

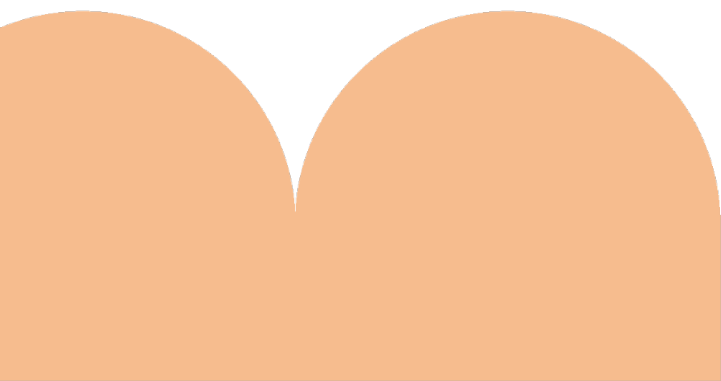
Natimuk Economic and Social Plan 2022

(Consultation Draft)

22 July 2022

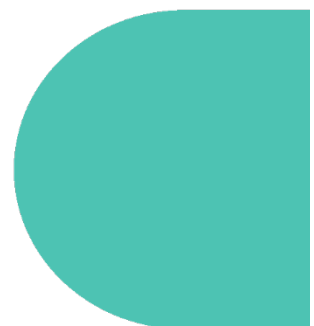
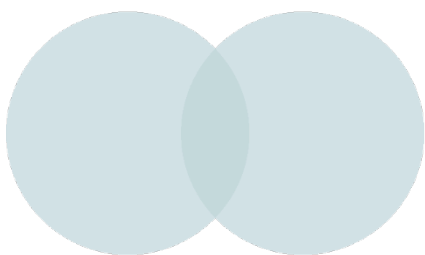


projectura



Natimuk Economic and Social Plan 2022 (Draft)

Prepared for	Horsham Rural City Council
Date	22 July 2022
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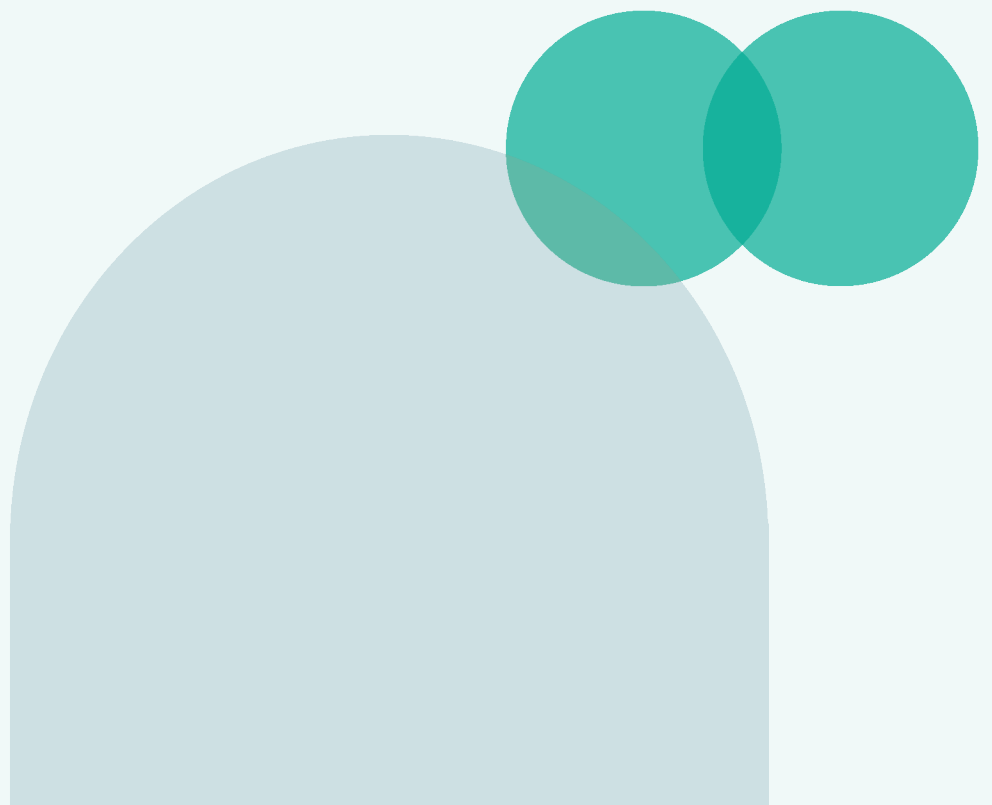
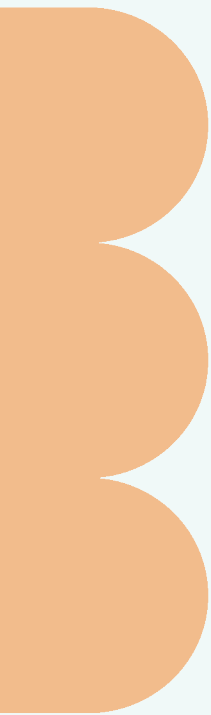
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We acknowledge the five traditional owner groups of this land; the Wotjobaluk, Wergaia, Jupagulk, Jaadwa and the Jadawadjali people.

We recognise the important and ongoing place that all Indigenous people hold in our community.

We pay our respects to elders, both past and present, and commit to working together in the spirit of mutual understanding and respect for the benefit of the broader community and future generations.



Purpose

The Natimuk Economic and Social Plan (the Plan) aims to provide a forward-looking document that improves the financial sustainability and liveability of the town and surrounding rural areas. The Plan will be owned and driven by the Natimuk community and will allow the community and stakeholders to work in the same direction towards achieving a shared vision over five years.

Drivers

Natimuk is a vibrant town 24km west of Horsham in the Wimmera region of Victoria with an active volunteer community. The area is a destination for tourists attracted by local events and Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), a world-class rock climbing location. COVID-19 and the closure of some of the climbs at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) have impacted visitation numbers and local business. In early 2021, the Arapiles District Community Group raised a range of concerns with the Council. They proposed that a community plan that addressed economic and social challenges be developed.

Developing the Plan

In early 2022, the Horsham Rural City Council commenced a process to create an Economic and Social Plan in collaboration with the Natimuk community. A consultancy, Projectura, was engaged by Council to collaborate with the community and develop the Plan. An eight-person Community Reference Group was formed to oversee the project.

In April 2022, an initial engagement exercise to understand Natimuk's identity, assets, issues and opportunities was undertaken with 23 stakeholders and community participants. The initial engagement provided the basis for broader community engagement involving 217 participants, further exploring the local strengths, challenges, community aspirations and future priorities.

Papers summarising each stage were prepared and presented to the Community Reference Group to test the validity of the findings.

The findings informed the development of the draft Plan's strategic direction, guiding principles, objectives and priority actions.

The last stage of consultation will occur with the release of this draft to enable community input before the Plan's finalisation.

Strengths

Natimuk's strengths, identified in the community engagement, are Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), a strong sense of community, the arts, culture and events, community groups and volunteers, the small-town feel, facilities and services.

Challenges

Natimuk's key challenges, identified in the community engagement, are the closure of some climbing sites at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), supporting businesses, economy and tourism, climate change and sustainability, water for Natimuk Lake, and the community's relationship with external stakeholders.

Natimuk community vision

'Together, our diverse and collaborative community supports a hub of creative, social, and recreational opportunities for all to enjoy.'

Guiding principles

Four key guiding principles underpin the decisions and actions associated with the Natimuk Economic and Social Plan.

- Community groups and individuals collaborate and co-exist harmoniously.
- The Traditional Owners of the land are recognised, and their cultural heritage and connection to Country is respected.
- There is respect for the area's agricultural and climbing history.
- Natimuk's small-town feel is retained.

Objectives

The four strategic objectives associated with the Plan are:

1. Boosting business, tourism, and the economy
2. An environmentally sustainable community
3. Improved recreation
4. Improved relationships

Priority actions for each objective are provided within the Plan.

About this Plan

Purpose

The Natimuk Economic and Social Plan (the Plan) aims to improve the financial sustainability and liveability of the town by establishing a shared strategic direction and a set of priority actions. As a place-based plan, it considers the community's unique attributes and focuses on addressing local needs and prioritising local solutions. The Plan provides a clear set of documented priorities that can be used to advocate for the needs and aspirations of Natimuk and enables the community and stakeholders to work together towards achieving the Natimuk community vision over five years between 2022-2027.

Several other localities surrounding the Natimuk township have been considered in this plan, including Mitre, Noradjuha, Tooan, Lower Norton and Quantong.

Rationale

The Natimuk community are diverse in their interests, with strong participation in football, netball, rock climbing, sporting shooting, arts and theatre. This diversity has arisen due to the migration of people into the small township, attracted by the rock climbing, natural features or the arts and cultural scene.

Natimuk is a destination for visitors who are attracted to Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), a world-class location for rock climbing, and events such as the Nati Frinj Festival and the Natimuk Farmers Market. COVID-19 and the closure of some of the climbs at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) have impacted visitation numbers and local businesses.

A Natimuk Community Action Plan was developed in 2007, with many actions delivered. In early 2021, the Arapiles District Community Group raised various concerns with the Council and suggested that the 2007 Community Action Plan be reviewed.

In early 2022, the Council commenced a process to create an Economic and Social Plan in collaboration with the community. Projectura, a community planning consultancy, was engaged by Council to work alongside the community to prepare the Plan.

The goal is to develop a plan that is reflective of Natimuk's needs and aspirations that can be owned by the community.

Plan development, Jan-Aug 2022



Community engagement

Community governance

Horsham Rural City advertised the opportunity for the local community to nominate to participate in a reference group. An eight-member Community Reference Group, including five members of the Natimuk community and three Council staff, was formed to oversee the project.

Engagement stages and activities

Community engagement to inform the Plan's development includes three stages.

Stage 1 (April 2022): Initial engagement to understand community identity, assets, needs, strengths and challenges.

Stage 2 (May 2022): Broad engagement to understand Natimuk's current situation and future vision, aspiration and priorities.

Stage 3 (July -August 2022): Broad engagement to seek feedback on this draft Plan. To be completed.

Table 1. Engagement activities

Activity	No. participants
Stage 1 engagement	
Community workshop	8
Stakeholder meetings with Council, Parks Victoria and Wimmera Catchment Management Authority	13
Community interviews	2
Stage 2 engagement	
Primary school workshop	8
Football training pop-up engagement	56
Post office pop-up engagement	29
Community workshop	8
Online survey	116
Total	240

Who was engaged?

Across all the engagement activities, it is estimated that 54% (n.130) of people were from Natimuk or the surrounding rural localities, not including Horsham.

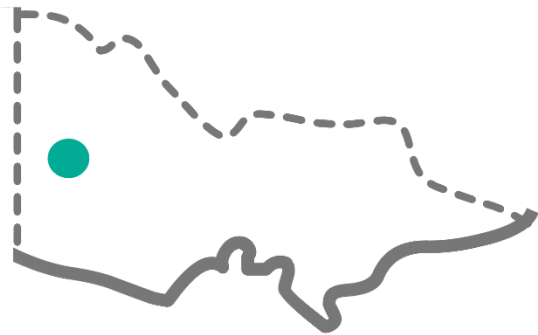
In total, it is estimated that 40% were female, 60% were male, and one person identified as non-binary.

The highest engagement was with people aged between 50-59 years, with 52 people engaged, whilst the lowest was from 80+ with two participants and the 70-79 year range with seven participants. Fourteen people under 15 participated, and all other age groups had 27-40 participants.



About Natimuk

Natimuk is a small town 24km west of Horsham in the Wimmera region of Victoria. Several other localities around the township are considered in this Plan. These include Mitre, Noradjuha, Tooan, Lower Norton and Quantong.



Our history and heritage

The Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk Peoples have remained connected to the land surrounding Natimuk for many thousands of years.¹ It is believed that the name Natimuk comes from the local Aboriginal word meaning 'little lake', a reference to Natimuk Lake, which is located just north of the township.

European settlement for sheep grazing commenced close to Natimuk on Vectis station in the 1840s. Settlement closer to the existing township occurred when land in the area was taken up by Lutheran selectors from Germany in the 1870s.² This period of European settlement has resulted in many heritage buildings within the town's centre.

Our people

The Natimuk township had a population of 548 people in 2021³. The combined population of the surrounding rural localities was 768 people⁴.

Key facts about Natimuk and the surrounding rural localities include:

- Between 2016-2021, the population increased by 7%.⁵
- 1% of the population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which is the same as the Victorian average.⁵
- 2% of people speak a language other than English at home, compared with the Victorian average of 30.2%.⁵
- 12% of people were born overseas, compared to 35% of the Victorian population.⁵
- 55% of the population is over 45, with 18% of residents aged between 55-64 years, compared to the Victorian average of 11.5%. 21% of the population is under 19 years with 11% of the population aged between 5-14 years, compared to the Victorian average of 12.2%.⁵
- 73% of the households are family households, 27% are single-person households and 1% are group households.⁵
- Of the family households, 51% are couples without children, 40% are couples with children and 8% are one-parent families.⁵
- The most common ancestries are Australian, English, German, Scottish, German and Irish.⁵
- 18% of households earn less than \$650 per week, compared to the Victorian average of 16.4%. 21% of households earn over \$3,000 per week, compared to the Victorian average of 24.2%.⁵
- 45% of homes are owned, 37% are mortgaged, and 12% are rented.⁵

¹ 2022, Parks Victoria website.

² 2004, Sydney Morning Herald, Natimuk.

³ 2021, ABS Census All persons QuickStats for Natimuk.

⁴ 2021, ABS Census All persons Quick Stats for Mitre, Noradjuha, Tooan, Lower Norton and Quantong.

⁵ 2021 ABS Census, All persons QuickStats for Natimuk, Quantong and Lower Norton

According to the index of Socio-economic Disadvantage (SEIFA), where a higher score means a lower level of disadvantage, Natimuk had an index score of 1,013.7. Compared with the overall SEIFA score for Horsham Rural City Council of 980.0 and the Victorian score of 1,010,³ Natimuk is at a higher level of disadvantage.

Natural features

Natural features in and around Natimuk include Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) and Mitre Rock which rise sharply out of the Wimmera Plain. The area also hosts a series of natural lakes, including Natimuk Lake, Lake Wyn Wyn, Olivers Lake and Mitre Lake. The Natimuk creek runs through the Natimuk township, and the Wimmera River runs through Quantong.

Our economy

Natimuk services the surrounding cropping and sheep farming establishments. More recently, particularly in the past 30 years, the town's economy has also focused on tourism to service visitors to Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite), one of Australia's premier rock-climbing areas.

Natimuk has several businesses that serve the local community and tourists, including the post office, café, hotel, general store and gallery. Other industries that operate from Natimuk include rock climbing guiding companies, a furniture store, a yoga studio, an engineering business and a solar energy equipment supplier. More than ten artists also use Natimuk as their home base.

Of the population in Natimuk and the surrounding localities, 96% of the labour force is employed, and 4% is unemployed⁶.

The top employment industries are hospitals, local government administration, grain growing, livestock farming, and aged care residential services⁶. An aged care facility in Natimuk operated by West Wimmera Health Service is a significant employer for the town.

It is estimated that up to 90,000 people visit Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) each year,⁷ with many using Natimuk as a service centre. The annual agricultural show and the farmers market, held a few times a year, attract additional visitation.

Every second year the Nati Frinj festival is held. In 2019 1,200 tickets were sold. The event supports local and visiting artists to perform, display and develop their work. Performances debuting at the festival have since been commissioned for national and international events.

Community assets and groups

Natimuk has many community assets that service the community. These include:

- A primary school and pre-school
- An aged care facility
- A medical clinic operating two days per week
- The showgrounds, home to the football/netball, cricket and tennis clubs, men's shed, agricultural and pastoral society and a rock-climbing training facility
- NC2, including three buildings, the craft shop, old council offices and the old courthouse
- The Soldiers Memorial Hall
- The Natimuk Lake foreshore
- The bowls club, RSL and gymnastic clubrooms.

In Natimuk and surrounds, 28% of the population did voluntary work through an organisation or group in the 12 months before the 2021 census, much higher than the Victorian average of 13.3%.⁵

It is estimated that 30 volunteer community groups are active in Natimuk. These include ACT Natimuk (Arapiles Community Theatre), Arapiles Historical Society, Football Netball Club, Bowls Club, Tennis Club, Gym Club, Urban Landcare, Natimuk Community Energy and Arapiles District Community Group.

Regular events such as the Palais de Pixel, coordinated by ACT Natimuk, which provides a cinema night each month at NC2, provide additional social connections for the community.

⁶ 2016 ABS Census All Person Quickstats for Natimuk

⁷ Arapiles Climbing Guides. www.arapiles.com.au

Celebrating our strengths

The Natimuk community has many strengths and unique characteristics. This Plan seeks to retain, reinforce and celebrate the town's strengths. Below is a summary of the top six themes identified through community engagement.

Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite)

People spoke of fresh air, views, leisure, recreation and the world-class climbing areas provided by the Mountain.

'We moved to Natimuk to be close to the best rock climbing in the world.'

'Great views of Arapiles.'

'Benefit from the magic of Mount Arapiles.'

Sense of community

People spoke of the community being close-knit, friendly, helping each other out, a good place to bring up a family and mostly harmonious.

'It embraces the rock climbing and farming community.'

'The best thing about Natimuk is the community feeling.'

'During droughts and floods, the tennis club ring others on farms to check on them.'

Arts, culture, and events

People spoke of the arts community, Palais de Pixel, aerial and projection performances on the silo, public art and the Frinj festival. Others said of other events such as the farmers market, agricultural shows and celebrations.

'I moved here for rock climbing, but now it is the art that sustains me.'

'Ag Show attracts 4-5,000 people.'

'Reputation for arts and culture.'

Community action, groups and volunteers

People spoke of a strong volunteer culture where people get things done and the value of community groups such as ACT Natimuk and the Football Club.

'Each footy game, we rally 75 volunteers to help.'

'Forward thinking people who don't wait for someone else to do things.'

Quiet, small-town feel

People spoke of the peace, quiet and how small the town is.

'Nice and quiet.'

'Freedom of a small town.'

'Nati is staying small, which is good.'

Facilities and services

People spoke of aged care, the showgrounds, the yoga studio, climbing wall, bike track and the skate park.

'The sports facilities at the showgrounds have had \$1M invested in the last 12 months.'

'Best nursing home.'

'For a small town, it has a lot of great facilities.'

Navigating our challenges

Engagement participants were asked about the main challenges facing Natimuk. Below is a summary of the six themes that emerged.

Climbing at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite)

Concerns about current climbing closures and the risk of further future closures were raised.

'Loss of climbing; without it, we will lose people, skilled professionals and the economy.'

'The biggest problem has been blanket closures of rock-climbing areas.'

'Looming threat of more climbing bans at Arapiles.'

Water for Lake Natimuk

Water availability for Lake Natimuk was regularly raised as a concern. The complexity of this issue seemed understood by many in the community. However, it remains a priority.

'In the last 25 years, there has been three years that much water has been apparent due to climate change and agricultural changes.'

'I think if Natimuk Lake had water, many benefits would flow onto the community through tourism.'

Business, economy and tourism

Lack of tourism promotion and infrastructure, limited shops, no fuel, support for existing shops and the bike path not being fully utilised were all raised as concerns.

'Small, limited shops and food.'

'Natimuk is excluded from regional tourism promotion.'

'Arapiles uncertainty kills tourism.'

Relationships with Traditional Owners

Many concerns around relationships with Traditional Owners appeared to stem from the closure of some climbs at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite). Some respondents were frustrated by the climbing closures and did not have communication channels to speak with Traditional Owners; others talked about respecting Traditional Owners' rights and cultural heritage.

'Wisely caring for Mount Arapiles, ensuring appropriate protection for Traditional Owners and suitable access for climbers.'

'Residents can't seem to make contact with the land council.'

Climate and sustainability

Concerns around the impact of and adaptation to climate change and other environmental issues such as rabbits, weeds, native vegetation loss and changes to natural flows at the lake were raised.

'Climate adaptation, especially in the heat of the summer.'

Relationship with Horsham Rural City

The relationship with and support of Horsham Rural City Council was raised as a concern.

'There is no conversation between the council and the community.'

'HRCC lack interest to spend money in or on Natimuk.'

It is also worth noting that two other challenge themes received many mentions; these were conflicting priorities between community groups and relationships with State agencies.

Understanding our priorities

Engagement participants were asked about the opportunities and priorities for Natimuk in the next ten years.

Below is a summary of common opportunities raised during the consultation under the most mentioned themes. Some opportunities are more achievable than others, and some of those put forward conflict with one another.

Boost business, tourism, and the economy

- Activating unused council buildings for small businesses.
- Art trails through private businesses.
- Rock climbing and biking events.
- A model for small-town rejuvenation.
- Business incubation centre.
- Improved camping and more accommodation.
- Promote Natimuk as a tourist destination.
- Place to access fuel.
- More shops in the street.
- Food and wine scene.
- Encouraging cottage industries to establish.
- Charge points for electric vehicles.

Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite)

- Recognition of Dyurrite as a cultural place.
- Culturally sensitive access for climbing.
- Indigenous youth climbing support.
- Celebrate climbing history, culture and one of the world's top climbing destinations.
- Communicating which climbs are open.
- Acknowledgment that climbers are a large proportion of residents and visitors to Natimuk.
- Keeping climbing open and stopping climbing restrictions.
- A plan to both preserve cultural heritage while maximising open climbing areas.
- Natimuk community working with Barengi Gadjin to resolve climbing closures.

Water for Lake Natimuk

- Find a way to make water available for Lake Natimuk.
- The community needs to understand why the lake doesn't fill.
- Completing the weir wall.
- Classification of the lake as an ephemeral wetland and appropriate management.
- Having water in the lake is a highly complex process. It is thought to be unlikely to be achieved but not impossible.

Improved or increased recreational activities

- Water-based facilities, e.g., pool, splash park, river access.
- Other recreational facilities, e.g., expanded skate park, trampoline park and pump track.
- Improved recreation facilities, e.g., mobile electronic scoreboard, more diverse use of recreation pavilion, lights along the bike path to the lake, and extended and covered netball courts.

Climate and sustainability actions (n.60)

- Zero-emission/carbon neutral town.
- Community energy.
- Solar farm and microgrid.
- Sustainable farming practices.
- Revegetation (planting trees along the creek and at the lake.
- Rabbit eradication.
- Replacement of dying street trees.



Our strategic direction

Natimuk community vision

'Together, our diverse and collaborative community supports a hub of creative, social, and recreational opportunities for all to enjoy.'

Guiding principles and objectives

Guiding principles

Four guiding principles have been formulated, which underpin decisions and actions associated with the Natimuk Economic and Social Plan.

- Community groups and individuals collaborate and co-exist harmoniously.
- The Traditional Owners of the land are recognised, and their cultural heritage and connection to Country is respected.
- There is respect for the area's agricultural and climbing history.
- Natimuk's small-town feel is retained.

Objectives

Four strategic objectives are associated with the Plan, further detailed in the next section. These include:

1. Boosting business, tourism, and the economy.
2. An environmentally sustainable community.
3. Improved recreation.
4. Improved relationships.

Boosting business, tourism and the economy

Priority area 1: Tourism branding and promotion

- 1.1 Create and disseminate clear messages on current climbing restrictions at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite) to assist visitors in understanding that not all climbing is closed.
- 1.2 Work in partnership with Horsham Rural City, Grampians Tourism and Wimmera Mallee Tourism to identify opportunities to increase tourism promotion of Natimuk.
- 1.3 Create online and hard copy tourism products to promote Natimuk attractions.

Priority area 2: Tourism attraction

- 2.1 Work in partnership with Parks Victoria to identify opportunities to improve the campground at Mount Arapiles and consider other infrastructure options that could increase visitation around Natimuk, e.g., improved river access or camping sites.
- 2.2 Work collaboratively across community groups and with GrainCorp to create a plan to utilise the silos for increased tourism and event attraction.
- 2.3 Coordinate additional events to increase tourism attraction.

Priority area 3: Business activation

- 3.1 Work with Horsham Rural City Council to create business incubation opportunities in unused Council buildings.
- 3.2 Work in partnership with Horsham Rural City Council to support new and existing businesses to grow and thrive in Natimuk.

Potential delivery partners

Partners who could support the delivery of the actions identified to boost the business, tourism and the economy in Natimuk include:

- Natimuk businesses and community
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Grampians Tourism
- Horsham Visitor Services
- Tourism Victoria
- Creative Victoria
- Parks Victoria
- Graincorp.



An environmentally sustainable community

Priority area 4: Sustainable power

- 4.1 Develop a solar farm, microgrid and community energy program for Natimuk.
- 4.2 Install electric vehicle charge stations.

Priority area 5: A healthy environment

- 5.1 Enhance native vegetation and revegetate priority areas in Natimuk and surrounding localities.
- 5.2 Undertake rabbit control works within the town centre.
- 5.3 Work with Horsham Rural City Council to plan for and replace dying street trees.

Potential delivery partners

- Natimuk community
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- Sustainability Victoria
- Department of Land, Water and Planning
- Parks Victoria.



Improved recreation

Priority area 6: Lake Natimuk

- 6.1 In partnership with Parks Victoria, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water, continue to:
- explore options to access recreational water for Natimuk Lake
 - explore options to increase the water holding capacity of Natimuk Lake
 - communicate with the community about the challenges of filling Natimuk Lake.

Potential delivery partners

- Horsham Rural City Council
- Parks Victoria
- Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority
- Victorian Environmental Water Holder
- Sport and Recreation Victoria.

Priority area 7: Recreation facilities

- 7.1 Access funding to continue to improve sports and recreation facilities and opportunities within Natimuk; these could include:
- A mobile electronic scoreboard that could be shared across community groups
 - Lights along the bike path to the lake
 - Drainage improvements at the showgrounds
 - Improved netball court facilities
 - Expanded skate park
 - Pump track
 - Water-based recreation options.



Improved relationships

Priority area 8: Local collaboration

- 8.1 With the support of Horsham Rural City Council, establish a local governance group to oversee the Natimuk Economic and Social Plan.
- 8.2 With the support of Horsham Rural City Council, the local governance group will develop an implementation plan for the priorities identified in this document, including funding opportunities, implementation roles and responsibilities and timelines for action.
- 8.3 Create mechanisms to ensure that most local community groups meet regularly to update each other on activities and priorities.

Priority area 9: Horsham Rural City Council and State agencies

- 9.1 Horsham Rural City Council to meet annually with the Natimuk community, potentially through the local governance group, to review the progress of the Economic and Social Plan and consider opportunities to support implementation.
- 9.2 Work with Horsham Rural City Council and relevant State agencies to facilitate regular communication and collaboration, potentially through the group proposed in 8.1.

Priority area 10: Barengi Gadjin Land Council

- 10.1 Seek funding to facilitate dialogue between the group proposed in 8.1 and the Barengi Gadjin Lands Council to:
 - discuss the future use and restrictions at Mount Arapiles (Dyurrite)
 - seek feedback on priorities that Traditional Owners and the community could collaborate on, e.g. cultural heritage and history promotion.

Potential delivery partners

- Natimuk community
- Horsham Rural City Council
- Barengi Gadjin Land Council
- Parks Victoria
- Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water
- Wimmera Catchment Management Authority.



Implementation

This Plan is uniquely tailored to Natimuk's needs as it was developed with the Natimuk community. Residents were clear that they wanted to work collaboratively across the community and with partner organisations to make Natimuk a hub of creative, social, and recreational opportunities.

It documents the high-level priorities unearthed during the community engagement activities. These projects align with the objectives:

1. Boosting business, tourism, and the economy.
2. An environmentally sustainable community.
3. Improved recreation.
4. Improved relationships.

Planning for implementation

Once the Plan is finalised, following a period of public consultation, Horsham Rural City will work with the community to establish governance, oversight, and an implementation plan to accompany this document.

It is proposed that a local governance group be established to oversee the Natimuk Economic and Social Plan.

Horsham Rural City Council will then work with the local governance group to develop an implementation plan that identifies funding opportunities, roles and responsibilities, and timelines for action.

Implementation

All sectors of the community have input into the Plan's implementation. The Plan is to be owned by the Natimuk community, with its implementation supported by Horsham Rural City Council, local businesses, service providers, agencies and community groups. Stakeholders will be brought together on a project-by-project delivery basis.

Evaluation and review

Horsham Rural City Council will meet annually with the Natimuk community through the proposed local governance group to review the progress of the Economic and Social Plan and consider opportunities to support implementation. A midterm review of the Plan will take place in 2025 and an end-of-term review in 2027.

