

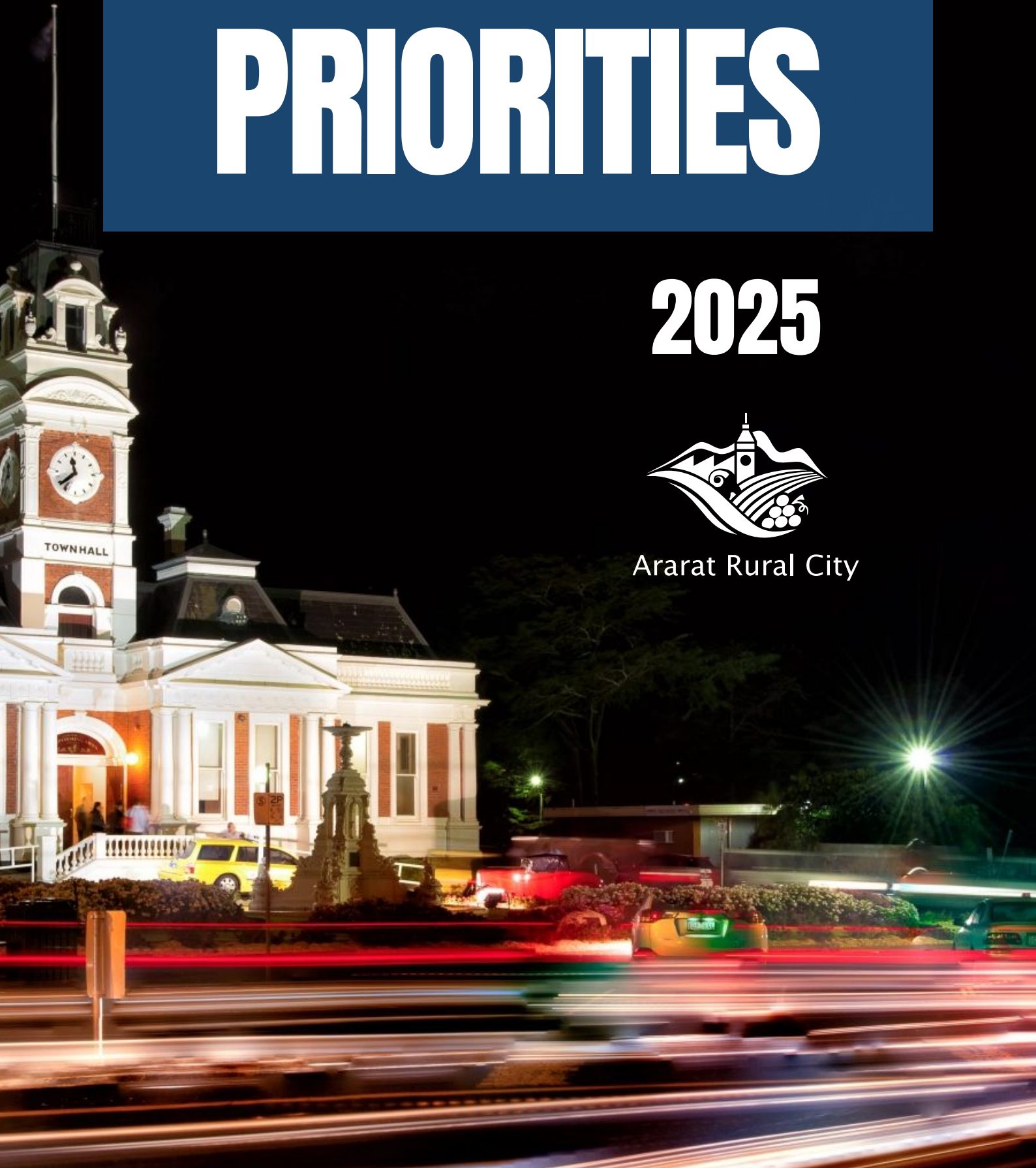
**ARARAT RURAL CITY COUNCIL**

# **ADVOCACY PRIORITIES**

**2025**



Ararat Rural City



## **Traditional Acknowledgement**

Ararat Rural City Council acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we live and work, the Eastern Maar, Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia, Jupagulk, and Wadawurrung peoples, and recognise their connection to the land and waterways.

We pay our respects to their Elders past, present and emerging, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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## **From the Mayor, Cr Jo Armstong**

Ararat Rural City Council has identified a number of major issues and projects that require advocacy to move them forward and achieve outcomes for the community. We also have a number of significant projects that are ready to go, and are simply waiting for the right government policies, settings and frameworks.

We will actively advocate for our priorities to State and Federal Governments so that our municipality can reach its full potential and thrive.



# GROWING OUR PLACE



Image: Early childhood education students from Federation University visiting Ararat, 12 September 2024

## 01 Housing Support

Continued support is needed from State and Federal Governments to deliver more housing

## 02 Childcare Access

Access to childcare in rural areas needs to be improved, especially in places like Lake Bolac

## 03 Kinder Infrastructure

New kindergarten facilities are needed to meet future unmet demand, as well as the renewal of existing facilities.

## 04 More Trains

More train services to Ararat are critical for improved livability and access to training and tourism opportunities





Image: New homes at Green Hill Lake Estate, enabled by trunk infrastructure support from the Victorian Government. Photo taken July 2024

# Continued Support to Deliver More Housing

Driven by years of chronic workforce and housing shortages, Ararat Rural City Council have undertaken bold new approaches to overcome housing market failure, support local jobs and transform its community and economy. Council's partnerships with State and Federal governments, local philanthropists, reputable and capable property developers and businesses has worked to increase supply of suitable, sustainable, safe and affordable housing.

**Ararat needs more quality rental housing.** People who relocate for jobs are typically not in a position to buy a home right away, they need to rent a place first, and temporary construction workers do not buy homes in project locations. There is a severe shortage of rental housing in Ararat, and an even shorter supply of quality rentals. Council will advocate for a continuation of State and Federal programs that have been effective in delivering more housing in the Ararat Rural City.





# Improve Childcare Access in Rural Areas

The Federal Government's 3-day guarantee that enables all families eligible for Child Care Subsidy to access 3 days of subsidised care for each child will have a positive impact on children and families.

This will be particularly positive for women, who are the most common primary carer, and their access to employment and training. However, the availability of childcare in rural areas is limited.

Council will advocate for funding models and policy settings that support the establishment of more childcare opens in areas with unmet demand and limited access to childcare, such as Lake Bolac.





Deliver

# Kindergarten Infrastructure

The Kindergarten Infrastructure and Services Plan (KISP) 2025 modelling shows that in the Ararat SA2 (ie the suburb of Ararat), there will not be enough kindergarten places to meet demand from 2026 onwards. Council and the Department of Education have commenced discussions on planning for expansions or new kindergarten facilities in Ararat.

Council will be advocating for new kindergarten facilities to meet the unmet demand as well as renewal and refurbishment of existing facilities to extend their useful life, where possible.



Much of the existing sessional kindergarten infrastructure is aged and/or poorly configured, poorly insulated for heating and cooling, and there is very limited natural lighting at one of the locations





# More Trains to Ararat

The announcement by the Victorian Government on 28 February 2025 on the two new weekend return services on the Ararat Line is a step in the right direction. Council will continue to advocate for more public transport services for Ararat.

# BUILDING ROBUST LOCAL ECONOMIES



Image: Canola fields in Willaura, circa 2017

## 01 Water Pipeline

The full extent of the East Grampians Rural Water Pipeline Project is essential for rural communities and economies

## 02 Activate Aradale

This is critical to unlocking development of the entire Ararat East Development Zone

## 03 Mountain Bike Trails

The Ararat Hills Mountain Bike Trails will yield significant economic benefits to the community.

## 04 Wine Discovery Centre

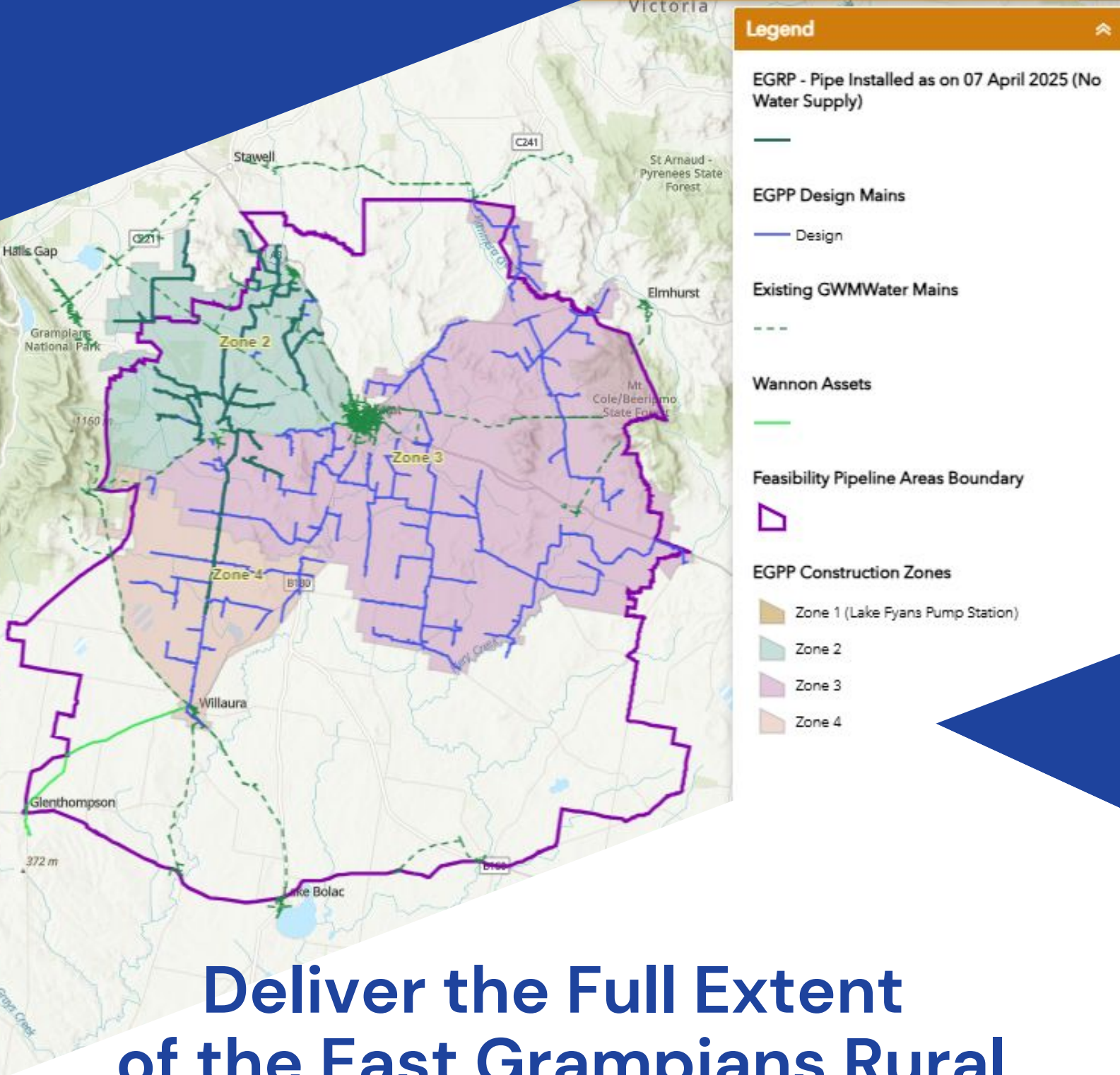
A Grampians Wine Discovery Centre will drive visitation and investment in the local and regional tourism sector

## 05 Renewable Energy Park

Industrial trunk infrastructure will unlock new business establishment at the Ararat Renewable Energy Park

## 06 Mobile & NBN

Poor connectivity negatively impacts on emergency preparedness and response, and in the day-to-day lives of residents



# Deliver the Full Extent of the East Grampians Rural Water Pipeline Project

This project has been plagued by delays, and the extent of Construction Zone 4 has been only partially included in the delivery scope due to cost. The recent Grampians bushfires and the continuing dry conditions has created hardships that could have been avoided or alleviated if the full extent of the Pipeline had been delivered on time.

These recent challenging events have also highlighted why it is so critical that the full extent of the East Grampians Rural Water Pipeline Project is delivered as soon as possible.



# Activate Aradale: Funding for Critical Studies



Ararat Rural City



The Ararat Development Strategy: Concept Masterplan & Feasibility Report identified 5 Precincts and a range of potential land uses, including:

- Tourism & Accommodation
- Civic/Historical/Community
- Restaurants, breweries and distilleries
- Functions, galleries, public and private events
- Residential housing
- Indigenous 'bush-tucker' paddock-to-plate businesses

Precinct	Hectares (approx)
1. Historic Core	6.2 ha
2. Events/Tourism	11.4 ha
3. Productive Land	28.5 ha
4. Residential	40.2 ha
5. Landscape public realm	11.4 ha

Located at the gateway to Ararat, Aradale was originally built in 1860s and features over 60 buildings. Since the closure of the Asylum in 1993, the 100-hectare site has been largely underutilised. Activation of the Aradale site is the key to unlocking residential and commercial development of the entire Ararat East Development Zone. Substantiated by the Aradale Development Strategy (2022), activation of the site to its full potential will drive the future growth and diversification of the regional economy.

The potential economic benefits include:

- Attract 82,000 new overnight visitors to the region and increase the yield of 45,000 existing visitors through new activities/development, events, functions and tours, and new wine events and accommodation in the Heritage Core and Events/Tourism Precincts, generating \$20.9M in additional visitor expenditure.
- Provide housing in the Residential Development Precinct to support around 450 workers to the local business base and support an additional 1,100 residents to live in the Ararat region.

The next step identified in the Aradale Development Strategy is to commission critical studies, such as environmental, biodiversity, drainage/flood, heritage, indigenous cultural heritage and other necessary investigations and plans are required in order to progress through to the next stages of this significant economic project.

(Below: excerpt from the Aradale Development Strategy)

## Funding Requested

Council is seeking \$500,000 to deliver critical studies that will enable the development and activation of Aradale.

Council will contribute \$100,000 for a total project cost of \$600,000.



## Next Steps

- 1 Commission Critical Studies**
- 2 Confirmation of the Master Plan**
- 3 Implementation**



# DELIVER THE ARARAT HILLS MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

This initiative will yield significant economic benefits to the community. In 2020 \$3 million in funding was provided by the Victorian State Government, through RDV, and Council to construct the track. The project was managed by Parks Vic as landowners but it has faced significant delays around planning and consent.

Council will continue to advocate for the delivery of a mountain bike track in the Ararat Hills Regional Park and work with Traditional Owners and Regional Development Victoria to resolve the issues that has stalled this project.





# Grampians Wine Discovery Centre

The Grampians wine region has over 150 years of history, with some of the world's oldest vines and is one of the longest continually producing wine regions in Victoria. While our wine and food offering is growing, the Grampians struggles at times to compete with other larger wine regions because of a lack of visible presence. To help overcome this, the potential exists to develop a regional wine and produce emporium.

The need and business case for a Grampians Wine Discovery Centre has been established in the Grampians Destination Management Plan 2023-2030 (DMP). This Centre is important for our local winemakers, it will boost our local and regional tourism economy and lift the region's profile as an exceptional food, drink and wine destination. The Grampians Wine Discovery Centre is one of the top five public enablers for private investments identified in the Grampians Strategic Tourism Investment Plan, and listed as a high priority investment opportunity in the Ararat Region in the Grampians Tourism Investment Prospectus.

## Funding Request

The Ararat Rural City Council and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism are seeking **\$500,000** of funding to develop a major wine discovery centre in Ararat and to enable this regionally significant initiative to come to fruition in the future.

Council have committed \$125,000 for a total project cost of \$625,000.





# Industrial Trunk Infrastructure for the Ararat Renewable Energy Park

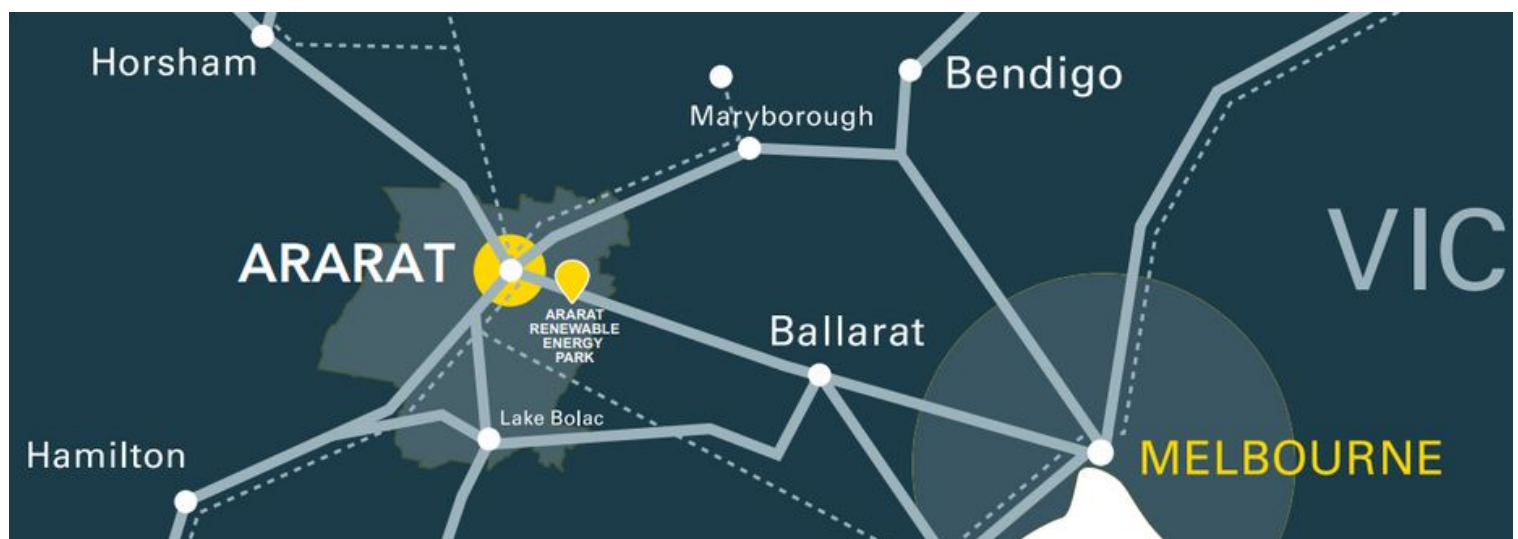


## *THE MISSING PIECE*

The Ararat Renewable Energy Park is the preferred site for Valorify's \$400M biogas plant, PlastOil's \$270M soft plastics recycling refinery, and other new business ventures keen to establish themselves in Ararat. But this site currently lacks trunk infrastructure connections to essential services, including water, sewer, electricity and gas.

The dependency on the first business to establish themselves to cover the cost of bringing trunk infrastructure to the precinct dramatically increases startup costs for that first business, and rendering many otherwise commercially viable proposals unviable. This acts as a major barrier to development of the precinct and the resultant economic growth. Council seeks funding to deliver trunk infrastructure to the Ararat Renewable Energy Park to overcome this hurdle and speed up the creation of jobs and economic activity for the Ararat region.

### Strategic Site Location



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# IMPROVE MOBILE PHONE AND NBN CONNECTIVITY IN RURAL AREAS

Many of our rural communities have reported a complete lack of service since 3G was turned off. These mobile black spots negatively impact on preparedness and response in emergencies and in the day-to-day lives of residents. Council hosted a series of Community Emergency Management Planning Workshops in late 2024-early 2025.

A very clear message from these workshops was the major concerns around lack of coverage and the inability to stay up to date on the VicEmergency warnings during the recent bushfires. EFTPOS machines also regularly drop out, and the lack of reception discourages revisits by tourists.



# PRESERVING OUR ENVIRONMENT



## 01 Give Greater Confidence and Support to Renewable Gas

Other renewable fuel alternatives are not yet able to fully replace gas in high temperature applications. Clear policy directions in support of renewable gas production is needed to give greater confidence to accelerate investment in renewable energy generation.



# Give Greater Confidence and Support to Renewable Gas

## What and Why

Gas will continue to be essential in a net-zero future (Annual Climate Change Statement 2024, DCCEEW). Other renewable fuel alternatives are not yet able to fully replace gas in high temperature applications in some industries, and it cannot be substituted as chemical inputs into some products such as medicines, fertilisers and cleaning products. For these industries, a renewable gas source would reduce the use of fossil fuel gas.

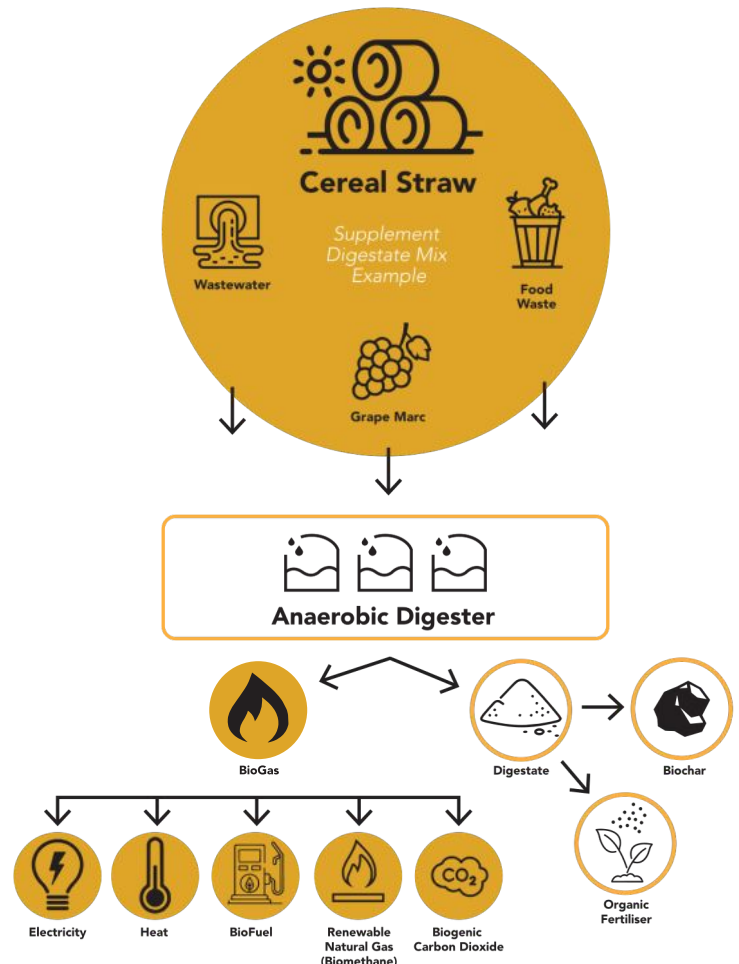
While other States have been proactive in supporting renewable gas developments, the Victorian Government have dragged their feet with the development of roadmaps, consultation papers, policy direction papers, and more policy framework development.

Victoria's Gas Substitution Strategy and AEMO's 2025 Gas Statement of Opportunities recognises the need for new gas supply developments to prevent future supply gaps as southern fossil fuel gas production continues to decline. Renewable gases such as biogas provide a carbon-neutral natural gas substitutes that do not generate additional greenhouse gas emissions when burnt.

The Victorian Government needs to provide clear policy directions in support of renewable gas production. This will give greater confidence to accelerate Valorify's \$400 million biogas plant in Ararat and subsequent enterprises that seek to co-locate and access "behind the meter" power.

Valorify's \$400m biomethane plant will use agricultural waste that is normally burnt on-farm, releasing tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions plus other harmful gases, to produce a surplus of over 4 petajoules (PJ) of green gas annually at full production. This volume is equivalent to 6.5 per cent of Victoria's gas usage in 2020, and is enough to supply the entire Carrisbrook to Horsham gas pipeline (approx. 1 PJ per annum), which services townships such as Ararat, Horsham, Maryborough, and Stawell.

## ANAEROBIC DIGESTION PROCESS



# KEY ENABLING INFRASTRUCTURE



Image: New road seal applied to Andrews Lane. June 2024.

## 01 Local Roads Funding

Smaller rural councils often have the largest road network per capita, longer term road funding surety is critical.

## 02 Buangor-Ben Nevis Rd

A vital thoroughfare between the Pyrenees Highway and Western Highway for locals, freight and tourists

## 03 Mount William Road

One of the busiest and important heavy vehicle freight links, this road is vital for the local agricultural economy

## 04 Western Highway Upgrade

The upgrade of this key transport route is urgently needed to improve safety and transport efficiency

## 05 North-South HV Route

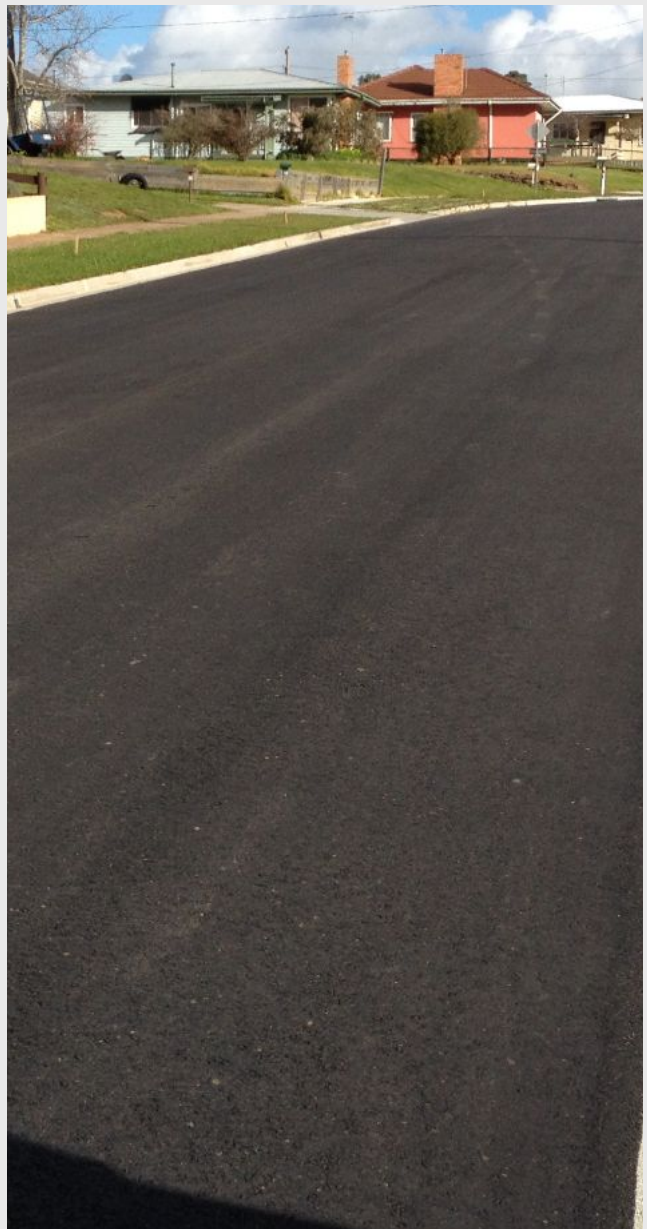
A north-south heavy vehicle route is needed to remove large trucks from the Ararat CBD

# MORE LOCAL ROAD FUNDING

There are a number of State and Federal road funding programs that enable Council to maintain and renew its road network.

Programs that provide recurring and upfront amounts and criteria such as Roads to Recovery and the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure fund have been valuable for enabling Council to decide which roads meet the funding criteria and local needs. There are also a number of competitive grant programs which generally require more details and a certain level of design work upfront.

Smaller rural councils, who often also have the largest road network per capita, often find it challenging to dedicate resources upfront to a grant application that has risks of not being awarded. Council will advocate to maintain and index recurring funding programs, as well as advocate for new roads funding programs that can provide longer term funding surety and have streamlined application processes.







## Buangor Ben-Nevis Road Upgrade

Buangor-Ben Nevis Road is a vital thoroughfare between the Pyrenees Highway and Western Highway, and is a significant route for freight vehicles as well as local and tourist traffic. These renewal and upgrade improvements to the road will allow for a reduction in the number of large capacity vehicles travelling through Ararat, in turn alleviating the impact on local roads and substantially increasing transport efficiency.

Buangor-Ben Nevis Road is also the main route for accessing the townships of Buangor, Bayindeen, Warrak and Mount Cole Creek. These reconstruction works will deliver improved connectivity and an enhanced driving experience to our local community, reducing travel times and driver fatigue.

Works proposed include road seal widened to a minimum of 7 metres, excavation and removal of existing pavement, new road base course layers, drainage works, sealing, linemarking, safety barriers and associated signage.

Ararat Rural City Council have allocated over \$3m for urgent reconstruct works. A further \$1.25m is committed in subsequent financial years to leverage Federal Government funding to undertake further works along this route.



### Funding Requested

Council is seeking \$5 million from the Federal Government to deliver this project



Ararat Rural City





## Mount William Road - Stage 2

Mount William Road serves as the region's main freight route to the CHS Broadbent - Lakaput Bulk Storage Facility. The road takes heavy agricultural freight carrying wheat, barley, canola and oats from across the entire Wimmera Southern Mallee.

As one of the busiest and most vitally important heavy vehicle freight links, the road is vital in supporting Victoria's agricultural economy over the harvest season.

Recognising its importance as a primary product to market road, Council has recently invested in a number of emergency works to respond to failures of the road pavement.

These works have only scratched the surface of the level of maintenance required, with damages to the road base and narrow shoulders an impediment to meeting the increasing demands of industry.

Council have developed a proposal that will see the reconstruction of a 10km section of the road pavement, plus works to widen the road seal to 7 metre dual lane with centre and edge line markings, raised road pavement marking (RRPM), and improved water run-off.

The road reconstruction works will enhance freight efficiency and safety and reduce whole-of-life asset management costs.



### Funding Requested

Council has secured \$5 million from the Federal Government and is contributing \$1.25 million. This proposal seeks a further \$3 million for Stage 2, recognising the strategic importance of the road to the entire Western Victoria and the Wimmera Mallee economy.





Image: Poor distance visibility on approach to a narrow bridge on the Western Highway near Buangor. Source: Google Maps

# Deliver the Western Highway Upgrade from Buangor to Ararat

The Western Highway from Buangor to Ararat continues to experience unacceptable levels of traffic accidents that cause fatalities, injury, disruptive road closures and detours onto rural roads.

The upgrade of this key transport route is urgently needed to improve safety and transport efficiency.



Image: Status of the Buangor to Ararat section of the Western Highway Upgrade. Source: Victoria's Big Build website, 22/04/2025



# DELIVER A NORTH SOUTH HEAVY VEHICLE ROUTE



Image: Heavy vehicle trucks on Pyrenees Highway (Vincent St) through the Ararat CBD

The North South route of the Pyrenees Highway along Vincent St in the Ararat CBD has a significant number of heavy vehicle movements which raises safety concerns and causes congestion at the Vincent St/Barkly St and Vincent St/High St intersections.

A solution to this issue is to develop a heavy vehicle route for the Pyrenees Highway to the East of the Ararat township to remove heavy vehicles from these two intersections.

Council will advocate for planning and delivery of this project with the Department of Transport and Planning.

# ENHANCING COMMUNITY LIFE



## 01 New Tatyoon Pavilion

Community sporting clubs are a key part of the social fabric of rural communities.

## 02 New Indoor Sports Complex

New recreational facilities that are functional, accessible, inclusive are needed

## 03 A&J McDonald Centre Redevelopment

Much of this building is not in current use due to its lack of essential infrastructure and disability access.

## 04 Ararat Pool Upgrade

Upgrade the Ararat Outdoor Pool to enable it to be used all year round



# Tatyoon Recreation Reserve New Pavilion



Community sporting clubs are a key part of the social fabric of rural communities. The social element helps to retain players, keeps them engaged in sport and encourages their kids and grandkids to play as well.

Council will seek co-funding from the State and Federal governments and community for the development of the new pavilion and a refurbishment of the football change rooms to modernise the amenities and make them female friendly.



# New Indoor Sports Complex



The Council remains committed to delivering recreational facilities that are functional, accessible, inclusive, and that yield significant social, economic and community benefit to residents of the Ararat Rural City.

The redevelopment of the existing Ararat Fitness Centre was determined to be no longer a financially sound and responsible option for achieving this outcome. Planning is underway for a new Indoor Sports Complex at Alexandra Oval Precinct. Co-funding will be sought from State and Federal Governments to deliver this project.





# A & J MCDONALD CENTRE REDEVELOPMENT

Grampians Community Health (GCH) in partnership with Ararat Rural City Council are seeking to redevelop the A & J McDonald Centre into a community health and social hub. The McDonald Centre is a large 1950s era Art Deco building that has served as a community centre and public hall. Much of the building is not in current use due to its lack of essential infrastructure and disability access. This results in limitations with participating community health programs and support becoming dispersed across the region, and increased limitations in terms of the ability to meet needs associated with future service provision.

The proposed redevelopment, built strongly on the foundation of GCH as the lead tenant, will bring together a range of related service providers to deliver integrated, accessible services to the community from a co-located site. The facility will offer general practice, allied health, Home and Community Care services, community nursing, NDIS, health promotion, alcohol and other drugs support, family violence services, housing, mental health, maternal and child health, Aboriginal support, community care, palliative care, aged and disability services, youth mental health, My Aged Care services, carer connect and carer support services, migrant resettlement, youth services, and adult education and training.



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# ARARAT OUTDOOR POOL UPGRADE

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Planning is currently underway on an upgrade to the Ararat Outdoor Pool to enable it to be utilised all year round, rather than only in summer as it is currently. Co-funding will be sought from State and Federal Governments to deliver this project.



Example of year-round indoor splash park



Above: existing Ararat Outdoor Pool



Example of sunroom-like pool enclosure



# EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE



## 01 Condemn ESVF

Council will advocate against the Emergency Services & Volunteers Fund on behalf of our community

## 02 Faster, Better DRFA

Councils need a faster and far more streamlined process for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements

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# CONDEMNATION OF THE ESVF

While Council acknowledges the importance of adequate funding for emergency services, Council has condemned the Emergency Services & Volunteers Fund (ESVF) due to its disproportionate impact on primary producers, obscenely steep increase imposed onto all ratepayers, and the ongoing expectation that local councils act as the collection agency for a state-imposed tax. Council will advocate against the ESVF on behalf of our community.

The ESVF variable rate for Primary Production properties is nearly 3 times the Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL) rate. The exorbitant impost on primary producers penalises the very people who make the biggest contribution to the emergency relief and response efforts in regional and rural areas.

Local councils are currently tasked with collecting the FSPL and the ESVF, which creates a significant administrative burden on councils as the collection agency.

Council staff bear the brunt of disgruntled ratepayers when they see the increased total bill on their rates notice, yet none of the ESVF is guaranteed to be spent in the municipality where it is collected.



# FASTER, MORE STREAMLINED PROCESSES FOR DRFA

Natural disasters such as major bushfires, storms and floods are expected to become more intense and frequent. The current burdensome administrative processes for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) mean that councils are left out of pocket for emergency recovery works for over 12 months per disaster event.

This is very financially challenging for small rural councils and where multiple disaster events occur within a short period of time. This has been experienced by Ararat Rural City with two major bushfires in 2024 (AGRN 1108 and 1166) and major floods in 2023 (AGRN 1037).





# CONTACT US



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