

MORNINGTON PENINSULA
OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Discussion Paper

MORNINGTON PENINSULA
Shire



Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong people, who have been the custodians of this land for many thousands of years; and pay respect to their elders past and present. We acknowledge that the land on which we live and work is the place of age-old ceremonies, celebrations, initiation and renewal; and that the Bunurong peoples' living culture continues to have a unique role in the life of this region.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who now call the Mornington Peninsula home, their rich cultural heritage, and their connection to Country of their homelands. We understand that healing Country through truth-telling, traditional knowledge, and reconciliation will also start to heal cultural divides between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. Cultural tradition and knowledge are intrinsic parts of valuing and connecting with the landscape (open space); this knowledge is a gift to be embraced by all.



What is this Document?

The aim of this discussion paper is to provide an overview of the Mornington Peninsula open space network, and to explore how an open space strategy could help to address current and future pressures.

INTRODUCTION

Situated between Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay, Mornington Peninsula Shire is located 40-80 kilometres south-east of the Melbourne central business district.

Mornington Peninsula has a unique open space network with a particularly high percentage of natural areas including two national parks: Mornington Peninsula National Park and Pont Nepean National Park; and, one state park, Arthurs Seat State Park.

The Shire has 192km of unique and dynamic coastline. Distinct landforms and ecosystems define the different coastal regions providing diverse open spaces and trails which are among the Peninsula's most popular tourist destinations.

MORNINGTON PENINSULA'S NEW OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

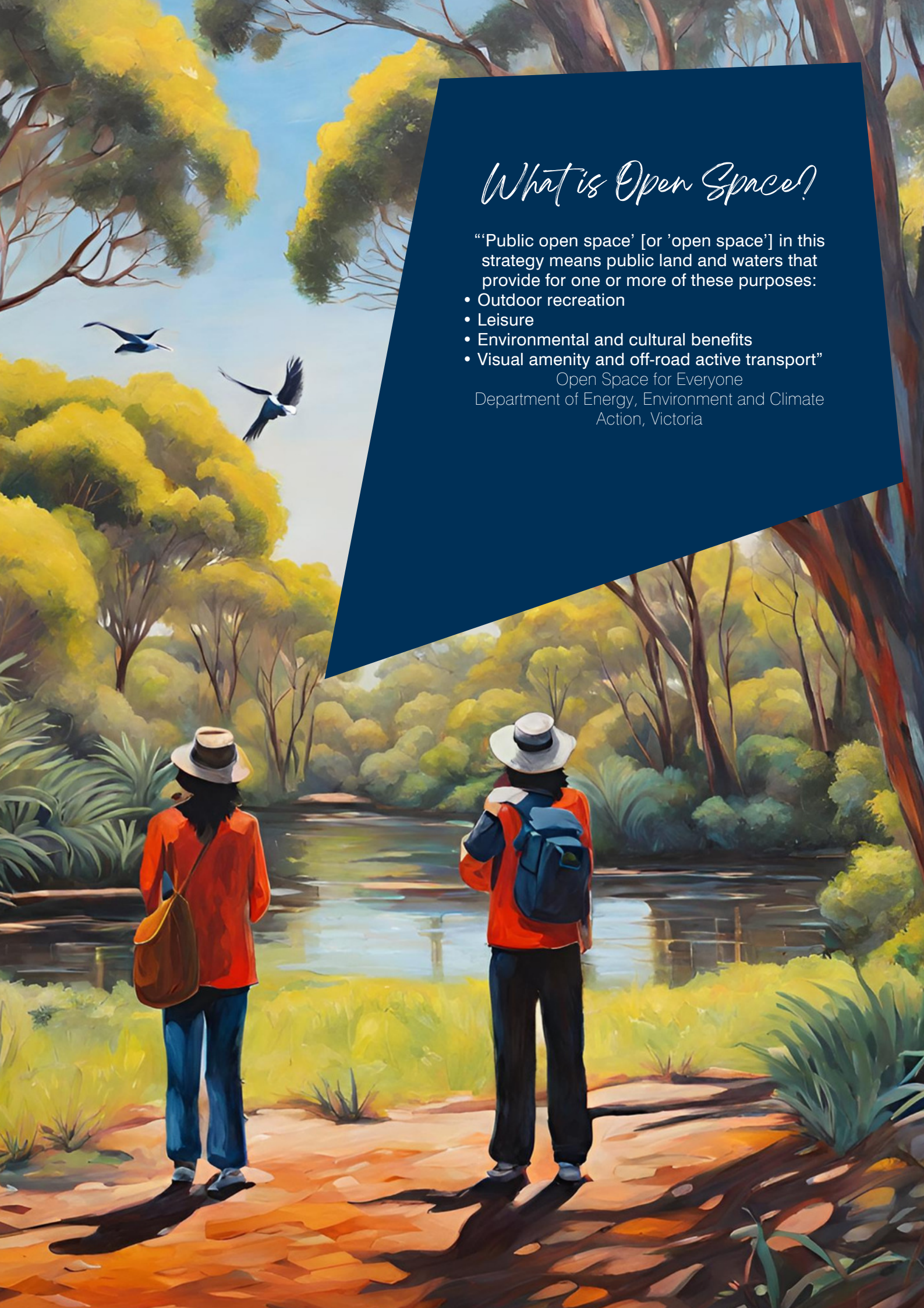
Our aim is to set a clear direction for achieving an open space network that meets the wide-ranging needs of a growing and diverse community.

The purpose of the Open Space Strategy (the Strategy) is to guide the future planning, provision, design, and management of existing and future open space for a 15-year period up until 2040.

The Strategy will seek to protect and enhance the Peninsula's distinctive and unique open space values as the Shire responds to increasing pressures including climate change, population increase, residential expansion, changing recreation needs, greater reflection of culture, history and stories, vegetation clearing and increasing levels of tourism.

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What is Open Space?

"'Public open space' [or 'open space'] in this strategy means public land and waters that provide for one or more of these purposes:

- Outdoor recreation
- Leisure
- Environmental and cultural benefits
- Visual amenity and off-road active transport"

Open Space for Everyone
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Victoria

OPEN SPACE IN MORNINGTON PENINSULA

Open space is an important feature of the Peninsula's landscape, providing social gathering points, formal and informal sporting/recreation opportunities, places for nature to thrive, play spaces, trails, tourist destinations, sites of cultural significance and an array of healthy lifestyle experiences and opportunities.

GREEN WEDGE

The Mornington Peninsula Green Wedge is one of Victoria's most important assets. Conservation policies for the Mornington Peninsula were first introduced more than 40 years ago and the special role and character of the Mornington Peninsula Green Wedge, which covers nearly 50,000 hectares, continues to be highly valued by both the local community and the wider population of Melbourne.

Over 70% of the Peninsula is classified as "green wedge" by the planning strategy for Melbourne's metropolitan region; Plan Melbourne (2017-2050). Land within the green wedge cannot be intensively developed for housing or other urban uses. The policy protects the habitat, biodiversity, landscape quality and rural character of the Peninsula.

The Mornington Peninsula is also specifically identified as an environmentally sensitive area with significant recreational value under the Victoria Planning Provisions Policy Framework (PPF) (clause 12.05 - Significant environments and landscapes) and is designated as one of four 'distinctive areas and landscapes' in the state.

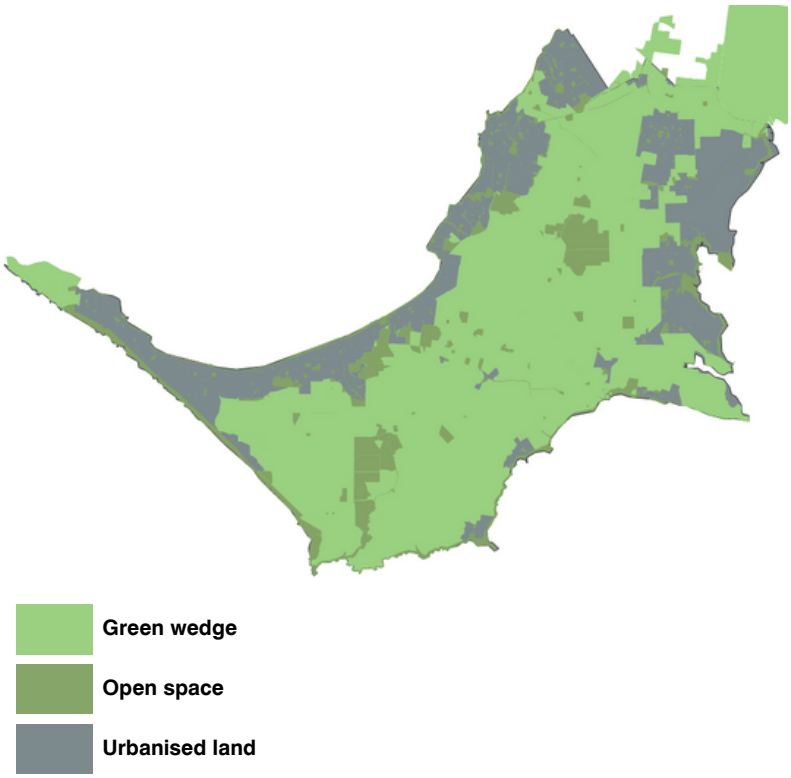


Figure 1: Mornington Peninsula Shire Council Area - showing open space and green wedge land

723 sqkm — Total shire land area, **70%** of which is green wedge

10.5% — of the Shire is open space; **3.8%** managed by the Shire

$143.8M — Open Space Asset Value (2022) (replacement cost)

300 — Sporting/ recreation groups (approx.)

43 — Netball Courts (2022)

49 — Sports Ovals (2022)

156 — Playgrounds (2022)

135 — Tennis Courts (2022)

192km — Coastline

440km — Waterways

8 — Skate parks (2022)

38 — Jetties and boat ramps (2022)



Community Vision

"Welcome (Wominjeka) to the Mornington Peninsula, bound by green spaces and sea. We honour and pay respects to the Traditional Owners of this beautiful land – the Bunurong people. We also pay our deepest respects to their Ancestors and Elders.

We are inspired to protect and enhance our distinct region that values its diverse community, environments and townships. Our community spirit thrives, with safe, accessible and inclusive spaces for all. Together we continue to create a sustainable, vibrant and prosperous future that values innovation and shared compassion."

POLICY CONTEXT

COUNCIL AND WELLBEING PLAN

The Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 was adopted by Council in November 2021. This plan was informed by the Community Vision, and other key documents and provides the framework for all the decisions and operations of Council.

The new Open Space Strategy will assist the Shire in achieving the following strategic objectives identified in the Council and Wellbeing Plan.

- **1.1** An accessible and unique natural environment that helps our community to be healthy and well
- **1.2** A healthy ecosystem, in which our coastline, bushland, wildlife and green wedge is resilient to the climate emergency and development
- **1.3** A sustainable built environment that respects the natural environment and protects the community from the impacts of the climate emergency
- **1.4** An accessible built environment that supports diverse, current and future community needs
- **3.3** A community in which people from all generations, backgrounds and abilities can access local services
- **3.4** A community with vibrant arts, culture, sport and recreational opportunities that foster connections and participation across generations, backgrounds and abilities

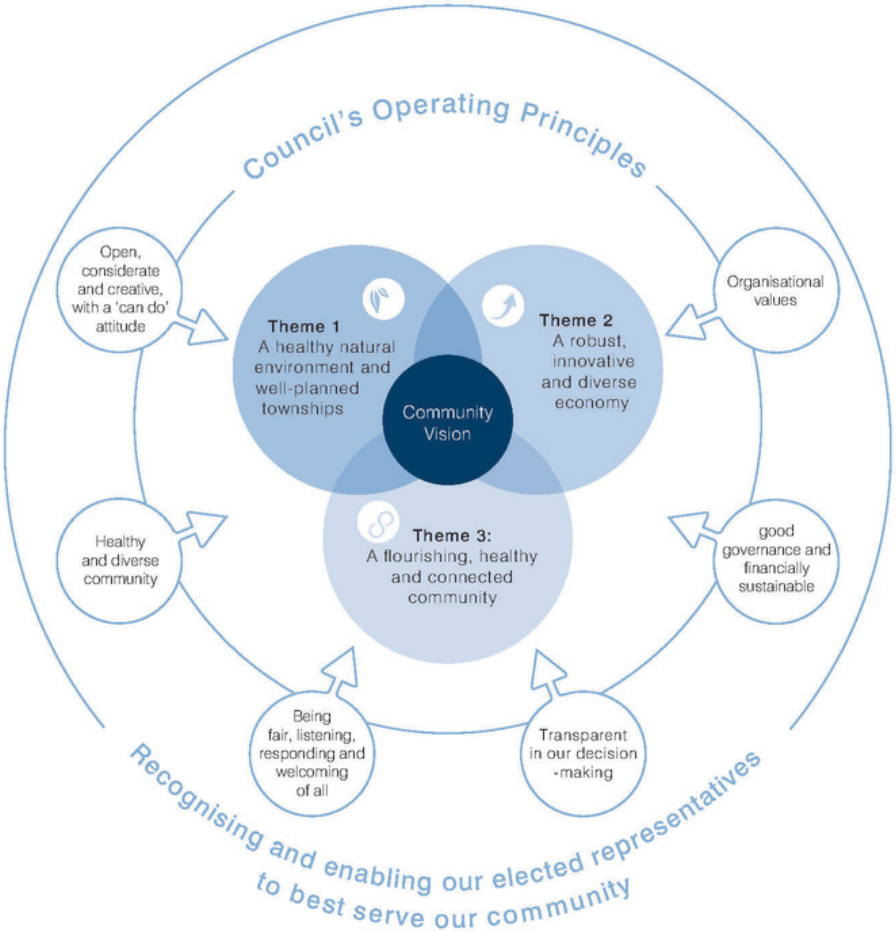
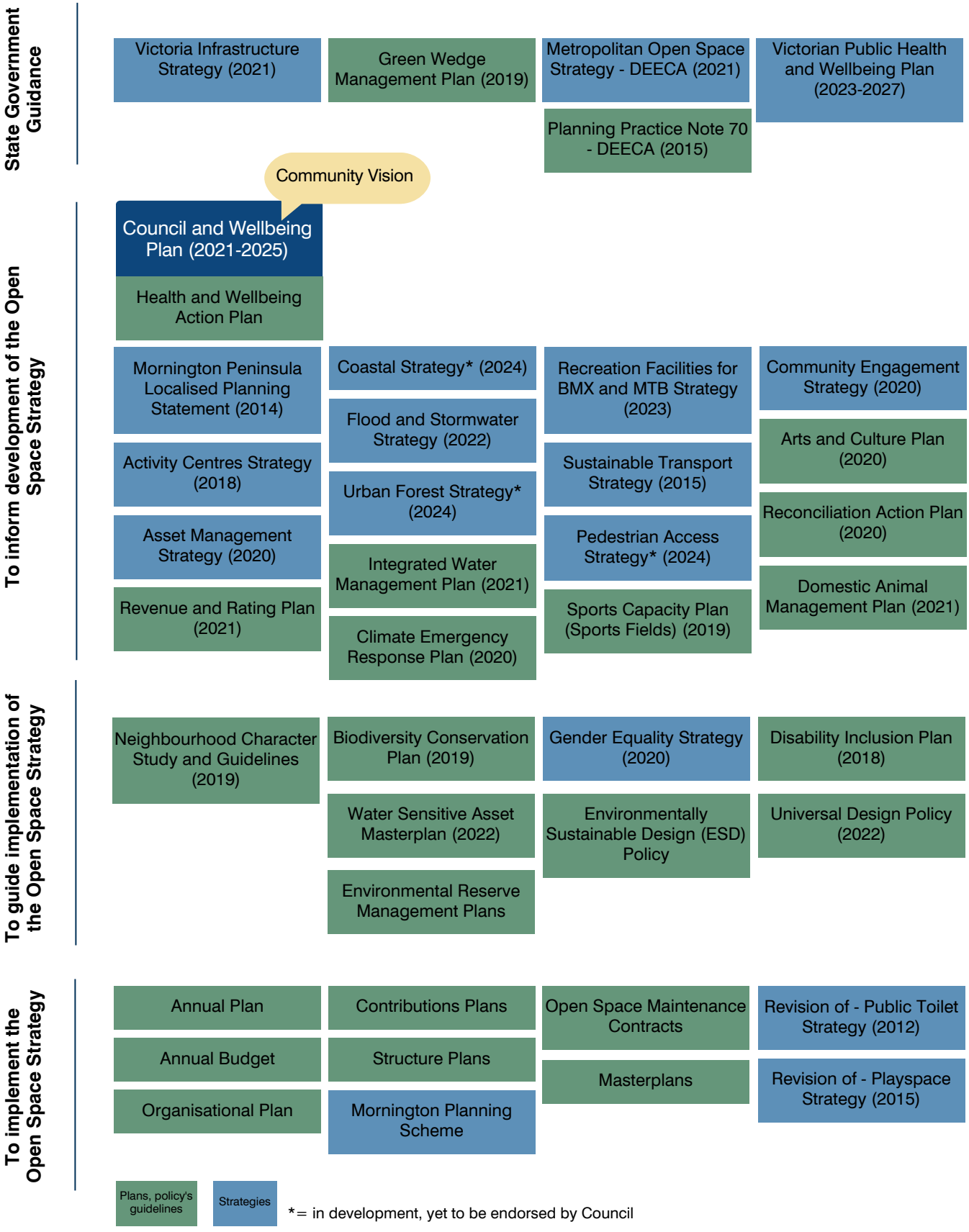


Figure 2: Council and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025 Framework

POLICY INFORMING THE OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

Council has a suite of other documents, strategic frameworks and external guidelines/strategies to guide decision making. These documents provide direction, detailed information and outline agreed approaches which contribute to development and implementation of the Strategy.



THE SHIRE'S ROLE IN OPEN SPACE

The majority of sport and recreation parks throughout the Peninsula are owned and managed by Council, however, there are a number of other partnership arrangements in place, especially to manage larger areas of conservation open space like regional parks.

Parks Victoria and the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) manage some of the regional open spaces on Crown Land, while committees of management partner with Council to manage open space on behalf of Council or the Crown. Although the Strategy will consider existing and potential partnerships with other public land managers, it will predominantly focus on open space owned or managed by Council.

Council's role as custodian of its open spaces includes:

Service provider	• Designs, constructs, enhances, and maintains Council owned parks and open spaces, allowing them to be freely accessible. This includes; planning, funding, asset provision (design, development, building), management, maintenance, and renewal.
Partner & planner	• Facilitates, manages and plans open space with a range of other organisations including but not limited to Parks Victoria, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Melbourne Water, VicRoads, Committees of Management and Traditional Owners. • Works in partnership with schools, clubs and community groups to provide services that meet the needs of the community.
Environmental Steward	• Protects and enhances biodiversity within the municipality, in partnership with community stewardship groups. • Considers risks and opportunities to enhance ecosystem health and landscape values as a part of planning and decision making.
Advocate & leader	• Advocates for state and federal government investment in new open space and recreation projects, and to ensure parks and open space needs and priorities are addressed in state planning documents and funding arrangements. • Facilitates addressing park, sport, recreation and environmental issues with stakeholders.
Information provider	• Provides information to the community about recreation opportunities and open spaces via promotion and communications.
Regulator	• Ensures that open space and recreation facilities are provided and used in accordance with the local law, policies and procedures.



ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES


What if...
a thriving natural environment was a clear priority?
What if...
open spaces offered many different options to play and move?
What if...
parks felt just a little more uniquely “Mornington Peninsula”?
What if...
going to the park was a bit easier and more comfortable?

BIODIVERSITY AND ECOSYSTEM HEALTH

What if...

a thriving natural environment was a clear priority?

Mornington Peninsula's varied geology, topography, and coastal environment creates a highly biodiverse landscape, rich in species and habitat. Pre-colonisation, approximately 65 Ecological Vegetation Classes (EVC's), were present on the Peninsula, including coastal scrub and wetlands to the south and along the coast, and herb–rich woodlands and heathlands on the central ridges and plains.

Today, western land use practices, including viticulture, exotic pasture, and urbanisation, have caused fragmentation of the remnant vegetation, and ecosystem degradation, including species decline and extinction. Ongoing vegetation clearing and weeds are putting added pressure on the remaining local indigenous ecologies. However, the Shire's Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan (2019) states, 'What remains is worth protecting…'

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES?

- Ecosystems across the Peninsula are fragmented and degraded. Rates of biodiversity and quality of habitats is in decline
- Traditional Owners, the Bunurong people, have managed the Peninsula landscape since time immemorial. Their knowledge and custodianship is invaluable to the future of the Peninsula's natural areas
- Climate changes will see increased extreme weather events, reduced rainfall all of which put pressure on sensitive natural areas
- The Shire's coastlines and natural areas are highly valued by the community, and addressing climate change is a high priority

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

- Identify important "environmental conservation" areas, and where there are disconnected or fragmented ecosystems, to support implementation of the Shire's Biodiversity Conservation Plan
- Prioritise connecting "bio-links" through coordination with the Urban Forest and Coastal Strategy (being developed concurrently).These habitat corridors connect patches of remnant vegetation including along waterways and coastlines
- Support Traditional Owner knowledge and practice in healing and connection with Country by integrating with the Shire's Reconciliation Action Plan and ongoing collaborative work with the Bunurong people
- Identify opportunities for co-management of open spaces with Traditional Owners and make recommendations for future collaborative projects and acknowledgement
- Identify opportunities to consider integrated water management infrastructure projects in open space (such as bioswales, wetlands), alternative water sourcing and water recycling, all of which will help implement the Shire's Integrated Water Management Plan and Climate Emergency Response Plan. These projects will improve ecosystem health, water quality, reduce urban heat and help support more efficient use of water
- Increase safe and low impact access to 'natural' areas by identifying the kinds of infrastructure (like trails, boardwalks, environmental education signage) that is right for different types of natural environments

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND PLAY

The Peninsula offers an abundance of parks, reserves and sporting facilities that cater for a wide range of activities. Large open spaces offer destinations for sport, events, or gatherings, while smaller spaces distributed through neighborhoods provide a green space for daily exercise, play and respite.

In addition to local residents and visitors, there are approximately 300 sporting/recreation groups, 50 schools as well as a variety of other groups that use the Shire's fields, courts and facilities regularly.

What if...

open spaces offered many different options to play and move?

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES?

- Play spaces are well distributed, but some are ageing with high levels of wear and tear and elements of poor design
- Almost 40% of residents are insufficiently physically active
- The Shire is financially constrained. The rising costs of asset management and replacement limits development of new amenities and facilities
- Water supply is increasingly limited, this is especially challenging for fields and ovals
- The Sports Capacity Plan indicates that the amount of land dedicated to sporting infrastructure is generally good however recommends the acquisition of additional land in some key locations. Surveys suggest that residents are generally satisfied with ovals and other sport facilities. However, some sporting clubs indicated that the number of facilities do not meet their current and future needs
- Tensions are increasing between users of open space for conflicting activities (e.g dogs, bikes, sports, nature). In some cases sites can be more multifunctional to better accommodate these mixed uses
- Population growth in town centres is putting pressure on existing facilities and open spaces. Properties with no or small backyards are more reliant on parks
- The community has higher expectations for their parks to provide opportunities for a broader range of activities with a focus on health and social connectivity

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

- Identify priorities for investment in new and renewed open spaces. This will be used to set out a prioritised, realistic program of projects over the next 10 years
- Make recommendations about spending contributions received from developers to provide open spaces to serve new residents, and consider if changes to contribution rates may be justified
- Set targets and standards for the type, distribution and scale of open spaces. The intent is to balance community needs with a sustainable approach to management and renewal
- Provide rationale for future communication about what, how, why something is happening (or not) in open space as the Strategy is implemented.
- Provide rationale for applications for grants and project proposals for external funding
- Identify areas likely to be impacted by sea level rise and plan for the future of community access to the coastline in coordination with the Coastal Strategy, which is being developed concurrently

UNIQUENESS AND SENSE OF PLACE

What if...

parks felt just a little more uniquely "Mornington Peninsula"?

The Mornington Peninsula landscape is shaped by diverse topography, from rugged coastal cliffs and beaches to the sheltered foreshore of the bays and wooded hills and open plains. The Peninsula has a unique location with the wild ocean of Bass Strait to the south, contrasted with the comparatively calm waters of Port Phillip Bay and Western Port Bay. The Shire includes large areas of bushland including Point Nepean Park, Mornington Peninsula National Park and Arthurs Seat State Park.

Previously shaped by sixty thousand years of Bunurong custodianship, post-colonisation, the landscape now includes coastal beach shacks, holiday homes, rural and industrial communities, as well as military facilities. The unique townships, landscapes, communities and Traditional Custodianship all contribute to and form the sense of place that makes Mornington Peninsula special.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES?

- There is a building expectation that the Shire will work towards preserving or increasing the current amount and quality of green space on the Peninsula. While work is ongoing, this is often behind the scenes or incremental and progress may not always be obvious
- Increasing local tourism (due to population growth in metropolitan Melbourne), especially during the summer season peak, is putting pressure on parks in popular tourist areas that can not handle the intensity of use
- Some sensitive environments are being degraded due to the rising popularity of recreation activities in natural, rural and cultural heritage areas
- Development of new suburban areas can sometimes feel "generic" and some attempts at creating sense of place can feel inauthentic which can make parks in new areas feel a bit out of place

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

- Identify the unique qualities and characters of open spaces on the Peninsula and recommend approaches for their protection, enhancement and management
- Engage with the Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation to identify approaches for protection of cultural heritage sites, to collaborate and coordinate planning, and support healing and connection to Country
- Guide asset planning to increase the resilience/capacity of open spaces which see visitation by people from the wider region
- Advocate to partners, external parties for investment or collaboration for projects which may be beyond the Shire's capacity or remit
- Identify opportunities to engage people through participation in stewardship, art, programming, events and other creative pursuits, placemaking and cultural activities to support implementation of the Shire's Arts and Culture Plan and Biodiversity Conservation Plan
- Identify opportunities to increase access to; and understanding and enjoyment of, rural or environmentally sensitive areas, to encourage and enable nature based recreation in suitable locations, rather than encouraging the development of more formal, "urban type" recreational facilities or intensive tourism based development which may be intrusive or "out of character"
- Provide practical open space design objectives to assist in preserving and enhancing sense of place

COMFORTABLE AND ACCESSIBLE

Physical activity, community events and social opportunities benefit people's physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. People experience barriers to participation due to a range of factors, including transport, cost, issues with the built environment (such as a lack of physical accessibility for people with movement limitations), and attitudes or awareness which can create culturally unsafe spaces. Equity in the open space network seeks to provide support for different communities to access open space.

"Designing for all, or Universal Design, makes sense from a social justice perspective but is also a sound economic and strategic approach that will future-proof our community infrastructure, ensuring safe and equitable access for everyone"
- Disability Inclusion Plan

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT ISSUES?

- Survey results suggest that the provision, condition and connectivity of footpaths and trails throughout the Peninsula needs improvement
- Public toilets significantly increase access to open spaces for many, especially older adults, people with young children and those with health conditions. The number, location and condition of public toilets is not currently meeting community expectations
- To maintain a sustainable asset management approach the Shire must regularly reflect on the land and infrastructure it has and consider possibilities to rationalise, change use or other opportunities
- The median age of residents is 46 (10 years higher than greater Melbourne). There are less 20-39 year olds and more 60+ year olds. To create welcoming and accessible open spaces, designs and facilities should reflect the recreational interests and accessibility needs of older adults
- On the whole, the community are generally satisfied with the level of maintenance and cleanliness of open space
- Predicted increasing heat and extreme weather events due to climate change will impact open space use, design and access. For example, more shade will be required and open space will need to manage more stormwater in the future
- The Climate Emergency Response Plan has set a target for urban public spaces to be covered by 45% shade

What if...

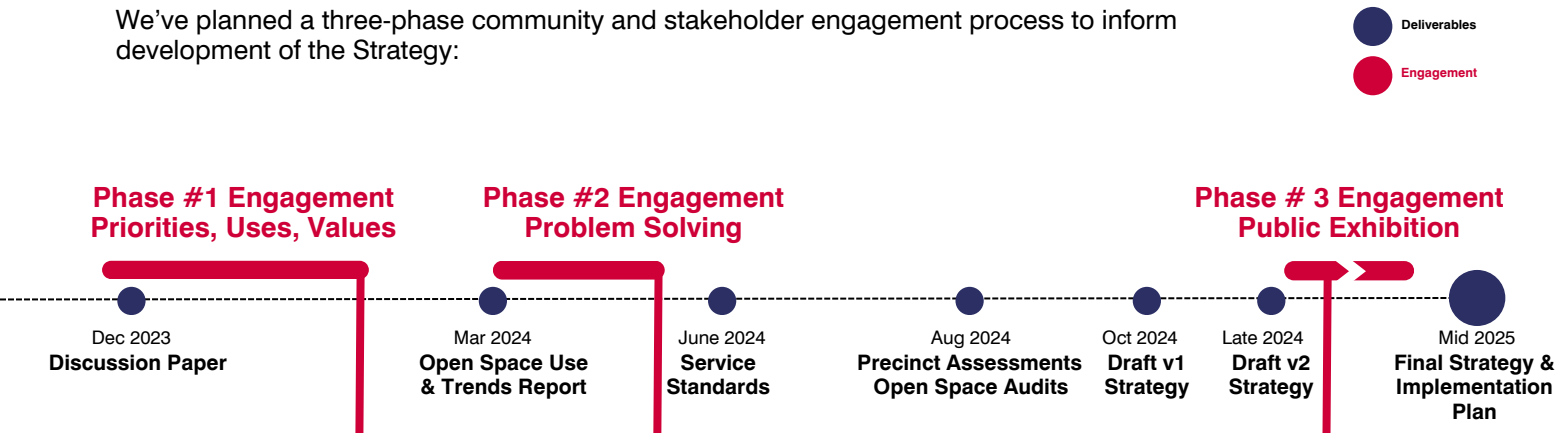
going to the park was a bit easier and more comfortable?

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE OPEN SPACE STRATEGY

- Assess all open spaces to measure quality, access, comfort and overall performance to identify and prioritise improvements, over the next 10 years
- Identify opportunities to improve connectivity across neighbourhoods, within parks, and with regional or destination trails
- Create a classification system to describe the services likely to be expected at different types of open spaces. These standards will include accessible infrastructure, bathrooms and pathways
- Outline approaches for planning and design of open spaces which adopt a Universal Design approach
- Identify areas most impacted by the urban heat island effect to prioritise investment in shade
- Set a clear policy position for the protection of open space and outline a rationale for land acquisition and identify potential alternate uses

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

We've planned a three-phase community and stakeholder engagement process to inform development of the Strategy:



OBJECTIVES

In phase 1 we want to hear how you use your local park and the open space network at large. This includes how often you visit and the types of activities you do there.

Understanding how open space is used and overall satisfaction with different elements will help us better develop priorities for parks across the Peninsula.

Phase 2 will be deeper consultation to respond to what we heard in Phase 1, problem solve and shape the strategy in response.

Phase 3 will allow you to provide feedback on the draft Strategy with respect to the key directions and actions.

WHAT DO WE WANT TO KNOW?

Use of parks and open space

- Why and how people use open spaces including the types of activities, frequency of visits, preferred features, and overall satisfaction with existing parks and open spaces.

Barriers to access

- How open spaces can be designed to ensure they are accessible and inclusive for all, including those with disabilities, women, gender-diverse individuals, and single-parent families.
- What concerns do people have around safety and security in open spaces, particularly for traditionally under-represented demographics, and explore solutions to enhance safety for all users.

Priorities for investment

- What are the top priorities for investment in open spaces, and what this means in terms of potential trade-offs and resource allocation.

Tell us about your park!

COMPLETE THE ONLINE SURVEY

We want to hear how you use your local park and other open spaces on the Peninsula. This includes how often you visit and the types of activities you do there.

Understanding how open space is used and overall satisfaction with different elements will help us better develop priorities for parks across the Peninsula.

Please complete the survey and share the opportunity with family, friends and colleagues. Even if they don't live in the Shire!

Survey open: 18 January to 29 February

COME AND TALK TO US

We'll be at:

- Point Nepean Market, Portsea - 21 January, 9am – 1pm
- Mornington Main Street Market - 24 January, 9am – 1pm
- Fred Smith Reserve, Hastings - 24 January, 3pm – 7pm
- Somerville Recreation Centre, Somerville - 31 January, 9am -1pm
- Rye Foreshore Market - 3 February, 7am – 11am
- Flinders Park (Corner Cook and Norman Street) - 3 February, 2pm – 6pm

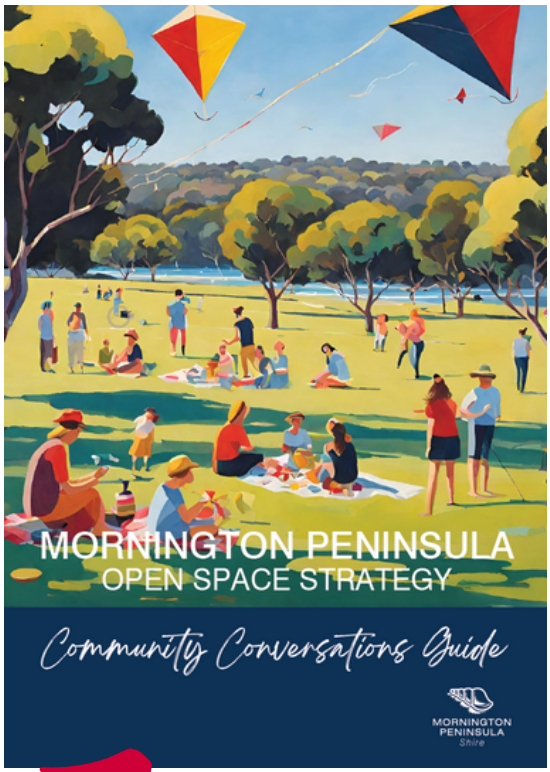
And we are also hosting two online information sessions:

- Tuesday 30 January, 5:30pm - 6:15pm
- Thursday 1 February, 5:30pm - 6:15pm

HOST A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Community Conversations are an important input into the Strategy, hosted by you!
They are designed for established groups - friends, family, work colleagues, your parents' group, sports or book club - or any other group you might want to involve.
Hosting is easy. It's a great opportunity to get together with people you know, have a chat about what is important to your community and help develop an Open Space Strategy that reflects the needs of our diverse communities across the Shire.

You can arrange a special get together, or if you're part of a community group, you can host a conversation at one of your regular meetings.
You don't need any expertise to host or participate in a conversation, just your local knowledge and understanding of the needs of your community.
We've created a guide which steps through the process.
You pick the time, the people you want to join the conversation, and your preferred way to communicate. Then, simply discuss, record your responses, and submit it by midnight, 29 February 2024.



The guide provides everything you need to know!



emerge ASSOCIATES

MORNINGTON PENINSULA Shire