TERMS OF REFERENCE:

Community Reference Group

For the CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2023-2033

# Introduction to project

The Climate Change Strategy 2023-2033 (‘the strategy’) will inform Council’s response to the Climate Emergency.

Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 in response to strong community demand. A petition calling for the Declaration was signed by 2,000 residents. A Climate Change Forum hosted by Council attracted 49 verbal submissions, complemented by an additional 91 written submissions. Our community has shown extremely high engagement on the issue of climate change.

Through the declaration process community members offered their significant expertise and good will to work with Council on reducing our community’s greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) and increase our ability to adapt to climate change, including the development of Council’s next climate change strategy.

The Climate Change Strategy 2023-2033 is identified in the Council Plan 2021-2025 and will be delivered this financial year.  It is supported by the Community Vision 2021-2031 which includes the statement ‘We are protecting our shire from the threat of climate change by working together at the local level’. Other specific Council Plan actions related to this Strategy are:

* Strengthening participatory engagement with the community to guide our actions on the complex challenge of climate change (Partner)
* Championing funding to projects which educate the community on mitigating the impacts of climate change (Advocate)
* Work with the local community to support the ongoing development and implementation of their community climate transition plan (Partner)
* Partnering with the Indigenous community and community groups to improve management and knowledge of our environment (Partner)

Specifically, the objectives of the Climate Change Strategy are:

* To provide informed strategic direction on how Council can best prioritise its resources to reduce emissions and increase resilience within Council operations and the broader community.
* To identify opportunities and processes for Council to work collaboratively with the community on climate focused outcomes.
* To ensure the Council is listening to and reflecting the broad needs of all of its Community.
* To establish decision-making guidelines to assess existing and future opportunities.
* To identify priority projects to be developed to grant-ready stage.

In addition, a first year implementation plan will be developed through this project.

See project details at Appendix A.

# Purpose and function of Community Reference Group

The Community Reference Group is to support and encourage constructive collaboration between Council and the community, and to harness local knowledge and experience relating to climate change adaptation and mitigation.

Specifically, the community representatives appointed to the Community Reference Group will assist in the development of the strategy by:

* Having demonstrated knowledge of local climate change challenges and approaches to adaptation and mitigation.
* Providing feedback on the engagement and communications plan.
* Acting as a point of contact in the community, bringing ‘word on the street’ into the conversation.
* Supporting delivery of community engagement throughout November 2022 and February 2023 by talking with various sectors of the community about key themes of the Strategy.
* Participating in meetings at key points in Strategy development, outlined in Appendix A.
* Reviewing and advising on feedback received during public consultation (if/when required).
* Providing strategic input and advice into the preparation of the draft and final strategy.

# Term of the Community Reference Group

This Terms of Reference is effective from appointment of the Community Reference Group and continues until Council adoption of the Climate Change Strategy 2023-2033 (anticipated June 2023).

# Membership and responsibilities

The Community Reference Group will comprise membership from:

* 7 Community representatives (elected via an Expression of Interest (EOI) process). The key selection criteria for the community representatives (as outlined within the EOI form) include:
  1. Strong local knowledge of climate change challenges and opportunities
  2. Be a resident of the shire
  3. Understanding of Council’s role in relation to other government agencies and service providers
  4. Ability to represent a broad range of views that represent the diversity of the community
  5. A willingness to take part in communications activities for project documentation and promotion purposes.
  6. A willingness to contribute meaningfully to meetings in a fair and unbiased manner, looking beyond personal interests for the benefit of the community
  7. Ability to commit to the Community Reference Group term of appointment (approximately 8 months).
* Mount Alexander Shire Council – a Councillor will chair the Community Reference Group
* Consultant assigned to this project (as needed)
* Project Director (Climate Change Coordinator) and Project Manager (Business Support Officer), for the purpose of facilitating activities and setting up meetings.

The responsibilities of the members are:

* Declare any personal interest, connection or association with any matter brought before the group.
* Not make improper use of information acquired as a consequence of membership of the group.
* Retain the confidentiality of any sensitive or personal material or information deemed to be ‘commercial in-confidence’.

The responsibilities of Mount Alexander Shire Council are:

* Providing meeting support including coordinating meetings, distributing agendas and taking minutes.
* Project management.
* Consultation and communication with collective members of the Community Reference Group.
* Reporting of information through to Executive Management and Councillors.

# Meetings

The group will determine the location and timing of meetings and the forward agenda.

* Meetings will occur at least at key milestones as per the project plan (see draft Appendix A), unless otherwise agreed by members. Aim for meetings to occur week days or weekday evenings, 1-1.5 hours long. The first meeting will be a workshop 2-3 hours long.
* Meetings will be chaired by the Councilor representative.
* Decisions are to be made by a quorum (at least four members).
* Agenda items must be provided to the Project Manager no later than five working days prior to each meeting. These items should include:
* Agenda
* Minutes from the last meeting including an Action List
* Progress or update report
* Other documents that will be considered/reviewed at the meeting (such as engagement materials, draft strategy etc).
* Papers will be distributed by the Project Manager no later than four working days prior to each meeting.
* Minutes will be produced within five working days of each meeting by the Project Manager for review by the Project Director prior to distribution.

# Confidentiality

From time to time during the course of this process information may be shared with Community Reference Group members (verbally and/or in writing) and highlighted as confidential. Confidential information must not be shared or discussed with anyone outside of the Community Reference Group.

# Amendment, Modification or Variation

This Terms of Reference may be amended, varied or modified in writing after consultation and agreement by the Community Reference Group and Mount Alexander Shire Council.

Appendix A | Draft Project Plan

# STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT TIMELINE

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| September 2022 | Engage consultant to write Climate Change Strategy (complete). |
| October 2022 | Consultant ‘deep dive’ assessment of existing information, synthesise key themes. Create a ‘Current State Review’. |
| November 2022 | **First meeting of Community Reference Group (CRG) week beginning 14 November. Aim to hold meeting either:**   * **1:30-4:30pm Mon 14 November** * **6:30-9:30pm Mon 14 November** * **6:30-9:30pm Wed 16 November**   Community Reference Group members to participate in and support community engagement throughout November as available.  Online survey via Council’s Shape platform to occur in tandem. CRG members to support distribution of survey where possible for maximum reach. |
| December 2022 | Early December - Consultant to provide summary of community engagement.  **Second meeting of CRG week beginning 12 December. Discussion of data / findings from community engagement, how this will feed into strategy.** |
| January 2023 | Holidays – no CRG time required. Consultant drafting strategy. |
| February 2023 | Early February – Preparation for draft strategy to go out for community feedback via Shape.  **Third meeting of** **CRG to inform finalisation of draft strategy, and help craft questions for feedback, week beginning 30 Jan or 6 February.**  Mid-February – draft strategy up on Shape. CRG to help raise awareness for extensive reach, and support direct community consultation. |
| March 2023 | Shape draft strategy feedback closes early March.  **Fourth meeting of CRG – summary of community feedback, review of proposed changes to draft strategy week beginning 13 March.** |
| April 2023 | Final strategy submitted to Council Executive team. CRG may be called upon if changes requested. |
| May 2023 | Final strategy submitted to Councillor briefing |
| June 2023 | Final strategy submitted for adoption, June Meeting of Council. |