



Connecting communities through spaces

Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy 2019

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Region one – Neerim South, Noojee and surrounds

Section 3.1

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Region one – Neerim South, Noojee and surrounds

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

The region is a comparatively large region comprised of small townships spread around the commercial and service centre of Neerim South – a medium-sized town in the Shire. The southern part of the region is comprised of small townships and farming land, however, has good access to the commercial and service centres of Neerim South, Drouin or Warragul. The northern part of the region is comparatively more spread out, as it contains significant tracts of mountainous parkland. In the north, the townships of Noojee and Neerim Junction have a twice day bus service to Drouin and Warragul. The region borders the Bunyip State Park to the west and the Sweetwater Creek Nature Conservation Reserve to the east.



Demographic snapshot

This region has a combined population of 3,762 people. The age profile is older than that of the Shire, with 45 per cent aged between 45 and 74 years.

The region has slightly higher rates of labour force participation compared with the Shire, with 45 per cent in employment. Comparatively, the region has a higher proportion of engaged young people and lower rates of youth disengagement with 7.6 per cent disengaged compared to 9.8 per cent for the shire. Households generally own more cars in this region compared to the Shire, which may be reflective of the geography and a higher proportion of multiple family households. All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise stated. See appendices for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

Neerim South is the service centre for this region and has relatively good provision of community and recreational facilities including the Neerim South Hospital. Outside of Neerim South, most of the community spaces in this region are standalone facilities. In the southern part of the region facilities are better utilised, for example Rokeby has a community hall well cared for by the community. In the northern part of the region the standalone facilities are often underutilised and offer limited multi-use functionality such as the community halls, primary schools and passive open space in Noojee and Neerim Junction. There is also the Noojee Heritage Centre (the old railway station), home to the Noojee and District Historical Society. The Centre offers meeting room facilities for hire.

Policy review findings

A review of Council's policies and strategies identified the following important considerations for this region:

- Council's Community Service Planning Framework (2013) identified the following key considerations/recommendation:
 - Neerim South is also considered the main service centre for the North-West of the municipality (*Community Service Planning Framework, 2013*).
 - Future model of provision for the north-west¹ of the Shire will focus on 'district' level facilities in Neerim South and 'local' facilities in small towns/rural settlements that reflect the principles of viability, access, balance, responsiveness and maximum utilisation.
 - The Neerim South Community Library is currently co-located with Neerim District Secondary College, which has several issues associated with public access and governance.
 - The Noojee Library is used for two hours per week. This infrastructure is therefore underutilised and the mobile library service or co-location with other services should be considered (*Community Service Planning Framework, 2013*).
 - The primary schools in Neerim South and Jindivick support access for broader community use and further opportunities for co-locating/sharing facilities should be explored in the future (i.e. consideration of school needs as part of community hubs)(*Community Service Planning Framework, 2013*).

¹ Region one falls primarily in the North West District as outlined in the Community Service Planning Framework, and partially also in the North-East District.

- Consideration should be given to community hub style development in existing facilities in Jindivick, Rokeby, Neerim and Noojee (*Community Service Planning Framework, 2013*).
- Both Council's *Community Service Planning Framework (2013)* and *Neerim South Urban Design Framework (2017)* recommend the establishment of an integrated community hub in a new facility in Neerim South near the primary school to create a community precinct.
- Consideration should be given to the provision of health care services in multi-use facilities in small towns / localities that can accommodate counselling services, rehabilitation, support services and other complimentary services. Health care services could also be provided on a mobile basis and virtual and remote access may emerge with increasing use and availability of technology (*Community Service Planning Framework, 2013*).

Community plan findings

Four community plans were developed by the local community in this region. The community plans are for Neerim District, Rokeby/Crossover, Noojee and Tanjil Bren. The community plans were developed with the assistance of Council, however, delivering each plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from these plans are detailed below.

- **Neerim District 2007 – 2012 Community Plan**

The vision of the plan was aimed at managing growth in a way that preserves the environment and character. The plan identified challenges for managing population growth, lack of services for young families and transport for the elderly. Key projects included developing a community hub with co-located services, and better transport to Warragul.

- **Rokeby / Crossover 2008 – 2013 Community Plan**

The vision of the plan was aimed at developing connected and inclusive communities. The key challenges in the plan were focused on a lack of community cohesiveness and poor transport and phone services. Projects included new bus services and upgrading infrastructure.

- **Noojee 2007 – 2012 Community Plan**

The vision of the plan was aimed at protecting and enhancing the town's natural assets. Most projects within the plan focused on improving infrastructure around the town such as toilets, the electricity supply and parking at the library.

- **Tanjil Bren 2008 – 2013 Community Plan**

The vision of the plan was aimed at protecting and enhancing the town's natural assets. Key challenges were a fragmented community, while projects focussed on improving telecommunications services, and upgrading town infrastructure such as toilets and the community hall.

Community engagement findings

In the region, twenty-six people of the 3,762 participated in the engagement by completing the connecting communities survey at two of the community pop-ups. Lower participation rates may be explained by the inclement weather experienced at the Rokeby market pop-up and that many of the participants were from outside the region, namely that of Drouin and Warragul. For example, only one participant was from Rokeby despite the pop-up successfully engaging many people. Figure 1 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from Region one.

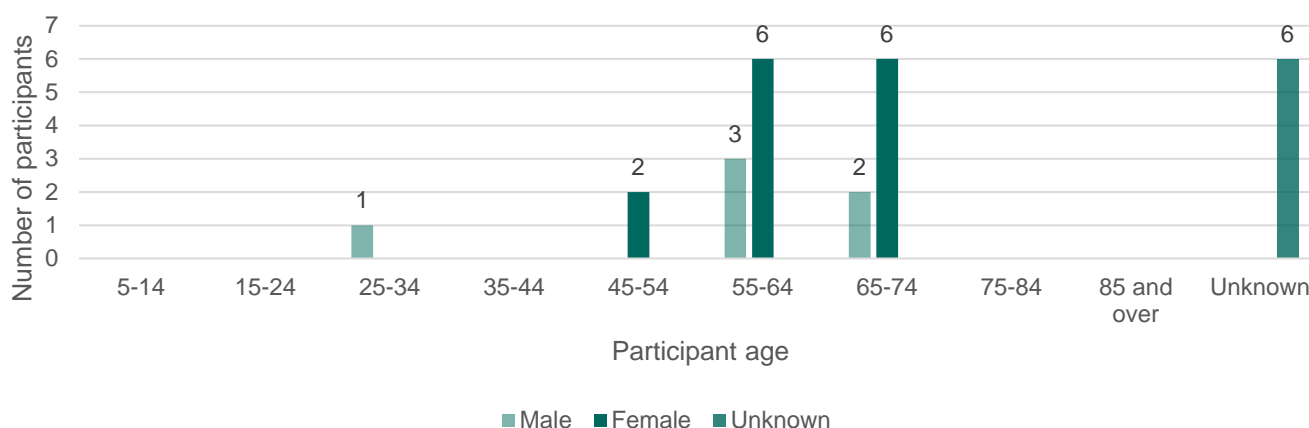


Figure 1. Region one community engagement participants - age profile

The towns and suburbs represented by participants were:

- Neerim south, seven participants
- Noojee, four participants
- Buln Buln, two participants
- Neerim Junction, one participant.
- Neerim, one participant
- Rokeby, one participant.

In addition to the survey participants, approximately six community members provided comments and ideas regarding specific facilities and spaces in this region. Demographic information was not collected from these participants.

Community connection

The participants discussed the different ways they typically connect to their community, these included connecting through organised groups, associations and sport clubs, community and sporting events, volunteering, employment, education, via social media and incidental interactions, for example, at the local pub.

The participants articulated several challenges to connecting with their community. The main challenges were:

- individual barriers, such as being time poor and lacking motivation to engage with the community.
- the level of service, facility and program provision in their community, particularly the lack of community spaces within the community.
- lack of communication about what's going on in the community.

According to participants, community connection could be improved by providing more spaces and services and increasing the amount of Council support. Holding more community and public events was recognised as an opportunity to improve connection. Participants believed it is also important that people have more access to information about what's going on in their community.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of community facilities and spaces that are used by participants, the types of facilities identified included:

- community centres and halls such as the Arts Centre, Community Centre and Community Hall.
- sporting facilities such as football and netball clubs, recreation reserves and skate parks.
- parks, open spaces and playgrounds such as Bellbird park located in Drouin and Rokeby Reserve particularly for the Rokeby market which is highly valued by the community as a place to engage.
- community gardens.
- walking tracks and paths such as the pathway between Neerim and Neerim South.
- Schools.
- Libraries.
- non-community spaces, such as local pubs, cafes and shops, particularly in the northern part of the region.

Other spaces and facilities identified as being valued by the broader community included:

- kinder and childcare.
- the men's shed in Neerim South, which is currently looking for a space.
- the hospital, which is community run.
- the Neerim Junction community hall which is valued by the local community for the market.
- the Noojee community hall which used to be valued but now people are more likely to gather at the pub.
- the parks and picnic grounds.

According to participants the following services, programs and spaces could be improved or are missing:

- Community facilities and services that are missing or could be improved, include:
 - a meeting place and space for different activities and learning.
 - the hall in Neerim South which could be improved to allow more community activity.
 - the men’s shed in Neerim South which needs a permanent location.
 - revitalisation of the Noojee library as a living and learning centre including tourist information, free Wi-Fi and computer access (there is free Wi-Fi at the post office, but nowhere for people to sit).
 - a central place for services such as childcare, maternal and child health.
 - more spaces for the arts, such as a smaller theatre.
 - more and improved sporting facilities.
- The following access and use issues could be improved, including:
 - provision of more spaces that have storage facilities and different sized spaces for community groups.
 - increased provision of education about technology.
 - the connection between various spaces, providing more lighting, signage and better footpaths.
 - improve footpaths and connections between the town centre and historical centre in Noojee.
 - public amenities which could be improved.
 - more evening spaces for improved accessibility.

Information on hub and service provision

The following suggestions were provided by participants to improve understanding of what is currently available.

- Online communication and support, such as:
 - Provide free Wi-Fi or computer access to aged people, giving them the opportunity to connect with people via social media.
 - Provide links to the Council website and an online directory.
 - Communicate with young people via social media.
- Printed communication, for example, communicating through local papers and newsletters via mail.
- Deliver announcements on the local radio.

Community hub principles

The participants from Region one believed that a community hub includes the following elements and principles:

- It is an **inclusive** space or place, that is:
 - welcoming.
 - financially accessible.
 - a space that provides activities for all members of the community, all ages, sexes and interests.
- It is a **meeting space or place** for the community that provides:
 - a space for informal interaction with the community.
 - a space where you can drop in with no obligation.
 - a space to meet and engage with various people and groups.
- There is a **diverse offering**; is a space where several activities occur.
- It is a **multi-purpose** space that provides:
 - multiple services.
 - a space for activities.

- space to hold events.
- shared space for community groups with storage.
- It is a place with **support services**, particularly childcare and health.
- It is **people focused**, in that it fosters relationship and community support for one another.
- It is **community driven**, in that there is community ownership.
- It is supported by the Shire.

“A space where a number of activities occur, which encompasses members of the community all ages, sexes, interests. This Hub is a space is used daily or almost daily, not sitting idle for most of the week. Affordable for use and access.” (Resident)

According to their responses, it should not be:

- exclusive, available for just one group.
- a big and cold space, as they are not good for small groups to meet.
- a place that allows or fosters participation in drug use, drinking alcohol and gambling.

Recommendations

For Region one, Council policy articulates that a ‘district’ level integrated service hub is required in Neerim South recognising that Neerim South functions as a service centre for surrounding communities in this region. Council policy similarly notes a need for ‘local’ level service provision in smaller townships. This need for ‘district’ level and ‘local’ level service and hub provision is mirrored in the Community Plans for the region and from community engagement findings. Community engagement revealed that Neerim South is home to many community groups that need space to operate. The smaller townships of the region have available spaces, however, may need refurbishment, improved connections and activation.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- **Consideration of existing and additional community space** in Neerim South to accommodate existing programs such as the community house and the men’s shed. Consider renegotiating existing assets to provide for a new multi-use facility. This proposed initiative should consider the existing Urban Design Framework recommendations, any other community initiatives and strong community ties and investment that has gone into existing facilities, such as the Algie Hall.
- **Improve multi-use functionality** of existing, well-cared for spaces in other areas of the region. This includes Rokeby Hall.
- **Improve access and connectivity between existing spaces and places** in Noojee including public realm improvements to create more places for incidental social interactions, particularly around the commercial areas and down to the historical centre.
- Improve mobile service and program delivery in Noojee while maintaining space for events. Consider consolidating existing community spaces and facilities and **improve multi-use functionality**. Consider the following facilities:
 - the community hall
 - the Heritage Centre
 - Noojee Primary School (potential co-location opportunities).
- Continue to support the provision of community managed facilities in other areas of the region such as the Neerim Junction Hall.