

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PLAN



Mansfield Shire



2024-28

JAMIESON RIVER



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Mansfield Shire Council acknowledges the Taungurung people as the traditional custodians and we pay our respects to their Elders past and present. Council extends that respect to all members of our community.

Introduction

Our Shire boasts a unique blend of natural beauty, vibrant culture, and thriving economy, making it an attractive place to live, work, and visit. As our Shire has experienced significant population growth over the past five years, combined with increased visitor numbers, it's essential to recognise and welcome newcomers while preserving the unique essence that defines our community.

Tourism plays a pivotal role in our Shire's economy, offering a diverse range of experiences for visitors and residents alike. From adventurous outdoor pursuits to savouring local flavours at wineries and distilleries, our region provides something for everyone.

The Sustainable Tourism Plan, in alignment with the Council Plan, serves as a blueprint for enriching our visitor economy while safeguarding the unique charm and high quality of life in our Shire. Informed by community feedback and inspired by the Mansfield Community Vision within the Council Plan, it reflects our dedication to guiding, supporting, and championing the interests of both our residents and visitors.

The exponential growth in our population, coupled with over 600,000 annual visitors, underscores the need for a thoughtful approach to tourism management. This Sustainable Tourism Plan outlines our strategy for nurturing our visitor economy sustainably, enhancing services and infrastructure, and preserving our natural environment.

By actively implementing this plan, we aim to strike a balance between fostering economic growth and safeguarding our environment and community's liveability. I extend my sincere gratitude to the industry and community for their invaluable input and support in shaping the tourism priorities for our region.

Our Sustainable Tourism Plan intertwines tourism, culture, scientific insights, and the natural environment to forge a resilient future that respects our heritage and delivers genuine experiences. Together, let's work towards securing a future for our Shire that is sustainable, beautifully showcased, and protected, ensuring its enduring charm and allure for generations to come.

Contents

Introduction	1
1. Executive Summary	3
2. Definitions	5
3. Developing the Sustainable Tourism Plan	6
4. The Visitor Economy	8
5. Our Identity	12
6. Situational Analysis	16
7. Council's Role	22
8. Key Focus Areas	24
9. Implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Plan	26
10. Alignment to Council Plans	27
11. References	28



HIGH COUNTRY GARDENS, GALLERY AND MAZE

1. Executive Summary

Mansfield Shire is a well-loved, appealing destination for visitors and residents alike. Tourism has contributed to economic growth, employment growth, and an expanded range of lifestyle amenities for residents.

By extending the scope and scale of built attractions and hospitality to attract visitors, we are not only enhancing local offerings but also creating opportunities for a more diverse and enriching experience for visitors. This expansion allows for the introduction of unique amenities and services that may not be feasible with only local support, thereby enriching the overall tourism and hospitality landscape. This diversity ultimately contributes to a more vibrant and dynamic community, fostering economic growth and cultural exchange on a broader scale. Tourism becomes a vital catalyst for enhancing the appeal of Mansfield Shire as a desirable destination to live, work, and visit.

While tourism brings many advantages, it also generates negative impacts such as peak period congestion and additional load placed on waste management and essential services. Given the Shire's unique natural environment, tourism can also lead to the potential overuse of sensitive landscapes and environments. For this reason, it is essential that tourism provides net benefits that are reflective of the values and needs of our community.

Mansfield Shire Council has led a comprehensive, consultative process to develop this Sustainable Tourism Plan 2024-28, engaging with almost 300 stakeholders across surveys, workshops, one on one sessions, group consultation and a focus group. This process delivered a wealth of insights and clear direction on where there is greatest opportunity to combine collective efforts and deliver on our destination's vision, below:

Mansfield Shire is a must-visit destination, renowned for its stunning natural environment, authentic rural experiences, and diverse range of year-round attractions. We are an inviting and welcoming community that celebrates and actively preserves its cultural and natural heritage.

The purpose of this Sustainable Tourism Plan (2024-2028) (*hereafter the Plan*) is to guide Mansfield Shire Council, through collaborative partnerships with community, businesses, land managers and other key stakeholders, to support projects that aim to enhance visitor satisfaction and deliver memorable experiences that exceed expectations and generate economic and social benefits for our region.

For the purposes of this Plan, the Council adopts the following definition of sustainable tourism developed by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO):

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.¹

Mansfield Shire Council reaffirms its commitment to fostering a sustainable destination that celebrates our natural environment, cultural heritage, and community spirit, ensuring a vibrant and prosperous future for all who call our Shire home.

Our approach to sustainable tourism in the Shire is guided by the following principles:

- We value our natural environment and recognise this is one of our major assets.
- We honour the rich culture and history of Mansfield Shire, respecting the traditional owners and acknowledging their ongoing contribution to the community
- We support industry growth by collaborating with stakeholders to create quality tourism experiences and promote sustainable tourism practices.
- We recognise that inclusion and accessibility is essential to delivering positive, safe communities and visitor experiences.

The Sustainable Tourism Plan (2024-28) recognises the Council has an important role to play in the sustainable development of our region's tourism industry by focusing on the following key areas:

1. Lead and support significant activation projects, individual town plans and opportunities to grow the visitor economy in our region, capitalising on our strengths and competitive advantages as identified in our tourism pillars
2. Support the industry in best-practice tourism, product development and sustainable growth through grant funding, education, resources and marketing.
3. Deliver efficient, sustainable visitor servicing, positioning Mansfield as a sustainable tourism destination



**GREAT VICTORIAN
RAIL TRAIL**

2. Definitions



What is sustainable tourism?

Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities.

The three pillars of sustainable tourism are environmental sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability.



What is destination management?

The five broad components of destination management are product development, infrastructure, governance, sustainability, marketing & promotion. Within these components, there are different activation areas that can assist in delivering a destination management approach and a sustainable visitor economy.



What is a visitor?

For the purpose of this Plan, a visitor includes all of those travelling to the Shire, either for a day trip, or staying overnight, for a variety of reasons including leisure/holiday purposes (including the Alpine resort visitors who visit Mansfield), events, business-based travel, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), medical tourism (MASS), educational purposes and employment purposes.



What is visitor economy?

The visitor economy accounts for the fact that visitor activity does not occur in isolation, but rather, contributes to investment in jobs across a broad range of industry sectors. This includes all industries that directly and indirectly serve visitors, ranging from accommodation and tourism operators and attractions to broader goods and services such as retail, and food and beverage operators. As tourism is not a defined industry sector on its own, but rather the amalgamation of a variety of industry sectors, the full extend of what comprises the visitor economy and its reach across many elements of the broader economy is often not fully understood.

3. Developing the Sustainable Tourism Plan

The Plan was developed with extensive input from industry, community, key stakeholder agencies and local government. It is supported by background reports that address the role of local government in tourism, Mansfield Shire’s visitor economy, an experience audit, and a local government benchmarking report.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PROCESS

- Consultation with almost 300 residents and industry representatives. The consultation process included two online surveys, 12 consultation sessions with residents and businesses held across 5 towns, seven workshops with the focus group, one-one-one sessions with key stakeholders including land managers, alpine resort management and the Regional Tourism Board.
- Consultation with Shire staff and Councillors.
- Community feedback on the draft Strategy and key focus areas.

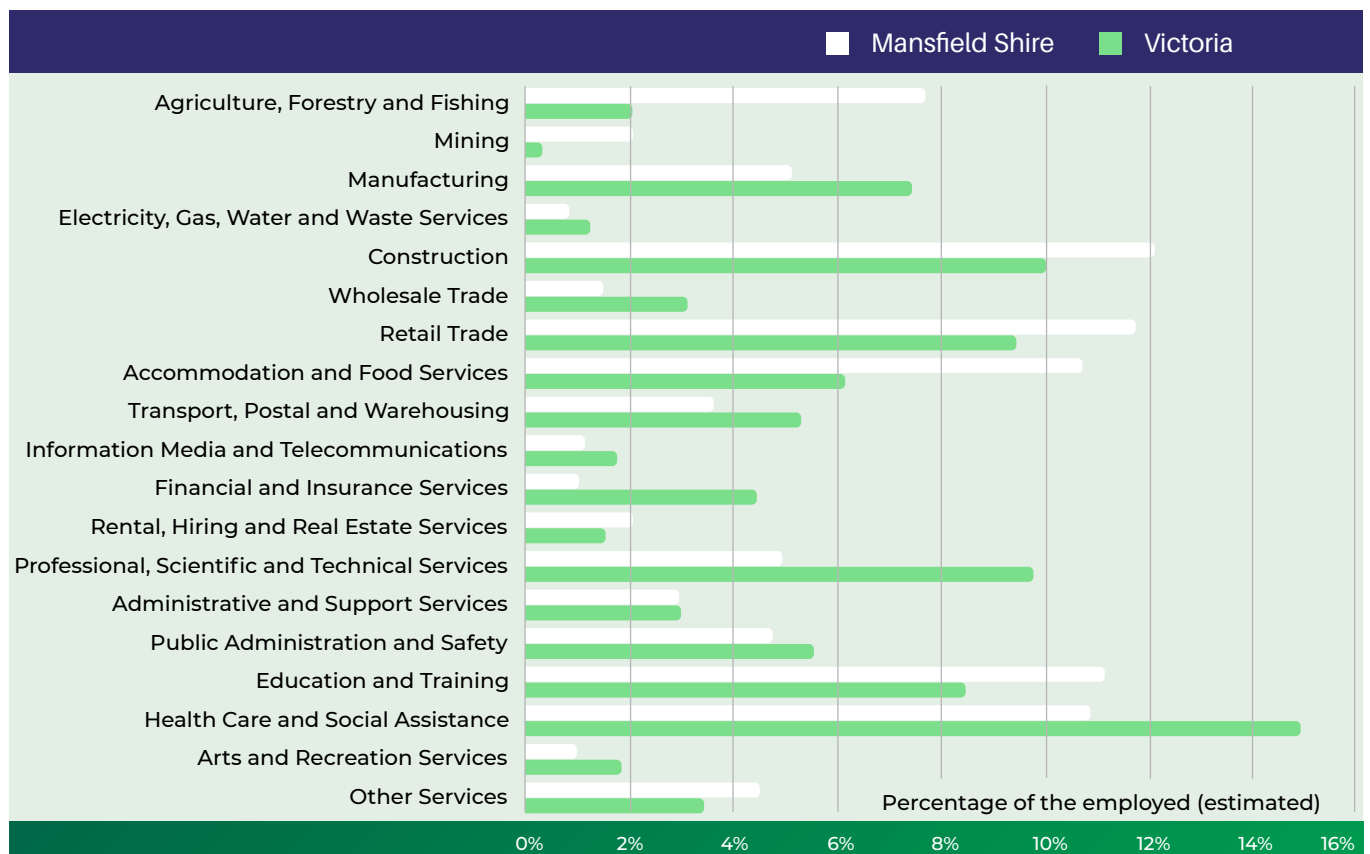
WHAT DID BUSINESSES SAY?

Mansfield Shire has a diverse range of industries represented with the most significant employers being in the construction, retail and education sectors. Accommodation and Food services account for 10.7% of employees in the region with numbers increasing during peak periods. Whilst tourism itself is not measured (see graph below), we know that it plays an important role in our economy².

The consultation process revealed that:

- Business owners have a strong understanding of tourism’s role in the local economy.

Figure 1 Employment (total) by industry 2022/23



Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ©2023 Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions).

- Business owners are supportive of strategic planning for sustainable tourism development.
- Industry partners and tourism operators in the Shire indicated that they would like to see visitor numbers stabilise across the year to reduce the stress (resources, accommodation etc) associated with significant fluctuations between peaks and troughs. Most businesses want to see visitor numbers maintained at current levels during the peak season but grow in the shoulder and off-peak periods.
- All businesses reported a desire to see visitor yield increase.

WHAT DID THE COMMUNITY SAY?

The consultation process revealed shared views around the importance of tourism and the need to protect core environmental and community values.

- Community members are aware of the economic benefits of tourism, including its contribution to jobs and enhanced quality-of-life elements such as the range of cafes and restaurants, activities, services, retail, events and outdoor recreation.

- Resident quality of life is of great interest. When asked what factors are most important, residents say conservation of natural areas, clean air and water, and the maintenance of the Shire's unique character. This extends to the character of each of the towns within the Shire.
- When asked which aspects of tourism they would like to see lessened, the most significant responses are about traffic management at peak periods, and a reduction in the number of un-hosted Holiday Homes.
- Residents aspire to balance tourism planning that respects people (community) and place (environment). They want the Shire to remain an attractive, vibrant, creative community; and they want tourism to be eco-friendly and environmentally sustainable.

Mansfield Shire's community, including business owners, support the vision of sustainable tourism.

Figure 2 Key themes from community consultation



4. The Visitor Economy

TOURISM IN MANSFIELD SHIRE³

Tourism is a significant industry in the Mansfield Shire. From 2013 to 2022, the number of visitors to Mansfield Shire increased from 440,000 to 612,000 over a ten-year period, with an average annual growth rate of 3.7% (compounding).

Domestic overnight visitors consistently constitute the majority, comprising an average of 61.8% of all visitors. It's important to note that while timely data for international day visitors is unavailable, domestic day visitors contribute a further 37.9%, while international overnight visitors continue to represent less than 1% of the total visitor profile.

From 2013 to 2019, Mansfield experienced an annual average growth rate in visitor numbers of nearly 7% per annum. Had this pre-pandemic trend persisted, total visitor numbers in 2022 would have approached 750,000, which is 138,000 more than the recorded 612,000. While the domestic overnight market has rebounded to 95% and domestic day trips to 82% of projected trends, the international market's recovery is slower but showing signs of improvement.

Of the Shire's domestic overnight visitors, 90% originate from within Victoria, primarily traveling for holidays or to visit friends and family. These visitors typically stay an average of three nights within the Shire, with 88% choosing to stay within Mansfield itself. January emerges as the busiest month for tourism, closely followed by March and April, while visitor numbers drop significantly in May, July, November, and December.

Although acquiring average spend data proves challenging, it's evident that the average expenditure per trip is notably lower compared to neighbouring Shires like Alpine and Indigo. This discrepancy can be attributed to the prevalence of camping in the region and the historical perception of Mansfield Shire as a gateway to the Alpine Region, particularly Mount Buller.

Key projections for 2028

It is important to recognise the benefits of a thriving visitor economy from both an economic and a social and community perspective. While visitor expenditure is an obvious monetary benefit that flows from tourism, there are a number of non-monetary benefits that the Mansfield community benefits from, including:

- Overnight visits from Victorian residents to Regional Victoria are anticipated to grow at an average annual rate of 5.7%. If Mansfield Shire follows this trajectory, it would result in approximately 850,000 overnight visits
- The primary purposes of trips are expected to remain Holiday, Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR), and business.
- 'Travelling Alone' (30%) and 'Adult Couples' (28%) are projected to continue dominating the visitor demographics.
- Around 18% of the market is forecasted to involve trips with children.
- Social activities, such as eating out, visiting friends/relatives, and leisure shopping, are expected to be part of 80% of trips.
- 'Outdoor/nature' activities, including bushwalking and visiting National Parks, are anticipated to grow to approximately 60% of trips, while 'Active outdoor/sports' activities, such as water sports, cycling, and snow skiing, are projected to account for around 30% of trips.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

Mansfield Shire forms part of:

- Victoria’s High Country Tourism Region, along with the local government areas of Alpine, Benalla, Indigo, Mansfield, Murrundindi, Towong and Wangaratta – and the Victoria’s alpine resorts.
- The Hume Region; together with the municipalities of Alpine, Benalla, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Mansfield, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta and Wodonga.
- The Ovens Murray Region; jointly with Alpine, Indigo, Towong, Wangaratta, and Benalla Shires. The Regional Economic Development Strategy defines five strategic directions for economic development in the region. One of the strategic directions is to Strengthen and diversify the visitor economy through leveraging the region’s nature and epicurean tourism industries.

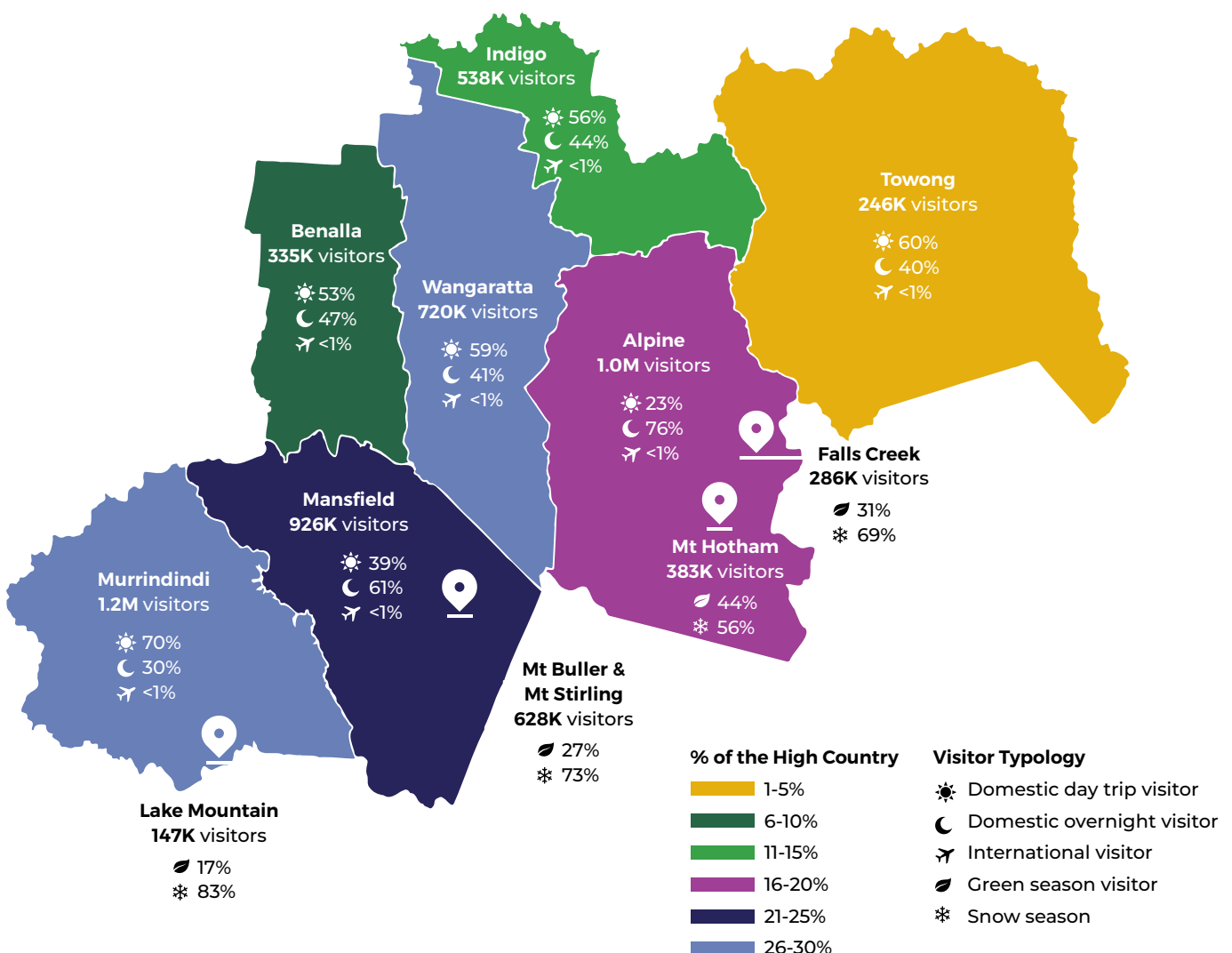
TOURISM IN VICTORIAN HIGH COUNTRY⁵

Tourism North East (TNE) is the peak tourism organisation for North East Victoria, the region best known as Victoria’s High Country of which Mansfield is located.

TNE works collaboratively with government and industry stakeholders, driving strategic tourism efforts across the areas of research, strategic planning, destination marketing of scale, product and industry development, investment attraction and advocacy.

It is imperative that Mansfield Shire Council’s tourism initiatives align with TNE’s work to ensure consistent messaging and a collective effort to sustainably develop the tourism industry.

Figure 3 Visitor Dispersal Victorian High Country 2022⁴



TNE's Destination Management Plan 2023-33 identifies five product pillars for the Victorian High Country:

- **Cycling:** Reinforcing Victoria's High Country as Australia's Premier Cycling Destination through continued marketing and product development in road cycling, mountain biking, recreational and gravel cycling
- **Victorian Alps:** Strengthening the year-round appeal and experiences of the Victorian Alps through activating green season and capacity building for white season
- **Nature:** Delivering outstanding nature experiences through the region's iconic National and State Parks, compelling walk product, activated water assets and adrenaline-filled adventure recreation
- **Food, drink and produce:** Lifting the quality, access and provenance of local food and produce, exceptional wines, breweries and distilleries to drive innovation and deliver unique High Country food, drink and produce experiences
- **Arts, cultural heritage and events:** Driving visitation and strengthening experience of the region through galleries, artisans, first nations experiences, goldrush and pioneer heritage, and "only in High Country" events

These product pillars have been echoed in Mansfield's own strengths analysis.

High Country visitors are characterised by two key segments - Lifestyle Leaders, who account for 40% of the region's visitors, and Habituals who make up 28% of visitor numbers.

Lifestyle Leaders are progressive, educated and professional individuals who actively seek out new experiences. They enjoy an active social life and have extensive social networks in which they are viewed as trusted advisors and influencers. They are higher in affluence and discretionary expenditure than the average Australian, so travel frequently and spend more when traveling. The Habituals are travellers who come to the High Country each year (sometimes many times a year) and tend to return to a consistent location and often travel with the same group. They are heavily influenced by the recommendations of friends and family members, prioritise value for money, and are often motivated by familiarity with a destination. Both Habituals and Lifestyle Leaders are primarily self-drive markets.

Tourism North East primarily focus on attracting Lifestyle Leaders as the size of the segment and yield it can drive within our region defines it as the most valuable market with the potential to drive the greatest return on investment. It's also worth noting that the Lifestyle Leader market is a focus for Visit Victoria and strongly aligns to Tourism Australia's High Value Traveler (HVT) audience.

Mansfield Shire Council will continue to focus efforts on attracting Lifestyle Leaders, positioning Council favourably to collaborate with regional and state tourism organisations.



**DELATITE
WINERY**

EXPERIENCE VICTORIA 2033

Experience Victoria is Visit Victoria's strategic plan that shapes the future of Victoria's visitor economy over the next 10 years and will strengthen Victoria's enviable tourism offering by leveraging the state's competitive advantages. The plan has 5 product priorities:

- First Peoples-led experiences
- Wellness
- Arts and culture
- Food and drink
- Nature

These product priorities come through in Mansfield's key strengths which insinuates our region is well-placed to capitalise on the ongoing sustainable development of these products.

Experience Victoria recognises trends and opportunities to address market gaps by:

- Developing new engaging experiences for visitor participation and spending, such as new nature based and First Peoples' tourism products
- Creating premium accommodation in suitable natural settings

- Expanding on strengths (such as extending creative and culinary strengths further into regional areas) and specialisations (such as expanding our thermal and mineral springs and bathing to incorporate wellness and luxury experiences)
- Supporting longer stays through evening attractions and connected experiences and trails
- Encouraging growth in existing markets and experiences by modernising and expanding them, including in the broader visitor economy such as hospitality, design, retail and sport
- Expanding service excellence to every experience.

These opportunities should be considered by Mansfield Shire Council in conjunction with the gaps identified through our own situation analysis to ensure our region is maximising opportunities to drive sustainable tourism in line with regional and state priorities.

Similar to Tourism North East, Victoria's key target markets for demand-driving marketing activity are Lifestyle Leaders in the domestic market. Lifestyle Leaders represent more than 30 per cent of the Australian population (5.95 million Australians). They spend more when they travel and travel more than the average population.

Community Benefits of Tourism

It is important to recognise the benefits of a thriving visitor economy from both an economic and a social and community perspective. While visitor expenditure is an obvious monetary benefit that flows from tourism, there are a number of non-monetary benefits that the Mansfield community benefits from, including:

- Job creation
- Enhanced services and amenities
- Cultural exchange to grow appreciation for local heritage, arts and culture
- Improved facilities such as roads, public transport and recreational facilities
- Business attraction, growth and diversification opportunities
- Community pride
- Volunteer opportunities
- Enhanced quality of life for local community

5. Our Identity

Each town within Mansfield Shire possesses a distinct identity and allure, collectively contributing to the rich tapestry of experiences. Our goal is to offer visitors and residents compelling reasons to explore and journey throughout the Shire.

Throughout the engagement sessions, there was widespread consensus on the reasons why individuals choose to visit or reside within our Shire, as well as a shared commitment to safeguarding these assets for future generations.

Stakeholders are particularly invested in preserving and enhancing our natural environment and cultural heritage, while also ensuring the protection of our unique towns from the pressures of over-tourism. They recognise, however, that many of the services and amenities that enrich our communities are made possible by the contributions of the visitor economy.





MANSFIELD SHIRE

Exceeds expectations with hidden pockets of stunning treasures of mountain wilderness, rivers, lakes and bush destinations, quirky towns and friendly locals.



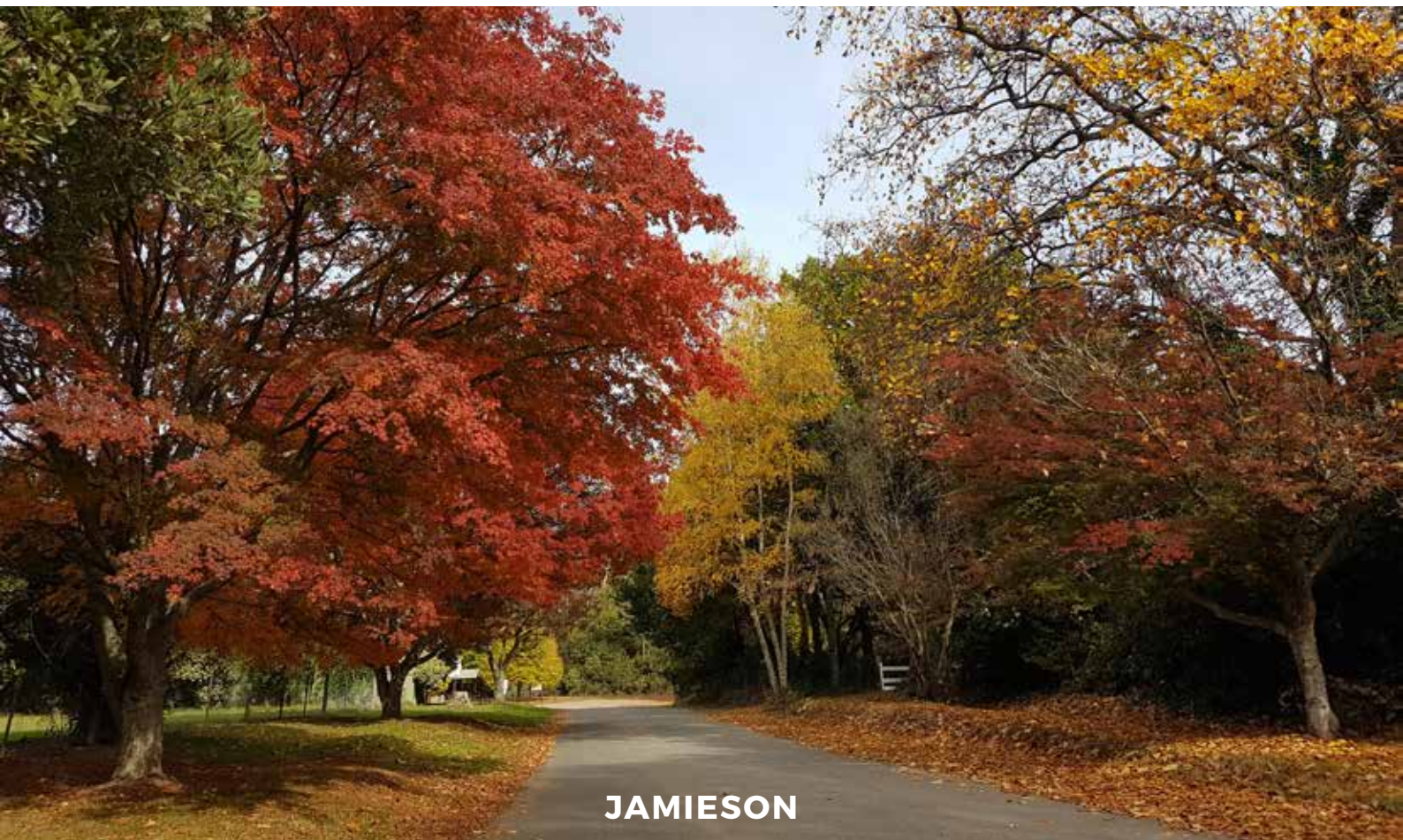
MERRIJIG

Arrive at the most spectacular vista where the valleys meet the peaks.
A rural community where the horse is a local and our backyard is your escape.



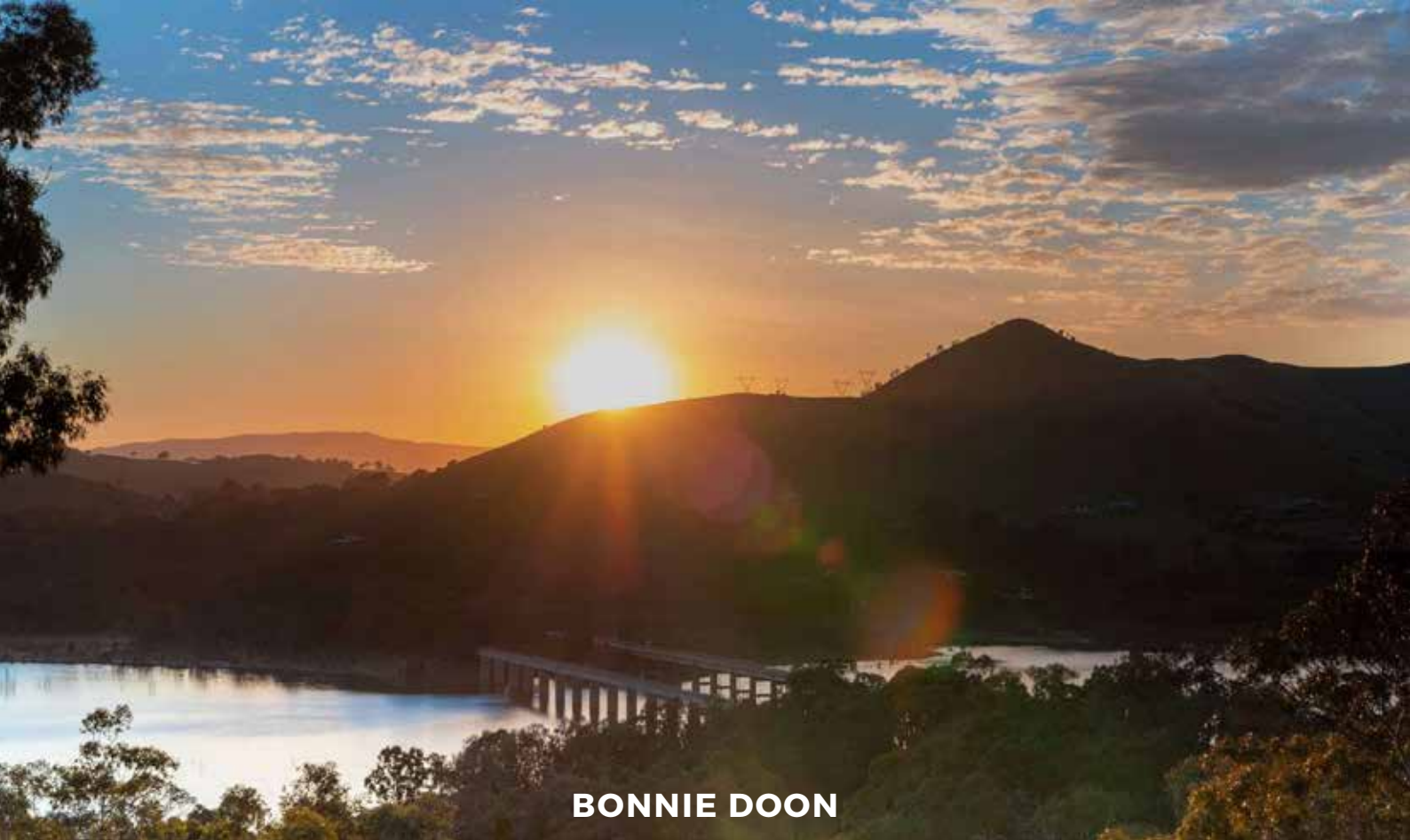
MANSFIELD TOWN

The heart of the Shire where people come to connect, catch up and prepare for adventure. A welcoming community with year-round events, an abundance of the arts and a beautiful, lively retail centre.



JAMIESON

The place where you go for the sublime meeting of the rivers and forest experiences. You can relax cruising along the river, experience the nostalgia of yesteryear or witness brilliant autumn colours.



BONNIE DOON

Discover and explore - from the lake to the hills, the area is packed with adventure, fun and fascinating history.

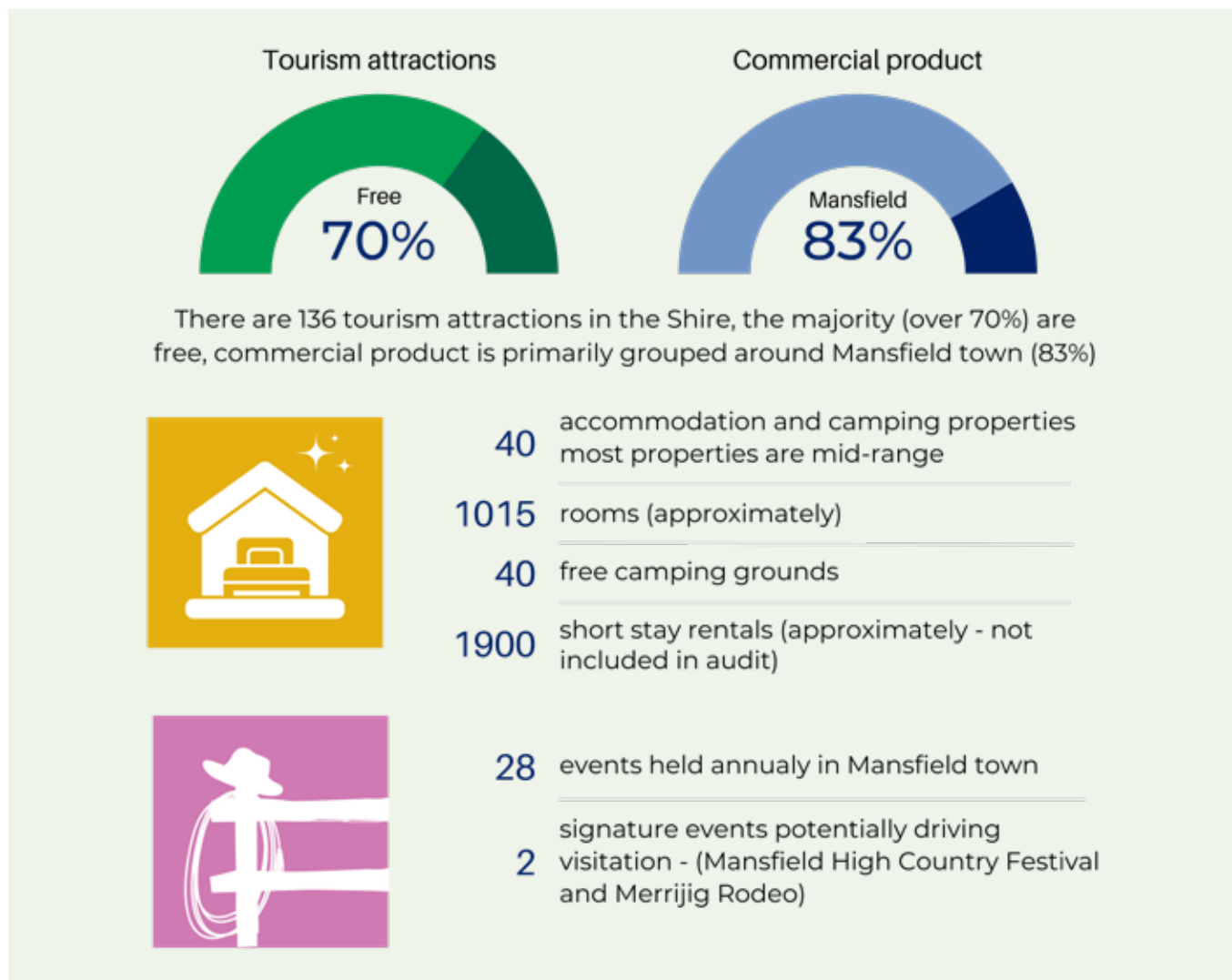


COUGHS BAY

The lake is at the heart of this welcoming community. Surrounded by rolling hills, you can immerse yourself in the picturesque and peaceful stretches of the expansive water views or discover the many bays waiting to be explored.

6. Situational Analysis

In 2023, an audit was conducted on the current tourism offerings (including accommodation, attractions, and events) as part of the community consultation process to identify areas for improvement and to highlight strengths in the Shire's tourism offerings.



SECTOR ANALYSIS - ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation audit has focused on commercial forms of accommodation in the Shire.

Key findings:

- Based on the audit, there are 45 accommodation and camping properties, and over 81 holiday houses managed by agents.
- All accommodation offerings accounts for approximately 1015 rooms, not including 1900 Airbnb properties.
- Of these properties, the largest proportion is in the mid-range class.
- The Shire has 40 free camping grounds.

SECTOR ANALYSIS - EVENTS

Events can be used to drive visitation in low periods and locations. The events audit has focused on council run and supported events.

Key findings:

- Mansfield Shire has approximately 48 events annually, two of these are signature events.
- Council manages 10 and supports 22 financially and 16 in kind.
- The most events are in the Heritage, culture and arts pillar (28), followed by Lakes, rivers and mountains (10) and Equine (6). The food, drinks and local produce pillar has the least number of events (3).

- The majority of events are held in Mansfield town (28).
- Most events are held in April (10) and November (12).

SECTOR ANALYSIS - ATTRACTIONS AND “THINGS TO DO”

An audit was conducted on the tourism product (accommodation, attractions and events) to find gaps and to identify existing strengths.

Key findings:

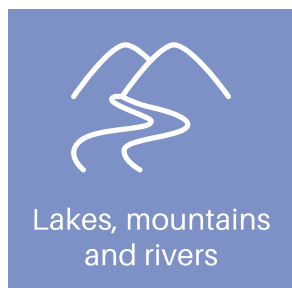
- There are 136 tourism attractions in the Shire
- Over 70% are free with 28% categorised as 'Parks and Reserves', followed by huts, waterfalls and lookouts. The number of existing tracks and trails is low compared to the available area.
- Chargeable product is primarily grouped around Mansfield (83%) with little outside this area.
- Mansfield has a very active arts community who run multiple events throughout the year, but there is no dedicated art gallery
- Although the Shire has an extensive horse identity and mountain cattlemen heritage and this visitor market is renowned for high yield, the product supply does not meet the high demand
- With agriculture being the second largest economic sector for the Shire (in terms of employment and output), there is little by way of agri-tourism product available



TOURISM PILLARS

The community engagement and corresponding analysis of existing experiences, services and amenities identified four tourism pillars that recognise the key strengths of our region's offering and reflect our tourism industry's competitive advantages, as well as the areas to best focus attention to enhance our visitor economy.

These tourism products, attractions, visitor experiences and encounters collectively shape a visitor's decision to journey to and spend time here.



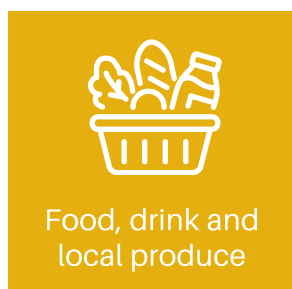
Explore our lakes, mountains and rivers

- Cycling
- Winter sports
- Adventure and nature-based activities (fishing, watersports, hiking and bushwalking, 4wd, hunting etc)
- Camping



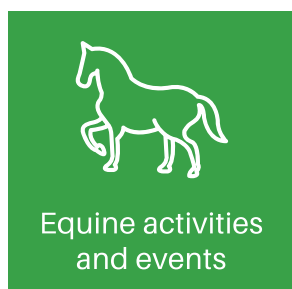
Immerse yourself in our heritage, culture and arts

- First People's heritage
- Unique history of the region with the timber and gold mining historical industries, legend of Ned Kelly and story of the Man from Snowy River
- Exhibits and galleries
- Events showcasing art in various forms such as pottery, fine arts, music and theatre



Indulge in food, drink and local produce

- Cellar doors, distilleries and breweries
- Restaurants and cafes
- Rich, quality local produce
- Producers and providore markets



Discover the Equine activities and events our region is famous for

- Unique-to-place events including Merrijig Rodeo and Campdraft
- History of the mountain cattleman
- Trail rides through country

OPPORTUNITIES

The situational analysis has identified several exciting opportunities for Mansfield Shire Council to consider strengthening its visitor economy to benefit its local communities as well as the visitor markets. The sustainable growth of the tourism sector in Mansfield will be a collaboration between Council, industry, government, land managers, and community stakeholders.

There's an overwhelming opportunity to shift from focusing on increasing visitation numbers to instead increasing the yield of the visitors coming to our region, prioritising value over volume. To attract these visitors and encourage longer stays as well as repeat visitation, mid-week and off-peak visitation the tourism industry must emphasise quality, value and diversity and provide product that addresses these gaps.

The following identified opportunities serve as a roadmap for the Council to foster sustainable tourism and support investment within the Shire to bridge the identified gaps and grow the capacity of our visitor economy to respond to the increased visitor trends. Each opportunity will have varying impacts on the Shire's visitor economy, and it's the collective implementation of these ideas that will bring the destination vision to fruition. Opportunities have been selected based on their ability to:

- Address gaps and enhance visitor economy.
- Foster sustainable growth by focusing on visitor yield rather than sheer numbers.
- Leverage strengths and competitive advantages (product pillars).
- Complement existing product and services within our region.

Gap	Opportunity
Tourism Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Creation of paid tourism attractions within the Shire ▪ Accessible and inclusive products ▪ All-weather experiences for visitors to undertake during times of inclement weather ▪ Family-friendly experiences ▪ Water sport and experiences to activate the lakes and rivers ▪ Unique food and drinks experiences including agri-tourism ▪ Products celebrating the rich history and heritage of Mansfield and its outlying towns ▪ Large scale accommodation offering with conferencing facilities to attract high yield business and family market ▪ High-quality properties (high end or larger size), as well as properties that leverage the strength of the regions natural assets ▪ Powered sites for RVs and caravans to target high-yield market ▪ Creation/allocation of a dedicated art gallery with supporting calendar of resident artists
Accessibility & Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tracks and trails master plan, increasing intraconnectivity noting that the Shire is popular for all forms of bike riding, hiking/walking, and horse-riding ▪ Review of public transport options
Evening and Weekday Product/Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Evening-based experiences to encourage a longer length of visitor stay and to provide experiences which locals can enjoy ▪ Experiences and activities that support mid-week visitation
Enhanced Calendar of Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop events into signature events to drive traffic during quiet periods and address product gaps
Destination Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visitor Management through data collection, education and monitoring especially for national parks and towns avoiding the risk of over tourism during peak visitation periods. ▪ Coordinated signage strategy including signage in its broadest context including roadside signs, information kiosks, information centres and online information sources ▪ Flexible visitor information servicing models

RISKS

It is essential to examine risks alongside opportunities and gaps to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the challenges facing our tourism initiatives and to develop effective strategies for sustainable growth and resilience. The risks identified through the consultation process include:

1. Environmental Degradation

- Increased visitation leads to pollution, traffic congestion, littering, and noise, impacting residents' quality of life.
- Visitors often disregard regulations regarding campfire safety, waste disposal, speed limits, and vegetation protection.

Mitigation Strategy

- Creation of educational content to promote best practice sustainable travelling options.
- Identifying Shire-led initiatives with our key stakeholders to mitigate impact to the environment, such as increased waste services in peak periods, and traffic mitigation for problem areas.

2. Climate Change

- Tourism contributes to air and water pollution, exacerbating climate change.
- Reliance on Alpine Resorts during winter makes the local economy vulnerable to diminishing snowfall due to climate change, affecting both tourism and agriculture.
- Bushfires are an ongoing risk for the visitor economy and have a significant impact on tourism infrastructure and natural assets.
- There has been an increasing number of high rainfall, flood and storm events which have had major impacts.
- Low water levels in Lake Eildon.

Mitigation Strategy

- Diversification of products and experiences across all tourism pillars and the activities associated to avoid concentration of a visitor market in one particular market segment. Should any of the tourism pillars or activities become 'unavailable' due to natural disasters, the Shire and wider industry can mitigate impact by continuing to leverage the other strengths, diverting focus while the other segment rebuilds.

3. Loss of Character

- Development for tourism and residential purposes threatens the Shire's character.
- Inadequate planning guidelines and lack of heritage facilities pose risks to preserving local stories and heritage.

Mitigation Strategy

- Planning mechanisms that protect the Shire's unique character and sense of identity identified in the Sustainable Tourism Plan.
- Protection of heritage sites and cultural heritage in Planning Scheme.
- Community engagement on all projects that could impact the Shire's character.

4. Strain on Local Businesses

- Seasonal visitation patterns and staffing shortages strain the viability of local businesses.

Mitigation Strategy

- Identify strategy for attracting visitors outside of peak periods, including driving mid-week and shoulder season visitation. This includes supporting events, attractions and experiences that will stabilise the peaks and troughs throughout the year and increase visitation in the traditionally quieter periods.
- In line with Council's keyworker housing work, support the development of affordable housing to attract workers to our region.

5. Insufficient Infrastructure

- Lack of toilets, parking, waste services, and wayfinding signage diminishes the destination's appeal and liveability.
- Affordable housing shortage affects workers in the tourism industry.

Mitigation Strategy

- Ensure Masterplans identify adequate infrastructure needs to support growing visitor base.
- Signage and wayfinding review with recommendations implemented.
- In line with Council's keyworker housing work, support the development of affordable housing to attract workers to our region.

6. Limited Economic Benefit

- Current visitation levels are not fully leveraged due to a lack of chargeable products, weak town-product connection, and inadequate marketing and information services.
- Uneven disperse of visitation year-round.

Mitigation Strategy

- Identify product gaps and develop an investment prospectus to showcase opportunities for potential investors for our region.
- In collaboration with the tourism industry, develop a Destination Management Action Plan that identifies key priority projects for the industry.
- Review visitor servicing strategy to ensure effective delivery of information to visitors, including reviewing the online presence.
- Support Tourism North East's marketing initiatives for the Victorian High Country including Mansfield.
- Identify strategy for attracting visitors outside of peak periods, including driving mid-week and shoulder season visitation. This includes supporting events, attractions and experiences that will stabilise the peaks and troughs throughout the year and increase visitation in the traditionally quieter periods.

7. Lack of Accessibility

- Poor accessibility impacts people with diverse access needs, limiting their access to businesses, services, accommodation, and infrastructure.
- Absence of formal access for specific user groups to popular visitor destinations leads to safety concerns and a subpar visitor experience.

Mitigation Strategy

- Review public transport options and continue to advocate for increased availability of services.
- Tracks and trails strategy to identify opportunities to enhance the intraconnectivity within the region for all user groups and abilities.
- Work with Tourism North East to support our region's businesses and tourism operators to ensure their business is accessible for all abilities.



7. Council's Role

Council's role in the Sustainable Tourism Plan encompasses the areas of leadership, advocacy, partnerships and service delivery.

Beyond Council, there are multiple organisations as demonstrated in Figure 4 with responsibility for different aspects of tourism planning, management and delivery, including local and regional tourism organisations, state government agencies, private tourism operators and community organisations. These organisations perform a variety of functions, including marketing, visitor servicing, product and experience development, business development, area management and strategic planning.

A Destination Management Action Plan will need to be developed in collaboration with the tourism industry to adopt an integrated, holistic approach to tourism planning which will determine priorities, timeframes, resourcing, and measures of success.

Figure 4 Stakeholders Mansfield Visitor Economy



The Sustainable Tourism Plan (2024-28) recognises that Council has an important role to play in the sustainable development of our region’s tourism industry in line with the collective vision for our destination. The following provides the structure from a Council’s perspective to manage and enhance the Mansfield Shire as both a visitor destination and a thriving place to live.

DESTINATION VISION

**Mansfield Shire is a must-visit destination.
Renowned for its stunning natural environment, authentic rural experiences and a diverse range of year-round attractions.
We are an inviting and welcoming community that celebrates and actively preserves its cultural and natural heritage.**

Key Focus Areas	Desired Outcomes
1. Lead and support significant activation projects, individual town plans and opportunities to grow the visitor economy in our region, capitalising on our strengths and competitive advantages as identified in our tourism pillars.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Industry and community aspirations inform tourism planning and decision-making. ▪ Mansfield Shire’s landscapes and natural environment are protected for current and future generations to enjoy. ▪ Visitors have access to and are dispersed across the Shire to spread the benefits of tourism and reduce the impacts of seasonality.
2. Support the industry in best-practice tourism, product development and sustainable growth through grant funding, education, resources and marketing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism experiences meet visitors’ needs and expectations and are true to the brand promise. ▪ Tourism operators are supported to deliver exceptional visitor experiences and embrace sustainability initiatives.
3. Deliver efficient, sustainable visitor servicing, positioning Mansfield as a sustainable tourism destination.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Visitors have access to and are dispersed across the Shire to spread the benefits of tourism and reduce the impacts of seasonality. ▪ Visitors receive accurate, quality, timely information at every stage of the visitor journey, and are made to feel welcome when they visit. ▪ Branding and marketing capture the essence of the Mansfield Shire and are supported by industry and community.

8. Key Focus Areas

Key Focus Area	Related Projects and Strategies	Council's Role	Key Stakeholders
<p>1. Lead and support significant activation projects, individual town plans and opportunities to grow the visitor economy in our region, capitalising on our strengths and competitive advantages as identified in our tourism pillars</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delatite Valley Masterplan. ▪ Goughs Bay Masterplan. ▪ Station Precinct Masterplan including the new Heritage Museum. ▪ Improving river access, facilities and visitor experiences at Mirimbah, Merrijig and Carters Rd. ▪ Improving connectivity through tracks and trails to and within the region. ▪ Activating the Lake Eildon Masterplan, in particular Skyline Road Tourist Precinct. ▪ High Country Hall of Fame, based in Merrijig. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lead the related projects and their effective delivery ▪ Identify ongoing grant opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Delatite Valley Association ▪ Mansfield Historical Society ▪ Friends of the Great Victorian Rail Trail ▪ Goughs Bay Progress Association ▪ Mountain Cattlemen's Association of Victoria
<p>2. Support the industry in best-practice tourism, product development and sustainable growth through grant funding, education, resources and marketing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Establishing a tourism network or advisory group pilot program. ▪ Creating a Destination Management Action Plan with the tourism industry. ▪ Continue passing on opportunities to operators for workshops, training, marketing and PR through relationship with Tourism North East. ▪ Assist tourism operators to develop and grow the region's product and experience offering. ▪ Educate and engage businesses on sustainability initiatives. ▪ Develop a tourism investment plan to address product and experience gaps. ▪ Facilitate and support the delivery of events that attract visitors to the shire. ▪ Council will continue to support the business development and advocacy programs of the Mansfield & District Business Association and other organisations to grow the capacity and capability of the region's business community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lead tourism governance model ▪ Advocacy ▪ Ongoing partnership with Tourism North East ▪ Identify ongoing grant opportunities ▪ Mansfield & District Business Association relationship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tourism operators, event organisers and businesses ▪ Tourism North East ▪ Mansfield Business District Association ▪ Mansfield Autism Statewide Services

Key Focus Area	Related Projects and Strategies	Council's Role	Key Stakeholders
<p>3. Deliver efficient, sustainable visitor servicing, positioning Mansfield as a sustainable tourism destination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintain strong relationships with key stakeholders and community groups across the tourism pillars. ▪ Identify opportunities to promote and market the local produce of our region including supporting farmers markets. ▪ Develop a tourism brand for the region. ▪ Ensure provision of face-to-face visitor servicing is cost-effective and returns benefit to visitors, tourism operators and the local community. ▪ Engage industry and community in transitioning to a sustainable model of visitor servicing, using multiple channels to distribute visitor information across the Shire. ▪ Conduct a wayfinding and signage review and implement recommendations. ▪ Review the Visitor Servicing strategy and recommendations to ensure visitors maximise their stay and disperse into the region. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advocacy ▪ Partnerships with various stakeholders ▪ Ongoing partnership with Tourism North East ▪ Identify ongoing grant opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Alpine Resorts Victoria ▪ Buller Ski Lifts ▪ Mt Buller Chamber of Commerce ▪ Tourism North East ▪ Arts Mansfield ▪ Mansfield Historical Society ▪ Mansfield Agricultural & Pastoral Society ▪ Tourism operators



9. Implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Plan

Successful tourism planning and management necessitates a strategy that harmonises economic advancement with social, cultural, and environmental considerations to attain sustainability. For it to be effective, tourism planning and management must adopt an integrated and comprehensive approach involving collaboration among the Council, industry, stakeholders, community, and visitors.

The Sustainable Tourism Plan 2024-28 illustrates Mansfield Shire Council's role across leadership, advocacy, partnerships, and service delivery.

The Destination Management Action Plan, to be created in collaboration with the tourism industry, will adopt a wider approach to tourism planning and further detail actions, priorities, timeframes, resourcing, and measures of success.

The Council recognises the following guidelines for the successful implementation of the Sustainable Tourism Plan:

- Resources must be committed, including financial and human resources. The resourcing of enabling activities, such networks and partnerships, and building the capacity and capability of Council, industry and community, are just as critical as the funding of capital works for infrastructure.
- There is a need for collaboration between Council, communities, businesses and other key stakeholders across the region and beyond. Building and maintaining networks and ensuring ongoing communication with local communities and businesses is essential and requires a consistent and planned approach.

- The planning policies and procedures of the Council play a crucial role in enabling economic growth, including offering incentives to attract suitable investments. In a competitive landscape where numerous regions are vying to draw in new investments, the Council must communicate its vision effectively, articulate its long-term goals, and ensure they are integrated into the Council's planning policies, development application procedures, and decision-making processes. It's imperative that the Strategy be perceived as a comprehensive Council plan, fostering collaboration and cooperation across all service areas within the Shire.
- Partners are critical to long-term success. There will be a need to work closely with Tourism North East, Mansfield Business District Association, Taungurung Land & Waters Council (TLaWC) and other public and private sector organisations.



10. Alignment to Council Plans

Council's commitment to Sustainable Tourism aligns closely with promoting tourism and enhancing the overall visitor experience as included in the Council Plan (2021-2025):

- **Economic Prosperity:** Tourism is a significant driver of economic growth in Mansfield Shire. By attracting visitors and supporting local businesses in the tourism sector, the council contributes to economic prosperity and job creation within the community.
 - **Environmental Sustainability:** The Council recognises the importance of preserving the natural environment, which is a key attraction for tourists. Sustainable tourism practices, such as promoting eco-friendly activities and minimising the environmental impact of visitors, align with the goal of environmental sustainability outlined in the Council Plan.
 - **Community Wellbeing:** Tourism plays a crucial role in enhancing community wellbeing by providing recreational opportunities, supporting cultural events, and promoting local attractions. By fostering a vibrant tourism industry, the Council contributes to the overall wellbeing and quality of life of residents.
- **Place Making and Planning:** The Council aims to create attractive and accessible public spaces that enhance the visitor experience and contribute to the overall appeal of Mansfield Shire as a tourism destination. Through strategic planning and investment in infrastructure, the Council ensures that tourism facilities and attractions meet the needs of visitors while preserving the character of the region.
 - **Leadership and Governance:** As a leader in the community, the Council is responsible for setting the vision and direction for tourism development. By collaborating with stakeholders, implementing policies that support sustainable tourism, and providing leadership in destination marketing, the Council facilitates the growth and success of the tourism industry in Mansfield Shire.



11. References

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CRAIG'S HUT



Mansfield Shire

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