



Where Lifestyle &
Opportunity Meet

Economic Development Strategy - DRAFT

2024 - 2030

Acknowledgement of Country

Swan Hill Rural City Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land in which we live, and pays its respects to their elders, past and present.

The Wamba Wamba, Latji Latji, Tatti Tatti, Waddi Waddi and Barapa Barapa peoples are the original custodians of the land known as the Swan Hill Rural City and our region remains strong in Aboriginal cultural heritage values.



A MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR



Council has renewed its Swan Hill Region Economic Development Strategy to directly reflect the needs and priorities of our diverse community for the next five years. A key focus for this period is to progress a vision for the region towards 2050, work that was commenced in 2023, to better strategise our planning, critical infrastructure, economic and community development into the future.

As you read through this document you will see that it sets out Council's Economic Development strategic intent for the next five years. This strategy is based on what industry, businesses and the community told us was important to them, their hopes and aspirations, and the kind of place they desire for the future.

Through implementing this Strategy, together we will work hard to make the Swan Hill region a place where lifestyle and opportunity meet.

Swan Hill Rural City Council affirms its commitment to partner with new and existing industries, businesses, developers and other levels of Government to provide positive outcomes for the people who are part of the communities in our region.

Cr Stuart King
Mayor

May 2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This new Economic Development Strategy provides vision, direction and a clear roadmap that will support decision making, drive alignment, and communicate Council's economic development priorities.

Collaboration will be crucial to success, with Council seeking a partnership orientated approach with industry, businesses and community groups to deliver set objectives.

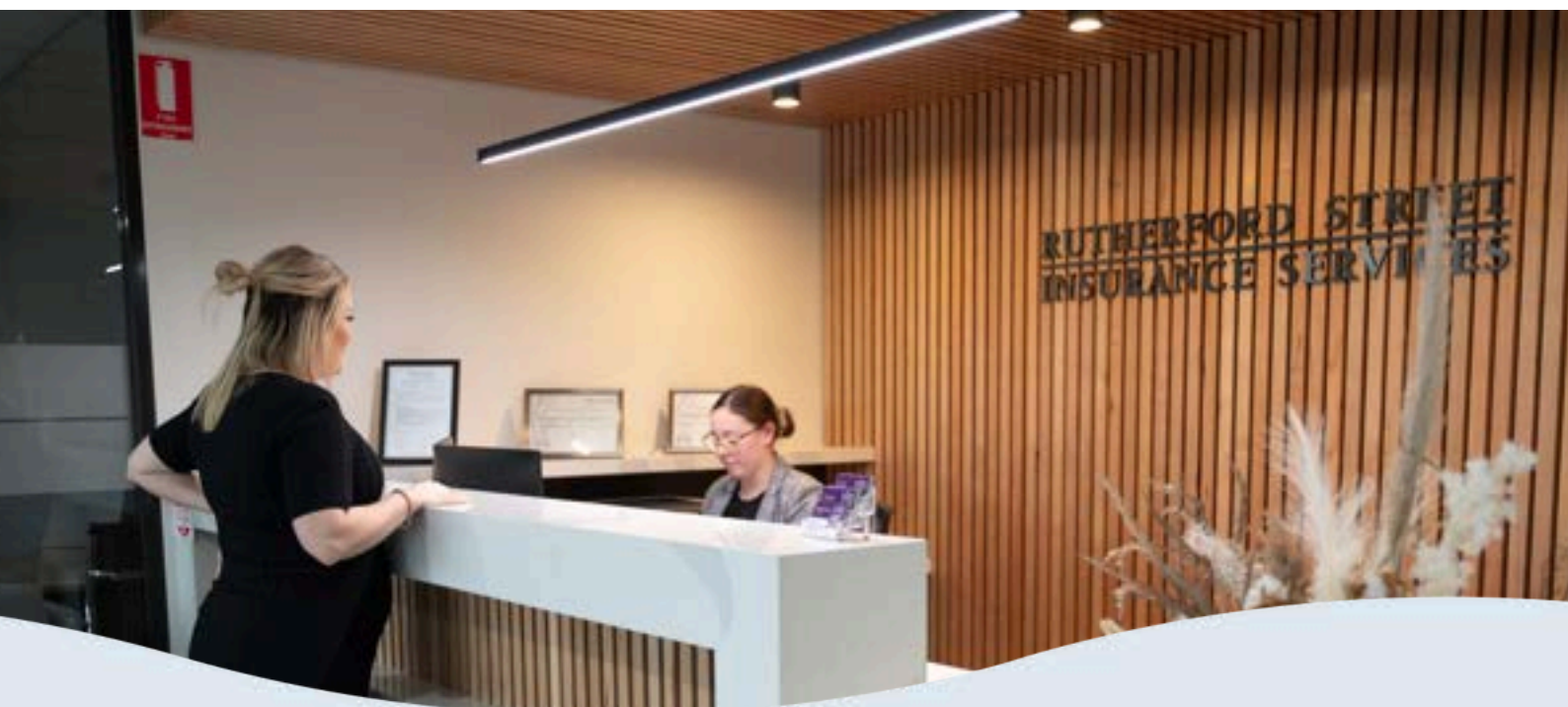
Based on reoccurring themes from industry engagement and reflection on the strengths, critical constraints, opportunities and emerging trends, four priority focus areas were identified:

- **industry and business support,**
- **workforce,**
- **housing and liveability, and**
- **leadership.**

Each focus area is accompanied by strategic intent and associated actions to be implemented.

Initiatives listed within the Strategy that are expected to form the bases for Council's 2050 vision include:

- Swan Hill Industry Land Development Strategy
- Swan Hill/Robinvale CBD Revitalisation Plan
- Swan Hill/Robinvale Future Development Masterplan
- Small Township Enhancement
- Tourism Destination Plan
- Investment Attraction Campaign



STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

The Strategy was developed under the following principle guidelines:

1. Clear Intent
2. Evidence Based
3. Strategic Alignment

01 CLEAR INTENT

- Economic development vision
- Define focus areas and key initiatives
- Align Council's available resources
- Provide collaborative approach
- Project Advocacy documentation
- Implementation framework - 5 years
- Measurable activities and outcomes

02 EVIDENCE BASED

- Review 2017-2022 Swan Hill Region Economic Development Strategy
- Findings and feedback from community and stakeholder engagement
- Council's Covid-19 Response, Relief, Recover Plan
- Align with regional plans and strategy
- Consideration of emerging trends and activities

03 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- Community Vision & Council Plan 2021-2025
- Council's Corporate Plan
- Mallee Regional Economic Development Strategy 2022
- Murray River Tourism Destination Management Plan 2022
- Loddon Mallee Regional Strategic Plan 2018

SINCE 2017

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2017-22

This strategy focused on the following three themes – Expand On Our Strengths, Develop New Opportunities and Take Up The Challenge, with over 20 strategic initiatives and 65 listed tactics. With 40 actions completed, approximately 12 actions rated 'high' remain as an 'ongoing'.



ACTIONS TO BE CARRIED FORWARD

The following actions remaining from Economic Development Strategy 2017-22 that will be incorporated into this strategy include:

- Advocate for improved housing accessibility
- Facilitate the development of identified commercial opportunities within the Swan Hill Riverfront Precinct
- Advocate for infrastructure and services that improve the region's freight and logistics supply chains
- Advocate and partner with local services to further enhance the regions health and education services

PROJECTS COMPLETED

Some of the key projects and initiatives undertaken since 2017 include:

- Swan Hill Riverfront Precinct \$3.98M Stage 1
- \$30M Solar farm developments – Blackwire & Bannerton
- \$10M Tourism & Cultural Hub/Art Gallery
- \$4.5M redevelopment Swan Hill & Robinvale Leisure Centre's Rural Township Placemaking - \$750,000
- Robinvale Housing Strategy/Business Case 2022
- Loddon Mallee Housing Strategy 2023
- Robinvale Population Review
- Robinvale Riverfront Masterplan 2022
- Seasonal Workers Accommodation Study

POST COVID-19

Significant changes in the economic environment, including the impact of COVID-19, highlight the need to review and adjust this strategy. Some of these key changes include:

- lack of housing,
- skilled workforce shortages,
- **workplace practices**,
- **the realisation** of renewable energy and mineral sand mining, and
- transport and logistic advancements.

This strategy will seek to address these changes, as well as support key initiatives from Council's Covid-19 Response, Relief, Recover Action Plan 2020.

COUNCIL'S ROLE

The role of local government is to assist in creating an environment where local businesses can grow and prosper, undertaking (not limited to) the following activities:

- proactively engage and collaborate,
- being visionary and strategic,
- **acting as an enabler**,
- advocacy,
- facilitation,
- investment attraction,
- **investigation**, and
- planning.

Although Council has a wide scope to undertake economic development, actions need to be targeted due to budgetary and resource constraints.



STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This strategy forms part of a suite of Council policies, plans and strategies that are intended to work together to realise economic, social and environmental benefits for the region. This document also supports the broader policy and strategic environment as outlined in relevant local, regional and state-wide documents - summarised in Table 1.0.

The Swan Hill Region Community Vision and Council Plan consists of four themed pillars - Liveability, Prosperity, Harmony and Leadership. A key focus of this Strategy is to align actions and outcomes to these pillars.

Council Plan Pillars



Liveability

We will be a healthy, connected and growing community supported by a range of infrastructure and services.



Prosperity

We will continue to build and strengthen a prosperous local economy, through sustainable growth and education. We will focus on creating jobs and wealth through adding value to existing strengths in all areas of our economy.



Harmony

We will be a welcoming community for all, recognised for our maturity and respect for each other.



Leadership

We will ensure accountable leadership, advocacy and transparent decision making.

Regional

- Mallee Regional Economic Growth Strategy 2019
- Loddon Mallee Regional Strategic Plan 2018
- Mallee Regional Partnerships: Mallee Roadmap Outcomes 2022
- Loddon Mallee Housing Strategy 2022
- Murray Regional Tourism Destination Plan 2022
- Western Murray Regional Economic Development Strategy – 2023 Update

Local

- Swan Hill Community Vision & Council Plan 2021-25
- Swan Hill Rural City Council Economic Development Strategy 2017-2022
- Swan Hill and Surrounds Local Area Action Plan 2022
- Swan Hill Riverfront Masterplan 2013
- Community Plans
- Robinvale Housing Strategy 2019



Table 1.0



SWAN HILL REGION



...IN THE HEART OF AUSTRALIA'S SOUTH EAST



Demographic Snapshot



POPULATION 21,225

- Based on Robinvale population at 8,000 (as to 3,479 ABS) - Geographic population study total population 25,806

Average Age
39 YRS
43 yrs State
Average



AGE CHARACTERISTIC

- Decrease years 15-19 by 14%
- Decrease years 20-24 by 7%
- Increase years 25-29 by 12 %
- Increase years 30-39 by 18%

*since 2017

Person Born
Overseas

13%

30% State Average



WHERE WE COME FROM

The net migration measure in Swan Hill is lower than Victoria at -6.5%, compared to 4.5%.



HOUSING

- Couples without children 27% (28% Regional Victoria avg)
- Couples with children 24% (25% Regional Victoria avg)
- 2.46 person per household (2.35 Regional Victoria avg)



HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTIC

- Medium weekly mortgage repayment \$267 compared to \$320 Regional Victoria
- Medium weekly rental payment \$225 compared to \$285 Regional Victoria
- Current rental vacancy rate 0.26%



PROPERTY MARKET

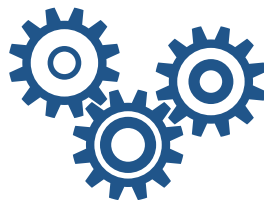
- \$438,000 medium house price Swan Hill, up 9.4% past 12 months

Economic Snapshot



TOTAL OUTPUT

1. Agricultural \$1.5B
2. Manufacturing \$273M
3. Construction \$240M



BUSINESS PROFILE

- Total Businesses - 2,660
- Total Jobs 11,072



EMPLOYMENT PROFILE

1. Agricultural 2,019 - 18%
2. Health Care 1,546 - 14%
3. Retail Trade 1,028 - 9%



INDUSTRY PROFILE

- Unemployment Rate 3.2%
- A larger percentage of workforce employed in Agriculture 21% compared to 2% (Victoria)
- A smaller percentage of workforce employed in Professional Services 2.6% compared to 8.4% (Victoria)



VISITOR ECONOMY

- Total Visitors 768,000
- Total Visitor Spend - \$253M

*National Visitor Survey & Expenditure
Model YE March 2023 - Tourism Research
Australia



OTHER

2,528 people or 25.6% of Swan Hill's resident workers (All industries) have a tertiary qualification





Insight - Agriculture

69% (426,300 ha) of the municipality is currently used for cropping and associated dryland infrastructure, which includes:

- 39% wheat grain
- 32% barley grain
- 8% lentils
- 7.5% cereal/hay

Insight - Horticulture

Almond and table grape planting accounted for 63% of the gross value for irrigated crops, which was \$1.22B. Other composition included:

- vegetables inc potatoes and carrots (16%)
- stone fruit (7%)
- olives (4%)
- avocados (3%)
- field crops (3%)



Economic Impact

Total Gross Value Price for agriculture in the Swan Hill LGA across three seasons were:

- \$931 million in 2015-16, all agricultural commodities including livestock
- \$1,392 million in 2017-18, dryland and irrigated cropping
- \$1,486 million in 2020-21, dryland and irrigated cropping



Insight - Regional Solar

Swan Hill has approximately 1,710 small-scale systems installed (18%), with a collective capacity of 13,139 kW, as at March 31, 2023.

(source: www.solarchoice.net.au)

There is currently 3,000MW Large Solar Power Projects in the proposed staged within the Mallee region

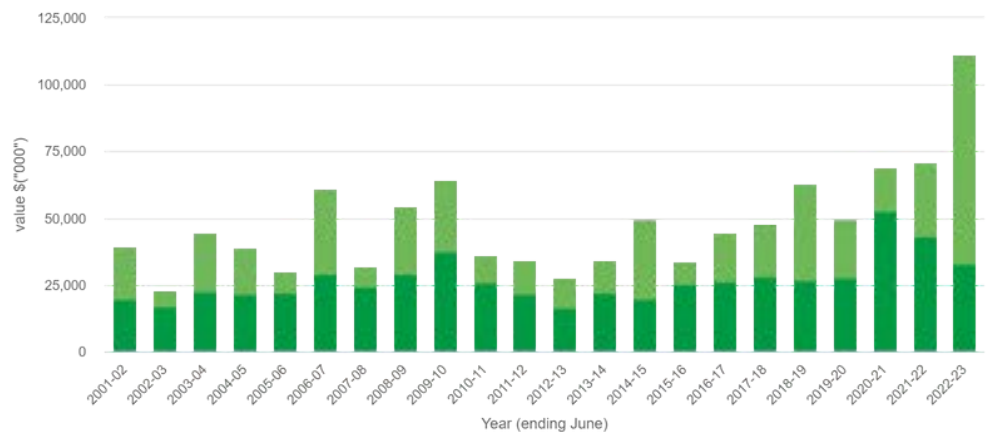
Insight - Building Permits

The total value of building permits for the municipality has doubled since 2019/20 (post Covid-19) to \$112m in 2022/23

Value of total building approvals

Swan Hill

Non Residential Residential



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Regional Population Growth, Australia (3218.0). Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions).

.id
informed
decisions



Insight - Characteristics

Emerging groups

The largest changes in the age structure of the workforce in Swan Hill between 2016 and 2021 were:

- 25 to 34 years (+613 local workers)
- 35 to 44 years (+409 local workers)
- 55 to 64 years (+190 local workers)
- 65 years and over (+191 local workers)



CHALLENGES

Key identified challenges that will guide the development of this strategy include;

Housing
supply



Workforce
constraints -
access to skill base/
training/childcare



Infrastructure -
health, transport,
land availability



CONSULTATION

Consultation Process

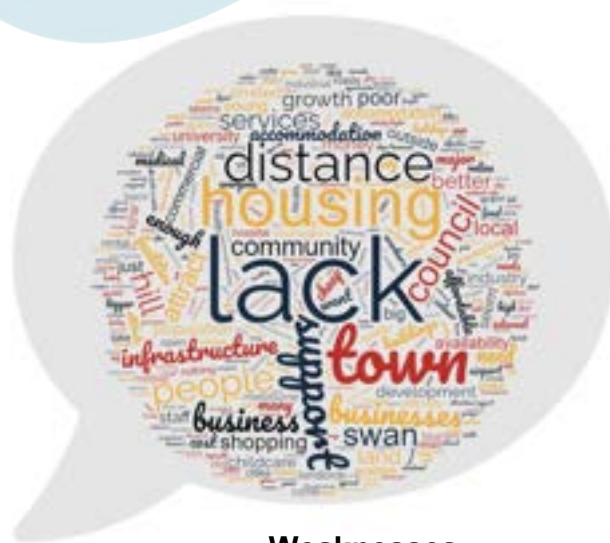
- 650 newsletters
- 6 workshops - 180 participants
- 51 business checks
- 62 online survey

SURVEY, WORKSHOPS,
BUSINESS VISITS FEEDBACK

- Key industries are being severely affected by ongoing labour shortages
- Access to childcare is currently an inhibiting factor employing staff
- Housing shortages, especially in rental accommodation, are impacting importing labour to the region
- Local employment pathways are not aligned and could be significantly improved
- There is currently limited localised compliance training options available
- There is a lack of collaboration and trade between local industries
- Support of business start-ups (eg. business incubator) local grant programs
- Need for new industrial zone land/precincts in Swan Hill to meet current/future demands
- Industries are heavily siloed by their own economic interest
- Need for industry collaboration



Strengths



Weaknesses

- Need to create new indigenous and/or nature-based tourism products/experiences
- Opportunity to deliver high quality riverfront accommodation
- Need for investment in product and experience to attract the younger millennial and higher spend markets
- Access to health services are highlighted as an ongoing issue
- Improve access to the Swan Hill and Robinvale Riverfront Precincts
- Lack of commercial/hospitality infrastructure on the river
- Need for more space for creative arts
- On-farm accommodation regulations and condition having negative impact on developers
- Need for streetscape improvements and placemaking in Swan Hill
- Improve public transport between Swan Hill and Melbourne
- Expand and improve shared trails and connections
- Improve water-access and infrastructure such as wharves, boat ramps and moorings
- Lack of shared vision
- Need a strategic vision for Swan Hill
- There is a perceived short sightedness of community and Council



OPPORTUNITIES

Abound by natural attributes, robust agricultural sector and innovative manufacturing industry, the region has the following distinct opportunities that will shape its future.

Renewable
energy and
mineral
resources



Intermodal and
transport
logistics



Value add
downstream
production



Vibrant and
connected
places



Visitor
economy -
nature base
and Aboriginal
tourism
experiences

Future Aspirations 2030



POPULATION

23,000



TOTAL JOBS

11,000



TOTAL BUSINESSES

2,800



UNEMPLOYMENT

3.5%



VISITOR ECONOMY

- Total Visitors 800,000
- Total Visitor Spend - \$300M



HOUSES

The construction of 500 new dwellings

SHAPING OUR REGION

SWAN HILL REGION - A PLACE TO GROW & THRIVE

We're laying the foundation to grow our economy, attract new investment and support our community as a place of choice.

Macro-economic trends related to climate, water security, population movements and housing demands have played a significant role in the development of our region since 2017 and are likely to continue to have a strong influence on its future. In line with these trends, the region is on the cusp of significant investment in mining and renewable activities that will transform our economy for the next 20 years and beyond.

These include:

Mineral sands deposits

The Murray Basin presents significant opportunities for discovery of new mineral sand deposits and development of existing resources.

Renewable energy + generation (South West Renewable + Energy Zone (REZ))

The region has ideal conditions for renewable energy generation, with significant private investment already made and further projects in planning, supporting industry energy security. This is highlighted with the South West REZ and expected to attract \$2.8 billion in private investment by 2030.

Value add downstream

With the inclusion of intermodal terminal and direct access to key shipping ports, the region is in a unique position to support value adding activities. This is highlighted in the almond processing plant currently under construction at Murray Downs.

Through its 20+ year mine operation VHM Goschen project's construction and ongoing operations are predicted to generate more than \$2 billion for the Loddon-Mallee economy, supporting 250 construction jobs and 400 operating jobs.

minerals.org.au/
Victoria

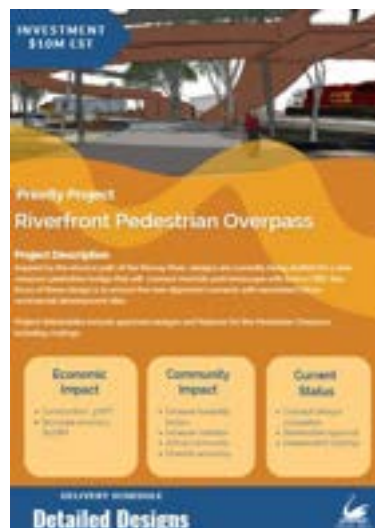
SHAPING OUR REGION

Supporting these potential developments, Council will look to maximise the associated benefits these activities will provide local businesses and communities. Council will also continue to advocate and facilitate for the delivery of identified priority projects that support a better place to live, work and play. These priority projects will form part of Council's Leadership and Advocacy works associated with this Strategy and will be updated on an annual basis. These Council led enabling projects include:

- Swan Hill Riverfront Precinct - Wharf
- Robinvale Riverfront Precinct - River terrace / playground / trails
- Swan Hill Sports & Recreation Precinct - Regional Sporting Hub / Outdoor Pool
- Pental Island Cultural Precinct
- Eco-Trail Network - Swan Hill to Lake Boga / Nyah-Vinifera Park / Former Number 9 channel Swan Hill / Robinvale township loop / foreshore at Lake Boga
- Swan Hill CBD revitalisation
- Swan Hill Railway Precinct (pedestrian bridge)

Advocacy support

- 2050 Vision
- Swan Hill bridge
- Swan Hill District Health precinct redevelopment
- Royalty returns mining operations
- Social / affordable / workers accommodation



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Based on the reoccurring themes and reflection on the strengths, critical constraints, opportunities and trends highlighted in the discussion, the following four priority focus areas were identified.



INDUSTRY/BUSINESS SUPPORT



WORKFORCE



HOUSING/LIVEABILITY



LEADERSHIP





Focus Area:
Industry/Business Support

KEY INSIGHTS

Uniting industries to meet collective needs and find shared opportunities

The economic data for the region highlights the significant performance and wealth generated by key industries. However, a collective narrative to promote investment in all industries is a priority. Feedback highlights a lack of connection and shared understanding across industries that is required to encourage local spend and reinvestment into the community. The growth of key industries and higher offshore ownership has resulted in a siloed economic structure.

Housing and workforce constraints are common to all, our solutions are not defined collectively. Competing priorities and investment in quick fixes has unintended consequences. For example, the purchase and use of retail properties to house workers impacting on the viability of business strips.

The broader industries do not understand the role of tourism in the region, however shared economic opportunity exists and should be explored in more collaborated ways to promote the full potential of the region.



FOCUS AREA

Champion the region and the unique needs of current and emerging industries to create unity, stimulate investment and drive reform

STRATEGIC INTENT

Support a connected and capable business base

ACTIONS

1. Develop a Business Friendly Approval Program
2. Facilitate Local Business Support Program - B2B networking/events
3. Support connecting entrepreneurs with opportunities

STRATEGIC INTENT

Support a thriving and sustainable rural and manufacturing industry

ACTIONS

1. Prepare an Agricultural/ Manufacturing Investment Prospectus
2. Investigate localised Circular Economy Opportunities/Pathways

STRATEGIC INTENT

Stimulate investment to support business/industry growth

ACTIONS

1. Swan Hill & Robinvale Industrial Land Development Strategy 2050
2. Develop business case for a Swan Hill Gov Hub 2050
3. Prepare a revised streetscape masterplan for Swan Hill & Robinvale CBD

STRATEGIC INTENT

Advocate for investment in high quality tourism products and experiences

ACTIONS

1. Pental Island Cultural Masterplan Implementation
2. Develop Trail Network Masterplans
3. Tourism Destination Management Plan 2050

"We should not be so broad or siloed, or we don't have the investment or energy to really achieve anything"



Focus Area: Workforce

KEY INSIGHTS

Enabling a fit for industry workforce through attraction & local up-skilling

Engagement highlighted the critical impact of skills shortages and limited localised compliance training options. This negatively impacts the productivity and sustainability of horticulture and manufacturing. The misalignment between the critical skills required in the region and the local in-scope TAFE qualifications means education assets are not optimised and the cost burden of skilling remotely is carried by industry.

Housing shortages are a known barrier to importing labour and there is not an immediate solution. Therefore, retaining the existing young adult workforce and up-skilling locally to meet industry needs is a priority. This requires a clear skills pathway that aligns schools, TAFE and industry to deliver a fit for industry workforce in partnership.

The inability to access childcare is removing significant capacity from the local workforce. A short term resolution to the childcare crisis is critical to unlocking immediate talent. Supporting the workforce needs for the long term is essential to delivering on the economic potential.



FOCUS AREA

Resolve critical skills shortage through a coordinated approach to regional workforce planning and fit for industry training provision

STRATEGIC INTENT

Diversify & Expand Training, Education and Workforce Base

ACTIONS

- 1. Partner with industry, government and education providers to deliver training aligned to industry demands
- 2. Workforce attraction campaign to drive awareness of the region as a great place to work, live and play
- 3. Promote & Support Country University Campus
- 4. Establish partnerships with emerging industries - solar/wind/mining/circular economy

STRATEGIC INTENT

Support Migrant Skilled Workbase

ACTIONS

- 1. Undertake Regional Certification duties
- 2. Support PALM initiative
- 3. Partner with Government agencies to connect business with skill migrants

"We need to push hard for 5 years and get some important change to the way we're supported with skills in the region."







Focus Area: Housing and Liveability

KEY INSIGHTS

Overcoming critical issues that limit liveability of the region and economic growth

Liveability is a critical component to attract and retain employees for industry and provide a workforce to deliver essential services. The attractiveness of the region is celebrated, but industry engagement highlighted extreme dissatisfaction with the constraints on housing, healthcare, childcare and availability of land. Industry reflects on this crisis as an ongoing disruptor to sustained economic performance. The lack of strategic progress over the last decade has limited confidence and discouraged investment, and funds are being diverted to other regions.

Retail precincts are impacted when space is converted to accommodation and storage for other industries. This reduces the viability and vibrancy of town centres and diminishes the value of existing businesses and limits the succession plans of owners. Changes to policy relating to on-farm accommodation has created additional regulatory burden, confusion and costs to modify or rebuild.

Childcare shortages limit access to the workforce and reduce the financial capacity of community when higher inflation and interest rates is also impacting liveability.



FOCUS AREA

Prioritise the delivery of solutions to liveability constraints through mobilising partnerships, policy reform and driving local investment

STRATEGIC INTENT

Support Housing Developments & Opportunities

ACTIONS



1. Swan Hill Region Housing Action Plan
2. Implementation Loddon Mallee Housing Strategy 2023
3. Establish Committee for Greater Swan Hill

"Housing, health and childcare may not be what brings people to the region but is definitely what sends them away."

STRATEGIC INTENT

Facilitate commercial development opportunities within Swan Hill/Robinvale Riverfront Precinct

ACTIONS



1. Redevelop 42 Monash Drive
2. Advocate & Connect for the Swan Hill Riverfront - Pedestrian Overpass/Wharf
3. Undertake Swan Hill Future Development Plan (greenfield/gov't controlled sites)

STRATEGIC INTENT

Invest in place activation program

ACTIONS



1. Undertake Small Townships Enhancement Masterplan 2050
2. Facilitate the Swan Hill Region Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy 2050
3. Investment attraction strategy / marketing campaign 2050
4. Swan Hill Showground, Sport & Recreation Precinct Masterplan
5. Ken Harrison Reserve Precinct Masterplan 2050



Focus Area: Leadership

KEY INSIGHTS

Elevating opportunity through future focused leadership

The consultation has highlighted the sentiment that industry sectors are heavily siloed by their own economic interest. This has led to a lack of shared vision or interest in supporting the evolution of emerging industries or precincts. Without rectification it has an impact on community mindset, attraction and regional identity.

It has been demonstrated by the challenge of moving community mindset forward to embrace and deliver progressive tourism projects, reducing benefit for future generations.

Strengthening connections between a new generation of industry and community leaders is critical to ignite relationships between future decision makers and build confident and proactive change agents.

The cost of standing still has been loudly emphasised throughout the engagement. Existing leaders are keen to engage in new thinking that encourages cross industry collaboration, public problem solving and progress beyond debate.



FOCUS AREA

Stimulate future focused leadership from within industry, community and Council to unlock potential and regional pride for the next generation.

STRATEGIC INTENT

Identify and prioritise strategic infrastructure projects

ACTIONS

- 1. Prioritise and advocate for Council's major projects & initiatives

STRATEGIC INTENT

Work collaborative to realize a vision for the region

ACTIONS

- 1. Resource a regional leadership 2050 group
- 2. Develop and promote refreshing and bold 2050 vision
- 3. Inform potential investors on earmarked future projects / opportunities

STRATEGIC INTENT

Allocate and align Council's available resources to business and community needs

ACTIONS

- 1. Review Council's Grant Program
- 2. Review Council's Community Planning
- 3. Advocate for the delivery of Community Planning priority projects that have economic outcomes
- 4. Review and update Swan Hill Riverfront Masterplan 2013

STRATEGIC INTENT

Investment and resource in sustainability

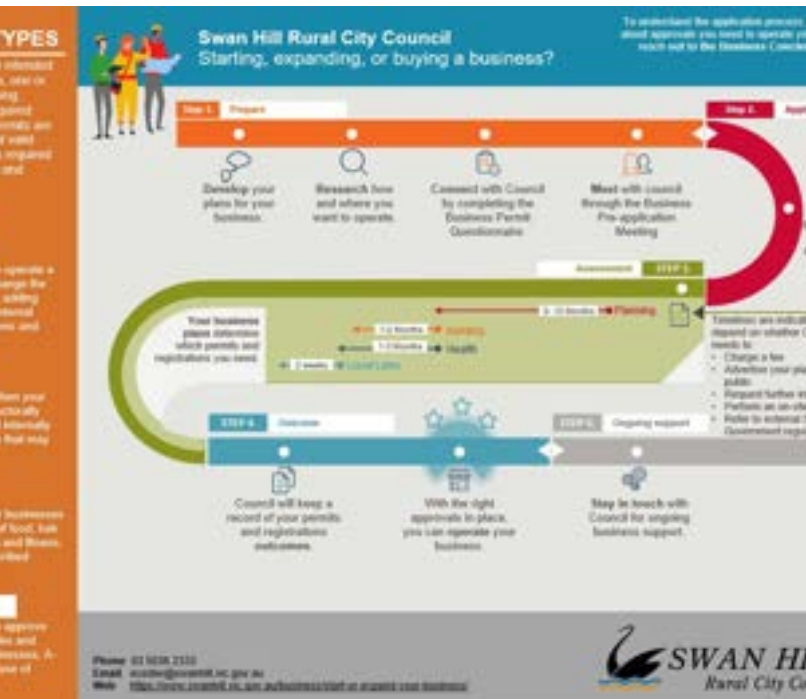
ACTIONS

- 1. Advocate and prepare for renewable energy transition

"I'm not sure we could all share the same story right now but we could come together as different sections of industry and community - and create it"

PRIORITY ACTIONS

- Support Housing Developments
- Unlock Government owned land for future investment opportunities
- Business Support
- Build on existing strengths and opportunities
- Advocate for the delivery of priority projects



QUICK WINS

- Investment Attraction Strategy
- Define Agreed Priority Projects
- Review Council's Grant program to support Business & Arts
- Develop Business Friendly Approvals Program

Key Performance Indicators

Industry/Business Support

Develop & maintain an up-to-date business database

Increase attendance in business support activities

Reduce planning permit decisions relating to business matters

Workforce

Increase number of local business

Increase number of local jobs

Increase investment enquiries planning/building permits relating to commercial and industrial developments

Housing/Liveability

Population Growth

Increase investment enquires, planning/building permits relating to residential developments

Reduce planning permit decisions relating to housing matters

Leadership

Increase investment enquires

Increase grant applications and/or approvals

Reduce planning permit decisions relating to business matters

A photograph of a vineyard at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm, golden glow over the rows of grapevines. The vines are supported by wooden posts and wires. The sky is filled with soft, colorful clouds. In the bottom left corner, there is white text. In the top right corner, there is a large, abstract, light blue shape that overlaps the sky.

Swan Hill Region
*A place to grow
and thrive*