Deliberative Panel Recommendations Summary

Yarra Ranges Council

Introduction

To support the development of the next Council Plan, Council engaged independent consultants Deliberatively Engaging to facilitate a deliberative panel process.

A 40-member panel was selected from 441 expressions of interest, ensuring representation of the diversity within the Yarra Ranges community. The panel was asked to consider the overarching question:

> *"Given the complex challenges faced, how can Council better plan for Yarra Ranges as a whole and work towards a collective long-term good beyond the four-year planning cycle?"*

In response to this remit, the panel explored five of Council's most complex and interrelated policy areas: asset management, road maintenance, revenue raising, climate action, and tourism. Feedback was also provided on community engagement with Council decisions.

Panel members met across four sessions—one online and three full-day, in-person workshops—designed to build understanding and support meaningful deliberation. The process was completed with a final report presented to Council on the closing day and shared as part of the Councillor Induction Program.

The recommendations put forward by the panel have been reviewed and considered in the development of this draft Council Plan.

The following section outlines how community insights have been reflected in the draft priorities.

Deliberative Panel recommendations	Consideration in draft Council Plan
Asset Management	
Criteria for asset management decisions (in order of importance): • Supports the local community • Delivers multiple uses, objectives or values • Demonstrates long-term relevance and adaptable use • Offers a variety of uses • Has a manageable cost of upkeep and ongoing management • Is useful in emergency situations • Is accessible • Is safe • Shows a high level of activity or use	The draft Council Plan reflects key asset (community buildings) actions supported by the deliberative panel, and acknowledges the challenges faced on page 19. *Connected and Healthy Community* on page 24, acknowledges importance of assets in the following initiatives: **3. Deliver and enhance multi-use Community Pavilions across the municipality, and** **4. Planning for an urban aquatic and leisure facility** *Protected and Enhanced Natural Environment* on page 27, focuses increasing resilience of assets in the following initiative: **5. Enhance energy and infrastructure resilience for Council and communities before, during and after extreme weather events.** The new Indicator on page 36, is proposed to measure use and demand for community buildings and will help inform decisions in line with the recommended criteria.

Deliberative Panel recommendations	Consideration in draft Council Plan
Road Maintenance	
The panel provided specific recommendations to guide future decisions around road management, identifying key factors that should influence whether roads are sealed or remain unsealed. Recommended factors for prioritising which roads to seal (in order of panel support): • Traffic and usage • Safety • Extent of road damage • Stormwater and pollution impacts • Emergency vehicle access Factors that would make unsealed roads more acceptable: • Improved maintenance regime • Enhanced drainage • Rate reductions Factors that would make sealed roads more acceptable: • Reduced repair costs and frequency • Improved accessibility • Enhanced safety	The draft Council Plan reflects key asset (roads) actions supported by the deliberative panel, and acknowledges the challenges faced on page 19-21. Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places on page 30, focuses on roads in the following initiative: **12. Improve safety and maintenance of local roads-** *Plan and deliver road maintenance in accordance with local priorities and advocate for further funding opportunities.* The new Indicator on page 36, is proposed to measure average rating for condition of local roads and footpaths and sets a clear target.
Revenue Raising	
The panel identified preferred approaches for Council to raise revenue, highlighting areas for focus as well as key concerns. Most supported revenue-raising opportunities: • Venue hire • Circular economy initiatives • Exploring other external funding opportunities Areas where Council should focus its efforts: • Revenue options that align with community values and deliver mutual benefit Least supported approaches: • The panel was least supportive of any revenue-raising options that posed risks detrimental to residents	The draft Council Plan reflects key revenue actions supported by the deliberative panel, and acknowledges the challenges, on page 19. Several initiatives consider this recommendation, and the action plan seek to establish alternative sources of funding such as initiative 2, 4, 11 and 15. Our commitment on page 10 underpins all Council actions stating: 'We are focused on ensuring every action and decision we take is responsible, transparent and efficient - maximising impact while delivering strong value for money. With a future-focused mindset, we continuously seek smarter, fairer and more sustainable ways to serve our community, ensuring our resources are positioned to meet both current and future needs.'

Deliberative Panel recommendations	Consideration in draft Council Plan
Climate Actions	
Many of Council's existing climate actions sparked mixed views among panel members, largely due to the breadth of initiatives and differing individual preferences. Most supported current actions included: • Energy and climate-resilient infrastructure and programs (e.g. micro-grids, solar on buildings) • Street trees program • Bushland rehabilitation and maintenance • Weed control • Yering Billabongs Project New ideas suggested by the panel: • Incentives for improved waste management • Council-led evaluation of household solar systems • E-books in libraries as a low-emissions alternative • A centralised Council webpage with resources to help residents reduce their emissions Recommendations for improvement: • Greater promotion of existing services • Clear information on the cost-benefit of available programs • Improved waste collection and management • Stronger advocacy for programs that directly benefit residents • Better community consultation and more opportunities for local skills development	The draft Council Plan reflects key climate actions supported by the deliberative panel, including investment in nature-based solutions such as billabong restoration and enhancing local tree canopy and biodiversity in the following initiatives: **6. Increase and protect biodiversity links and canopy connections.** *Increase and protect connected natural landscapes and healthy waterways for local biodiversity, and cooling affect.* **7. Use nature-based solutions to increase resilience of natural landscape in a changing climate.** *Partner with Traditional Owners and utilise solutions for the changing climate that work with nature, reducing impact of natural hazards (e.g. storms, flooding and fire).* While the Plan does not detail every action raised new ideas align to the following initiative: **8. Provide leadership in achieving net zero emissions and developing a resilient local energy supply** - *Deliver climate programs that strengthen community's climate adaptation and resilience to climate impacts. Support the transition to a net zero future, by increasing the use of renewable energy, improving energy efficiency, and promoting sustainable practices in local businesses and homes.* The broader strategic intent and leadership role of council is expressed on page 19, **Extreme weather and changing climate.**

Deliberative Panel recommendations	Consideration in draft Council Plan
Tourism	
The panel's preferred responses to the tourism challenge reflected a desire for bespoke, sustainable, and well-managed approaches that ease pressure on the community. Most supported tourism approaches: • Focus on dark sky tourism • Careful maintenance and enhancement of eco-tourism experiences Additional ideas with strong support: • The runner-up proposal for Horizon Hills, centred on regular, seasonal events Key message: • These suggestions indicate a clear preference for place-based tourism strategies that manage peak time stress and protect local amenity	The draft Council Plan reflects key tourism actions supported by the deliberative panel and acknowledges the challenge growth in tourism may present on page 19. *Prosperous Community and Vibrant Economy* on page 33, focuses on managing the impact of tourism in initiative **14. Strengthen tourism destination management across the region** *Collaborate across the new Visitor Economy Partnership and local communities to cohesively manage the impact of new and existing tourism assets on established communities and infrastructure.* The new Indicator on page 36, is proposed to measure growth in the percentage of overnight stays and aims see this increase in line with the regional target of 18 percent, by 2032.
Community engagement with Council decisions	
The panel expressed interest in Council playing a more active role in • Actively inform and involve the community in decision-making • Support opportunities for collaboration where possible • Help mediate discussions between residents and traders to foster mutual understanding	The draft Council Plan reflects key community engagement feedback from the deliberative panel, in Our commitment on page 10 & Community Vision page 17, and on page 25, the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2029 action to create inclusive and accessible local opportunities for children, young people and families to have a say and get involved in shaping their community and Council services.