

Yarra Ranges Council
Progress Report on the Council Plan
July – December 2024



Yarra Ranges Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri and other Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of these lands and waterways.

We pay our respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging, who have been, and always will be, integral to the story of our region.

We proudly share custodianship to care for Country together.

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About this report

The 2021-2025 Yarra Ranges Council Plan Progress Report provides an account of Council's performance in the first half of the 2024-25 financial year. The 2021-25 Council Plan is the key planning document for the four-year electoral term. It outlines Council's vision, our strategic objectives and the high priority activities we will complete.

Included in this report, Yarra Ranges Council is proud to provide a progress update against all major initiatives and Council actions that contribute to Council's key strategic objectives for the municipality.

Throughout the year, Council continues to report progress against major initiatives, the action plan, strategies, performance measures and infrastructure projects across Council's communication channels including website, social media, e-newsletters and Your Yarra Ranges print publication, together with our 2024-25 Annual Report.

This will be the last Council Plan progress report for the current Council Plan period. The 2024-25 Annual Report will be prepared following the end of the 2024-25 year and will close off the 2021-25 Council Plan. Consultation and development of the next Council Plan is well underway.

Introduction

Vision 2036

“Whether you live here or visit, you will see how much we care for Country, how inclusive and connected our communities are, and how sustainable balanced growth makes this the best place in the world.”

The Yarra Ranges community vision, and vision statement, was developed in consultation with over 1,000 local community members in 2016 and revisited again in 2021 with Council’s community panel. It captures the community’s vision for our municipality in 2036.

Community Vision Statement

Read the Yarra Ranges Community Vision Statement here: [Community Vision 2036 Yarra Ranges Council](#)

Council plan

The 2021-25 Council Plan articulates the key strategic objectives which guides Council's work in addition to eight major initiatives. These initiatives and objectives were informed by the community in 2020 and respond to the priorities and big issues facing the Yarra Ranges community at the time.

Within the Council Plan, an action plan details how we will aim to achieve the key strategic objectives. The following sections details these actions and our progress towards achieving them.

The Yarra Ranges Council's key strategic objectives, as outlined in the 2021-25 Council Plan, are:

Connected and Healthy Communities

Communities are safe, resilient, healthy, inclusive and socially well connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone.

Protected & Enhanced Natural Environment

A healthier environment for future generations.

Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places

Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned and are hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity and innovation.

Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism

Our tourism, agriculture, health, manufacturing and other industries are leading and dynamic. Strong investment and attraction underpins sustainable economic growth and job creation.

High Performing Organisation

An innovative, responsive organisation that listens and delivers quality, value for money services to our community.

Major initiatives for 2021 – 2025

Major Initiative 1:

On
track

Improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing by providing a range of supports to Oonah Health and Community Services Aboriginal Corporation to establish the Healesville Belonging Place, an integrated Aboriginal health facility.

Connection to culture, community, family, and Country is recognised as a key social determinant of Indigenous health and wellbeing and is critical to closing the gap.

Council has partnered with Oonah for several years to establish an Aboriginal community-controlled health and wellbeing service in Healesville, with purpose-built, integrated Aboriginal Health facility planned to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing in Healesville and the broader Eastern Metro Region.

Following the initial business planning phase, a feasibility study was commissioned and completed in 2018. Subsequent reports and studies were undertaken to move the Belonging Place project toward schematic design by 2020.

Though progress slowed due to Covid, the schematic design phase for the Healesville Belonging Place was finalised in mid-2023, and a planning application for the facility's construction has been submitted to Council's Planning Department. The planning process is expected to be lengthy, involving several referral points, including complex Cultural Heritage Management Plan (CHMP), bushfire management, and Vic Roads considerations.

Council acknowledges its ongoing role in supporting Aboriginal health and wellbeing and will continue working with Oonah and other agencies to close the gap on Aboriginal health outcomes.

An interim Belonging Place is currently operated by the Aboriginal community-controlled Oonah Health and Community Services Aboriginal Corporation which supports the Aboriginal community to self-determine the response to local health needs.

Major Initiative 2:

On
track

Become a world class trails and eco-tourism destination through project development, delivery, advocacy and partnerships, including the delivery of the and Ridges and Rivers projects.

Warburton Mountain Bike Destination

Construction of the Warburton Mountain Bike Destination is progressing with the appointed contractor World Trail currently delivering approximately 15km of trails within the Mt Little Joe area. The project includes easy, intermediate, and advanced climbing and descending trails, including a trail from Wesburn Park to the top of Mt Little Joe. The works also involve constructing 11 timber boardwalks (5m span) and two larger steel bridges (10+m span) over waterways.

Engineering design for the Old Warburton Road Bridge, which will link trails on either side of the road, is complete. Construction of the bridge is scheduled for late 2025. The first 30km stage of mountain bike trails is on schedule to open by mid-2025, with the next 30km stage commencing in March 2025, expected to take approximately nine months to complete.

Yarra Valley Trail

The 1.2km Yarra Valley Trail Stage 1B.1 (Yering to Melba Bend) is under construction, with trail works complete and heritage bridges being reconstructed. This section is scheduled to open in mid-2025.

Planning for Stage 1B.3 (Yarra River to Yarra Glen) is underway. The Gulf Road section of the Yarra Valley Trail Northern Tourist Loop is nearing completion, with full opening expected in June 2025. The Melba Highway section of the trail is awaiting final approvals from Melbourne Water and the Department of Transport and Planning.

Detailed planning and design for Stage 2A (Yarra Glen to Tarrawarra) is underway, with construction scheduled to begin in late 2025. Council recently purchased encumbered parcels of land from VicTrack to secure a route for Stage 2B (Tarrawarra to Healesville), and preliminary planning continues.

ngurrak barring

The delivery of ngurrak barring-RidgeWalk is underway, with a new artwork, 'Storm Leaves' installed at Kallista and Birdland. Other artworks, such as Kalorama Land Art and Djirra Binak, are also under construction, with the Doongalla Environmental artwork scheduled for completion in the coming months.

Burkes Lookout carpark construction is complete, as are the McNicol and Kaola pedestrian crossings. To support the public launch of ngarrak barring, a website is currently being developed. A Landcare grant was received for native planting at Node 2, Node 5, and Djirra Binak, with plants ordered for autumn planting.

Major Initiative 3:

Ensure the plants, animals and ecologies of Yarra Ranges that our community value so much are supported and retained alongside us in healthy landscapes, by preparing and implementing a Biodiversity Plan that provides renewed focus for Council, the community, and partners.

On
track

The Yarra Ranges Nature Plan: Protecting our Biodiversity Assets (Nature Plan) sets out the investment pathway and framework for achieving biodiversity preservation objectives, aligned with Council's focus on environmental stewardship. The plan outlines strategies for mitigating threats to biodiversity across four key themes:

- Land Use and a Changing Climate
- Landscapes and Ecosystems
- Pest Plants and Animals
- People and Nature

The Nature Plan was endorsed by Council on December 12 2023 after significant community consultation.

The Plan details Council's commitment to evidence-based decision-making for nature resource management, climate mitigation activities, and measurable improvements in biodiversity in the Yarra Ranges over the next 10 years. The Plan's activities, including delivery of community education programs to help move the region toward a vision of a healthy, resilient, and connected natural landscape. The plan also provides guidance in Council's land management practices in partnership with agencies such as DECCA and friend of groups.

Major Initiative 4:

On
track

Reduce our ecological footprint through our commitment to shift to sourcing 100% renewable energy and help our communities to thrive in a changing climate through adaptive, resilient and regenerative programs and projects.

Council's transition to 100% renewable electricity was achieved in 2022 through the Victorian Energy Collaboration (VECO), a 10-year contract involving over 50 Victorian councils. This transition from fossil fuel energy sources to renewables is essential for mitigating climate impacts, benefiting both Council and the community.

As of July 2023, Yarra Ranges has reduced its emissions by 48% compared with the 2004/2005 baseline, demonstrating leadership in reducing the ecological footprint. The draft Energy Transition Plan, under development, provides a framework for investments in electrification and options for maintaining the 100% renewable electricity supply after VECO concludes.

Council's Biochar Facility is progressing toward carbon offset accreditation, further reducing local emissions and supporting regenerative practices.

Yarra Ranges continues to participate in regional programs such as Solar Savers, Energy Savers, the Eastern Alliance for Greenhouse Action, and the Eastern Alliance for Sustainable Learning. These programs support local communities in adapting to a changing climate and help shape the supply of locally generated renewable energy.

Council is also pursuing a Local Government first by connecting two Council facilities to form a microgrid. The Monbulk Microgrid project will deliver a Localised Energy System (LES) using findings from the Resilient Energy Precinct Feasibility Study (May 2024). The project will enable the Monbulk Link and Monbulk Sporting Pavilion to share solar-generated electricity and stored energy during grid outages. The LES will provide continuous energy backup at these Council buildings, ensuring essential services are available during emergencies.

Major Initiative 5:

On
track

Improve mental health & wellbeing outcomes for the community, strengthen social connections, and support and encourage equitable and accessible mental health services across the municipality.

Council has recently finalised evaluations for two key mental health initiatives:

Initiative #1: The Living Stories Project (2023) aimed to destigmatise mental health conversations and encourage help-seeking. Surveys revealed that 60% of viewers felt more comfortable discussing mental health, and 63% were more willing to seek help after watching the stories. To thank participants, a dinner was held at the Civic Centre in December, where feedback surveys were shared and participants provided input on the draft evaluation report.

Initiative #2: The Community Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Program (2021–2024) trained over 480 community members through 27 MHFA courses delivered in partnership with 17 organisations. Surveys indicated that 97% of participants improved their ability to support others, and 100% valued the free training.

In December 2024, the Yarra Ranges Mental Wellbeing Network stakeholders meeting provided an opportunity from stakeholders to inform the development of Council's draft 2025–2029 Health & Wellbeing Strategy. Throughout the reporting period the Mental Wellbeing Internal Working Group continued to meet monthly, finalising its Theory of Change Framework. Key achievements included finalising five focus areas for addressing local mental wellbeing needs, developing an evaluation framework to track progress, and enhancing cross-departmental collaboration.

Major Initiative 6:

On
track

Undertake and deliver integrated place planning for priority activity centres and town centres to achieve coordinated community outcomes across Yarra Ranges, in accordance with the Living Places Framework.

Council is making progress in the delivery of place planning for Yarra Ranges centres. The Yarra Junction Place Plan has completed two rounds of community engagement and is preparing for formal consideration by Council. Key master plans have been adopted for Lillydale Lake, Morrisons Reserve, Kilsyth Recreation Reserve, and 150 Cambridge Rd, Kilsyth. Work is progressing well for McDermott Reserve and Don Road in Healesville.

Early background work has been completed for Belgrave and Healesville in preparation for Township Design Frameworks, and a new Structure Plan is underway for Chirnside Park. Following community consultation, a draft concept for the Upwey Town Centre Masterplan is being developed, with a review scheduled for early 2025.

Major Initiative 7:On
track

Strengthen community resilience by working together to achieve greater emergency planning and preparedness with a focus on traditional cultural burning practices. This will include the development a firestick program across public, private land and local training hubs.

Community Resilience

Council's partnership with community groups in emergency planning and resilience continues to grow. During the August 2024 storm, numerous community groups mobilised, to provide power and shower services.

Whilst distressing, each emergency event strengthens community connections in some capacity. In emergency impacted areas, Council continues to proactively engage with communities, offering guidance and connecting with community leaders. Preliminary planning has commenced to further strengthen community partnerships for ahead of the next fire season. Key groups have been invited to participate in emergency planning forums and exercises to build community and agency capabilities.

Firesticks Project

An On Country Gathering led by Traditional Owners was completed. This reinforced Council's approach in working collaboratively with Traditional Owners. These learnings informed the first cultural burn on council-managed land at Spidonis Reserve, marking the beginning of many future Council-led cultural burns.

Major Initiative 8:On
track

Implement a Build Back Better approach to economic recovery and adaptation activities that improves the well-being of the community and business.

Council continues to connect with Business and Trader Groups through regular meetings, active involvement in committees, and ongoing support. New initiatives aim to bring community groups together with business groups to share perspectives and lessons continue. This information is helping inform placemaking activities, enhancing the vibrancy and sustainability of local business environments.

Connected and Healthy Communities

Communities are safe, resilient, healthy, inclusive and socially well connected. Quality services are accessible to everyone.

Key strategies and plans to achieve our objective include:

- Health and Wellbeing Plan
- Child and Youth Strategy
- Creative Communities Strategy
- Reconciliation Framework for Action
- Community Safety Strategy
- Equity, Access, and Inclusion Strategy
- Health and Active Ageing Plan

Our performance

Action	Completion Status
Implement priority actions arising from the Health and Wellbeing Plan.	On track
Implement Council's Healthy and Active Ageing Plan to increase the age and dementia friendliness of the municipality and improve social connection.	Completed
Implement the Pandemic Recovery and Resilience Framework and other key recovery actions to support the rebuilding of community resilience.	Completed
Update the Aquatics Strategy to strategically plan for the provision of aquatic facilities across the municipality that are inclusive, sustainable, well designed and positioned to improve community health and wellness.	Completed
Revise and implement key actions of the Recreation and Open Space Strategy to increase community access, support community connections and activate Council's community facilities and open space network.	On track
Implementing key actions in the Integrated Transport Strategy 2040 with a focus on people's localised movements and advocating for a cohesive public transport network that connects people with services, employment and to each other.	On track

Protected and Enhanced Natural Environment

A healthier environment for future generations.

Key strategies and plans to achieve our objective include:

- Environment Strategy
- Liveable Climate Plan
- Zero Emissions Fleet Transition Plan
- Flora and Fauna Strategy
- Community Waste Management Plan

Our performance

Action	Completion Status
Implement actions of the Liveable Climate Plan and shift to low carbon and renewable energy sources across all facilities, buildings, plant and fleet to reduce Council's climate impact.	On track
Deliver actions of the Urban Tree Canopy Strategy and deliver the parks and reserves improvement program to enhance amenity, access and participation in public spaces and places.	On track
Develop a Municipal Waste Plan, education programs and pursue innovative waste processing technologies to maximise waste resource recovery for a more sustainable future.	On track
Continue to develop and support the capability of Environmental Volunteer Groups including seeking funding support to invest in our shared environment.	On track
Improve our green corridors to enable native wildlife movement across the landscape by investing in restoration and revegetation works on private and council land.	On track

Quality Infrastructure and Liveable Places

Quality facilities and infrastructure meets current and future needs. Places are well planned hubs of activity that foster wellbeing, creativity and innovation.

Key strategies and plans to achieve our objective include:

- Recreation and Open Space Strategy
- Aquatics Facilities Strategy
- Asset Management Strategy
- Integrated Transport Strategy
- Housing Strategy

Our performance

Action	Completion Status
Improve our social infrastructure planning by working across Council to integrate place, service and infrastructure planning to meet the needs of our diverse communities and improve the unique places they live.	On Track
Develop and implement a strategic approach for activating and providing functional and affordable community assets and spaces that are welcoming to all and support the wellbeing and connectedness of the community.	On Track
Continue to evolve the maturity and sophistication of Council's Asset Management planning to ensure existing community infrastructure is renewed and maintained for the benefit of future generations.	On Track
Activate, develop and construct significant community facility projects across the municipality to respond to current and future community and social needs.	On Track
Seal gravel roads in townships across the municipality enabled through funding provided by the Federal Government combined with landowner contributions to improve local amenity and liveability for the community.	On Track
Integrate and strengthen the planning, maintenance and management of community assets to ensure the needs and priorities of current and future communities are balanced against investment requirements and Council's ability to pay for them.	On Track
Complete the Lilydale Structure Plan and incorporate key actions into the Planning Scheme through an amendment to provide clear direction of the future land use, urban design, transport and access and landscaping forms for Lilydale.	On Track
Amend the planning scheme by using the outcomes of the reviewed Housing Strategy to ensure housing needs of the community are met, new housing is well designed, provides for housing choice and improve neighbourhood character outcomes in residential areas.	On Track
Plan, facilitate and develop urban renewal projects, including Lilydale Revitalisation project, Kinley development and Level Crossing Removal to facilitate the revitalisation of Lilydale. Ensuring alignment with Council's place making - objectives of encouraging a vibrant, attractive, sustainable, healthy and connected community.	On Track

Action	Completion Status
<p>Establish a municipal wide Development Contributions Plan to provide funds for new infrastructure to support future growth and development.</p> <p>Note: A draft Municipal Wide Development Contributions Plan (DCP) was developed to explore potential funding for infrastructure through developer contributions. However, analysis identified several challenges, including a decline in planning permit activity, the likelihood of frequent updates to align with the Capital Expenditure Program, and potential State Government reforms in the developer contributions space. These factors created uncertainty around the plan's financial viability, particularly in terms of cost recovery in the early years. After presenting the draft DCP to Councillors at a Council Forum on 23 January 2024 and considering their feedback, the CEO determined that proceeding with the plan was not feasible at this time.</p>	Action ceased (see note)

Vibrant Economy, Agriculture and Tourism

Our tourism, agriculture, health, manufacturing and other industries are leading and dynamic. Strong investment and attraction underpins sustainable economic growth and job creation.

Key strategies and plans to achieve our objective include:

- Economic Development Strategy

Our performance

Action	Completion Status
Implement a plan that improves employment opportunities and mental health outcomes for everyone.	Completed
Develop and deliver improvements to Council's network of recreational trails across the municipality to support improved recreational, health, social, and economic needs of the community and become a world class trails, agritourism and eco-tourism destination.	On Track
Finalise and implement a new Economic Development Strategy and Investment Attraction Plan, to create local jobs, business, and investment to deliver positive and sustainable economic community outcomes.	On Track
Deliver key initiatives outlined in the Bayswater Business Precinct Transformation Strategy that create jobs, attracts future investment and progresses the revitalisation of the Precinct, in association with Knox and Maroondah Councils.	On Track
Raise the cultural profile of Yarra Ranges to drive creative industry development and cultural tourism spend via attracting and retaining new creative professionals and businesses and supporting existing creative professionals and businesses. [Commenced mid 2022]	On Track
Develop a destination management Plan with Yarra Ranges Tourism Board to support the right eco-tourism, infrastructure growth that also protects our natural environment.	Completed

High Performing Organisation

An innovative, responsive organisation that listens and delivers quality, value for money services to our community.

Key strategies and plans to achieve our objective include:

- YR Ignite - High Performing Organisation Strategy
- Workforce Management Plan
- Asset Plan
- Strategic Asset Management Plan
- Long Term Financial Management Plan
- Annual Budget & 3 Year Plan
- Information and Communication Technology Strategy (Under Review)
- Customer Experience Strategy (Under Review)
- Communications Strategy (Under Review)
- Brand Experience (Under Development)
- People & Culture Plan (Under Development)
- Health & Safety Strategy
- Gender Equity Action Plan

Our performance

Action	Completion Status
Ensure Council's workforce reflects the community it serves by embedding the principles of diversity and inclusion in our day-to-day leadership and share our experience and knowledge with the community.	On Track
Improve the community's trust and connection with Council through more meaningful and inclusive community engagement and innovative approaches to communication.	On Track
Develop and grow an organisational culture committed to delivering exceptional customer experience.	On Track
Streamline internal Council processes and improve systems to deliver more efficient services and improved interactions with our community.	On Track
Increase the community's visibility, understanding of and access to Council's information and performance to improve accountability to the community.	On Track
Consolidate and strengthen advocacy through evidence and stronger relationships to ensure other levels of government are effectively and efficiently engaged to support local services and programs.	On Track
Adapt and improve our service delivery to ensure the measurable provision of services that are supporting our municipality to rebuild resilience.	On track
Strengthen relationships and networks to support local community groups and build their capacity to be active in achieving community outcomes.	On Track

Copies and further information

Copies of the Progress Report on the Council Plan are available as hard copies or online. All strategic documents to support the delivery of the strategic objectives are available in hard copy and in electronic format on Council's website at: www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au or by contacting 1300 368 333.

Contact information

Community Links

Lilydale 15 Anderson Street

Healesville 110 River Street

Monbulk 21 Main Road

Yarra Junction 2442-2444 Warburton Highway

Upwey 40 Main Street

National Relay Service

133 677 - for callers who have a hearing, speech or communication impairment and for Text Telephone or modem callers

1300 555 727 - for callers using Speech to Speech relay

9658 9461 - Teletypewriter (TTY)

Translating and Interpreting Service

131 450 - Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) National. An interpreting service is available if required.

Chinese Simplified (Mandarin)

如需要，可拨打全国翻译服务处 (TIS) 的电话
131 450 提供口译服务。

Chinese Traditional (Cantonese)

如需要，可撥打全國翻譯服務處 (TIS) 的電話
131 450 提供傳譯服務

Chin Hakha

Holhlet na herh ah cun Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) kha 131450 ah chawnh in hlohleh rian tuawn nak kha hman khawh a si

Dutch

Indien nodig kunt u onze tolken- en vertaaldienst Translating and Interpreting Services (TIS) bellen op 131 450 om met een tolk te spreken

Italian

Un servizio di interpretariato è disponibile, se richiesto, contattando i Servizi di traduzione e interpretariato nazionali (TIS) al numero 131 450

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