



Macedon Ranges Open Space Strategy

**Macedon Ranges Open Space:
Present and Future
Consultation Paper**

February 2022



**Macedon
Ranges**
Shire Council

Version Control

Date	Version	Purpose
28-01-2022	Version 1	Draft for internal review
01-02-2022	Version 2	Draft for community consultation
11-02-2022	Version 3	Final for community consultation



Macedon Ranges Shire Council is developing a new Open Space Strategy to provide strategic direction for the planning, management and delivery of public open space.

Macedon Ranges Shire is located on the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung, Taungurung, and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Kulin nation, who are acknowledged as caretakers and Traditional Custodians of the land.

Towns and villages in the Macedon Ranges are surrounded by significant landscapes and contain a diversity of open spaces that have high aesthetic, conservation, biodiversity, social, economic, and cultural heritage values.

Council owns and manages over 900 hectares of open space including public parks, waterways, recreation reserves and bushland conservation reserves.

Some towns are growing, the climate is changing and new recreation trends are emerging. How we provide high quality open spaces needs to be managed equitably throughout the shire.

Strategic decisions must be made about the future of parks, sporting fields and recreation to balance the needs of the wider community with protecting the natural beauty of our shire.

The strategy will provide clear direction to Council on current and future open space requirements to service the shire's existing and growing community.

Have
your say

Phase 1 Consultation is now underway. During this round of consultation, we want to understand community preferences, perceptions and values related to open space.

This information will be used to form a strategy that responds to the needs and expectations of the Macedon Ranges community.

Consultation closes Friday 8 April 2022



About this document

This *Macedon Ranges Open Space: Present and Future* consultation paper has been prepared to outline the scope of the project and how the strategy is going to be developed.

This paper explores some of the core challenges for the strategy to take on and considers how they may be addressed.

During this round of consultation, we are seeking to understand community preferences, perceptions and values related to open space.

Online survey



Throughout the paper are questions and prompts for feedback that we would like from you. These relate to questions in the online survey on our *Have Your Say* page, so please have a read of this document then head over to the survey to provide your response. This survey is intended to inform open space priorities for your town.



Project team

Council's Strategic Planning unit is leading the project, with input from an internal project team comprising key departments including Environment, Open Space and Recreation, Asset Management and Facilities and Operations.

Xyst have been engaged by Council to prepare the strategy. Xyst are an open space planning consultancy that specialises in parkland and open space strategies.

Engagement specialists i.e. community have joined the team to recruit the Open Space Community Assembly and facilitate the deliberative engagement sessions.

Study area

The Open Space Strategy is a 'whole of shire' project that recognises the diversity of land ownership and management regimes within the municipality.

Although the strategy will consider where there are partnerships with other public land managers, it will predominantly be **focused on open space owned or managed by Council.**

The strategy will focus on the key townships within the shire: Gisborne, Kyneton, Woodend, Romsey, Lancefield, and Riddells Creek, and address smaller settlements and localities as required.

How will we get there?

Stage 1

Issues and opportunities

Focused on understanding the current state of open space in Macedon Ranges, this stage includes background analysis, trends analysis, and community consultation and surveys to measure satisfaction.

At the end of this stage, more clarity will emerge around the challenges affecting open space, and the opportunities available for the strategy to respond.

Stage 2

Supply & demand

This phase will analyse the quality and quantity of open space. Through outcomes of community and stakeholder engagement, equity focused gap analysis, performance assessment and benchmarking, local priorities will become clearer.

Stage 3

Draft Open Space Strategy

Priorities and opportunities will be brought together to develop a strategy which supports outcomes, goals and actions for the future. Strategy development will be informed by deliberation on proposed approaches by the Community Assembly.

Draft town-specific action plans, approaches and directions will be prepared and exhibited to the community for the second phase of consultation.

Stage 4

Final Open Space Strategy

Feedback from the community and stakeholders will be incorporated into a final Open Space Strategy and presented to Council for adoption.

Following adoption, authorisation will be sought to proceed with an amendment to implement changes to the planning scheme.

How can you be involved?

Phase 1

Consultation

During this round of consultation, we want to understand community preferences, perceptions, and values related to open space. Information collected will be used to form a strategy that responds to the needs and expectations of the Macedon Ranges community.

Community Assembly

Through rich discussion and in-depth assessment of different options, the Assembly will make decisions and recommendations on how we can best manage our open space, in the context of growing demand and limited resources.

The decisions/recommendations from the Assembly will guide the development of the new Open Space strategy and shape the future of the management of open space in our Shire.

Phase 2

Consultation

During this round of consultation, the draft strategy will be exhibited to the community to seek feedback and formal submissions. We will present draft actions which intend to improve service provision. There will be opportunities for you to provide feedback on these actions and help shape them.

Community Assembly

Register your interest to be part of our Community Assembly!

Council is creating a panel of community members to contribute to the development of the open space strategy.

Engagement specialists i.e. community have joined the project team to recruit the Open Space Community Assembly and facilitate the deliberative engagement sessions that will help inform the plan.

The Open Space Community Assembly will provide the opportunity to build on the hard work of the Macedon Ranges Shire Community Assembly, which developed our Community Vision for the future of the Shire:

With our unique regional identity, Macedon Ranges Shire embodies a caring, resilient approach to community through our robust local economy, protection of the natural environment and a collaborative commitment to inclusivity for all.

Open space is central to delivering our vision, playing a key role in connecting communities, creating a healthy environment, healthy people, and business and tourism.

The Assembly members will learn about our challenges, including the pressures of growth, increasing demand and competition for open space, and a changing climate. They will also explore the opportunities open space provides, including increasing the health and wellbeing of residents, attracting tourists and delivering on our commitment to reconciliation.

Through rich discussion and in-depth assessment of different options, the Assembly will make decisions/recommendations on how we can best manage our open space, in the context of growing demand and limited resources. The decisions/recommendations from the Assembly will guide the development of the new Open Space strategy and shape the future of the management of open space in our shire.

Building on the lessons learnt through the first Community Assembly, this process provides a great opportunity to build the capacity of the community and Council to understand and respond to future challenges, to deliver deliberative engagement, and to work more closely together.

Deliberative engagement provides the opportunity for Council and the community to work together to make important decisions about the future of open space in our shire.

We welcome all residents and other users of open space to register their interest to be part of the Assembly.

Applications will open on **Friday 11 March** and close on **Friday 8 April.**

To apply please visit **mrsc.vic.gov.au/yoursay**



What you have already told us



You value landscape views, vistas, wildlife, parks, and open space.

You value protection of biodiversity, habitat, and significant vegetation, particularly critically endangered grasslands.



Walking, cycling, and running account for the largest proportion of overall physical activity participation, reinforcing the importance of quality walking paths, trails, and accessible open space facilities and programs.



You value the use of natural landforms and natural elements (rocks, logs, mounds etc) in play spaces, and the provision of structured and unstructured play opportunities, which cater for a range of age groups.



You would like a range of park facilities including seating, drinking fountains, toilets, picnic tables, shelters, and barbeque facilities.



It is important to support community-led initiatives for events, festivals and activities, and the attraction of major sport/recreation participation events in the shire.



Macedon Ranges Shire has high levels of community participation in recreation and sport activities, with participation rates above state averages for many activities, and most clubs reporting membership growth in recent years. 75% of clubs in the shire have said that existing facilities are not meeting their needs.



There is a large demand and community support for dog off-leash areas. 83% of respondents to the Domestic Animal Management Plan showed strong support for dedicated purpose built off leash dog parks.



A service driven approach

The Open Space Strategy will describe the amount, quality and type of open spaces which will best meet community needs into the future. These will be presented as “service standards” for each different type of open space in a hierarchy.

Establishing a framework

The Open Space Strategy will establish a framework that will define how open space is delivered and the range of services to be provided.

Clear standards for the development and management of open space will improve both the services provided by Council, as well as how Council communicates, manages, and meets community expectations.

The framework will describe each open space by type - active recreation, passive recreation, linear, or conservation - and in a hierarchy - destination, community, local.













For example, a small local park, primarily used for passive recreation will have a different set of facilities provided compared with a destination park that attracts visitors from further afield.

The ‘levels of service’ approach will establish:

- How many, and what type of parks are provided
- What service can be expected
- What it will cost
- A way of measuring “are we delivering?”

What are park services?

Park services include all of the facilities and features that can be found in parks, for example:

-  **Dog off-leash areas**
-  **Picnic settings**
-  **Rubbish bins**
-  **Public art**
-  **Drinking fountains**
-  **Barbeques**
-  **Skate parks**
-  **Car parking**
-  **Trees**
-  **Gardens**
-  **Playgrounds**
-  **Public toilets**
-  **Paths**



Categorising open space types

There are many different types of open space, from sporting fields to creek lines. Each town has its own unique mix of open space types which reflect its landscape, needs, values, and ambitions.

It's helpful to give names to these different types of open spaces so that we can discuss the services they provide, which ones we need more of, and how best to provide them.

It is not possible or desirable to do everything identically everywhere, so there are inherent tensions and choices to be made when deciding the right mix of open space types, sizes, and designs for each community.

Understanding this will inform the strategy regarding everything from land acquisition, negotiations with developers, programming, and management.

Many open spaces serve multiple functions. Passive recreational facilities can sit alongside sports fields; pockets set aside for conservation can be found in spaces that have passive recreation as their primary use.

For the purposes of consultation, we will focus on the more prominent types that you are most likely to be interested in.



Active recreation

Ovals, fields, courts, and sports grounds that often feature lighting, club rooms, stands and other amenities.

Sports precincts are active community hubs. Often multi-use facilities, they are designed and programmed for a broad range of users. Competitive and recreational activities are integrated.



Passive recreation

Community parks with multiple functions like playgrounds, gardens, picnic facilities, event spaces, skate parks, exercise stations, dog off-leash areas, and more. These meet the needs of multiple user groups with designs that bring people of all ages, interests, and abilities together.



Linear

Linear parks and open space connections often following waterways (rivers, creek lines) or connecting key destinations.

Ecological linkages are managed for conservation, landscape amenity, and to improve water quality and biodiversity values. A network of paths and trails could include public art or history walks, dog off-leash trails, equestrian trails, or other experiences.



Conservation

Bushland areas managed for environmental conservation, they are essential to local character with a focus on biodiversity, reducing weed species, water purification, and ecological services such as pollination and pest predation.

These reserves can provide inspiring places for the community to connect with and learn about nature, while providing a place of respite. However, certain reserves will not always be accessible to the public, as the ecological value they provide to the community can only be retained through careful preservation.



As part of this first phase of community consultation you are invited to explore these types of open space and tell us about levels of satisfaction to access, quantity and quality of these types.

Establishing an open space hierarchy

To accurately describe the services provided by an open space it is useful to consider the size, scale, or quality of a park in a hierarchy. The Open Space Strategy will use a three-tier hierarchy. This approach helps to describe the types and number of amenities you might expect to find at a park.

Local parks



Local parks are designed and managed to cater for residents who live within a short distance. These spaces are typically used for daily recreational activities like walking the dog or playing on a playground. It's expected that most people would walk or ride to local parks.

Community parks



Community parks are designed and managed to cater for residents and visitors that live in the town and surrounding rural areas.

It's expected that most people would ride or drive a short distance to community parks. They may offer some amenities which are intended to meet the needs of the entire town, like a community oval for example.

Destination parks



These parks are designed to cater for a large number of people due to being a regional drawcard.

It is expected that people will travel to visit these places, likely because they offer a unique experience or amenity. Large bush reserves, botanic gardens, adventure playgrounds and sport precincts are usually regional parks.



Example levels of service

Passive recreation

Destination



Community



Local



Planning for future open space

The Macedon Ranges Statement of Planning Policy directs urban development to a hierarchy of towns with long-term settlement boundaries. These boundaries are set to avoid urban sprawl, and to protect township character, agricultural land, environmental assets, and the rural landscape setting of the ranges.

Gisborne and Kyneton are the two regional centres in the shire where growth is to be focused, with other townships including Romsey, Woodend, Lancefield, and Riddells Creek supporting a moderate level of growth.

There are a range of strategic township planning projects currently underway, including structure plans for Gisborne and Romsey, a Precinct Structure Plan for Amess Road in Riddells Creek, a Draft Framework Plan for Kyneton South and numerous development plans in various parts of the shire. The current open space strategy does not provide a sufficient direction to guide the future open space requirements for the development and assessment of these plans.

As townships grow, so too does the pressure and demands on existing open spaces. Preparation of strategies such as this are the ideal time to set goals for development partnerships and to allocate areas for future open space.

An analysis into the quality and quantity of open space is required to understand where there may be gaps in the level of open space provision.

The open space strategy can:

- provide guidance on the size, location and function of open space required for the preparation of structure plans, assessing development plans and growth area planning
- review the current rates of developer open space contributions, consider the appropriateness of these, and provide clear policy to guide contributions
- identify linear open space corridors which may facilitate walking, cycling and ecological connections
- provide guidance for activated, multi-functional open spaces that integrate conservation, recreation and water management.

Defining a strategic direction

All good strategies need a clear direction or intended outcome. These can sometimes feel a little vague and generic, so we need your help to make it relevant and exciting.

Open space reflects the values, needs, unique character and ambitions of individual towns. The result is an equitable parks and recreation network which responds to its community, encourages healthy active lifestyles, and supports a thriving natural environment.



Please reflect on the above strategic direction and provide feedback in the survey.

Providing equitable access to open space

Each community in the Macedon Ranges has a unique character with different open space qualities and needs.

The strategy will assess the distribution of open space in each town and its function, quality, and quantity.

This data will provide a picture of where there may be gaps in open space service in the existing network and provide direction on the open space requirements for future growth areas.

Community needs can be addressed in an equitable manner by prioritising open space investment where it is needed most.

Quality of open space

Through previous engagement, Council understands that the community has high expectations when it comes to the care and presentation of open spaces.

It is likely that the most popular, known and favourite places within the shire will see continued increases in visitation as local and visitor populations increase. Destination parks which draw many visitors should feature amenities which are designed to withstand a high level of use while providing a high standard of service.

In some cases, dispersing and strategically managing demand will be key to avoiding some places being “loved to death” and to protect the quality of quiet local parks.

Council currently has limited funds to provide embellishments such as park furniture, landscaping, play equipment or other infrastructure on public open space that is acquired through development, or to purchase additional open space where there is a shortfall. While residents may have access to open space, if it remains undeveloped it is unlikely to provide a quality experience.



Quantity of open space

While an abundance of open space is unlikely to be an issue for existing residential areas in Macedon Ranges, this space may not be meeting community needs due to its location, type or quality of amenities and assets or design.

The open space strategy will identify future investment priorities to best deliver on community needs. This may include transitioning spaces from one type to another or increasing the capacity or performance of existing spaces.

In growth areas, proactive planning is required to ensure new residential areas have sufficient open space of the correct types to meet needs, and to reflect the unique character of the area. Currently no future open space needs assessment or hierarchy exists to guide developers regarding the kinds of open space or facilities they are required to provide within these spaces. Similarly, there is no framework available to manage expectations from the community.



We are interested in how satisfied you are with the quality and quantity of the types of open space in your town.

From this information we'll get a better understanding of how well open spaces are performing and how well our maintenance is meeting your needs. This will help us to prioritise effort to address where the community is least satisfied with the quality of open spaces.

The strategy can address quantity by prioritising growing the provision of open space (such as land acquisition, park renewals, negotiations with developers, or other partners). This information will help us to prioritise effort to address increasing the quantity of open space.

What are we taking on?

Accessibility for all

New standards are now expected in respect to provision of spaces and amenities which are physically and socially accessible to all.

Council can ensure that services and opportunities are communicated in an inclusive manner. The Open Space Strategy can include recommendations, standards, and policy statements which make this clear and actionable.

The strategy both in its development and result can model this approach.

Amenities such as shaded, comfortable seating, outdoor exercise equipment, and looped, easy walking trails have been shown to increase physical activity levels in older adults, families with children, and those with limited mobility.

The strategy can propose new design guidelines or procedures to better support provision of amenities and assets which appeal to all members of the community.

Council is committed to inclusive governance and encouraging all members of the community to access open space.



We are interested in how you perceive your access to open space. How accessible, welcoming and generally available to you do you think the identified types of open space are in your town?

Infrastructure for walking and cycling

As the shire's population grows, so does the demand for high quality walking and cycling infrastructure.

Connected, active movement networks are a recurring theme throughout Council engagement activities and strategic documents.

There are challenges in determining and implementing walking and cycling infrastructure within the shire. Large physical distances exist both within and between townships and settlements, often over steep terrain. There are also competing interests between vehicle use and safe, efficient cycling routes.

The strategy can envision open space in towns as networks: parks connected with a green, linear network, and prioritise where to complete crucial corridors.

A greater proportion of linear open spaces would provide space for this infrastructure. Additionally, should this ambition be supported by the community, Council can play an advocacy role in influencing open spaces that are in ownership or management of partner agencies such as Regional Roads Victoria or VicTrack.



We are interested in how you feel about increasing the proportion of linear open spaces in your area, and if we should be aiming to increase the length of connected pathways and trails overall. How important is this to you?



Traditional Owner representation

Macedon Ranges Shire is located on the traditional land of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung peoples who are acknowledged as caretakers and Traditional Custodians of the land.

The shire includes significant locations where intertribal affiliations with the clans were strengthened through the sharing of resources and social connections.

The Traditional Owners continue to practice their culture and customs and experience a close spiritual, physical, social, historical, and economic relationship with the land and waters that make up their country.

The open space strategy can support:

- on-going involvement in landscape planning as part of the effort to appropriately emphasise the Traditional Owners' cultural footprint
- inclusion of Traditional Owner priorities and values in decision making and priority setting criteria throughout the strategy
- communicating the importance of significant places and educating on Traditional Owner values through landscape design, with storytelling and cultural education that supports understanding and enhances respect for places

Traditional Owner groups will be engaged in the development of this strategy, and as such many more issues and opportunities will be raised as the project develops. In the strategy, you will see a series of actions and priorities proposed which reflect this.

Living in a changing climate

Macedon Ranges is characterised by its landscape. Many choose to live in the region for the wide-open spaces, proximity to bushland and dramatic natural scenery.

Climate change modelling indicates that there will be an increase in extreme weather events in the future, including flooding, fire and drought.

The open space strategy can explore incorporating emergency response to storm events and for proactive arborist care for trees in high-risk areas.

Increasing tree canopy cover could help prioritise tree planting and other proactive urban cooling strategies, mitigating extreme temperatures while also enhancing biodiversity.

Strategic prioritisation of high-water use park functions can build resilience to climate change by reducing water consumption, tapping into recycled water sources and considering more sustainable park management practices.

The way that Council manages parks can strategically reduce fire risk. For example, thoughtfully distributing high fire risk open spaces, like conservation reserves, with low risk spaces, like fields, can create natural fire breaks. The fire risk reduction work that park operations crews do, such as controlled burns and leaf litter clearing, can be prioritised for high risk areas.



We are interested in where you place Traditional Owner recognition and responding to climate change in order of priority for the Open Space Strategy.

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity

The biodiversity found in the Macedon Ranges Shire is unique and highly significant. The varying topography, range of altitudes and localised climatic patterns results in many diverse ecosystems hosting a wide range of native plants and animals.

Volunteers have spent numerous hours enhancing the biodiversity of public open space in the shire, and the community has consistently emphasised the biodiversity value of public open space, particularly waterway corridors within the shire.

While bush reserves serve a significant purpose for environmental outcomes, they can also provide opportunities for recreation.

As population increases and more people explore the Macedon Ranges bushland, engagement with these areas requires management and support through appropriate infrastructure to limit negative impacts and enhance people's nature experience.

Establishing "conservation" as a core function of open space in the parks level of service framework enables the strategy to identify, protect, and manage open space resources for this purpose.

The open space strategy can:

- reinforce plans for strategically connected biolinks of increased tree planting and native vegetation across fragmented landscapes, particularly along waterways and road reserves
- support direction to seek opportunities to transfer waterways and appropriate buffers to public ownership in urban growth areas
- provide direction to improve and protect waterway corridors and wetlands as refuges for native flora and fauna, through fencing, weed removal, revegetation, seeking to maintain water levels and connecting them to other patches of habitat via vegetation links.



We are interested in where you place 'protecting and enhancing biodiversity' in order of priority for the Open Space Strategy. Do you feel that your area has sufficient open space dedicated to conservation?



Summary

Research and analysis completed to inform development of the Open Space Strategy has revealed this series of core challenges to which the strategy must respond.

It is clear that an approach to open space planning which reflects the unique character of individual towns is key.

By understanding the functions and outcomes provided by the various types of open spaces, the strategy can describe desired service standards. The result is likely to be balanced and more equitable service provision which reflects the needs of community.

This report describes the present state and introduces language to support development of the strategy in pursuit of this goal.



Please head to mrsc.vic.gov.au/youresay to complete our survey and register to join the Community Assembly.

Macedon Ranges Open Space Strategy



Have
your say

How to get involved

- Read the **Macedon Ranges Open Space: Present and Future** consultation paper
- Join in the discussion at an online webinar
- Complete our online survey
- Apply to join our Open Space Community Assembly

Note: Applications open on 11 March

Contact us

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Consultation closes

Friday 8 April 2022

For more information and to stay updated visit
mrsc.vic.gov.au/yoursay