



Date: Tuesday, 16 June 2026
Time: 3.00pm
Location: Loddon Shire Council Chambers, Wedderburn

MINUTES

Council Meeting

**MINUTES OF LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING
HELD AT THE LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEDDERBURN
ON TUESDAY, 16 JUNE 2026 AT 3.00PM**

PRESENT: Cr Dan Straub (Mayor), Cr Nick Angelo, Cr Gavan Holt, Cr David Weaver and Cr Miki Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE: Lincoln Fitzgerald (Chief Executive Officer), Wendy Gladman (Director Community Wellbeing), Michelle Stedman (Director Corporate), Steve Van Orsouw (Director Operations) and Lisa Clue (Manager Governance)

1 OPENING AFFIRMATION

The Mayor read the Opening Affirmation

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Chief Executive Officer read the Acknowledgement of Country

3 APOLOGIES

Nil

4 DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nil

5 PREVIOUS MINUTES**5.1 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES****File Number:** FOL/19/45615**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council confirm the Minutes of the following meetings as previously circulated to Councillors:

1. Council Briefing of 26 May 2026
2. Council Meeting of 26 May 2026
3. Council Forum of 9 June 2026

REPORT

This report seeks Council confirmation of Minutes from the May 2026 Council Briefing and Council Meeting, and June 2026 Council Forum as previously circulated to Councillors.

RESOLUTION 2026/78**Moved:** Cr David Weaver**Seconded:** Cr Nick Angelo

That Council confirm the Minutes of the following meetings as previously circulated to Councillors:

1. Council Briefing of 26 May 2026
2. Council Meeting of 26 May 2026
3. Council Forum of 9 June 2026

CARRIED

6 COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS

6.1 RECORD OF COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS

File Number: 02/01/001

Author: Lisa Clue, Manager Governance

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council confirm the records of the following auspiced meetings as detailed within this report:

1. Council Briefing held 26 May 2026
2. Council Forum held 9 June 2026

Rule 35 of Council's Governance Rules requires a record of meetings conducted under the auspices of Council to be presented to the next available scheduled Council meeting for confirmation that must include:

- a) a record of which Councillors and officers attended the meeting;
- b) a summary of the matters considered in the meeting; and
- c) a record of any conflicts of interest disclosed by Councillors and officers and any Councillors or officers that left the meeting whilst a matter that their conflict of interest related to was being discussed.

Section 3 of the Governance Rules defines meetings conducted under the auspices of Council to mean a meeting of the kind described in section 131(1) of the *Local Government Act 2020* and includes a meeting which:

- a) is schedule or planned for the purpose of discussing the business of Council or briefing Councillors;
- b) is attended by a majority of Councillors;
- c) is attended by at least one member of Council staff; and
- d) is not a Council meeting or delegated committee meeting.

This report seeks confirmation of the following auspiced meetings:

Meeting details	Council Briefing
Date	26 May 2026
Councillor Attendees	Cr Straub (Mayor) Cr Angelo Cr Holt Cr Weaver Cr Wilson
Staff/ Stakeholder representatives	Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer Wendy Gladman, Director Community Wellbeing Steve Van Orsouw, Director Operations Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate Lisa Clue, Manager Governance Janine Jackson, Manager Organisation Development – for item 2 below Amber Currie, Loddon Shire Council Audit and Risk Committee Independent Member – for item 3 below
Item(s) discussed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review of Council Meeting Agenda 2. CEO Employment and Remuneration Policy Review 3. Audit and Risk Committee – Biannual Report 4. General Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MAV State Council Motions
Conflict of Interest Disclosures – Councillor/ officer making disclosure	Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer declared a Material conflict of interest in relation to item 2 above.
Councillor/officer left room	Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer – item 2

Meeting details	Council Forum
Date	9 June 2026
Councillor Attendees	Cr Straub (Mayor) Cr Angelo Cr Holt Cr Weaver Cr Wilson
Staff/ Stakeholder representatives	Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer Wendy Gladman, Director Community Wellbeing Steve Van Orsouw, Director Operations Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate Lisa Clue, Manager Governance David Stretch, Manager Tourism and Economic Development – items 2 and 3 below Luz Restrepo, Made by Many Minds Holdings – item 3 below Mark Zuker, JWS Research (Virtual) – item 4 below Natalie Martin, Manager Financial Services and David Southcombe, Manager Assets and Infrastructure – item 5 below Orrin Hogan, Manager Community Partnerships, Edwina Reid, Recreation Officer, and Kate Maddock and Ben Bainbridge, Otium – item 7 below Nicole Taylor, Manager Community Services and Darcy Jackson, Statutory Planning Officer – items 8 and 9 below
Item(s) discussed.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of the draft Central Victorian Public Libraries Library Agreement 2. Visitor Information Centre Report 3. Loddon Business Expo – September 2026 4. 2026 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey Results 5. Final Review of Draft 2026/27 Annual Budget, Capital Program, Annual Action Plan, and Fees and Charges Schedule 6. Social Infrastructure Strategy review 7. Councillor Workshop – Loddon Aquatic Service Review 8. Planning Application 6074 – Use and development of the land for animal production (duck farm), use and development of the land for a caretakers dwelling, and carry out earthworks (dams) in the Farming Zone and Land Subject to Inundation Overlay 9. Planning Application 6078 – Carry out earthworks in the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and Farming Zone 10. Review of Forward Council Agendas 11. General Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'MeshCall' system • Kindergarten staffing
Conflict of Interest Disclosures – Councillor/ officer making disclosure	Nil
Councillor/officer left room	N/A

RESOLUTION 2026/79

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson
Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council confirm the records of the following auspiced meetings as detailed within this report:

1. Council Briefing held 26 May 2026
2. Council Forum held 9 June 2026

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

7 REVIEW OF ACTIONS**7.1 REVIEW OF ACTIONS****File Number:****Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** 1. **Status of Council Resolution Actions****RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive and note the status of Council resolution actions, as attached to this report.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

REPORT

A document containing the status of actions associated with Council resolutions is attached to this Agenda report.

All eight actions arising from the May 2026 Council meeting resolutions have been acted upon.

One resolution action was outstanding prior to the May 2026 Council meeting, relating to updating Council's 2024 Priorities document. This action has now been acted upon.

RESOLUTION 2026/80**Moved:** Cr David Weaver**Seconded:** Cr Nick Angelo

That Council receive and note the status of Council resolution actions, as attached to this report.

CARRIED

8 MAYORAL REPORT**8.1 MAYORAL REPORT****File Number:****Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive and note the Mayoral Report.

REPORT

Mayor Straub presented a verbal report at the meeting.

Murray River Group of Councils
05/06/2026 – Mayors and CEOs Meeting - Barmah

RESOLUTION 2026/81

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council receive and note the Mayoral Report.

CARRIED

9 COUNCILLORS' REPORT**9.1 COUNCILLORS' REPORTS**

File Number:

Author: Lisa Clue, Manager Governance

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive and note the Councillors' reports.

REPORT

Each Councillor presented a verbal report at the meeting.

Cr Weaver

Council activities	
Date	Activity
01/06/2026	Boort Tourism and Development Meeting

Cr Wilson

Section 65 Community Asset Committees:	
Inglewood Community Sports Centre - Meeting	
Other Council activities	
Date	Activity
10/06/2026	MAV Briefing regarding National General Assembly Motions - Online
15/06/2026	Inglewood Development and Tourism Committee Meeting - Online

Cr Holt

Municipal Association of Victoria	
29/05/2026 – Municipal Association of Victoria State Council Meeting - Melbourne	
Other Council activities	
Date	Activity
27/05/2026	Public Meeting re Wedderburn Detector Jamboree - Wedderburn

Cr Angelo

Council activities	
Date	Activity
06/06/2026	Tarnagulla Community Breakfast
10/06/2026	Tiny Towns Program Announcement – Newbridge
11/06/2026	Consultant meeting regarding Newbridge Urban Development Strategy
	Off-grid Emergency Communications Seminar

RESOLUTION 2026/82

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council receive and note the Councillors' reports.

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

10 DECISION REPORTS**10.1 PLANNING APPLICATION 6078 - CARRY OUT EARTHWORKS ASSOCIATED WITH IRRIGATION IN THE FARMING ZONE AND LAND SUBJECT TO INUNDATION OVERLAY**

- File Number:** FOL/19/384000
- Author:** Darcy Jackson, Statutory Planning Officer
- Authoriser:** Nicole Taylor, Manager Community Services, Acting Manager Planning
- Attachments:**
1. Decision Report
 2. Proposed Design Plan
 3. Existing Earthworks Plan
 4. Objections - redacted

RECOMMENDATION

That the Responsible Authority having considered all matters which the Planning and Environment Act, 1987, requires it to consider, decides to issue a Notice of Decision to grant a planning permit 6078 to carry out earthworks associated with irrigation (laser grading, channel and drain construction).

Endorsed Plans

1. The works must be carried out in accordance with the endorsed plans and must not be altered without the written consent of the Responsible Authority

Check Banks

2. All check banks must be constructed no higher than 300mm above natural ground level
3. Check banks on irrigation bays 1-13 must be curtailed a minimum of 20 metres from the proposed drain to preserve the flood path through the site.

Access Tracks

4. All access tracks must be no higher than 450mm above natural ground level.
5. A 12-metre-wide gap in the raised access track must be constructed at natural ground level at bays 9 and 10 as shown on the endorsed plan.

Native Vegetation

6. No native vegetation is permitted to be removed as part of this permit.

North Central Catchment Management Authority Condition

7. There must be no fill placed in the drainage depression at the northwest corner of the property. The drainage depression is land with existing elevation of 92.6 metres AHD and lower. This condition will be satisfied if proposed irrigation bays 1, 2 and 3 are shortened and the proposed track and drain are moved eastward to remove the need for earthworks in the triangle of land with elevation lower than 92.6 metres AHD.

Expiry of Permit

8. This permit will expire if one of the following circumstances apply:
- a) the development is not started within two (2) years of the date of this permit;
 - b) the development is not completed within four (4) years of the date of this permit.

The Responsible Authority may extend the periods referred to if a request is made in writing before the permit expires or;

- a) within six (6) months afterwards if the development has not started;
- b) within twelve (12) months afterwards if the development has lawfully started but not completed.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Planners and Councillors discussed this application at both the June Council Forum and Council Briefing.

BACKGROUND

The application was lodged on 11 July 2025 proposing to complete earthworks for irrigation (laser grading, channel and drain construction) in the Farming Zone and Land Subject to Inundation Overlay.

The application was lodged in response to a planning compliance notice for earthworks undertaken without a planning permit. The Statutory Planning Officer and Community Compliance Coordinator conducted a site inspection on the 21 August 2025 with the applicant and earthmoving contractor in attendance. It was determined at this meeting that the earthworks which had already been undertaken would have required planning permission.

The application was advertised to surrounding landowners; with 2 objections received. The objections raised issues around excess irrigation water from land to the south draining to the site, banks redirecting floodwater, water pooling, and salinity issues.

In response to the objections raised, the applicant provided a document addressing some of the concerns and attempting to provide justification for the works which were undertaken. This document was provided to objectors with some further comments received which are included in the objections at Attachment 4.

The application was referred externally to North Central Catchment Management Authority (section 55) and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (section 52). The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action was notified, as part of the land contains a mapped wetland, however confirmation from Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action confirmed that the mapped wetland has been subject to significant work and cropping.

North Central Catchment Management Authority provided conditional consent to a permit being granted and were involved in the design of the irrigation, and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action had no objection or conditions.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Under the Planning and Environment Act 1987 (the Act) the Minister of Planning delegates a municipal council power to become the planning authority for any planning scheme in force in its municipal district.

A municipal council is obligated to enforce and administer the relevant Planning Scheme and must use the scheme to determine applications. The Loddon Planning Scheme is the relevant Planning Scheme for Council. An application is referred to Council for determination, which:

- receive one or more objections, and/or
- are to be recommended for refusal by the Planning Officer.

Pursuant to Section 52 of the Planning and Environment Act 1987, notices were sent to owners and occupiers of adjoining land, opposite and surrounding the site. Council has received four objections as the result of the public notification process and the Officers Recommendation is to refuse the application as such; the matter is being brought to Council for determination. A decision report detailing this application has been prepared and can be found in Attachment 1.

COST/BENEFITS

There are various costs associated with having a delegated Planning Officer consider an application, provide a recommendation and the time for the Councillors to consider this recommendation.

The benefits associated with this report is to provide the Council the opportunity to fulfil its requirement under law and provide the community with a statutory service that delivers well managed and appropriate development.

RISK ANALYSIS

The risks of Council not fulfilling its statutory obligation under the Act include:

- inappropriate use and development which could endanger life and property
- Council's reputation as a Responsible Authority
- breaches of the Planning & Environment Act 1987 requiring compliance action.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Refer to the decision report for further detail on the application.

RESOLUTION 2026/83

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That the Responsible Authority having considered all matters which the Planning and Environment Act, 1987, requires it to consider, decides to issue a Notice of Decision to grant a planning permit 6078 to carry out earthworks associated with irrigation (laser grading, channel and drain construction).

Endorsed Plans

1. The works must be carried out in accordance with the endorsed plans and must not be altered without the written consent of the Responsible Authority

Check Banks

2. All check banks must be constructed no higher than 300mm above natural ground level
3. Check banks on irrigation bays 1-13 must be curtailed a minimum of 20 metres from the proposed drain to preserve the flood path through the site.

Access Tracks

4. All access tracks must be no higher than 450mm above natural ground level.
5. A 12-metre-wide gap in the raised access track must be constructed at natural ground level at bays 9 and 10 as shown on the endorsed plan.

Native Vegetation

6. No native vegetation is permitted to be removed as part of this permit.

North Central Catchment Management Authority Condition

7. There must be no fill placed in the drainage depression at the northwest corner of the property. The drainage depression is land with existing elevation of 92.6 metres AHD and lower. This condition will be satisfied if proposed irrigation bays 1, 2 and 3 are shortened and the proposed track and drain are moved eastward to remove the need for earthworks in the triangle of land with elevation lower than 92.6 metres AHD.

Expiry of Permit

8. This permit will expire if one of the following circumstances apply:
 - a) the development is not started within two (2) years of the date of this permit;
 - b) the development is not completed within four (4) years of the date of this permit.

The Responsible Authority may extend the periods referred to if a request is made in writing before the permit expires or;

- a) within six (6) months afterwards if the development has not started;
- b) within twelve (12) months afterwards if the development has lawfully started but not completed.

CARRIED

10.2 ADOPTION OF THE 2026/27 ANNUAL BUDGET, FEES AND CHARGES SCHEDULE, AND ANNUAL ACTION PLAN

File Number:

Author: **Natalie Martin, Manager Financial Services**

Authoriser: **Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate**

Attachments: **1. 2026/27 Annual Budget**
2. 2026/27 Fees and Charges Schedule
3. 2026/27 Annual Action Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. adopts the 2026/27 Annual Budget, comprising the 2026/27 financial year plus the subsequent three financial years 2027/28 to 2029/30, pursuant to section 94 and 96 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, and acknowledges the 2026/27 Capital Works Program as detailed in section 4.5.2 of the 2026/27 Budget;
2. declares the Rates and Charges in accordance with section 4.1.1 of the 2026/27 Annual Budget as required under section 94(2)(i) of the *Local Government Act 2020* and section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*;
3. adopts the 2026/27 Fees and Charges Schedule;
4. authorises either the Director Corporate or Chief Executive Officer to approve changes to Council's 2026/27 Fees and Charges Schedule where statutory fees and charges are altered by external parties;
5. acknowledges the community's contribution to the Budget consultation process and thanks them for their contribution;
6. adopts the 2026/27 Annual Action Plan;
7. notes the ongoing annual budget deficit and the need to improve Council's long-term financial sustainability; and as such directs the Chief Executive Officer to prepare and present a mid-year financial sustainability report identifying recurrent savings opportunities and proposed savings targets to address the annual deficit and strengthen Council's underlying financial position.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council have considered a number of key drafting milestones across the development of the 2026/27 Budget (the Budget), the Fees and Charges Schedule (the Schedule), as well as the Capital Program and the Annual Action Plan (the Plan):

- **January 2026:** Budget workshop
- **March 2026:** Budget Management and Principles Policy; Financial Reserves Policy Review
- **April 2026:** Outcomes of the Budget Engagement Survey; Draft 2026/27 Fees and Charges Schedule and subsequent release of draft schedule for public feedback; Options for Waste Service Charges

- **May 2026:** Overview of 2026/27 Property Valuations; Draft 2026/27 Budget Overview; Draft 2026/27 Capital Program; Waste Service Charge Finalisation; Draft 2026/27 Annual Action Plan
- **June 2026:** Final review of Draft 2026/27 Annual Budget, Capital Program, Annual Action Plan, and Fees and Charges Schedule

BACKGROUND

The Budget has been developed in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2020* and forms part of Council's integrated planning and reporting framework. It sets out the resources required to deliver Council services, major initiatives and capital works for 2026/27, together with the subsequent three financial years and has been prepared alongside the proposed Capital Program, Annual Action Plan, and Fees and Charges Schedule to support implementation of the Council Plan 2025-2029.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Annual Budget including Capital Works and Fees and Charges Schedule

The Budget has been prepared in line with Council's Budget Management and Principles Policy and the Victorian Government's rate cap system. It seeks to maintain core services, support renewal of community assets and respond to ongoing cost pressures within a constrained financial environment. The Budget maintains a positive cash position of \$28.333 million, continues the Community Planning Program of \$0.75 million, includes no new borrowings and continues the use of discretionary reserves as revised by Council in March 2026.

Under the Victorian Government's rate cap, the total increase in rate revenue that Council may raise from general rates and municipal charges is capped at 2.75% for 2026/27, as set by the Minister for Local Government. Under the rate cap system, it is recognised that Loddon Shire Council continues to have the lowest average rates per annum of all 79 councils in Victoria.

Council also continues to apply two differential rates in accordance with its Revenue and Rating Plan, with rateable rural properties receiving a 12% discount on the general rate. For 2026/27, the rates in the dollar to be applied to the Capital Improved Value (CIV) of the rateable property are:

- General Properties \$ 0.00185075
- Rural Properties \$ 0.00162866

The 2026/27 kerbside garbage and recycling charge, to which rate capping does not apply, will increase by 15% consistent with Council's May 2026 resolution supporting cost-neutral service delivery. For a standard residential kerbside service (garbage and recycling), this represents an increase of \$88 per annum compared to 2025/26, or \$1.69 per week.

Waste service charge	2025/26	2026/27	Increase from previous year	Equivalent weekly increase
Garbage collection (140 litre)	\$425	\$489	\$64	\$1.23
Kerbside recycling (240 litre)	\$160	\$184	\$24	\$0.46
Commercial garbage collection (240 litre)	\$578	\$665	\$87	\$1.67

Discretionary fees and charges have generally increased by a minimum of 3%, with some variations applied to reflect service-specific pricing considerations and cost recovery principles. In setting these fees and charges, Council refers to its Revenue and Rating Plan and takes into account a number of factors including the latest Consumer Price Index, the cost to deliver services, ideal fee structures, and community capacity to pay.

The Budget forecasts an operating deficit of \$6.224 million, primarily reflecting cost pressures and revenue constraints under rate capping, and non-cash depreciation. Total rates and charges are budgeted at \$14.383 million, including \$2.659 million in waste service charges.

The Budget has been prepared in line with the State Government's rate capping framework and is intended to maintain core services and support renewal of community assets within a constrained financial environment.

It utilises conservative assumptions in accordance with Council's Budget Management and Principles Policy, assumes full receipt of Financial Assistance Grants in 2026/27 (\$12.457 million) and notes ongoing inflationary impacts across key expenditure areas such as fuel, information technology, insurance, contracts and materials. While savings have been identified in some areas, continued volatility in input costs remains a key risk for both operating performance and capital delivery.

Base budget reviews have been undertaken to further improve cost allocation and budget accuracy. Continued monitoring through procurement, contract management and budget governance processes will be required during 2026/27 in response to pricing pressures across construction, technology, and service delivery.

Key operating budget settings include:

- a 15% increase in the kerbside collection waste charge to support cost-neutral service delivery;
- employee costs reflecting the recently negotiated Enterprise Agreement, allowing for a 3% increase, in addition to programmed banding increments. This is offset in part by lower staffing numbers in 2026/27 (budgeted FTE from 142.38 to 137.72); and
- decreased investment income across the forward estimates as cash balances reduce.

Compared with 2025/26, key movements include:

- operating grants increasing by \$5.898 million (75.29%), largely due to the assumed timing of Financial Assistance Grants being received in-year (partly offset by completion of one-off project grants);
- capital grants decreasing by \$0.658 million (13.27%) reflecting completion of projects supported by capital grants in 2025/26; and
- total expenditure decreasing, with employee costs down \$0.669 million (4.35%) and materials and services down \$1.088 million (7.58%).

The proposed 2026/27 capital program of \$10.215 million has been developed with regard to strategic priorities, available funding, delivery capacity and asset management plans, with a strong focus on renewal of existing infrastructure, particularly the road network. A total of \$6.128 million has been allocated to Council's infrastructure program, supported by \$3.640 million in Roads to Recovery funding.

Overall, the 2026/27 Budget seeks to balance affordability with service continuity and ongoing investment in community assets. However, Loddon Shire Council currently remains in a deficit operating position which is unsustainable. In line with a programmed annual review of Council's long term Financial Plan, budget settings will require further attention during the year not just in response to changing economic factors and grant program adjustments, but to the wider ongoing deficit.

As such, this report recommends that in conjunction with the Financial Plan review due to Council in October, that a mid-year financial sustainability report be prepared which identifies recurrent savings opportunities and proposed savings targets to address the annual deficit and strengthen Council's underlying financial position.

Integrated Strategic Planning and the Annual Action Plan

For 2026/27, the Annual Budget and related schedules are presented in conjunction with the Annual Action Plan. These have been developed together as an integrated suite of documents that collectively support delivery of the Council Plan 2025–2029.

The service areas, major initiatives, other initiatives and performance indicators contained within the Budget are directly informed by, and aligned to, the proposed actions contained within the Annual Action Plan. This alignment ensures that Council's financial resources, service delivery activities and performance monitoring framework are focused on achieving the strategic objectives adopted by Council across the five strategic directions of Thriving, Welcome, Live, Work and Experience.

The services as proposed to be funded through the Budget provide the operational capability required to deliver the proposed actions identified in the Annual Action Plan. For example, Community Wellbeing services support actions relating to volunteer development, recreation, community health and emergency management; Operations services support infrastructure delivery, waste management reform, flood mitigation and asset management initiatives; Executive Services support economic development, tourism and business growth actions; and Corporate Services support governance, customer experience, workforce capability and community engagement improvements.

The major and other initiatives identified within each service area reflect key actions from the Annual Action Plan, while the service performance indicators provide measurable outcomes against which Council can monitor progress and report achievements throughout the year.

Service Performance indicators are reported on in Council's Annual Performance Statements at the end of the financial year. The Budget contains targets against these indicators with a number of these mandated by the State Government and others selected in line with the Council Plan strategic objectives, from a range of potential indicators covered by the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework which is also reported on annually.

Together, these documents establish a clear line of sight between Council Plan objectives, annual actions, service delivery, resource allocation and performance reporting, providing a transparent framework for implementation and accountability during 2026/27.

COST/BENEFITS

The draft operating budget works to support financial sustainability by undertaking resets on base budgeting, continuing to strengthen accountability and targeting efficiencies while maintaining core services within a rate-capped revenue base.

The proposed capital program supports renewal of Council's core assets and delivery of targeted community infrastructure, contributing to service continuity, and improved safety and accessibility.

Costs are reflected within the proposed operating and capital budgets using existing resourcing, with any ongoing operational impacts considered through project and asset lifecycles.

RISK ANALYSIS

The budget has been prepared using the Local Government Best Practice Guide Model Budget 2026-27, minimising any risk of a non-compliant Budget.

Key risks identified include continued operating deficits with limited ability to drive revenue within the rate-cap environment, escalating input costs (including energy, materials, insurance, contractor rates, information technology and fuel), and the timing and accounting treatment of grant income.

On the capital side, delivery risks remain if project readiness changes or if internal capacity, procurement lead times or contractor availability affect timing of that delivery.

Federal Government-driven changes to in-year and next year's Roads to Recovery funding also present cash flow and delivery risks for road projects which may require reprioritisation within changed funding envelopes. This risk is managed through a number of initiatives including ongoing expenditure monitoring, conservative indexation and contract management, procurement initiatives, service reviews, and active capital program governance activities such as regular forecasting, realistic phasing and application of the Project Management Framework. Funding advice from other levels of government is closely monitored to maintain a program that remains aligned with Council priorities and is achievable within resourcing constraints.

Fuel supply and costs remain a volatile risk in response to current global conditions. This outlook will continue to be monitored in relation to contracts and procurement, with indexation and contract management settings adjusted where appropriate and in accordance with changes to the legislative context around cost recovery by suppliers.

All of these factors relate directly to one of Council's current Strategic Risks regarding financial sustainability:

Limited ability to impact and diversify Council's revenue base, combined with rising expenses, leads to long-term financial unsustainability and reduced ability to deliver the Council Plan.

This risk currently remains at a 'very high' risk level. The proposed review and preparation in the following six months of Council's long term Financial Plan, and a mid-year financial sustainability report will seek to identify further control mechanisms to further de-escalate the likelihood and consequences in relation to risks associated with financial unsustainability.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

All components of the Budget, Capital Program, Schedules and Action Plan have received months of internal consultation within the organisation at Management Executive and Loddon Leaders levels.

Community input has been gathered through the Budget Engagement Survey, with additional consultation undertaken across the proposed 2026/27 fees and charges. Feedback from the Survey in relation to community priorities has been considered and the proposed Budget is reflective of the community sentiment shared in this valuable feedback.

Other qualitative feedback received through these processes is being considered for service delivery enhancements, and capital works delivery and phasing within existing funding envelopes.

The Audit and Risk Committee has been consulted on the draft Budget at a dedicated meeting held on 28 May 2026 where members were generally supportive of the Draft 2026/27 Annual Budget and Draft 2026/27 Fees and Charges as presented.

Councillors have also been provided opportunities as outlined earlier in the report to consider the draft operating and capital positions and programs, and to provide feedback ahead of the Budget being finalised and prepared for consideration of adoption.

Gender Impact Assessment

A gender impact assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. The assessment considered whether the proposed 2026/27 Budget, Fees and Charges Schedule and Annual Action Plan are likely to have any direct and significant impacts on people of different genders and, where relevant, whether any disproportionate impacts may arise. On this basis, the assessment did not identify any material adverse gendered impacts that would prevent the matters proceeding as recommended.

RESOLUTION 2026/84

Moved: Cr Gavan Holt

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council:

1. adopts the 2026/27 Annual Budget, comprising the 2026/27 financial year plus the subsequent three financial years 2027/28 to 2029/30, pursuant to section 94 and 96 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, and acknowledges the 2026/27 Capital Works Program as detailed in section 4.5.2 of the 2026/27 Budget;
2. declares the Rates and Charges in accordance with section 4.1.1 of the 2026/27 Annual Budget as required under section 94(2)(i) of the *Local Government Act 2020* and section 161(2) of the *Local Government Act 1989*;
3. adopts the 2026/27 Fees and Charges Schedule;
4. authorises either the Director Corporate or Chief Executive Officer to approve changes to Council's 2026/27 Fees and Charges Schedule where statutory fees and charges are altered by external parties;
5. acknowledges the community's contribution to the Budget consultation process and thanks them for their contribution;
6. adopts the 2026/27 Annual Action Plan;
7. notes the ongoing annual budget deficit and the need to improve Council's long-term financial sustainability; and as such directs the Chief Executive Officer to prepare and present a mid-year financial sustainability report identifying recurrent savings opportunities and proposed savings targets to address the annual deficit and strengthen Council's underlying financial position.

CARRIED

10.3 BRIDGEWATER AND INGLEWOOD DRAFT STRUCTURE PLANS FOR COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

File Number:

Author: Carolyn Stephenson, Senior Strategic Planner

Authoriser: Nicole Taylor, Manager Community Services, Acting Manager Planning

Attachments:

1. Draft Bridgewater Structure Plan
2. Draft Inglewood Structure Plan

RECOMMENDATION

That Council undertakes community consultation on the draft Bridgewater and Inglewood Structure Plans for a period of one month commencing 17 June 2026.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council has been briefed on the background to the draft structure plans and the preliminary recommendations at the February 2026 forum. At that time, CFA feedback had not been received.

BACKGROUND

The Department of Transport and Planning have funded the development of a structure plan for the towns of Bridgewater and Inglewood. The project commenced in July 2025 and Plan2Place, a strategic planning consultancy, have been engaged to complete this project.

Background reports have been prepared for each town, providing technical and specialist information of the opportunities and challenges that will influence how future growth and development are managed. Community consultation and meetings with relevant agencies have also been undertaken. Key findings from this research are included in the structure plan reports and forms the basis of the draft structure plans prepared for each town.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The structure plans aim to support population and economic growth in Bridgewater and Inglewood, improve resilience to bushfire and flood risks, and protect and enhance the character, amenity and liveability of each town. The structure plans define the form, function, size and intended layout of land uses of a town. The structure plans will primarily be implemented through the planning scheme with the application of zones and overlays. The structure plan may also identify infrastructure projects that are required to support the intended future of the towns.

These structure plans have been developed following extensive research into population change, economic development, urban design, heritage, traffic and transport, environmental values and risks, and infrastructure requirements. The process has included consultation with the community and relevant agencies, and the final plans are aligned with State planning policy.

The Bridgewater Structure Plan will provide for at least 120 additional homes in the new residential areas. Future growth is directed away from flood prone land to reduce community risk, with new residential land primarily located to the east of the existing urban area. Economic growth will be supported through industrial activity and tourism, with new retail uses encouraged in Main Street. A small amount of new industrial land will be provided to support local employment and business opportunities. Pedestrian activity will be facilitated through street tree planting and improvements to Main Street. Visual and pedestrian connections to the river will be improved to highlight this valuable asset, enhance town amenity and encourage passing traffic to stop.

It is proposed that the residential areas be rezoned Neighbourhood Residential Zone, from the current Township Zone. This will facilitate residential development and protect urban amenity. A small extension to the Low Density Residential Zone is proposed at the southern end of Arnold Road to reflect existing land use. The Township Zone land on the north side of the railway line on the Bridgewater Serpentine Road is recommended to be rezoned Farming Zone to reflect existing land use and is not considered suitable or required for urban development at this time. Land along Main Street will be rezoned Commercial Zone to facilitate retail use and development.

The Inglewood Structure Plan will provide for at least 100 additional homes in the new residential areas, with growth being directed to the east and south east of town away from the greatest bushfire risk. The CFA have provided strong direction that development must be minimised to the north and west of town to reduce risk to life and property from bushfire. There is also some capacity for growth within the existing residential area and beyond town in the rural residential areas.

As with Bridgewater, it is proposed that land intended for residential use be rezoned to a residential zone, as opposed to the current Township Zone. It is recommended that the Neighbourhood Residential Zone be used for those areas where growth and standard residential density is proposed. This includes the existing Township zoned land through much of the town, plus three new areas, on Station Street and Borung Street. Land on the north, north west, and west fringe of town is proposed to be rezoned Low Density Residential and Rural Living to recognise the residential function of the land but minimise development density in response to the bushfire risk assessment. It is also proposed to rezone the industrial estate to Low Density Residential as the site has not been successful as an industrial location.

The Inglewood Structure plan also aims to deliver a more diverse visitor economy and vibrant main street. It is recommended that rezoning the town centre from Township Zone to Commercial 1 Zone will provide clearer direction on the role and function of the centre as the commercial and civic heart of the town, while also reducing the need for planning permits for compatible uses. The structure plan supports the implementation of the Inglewood Streetscape Plans, as a way to enhance the economy and liveability of the town.

It is proposed that the draft structure plans be made available for community feedback throughout June and July. Following this consultation period, the plans will be finalised and presented at a future Council meeting for further consideration. Once the structure plans are adopted by Council, preparation of a planning scheme amendment to change zones and overlays to reflect the structure plan will commence.

COST/BENEFITS

This project is primarily being funded by the Department of Transport and Planning. Council staff are assisting in the delivery of the project.

The benefit of the project is a clear plan for the appropriate growth and development of these communities.

RISK ANALYSIS

The project is based on solid research and rigorous community engagement and is being conducted by an experienced consultant in conjunction with Council staff. This is considered to maximise the potential that the structure plans will be supported by Council, the majority of the community and government agencies.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

This project includes community consultation. The first round of community consultation involved a community drop in session in each of the towns, targeted discussions with key community groups, a survey and online information. That consultation sought to obtain information about what the community value about their towns, what they see as the challenges, what they would like to see changed and what they would like to see their towns be in the future. This information supported the development of the draft structure plans.

Community consultation about the draft plans will involve a community drop in session in each town, discussions with key groups and agencies, and the opportunity to view and provide feedback on the plans via Connect@Loddon.

RESOLUTION 2026/85

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson

Seconded: Cr Gavan Holt

That Council undertakes community consultation on the draft Bridgewater and Inglewood Structure Plans for a period of one month commencing 17 June 2026.

CARRIED

10.4 ADOPTION OF MEDIA AND SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY V3

File Number:**Author:** Chalpat Sonti, Media and Communications Coordinator**Authoriser:** David Stretch, Manager Tourism and Economic Development**Attachments:** 1. Media and Social Media Policy v3

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopts the Media and Social Media Policy V3

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

This is the third version of the Media and Social Media Policy. The previous version was adopted by Council on 24 August 2021.

The draft documents were discussed at the Council Forum on 12 May 2026.

BACKGROUND

The Media and Social Media Policy outlines protocols for managing communication between Council, the media and community.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Content which more appropriately belongs in internal procedures has been removed from this Policy. The only procedural items that remain in this Policy are there for transparency to explain to the public why something may or may not happen.

Among the changes are that the key themes have been expanded on, definitions of media have been made clearer, a section has been added as to when Council might not release information (again for transparency) and there is now more clarity on who might speak to the media and when.

It also includes a section on why Council may moderate its social media pages. There has also been an expansion of, and more clarity around, definitions.

COST/BENEFITS

There are no direct costs associated with considering adoption of this Policy. There are benefits of further streamlining processes and providing robust guidelines to staff and the public which ensures compliance for Council.

RISK ANALYSIS

There is no change in risk associated with the adoption of the new policy. It is a required update of an existing policy.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The draft Policy has been reviewed by Councillors and Council officers.

The Policy will have a review timeline of four years.

RESOLUTION 2026/86

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council defers this report on the premise that it needs more work and needs to come back to Councillors at a Council Forum prior to being resubmitted to Council for adoption.

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

10.5 LODDON VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

File Number:

Author: David Stretch, Manager Tourism and Economic Development

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

1. Establishes a Visitor Information Centre at 25 Main Street, Bridgewater;
2. Approves the transfer of \$300,000 from the Land & Buildings Reserve to fund capital renewal and improvement works on the council owned building located at 25 Main Street, Bridgewater; and,
3. Receives an evaluation of the Visitor Information Centre performance after 3 years of operation to confirm ongoing operation or cessation of the service.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

February 2025

Council adopted the Loddon Shire Visitor Economy Strategy (2025-2030) which recommended the adoption and delivery of actions from the 2023 Loddon Shire Visitor Servicing Review, and specifically, the exploration of a relocation of the Visitor Centre and an expanded network of visitor information venues across the Shire.

June 2025

Council was presented with an Information Report (25 MAIN STREET BRIDGEWATER) which discussed the potential for a site in Bridgewater to host a Visitor Information Centre.

The Report Conclusion stated 'Council officers will continue to gather intelligence, including further benchmarking on visitor footfall and retail sales at comparable sites, to improve clarity and certainty in relation to operational feasibility.'

May 2026

The Tourism and Economic Development department presented the Visitor Information Centre Feasibility report to May Council Forum meeting, containing additional research funded by operational budget, from Bendigo-based business and tourism consultancy Tough Cookie Marketing.

June 2026

The Tourism and Economic Development department presented the Visitor Information Centre Feasibility report to June Council Forum meeting, with additional information to assist Councillors; including but not limited to contemporary visitor servicing research and data, financial projections and also caveats related to any potential Council investment in the proposed site and operations.

BACKGROUND

Tourism is an important economic driver for the Loddon Shire.

- In 2019, the LSC Region yielded approximately \$21 million in visitor expenditure, generated through 208,000 visitors, consisting of 149,000 overnight visitors (ave. 2 night stay) and 144,000 day trip visitors.
- The average spend per day trip visitor was \$70, with overnight visitors yielding an average of \$172.
- The majority of domestic overnight visitors to the region are reportedly from intrastate, with a very small portion from interstate origins.
- Visitors to the region are typically over the age of 55 and are visiting for holiday reasons.
- In 2019, there were 76 tourism businesses, with the majority of micro businesses with 4 employees or less.
- As at 2023, the LSC Region supported 98 tourism related jobs.

In 2025, visitor expenditure (direct and value-add) in accommodation and food services, transport, retail, agriculture, arts and recreation services contributed \$38 million to the Loddon Shire economy. (Source REMPLAN - ABS 2025 Estimated Resident Population, ABS 2024 / 2025 Tourism Satellite Account)

The key finding of the Loddon Shire's Visitor Servicing Review (Urban Enterprise - August 2023) was that Loddon's Visitor Information Centre in Wedderburn was not generating suitable return on investment, in comparison to similar centres in similar LGAs.

The Loddon Shire's Visitor Servicing Review (Urban Enterprise - August 2023) recommended that Loddon's Visitor Information Centre be relocated to a 'gateway town' such as Bridgewater on Loddon, where the vast majority of visitors entered the Loddon Shire.

Subsequent research within project and strategy work, as well as destination management planning, supported and recommended the development of an accredited visitor centre in Bridgewater that was:

- Located on the main street (Calder Highway)
- Included a unique retail offering that would further incentivise 'stopping' and 'footfall'.

The Visitor Information Centre Feasibility Project Report (2026) advanced the thinking (concept development) and feasibility (business case) for a Visitor Information Centre in Bridgewater and the solution for the continuation of visitor services provision in Wedderburn, as part of a network of face-to-face tourism and visitor services across the Loddon Shire.

Project objectives were to design a feasible business model for the concept that is:

- Financially sustainable and deliverable
- Generates industry and visitor benefit
- Responds to modern visitor servicing needs
- Contributes to Loddon Shire's attractiveness and liveability
- Generates civic pride for residents

Further project principles included ensuring the proposed solution generated:

- No net detriment to Wedderburn Community House
- No net detriment to Wedderburn Tourism Inc.
- No additional council staff resourcing
- A cost-neutral (or profit-making) operational model

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The Loddon Visitor Information Centre Feasibility Report identifies a feasible PPP operational concept and in an accredited visitor centre at 25 Main Street, Bridgewater, as well as a feasible community-led solution supported by the Wedderburn Community House at the Wedderburn Community Centre.

Bridgewater occupies a strategically significant position within the Shire's visitor economy. As a primary gateway into the Loddon Valley, it receives materially higher volumes of passing traffic, in comparison to all other townships.

Research and investigation from Urban Enterprise (Loddon Visitor Servicing Review 2023) recommended the relocation of Loddon Shire's accredited Visitor information Centre from Wedderburn to Bridgewater.

Tough Cookie Marketing's Visitor Information Centre Feasibility Report (2026) indicates the opportunity in Bridgewater is credible, and that an opportunity to see more localised destination experiences supported by a non-accredited centre in Wedderburn is also viable.

The report states:

'a future-focused "public - private - producer" partnership model delivers benefits to all stakeholders, allows diverse funding streams and investment, and aligns with global travel trends and core visitor needs and expectations.

With disciplined, destination-authentic activation delivery, commercially clear consignment arrangements, and structured producer participation, including regional winemakers, it presents a strong feasibility profile, grounded by co-partner expertise and enthusiasm, realistic capacity expectations and new labour and volunteer engagement models, and a sensible staged progression.

Wedderburn's VIC remains an important asset for the town and the broader Shire. While the current model faces challenges, there is a clear opportunity to evolve the centre into a more sustainable, integrated and locally distinctive visitor hub.

Wedderburn Enhancement

The intention is to enhance the current Visitor Information Centre space with signage, retail merchandising and messaging that focuses on Wedderburn and district experiences including: gold prospecting and bird-watching - and associated events, local camping and accommodation, tours and experiences.

Wedderburn tourism and community stakeholders have expressed interest in leading the management of the space into the future.

The Wedderburn Visitor Information Centre would become a satellite centre, closely connected and supported by the accredited centre in Bridgewater and a key component of Loddon's visitor servicing and 'Welcome Shop' network.

Bridgewater Development

The intention is to undertake a modest renewal of the existing council owned building and land at 25 Main Street Bridgewater to create an accredited visitor information centre and retail space, showcasing and selling product from Loddon Shire's food, beverage and creative industries.

Council staff are poised to execute partnership agreements with local businesses who have indicated interest in participation.

Establishing a modest Visitor Information Centre at Bridgewater would be subject to the following conditions:

- a. All Council and third-party roles, responsibilities and deliverables are formalised through appropriate Memoranda of Understanding, in line with feasibility and financial projections contained in the Loddon Visitor Information Centre Feasibility report.
- b. Council maintains Victorian Tourism Industry Council (VTIC) accreditation for the Bridgewater Visitor Information Centre.
- c. Council officers will report on the Bridgewater Visitor Information Centre, including visitor numbers and demographics, financial performance, net cost to Council and overall viability.
- d. The operations, financial position and viability of the Wedderburn Community House site (non-VTIC accredited and community-led) will be monitored and reported to Council.
- e. A comprehensive review of the Bridgewater Visitor Information Centre and the Wedderburn Community Centre's visitor servicing operations, financial position and viability is undertaken after three years of operation.
- f. The three-year review is independently verified and presented to Council.
- g. Council reserves its right to withdraw funding and support for the Bridgewater Visitor Information Centre at the conclusion of the initial three-year operational period, with this condition reflected in all associated agreements.
- h. Council considers opportunities to support external funding applications for Stage 2 development of the Bridgewater site.
- i. Initial capital works are designed to enhance the long-term value and adaptability of the site, including its potential for alternative use or sale should the facility be deemed unviable after the initial 3-year operational term.

COST/BENEFITS

The Loddon Visitor Information Centre Feasibility report identifies cost generation and potential benefits for the proposed concepts.

Additionally, council officers have prepared a cost estimate for internal and external works to prepare the building and property at 25 Main Street Bridgewater, for operational readiness.

The value of Visitor Servicing in the Loddon Shire and in contemporary tourism generally, is understood.

In 2019, the LSC Region yielded approximately \$21 million in visitor expenditure, generated through 208,000 visitors, consisting of 149,000 overnight visitors (ave. 2 night stay) and 144,000 day trip visitors.

Visitors to the region are typically over the age of 55 and are visiting for holiday reasons. (Loddon Shire Local Area Action Plan, Tourism Research Australia, The Tourism Collective 2024)

Older generations remain a major source of travel spending. Providers can look for ways to keep these travellers coming back by meeting their unique needs. While older travellers are growing more comfortable with technology, they continue to favour human interaction. Stakeholders can cater to this preference by maintaining in-person visitor centres and other touchpoints that emphasize a human touch. (State of Tourism and Hospitality, McKinsey 2024)

Despite the rapid growth of digital channels in travel planning, Australian research consistently shows that face-to-face visitor servicing remains essential to achieving economic outcomes for regional destinations.

Evidence demonstrates that while digital platforms drive awareness and pre-trip planning, in-person engagement - particularly through Visitor Information Centres - plays a critical role in influencing visitor behaviour on the ground, including increasing length of stay, expenditure and participation in local experiences.

A significant proportion of visitors continue to actively seek personalised advice, valuing trusted, locally informed guidance that validates and enhances information sourced online.

Contemporary policy and local feasibility work reinforce that digital technology has not replaced face-to-face servicing, but instead heightened expectations for tailored, high-quality interactions across multiple touchpoints.

The emerging best-practice model is therefore hybrid—combining digital accessibility with human interaction—positioning face-to-face visitor servicing as a key driver of conversion, dispersal and regional yield rather than simply an information service. (Growing Victorian Tourism, Victorian Government 2023)

190, 000 visitors were surveyed in Tasmania to understand the role of Visitor Information Centres in supporting visitor confidence, regional dispersal and local spend. 58% of visitors reported they would spend more in the region following engagement with a Visitor Information Centre.

61% of visitors sought personalised face-to-face advice during their travels. Visitor Information Centres continue to strongly connect with older, high-value traveller segments seeking trusted local knowledge and support. (TVIN Visitor Information Centre Survey 2026)

RISK ANALYSIS

The Loddon Visitor Information Centre Feasibility report details project risks and mitigation strategies.

The Project Management Plan for the Visitor Information Centre 'Stage 1' development will include mitigation strategies including but not limited to:

- **Thorough Planning:** A detailed plan outlining the move, communication strategy, and contingency plans for potential issues.
- **Strong Marketing:** Promoting the new location and highlighting the benefits of the move, such as increased accessibility or improved amenities.
- **Collaboration with Local Businesses and Organisations:** Working with local businesses to ensure the move benefits them and the overall tourism industry.
- **Open Communication:** Keeping visitors, local businesses, and the community informed about the move and its rationale.
- **Flexibility and Contingency Planning:** Developing strategies for addressing unexpected challenges or issues that may arise during the development works and relocation.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Extensive community and stakeholder consultation was undertaken during 2025 and 2026, building up the community consultation inherent to previous related project work including the Visitor Servicing Review (2023) and Visitor Economy Strategy (2025).

Extensive stakeholder and community consultation has been undertaken throughout planning and development phases of the Visitor Information Centre Feasibility report project.

Identified stakeholders engaged include:

- Wedderburn Community Centre
- Wedderburn Community House
- Wedderburn Tourism
- Bridgewater on Loddon Development
- Local Tourism Operators

- Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions – Tourism and Events
- Loddon Shire Tourism, Planning, Community, Assets and Infrastructure officers
- Destination Greater Bendigo Loddon
- Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation
- Wedderburn Development Association

In November 2025 project information and a community survey was published and promoted on Council's connect@loddon portal on the Loddon Shire website.

RESOLUTION 2026/87

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council

1. Establishes a Visitor Information Centre at 25 Main Street, Bridgewater;
2. Approves the transfer of \$300,000 from the Land & Buildings Reserve to fund capital renewal and improvement works on the council owned building located at 25 Main Street, Bridgewater; and,
3. Receives an evaluation of the Visitor Information Centre performance after 3 years of operation to confirm ongoing operation or cessation of the service.

CARRIED

11 INFORMATION REPORTS**11.1 2026 LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS**

File Number:

Author: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

- Attachments:
1. **2026 Loddon Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey Results Report**
 2. **2026 Loddon Shire Council Community Satisfaction Survey - Tailored Questions Results Report**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council note Loddon Shire Council's results from the 2026 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Councillors were briefed by JWS Research on the results of the 2026 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey at the June 2026 Council Forum.

BACKGROUND

The Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey (CSS) is conducted each year to gather data on how satisfied residents are with Council's resources, facilities and services. The results provide data for the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF) and provide an opportunity to consider improvements that would be valued by residents and ratepayers. Collection of the data is mandated as part of Council's compliance obligations under the LGPRF.

Survey fieldwork for the CSS was conducted over three waves from 13 August 2025 to 15 March 2026 and represents the opinions of 500 residents (7.9% of total Loddon Shire residents aged over 18) – 57% of which had contact with Council in the last 12 months. The sample of residents is matched as closely as possible to Loddon community demographics as per census data, noting that close to 80% of survey respondents are aged over 50:

Age group	Percentage of respondents (%)
65 or over	53
50-54	26
35-49	13
18-34	8

Ward Grouping	Number of Respondents
Boort	94
Inglewood	163
Tarnagulla	9
Terrick	105
Wedderburn	129

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The overall performance index score for Loddon Shire Council is 63, up from 58 in 2025 and its lowest ever score of 53 in 2024. Council's overall performance has rated 6 points above the State-wide average and 3 points above the Small Rural group average (index scores of 57 and 60 respectively). This is a statistically significant improvement result and is a positive for Loddon Shire Council and its community.

Council has either performed in line with or significantly higher than the Small Rural group and State-wide averages on all service areas evaluated, including Value for Money in Services and Infrastructure. Similar to 2025 results, Council maintains its top three performing areas in the 2026 results:

- Appearance of public areas (index score of 76)
- Waste management (index score of 75)
- Recreational facilities (index score of 75)

Customer Service has seen a significant jump up to a score of 73 (66 in 2025 results) to be among Loddon's highest rating performance areas.

This is another positive result, with Council performing statistically higher than the Small Rural group and State-wide averages for Overall Performance, Value for Money, Overall Council Direction, Appearance of Public Areas, Lobbying, Consultation and Engagement, Community Decisions, Sealed Local Roads, Waste Management and Recreational Facilities.

Loddon's lowest performing areas from the 2026 survey remain consistent with previous years:

- Unsealed Roads (index score of 46)
- Planning and building permits (index score of 47)
- Sealed Local Roads (index score of 51)

However, all low-end scores have improved from 2025, with both sealed and unsealed roads improving by a statistically significant 10 points from the 2025 results.

Road Management

As part of the surveying, Loddon also undertakes tailored questions (in addition to the mandatory questions required under legislated frameworks) to better understand areas with Loddon-specific data. One of the key areas this is done for is road management. Obtaining location specific information allows the organisation to directly respond to areas that the community finds problematic.

A factor that Loddon continues to contend with in its satisfaction scoring against sealed roads in particular are community perceptions of road management responsibilities. Within the tailored questions asked, 104 comments were received around road management, some identifying the same locations. 31 of the locations raised have since been scheduled for maintenance inspections, and 14 were referred for infrastructure consideration. Significantly however, over 32% of respondents, when asked which roads in particular they were not satisfied with Council's management of, identified arterial roads which are the responsibility of the Department of Transport and Planning, not Council. This is an area of messaging that continues to be a focus for Council.

It is also noted that service performance reporting on Council's road management at its May Council Meeting indicate that Loddon is operating well against its Road Management Plan (RMP) for the maintenance of its local road network with the most recent quarter seeing 98.5 per cent of defects resolved and 93.7 per cent of maintenance grading activities completed within timeframes outlined in the RMP.

Planning and Building

Another contrast seen in the 2026 CSS results is that of the Planning and Building Permits service area, noting that this space is dictated by State Government process, which Council does not control. Despite its lower index score of 47, service performance reports to Council at its May council meeting note that in quarter 3 of the 25/26 financial year, 91 per cent of planning applications were approved within statutory timeframes (well above rural shire average of 69.5 per cent), with the median processing days for Council to make a determination on applications being 44 days. Council has also issued 128 new building permits over the last 12-month period.

Overall Council Direction

The state-wide index score of 48 for the overall direction of councils continues its low-running score over the last ten years. By comparison, Loddon's index score is 56 in this area. This particular question asks residents to measure their views on the trajectory of Council's overall performance – having improved, stayed the same, deteriorated or can't say. This year's results on Council's direction of performance shows 87 per cent of residents feel Loddon's overall performance has either improved or stayed the same (up from 74 per cent in 2025). This is Loddon's highest score in ten years.

Value for money in Services and Infrastructure

At an index score of 57, Loddon has continued to improve its performance over State-wide and Small Rural groups in Value for Money. This is Loddon's highest result in the five years of it being measured. 77 per cent of those surveyed felt Loddon provided average to very good value for money in infrastructure and services provided to the community. Residents located in Inglewood ward were more likely to be part of the 18 per cent that said value for money was poor or very poor.

Overview

The full results of the CSS are attached to this report including responses to tailored questions that provide further data specific to Loddon Shire, including nomination of problematic roads.

In conclusion, the 2026 Community Satisfaction Survey results demonstrate an overall improvement in community perceptions of Council performance, including positive movement across a number of key service areas and measures of Council direction, customer service and value for money. The results are some of the most positive results that Council has seen over ten years of data.

The results also identify several service areas that remain of high importance to the community and where residents would like to see continued improvement, particularly in relation to road maintenance. These findings provide valuable insight into community priorities and will assist Council in informing future advocacy, service planning, communication and resource allocation discussions.

COST/BENEFITS

The Community Satisfaction Survey was administered externally by JWS Research and its cost is contained within Loddon's operational budget. The benefit of conducting the Community Satisfaction Survey is obtaining results for mandatory reporting along with valuable insight and benchmarking into how Council and its operations are perceived now and over time. It also highlights areas for improvement and is used to inform strategic and policy work.

RISK ANALYSIS

There is a risk that results may reflect poorly on Council and have negative outcomes for Council's reputation, despite areas where Council has little or no control over results such as deterioration on particular roads which are not in Council's remit.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

A sample of 500 residents was used to establish levels of satisfaction. A copy of the 2026 Survey results will be made available on Loddon Shire Council's website.

As in past years, data collection was undertaken at varied times over the year in order to normalise seasonal factors that may skew data outcomes.

RESOLUTION 2026/88

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council note Loddon Shire Council's results from the 2026 Local Government Community Satisfaction Survey.

CARRIED

Unconfirmed

12 COMPLIANCE REPORTS

12.1 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE UPDATE

File Number:

Author: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receives and notes the Summary of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting – 28 May 2026.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council most recently received an update on a Loddon Shire Council Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) meeting at its May 2026 meeting.

BACKGROUND

Council's ARC has been established in accordance with section 53 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, to support it in discharging its oversight responsibilities related to financial and performance reporting, risk management, fraud prevention systems and control, maintenance of a sound internal control environment, assurance activities including internal and external audit, and Council's performance with regard to compliance with its policies and legislative and regulatory requirements.

This report is a requirement of the ARC Charter which states '*A summary of each ARC meeting will be reported at the next meeting of the Council.*'

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Summary of meeting

Below is a summary of the ARC meeting held on Thursday, 28 May 2026 in the Loddon Shire Council Chambers.

Member attendees:

Amber Currie – Independent Member (Acting Chair)

Mick Cummins – Independent Member

David Gunn – Independent Member

Officer attendees:

Lincoln Fitzgerald – Chief Executive Officer

Michelle Stedman – Director Corporate

Natalie Martin – Manager Financial Services

Lisa Clue – Manager Governance

Other attendees:

Brad Ead – AFS & Associates Pty Ltd

Apologies:

Marg Allan – Independent Member/Chair
 Cr Gavan Holt – Councillor Representative

The following matters were considered by the ARC at the meeting:

Report	Discussion points
Loddon Shire Council Draft 2026/27 Annual Budget	Following discussion and receiving responses to questions, Audit and Risk Committee members: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • advised they were generally supportive of the Draft 2026/27 Annual Budget and Draft 2026/27 Fees and Charges as presented • recommended Council continue its focus on reversing the deficit position • look forward to receiving a report on implementation of Financial Plan strategic actions later in the year • resolved to note the Draft 2026/27 Budget and Draft 2026/27 Fees and Charges.

COST/BENEFITS

This report provides Council with oversight of the work of the ARC, providing assurance that services are undertaken efficiently and effectively.

There are no costs associated with development of this report, however there are modest costs associated with the Audit and Risk Committee and undertaking regular internal and external auditing of Council activities. These costs are provided for in Council's approved budget.

RISK ANALYSIS

The ARC has risk management oversight for the Council and monitors, reviews, endorses and advises Council on matters as set out in the Charter.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Officers involved in the conduct of the ARC meeting were consulted in the preparation of this report.

RESOLUTION 2026/89

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo
 Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council receives and notes the Summary of the Audit and Risk Committee Meeting – 28 May 2026.

CARRIED

13 URGENT BUSINESS

Nil

14 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Nil

NEXT MEETING

The next Meeting of Council will be held on 28 July 2026 at Wedderburn commencing at 3.00pm.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 4.01 pm.

Confirmed this.....day of..... 2026

.....
CHAIRPERSON

Unconfirmed