they will pay the full cost of the infrastructure, provided Council becomes responsible for leasing the building from DET.
Nyora	N/A	N/A	N/A	Develop an early year's hub with 1 program room (33 licensed places) for kindergarten, space for MCH and playgroup. Possible locations are the Nyora Primary School site and a greenfield site. Primary School site preferred.	Short term (1 – 3 years)	People in Nyora are travelling to Poowong, Loch, Korumburra, or Lang Lang (Cardinia Shire) to access early years services. Service demand for 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten is growing quickly as the population grows. Primary school site identified in Nyora Development Strategy (2016).	\$1,918m - \$2.755m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding because of unmet service demand. Scale of the facility is outside standard programs, so discussions required with VSBA.
Poowong	Poowong Kindergarten	Main Street	Council	Interim works to address functionality and if possible, increase licensed capacity under the existing roofline.	Short term (1 – 3 years)	While old, the building is in good condition and has had some works. Addressing functionality constraints will extend the lifespan of the building and potentially increase licensed capacity by a small amount.	\$400,000	There is capacity to access State Govt. funding for interim works.

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Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Toora	Toora Kindergarten	25 Gray Street	Council	Replacement of the existing building with contemporary like for like facilities i.e. single program room. OR Consolidate the Toora and Welshpool kindergartens to this site.	Short to medium term 2 - 5 years	The building age and poor functionality means replacement needs to occur. No unmet current or future demand.	\$1.022m - \$1.458m	Council. Based upon current programs there is unlikely to be State Govt. funding available to support replacement of the kindergarten.
Welshpool	Welshpool Kindergarten	15 Main Street	Council	Replacement of the existing building with contemporary like for like facilities i.e. single program room. Relocate the service to the Welshpool and District Primary School.	Short to medium term 2 - 5 years	The building age and poor functionality means replacement needs to occur. No unmet current or future demand. School has capacity and it will support families to access kindergarten.	\$1.022m - \$1.458m	Council. Based upon current programs, there is unlikely to be State Govt. funding available to support replacement of the kindergarten.
Mirboo North	Mirboo North Kindergarten	8 Brennan Street	Council	Develop a new early year's hub to accommodate kindergarten (with a small increase in licensed capacity), MCH, playgroup and toy library. Site to be determined. Also consider Mirboo North Library.	Short to medium term 3 – 5 years	The age, accessibility, and functionality constraints of the existing buildings – kindergarten, MCH, playgroup. Small increase in capacity will address unmet demand.	\$1.918m - \$2.755m	Some opportunity to access State Govt. funding for increasing service capacity in response to unmet demand.
Leongatha	Hassett Street Kindergarten	9 Hassett Street	Crown (DELWP)	Replace existing program room with 1 program room x 33 licensed places. Note: Assumes Hassett St retained for kinder. Alternatives east of the Hwy could be considered.	Medium term 5 years	Age and poor condition of the existing building. Essential to retain a service east of the Highway. No unmet current or future demand.	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	Council: Based upon current programs there is unlikely to be State Govt. funding available to support replacement of the kindergarten.
Foster	Prom Coast Centres for Children	30 – 32 Pioneer Street	Crown	Reconfigure the existing infrastructure to align program rooms with staff child ratios and address functionality and accessibility constraints.	Medium to long term 5 – 10 years	Functionality and accessibility constraints of the building means the service cannot operate at capacity.	\$500,000	There is capacity to access State Govt. funding for interim works.

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Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Tarwin Lower / Venus Bay	N/A	N/A	N/A	Develop a single room kindergarten facility with 22 licensed places. Possible location Tarwin Lower Primary School or Tarwin Lower Community Health Centre	Medium to long term 5 – 10 years	Communities of Venus Bay and Tarwin Lower travelling up to 30 mins to access kindergarten, when they have the same or higher demand for kindergarten as Loch, Toora and Welshpool, which all have a kindergarten service. Tarwin Lower is preferred over Venus Bay from a risk perspective.	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	Based upon current programs, there may be capacity to access State Govt. funding because this infrastructure will respond to unmet service demand.
Meeniyan	Meeniyan Preschool	95 Whitelaw Street	Council	Refurbishment of existing infrastructure.	Long term 10 years	Building is in good condition, has some functionality issues but is generally fit for purpose. No unmet current or future demand.	\$500,000	May be capacity to access State Govt funding for minor improvement works but will need to be assessed at a later time because it is a long-term priority.
Fish Creek	Fish Creek Kindergarten	2 Ryan Street	Council	Investigate the feasibility of relocating Fish Creek Kindergarten to Fish Creek Primary School.	Long term 10 years	Upgrade works extended the life of the building but access to the site is difficult. It is an old building which will need to be replaced in the future.	\$40,000 - \$50,000	Council. Unlikely to be opportunity to access State Govt. funding for planning as there is no unmet service demand.
Leongatha	Leongatha Children's Centre	7 Symons Street	Council	Refurbishment of existing infrastructure.	Long term 10 years plus	Building is in good condition, is functional and fit for purpose. No unmet current or future demand.	\$600,000	May be capacity to access State Govt. funding for minor improvement works but will need to be assessed at a later time because it is a long-term priority.

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Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Korumburra	Karmai Community Children's Centre	22 Princes Street	Council	Refurbishment of existing infrastructure in the long term.	Long term 10 years plus	New building, in good condition, functional and fit for purpose. No capacity to expand on the site.	\$600,000	May be capacity to access State Govt funding for minor improvement works but will need to be assessed at a later time because it is a long term priority.
Poowong	Poowong Kindergarten	Main Street	Council	Long term the building will need to be replaced.	Long term 10 years plus	Interim works proposed above will extend the lifespan of the building by 10 years or more, but it will eventually need to be replaced.	\$1.571m - \$2.217m	Building replacement may attract funding if aligned with unmet demand, but will need to be assessed at a later time because it is a long term priority.
Loch	Loch and District Preschool	18 Smith Street	Council	Replacement of the existing building with contemporary like for like facilities with reduced licensed capacity (22 rather than 30). OR Consider the long-term need for kindergarten services in Loch.	Long term 10 years plus	The building age and functionality means replacement will need to occur, but with low demand and recommended investment in kindergarten facilities in Nyora and Poowong first, the long term need for kindergarten in Loch should be considered by Council.	\$1.022m - \$1.458m for building replacement	Council. Based upon current programs, there is unlikely to be State Govt. funding available to support replacement of the kindergarten.
Leongatha	Allora Kindergarten	1 Symons Street	Council	Refurbishment of existing infrastructure in the long term. Note: Assumes Allora is retained for kinder. Could bring Hassett St and Allora together east of the Hwy.	Long term 10 years plus	Facility built in 2001 and in good condition. No unmet current or future demand.	\$500,000	May be capacity to access State Govt funding for minor improvement works but will need to be assessed at a later time because it is a long term priority

Table 3: Proposed approach assuming 3- and 4-year-old kindergarten remains at 15 hours, South Gippsland Early Years Infrastructure

Additional Infrastructure required for 30 hours for 4-year-old kindergarten

Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Leongatha	Hassett Street Kindergarten	9 Hassett Street	Crown (DELWP)	Additional kindergarten program 1 x 33 licensed places. Will deliver total service capacity of 66 licensed places. Note: Assumes Hassett St is retained for kinder. Alternatives east of the Hwy could be considered.	Medium to long term 5 - 10 align to 30 hrs of 4-year-old kindergarten	Additional capacity required to respond to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding because of unmet service demand.
Mirboo North	Mirboo North Kindergarten	8 Brennan Street	Council	Additional kindergarten program 1 x 22 licensed places. Will deliver total service capacity of 55 licensed places.	Medium to long term 5 – 10 years align to 30 hrs of 4-year-old kindergarten	Additional capacity required to respond to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	\$1.022m - \$1.459m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding because of unmet service demand.
Meeniyah	Meeniyah Preschool	95 Whitelaw Street	Council	Additional kindergarten program room (22 places) and possibly expand existing program room (by 6). Licensed capacity to increase from 27 to either 49 or 55. Address functional issues with existing facilities.	Medium to long term 5 – 10 years	Additional capacity required to respond to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	\$1,272m - \$1,827m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding because of unmet service demand.
Korumburra	N/A	N/A	N/A	Develop a 2-program room kindergarten with 44 licensed places. Site to be determined. Options include St Joseph's Primary School or a greenfield site.	Medium to long term 5 – 10 years align to 30 hrs of 4-year-old kindergarten	Additional capacity required to respond to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten IF the private childcare service (which has a planning permit), does not proceed.	\$1.571 - \$2,217m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding to because of unmet service demand.

South Gippsland Shire Council – Early Years Services Needs Assessment – Executive Summary

Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Nyora	N/A	N/A	N/A	Additional kindergarten program 1 x 22 OR 33 licensed places to be added to the proposed early years hub in Nyora. Will deliver total service capacity of 55 - 66 licensed places.	Medium to long term 5 - 10 align to 30 hrs of 4-year-old kindergarten	Additional capacity required to respond to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding because of unmet service demand.
Poowong	Poowong Kindergarten	Main Street	Council	Replacement of the existing building with 2 program rooms and increased licensed capacity. Will deliver total service capacity of 44 licensed places.	Long term 10 years	Additional capacity required to respond to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	\$1.571m - \$2.217m	There is likely to be capacity to access State Govt. funding because of unmet service demand.
Fish Creek	Fish Creek Kindergarten	2 Ryan Street	Council	No additional infrastructure recommended in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	No unmet demand with 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	N/A
Foster	Prom Coast Centres for Children	30 – 32 Pioneer Street	Crown	No additional infrastructure recommended in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten	N/A	No unmet demand with 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten provided functionality and accessibility constraints of the existing building have been addressed.	N/A	N/A
Toora	Toora Kindergarten	25 Gray Street	Council	If consolidation of Toora and Welshpool kindergartens to this site has occurred, the single program room will need to increase from 22 to 33 licensed places in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	No unmet demand with 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	\$1.331m - \$1.888m	Council. Based upon current programs there is unlikely to be State Govt. funding available to support expansion of Toora Kindergarten.
Welshpool	Welshpool Kindergarten	15 Main Street	Council	No additional infrastructure recommended in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	No unmet demand with 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	N/A

South Gippsland Shire Council – Early Years Services Needs Assessment – Executive Summary

Location	Existing Service	Address	Ownership	Infrastructure / Service Response	Priority	Rational	Estimated Cost	Funding Sources
Tarwin Lower	N/A	N/A	N/A	No additional infrastructure recommended in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	No unmet demand with 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten, provided single kindergarten program room with 22 licensed places has been developed as recommended.	N/A	N/A
Korumburra	Karmai Community Children's Centre	22 Princes Street	Council	No additional infrastructure recommended in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	Unmet demand will be addressed with 66 licensed places proposed at Korumburra Primary School and either private childcare service or additional 2 program room service identified above.	N/A	N/A
Loch	Loch and District Preschool	18 Smith Street	Council	No additional infrastructure recommended in response to 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	No unmet demand with 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten.	N/A	N/A

Table 4: Summary of additional infrastructure required to support 30 hours of 4-year-old kindergarten, South Gippsland Early Years Infrastructure

4.2. MIRBOO NORTH KINDERGARTEN PLANNING

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community Health and Safety

Council Plan

Objective - Healthy and Engaged Communities

Objective - Sustainable Growth

This report relates to the South Gippsland Shire Council – Council Plan 2022-2026 Strategic Objectives Healthy and Engaged Communities and Sustainable Growth, with a specific focus on priorities, ‘Advocate for increased access to early years services including kindergarten, playgroups, childcare and for equitable access to health and social services for our community’ and ‘Manage urban growth within defined town boundaries to deliver fit-for-purpose infrastructure in partnership with other agencies that share this responsibility’ respectively.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to endorse the preferred design option, Design Option One – two room kindergarten building with Maternal and Child Health (MCH) services located at the Mirboo North Primary School. This option aligns with the service guidelines from the Position Paper: Council’s Role in the Early Years (**Attachment [4.2.1]**) addressing the need to replace ageing infrastructure and meet future demand amidst State Government policy reforms.

Preliminary cost estimates indicate that the proposed two-room kindergarten building with MCH services will require a Council contribution of approximately \$200,000, whilst also being eligible for State Government funding.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Proceeds with planning for Design Option One – Two room Kindergarten building with Maternal Child Health services located at Mirboo North Primary School.**
 - a. Allow space within the design for a Stage 2 to construct a Long Day Care, dependant on external funding.**
- 2. Procure and appoint design consultant to undertake the works.**
- 3. Inform the community and relevant stakeholders of the endorsed Design Option.**

REPORT

Background

In December 2022, Council adopted The Position Paper: Council's Role in the Early Years (**Attachment [4.2.1]**). The purpose of this document is to define the role and level of service Council will provide in supporting early years services and infrastructure in South Gippsland. The Position Paper outlines Council's future provision of infrastructure to support kindergarten, LDC, MCH and playgroups, noting that, the Position Paper only nominates LDC for the townships of Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster.

As part of the Position Paper, a desktop analysis identified the current Mirboo North Kindergarten site would not accommodate any expansion to increase kindergarten capacity. After consultation with the Mirboo North Primary School, it was agreed that an unused area of the school (the Arboretum) would be further investigated as the potential location for any new facility, which is in alignment with the commitment of the Department of Education to building kindergartens on school sites.

In conjunction with this, in July 2023, Council was successful in receiving a \$150,000 State Government grant from the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA), to undertake planning and pre-construction work for a replacement kindergarten in Mirboo North. Council funded an additional \$40,000 to this project budget, allowing a total of \$190,000 to be allocated to the delivery of this project.

The aim of the planning grant was to scope:

- The type of facility required;
- The best location for the facility;
- What potential services could operate within the facility; and
- Cost.

Initial planning work scoped potential locations for the kindergarten that would be suitable to incorporate multiple service delivery options. For example, a facility that could include kindergarten, LDC, MCH, or playgroup and the toy library.

As part of the preliminary planning process, community consultation was undertaken to get feedback on the proposed location of a facility on the primary school site, and the potential services that would be included. Considering Council's Position Paper did not identify the township of Mirboo North as requiring future provision of LDC, the survey advised that LDC would not be included in the scope.

Community feedback which included a survey, submissions and a round table with key stakeholders showed overwhelming support (92%) for a new kindergarten on the primary school site.

However, many respondents expressed concern at the exclusion of LDC. Key concerns raised by the community included the omission of LDC in the planning and challenges that would arise, including:

- Access to before and after kindergarten care.
- Best practice to integrate services such as kindergarten and LDC.
- Financial viability of the LDC service if separated from kindergarten.
- Future proofing Mirboo North with adequate service provision.
- A detailed breakdown of survey responses is included in (**Attachment [4.2.2]**).

Discussion

As a result of the feedback, the following options below (**Table 1**) have been considered to identify the inclusion of services and progress the planning of the facility. **Table 1** also depicts how each option meets the key areas of the Position Paper.

Table 1 – Proposed Early Years options in Mirboo North

	Services Included	Supported in the Position Paper	Council co-contribution required	Council Assets
Option 1	2-room Kindergarten and MCH	✓	✓	No change
Option 2	2-room Kindergarten, MCH, playgroup and toy library	✓	✓	No change
Option 3	2-room Kindergarten, LDC, MCH, playgroup and toy library	X	✓	Increase
Option 4	VSBA delivered Kindergarten and MCH	X	X	Decrease
<p>Option 1 and 2 would be replacing current ageing infrastructure and could accommodate future demand.</p> <p>Option 3 increases council assets by adding LDC which is not currently a Council asset.</p> <p>Option 4 decreases Councils assets and future financial liability by handing over delivery and management to the VSBA. The delivery and management of the kindergarten would be at the discretion of the VSBA and Department of Education.</p>				

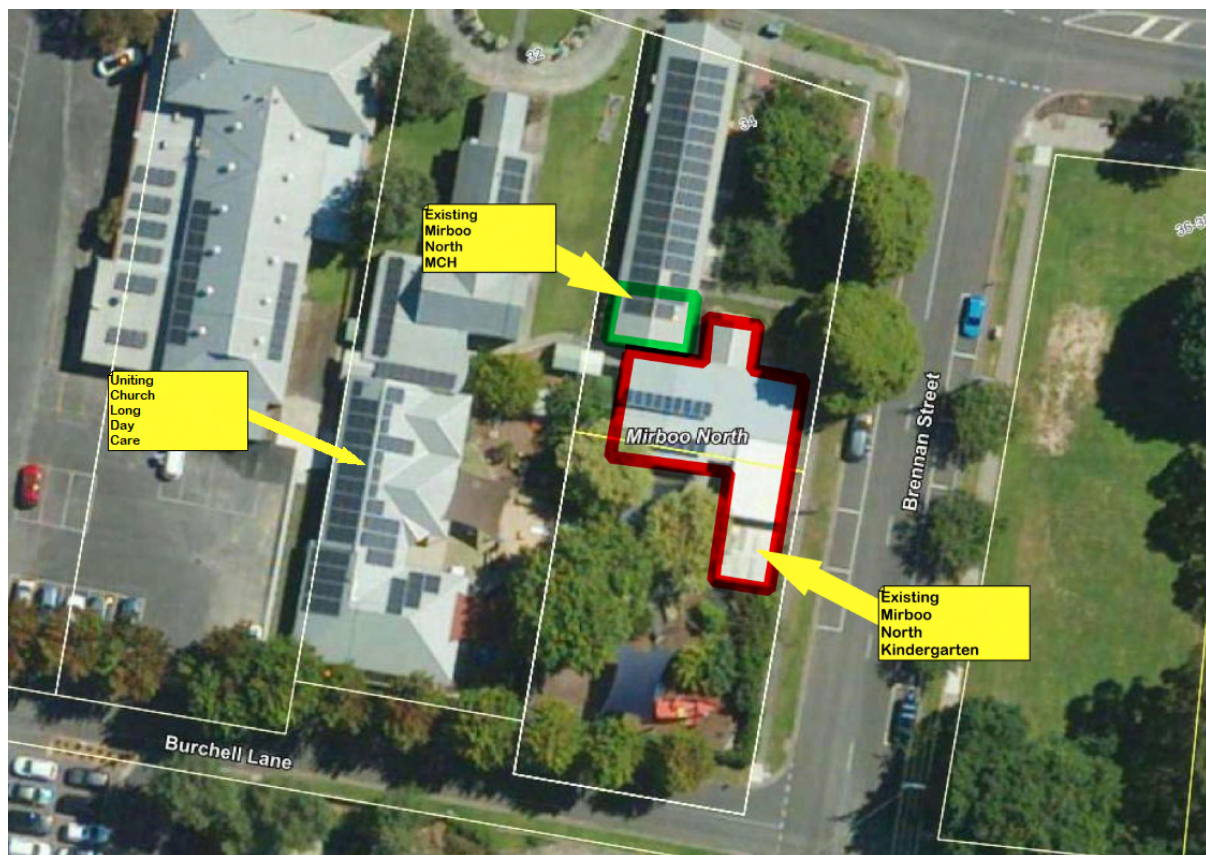
Table 2 demonstrates the desktop analysis of costings for the construction of all four options. Options 1, 2 and 3 require a contribution from Council and Option 4 is dependant of VSBA delivering and maintaining the facility.

Table 2 – High Level Cost Estimates of Options

Option	Services Included	Est. Cost	Council Contribution
1	2-room Kindergarten and MCH	\$2.2M	\$200,000
2	2-room Kindergarten, MCH, playgroup and toy library	\$3.5M	\$600,000 including car park
3	2-room Kindergarten, LDC, MCH, playgroup and toy library	\$6.8M	\$2.3M
4	VSBA delivered Kindergarten and MCH	\$0	\$0

It should be noted that early year’s services in Mirboo North are complex. The existing kindergarten is located on Council land and adjoins the long day care (see **Figure 1** below). The LDC building is owned by, and located on, Uniting Church land.

Figure 1 – Existing Early Years Services in Mirboo North



The Maternal and Child Health Centre is located adjacent to the kindergarten in the Council owned library complex. The Y Ballarat, an Early Years Manager, operates both the kindergarten and long day care centre, and has separate leases with Council and the Uniting Church for use of the buildings.

There is also a playgroup and toy library in Mirboo North. Historically, they operated out of the Council owned former Railway Station building in Baromi Park but have been temporarily relocated to the Anglican Church due to structural issues with the building.

The existing kindergarten is a single room building that is nearing the end of its life and does not have the capacity for expansion to meet the growing demand for kindergarten in Mirboo North in the future. The introduction of the State Government's Best Start Best Life reforms which includes 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten and a new initiative of 30 hours of pre-prep to be rolled-out over the next eight years means the current site will not have the capacity to meet the needs of the community.

Based on the defined levels of service identified in the Position Paper and projected cost estimates in Table 2, it is proposed to progress the planning works for **Option 1 to replace the existing kindergarten and Maternal Child Health infrastructure at the Mirboo North Primary School site.**

Taking into consideration feedback from community consultation, the design and planning will allow space to include the provision of a Stage 2, to construct LDC. Noting that any construction would be dependent on the development of community partnerships to source external funding.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The local community was surveyed over a three-week period in November and December 2023 and 109 responses were received. In addition, written submissions were received from the Mirboo North Uniting Church and Mirboo North District Foundation. Refer to (**Attachment [4.2.2]**) for a detailed summary of survey responses.

Further to the survey, the Mayor and Council officers had a round table discussion with key stakeholders from the Mirboo North community including, the Mirboo North District Foundation, Mirboo North Uniting Church, Mirboo North Primary School, playgroup, kindergarten and long day care.

Key themes from the survey and stakeholder consultation identified:

- If the kinder was to be located on the school site, children that access before and after kindergarten care will need to get from the school site to the existing LDC in Ridgway. It should be noted, there is limited availability in the before and after kindergarten care at the LDC. Option: Before and after kindergarten care could be explored in conjunction with the Primary School's existing program.
- The services will not be integrated – co-location of early years services is important to the Mirboo North community.
- There has been considerable investment in the existing LDC service by the Uniting Church, which was purpose built in 2006 to meet the needs of the community.
- Separating the kindergarten and LDC could impact the financial viability of the LDC, leaving Mirboo North without LDC and resulting in a loss of rent if the LDC was to close. It will be hard to find a tenant for the purpose-built facility. This is only likely to be a concern if different providers were operating the kindergarten and LDC.

- Future proofing Mirboo North with adequate service provision – which in turn will provide better outcomes for children.

Council officers will establish a Project Reference Group to keep the community informed of the project, including preparing communication plan to ensure the community is kept informed of the project and consulted when appropriate.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Cost estimates have been projected and are summarised in **Table 3** for each option using Council’s Early Years calculator. The Early Years calculator is based on compliant areas per child to provide a footprint for the building which then has a current construction industry \$/m² rate applied.

Table 3 – Cost Estimates

Design Option	Project Estimate	Funding available	Annual Maintenance Cost to Council	Capital Co-contribution	In 25-40 years
Option 1 2-room Kindergarten and MCH	\$2.2M	Up to \$2M	\$20,000	\$200,000	Full replacement of building
Option 2 2-room Kindergarten, MCH, playgroup and toy library	\$3.5M	Up to \$4M	\$35,000	\$600,000	Full replacement of building
Option 3 2-room Kindergarten, LDC, MCH, playgroup and toy library	\$6.8M	Up to \$4.5M	\$68,000	\$2.3M	Full replacement of building
Option 4 VSBA delivered Kindergarten and MCH	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0	No replacement

Competing Future Builds

Upon completion of the design process, it is envisaged Council will be encouraged to submit the project for construction under the same funding stream.

Council has a number of Early Years facilities that are nearing the end of their lifecycle or are requiring an increase in capacity to meet the roll-out of pre-prep. A pipeline of projects including costs and available resources will be presented

to Council in 2025 to determine priority, potential timelines and budget allocation.

RISKS

Long Day Care

Whilst including long day care comes at a significant cost, excluding it may pose a reputational risk for Council. Stage 2 will require partnering with the community to seek external funding. It is anticipated the existing LDC will continue to operate ensuring the Mirboo North Community will still have access to LDC.

Council Co-contribution cost for construction

Co-contribution costs are likely to increase due to cost escalation.

Car Parking

The proposed location of the new facility at the Mirboo North Primary School will contribute to increased parking demand, (mainly at drop off/pick up times).

Additional parking in Balook Street adjacent to the school will be considered as part of the planning works.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Position Paper: Councils Role in the Early Years 2022 [4.2.1 - 13 pages]
2. Detailed breakdown of survey responses [4.2.2 - 2 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Asset Management Policy (C04)

Leasing Policy (C62)

Children and Families - A Plan for the Future in South Gippsland

Social Community Infrastructure Blueprint

Asset Management Plan - Buildings (internal)

Children and Families Plan

Municipal Early Year's Plan

Legislative Provisions

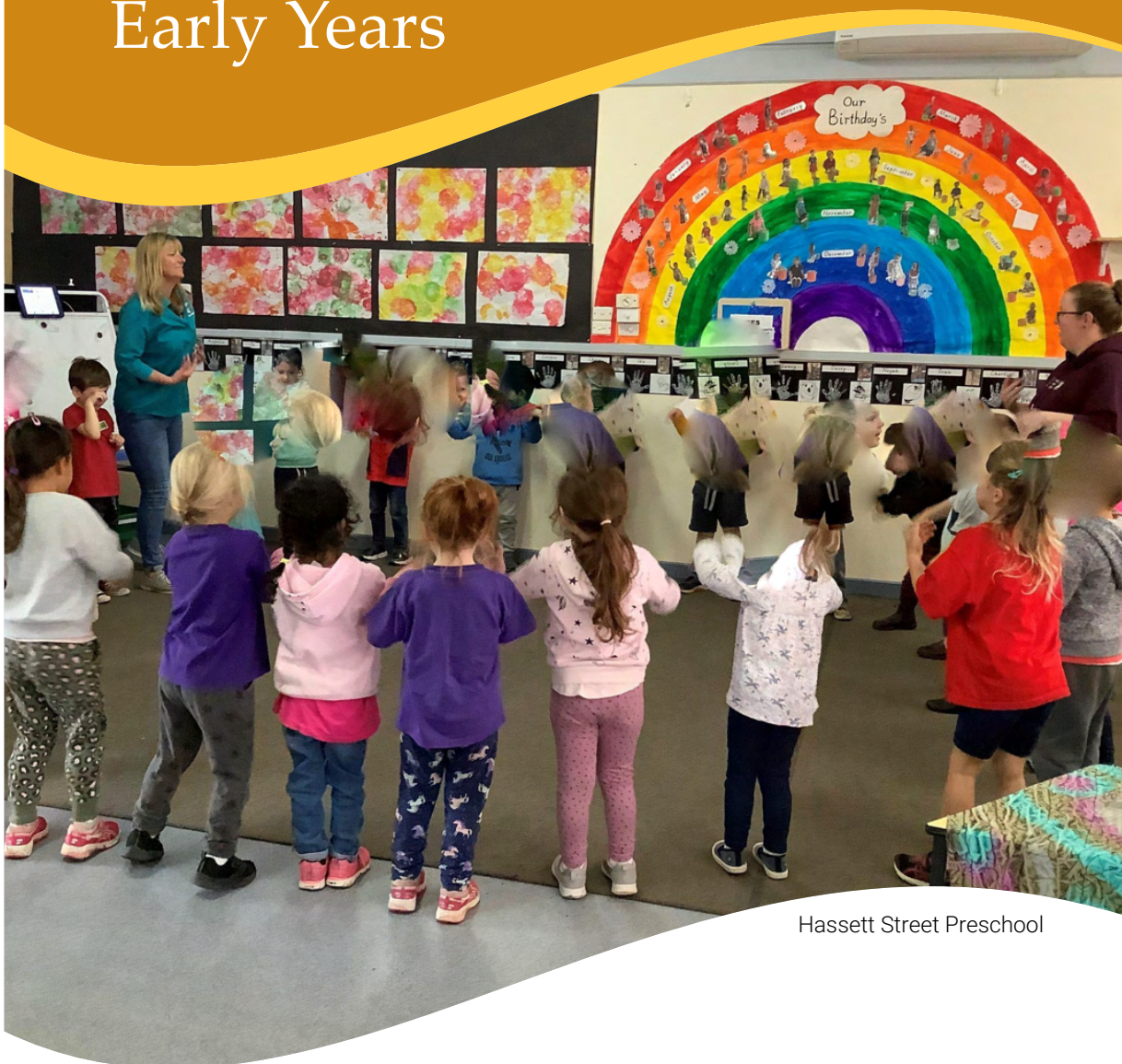
Child Safe Standards 2016

Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005

Children, Youth and Families Act 2009
Children's Services Act 1996
Children, Youth and Families Regulations 2017
Children's Services Regulations 2020
Regional, State and National Plan and Policies
Nil

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Position Paper: Council's Role in the Early Years



Hassett Street Preschool

Prepared 25 October 2022



South Gippsland Shire Council

Meeting No. 478 - 14 December 2022

Purpose of the Position Paper

The purpose of this Position Paper is to define the role and level of service Council will provide in supporting early years services and infrastructure in South Gippsland Shire. The Position Paper will guide Council's decision about:

- The early years services where Council has a direct service delivery role.
- Investing in early years infrastructure.
- Seeking funding from the Victorian State Government.
- Advocating for improved early years services, infrastructure and funding in South Gippsland.



Mossvale Park

Proposed Future Direction

Council's future role in the early years will focus upon four key areas:

- **Direct service delivery** for Maternal and Child Health (MCH) (including enhanced MCH), immunisation and supported playgroup services.
- **Provision of infrastructure** to support kindergarten, childcare (Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster), Maternal and Child Health and playgroups.
- **Sector coordination and capacity building** including coordinating Kindergarten Central Registration, facilitating networking and training opportunities for services and the preschool field officer.
- **Capacity planning for the service system** to ensure the community has access to early years services in the right locations and in facilities which support the delivery of high-quality early years services.

In recognition of the changing community, policy and financial context within which Council operates, this role will be influenced and guided by a series of principles.

Key Principles

Evidence based decisions	Support the provision of kindergarten and childcare infrastructure where there is clear evidence of community need including population size and change, the availability of other like services, changes in government policy, infrastructure age and condition, and the link between these services and the economic prosperity and liveability of communities.
Partnering	Actively pursue constructive and strong partnerships with State and Local Governments, community, and private providers to facilitate access to the right early years' services in the right location.
Quality	Facilitate and deliver quality early years infrastructure and service models. This means smaller rather than larger spaces and group sizes, providing infrastructure to complement core activities and support children and families with additional needs, and high-quality outdoor environments.
Strengthening the service system	Strengthen the capability of individual service providers, supporting them to maximise licensed capacity in response to community needs and facilitating a more collective approach between service providers.
Advocacy	Advocate to the State Government and State agencies about the needs of the South Gippsland Shire community for access to early years services, supports and infrastructure, and the community and economic impact of continued changes in policy about early years services.
Sustainable future	Take a proactive approach to attracting funding and partnering with others to support capital developments, and implement a sustainable approach to funding the ongoing maintenance of infrastructure.

Proposed Initial Priorities

1. Share the Position Paper with early years' service providers operating from Council-owned buildings.
2. Share the proposed infrastructure development projects from the Early Years Service Needs Assessment with the Victorian School Building Authority and develop an agreed pipeline of projects for capital investment.
3. Advocate to the State Government for the provision of 66 licensed places at the Korumburra Primary School to support the future need for three- and four-year-old kindergarten.
4. Enter an interim / short-term lease arrangement with the State Government for the kindergarten facilities proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. The purpose of the short-term agreement is to provide time for Council to facilitate the establishment of an early year's management arrangement as outlined in priority five below.
5. Facilitate the establishment of localised Early Years Managers with the suggested catchments including:
 - Central – Leongatha, Mirboo North and Meeniyan.
 - West – Korumburra, Loch and Poowong.
 - East – Foster, Toora and Welshpool (noting this is already in place).
6. Continue to implement the service agreements with early years providers located in Council buildings.
7. Explore options for having a collaborative approach to managing the cost of maintaining Council-owned building supporting early years services.

Community Context

Council's Existing Role in the Early Years

Council's existing role in the early years is focused upon four core areas:

- **Direct service delivery** for Maternal and Child Health (including enhanced MCH), immunisation and supported playgroup services.
- **Provision of infrastructure** to support kindergarten, childcare (Korumburra, Leongatha and Foster), Maternal and Child Health and playgroups.
- **Sector coordination and capacity building** including coordinating Kindergarten Central Registration, facilitating networking and training opportunities for services and the preschool field officer.
- **Capacity planning for the service system** to ensure the community has access to early years services in the right locations and in facilities which support the delivery of high-quality early years services.

Table 1 below provides a summary of where early years services and infrastructure is delivered or provided by South Gippsland Shire Council.

	Toora	Welshpool	Foster	Meeniyah	Tarwin Lower	Mirboo North	Leongatha	Korumburra	Poowong	Nyora	Loch
MCH			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Immunisation			✓			✓	✓	✓			
Supported Playgroup			✓		✓		✓	✓		✓	
Kindergarten Infrastructure	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Childcare Infrastructure			✓				✓	✓			

Table 1. Summary of early years services and infrastructure delivered or provided by South Gippsland Shire Council

The Early Years Population We Support

In 2021, there were 1,437 children aged between zero and four years and a further 331 aged five years. Families with children in this age cohort are actively accessing kindergarten, childcare, maternal and child health, immunisation and playgroup services.

While there was a small decline in the number of children aged zero to four years between 2016 and 2021, forecast data suggests the population will increase between 2021 and 2031, particularly in Leongatha, Korumburra, Nyora – Poowong and the South East Central Coastal District which includes Foster, Fish Creek, Toora and Welshpool.

	Actual 0 - 4 population		Difference		Projected 0 - 4 population	Difference	
	2016	2021	Number	%		2031	Number
South Gippsland	1,589	1,437	-152	-9.6	1,844	407	28.3
Leongatha	391	301	-90	-23.0	473	172	57.1
Korumburra	232	270	38	16.4	336	66	24.4
Mirboo North	110	98	-12	-10.9	117	19	19.4
Nyora – Poowong	172	177	5	2.9	269	92	52.0
South East Coastal District	204	153	-51	-25.0	220	67	43.8
South West Coastal District	167	150	-17	-10.2	165	15	10.0
Rural West	108	100	-29	-26.9	127	27	27.0
Rural North East	103	102	-1	-1.0	134	32	31.4

Table 2. Actual and projected 0 - 4 population in South Gippsland by locality, 2016 - 2031

In 2022 there are 506 children accessing three- and four-year-old kindergarten in buildings owned by Council and a further 80 in non-Council owned buildings. Using the 2021 Census data as a guide, this means that 82.5 per cent of three- and four-year-old children in South Gippsland are accessing kindergarten in a Council owned building. While it is acknowledged some four-year-old children accessing kindergarten in South Gippsland live outside South Gippsland, this is a small number and is counteracted by children from South Gippsland accessing kindergarten outside the Shire.

2021 Pop.	Kindergarten Participation 2022 in Council owned buildings												Non-Council buildings
	Toora	Welshpool	Foster	Meeniyah	Mirboo North	Leongatha CC	Allora	Hassett	Karmai	Poowong	Loch	Total	
613	18	21	33	45	50	84	68	26	66	31	36	506	80

Table 3. Kindergarten participation in South Gippsland by locality in 2022



Sand Pit at Hassett Street

Key Factors Influencing this Position Paper

The Position Paper has been influenced and prompted by several factors including:

- **The significant State Government led change and reform** occurring in three- and four-year-old kindergarten including the roll out of 15 hours of three-year-old kindergarten and the recently announced proposal to increase four-year-old kindergarten to 30 hours per week through a staged roll out between 2025 and 2032.

The ongoing changes to State Government policy about kindergarten are increasing expectations of local government. This means it is critical Council has a clear position about its role in relation to kindergarten, has a documented priority list of projects (pipeline of projects). It will seek to partner with the State Government in delivering, and understands when advocacy for improved services, infrastructure and funding is required.

- **The urgent need to respond to a request from the Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA)** for Council to be the lessee for a 44 licensed place modular kindergarten facility proposed at the Korumburra Primary School. And in addition, for Council to confirm this provision is adequate or that additional capacity is required.
- **The recently completed Early Years Services Needs Assessment** which has confirmed:
 - » With population growth and increased demand from the changes to three- and four-year-old kindergarten:
 - Additional service capacity (licensed places) is needed in the short to medium term in Korumburra, Nyora and Mirboo North to meet the demand for 15 hours of three- and four-year-old kindergarten.
 - Further capacity will be needed in multiple locations in the medium to long term to meet the demand generated by 30 hours of four-year-old kindergarten including in Leongatha, Mirboo North, Meenyan, Korumburra, Nyora and Poowong.
 - » The age and poor condition of kindergarten infrastructure in multiple locations means infrastructure will need to be replaced in the medium to long term in Toora, Welshpool, Hassett Street (Leongatha), Fish Creek, Poowong and Loch.
 - » There are issues related to equitable access to kindergarten, in particular whether services should be retained or be provided in some communities in the medium to long term. Key locations for consideration are Tarwin Lower / Venus Bay, Loch, Toora and Welshpool.
 - » The critical role of childcare and kindergarten in supporting the liveability and economic prosperity of communities. Without reasonable access to childcare and kindergarten, communities become less attractive for families to remain or to relocate to.

- **The views and perspectives of Councillors** about the current and future role of Council in supporting families and children in the early years.

The Position Paper is also informed by *Council's Blueprint for Community and Economic Infrastructure* which has identified the most pressing need is for renewal of existing facilities, the importance of planning for multipurpose / community hub facilities as opposed to single-use facilities, and the demand for services is expected to be strongest in the growth areas such as Korumburra, Nyora, and Leongatha, AND the *2021 Early Years Infrastructure Review* which proposes a range of infrastructure changes and improvements in response to service demand, the condition of infrastructure, and the aspirations of early years' service providers.



Mossvale Park excursion

Options Available to Council

In simple terms the options available to Council for its future role in the early years are:

Option One	Maintain the same role / a similar role and service level.
Option Two	Take on a larger role e.g. directly deliver kindergarten and childcare services from Council owned buildings or sites.
Option Three	Have a smaller role e.g. maintain what is currently in place but not replace ageing infrastructure or building any new facilities OR ceasing to have any involvement providing infrastructure to support kindergarten or childcare services.

Assessing the Options

A number of impacts and factors have been considered by Council when assessing each of these options and determining Council's preferred role for the future. These factors include:

- **Access to services:** How community access early years services will be impacted. Will it be easier, will it be harder, will it be consistent? What is the likelihood other providers (private or not for profit) will step into the market to deliver early years services.
- **Financial impact:** How significant will the financial impacts and risks be for Council and service providers?
- **Strong service system:** Will the service system be strengthened? Will it support strong service providers capable of delivering quality early years services for the community?
- **Economic and liveability impacts:** Will the option support local economic prosperity and liveability?
- **Operational impacts for Council:** How will the option impact upon Council's workforce requirements? Is the option consistent with Council's skills and expertise?
- **Existing obligations:** How will Council's existing obligations in relation to leases, service agreements, funding, and sector-wide agreements be impacted?
- **Reputational impacts:** What will be the reputational impacts for Council?

Table Four below provides a summary of the assessment of the key impacts and factors for each option with a brief written description and a colour-coding system to indicate as follows:

Green = There is likely to be positive impacts and/or no negative impacts.

Yellow = There is likely to be some negative impact.

Orange = There is likely to be significant negative impacts.

It shows that **Option One: Maintaining the same role / similar role and service level** the early years space will deliver the most positive impacts and minimal to no negative impacts.

Factors	Option One: Maintain the same / similar role	Option Two: Take on a larger role	Option Three: Have a smaller role
Access to services	Access to services will be maintained and likely increased as additional infrastructure is developed in response to community need.	Access to services will be maintained and likely increased as additional infrastructure is developed in response to community need.	Access to services is likely to be reduced with no investment in additional infrastructure, and/or existing service providers unable to purchase Council property to continue operating services. The private sector is unlikely to step into the market in any great way because it is a regional location.
Financial impact	Capital costs will increase, but they will be consistent with the findings from the Early Years Needs Assessment and the funding currently nominally allocated in Council's 10-year financial plan.	The operational cost to Council will increase as a workforce will need to be employed to operate the existing kindergarten and childcare services. Capital costs will increase, but they will be consistent with the findings from the Early Years Needs Assessment and the funding currently nominally allocated in Council's 10-year financial plan.	The capital cost to Council would be reduced with no investment required in capacity building infrastructure, and if infrastructure was sold off, this would provide Council with funding for other infrastructure projects. Operational costs may be reduced if Council steps away from its role in capacity building and planning, and the direct delivery of services such as MCH, immunisation and supported playgroups.
Strong service system	The capacity of the service system will be maintained with Council continuing its role in its sector coordination, capacity planning and building. It will be strengthened as Council pursuing key initiatives e.g. service agreements with all providers in Council buildings and facilitating strong local early years managers.	The capacity of the service system will be reduced, as existing capable and viable community not-for-profit providers are obliged to step away because Council chooses to become responsible for kindergarten and childcare service delivery in Council buildings.	The capacity of the service system would likely be reduced, particularly if Council sold off early years infrastructure. Council has a critical role in sector coordination, capacity planning and building which would be diminished or lost if Council reduces its role.
Economic and liveability impact	Maintaining Council's current role in capacity planning for the service system and providing infrastructure, which is responsive to community needs, the community will retain access to quality early years services that support parents to work and families and children to thrive.	Increasing Council's role in direct service delivery may increase access to quality early years services, but it may also redirect away resources from capacity planning and building. When Council has a large footprint in direct service delivery, attention can be directed away from future service and infrastructure planning and delivery, and puts at risk Council's ability to be responsive to future community needs.	This option means there is significant risk service capacity that will be reduced or at a minimum not increased to meet changing community needs. The provision of accessible quality childcare, kindergarten and maternal and child health services is recognised as critical to the economic prosperity and liveability of all communities.

Factors	Option 1: Maintain the same / similar role	Option 2: Take on a larger role	Option 3: Have a smaller role
Operational impacts for Council	There are no new operational impacts for Council by maintaining the same or a similar role in the early years space.	The workforce planning and management issues for Council as the direct provider of kindergarten and childcare services will be significant. As noted above, this is likely to take away from future service and infrastructure planning and delivery, putting at risk Council's ability to be responsive to future community needs for kindergarten and childcare.	There may be a reduction in the staff Council is required to employ to support early years services and infrastructure, but this would depend upon the extent of the reduced footprint.
Existing obligations	Existing obligations will be honoured with service providers (lease and service agreements) and the State Government (Compact Agreement).	Council has lease and service agreements in place with many of the early years' providers located in Council's buildings. These would need to be exited or broken for Council to become responsible for directly delivering childcare and kindergarten services.	Council has lease and service agreements in place with many of the early years' providers located in Council's buildings. The ability to sell any of these buildings or sites will be compromised by the existing agreements. The Compact Agreement between the MAV (on behalf of local government) and the State Government underpins funding for MCH services and supported playgroups. This may be impacted if Council chooses to reduce its footprint.
Reputational impacts	The reputational risk for Council is minimal and the community is likely to be supportive of Council maintaining its current role. The State Government will be supportive of Council taking a proactive approach in planning for early years services and infrastructure.	The reputational risk for Council with becoming responsible for directly delivering kindergarten and childcare services is high. Existing community providers and local communities are likely to have significant concerns where the service providers are delivering a quality, viable service, that is well regarded by the community.	The reputational risk for Council with any reduction in Council's role is high, whether this be over time by not investing in existing or new infrastructure in response to service demand OR by largely exiting the early years space. The community is likely to be strongly opposed to this, and Council' reputation with the State Government is likely to be negatively impacted.

Table 4. Assessment of options for Council's future role in the Early Years



SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

9 Smith Street (Private Bag 4) Leongatha VIC 3953

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Website: www.southgippsland.vic.gov.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/southgippslandshirecouncil



Detailed breakdown of survey responses

92% of survey respondents support a new kindergarten on the primary school site.

8% of survey respondents that did not support the kindergarten on the primary school. A consistent concern from these respondents was about families not being able to access before and after kindergarten care. Other reasons were consistent when broken down in to age groups.

Under 55 age group

- Concerned about kindergarten children mixing with older school children in the playgroup.
- Primary school outdoor space would be lost to the kindergarten.

The above concerns will be addressed through the design process.

65+ age group

- There is already an Early Learning Centre comprising a kindergarten, a child care centre, library and Maternal and Infant Welfare Centre.
- The financial viability of the long day care and being able to attract staff if the kindergarten is moved.

Breakdown of respondents

- **60% of respondents were parents** and 95% of these parents support the kindergarten on the school site. The 5% (3 respondents) that do not support the location had concerns about the school losing playspace, lack of playspace for kindergarten children or kindergarten children in the same playspace as older school children. These concerns could be addressed through design.
- **12% of respondents were educators** and 93% of these educators support the kindergarten on the school site. The 7% (1 respondent) that did not support the location had concerns about the school losing playspace or lack of playspace for kindergarten children. These concerns could be addressed through design.
- **28% local residents.**

Co-location of MCH, playgroup and toy library

77% of respondents support the co-location of MCH, playgroup and the toy library.

Those that did not support the co-location or had concerns about the co-location provided the following reasons.

- These services already have a space.
- Should be located the old train station building – spend the money on improving the building.
- These services should be central.
- Would create traffic issues at the school.

Car parking

90% of respondents believe additional carparking should be provided

Respondents residency

- 78% Mirboo North residents.
- Balance mostly from surrounding towns with 3 respondents from outside the shire.

4.3. COAL CREEK COMMUNITY PARK AND MUSEUM STRATEGIC PLAN

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community, Customer and Visitor

Council Plan

Sustainable Growth

Complete the development of a Strategic Plan for Coal Creek Community Park and Museum and commence implementation of actions is a 2024/25 major initiative.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to present Council with the final Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan 2024-2034 (the Strategic Plan) (**Attachment [4.3.1]**) for consideration and determination.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan 2024-2034 (Attachment [4.3.1]).

REPORT

The development of a Strategic Plan for Coal Creek Community Park and Museum was an adopted 2023/24 Council Plan initiative with the intention of a major review and community engagement process to inform the future direction for Coal Creek.

Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan

The new Strategic Plan is intended to address the actions identified in the *Visitor Economy Strategy 2021-2031* to position Coal Creek as a key cultural tourism asset for South Gippsland. The Strategic Plan also responds to the strategic actions that specifically relate to Coal Creek in the *Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy 2022-2026* to address the needs of Coal Creek.

The Strategic Plan has been developed with the assistance from community and stakeholder engagement specialists, i.e community, who have undertaken significant consultation in its development.

The new Strategic Plan recommends the following proposed vision and strategic directions in supporting a new direction for Coal Creek.

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.

To achieve this, the following strategic directions have been developed, each with identified short- and long-term actions.

- 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.

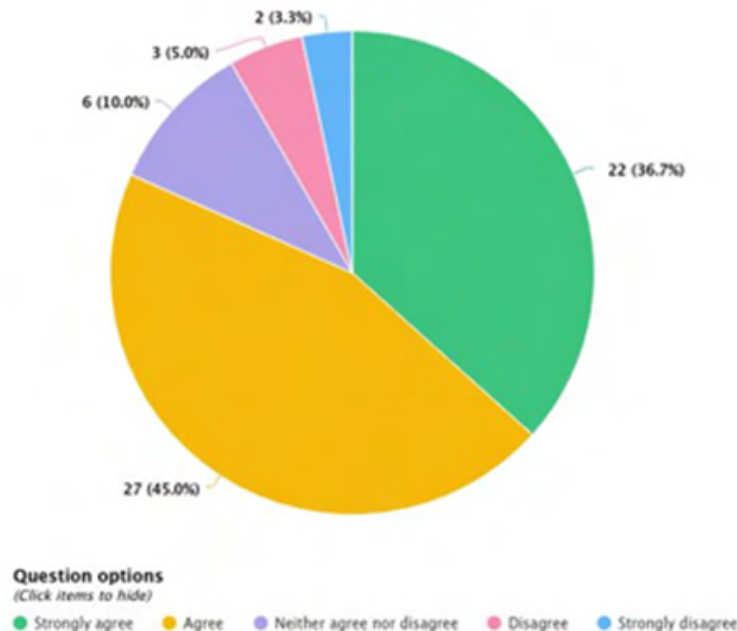
Community feedback to Draft Plan

The Draft Strategic Plan was released for public exhibition from 18 July to 1 August 2024, requesting feedback from the community. Feedback was requested via an online survey on the Your Say platform with the opportunity to provide either comments or upload a written submission. A total of 60 submissions were received.

A significant portion of the feedback received was positive and indicated support for the Draft Strategic Plan with the following responses.

Do you agree or disagree with the draft Coal Creek Strategic Plan?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
22	27	6	3	2



In addition to the above, 42 of the 60 respondents provided written feedback which mostly focused on suggestions to implement the strategic actions identified in the draft Plan. This included detailed submissions uploaded by three respondents.

Changes to Draft Plan

The following changes have been made to the Strategic Plan in response to the submissions received during the final community consultation process.

All other feedback will be retained and considered when implementing actions and the three submitters who gave their names will receive correspondence in relation to their feedback.

- Operations, Marketing and Resourcing

Amend long-term strategic action *Explore Alternative Operational Models* to read 'To ensure long-term sustainability and growth, consider alternative options for Park operations such as management models, commercial partnerships or leases of areas or assets' (refer to the page 33 of the Draft Plan).

- Include an introductory paragraph to the section *Case Studies* to explain their inclusion (see page 35 of the Draft Plan).

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The 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.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

An allocation of \$50,000 was approved in the 2024/25 annual budget towards the major initiative of commencing the implementation of actions identified in the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan.

RISKS

The Strategic Plan has undergone a significant community engagement process with various opportunities for feedback from the community. The Strategic Plan has been developed based on the community feedback and will now be considered for adoption by Council as a final document.

If not supported, the proposed actions from the Strategic Plan cannot commence and the future of Coal Creek would remain unclear. This would therefore have an impact on delivering the relevant strategic objectives of the Visitor Economy Strategy and Art, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan 2024-2034 - August 2024 [4.3.1 - 42 pages]

CONFIDENTIAL ATTACHMENTS

Nil

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Coal Creek Community Park Museum and Collection Policy (C05)
Arts, Culture and Creative Industry Strategy
Community Engagement Strategy
Visitor Economy Strategy
Annual Budget
Council Plan 2022-2026
Long Term Financial Plan

Legislative Provisions

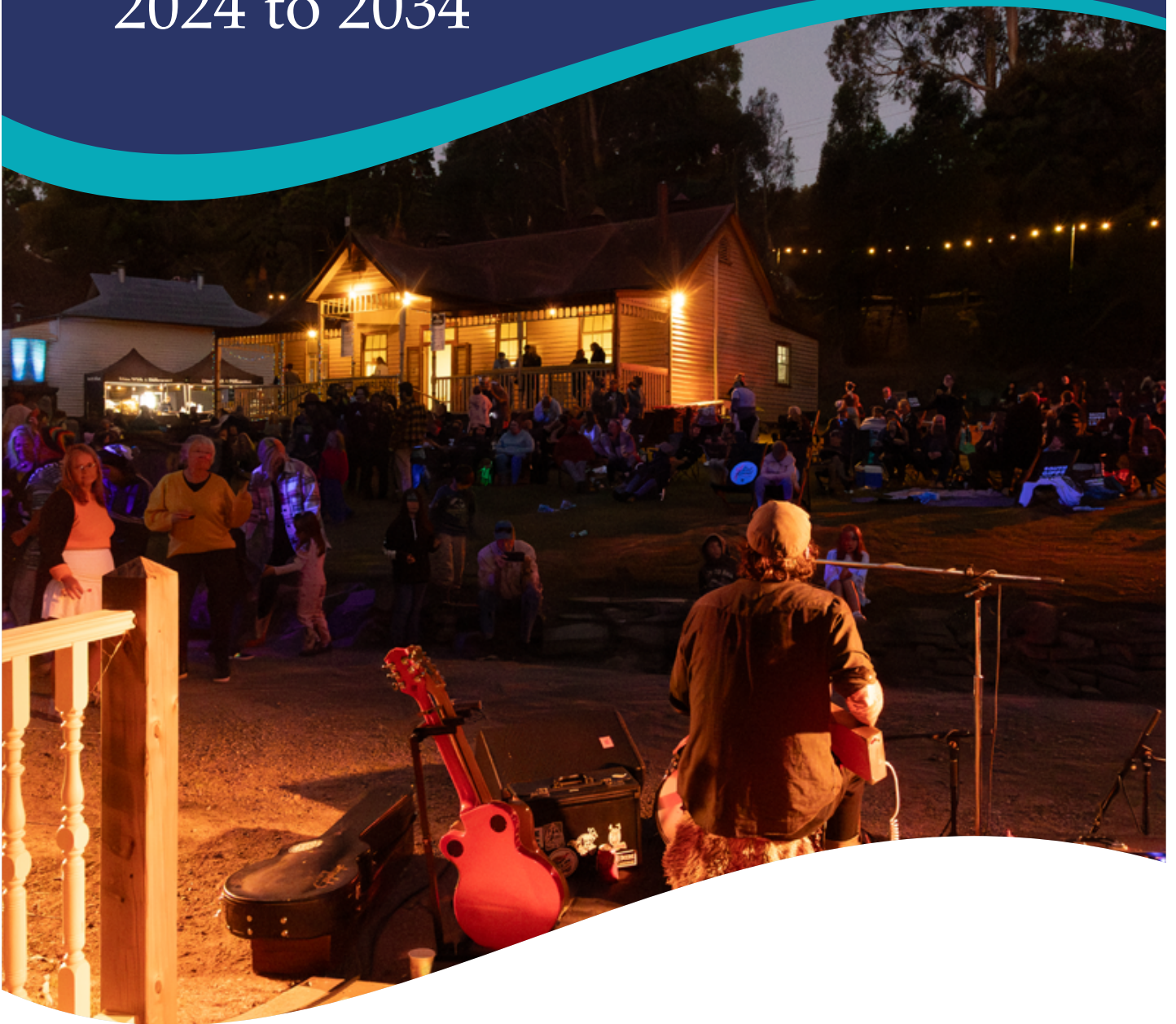
Nil

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Gippsland Destination Management Plan - Towards 2030 - A Blueprint for Growth
(Destination Gippsland)

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan 2024 to 2034



Charting a new direction for Coal Creek



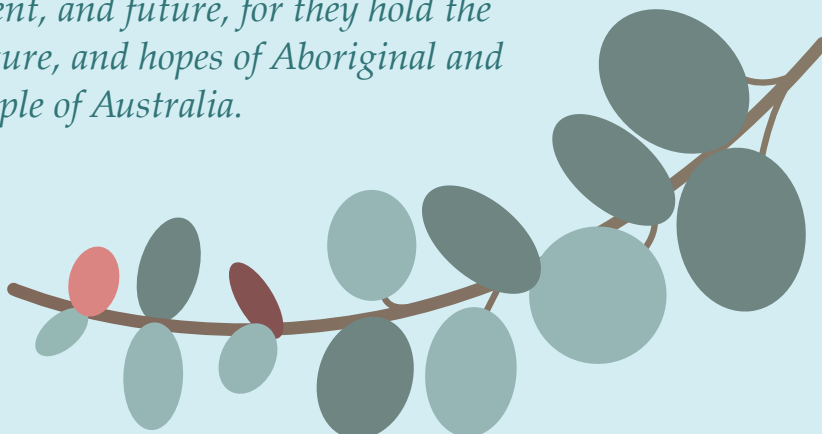
South Gippsland
Shire Council

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Coal Creek Community Assembly	11	Environmental Stewardship and Access to Open Space	
Recommendation to Council	14	Contribution to South Gippsland	
A New Vision for Coal Creek	17	Preserving Historical and Cultural Significance	
		Operations, Marketing and Resourcing	
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Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.



eucalyptus, (genus Eucalyptus)

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-19 pandemic accelerating these issues, it became clear that some hard decisions needed to be made about the future of Coal Creek. So, South Gippsland Shire 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 South Gippsland Shire 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.

Photo Right: Charley Crockett at Coal Creek



COAL CREEK STRATEGIC PLAN 2024-2034 – SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL | 3

Purpose

This Strategic Plan provides a road map for how South Gippsland Shire 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 Coal Creek Community Park and Museum Strategic Plan has been the requirement that it be realistic and that the strategic directions it outlines can be achieved without significant additional funding from South Gippsland Shire 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.

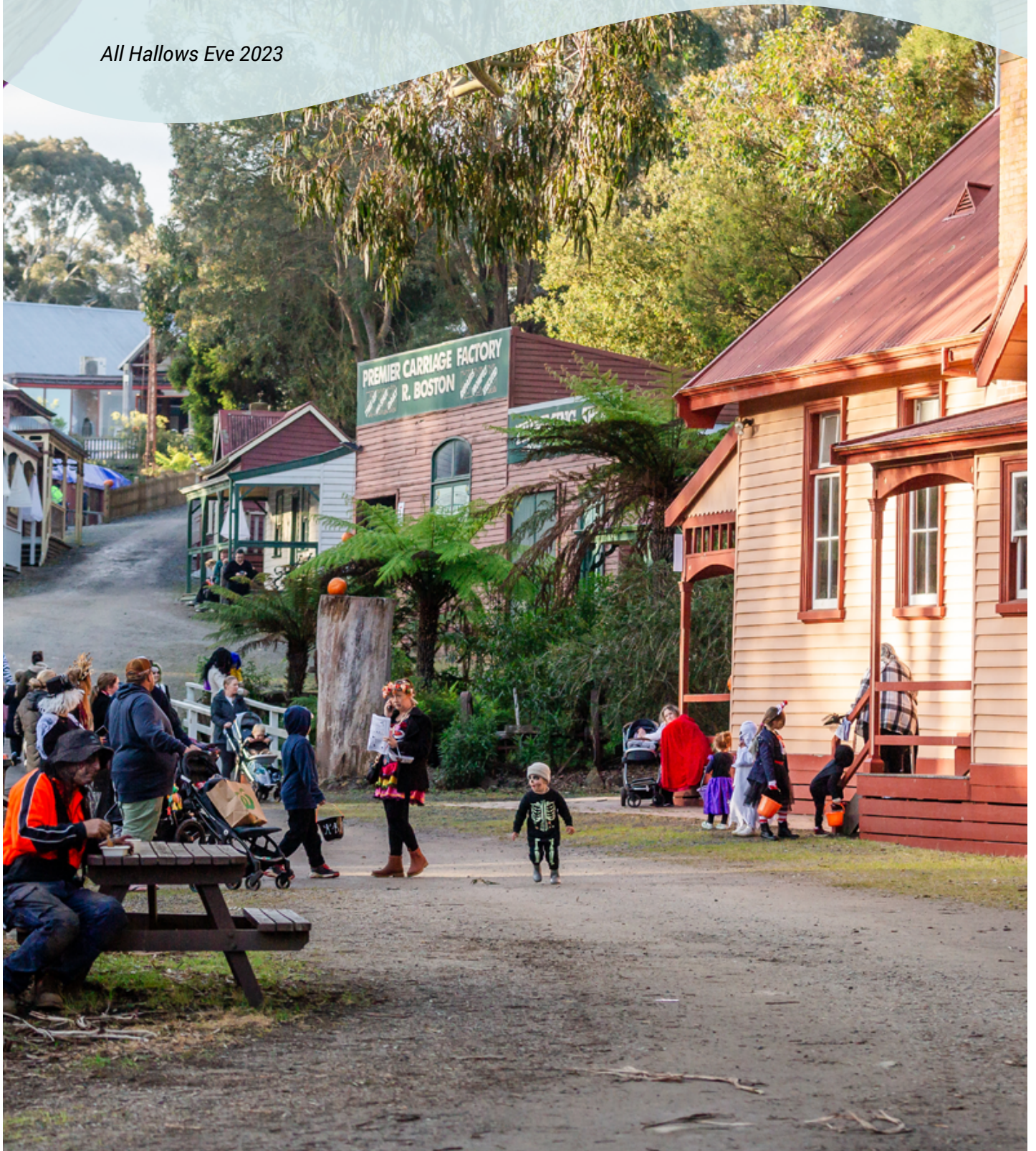
The Strategic Plan contains the following:

- **Vision:** A new vision for Coal Creek.
- **Strategic directions:** Provide a high-level framework to achieve the Vision.
- **Actions:** High-level actions that provide a road map for how Coal Creek can rebuild its foundations in the short term (next three to five years) and embark on a new direction in the long term (five 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

All Hallows Eve 2023



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 South Gippsland Shire 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 South Gippsland Shire 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

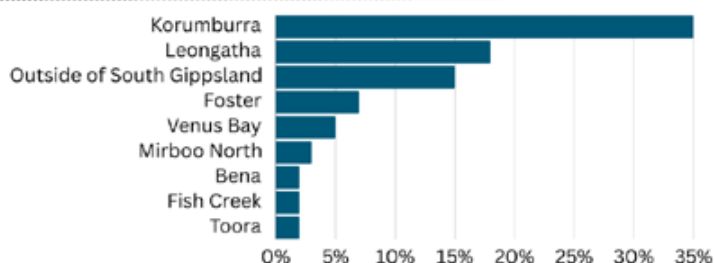
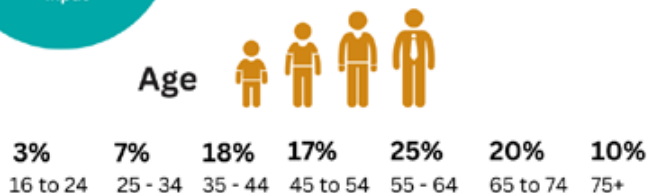
- The Long Table, Tarwin Lower, 26 Jan
- Outside, Memorial Hall, Leongatha, 2 Feb
- Coal Creek, Korumburra, 2 Feb
- Foster and district Ag show, 24 Feb



Gender



Age



Key Findings

- **Visitation:** Most respondents from both the intercept and online surveys had visited Coal Creek (96 per cent).
- **Condition of Coal Creek:** In the online survey, almost half of respondents rated the current condition of Coal Creek as average (47 per cent), with 34 per cent rating it positively.
- **Attractions:** In the online survey, over half of respondents (60 per cent) 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 per cent) 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 appreciated 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 things 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 café 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 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 showcasing 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 café and speciality 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 South Gippsland Shire 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 cost, suggesting that funds allocated to Coal Creek could be better spent elsewhere in the Shire. They urged South Gippsland Shire Council to consider closure, stating that the closure costs would be manageable compared to the ongoing financial burden.

Coal Creek Community Assembly

Launch of the ArtCubes



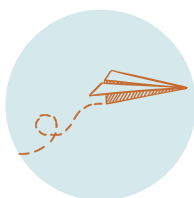
The Coal Creek Community Assembly was a deliberative engagement process that placed the community at the centre of decision-making for the future of Coal Creek. This approach aimed to capture the diverse views of South Gippsland residents and ensure that the new Strategic Plan for Coal Creek genuinely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



New Direction



Cease 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, South Gippsland Shire 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, South Gippsland Shire 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?

Coal Creek Assembly

Demographic snapshot

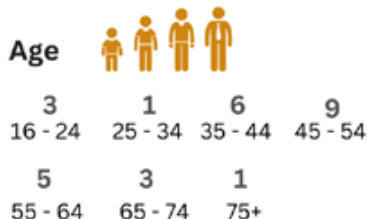
28

Assembly Members

Gender



Age



Education



Ward



Relationship to the Shire



- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------|
| 22 Resident - owner | 3 Resident - dependant |
| 1 Resident - renter | 2 Holiday home owner |
| 4 Business operator | |
| 5 Farmer or primary producer | |

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 South Gippsland Shire 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

Coal Creek Carols



The core task of the Coal Creek Assembly was to provide a recommendation to South Gippsland Shire 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 South Gippsland Shire Council.

We, the Coal Creek Assembly, have considered the options presented. We recommend Option Two, 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 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 directions about Coal Creek.



Community Involvement and Inclusion



Economic Viability
(regarding cost to Council)



Environmental Sustainability and Access to Open Space



Contribution to the South Gippsland Economy



Preserving Historical and Cultural Significance

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, South Gippsland Shire 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 South Gippsland Shire 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 road map 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 South Gippsland Shire 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.

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 South Gippsland Shire 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.



All Hallows Eve (Halloween) 2023



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.



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Actions

Short Term

Build the Volunteer Program:	Strengthen partnerships with community groups to bolster community 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 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 road map for how Coal Creek can become a favourite day out whether you're from down the coast or Melbourne.



Achieving Financial Sustainability

Coal Creek Today

Coal Creek relies heavily on South Gippsland Shire 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 the 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 South Gippsland Shire 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 heritage while embracing new opportunities for growth and prosperity.



Actions

Short Term

Enhance the 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 South Gippsland Shire 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 South Gippsland Shire Council in the next five years.

As South Gippsland Shire 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.



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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.



Contribution to 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, Culture and Creative Industries 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, benefitting 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.



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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 South Gippsland Shire 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 South Gippsland Shire 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.



Operations, Marketing and Resourcing

Coal Creek Today

Coal Creek operates with a limited budget and resources, relying heavily on South Gippsland Shire 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 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 management models, 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.

Appendix

Coal Creek Main Entrance



Appendix One – Case Studies

The following Case Studies are provided as examples of other facilities that have undertaken successful and innovative transformations.

The diverse range of Case Studies were selected to demonstrate the opportunities for Coal Creek that embraces community involvement, cultural experiences and tourism.

The new vision for Coal Creek is not intended to replicate the provided Case Study examples.

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



Photo Credit: CERES Community Environment Park

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, café, 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.



Photo Credit: Visit Melbourne

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.

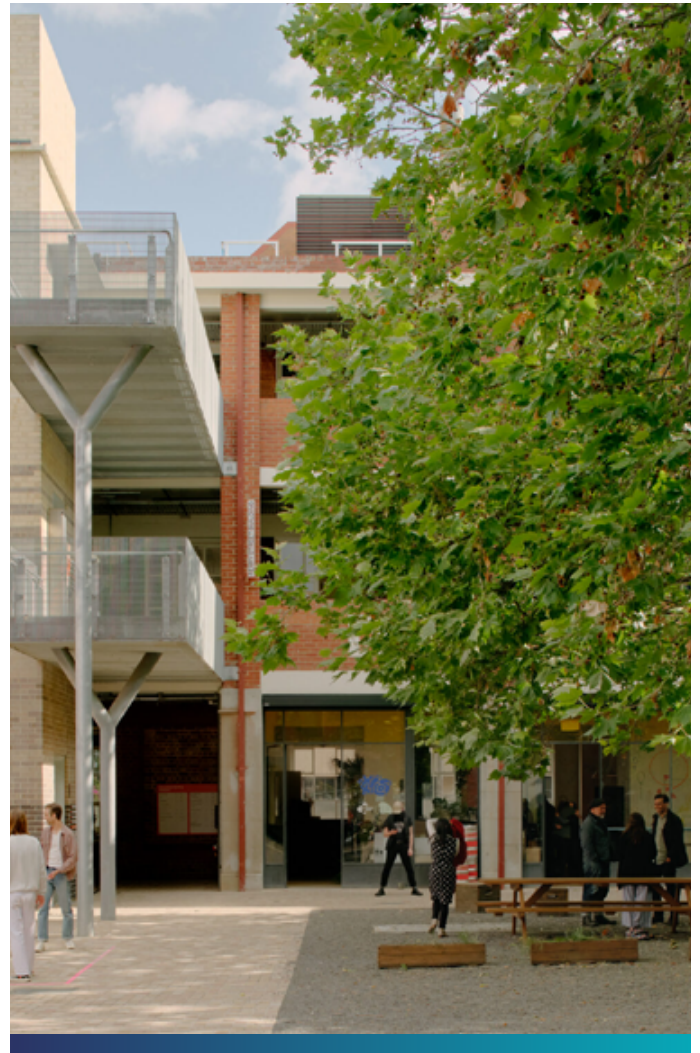


Photo Credit: Collingwood Yards

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 with 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 beach-front 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.

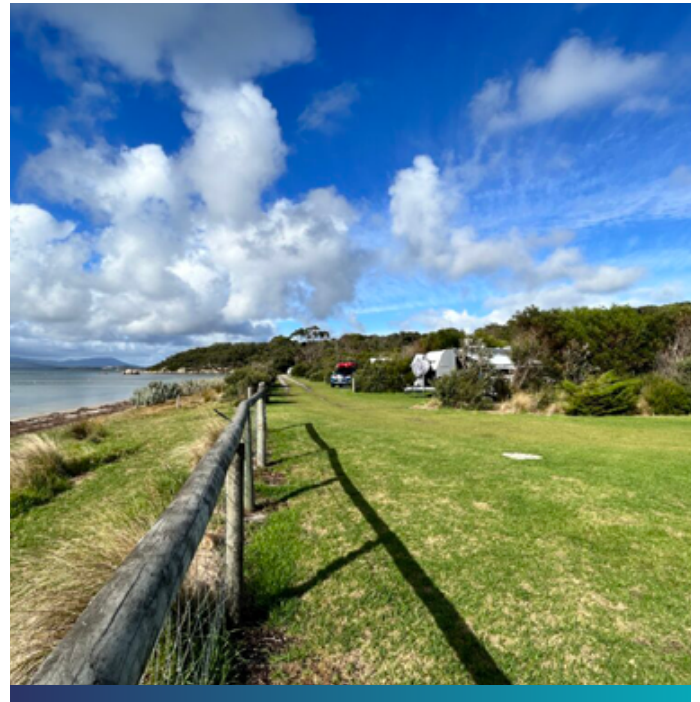


Photo Credit: Wilsons Prom Holiday Park

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.

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

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South Gippsland
Shire Council

4.4. DOMESTIC ANIMAL MANAGEMENT PLAN 2022-2025 - ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community, Health and Safety

Council Plan

Objective - Healthy and Engaged Communities

Objective - Protecting and Enhancing our Environment

This report relates to the South Gippsland Shire Council – Council Plan 2022-2026 Strategic Objectives Healthy and Engaged Communities and Protecting and Enhancing our Environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to highlight Council’s progress and achievements in relation to the Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) 2022-2025, Annual Implementation Report May 2024. The DAMP also includes 34 action items to be completed during its three-year life cycle, with the progress of these actions to be reported on annually, with a copy sent to the Minister of Agriculture at the end of each calendar year.

Of the 34 actions:

- 30% (10 actions) are completed;
- 53% (18 actions) are in progress with high confidence levels for completion by the end of the DAMP life cycle;
- 15% (5 actions) have not yet commenced, however are on the Community Health and Safety’s departmental business plan for commencement in the 2024/25 financial year; and
- 2% (1 action) is currently being monitored and will continue to be reviewed as part of operational deliverables in relation to ‘Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs’.

Attachment [4.4.1] details the progress of the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Adopt the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024.**

2. Notes a copy of the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024 that will be sent to the Minister of Agriculture.

REPORT

In accordance with section 68A of the *Domestic Animals Act 1994*, Council is required to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) every four years. The DAMP was adopted at the 16 November 2022 Council Meeting and outlines the services, programs and policies established to address the administration of the Domestic Animal Act 1994. It also ensures responsible pet ownership with consideration to the wider environment and municipality.

Council has made excellent progress on most actions, with key achievements highlighted in the table below:

Key Achievements
Strategy: Training of Authorised Officers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community Safety Officers are attending mandatory training sessions. This includes completing a Certificate IV in Animal Management and practical bite prevention training, with a focus on understanding animal psychology.
Strategy: Registration and Identification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A test online animal registration application system was developed in collaboration with the Communications and Engagement team. The development of an e-pathway option is underway.
Strategy: Nuisance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues relating to nuisance dogs and cats continue to be addressed, with Council establishing clear processes to manage common complaints. A total of 129 barking dog complaints were managed, with 96% (124) resolved successfully at the time of the report.
Strategy: Dog Attacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues relating to dog attacks continue to be addressed with Council receiving 23 reports for dog attacks. Whilst these matters can take time to resolve, Council ensures each case is treated with due diligence to ensure sufficient evidence is gathered and the case is investigated thoroughly to achieve the best outcome.

- A FAQ brochure was developed to support both the victim and owner following dog attack incidences, ensuring they have clear information about Council’s process and next steps.

Strategy: Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs

- Council continues to ensure compliance is maintained and scheduled visits are undertaken to dogs registered as dangerous and menacing. No restricted breeds have been identified in the municipality.
- The Victorian Declared Dog Register is maintained and regularly referred to as part of service delivery. This ensures that Council is up to date with the movement of any dangerous, menacing or restricted animal breeds both into and out of our municipality. This includes Community Safety officers undertaking restricted breed identification training.
- The Department of Agriculture’s Dangerous Dogs Hotline is available for the community to report dog attacks or suspected dangerous dogs; however, no referrals are recorded to date.

Strategy: Overpopulation and High Euthanasia

- The cat trapping program has expanded. Cat traps can be booked by members of the public to catch feral and nuisance cats on their property, with the current wait time 2-3 weeks.
- Council continues to manage the pound service internally, with full control over the fate of all animals which are impounded.
- The advertising of impounded animals on Facebook has been highly successful, especially when owners have not been found. The posts reach an extensive audience and receive a high volume of comments and shares, which gives the animals the best chance of being reunited with their owners.
- Where animals remain unclaimed, or are surrendered directly to Council, Community Safety Officers work closely with at least 14 rescue organisations across Victoria to facilitate the rehoming of all suitable animals.

Strategy: Domestic Animal Businesses

- Council continues to develop a procedure that will allow for all audit inspection documentation to be stored electronically against the licensee. Our current customer request management system Pathway is the preferred system with a licencing module.

Strategy: Other Matters

- Council successfully negotiated another 18 months with the Korumburra Veterinary Clinic to lease their facilities for our in-house pound service. This

will continue to be explored as part of the Community Health and Safety departmental business plan 2024/25.

Strategy: Annual Review of Plan and Annual Reporting

- Council continues to report on the progress of actions in the DAMP to Council. The Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024 was presented at the Council Briefing on Wednesday 8 May 2024.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There was an extensive consultation period during the development of the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025. Future actions, specifically those associated with new Council Orders, will be subject to additional community engagement and consultation programs.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

The implementation of actions included in the DAMP are accommodated from within the Community Safety Team operational budget.

RISKS

If Council does not endorse the Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024, it will not be able to meet its legislative obligations, including the report being forwarded to the Minister for Agriculture.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025 - Year 1 reporting 2023 [4.4.1 - 5 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Domestic Animal Management Plan

Legislative Provisions

Domestic Animals Act 1994

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Nil



*South Gippsland
Shire Council*

Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025

Annual
Implementation
Update

Domestic Animal Management Plan 2022-2025

Council Plan Objective – Healthy and Engaged Communities

Council Plan Objective - Protecting and Enhancing our Environment

Initiative Status - Not Started, On Track, Monitor, Delays/Off Track & Completed

Action Plan Reporting on Activities

2023

2023					
Year 1					
STRATEGY	ACTION	Who	When	Progress Update - 1st year	Status
Training of Authorised Officers	Ensure all officers have access to the Bureau of Animal Welfare website.	Local Laws Administration Officer	Ongoing	Officers have access to all required systems and any changes to staff are communicated appropriately.	Completed
Training of Authorised Officers	Maintain a training register for individual officers.	Local Laws Coordinator	Annually	Training is identified through PDP process for all staff. Any new training opportunities identified are considered for all relevant staff.	On Track
Training of Authorised Officers	Ensure officers attend at least one training / networking session each year.	Local Laws Coordinator	As per training register	Officers attend mandatory training sessions annually, as well as any additional opportunities that are identified through PDPs.	Completed
Training of Authorised Officers	Maximise learning and development opportunities to attract and maintain quality staff and performance.	Local Laws Coordinator	As per training opportunities	Through networking and professional relationships with other Councils, State Departments and Authorities and relevant sector organisations we can identify and connect in to other training opportunities to keep officers skilled and engaged.	On Track
Training of Authorised Officers	Identify additional training and development opportunities as they arise.	Local Laws Coordinator	As per training opportunities	Through networking and professional relationships with other Councils, State Departments and Authorities and relevant sector organisations we can identify and connect in to other training opportunities to keep officers skilled and engaged.	On Track
Registration and Identification	Continue to conduct registration compliance campaigns across the municipal district targeting townships and rural areas each year.	Local Laws Coordinator	Ongoing	Due to resourcing shortages, this was not conducted in 2023, however with some stability to the team it is prioritised for 2024.	On Track
Registration and Identification	Introduce an online animal registration application system for new registrations.	Local Laws Administration Officer	Ongoing	A prototype form was produced by Councils Communications team which has not been rolled out publicly yet. The development of an e-pathway option is also being explored.	On Track
Registration and Identification	Continue to distribute animal information articles on Council's website, social media, telephone on-hold messages and in local newspapers to promote the benefits of registration, microchipping and legislative compliance	Local Laws Administration Officer Communications Officer	Ongoing	Due to resourcing shortages, this was not conducted in 2023, however with some stability to the team it is prioritised for 2024.	On Track
Registration and Identification	Continue compliance and enforcement activities to achieve greater compliance with all aspects of the Act.	Local Laws Coordinator	Ongoing	The team continues to follow up known breaches of registration, initially through education but will escalate to enforcement measures if compliance is not obtained.	On Track

Nuisance	Continue to distribute animal information articles on Council's website, social media, telephone on-hold messages and in local newspapers to promote the issues relating to nuisance dogs and cats	Local Laws Administration Officer Communications Officer	Ongoing	Due to resourcing shortages, this was not conducted in 2023, however with some stability to the team it is prioritised for 2024.	On Track
Nuisance	Investigate the introduction of a 'Leash Order' to reduce the incidence of wandering/ unrestrained dogs in public places and number of dogs causing a nuisance	Local Laws Coordinator	Future Plan	Considerable feedback was received during the development of the DAMP, and also the review of Council's Local Law, in relation to dogs off leash. Once the new Local Law is in place, we will begin investigating Council's options for Orders under the DAA 1994.	Not Started
Nuisance	Investigate the need for designated 'Dog Off-Leash' parks if a leash order is introduced.	Local Laws Coordinator	Future Plan	Considerable feedback was received during the development of the DAMP, and also the review of Council's Local Law, in relation to dogs off leash. Once the new Local Law is in place, we will begin investigating Council's options for Orders under the DAA 1994.	Not Started
Nuisance	Investigate the introduction of a 'Cat Curfew Order' to reduce the incidence of cats causing a nuisance, attacks on native fauna and unwanted cat litters.	Local Laws Coordinator	Future Plan	Considerable feedback was received during the development of the DAMP, and also the review of Council's Local Law, in relation to wandering cats. Once the new Local Law is in place, we will begin investigating Council's options for Orders under the DAA 1994. A desexing Order may also be investigated.	Not Started
Dog Attacks	Issue infringements and prosecute offenders for non-compliance with the Act in accordance with our normal practices.	Local Laws Coordinator Local Laws Administration Officer	Ongoing	Officers issue infringements in line with best practice and Council policy. Unpaid infringements escalate to Fines Victoria for follow up. Serious matters, or nominations for Court, proceed through to prosecution in the Magistrates' Court of Victoria.	On Track
Dog Attacks	Continue to educate the public regarding the broader implications of dog attacks to the community, the victim, the offending animal and the owner of that animal	Local Laws Coordinator	Ongoing	A FAQ brochure is being developed to distribute to all involved in dog attacks to confirm the information they are given verbally and to provide additional information/resources	On Track
Dog Attacks	Continue to distribute animal information articles on Council's website, social media, telephone on-hold messages and in local newspapers to promote issues relating to dog attacks.	Local Laws Administration Officer Communications Officer	Ongoing	Due to resourcing shortages, this was not conducted in 2023, however with some stability to the team it is prioritised for 2024.	On Track
Dog Attacks	Provide residents with information on how to report dog attacks and promote and encourage the reporting of any dog attack.	Local Laws Administration Officer Communications Officer	Ongoing	Update to Council's website required with revised information and resources	Not Started

Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs	Promote the Department of Primary Industries "Dangerous Dogs Hotline"	Local Laws Administration Officer	Ongoing	We would rather dog attacks be reported directly to our Officers, rather than through a third party to pass on to us. We can include this information on the updated Council webpage, however this action may not be appropriate.	Monitor
Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs	Provide advice and guidance to dog owners regarding restricted breeds and dangerous dogs.	Local Laws Coordinator Local Laws Administration Officer	Ongoing	Update to Council's website required with revised information and resources	Not Started
Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs	Conduct annual inspections of premises where declared restricted breeds of dogs are housed.	Local Laws Officers	Annually in April	No restricted breed dogs have been identified in South Gippsland.	Completed
Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs	Conduct annual inspections of premises where declared dangerous and menacing dogs are housed.	Local Laws Officers	Annually in April	South Gippsland Shire Council has three declared dogs. These properties are inspected annually in line with registration renewals.	Completed
Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs	Proactively enforce menacing, restricted breed and dangerous dog legislation.	Local Laws Coordinator Local Laws Officers	When Required	Dogs are declared menacing or dangerous, as required, following serious incidents.	Completed
Dangerous, Menacing and Restricted Breed Dogs	Ensure that the standards to identify restricted breed dogs are applied.	Local Laws Coordinator Local Laws Officers	When Required	Officers complete training to identify restricted breed dogs as it is offered by the Department of Agriculture. This helps them compare suspected dogs against the written standard.	Completed
Overpopulation and High Euthanasia	Expand Council's cat trapping program.	Local Laws Officers	2023	The cat trapping program was suspended temporarily during the second half of the year due to the uncertainty of Council's pound facility. Council currently loans out 12 traps for feral and nuisance cats to be caught. Each trap is loaned out for one week. The current wait time is approximately 2-3 weeks as it is peak breeding season. Additional traps to be purchased if demand increases.	On Track
Overpopulation and High Euthanasia	Through Council's pound service, advertise lost and/or found dogs and cats on Council's website and in local papers.	Pound Service Provider	Ongoing	Council no longer uses an external pound service provider.	Completed
Overpopulation and High Euthanasia	Ensure that notices advertising animals for sale within South Gippsland contain the microchip number for each animal being sold.	Local Laws Administration Officer Local Laws Officers	Ongoing	Where advertisements are discovered, through print and online platforms, compliance with microchipping and the Pet Exchange Register is confirmed.	On Track
Overpopulation and High Euthanasia	Investigate the extended use of social media to increase the return of lost or impounded animals to their owners.	Local Laws Coordinator Local Laws Administration Officer Local Laws Officers	Ongoing	Collected dogs and cats, where an owner cannot be identified or contacted, are posted on Council's Facebook page. This has proven very successful, particularly as other users can tag and share the posts.	Completed

Domestic Animal Businesses	Develop a procedure that will allow for all audit inspection documentation to be stored electronically against the license.	Local Laws Administration Officer Local Laws Officers	2023	The licencing module in Pathway to be utilised	On Track
Domestic Animal Businesses	Assessment of Council's registration database, to proactively identify unregistered Domestic Animal Businesses.	Local Laws Administration Officer Local Laws Officers	Ongoing	Unregistered Domestic Animal Businesses, where identified, are contacted to discuss requirements.	On Track
Domestic Animal Businesses	Provide Domestic Animal Businesses with educative material to ensure they are kept informed of all new developments and changes to legislation that may affect the operation of their business.	Local Laws Officers	Annually in April or as required	Council Officers provide any new relevant information to DAB owners during inspections. Any changes to legislation that affect the DABs is communicated with them as received.	Completed
Other Matters	Undertake a review of pound service in 30 June 2023. Management would seek approval from the Chief Executive Officer for a contract extension for an additional year recurring up to five times applicable to 30 June 2028.	Manager Community Health and Safety	30 June 2023	Council no longer uses an external pound service provider. From 1 July 2023 Council has been responsible for managing the pound service. Council initially leased the existing facility for six months, and has just negotiated an extension until 30 July 2025 to allow time to investigate other potential options for the facility.	Completed
Annual Review of Plan and Annual Reporting	Provide the Department of Primary Industries Secretary with a copy of the Domestic Animal Management Plan and any amendments.	Local Laws Coordinator	Annually in December	The Council report concerning the annual review of the DAMP will be prepared following the Council briefing.	On Track
Annual Review of Plan and Annual Reporting	Publish an evaluation of the implementation of the Domestic Animal Management Plan in Council's Annual Report	Manager Community Health and Safety Communications Officer	Annually	This would be completed in conjunction with the annual review to Council, through the publishing of Council minutes and follow up media release. To be completed once report is adopted by Council.	On Track
Annual Review of Plan and Annual Reporting	Review the Domestic Animal Management Plan annually and if appropriate, make any amendments to the Plan.	Local Laws Coordinator Local Laws Officers	Annually	The Council report concerning the annual review of the DAMP will be prepared following the Council briefing.	On Track

5. OBJECTIVE - LEADING WITH INTEGRITY

5.1. COUNCILLOR POLICIES UPDATE

Directorate:	Performance and Innovation
Department:	Governance

Council Plan

Objective - Leading with Integrity

Ensure that Council is leading with integrity. It is essential that Council policies are reviewed and updated regularly to ensure they are compliant with legal requirements and sector leading practices.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the report is to seek Council consideration of the *Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy Attachment [5.1.1]* and *Councillor, Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy Attachment [5.1.2]*. Both policies were adopted in March 2022 and April 2021 respectively. Both policies have had administrative reviews conducted and sections either updated or created to ensure they compliant with legal requirements and sector leading practices.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Adopt the updated Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy as per attachment [5.1.3]; and**
- 2. Adopt the updated Councillor, Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy as per attachment [5.1.4].**

REPORT

A recent internal audit report into Councillor Compliance recommended that Council review both the *Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy* and *Councillor, Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy*.

As part of the review into the *Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy* and *Councillor, Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy*, Council Officers undertook benching marking against other Councils to ensure Council's policies were inline within sector norms and practices.

Proposed Changes to Policies

Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy

The *Council Support and Expenditure Policy* has had an administrative review conducted (updating of titles or removal of references to outdated acts or regulations etc) and several sections have been updated or added:

- *Updated - Section 3.18 - Payment of Councillor Allowance* - Payment of the Councillor Allowances are to be paid on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month for the current month and this is to take effect from November 2024.
- *Removed – Mayoral Office – All Councillors are provided access to the Councillor lounge as per Section 3.40.*
- *Updated – Section 3.22 - Mayoral Vehicle – A Mayoral vehicle can be provided for full Council and private use restricted to within the Shire boundary. The Mayoral vehicle will be insured, maintained and allocated a fuel card by Council.*
- *Updated – Section 3.48 - Reimbursement of reasonable meal expenses* - Reasonable meal expenses are to be capped at the ATO rate for meal allowances (*Reasonable amounts for domestic travel expenses – employee’s annual salary \$143,650 or less*) and alcoholic beverages are unable to be reimbursed.
- *New – Section 3.56 - Reimbursement of the fee for Working with Children Check (WWCC)* - Currently Councillors are not required to obtain a WWCC to undertake their role. But in keeping with Council’s commitment to the implementation of the Child Safe Standards, this could be seen as removing a barrier for Councillors to obtain a WWCC.
- *Updated – Section 3.108 - Childcare Fees Reimbursement* – For days in which Councillors have regularly scheduled briefings or meetings such as Wednesdays. If Council cancels or does not hold a briefing or meeting on the regular scheduled briefing or meeting day, a Councillor can be reimbursed for any charges they are required to pay to their childcare service for holding of the allocated position at the childcare service for their child on that day, only if the child does not attend childcare service on that day. This updated wording acknowledges the commercial requirements of childcare providers and ensures Councillors are not out pocket for childcare which would have been provided for the Councillor to conduct Council business. This would further strengthen Council’s commitment in relation to gender equality
- *New - Section 3.125 - Unable to Reimbursement Any Item Twice* – New section to provide clarity that Councillors are unable to be reimbursed for any item listed in this Policy if they have already been reimbursed by their employer or any other third party for the said item.

Councillor, Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy

The Councillor, Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy has had an administrative review conducted (updating of titles etc) and one new section has been added:

- *New – section 3.11.* - To support the intent and expectations of the policy by including information relating to gifts offered or received by family members as defined under the *Local Government Act 2020* which may give raise actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest or reputational risk to Council must be declared.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was undertaken as these policies relate directly to Councillors. Benchmarking against other Councils was undertaken.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

All changes and current requirements of the policies can be managed within existing allocated budgets.

RISKS

To manage risks effectively, Council policies should be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure they are compliant with legal requirements and sector leading practices.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Current - C51 Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy - Adopted 16 March 2022 [5.1.1 - 18 pages]
2. Current - C01 Councillor Gifts Benefits and Hospitality Policy - Adopted 21 April 2021 [5.1.2 - 17 pages]
3. Proposed Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy C51 21 (1) [5.1.3 - 15 pages]
4. Proposed Councillor Gifts Benefits and Hospitality Policy (1) [5.1.4 - 14 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy (C51)

Legislative Provisions

Local Government Act 2020

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

Nil

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

COUNCIL POLICYSouth Gippsland
Shire Council**COUNCILLOR SUPPORT & EXPENDITURE POLICY**

Policy No.	C51	Adoption Date:	Council Meeting 16 March 2022	
Revision Date:	March 2026			
Directorate:	Performance & Innovation	Department:	Governance Team	
GOOD GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES				
Supporting Pillar:	Pillar 6 - Capability			
Link to Pillar:	The level of support as detailed in the Policy supports the Mayor, Councillors and members of Delegated Committees to fulfil their civic duties.			

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the *Councillor Support & Expenditure Policy (C51)* (the Policy) is to provide guidance for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and the provision of facilities and resources support for Councillors and members of Council Delegated Committees.
- 1.2. The Policy outlines the responsibilities of claiming out-of-pocket expenses and that the payment or reimbursement must only be for the actual cost incurred while carrying out legitimate Council business. It is not for the time and effort spent in performing these duties.
- 1.3. The Policy is written to meet sections 41, 42 and 43 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (2020 Act).

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. The scope of this Policy applies to current elected Councillors of South Gippsland Shire Council in the performance of their duties as a Councillor and appointed as the Council representative on South Gippsland Shire Council Delegated Committees or Joint Delegated Committees (2020 Act, s.63).
- 2.2. Councillor duties are those performed by a councillor as a necessary part of their role, in achieving the objectives of Council.
- 2.3. These duties may include (but are not limited to):
 - 2.3.1. attendance at meetings of council and its committees.
 - 2.3.2. attendance at briefing sessions, workshops, civic events or functions convened by council.



- 2.3.3. attendance at conferences, workshops and training programs related to the role of councillor, mayor or deputy mayor.
- 2.3.4. attendance at meetings, events or functions representing council duties in relation to constituents concerning council business.
- 2.4. Members of delegated committees exercise powers of Councillors, under delegation. This Policy also applies to those members in the course of undertaking their role as delegated committee members.
- 2.5. The Policy does not apply to external contractors, independent people, or volunteers appointed by Council to Council Committees that include, but not limited to, the Audit & Risk Committee, Chief Executive Officer Employment & Remuneration Committee, Community Asset Committees (2020 Act, s.65) or formally appointed Advisory Committees. These are each dealt with separately under terms of reference or other arrangements.

3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Role of Councillor

- 3.1. Councillors roles and responsibilities as prescribed in s.28(2) of the 2020 Act, sets out how Councillors are required to undertake their duties. The principles set out below require Councillors to:
 - 3.1.1. Consider the diversity of interest and needs within the municipality;
 - 3.1.2. Support the role of the Council;
 - 3.1.3. Acknowledge and support the role of the Mayor;
 - 3.1.4. Act lawfully and in accordance with the oath or affirmation of office;
 - 3.1.5. Act in accordance with the standards of conduct;
 - 3.1.6. Comply with Council procedures required for good governance; and
 - 3.1.7. Understand that the role of Councillor does not include the performance of any responsibilities or functions of the Chief Executive Officer.

Provision of Support and Recognition Principles

- 3.2. Council will specify the level of support determined as reasonable for South Gippsland Shire Councillors and Delegated Committee members. The level of support includes mandatory items such as reimbursement of bona-fide expenses, Council meeting facilities, support and resources, as prescribed in the regulations and guidelines provided by Local Government Victoria, as amended from time to time, and additional resource provision deemed acceptable by Council.
- 3.3. The principle of providing support and reimbursements of expenses to Councillors is derived from legislated requirements in ss.40 to 43 of the 2020 Act.



- 3.4. Minimum resources and facilities are prescribed for the purposes of supporting Mayors and Councillors in performing their duties as a Councillor.
- 3.5. The Policy is compliant with relevant legislation, consistent with Local Government Victoria's specified standards and it supports the attraction and retention of Councillors from a wide cross section of people.
- 3.6. The establishment of clear support and expenditure principles assists Councillors to perform their duties and seeks to encourage diversity in participation, equity and access by recognising that Councillors operate in a complex environment and bring unique skills and insights to the role that include:
 - 3.6.1. Diversity in participation and access to local representation contributes to well informed decision making involving the community;
 - 3.6.2. The role of Councillor should attract and retain a wide cross section of people, including those from under-represented groups;
 - 3.6.3. Councillors need to be accessible to a wide range of constituents and stay informed about issues in the community. These are an important part of the role and use of internet is essential to facilitate access;
 - 3.6.4. Councillors are supported in undertaking their duties by assuring that reimbursement of expenses and access to resources support are provided in an equitable manner to cater for the full participation of all Councillors in Council business and with their communities, while recognising individual needs and circumstances;
 - 3.6.5. Councillors are required to attend formal Council meetings and participate in community activities; and
 - 3.6.6. The Community, Council and the State Government require resources to be used judiciously within a rate capped environment setting an expectation of Council to tighten controls on spending on behalf of the community.

Encourage Accountability, Transparency and Community Acceptance

The principle to is Encourage Accountability, Transparency and Community Acceptance is upheld by:

- 3.7. Adopting and adhering to the Policy;
- 3.8. In addition to providing expenses reimbursement, adequately reflecting and using the allocated provision of resources and facilities entitlements available to a Mayor and Councillors;
- 3.9. Providing flexibility to determine what Council can afford to provide beyond the mandatory items mentioned under clause 4.3 of this Policy and what is acceptable to the community; and
- 3.10. Ensuring the details and range of benefits provided to Councillors by Council is clearly stated and fully transparent and acceptable to the local community.



Support local flexibility according to complexity, needs and standards

Councillors can support local flexibility according to complexity, needs and standards by recognising that:

- 3.11. It is a basic cost of governance to provide for the reimbursement of expenses necessarily incurred by Councillors in the performance of their duties;
- 3.12. Council has a responsibility to establish and define an appropriate and reasonable level of provision. This level will consider differences between councils and levels of complexity of councils indicated by population size and revenue base to enable Councillors to carry out their civic role;
- 3.13. This provision allows Council to conform to legislative and statutory requirements or accepted benchmarks and standards applied in the Sector.

No Disadvantage – Mayor and Councillors are provided reimbursements for expenses and costs of facilities and resource support in addition to allowances.

- 3.14. The provision of Mayoral and Councillor allowances are not a form of salary, but are legislated by the State Government under s.39 of the 2020 Act and in accordance with a determination of the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal under the *Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019*.

4. GUIDELINES – COUNCILLOR SUPPORT & EXPENDITURE

Councillor Induction

- 4.1. Councillors will be supported in their role through a comprehensive Councillor Induction Training Program, incorporating relevant sessions organised by Council staff and local government peak bodies. This Program is to be conducted within six months after the day the Councillor takes the oath or affirmation of office.
- 4.2. If a Councillor fails to participate fully and complete the Councillor Induction Training Program within this timeframe and does not make a written declaration in front of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as required by s.32(3) of the 2020 Act, an allowance of a Councillor is withheld until these actions by the Councillor is completed.

Councillor Allowances

- 4.3. Councillor allowances are paid in accordance with legislated requirements (including superannuation), with annual increases gazette by the Minister for Local Government.
- 4.4. South Gippsland Shire Council is a Category 2 Council as gazetted by the Minister for Local Government. Councillors will be paid the maximum level available under this Category 2, unless they individually choose to receive a lower or no allowance. Allowances are taxable incomes which will be paid monthly, in advance of the commencement of the month.



- 4.5. Payment will be made by electronic funds transfer, into an account authorised by the Councillor in writing by the Councillor.
- 4.6. Under s.39(5) of the 2020 Act, a Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Councillor may elect:
 - 4.6.1. to receive the entire allowance to which they are entitled; or
 - 4.6.2. to receive a specified part of the allowance to which they are entitled; or
 - 4.6.3. to receive no allowance.

Necessary Items for Support, Resources and Facilities

- 4.7. Administrative support for the Mayor.
- 4.8. Office for the Mayor.
- 4.9. Vehicle for the Mayor.
- 4.10. Computer - laptop and associated chargers for all Councillors.
- 4.11. Councillor accessible intranet (or equivalent) as part of Council's online environment (this will be provided through the laptop).
- 4.12. Council's online Portal – online accessibility to Council's agendas, minutes and briefing papers.
- 4.13. Mobile phone (and landline only if there is inadequate mobile coverage at a Councillor's normal residence).
- 4.14. Stationery.
- 4.15. Access to fax / copier / incidental printing (smallest number of pages possible) at Council offices, or for printing own copies of Council briefing papers, agendas and minutes. Any printing beyond this requirement requires the approval of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

As part of Council's Sustainability Strategy printing is encouraged to be kept to a minimum and undertaken at the Council offices where costs are the lowest. The Policy recognises from time to time a Councillor may need to utilise their own printing devices and therefore a small number of cartridges for monochromatic printing may be reimbursed annually.

Note: Council resources will not be provided for personalised Ward newsletters (as per Council's resolution on 27 April 2016).
- 4.16. Website development – provided in the form of a webpage containing Councillors' names, photos, contact details and associated links to facilitate participation and access between Councillors and the community.
- 4.17. A Council must indemnify and keep indemnified each Councillor, member of a Delegated Committee and member of a Community Asset Committee in accordance with s.43 of 2020 Act.



Resources Provided in addition to the Necessary Items

The following has been determined by Council to be in addition to the specific necessary items:

- 4.18. Councillors will be provided travel reimbursements for the use of their personal vehicles when used on Council required activities. Exceptional circumstances allow for a Council vehicle to be provided to Councillors when:
- 4.19. a pool car is required for short term requirements such as interstate travel or several Councillors are travelling together to one destination; or
- 4.20. the longer-term provision of a Council vehicle is required for a Councillor to be able to fulfil their civic functions; or
- 4.21. a Councillor is travelling an extensive distance each year (approximately 12,000+ kilometers per annum) whereby it will be more efficient to provide a Council vehicle, than provide travel reimbursements. This will also save extensive wear and tear on a Councillors' personal vehicle.
- 4.22. All Councillors will be issued with a logbook for the purpose of recording Council related travel including destination, purpose of trip, beginning and ending odometer readings and dates and the proportion of Council Business and private use.
- 4.23. The Councillor must ensure that the logbook is being updated daily when utilised for Council related business.
- 4.24. Catering is provided by Council's contracted caterer for Council business meeting dates. The type of catering will depend on the type of meeting, timing and attendees.
- 4.25. Car Parking Permit on Council premises. Allowing access to the Council offices on Council business days. The Permit is only valid on days that are nominated as Council business.
- 4.26. Access to office space and furniture in the form of Councillor's room.
- 4.27. Where available, use of meeting rooms owned and controlled by Council where a Councillor is in attendance.
- 4.28. For any Councillor with a disability, Council may resolve to provide reasonable additional facilities and expenses, which may be necessary for the performance of their duties.
- 4.29. Access to Council email and internet.
- 4.30. Internet at normal place of residence (where Council internet provision is not available through the laptop/mobile phone).
- 4.31. Business cards, name badges, including changeover with Mayor and Deputy Mayor titles, and a diary.



- 4.32. Council officer nominated to provide incidental (limited) support for Councillors for Council business requirements.
- 4.33. Incidental postage of Council related mail through Council's mail system. A copy of this postage will be kept by Council. Any postage beyond this requirement requires the approval of the Mayor.
- 4.34. Reimbursement of reasonable expenses necessarily incurred while entertaining visiting guests on behalf of Council or attending meetings, seminars or conferences (separate to accommodation and travel expenses) including the reasonable cost of drinks accompanying a meal.
- 4.35. The Council or Chief Executive Officer (CEO) must give approval prior to any such entertainment/ seminar/conference or meeting for which reimbursement will be sought, unless the Councillor is Council's nominated representative for the event concerned.
- 4.36. Payment and re-imbusement of course, conference and program fees incurred in undertaking training and development activities to acquire new, or to enhance existing skills required to assist a Councillor in performing their role as a Councillor, or to achieve wider Council goals. Any learning opportunities identified are to be approved by the CEO. Where appropriate, Councillors are encouraged to report the outcome of the activity to Council immediately upon completion of the activity.
- 4.37. Child care/family care to cover Council related meetings and functions in accordance with the defined level of provision (refer to item 4.5(5) Level of Provision for further information on child/dependent care and/or carer relationship.
- 4.38. Transcripts specifying sections required of a recorded Council meeting. Requests are to be made through the CEO.
- 4.39. Requests for Information and/or assistance from staff, beyond that provided in briefings and published on the Councillor Intranet, are to be made through the relevant Director and will be managed at the Director's discretion. Refer to *Councillor Access to Information Policy (C66)*.
- 4.40. Access to the Local Government Act 2020 and other legislation online at www.legislation.vic.gov.au.
- 4.41. Councillor Newsletter weekly bulletin of Council information, relevant publications, local and industry events and other general information published online through the Councillors' intranet (excluding publications in the second half of December and the month of January).



Level of Provision for Councillor Travel – Reimbursement of Private Vehicle Usage and Public Transport Costs

The level of provision for Councillor travel is only for:

- 4.42. Travel where the primary purpose of the trip is for legitimate and necessary Council business, including:
 - 4.42.1. Council Meetings and Briefings of Councillors;
 - 4.42.2. Delegated Committee Meetings of Council when the Councillor/Member is the nominated representative/ substitute;
 - 4.42.3. Regional meetings where the Councillor claiming reimbursement is Council's endorsed representative and travel is not paid/reimbursed by the regional organisation or meeting convenor;
 - 4.42.4. Other Nominated Committees where the Councillor has been appointed as Council's representative/substitute by Council, or otherwise by approval of the Mayor;
 - 4.42.5. Functions to which Councillors are invited by organisations and where there is a direct involvement of Council. (Note: costs associated with the attendance by spouses/partners must be paid by the relevant Councillor);
 - 4.42.6. Functions and events when requested by the Mayor to deputise for him/her;
 - 4.42.7. Inspections of properties and/or locations in regard to:
 - 4.42.7.1. matters in current briefings and/or Council agendas, or
 - 4.42.7.2. a community member with a relevant Council related matter; or
 - 4.42.7.3. for Ward related open public information stands; and
 - 4.42.7.4. that sufficient relevant details are to be specified on the claim form.
 - 4.42.8. Organised community meetings; and
 - 4.42.9. Organised training, conferences and sector networking meetings.

Level of Provision for Councillor Travel – Reimbursement of Mileage and other Travel Expenses

- 4.43. Kilometres are eligible to be claimed measured from (and to) the Councillors' place of residence, or from the journey's commencement (or end) point, whichever is the closest to the Council offices or designated meeting location.
- 4.44. Where a journey's originating (or end) point is further away than the Councillors usual place of residence, it is only the incremental portion that is to be claimed as Council business related.



- 4.45. Where personal and Council related travel are both being undertaken in a single journey, the Councillor is required to use their professional judgement to articulate kilometres that are predominantly attributable to the primary and secondary purpose of the journey.
- 4.46. For the sake of clarity, Councillors will not make a claim, nor will a claim be approved by the CEO, for travel where the primary reason for the travel is for private purposes and the Council related purpose is secondary and incidental.
- 4.47. Travel is to be taken by the shortest practical route.
- 4.48. Travel reimbursements per kilometre are the rates set by the Australian Taxation Office.
- 4.49. On and off-street car parking fees.
- 4.50. Does not include valet or personalised service parking where these costs are higher than other standard parking facilities available in close proximity.
- 4.51. Tolls maybe incurred including those associated with CityLink such as day passes or those transactions incurred as part of an existing personal e-tag account.
- 4.52. Taxi charges.
- 4.53. Public transport charges.

Note: All receipts and relevant details regarding the purpose, date and time of the meeting or function must be submitted with the reimbursement claim.

Note: Incidental travel is considered to be within 5 kilometres.

Councillor Vehicle Allocation and Usage

- 4.54. If an elected Councillor has a current drivers' licence but does not have an adequate private vehicle, the Councillor may be issued with a Council vehicle for Council related purposes as soon as practicable after the election.
- 4.55. Councillors who are not provided with a Council vehicle are able to book a car from the Council car pool to attend an event, conference/training or meeting, for the duration of one day, if required. A request to book a car is to be made through the Mayor and Councillors Support Officer a minimum of two days in advance.
- 4.56. No persons other than valid licensed Councillors or Council officers are authorised to drive the Council vehicle without prior approval from the Chief Executive Officer
- 4.57. The Council vehicle can only be used when the primary purpose of the trip is for Council business
- 4.58. There is no private use other than usage that is incidental to attending to Council business (for example if the incidental travel is a minor deviance from the intended route).
- 4.59. Vehicles are not to be used for supplementary / secondary income purposes.



- 4.60. Councillors allocated a Council vehicle are required to provide their log book to the Mayor and Councillors Support Officer every six months to enable calculation of the amount to be reimbursed for any private vehicle usage. This amount will be invoiced to the Councillor for payment. Any anomalies will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer for consideration or further action required
- 4.61. Reimbursement of accumulated incidental private travel back to Council is at the vehicle rate in accordance with the flat ATO rate as at 1 July for the current financial year. Councillors will be advised accordingly.
- 4.62. Smoking is prohibited in vehicles at all times
- 4.63. Animals are prohibited in the vehicles at all times
- 4.64. Drivers are required to obey all road rules, drive carefully by adjusting to the local conditions and not drive when their capacity to drive safely is impaired.
- 4.65. Council is not liable to pay any fine or cost incurred by a Driver of a Council vehicle, who infringes against Road Traffic Regulations, Local Laws of any municipality with respect to parking restrictions, or any other regulation in relation to the use of vehicles. Onus for payment of a fine or other costs rest with the offender.
- 4.66. The vehicle shall not be driven in areas where damage may be incurred due to unfavourable ground conditions or hidden obstructions. Drivers shall not drive vehicles on rough tracks or across unsuitable terrain.
- 4.67. A fuel card is provided with a dedicated pin number. If the Pin Number is not provided, the transaction will be cancelled and the Councillor will be required to pay for the fuel from their own expenses and seek reimbursement through provision of the Receipt to the Mayor and Councillor Support Officer.
- 4.68. Roadside assist numbers for each vehicle make is also located in the driver's manual.
- 4.69. The Councillor is to keep the vehicle clean and tidy, at all times and on return of the vehicle. This involves both the interior and exterior of the vehicle. This is always at the Councillors cost.
- 4.70. Councillors are responsible for ensuring the vehicle receives the scheduled services and warranty repairs (if required). This involves:
 - 4.70.1. regularly checked fuel, oil, water, battery, tyre pressure and road worthiness.
 - 4.70.2. scheduling a service with any authorised repairer and delivering the vehicle for service.
 - 4.70.3. forwarding the Invoice to the Mayor and Council Support Officer to arrange for payment.



- 4.71. Councillors are required to report any damage, tyre repair or replacement, or maintenance requirements of the vehicle to the Coordinator Plant and Fleet and the Risk Officer.
- 4.72. Councillors shall ensure the vehicle is parked in a secure 'off the street' location, locked when unattended and no valuables or equipment left in the vehicles.
- 4.73. Council vehicles will be insured under a comprehensive policy covering vehicles, drivers, passengers and damage to third parties. Certain circumstances and actions may result in the policy being declared null and void whereby the driver may become personally liable for damages, including:
- 4.73.1. unlicensed drivers,
 - 4.73.2. drivers under the influence of drugs or alcohol,
 - 4.73.3. drivers breaking the road laws or regulations.
- 4.74. Personal belongings / valuables are not covered under Council's Policy in the event that they are damaged or stolen.
- 4.75. A Councillor in charge or using a Council owned vehicle that is involved in an accident or incident giving rise to a possible claim must:
- 4.75.1. Stop and provide assistance by calling emergency services if required. Police must be notified if someone is injured. Collect insurance, driver and license details of any other party involved and submit these to the Risk Officer.
 - 4.75.2. Not drive the vehicle if it is unroadworthy;
 - 4.75.3. Not incur or admit liability in the event of an accident, nor offer promise of payment.
 - 4.75.4. Immediately or as soon as is reasonably practical, notify Council's Risk Officer so that Council's Insurer receives adequate and appropriate advice of a claim or possible claim;
 - 4.75.5. Refrain from admitting liability in any matter as this will enable Council's Insurer to assess and consider an appropriate non-prejudiced response.
 - 4.75.6. Towing / salvage services from the accident site to the nearest GIO recommended repairer (currently Burchells panels 5662 3346) are covered under Council insurance. Any "Authority to Tow" form provided by a towing company is to be completed and a copy forwarded to Council's Risk Officer.
 - 4.75.7. The Councillor is to report an accident or any minor incidents to Council's Risk Officer and Coordinator Plant and Fleet, as soon as possible after the event, and complete an incident form.
- 4.76. The right to drive and / or access a Council vehicle will cease:



- 4.76.1. Upon the suspension, or expiry of the term of office, ouster removal or resignation of a Councillor;
- 4.76.2. Any Councillor not running for re-election shall return their Council provided vehicle at the conclusion of their duties, but not later than 6am on Election Day;
- 4.76.3. Councillors running for re-election shall retain their Council provided vehicle until their election is confirmed;
- 4.76.4. Councillors standing for State or Federal government elections shall return their Council vehicle during the nomination and election period; and
- 4.76.5. Councillors lose their licence, if there is a breach of the Councillor allocation and usage components of this Policy, or determined by the Chief Executive Officer that the provision of a vehicle should be withdrawn.

Level of Provision for Councillor Travel – Interstate and Overseas

- 4.77. Discretionary interstate trips, interstate travel and attendance at interstate conferences in relation to Council business, requires approval of the CEO prior to the event.
- 4.78. Overseas travel in relation to Council business requires approval by resolution of Council prior to the event.
- 4.79. Overseas travel in relation to Council business requires approval by resolution of Council prior to the event.
- 4.80. Air travel will be by economy class with bookings and payment to be made by Council.
- 4.81. Councillors must, within seven days after the completion of a trip, record the following details in Council's Local Government register:
 - 4.81.1. Councillor Name;
 - 4.81.2. Destination;
 - 4.81.3. Date/s of travel;
 - 4.81.4. Purpose of travel; and
 - 4.81.5. Total cost to the Council including accommodation costs.
- 4.82. As per clause 12 of the *Local Government (General) Regulations 2015* requires Council to maintain a register for public inspection of details and costs relating to overseas and interstate travel undertaken by Councillors (with the exception of interstate travel by land for less than three days) *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.
- 4.83. It is expected that a Councillor will provide a full report of the outcomes of their travel to the next meeting of the Council after the travel occurs.



- 4.84. International use of mobile phones or electronic data connections on iPad/tablet, including associated roaming charges, requires CEO approval prior to departure and expenditure is limited to a maximum of \$600 for the entire trip. Councillors must minimise these costs by turning the phone off except when making a call and using SMS messaging to keep costs as low as possible. Expenses incurred over \$600 are to be paid by the Councillor.
- 4.85. Councillors where possible are to use free wi-fi internet to minimise data costs to Council.

Level of Provision for Accommodation

- 4.86. Accommodation for conferences and overnight requirements to attend meetings is limited to a maximum of four-star level only if a suitable three-star accommodation is not available.
- 4.87. The difference in cost is to be paid by the Councillor where accommodation is sought at a higher standard than the available 3-star (4 star by exception) standard.

Level of Provision for Child Care and Carers in a Carer and Dependent Relationship Provisions

- 4.88. As per s.41(c)(d) and s.42(2)(b) of the 2020 Act, Council is to provide reimbursements for child care costs and expenses incurred by a Councillor who is a carer of a dependent in a care relationship (within the meaning of section 4 of the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*).

The following reimbursements criteria apply to either child care and/or carer relationship:

- 4.89. Child care / family care – expenses reimbursed for the care of a dependant whilst the Councillor is engaged in Council duties, such as attending a Council related meeting or event, plus reasonable travel time.
- 4.90. Where the care relates to dependent adults, the CEO must be satisfied that the expense is appropriate.
- 4.91. Family care expenses include hourly fees paid by the Councillor and/or agency booking fees where applicable.
- 4.92. The following will be eligible for the purposes of child/dependent care and/or carer relationship reimbursement:
- 4.92.1. Council Meetings and Assemblies of Councillors.
 - 4.92.2. Delegated Committee Meetings of Council when the Councillor is the nominated representative/substitute.
 - 4.92.3. Regional meetings where the Councillor claiming reimbursement is Council's endorsed representative and child/dependent and/or carer



relationship care is not paid/reimbursed by the regional organisation or meeting convenor.

- 4.92.4. Other Nominated Committees where the Councillor has been appointed as Council's representative/substitute by Council, or otherwise by approval of the Mayor;
- 4.92.5. Functions to which Councillors are invited by organisations (attendance by spouses/partners must be paid by the Councillors) and where there is a direct involvement of Council.
- 4.92.6. Functions to which Councillors are invited by organisations (attendance by spouses/partners must be paid by the Councillors) and where there is a direct involvement of Council.
- 4.92.7. The purpose, destination, subject matter, date and time are required to be provided to support the claim.
- 4.92.8. Approved training, conferences and seminars.
- 4.92.9. Travel reimbursements to deliver and pick up a child (children) from the child care provider.

No payments will be made to a person who:

- 4.93. Has a financial or pecuniary relationship with the Councillor; or
- 4.94. Resides either permanently or temporarily with the Councillor, except where a live-in/professional helper such as a nanny or nurse is required to work additional time at extra expense because of the Councillors duties. In these occurrences the extra payment can be claimed; or
- 4.95. Has a relationship with the Councillor or his or her partner, such that it would be inappropriate for Council to reimburse monies paid to the Care Provider.

Other Related Acts and Requirements

- 4.96. Councillors must disclose any disclosable gift that is given to them as per s.128(4), s.137(1) and s.138 of the 2020 Act. Gifts to Councillors must also be disclosed and recorded in Council's gift register via the support officer to the CEO. Refer to Council's *Acceptance of Gifts & Donations Policy (C01)* (or equivalent once adopted) for further guidance on disclosing gifts and the value of gifts.
- 4.97. Council must consider the support that may be required for a Councillor because of a disability as per s.42(a) of the 2020 Act. For any Councillor with a disability, Council may resolve to provide reasonable additional facilities and expenses, which may be necessary for the performance of their duties. Council is to follow the *Disability Act 2006*.
- 4.98. Councillors are to abide by Occupational Health and Safety requirements and Council's Occupational Health and Safety Policy (CE78) when undertaking their



duties of office. A Councillor injured while carrying out their duties may be entitled to claim workers compensation under the Accident Compensation Act 1985.

- 4.99. To ensure the safety of Councillors, Officers and members of the public and continuance of Council meetings and briefings, Councillors are required to comply with the same restrictions, mandatory requirements and Covid Safe plans that staff are required to adhere to.

Limitations on Resource Usage

- 4.100. A Councillor should seek authorisation from the Council through the Mayor prior to using public funds or resources for any purpose that is not a standard/regular practice or likely to incur expenditure that may not be deemed an acceptable use by the broader community (*Source: Council resolution 27 April 2016*).

Internal/External Audit Review of Claims

- 4.101. Support provided under the Policy will be subject to review by the internal Audit and Risk Committee on an annual, or as requested, basis.
- 4.102. The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) may also request to review claims for reimbursement by Councillors, as part of the review of Council's financial management.

Transparency on Expenditure and Reimbursements

- 4.103. The annual expenditure on Councillors' allowances and reimbursements will be reported in accordance with legislated requirements in the Annual Report.
- 4.104. The broader 'Costs of Elected Representation' will be reported annually in accordance with the regulated Local Government Performance Reporting Framework indicator requirements and published on the State Government's 'Know Your Council' website for comparative and transparency purposes.

Procedure for Reimbursement of Claims

- 4.105. This section outlines the timeframes and procedures for reimbursement of claims. As per s.40 of the 2020 Act, Councillors will only claim reimbursements for reasonable, bona fide out-of-pocket expenses incurred while performing the role and duties of Councillor.

Reimbursements

- 4.106. Councillors are responsible for retaining and submitting all relevant documentation (receipts and invoices) for their reimbursement claims;
- 4.107. To ensure transparency and accurate recording, all reimbursements will be paid directly into the Councillor's nominated bank account. A remittance of payment will be provided to the Councillor.

**Forms and Receipts**

- 4.108. Claims must be made on the appropriate Council claim form with supporting documentation including GST receipts and invoices and the dates purchased. The claim forms are required to be signed by the Councillor;
- 4.109. A Councillor claiming for private vehicle use and mileage is responsible for keeping a travel log. This travel log is to be submitted at the end of each month.
- 4.110. All claims must be submitted to the Mayor and Councillors Support Officer.

Timeframe for Submitting Claims

- 4.111. Councillors must submit claims within seven (7) days of the end of each month.
- 4.112. Claims that are submitted after seven (7) days are considered late and will be referred to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to determine if extenuating circumstances for late submissions are reasonable. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor will advise the CEO if these circumstances are acceptable or not for payment determination. They will also advise the Councillor accordingly.
- 4.113. If the claims relate to the Mayor then these will be referred to the Deputy Mayor and the most recent previous Mayor to consider and advise accordingly. (Note: the CEO retains the financial delegation to authorise payments and/or seek further information to support claims made).
- 4.114. At the end of each Financial Year all claims, must be submitted to the support officer to the CEO and Mayor for authorisation by 7 July (within seven (7) days of the end of the financial year), so that they can be paid in the year in which they were incurred.
- 4.115. Late payments received after this date for the end of each Financial year are to be referred to Council as a report to Council, ideally in the July meeting as this approval for payment is in the next financial year to when it was incurred.

Reimbursement Authorisation

- 4.116. Claims that appear to lack clear alignment with Council related purposes will be referred to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to determine before payment can be approved.
- 4.117. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor will advise the Councillor accordingly. If the claims relate to the Mayor then these will be referred to the Deputy Mayor and the most recent previous Mayor to determine and advise the CEO/Mayor accordingly.
- 4.118. CEO will designate Council officers in respect of reimbursement and other expense transaction processes referred to in the Policy.



Reimbursement of Claims in an Election Year

- 4.119. In an election year of Council, all claims for reimbursement are to be submitted to Council prior to the commencement date of a Council Election Period. As defined in s.3 of the 2020 Act an Election Period means the period that:
- 4.119.1. Starts at the time that nominations close on nomination; and
 - 4.119.2. Ends at 6pm on Election Day.
- 4.120. All equipment provided by Council under the Policy must be returned to Council at the end of a Councillor's term of office.
- 4.121. Council resources are not to be used for any electioneering purposes.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

This Policy mitigates Council's risks as described below:

People

- 5.1. This Policy enables Council to demonstrate its commitment to openness and transparency by articulating requirements that are considered by Council to be necessary and reasonable for Councillors to claim as bona-fide out-of-pocket expenses

Reputational

- 5.2. The Policy enables Council, Councillors and Council staff to understand misuse of Council resources (fraud) and reputational risk is minimised by providing:
- 5.2.1. Consistency with current legislation;
 - 5.2.2. Adequate support to Councillors to carry out their responsibilities effectively;
 - 5.2.3. Approval requirements for resource usage beyond the levels of mandatory and general incidental use;
 - 5.2.4. Transparency and accountability in respect to payments made and expenditure incurred to/by Councillors; and
 - 5.2.5. The Policy builds Community confidence and public trust in Council to be maintained or improved.

Governance

- 5.3. This Policy allows Council to address matters that are not explicitly captured in the Local Government Act 2020 and, when followed will mitigate the likelihood of any breaches of the *Local Government Act 2020*.



6. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

Human Rights Charter

6.1. This Policy has considered the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* in its development.

Gender Equality

6.2. This Policy has considered the *Gender Equality Act 2020* in its development.

Roles and Responsibilities

6.3. Councillors are responsible for ensuring they use Council resources responsibly and efficiently, being mindful not to use Council support and resources for personal use.

6.4. The Chief Executive Office is responsible for supporting Councillors in their roles and providing the approved level of support and resources contained within this Policy.

7. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

7.1. This Policy will be reviewed and adopted by Council on a four-year cycle.

8. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Legislative Provisions	Carers Recognition Act 2012 Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 Freedom of Information Act 1982 Gender Equality Act 2020 Local Government Act 1989 Local Government Act 2020 Local Government (General) Regulations 2015 Freedom of Information Act 1982 Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019
Council Supporting Documents	Acceptance of Gifts & Donations Policy (C01) Councillor Access to Information Policy (C66) Occupational Health and Safety Policy (CE78)

9. DEFINITIONS

Carer	A carer is defined under s.4 of the <i>Carers Recognition Act 2012</i> .
Councillor	A person who holds the office of member of a Council.
Delegated Committee	Defined under the Local Government Act 2020, s.63 Delegated committees: (1) A delegated committee established by a Council— (a) must include at least 2 Councillors; and (b) may include any other persons appointed to the delegated committee by the Council who are entitled to vote.

10. REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Sections Modified	CM9 Ref#
2.0	Council	16 March 2022	Revised Policy following introduction of new Council.	D399122



COUNCILLOR GIFTS, BENEFITS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY (C01)

Policy Number	CO1	Directorate	Performance & Innovation
Council Meeting	21 April 2021	Department	Governance
Meeting Item No.	4.4	Primary Author	Coordinator Council Business
Next Review Date	April 2025		

GOOD GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – COUNCILLOR GIFTS, BENEFITS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY

Overarching Principle

This Policy provides guidance in the management and declaration of gifts provided to Councillors and supports Council's governance and risk framework that protects and promotes public confidence in the honesty and integrity of the Council.

This Policy is an integral part of the Structure, Systems and Policies pillar of the Good Governance Framework and outlines responsibility of a Councillor in declaring the receiving of gifts and donations.

1. PURPOSE

South Gippsland Shire Council is committed to ensuring that Councillors act with integrity and honesty when performing their duties and while attending functions as Council representatives.

The Policy states South Gippsland Shire Council's position on:

- Responding to offers of gifts, benefits and hospitality; and
- Providing gifts, benefits and hospitality
- Donations.

The acceptance of these types of gifts can create perceptions that a Councillor's integrity has been compromised. Councillors are required to declare the acceptance of gifts and donations to avoid putting themselves in a position which is likely to create a general or material conflict of interest whether real or perceived.

The aim of the *Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy (CO1)* (the Policy) is to provide clear guidelines to ensure Councillors are not compromised in the performance of their duties by accepting gifts or benefits (immediate or for the future) which may result in a sense of obligation, or could be interpreted as an attempt to influence. This helps to protect and promote public confidence in the honesty and integrity of the Council.

Further, the Policy provides a way of meeting the high level of community expectations in respect of transparency and accountability, by the proper recording of significant gifts and donations made to Councillors in a public register.



The Policy has been developed in accordance with s.138 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) that requires Council to adopt a Councillor Gift Policy and ss.128(3)(h) and 128(4) that requires a Councillor to declare a conflict of interest because of receipt of a 'disclosable gift'.

The Policy should be read in conjunction with the Act and associated regulations. Particular requirements apply to s.137 of the Act relating to 'anonymous gifts' and ss. 306 and 309 relating to election campaign donations. The Policy should be read in conjunction with each of these sections of the Act and as an aid to achieving best practice and avoidance of any real or perceived conflict of interest.

2. SCOPE

This Policy applies to all Councillors of South Gippsland Shire Council.

The Policy sets out the standards, procedures and responsibilities of Councillors for responding to gift or donation offers.

3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

The *Councillor Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy (CO1)* is based on transparency and integrity principles that apply to every person in public office, that they should avoid putting themselves in positions which are likely to create a general or material conflict of interest, whether real or perceived. This means that Councillors do not seek or accept gifts from people where the receipt of the gift is likely to create any perception of a conflict of interest with their public duty.

It is preferable that no gifts be accepted at all by Councillors, although Councillors are not prohibited from accepting gifts. The Policy requires that Councillors should avoid accepting gifts from people they know, or reasonably expect, will have dealings with the Council, and when it is possible that as a Councillor they may be called upon to deal with these people in their official capacity. Examples may include developers, community groups, real estate agents, suppliers and contractors (including potential), or other parties that may need to deal with Council at some stage.

Not accepting gifts from people and organisations that Councillors have dealings with in an official capacity, can avoid the following consequences:

- a. The impression that the recipient is using their position for personal gain, rather than to serve the community; which reflects badly on the recipient and on the Council.
- b. It is likely to prevent the recipient from undertaking duties that the recipient has been elected, appointed or reimbursed to perform, which may lead to a failing of responsibilities.
- c. Accepting a gift may constitute, or appear to constitute, a misuse of position or acceptance of a secret commission, which are serious offences under the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Crimes Act 1958* respectively.

The key principles are:

1. **Obligations:** Councillors act in accordance with their respective obligations with good governance.



2. **Public interest:** Councillors have a duty to act in the public interest above their private interests when carrying out their official functions, in compliance with this Policy.
3. **Culture of integrity:** South Gippsland Shire Council fosters a culture of integrity with Councillors declaring all gifts.
4. **Risk-based:** The Council's risk in relation to gift offers are assessed, managed and monitored.
5. **Accountability:** The Council's procedures are transparent and accountable. Councillors are accountable for declaring accepted gifts and declined gifts, or where an exception applies under this Policy.

3.1 Gift Acceptance and Refusal

In accordance with the key principles of this Policy before deciding whether to accept an offer, Councillors should first consider if the offer could be perceived as influencing them in performing their duties or lead to reputational damage. The more valuable the offer, the more likely that a conflict of interest or reputational risk exists.

A Councillor is required to check the *Local Government Act 2020*, s.128(3)(h) and s.128(4) to determine if they are required to declare a material conflict of interest because of receipt of an 'disclosable gift' in any matter where a conflict may be relevant.

The Council Gift Register is to be used to record all gifts, whether accepted, declined, or given to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Council's use, on the *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*

Developed by the Victorian Public Sector Commission, the GIFT test is a good example of what to think about when deciding whether to accept or decline a gift, benefit or hospitality.

G	Giver	<p>Who is providing the gift, benefit or hospitality and what is their relationship to me? Does my role require me to select contractors, award grants, regulate industries or determine government policies? Could the person or organisation benefit from a decision I make?</p>
I	Influence	<p>Are they seeking to gain an advantage or influence my decisions or actions? Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered to me publicly or privately? Is it a courtesy or a token of appreciation or valuable non-token offer? Does its timing coincide with a decision I am about to make?</p>
F	Favour	<p>Are they seeking a favour in return for the gift, benefit or hospitality? Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered honestly? Has the person or organisation made several offers over the last 12 months? Would accepting it create an obligation to return a favour?</p>
T	Trust	<p>Would accepting the gift, benefit or hospitality diminish public trust? How would the public view acceptance of this gift, benefit or hospitality? What would my colleagues, family, friends or associates think?</p>



3.2 Acceptable Gifts

3.2.1 Non-token Gifts valued at \$50 or more, including aggregates

Councillors are allowed to accept some gifts; however, they should avoid compromising their ability to act independently by accepting gifts individually, or accumulatively within a financial year that have a monetary value of \$50 or more.

Fifty dollars is the Victorian public sector industry-based standard for non-token offers of benefits, gifts or hospitality that may be perceived to be by the recipient, the person making the offer or by the wider community, of more than consequential value.

All offers worth \$50 or more are non-token offers. Regardless whether they are accepted or declined, they must be declared and submitted to the Executive Office to include in Council's Gifts Register. This is to ensure that the combined aggregated total of offers made from a single source in the last five years does not exceed the gift disclosure threshold of \$500.

While permissible to be retained, Councillors acting in good faith are encouraged to refuse, or dispose to the CEO gift offers that have an aggregate value of \$50 or more that:

- a. Are likely to influence them, or would be perceived to influence them, in the course of their duties; or
- b. Have no legitimate business benefit.

While Councillors are able to accept gifts of \$50 or more, they are encouraged to hand over the gift to the CEO to utilise for Council related purposes.

3.2.2. Gestures and Token Gift Offers

Councillors are allowed to accept gestures that are token gift offers, benefits and hospitality, without approval or declaring the offer on the South Gippsland Shire Council's Gift Register if the value, or aggregate value is under \$50.

An example of a gesture is an object with no monetary value such as flowers cut from the person's garden or homemade baked goods.

A gesture may also be a souvenir received from a person or company as a result of attending a seminar or conference held, conducted or sponsored by them, for which an appropriate fee was paid to attend. An example of this is a tie, pen or mug.

Door prizes and raffle prizes at functions or conferences are not considered a gift if the individual has personally paid for their attendance, or where the individual has paid for the raffle ticket.

Reasonable hospitality does not need to be declared. Refer to the section Definitions of this Policy for Hospitality for greater details.

If a Councillor is repetitively offered gestures that accumulatively equate to \$50 or more in a 12-month period, these are to be recorded in Council's Gift Register once a \$50 value is reached.



3.2.3 Disclosable Gifts – restrictions apply

While Councillors may accept 'disclosable gifts', Council discourages this act.

A 'disclosable gift' for the purposes of declaring a material conflict of interest and determining if such a gift may be accepted is defined in s.128(4) as follows:

*“For the purposes of subsection (3)(h), **disclosable gift** means one or more gifts with a total value of, or more than, \$500 or if an amount is prescribed for the purposes of this subsection, the prescribed amount, received from a person in the 5 years preceding the decision on the matter—*

- (a) *if the relevant person held the office of Councillor, was a member of Council staff or was a member of a delegated committee at the time the gift was received; or*
- (b) *if the gift was, or gifts were, or will be, required to be disclosed as an election campaign donation—*

but does not include the value of any reasonable hospitality received by the relevant person at an event or function that the relevant person attended in an official capacity as a Councillor, member of Council staff or member of a delegated committee.”

The acceptance of any gifts over the aggregated value of \$500 or more (accumulative in the past 5 years or as a single gift) should be declined to avoid placing a Councillor in the position of having a potential Conflict of Interest in any matter involving the affected person (gift giver) in the future.

3.3 Prohibited Gifts

Any gift that is inconsistent with community values and could bring a Councillor's integrity, or that of the Council into disrepute must be declined.

All Councillors must refuse the following gift offers:

3.3.1 Anonymous Gifts

An 'anonymous gift' is prohibited and must not to be accepted by a Councillor as per s.137 of the Act:

“Section 137 Local Government Act 2020 - anonymous gift not to be accepted

1. *Subject to subsection (2), a Councillor must not accept, directly or indirectly, a gift for the benefit of the Councillor the amount or value of which is equal to or exceeds the gift disclosure threshold unless—*
 - (a) *the name and address of the person making the gift are known to the Councillor; or*
 - (b) *at the time when the gift is made—*
 - (i) *the Councillor is given the name and address of the person making the gift; and*



- (ii) *the Councillor reasonably believes that the name and address so given are the true name and address of the person making the gift.*

Penalty: 60 penalty units.

2. *If the name and address of the person making the gift are not known to the Councillor for whose benefit the gift is intended, the Councillor is not in breach of subsection (1) if the Councillor disposes of the gift to the Council within 30 days of the gift being received.*
3. *In addition to the penalty specified in subsection (1), a Councillor who is found guilty of a breach of that subsection must pay to the Council the amount or value of the gift accepted in contravention of that subsection.”*

If for any reason a Councillor finds themselves in possession of a gift when they don't know the name and address of the person who gave the gift, the Councillor can give the gift to the Council within 30 days to avoid committing an offence.

3.3.2 Gifts that create a Conflict of Interest

Councillors must not accept a gift that creates a conflict of interest (real, potential or perceived).

Note that a person from whom a Councillor has received a 'disclosable gift' is determined to be an 'affected person' under s.128(h) for the purposes of declaring a material conflict of interest.

A conflict of interest, created through receipt of a gift, denies all other community members of the right to be represented by their Councillor on particular matters coming before Council.

A conflict formed this way may also result in a Councillor unduly influencing other Councillors on how to vote for a certain issue. This is a misuse of position.

These actions undermine the integrity of individual Councillors and the trust of the community in Council.

3.3.3 Money or equivalent

Councillors must not accept money in any form. This includes gift cards (e.g. gift vouchers), or those easily converted into money (e.g. shares).

3.3.4 Regulatory processes

A Councillor must not accept any gifts from any individual or group that may be involved with the permit application or regulatory activity where a Council regulatory process, or legal matter is underway, or coming up (e.g. a planning permit application; infringement appeal or claim against Council).

3.3.5 Bequests/Wills

Any bequests to Councillors resulting from their position with Council must not be accepted. Arrangements may be made to donate the bequest to a charitable institution in the name of the donor or returned to the immediate family.



3.3.6 Reward Programs

Councillors must not collect rewards for personal use via reward points program for any Council related transactions (i.e. fly buys or frequent flyers). This relates to any claims for reimbursement of expenses incurred in accordance with the *Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy (C51)*.

3.3.7 Procurement and Tender Process

Councillors must not accept any gifts from a current or prospective supplier/contractor or any offer that is made during a procurement or tender process by a person or organisation involved in the process.

Where gifts are received, offered or there are irregular approaches from suppliers, the Councillor must notify the Mayor and CEO and lodge a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*, so their refusal/action can be properly recorded.

Councillors must not visit a current supplier's premises without invitation. If a visit is required, the Councillor is to request a Senior Officer attend with them.

3.3.8 Hospitality

Gift offers of hospitality that exceed common courtesy must be refused as they are often inconsistent with community expectations and have a high risk of creating a conflict of interest. Examples of gift offers of hospitality that exceed common courtesy include:

- a. Attending as a guest in a corporate box at the football or races
- b. Attending a concert or theatre event
- c. Attending an industry golf day at a reduced fee
- d. Being 'shouted' a meal at a restaurant or sporting club
- e. Accepting discounted or complimentary tickets for a family member to attend the tennis

3.3.9 Conferences

Gift offers in relation to conferences (sponsored attendance, participation, travel or accommodation) must be declined, unless there is:

- a. Clear justification, such as where the invitation is issued by a government department or the offeror is a peak body, and
- b. Prior written approval granted by the CEO (Mayor for Councillors, CEO for Mayor) or another responsible person. The signed and dated approval must be attached to the gift offer declaration and noted in Council's Gifts Register.



3.3.10 Future Benefit

Councillors are prohibited from accepting any offering in any form, to any value, that may be perceived to be a suggestion or guarantee of a future benefit to the Councillor or any other person.

This includes any benefits that may be derived either during or after a Councillor finishes their term of office. Some examples include the assurance of future employment, services provided at a nil or substantially reduced value, beneficial property dealings, bank transfers or contract opportunities.

These will be treated as a fraudulent action and will be dealt with in accordance with Council's *Fraud and Corrupt Conduct Policy (C19)*, or as a criminal matter to be dealt with by the Police depending on the circumstances.

Any offers of this kind must be publicly declared and disclosed to the CEO, who will consider the offer in line with Council's *Fraud and Corrupt Conduct Policy (C19)*.

3.3.11 Attempts to Bribe

A Councillor who receives a gift offer that they believe is an attempted bribe must refuse the offer. They must:

- a. Immediately notify the CEO and lodge a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*, so their refusal can be properly recorded; and
- b. Report the matter to the CEO or Public Interest Disclosure Officer who should report any criminal or corrupt conduct to Victoria Police or the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

3.3.12 Endorsement of a product or service

A Councillor must not accept a gift, service, benefit or hospitality that could be perceived to be an endorsement of a product or service and will bring the individual or Council into disrepute;

3.4 Consequences of accepting prohibited gifts

Accepting a prohibited gift may constitute misuse of a Councillor's position. A breach of this Policy may result in serious misconduct allegations for Councillors. In addition, if the gift was offered with the expectation of something in return either immediately or in the future, such as preferential treatment, accepting it may constitute a bribe or other form of corruption and lead to criminal prosecution.

3.5 Recording and reporting prohibited gift offers

To assist the Council in monitoring the frequency and nature of prohibited gifts, it is essential that all such offers are disclosed and notified as declined in Council's Gifts Register. Councillors must lodge a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* and details of the gift to be included in Council's Gift Register.

A Councillor who believes another person within the Council may have solicited or been offered a bribe which they have not reported, must notify the CEO or report the matter as a public interest disclosure in accordance with Council's Public Interest Disclosure Procedures.



3.6 No Soliciting of Gifts or Secret Deals

Councillors must not solicit gifts, benefits, hospitality or secret deals for themselves or anyone else, in any form. To do so may constitute misuse of their position. It may also constitute corruption and lead to criminal prosecution.

3.7 Donations and Bequests of Gifts to Council

South Gippsland Shire Council may be offered or bequeathed gifts or donations. Such gifts include:

- a. Real property
- b. Donations
- c. Art work
- d. Free Training & Services

South Gippsland Shire Council does not encourage and will not automatically accept a gift or donation. Given the potential for a vast range in terms of quality, relevance and the ongoing responsibility and maintenance requirements, Council reserves the right to decline the offer.

In relation to Bequests, consideration will be given to:

- a. The expressed wishes and intentions of the bequestor, as outlined in the will, are paramount in determining the purpose for which the gift will be used.
- b. Where Council is unable to honour the intentions of the will, all appropriate legal measures will be taken to determine a purpose for the gift that most closely aligns to the bequestor's intentions.

3.8 Process of Declaring Gifts and Donations

3.8.1 Disclosure of Disclosable Gifts

A Councillor must disclose any 'disclosable gift' valued at \$500 or more (accumulative in the past 5 years or as a single gift) in their next bi-annual *Personal Interest Return* form. They must also include the disclosable gift(s) in Council's Gift Register within 14 days of receiving the gift(s).

3.8.2 Disclosures of Conflicts of Interest

A Councillor who has a conflict of interest as a result of receiving a gift or gifts from a person must disclose the conflict of interest in accordance with the procedures outlined in the *Governance Rules (C82)*.

3.8.3 Disclosures on Election Campaign Donation Forms

Gifts above the gift disclosure threshold that are election campaign donations must be disclosed in an *Election Campaign Donation form* and in accordance with the ss. 128(4), 306, 309, 310, of the Act and the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020*.



3.8.4 Recording of Gifts in Council's Gift Register

Gifts valued at \$50 or more, including aggregated gifts must be disclosed in Council's Gift Register by completing a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* and submitting this to the CEO office.

- a. Where a gift is shared amongst multiple Councillors the gift must be declared if the total value of the gift exceeds \$50. All people sharing in the receipt of the gift must be listed on Council's *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* with the initial receiver of the gift responsible for registering receipt of the gift at the top of the list.
- b. Councillors are to provide details pertaining to the receipt, or offer, of any gift to the CEO within 14 days from the date of receipt/offer.
- c. The information on Council's *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* will include if the gift has been refused, retained by the individual or given to the CEO for use by Council.
- d. Gifts accepted (or declined) of \$50 or more will be included in Council's Gifts Register by the CEO Office and will contain:
 - i. A description of the gift (or donation) and its estimated value;
 - ii. Date of receipt or decline of gift
 - iii. The name of the gift giver (if known)
 - iv. Name of the recipient of gift
 - v. What was done with the gift (was it retained by the Councillor, handed to the Council, or declined)
 - vi. Gift offers provided by suppliers (irregular approaches from suppliers).

3.8.5 Undervaluing gifts

Undervaluing gifts received to avoid declaring them, may constitute a breach of the *Councillor Code of Conduct (C14)*. Such matters will be managed in accordance with the procedures set out in the respective code and relevant sections of the Act.

3.8.6 Inability to politely refuse a gift

On occasions a Councillor may be given a gift that cannot be politely refused. This typically occurs after a presentation at a function when a gift is given as an appreciation. If there is any risk that the gift may give rise to a material conflict of interest or otherwise compromise the recipient, it should be accepted on behalf of the Council and passed on to the CEO for use by the Council to avoid any personal conflict of interest. This type of gift must be declared on Council's Gifts Register.



4. RISK ASSESSMENT

In order to comply with its obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020* and maintain the trust and confidence of the community, it is critical that Council and Councillors maintain the highest possible standards of good governance, integrity, ethical behaviour and conduct.

This Policy and the associated procedures mitigate Council's risks and enables:

- a. Councillors to understand their requirements and obligations under the *Councillor Code of Conduct (C14)*, *Governance Rules (C82)* and *Election Period Policy (C30)*, and under the Act.
- b. Council to demonstrate its commitment to probity in the management of potential breaches of the *Local Government Act 2020*, *Crimes Act 1958*, Codes of Conduct and Council policies.
- c. Community confidence and public trust in Council to be maintained or improved through appropriate and transparent declaration and use of gifts thereby minimising risks to Council, Councillors or staff reputations.
- d. Councillors and staff to mitigate the risk of fraud and appropriately manage situations which may be regarded as unethical conduct or behaviour.

5. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

5.1 Publication of Policy

The Policy will be published on Council's website.

Council's Gift Register will be made available in accordance with South Gippsland Shire Council's *Public Transparency Policy (C75)*.

Communications regarding the existence of the Policy are to be sent to Councillors in August/September each year (AFL finals, Racing Season, Christmas).

The Policy is to be included in Council's Councillor Induction Program.

Members of the public may view Council's Gift Register in accordance with the *Public Transparency Policy (C75)*.

5.2 Roles and Responsibilities

Councillors are to always act in accordance with their respective obligations for good governance. These include, but are not limited to:

- a. Reading, understanding and abiding by the Act at all times. In particular in relation to receipt, disposal and management of any gift, donations, hospitality, or benefit.'
- b. Refusing all prohibited gifts



- c. Declining anything that is offered as an attempt to influence, bribe or create an expectation or an obligation on the Councillor or Council.
- d. Not accept any offer that suggests a guarantee of a future benefit that may be deemed to be as real and tangible as money-in-the-bank.
- e. Not soliciting gifts for themselves or anyone else, in any form.
- f. Disclosing of any gift valued at \$500 or more (accumulative in the past 5 years or as a single gift) in their biannual Personal Interest Return form, unless the gift is from a family member.
- g. Declaring conflicts of interest as result of receiving a gift or gifts from a person, in accordance with the *Governance Rules (C82)*.
- h. Declaring gifts of over \$50 or more, including aggregates in the Council's Gift Register, within 14 days of receipt of the gift, in accordance with register requirements.
- i. Declaring gifts above the threshold that are election campaign donations in their *Election Campaign Donation Return form*.
- j. Councillors are responsible for completing and submitting the Council's *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* and provide them to the CEO office for updating on Council's Gift Register.

The Executive Office maintains Council's Gift Register for recording all gifts declarations for Councillors, Staff and Contractors.

The Protected Disclosure Officer will manage any disclosures made in regard to questionable gifts or conduct and refer these to the respective authorities to investigate.

A copy of Council's Gifts Register may be provided to the Audit and Risk Committee and Council (via the Audit and Risk Committee) every 12-months for their consideration. Monitoring Council's Gifts Register will allow for any identified trends developing to be identified and considered by the Committee.

The Governance Department is able to provide public access to the Council's Gift Register in accordance with Council's *Public Transparency Policy (C75)* via Council's email address council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au.

5.3 Human Rights Charter

This Policy is a key mechanism for providing assurance to the Council that Councillors are meeting their obligations to declaring the acceptance of gifts and donations and/or a conflict of interest as a result of receiving a gift as required by the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* and associated obligations.

5.4 Non-compliance with this Policy

A Councillor has a duty to act in the public interest above their private interests when carrying out their official capacity and functions of a Councillor and to abide by this Policy.



If a member of the community wishes to question the release of information on Council's Gifts Register, this should be raised directly with the Executive Office via Council's email address council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au.

5.5 Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Council will undertake a four-yearly periodic review of this policy to ensure changes required to strengthen or update the policy to meet changing circumstances are made in a timely manner, or earlier if changes to legislation or practices require an earlier intervention.

6. LEGISLATIVE PROVISIONS

This policy has been developed to support the Council to comply with its good governance and conduct obligations in line with various legislation, principally the *Local Government Act 2020*.

South Gippsland Shire Council is a public body subject to the *Local Government Act 2020*. The objective of the Act is to establish a legislative framework that provides for Councils to be accountable to their local communities in the performance of functions and exercise of power and use of resources.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION	
Legislative Provisions	<i>Local Government Act 2020 Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020. Public Interest Disclosure Guidelines (CE21) Public Transparency Policy (C75) Crimes Act 1958</i>
Council Supporting Documents	<i>Councillor Code of Conduct (C14) Governance Rules (C82), including the Election Period Policy (C30) Code of Conduct for Staff (CE20) Council Plan 2020-2024 South Gippsland Shire Council Governance Framework Local Law No 2 2020 Audit Policy C65 Fraud and Corrupt Conduct Policy C19 Human Rights Policy C52 Information Privacy Policy C22</i>
Related Documents	<i>Gift and Donation Declaration Form (D2093011) Conflict of Interest, A Guide for Councillors October 2012, Department of Planning and Community Development Victorian Public Sector Commission – Gifts, Benefits and Hospitality Policy Framework - 2016 Independent board-based anti-corruption commission (IBAC) Local Government Integrity Frameworks Review (2019) Victorian Ombudsman Conflicts of Interest in Local Government Report (2008) Guidelines for Making and Handling Protected Disclosures January 2020, Independent board-based anti-corruption commission (IBAC) Victorian Public Sector Commission (vpsc.vic.gov.au)</i>
File Number	<i>D1313021</i>

COUNCIL POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY



7. DEFINITIONS

Council	South Gippsland Shire Council
Councillor	Is an elected member of the Council as defined by the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (the Act).
Chief Executive Officer / CEO	Is the Chief Executive Officer appointed by Council as defined by the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> (the Act).
Conflict of Interest	<p>The <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> requires Councillors to declare General or Material Conflicts of Interest.</p> <p>A conflict of interest is a conflict between a Councillor's public duty to act in the best interest of the Council and their private interests (financial or non-financial). A conflict exists whether it is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real – it currently exists • Potential – it may arise, given the circumstances • Perceived – members of the public could reasonably form the view that a conflict exists, or could arise, that may improperly influence the person's performance of their duty to the Council, now or in the future.
General Conflict of Interest	Has the same meaning as defined in s.127 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
Material Conflict of Interest	Has the same meaning as defined in s.128 of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
Gift (s3 LGA)	Means any disposition of property otherwise than by will made by a person to another person without consideration in money or money's worth or with inadequate consideration, including— <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the provision of a service (other than volunteer labour); and (b) the payment of an amount in respect of a guarantee; and (c) the making of a payment or contribution at a fundraising
Declarable gift	A gift that is valued \$50 or more must be registers in Council's Gifts Register.
Anonymous Gift	Is to not be accepted by a Councillor as per s.137 of the Act
Gift Disclosure Threshold	Has the same meaning as defined in s. 128 (4) of the <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> .
Disclosable Gift	<p>A 'disclosable gift' means any gift valued at or above \$500 or a higher prescribed amount that a relevant person received in the preceding five years if:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relevant person was a councillor, member of council staff or member of a delegated committee at the time the gift was received, or • the gift was an election campaign donation. <p>If multiple gifts are received from a person, they must be treated as a single gift with an aggregate value.</p> <p>A gift includes any good or service (other than volunteer labour) that is provided for free or at an inadequate price. It includes a payment or contribution at a fundraising function.</p>

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	A failure to comply is an offence that can be prosecuted in court. If found guilty a fine of up to 60 penalty units may be imposed, the value of the gift must be paid to the Council and the Councillor may be required to pay the costs of the prosecution.
<p>Gifts explanation to support definition includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Items & services • Benefits • Hospitality 	<p>A gift is anything of monetary or other value that is offered by an external organisation or individual to a Councillor, Officer or contractor as a result of their role with the agency. It includes free or discounted items or services, benefits or hospitality that exceeds common courtesy. Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bottle of wine or spirits • Tickets to sporting events • Gift Voucher • Corporate hospitality at a corporate facility • Discounted products for personal use • Use of a holiday home • Free or discounted travel • Free training excursions • Door prize or voucher if an individual has not personally paid to attend.
<p>Items or services</p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas hamper • Desk calendar • Box of chocolates • Bottle of wine • Commemorative object • Door prize at a function • Tree lopping • House painting
<p>Benefits</p>	<p>For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferential treatment • Privileged access • Access to discount or loyalty programs • Promise of a new job
<p>Hospitality</p>	<p>Hospitality is considered a gift unless the hospitality was reasonable and the person attending the function or event in an official Council capacity.</p> <p><u>Reasonableness test</u>: the hospitality must be of a standard and type that an independent observer would consider appropriate and not excessive.</p> <p><u>Official capacity test</u>: it must clearly be your duty as a Councillor to attend the relevant function or event.</p> <p>Hospitality that <u>exceeds</u> common courtesy includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 'fine dining and wines' working lunch at another organisation's premises • An offer to pay for a working lunch at a café • An offer of a free spot on an industry golf day



	<p>Hospitality that does <u>not</u> exceed common courtesy and is therefore <u>not</u> a gift includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwiches and pastries over a lunchtime meeting • A cup of coffee at another organisation's premises • A cup of coffee at a café (unless there is a conflict of interest)
Ceremonial Gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ceremonial gifts are official gifts provided as part of the culture and practices of communities and government, within Australia or internationally. Ceremonial gifts are usually provided when conducting business with official delegates or representatives from another organisation, community. • Ceremonial gifts are the property of South Gippsland Shire Council, irrespective of value. The receipt of ceremonial gifts should be recorded on Council's Gift Register but does not need to be published online.
Gestures/tokens that are not considered gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A souvenir received from a person or company as a result of attending a seminar or conference held, conducted or sponsored by them, for which an appropriate fee was paid to attend. For example ties, pens or mugs. • Small gestures of appreciation from the community or customers such as cut flowers from their garden or homemade baked goods. • Door prizes and raffle prizes at functions or conferences are <u>not</u> considered a gift if the individual has personally paid for their attendance, or where the individual has paid for the raffle ticket.
Internal Gifts	<p>Gifts received by Councillors from South Gippsland Shire Council are not covered by this Policy and do not need to be declared.</p> <p>For example recognition gifts after the end of the Mayor term or Councillor term</p>
Aggregated Gifts/Benefits	<p>If multiple gifts, donations, benefits or hospitality are received from a person, they must be treated as a single gift with an aggregate value.</p> <p>This applies to multiple token gifts and gestures aggregating to \$50 or more in one financial year, or to a 'disclosable gift' value of \$500 aggregated within five years.</p>
Bribe	<p>A bribe is an offer of money or other inducement made with the intention to corruptly influence a Councillor, officer or contractor in the performance of their duties. Bribery or attempted bribery of a public official is a criminal offence.</p>
Supplier/ Contractor	<p>Person or company supplying goods, services or works to the Council.</p>
Legitimate Business Reason	<p>A legitimate business reason is a business purpose that furthers official business or other legitimate goals of the Council.</p> <p>The following are <u>not</u> legitimate business reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'it would have been impolite to refuse • 'Refusal would offend' (except in compelling circumstances that are in the public interest, for example accepting a gift onstage at an official ceremony) • 'Networking' • 'Maintaining stakeholder relationships'
Value	<p>Value means the face value or estimated retail value.</p>



REVISION HISTORY			
Version	Approved	Approval Date Range	Sections Modified
1.0	Council Meeting	19 March 2014	New Policy
1.1	Council Meeting	23 November 2016	Revised
2	Council Meeting	21 April 2021	Significant revisions to align with Local Government Act 2020, incorporating separation from the staff gift policy and a name change for the retained policy.

COUNCIL POLICY

8. ATTACHMENT

Nil

COUNCIL POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY

COUNCIL POLICY

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL POLICY

COUNCILLOR SUPPORT & EXPENDITURE POLICY

Policy No.	C51	Adoption Date:	Council Meeting 21 August 2024
Directorate:	Performance and Innovation	Department:	Governance
Revision Date:	August 2028		

GOOD GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

Supporting Pillar:	Pillar 6. Capability
Link to Pillar:	The level of support as detailed in the Policy supports the Mayor, Councillors and members of Delegated Committees to fulfil their civic duties.

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the *Councillor Support & Expenditure Policy (C51)* (the Policy) is to provide guidance for reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and the provision of facilities and resources support for Councillors and members of Council Delegated Committees.
- 1.2. The Policy outlines the responsibilities of claiming out-of-pocket expenses and that the payment or reimbursement must only be for the actual cost incurred while carrying out legitimate Council business. It is not for the time and effort spent in performing these duties
- 1.3. This Policy has been developed to meet sections 41, 42 and 43 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act).

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. The scope of this Policy applies to current elected Councillors of South Gippsland Shire Council (Council) in the performance of their duties as a Councillor and appointed as the Council representative on Council Delegated Committees or Joint Delegated Committees (the Act, s.63).
- 2.2. Councillor duties are those performed by a councillor as a necessary part of their role, in achieving the objectives of Council.
- 2.3. These duties may include (but are not limited to):
 - 2.3.1. Attendance at meetings of Council and its committees.
 - 2.3.2. Attendance at briefing sessions, workshops, civic events or functions convened by council.
 - 2.3.3. Attendance at conferences, workshops and training programs related to the role of councillor, mayor or deputy mayor.
 - 2.3.4. Attendance at meetings, events or functions representing council duties in relation to constituents concerning council business.

- 2.4. Members of delegated committees exercise powers of Councillors, under delegation. This Policy also applies to those members in the course of undertaking their role as delegated committee members.
- 2.5. The Policy does not apply to external contractors, independent people, or volunteers appointed by Council to Council Committees that include, but not limited to, the Audit & Risk Committee, Chief Executive Officer Employment & Remuneration Committee, Community Asset Committees (the Act, s.65) or formally appointed Advisory Committees. These are each dealt with separately under terms of reference or other arrangements.

3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Role of Councillors

- 3.1. Councillors roles and responsibilities as prescribed in s.28(2) of the Act, sets out how Councillors are required to undertake their duties. The principles set out below require Councillors to:
 - 3.1.1. Consider the diversity of interest and needs within the municipality;
 - 3.1.2. Support the role of the Council;
 - 3.1.3. Acknowledge and support the role of the Mayor;
 - 3.1.4. Act lawfully and in accordance with the oath or affirmation of office;
 - 3.1.5. Act in accordance with the standards of conduct;
 - 3.1.6. Comply with Council procedures required for good governance; and
 - 3.1.7. Understand that the role of Councillor does not include the performance of any responsibilities or functions of the CEO.

Provision of Support and Recognition

- 3.2. Council will specify the level of support determined as reasonable for South Gippsland Shire Councillors and Delegated Committee members. The level of support includes mandatory items such as reimbursement of bona-fide expenses, Council meeting facilities, support and resources, as prescribed in the regulations and guidelines provided by Local Government Victoria, as amended from time to time, and additional resource provision deemed acceptable by Council.
- 3.3. The principle of providing support and reimbursements of expenses to Councillors is derived from legislated requirements in ss.40 to 43 of the Act.
- 3.4. Minimum resources and facilities are prescribed for the purposes of supporting Mayors and Councillors in performing their duties as a Councillor.
- 3.5. The Policy is compliant with relevant legislation, consistent with Local Government Victoria's specified standards and it supports the attraction and retention of Councillors from a wide cross section of people.
- 3.6. The establishment of clear support and expenditure principles assists Councillors to perform their duties and seeks to encourage diversity in participation, equity and access by recognising that Councillors operate in a complex environment and bring unique skills and insights to the role that include:
 - 3.6.1. Diversity in participation and access to local representation contributes to well informed decision making involving the community;
 - 3.6.2. The role of Councillor should attract and retain a wide cross section of people, including those from under-represented groups;

- 3.6.3. Councillors need to be accessible to a wide range of constituents and stay informed about issues in the community. These are an important part of the role and use of internet is essential to facilitate access;
- 3.6.4. Councillors are supported in undertaking their duties by assuring that reimbursement of expenses and access to resources support are provided in an equitable manner to cater for the full participation of all Councillors in Council business and with their communities, while recognising individual needs and circumstances;
- 3.6.5. Councillors are required to attend formal Council meetings and participate in community activities; and
- 3.6.6. The Community, Council and the State Government require resources to be used judiciously within a rate capped environment setting an expectation of Council to tighten controls on spending on behalf of the community.

Encourage Accountability, Transparency and Community Acceptance

- 3.7. Adopting and adhering to the Policy;
- 3.8. In addition to providing expenses reimbursement, adequately reflecting and using the allocated provision of resources and facilities entitlements available to a Mayor and Councillors;
- 3.9. Providing flexibility to determine what Council can afford to provide beyond the mandatory items mentioned under clause 4.3 of this Policy and what is acceptable to the community; and
- 3.10. Ensuring the details and range of benefits provided to Councillors by Council is clearly stated and fully transparent and acceptable to the local community.

Support Local Flexibility According to Complexity, Needs and Standards

- 3.11. It is a basic cost of governance to provide for the reimbursement of expenses necessarily incurred by Councillors in the performance of their duties;
- 3.12. Council has a responsibility to establish and define an appropriate and reasonable level of provision. This level will consider differences between councils and levels of complexity of councils indicated by population size and revenue base to enable Councillors to carry out their civic role;
- 3.13. This provision allows Council to conform to legislative and statutory requirements or accepted benchmarks and standards applied in the Sector.

No Disadvantage – Mayor and Councillors are provided reimbursements for expenses and costs of facilities and resource support in addition to allowances

- 3.14. The provision of Mayoral and Councillor allowances are not a form of salary, but are legislated by the State Government under s.39 of the 2020 Act and in accordance with a determination of the Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal under the *Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019*.

Councillor Induction

- 3.15. Councillors will be supported in their role through a comprehensive Councillor Induction Training Program, incorporating relevant sessions organised by Council staff and local government peak bodies. This Program is to be conducted within six months after the day the Councillor takes the oath or affirmation of office.

- 3.16. If a Councillor fails to participate fully and complete the Councillor Induction Training Program within this timeframe and does not make a written declaration in front of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), as required by s.32(3) of the 2020 Act, an allowance of a Councillor is withheld until these actions by the Councillor is completed.

Councillors Allowances

- 3.17. Councillor allowances are paid in accordance with legislated requirements (including superannuation), with annual increases gazette by the Minister for Local Government.
- 3.18. Council is a Category 2 Council as gazetted by the Minister for Local Government. Councillors will be paid the maximum level available under this Category 2, unless they individually choose to receive a lower or no allowance. Allowances are taxable incomes which will be paid on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month for the current month and this is to take effect from November 2024.
- 3.19. Payment will be made by electronic funds transfer, into an account authorised by the Councillor in writing by the Councillor.
- 3.20. Under s.39(5) of the Act, a Mayor, Deputy Mayor or Councillor may elect:
- 3.20.1. to receive the entire allowance to which they are entitled;
 - 3.20.2. to receive a specified part of the allowance to which they are entitled; or
 - 3.20.3. to receive no allowance.

Necessary Items for Support, Resources and Facilities

- 3.21. Administrative support for the Mayor
- 3.22. A Mayoral vehicle can be provided for full Council and private use restricted to within the Shire boundary. The Mayoral vehicle will be insured, maintained and allocated a fuel card by Council.
- 3.23. Computer – laptop and associated chargers for all Councillors.
- 3.24. Councillor accessible intranet (or equivalent) as part of Council's online environment (this will be provided through the laptop).
- 3.25. Council's online Portal – online accessibility to Council's agendas, minutes and briefing papers.
- 3.26. Mobile phone (and landline only if there is inadequate mobile coverage at a Councillor's normal residence).
- 3.27. Stationery.
- 3.28. Access to fax / copier / incidental printing (smallest number of pages possible) at Council offices, or for printing own copies of Council briefing papers, agendas and minutes. Any printing beyond this requirement requires the approval of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.
- 3.29. As part of Council's Sustainability Strategy printing is encouraged to be kept to a minimum and undertaken at the Council offices where costs are the lowest. The Policy recognises from time to time a Councillor may need to utilise their own printing devices and therefore a small number of cartridges for monochromatic printing may be reimbursed annually.

Note: Council resources will not be provided for personalised Ward newsletters (as per Council's resolution on 27 April 2016).

- 3.30. Website development – provided in the form of a webpage containing Councillors' names, photos, contact details and associated links to facilitate participation and access between Councillors and the community.
- 3.31. A Council must indemnify and keep indemnified each Councillor, member of a Delegated Committee and member of a Community Asset Committee in accordance with s.43 of Act.

Resources Provided in addition to the Necessary Items

The following has been determined by Council to be in addition to the specific necessary items:

- 3.32. Councillors will be provided travel reimbursements for the use of their personal vehicles when used on Council required activities. Exceptional circumstances allow for a Council vehicle to be provided to Councillors when:
 - 3.33. A pool car is required for short term requirements such as interstate travel or several Councillors are travelling together to one destination; or
 - 3.34. The longer-term provision of a Council vehicle is required for a Councillor to be able to fulfil their civic functions; or
 - 3.35. A Councillor is travelling an extensive distance each year (approximately 12,000+ kilometers per annum) whereby it will be more efficient to provide a Council vehicle, than provide travel reimbursements. This will also save extensive wear and tear on a Councillors' personal vehicle.
- 3.36. All Councillors will be issued with a logbook for the purpose of recording Council related travel including destination, purpose of trip, beginning and ending odometer readings and dates and the proportion of Council Business and private use.
- 3.37. The Councillor must ensure that the logbook is being updated daily when utilised for Council related business.
- 3.38. Catering is provided by Council's contracted caterer for Council business meeting dates. The type of catering will depend on the type of meeting, timing and attendees.
- 3.39. Car Parking Permit on Council premises. Allowing access to the Council offices on Council business days. The Permit is only valid on days that are nominated as Council business.
- 3.40. Access to office space and furniture in the form of Councillor's room.
- 3.41. Where available, use of meeting rooms owned and controlled by Council where a Councillor is in attendance.
- 3.42. For any Councillor with a disability, Council may resolve to provide reasonable additional facilities and expenses, which may be necessary for the performance of their duties.
- 3.43. Access to Council email and internet.
- 3.44. Internet at normal place of residence (where Council internet provision is not available through the laptop/mobile phone).
- 3.45. Business cards, name badges, including changeover with Mayor and Deputy Mayor titles, and a diary.
- 3.46. Council officer nominated to provide incidental (limited) support for Councillors for Council business requirements.

- 3.47. Incidental postage of Council related mail through Council's mail system. A copy of this postage will be kept by Council. Any postage beyond this requirement requires the approval of the Mayor.
- 3.48. Reimbursement of reasonable meal expenses necessarily incurred while entertaining visiting guests on behalf of Council or attending meetings, seminars or conferences (separate to accommodation and travel expenses) including the reasonable cost of drinks accompanying a meal. Alcoholic drinks are unable to be reimbursed. A daily limit of expenses which can be reimbursed is set at the ATO rate for food and drink expenses (*Reasonable amounts for domestic travel expenses – employee's annual salary \$143,650 or less*).
- 3.49. The Council or CEO must give approval prior to any such entertainment/ seminar/conference or meeting for which reimbursement will be sought, unless the Councillor is Council's nominated representative for the event concerned.
- 3.50. Payment and re-imburement of course, conference and program fees incurred in undertaking training and development activities to acquire new, or to enhance existing skills required to assist a Councillor in performing their role as a Councillor, or to achieve wider Council goals. Any learning opportunities identified are to be approved by the CEO. Where appropriate, Councillors are encouraged to report the outcome of the activity to Council immediately upon completion of the activity.
- 3.51. Child care/family care to cover Council related meetings and functions in accordance with the defined level of provision (refer to item 4.5(5) Level of Provision for further information on child/dependent care and/or carer relationship).
- 3.52. Transcripts specifying sections required of a recorded Council meeting. Requests are to be made through the CEO.
- 3.53. Requests for Information and/or assistance from staff, beyond that provided in briefings and published on the Councillor Intranet, are to be made through the relevant Director and will be managed at the Director's discretion. Refer to *Councillor Access to Information Policy (C66)*.
- 3.54. Access to the *Local Government Act 2020* and other legislation online at www.legislation.vic.gov.au.
- 3.55. Councillor Newsletter weekly bulletin of Council information, relevant publications, local and industry events and other general information published online through the Councillors' intranet (excluding publications in the second half of December and the month of January).
- 3.56. Currently Councillors are not required to obtain a WWCC to undertake their role. But in keeping with Council's commitment to the implementation of the Child Safe Standards, any costs associated with a Councillor obtaining a Working with Children Check can be reimbursed.

Level of Provision for Councillor Travel – Reimbursement of Private Vehicle Usage and Public Transport Costs

- 3.57. The level of provision for Councillor Travel, where the primary purpose of the trip is for legitimate and necessary Council business, including:
- 3.57.1. Council Meetings and Briefings of Councillors;
 - 3.57.2. Delegated Committee Meetings of Council when the Councillor/Member is the nominated representative/ substitute;

- 3.57.3. Regional meetings where the Councillor claiming reimbursement is Council's endorsed representative and travel is not paid/reimbursed by the regional organisation or meeting convenor;
- 3.57.4. Other Nominated Committees where the Councillor has been appointed as Council's representative/substitute by Council, or otherwise by approval of the Mayor;
- 3.57.5. Functions to which Councillors are invited by organisations and where there is a direct involvement of Council. (Note: costs associated with the attendance by spouses/partners must be paid by the relevant Councillor);
- 3.57.6. Functions and events when requested by the Mayor to deputise for him/her;
- 3.57.7. Inspections of properties and/or locations in regard to:
 - i. matters in current briefings and/or Council agendas, or
 - ii. a community member with a relevant Council related matter; or
 - iii. for Ward related open public information stands; and
 - iv. that sufficient relevant details are to be specified on the claim form.

3.58. Organised community meetings; and

3.59. Organised training, conferences and sector networking meetings.

Level of Provision for Councillor Travel – Reimbursement of Mileage and other Travel Expenses

3.60. Kilometres are eligible to be claimed measured from (and to) the Councillors' place of residence, or from the journey's commencement (or end) point, whichever is the closest to the Council offices or designated meeting location.

3.61. Where a journey's originating (or end) point is further away than the Councillors usual place of residence, it is only the incremental portion that is to be claimed as Council business related.

3.62. Where personal and Council related travel are both being undertaken in a single journey, the Councillor is required to use their professional judgement to articulate kilometres that are predominantly attributable to the primary and secondary purpose of the journey.

3.63. For the sake of clarity, Councillors will not make a claim, nor will a claim be approved by the CEO, for travel where the primary reason for the travel is for private purposes and the Council related purpose is secondary and incidental.

3.64. Travel is to be taken by the shortest practical route.

3.65. Travel reimbursements per kilometre are the rates set by the Australian Taxation Office.

3.66. On and off-street car parking fees.

3.67. Does not include valet or personalised service parking where these costs are higher than other standard parking facilities available in close proximity.

3.68. Tolls maybe incurred including those associated with CityLink such as day passes or those transactions incurred as part of an existing personal e-tag account.

3.69. Taxi charges.

3.70. Public transport charges.

3.71. All receipts and relevant details regarding the purpose, date and time of the meeting or function must be submitted with the reimbursement claim.

3.72. Incidental travel is considered to be within 5 kilometres.

Councillor Vehicle Allocation and Usage

3.73. If an elected Councillor has a current drivers' licence but does not have an adequate private vehicle, the Councillor may be issued with a Council vehicle for Council related purposes as soon as practicable after the election.

3.74. Councillors who are not provided with a Council vehicle are able to book a car from the Council car pool to attend an event, conference/training or meeting, for the duration of one day, if required. A request to book a car is to be made through the Mayor and Councillors Support Officer a minimum of two days in advance.

3.75. No persons other than valid licensed Councillors or Council officers are authorised to drive the Council vehicle without prior approval from the CEO.

3.76. The Council vehicle can only be used when the primary purpose of the trip is for Council business.

3.77. There is no private use other than usage that is incidental to attending to Council business (for example if the incidental travel is a minor deviance from the intended route).

3.78. Vehicles are not to be used for supplementary / secondary income purposes.

3.79. Councillors allocated a Council vehicle are required to provide their log book to the Mayor and Councillors Support Officer every six months to enable calculation of the amount to be reimbursed for any private vehicle usage. This amount will be invoiced to the Councillor for payment. Any anomalies will be referred to the Chief Executive Officer for consideration or further action required.

3.80. Reimbursement of accumulated incidental private travel back to Council is at the vehicle rate in accordance with the flat ATO rate as at 1 July for the current financial year. Councillors will be advised accordingly.

3.81. Smoking is prohibited in vehicles at all times.

3.82. Animals are prohibited in the vehicles at all times.

3.83. Drivers are required to obey all road rules, drive carefully by adjusting to the local conditions and not drive when their capacity to drive safely is impaired.

3.84. Council is not liable to pay any fine or cost incurred by a Driver of a Council vehicle, who infringes against Road Traffic Regulations, Local Laws of any municipality with respect to parking restrictions, or any other regulation in relation to the use of vehicles. Onus for payment of a fine or other costs rest with the offender.

3.85. The vehicle shall not be driven in areas where damage may be incurred due to unfavourable ground conditions or hidden obstructions. Drivers shall not drive vehicles on rough tracks or across unsuitable terrain.

3.86. A fuel card is provided with a dedicated pin number. If the Pin Number is not provided, the transaction will be cancelled and the Councillor will be required to pay for the fuel from their own expenses and seek reimbursement through provision of the Receipt to the Mayor and Councillor Support Officer.

3.87. Roadside assist numbers for each vehicle make is also located in the driver's manual.

- 3.88. The Councillor is to keep the vehicle clean and tidy, at all times and on return of the vehicle. This involves both the interior and exterior of the vehicle. This is always at the Councillors cost.
- 3.89. Councillors are responsible for ensuring the vehicle receives the scheduled services and warranty repairs (if required). This involves:
- 3.89.1. Regularly checked fuel, oil, water, battery, tyre pressure and road worthiness.
 - 3.89.2. Scheduling a service with any authorised repairer and delivering the vehicle for service.
 - 3.89.3. Forwarding the Invoice to the Mayor and Council Support Officer to arrange for payment.
- 3.90. Councillors are required to report any damage, tyre repair or replacement, or maintenance requirements of the vehicle to the Coordinator Plant and Fleet and the Risk Officer.
- 3.91. Councillors shall ensure the vehicle is parked in a secure 'off the street' location, locked when unattended and no valuables or equipment left in the vehicles.
- 3.92. Council vehicles will be insured under a comprehensive policy covering vehicles, drivers, passengers and damage to third parties. Certain circumstances and actions may result in the policy being declared null and void whereby the driver may become personally liable for damages, including:
- 3.92.1. Unlicensed drivers,
 - 3.92.2. Drivers under the influence of drugs or alcohol,
 - 3.92.3. Drivers breaking the road laws or regulations.
- 3.93. Personal belongings / valuables are not covered under Council's Policy in the event that they are damaged or stolen.
- 3.94. A Councillor in charge or using a Council owned vehicle that is involved in an accident or incident giving rise to a possible claim must:
- 3.94.1. Stop and provide assistance by calling emergency services if required. Police must be notified if someone is injured. Collect insurance, driver and license details of any other party involved and submit these to the Risk Officer;
 - 3.94.2. Not drive the vehicle if it is unroadworthy;
 - 3.94.3. Not incur or admit liability in the event of an accident, nor offer promise of payment;
 - 3.94.4. Immediately or as soon as is reasonably practical, notify Council's Risk Officer so that Council's Insurer receives adequate and appropriate advice of a claim or possible claim;
 - 3.94.5. Refrain from admitting liability in any matter as this will enable Council's Insurer to assess and consider an appropriate non-prejudiced response;
 - 3.94.6. Towing / salvage services from the accident site to the nearest GIO recommended repairer (currently Burchells panels 03 5662 3346) are covered under Council insurance. Any "Authority to Tow" form provided by a towing company is to be completed and a copy forwarded to Council's Risk Officer; and

- 3.94.7. The Councillor is to report an accident or any minor incidents to Council's Risk Officer and Coordinator Plant and Fleet, as soon as possible after the event, and complete an incident form.
- 3.95. The right to drive and / or access a Council vehicle will cease:
- 3.95.1. Upon the suspension, or expiry of the term of office, ouster removal or resignation of a Councillor;
 - 3.95.2. Any Councillor not running for re-election shall return their Council provided vehicle at the conclusion of their duties, but not later than 6am on Election Day;
 - 3.95.3. Councillors running for re-election shall retain their Council provided vehicle until their election is confirmed;
 - 3.95.4. Councillors standing for State or Federal government elections shall return their Council vehicle during the nomination and election period; and
 - 3.95.5. Councillors lose their licence, if there is a breach of the Councillor allocation and usage components of this Policy, or determined by the Chief Executive Officer that the provision of a vehicle should be withdrawn.

Level of Provision for Councillor Travel – Interstate and Overseas

- 3.96. Discretionary interstate trips, interstate travel and attendance at interstate conferences in relation to Council business, requires approval of the CEO prior to the event.
- 3.97. Overseas travel in relation to Council business requires approval by resolution of Council prior to the event.
- 3.98. Overseas travel in relation to Council business requires approval by resolution of Council prior to the event.
- 3.99. Air travel will be by economy class with bookings and payment to be made by Council.
- 3.100. Councillors must, within seven days after the completion of a trip, record the following details in Council's Travel Register:
- 3.100.1. Councillor Name;
 - 3.100.2. Destination;
 - 3.100.3. Date/s of travel;
 - 3.100.4. Purpose of travel; and
 - 3.100.5. Total cost to the Council including accommodation costs.
- 3.101. It is expected that a Councillor will provide a full report of the outcomes of their travel to the next meeting of the Council after the travel occurs.
- 3.102. International use of mobile phones or electronic data connections on iPad/tablet, including associated roaming charges, requires CEO approval prior to departure and expenditure is limited to a maximum of \$600 for the entire trip. Councillors must minimise these costs by turning the phone off except when making a call and using SMS messaging to keep costs as low as possible. Expenses incurred over \$600 are to be paid by the Councillor.
- 3.103. Councillors where possible are to use free wi-fi internet to minimise data costs to Council.

Level of Provision for Accommodation

- 3.104. Accommodation for conferences and overnight requirements to attend meetings is limited to a maximum of four-star level only if a suitable three-star accommodation is not available.
- 3.105. The difference in cost is to be paid by the Councillor where accommodation is sought at a higher standard than the available 3-star (4 star by exception) standard.

Level of Provision for Child Care and Carers in a Carer and Dependent Relationship Provisions

- 3.106. As per s.41(c)(d) and s.42(2)(b) of the Act, Council is to provide reimbursements for child care costs and expenses incurred by a Councillor who is a carer of a dependent in a care relationship (within the meaning of section 4 of the *Carers Recognition Act 2012*).

Reimbursement Criteria for Child Care and/ or Carer Relationships

- 3.107. Child care / family care – expenses reimbursed for the care of a dependant whilst the Councillor is engaged in Council duties, such as attending a Council related meeting or event, plus reasonable travel time.
- 3.108. For days in which Councillors have regularly scheduled briefings or meetings such, if Council cancels or doesn't hold a briefing or meeting on the regular scheduled briefing or meeting day, a Councillor can be reimbursed for any charges they are required to pay to their child care service for holding of the allocated position at the child care service for their child on that day, only if the child does not attend childcare service on that day.
- 3.109. Where the care relates to dependent adults, the CEO must be satisfied that the expense is appropriate.
- 3.110. Family care expenses include hourly fees paid by the Councillor and/or agency booking fees where applicable.
- 3.111. The following will be eligible for the purposes of child/dependent care and/or carer relationship reimbursement:
- 3.111.1. Council Meetings and briefings.
 - 3.111.2. Delegated Committee Meetings of Council when the Councillor is the nominated representative/substitute.
 - 3.111.3. Regional meetings where the Councillor claiming reimbursement is Council's endorsed representative and child/dependent and/or carer relationship care is not paid/reimbursed by the regional organisation or meeting convenor.
 - 3.111.4. Other Nominated Committees where the Councillor has been appointed as Council's representative/substitute by Council, or otherwise by approval of the Mayor;
 - 3.111.5. Functions to which Councillors are invited by organisations (attendance by spouses/partners must be paid by the Councillors) and where there is a direct involvement of Council.
 - 3.111.6. Functions to which Councillors are invited by organisations (attendance by spouses/partners must be paid by the Councillors) and where there is a direct involvement of Council.

3.111.7. The purpose, destination, subject matter, date and time are required to be provided to support the claim.

3.111.8. Approved training, conferences and seminars.

3.111.9. Travel reimbursements to deliver and pick up a child (children) from the child care provider.

Situations In Which Reimbursement of Child Care Will Not Occur

Reimbursement to a Councillor will not occur when a person undertaking child care / family care:

3.112. Has a financial or pecuniary relationship with the Councillor; or

3.113. Resides either permanently or temporarily with the Councillor, except where a live-in/professional helper such as a nanny or nurse is required to work additional time at extra expense because of the Councillors duties. In these occurrences the extra payment can be claimed; or

3.114. Has a relationship with the Councillor or his or her partner, such that it would be inappropriate for Council to reimburse monies paid to the Care Provider.

Other Related Acts and Requirements

3.115. Councillors must disclose any disclosable gift that is given to them as per s.128(4), s.137(1) and s.138 of the Act. Gifts to Councillors must also be disclosed and recorded in Council's gift register via the support officer to the CEO. Refer to Council's *Acceptance of Gifts & Donations Policy (C01)* (or equivalent once adopted) for further guidance on disclosing gifts and the value of gifts.

3.116. Council must consider the support that may be required for a Councillor because of a disability as per s.42(a) of the Act. For any Councillor with a disability, Council may resolve to provide reasonable additional facilities and expenses, which may be necessary for the performance of their duties. Council is to follow the *Disability Act 2006*.

3.117. Councillors are to abide by *Occupational Health and Safety requirements and Council's Occupational Health and Safety Policy (CE78)* when undertaking their duties of office. A Councillor injured while carrying out their duties may be entitled to claim workers compensation under the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*.

3.118. To ensure the safety of Councillors, Officers and members of the public and continuance of Council meetings and briefings, Councillors are required to comply with the same restrictions, mandatory requirements and public safety orders that staff are required to adhere to.

Limitations on Resource Usage

3.119. A Councillor should seek authorisation from the Council through the Mayor prior to using public funds or resources for any purpose that is not a standard/regular practice or likely to incur expenditure that may not be deemed an acceptable use by the broader community (Source: Council resolution 27 April 2016).

Internal/ External Audit Review of Claims

3.120. Support provided under the Policy will be subject to review by the internal Audit and Risk Committee on an annual, or as requested, basis.

3.121. The Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO) may also request to review claims for reimbursement by Councillors, as part of the review of Council's financial management.

Transparency on Expenditure and Reimbursements

- 3.122. The annual expenditure on Councillors' allowances and reimbursements will be reported in accordance with legislated requirements in the Annual Report.
- 3.123. The broader 'Costs of Elected Representation' will be reported annually in accordance with the regulated Local Government Performance Reporting Framework indicator requirements and published on the State Government's 'Know Your Council' website for comparative and transparency purposes.

Procedure for Reimbursement of Claims

- 3.124. This section outlines the timeframes and procedures for reimbursement of claims. As per s.40 of the Act, Councillors will only claim reimbursements for reasonable, bona fide out-of-pocket expenses incurred while performing the role and duties of Councillor.
- 3.125. Councillors are unable to be reimbursed for any item listed in this Policy if they have already been reimbursed by their employer or any other third party for the said item.

Reimbursements

- 3.126. Councillors are responsible for retaining and submitting all relevant documentation (receipts and invoices) for their reimbursement claims;
- 3.127. To ensure transparency and accurate recording, all reimbursements will be paid directly into the Councillor's nominated bank account. A remittance of payment will be provided to the Councillor.

Forms and Receipts

- 3.128. Claims must be made on the appropriate Council claim form with supporting documentation including GST receipts and invoices and the dates purchased. The claim forms are required to be signed by the Councillor;
- 3.129. A Councillor claiming for private vehicle use and mileage is responsible for keeping a travel log. This travel log is to be submitted at the end of each month.
- 3.130. All claims must be submitted to the Mayor and Councillors Support Officer.

Timeframe for Submitting Claims

- 3.131. Councillors must submit claims within seven (7) days of the end of each month.
- 3.132. Claims that are submitted after seven (7) days are considered late and will be referred to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to determine if extenuating circumstances for late submissions are reasonable. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor will advise the CEO if these circumstances are acceptable or not for payment determination. They will also advise the Councillor accordingly.
- 3.133. If the claims relate to the Mayor then these will be referred to the Deputy Mayor and the most recent previous Mayor to consider and advise accordingly. (Note: the CEO retains the financial delegation to authorise payments and/or seek further information to support claims made).
- 3.134. At the end of each Financial Year all claims, must be submitted to the support officer to the CEO and Mayor for authorisation by 7 July (within seven (7) days of the end of the financial year), so that they can be paid in the year in which they were incurred.

3.135. Late payments received after this date for the end of each Financial year are to be referred to Council as a report to Council, ideally in the July meeting as this approval for payment is in the next financial year to when it was incurred.

Reimbursement Authorisation

3.136. Claims that appear to lack clear alignment with Council related purposes will be referred to the Mayor and Deputy Mayor to determine before payment can be approved.

3.137. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor will advise the Councillor accordingly. If the claims relate to the Mayor then these will be referred to the Deputy Mayor and the most recent previous Mayor to determine and advise the CEO/Mayor accordingly.

3.138. CEO will designate Council officers in respect of reimbursement and other expense transaction processes referred to in the Policy.

Reimbursement Claims in an Election Year

3.139. In an election year of Council, all claims for reimbursement are to be submitted to Council prior to the commencement date of a Council Election Period. As defined in s.3 of the Act an Election Period means the period that:

3.139.1. Starts at the time that nominations close on nomination; and

3.139.2. Ends at 6pm on Election Day.

3.140. All equipment provided by Council under the Policy must be returned to Council at the end of a Councillor's term of office.

3.141. Council resources are not to be used for any electioneering purposes.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

People

4.1. This Policy enables Council to demonstrate its commitment to openness and transparency by articulating requirements that are considered by Council to be necessary and reasonable for Councillors to claim as bona-fide out-of-pocket expenses.

Reputational

4.2. The Policy enables Council, Councillors and Council staff to understand misuse of Council resources (fraud) and reputational risk is minimised by providing:

4.2.1. Consistency with current legislation;

4.2.2. Adequate support to Councillors to carry out their responsibilities effectively;

4.2.3. Approval requirements for resource usage beyond the levels of mandatory and general incidental use;

4.2.4. Transparency and accountability in respect to payments made and expenditure incurred to/by Councillors; and

4.2.5. The Policy builds Community confidence and public trust in Council to be maintained or improved.

Governance

4.3. This Policy allows Council to address matters that are not explicitly captured in the Act and, when followed will mitigate the likelihood of any breaches of the Act.

5. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

Human Rights Charter

5.1. This Policy has considered the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

Gender Equality

5.2. This Policy has considered the *Gender Equality Act 2020* in its development.

Roles and Responsibilities

5.3. Councillors are responsible for ensuring they use Council resources responsibly and efficiently, being mindful not to use Council support and resources for personal use.

5.4. The CEO is responsible for supporting Councillors in their roles and providing the approved level of support and resources contained within this Policy.

6. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

6.1. This Policy will be reviewed and adopted by Council on a four-year cycle.

7. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Legislative Provisions	Accident & Compensation Act 1985 Carers Recognition Act 2012 Charter of Human Rights and Responsibility Act 2006 Disability Act 2006 Freedom of Information Act 1982 Gender Equality Act 2020 Local Government (General) Regulations 2015 Local Government Act 2020 Victorian Independent Remuneration Tribunal and Improving Parliamentary Standards Act 2019
Council Supporting Documents	Councillor Access to Information Policy (C66) Occupational Health and Safety Policy (CE78)

8. DEFINITIONS

Carer	A carer is defined under s.4 of the <i>Carers Recognition Act 2012</i> .
Delegated Committee	defined under the Local Government Act 2020, s.63 Delegated committees: (1) A delegated committee established by a Council– (a) must include at least 2 Councillors; and (b) may include any other persons appointed to the delegated committee by the Council who are entitled to vote.

9. REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Sections Modified	CM9 Ref#
2.0	Council Meeting	16 March 2022	Revised Policy following introduction of new Council.	D399122
3.0	Council Meeting	16 March 2022	Administrative review conducted (updating of titles or removal of references to outdated acts or regulations etc) and several sections have been updated or added.	

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL COUNCIL POLICY



South Gippsland
Shire Council

COUNCILLOR GIFTS BENEFITS AND HOSPITALITY POLICY

Policy No.	C01	Adoption Date:	Council Meeting 21 August 2024
Directorate:	Performance and Innovation	Department:	Governance
Revision Date:	August 2028		
GOOD GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK – OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES			
Supporting Pillar:	Pillar 4. Structure, Systems & Policies Pillar 7. Risk & Compliance		
Link to Pillar:	This Policy aims to ensure the management of gifts and hospitality are managed in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Act 2020.		

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1. The purpose of the *Councillor Gifts Benefits and Hospitality Policy (C01)* (the Policy) is to provide guidance to Councillors to ensure Councillors are not compromised in the performance of their duties by accepting gifts or benefits (immediate or for the future) which may result in a sense of obligation or could be interpreted as an attempt to influence.
- 1.2. The Policy has been developed in accordance with section 138 of the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) that requires Council to adopt a Councillor Gift Policy and ss.128(3)(h) and 128(4) that requires a Councillor to declare a conflict of interest because of receipt of a 'disclosable gift'.
- 1.3. The Policy should be read in conjunction with *the Act* and associated regulations. Particular requirements apply to s.137 of *the Act* relating to 'anonymous gifts' and ss. 306 and 309 relating to election campaign donations.

2. SCOPE

- 2.1. The scope of this Policy applies to all Councillors of the South Gippsland Shire Council (Council).

3. POLICY PRINCIPLES

Background

- 3.1. South Gippsland Shire Council is committed to ensuring that Councillors act with integrity and honesty when performing their duties and while attending functions as Council representatives.
- 3.2. The acceptance of gifts, benefits, hospitality and donations can create perceptions that a Councillor's integrity has been compromised. Councillors are required to declare the acceptance of gifts and donations to avoid putting themselves in a position which is likely to create a general or material conflict of interest whether real or perceived.

- 3.3. The Policy provides a way of meeting the high level of community expectations in respect of transparency and accountability, by the proper recording of significant gifts and donations made to Councillors in a public register.

Transparency and Integrity

- 3.4. The Policy is based on transparency and integrity principles that apply to every person in public office, that they should avoid putting themselves in positions which are likely to create a general or material conflict of interest, whether real or perceived. This means that Councillors do not seek or accept gifts from people where the receipt of the gift is likely to create any perception of a conflict of interest with their public duty.
- 3.5. It is preferable that no gifts be accepted at all by Councillors, although Councillors are not prohibited from accepting gifts. The Policy requires that Councillors should avoid accepting gifts from people they know, or reasonably expect, will have dealings with the Council, and when it is possible that as a Councillor they may be called upon to deal with these people in their official capacity. Examples may include developers, community groups, real estate agents, suppliers and contractors (including potential), or other parties that may need to deal with Council at some stage.
- 3.6. Not accepting gifts from people and organisations that Councillors have dealings with in an official capacity, can avoid the following consequences:
- 3.6.1. The impression that the recipient is using their position for personal gain, rather than to serve the community; which reflects badly on the recipient and on the Council.
- 3.6.2. It is likely to prevent the recipient from undertaking duties that the recipient has been elected, appointed or reimbursed to perform, which may lead to a failing of responsibilities.
- 3.6.3. Accepting a gift may constitute, or appear to constitute, a misuse of position or acceptance of a secret commission, which are serious offences under the *Local Government Act 2020* and the *Crimes Act 1958* respectively.
- 3.7. The key principles are:
- 3.7.1. **Obligations:** Councillors act in accordance with their respective obligations with good governance.
- 3.7.2. **Public Interest:** Councillors have a duty to act in the public interest above their private interests when carrying out their official functions, in compliance with this Policy.
- 3.7.3. **Culture of Integrity:** Council fosters a culture of integrity with Councillors declaring all gifts.
- 3.7.4. **Risk-based:** Council's risk in relation to gift offers are assessed, managed and monitored.
- 3.7.5. **Accountability:** Council's procedures are transparent and accountable. Councillors are accountable for declaring accepted gifts, declined gifts or where an exception applies under this Policy.

Gift Acceptance and Refusal

- 3.8. In accordance with the key principles of this Policy before deciding whether to accept an offer, Councillors should first consider if the offer could be perceived as influencing them in performing their duties or lead to reputational damage. The more valuable the offer, the more likely that a conflict of interest or reputational risk exists.
- 3.9. A Councillor is required to check the *Local Government Act 2020*, s.128(3)(h) and s.128(4) to determine if they are required to declare a material conflict of interest because of receipt of an 'disclosable gift' in any matter where a conflict may be relevant.
- 3.10. The Council Gift Register is to be used to record all gifts, whether accepted, declined, or given to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) for Council's use, on the *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*.
- 3.11. To support the intent and expectations of the policy Councillors are required to declare gifts offered or received by family members as defined under the Act, which may give raise actual, perceived or potential conflict of interest or reputational risk to Council.
- 3.12. Developed by the Victorian Public Sector Commission, the **GIFT** test is a good example of what to think about when deciding whether to accept or decline a gift, benefit or hospitality.

G	Giver	<p>Who is providing the gift, benefit or hospitality and what is their relationship to me?</p> <p>Does my role require me to select contractors, award grants, regulate industries or determine government policies? Could the person or organisation benefit from a decision I make?</p>
I	Influence	<p>Are they seeking to gain an advantage or influence my decisions or actions?</p> <p>Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered to me publicly or privately? Is it a courtesy or token of appreciation or valuable non-token offer? Does its timing coincide with a decision I am about to make?</p>
F	Favour	<p>Are they seeking a favour in return for the gift, benefit or hospitality?</p> <p>Has the gift, benefit or hospitality been offered honestly? Has the person or organisation made several offers over the last 12 months? Would accepting it create an obligation to return a favour?</p>
T	Trust	<p>Would accepting the gift, benefit or hospitality diminish public trust?</p> <p>How would the public view acceptance of this gift, benefit or hospitality? What would my colleagues, family, friends or associates think?</p>

Acceptable Gifts – Non-token Gifts valued at \$50 or more, including aggregates

- 3.13. Councillors are allowed to accept some gifts; however, they should avoid compromising their ability to act independently by accepting gifts individually, or accumulatively within a financial year that have a monetary value of \$50 or more.
- 3.14. Fifty dollars is the Victorian public sector industry-based standard for non-token offers of benefits, gifts or hospitality that may be perceived to be by the recipient, the person making the offer or by the wider community, of more than consequential value.
- 3.15. All offers worth \$50 or more are non-token offers. Regardless whether they are accepted or declined, they must be declared and submitted to the Executive Office to include in Council's Gifts Register. This is to ensure that the combined aggregated total of offers made from a single source in the last five years does not exceed the gift disclosure threshold of \$500.
- 3.16. While permissible to be retained, Councillors acting in good faith are encouraged to refuse, or dispose to the CEO gift offers that have an aggregate value of \$50 or more that:
- 3.16.1. Are likely to influence them, or would be perceived to influence them, in the course of their duties; or
- 3.16.2. Have no legitimate business benefit.
- 3.17. While Councillors are able to accept gifts of \$50 or more, they are encouraged to hand over the gift to the CEO to utilise for Council related purposes.

Acceptable Gifts – Gestures and Token Gift Offers

- 3.18. Councillors are allowed to accept gestures that are token gift offers, benefits and hospitality, without approval or declaring the offer on the South Gippsland Shire Council's Gift Register if the value, or aggregate value is under \$50. An example of a gesture is an object with no monetary value such as flowers cut from the person's garden or homemade baked goods.
- 3.19. A gesture may also be a souvenir received from a person or company as a result of attending a seminar or conference held, conducted or sponsored by them, for which an appropriate fee was paid to attend. An example of this is a tie, pen or mug.
- 3.20. Door prizes and raffle prizes at functions or conferences are not considered a gift if the individual has personally paid for their attendance, or where the individual has paid for the raffle ticket.
- 3.21. If a Councillor is repetitively offered gestures that accumulatively equate to \$50 or more in a 12-month period, these are to be recorded in Council's Gift Register once a \$50 value is reached.

Disclosable Gifts – restrictions apply

- 3.22. Council discourages the acceptance of 'disclosable gifts'.
- 3.23. A 'disclosable gift' for the purposes of declaring a material conflict of interest and determining if such a gift may be accepted is defined in s.128(4) as follows:

*"For the purposes of subsection (3)(h), **disclosable gift** means one or more gifts with a total value of, or more than, \$500 or if an amount is prescribed for the purposes of this subsection, the prescribed amount,*

received from a person in the 5 years preceding the decision on the matter—

- (a) if the relevant person held the office of Councillor, was a member of Council staff or was a member of a delegated committee at the time the gift was received; or*
- (b) if the gift was, or gifts were, or will be, required to be disclosed as an election campaign donation—*

but does not include the value of any reasonable hospitality received by the relevant person at an event or function that the relevant person attended in an official capacity as a Councillor, member of Council staff or member of a delegated committee.”

- 3.24. The acceptance of any gifts over the aggregated value of \$500 or more (accumulative in the past 5 years or as a single gift) should be declined to avoid placing a Councillor in the position of having a potential Conflict of Interest in any matter involving the affected person (gift giver) in the future.

Prohibited Gifts – Anonymous Gifts

- 3.25. Any gift that is inconsistent with community values and could bring a Councillor's integrity, or that of the Council into disrepute must be declined.

- 3.26. An 'anonymous gift' is prohibited and must not to be accepted by a Councillor as per s.137 of the Act:

“Section 137 Local Government Act 2020 - anonymous gift not to be accepted

1. Subject to subsection (2), a Councillor must not accept, directly or indirectly, a gift for the benefit of the Councillor the amount or value of which is equal to or exceeds the gift disclosure threshold unless—

- (a) the name and address of the person making the gift are known to the Councillor; or*
- (b) at the time when the gift is made—*
 - (i) the Councillor is given the name and address of the person making the gift; and*
 - (ii) the Councillor reasonably believes that the name and address so given are the true name and address of the person making the gift.”*

Penalty: 60 penalty units.

- 3.27. If the name and address of the person making the gift are not known to the Councillor for whose benefit the gift is intended, the Councillor is not in breach of subsection (1) if the Councillor disposes of the gift to the Council within 30 days of the gift being received.

- 3.28. In addition to the penalty specified in subsection (1), a Councillor who is found guilty of a breach of that subsection must pay to the Council the amount or value of the gift accepted in contravention of that subsection.

- 3.29. If for any reason a Councillor finds themselves in possession of a gift when they don't know the name and address of the person who gave the gift, the Councillor can give the gift to the Council within 30 days to avoid committing an offence.

Gifts that create a Conflict of Interest

- 3.30. Councillors must not accept a gift that creates a conflict of interest (real, potential or perceived).
- 3.31. Note that a person from whom a Councillor has received a 'disclosable gift' is determined to be an 'affected person' under s.128(h) for the purposes of declaring a material conflict of interest.
- 3.32. A conflict of interest, created through receipt of a gift, denies all other community members of the right to be represented by their Councillor on particular matters coming before Council.
- 3.33. A conflict formed this way may also result in a Councillor unduly influencing other Councillors on how to vote for a certain issue. This is a misuse of position.
- 3.34. These actions undermine the integrity of individual Councillors and the trust of the community in Council.

Money or equivalent

- 3.35. Councillors must not accept money in any form. This includes gift cards (e.g. gift vouchers), or those easily converted into money (e.g. shares).

Regulatory Processes

- 3.36. A Councillor must not accept any gifts from any individual or group that may be involved with the permit application or regulatory activity where a Council regulatory process, or legal matter is underway, or coming up (e.g. a planning permit application; infringement appeal or claim against Council).

Bequests/ Wills

- 3.37. Any bequests to Councillors resulting from their position with Council must not be accepted. Arrangements may be made to donate the bequest to a charitable institution in the name of the donor or returned to the immediate family.

Reward Programs

- 3.38. Councillors must not collect rewards for personal use via reward points program for any Council related transactions (i.e. fly buys, frequent flyers, Everyday Rewards - Woolworths). This relates to any claims for reimbursement of expenses incurred in accordance with the *Councillor Support and Expenditure Policy (C51)*.

Procurement and Tender Process

- 3.39. Councillors must not accept any gifts from a current or prospective supplier/contractor or any offer that is made during a procurement or tender process by a person or organisation involved in the process.
- 3.40. Where gifts are received, offered or there are irregular approaches from suppliers, the Councillor must notify the Mayor and CEO and lodge a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*, so their refusal/action can be properly recorded.
- 3.41. Councillors must not visit a current supplier's premises without invitation. If a visit is required, the Councillor is to request a Senior Officer attend with them. Sub-Heading if required.

Hospitality

- 3.42. Gift offers of hospitality that exceed common courtesy must be refused as they are often inconsistent with community expectations and have a high risk of creating a conflict of interest. Examples of gift offers of hospitality that exceed common courtesy include:

- 3.42.1. Attending as a guest in a corporate box at the football or races.
- 3.42.2. Attending a concert or theatre event.
- 3.42.3. Attending an industry golf day at a reduced fee.
- 3.42.4. Being 'shouted' a meal at a restaurant or sporting club.
- 3.42.5. Accepting discounted or complimentary tickets for a family member to attend the tennis.

Conferences

- 3.43. Gift offers in relation to conferences (sponsored attendance, participation, travel or accommodation) must be declined, unless there is:
 - 3.43.1. Clear justification, such as where the invitation is issued by a government department or the offeror is a peak body; and
 - 3.43.2. Prior written approval granted by the CEO (Mayor for Councillors, CEO for Mayor) or another responsible person. The signed and dated approval must be attached to the gift offer declaration and noted in Council's *Gifts Register*.

Future Benefit

- 3.44. Councillors are prohibited from accepting any offering in any form, to any value, that may be perceived to be a suggestion or guarantee of a future benefit to the Councillor or any other person.
- 3.45. This includes any benefits that may be derived either during or after a Councillor finishes their term of office. Some examples include the assurance of future employment, services provided at a nil or substantially reduced value, beneficial property dealings, bank transfers or contract opportunities.
- 3.46. These will be treated as a fraudulent action and will be dealt with in accordance with Council's *Fraud and Corrupt Conduct Policy (C19)*, or as a criminal matter to be dealt with by the Police depending on the circumstances.
- 3.47. Any offers of this kind must be publicly declared and disclosed to the CEO, who will consider the offer in line with Council's *Fraud and Corrupt Conduct Policy (C19)*.

Attempts to Bribe

- 3.48. A Councillor who receives a gift offer that they believe is an attempted bribe must refuse the offer. They must:
 - 3.48.1. Immediately notify the CEO and lodge a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*, so their refusal can be recorded.
 - 3.48.2. Report the matter to the CEO or Public Interest Disclosure Officer who should report any criminal or corrupt conduct to the Victoria Police or the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC).

Endorsement of a product or service

- 3.49. A Councillor must not accept a gift, service, benefit or hospitality that could be perceived to be an endorsement of a product or service and will bring the individual or Council into disrepute.

Consequences of accepting prohibited gifts

3.50. Accepting a prohibited gift may constitute misuse of a Councillor's position. A breach of this Policy may result in serious misconduct allegations for Councillors. In addition, if the gift was offered with the expectation of something in return either immediately or in the future, such as preferential treatment, accepting it may constitute a bribe or other form of corruption and lead to criminal prosecution.

Recording and Reporting Prohibited Gift Offers

3.51. To assist the Council in monitoring the frequency and nature of prohibited gifts, it is essential that all such offers are disclosed and notified as declined in Council's *Gifts Register*. Councillors must lodge a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* and details of the gift to be included in Council's *Gift Register*.

3.52. A Councillor who believes another person within the Council may have solicited or been offered a bribe which they have not reported, must notify the CEO or report the matter as a public interest disclosure in accordance with Council's *Public Interest Disclosure Policy (CE21)*.

No Soliciting of Gifts or Secret Deals

3.53. Councillors must not solicit gifts, benefits, hospitality or secret deals for themselves or anyone else, in any form. To do so may constitute misuse of their position. It may also constitute corruption and lead to criminal prosecution.

Donations and Bequests of Gifts to Council

3.54. Council may be offered or bequested gifts or donations. Such gifts may include and are not limited to:

- 3.54.1. Real property
- 3.54.2. Donations
- 3.54.3. Art work
- 3.54.4. Free Training and Services

3.55. Council does not encourage and will not automatically accept a gift or donation. Given the potential for a vast range in terms of quality, relevance and the ongoing responsibility and maintenance requirements, Council reserves the right to decline the offer.

3.56. In relation to Bequests, consideration will be given to:

- 3.56.1. The expressed wishes and intentions of the bequestor, as outlined in the will, are paramount in determining the purpose for which the gift will be used.
- 3.56.2. Where Council is unable to honor the intentions of the will, all appropriate legal measures will be taken to determine a purpose for the gift that most closely aligns to the bequestor's intentions.

Gift Disclosure

3.57. A Councillor must disclose any 'disclosable gift' valued at \$500 or more (accumulative in the past 5 years or as a single gift) in their next bi-annual

Personal Interest Return form. They must also include the disclosable gift(s) in Council's Gift Register within 14 days of receiving the gift(s).

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

3.58. A Councillor who has a conflict of interest as a result of receiving a gift or gifts from a person must disclose the conflict of interest in accordance with the procedures outlined in the *Governance Rules (C82)*.

Election Campaign Donation Disclosure

3.59. Gifts above the gift disclosure threshold that are election campaign donations must be disclosed in an *Election Campaign Donation form* and in accordance with the ss. 128(4), 306, 309, 310, of the Act and the *Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020*.

Recording Gift Declaration in Council's Gift Register

3.60. Gifts valued at \$50 or more, including aggregated gifts must be disclosed in Council's Gift Register by completing a *Gift and Donation Declaration Form*:

- 3.60.1. Where a gift is shared amongst multiple Councillors, the gift must be declared if the total value of the gift exceeds \$50. All people sharing in the receipt of the gift must be listed on Council's Gift and Donation Declaration Form, with the initial receiver of the gift responsible for registering receipt of the gift at the top of the list.
- 3.60.2. Councillors are to provide details pertaining to the receipt, or offer, of any gift to the CEO within 14 days from the date of receipt/ offer.
- 3.60.3. The information on Council's *Gift and Donation Declaration Form* will include if the gift has been refused, retained by the individual or given to the CEO for use by Council.
- 3.60.4. Gifts accepted (or declined) of \$50 or more will be included in Council's Gifts Register by the CEO and will contain:
 - i. A description of the gift (or donation) and its estimated value.
 - ii. Date of receipt or decline of gift.
 - iii. The name of the gift giver (if known).
 - iv. Name of the receipt of gift.
 - v. What was done with the gift (was it retained by the Councillor, handed to the Council, or declined).
 - vi. Gift offers provided by suppliers (irregular approaches from suppliers).

Undervaluing Gifts

3.61. Undervaluing gifts received to avoid declaring them, may constitute a breach of the *Councillor Code of Conduct (C14)*. Such matters will be managed in accordance with the procedures set out in the respective *Code* and relevant sections of the Act.

Inability to politely refuse a gift

3.62. On occasions a Councillor may be given a gift that cannot be politely refused. This typically occurs after a presentation at a function when a gift is given as

an appreciation. If there is any risk that the gift may give rise to a material conflict of interest or otherwise compromise the recipient, it should be accepted on behalf of the Council and passed on to the CEO for use by the Council to avoid any personal conflict of interest. This type of gift must be declared on Council's *Gifts Register*.

4. RISK ASSESSMENT

This Policy mitigates Council's risks as described below:

Governance

- 4.1. Councillors to understand their requirements and obligations under the *Councillor Code of Conduct (C14)*, *Governance Rules (C82)* and *Election Period Policy (C30)*, and under the Act.
- 4.2. Council to demonstrate its commitment to probity in the management of potential breaches of the *Local Government Act 2020*, *Crimes Act 1958*, Codes of Conduct and Council policies.
- 4.3. Community confidence and public trust in Council to be maintained or improved through appropriate and transparent declaration and use of gifts thereby minimising risks to Council, Councillors or staff reputations.
- 4.4. Councillors and staff to mitigate the risk of fraud and appropriately manage situations which may be regarded as unethical conduct or behaviour.

5. IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT

Human Rights Charter

- 5.1. This Policy has considered the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006*.

Gender Equality

- 5.2. This Policy has considered the *Gender Equity Act 2020*.

Policy Publication

- 5.3. The Policy will be published on Council's website.
- 5.4. Council's Gift Register will be made available in accordance with South Gippsland Shire Council's *Public Transparency Policy (C75)*.
- 5.5. The Policy is to be included in Council's Councillor Induction Program.

Roles and Responsibilities

- 5.6. Councillors are to always act in accordance with their respective obligations for good governance. These include, but are not limited to:
 - 5.6.1. Reading, understanding and abiding by the Act at all times. In particular in relation to receipt, disposal and management of any gift, donations, hospitality or benefit.
 - 5.6.2. Refusing all prohibited gifts.
 - 5.6.3. Declining anything that is offered as an attempt to influence, bribe or create an expectation or an obligation on the Councillor or Council.
 - 5.6.4. Not accept any offer that suggests a guarantee of a future benefit that may be deemed to be as real and tangible as money-in-the-bank.

- 5.6.5. Not soliciting gifts for themselves or anyone, in any form.
 - 5.6.6. Disclosing of any gift valued at \$500 or more (accumulative in the past 5 years or as a single gift) in their Biannual Personal Interest Return Form, unless the gift is from a family member.
 - 5.6.7. Declaring conflicts of interest as a result of receiving a gift or gifts from a person, in accordance with the *Governance Rules (C82)*.
 - 5.6.8. Declaring gifts of over \$50 or more, including aggregates in the Council's Gift Register within 14 days of receipt of the gift, in accordance with register requirements.
 - 5.6.9. Declaring gifts above the threshold that are election campaign donations in their Election Campaign Donation Return Form.
 - 5.6.10. Councillors are responsible for completing and submitting the Council's Gift and Donation Declaration Form and provide them to the Governance Team for updating on Council's *Gift Register*.
- 5.7. The Governance Team maintains Council's *Gift Register* for recording all gifts declarations for Councillors, Staff and Contractors.
 - 5.8. The Protected Disclosure Officer will manage any disclosures made in regard to questionable gifts or conduct and refer these to the respective authorities to investigate.
 - 5.9. A copy of Council's *Gifts Register* may be provided to the Audit and Risk Committee and Council (via the Audit and Risk Committee) every 12-months for their consideration. Monitoring Council's *Gifts Register* will allow for any identified trends developing to be identified and considered by the Committee.
 - 5.10. The Governance Team is able to provide public access to the Council's *Gift Register* in accordance with Council's *Public Transparency Policy (C75)* via Council's email address council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au.

Non-compliance with this Policy

- 5.11. A Councillor has a duty to act in the public interest above their private interests when carrying out their official capacity and functions of a Councillor and to abide by this Policy.
- 5.12. If a member of the community wishes to ask a question in relation to Council's *Gifts Register*, this should be raised directly with the Governance Team via Council's email address council@southgippsland.vic.gov.au.

6. MONITORING, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

- 6.1. This Policy will be reviewed and adopted by Council on a four-year cycle.

7. REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Legislative Provisions	
	Crimes Act 1958
	Local Government (Electoral) Regulations 2020
	Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006
	Freedom of Information Act 1982
	Gender Equality Act 2020
	Local Government Act 2020

Council Supporting Documents	Audit Policy (C55) Councillor Code of Conduct Policy (C14) Employee Code of Conduct (CE20) Fraud and Corrupt Conduct Policy (C19) Governance Rules (C82) Human Rights Policy (C52) Information Privacy Policy (Website Privacy Statement) (C22) Public Interest Disclosure Guidelines Policy (CE21) Public Transparency Policy (C75)
Related External Documents (<i>optional</i>)	Gift and Declaration Form Conflict of Interest a Guide for Councillors and Staff, October 2020

8. DEFINITIONS

Aggregated Gifts/ Benefits	If multiple gifts, donations, benefits or hospitality are received from a person, they must be treated as a single gift with an aggregate value. This applies to multiple token gifts and gestures aggregating to \$50 or more in one financial year, or to a 'disclosable gift' value of \$500 aggregated within five years.
Bribe	A bribe is an offer of money or other inducement made with the intention to corruptly influence a Councillor, officer or contractor in the performance of their duties. Bribery or attempted bribery of a public official is a criminal offence.
Conflict of Interest	The <i>Local Government Act 2020</i> requires Councillors to declare General (s.127) or Material Conflicts (s.128) of Interest. A conflict of interest is a conflict between a Councillor's public duty to act in the best interest of the Council and their private interests (financial or non-financial). A conflict exists whether it is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Real – it currently exists • Potential – it may arise, given the circumstances • Perceived – members of the public could reasonably form the view that a conflict exists, or could arise, that may improperly influence the person's performance of their duty to the Council, now or in the future.
Declarable Gift	A gift that is valued \$50 or more must be registers in Council's Gifts Register.
Disclosable Gift	A 'disclosable gift' means any gift valued at or above \$500 or a higher prescribed amount that a relevant person received in the preceding five years if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the relevant person was a councillor, member of council staff or member of a delegated committee at the time the gift was received, or • the gift was an election campaign donation. <p>If multiple gifts are received from a person, they must be treated as a single gift with an aggregate value. A gift includes any good or service (other than volunteer labour) that is provided for free or at an inadequate price. A failure to comply is an offence that can be prosecuted in court. If found guilty a fine of up to 60 penalty units may be imposed, the value of the gift must be paid to the Council and the Councillor may be required to pay the costs of the prosecution.</p>
Ceremonial Gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ceremonial gifts are official gifts provided as part of the culture and practices of communities and government, within Australia or internationally. Ceremonial gifts are usually provided when conducting business with official delegates or representatives from another organisation, community. • Ceremonial gifts are the property of South Gippsland Shire Council, irrespective of value. The receipt of ceremonial gifts should be recorded on Council's Gift Register but does not need to be published online.

Gestures/ tokens – not considered gifts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A souvenir received from a person or company as a result of attending a seminar or conference held, conducted or sponsored by them, for which an appropriate fee was paid to attend. For example: ties, pens or mugs. • Small gestures of appreciation from the community or customers such as cut flowers from their garden or homemade baked goods. • Door prizes and raffle prizes at functions or conferences are not considered a gift if the individual has personally paid for their attendance, or where the individual has paid for the raffle ticket. 	
Gift (s.3)	<p>Means any disposition of property otherwise than by will made by a person to another person without consideration in money or money's worth or with inadequate consideration, including–</p> <p>(a) the provision of a service (other than volunteer labour); and</p> <p>(b) the payment of an amount in respect of a guarantee; and</p> <p>(c) the making of a payment or contribution at a fundraising</p>	
Gift Examples	<p>A gift is anything of monetary or other value that is offered by an external organisation or individual to a Councillor, Officer or contractor as a result of their role with the agency. It includes free or discounted items or services, benefits or hospitality that exceeds common courtesy.</p>	
<p>Hospitality Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A bottle of wine or spirits, • Tickets to sporting events • Gift Voucher • Corporate hospitality at a corporate facility • Discounted products for personal use • Use of a holiday home • Free or discounted travel • Free training excursions • Door prize or voucher if an individual has not personally paid to attend. 	<p>Services Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Christmas hamper • Desk calendar • Box of chocolates • Bottle of wine • Commemorative object • Door prize at a function • Tree lopping • House painting 	<p>Benefits Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preferential treatment • Privileged access • Access to discount or loyalty programs • Promise of a new job
Hospitality	<p>Hospitality is considered a gift unless the hospitality was reasonable and the person attending the function or event in an official Council capacity. Reasonableness test: the hospitality must be of a standard and type that an independent observer would consider appropriate and not excessive. Official capacity test: it must clearly be your duty as a Councillor to attend the relevant function or event.</p> <p>Hospitality that exceeds common courtesy includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A 'fine dining and wines' working lunch at another organisation's premises • An offer to pay for a working lunch at a café • An offer of a free spot on an industry golf day <p>Hospitality that does not exceed common courtesy and is therefore not a gift includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sandwiches and pastries over a lunchtime meeting • A cup of coffee at another organisation's premises • A cup of coffee at a café (unless there is a conflict of interest) 	
Internal Gifts	<p>Gifts received by Councillors from South Gippsland Shire Council are not covered by this Policy and do not need to be declared. For example: recognition gifts after the end of the Mayoral term or Councillor term.</p>	
Legitimate Business Reason	<p>A legitimate business reason is a business purpose that furthers official business or other legitimate goals of the Council.</p> <p>The following are not legitimate business reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'it would have been impolite to refuse • 'Refusal would offend' (except in compelling circumstances that are in the public interest, for example accepting a gift onstage at an official ceremony) • 'Networking' • 'Maintaining stakeholder relationships' 	

Supplier/ Contractor	Person or company supplying goods, services or works to the Council.
Value	Value means the face value or estimated retail value.

9. REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved By	Approval Date	Sections Modified	CM9 Ref#
1.0	Council Meeting	19 March 2014	New Policy	
1.1	Council Meeting	23 November 2016	Revised	
2.0	Council Meeting	21 April 2021	Significant revisions to align with Local Government Act 2020, incorporating separation from the staff gift policy and a name change for the retained policy.	
3.0	Council Meeting	21 August 2024	Administrative review and new section added section 3.11	

5.2. SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC BRIEFINGS - 13 JUNE TO 12 JULY 2024

Directorate: Performance and Innovation

Department: Governance

Council Plan

Objective - Leading with Integrity

Council's transparency and governance is strengthened by regularly reporting on summaries of briefings held, that assist Council to make informed decisions in Council Meetings on behalf of the community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the information presented to Councillors during 13 June and 12 July 2024.

This aligns with the principles of the Local Government Act 2020 and supports transparency around Council decisions and actions.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives and notes this report.

REPORT

Meeting Title	Details
Wednesday 19 June 2024	
Executive Update	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
Council Meeting Agenda Topic Discussion – 26 June 2024	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Councillor Jenni Keerie has declared a material interest in Confidential Agenda Item 10.1 2023/24 Community Grants - Round 2, as she is employed by an organisation that auspiced one community grant application and auspiced the funds for another community grant application on behalf of another organisation.</p>

Meeting Title	Details
	<p>Councillor Clare Williams has declared a material conflict of interest in Confidential Agenda Item 10.1 2023/24 Community Grants - Round 2, as she is a joint owner of a business that provided a quote to a community grant application.</p> <p>Councillor Clare Williams has declared a general conflict of interest in Confidential Agenda Item 10.1 2023/24 Community Grants - Round 2, as she is a member of community group that has made a community grant application.</p> <p>Councillor Mohya Davies has declared a general conflict of interest in Confidential Agenda Item 10.1 2023/24 Community Grants - Round 2, as she is the Chair on an organisation that has made a community grant application.</p> <p>Councillor Sarah Gilligan has declared a general conflict of interest in Confidential Agenda Item 10.1 2023/24 Community Grants - Round 2, as she has a close association to a project that has made a community grant application.</p> <p>The matters with a declared conflict of interest were not discussed.</p>
<p>Mirboo North Kindergarten Project</p>	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
<p>Marinus Link Update</p>	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
<p>Leongatha and Korumburra Rail Precincts Update</p>	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
<p>Former Mirboo North Railway Station Refurbishment</p>	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p>

Meeting Title	Details
	Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
Wednesday 26 June 2024	
Executive Update	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Councillor Clare Williams has a declared material conflict of interest in Executive Update discussion on Simon’s Lane, as she is part owner of a business that tendered for machinery used in the Simon’s Lane Project. Councillor Clare Williams left the meeting at 9.26am and returned at 9.28am with a conflict of Interest.</p>
Council Meeting Agenda Topic Discussion – 26 June 2024	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
Coal Creek Community Park and Museum	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
Qube - Barry Beach Marine Terminal	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
Integrated Water Management Plan	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
Wednesday 10 July 2024	
Executive Update	<p>Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey.</p> <p>Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.</p>
Council Meeting Agenda Topic	Councillors Attending:

Meeting Title	Details
Discussion – 17 July 2024	Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
Ward Boundary Review and Election Update	Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
People & Culture Update	Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
Audit and Risk Committee Update	Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
Planning Briefing	Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Adrian Darakai, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
Electronic Surveillance Data Usage Policy	Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.
Integrated Water Management Plan	Councillors Attending: Mohya Davies, Scott Rae, Clare Williams, John Schelling, Sarah Gilligan, Jenni Keerie, Michael Felton and Nathan Hersey. Conflict of Interest: Nil disclosed.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Governance Rules (C82)

Public Transparency Policy (C75)

Legislative Provisions

Local Government Act 2020

5.3. DOCUMENTS SEALED, CONTRACTS VARIED, AWARDED OR EXTENDED BY CEO - 13 JUNE 2024 TO 12 JULY 2024

Directorate:	Performance and Innovation
Department:	Financial Strategy

Council Plan

Objective - Leading with Integrity

Council's transparency of financial decisions made and overall financial sustainability is strengthened by regularly reporting on documents sealed, contracts awarded, varied or extended under the CEO's delegation.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report documents the following actions undertaken by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) which occurred during the period from 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024. Council's *Procurement Policy (C32)* requires the CEO to report to Council any of the following actions undertaken to the next appropriate Meeting:

- Documents sealed;
- Contracts awarded after a public tender process within the CEO's delegation;
- Contracts varied or extended by the CEO which exceeded the CEO's delegation;
- Annual WorkCover premiums; and
- Annual Insurance Premiums.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives and notes this report.

REPORT

Documents Sealed

Under the *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), s.14 states that each Council is a body corporate with perpetual succession; and must have a common seal. Sealing a document makes it an official document of Council as a corporate body. Documents that require sealing include agreements, leases or any other contractual or legally binding document that binds Council to another party.

Use of the *General Local Law 2024*, Part 5 - Administration, clause 65 – Common Seal of Council, states that if the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) uses the Common Seal in a manner described by sub-clause (5), this means on the authority of a Council resolution, then Council must be advised of such use on a regular basis.

In accordance with the *General Local Law 2024*, Part 5 - Administration, clause 65 (6), the following are presented to Council as documents sealed during the period from 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024.

1. Nil.

Section 173 Agreements are prepared in accordance with s.173 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, allowing Council to enter into agreements relating to the use or development of land, conditions to which the land June be used or developed or any matter that relates to planning or planning schemes in Victoria. Section 174 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* requires that such an agreement be under seal and must bind the owner to the covenants specified in the agreement.

In accordance with the *General Local Law 2024*, Instrument of Delegation and *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, the following are presented to Council as documents sealed during the period from 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024.

1. Section 173 Agreement between South Gippsland Shire Council and the owner of 110 D M Scotts Road, Korumburra for a two lot subdivision. Seal applied 1 July 2024.
2. Section 173 Agreement between South Gippsland Shire Council and the owner of 24 Railway Road, Baromi for a two lot subdivision. Seal applied 1 July 2024.

Contracts Awarded, Varied or Extended

In accordance with Council's Procurement Policy where contracts are awarded under delegation, varied or extended, they are required to be reported to the next practicable Council Meeting.

1. Contracts awarded by Council after a public tender process, signed by the CEO between 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024.
 - a. Nil
2. Contracts awarded after a public tender process within the CEO's delegation between 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024.
 - a. CON/398 for Provision of Mount Lyall Road, Nyora Road Rehabilitation was awarded to Sure Constructions(Vic) Pty Ltd, signed by the CEO 20 June 2024.
 - b. CON/403 Leongatha Memorial Hall Precinct Feasibility Study to Wendy Dunstan, T/A Outside the Square Creative Consulting, signed by the CEO 24 June 2024.
3. Contract variations approved by the CEO between 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024.

- a. Nil
4. Contract extensions approved by the CEO 13 June 2024 to 12 July 2024.
 - a. CON/252 for Provision of South Gippsland Shire Council Pool's Maintenance Services was awarded to Mechanical Plumbing Services Pty Ltd. The contract was for a three-year term commencing on 1 July 2020 with an option of two 1-year extensions. An extension of 1 year (second year extension option) has been approved, signed by the CEO 12 July 2024.
 - b. CON/284 for Provision of HVAC Maintenance Services was awarded to Williams and Burns Pty Ltd. The contract was for a three-year term commencing on 1 July 2021, with an option of two one-year extensions. An extension of 1 year (first extension option) has been approved, signed by the CEO 12 July 2024.

Annual WorkCover Premium

In accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), s.5 where insurances are processed for payment under delegation, they are required to be reported to the next practicable Council Meeting.

5. WorkCover Premium for 2024-2025 has been approved for payment for the value \$558,098.88 (value includes GST and is the Early Full Payment value with 5% discount).

Annual Insurance Premiums

In accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), s.5 where insurances are processed for payment under delegation, they are required to be reported to the next practicable Council Meeting.

6. Councils Insurance Premiums for 2024-2025 have been approved for payment for the value \$1,451,888.60 (value includes GST).

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework
Pillar 3. Decision Making

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Governance Rules (C82)

General Local Law 2024

Procurement Policy (C32)

Legislative Provisions

Local Government Act 1989

Local Government Act 2020

Planning and Environment Act 1987

6. OBJECTIVE - PROTECTING AND ENHANCING OUR ENVIRONMENT

6.1. DOMESTIC WASTEWATER MANAGEMENT PLAN - ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION REPORT

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Community Health and Safety

Council Plan

Objective - Protecting and Enhancing our Environment

This report relates to the South Gippsland Shire – Council Plan 2022-2026 Strategic Objective Protection and Enhancing our Environment.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to highlight Council’s progress and achievements in relation to the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan (DWMP) 2022-2026, Annual Implementation Report May 2024. The DWMP includes eight strategies with a suite of 74 actions across those strategies, to be completed during its four-year life cycle.

Of the 74 actions:

- 26% (19 actions) are completed.
- 48% (36 actions) are on track with high confidence levels for completion by the end of the DWMP life cycle, and
- 26% (19 actions) are currently being monitored and will continue to be reviewed as part of delivery of the DWMP 2022-2026.

The attached Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024 **Attachment [6.1.1]** details the current progress of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

- 1. Adopt the report of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022 – 2026 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024, and**
- 2. Note a copy of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026 – Annual Implementation Report May 2024 will be made public on Council’s website.**

REPORT

To ensure the health of our environment and that of our residents, visitors and those working within the municipality, South Gippsland Shire Council has several

significant roles and legislative responsibilities which govern the effective management and disposal of wastewater.

In accordance with the *Environment Protection Act 2017* and the *Environment Protection Transitional Regulations 2021*, Council must develop and implement a DWMP that:

- (a) Identifies the public health and environmental risks associated with onsite domestic wastewater management systems; and
- (b) Sets out strategies to minimise those risks.

Council’s Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026 was adopted by Council at the 22 July 2022 Council meeting and outlines the strategies and actions that will be taken to manage domestic wastewater across the municipality.

Council has made excellent progress on most actions, with key achievements highlighted in the table below:

Key Achievements
Strategy 1: Further Develop Information Management Systems
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant progress has been made in the way Council captures Onsite Wastewater Management System (OWMS) data, including increased reporting and mapping capabilities. These improvements have seen a dramatic reduction in the number of days taken to assess and issue OWMS permits. Most permits have been issued within half the designated statutory timeframe (42 days). • Approximately 3,000 OWMS service reports have been received and processed since the introduction of the DWMP in 2022. • Relationship building, and community engagement with key stakeholders has continued and significantly improved since the implementation of the DWMP. A successful business breakfast gathering (Annual Onsite Wastewater Management System Conversation) was held with local plumbers, OWMS installers and service agents invited to attend. The session provides a platform for Council to provide an update on new OWMS processes, outline any trends and discuss any wastewater issues and concerns which require further attention. • The development of new OWMS educational material has been released to assist new homeowners with identifying the location of their OWMS, understanding OWMS maintenance requirements and standard operational information.
Strategy 2: Education and Community Consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Environmental Health team have actively engaged with OWMS plumbers, installers and service agents to promote stronger relationships and to increase understanding of the OWMS permit process.

- Internal OWMS processes have been reviewed and updated to better align with the requirements of the *Environment Protection Act 2017*. This has seen a complete rework of all OWMS forms, fees and publicly available information. Further updates are scheduled in line with the DWMP strategies in future years.
- Council continues to meet with the regional Environment Protection Authority (EPA) and other regulatory authorities on a regular basis to advocate for shared goals and outcomes. This includes advocating for sewer infrastructure in priority townships.

Strategy 3: Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Development

- A review of Council's Wastewater Management Policy (C78) has commenced and is on track for completion in the 2024/25 year. The new policy will focus on Council's information systems, permit processes, improved mapping, system life span and other requirement of the *Environment Protection Act 2017* and the *Environment Protection Regulations 2021*.
- Compliance and enforcement processes have been improved to reduce the impact of off-site wastewater discharge on stormwater drains and ground waters. This process improvement has seen an increase in risk identification and property owner/occupier compliance. As a result, overall compliance of OWMS with the *Environment Protection Act 2017* has been experienced.

Strategy 4: Environmental Monitoring

- Council has been successful in obtaining a financial grant from the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), which is being used to develop a pilot environmental water sampling program to monitor the effect of OWMS systems in vulnerable areas. The pilot sampling program is on track for completion (and acquittal) at the end of December 2024.
- Improved process continues to identify failing OWMS and implement compliance and enforcement processes to achieve corrective actions as required. As a direct result of process change in this area, an increase in ongoing compliance of OWMS has been experienced.
- Approximately 4,000 OWMS have been assessed as compliant through the OWMS Compliance Program since the beginning of the DWMP implementation.

Strategy 5: Management of Commercial Properties

- The Environmental Health team continues to routinely engage with property owners in unsewered commercial areas to achieve best environmental outcomes.

- The development of commercial property OWMS education and information is on track to be delivered in the 2024/25 financial year. This package of information will assist commercial businesses in understanding their OWMS and identify any issues early.

Strategy 6: Continue to Develop and Implement Compliance Management

- There has been a review, with updates undertaken to the suite of information provided to property owners upon the issue of the Certificate to Use. This information informs and educates property owners regarding the service, maintenance and upkeep requirements of their OWMS.
- Improved electronic data capture has been undertaken by completing the historic uptake process for OWMS records prior to amalgamation.
- An audit and enforcement program has been established to ensure property owners, service technicians and agents adequately fulfil their respective responsibilities.
- All notified OWMS failures or outstanding works were followed up and entered the enforcement process where required.

Strategy 7: Regulatory Management

- The Environmental Health team provided significant input and user context for the review and development of the new EPA OWMS Guidelines, which was implemented in May 2024.
- The identification of errors in the previous EPA OWMS Code of Practice was completed, which achieved an improved outcome for OWMS installed in sandy soils.
- Bore impacts on OWMS installed in sandy soils was investigated, particularly those in Venus Bay, Sandy Point and Walkerville, and developed a new bore process in line with current legislation resulting in an improved outcome for the environment and property owners.
- Commenced the implementation of the pilot environmental sampling program, to monitor stormwater systems, surface waters and groundwaters in high-risk areas and priority townships.

Strategy 8: Reporting, Audits and Review

- The requirement to have the DWMP third party audited has been removed from legislation, therefore this cost will no longer be incurred by the DWMP implementation. Internal audits will replace the previously required external audits and be conducted every three years.
- No updates to the DWMP 2022-2026 are required currently.

CONSULTATION/COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There was an extensive consultation period during the development of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

The implementation of strategies and actions included in the DWMP are accommodated from within the Environmental Health team operational budget.

RISKS

Environmental protection legislation requires Council to develop and implement a domestic wastewater management plan to identify public health and environmental risk associated with OWMS, and to specify strategies to manage these risks. Council's DWMP 2022-2026 complies with this requirement. Council's risk exposure is being managed.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Domestic Wastewater Management Plan - Year 1 Reporting 2024 [6.1.1 - 12 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Pillar 8. Monitoring & Performance Review

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Domestic Wastewater Management Plan

Legislative Provisions

Environment Protection Act 2017

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

{regional-plans}



*South Gippsland
Shire Council*

Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026

Annual
Implementation
Update
May 2024

Domestic Wastewater Management Plan 2022-2026

Council Plan Objective – Protecting and Enhancing our Environment

- Initiative:
Annual implementation of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan (DAMP) 2022-2026

			Year 1 – 2022/2023	
STRATEGY	ACTION	When / Staging	Progress Update	Status
1. Further develop information management systems				
Improve the quality and quantity of wastewater related information captured	Identify and collect the appropriate information required for all installed septic tank systems	Ongoing	Historical wastewater permits have been reviewed and completed “permits to use” have been entered into Council’s corporate systems. New procedures have been implemented ensuring new permits are processed within statutory timeframes.	Completed
	Data capture processes to be reviewed to ensure efficiency of data entry and appropriate use of data fields for reporting and document processing purposes	Ongoing	Procedures have been reviewed and new ones implemented. All permit data is accurately processed at each of the permit stages. Timeframes have improved for processing which enables more current reporting.	Completed
	Develop and maintain partnerships and reporting agreements with service agents to improve reporting accuracy and efficiency	Ongoing	Relationships with stakeholders, builders, plumbers and property owners has significantly improved. A successful business breakfast was held enabling a two- way robust conversation around what was working and what wasn’t, [bW X]b[k \U]could be improved.	Completed
Better utilise information and Communication Technologies tools to	Maintain a relevant and accurate webpage, with links to/ from relevant external pages	Ongoing	The webpage is being reviewed looking for ways to improve information. Working closely with the communications team to make more user friendly.	On Track

efficiently collect and store wastewater data	Cross reference wastewater licence information with other relevant permit controls, e.g. building or planning permits	2021/2022	Introduction of internal team meetings to assess incoming planning referrals for proposed subdivisions and/or development. This has resulted in reduced response times.	Completed
	Utilise in the field' data management and communication tools	Ongoing	iPads have recently been acquired for use in the field. Currently assessing suitable programs to implement to improve efficiency.	On Track
	Investigate suitable data sources for groundwater levels, soil types, effective transportation rates and treatment ability to identify high-risk areas	Ongoing	Information such as Land Capability Assessments (LCAs) where available are used to evaluate wastewater permits. Other data sources are considered when required such as bore hole locations. This information informs system design for the best environmental outcome from wastewater permits.	Completed
	Investigate costs and potential benefits of GIS-based wastewater mapping system including retrospective data entry	Ongoing	Not yet fully assessed but will be part of further system improvement. This action is due to commence in the 2024/25 reporting year.	On Track
Investigate and implement an online portal for wastewater contractors to use when submitting information to Council	Develop and implement an incentive strategy to promote the uptake of a Council approved online information management system i.e. a published list of 'Approved Service Agents'. Strategy to be implemented through Council's Wastewater Management Policy. Encourage, through education and incentives, wastewater contractors to adopt approved systems.	2023/2024	The Wastewater Management Policy (C78) is currently under review, with a view to looking to include these actions. The policy review is due to be finalised in the 2024/25 reporting year.	On Track
Risk Prioritisation	Investigate ways to use Council's corporate information management systems (Pathway/ TRIM/ Intramaps) to record on-site wastewater treatment systems that are known to be failing and causing risks to public and environmental health (low, medium, low-risk rating).	2024/2025	Not due to start this action until next year but the team has commenced re-establishing the foundations for corporate systems from which risk identification for properties can be established.	On Track
	Develop a procedure to record when risks have been addressed and removed	2024/2025	This will be developed in conjunction with the action above.	On Track

2. Education and community consultation				
Raise profile of wastewater system operation and maintenance requirements within the municipality and region	Attend the South Gippsland Shire Council Sustainability Festival and other relevant community events to promote wastewater management best practice	2022/2023	Officers attend festivals as part of monitoring compliance with food safety standards. Where the festival is taking place in unsewered areas offices take the opportunity to also provide wastewater information. Wastewater information is also provided to our events team to ensure it is included with anyone looking to hold a festival in an unsewered area.	Completed
	Implement targeted education campaigns to property owners, occupiers and agents in high-risk areas at appropriate times	2022/2023	Applied on an as needed basis to specific properties. Enhanced campaigns to follow for the duration of the plan	On Track
	Provide readily accessible wastewater management information in hard copy and web-based format	2022/2023	The information is available and will continue to be ongoing	Completed
Provide regular opportunities to improve community and stakeholder understanding and support of improved wastewater management projects and programs	Develop and implement an ongoing community education program	Ongoing	Due to commence in 2024/25	On Track
	Provide information on septic tank system best practice to property owners via community outlets and Council publications	Ongoing	Due to commence in 2024/25	On Track
	Liaise with communities and local water authorities to progress community sewerage, where appropriate	Ongoing	Strong advocacy support is provided to sewer all townships such as Fish Creek. Attended a number of meetings with the Fish Creek Community Development Group and will continue as opportunities arise with other townships.	On Track

	Work with the EPA, Water Authorities, Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) and other interested stakeholders to achieve shared goals	Ongoing	Attend regular meetings with the EPA, building strong relationships. Council continues to meet regularly with other regulatory authorities. These relationships are important to Council and our stakeholders and will continue ongoing.	Completed
Develop and implement a process that will ensure all new property owners are informed about what type of on-site wastewater treatment system is on or available to their property	Section 32 notices to include basic information on property's on-site wastewater treatment system including: → Property on on-site wastewater treatment system indefinitely. → Property in a declared water catchment area. → Any outstanding notices issued on property with respect to on-site wastewater treatment system	Ongoing	Further work is required on this action in consultation with other internal departments. Due for completion 2024/25.	On Track
	Develop a process with Rates to be able to add or remove the available details on Section 32 notices as required	Ongoing	Follows on from action above. Due for completion 2024/25.	On Track
Disseminate information on landowner/occupier responsibilities and maintenance requirements for residents with on-site wastewater treatment systems when properties change hands	Develop a 'new residents kit' for all new residents who are moving into a property serviced by an on-site wastewater system	2022/2023	Requires input from other internal departments. This action has been pushed out to 2023/2024	Monitor
	Upon notification of property transfer, provide new residents with details about their on-site wastewater management system including the type of system, maintenance and service conditions, a copy of the property's wastewater permit and plan (if available)	2022/2023	This action has been delayed but will be completed by 2023/24. Ensuring accuracy of historical data has delayed this action.	Monitor
Develop education materials for property owners and users of holiday accommodation, particularly those in sandy soils	Develop education materials for property owners who use their property for holiday type purposes (absentee land owners) to educate on matters such as restarting on-site wastewater systems after a period of absence and what to do when you leave the property	2022/2023	The educational materials are currently in draft, with collaboration taking place. Communications Team to finalise materials. Due for completion 2024/25.	Monitor

	Develop resources for property owners to provide to guests staying at holiday houses and accommodation serviced by on-site wastewater systems	2022/2023	This action planned for 2024 as part of the same educational package for our community	Monitor
Develop targeted resources for industry	Develop dedicated education of property agents and owners of short-term rentals regarding management of on-site wastewater treatment systems in holiday rentals in a Communications Plan	2023/2024	Educational material currently being developed.	On Track
3. Strategic planning and infrastructure development				
Reduce impact of off-site discharges through available mitigation remedies	Investigate health protection measures to address high-risk and accessible contaminated stormwater drains or groundwaters	Ongoing	This action is ongoing – water sampling commencing in 2024. Sampling locations have been identified.	On Track
	Seek improved maintenance and development of stormwater drainage in priority townships in partnership with Maintenance and Engineering departments	Ongoing	Through the sampling program Council will be able to better target any interventions required in consultation with our other Council departments.	On Track
	Identify funding opportunities to implement improvement options in priority townships	Ongoing	Council continues to look for funding opportunities – e.g. DEWLP grant for improved wastewater management within the Shire	On Track
Investigate alternative, community-scale treatment systems for priority townships and availability of funding	Investigate innovative and sustainable community-scale or on-site wastewater treatment and water cycle management solutions in partnership with key stakeholders	Ongoing	In consultation with other stakeholders such as EPA and system designers Council will contribute to the evaluation of new systems, providing they comply with the relevant legislation and codes of practice. This was evidenced in Fish Creek.	On Track
Liaise with appropriate departments to ensure that planning and infrastructure proposals adequately address wastewater	Assess existing block density in unsewered townships and investigate options to reduce density to sustainable levels	Ongoing	Where opportunities arise block density is assessed. Wastewater management is a complex science, with everchanging technology and codes of practice, so we need to be agile in responding these changes within Council and with external agencies	On Track

management needs for townships	Develop clear policy guidelines for future developments with unsewered townships and for unsewered allotments within sewerer townships	Ongoing	This action is subject to review of Wastewater Management Policy which is expected to be completed in 2024. Will be commenced 2024/25.	On Track
	Review Planning Scheme and other relevant Council policies to identify opportunities for improvements to existing wastewater management clauses and/or policies	Ongoing	This is a continuous process. Every opportunity is taken to review policies. Expert input is regularly provided to planning the referral process as well as specific property issues.	On Track
	Continue to investigate and update appropriate design standards for high-risk townships so as to inform any future improvement plans	Ongoing	Council is committed to assessing the implications of standards for the best environmental and health outcome for our communities.	On Track
4. Environmental monitoring				
Develop an environmental monitoring program in cohabitation with other agencies	Identify and collate relevant existing environmental data for the South Gippsland Shire to quantify wastewater impacts on waterways, groundwater, public health and water catchments	2022/2023	Specific monitoring program is being developed in conjunction with South Gippsland Water. It is expected to be developed through 2024	Monitor
	Design and implement an environmental monitoring strategy in collaboration with EPA, South Gippsland Water and Gippsland Water including industrial areas, high-risk locations and groundwater, for environmental and health contaminants (e.g. nutrients and pathogens)	2022/2023	Further consultation in 2024 is required with external agencies. Sampling data will assist informing any future strategy for our townships	Monitor
	Identify source locations for environmental monitoring and produce a publicly available map which shows these locations	2022/2023	A number of locations have been identified across the Shire to be sampled. Our testing program will commence in the second half of 2024	Monitor
Implement an environmental monitoring program	Implement a comprehensive environmental monitoring program including the collection of water samples from selected locations, and arranging their analysis at a NATA-approved laboratory	2021/2022	Monitoring locations have been identified and preparations underway for our wastewater sampling program.	Monitor

	Prepare an annual report outlining the results of the environmental monitoring program and any improvements that have been made	2021/2022	Sampling program about to commence, and future reporting will be provided.	Monitor
Secure funding for ongoing environmental monitoring program	Seek and source an ongoing funding stream for environmental monitoring sampling and analysis	2025/2026	Future years action	On Track
5. Management of commercial properties				
Develop wastewater standard conditions for wastewater permits issued for commercial businesses	Develop and include standard wastewater conditions for commercial properties to have pre-treatment (i.e. grease trap), similar to those implemented by South Gippsland Water trade waste arrangements	2022/2023	Currently managed on a case by case basis for specific properties. The knowledge gained from our commercial premises wastewater systems will support a consistent application of standards for future business operations	On Track
	Update South Gippsland Shire Council Wastewater Management Policy to allow Council to request on-site wastewater treatment system upgrades (i.e. pre-treatment), including where a new commercial premise is established either in a new or existing construction, where a change of use occurs for the land or building, or where a business significantly changes which impacts on the existing wastewater system	2022/2023	Policy currently under review – to be completed in 2024	Monitor
Develop specific education for food businesses and on-site wastewater treatment system	Develop education for commercial food businesses in unsewered areas i.e. use of chemicals and impact on on-site wastewater treatment systems	2022/2023	Determined that this information was best managed on a case by case basis due to different factors such as to site conditions impacting each site. Information regarding the use of chemicals with wastewater systems is included in certificates to use.	Completed
	Link education to other programs already conducted by South Gippsland Shire Council including Food Safety Management activities	2022/2023	All education materials developed and provided link to other programs conducted by Council.	Completed
Improve the relationship between South Gippsland Shire Council and EPA works approvals	Establish a process for the exchange of information between the Shire and EPA on commercial properties that exceed 5,000 litres per day	Ongoing	A strong relationship has been developed with the Gippsland region EPA and meets regularly to share information.	Completed

	Develop a better relationship between Council and the EPA to allow better sharing of information, particularly with regards to wastewater systems with EPA works approvals	Ongoing	As per action above.	Completed
Audit commercial businesses in identified high-risk areas	Conduct an audit for all commercial businesses located in the 'high-risk' locations identified in this plan to assess adequacy and to identify any immediate public or environmental health risks – every three years	2022/2023	Action commence but will take longer than first predicted. Will now be completed in the later years of the plan following improved information and data collection to inform any audit.	Monitor
6. Continue to develop and implement compliance management				
Implement an education program to assist property owners to understand and comply with their legal responsibilities for monitoring and maintaining their wastewater systems	Utilise web-based and hard copy information to promote correct maintenance of wastewater systems.	Ongoing	Maintenance of wastewater systems provided as part of certificate to use. Information also available on website and in hardcopy when requested.	Completed
	Public contact lists of appropriate servicing agents.	Ongoing	Details of service agents continuously updated and provided on request.	Completed
	Send reminders to all owners requiring annual service contracts or three-yearly de-sludging of primary systems	Ongoing	Reminder letters being sent as part of a broad education program. Currently reviewing the letters being sent and how often they are sent.	On Track
Improve electronic data capture and storage to maximise administrative efficiencies and assist in appropriate targeting of resources	Update existing hard copy records onto Council's electronic database.	Ongoing	Over 1000 service reports have been updated into Councils system.	On Track
Develop South Gippsland Shire Council wastewater installation guidelines	Implement a system to follow-up on owners who fail to maintain service contracts.	2022/2023	System has been implemented but issues have been identified. Looking at ways to improved the process as it is labor intensive.	Monitor

	Review service reports and follow-up any outstanding failures.	2022/2023	Service reports reviewed and outstanding failures followed up.	On Track
	Implement an audit program to confirm accuracy of service reports and wastewater treatment system performance.	2022/2023	Audit program has been delayed. Has proven to be more difficult than expected.	Monitor
Review South Gippsland Shire Council Wastewater Management Policy	Review South Gippsland Shire Council's Wastewater Management Policy in line with recent legislative changes (Environment Protection Act 2020). Policy update to also include: → Major/ minor alterations and a clear definition of each; → Pump-out systems and the conditions in which they will be approved; → Council's domestic bore position and investigation process; and → Any other matter identified in the review.	2022/2023	Wastewater Management Policy review underway, anticipated to be finalised late in 2024	Monitor
Develop a wastewater compliance and enforcement policy and associated procedures	Develop robust wastewater compliance processes including procedures for managing non-compliance	2022/2023	Compliance processes link to existing policies and procedures managed by the team. The Wastewater Management Policy will include specific compliance processes.	On Track
7. Regulatory management				
Advocate to government agencies and other stakeholders to improve the regulatory framework within which Council operates	Seek the development and implementation of improved wastewater management legislation and guidelines.	Ongoing	Ongoing as opportunities arise. The Health Team provide feedback to our legislators when requested from regulators.	On Track
	Influence government agencies to better coordinate wastewater and water supply policy and legislation.	Ongoing	Ongoing as opportunities arise. The Health Team provide feedback to agencies when requested.	On Track
	Work with EPA Victoria to facilitate improved designs for high-risk areas, such as coarse sand and heavy clay.	Ongoing	Ongoing as opportunities arise. Health staff meet regularly with EPA where system design are considered for compliance and improvement	On Track

Alternative or innovative uses of existing legislation provisions to enhance wastewater management processes	Investigate options for applying controls to bore installation and use in sandy soil townships.	2022/2023	Action not yet commenced though consultation is conducted with Southern Rural Water on specific properties. This action will be advanced in late 2024	Monitor
	Review wastewater management controls for temporary or seasonal use facilities (building sites, festivals, camping on private land)	2022/2023	Completed review of wastewater for camping on private land and building sites as part of General Local Law Review. New code introduced.	Monitor
Update the existing South Gippsland Shire Council Wastewater Management Policy	Review and update Council's Wastewater Management Policy in line with the new Environment Protection Act 2020 and the Environment Protection Regulations 2021.	2022/2023	Policy review underway. Working closely with the EPA. Anticipated completion late 2024	Monitor
Develop Council's Wastewater Management Policy through evidence-based investigation	Identify funding opportunities to undertake Land Capability Assessments of priority townships and implement findings into Council's strategic policy and statutory programs	2022 to 2025	Continuously look for funding sources to undertake LCAs of unsewered townships.	Monitor
	Where appropriate, standardise guidelines and processes with neighbouring Councils and water authorities.	2022 to 2025	Policy Review underway – anticipated late 2024	On Track
	Conduct targeted monitoring of stormwater systems, surface waters and groundwaters in high-risk areas.	2022 to 2025	Monitoring locations identified, sampling to commence in the second half of 2024	On Track
8. Reporting, audits and review				
Annual internal review (with amendments as required).	Conduct an annual review and assessment of the progress achieved in the previous year of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan implementation and action plan	2022/2023 2023/2024 2024/2025 2025/2026	Annual review completed in 2022/23 however there was a delay in presenting to Council. Future reviews will be presented to Council in December each year.	On Track
	Prepare a report for Council and make publicly available: → Annual review to identify and allow for any major changes in wastewater legislation and industry – particularly as the implementation of the Environment Protection Act 2020 is implemented	2022/2023 2023/2024 2024/2025 2025/2026	Council report to be prepared to reflect these reviews and report made publicly available.	On Track

	Conduct an audit to assess and report on the progress of the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan implementation and action plan every three years and publish the report on Council's website	2024/2025	Audit to be conducted within nominated timeframe	On Track
Five-yearly review and report of this plan	Review and update the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan every five years as required by the State Environment Protection Policy: Waters.	2026	DWMP review will be conducted as required by the applicable legislation, noting SEPP - Waters no longer applies	On Track
Develop and strengthen external stakeholder relationships and collaboration	Identify shared water/ wastewater objectives and strategies with external water authorities and stakeholders.	Ongoing	Strong relationships have been developed with external stakeholders.	Completed
	Work with Southern Rural Water to develop a domestic bore installation process, including developing accurate mapping of bores within the Shire and providing property owners/ occupiers with information about the risks of using bore water and how to safely use that water around the home	Ongoing	There are challenges associated with bores being managed by an external agency often with conflicting outcomes. Further work with Southern Rural Water is required to have effective bore location information available to our stakeholders.	Monitor
	Promote and facilitate ongoing coordination of internal resources into wastewater management strategies and projects	Ongoing	Internal resources are required to deal with day to day operational management of wastewater and other statutory functions. A recent structural change to the team has resulted in improved response to wastewater issues.	Completed
Community engagement	Conduct community engagement every five years in line with the Domestic Wastewater Management Plan five-yearly review process	2021/2022 2025/2026	Community engagement was conducted to develop the 2022-2026 DWMP. Further engagement will be undertaken as part of the development of any future DWMP.	Completed
Advocate for and contribute to reform of the wastewater legislative framework	Advocate for improvements to legislative framework.	Ongoing	Ongoing as opportunities arise. Council works closely with external agencies such as EPA.	Completed
	Provide input into proposed legislation and standards pertaining to domestic wastewater.	Ongoing	Input provided as opportunities arise	Completed

7. OBJECTIVE - SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

7.1. COASTAL STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Directorate:	Future Communities
Department:	Planning and Building Services

Council Plan

Objective - Sustainable Growth

The activities outlined in this report support our coastal communities to respond to existing and emerging risks to their liveability and environmental health and protect the character of our communities, including our built, natural and cultural heritage.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to discuss the ongoing implementation of the South Gippsland Coastal Strategy 2023. The Coastal Strategy is a key strategic document that sets out how Council will work to identify and mitigate coastal hazards to protect coastal communities and our precious coastal environment. The Coastal Strategy was adopted by Council in September 2023.

This report outlines the progress of actions identified in the Coastal Strategy. It is provided for Council and community information.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. **Notes the South Gippsland Coastal Strategy 2023/2024 progress report.**
2. **Endorses the continued implementation of the South Gippsland Coastal Strategy in 2024/2025.**

REPORT

The Coastal Strategy identified a range of short, medium and long-term actions for implementation. Implementation of several of these actions has commenced (see comments below and **Attachment [7.1.1]**).

Council has been successful in obtaining grant funding totalling \$462,000 to progress a range of these actions.

Advocacy

Council is advocating to the State Government for coastal specific planning controls that can be used to avoid risks from climate change in coastal settlements through minimising new and inappropriate infill urban growth. This work is nearing completion and will form the basis of a planning scheme

amendment to implement key recommendations of the Coastal Strategy, including removal of township growth area and restrictions on further subdivision.

Council has in the past year advocated on coastal matters through submissions to the State Government's House Committee on Regional Development and the Legislative Council 'Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry' into Local Government funding and services. The submissions discussed the cost of maintaining our infrastructure (including coastal infrastructure) in a financially constrained and rate capped environment.

Council will continue to advocate and engage with both State and Federal Government to secure more funding and support for our coastal communities, especially in relation to risk mitigation and resilience planning.

Risk Avoidance

In May 2024, Council was successful in obtaining \$200,000 in State Government funding to commence the preparation of a coastal hazards risk assessment for Waratah Bay. Indigenous communities have been invited to participate in the project steering / reference committee, along with Parks Victoria and the West Gippsland Catchment Management Authority.

Additionally, Council has secured \$150,000 Federal Government funding to investigate the condition of coastal levees across the municipality. This work will build upon previous investigations conducted in 2018 and provide a detailed assessment of levee weak points and vulnerabilities to impacts of rising sea levels. The project will also investigate policy options to address the risks posed by the levee system, the majority of which are located on private land.

Council continues to work with the State Government in the preparation of the Cape to Cape Resilience Plan (Cape Paterson to Cape Liptrap including Andersons Inlet and the Tarwin River at Tarwin Lower) which investigates the impacts of climate change and rising sea levels on our coastline and considers options to manage the impacts.

Development of the next stage of the draft Resilience Plan is currently being considered by the State Government. Council will continue to work with the State Government on the project.

Council is also partnering with the Gippsland Alliance for Climate Action (GACA) to develop a risk analysis tool to model and map climate hazards and impacts for Port Welshpool and Barry Beach. When complete, the risk mapping will provide a visual representation of the spatial, temporal and climate hazard variability (heat, bushfire, sea level rise etc.) in these areas. The project has received \$32,000 funding from Emergency Management Victoria's Risk and Resilience Grants Program.

Council has also contributed to and supported the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) motion that "MAV call on the Victorian Government to fund and implement a state-led process to modify Victorian Planning Schemes to amend, strengthen, and protect the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay to manage risk

areas that are vulnerable to climate change, inclusive of all affected coastal and riverine areas”.

Emergency Management

In 2023, Council partnered with State Government agencies and the community to prepare the '[Venus Bay Emergency Planning Information](#)' publication with funding assistance from Emergency Recovery Victoria. Should additional funding become available, similar management plans could be developed for our other coastal communities.

Environment and Landscape (Common Ground)

Council is investigating options for the reinstatement of saltmarsh on farmland between Andersons Inlet and the Venus Bay settlement. The farmland is protected by an earth levee which is unlikely to manage the impacts of rising sea levels. Some saltwater incursion is already occurring on the land and the project will look at the pros and cons of allowing natural processes to continue to occur and for the land to gradually return to its pre levee state. The project has received \$80,000 in State Government funding for implementation.

Committees of Management at Yanakie, Foster Beach and Waratah Bay

The Committee of Management of Waratah Bay (“the Gap”) was formally passed from Council to Sandy Point Foreshore Committee in April 2024. Council remains Committee of Management for Yanakie (Red Bluff) and Foster Beach. Additional consultation and negotiation with affected stakeholders and agencies are required to progress the land management options at Yanakie. It is expected that this work will be ongoing.

CONSULTATION / COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

External and internal consultation will continue to be undertaken as part of each action’s implementation, as required.

RESOURCES / FINANCIAL VIABILITY

Actions are typically undertaken within existing staff resources and budgets. Where additional expertise / work is required to complete actions, external grant funding will be sought where available.

RISKS

The continued implementation of the South Gippsland Coastal Strategy will ensure the risks it identifies are investigated and effectively managed into the future for net community benefit and the support of healthy natural systems.

Effectively responding to the identified risks will provide greater certainty for residents’ safety, infrastructure planning, ecosystem health and tourism opportunities.

Advocacy by Council for policy and financial support to the State and Federal Governments will need to continue if these risks are to be effectively managed and funded.

STAFF DISCLOSURE

All officers involved in the preparation of this report have considered and determined that they do not have a conflict of interest in the matter.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachments are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

1. Coastal Strategy Implementation Progress Report 2024 (1) [7.1.1 - 6 pages]

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

Council's Good Governance Framework

Pillar 1. Direction & Leadership

Council Policy / Strategy / Plans

Documents are available on Council's website at the following [LINK](#).

Community Vision 2040

South Gippsland's Planning Scheme

Legislative Provisions

Marine and Coastal Act 2018

Planning and Environment Act 1987

Regional, State and National Plan and Policies

West Gippsland Regional Floodplain Management Strategy 2018-2027

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Coastal Strategy

Progress Review June 2024



1. POPULATION PRESSURE AND DEVELOPMENT

ACTIONS	Short Term	Medium Term	Longer Term	Progress Update June 2024
1.1 Review and update the Housing and Settlement Strategy as appropriate to reflect updated conditions, policy or available science affecting coastal settlements		X		Not due
1.2 Where state coastal planning policy is being considered for change, advocate for change that more directly communicates coastal hazard and climate change risk through new planning scheme zone or overlay controls that more directly identify, address and promote the risk.	X			Investigated as part of the Coastal Settlement Risk Project
1.3 Remove all coastal township greenfield residential growth areas from the planning scheme framework plan maps, and retain the township boundaries consistent with the current application of each township's urban land zoning.		X		Investigated as part of the Coastal Settlement Risk Project
1.4 Explore the strategic justification for Council to restrict or discourage the development of more than one dwelling per lot and the subdivision of land which increases dwelling development potential	X			Investigated as part of the Coastal Settlement Risk Project
1.5 Support existing State Planning Policy in a commitment to retain coastal townships to within their existing urban zoned boundaries.	X			Investigated as part of the Coastal Settlement Risk Project
1.6 Add a statement in Council's local planning policy under clause 13.01 that clarifies a position on the coastal towns that are identified as being at risk from coastal hazards. This will set out Council's position on settlements that are at risk.		X		Not due



2. ENVIRONMENT AND LANDSCAPE

ACTIONS	Short Term	Medium Term	Longer Term	Progress Update June 2024
2.1 Advocate for the implementation of new or updated hazard risk mapping and policy changes to identify, to our best ability, current and anticipated coastal hazard risks affecting the values of our coastal areas.	X			Ongoing. Waratah Bay Coastal Risk Assessment funding successful. The two year project commenced in May 2024. A Motion calling on the Victorian Government to update hazard mapping across Victoria, engage with communities and fund potential adaptation responses was raised, and supported by Council at the MAV State Council.
2.2 Investigate the 'Common Ground' community initiative on the land adjoining Andersons Inlet at Venus Bay that proposes nature-based adaptation concepts that if implemented, will assist in managing storm surge, flooding and coastal erosion.		X		Venus Bay Common Ground (salt marsh) project commenced early in 2024.
2.3 Proactively work with, and advocate to, the State and Federal Government for the preparation and implementation of nature-based solutions to manage the impacts of environmental coastal hazard risks.		X		Not due Advocacy through Council's submissions to the House Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure & Transport- Inquiry in local government sustainability and the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee- Inquiry into Local Government funding and services.
2.4 Prioritise the implementation of new or updated hazard risk mapping and policy changes to identify current and anticipated coastal hazard risks affecting the values of our coastal areas. This includes timely planning scheme implementation of the recommendations of the Cape to Cape Resilience Project.	X			Council has participated in the Cape to Cape Resilience Project. The Minister has decided not to complete the project at this time. Council has partnered with Gippsland Alliance for Climate Action (GACA) to develop a risk analysis tool that models and maps climate hazards and impacts at a fine (100m ² scale) for Port Welshpool and Barry Beach.

2.5

Update Council's local planning policy on coastal climate risk to more clearly set out the long term risks posed to our townships.

x

Planned as part of the Coastal Settlement Climate Risk Project.



3. DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE LAND MANAGEMENT

ACTIONS	Short Term	Medium Term	Longer Term	Progress Update June 2024
3.1 Engage with communities in Venus Bay and Sandy Point to determine their preferences and priorities for paths and trails infrastructure. The engagement will build on information that was obtained through the coastal strategy consultation and address specific projects and routes.	X			Community engagement closed on 28 July 2024. See Council's Your Say project page
3.2 Investigate development of a township character study for South Gippsland.			X	Not due. Included in Planning Scheme Review for inclusion in the Planning Scheme's Schedule to Clause 74.02 as future strategic work.
3.3 Ensure community town plans are updated to align with the Coastal Strategy and the Blueprint for Community and Economic Infrastructure. Updates should occur when the documents are due for renewal.		X		Not due / ongoing
3.4 Work with Southern Rural Water, the Environmental Protection Authority Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action to resolve the issue of ground water bores.			X	Not due
3.5 Partner with the State and Federal Government to investigate options and issues with seawalls and coastal levees.		X		Infrastructure Planning team are undertaking further technical assessments of sea walls.
3.6 Engage with Yanakie Boat Shed owners, and other related stakeholders, regarding future land management options.		X		Not due / ongoing. Additional consultation and negotiation with affected stakeholders and agencies are required to progress the land management options at Yanakie.



4. COMMUNITY AND ECONOMY

ACTIONS	Short Term	Medium Term	Longer Term	Progress Update June 2024
4.1 Work with community and emergency organisations to identify areas of concern in relation to volunteer recruitment and identify opportunities for volunteer collaboration and connection.	X			Council continues to seek and take advantage of opportunities where they arise.
4.2 Engage with coastal communities to determine if there are specific actions or initiatives that can be included in the <i>Visitor Economy Strategy 2021-2031</i> , the <i>Economic Development Strategy 2021-2031</i> and the <i>Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy 2022 - 2026</i> .	X			Ongoing.
4.3 Through Council's Emergency Management team, work with other emergency services, community groups and resident associations to promote community safety in coastal areas.	X			In collaboration with a range of agencies and community, a Venus Bay Emergency Management Planning information document was developed in 2023. This document and other emergency management information is available on Council's Website .
4.4 Develop a Short Stay Accommodation strategy in consultation with local communities, particularly those located in coastal areas that may be impacted by future planning controls.		X		Not due
4.5 Continue to work with Indigenous communities and State Government in the protection of cultural heritage in our coastal areas and consider heritage values and protection in the preparation of coastal hazard risk assessments.	X			Indigenous communities and the state government have been invited to participate in the Waratah Bay Coastal Risk Assessment.
4.6 Investigate if there is interest in reconvening the Community Dialogue group on a semi-regular basis.		X		Not due

8. NOTICES OF MOTION AND/OR RESCISSION

8.1. NIL

9. COUNCILLOR REPORTS

9.1. REQUESTS FOR LEAVE OF ABSENCE

9.2. COUNCILLOR UPDATES

10. URGENT BUSINESS

This section of the Agenda is for urgent business items:

1. Urgent Business

Normally no motion should be debated by Councillors unless the matter is already included as an item on the Agenda. However, in some circumstances it is possible to raise urgent motions.

Council's *Governance Rules 2020* (clause 22 - Urgent Business) adopted on 19 October 2022, allows for where a situation has not been provided for under the Governance Rules, the Council may determine the matter by resolution. Established practice has provided for urgent motions to be raised at Council provided the matter cannot be dealt with at the next Council Meeting or by Officers under delegation.

It is necessary for the Councillor wishing to raise a matter of urgent business to raise a motion similar to the following:

'That consideration of (the issue) be dealt with as a matter of urgent business and Councillor....be allowed a 'short period' to indicate the reason(s) why the matter should be considered as a matter of urgent business.' If the Chairperson accepts the motion as meeting the urgent business criteria, normal meeting procedures in Council's *Governance Rules 2020* (clause 22) will apply.

If the motion to accept the item as a matter of urgent business is passed by Council, the motion relating to the specific issue can then be put and debated in the normal way.

11. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

11.1. PETITIONS AND JOINT LETTERS

Petitions and Joint Letters are written requests that have been signed by a number of community members. According to the *Governance Rules (C82)*, *clause 57*, members of the community may submit a valid petition or joint letter to a Councillor or to Council addressed to the Chief Executive Officer.

At the Meeting a petition or joint letter is presented, Council will consider a motion to receive it, the matter itself will not be considered unless determined as urgent business.

The Councillor presenting the petition or joint letter is responsible for ensuring that they are familiar with the contents and purpose of the petition or joint letter and that it does not contain language disrespectful to Council.

The requirements of the lead petitioner are detailed in the *Governance Rules (C82)*, *clause 57*.

Source: [Governance Rules \(C82\)](#) – adopted 19 October 2022.

11.2. ANSWERS TO PREVIOUS QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Answers to previous questions taken on notice at a former Council Meeting, are included in the Minutes of this Meeting.

Background material submitted with a question will not be recorded in the Council Meeting Minutes.

Source: [Governance Rules \(C82\)](#) – adopted 19 October 2022.

Nil

11.3. SUBMITTED PUBLIC QUESTIONS

All community member questions for Council Meetings are to be written and submitted to the Governance Team by 9.00am on the Monday morning preceding the Council Meeting to allow time for a response to be prepared, where possible, for the Council Meeting. All reasonable attempts will be made to answer pre-submitted questions at the Meeting. When further time is required to prepare an answer, questions may be taken on notice and responses will be provided at the next Council Meeting.

On the day of the Meeting, questions on the prescribed form must be received prior to the commencement of the Council Meeting by 2.00pm and placed in the receptacle at the Governance Officers table. These questions will be taken on notice, included in the Minutes and responses provided at the next Council Meeting.

Public Question Time in Council Meetings is to be used for matters that are relevant to the business or functions of Council and are clear and legible.

Questions may not be allowed where the question(s) is deemed to be:

- Related to a matter beyond or outside the powers of Council;
- Trivial or frivolous;
- Defamatory, indecent, abusive or objectionable;
- Derogatory or designed to embarrass a Councillor, a member of Council staff or a member of the community;
- Related to subject matter previously received and responded to;
- Related to a matter already considered and resolved upon by Council;
- Breach Council's confidentiality obligations; and/or
- Illegible, vague or not make sense.

A person may submit a maximum of three (3) questions for any one Council Meeting, this includes a combined total of three (3) questions for related parties or groups. The total word count of all questions submitted is to be 100 words or fewer.

Background material submitted with a question will not be read out or recorded in the Council Meeting Minutes.

The CEO retains the discretion, in consultation with the Mayor, to not refer questions to Council meetings if there is a more effective or appropriate way to respond to the matters raised. Answers to questions from a member of the community who is present in the gallery will be read out at the Council Meeting by the CEO or Mayor.

Source: [Governance Rules \(C82\)](#) – adopted 19 October 2022.

12. CLOSED SESSION

The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act), section 66 provides that if a council or delegated committee determines that a meeting is to be closed to the public to consider confidential information, the Council or delegated committee must record in the minutes of the meeting that are available for public inspection –

- a) the ground or grounds for determining to close the meeting to the public by reference to the grounds specified in the definition of ***confidential information*** in section 3(1); and
- b) an explanation of why the specified ground or grounds applied.

The Act defines ***confidential information*** in s.3(1)(a)-(l), and includes information that may prejudice or impact; commercial negotiations, the security of Council, land use planning, law enforcement, legal privilege, personal information, private commercial information, confidential meeting information, internal arbitration, Councillor conduct panel information and information specified under s.77 of the previous *Local Government Act 1989*.

Once confidential information has been considered and decided in a closed session of a Council Meeting, a further resolution to resume open Council is required.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council pursuant to section 66(5)(a) and (b) of the *Local Government Act 2020* close the Council Meeting to the public to consider the following confidential information:

1. **Per s.3(1)(f) Agenda item 14.1 – Personal Information – CEO Employment & Remuneration Committee, designated as personal information,**
 - a. **being information which if released would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs;**
 - b. **The grounds for designation have been made to protect the privacy of an individual’s personal information.**

13. MEETING CLOSED

NEXT MEETING

The next Council Meeting open to the public will be held on Wednesday, 11 September 2024 commencing at 2pm in the Council Chambers, Leongatha.