



Shaping Our Future – Stage One Findings Report

COUNCIL PLAN

The first stage of community engagement for the ‘Shaping Our Future’ project has been completed, with over 500 community members participating from across Murrindindi Shire. This report provides a summary of the themes and issues shared by community members for consideration in the development of our Council Plan 2021-2025.

Council would like to acknowledge everyone who took the time to share their ideas and opinions with us. Whether you stopped by for a chat at one of our pop-up kiosks or completed our survey, we really value your input! We received 148 responses to the long survey, 195 responses to the short survey, which was used at our pop-up kiosks, and 28 responses to the Easy English survey. Almost one hundred people posted stand-alone ideas on our online Ideas Board, and hundreds of votes were registered against these ideas. More information about the demographics of participants can be found in the *Shaping Our Future: Stage 1 Community Engagement Report*, available [here](#).

Under the *Local Government Act 2020*, Council is required to engage with community to inform all strategic planning including the development of the Council Plan. The Shaping Our Future findings outlined in this report have been taken into account in the creation of the Council Plan 2021-2025.

Council Plan: How we engaged

Through the Shaping Our Future project, we collected feedback and suggestions from community members through a detailed long survey, as well as a short survey and via our online Ideas Board. The long survey allowed very specific questions to be asked, focusing attention on key areas of Council business and services, as well as some more general questions. The questions were grouped under the following topics

- **Our Connected and Inclusive Communities:** support for local groups and clubs, as well as diversity and inclusion.
- **Council Assets:** road maintenance and asset management, including buildings and parks and gardens.
- **Our Thriving Economy:** how we ensure our economy supports our community, including tourism and other industries.
- **Our Natural Environment:** priorities for environmental protection and climate change.
- **Our Places and Open Spaces:** the tension of maintaining history and charm while supporting growth and progress, and how to make our places and spaces more accessible

The results from these detailed surveys were considered, together with the more general responses provided through the short surveys and the standalone ideas that were posted on our Ideas Board. Together, all the data was analysed and grouped. Council was able to establish strong themes and patterns in what community members told us.



Council Plan: What we heard

People & Community findings

Most survey respondents thought Council were providing the right amount of support for various groups to access services. Older people and youth were the two identified groups that respondents indicated require (slightly) more attention to help them thrive in Murrindindi Shire. This was supported by commentary in other parts of the survey, where community members highlighted the need to focus on our aging population as well as the young people as the future of the Shire. Community members said they were keen to continue to see provision of quality services for families, children and young people, as well as support for older residents.

Many comments highlighted the need to encourage diversity and facilitate inclusion within our communities. Recognition and acknowledgement of First Nations people was raised by many participants.

There were numerous comments expressing a desire to see creativity and the arts supported and promoted more throughout the Shire, given the large number of artists who live here.

Volunteering rates across the Shire are higher than the state average and many community members expressed a desire to see Council provide further support to volunteers and also community participation in general.

Many participants highlighted the need for Council to continue its advocacy for better access to health and community services, including mental health services. Difficulty accessing services and the flow-on effect this has in attracting and retaining new residents in the Shire was a common theme.

There were also many comments appreciating the natural assets for recreation around the Shire, including the desire to further develop recreation options for improved health and wellbeing.

Here are some examples of responses that demonstrated these views:

‘Community art within our towns and villages will create a strong sense of place, and would be of benefit as an attraction for people visiting the community I believe.’

‘Incorporating children into community initiatives.’

‘With older than average population, we need to do more to look after older people and value them more.’

‘We have more people from diverse backgrounds living in the area. Again we don’t hear much about them.’

‘I feel there will need to have more focus on the older generation who will need more support in the future.’

‘There is a huge lack of child psychologists with availability, no psychiatrists and speech pathologists have increasingly high workloads and are difficult to get into privately. There is a lack of support for people with physical disabilities and next to no mental wellbeing support.’

‘More mental health programmes for drug abuse and anxiety. More female doctors and female programmes.’

‘Young people bring vibrancy and future thinking.’

‘Child care is limited for mothers restricts employment opportunities.’

‘Young people is a focus that needs additional attention, they need safe engaging and fun places to spend time and connect positively. They need opportunities locally also.’

‘There are no public gymnasiums to support community wellbeing/health and any classes offered are privately run and cost-prohibitive.’

‘Improved playground facilities with undercover areas adjacent to playgrounds or over some playgrounds for use year round.’

‘Better access for people to enjoy the natural environment including bike trails and walking tracks at all levels.’

Economy and Jobs findings

The previous Council Plan focused on tourism industry development and business support as a way to develop the economy. Participants were asked whether they think we should continue with that approach. The majority of participants support the approach, with the results as follows:

- 59% of participants thought we should continue with this approach
- 20.5% felt we need to change our approach
- 20.5% were unsure

Many participants provided suggestions for ways Council can support new and existing businesses. A number of people reminded Council that it should not be business growth above everything, but that it needs to be considered with a focus on sustainability.

Some comments highlighted the potential value in relation to sustainability-focused businesses and eco-tourism in particular. Quite a few community members said they are keen to see increased promotion of the area, with some stating the natural attractions of the area should be the main drawcard. Others suggested more of a focus on arts and cultural events is needed.

A large number of people raised concerns about support for the timber industry, with state government plans to phase out of native forest timber harvesting. Some people were unsure about how the Shire will manage likely impacts of this change in our economy, while others were concerned that Council ensure appropriate support is available for businesses effected by the change. Some also proposed that the Shire support development of a sustainable timber industry.

Here are some examples of responses that demonstrated these views:

‘More focus on supporting young people to get jobs.’

‘Further education to support youth and mature aged industry readiness and access to local opportunities’

‘Focus on ways to harness sustainable tourism.’

‘Encourage more growth to encourage more commercial development.’

‘Improve telecommunications across Murrindindi, get rid of blackspots.’

‘There needs to be more ‘in your face’ advertising of natural attractions/things to see and do in the region, without the need for active seeking.’

‘Focus more on unique natural resources that bring tourists to enjoy the "big nature" of the area.’

‘I think Melbourne people are beginning to realise how close the Shire is, hence we should concentrate on encouraging people to visit. Cultural events, Art Shows, festivals etc.’

‘Supporting new business and ventures, where possible, focussing on those that create job opportunities and tap into the tourist dollar.’

‘Support and quicken the process to get new business up and running.’

‘Our first priority cannot be growing business unless it is in a framework or obeys new rules of how the circular economy, zero-emissions.’

‘Support for businesses who choose to change to renewable energy sources. Support for farmers to use sustainable farming practices that protect the environment.’

‘Be careful with timber loss to economy.’

‘Forestry and transitioning impacted workers into new sustainable work.’

‘Why not become the Gold Star example of sustainable forestry. To do that perhaps Council needs to seek their own funding for someone to research sustainable timber and for someone to market that sustainable timber.’

Environment and Climate Action findings

There is so much Council can do in the area of environmental protection and management, and of course we need to operate within our resources. Participants were asked to rank the importance of various environmental activities for Council to carry out at this time, from most to least importance. The following results show the priority order given to each item from 129 people:

1. Actions to reduce or reverse climate change
2. Community education
3. Public land management including weeds
4. Natural disaster preparedness
5. Biodiversity conservation
6. Waste management activities
7. Protecting vegetation from illegal clearing
8. Actions to adapt to climate change impacts

Many people then chose to provide specific ideas and suggestions for how Council could lead in this space, with suggestions around reducing our own emissions and operating more sustainably. Community members were keen to see Council reduce its own environmental footprint, to be able to lead by example.

Renewable energy investments and initiatives were frequently mentioned. Sustainable transport and specific ideas for community education also featured.

Some comments highlighted specific aspects of biodiversity protection, including care of bushlands as well as pest and weed management. This was also clearly linked by community members to management of fuel load.

A number of community members also made the link between care of the environment and Indigenous land management practices, encouraging partnerships and leadership in this space.

Here are some examples of responses that demonstrated these views:

‘Climate change mitigation and environmental protections have to be the number one lens through which we plan everything until atmospheric gases that are blanketing the earth are stabilized/reversed.’

‘Better waste management the shire fails to accept many items. The shire does not have a Coles or Woolworths that accept plastic packaging so need to have a bin at waste transfer stations so people can take it to there. Along with other items like light globes, batteries, small electrical items, printer cartridges for free.’

‘Part of the Council's role is to educate itself then the people.’

‘Thinking of ways Council can reduce their footprint e.g. having option to opt into receive mail outs via e-mail e.g. for rates and community information that is mailed.’

‘Taking leadership, helping individuals and communities to transition to a zero-carbon economy.’

‘Better maintenance of our bushland reserves is needed especially regarding pest plants and pest animals such as foxes and rabbits.’

‘Provision of regenerative agriculture education locally.’

‘Priority needs to be given to managing our natural environment especially local waterways.’

‘Our environment underpins the health of our community and should be the first consideration in everything that we do, it is what we all love about the place, and we are nothing without it.’

‘The Indigenous people of Australia walked gently on this land - I would like us to acknowledge and listen and learn from them.’

‘Ensuring that the Council's transport fleet is EV based and that support for no-emissions vehicles and EV charging facilities across all major towns in the Shire.’

Infrastructure and Built Environment findings

In response to the question about our spending on maintenance of roads, buildings, parks and gardens and sports reserves, the majority of participants thought we were spending the right amounts on these areas.

The results were as follows:

- Roads maintenance: 60% 'about right', 36% spend more, 4% spend less
- Buildings maintenance: 83.5% 'about right', 15.5% spend more, 1% spend less
- Maintaining our parks, gardens and sports reserves: 59% 'about right', 39.5% spend more, 1.5% spend less

Many people expressed concerns about access – with disability-access of buildings, paths and walkways a significant concern. Some people identified specific locations that present problems for community members with limited mobility. The importance of improved signage for way-finding and parking were also highlighted by many respondents.

A number of people acknowledged the ongoing challenge for Council in maintaining a large road network from a small rate base, while others highlighted specific roads requiring attention. Some people also believe a review of Council assets is required – for relevance, useability and disability access.

Public transport is another area of concern for many community members. Several participants made the link between social isolation, particularly outside of the major townships and the need for improved public transport options. In particular, some people highlighted the importance of public transport for young people for both socialising and for employment and training.

In response to the question regarding how well Council is balancing the tension between maintaining the history and charm of the Shire and supporting business innovation and progress, the following data was received:

- 35% of respondents thought Council is balancing these tensions well
- 12% felt Council was NOT balancing these tensions well
- 53% were positioned in the middle, neutral

A range of comments were provided to back up these views, with many different perspectives offered. These included a desire to see planning regulations tightened to strengthen protection of the environment, a zoning review so that housing developments can happen more easily and concerns for greater protections for historic buildings and other sites.

A number of participants highlighted a need for increased street trees in the townships across the Shire, both for improved amenity and as a response to climate change. Making drinking taps available in more places was also seen as a key improvement Council should be working towards.

Here are some examples of responses that demonstrated these views:

'Community bus to service towns. Council [could] run a service itself.'

'Pedestrian gutter crossings are too deep and could trip elderly; and uncomfortable for scooter riders.'

'Wheelchair access to places is important.'

'Better signs - it is hard for people to know where things are.'

'Protection of agricultural land and native vegetation, ensure development is appropriately located, protection of site of historical significance'

'Council could support people with planning process, overcoming the red tape, support quicker decisions. Land use management with population growth pressures.'

'Don't overdevelop with tiny blocks. Keep it rural, keep the ambience.'

'Council might consider more input in to smaller towns or hubs that we have with in the shire rather than the larger precincts.'

'Develop thoughtful greening our public spaces; it supports individuals' well-being, cooling of climate-vulnerable spaces, and more enjoyable places for visitors (the #instagram factor).'

'Drinking fountains and refill stations in public areas that link to bike trail and parks.'

'Ensure all new spaces and places undergo an inclusion access audit. Engage with these auditors at the beginning of a project to ensure it is accessible for people of all abilities and ages.'

'Develop tree improvement plan for open areas across the Shire.'

'Review the planning scheme and ask us locals about it to help you get it right.'

'Reviewing planning restrictions to help people transition to less impactful lives (such as waste management including compost toilets etc).'

'Some buildings in the Shire are not so 'relevant' to current community use in many cases. Shire Halls were built in another era and are lovely but often not very user friendly. Perhaps some focus on retro fitting to maximise their usage?'

'Disability bathrooms need total update need changing places at Rotary park not only for residents, visitors from metropolitan expecting what they have even in Yarra Glen.'

Good Governance findings

In the Shaping Our Future data, there were numerous responses relating to the way Council works, encouraging an ongoing focus on transparency regarding decisions, along with an efficient and effective use of resources. A number of community members also want to see increased focus on sustainability of our facilities and services, while others are encouraging Council to strengthen the focus on innovation.

Community focused customer service was a consistent theme. While several respondents acknowledged the efforts Council has made to improve communication, community members are keen for Council to strengthen this further. Some people are concerned that certain groups in the community might miss out on important messages, particularly those who are not active online. Similarly, some participants reminded Council to improve consultation with the community – to ask and to listen, taking care to involve the people who will be impacted by decisions.

Council's role in helping the community plan for emergencies was also raised by a number of respondents.

Here are some examples of responses that demonstrated these views:

'Listen to community and think big.'

'Something about transparency and fairness, equality when accessing Council.'

'Sustainable, connected, with people who are happy, employed and empowered.'

'Yes, a focus on using new technologies as well as the existing statement items.'

'Dynamic, responsive, responsible.'

'Community consultation, responsive to local needs and safe caring community.'

'Respectful partnerships. Being heard...listened to.'

Council Plan: What happens next?

Council has used the ideas and suggestions provided by the community to help us draft the Council Plan 2021-2025. The draft will be on display for the community via our online engagement platform The Loop. Community members will also be able to view a copy at our Library and Customer Service centres. Once the community has had an opportunity to provide feedback during August and September, the new Council Plan will then be finalised and adopted by the Council in October 2021.

