

THE FUTURE OF
**HEYFIELD
& DISTRICT**



Local Development Strategy - June 2024

**Advancing community
& business innovation**



Acknowledgment Of Country

Wellington Shire Council acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land, the Gunakurnai people, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging.

Document Preparation

This document was prepared and produced by Wellington Shire Council as part of the Local Development Strategy in partnership with Department Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and RMIT.

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Executive Summary

The Future of Heyfield and District has been a two-year project to work with the Heyfield and District community to investigate opportunities that will lead to long-term economic and social benefits, new jobs in sustainable industries, and to support the transition away from native timber harvesting.

Funded by the State Government via Forestry Transition Program in response to the policy to cease native timber harvesting on 1 January 2024. A smart specialisation approach was used with an emphasis on innovation and collaboration between government, business, community and education.

Project highlights & challenges

There has been genuine curiosity from people in the local community about the Local Development Strategy and the opportunity to explore future directions. However, many people spoke of the challenges associated with transition, identity, and employment stability as a reflection on the turbulent times for Heyfield and District with the closure of the native timber industry, and other societal changes that have rippled through the whole community.

A significant highlight has been the increase in collaboration within the community and the connections to regional development. Building solid working relationships takes time and effort, and after 44 events over two years, the project has enabled many new connections to broaden the horizons for local people and project proposals.

In May 2023 there were 6 innovation themes that were identified: Agriculture; Timber Manufacturing and Associated Businesses; Health and Active Ageing; New Energy; Tourism; Environmental Restoration and Land Management. Four of these themes have subsequently been explored with the following outcomes:

Agriculture Working Group for Skills and Training

Victorian Skills Authority's co-design workshop outcome:

Industry perception, training pathways, skills and retention are all contributing to an inadequate supply of Agricultural workers in the Heyfield and district which is adversely affecting productivity, growth, and sustainability in the industry

Gippsland Agricultural Group have designed a regional Agriculture program as a proposal for future funding:

The Gippsland Rural Education Program is designed to cultivate a passion for agricultural careers among year 9 students while equipping them with the skills and characteristics that are essential for success in the industry. The program consists of 4 one week blocks across the school calendar, and will integrate immersive learning experiences to provide students with a holistic understanding of modern agriculture.

The program is to be modelled on a hub and spoke model across Wellington and East Gippsland Shire. Next steps are to establish Governance Group and collaboration partners; and finalise the funding application, timing schedule and logistics.

Wellington Chicken Growers Group are exploring options to implement circular economy principles as a collaborative effort. Areas of interest include geothermal, organic fertiliser, anaerobic digester, robotics, farm services and energy efficiencies.

Heyfield Integrated Manufacturing Cluster

Grant funding was secured for market research and planning for two parcels of industrial land in Heyfield as a proposal for Heyfield Integrated Manufacturing Cluster. A consultant has conducted interviews for market sounding, and developed a subdivision masterplan for future investment. The project proposal has the potential to attract manufacturing businesses synergistic to ASH and increase economic activity to support the transition away from local timber harvesting.

Tourism

The Tourism Group have been exploring the concept of Heyfield Adventure Hub. It has been challenging to navigate the pathway to tangible outcomes and project proposals. Key elements for success will include partnerships, the promotion of the key tourism assets in Heyfield and District, support for local business, and employment of a project facilitator. The collective vision for the Group is to offer visitors a helping hand to enjoy and experience adventure in local landscapes, and build a co-ordinated and sustainable local tourism economy.

Active Ageing

The focus for the Active Ageing group is to implement small, targeted activities to increase wellbeing in the local community through innovative thinking and provision of meaningful connections. The group has delivered "Dying to Know": a program on how to start difficult conversations around planning for end-of-life. The successful program generated interest from other places to replicate the format. The future focus will be on mechanisms to support people to stay at home longer, and to improve local healthcare service providers via new businesses opportunities.

Next steps

Wellington Shire Council will continue to support economic and community activity in Heyfield and District in key areas. The Heyfield Community Resource Centre will become a hub for Local Development Strategy groups via project support and resourcing. There is a confidence that the Groups will build on the foundations established in the first 2 years of the project. The local community spirit remains strong as people help each other, share knowledge and invest in future aspirations.

Introduction

The Future of Heyfield and District is a project funded by the Forestry Transition Program which is the Victorian Government's forestry policy to cease native timber harvesting on 1 January, 2024. Heyfield is one of 11 places identified for support to diversify business and industry, and for community development.

There are support programs for timber business' and their workers who are more immediately impacted by the Victorian Forestry Plan and these programs will operate in tandem with the Future of Heyfield and District project.

Innovation And Smart Specialisation

Drawing on experience of energy transition in the Latrobe Valley, Smart Specialisation was adopted as an effective approach to facilitate transition, and is used with the project to develop Heyfield and District's roadmap.

Smart Specialisation is a place-based approach to innovation and regional development. Research shows that regions with innovative economies often depend on cooperation, capacity-building, and knowledge-sharing. Collaboration and connecting the dots are key to the Smart Specialisation approach. It requires state and local government, education, business, and the community to work together to identify and progress regional opportunities and long-term growth strategies and actions.

The Future of Heyfield and District project is a partnership between Wellington Shire Council; Department Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA); and RMIT.

Project Objectives

To assist communities impacted by Victorian Forestry Plan to develop strategies that:

- 1 Support the transition away from native timber harvesting.
- 2 Lead to the creation of new jobs in sustainable industries.
- 3 Result in long-term economic and social benefits for each community.

Data, Insights and Analysis

Statistics for this report is provided by the company REMPLAN that uses census data (2021 data unless otherwise stated) and other sources.

Economic and Social Benefits

The Future of Heyfield and District project has explored local assets, advantages and challenges; and has brought people together to share ideas and put forward innovation opportunities.

The project has explored the local environment; employment and economic drivers; visitation; recreation and culture; and community wellbeing. It has involved community, government; business and industry; and education providers.

Project Timeline

Project Set Up: January to May 2022

Recruitment of Project Officer and administration assistant, Project Control Group established.

Research: June 2022 to May 2023

Interviews, review policy documents, demographic statistics, community workshops, and feedback, Context Analysis published.

Discovery: May to October 2023

Community Innovation Discovery workshops for selected themes.

Project Proposals: November 2023 to May 2024

Working Groups established to identify project proposals, business cases, and funding applications.

Completion: June 2024

Final report, next steps and handover.



Policy Context

Gippsland's transition from reliance on coal and gas to new energy is underway. Locally, Heyfield is affected by the transition from native timber harvesting, and ongoing agricultural modernisation. The region is exploring diversification and innovation across its economy.

The following policy documents have been reviewed as supporting the economic and community development of Heyfield. (See Appendix 1)

- Wellington Shire Council Plan 2021-25
- Wellington 2031
- Economic Development Strategy 2016-2022
- Gippsland Regional Labour Force Participation
- Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS)
- Investment Prospectus Wellington Shire
- Gippsland Regional Plan 2020-2025
- Heyfield Structure Plan Background & Emerging Directions 2011
- Heyfield Structure Plan 2011
- Heyfield Structure Plan Economic Analysis 2011
- Agricultural Position Paper 2017

Key Findings

There is a broad economic development policy framework for Wellington Shire and Gippsland, with consistency in the challenges and opportunities. There are a range of observations about how the regional economy can develop and thrive.

- There is a strong link between economic development, liveability, and community and individual wellbeing.
- Encouraging innovation and investment is key to broadening the economic base.
- The relationship between the rural hinterland and Heyfield township is strong and needs to be supported.
- Support for community capacity building generates sustainable outcomes and encourages resilient communities.
- Place management activities support community involvement and can reflect the distinctiveness of a township

Enablers

There are a range of enablers that underpin economic prosperity and these need to be prioritised and supported.

- A diversity of housing options to promote affordability, support ageing in place, and attract and retain local staff and short-term accommodation to support workforce retention and tourists.
- Access to transport including public and community transport and travel to work.
- Infrastructure to support business and economic activity, such as roads, bridges, water, and sewerage.
- Access to education and training to develop a skilled workforce and support lifelong learning.
- Provision of health and community services and facilities (including childcare) to support health and wellbeing of workers and the wider community.
- Improving digital connectivity including reliable access to internet and mobile services.
- Availability of adequate industrial and commercial land to support population growth.

Heyfield Community Resource Centre

Heyfield Community Resource Centre was established in 1988, and is part of the Victorian-wide Neighbourhood House network, offering a range of programs and activities to increase social cohesion and skills within the community. Some of their activities include:

- Learn Local pre-employment programs
- Occasional Childcare
- Community lunches
- Mens Shed
- Digital skills for seniors
- Health and wellbeing and more

For more information or to find out about becoming a volunteer visit: www.heyfieldcommunity.org.au or drop in at 5 George Street, Heyfield.



Heyfield and District Past, Present and Future

Heyfield & District has seen many changes over its history. Now, as people are exploring their identity in a modern world, there are conversations about how to collaboratively move towards a prosperous future.

In 1995 Brian Howell wrote a book about Heyfield called *A New Beginning: the story of Heyfield and sawmilling history 1945-1995*. This book is a historical record of the people that worked in the timber industry, their contribution to the fabric of the town across decades and a recognition that times were changing. He notes:

"The timber industry in Heyfield has experienced continuing decline in volume of wood cut since the initial log allocations were reduced in 1958...the heady days where Heyfield led the state are well and truly past." Howell concludes that in 1995, the people of Heyfield "believe that sawmilling in Heyfield simply is a fact of life".

Fast forward to 2024, and the world is more complex and fast-paced, and there are changes in social expectations, and unprecedented uncertainty about the future.

For some people in Heyfield and District, in comparison to 1995, little has changed in their everyday employment and life-style, with strong connections to the timber industry. For other people (for example, new arrivals), there may be slim links to timber industry because their everyday lives are centred on other industries or local attractions.

It is likely most people in Heyfield and District fall in the middle of these two ends of the spectrum. They have memories and links to timber industry, and a genuine fondness for the heritage. However this runs concurrently with connections to other industries and the patterns of everyday life.

In general, people like living in Heyfield and District because of the community spirit, being close to family and friends, attractions nearby, and the relaxed lifestyle.

Identity and Transition

The people of Heyfield and District have identified themselves as a Timber Town for decades because of their history. However, there are new conversations starting about the future identity of Heyfield while respectfully acknowledging the tensions between the past and future, and that change can be difficult.

The decision from the Victorian Government to end native timber harvesting on 1 January, 2024 has intensified the conversations in Heyfield and District around identity and future directions. For many people, it has been a difficult time.

Agriculture, timber manufacturing and construction are the most important drivers in the local economy. Heyfield and District has a variety of industries and businesses that make up the economy and services the surrounding areas and beyond.

ASH is Australia's largest timber manufacturer, and the company thrives from the combination of innovation, technology and adaptiveness. As the largest employer, ASH has had the foresight to secure timber supplies from elsewhere, and had extensive diversification into manufacturing, and multiple product lines. It continues to expand the employment base, products and business opportunities.

Heyfield Structure Plan 2011

The 2011 plan was a strategic plan from over 10 years ago and it is an important historical document.

Vision: Heyfield will develop in a manner that embraces its three-fold role as a 'timber town', a tourist 'gateway' to the Alpine National Park and Lake Glenmaggie and a healthy, sustainable and enjoyable place for all residents and visitors. The town will come to be characterised by diversity in housing choice, inclusive neighbourhoods, accessible employment, high quality sporting and recreational facilities, community and social infrastructure and a vibrant town centre that reflects a genuine sense of community pride.

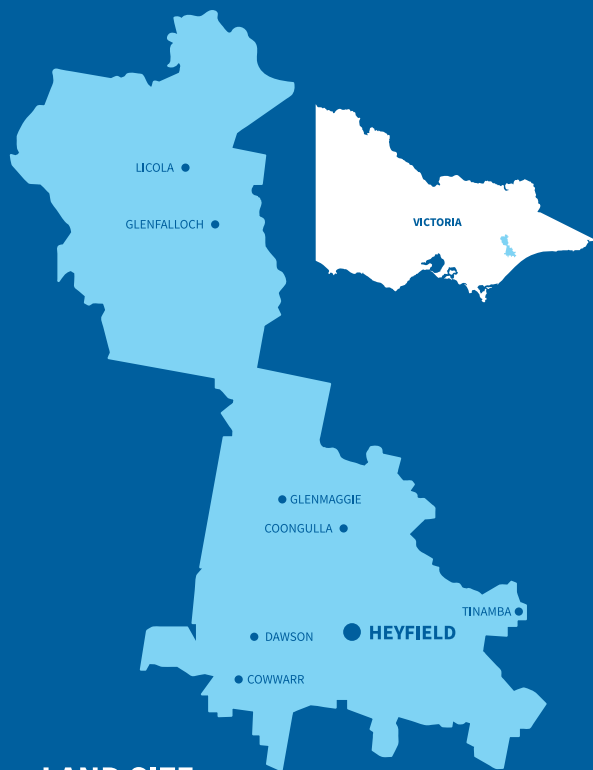


Image - Heyfield & District Historical Society



Image - Heyfield & District Historical Society





LAND SIZE

HEYFIELD & DISTRICT COMPRISES OF

1,007 Square KM

of the

10,817 Square KM

in Wellington Shire

Heyfield
Cowwarr
Coongulla
Dawson
Denison

Glenmaggie
Licola
Tinamba
Seaton
Winnindoo

The Place

The project area of Heyfield and District is located in the north-west of Wellington Shire, and approximately 200km east of Melbourne. The land size is approx. 1,007 square kilometres, and the majority of the landscapes is agricultural and forests.

Currently, Heyfield services the timber industry, and a very large dairy farming community. Once home to eight sawmills, the largest sawmill ASH (Australian Sustainable Hardwood) is now a manufacturing centre.

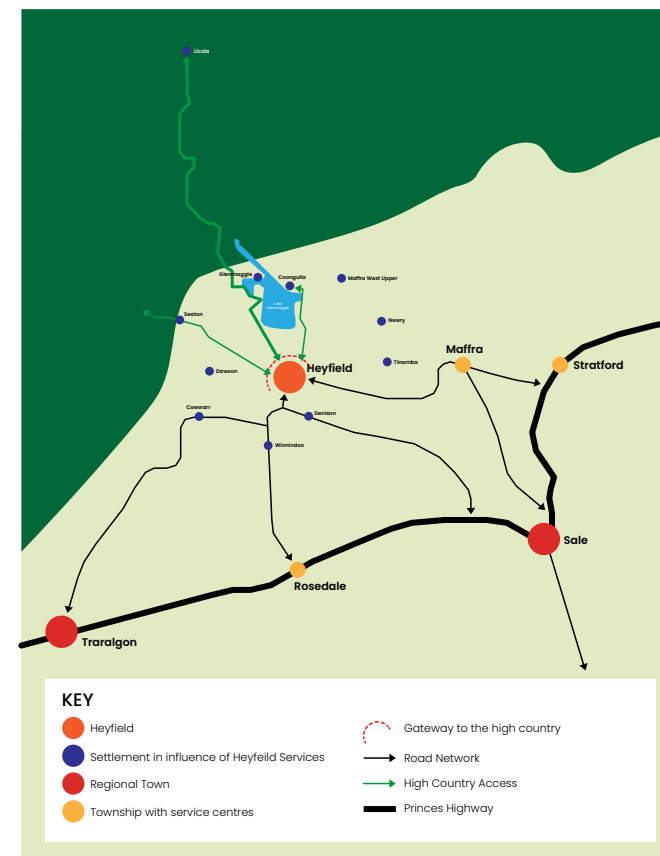
Heyfield is located in central Gippsland on the Thompson River. The largest nearby towns are Maffra (15 minute drive), Sale (30minute drive) and Traralgon (40 minute drive) that provide a range of higher order retail and employment services. As a result of the proximity of Heyfield to other regional centres, there is access to a variety of employment, housing, services (including healthcare, financial, etc) Government agencies and population centres, within a distance that is possible to commute.

People like Heyfield as a small country town, without pokies or traffic lights, and are understanding of limitations of services. Heyfield acts as a service centre for the District.

Natural Beauty and Active Recreation

Many local people commented about the feel-good value of spending time in nature as the variety, closeness and beauty of the natural environment has many benefits. This included active recreation opportunities via water sports (boating, swimming, skiing) and in the forested areas for bushwalking, riding, cycling, camping, four-wheel driving, etc. Many people commented that being in nature improved their mental health.

Popular spots for outdoor recreation include Lake Glenmaggie, Blores Hill Mountain Bike Park, Gippsland Plains Rail Trail, Macalister River and Licola, and Heyfield Wetlands.



The Community

People are proud to belong to Heyfield and District community, and there was general appreciation of local facilities such as community buildings, parklands, healthcare services and local clubs and events. It was generally seen as a vibrant and active place to live.

Community Built Assets

Over many years, the people of Heyfield and District have just got things done by being proactive, helping each other and pooling resources to improve the facilities of the town. They are quietly proud of their achievements that include:

1960s

- Community swimming pool (residents paid 10c of their pay every week),
- Golf club
- Hospital

1970-1990s

- Basketball stadium (1975),
- Community funded Resource Centre (1989),
- Laurina Lodge – Aged Care Facility (approx 1995)

2000s to today

- Wetlands, walking tracks and wetlands centre
- A community funded RV park
- A community bank
- Community funded museum
- Feasibility study into Community Micro Grid
- Pump track and Skatepark

Heyfield Community Plan 2008 – 2013

A vibrant, sustainable, forward-thinking town. A community that fosters co-operation and support, encompassing a spirit of “can do”.

Seniors

Seniors and ageing well in Heyfield and District was a popular topic. There are many individuals and community groups that have a focus to support seniors with a variety of social activities. Topics that seniors were interested in included:

Housing: having a diversity of housing options to allow older people to downsize, to have a housing transition pathway - from large houses to smaller, from independent to supported living.

Transport: having access to public and community transport to support older people to move around Heyfield and to other locations such as Sale or Traralgon to access services, to stay fit and well and socially connected.

Social Connections: to reduce isolation and maintain physical and mental wellbeing. The range of activities and community organisations in Heyfield, along with friendship networks are seen as a key strength of the town and in supporting people to age well in their community.

Local Services and support: access to health, retail, banking, and in home services. Access to reliable telecommunications services and the ability to navigate new technologies are also a key concern for older members of the community.

Walkability: Being able to walk or travel via motor scooter safely around town during the day or night-time. Improved street lighting and footpaths are key to this, along with patience and tolerance from the community.

Staying at Home: Older people have strong desire to remain in their own home, provided they can have access to the services and supports they need, and they feel safe in their home and their town.

Valued and active member of the community: The broader community needs to understand just because someone becomes older, doesn't mean that they are not able to contribute to all aspects of community life. A key concern is not being pigeonholed as being less capable or less interested in certain activities or initiatives.

Laurina Lodge Aged Care facility

People were proud of the history of community support for Laurina Lodge, and see it as a community asset and essential as somewhere local for supported living.

Heyfield & District

POPULATION

4,102 

MEDIAN AGE

48 ⁴⁴ Wellington Shire ³⁸ Victoria

POPULATION AGE BREAKDOWN

5.22%	80+	Elderly
20.45%	65-79	Retirement
21.67%	50-64	Older Workers
16.58%	35-49	Workers
9.78%	25-34	Young Workers
10.65%	15-24	Youth
11.43%	5-14	School Age
4.66%	0-4	Preschool

QUALIFICATIONS OBTAINED

48% 

WAS AT CERTIFICATE LEVEL COMPARED WITH:

41% Wellington Shire 27% Victoria

14%

WAS AT BACHELOR DEGREE LEVEL COMPARED WITH:

15% Wellington Shire 27% Victoria

HEYFIELD & DISTRICT MEDIAN PERSONAL INCOME PER YEAR

\$31,046 ^{\$27,106} Heyfield Only ^{\$34,215} Wellington Shire ^{\$41,740} Victoria

The Economy

Key Sectors

The Heyfield economy is driven by three sectors: agriculture (focused on farming), construction (focused on construction services), and manufacturing (focused on sawmilling and wood manufacturing).

ASH - Australian Sustainable Hardwood

ASH is a visible presence in Heyfield - it occupies a large site in town, has infrastructure and logs that are visible from the road, is the biggest employer, has a retail store, and directly and indirectly supports many local businesses. ASH management have fostered a culture of innovation, adaption to changing circumstances, and significant expansion with diversity of manufacturing.

Technology, innovation and culture have and will continue to be at the forefront of ASH. Over many years, there has been extensive collaboration with staff, and/or with researchers to improve utilisation of timber products. This has included sawdust to energy (increase efficiencies and reduce energy costs) and continuous improvement for higher value-add products for the whole timber processing line. ASH's research and development have resulted in new product lines and improved efficiencies and profitability, and their manufacturing capabilities and processes are often Australian firsts. For example, the glue used in the laminating process has been developed by ASH for use with their timber products – this glue has unique characteristics to enable the product lines efficiencies (glue drying time, strength, aesthetics). There are multiple factories at ASH, and each one continues to push the boundaries of product innovation.

Agriculture

There is a variety of farming operations in the district that take advantage of the soils, climate and irrigation, location, labour supply and supply chains. Types of farming operations include dairy, beef, sheep, cropping, large scale vegetables, small horticulture, viticulture, and poultry. The scale of farming operations ranges from small boutique farms to corporate farms with multiple farming ventures.

Broadening Agriculture

In the last 4 years in the Heyfield District, a new industry has established and is growing rapidly. Currently there are 60+ broiler (chicken meat) sheds in operation. It is forecast the number of sheds and birds will **at least double** in the next 4 years. These facilities provide high standards for animal welfare, biosecurity, and technology (heating, cooling, monitoring, OH&S, desalination plants, etc). There is significant commercial opportunity to value-add to broiler and other farming waste-products. This includes anerobic digestion, fertiliser production, gas/heat/power generation, and carbon to algae conversion for high protein products.

Construction

Construction provides a significant proportion of local jobs and economic output. There is significant employment, skills, machinery, and expertise in the construction sector for projects in the local area and across Victorian construction zones. The local construction businesses have an extensive training program for their employees for qualifications and to facilitate regulations for the industry.



Industry Statistics

LARGEST INDUSTRIES ECONOMIC OUTPUT



33%

MANUFACTURING



30.7%

AGRICULTURE,
FORESTRY & FISHING



12.4%

CONSTRUCTION

LARGEST INDUSTRIES BY JOBS



34.6%

AGRICULTURE,
FORESTRY & FISHING



21.7%

MANUFACTURING



11.4%

CONSTRUCTION



6.8%

HEALTH CARE &
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE



6.8%

RETAIL TRADE

An aerial photograph of a river valley. A river flows through the center, bordered by lush green trees and vegetation. On the left bank, there is a small settlement with several buildings and a parking area. The background features rolling hills and a prominent mountain peak under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

Aspirations for Heyfield and District

After two years of exploration into the aspirations of Heyfield and District, the following pages outline the information that has been uncovered about the place, the people, the economy and possible opportunities associated with transition, economic development, and community wellbeing.

Highlights from the project

There has been genuine curiosity from people in the local community about the Local Development Strategy and the opportunity to explore future directions. For many locals, the assets are almost invisible - they are just there, as part of the fabric of the place. By compiling a list of assets, (see Page 12) it brings into sharp focus that there are many strengths to Heyfield and District. The community spirit was the most admired asset, followed by local services and facilities; Heyfield Community Resource Centre; Gateway for tourism; and ASH.

Many people spoke of the challenges with transition, identity, and employment stability as a reflection on the turbulent times for Heyfield and District with the closure of the native timber industry. Other challenges that have been regularly discussed included the limited local training options; identifying external organisations to support the Working Groups; and housing diversity and transport options.

A highlight of the project has been the increase in collaboration within the community and at a regional level. Building solid working relationships takes time and effort, and the project has enabled many new connections for the innovation ecosystem (see Page 13) that are advantageous to broaden the horizons for project proposals.



Themes identified in Context Analysis in May 2023

- 1 Agriculture
- 2 Timber Manufacturing and Associated Business
- 3 Health and Active Ageing
- 4 New Energy
- 5 Tourism
- 6 Environmental Restoration and Land Management

Outcomes by June 2024

Innovation Working Groups Established

- Tourism
- Agriculture - Skills, Training and Employment
- Wellington Chicken Growers Group
- Active Ageing Community Group

Other Outcomes

- Multiple community workshops, meetings and training
- Masterplan for vacant industrial land in Heyfield for proposed "Heyfield Integrated Manufacturing Cluster"
- Exploration and recommendations to implement project proposals.
- Funding application from Heyfield Community Resource Centre for community development and project support.

NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO ATTEND EVENTS

790 

TOTAL NUMBER OF EVENTS HELD

44

EVENT NUMBERS BY THEME

 10
GENERAL

 10
TOURISM

 14
ACTIVE AGEING

 7
AGRICULTURE

 3
COMMUNITY GROUP TRAINING

Heyfield And District - A Snapshot

STRENGTHS - OVERALL



- Location
- Climate
- Soil and Topography
- Agricultural Land
- Agricultural Industry

- Macalister Irrigation District (MID) system
- Water security
- Lake Glenmaggie
- Small towns
- Forests
- Timber heritage
- Nearby areas of scenic beauty and nature
- Gateway to Southern Alps
- Macalister River
- Rail Trail
- Blores Hill



- Cowwarr Weir
- Tracks and trails
- Vast areas of State Forests and Parks Vic land
- Variety of outdoor recreational activities
- Laurina Lodge and Heyfield Hospital
- Diversity of local businesses and employment
- Population is growing



STRENGTHS - PEOPLE

- Community spirit
- Heyfield Community Resource Centre
- Local knowledge, skills and experience
- ASH
- Business resilience
- Heyfield Tourism and Traders Association
- Local business networks
- Macalister Demonstration Farm
- Adaptable
- Schools
- Lifestyle
- Heyfield Wetlands and Information Centre
- Community Groups and volunteers
- Community facilities and services
- New arrivals
- Response to disaster
- Opportunities to participate in the local community
- “Can do” attitude
- Many retirees



STRENGTHS & CHALLENGES

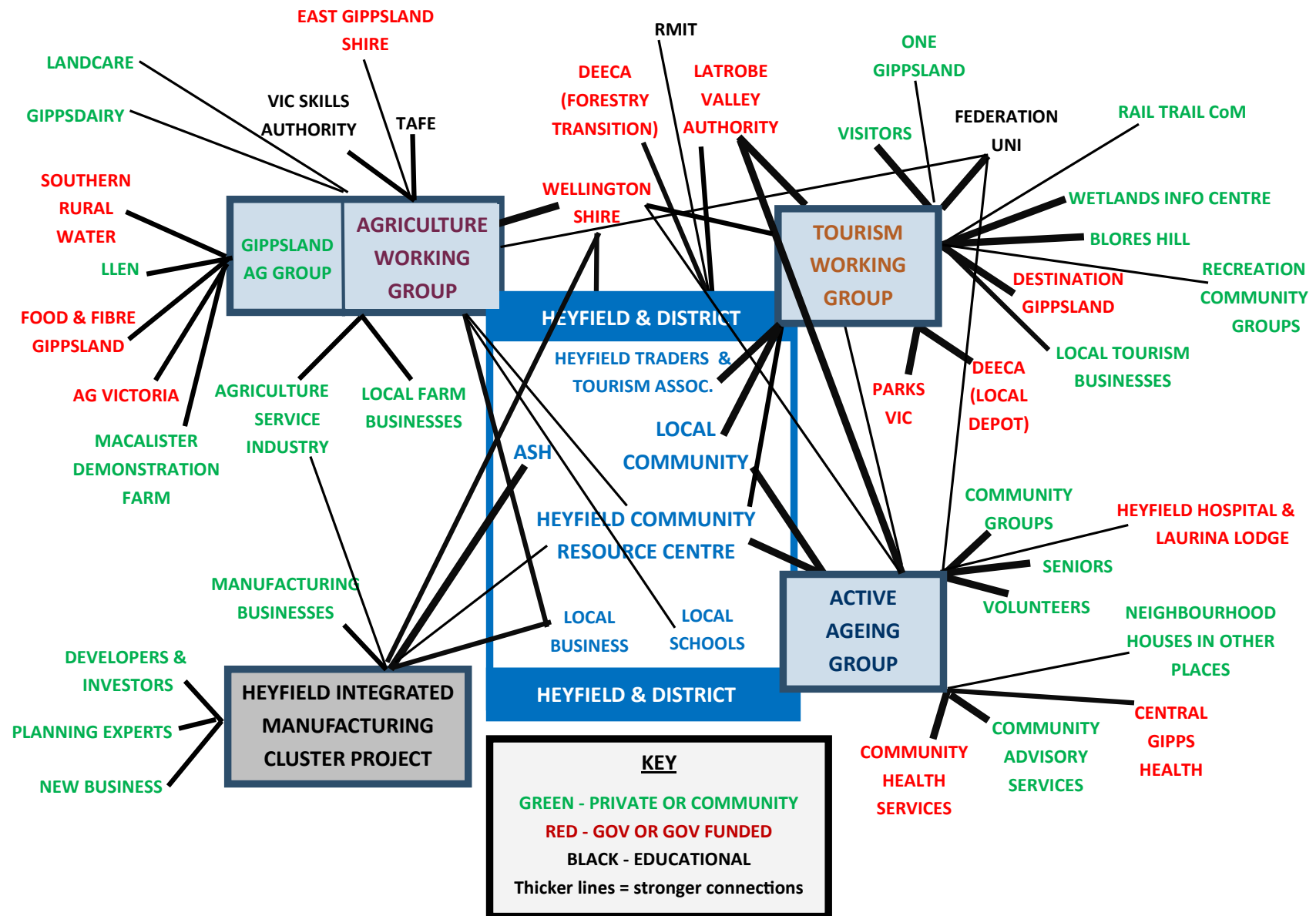
- Technology
- Climate
- Population size (4000 residents in Heyfield & District)
- Tourists in peak season
- Questions about identity
- Employment options
- Distance to Melbourne
- Ageing population
- Land price increases since Covid19
- Vacant land
- Accessibility in towns
- Healthcare services
- Seniors to stay at home as long as possible



CHALLENGES

- Median age of population is 47 (Victoria is 38)
- Median income is less than Gippsland and Victoria
- Less people with Bachelor qualification than Victorian average
- Distances to on-campus higher education
- Limited local training options for agriculture and other industries
- Limited transport options other than car
- Employment stability
- Consequences associated with the end of native timber harvesting in Victoria
- Transition and identity of town
- Services shrinking in smaller towns
- Land planning zones in Heyfield
- Extreme weather
- Housing diversity and affordability
- Volunteer recruitment and burnout
- Funding for maintenance of local facilities
- Some people have narrow or fixed mindset
- People who have disrespectful behaviour
- Lake Glenmaggie's primary purpose is irrigation and can be at odds with recreational purposes.
- Diversity in Accommodation
- Some industry groups fragmented and disconnected.

Innovation Ecosystem - Collaboration in action

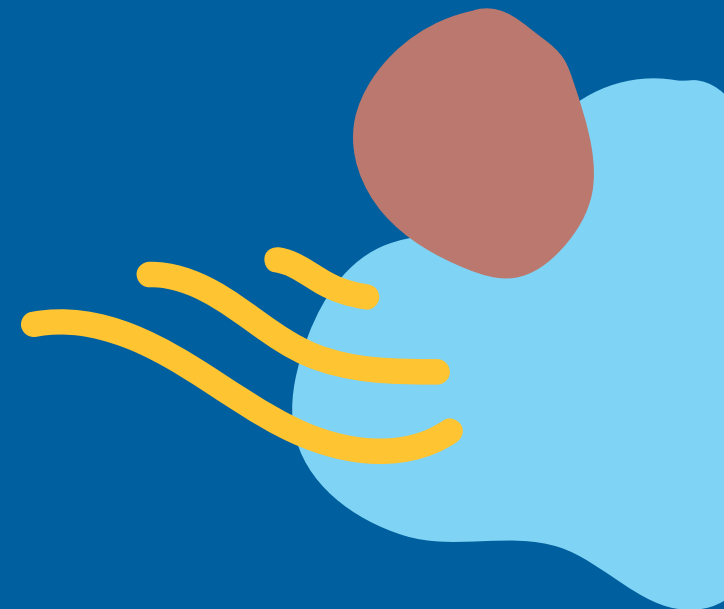




Innovation Themes

Recommendations
for the implementation
roadmap.

The Working Groups have been meeting from October 2023 until May 2024 to identify and define project proposals, and to discuss the options for implementation.





Agriculture - Skills and Training

There were two Discovery workshops held in May and August 2023 that identified four areas that could be explored.

Employment, Training and Skills Development

- New local training.
- Co-ordinating and awareness of existing programs.
- Professional Development and networking.

Organic Resources

- On-farm “waste” resources from broiler and dairy industries that could add to circular economy as biomass for fertiliser production or other uses.
- New approaches for efficiencies with water and energy use.

Natural Capital

- Improving water security, protecting the environment, conserving irrigation and storing carbon.

Farming Systems

- Capitalising on comms and technology, such as integrating smart farming and accessing ongoing tech support.

The first priority was identified as Training and Skills

- Outcome: *Heyfield Agricultural Training Coordination Hub - Heyfield community will lead the development of an Agricultural learning Hub to build the Ag talent pipeline.*

The next priority was identified as Organic Resources.

- Outcome: *To expand the opportunities for the broiler sector via collaboration and knowledge sharing of common themes such as farm services, energy efficiency, and opportunities with chicken litter management and value-add (organic fertiliser).*

The Agriculture Skills and Training Working Group established in 2023 with regular meetings.

In December 2023 and February 2024, Victorian Skills Authority (VSA) ran the workshops as a co-design process (see Page 16). There has been ongoing discussion with various Agricultural industry groups including Gippsland Agriculture Group (who have just completed a training centre in Bairnsdale area) and Macalister Demonstration Farm, etc.

The Wellington Chicken Growers Group was established early in 2024 with regular meetings.

The group are investigating economy of scale and options to implement circular economy principles as a collaborative effort. Latrobe Valley Authority are supporting the group in their investigation of bioenergy and geothermal opportunities.

The group are exploring possible partnerships and opportunities to value add their chicken litter as organic fertiliser that could be used in district to kick off local carbon economy.



Victorian Skills Authority Co-Design Process For Agriculture

Understanding the problem (themes)

- Employment Barriers
- Workforce Attraction
- Pathways & Careers
- Industry Perception
- Industry Accessibility
- Skills & Education
- Heyfield Identity
- Contemporary Workforce

Problem Statement

Industry perception, training pathways, skills and retention are all contributing to an inadequate supply of Agricultural workers in the Heyfield and district which is adversely affecting productivity, growth, and sustainability in the industry.

Develop And Test Prototype Models

Model #1: Redgum Plains Agricultural Skills & Education Program

Industry-led program utilising a hybrid delivery model incorporating both classroom instruction and on-farm that bridges educational institutions such as TAFEs and schools.

Model #2: Keeping it Local: Agriculture Experience Tours

Agricultural local tours offering access to organisations not usually open to the public, showcasing the diversity of agricultural activities in the local area.

Model #3: City-2-Country Exchange Program

Template exchange program targeted at metropolitan high school students providing structured workplace learning opportunities.

Model #4: Heyfield Ag Training Coordination Hub with the Hub in Heyfield

Either bricks and mortar or online, connecting farmers to training opportunities, job seekers to employment opportunities, and serving as an advocate for the Heyfield Agriculture sector.

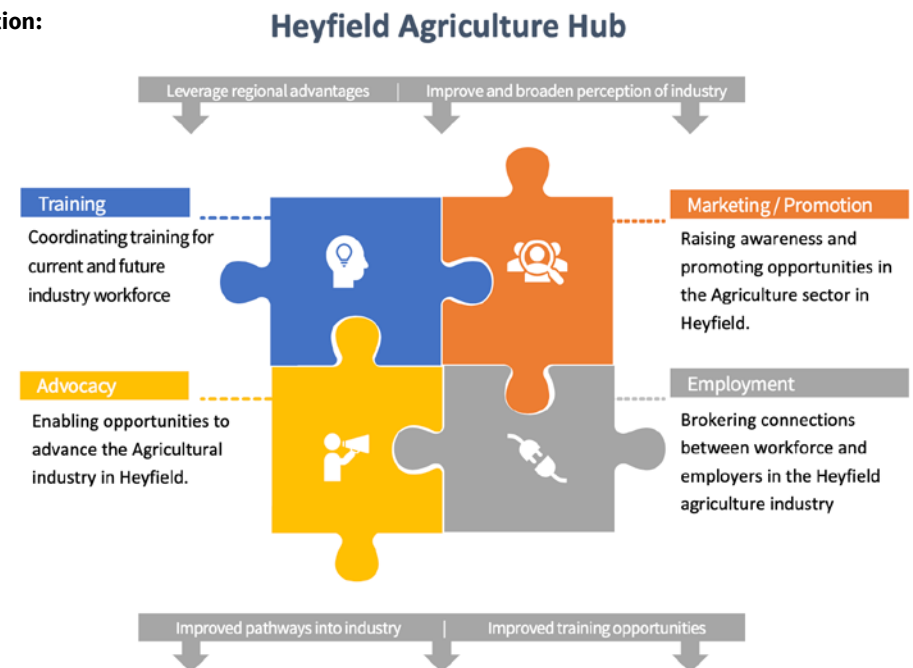
Next Steps

- To review and further develop the Agricultural Hub model
- Test the model with key local stakeholders, in particular farmers, agricultural organisations, school leavers and education providers (Interviews, focus groups or surveys)
 - Investigate opportunities to partner with other key organisations
 - Coordinate with other Gippsland communities with similar challenges, share information and determine potential for a broader Gippsland project .
 - Identify any potential sources of funding for a pilot project or implementation of Ag Hub.

Develop a governance model to enable the establishment of the Agricultural Hub and future growth and development (initial phases may have an auspice organisation with stake-holder reference group during implementation through to a co-operative owned by the sector or similar legal structure).

Determine vision, priority and core objectives for the Agricultural Hub and develop a long-term implementation plan.

Victorian Skills Authority recommendation:
Model #4 - see diagram.



Gippsland Agricultural Group project proposal

Gippsland Agricultural Group have researched and produced a “shovel ready” program design in response to the problem statement from Victorian Skills Authority workshop (see below).

Why: Industry perception, training pathways, skills and retention are all contributing to an inadequate supply of Agricultural work-ers in the Heyfield and district which is adversely affecting productivity, growth, and sustainability in the industry.

What:

The Gippsland Rural Education Program is designed to cultivate a passion for agricultural careers among year 9 students while equipping them with the skills and character essential for success in the industry.

How: The program consists of 4 x one week blocks across the school calendar, it will integrate immersive learning experiences, inquiry-based learning model, to provide students with a holistic understanding of modern agriculture.

Who: Gippsland Agricultural Group, Local Government, Ag industry agencies, Food and Fibre Gippsland, Macalister Demonstration Farm.

Where: A hub and spoke model across Wellington and East Gippsland Shires. Based from Gippsland Agricultural Centre in Bairnsdale.

Industry Engagement: Participants are paired with industry mentors and encouraged to attend key agricultural events, fostering networking opportunities, and providing insights into career pathways within the agricultural sector.

Next steps: Establishment of Governance Group and collaboration partners; funding application, timing schedule and logistics.





Tourism

There were four Discovery workshops held in May, June, August and September 2023.

- Outcome: *Heyfield Adventure Hub + 4WD Training Centre will offer visitors a helping hand to enjoy and experience adventure in local landscapes; and build a co-ordinated and sustainable local tourism economy.*

The Tourism Working Group was established in 2023 with regular meetings.

Topics of interest for Project proposals:

Heyfield Regional Adventure Hub

- Project Facilitator
- Helping hand for Adventurers
- Adventure equipment, skills and training
- Partnerships
- Infrastructure such as 4WD training centre.
- Accessibility and wayfinding improvements.

Co-ordination

- Marketing and Events
- Digital Tools (Kiosk)
- Communication Centre
- Heyfield Wetlands Centre – Visitor Information Centre.

Tourism Working Group

- Strategic Planning
- Attracting Investment
- Sustainable Business Model
- Tourism Culture

Local Places and Landscapes

- Gateway to the Southern Alps – historical, cultural, remote wilderness, huts.
- Outdoor Fun – accessible and affordable.
- Beyond 4WDs

The Tourism Working Group are currently working on next steps, governance, and implementation of project ideas with assistance from Federation University.



PRIORITIES



Attract more people to Heyfield

Implement the strategic plan



Create Jobs & tourism activities

Enhance visitor experiences



Educate local community on benefits of tourism

Collective vision for Heyfield



Group collaboration



Apply for funds for the project



Develop Heyfield as a Tourism Hub



Connect tourism operators in the area

PROJECTS



Employ someone to implement strategy & promote Heyfield Region



4WD TRACKS



Digital kiosks



Bring together existing offerings



Better use of visit Heyfield facebook page



Helping hand for Adventurers



Create a realistic plan

TOURISM INNOVATION WORKING GROUP HEYFIELD + DISTRICT

POINT OF DIFFERENCE

Variety of Shops & accommodation

VIBRANT community



Friendly & welcoming



Scenic

small community spirit

high volunteer rates



Home to large Hardwood Manufacturer



Close proximity to nature based experiences

Easily Accessible day drive



Gippsland Plains Rail Trail



We need sufficient time



Community Engagement AND Collaboration



Resource allocation and funding

Businesses to support tourism



Maintaining Interest & input



Clarity of purpose



long term vision AND continuity

WHAT WE NEED



Leadership



Volunteers



Understand priorities



Measurable objectives



Host Agency

Locals need to be onboard with tourism



GRAPHIC RECORDED BY ANGHARAD NEAL-WILLIAMS



Active Ageing

There were three Discovery workshops held in May, July and August 2023 that identified areas that could be explored.

- Outcome: *An all-ability, intergenerational positive ageing program for Heyfield and District that is fun and friendly, that will benefit the community via increased social participation, technology and learning, and support for seniors who want to stay in their own home longer.*

The Active Ageing Community Group was established in 2023 with regular meetings.

The Heyfield Community Resource Centre has actively supported the Active Ageing Group because it is aligned to the core objectives, community development and existing Seniors' Groups.

Actions (short term)

- DYING TO KNOW – series of events as a conversation starter for difficult conversations.
- Local Liveability Audit.
- Volunteer Week 2024.
- My Aged Care and NDIS service providers for garden maintenance - where are the gaps (and opportunities) in local area?

Actions (medium/long term)

- Housing – increasing the local options; awareness of policy and regulations.
- Small Jobs – House & Garden Maintenance.
- Retirees and Employment – what's the deal?



DYING TO KNOW
starting the difficult conversations
around planning for end-of-life

**An introduction to
life planning**
Thur 29th Feb

**Palliative care &
support services**
Thur 7th Mar

**Wills &
Power of Attorney**
Thur 14th Mar

**Funerals, trauma &
financial planning**
Thur 21st Mar

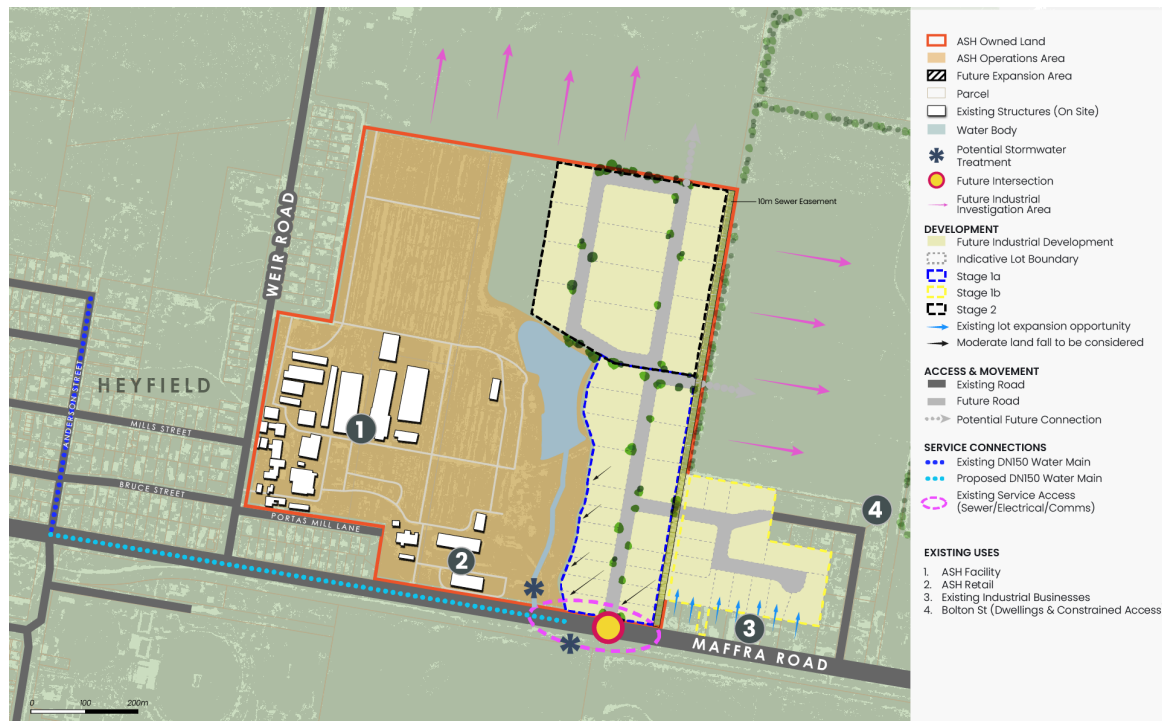
**Voluntary Assisted
Dying Laws**
Thur 28th Mar

**All sessions are FREE and held at the
Heyfield Community Resource Centre
5 George St Heyfield, 10am - 11.30am
Bookings on 5148 2100 or email coordinator@heyfield.net
light morning tea provided**



Heyfield Integrated Manufacturing Cluster

Grant funding was secured for market research, development and planning of industrial land in Heyfield as a proposal for Heyfield Integrated Manufacturing Cluster. A consultant has been engaged and commenced in September 2023 with interviews, site visits, market sounding and discussions with local business, community, and other stakeholders.



Proposed layout of Masterplan for new industrial land subdivision for Heyfield, as a proposal for development of integrated manufacturing cluster. Prepared by Stantec and Urban Enterprise.

The Development Opportunity

The development opportunity is summarised as follows:

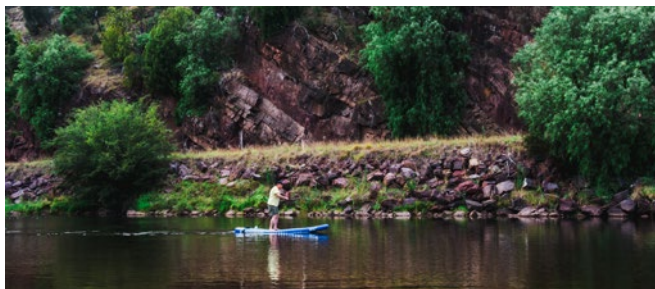
- The land adjacent to the ASH manufacturing complex is considered to be surplus and not required for current and future operations. There is interest to investigate opportunities to develop the land.
- There is industrial land adjoining the ASH site that is vacant and largely undeveloped. While completing the economic analysis and planning for subdivision, it was beneficial for the two parcels of land to be considered together, as neighbours, with the possibility of a shared access road.
- Wellington Shire Council has identified the importance of attracting investment and economic activity to Heyfield which will support the town in the context of local and regional economic uncertainties and the transitions underway.

ASH has identified the opportunity for synergistic businesses to utilise the surplus industrial land and benefit from the efficiencies and advantages of co-locating with ASH and other similar manufacturers and related businesses in Heyfield.

Any proposed development of the site would require planning approval, infrastructure investment and land development in order to accommodate new businesses.

Community Capacity Building

There is a proposed initiative that will lead to the development of programs to build the capacity of people in the community and local businesses. Heyfield Community Resource Centre (HCRC) are well placed to play a key role in delivering programs as they have an established reputation to deliver skills and training. This could include new learning programs, community and business development, grant writing, and collaboration opportunities.



Authors Acknowledgments

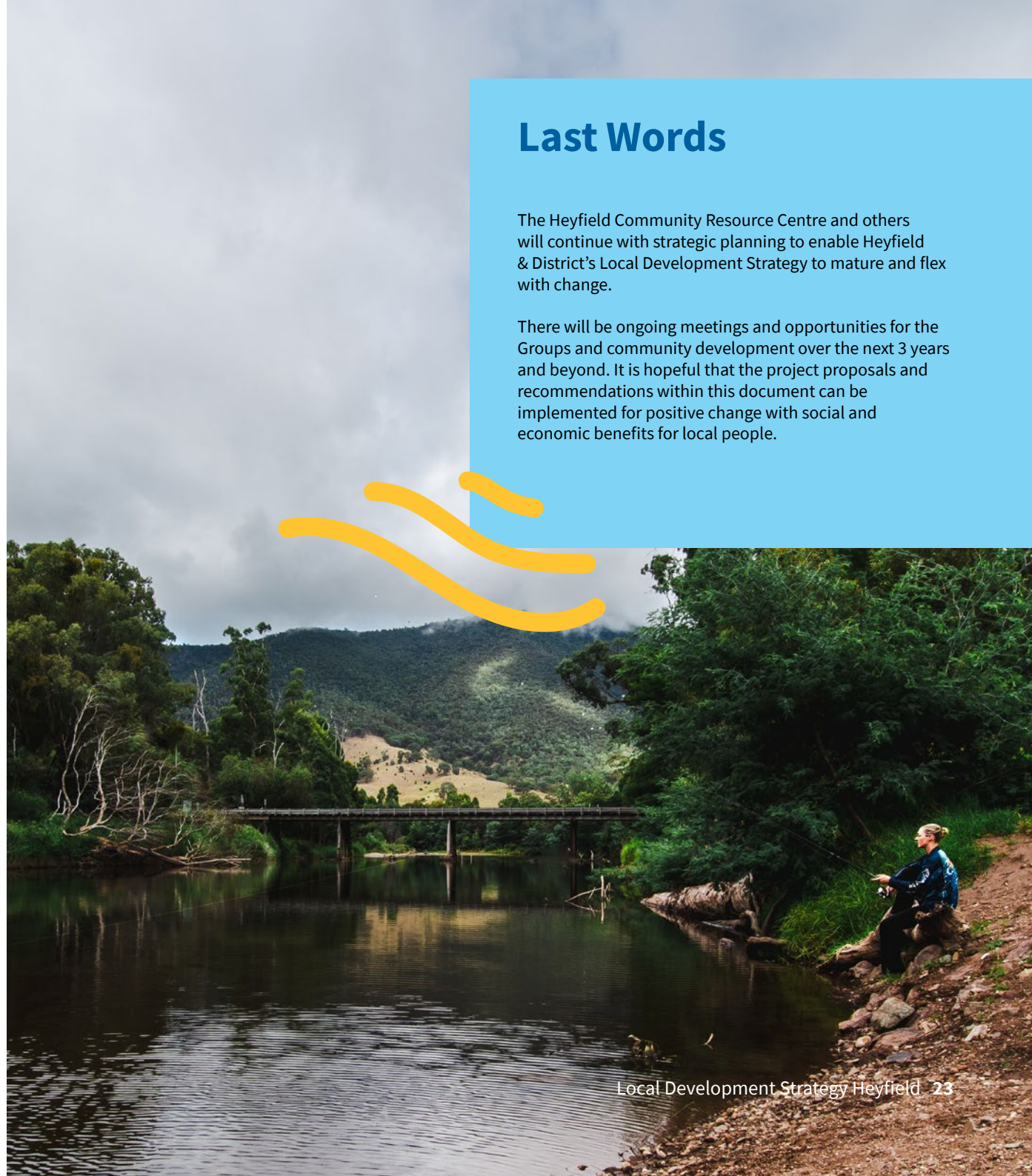
I want to thank all the people who showed up at workshops, meetings and were interested to contribute. A special thanks to Jess, Mark, Ash and the Thinktank gang for the support, advice and enthusiasm. Transition and collaboration are difficult to navigate and I am hopeful that we have left a positive legacy that will endure. I wish people in Heyfield & District all the best for the future endeavours - for the Groups and the project proposals, and for Heyfield Community Resource Centre to support the work into the future.

Petra Wood

Last Words

The Heyfield Community Resource Centre and others will continue with strategic planning to enable Heyfield & District's Local Development Strategy to mature and flex with change.

There will be ongoing meetings and opportunities for the Groups and community development over the next 3 years and beyond. It is hopeful that the project proposals and recommendations within this document can be implemented for positive change with social and economic benefits for local people.





More information:

Heyfield Community Resource Centre on 5148 2100

Wellington Shire Council - Mark Coleman, Economic Development – 5142 3050 or 1300 366 244

DEECA Forestry Transition Program - <https://www.deeca.vic.gov.au/forestry/forestry-transition-program>