

Mount Alexander Shire Council

Economic Development Strategy

*A thriving economy that serves the wellbeing of people,
place, and the environment.*

June 2024



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Executive summary

Mount Alexander Shire is a beautiful and vibrant place to live, with a diverse community and a great variety of businesses and organisations.

As we navigate rapid technological advancements, a climate crisis, pandemic upheavals, housing scarcity, and increasing demands on our healthcare system, our community faces important choices. Mount Alexander Shire Council recognises that real prosperity is more than just economic growth. It includes the health, happiness and overall wellbeing of our whole community. As we deal with the modern world's challenges, it is clear that traditional economic models, which focus only on financial measures, don't fully capture what makes life meaningful and fulfilling.

This is why we are adopting the idea of a wellbeing economy. By focusing on quality of life, environmental sustainability and social fairness, we aim to make our community more resilient and one that thrives with both nature and innovation. Our commitment to this approach underscores our belief that every resident deserves the opportunity to flourish, and that success should be seen in the richness of our lives. Through this approach, we hope to measure progress not just in financial terms but to see and feel it in the daily lives of our community.

This strategy builds on the 2021–2025 Council Plan pillar 'A resilient and growing local economy'. The pillar is about creating a strong and adaptable local economy. Council's objectives work to promote a diverse range of industries and reduce reliance on any single sector. Council supports continuous learning to ensure the local workforce can adapt to new technologies, whilst looking for ways to make business processes simpler to make operations more efficient and sustainable. Additionally, it encourages investment in the cultural and creative sectors to enrich the community and attract tourists.

Mount Alexander Shire Council's Economic Development Strategy's (EDS) vision is:

A thriving economy that serves the wellbeing of people, place, and the environment.

To achieve a more equitable economy that ensures prosperity and sustainability, we have developed six goals with related objectives to guide our efforts:

Goal 1: Prosperous local enterprises and organisations

- **Objective 1.1:** Support local enterprises and organisations.
- **Objective 1.2:** Grow local community wealth building.

Goal 2: Future-ready people and industry

- **Objective 2.1:** Support ongoing alignment between learning, workforce, and industry needs and opportunities.
- **Objective 2.2:** Enhance resilience and adaptability in people, enterprise and industry.

Goal 3: Connected and vibrant precincts

- **Objective 3.1:** Support thriving local precincts and neighbourhoods.
- **Objective 3.2:** Provide infrastructure and assets that support innovation, inclusion and connection.

Goal 4: Sustainable approaches and systems

- **Objective 4.1:** Learn and lead in sustainability and wellbeing approaches.

- **Objective 4.2:** Promote and support innovation in sustainability across the shire.
- **Objective 4.3:** Support the growth and mainstreaming of circular economy thinking and practice.

Goal 5: People participating equitably in the economy

- **Objective 5.1:** Reduce systemic barriers to economic participation.

Goal 6: Healthy Country

- **Objective 6.1:** Promote best practice in agribusiness development, agriculture and local food systems.
- **Objective 6.2:** Protect, preserve and promote health and aesthetics of Country.

Our approach

This strategy is developed in response to extensive community engagement through workshops, surveys and numerous conversations.

A Discussion Paper was developed which outlined the direction and purpose, setting a path into the development of a 'wellbeing economy' perspective. This paper presented a working model that could explore what, where, how and with whom to reshape our local economy so that it better serves the wellbeing of this place and people.

A Position Paper was then developed which outlined the key economic drivers, regional contexts and stakeholder analysis, and developed vision and goals which are now fleshed out and presented in this strategy.

Each year, we will develop achievable actions against the goals, objectives and strategic areas, based on where Council can have the biggest impact within our resource constraints. This plan recognises the work that is already occurring under other plans and strategies across Council, and will help to address gaps and support aligned initiatives.

These actions will depend on the priorities of the current council, and importantly what has changed in the community and external environment. Sometimes this means taking the lead, sometimes it is about supporting others to do the work, or it may mean advocacy.

A strategic decision-making framework

Throughout the strategy development, and as we move forward with actions and decisions, we are holding the following principles in mind to guide action, resource allocation, alignment and accountability.

How we think about our contribution to the economy

When we set and review goals and objectives, the process we go through is to consider 'How Mount Alexander Shire Council can best contribute to each goal in a way that':

- Builds on the unique strengths of the community, and of **Council**.
- Focuses on the areas where Council can have the most meaningful **impact**.
- Builds off and contributes to regional economic development **opportunities**.
- Aligns with the aspirations and needs of key partners and **stakeholders**.

- Encompasses wellbeing thinking and approaches:
 - **Holistic** (looking at the whole system).
 - **Preventative** (intervening as far upstream as possible).
 - **Values-based** (informed by community values and goals).
 - **Intergenerational** (making decisions with future generations in mind).
 - **Outcomes and impact focused** (keeping improved human and environmental health wellbeing in mind as the end goal).

Council's internal context and role

The objectives in the strategy were defined based on the areas of the economy where we have *the most* control and influence, although realising the benefits of the objectives will rely on other stakeholders. The goals themselves will require continued collective effort with community and stakeholders to achieve.

Council's role in the local economy is derived from its overarching vision – 'Working together for a healthy, connected shire'. The Economy and Culture Unit of Council holds primary responsibility for Council's economic development function which includes:

- Providing resources and opportunities to the industry/business sector to help build resilient, thriving and sustainable businesses.
- Facilitating coalitions and partnerships to promote active collaboration within the business community.
- Promoting and building capacity of tourism, arts and creative industries.
- Statewide advocacy to support local industry/business needs.

No team or strategy at Council operates as a silo, and the issues and opportunities presented in the EDS will rely heavily on the actions and leadership guided by other key plans and strategies, primarily:

- Council Plan.
- Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Other plans include: Industrial Land Use Strategy, Reconciliation Plan, Gender Equity Act, Climate Change Strategy, Disability Access Plan. This is not an exhaustive list and there are many relationships across Council and across projects.

The economic development function of Council sits at the complex intersection of community, social, cultural and environmental focussed functions. Cross collaboration and alignment across the various strategies and actions between these departmental areas (that have a direct impact on the local economy) is critical for a successful economic function of Council. Working together across the organisation, and in partnership with the community, is required to achieve the goals and objectives in this strategy.

About this Economic Development Strategy

This strategy is guided by six foundational goals, each representing an element of our vision for the future.

These goals symbolise our commitment to fostering prosperous enterprises, where businesses thrive and contribute to our community's growth and vitality.

We aim to help our workforce be 'future-ready', equipped with the skills to navigate an ever-evolving world, ensuring we are empowered to seize opportunities and innovate.

We want our precincts to be energetic and vital, serving as vibrant hubs of activity and culture that foster inclusion, connection and creativity.

Through sustainable practices, we are safeguarding resources for generations to come while fostering equitable participation.

We prioritise our natural environmental, learning from First Nations people and recognising the intrinsic connection between human wellbeing and the health of our natural world.

What hasn't changed is that:

- We review trends in demographic, industry and the global economy.
- We are drawing from the current strategic and political context.
- We acknowledge and build on the strengths of our economy and the community.
- We consider workforce, education and training, business and industry needs, skills, specialisation, supply chains, and traditional economy development components and principles.
- We show how the strategy draws from and contributes to other relevant strategies and plans.

What is different from previous approaches to the strategy is that:

- We have adopted a wellbeing focused approach, articulating values, issues and priorities, and Council's role in the economy, so the strategy can direct our decisions and actions over the long term.
- It defines a vision for the economy, nested within the community vision, increasing the relevance and responsiveness of our strategy to the aspirations of the community.
- We have engaged broadly, bringing in voices that are often absent in shaping the economy, including young people, care workers and under-represented groups.
- We have sought to balance accountability with agility – giving the community and our stakeholders enough detail about our approach to ensure alignment and seizing the opportunities, without providing so much detail that we lock ourselves into actions or roles that become outdated.

This strategy will be reviewed at planned intervals, and when there are big shifts or shocks in the systems that require us to go back to our context and issues analysis to make sure they are still relevant.

A local and wellbeing focused approach

When we looked at the community vision and asked ourselves how an economy could best serve to achieve that vision, we asked ourselves '*What approaches and disciplines can we use to bring this to life?*' While several practices and principles have been drawn from, the main ones are:

'Wellbeing economy'

A wellbeing economy considers not just immediate economic gains, but also the long-term health and happiness of our community and the environment we rely on. It's about finding a balance where economic activity supports our wellbeing today without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. In this approach, the economy isn't seen as separate from our wellbeing, but as a tool to enhance it. By aligning economic activities with the goal of improving overall quality of life, we can create a more sustainable and resilient society.

'Place-based systems change'

'Place-based systems change' is all about joining forces to tackle important issues and take advantage of opportunities in our local area. It's about using the knowledge, skills, and connections we have in the shire to make meaningful changes. It means working together to create positive and lasting changes that benefit everyone.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

There are 17 SDGs (<https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>) of which we have identified that Local Government has influence on only around 10 of these. Each goal in this plan has been associated with a number of SDGs. We use these indicators so that we can understand our progress towards globally recognised social justice and environmental sustainability.

SDG 1: No Poverty – End poverty in all its forms everywhere.

SDG 3: Good health and wellbeing – Ensuring healthy lives and promoting the wellbeing for all at all ages is essential to sustainable development.

SDG 4: Quality Education – Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

SDG 5: Gender Equality – Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth – Sustainable economic growth will require societies to create the conditions that allow people to have quality jobs.

SDG 9: Industry innovation and infrastructure – Investments in infrastructure are crucial to achieving sustainable development.

SDG 10: Reduced inequalities – To reduce inequalities, policies should be universal in principle, paying attention to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalised populations.

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities – There needs to be a future in which cities provide opportunities for all, with access to basic services, energy, housing, transportation and more.

SDG 15: Life on Land – Protect and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions – Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.

Priority issues for our economy

Throughout the EDS development we engaged and listened broadly. We heard that priority issues are housing, childcare, transport, ageing well, mental health, disability access and inclusion, the need for young people to have a leading role in shaping the economy, racism, discrimination based on gender identity and sexual orientation, the cost of living, and food security.

We also heard concerns about the health of the environment that will impact the economy like soil and waterway health and biodiversity.

For example:

- Housing access and stress is impacting people's sense of safety and mental health, and there can be immediate flow-on to accessing work and education. Often families are forced into areas away from school and support networks, with little access to transport. The lack of affordable housing means that local employers can't attract and retain staff, which is impacting organisations and services of all types, from hospitality and tourism to manufacturing and healthcare.
- Childcare access impacts parents and carers, and their capacity to work or study, which can have flow-on impacts for financial security, mental health and a sense of belonging. These issues are often compounded by related issues of housing, financial stress, isolation, and access to health and wellbeing services. For families lucky enough to have support from other family members it often means those family members are taking time out of the workforce to provide support.
- Other issues which impact Council's ability to shape the economy include land availability, zoning, and existing infrastructure.

Council is already working on a number of these issues through initiatives such as the Housing Strategy and the Early Years Strategy, and we are acknowledging these here because they have such a big impact on wellbeing and the economy.

These areas we're focusing on aren't just important for people's lives, they also present opportunities for economic growth. For example, making places more inclusive and accessible can bring in more visitors, and finding ways to help people age well locally can create new businesses and jobs. It's all about working together with businesses, community groups and policymakers to tackle these challenges in ways that make our community, economy and the environment even better and more resilient.

Growth and strength industries

We heard from the community that we have historical strengths, areas of recent growth and areas that are opportunities for the future.

Historical strengths	More recent areas of growth / strength	What we will need more of
Heavy industries inc. mining	Construction	Care economy
Manufacturing	Tourism & visitor economy (inc. accommodation and food services, gastronomy)	Food systems & small-scale agriculture
Automotive		Sustainability products, industry, initiatives and organisations
Heritage and restoration	Circular economy	First Nations enterprise and initiatives
	Creative economy	Digital and technology-advanced work and industry
	Knowledge economy (professional, scientific and technical services)	Renewable energy
	Healthcare and social assistance	Education and skills development
	Retail trade	Gastronomy tourism, eco-tourism and cultural tourism
		Urban renewal and brownfield development
		Recycling and waste management services
		Business incubators and innovation infrastructure

What else will change as we grow our wellbeing economy?

Beyond a focus on industry, there are other aspects of the economy where we will see change as our local economy strengthens with a focus on a wellbeing economy. These changes will include:

- More and stronger local small businesses (sole traders, owner-operator, micro-business and cooperatives).
- Increased economic complexity, including strengthened value chains, more diversification and more things made (and repaired, restored and repurposed) in our region.
- Improved livelihoods and individual/family security that enables individuals to contribute to the economy through volunteering, caring and other high-value work.

Vision, goals and objectives

The vision, goals and objectives of this Economic Development Strategy are aligned with the Community Vision and take a considered view of how economic development, and Council's unique role in our local economy, can have the most impact in achieving the long-term wellbeing of people, place and the environment. They are described in more detail below.

Council community vision

In 2031, our community is connected to each other, and comes together to build and celebrate an inclusive, creative shire.

- We are a healthy community that values the natural beauty of the Djaara Country we live on. We also know that preserving our natural environment means living sustainably and caring for country.
- We are protecting our shire from the threat of climate change by working together at the local level.
- We are a welcoming community where everybody has access to services and supports, and opportunities for housing, education, employment, and creative and social pursuits.
- We're known as a vibrant place which draws upon its creative spirit and shared heritage.
- We're building a place where everyone can enjoy the beauty, history and friendliness of the shire.

Economy vision

A thriving economy that serves the wellbeing of people, place and the environment.

Economy goals

- Prosperous local enterprises and organisations.
- Future-ready people and industry.
- Connected and vibrant precincts.
- Sustainable approaches and systems.
- People participating equitably in the economy.
- Healthy Country.

Goal 1 – Prosperous local enterprises and organisations

About this goal

Supporting locally owned and governed businesses and organisations is a key goal for a wellbeing economy, as they provide the combined benefits of:

- Local employment.
- Maximising local wealth investment (and reinvestment) as more spending stays in the shire.
- Reliability and control of asset use and employment.
- Strengthened local supply chains.

Local businesses give back to the community, and generally have a greater sense of social and environmental responsibility. They value and work to maintain the social license to operate in the shire.

When we have prosperous organisations, we also maximise local work and volunteering opportunities that are purposeful, dignified and create connection.

What Council is already doing

Council supports local enterprises and organisations through a range of initiatives. These include a business help desk, engagement with local business associations, prioritising local procurement, offering grants and in-kind support, supporting artists and artisans, advocating for favourable policies, promoting tourism, sharing positive news, participating in job fairs, and investing in local infrastructure. There is also the continuous work to enhance statutory planning, permit, registration and approval processes. Council has also actively supported several First Nations projects and enterprises. Council makes its spaces and assets available to community organisations and for commercial events and activities.

Objectives and strategic areas

	What we want to achieve (Objectives)	Strategic areas
1.1	Support local enterprises and organisations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the start-up, operations and growth of businesses that align with the council's commitment to enhancing community wellbeing. 2. Enable business and industry growth by seeking opportunities to minimise regulatory burden and improve customer experience.
1.2	Grow local community wealth building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support locally owned and governed businesses. 2. Favour local businesses and encourage wellbeing economy practices in procurement. 3. Support 'buy-local' campaigns and initiatives that stimulate the local economy. 4. Support First Nations economy and enterprise. 5. Encourage and reward volunteering. 6. Support the use of Council and community assets for innovation and wellbeing business models.

Links to other internal strategies: Council Plan 2021-2025, Shaping an Industrial Future, Customer Service Strategy, Reconciliation Action Plan, Arts Strategy (2017), Public Open Space Strategy.

Links to other external strategies: Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy, Loddon Campaspe Regional Employment Innovation Corridor Plan, DJAARA Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan, Nalderun Strategic Plan, Bendigo Regional Destination Management Plan and Local Area Action Plan.

Sustainable Development Goals:

- 8. Decent work and economic growth.
- 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure.
- 11. Sustainable cities and communities.

Goal 2 – Future-ready people and industry

About this goal

Being ready for the future means not just learning new skills, but also being able to adapt and think ahead. It's about planning for the long term and making sure everyone's goals match up with what the community needs. This includes improving education, planning our workforce better, and being open to new ideas and technologies. It is also about working towards our local economy connecting well with the wider region and ensuring people and businesses have the tools they need to succeed.

What Council is already doing

Council actively collaborates with local educational institutions, businesses and organisations to boost economic growth and increase job opportunities. Council promotes entrepreneurship through hosting workshops and supports the creation of coworking spaces. Additionally, Council assists communities affected by extreme weather events in recovery efforts and resilience building.

Objectives and strategic areas

	What we want to achieve (Objectives)	Strategic areas
2.1	Support ongoing alignment between learning, workforce, and industry needs and opportunities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support collaboration between business, community, government and training sectors to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Improve future workforce readiness. b. Create new training and learning opportunities. c. Encourage business innovation. 2. Work with state and regional government bodies to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Align policy and resourcing to wellbeing objectives. b. Better connect businesses and markets along the Calder Employment and Innovation Corridor to each other, and external opportunities and markets.
2.2	Enhance resilience and adaptability in people, enterprise and industry	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with the business, community, government and training sectors to <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increase understanding of shared risks (e.g. climate, disaster, and economic downturn) as well as opportunities for innovation. b. Connect organisations and enterprises with resources, information and expertise. c. Develop individual and organisational capacity around resilience and disruption preparedness.

Links to other internal strategies: Council Plan 2021-2025.

Links to other external strategies: Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy, Loddon Campaspe Regional Employment Innovation Corridor Plan, RDA Loddon Mallee Industry 4.0 Business & Investment Prospectus, Loddon Campaspe Regional Growth Summit Summary Report.

Sustainable Development Goals:

- 4. Quality education.
- 8. Decent work and economic growth.
- 9. Industry, innovation and infrastructure.
- 11. Sustainable cities and communities.

Goal 3 – Connected and vibrant precincts

About this goal

We want our towns to be vibrant and full of life, and for people to be able to move easily between them to access opportunities for learning, work and fun. This means investing in places like local business areas and hosting events where people can come together.

Strong and vibrant neighbourhoods also enable connection and the opportunity for people to provide support for each other, and create opportunities and solve problems for their local areas.

When we build welcoming and inclusive places, it helps everyone feel happier and more connected to each other and to our shire.

What Council is already doing

Council supports local markets, festivals and events, as well as places where people can come together, like the regular community lunch at Castlemaine and Maldon's Community Houses. We work alongside businesses to make our towns more accessible for everyone. Council invests in arts, festivals, public art and special events to bring our community together and to celebrate our diversity, health and the beautiful environment around us. We take care of our parks and gardens, beautiful buildings and streetscapes. We also work to create safe and fun places for young people to stay connected.

Objectives and strategic areas

	What we want to achieve (Objectives)	Strategic areas
3.1	Support thriving local precincts and neighbourhoods	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Actively engage with our shops and traders to make our area more inviting and accessible.2. Work to fill vacant spaces or refresh existing places for shops, fun, work, play, connection, and innovation, ensuring they're vibrant and inclusive. This includes neighbourhoods, towns and hamlets, and other places of connection.3. Prioritise connection, inclusion, and health when we plan and talk about making our towns and places better.4. Support local businesses and developers to meet the accommodation needs of visitors to the area.
3.2	Provide infrastructure and assets that support innovation, inclusion and connection.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Work closely with state and regional authorities, and organisational stakeholders to advocate for our area's needs in regional planning and development.2. Advocate for increased support to finance upgrades in walking, cycling, roads, trains, and delivery and transport routes for enhanced accessibility.3. Prioritise the long-term health and happiness of our community and the environment when developing strategic plans.

Links to other internal strategies: Council Plan 2021-2025, Industrial Land Strategy, Maldon Town Plan, Plan Harcourt, Active Transport Strategy, Public Open Space Strategy.

Links to other external strategies: Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy, Loddon Campaspe Regional Employment Innovation Corridor Plan, Loddon Campaspe Regional Growth Summit Summary Report.

Sustainable Development Goals:

- 3. Good health and wellbeing.
- 8. Decent work and economic growth.
- 10. Reduced inequalities.
- 11. Sustainable cities and communities.

Goal 4 – Sustainable approaches and systems

About this goal

We have the people, industry and capacity to lead the way in our region by coming up with smart ideas for a sustainable economy. We're focusing on things like recycling, using land wisely and promoting local food. This not only helps the environment but also creates new jobs and supports business. By doing this, we're working towards reducing our impact on the planet and moving closer to net-zero emissions.

What Council is already doing

Council is committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2025 for its own operations, implementing a wide range of strategies and initiatives which prioritise sustainability, energy efficiency measures and waste reduction strategies. Council supports local sustainability initiatives through grants and funding opportunities, and collaborates with waste management companies to improve recycling efforts. Council also supports community gardens and promotes the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency. Council uses 100% renewable electricity and is increasing its use of electric and hybrid vehicles. Council is also committed to reducing the generation of waste, increasing resource recovery of reusable and recyclable materials, supporting a local circular economy, and minimising the environmental impacts of waste management.

Council is currently piloting a Community Carbon project to deliver a native planting program, helping us reach our goal of net-zero emissions.

Objectives and strategic areas

	What we want to achieve (Objectives)	Strategic areas
4.1	Learn and lead in sustainability and wellbeing approaches	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to develop internal processes which promote sustainability, wellbeing and holistic decision making. 2. Learn from and amplify: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. First Nations perspectives and support effective community initiatives. b. Community initiatives, businesses and other organisations which have found ways to improve sustainability and wellbeing. 3. Help businesses connect with resources to understand how their choices and structure can impact people's health and sense of wellbeing, and supports opportunities to make positive changes. 4. Partner with community in genuine and open engagement processes. 5. Encourage long-term thinking and action for a better future.
4.2	Promote and support innovation in sustainability across the shire	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support local sustainability initiatives. 2. Foster eco-friendly industry growth. 3. Advocate for change to systems to support new ideas in sustainability and wellbeing.
4.3	Support the growth and mainstreaming of circular economy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage businesses, organisations and individuals in sustainable consumption and production, and cultivate a culture of reuse, repair, recycling, and closed-loop systems.

Links to other internal strategies: Council Plan 2021-2025, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024, Climate Change Strategy, Communications and Engagement Strategy, Waste Management Strategy 2023-2033, Environment Strategy.

Links to other external strategies: Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy, Loddon Campaspe Regional Employment Innovation Corridor Plan, DJAARA Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan, Nalderun Strategic Plan, RDA Loddon Mallee Industry 4.0 Business & Investment Prospectus.

Sustainable Development Goals:

- 3. Good health and wellbeing.
- 10. Reduced inequalities.
- 15. Life on land.
- 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions.

Goal 5 – People participating equitably in the economy

About this goal

In the well-being economy that we are working towards, everyone's needs are met, and everyone feels safe and respected. People can reach their goals and do their best over time. This helps local businesses to grow.

We acknowledge that issues like discrimination, violence and poverty happen in our community. We do what we can to address these issues, and aspire to a fair and inclusive economy, where everyone can take part in making decisions about the issues which affect them.

What Council is already doing

Council provides care to those in need through Council-run services and by collaborating with community organisations to offer support services for those facing economic hardship. It supports initiatives for affordable housing and food security while facilitating connections between job seekers and local employers through networking events, job fairs and workshops.

Council is committed to ensuring public spaces are accessible for individuals with disabilities and fostering a community culture of inclusion and acceptance towards groups including First Nations, migrant groups and the LGBTQIA+ community.

Objectives and strategic areas

	What we want to achieve (Objectives)	Strategic areas
5.1	Reduce systemic barriers to economic participation	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Encourage organisations to prioritise health and wellbeing in their operations, including mental health.2. Work closely with partners and stakeholders to address changing community needs (including current issues of housing, childcare, service access and mental health).3. Find ways to nurture and strengthen the care economy, including Council-run services.4. Work to improve access to education, volunteering, job opportunities, businesses and public spaces for everyone, regardless of differences or age.5. Continue to implement – and build upon – existing efforts to foster a community culture of inclusion and acceptance towards priority groups in the community (e.g. First Nations, migrant groups, the LGBTQIA+ community).

Links to other internal strategies: Council Plan 2021-2025, Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, Reconciliation Plan 2023-2026, Disability Inclusion Action Plan, Gender Equality Action Plan, Youth Engagement Action Plan (2017).

Links to other external strategies: Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy, Loddon Campaspe Regional Employment Innovation Corridor Plan, DJAARA Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan, Nalderun

Strategic Plan.

Sustainable Development Goals:

- 3. Good health and wellbeing.
- 8. Decent work and economic growth.
- 10. Reduced inequalities.
- 11. Sustainable cities and communities.
- 16. Peace, justice and strong institutions.

Goal 6 – Healthy Country

About this goal

Our natural environment is crucial for both our wellbeing and economy. We aim to promote responsible land use, including in farming and housing, and infrastructure development, to ensure soil, land and waterways are protected. We also understand that supporting farmers in adopting eco-friendly methods and planning for the future is important.

We seek to collaborate with Indigenous groups to learn how to better care for the land, and we support events and tourism that highlight our land and culture.

Our goal is to strike a balance between growth and preserving nature for everyone, now and in the future.

What Council is already doing

Council is committed to environmental conservation and sustainable land management. We collaborate with local organisations to protect natural areas, rivers and wildlife habitats, while also establishing community gardens and walking trails. Our initiatives include promoting native plant use, supporting farmers' markets and working with farmers. We actively work to reduce plastic usage, restore ecosystems and protect endangered species. Council partners with Landcare groups and Indigenous organisations to preserve native vegetation and culture.

Objectives and strategic areas

	What we want to achieve (Objectives)	Strategic areas
6.1	Promote best practice in agribusiness development, agriculture and local food systems	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Plan land use for future generations, thinking about the need for food, homes, soil and waterway health, and nature.2. Encourage the adoption of sustainable and regenerative practices in farming, food production, distribution and manufacturing.
6.2	Protect, preserve, and promote health and aesthetics of Country	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Partner with Traditional Owners and First Nations initiatives and enterprise to look after and heal the land.2. Work with local organisations to take care of nature, including rivers and wildlife.3. Support tourism and events that share the stories of our land and culture.

Links to other internal strategies: Council Plan 2021-2025, Domestic Wastewater Management Action Plan, Environment Strategy, Castlemaine Botanic Gardens Flora and Fauna Reserve Environment Plan, Reconciliation Action Plan.

Links to other external strategies: DJAARA Dhelkunya Dja Country Plan, DJAARA Gatjin (Water) Strategy, Nalderun Strategic Plan, Coliban Water Strategy (dhelk gatjin dhelk balak).

Sustainable Development Goals:

- 3. Good health and wellbeing.

- 8. Decent work and economic growth.
- 10. Reduced inequalities.
- 12. Responsible consumption and production.
- 15. Life on land.

Next steps

Review and renewal

This strategy will be reviewed and refreshed at the following planned intervals which are:

- Change to the Community Vision.
- A new Council Plan.
- Interim strategy review process (offset against the Council Plan review cycle).
- Inputs from monitoring, evaluation and learnings, and continuous improvement.

Other triggers for a review might include significant external shocks and changes (inc. legislation, policy, or political context, national and global disruptions).

Annual Action Plans which respond to the Goals, Objectives and Strategic Areas will be developed (see page 4, 'Our Approach').

Council will be developing Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework for this strategy which will guide experimentation and continuous learning and feed into the review cycle.

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