Community Hubs Strategy

Connecting communities through spaces

Part 1 - Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy 2019

Developed by Capire Consulting in collaboration with Baw Baw Shire Council, 31 May 2019

Section 1 Executive Summary

Project overview

Baw Baw Shire Council's vision is for 'Happy, healthy people sharing prosperity and knowledge from living sustainable and in harmony with our rural identity, thriving villages, productive and inspiring landscapes'.

'Vibrant communities' is an important objective of the vision, which Council is committed to fostering through good planning, providing community focused services and facilities, and celebrating the uniqueness of each community. As part of the Council Plan, Council identified the need to develop a coordinated approach to community hubs and precincts in the municipality. The *Community Hubs Strategy* aims to achieve this.

The Baw Baw Shire Community Hubs Strategy is split into three distinct parts. *Part 1 - Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy 2019* aims to generate a shared understanding of what constitutes a community hub, including the articulation of values and principles, and recognition of how these vary across different geographical settings in the Shire. This shared understanding of a community hub will help Council respond to community needs at a local and municipal level as well as determine the role that community spaces play in supporting vibrant communities. This part also seeks to articulate the opportunities for improving the provision of community hubs across the Shire taking a place-based approach, recognising that one size does not necessarily fit all. As a response to the *Part 1 - Aspirational Community Hub Strategy 2019,* Baw Baw Shire have produced *Part 2 - Community Hubs Action Plan.* This part seeks to prioritise the aspirational recommendations identified in part 1 and outline how Council will action them over the next five years. Lastly, *Part 3 – Appendices* is made up of supporting information and supplementary documentation utilised in the creation of the Community Hubs Strategy.

Project approach

For the *Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy 2019*, the Shire has been divided into eight regions as shown in Figure 1. The regions are based on Council's understanding of travel patterns throughout the municipality and community program delivery and service access trends. The division was created to enable a localised analysis to inform place-based recommendations. In this document, an overall analysis of the Baw Baw Shire is provided, with a region by region analysis completed. Recommendations regarding community hubs and infrastructure development are then provided on a region by region basis.

Figure 1 Map detailing the study area regions

The challenges and opportunities

Through the completion of background research and the community and stakeholder engagement, this strategy has identified several key challenges and opportunities. These are:

- Population growth: Between 2016 (last census) and 2031 the Shire is expected to experience a population growth of over 1,200 people a year, with much of that growth expected to be in Warragul and Drouin and to a lesser extent Longwarry and Trafalgar. Managing growth in these areas is important. Whilst greater populations can attract superior service provision, they also risk impacting what communities love about their rural towns.

- Population decline: While some communities are thriving with steady populations others are struggling and their populations are declining. Declining populations can impact the viability of existing community services and facility provision.

- Physical and social isolation: The Shire is primarily a rural-based municipality made up of many smaller and remote communities. Rural towns can be both physically and socially isolating, with high car dependency and limited public transport provision and walkability. This impacts access to community services and activities, particularly for vulnerable community members such as the elderly, people with a disability and young people.

- Lack of community focal points: Many rural areas lack a clear town centre, or the town centre is geographically dispersed. Therefore, providing a focal point may be focused on improving connectedness between spaces and providing increased opportunities for incidental interactions.

- Lack of fit-for-purpose and multi-purpose facilities: The Victorian Government's *30 Year Infrastructure Strategy*[1] highlighted that a 2015 report by the local government sector found that 40 per cent of their community infrastructure is currently not considered to be fit-for-purpose and requires significant investment in maintenance or renewal to bring it up to standard. The *30 Year Infrastructure Strategy* also reflects that whilst resources might be better spent on developing a new facility than on maintenance, communities often have strong ties to these spaces and can be resistant to change. Most community facilities in the Shire are stand-alone and ageing. They provide limited flexibility and opportunities for services and programs to integrate into their current designs.

- Poor utilisation of existing facilities: The overall utilisation across Council's stand-alone facilities such as 31 public halls, the 22 social clubs, and the 75 sporting pavilions is low. This is due to a mix of accessibility issues, level of demand, historic ownership arrangements and functionality constraints.

- Policy drivers: Across both state and local government policy there is a strong desire to provide multi-use and integrated community spaces through optimising the use of existing and new facilities, while reducing maintenance costs of community assets and increasing opportunities for communities to connect. There is also a push for greater community access and co-location of community infrastructure with primary and secondary school facilities such as kindergartens, libraries, meeting spaces and recreational facilities.

- Need to support greater participation by vulnerable communities: Typical of many regional and rural areas the Shire has a high proportion of youth disengagement i.e. young people neither engaged in education or employed (10 per cent compared to eight percent for Victoria). Council have been engaging with young people to understand their issues and aspirations, and more specifically about what Council can do to keep young people in the Shire. There was strong support for new spaces for young people to hang out in and more events for young people. Alongside this Council has also been engaging with the Kurnai Nation around the need for a cultural space where local Aboriginal community members can connect with their culture and engage with activities and services.

---

[1] Infrastructure Victoria, 2016, 'Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy'.

Defining what a 'community hub' is

Community hubs play an important role in the social life of cities, towns and townships. A large body of literature illustrates how physical spaces can foster social cohesion within communities. While the look and feel of a physical space is important, the programming or incidental interactions provided for by a space are often considered the most important to community connections and social cohesion[2]. As such a one-size fits all approach cannot be taken with developing spaces for community activity. Appropriate programming reflective of community needs and fostering occurrences of incidental interactions requires communities adopting, using and managing the space. A community hub may look, feel and function differently in every community[3].

A key component of the community engagement for this project was to explore with the Baw Baw community what a 'community hub' means to them including what it *does* and *does not* include. Across the engagement the following community hub principles emerged:

- A community hub is **inclusive**: a place all members of the community can access, are accepted and heard, regardless of age, race, culture, gender, ability or financial position. There are activities programs and events to suit all.

- A community hub is a **people focused** meeting space or place: People can drop in any time to meet other community members. It has both formal and informal spaces for socialising or group activities. Dropping in and meeting people is obligation free and does not require someone to be taking part in an activity.

- A community hub is **community driven**: community take ownership with support from Council, where needed. Activities, events, programs or care are driven by the local community, residents and businesses.

- A community hub is **multi-purpose**: It offers diverse events, programs or activities that provide for all members of the community. It also provides space for community service provision.

A community hub is not exclusive, commercially focused or a place where people may feel unsafe.

The principles identified through the community engagement were somewhat consistent across the regions, particularly principles around 'inclusion' and hubs being 'people-focused'. The identification of Community Hubs as 'a space for service provision' was not as strongly identified but came up in most regions. Service provision could be considered more of a secondary driver for establishing a community hub compared to providing spaces for people to come together. This would be dependent on the need for a particular service in a specific location.

---

[2] John McLeod, Simon Pryer, John Meade, 2004, 'Health in public spaces – promoting mental health and wellbeing through the Arts and Environment Scheme', *Prepared for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation*
[3] Ken Worpole and Katharine Knox, 'The social value of public spaces', *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*

Community hub recommendations

There are recommendations for each region that seek to improve the opportunities for community hubs to be established and/or activated. The recommendations can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Improving multi-use functionality of existing spaces

- Activation of existing spaces to respond to community needs and aspirations

- Provision of new built form spaces

- Improving access and connection to and between existing spaces and places.

A summary of the recommendations, description and associated regions are summarised in figure 2 below.

RECOMMENDATION   DESCRIPTION   REGIONS

Improving multi purpose functionality of existing spaces

Opportunity to improve the functionality of existing spaces/facilities to provide for multi-purpose uses and improve usability.

- Region one
- Region two
- Region three
- Region six
- Region eight

Activation of existing spaces to respond to community need

Adequate provision of spaces but a need for Council to support greater activation with programs and activities.

- Region three
- Region five
- Region six

Improving access and connection to/ between existing spaces and places

There is an opportunity to link several well-used spaces and places to create a community precinct, improving access and connection.

- Region one
- Region four
- Region seven

Provision of new built form spaces

The need for additional community spaces to cater for identified demand in the form of a multi-purpose facility.

- Region one
- Region five

Figure 2 Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy recommendations

Structure of the Community Hub Strategy

For the purposes of clarity, the report has been presented in the following structure. The Community Hubs Strategy is provided in three parts. Part 1 – The Aspirations Community Hubs Strategy 2019, Part 2 – Community Hubs Action Plan 2019 – 2024 and Part 3 – Appendices. The first two sections provide for an overview of the strategy, its method and the background research. Following this, each of the 8 regions are presented individually with the relevant research, community engagement results and an explanation of the key recommendations. Lastly, Council have created an action plan that reviews and prioritises the proposed recommendations for implementation. This document also reviews the financial capacity of Council to deliver the priority recommendations.

The following outlines the structure of the report:

Part 1 – Aspirations Community Hubs Strategy 2019

1. Executive Summary

2. Methodology and Research

3. The Regions

    1. Neerim South, Noojee and surrounds

    2. Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and surrounds

    3. Hill End and Willow Grove

    4. Longwarry

    5. Drouin and Warragul

    6. Yarragon and surrounds

    7. Trafalgar and surrounds

    8. Towns of the Strzelecki Ranges

Part 2 – Community Hubs Action Plan 2019 - 2024

1. Action Plan

2. Project Prioritisation

3. Funding

4. Implementation Overview

Part 3 - Appendices

Section 2 Methodology and Background Research

This section provides an overview of how research has been carried out to outline the aspirations for Community Hubs throughout the Shire. This overview is structured as follows:

1. The <u>methodology</u> used for this project is outlined. This includes the collection of primary data and the way it will be analysed. The main tenant of the research process is that it will consider the Baw Baw Shire region first as a whole, and then as eight (8) separate areas. It will consider, engage and make recommendations based on Baw Baw Shire being composed of a variety of regions.

2. It has reviewed the <u>overall context of Baw Baw Shire</u> by presenting its demographic, planning and geographical data. This sets the base for research of the Baw Baw community.

3. A <u>review of Council's wider policy</u> drivers has been undertaken. These form the key frames informing the research.

4. A <u>review of industry trends</u> around public spaces and community cohesion is presented.

Methodology

The purpose of the project was to develop a Community Hubs Strategy that contains a shared understanding of what constitutes a 'community hub', including values and principles and recognition of how these may change to respond to the different geographical settings across the Shire. To do this, a mixed methodology approach was employed in two phases. The first phase involved a background review, and included:

- determining geographic setting

- demographic analysis

- policy and literature review

While the second phase involved primary research, and included:

- community engagement

- stakeholder engagement

The following sections expand upon these methods, detail the method of data analysis and the limitations of the methodology.

Background review

The purpose of the background review was to provide context to the primary research by identifying evidence of potential need or disadvantage and to provide a framework to analyse primary research findings.

Geographical setting

For this project, the Shire was divided into eight geographic regions. The regions were predefined by Council based on geographical evidence and demonstration of similar patterns of function and characteristics. The Shire was divided into regions to guide localised analysis and to make tailor-made recommendations. Council may review and realign the regions based on the findings of this study. A map of the geographical regions is provided within the Baw Baw Context section.

Demographic analysis

A demographic analysis using 2016 census data was conducted to identify population trends of service delivery age groups across the Shire. This was completed primarily using the online analytical tool REMPLAN which allows users to create 'projects' based on different geographic boundaries and subsequently map census data. Eight 'projects' were created that directly corresponded with the eight geographic regions. Demographic data from each region was then benchmarked against demographics of the Shire.

Policy review

A contextual review of Council's policies and strategies was performed to identify overarching principles guiding community hub provision across the Shire. This was conducted to understand known issues, opportunities and planned projects relating to community hubs or spaces for each region. In total, 26 Council documents were reviewed for the project. The following is a list of these:

- Community Plans
  - Yarragon Community Plan
  - Thorpdale Community Plan
  - Tanjil Bren Community Plan
  - Tanjil Valley District Community Plan
  - Seaview Community Plan
  - Rokeby Crossover Community Plan
  - Rawson Community Plan
  - Poowong East Community Plan
  - Noojee Community Plan
  - Neerim and District Community Plan
  - Longwarry Community Plan
  - Jindivick Community Plan
  - Erica Community Plan
  - Drouin Community Plan
  - Darnum Community Plan
- Baw Baw Shire Long Term Infrastructure Plan 2019-2028
- Community Service Planning Framework, 2013
- Baw Baw Shire Municipal Early Years Plan 2015-2018
- Baw Baw Shire Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017 – 2021
- Youth Strategy 2018
- Baw Baw Recreation Strategy 2017 – 2027
- Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan
- Neerim South Urban Design Framework
- Drouin Town Centre Strategy
- Six Generations Yarning Together Report
- Baw Baw Youth Survey 2018
- Warragul PSP
- Drouin PSP

Literature Review

A review of literature was undertaken to identify the role that community spaces play in fostering community connectedness. Additionally, the review examined key principles that should be considered by Baw Baw Shire in their future planning of community spaces and places. Literature was sourced from academia, government publications and practitioner reports to provide a balance of views. This review provided the project with a framework to compare other research findings and to inform recommendations. The following articles and publications were reviewed as part of this project:

- CoDesign Studio, 2017, 'The Neighbourhood Project', available: https://theneighbourhoodproject.org/
- Heart Foundation, 2018, 'Healthy Active by Design'
- Infrastructure Victoria, 2016, 'Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy'

- John McLeod, Simon Pryer, John Meade, 2004, 'Health in public spaces – promoting mental health and wellbeing through the Arts and Environment Scheme', Prepared for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation

- Ken Worpole and Katharine Knox, 'The social value of public spaces', Joseph Rowntree Foundation

- Linda Mullet and Lisa Williams, 2014, 'Six Generations Yarning Together – Local Aboriginal Needs Analysis Project 2014 Report', prepared for the Kurnai Nations Company, funded by Baw Baw Shire Council

- Royal Academy of British Architect, 2017, 'Hastings Pier by dRMM Architects', available: https://www.architecture.com/awards-and-competitions-landing-page/awards/riba-regional-awards/riba-south-east-award-winners/2017/hastings-pier

- VicHealth, 2005, 'Social Inclusion as a determinant of mental health and wellbeing'

- Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, 2010, 'A Guide to Governing Shared Community Facilities'

- Victorian Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011, 'Indicators of community strength in Victoria: framework and evidence'

Primary research

Primary research was undertaken through community and stakeholder engagement across the Shire. The following paragraphs outline the engagement approach, while a copy of the engagement and research frame is the appendices.

Community and stakeholder engagement

Community engagement activities were conducted in each of the project's eight regions, as well as through an online hub. The stakeholder engagement was conducted through a workshop with service providers that operate out of hubs or hub like spaces across the Shire. The objectives of the community and stakeholder engagement were to:

- build a greater understanding of the existing social context including current patterns, strengths, issues and opportunities.

- determine the community's aspirations for community spaces and the role they play in meeting community needs.

- understand the current value of community spaces and any structured or perceived barriers to the use of and access to existing spaces.

- understand the information needs of the community in relation to what community spaces, programs, services and activities are available.

- explore the different roles of community, service providers and Council in facilitating community strengthening.

Community engagement activities

To engage the general Baw Baw community, two engagement techniques were employed: community 'pop-ups' and an online engagement hub.

The pop-ups involved setting up a marquee in busy and popular locations in each of the eight regions. At the pop-ups the engagement team asked passers-by to fill in surveys containing questions from the engagement frame (refer to appendices for a copy of the survey). Additionally, participants were able to annotate maps of the region to identify places or spaces they believe serve as community hubs. This method was chosen to allow for incidental engagement, whereby community members who would not otherwise engage were presented with the opportunity. In total ten pop-ups were held at the following locations:

- Rokeby Community Market (Region one – Neerim South, Noojee and surrounds)

- Sunday at Noojee Hotel (Region one – Neerim South, Noojee and surrounds)

- Rawson – West Gippsland Mobile Library (Region two – Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and surrounds)

- Hill End vs Thorpdale, Mid Gippsland Football League (Region three – Hill End and Willow Grove)

- Longwarry Fire Brigade Market (Region four – Longwarry)

- Drouin Craft and Produce Market (Region five – Drouin and Warragul)

- Smith St in Warragul (Region five – Drouin and Warragul)

- Yarragon Market (Region six – Yarragon and surrounds)

- Trafalgar Community Garden (Region seven – Trafalgar and surrounds)

- Ellinbank vs Nyora, Ellinbank and Districts Football League (Region eight – North of the Strzelecki Ranges)

The 'online engagement hub' was a web page dedicated to the project. It contained an interactive map in which participants dropped 'pins' on key locations and subsequently wrote a description on their pin drop. Participants could select three styles of pins, these were:

- places they currently connect

- barriers to connection

- potential opportunities to connect

The three pin styles were chosen based upon the approach detailed in the research frame. An online hub was established to reach a broad section of the community, particularly those who lived in remote areas or had barriers to other forms of participation.

Service providers, an identified stakeholder group in the project, participated through a group workshop. The workshop aimed to better understand current service provision and infrastructure needs in respect to community spaces. This included how current spaces function and the identification of future opportunities.

The workshop was facilitated by an engagement team member, who guided participants through a workbook and group discussions. A copy of the workbook with questions is shown in Appendix three.

Recruitment and advertisement

To generate interest, knowledge and participation in the project, several methods of recruitment and advertisement were used. These were:

- developing a community directory of social and business leaders of Baw Baw and sending out regular emails about the project

- using the 'snowball' sampling method and having community leaders generate interest amongst their networks

- advertising pop-up dates through social media channels, including the Council Facebook and Instagram accounts

- advertising pop-up dates on the Council website

- having key Council members discuss the project in local media, including print and radio

- handing out flyers at pop-up events

- using Council staff relationships to contact services

- requesting service providers to use the 'snowball' sampling method and inform their service users of the project

An initial mailing list was compiled of key community members and organisation. This included 190 subscribers, of which 130 were linked to an organisation. A further 164 people registered their interest online and were sent eight emails throughout the project period while 42 were contacted via paper based mailouts.

The project was advertised through local media. A Baw Baw Shire Council media release was sent out on 18 May and was published on the Council website. An article was published in the The Baw Baw Shire and West Gippsland Trader on 24 May 2018, which discussed the project and opportunities to get involved. Additionally, the May edition of Council News which appears in The Warragul and Drouin Gazette, The Baw Baw Shire and West Gippsland Trader and The Traf News all included a section detailing the project and options for getting involved.

Advertising of the project through Council's social media accounts reached a total of 44,312 people, of which 2,003 people were considered engaged. To be considered engaged on social media, a person must either react, comment or share a post on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter rather than simply viewing a post. The breakdown of these numbers is demonstrated below in table 2.

Table 1 Social media engagement statistics

Social media platform	People reached	People engaged
Facebook	42,456	1,957 - Link clicks: 1,397 - Reactions, comments and shares: 560
Instagram	707	38
Twitter	1,149	8
Total	44,312	2,003

Data analysis

Community and stakeholder engagement data was analysed by finding themes throughout the data. This method was chosen as it allows for the analysis of large amounts of data. All data was compiled and collated into a spreadsheet. Data codes were developed iteratively through reviewing background research, input from Council officers and primary data.

An analysis of the issues and opportunities for the future provision of community hubs was undertaken at a regional level based on the background research and engagement with the community and service providers. A set of community hub principles was developed based on the combined analysis of the community engagement and background review.

Limitations

While the project methodology was rigorous and produced valuable research results, there are some limitations which must be acknowledged.

Lack of a facilities audit

Due to the scope and objectives of the project, a facilities audit was not conducted on hubs or hub like spaces and places across the Shire. Background research produced some data relating to facility provision and condition, however, this data was not exhaustive. This data was used when available, while anecdotal evidence was used in place of audit data when unavailable.

Mismatch in participation rates across regions

Project participation rates were not evenly spread across the regions. Roughly half of the participants (103) were from Region five – Drouin and Warragul, while Region eight – North of the Strzelecki Ranges had four participants. This mismatch in participation may be a result of differing population sizes between regions or lack of population centres in some regions.

Engagement lead times and inclement weather

Some constraints were placed on the engagement due to short lead times for pop-up engagements. Many events, such as outdoor markets, do not run during winter. As such, some pop-up engagements did not have the ideal amount of lead time. Similarly, some engagements ran during cold and windy weather. Both factors may have impacted on participation rates.

Not all participants provided demographic data

Some participants did not provide any demographic data. These participants most likely would have contributed through mapping tools at pop-ups or via online.

The Baw Baw context

The following section provides a summary of the context in which this project was undertaken including Council's role in the provision of community spaces, the geographical context of the Baw Baw Shire and key population and growth considerations.

This section provides a base for understanding Baw Baw Shire and it's constituents as a whole.

Demographic summary

Baw Baw Shire has a population of 48,477 with a similar age profile to Victoria - most of the population being aged between 30 to 64 years (43.9 per cent) or working age. The Shire has a lower proportion of those aged 20 to 29 years, those considered in tertiary education or of young working age (11 per cent) and a slightly higher proportion of the elderly, those aged 75 years and over (8 per cent).

The population is primarily Australian born or of English-speaking backgrounds. There is a small community of residents of non-English speaking backgrounds mainly from Asia. Most residents, however, have a high-level of English proficiency. Just 0.5 per cent of the population do not speak English well or not at all and are generally clustered in the Drouin and Warragul areas.

Within the Shire there is some evidence of relative disadvantage according to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), a ranking of areas according to relative socio-economic disadvantage. In Warragul, there are five SA1s (Statistical areas) ranked in SEIFA as demonstrating evidence of significant relative disadvantage, while there are two in Drouin.[4] These are the only areas of disadvantage in Baw Baw Shire according to the SEIFA index.

Below in Table 2, is a demographic snapshot of the Shire. A full set of statistics is in Appendix three.

Table 2 Demographic snapshot of Baw Baw Shire

Indicator	Description
Population (usual place of residence)	48,477
Annualised growth rate 2011-2016	2.5%
Median age	42 years
Median Weekly income	$585
Labour force participation rate	46%
English proficiency	0.5% speak English not well or not at all.
Motor vehicles per household	40% of households own two motor vehicles
Need for assistance with core activities	5.5%
Disengaged youth (those aged 15 – 24 not engaged in work or study).	540
Highest year of school completed	31% of residents have completed Year 12 or equivalent, compared to 44% for Victoria

Geographical context of Baw Baw

The following paragraphs provide an overview of the Shire's geographic context. Unless otherwise stated, all data has been compiled from the Census Population and Housing 2016.

Baw Baw Shire is primarily a rural-based municipality made up of many smaller and remote communities. The Shire has a land area of 402,000 hectares with a population of 0.12 persons per hectare. The Shire, however, also has a major peri-urban growth area focused in the centres of Drouin and Warragul.

Most of the Shire's largest towns by population are located along or near to the M1 (Princess Highway) and railway, which runs east from Melbourne and across the centre of the Shire. The Shire's five largest towns by population can be found in table 3.

---

[4] ABS 2016 Census of Population and Housing

Table 3 Population growth of the five largest towns in the Shire, based on ABS Census of Housing and Population 2011 and 2016.

Town	2011 population	2016 population	% change
Warragul	13,914	15,367	+10.4%
Drouin	9,403	12,034	+27.98%
Trafalgar	3,462	3,779	+9%
Longwarry	1,404	1,992	+41.8%
Yarragon	1,474	1,623	+10.1%

The northern areas of the Shire contain large areas of state and national parks including the Baw Baw National Park. The largest townships of the northern area of the Shire by population are:

- Neerim South: 1,305

- Willow Grove: 593

- Jindivick: 493

- Rawson: 293

The southern parts of the Shire contain significant tracts of farming land and are bound by the Strzelecki Ranges. The largest townships of the southern area of the Shire by population are:

- Thorpdale: 472

- Ellinbank: 232

- Ripplebrook: 223

For this project, the Shire has been divided into eight regions as shown in figure 3 on the next page.

Figure 3 Proposed geographic regions

Current planning and growth context

By 2031, the resident population of the Shire is expected to increase to 67,700, from 49,000 in 2016, representing a 2.5 per cent annual growth rate (equivalent to an additional 1,247 people each year)[5]. Most of the population growth over the last five years has been in Warragul and Drouin, which increased 13 per cent from 2011 to 2016.[6] Moderate growth is also occurring in other towns along the Princess Highway including Longwarry and Trafalgar.

Population growth in Baw Baw Shire is being driven by several 'push' and 'pull' factors. The push factors include Melbourne's metropolitan boundary expanding eastward and the growth in 'tree change' lifestyle choices[7]. While the pull factors include housing affordability of the Shire as well as lifestyle, employment and business opportunities[8]. As noted in the 'Community Services Planning Framework' (2013), 'Baw Baw Shire is faced with future population growth that will place significant pressure on the capacity of existing services to provide for changing and increasing community needs. Some services may be able to expand in capacity while other services will require greater levels of imagination and creativity to stimulate local solutions that successfully meet community needs' (p.9).

As shown above much of this growth is concentrated and while greater populations can attract superior service provision, they also risk impacting what communities love about their rural towns such as:

- land-use
- services
- local identity
- wellbeing
- infrastructure

Conversely, some of the small communities have declining populations impacting on the viability of existing community service and facility provision. In these cases, residents may feel the townships local identity is being lost and may also face challenges associated with an ageing population. Figure 4 below illustrates the planning and growth context:
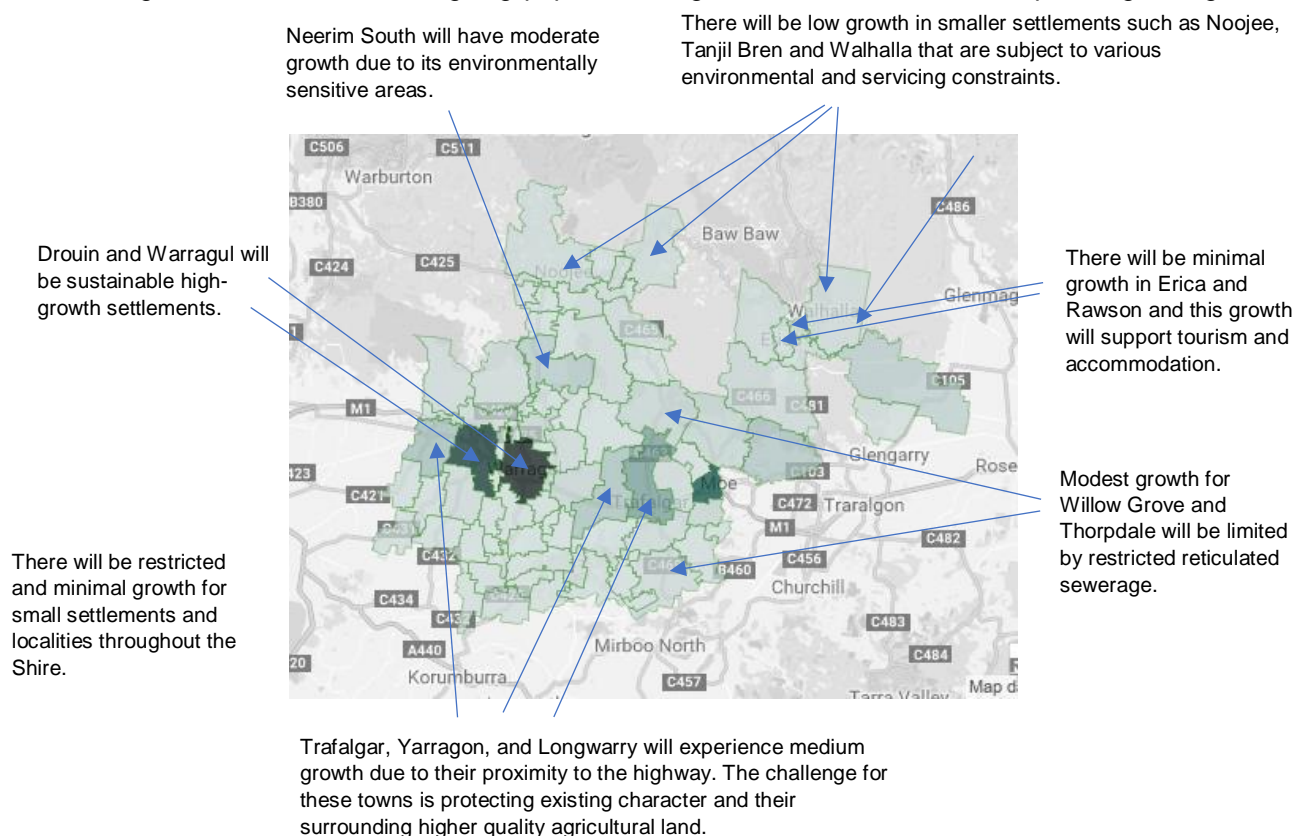

Figure 4. Growth and settlement context – Baw Baw Shire Council Settlement Management Plan 2013

---

[5] Baw Baw Shire Council, 2013, 'Community Services Planning Framework'
[6] ABS 2016 Census Population and Housing
[7] Baw Baw Shire Council, 2013, 'Community Services Planning Framework'
[8] Baw Baw Shire Council, 2013, 'Community Services Planning Framework'

Council's role in the provision of community spaces

Across the Shire, Baw Baw has many stand-alone community facilities and spaces. While stand-alone facilities may provide dedicated space for some services and programs, they also reduce flexibility and opportunities for services and programs to integrate. In July 2017 Council undertook an audit of Council-owned buildings and their utilisation. The following outcomes were identified:

- There are 31 public halls (nine Council-owned, two owned by independent committees, and the remainder owned by the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DEWLP)). The overall utilisation of the public halls is considered very low and the condition and size of the spaces vary greatly.

- There are 22 social clubs primarily located on Council-owned (and some DELWP-owned) recreation reserves. Other than the social events hosted by sporting clubs and some private event use, they are largely underutilised facilities for events and as community meeting spaces.

- Smaller Council-owned buildings, including over 75 sporting pavilions, 30 reserves with active sporting clubs, 24 ovals, 83 tennis courts, 36 netball courts and 40 cricket nets among others, which vary in size and condition and some of which are extremely underutilised.

- Public buildings, such as the Exhibition Hall, Old Shire Hall, Goods Shed, Drouin RSL, Trafalgar Business Centre, Warragul and Drouin Civic Offices are available for public hire by community and other groups. There are many opportunities and options that have been identified by Council to increase the use of these facilities, particularly raising awareness.

- There are two senior citizen centres in Warragul and Drouin that Council owns but does not manage. These buildings have significant capacity for increased community use as they are largely vacant on weeknights.

- In addition to these facilities Council also has a role in providing spaces for community services and programs such as kindergarten, childcare, maternal and child health services, community health, libraries, etc.

Planning for community hubs in regional areas

Provision of community infrastructure is often linked to population provision for sustainability and resourcing reasons. This approach can be detrimental to regional and rural towns where a population approach would result in very poor provision. Rural towns can be both physically and socially isolating and providing spaces that connect people is important from a community strengthening perspective, but also to provide static community service provision to ensure the wellbeing of residents.

One of the key principles of Council's *Community Service Planning Framework* (the framework) is 'integration and equity'. The framework outlines that in each major town, medium and small township, one or more community focal points or a community hub will be identified as a 'shared' base for static, mobile and virtual community services, maximising access to a diverse and complementary range of services.

Many rural towns do not have a clear town centre, or the centre is geographically dispersed, therefore providing a focal point may be focused on improving connectedness between spaces and providing increased opportunities for incidental social interaction. Planning for community hubs and spaces across Baw Baw will need to consider the uniqueness of each community, along with their vulnerabilities. This understanding will then inform place-based physical design responses.

Council's policy framework

The following section summarises key Council policy drivers behind strengthening community cohesion and connectedness, and the provision of community infrastructure in the Shire. These have been informed by a review of key Council policies and strategies. A full list of the policies and strategies reviewed is provided in the appendices.

Council's Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2019 – 2028

As outlined in Council's *Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2019 - 2028* (the Long-Term Infrastructure Plan), the trend across municipalities is towards the development of a range of community facilities as multi-use hubs, including moving away from sole-purpose facilities. The Long-Term Infrastructure Plan suggests this is the most effective way of optimising use of existing and new facilities, reducing maintenance costs over the life of community assets, and increasing overall community connectedness. The Long-Term Infrastructure Plan also highlights that the creation of community hubs, delivered in various ways (onsite, outreach, mobile, online, 'virtual') requires careful consideration in terms of design and governance, and commitment from the various community groups that would use them.

Council's Community Service Planning Framework

Council's *Community Service Planning Framework* also highlights Council's support for multi-use, integrated community facilities and suggests community hub principles should be considered in all aspects of infrastructure planning, master planning, design and the capital works program. The Framework also supports:

- advocating to State Government for the inclusion of kindergartens in schools.

- advocating to State Government for increased community access to educational facilities for a range of services.

- libraries to be multi-functional spaces, integrated with education (particularly tertiary level) and with virtual and on-line services for remote communities.

Baw Baw Shire Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017–2021: Health and wellbeing priorities

The *Baw Baw Shire Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017-2021* (MPHWP) identifies five priority health areas. The following table summarises the priorities and strategies that are important considerations in the planning of community spaces:

Table 4. MPHWP 2017-2021 priority areas and strategies relating to community spaces

Strategies	Success factors
Priority area: Improving mental health	
1.3 Improve access to recreation opportunities and places for healthy connections	Public spaces and recreation opportunities are welcoming for people of different ages, cultures, genders and abilities.
1.5 Promote positive mental health	People create environments that make it easier to stay mentally well.
1.6 Provide mental health services	People have access to mental health services that meet their needs.
Priority area: Preventing violence and injury	
2.3 Support the implementation of Child Safe Standards in organisations and the community	Organisation and the community understand the Child Safe Standards and make changes to their environments to meet the standards.
Priority area: Healthy eating and active living	
3.4 Connect food producers, suppliers and retailers with each other and Baw Baw residents	People can get a good variety of locally grown fresh food.

3.6 Improve access to active living programs, sport and active recreation, and community infrastructure	It is easy for people with diverse needs to use community infrastructure and participate in active living programs, sport and active recreation.
3.7 Build people's capacity to eat healthy and be more active where we live, learn, work and play through healthy design, education and policy	The environment makes it easy for people to behave in healthy ways. People take action to encourage healthy eating and being active in their own environments, and for the people around them.
Priority area: Reducing harm from gambling, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs	
4.2 Support smoke-free living	People breath smoke-free air in public places where children live and play, and where people dine.
Priority area: Leadership for a healthy Baw Baw	
5.1 Maintain or improve the provision of public health services and infrastructure	People will have the same or better access to services and infrastructure that protects public health.

Baw Baw Recreation Strategy 2017–2027: Barriers to participation in recreation

Community engagement undertaken as part of the development of the *Baw Baw Recreation Strategy 2017-2027* (the Rec Strategy) identified the following top barriers to participating in recreation across the Shire:

- facilities are poorly maintained (37 per cent)
- lack of toilets at parks/sports grounds (35 per cent)
- limited provision of spaces (28 per cent)
- lack of parking (26 per cent)

The engagement highlighted that the community's top priorities for improving participation in recreation were:

- improved quality of sport grounds/ovals/courts (40 per cent)
- provision of places/facilities/programs for young people (36 per cent)
- increased supporting facilities including car parking and amenities (33 per cent)
- new/upgraded cycle and walking paths (29 per cent)
- more sports grounds/ovals/courts (27 per cent)

The Rec Strategy also highlights the national, state and local trends in increased participation in informal, unstructured recreation is greater than participation in organised sports. The Rec Strategy recommends considering initiatives such as 'challenge parks', playgrounds (nature play, access, sensory, themed, increased engagement in design stage), technology-based activation of parks for young people, re-purpose unused facilities (such as tennis courts) where appropriate.

The Rec Strategy includes guiding principles that support multi-use functionality of sporting facilities to promote greater community use, including:

- supporting the development of shared multi-use facilities that comply with relevant sporting design standards
- maximising opportunities for broader community use of recreation reserves by incorporating passive leisure facilities

Council's Youth Strategy 2018: Opportunities for young people to connect

Council is currently in the process of developing its *Youth Strategy 2018*, and as such has been engaging with young people to understand their issues and aspirations. One of the questions asked as part of the engagement included 'Baw Baw is a beautiful place to be, what can we do to keep you around?'. As illustrated in Figure 4, the following answers received the most support:

- create new spaces for you to hang out with friends (54.77 per cent)
- create more events that benefit you (51.50 per cent).

This is consistent with community engagement findings from the *Baw Baw Recreation Strategy 2017-2027*, which identified the desire for more places and programs for young people.
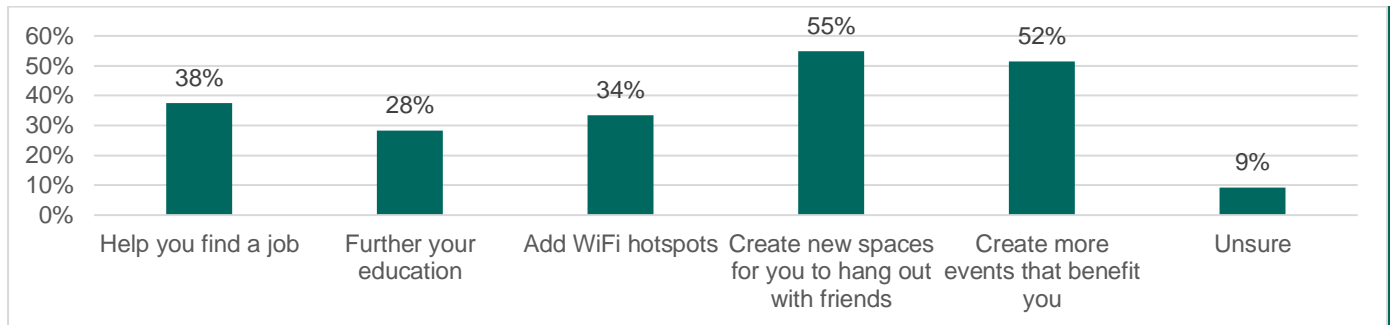

Figure 5 Baw Baw Youth Survey 2018 survey results '… what can we do to keep you around?'

Local Aboriginal Needs Analysis Report: Supporting Aboriginal community connectedness

In 2014, Council supported the Kurnai Nations Company to undertake a needs assessment project[9] that sought to explore in greater depth, the barriers and issues Aboriginal people in the Baw Baw Shire face in their day to day lives. The assessment identified the following key findings in relation to the needs of the Aboriginal community for community connectedness and community spaces and places:

- There is a strong sense of community within the connected Aboriginal community.

- Events that support the Aboriginal community coming together were highlighted as the most important and positive things in their lives.

- The importance of these community gatherings supports the recommendation to establish a healing centre that will engage and deliver a holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal people.

- The community highlighted that there needs to be more assistance in utilising local sporting club and facilities. The two main barriers identified was cost and the feeling of not belonging.

- Information about what is available is not being tailored for the Aboriginal community.

- It is often felt amongst community that there is no connection to the Council and when they do use Council facilities they do not feel comfortable because 'it is not our place'.

Building on existing planned community infrastructure provision and improvements

There are several existing strategies and planned projects that Council has identified in relation to the provision of new or upgraded community spaces and places. These have all been considered in the development of the *Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy*. These have been included within their relevant locality, and include recommendations made in developer contribution plans, service strategies and urban design frameworks.

---

[9] Linda Mullet and Lisa Williams, 2014, 'Six Generations Yarning Together – Local Aboriginal Needs Analysis Project 2014 Report', *prepared for the Kurnai Nations Company, funded by Baw Baw Shire Council*

Better practice and industry trends

The following section highlights some key learnings from better practice and industry trends that should be considered in planning for community hubs across the shire.

The role of public spaces in supporting strong communities

Research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation[10] identified public spaces play a vital role in the social and economic life of communities. They act as a 'self-organising public service', a shared resource in which experiences and value are created. The report also highlighted that the success of public space is not solely in the hands of the architect, urban designer or town planner; it relies also on people adopting, using and managing the space – people make places, more than places make people. The report identified the following different roles that public spaces play in the social life of communities:

- the exchange of goods and services e.g. a community market or garden
- education or sharing of ideas
- play
- promoting cultural awareness and cohesion

The solution to improved community cohesion and community connectedness isn't always physical infrastructure

There are large amounts of research that support the role of physical spaces in fostering social cohesion. VicHealth described a 'liveable' city or local area as containing public spaces that are safe, welcoming and aesthetically engaging. It describes how a public space that is well used can create a sense of community, belonging and identity. This can be fostered by the space's location, natural beauty, or because of good design.[11] It is more the opportunity that the space provides for programming or incidental interactions, rather than the importance of the space itself.

The Neighbourhood Project run by CoDesign Studio is testing the social impact of supporting community-led placemaking initiatives. The project is illustrating how providing practical skills in placemaking, and strengthening community ownership of public spaces in neighbourhoods, can build improved social cohesion and community connectedness. By Government stepping back and supporting community members to take the lead, they are supporting increased sense of local pride and care of public spaces and improved utilisation of public spaces for community activity. It is the process of working together to undertake the placemaking project that creates the social impact, not necessarily the space itself.

The findings from The Neighbourhood Project are supported by the research undertaken by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation which identified that the most successful social spaces were places that encouraged people to play a role in the evolution of activities and to help shape these places.

A better practice case study that illustrates the importance of community-led place activation is the 2017 RIBA Stirling Prize Winner – Hastings Pier, United Kingdom. This historic pier was closed in 2008 due to its state of disrepair. However, after a long battle by the community the pier was purchased by the Hastings Pier Charity for £1 in 2013 to drive the pier's restoration and manage its future. They were able to raise enough funds to restore the pier and construct a new visitor centre.

The design of this space was led by the community in partnership with the Architect dRMM with the objective of creating an open space, recognising the importance of space for citizens to occupy and make their own rather than imposing what the team referred to as a 'hero' building. The brief was to design a strong, community led and owned service platform which could accommodate whole host of uses, from music concerts, to international markets.
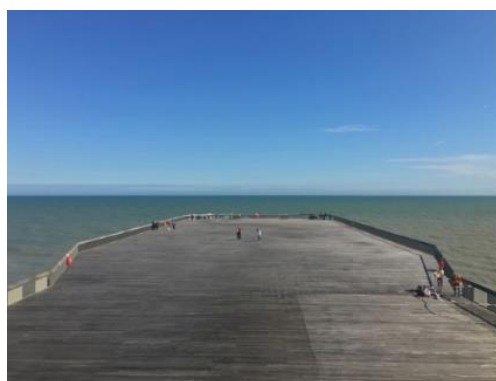
Source: © Alex de Rijke

Figure 6. Hastings Pier restoration

---

[10] Ken Worpole and Katharine Knox, 'The social value of public spaces', *Joseph Rowntree Foundation*
[11] John McLeod, Simon Pryer, John Meade, 2004, 'Health in public spaces – promoting mental health and wellbeing through the Arts and Environment Scheme', *Prepared for the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation*

Maximising use of existing facilities

Victorian Government policy encourages joint service and facility planning and delivery, particularly across different levels and departments within government. The State's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy[12] highlighted that a 2015 report by the local Government sector found that 40 per cent of their community infrastructure is currently not considered to be fit-for-purpose and requires significant investment in maintenance or renewal to bring it up to standard. The 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy also reflects that although the cost spent on maintenance may be better spent on a new facility, communities have strong ties to these spaces and are often resistant to them changing. The 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy recommends that the Victorian Government assist local government to transition these assets to become fit-for-purpose over the coming years through a fund tied to criteria. It also recommends targeting areas experiencing strong population growth or rural areas with constrained resources in the first instance. The recommendations broadly cover:

- better use of existing public spaces.

- turning schools into places for the whole community.

- upgrading existing facilities and building new ones that meet the needs of more than just one group and respond to the changing needs of the community.

---

[12] Infrastructure Victoria, 2016, 'Victoria's 30-Year Infrastructure Strategy'.

Section 3 The Regions

Region one – Neerim South, Noojee and surrounds

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region one is a comparatively large area 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.

Region 1: Neerim South, Noojee and Surrounds (Toorongo, Noojee, Gentle Annie, Neerim South, Rokeby)

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-west[13] 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.

---

[13] 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.

- 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).

- 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, 26 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 7 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from Region one.
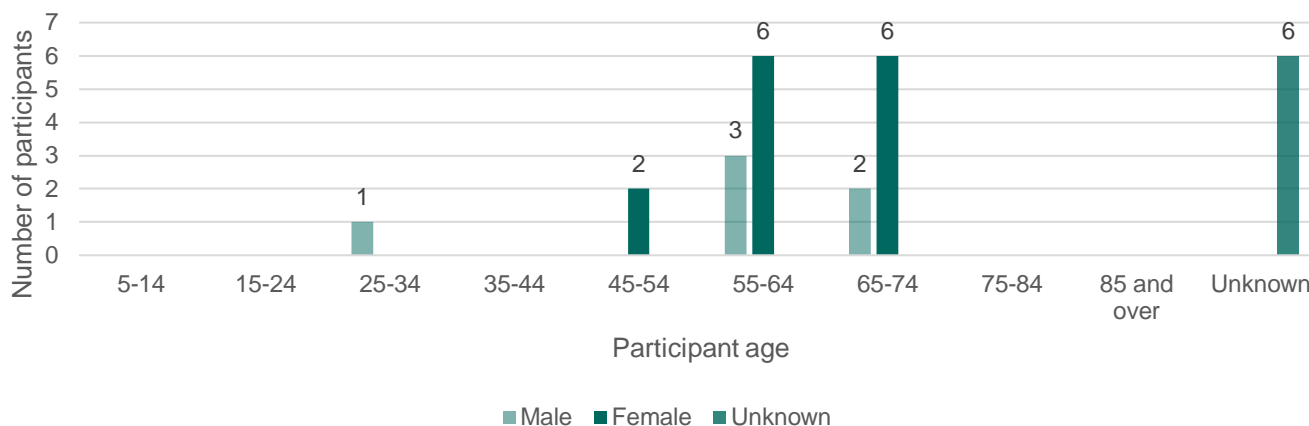
Figure 7. Region one community engagement participants - age profile

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:

  o Provide free Wi-Fi or computer access to aged people, giving them the opportunity to connect with people via social media.

  o Provide links to the Council website and an online directory.

  o 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 planning 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.

- I**mprove multi-use functionality** of existing, well-cared for spaces in other areas of the region. This includes Rokeby Hall.

- **Impro**v**e 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.

Region two – Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and surrounds

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region two is a large and comparatively remote area, containing the Baw Baw National Park and Moondarra State Park within its boundaries. The townships of Rawson and Erica are located at the southern end of the Baw Baw National Park. These towns contain some shops and services and have reasonable car access to larger service centres such as Moe in the Latrobe Valley. The township of Walhalla is set in a valley of the Baw Baw National Park area and as such has poorer access to commercial and service centres. The northern areas of the region are dominated by mountainous parkland and are predominantly uninhabited, except for the township of Tanjil Bren (with a population of 12 people) and Aberfeldy with only one permanent resident.

Demographic snapshot

This region has a combined population of 599 people. The age profile is comparatively older to other regions, with 50 per cent aged between 50 and 69 years. There are comparatively lower rates of labour force participation with 32 per cent not in the labour force. The region has a higher rate of non-family households which make up 16 per cent compared to 12 percent for the Shire. A lower proportion of residents have completed year 12 (26 percent) compared with the Shire (31 percent).

All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise stated. See Appendix one for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

This region has numerous facilities, but they are underutilised and single-purpose. Most of the community spaces are in Erica, Rawson and Walhalla.

There is no district service centre in this region. Within the Shire Trafalgar is the closest service centre for this region. However, access to Trafalgar is via Moe and community engagement findings noted that residents are more likely to access Moe for services and employment.

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/recommendations:

  – Rawson Primary School caters for residents across this region. Additional opportunities for co-location of facilities and sharing resources should be explored in the future, in addition to increasing the mix of remotely delivered education

  – A preschool and maternal and child health centre is currently provided in Erica, however future consideration may need to be given to a mobile kindergarten and / or partnership opportunity with Rawson Primary School (*Community Service Planning Framework 2013*)

  – This district is currently serviced by the mobile library service which visits Erica and Rawson four hours every fortnight. This arrangement is likely to continue, however other options for the long-term provision of library services should be considered such as use of multi-function spaces, integration with other community facilities, virtual libraries, partnerships with private enterprises and co-location with other services (*Community Service Planning Framework 2013*)

  – Consider the provision of health care services in multiuse facilities that can provide for mobile community services including health and disability services

- Recommendations from the Skate and BMX Strategy at the Rawson Reserve are being implemented by Council (Long Term Infrastructure Plan 2019-2028)

Community plan findings

Two community plans were developed by the community in this region. 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.

- Rawson 2008 – 2013 Community Plan

The vision of the plan was aimed at preserving the natural flora and fauna of the town and becoming a tourist hub. The plan identified significant challenges around cohesiveness and connections. Key projects include running more activities for the town's residents while also improving transport links.

- Erica Community Plan 2006 – 2011

The key challenges in the plan were the look and feel of the town not reflecting its small-town charm. No vision was included in the plan.

Community engagement findings

A limitation in this region is that 10 people participated in the community engagement by completing the connecting communities survey either online or at one of the community pop-ups. Lower rates of participation are most likely caused by two factors. First, the region has a low population (599) which is spread out across a large area. Secondly, older population groups may be less inclined to engage through online methods which can be helpful in engaging a dispersed population.
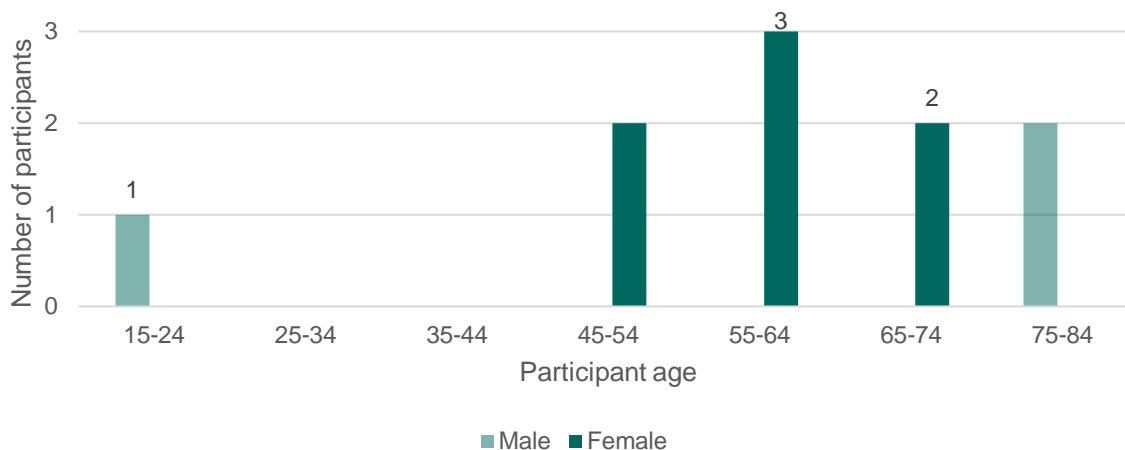

Figure 8 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from this region.
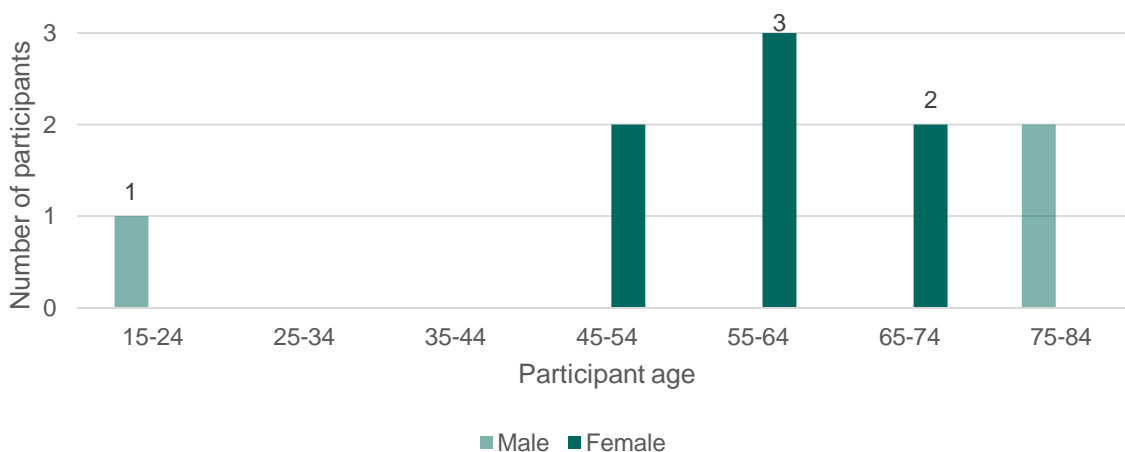

Figure 8. Region two community engagement participants - age profile

The towns and suburbs represented by participants were:

- Rawson, seven participants.

- Erica, one participant.
- Parkers Corner, one participant.
- One participant did not provide the specific town or suburb they live in.

Community connection

The participants discussed the different ways they connect to their community through organised groups, associations and sport clubs. They also connect through early year services and education, employment, community events and incidental interactions, for example the local shops. Two participants expressed that they do not connect to the community.

The main challenge for community connection recognised by participants was the lack of community cohesion. It was felt that this had been caused by the following:

- Many people who live in the region work and go to school in the Latrobe Valley.
- The community groups and associations appear to be targeted at those who are not currently participating full time in the work-force.
- There is a perception that the local community groups and associations are unwelcoming of newcomers, making it difficult for new residents to meet people.
- Individuals not having the time to connect with others.
- Lack of community is not seen as a problem to some - with the reclusive atmosphere being valued by some members of the community.

Improving public transport options and regularity was identified as an opportunity to improve social connection. Participants commented that older people would benefit most from transport services, as it could connect them better to shops and other places of incidental interaction.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used, according to participant responses, including:

- sporting facilities, specifically the football clubs and the cricket club and pavilion.
- trails and paths, specifically the track around the lake in Rawson and the rail trail from from Erica to Thomson Station.
- community centres and halls, specifically Bells Hall which was noted as being used by the Historical society and Memorial Hall in Erica.
- the Rawson community health centre.
- non-community spaces, such as the local shops and milk bar.
- other community spaces valued by the community more broadly included:
  - the lake and BBQ areas.
  - the swimming pool.
  - the BMX track.

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

- Community facilities and services such as:
  - medical services, specifically a doctor.
  - improvement of medical facilities.
  - improvement of parks and open spaces, such as BBQ and picnic areas.
  - the trails and paths, specifically a path between Rawson and Erica is missing, and maintenance work to the track around the lake is required.

- Increase the provision of public transport or transport provided by the Shire, for example increase the regularity and soften criteria for use of the community bus.

- Improve the access and use of facilities, including providing parking, extending the opening hours and, decreasing costs of the local swimming pool.

- Offer services for wellbeing and self-esteem building.

Information on hub and service provision

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

- online information via a local website for the community.

- informal communication between people in the community talking to each other.

- Council should lead the access to information by:

  - providing more information, more regularly.

  - providing a continual, monthly newsletter from Council may help.

One participant raised the difficulty of communicating about 'what's on' with people who work in the Latrobe Valley.

Community hub principles

The participants from Region two believe that a community hub includes the following elements and principles:

- It is a meeting space or place.

- It is **inclusive**, meaning it is:

  - a space or place where people are accepted and heard.

  - a place for everyone.

- It is **people-focussed**, fostering a support network in the community.

According to their responses, it should not be:

- Exclusive; it should not be dominated by individual ideas and opinions.

- Exclusive; it should be affordable.

Recommendations

For Region two, Council planning acknowledges the challenges of providing services to a low population in a large geographic area. Policy drivers prioritise co-locating different services in community hubs or providing more mobile services to the community. Engagement findings suggest that the local community has barriers to connecting with each other and accessing services. These barriers include transportation gaps, knowledge of what is available in the region and the lack of provision of certain services.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- Consider consolidation of existing community facilities, such as health care services, in Erica to improve multi-use functionality.

- Consideration should be given to co-location with Rawson Primary School where facilities can be shared, such as a static library, meeting spaces, early years programs.

- Consider multi-use functionality of existing facilities to provide for mobile community services and programs to ensure localised access, particularly in areas such as Aberfeldy that are remote from the region's centre.

Region three – Hill End and Willow Grove

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region three is a comparatively small area comprised of farming communities and small townships spread along Willow Grove Road that runs between two national parks, the Sweetwater Creek Nature Conservation Reserve to the west and the Bull Beef Nature Conservation Reserve to the east. The townships have good access to commercial and service centres such as Trafalgar and Moe in Latrobe Valley.

Demographic snapshot

The region has a combined population of 762. A slightly higher proportion of households are single child family at 84 per cent. The region has a lower rate of migration, with 67 per cent of people living at the same address as five years ago. There is a higher rate of car ownership within the region, with 45 per cent of households owning three or more cars.

All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise stated. See Appendix one for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

Willow Grove hosts most of the community facilities in the region, with a relatively good supply of facilities. Facilities include a primary school, kindergarten, maternal and child service, sports complex, recreation reserve, community centre and health service.

Policy review findings

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

- A community hub style development in existing or proposed facilities incorporating a range of static, outreach and/or 'virtual' education, learning, library, seniors, health, disability, family services and recreation and leisure services in Willow Grove (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013)

- Hill End is considered in the catchment of Willow Grove (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013)

- Willow Grove Recreation Reserve Master Plan recommends improved connectivity from the reserve to the Blue Rock Lake Trail, new housing estate and adjacent Willow Grove Primary and recommends considering the provision of a community garden, subject to future demand (Baw Baw Shire Council Rural Recreation Reserve Master Plans Stage 2, August 2016)

Community plan findings

One community plan was developed by the community in this region. The community plan was developed with the assistance of Council, however, delivering each plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from this plan is detailed below.

- Tanjil Valley District 2008 – 2013 Community Plan

The top priority project was to liaise with Southern Rural Water about the future of Blue Rock Lake. At the time Tanjil Valley Landcare group was working with Southern Rural Water. In addition, getting roads sealed was also a high priority.

Community engagement findings

In Region three, 11 community members participated in the engagement by completing the connecting communities survey at one of the community pop-ups.
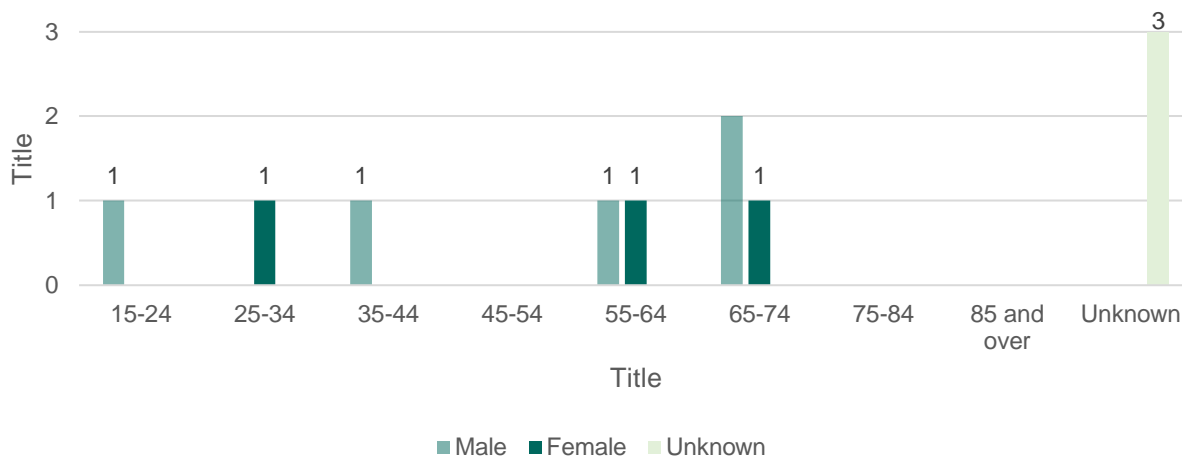

Figure 9. Region three community engagement participants - age profile

The suburbs and towns represented by participants were:

- Willow Grove, seven participants
- Hill End, one participant
- Tanjil South, three participants.

In addition to survey participants, one community member provided feedback via the mapping tool. Demographic information was not collected from this participant.

Community connection

The participants discussed the different ways they typically connect to their community, these included connecting through organised community groups, associations and sport clubs. Community facilities and services including the community hall, early years learning, education and parks were also identified as ways participants connect with their community. Incidental interactions at the local pub and shops was another way they connect.

The main challenges for community connection identified by participants were individual barriers. These include:

- being time poor.
- lack of motivation and confidence to engage.
- lack of access to transport.
- the cost of activities.

The participants believed there are several opportunities to improve community connection, including:

- support from the Shire, such as communication about events and activities, provision of funding and supporting community groups with advice.
- improving community cohesion by supporting each other and local groups more.
- provision of more activities other than sport.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used, according to participant responses, including:

- sporting facilities, specifically Willow Grove Recreation Reserve.

- parks and open spaces such as Blue Rock Lake for swimming.

- trails and paths, specifically the track around Blue Rock.

- community centres and halls, specifically the Old School, Willow Grove Public Hall and Fumina House.

The participants recognised sporting facilities as being highly valued by their community. The recreation reserves, football grounds and clubs are valued because they are a place where the community gathers and communicates. According to one participant, the football clubs are heavily valued by the older members as it presents a social opportunity.

The lake and walking tracks were also spaces valued by the community more broadly.

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

- Facility standards could be improved, such as lighting and football infrastructure.

- The diversity of activities offered could be increased, including activities that cater to younger people.

- Community facilities, such as a community garden, market space and men's shed, are missing.

- The Old School in Hill End was identified as a community space that could be utilised more. It has technology set up and could therefore be utilised for computers or technology classes.

Information on hub and service provision

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

- online information via:

    - a website that lists spaces people can use

    - social media, for example, community Facebook pages

- printed information in community newsletters

- access to information led by Council, letting the community know what's going on and with sufficient time

Community hub principles

The participants from Region three believe that a community hub includes the following elements and principles:

- It is **a meeting space or place** where people can meet and gather

- It is a **multi-purpose space** for people to do different things

- It is **a space for programming**, the provision of activities

- It provides the community **access to information**

- It is a space with **support services**, particularly family and health services

- It is inclusive, a place:

    - to involve and include people

    - where people get together and enjoying each other

"It's teaching people what it used to be like, going back to old values of what commonly used to be – interrelated, meeting place. It's a place to come together and talk and spend time. A place to involve and include older and newer residents. More use of the school – needs to be activated." (Resident)

According to their responses, it should not be:

- commercially focussed
- exclusive

Recommendations

For Region three, Council planning recognises Willow Grove as the central location with the other townships falling into its catchment. A masterplan for Willow Grove Recreation Reserve has already been developed which aims to improve connection to surrounding communities and facilities. Community engagement findings suggest that community would like Council assistance to better utilise the community spaces in townships such as Hill End.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- Council to support the community in the **activation of existing spaces**, particularly the Old School in Hill End to respond to community need. This may include a community garden and men's shed program, both identified through the community engagement as programs missing from this region.

- Continue to support provision of local level facilities such as the kindergarten[14], maternal and child health services and the local hall in Willow Grove.

- Explore the **multi-use functionality** of the Old School to also accommodate mobile service provision and programs. Mobile services travel to different locations to provide their service in offsite venues and include services such as medical clinics.

- Continue to support the Willow Grove Recreation Reserve improvements.

---

[14] Note that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning owns the Willow Grove Kindergarten site.

Region four – Longwarry

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region four is a small area comprised of the comparatively mid-sized town of Longwarry and its regions as well as the area of Labertouche. The region is located on Melbourne's eastern urban fringe, near the M1 highway, and has good car and train access to Melbourne. The region is also accessible to the Shire's central towns of Drouin and Warragul by both car and public transport.

Demographic snapshot

This region has a combined population of 2,547. The age profile is comparatively younger than other regions, with 51 per cent aged between 0 and 34 years of age. It has experienced higher levels of migration, with 40 per cent of residents having moved into the region since the last census due to land subdivision. The region has a comparatively high proportion of youth disengagement.

All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing unless stated otherwise. See appendices for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

Community spaces and places are well provided for in Longwarry with a primary school, community hall, community garden and a kindergarten. The rail line is likely to act as a barrier access to existing facilities with most facilities located on the south side of the rail line and limited pedestrian crossings over the rail line. The public hall appears to be well used and maintained by the community. Labertouche is serviced by the local Primary School and the Labertouche & District Community Centre.

Policy review findings

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

- The Longwarry Senior Citizens Program was co-located at the Longwarry RSL Hall until recently. There may be scope for greater sharing / multi-use of facilities in Longwarry to enable greater integration of generations (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013).

- Due to the expected continued growth for maternal and child health services there is potential for a new service to be in Longwarry (to be co-located with other children's services) (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013).

- Opportunities for increasing sharing and co-location of school and community facilities should be considered in the future, particularly in the towns and small towns of this region (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013).

- A development has been proposed within an existing or new facility to incorporate a range of static, outreach and/or 'virtual' education, learning, library, seniors, health, disability, family services and recreation and leisure services in Longwarry (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013).

- The Longwarry Urban Design Framework (2017) suggests the following improvements to the township of Longwarry, relevant to the provision of community spaces and places:

  - Upgrade and enhance the playground to the south of the rail reserve incorporating 'nature play' and environmental learning facilities.

  - In the longer term if the CFA relocates, consider establishing a skate park adjacent to the playground.

  - Integrate public amenity and rest stop facilities.

  - Establish a 'bandicoot trail' using techniques such as embedded or stencilled footprints from the tourist node to the Bandicoot Trail south of the town centre.

- The Longwarry Urban Design Framework also identifies the area along First Street including the Longwarry Community Hall as an emerging community hub.

- The *Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan* (2019) identifies significant growth in kindergarten demand for Longwarry. The existing kindergarten, located at 4 Ford Place, currently operates four-days per week. As part of the Victorian Government's Regional Rail Revival program several upgrades have been identified for the Gippsland line. One of which includes a second platform at Longwarry.

Community plan findings:

A community plan was developed for Longwarry. The community plan was developed with the assistance of Council, however, delivering the plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from this plan are detailed below.

- Longwarry Community Plan 2006 – 2011

The vision of the plan was aimed at building a safe and sustainable future. Key projects included upgrading the community hall, offering more day care and youth services and improving the town noticeboards.

Community engagement findings

In region four, ten community members participated in the engagement by completing the connecting communities survey either online or at one of the community pop-ups.
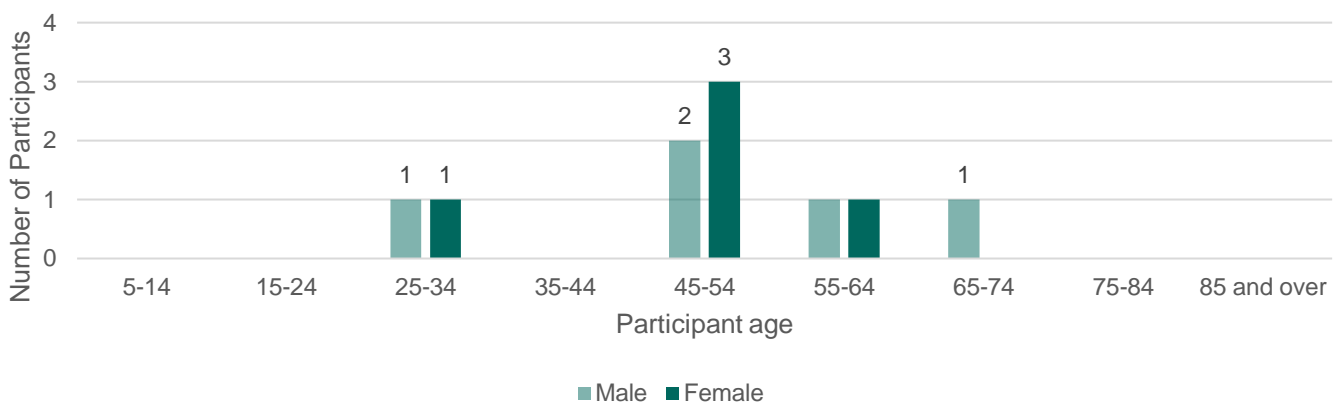

Figure 10 Region four community engagement participants - age profile

The suburbs and towns represented by the participants were:

- Longwarry, six participants

- Longwarry North, one participant

- Labertouche, two participants

- one participant did not provide the specific town or suburb they live in.

Community connection

The participants discussed the different ways they connect to their community, these included through organised groups, associations and sport clubs, attending community events, volunteering and through local schools.

According to participants the challenges for community connection are:

- individual barriers such as being time poor, limited access to transport and affordability of activities

- lack of information about what is available

- difficulty in involving the broader community in events

- competing with Warragul and Drouin.

Participants felt there are several opportunities for improving community connection, these included:

- providing more diverse opportunities to connect such as through music and art
- utilise community facilities and spaces more.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used by participants including:

- parks, open spaces and playgrounds such as Bellbird Park, located in Drouin, and Bennet Street Reserve. Bennet Street Reserve is valued by the community because of the market, dog training and public holiday events
- community centres and halls such as the scout hall are used for meetings

The participants also felt that other facilities and spaces valued by the broader community include:

- sporting facilities, particularly the sport clubs and reserves
- walking tracks
- church delivered programs and services
- McRae Street community garden

Concern was raised that the increase in development would put pressure on the existing green spaces. It was also stated that while the community hall is valued, it is an expensive facility to use.

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

- Community facilities such as:
  - new or improved sporting facilities, with the suggestion of a new sporting ground and improved club rooms
  - a space for sports such as basketball and soccer
  - a skatepark in Longwarry
- Access and use issues, such as:
  - the pedestrian connection along the highway and into town needs to be improved
  - provide a bus service to Warragul and Drouin for pensioners
  - improve telecommunication in the region
  - concern of impacts on amenity from the factory, including use of open space

Information on hub and service provision

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

- a community noticeboard
- increase the amount of advertising, for example a full page in the paper about what's going on each week
- online information
- a community or neighbourhood house

Community hub principles

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

- It is **community-driven**, it should be informed by the community
- It is **inclusive**, bringing all people in the community together

- It is a **meeting space or place** where neighbours can get to know each other

- It provides the community with **access to information**

- It is integrated with **service providers**

- It is supported by the Shire

According to their responses, it should not be:

- dominated by Council ideas

- exclusive

Recommendations

Longwarry is experiencing significant migration into the region and the demographics are comparatively very young, with 51 per cent of the population aged between 0 and 39 years of age. Council policy acknowledges this age profile and focuses on increasing services for a younger population such as co-locating new maternal and child health services with other children's services.

Similarly, the Urban Design Framework prepared for Longwarry notes opportunities to increase provision of playgrounds in the area. Participants in the community engagement did not directly address the need for more early years services, however, they did comment on population growth putting pressure on existing public infrastructure such as green space. Community engagement findings also show residents have a variety of public spaces and places to use and visit but have poor connections between these spaces and there is a lack of a precinct feel.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- **Improve access and connectivity between existing spaces and places** in Longwarry. There are several existing community spaces located nearby that could form a community precinct with improvements to the public realm, such as between the primary school, kindergarten, community hall, community garden, and church.

- I**mprove multi-use functionality** of existing, well-cared for spaces such as the Labertouche & District Community Centre.

- Consider opportunities **to improve connectivity** over the rail line which was identified as a barrier for this community.

- **Bennett Street Reserve**, which is highly valued by the community, was identified in the Urban Design Framework as having potential to improve recreation opportunities. This option may be impacted by the additional platform plans for Longwarry Station. Consultation with VicTrack will be required.

- **Improve connection** to the Bandicoot Track.

Region five – Drouin and Warragul

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region five is a predominantly urbanised area and contains the Shire's two largest towns, Drouin and Warragul. Warragul appears to function as the Shire hub as it contains large industry, large retail stores and other major civic spaces. The M1 highway to Melbourne runs through the centre of the region where most township development has occurred. The region additionally is well connected to Melbourne by regional trains.

Demographic snapshot

This region has a population of 28,001 people, the most populous region of the Shire, while Warragul is the most populous town of the Shire with 15,367 residents, growing by 10 per cent since the last census. The age profile of Warragul is comparative to the Shire. Warragul has a higher proportion of people who have completed Year 12 or equivalent compared to the Shire with 34 per cent. A lower rate of car ownership for Warragul is likely explained by a reduced car dependency due to a larger town having easier access to shops and services by foot and public transport options.

Drouin is the second largest town in the Shire with a population of 12,034. The age profile of Drouin is comparatively younger, with 14.5 per cent aged between 0 and 9 years. Drouin has a higher proportion of disengaged young people, with 12 per cent being classified as disengaged. Drouin has higher rates of migration compared to the Shire and Warragul, with 42 per cent of people having lived at a different address since last census. This is likely explained by the large population growth experienced in Drouin. Between the 2011 and 2016 census years Drouin's population grew from 9,403 to 12,034, a 28 per cent increase. Like Warragul, a lower rate of car ownership is likely explained by a reduced car dependency due to it being a larger town with easier access to shops and services by foot and public transport options.

This is the only region in the Shire with evidence of relative disadvantage according to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), a ranking of areas according to relative socio-economic disadvantage. In Warragul, there are five SA1s (Statistical areas) ranked in SEIFA as demonstrating evidence of disadvantage, while there are two in Drouin.[15]

All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 and 2011 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise stated. See Appendix one for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

Community spaces and facilities are scattered across the region. Provision is relatively high, but they are primarily single purpose facilities. The growth expected for this region is likely to place pressure on existing facilities and services, particularly early years services such as maternal and child health, kindergarten and occasional care, along with schools.

Policy review findings

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

- Two sole-use senior citizens centres are currently provided in Warragul and Drouin. These are likely to continue to be required to cater for the growing number of older adults in these areas. However, opportunities exist to expand/diversify the use of these (or other nearby facilities) in the future (*Community Service Planning Framework,* 2013).

- Opportunities for increased sharing and co-location of school and community facilities should be considered in the future, particularly throughout towns and small communities in this region (*Community Service Planning Framework,* 2013).

- The provision of youth spaces within multi-purpose buildings and mobile youth services (in more rural areas) should also be considered in the future (*Community Service Planning Framework,* 2013).

- High demand for maternal and child health services is expected to continue and require expanded services in Warragul and Drouin. Increased facilities for occasional care will also be required, which could be shared with kindergartens, preschools and hall (*Community Service Planning Framework,* 2013).

- The Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan (2019) makes the following recommendations:

  - Two early years' service hubs are likely to be required in Warragul in 2019 and 2028.

  - One early years' service hub is likely to be required in Drouin in 2019.

- Council has expanded the West Gippsland Arts Centre which provides increased meeting, performance and exhibition spaces.

- Community health services are in high demand. In towns and small towns/rural settlements, consideration should be given to the provision of health services in multi-use facilities that can be used for counselling services, rehabilitation, support services and other complimentary services (e.g. financial counselling) (*Community Service Planning Framework,* 2013).

- The *Community Service Planning Framework* (2013), makes the following recommendations regarding future community spaces and places in this region:

  - education and lifelong learning/library community hub in Warragul.

  - an expansion of the Warragul Leisure Centre as a recreation, leisure, sports and community hub (completed).

  - a community hub style development in existing or proposed facilities incorporating a range of static, outreach and/or 'virtual' education, learning, library, seniors, health, disability, family services and recreation in both Warragul and Drouin.

- *Warragul Town Centre Masterplan* (2011) recommends the provision of a new multi-purpose community facility at the Western end of the Palmerston Street axis.

- *Drouin Town Centre Strategy* (2010) identifies demand for a new community and children's hub in Drouin and suggests the Oak Street site as a suitable location.

- A portion of the community in Drouin are currently advocating for the purchase of the Old Drouin Butter Factory with the intention of turning it into a community art space. The community's desire is that the space is run by the community, for the community, and consider the facility as a potential community hub.

- Council's *Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2019-2028* identifies the following significant capital works projects:

  - Drouin Integrated Children's Hub.

  - Multi-purpose centre including kindergarten in Warragul.

Community plan findings

A community plan was developed for Drouin in 2008. The community plan was developed with the assistance of Council, however, delivering the plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from this plan are detailed below.

- Drouin Community Plan 2008 – 2013

Key issues and needs identified in the plan were fostering more town involvement, especially from tree changers and providing entertainment and activities for young people. Projects were aimed at developing a community hall and associated services and activities, as well as supporting and welcoming of new residents.

Community engagement findings

In total 103 community members in this region participated in the initial engagement by completing the connecting communities survey, either online or at one of the community pop-ups.
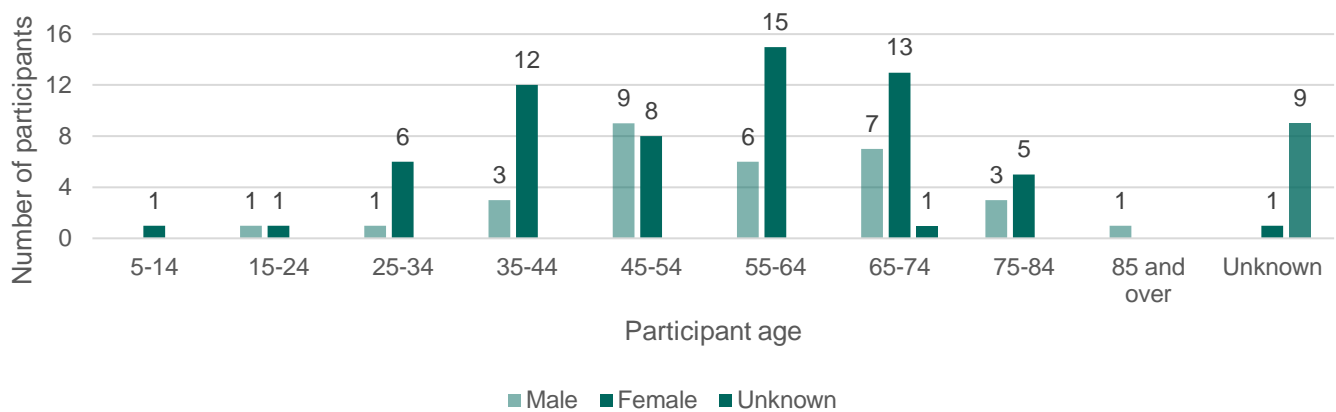
Figure 11. Region five community engagement participants - age profile

The suburbs and towns represented by participants were:

- Drouin, 62 participants.

- Warragul, 38 participants.

- Drouin West, one participant.

- One participant did not provide their specific town or suburb.

In addition to survey participants, approximately 18 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 community groups, associations and sport clubs, for example, local football clubs, art networks and chorus groups. They connect through community events, volunteering, education and employment. The local community facilities are also used for connection, for example, the Warragul Hub and the Old Butter Factory in Drouin. Incidental interactions were another common way participants connected with their community, particularly through shopping and at the cafes and restaurants.

The participants identified the following challenges to connecting with their community:

- the current level of service, facility and activity provision such as:

    - the lack of community spaces where people and groups can meet and hold events, particularly in Drouin.

    - limited activities that respond to the diverse community, for example, activities for families and young people.

    - limited support services, particularly parent support.

- individual barriers such as:

    - access and transport, including car parking and issues of congestion.

    - being time poor.

    - the motivation and confidence to engage.

    - the cost of activities and events.

- The main opportunity identified by many participants, predominately from Drouin, was the provision of a space where the community groups can meet, and community events can be held. Other opportunities discussed, included providing more information to the community as to how to connect and strengthening community cohesion with a focus on young people and new residents.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used, according to responses. The most common types of facilities included:

- parks, open spaces and playgrounds such as Warragul Civic Park, Drouin Civic Park, Bellbird Park, and Linear Park.

- community centres and halls such as the Old Butter Factory, Warragul Community House and CFA Hall.

- sporting facilities such as football grounds, netball and tennis courts.

- trails and paths, both walking and cycling, for example, the Drouin and Warragul walking tracks which are used by individuals and walking groups.

- commercial spaces such as the local shops, restaurants and cafes.

- several participants also use the libraries, churches and schools.

The types of facilities and spaces above were also recognised by participants as being valued by the community more broadly. Evident in the number of participant responses, the parks and open green spaces are greatly valued by the broader community.

The participants identified services, programs and spaces that could be improved or are missing in their community. The following are the main issues discussed relating to community facilities:

- It was believed that a community hub, centre or precinct is missing from Drouin; a space where groups can meet, access services and information and participate in activities. Several participants discussed the potential for the Old Butter Factory to become a community hub.

- Participants from Warragul and Drouin expressed the desire for spaces to accommodate men's sheds, community gardens and art galleries and exhibitions.

- Participants identified limited dedicated services, activities and spaces for young people.

- There were several references for the need of a cultural space.

Some participants felt that the following could be improved to address current issues of access and use:

- affordability of activities and spaces.

- connectivity in the towns and more walking and off-road cycling tracks.

- access to transport.

- facility standards, such as improving access for people with mobility issues and providing access to parent changerooms.

- Other issues relating to services, programs and spaces discussed included:

  - improving sporting facilities, for example, football club rooms, tennis and basketball courts.

  - more activities for young kids.

  - greater diversity of activities and focusing on the community outside of sports.

Information on hub and service provision

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

- Provide information online:

  - via multiple platforms such as social media and website.

  - via a user-friendly website.

  - providing up to date information about events and activities.

- Provide information in a printed format such as:
    - the local newspaper.
    - brochures.
    - flyers.
    - mailed newsletters.
- Provide more information more regularly.
- Centralise the dissemination of information.

Community hub principles

The participants believed that the following elements and principles are needed in a community hub:

- It is an **inclusive** space or place, for participants this means:
    - It is a space available to all ages and abilities.
    - it is accessible in terms of opening hours, location and affordability.
    - it is a welcoming.
    - it is a caring environment.
    - it fosters acceptance.
- It has an anchor facility or activity such as:
    - the Arts Centre.
    - community gardens.
    - sporting facilities.
- It is **a meeting space or place** where people can gather and connect.
- It is **people focussed**, it is a space for people.
- It provides **a space for programming**, for example the provision of activities and programs.
- It provides a **diverse offering** of services and activities.
- It is **a multi-purpose space or place**, in that it provides multiple services and spaces for activities.
- It includes the provision of **support services**, such as health services, youth services and aged care.
- It is a place where people can **access information.**

According to participant responses, it should not be:

- exclusive, for example, expensive or focussed on sport.
- commercially focused.
- a sterile, one-size fits all, type of facility.

Recommendations

The region is experiencing significant population growth, particularly in Drouin and Warragul which grew by 28 per cent and 10 per cent respectively between 2011 and 2016. Council policy recognises this growth and recommends providing new facilities and services to cater for this growth particularly in Drouin. These new facilities include one early years' service hub, a new multi-purpose community facility and a community and children's hub in Drouin. Similar plans have been made for Warragul. The community engagement results from this region mirror this need for more hubs and hub like services. Many participants commented that there is an insufficient amount of space for community groups to utilise, particularly for diverse groups and young people. Community engagement revealed that many participants would like to be supported to run a new community hub.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- Drouin requires **a new integrated facility**. As suggested by the Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan this could include early years facilities. Work with the community on the desired size and service mix of the new facility. There is an opportunity to increase the scope to include community space. This recommendation is explored in more detail in the following section.

- Expansion of integrated facility catering for a range of community services identified as per the Community Service Planning Framework 2013

- The creation of a community hub in combination with a children centre is a key recommendation of the Drouin Town Centre Strategy

- Consider opportunities to work with the Drouin community to support their purchase and activation of the Old Drouin Butter Factory to create a community-led hub.

- Work with the community in Warragul and Drouin as new developments arise through precinct structure planning processes and developer contributions which provide for new community hubs.

- Continue to engage with youth to identify appropriate provision of a youth focused space. Consider co-location opportunities to ensure flexibility of the space as needs may change.

- Continue to engage with Traditional Owner groups to identify suitable opportunities for a cultural space within Warragul, Drouin or other suitable area through the Shire.

- Create an integrated master plan for the Civic Precinct in Warragul.

Exploring the idea of a new integrated facility for Drouin

Council undertook a co-design process with the community and internal Council staff to develop a high-level design brief for the recommended new integrated facility for Drouin (referred henceforth to as a 'community hub'). The design brief provides design principles, functional requirements, relationships between the different elements and key considerations for progressing the community hub. The following pages provide the outcomes of the co-design process. A more detailed paper has been prepared that captures all engagement data collected as part of the process, this has been provided to Council to help inform the detailed concept and feasibility work for the future hub.

The Co-Design Process

Three workshops were undertaken as part of the co-design process. The following diagram illustrates an overview of each of the workshops.

Community Workshop #1	Council Workshop	Community Workshop #2
Purpose: To explore the functional requirements of the hub, confirm community priorities and the community's desired roles in the future hub.	**Purpose:** To confirm the functional needs, explore governance and operational models and how Council can support community involvement.	**Purpose:** To present back the draft design brief, seek feedback and explore the spatial relationships between the different functions.
Date: 2 April 2019	**Date:** 12 April 2019	**Date:** 30 April 2019
Number of participants: 44	**Number of participants:** 13	**Number of participants:** 36

High-level design brief

The following high-level design brief provides outputs from the co-design workshops as they relate to design principles, functional requirements and spatial relationships for a future community hub in Drouin.

Design principles

Sense of place
Welcoming arrival
Local materials
Connection to landscape
Natural views

Physical accessibility
Encourage cycling and walking
Scooter charging
RV facilities
Car parking
Disability parking and access
Electric vehicle charging

Outdoor space
Connection to outdoor space
and amenity
Community garden
Capacity for outdoor events

Locational accessibility
Ample car parking
Central meeting location
Accessible by public
transport

Personal accessibility
All ages
All genders
All abilities
All races
Universal design

Functional requirements

The following functional requirements were developed based on community need and aspirations for the hub. These requirements were confirmed with internal Council staff and a representative of the West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation in the second codesign workshop. Following this section is a discussion around service and program mix, suitability for co-location and how these spaces may be shared with one another.

Library

Understanding the changing spatial requirements for libraries over time, it is possible for the library to act as an anchor and provide additional community spaces and programs, such as business support, a toy library, youth spaces and study spaces. Demand for a library is further demonstrated in appendix 7.

Spaces for all ages
Accommodate different uses
Greenery + study spaces

Youth spaces

Youth spaces have been identified as important to provide attractive and safe spaces. These spaces may take a multitude of forms, but ultimately provide activities and/or amenity such as relaxation spaces, active spaces, games and lounges.

Early years

These spaces should suit the functional needs of early years services, providing consulting and waiting rooms, meeting rooms, amenities, staff areas, kindergarten rooms and access to secure outdoor space. Needs are highlighted in the Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan 2019

Kindergarten rooms
Consult rooms
Access to outdoor space

Creative spaces

Provision of space for people to be creative and learn, including workshop space, exhibitions and performances. Spaces need to be flexible to accommodate a range of uses including wet and dry areas and storage.

Outdoor space

Providing open space that can be used for events, programming and connects to a community kitchen. Drouin has relatively good provision of open space so there may be the opportunity to explore co-location to maximise use.
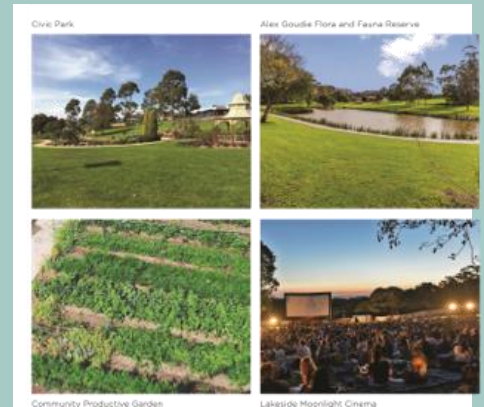

Civic Park
Alex Goudie Flora and Fauna Reserve
Community Productive Garden
Lakeside Moonlight Cinema

Business support

Providing support and amenity for small businesses, the business space should be flexible for a range of uses and business typologies. Introducing bookable consulting spaces, co-working desks, and various working spaces would allow businesses and individuals to access the resources they require.
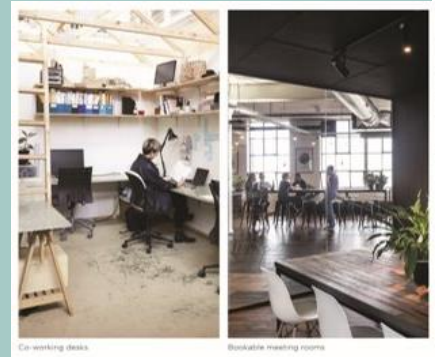
Co-working desks
Bookable meeting rooms

Information Centre

A small-scale information centre providing locational information and local history to visitors. In a central location with connection to the street and the provision of seating and street activation would provide an amenable experience for visitors and locals alike.

Brochures / local information

Counselling services

Additional multipurpose rooms for counselling and consultations at various scales will accommodate a range of group sizes, discussions and functional needs.

Small private counselling
Open group discussions

Communal food spaces

Adjoining the outdoor space, a large space could have the potential to fulfil the desire for community kitchen facilities, whilst also providing space for events, functions and performances.

Large, flexible communal dining space
Large multipurpose hall

Images provided by Breathe Architecture, who assisted with the development of the design brief.

Exploring the spatial relationships

As part of the second Community Workshop, the community was presented a spatial relationship diagram that illustrated how the different functional elements could relate to one another and could serve as multi-purpose and shared spaces. The following diagram is the draft version that was presented with a summary of the feedback given.
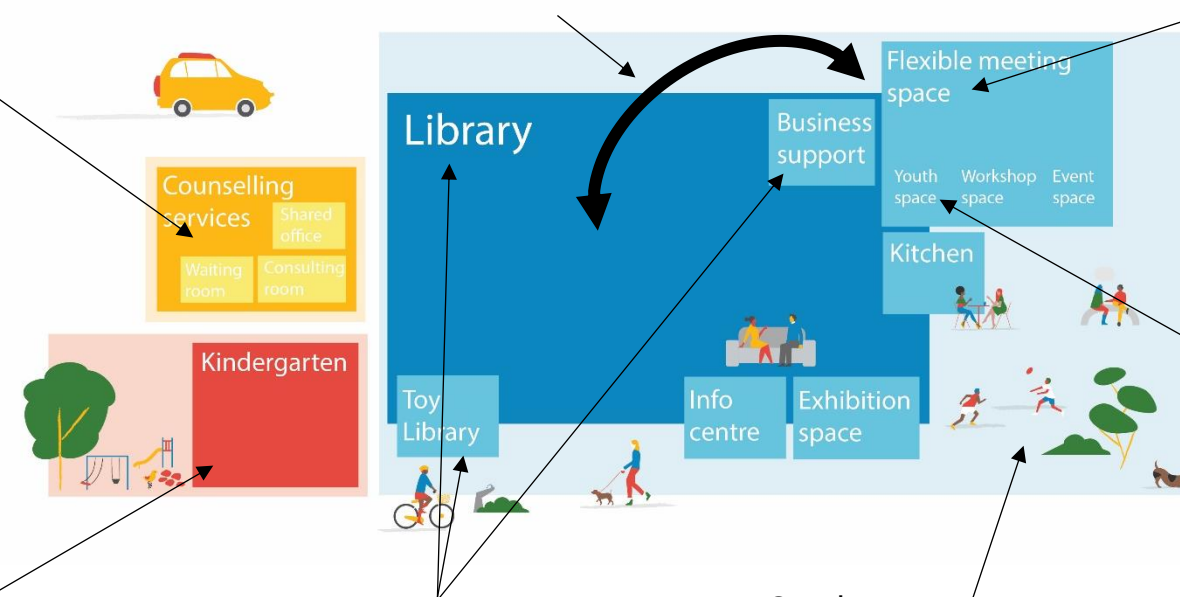
Counselling services

This was a heavily debated element of the future hub. Whilst there is a recognised need to provide space for visiting services the hub was not necessarily the right location. There was concern about co-locating services that support people with challenging behaviours with early years and general public spaces. There was also concerns around providing privacy for people accessing different counselling services. The types of counselling services that were supported were those relating to early years and business support services. Youth services were also identified but it was suggested by several participants that space for youth services would be better integrated with a youth-specific space.

The hub's anchor

The anchor refers to the core function of the hub. It is often dictated by the operational model and at other times driven by the priority need. While there was some support for a new Drouin library to be the anchor, many participants supported the meeting and multi-purposes spaces as the anchor for the hub. This preference would result in more of a neighbourhood house/learning centre type-anchor.

Flexible meeting spaces

This was the priority for the hub as these types of spaces are lacking in Drouin. Ideas included having flexible design so that rooms and spaces could be joined to create larger community meeting spaces for 500+ people events, exhibitions and performances. Having these spaces linked to a kitchen and outdoor areas was considered essential.

Dedicated youth space

There was strong support for youth to have a dedicated space rather than use of a multi-purpose space. However, it was also felt that this needed to be tested with young people about the best way to respond to their needs and aspirations.

Early years

Participants through the co-design process accepted the need for the kindergarten and MCH services in Drouin however, it was not necessarily recognised as a core element of the future hub. Some participant questioned whether it could be separated out. There was concerns about the possibility of colocating early years with a hub due to the risk of inappropriate behaviour with young children could occur.

Provision of a library

Irrespective of the anchor, inclusion of a library was strongly supported. There was also support that the business support functions and toy library functions be integrated with the library spaces.

Outdoor space

This was seen as a core element. Priority was for the open space to be integrated with the flexible meeting spaces, kitchen and potential café, and be of sufficient size to support large events/functions and provision of a community garden.

The following spatial diagram reflects the outcome of the community co-design process and provides a basis for a Drouin Community Hub when a site has been identified:
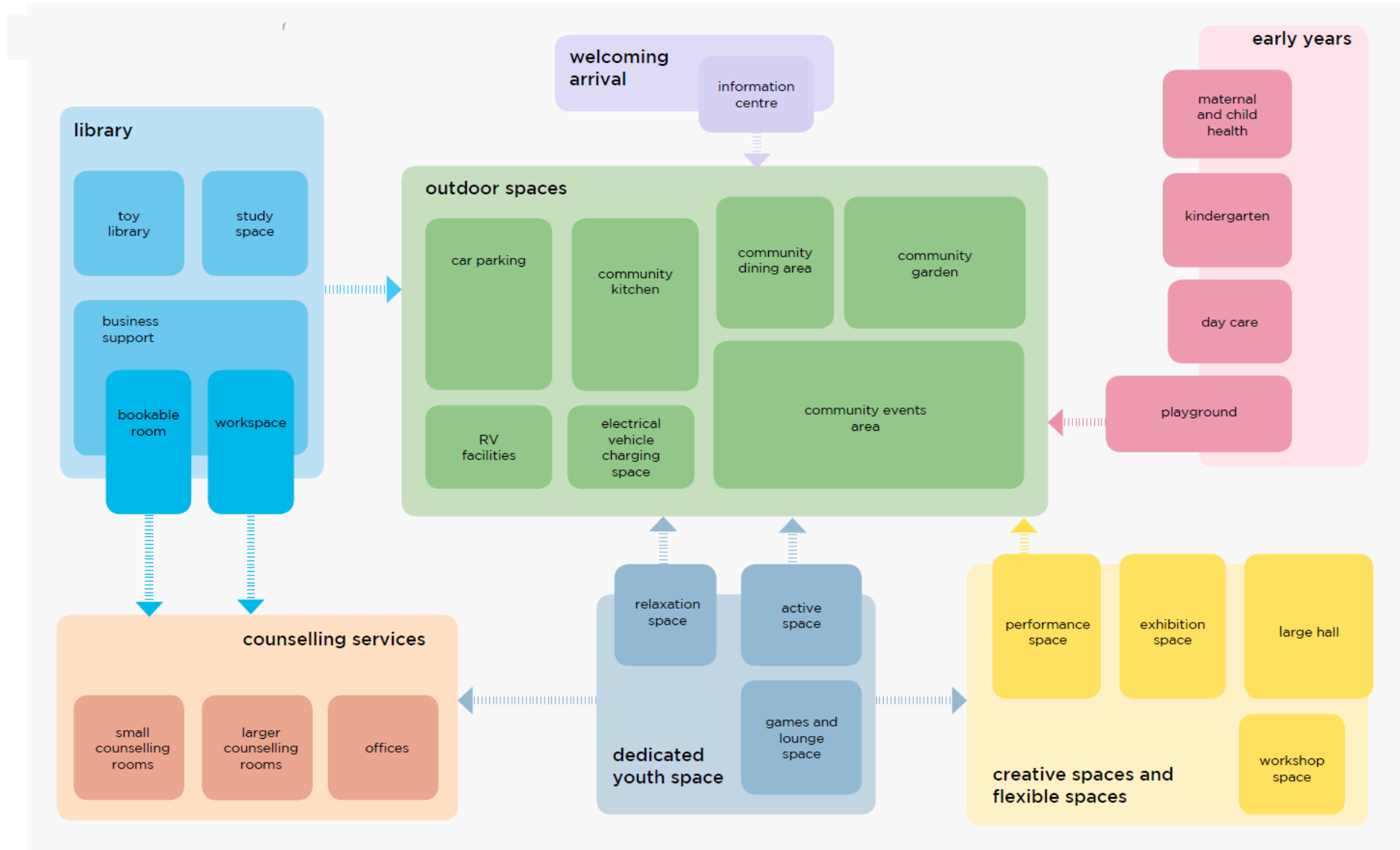

Image developed by Breathe Architecture

Prioritisation of functions

Table 1 summarises how individual functions identified through the co-design process have translated into the functional requirements, which are described in more detail in the following section. There was much conversation across the workshops around whether the Community Hub could be 'everything' and the idea that there were some functional requirements that were considered a higher priority over others. To help assist with understanding the priority needs the Community Workshop participants were asked to first identify their top five priorities as a table and individually vote (with each participant given five votes). The table includes a summary of the priority voting as well as issues discussed through the co-design process around priority needs.

Table 1. Summary of functional needs identified in the Community Workshop and how they were prioritised

Priority	Final functional requirements	Relating functional needs identified in the Community Workshop
Highest	**Early years** **Council-led priority**	**Early years services**, particularly kindergarten, was an accepted need for Drouin, but not seen as an essential element for the success of the future Community Hub by the Community Workshop participants – particularly given that these services would need separate entrances with limited capacity to share spaces.
	Creative spaces **Community-led priority**	**Creative spaces** (identified as a priority by all six tables and received 19 individual votes)
		Multi-use facilities (identified as a priority across all six tables and received 11 individual votes)
		Multi-purpose meeting/activity space (identified as a priority by four tables and received 14 individual votes)
		Community house/neighbourhood house (identified as a priority by one table and received four individual votes)
	Outdoor space	**Central location with all-abilities access and access to open space** (identified as a priority by one table and received 19 individual votes)
	Communal food spaces	**Large hall** (identified as a priority by two tables and received 17 individual votes)
		Communal food spaces (identified as a priority by all six tables and received 16 individual votes)
	Library	**Purpose built library** (identified as a priority by three tables and received 17 individual votes) From a population perspective and the forecasted growth in Drouin the need for a larger library was confirmed by Council.
		Study room (identified as a priority by one table and received four individual votes)
	Information centre	**Information centre** (identified as a priority for one table and received 13 individual votes)
	Business support	**Business support** (identified as a priority by one table and received 3 individual votes)
	Youth spaces	**Youth spaces** were not previously identified as a standalone need. This need emerged through the second workshop, but it was highlighted that young people need to be engaged around what this space would be.
Lowest	**Counselling services**	Space for **counselling services** were identified in the Council workshop as needed in Drouin to provide for visiting services and local access to much needed services. This was not seen as a priority by the community from a functionality perspective.

Possible locations

The following locations could be considered for their feasibility in accommodating a Community Hub. The requirements of the design brief and the viability of Council's acquiring land for development are to be considered in this process. Other possible private sites have been suggested and require further consideration.

Civic Park and Young Street

Oak Street Area

Bellbird Park

Old Drouin Butter Factory / South of VicTrack

Weebar Road Site

Greenfield site between Warragul and Drouin

Comparative Hubs

The following provides a brief overview of some community hubs developed in the City of Casey and Cardinia Shire. The cost depends of a hub depends on its location and the functions that are included in its form. These hubs have been provided as a comparative guide for what can be achieved with particular budgets. Note that the overall costs shown below do not include land costs or operating costs.

Hills Hub (Emerald Community Hub) – Cardinia Shire Council $8.1 million

Redevelopment of Old Emerald Library and Mechanics Hall with additional building added

- Multipurpose rooms
- Library with reading garden
- Men's shed with loading bay
- Storage
- Community spaces
- Training rooms
- Radio Station
- Community Tea Station
- Lounge
- Bus shelter
- Health and counselling services
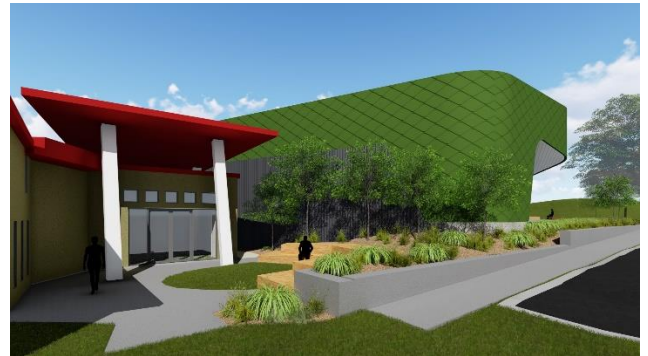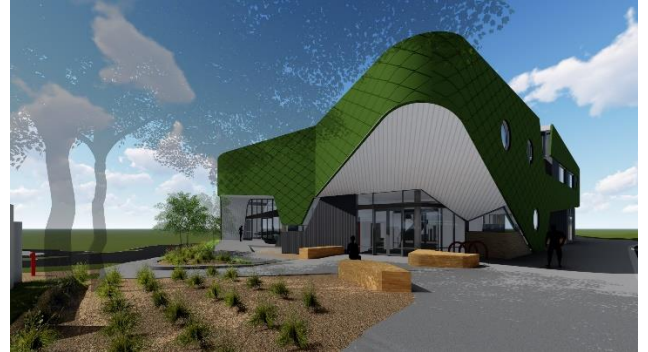
Selandra Community Hub – City of Casey $9 million

- New Greenfield Site
- Learning and Training Rooms
- Multipurpose Rooms
- Health and Welling being spaces
- Early Years Centre
- Commercial Kitchen
- Consulting Rooms
- Lounges

Lynbrook Community Hub – City of Casey $9 million

- Commercial Kitchen

- Large Multipurpose Hall (250 people)

- Smaller Multipurpose Galls x 2 (80 people)

- Meeting rooms x 3 (15 people)

- Learning and Training Room

- Consulting Rooms
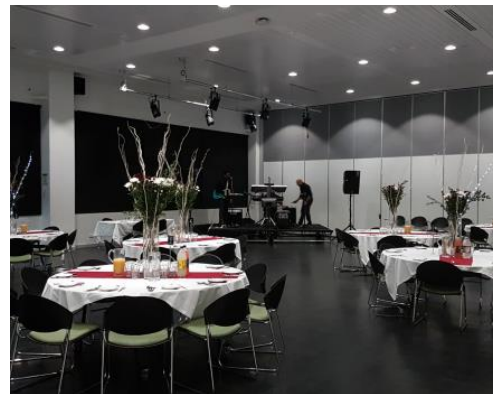
General considerations for progressing the design:

Through the co-design process there were some important considerations and ideas shared about progressing to the detailed design and feasibility of the future hub. These have been summarised below:

- There is general acceptance from the community participants that the hub cannot be everything to everyone. The hub should focus on providing the spaces most needed, while balancing what functions work well together.

- Council should ensure it maximises the use of existing community spaces in Drouin including spaces that may not be owned by Council – for example exploring how community can have access to the use of performance spaces at secondary schools.

- The design of the building should be future proof. This includes flexibility in the design and room to grow. Some ideas explored by the community participants to achieve this included modular buildings, staging the development of the hub and having enough land to grow.

- There is support for exploring different operational models, including models where there is a host organisation for the hub and having a commercial element such as a café.

- There is a strong desire for the community to have an active role in the planning and delivery of the community hub, this includes providing ongoing engagement opportunities as the design progresses. Several community members identified an interest in being on a future board/committee for the hub. This model was considered in the internal Council workshop and ways for how this could be achieved are being explored by Council.

Next steps in the development of an integrated community hub for Drouin
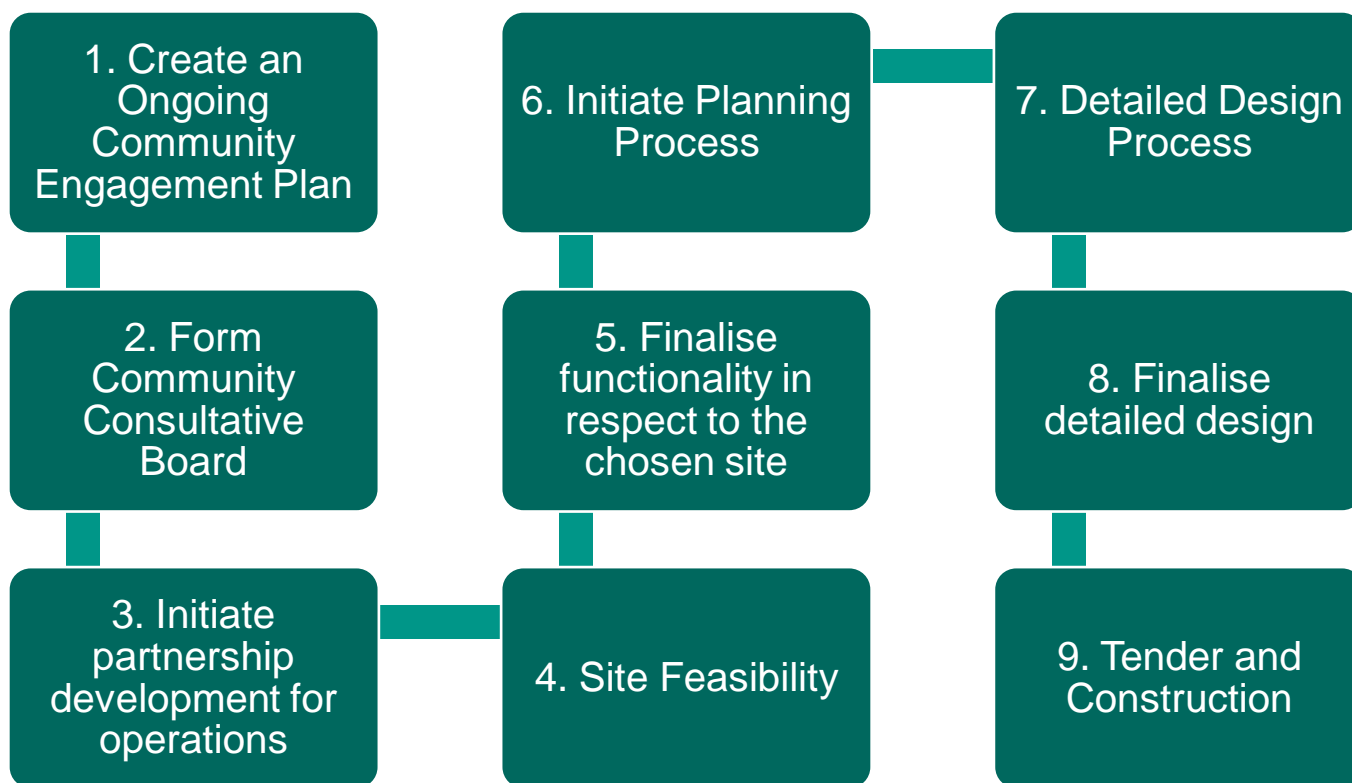
Region six – Yarragon and surrounds

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region six is comparatively a mid-sized area characterised by small townships in the south of the region, and more urbanised areas located in the north. Yarragon, the region's largest town, is located on the M1 highway which splits the region. As such, the region has ready access to Warragul and Drouin. The townships to the south of the region are comparatively remote farming communities, located in hilly nature reserves, with poorer access to commercial and service centres.

Demographic snapshot

This region has a combined population of 3775. The age profile is comparatively similar to other regions, but with slightly less people aged between 25 and 34 years. There is a high percentage of car ownership with 18 per cent of dwellings with four or more cars. This is reflective of an area with few public transport options and urban centres.

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

Most community spaces in this region are in Yarragon, including a community hall, post office, community garden, health centre, maternal and child health centre, school and kindergarten. The Yarragon Primary School was relocated in 2012 to a new facility that can meet projected growth. The old site has been identified as surplus for education purposes. The community has been advocating for Council to purchase the site for community use. Council also received funding for a skate park in Yarragon that has been constructed at Howard Park.

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) discusses that in the long-term, provision of a library service should be considered as part of a multi-function space, integrated with other community facilities, virtual libraries, partnerships with private enterprise and co-location with other services be considered for the South-East region of the municipality (includes region's 4, 7, and 8).

- Kindergarten provision in Yarragon is expected to be adequate for 2050 (Community Service Planning Framework, 2013).

- Although outside of region six, the community services centre in Trafalgar provides a range of health services for the south-east of the municipality. Health care services should 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).

- A community hub style development in existing or proposed facilities incorporating a range of static, outreach and/or 'virtual' education, learning, library, seniors, health, disability, family services and recreation and leisure services is recommended for Yarragon, Nilma/Nilma North and Darnum.

- Council's *10 Year Infrastructure Plan 2019-2028* identifies a potential indoor sports hall (with Yarragon Primary School) as a capital works project.

Community plan findings

Two community plans were developed for towns in Region six. The community plans were developed with the assistance of Council; however, the plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from these plans are detailed below.

- Darnum Community Plan 2008 – 2013

The vision of the plan aimed to maintain a safe and quiet rural feel and to welcome visitors to the town. Key issues were focussed on a lack of town identity, centre and no farmers market. Projects aimed to improve signage within the town, infrastructure in public spaces and to run more community events.

- Yarragon Community Plan 2008 – 2013

The plan's vision is aimed at maintaining a small country town feel and access to services. Issues and challenges concern the lack of healthcare and education services while key projects involve developing co-located education facilities with child care services.

Community engagement findings

In total, 22 community members participated in the engagement by completing the connecting communities survey either online or at one of the community pop-ups.

Figure 12 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from this region.
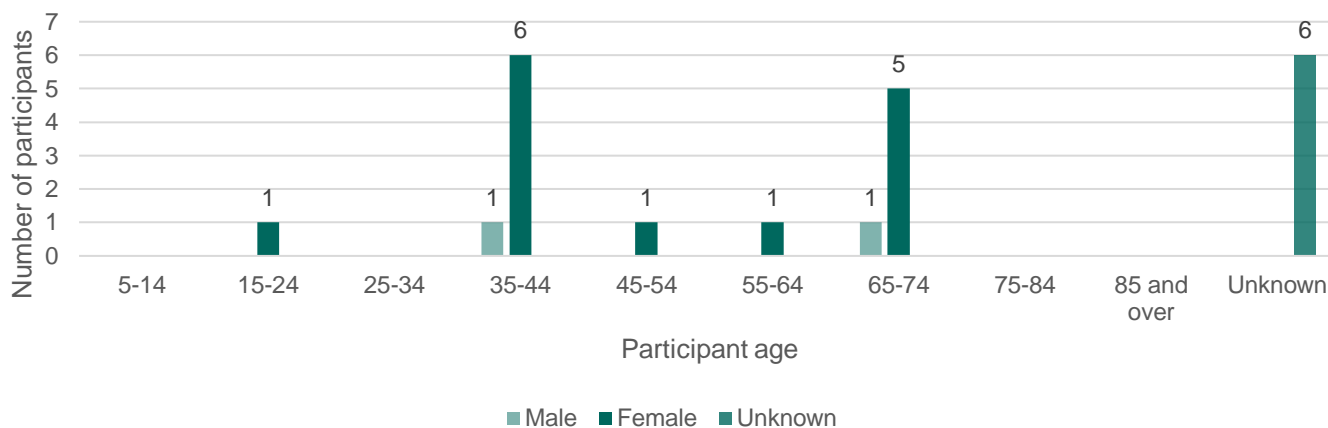

Figure 12 Region six community engagement participants - age profile

The suburbs and towns represented by participants were:

- Yarragon, 18 participants
- Nilma, two participants
- Nilma North, one participant
- Shady Creek, one participant

In addition to survey participants, approximately four 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 connect to their community, these included connecting through organised community groups, associations and sports clubs, community events, involvement in schools, volunteering and incidental interactions, for example at the local shops.

Participants recognised a variety of challenges for community connection in their region. The main challenges were people's individual barriers and the level of provision of community facilities and activities.

Individual barriers include:

- the motivation and confidence to participate.
- the affordability of meeting spaces.
- access to transport.
- Affordability of meeting spaces was an issue for several organised community groups. A few participants discussed the challenges they had faced when trying to find an affordable space for their men's shed.
- The level of provision of community facilities and activities was also identified as a challenge. Participants felt that the main issue was a lack of infrastructure. They believed there is nowhere they can have a community garden, men's shed, library or learning space. Many participants felt that as a community they would benefit from a multi-purpose space to hold activities and accommodate existing groups.
- Several participants felt there was a strong sense of community cohesion, but that they needed more support from the Shire.

Facilities and spaces

Despite participants feeling there was a lack of community infrastructure to meet and hold activities, the following are spaces and facilities that are currently used:

- Community centres and halls such as:
  - CFA meeting room used for community group and association meetings.
  - Yarragon Hall, predominately for the market.
  - Station Gallery, Yarragon.
  - Shady Creek Hall.
  - Church Hall.
- Parks, open spaces and playgrounds such as Dowton Park and Howard Park were commonly referenced and recognised as valued green spaces.
- Trails and paths.
- Sporting facilities, such as leisure centres and skateparks.
- Several participants used community facilities and spaces outside of the region, particularly in Warragul.

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

- A community facility that is:
  - a centralised space for services and activities.
  - a space people can meet.
  - a learning space and information centre.
  - financially accessible.
- Activities and spaces are missing, particularly for young people.
- Support for community groups could be improved.
- Indoor sporting facilities, such as netball and basketball courts, are missing.
- Provision of more community events and get togethers.
- Several participants discussed the opportunity of developing the old school site to include community facilities.

Information on hub and service provision

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

- printed information via local newspaper and mail.

- online information via a webpage.

- centrally located information.

- better use of the community notice board in Yarragon.

- a welcome package for new residents.

- more information from Council.

Community hub principles

The participants from this region believed a community hub includes the following elements and principles:

- It is **inclusive**, in that it is:

  - accessible to everyone, all abilities and ages.

  - financially accessible.

  - promotes inclusiveness and involvement.

- It is **community-driven** and supported by the local community, residents, groups and businesses.

- It is a meeting space or place:

  - for people to meet and socialise.

  - that provides a meeting space for community groups.

- It is a multi-purpose space or place for:

  - learning

  - youth activities

  - men's sheds

  - meetings

- It provides the community with **access to information.**

- Its location is **central** to the community.

- It includes the provision of support services such as health and transport.

"A place where many people of different ages can access and gain something in their life, that brings people together, that brings people from far and wide, that provides opportunities for clubs to raise money, that different groups use and share resources. A place that improves people's health both physically and mentally. It could include a meeting place." (Resident)

According to their responses, it should not be:

- commercially focused

- exclusive

- unsafe

Recommendations

The region has a relatively stable population and is well serviced by community infrastructure. Council planning acknowledges this, however, suggests there is scope for a new multi-purpose facility in the region. Community

engagement findings also suggest people in the region have a variety of community spaces to utilise. Like Council policy, participants feel there is scope to improve the multi-use functionality of the available spaces. Within the community, there is a significant level of support to activate the old Yarragon Primary School site which would function as a multi-use space.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- Consider opportunities to **improve the multi-use functionality of existing spaces**, such as the Yarragon Public Hall to accommodate mobile programs and services.

- Consider opportunities to support community-led activation of the old Yarragon Primary School site. Some of the programs identified as needed in the community include a men's shed, historical society and library/learning space.

Region seven – Trafalgar and surrounds

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region seven is a comparatively mid-sized region split in half by the M1 highway. The region's largest town, Trafalgar, is centrally located with good access to Moe in the east and Warragul and Drouin in the west. The towns to the north and south of Trafalgar are small townships and farming communities. Most townships, however, have reasonable car access to a commercial and service centre.

Demographic snapshot

The region has a combined population of 5,453. The age profile is similar to other regions. The region has a similar level of labour force participation to other regions, with 42 per cent employed. It has a comparatively lower percentage of disengaged young people and people with need for assistance.

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.

Trafalgar
Moe (Latrobe Valley)
Region 7: Trafalgar and surrounds
Thorpdale
Childers
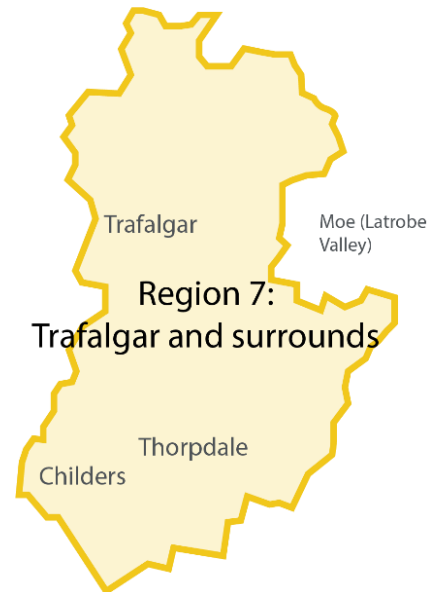
Existing level of provision

This region has relatively good provision of services and community facilities, particularly in Trafalgar which acts as the main service centre to the region. Most of the region is also relatively close to the two major centres, Moe and Warragul. However, engagement with the community identified that most people travel to Moe over Warragul. The kindergarten in Trafalgar was identified as being at capacity and with a wait list, forces families to travel to Willow Grove for kindergarten. Trafalgar also has a youth resource centre and internet café and a community services centre.

Policy review findings

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

- A community hub style development is recommended for Trafalgar in existing facilities that incorporates a range of static, outreach and/or virtual education, learning, library, seniors, health, disability, family services, and recreation and leisure services (*Community Service Planning Framework,* 2013).

- There is medium population growth expected in Trafalgar due to its proximity to the highway and the need to protect the character of the town and its surrounding agricultural land.

- Trafalgar has a relatively good level of provision of recreational spaces and facilities. The Trafalgar Recreation Precinct Master Plan recommends several improvements including a new oval, a new multi-use complex, and an adventure playground.

- The *Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan* (2019) recommends that one early years' service hub is required in Trafalgar.

Community plan findings

A community plan was developed for Thorpdale. The community plan was developed with the assistance of Council, however, delivering the plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from this plan are detailed below.

- Thorpdale Community Plan 2008 – 2013

    The plan's vision focused on maintaining a sustainable agricultural future. The key issues detailed in the plan are on keeping the town 'alive'. Projects involved encouraging people to get involved, developing a store at the heart of town and ensuring businesses and services do no close

Community engagement findings

In total, 21 community members participated in the engagement by completing the connecting communities survey, either online or at one of the community pop-ups. Figure13 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from this region.
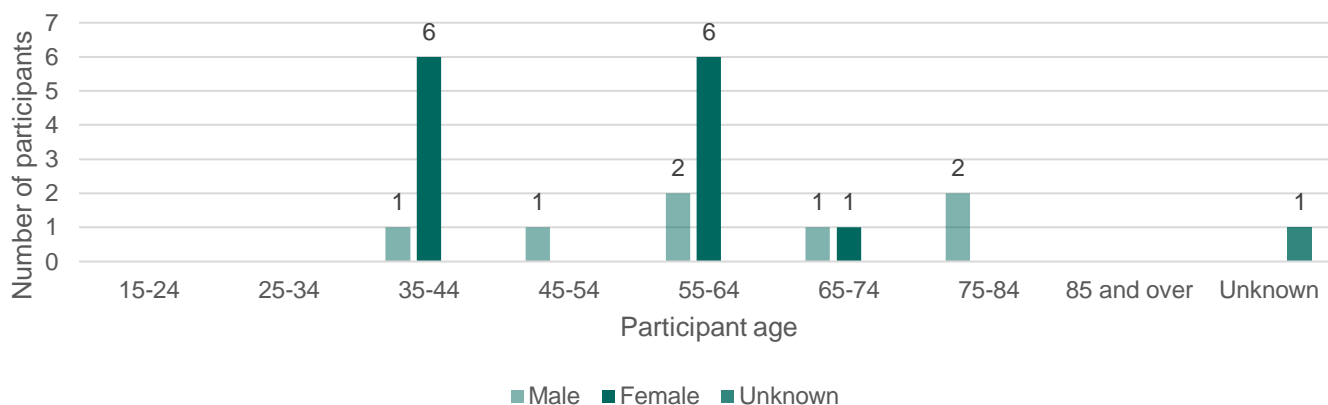

Figure 13 Region seven community engagement participants age profile

The suburbs and towns represented by the community were:

- Trafalgar, 14 participants
- Thorpdale, five participants
- Trafalgar East, one participant
- one participant did not provide their town or suburb

In addition to survey participants, approximately two 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 connect to their community, these included connecting through organised community groups, associations and sport clubs. They also identified community events, volunteering, the school, church and community spaces as other ways they connect to their community. Some participants said they connect through employment and incidental interactions at local cafes.

Many participants felt that the main challenge for community connection was individual barriers, including:

- time poor.
- cost of activities and services.

- motivation and confidence.
- access and transport; the highway is a physical barrier to people connecting.

Another challenge referenced several times was the issue of available information. Some participants felt they did not have access to information about what is currently available in the community.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used according to participants, these are outlined below:

- Parks, open spaces and playgrounds such as:
  - playgrounds for kids and parents to connect
  - Thorpdale Park
- Trails and paths for:
  - walking and running
  - walking the dog
- Sporting facilities such as:
  - recreation reserves
  - tennis courts
  - netball courts
  - football fields
  - swimming pool
- Community centres and halls such as:
  - Trafalgar Public hall which is run by the community, for the community.
  - community hall for gatherings, markets and activities.
  - community centre
- Other facilities and spaces mentioned included:
  - community garden
  - the schools, specifically Thorpdale
  - early years
  - the mobile library
- Participants also recognised the men's shed and church as spaces valued by the community more broadly included.
- The Thorpdale pub prior to being burnt down was also valued by the community, according to a few participants.

The participant responses regarding what services, programs and spaces need improvement or are missing were focussed on community facilities. These included:

- Early years: The kindergarten in Trafalgar is in high demand and local families are having to travel outside of town for kindergarten.
- Education: The school in Trafalgar is popular and operating out of portables.
- an off-road walking/running tracks and cycling tracks, with opportunities to connect to Trafalgar east.
- missing a library or community hub that includes civic services, computer access and meeting space for community groups.

Participants from Thorpdale and Trafalgar believed that their communities are missing infrastructure to help them connect. The facilities and services are scattered, identifying the need to bring them together like a hub. Connecting services such as the kindergarten and maternal health were considered priorities.

Improving the connections between existing facilities and spaces, such as the recreation reserve, was also discussed.

Information on hub and service provision

The following were suggested by participants to improve understanding of what is currently available:

- online information via:
- social media
- improved Council website
- printed information via:
- local newspapers
- community newsletter
- Council to lead dissemination of information
- community noticeboard

Community hub principles

The participants from this region believed the following elements and principles are included in a community hub:

- It is **inclusive**, such as:
- activities are inclusive and not focussed around one activity.
- inclusive and open to everyone.
- respecting different views.
- It is **people-focussed**, in that it:
- fosters social connections between people in the community.
- is about the community supporting each other.
- It is **an anchor facility or activity** such as community garden or a pub.
- It is **a meeting space or place**, providing opportunity for informal interactions.
- It is a space with a **diverse offering**, such as:
- a wide range of activities.
- a space for learning and socialising.
- It is a **space for programming** of activities and events that bring the community together.
- It includes the provision of **support services**, bringing services to the people.
- It provides the community with **access to information**.

"A place where community members can meet, collaborate and learn from each other and where community building can take place." (Resident)

According to their responses, it should not be:

- exclusive.
- commercially focused.

- a space that focuses on alcohol.

- disconnected spaces and places.

Recommendations

Council planning recommends a multi-use community hub style development for Trafalgar in existing facilities and that one early years' service hub is required in Trafalgar by 2019. These policy drivers are reflected in the community engagement findings that suggest families are having to travel to outside of Trafalgar to find available kindergarten places. Similarly, many participants identified barriers to accessing different services or community spaces. Feedback from the community suggested there is scope to improve physical connections between hubs and services in Trafalgar to improve the accessibility of these spaces and places.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- Improve access and connectivity between existing spaces and places in Trafalgar. There are several existing community spaces located near one another that could form a community precinct with improvements to the public realm, such as between the kindergarten, CFA, scout's hall, community garden and men's shed.

- If Council was successful in advocating to state government for the relocation of the kindergarten to the primary school site in Trafalgar, consideration should be given to repurposing the existing kindergarten facility to a space for community groups to operate from, a library/learning space, and a space to accommodate mobile services and programs.

- The community identified the need for improved connectivity between Trafalgar and Trafalgar East with off-road trails. Additionally, improved connectivity to the sports reserve was identified.

Region eight – Towns of the Strzelecki Ranges

Geographical and social context

Geographical context

Region eight is comprised of small townships and farming communities spread across a large geographic area. The region is very decentralised and does not have a main town or township acting as a commercial and service centre. The central and eastern parts of the region have reasonable road access to other centres however, the eastern and southern townships of the region lack direct road access.

Demographic snapshot

The region has a combined population of 1,971. It has a similar age profile to other regions, but with eight per cent of people aged 20 to 29, a slightly lower proportion. It has a higher percentage of people in employment. A high percentage (47 per cent) of households have three or more cars.

All data presented in this section has been collated from the 2016 Census of Population and Housing unless otherwise stated. See Appendix one for a set of comparative data.

Existing level of provision

Due to the nature of the small townships and settlements in this region, the provision of community facilities is dispersed and predominantly stand alone. Facilities include recreation reserves, sporting club facilities (such as the Ellinbank Badminton Club), schools and old community halls. These facilities are underutilised due to low demand and capacity for the community to activate.

Policy review findings

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

- This region falls into the south-west district of the shire, as identified in the *Community Service Planning Framework* (2013). This district's primary service centres are Warragul and Drouin which have high provision of facilities and services. All recommendations made regarding this District are focused on the main towns. No hubs are recommended for the towns in this region. The Framework recommends focusing on increasing provision of mobile bases and virtual and remote access services, which would be suitable opportunities for this region.

Community plan findings

A community plan was developed for Seaview. The community plans were developed with the assistance of Council however, the plan's projects are the responsibility of the community. The key findings from this plan are detailed below.

- Seaview Community Plan 2008 – 2013

The plan's vision focussed on being a cohesive community in which people connect with each other and protecting the environment. Issues include a lack of community involvement in the town. Projects involved running more events, using the school for a community house.

Community engagement findings

In this region, four community members participated in the engagement by completing the connecting communities survey, either online or at one of the community pop-ups. This figure is low, however, is most likely reflective of the region's small population and geographic spread. As noted above, the region is decentralised, and residents are likely to visit Warragul or Drouin for services. Figure 14 provides a summary of the age profile of the community engagement participants from this region.
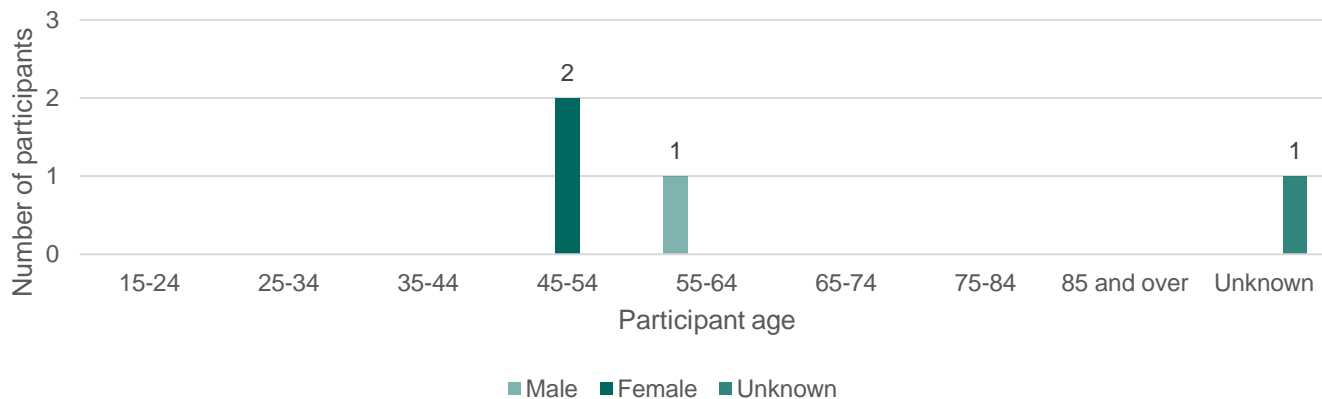

Figure 14 Region eight community engagement participants - age profile

The suburbs and town represented by participants were:

- Ellinbank, one participant

- Ripplebrook, one participant

- South Warragul, one participant

- Tetoora Road, one participant

In addition to survey participants, one community member provided feedback regarding a specific space in this region. Demographic information was not collected from this participant.

Community connection

The participants discussed the ways they connect to their community are typically through organised community groups, associations and sport clubs and community events.

The challenges they identified to connecting with their community was the lack of affordable community spaces to meet, particularly issues with insurance.

Facilities and spaces

There are a variety of facilities and spaces that are used, according to participant responses, including:

- community centres and halls, such as Tetoora Road Hall, for events and to meet with the local community

- sporting facilities, such as Ellinbank Football facilities and tennis courts, for exercise and socialising

- parks, open spaces, playgrounds and walking tracks for spending time with friends and for children to play

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

- a place to meet

- access between facilities, for example the zebra crossing between the leisure centre and Burke Street park

- disability awareness

- social opportunities

The participant from Ripplebrook predominately discussed community facilities and spaces in Drouin, such as the Old Butter Factory. Service providers identified Lardner Park as a community space.

Information on hub and service provision

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

- online via social media
- a community noticeboard
- in print, including flyers and advertisements in the local newspaper

Community hub principles

The participants from Region eight believed the following elements and principles included in a community hub are:

- It is **a multi-purpose space** for education, youth and support services.
- It is **inclusive**.
- It is **people-focused,** in that it is focussed on connection, friends and family working together.
- It is a meeting place

According to their responses, it should not be:

- commercially focussed
- a space with bad access and a single use purpose

Recommendations

Council planning makes no recommendations for this region as it is considered part of the Drouin and Warragul catchment. Community engagement findings show that residents value the community halls and sporting clubs of the region, however, believe the spaces could be altered to be multi-use.

Accordingly, the recommendations for this region include:

- This region is made up predominantly small rural towns and settlements, therefore the focus is providing spaces for mobile programs and services. Consider improving the multi-use functionality of existing spaces and places to provide for mobile programs and services such as existing community halls and recreation facilities such as the sporting pavilion and the Ellinbank Badminton Hall.

Conclusion

This *Aspirational Community Hubs Strategy 2019 – Connecting Communities Through Spaces* sought to create a shared understanding of what constitutes a 'community hub' across eight regions in Baw Baw Shire Council. This understanding has relied on undertaking an analysis of demographics, geography and policies as they apply to each region, and then carrying out a series of community engagement exercises. These community engagement exercises included online surveys and mapping tools, various pop-up opportunities, a workshop with service providers and finally a series of codesign workshops dedicated to the recommended new integrated facility for Drouin.

The outcomes of this initiative include a series of articulated values from each region as they relate to the idea of a 'community hub', as well as a series of recommendations. These aspirational recommendations are as follows:

Region 1 – Neerim South, Noojee and Surrounds

- 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.

Region 2 – Erica, Rawson, Walhalla and Surrounds

- Consider consolidation of existing community facilities, such as health care services, in Erica to improve multi-use functionality.

- Consideration should be given to co-location with Rawson Primary School where facilities can be shared, such as a static library, meeting spaces, early years programs.

- Consider multi-use functionality of existing facilities to provide for mobile community services and programs to ensure localised access, particularly in areas such as Aberfeldy that are remote from the region's centre.

Region 3 – Hill End and Willow Grove

- Council to support the community in the activation of existing spaces, particularly the Old School in Hill End to respond to community need. This may include a community garden and men's shed program, both identified through the community engagement as programs missing from this region.

- Continue to support provision of local level facilities such as the kindergarten16, maternal and child health services and the local hall in Willow Grove.

- Explore the multi-use functionality of the Old School to also accommodate mobile service provision and programs. Mobile services travel to different locations to provide their service in offsite venues and include services such as medical clinics.

---

[16] Note that the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning owns the Willow Grove Kindergarten site.

- Continue to support the Willow Grove Recreation Reserve improvements.

Region 4 – Longwarry

- Improve access and connectivity between existing spaces and places in Longwarry. There are several existing community spaces located nearby that could form a community precinct with improvements to the public realm, such as between the primary school, kindergarten, community hall, community garden, and church.

- Improve multi-use functionality of existing, well-cared for spaces such as the Labertouche & District Community Centre.

- Consider opportunities to improve connectivity over the rail line which was identified as a barrier for this community.

- Bennett Street Reserve, which is highly valued by the community, was identified in the Urban Design Framework as having potential to improve recreation opportunities. This option may be impacted by the additional platform plans for Longwarry Station. Consultation with VicTrack is recommended.

- Improve connection to the Bandicoot Track.

Region 5 – Drouin and Warragul

- Drouin requires a new integrated facility. As suggested by the Municipal Early Years Infrastructure Plan this could include early years facilities. Work with the community on the desired size and service mix of the new facility. There is an opportunity to increase the scope to include community space. This recommendation is explored in more detail in the following section.

- Expansion of integrated facility catering for a range of community services identified as per the Community Service Planning Framework 2013

- The creation of a community hub in combination with a children centre is a key recommendation of the Drouin Town Centre Strategy

- Consider opportunities to work with the Drouin community to support their purchase and activation of the Old Drouin Butter Factory to create a community-led hub.

- Work with the community in Warragul and Drouin as new developments arise through precinct structure planning processes and developer contributions which provide for new community hubs.

- Continue to engage with youth to identify appropriate provision of a youth focused space. Consider co-location opportunities to ensure flexibility of the space as needs may change.

- Continue to engage with Traditional Owner groups to identify suitable opportunities for a cultural space within Warragul, Drouin or other suitable area through the Shire.

- Create an integrated master plan for the Civic Precinct in Warragul.

Region 6 – Yarragon and Surrounds

- Consider opportunities to improve the multi-use functionality of existing spaces, such as the Yarragon Public Hall to accommodate mobile programs and services.

- Consider opportunities to support community-led activation of the old Yarragon Primary School site. Some of the programs identified as needed in the community include a men's shed, historical society and library/learning space.

Region 7 – Trafalgar and Surrounds

- Improve access and connectivity between existing spaces and places in Trafalgar. There are several existing community spaces located near one another that could form a community precinct with improvements to the public realm, such as between the kindergarten, CFA, scout's hall, community garden and men's shed.

- If Council was successful in advocating to state government for the relocation of the kindergarten to the primary school site in Trafalgar, consideration should be given to repurposing the existing kindergarten facility to a space for community groups to operate from, a library/learning space, and a space to accommodate mobile services and programs.

- The community identified the need for improved connectivity between Trafalgar and Trafalgar East with off-road trails. Additionally, improved connectivity to the sports reserve was identified.

Region 8 – Towns of the Strzelecki Ranges

- This region is made up predominantly small rural towns and settlements, therefore the focus is providing spaces for mobile programs and services. Consider improving the multi-use functionality of existing spaces and places to provide for mobile programs and services such as existing community halls and recreation facilities such as the sporting pavilion and the Ellinbank Badminton Hall.

Following part one of the Community Hubs Strategy, Baw Baw Shire Council have produced an action plan that outlines how Council have prioritised the recommendations and how they will be progressed over the next five years. This is covered in *Part 2 – Community Hubs Action Plan 2019.*