Engagement Summary

Mount Alexander Shire Council
Climate Change Strategy

Mount Alexander Shire Council

LET ME BE FRANK.

ROB LAW

Image (top): 'Always' by Rachel Derum

This report was developed on Aboriginal lands of our first Australians, the Dja Dja Wurrung and Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation, whose sovereignty of the land was never ceded. We pay our respect to their elders past, present and emerging, and extend this respect to all first Australians.

The changing climate is anticipated to have drastic impact on lands held under native title, and recognise that Indigenous Australians remain a source of deep knowledge of resilience and sustainability.

We live, work and play on Aboriginal land. 1% of our income is paid to Traditional Owners. We encourage everyone to Pay the Rent.

Let Me Be Frank is a member of 1% for the Planet. We donate 1% of our annual income to environmental organisations. We are proud to be part of a global network that is accelerating smart environmental giving.

Contents

About this report

This report centralises and summarises what was heard through the engagement process for the Climate Change Strategy.

Engagement activities included:

- Survey on Shape platform
- Paper surveys
- Pop-ups events:
  - Library Rhyme Time
  - Castlemaine Community Lunch
  - Maxi IGA x 2
  - Castlemaine Farmers Market
  - Migrant Women in Business
  - Maldon Community Lunch
  - Mount Alexander Youth Advisory Group
  - CWA Sewing Circle
  - Maldon Market

- Transitions community workshop in partnership with Wararack Initiatives
- Community Reference Group
- Council Climate Leaders Group workshop
- Councillor workshop
- Data from climate ready conversations
- Stakeholder emails

The insights in this report will shape the Climate Change Strategy. However, this report will continue to have relevance once the Strategy is finalised. The report can be used to support future project planning, and as a reference point when the Strategy is updated.

Climate Change
Community Reference Group
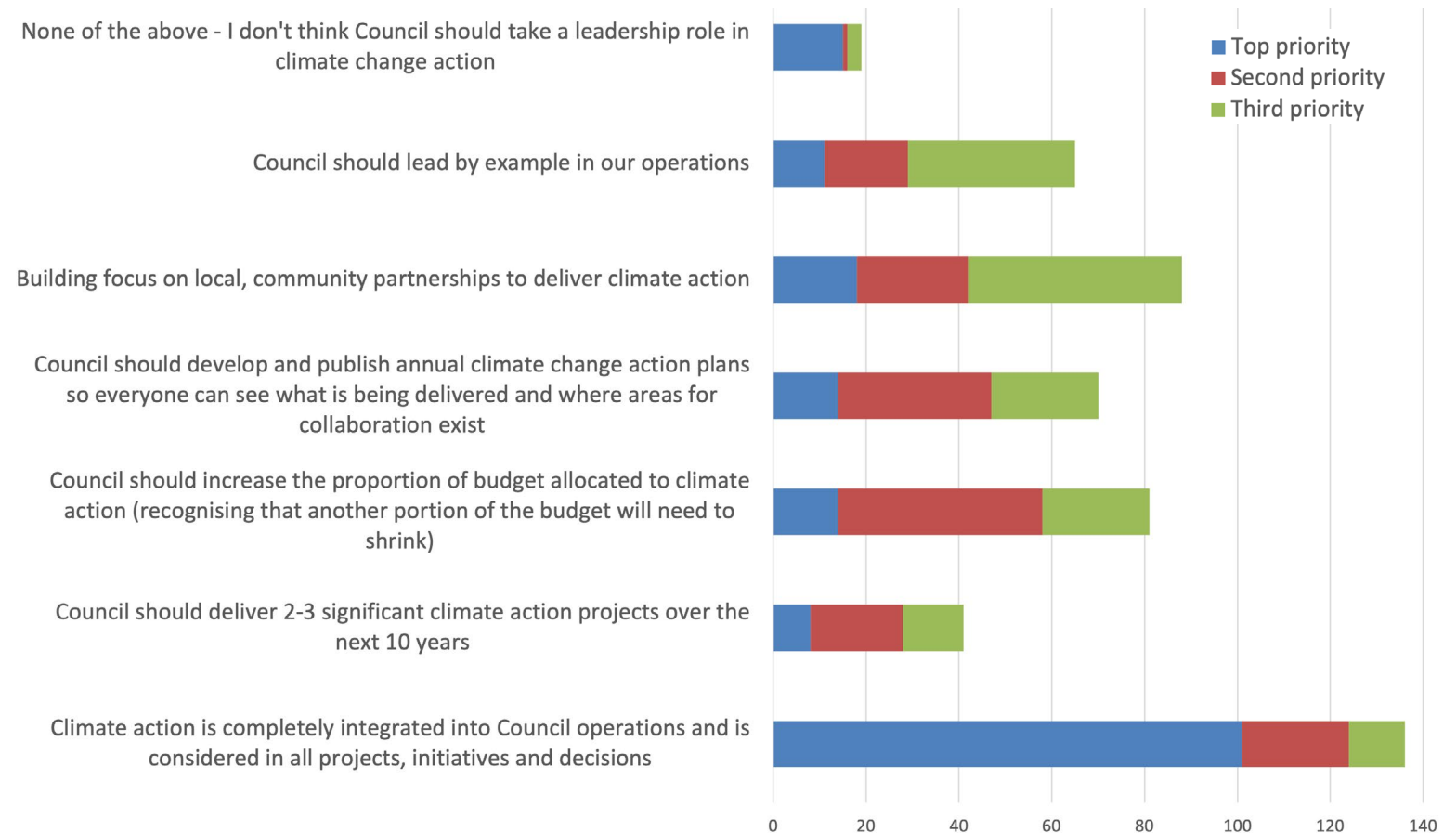
Exploring Council's role

There is a local expectation for Council to play a leadership role in responding to climate change.

To set expectations with staff and community, and to ensure an effective contribution, it's important for Council to be clear about their role.

The role of Council was explored through workshops, meetings and surveys.

The community survey asked what should Council's leadership role look like when it comes to climate change action. Overwhelmingly, respondents wanted to see climate action completely integrated into Council's operations so it is considered in all projects, initiatives and decisions.

Local community partnerships, and increasing budget allocation to climate action were also seen as important to Council's role.

Bar chart legend:
- Top priority (blue)
- Second priority (red)
- Third priority (green)

Categories (top to bottom):
- None of the above - I don't think Council should take a leadership role in climate change action
- Council should lead by example in our operations
- Building focus on local, community partnerships to deliver climate action
- Council should develop and publish annual climate change action plans so everyone can see what is being delivered and where areas for collaboration exist
- Council should increase the proportion of budget allocated to climate action (recognising that another portion of the budget will need to shrink)
- Council should deliver 2-3 significant climate action projects over the next 10 years
- Climate action is completely integrated into Council operations and is considered in all projects, initiatives and decisions

X-axis: 0, 20, 40, 60, 80, 100, 120, 140

Embed a climate culture within Council

- Practice what you preac
- Make like OHS - you have to do it!
- Some of existing work in Council reflects the commitment and lead by council. Looking further to embed the work across Council
- Ensure climate response is included, is visible and is talked about for all major projects
- Internal education and updated pds required for us to prioritize
- Can Council induct new Councillors on climate to increase their climate literacy
- Prioritise everything we do to respond and adapt
- Consider climate in all of Council's activities and actions
- Council officers and the councilors themselves do not always connect effectively
- Holding cultural leadership - behaving across the organisation the way they want to see in the boarder community
- Leading by listening
- You have A graders on the team - empower them to be rockstars
- Look at climate action as an investment not a cost
- Council using existing events and tourism to "theme" and include climate work and celebration - draw on what we have
- Shared understanding of climate change impacts and adaptation across all areas of Council
- Clarity on climate lens
- Review what Council (as a whole and at a staff and team levels) can stop doing (where Council is contributing negatively to climate change and to free up more resources)

- Improving climate change adaptation linking to other Council departments-housing, planning, inclusion, gender equality etc
- Define what climate lens means to make decisions in link with declaration
- Step into leadership of Council's resolution in climate emergency declaration
- Council reset Council meetings to act and hold decisions based on regenerative outcomes
- Council considers climate change in everything they do
- Stepping into legal responsibility
- Go as far as you can with the powers you have
- Council's powers (in planning scheme etc) are where it can strongly influence behaviour. Those powers need to have the liens of climate emergency
- Climate emergency declaration lens should direct all work at Council
- Embedding in all decision making (like OHS)
- Exploring procurement guidelines
- Governance, polices and processes, legal responsibilities
- It's a must with specific targets / KPIs to address (not just a statement)

Advocacy

- Advocating to other levels of government to maximise impact on things beyond our shire that affect our shire
- Advocate to state and federal governments where this is out of council sphere of influence
- Community voice heard for advocacy and influence
- Be an example for State and Federal to follow
- Council influences other layers of government
- Advocating within broader programs and funding
- Advocating for funding and resources
- Seek funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects

Building connections and drawing on local knowledge

- Community mapping - shining different mirrors back to the community
- Vulnerability mapping to prepare communities for disaster response, so we know who to check in on. Ie elderly residents in heatwaves. Is there work in the west end resilience networks that could be replicated in other areas?
- Council to re-prioritise major projects to draw on local knowledge rather than relying totally on paying consultant
- Harness the communities knowledge
- Harness/embrace the lived experience and knowledge in the community
- Council a key point of contact for climate response
- Harness knowledge in the community

Help the business community lead

- Council often has greater clout/ability to influence certain groups (eg. businesses)
- Educate local business in carbon offset complexity
- Support business innovation
- The Farmers Market needs a home, and Council needs to champion it
- Council and Business Mt Alexander initiate a renewable power purchase agreement. Council should lead this and look to Wollongong as an example

Working regionally and cross-sector

- Cross-shire collaboration on common themes. Collaboration via CVGA, municipal public health and wellbeing plan, collaboration with health sector
- Work with other councils to lead and work together
- Council has some fabulous partners but can continue to strengthen them
- Pooling ideas across shires. Conduit for opportunities and resources
- Communities of practice for cross sector orgs in the Shire

Working with community

- Citizens assemblies to hear the communities' voices
- Community engagement
- Council takes a leading role in farmers market, they are champions
- Ensure Council staff have time to get out into the community
- Increase funding and support for community deliberation and citizens assemblies
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- Facilitation building access to opportunities and knowledge and funds and connections
- Identify incongruence / gaps in community and broader systems
- Harness momentum from community
- Support climate initiatives from community - e.g. climate strikes
- Central point of contact. Info, resources portal or hub
- Role in bringing people together and trust building
- Council to consider how they are in the way or enabling what the community is doing
- YIMBY project a good working example of working together challenge
- Leadership and followship will be interchangeable between Council and community
- Council community engagement strategy
- Embedding Indigenous self determination in climate change adaptation
- Leading with community not over community
- Listening to what the community wants
- Grant-writing workshops or other upskillsing for community group or a resource like community toolbox. Map community capacity? Workshops on specific areas. A pool of people willing to donate their time/skills

- A great leader will lead without being seen. There are so many balls spinning in the community, how can Council help to keep them up? Venues, networking, partnerships, small grants
- Council leadership means increased understanding in community and allows comm-led initiatives

Resilient community

- Influence and help to build a strong, resilient community
- The need to consider increasing potential of natural disasters (bushfires etc) and how development can be more sustainable
- To respond and meet community expectations at a local level
- We have moved from mitigation to readiness to response to what is coming

Equity, justice and inclusion

- Equity lens in developing the priorities in the Strategy to screen the Strategy
- Intergenerational justice lens for the climate strategy
- Applying a systemic disadvantage lens across adaptation
- How to collaborate to make it inclusive
- Energy equity - prioritising fair access to renewables
- Include those who feel they don't have a voice

Communications and knowledge sharing

- Language of climate change used across publications to help build literacy
- Council to talk about recent flood events and link them to climate change (recognising that the language used will need to be very considered), while discussing how their effects can be off-set e.g. electricity sub-stations above flood level
- Leading involves sharing knowledge and resources within to community and beyond
- Consistent messaging throughout the organisation of externally relating to the impact of climate change on Council ops
- Keeps the narrative alive in the community (we could do it better)
- External education
- Be honest about the journey and hurdles
- Council conduit of what is happening in community led action (in newsletters and Council website)
- Annual state of the environment report for Council annual report (and into broader policies)
- Set clear priorities
- Communicating benefits / measuring dividends to community
- Council engagement strategy about climate change - meaningful engagement
- Community education on climate change impacts
- Challenging community will / desire to act
- Communication outwards to explain implication of a policy campaign
- Council need to talk back to the community. If Council doesn't do something the community requests, they need to say why
- Council has a role in educating about climate impacts and opportunities
- Conversations with people who have been frustrated with Council in the past on projects to help identify barriers

Land and housing

- Allow multi-occupancy for farmers on shared farming land
- Allowing multiple occupancy per property
- Change planning subdivision rules so we don't need 2 car parks per household but rather e charging stations
- Council can advocate for more sustainable building and planning policies as dictated by state and federal governments
- Council disables a lot of people building and renovating housing and should consider enabling policies in this area
- Council should advocate for the community. Particularly in terms of planning. We need planning regs that support country town and the impact of our changing climate
- Do more to support ESD
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Systems approach

- Recognise transportation, food systems, housing - acknowledge pre-existing stressors. Not to amplify the stressors but creating initiatives that are future focused
- Energy - land - food - transport - development : education, diversity, social cohesion, resilience and connection
- Focusing on interconnectedness, adaptation and interdependencies as challenges and opportunities
- Systems-thinking approach - resource sharing - values informed practice/ approach
- Education and facilitation - break down the BIG problem into components that can be tackled?
- Encourage contractors and suppliers to take up relevant climate change initiatives and F/U to make sure they are doing what they say they will do. Choose to work with leaders in this area. Assisting them to also improve their practice
- Long term - response over 30-40 years

Brave best practice

- Be brave - role model worlds best practices and beyond
- Proving that council is so much more than bins and rates
- Council can challenge current ways of doing and regulating by allowing for and creating pilot projects
- Bend local laws for the greater good
- Utilising assets for demonstrate change
- Council can take more long term financial risk than community groups
- Worlds best practice for each area of work
- Pilot projects that break new ground
- Set an example e.g. WSUD
- Allow time for staff to learn new and best practice approaches

Nature and water

- Street greening
- Shift from preserve national environment to improve
- Care for public land and roadsides - protect vegetation and habitat
- Health and wellbeing plan for country
- Employ strong water sensitive urban design practices

Transport

- De-paving roads, returning to green space or to town public space
- Increase bicycle infrastructure

Emissions

- Council project to demonstrate how they will work towards zero net emissions by 2025
- Reducing emissions from our own operations
- Implement Vic Govt emissions targets

Circular economy

- Food waste collection (FOGO)
- Advocate for waste avoidance measures eg to reduce packaging
- Waste reduction > zero waste, zero emissions

Other

- Holding climate change against some community opinion
- Climate forum has data requests of Council

Exploring goals

Photo care of MASC Facebook page

Through this engagement process, community members - and some staff - said that regular communication from Council about achievements is important.

Setting clear goals can help Council communicate internally and externally about what they are aiming for, what progress is being made and what activities are being conducted to help achieve the goal.

Exploring goals

In the community survey, respondents were asked to think about Council's role and legislated responsibilities, and select areas they think are most important for Council to address.

'Zero waste and circular economy' was the top priority, closely followed by 'healthy and resilient natural systems', and 'climate change leadership, culture and governance'.

'Sustainable food systems', 'climate ready economy and business', and 'community resilience and wellbeing' were the areas that were seen as less important for Council to address.
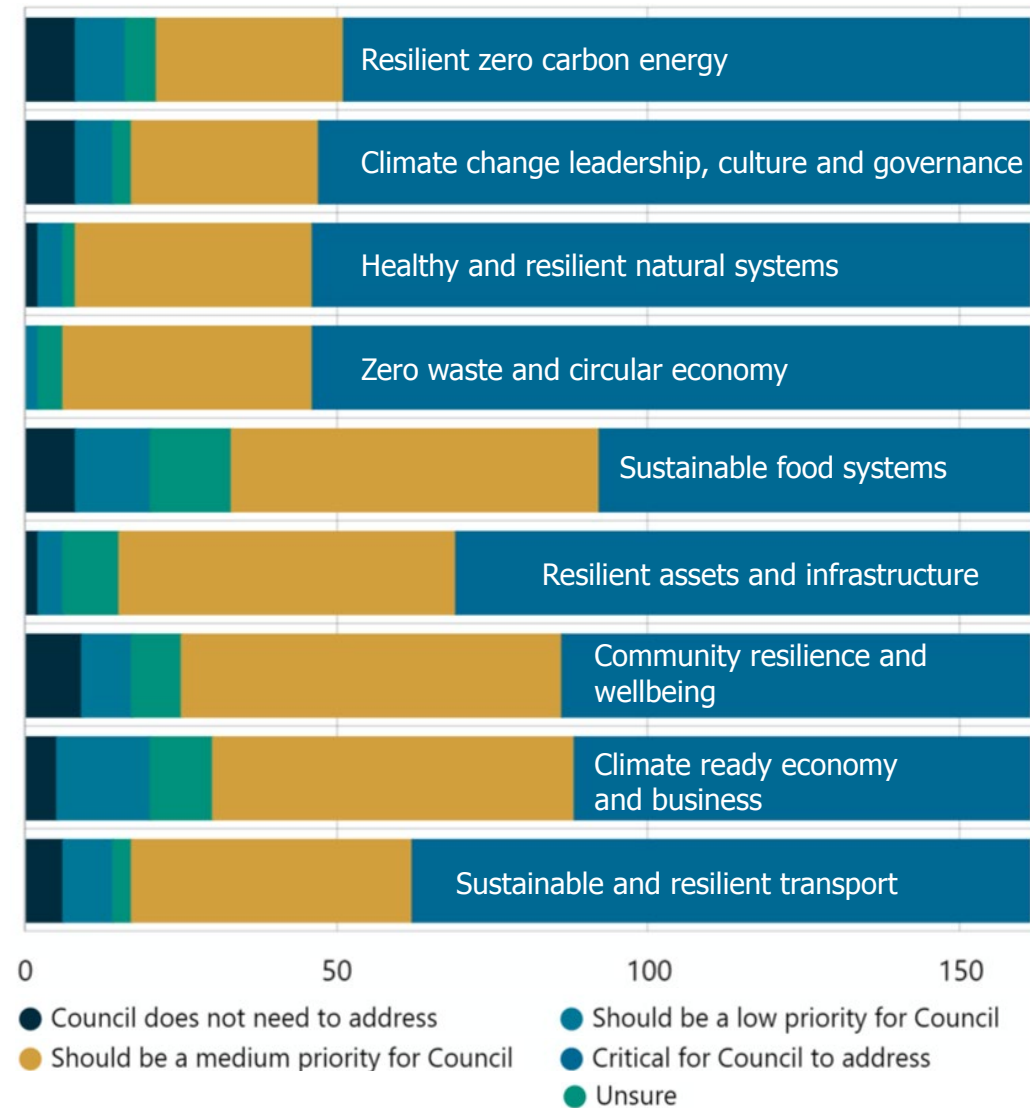
KEY: Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality 2020 – 2025 (RCN)   Notice of Motion 2019/009 – Climate Emergency (NoM)
Wararack Initiatives (WI)   Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan (MHWP)
Environment Strategy 2015-2025 (ES)

Leadership, culture and governance	Resilient zero carbon energy

Existing goals:
1. Create a thriving climate change aware culture across the organisation (RCN)
  - We have concerns about the word 'aware'. Need it to be business as usual
  - Yes
  - Yes but reword. It needs to be more direct and combine both. 'Continue to promote a thriving...'
  - Not worded great. Instead use 'We embed climate change action in everything that we do'
 	
2. Integrate a climate change lens into the planning and implementation of services and the development of policies and strategies (NoM)
	Existing goals:
	1. Zero net emissions for Council operations by 2025 (RCN)
	  - Are net zero goals achievable? Really? Financially?
	  - Zero net emissions for Council operations by 2025 - just say it again
	
	2. Zero net emissions for the community by 2030 (WI)
	3. 100% renewable electricity supply by 2022 (RCN) (achieved)

Other goals recommend:
1. Mobilise and enable our community to respond to the climate emergency
  - We don't need to mobilise, but should be looking for opportunities to enable
  - Consider awareness vs active participation
 	
2. We embed climate change action in everything that we do
3. Our community is active and mobilised on climate action
	Other goals recommended:
	● Not transporting waste out of the shire by 2025!
	● Direct 100% of organic waste from landfill by 2025

Other comments ● Create a picture of costs if we do, and costs if we don't. What is it costing Council now (climate change initiatives) ● Lead community discussion. Engaging the whole community ● Be a leader, push the boundaries to move forward - but tread carefully	**Other comments** ● Waste Strategy should support ● Deal with our own crap ● Become zero emissions withing Council

Sustainable and resilient transport	Sustainable food systems

Existing goals:
1. Zero-net emissions from Council transport by 2025 (RCN)
  - Is it achievable? Actually?
  - Yes
  - Yes but date will need to change in a 10 year strategy (note fleet transition strategy is under development)
  - Look for goals in MHWP. 2025 timeframe too short
	Existing goals:
	1. Ensure protections for farming and agricultural land are in place to support a local food systems and the health of our community (MHWP)
	  - Yes to goal 1 above
	
	● MPHWP includes protecting farm land, and covers access to healthy food
	● Healthy Lodden Campaspe Food system framework currently in development

Other goals recommend: ● Advocate for other modes of transport ● Prioritising active transport infrastructure. But perhaps both should be in the Active Transport Strategy 7. Sustainable transport that is active or has zero emissions 9. A region well connected through low carbon transport	**Other goals recommend:** 22. Grow and distribute food locally and sustainably 25. A resilient foodbowl that increases resilience to future food system stresses and shocks - resonates with us but we don't think our shire can be a food bowl x 2 22. Grow and distribute food locally and sustainably 23. Everyone in our community has access to sufficient nutritious, safe, fair and culturally appropriate food both now and in the future
Other comments: ● Is the zero net emissions transport industry advance well enough to replace the current stock and be effective? What are the alternatives? ● What are the costs?	**Other comments:** ● This theme belongs with community resilience and wellbeing (rather than being stand alone ● Is this achievable? What influence can we have? ● Supporting agribusiness - diversify ● Stronger focus on supporting agricultural community ● Strong provisions for urban planning to support agricultural land and resources

Healthy and resilient natural systems	Zero waste and circular economy

Existing goals:
 1. The natural environment is healthy and thriving (ES)
   - Yes to goal 1 above
	Existing goals:
	 1. Zero-net emissions waste for Council operations by 2025 (RCN)
	 2. Supporting community-wide waste reduction (RCN)
	 3. Towards zero waste (ES)
	   - Are these goals REALLY achievable?

Other goals recommend: 14. Native habitat and areas of important biodiversity are protected for future generations 15. Connected and flourishing urban and rural landscapes and ecosystems 16. Strong community connection to, awareness of and care for our ecosystems and biodiversity 17. By 2040, increase canopy cover for the whole municipality by 25% from a 17% baseline in 2014 (but with locally relevant targets) 11. Respectful and effective partnerships with Traditional Owners to regenerate ecosystems	**Other goals recommend:** 18. A circular economy with zero waste 20. Divert 80% of waste from landfill by 2030, with an interim target of 72% reduction by 2025 21. Halve the volume of organic material going to landfill between 2020 and 2030, with an interim target of 20% reduction by 2025
Other comments: • Waterways! Bushland! • Cost of maintaining new ecosystems	**Other comments:** • Options to explore goals with internal landfill management • A fully circular economy driven by community?

Resilient assets and infrastructure	Community resilience and wellbeing	Sustainable economy and business

Existing goals:
1. Council is resilient to the impacts of climate change (ES)
  - Reword to be more like goal 26 (see below)
  - No (use examples 26 and 27 instead, see below)
  - Reword resilience reliant on crisis funds from State and Fed gov. Maybe mitigate?
 	
2. Integrate a climate change lens into Council's design and construction of infrastructure (NoM)
  - Yes
  - Yes. No 2 more relevant 9
	Existing goals:
	1. Demonstrate leadership and commitment to addressing climate change and its impacts on health within the community, through a strategic approach at multiple levels of decision making across all Council business areas (MHWP)
		Existing goals:
		None

Other goals recommend: 26. Council-owned buildings and infrastructure are resilient and safe for our staff and community 27. A region with a built environment supporting the community's resilience to climate change 28. By 2024, 15% of total water consumption by Council to come from alternative sources • X% of recycled content in road construction or other similar measurable goals would be good	**Other goals recommend:** 30. Be a well informed and prepared community 31. Sustainable, resilient and adaptive communities 32. Our vulnerable people are supported to thrive, even in a changing climate 33. A region that is cool and green 34. Ensure our community is safe, healthy and resilient — especially those most vulnerable to severe climate impacts • Ensure continuity of services through climate events • Direct future population towards low-risk (brushfire / flood) areas	**Other goals recommend:** 36. A region with a thriving and resilient net zero carbon economy • Education - help businesses understand mitigation measures - what to do when. Facilitate connections to help. Access to information preparedness for emergency • Innovative • Encourage business initiatives relating to climate change • Prioritise climate change goals other traditional business goals
Other comments: -	**Other comments:** • MPHWP has objectives and goals	**Other comments:** • Rename theme to be more descriptive • Note: Eco Dev Strategy under development

Other insights

In addition to primary area of exploration around Council's role in climate action and goals for the Strategy, the engagement uncovered a range of other useful insights. These insights are summarised here.

Insights about the Strategy format

- Community Vision should be at the centre of the Strategy
- The language used in the Strategy should be as plain and accessible as possible, avoiding technical and specalised language wherever possible
- The Strategy should address mitigation, adaptation and resilience
- The Strategy should consider Council's role as it relates to the urban and regional areas of the shire
- Consider how risk fits into the Strategy. Risks and costs of inaction, who is carrying the risk, who should be carrying the risk and how Council can take well-thought out risks

Priority areas to address

Some key priority areas emerged from those who participated in the engagement processes:

- Sustainable housing: Council should seek to use its available planning powers to ensure any new housing and major renovations are low carbon, comfortable resilient housing, and support different occupancy models to maximise the availability of housing
- Natural environment: Supporting the natural environment is a priority, and can provide climate change adaptation benefits
- Communication: Council could improve the way it communicates on climate change and how Council and community are responding. This would also work to build trust and confidence in Council. Consider online, reporting, creative, and in-person ways of communicating
- Drawing on local knowledge: Council could bring in more local experts in to advise and support Council

- Partnerships: There is a strong desire for Council and community partnerships to help deliver the climate change response
- Systems approach: consider how Council can deliver systems-thinking approach, given the interconnectedness of the different elements of a climate response
- Equity and inclusion: consider how Council can drive a more equitable climate response

What climate risks are of most concern to the community?

Increased risk of fire and hotter temperatures were the top climate risk concerns for respondents. However, extreme rainfall and the expected overall decrease in rain were still of significant concern to respondents.

What could Council and community partnerships look like?

Unsurprisingly, there was no one solution to Council and community partnerships, however the list below aims to summarise the most common mechanisms suggested:

- Council could look to maximise low-cost support mechanisms like in-kind support, supporting advocacy efforts, facilitating free use of venues
- Work with the community to amplify relevant local stories
- Together, Council and community could trial new ways of working together (even if they're not perfect)
- Work to understand each others challenges and seek to maximise each others strengths. Look for the positives in collaboration
- Council could play a coordination, connecting and information decimation role
- Provision of funding to community organisations and groups

It was generally recognised that roles between Council and community should shift across time and projects. Sometimes Council is better placed to lead, something a community group will be better placed to lead and Council can support.

How much should Council involve the community on decision-making climate change?

The engagement data did not show a clear majority direction on how much Council should involve the community in decision-making on climate change.

In the survey, there was an almost equal split between respondents who wanted more opportunities to contribute (51%) and those that want less consultation (and more action) or are happy with current level of consultation (49%).

The smallest minority were those people that want many more opportunities to contribute (19%).

Looking across the all the engagement data, it seems that investing more in community engagement or deliberative democracy might not be the most effective approach. Instead, Council could focus on:

- Improving they way Council communicates about climate change and local action and achievements
- Seeking more opportunities to partner with local groups and organisations
- Seeking opportunities for local experts (both paid and unpaid) to feed into projects

Appendices

Outputs from each engagement activity

Stakeholder workshops

Thank you for your time and contributions to the Transitions Workshops held on 7 December 2022.

Mount Alexander Shire Council partnered with the Wararack Initiative to host the two workshops:

- In person session at Senior Citizens Club
- Online evening session

Wararack Initiative ran the first hour of the session, gathering information to help shape their upcoming Transition Plan.

Council's consultants Amy Brand (from Let Me Be Frank) and Rob Law led the second hour, gathering information to support the development of Council's upcoming Climate Change Strategy.

For your records, this document contains the verbatim notes for the second hour of both session, capturing insights for Council's upcoming Climate Change Strategy.

We would like to thank Sharon and the Wararack Initiative team for their work to help develop and host the workshops.
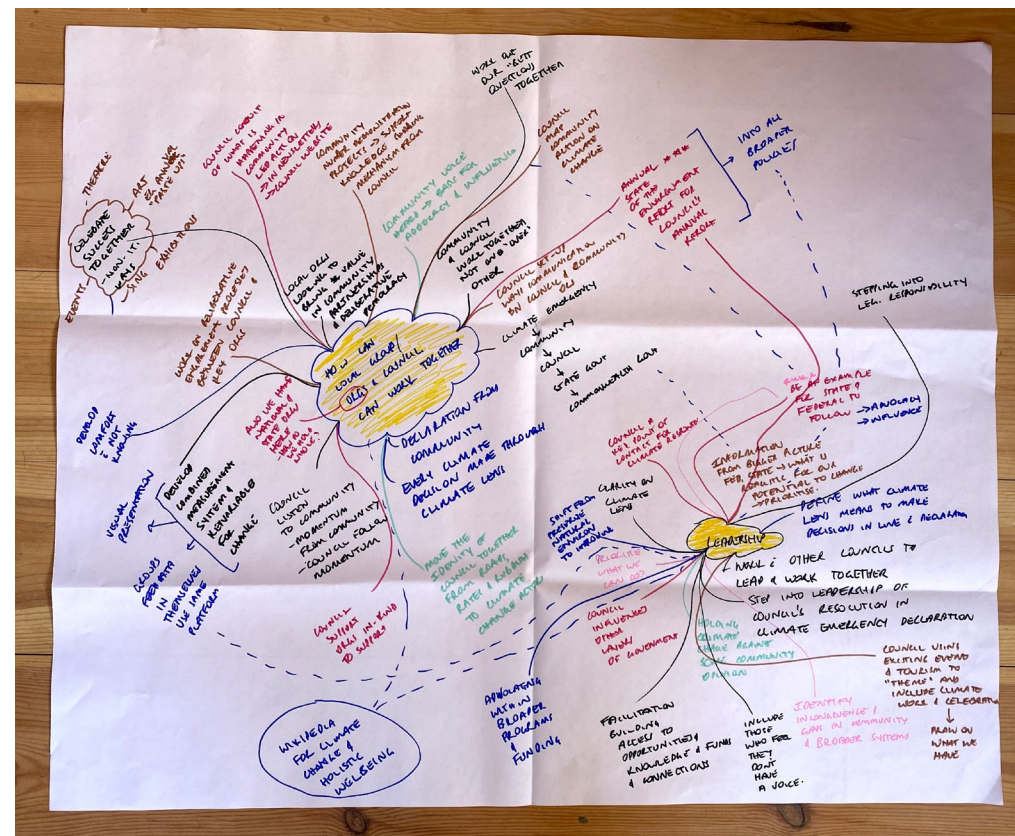
Notes from one of the small group discussion

We asked the question 'What is Council's leadership role in responding to climate change so we can achieve the community vision?'. The group responded with:

Culture culture

- Council officers and the councilors themselves do not always connect effectively
- Holding cultural leadership - behaving across the organisation the way they want to see in the boarder community
- Leading by listening
- Leading with community not over community
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- Allow time for staff to learn new and best practice approaches

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- Waste reduction > zero waste, zero emissions

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- Harness/embrace the lived experience and knowledge in the community

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- Employ strong water sensitive urban design practices

Transport

- De-paving roads, returning to green space or to town public space
- Increase bicycle infrastructure

Emissions

- Energy equity - prioritising fair access to renewables
- Implement Vic Govt emissions targets

Other

- Council a key point of contact for climate response
- Holding climate change against some community opinion
- Seek funding for climate change mitigation and adaptation projects
- How to collaborate to make it inclusive
- Climate forum has data requests of Council
- Applying a systemic disadvantage lens across adaptation

We asked the question 'How can our local groups / organisations and Council can work together to maximise impact?'. The group responded with:

Council providing support

- Facilitated community spaces outside of c'maine (Maldon, Harcourt, etc). Things feel a little c'maine centric
- A purpose built or thought through space for farmers markets
- Council support orgs in-kind
- Advocate for funding
- Provide support e.g. venues

Goal setting and common interests

- Find a collective goal across Council and all the groups, even if we get to the end goal in a different way
- Common goals
- Aim high and help align parties with common interests
- Work out our best questions together

Test and trial new ways

- Seek opportunities to try to partner. Give it a crack and learn as you go. Understand the risk tolerance that exists for each of the partners
- New ways of working together
- Learn how to collaborate and partner together
- Community demonstration project - support knowledge sharing mechanism from Council
- Work on deliberative engagement projects between Council and key orgs
- More support/capacity in Council to facilitate with community
- People's Republic of Mallacoota is a good example to follow

Business

- Connecting small businesses for low carbon mentoring/support

Communication

- Huge opportunity in storytelling and knowledge sharing via social media if implemented successfully across local community and groups
- Develop combined measurement system and key variables for change
  - Visual presentation
  - Groups feed data in themselves ans use same platform as Council
- Move the identity of Council together from road, rates and rubbish to climate change actor
- Make info accessible for all, including young people
- Better website - well maintained
- Verbal report back even annual from Council

Risk

- Consider who can best carry the risk
- Risk reaches right to the international reinsurance level - very complex to untangle
- A the moment most of the climate risk is being carried by individuals, it would be great to shift some of that risk to govt - and even better, to companies who are responsible for emissions. And shift it to the collective
- Take more risks, or more effective management of risks

Drawing on community expertise

- Council could use working groups and workshops to harvest community/ general and expert opinion and ideas
- Participatory budgeting + citizens assemblies + sortition to have a good representation of community deciding how limited budget and resources might be spent
- Can be problematic when committees are resistant - conflicting wants and needs
- Use all those PhD brains!
- Community hold the knowledge. Council needs to listen
- Council listen to community
  - Momentum from community
  - Council follow momentum

- We have experts around housing, active transport, health (mental health, hospitals etc), WSUD
- Committees are a useful way for Council to work with community
- Council really needs to harness local experts, especially because Council doesn't always have the budget get the right advice
- Volunteer coordinator at Council to help draw in community expertise to Council projects
- Council to develop an open source panel of experts process that Council can draw on for their own projects and can also be accessed by community

Connection into Council

- If the resources were there having an industry contact at council would be wonderful, a direct line to an ear in council for collaborative purposes
- Access to a support person on council that is aware of the group and develops a relationship with the community group
- Support person in council who gives support to community groups
- Council set up ways of communication between Council and community
- Point of contact for info and opportunities
- Community engagement officer, connecting groups and projects

Grow connections and mutual understanding

- Understanding of the other
- Bring compassion into the room for Council officers. In small councils they get tasked with so much
- Develop comfort in not knowing
- Council being open and transparent

Celebrate

- Celebrate successes together (in non-IT way. e.g. events theatre, singing, exhibitions, art, annual paste ups)

Coordinator role

- Council map community action on climate change
- Clarify roles - Wararack and other groups
- Community of practice - share resources between groups, businesses, schools etc
- Coordinate info sharing for cross-support. Facilitate connection e.g. business support recycling project

Culture and attitude

- An attitude of 'yes lets'
- A 'we together' attitude
- Moving away from fear of community push back
- Decreasing silos / separation - more consistent problem solving
- Every decision made through climate lens

Other

- Community and Council work together not one over the other
- Local org looking to bring value in community partnership and deliberative democracy
- Climate emergency > community >Council > State Govt > Commonwealth Govt
- And we have national and state orgs here. How do we hold whole?
- Wikipedia for climate change and holistic wellbeing
- Engage with young people and schools
- Look to other councils
- Beware of volunteer burnout
- When can council get out of the way? e.g. giving up control to allow residents to plant in kerbside gardens

Photo by Rob Law

Community Reference Group Meeting 1

On 14 November 2022, the first Community Reference Group meeting was held for the Climate Change Strategy.

The meeting agenda was:

1. Insights and recommendations we'd like from you
2. Briefing on Climate Change Current State Report
3. Your local context
4. Discussion: What do you think Council needs to do to prioritise and lead on climate change?
5. Presentation and feedback on Strategy wireframe
6. Next meeting: Brainstorm goals for the Climate Change Strategy
7. Next steps and close

This following pages summarise what was heard at the meeting.

Exploring Council's role in local climate action

Two key questions were explored:

- What does it mean for Council to prioritise and lead on climate change?
- What do you think Council's role in climate change action is?

The brainstorm conducted by the Group has been sorted into themes below for further reflection.

Demonstrate what's possible

- Council project to demonstrate how they will work towards zero net emissions by 2025
- Ensure climate response is included, is visible and is talked about for all major projects

Building connections and drawing on local knowledge

- Community mapping - shining different mirrors back to the community - Michael C
- Vulnerability mapping to prepare communities for disaster response, so we know who to check in on. Ie elderly residents in heatwaves. Is there work in the west end resilience networks that could be replicated in other areas?
- Council to re-prioritise major projects to draw on local knowledge rather than relying totally on paying consultants
- Ecological mapping
- Stakeholder mapping: Who is doing what and relationships

Communications and climate literacy

- Language of climate change used across publications to help build literacy
- Can Council induct new Councillors on climate to increase their climate literacy
- Council to talk about recent flood events and link them to climate change (recognising that the language used will need to be very considered), while discussing how their effects can be off-set e.g. electricity sub-stations above flood level
- Council to have a dedicated communications portal (personal and online) dedicated to the Council's climate strategy for people to ask questions and receive information about climate issues in the shire.
- Council to set up regular communication points at locations around the Shire (e.g., table and chairs at a shopping centre) for people to have impromptu and prepared discussions with staff and Councillors.

Decision making

Equity lens in developing the priorities in the Strategy to screen the Strategy by including people with different abilities.

Intergenerational justice lens for the climate strategy by involving younger people who will be the main beneficiaries of the decisions and priorities.

The ongoing inclusion of First Nations People's representation is key to this climate strategy having support and validity.

Development of a decision making framework for Council to delegate decisions to community groups active in addressing key pillars of the strategy:

- Z net emissions
- Community and Culture
- Adaptation/Mitigation

Community upskilling and resource provision

- Grant-writing workshops or other upskillsing for community group. Or a resource like community toolbox. Map community capacity? Workshops on specific areas. A pool of people who are willing to donate their time/skills (one CRG member commented in relation to the donation of time: I think this is potentially problematic from an inclusion perspective. Many equity-denied people in our community don't have the means to donate time, therefore we don't get fair representation of needs, capacities, knowledges, etc. in the community. If we value these, then remuneration and working with their availability is important.)
- A great leader will lead without being seen. There are so many balls spinning in the community, how can Council help to keep them up? Venues, networking, partnerships, small grants

Systems approach

- Recognise transportation, food systems, housing - acknowledge pre-existing stressors. Not to amplify the stressors but creating initiatives that are future focused
- Energy - land - food - transport - development : education, diversity, social cohesion, resilience and connection
- Focusing on interconnectedness, adaptation and interdependencies as challenges and opportunities
- Systems-thinking approach - resource sharing - values informed practice/approach
- Be explicit about what type of transitions are needed to deliver on the strategy:

  - Behaviour?
  - Power/authority/legitimacy?
  - Mindsets?
  - etc

Other

- Conversations with people who have been frustrated with Council in the past on projects to help identify barriers
- Long term - response over 30-40 years
- Council is under-resourced
- Council has a community that is driving and owning this more than other Councils, How does Mt Alexander Council maximise and capitalise on this social capital?

Questions from the group brainstorm

- How do we brain align people who are adamant climate change denialists? Response was to ignore them, and the recent lack of influence by right-wing media outlets to promote theories and candidates in the Victorian State Election seems to support this strategy.
- Council's guaranteed continuity and stability is an asset - how can we make the most of this?

Community Survey

156 people contributed to the online survey. 15 people contributed via a paper survey.

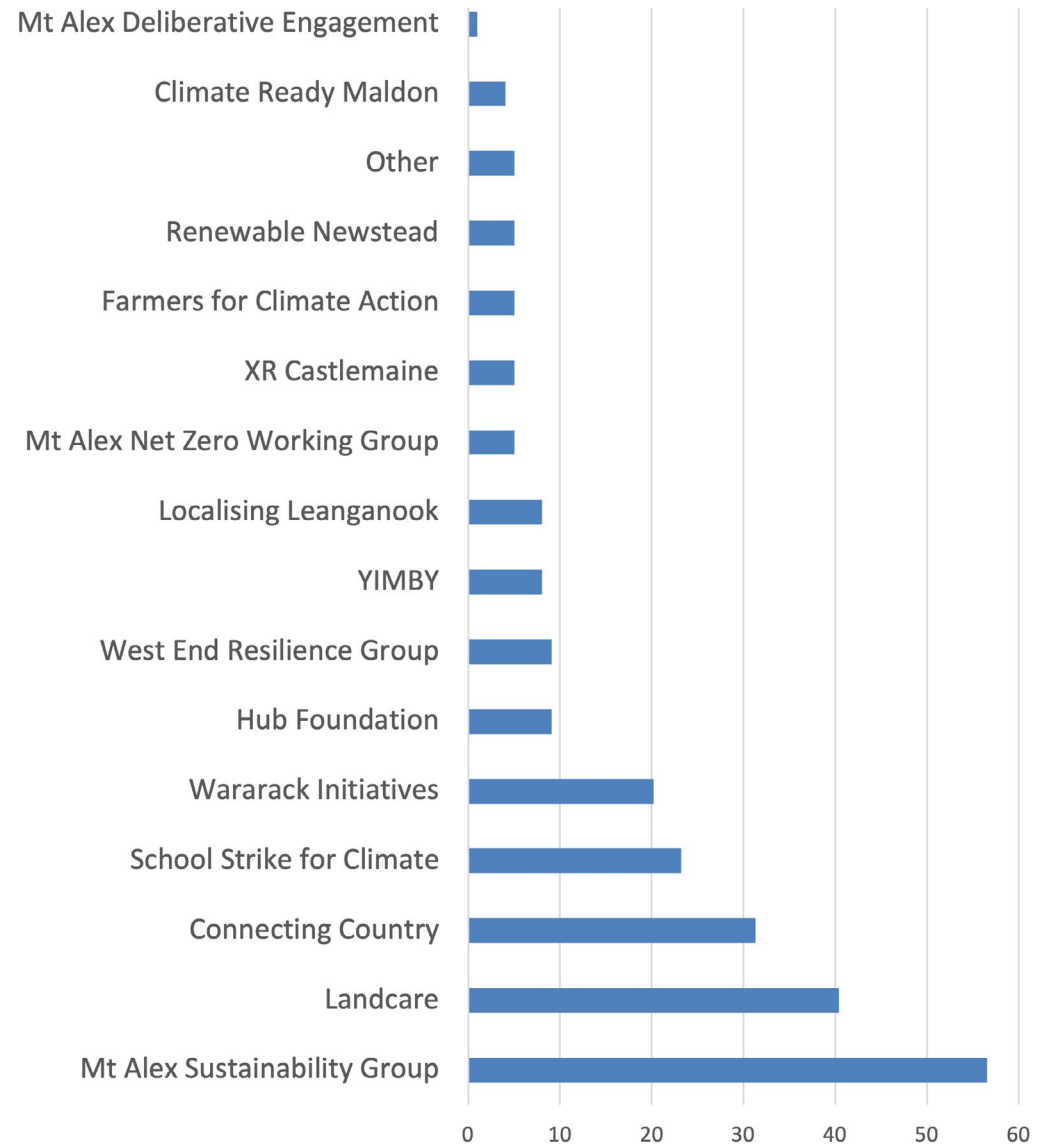The graph below shows the age spread of survey respondents:

Under 18 years   18 - 29

30 - 44

Over 60 years

45 - 59
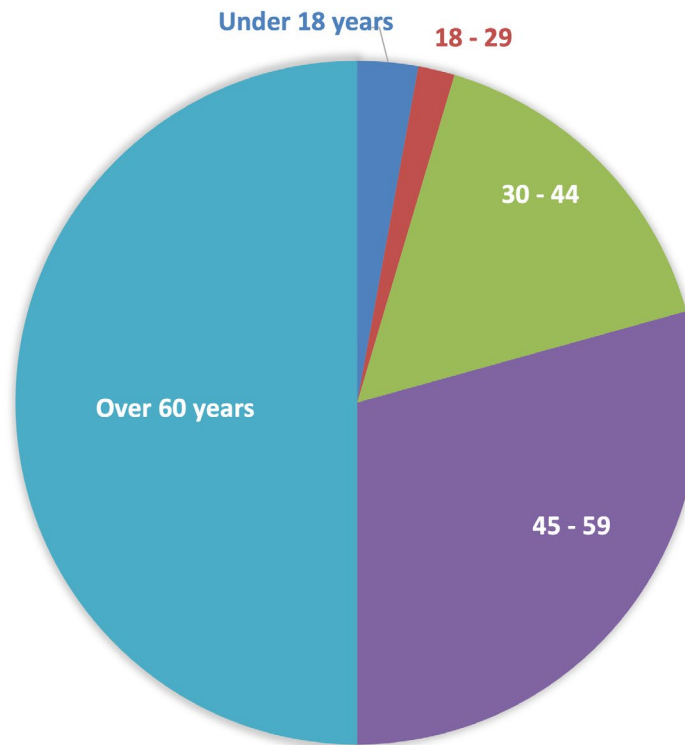
Responses were received from residents in the following regions:

Region	%
Castlemaine	46.0
Campbells Creek	8.6
Maldon	6.3
Newstead	4.6
Other	4.6
Harcourt	4.0
Barkers Creek	3.4
Chewton	3.4
Taradale	2.9
Faraday	2.3
McKenzie Hill	2.3
Chewton Bushlands	1.7
Elphinstone	1.7
Tarrengower	1.7
Fryerstown	1.1
Metcalfe	1.1
Muckleford	1.1
Walmer	1.1
Baringhup	0.6
Guildford	0.6
Welshmans Reef	0.6

63% of respondents have been involved in a climate action group, 37% had not. Of those that had been involved in a group, many were involved in more than one.

The table to the right show the groups respondents have participated in.

4. How concerned are you about the following climate change risks*? (online survey only)

Average maximum temperature increase up to 3.0°C

Annual rainfall to decrease by as much as 20mm

Extreme rainfall and flooding expected to be more intense

Longer fire seasons and 62% more very high fire danger days

● Not worried at all ● Somewhat worried ● Unsure ● Quite worried ● Very worried
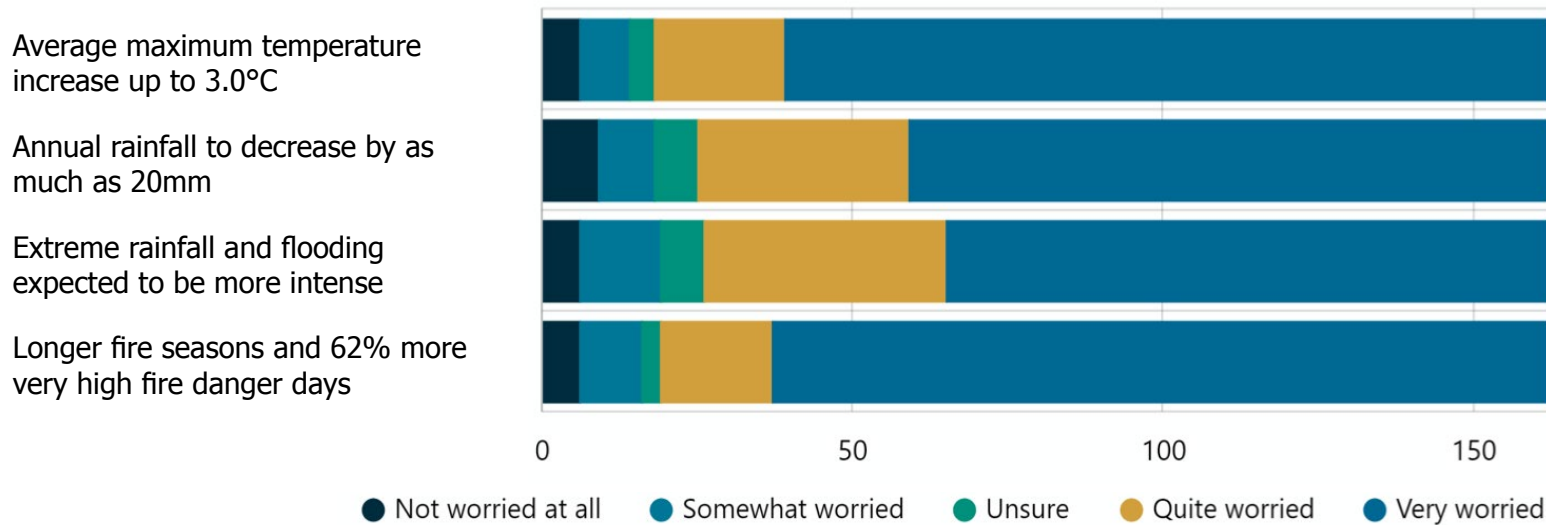
Increased risk of fire and hotter temperatures were the top concerns for respondents.

However, extreme rainfall and the expected overall decrease in rain were still of significant concern to respondents.

**5. What should Council's leadership role look like when it comes to climate change action? Select three statements that best reflect your view.** (online survey and in-person survey)
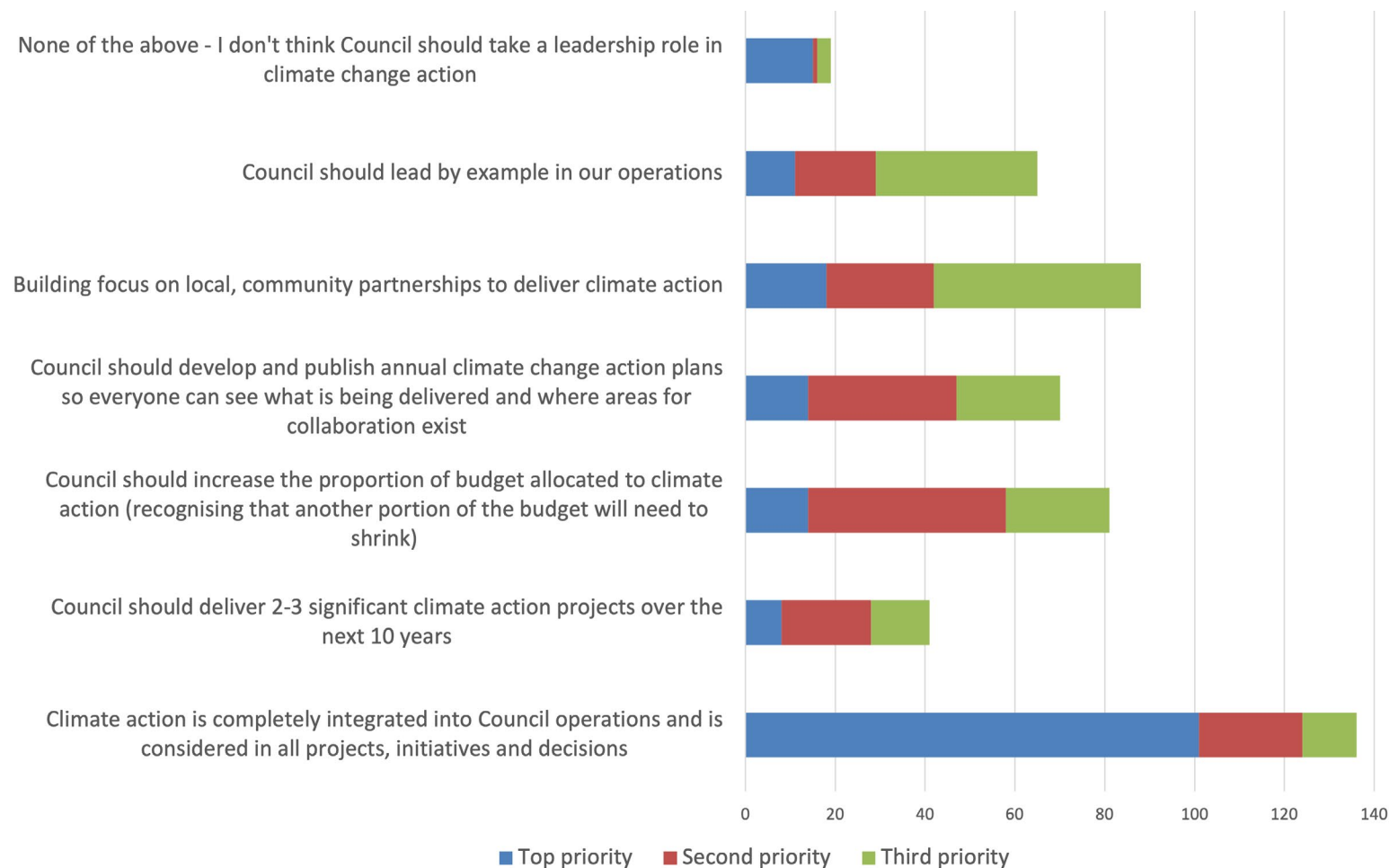
Legend: ■ Top priority ■ Second priority ■ Third priority

Overwhelmingly, respondents wanted to see climate action completely integrated into Council's operations so it is considered in all projects, initiatives and decisions.

Local community partnerships, and increasing budget allocation to climate action were also seen as important to Council's role.

6. Thinking about Council's role and legislated responsibilities, which areas do you think are most important for Council to address?
(online survey only)
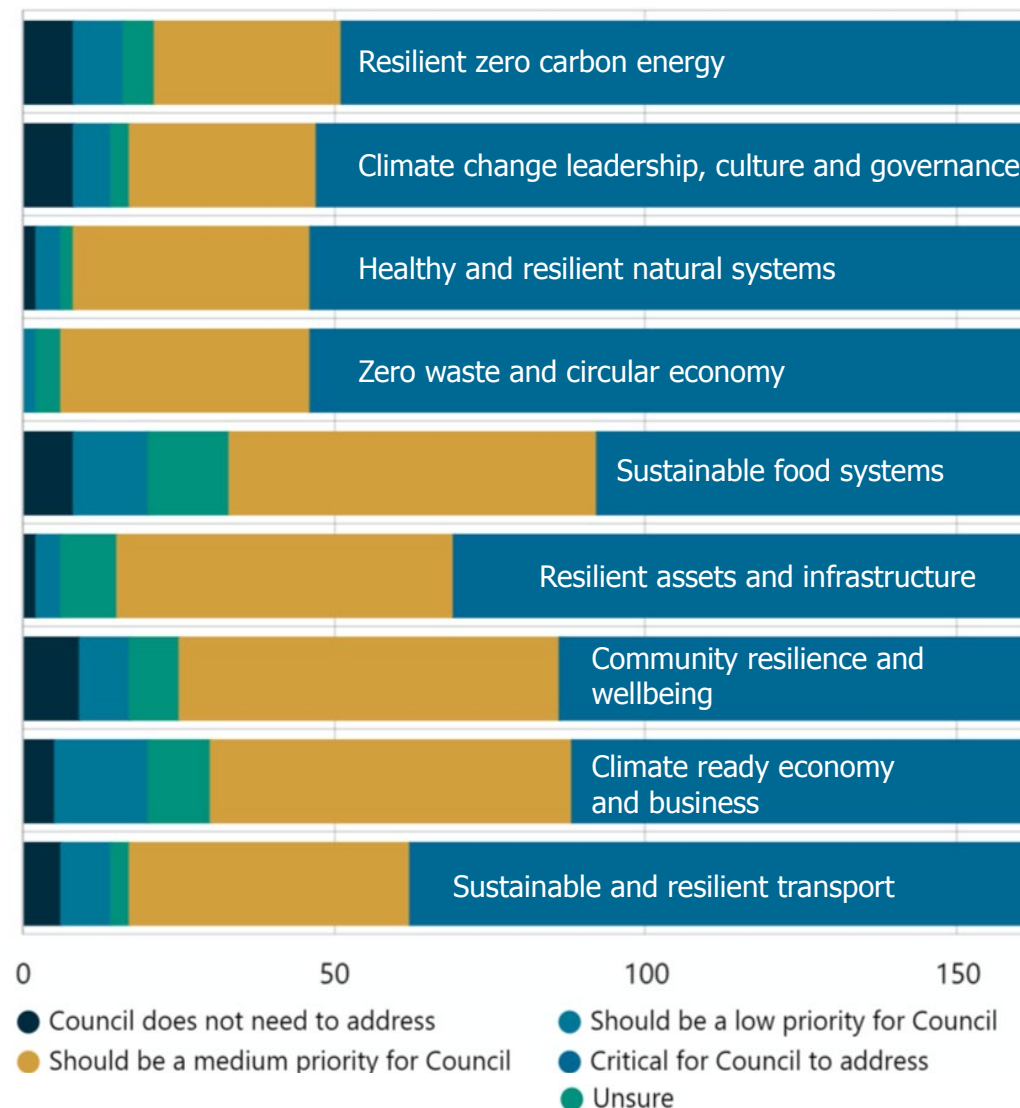
Resilient zero carbon energy

Climate change leadership, culture and governance

Healthy and resilient natural systems

Zero waste and circular economy

Sustainable food systems

Resilient assets and infrastructure

Community resilience and wellbeing

Climate ready economy and business

Sustainable and resilient transport

0   50   100   150

● Council does not need to address   ● Should be a low priority for Council
● Should be a medium priority for Council   ● Critical for Council to address
● Unsure

'Zero waste and circular economy' was the top priority, closely followed by 'healthy and resilient natural systems', and 'climate change leadership, culture and governance'.

'Sustainable food systems', 'climate ready economy and business', and 'community resilience and wellbeing' were the areas that were seen as less important for Council to address.

Resilient zero carbon energy: use 100% renewable energy, and advocate for community renewable energy solutions that will withstand climate change impacts (like extreme weather)

Climate change leadership, culture and governance: a whole-of-Council approach with decision-making that considers climate change

Healthy and resilient natural systems: work with the community to care for waterways, landscapes and habitats and support their adaptive capacity

Zero waste and circular economy: provide waste services that make it easier to reduce, reuse and recycle, and advocate for stronger circular economy polices and solutions

Sustainable food systems: work with the community to ensure there are locally sourced, healthy food options for all

Resilient assets and infrastructure: deliver buildings, roads and bridges that can withstand climate change impact, and advocate for programs and legislation to improve homes and public infrastructure

Community resilience and wellbeing: work with community to strengthen connection and networks, and invite more people to participate in climate change action
Climate ready economy and business: work with businesses and industry to prepare for climate change impacts, and the green economy

Sustainable and resilient transport: provide infrastructure, partnerships and advocacy to support active and low carbon transport, like walking, riding and electric vehicles

7. We know connected and supportive communities are more resilient to the impacts of climate change. How can we further strengthen cohesion and connectedness in Mount Alexander shire? (online survey only)

190 responses were received. The top themes that emerged in the responses to this question are listed below, along with some examples of the responses:

1. Supporting community leadership through funding and support

- Actively supporting community groups and businesses who are on the ground building a more resilient community - food producers, food systems (markets, community based shops, catering, schools, council, health services)
- Continue to fund projects that have an emphasis on community and climate action, less on technology
- Free use of council facilities for groups working along these lines
- Support as many community-led initiatives as possible - maybe a shift in focus from council as community leaders to council as community supporters (though obviously they also have to play a leadership role).

2. Partner - community and Council working together

- Both Hume City and Moonee Valley City Councils have recently paid their local sustainability groups to map all the similar environmental, community, faith based, trader, and social support groups in their area. This data has been used to build inter-connections between these groups, and to develop leadership support programs to strengthen these groups
- Employing more staff to work on climate change adaptation across all council priorities and working on projects with community groups, and community members
- Do more of council's work as a collaboration with the community, rather than "delivering services" like city municipalities, i.e men's shed & Salvage Yard fixing the street furniture, YIMBY delivering FOGO services. We can do this stuff together

Education, engagement and events

- Provide local area get togethers... small groups of neighbours
- By helping the community to understand the issues of climate change and how actions Council is taking will help this
- Education, awareness raising and meaningful action across all age groups that can engage young people as well as adults. This needs to be targeted

Communication

- Create or support central points of event and info sharing. Eg. Weekly updated website or e-publication that has community- based events
- Keep talking about it and announcing what Council is doing to keep awareness there. This actually links to Camp Reserve and the plans for it. A climate aware council would not cut down old trees and would consider more permeable surfaces to cope with heavy rainfall
- Council MUST improve its communication with its residents, and have transparent governance procedures

Equity and inclusion

- Prioritising support for those who are disproportionately impacted by climate change due to systemic disadvantage
- Address class and equal access to food shelter building services etc
- Breaking down barriers between so called 'old' and 'new' Castlemaine

Coordinate

- Encourage liaisons between all community groups
- Encourage/help organise neighbourhood resilience groups (like the west end) so people living near each other meet and make disaster-ready plans for their neighbourhood. So no-one who wants to be connected is left alone
- Provide a resource to coordinate and support community groups efforts and provides leverage for council, eg. West End Resilience Group, MASG. Partnerships that enable groups to achieve more would be a good outcome

8. How involved would you like to be in Council decision-making on climate change action and investment? (online survey and in-person survey)
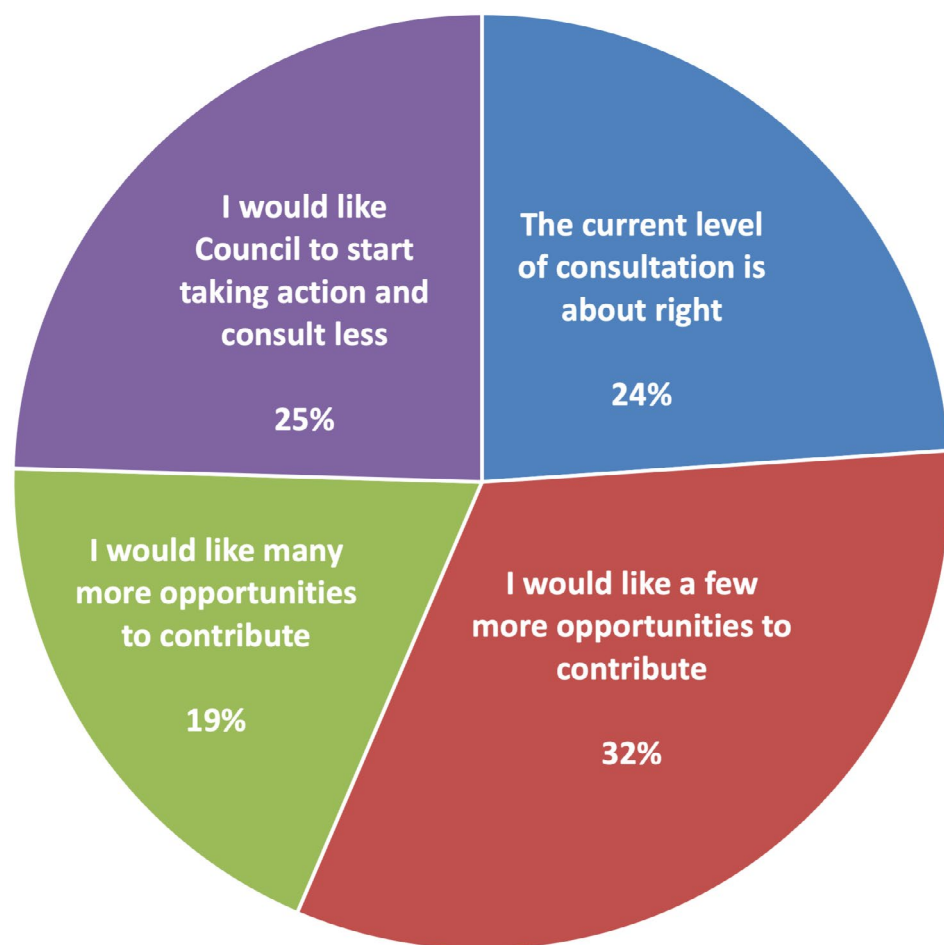
There was an almost equal split between respondents who wanted more opportunities to contribute (51%) and those that want less consultation (and more action) or are happy with current level of consultation (49%).

I would like Council to start taking action and consult less — 25%

The current level of consultation is about right — 24%

I would like many more opportunities to contribute — 19%

I would like a few more opportunities to contribute — 32%

Respondents left the following comments:

- A bit more consultation, but I'm not sure I am the best for council to ask me to contribute
- Actions first. Initiate projects which will invite community involvement.
- Consult with ordinary rate payers not just all the so called green groups that have their own agenda or benefits for their group, eg masg, castlemaine institute & west end
- Council could see itself as part of the community, and so engage within community in shared decision making and deliberative democracy.
- Council to start taking action and continue offering consultation. Be bold, we need leaders. Look at other lgas that are leaders, collaborate, share
- Everybody should have 100% input in any changes

- I could offer an alternative voice.
- I would like council to be talking action while explaining clearly what, why, how. This should include continued consultation with residents
- I would like Council to start taking action AND consulting some more
- I'd like council to take action more. And continue consultation.
- It depends on what you mean by 'climate action', this can mean lots of things, and just buying electricity from a 'renewable' source is not the same as truly reducing our need for energy to do the things that we need to do.
- More opportunity for involvement and more MASC action
- Yes I want to contribute - but REALLY Council needs to stop consulting endlessly, and start acting

9. Is there anything else you would like to tell us? (online survey and in-person survey)

120 comments were left. The top themes that emerged, along with some examples of the responses were:

1. Planning and housing

- A major area where Council should focus action is in planning for housing developments. Recent large new housing developments appear to have been approved with no regard to future climate impacts and sustainability - closely spaced houses with black roofs, poorly sited to take advantage of passive solar winter heating and shaded from summer sun, minimal hard concrete surfaces. Your planning department and staff need expert knowledge of what works ad what doesn't, and advise accordingly
- Council is in the difficult position of having to accommodate development and yet build and maintain sustainability. As these are often in conflict, clearly & publicly declare an expression of intent to support and prioritise one or the other. Environmental overlays are the most immediately effective way of setting boundaries around development, preventing more over development
- It's been disappointing to see good ideas proposed pre-COVID not proceed. There was supposed to be a positive development around Castlemaine marketplace and laneway next to Bendigo Bank that was going to include more green space, pedestrian zoning and trees. Not sure what has happened to the idea. Terrible waste of resources and people's time if it has been abandoned
- Stop approving permits to build on flood designated land. Stop tree felling and land clearing. Need to start building UP not OUT

2. Praise and thanks to Council

- Council is doing a pretty good job. To change what you are doing will take time and learning new skills. It will be hard in the short-term, but will pay off in the long term!

- I am very happy with the current mayor, and it is important to have young people making decisions for the future
- Keep up the good work. The planet needs it

Transport

- Close Mostyn St between Barker & Hargraves Streets. Connect walking track through to Campbell's Creek. Improve cycling tracks on Barker St
- Get cyclists out of the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens, they are a hazzard to elderly walkers!
- Its great that your asking. Also the bike tracks are really bad and trashed now. We need safe passage on the roads. Through town and to main community places including the res. Many of us have bikes and should encourage much more of that- but the roads are so dangerous.

Communication

- A regular communication sheet would be great for both the council and the community to have a hard copy of a regular sheet of information sent to the community regarding 'what's on'. etc
- Perhaps use local media to update community on council driven climate action, fortnightly updates on local papers, main fm, community group emails
- If it (Council) improves its own connections and communication then that will improve cohesion and communication in the community.
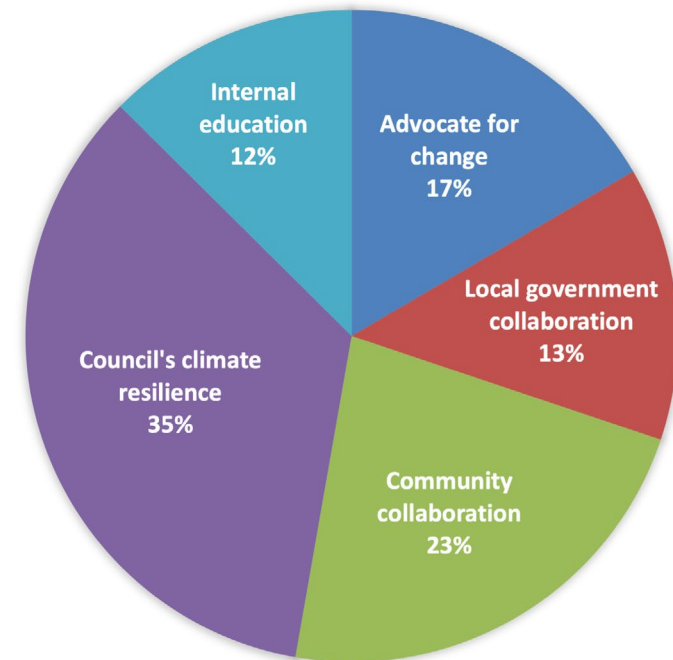
Urgency

- I am concerned that climate catastrophe could end my life prematurely (and I'm 83)
- Be bold, efficient and don't stall - time is of the essence
- I am deeply concerned about the climate emergency and am pleased to see this as a priority for council. It is absolutely critical

Fund it exercise

People who visited the Shape page were offed an opportunity to respond to the question "How would you fund our climate change response?". The results are presented in the table to the right.

We can see that respondents wanted Council to invest most heavily in Council's climate resilience to ensure councils operations are zero carbon and resilient to the impacts of climate change. Community collaboration was the second highest funded area.

This exercise was presented in addition to the full survey and it's important to note that only 20 respondents contributed to this question so the result does not represent the wider view of survey respondents.

Internal education: Ensure Councillors, the Executive Management Team and Council staff understand and act on their roles in a climate emergency response.

Local government collaboration: Collaborate with and support other councils to implement a climate emergency response.

Council's climate resilience: Take direct action to ensure councils operations are zero carbon and resilient to the impacts of climate change.

Advocate for change: Council should advocate to state and federal governments to adopt and resource a climate emergency response.

Community collaboration: Work in partnership with the local community and Traditional Owners to initiate local community education, mobilisation, action, mitigation (emissions reduction) and resilience building.

Other engagement

Council received a number of direct emails relating to the Strategy. These are captured here, along with some engagement data gathered by stakeholders and shared with Council.

Castlemaine Landcare

I was so impressed by the ADAPT Loddon Mallee Climate Ready Action Plan that I wondered what else needed to be said before we all get going. My strong sense was that Council's role was threefold:

- A strong internally and collaboratively supported initiative to become and remain informed about scientifically viable and effective (cost and outcome) actions
- Strengthen the knowledge of Councillors for decision support
- Help the community to learn and do

This all depends upon partnerships - across the organisation, externally such as you have now and with the community itself.

I was impressed with the 2021-22 Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality update report that went to Council, because it did not gloss over areas where you had learned things and needed to revise timelines or outcomes. To me, it seemed that if Council had a program of ongoing, direct officer contact with the community where learnings such as those in the report are shared and where people and all sorts of groups are invited to be on the journey together, that would be worth trying. I imagine that most people would not have read that report in normal circumstances so how does your progress find its way into the community lexicon through talking together, sharing improvements and adaptations rather than just having it as part of a report to Councillors? Forgive me if you are already doing this and I am the one missing from the process!

I realise that the above is a very limited description of what the ADAPT plan calls Knowledge and Connection, but I see Council's role as a bit like a spider, spinning a resilient web that links community with a sense of control over their destiny. The spider hops out when something flies into or drops on the web and does the extra work of patching up in order to catch the nutrients required to survive! ADAPT could provide the silk and help strengthen it through trial and error.

This is, of course, not achievable by a small council without the support of other levels of government, scientific and business leadership and learning. But somewhere in there, I think there is a rewarding role for small Councils to shine. You are after all close to where the action needs to occur.

Bendigo Council / Resident

My main things are that we, being councils, need to be pushing the 'electrify everything' message to our community.

We also need to be making sure that people understand that 'water is the primary medium through which we will feel climate change'.

Resident

i would like to request that we have community goat coops on council land. They could be borrowed out to cut grass and provide milk etc. I always ask for it to be added to the agenda, could you add it for me as i never hear any response

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Resident

I commend Council on its past and present leadership in addressing climate change. By way of introduction I was employed by Council from 2012-2017 in the roles of Sustainability Officer and then Manager Healthy Environments. During this time I led the development of the Mount Alexander Environment Strategy and the Mount Alexander Climate Change Action Plan. My current role is Sustainability Coordinator, Brimbank City Council. Since June 2019 I have been writing the draft Brimbank Climate Emergency Plan. Developing this draft has provided me with the privilege of undertaking deep analysis of the role of local government in responding to the climate emergency at this juncture. I offer the insights below for the consideration of Council.

1. A Council declaration of a climate emergency is a critical step to signal to the community, both locally and more broadly, that action is required at scale and at speed to address the existential threat of climate change. The messages are that we have a final window of opportunity for concerted action; that fossil fuels have served their purpose and are fast approaching their 'use by date'; and that there is no impediment to a 100% renewable energy powered Victoria. The declaration of a climate emergency relates directly to the purpose of local government under the Victorian Local Government Act 1989: To provide for the peace, order and good government of our municipal district. Climate emergency plans can/should be submitted as a council pledge under S46 of the Victorian Climate Change Act 2017.

2. The move to 100% renewable energy including for heating and transport is the lion's share of the task at hand. The flip side of this is that we need to price carbon pollution to enable the speed of transition required. The Victorian Government holds the keys to both big policy moves, being a 100% Victorian Renewable Energy Target for 2030 (currently 50%) and a carbon price through state legislation, ideally the Australian Carbon Dividend Plan developed by the UNSW. The climate emergency declaration provides the remit for candid and bold policy advocacy.

3. The climate emergency is both a very real health emergency as recognised by the AMA, and a very real water emergency as recognised by the UN. A key insight is that whereas climate change is caused by greenhouse gas, water is the 'medium' through which we will feel it e.g. drought. Do everything you can, at every scale, to increase water security for the municipality.

4. The 'five themes for action' I have included in the draft Brimbank plan are: People Power; 100% Renewable; Resilient Rebuild; Green and Cool; and the Circular Economy. Taken together these five themes demonstrate that this crisis presents an opportunity for us to transition to the new economy. The transition is an economic winner. There is significant opportunity in crisis.

5. Climate change is a hard to grasp 'hyper object' that is everywhere but invisible. A place-based implementation approach is how we get the job done. For example, Renewable Newstead.

Resident

Victoria's infrastructure strategy 2021 – 2051, Summary of recommendations

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Resident

Please review the community plans.

Resident

Consider a role for Council in coordinating large scale living fire breaks to protect Maldon region from bushfires. This could be done with fire retardant trees (see example from Fire Tas and permaculture)

Resident

I do believe there are some big issues which will need to be addressed, and the Council will have a role, a difficult one, in bringing the local people along as it meets State Government's direction/laws at the same time meeting community expectations, which can be a bit unrealistic at times.

A few points that I think need to be weaved into Znet, Adaptation and Culture, they are not in any particular order or priority:

The State Government's aim is to grow the economy and there-by control and reduce State debt – i.e., it is all about growth. This is going to impact MASC:

- Population – Determine physical size of towns, growth areas must contain 25% parkland, limit area that can be built on within blocks that make up the new subdivision, dedicated cycle paths/infrastructure, will the community support high rise buildings and to what height?, planning laws that don't look like NIMBY to the rest of the State, meeting housing requirements

- Freight Task – The expectation is farmers will produce more, larger community means more goods and services etc. What does the community think of B 3 triples rolling through (it's not far off), the noise of the b doubles and trucks generally, push for a local "inland port" (probably near Bendigo) to allow greater movement of containers by rail then moved by smaller vehicles locally. Reducing truck movements overall.

- Traffic – The Reality is most households will have at least two cars for many years to come and it's going to grow. People moving about isn't going to slow so how to deal with? E vehicles are a dream for most people as the cost is just prohibitive. Linked to population, need to limit urban spread otherwise cannot slow the need for vehicles.

- Tourist Industry – As a tourist area, this industry is likely to continue to grow which means a greater need for accommodation. Expect more Air B & B type housing will be needed but at the same time there is a need for rental housing – how to manage both demands?

Another area not touched on is: Drought – how to drought proof the MASC?

Perhaps concentrate on things MASC can control – slowing traffic through all the towns (from the outskirts) to 40kpm to reduce noise and speed, allowing solar panels on all housing, investing in solar farms, encourage recycling industries to MASC, good cycle paths between the towns (the Maldon to Castlemaine connection is a goat track in parts!) and within the towns. Etc. etc.

Climate ready kitchen table conversation themes

Note: This engagement was conducted by a council partner, not Council directly. The data was kindly shared with Council.

Personal action

- Housing
- Transport
- Degrowth
- Renewable energy

Collective action

- Assisting/supporting those experiencing systemic disadvantage
- Indigenous people and wisdom
- Mental Health
- Sharing information/learning
- Water management
- Regenerative/Sustainable Farming/food systems
- Waste management
- Ecology
- Climate change crisis risk mitigation
- Advocacy
- Children
- Collaboration/strategic approach
- Story, identity
- Local/deliberative democracy
- Place based action in small communities/neighbourhoods
- Gathering/group work

LET.ME.BE.
CURIOUS.
CREATIVE.
COLLABORATIVE.
KIND.
FUN.
LET.ME.BE.
FRANK.

ROB LAW **LET ME BE FRANK.**