



HEPBURN SHIRE COUNCIL
SPECIAL MEETING OF COUNCIL
PUBLIC MINUTES

Tuesday 13 May 2025

Council Chamber
24 Vincent Street Daylesford

6:00 PM

A LIVE STREAM OF THE MEETING CAN BE VIEWED
VIA [COUNCIL'S YOUTUBE PAGE](#)

MINUTES

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24 Vincent Street Daylesford

Commencing at 6:00 PM

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BRADLEY THOMAS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Tuesday 13 May 2025

1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRADITIONAL OWNERS

Hepburn Shire Council acknowledges the Dja Dja Wurrung as the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters we live and work on. On these lands, Djaara has performed age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal. We recognise their resilience through dispossession and 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.

2 SAFETY ORIENTATION

Emergency exits and convenience facilities at the venue to be highlighted to members of the public in attendance.

3 OPENING OF MEETING

COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Cr Brian Hood, Cr Don Henderson, Cr Lesley Hewitt, Cr Pat Hockey, Cr Shirley Cornish, Cr Tim Drylie, Cr Tony Clark

OFFICERS PRESENT: Mr Bradley Thomas - Chief Executive Officer, Mr Bruce Lucas - Director Infrastructure and Delivery, Ms Brooke Holmes - Director Performance and Transformation, Mr Ron Torres - Director Development and Community, Mr Chris Whyte - Manager Technology and Transformation, Ms Rebecca Smith - Manager Governance and Risk

The meeting opened at 6:00pm.

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

“WE THE COUNCILLORS OF HEPBURN SHIRE
DECLARE THAT WE WILL UNDERTAKE ON EVERY OCCASION
TO CARRY OUT OUR DUTIES IN THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE COMMUNITY
AND THAT OUR CONDUCT SHALL MAINTAIN THE STANDARDS OF THE CODE OF
GOOD GOVERNANCE

SO THAT WE MAY FAITHFULLY REPRESENT AND UPHOLD THE TRUST PLACED IN THIS
COUNCIL BY THE PEOPLE OF HEPBURN SHIRE”

4 APOLOGIES

Nil.

5 DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Nil.

6 OFFICER REPORTS

6.1 ENDORSEMENT OF DRAFT COUNCIL PLAN 2025-2029 AND INTEGRATED STRATEGIC PLANNING DOCUMENTS FOR PUBLIC EXHIBITION

Go to 00:03:10 in the meeting recording to view this item.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

In providing this advice to Council as the Chief Executive Officer, I Bradley Thomas have no interests to disclose in this report.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Draft Council Plan 2025-2029 [6.1.1 - 58 pages]
2. Draft Budget 2025-2026 [6.1.2 - 62 pages]
3. Fees and Charges Schedule 2025-2026 [6.1.3 - 28 pages]
4. Long Term Financial Plan 2025 2035 [6.1.4 - 42 pages]
5. Draft Revenue and Rating Plan 2025-2029 [6.1.5 - 44 pages]
6. Draft Asset Plan 2025-2035 [6.1.6 - 42 pages]
7. Hepburn Together 2025-2029 Community Panel Engagement Report [6.1.7 - 55 pages]
8. Your Feedback and Alignment with the Council Plan 2025-2029 [6.1.8 - 7 pages]
9. Essential Services Commission Higher Rate Cap Application Decision [6.1.9 - 37 pages]

OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. *Endorses the following draft documents for community engagement and consultation from 14 May 2025 to 5 June 2025:*
 - a. *Council Plan 2025-2029, including the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan;*
 - b. *Financial Plan;*
 - c. *Budget 2025/2026;*
 - d. *Revenue and Rating Plan; and,*
 - e. *Asset Plan.*
2. *Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to undertake minor, administrative changes to the documents to correct errors and improve readability, if required, during the consultation period;*

3. *Notes the draft documents are fully compliant with relevant legislation;*
4. *Notes that results of community consultation will be provided to Councillors to consider the adoption of the draft documents at the June Council Meeting;*
5. *Thanks members of the Community Deliberative Engagement Panel for their involvement;*
6. *Notes the Hepburn Together 2025-2029 Community Panel Outcomes Report, and ensures the panel and community that feedback from the panel has been included in the drafting of the report, as included in the attached;*
7. *Notes the Essential Services Commission decision to approve Hepburn Shire Council's proposed higher cap of 10 per cent (7% above the state cap) for the 2025/2026 financial year; and,*
8. *Requests that the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer write to the Member for Ballarat, and the State Government members for Ripon and Macedon detailing the outcome of this resolution.*

MOTION

That Council:

1. *Endorses the following draft documents for community engagement and consultation from 14 May 2025 to 5 June 2025:*
 - a. *Council Plan 2025-2029, including the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan;*
 - b. *Financial Plan;*
 - c. *Budget 2025/2026;*
 - d. *Revenue and Rating Plan; and,*
 - e. *Asset Plan.*
2. *Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to undertake minor, administrative changes to the documents to correct errors and improve readability, if required, during the consultation period;*
3. *Notes the draft documents are fully compliant with relevant legislation;*

4. *Notes that results of community consultation will be provided to Councillors to consider the adoption of the draft documents at the June Council Meeting;*
5. *Thanks members of the Community Deliberative Engagement Panel for their involvement;*
6. *Notes the Hepburn Together 2025-2029 Community Panel Outcomes Report, and ensures the panel and community that feedback from the panel has been included in the drafting of the report, as included in the attached;*
7. *Notes the Essential Services Commission (ESC) decision to approve Hepburn Shire Council's proposed higher cap of 10 per cent (7% above the state cap) for the 2025/2026 financial year and Officers are to bring a report back to Council before adoption of the budget; and,*
8. *Requests that the Mayor and Chief Executive Officer write to the Member for Ballarat, and the State Government members for Ripon and Macedon detailing the outcome of this resolution.*

Moved: Cr Tony Clark

Seconded: Cr Lesley Hewitt

Carried

Cr Tim Drylie moved an extension of speaking time for Cr Brian Hood.

Moved: Cr Tim Drylie

Motion lapsed for want of a seconder.

Debate returned to the motion on the table.

Voted for: Cr Don Henderson, Cr Lesley Hewitt, Cr Pat Hockey, Cr Shirley Cornish, Cr Tim Drylie and Cr Tony Clark

Voted against: Nil

Abstained: Cr Brian Hood

Cr Shirley Cornish called for a division

Voted for: Cr Don Henderson, Cr Lesley Hewitt, Cr Pat Hockey, Cr Shirley Cornish, Cr Tim Drylie and Cr Tony Clark

Voted against: Nil

Abstained: Cr Brian Hood

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The development of these draft Integrated Plans set the strategic direction of the Council over the next four to ten years. The purpose of this report is to present the suite of draft documents for endorsement and community consultation.

Council is entering a new chapter, one defined by a strong commitment to our community, improving our customer responsiveness and ensuring our financial sustainability.

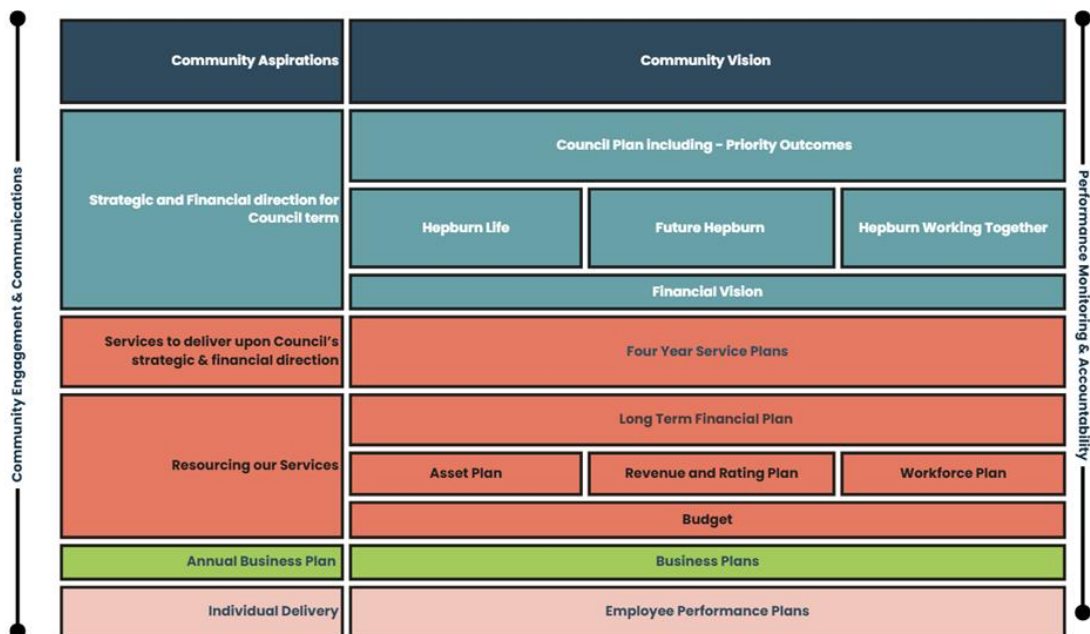
Financial sustainability is at the core of our plans for the future. Challenging finances is not something unique to Hepburn Shire, it is an outlook being repeated across many of the 79 councils in Victoria. We need strong economic foundations to allow us to meet the challenges ahead. By making the difficult but important decisions today, we will be protecting our ability to deliver for our community tomorrow.

The plans are outcomes focused – we have detailed the outcomes Council is seeking to achieve across the Council term, reflecting the change or benefit to community, environment or organisation.

Our plans are a shared vision. Plans that incorporate the voices of residents and ratepayers collected through community feedback and a Deliberative Engagement Panel made up of community representatives. Working together has helped us shape the various plans that reflects the hopes and needs of those who call our Shire home, in a financially sustainable manner.

BACKGROUND

The Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework sets out the range of strategic documents Council is required to adopt under the *Local Government Act 2020*, following the election of a new Council. The framework (below) sets out Hepburn Shire's integrated approach to planning, monitoring, and performance reporting.



Layer	Description	Documents
Community aspirations	Community aspirations are set out in our Community Vision.	Community Vision
Strategic direction	The strategic and financial direction and priorities across the Council term.	Council Plan and Financial Vision
Council services	Services that will deliver upon Council's strategic and financial priorities.	Service Catalogue and Service Map
Resourcing	How we will resource our services to deliver Council's strategic and financial priorities.	Financial Plan, Asset Plan, Workforce Plan and Annual Budget.
Annual business plan	The projects and initiatives funded through the annual Budget that will deliver on Council's strategic and financial priorities.	Annual Plan
Individual delivery	Individual employee plans that align our Council Officers roles and responsibilities to Council's	Employee Performance Plans

	strategic and financial priorities.	
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KEY ISSUES

Summary details of each document within the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework being considered for endorsement are provided below, with specific details included in each of the draft documents.

Council Plan 2025-2029

Our Council Plan 2025–2029 (including the Health and Wellbeing Plan) is focused on getting back to the basics. We are laying the groundwork for a strong future by focusing on maintaining our roads, enhancing our parks, planning for our community’s future and delivering customer-centred services.

Our vision is to build a future where services are accessible and connected to the needs of our community. We will focus on three domains (strategic objectives), Hepburn Life, Future Hepburn and Hepburn Working Together:

- Hepburn Life is about building a vibrant, resilient, and inclusive community where every person feels connected, informed, and supported to thrive.
- Future Hepburn strives to honour the distinctive character of our towns and rural landscapes while fostering sustainable growth, infrastructure, and economic vitality.
- Hepburn Working Together is guided by a commitment to delivering high-quality services, ensuring strong governance, and fostering a positive and skilled workforce.

The following provides the draft outcomes of the Council Plan.

Hepburn Life

Outcomes



- 1 Connected communities that are resilient, adaptable, and empowered - able to respond to and recover from climate-related impacts, emergencies, and other community challenges.
- 2 A healthy and inclusive community, where all people regardless of background or life stage have the opportunity to participate and thrive.
- 3 An informed and engaged community.

Future Hepburn

Outcomes



- 1 Preserve the unique character of our towns and communities, plan for future growth and protect our productive rural landscape.
- 2 Responsible management of infrastructure and environment to support wellbeing now and for future generations.
- 3 A dynamic, vibrant and resilient economic environment.

Hepburn working together

Outcomes



- 1 Future-focused services that are easy to use and inclusive.
- 2 Maintain corporate governance to enable good Council decision making and to ensure long-term financial viability.
- 3 An engaged, safe, and skillful workforce.

Hepburn Life	
Outcome 1	Connected communities that are resilient, adaptable, and empowered - able to respond to and recover from climate-related impacts, emergencies, and other community challenges.
Outcome 2	A healthy and inclusive community, where all people regardless of background or stage of life and have the opportunity to participate and thrive.
Outcome 3	An informed and engaged community.
Future Hepburn	

Outcome 1	Preserve the unique character of our towns and communities, plan for future growth and protect our productive rural landscape.
Outcome 2	Responsible management of infrastructure and environment to support wellbeing now and for future generations.
Outcome 3	A dynamic, vibrant, and resilient economic environment.
Hepburn Working Together	
Outcome 1	Future focused services that are easy to use and inclusive.
Outcome 2	Maintain corporate governance to enable good Council decision making and to ensure long-term financial viability.
Outcome 3	An engaged, safe, and skilful workforce.

Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan

The Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 requires all local governments to prepare a Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (MPHWP) within 12 months of a council election. The Hepburn Shire Council Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2025-2029 has been integrated into the Community Vision and Council Plan 2025-2029.

The MPHWP identifies the health priorities of the municipality for the next four years, with the two priority areas selected are:

- increasing active living
- increasing mental wellbeing

Financial Plan

In September 2024, Council adopted its Financial Vision, which was proactively developed to support its commitment to financial sustainability. This vision, created in collaboration with Council and the community, serves as a strategic guide for providing services, setting priorities, and executing projects that meet community needs while ensuring financial stability over the next decade.

In creating the Financial Plan, key financial principles underpin Council's projected financial performance and position over a ten-year period, fulfilling our statutory requirements. The financial forecasts within this plan outline Council's future direction and financial capacity, serving as a guide for future actions or opportunities. This allows Council to assess the future impacts of its current decisions and review the Plan annually following the adoption of the Annual Budget.

This Financial Plan is underpinned by the Financial Vision, which had the following high-level inclusions:

- That the current and projected financial outlook of Council must be a key consideration in the development of the Council Plan 2025-2029 and Financial Plan 2025-2034 (completed);
- That Council must consider operational savings, services changes and revenue opportunities in the development of the 2025/2026 budget (completed);
- That Council prepare and submit an application to the Essential Services Commission for a rate cap variation applicable for the 2025/2026 financial year of 7% (completed, and approved in full);
- Subject to a successful application for a rate cap variation, the rebate on rate charges for pensioners who qualify under the State Government's Pensioner Rate Remission scheme will be doubled. This initiative will increase Council's rebate from \$21 to \$42 to assist pensioners in their rate payments (completed, to apply in the 2025/2026 year);
- The Chief Executive Officer will work with Councillors to analyse all services offered by Council, to ensure that the Council Plan 2025-2029 and Budget 2025/2026 identify operational saving and/or new revenue opportunities needed to realise the Financial Vision (completed, and service changes will be ongoing);
- That the funding of asset renewal is a priority, and that capital works expenditure is limited to effectively renewal works only. Council will actively seek State and Federal Government funding, if new or extended assets are to be considered (completed, and ongoing); and
- Creation of a 'grant funding reserve', if the rate cap variation is approved, which will mean funds will be available to allocate to government grant applications as 'matching' funds (completed, and ongoing).

This Financial Plan ensures that the objectives outlined within the Financial Vision are achieved:

- Ensure that cash reserves are sufficient to sustain service delivery for the community and to fulfill our obligations;
- Strive to have an amount of unallocated cash to provide a buffer so that we can adequately respond to any unforeseen emergencies;
- In the long-term, establish a reserve that can provide matching funds for grants received from other tiers of government to deliver for our future generations.

Budget 2025/2026

The 2025/2026 budget has been developed within the objectives of the Financial Vision and the new Council Plan 2025-2029 acknowledging operational savings are required to ensure unrestricted cash remains positive.

Council has budgeted both a surplus, and an adjusted underlying surplus for the 2025/2026 year, and while a positive unrestricted cash position – these are positive trends and improvements on prior financial years.

The projected total revenue from rates and charges is \$28.9M, which includes an average rate increase of 10.0%. This increase consists of a rate cap variation for a permanent uplift of 7% to ensure the financial viability and long-term sustainability of the Council, and a 3% rate cap in accordance with the Fair Go Rates System (FGRS), which limits rate increases for Victorian councils as determined by the Minister for Local Government.

Council has weekly kerbside collections across the Shire and a review of the standard annual fees for 2025/2026 has retained these annual fees at the 2024/2025 rates with the except of food and organics (FOGO) for township residents which has reduced by \$40 per annum.

Council will continue to work with the community in the coming years to ensure that community priorities and expectations are aligned with the Council's service delivery model. This alignment must be achieved within a financially sustainable framework. For more details on the cost of the Council's services, please refer to section 2 of the budget that provides a summary of the budgeted permanent savings or additional revenue for 2025/2026 onwards, with more specific details in section 2. It is important to note that these savings or additional revenue are in addition to the \$1.5 million identified and achieved for 2024/2025.

Revenue and Rating Plan

The Revenue and Rating Plan aims to identify the most suitable revenue and rating strategy for the Hepburn Shire Council. This strategy will ensure adequate funding for the objectives outlined in the Council Plan.

The Council Plan includes a strategy to - *Actively pursue alternative revenue opportunities*, and this Revenue and Rating Plan has been created with that in mind.

The Plan includes a number of recommendations/findings, including but not limited to the following:

- Proposed no changes to rating differentials.
- Council will undertake a review of the kerbside food and garden organics service following its 12-months implementation, with a report presented to Council in early 2025-2026.
- Councillors will receive a briefing paper that considers the possible options for special rate and charge schemes, including for possible road upgrades.
- Given the successful rate cap variation, Council's additional pension concession will increase to \$42 (from \$21).
- Council will collaborate with advocacy bodies to request State Government undertake reviews and make adjustment to statutory fees and fine to improve the alignment between costs and revenue.
- Council continues to explore options that diversifies funding sources by exploring partnerships and other models with values-aligned organisations, and additionally, examines opportunities for shared service models with neighbouring councils and other entities to increase operational efficiency.
- In 2025/2026 Council officers prepare a briefing for Councillors that reviews the implementation of the Leases and Licences Policy to ensure compliance is fast-tracked across the shire.

Asset Plan 2025-2035

The Asset Plan is a strategic document that covers the next ten-year period, outlines Council's management approach for community assets and demonstrates its commitment to accountability, transparency and financial responsibility in decision making.

The Asset Plan ensures that infrastructure and facilities are maintained, renewed, and developed in a manner that aligns with community needs and expectations. The Plan integrates asset management practices with the broader objectives of the Council Plan and Community Vision, providing a structured approach to asset lifecycle management, including acquisition, maintenance/operations, renewal, and disposal. This alignment ensures that asset management decisions contribute to the achievement of the Council's strategic goals and respond effectively to community priorities.

Essential Services Commission Rate Variation Application

The independent Essential Services Commission (ESC) has approved Council's rate cap variation for the 7% uplift in rates, over above the State Government rate cap of 3%. Therefore, rates will raise 10% for the 2025/2026 financial year.

The full report from the ESC is included as an attachment.

COUNCIL POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE IMPLICATIONS

The Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework outlines the range of strategic documents that the Council is required to adopt under the *Local Government Act 2020*. The documents and the processes undertaken are fully compliant with, and exceed, the requirements of the Act.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The draft documents have been developed in line with Council's Financial Vision. Specific financial details are included throughout the documents.

With a commitment to safeguarding Council's long-term financial health, a comprehensive review of the ten-year Financial Plan, alongside a broad evaluation of service provisions, has been undertaken and continues on from the previous work associated with the Financial Vision 2024-2027. Striking a balance between financial constraints, community expectations, and statutory obligations remains a formidable task, particularly given the constraints of the State Government rate cap and fluctuations in government grant funding.

The adoption of the documents, post community consultation will respond to Council's identified risk of 'Financial sustainability: Failure to maintain our long-term financial sustainability to deliver on our business objectives' as included in Council's strategic risk register.

The Essential Services Commission has approved Council's rate cap variation stated in its decision:

"Hepburn's decision to apply for a higher cap of 10 per cent for the 2025–26 financial year is consistent with its long-term planning outlined in its Financial Vision.

By developing its Financial Vision ahead of the planning cycle currently underway, Hepburn has been transparent with its community about its financial situation and been able to have important conversations to ensure the next tranche of plans is principally concerned with financial sustainability, and focuses on the services that are most important to the community."

COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

A range of engagement factors have been considered in the drafting of the Council Plan and other documents, including:

- Previous engagement activities, especially associated with Future Hepburn (Township Structure Plans and Rural Strategy), previous Council Plan input and the Financial Vision.
- Councillor and Officer insights.
- A community based deliberative engagement panel.
- A shire-wide community survey, with over 400 responses.

As core inputs to the Council Plan, an attachment is included that how the results and recommendations of the community based deliberative engagement panel and shire-wide community survey have influenced the Plan, along with a table that shows the alignment of community feedback to the Council Plan.

Post endorsement of the draft, feedback from community will be requested through a range of formats.

RISK AND GOVERNANCE IMPLICATIONS

The draft documents and their inclusions fully comply with the *Local Government Act 2020*.

Council has identified several strategic risks as part of its Risk Management Framework. Developing quality documents within the Integrated Strategic Planning Framework will serve as a crucial control to mitigate or eliminate these risks.

Regular performance reporting on these documents will occur throughout the financial years and will be made available to the public.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability implications are a key consideration for the Council and have been incorporated into the various documents. Specifically, several outcomes and strategies in the Council plan directly address the protection and enhancement of our environment.

GENDER IMPACT ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive Gender Impact Assessment is being conducted on the draft documents and will be taken into account during the consultation period. Any necessary amendments will be considered before final adoption.

7 CLOSE OF MEETING

The Meeting closed at 6:52pm.