Benalla Rural City Council

Draft Council Plan

2025-2029

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Contents

1 Acknowledgement of Country....3
2 Mayor's Message....4
3 Councillors....5
4 About the Council Plan....6
5 Aligning with Community Vision 2036....8
6 About Benalla Rural City....10
7 If Benalla Rural City was 100 people....12
8 Our Community Engagement....16
9 How to Read This Plan....18
10 Themes....19
11 Theme 1: Community....21
12 Theme 2: Economy....23
13 Theme 3: Environment....25
14 Theme 4: Liveability....27
15 Theme 5: Leadership....29
16 Delivering the Plan....31
17 Monitoring and Accountability....31
18 Gender Impact Assessment....32

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1 Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.



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2 Mayor's Message

To be provided.



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3 Councillors



Cr Justin King



Cr David Blore



Cr Peter Davis



Cr Puna Hewa Gunaratne



Cr Jillian Merkel



Cr Nathan Tolliday

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4 About the Council Plan

The Integrated *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025–2029* brings together the *Council Plan*, the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan*, and the *Disability Action Plan* into a single, strategic document. It reflects what matters most to our community and guides how Council will deliver services, allocate resources, and respond to local priorities over the next four years.

As a legislative requirement under Section 90 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, all Victorian councils must adopt a four-year strategic plan that outlines key priorities, services, resource use, and ways to measure performance. The Plan also must meet the requirements of Section 55, with deliberative engagement practices shaped by Council's *Community Engagement Policy* to ensure it reflects the values, needs and aspirations of the Benalla Rural City community. This Council Plan achieves these legislative requirements.

	Vision, Strategy, and Policy	Resource Allocation & Management
LONG TERM	• Benalla Rural City Community Vision 2036 • Benalla Rural City Community Plan	• Asset Plan • Long-term Financial Plan

MEDIUM TERM	• Council Plan integrating the:
	  ○ Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, and
	  ○ Disability Action Plan
	• Other Key Strategies and Plans
		• Budget
		• Revenue and Rating Plan

SHORT TERM	• Action Plans • Service Plans • Programs, projects and initiatives	• Budgets • Staff • Grant Funding

Developed for both the organisation and the community, the Plan draws on the long-term Vision in the *Benalla Rural City Community Plan 2016–2036* and aligns with key documents including the *10-Year Asset Plan*, *10-Year Financial Plan*, and a range of Council strategies and policies. Together, these guide Council's annual budgets and short-term planning.

4.1 Integrating public health, wellbeing and disability into the Plan

Council's commitment to health and wellbeing is reflected in the integration of the *Disability Action Plan* and the *Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan*, which outlines Council's role in supporting better health outcomes across the municipality. It aligns with the *Victorian*

Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2023–2027 and has been developed in accordance with the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008*.

The Plan focuses on six regionally relevant themes:

1. Increasing healthy eating
2. Increasing active living
3. Improved mental wellbeing
4. Supporting healthy ageing
5. Preventing all forms of violence
6. Tackling the health impacts of climate change

These priorities will be delivered in partnership with local and regional organisations including Benalla Health and the Goulburn Valley Public Health Unit, whose work is supported and complemented through this Plan. The Benalla Health and Wellbeing Partnership will work collaboratively to monitor the Plan.

4.2 The Importance of External Funding

Achieving the ambitious goals outlined in the *Integrated Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025–2029* requires more than just careful planning and resource allocation. While municipal rates provide a critical foundation for Council's operations, they are not sufficient to fully fund the transformative initiatives and services envisioned in this Plan.

To bridge this gap, securing external funding from State and Federal Government streams is essential. These funding opportunities enable Council to deliver on its commitment to the community by supporting vital projects, programs, and infrastructure that would otherwise be beyond the reach of local resources alone.

By leveraging these external funding sources, Council can ensure that the priorities identified in the Plan – such as improving health and wellbeing, tackling climate change, and enhancing community infrastructure – are not only aspirational but achievable. This approach reinforces the vital importance of community collaborations, emphasising that partnerships and shared responsibility are the foundation for building a thriving, resilient, and sustainable Benalla Rural City.

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5 Aligning with Community Vision 2036

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 — a place where people want to continue to live, move to and are proud to call home.

The *Benalla Rural City Community Vision 2036* was developed in 2015 through a deliberative engagement process involving more than 700 community members and a panel of independent representatives. It reflects a collective aspiration for a sustainable, inclusive, liveable and resilient future — and continues to guide Council's planning and investment. The *Benalla Rural City Council Plan 2025–2029* plays a key role in delivering on this Vision that ensure each four-year Council Plan cycle continues building toward the future our community has imagined.

The *Community Vision 2036* is supported by seven guiding themes:

- **Community wellbeing and sense of place** – Fostering a vibrant, inclusive and connected community that values diversity, lifestyle and local identity.
- **A well-planned, connected and accessible community** – Ensuring high-quality infrastructure, transport and digital connectivity for everyone.
- **A vibrant, thriving and progressive economy** – Supporting business growth, innovation, and local employment across all industries.
- **Planning for population growth** – Embracing diversity while ensuring services, housing and workforce capacity keep pace with future needs.
- **A sustainable environment** – Protecting landscapes and waterways through responsible planning, education and community partnerships.
- **A destination of choice** – Creating opportunities through tourism, arts, events and cultural initiatives that enrich local life.
- **Leadership and community spirit** – Building on local leadership, collaboration and civic pride to strengthen our future together.

To bring this Vision to life, Council must lead with intention, act in partnership, and stay accountable to the community's goals. The following Vision, Purpose and Values guide how Council plans, delivers and advocates over the next four years.

Our Vision

A sustainable, thriving and cohesive community where lifestyle, culture, health and wellbeing are supported by sound leadership and community partnership.

Council's Purpose

Council's purpose is to work in partnership with the community to build a connected and thriving, future-focused municipality.

Council's Values

To deliver on this purpose and support the *Community Vision 2036*, Council is guided by the following values:

- **Accountability** – acting with transparency and responsibility
- **Continuous improvement** – always striving to do better
- **Equity** – making fair, inclusive and evidence-based decisions
- **Integrity** – being honest, consistent and ethical
- **Leadership** – setting direction and taking action
- **Respect** – valuing people, place and diversity

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6 About Benalla Rural City

Benalla Rural City is located in North-east Victoria, around two hours from Melbourne. It is home to more than 14,500 people, with over one-third living outside of the Benalla township. While residents primarily speak English at home, Punjabi is now the second most common language, reflecting a growing South Asian community.



Regional Snapshot

193 km	14,528	36%	51	96.4%	$1.1b
North East of Melbourne	Total 2021 Population	Reside outside Benalla City	Median Age	Speak English at home	GRP Estimate

6.1 Council Services & Assets

Benalla Rural City Council supports the liveability of the region through services that many people rely on every day, including family and youth programs, waste collection, public health, and business support. Council also looks after the infrastructure that keeps the community running, such as more than 1,300 kilometres of roads, over 100 public buildings, and key facilities like the aquatic centre and local recreation reserves.

Council's Key Services	Details
Community Development & Family Services	Community resilience, family wellbeing, and youth development.
Economic Development	Business support, tourism and cultural development.
Waste Management	Kerbside collections, landfill operations, and waste minimisation projects, ensuring EPA compliance.
Public Health	Immunisations, health education, and regulatory oversight of food safety and accommodation standards.
Emergency Management	Plans for and responds to natural disasters, ensuring community safety and preparedness.
Facilities and Maintenance	Maintenance of community assets, including open spaces, recreational reserves, and other key infrastructure.

Key Assets Maintained by the Council	Details
Sealed Roads	561km
Unsealed Roads	773km
Kerb and Channel	130km
Off Street Carparks	110,097sqm
Bridges	75
Major Culverts	230
Footpaths	104km
Cycleways	21km
Pipe	54km
Pits	2,059
Buildings & Structure	104
Aquatic centre	1
Recreational/Sporting Centres	8

7 If Benalla Rural City was 100 people

Genders

52
Female

48
Male

Age

14
<14 years old

9
15-24 years old

19
25-44 years old

28
45-64 years old

26
65-84 years old

4
85+ years old

Multiculturalism

9
Born overseas

4
Speak other language than English at home

2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

House Composition

31
Live by themselves

32
Couple without children

18
Couples with children

9
One-parent family

10
Other/not stated

Education

14
Completed Bachelor or Higher degree

39
People aged over 15 years old completed Year 12 or equivalent

Housing & Transport

69
Owns or mortgage a house

$490,000
Median house price (2025)

4
Rents – Social housing

17
Rents – Private

$460
Median rent (2025)

10
Other/not stated

5
Live in a house without a car

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Workforce

54
Full time

35
Part time

8
Employed away from work*

3
Unemployed

19
Volunteer

$1,192
Median Household Income

Health & Wellbeing

11
Live with asthma

11
Live with mental health issue

14
Live with Arthritis

38
Suffer from one or more long term health condition

62
Are obese or overweight

92
Did not comply with the veg intake guidelines

38
Complied with the fruit intake guidelines (1-2 daily)

58
Insufficient physical activity*

14
Daily smokers

1
Men experience FV, compared to state average (0.4%)

4
Women experience FV, compared to state average (2%)

* The 'employed away from work' category refers to people who responded that they had a job in the week before the Census, but were away from work on holidays, on paid leave, on strike, or temporarily stood down.

* Australian national guidelines for physical activity are defined by the Department of Health and Aged Care for each of the following age groups:

- 5-17 years old – 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day
- 18-64 years old – at least 2.5 hours of moderate intensity physical activity and 1.25 hours of vigorous intensity physical activity per week
- 65+ years old – at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most days

Source:

- Goulburn Valley Public Health, Health Needs Assesment 2023
- Australian Bureau Statistic, Benalla (LGA) Census All Person 2021
- Profile.id (informed decisions), Benalla Rural City

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7.1 Population Change

With a median age of 51, Benalla Rural City has a strong retiree presence and an ageing population that is expected to grow over time. Projections show continued increases in older age groups alongside a gradual decline in younger cohorts. This shift is part of a broader demographic trend affecting many regional areas across Victoria.

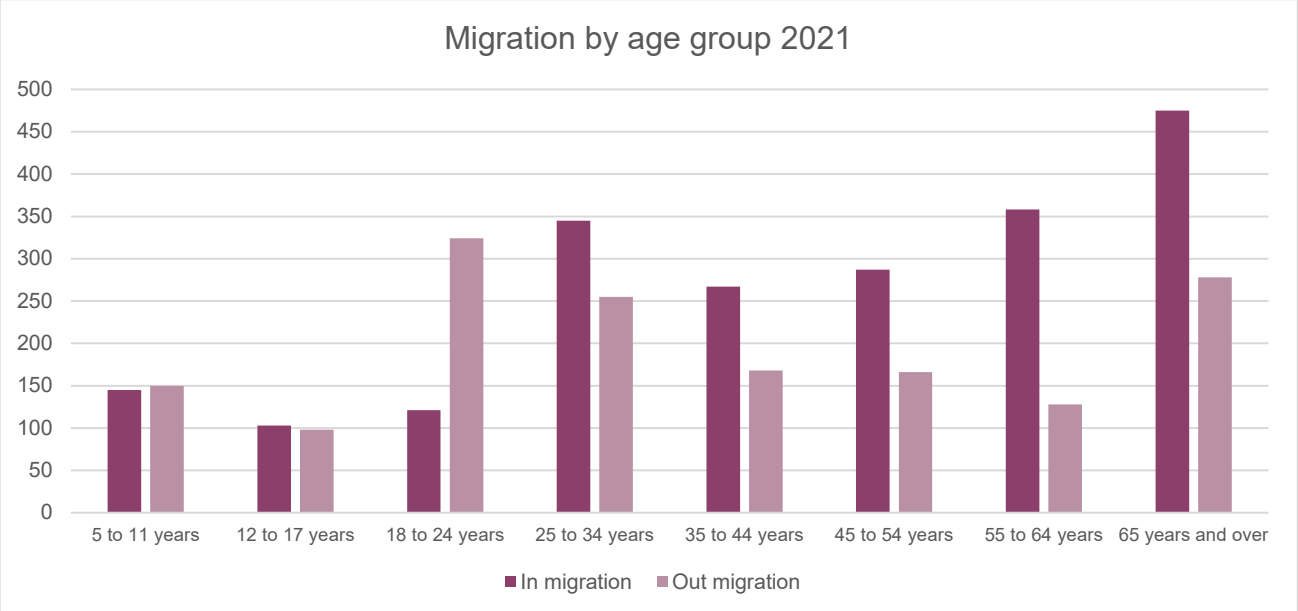
Age Group	2016	2021	2036 (Forecast)	% Change (2021-2036)
0-14	2200	2050	1950	-11%
15-29	2000	2000	1500	-25%
30-44	1900	2050	2200	+16%
45-59	3000	2800	2700	-10%
60-74	3100	3600	3300	+6%
75+	1500	2000	3200	+113%

7.2 Migration

In line with the region's demographic profile, older adults are more likely to move in, often arriving from nearby rural and peri-urban areas for lifestyle reasons and more affordable housing. On the other hand, younger cohorts tend to move out as part of life stage shifts, typically for study, work, or broader opportunities. Most of this movement remains local, with strong ties to surrounding LGAs, such as Wangaratta and Greater Shepparton.

	In Migration	Out Migration
Top 3 Locations*	Wangaratta	Wangaratta
	Greater Shepparton	Greater Shepparton
	Strathbogie	Greater Geelong

*Source: Profile.id (informed decisions), Benalla Rural City



7.3 Major Industries

The local workforce includes a strong base of professionals, with health and social care emerging as the region's leading employment sector. The region is also home to advanced manufacturing operations and a vocational training presence through GOTAFE, both of which contribute to local job pathways. While these industries attract large employers and investment, access to skilled labour is shaped by housing availability and ongoing workforce retention challenges.

Employment per sector



15.1% **(▲ 0.7%)**
Health Care and Social Assistance



12.6% **(▲ 4.2%)**
Construction



9.7% **(▼ 0.1%)**
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing



8.5% **(▼ 0.3%)**
Manufacturing



8.2% **(▼ 0.9%)**
Retail Trade

7.4 What is Benalla Rural City Known For?

Benalla Rural City is renowned for its vibrant arts and cultural identity, with public art, exhibitions, and events bringing the community together. In 2023–24, over 79,000 people visited the Benalla Art Gallery, while the region's growing collection of street and silo art in Benalla, Goorambat, and Devenish continues to attract visitors. Council also supports popular events like the Benalla Street Art Festival and the annual Benalla Festival in November.

The city's rich heritage and history, along with attractions like the Winton Motor Raceway, which draws motorsport enthusiasts nationwide, further enhance Benalla Rural City's appeal for residents and visitors alike. Nature lovers can explore the Winton Wetlands, a unique ecological and cultural landmark, as well as the Warby Ranges and Mount Samaria State Park, offering stunning landscapes, diverse wildlife, and opportunities for hiking, cycling, four-wheel driving and camping. Together, these experiences highlight the region's cultural vibrancy and natural beauty.

8 Our Community Engagement

In developing this Council Plan, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods were used. Through consultations, workshops, pop-up sessions and listening forums, we heard directly from residents, students, businesses, service providers and local groups about their experiences and aspirations. These conversations were complemented by a community survey, along with a review of existing strategies, plans, and datasets to build a more complete understanding of local priorities. To bring these diverse perspectives to life, community personas were developed as a tool to ensure the Plan remains easy to connect with.

8.1 Qualitative Approach

Throughout early 2025, extensive community engagement was conducted with businesses, community groups, and more than 190 school-aged children and over 20 seniors engaged through a series of community engagement activities. These activities included:

- 71 individual consultations
- 5 community workshops
- 4 community panel sessions with up to 15 participants
- 13 listening sessions with schools, local groups and at public events
- Street pop-up sessions across the municipality

8.2 Quantitative Approach

To support our analysis of the region's trends and priorities, we reviewed over 120 data sources. This work drew on:

- 45 Council strategies and plans
- Over 50 datasets sourced by the Council
- 172 community survey responses
- Data from over 10 community organisations
- Findings from benchmarked Councils

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8.3 What the Community Says

In developing this Council Plan, we conducted a series of community consultations that included community groups, service providers, and key organisations. Some insights from the consultations were:

What do you like about where you live?

"The natural environment is beautiful and calming. The lake, walking tracks and green spaces are a big part of why people stay."

"It's a relaxed place to live, but there are still plenty of ways to get involved if you want to."

"Benalla has a creative feel. The murals, the gallery and local events add life and character to the town."

"Community spirit is one of the region's biggest assets. People take pride in supporting local groups, events and each other."

What are your challenges?

"Public transport within and beyond Benalla is limited. The timing often doesn't match up with work, school or appointments."

"Young people want more pathways to study, work and build a future here."

"Some people still feel left out of community life, especially if they're new, living outside of Benalla, or speak another language."

"People in the outer towns want to feel seen and supported, just like those in central Benalla."

8.4 Key Challenges and Considerations

Benalla Rural City, like many regional communities, faces a range of external pressures that may influence the delivery of this Plan. Key challenges include:

- Ageing population and workforce shortages, which may impact service capacity and local employment.
- Housing affordability and availability, particularly in attracting and retaining skilled workers.
- Diversity of employment opportunities.
- Climate change and increasing frequency of extreme weather events, which place pressure on infrastructure, natural assets and community wellbeing.
- Digital exclusion and access to transport, particularly for isolated or vulnerable residents.
- Cost-of-living pressures, which affect residents' health, safety and access to opportunities.

Council will continue to monitor these issues and adjust service delivery and planning accordingly, in collaboration with local, regional and state partners.

9 How to Read This Plan

This Council Plan sets out Benalla Rural City Council's direction for the next four years. It explains what the community has told us is important, and how Council will respond through services, projects, partnerships and advocacy.

To make the Plan easy to navigate, we've broken it down into clear and connected segments. Each part builds on the last, showing the link between your priorities and the Council's strategies.



9.1 Theme

A theme is a broad policy domain that captures a key area of Council responsibility and community interest. Themes help organise the Plan and reflect the structure of Council's long-term service and infrastructure planning.

9.2 Objective

An objective defines the desired outcome that Council aims to achieve within each theme over the four-year period. Objectives articulate the future state Council is working towards in response to community needs and strategic priorities.

- Timeframe: Medium-term (four years)
- Purpose: Defines the "what" — a clear, outcome-oriented goal

9.3 Strategy

A strategy outlines the overarching approach that Council will adopt to achieve each objective. Strategies describe the methods, partnerships or interventions that will be pursued to address key challenges and opportunities.

- Timeframe: Medium- to long-term (ongoing throughout the Plan period)
- Purpose: Defines the "how" — a targeted, high-level response

9.4 Measures of Success

Each strategy includes measures of success, an indicator used to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's efforts and to track progress against the Plan's strategies over time. Measures may include service delivery data, infrastructure performance, engagement levels, or community outcomes or satisfaction indicators.

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10 Themes

This Council Plan is organised into five themes that group together related priorities and challenges. Each theme brings together the types of issues the Council works on, such as services, infrastructure, community wellbeing, the environment, and local leadership. This structure helps display how different parts of the work done by the Council connect and provides a clear lens for understanding the Plan's goals and actions.

The five themes are:

Community

Covers inclusion, connection, and support for people across different life stages and backgrounds.

Economy

Focuses on business, employment, tourism, and local industries.

Environment

Encompasses sustainability, climate resilience and the natural environment.

Liveability

Relates to how people experience daily life, including safety, neighbourhoods, transport, and access to services.

Leadership

Looks at the Council's internal performance, community engagement, decision-making, and advocacy.

Throughout the Plan, the Council's role is defined for each strategy to clarify its level of responsibility:

- **Advocate** – Represent community needs to other levels of government and external bodies
- **Facilitator** – Enable collaboration and support community-led initiatives
- **Provider** – Directly deliver services, programs or infrastructure

- **Asset Owner** – Manage and maintain Council-owned assets and infrastructure
- **Regulator** – Administer and enforce local laws and statutory obligations
- **Partner** – Collaborate with others to deliver joint outcomes
- **MPHWP** – Refers to a strategy that is aligned with the *Municipal Public Health & Wellbeing Plan*.

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11 Theme 1: Community

11.1 Objective 1: A healthy, safe and resilient community

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Work with key partners to implement and support initiatives that promote gender equality, reduce and prevent gendered violence, homelessness, food insecurity and harms caused by drugs, alcohol and gambling.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Partner	Partners working collaboratively to identify and address public health and wellbeing priorities and concerns.
Support our community to feel safe, build resilience and prepare for emergencies and natural disasters.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Partner	Community safety initiatives delivered. Emergency planning or preparedness actions implemented.
Deliver inclusive, accessible events and programs that reduce social isolation and promote participation for all community members.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Partner, Provider	Improved accessibility to Council and community spaces or events. Programs and events codesigned and delivered in partnership targeting social isolation.
Help people stay healthy and active.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Partner	Improvement in health indicators within the community. Increased opportunity for active participation.

11.2 Objective 2: A connected, involved and inclusive community

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Provide opportunities for our children and young people to thrive.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Partner	Youth-focused initiatives delivered and co-designed with young people.
Support initiatives that enhance the inclusion of culturally diverse groups.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Partner	Events or programs delivered incorporating multicultural content or partnerships with the CALD community.
Improve access, inclusion and opportunities for an ageing population.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Partner	Age-friendly programs and communications delivered.
Support volunteering opportunities that enable all community members to contribute to community life.	MPHWP, Advocate, Facilitator, Partner	New or improved volunteer opportunities promoted with a focus on inclusion.
Respectfully engage, include and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and communities.	Advocate, Facilitator, Partner	Engagement activities held in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and other stakeholders.
Ensure rural residents can access Council services fairly, and join in community life, and share their ideas and priorities.	MPHWP, Provider, Asset Owner, Partner, Facilitator	Engagement sessions or consultations delivered in smaller rural townships. Council services made available or improved in rural areas.

What the community says

"Young people here have a lot of potential. They just want more chances to get involved and do something meaningful."

"It would be great to see more events and programs in the smaller towns - something that brings people together and makes sure no one feels left out."

"Most local groups run on volunteers, and it is getting harder to find new ones. A bit more support would make it easier for people to step in and help."

"Benalla is really diverse now, but sometimes that is not reflected in the events we see. It would mean a lot to include more cultural celebrations."

"There's a need to focus on preventing family violence. More awareness and education could go a long way."

"Families are experiencing more complex needs, and early mental health support for children under 12 remains limited. There is an opportunity to strengthen wraparound services."

"People living further out are finding it harder to get to appointments. More local services or better transport would make things a lot easier."

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12 Theme 2: Economy

12.1 Objective 1: Flourishing visitor economy and sustainable growth

Strategy	Council's Role	Measures of Success
Improve local accommodation and nighttime economy offerings in Benalla Rural City.	Facilitator, Advocate, Partner	Council-led initiatives to assess or improve accommodation or nighttime economy. Visitor economy initiatives delivered or supported.
Attract investment and support local businesses.	Facilitator, Advocate, Provider, Asset Owner, Partner	Council-led investment attraction or industry engagement activities. CBD or small business support initiatives delivered or co-designed.
Advocate for improved digital, freight and transport connectivity to support business growth and new development.	Facilitator, Advocate, Partner	Formal advocacy or partnership activities progressed.
Work with key stakeholders to improve local learning and employment pathways that address skills gaps, align with future needs, and local employment opportunities.	Facilitator, Advocate, Partner	Initiatives delivered in partnership with key stakeholders.
Promote Benalla Rural City's liveability and proactively plan for sustainable residential development.	Facilitator, Regulator, Advocate	Development and launch of a liveability campaign. Planning or engagement actions progressed to support residential development.

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What the community says

"Benalla has some great assets, but there is not much to do in the evenings. More dining or entertainment options would help keep visitors around longer."

"People are already coming for things like the gallery, street art and wetlands - we just need to promote them better and make the most of what we have."

"There is strong economic potential in the region, but we need to attract more businesses and make it easier for them to grow, especially in the CBD and smaller towns."

"It is hard to grow a business if we lack reliable internet and better freight access."

“It would be great to see more support for businesses trying to reduce waste or do things more sustainably”

"Young people want pathways that go beyond more courses available, like experiences that lead to jobs.”

"We want youth to be able to get their training in the region, but access to things like TAFE or other post-school opportunities can be really limited."

“Benalla has a great lifestyle, but we need to raise people’s awareness about it. Promoting areas could bring in more families and businesses.”

“There is a lot of interest in moving here, but we need to plan for that growth, so it says sustainable– housing, infrastructure, the works.”

13 Theme 3: Environment

13.1 Objective 1: Healthy and protected natural environment

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Enhance climate change resilience.	Provider, Facilitator, Regulator, Partner	Climate resilience and education initiatives delivered.
Partner to manage and enhance our environmental assets.	Facilitator, Regulator, Advocate, MPHWP, Partner	Collaborative initiatives aligned with regional priorities delivered.

13.2 Objective 2: Circular economy, renewable energy and sustainable waste management

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Provide efficient waste services and promote recycling and reuse through community and business involvement.	Provider, Facilitator, Regulator, Advocate, Parter	Circular economy education or engagement campaigns delivered. Deliver high quality, efficient and sustainable waste management services.
Improve the environmental sustainability and climate resilience of Council assets.	Provider, Facilitator, Regulator, Advocate, Asset Owner	Internal systems, processes or assets improved to embed sustainability.
Support and inspire our community to embrace sustainability initiatives such as clean and renewable energy.	Facilitator, Advocate, Partner	Council-led campaigns, resources or pilots to support renewable energy uptake initiated.

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What the community says

"People want to do the right thing, but we need clearer information about recycling and ways to reduce waste."

"There's interest in the circular economy– things like reusing, sharing, composting– but it needs more support to take off properly."

"We'd love to see more promotion of clean energy and support for residents and businesses wanting to switch."

"More trees and shade in our streets and parks would really help, especially with the hotter summers we've been getting."

"It's great that Council buildings are running on renewables. That kind of leadership makes a difference."

"There's good momentum from groups like Landcare, but we need stronger partnerships to look after the river and environment long-term."

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14 Theme 4: Liveability

14.1 Objective 1: Vibrant public spaces and places

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Provide and maintain services, spaces and facilities that support community wellbeing and creative activities.	Provider, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate, MPHWP, Partner	Equitable access to well-maintained spaces and services that promote wellbeing and creativity.
Make Council services and facilities easy for everyone to access.	Provider, Facilitator, Asset Owner	Increased community access to Council services and facilities. Improved ease of use, inclusivity, and satisfaction across all user groups.
Beautify and maintain streetscapes, landscaping, signage and town entrances.	Provider, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate, Partner	Increased visual appeal and community pride.
Protect and promote heritage to preserve local character and culture.	Provider, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate, MPHWP, Partner	Heritage promotion or maintenance actions delivered or supported.
Maintain and develop recreation reserves, parks and gardens, playgrounds, and paths.	Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate, MPHWP	Increased community use and enjoyment of recreation reserves, parks, gardens, playgrounds, and paths.
Facilitate and support better quality design principles in new developments.	Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate	Increased adoption of high-quality design principles in new developments, reflected in improved aesthetics, functionality, and community satisfaction.

14.2 Objective 2: Connected and accessible roads, footpaths, transport and parking

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Plan for accessible, sustainable, well-serviced and connected neighbourhoods.	Provider, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate, MPHWP	Subdivision or precinct planning processes embedding liveability principles.
Maintain and improve roads, footpaths, drainage and other infrastructure.	Provider, Facilitator, Asset Owner, Advocate	Infrastructure actions progressed.

What the community says

"Drainage and footpaths are an issue in some older areas. They just don't hold up like the newer subdivisions."

"As more people move in, we need to make sure roads and parking can keep up, especially around key services."

"People in smaller towns or new developments really rely on transport. Having better public options would help connect communities and ease pressure on roads."

"Footpaths and crossings are really important, especially for older people or anyone using a mobility aid."

"We'd love to see more shade, seating, and better lighting in public areas. Small changes like that make a big difference to how people use the space."

"The parks and gardens are a big drawcard. Keeping them well-maintained and accessible means more people can enjoy them"

"The region's heritage is part of its charm. It is important that older buildings and cultural sites are looked after and promoted properly."

15 Theme 5: Leadership

15.1 Objective 1: Good governance

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Ensure Council meets legislative obligations.	Provider, Facilitator, Regulator	Internal governance reviews, updates or training completed. Compliance with legislation.
Ensure procurement provides good value and benefits the local community.	Provider, Advocate	Procurement processes updated.
Pursue sustainable funding and service arrangements with State and Federal governments.	Advocate	Advocacy or funding actions implemented.
Advocate to all levels of government for improved services, infrastructure and social outcomes.	Partner, Advocate	Advocacy campaigns delivered.

15.2 Objective 2: High performance culture

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Deliver accessible and responsive services.	Provider, Asset Owner	Customer service improvements completed.
Maintain an educated, healthy, safe, inclusive and diverse workforce.	Provider	Workforce development actions delivered.

15.3 Objective 3: Engaged and informed community

Strategy	Council's Role	Measure of Success
Engage clearly and openly with our community and stakeholders to better understand their needs and priorities.	Provider, Facilitator, MPHWP, Partner	Engagement tools or processes improved. Increased community participation in decision making process.
Provide clear, timely, and accessible communication.	Provider, MPHWP, Asset Owner	Access improvements delivered to support communication with the community.

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What the community says

"Community feedback should not just be collected– it needs to shape decisions. People want to see that they are making

"It's important that Council's advocacy matches what the community is asking for and that funding goes where it's needed most."

"We need to see Council decisions based on real community needs and made in a way that feels transparent and fair."

"Procurement is a chance to support local jobs and deliver broader value for the community."

"Clear communication is everything. Just knowing what's happening and where to go for help makes a big difference."

"People want to be able to get things done easily. Making services more responsive and straightforward really matters."

"Having a safe and inclusive workplace is key, especially when working with vulnerable communities. Ongoing training is essential."

"Partnering with other Councils to push for regional priorities can be a good value as it shows strength in numbers."

"It's great when Councillors get out and talk with people directly. That kind of visibility builds trust."

"Advocacy is strongest when it brings together community voices, Working alongside residents make the message more powerful."

"We have a small team wearing different hats. It makes a big difference when staff feel supported and trained to do their job well."

16 Delivering the Plan

This Council Plan will be delivered through a coordinated program of strategies, services and partnerships over the next four years. Its implementation will be supported by:

- The 10-Year Financial Plan, which ensures resources are allocated sustainably to support community priorities.
- The Annual Budget, which identifies year-by-year service delivery, capital works and operational projects aligned with the Council Plan objectives.
- The Council's Workforce Plan, which supports the organisational capability required to deliver the actions in this Plan.
- Partnerships with other levels of government, community organisations and local stakeholders, which are essential to deliver shared outcomes.

Council will ensure that resourcing decisions remain consistent with the goals of this Plan, while maintaining flexibility to respond to emerging needs or opportunities.

17 Monitoring and Accountability

Council is committed to transparency and continuous improvement. Progress against this Council Plan will be monitored and reported through:

- The Annual Report, which includes a formal review of progress on Council Plan objectives and measures of success.
- Quarterly internal reporting, enabling timely performance monitoring by Council and the executive team.
- Community updates, such as newsletters, digital dashboards or annual scorecards, to show how Council is delivering on its commitments.
- A mid-term review at the two-year mark to assess progress and ensure the Plan remains relevant and responsive.

These processes support accountable, evidence-based decision-making and build community trust in Council's delivery.

18 Gender Impact Assessment

As part of our commitment to fairness and inclusion, Council has completed a Gender Impact Assessment in line with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. This ensures the Council Plan considers how gender and other factors, such as age, culture, or caregiving roles, might affect people's ability to participate in engagement activities and provide input. Efforts were made to remove barriers and create safer, more welcoming opportunities for involvement - in particular for women, young people, caregivers, and gender-diverse or LGBTIQA+ community members, whose voices are often underrepresented in local planning. This commitment to inclusion continues through the Council's partnerships, program design, and community-facing work, ensuring that equity remains a guiding principle in how decisions are made and implemented.

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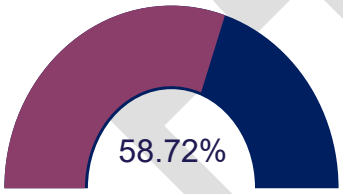
A1 Appendix 1: Survey Key Findings

Respondent Profile

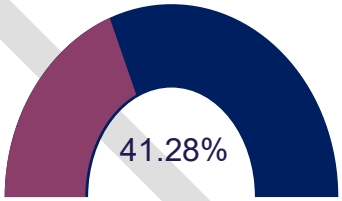
- Lives in the Benalla Township (79.65%)
- A part of local volunteer programs (52.91%)
- Connection to the LGA: Live here (90.70%)
- Lived here for over 10 years (72.67%)
- Female (68.02%)
- 55 to 64 years (25.58%)



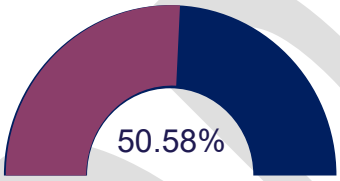
Average rating for tree canopy and urban greening as top environmental priorities



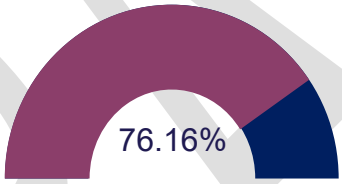
Selected upgraded footpaths and roads as the top liveability priority



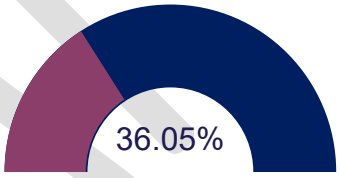
Said low community awareness is the biggest barrier to environmental progress



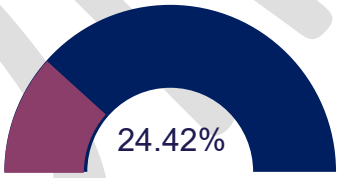
Want stronger investment in community grants and partnerships



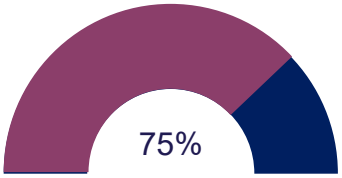
Identified limited healthcare access as a major health barrier



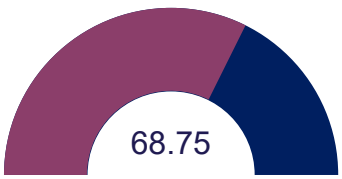
Identified antisocial behaviour as a safety concern



Identified vandalism as a safety concern



Get their information through Social media (Facebook, Instagram)



Get their information through word of mouth

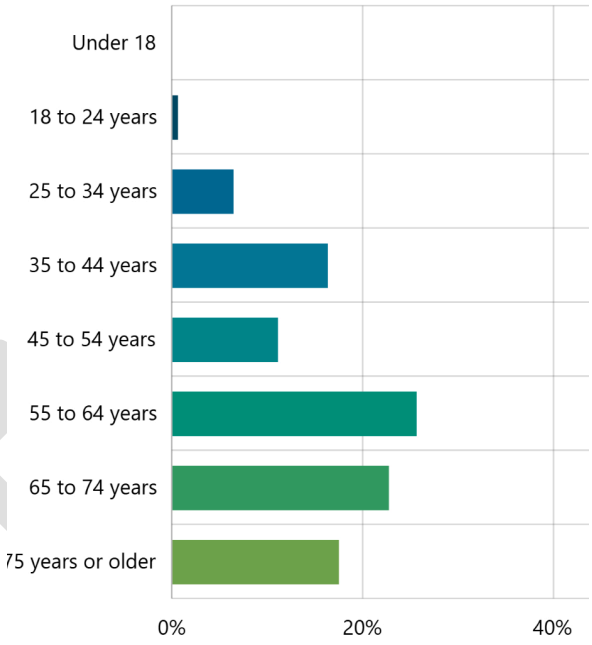
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A2 Appendix 2: Detailed Survey Results

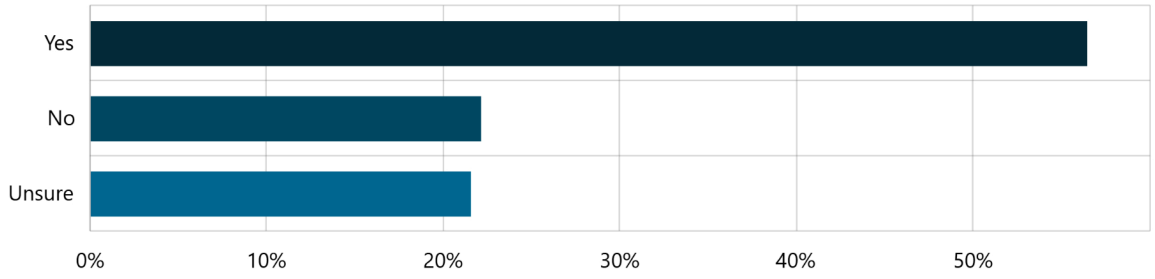
Survey Respondents – 172 responses

- 68% Female
- 91% Residents
- 80% Reside in Benalla
- 15% Resided Less Than 5 yrs
- 53% Local Volunteer Programs
- 43% Sports & Rec Groups
- 67% No Dependants

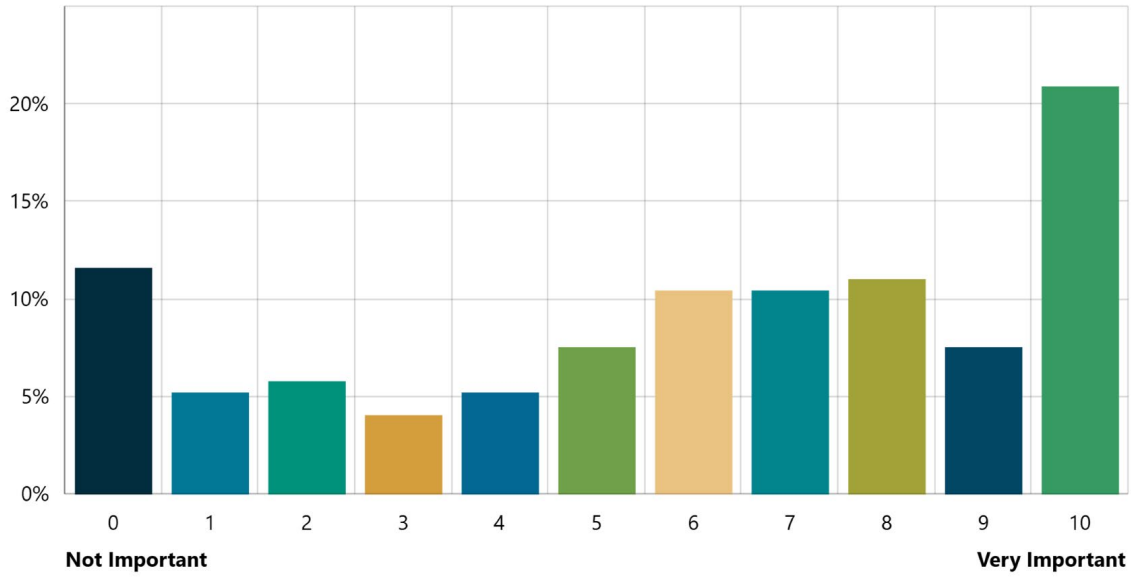
Survey Respondents Age Groups



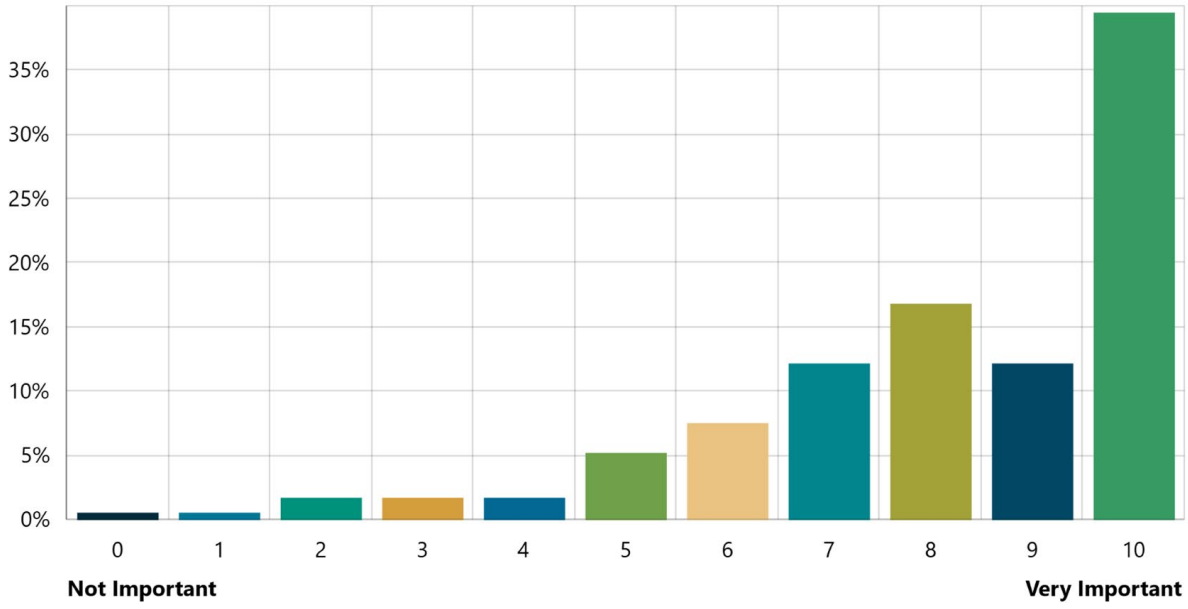
Do you think the Vision still reflects the needs and aspirations of our community?



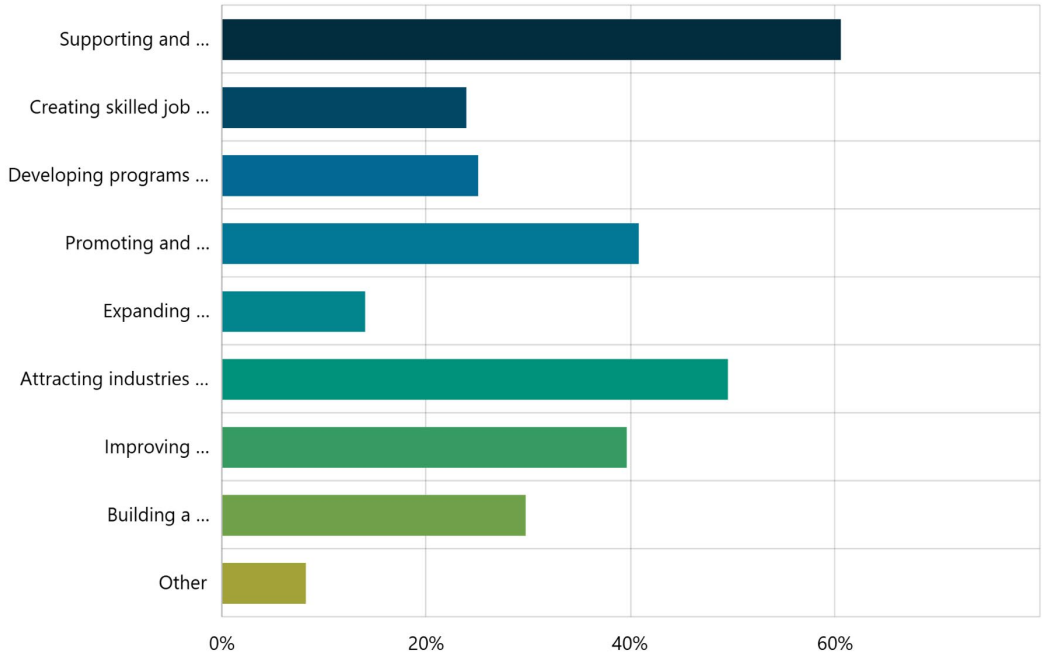
Set a net zero target to address climate change and reduce our environmental impact.



Increasing tree cover to cool the urban area, improve air quality, and support wildlife.

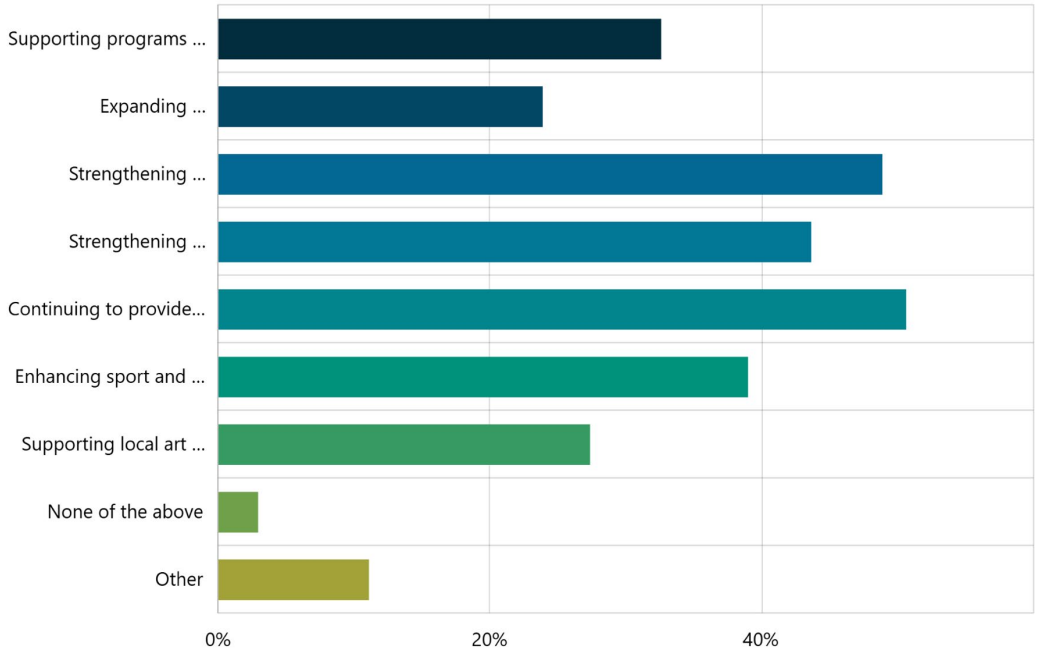


What should Benalla Rural City Council's economy focus on most to thrive in the



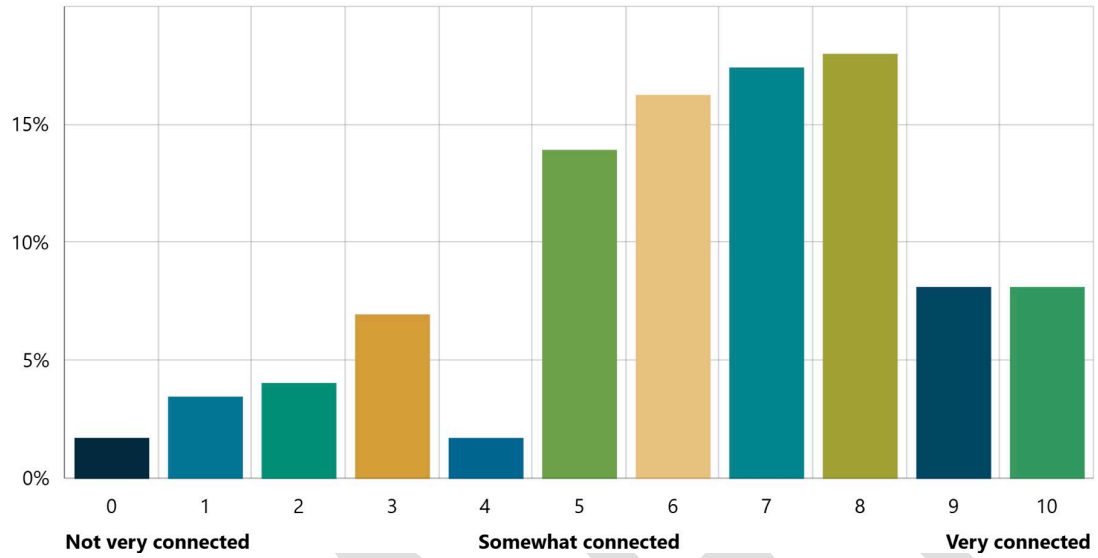
Answer choices	Percent	Count
Supporting and growing small businesses.	60.47%	104
Creating skilled job opportunities.	23.84%	41
Developing programs for education and upskilling.	25.00%	43
Promoting and investing in tourism.	40.70%	70
Expanding agriculture and farming opportunities.	13.95%	24
Attracting industries to the region.	49.42%	85
Improving infrastructure (eg: transport, internet).	39.53%	68
Building a sustainable economy (eg: renewable energy, green initiatives)	29.65%	51
Other	8.14%	14

What should Benalla Rural City Council focus on most to help the community thrive in the future?

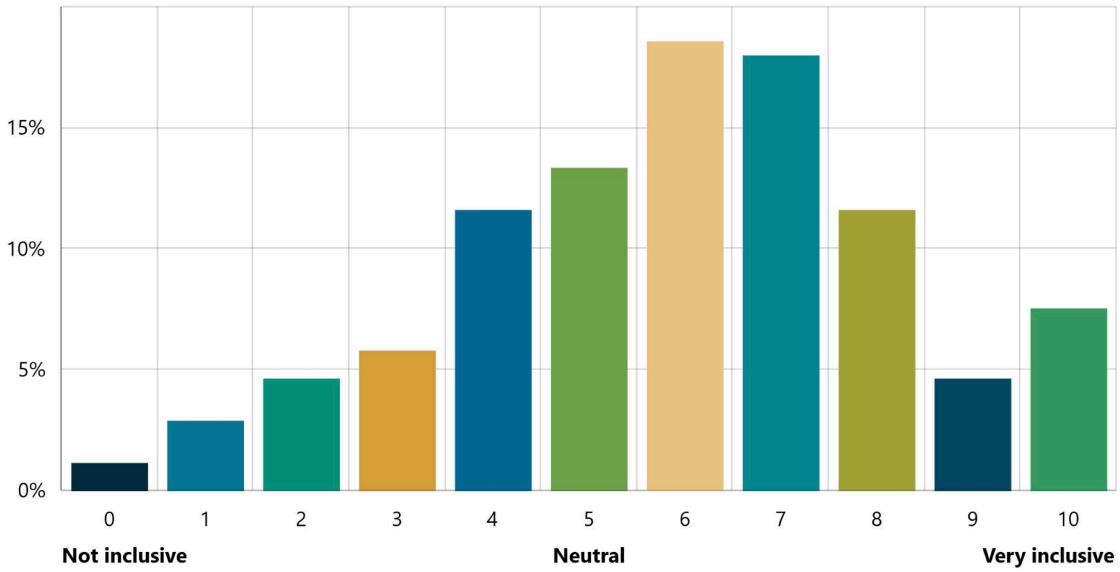


Answer choices	Percent	Count
Supporting programs and activities that bring together people from diverse backgrounds and promote cultural understanding.	32.56%	56
Expanding volunteer programs and community events	23.84%	41
Strengthening collaboration between the Council and community organisations	48.84%	84
Strengthening community connections and reducing isolation	43.60%	75
Continuing to provide grants that support community groups, events, and local initiatives	50.58%	87
Enhancing sport and recreation facilities to support active and healthy lifestyles	38.95%	67
Supporting local art and cultural programs to celebrate creativity and heritage	27.33%	47
None of the above	2.91%	5
Other	11.05%	19

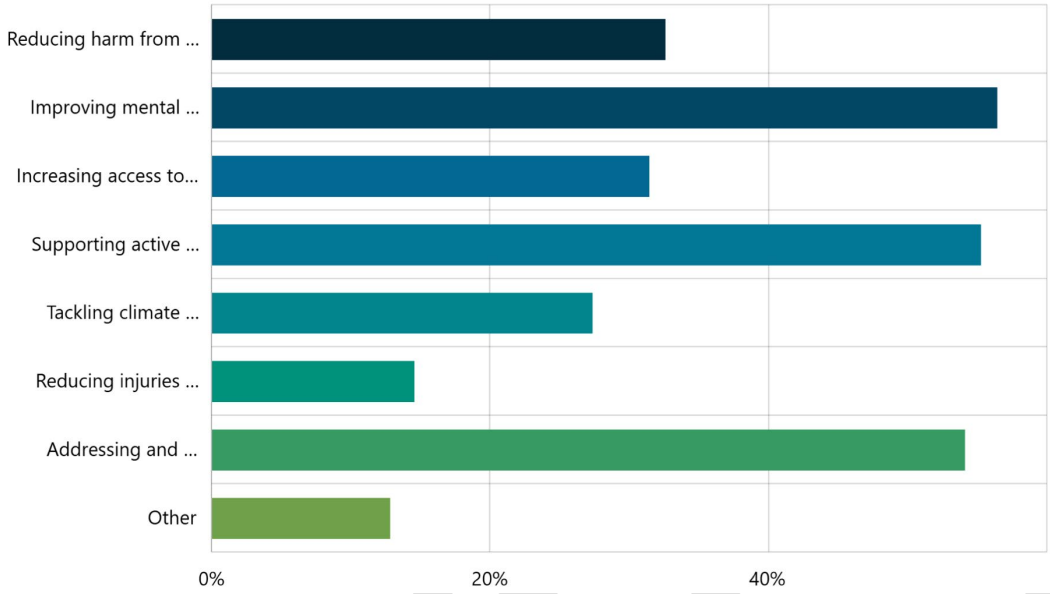
How connected do you feel to your local community?



How inclusive do you feel the community is for people from diverse cultural backgrounds, including migrant populations?

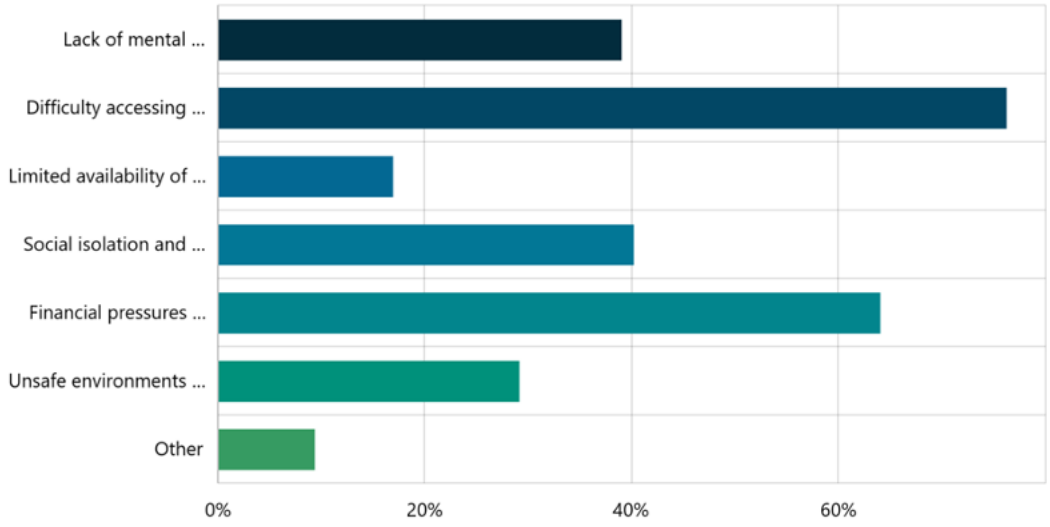


What should Benalla Rural City Council prioritise to improve health and wellbeing across the community?



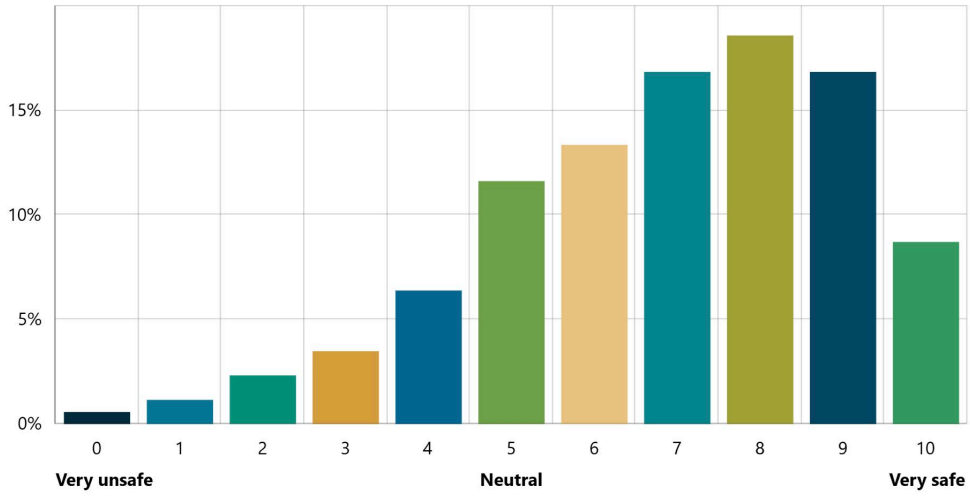
Answer choices	Percent	Count
Reducing harm from alcohol, drug, and tobacco use	32.56%	56
Improving mental health and emotional wellbeing services	56.40%	97
Increasing access to healthy food and promoting nutrition	31.40%	54
Supporting active living and physical activity opportunities	55.23%	95
Tackling climate change and its impacts on community health	27.33%	47
Reducing injuries and creating safer environments	14.53%	25
Addressing and preventing family violence and other forms of violence	54.07%	93
Other	12.79%	22

What are the biggest barriers to good health and wellbeing in the community?

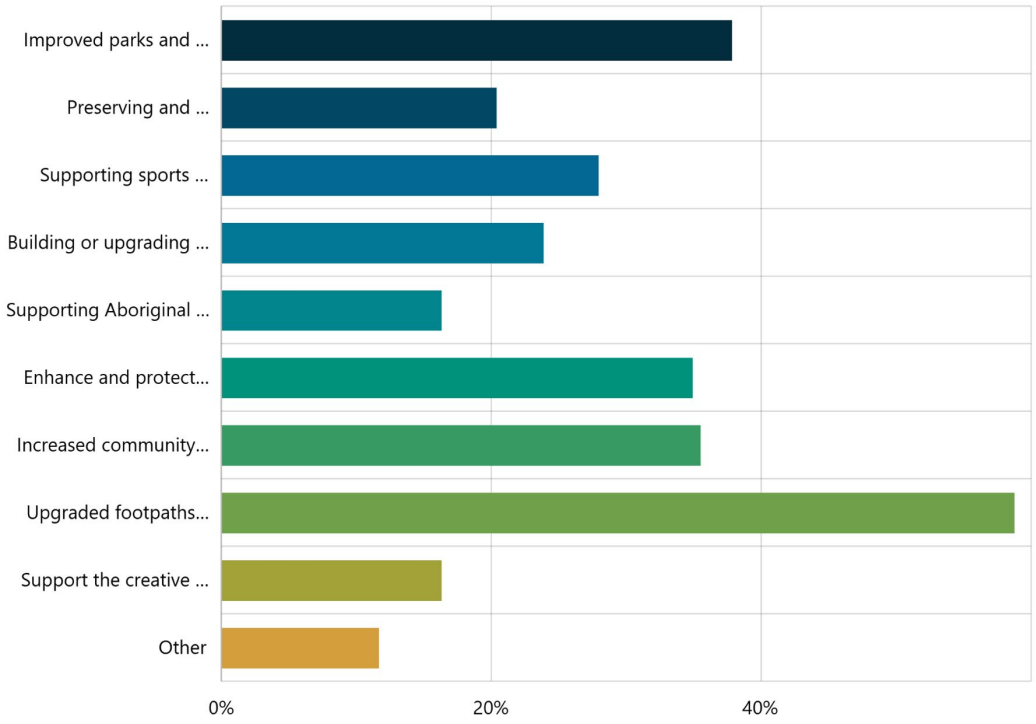


Answer choices	Percent	Count
Lack of mental health services and support	38.95%	67
Difficulty accessing healthcare (eg: GP, specialists, transport)	76.16%	131
Limited availability of recreational or fitness facilities	16.86%	29
Social isolation and loneliness	40.12%	69
Financial pressures affecting health-related decisions	63.95%	110
Unsafe environments (eg: family violence, lack of safe spaces)	29.07%	50
Other	9.30%	16

Do you feel safe in your community?

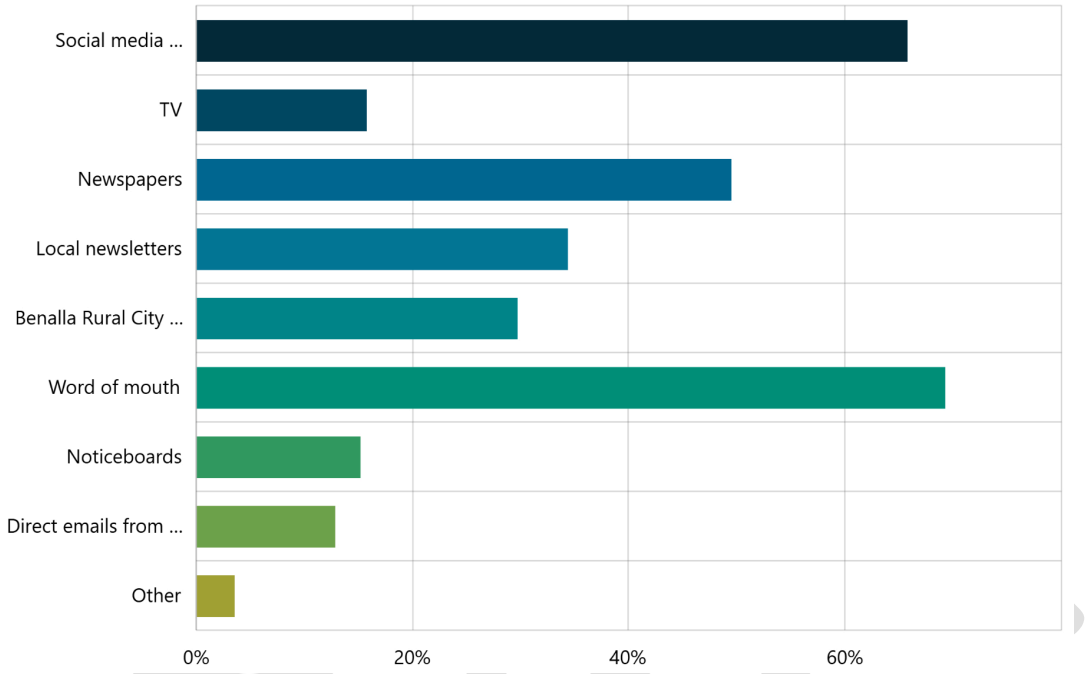


What should Benalla Rural City Council focus on most to promote liveability in the community?



Answer choices	Percent	Count
Improved parks and open spaces	37.79%	65
Preserving and promoting cultural heritage and history	20.35%	35
Supporting sports and recreation	27.91%	48
Building or upgrading cultural facilities (eg: galleries, theatres, libraries)	23.84%	41
Supporting Aboriginal art, culture, and history initiatives	16.28%	28
Enhance and protect the natural environment	34.88%	60
Increased community events	35.47%	61
Upgraded footpaths and roads	58.72%	101
Support the creative arts sector	16.28%	28
Other	11.63%	20

Where do you (and your household) usually get your information about news, services, or events in your community?



Answer choices	Percent	Count
Social media (Facebook, Instagram)	65.70%	113
TV	15.70%	27
Newspapers	49.42%	85
Local newsletters	34.30%	59
Benalla Rural City Council website	29.65%	51
Word of mouth	69.19%	119
Noticeboards	15.12%	26
Direct emails from Council	12.79%	22
Other	3.49%	6

A3 Appendix 3: Summary of Consultation Notes

A3.1 Business & Economy

- **Local entrepreneurs face structural and regulatory barriers**: Small businesses and startups encounter delays, costs and complexity when dealing with Council processes. This includes planning approvals, compliance requirements, and navigating regulations that may not reflect the scale or nature of local enterprise. There is a demand for clearer information, more supportive systems, and a stronger enabling mindset from Council staff.
- **CBD needs activation beyond infrastructure upgrades**: While streetscape improvements are valued, there's concern that physical upgrades alone will not drive foot traffic or vibrancy. Locals want to see more pop-up activity, creative uses of empty shops, and partnerships that give small businesses and community groups a chance to animate the town centre. Programs that reduce risk and lower the entry barrier for participation were frequently mentioned.
- **Benalla's industrial and commercial precincts need long-term planning**: Businesses expressed interest in long-term planning for precincts that support growth, relocation, and co-location of like-minded industries. This includes maintaining well-serviced industrial estates and future-proofing key employment zones. The ability to attract and retain investment relies on certainty and infrastructure that meets modern business needs.
- **Labour shortages and housing constraints affect workforce attraction**: Many employers struggle to find and retain workers due to the lack of affordable or appropriate housing in the area. This is particularly challenging for larger businesses or those bringing in seasonal or skilled labour. Accommodation shortages affect recruitment and create flow-on challenges for service levels and business hours.
- **Youth and workforce development pathways are limited**: There are gaps in training, internships, and transition programs that help young people find work locally or upskill for growth sectors. Without strong partnerships between schools, employers and training providers, many young people leave the region or remain underemployed. This creates a missed opportunity for both economic and community resilience.

A3.2 Environment

- **Tree canopy is limited in key public areas:** Many neighbourhoods, newer housing estates, town entrances and footpaths lack adequate shade. This affects comfort during warmer months, limits walkability, and reduces local amenity. Increasing tree coverage is widely supported as a way to improve cooling, safety and visual appeal.

- **Road and drainage issues are a persistent concern:** Potholes, uneven surfaces and poor drainage create access and safety challenges for drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. In some rural and low-lying areas, maintenance is irregular, reinforcing perceptions of an infrastructure gap between central Benalla and surrounding areas.
- **There is strong support for visible environmental leadership:** Projects such as tree planting are seen as effective ways for the Council to demonstrate its environmental commitment. Actions that leave a lasting impact on the landscape and contribute to regional resilience are considered a priority for future investment.

A3.3 Health & Wellbeing

- **Access to mental health and counselling services is limited:** Support options for youth and adults are constrained by long waitlists, eligibility criteria, and the need to travel to larger centres. Services often prioritise acute or crisis-based care, leaving limited support for mild to moderate needs. In rural settings, stigma around mental health can deter help-seeking. There is a need to strengthen outreach and make support feel more visible, normalised and approachable.
- **Access to general health services depends on transport and limited local supply:** Many residents travel beyond the municipality for regular GP or specialist appointments. Without a car, attending appointments or collecting prescriptions becomes difficult. Informal support from neighbours or family often fills the gap, highlighting both the need for reliable access and the value of community care.
- **Cost-of-living pressures are affecting food security and medical access:** Rising costs for food, rent, and utilities make it harder to maintain health and stability. This includes difficulty affording medication, fresh food, or travel to medical appointments. These pressures are affecting both the day-to-day quality of life and long-term health outcomes.
- **Preventive health and wellbeing programs are not accessible:** Many residents are unaware of local initiatives that support early intervention or healthy living. While the neighbourhood house plays a valuable role, there is demand for broader outreach and more inclusive, proactive wellbeing programs.

A3.4 Leadership

- **Council presence builds trust and connection:** Council presence in rural townships, events and local venues helps build confidence and improve relationships across the municipality. When councillors and staff are seen at events, community meetings, or local halls, it helps close the perceived distance between Council and the broader municipality.

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- **Customer service needs stronger coordination and clearer pathways:** Unclear pathways, slow response times, and inconsistent communication create an unpleasant customer experience. When queries go unanswered, it affects trust. Clearer roles, quicker follow-through, and more visible communication channels are needed to improve the overall experience.
- **Engagement efforts need to better connect with decision-making:** Community input is more meaningful when people can see how it informs plans and actions. Strengthening feedback loops, involving local organisations earlier, and improving transparency in decision-making are important to rebuilding and maintaining trust.

A3.5 Arts, Culture, and Tourism

- **Creative activity is strong but lacks dedicated spaces and support:** Benalla has an active base of local artists, makers and creative groups, but many projects rely on individual effort. Limited promotion, funding and access to suitable spaces make it difficult to grow the sector. There is interest in more support to connect local creatives, activate underused venues, and reach wider audiences.
- **Tourism potential is underutilised due to limited experiences and coordination:** Visitors are drawn to Benalla's art and natural beauty, but often struggle to find experiences beyond key events or attractions. There is strong support for clearer signage, better information, and coordinated packaging of local experiences. Stronger partnerships between the Council, tourism operators and regional bodies could help extend visitor stays and strengthen the local economy.

A3.6 Community and Liveability

- **Volunteerism is sustained by a group of regulars:** Community life is sustained by a small number of long-term volunteers, many of whom are older adults. While this fosters strong social connections, it places pressure on the same people and limits renewal. There is a clear need to find ways to attract new and younger residents to participate.
- **Transport creates barriers for people to join activities:** Residents living outside of Benalla struggle to attend events, programs or gatherings due to limited transport options. Without a car, it is difficult to participate, which leaves many feelings disconnected from broader community life.
- **Social infrastructure is ageing or under-utilised:** Town halls, recreation reserves and community centres are key venues for local connection, but not all are easy to access. For smaller or newer groups, hiring costs or physical limitations of older buildings can become barriers.

- **Digital exclusion affects how people stay informed and involved:** Older residents and people without stable internet access or reliable mobile connectivity, or with low digital literacy can easily miss out, especially in rural areas. Without consistent offline communication methods like posters or word-of-mouth networks, many are simply unaware of what is happening.

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RURAL CITY