

## **Appendix #3**

The Forrest and District Plan: Towards 2030, final published version



Forrest & District Plan



**TOWARDS 2030**





Forrest and District Community Group

Deakin University

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)

Colac Otway Shire

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# Executive Summary

## Forrest & District Plan: Towards 2030

An initiative of the Forrest Community, the *Forrest & District Plan: Towards 2030* is the result of many years of community consultation and articulates the community of Forrest and District's goals for growth and prosperity over the next ten years to 2030.

The Plan has been written by community representatives for the community and consolidates the collected thoughts across many years of deliberations. The opportunity to

produce a comprehensive document (the Plan), was a rare moment to combine all the consultations and reports into one place: a synthesis that expresses key themes, community values, concerns and aspirations.

The document aims to support future planning for the community over the next 10 years (2020-2030), acknowledging key characteristics and driving forces to encourage sustainable development. The Plan will give clarity to government and

agencies about the sort of community Forrest and District aspires to be.

The Plan identifies the community's five key goals. These goals reflect place-based planning and priorities across the themes of nature, community, infrastructure, recreation, challenges and the future that can enhance the delivery of government services, with the focus on the community rather than the individual services. They help determine the community's aspirations and the issues that need to be addressed.

### A 10-YEAR VISION

*This dynamic rural community has demonstrated its capacity to be resilient and adaptive, and now looks forward to a future that uses a thoughtful and robust framework for community development.*

*As a gateway town to the Otway Ranges, Forrest and District offers an opportunity to connect with the natural environment and cultural landscape and maximise enrichment of the Otways experience. Not only*

*does the community cherish the rich landscape of the Gadubanud country in the Otways, but they share it with the wider populations of Victoria and Australia, through tourism and its supporting activities, land managers both government and private, and research projects.*

*The Plan was written during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, and this context is important to keep in mind*

*as its impact across society and the economy are likely to have informed the considerations of the authors and community contributors. The pandemic will affect government decision-making for years to come. While its impact on the region over the long term is uncertain, assessment of the Plan against this new reality reinforces and strengthens the need for the goals and priorities identified.*

### KEY THEMES

Six key themes were identified from community engagement.

**Nature:** The pristine natural environment is a major drawcard for both residents and tourists. The spectacular surrounding bushland and the proximity to the Great Ocean Road were both cited by residents as benefits of living in Forrest and District. People wanted more connection to Indigenous knowledge and practices.

**Community:** Forrest and District have a small-town charm. The community are highly supportive of one another and the many local community groups are indicative of the tight-knit, connected character of the local residents.

**Infrastructure:** In order for Forrest and District to progress and prosper, investment in infrastructure is needed. The current situation sees failing wastewater infrastructure, inadequate communications infrastructure, insufficient housing, and a community vulnerable to bushfire without a local bushfire place of last resort. Additional improvements to local bike/horseriding/walking trails and a view to sustainability (e.g. integrated water management, microgrids, solar panels) were expressed by the community.

**Recreation:** Infrastructure focused around recreation was noted by many – including tourism, mountain biking, sport, horse-riding, camping

and art. The interplay between tourist needs and local resident needs was highlighted.

**Challenges:** Vulnerability to bushfire and climate change are key concerns of the community. The future of local agriculture is also a concern.

**The Future:** The local community are positive about their sustainability aspirations. They have ideas for energy independence, food systems and food sharing, progressive farming techniques, and what the future economy of Forrest and District might look like.

Based on these themes, five goals were developed for the future of Forrest and District.

**CORE RECOMMENDATION**

That investments and project decisions in Forrest and District should be made in line with the goals, values and priorities identified in this Plan, and with respect to the outcomes of extensive consultation over the past five years that have informed this Plan.

**FORREST AND DISTRICT'S FIVE GOALS**

- 1 **A BUSHFIRE-SAFE COMMUNITY** which encourages resilience to live safely in the Otways environment
- 2 **A DIVERSE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY** including sustainable tourism and diversifying to open opportunities in other sectors
- 3 **GREAT PUBLIC AND PRIVATE INFRASTRUCTURE** to ensure long-term viability to support liveability, amenity, the environment, and growth opportunities
- 4 **A CARED-FOR COMMUNITY** that is supportive and inclusive with a focus on the wellbeing of residents
- 5 **A SECURE FUTURE** that considers the many threats such as climate change, public health risks, and bushfire

**STRATEGIC DIRECTION**

The community partnered with researchers from Deakin University's Local SDGs program to develop ways to adapt the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in local communities. The Plan was developed using this framework underpinned by the principles of sustainability: Environment, Society and Economy. The SDGs are core to many government decision-making processes.

The community in Forrest and District expressed a desire for a future that is proactive with ideas to support environmental sustainability and self-sufficiency (e.g. solar microgrids, community farming/gardening projects, regenerative agriculture, and traditional burning). It has been empowered by taking opportunities to protect its built assets (DELWP sites hand-over in 2019) and create a community centre that will support bushfire safety.

**PROCESS**

The key consultation processes which informed this Plan were:

1. Forrest and District Community Group survey (2015)
2. Forrest Futures (leading to community management of the former DELWP sites 2017)
3. Forrest Wastewater Investigation (2017)
4. Forrest Common Masterplan (2018)
5. Forrest Gateway Project feasibility (2019)
6. Forrest Mountain Bike Trails redevelopment (2019)
7. Forrest Futures II (Deakin University SDG research (2020)

The Plan was drafted iteratively with two rounds of community comment, and revision made based upon the feedback received. This process served to validate the contents and conclusions of the Plan. The community had further options to participate, with two video conferencing meetings and a survey to rank infrastructure priorities. The Version 3 draft was sent to non-resident stakeholders, such as government and agencies, and this final version incorporates this feedback.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

We would like to thank Deakin University's Local SDGs program team, and DELWP for providing their time and expertise in writing this Plan and assisting with community engagement. Ebony Hickey of the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative provided an Indigenous perspective for the Plan's contents, and Gillian Brew provided graphic design services for the final publication.

The coordination and writing of this Plan was made possible through the Forrest Gateway Project, funded by the State Government's Virtual Centre for Climate Change Innovation (Emma Ashton), and the Ian Potter Foundation (Katrina Szetey). Sharon Bradshaw, in her role as secretary of the Forrest and District Community Group, volunteered her time to consult on the writing of this Plan.

# FORREST in 2020



**Yaugher Trail Head**

**Forrest Recreation Reserve and Horseriding Club**

**Forrest Primary School and Early Learning Centre**

**Forrest Caravan Park**  
Lease renewal and review with Colac Otway Shire underway

**Forrest Public Hall**  
received funding in 2020 to remove asbestos and re-clad

**Forrest Common Masterplan**  
approved by Council 2019 and seeking funding

**Forrest Wastewater Investigation**  
Barwon Water and Colac Otway Shire investigating funding options

**BUSINESS PRECINCT**

**STATION ST**

**Gateway to the Otways Centre**  
Feasibility study for community and visitor centre & Bushfire Place of Last Resort nearing completion and seeking funding

**Men's Shed**  
received funding 2020 for building works, solar panels, IT and volunteer grant

**Lions Club**

**Community Hub**  
Neighbourhood House, Art Studio, CFA and Historical Society, meeting room for hire and proposed Gateway Centre

**Mountain Bike Network Upgrades**  
received partial funding to implement improvements to trails and facilities

**to Apollo Bay**



## Priorities

To help achieve the five goals, a number of priorities have been identified by the community. Some are the responsibility of government and council, public or private enterprises and organisations, and others may be priorities the community can take on. Many priorities are in progress and completion could pave the way for further ideas. Investments and project decisions should be made in line with the goals, values and priorities and with respect to the outcomes of extensive consultations that have informed this Plan. The impact of the Plan and meeting these goals will reach far beyond the population of Forrest & District.

**Gateway to the Otways Centre** The Gateway to the Otways Centre is a community-led initiative for driving climate and economic adaptation, resilience and recovery, while celebrating the unique and accessible beauty of the Otway Ranges. The project involves constructing a best-practice, fire-adapted building which will have everyday use as a community and visitor hub, a research and learning centre and a co-located CFA fire station. The design enables the Centre to operate as a Bushfire Place of Last Resort and will help achieve all five community goals (see section 2.4 for details).

**Integrated Water Management Plan incorporating new wastewater infrastructure** The lack of suitable wastewater facilities in Forrest is an impediment to community development and poses a public health risk. Installing new wastewater infrastructure will advance many other improvements, such as residential development and health and wellbeing. Developing a fully integrated water management plan will set up the community for a sustainable future and help achieve all five community goals. Wastewater infrastructure is an urgent priority. (see section 2.4 for details)

**Mountain Bike Trails Design Project** Upgrading the mountain bike trail facilities and trail network will help achieve four community goals. Upgraded trails will also benefit horse-riders and walkers. This project has been through extensive community consultation, and with funding, can be realised quickly (see section 2.4 for details).

**Revitalised Forrest Common (and Forrest Caravan Park) precinct** The Forrest Common located on Station Street is a 1.5ha township parkland that is well used by the community and visitors and includes a playground, tennis courts, car park, picnic and BBQ facility, and expansive lawn area. A Master Plan developed by the community and Colac Otway Shire in 2019 to revitalise this precinct has been endorsed and is awaiting funding. The Forrest Caravan Park is a leased area adjoining this precinct and is due for lease renewal in 2021. Addressing these will help achieve four community goals.

**Improve communications infrastructure** Many residents noted frustrations with poor internet and mobile service. Not only are these safety concerns for residents – bushfire safety information is increasingly moving online, and the defunding of the ABC puts their crucial bushfire services at risk. It is also an impediment to local business growth and affects education opportunities for youth and the whole community. This will help with all five goals.

**Changes to zoning laws to allow residential development on agricultural land adjacent to township boundary.** The lack of housing for residents is a central problem in the community. Changes to zoning laws is a step toward fixing this problem. Development adjacent to and within township boundaries will support the school and local businesses and provide access to services where a bushfire place of last resort can be provided and the CFA and Police are present. This will facilitate development of housing both for locals and tourist accommodation and will help with four community goals.

**Regular public transport links** A once-weekly bus to Birregurra, Colac and Apollo Bay is a clear lack of accessibility. More frequent bus services to local centres will provide mobility for local residents and reduce reliance on private cars, improving health and wellbeing. This will help with four community goals.

**Community garden** An integrated community garden with the Forrest Learning Centre will help with two community goals, and will be easily achievable as the garden at the school already exists.

**Second CFA truck** An appropriately resourced volunteer firefighting brigade fulfils two community goals and will go a long way toward assisting with bushfire safety, and is a 'quick win' for which there has been strong community support and fundraising.





# 1 INTRODUCTION

*Forrest is a small rural township set in the cool temperate rainforest of Gadubanud and Gulidjan country in the Otway Ranges (the Otways), Victoria, Australia. It is surrounded by the smaller hamlets of Barwon Downs, Gerangamete and Barramunga, which are all part of the Maar Nation. This collective region is known as Forrest and District. At the 2016 census Forrest had a permanent population of 230 and the Forrest and District had 473 people. In addition to permanent residents, a number of part-time residents increase the population. Forrest and District acts as a central hub for the northern gateway to the Otways and regularly attracts visitors to the town. Numbers swell on weekends and there are visitors to Forrest on any day of the week. During special events such as the Forrest SoupFest and the Otway Odyssey, numbers can grow to beyond 5000.*

## **Commitment to country**

We acknowledge the Maar as a sovereign Nation and pay our respects to all Traditional Owners: those who live on Country, those passing through, and their ancestors who carefully and thoughtfully managed and cared for the Country that we have all been lucky to call home since the beginning of time. We commit to working openly and honestly with Traditional Owners to ensure that culturally appropriate and respectful relationships with Maar people and their natural resources are always upheld.

## **A community-owned plan for the future**

In April 2020, the Forrest and District community began writing a community development plan for the near-term future, titled the Forrest & District Plan: Towards 2030.

The Plan emerged from the research partnership between the community (through the Forrest Gateway Project) and Deakin University's program to adapt the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in local communities. It clarifies the high-level goals of the community and the projects that are needed to support them. It builds upon the

spirit of community-led decision making that was embodied by the Forrest Futures consultations (2017 & 2019 in collaboration with DELWP). A well-supported process of community engagement empowered the community to think strategically about what they wanted. This Plan grew from that ethos.

The Plan is a resource coordinated and owned by the community. It has been prepared collaboratively with the local community, traditional owners, Forrest and District Community Group (FDCG), Deakin University's Local Sustainable Development Goal Program Team, Colac Otway Shire Council, and the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

The Plan reflects the community's priorities as determined by the work that Deakin University and DELWP have undertaken in their localisation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (see Appendix) for Forrest, and draws on the Transitioning Towns Toolbox as developed by Regional Development Victoria.

The information contained in this Plan may sometimes only address Forrest, as opposed to Forrest and District. In part, this is due to the central nature of Forrest's location

and services – it is a hub for the surrounding communities. The future of Forrest and its services (economic and social) will have a significant impact on the district townships.

## **A transition town**

Since European settlement the area has seen significant change, and most recently over the past 20 years, the local community has experienced a period of adaptive re-use. Following a 150-year history in forestry (logging and milling) that ended around 2003, Forrest reinvented itself to connect with the forests in a new way through tourism, hospitality and recreation, and a richer understanding of the significance of the cultural landscape, capitalising on the natural landscape and becoming the Gateway to the Otway Ranges. Around the same time, there was a decline in local agriculture, which the community adapted to by evolving agricultural and food systems.

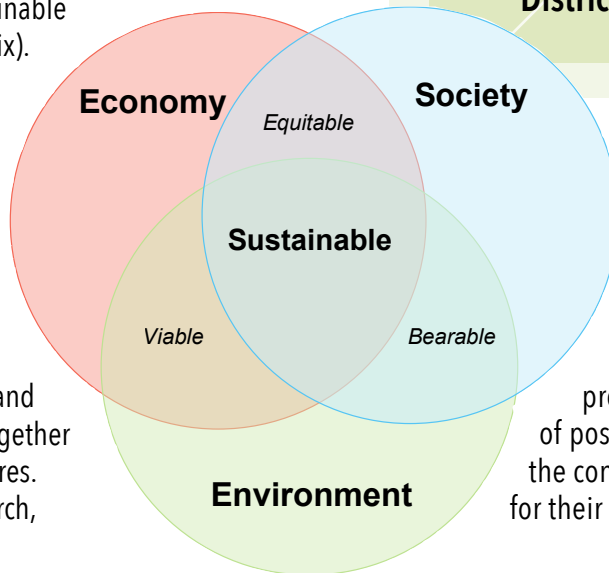
This document tells of the transition by the community to the current-day drivers of tourism, regional population growth and increasing climate change. It aims to support the community to achieve its goals of a stable society, economy, and environment into the future.

# 2 TOWARDS 2030

## 2.1 Sustainability principles of the plan

The Plan is underpinned by the three pillars of sustainability – society, economy, and environment. Researchers from Deakin University are working with the Forrest community to find ways to make Forrest socially inclusive, with a thriving economy and healthy local environment, guided by the principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a set of 17 goals adopted by all UN member states, based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see Appendix).

The SDGs can empower local communities and give them an autonomous voice to advance their own local sustainability ideas. To guide long-term planning and decision-making, researchers, governments and communities must work together to achieve sustainable futures. As part of the Deakin research,



There are five goals to enable Forrest and District to become sustainable and progress:

1. A bushfire safe community
2. A diverse and sustainable economy
3. Great public and private infrastructure
4. A cared-for community
5. A secure future

The impact of the Plan and meeting these goals will reach far beyond the population of Forrest and District. Infrastructure as coordinated by Colac Otway Shire is a key driver for Forrest and District to achieve their objectives.

six scenarios of possible futures for Forrest were created, based upon different combinations of social, economic, and environmental priorities, informed by the current trajectories of driving forces in the community (see Appendix). They provide a thought-provoking description of possible future outcomes depending on the community's determination of priorities for their future direction.

## 2.2 The community's 5 goals

Using the data collected through the Forrest Futures II engagement process in 2019 (see section 4), five specifically tailored Goals were developed with the Forrest and District community. These Goals are:

### 1. A bushfire-safe community

Forrest and District's location in Gadubanud Country at the edge of the Great Otway National Park puts it at high bushfire risk. A bushfire place of last resort and increasing bushfire safety is a community priority.

### 2. A diverse and sustainable economy

Tourism in Forrest and District is here to stay, and working in tourism isn't for everyone. Diversifying the sorts of

jobs that can be done in the area will make for a more resilient and better long-term outcome for all. This will also provide opportunities for young people that do not currently exist.

### 3. Great public and private infrastructure

Improving public infrastructure, particularly an effective waste water treatment system, will enable the aspirations and long-term viability of Forrest and District.

### 4. A cared-for community

Forrest and District are a supportive and inclusive community. This goal encompasses community programs, support for people with disability, accessibility to all, community

governance, and the health and wellbeing of residents, which has a strong connection to the beautiful natural environment, and has been a practice of the Maar for eons.

### 5. A secure future

There are many threats which could affect the community. Resilience against threats such as climate change, public health risks, and bushfire are community priorities. The community have stated a strong commitment to respect and honour Indigenous peoples' connection to Forrest and District, and work in collaboration with Eastern Maar representatives over future developments.

## Some of the ideas provided by the community are listed here, with their associated goal.

*"Explore housing, land and farming co-operatives"*

*"Be a model sustainable, adaptive town that demonstrates what is possible for others"*

*"Co-housing using environmental and social design – ensure a variety of affordable options for all socioeconomic groups"*

*"Consider how wastewater can be used for production"*

*"Solar farm/microgrid for town and sustainable power for low-income households"*

*"Community energy plan"*

*"Housing affordability, so that people and families who want to participate and live in Forrest and District can"*

*"If fire impacts town – plans (should already be) in place for best-practice rebuild. (We need to) transition to a real fire-adapted town"*

*"Clean energy, sustainable agriculture, revegetation of carbon dense forest"*

*"Parks Vic to maintain forest tracks for fire-fighting access"*

*"Encourage businesses that cater to local as well as tourist needs"*

*"A First Nations-led approach to cultural tourism that supports self-determination and knowledge exchange with local community"*

*"Environment, health, ecology, coastal science, forest conservation, community development – all jobs that would be good to create in Forrest"*

*"Education focused on keeping children in the area. Focus on future-proofing employment/growth/sustainability"*

### **GOAL 5: A secure future**

### **GOAL 1: Bushfire-safe community**

### **GOAL 2: Diverse and sustainable economy**

### **GOAL 4: A cared-for community**

### **GOAL 3: Great public and private infrastructure**

*"Facilitate sharing of produce; local markets; reducing travel to Colac; increasing intake of healthy, fresh wholefoods; increasing local income"*

*"Sharing practices of self and our relationship to Country, to relearn these knowledges and stories that have been here since time immemorial"*

*"Training in progressive farming techniques"*

*"Better maintenance of tracks would allow for more walking – good for health"*

*"Services and access to keep me living in Forrest as I age"*

*"More support for Neighbourhood House to deliver health and social services on a needs basis"*

*"Lack of transport to access support services – opportunities for community transport? Community minibus?"*

*"Involvement with First Nations/Maar planners who can balance interconnected themes of country, culture and identify highlighting cultural expression"*

*"Sewerage still remains a big issue and prevents new growth and new business"*

*"Channel routes – Colac-Forrest Rd, Birre-Forrest Rd, Apollo Bay-Forrest Rd, require urgent attention"*

*"Rail trail – an extended rail trail would link biking culture with food trail opportunities and sustainable tourism/transport"*

*"Improve wireless internet as reception poor on outskirts"*

*"Electric car chargers"*

## 2.3 Plan impact

The population of Forrest and District was 473 as at the 2016 Census, however the number of people who will be impacted by this plan is far greater than this. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected visitor numbers but in general the number of residents plus visitors is much higher. During special events such as Forrest SoupFest and Otway Odyssey, the number of visitors can grow to beyond 5,000. Colac Otway Shire receives over 1 million visitors each year, some of whom will pass through Forrest and District.

Colac Otway Shire are aiming for population growth in Colac (20,000 people by 2050), and the G21 Region (Geelong Regional Alliance) estimates that the region will grow to 500,000

people by 2050. This points very strongly to regional development opportunities that Forrest and District can place itself to take advantage of by realising some of the objectives identified in this Plan.

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all been forced to challenge assumptions about the location of our workplaces. Forrest and District could capitalise on this by becoming a remote working hub for the community and visitors.

If Forrest and District are enabled to achieve their infrastructure ambitions, this will not only support the townships and their permanent residents, but also keep visitors safe and local businesses prosperous.

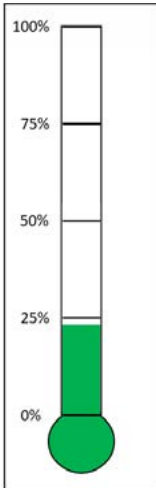
It will also address broader regional issues such as investment in bushfire safety. Maintaining and growing the population will ensure crucial local services such as the Forrest Primary School and Early Years Centre remain and are strengthened.

The place-based planning demonstrated in this Plan can enhance the delivery of government services with the focus on the community rather than individual services. This will enable the strengthening of links to, and involvement of state agencies within Forrest and District, particularly Parks Victoria, DELWP, Barwon Water, Regional Roads Victoria and Fire Rescue Victoria/CFA.



## 2.4 Recent projects and investigations

Although many consultations have informed the Community Goals and plans for the next 10 years, there have been four major community infrastructure projects that have received extra funding for feasibility studies and community attention. The following projects are seeking funding and further commitment to be advanced and completed.



### FORREST MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS PROJECT (Supports 4 Community Goals)

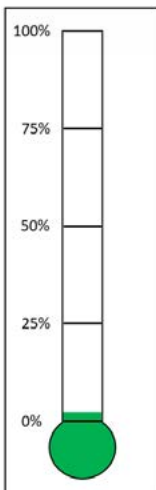
- **Total project budget: \$4.55 million**
- **Funds committed to date: \$1.05 million**
- **Remaining funds required: \$3.5 million**

The development of the mountain bike trail network began around 2005 with an initial investment of \$500,000 by the Victorian State Government (DELWP). DELWP have demonstrated strong support and commitment for investment in recreational facilities, by working collaboratively with the local community, Colac Otway Shire and the Forrest MTB Club. This investment in public infrastructure has been the catalyst for private investment particularly in accommodation and hospitality venues in and around the township. Since then, Forrest has become known for its mountain bike trails which attract many domestic and international cycling enthusiasts each year. It is a Council and DELWP priority to procure funding to complete the implementation of the Forrest Mountain Bike

- **Ongoing investment: Trails maintenance (DELWP), Local Government (planning) and in-kind Forrest Mountain Bike Club committee**

Strategic Plan (G21 Geelong Regional Alliance, 2019). When completed, this strategic plan is estimated to draw up to 40,000 cycling enthusiasts per year, which will support more employment and increase demand for accommodation, resulting in an increased annual economic benefit of \$8.4 million for the Forrest region. REMPLAN provides data specifically for Colac Otway which indicates the following for 2016-17:

- **Jobs supported by tourism:** a total of approximately 950 jobs were supported by the tourism sector in Colac Otway.
- **Tourism wages:** tourism generated \$39.9m in wages in 2016-17.
- **Tourism GVA (Gross Value Added):** tourism accounted for \$74.3m in GVA.



### FORREST GATEWAY TO THE OTWAYS CENTRE (Supports 5 Community Goals)

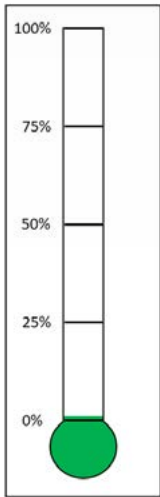
- **Total project budget: \$12 million**
- **Funds committed to date: \$250,000 (State Government for community-led feasibility studies 2018-2020)**

Through a grant from DELWP's Virtual Centre for Climate Change Innovation, the community has undertaken studies to assess options for improving socio-economic and environmental sustainability and resilience for the community in the context of climate change. A central outcome of the studies is the design for the Gateway to the Otways Centre, which is to be built on one of the vacated DELWP sites. This will be a state-of-the-art building functioning as a bushfire place of last resort, while also housing community facilities and the CFA station, together with a multipurpose centre for interactive visitor experiences and climate change education and research.

Community management of these sites presents a unique opportunity for Forrest to establish

- **Remaining funds required: \$11.75 million**
- **On-going investment: in-kind Forrest Gateway Project steering committee**

and strengthen a range of community services and assets sorely needed in the township and surrounding districts. This process has enabled the consideration of long-term community development aspirations that serve not just the Forrest community, but also the many visitors who come to Forrest to experience the Otway region. Whilst there are many dimensions to resilient communities, designing new community infrastructure that responds to our changing climate and potential bushfire impact will be vital for Forrest's community resilience. The residents of Forrest identified this as one of their highest priorities as part of the Forrest Futures engagement process and this seeks to address aspects related to developing a fire-adapted community building as a central pillar within the community's broader aspirations.



**FORREST WASTEWATER INVESTIGATION AND ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT (Supports 5 Community Goals)**

- **Total project budget (preferred solution): \$10.1 million**
- **Funds committed to date: \$120,000 (Barwon Water feasibility studies 2017-2020)**

- **Remaining funds required: \$9.98 million**
- **On-going investment: in kind Forrest and District Community Group committee**

The Forrest and District Community Group approached the Victorian Water Minister in late 2016 to raise concerns about wastewater issues that were affecting the town. As a result, Barwon Water and Colac Otway Shire Council partnered with the Forrest community to investigate opportunities for wastewater improvements across the township. This partnership acknowledged the growing role tourism plays in Forrest and the regional economy, and the increasing stress this may place on existing wastewater systems in the town.

Council commissioned an initial audit of the existing on-site systems to determine the extent of the problem. This work confirmed there were widespread problems across the township where a large proportion of existing systems were inadequate for managing loads from existing houses in the town. The audit indicated that the total number of systems that were considered to be failing and/or impacting on health and the environment was approximately 60% - 70%.

It was determined that the township was currently (and would continue to be) well below the World Health Organisations target for Disease Protection due to discharge of wastewater off-site (four times below the WHO threshold). Many of the smaller properties in the town centre are too small to

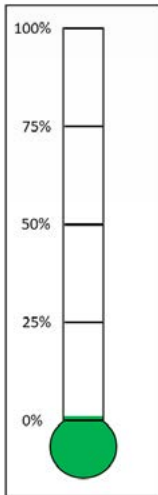
safely contain wastewater on-site under current EPA standards.

A full description of the options can be found here <https://www.yoursay.barwonwater.vic.gov.au/28609/widgets/181978/documents/110921> While there was a range of wastewater infrastructure solutions presented to community, Solution Package 3 received the most votes from the community and was therefore nominated as the preferred solution for addressing wastewater issues. This solution involves a combination of on-property and off-property treatment and irrigation of recycled water. This provides the dual benefits of providing water for use by residents whilst also reducing the treatment and irrigation requirements at the local water recycling system. The proposed solution is to be delivered and managed by a single responsible management entity. All on-property systems will also be managed by the management entity and not individual homeowners.

Barwon Water has now engaged Marsden Jacob Associates (MJA) to undertake a cost-benefit analysis for the preferred Forrest wastewater solution. The aim of MJA's work is to collect the data required to understand the costs and benefits of the system holistically. This will help plan any next steps.



Tiger Rail Trail



### FORREST COMMON MASTERPLAN (Supports 4 Community Goals)

- **Total project budget: \$1.7 million**
- **Funds committed to date: \$15,000**

The Forrest and District Community Group were successful in receiving a funding allocation under Council's 2017/18 Small Town Improvement Program (STIP) to develop a master plan for the Forrest Common. The Forrest Common is located on Station Street, Forrest and is used by locals and visitors, including caravan park patrons, people using the local mountain bike trail network and Tennis Club members. The Forrest Common is 1.5ha in size and is classified as township parkland as per the Colac Otway Public Open Space Strategy (2011). The parkland has the following existing features:

- BBQ and shelter
- Playground
- Limited natural shade areas
- Picnic tables and seats
- Bike racks
- Lawn area
- Interpretive signage/ information board for the Forrest History walk
- Tennis courts
- Skate pad
- Car parking area.

The community advocated for the Forrest Common to be developed with guiding themes and stories, represented through the installation of bespoke, unique and customised elements that represent the character and history of Forrest. The proposed development of the Forrest Common Master Plan is supported by the Colac Otway Public Open Space Strategy (2011). However, the level and standard of development proposed is higher than the Standards for Open Space Development for a Township park

- **Remaining funds required: \$1.55 million**
- **On-going investment: in kind Forrest and District Community Group sub-committee**

as outlined in the strategy. The estimated cost for full implementation of the plan is \$1,696,569 over four or more stages, with an additional, ongoing maintenance cost annually of approximately \$25,000 following completion of the works. Officers have prepared a minimum stage 1 scope of works that would see a portion of the play and path network development completed in line with Council's typical spend and may assist the community in leveraging funding for further improvements. The total cost of minimum stage 1 works is estimated to be \$311,751. The implementation of the master plan is subject to future Council budget considerations and the ability to access funding from other external funding sources.

Adjoining this land is the Forrest Caravan Park. In June 2020, the community were consulted about an Expression of Interest process for the new 20 year lease. The purpose of this community consultation was to provide an opportunity for the Forrest and District community to comment on the area of land included, but also to better understand what the Forrest community wants to achieve from the caravan park lease. The lease for the Forrest Caravan Park, which was originally drawn up in 2001, expires in April 2021 (negotiations are currently underway for a one year extension). The Colac Otway Shire Council has decided to test the market by inviting Expressions of Interest (EOI) from operators interested in managing the Forrest caravan park.

### TIGER RAIL TRAIL

- **Total Project budget: \$9 million**
- **Currently no active support to extend this Trail**

The "Tiger" Rail Trail was officially opened on Sunday 12th June, 2011 and was held in conjunction with the Forrest Soup Fest. Currently 7km of the trail is completed from the Forrest end. The trail begins in Forrest, across the road from the Terminus Hotel on Henry Street. It is a short but well-maintained trail, with interpretative signage along the way. It is a critical linking trail for the Mountain Bike Trail network, connecting the Southern and Northern trails. It is also well used by walkers and horse-riders accessing the Forrest Recreation Reserve.

The original construction of the rail line to Forrest from Birregurra began in 1889 and was completed at a cost of 96,000 pounds. It was opened to Deans Marsh on December 19, 1889 and to Forrest on June 5, 1891. The line was used by tourists bound for the coastal resorts of Lorne and Apollo Bay. The Forrest line was closed in 1957.

The trail's "Tiger" moniker comes from the days when trains stopped running between the towns of Birregurra and Forrest. A converted Dodge sedan, painted black and yellow, ferried passengers instead.

The grand vision for this trail was to start in Birregurra, on the main Melbourne - Warrnambool rail line, meander along the old railway formation, through Deans Marsh, to the existing section near Barwon Downs and on to Forrest, for a total length of 30km. A feasibility study in 2015 for this extension found it unviable due to opposition from landowners whose land the trail would run through, and because of an estimated \$9 million cost for replacing 22 bridges along its length.





Smoking ceremony at Forrest & District Men's Shed opening

## Commitment to country

*We acknowledge the Maar as a sovereign Nation and pay our respects to all Traditional Owners: those who live on Country, those passing through, and their ancestors who carefully and thoughtfully managed and cared for the Country that we have all been lucky to call home since the beginning of time.*

*We commit to working openly and honestly with Traditional Owners to ensure that culturally appropriate and respectful relationships with Maar people and their natural resources are always upheld.*



## 3 CONTEXT

*Forrest & District have long been places where people have congregated for ceremony, celebration and culture. This tradition continues today with both local people and visitors from afar sharing the rich landscape.*

**Forrest and the surrounding district have a long human history from the original Indigenous inhabitants through to European colonisation and beyond. The local environment is a central focus for both residents and visitors. The growth of and plans for the surrounding regions are significant as they will affect the trajectory of Forrest and District.**

### 3.1 Forrest and District's first people

As mentioned throughout this document, Forrest and the surrounding district lie proudly within the borders of the Maar nation. Despite the population declining upon the invasion of Europeans due to disease and genocide, we are very lucky to have survivors of the ancestors active in our district to this day.

Eastern Maar people continue to maintain economic, traditional, cultural, familial and spiritual ties in Forrest and District. Through the leadership and cultural authority, Traditional Owners are able to practice laws and customs, strengthen systems of governance, and nurture connection to Country.

Indigenous ecological knowledge allows interaction with Country and its plants and animals. It guides

the identification and utilisation of resources for traditional purposes and the basics of life. The Country of Forrest and District is resource and landscape rich, with reliable food sources all year. This meant that ancestors could avoid travelling far and were able to construct both permanent and semi-permanent settlements. From these settlements they undertook traditional land management practices, including the use of fire, and farming practices to sustain themselves on local food sources. The local Indigenous community continue to practice sustainable living today by several means, including hunting for traditional game such as kangaroo and duck and the harvesting of edible plants such as the Daisy Yam and Pigface.

Oral stories that pre-date western settlement scatter the landscape of Forrest and District like a mosaic of largely untapped knowledge. However, despite what has been lost, much survives in language throughout the district. Sharing and reciprocity are such important parts of Gadubanud Story and form part of a complex cultural support system in terms of caring for country, our enormous waterways, and the people who live on Country.

#### Recognised Aboriginal Party

Eastern Maar were appointed a Recognised Aboriginal Party on 5 December 2013.

A Recognised Aboriginal Party is the primary source of advice and knowledge on matters relating to Aboriginal places or Aboriginal objects in their region. Their core functions include:

- evaluating Cultural Heritage Management Plans
- assessing Cultural Heritage Permit applications
- making decisions about Cultural Heritage Agreements
- providing advice on applications for interim or ongoing Protection Declarations
- entering into Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Land Management Agreements with public land managers
- nominating Aboriginal intangible heritage to the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Register and managing intangible heritage agreements.





## International Indigenous Design Charter

The International Indigenous Design Charter takes into consideration the needs of the diverse communities and cultures globally and has 10 principles:

### 1. Indigenous led:

Ensure Indigenous stakeholders oversee creative development and the design process.

### 2. Self-determined:

Respect the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine the application of traditional knowledge and representation of their culture in design practice.

### 3. Community specific:

Ensure respect for the diversity of Indigenous culture by acknowledging and following regional cultural understandings.

### 4. Deep listening:

Ensure respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviours for effective communication and courteous interaction. Make sure to be inclusive and ensure that recognised custodians are actively involved and consulted.

### 5. Indigenous knowledge:

Acknowledge and respect the rich cultural history of Indigenous knowledge. This includes designs, stories, sustainability and land management, with the understanding that ownership of knowledge must remain with the Indigenous custodians.

### 6. Shared knowledge (collaboration, co-creation, procurement):

Cultivate respectful, culturally specific, personal engagement behaviours for effective communication. This involves courteous interactions to encourage the transmission of shared knowledge by developing a cultural competency framework to remain aware of Indigenous cultural realities.

### 7. Shared benefits:

Ensure Indigenous people share in the benefits from the use of their cultural knowledge, especially where it is being commercially applied.

### 8. Impact of design:

Consider the reception and implication of all designs so that they protect the environment, are sustainable, and remain respectful of Indigenous cultures over deep time: past, present and future.

### 9. Legal and moral:

Demonstrate respect and honour cultural ownership and intellectual property rights, including moral rights, by obtaining appropriate permissions where required.

### 10. Charter implementation:

Ask the question if there is an aspect to the project, in relation to any design brief, that may be improved with Indigenous knowledge. Use the Charter to safeguard Indigenous design integrity and to help build the cultural awareness of your clients and associated stakeholders.



Connecting cultures by sharing knowledge  
Inspiration, Diversity, Community





Station Street, Forrest

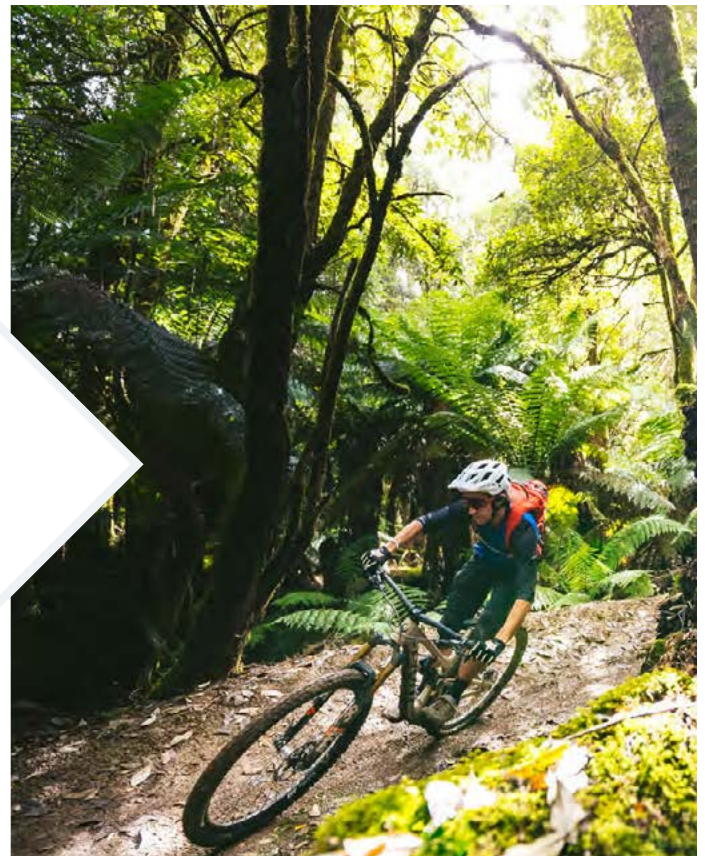
### 3.2 Forrest and District - since 1890

European settlement at Forrest was established in 1890, named after state MP Charles Forrest, who advocated for the rail line extension to Forrest. Historically, the region was a timber town with four sawmills in Forrest and neighbouring Yaugher. All of these mills are now closed.

After the cessation of logging in the Otways in 2005, the Victorian Government made funds available for the creation of dedicated mountain bike trails in the Yaugher area. The project was the first time in Australia that mountain biking had been used as a driver for tourism and economic development. It was seen as an addition to the burgeoning local eco-tourism industry, and now makes up a large portion of the economy in Forrest, with over 60 km of sign posted "single track" in the area.

Forrest swiftly became one of the best holiday destinations in the Great Ocean Road hinterland, situated just a 30-minute drive through the Otways from the iconic coastal route.

The rural communities of Forrest and District lie at the northern gateway to the Otways. Forrest acts as a central hub for the area, which is known for mountain biking, hiking, camping, fishing, wildlife watching, beer, food, wine and relaxation. The West Barwon River flows through the township and it is near the West Barwon reservoir, which services Geelong.



Forrest MTB Trails Design Project  
Colac Otway Shire  
December 2019

### 3.3 Topography and landscape

#### Forrest in the Otway Ranges

The Otway Ranges (the Otways) is characterised by diverse forest environments, and the communities of Forrest and District are situated on its northern slopes. The mountain range rises to 500-600m off the surrounding plains and coast, and Forrest sits at the foot of the ranges at 182m above sea level.

The dissected ridges of the ranges are a defining part of the landscape of the Otways, particularly where the ranges extend south to the sea at locations such as Mount Defiance and Cape Otway. Streams and waterfalls are common throughout the ranges, with an average rainfall that varies from about 600mm near Anglesea to 2000mm near Lavers Hill, with Forrest receiving about 1000mm per year.

The forests of the Otways are dominated by eucalypt species. The vegetation around Forrest varies

from Heathy Woodland and Shrubby Foothill Forest to Wet Forest. Areas to the north also include extensive farmland and associated grasslands.

The Forrest district, Otway area and Barwon South West region are ecologically diverse, incorporating the hinterland forests of the Otways and the Great Ocean Road coastline. The area contains some of the most significant environmental assets found in Australia, including several endemic species, Ramsar-listed waterbodies, and protected habitats.

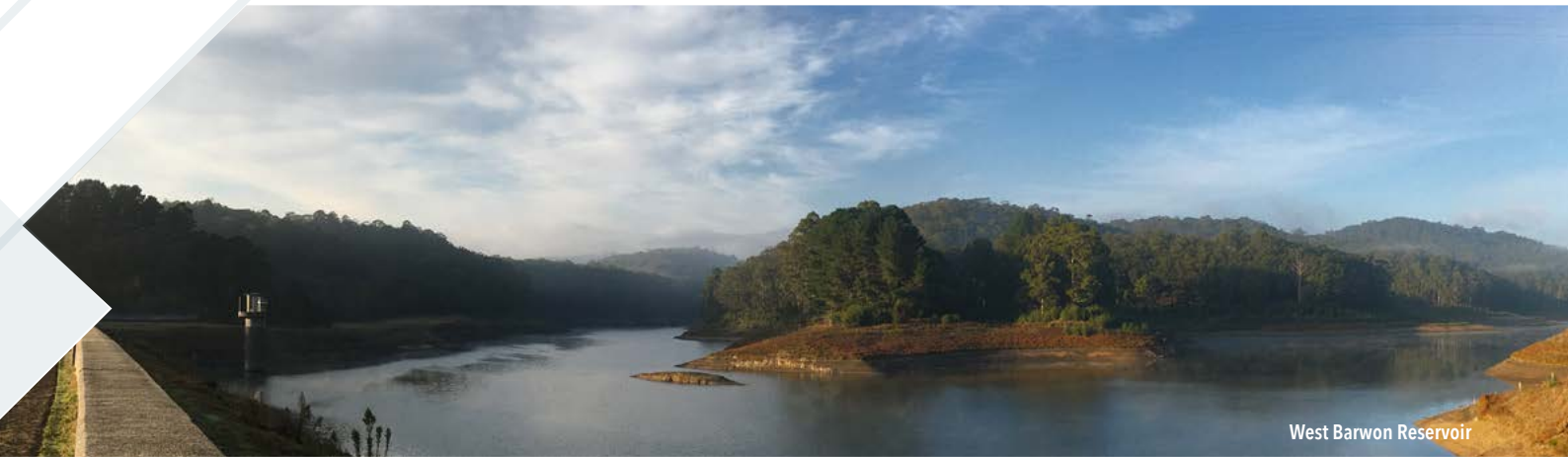
Forrest is surrounded by a mix of native forest, farming and semi-rural land. Soil types and climate of this area are suitable for agricultural production of dairy, beef, and produce: particularly potatoes, fruits, and mushrooms. They are also well suited for growing trees, and there are timber plantations in the region: south of Beech Forest; and to the north and southwest of Forrest.

#### Bushfire risk

The Otways District is recognised as one of the highest bushfire risk areas in Australia and the world (Bradstock, 2010). An assessment of bushfire risk found that Forrest has one of the highest bushfire risk profiles within Colac Otway Shire (Otway District Bushfire Planning Collaboration, 2016). This is due to a range of factors including the extent and proximity to dense vegetation, weather, climate, and the likelihood of fire reaching town and with the potential for significant house loss.

The surrounding topography has the ability to increase the severity of bushfires through the development of large convection columns, which can create bushfire-induced wind storms and support the launching of embers well ahead of a fire. With the increasing impact of climate change, the risk factors are predicted to increase, particularly around the drying of the vegetation, the length of fire seasons and the increased number of high-risk fire weather days.





West Barwon Reservoir

## Barwon River and West Barwon Reservoir

The Barwon River begins in the creeks of the inland slopes of the Otway Ranges. The Upper Barwon sub-catchment is located along the inland slopes and plains of the Otway Ranges to the north of Lorne and east of Colac, and comprises 1,822 km of rivers and streams.

Work began on the West Barwon dam in 1959 and the reservoir was officially opened in 1965. It was constructed near Forrest by the Geelong Waterworks and Sewerage Trust.

This water system forms part of the Barwon catchment and has some of the state's most flow-stressed waterways. Significant population growth and a changing climate are expected to place increasing pressures on the health of the catchment's waterways and its natural landscapes. Parts of both the Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park are within this landscape; however, grazing for livestock (beef, sheep and dairy) and forestry dominate land use in the area, bringing significant economic benefits to the region.

A key threat to the area's waterways is uncontrolled stock access to waterways that, if stock are not fenced out, can erode banks, damage riparian vegetation and reduce water quality through sedimentation and effluent contamination. Further threats include bed instability and degradation, changes in flow regimes

and reduced riverine connectivity, degraded riverbank vegetation and loss of instream woody habitat. Willows (*Salix* spp.) and reed sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*) threaten a number of waterways in the upper section of the Barwon.

In sections along the Upper Barwon, water has ceased to flow at times of drought. The Upper Barwon also experienced a large-scale fish death event in June 2016, linked to an acid event that impacted water quality and the health of the river. In 2019, the Corangamite CMA in partnership with Barwon Water coordinated the release of 485 ML of water from the West Barwon Reservoir as part of a new 1 gigalitre (GL, billion litres) entitlement of water for the environment recovered through the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy. The aim has been to improve river health of the upper reaches by flushing sediment, wetting riparian vegetation and connecting habitat pools that provide a refuge for native fish and other fauna.

In early 2019, The Victorian Government established the Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee (Barwon MAC) to facilitate a community-led approach to the future management and protection of the Barwon catchment. The Barwon Action Plan aims to ensure the iconic Barwon catchment can thrive and be enjoyed as a natural treasure for

many years to come. The Action Plan will be released in late 2020.

## Boundary Creek

Historic management of groundwater pumping in the Boundary Creek catchment near Yeodene has had an environmentally significant impact. Reductions in flows caused by groundwater extraction coupled with a drier climate and the ineffective regulation of passing flow conditions all contributed to the drying out of Big Swamp. This resulted in the activation of acid sulfate soils and ongoing release of acidic water to the lower reach of Boundary Creek. Ecological impacts of this have included loss and/or reduction of fish, crustacean and mammal species in the Barwon River and its creeks, and fish kills along the Barwon River; although sampling in 2020 indicated that the river has recovered from the 2016 fish kill event. Barwon Water have acknowledged the problem and their role and have established a Remediation and Environmental Protection Plan to improve water quality in Big Swamp, stabilise the acidification process that takes place due to the drying and wetting of the acid sulfate soils in the area, and reduce the risk of acid flush events from Boundary Creek in the long-term. This plan will run until 2023, and monitoring will continue beyond this time. Improvements are anticipated within 10 years of the commencement of remediation.

### The regional context

The community sits within the Colac Otway Shire Local Government Authority. The Shire has a population of approximately 21,000 people, with about 13,000 people living in the shire's major centre of Colac. Colac Otway Shire is part of the larger G21 Geelong Region Alliance.

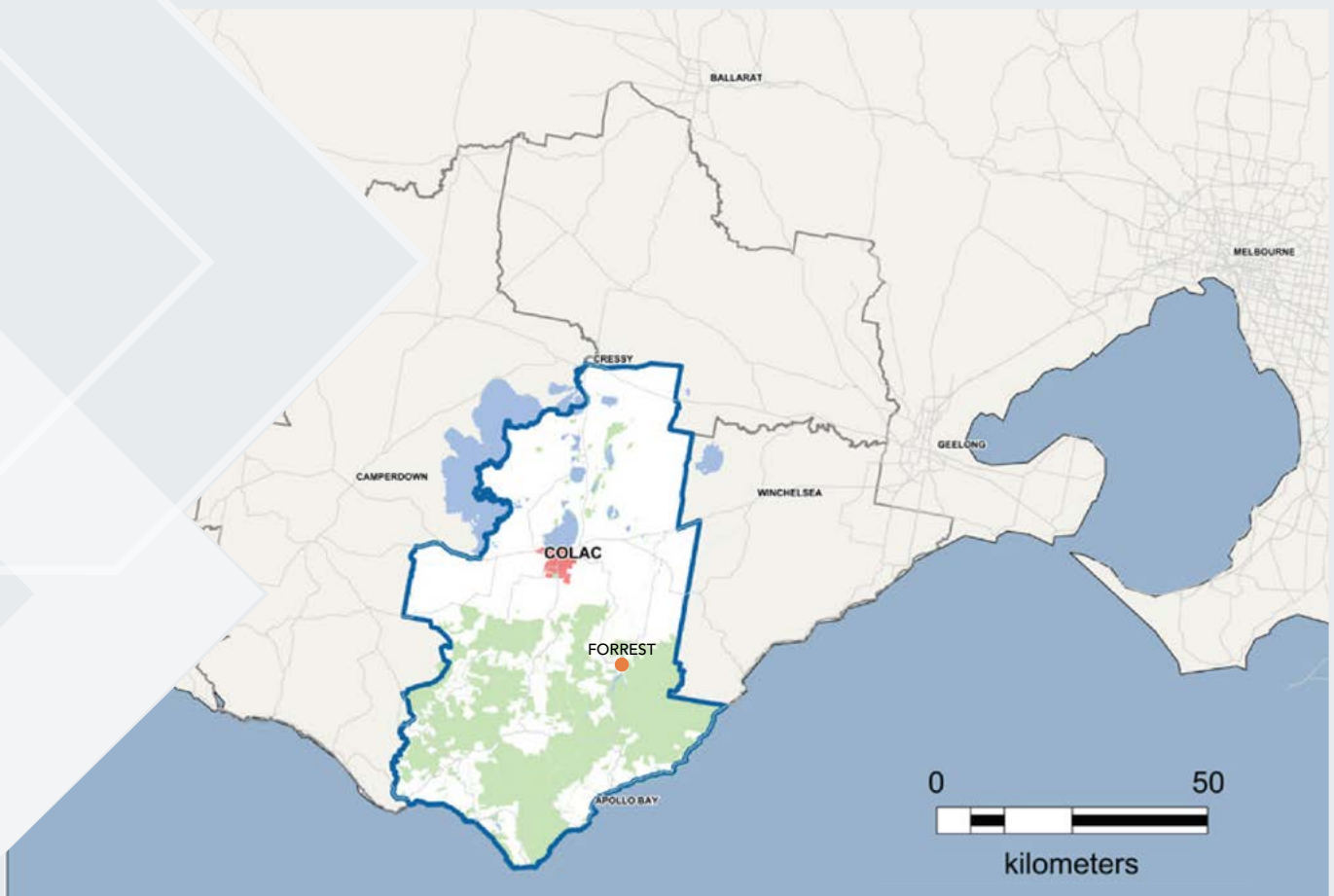
To the east and south of Forrest, within 30km, is access to the Great Ocean Road. The Great Ocean Road is a National Heritage-listed 243km stretch of road along the south-eastern coast of Australia between the Victorian towns of Torquay and Allansford. The Great Ocean Road region receives over 3 million domestic daytrip and over 785,000 international daytrip visitors each year (Great Ocean Road Regional

Tourism Board, 2019). Colac Otway Shire currently receives just over one million visitors per year. Forrest is an important hinterland township for the Great Ocean Road, and tourism provides direct and indirect jobs.

The population of the G21 region is forecast to grow to 500,000 by 2050 (G21 Geelong Regional Alliance, 2015) and the Colac Otway Shire Council believes that the Shire, and in particular Colac, is well positioned to cater for some of that growth. The Colac 2050 Growth Plan (Colac Otway Shire, 2019) is a long-term strategy that guides the location of new housing, associated servicing infrastructure (e.g. water drainage), and open space for the township of Colac. The plan sets an aspiration to expand the township's population to 20,000 persons by 2050.

In November 2019, the duplication of the Princes Highway West from Winchelsea to Colac was completed. The Princes Highway Duplication project is a key route for regional commuters, freight traffic and tourists as a feeder route to the Great Ocean Road.

Melbourne's western region is one of the fastest growing in Australia. The area covered by the West Growth Corridor Plan will eventually accommodate a population of 377,000 or more people (Victorian Planning Authority, 2011). This growth, along with planning for the Regional Rail Link and Outer Metropolitan Ring Transport corridor, will forge stronger connections and relationships between regions, particularly between Geelong and the recreational opportunities of the Otways.



### 3.4 Forrest Historical Timeline

#### First inhabitants - Gadubanud and Gulidjan peoples

#### 1800s

- 1880s** European settlers arrive in the Barwon Valley at Yaugher and begin farming hops, root crops and running dairy cows
- 1885 School opens at Yaugher (settlement near current football ground)
- 1890 Town of Forrest surveyed and first land sales held
- 1891 Completion of rail line to Yaugher Valley, renamed Forrest after politician Charles Forrest. Tramways built to feed timber from the bush mills to the Forrest rail head

#### 1900s

- 1900s** Forrest grows rapidly, exporting timber and agricultural produce by rail. Businesses flourish
- 1902 Mechanics Institute built (public hall)
- 1906 School moved to Forrest township
- 1913 Police Station opens and Forrest Commission commences
- 1915 Bush nursing service inaugurated
- 1920s**
- 1926 Daily road motor coach service to Colac commences. Football ground in town relocated to better site at Yaugher
- 1930s** Geelong water channel work started at Forrest
- 1932 Forrest Dramatic Society formed to provide entertainment during the Great Depression
- 1937 'The Tiger' rail car introduced for improved passenger service
- 1939 Black Friday bushfires burn around Forrest
- 1940s** Royal Commission into the '39 fires orders relocation of bush mills to townships
- 1942 War conditions throttle town activities
- 1943 First proper post office started in a shop, formerly the railway station
- 1947 Three sawmills set up in town

- 1950s**
- 1952 'The Tiger' rail car stops running
- 1953 Lake Elizabeth formed due to landslide following heavy rains
- 1956 Mains electricity connected to Forrest. Electrical goods shop opens
- 1956 Peak year for native forest logging at the back of Forrest
- 1957 Railway ceases operation as uneconomic for traffic being offered
- 1959 Shire opens rubbish tip, first one for town
- 1959 Fire brigade formed
- 1960s** Timber allocations decline, mills begin to close
- 1963 Town holds its first debutante ball  
Infant welfare centre opens
- 1964 Long established bakery burns down. No more local bread.
- 1965 West Barwon reservoir opens and gives Forrest water service
- 1966 New public hall opens on Grant St. after fire destroyed earlier building
- 1969 Town has three profitable general stores

#### 1900s

- 1970s**
- 1972 Pre- school centre opens
- 1972 Otway Shire buys north end railway yard for public purposes. Sawmill buys south end
- 1972 Town sawmills reduced to one operator
- 1974 Citizen committee establishes caravan park
- 1974 Methodist and Catholic churches close
- 1980s**
- Shire identifies town subdivision opportunities
- 1982 Football club opens new rooms  
Horseriding grounds established
- 1990s**
- Closure of primary schools and churches in nearby towns leave Forrest with the last remaining primary school and Anglican/Uniting church in the area
- 1994 Up market guest house opens  
Arts gallery set up in old church
- 1996 Inaugural Otway Harvest festival held  
Kinder opens  
Fire destroys Terminus Hotel, rebuilt 1997

#### 2000s

- 2000 to 2020s**
- 2003 Last operating sawmill quits town site
- 2003-2010 Decline in dairy farm operations
- 2004 Great Otway National Park established
- 2004 Forrest SoupFest commenced
- 2005 Forrest mountain bike trails opened
- 2007 Neighbourhood house opens at the hall, auspiced by Otway Health
- 2009 Public infrastructure investment in mountain bike trails increases tourism and encourages new businesses
- 2011 Tiger rail trail opens
- 2012 Telstra mobile phone tower erected 2km from township after local campaigning against Optus tower in centre of town.
- 2014 Air BnB accommodation venues flourish
- 2016 DELWP relocates to Barwon Downs
- 2016 Forrest football club goes into recess
- 2018 Forrest Gateway Project – feasibility studies for development of 47 Grant Street
- 2019 DELWP site (47 Grant Street) handed to community management  
Forrest Men's Shed officially opens
- 2020 Forrest and District Plan Towards 2030





# 4 COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

**Forrest and District's best assets are their people. There is a strong community aesthetic which is demonstrated by the number of community groups. The environment is also a key drawcard for both residents and visitors.**

## 4.1 Community Snapshot (Census data)

The rural communities of Forrest, Barwon Downs, Gerangamete and Barramunga are similar in composition. The census in 2016 showed that the population is ageing, with the median age 11 years older than for the state, and the percentage of people under 25 falling.

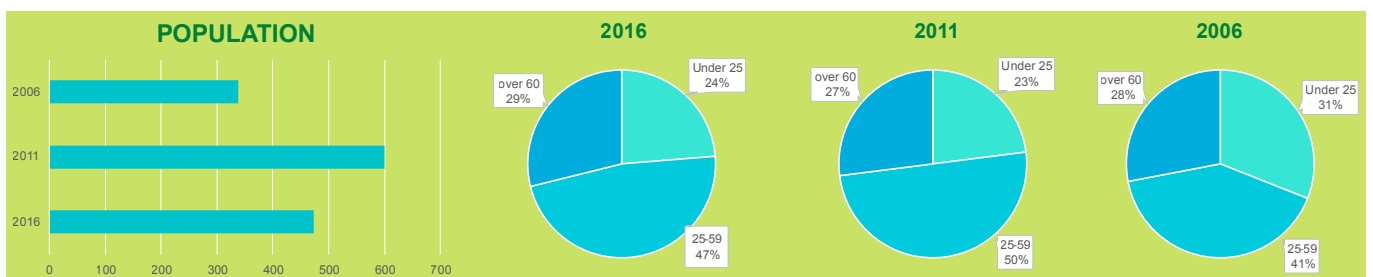
The median weekly income is one-third lower than for the rest of the

state. However the median rent and mortgage repayments are concurrently lower than for the whole of Victoria, and there is a lower percentage of Forrest's residents under rent stress (>30% of household income). Forrest has a slightly higher percentage (0.6%) of its population under mortgage repayment stress (>30% of household income) than the rest

of Victoria. This paints a picture of a community which is less well-off, whose homeowners are having a little more difficulty paying off mortgages, and whose renters pay less in rent, than the state average.

**Table 1: 2016 Census data for all communities - Forrest, Barwon Downs, Gerangamete and Barramunga**

	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga	AVERAGE
All People	230	131	105	7	473 (TOTAL)
Male	44.5%	57.5%	52.3%	100%	
Female	55.5%	42.3%	47.7%	0%	
Median age	52	52	42	45	48
Families	55	37	19	0	
Average children per family, for families with children	1.5	2	2.3	0	1.9
For all families	0.4	0.5	0.9	0	0.45
All private dwellings	148	96	50	12	
Average people per household	2	2	2.8	2	2.2
Median weekly household income	\$875	\$866	\$1,374	\$949	\$1,016
Median monthly mortgage repayments	\$1,538	\$1,165	\$1,400	\$0	\$1,368
Median weekly rent	\$225	\$166	\$200	\$0	\$197
Average motor vehicles per dwelling	1.7	1.8	2.4	2	2



**Figure 1: Population changes from 2006 to 2016 in Forrest and District (data not available for Gerangamete and Barramunga for 2011 and 2006).**

**Table 2: Demographic changes over time in Forrest, with comparisons to Regional Victoria and Australia**

Measure	Forrest	Regional Victoria	Australia
Population (2016)	230	1,433,805	23,401,945
Population (2011)	238	1,368,451	21,504,691
Population (2006)	170	1,300,506	19,855,287
% change 2011 to 2016	-3.5%	+4.8%	+4.8%
% change 2006 to 2011	+40.0%	+5.2%	+8.3%
% under 25 years old	22%	30%	32%
% between 25-59 years old	48%	43%	47%
% over 60 years old	30%	27%	21%
M/F % split	44.5%/55.5%	49.1%/50.9%	49.3%/50.7%
% with non-Australian ancestry	30.2%	59.9%	66.4%
% Indigenous population	1.3%	1.6%	2.8%

## 4.2 Community Strength

### LIVEABILITY AND COMMUNITY

The information below may sometimes only address Forrest, as opposed to Forrest and District. In part, this is due to the central nature of Forrest's location and services – it is a hub for the surrounding communities. The future of Forrest and its services (economic and social) will have a significant impact on the district townships.

The community has a sense of pride about their region. It is regarded as a pleasant place to live, with access to open spaces, recreation options, and has a small-town charm. Since the increase in tourism, the hub of Forrest now enjoys multiple places to congregate for coffee, lunch or a beverage at various venues. This has attracted a number of part-time residents and Forrest's population swells at weekends. The primary school is held in high regard and is

a drawcard for many young families. However, rising property prices mean many young families cannot afford to live in the district.

Unique attributes for Forrest & District include: small-town charm; West Barwon reservoir; Lake Elizabeth; a learning centre that incorporates a primary school, kindergarten and after-school care; DELWP Forest Fire Management depot at Barwon Downs; world-class mountain bike trails; and close proximity to the coast and Great Ocean Road. Forrest and District's position at the gateway to the Otways and bordering on agricultural regions means it is a nexus for land and asset managers.

One of Forrest's greatest assets is access to the natural environment, with the bush within immediate access, and visible from most people's houses. This is a drawcard

for tourism (discussed below), and studies show that spending time in contact with nature is associated with good health and wellbeing (White et al., 2019), which is important for permanent residents. One common theme identified from community engagement activities is connection with nature.

The following is a sample of responses from the community survey in 2015 regarding what people like most about living in Forrest:

- > *Fresh air and stress free living*
- > *Historic, biodiversity and cultural significance. Community of artists.*
- > *School community is awesome*
- > *Just very pleasant and not far from everything*
- > *The peace and quiet, trees, nature, birds*



### And, how can we make Forrest a better place to live (environmentally, socially, recreationally)

- > *The Colac-Forrest road is dangerous! Movie nights in the hall - winter or summer book club. Ladies catch-up group - CWA is great but everyone is already busy - having just a catch up for a chat group once a fortnight or week for whoever is around.*
- > *Elderly: mini-bus tours around Forrest and District on weekends Youth: internet cafe maybe Entertainment: Band (live music) at hall inside or out*
- > *Leave it alone so you won't bugger it. And clean up a few local houses. Just bring a little pride in the town. Farmers: also thistles, ragwort terrible.*
- > *A ban on people playing music outdoors, and loud music generally!*
- > *Sewerage treatment plant*
- > *Change rooms for mountain bikers*
- > *A public toilet on the main road*
- > *Clubroom/meeting place, pool table entertainment: chamber music/arts adult education: new reading group*
- > *Swimming pool - for both elderly and younger, picture theatre. Skip spending money on anything else, the bushfire refuge is the most important. My car's suspension gets a little bit more wrecked with the patch-up jobs that never work*
- > *Very appreciative of full-time presence of police officer (and of present incumbent)*
- > *Old time dance and theatre for elderly, upgrade hall to include air conditioning for somewhere to go on hot days, youth group, better playground. Movie and music nights. Art art and more art*
- > *Special Neighbourhood House program for elderly people, including education, outings, social activities, film nights*

Forrest and District has a reputation for being a highly engaged community, and has had high participation in consultation activities over the past five years. Almost half of Forrest's population attended the Forrest Futures engagement process (see section 5.3). Some locals have suggested this enthusiasm could be because of the community's

size - residents are able to have a sense of connection to community, while also remaining private if they choose. Locals feel there is a sense of belonging to place. This sense of belonging and connection is demonstrated by the pride that local residents have in their community, and by the levels of engagement.

Volunteerism in the community averages 38% of the district's population, almost twice the percent of the population compared to a national scale (19%), and Victorian scale (19.2%). There are many community groups and clubs in the district - almost 30 for a population of about 450.



## ECONOMY

The community's full-time employment levels are slightly lower than average at 49.3%, with part-time employment slightly higher than average at 37.5%. Whilst Forrest offers local employment, a considerable number of residents who may live in the area for lifestyle and family reasons travel to major centres such as Colac and Geelong for work.

The most common employment industries are:

- Government and health (Colac Otway Shire, DELWP, Barwon Water, Colac Area Health, Forrest Primary School)
  - Tourism and hospitality
  - Agriculture
  - Building and construction
- Nature-based tourism is one of the

largest income generators for the region, relying upon the natural assets of the hinterland forests of the Otway Ranges and the Great Ocean Road coastline. Large numbers of national and some international tourists come to the region to visit waterfalls and the rainforest, go fishing and bird-watching, and other adventure activities (Arup, 2018).

**Table 3: Employment information for Forrest and District**

	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga	Australia
Employed full time	41.5%	51.3%	55.8%	No data	57.7%
Employed part time	41.5%	38.2%	32.7%	No data	30.4%
Away from work	9.3%	5.3%	0%	No data	5%
Unemployed	7.6%	5.3%	11.5%	No data	6.9%

Occupation	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga	Average
Professional	28.8%	16.4%	7.0%		17.4%
Managers	14.4%	37.7%	51.2%	No data	34.5%
Labourers	16.2%	14.9%	18.6%	No data	16.5%
Technicians & trades, machinery operators & drivers	22.5%	10.5%	7.0%	No data	13.3%
Community & Personal Service, Clerical & Admin	18.0%	16.4%	16.3%		16.9%
Other	0%	4.5%	0%	No data	1.9%

**Table 4: Top industries worked in by residents of Forrest and District**

Industry	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga
Government and administration	17.2%			
Hospitals, and other social assistance services	15.5%	13.6%		No data
Accommodation, cafés and restaurants	13.8%	15.9%		
Beef and dairy cattle farming	8.6%	29.5%	83.3%	No data
Building & other industrialised services	6.9%			



Otway Odyssey > Image Matt Hull

Building on these assets, Forrest has capitalised on the development of world-class mountain bike trails and access to walks and waterfalls. The local hospitality and tourism businesses provide a critical infrastructure to support this growing economy, with great places to stay, eat, relax and enjoy fresh air.

Local events such as the Otway Odyssey Mountain bike race and Forrest SoupFest are further economic drivers for the town.

In addition to the regional tourism drivers, the Shire attracts 32,000 cyclists per year to Forrest's and other mountain bike trails. There are 16

trails in Forrest, ranging from 'easy' to 'very difficult'. The trails are located on Crown Land to the north and south of the Forrest township, with the trails network crossing a number of land tenures including the Otway Forrest Park, Great Otway Forest Park, and land managed by Barwon Water.



## SERVICES

Forrest and District have access to most services within a 30 minute drive – principally these are located in the regional centre of Colac. However, without regular and frequent public transport services in the towns, attending these requires access to a car.

**Table 5: Services and the time it takes to travel to them by car from Forrest**

	Within town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1hr drive
Supermarket		•	
Chemist		•	
Clothing store		•	
Petrol station		•	
Car service		•	
Post office	•		
GP		•	
Dentist		•	
Chiro/Physio		•	
General hospital		•	
Surgical hospital		•	
Maternity hospital		•	
Nursing home		•	
Kinder/day care	•		
Primary school	•		
Secondary school		•	
P-12			•
University			•
TAFE		•	
Football team		•	
Basketball team		•	
Heated pool		•	
Multi-purpose community centre	•		
Movie theatre		•	
Gallery	•		



### 4.3 Social, human and economic capital

#### SOCIAL CAPITAL

**The Forrest Learning Centre** is integral to the fabric of the Community. It provides a focal point and gathering place for local families. The school takes in students from the Forrest community, as well as providing a bus service to bring students from the neighbouring hamlets of Barwon Downs, Gerangamete, and further to Yeodene. In 2020, the population of the school was 34. Kindergarten and occasional care have been available since 1996 and has evolved into long day care and after school care based on meeting parent needs, providing a valued service for full-time working families.

Over the past five years, the Primary School has shown indicators of a strengthening community, with higher than average NAPLAN results (one of the highest in the state in 2016-2018), and a school family occupation index (SFO) at its lowest point since 2010. The SFO indexes are based on parental occupations (not incomes), and indicates that the parents in the community perform medium to high skilled jobs and/or are qualified professionals. It also indicates that the levels of education among the parent community are high.

**The Forrest and District Neighbourhood House Inc.** brings people together to connect, learn and contribute to the local community through social, educational, recreational and wellbeing activities, using a unique community development approach. The Neighbourhood House is an Incorporated Association that receives some of its funds through the Victorian State Government. This funding allows the Committee to employ a Coordinator for 25 hours a week. Other funds are sought through a range of grants and fundraising activities. The Neighbourhood House was originally auspiced and supported by Otway Health (now Great Ocean Road Health) but became an Incorporated Association in 2014 after the community decided to take on all governance, financial and employer responsibilities.

Based out of the Forrest Hall until 2019, the Neighbourhood House has relocated to the new Community Hub at 47 Grant Street (former DELWP site), and developed an extensive community development program whose strategies currently include community lunch, book club, yoga,

playgroup, dance, weekly bike ride, youth group, community gym, community library, exercise class, FoodShare cupboard, and Studio Forrest art group. In addition, the organisation provides IT access, a recycling hub and facilitates regular community events such as Forrest Got Talent, Women of the Otways dinners, community heroes awards and a comedy night. The Neighbourhood House provides space for visiting health professionals and the Forrest Historical society. People also attend the building during opening hours to seek referrals and support in times of crisis or just to have a cuppa and chat.

Local volunteers are supported to build skills and are currently engaged in a number of governance, program support and delivery roles. The organisation is further supported in its work by the statewide network of Neighbourhood Houses and through a range of strategic partnerships and collaborations. The Forrest and District Neighbourhood House is a dynamic, responsive and adaptive organisation whose potential will continue to develop in direct response to the needs and aspirations of our community.





**FORREST  
& DISTRICT**  
**MENS SHED FMS**

In 2013, a parcel of land from Colac Otway Shire was acquired by an active bunch of locals to set up the **Forrest and District Men's Shed**, a member of the Australian Men's Shed Association. During 2017-18, the Men's Shed received funding to construct a new facility, to offer education, training, and community engagement opportunities for the

men of the community, and their families and friends. This Shed also has a meeting place with kitchen facilities. In October 2019, the Men's Shed was officially opened by dignitaries from the Colac Otway Shire following many years of hard work from the members, and \$68,000 in federal, state and local government grants.

The Men's Shed provides an ideal forum for people to share interests and activities and socialise in a safe, secure and non-judgemental environment. The Men's Shed is also home to the King Parrot Pickers, a local bluegrass band who regularly get together for jam sessions and fun on alternate Sunday afternoons.

#### Forrest and District has almost 30 groups, clubs and committees including:

Forrest and District Community Group	Forrest Mountain Bike Club
Forrest Gateway Project	Forrest Horse Riding Club
Forrest Public Reserves Committee	Forrest Recreation Reserve
Forrest and District Neighbourhood House CofM	Forrest and District Historical Society
Forrest Primary School Council	Lions Club of Forrest and District
Forrest, Barwon Downs and Gerangamete CFA	Forrest and District Men's Shed
Youth Group	The Forrest Post Editorial Team
Book Club	Forrest Special Events Club (Forrest SoupFest committee)
Studio Forrest	Barwon Downs Tennis Club
Forrest Cricket Club	Otway Harvest Trail
Anglican Church and Op Shop	Country Women's Association
Forrest Football/Netball Club	Upper Barwon Landcare Group
Forrest Tennis Club	

## HUMAN CAPITAL

Members of the community have been the drivers of many town projects such as the wastewater investigation, Forrest Common re-development, Forrest Mountain Bike Trails Design Project, and the Forrest Gateway to the Otways Project.

In April 2019, three former DELWP sites including 47 Grant St were transitioned to community management, as a result of the participation, energy, vision and activism of the community. The Community Hub at 47 Grant St is managed under a DELWP Category 3 Management Committee, known as the Forrest Public Reserves Committee. Tenants of this site include the Neighbourhood House and Forrest CFA. It is also anticipated this will become the Forrest Gateway to the Otways concept development.

The in-kind contribution of community members attending meetings as committee members; writing submissions; applying for grants; coordinating maintenance, repairs and working bees for community assets; as well as professional services such as report writing and communications are critical to the progress of many community projects. These volunteered hours make projects possible and improve community cohesion.

Service organisations and local committees in the community support festivals and have attracted events, such as Forrest SoupFest. In 2004, the Forrest and District Lions Club started this festival with approximately 200 attendees. It has grown in size and popularity, and in 2019 attendance was over 7,000. The committee estimates this festival brings in over \$100,000 to the local economy during the June long weekend.

## ECONOMIC CAPITAL

The natural environment of Forrest and District is not only a drawcard for residents, but also tourists.

Investment in tourism infrastructure, both publicly and privately owned, has increased over the past five years. This not only provides employment opportunities, but also offers socialising and recreation opportunities for residents and tourists alike. The community has undertaken extensive consultation regarding an upgrade to the Mountain Bike Trail network, as detailed in the next section.

Since 2015, tourism and hospitality venue growth in town has reflected the increased tourism demand and popularity of the township, and includes the following businesses:

**Forrest Brewing Co**  
**Forrest General Store**  
**Terminus Hotel**  
**Forrest Caravan Park / Wonky Stables**  
**Forrest Guesthouse (and Bespoke Harvest Restaurant 2013 - 2018)**  
**Forrest Hire Bikes (and formerly Forrest Corner Store café/bike hire 2012-18)**

**Platypi Chocolate Café**  
**Susanna Weddell Jewellery**  
**Antiques on Station St**  
**Forrest Op Shop**  
**Top Bike Tours**  
**Trees Adventure (Yeodene)**  
**Otway Eco Tours (platypus tours)**

In addition, Forrest offers a range of accommodation venues, with approximately 40 providers, and over 180 beds.

Festivals and events are a regular feature on the Forrest calendar, and have included:

**Otway Odyssey Mountain Bike competition**  
**Forrest 6-hour ride**  
**Forrest SoupFest**  
**Run Forrest trail run**  
**Forrest Festival (no longer operating)**

Aside from tourism, there are a number of other businesses that contribute to the local economy. These include:

**Evans Earthmoving**  
**Forrest Foods**  
**Wattle and Wire**  
**and a range of trade businesses and primary producers.**

2019 Forrest Soup Festival





2019 - Forrest Community Hub Open Day



2017 - Forrest Futures Project

# 5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT 2015-20

Participation in civic engagement is strong in Forrest and District. This section summarises community engagement activities which took place between 2015 and 2020 and details the "big four" community infrastructure projects.

## 5.1 Visioning and Ideas Workshop

In November 2019, members of the community participated in a visioning workshop conducted by DELWP Community Engagement specialists and Deakin University researchers, as part of the Forrest Futures II community engagement process.

Forrest Futures II is a collaboration between the Forrest and District Community Group, Deakin University, and DELWP to localise the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be relevant for Forrest, and to find ways to implement those local goals by 2030.

This workshop led to the following statement by participants for goals for Forrest in 2030:

*"In 2030 Forrest will be a leader in sustainable energy, a leader in food sharing, a leader in caring for all citizens, and an economically thriving community"*

**Forrest Futures II, November 2019**

Participants were invited to participate in writing a newsletter of the future (see appendix for full size):

Previous shared visioning exercises have produced the following:

*"The vision for Forrest is to be a place that revitalises and engages people and maximises opportunities for living, working and recreation by utilising the Otway's unique qualities and assets"*

**Forrest Structure Plan 2011**





## 5.2 Key themes

Common themes were identified in the Forrest Futures II engagement, and they included six main areas:

### NATURE

**Beautiful landscape**

**Otways & Great Ocean Road**

**Connection to Country**

*"Natural environment in your actual backyard"*

*"Understanding that we have something precious"*

*"Green, rural, close to Colac, close to the beach"*

*"Ensure planning overlays for Forrest include "Township - Character" requirements that link to natural aesthetics, rural setting and ecological development"*

*"Weaving First Nations ecological knowledge into practice"*

*"Lots of visitors enjoying the natural environment and contributing economically to the local community"*



### COMMUNITY

**Supportive and connected**

**Small-town charm**

**Includes young and old**

*"Engage kids in multi-generational conversations about the future"*

*"Co-housing using environmental and social design. Ensuring a variety of affordability options for all socioeconomic groups"*

*"Services and access to keep me living in Forrest as I age"*

*"Engage and learn from traditional owners and practices"*

*"Focused activities on building kindness and continued tolerance because these shared skills will see us through changes positive and negative"*

*"Indigenous knowledge (especially land management, fire use) being centrally used in discussions - equal relationships for land management with Indigenous locals and agencies solving challenges together"*

*"Talking about change - people have very different ideas of change. Many projects - don't assume funding will be approved for all"*

*"Small town diversity - different voices heard"*

*"Cultural divide between older residents and newer city-arrivals. But relationships still exist and don't suffer. Everyone has to get along and they do. People help others who are struggling"*



### INFRASTRUCTURE

**Inadequate wastewater system**

**Mountain Bike Trail development**

**Key assets reflect town character**

*"Sewerage still remains a big issue and prevents growth and new business"*

*"Consider how wastewater can be used for production"*

*"Encourage microgrids, self-sustainable lifestyles, be a beacon for future-proofing local economies - embrace the environment"*

*"Explore planning overlays (plus other incentives) that encourage more business and permanent residential accommodation options"*

*"Parking plan developed for Forrest by Council - need focus on funding and implementation, not just plans"*

*"NBN has not improved internet access"*

*"Fall-back place of refuge to help avoid loss of life in bushfire"*



*"A future to look forward to"* Forrest Futures II, September 2019

## RECREATION

**Tourism, mountain biking, sport, camping, horse-riding, arts Infrastructure**

*"Maintenance of mountain bike trails and improvements to ensure that Forrest remains a viable tourist attraction (a lot of competition in the space now)"*

*"Challenge the balance of housing and Airbnb/tourism accommodation"*

*"Attract different skills - e.g. recreation (massage, healing centre, spa centre, conference)"*

*"Encourage businesses that cater to local as well as tourist needs"*

*"How to engage owners of accommodation places in town/ planning needs?"*

## CHALLENGES

**Bushfire vulnerable**

**Climate change**

**Agricultural adaptation**

*"Reduced access to healthcare in the town; e.g. 20 minute drive when no petrol in the car means people won't visit the doctor when required"*

*"Who will own the land and farms and work them in 20-30 years?"*

*"Everyone's a farmer but how do we manage runoff pollution in the rivers?"*

*"Increasing cost of insurance. Shift in space will come through in 2-3 years"*

*"Plan upfront for a fire disaster scenario. Don't rebuild town to burn again. A higher standard than current standards"*

## THE FUTURE

**Sustainability aspirations**

**Food systems and sharing**

**Energy independence**

*"Starting up a community supported agriculture (CSA) program with local growers and organic producers"*

*"Food processing facility in Forrest - jobs, food miles"*

*"Embed town landscape as edible landscape - create a large community garden"*

*"Clean energy, sustainable agriculture, revegetation of carbon dense forest"*

*"Sustainability included in school curriculum - embedded through all subjects, teach problem solving"*

*"Education focused on keeping children in the area. Focus on future-proofing employment/growth / sustainability"*

*"Explore joint build opportunities for new home buyers (UK and Holland have some good models)"*

*"Off grid - microgrid, solar passive, built for our environment - utilise larger blocks better; subdivision of larger blocks/tiny homes"*

*"Employment on farms? Training in progressive farming techniques"*

*"New jobs should focus on: home based working (good internet required); small scale/community farming; incentives for tourism-based employment, such as guided walk tours in Otways"*

*"Environment, health, science, ecology, coastal science, forest conservation, community development - all jobs that would be great to create in Forrest"*





### 5.3 Community Surveys

The communities were involved in extensive consultation over the years 2015 to 2020. The following is a summary of these engagements.

#### 2015 – FORREST AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY GROUP (FDCG) SURVEY

An initiative of the FDCG, in 2015 the Community was surveyed about their thoughts on living in Forrest. A total of 61 participants (local residents and visitors) completed the survey, and questions related to the liveability and amenities of Forrest.

The survey was conducted during a period of great transition for Forrest, including:

- Forrest & District Neighbourhood House transitioned to a local Committee of Management and financial management structure
- New website proposed (for community & visitors) [www.forrestvictoria.com](http://www.forrestvictoria.com)
- Forrest Post newsletter launched
- Fire siren removed (later relocated)
- Expansion of services on offer at Forrest Primary School and Early Years Centre
- Forrest Football and Netball Clubs in recess while searching for participants
- Free wifi spot to be installed

Responses and comments to questions about living in Forrest included:

#### **What do you like most about Forrest?**

Friendly community	76%
Healthy lifestyle	71%
Cafes/restaurants/pub	62%
Bushwalks	57%
Convenient location	49%
Bike tracks	40%
The community groups available	38%
Fishing	22%
Other (please specify)	38%

*"The peace and quiet, trees, nature birds"*

*"Wonderful education at Forrest PS"  
"Surrounding bush - birds, flowers, etc."*

*"Just very pleasant and not far from everything"*

*"The peacefulness of the bush, and the beauty of the birdsong"*

*"Environment, peace and quiet, flora and fauna. People willing to work together and doing their best for the town"*

*"Quiet and peaceful atmosphere"*

*"Fresh air, clear skies, hills are for ever green"*

*"Closest community centre, diversity of people, relaxed atmosphere"*

#### **How can we make Forrest a better place to live (environmentally, socially, recreationally, other)?**

More public transport to Colac, Geelong, Lorne, Apollo Bay	64%
Better road maintenance	61%
Better roadside vegetation maintenance	55%
Bushfire refuge	58%
More local employment	39%
More entertainment	31%
More activities/facilities for younger people	36%
More activities/facilities for elderly people	17%
More adult education	9%

#### **What do you think Forrest needs most to stimulate its economy?**

Greater variety of businesses	40%
Longer business opening hours	19%
Fuel	65%
Other (please specify)	64%

*"Take away shop"*

*"Town sewerage"*

*"Better universal access to public spaces and amenities"*

*"Expanded governmental services to protect water catchment, fire prevention, public land maintenance and protection. Parks supervision."*

*"More employment opportunities"*

*"Market to sell local produce"*

*"Local craft and produce store"*

*"Promotion of Forrest PS and services such as childcare and pre-school services which is offered at Learning Centre"*

*"Music/arts events"*

*"Talk in terms as being a small town. It's not a city"*

*"A festival of fungi"*

*"More permanent housing so families can move in and work, play and boost school numbers"*

*"More places of interest for tourists. Camp for school groups to stay and bike ride/enjoy environment. Music/ Arts Festival Old time sports festival"*

*"Increase opportunities for environmentalism"*

*"Upgrade history walk and make more of our timber history"*

*"Artist's studios creating artwork for sale"*

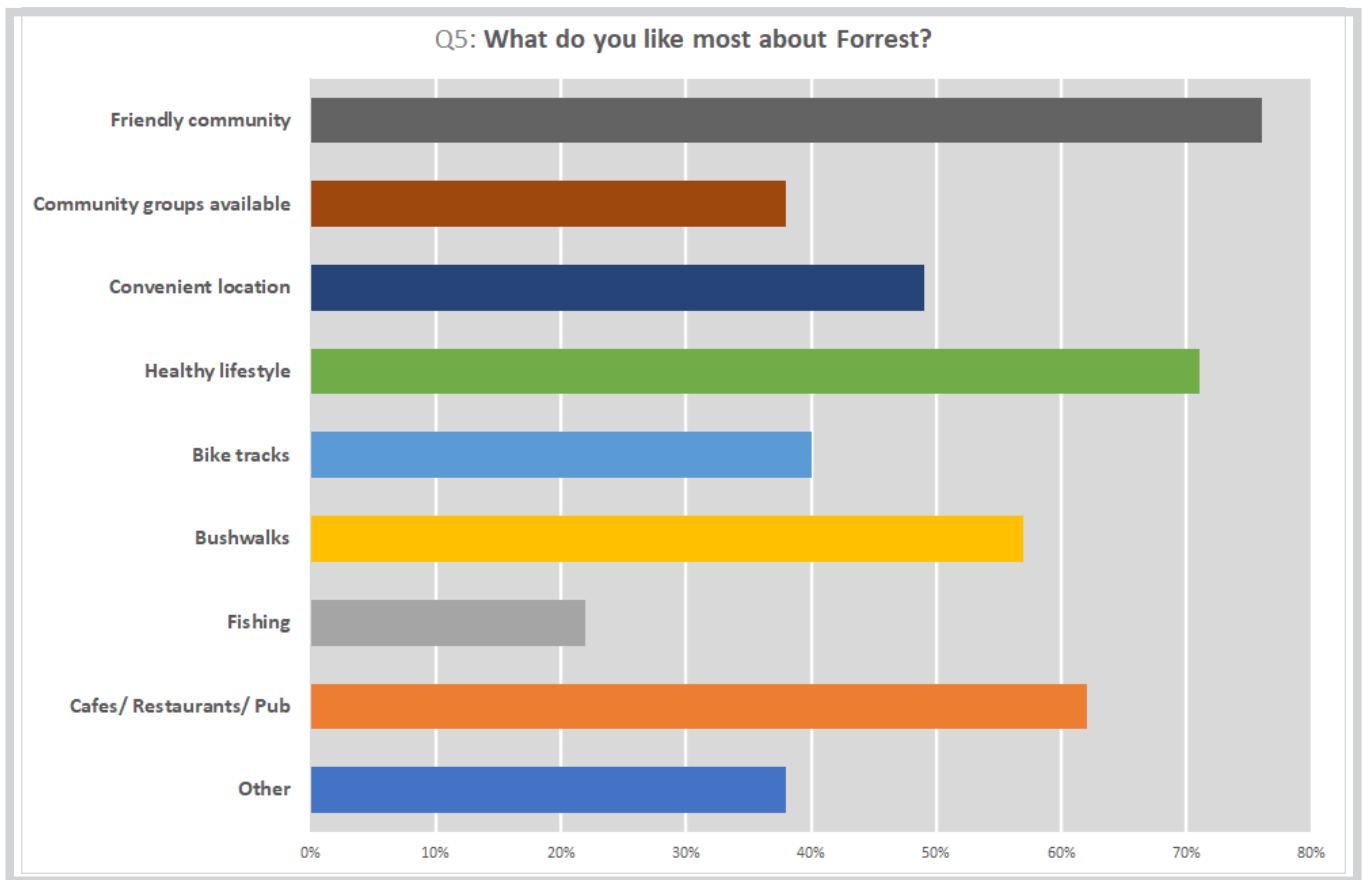
*"Micro hydro-electric from the dam"*

*"Grant St Parking improvements"*

*"A viable set of primary production industries would provide employment and retain the younger generation/s"*

*"Cheap housing for workers and families"*

*"I think it is fine the way it is and I do not want it to change much more."*



**Do you have any further comments to make about what you would like to see happening in Forrest to make the town even better?**

*"Infrastructure, parking, rubbish bins, toilets in main street, playground"*

*"More opportunities to bring the whole town together. Like the school play where everyone was invited. A Christmas gathering?? Movie nights - summer and winter. Not things that you necessarily have to pay much to go to."*

*"The construction of a \$2-3M interpretation centre - wildlife, natural history, geology, forestry"*

*"Clean up the old mill site"*

*"Just keep it clean and show off its beauty"*

*"Speed camera south and north ends of town"*

*"A weekly movie night at the hall"*

*"Recently a sculpture was formed in the Barwon Water reserve from wild fallen tree branches. Perhaps a series of these could be made along the river"*

*"Definitely more public transport to and from Colac,"*

*"More car parking and mowing in town"*

*"Town stinks from the business septics, all you can smell is septic and hot food cooking,"*

*"The control of cats in the Otways/ Forrest"*

*"Community engagement via regular community events, sports picnic day or occasional town market days. Community consultation important for inclusivity. Community Bushfire Planning results on display at prominent place"*

*"I think the town is growing at a nice gentle pace and this survey is helpful to keep it on track. Not letting it get too big too quickly"*

*"Extending the Rail trail is a project that has already been proposed. Would it be worth approaching Barwon water, to ask if the track next to the channel from Barwon Downs to Murroon could be an alternative route for walkers / cyclists?"*

*"The toilets at the south end of town are terrible given the enormous numbers of visitors and travellers that use them"*

*"Complete the Tiger Rail trail"*

*"Just remember why we like Forrest and not to lose that"*





## 2017 - FORREST FUTURES PROJECT (COMMUNITY AT CENTRE OF DECISION MAKING, DELWP)

The Forrest Futures Project was initiated to explore community interest in utilising additional public land in the Forrest Township. Over 100 participants were involved in a multi-stage consultation process over six months.

The announcement in 2015 by DELWP to relocate and develop a new work centre at Barwon Downs, 7km north of Forrest, meant that three public land sites in Forrest became surplus to DELWP needs. A conversation in May 2015 between Forrest and District Community Group and the Otway District Manager David Rourke occurred, with a reassurance that the relocation would in no way place the Forrest community at a greater bushfire risk due to DELWP's departure.

This project was seen as a significant opportunity by DELWP to apply an engagement process that sought to empower community to make decisions and take control of the management processes under agreement with DELWP. To this end, the project team set out its aim to "Transition the DELWP Forrest work centre sites to possible

community use under an agreed DELWP management structure (defined under negotiables and non-negotiables) that meets the needs and aspirations of the Department and of the Forrest Community".

### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS 2017

#### **DELWP Open House - 27th & 28th January 2017**

- Community Participation - Day 1 = 52; Day 2 = 47. Total 97 people providing 103 contributions

#### **DELWP Workshop 1 - 21 May 2017**

- World Cafe - 57 people and narrowing contributions down to 30 options

#### **DELWP Workshop 2 - 18 June 2017**

- Market Place - 38 people and narrowing contributions down to 10 options

#### **First Community Group led Community Forum**

- 30 people attending. Led by community groups to seek community centred decision-making regarding which committee of management would lead the transition process

DELWP staff at the Open House heard a broad range of ideas, ranging from easy to complex possibilities; this included five comprehensive written submissions. There were many ideas with similar themes which were combined into a summary for each site.

**The Camp:** Bike and Café Hub - School camp - Neighbourhood Safer Place - Markets - Garden and Native Nursery - Multipurpose Centre - Community Activities - Sell the site - Public toilets.

**The Car Park:** Leave as carpark - Sell the site - Exhibit large historic items.

**The Main Depot:** Market place - Historic and Cultural Hub - Tourist Interpretative Centre - Physical Activity Centre - Move the buildings - Sell the site - Neighbourhood Safer Place - Combined CFA and Neighbourhood Safer Place - Combined Community Hub and Neighbourhood Safer Place - Multi-Purpose Centre - CFA Shed - Historical Society Centre - Nursery/ Garden Centre - Youth Centre - School Camp - Business Activity Centre - Art Space - Public Toilets - Community hub.

### Final thoughts from participants (as written):

- Forrest needs a safer place
- Want building 14 for N/H House interests
- How about an Entry Arch - Forrest - Gateway to the Otway's
- Better signage in town, hard to find things in town and get about, e.g. bike trails/walking tracks and Lake Elizabeth
- BMX track
- Great community engagement opportunity, would be nice to know if \$\$ avail for a solid proposal and the amount
- Go CFA
- Good that you're trying to keep them in the community
- Lots of good ideas
- Let's promote Forrest business development
- Forrest to make the decision!
- Important that the sites stay as a community space and important to think out of the box/no preconceptions
- Really good display
- Thanks for the investment in our town
- We need \$\$ commitment to fund feasibility
- Funding opportunities for Environmental, social, economic risk reduction - GREEN BONDS ethical investment scheme
- Funds generated by community enterprise, training, education, produce, - Community employment and enterprise
- Great to see DELWP genuinely committed to helping Forrest

**The engagement process resulted in agreement to use the space for a bushfire place of last resort, a community hub (including the Neighbourhood House and the Historical Society), and a CFA station. The agreement was to use the sites as they currently stood until funding could be obtained to re-develop them.**



**2017 - FORREST WASTEWATER INVESTIGATION (BARWON WATER AND COLAC OTWAY SHIRE)**

In 2017, Barwon Water and Colac Otway Shire conducted community engagement in Forrest to investigate opportunities for improved wastewater management. Community feedback over recent years told of a range of system issues leading to amenity and odour issues around the town, exacerbated during peak tourist periods.

Wastewater in Forrest is managed by home owners via individual on-site wastewater management systems (on-site systems) with approval and performance regulated by Council. An audit of existing on-site systems determined there was a problem across the township with a large

proportion of systems deemed inadequate for managing loads from existing houses in the town (60% - 70% of systems considered to be failing and/or impacting on health and the environment).

Community consultation was undertaken to determine the key issues that were seen to be facing Forrest, including bad smells, polluted environment, risks to public health, community disruption when there are many visitors, and business disruption when there are many visitors.

Extensive consultation and investigations were undertaken for this project, and a number

of potential options were then developed with the community and formulated into four Solution Packages for Forrest. While there was a range of views, Solution Package 3 received the most votes from the community and was therefore nominated as the preferred solution for addressing wastewater issues. This solution involves a combination of on-property and off-property treatment and irrigation of recycled water. This provides the dual benefits of providing water for use by residents whilst also reducing the treatment and irrigation requirements at the local water recycling system.

**2018 - FORREST COMMON MASTERPLAN (COLAC OTWAY SHIRE)**

The development of a master plan for the Forrest Common was a 2017/18 Small Town Improvement Program (STIP) funded project. A draft master plan was endorsed for public consultation at the 26 September 2018 Ordinary Council Meeting and documents were on public exhibition from Monday 1 October 2018 to Monday 12 November 2018.

Fifteen formal submissions were received during this period. Council officers worked with the Forrest Common Master Plan Working Group to consider the feedback and it was determined during this process that some members of the community were concerned that the draft and proposed changes didn't capture how the community wanted to see the park developed.

Council officers continued to work with delegated community representatives and interested groups to prepare a revised master plan more representative of the collective community vision. Following extensive engagement and input from the local community, the final Forrest Common Master Plan was presented to Council at the November 2019 meeting for consideration and endorsement.

The plan was supported by Council, and will guide future development, upgrades and renewal within the Common. The implementation of the master plan is subject to future Council budget considerations and the ability to access funding from other external funding sources.



## 2019 - FORREST GATEWAY PROJECT SURVEY

Following the Forrest Futures process by DELWP in 2017 to transition public land to community management, the Forrest and District Community Group auspiced funds to conduct feasibility assessments and proof of concept to redevelop the DELWP sites in Forrest. This project was known as the Forrest Gateway Project.

In 2018, the group received a \$250,000 grant through the Victorian Government's Virtual Centre for Climate Change Innovation to conduct a two-year feasibility study into the Forrest Gateway to the Otways centre. In March/April 2019, a community consultation process invited community feedback regarding possible uses of the site.

The survey was completed by 69 participants. The survey was designed to gather community comment on ideas for what could be included in the centre, with a focus on three main areas:

- Importance of having a fire refuge / bushfire place of last resort
- Options for income generation to enable maintenance and upkeep
- Enabling community services (Neighbourhood House) and a home for the Forrest and District Historical Society

Results included:

### Fire refuge / bushfire place of last resort

Respondents generally felt that having a fire refuge or bushfire place of last resort was either extremely important (75%) or very important (15%). 62% of respondents thought it extremely important and 19% very important, that a new state-of-the-art fire safe facility is prioritised and built, rather than simply making best use of existing buildings.

### Income generating uses

To enable ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the site, the following income generating uses were

identified which respondents would like to see operating on the site:

Tourism/visitation/history experience (78%)

Neighbourhood House (67%)

Research and educational partnerships (58%)

Consultancy rooms rental (46%)

On-site fee paying (41%)

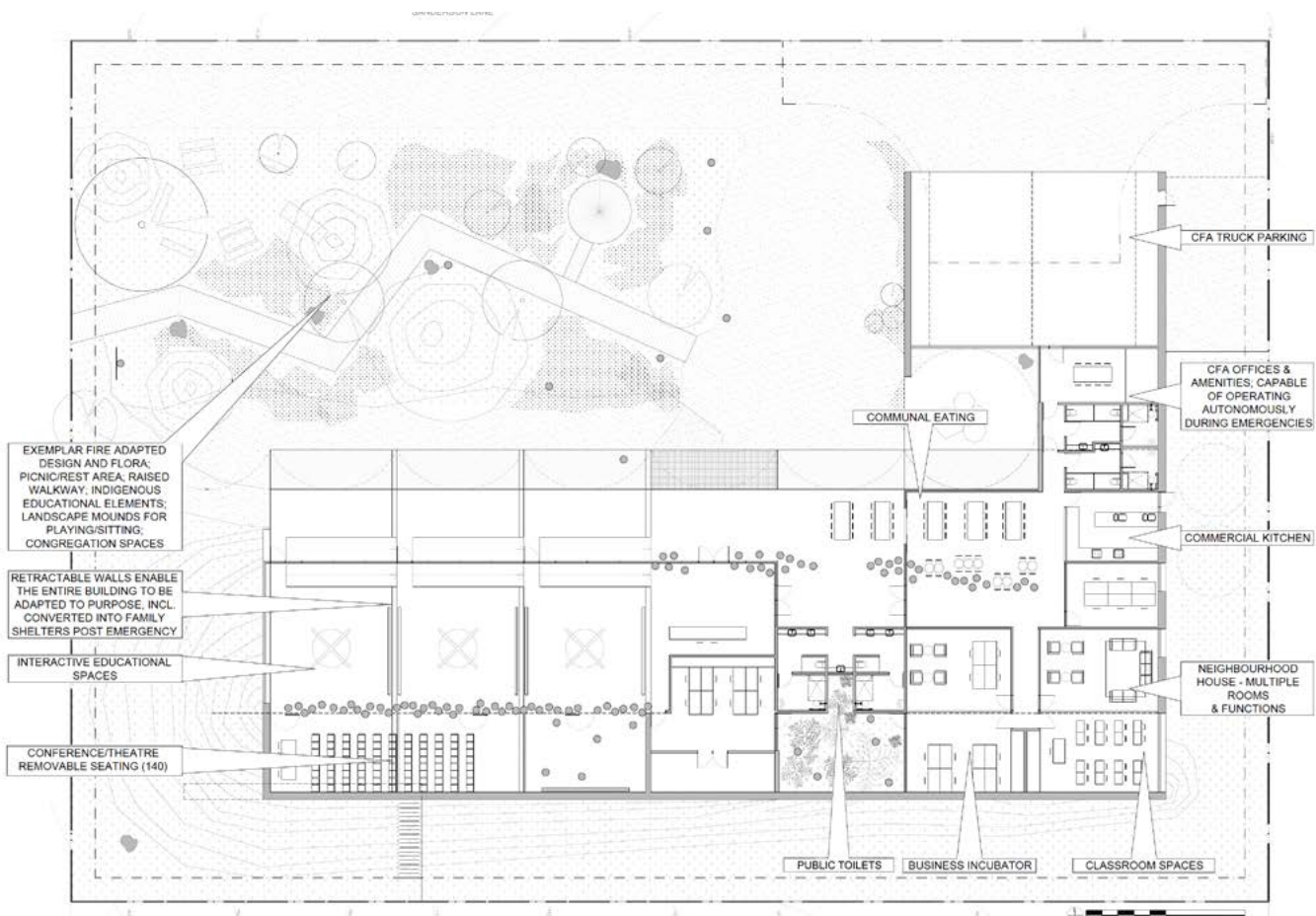
Local council or state government involvement (38%)

Commercial operations (renting space to businesses) (35%).

Further responses relating to these areas included:

- **Interactive tourism experience**

The majority of respondents were supportive of increasing tourism as an option for generating revenue at the site and for increasing employment and income. Responses overwhelmingly stated the importance of keeping this nature-based tourism and some important cautions highlighted in the comments.



*"Eco tourism is the only logical focus; nothing that would be a detriment to our natural environment".*

*"Not a visitor information centre! A 'science works' approach of interactive engagement".*

*"I hope that any tourism experience is also a learning experience".*

#### • **Education & Research facility**

The majority of people were supportive of a research facility in collaboration with universities or research organisations on the site. Respondents were also supportive of the idea to use the site as a learning hub for school groups, universities and open to the public in general.

"I'm a strong supporter of 'research to practice' activities, where the locals and general public can learn directly from the research activity. This requires a translation for the 'average' person, but means that the research can impact real change at the grass roots level. It would be ideal

as a location for the education officers of the land managers to deliver educative sessions followed by field practice within walking distance".

#### **Historical Discovery Centre**

Preserving Forrest's history by having a Historical Discovery Centre as part of the site was seen as important to almost all respondents.

Additional comments regarding the project included:

*"How good would it be to give our community a chance to learn and teach others about the precious Otways right here."*

*"Will bring jobs in science and environment and education to our future generations; will establish a culture and pride in our contribution to positive environmental stewardship, in a beautiful and creative way."*

*"Will increase pride and connections in town."*

*"I think there is a need to carefully consider the intersect of local people and visitors".*

*"It could play a role in managing our changing environment. It could keep local people and tourists safe in the case of an environmental emergency. It would certainly increase pride in our community and extend community connectedness".*

*"This is a fantastic project. I can't wait to see how it develops and be part of its growth. Well done to all involved."*

*"It will become a hub for the most important issues of our time and increase awareness to next generations of the ecology of our area and the planet in general".*

*"This seems like a project with so much potential for Forrest and its visitors. I'd really love to see a big indigenous focus here as well, paving the way for other areas to start truly acknowledging and bringing back our indigenous heritage".*



Gateway to the Otways Centre Concept



## 2019 - FORREST MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS DESIGN PROJECT (COLAC OTWAY SHIRE AND DIRT ART)

Colac Otway Shire in conjunction with consultants, Dirt Art, conducted community engagement in Forrest to gauge community opinions around revitalizing the Forrest Mountain Bike trail network. The project included auditing existing trails, detailed design for current and proposed trails, a signage audit, design of traffic treatments, and master planning of the Forrest and Yaughter Trail Heads.

Residents and riders were invited to submit project ideas and questions via an online portal and via a social media survey. 340 supportive

comments were made via the portal and social media platforms. Council also conducted four open house sessions with the community in May (two sessions), July and October 2019. A total of 102 different community members attended these sessions.

All forums provided Shire and the project consultants a valuable insight on the work required to meet the needs of the community and create a nationally significant mountain bike facility in Forrest. Key community consultation outcomes included:

- Overwhelming general support for the project
- Members of the horse riding community seeking shared trail access and development
- Residential concerns regarding trails being developed close to local houses
- Concern around environmental impacts
- Concern around access Forrest Mountain Bike Trails Design Project 21
- Retaining existing horse-riding loops at the Yaughter Trail Head



**2020 – FORREST FUTURES II: LOCALISING THE UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs) IN FORREST**

Following on from the Forrest Futures groundwork laid in 2017 by DELWP, the project entered a second phase of consultation with the community, facilitated by DELWP and in collaboration with Deakin University. The purpose of this was to prepare a town plan for Forrest for 2030 and beyond using the SDGs as a framework (see section 2.1).

The United Nations (UN) SDGs are a global framework to support action on the greatest challenges of our time such as climate change and inequality. To complement and augment national implementation, the UN has encouraged local authorities and communities to implement the SDGs at the local scale. Researchers from Deakin University began actively working with the Forrest community in June 2019. Their project focused on comprehensive research using mixed qualitative (participatory) and quantitative (modelling) methods to assess options for improving multiple socio-economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. This

project is co-funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, and in collaboration with Monash University.

There were a range of community engagement activities to determine the shared aspirations and views of the community for their future.

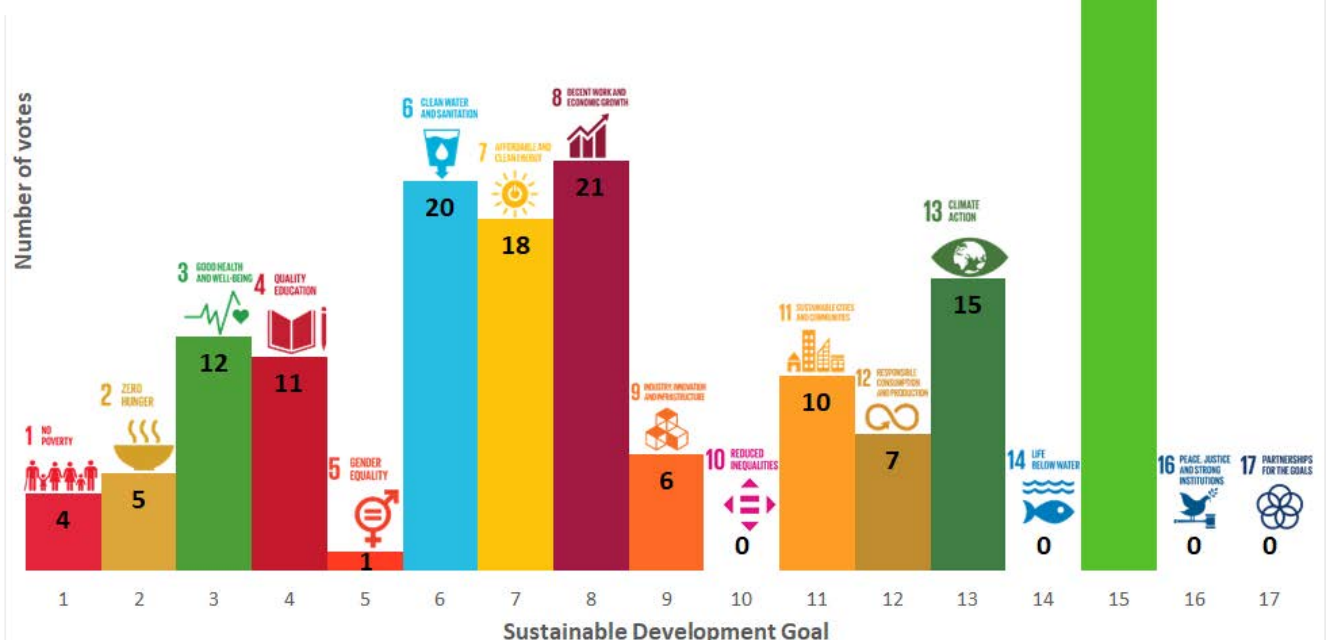
**Listening Post, Sept 2019** – each community member who participated was allocated three stickers to vote for their three top issues of concern for Forrest, framed by the SDGs (55 participants).

**Kitchen Table Discussion, Sept 2019** – this was facilitated by DELWP with eight people of diverse experiences (a farmer, a local tourism business operator, a school administrator, and a government employee) to discover what they considered important for the future of the community.

**Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with employees of Colac Otway Shire to gain an understanding of the community priorities from a local government perspective.

**Open House, Oct 2019** – To extend and confirm the research from the Listening Post and Kitchen Table Discussion, an Open House event presented the information gained from the previous activities. Visitors were invited to provide feedback and further ideas.

**Visioning and Ideas Workshop:** To have the community articulate a shared vision for a sustainable future for Forrest in 2030, a Visioning and Ideas Workshop was conducted. To elicit this vision, the facilitator took the group through a guided visualisation which described a hypothetical walk through the town in 2030, and each attendee wrote down the changes they saw. Then, in small groups, the participants collated these visions into a mock newspaper template, and shared them as ‘news articles’ with the larger group.





## 5.4 Community infrastructure priorities 2020

Small town community infrastructure is a function coordinated and supported by the local government authority, Colac Otway Shire Council. Council supports the initiative by communities to prepare their own community plan for the future. Each year, Council allocates funds for investment in community infrastructure. The identification of works is a combined effort of community-identified priorities and council budget.

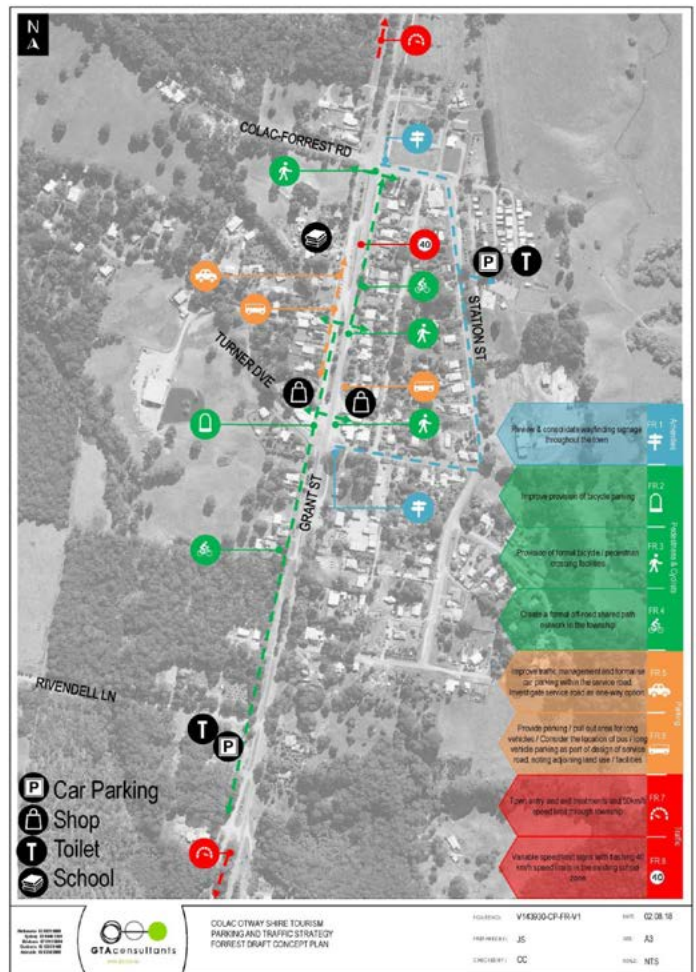
Communities in rural areas generally aspire to the same standards of services as their metropolitan counterparts at the same rate/tax base; however, the costs of delivering these services in regional areas are significantly higher.

A township assessment considers the setting and the natural environment, heritage issues, streetscape and public land issues, infrastructure improvements/needs, opportunities and constraints.

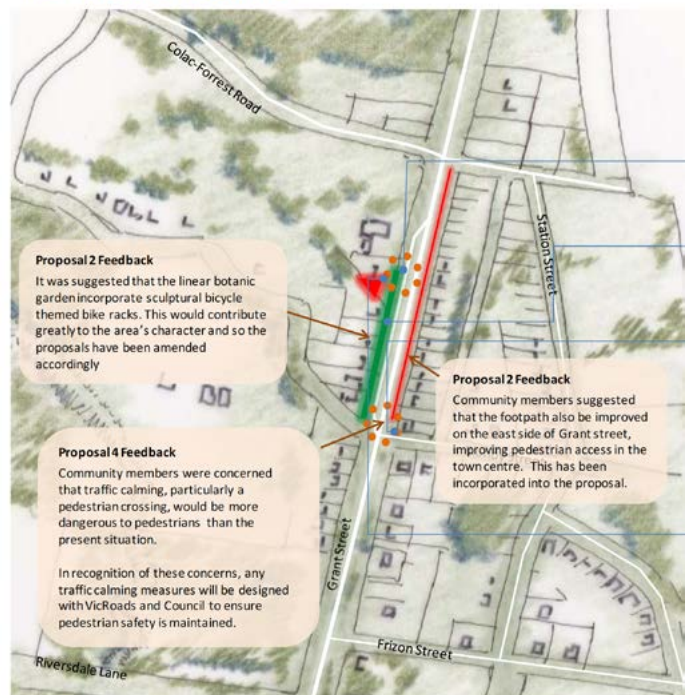
The previous strategy, released in 2012, proposed the following infrastructure changes:

1. Northern threshold to the town centre defined by a village green incorporating landscaping, seating and sculptural play feature (this was not achieved).
2. Linear botanic garden showcasing the area's native landscape character. Incorporate improvements to footpaths and the road edge, landscaping, seating, sculptural features and information about the plants growing there. This proposal would need to be undertaken in conjunction with the future drainage review (this was partially achieved).
3. Southern threshold to town centre to incorporate improvements to parking adjacent to the Forrest Brewery and Café, traffic calming to facilitate safe pedestrian crossing (subject to VicRoads agreement) and sculptural gateway feature (this was partially achieved).
4. Signage strategy (this was not achieved).

A 2020 update to the community infrastructure priorities forms part of this Plan and will supersede the Forrest part of the 2012 Birregurra and Forrest Township Community Infrastructure Plan



### 4.5 Forrest CIP proposals





As part of preparing the Forrest & District Plan: Towards 2030, the community worked with Council to update the Small Town Community Infrastructure Priorities. The community was invited to submit ideas for infrastructure improvements or changes (see Section 5.5 for full list).

This list and ranking was developed in consultation with the community, through submitted comment, online facilitated discussion, and a survey. Based on Community Infrastructure ranking and feedback, the following projects have been identified as priority projects over the next 5-10 years. 23 people completed the survey.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Bushfire safe place/Gateway to the Otways Centre</b></li> <li>2. <b>An integrated town waste water facility</b></li> <li>3. <b>Improve current public toilets</b></li> <li>4. <b>Move public toilets to Grant St</b></li> <li>5. <b>Install a safe crossing on Grant St between Forrest Brewing Company and Forrest General Store</b></li> <li>6. <b>Electricity Micro Grid</b></li> <li>7. <b>Continue rail trail to Barwon Downs &amp; Birregurra</b></li> <li>8. <b>Dual use footpath from town centre to Barwon Reservoir along Grant St</b></li> <li>9. <b>Upgraded facilities at mountain bike trailhead</b></li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. <b>Unique town wayfinding signage</b></li> <li>11. <b>Upgraded and improved mountain bike trails</b></li> <li>12. <b>Town hall upgrades (e.g. heating)</b></li> <li>13. <b>Car parking improvements on service road to the west of Grant St</b></li> <li>14. <b>Speed restriction signage and reduction measures (speed humps etc) on Turner Drive</b></li> <li>15. <b>Extend Barwon River walk to link with town centre</b></li> <li>16. <b>Art trail and sculpture trail along Barwon River</b></li> <li>17. <b>Community Gardens</b></li> </ol> |
|--|---|

**EXISTING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE**

<b>Open Space and Recreation</b>	Mountain Bike trails Mountain Bike shelter/trailhead Mountain Bike skills park Walking paths (multi-use) Tiger Rail Trail Forrest Common, Tennis court and BBQ facilities, Forrest Terminus Historical point Forrest Caravan Park West Barwon Reservoir and River walks Forrest Recreation Reserve and Horse Riding Club Public Toilets for tourists / visitors Tennis courts at Barwon Downs and Gerangamete
<b>Community and Cultural Facilities</b>	Community Hub (47 Grant St): Neighbourhood House; Community Gym; Studio Forrest (Art studio); Multipurpose room for meeting hire; CFA Station Community Hall at Forrest and Barwon Downs Forrest and District Men's Shed
<b>Early Years</b>	Forrest Pre-School and Day Care
<b>Primary School</b>	Forrest Primary School and Out of School Hours Care
<b>Emergency Services</b>	CFA – Forrest, Barwon Downs and Gerangamete Police station DELWP Barwon Downs Work Centre





## 5.5 Community ideas for town improvements towards 2030

The Community was invited to comment and suggest ideas for improving Forrest and District over the next 10 years, and these ideas are all collected below. They are listed with the goals they are aligned with, and sorted by the number of goals they will help achieve, to indicate the potential importance of each idea.

IDEAS THAT MEET FIVE GOALS	
Forrest Gateway to the Otways Centre (incorporating a bushfire place of last resort)	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Change town planning character overlay (post-bushfire)	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Integrated water management plan (water supply, tanks, waste water, reuse and stormwater)	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Improve stability of power supply (outages occur regularly)	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Improve internet access (mobile and fixed) and communications infrastructure generally	★ ★ ★ ★ ★
IDEAS THAT MEET FOUR GOALS	
Housing options for local workers, including encouraging more permanent housing at caravan park	★ ★ ★ ★
Options for farms to build second dwellings (change to zoning laws)	★ ★ ★ ★
More permanent housing options	★ ★ ★ ★
Enabling housing for long-term residents rather than B&Bs	★ ★ ★ ★
Increased options for short-term accommodation	★ ★ ★ ★
Upgrade facilities at mountain bike trail hub for tourist and community use	★ ★ ★ ★
Better access to public transport (e.g. use the rail trail to link to Birregurra or improve bus service)	★ ★ ★ ★
Build a new caravan park at the recreation reserve/use it as camping overflow at times of high tourist congestion	★ ★ ★ ★
Access for non-powered boats including canoes and kayaks on Barwon Reservoir, either open access or permitted access for annual triathlon	★ ★ ★ ★
Epic mountain bike trail around the perimeter of the Barwon Reservoir	★ ★ ★ ★
IDEAS THAT MEET THREE GOALS	
Roundabout at Brewery corner and proper crossing	★ ★ ★
Creative in-town wayfinding signage designed with local art groups	★ ★ ★
Art gallery and studio (perhaps at old CFA building)	★ ★ ★
Upgrade hall to remove asbestos and improve facility for performances	★ ★ ★
Upgrade heating/air conditioning at the hall	★ ★ ★
Connect Barwon Downs and Forrest with a walking/horseriding/ bike track (not necessarily rail trail, possibly along channel)	★ ★ ★
Continue rail trail to Barwon Downs and then Birregurra	★ ★ ★
All-abilities infrastructure access to the reservoir for fishing	★ ★ ★
Swimming hole, swimming platform on the river's edge, downstream from the catchment	★ ★ ★
Recognition and preservation of original Forrest station site	★ ★ ★
Public art on the water-tower (at reservoir)	★ ★ ★
Street art on reservoir wall	★ ★ ★
Health and wellbeing precinct	★ ★ ★
Arts trail & sculpture walk along Barwon River	★ ★ ★



- ★ 1. Bushfire safe community
- ★ 2. Diverse and sustainable economy,
- ★ 3. Great public and private infrastructure
- ★ 4. Cared-for community,
- ★ 5. Secure future

IDEAS THAT MEET THREE GOALS	
Investigate alternative crops to encourage new businesses	★ ★ ★
Stock the Barwon reservoir with estuary perch, a native fish species	★ ★ ★
More action on wastewater	★ ★ ★
Wastewater treatment (for reuse e.g. crops)	★ ★ ★
Waste to energy	★ ★ ★
Weed eradication program (e.g. holly and blackberry removal between Hennigan Cres & reservoir); set up Forrest LandCare to do this in partnership with DELWP	★ ★ ★
Caravan park that retains its affordability and community connectedness	★ ★ ★
Roof-top solar program for community observing social equity	★ ★ ★
Fresh inspection of buildings and sites for heritage listing	★ ★ ★
Retain community involvement/management of the Forrest common and caravan park sites	★ ★ ★
Expand the common to full 5 acres/Develop Forrest common in line with Master Plan	★ ★ ★
IDEAS THAT MEET TWO GOALS	
Bushfire place of last resort	★ ★
Second CFA truck	★ ★
Prohibit camping on Forrest common	★ ★
Greater access to tennis courts	★ ★
Citizen science projects/school education	★ ★
Create a Forrest history centre	★ ★
Coordinated plan to promote Forrest as a foodie destination	★ ★
Solar farm	★ ★
Public toilet improvements	★ ★
Better road signage on Turner Dve (40km/hr), traffic calming measures (e.g. speed humps)	★ ★
Footpath on eastern side of road from town to Barwon reservoir (trail on western side of road plus fire break could be repurposed to avoid destroying bushland)	★ ★
Address dangerous crossing at Grant St and Tip Rd	★ ★
Community gardens (possibly at school or caravan park)	★ ★
Link the school with the arts proposals (listed above)	★ ★
Energy microgrid(s)	★ ★
IDEAS THAT MEET ONE GOAL	
Remove native trees from roadsides	★
Service road carparking	★
Bus parking	★
Town beautification (e.g. tree planting on Henry/Station Sts)	★

# 6 FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

## 6.1 Drivers of change (future scanning)

### FORREST

- Changes in residential composition
- Opening/closing of commercial business
- Changes in land use & zoning, influencing house availability/affordability and population growth
  - Minor investment in township infrastructure

### LOCAL

- Changes to local council governance and composition
- Changes to student enrolments at Primary school/ increasing-decreasing
- Major weather event (bushfire) as a result of climate change
- Changes in infrastructure land use zoning
- Re-evaluation of the hinterland towns as population growth opportunities
- Major investment in regionally significant infrastructure within the town
  - Any realignment of electoral boundaries at a local, state or federal level (i.e. no longer a marginal seat)

### REGIONAL

- New and emerging industries
- A greater recognition of Indigenous peoples' connection to Forrest & District, and a commitment to work in collaboration with Eastern Maar representatives over future developments
- Increased momentum desire for/towards regional living
- Changes to regional cities and service towns, Geelong, Colac, Warrnambool
- Growth in population across Melbourne's Western suburbs
- Investment in regional infrastructure, channel routes roads, rail, transport, increased train services from Colac and/or Birregurra, tourism infrastructure, Avalon airport
- Significant public/private investment in leisure and recreational infrastructure (i.e. Forrest Caravan Park, Forrest MTB trails, Forrest Brewery expansion)

There are a number of key drivers which will affect the future of Forrest and District:

- Population and demographics
- Residential land development
- Affordability of property and suitability of housing
- Inequality
- Local economy
- Environment
- Major infrastructure projects
- Transport and connectivity
- Local school
- Climate change

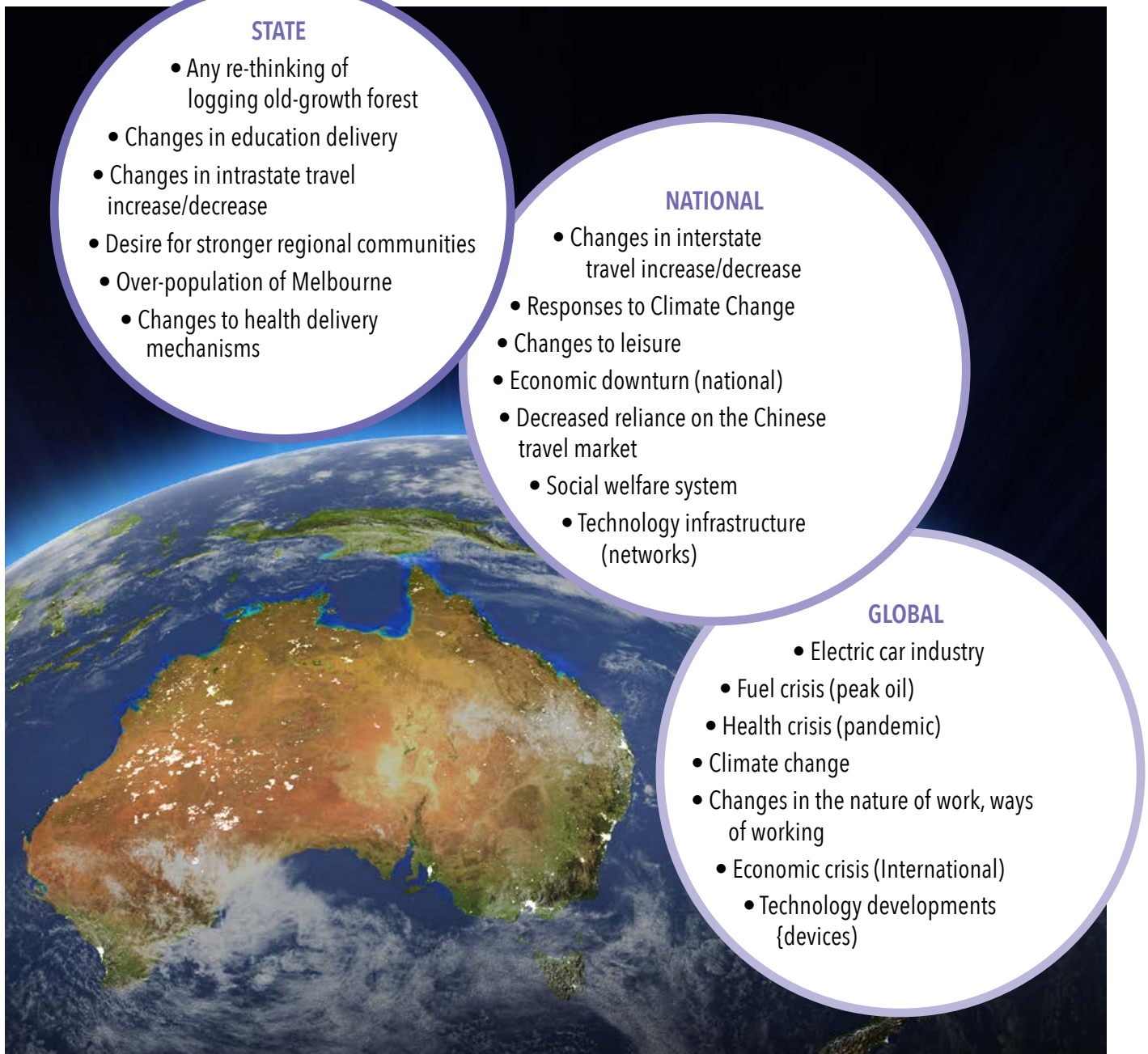
In addition, there are many government and stakeholder policies which may impact the community.

### POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Between 2006 and 2016, Forrest experienced a 35% increase in population. Over that time, the number of children aged 0-14 decreased by 14% and people over 55 increased by 26%. The median age of a person living in Forrest has increased from 41 to 52. Forrest has a slowly increasing and ageing population, which will influence the needs of residents in the future.

### RESIDENTIAL LAND DEVELOPMENT

Colac Otway Shire have designated that Forrest remain a low growth community and estimated a release of 3.5 permits per year for residential land development. There has only been one permit issued per year since 2011, so development has been below expected levels. Planning laws prohibiting more than one dwelling per 40 hectares (100 acres) in Farming Zone land has been noted by local residents as an obstruction to development. Additionally, new housing cannot be built without a new wastewater system, making this a critical priority for community development.



## AFFORDABILITY OF PROPERTY AND SUITABILITY OF HOUSING

Cost and availability of housing has become an issue in Forrest over the last decade. Tourism businesses purchase properties for accommodation, removing them from the pool of available residential housing. This in turn drives up prices due to scarcity of supply. In addition, local tourism businesses must look outside of Forrest for staff, who then have to travel some distance as they cannot find local housing. Other potential new residents also struggle to find housing, and anecdotally must wait until existing residents move away or travel.

Median house prices have increased 188% since 2009, while median rents have only increased by 30%. This should be viewed from the perspective of the limited supply of housing stock – the largest number of house sales in any year over that period has been nine, and the rental turnover is even smaller at a maximum of five per year. While it is still far cheaper to buy or rent in Forrest than in a metropolitan centre, the chances of locating a property are much smaller.

## INEQUALITY

Along with this issue of housing, Forrest also grapples with inequality. In the greater Otway region, 19% of people live in poverty and the median family income in Forrest is 55% lower than for the rest of Victoria (2016). Twenty percent of all families in Forrest are single-parent families (and all single parents are women). The SEIFA score (a measure of socio-economic conditions) puts Forrest in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country, and the 20% most disadvantaged in Victoria. However, Forrest is a supportive community and provides assistance to those in need, for example community lunches and foodshare.



## LOCAL ECONOMY

Forrest experienced a major shift in local industry with the cessation of logging in 2008 and the decline of agricultural industries. The development of the Mountain Bike Trail system began the transition to a primarily tourism-based economy, capitalising on Forrest's beautiful environment. This transition was enhanced with private investment in local small businesses catering to both tourists and local residents. The expansion of the tourism industry is obstructed by limited housing supply for both accommodation and employees, and by ageing and failing infrastructure.

The G21 Colac Otway region profile identifies a number of economic development opportunities through the greater Colac Otway region, including dairy farming and processing; green energy; transport and logistics; tourism; and health care and social assistance. It also

notes that the Forrest Common and Forrest Mountain Bike Trails Strategy projects are likely to have positive impact on future economic growth in the Shire.

The local community are happy to have tourism in Forrest, except where there is conflict with housing availability, but have expressed a desire for diversification of the economy so there are other options for employment growth within the town. Local small businesses are dominated by tourism/hospitality and farming. Additional businesses are prevented from being created due to lack of housing and office space (e.g. having service businesses move into the area - accountants, hairdressers, tradespeople etc) and poor connectivity (internet and transport). Agriculture is still a major part of Forrest and District, with local dairy and beef farms and mushroom growers.

## ENVIRONMENT

Forrest's placement as the Gateway to the Otways means it is located in an enviably beautiful environment. The area is located in a biodiversity hotspot, and the Great Otway National Park provides protection for some of that biodiversity. This, along with the mountain bike trails, are the biggest drawcard of the local tourism industry. The local residents are proud of their pristine surroundings and dedicated to ensuring they remain so. Climate change and potential bushfire impact are both threats to the local environment.

Forrest and District is a growing hub for regenerative agriculture - where the land is improved as a result of agriculture and carbon is stored in biologically active soil. This limits the use of fertilisers, which reduces agricultural runoff into waterways, improving local water quality and the environment generally.



## MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

Forrest currently has several major infrastructure projects in planning (see Section 2.4).

### The Forrest Gateway Project

In 2019, three parcels of land were transferred to community ownership from DELWP. The Gateway Project has developed plans to build a multipurpose site incorporating a Bushfire Place of Last Resort, a community hub and the CFA station, together with a centre for interactive visitor experiences and climate change education and research.

### Wastewater

The issue of sewerage and wastewater infrastructure has been developing for some years in Forrest and has recently come to a head. Ageing septic systems that don't meet current safety standards are no longer adequate and new infrastructure is urgently needed. This affects the local environment and biodiversity, the local economy (by limiting tourism), wellbeing of local residents, and additional development in the town.

### Forrest Mountain Bike Trails Design Project

The Forrest Mountain Bike Trails were first opened in 2005, encompassing over 60km of trails. A proposal was released in December 2019 to increase the Mountain Bike trail network by approximately 38kms, including restructuring the existing trails and creating a new Trail Head. This plan is aimed to revitalise mountain bike tourism and re-establish Forrest as a nationally significant mountain bike destination.

### Forrest Common

Colac-Otway Shire have been consulting with the Forrest community to revamp and reinvigorate the Forrest Common.

## TRANSPORT AND CONNECTIVITY

Forrest lies on the route between Apollo Bay and Colac. It is a feeder route to tourism along the Great Ocean Road and the Great Otway National Park. State government are currently upgrading some portions of the Forrest-Apollo Bay Road, and are planning to undertake surfacing work on the Birregurra-Forrest Road near Seven Bridges Road. Recent upgrades to the channel routes to Forrest, such as the Princes Hwy between Winchelsea and Colac, and the Great Ocean Road, make it easier for tourists to visit the area, and safer for residents to drive.

There is one bus line that runs through Forrest, the Colac-Marengo route. This service runs only on Wednesdays and only once in each direction. During summer months, a more frequent bus service is offered for tourists. There is a V-Line station in Birregurra, but apart from the once-weekly bus, there is no connecting service from Birregurra to Forrest, and there is no alignment of the bus timetable with the train timetable. This puts a severe limit on residents who may want to avoid driving, and for tourists who wish to visit that do not drive.

The NBN has been rolled out in Forrest, but the service can be poor. NBN Fixed Wireless is known to suffer from congestion issues, and the distance to the fixed wireless tower can also affect internet speeds. The nearest tower to Forrest is in Barwon Downs, and towers have an effective range of 14kms, which can be disrupted by terrain (trees, mountains, etc.), and precipitation. There is also limited mobile reception throughout Forrest. Improved internet access (fixed and mobile) would encourage new businesses which rely on connectivity, and better support the existing residents and businesses.

## LOCAL SCHOOL

In the period from 1993-2001, schools in the neighbouring areas of Barwon Downs, Gerangamete, Yeodene and Barongarook closed down. That left the Forrest Primary School as the only primary school in the district (schools in Colac, Birregurra, Apollo Bay and Carlisle River being closest). Forrest Primary School contains the Forrest Pre-School (also the central pre-school for the district, the nearest being in Apollo Bay, Colac and Birregurra), in addition to long day-care and out of school hours care, assisting parents who need to travel longer distances for work outside of Forrest. The school is a significant employer with three full-time and eight part-time staff, and one trainee. The school has offered traineeships to local residents for over 20 years.

With Forrest Primary School being the central school, pre-school, and childcare service for the community, it creates traffic for local businesses in town, such as the General Store. It also works with many of the community groups in Forrest. If Forrest were to lose its primary school, there would be many negative knock-on effects causing harm to Forrest's future.





## CLIMATE CHANGE

Human-induced climate change is a problem that will require a united, global effort to combat. However, the effects of climate change do and will continue to affect Forrest at a community level. Such effects include increasing temperatures, drying climates, increased frequency and severity of bushfires, droughts and extreme weather. As the gateway to the Otways, Forrest is vulnerable to bushfires and drought. The effect of climate change on biodiversity is a serious threat by itself, but may also affect Forrest's eco-tourism economy. Forrest is likely to be impacted by bushfire in the near future simply through the balance of probabilities, and climate change means that such an impact is likely to be harsher and stronger than it may otherwise have been. Even if Forrest isn't directly affected by bushfire in a given year, the influence of other bushfires will affect Forrest because of bushfire smoke and a general downturn in visitor numbers (as seen during the Eastern Victoria bushfires in 2019-20).

Encroaching sea level rise is already affecting communities along the Great Ocean Road, with landslips creating dangerous road conditions and impacting coastal properties. This could have positive or negative effects on visitor numbers to Forrest – dangerous and unsightly conditions may drive people away from the region, or encourage them to visit areas further inland. Decreasing amenity along the Great Ocean Road could also push residents to move further inland, potentially into Forrest and District. This, coupled with the increasing cost of farmland as agriculture shifts south, away from drying and drought-affected northern Victoria, could make living in Forrest and District even less affordable than it currently is.

The Geelong region is anticipated to have significant population growth between now and 2050, and the

water supplies for the region are already fully allocated. Providing water resources for the Geelong region without negatively affecting the environment is a sustainability challenge that needs addressing.

Increasing temperatures will also affect Forrest's residents, especially as the community is ageing. More frequent heatwaves will put older people, more susceptible to heat-induced illness, at risk. Forrest is occasionally subject to flooding (e.g. the spillover of Barwon Dam in 2012), and with the increase in extreme weather events this could become more frequent. To remain safe and stay resilient in the face of climate change, Forrest must anticipate more frequent bushfires, flooding and drought, and develop plans for sustainable recovery.

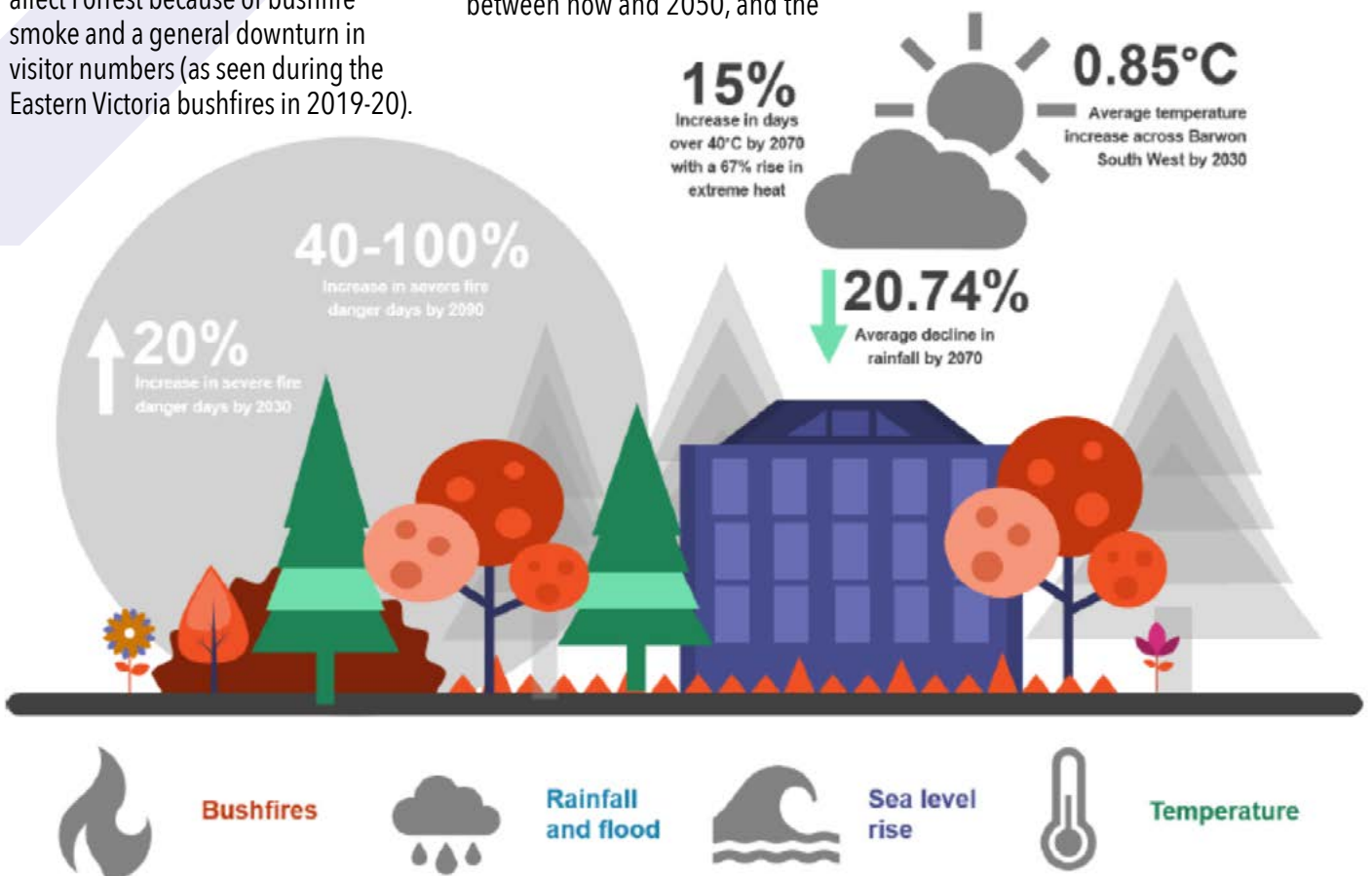


Figure 2: Projected climate change impacts in Barwon South West (Geelong Regional Alliance, 2018, CSIRO, 2015)



## 6.2 Current Government objectives

Careful consideration has been given to the community's role in addressing government and stakeholder priorities, and this plan goes some way to addressing a number of those. A list of government and stakeholder policies has been compiled below.

NATIONAL	
Federal government policies covering issues such as regional development, agriculture, water, digital connectivity (NBN), health, energy, biodiversity and threatened species, climate change, bushfire recovery, forestry, and land use.	
<b>Regional Institute of Australia</b>	Project Agenda(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future of Regional Jobs</li> <li>• Mid-Sized Towns (Colac, as it impacts / relates to Forrest)</li> <li>• Regions in Transition</li> <li>• Effectiveness of place-based transition packages</li> <li>• Investing in Regional Development – Competition and Collaboration</li> </ul>
<b>Tourism Australia</b>	Tourism2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grow demand from Asia</li> <li>• Ensure tourism transport environment supports growth</li> <li>• Build industry resilience, productivity and quality</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Development Australia</b>	2011 The Great Ocean Road World Class Tourism Investment Study - A Product Gap Audit Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF)







STATE	
<b>Regional Development Victoria</b>	Victoria's Regional Statement 2016 – 2020 Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy Action Plan Grants and Programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger Regional Communities Program</li> <li>• Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund</li> <li>• Regional Infrastructure Fund</li> <li>• Regional Community Leadership Program</li> </ul>
<b>Regional Roads Victoria</b>	Fixing Country Roads Program
<b>Country Fire Authority</b>	Koori Inclusion Action Plan
<b>Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations</b>	Victorian Cultural Fire Strategy
<b>First People's Assembly of Victoria</b>	Treaty Negotiation Framework
<b>Aboriginal Victoria</b>	Aboriginal Heritage Act 2006 Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 2018
<b>Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning</b>	2003 DSE A New Future for the Otways 2009 Caring for Country – the Otways and You: Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park Management Plan Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037 Victoria's Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017-2020 State of the Environment 2018 Victoria's Climate Science Report 2019 Aboriginal Cultural Identity Aboriginal Inclusion Plan Current Corporate Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zero emissions, climate-ready economy and community</li> <li>• Safe, sustainable and productive water resources</li> <li>• Reliable, sustainable and affordable energy services</li> <li>• A safe and quality built-environment</li> <li>• Sustainable and effective local governments</li> <li>• Reduced impact of major bushfires and other emergencies on our people, property and the environment</li> </ul>
<b>VisitVictoria</b>	2013 – 16 Victoria's Regional Tourism Strategy Victoria's 2020 Tourism Strategy 2014-2024 Victoria's Trails Strategy
REGIONAL	
<b>G21 Geelong Regional Alliance</b>	G21 Adventure Trails
<b>Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation</b>	Eastern Maar Country Plan
<b>Barwon Water</b>	2017 Forrest Waste Water Investigation Strategy 2030 Reconciliation Action Plan
<b>Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism</b>	2015-2025 Strategic master plan for the Great Ocean Road Region Visitor Economy 2015-2017 Destination Action Plan: Otways



LOCAL	
<b>Colac Otway Shire</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002 Colac Otway Stormwater Management Plan (vol 1&amp;2)</li> <li>• 2004 COS Economic Development and Tourism Strategy</li> <li>• 2006-2010 Recreation Strategy</li> <li>• 2007 Rural Land Strategy</li> <li>• 2010-2018 Environment Strategy</li> <li>• 2011 COS Rural Living Strategy</li> <li>• 2011 COS Open Space Final Report</li> <li>• 2013-2015 Environment Action Plan</li> <li>• 2013 Roadmap for a Carbon Neutral Plan</li> <li>• 2015 Domestic Wastewater Management Plan</li> <li>• 2017-2021 COS Council Plan</li> <li>• 2017-2021 COS Health and Wellbeing Plan</li> <li>• 2017-2027 Climate Change Adaptation Plan</li> <li>• 2019 COS Tourism Parking and Traffic Strategy</li> <li>• 2019-2024 Economic Development Strategy</li> <li>• 2020 COS Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan</li> <li>• Colac 2050 Growth Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Surf Coast Shire</b>	2019 Rural Hinterland Futures Strategy
<b>Forrest and District</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002 Nature-based tourism strategy</li> <li>• 2004 Angahook-Otway Investigation</li> <li>• 2005 Feasibility Study Into Increased Economic Activity In Forrest</li> <li>• 2007 Reviewed Forrest Township Masterplan</li> <li>• 2010 Forrest Structure Plan 2010</li> <li>• 2011 Forrest Small Town Infrastructure Plan</li> <li>• 2015 Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Strategic Plan</li> <li>• 2015 Tiger Rail Trail Feasibility Study</li> <li>• 2016-2019 Forrest Primary School Strategic Plan</li> <li>• 2018 Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Economic Analysis</li> <li>• 2019 Forrest Gateway to the Otways Assessing feasibility, building collaboration</li> </ul>





# 7 APPENDICES

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## Glossary

### **Bushfire place of last resort**

A place of last resort when all other bushfire plans have failed.

### **G21 – Geelong Region Alliance**

The formal alliance of government, business and community organisations working together to improve the lives of people within the Geelong region across five municipalities – Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe and Surf Coast.

### **Regional Development**

The provision of assistance to regions for economic development. In Australia, there are Regional Development Associations coordinated by the Federal government and run by the State governments.

### **Structure Plan**

A long-term guide for change to land use, building and public spaces.

### **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

A set of 17 goals adopted by all UN member states, based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda is a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet.

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# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



## Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an agenda developed by the United Nations and are intended to guide development for a sustainable future. The SDGs were adopted by all UN member states in 2015 and their horizon is 2030 – that is, countries should intend to achieve all 17 goals by 2030. The United Nations believe that it will require contributions from all levels of society to achieve the SDGs, with government, business and community working together.

The aim of Deakin University's Local SDGs Program is to find ways to implement the SDGs at a community level. We can adapt the SDGs to be relevant to the concerns of a specific community and thus advance sustainability at the local level.

Work undertaken in Forrest in 2020 to identify the priority SDGs for the community in Forrest found that there were six SDGs of special importance:



These goals were consolidated and renamed in order to be meaningful for the community. The correspondences between the five community goals and these SDGs are as follows:

COMMUNITY GOAL	SDG
<b>A bushfire safe community</b>	3 Good Health and Wellbeing, 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities 13 Climate Action, 15 Life on Land
<b>A diverse and sustainable economy</b>	8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities
<b>Great public and private infrastructure</b>	6 Clean Water and Sanitation, 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities
<b>A cared-for community</b>	3 Good Health and Wellbeing, 6 Clean Water and Sanitation 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, 13 Climate Action 15 Life on Land
<b>A secure future</b>	3 Good Health and Wellbeing, 6 Clean Water and Sanitation 8 Decent Work and Economic Growth, 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, 13 Climate Action, 15 Life on Land

## Scenarios

As part of the Deakin University SDG research, six scenarios were created. These show six possible futures for Forrest depending on how successfully the SDGs were implemented. Shown below are the narratives (stories) for the six different scenarios. Many of the ideas provided by the community during the Deakin community engagements were incorporated into these narratives (although mostly only in the positive scenarios). It is important to realise that these are only potential outcomes and many other futures may arise.

### 1. SUSTAINABILITY IN ALL ASPECTS (UTOPIA)

The town shifts gradually to a more sustainable path. There has been significant take-up of renewable energy, particularly solar panels, and the town generates all its own energy through a local microgrid (SDG 7). The condition of the environment is improving over time thanks to changes in policy and management – for instance, there are strong regulations on land use to avoid environmental trade-offs (SDG 15). Domestic tourism is moderate and well managed to keep the environment pristine, focused on green- and eco-tourism, and niche agriculture such as mushrooms, plus examples of regenerative farming also encourage visitors (SDG 8). The region becomes known for small-scale sustainable farming, and Community Supported Agriculture models (where consumers pay in

advance for regular deliveries of produce) are implemented to share the costs and risks of farming with the community (SDG 2). Niche agriculture and international tourism promote a moderate level of international trade at the local scale, although international tourism has trade-offs against carbon intensity, primarily through air travel (SDG 13). The town is susceptible to bushfire and drought but managed burning and sustainable water use mitigate the threat (SDG 6, 13, 15). Additionally, drought-resilient water infrastructure and a sewerage system are built which increases resilience to climate change impacts (SDG 6, 13). Forrest becomes an incubator for climate change resilience and technology research and this encourages the growth of the local economy beyond tourism (SDG 13). At a social level,

medical services and excellent health care are available within the township (SDG 3). The population grows slowly through in-migration and an ageing population, and alternative housing options such as co-housing emerge to sustainably house new residents and increase the sense of community (SDG 11). Forrest is a desirable, safe place to live for families with young children and retirees, as poverty and inequality has been reduced/eliminated and equity is high (SDG 1, 10). The community values the Indigenous heritage of the land, recognises traditional owners and adopts traditional land management practices (SDG 10, 15). The community is small, socially engaged, and close-knit, and so have an advantage in being able to pull together to achieve implementation of the SDGs (SDG 17).



## 2. INCLUSIVE GROWTH AT THE EXPENSE OF THE ENVIRONMENT

On this pathway, there has been an economic boom, allowing investment in social institutions and the 'lifting up' of many disadvantaged peoples (SDG 1, 10). This has occurred in concert with the exploitation of fossil fuel reserves and intensive management of the environment, resulting in an increased pace of climate change (SDG 13, 15). Australia has high fossil fuel reserves and has had minimal take-up of renewable energy, impairing achievement of climate action and sustainable consumption SDGs (SDG 7, 11, 13). In Forrest, results of environmental management include earthmoving to create firebreaks for bushfire prevention and fracking for fossil fuels (SDG 13, 15). These management techniques, combined with climate change, have a negative effect on biodiversity even though improvements are seen in other ways (such as increased bushfire resilience) (SDG 13, 15). Land use regulation leads to a slow decline in the rate

of native deforestation, replaced with timber plantations (SDG 15). A new sewerage system and drought resilient water infrastructure permits greater numbers of tourists and new residents, while desalinated water is trucked in when required (SDG 6, 8). Agriculture such as dairy and beef farming, and mushroom growing is highly managed and resource intensive; there is a rapid increase in productivity. The region becomes known for small-scale sustainable farming (SDG 2). This, as well as mountain biking, encourages domestic and international tourism to the region. International tourism has trade-offs against carbon intensity, principally from air travel emissions (SDG 8, 13). There are high levels of consumption, materialism, and meat-rich diets (SDG 12). There is rapid technology development and Forrest becomes a development hub for new tech, allowing full and productive employment and growth in the local economy (SDG 8). The community

values the indigenous heritage of the land and recognises traditional owners and traditional management practices for the local environment (SDG 10, 15). Poverty and inequality are significantly reduced for all members of the community, so Forrest is a safe and desirable place to live, and the population of the town grows through migration, births, and an ageing population (SDG 1, 2, 10). Medical services are available within the town, and excellent health care improves outcomes post-natally and for elderly people (SDG 3). New housing is built in rezoned land to house new residents (SDG 11). Social cohesion and engagement is high, meaning the community is able to pull together to achieve implementation of the SDGs (SDG 17). The acceleration of climate change due to forces outside of the local level of control limits the successful outcomes from SDG implementation (SDG 13).

## 3. PROSPERITY WITHOUT GROWTH

The capitalist mantra of growth at all costs has been abandoned in this pathway (SDG 8). There is no drive to grow the town beyond its current capacity. Forrest has excellent health care (SDG 3), a new sewerage system (SDG 6), protection of local ecosystems (SDG 15) and enough jobs, funded by reinvestment of profits into the community (SDG 8). Alternative housing options such as co-housing emerge to house new residents, and policies to limit the use of housing for profit (for rental and tourism) increases available housing supply (SDG 11). Water scarcity is substantially reduced due to water reuse from the new sewerage system and improvements to water collection methods (SDG 6) and the community is resilient to disasters (SDG 13). Forrest is therefore a

desirable place to live and raise families, although the fertility rate is below replacement and there is social pressure to limit children to one per couple (SDG 12). Economically, all forms of tourism decline as it has too high an impact on climate change (SDG 8), but in its place, Forrest becomes a development hub for climate change adaptation and resilience research, resulting in fulfilling employment and assisting with ecosystem management and disaster resilience (SDG 8, 13). There are renewable energy microgrids in the greater Otway region and electric vehicle chargers available in the town (SDG 7). There is clean and accessible public transport available to travel to local centres such as Colac and Geelong, but travelling long distances is more difficult, and the community

becomes a little isolated (SDG 10, 11). The indigenous community assist in protection, restoration and management as stewards of the land and water, and all indigenous rights are recognised and have been enshrined in the constitution (SDG 6, 10 15). Ecosystem protection and a halt to deforestation sees improvements in CO2 capture (SDG 13, 15). Sustainable agricultural practices and communal agricultural models allow the whole community to share the labour and output of farming (SDG 2). Seed sharing becomes widespread (SDG 2). The community are highly cohesive and engaged, and are focused on achieving the SDGs that do not emphasize economic growth for growth's sake (SDG 17).

#### 4. ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY GROWTH IN A DIVIDED COMMUNITY

The gap between the haves and have-nots has widened (SDG 10). Poverty and inequality are high and disadvantaged people are crowded out of the town due to rising housing costs (SDG 1, 10, 11). Access to health care is expensive and limited (SDG 3), while privileged people moving to Forrest limit the number of children they have as they see this as having a positive impact on sustainability (SDG 12). The local environment is a drawback for migration into the town and tourism, and thus new and existing residents make efforts to preserve the environment for economic and their own benefits

(SDG 6, 8, 15). Sustainable agriculture lessens the impact of agriculture on the environment and on climate (SDG 2). Consumption, like many things, is stratified: rich people have better access to sustainable resources while disadvantaged people are more likely to opt for cheaper, resource intensive products (SDG 12). There are plans for a new sewerage system, but there is division over the cost (SDG 6). Renewable energy and electric vehicles are available to those who can afford it, although the cost is prohibitive for many and resource efficiency is uneven across the community (SDG 7, 12). Forrest

becomes a development hub for new technologies, including for climate adaptation and resilience – this encourages the growth of the local economy but prices people out of the housing market as prices rise due to demand (SDG 8, 11, 13). Community cohesion and participation is low and stratified: only privileged community members believe that SDG implementation is in the best interests of the community (SDG 17). There is a low chance of successful implementation of the SDGs as an integrated and holistic set of goals in Forrest.

#### 5. NO SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

This pathway is characterised by an insular perspective. Government policies change to focus on energy (SDG 7) and agricultural security (SDG 2) at the expense of education (SDG 4), health (SDG 3) and the environment (SDG 6, 13, 15). Inequality is high and the community has regressed back to the days of high economic disadvantage (SDG 1, 10). Consumption is materials intensive and meat consumption is high and unsustainable, and only available to those who can afford it (SDG 12). Low investment and the abandonment of policy and management results in serious degradation of the environment (SDG 6, 15). Likewise, with minimal regulation for land use, deforestation continues, logging and large-scale

agriculture intensifies (SDG 15), and sustainable agriculture practices decline (SDG 2). The effects of climate change have narrowed the window to carry out prescribed burning and increased the community's susceptibility to bushfire (SDG 13, 15). Water use and resources are not managed sustainably and there is no guard against drought (SDG 6). There has been minimal take-up of renewable energy such as solar panels, so unconventional fossil fuel resources (e.g. fracking) are exploited in order to provide energy security (SDG 7). The internet is not reliable, deterring people from starting local businesses, so the economy is neither diverse nor flourishing (SDG 8). There is some domestic tourism, but people avoid visiting in bushfire

season as the town is not safe or resilient (SDG 8, 13). Health services are not available close by, only in the major centres (Geelong, Melbourne), and they are difficult to access (SDG 3). This has an impact on post-natal health outcomes (SDG 5). Indigenous rights and recognition are no longer considered at all (SDG 10). Land is rezoned for new housing to house new residents (SDG 11), but Council are unwilling to consider sewerage for the township so any new housing developments must have septic systems (SDG 6). The community is small and close-knit; few community members are convinced that SDG implementation is in the best interests of the community, so there is a low chance of successful SDG implementation (SDG 17).





## 6. BUSINESS AS USUAL (BAU)

This is a path in which not much changes from the status quo. The population grows slowly, through migration, births and an ageing population. Health care is excellent, although access to health services is somewhat limited within the town (SDG 3). Forrest is a safe place to live, and an attractive prospect for families with young children and 'treechanging' retirees (SDG 11). However, the escalation of house prices and lack of available rental properties are crowding people out of town; young people will generally move away from the town for university or work once coming of age, leaving a demographic gap in the 18-30 year old range (SDG 11, 12). There are pockets of disadvantage but the community support each other when they are in need (SDG 1, 10). Indigenous rights are paid lip service and little changes for indigenous recognition (SDG

10). Domestic tourism is moderate, focused on large-scale events and mountain biking, and investment in mountain bike trails and public amenities lowers the impact on the environment (SDG 8, 15). International tourism has trade-offs against carbon intensity (from air travel, SDG 13), but locally there are positive signs, such as investigation of a renewable energy microgrid (SDG 7). To diversify the economy, there has been an attempt to promote Forrest as a technology development hub, but it is hampered by poor internet access (SDG 8). Consumption is materials intensive, and diets contain unsustainable levels of meat (SDG 12). The environment continues to experience degradation, however regulations on land use lead to a slow decline in the rate of deforestation, which eventually ceases (SDG 6, 13, 15). Small-scale agriculture is locally sustainable (SDG

2), and while there is an increase in large-scale agricultural productivity, there is not a concurrent increase in employment (SDG 8). Managed burns reduce bushfire risk (SDG 13, 15), and restrictions on water use protects against drought (SDG 6, 13), however water supplies are vulnerable to sustained drought (SDG 6). The Forrest community take the initiative on climate resilience projects as they receive little support from Council or government (SDG 13). The town is unsewered; Barwon Water are investigating reticulated sewerage but it will come at a cost (SDG 6). The community is small and close-knit, but not all community members are convinced that the SDGs are in the best interests of the community, implying a moderate chance of successful holistic SDG implementation (SDG 17).



## Forrest Futures - Newsletters of the future

# THE FORREST NEWSLETTER



## FORREST FUTURES

10 YEARS SINCE STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTED



It has been ten years since the Forrest Futures II strategic plan was launched. There have been big changes in town on the road to becoming a more sustainable community.

On a walk around Forrest, we can see some of the changes. The Terminus Hotel has been overhauled to take into account its history and the environment. The Forrest Common and playground finally got some attention and is now beautifully landscaped. Alongside the river there are boutique shops and multi-use walking space.

People are happy and friendly, and there are many economically viable businesses supporting tourism and the environment. The place is buzzing with solar powered cars, powered by energy generated by the local microgrid. The hub is central to the tourist and community experience of our natural environment and there is a variety of tours available. Art and artisans are everywhere. Read on for more of the changes in town!



### International visitors spend 1 week in Forrest

100 guests visited Forrest and were enthralled. They especially noted the general tidiness of the town, the streetscaping, and the edible landscape.



The town is now a leader in sustainable energy, food sharing and care of all citizens – from the very young to the elders.



The new Forrest Brewery finally evicted the alpacas and opened the new site in 2025 – it took ten years, but Sharon and Matt finally got there.



## THE FORREST NEWSLETTER

-10 YEARS ON-



### CLOSED FOR 2 YRS

#### *GREAT OCEAN ROAD*

Long term closure of the Great Ocean Road due to sea level rises and landslides which the State government can no longer afford to resolve. Forrest is now the main access road to Apollo Bay and the 12 Apostles.



### SOLAR PV ARRAY OPENED

#### *VAST ARRAY IN FORREST*

On Monday 23 Nov, 500 people attended the opening of a vast solar PV array on West Barwon Reservoir which will generate enough electricity to power 1000 homes.

The new microgrid provides solar power connectivity – including electric self-drive, community-owned cars. Elderly can now easily get to Colac for shopping and appointments.

#### *LIGHT RAIL LINK*

Plans announced by minister regarding the reopening of a Forrest to Birregurra light rail link. Mayor Andrew Evans cuts ribbon on light rail opening.

#### *STRUCTURE PLAN REVIEW*

Structure plan review results in changes to the 100 acre rule – small 10 acre allotments released to support a changing population. Multiple houses on LA2 blocks enable multi-generational living. All new developments require low-income housing and supported accommodation.

#### *2027 FIRES*

2027 fires impacted the township and community of Forrest but Forrest Neighbourhood Safer Place and Gateway Centre provided refuge for CFA captain Bob Brooks and team. Community recovery was enabled through resilience of community.

#### *WASTE WATER*

Waste water resource brings new vision agribusiness to mountain town.

#### *FORREST HOPS*

Forrest Hop co-operative now rivals Yakaruer Valley Hops. Export of hop crops provide another source of employment and destination brand for Forrest.

#### *CLIMATE CHANGE INNOVATION*

Forrest to commence innovative New Green Deal project which will see employment opportunities for job seekers to train as park rangers and firefighters.

#### *HCL CENTRE*

History and Cultural Learning Centre celebrates 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. Local elders of early settlers and indigenous traditional owners work together to build comprehensive understanding of the Otways.

#### *FORREST SCHOOL*

Bush kinder expands to whole community and everyone adopts "Gumboot Friday".

# THE FORREST NEWSLETTER

-10 YEARS ON-

## THE HUB

### WORKSHOPS THIS MONTH:

- 1<sup>st</sup> Saturday: How to microdose safely: Forrest Mushies
- 2<sup>nd</sup> Saturday: Vertical Food Walls
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday: Microhydro electricity
- 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday: How eating beef can help save the planet
- Every Sunday: Farmers and produce market selling local produce, wine, gin, cheese, mushies and other medicinals

### COMMUNITY SPACE AT THE HUB

- Interactive displays
- Neighbourhood Safer Place
- Meeting rooms
- Cafe
- Tours and experiences



## SINCE 2020 FORREST'S ACHIEVEMENTS

We have celebrated the accomplishment of 100% of Forrest's houses having solar panels, water tanks and full sewerage. In addition, the mayor cut the ribbon on our electric vehicle charging station.

The community centre continues to house indigenous land management programs with government agencies and local people working together on Otways land management and conservation.

New public art and sculpture that relates to the natural environment was commissioned and installed.

Forrest won most beautiful town of the Otways award. The Terminus renovation was a great success and the view from the verandah overlooks the new, sustainable houses that have been completed on the properties to the north.

Bumper harvests in the community garden mean the weekly share food market is heaving. The gin distillery has been a major success.

Community gardens encourage elderly residents to remain in Forrest. Bev Frizon's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated at the Neighbourhood garden.

There was a major mountain bike event. 1,000 people came to town. All waste was managed through the town recycling hub.

Forrest joined the Otways Conservation Alliance.

Forrest is recognised as a leader in climate change technologies and environmental integration.



