

Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy 2025 - 2029



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Loddon Shire Council Acknowledgement of Country and Partnership Statement

Loddon Shire Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land comprising the Loddon Shire Council area. Council would like to pay respect to their Elders both past and present. Council also recognises the many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members across the Shire who make up the vibrant communities to which our organisation provides services.

Loddon Shire Council is committed to working in partnership with the Traditional Custodians and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and groups in the region.

Council recognises these Traditional Custodians as the rights holders of the land and water, not just stakeholders. We value their knowledge, culture, and aspirations, and seek to support them in achieving their goals.

Loddon Shire Council is proud to support the Recognition and Land Use Agreement process with the Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation. This process aims to recognise the rights and interests of the Dja Dja Wurrung people in the land and water, and to establish a framework for joint management of natural and cultural resources. We support the journey to self-determination for Djaara people and acknowledge their contribution to the environmental and economic wellbeing of the region.

Loddon Shire Council recognises the scope of the project and opportunity that the Recognition and Land Use Agreement presents for the Shire and its communities. We see this as a chance to strengthen our relationship with the Traditional Custodians, to learn from their wisdom and experience, and to collaborate on initiatives that benefit both parties. We are open to exploring new and innovative ways of working together, such as co-design, co-delivery, and co-evaluation of programs and services.

Loddon Shire Council supports the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises in the region, and the opportunities they could take up in various sectors, such as tourism, agriculture, forestry, arts, and education. We are keen to facilitate the growth and sustainability of these enterprises in the local economy, and to promote their products and services to the wider market. We believe that these enterprises can enhance the diversity and resilience of the local economy and create employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Loddon Shire Council aligns its policies and strategies with the principles and objectives of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Council is guided by the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, the Victorian Aboriginal Economic Strategy, the Victorian Forest Policy, and other relevant policies and plans.

Loddon Shire Council is keen to build a relationship with Traditional Custodians and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and groups to inform its key initiatives for economic development.

The principle of 'walking together' underpins the approach that Council seeks to take in building a relationship and building momentum for positive regional economic development outcomes.

Council believes future economic development initiatives can be enhanced and enriched by the involvement and participation of the Traditional Custodians and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and groups, and that they will create mutual benefits for all.

Executive Summary

Purpose

Economic development aims to increase the economic capacity of an area, which, in turn, seeks to improve the wellbeing of local communities. An economic development strategy provides a framework for the future growth and prosperity of a particular region.

Loddon Shire Council is committed to working toward realising the community's vision for a Loddon where everyone has the opportunity to live, work and thrive.

The Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy 2025-2029 (Strategy) outlines a comprehensive plan to foster economic growth and resilience in the region.

Strategy Development

This Strategy is the product of a suite of work including the *Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy 2025-2029: Strategic Directions Paper* and a range of stakeholder engagement activities. Engagement activities involved Township representatives, industry leaders, elected members of Loddon Council, Loddon Leaders (Council management),

The Strategy, identification of economic objectives, and priority actions has been developed with the support of the nominated Project Advisory Group, which consists of industry leaders and Loddon Council project team.

The Strategy prioritises several objectives, including optimising the agricultural sector, promoting housing development as a catalyst for growth, positioning the Council as a collaborative partner, enhancing community liability, and fostering innovative and diverse industries.

Implementation

The Strategy includes an implementation plan detailing activities and initiatives to be undertaken that focus on achieving the outlined strategic objectives, contributing to a sustainable and prosperous future for Loddon Shire. The implementation plan includes some recommended projects, the delivery of which may be subject to third party funding.

Review and reporting of Council's progress in implementing the Strategy is essential not only to monitor progress but to ensure key priority areas remain relevant as Council work toward achieving the community's economic aspirations.



Optimised Agricultural Sector

An optimised agricultural sector that promotes collaboration and innovation among producers, enhancing productivity, resilience, market responsiveness, and the region's capacity to attract investment, new businesses, and talent.



Housing: A catalyst for growth

A diverse and sustainable housing supply which supports economic growth by attracting and retaining residents and workers, while strengthening existing townships.



Council: An advocating & collaborative partner

Council actions that foster a growing and prosperous Loddon Shire by collaborating with businesses and industry partners, and government entities to attract investment, and promote sustainable economic growth and job creation.



Liveable & Resilient Communities

Loddon will be known for its lifestyle and opportunities, offering equitable access to services and employment, celebrated through a strong regional identity that attracts people and investment, comprised of townships that foster a sense of place and culture.



Innovative & Diverse Industries

A diverse and innovative industry base that has capabilities to respond to emerging industry, economic and policy trends, leveraging regional supply chain opportunities while value adding to the local economy.



Loddon Shire

Overview

Loddon Shire is situated 200km north of Melbourne, close to the major town centres of Bendigo, Kerang and Echuca. Home to almost 7,800 residents, the Shire spans 6,700 km², featuring rolling hills, forests, granite outcrops, premium agricultural land, and the Loddon River, which services industry, people, tourism, and lifestyle.

The Shire is a 'community of communities', comprising many small towns including Bridgewater, Inglewood, Wedderburn, Korong Vale, Dingee, Mitiamo, Serpentine, Newbridge, Tarnagulla, Laanecoorie, Eddington, Boort, Pyramid Hill and other surrounding towns and communities.

Key infrastructure includes the Calder Highway and South West Loddon Pipeline, which provides a reliable water supply for agricultural activities and potential future business ventures.

Major employers in Loddon Shire include Laucke Flour Mills, Hazeldene's Chicken Farms, Boundary Bend Olives, Water Wheel Vineyards, Southern Riverlands Poultry, Southern Stockfeeds, ASQ Allstone Quarries, Cobram Estate Olives, George Weston Foods, Corian Park Earth Moving and Kia-Ora Piggery.

Agriculture is the Shire's primary industry, accounting for half of all employment and economic output and almost three-quarters of all regional exports. Activities include dairy, horticulture, viticulture, cropping, lamb and intensive poultry and pig farming. An increasing number of agriculture producers are investing in intensive production facilities for pigs and chickens.

Loddon Shire's economy and workforce benefit from neighbouring municipalities like Gannawarra, Campaspe, Buloke, and Northern Grampians. Greater Bendigo, the major regional centre, provides employment for one in five Loddon Shire residents.

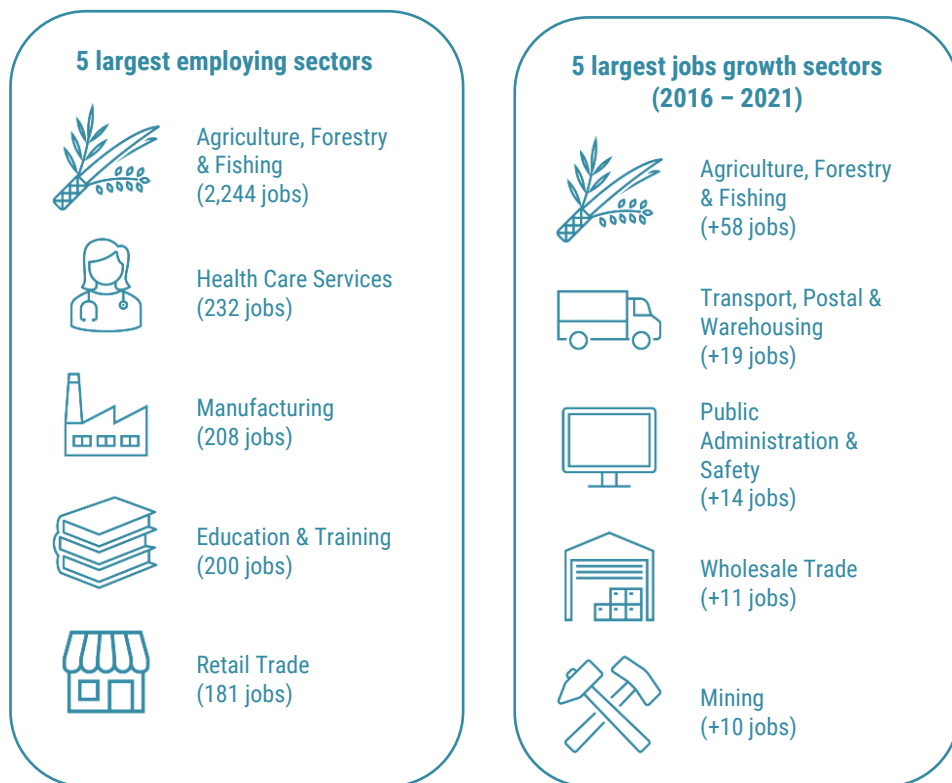
As surrounding economies diversify, so too does demand for goods and services, providing various opportunities for Loddon industries, provided there is an adequate workforce and housing. Increased investment in neighbouring regions, such as the establishment of the Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct (BREP), Marong, presents significant value-add opportunities for Loddon's primary production and agriculture.



Economic Context

Loddon Shire's gross regional product (GRP) is estimated at \$586.7 million, supporting an estimated 2,770 jobs. Employment is concentrated in the five largest industries (agriculture, health care, manufacturing, education and retail), which employs three quarters of Loddon's workforce. Agriculture accounts for almost half of all economic activity and local jobs.

Between 2016 and 2021, jobs growth was concentrated in agriculture, and transport and warehousing, reflecting the Shire's primary industries and strategic location in terms of logistics and transportation.



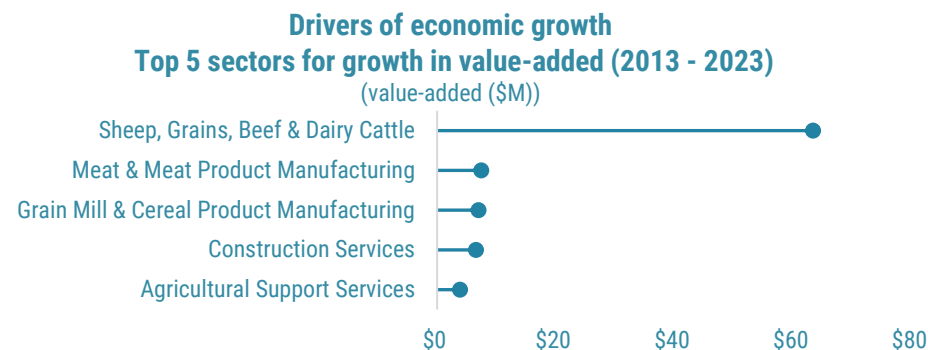
Note: Economic context data sourced from REMPLAN Economy.

Local expenditure within Loddon is estimated to be \$221.8 million and reflects local industry demand for locally sourced inputs into production. More than half of this local expenditure is generated by the agriculture sector.

When local industries with strong links to local business expand, so too do the local supply chains. Sectors with the highest ratio of local spend compared revenue include meat production, grain milling, building construction and agricultural services. For every \$1.00 of gross revenue generated by the Meat & Meat Product Manufacturing sector, \$0.63 is spent on local inputs into production.



Change in value-added (a major component of GRP) highlights sectors which are key drivers of economic growth. Much of Loddon's economic growth over the past decade has been in sectors associated with agriculture, food manufacturing and trades (construction services).



Economic Opportunities

Loddon's natural endowments and strong economic foundations present a range of opportunities for economic growth. By capitalising on these opportunities, the Shire can attract investment in new-age industry and technology, and high-value workers to the region.

Agriculture

Agriculture and food production continue to be an inherent comparative advantage of the Loddon Shire's economy due to an abundance of productive land and water assets. The region also has created economic strengths by investing in infrastructure that connects local producers to nearby key markets, processors, and national distributors.

The agricultural sector continues to grow and with significant investment into expansion of intensive agricultural production and establishment of value adding processes, in addition to diversification into energy production and carbon capture.

Housing

Housing supply and diversity facilitate population growth, and workforce attraction and retention. This, in turn, enables businesses to access the talent they require to operate and grow, making housing supply intrinsically linked to economic growth.

A continual focus on housing availability influences local investment, as residents generate demand for local goods and services. Sufficient housing supply also contributes to resident stability, allowing people to establish roots in the community, creating a vibrant environment for current and future residents.

Renewables

Energy is a key consideration for the longer-term planning of businesses and households. Renewable energy contributes to Australia's Net Zero targets and enhances the competitive advantage of regional economies and local businesses. Loddon Shire, with its abundant sunshine and open spaces, is well-suited for renewable energy production.

Businesses in the Loddon Shire are investing in various forms of renewable energy, from traditional solar and wind infrastructure to advanced bioenergy production. These investments attract new capital and high-valued jobs to the region.

Industry Trends

Industry 4.0 has revolutionised traditional primary production industries through digital technology, enabling businesses to increase their productivity, improve process efficiency through automation, and diversify revenue streams with new products. Embracing these innovations across these major economic opportunities positions Loddon Shire as a leader in modern, sustainable industry practices.

In the agriculture and food production sector, investments in technology are driving diversification into new, circular economy products like biofuels and fertilisers, and risk mitigation infrastructure to protect against disasters such as flooding and energy insecurity. By integrating these emerging technologies, Loddon Shire is ensuring long-term economic resilience and growth.



A photograph of a woman sitting at a bar in a cafe. The bar is made of wood and has a red toy train on it. There are several wooden stools in front of the bar. The background shows a window with a view of a street with a white truck and an orange car. The image has a green overlay on the left side.

Economic Development Strategy in Context

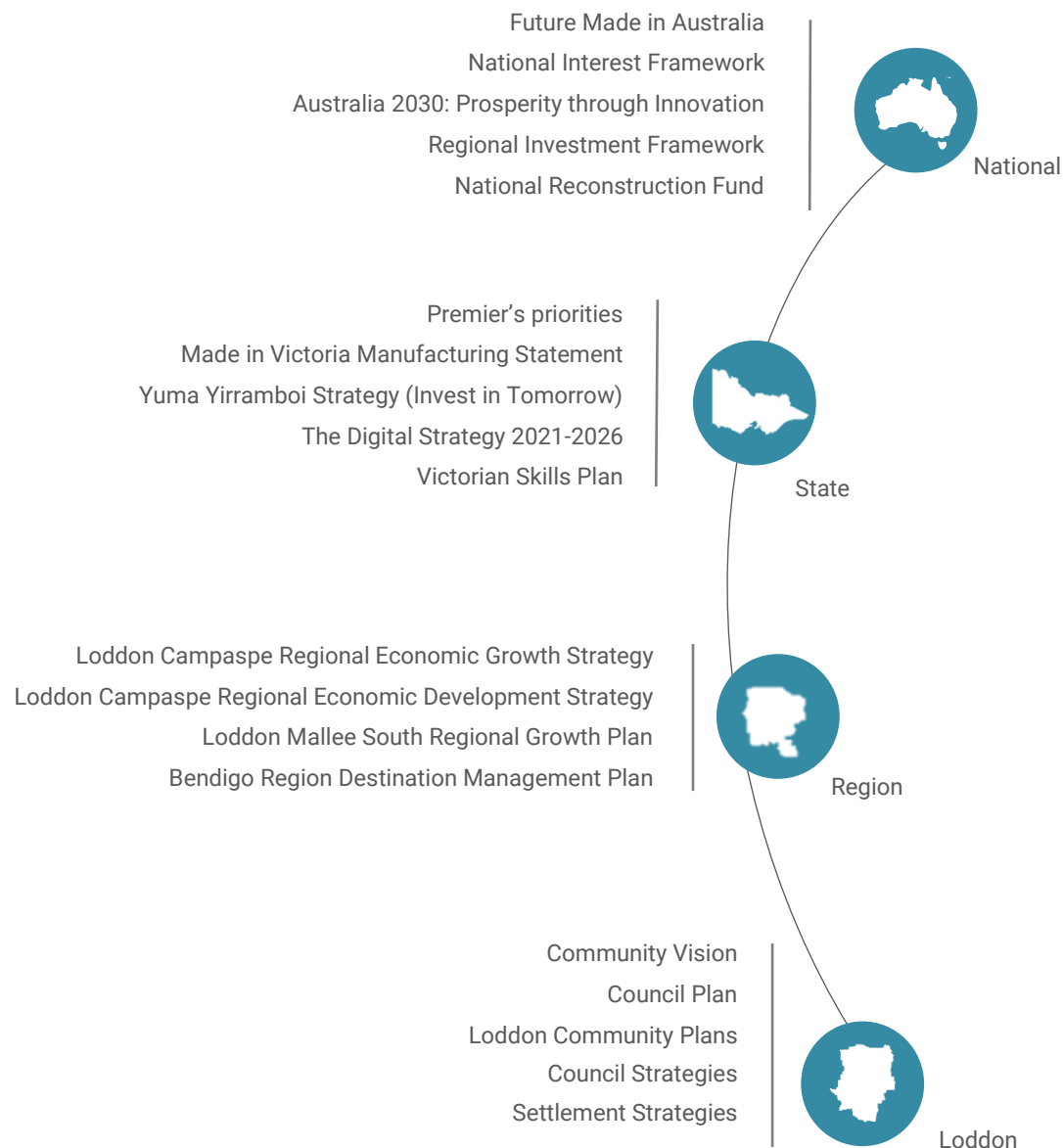
Policy Context

Economic development in local government forms part of a broader strategic and legislative framework that guides and regulates local government actions. The Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy (EDS) fits within a hierarchy of government priorities that influence changes in legislation, policies, strategies, and initiatives. As priorities of other levels of government change, the response at a local level must adapt accordingly, while still maintaining a clear line of sight our local aspirations.

Economic development in local government plays an important role in collaboration with local partners to promote the interests of the region, while the Victorian Government and Australian Government play significant roles in progressing economic development at broader regional and national scales.

At a regional level, Loddon Shire forms part of the Loddon Campaspe economic region, which is a sub-region within the broader Loddon Mallee region in Victoria. It encompasses several local government areas, including the City of Greater Bendigo, Mount Alexander Shire, Central Goldfields Shire, Macedon Ranges Shire and Loddon Shire.

While national, state and regional strategies, such as the Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS), provide overarching direction, it is at the local level that actions specific to the Loddon Shire are identified. Understanding Loddon Shires' role in the wider region and contributing to regional outcomes is critical in realising local opportunities.



Economic Development in Local Government

Local economic development aims to increase the economic capacity of a local area which, in turn, improves the well-being of local communities. In this way, economic development is ultimately about progressing outcomes that benefit the local community.

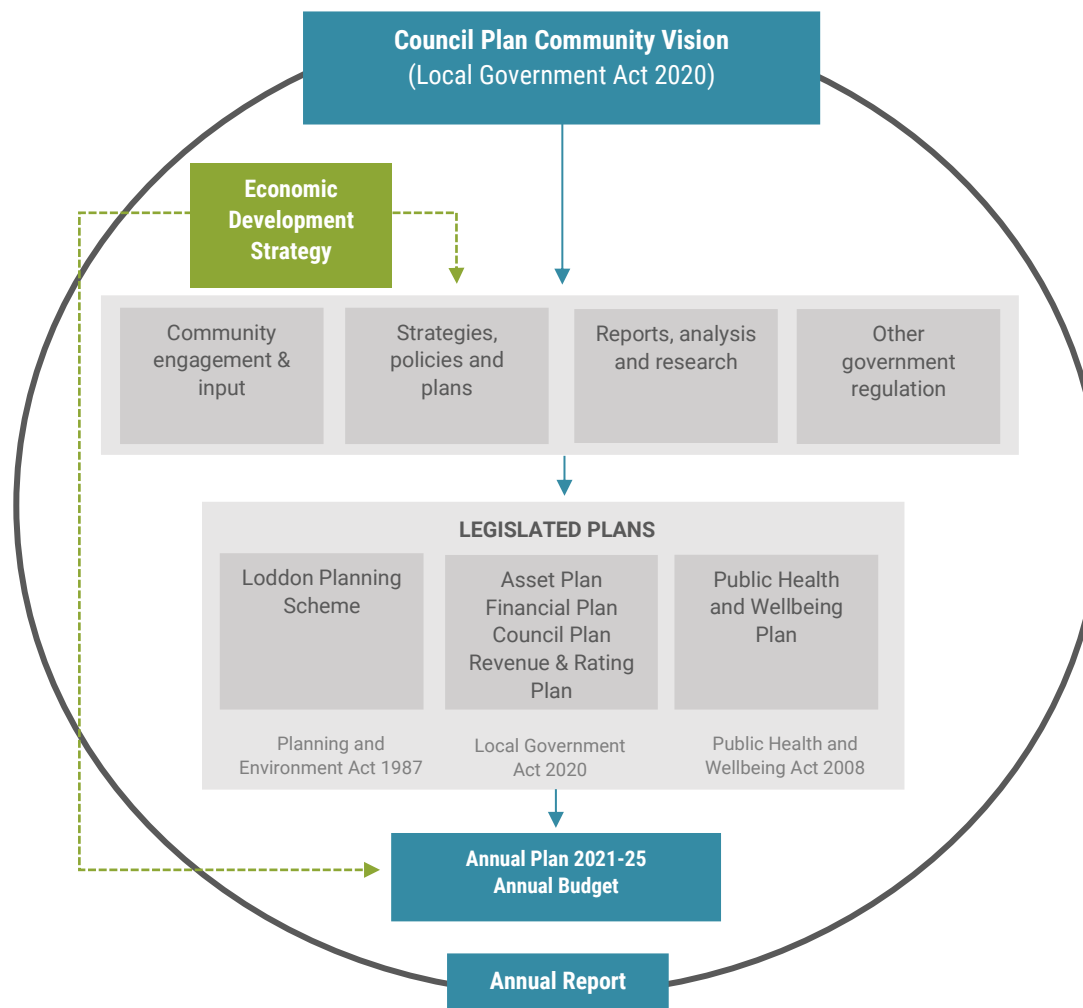
The Economic Development Strategy (EDS) is one of the strategies that is formally adopted by Loddon Shire Council which aligns with engagement activities and priorities identified in the Loddon Shire Council Plan (2021-2025).

The Local Government Act 2020 defines the powers and responsibilities of local government in Victoria. In fulfilling its role, Council adheres to a set of overarching governance and supporting principles. These principles are designed to ensure the best long-term outcomes for the municipal community.

In summary, the development of strategic plans is a crucial part of the planning framework that guides Council's plans and resources, outlining how they aim to achieve agreed community objectives. The adjacent figure illustrates how an EDS informs the Council's long-term direction while guiding annual planning and resource allocation.

The EDS outlines Loddon Shire Council's vision, commitment, strategic directions, and key actions for the next 4 years. While this is a 4-year strategy, the outcomes will be driven by intentional prioritisation and capacity, annual action plans and funding availability.

Loddon Shire planning and reporting framework



The role of Council in Economic Development

The private sector is the primary driver of economic development through investment, business growth and local employment.

Work within the control of Council includes investment attraction and business development, infrastructure projects, land development, strategic planning, localised data provision, marketing and advocacy.

Loddon Shire Council has an important role to play by creating suitable conditions for positive economic development outcomes through its core economic development functions.

Repeatedly through engagement activities undertaken as part of the preparation of this Economic Development Strategy, participants indicated Council is most effective in 'Facilitation', 'Planning' and 'Investment Attraction' as a means to achieve local economic development outcomes.

Council's core functions and their relationship to economic development



Facilitation

- Marketing and incentives.
- Fostering partnerships.
- Establishing local regulation.



Planning

Aligning economic development vision to local and regional plans | land use planning.



Investment Attraction

Creating an environment that catalyses investor interest.



Investigation

Completing due diligence, feasibilities, and de-risking for future investment.



Advocacy

Promotion of regional interests to other levels of government and decision makers.



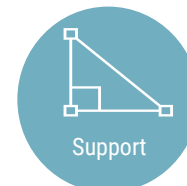
Service Provision

Traditional or new services to support economic development.



Lead

- Leading or delivering projects and initiatives.
- Playing a lead role in activities delivered by others.



Support

Supporting initiatives that are led by other organisations.



Information Provision

Providing information to business and community.

The role of the Economic Development Strategy

The Community Vision 2031 and Council Plan 2021-2025 reflect the Council's commitment to listen to the community's vision for the future and deliver a progressive and future-focussed plan that will see the Shire continue to grow and prosper. Building on the foundations of the Loddon Shire Community Vision, the Economic Development Strategy enacts Council strategies to achieve the economic objective.

Loddon Shire Community Vision: *'A community where everyone is welcome and has the opportunity to live, work, and thrive'*

Four themes captured community concerns and aspirations:



A sustainable built and natural environment



A growing vibrant community



A diverse and expanding economy



A supported and accessible community

Loddon Shire Council Plan (Council's goal): *'Loddon will be a resilient, sustainable and prosperous community of communities'*

Strategic Objective:

3.2 We will support established businesses and seek to attract new businesses to grow our local economy.

3.2.1 Provide support for economic development opportunities in the Shire

3.2.2 Increase the volume and value of the local economy

Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy 2025-2029

The Strategy



The Economic Vision

Over 2020 and 2021 Council delivered a major community engagement project, The Loddon Project, the outcome of which was to develop our Community Vision and Council Plan (2021), which are integral documents in our strategic planning framework. The Loddon Project was designed to develop Council's strategic direction. The engagement process identified four themes which are to serve as priority areas of focus for Council, one of the themes being "A diverse and expanding economy".

The expansion of the economic theme to become Loddon Shire's economic vision attempts to reflect the values, objectives and aspirations of the people of Loddon Shire and is the foundation for the preparation of the economic development strategy.

The economic vision, as determined through the Loddon Project (2021), for Loddon Shire is:



A diverse and expanding economy

Loddon will have a growing and sustainable economy that supports established and new businesses, has a skilled workforce and attracts business, industry, and people to our area.

Strategic Objectives

Five strategic directions were identified as areas of focus for Council's economic development efforts following a review of key strategy and policy documents, in conjunction with, a series of engagement sessions with Council members, Council executive and senior staff, the nominated Project Advisory Group, Regional Development Victoria, local business leaders and First Nation representatives.

Following development of the Economic Development Strategy Strategic Directions Paper, further stakeholder engagement was undertaken to identify objectives and actions to provide clear direction for implementation of the strategy and focus Council efforts to unlock opportunities.

Loddon Shire Strategic Objectives



Optimised Agricultural Sector

An optimised agricultural sector that promotes collaboration and innovation among producers, enhancing productivity, resilience, market responsiveness, and the region's capacity to attract investment, new businesses, and talent.



Housing: A catalyst for growth

A diverse and sustainable housing supply which supports economic growth by attracting and retaining residents and workers, while strengthening existing townships.



Council: An advocating & collaborative partner

Council actions that foster a growing and prosperous Loddon Shire by collaborating with businesses and industry partners, and government entities to attract investment, and promote sustainable economic growth and job creation.



Liveable & Resilient Communities

Loddon will be known for its lifestyle and opportunities, offering equitable access to services and employment, celebrated through a strong regional identity that attracts people and investment, comprised of townships that foster a sense of place and culture.



Innovative & Diverse Industries

A diverse and innovative industry base that has capabilities to respond to emerging industry, economic and policy trends, leveraging regional supply chain opportunities while value adding to the local economy.

Loddon Economic Development Strategy Overview

Economic Vision

A diverse and expanding economy: Loddon will have a growing and sustainable economy that supports established and new businesses, has a skilled workforce and attracts business, industry, and people to our area.

Council Commitment

Deliver: Council will deliver initiatives and priorities in pursuit of our objectives.
Collaborate: Council will partner with stakeholders and community groups to pursue and deliver priorities that are aligned to our objectives
Facilitate: Council will assist others to pursue and deliver their priorities that are aligned to our objectives.
Advocate: Council will communicate our community's interests and priorities to government and other decision makers that are aligned with our objectives.

Strategic Objectives

Optimised Agricultural Sector

Housing: A catalyst for growth

Council: An advocating & collaborative partner

Liveable & Resilient Communities

Innovative & Diverse Industries

Strategic Priorities



An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there is a large, rectangular field with a grid-like pattern of small, dark spots, possibly a plantation or a field of young trees. To the right of this field is a large, open green field. In the middle ground, there is a residential area with many houses and buildings. In the background, there is a large body of water, possibly a lake or a reservoir, surrounded by more land. The sky is clear and blue.

Detailed Objectives and Priorities

Optimised Agricultural Sector

Objective

An optimised agricultural sector that promotes collaboration and innovation among producers, enhancing productivity, resilience, market responsiveness, and the region's capacity to attract investment, new businesses, and talent.

An optimised agricultural sector connects producers, fostering collaboration and the exchange of innovative farm and land management practices. Adoption of innovative techniques and business practices will boost productivity in Loddon's most important industry sector. An optimised agricultural sector demonstrates resilience to economic and environmental change and agility in market responsiveness while showcasing Loddon's capacity to service supply chain demands and attract investment, new businesses, and talent.

Challenges and opportunities

Agriculture and food product manufacturing are cornerstones of Loddon Shire's economy. Vast productive land and access to water has allowed agriculture to flourish. While the integral role of agriculture in Loddon's economy presents certain risks, it also highlights the region's inherent comparative advantage.

The agriculture sector faces challenges such as climate change impacts, water security issues, and more frequent flooding events. Additionally, inadequate housing supply and poor mobile connectivity constrains business growth and technology adoption.

Loddon Shire boasts a skilled agricultural workforce, fertile land, the South West Loddon Pipeline, and the Loddon River. These assets, along with extensive irrigation infrastructure, support a high-quality water supply with proximity to value-adding processors.

Opportunities include modernising agriculture enterprises, partnering with First Nations groups for land management, investing in water security and flood mitigation, and improving road and telecommunications infrastructure to support logistics and technology adoption.

Priorities

Partnerships

- Support self-determination for First Nations businesses through closer working relationships for land management practices and food production opportunities which leverage natural endowments.
- Work with producers and supply chain businesses to strengthen networks, identify clusters, share information, and assist in the identification of supply chain gaps and local supply chain capacity.

Sustained water security

- Enhance strategic oversight and application of water reform policy to improve the economic, environmental and social outcomes for irrigators, upstream and downstream businesses, and local communities.
- Realise the benefits associated with the South West Loddon Pipeline, a critical water asset for Loddon, and assist industry in leveraging the associated opportunities. Further leverage opportunities associated with the South West Loddon Pipeline to deliver diversification and intensification of agriculture, further securing the future for local supply chains and communities.

Advocacy

- Continue to advocate for improved digital and logistical connectivity. Improved digital connectivity is vital for increased uptake of technology driven innovation in agriculture.

Housing to support skills attraction and retention

- Improve housing supply and worker accommodation options to support the workforce expansion requirements of local business. Housing options within proximity to townships and agricultural enterprises attracts workers by offering reduced commute times and access to essential services.

Housing: A catalyst for growth

Objective

A diverse and sustainable housing supply which supports economic growth by attracting and retaining residents and workers, while strengthening existing townships.

Housing supply acts as a catalyst for economic growth by attracting and retaining residents and workers whilst building on existing vibrant communities. A housing supply that delivers a diversity of housing and accommodation stock that meets worker accommodation needs, desired quality and builds on Loddon's lifestyle, attracts new residents and accommodates residents of all life stages. A sustainable delivery of housing stock strengthens existing townships by leveraging existing services and infrastructure.

Challenges and opportunities

Housing availability and quality are crucial in shaping the attractiveness of regional towns, influencing decisions to relocate. This is particularly important in Loddon as migration (i.e. people relocating to the region) is the primary driver of population growth.

Population growth and workforce attraction are crucial for business expansion. While housing remains affordable in Loddon, the cost of development in the Shire is impeding the utilisation of available land and constraining growth in housing stock.

The primary issues impeding housing supply in Loddon include prohibitive infrastructure costs, higher building costs in regional areas, and low volume development opportunities. The existing poor supply of housing is limiting population growth, with migration being the main driver of workforce growth.

Loddon boasts several assets that can support housing development, such as affordability, demand, available land, community amenities, and established well-serviced townships such as like Wedderburn, Boort, and Inglewood.

There are several opportunities to enhance housing development, including state and federal grants, direct investment by the Council, extension of trunk infrastructure, reduction of development fees, and initiatives to support the provision of worker accommodation.

Priorities

Housing to support skills attraction and retention

- Establish housing targets within key townships to send a signal to the market that Council places a high value of residential development, and that there is demand and opportunity in priority settlements.
- Support infrastructure projects and settlement within Loddon's five key townships to improve and leverage existing infrastructure and builds the case for improved delivery of essential services.
- Investigate ways to release unoccupied dwellings onto the market in key townships.

Celebration of regional identity and opportunities

- Build on a strong regional identity and marketing product to showcase development, land and house sales to enhance the story that Loddon is a place of quality lifestyle and opportunity. Signal the economic growth potential and future job opportunities to help attract residential developers.

Advocacy

- Continue advocacy efforts for funding support for provision of infrastructure and land development to attract residential developments.

Partnerships

- Regional opportunities and demand for flexible worker accommodation options are understood and communicated to businesses reliant on housing employees to expand operations.
- Partner with private and public sector organisations to investigate best practice approach for Council to support housing development.

Council: An advocating & collaborative partner

Objective

Council actions that foster a growing and prosperous Loddon Shire by collaborating with businesses and industry partners, and government entities to attract investment, and promote sustainable economic growth and job creation.

Council is committed to working toward a Loddon Shire that is growing and prosperous through working with multiple regional and government partners. An advocating and collaborative partner will support local business, strengthen industry connections, enhance liveability, and ensure sustainable growth for the region. Delivery of economic development efforts will attract investment to support infrastructure projects, business growth, and job creation and lifestyle.

Challenges and opportunities

Effective council advocacy and investment attraction are crucial for fostering economic growth and community development in rural municipalities like Loddon Shire. By actively engaging with stakeholders and advocating for supportive policies and funding, Council can stimulate innovation, enhance liveability, and ensure sustainable growth for the region.

Loddon Shire is often seen as a pass-through municipality, facing higher costs, limited market access, and poor infrastructure, reducing its competitiveness. Successful local governments must identify, commission, and manage strategic partnerships to maximise value. Loddon Council manages extensive infrastructure with limited financial resources which constrains spending on growth-stimulating projects.

State and federal incentives for renewable energy projects within the Murray River Renewable Energy Zone can attract investment, benefiting local workers and supply chains. Organising events and developing a strong regional brand can attract residents, businesses, and visitors, enhancing tourism and celebrating unique local characteristics.

Priorities

Advocacy

- Advocate on behalf of Loddon residents and business to ensure challenges specific to Loddon and regional Australia are adequately considered, prioritised and resolved by other levels government.
- Prioritise projects and activities aimed at addressing local challenges to assist in efforts to secure funding, major project development and improve essential services.
- Adequate digital connectivity is vital for business and community viability. Continue to work with NBN Co, and telecommunications providers to deliver better network connectivity to improved productivity, public safety (e.g. natural disaster early warning), and environmental monitoring.

Housing to support skills attraction and retention

- By collaborating with private and public sector partners, the Council is exploring ways to increase housing supply, identify the most effective methods to facilitate housing development, and assess current constraints to determine the best actions the Council can take to address these challenges.

Business support

- Deliver an effective single point of contact of business and potential investors.
- Develop business networks to establish connections, information sharing and the opportunity to highlight achievements, celebrate the wins.

Celebration of regional identity and opportunities

- Establish a strong regional identity which celebrates, culture, lifestyle, industry, and opportunity in Loddon.
- Work to retain young workers in the region by showcasing industry leaders and innovative businesses to highlight employment and career progression opportunities in Loddon.

Liveable & Resilient Communities

Objective

Loddon will be known for its lifestyle and opportunities, offering equitable access to services and employment, celebrated through a strong regional identity that attracts people and investment, comprised of townships that foster a sense of place and culture.

Communities renowned for lifestyle and resilience, within a region comprised of equitable access to services and employment, residents who celebrate their strong regional identity, an identity that attracts residents, workers, visitors, and investment. Local townships feature public spaces which showcase unique local characteristics fostering a sense of place and culture.

Challenges and opportunities

Loddon Shire is a 'community of communities' - a great place to live, with diverse landscapes, vibrant communities, and rich natural endowments. Loddon Shire faces several challenges that impact its liveability, but it also has numerous opportunities and existing assets to leverage for community growth and development.

Challenges include a preference shift for population and investment towards large regional centres, continued flood recovery, limited access to aged care and child care services, climate change impacts, housing supply restrictions, social isolation, lack of place branding, poor digital connectivity, and disparity in social and economic disadvantage.

Loddon Shire benefits from an engaged community, established partnerships with key groups, a range of community networks, regular events, and natural assets like Lake Boort.

Opportunities for growth include fostering community-driven initiatives, building economic, social, and human capital, advocating for key service providers, investing in telecommunications infrastructure, collaborating with existing partnerships, supporting local events, and leveraging the unique insights of the Dja Dja Wurrung peoples.

Priorities

Advocacy

- Advocate to other levels of Government to highlight region-specific challenges and aim to secure improved outcomes for residents and business on key issues such as skills attraction, access to childcare services and digital connectivity.

Housing to support skills attraction and retention

- Progress housing developments that capitalise on Loddon's attractive lifestyle and the services available in key townships to encourage population growth and boost confidence among current residents about Loddon's future and the opportunities it will bring.

Celebration of regional identity and opportunities

- A strong regional identity that draws on the culture and character across Loddon attracts population, visitors, workers and fosters community and civic pride.
- Promotion of business and employment opportunities within Loddon helps to reinforce local opportunities to existing residents and workers - retaining younger workers and those workers that are unaware of career progression opportunities within Loddon.

Township activation

- Design, public amenity and placemaking to support townships and to facilitate activity, visitation and community connection and to encourage people to 'linger longer'.

Innovative & Diverse Industries

Objective

A diverse and innovative industry base that has capabilities to respond to emerging industry, economic and policy trends, leveraging regional supply chain opportunities while value adding to the local economy.

A diverse and innovative industry base that builds capacity and capability to attract investment and capitalise on opportunities for new technologies, productive ways of using resources and waste materials. Industry that is supported to ensure responsiveness to changes in policy, trade conditions, and emerging industry trends. A diverse industrial base that complements and builds on Loddon's strong agricultural foundations, natural endowments, connectivity and water infrastructure.

Challenges and opportunities

Loddon Shire aims to diversify its economy to enhance resilience, productivity, and sustainability. The region faces several challenges but also has opportunities to leverage its existing assets and emerging trends.

Embracing innovation and diversifying the industry base can improve economic resilience, productivity, environmental sustainability, and attract investment and skilled workers.

Challenges include poor digital connectivity, a highly concentrated economy dominated by agriculture, stagnant population due to limited housing, poor access to child and health care services, and constrained transmission network.

Existing assets include solar resources, available land for development, the South West Loddon Pipeline, the Murray Renewable Energy Zone, and membership in the Victorian Energy Collaboration.

Opportunities include diversifying the industrial base, promoting buy-local campaigns, leveraging the South West Loddon Pipeline, renewable energy opportunities and investing in adequate housing stock to support a growing workforce.

Priorities

Advocacy

- Advocate for state and federal renewable energy projects to leverage the significant opportunity for Loddon as part of the Murray River Renewable Energy Zone. Increased renewable energy activity attracts investment, creating new opportunities for local workers business.
- Collaborative efforts with regional stakeholders ensure the Victoria NSW Interconnector (VNI West) minimises impact on lifestyle and amenity while supporting growth in local power generation and renewables.

Economic Diversity

- Building on work already undertaken by Council, create circular economy opportunities to add value from waste materials - in particular agriculture byproduct into biomass. One of the key principles of circular economy is to build on existing resources and utilise what is already being generated within the local economy. In Loddon, this is agriculture byproduct.
- Support private sector investment into supply chain or value-adding processing to broaden the economy from its principal economic base.

Sustained water security

- Investigate how industry can further leverage the opportunities associated with the South West Loddon Pipeline through innovative and efficient use of water resources.
- Partner with Murray River Group of Councils to support water security advocacy efforts.

Housing to support skills attraction and retention

- Increase housing supply and offer innovative worker accommodation options in Loddon to demonstrate to the private sector that the region can cater for and absorb a growing workforce.
- Expand the diversity of housing options to help retain workers who might otherwise leave the region due to different life stage needs. Retaining a skilled workforce in Loddon strengthens the region's capacity to support industry diversification.

Implementation Plan



Action Plan

This Economic Development Strategy has been developed within Loddon Shire Council's existing strategic framework, the foundation of which is Loddon's community strategic plan, *Community Vision 2031 | Council Plan 2021-2025*.

This Action Plan outlines a range of focused actions for the 5-year period 2025-2029, relating to the identified strategic priorities which will be delivered within Loddon Shire Council's strategic framework. Delivering on these actions aims to achieve the five strategic objectives outlined in the Economic Development Strategy and fulfil Loddon Shire's economic vision.

Activities outlined in this Action Plan align with the following state, regional and local policies:

- Council Plan 2021-2025
- Settlement Strategy 2019-2034
- Settlement Strategy 2019-2034
- Loddon Community Plans
- Youth Strategy
- *DRAFT* Tourism Strategy 2025-2029
- *DRAFT* Loddon Social Infrastructure Strategy Childcare Feasibility Study
- Waste Management Strategy 2020-2030
- Loddon Campaspe Regional Economic Development Strategy
- Loddon Mallee South Regional Growth Plan
- Bendigo Region Destination Management Plan
- Regional Jobs and Infrastructure Fund
- Victorian Renewable Energy Target
- Victorian Skills Commissioner, Regional Skills Demand Profile for the Loddon Campaspe
- Made in Victoria Manufacturing Statement
- Yuma Yirramboi Strategy (Invest in Tomorrow)
- Victorian Skills Plan

Council's efforts in supporting economic development within Loddon includes a range of ongoing activities and project specific activities, both of which are outlined in the following pages. The delivery of certain project oriented actions may be subject to third party funding.

Implementation of the Economic Development Strategy requires ongoing monitoring and review which is an important task and will be embedded in the delivery of this Action Plan. Annual review of progress metrics and strategic priorities is crucial for Council to ensure that efforts remain aligned with achieving Loddon's economic vision. Council will invest in an annual review of economic development efforts to:

- undertake review and reporting of Council's progress against strategic outcomes and adopted key performance measures;
- consider strategic priorities to ensure short, medium and long term actions remain strongly aligned with the most current state and federal government policy and match community and business needs; and
- develop a transparent reporting mechanism to demonstrate the return on investment in economic development in terms of broader community benefits.

Ongoing Responsibilities

The following activities reflect the day-to-day function and role of the Economic Development Unit within Loddon Shire Council to supporting local business, marketing and promotions and planning and events. In addition to those listed below, a number of project oriented actions will become an ongoing responsibility once they have been established.

Economic Development Function	Activity
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparing research support documents, attending meetings and representing the Shire with government and potential new businesses • Work with regional partners to advocate for faster and more stable mobile and digital connectivity across the region. • Advocate to other decision makers to ensure the supply of adequate infrastructure to service the resident population and enable employment growth (such as affordable housing, health services, and education facilities).
Investment attraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concierge service / single point of contact for business and investors. • Developing newsletters, media, brochures and communiques • Presentations to business and community groups and stakeholders • Advice, referrals and printed materials • Manage sale, purchase and leasing of Council's vacant land, residential and industrial property. • Support projects which align with existing industrial and residential land zoning.
Grant applications support to business and community organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting businesses and community organisations with grant applications and liaison with State and Federal agencies
Industry support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to work with leaders in intensive agriculture and relevant industry supply chains to attract investment in intensive animal industries in an effort to leverage the economic foundations of Loddon and boost employment and output in the agricultural sector.
Business liaison and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing liaison with businesses and community groups involved in economic development • Provide supportive services for new, existing and expanding businesses, including staff "facilitators" for investors, partnering with businesses as opportunities arise, and investigating business support packages for businesses.
Tourism product support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support implementation of the Loddon Shire Tourism Strategy 2025-2029 • Facilitate emerging niche food and beverages businesses into an integrated artisan food network. • Support the Central Victorian Goldfields World Heritage Bid.
Skills attraction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support migration assistance activities to attract skilled workers to the region. • Support initiatives to improve employment opportunities for Loddon residents and employers.

Project Oriented Actions

The following actions represent project-focused activities that have been prioritised for the strategy timeframe (2025-2029). These actions have been selected to concentrate Council efforts and accelerate the achievement of the five economic objectives:

- Optimised Agricultural Sector.
- Housing: A catalyst for growth.
- Council: An advocating & collaborative partner.
- Liveable & Resilient Communities.
- Innovative & Diverse Industries.

The following actions have been identified as having the greatest priority and greatest impact on the Loddon economy within the capacity of the Loddon Shire Economic Development Unit and within the Strategy's timeframe.

Project oriented actions include detail for each initiative, Council role, potential partners, and timing.

The following acronyms have been adopted to describe action delivery partners:

- DET: Department of Education and Training.
- DET (VIC): Department of Education and Training.
- DEECA: Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action.
- DITRDCA: Dept. Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communication & the Arts.
- RAI: Regional Australia Institute.
- RDV: Regional Development Victoria.
- VPA: Victorian Planning Authority.
- VSA: Victorian Skills Authority.

The following timeframes has been allocated to each delivery:

- Short: undertaken in 2025.
- Medium: undertaken in 2-4 years.
- Long: undertaken in 2-5 years.

A number of project oriented actions will become an ongoing responsibility for the Economic Development Unit once the activity have been undertaken, this is indicated in the last column of each action table.





Optimised Agricultural Sector

Objective

An optimised agricultural sector that promotes collaboration and innovation among producers, enhancing productivity, resilience, market responsiveness, and the region's capacity to attract investment, new businesses, and talent.

Outcomes

- Increased value-added generated by agriculture and food product manufacturing
- Employment growth within agriculture and food product manufacturing
- Increased First Nations workforce participation

Actions	Council Role	Potential Partners	Timeframe	Ongoing
	Lead Partner Support		Short Medium Long	Following action completion
1. Optimised Agricultural Sector				
1.1. Establish and facilitate a local producer and supply chain network, to assist in knowledge sharing and the implantation of innovative farming practices.	Lead	-	Short	
1.2. Actively engage with Agriculture Victoria and Regional Development Victoria to investigate further leveraging the public benefit of the SW Pipeline. Actively engage with stakeholders to review farm business planning and how it relates to piped water as an asset.	Partner	RDV Agriculture Victoria	Short	
1.3. Partner with DEECA and Agriculture Victoria to ensure industry is positioned to respond to the risk of lower water allocations with best practice approaches.	Partner	DEECA Agriculture Victoria	Short	
1.4. Investigate and share industry trends and supply chain opportunities with local network to boost local capability, increase local expenditure and support growth of local jobs.	Lead	-	Medium	
1.5. Facilitate business and industry connections between First Nations businesses and the agricultural sector.	Support	Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Corporation Local producers	Medium	





Housing: A catalyst for growth

Objective

A diverse and sustainable housing supply which supports economic growth by attracting and retaining residents and workers, while strengthening existing townships.

Outcomes

- Increased interest and activity from residential developers.
- Increased housing supply
- Sustained annual housing development in key townships.

Actions	Council Role Lead Partner Support	Potential Partners	Timeframe Short Medium Long	Ongoing Following action completion
2. Housing: A catalyst for growth				
2.1. Delos Delta action: Delivery housing investigation and feasibility project.	Partner	Private sector	Short	
2.2. Develop marketing collateral highlighting infrastructure projects, Council land sales, sub-division process and land development opportunities.	Lead	-	Short	
2.3. Investigate alternative funding options to provide trunk infrastructure & regional government grants to support land development.	Lead	-	Short	
2.4. Establish annual dwelling targets through settlement planning and/or township structure plans for the townships of Inglewood, Wedderburn, and Boort to support a steady release of new housing.	Lead	VPA DEECA	Medium	
2.5. Identify and document options alternatives to traditional housing (e.g., modular) that may resolve worker accommodation issues, with a focus on local regional providers.	Partner	Industry	Medium	
2.6. Identify and work with potential development partners to support long term procurement of housing that directly addresses supply constraints and supports access to new skills and increased workforce.	Partner	Homes Victoria Housing Developers DEECA RDV	Long	
2.7. Develop a project to investigate cause, effect and potential actions to address the high rate of unoccupied dwellings and the potential release of a proportion of those dwellings back onto the housing market, with a focus on key townships.	Partner	Private sector	Long	



Council: An advocating & collaborative partner

Objective

Council actions that foster a growing and prosperous Loddon Shire by collaborating with businesses and industry partners, and government entities to attract investment, and promote sustainable economic growth and job creation.

Outcomes

- More residents participating in the workforce, particularly women and young people.
- Delivery of infrastructure and activities that address lifestyle and industry challenges.
- Increased relocation interest from business and people.
- Authentic, unique and celebrated regional identity marketing created.

Actions	Council Role	Potential Partners	Timeframe	Ongoing
	Lead Partner Support		Short Medium Long	Following action completion
3. Council: An advocating & collaborative partner				
3.1. Actively engage with local stakeholders and advocate to other levels of government on behalf of local business and industry. Advocating efforts to focus on challenges in attracting workforce and local workforce participation, focus area to include housing, access to child care.	Partner	Local Business DITRDCA DET DET (VIC) RDV	Short	
3.2. Identify and apply for funding opportunities which address key challenges as identified by local industry.	Lead	-	Short	
3.3. Partner with neighbouring Councils across the region to showcase liveability, jobs and investment opportunities and cultural and visitor attractions.	Partner	Neighbouring Councils	Medium	
3.4. Prepare a 'business support package' proposal to Council with modest financial support for businesses needing investment incentives (involving a possible mix of rate relief, infrastructure provision or support, and/or small capital works contributions).	Lead	-	Medium	
3.5. Develop case studies for marketing collateral showcasing innovative local businesses to highlight opportunities for investment and employment opportunities.	Lead	Local Business	Medium	
3.6. In order to address the perception of lack of opportunity in regional areas, and address business staffing difficulties, Council to promote the benefits and opportunities within key industries and of lifestyle in Loddon Shire	Lead	Neighbouring Councils VSA	Medium	
3.7. Build on "Waste" team actions to promote recycling to identify opportunities to attract business and investment in circular economy activities / engage with business to identify challenges for business in adopting circular economy practices and identify which challenges are realistic to be overcome.	Support	Internal (Waste)	Medium	
3.8. Participate in a regional joint skills development project which aims to improve the matching of labour requirements with available skills, including the improvement of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses and other accredited training. For Loddon, this impacts on jobs on farms, at processing plants and service businesses.	Support	DET (VIC) RDV	Long	



Liveable & Resilient Communities

Objective

Loddon will be known for its lifestyle and opportunities, offering equitable access to services and employment, celebrated through a strong regional identity that attracts people and investment, comprised of townships that foster a sense of place and culture.

Outcomes

- Delivery of community leader training and initiatives
- Improved experience for users of township retail areas
- Stronger population growth
- Retain new residents

Actions	Council Role	Potential Partners	Timeframe	Ongoing
	Lead Partner Support		Short Medium Long	Following action completion
4. Liveable & Resilient Communities				
4.1. Investigate opportunity for local artisan food and beverage products to be showcased and retailed in townships, enhancing the retail experience for residents and visitors.	Lead	-	Short	
4.2. Work with local town traders to develop collaboration and coordination to support retail viability and a positive main street experience for local residents and visitors.	Lead	-	Short	
4.3. Facilitate training and initiatives that identify and build capability of community leaders.	Lead	-	Medium	
4.4. Facilitate and promote community groups in the coordination of delivery of events that celebrate culture, Loddon's liveability, strong community connections, business and industry.	Lead	-	Medium	
4.5. Provide content for Move to More (resident attraction campaign by Regional Australia Institute) to attract residents and skilled workers.	Support	RAI	Medium	
4.6. Contribute to development and delivery of Local Community Plans place making activities to support business development and viability.	Support	Internal – Community Partnerships	Medium	
4.7. Identify priority services, infrastructure and development in southern areas of Loddon required to service the potential growth in the area due to Bendigo Regional Employment Precinct.	Partner	City of Greater Bendigo VPA	Long	
4.8. Support the implementation of township structure plans and/or relevant urban design frameworks through business case development that attracts funding support for high quality urban design and streetscape improvement works.	Support	Internal – Planning	Long	
4.9. Audit and improve township and way finding signage to showcase attractions and retail precincts in key settlements to boost visitor experience and place identity.	Partner	Internal - Tourism	Long	



Innovative & Diverse Industries

Objective

A diverse and innovative industry base that has capabilities to respond to emerging industry, economic and policy trends, leveraging regional supply chain opportunities while value adding to the local economy.

Outcomes

- Established clusters of priority industries.
- Diversified industry base.
- Growth in the circular economy.
- Greater contribution to value of production and value adding in industries other than agriculture.
- Infrastructure established to support growth in renewables industry

Action	Council Role Lead Partner Support	Potential Partners	Timeframe Short Medium Long	Ongoing Following action completion
5. Innovative & Diverse Industries				
5.1. Develop and maintain a documented understanding of funding opportunities for renewable energy projects, share that knowledge with industry and business network.	Lead	Industry	Short	
5.2. Advocate for renewable energy projects and infrastructure that will enable Loddon to leverage opportunities associated with its natural resource endowment, particularly solar.	Lead	Sustainability Victoria Invest Victoria DEECA	Short	
5.3. Undertake a Circular Economy Feasibility study that identifies opportunities for local material flows to address supply chain gaps and return local economic benefits.	Lead	Industry Internal – Waste	Medium	
5.4. Applying for funding and offer support for funding applications prepared by other organisations seeking support for renewable energy projects.	Lead	Industry	Medium	
5.5. Maintain connections with industry and private sector to understand existing and prospective investments in order to ensure projects deliver local benefits and local projects are adopting circular economy initiatives.	Partner	Industry Internal – Waste	Long	

Implementation Timeframe



Measuring our success

The role of monitoring and evaluation of the Economic Development Strategy is required to understand the performance and success of actions taken to achieve our economic objectives.

Where available, a quantitative measure has been suggested for the remaining objectives to assess performance over time. A regional benchmark has been included where data is readily available, primarily regional New South Wales. Measuring performance against a benchmark is a means to account for factors outside the influence of local economic development actions, e.g. unexpected events that impact the wider region, State or the Nation.

Strategic Objective	Outcome	Indicator	Reporting / data source	Measure
Optimised Agricultural Sector	Increased value-added generated by agriculture and food product manufacturing.	Worker productivity (value-added).	Value-added per worker in agriculture and food product manufacturing.	Increase of worker productivity by selected industry sectors.
	Employment growth within agriculture and food product manufacturing.	Count of jobs.	Census 2026 (available 2027) indicator "Industry of Employment" for agriculture and food product manufacturing.	Increase of jobs by selected industry sectors.
	Increased First Nations workforce participation.	Labour force participation of First Nations people.	Census 2026 (available 2027) indicator "Labour Force Status" benchmarked against Census 2021.	Increase in labour force participation by First Nations people.
	Delivery of information sessions.	Count of events and attendees.	Events delivery and attendance recorded.	Event delivery and annual increase in attendance.
Housing: A catalyst for growth	Increased interest and activity from residential developers.	Development enquiries and applications.	Development applications for new dwellings.	Increase from the annual average of 2019 – 2024.
	Increased housing supply.	Residential building approvals.	Approved development applications for new dwellings.	Increase from the annual average of 2019 – 2024.
	Sustained annual housing development activity within each of the key townships.	Number of residential building completions.	Occupation Certificates.	Increase from the annual average of 2019 – 2024.
Council: An advocating & collaborative partner	More residents participating in the workforce, particularly women and young people.	Labor force participation rate.	Census 2026 (available 2027) indicator "Not in Labour Force" benchmarked against Census 2021.	Fall in the proportion of residents not in labour force (i.e. residents neither working or looking for work).
	More young residents participating in study or work.	Youth engagement (study or work).	Census 2026 (available 2027) benchmarked against Census 2021.	Proportion of youth engaged in work or study has experienced a higher increase than regional Victoria.
	Increased relocation interest from business and people.	Enquiries from businesses and residents.	Counts of enquiries.	Increase in enquiries from previous years.

Strategic Objective	Outcome	Indicator	Reporting / data source	Measure
	Funding to support delivery of infrastructure and activities that address lifestyle and industry challenges.	Funding opportunities that address key challenges identified by industry.	Number of applications submitted.	Value of successful grants.
	Authentic, unique and celebrated regional identity marketing created.	Developed marketing products.	Reporting on the marketing engagement.	Published marketing collateral.
Liveable & Resilient Communities	Delivery of community leader training and initiatives.	Delivery of community leader training and initiatives.	Count of Council facilitated events.	Annual delivery target met.
	Improved experience for users of township retail areas.	User experience.	Annual online public survey.	Amenity improvements noted by users.
	Stronger population growth.	Count of residents.	Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population.	Increasing annual growth rate faster than previous years.
	Retain new residents.	New resident retention.	Census 2026 (available 2027) indicators “LGA of Usual Residence 1 Year ago” and “LGA of Usual Residence 5 Years ago” benchmarked against Census 2021.	Proportion of retained residents is higher than is higher than the Loddon Campaspe Region.
Innovative & Diverse Industries	Established clusters of priority industries.	Enquiries from potential businesses in priority industries.	Count of enquiries.	Count of enquiries.
	Diversified industry base.	Industry diversification.	Industry diversification index. (Utilising an approach such as the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index or standard deviation across employment sectors).	Industry diversification is greater than regional Victoria.
	Growth in the circular economy.	Circular economy business count.	Australian Business Register data.	Annual increase in number of businesses within industries with a propensity to contribute to the circular economy.
	Greater contribution to value of production and value adding in industries other than agriculture.	Increased diversity in industry contribution to total value-add.	Annual estimate of value-add by industry, share of total value-added by industry.	Annual growth in value-added is higher than the annual growth rate for Loddon Campaspe Region. Reduced concentration of industry contribution (currently 50% in agriculture).
	Infrastructure established to support growth in renewables industry.	Funding opportunities.	Number of applications submitted.	Value of successful applications and infrastructure delivered.

Loddon Shire Economic Development Strategy 2025-2029
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Postal address: PO Box 21 Wedderburn Vic 3518

Telephone: (03) 5494 1200

Fax: (03) 5494 3003

Email: loddon@loddon.vic.gov.au

Website: www.loddon.vic.gov.au

Municipal office: 37 - 41 High Street Wedderburn Vic 3518



REMPAN: Nick Byrne | Arlette White

Disclaimer: All figures and data presented in this document are based on data sourced from the Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS), government agencies and other sources where cited. Using ABS datasets, the regional economic modelling software REMPLAN, developed by REMPLAN has been applied to generate industrial economic data estimates. This document is provided in good faith with every effort made to provide accurate data and apply comprehensive knowledge. However, REMPLAN does not guarantee the accuracy of data, nor the conclusions drawn from this information. A decision to pursue any suggestions mentioned in the report is wholly the responsibility of the party concerned. REMPLAN advises any party to conduct detailed feasibility studies and seek professional advice before proceeding with any action and accept no responsibility for the consequences of pursuing any of the findings or actions discussed in the document.