Asset Plan Deliberative Engagement Panel

Asset Panel Outcomes Summary Report

Submitted to:

Council Forum

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Distribution List

Council Forum

Table of Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION.....1

2.0 ASSET MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES.....1

3.0 ASSET GROUP OUTCOMES.....3

3.1 Session 1 - Footpaths 4

3.2 Session 2 - Aquatics 4

3.3 Session 3 - Halls and Community Rooms.....5

3.4 Session 4 - Roads and Drainage.....6

3.5 Session 5 - Open Space and Parks.....8

4.0 REFLECTIONS ON THE DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS 9

TABLES

Table 1: Asset Management Principles - Outcomes.....2

Table 2: Footpaths Outcomes 4

Table 3: Aquatics Outcomes 4

Table 4: Halls and Community Rooms Outcomes.....5

Table 5: Roads and Drainage Outcomes.....6

Table 6: Open Space and Parks Outcomes.....8

FIGURES

Figure 1: Summary of principles developed with the panel and presented to the panel in the final engagement session 2

Figure 2: Important Principles for Footpaths 4

Figure 3: Important Principles for Aquatics Assets.....5

Figure 4: Important Principles for Halls and Community Rooms.....6

Figure 5: Important Principles for Roads and Drainage.....8

Figure 7: Important Principles for Open Space and Parks.....9

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In support of the services provided to the community, Yarra Ranges Council (Council) manages a portfolio of assets with a total value in excess of $1.5 billion. The *Local Government Act 2020* (the Act) requires Council to develop an Asset Plan as part of the integrated strategic planning and reporting framework which includes documents such as the Council Vision, Council Plan and Financial Plan. Council's Community Engagement Policy requires a deliberative community engagement process for the plan. The Asset Panel was established in February 2022 to:

1) Provide input into how decisions about asset lifecycle funding are made, by reviewing principles in the **Asset Management Policy**

2) To understand the panel's views around **difficult asset management decisions** or trade-offs facing Council over the next ten years, and establishing the conditions under which these trade-offs may be acceptable, if at all.

3) To understand **asset management related issues** that the panel consider are important to address over the next ten years and the reasons why they think they are important.

The panel was provided the following question:

"How should Council balance the cost and quality of its assets with the diverse needs of the community?"

This report presents a summary of the deliberative engagement process and outcomes.

2.0 ASSET MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

Council's Asset Plan has been prepared and the Asset Management Policy has been revised to meet Local Government Act requirements, and to ensure Council continues to manage its assets in a way that meets current and future community needs.

A focus of the panel engagement was to consider various general principles to guide asset management decision making, with respect to each asset group considered throughout the sessions. We asked the panel to capture what was important and why, and to add principles that they thought were missing. The principles highlighted in green in Figure 1 are those added by the panel.

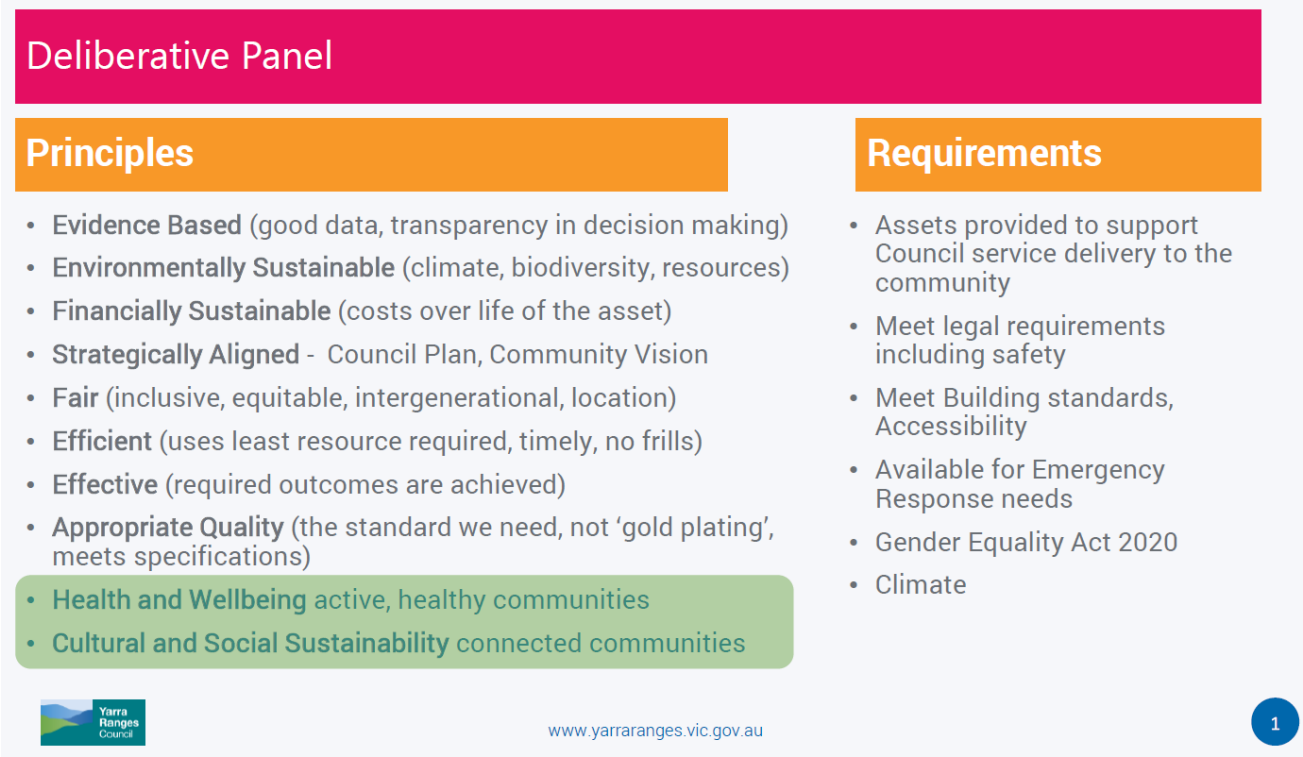


Figure 1: Summary of principles developed with the panel and presented to the panel in the final engagement session

In presenting a summary of principles by theme, it is possible that some themes were less easily worked with by the panel; namely the "effective" and "efficient" themes. More clear and specific language around these themes was required in the policy to provide more clarity to decision makers and the community around these two items. To address this, the Draft Asset Management Policy has combined these under the theme of Appropriate Quality.

Table 1: Asset Management Principles - Outcomes

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions	Outcomes
Draft asset management principles were rated by level of importance by the panel and were added to by the panel.	Asset Management Policy to include principles supported by the panel and include the two principles added by the panel.	Council makes asset management decisions which are consistent with and guided by the community's values on what matters most when prioritising limited budgets.
Safety noted as a key priority for roads and footpaths.	To be addressed as a statutory requirement in the Asset Management Policy and discussed from an asset user experience perspective (level of service).	Safety of asset users is considered throughout the asset lifecycle including asset design, maintenance and operation leading to user safety at an acceptable standard to the community.
The importance of each principle for asset management decision making varied with each	include guidance that reflects the panel's input on the relative importance of principles across different asset types.	Evidence based, transparent processes for asset management decision making.

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions	Outcomes
asset type being considered by the panel.	This may be a guiding statement as a minimum but may also include the specific requirement to develop weightings/importance for different principles when applying them to asset strategies and projects, with a requirement to publish the process applied publicly (addressing transparency in decision making).	
Evidence based decision making, including transparency of decision making, was consistently rated highly by the panel.	Evidence based decision making is a requirement to be directly noted in the Asset Management Policy.	Council makes decisions on the best available evidence and is able to demonstrate this.

3.0 ASSET GROUP OUTCOMES

A selection of asset categories were presented to the panel in detail for consideration of asset management challenges facing those assets over the next 10 to 15 years, and as an exercise in how to apply the principles of asset management to those challenges.

The topics were selected after consultation with asset managers and operators across the organisation and range from asset challenges where the asset management system maturity is relatively high, to assets where asset management system maturity is still developing.

A key challenge facing Council is the increasing cost of operating and maintaining assets that are at the end of their life. Some of these assets were designed and built many decades ago to meet needs that are no longer the same or that have a different priority in the future. To be financially sustainable, Council needs to consider which assets can be disposed of as part of the discussion about providing new and improved assets for the future. To assist Council with this challenge, the panel was presented with the question:

> *"Under what circumstances, if at all, would it be acceptable to reduce the number of assets provided in order to provide fewer but larger, modern, multi-purpose assets?'*

Feedback from the panel showed that there was support for this concept across almost all panel members as a solution to address poorly used assets that no longer suit modern community needs, and a way to free up funding to invest in modern assets that better suit a range of users. The provisos included a high importance on evidence based, transparent decision making that involved the community and considered the asset management principles in the draft Asset Management Policy. The panel also highlighted the need to consider improving activation and communication to support the use of the assets rather than assuming low usage is a result of unsuitable asset features. This would be addressed as part of an evidence based decision making process.

3.1 Session 1 - Footpaths

Table 2: Footpaths Outcomes

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
Evidence based decision making was the top-rated principle by the panel for decisions about footpaths.	The next review of Council's Pathways asset management plan to capture these principles and utilise them for prioritisation of future improvement actions.
Health and Wellbeing was suggested by the panel as an additional principle.	Health and Wellbeing was added to the draft principles for inclusion in the Asset Management policy.

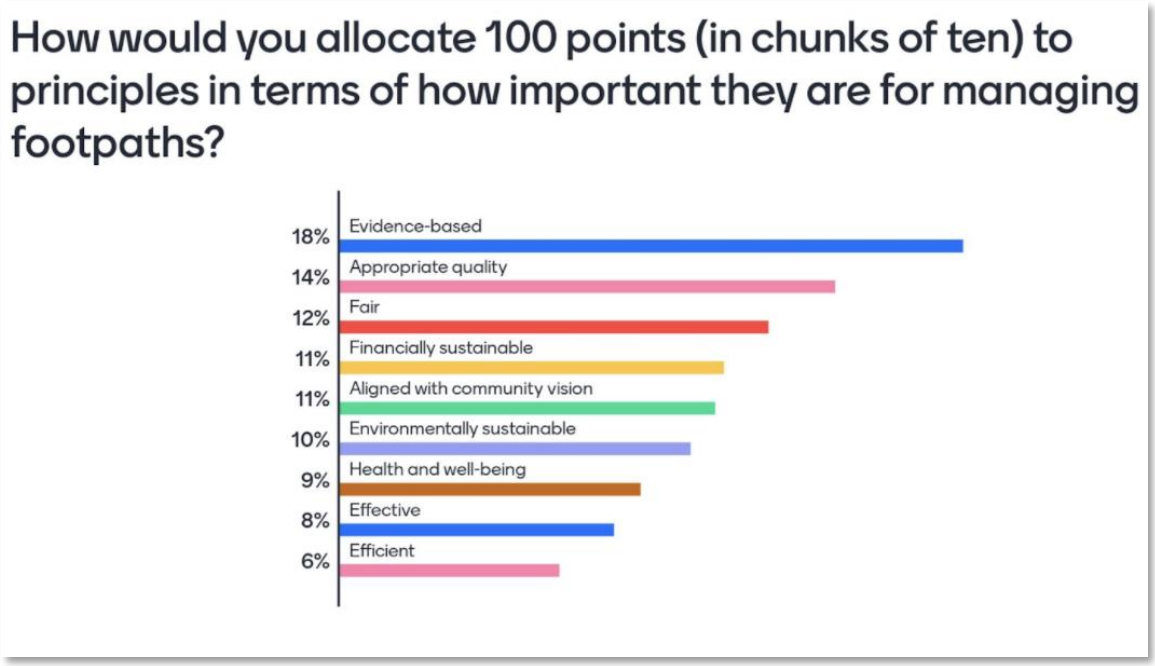


Figure 2: Important Principles for Footpaths

3.2 Session 2 - Aquatics

Table 3: Aquatics Outcomes

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
Initial thoughts from the panel were captured on challenges Council faces regarding aquatic assets, and ideas on how Council might ensure they are both financially sustainable and enjoyed by more residents.	Feedback from the panel to be considered during the development of the Aquatics Strategy and Open Space Asset Management Plan update. Based on the value gained from this session, Council is considering a deliberative engagement process for the Aquatics Strategy.
Evidence for the usage rates of the splash parks was raised as an important piece of evidence to better consider the usage across all the aquatics assets.	Investigate methods for usage counts at splash parks to better provide evidence for usage rates.

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
Further engagement.	Further deliberative engagement on aquatics has been proposed by asset manager.

Figure 3: Important Principles for Aquatics Assets

3.3 Session 3 - Halls and Community Rooms

Table 4: Halls and Community Rooms Outcomes

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
Need to build usage data for making decisions about halls and community rooms.	As part of the Buildings Asset Management Plan update, assess utilisation of halls and community rooms in line with the principles in the Asset Management Policy.
Consideration of heritage value and cultural, social value is important on a case-by-case basis when considering consolidating assets into a single, modern, multi-use facility or with other modern council buildings eg pavilions.	Inclusion of cultural and social sustainability as a principle in the draft Asset Management Policy.
Appropriate governance plans should be in place to ensure halls and community rooms are financially, environmentally sustainable and that community access is fair, equitable and accessible.	Inclusion of financial sustainability, environmental sustainability, equality, fairness and accessibility in the draft Asset Management Policy. Consideration of these principles when assessing function, utilisation and condition of halls and community rooms in the Buildings Asset Management Plan update.
Advertising of halls and rooms for hire should be reviewed to ensure utilisation is not constrained by poor promotion.	Promotion and advertising of halls and community rooms to be reviewed for impact.

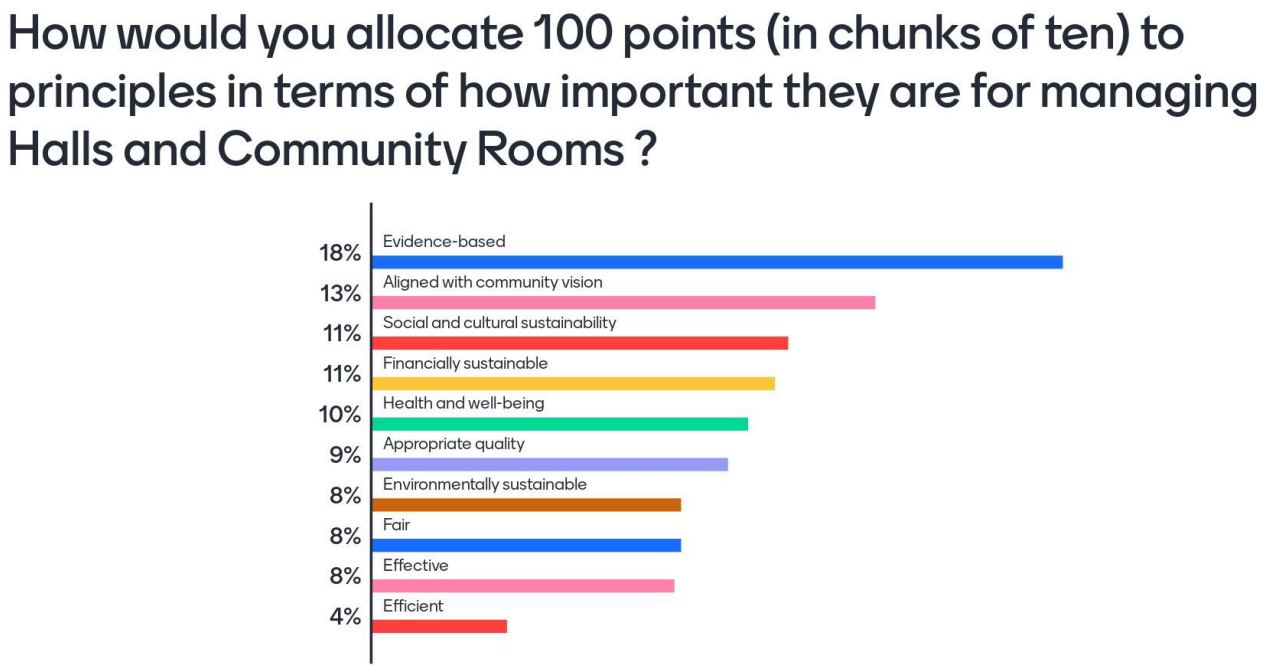


Figure 4: Important Principles for Halls and Community Rooms

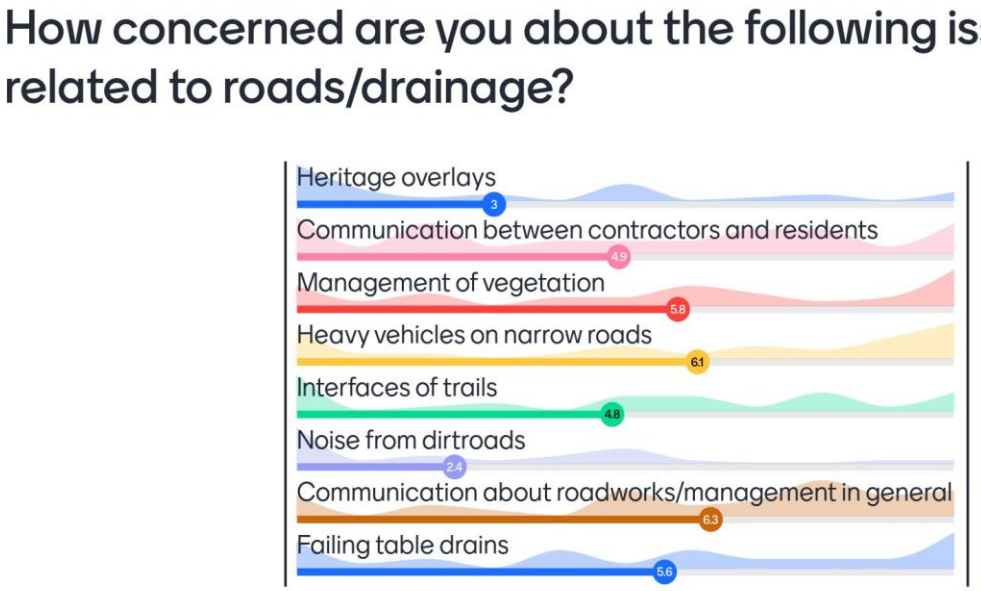
3.4 Session 4 - Roads and Drainage

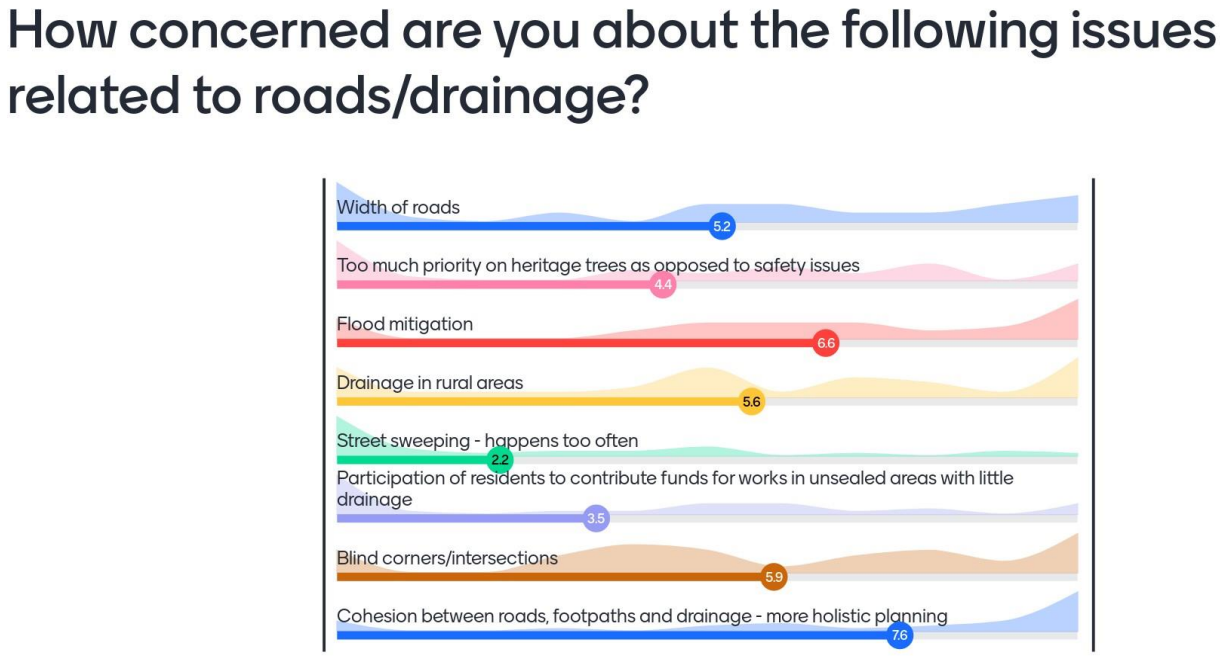
Table 5: Roads and Drainage Outcomes

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
Discussions featured participants who were personally impacted by a level of service that is not meeting their desired level of service (in particular, for unsealed roads and surface drains).	Development of a communication and engagement plan for roads and drainage, and the inclusion of footpaths where possible, to enable higher quality engagement with the community over roads and drainage issues that impact them.
Breakout room discussions also focused issues that were outside of Council's asset management scope. This included water flows from private property, driveway crossovers, or issues with road width or repairs on Department of Transport (DoT) roads.	This presents an opportunity to further investigate the extent to which the community is satisfied with the level of service on sealed roads, in a manner that carefully separates out DoT and Council roads.
Evidence based decision making, financial sustainability and appropriate quality were the three highest rated principles for managing roads and drainage assets.	Assessment of the prioritisation of roads and drainage capital projects and maintenance against these principles to improve transparency with the community around decision making and inform the community of the considerations made in prioritising works. Review of the prioritisation process where it departs from

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
	these principles, or additional engagement with the community to gain further input into the process.

The panel were asked for their thoughts on a list issues around Council's management of roads, and to identify any missing issues. They were then asked which of the issues are most important to address.





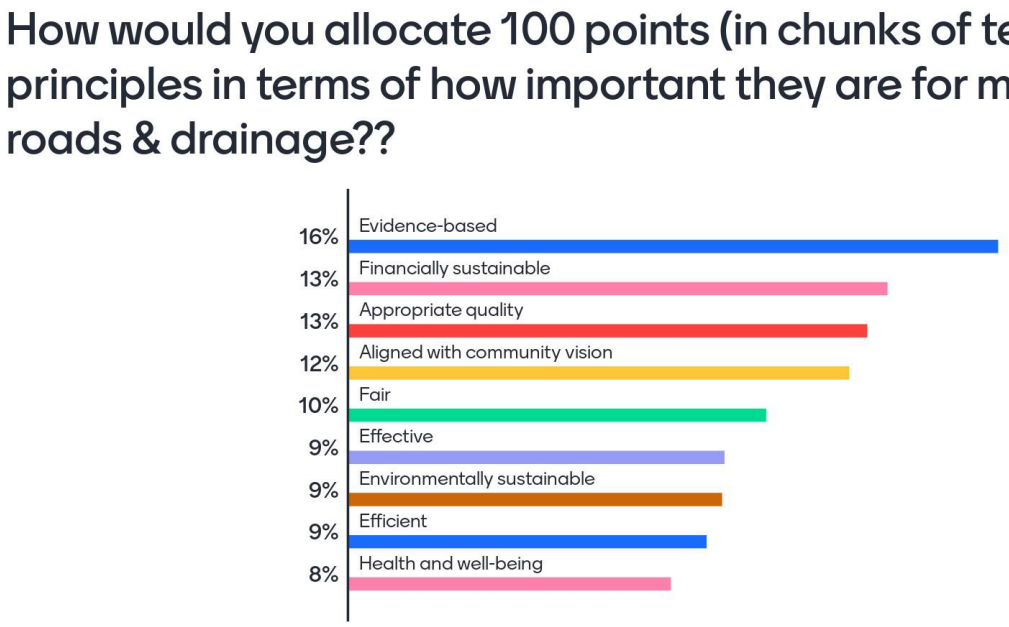


Figure 5: Important Principles for Roads and Drainage

3.5 Session 5 - Open Space and Parks

Types of open space as well as levels of service for social recreation reserves were presented to the panel. The challenge of providing (and funding) additional open space for a growing population was presented. The panel was asked to consider the case study of 150 Cambridge Road, with the sale of small parcels of land as a method of raising funds to provide larger parcels of land.

Table 6: Open Space and Parks Outcomes

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
The panel was asked to consider in what circumstances selling of small parcels of land would be acceptable to create larger ones. Responses varied from it would not be appropriate, to it could be appropriate on a case-by-case basis but needs to consider the demand for these small parks in the future. The importance of local, smaller parks was highlighted, as well as the inherent features of the park such as slope, walking distance, footpaths and assets provided such as seats and equipment.	Open Space provision will be considered as part of the upcoming Recreation and Open Space Strategy (ROSS). The panel's consideration of when the sale of smaller land parcels to create larger land parcels would be acceptable, if at all, will be used to identify and inform further opportunities to address shortages in larger parks.
Levels of Service were presented to the panel, and the panel was asked to rate what features they would expect to see at Regional, District and Local Parks. The response from the panel was generally consistent with the existing level of service provision.	Levels of service for open space in the context of social recreation parks will be prepared as part of the upcoming Recreation and Open Space Strategy (ROSS). The panel's expectations around the assets provided in different spaces will form a basis for further engagement on the draft ROSS.

Panel Findings	Proposed Council Actions
	These levels of service will also be detailed in the upcoming Open Space Asset Management Plan.

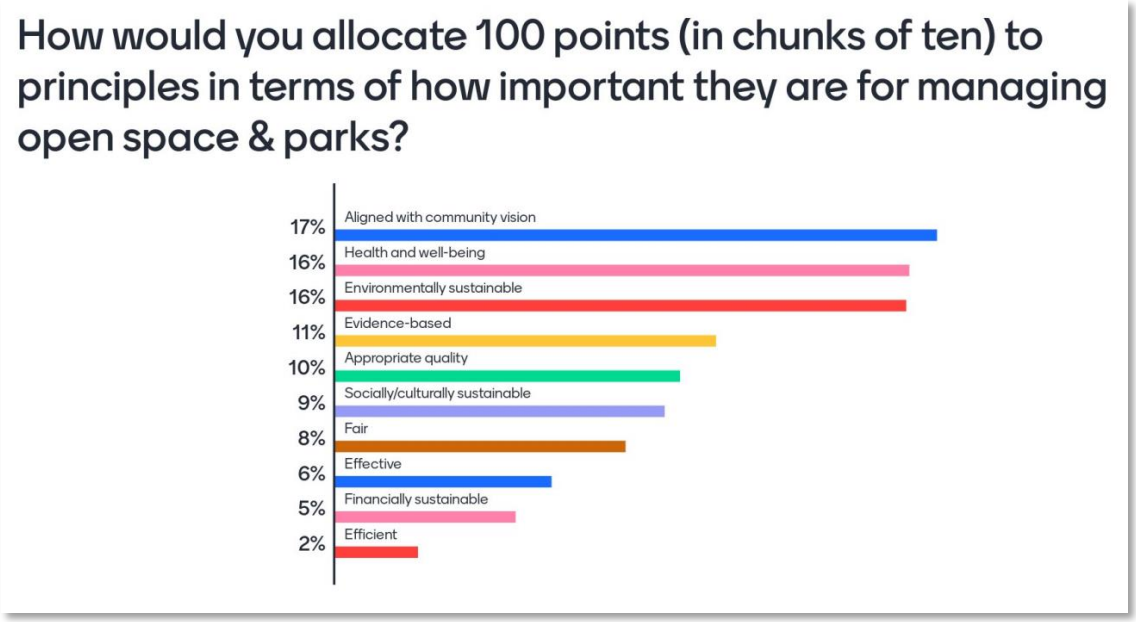


Figure 6: Important Principles for Open Space and Parks

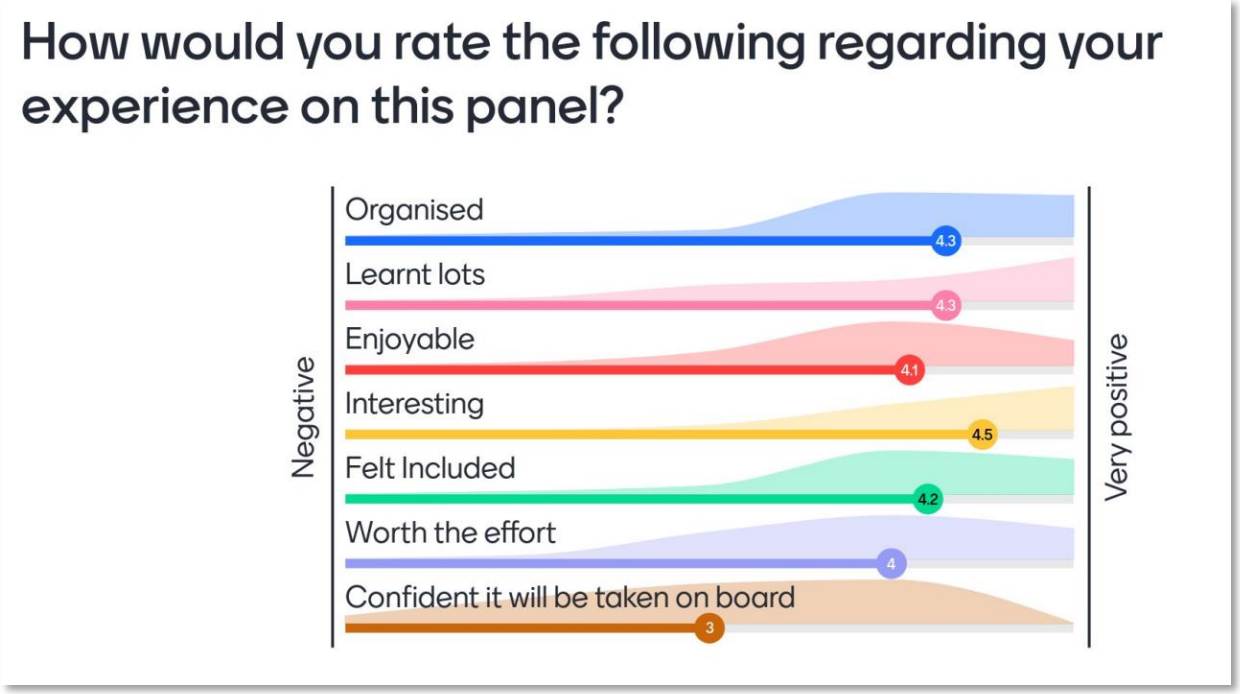
4.0 REFLECTIONS ON THE DELIBERATIVE ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The panel provided feedback on the deliberative process during the final session.

During the first session, participants were surprised at the amount and value of assets that Council manages, and the complexity of the asset portfolio, and this sentiment continued throughout the sessions.

- Participants were surprised by the amount of assets Council manages, and the complexity of the portfolio
- Participants generally enjoyed the session and were happy to see Council participating in this type of engagement
- Participants are keen for further updates and feedback on the Asset Plan.

A poll of the panel was taken to assess their level of satisfaction with the deliberative engagement experience. It is critical that Council continues active communication on the final stages of the Asset Plan development, as well as providing this action summary back to the panel, to satisfy their concerns about whether their significant contribution will be given appropriate consideration.



Comments were also provided by panellists to reflect on their experience. Some themes that emerged included:

- Appreciation for the opportunity to be part of the process
- Would like to see this type of engagement utilised more by Council
- Desire to see real outcomes achieved as a result of the process

Any questions? Reflections? Comments?

Mentimeter

Still be included in further input in regards to the implementation of the plan in future months.

Thanks for the opportunity to take part in this.

Please keep in contact - interested in what becomes of the recommendations

Thank for including us in this process. Appreciate the effort that went into all this. Good luck

Comment on asset sales - this is always a concern, lose an asset for shorter term gain but community needs in the future need to be taken into account. Only done in extreme circumstances

Have learnt a lot about the council and what goes on. What sort of volunteer work is provided for retirees who are interested in being more involved

This process was great and shows council are very open to being communicative and engaging with the community. This needs to extend to other parts of council.

Many have added to comments section and wonder if in fact these are being considered because these will reflect how people are really feeling beyond the polls

It was great to work with the council staff who we can see are very passionate, knowledgeable and genuinely care about our community - thank you!

I have thoroughly enjoyed in being part of this process and understanding the background. I would like to receive a copy sent to all of the recipients so we can be aware of the outcomes

Great process, interesting to see how a large organisation manages assets.

Some strategic management concepts that came up in discussion we best practice, benchmarking, balanced scorecard. This thinking is more useful that having lists of specific issues and example cases which are restricted to specific locatiions/contexts

A similar panel type group discussion to this should be in place for property and planning. A very hot topic especially in the urban areas

It was great to be able to be a voice to help shape the future of the Yarra Ranges Council

Appreciate having the council people to ask questions of and hear their approach to issues.

Very interesting exercise, still think SoYR is to big, shire of the Dandenong Ranges, one for the outer communities, very different requirements..

Thanks for the opportunities and great to hear and learn a lot from the process. love to hear the update and impact that the panel has made if any

Evidence Based decisions are critical to any plan. Please make sure that a plan is set and followed

Communicate, communicate, communicate! The main issue I have ever had with council is having to constantly follow up reported issues and chase an outcome. Council need to get better with closing the loop with people and communicating. Great process!

Felt very hopeful at the start that this might lead to something but unfortunately over the weeks it's become clear it's just another "tick the box" for having asked for the communities input!

Give Jennie a raise! Great facilitation...all the facilitators in fact

Great work.

More maintenance, more focus on the needs of the local community. If an area is too large, then divide it to provide a better connectivity & inclusivity. Better advocacy from the council for the residents to other organisations. Better communication

More publicly accessible data to be made available online via Intramaps

Generally good but I believe that we could have focused more on the really important issues for people such as the roads footpaths and drainage - as this raised the most discussion and has the biggest budget in council expenditure

I feel to feedback is too vague for key strategic directions. Large community use assets like aquatics, sporting fields, recreatinal space need broader community surveying. (Roads might be too complicated and feels budget constrained)

Thanks for including me in this process, it was interesting and I felt involved, included and most importantly heard. And I enjoyed listening to other people views.

I welcome these opportunities. We were not really given the 'jury' type interaction where we weighed real things to choose and chose a 'verdict' with which to proceed. the idea of balance was talked about, but not forced to consensus - ie. cit. jury

Great Job organising team re keeping things rolling through tech and opinion in realtime!

Thank you for the experience it has been very interesting.

I felt council staff and councillors were authentic and doing their best in a complicated task.

The Mayor showing up is a great sign of the interest especially on a PH.

Very interesting panel. I am just hoping action will be taken and it is just not ticking the box. Disappointed to realise that funding for roads and drains decreased last financial year when service levels are poor. Safety should be highest priority.

By and large people have been able to overlook their own grievances with council and looked to better the greater good. Tough for some sometimes, but it was a good experience to hear all the different viewpoints.

Im gonna miss Max somber voice over the headphones

There needs to be a paradigm shift in the way that public assets are sold between governments and departments / councils the ownership is that of the people already

As a rate paying resident living in the heart of Healesville. I expect at the very least to have safe sealed access with drainage to my home and the houses around me, which have a heritage overlay. Proper safe surfacing of pedestrian path adjacent.

The lack of 21st century drainage in the heart of Healesville impacts our houses, roads, footpaths. The upgrade of play area in Queens park routinely floods when we have significant rain. GravelPaths wash away and money is wasted resurfacing gravel

Thanks for the opportunity to represent the community. I hope SYR got some valuable insite into what the community needs are. Even though some people were there to simply talk down the council.

I highly recommend the council invest in community gardens on these small pockets of land in the heavily populated urban areas of the Shire. The benefits to the community young and old, cultures, sharing, education, mental health, being on country.

I would love for the council to invest in the great asset of Healesville outdoor pool in Queens Park. Solar so that our community can access it all year round. Look after,invest in this asset. Opening early morning late at night. The youth need it!

Signature Page

Yarra Ranges Council

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