

Benalla Recreation Reserves Masterplans 2026 - 2036

MASTERPLANS REPORT

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BENALLA RURAL CITY

VICTORIA

Acknowledgement of Country

Benalla Rural City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and pays respect to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. We recognise and respect their unique cultural heritage, beliefs, and relationship to Country.



Figure 1- Arundel Street fields at Benalla Showgrounds

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and scope

These master plans have been prepared for Benalla Rural City Council as part of the Recreation Reserves Masterplans 2026 to 2036. The study was commissioned in October 2025 and undertaken by SPORTENG and Simon Leisure Consulting. It encompasses four key recreation reserves in the Benalla township: Churchill Recreation Reserve (102 Waller Street), United Friendlies Society Reserve (Ackerly Avenue), Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve (Bridge Street), and Benalla Gardens Reserve (Arundel Street). These reserves collectively accommodate most of the organised sport in Benalla and host community events of local and regional significance, supporting approximately 2,230 registered sporting participants across 12 sports.

Community context

Benalla Rural City has a population of 14,528, with a median age of 51 years, significantly above the Victorian median of 38 years. The municipality records a Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) score of 938, placing it in the third decile nationally. These factors underscore the community's reliance on accessible, low-cost recreation facilities, the importance of Council investment in sport infrastructure, and the need for universal design to support older and less mobile participants. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent 3.2% of the population, above the Victorian average, requiring recognition in facility design and programming.

Key findings from consultation and analysis

Community and stakeholder engagement was conducted across two rounds spanning May 2025 to July 2026, including an online community survey (126 respondents), one-on-one user group meetings in December 2025, state sporting association consultation, combined user group meetings attended by 27 representatives on 13 May 2026, a public exhibition period facilitated online via Council's 'Have Your Say' platform and via public submissions made by groups and individuals at the Council meeting held on 29 July 2026 .

The master planning process identified several recurring infrastructure issues across the reserve network, while community consultation also highlighted specific priorities that have informed amendments to the final plans:

- Playing surfaces in poor to fair condition, limiting the quality and safety of competition and training.
- Pavilions and clubrooms are ageing, undersized, and not gender-neutral, failing to meet current standards for female and non-binary participants.
- Sports lighting does not meet current competition standards at several venues, limiting capacity and flexibility.
- Car parking is insufficient at all four reserves, with inadequate sealed and accessible surfaces for large events.
- Shade, seating, and public amenities are consistently identified as barriers to community use of open space.
- The tennis courts at Benalla Gardens are an important feature of the reserve and used formally and informally by a significant portion of the community.
- The ability to cater for current and future growth of netball at Churchill Reserve is supported and with the addition of the Benalla Multisport Stadium netball can be adequately supported into the long-term future.

Critical issues and recommendations by reserve

Reserve	Critical issues	Key recommendations	OPC (excl. GST)
Churchill Recreation Reserve	Ageing pavilions not fit for purpose; hockey pitch in very poor condition; unsurfaced Waller Street car park; inadequate sports lighting across soccer/athletics, hockey, and netball	New Benalla Multisport Stadium (BMS); realigned athletics track with soccer infield; renewal of six netball courts; hockey pitch renewal to natural turf; Waller Street car park sealed to asphalt; new play space and landscaped plaza; sports lighting upgrade	$28,442,220
United Friendlies Society Reserve	Poor oval surface with mixed grass species; non-compliant sports lighting for AFL/cricket, netball, and indoor courts; unreliable irrigation water source; inadequate gender-neutral change facilities for AFL and netball	Sports field upgrade with irrigation, subsurface drainage, and sand carpet couch grass; new gender-neutral umpires' changerooms converted from existing netball clubroom; new integrated netball clubroom and CFA store; four natural turf tennis courts converted to hardcourts with LED lighting; AFL/cricket lighting upgraded to LED 100 lux; second netball training court on widened CFA track	$6,887,850
Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve	Poor sports field surface requiring full reconstruction; sports lighting below 100 lux standards for AFL/cricket; netball courts requiring resurfacing; unsealed main car park; ageing cricket nets	Full sports field upgrade, including irrigation, subsurface drainage, sports lighting, and sand carpet couch grass; sports lighting upgrade to upgrading sports lighting to LED minimum 100 LUX, and compliant standards; main car park sealed; cricket nets renewed; netball courts resurfaced; kiosk demolished; balcony completed around the Glasshouse	$5,773,500
Benalla Gardens Reserve	Ageing cricket clubrooms and change rooms not meeting contemporary standards; inadequate cricket training net provision; two of six tennis courts non-compliant, sports lighting across all courts non-compliant; irrigation system requiring renewal	Expanded and upgraded clubrooms under the grandstand, including two female-friendly change rooms; new multipurpose synthetic cricket net enclosure with six lanes; field and turf wicket irrigation renewal with warm season couch grass; retain courts 1, 2, 5 and 6 as tennis and convert courts 3 and 4 to pickleball	$1,840,050

Recommendations and next steps

- Endorse the Recreation Reserves Master Plans 2026 to 2036 as Council policy to provide the mandate for staged implementation.
- Initiate a funding strategy and pursue grant opportunities aligned to priority projects.
- Develop detailed designs and cost plans for priority projects in preparation for funding submissions.
- Establish a governance and reporting framework to monitor implementation progress and review the master plans at the midpoint of the planning period (2031)



Figure 2 - Benalla Gardens cricket practice nets

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Overview

These master plans have been prepared for Benalla Rural City Council as part of the Recreation Reserves Master Planning Program 2026 to 2036. The study was commissioned in October 2025 and undertaken by SPORTENG and Simon Leisure Consulting.

The project encompasses four key recreation reserves within the Benalla township:

- Churchill Recreation Reserve, 102 Waller Street
- United Friendlies Society Reserve, Ackerly Avenue
- Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve, Bridge Street
- Benalla Gardens Reserve, Arundel Street

These four reserves collectively accommodate most of the organised sport in Benalla and host community events of local and regional significance. The master plans provide a strategic framework to guide infrastructure investment, support sustainable asset management, and ensure that the reserves, individually and collectively, meet the current and future needs of the community.

1.2 Project Aim

To develop site-specific master plans for four key recreation reserves in Benalla Rural City that will guide future infrastructure improvements, inform investment prioritisation, and support the sustainable management of community sporting assets.

The master plans are essential to support the growth and long-term viability of sport and recreation across the municipality, considering interdependencies between sites.

1.3 Project Objectives

The key objectives of these Master Plans are to:

- Develop comprehensive master plans to guide future infrastructure improvements aligned with the Benalla Rural City Open Space Strategy 2026-2036
- Highlight interdependencies across the four sites and complementary use opportunities for shared facilities
- Establish a prioritisation framework for sports and recreation infrastructure upgrades to guide Council's budgeting and investment decisions.
- Strengthen collaboration between sports clubs, community groups, and Council by aligning planning priorities
- Build the capacity of sports clubs and reserve management through strategic planning support and facility improvement
- Identify active recreation opportunities and prioritise participation of groups that traditionally engage less in sport and physical activity

- Embed universal design principles to increase participation among underrepresented groups.
- Ensure the reserve supports long-term community health, social inclusion, and economic sustainability.

1.4 About Benalla Rural City Council

Benalla Rural City is a small local government area of 2,350 square kilometres located in the north-eastern region of Victoria, approximately two hours from Melbourne along the Hume Freeway. The municipality comprises the township of Benalla and the communities of Baddaginnie, Devenish, Goorambat, Swanpool, Tatong, Thoona, and Winton.

The Rural City has a population of 14,528, with approximately 9,000 people living in the Benalla urban area. Over one-third of residents live in rural areas beyond the township, underscoring the strong rural lifestyle and industry that contribute to the community. Benalla Rural City Council has stated its 2025 to 2029 community vision as: 'Our Community Vision 2036 Benalla Rural City is welcoming and friendly, thriving and prosperous, environmentally responsible, innovative and industrious, caring and supportive, and engaging for all residents and visitors.'



Figure 3 - Map of Benalla and surrounding townships (Council Plan 2025-2029)

1.5 Demographic overview

1.5.1 Age profile

With a median age of 51 years, Benalla Rural City has a significantly older population compared to the Victorian median age of 38 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021). This demographic characteristic reflects a regional trend common across rural and regional Victoria, where younger cohorts migrate to metropolitan centres while retirees and older adults seek lifestyle changes and affordable housing in regional areas. Infrastructure investment across the four reserves must account for this profile, with equal emphasis on junior participation pathways and facilities that support older and senior participants.

1.5.2 Socio-economic profile

Benalla Rural City records a Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage score of 938 (ABS, 2021), placing it in the third decile nationally. This indicates higher levels of socioeconomic disadvantage compared to the Victorian average, with implications for:

- Affordability and accessibility of sport and recreation participation
- Reliance on low-cost or free community facilities
- The importance of Council subsidy and support for sport infrastructure
- Volunteer-led club models as the primary means of delivery
- Reduced capacity for club-based fundraising and capital contributions

1.5.3 Cultural diversity

According to the 2021 Census, 85.3% of residents were born in Australia and 89.7% speak only English at home. The largest Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities include residents born in England (1.8%), New Zealand (0.9%), and India (0.4%). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent 3.2% of the population, compared to 2.0% for Victoria. Growing CALD communities and a significant Indigenous population require consideration in facility design, particularly for culturally appropriate spaces and amenities, programs that engage diverse communities, recognition of Aboriginal culture and connection to Country, and universal design for all abilities and backgrounds.

2. BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

2.1 Background Reports

2.1.1 Council Plans and Strategies

Council Plan 2025-2029

The Council Plan brings together the Council Plan, the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and the Disability Action Plan into one strategic document. It sets out the Council's direction for the four-year planning period. The themes most relevant to this study are Theme 1 (Community) and Theme 4 (Liveability). The plan's strategies include helping people to stay healthy and active, and maintaining and developing recreation reserves, parks, and gardens to increase community use and enjoyment.

Table 1 - Council Plan objectives

Theme 1: Community	
Strategy	**Measure of Success**
Help people stay healthy and active	Improvement in health indicators within the community. Increased opportunity for active participation.
Theme 4: Liveability	
Strategy	**Measure of Success**
Maintain and develop recreation reserves, parks and gardens, playgrounds, and paths.	Increased community use and enjoyment of recreation reserves, parks, gardens, playgrounds, and paths.

Recreation Strategic Plan (2015)

The plan provides a strategic overview of recreational facilities within the Benalla Rural City area. It assists the Council in planning for upgrades and developments to increase sporting participation and accessibility.

The plan includes reserve master plans for:

- Churchill Recreation Reserve
- Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve
- United Friendlies Society Reserve
- Benalla Gardens Recreation Reserve

This recreation reserves masterplan study will review the projects identified in the 2015 master plans and where they are yet to be implemented and determine whether they are still relevant.

Benalla Community Infrastructure Needs Assessment (2025)

This report provides an evaluation of the existing and future community infrastructure capacity, whilst identifying key gaps and needs of the community.

The needs assessment identifies an action to develop a multi-purpose community hub at Churchill Reserve.

Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre Master Plan (2019)

The plan builds on previous strategic work undertaken by Council relating to the ongoing support and development of several indoor sports.

The plan collates a series of issues and opportunities raised by tenant indoor clubs and the clubs utilising the outdoor sporting facilities at the United Friendlies Society Reserve. This recreation reserves masterplan study will review the issues and opportunities raised.

Fair Access Policy 2024

The policy seeks to address known barriers experienced by women and girls in accessing and using community sports infrastructure.

The stated objectives of the policy are:

- To build the capacity and capabilities of Benalla Rural City Council in the identification and elimination of systemic causes of gender inequality in policy, programs, communications, and delivery of services in relation to community sport and recreation.
- To ensure an effective place-based response for the gender equitable use and access of community sports infrastructure.
- To promote gender equality in policies, programs, communications, and services as they relate to community sports infrastructure.

For Benalla Rural City Council, the policy applies to community sports infrastructure, with Council being the land manager and/or operator of the facility.

Benalla Active Transport Strategy 2025 – 2030

The purpose of the strategy is to provide a clear, practical framework for making walking and cycling safe, connected and viable for everyday trips across Benalla

The strategy summarises the Ultimate Active Transport Network where the Lake Benalla Loop functions as the natural spine of the walking and cycling network. The Ultimate Network is structured around three complementary components.

Primary Network

The Primary Network is built around the Lake Benalla Loop, which provides connections to Benalla Gardens Reserve and Benalla Showgrounds & Recreation Reserve.

There are three access corridors to the Lake Benalla Loop.

Thomas Street / Waller Street

This link is designed for children to walk or ride without exposure to traffic above 30km/h. It connects Churchill Recreation Reserve to the Lake Benalla Loop.

Wedge Street

This link along Wedge Street connects to the Lake Benalla Loop at the Benalla Gardens Reserve entrance. There will be low speeds and pedestrian-priority design.

Church Street

This link will provide a walking and cycling link between the Lake Benalla Loop and Benalla Station.

Pedestrian Priority Areas

The pedestrian priority areas are areas that warrant elevated priority due to their high pedestrian activity, vulnerability of users, or strategic value in connecting key destinations.

Identified areas include:

- Waller Street adjacent to Churchill Recreation Reserve
- Wedge Street, Arundel Street and Bridge Street adjacent to Benalla Gardens Reserve
- Bridge Street adjacent to Benalla Showgrounds & Recreation Reserve
- The CBD grid including adjacent to United Friendlies Society Reserve

Cycling 'Training Route' Network

This component is the upgrade of well-established recreational and fitness cycling routes, particularly on rural roads south and east of Benalla.

2.2 Victorian Sport Participation Trends

2.2.1 Participation levels

The AusPlay Survey conducted by Sport Australia provides national participation data with Victorian breakdowns. Adults aged 15 years and older account for approximately 8.2 million sport and physical activity participation instances nationally, with Victoria representing approximately 26% of the Australian population. Children's peak participation occurs in the nine-to eleven-year-old age group, and the gender gap in organised sport continues to narrow, particularly in children's sport.

2.2.2 Participation by age group

Research shows that sports participation is highest for people living in regional Victoria (17%), compared to Melbourne Metro (13%). This higher baseline participation rate underlines the critical role that recreation reserves play in community health and social connection in regional centres such as Benalla.

2.2.3 Gender participation trends

Female participation across the four reserves is growing. The Benalla Netball Association (330 players), the Benalla Saints Football Netball Club (56 netballers), and Benalla Auskick (the highest female participation of any centre in Regional Victoria in 2025, with 68 participants) all reflect positive trends. Facilities that are not gender inclusive are a constraint on continued growth and are addressed in reserve-specific recommendations.

3. CURRENT SITUATION ANALYSIS

This section provides a summary of each reserve's current state, including land ownership, planning controls, user groups, and playing numbers.

3.1 Churchill Recreation Reserve

3.1.1 Ownership and Town Planning

Churchill Recreation Reserve is located at 102 Waller Street, Benalla and comprises approximately 7.2 hectares. The majority of the reserve, including the green space, ovals and netball pavilion, is Crown land reserved for public recreation. Benalla Rural City Council is the appointed land manager and has historically worked in partnership with a Committee of Management (formerly Section 86 Committee).

The eastern portion of the reserve, including the netball courts, hockey field and car park, is Council-owned freehold land.

3.1.2 Planning scheme controls

Churchill Recreation Reserve is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) under the Benalla Planning Scheme. The PPRZ is designed to recognise and protect public land used for recreation and open space, and to provide for a range of recreational and sporting facilities. Under Clause 36.02 of the Benalla Planning Scheme, most recreational and sporting facilities are permitted without a planning permit, provided they are consistent with the zone purpose. Buildings and works generally require a planning permit unless specifically exempted.

3.1.3 Reserve summary

Table 2 - reserve summary information

Attribute	Detail
Address	102 Waller Street, Benalla VIC 3672
Area	7.2 ha
Land tenure	Crown land (ovals and netball pavilion); Council-owned (netball courts, hockey field, car park)
Management	Benalla Rural City Council / Churchill Recreation Reserve Committee of Management (CRRCM)
Zoning	Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ)

3.1.4 User group overview

An estimated 478 people are players with Churchill Recreation Reserve sporting clubs.

Table 3 - user group summary information

User group	Players (total)	Teams (total)	Future membership trend
Benalla Netball Association	330	34	Growth
Benalla Little Athletics	60	N/A (track-based)	Growth
Benalla Hockey Club	78	4	Decline
Benalla Rovers Soccer Club	10	0 (social only)	Growth (with support)
TOTAL	478	38	

The Benalla Netball Association (approximately 60 years old) provides opportunities for junior and senior netballers across 34 teams. Competition is held on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, utilising two of the four available courts. The Association aspires to host representative tournaments, which would require eight courts. The Benalla Little Athletics (approximately 40 years old) operates a season from October to March with competition on Friday nights.

The Benalla Hockey Club (formed 1927) uses the gravel pitch for training only, with competition games played in Shepparton. The club identifies the current gravel surface as a constraint on player retention and development.

The Benalla Rovers Soccer Club resumed activity in 2024 with social soccer on Friday evenings for players aged 16 and above, following a period of inactivity since 2015.

3.1.5 Fields of play and supporting infrastructure

Churchill Recreation Reserve contains the following playing facilities:

- One natural turf athletics track, including a cage for throwing events
- Two long jump lanes and pits
- One natural turf soccer pitch
- Seven outdoor asphalt netball courts
- One gravel hockey field

Supporting infrastructure includes a soccer pavilion, netball pavilion, hockey pavilion, sports lighting for soccer, netball, and hockey, player shelters for hockey and netball, a Little Athletics storage facility, chain mesh perimeter fencing, an unsealed car park (entrance from Waller Street), and on-street parking on Bond, Margaret, and Clarke Streets.

3.1.6 Sports Facility Condition Assessment

The condition assessment identified widespread asset deterioration across Churchill Reserve, with most fields of play and sports infrastructure rated poor. The netball courts, athletics track, long jump facilities, throwing cage, hockey pitch, and associated sports lighting are all in poor condition and assessed as not fit for purpose, with renewal recommended across the board. The three pavilions (soccer, netball, and hockey) are rated fair but are DDA non-compliant, lack gender-neutral changerooms, and are energy inefficient. The public toilets and unsealed car park are in poor condition and require renewal and upgrade, respectively.

The condition of assets across the reserve reflects significant accumulated deferred maintenance and underinvestment. While the established tree canopy is a landscape asset, no field of play or built facility is currently fit for purpose. The scale of renewal required reinforces the strategic case for a consolidated redevelopment of Churchill Reserve centred on the Benalla Multisport Stadium (BMS), rather than incremental maintenance of individual assets in their current configuration.

Refer to Appendix D for the basis of assessment and detailed condition assessments, and Appendix C for related site images.

3.2 United Friendlies Society Reserve

3.2.1 Ownership and town planning

The United Friendlies Society Reserve is located on Ackerly Avenue, Benalla. The entire reserve is Crown land reserved for public recreation. Benalla Rural City Council is the appointed land manager and has historically worked in partnership with a Committee of Management (formerly Section 86 Committee) to oversee the reserve. The reserve adjoins the Broken River and contains the existing Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre (BIRC).

3.2.2 Planning scheme controls

The reserve is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) under the Benalla Planning Scheme. The same permit and exemption provisions described for Churchill Recreation Reserve apply. Given the flood plain proximity to the Broken River, any development within or adjacent to the reserve will also require assessment against the relevant Land Subject to Inundation Overlay provisions and appropriate drainage management.

3.2.3 Reserve summary

Table 4 - reserve information summary

Attribute	Detail
Address	Ackerly Avenue, Benalla VIC 3672
Land tenure	All Crown land
Management	Committee of Management
Zoning	Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ)
Notable constraint	Flood plain adjacent to Broken River; water supply sustainability issues

3.2.4 User group overview

An estimated 769 people are players with Friendlies Reserve sporting clubs and associations. Most groups expect their player numbers to stabilise over the next 10 years, with the exception of the Benalla Basketball Association and the Benalla Badminton Association, which expect growth. The Benalla CFA operates a Training Track at the reserve with 75 members.

Table 5 - user group summary

User group	Players (total)	Teams (total)	Future membership trend
Benalla Basketball Association	280	35	Growth
Northeast Bushrangers Basketball Club	100	10	Stable
Benalla Table Tennis Association	68	26	Stable
Benalla Badminton Association	106	7	Growth
Benalla All Blacks FNC (football)	60	3	Stable
Benalla All Blacks FNC (netball)	50	5	Stable
Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (tennis)	80	2	Stable
Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (croquet)	25	8	Stable
Benalla CFA (Training Track)	75 members	N/A	Stable
TOTAL (sporting players)	769	96	

The Benalla Basketball Association hosts an annual tournament in February involving 177 teams and operates its domestic competition across two nights; Monday, and Thursday. Representative team training is held on Tuesday and Wednesday on 1 court, and a regional team uses 1 court for training on Friday and Sunday's. The Association's participation rate in the Shire is well below the state average, suggesting capacity for further growth.

The Benalla Badminton Association uses all eight courts in the main stadium on Wednesday nights and is unable to use the two end courts in the smaller stadium due to fixed basketball backboards.

The Benalla Table Tennis Association sets up 12 courts in the smaller stadium on Thursday nights but is unable to use the main stadium due to non-compliant lighting.

The Benalla All Blacks Football Netball Club uses the oval and netball courts for training and matches, and the CFA use the Training Track for fire training drills.

The Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club hosts an annual lawn tennis tournament and competitions on Tuesday (Ladies) and Saturday (Juniors), with social tennis and coaching available along with court hire to public during non-club use times. The croquet courts are used on Tuesday to Thursday for social use, and pennant on Wednesday. The club hosts interclub competition twice per year and once a year an event for 28 clubs across the Northeast Region.

An unreliable and unsustainable water source for sports surface irrigation has been identified as a systemic issue affecting the oval.

3.2.5 Fields of play and supporting infrastructure

The reserve contains the following playing facilities:

- One main stadium (BIRC) with three basketball courts. Court 3 is non-compliant and has a fixed basketball backboard, but can accommodate lower-age matches. Basketball, alongside Badminton and Table Tennis are the primary sports played within the stadium.
- One natural turf Australian rules football oval
- One asphalt netball court
- CFA Training Track
- Twenty-two lawn tennis courts and four croquet lawns (overlaid onto tennis courts)

Supporting infrastructure includes the existing BIRC buildings and amenities, the All-Blacks Football Netball Club changerooms and social facilities, CFA pump house and club rooms, and associated car parking.

3.2.6 Sports Facility Condition Assessment

The condition assessment at UFS Reserve reflects a reserve in transition, with a mix of asset conditions across the site. The natural turf field of play and centre wicket are in good condition and assessed as fit for purpose, while the cricket practice nets are in very poor condition and require renewal or removal. The two disused hardcourts are in very poor condition and are recommended for conversion to sealed car parking, while the 24 natural turf tennis courts are in good condition, with four proposed for conversion to hardcourts with sports lighting. Sports lighting across both the field of play and netball courts is rated poor and requires renewal and/or upgrade.

The built infrastructure at UFS Reserve is generally rated fair, with the football pavilion, changerooms, tennis pavilion, and BIRC all serviceable but requiring varying levels of improvement. The football and netball sealed car park is in good condition and DDA compliant, while the tennis unsealed car park is in fair condition. The reserve's overall asset base is in better relative condition than Churchill Reserve, and targeted renewal of key facilities will be sufficient to meet the strategic directions of the master plan.

Refer to Appendix D for the basis of assessment and condition assessment and Appendix C for related site images.

3.3 Benalla Gardens Reserve

3.3.1 Ownership and town planning

Benalla Gardens Reserve is located on Arundel Street, Benalla, adjacent to Lake Benalla. The Gardens oval and broader reserve are Crown land reserved for public recreation. Benalla Rural City Council is the appointed land manager and works in partnership with a Council-appointed Committee of Management.

The cricket practice nets area is also Crown land (Reserve 1, PS441433). Car parking adjacent to the nets is owned by the Benalla Bowls Club Inc (1, PS441433). The reserve is situated in a scenic lakeside setting and is subject to flooding risk near the lake foreshore.

3.3.2 Planning scheme controls

Benalla Gardens Reserve is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) under the Benalla Planning Scheme. Proximity to Lake Benalla and associated flood plain areas means that development in certain parts of the reserve will be subject to the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and will require appropriate flood management assessment and Council approval.

3.3.3 Reserve summary

Table 6 - reserve information summary

Attribute	Detail
Address	Arundel Street, Benalla VIC 3672
Land tenure	Crown land (oval, reserve, cricket nets area); Benalla Bowls Club Inc (car park adjacent to nets)
Management	Benalla Gardens Committee of Management (Council-appointed)
Zoning	Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ)
Notable constraint	Flood risk near lake foreshore; tennis courts potentially in flood plain

3.3.4 User group overview

An estimated 234 people are players with the Gardens Reserve sporting clubs. Both clubs expect to increase their player numbers in the next 10 years.

Table 7 - user group summary

User group	Players (total)	Teams (total)	Future membership trend
Benalla Bushrangers Cricket Club	180	11	Growth
Benalla Gardens Tennis Club	54	5	Growth
TOTAL	234	16	

The Benalla Gardens Tennis Club (initially formed in 1937 as the UFS Tennis Club) operates Monday and Tuesday competition nights using four courts and Friday socials. The Gardens Committee of Management maintains the oval and the cricket practice nets area and has access to approximately half of the storage shed. The Benalla Bushrangers Cricket Club was formed by merging all remaining cricket clubs following the cessation of the Benalla and District Cricket Association in 2015. The club trains from Tuesday to Friday and plays matches from Friday to Sunday at both the Gardens Reserve and the Showgrounds. FCJ College uses the Gardens Reserve oval (not the centre wicket) and the tennis courts. The cricket club aspires to construct a five-lane enclosed training facility, and may require an additional oval in the future, potentially through a hard wicket in the oval at the Friendlies Reserve.

3.3.5 Fields of play and supporting infrastructure

The reserve contains the following playing facilities:

- One natural turf cricket oval (centre and outer wickets)
- Cricket practice nets (multiple lanes)
- Six hardcourt tennis courts

Supporting infrastructure includes a grandstand, player change rooms, and the clubroom (shared between cricket and the Committee of Management), a storage shed (shared between the Committee of Management and cricket), and court-side amenities.

3.3.6 Sports Facility Condition Assessment

The condition assessment at Benalla Gardens Reserve identified significant deterioration across the site's tennis and cricket practice facilities. The six tennis courts are in poor condition, with cracking and non-compliant runoff, the associated lighting is also non-compliant.

The reserve's two built pavilions (cricket and tennis) are rated fair but are DDA non-compliant, lack gender-neutral changerooms, and are energy inefficient. The natural turf field of play and centre wicket are in good condition and assessed as fit for purpose. The established trees and gardens are a significant landscape asset and are recommended for retention. The overall condition profile supports the master plan's direction to rationalise facilities at this reserve and consolidate investment of tennis infrastructure at the Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club.

The assessments have been undertaken in line with the Institute of Public Works Australasia (IPWEA) condition assessment framework. Refer to Appendix D for the basis of assessment and Appendix C for related site images.

3.4 Benalla Showgrounds

3.4.1 Ownership and town planning

The Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve is located on Bridge Street, Benalla. Land tenure across the reserve is complex. The green shaded section containing the main oval, the Agricultural and Pastoral (A&P) Society office, sheds, and grandstand is Crown land. The rectangular blocks to the left and right of the main entrance are A&P Society-owned land used for camping and generate approximately $15,000 per annum in revenue for the A&P Society, which is critical to its maintenance funding. Five long parcels of land covering the two smaller ovals, the shed, stock yards, and sports pavilion are all owned by Council. The A&P Society owns most of the sheds and buildings other than the Lakeside Function Centre building, the recently constructed junior football change room building, the historic grandstand, and the former football change room building and bar.

3.4.2 Planning scheme controls

The Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve is zoned Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ) under the Benalla Planning Scheme. The reserve also accommodates the annual Benalla Spring Show, which requires specific management consideration in the context of master plan works, particularly regarding the oval surface condition.

3.4.3 Reserve summary

Table 8 - reserve summary information

Attribute	Detail
Address	Bridge Street, Benalla VIC 3672
Land tenure	Crown land (main oval, A&P sheds, grandstand); A&P Society-owned (camping blocks); Council-owned (back ovals, sports pavilion, shed)
Management	Showgrounds Committee of Management / Benalla A&P Society / Benalla Rural City Council
Zoning	Public Park and Recreation Zone (PPRZ)
Notable event	Benalla Spring Show (annual, Friday to Saturday, October, approx. 5,000 patrons)

3.4.4 User group overview

An estimated 749 people are players with the sporting groups at Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve. The annual Benalla Spring Show attracts an estimated 5,000 patrons over two days. The two junior football groups expect to increase their player numbers in the next 10 years, while the Benalla Saints Football Netball Club expects its numbers to remain stable.

Table 9 - user group summary

User group	Players (total)	Teams (total)	Future membership trend
Benalla Saints Football Netball Club (football)	70	3	Stable
Benalla Saints Football Netball Club (netball)	45	5	Stable
Benalla and District Junior Football League	376	23	Growth
Benalla Auskick	258	0 (introductory program)	Growth
TOTAL	749	31	

The Benalla Saints Football Netball Club (formed 1896) trains Tuesday and Thursday and plays Saturday home games. The club has struggled for football players post-COVID and is concerned about the conflict between netball court use and the Benalla Spring Show equestrian events.

The Benalla and District Junior Football League (formed 1953) uses the main oval and the back sports field for Monday, Wednesday, Tuesday, and Thursday training and Sunday matches. The junior league consistently identifies that the back sports fields are too small for U14s and U17s matches, with one larger oval ideally located adjacent to the canteen and changerooms.

The Benalla Auskick program (formed 1991) recorded the highest number of female participants (68) in Regional Victoria in 2025 and uses the back sports field on Saturday mornings during the winter season.

The Benalla Bushrangers Cricket Club also uses three ovals at the Showgrounds for matches on Friday to Sunday.

3.4.5 Fields of play and supporting infrastructure

The reserve contains the following playing facilities:

- One main natural turf oval (Australian rules football and cricket)
- Two smaller back sports fields (junior football, Auskick, cricket)
- Two asphalt netball courts

Supporting infrastructure includes the Lakeside Function Centre and associated facilities, the A&P Society grandstand, a sports pavilion (Council-owned) on the back sports field, a Showgrounds Committee of Management clubroom, junior football change rooms (recently constructed), the historic Croxford Shed and Poultry Shed (A&P Society-owned), multiple access points from Maud Street, Cecil Street, and Main Road, and an unsealed car park

3.4.6 Sports Facility Condition Assessment

The condition assessment at the Showgrounds reflects a complex management environment, with assets shared across Benalla Rural City Council, the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), the Agricultural and Pastoral (A&P) Society, and a delegated management committee. The main natural turf field of play is in very poor condition, the netball courts are in poor condition and only partially fit for purpose, and sports lighting across the site is rated poor. The cricket practice nets are in very poor condition and non-compliant with Cricket Australia guidelines. The Arundel Street field and synthetic wickets are in good condition, and the established trees are a significant landscape asset recommended for retention.

A&P Society-managed assets are in markedly poor condition, with the showground's kiosk in poor condition, the old bar building in very poor condition, and the public toilets in very poor condition and recommended for disposal. The Lakeside unsealed car park requires an upgrade. Responsibility for renewal works is distributed across multiple parties, and the condition profile of the reserve underscores the need for a coordinated investment and governance approach across Council, DEECA, and reserve user groups.

The assessments have been undertaken in line with the Institute of Public Works Australasia (IPWEA) condition assessment framework. Refer to Appendix D for the basis of assessment and Appendix C for related site images.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The development of the master plans has been heavily influenced by the community and the numerous user groups across each of the reserves. The consultant team has met with user groups on site as part of condition assessments, online meetings, online survey (open space strategy) and in person as part of a series of face-to-face workshops to understand the current state and future aspirations.

The first round was completed in December 2025 and focused on information gathering, assessment of existing facility adequacy, and identification of issues and opportunities from the perspective of reserve user groups. The second round, completed in May 2026, focused on review and feedback on the draft reserve master plans.

4.1 First round engagement

4.1.1 Community survey

Relevant information was drawn from the community survey conducted in May 2025 for the development of the Council's new Open Space Strategy, which received 126 responses. Key findings included:

- Survey respondents strongly agreed that formal and organised sport should be an important component of the City's open space provision
- Identified barriers to using open space include lack of toilets, lack of shade, lack of lighting, lack of seating, lack of drinking fountains, and a limited range of sporting facilities
- 78% of respondents rated the overall quality of sports fields as very good, good, or average; for sports courts, the figure was 65%
- Improving the quality of sports grounds, ovals, and courts was the fourth ranked open space priority for funding over the next 10 years (23%), behind new or upgraded cycle and walking paths (38%), new or upgraded playgrounds (37%), and provision of places and facilities for young people (32%)
- Infrastructure upgrades at Churchill Recreation Reserve, identified as priorities, included the hockey pitch, athletic field, playground, netball courts, and increased seating
- Infrastructure upgrades at Benalla Showgrounds identified as priorities included netball courts, sports lighting, and increased seating

4.1.2 User group engagement

In-person meetings were conducted with user groups based at each reserve and with Committees of Management that are active. The first-round engagement confirmed player numbers and participation trends, documented facility use profiles, identified adequacy and constraints of existing facilities, and identified key issues and opportunities for consideration in the master plans.

A summary of key user group issues identified during the first-round engagement is provided in Table 14 below.

Table 10 - User Group Feedback Summary

Reserve	User group	Key issues and opportunities
Churchill	Benalla Netball Association	Poor court surface; continually failing lights; basic pavilion facilities; lack of security lighting; lack of adequate spectator shelters. Aspiration to host representative tournaments (requires 8 courts).
Churchill	Benalla Little Athletics	Track surface uneven and a safety hazard; facility upgrades required, new jump run-ups, high jump and throwing infrastructure, new clubrooms with change rooms, toilets and canteen. Open to relocating if superior facilities are available.
Churchill	Benalla Hockey Club	Gravel surface not suitable for competition or adequate for training; player retention is impacted; underground subsidence prevents a synthetic surface at the current location; safety concerns from the adjacent car park.
Churchill	Benalla Rovers Soccer Club	Surface condition is the biggest issue; uneven surface, weeds, and poor lighting; insufficient junior numbers to form local age-group teams.
Friendlies	Benalla Basketball Association	If relocated to a two-court venue, domestic competition would extend to two nights. Preference for three courts at Churchill Reserve.
Friendlies	Benalla Badminton Association	Lights need realignment; solid court line markings preferred; court dividing curtain required; dark wall surface at court ends required.

Reserve	User group	Key issues and opportunities
Friendlies	Benalla Table Tennis Association	Unable to use the main stadium due to non-compliant lighting; no permanent set-up possible; unable to expand due to lack of court availability; insufficient storage; lack of air conditioning.
Friendlies	Benalla All Blacks FNC	Unreliable water source for oval; non-compliant sports lighting on oval and netball courts; poor oval surface. Inadequate netball change rooms; a second netball court is required
Friendlies	Benalla CFA	Pump house and system require refurbishment; clubroom requires refurbishment; supports netball court line being marked on the Training Track.
Showgrounds	Benalla Saints FNC	Netball court lighting to be changed to LED; new oval sports lighting required; oval needs rebuilding; forecourt paving required; first-floor decking incomplete; sports lighting on back sports field; behind-goal netting required.
Showgrounds	Benalla and District Junior Football League	Back sports fields are too small for U14s and U17s; one larger oval is needed; sports lighting is needed on the back field for all training on Tuesday and Thursday nights.
Showgrounds	Benalla Agricultural and Pastoral Society	Croxford Shed requires upgrading; new floor in Poultry Shed; kiosk building removal and alternative power distribution solution required; new location for trade show (bollards adjacent to netball courts are a constraint).
Gardens	Benalla Gardens Tennis Club	Currently, only two committee members; plan to remove courts 3 and 4 for beach volleyball and pickleball; all court sports lights need replacing to LED.
Gardens	Benalla Bushrangers Cricket Club	Additional cricket practice net required; aspiration to remove turf training pitch and construct five-lane enclosed training facility; change rooms and amenities not fit for purpose as gender-inclusive facilities; new digital scoreboard required; additional oval may be required in future.

Reserve	User group	Key issues and opportunities
Gardens	Benalla Gardens Committee of Management	Increased storage area required; oval resurfacing to uniform warm season couch preferred; irrigation renewal; change rooms and amenities require upgrade; larger social room required.

4.2 Second round engagement

4.2.1 Combined user group meeting

A combined meeting of reserve user groups and committees of management from all four reserves was conducted on 13 May 2026 at the Benalla Glasshouse. Twenty-seven people attended.

The session was facilitated by a member of the project consultant team and the Council's Community and Recreation Officer. The session discussed and reported on the strengths, concerns, and improvements for each draft master plan. The feedback captured during the session has been carefully considered by the project team as part of evaluating the purpose and condition of sports infrastructure across the four reserves.

4.2.2 Public Exhibition

All stakeholders, including the wider community, were invited to review the four draft master plans and provide feedback during the public exhibition period between 25 June and 22 July 2026. During the public exhibition period the opportunity for the public to provide feedback was advertised and promoted using the following mediums:

- the Benalla Ensign,
- local radio,
- social media posts,
- signage at the four reserves, and
- directly emailing stakeholders involved during previous consultation.

Printed submission forms were available at Council's Customer Service Centre and the Sir Edward 'Weary' Dunlop Learning Centre (Benalla Library).

At the close of the public exhibition period, 267 submissions had been received. The following is a summary of the general themes of feedback received for each reserve in the submissions.

Draft Churchill Recreation Reserve Master Plan

- Netball court numbers and capacity (retain more courts, support growth, tournament hosting).
- Support for the stadium and broader reserve upgrades.
- Need for netball-specific facilities (canteen, storage, umpire rooms, admin, shelters, changerooms).
- Traffic, parking, access, noise and residential amenity impacts.
- Requests for additional community facilities (playground, picnic areas).
- Potential operational impact of stadium construction on user groups.

Draft United Friendlies Society Reserve Master Plan

- Requests to include squash courts/future squash provision.
- Support for upgraded tennis facilities and consolidation opportunities.
- Concerns about reducing lawn court capacity / loss of grass courts.
- Retention of significant trees and reserve character.
- Parking and tournament/event support infrastructure.

Draft Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve Master Plan

- Strong support for lighting at Arundel Street ovals.
- Support for junior football growth and training opportunities.
- Support for cricket oval, irrigation and training facility upgrades.
- Requests for improved spectator shelter, seating and game-day amenities.
- Support for Netball court renewal and safety improvements.
- Protection of mature trees and showgrounds character.

Draft Benalla Gardens Reserve Master Plan

- Opposition to removal/relocation of Benalla Gardens Tennis.
- Support for cricket oval, training nets and clubroom upgrades.

4.2.3 July 2026 Council Meeting

Eleven people who had provided a submission during the public exhibition period spoke to their submission at the 29 July 2026 Council meeting.

4.3 Other stakeholder engagement

4.3.1 Community service providers and agencies

All community service providers and health agencies in Benalla were invited to attend agency drop-in sessions held in December 2025. The primary purpose was to understand whether groups currently use the recreation reserves for activities or excursions, and whether the appetite exists to do so.

The key findings included:

- Benalla U3A (470 members, 49 different courses in 2025) does not currently utilise any of the four reserves and is unlikely to in the future but identified general infrastructure needs for older adults, including public toilets, seats, shade, and paths
- Waminda Community House (established 1984) recognises an opportunity to co-locate with the proposed new Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre at Churchill Recreation Reserve, citing the need for a commercial kitchen, two small meeting rooms, a consulting room, administration space, storage, and a reception area.

4.3.2 Education

Benalla P-12 College currently uses Churchill Recreation Reserve for athletics and the Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve for cross-country, cricket, and football. The College is generally satisfied with the facilities, except for the lack of shade and the poor condition of the long and triple jump run-ups at Churchill Recreation Reserve, and the distance from the athletics facilities to the available toilet facilities.

4.3.3 State Sporting Associations and regional leagues

The following SSAs and regional associations contributed background information: Tennis Victoria, Netball Victoria, Cricket Victoria, Football Victoria (soccer), AFL Victoria (AFL North East Border and Ovens and King Football Netball League), Little Athletics Victoria, and Croquet Victoria.

5. SPORTS FACILITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

This section identifies the future demand for sporting facilities in Benalla. The method for determining the demand includes the following aspects:

- Optimum number of players and/or teams a facility can accommodate per session.
- Sports facility benchmarks endorsed by State Sporting Associations (where available)
- Current statewide trends of participation for the 12 sports covered within the study scope.

Other inputs used to develop the recommendations for the future provision of sporting facilities include:

- The total estimated population for Benalla Rural City in 2036 (15,201 people).
- The current participation rates of Shire residents in sport.
- Input from Benalla sports clubs and other stakeholders.
- Research that shows that sports participation is highest for people living in Regional Victoria (17%), compared to Melbourne Metro (13%).
- The current availability, distribution, usage and condition of sporting facilities throughout Benalla township.

5.1 Projected Sporting Demand

Table 15 shows the application of the facility planning benchmarks after projecting the future participation in each sport to 2036 (projected shire population 15,201[1]) using the current rate of participation as the multiplier to 2036.

Table 11 - Facility planning benchmarks

Sport	Victorian average (%)	Benalla Rural City (%)	Projected participants (2036)	Benchmark (team/court/pitch)	2036 facility requirement
Little Athletics	0.28	0.41	65	300 athletes/track/session	1 track
Badminton	0.16	0.73	110	12 players/court/session	8 courts
Basketball	3.18	2.61	395	60 players/court/session	3 courts
Cricket	2.27	1.24	190	15 teams	4 ovals
Croquet	0.04	0.17	30	12 players/court/session	3 courts
Football (AFL)*	3.32	5.67	865	15 teams+	4 ovals
Hockey	0.25	0.54	85	7 teams	1 pitch
Netball*	1.68	1.82	505	42 players/court/session	12 courts
Soccer	1.31	0.07	15	1 team	1 pitch
Squash	0.03	0.24	40	8 players/court/session	3 courts

Sport	Victorian average (%)	Benalla Rural City (%)	Projected participants (2036)	Benchmark (team/court/pitch)	2036 facility requirement
Table Tennis	0.06	0.47	80	12 players/court/session	10 courts
Tennis	3.08	0.92	140	1 court per 2,500 people	6 courts

** Players with Goormabat and District FNC have been added to the total number of Shire football and netball players.*
Based on the projected population of 15,201 for Benalla Rural City in 2036.
+Excludes the proportion of football participants enrolled in the Auskick program.

5.2 Sports Facility Needs Analysis

Table 16 below provides a summary of the required sporting facilities to accommodate the needs of the community until 2036, when the population is projected to be 15,201. The table also compares the forecast to the current provision to identify the key areas for change.

The analysis has concluded that for all sports in scope except for football, netball and social tennis, the sporting facilities currently available in the shire meet the needs of the community.

Table 16 – Sports Facility Needs Analysis

Sport	Need per Benchmark	Existing Provision	Shortfall (-)/ Surplus (+)	Discussion
Little Athletics	1 track	1 track	0	One grass track in Benalla can absorb any future growth in Little Athletics.
Basketball	3 courts	3 (excludes 2 courts at the Benalla College)	0	The current BIRC at the United Friendlies Society Reserve has 3 basketball courts, although Court 3 is non-compliant, but can accommodate lower age matches. The proposed new Benalla Multisport Stadium (BMS) at Churchill Recreation Reserve will provide at least 2 additional compliant basketball courts, bringing the total to 5 and exceeding future basketball needs. However, retaining the current BIRC courts will enable other indoor sports to grow after basketball relocates from the centre. Whilst the Benalla Basketball Association is currently able to schedule all domestic matches on the 3 courts at the current BIRC, it will likely have to utilise a second night at the new BMS with only 2 courts available. The current Shire participation rate for basketball is well below the State average and suggests that the sport may experience a further increase in participant numbers. For tournaments, the Benalla Basketball Association will have up to 7 courts available throughout Benalla, which includes two courts at the College.

Sport	Need per Benchmark	Existing Provision	Shortfall (-)/ Surplus (+)	Discussion
Cricket	4 ovals	6 (excludes ovals in other towns)	+ 2	Since the merger of all cricket clubs and the Benalla District Cricket Association to form the Benalla Bushrangers Cricket Club, the sport (and club) has experienced continued growth. The 2 turf ovals at the Gardens Reserve and the Showgrounds should continue to meet all future turf team needs (up to 4 senior turf teams). These two ovals, plus the 2 hard wicket ovals at the Showgrounds, are adequate to meet future match days needs for junior cricket. In the event an additional cricket oval is required, a pitch could be re-installed to either the United Friendlies Society Reserve oval, or the Benalla Sport and Equestrian Centre oval. In relation to cricket practice wickets, there is a 3-lane facility at the Gardens Oval (the Bushrangers Cricket Club's home ground), a 2-lane facility at the Showgrounds, and a 2-lane facility at the United Friendlies Society Reserve. The Showgrounds and Friendlies Reserve facilities are in very poor condition and close to end of functional life. The Bushrangers Cricket Club do not use these practice facilities; all club training is centralised at the Gardens Oval. To enhance club training facilities and to future-proof the cricket practice facilities at Gardens Oval against future additional teams, it is recommended that the facility be expanded from 3 lanes to 6 lanes. It is also recommended that the practice facilities at the Showgrounds be renewed and that both lanes are removed from the Friendlies Reserve.
Croquet	3 courts	4	0	The Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club is the only croquet club in the shire and currently has access to 4 courts, which can absorb any future growth of croquet. The club uses other grass tennis courts to prepare additional courts when required for tournaments, and this flexibility can also be applied if an additional croquet court might be required regularly in future.

Sport	Need per Benchmark	Existing Provision	Shortfall (-)/ Surplus (+)	Discussion
Football	4 ovals	4 (Includes the Goorambat Recreation Reserve but excludes ovals in other towns)	0	The 4 ovals currently servicing the 3 senior football netball clubs, the Benalla Juniors, and the Benalla Auskick should continue to meet all needs for each group until 2036. In the event additional ovals are required for junior football in Benalla township, the Gardens Reserve oval or the United Friendlies Society Oval can be utilised.
Hockey	1 Pitch	1 (training only)	1 (training only)	The feasibility of upgrading the current gravel pitch to a full-size synthetic pitch is low, given the cost-benefit analysis. It is also not feasible to co-locate hockey and football on the same synthetic surface due to the different surface requirements. Hockey participation in the Shire exceeds the state average, so it is unlikely that participation will grow beyond current levels. It is recommended that hockey in the area be supported with fit-for-purpose training facilities, with competition games played in Shepparton.
Netball (outdoor)	12 courts	11 (includes the Goorambat Recreation Reserve but excludes courts in other towns.	-1	Overall netball participation in the Shire exceeds the State average. The Benalla Netball Association currently utilises 4 of the 7 full size courts at Churchill Recreation Reserve for its female-only and mixed competitions (Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, respectively). Of the 7 courts, 3 are non-compliant and are used for warm up/training purposes only. Six compliant outdoor courts are expected to meet future Association needs, and the additional 2 indoor courts coming to the reserve with the proposed BMS will provide a buffer to accommodate any future peaks in demand. Whilst there are 11 outdoor netball courts available in Benalla and Goorambat, their distribution does not correlate with current and likely future needs. Of the 3 football-netball clubs in the Shire, only the Benalla Saints have 2 netball courts available at its home ground. The Ovens & King FNL is now advocating that all

Sport	Need per Benchmark	Existing Provision	Shortfall (-)/ Surplus (+)	Discussion
				affiliate clubs have 2 compliant netball courts at their home grounds to accommodate increasing netball training and match day needs being experienced throughout the league. It is recommended that the All Blacks FNC and the Goorambat and District FNC each have 2 netball courts at their grounds.
Soccer	1 pitch	1 pitch	2 pitches	The status of the Benalla Rovers Soccer Club as a club with low participation and no teams is in stark contrast to the strong participation and growth of soccer throughout Victoria, although there are 20-30 Benalla juniors currently playing with the Euroa Soccer Club. It is highly likely that soccer will once again become a popular sport in Benalla (a view also supported by Football Victoria), therefore, this study needs to ensure sustainable soccer facility provision is an outcome, even if their development may not be required in the short to medium term. A senior sized pitch and a junior sized pitch are considered adequate for Benalla and will be sufficient to accommodate a club of 10-12 teams across all age groups. It is proposed that a senior pitch be planned for the infield area of the grass athletics track at Churchill Recreation Reserve, rather than planning for a dedicated pitch. The available open space in the reserve outside the athletics track and beyond the BMS will be suitable for junior pitches to be line-marked with portable goals. If the Benalla Rovers were to affiliate with the Shepparton Junior Soccer Association dedicated soccer pitches are not strictly required as all matches are centralised at Shepparton Sports City. This would largely require only sustainable soccer training facilities to be provided, similar to what is proposed for the Benalla Hockey Club.
Squash	3 courts	2 courts	-1 court	Squash is a popular sport in the Shire (35 players) when compared to the State participation average for squash, and it is a sport that has historically maintained good numbers. The challenge for the Benalla Squash Club is that its 2-court centre is privately owned and is in average condition. The opportunity for squash is to include up to 3 squash courts in any future upgrade of the current BIRC if the Benalla Basketball Association relocates, and the centre can be developed as a 'hub' for other indoor sports.

Sport	Need per Benchmark	Existing Provision	Shortfall (-)/ Surplus (+)	Discussion
				Whilst the historic model of provision for squash courts has been largely private sector, there is an increasing number of courts now being included in Council owned facilities utilising temporary/relocatable walls etc to ensure spaces remain flexible in their use.
Table Tennis	10 courts	12 courts	+2	Similar to squash, table tennis is a very popular sport in the Shire (68 players) when compared to the State participation average for table tennis; this will be partly due to the older age profile of the Shire and the sport appealing to older adults. The Benalla Table Tennis Association's membership is capped as it is currently unable to access the BIRC for additional midweek evening sessions. A key challenge for the Association is that it has to set up and pack down all courts and tables for each session, and ideally it would have a dedicated table tennis space with courts permanently set up. This would allow the Association to not only expand its competition offerings, but to also offer instructional sessions for new players and practice nights for existing members. The opportunity for table tennis is to potentially be given exclusive use of Court 3 in the current BIRC as part of any future upgrade when the Benalla Basketball Association relocates, and the centre can be developed as a 'hub' for other indoor sports. Notwithstanding this opportunity, a second option is that the Association be granted use of Court 3 for 2 or 3 consecutive evenings to enable a greater gain to be achieved from each time the equipment is set up and to be able to expand their program.
Tennis	6 Courts	30 8 hardcourts 22 grass courts	3 hardcourts 3 grass courts	There are currently two community tennis clubs in Benalla – the Benalla Gardens Tennis Club (6 hardcourts) and the Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club (2 hardcourts, 22 grass courts). The Benalla Gardens Tennis Club is largely operating as a social tennis club; it has no junior programs (only 2 juniors currently) and has no interclub teams entered into Benalla District Association competitions. The club's Monday evening intraclub social tennis competition is its main offering. Conversely, the Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club operates as a traditional community

Sport	Need per Benchmark	Existing Provision	Shortfall (-)/ Surplus (+)	Discussion
				tennis club, with junior coaching, teams entering into junior and senior Benalla District Tennis Association competitions, and hosts an annual tournament in January, attracting more than 220 players. The club does not utilise the 2 hardcourts which have reached the end of their useful life. The total number of tennis courts available in Benalla is surplus to current and future needs, particularly given that the Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club have a policy of allowing (free) community use of the 2 hardcourts and grass courts when the courts are not required for club activities. The main point of difference between the two clubs is the surface of the courts, and the availability of flood-lit courts at the Benalla Gardens Tennis Club. The Benalla Gardens Tennis Club has the following significant issues: lack of a sustainable club committee (currently only two committee members), 4 courts have non-compliant run-off, 2 courts have surfaces in poor condition and are currently unplayable, all courts require a lighting upgrade.

5.3 Sports facility strategic directions

The recommendations for provision and distribution of sports facilities within the Benalla township are informed by the sports facility needs assessment, input from reserve committees and user groups, consultant observations regarding facility condition and supporting infrastructure, and Council input.

An underlying principle is to optimise the shared use and co-location of sports across the four reserves. Two key assumptions in determining the sports mix across the network are that the new Benalla Multisport Stadium will be constructed at Churchill Recreation Reserve and that the current BIRC at the Friendlies Reserve will be retained and remain available for a range of indoor sports and community activities.

5.3.1 Churchill Recreation Reserve

The recommended strategic direction for Churchill Recreation Reserve includes the following:

- retain and renew six netball courts to Netball Victoria standards
- renewing the hockey pitch to training size with natural grass (warm-season couch grass)
- renewing the hockey clubroom for storage and a basic canteen and gathering function
- renewing the natural turf athletics track with a soccer pitch infield
- renewing long jump and high jump areas and throwing event areas as part of a relocated athletics precinct
- upgrading the Waller Street car park to a sealed surface (approx. 131 spaces)
- Upgrade the irrigation system to incorporate Integrated Water Management (IWM)
- upgrading sports lighting to LED, minimum 100 lux, and compliant standards
- Soccer and netball pavilions, public toilet, are recommended for removal as part of the redevelopment

The recommended new sports and open space facilities include the following:

- Benalla Multisport Stadium, including two netball and basketball courts, change rooms and amenities for all reserve user groups, a multipurpose room, office space, a canteen, and public toilets accessible from the external concourse;
- new pedestrian concourse central to all sports facilities;
- new spectator viewing mound for athletics and soccer, a new district-level play space with shelter, seating, and BBQ
- new reserve walking path with connectivity from all surrounding local roads
- new on-street angle parking (approx. 41 spaces)
- re-establish and create new landscape areas

5.3.2 United Friendlies Society Reserve

The recommended strategic direction for the Friendlies Reserve includes the following:

- retaining the existing BIRC for indoor sports (basketball, badminton, table tennis) and other community activities following the relocation of basketball to the Benalla Multisport Stadium. Includes investigating the feasibility of adding squash courts at the appropriate time;
- providing an additional outdoor netball court to achieve two compliant courts for the All Blacks FNC;
- upgrading the current netball clubroom into a gender-neutral umpires' changeroom and amenities, along with increased spectator shelter.
- new integrated netball clubroom and CFA changerooms and amenities
- renewing the oval surface with a reliable and sustainable irrigation system;
- upgrading sports lighting on the oval and netball courts to LED and compliant standards;
- relocating the CFA pump house
- improving pedestrian access, including crossing of Ackerly Avenue.
- convert tennis hardcourts to sealed car parking
- four new acrylic tennis courts with sports lighting at the tennis and croquet facility
- remove cricket nets

5.3.3 Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve

The recommended strategic direction for the Showgrounds includes the following:

- rebuilding the main oval with drainage, irrigation, levelling, and surface renewal together with new LED sports lighting;
- providing sports lighting on the back sports field to accommodate football training,
- setting up one larger oval on the back sports field to meet U14 and U17 match requirements, including goal posts and ball netting;
- completing the first-floor decking around the Glasshouse
- sealing the main car park and introducing traffic calming measures to the main car park and internal roads
- renew cricket nets
- re-purpose the showground bar facility to provide camp kitchen facilities
- upgrading the Croxford Shed and Poultry Shed and
- upgrading netball court lighting to LED.

5.3.4 Benalla Gardens Reserve

The recommended strategic direction for the Gardens Reserve includes the following:

- resurfacing the oval to a uniform warm-season couch grass with a renewed irrigation system
- constructing a six-lane enclosed cricket practice facility to replace the existing open nets, including a pedestrian access path
- upgrading cricket change rooms and the clubroom to be gender-inclusive and fit for purpose
- retain courts 1, 2, 5 and 6 as tennis courts for continued use by the Benalla Gardens Tennis Club at a social / community level and convert courts 3 and 4 to pickleball courts or alternate activation opportunities as identified by the club.

5.4 Strategic options for sport and/or club co-locations

5.4.1 Retention of the Benalla Gardens Tennis Club site

Following consultation, the master plan retains tennis at the Benalla Gardens Tennis Club (BGTC) site. Courts 1, 2, 5 and 6 are retained as tennis courts and courts 3 and 4 are converted to pickleball courts to make productive use of two courts the club had already identified as underused for tennis.

The following sets out the facility condition and club profile background that informed this decision, together with the community feedback that led Council to retain the club and site rather than pursue the consolidation option considered earlier in the study.

5.4.2 Facility Infrastructure

The BGTC facility has 6 hardcourts, 4 courts have non-compliant run-offs and 2 courts have surfaces in poor condition and are currently unplayable; the sports lighting for all courts is not compliant and is in poor condition.

The clubroom was constructed in 1980 and extended in 2009; however, it remains spartan in appearance and function and is subject to regular break-ins and vandalism.

The BLT&CC has 22 grass courts and 2 hard courts; the grass courts are all in good condition, whilst the hard courts are in poor condition with cracks evident throughout the surface. None of the hardcourts or grass courts are floodlit.

The clubroom is in good condition, having had the following recent upgrades: floor replaced, ceiling and insulation replaced, and the internal spaces repainted.

5.4.3 Club Offerings

The BGTC has an estimated 54 members (2 juniors) and largely operates as a social tennis club; it has a small junior coaching and pathway program, and has no interclub teams entered into Benalla & District Tennis Association competitions; the club's Monday evening intraclub social tennis competition is its main offering (6 teams).

The BLT&CC has an estimated 80 members (50 juniors) and offers a full range of coaching, competition and social play programs, and hosts an annual tennis tournament that attracts over 200 players; it has junior and senior teams entered into Benalla & District Tennis Association competitions, and the club's Wednesday evening intraclub social tennis competition has 16 teams.

5.4.4 Facility Needs

The overall participation in tennis nationally and in Victoria declined between 2024 and 2025, as did participation in organised tennis and participation as a tennis club member (Ref: AusSport).

Benalla has a surplus of tennis courts compared to industry standards, with the current total of 30 courts across both venues exceeding demand, which is evidenced by the Croquet section of the BLT&CC being able to regularly use 8 grass courts for 4 croquet courts, and the BGTC actively investigating alternate recreational uses (non-tennis) for courts 3 & 4.

On this basis, a net reduction in the number of courts in the shire will not impact tennis participation opportunities both now and into the future; the current population of Benalla Rural Shire is an estimated 14,600, and there is very little population growth projected to 2036 – only 600.

Notwithstanding this shire-wide surplus, retaining a scaled-back BGTC facility of four tennis courts, with courts 3 and 4 converted to pickleball, is a modest and low-risk response that addresses the club's own identified need for alternative uses without requiring the club's closure or the relocation of hard courts to another site.

5.4.5 Club Sustainability

The BGTC's committee capacity is a genuine challenge, i.e. low number of committee members (2 committee members at time of interview in December 2025) and the fact that the club coach is also the main committee person, and the retained facility will need continued support from Council and Tennis Victoria to build committee depth. By comparison, the BLT&CC has a stronger governance base, with:

- Its current facility provision being in average to good condition
- Its diversity of tennis offerings PLUS the croquet section
- Its strong committee (> 10 people)
- The annual guarantee of a revenue stream through its annual tennis tournament and annual regional croquet event

Adding four floodlit hardcourts will further diversify the Club’s offerings through the potential expansion of its coaching program and the introduction of night tennis competitions and social tennis programs during the winter months.

5.4.6 Fiscal Responsibility

The confirmed scope for the BGTC site is limited to converting courts 3 and 4 to rather than a full rebuild of all six courts.

The BGTC's low membership, small committee, and declining volunteer base remain genuine risks to the club's long-term sustainability, and the club will continue to need support from Council and Tennis Victoria to build its governance capacity. These risks are addressed through continued support rather than through relocation of the club's tennis courts, given the strength of community feedback in favour of retaining the site.

The BGTC clubroom requires upgrade to meet community expectations for a tennis clubroom; this is not included in the confirmed scope for this master plan.

The proposed hardcourt tennis facilities at BLT&CC are recommended to remain within the Masterplan. Tennis Victoria supports consolidation of tennis infrastructure at a single venue to improve long-term sustainability, participation opportunities and programming outcomes.

The Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club currently has higher participation levels, established governance arrangements, a long-standing Tennis Victoria affiliation, compliant courts and significantly stronger supporting infrastructure. While both sites would require substantial investment and reconstruction to deliver compliant hardcourt facilities in the future, the Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club represents the preferred location for any future investment for these reasons.

Both clubs advised during meetings in December 2025 that Tennis Victoria had previously encouraged the two clubs to combine. This master plan does not recommend or assume any merging of the two clubs; any such discussion remains a separate, voluntary matter for the clubs, Council, and Tennis Victoria to pursue outside this study.

5.4.7 Conclusion

The Benalla Gardens Tennis Club has a celebrated history and has served the Benalla community well, including its outlook to Lake Benalla within the Benalla Botanic Gardens. An earlier option considered during this study was to close the BGTC site and relocate hardcourts to the United Friendlies Society Reserve. This option was tested through the second round of stakeholder engagement, including the combined user group meeting, the public exhibition, and the Council meeting, and was met with clear community opposition, including concern about the loss of a valued clubhouse and outlook, and questions about the case for relocating a facility that primarily required maintenance rather than replacement.

In response to this feedback, the master plan retains the BGTC at its current site. Courts 1, 2, 5 and 6 are retained as tennis courts and courts 3 and 4, which the club had already identified as underused for tennis, are converted to pickleball courts or other alternate use. This direction addresses the club's own facility concerns at a modest cost, avoids the greater capital risk and community disruption of the consolidation option, and reflects the weight of community feedback received through the master plan's second round of engagement. It

makes no recommendation or assumption regarding the merging of the two Benalla tennis clubs; any future discussion about combining the BGTC and the Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club remains a separate, voluntary matter for the clubs, Council, and Tennis Victoria.

6. RESERVE MASTERPLANS

The draft master plans have been developed in consultation with the project's key stakeholders. The plans have been developed to the concept level, and at the appropriate time each element will need to undergo a detailed design and documentation process.

Refer to Appendix A for the draft reserve master plans.



7. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The implementation plan provides high-level guidance on the aspects that will influence the successful implementation of the master plans.

7.1 Staging Philosophy

Each of the reserve master plans will require a tailored implementation plan to cater for the differing needs of the recommended actions.

The sequencing of projects across the four reserves will be guided by the following principles, applied in combination rather than in strict hierarchy. No single principle overrides another; the staging plan will weigh all principles in the context of each project.

Safety and compliance

Projects that address an identified safety risk, a Disability Discrimination Act non-compliance, or a demonstrated failure to meet minimum standards for the relevant sport will be actioned ahead of improvement or growth projects, regardless of the reserve in which they are located.

Sporting need drives sequence, not funding opportunity

The priority assigned to each project reflects sporting need as assessed in this master plan. Where funding becomes available for a lower-priority project ahead of a higher-priority one, that funding will only be accepted if it does not delay or preclude the delivery of the higher-priority project within a reasonable timeframe.

Anchor projects first

The new Benalla Multisport Stadium at Churchill Recreation Reserve is the anchor project for the community. Projects that are contingent on or directly enabled by the new BMS. — including the reconfiguration of the athletics and netball precincts at Churchill — will be sequenced in alignment with the BMS construction program. Projects at other reserves that depend on the BIRC relocation of basketball will similarly be sequenced accordingly.

Enable before enhancing

Infrastructure that enables a sport to be played to a minimum acceptable standard — surface, lighting, change rooms — is delivered before infrastructure that enhances the experience, such as spectator seating, scoreboards, and landscaping. A club must be able to function before it can grow.

Participation impact per dollar

Where two projects are of equal or similar priority, preference is given to the project that benefits the greater number of participants or removes a constraint affecting the largest user group. This reflects the socioeconomic profile of Benalla, where reliance on community facilities is high and the capacity of clubs to fund alternatives is limited.

Gender equity is non-negotiable

Projects that directly deliver gender-neutral or female-inclusive change rooms, amenities, or playing infrastructure are not deferred on cost grounds alone. The Fair Access Policy 2024 and the AFL Goulburn Murray Football and Netball Facilities Strategy 2024–2035 both impose obligations in this regard.

Minimise disruption to ongoing use

Where a project requires the temporary closure or reduced capacity of a facility, construction will be programmed to minimise impact on competition seasons. Off-season construction windows will be used wherever feasible. Where closure is unavoidable, Council will work with affected clubs to identify interim arrangements.

Land tenure must be resolved before works commence

No capital works will be programmed on land where ownership, reserve status, or management responsibilities are not formally confirmed. This applies to the mixed-tenure parcels at the Showgrounds and the Crown land components at Churchill and the Gardens Reserve. Tenure resolution is a prerequisite.

Interdependencies across the reserve network are actively managed

The four reserves do not operate in isolation. A decision at one reserve — the relocation of a sport, the construction of new courts, or the decommissioning of an existing facility — has implications for the others. The staging plan will be reviewed as a whole at each decision point to ensure that network-level needs are not inadvertently compromised by site-level decisions.

Whole-of-life cost is considered alongside capital cost

Preference is given to solutions that reduce the ongoing maintenance and operational burden on clubs and Council. Where a higher capital cost option demonstrably reduces whole-of-life cost — for example, LED lighting over conventional fittings, the lower whole-of-life cost option is preferred, subject to the capital funding being available.

Club and community capacity to contribute is respected

Staging will not assume a level of club financial contribution that is inconsistent with the socioeconomic profile of the community or the demonstrated fundraising capacity of the club. Where a project is contingent on a club contribution, that contribution will be agreed in writing before the project is staged.

Deliver complete projects, not partial solutions

Projects will be scoped and funded to a functional completion standard. Partial works that leave a facility in an incomplete or non-functional state — such as a playing surface without lighting or change rooms without accessible toilets — will not be staged as standalone deliverables unless an agreed completion program is in place.

7.2 Opinion of Probable Cost

Table 17 below provides a summary of the high-level opinion of probable costs (OPC's) for each reserve. The detailed OPC's are provided as part of Appendix B. The OPC's are based on the following key assumptions:

- Churchill Recreation Reserve includes the $15,000,000 for the creation of the BMS.
- No detailed design has been undertaken
- Areas and volumes have been taken from Near Map
- It has been assumed that existing stormwater and electrical supply have sufficient capacity to accommodate renewal and upgrades.
- It has been assumed that no subgrade improvement works are required.
- A contingency of 30% has been applied due to level of detail currently available.
- All costs are excluded from GST

Table 17 - OPC summary

Reserve	Design fee (5%)	Construction prelims (6%)	Construction contract cost	Contingency (30%)	Total OPC (excl. GST)
Churchill Recreation Reserve	$317,100	$380,520	$21,342,000	$6,402,600	$28,442,220
United Friendlies Society Reserve	$244,250	$293,100	$4,885,000	$1,465,500	$6,887,850
Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve	$204,750	$245,700	$4,095,000	$1,228,500	$5,773,950
Benalla Gardens Reserve	$65,250	$78,300	$1,305,000	$391,500	$1,840,050
Total	**$831,350**	**$997,620**	**$31,627,000**	**$9,488,100**	**$42,944,070**

7.3 Funding Sources

The following funding programs are likely to be relevant to projects across the four reserves. Confirmation of program availability and eligibility will be assessed at the time of application:

- Council capital works and asset renewal budget
- Victorian Government Community Infrastructure Loans Scheme
- State Government Sport and Recreation Victoria grants programs
- Australian Government Infrastructure grants
- AFL Victoria and Football Victoria grant programs
- Netball Victoria facility improvement grants
- Cricket Victoria facility grants
- Club contributions and fundraising

7.4 Funding Plan

At the time of preparing this plan, two projects have committed funding:

1. Construction of the new BMS at Churchill Reserve. Sport and Recreation Victoria have allocated $15 million to the project.

2. Resurfacing of the two outdoor Netball Courts located at Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve. The Victorian Government have committed $150,000 to this project.

All other items will be subject to sourcing and securing funding for design, construction and maintenance.

7.5 Funding Rationale

The opinion of probable cost of $42,944,070 (excluding GST) represents a significant but targeted investment across four recreation reserves that collectively serve the organised sporting and recreational needs of the Benalla community.

The following metrics contextualise the cost across a range of measures, providing a basis for advocacy, funding applications, and community communication. All metrics are based on the Opinion of Probable Cost (Refer to Appendix B). An additional note is provided on each metric where the Benalla Multisport Stadium (BMS, $15,000,000) materially influences the result, given that it represents approximately 34% of the cost.

Registered participant and team-based

Table 18 summarises the registered participants and competition team numbers at each reserve, together with the reserve-specific OPC expressed on a per-participant basis. These figures provide the foundation for the programme-level metrics that follow.

Table 18 - reserve level participant numbers and OPC per participant

Reserve	Registered participants	Competition teams	Reserve OPC (excl. GST)	OPC per participant	OPC per participant per year (25 yr)
Churchill Recreation Reserve	478	38	$28,442,220	$59,503	$2,380
United Friendlies Society Reserve	769	96	$6,887,850	$8,957	$358
Benalla Showgrounds and Recreation Reserve	749	31	$5,773,950	$7,709	$308
Benalla Gardens Reserve	234	16	$1,840,050	$7,863	$315
Total	**2,230**	**181**	**$42,944,070**	**$19,257**	**$770**

Cost metrics

Table 19 provides the full suite of programme cost metrics. Where a metric is materially influenced by the BMS, the metric is also provided excluding the BMS so that the outdoor and shared facilities programme can be assessed independently.

Table 19 - cost metrics summary

Metric	Basis	Full programme ($42,944,070)	Excl. BMS ($27,944,070)
Cost per registered participant	2,230 registered sporting participants across 4 reserves	$19,257	$12,531
Cost per participant per year (amortised over 25-year asset life)	One-off capital cost spread over the design life of the infrastructure	$770	$501
Cost per competition team	181 registered competition teams across all sports	$237,260	$154,387
Cost per sport supported	12 organised sports supported across the 4 reserves	$3,578,673	—
Cost per municipal resident	Benalla Rural City population 14,528 (ABS 2021)	$2,956	—
Cost per municipal resident per year (amortised over 25-year asset life)	One-off capital cost per resident spread over design life of the infrastructure	$118	—
Cost per urban resident	Benalla township population approx. 9,000 — direct beneficiaries	$4,772	—
Cost per urban resident per year (amortised over 25-year asset life)	One-off capital cost per urban resident spread over design life	$191	—

Metric	Basis	Full programme ($42,944,070)	Excl. BMS ($27,944,070)
Annual programme cost (amortised over 25-year asset life)	Total programme cost expressed as an equivalent annual infrastructure investment	$1,717,763	—

Cost per registered participant

At $19,257 per registered participant across 2,230 players, the programme cost is within the range typically observed for comparable regional sports facility programmes in Victoria. Excluding the BMS, which is separately funded and represents a distinct indoor venue procurement. The cost falls to $12,531 per participant across the outdoor and shared facilities programme. This figure is directly comparable to Sport and Recreation Victoria benchmarks for community outdoor sports infrastructure, which typically range from $10,000 to $25,000 per participant for programmes of this scale and complexity.

Cost per participant per year

Amortising the full programme cost over the 25-year design life of the infrastructure produces an annual cost of $770 per registered participant. Excluding the BMS, this falls to $501 per participant per year. These figures compare favourably with the cost of commercial recreation memberships, which typically range from $800 to $1,500 per person per year in regional Victoria, and illustrate the value of community sport infrastructure as a publicly subsidised amenity.

Cost per competition team

Across 181 registered competition teams, the programme OPC equates to $237,260 per team, reducing to $154,387 per team excluding the BMS. This metric is particularly useful when presenting the programme to state sporting associations and the Ovens and King Football Netball League, which think in terms of competition units and have a direct interest in the adequacy of home-ground facilities for each affiliated club.

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Cost per resident

Expressed as a one-off capital cost per resident, the programme represents $2,956 per person across the Benalla Rural City municipal population of 14,528, or $4,772 per person across the Benalla urban area of approximately 9,000 people who have direct access to the four reserves. Amortised over 25 years, these figures reduce to $118 per municipal resident per year and $191 per urban resident per year, equivalent to approximately the cost of a weekly cup of coffee or a monthly streaming subscription. This framing is accessible and effective for community communication.

Annual cost

The annualised equivalent of the programme investment is $1,717,763, per year over 25 years. For a community of this size, an annual infrastructure investment of this scale across four major recreation reserves is consistent with responsible asset stewardship and comparable to annual expenditure on other municipal infrastructure categories such as road maintenance and drainage. It also provides a useful reference point when developing a multi-year capital works budget.

Health cost avoidance

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare estimates the annual cost of physical inactivity to the health system at approximately $900 per inactive person (based on the AIHW 2020 figure of $805, adjusted for CPI to 2026). Benalla Rural City's median age of 51 years, SEIFA score of 938 (third decile nationally), and higher-than-average rates of chronic disease make its population particularly susceptible to the health costs of inactivity. Conservatively estimating that the programme sustains 2,230 registered participants and supports a further 3,345 informal users — approximately 2.5 times the registered base — suggests that the programme actively supports 5,575 people in regular physical activity. At $900 per person per year, the estimated annual health cost avoidance is $5,017,500. At this rate, the infrastructure investment pays for itself in health system terms within approximately 9 years. This metric is well established in Australian sport and recreation advocacy and is accepted by both state and federal health and sport agencies as a legitimate basis for infrastructure investment.

Grant leverage

A grant leverage ratio will be calculated once the funding strategy is confirmed. If, as an illustrative example, 60% of the programme is secured through state and federal grants and Council contributes 40% from its own resources, the Council investment of approximately $17.4 million would attract approximately $26.1 million in external funding — a leverage ratio of 1.5:1. For reserves with AFL Victoria, Netball Victoria, Cricket Victoria, and Sport and Recreation Victoria alignment, the programme is well positioned to attract multiple funding streams simultaneously.

Appendices

APPENDIX A –RESERVE MASTERPLANS

APPENDIX B – OPINION OF PROBABLE COST

APPENDIX C- SITE IMAGES

APPENDIX D – BASIS OF ASSESSMENT

Assessment methodology

Asset condition assessments have been undertaken in accordance with the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) asset condition methodology. This approach provides a consistent framework for assessing asset condition and informing investment priorities across the four recreation reserves covered by this masterplan.

The IPWEA condition rating scale uses a five-point system to describe asset condition, as summarised in the table below.

Rating	Grade	Description	Intervention required
1	Very Poor	Failed or failure imminent / safety risk. Refurbishment, replacement or removal is required as a priority.	Urgent replacement required
2	Poor	Failure likely in the short term. Renewal likely to be required in 2 to 5 years.	Major renewal required
3	Fair	Significant deterioration evident; failure unlikely in the near future, but further deterioration likely. Renewal likely to be required in the medium term – 5 to 10 years.	Planned maintenance and minor renewal
4	Good	Acceptable physical condition; minimal short-term failure risk but potential for deterioration. Only minor work required (if any).	Minor maintenance and monitoring
5	Very Good	Sound physical condition. No work required.	Routine maintenance only

APPENDIX E -BACKGROUND INFORMATION

National & State Plans

National Sport Plan 2023

Sport 2030 is Australia's first national sport plan and provides the vision and the plan for sport and physical activity in Australia over the next 12 years.

The vision for Australian sport is:

'Australia is the world's most active, healthy sporting nation, known for its integrity and excellence'

The plan has 4 strategic priorities, each underpinned by a mission and a target.

Those relating to sport participation are:

Table 12 - Strategic priorities summary table

STRATEGIC PRIORITY	MISSION	TARGET
Building a More Active Australia	Reduce inactivity amongst Australians by 15% by 2030	More people of all ages engaged in sport and physical activity throughout every stage of their lives

Under the strategic priority of 'Building a More Active Australia', the Australian Government will promote sport and physical activity participation in the following ways:

- Drive movement for life through sport and physical activity participation for all Australians
- Ensure all Australian children have the skills, confidence and motivation to be active for life and safe in the water
- Reduce barriers to sport and physical activity participation, including swimming, and actively promote incentives for participation
- Coordinated investment in sport and recreation facilities to achieve sustainable outcomes for communities, with a focus on universal design to ensure sport is accessible to all Australians

The plan states that the Australian Government will play a key role — alongside state, territory and local governments — in funding infrastructure that meets the ever-changing needs of Australian communities.

All funded facilities should be designed in a way that they are accessible to all, not modified for use by people with a disability, but designed to be used by people with a disability.

All Australians, regardless of age, gender and ability, should be able to access infrastructure, play and participate. We need to ensure that all new developments have sporting infrastructure that is accessible to all, have physical activity as a core design element, and provide for the future sporting needs of new communities.

Further, we need to ensure that sporting infrastructure supports longer hours of use and includes programs that encourage more flexible use of facilities by individuals, sports, and community groups.

National Policy Framework for Girls and Women in Sport 2030

The Framework for Women and Girls in Sport is for the Commonwealth and State/Territory government jurisdictions to collectively measure progress on achieving equality for girls and women in sport.

The 2030 Vision is '*Equality for girls and women in sport'*

The Framework contains four strategic focuses. These include:

Leadership

Strong gender balanced leadership in sport to enable real change. Leadership includes coaches, officials, administrators, and committee and Board members.

Places and Spaces

Equal access to quality, safe, comfortable and culturally appropriate sport places and spaces that facilitate the participation of girls and women.

Participation

Girls and women playing sports of their choice and having opportunities to reach their performance potential.

Cooperation

Jurisdictions working together and working with sport to achieve equality for girls and women in sport.

Active Victoria 2022-2026, Sport and Recreation Victoria

Active Victoria is the State Government's strategic framework for sport and recreation in Victoria. Its vision is '*To build a thriving, inclusive and connected sport and active recreation sector that benefits all Victorians'.*

Active Victoria is underpinned by three objectives and six outcomes to guide activities and investment in sport and active recreation. The first two objectives and their outcomes are relevant to this study.

Objective 1: Connecting Communities
All Victorians have access to high-quality environments and appropriate participation opportunities.

Outcomes

- More Victorians participate equitably in sport and active recreation.
- Victoria has inclusive, accessible, and respectful places and spaces for sport and active recreation.

Objective 2: Building Value
The sport and active recreation workforce create positive experiences for people.

Outcomes

- The sport and active recreation workforce is highly skilled and leads a strong, sustainable workforce.
- Sport and active recreation is a safe, inclusive, and resilient sector.

Value of Community Sport & Active Recreation Infrastructure (2020)

This report considers the economic, health and social benefits that community sport and active recreation infrastructure can add to individuals, communities and society. These benefits are generated from the construction and operation of these facilities and spaces, and the activities that take place within them.

The annual value supported by community sport and active recreation infrastructure in Victoria is at least $7.04 billion.

Economic Benefits
The construction and operation of community sport and active recreation infrastructure makes a direct impact on Victoria's economy through a number of different channels. These facilities create employment and generate economic activity both through spend on the facilities and at the facilities. The economic benefits supported by community sport and active recreation infrastructure have been estimated at $2.1 billion on an average annual basis.

Health Benefits
The health benefits from community sport and active recreation infrastructure are driven by the physical activity this infrastructure supports. The health benefits of being physically active are well documented, and those supported by community sport and active recreation infrastructure have been estimated at $2.3 billion annually.

Social Benefits
The social benefits of community sport and active recreation infrastructure can be driven by two factors: firstly, the social connections created through events, programs and activities; and secondly, the role that infrastructure plays in communities in which it is located. The social benefits supported by community sport and active recreation infrastructure have been estimated at $2.6 billion on an average annual basis.

These findings make the case at a micro-level for Benalla Rural City that community sport and active recreation infrastructure deliver outcomes that make people happier, healthier and more productive to improve social cohesion, and contribute directly and indirectly to a stronger local economy

SSA Strategic Facility Plans

AFL Victoria 'Growing the Heartland' Football Facilities Development Strategy 2022-2027

The strategy provides facility and infrastructure-related responses to the following key challenges:

- Accessing new ovals for Australian football
- Catering for continued growth in female football
- Supporting umpires and officials with facilities.
- Enhancing the capacity of existing facilities and ensuring they are fit for purpose.

AFL Victoria has identified facility priorities to best meet needs for football infrastructure.

Goal 1: Build the capacity of community football

The strategies 5-year priorities to improve facilities to support and promote diversity in football include:

- Support inclusion through gender neutrality and universal design
- Maximise the carrying capacity of ovals
- Maximise functionality of venue infrastructure to support access and club sustainability.
- Support more ovals with 100-150 lux LED lighting.

AFL Goulburn Murray Football & Netball Facilities Strategy 2024-2035

This strategy sets priorities to support the AFL's national and statewide aspirations in the Goulburn Murray Region and is predominately facilities focused.

The priorities to 2034 for Benalla Rural City include:

- Provide gender neutral player and umpire change facilities at Benalla Showgrounds as per the facility audit information identified in this report.

Badminton

No state-wide facility strategy available.

Basketball Victoria Facility & Infrastructure Priorities 2022

This report outlines all basketball facilities in planning across Victoria in 2022.

Included is the new Benalla Indoor Recreation Centre, which is listed as being in the design phase with an estimated cost of $10m.

Victorian Cricket Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2028

The strategy provides regional summaries and priorities cricket facilities. The Rural City of Benalla is in Region #6 – North East Country.

The 'Big 6 Infrastructure Priorities' in Region 6 are listed below.

- Deliver and activate a regional-level Cricket and Community Centre
- Increase change room facilities and supporting amenities provision
- Increase the number of and improved condition of synthetic pitches
- Increase training net provision levels for Club Home venues
- Increase provision of inclusive facilities with a focus on female-friendly design
- Promote a high level of turf pitch provision across the Region

Hockey Victoria Strategic Facilities Master Plan 2015

The plan guides the future planning and development of hockey facilities throughout Victoria.

The plan includes a condition assessment of available pitches: the rating of the surface at the Churchill Reserve hockey facility is 'very poor'.

The plan concludes that based on the predicted population to 2026, the Northeast Regional Zone will require an additional 2 synthetic pitches to meet demand (based on a provision ratio of 1 pitch for every 300 players).

Growing Croquet Facilities - Infrastructure Planning Project 2020-2030

A key aim of the project was to establish a sustainable hierarchy of facilities to encourage increased participation in croquet.

A recommended hierarchy is provided with four levels: Local, District, Regional and State. Suggested facility requirements are provided for each level.

The Benalla Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club is listed as a 'District' facility, with the Wodonga Croquet Club nominated as the 'Regional' facility for the Northeastern Region.

With up to 7 courts available in Benalla, the report notes that there is no demand for more courts to 2031 and that there needs to be increased membership to improve sustainability.

Little Athletics

No state-wide facility strategy available

Netball Victoria Statewide Facilities Strategy – Competition Courts 2026-2028

The strategy is a plan that supports the sustainable provision, development and capacity building of competition netball courts across Victoria. Churchill and Friendlies are both listed as priority projects for 2026.



Figure 4 - Extract from Netball Victoria Priority Project List

It supports nine netball facility priorities, with those relevant to the Benalla Region being:

Outdoor Court Surface Type

Hard court and asphalt surfaces are preferred for netball competition and training.

Supporting Infrastructure

Ensuring the adequate provision of supporting infrastructure such as change rooms, car parking, shade and seating for spectators, players, and officials is vital to create safe and functional netball facilities.

Outdoor Court Lighting

Improving competition standard lighting and the provision of LED systems will help increase court capacity and promote greater flexibility in use.

Facility Condition

Improving regular facility maintenance and interventions and investing in facility renewal projects will support increased user safety and improve user experience.

Facility Flexibility

Better outdoor court lighting and improved access to indoor netball facilities increase the flexibility and diversity of ways to play netball.

The strategy provides an analysis of each LGA's existing court usage capacity. This analysis considers the maximal number of playable hours each week, considering aspects such as standard of court lighting, multiple line marking, and court condition.

Benalla is part of the North Region of Victoria and is listed as having 12 outdoor courts and no indoor courts. After taking into consideration the aspects of the courts, the outdoor court capacity is 90%.

Football Victoria Facilities Strategy 2025-2035

The strategy sets the strategic direction and priorities for soccer facility development through to 2035.

Benalla is in Football Victoria's Goulburn Northeast Region, which experienced a 38% growth in participation between 2021 and 2024.

Infrastructure priorities by 2035 are:

Priority 1

Deliver Local High Priority Infrastructure Projects

These projects include player change rooms to be gender accessible, pitches to have 100+ lux lighting, and competition pitches to be rated good or excellent.

There is no priority projects listed in the strategy for Benalla.

Priority 2

Deliver Football Hub Projects Around the State

Baranduda Fields Sporting Complex near Wodonga is identified as the future soccer hub for the Northeast Region.

Priority 3

Deliver Home of Matildas Stage 2

Squash Victoria Regional Facility Strategy 2014

The strategy provides a framework for the provision and development of squash and racquetball infrastructure, and for stakeholder and partner participation in the planning and development of squash/racquetball facilities for the next 10 years.

A steady decline in squash/racquetball participation throughout a majority of Regional Victoria over the past 10 years indicates that the development of additional squash/racquetball facilities in the short term is not justified. Future investment and resources should be directed towards improving existing facility condition and accessibility.

Future planning directions for squash and racquetball in regional Victoria include:

Seek to have a minimum of one 'Regional' hierarchy level squash/racquetball facility capable of hosting a squash/racquetball tournament within each of Squash and Racquetball Victoria's Regional Planning Zones to assist with player pathway and competition development.

Aim to have a combination and even distribution of club, local and regional squash/racquetball facilities within each of Squash and Racquetball Victoria's proposed Regional Planning Zones.

Prioritise the improvement of existing squash/racquetball facility condition and accessibility over the development of new establishments.

Standalone squash/racquetball facilities used purely for squash/racquetball related facilities during squash's peak usage' times (weeknights and weekends) are fast becoming financially unviable. Future squash/racquetball facility improvements or new developments must be focused on providing opportunities for alternate facility usage (e.g., dance/karate classes) to increase revenue and attract external funding.

When developing existing facilities or planning for additional facilities, ensure facilities are equipped with movable walls to enable the court/s to be opened up into a larger programmable floor space, hence increasing the appeal for alternate uses and revenue through hire fees.

The strategy provides a four-level facility hierarchy: State/National, Regional, Local and Club.

Benalla is located within the Hume Regional Planning Zone and the Benalla Squash and Racquetball Centre is classed as a 'Club' level facility. Within the Planning Zone the Wangaratta Indoor Sports and Aquatic Centre and the Wodonga Squash Centre are both classed as 'Regional' level facilities.

Table Tennis

No state-wide facility strategy available

Tennis Victoria Facilities Blueprint 2025-2029

The document presents a strategy designed to modernise and future-proof tennis infrastructure across Victoria.

Tennis Victoria has identified a range of emerging and long-term challenges within the community sport landscape, including:

Ageing Infrastructure

Much of Victoria's tennis infrastructure is ageing and increasingly misaligned with contemporary participation needs. Ongoing maintenance and strategic renewal are critical to support evolving club programs and community expectations. A key challenge lies in balancing these demands with the resource constraints of local government and volunteer clubs.

A Changing Climate

With many facilities not designed for climate resilience, upgrades such as water-efficient irrigation, solar power, sustainable materials, and improved ventilation and shading will be essential to maintain safe, cost-effective venues.

Financial Sustainability

Rising costs associated with facility development, maintenance and operations are placing financial pressure on local government and clubs. Long-term viability depends on robust financial planning, budgeting and oversight. Clubs must be equipped with the tools to manage these challenges effectively in partnership with landowners.

Accessibility

Improving physical access and support amenities across tennis venues is essential to broadening participation. Equally important is digital access, including online booking systems and real-time venue information, which enhances usability and engagement.

Management Models

The general decline in volunteerism among tennis clubs in Victoria is placing increased strain on their operations. This trend necessitates a rethinking of club management, including the adoption of innovative or alternative operational models to reduce reliance on volunteer labour and improve sustainability.

Complementary Disciplines

The recent growth in racquet sports, including POP Tennis, Pickleball and Padel, presents both competition and collaboration opportunities. While these disciplines can enhance community engagement and diversify offerings, their integration must be carefully managed to ensure tennis programming remains central to venue operations.

The Blueprint provides a 6-tier tennis facility hierarchy.

Table 13 - Tennis facility hierarchy

Tier	Hierarchy Level	Facility Role
1	International	International events
2	Performance Hubs	ITF professional events
3	Premier Community Venue	Premier competition venues
4	Full-service Community Venue	Full mix of recreational play, competition play, coaching and programming for local catchment
5	Community Venue	Will have some program offerings such as coaching and competition play
6	Community Access Venue	Casual bookings and may have limited coaching

Tennis Victoria is actively seeking funding opportunities and partnerships to accelerate court lighting upgrades. Evening tennis provides a cooler, safer alternative and helps reduce the risks of heat-related health issues and sun exposure.