




Loddon Shire Council **Priorities 2026**





Acknowledgement of Country

Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present.

Welcome to the Loddon Shire

Blessed with rich, natural beauty and a genuine sense of connection to its history and environment, the Loddon Shire is described as a “community of communities”.

Loddon Shire is located approximately 175km north of Melbourne, close to the major town centres of Bendigo, Kerang and Echuca. Home to almost 7,800 residents, the Shire spans 6,700 square kilometres, featuring rolling hills, forests, granite outcrops, premium agricultural land, and the Loddon River, which services industry, people, tourism and lifestyle.

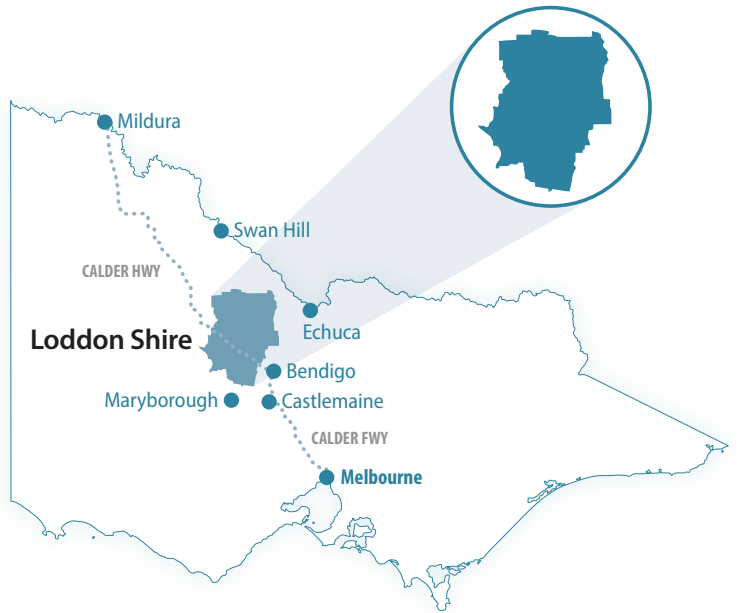
Loddon comprises many vibrant small towns including Bridgewater, Inglewood, Wedderburn, Korong Vale, Dingee, Mitiamo, Serpentine, Newbridge, Tarnagulla, Laanecoorie, Eddington, Boort, Pyramid Hill and other surrounding towns.

Loddon Shire’s location, its transport, arterial and freight connections, thriving agriculture industry, natural tourism and economic development opportunities, ensure the Shire’s towns are exceptionally placed for further investment, development and expansion.

Agricultural industries are the ‘bread and butter’ of the Loddon Shire with horticulture, viticulture, cropping, lamb, dairy, intensive poultry and piggeries making up the main income streams. It is also among its plains that you will encounter some of the world’s finest gourmet products – from artisanal to large-scale production in flour, meats, olives and olive oil, tomatoes, fruit and salt.

While Loddon has a relatively small population, Loddon Shire Council is custodian of an extensive range of community assets that it provides to facilitate delivery of services to the community. For road assets, it has responsibility for 4,759km of roads, 219 bridges, major culverts and structures, 37km of footpaths and 62km of kerb and channelling.

Ranked 72 out of 79 Councils in Victoria on socio-economic indexes for areas (SEIFA) index



Loddon Shire

- **6,700** square kilometres
- **5** larger towns
- **1,011** local businesses
- **3,138** local jobs



Largest industries include

- Agriculture
- Health Care and Social Assistance
- Manufacturing
- Retail Trade
- Education and Training



Population

- **7,800** estimated residential population (ABS 2021 Census)
- **52** median age
- **20%** born overseas



Families

- **51.8%** family with no children
- **34%** family with children
- **12.6%** one parent family



Incomes

- **\$554** weekly personal income
- **\$1,039** weekly household income
- **\$1,394** weekly family income



Education – % people attending educational institutions

- **4.9%** attending preschool
- **24%** primary education
- **20.5%** secondary education
- **9.6%** university/technical institution

PRIORITIES 2026



About this document

Advocacy is one of Loddon Shire Council's key roles and is essential to influencing government policy and attracting investment to support its rural communities.

This document outlines Loddon Shire's priorities, aligned with the Community Vision 2035 and Council Plan 2025-2029, including the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan. These critical documents have been developed in consultation with, and in collaboration with the community, ensuring Council's direction reflects local needs and aspirations.

Council's advocacy priorities are informed by ongoing engagement with the community and partnerships with regional stakeholders, peak bodies and State and Federal Governments. Through this approach, Council seeks to deliver meaningful outcomes that enhance liveability, support economic development and promote the wellbeing of residents.

Community Vision 2035

Thriving communities where everyone is welcome and all have the opportunity to live, work and create experiences.

Our focus areas:



Thriving



Welcome



Live



Work



Experience

Loddon Shire's priorities at a glance

Priorities	Ask
Rural Childcare in Loddon Shire	Council seeks targeted State Government funding for a sustainable rural funding model to attract long day care providers to Loddon Shire.
Roads and Bridges	Council seeks increased and continued State Government funding to ensure regional road networks remain fit-for-purpose across Loddon Shire.
Inglewood Streetscape Enhancement Project	Council seeks \$6.1 million in State Government funding to support delivery of the Inglewood Streetscape Enhancement Project.
Wedderburn Flood Risk Reduction Upgrade	Council seeks \$9.5 million in State Government funding to reconstruct the Skinners Flat Reservoir embankment and spillway to protect the township of Wedderburn.
Pyramid Hill Community Centre Stage 2	Council seeks \$2.8 million in State Government funding to support delivery of Stage 2 of the Pyramid Hill Community Centre.
Critical Drainage Upgrade for Pyramid Hill Township	Council seeks \$14.2 million in State Government funding to upgrade the stormwater and drainage infrastructure in Pyramid Hill.
Serpentine Township Flood Mitigation Levee Project	Council seeks \$335,000 in State Government funding to support to upgrade the Serpentine levee.
Enabling Housing Growth	Council seeks \$1.27 million in State Government funding to support delivery of a 19-lot residential subdivision of Reef Street, Wedderburn.

Advocacy matters

- Emergency Services Volunteers Fund Levy
- Mobile and Digital Connectivity
- Fund a New Wedderburn Ambulance Victoria Branch
- Rural Swimming Pool Renewal and Safety
- Local Government Financial Sustainability
- Structure Plans – Boort and Pyramid Hill
- Rural Economic Development Investment
- Healthy Loddon Campaspe – Continued Investment
- Bendigo FoodShare Support
- Local Government Capacity
- Renewable Energy and Resource Development
- Strong Families Strong Children
- Strong Youth Strong Communities



PRIORITY

Rural Childcare in Loddon Shire

Limited access to childcare continues to restrict workforce participation, impacting local businesses and making it harder to attract and retain families.

Without a sustainable rural service model, smaller communities remain underserved with existing service models often financially unviable in rural settings.

The opening of the Wedderburn Early Learning Centre (Dupitjin) demonstrates that a purpose built, government-supported childcare model can successfully operate in a small rural community. This model should be replicated in other towns of Loddon Shire through government investment.

Council seeks targeted State Government funding for a sustainable rural funding model to attract long day care providers to Loddon Shire.

- Loddon’s contribution**
Childcare feasibility business case development
- Investment being sought**
Council seeks targeted State Government funding for a sustainable rural funding model to attract long day care providers to Loddon Shire.



PRIORITY

Roads and Bridges

Continuation and indexation of road funding

Loddon Shire’s road network underpins the region’s agricultural productivity, freight movement and community connectivity but is deteriorating faster than Council can maintain. Council’s 2025 Asset Plan identifies a \$15.6 million road renewal gap that cannot be addressed without increased external funding.

Without additional investment, road conditions will continue to decline, increasing safety risks, reducing freight efficiency and limiting regional productivity.

Council continues to strategically upgrade assets where required to ensure service levels meet evolving community and industry needs. This particularly applies to upgrading roads and bridges on strategic freight routes as larger vehicles are used to transport goods.

Council supports sector advocacy led by the Municipal Association of Victoria 2026 and Rural Councils Victoria for increased road funding across rural Victoria.

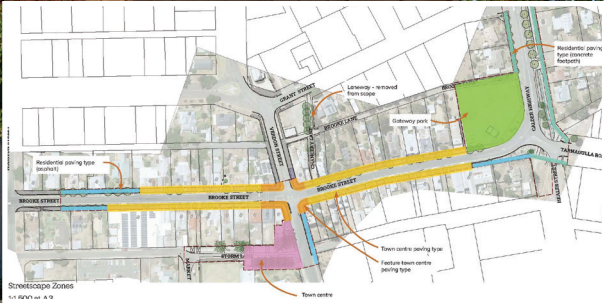
Council seeks increased and continued State Government funding to ensure regional road networks remain fit-for-purpose across Loddon Shire.

● Investment being sought

- increased investment to improve maintenance standards in rural and regional road infrastructure;
- targeted investment to strategic freight routes and bridges;
- continued and expanded support for road safety programs, such as Safe Local Roads and Streets Program;
- ongoing, multi-year programs similar to AgriLinks and Fixing Country Roads, and
- dedicated funding to improve road resilience to climate impacts, including flood damage, to reduce service disruptions, repair costs and long-term asset degradation.

Targeted investment in these areas will improve safety, network reliability and productivity outcomes, while enabling Council to focus its limited resources on essential maintenance and renewal.

WELCOME



PRIORITY

Inglewood Streetscape Enhancement Project

Inglewood's town centre requires renewal to improve safety, accessibility, functionality and amenity, and to better support local businesses, tourism and community use.

The proposed project will deliver a coordinated streetscape upgrade, including improved pedestrian safety, public spaces, new public parkland, kerb and channel improvements, underground power and place making outcomes that enhance the town's visual appeal and functionality.

The design incorporates innovative urban design by DJANDAK (Dja Dja Wurrung), strengthening connections to Mount Kooyoora and the region's significant First Nations cultural heritage sites.

Council seeks \$6.1 million in State Government funding to support delivery of the Inglewood Streetscape Enhancement Project.

- **Current status**

Shovel-ready, subject to funding

- **Loddon's contribution**

\$1M - design phase complete

- **Investment being sought**

\$6.1M

- **Total investment**

\$7.1M

PRECEDENT IMAGES

Streetscape



Gateway Park



Plaza



Lighting & Artwork





PRIORITY

Wedderburn Flood Risk Reduction Upgrade

Skinner's Flat reservoir, a former water supply for Wedderburn and now a key recreational asset, has sustained damage during major flood events in 2010-11 and 2022. This includes significant scour at the downstream toe of the dam, posing a risk to dam integrity and safety of the township.

While temporary work has been undertaken to improve dam safety, the reservoir requires upgrade works to repair this damage and to ensure the embankment and spillway meet the Australian National Committee on Large Dams (ANCOLD) safety guidelines.

Council is finalising a detailed design that will allow upgrade works to commence once suitable funding is secured.

Council seeks \$9.5 million in State Government funding to reconstruct the Skinner's Flat Reservoir embankment and spillway to protect the township of Wedderburn.

- **Current status**
Detailed design in progress
- **Loddon's contribution**
\$800,000
- **Investment being sought**
\$9.5M
- **Total investment**
\$10.3M

WELCOME



PRIORITY

Pyramid Hill Community Centre Stage 2

The Pyramid Hill Community Centre is the township's primary community facility but is not yet fully developed to meet current and future community needs.

Construction of Stage 2 will deliver a fit-for-purpose, multi-use hub incorporating a library, community gymnasium, car parking and associated infrastructure, improving access to services, supporting community wellbeing and increasing local participation.

Council seeks \$2.8 million in State Government funding to support delivery of Stage 2 of the Pyramid Hill Community Centre.

- **Current status**
Shovel-ready, subject to funding
- **Loddon's contribution**
In-kind project management
- **Investment being sought**
\$2.8M



PRIORITY

Critical Drainage Upgrade for Pyramid Hill Township

Pyramid Hill's stormwater drainage system is outdated and no longer meets current standards, resulting in frequent localised flooding, poor drainage performance and ongoing maintenance issues.

The system lacks adequate capacity, with limited infrastructure, undersized components and poor drainage grades contributing to sedimentation and localised pooling.

Upgrade works are required to address these deficiencies, improve system performance and support the future liveability and growth of the township.

A staged delivery approach is proposed, with initial detailed design and construction works to be delivered as part of this funding request. Future stages will be completed by Council as additional funding becomes available.

Council seeks \$14.2 million in State Government funding to upgrade the stormwater and drainage infrastructure in Pyramid Hill.

- **Current status**
Detailed design to be completed, subject to funding
- **Loddon's contribution**
Strategic plan completed
- **Investment being sought**
\$14.2M



PRIORITY

Serpentine Township Flood Mitigation Levee Project

The township of Serpentine remains vulnerable to flooding, with previous flood events impacting residential properties, local infrastructure and community wellbeing.

While Council has undertaken targeted flood mitigation works, the existing levee system no longer meets contemporary engineering standards and does not provide an adequate level of protection.

Upgrade works are required to strengthen and modernise the levee system, addressing identified deficiencies and reducing the risk of future flood impacts.

Delivery of this project will significantly improve flood resilience, protect homes and infrastructure and improve flood protection for the township.

Council seeks \$335,000 in State Government funding to support the upgrade of the Serpentine levee.

- **Current status**
Ready to proceed, subject to funding
- **Loddon's contribution**
\$90,000
- **Investment being sought**
\$335,000
- **Total investment**
\$425,000



PRIORITY

Enabling Housing Growth

The shortage of residential land and housing in Loddon Shire is a significant barrier to population growth and workforce attraction. Development is constrained by high costs, lack of land available and lack of enabling infrastructure, making private developers unable to undertake viable developments.

Council has identified a 19-lot residential subdivision at Reef Street, Wedderburn, as ready opportunity to increase housing supply. The site is well located with access to essential services and nearby community facilities.

Council supports sector advocacy led by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) for the development of a Community Infrastructure Fund over three years, to enable councils to deliver essential enabling infrastructure required to support housing development and strengthen community wellbeing.

Council seeks \$1.27 million in State Government funding to support delivery of a 19-lot residential subdivision of Reef Street, Wedderburn.

- **Current status**
 Planning application submitted
 Design stage underway
- **Loddon’s contribution**
 Provision of land
 \$300,000 – Local Development Association
- **Investment being sought**
 \$1.27M
- **Total investment**
 \$1.57M





Emergency Services Volunteers Fund Levy

Loddon Shire Council does not support the introduction of the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund Levy in its current form.

The levy places additional financial pressure on ratepayers and unfairly targets farming, commercial, industrial and residential sectors, as well as volunteers. It also imposes an administrative and resource burden on Council to administer the collection of these funds.

Council urges the State Government to repeal the Emergency Services Volunteers Fund Levy legislation.

Mobile and Digital Connectivity

Reliable mobile coverage and high-speed internet access are essential services that underpin economic growth, public safety, service delivery and community wellbeing.

Significant areas of Loddon Shire continue to experience limited or no mobile phone coverage and unreliable internet connectivity.

This lack of digital infrastructure restricts business growth, limits workforce participation and reduces Loddon Shire's ability to attract new residents and investment. It also places local businesses at a competitive disadvantage and limits access to essential services.

Connectivity gaps also pose broader risks to community safety and emergency response capability. Reliable telecommunications are critical during emergencies and natural disasters and are essential for accessing health services, education and other online platforms.

Council seeks State Government investment to expand mobile coverage and improve digital connectivity across Loddon Shire, addressing critical service gaps in rural areas.

ADVOCACY



Rural Swimming Pool Renewal and Safety

Loddon Shire's five outdoor swimming pools are critical community assets, providing safe, supervised environments for recreation and learn-to-swim programs, particularly during summer.

In a region with extensive waterways, these facilities play an essential role in reducing drowning risk and supporting community safety.

However, the majority of pools infrastructure is more than 60 years old and is reaching the end of its lifespan. These assets are falling into disrepair and are in desperate need of renewal to remain safe and fit-for-purpose.

For small rural councils, the cost of maintaining pools to required standards is increasingly impacting Council's ability to fund the operation and maintain service levels.

While the current aquatics management model is effective, it is financially unsustainable. Exploring and evaluating alternative partnership management models is critical over the next three years to preserve the current number of aquatic facilities beyond 2028.

Council calls upon the State Government to establish a dedicated funding program to renew ageing rural aquatic facilities.

Fund a New Wedderburn Ambulance Victoria Branch

Wedderburn residents experience long travel distances and extended emergency response times, placing them at a significant disadvantage compared to other communities.

Previous funding commitments for a Wedderburn ambulance branch recognised this need. However, the project has not progressed and restoring this investment is critical to ensuring equitable access to emergency care to the community.

Improved emergency service coverage is fundamental to liveability, community confidence and the safety of residents across the Shire.

Council seeks a State Government commitment to fund a new Ambulance Victoria branch in Wedderburn.

Local Government Financial Sustainability

Loddon Shire faces significant challenges to long-term financial sustainability due to rate capping, cost shifting and rising community expectations.

As a small rural council responsible for maintaining a large road network and extensive community infrastructure, Council must deliver essential services across a dispersed population with limited revenue. Increasing infrastructure maintenance costs, declining funding and ongoing cost shifting from other levels of government are placing significant pressure on Council's limited financial capacity.

Sustainable funding is essential to ensure councils can continue delivering essential services, including road maintenance, waste, emergency management, recreation facilities and community services.

Council supports sector advocacy led by the Municipal Association of Victoria's (MAV) for the establishment of a Local Government Accord, recognising local government as an equal partner with the State Government, enabling structured engagement to shape policy, strengthen service delivery and improve outcomes.

Council seeks State Government reform to improve the financial sustainability of local government, including:

- reviewing the rate capping framework to ensure indexation reflects both the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the actual cost pressures faced by councils, allowing local government to sustainably fund essential community services;
- undertaking a comprehensive review of the financial sustainability of the Victorian local government sector, including the impacts of cost shifting from State and Commonwealth Governments; and
- maintaining fair funding partnerships for services delivered by councils on behalf of other levels of government, including libraries, maternal and child health services, school crossing supervision, through minimum 50:50 arrangements.

Supporting Town Growth through Precinct Structure Plans in Boort and Pyramid Hill

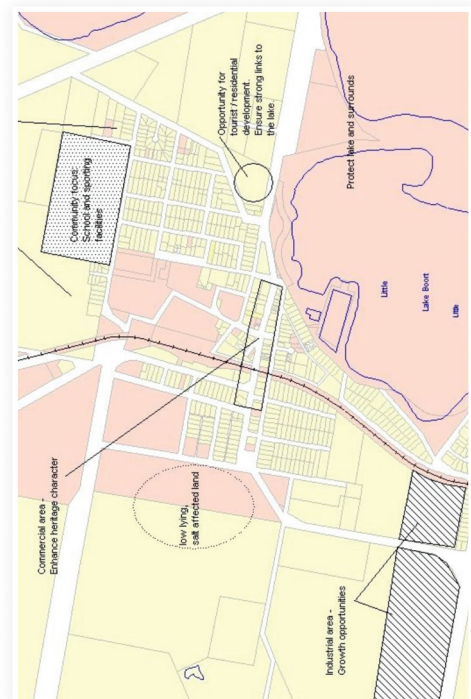
Sustainable population growth across Loddon Shire relies on clear and coordinated strategic planning.

The townships of Boort and Pyramid Hill are experiencing increasing demand for residential development. In the absence of detailed precinct structure plans, Council's ability to translate strategic planning into deliverable outcomes is constrained.

Council is working to encourage a diverse and sustainable housing supply that supports economic growth by attracting and retaining residents and workers, while strengthening existing townships.

Annual dwelling targets are being established through settlement planning and township structure plans to support a steady release of new housing.

Council seeks \$300,000 in State Government funding to develop precinct structure plans for Boort and Pyramid Hill.



Rural Economic Development Investment

Loddon Shire's economy is driven by agriculture, small business, tourism and emerging industries. Continued support from State Government is critical to ensure rural communities can compete with metropolitan and regional regions for investment, skills and economic opportunities.

Council supports the Rural Councils Victoria (RCV) 2026 State election advocacy priorities, which call for increased State Government investment in rural economic development initiatives that strengthen regional productivity, support local industry growth and create employment opportunities across rural Victoria.

Council calls on the State Government to increase investment in rural economic development through the establishment of a Rural and Regional Victoria Productivity and Growth Fund.

Healthy Loddon Campaspe – Continued Investment

The Healthy Loddon Campaspe (HLC) program has enabled Loddon Shire to partner with six neighbouring councils to strengthen community health and wellbeing outcomes through coordinated, place-based initiatives.

With Stage 2 concluding in June 2026, there is a risk of losing momentum and established partnerships without continued investment.

Stage 3 represents an efficient, strategic investment in generational health improvements, supporting long-term improvements in wellbeing and reducing future demand on health services across the region.

Council seeks continued State Government investment of \$7.9 million over four years to deliver Stage 3 of the Healthy Loddon Campaspe program.

Bendigo FoodShare Support

Food insecurity is a growing challenge across Central Victoria, impacting the health, wellbeing and dignity of individuals and families.

In Loddon Shire, many residents rely on food relief services to meet every day needs, reflecting growing pressure on households across the region.

Bendigo FoodShare is a critical regional service delivering food relief in partnership with over 100 local charities, schools and community organisations, supporting approximately 15,500 people weekly across a 19,000 square kilometre area.

Councils advocates for State Government funding to support Bendigo FoodShare's capacity to deliver essential food relief and support initiatives across Loddon Shire.



Local Government Capacity

Council faces ongoing workforce capacity constraints, including difficulty attracting and retaining specialised staff, managing skills shortages and providing effective backfill during staff vacancies.

To address these constraints, Council advocates for State Government funding and supportive policy settings to support shared service models across regional and rural Victorian councils.

Investment in collaborative workforce arrangements will enable councils to access specialised expertise, shared corporate systems, coordinated backfill arrangements, reducing service disruption and improving operational capability.

With appropriate State Government support, shared services can deliver more resilient local government operations, improved value for money and consistent high quality service outcomes for rural communities.

Council seeks funding from the State Government to establish shared service arrangements.



Renewable Energy and Resource Development

Loddon Shire is experiencing rapid growth in renewable energy and resource development, creating both opportunities and also increasing pressure on local infrastructure, services and communities.

Without coordinated planning and investment, these developments place strain on local roads, housing, emergency services and community resources, while also creating uncertainty around long-term impacts and community benefit.

Council supports sector advocacy led by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) including mandatory developer engagement with local governments hosting the transition to renewable energy and critical minerals projects.

Council seeks State Government action to ensure renewable energy and resource development is effectively planned and supported, including:

- coordinated investment in infrastructure and services for communities hosting major energy, mining and minerals developments;
- mandated regional planning for transmission and shared infrastructure,
- modernised planning and noise standards that reflect current technology,
- enforceable decommissioning requirements to avoid legacy liabilities;
- consistent and transparent strategic community benefit frameworks; and
- planning processes that formally recognise Council's role as a referral authority support management of cumulative impacts on agriculture, housing availability, local roads, housing, emergency services, economic impacts and other community resources.

ADVOCACY



Strong Families Strong Children

Loddon Shire experiences high levels of disadvantage, with the 2021 Census ranking it as the 11th most disadvantaged Local Government Area in Victoria under the SEIFA index. This highlights the need for sustained and targeted investment in early years support.

Strong Families Strong Children is a collaborative initiative led by the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (NCLLEN). The program connects families with local services through early intervention and coordinated support, improving school readiness and long-term educational and life outcomes.

The initiative focuses on strengthening families, improving social and emotional wellbeing, while ensuring children and families have a voice in the design and delivery of services to support them.

Council seeks a State Government commitment of \$150,000 per year for up to 10 years to support delivery of the Strong Families Strong Children program

Strong Youth Strong Communities

Without targeted early intervention and support, young people in Loddon Shire are less likely to engage in education, limiting future employment opportunities and long-term outcomes.

Strong Youth Strong Communities (SYSC) is a community based program led by the North Central Local Learning and Employment Network (NCLLEN).

The program works with schools, families and community organisations designed to promote wellbeing and strengthen school engagement during the formative years, helping to prevent long-term social and economic impacts.

The program focuses on key areas such as physical health, mental wellbeing, connectedness and social and emotional development.

Council seeks a State Government commitment of \$60,000 per year for up to 10 years to support the delivery of the Strong Youth Strong Communities program.









Loddon Shire Council

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