

11 April 2025

Essential Services Commission

Linda Marson

Project Manager, Price Monitoring and Regulation

Sent via email: localgovernment@esc.vic.gov.au

Dear Linda

Request for information (RFI) - Hepburn Shire Council's higher cap application 2025-26

Further to your email request for further information (RFI) received 25 March 2025, please see our responses below.

185E(3)(a) – Higher Cap

We note no concerns noted.

RFI 185E(3)(b) – Reasons

An initial review by Commission staff has raised areas where further information is needed to verify or understand aspects of Council's application and/or supporting documents.

The application (p.13) explains that Council's Financial Vision was adopted to address concerns of Council's Audit and Risk Committee and a rating of 'high' for the strategic risk of Financial Sustainability.

- *Can Council provide a copy of relevant materials outlining the 'high' risk rating for the strategic risk of financial sustainability, together with any reviews of this risk rating?*
 - *Biannual Risk Report - Strategic Risks - Financial Sustainability (appendix 7)*
 - *Council is in a 'maturing' phase of our risk management methodology, but we do have in place a strategic risk register that is reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team, and our Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) on a bi-annual basis.*

- *The most recent update to the ARC was on 18 March 2025.*
 - *The controls in place, and risk rating of our financial sustainability will be reviewed post adoption of the Council Plan, Budget 2025/26 and Financial Plan, in late June 2025. The result of our rate cap variation will also be known then and therefore it appears reasonable that Council reviews in detail its risk rating. Officers would be hopeful that with a successful rate cap variation, and adoption of the financial sustainable Council Plan and Budget the risk rating might be able to be revised.*
 - *Appendix 16 is a confidential attachment is a briefing paper prepared for the Audit and Risk Committee, which provides insight to the work undertaken with Councillors, to assist in their preparation of the 2023/24 budget, long term financial plan and ultimately the Financial Vision.*
- Does Council have targets or target bands it is aiming to achieve for specific financial indicators (e.g., unrestricted cash, adjusted underlying result, operating result)? If so, what are these?
 - *Councils targets through various reporting (year-end, budget, and the Financial Vision) has tended to focus on unrestricted cash position and improving this to a positive figure.*
 - *We have, and will continue to use specific targets or targets band as per State government recommendations (VAGO), and we aim to work within the following guidelines:*
 - *Unrestricted cash – target of between 50-100%*
 - *Adjusted underlying result – target of between 0-10%*
 - *Borrowing ratio – target of between 0-60%*
 - *Debt commitment – target of between 0-5%*
 - *Indebtedness – target of between 0-40%*
 - *You can see our regular quarterly reporting to Council and the Community include a number of these ratios - [attachments-public-minutes-ordinary-meeting-of-council-25-february-2025.pdf](#) Attachment 8.3.1*

- *Officers would like to include in the Financial Plan (to be adopted) a series of targets however are focused, firstly on the rate cap variation process and savings targets to drive the Financial Vision.*
- *The Financial Vision states in that in 2026/27 that the 'Financial Vision implemented, continued monitoring and review required' and we believe setting of targets at this stage would be prudent.*

The Financial Vision (p.3) states "To protect Council's long-term financial stability, a thorough review of the ten-year Financial Plan, along with a wide-ranging assessment of service provisions, has been conducted by the Council."

- Is Council able to provide us with a copy of these review documents, particularly the review of the Financial Plan?
 - *There were various briefings, and workshops undertaken with Councillors over an 18 months period, including a lot of analysis, scenarios and general information. We have provided an example of 3 workshop supporting documentation in confidential appendixes 13, 14 and 15. If there are specific topics of interest, we can look to provide these from the various workshops.*

The application states that "Council will be required to find additional savings or revenue totalling \$4 million in 2025/26 to return to surplus and meet commitments outlined in the Financial Vision 2024-27. [Council] plan[s] on achieving this in 2025/26 with the rate cap variation request of \$1.36 million and by an additional \$2.53 million in operational savings (or increased revenue)".

- Can Council confirm our understanding that Council is yet to identify this \$2.53 million in operational savings (or increased revenue) for 2025-26?
 - *We are currently working through the process to identify the \$2.53 million of operational savings with various workshops been occurring across the organisation with the Executive and Senior Leadership Teams, and discussions with Councillors. A confidential listing of possible savings was provided to the ESC on 10 April 2025 and can be continually updated leading up to the draft budget endorsement (appendix 9).*

- Can Council please clarify whether it intends to find \$2.53 million in operational savings (or increased revenue) regardless of whether the higher cap application is approved?
 - *Yes, this is 100% occurring and is a requirement of the Financial Vision.*
 - *If the rate cap variation is not approved in full it is highly likely additional operational savings (service cuts) will be required to meet the \$4M shortfall.*
- Can council confirm whether or not the forecasts provided by council in the LTFP sheet of the Higher Cap Information template reflect the \$2.53 million in operational savings (or additional revenue)? If so, where are these savings / additional revenue incorporated?
 - *Yes, the with higher rate cap includes the operational savings and these were allocated as a lump sum to employee costs (\$1.53m) and materials and services (\$1.00m) within the template.*
 - *Once the operational savings have been fully costed and approved then they will be removed (or added to) in the Budget and Financial Plan.*

We have identified a number of differences between the financial tables contained in the 2024-25 Adopted Budget, the Financial Vision 2024-27 and the Higher Cap Information spreadsheet provided with Council's application.

- Can Council confirm that the Higher Cap Information spreadsheet contains the most recent forecasts, and that Hepburn has based its application on these figures?
 - *Yes, at the time when the Higher Cap Information spreadsheet was compiled it contained the most recent financial results and forecasts, and these remain materially correct as of today.*
 - *We are now in the process of developing the 10-year financial plan based on our current forecast position and budget for 2025/26, including the rate cap variation.*
- Can Council outline the assumptions that underpin forecasts for each of the following in the LTFP sheet of the Higher Cap Information spreadsheet, noting in particular where these assumptions have changed since other documents were prepared (e.g., 2024-25 Budget, Financial Vision):

- *Revenue from rates and charges (including assumptions around growth):*
 - *2025/26 @ 10% (assumed 7% rate cap variation & 3% rate cap announced by the Minister)*
 - *2026/27 onwards @ 2.5% which is based on an estimate of CPI throughout the 10-years of 2.5%.*
- *User fees:*
 - *3.5% - this reflects annual increases in line with CPI plus some growth*
- *Grant revenue and grant funding:*
 - *2.5% which appears reasonable as some grants have a higher increase such as the Financial Assistance Grants whereas as grants, in particular recurrent funding from State Government have no annual increases.*
- *Contributions (monetary and non-monetary):*
 - *assumed \$520k with matching expenditures, based on trends of development within the shire.*
- *Other income:*
 - *2.5%, based on CPI*
- *Depreciation:*
 - *various as built into the financial modelling tool based on capex spend, and life cycle of assets.*
- *Cash and cash equivalents (including unrestricted cash):*
 - *creditor days @ 14; rates collection rate @ 93%*

Council would be happy to further discuss these in detail or any concerns the ESC have.

The application and Financial Vision indicate that capital expenditure will focus on asset renewal over new capital or upgrade projects. However, the 2024-25 Budget lists a number of capital projects that appear to be new or upgrade projects that are currently underway.

- Can Council clarify the status of these projects?
 - *The Financial Vision effectively applied to budgets 2025/26 onwards, so not the 2024/25 budget and projects.*
 - *However, the majority were existing projects that were carried forward from the previous financial year with several now completed and the remaining in*

progress. Any new works are supported by grant funding and are unlikely to proceed unless the funding is secured.

- Have the costs of these projects been reassessed in the process of developing the Financial Vision or more recently in work undertaken for the 2025-26 budget and council plan? Does the Higher Cap Information spreadsheet reflect any ongoing costs associated with these projects?
 - *These projects were already costed out and a renewal program identified for the long-term capital program.*
 - *Maintenance and running costs of these projects exist or will need to exist within the maintenance program. No new funding is built into the program, and the focus is on service review to establish the most cost-efficient way of delivering the program.*
 - *A next version of the Financial Vision would be important to ensure that maintenance costs are allocated for new/expanded assets but currently this will need to be achieved within the on-going maintenance budgets.*
- Can Council outline its assumptions around asset renewal, including the renewal gap and any backlog, grant funding, and how past spending (actual vs. budget) has informed its forecasts?
 - *The assumptions around asset renewal in the financial vision was driven by the dollar value that was expected to be required to refund the renewal program.*
 - *Over recent years we have spent significant financial and human resources to update our asset condition and revaluation data. We are currently working with an external expert in asset management in preparing our Asset Plan for adoption by June 2025.*
 - *Preliminary data from the asset data workshops shows that the current renewal spend in the Financial Vision is likely to result in the slight reduction in asset quality over the ten years. So, with this data would imagine that the asset plan will look to seek through government funding additional spend to assist reduce the renewal gap.*
 - *The below graphs demonstrate our current asset health, which demonstrates our overall asset health at 67%, similar to national averages.*

Current Health by Asset Class



- The modelling based on the Financial Vision spend for renewal shows (per table below) that overall based on that spend over the 10 years we will see a reduction in the health of our assets to 62% - this is something that Council wants to avoid.
- You can see that to maintain the asset an additional \$29 million is needed over the 10-years. The full rate cap variation is imperative to maintain our current assets, as will be seeking additional government investments (grants).

10 Year Average Annual Investment

	SCENARIO 1: Current Renewal Allocation	SCENARIO 2: Increased Renewal Allocation	SCENARIO 3: Reduced Renewal Allocation
Upgrade/New	Nil	Nil	\$1M
Renewal	\$8.1M	\$11.4M	\$7.1M
Maintenance	\$3.6M	\$3.2M	\$3.8M
Total Required	\$11.7M+	\$14.6M+	\$10.9M+
10 Year Investment	\$117M	\$146M	\$109M
Impact to Council	Overall asset portfolio health drops from current 67% to 62% in 2034 (below the national average of 65%)	Overall asset portfolio health is maintained at 67% in 2034. Bridges and Roads stay well above the national average of 65%	Overall asset portfolio health drops from current 67% to 61% in 2034. PVP and reactive maintenance costs increase

RFI 185E(3)(c) – Engagement

- Can council please provide more information about the steps it took to raise awareness of the survey and consultation period, including:
 - The audience reach for the Hepburn Life e-newsletter, the Trentham Trumpet and The Local
 - Council created and distributed a Hepburn Life e-newsletter Special Edition in relation to the Financial Vision on Thursday 4 July 2024. The edition was sent to 3,981 recipients (email address) and had an open rate of Open Rate: 59.3%. [Building our financial roadmap together](#)
 - Council also distributed our Hepburn Life e-newsletter June 2024, which also included information about the Financial Vision and survey link, that edition was sent to 3,993 recipients with an open rate of 45.8%. [Hepburn Life - June 2024](#)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Financial Vision - Hepburn Life Special Edition			Hepburn Shire Council 3,981 recipients	59.3% Opens	2.8% Clicks
		Last edited Thu, Jul 04, 2024, 04:04 PM by Hepburn Comms	Thu, Jul 04, 2024, 04:04 PM			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Hepburn Life - June 2024			Hepburn Shire Council 3,993 recipients	45.8% Opens	5.4% Clicks
		Last edited Thu, Jun 27, 2024, 04:57 PM by Hepburn Comms	Thu, Jun 27, 2024, 04:58 PM			

- Hepburn Shire do not publish or distribute the Trentham Trumpet or The Local but we are aware that the reach of these publications are significant within their local communities. Both publications are provided free of costs, are available online and then are printed and distributed within the area. Entering shops including a café or bakery you can always see a copy of each.
- Was there an article in the Hepburn Advocate (and what is the audience reach for this publication)?
 - The Hepburn Advocate ceased publishing during the COVID pandemic with its last paper published April 2020.
- How ratepayers who do not reside in the shire were made aware of the consultation?
 - Hepburn Shire utilised our existing communication channels such as Social Media, e-newsletters, website and media releases which are not specific to residents residing in the shire.
 - No specific mailout was conducted for ratepayers that reside outside of the municipality, however many receiving the Hepburn Life e-newsletter are non-resident ratepayers as we have utilised this method previously to drive growth of the e-newsletter.
- How many Hepburn ratepayers or community members have a first language other than English? What, if any, information was made available in other languages?

- *REMPPLAN data from the 2021 census shows 69 residents of our community speak a language other than English and rate their English skills as 'not well or not at all', representing 0.4%.*
- *Council is not able to determine which of the 0.4% of our community are ratepayers.*
- *No documentation was specifically provided in languages other than English given this low percentage.*

PROFICIENCY	PERSONS
Speaks English only	14,507
Not stated - both language (LANP) and proficiency (ENGP) not stated	1,253
Speaks other language and speaks English: Very well	574
Speaks other language and speaks English: Well	193
Speaks other language and speaks English: Not well	51
Speaks other language and speaks English: Not at all	18
Not stated - language (LANP) stated, proficiency (ENGP) not stated	8
Total	16,604

- Can council provide a copy of:
 - the Hepburn Life special edition
 - the full page advertisement in The Local
 - the advertisement in the Trentham Trumpet
- **Hepburn Life Special Addition:**
Appendix 1. Hepburn Life Special Addition
- **The Local Advertisement:**
27th June 2024. Appendix 2. The Local - Community News - 27 June 2024
27th July 2024. Appendix 3. 3. The Local - Community News - 27 July 2024
Appendix 4. Budget summary – The Local – 24 – 25
Appendix 5. The Local - 15 July 2024 - Half page
- **Trentham Trumpet Advertisement:**
Appendix 6. Trentham Trumpet – July 2024

- Can council provide further details about the level of engagement achieved through the Financial Vision engagement including:
 - a breakdown of the 315 submissions by type (eg. survey responses, drop-in sessions, other)
 - the number of unique views among the 3473 page views for the Financial Vision Participate Hepburn project page.
 - *The detail provided in the Council Report and Engagement Summary as previously supplied is the data that we have.*
 - *We can confirm that there was 1,329 unique visitors to the page – this would represent 10% of our community aged above 19 years.*
 - *No data is available on attendance at drop-in sessions, but approximately 14 responses were received outside of the Participate Hepburn online platform (forms completed at drop-in sessions or sent via email).*

[REDACTED]

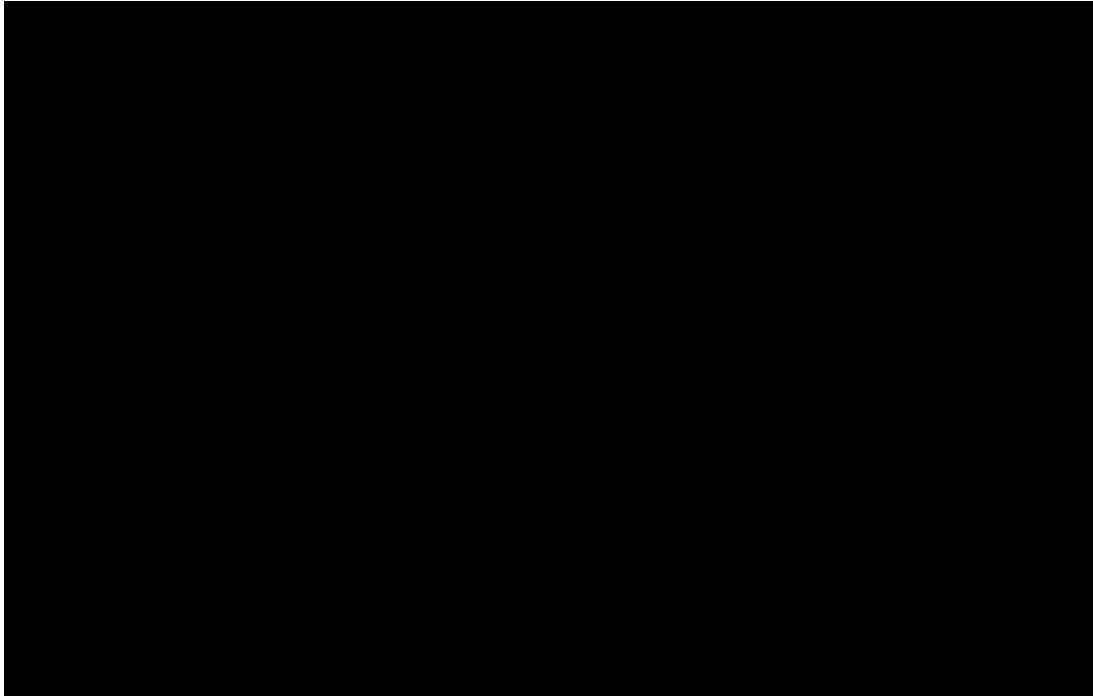
[REDACTED]

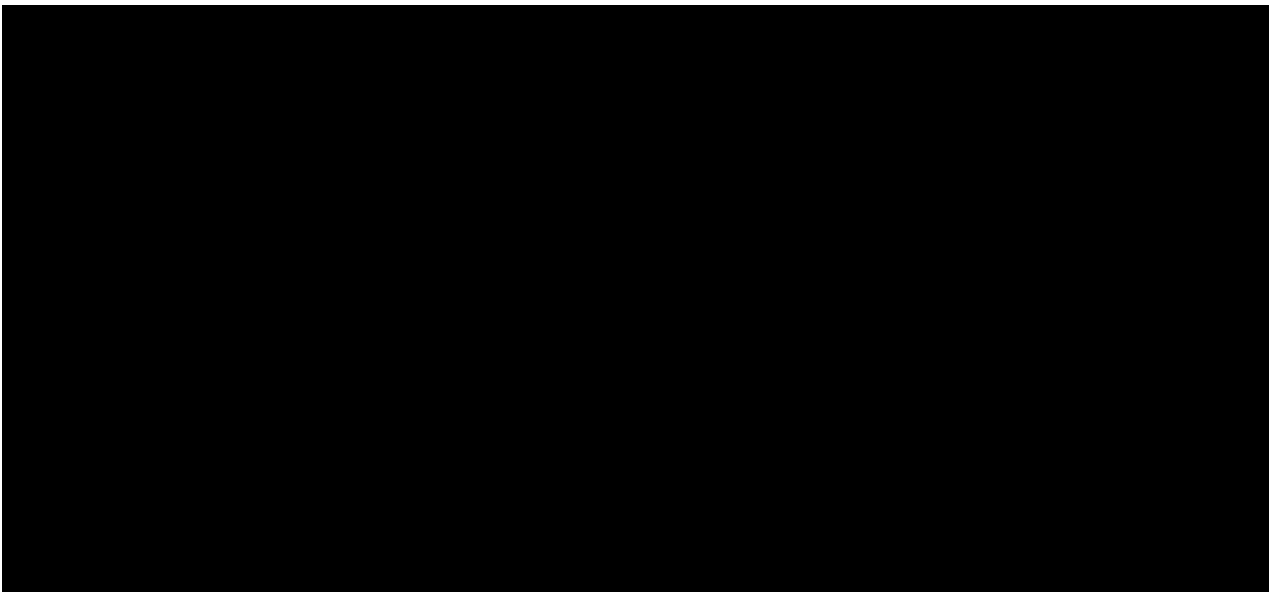
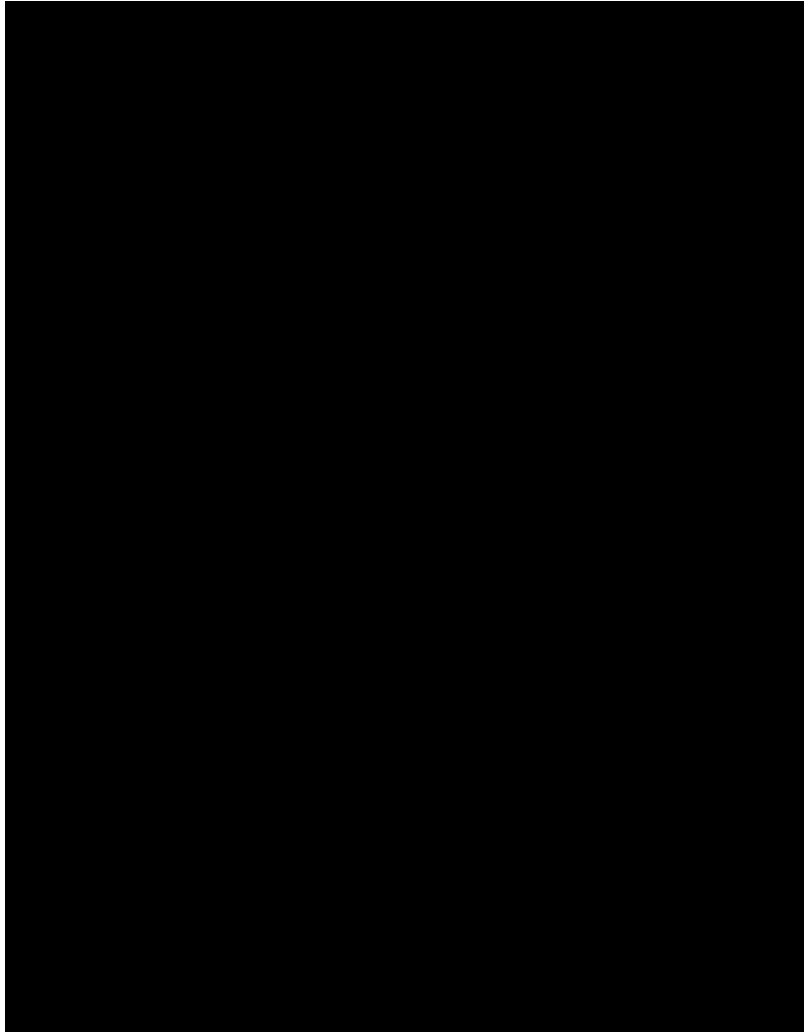
[REDACTED]

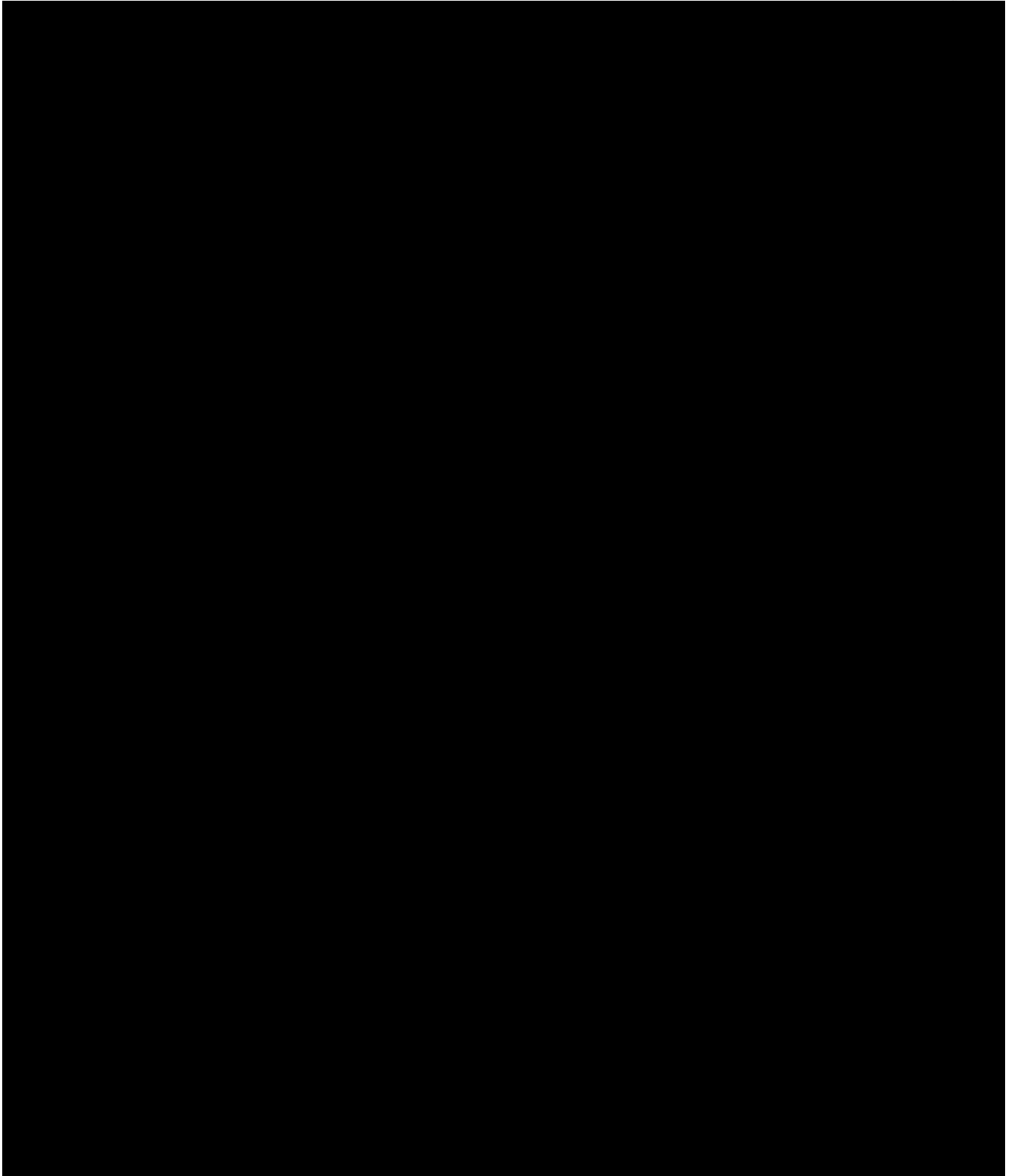
[REDACTED]

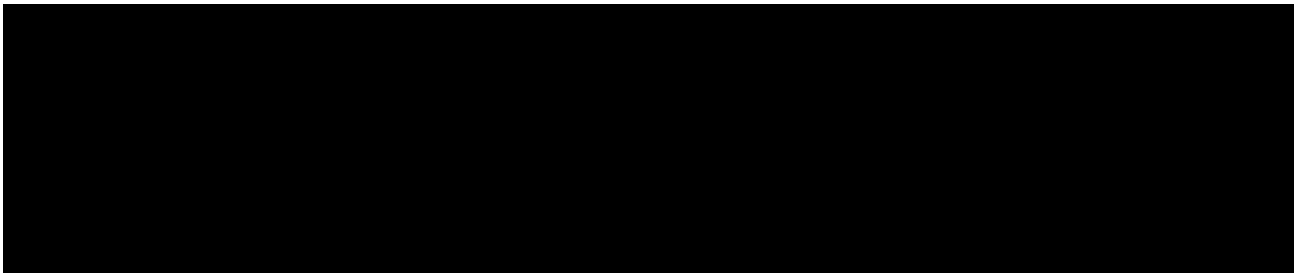
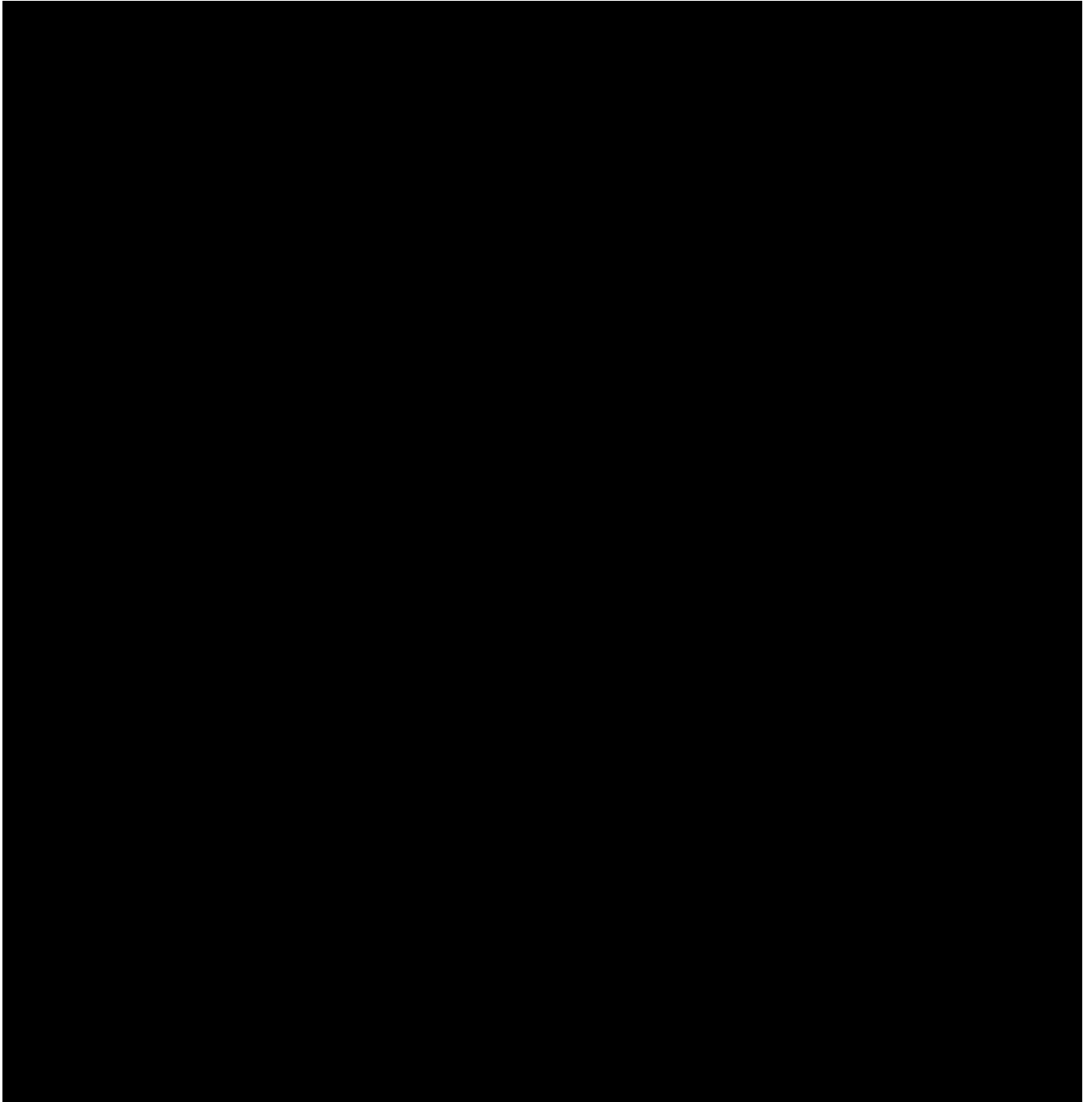
[REDACTED]

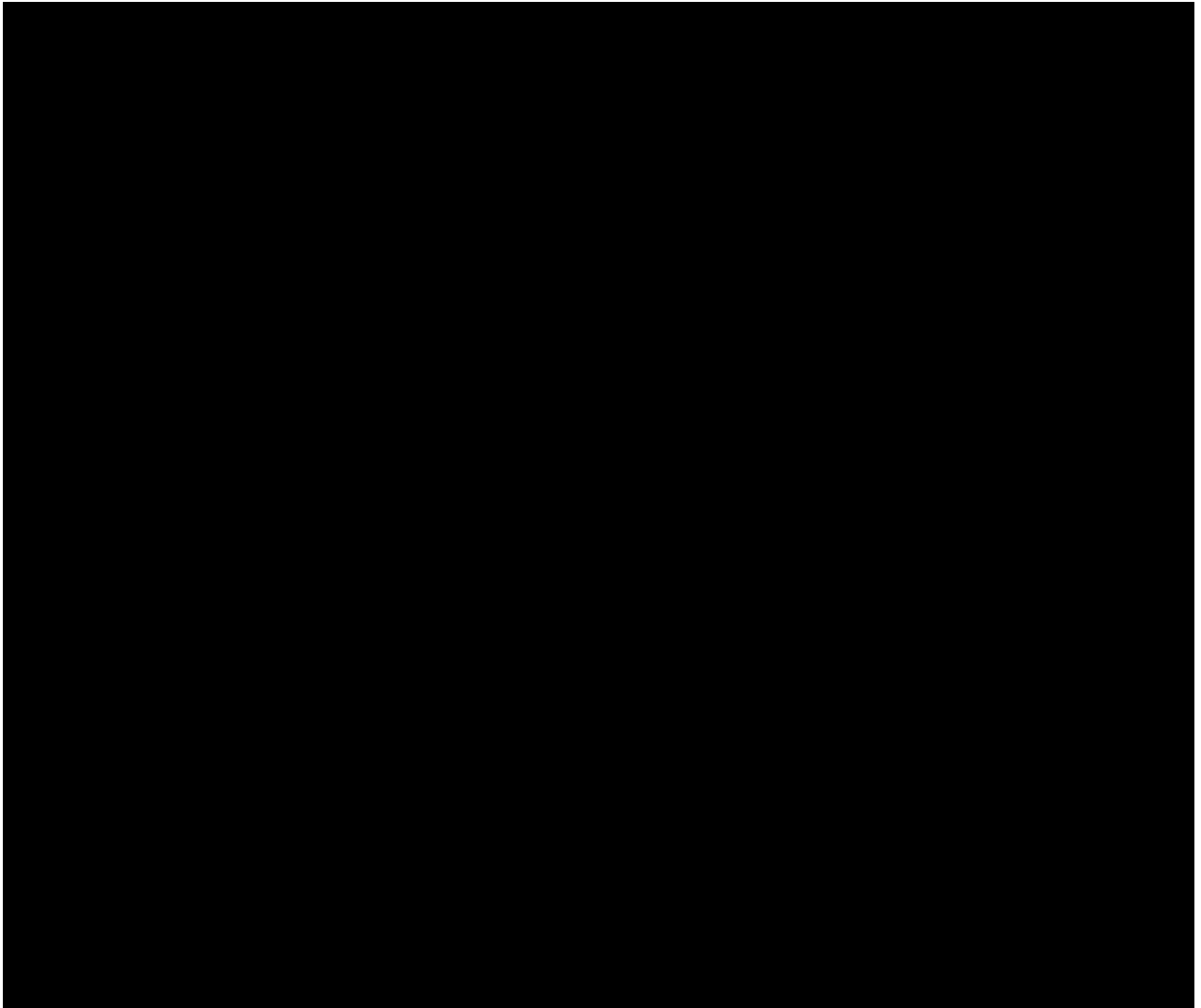
[REDACTED]











The higher cap application (page 19) refers to a large-scale community engagement exercise in 2021 (Hepburn Together) in the development of the Council Plan 2021-25 and LTFP 2021-31.

- Did council consider the outcomes of this engagement when making its decision to apply for a higher cap? If so, can council outline how this engagement informed its decision and provide more details around this engagement?
 - *Community engagement through the Council Plan 2021-25 project, and all projects conducted throughout the Council Term were part of the considering of Councillors in the development of the Financial Vision.*
 - *Whilst the Hepburn Together community engagement exercise in 2021 did not explicitly reference a higher rate cap, it asked the question 'Council delivers a broad range of services and projects to the community. When considering the overview of*

Council services and finances on the Participate Hepburn website what areas should Council spend less on? 220 responses were received to the question with the results showing:

- *Council expenditure including hiring external consultants, staffing, administration and expanding their role from traditional local government roles and responsibilities (28.62%)*
- *Infrastructure and amenity relating to less major projects, high risk projects or those that have low socio-economic benefit (25.91%)*
- *Tourism and events (13.64%)*
- *These results informed the 2024/25 budget savings of \$1.5 million and are informing the \$2.6 million savings Council are seeking in its 2025/26 budget.*
- Did council discuss or raise the potential for a higher cap when engaging with community members and ratepayers during the development of the 2024-25 Budget?
 - *Not directly as a rate cap variation was not being considered for 2024/25.*
 - *When Council released the draft 2024/25 budget for feedback, it took the opportunity to indicate the need for savings or revenue changes into the future.*
 - *The media release noted that - The budget also indicates that a further \$4.06 million in permanent savings or increased revenue must be generated in the 2025/26 financial year if Council is to remain sustainable in the long-term. To illustrate the scale of the necessary changes it should be noted that \$4m is the equivalent of 20% of Council's rates income or 12.5% of its cash operating costs. Over the coming months, Council will prepare and adopt a revised Long Term Financial Plan that will outline a strategy for the sustainability of Hepburn Shire over the next ten years. Council will engage with the community in July on the Long-Term Financial Plan (10-years) and look to adopt the plan at the September 2024 meeting. Continued collaboration with the community remains essential for:*
 - *Assessing and prioritising our service offerings.*
 - *Determining feasible and affordable levels of expenditure.*
 - *Identifying assets necessary for delivering prioritised services.*
 - *Evaluating surplus assets for potential disposal.*
 - *Adjusting resources to support the delivery of prioritised services.*
 - *Reviewing borrowing levels.*
 - *Reviewing opportunities for additional revenue, including an application for a rate cap variation.*
 - *Please refer to media release: [Council releases tough 2024-25 draft Budget for community feedback Hepburn Shire Council](#)*
 - *This release was the also put community on notice about the upcoming engagement opportunity in July (Financial Vision)*

The higher cap application (page 22) notes that the Financial Vision engagement report was provided to the community in the 10 September 2024 Special council meeting agenda.

- Can council please outline the steps it took to satisfy itself that ratepayers and community members were aware of the outcomes of the engagement and the decision made by council at its 10 September meeting?
 - *The Council Meeting was open to the public to attend, of which a few members did, and the meeting was also live streamed. Minutes of the meeting and the recording are available on our website [Agendas and minutes Hepburn Shire Council](#)*
 - *The agenda [Agendas and minutes Hepburn Shire Council](#) was released to the community ahead of the meeting and included the detailed engagement report.*
 - *Media release, with associated communications (socials etc) that indicated the agenda for the meeting was available - [Financial Vision Special Council Meeting agenda live Hepburn Shire Council](#)*
 - *Media release, with associated communication [Adopted Financial Vision strives for financial sustainability Hepburn Shire Council](#)*
 - *Given the importance of the decision, it was well covered in local media, and other media given the impact on the sector.*

The Financial Vision Engagement Report (page 6) states that “Results showed that 61.56% of respondents found a rate rise above the imposed State Government rate cap was acceptable”. However, the accompanying chart shows that respondents identified a wide range of acceptable rate increases in response to this question.

- How did council use this and other information to determine the higher cap of 10% (7% above the minister’s cap) that council has applied for?
 - *It was certainly an input to the decision-making process of officers in their recommendation and ultimately Council in their decision making but it was not the sole factor.*
 - *Information, workshops, engagement, conversations had been on-going for approximately 18 months.*
 - *It is important to note that the officer’s recommendation was in fact for 10% plus the rate cap variation request, whereas Council ultimately considered all factors, including capacity to pay of rate payers, community sentiment and settled on 10% including the rate cap.*

185E(3)(d) – Value and efficiency

This legislative matter requires councils to ensure that they can demonstrate they have sufficient policies and processes in place (and have taken specific actions) to ensure that the

additional revenue raised will be used efficiently and that the outcomes being pursued represent value for money for ratepayers.

The application (p.3) notes that Council's adopted 2024-25 Budget outlined \$1.5 million of service reductions and savings.

- Can Council provide us with an update on whether or not these savings have been realised or are on track to be realised in 2024-25?
 - *Yes, these savings have been realised and were removed from the 2024/25 as at 1 July 2024. They are permanent, on-going savings and have been factored into the 2025/26 budget.*
- Does Council have a draft budget for 2025-26 that it can provide us?
 - *Yes, it is confidential and subject to change as Councillors are still undertaking workshops. Refer to Appendix 10 and 11.*

Council's Financial Vision (page 4) states that "Projections for the long-term financial plan indicate that from 2024/25, a combination of strategies (such as rate variations, additional revenue, operational budget cuts, borrowing, and asset reviews) will be needed to address a \$4m cash shortfall". The application (page 4) outlines how the \$4m shortfall will be met in 2025-26 through increased revenue from the higher cap (\$1.36m) and \$2.53m (7.6% of operational expenditure) in operational savings (or increased revenue).

- Can council outline how it arrived at the balance between addressing this revenue shortfall through a higher cap and addressing it through other means?
 - *It was arrived at following 18 months of workshops, analysis and scenario planning as well as the community engagement.*
 - *The Financial Vision adopted includes a combination of strategies and as such Council would argue that the rate cap variation has been adopted as a last resort. Council is looking at alternative revenue (which is limited for a small rural council), already has borrowings, has significantly reduced capital works, is reducing services and conducted analysis of its property portfolio.*

The application (page 26) says that "In the development of the Financial Vision 2024-27, council carefully examined every council service to identify potential organisational efficiencies, achieving \$1.5m in operating savings".

- Can council provide more detail about the scope and extent of the review undertaken?
- Has council completed any full service reviews in the past 3 years?
- Has council done any benchmarking or analysis that compares the council's unit costs with those of its peers?

- *The Director Infrastructure and Delivery has been the lead in the development and would be happy to meet with you to discuss to get a sense of the projects undertaken, scope, and how we are developing services reviews if that was helpful.*
- *Council is using the current service reviews as a 'pilot' of how a small, rural council with limited resources would undertake the service reviews with internal resources, and what benchmarking would be helpful to decision making.*

The application notes that council is undertaking an ongoing program of service reviews (commenced in the 2024/25 financial year), with the following service reviews underway (p. 26 application):

- Waste services
- Circular economy
- Cleaning and public toilets
- Infrastructure operations
- Motor vehicle use
- Shared service opportunities
- Has council completed any of these service reviews? Have savings been identified?
 - *This service reviews are currently in working format and are being collated for presentation to the Executive Leadership Team for review, so are not in a format than can be shared. The Director Infrastructure and Delivery has been the lead in the development and would be happy to meet with you to discuss to get a sense of the project if that was helpful.*
 - *Council has entered into a shared service agreement with Mount Alexander Shire Council [Council partners with Hepburn Shire to deliver building services Hepburn Shire Council](#) and is actively looking for further shared services opportunities.*

The application (page 24) notes that council is currently developing the following key strategic plans, with the aim of having these adopted by 30 June 2025:

- 10-year Community Vision
- 4-year Council Plan (including the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan)
- 10-year Financial and Asset Plans
- 4-year Revenue and Rating Plan

The application (page 24) notes that the [deliberative] engagement currently being undertaken will form a key input into the decision making around where services and the budget can be reduced as part of the savings program.

- Can Council provide an update on where the development of these documents is currently at?

- *Each of these are significantly under development, with workshops continuing. Confidential appendix 20 provides an update.*
- Can Council provide a copy of the material provided to members of the deliberative panel?
 - *Yes, we will send a link to the ESC.*
- Are there any outcomes of the deliberative engagement process that council is able to provide us now?
 - *Our deliberative panel is currently meeting with the final session planned for 13th April, we maybe able to provide some draft insights post that, however the panel report will not be available for a couple of weeks post.*
- Are there drafts of any of the above documents available for us to view?
 - *Yes, we will provide some confidential updates post the conclusion of the panel on 13th April.*

The application (page 28) refers to a 'Dollars and Sense' initiative, where all staff were invited to submit suggestions for achieving internal operational efficiencies. The application noted that 85 of the 149 suggestions were being assessed further.

- Has this process concluded and have savings been identified?
 - *The process has not fully completed and will be ongoing through 2025-26 as the operational efficiencies are implemented. Many of the ideas gathered through the 'dollars and sense' initiative have formed part of the development of the identified savings operational savings in 2025/26. We can provide further information about any of the specific savings identified if you wish.*

As outlined in our *Guidance for councils – higher cap applications 2025-26* document, we consider the service performance principles cover expenditure on capital works.

- Can council outline the policies and processes in place to ensure the efficiency and value for money of its capital spending?
 - *Council has an adopted Project Management Framework – Appendix 17. The framework is designed to ensure appropriate governance, oversight and reporting exists on capital projects to ensure efficiency and value for our communities.*
 - *Council also has its adopted Procurement Policy [procurement-policy-adopted-final.pdf](#) which ensures that Council's contracting, purchasing and contract management activities achieves demonstrable value for money.*

The application outlines how, if the higher cap application is successful, council will create a 'grant funding reserve' with \$200,000 ongoing and increasing to be allocated to the reserve from 2026-27. The Higher Cap Information spreadsheet outlines the amount allocated each year as follows:

– 2026-27: \$200,000

- 2027-28: \$200,000
 - 2028-29: \$250,000
 - 2029-30: \$250,000
 - 2030-31: \$250,000
 - 2031-32: \$250,000
- Can council provide an explanation for the increasing amounts to be allocated to this reserve, and why no funds will be allocated in 2025-26?
 - *Councils financial position doesn't allow for any funds to be transferred to the reserve in 2025/26, given such a low unrestricted cash position.*
 - *As Council's financial position improves this gives the ability to transfer more funds to the reserve in future years.*
 - What policies and processes will council put in place to ensure these funds will be used efficiently and in line with community and ratepayer preferences?
 - *All projects need to demonstrate their alignment with the Council Plan, which is currently being developed in conjunction with the community.*
 - *Councils Project Management Framework provides the guidance to ensure appropriate governance and decision-making is in place, including when to seek grant funding.*
 - *Council is also part-way through implementing an EPMO as the next step in the maturity of Councils project management framework.*

The Higher Cap Information spreadsheet provided by Council does not outline any expenditure reduction in the event that a higher cap is not approved (the main difference between the 'with higher cap' and 'without higher cap' scenarios being a difference in Council's unrestricted cash balances.

- What steps would Council take if a higher cap was not approved?
 - *Effectively if the higher cap was not approved in full, then additional services cuts would be required, or a further reduction in capital works (below renewal) would be needed in the first instance. Council would ultimately review its Council Plan, and Financial Vision to ensure solvency but it's likely to result in reduced services being provided to the community.*
- How is the uncertainty around the outcome of its higher cap application being addressed and factored into its current planning and deliberative engagement processes (noting Council aims to have the Council Plan 2025-29 and Financial Plan 2025-35 finalised by June 2025)?
 - *We are scheduling a special meeting on the 13th May to consider endorsement of the Council Plan, Budget, Financial Plan, Asset Plan, and Revenue and Rating Strategy.*

We have aligned this meeting to be post the outcome of the cap being known so it can be factored into the development of the documents.

RFI | 185E(3)(e) – Trade-offs and alternative funding

This legislative matter requires councils to demonstrate that they have considered the prioritisation of services and different funding options before seeking a higher cap.

The application states that “in preparing the Financial Vision, Council considered a range of alternative revenue sources” and that “Council will continue to look at innovation and opportunities to increase revenue and limit the reduction of services”.

- Has Council done any further work to identify potential revenue from asset sales?
 - *Yes, a project has been developed, and we are undertaking a review of the properties owned by Council. Noting any asset sales will take some time to complete, are subject to community consultation and although may provide some one-off improvements to Councils cash position, are unlikely to have a material, ongoing positive impact to the Financial Vision. More details are provided in confidential appendix 18.*

The application (p. 33) says “Council will continue to investigate opportunities for increased user fees where appropriate, however given the small value of fees obtained, this will not have a material impact on Council’s financial position”. The application also notes that Council is looking at opportunities for the introduction of new fees (such as parking fees, re-introduction of swimming pool fees, and short-stay accommodation fees), however Council will need to ensure that any additional expenditure to collect these fees would offset any revenue generated.

- Can Council provide more information on any work it has done to evaluate the potential revenue and expenditure impacts of new fees or fee increases?
 - *Work is still in very early stages. It should be noted that given Councils (and all small rural councils) low user fees an increase might be a significant % increase but will be a lower \$ impact.*

Council’s Financial Vision (p.19) is based on the assumption of no new debt from 2025-26 onward. However, the application notes that Council has taken on a significant level of borrowings (for a small rural council) over the period 2020/21 to 2024/25 (\$15.93 million in new borrowings).

- Can Council provide more information about its borrowing strategy and the repayment of existing borrowings?

- *Council took out loans to fund capital works through the period noted. Through this period Council has completed a number of large capital projects, most with significant government funding that will be for the benefit of current and future generations.*
- *Council would not be in a cash position to repay more debt in the short term; however, the Financial Vision does allow the capacity for debt to be considered in the medium-long term.*
- *Debt funding will be considered for capital expenditure, where appropriate in specific project funding plans, but will not be used to fund operational activities.*

The application states that Council “has been mindful of increasing financial pressures for ratepayers and has not taken the decision to apply for the rate cap variation lightly”. The application also notes that the rate cap variation request is one level that Council is implementing with further work being undertaken to identify additional savings or revenue opportunities.

- Did Council consider alternative strategies to applying for a higher cap of 10% for the 2025-26 rating year, such as:
 - deferring the submission of a higher cap application until a future year when more of the work currently underway will have been completed?
 - *The timing of decisions being made by Council have been considered.*
 - *The Financial Vision was adopted by the 2020-24 Council term, given they considered the impact of the financial position through a series of workshops over a 18-months period. It was important for there to be clarity on the financial position and approach at the 2024 Council elections.*
 - *The 2024-28 Council term will consider and ultimately adopt the service changes that will allow for the Financial Vision to be implemented, and doing it in conjunction with feedback that is driving the Council Plan development.*
 - *The rate cap variation is required in 2025/26 otherwise even greater cuts to operations or capital works will be required.*
 - submitting a multi-year application, with rate increases spread over several (up to four) years?
 - *These were considered but effectively ruled out due to Councils low unrestricted cash position. If the additional cap is not forthcoming in 2025/26 additional cuts, over and above the \$1.5m in 2024/25 and the \$2.53 in 2025/26 will be required. These cuts will impact community greatly and so it is Councils preference to avoid further cuts.*
 - *Had the rate cap variation been spilt over multiple years ultimately additional funding or cuts would need to be found in 2025/26. With \$1.36 million in the rate cap variation proposed, even if the rate cap variation was spilt over two years, that would mean that \$680,000 of additional funds would need to be found in 2025/26.*

- *An additional 7% rate rise would be on average equal to \$2.20 per property per week but will generate \$1.36 million to invest in programs and services.*

The application refers to a decision of Council on 10 September 2024 (subject to approval of this higher cap application) to “double the current rebate on rate charges for pensioners who qualify under the State Government’s Pensioner Rate Remission scheme” for the 2025-26 rating year from \$21 to \$42 to assist pensioners with their rate payments.

- Is this concession forecast to continue beyond 2025-26? If so, at what rate?
 - *Yes this concession will continue beyond 2025-26 subject to an approve rate cap variation and will be based on the \$42 to assist eligible concession holders.*
 - *Council might consider in future years to increase the rate but that has not been included in the modelling.*

185E(3)(f) – Long term planning

This legislative matter requires that the assumptions and proposals in the application are consistent with those in the council’s long-term strategy and financial management policies set out in the council’s planning documents and annual budget.

- Is council able to share the main focus areas from its forthcoming council plan (in draft form)?
 - *Yes, in a confidential format given they are under development, through Councillor workshops and will be revised as our deliberative panel and community engagement findings are complete. Refer to appendix 12.*

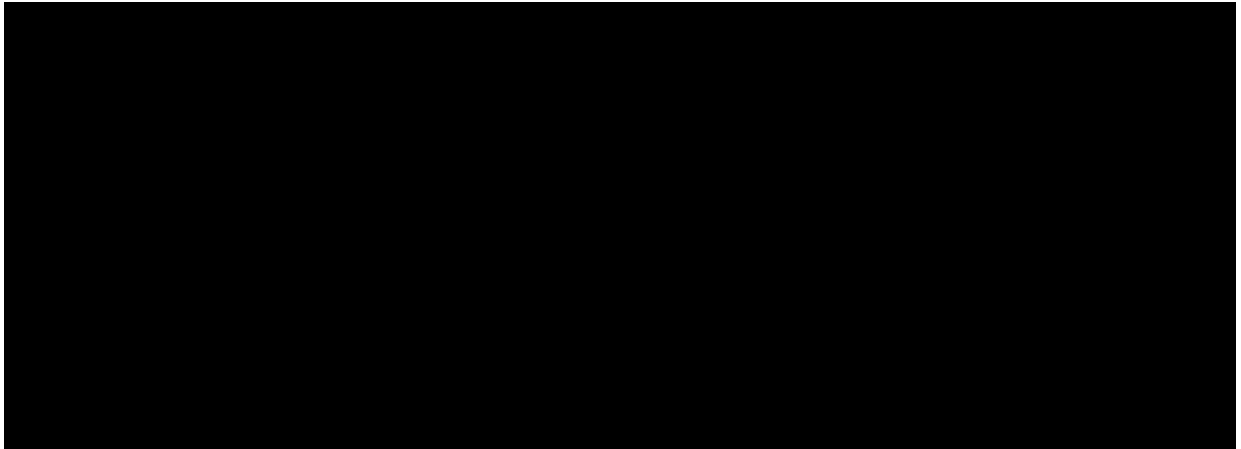
Subsequent requests

The Financial Vision shows that Council's 'trade and receivable' assets are forecast to reduce from \$7.7m to \$3.7m in the 2024-25 financial year.

- Can Council outline the assumptions underpinning this reduction and provide the most recent balance for trade and receivables?
 - *Yes, we provided in detail separately on 3rd April 2025.*

We have engaged a contractor to assist us with parts of our analysis, including Council's financial sustainability. Our contractor has found it useful to try and replicate Council's Long-Term Financial Plan. To do this they need some further detail around Council's loans and repayments.

- Can Council provide relevant information around its loans and repayment schedules, including identifying whether loans are fixed or variable and whether repayments include both principal and interest.
 - *Yes, we provided in detail separately on 3rd April 2025.*



Should you have any further questions, please contact myself on [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] or Manager Financial Services – Natalie Martin

We look forward to hearing the outcome of our application in the week of the 5 May 2025.

Yours sincerely

Bradley Thomas

Chief Executive Officer

Appendix 1: Hepburn Life Special Edition

[View this email in your browser](#)



| JUNE 2024



Financial Vision - Building our financial roadmap together

Council is committed to transparency and accountability when delivering on our financial strategy and the delivery of our services. In the 2024/25 budget, Council has committed to making \$1.5 million in operating savings and is now committing to working with community and Councillors to ensure our long-term financial viability.

In the 2025/2026 financial year, Council needs to find an additional \$4 million in long-term savings or additional revenue to develop a financially responsible plan that delivers on our shared Community Vision.

We need your help to understand your appetite for a potential rate increase, your priorities in service delivery, and your preferences for managing our community buildings and infrastructure.

How can I find out more?

Community Drop-in sessions are being held across the Shire. We encourage you to come and see us, have a chat, and read through the supporting documents. You can even fill in your survey on the spot! Feel free to just pop in for 5-10 minutes or complete the online surveys.

Session times:

- **Creswick:** Friday 5 July from 4:30pm to 7:30pm at the Creswick Town Hall

- **Glenlyon:** Monday 8 July from 4:30pm to 7:30pm at Glenlyon Shire Hall
- **Daylesford:** Thursday 11 July from 5:00pm to 8:00pm at Daylesford Town Hall
- **Trentham:** Friday 12 July from 4:30pm to 7:30pm at The Mechanics Trentham

For more information and to complete the surveys visit [Financial Vision](#) | [Participate Hepburn](#).



One of the five new Engagement Stations set up in our libraries to support your engagement with us.

How to provide feedback

Available until Wednesday 17 July, the Financial Vision survey is in two parts; a set of general questions about Council's revenue, assets and service provision, and a short activity that allows you to help us understand where you would like us to focus future budgets. A short how-to video has been created to guide you through the process.

of the Financial Vision and adoption of a new Long Term Financial Plan in September 2024. This engagement is only the first of the many conversations that we will need to have with our community as we work towards the development of a new Council Plan in 2025, following Council elections.

For more information and to complete the surveys visit [Financial Vision](#) | [Participate Hepburn](#)



Hepburn Shire Council

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hepburn.vic.gov.au

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Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we live and work. On these lands, Djaara have performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We recognise their resilience through dispossession and it is a testament to their continuing culture and tradition, which is strong and thriving. We also acknowledge the neighbouring Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri to our South East and the Wadawurrung to our South West and pay our respect to all Aboriginal peoples, their culture, and lore. We acknowledge their living culture and the unique role they play in the life of this region.

Appendix 2: The Local Community News – 27 June 2024

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Two key outcomes from Council's 18 June meeting were the adoption of an Arts & Culture Strategy, and a Fair Access Policy. The Arts & Culture Strategy (Council's first) seeks to support local artists of all kinds in the provision of creative cultural experiences, with the aim of enriching community wellbeing. The Fair Access Policy seeks to address barriers experienced by women, girls, trans, non-binary and gender diverse people in accessing and using

community sports infrastructure and to assist in eliminating systemic causes of gender inequality. Council is proud to develop and implement such policies and strategies.

Council's Special Meeting on 25 June resolved to adopt the budget for 2024/25. The key features are a 2.75% increase to rates; a reduction of \$1.5m in operating costs; increased borrowings of \$5.5m to fund the capital works program and the project to replace Daylesford Town Hall's roof and electrical systems. The very constrained cash environment necessitates the scaling back of the capital works program, to focus on completion of works already underway. Other aspirational projects will only advance to the construction stage in the event that grant funding is secured.

The budget quantifies a projected \$4m cash shortfall in each of the years 2025/26 and beyond. Clearly a \$4m cash shortfall each year is substantial – equating to 20% of rates income or 12.5% of operating costs. The potential remedies, to be pondered by councillors and community in the coming two months, are a combination of a rate increase up to 20% and/or a reduction in services by up to 12.5%. A variation to rates is subject to approval from the Essential Services Commission and, if granted, would be applicable in 2025/2026. A consultation process to gather feedback from the community will open on 1 July and is designed, in part, to identify those services and activities the community does not want to see reduced or changed and which services and activities the community could accept being changed. Similarly, community views on a potential increase to rates will be sought.

Council is obliged to prepare a long-term financial plan (LTFP), spanning the next 10 years, and councillors are obliged to ensure the organisation's financial sustainability. The revised LTFP is due to be adopted in early September and must guide the next Council Plan, which is to be prepared early in the new term.

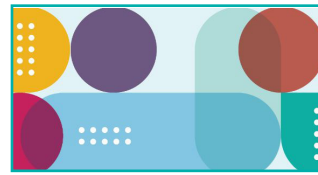
On another vitally important topic councillors and management readily agreed to extend the consultation period on the draft town structure plans and rural strategy to 26 June. Preliminary analysis suggests the State Government's allocation of a 3000 new housing target for Hepburn Shire closely aligns with the growth projections underpinning the draft plans.

I thank residents for making submissions into this vitally important topic. All submissions will be carefully considered before the draft plans are tabled for adoption in early September.

Mayor, Cr Brian Hood



BUDGET 2024-25 ADOPTED



The Budget 2024-25 was adopted at a Special Meeting of Council. This is the fourth and final year Budget under our current Council Plan and it funds important services such as roads, parks, waste and recycling and more.

We have been adversely impacted financially by a sub-CPI rate cap environment, increased costs due to inflation, natural disasters including storms and floods, increasing community and government expectations and limited alternate income streams. However, the budget has a strong focus on the completion of current works, projects and infrastructure, services and programs.

Councillors have chosen to increase rates at 2.75 per cent as per the maximum rate set by the State Government, which is below the current CPI rate of 3.6 per cent for the period to March 2024.

The budget endorsed a reduction in operational costs by \$1.5 million, while striving to minimise the impact on service delivery. We'll be working on our Financial Vision over the coming weeks. There is more information on how you can get involved at this link:

<https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au/financial-vision>

Participation in this project will be open from 1-17 July. You can also participate by attending a Community Drop-in Session:

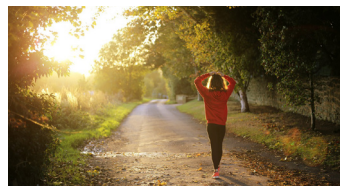
- **Creswick:** Friday 5 July 4:30 - 7:30pm at Creswick Town Hall
- **Clunes:** Saturday 6 July 9:30am - 12:30pm at Clunes Library, Ulumbarra Room on ground floor
- **Glenlyon:** Monday 8 July 4:30 - 7:30pm at Glenlyon Shire Hall
- **Daylesford:** Thursday 11 July 5 - 8:00pm at the Town Hall
- **Trentham:** Friday 12 July 4:30 - 7:30pm at The Mechanics

Share your thoughts and make a submission. Submissions can be made from 1 - 17 July 2024:

Visit one of our libraries or Daylesford customer service centre (Duke Street, Daylesford) and use one of the new engagement stations. If technology is not your thing, please ask one of the Library and Customer Experience staff to help you. Printable resources are available if you would prefer to write your submission.



COMMUNITY SATISFACTION SURVEY



Council has defied the statewide trend of declining community satisfaction by receiving steady or improving satisfaction results in many service areas. The Community Satisfaction Survey seeks the opinion of residents

about the operations of Council.

The State Government-commissioned survey administered by JWS Research is now conducted quarterly in Hepburn Shire, rather than yearly. Results from the most recent Survey, which covers 1 June 2023 to 18 March 2024, reveal 72 per cent of survey respondents rated the Shire's overall performance as 'average and above'.

This is an increase from 70% in the previous year. It was pleasing to see improvements in many key metrics, and Council recognises that there is room to improve its service delivery, but seeing this upward trend in many service areas is a further step in the right direction.

COUNCIL PLAN FOCUS AREAS



A resilient, sustainable and protected environment



A healthy supported, and empowered community



Embracing our past and planning for the future



Diverse economy and opportunities



A dynamic and responsive council

The Council Plan 2021-2025 describes how Council will strive towards our vision, where to focus efforts, and how to measure progress. Each Focus Area has a series of priority statements, with actions against each item.

Appendix 3: The Local – Community News – 27 July 2024

MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

Breaking news – we won!

I am absolutely thrilled to announce that Daylesford has been named the 2024 TAC Victoria Top Tourism Town in the Small Town Category. This award is great news for Daylesford and the Shire. When accepting the award on behalf of Council I commented that in some ways we were not surprised by this award. Daylesford was recently named by Booking.com as one of the most welcoming places on the planet. We know that our community, traders and accommodation providers create a welcoming environment.

That human factor is complemented by the fact that Daylesford is fortunate to be located within a wonderful natural environment that includes natural springs, forests and walking trails.

Thanks to our community and the visitors who voted for Daylesford.

And thank you to Steve Wroe and the Daylesford Macedon Tourism team for all of the work they did in producing an outstanding submission and for working so collaboratively with Council's Economic Development team.

Key outcomes from the **16 July Council meeting** were the adoption of Council's first Rainbow Action Plan and revised policies covering privacy, expenses and resources and public interest disclosures. An updated charter for the Audit & Risk Committee was also adopted.

The **Rainbow Action Plan** re-commits Council to achieving equality for LGBTIQ+ people by working to end LGBTIQ+ discrimination and by affirming and defending the fundamental human rights of LGBTIQ+ people. Hepburn Shire Council is one of only 18 local government authorities in Victoria to adopt an LGBTIQ+ Action Plan and it is further evidence of our role as a leader in gender equality and equity and promoting respect and safety in our community. The Plan is available on Council's website.

Council is aware of the decision by the producers of **The Block** to choose Daylesford for filming of the 2025 season, at the corner of Raglan Street and the Midland Highway in Daylesford. As is the case in all planning permits, Council will monitor compliance with conditions addressing landscaping, construction, stormwater and environmentally sustainable design. In this case, matters such as traffic management will also be an important consideration. It is anticipated that the production will generate a welcome boost for the local economy.

Councillors and officers are working through the vast number of submissions received on the **draft Town Structure Plans and Rural Hepburn Strategy**. An unprecedented number of submissions were received – in excess of 400 – with 34 public and stakeholder meetings held, 32,000 views of site pages and 16,000 letters sent to residents. It is very pleasing that community engagement and involvement has been so comprehensive on what is undoubtedly critically important work. Councillors will consider the revised documents separately in early September at a Special Council Meeting, deciding whether to adopt or amend the revised plans.

I wish to emphasise that, should the plans be endorsed, this will not result in an automatic change in planning provisions in the Shire. For any changes to planning provisions to occur the successful completion of a planning scheme amendment process must take place. This is a separate and lengthy statutory process involving further formal community consultation.

Community and stakeholders will have their say once again, and the ability to express their views before an independent panel appointed by the Minister for Planning. Council will also be required to make a number of future decisions at certain key milestones during the planning scheme amendment process.

Similarly, the consultation and engagement process on the development of a long-term financial plan (LTFP) has attracted 315 submissions. We are very appreciative of the community's efforts to have their say on this critically important matter. Councillors will consider the adoption of a LTFP at another Special Meeting in early September.

Mayor, Cr Brian Hood



EV CHARGER FOR TRENTAM

The Mechanics Trentam is now hosting Hepburn Shire's fourth electric vehicle (EV) charging station thanks to a collaboration between Hepburn Energy, Chargefox and the Hepburn Shire Council. This project received co-funding from the State Government's Destination Charging Across Victoria (DCAV) Program and was installed by JET Charge.



The new EV charger is the final one to be installed as part of the DCAV program. These stations are helping the region's tourism industry become more sustainable, while strengthening shire-wide efforts to reach zero-net emissions by 2030 as part of the Hepburn Z-NET partnership.

Hepburn Energy's General Manager, Taryn Lane, has been excited to see this collaboration contribute to local zero-net emissions efforts, delivering another EV charging station.

For more information, visit the Hepburn Z-NET website <https://hepburnznet.org.au>



RAINBOW ACTION PLAN

Council adopted its inaugural Rainbow Action Plan for LGBTIQ+ inclusion. The plan commits Council to a clear and achievable set of actions to create a safe and welcoming community for all LGBTIQ+ people.

We recognise and celebrate the important contributions that our LGBTIQ+ people, businesses and visitors bring to the life of our Shire. The plan will help to ensure that all LGBTIQ+ people feel supported, connected, visible and safe. It will also guide Council in providing an inclusive workplace for its LGBTIQ+ staff and volunteers.

You can view it at www.hepburn.vic.gov.au



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Appendix 4: Draft Budget summary – The Local 2024-25

DRAFT BUDGET 2024-25

Council has released its \$41.6 million draft budget for 2024-25 and invites the community to review and provide feedback. This is the fourth and final year budget under our 2021-2025 Council Plan. High inflation, and sharply increasing costs for the delivery of capital projects and operating services, combined with the extraordinary costs of unprecedented natural disasters and weather events, have put significant pressure on the financial management of councils. Hepburn Shire is not immune to those factors.

The 2024/2025 budget has been developed with the aim of minimising service impacts to the community where possible, while acknowledging operational savings are required to ensure unrestricted cash remains positive. Revenue collected through rates, charges, State and Federal Government grants and other sources, is projected to be \$40.3 million. Rate increases for 2024/2025 have been capped at 2.75% in line with the Victorian Government's Fair Go Rates System, below the current CPI rate of 3.6 percent.

Council implemented a weekly kerbside collection of food and organics (FOGO) for township residents in April 2024 as per our Sustainable Hepburn Strategy. The rollout of this service will see the standard annual fee for a residential property (fortnightly garbage collection, recycling and weekly FOGO) set at \$650 per annum or the equivalent of \$12.50 per week. This is in comparison to the current charge of \$570 per annum for a residential property that had weekly garbage collection and fortnightly recycling.

Council remains committed to ensuring we deliver for the community by completing existing capital projects, investing in the renewal of assets and community infrastructure, and through effective and efficient service delivery in line with community vision. In this coming year, it will be necessary for Council to reduce operational budgets by \$1.5 million, while seeking minimal impact on service delivery.

We are committed to continuing the delivery of recently adopted and existing strategies in a financially sustainable manner.

These include Sustainable Hepburn; Early and Middle Years, Youth and Positive Ageing Strategies; Gender Equity Strategy, and our Arts and Culture Strategy and the Rainbow Action Plan, which is to be considered for adoption shortly. Support for Dja Dja Wurrung as the Traditional Owners, and diversity and inclusion in our community, remain a priority in all forward plans for Council.

This budget outlines the ongoing commitment to deliver services across the Shire that support economic development, tourism, health and wellbeing, sustainability, waste, community grants, support for events and other services. These are required to ensure that we remain a diverse, dynamic and engaged place to live and play. Council's Governance and corporate functions remain committed to best practice and good governance standards in line with the Local Government Act 2020.

This budget includes \$5.53 million of new borrowings to support









the delivery of capital projects and provide upgraded and new infrastructure for our community.

Given the cost increases being experienced by the sector, and particularly the costs of responding to recent storm events, this borrowing is required in the short term.

The budget also indicates that a further \$4.06 million in permanent savings or increased revenue must be generated in the 2025/26 financial year if Council is to remain sustainable in the long term. Over the coming months, Council will prepare and adopt a revised Long Term Financial Plan that will outline a strategy for the sustainability of Hepburn Shire over the next ten years. Council will engage with the community in July on the Long-Term Financial Plan (10 years) and look to adopt the plan at the September 2024 meeting.

Capital Works Investment

- Major investment in road renewal and resealing \$2.58 million;
- Daylesford Town Hall \$1.03 million – funding to finalise roof and electrical replacement to ensure the ongoing protection of a key heritage asset;
- Building works of \$1.06 million, including the design for Daylesford Community Facilities \$0.3 million and a further \$100,000 to continue progression of Glenlyon Recreation Reserve Pavilion; and
- Recreational and Community facilities including parks and open spaces of \$1.50 million, of which \$1 million is grant funded.

Community buildings \$2.08M  (inc. Daylesford Town Hall \$1M)	Plant & equipment \$1.28M 	ICT & libraries \$280,000 	Roads \$2.6M 
Drainage, footpaths & cycleway \$643,000 	Parks & open spaces \$182,000 	Bridges \$125,000 	Community & rec facilities \$1.3M 

HAVE YOUR SAY

The draft Budget is available to view at Council offices in Daylesford, Clunes, Creswick and Trentham, and at the Daylesford Library.

You can also view the draft Budget and make a submission at <https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au/draft-budget>

Submissions must be received by Council by **Thursday 13 June 2023**. Council will consider the budget for adoption at the Council Meeting on Tuesday 25 June 2023.

The meeting will be livestreamed on Council's Facebook page at www.facebook.com/hepburncouncil

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Appendix 5: The Local – 15 July 2024

Council news

TINY TOWNS FUNDING

Council is thrilled to announce it has been successful in a number of applications for funding in grants from Regional Development Victoria's Tiny Towns Fund, to improve facilities and infrastructure in small towns across the Shire.

We are planning upgrades for outdoor fitness equipment in Trentham, shade sails in Clunes, development of a masterplan for Victoria Park, Daylesford, an accessible equestrian ramp at Glenlyon Recreation Reserve and playground relocation at Newlyn. Council is also pleased to auspice the Lyonville Hall Community Asset Committee, who were successful in obtaining a \$50,000 grant towards a landscaping project at the popular Lyonville Hall. We also supported community groups in various ways to successfully apply for funding.

SUBSCRIBE TO HEPBURN LIFE

Have you signed up to our enewsletter, Hepburn Life?

It's a great way to stay in touch. It gets delivered to your email inbox each month.

Use the QR code or visit...

<https://mailchi.mp/hepburn/sign-up>



FINANCIAL VISION



Council is working on its Financial Vision, and we want to hear from you.

We want to build our financial roadmap together, so why not have your say between 1 and 17 July on Participate Hepburn.

We have hosted community drop-in sessions in our townships of Creswick, Clunes, Glenlyon, Daylesford and Trentham. Thank you to everyone who came along for a discussion and to provide feedback.

There is still time to complete our survey, either online or at one of our engagement stations.

Visit <https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au/financial-vision>, one of our libraries or customer service centres and use one of the new engagement stations. If technology is not your thing, please ask one of the Library and Customer Experience staff to help you out. Printable resources will also be available if you would prefer to provide your feedback on paper. Feedback is open until 17 July 2024.

Appendix 6: Trentham Trumpet – July 2024

THE MECHANICS TRENTHAM



It's official - we're open!

The Mechanics Trentham was officially opened on 21 June by the Mayor Cr Brian Hood, Mary-Anne Thomas MP and The Hon. Catherine King MP.

The community was warmly welcomed with a Smoking Ceremony. Members of the community filled the building to celebrate and enjoy the spaces.

This amazing facility caters to the whole community, offering playgroup space, a library, study nooks, workspaces, visitor information, a commercial-style kitchen, and a large function space.

At the opening, we unveiled a magnificent piece of Indigenous artwork, a series of purpose-made fish traps created by Aunty Marilyn Nicholls. In keeping with the water theme, the meeting rooms are named after local rivers and feature nameplates in both English and Dja Dja Wurrung languages.



A highlight of the afternoon was the announcement that the facility's large commercial style kitchen was named 'Kit's Kitchen' after local legend Kit Manning.

The Mechanics Trentham is now available to hire: www.hepburn.vic.gov.au/venues

Read our full media release on the official opening at www.hepburn.vic.gov.au

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FUTURE HEPBURN UPDATE

Thank you to the thousands of community members who have reviewed the Township Structure Plans and Rural Hepburn over the last few months. We have received feedback from hundreds of community members. We created a comprehensive project page on Participate Hepburn, held community panels, community information sessions, webinars, hosted a survey and recieved hundreds of emails. Your feedback is appreciated and will be considered by Councillors during a series of workshops.

The final strategic documents are scheduled to be considered by Council at a Special Meeting in September. Keep up to date on the project at

<https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au/future-hepburn>

BUDGET 2024-25 ADOPTED

The Budget 2024-25 was adopted at a Special Meeting of Council on 25 June. This is the fourth and final year Budget under our current Council Plan and it funds important services such as roads, parks, waste and recycling and more. The budget has a strong focus on the completion of current works, projects and infrastructure, services and programs. Councillors have chosen to increase rates at 2.75 per cent as per the maximum rate set by the State Government, which is below the current CPI rate of 3.6 per cent for the period to March 2024. More information at www.hepburn.vic.gov.au

FINANCIAL VISION

Councils across Victoria are facing financial challenges due to increased costs of service delivery, inflation, limited revenue resources and recovery from natural disasters.

In the 2024/25 Budget, Council has committed to make \$1.5 million in operating savings. In 2025/26, Council needs to find an additional \$4 million in long-term savings or additional revenue to develop a financially responsible plan that delivers on our shared Community Vision.

We need your help to understand community priorities in service delivery, and your willingness for a percentage rate increase to ensure Council continues to be able to deliver the level of current services. We would also like to know more about your thoughts on the management of our buildings and infrastructure.

Get involved at <https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au>

CONTACT US

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w <https://participate.hepburn.vic.gov.au>
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