

Cardinia Shire Council



Emerald Lake Precinct

Strategic Plan 2020–30



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1 Introduction

In close proximity to the Dandenong Ranges, about 45 kilometres south-east of Melbourne, are two distinctly unique yet strongly connected parklands – Emerald Lake and Nobelius Heritage parks. Together, these historic and beautiful parks have recently become Emerald Lake Precinct (ELP).

Cardinia Shire Council has developed the draft *Emerald Lake Precinct Strategic Plan 2020–30*. This plan builds on previous strategic documents that focussed solely on the individual parks and that created solid foundations on which the future of the precinct can build.

As this is a newly formed precinct, Council’s approach to developing this plan needed to ensure the following attributes were considered:

- incorporating both Emerald Lake and Nobelius Heritage parks as a precinct, yet respecting each park’s individuality

- recognising the precinct is considered a regional level open space and develops service levels that meet this expectation
- incorporating key placemaking principles to ensure success and buy-in of visitors and stakeholders
- identifying goals and objectives to be met, yet allowing space and flexibility to take up unforeseen opportunities
- aligning with the *Council Plan 2019–23* and Council’s *Liveability Plan 2017–29*
- ongoing review of how the goals and objectives are being met.

To incorporate these attributes into the strategic plan, Council referenced the Project of Public Spaces (PPS) Placemaking Process¹ and The Place Diagram² assessment tool.



1 Project for Public Spaces, *The Placemaking Process*, <https://www.pps.org/article/5-steps-to-making-places>
2 Project for Public Spaces, *What makes a successful place?* <https://www.pps.org/article/grplacefeat>



2 Strategic context

The *ELP Strategic Plan* aligns closely with two key Council documents: the *Council Plan 2019–23* and Council's *Liveability Plan 2017–29* which are summarised below. How the *ELP Strategic Plan* considers and aligns with the *Project of Public Places (PPS) Placemaking Process* is also outlined.

2.1 Cardinia Shire Council Plan 2019–23

The Council Plan sets out a medium to long-term vision for how we will respond to community needs and the opportunities and challenges facing Cardinia Shire. The five key strategic objectives are:

1. **Our people:** We support a variety of needs and lifestyles through programs and activities that promote and develop the wellbeing of Cardinia Shire's people.
2. **Our community:** We will foster a strong sense of connection between Cardinia Shire's diverse communities.
3. **Our environment:** We will continue to plan and manage the natural and built environment for present and future generations.
4. **Our economy:** We will create and support local employment and business opportunities for our community and the wider region.
5. **Our governance:** We will consult with the community, as appropriate, in an open and accountable way to help in determining the key direction of Council.

2.2 Cardinia Shire's Liveability Plan 2017–29

The *Liveability Plan 2017–29* is Council's public health plan for Cardinia Shire and has been developed to provide a clear framework for public health planning within the shire. The framework outlines the common agenda that Council, partners and the community, will collectively work towards over the next 12 years. The Liveability Plan identifies seven policy domain objectives.

Active travel – In Cardinia Shire, walking and cycling for transport is safe, enjoyable, accessible and linked to promote social connection, reduce financial hardship and enhance the health of people and the environment.

Education – In Cardinia Shire, all residents have access to a variety of education and training opportunities close to home. Modern and contemporary learning environments support quality education, continuous learning, enhanced employment opportunities, social connection and better health outcomes.

Employment – Cardinia Shire residents are skilled to access local jobs in a resilient, innovative and thriving local economy. Workplaces are inclusive and promote the health, wellbeing and safety of workers.

Food – Cardinia Shire's healthy, delicious, sustainable and fair local food system promotes the health of people, strengthens the local economy and enhances the natural environment.

Health and social services – In Cardinia Shire, local services and community groups work together to ensure residents can access appropriate and affordable services and facilities which promote and protect health and wellbeing throughout life.

Housing – Cardinia Shire encourages diverse, high quality and sustainable housing, affordable for all, in close proximity to employment, education, goods and services and open space, which is connected by active travel infrastructure and meets the needs of a growing and diverse community.

Open spaces and places – Open space in Cardinia Shire is strategically planned, developed and maintained to create a sense of place, encourage participation, protect the natural environment and promote health and wellbeing.

2.3 Placemaking

Placemaking is a practical and philosophical approach for creating and transforming public places. It emphasises the requirement of listening to the community and visitors, recognising it as a place where people live, work and play. Understanding the current and future needs for that place and aspirations of the community. The process that placemaking follows includes:

- defining a place and identifying stakeholders
- evaluating space and identifying issues
- develop a place vision
- short-term experiments and quick wins
- ongoing re-evaluations and long-term improvements.

The process can be applied to new or existing places and the steps may vary depending on that particular place and the people who use it. The *Project of Public Places (PPS); Placemaking Process* provides further

3 Emerald Lake Precinct

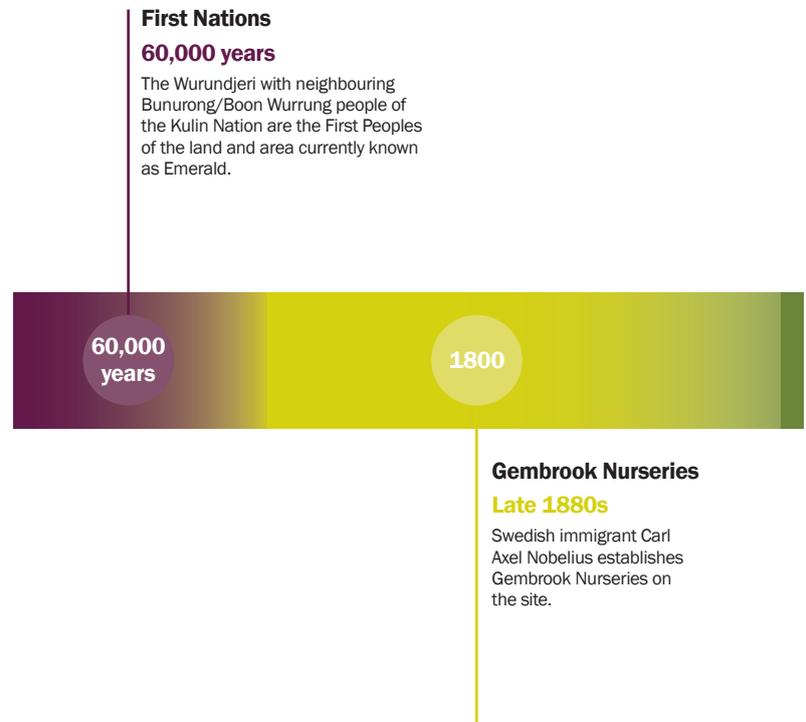
3.1 History

Emerald Lake Precinct has had a rich and fruitful history, from the First Nations who lived and connected with the land, through post-settlement development and economic drive to public recreational parklands of state significance.

The timeline (Figure 2) shows some of the key milestones in the history of the precinct. For further details on the history of the precinct, visit:

- Emerald Museum as part of your visit to the precinct
- Melbourne’s Dandenong Ranges visitor site at www.visitdandenongranges.com.au/history
- Emerald Museum and Nobelius Heritage Park website at www.emeraldmuseum.org.au/our-history
- Emerald Lake Park website at www.cardinia.vic.gov.au/elphistory
- Puffing Billy Railway website at www.puffingbilly.com.au/about/history-heritage
- Friends of Emerald Lake Park website at www.felp.org.au

Figure 2. Emerald Lake Precinct historic timeline



Railway opens

1900

Narrow gauge railway line opened. CA Nobelius lobbied for the line from Ferntree Gully and in 1904 was granted permission to build a packing shed alongside the railway line.

Public park

1939

Land now known as Emerald Lake Park officially developed as a park in 1939 and is acquired by the former Shire of Ferntree Gully and officially opened in 1940.

Railway re-opens

1962

Puffing Billy Railway re-opens line from Belgrave to Menzies Creek. Reopening is driven by Puffing Billy Preservation Society which was formed due to the public interest. Expansion of the line to Emerald (1962), Lakeside (1975) and Gembrook (1998).

Emerald Museum

1993

Purpose built Emerald Museum is constructed and opened in Nobelius Heritage Park, moving the museum from the Emerald hall.

FELP

2000

Friends of Emerald Lake Park (FELP) is established as a volunteer group with about 40 local people coming together to restore and preserve Emerald Lake Park. The group are still actively working with Council.

1900

1921

1939

1954

1962

1980s

1993

1994

2000

2017

Syndicate ownership

1921

CA Nobelius dies in 1921. Land sold to a syndicate (consisting of Dr William Bottomley, William Treganowan and Bertie Sellars Stilwell) which continued the nursery production for around 20 years.

Railway closes

1954

Railway line officially closed after a landslide blocked the track in 1953 and subsequent operating losses.

Public park

1980s

Emerald Museum opens in Emerald hall in 1981. The land on which Nobelius (formerly Gembrook) Nurseries is based is purchased by the former Shire of Sherbrooke in 1981 with the help of the Victorian Government and is reopened in 1988 as a public park. Nobelius Heritage Park Committee is formed in 1988.

New Council

1994

Cardinia Shire Council is formed and ownership and management of park is transferred. Structure of Nobelius Heritage Park Committee continued and subsequently named Nobelius Heritage Park and Emerald Museum Committee.

A Precinct

2017

Following staff restructures, Cardinia Shire Council made the decision to connect Emerald Lake and Nobelius Heritage parks under the banner of the Emerald Lake Precinct (ELP).

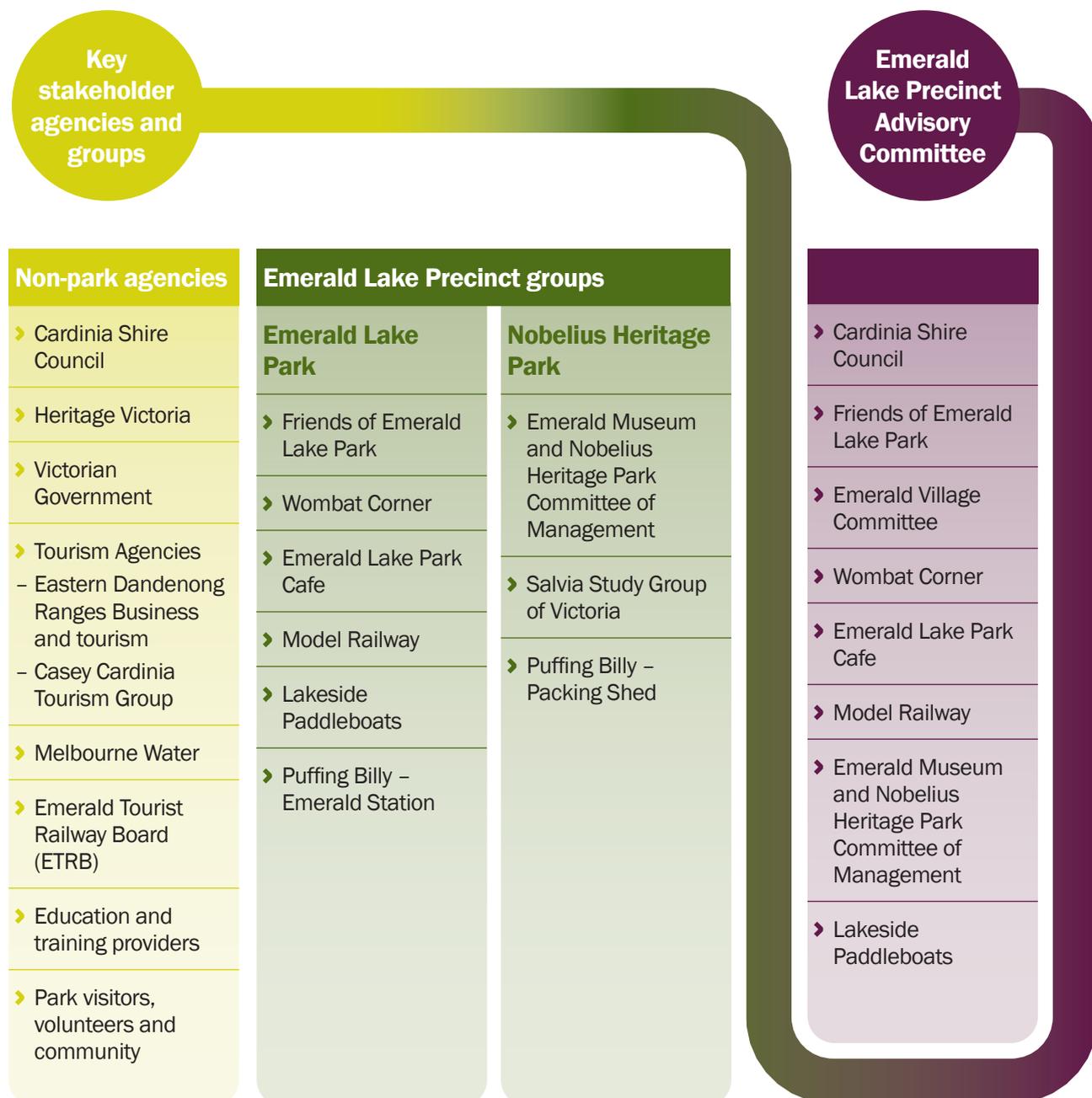


4 Precinct stakeholders

4.1 Who's involved?

Many people are involved in operating and managing Emerald Lake Precinct. Figure 3 shows the organisations, volunteer groups, community groups and businesses connected to the successful management of the precinct.

Figure 3. Stakeholders involved in ELP







5 Precinct vision

Council's vision for the Emerald Lake Precinct is:

- The precinct is recognised as a regional park offering a unique blend of natural, historical, recreational and cultural experiences for local, regional, national and international visitors.
- The precinct is accessible for all ages, abilities and cultures and hosts a range of opportunities for social and economic exchanges.
- The precinct is well maintained and comfortable and offers appropriate amenities and infrastructure expected in a regional open space.
- Visitors are engaged in a range of events, activations, recreation and leisure activities and the precinct supports both public and private functions.
- Through sustainable management and practices, the precinct balances development with the natural environment.



6 Community engagement

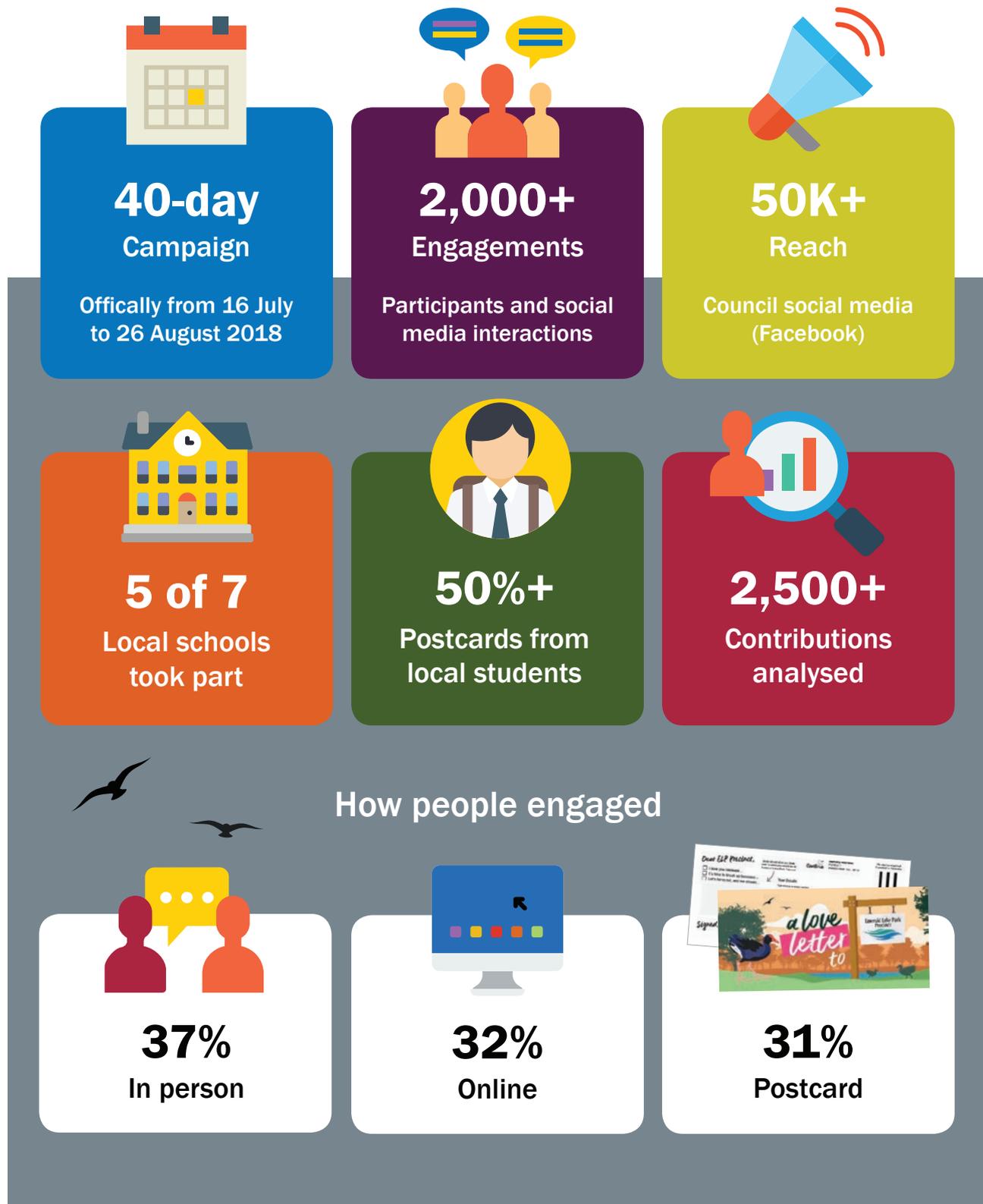
Council undertook extensive community engagement for the development of the strategic plan. Phase One (16 July to 26 August 2018) began the development of the plan, using eight engagement methods, including interviews, surveys, postcard submissions and forums. Opportunities to 'have a say' were promoted across eight different avenues, reaching more than 50,400 people via social media alone.

Phase Two consultation on the plan took place over seven weeks from 24 September until 11 November 2019. 146 individual pieces of feedback were received and were generally based around the issues and opportunities in the precinct. This feedback led to 14 amendments to the draft strategic plan to create the final plan.

Figure 4. Community engagement summary

Emerald Lake Precinct Community Engagement

During 2018, Council undertook extensive community engagement to inform the development of the Emerald Lake Precinct Strategic Plan. Here is a summary of the process and feedback.



Who took part



74%
Cardinia Shire residents



26%
Reside elsewhere

22%
<15 years

4%
16–24 years

39%
25–44 years

23%
45–64 years

12%
65+ years

What they said



Maintenance standards and upkeep

The need for a long-term maintenance program for the precinct and a desire for an increased level of service standard to be implemented.



Events and activation

A desire to have an increased number of events and activations within the precinct.



Food and hospitality

Disappointment in food delivery opportunities within the precinct, and a desire to have more options, including healthy options, expanded hours and more inviting spaces available to park visitors.



Parking and road access

Opposition to current car parking fees and a desire for improved pedestrian walkways, clearly signed wayfinding between parks, plus concerns regarding Emerald Lake Road.



Playground and pool

A desire to upgrade the swimming and water play options within the precinct, including opening times of the current facilities and potential zero depth water play opportunities, and to increase play space options to incorporate accessible and nature play options.

7 Precinct strategic goals

The key themes emerging from the community engagement data were used to develop the precinct strategic goals and objectives for the plan. These goals will guide how Council manages, maintains and activates the Emerald Lake Precinct over the next 10 years.

1. Activation and engagement

ELP is a leading outdoor venue for quality educational, entertaining, active, passive, private and public activities and events all year round.

2. Environmental, cultural and historical significance

ELP is recognised and celebrated for its distinctive environmental, cultural and historical significance and offerings.

3. Accessibility and inclusion

ELP is well connected, accessible and hosts a variety of offerings for all ages, abilities and nationalities.

4. Sociability and comfort

ELP is the place of choice for local, national and international visitors to establish and build social connections, feel welcome and create memories.

5. Sustainability

ELP is a leading example in sustainable operation and management.

7.1 Activation and engagement

ELP is a leading outdoor venue for quality educational, entertaining, active, passive, private and public activities and events all year round.

7.1.1 Why?

Community feedback told us that you wanted to see more events and activations at the precinct.

Visitors enjoyed what was already on offer, i.e. annual music events, theatre shows, races and treasure hunts; however, believed the precinct could offer so much more. The uniqueness of the precinct and the variety of visitors made it an ideal location to offer a range of programs, including educational programs, organised recreation activities and classes, arts and cultural events, festivals and markets (plus much more). Council heard that the community enjoyed hosting private and public events and it was important that the precinct offer better opportunities to facilitate these more easily in future. It was important that up-to-date information was provided in a range of ways to promote activities and events, as well inform the community about operational activities that will have a direct impact on them.

7.1.2 Objectives – what we will do

- Explore partnerships to offer a variety of events and activations programs (educational, entertaining, Council funded, community led and commercial).
- Have the infrastructure in place to support a range of uses and activities including community events.
- Have clear processes and resources to support community use of spaces, community-led placemaking activities and events.
- Engage visitors in activities and events as a way of expanding their understanding and involvement with the precinct and broader social commentary.
- Engage and promote events and activities through a range of mediums, technology and based on latest trends to reach a wide audience.
- Support opportunities for the community to be more involved and informed with what is happening in the precinct from both an events, maintenance and operational perspective.

7.2 Environmental, cultural and historical significance

ELP is recognised and celebrated for its distinctive environmental, cultural and historical significance and offerings

7.2.1 Why?

Community feedback told us that the natural environment and history of the precinct was important. The community felt it was important that the unique stories were shared so that not only locals knew them, but so that visitors from further afield could also better appreciate and learn from them. The feedback on the draft strategic plan also told us that it was important to protect and enhance the environmental significance of the precinct, promoting the native and indigenous flora and fauna as well as significant tree species.

7.2.2 Objectives – what we will do

- Preserve and enhance significant natural environmental assets in the precinct.
- Ensure the precinct has a strong promotional presence in eco-tourism, environmental and public sectors.
- Increase visitors' understanding of the precinct's environmental significance and ecological issues.
- Educate visitors on the precinct's historical significance and how that translates to the present day (including Aboriginal, post settlement, economic and industrial themes).
- Encourage locals and visitors to have a strong sense of pride and increased stewardship of the precinct (natural and built).
- Ensure upkeep and maintenance of natural and built assets is proactive, and meets service standards that balance community expectations and Council resources.
- Ensure future infrastructure upgrades and development is considerate of environmental, historical and cultural significance that meets current standards and visitor expectations
- Ensure measures are put in place for the protection of significant built and natural assets, including waterways, during any upgrade or new build works.



7.3 Accessibility and inclusion

ELP is well connected, accessible and hosts a variety of offerings for all ages, abilities and nationalities.

7.3.1 Why?

The community feedback told us of your favourite areas within the precinct and what made them unique. We heard visitors come with families and groups of friends of all ages and abilities.

The community told us that people of all abilities want to use the space, but felt some areas were not considered safe or accessible. Council heard that visitors don't always explore all that the precinct has on offer as it can be difficult for people to navigate, move, or feel safe in all areas of the precinct.

Feedback highlighted that the two parks did not yet feel connected and were somewhat disconnected from Emerald township.

The community wanted more activities and events to take place throughout the calendar year that are relevant to local, regional, national and international visitors.

7.3.2 Objectives – what we will do

- Encourage visitors to explore the range of key nodes within the precinct (e.g. bushland, 'urban', historical, trails).
- Provide accessible and inclusive facilities and trails where appropriate, recognising that not all areas in the precinct can meet all abilities due to the natural topography of the landscape.
- Ensure the precinct has proactive maintenance regimes in place and sufficient resources to manage the infrastructure and grounds.
- Ensure adequate resources to proactively manage, maintain and activate the precinct
- Ensure visitors of all ages, abilities and nationalities can easily navigate between the individual parks, key nodes and activities in the precinct.
- Identify opportunities to better connect ELP to the Emerald township.
- Develop a varied program of events and activities.
- Ensure the precinct supports social connections across ages, abilities and cultures.
- Recognise, embrace and celebrate local, national and international interests and cultures through programing and information sharing.
- Ensure precinct staff represent Council in key industry sectors and keep up-to-date with developments, opportunities, legislation, industry best practice and relevant regulations.



7.4 Sociability and comfort

ELP is the place of choice for local, national and international visitors to establish and build social connections, feel welcome and create memories.

7.4.1 Why?

Community feedback told us the precinct is like the 'backyard' for locals and those who come from urban areas. The precinct also attracts a broad range of visitors from many faiths and cultures. Respondents shared many memories they have of the precinct and they would return with friends, children and family to reminisce and create new ones.

Feedback informed us that the community believes parks of this size and significance, should have more up-to-date facilities, a greater variety in food and hospitality options along with better quality playground and water play opportunities. A common comment was that the precinct was tired and needed some more 'sparkle'.

A desire to have people to assist and welcome visitors to the parks and for information to be easily found and understood, regardless of background, was also expressed.

7.4.2 Objectives – what we will do

- Encourage and foster diversity in visitor demographics through provision of infrastructure that considers all ages, abilities and interests.
- Strive to meet CPTED (crime prevention through environmental design) principles and align with Council's 'Healthy by Design' framework.
- Create inviting and engaging play areas for children, teens and adults.
- Provide a range of opportunities and infrastructure to enhance social connections – both formal and informal.
- Support a variety of hospitality and food options catering for the range of visitor experiences.
- Have easily accessible, personable and welcoming information and customer service.
- Increase and support volunteerism and stewardship of the precinct.
- Continue to build a strong relationship and support Emerald Tourist Railway Board in continuing to provide visitors with opportunities to explore the precinct during their travels on Puffing Billy.

7.5 Sustainability

ELP is a leading example in sustainable operation and management.

7.5.1 Why?

Community feedback told us sustainability was important to you and that the precinct and those who operate in it should be implementing sustainable practices. The precinct could showcase and offer opportunities to educate about the importance of climate change and sustainability.

Council understands the importance of being sustainable in how activities in the precinct are funded and managed. Feedback told us that the precinct was 'tired' and some of the infrastructure was run-down. The community hoped for appropriate resources to bring the maintenance, operations and management of the precinct to a higher level that will be maintained into the future for others to enjoy.

7.5.2 Objectives – what we will do

- Showcase environmental sustainability to visitors in an engaging and practical way.
- Support business operators in the precinct to reduce their environmental footprint in day-to-day operations.
- Encourage and promote precinct visitation to support economic viability of operators.
- Explore and implement sustainable options when upgrading existing and creating new infrastructure.
- Ensure a diverse range of cost recovery avenues and opportunities to generate income are sought to enhance and support the operation and management of the precinct.

8 Strategic plan implementation

Every year, Council will use this plan to guide the development and implementation of annual action plans for ELP. These action plans will consider resources, programming and balancing a range of areas from this strategic plan. These action plans will also allow Council to respond to opportunities as they arise.

The ELP Advisory Committee will be provided with annual updates documenting how activities undertaken in the precinct have met the goals and objectives outlined in this strategic plan.

Priority actions have been developed as part of the strategic plan and will build on the work contained in this plan to provide further direction and detail for subsequent year's actions.

8.1 Priority actions

Based on this strategic plan, the priority actions are as follows.

Aboriginal cultural heritage report

Staff will work with internal departments and external consultants to:

- begin building meaningful relationships with local Aboriginal groups and Traditional Custodians
- gather research on the Aboriginal significance of the precinct and surrounds

- create an overarching Aboriginal Cultural Report for the precinct which takes into consideration:
 - historical significance of the sites
 - current cultural significance of the sites
 - appropriate cultural contacts for ongoing relationship and permissions
 - review of current wording/names/representations within site and assessment of cultural appropriateness
 - key actions for implementation to build education on local Aboriginal culture and significance in relation to the site.



Conservation management plan (CMP)

Staff will work with internal departments and consultants to:

- collate existing data and information about cultural heritage significance of the precinct for natural and built assets
- engage a consultant to prepare a CMP that will provide Council with a clear understanding of the requirements around significant infrastructure, vegetation and fauna throughout the precinct to assist in guiding future development and maintenance upgrades.

Arborist assessment

Staff will work with internal departments and external consultants to:

- collate existing data and information about tree species
- assess tree health, structure, and screen for any pests and /or disease
- identify and prioritise tree works required around high use trails and key activity areas.

Building and infrastructure audit

Staff will work with internal departments and external consultants to:

- review and assess current condition and functionality of buildings, furniture and other infrastructure types
- identify improvement opportunities for buildings and infrastructure
- identify infrastructure needs to enhance bookings, events and activations
- develop infrastructure improvements and purchasing plan.

ELP Master Plan

Staff will work with internal departments and external consultants to:

- review and assess current landscaping and associated plans and reports
- identify improvement opportunities for landscaping within the precinct
- undertake extensive community consultation
- create a master plan to align with strategic plan objectives taking into consideration:
 - data and recommendations from the Arborist Assessment, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Report, Conservation Management Plan and the Building and Infrastructure Audit.
 - heritage overlays

- wayfinding, accessibility and lighting
- balance between natural and landscaped/built environment
- capital works plan to implement master plan (short, medium and long term actions) including cost estimates for implementation.

Promotions and marketing plan

Staff will work with internal business units and external consultants to:

- develop baseline current promotions and marketing activities (including Council, business operators, key volunteer groups and broader tourism avenues)
- assess what does and does not work in line with promotional and marketing trends
- create an overarching promotional and marketing strategy to align with strategic plan objectives and taking into consideration:
 - the precinct as a whole
 - the individuality of the parks in the precinct
 - business operators and volunteer groups (both under the precinct banner and as individual entities)
 - key market demographics
 - key actions for implementation (short, medium and long term)
 - design, web, print (and other) proposals.

8.2 Ongoing priorities

Increase in activation

Staff will work with internal business units and external groups and agencies to increase the activations within the precinct. Activations are not defined only as events or festivals, but include all activities (formal and informal) that increase visitations, activity and usage of any areas in the space and may include:

- Council organised events and activations
- community organised events and activations
- partnerships with groups, event organisers and operators from outside the shire to host events and activations
- purchasing of shows, events, festivals and activations to take place in the precinct
- bookings of spaces and private functions
- research and development of professional relationships for future activations
- community consultation.



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