

Council Plan

Background paper one

2021-25



Introduction

We live in one of the best places in the world.

We are surrounded by rolling hills and valleys, deep forests and a wide range of unique places to explore.

Our soil, our air and our water helps us to create world class products not only for us, but for the rest of the world to enjoy.

We have access to a wide range of services in our growing urban centres, and these centres continue to expand and adapt to meet our changing needs.

We have built our own history here and we celebrate our achievements, but we are also fortunate to share in the experience of a deeper history and culture on country that goes back tens of thousands of years.

And we look after each other. There are deep connections in our communities through sharing neighbourhoods, interests and activities. We are well prepared to face threats and support each other through hard times, as we have done before through fire, flood and more recently – pandemic.

Yarra Ranges Council has learnt much by listening to our communities and produced strategies that respond to communities' values and needs. These strategies have long term goals that focus on particular areas such as health, recreation, arts, culture, economy and environment. The strategies developed by Yarra Ranges Council in partnership with the community also inform the four year Council Plan. The Council Plan is the “guiding document” for service delivery across Yarra Ranges.

The current Yarra Ranges Council four year plan will end in June 2021, which means now is the time to start preparing the next plan that will guide us from 2021 to 2025.

To help Council prepare the 2021-2025 plan, this document offers you the opportunity to learn more about the strategies in place, how we are delivering against them in light of the need to help communities recover from the impact of the Covid19 pandemic and what we still need to do.

More importantly, this document offers you the opportunity to give us your feedback on how we are going and where we need to go. We know we can create a better Council Plan if we listen to our community and constantly check in to make sure we are delivering the right services to the right people at the right time.

So this is your opportunity to help us create the 2021 to 2025 Council Plan.

Together.

Our Vision

We inspire people to create a better future.

At the heart of our vision is an authentic desire to listen to our community and respond to their needs and aspirations. We are visible and communicate clearly and honestly.

In 2036 Yarra Ranges is a wonderful place to live, and also a world-class destination for visitors and investors who make a significant contribution to prosperity within the region.

Yarra Ranges' natural beauty, stunning landscapes and reputation for exceptional local produce is enhanced, and has a significant influence on decisions made regarding growth and development in the region.

A focus on responsible eco-tourism projects, access to digital services, networks, infrastructure and balanced economic development has enhanced the region's reputation and improved quality of life for all.

The look and feel of our commercial and industrial areas, and their environmental characteristics, has improved. Our roads, paths and other infrastructure are well maintained.

Advocacy for innovative and state of the art transport solutions has improved access to important community services, new and upgraded facilities and infrastructure and jobs.

'Gateways' into the municipality now strengthen our identity, our culture and heritage and create a sense of belonging for our community.

Educational facilities build the skills of our people and develop our leaders to strengthen communities and support local employment.

Our local planning approach enables us to recognise that each community is unique, and enables us to embrace the diversity and strength of local communities and support their health, safety and wellbeing needs.

Services are accessible in many ways and cater for children, youth, families and older people.

People actively participate in recreational and cultural activities using the facilities and activities developed for all ages and abilities.

Residents who are disadvantaged within the municipality are well supported by partnerships between government, business and community organisations.

Council resources are managed responsibly and principles of fairness and consistency are applied to avoid unnecessarily burdening rate payers.



Connected and healthy communities

Communities are safe, resilient, healthy, inclusive and socially well connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone.

The number one priority for Yarra Ranges Council is the health and wellbeing of our community. We work with communities to understand what services are required to help them to live healthy happy lives in Yarra Ranges. We deliver a wide range of services to the community and we focus our efforts on communities with specific needs such as the elderly, disadvantaged or marginalised.

Now more than ever, we are focussed on keeping our communities healthy and connected in a post pandemic environment where community health is at risk and our traditional methods of connecting are challenged.

Council recognises the significant impact that the pandemic is having on our communities across the municipality. Council will continue its focus on supporting our ageing community, those that are vulnerable, and community members who have been impacted financially or are facing other challenges as a result of this pandemic.

We will continue to work with our community and township groups, local business, agencies and State Government to provide the support needed for our communities through a range of recovery efforts.

We have implemented a community response and recovery plan to assist individuals and families of our community along with businesses and industry to respond, adapt and recover from the impact of COVID-19.

Health and Wellbeing Strategy

The key strategy that informs our current and future service delivery is the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The current strategy will end soon so in 2020 we will be working with communities in the development of the next Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

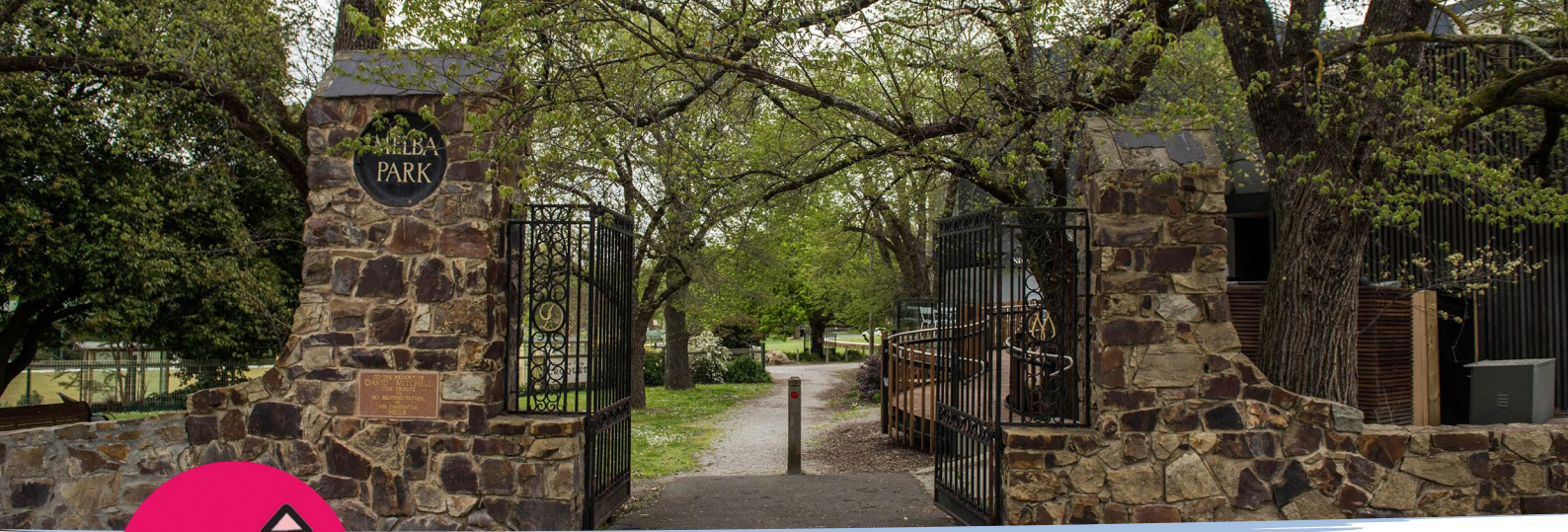
What we have done so far:

- ▶ Endorsed a Healthy & Active Ageing Plan (2019-2023) in October 2018, setting Council's direction in improving the quality of life for its older residents.
- ▶ Installed new drinking fountains in townships, playgrounds, sporting facilities and on premier trails.

What we are doing now:

- ▶ Partnering with communities in Reefton/McMahon's Creek and in Montrose to help them develop their Community Plans.
- ▶ Working with communities in Millgrove, Woori Yallock, Hoddles Creek, Launching Place, Don Valley (WHYLD) community, Powelltown, Little Yarra Community Group, Upwey, Yellingbo, Monbulk and District Community Opportunities Working group (MADCOW), and Kilsyth to review their existing Community Plans.





Quality infrastructure and liveable places

Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned and are hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity and innovation.

Our communities are deeply connected to the places they live, work and play in across Yarra Ranges. Yarra Ranges Council manages a wide range of public spaces and continually works to improve them.

The Covid19 impact on our outdoor spaces was significant, with sporting facilities, playgrounds, skate parks and outdoor fitness centres closed during the peak of the pandemic.

Yet at the same time the value of our walking paths, the outdoor seating in our townships and our recreational trails increased as people looked to them for opportunities to safely counter the isolation.

Council's Capital Works Program will play a key role in recovery for our community, with projects that help support a return to social gatherings and use of public spaces, while creating local jobs and increasing local spend through construction activities.

Council will continue to advocate on behalf of the community to ensure community and business infrastructure priorities are well supported. We have reviewed the plans we have for new and improved outdoor places. We have prioritised our capital works program to ensure we are responsible in our planned spend and that we provide quality infrastructure that safely supports community use of outdoor spaces.

Recreation and Open Space Strategy

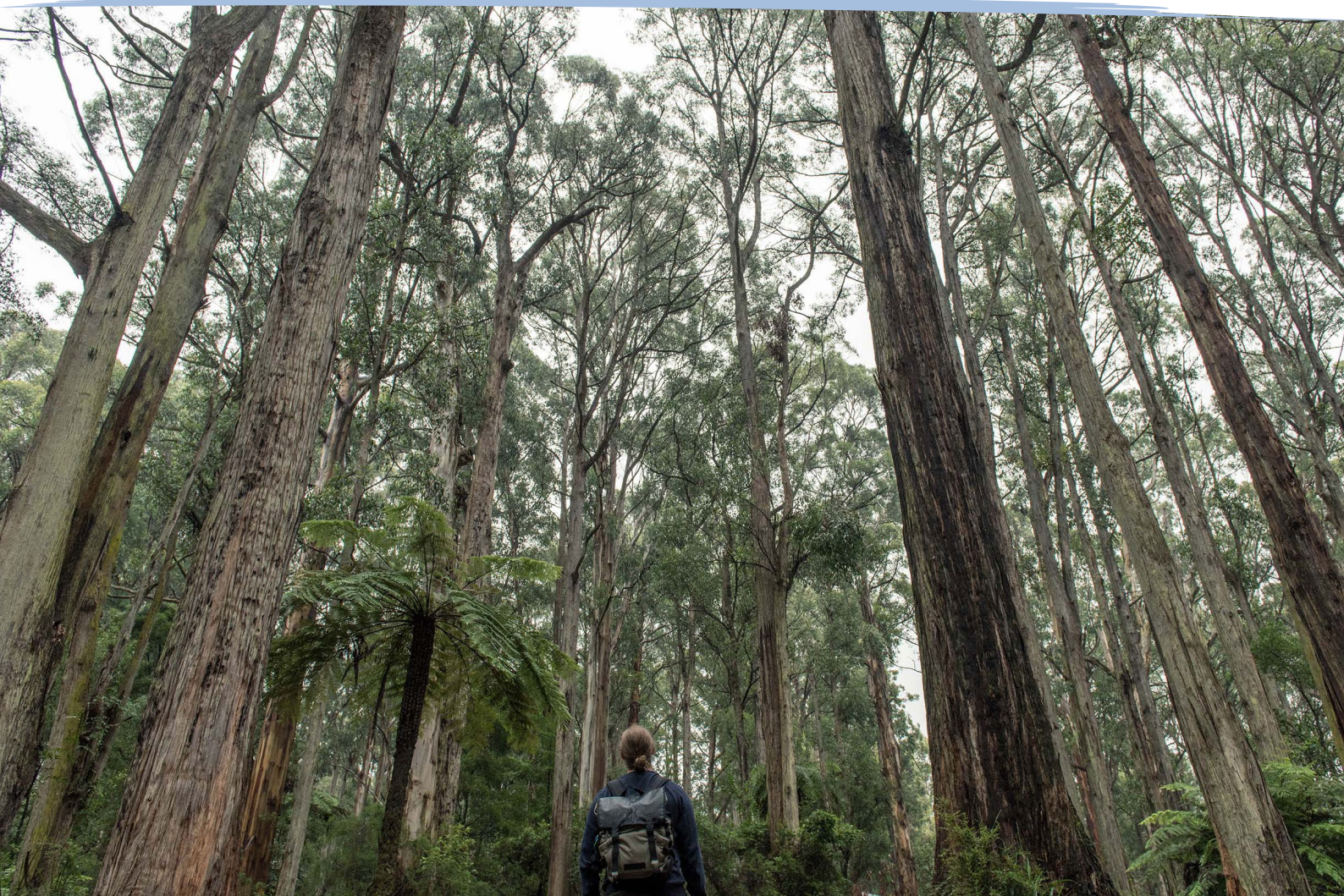
We continue deliver on the Recreation and Open Space Strategy developed in 2013 with a range of high quality projects delivered to the community. We are also renewing the Strategy to ensure that we continue to support a diverse range of well designed and well managed open spaces for both the Yarra Ranges community and the wider communities that visit.

What we have done so far:

- ▶ The RidgeWalk Master Plan is in draft form as final alignment changes are documented. With over 500 people consulted to date, community engagement continues to be at the core of RidgeWalk's development.
- ▶ In partnership with the community, new outdoor fitness equipment was installed at the Yarra Glenn recreation reserve.
- ▶ Lilydale's Melba Park gates underwent restoration works in November 2019; ensuring one of Council's most valuable heritage listed asset is protected for years to come.

What we are doing now:

- ▶ Working with the Millgrove Residents Action Group (MRAG) to deliver the Millgrove River Road Community Walking Track.





Protected and enhanced natural environment

A healthier environment for future generations.

The value of our parks and open spaces in supporting the mental and physical wellbeing of our community and visitors has been heightened during the pandemic. Council will continue to provide well maintained and safe open spaces for the community to enjoy, while also working hard to preserve the health of our natural environment for future generations.

We have now seen how the community responds to pandemics and we are recognising the opportunities to help individuals and communities build resilience to change with improved food security and energy security. We will continue to improve our clean energy generation through installing solar panels and batteries on our buildings so our community spaces are resilient and can function through any shocks and changes.

Environment Strategy

The key strategy that informs our priorities in protecting our natural environment is our Environment Strategy.

What we have done so far:

- We have worked with community on habitat restoration via the Ribbons of Green program with preparation for 50,570 plants to be planted in the winter months of 2020.
- Our Biodiversity Conservation team has been working with our Safer Communities team to ensure that fire prevention notices are issued with an understanding that targeting weeds can result in good outcomes environmentally as well as for fuel reduction.
- We continued to work with local community groups to maintain and enhance bushland sites and promoted a series of educational events aimed to increase awareness and appreciation of the environment.

Climate Change and Adaptation Plan

Our Climate Change and Adaptation Plan is being renewed in 2020 to provide us with a clear direction on the actions we need to take to decrease our impacts and improve our performance.

What we are doing now:

- ▶ Community engagement on the review of our Climate and Adaptation Plan continues, with a new “Liveable Climate Plan” to be endorsed by Council in 2020.





Vibrant economy, agriculture and tourism

Our tourism, agriculture, health, manufacturing and other industries are leading and dynamic. Strong investment and attraction underpins sustainable economic growth and job creation.

The economic impact of Covid-19 is being felt globally. Some sectors in our local economy are feeling the impact as businesses remain closed or operate on a significantly reduced level.

Our Emergency Management Team quickly recognised the potential impacts on our local economy and began recovery planning in April 2020. We made contact with impacted businesses and have established a range of services to support them through what may be a long term recovery process.

The success of our local industries will be key in the economic recovery of our region. This will include a focus on youth employment, traineeships and apprenticeships. Council will continue to work closely with local businesses, rural industry groups, agencies and tourism operators to understand the impact of Covid-19, respond to their changing needs and support them in getting back on their feet.

Economic Development Strategy

Our Economic Development Strategy outlines Council's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of individuals and local communities in Yarra Ranges by supporting and promoting a range of sustainable economic development initiatives.

What we have done so far:

- ▶ Supported regional tourism initiatives such as the Yarra Valley Trail, Warburton Mountain Bike Destination, RidgeWalk and Yarra Valley Railway including the development and implementation of a Business Acceleration Program.
- ▶ Delivered an extensive business support, events and training program which included organising the Business and Investment Forum, business visits and mentoring to more than 388 small business operators and entrepreneurs.
- ▶ Commenced implementation of the Better Approvals Project in partnership with the Victorian Government to reduce the time it takes for a small business to get the regulatory permits they need, and to reduce the administrative burden on both business and councils.

What we are doing now:

- ▶ We have introduced new purchasing requirements in Yarra Ranges Council that now makes it mandatory for every quotation for Council works or services to include a local provider where one is available.





High Performing Organisation

An innovative, responsive organisation that listens and delivers quality, value for money services to our community.

Council's has revised its budget for the 2020-21 year to enable the organisation to prioritise and implement many initiatives to help and support our residents, ratepayers and our business community through this pandemic. These initiatives, such as the Covid-19 Community Recovery Fund, will be identified and communicated as community needs are identified.

We will continue to adapt its methods of delivering services under Covid-19 restrictions to ensure the community has access to essential services and to support their needs.

We will continue to provide over the counter service and public internet in the urban, hills, and valley regions to ensure the community, especially the more vulnerable members, have access to important support services during this pandemic.

Flexible Future Strategy

The Flexible Future Strategy was developed in 2017 to guide Yarra Range's transformation in the way we think, work and deliver.

Ensuring we achieve our strategic objective of becoming a High Performing Organisation, each year we take a look at the strategy and identify the things that are most critical to work on to achieve its goals.

What we have done so far:

- ▶ We have transformed the way we use our office spaces and moved to an Activity Based Working environment, creating significant efficiencies in office use and improving productivity.

What we are doing now:

- ▶ Our Civic Centre redevelopment is on track to be completed in late 2021, giving the community greater access to Council facilities and services.