



Date: Tuesday, 25 March 2025
Time: 3.00pm
Location: Loddon Shire Council Chambers, Wedderburn

MINUTES

Council Meeting

**MINUTES OF LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL
COUNCIL MEETING
HELD AT THE LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, WEDDERBURN
ON TUESDAY, 25 MARCH 2025 AT 3.00PM**

PRESENT: Cr Dan Straub (Mayor), Cr Nick Angelo, Cr Gavan Holt, Cr David Weaver and Cr Miki Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE: Lincoln Fitzgerald (Chief Executive Officer), Wendy Gladman (Director Community Wellbeing), Steven Phillips (Director Operations), Michelle Stedman (Director Corporate) and Lisa Clue (Manager Governance)

1 OPENING AFFIRMATION

The Mayor read the Opening Affirmation

2 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The Chief Executive Officer read the Acknowledgement of Country

3 APOLOGIES

Nil

4 DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Nil

5 PREVIOUS MINUTES**5.1 CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES****File Number:** FOL/19/45615**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council confirm the Minutes of the following meetings as previously circulated to Councillors:

1. Council Briefing of 25 February 2025
2. Council Meeting of 25 February 2025
3. Council Forum of 11 March 2025

REPORT

This report seeks Council confirmation of Minutes from the February 2025 Council Briefing and Council Meeting, and the March 2025 Council Forum, as previously circulated to Councillors.

RESOLUTION 2025/25**Moved:** Cr David Weaver**Seconded:** Cr Nick Angelo

That Council confirm the Minutes of the following meetings as previously circulated to Councillors:

1. Council Briefing of 25 February 2025
2. Council Meeting of 25 February 2025
3. Council Forum of 11 March 2025

CARRIED

6 COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS**6.1 RECORD OF COUNCIL AUSPICED MEETINGS****File Number:** 02/01/001**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council confirm the records of the following auspiced meetings as detailed within this report:

1. Council Briefing held 25 February 2025
2. Council Forum held 11 March 2025.

Rule 35 of Council's Governance Rules requires a record of meetings conducted under the auspices of Council to be presented to the next available scheduled Council meeting for confirmation that must include:

- a) a record of which Councillors and officers attended the meeting;
- b) a summary of the matters considered in the meeting; and
- c) a record of any conflicts of interest disclosed by Councillors and officers and any Councillors or officers that left the meeting whilst a matter that their conflict of interest related to was being discussed.

Section 3 of the Governance Rules defines meetings conducted under the auspices of Council to mean a meeting of the kind described in section 131(1) of the Local Government Act 2020 and includes a meeting which:

- a) is schedule or planned for the purpose of discussing the business of Council or briefing Councillors;
- b) is attended by a majority of Councillors;
- c) is attended by at least one member of Council staff; and
- d) is not a Council meeting or delegated committee meeting.

This report seeks confirmation of the Council Briefing held on 25 February 2025 and the Council Forum held 11 March 2025.

Meeting details	Briefing
Date	25 February 2025
Councillor Attendees	Cr Straub (Mayor) Cr Angelo Cr Holt Cr Weaver Cr Wilson
Staff/ Stakeholder representatives	1. Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer 2. David Stretch, Acting Director Community Wellbeing 3. Steven Phillips, Director Operations 4. Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate 5. Lisa Clue, Manager Governance Jude Holt – item 2 below Deanne Caserta, Manager Financial Services – item 3 below Bradd Worrell, Tourism and Marketing Coordinator – item 4 below
Item(s) discussed.	1. Review of Council Meeting Agenda 2. Councillor roles in Risk Management 3. Finance Report for Quarter Ending 31 December 2024 4. Visitor Economy Strategy (2025-2030) – Final 5. 2024 Municipal Association of Victoria President and Regional Director Elections 6. Victorian Government's Response: Inquiry into the 2022 Victorian Floods 7. General Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Meeting agenda reports • CEO updates • Goldfields PSA Neighbourhood Policing Forum • VNI West Forum for Councils • Visitor Economy Strategy
Conflict of Interest Disclosures – Councillor/ officer making disclosure	Nil
Councillor/officer left room	n/a

Meeting details	Forum
Date	11 March 2025
Councillor Attendees	Cr Straub (Mayor) Cr Angelo Cr Holt Cr Weaver Cr Wilson (Virtual)
Staff/ Stakeholder representatives	1. Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer 2. David Stretch, Acting Director Community Wellbeing 3. Steven Phillips, Director Operations 4. Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate 5. Lisa Clue, Manager Governance 6. Jude Holt – Item 1 below Adam Crameri and Paul Vickery, Coliban Water – Item 3 below David Southcombe, Manager Assets and Infrastructure – Item 4 below Orrin Hogan, Manager Community Partnerships – Item 6 below
Item(s) discussed.	1. Strategic Risk Review 2. Governance Rules Review 3. Coliban Water Presentation 4. Annual Infrastructure Program 2025-2026 5. Management of Inglewood Town Hall Hub 6. Draft Loddon Recreation, Open Space and Aquatic Strategy 7. Bio Gro Update 8. 2025 ALGA National General Assembly – Call for Notices of Motion 9. General Business <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Laws Permits • Long weekend events across Loddon Shire Council • MAV State Council Elections • Victorian Goldfields World Heritage Bid Update
Conflict of Interest Disclosures – Councillor/ officer making disclosure	Nil
Councillor/officer left room	n/a

RESOLUTION 2025/26

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson
Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council confirm the records of the following auspiced meetings as detailed within this report:

1. Council Briefing held 25 February 2025
2. Council Forum held 11 March 2025.

CARRIED

7 REVIEW OF ACTIONS**7.1 REVIEW OF ACTIONS****File Number:** 02/01/002**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** 1. Status of Council resolution actions**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive and note the status of Council resolution actions, as attached to this report.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

REPORT

A document containing the status of actions associated with Council resolutions is attached to this Agenda report.

All five actions arising from February Council meeting resolutions have been completed.

Completion of one action generated from a January Council meeting resolution (relating to a review of Council's Governance Rules) is progressing and will be acted upon at the April Council meeting, in accordance with the resolution.

One action generated from a November 2024 Council meeting resolution, reported on as progressing at the February Council meeting, relates to a report on Newbridge Water and Sewerage, which will be presented to this Council meeting (in accordance with the resolution).

RESOLUTION 2025/27**Moved:** Cr David Weaver**Seconded:** Cr Gavan Holt

That Council receive and note the status of Council resolution actions, as attached to this report.

CARRIED

8 MAYORAL REPORT**8.1 MAYORAL REPORT**

File Number: 02/01/001

Author: Lisa Clue, Manager Governance

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council receive and note the Mayoral Report.

REPORT

Mayor Straub presented a verbal report at the meeting.

Loddon Healthy Minds Network	
27/02/2025 - Meeting	
Murray River Group of Councils	
28/02/2025 - Meeting with Minister Gayle Tierney, State Minister for Water – Shepparton	
06/03/2025 – Meeting - Kerang	
Other Council activities	
Date	Activity
26/02/2025	Pyramid Hill Sports Library Launch
28/02/2025	30 Years of Loddon - Bridgewater
09/03/2025	Wedderburn Detector Jamboree
	Flavours of Loddon event - Bridgewater
11/03/2025	Citizenship Ceremony - Wedderburn
	March Council Forum - Wedderburn
12/03/2025	Aussie/Kiwi Challenge Ski Competition – Bridgewater
18/03/2025	EPA hosted lunch and network event – Boort
19/03/2025	Pyramid Hill Progress Association Meeting

RESOLUTION 2025/28

Moved: Cr Dan Straub (Mayor)

Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council receive and note the Mayoral Report.

CARRIED

9 COUNCILLORS' REPORT**9.1 COUNCILLORS' REPORTS****File Number:** 02/01/001**Author:** Lisa Clue, Manager Governance**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** Nil**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council receive and note the Councillors' reports.

REPORT

Each Councillor presented a verbal report at the meeting.

Cr Holt

Council activities	
Date	Activity
26/02/2025	Wedderburn Development Association - Meeting
28/02/2025	30 Years of Loddon - Bridgewater
02/03/2025	Boort Trotting Club Cup Meeting
08/03/2025	Upper Loddon Cricket Association Grand Final
	Wedderburn Detector Jamboree
11/03/2025	March Council Forum - Wedderburn

Cr Angelo

Council activities	
Date	Activity
28/02/2025	30 Years of Loddon – Bridgewater
05/03/2025	Tarnagulla Sports Library Launch
11/03/2025	Citizenship Ceremony - Wedderburn
	March Council Forum - Wedderburn
23/03/2025	Llanelly Motorbike Swap Meet

Cr Wilson

Section 65 Community Asset Committees:	
03/03/2025 - Inglewood Town Hall Hub - Meeting	
13/03/2025 - Inglewood Community Sports Centre - Meeting	
Other Council activities	
Date	Activity
07/03/2025	Victorian Local Government Grants Commission – Financial Assistance Grants Information Session
11/03/2025	March Council Forum
20/03/2025	Bridgewater On Loddon Development (BOLD) Committee - Meeting

Cr Weaver

Council activities	
Date	Activity
28/02/2025	30 Years of Loddon - Bridgewater
02/03/2025	Boort Trotting Club Cub Meeting
11/03/2025	Citizenship Ceremony - Wedderburn
	March Council Forum - Wedderburn
Various	Working with local irrigators on water issues

RESOLUTION 2025/29

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson
 Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council receive and note the Councillors' reports.

CARRIED

10 DECISION REPORTS

10.1 PLANNING APPLICATION 6030: CONSTRUCT A BUILDING (STORAGE SHED) ASSOCIATED WITH AGRICULTURE

File Number: FOL/24/4127

Author: Darcy Jackson, Statutory Planning Officer

Authoriser: Glenn Harvey, Manager Development and Compliance

Attachments:

1. **Decision Report - PA6030**
2. **Proposed Plans**
3. **Objection - Confidential**

This attachment is designated as confidential in accordance with Section 3(1)(f) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. It contains personal information, being information which if released would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs.

contains personal contact information **(under separate cover)**

RECOMMENDATION

That the Responsible Authority having considered all matters which the Planning and Environment Act, 1987, requires it to consider, decides to issue a Notice of Decision to grant planning permit 6030 to construct a building (storage shed) associated with agriculture subject to the following conditions:

1. Amended Plans Required

Before the development starts, amended plans must be submitted to and approved by the Responsible Authority. When approved, the plans will be endorsed and will then form part of the permit. The plans must be drawn to scale with dimensions. The plans must be generally in accordance with the plans submitted with the application but modified to show:

- (a) Amended site plan drawn to scale showing the shed located within 25 metres of the western boundary and within 10 metres of the southern boundary as per North Central CMA condition.
- (b) Colour of the proposed shed

2. Layout not altered

The development as shown on the endorsed plans must not be altered or modified unless otherwise agreed in writing by the responsible authority.

3. Use of the building

The proposed building must not be used for any other purpose other than storage unless otherwise approved in writing by the responsible authority.

4. Materials and Colours

All external materials must be non-reflective and finished in muted tones to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority.

5. Buildings and works – drainage

All buildings and works must be drained to the satisfaction of the Loddon Shire as the responsible drainage authority.

6. North Central CMA Conditions

- 6.1. Water resistant buildings materials that minimise the physical effects of flooding on the shed structure and its contents must be used for foundations, footings, floor and walls up to at least the Nominal Flood Protection Level of 180.2 metres AHD. In addition:
 - a) Electrical fittings must be fixed above the Nominal Flood Protection Level of 180.2 metres AHD.
 - b) All chemicals, oil, fuel, grease, waste or other potential pollutants must be stored above the Nominal Flood Protection Level of 180.2 metres AHD. Adequate storage areas and shelving should be provided for this purpose.
- 6.2. The shed must be located within 25 metres of the western boundary and within 10 metres of the southern lot boundary.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

There have been no previous Council discussion on this matter.

BACKGROUND

The application was lodged on the 17 December 2024 proposing to construct a building (storage shed) associated with agriculture. The applicant has planted several fruit trees and established vegetable gardens throughout the site.

The application was advertised to surrounding landowners; with one objection received.

The application was also referred externally referrals to North Central CMA (Sec 52 referral).

The North Central CMA provided conditional consent with some amendments to the location of the shed required.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Under the *Planning and Environment Act 1987* (the Act) the Minister of Planning delegates a municipal council power to become the planning authority for any planning scheme in force in its municipal district.

A municipal council is obligated to enforce and administer the relevant Planning Scheme and must use the scheme to determine applications. The Loddon Planning Scheme is the relevant Planning Scheme for Council. An application is referred to Council for determination, which:

- receive one or more objections, and/or
- are to be recommended for refusal by the Planning officer.

Pursuant to Section 52 of the *Planning and Environment Act 1987*, notices were sent to owners and occupiers of adjoining land. Council has received one objection as the result of the public notification and as such, the matter is being brought to Council for determination. A decision report detailing this application has been prepared and can be found in attachment 1, the plans can be found at attachment 2. The objection is included in the decision report with the personal information removed. Attachment 3 is the same objection with the personal information intact.

The objection has been included twice, once without any personal information and a second time in confidential items including the personal information. This is to insure Council complies with its obligations for handling personal information under the *Privacy and Data Protections Act 2014*. A complete copy of the objection can be made available to the public via an appointment.

COST/BENEFITS

There are various costs associated with having a delegated Planning officer consider an application and make a recommendation as well as with the time of the Councillors to consider this recommendation.

The benefits associated with this report is the ability of Council to fulfil its requirement under law and provide the community with a statutory service that delivers well-managed and appropriate development.

RISK ANALYSIS

The risks of Council not fulfilling its statutory obligation under the Act include:

- inappropriate use and development which could endanger life and property
- Council's reputation as a Responsible Authority
- breaches of the *Planning & Environment Act 1987* requiring compliance action.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Refer to the decision report (attachment 1) for further detail on the application.

RESOLUTION 2025/30

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson

Seconded: Cr Gavan Holt

That the Responsible Authority having considered all matters which the Planning and Environment Act, 1987, requires it to consider, decides to issue a Notice of Decision to grant planning permit 6030 to construct a building (storage shed) associated with agriculture subject to the following conditions:

1. Amended Plans Required

Before the development starts, amended plans must be submitted to and approved by the Responsible Authority. When approved, the plans will be endorsed and will then form part of the permit. The plans must be drawn to scale with dimensions. The plans must be generally in accordance with the plans submitted with the application but modified to show:

- (a) Amended site plan drawn to scale showing the shed located within 25 metres of the western boundary and within 10 metres of the southern boundary as per North Central CMA condition.
- (b) Colour of the proposed shed

2. Layout not altered

The development as shown on the endorsed plans must not be altered or modified unless otherwise agreed in writing by the responsible authority.

3. Use of the building

The proposed building must not be used for any other purpose other than storage unless otherwise approved in writing by the responsible authority.

4. Materials and Colours

All external materials must be non-reflective and finished in muted tones to the satisfaction of the Responsible Authority.

5. Buildings and works – drainage

All buildings and works must be drained to the satisfaction of the Loddon Shire as the responsible drainage authority.

6. North Central CMA Conditions

- 6.1. Water resistant buildings materials that minimise the physical effects of flooding on the shed structure and its contents must be used for foundations, footings, floor and walls up to at least the Nominal Flood Protection Level of 180.2 metres AHD. In addition:
 - a) Electrical fittings must be fixed above the Nominal Flood Protection Level of 180.2 metres AHD.
 - b) All chemicals, oil, fuel, grease, waste or other potential pollutants must be stored above the Nominal Flood Protection Level of 180.2 metres AHD. Adequate storage areas and shelving should be provided for this purpose.
- 6.2. The shed must be located within 25 metres of the western boundary and within 10 metres of the southern lot boundary.

CARRIED

10.2 NATIONAL GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT - NOTICES OF MOTIONS

File Number:

Author: Renae Colls, Executive Assistant

Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

Attachments: 1. Murray River Group of Councils - NGA Motions 2025

RECOMMENDATION

That Council:

1. submits the attached Notices of Motions to the National General Assembly of Local Government on behalf of the Murray River Group of Councils;
2. authorises the Chief Executive Officer to amend the wording (without changing the meaning or purpose of the motion) if required during the submission process; and
3. authorise the Mayor to determine on behalf of Council if any motion is proposed to be combined with a similar motion from another council.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Draft versions of these motions were circulated in February and the matter was discussed at the March 2025 Council Forum so that Councillors could consider any motions in advance of this meeting.

BACKGROUND

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is now calling for Notices of Motions for the National General Assembly (NGA) 2025, which is scheduled for 25-27 June 2025 in Canberra.

The NGA provides a platform for local government to address national issues and advocate to the federal government on critical issues facing the sector.

Motions for the National General Assembly must be submitted by 31 March and must be endorsed by a Council resolution. This is the final Council meeting prior to the closing date for Council to resolve upon these motions.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The theme of the 2025 NGA is – *National Priorities Need Local Solutions*.

To be eligible for inclusion in the NGA Business Papers, and subsequent debate on the floor of the NGA, motions must meet the following criteria:

- 1) be relevant to the work of local government nationally;
- 2) not be focused on a specific jurisdiction, location or region – unless the project or issue has national implications;
- 3) be consistent with the themes of the NGA;

- 4) complement or build on the policy objectives of ALGA and your state or territory local government association;
- 5) be submitted from a council which is a financial member of their state or territory local government association;
- 6) propose a clear action and outcome ie call on the Australian Government to act on something;
- 7) not be advanced on behalf of external third parties that may seek to use the NGA to apply pressure to Board members or to gain national political exposure for positions that are not directly relevant to the work of, or in the national interests of, local government;
- 8) address issues that will directly improve the capacity of local government to deliver services and infrastructure for the benefit of all Australian communities;
- 9) not seek to advance an outcome that would result in a benefit to one group of councils to the detriment of another;
- 10) be supported by sufficient evidence and demonstrate the relevance and significance of the matter to local government;

Key Dates

18 December 2024 | Opening of Call for Motions

31 March 2025 | Acceptance of Motions closes

24 June 2025 | Regional Cooperation & Development Forum

25 - 27 June 2025 | National General Assembly

A briefing document is attached to this agenda paper containing the motion and a short background on the topic for further information. The proposed motions cover the following topics:

1. Housing
2. Energy
3. Water
4. Roads & Bridges
5. Resilient Infrastructure
6. Swimming Pools

The Murray River Group of Councils motions for endorsement are:

1. Housing

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to provide multi-year, regional housing development infrastructure funding for investment into essential trunk infrastructure such as sewerage, water, drainage, electricity, roads and communications, to facilitate residential housing development in regional and rural towns where the market is not delivering the needed housing opportunities.

2. Energy

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to ensure that communities hosting new energy generation, transmission and distribution infrastructure required for Australia's energy transition, directly benefit from new investment to support job growth and in infrastructure upgrades ensuring that the regional communities directly impacted by it are not left behind in the race to transition our energy grid.

3. Water

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to put Basin communities at the heart of Basin Plan delivery and future water reform by ceasing the damaging water purchase programs in our irrigation districts that will lead to job losses, put food production in our region at risk and will add to the cost of living crisis and instead engaging with communities and Local Governments to deliver a long term sustainable future for food growing and manufacturing in the Basin, and to ensure improved environmental outcomes for all the Basin's valued riverine and floodplain ecosystems.

4. Roads and Bridges

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to provide an additional road maintenance and restoration fund that invests directly in Local Government to fund the road infrastructure repair deficit road and allow local councils to catch up on the road and bridge repair backlog facing councils across the Country.

5. Resilient Infrastructure

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to establish a regional infrastructure resilience fund that will provide local councils with dedicated funding to identify and invest in resilient local infrastructure to ensure communities are better protected and connected even in the face of increasingly severe and frequent weather events.

6. Swimming Pools

This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to establish a dedicated national fund to support Local Government to replace and upgrade public swimming pools by providing financial assistance to local councils for the repair, replacement, and upgrading of aging public swimming pool facilities.

COST/BENEFITS

The only costs associated with this report are travel and accommodation expenses for Councillors who may wish to attend either event. Costs will be paid in advance or reimbursed to Councillors in accordance with Council policy.

RISK ANALYSIS

No risks have been identified for the subject matter of this report.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Councillors were advised at the February Council Forum that the calls for notices of motions had been made.

RESOLUTION 2025/31

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council:

1. submits the attached Notices of Motions to the National General Assembly of Local Government on behalf of the Murray River Group of Councils;
2. authorises the Chief Executive Officer to amend the wording (without changing the meaning or purpose of the motion) if required during the submission process; and
3. authorise the Mayor to determine on behalf of Council if any motion is proposed to be combined with a similar motion from another council.

CARRIED

10.3 NEWBRIDGE WATER AND SEWERAGE**File Number:****Author:** Renae Colls, Executive Assistant**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer

- Attachments:**
1. **SGS Economics and Planning - Newbridge Water and Sewerage Infrastructure Preliminary Business Case**
 2. **Grantus - Newbridge Water Supply and Sewerage Scheme - Business Case**
 3. **Loddon Shire Settlement Strategy**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

1. Undertake a land use planning process to determine the most appropriate way to expand the township of Newbridge; and
2. Allocate \$300,000 from the Strategic Fund to support the necessary investigations, community consultation and strategic planning required.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Since 2006, the efforts of the Councillors for a reticulated water and sewerage system in Newbridge has been a recurring topic in previous Council Forum, Briefings and Meetings.

The following timeline provides an overview of the history of these discussions and actions to date.

Date	Details
2006	Newbridge was included in the 35 towns announced to be connected to new sewerage services (to the township west of the Loddon River) as part of the State Government's \$42 million Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program. However, this funding was withdrawn and the project did not eventuate for Newbridge.
2007	Council engaged AECOM a construction engineering company to complete a Servicing Options Paper identifying a number of sewerage treatment, collection and reuse options. This paper then formed the basis for discussions between Loddon Shire and Coliban Water regarding identification of a suitable service area and initiation of the options evaluation and consultation phase of the project. Following preparation of the Options Servicing paper the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), as the administrators of the "Our Water Our Future" initiative, allocated \$435,000 funding to Coliban Water to proceed with the consultation, design and construction phase of the Newbridge Sewerage Scheme with AECOM also engaged by Coliban Water to prepare the Scheme Options Assessment report.
2008 - October	Coliban Water sent a letter to the Newbridge Community Plan Committee, following a meeting discussing possible sewerage and water supply for Newbridge. The letter referred to the community's desire for a reticulated water scheme if it is to get a sewerage scheme.

2009	Coliban Water provided further details about proposed sewerage scheme under the Country Towns Water Supply and Sewerage Program.
2011 – January Council Meeting	Report to Council on Newbridge Sewerage Scheme Options Assessment
2011-2012	Letters from Council advocating for the sewerage scheme and expressing disappointment that Coliban Water's 2013-2018 Water Plan did not include provision for this scheme.
2016	Letter from Newbridge Recreation Reserve Committee (NRRC) seeking Council support for a reticulated water supply and sewerage and subsequent letters from Council to politicians and Coliban Water.
2017	Following discussions with Coliban Water, Council wrote a letter to Newbridge Recreation Reserve Committee explaining that costings for water to Newbridge must await the completion of the South West Loddon Pipeline design. Letter received from NRRC in response agreeing that it's best to wait until costs can be properly identified before consulting with the broader community.
2017	Council resolution 2017/47: That Council resolve that the issue of a reticulated potable water supply and sewerage for Newbridge be deferred until the design of the South West Loddon Pipeline Project is announced.
2017	Letter received from Committee seeking to use Strategic Fund to conduct a costing study for water to Newbridge.
2019	Council officers worked with Coliban Water to prepare an updated business case that considers the supply of reticulated water and sewerage separately, identified the costs associated with each option and recommended the combined option preferred by Coliban Water.
2019 – August	Council officers then obtained funding from the Department of Land, Water, Environment and Planning (now known as the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action) Integrated Water Management Stream 1 to provide an economic assessment for the supply of reticulated water and sewerage to the township of Newbridge, to expand on the work undertaken by Coliban Water.
2019 – September Council Meeting	That Council place the draft Loddon Shire Settlement Strategy 2019-2034 on public exhibition in accordance with section 223 of the <i>Local Government Act 1989</i> , to provide an opportunity for public submissions. The strategy recommends that growth should be promoted in the well serviced towns of Inglewood, Wedderburn, Boort, Pyramid Hill and Bridgewater. The strategy recognises the opportunity for growth at Newbridge should reticulated water and sewerage be provided. The draft strategy was released for public comment during October/November 2019, with one submission received from the Wedderburn Development Association.
2020 – February Council Meeting	Council adopted the Loddon Shire Settlement Strategy.
2021 - March Council Forum	Newbridge sewerage and water business case – Councillors noted the proposal in the lead up to the next State Government election. There was strong support from Councillors for such schemes in Newbridge and other small towns within Loddon Shire.

2021 - June Council Forum	Presentation from Newbridge Arnold Llanelly Community Planning Group gave a presentation of their 2020 Community Plan, which includes discussing funding for Newbridge reticulated water and sewerage.
2021 – September Council Forum	<p>Coliban Water officers presented on small town sewerage schemes and the process for Coliban Water implementing new schemes.</p> <p>It was pointed out that the costs to the community would include initial capital costs for connection to the sewer (usually around \$20,000 per lot), as well as over \$1300 per annum for customer service charges, and that this would not result in cost recovery from new customers, as Bendigo revenue subsidises the rest of the Coliban network.</p>
2021 - October Council Forum	<p>Council officer summarised the information provided as attachments to the report for background to enable a discussion by Councillors on a preferred advocacy position regarding Newbridge water and sewerage.</p> <p>Councillors discussed the information provided, including the low number of responses received from the community survey, and whether the community could undertake a new survey.</p>
2021 – November Council Forum	<p>Advocacy for Newbridge water and sewerage proposal - further communication with landowners.</p> <p>The community has requested that Council seek to get better responses from the owners of vacant properties. It is believed that absentee landowners were the majority of the non-responses to the survey, and it should have been worded more strongly, requesting a response rather than taking unreturned responses as a “no”.</p>
2024 – July Council Briefing	<p>Advocacy for Newbridge Water and Sewerage</p> <p>Council Officers sought guidance from Councillors on the future advocacy detail for public water and sewerage supply system for Newbridge.</p> <p>Councillors discussed possible funding and loan structures, contributions by residents and future growth potential for the township. In addition to the cost of a water and sewer system, the added costs of strategic planning and social infrastructure to support growing townships were highlighted.</p> <p>Councillors noted that funding of this particular project for the implementation of a new system is the responsibility of the water authority.</p> <p>A grant is being sourced by the Newbridge/Llanelly community planning group to explore and form a social license scoping direction for the area.</p>
2024 - September Council Meeting	Council adopted the 2024 Council Priorities document, which outlines the development of precinct plans for Bridgewater and Inglewood to support growth and infrastructure investment.
2024 - September Council Meeting	<p>Notice of Motion – Newbridge Sewerage and Water</p> <p>That a report be provided to Council at a meeting in November 2024 on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the next steps required to expand the work undertaken by SGS regarding the feasibility of Newbridge Sewerage and Water to ensure a project concept is ready for funding; and 2) the opportunity to fund this further concept work from Council's Strategic Fund

BACKGROUND

Newbridge is a small regional town in Loddon Shire and situated on the bank of the Loddon River and on the Wimmera Highway.

Newbridge township does not have a reticulated water and sewerage system. Landowners are reliant on rainwater tanks for drinking supply and septic tank arrangement.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

At the September 2024 Council Meeting, Councillors resolved to receive a further report in November 2024 outlining the necessary next steps to further expand the SGS work on this project and the opportunity to fund the concept work through Council's Strategic Fund. At the November Council meeting the date for a report to Council was extended to March in recognition that new Councillors had not yet been provided with the opportunity to be briefed on the background of this idea.

This report summarises previous key findings and recommendations to provide Councillors an understanding of what is involved in providing a reticulated water and sewerage scheme for the Newbridge township and proposes a way council can seek to progress growth of the township.

While Council has undertaken work to understand the feasibility of reticulated water and sewerage, Council is not responsible for providing this service or infrastructure. This work has been undertaken in order for council to determine the growth capacity of the Newbridge township. Understandably, as a service responsibility of the Victorian government, council does not have the capacity or the appetite to expand its service investment or take on debt given its existing under funded obligations and financial position.

Comprehensive documents prepared by SGS Economics and Planning (attachment 1) and Grantus Newbridge Water Supply and Sewerage Scheme - Business Case (attachment 2) provide detailed analysis of the possible water and sewerage supply systems, including cost estimates, potential funding sources and projected benefits.

Grantus - Newbridge Water Supply and Sewerage Scheme - Business Case (2021)

This business case highlights several key findings, including:

- Newbridge has 139 subdivided quarter-acre (1,000m²) blocks, many of which remain undeveloped due to their inadequate size for an on-site sewerage disposal. The Environment Protection Authority recommends that lot sizes less than 10,000m² are unsuitable for the containment of wastewater onsite based on the soil type at Newbridge.
- The sewerage scheme would involve total costs of around \$6.82 million, with \$5.5 million needed to complete construction costs (Table 1.1).
- Benefit cost assessment identifies a total benefits valuation for the project of \$8.2 million (Table 4.1 property prices \$4.2 million, river health \$3 million and public health \$1 million).
- The main barrier to the project moving ahead is sourcing external capital funding and a third-party financing guarantor. The business case states that while the community and Coliban Water could contribute to the overall cost, without State Government involvement, the project cannot proceed.

SGS Economics & Planning Preliminary Business Case (2022)

This business case was developed in response to the Loddon Mallee Housing Action Plan as one of four example projects which could unlock additional housing supply in the region. The document presents a preliminary business case for the Newbridge Water and Sewerage Infrastructure extension proposal and included involvement of Regional Development Victoria (funder), Loddon Shire and Coliban Water.

Two options were explored based on the preferred delivery method produced by the options analysis by Coliban Water and Newbridge stakeholders within the Grantus report.

Option 1: Water and sewerage infrastructure is provided for the 40 lots in the township zone, west of the Loddon River. The infrastructure will give opportunity for densification within the township zone as larger lots can be sub-divided, increasing the property values of those lots. Businesses are able to expand with the increased water and sewerage capacity. However, further expansion of the town is limited as the water and sewerage infrastructure under this option is only designed to service the township area.

Option 2: Water and sewerage infrastructure is constructed to service the 40 lots in the township zone plus 290 lots within the available land close to the township zone. This means an increased population for the town and more opportunities to attract businesses into Newbridge. The increased population and business expansion is larger than Option 1, as the water and sewerage infrastructure goes beyond the boundaries of the existing township.

It should be noted that the additional 290 lots utilised for this business case is based on a high level assessment which is not informed by consultation with impacted land owners or site specific constraints such as native vegetation, bushfire attack level, etc. As such, this number could increase or reduce following detailed analysis.

Cost benefit analysis: the cost benefit analysis assessed whether there is a case for government intervention and financial support for this project. The result as outlined on page 19 of the report is:

TABLE 4: COST-BENEFIT RESULTS

	Option 1 (Net Present Value)	Option 2 (Net Present Value)
Capital costs	\$8,780,000	\$27,000,000
Operating costs	\$1,279,200	\$5,500,800
Loss of rural land	\$0	\$184,000
Total incremental costs	\$10,059,200	\$32,684,800
Increase in property values (\$000s)	\$8,528,000	\$70,352,000
Increase in profitability (\$000s)	\$844,000	\$6,962,000
Avoided public health costs (\$000s)	\$90,000	\$68,000
Total incremental benefits	\$9,743,000	\$77,382,000
Net benefits	(\$316,200)	\$44,697,200
BCR	1.0	2.4

Source: SGS Economics and Planning

Findings: Coliban Water can borrow to finance capital investments but only if financial analysis shows the benefitting residents can contribute sufficient revenue to service the debt. This would not be the case in Newbridge. A third-party financier (ie. government) would therefore be needed for investment in water and sewerage infrastructure in Newbridge.

Given the apportionment of benefits from the investment, a combination of loan and grant appears to be the only financing approach.

Unlocking Loddon's Residential Growth Potential

Villawood Properties "Unlocking Loddon's Residential Growth Potential" report highlights the potential for residential growth in Inglewood and Bridgewater, given their existing development and proximity to Marong and Bendigo. Consultation with stakeholders conducted as part of this project revealed support for Inglewood and Bridgewater being the focus towns for development. At the March 2024 Council Meeting, Council endorsed the Unlocking Loddon Action Plan that was developed to deliver the recommendations of the Villawood report. This action plan includes the preparation of a precinct plan for Bridgewater and Inglewood to support coordinated growth and infrastructure investment.

Villawood identified that infrastructure costs impact the viability of development. The growth of these towns will require investment in water and sewerage infrastructure.

Social license

A challenge for this project is the social license of the proposal. The Grantus report indicates that the community is divided in support or opposition to this proposal. Without a clear indication of support from local residents, it is challenging for any level of government to progress this proposal and impose an outcome on existing residents who would incur capital connection costs and an ongoing service fee.

Loddon Shire Settlement Strategy

The Settlement Strategy 2019 - 2034 recommends that growth should be promoted in the well serviced towns of Inglewood, Wedderburn, Boort, Pyramid Hill and Bridgewater. These towns currently have a sufficient land supply, including the opportunity for increased density through the further subdivision of existing large residential lots.

The strategy also identifies that Newbridge has potential for expansion subject to the feasibility of connecting the township to reticulated water and sewerage. This feasibility has been explored and demonstrated to be unfeasible within the foreseeable future from both the Grantus and SGS studies.

Water Authority

Coliban Water is the regional water authority. If a reticulated water and sewerage system was to be constructed, Coliban Water would become the responsible authority for its construction, operation and service fee collection.

Coliban Water has worked with Council for many years to investigate options for a water and sewerage scheme to service the township of Newbridge. From the work undertaken within a number of studies, Coliban Water has expressed their concern with the social license and financial challenges of the project given the divided community survey results and inability of the project to self-fund.

Coliban Water has a significant planned capital works program which has seen their investment grow from \$40 million per year to \$110 million in the coming financial years. This capital expenditure is funded by customers and as a result the authority has the highest water and sewerage fees within the sector and significant debt levels.

Considering the existing program of works and high fees to support the service, Coliban Water as a customer funded organisation is not in a position to fund this expansion of service within the foreseeable future unless the project is funded by a third party (such as government).

Options

1. Council could continue advocating for the Victorian Government to fund the necessary capital to connect water and sewerage to Newbridge.
2. Council could undertake a land use planning process to identify the potential to expand Newbridge without sewerage being available (recommended).
3. Council could elect to not progress this matter further.

Considering existing studies demonstrate that a reticulated water and sewerage system is not possible without significant external funding and that there is no existing funding appetite to construct a sewerage scheme for the township, it is proposed that council seek alternative ways to grow the township of Newbridge without sewerage.

COST/BENEFITS

Expansion of water and sewerage to Newbridge

Costs and benefits of the scheme have been detailed in the Grantus Business Case (attachment 2) and the SGS Economics report (attachment 1).

Estimated Landowner Costs associated with water and sewerage connections

Landowners who already have an existing house serviced by a septic tank or other on-site wastewater system will be required to connect to the new scheme. The necessary work required to connect to the new scheme would involve redirecting their plumbing and water supply connection. The costs associated with the connection will be the responsibility of the landowner.

The figures may also be affected by site specific variables which could significantly affect actual individual property costs, including the complexity of plumbing connections, septic decommissioning and site electrical changes.

Landowners would be required to pay the specified residential capital contribution and Coliban Water service fees when they connect to the finished scheme.

Land Use Planning

Land use planning would involve significant consultation and a range of detailed technical reports that are necessary to inform land use planning. These reports are beyond Council's professional capability and cannot be funded within existing operational budgets.

Expert reports which would be necessary could include (but are not limited to):

- bushfire management
- integrated water management
- cultural heritage
- flora and fauna
- transport and traffic
- existing and future trunk infrastructure
- public/social infrastructure
- and more.

Resources would also be required to consult land owners about the impact on their land such as rezoning, windfall gains tax implications and other findings from the studies. Consultation with the broader community would also be required to discuss the options for the township.

A challenge for this land use planning process will be to protect productive agricultural land while supporting residential expansion, as well as seeking government approval for any subsequent land rezoning considering a hesitancy to provide additional rural living or low density residential properties within Loddon Shire.

RISK ANALYSIS

Environmental Risk: the connection of sewerage and water would remove the volume of wastewater currently being managed on-site by individual households. These septic systems pose a higher environmental risk than reticulated sewerage.

Reputational Risk: Council is not the responsible authority for water and sewerage. These services are the responsibility of the Victorian government and Council has been advocating on behalf of the community for a number of years.

The community of Newbridge is divided in its support and opposition. There is a challenge that regardless of any Council decision residents will be equally satisfied and dissatisfied.

Amendment to Planning Scheme: while Council could undertake the necessary work to seek rezoning of land, all rezoning is subject to approval by the Victorian Minister for Planning. This process can take many years and despite Council's position the Minister may not agree. This is a significant risk to be managed in the process given the hesitancy of government to expand rural living zones or low density residential zones.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The development of the Grantus (attachment 2) business case involved consultation with Coliban Water and representatives of the Newbridge Recreation Reserve as members of a steering committee with Council officers.

In 2020, landowners in the township of Newbridge were mailed a survey with an explanatory letter and information about the background and proposed options presented. The survey sought the level of interest and support for a reticulated water and sewerage system in the Newbridge township. The survey also sought landowners interest in contributing \$15,000 (payable over 20 years) towards the capital works and paying their onsite connection costs. The consultant attended Newbridge during the survey period to be available for face-to-face enquiries from landowners.

The results showed no overwhelming consensus in favour of the proposal, with many respondents expressing concerns about the financial costs. Out of 135 surveys mailed out, only 48 responses were received, with just 28 landowners (20.7%) expressing their support. As a result, 79.3% of landowners either opposed or did not respond to the survey. The survey clearly noted that non-returns were to be considered as not supporting the schemes.

The assessment concluded that without significant financial support, landowners and Council cannot self-fund the required capital investment required for sewerage and water supply to the township of Newbridge.

If a land use planning process was undertaken to explore options to expand Newbridge, significant further consultation would be necessary with directly impacted land owners and the local community.

For nearly 20 years, Mayors and CEOs have engaged with state elected members to seek support for the Newbridge water and sewerage project. These discussions highlighted financial challenges and competing priorities across the region and state. As a result the government has not committed funding to progress water and sewerage connections at Newbridge.

RESOLUTION 2025/32

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council

1. Undertake a land use planning process to determine the most appropriate way to expand the township of Newbridge; and
2. Allocate \$300,000 from the Strategic Fund to support the necessary investigations, community consultation and strategic planning required.

CARRIED

10.4 BRIDGEWATER FOOTBALL NETBALL CLUB - FEE WAIVER AND REDUCTION APPLICATION

File Number: -
Author: Steven Phillips, Director Operations
Authoriser: Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer
Attachments: Nil

RECOMMENDATION

That Council grant a fee waiver to the Bridgewater Football Netball Club for a Planning Permit Application cost of \$1,453.40 for the erection of advertising signage at the Bridgewater Recreation Reserve.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this paper, or involved in the subject matter of the paper.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

There has been no previous discussion with Council on this matter.

BACKGROUND

Council's Fees and Charges – Waiver or Reduction Policy applies to any not for profit organisation, incorporated association or unincorporated community group where the activity will result in a community benefit.

Applications over \$1,000 are reviewed by the Chief Executive Officer and submitted to Council for approval via a formal resolution.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The Bridgewater Football Netball Club have applied for a Planning Permit fee waiver. They require the permit to comply with the Loddon Planning Scheme for the erection of advertising signage at the Bridgewater Recreation Reserve. The recreation reserve is on land owned by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA). There are currently signs that have been erected that contravene the Loddon Planning Scheme. Council's compliance team and planning team have been discussing suitable solutions with the Bridgewater Football Netball Club to bring the advertising signs into alignment with the Scheme.

Council has not made any financial contributions to this project to date. The Committee has requested that Council waive the Planning Permit Application fee of \$1,453.40. The benefit to the community as provided in the fee waiver application is "*monetary contribution from sponsor that allows us as a club to provide sporting activities etc. for the community to enjoy and participate in*".

The Planning Permit Application is to allow the use of club sponsorship signage. The signage will raise income for the club and it will also benefit the business and organisations that choose to take up the opportunity to advertise at the recreation reserve. Should the Planning Permit be granted and complied with it will avoid the need for enforcement action.

The granting or refusal of a fee waiver in no way affects or influences Council's statutory obligations to assess the Planning Permit Application on its merit.

COST/BENEFITS

Should Council decide to grant the fee waiver the cost to Council would be \$1,453.40 in lost revenue. The Planning Permit Application indicates the Club's intention is to align with the requirements for signage in a Public Park and Recreation Zone.

The Bridgewater Football Netball Club is seeking the fee waiver to support them in continuing to provide sporting activities for the community.

RISK ANALYSIS

The risks associated with this fee waiver is considered low.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Council officers have had discussions with the Bridgewater Football Netball Club on this matter.

RESOLUTION 2025/33

Moved: Cr Gavan Holt

Seconded: Cr Miki Wilson

That Council grant a fee waiver to the Bridgewater Football Netball Club for a Planning Permit Application cost of \$1,453.40 for the erection of advertising signage at the Bridgewater Recreation Reserve.

CARRIED

10.5 SALE OF PROPERTIES FOR RATE RECOVERY UNDER SECTION 181 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1989

File Number: FOL/21/6593

Author: Deanne Caserta, Manager Financial Services

Authoriser: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate

Attachments: 1. **Section 181 - Property Details - Confidential**

This attachment is designated as confidential in accordance with Section 3(1)(f) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. It contains personal information, being information which if released would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs.

Reason being that the information relates to matters of personal affairs. **(under separate cover)**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council approves the sale of properties listed in this report under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989* and authorises the use of the Council seal, if required, on any related documentation.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this paper, or involved in the subject matter of the paper.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council is provided with a quarterly update of properties that have been approved for sale under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989*. This outlines the progress to date of each property.

Of the 62 properties in total, 40 have been finalised and 6 are on acceptable payment arrangements at the time of this report. The remaining properties are at various stages of the rate recovery process.

BACKGROUND

There is no provision in the *Local Government Act 2020* for rate recovery sales; the process continues to fall under the *Local Government Act 1989* (the Act).

Under section 181 of the Act, Council may sell any rateable land to recover unpaid rates and charges (including enforcement costs and interest) that are more than three years overdue, where no current payment arrangement exists, and where all other means of debt collection have been exhausted.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Eight properties have been identified as being eligible for sale under section 181 of the Act, where all steps in the legal process have been taken in order to collect the outstanding rates and charges, with no success. The process of rate recovery sale is the last available option.

Every opportunity has been given to the owners of these properties (where they can be contacted) to enter into an agreed payment arrangement for the payment of any current and outstanding rates and charges on their properties.

Some of the owners are not able to be contacted and both Council and Council's debt collection agency have exhausted all possibilities in trying to locate them.

The associated table of information confidentially supplied with this report outlines the properties presented for Council's consideration.

COST/BENEFITS

All legal costs incurred by Council will be recouped if the properties are sold and the sale price exceeds the total outstanding rates and charges, and those costs incurred for the auction process.

RISK ANALYSIS

Once a property is sold under section 181 of the Act and all debts to Council have been finalised, the excess funds from the sale are returned to the titled owner and in the circumstances where the owner is unable to be located, the funds are held in trust whilst further efforts are undertaken to locate the owner. Where the debts are not covered by the sale proceeds, Council is left with a bad debt.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Council works in consultation with Midstate Credit Collect Pty Ltd and Executive Collections to collect outstanding debts. On the occasions that Council or the agents have been able to contact property owners, they have tried to put in place a payment arrangement.

Where Council is unable to locate the owners, the agents have used further external sources in an attempt to locate the owner on Council's behalf.

RESOLUTION 2025/34

Moved: Cr David Weaver

Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council approves the sale of properties listed in this report under section 181 of the *Local Government Act 1989* and authorises the use of the Council seal, if required, on any related documentation.

CARRIED

10.6 REQUEST TO WRITE OFF BAD DEBTS

File Number: FOL/20/2500

Author: Deanne Caserta, Manager Financial Services

Authoriser: Michelle Stedman, Director Corporate

Attachments: 1. **Bad Debt Request - Detail by Client - Confidential**

This attachment is designated as confidential in accordance with Section 3(1)(f) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. It contains personal information, being information which if released would result in the unreasonable disclosure of information about any person or their personal affairs.

Reason being that it includes information related to personal affairs. **(under separate cover)**

RECOMMENDATION

That Council resolve to write off the bad debts outlined in this report for the amount of \$6,844.27.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this paper, or involved in the subject matter of the paper.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Nil.

BACKGROUND

Council has a 'Provision for Doubtful Debts and Writing Off Bad Debts Policy' (the Policy). This sets the principles for variations of the provision for doubtful debts and the write-off of bad debts.

The Chief Executive Officer, on receipt of advice from the Director Corporate is able to:

- vary the provision for doubtful debts, or
- write off bad debts against the provision for doubtful debts up to the value of \$1,000 in an individual case, and \$5,000 in aggregate per financial year.

The request being considered by Council is over the above threshold therefore it is required to be submitted to Council for consideration.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Council ceased delivering home and community care services in June 2023. Since this time there has been continued effort placed into collection of any related debts.

A reconciliation of the amounts outstanding has been completed, and formal requests have been received from the Community Wellbeing Department to clear these items.

The request made is that the amount of \$6,844.27 be written off during the 2024/25 financial year.

Detail of the relevant debtor types are included in the confidential attachment to this report.

At the time of writing this report, \$36.02 has been written off in bad debts this financial year. The above totals will bring the amount to be written off in 2024/25 to \$6,880.29.

COST/BENEFITS

The cost to Council is that of the debt written off. Council staff have also spent a significant amount of time undertaking debt collection before arriving at this recommendation.

RISK ANALYSIS

Every service or charge that Council raises is at risk of payment not being met. The likelihood has historically been very low, and this is outweighed the benefit provided by delivering services and support to the community.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Discussions have been held with the relevant departments to determine what the next course of action is with these debtors.

RESOLUTION 2025/35

Moved: Cr Gavan Holt

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council resolve to write off the bad debts outlined in this report for the amount of \$6,844.27.

CARRIED

10.7 LODDON RECREATION, OPEN SPACE AND AQUATIC STRATEGY**File Number:****Author:** Orrin Hogan, Manager Community Partnerships**Authoriser:** Wendy Gladman, Director Community Wellbeing

- Attachments:**
1. Draft Loddon Recreation, Open Space and Aquatic Summary Report
 2. Draft Loddon Recreation, Open Space and Aquatic Background Report
 3. ROSA Public Display Feedback Summary - Redacted

RECOMMENDATION

That Council adopt the Loddon Recreation, Open Space and Aquatics Strategy.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

A timeline summary is provided below with key milestones for the development of this strategy:

In August 2023 Loddon Shire Council commenced the development of a Recreation, Open Space, and Aquatic Strategy, aiming to review existing facilities and plan for sustainable future development. Consultant firm, Otium, was appointed to assist with the development of the Strategy.

At the February 2024 Forum, Otium presented Council with the Recreation, Open Space and Aquatic Strategy background report and conducted a thorough presentation on consultation and survey results by interpreting data and trends and articulating a collective Loddon community response.

At the May 2024 Forum, Otium presented Council with the Engagement Findings Report.

The draft ROSA was presented to Councillors at the July 2024 Council Forum.

At the August 2024 Council meeting, Council approved the draft Recreation Open Space & Aquatic Strategy be placed on public display to receive community feedback.

In September 2024 Council officers hosted a community feedback and discussion meeting following the public display period to address question and concerns. Feedback did result in an addition to the draft strategy document.

October 2024 – Council Election

In March 2025, Council Officers attended Council Forum to present the public display period feedback and progress the adoption process.

BACKGROUND

Loddon's Recreation, Open Space & Aquatic Strategy (ROSA) consists of a Summary Report and a comprehensive Background and Data Report that has guided and informed the development of this 10-year strategic plan and establishes a clear direction and framework for providing, developing, and managing traditional sports, recreation, open spaces and aquatic facilities within our unique shire council area.

The Strategy provides a robust evidence base that has informed a planning framework, strategic directions, an implementation plan and a decision-making framework for identifying investment priorities.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The Recreation, Open Space and Aquatics Strategy (ROSA) is coming before Council for adoption today.

The Strategy intentionally aligns with Loddon's recently adopted Social Infrastructure Strategy.

Both Strategies employ the use of a benchmarking and service level driven framework to inform evidence based decision making and provide Council with guidance and consistent standards when deliberating over contentious outcomes involving the rationalisation or growth of Loddon's asset base.

The relationship between the Strategies is important to highlight because their development, themes and timing in adoption, in partnership, will provide an informed, consistent and defensible basis for strategic decision making for the next 10 years.

The draft Recreation, Open Space and Aquatic Strategy (updated November 2024), provided as Attachment 2 – contains information relating to industry research, integration with Council plans and strategies, community profile data, consultation outcomes and the proposed strategic direction for Council consideration.

The proposed strategic direction, along with a summary of the other components of the ROSA document is provided in the summary document, provided as Attachment 1.

The Recreation Open Space & Aquatic Strategy was placed on public display to receive community feedback. Attachment 3 provides the feedback received, along with a summary which includes Council officer's comments/recommendations.

On reviewing the feedback Council officers have recommended one adjustment to each of the documents to reflect community feedback requesting:

- That the strategy contain a clear and documented biennial review process that relates to each town/localities categorisation against the service level benchmarking table in Appendix 1: Planning Framework.

This adjustment to the benchmarking table was also communicated at a face to face ROSA feedback session held at Newbridge on September 16, 2024 (Public Display feedback summary attached). The smaller township communities in the Tarnagulla Ward that felt that "...smaller town populations can and will change quite quickly and a 10 year strategy that categorizes 'a place' for a 10 year period of time without review is unacceptable".

As a result the following amendment has been made to each document with the inclusion of the following:

Final Report - Page 1 and Summary Report - Page 2

The Strategy includes an implementation plan that will be reviewed every two years. This review process will consider the outcomes of planning and funding processes and ensure that any emerging community and industry trends/demands, as well as external funding opportunities and Council funding capacity, are assessed and priority projects remain relevant throughout its 10-year timeline.

Final Report - Page 148 and Summary Report - Page 24

The implementation plan will be reviewed every two years. This review process will consider the outcomes of planning and funding processes and ensure that any emerging community and industry trends/demands, as well as external funding opportunities and Council funding capacity, are assessed and priority projects remain relevant throughout its 10-year timeline.

COST/BENEFITS

Due to the prevailing fiscal environment, the expansive range of quality recreation and open space assets within the Loddon Shire Council, the strategy identifies an emphasis to be placed on activation and maintenance of existing assets and infrastructure.

The strategy provides functional service level information to inform future decision making around recreational, aquatic and open space infrastructure based on location, use and township categorization. Service level rationale is provided in the prescriptive table within the document and is designed to provide consistency and guidance in decision making across the municipality.

A 10 year asset plan for recreation and open space assets is yet to be developed, however this strategy has produced a 10 year pool maintenance plan with a cost of \$1.3m required over that period.

The Loddon ROSA strategy recreation services section will be implemented using existing resources and has a focus on activation and diversification of existing asset use over the next 10 year period. The strategy encourages Council to engage with the community and explore new and progressive partnership models in the interests of sustainable asset management.

Where future projects requiring funding are identified, a funding strategy will be adopted, exploring and identifying external funding options and strategic consideration given to internal co-contribution funding.

Over time, Loddon's ROSA strategy will positively contribute to the activation of recreational and open space assets within the Shire having a positive impact on community health and wellbeing.

RISK ANALYSIS

Comprehensive engagement and consultation processes are always challenging to run effectively, posing a risk that the information received may not represent the broader community. It is evident that one of Loddon Shire Council's challenges is how we effectively engage the community to receive meaningful feedback across a large geographical area and dispersed community. On this occasion, the community engagement and consultation processes used throughout the development of this strategy employed a variety of methods to ensure a broad capture of information and resulted in constructive feedback. This is captured in more detail in the attached Public Display feedback summary and also described in the consultation and engagement section of both reports.

With any strategy development there is always a risk that community expectations will exceed Council's capacity to deliver; with this in mind the scope for the development of the ROSA clearly identified a preference for 'activation of existing assets' over 'development of new assets'.

Condition audits for Council's five outdoor public swimming pools and a review into the operational performance of Loddon Shire's aquatic service found the asset condition and ongoing operation of the outdoor pools is a real concern. The pools do not meet current industry standards and are now over 60 years old which is beyond their theoretical asset lives meaning they will become less reliable and prone to failure. In costing Council \$40-50 per visit. The ROSA identifies the need to explore how a sustainable aquatic service can be provided in Loddon Shire.

Council will need to consider the long-term financial capacity to renew assets. An examination of the need for an asset at the time of renewal is required to ensure the current and future needs of community are met within a funding profile available to Council.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The final round of community consultation, placing the document on public display, occurred in August 2024 inviting community feedback. The community were advised with public notices via print and social media, placement of the document in key community locations and on Council's online engagement platform connect@Loddon. Council officers also hosted a Q&A session and attended a key stakeholder face to face meeting at Newbridge Recreation Reserve on September 16, 2025 to address key feedback as requested.

The Loddon Recreation, Open Space and Aquatics Strategy is now ready to be considered for adoption.

RESOLUTION 2025/36

Moved: Cr Gavan Holt
Seconded: Cr Nick Angelo

That Council adopt the Loddon Recreation, Open Space and Aquatics Strategy.

CARRIED

10.8 ANNUAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM 2025-2026**File Number:** FOL/19/432630**Author:** David Southcombe, Manager Assets and Infrastructure**Authoriser:** Steven Phillips, Director Operations**Attachments:** 1. **Attachment 1 - Program Summary**2. **Attachment 2 - Detailed Program - Confidential**

This attachment is designated as confidential in accordance with Section 3(1)(g(ii)) of the *Local Government Act 2020*. It contains private commercial information, being information provided by a business, commercial or financial undertaking that if released, would unreasonably expose the business, commercial or financial undertaking to disadvantage.

The attachment contains information on project estimates which may affect contractor prices **(under separate cover)**

3. **Attachment 3 - Detailed Program without estimates****RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

1. Adopt the proposed expenditure amounts as listed in Attachment 1 for the following works categories:
 - Local Road Gravel Resheet
 - Local Road Shoulder Resheet
 - Local Road Construction – Asset Preservation
 - Local Road Construction – Amenity
 - Local Road Construction – Safety
 - Township Street Improvements
 - Urban & Township Drainage
 - Local Bridges & Culverts
 - Road Reseals
 - Parks and Gardens
 - Buildings
2. Note the projects included in the various works categories as detailed in Attachment 2 - Detailed Program and Attachment 3 - Detailed Program without estimates.

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The Annual Infrastructure Program 2025-2026 was discussed at the March 2025 Council Forum.

BACKGROUND

Council allocates significant funding for capital infrastructure projects on an annual basis. Council staff continually scope new infrastructure projects and maintain a rolling program of these projects. The rolling program is a database that forms the basis of the Annual Infrastructure Program. Each project is assessed using a scoring matrix relevant to the type of infrastructure as part of the scoping process. This score assists in the development of the Annual Infrastructure Program by providing a level of prioritisation for each of the projects.

In preparing the program, several factors need to be given consideration, including the prioritisation score, availability of funds and capacity for delivery. Council has adopted several strategic documents that must also be taken into consideration when preparing the Annual Infrastructure Program. Primarily these are the:

- Council Plan
- Financial Plan
- Asset Plan
- Register of Public Roads.

The 2025-2026 Annual Infrastructure Program has been developed in accordance with the following expenditure requirements of:

- Council funds totalling \$2.75 million.
- Federal Government Roads to Recovery (R2R) funding of \$3.82 million
- Caravan Park Reserve funding of \$0.1 million

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

Attachment 1 summarises the proposed program of works planned for delivery in 2025-2026. A detailed program can be found in Attachment 2. Attachment 3 is a list of projects without estimates to provide further public detail without compromising council's commercial position in any procurement activities.

Council Funds

The draft budget and proposed expenditure includes Council expenditure of \$2,748,784 allocated to infrastructure projects.

Roads to Recovery

Council's Draft Budget had a proposed Roads to Recovery expenditure amount of \$2,507,112. Since the development of this budget, Council has been advised that the Roads to Recovery funding amount will be \$21,012,056 for the next five year funding period between 1 July 2024 and 30 June 2029. The yearly breakdown of this funding is as follows:

- 2024-25 - \$3,104,056
- 2025-26 - \$3,820,374
- 2026-27 - \$4,536,694
- 2027-28 - \$4,775,467
- 2028-29 - \$4,775,467

The proposed expenditure in the draft Annual Infrastructure Program for 2025-26 is \$3,820,374 per the updated allocation.

Caravan Park Reserve

The draft budget does not include an allocation from the Caravan Park Reserve. This is increased to \$100,000 for the proposed program which is associated with making a transfer from the reserve to fund the Bridgewater Caravan Park Amenities refurbishment project in the Buildings program.

Taken together, this is an increase of \$1,413,262 compared to the expenditure allocated in the Draft Budget for the 2024-25 financial year.

Adoption of the annual infrastructure program will allow the Council to undertake the following:

- Local Road Gravel Resheet
Funding of \$1,263,415 has been proposed to resheet and/or treat approximately 20.29 km of the gravel road network.
- Local Road Shoulder Resheet
Funding of \$227,920 has been proposed to resheet approximately 11.2 km (length is inclusive of both sides) of the gravel shoulders.

- Local Road Reconstruction (LRC) – Asset Preservation
Funding of \$2,128,063 has been allocated for reconstruction projects on Wedderburn Junction Rd, Dunolly Inglewood Rd, Gladfield Rd, and Laanecoorie Newbridge Rd. In total 6.52km of roads will be reconstructed.
- Township Street Improvement (TSI)
Funding of \$375,402 has been proposed for five projects. This includes the renewal of footpaths in Pyramid Hill, Boort and Wedderburn, as well as an allocation to undertake ancillary works associated with the Safer Local Roads and Streets Program.
- Urban & Township Drainage
Funding of \$587,500 has been proposed for three projects. These projects are the upgrade of the Tantalla and Wilson St intersection and drainage in Wedderburn, an additional allocation for the Boort Flood Levee project, and an allocation which can be used as matched funding to allow Council officers to apply for grants for the Serpentine Flood Levy project.
- Local Bridges and Culverts
Funding of \$380,000 has been proposed for two projects including the replacement of a wooden bridge on Dunolly Orville Rd and an allocation to allow the Works team to undertake culvert replacements.
- Reseals
Funding of \$972,858 has been proposed for the 2025/26 reseal program. The final list of road segments is currently in development based on road condition data and inspection reports currently in progress.
- Parks & Gardens
Funding of \$100,000 has been allowed for Parks and Gardens projects. The Townscape team is currently finalising projects for this program which will be provided prior to the start of the 2025/26 financial year.
- Buildings
Funding of \$634,000 is allocated for five building projects. This includes an allocation to repair the roof at the Wedderburn Hall, an allocation to internally paint 4 x preschools, an allocation to restump part of the East Loddon Community Centre, an allocation to allow the demolition of the Pyramid Hill Maternal Child Health building, and an allocation to fund the refurbishment of the amenities block at the Bridgewater Caravan Park. The \$100,000 for the project to refurbishment of the amenities block at the Bridgewater Caravan Park will be funded from the Caravan Park Reserve.

COST/BENEFITS

The Annual Infrastructure Program is a significant part of Council's annual expenditure. The current proposed program totals \$6,669,158. The benefit of the proposed expenditure is that it will allow Council to maintain safe public infrastructure and decrease annual liability over all asset classes. Better roads, better public facilities and improved bridges are the key outcomes of the proposed Program, which aligns with the strategic objective of "A sustainable built and natural environment" as stipulated in Council Plan 2021–2025.

While this expenditure is significant, Council should note that Council's Asset Plan 2022 indicates a \$22 million asset renewal gap. The increased Roads to Recovery funding will reduce this gap and the impact will be assessed as part of renewing the Asset Plan latter this year.

RISK ANALYSIS

One of the risks identified with the proposed program is cost overrun. The estimated cost of each project has been evaluated based on current unit rates with an adjustment for anticipated price inflation, industry practice, and contingencies. The likelihood of the risk is possible and this consequence is minor as per Council's risk matrix. The risk is thus deemed to be medium. This risk is offset by the large amount of grant funding that Council has received through a number of funding streams.

The other risk identified is the delay in delivering projects. The likelihood of this risk is possible and the consequence is minor as per Council's risk matrix. The risk is thus deemed to be medium. This risk is mitigated by allocating additional projects across Council's Works Department or Project Team for delivery depending on the progress of each group. For example, one of the local road construction projects, which are typically delivered by the Works Department, could be tendered out to a local contractor by the Project Team. This program list excludes projects identified from Community Planning or new external funding sources. Additions to the program could increase the risk rating of delivery.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

The program has been developed in consultation with Council staff, in particular the Assets & Infrastructure Department, the Works Department, the Community Support Department, and the Finance Department. Other stakeholders and community members make contributions to the rolling program throughout the year via works requests and onsite meetings and visits conducted by staff.

RESOLUTION 2025/37

Moved: Cr Nick Angelo
Seconded: Cr Gavan Holt

That Council:

1. Adopt the proposed expenditure amounts as listed in Attachment 1 for the following works categories:
 - Local Road Gravel Resheet
 - Local Road Shoulder Resheet
 - Local Road Construction – Asset Preservation
 - Local Road Construction – Amenity
 - Local Road Construction – Safety
 - Township Street Improvements
 - Urban & Township Drainage
 - Local Bridges & Culverts
 - Road Reseals
 - Parks and Gardens
 - Buildings
2. Note the projects included in the various works categories as detailed in Attachment 2 - Detailed Program and Attachment 3 - Detailed Program without estimates.

CARRIED

10.9 EMERGENCY SERVICES AND VOLUNTEERS FUND LEVY**File Number:****Author:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Authoriser:** Lincoln Fitzgerald, Chief Executive Officer**Attachments:** 1. FSPL vs Estimated ESVF - March 2025**RECOMMENDATION**

That Council

1. Notes the significant negative financial impacts that will occur in the Loddon Shire community, most notably the farming and business sectors, should the State Government introduce the current proposed Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Levy.
2. Notes that, as Councils are currently expected to implement this levy through the Council Rates Notice process and that it is highly likely that Council will be criticised for the significant levy charge which is entirely passed on to the State Government.
3. Notes that, the implementation date for this additional State Government levy is 1 July 2025 and, to-date, there is no clarity about what Councils must do to manage and implement this process.
4. Notes that, while the levy was announced in December 2024 that the new Emergency Services Volunteer Levy will be implemented on 1 July 2025, the required legislation to enact it is currently in the Victorian Legislative Assembly (Lower House) and therefore, the opportunity to pursue changes exists.
5. Directs the CEO to write to the Victorian Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Emergency Services, Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Treasurer and local Victorian Parliamentary representatives to advise that Loddon Shire Council:
 - a. Objects to the proposed introduction of the Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Levy in its current form, due to the significant impacts it will have on the Shire's farming, commercial and industrial sectors.
 - b. Believes that any State Government levy should be administered in full by the State Revenue Office, and that Local Government should not be required to have any part in its collection.
 - c. Requests that, notwithstanding the above position, should the State Government choose to proceed with introducing this new levy and require Local Government Authorities to administer it, then:
 - i. A realistic timeline for its implementation be negotiated with the Local Government sector, and
 - ii. Initial and ongoing funding support for its administration be provided, in full, to Local Government Authorities.
6. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor to continue to strongly advocate on behalf of the Council and community on this issue.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest for any Council staff member involved in the preparation of this report, or involved in the subject matter of the report.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DISCUSSION

Council have discussed this new levy during General Business of previous Council Briefings.

BACKGROUND

On 13 December 2024, the Premier, the Honourable Jacinta Allan MP, announced that the existing Fire Services Property Levy (FSPL) will be replaced, as of 1 July 2025, with an Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) levy.

According to the Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) website, the current FSPL has been in place since 2013 and was originally introduced because of the Bushfire Royal Commission. DTF states that:

The levy ensures that Victorian property owners make an annual contribution to the State's fire services. Revenue raised by the FSPL funds 87.5 per cent of Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and 77.5 per cent of the Country Fire Authority's (CFA) annual budget.

In accordance with the associated State Government legislation (the Fire Services Property Levy Act 2012), all Victorian Councils are required to collect the FSPL (a State Government property-based tax) and this is done through each Council's Rates Notice process.

This tax, which is required to be passed on in full to the State Government, is shown on Council Rates Notices as one of several line items that combine to make up the total rates bill due from a property owner. Consequently, it is a common incorrect perception that the FSPL is being collected by Council, for Council.

Further exacerbating this incorrect perception, is that Councils are obliged to use their own resources and processes to pursue any outstanding payments from property owners for the FSPL, and to charge interest on unpaid amounts.

The Premier's announcement in December expanded the proposed provisions of this tax through a revised scope that, again according to the DTF website, will now also include funding up to 95 per cent of the following budgets:

- Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES)
- Triple Zero Victoria
- State Control Centre
- Emergency Recovery Victoria
- Emergency Management Victoria
- Emergency Alert Program (automatic emergency warning SMSs)
- Emergency Management Operational Communication Program
- Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) and its support functions within the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

It appears from past State Government Budgets that most, if not all, of these entities are currently funded through other State taxes being collected in other ways. It is unclear though whether such other taxes have been reduced to reflect this change in collection mechanism.

ISSUES/DISCUSSION

The increase shown on a Council issued Rates Notice will substantially increase because of the State's new ESVF levy. Of great concern is the overall change in levy charged to the farming (primary production) community. Across Victoria the levy will rise from a state wide median liability of \$621 under the current Fire Services Levy to \$1,299 under the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund. A list of increases across all land categories can be found at the DTF website here: <https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/emergency-services-and-volunteers-fund>

Analysis of the impact upon Loddon Shire Council property owners is included in the Costs/benefits section of this report.

In addition to the significant increases that most sectors of our community will experience from the introduction of the ESVF, the additional burden on Council administration in managing, and enforcing, this new process is anticipated to be substantial. This burden will be carried across many parts of the organisation and will start in our Customer Service Team, due to an inevitable increase in angry and frustrated ratepayers who believe that the increases have come from Council. It will also impact on the I.T. department, as they will be required to undertake an, as yet, unknown level of I.T. system changes to accommodate this new process. The Rates department is also likely to be required to administer more financial hardship requests and to undertake more debt recovery activities, as these considerable increases take effect.

Many, if not ultimately all, of these changes will lead to additional costs being incurred by Council, with the impact further borne by ratepayers in the form of reduced available funds to do Council's own work.

There does not appear to be a Regulatory Impact Statement completed by the State Government to clarify or quantify the work required to establish and implement this new levy. Irrespective, the ability to put in place the required changes and to be assured that they are working correctly in 79 Councils by 1 July 2025 is a concern.

There is a common view in Local Government that, the ESVF being a State tax, should be administered directly by the State Government (and hence removed from Council Rate Notices). The State Government has its own mechanism for collecting this tax in the form of the State Revenue Office. To date, there has been no rationale offered by the State Government as to why this should not occur.

While the Premier has issued a statement in December 2024 that the new Emergency Services Volunteer Levy will be implemented on 1 July 2025, the required legislation to enact it is currently in the Victorian Legislative Assembly (Lower House) and therefore, the opportunity to pursue changes exists.

It is proposed that a letter be sent to the Victorian Premier, Treasurer, Minister for Emergency Services, Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Treasurer, to highlight each of these concerns and to request that further work be done to properly understand the implications of this proposed new State levy on rural and regional communities, before a decision is made on its introduction.

COST/BENEFITS

There are significant cost implications which will largely be borne by farming properties. This levy will increase income to the Victorian government to fund services which have traditionally been funded from other taxation income. It is unclear if there will be a subsequent decrease in other taxation. Given recent media announcements and the Victorian government's response to the flood inquiry which allocates significant additional spending it is expected that this income has already been announced and allocated to new ongoing operational expenses of the Victorian government.

For the property owner there will be a significant increase in this change from Fire Services Levy to the Emergency Services and Volunteer Fund with increased levy amounts. Extrapolating the 2024/25 assessment numbers three models have been generated. These are that the capital improved value of properties will grow by 0%, 3% and 5%. As a result the following levy will be collected by Council and provided in full to the Victorian government:

Land Category	Current FSL 2024/25	0% CIV Growth	3% CIV Growth	5% CIV Growth
Residential	\$656,647	\$770,570	\$776,685	\$780,762
Commercial	\$66,424	\$100,439	\$102,409	\$103,723
Industrial	\$98,580	\$135,444	\$138,166	\$139,981
Primary Production	\$1,590,166	\$3,826,711	\$3,928,629	\$3,996,574
Public Benefit	\$36,243	\$37,404	37,458	\$37,494
Vacant	\$6,872	-	-	-
Total	\$2,454,933	\$4,870,569 + 150%	\$4,983,348 + 163%	\$5,058,533 + 172%

A detailed breakdown is provided in the attachment to this report.

Loddon Shire currently collects a small administration fee to support collection of the Fire Services Levy. This fee is insufficient to meet the costs of administering the levy.

There will be capital IT costs associated with this change. Council is unable to define this cost due to the lack of information about the requirements of the levy to inform our service provider and have the system changes developed.

RISK ANALYSIS

While ultimately Council has no authority over the State Government's decision on the ESVF levy, it is suggested that the adoption of a position by Council, and the attempt to influence the legislators through the letters proposed, is a meaningful response and supports communication of the impact the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund is likely to have on property owners.

There is a risk that Council is unable to administer this change at 1 July due to the lack of information provided by the Victorian government and the system changes required.

CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT

Council was informed of the levy and has not been consulted by the Victorian Government in their design or application of the levy.

This report was developed from information collected from the Department of Treasury and Finance, Municipal Association of Victoria, Rural Councils Victoria and discussions with other local government CEOs.

RESOLUTION 2025/38

Moved: Cr Miki Wilson

Seconded: Cr David Weaver

That Council

1. Notes the significant negative financial impacts that will occur in the Loddon Shire community, most notably the farming and business sectors, should the State Government introduce the current proposed Emergency Services Volunteer Fund Levy.
2. Notes that, as Councils are currently expected to implement this levy through the Council Rates Notice process and that it is highly likely that Council will be criticised for the significant levy charge which is entirely passed on to the State Government.
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 - i. A realistic timeline for its implementation be negotiated with the Local Government sector, and
 - ii. Initial and ongoing funding support for its administration be provided, in full, to Local Government Authorities.
6. Authorise the Chief Executive Officer and the Mayor to continue to strongly advocate on behalf of the Council and community on this issue.

CARRIED

11 INFORMATION REPORTS

Nil

12 COMPLIANCE REPORTS

Nil

13 URGENT BUSINESS

Nil

14 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

Nil

NEXT MEETING

The next Meeting of Council will be held on 22 April 2025 at Wedderburn commencing at 3.00pm.

There being no further business the meeting was closed at 4.24pm.

Confirmed this.....day of..... 2025

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CHAIRPERSON