

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGY 2013-2023

Evaluation Paper Summary

2026



Background

The [Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2013-2023](#) (ROSS) was a framework to guide the way Council managed and improved sport and recreation facilities, parks, community spaces and recreation services.

Its vision “to have a healthy and active Yarra Ranges community and environment,” reflected the significant role that recreation and open space plays in community health and wellbeing, biodiversity, and the liveability of Yarra Ranges’ unique landscapes. The evaluation undertaken in late 2025-early 2026 sought to understand the Strategy’s impact, determine whether it delivered on its commitments, and identify learnings to inform development of the new Open Space Strategy.

Key findings

The ROSS made a significant and lasting contribution to recreation and open space planning and delivery in Yarra Ranges. One of its most notable achievements was its critical role in strategically justifying Planning Scheme Amendment C148, which successfully introduced a 5% public open space contribution rate within the Urban Growth Boundary in the Yarra Ranges Planning Scheme. This is an outcome that ensures Council’s long-term capacity to provide quality open space for a growing and changing community. The Strategy also demonstrated strong alignment with other Council strategies and policies, and its robust community engagement ensured that diverse voices and needs were reflected. The precinct-based planning framework proved highly valuable, offering township-specific insights that supported statutory processes, capital investment planning, as well as operations, and remains one of the ROSS’s key strengths.

In its ten year life the Strategy supported substantial progress, with more than two-thirds of its 270 actions completed, in progress, or incorporated into standard business as usual. The ROSS guided significant improvements to recreation and sporting facilities and supported effective partnerships with other land managers such as Parks Victoria. Its early adoption of principles relating to equity, access, demographic responsiveness, and environmental integration positioned Yarra Ranges as a leader among peri-urban and rural councils at the time.

The evaluation identified several factors that influenced how effectively the Strategy could be implemented and reviewed over its lifespan. At the time the Strategy was prepared it



reflected contemporary sector practice, including a stronger emphasis on strategic direction than on baseline indicators or measurable targets. This meant that, over time, there were some limitations in being able to clearly measure progress against the Strategy's intended outcomes.

The broad strategic scope of the ROSS supported flexibility and responsiveness across a wide range of issues; however, this breadth may also have made it more challenging to consistently interpret and apply the document across different contexts. In some areas, this affected how readily the Strategy could be used to drive coordinated and consistent change, as well as its overall ease of use.

The size and structure of the Implementation Plan also presented challenges, with a number of actions framed at a high level or contingent on future investigations or assessments. Some of these did not proceed, likely reflecting evolving circumstances, priorities, or resourcing over the life of the Strategy.

Notwithstanding these factors, substantial improvements in the quantity and quality of open space were achieved during the life of the Strategy, with many of these outcomes delivered in tandem with complementary plans, policies, and delivery mechanisms.

Key achievements

The five key achievements of the ROSS are:

Successfully underpinned Planning Scheme Amendment C148, establishing the strategic basis for introducing a 5% public open space contribution rate within the Urban Growth Boundary – a critical, reliable income stream to support expanded and improved open space.

Delivered strong implementation progress, with more than two-thirds of 270 actions completed, in progress, or embedded into standard business as usual – a substantial outcome given the Strategy's scale, complexity, and 10 year timeframe. Key initiatives delivered include Warburton Bike Park, ngurrak barring, Yarra Valley Trail, Kilsyth Sports Centre, Monbulk Soccer Centre, and new pavilions at Upwey Recreation Reserve, Powelltown Recreation Reserve.

Established highly effective precinct-based planning, enabling tailored analysis and direction for each precinct and supporting everything from statutory processes, capital investment decisions, and ongoing open space management.

Strengthened partnerships, including sector-leading collaborations with external land managers.

Embedded robust community engagement and integration with Council strategies, positioning recreation and open space as a central contributor to health, wellbeing, activation, community and environmental connection, whilst reflecting diverse community perspectives.

Progress against key outcomes and actions

The overall status of the Recreation and Open Space Strategy Implementation Plan actions is outlined below:

ACTION STATUS	PERCENTAGE OF ACTIONS
Complete	31.48%
Incorporated into standard business as usual/ongoing actions	18.52%
In progress	37.78%
Yet to commence	9.63%
Abandoned	2.59%

Conclusion and recommendations

Overall, the ROSS was an ambitious and industry-leading document that established a strong foundation for open space planning in Yarra Ranges. Its successes, especially in statutory and subsequent income-stream enhancements, precinct-based planning, partnership building, community engagement and completion of major initiatives, have had long-term positive impacts across the municipality. Subsequent land purchases undertaken by Council have contributed to a net increase in open space across the municipality.

The findings of this evaluation highlight the need for the new Open Space Strategy to retain these strengths whilst adopting a contemporary approach that aligns with recent State Government guidance, establishing a more focused scope, stronger analytical foundations, measurable actions, improved governance, enhanced inclusion, and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.