

AGENDA

MEETING OF THE **HORSHAM RURAL CITY COUNCIL**

To be held on

28 July 2025

At 5.30pm

In the

Council Chamber, Civic Centre

18 Roberts Avenue, HORSHAM



**COUNCILLORS are respectfully requested to attend the Council Meeting
of the Horsham Rural City Council to be held on 28 July 2025
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Horsham at 5.30pm**

Order of Business

PRESENT

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE

1. PRAYER

Almighty God, we pledge ourselves to work in harmony for, the social, cultural and economic well-being of our Rural City. Help us to be wise in our deliberations and fair in our actions, so that prosperity and happiness shall be the lot of our people. AMEN

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY STATEMENT

Horsham Rural City Council acknowledges the five Traditional Owner groups of this land; the Wotjobaluk, Jaadwa, Jadawadjali, Wergaia and Jupagulk people. We recognise the important and ongoing place that all Indigenous people hold in our community.

We pay our respects to the 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.

3. OPENING AND WELCOME

Chairman, Cr Ian Ross formally welcomed those in attendance to the meeting. The Mayor advised that the meeting will be recorded to maintain a video archive, which will be available on the Horsham Rural City Council website as soon as practicable.

4. APOLOGIES

5. LEAVE OF ABSENCE REQUESTS

6. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

Recommendation

That the minutes emanating from the Council Meeting of the Horsham Rural City Council held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Horsham at 5.30pm on 23 June 2025 be adopted.

7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Declarations of Interest

A Councillor who has declared a conflict of interest, must leave the meeting and remain outside the room while the matter is being considered, or any vote is taken.

Members of Staff

Under Section 130 of the *Local Government Act 2020*, officers or people engaged under contract to the Council providing a report or advice to Council must disclose any conflicts of interests in the matter, including the type of interest.

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<i>Defined as confidential information in accordance with Local Government Act 2020 - Section 3(1)(g) - Private Commercial Information</i>	

CLOSE



GAIL GATT
Chief Executive Officer

REPORTS FOR COUNCIL DECISION

9. OFFICERS REPORTS

9.1 AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE BIENNIAL REPORT TO COUNCIL – 1 JANUARY TO 30 JUNE 2025

Director:	Kim Hargreaves
Directorate:	Corporate Services
File Number:	F18/A13/000001

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 130:

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

Audit and Risk Committee's Biannual Report to Council Jan – Jun 2025 (**Appendix 9.1A**)

Purpose

To present the Audit and Risk Committee's Biannual Report for the period January to June 2025 to Council.

Summary

The report outlines key activity during the reporting period.

- Audit and Risk Committee meetings – 100% attendance rate by Committee members (independent members and Councillor Representatives).
- Two Committee meetings held during the reporting period – 20 March 2025 and 19 June 2025
- Appointment of new Internal Auditor, AFS & Associates Pty Ltd
- End of financial year preparation
- Interim Management Letter as provided by the Victorian Auditor General's Office (VAGO)

Recommendation

That Council receive and note the Biannual Report of the Audit and Risk Committee for the period January to June 2025.

REPORT

Background

This report is prepared in accordance with the Horsham Rural City Council's Audit and Risk Committee Charter 2025 (section 4.2.2) and fulfils the obligations under the *Local Government Act 2020* (s 54(5)).

The specific requirements of that section are that:

(5) An Audit and Risk Committee must—

- a) prepare a biannual audit and risk report that describes the activities of the Audit and Risk Committee and includes its findings and recommendations; and
- b) provide a copy of the biannual audit and risk report to the Chief Executive Officer for tabling at the next Council meeting.

The biannual report covers the period January to June 2025 and includes the Committee meetings held on 20 March and 19 June 2025. The minutes of the March meeting were tabled at the April 2025 Council Meeting and the minutes of the June meeting have been tabled as a separate report to this Council Meeting.

Discussion

This report provides a summary of the work the Committee performed to discharge its responsibilities. It also includes a summary of Council's progress in addressing the results of internal and external audit reports.

For the topics covered in the period under review, the report includes an overall assessment of risks, controls, and compliance processes, including consideration of a wide range of reports that indicated Council's continued monitoring of developments.

Options to Consider

There are no options other than to consider as the report is required by legislation (section 54(5) of the *Local Government Act 2020*).

Sustainability Implications

Not applicable

Community Engagement

Council's Audit and Risk Committee is comprised of Councillors and independent members. Consultation is undertaken with Internal Auditors and external (Victorian Auditor-General's Office – VAGO) Auditors.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Council applies the principles of continuous improvement in the operation of the Audit and Risk Committee with a strong process of regular review and evaluation of the Committee's operations. From this regular review and evaluation, processes and practices are changed as required to deliver improved and effective outcomes. The biannual report represents one such mechanism of evaluation of operations.

Collaboration

Not applicable

Financial Implications

Costs associated with Council's Audit and Risk Committee for the reporting period are within the 2024-25 operational budget allocation.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

Nil

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

2021-2025 Council Plan: Theme 5 – Leadership

1. Good governance, through leadership and connection with community
2. Good management for financial sustainability
4. Accountable and transparent decision making

Risk Implications

An Audit and Risk Committee is required under the *Local Government Act 2020* so having a properly functioning or constituted committee ensures Council meets its legislative obligations and is well placed to mitigate risk noting the Committee's responsibilities. These include monitoring compliance with Council policies and procedures, Council's financials and performance, risk management and fraud prevention systems and controls, and overseeing internal and external audit functions.

Conclusion

The Audit and Risk Committee is a legislated requirement under the *Local Government Act 2020*. Other obligations are placed on the Committee by the Audit and Risk Committee Charter. This report meets our obligations under the Act that requires the Audit and Risk Committee to prepare a biannual audit and risk report that describes the activities of the Audit and Risk Committee and includes its findings and recommendations; and provide a copy of that report to the next Council meeting.

9.2 COMMUNITY EVENTS GRANTS 2025-2026

Director:	Kim Hargreaves
Directorate:	Corporate Services
File Number:	F20/A01/000016

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 130:

☒ Yes ☐ No

Reason:

At all levels of the assessment process, those on the assessment panels and at briefings have been requested to declare any conflict of interest and are instructed to not discuss or vote on any applications where there may be a real or perceived conflict of interest. Details of conflict-of-interest declarations made by Officers and others involved in the process is attached (Appendix 9.2B)

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

Community Events Grants 2025-2026 (**Appendix 9.2A**)

Community Events Grants Conflict of Interest Declarations (**Appendix 9.2B**)

Community Events Grants Guidelines 2025-2026 (**Appendix 9.2C**)

Purpose

To provide Council with recommendations for events to be funded from the 2025-2026 Community Events budget.

Summary

- Council approved the allocation of \$73,000 for Community Events Grants as part of the Community Grants budget for 2025-2026 at the May 2025 Council meeting.
- Two funding rounds are offered each year with the first application round opened in May and a second to be opened in November if funds are not exhausted at round one.
- Council received a total of 37 Community Event Grant applications in the first round requesting \$168,073.
- Of the total number of applications, 43% funding requests are recommended for allocation.
- It is recommended that 27 Community Event Grants to the value of \$72,938 are approved by Council (Appendix A).

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Approve \$61,900 to the following the Community Event Grants (noting nil Councillor conflicts of interest):

Applicant	Amount
Beyond Community Inclusion Inc	\$1,500
Black Hole Theatre	\$6,000
Gariwerd Artists Inc	\$800

Horsham & District Orchid Society	\$500
Horsham Agricultural Society Inc	\$4,000
Horsham Calisthenics College	\$1,200
Horsham Fire Brigade	\$2,000
Horsham Girl Guides	\$1,000
Horsham Rockers Inc	\$2,000
Horsham Rural City Band	\$3,000
Horsham Spring Garden Festival Inc	\$2,000
Laharum Hall committee of management	\$3,800
Mother's Day Classic-Horsham	\$900
Old Skool Hotrod and Custom Club	\$4,000
Operation 19:14	\$4,000
Rotary Club of Horsham East	\$6,000
SmartArtz Theatre Inc	\$6,700
Toolondo Golf club	\$1,000
Wimmera Against Cancer in Kids	\$2,500
Wimmera Mallee Historical Vehicle Society	\$500
Wimmera Music Eisteddfod Inc.	\$4,500
Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly	\$2,000
Wimmera Rockers Danceworld Inc.	\$2,000
Total	\$61,900

2. Approve \$11,038 to the following community grant allocations (noting Councillor conflict of interest):

Applicant	Amount
Arapiles Community Theatre Inc	\$6,538
Arapiles Historical Society Inc	\$2,000
Natimuk Agricultural and Pastoral Society Inc	\$500
Natimuk and District Gymnastics Club	\$2,000
Total	\$11,038

3. Advise all Community Event Grant applicants of the outcome of their applications by the end of August 2025.

REPORT

Background

Council approved a revised Community Grants Policy on 18 December 2023 that split the community grants program into four streams:

1. Community Development Grants - annual program open in February each year
2. Community Events Grants – open in May and November each year
3. Youth Grants – open continuously from 1 July each year until funding is exhausted
4. Quick Response Small Grants - open continuously from 1 July each year until funding is exhausted (now called Urgent Need Small Grants).

At the Council meeting held on 26 May 2025, Council allocated \$231,684 in the 2025-26 Budget for approved community grants and donations across the following categories:

- Community Development Grants	\$137,684
- Community Events Grants	\$ 73,000
- Youth Grants	\$ 10,000
- Urgent Need Small Grants	\$ 11,000

The policy to support the Grants program is subject to an annual review process with Council approving a revised Community Grants Policy on 28 January 2025. The 2025-2026 Community Events Grants Round complies with the revised policy.

Discussion

In accordance with the 2025-26 Community Grants Policy, the community were invited to submit applications for event grant funding in May with applications open 1 May to 2 June 2025. At the closing date, Council had received 37 Community Event Grant applications requesting \$168,073 for 2025-2026 compared to 29 applications requesting \$131,317 in 2024-2025.

These 37 applications underwent the following assessment process using the new SmartyGrants platform:

- an initial eligibility assessment to ensure applications meet eligibility criteria for further assessment (reflecting eligibility requirements in the Community Grant Policy and Guidelines)
- individual assessments by the internal assessment panel as per the provisions of the Community Grants Policy with each application assessed against the criteria and weighting outlined in the Grant Guidelines (Appendix C).
- final moderation and approval of projects by the internal assessment panel (Appendix A)- which included calculated of the moderated score. The assessment panel then met to review the scores and noting the funding available to finalise the recommendations for funding - refer below for the additional assessment considerations).
- recommendations were then reviewed by the Executive Management Team and
- recommendations were reviewed at a Council Briefing.

Additional assessment considerations

Upon review of the moderated assessment scores against the available budget, only 11 of the 37 applications would have received their requested allocation if the full amount requested had been allocated. The assessment then considered the moderated score against an allocation of the minimum grant requested. This process resulted in an outcome whereby only 17 of the 37 applications would have received funding.

To provide more applicants with funding, noting the funding sought was from across all applications was \$168,073 and the budget allocation is \$73,000, the assessment panel considered the following:

1. Reducing the minimum requested amount in most instances
2. Examining the applicant's ability to self-fund (including ability to make a profit without provision of a grant)
3. Further distribution of funding to ensure more projects would receive some level of funding
4. Geographic distribution of events
5. Consideration of the application of a similar for one-day annual events that Council are asked to support (generally \$2000 per event)

Of the 37 eligible applications, 27 applications totalling \$72,938 are recommended for funding from the \$73,000 Community Events Grants Program budget thereby exhausting the funding allocation. On that basis there would be no second round of funding available.

The ten applications not recommended to receive funding were excluded for several reasons including:

- Receipt of other financial support from Council
- Ability to generate a large profit
- Multiple applications from the same applicant
- Proposed grant to be used for a fund-raising event
- Request not considered a request for grant funding (workshop or goods)
- Low scoring application

It is proposed that all applicants be advised of the outcome of their grant application as soon as practicable following the Council decision as to allocation of Community Events Grants for 2025-2026. Successful applicants should be advised as soon as possible to assist the respective groups in preparing for the implementation of their projects for the 2025-2026 financial year.

Options to Consider

That Council accept the recommendations of the assessment panel and endorse the allocation of funds as per the amounts specified in the report. Alternatively, Council may decide not to support the panel recommendations noting that the recommendations exhaust the budget allocation for Event Grants.

Sustainability Implications

Nil

Community Engagement

Applications for the event grants were advertised extensively in Council's e-newsletter, the Weekly Advertiser and Council's website during the month of May.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The use of the new SmartyGrants software platform has enabled improved grants program management and will be used for the administration of all Council grant programs from 2025-2026 onwards.

Collaboration

Not applicable

Financial Implications

Council received 37 Community Event Grant applications in the first round requesting a total of \$168,073 in funding. Of these 37 applications, 27 have been recommended for funding to a total of \$72,938 thereby exhausting the 2025-2026 budget allocation for Events Grants of \$73,000.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

Not applicable

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

- 2021-2025 Council Plan (including the Health and Wellbeing Plan)
- Community Inclusion Plan
- Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan
- Youth Strategy
- Age-Friendly Communities Implementation Plan
- Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2023-2026

Risk Implications

In December 2023 Council resolved to distribute the Community Grants via four separate funding streams. Since that change, the full annual allocation of funds for the Community Events grants has been exhausted in the first funding round with the result that no second round is offered. Noting successful projects have eighteen months from the grant notification date to complete their projects this should mitigate potential risks associated with events being funded in the first half of the financial year only however the program will need to consider this issue as part of the annual review process to ensure Council objectives are still being achieved.

Conclusion

The 2025-2026 Community Events Grants program will release significant money into the local community and economy to support a variety of diverse, inclusive and vibrant community events. The local expenditure resulting from this Council support will provide both an important economic stimulus to our not-for-profit sector as well as enable opportunities for participation and social connectivity.

9.3 ROAD MANAGEMENT PLAN

Director:	John Martin
Directorate:	Infrastructure
File Number:	F02/A01/000001

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with Local Government Act 2020 – Section 130:

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with Local Government Act 2020 – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

Amended Draft Road Management Plan (**Appendix 9.3A**)

Road Hierarchy Map - Urban (**Appendix 9.3B**)

Road Hierarchy Map - Rural (**Appendix 9.3C**)

Purpose

To provide Council with an update on the review of the Road Management Plan prior to commencing formal consultation on the Plan.

Summary

- The Road Management Plan (RMP) sets the minimum standards for maintenance of roads with a focus on road safety.
- The Road Management Act (2004) limits Council's liability for road incidents where a Road Management Plan is in place and is being complied with by Council.
- Road Management Plans are required to be reviewed each four years, following a Council election.
- This report provides an update on the proposed amendments to the Plan in advance of the formal consultation process.

Recommendation

That Council approve the commencement of consultation on the revised version of the Road Management Plan included as **Appendix 9.3A**, for a period of four weeks, including conduct of drop-in sessions in rural parts of the municipality, and with the provision for the community to make submissions on the draft Plan.

REPORT

Background

The Road Management Plan is a document that describes the maintenance systems and standards in place for Council's road and footpath network to facilitate their safe and serviceable use for vehicles, pedestrians and other users. Safety of road users is the number one priority for Council.

In addition, where Council has an RMP in place, and is compliant with it, Council's liability for claims relating to road incidents is limited. This provides significant protection against insurance claims.

Council has periodically reviewed and updated its Road Management Plan, as required under the provisions of the Road Management Act 2004 and related regulations. The Plan was reviewed as required by legislation in 2021 following the previous Council election. There have also been two minor reviews since, as follows:

- An improved process for addressing footpath defects and a changed classification for some minor tracks (June 2023);
- A clarification in the terminology for urgent defects in contrast to emergency events. (August 2024).

The purpose of the review is to ensure that the standards and priorities for the inspection, maintenance and repair of roads remain appropriate.

The process for review of the Road Management Plan is prescribed in regulations. The key steps in the process are:

- Conduct of a review of the existing RMP document to determine if an update is required.
- Formal notification that the review process is underway, including a Government Gazette notice.
- Conduct of a community engagement process on the plan.

There are two key aspects of the RMP review, these relate to:

- The service standards described in the plan, e.g. the frequency of inspections and response times when defects are identified (either as a result of inspections, or through public requests)
- The road hierarchy classification, which sets the standard of service for different roads.

Discussion

The reviewed draft Road Management Plan is now included as an attachment, in advance of its circulation for community and stakeholder consultation.

The main changes to the Plan relate to consideration of the Rural Road Network Plan, and its introduction of three separate overlays to the hierarchy outlined in the Road Management Plan, as follows:

- Freight Routes
- Farm Machinery Routes
- Tourism Routes.

Mostly, the inclusion of these overlays does not change the framework for the service standards in the Road Management Plan, but they do impact on the classification of roads in the hierarchy, once a

particular section of road is upgraded. Note that it is not practical to re-classify the identified routes until funding is obtained to perform the relevant upgrade works.

The one change in service standard relates to the vegetation clearance envelope for farm machinery routes. It is proposed to adopt a wider, 7m x 6m, envelope, however that is still subject to:

- Approval from DEECA in relation to its guidelines for native vegetation clearance. It is understood that DEECA is reviewing these guidelines, and a submission has been made to DEECA in relation to this.
- Funding for the upgrade works.

Other changes in the Road Management Plan are primarily to improve clarity of the text.

The next phase in the process is community engagement. This had been deferred from earlier in the year to avoid overlap with Council's broader Community Vision engagement.

Options to Consider

Council is not required to have a Road Management Plan, but if it does, then its liability to claims for road incidents from the public is limited under the provisions of the Road Management Act 2004.

Sustainability Implications

Nil

Community Engagement

Engagement requirements for the review of the Road Management Plan are defined in the Road Management Act 2004 and its related regulations. Key elements of this engagement include publishing details of the review on or in:

- Council's website (including a copy of relevant documents)
- The Government Gazette
- Council's public notices in the print media.

Additional engagement will occur as follows:

- Letters to stakeholders, including those identified as potential stakeholders in an MAV guide on updating Road Management Plans, such as emergency services and school bus operators.
- Letters to landholders on roads should it be proposed that a reduced standard of maintenance might apply.
- The planned period for engagement is proposed to exceed the minimum 28-day period required under the regulations.

This engagement is planned to occur during August, leading to consideration of an updated Road Management Plan, and any proposed changes to road hierarchies by Council during September (and October if required).

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

The revised RMP incorporates new directions from the Rural Road Network Plan

Collaboration

Council is engaging with MAV to ensure our amended RMP satisfies our insurer's requirements.

Financial Implications

Changes to road hierarchies need to consider the potential for increased costs.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

A Road Management Plan needs to be prepared in accordance with the Road Management Act 2004.

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

Council has had a Road Management Plan since 2004.

Risk Implications

The Road Management Plan's focus is on managing the risk of not maintaining roads in a suitable condition.

A critical aspect of this is that the RMP needs to establish service standards that are considered appropriate from a safety perspective, but which we can guarantee that we can resource. An over-commitment of service standards in the RMP could lead to non-compliance with the plan, which could lead to loss of Council's. Hence, the RMP is referred to as our minimum service standard, and we aim to achieve better than that.

Currently, public claims for road related damage, e.g. a tyre blowout due to a pothole, have a threshold of \$1681 before Council is considered potentially liable.

Conclusion

The report provides information about the process for review of the Road Management Plan, with the next planned step being community and stakeholder consultation.

9.4 HORSHAM REGIONAL LIVESTOCK EXCHANGE FEES – 2025-26

Director:	John Martin
Directorate:	Infrastructure
File Number:	F04/A01/000001

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 130:

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

HRLE New Fees 2025-26 (**Appendix 9.4A**)

Purpose

To update the Horsham Rural Livestock Exchange (HRLE) fees and charges for the 2025-26 financial year.

Summary

- The 2025-2026 Livestock Exchange fees presented to Council in June did not include a CPI increase.
- These fees need to be increased by CPI to ensure ongoing financial viability of the HRLE.
- The fees are proposed to be increased by 3% as per other increases reflected in the register.
- The HRLE Advisory Committee resolved to support the application of this increase at its recent meeting on 10 July 2025.
- A new list of fees is attached as **Appendix 9.4A** – HRLE New Fees 2025-26.

Recommendation

That Council adopt the fees/charges proposed for Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange for the 2025-26 financial year, as presented in **Appendix 9.4A**, with effect from 29 July 2025.

REPORT

Background

The CPI increase to fees/charges at Horsham Regional Livestock Exchange was not applied in this year's budget process.

Fees and charges for the HRLE need to be increased yearly to ensure it continues to be viable to operate this important community facility. The proposed increase to fees have been closely based around a 3% increase as far as possible reflective of the increases applied to other fees and charges.

Discussion

The proposed fees are appropriate to allow the livestock exchange to operate without needing to draw on funds from the capital reserve.

While the setting of some fees is subject to Council delegations, these amendments relate to a variation to fees and therefore are presented to Council for consideration and adoption. The updated fees will be incorporated in the Register of Fees and Charges and take effect following the Council resolution.

Options to Consider

- Leave the fees as they are in the current register, which would reduce the livestock exchange income.
- Approve a higher rate increase to boost the livestock reserve, but this may impact usage by local vendors, and resulting in reduced income.

Sustainability Implications

Nil

Community Engagement

The delay in setting the fees was presented to the HRLE Advisory Committee at its 10 July 2025 meeting. The Committee resolved as follows regarding this item:

That the Committee acknowledge that this error in not increasing the HRLE fees should be corrected, as a CPI increase was expected by the Committee. (10 July 2025)

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Not applicable

Collaboration

Not applicable

Financial Implications

The delay in setting the fees will lead to a reduction of income of approx \$800 for this financial year, based on:

- Anticipated throughput for July – 20,000 sheep/lambs
- Difference in fee (\$1.27 proposed less \$1.23 current) - \$0.04
- Total = \$800

The Livestock Exchange operates as a separate, self-funding operational entity within Council.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

Not applicable

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

The setting of fees and charges is an integral part of the Council Budget process. Corrective measures have been put in place to avoid a repeat of this error.

Risk Implications

Not applicable

Conclusion

This rate adjustment is in line with previous yearly increases and is required to maintain the financial viability of the site.

9.5 WESTERN HIGHWAY ADVOCACY PRIORITIES

Director:	John Martin
Directorate:	Infrastructure
File Number:	F15/A01/000001

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with Local Government Act 2020 – Section 130:

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with Local Government Act 2020 – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

Western Highway Advocacy Priorities (Appendix 9.5A)

Purpose

To seek Councillor input and endorsement of priorities for upgrades of the Western Highway Corridor to inform preparation of an advocacy strategy by the Western Highway Action Committee.

Summary

- The Western Highway Action Committee advocates for improvements to the Western Highway between Melbourne and the South Australian border.
- The Committee is preparing a new advocacy strategy and is seeking input from member Councils to inform the strategy.
- A draft set of issues has been identified in the template provided as an attachment to this report.

Recommendation

That Council endorse the set of advocacy priorities included in **Appendix 9.5A** for inclusion in the Western Highway Action Committee advocacy strategy.

REPORT

Background

The Western Highway Action Committee comprises the 10 Councils between Melton and West Wimmera along the Western Highway Corridor. The Committee has been in existence since at least 1999 and has played a key role in advocating to the Victorian and Australian Governments on priorities for upgrading the Western Highway. The key priority of the Committee has been supporting the duplication of the Highway, which is complete through to east of Ararat.

The Committee is now preparing an updated strategy so that it can establish the priorities of member Councils for a coordinated voice to Government about the community's further priorities for the Highway. The strategy is proposed to be completed this calendar year.

The development of a common set of priorities, shared by ten Councils, carries much weight in representations to Government.

Discussion

The attachment to this report is a template provided by the Committee seeking to gain input from each Council on priorities in a number of areas, in particular:

- Long term priorities
- Short term priorities and
- Safety issues.

The priorities listed in the template include references not just to highway projects, but also rail related projects, on the basis that we should look at the highway corridor, and not just the highway itself

Where appropriate, relevant strategies have also been referenced. These will be provided to the Committee as required to support the development of the strategy.

Subsequently, there will be a one-on-one consultation with each Council to provide for further elaboration on the issues raised. Draft versions of the strategy will be presented to the Committee for review prior to finalisation.

Options to Consider

Councillors may have different views on the priorities shown, and also may wish to include further projects not yet listed in the attached template.

Sustainability Implications

Nil

Community Engagement

The input of member Councils is being sought on behalf of the Western Highway communities along its route.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Nil

Collaboration

The Western Highway Action Committee is a collaboration between the ten Councils along the highway's route from Melton to the South Australian border. The Committee gains regular input from the Department of Transport and Planning, and Major Road Projects Victoria, however the strategy would be owned by the Committee and its member Councils, not those government agencies.

Financial Implications

Funding contributions to WHAC by Councils are not sought every year, however a \$3500 contribution has been requested for 2025-26. Funding contributions are based on the population of the member Councils.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

The Department of Transport and Planning prepared its own Western Highway Corridor Strategy in 2020, and while a presentation on key outcomes from that strategy was provided to WHAC, the Strategy itself was not publicly released.

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

Relevant Council strategies include:

- The Horsham Urban Transport Strategy
- The Housing Strategy (under development)
- Framework for Managing Growth (2013)

Preliminary community output from the current Council Plan / Community Vision has identified the community's high level of interest in a Horsham bypass.

Risk Implications

Preparation of an advocacy strategy provides the opportunity to address transport risks as identified by Council and the community.

Conclusion

Development of Council's priorities for the Western Highway will support the preparation of an advocacy strategy by the Western Highway Action Committee.

9.6 SUBMISSIONS ON "PAYMENT IN LIEU OF RATES (PILOT) SCHEME FOR ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEMS DISCUSSION PAPER." & SEC RENEWABLE ENERGY PARK HORSHAM COMMUNITY BENEFITS FUND

Director:	Kevin O'Brien
Directorate:	Communities and Place
File Number:	F06/A13/000001

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 130:

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

HRCC Submission in response to "Payment in Lieu of Rates (PILOT) scheme for Energy Storage Systems Discussion Paper." (**Appendix 9.6A**)

Draft submission: SEC Renewable Energy Park Horsham Community Benefits Fund (**Appendix 9.6B**)

Purpose

To inform Council of the submission that has been made to DEECA regarding the Payment in Lieu of Rates (PILOT) Scheme and present the draft submission to the State Electricity Commission (SEC) regarding the proposed Community Benefits Fund for the SEC Renewable Energy Park Horsham.

Summary

This report informs Councillors of the Horsham Regional City Council's (HRCC) submission to Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) regarding the proposed "Payment in Lieu of Rates (PILOT) scheme for Energy Storage Systems Discussion Paper." Concurrently, HRCC will engage with the State Electricity Commission (SEC) to seek acceptable rates for the Horsham Energy Park project, separate to the DEECA submission, and will also provide feedback on the SEC's proposed Community Benefits Fund for the SEC Renewable Energy Park Horsham. These actions are driven by HRCC's commitment to ensuring the energy transition provides tangible and equitable benefits to our community.

Recommendation

That Council:

1. Note the submission in response to DEECA's "Payment in Lieu of Rates (PILOT) scheme for Energy Storage Systems Discussion Paper," advocating for a wholesale review of the PILOT scheme and a return to standard industrial rates for energy facilities (**Appendix 9.6A**).
2. Note that Council Officers will engage directly with the State Electricity Commission (SEC) to seek the payment of acceptable rates for the SEC Renewable Energy Park - Horsham.
3. Endorse the draft submission to the SEC regarding the SEC Renewable Energy Park - Horsham Community Benefits Fund (**Appendix 9.6B**).

REPORT

Background

The PILOR scheme currently allows energy facilities to pay significantly lower rates than comparable commercial and industrial facilities. HRCC's position is that this undermines the Victorian Government's stated aim of providing local and regional community benefits from the energy transition.

The current PILOR methodology, designed for energy generators, is now being reviewed for energy storage systems. HRCC's submission to DEECA argues for a wholesale review of the PILOR scheme for all energy facilities, advocating for a return to ordinary industrial rates for these projects.

Separate to the DEECA submission, HRCC will engage directly with the SEC to seek the payment of acceptable rates for the SEC Renewable Energy Park - Horsham. This engagement will emphasize the need for the SEC to contribute equitably to the local community through appropriate rate payments, reflecting the true impact and benefits of their development.

Furthermore, it is proposed HRCC will provide feedback on the SEC's Community Benefits Fund for the Renewable Energy Park - Horsham.

The SEC is delivering the SEC Renewable Energy Park – Horsham, Victoria's first 100 per cent publicly owned, large scale renewable energy project.

The project will consist of over 212,000 photovoltaic solar panels and a 100 megawatt (MW) two-hour Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) and is currently in the early stages of construction.

The project will help accelerate Victoria's energy transition to deliver renewable, affordable, and reliable energy for all Victorians. The region will benefit from local employment and supplier opportunities, community benefit sharing and best practice engagement with First Peoples.

The SEC Renewable Energy Park-Horsham is anticipated to be fully operational in late 2027. Learn more by reading the Project Fact Sheet.

The project will deliver a range of direct and flow-on benefits to the Horsham community. The SEC has committed a Community Benefit Fund of \$42,000 per year (\$126,000 total) during the three-year construction phase and \$2 million for the life of the project once operational – \$70,000 per year and adjusted with Consumer Price Index.

The SEC is calling on the Horsham community to help us shape how the fund will be designed and delivered.

Discussion

The submission to DEECA has highlighted the following points:

- *Lack of Rationale for Discounted Rates:* There is no clear justification for energy facilities receiving a substantial discount on council rates, especially when other local businesses pay rates based on the capital improved value of their land. While there may have been a historical basis for supporting a nascent renewable energy industry, this is no longer applicable given its rapid growth.
- *Fairness to Councils:* The assertion that PILOR is "fair to councils and generators" is disputed. The deep discount on council rates is not fair to councils, who bear the costs of providing services to citizens and businesses, including those impacted by new energy developments.
- *Evidence of Strong Energy Storage Investment:* The DEECA discussion paper suggests that the current PILOR methodology may deter investment in energy storage technologies. HRCC's submission will counter this by citing evidence from the Clean Energy Council's "Quarterly investment report: Large-scale renewable energy and storage Q1 2025," which indicates a "remarkable run of investment commitments to energy storage projects," with Q1 2025 being "the best annual start for new storage projects on record."
- *Decreasing Battery Costs:* Further supporting the argument against rates subsidies, CSIRO's "GenCost 2024-25: Consultation draft" notes that "Large-scale battery costs improved the most in 2024-25 falling by 20% in 2024-25." This demonstrates that the industry is becoming more cost-effective, reducing the need for financial incentives through discounted rates.
- *Local Benefits are Not Guaranteed:* While energy storage projects offer significant benefits to the state and the National Energy Market (NEM), the benefits to local communities are not inherently guaranteed. The influx of a surge workforce during construction can strain local housing and services, and post-construction, these facilities may provide limited local employment. Proper council rates are a direct and genuine mechanism to share the benefits with regional communities.
- *Battery Energy Storage Systems are Industrial Facilities:* HRCC submits that battery energy storage systems are an intensive, industrial use of land. Therefore, their rates should be determined in the same manner as other industrial land, based on the industrial rate for the capital improved value of the land. This approach offers certainty and consistency.
- *Critique of Alternative Methods:* Alternative methods suggested in the discussion paper, such as using land footprint or varying rates based on capacity factors, are seen as undermining the objective of shared benefits and introducing unnecessary complexity and inconsistency.

The SEC Community Benefits Survey for the Renewable Energy Park – Horsham, is available on the Engage Victoria website with submissions closing on Sunday 27 July 2025, however an extension to this closing date has been allowed in order to have a submission endorsed by Council.

The survey seeks community input on how a Community Benefit Fund should be utilised. Key aspects of the survey include:

- Identifying local sectors and groups that should be supported by the fund.

- Suggesting specific initiatives the fund could support.
- Addressing potential barriers that might prevent people from accessing the fund.
- Gathering preferences on the distribution method (annually or lump sum) and management of the fund.

HRCC's submission will advocate for the Community Benefit Fund to genuinely address local needs and impacts, ensuring it complements rather than replaces the revenue that should be generated through fair council rates (**Appendix 9.6B**).

Options to Consider

1. Approve the SEC Solar Park Community Benefits Scheme funding submission
2. Not approve SEC Solar Park Community Benefits Scheme funding submission

Option 1 is recommended to ensure the best outcome for the community is achieved through the community benefits scheme.

Sustainability Implications

These submissions are important in order to create a sustainable and equitable methodology regarding renewable energy projects payment of rates or payment in lieu of rates and how the community benefits fund is delivered.

Community Engagement

The PILOR discussion paper and submission questions were available on the Engage Vic website for a consultation period of 26 May – 14 July.

The SEC Renewable Energy Park consultation period was from 12 June – 25 July.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Not applicable

Collaboration

Not Applicable

Financial Implications

The following example was used to understand the implications of the proposed PILOR for renewable energy facilities. The SEC's Horsham Energy Park is a \$370 million project comprising a 119 MW solar farm and a 100 MW, 200 MWh battery, serves as a compelling local example. A comparison of potential annual local benefits highlights the disparity:

Benefit Source	Annual Local Benefit
Industrial Rates	\$1,417,470
Current PILOR	\$389,849

Officers Reports

This comparison clearly demonstrates that the current PILOR rate provides less than one-quarter of the revenue that would be received under standard industrial rates, and the proposed community benefit fund is significantly lower. This underscores the urgent need for an overhaul of the rates paid by energy facilities.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

Payment in Lieu of Rates (PILOR) framework

Electricity Industry Act

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

N/A

Risk Implications

N/A

Conclusion

HRCC welcomes the opportunity for genuine engagement with DEECA on the PILOR issue and has requested a meeting to discuss this important matter for our community. On behalf of the local community, HRCC needs to shape the Horsham Solar Park Community Benefits Scheme.

10. COUNCILLOR REPORTS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Cr Ian Ross, Mayor

Committee Representation	
Date	Description
13/06/25	Meeting with Cr O'Loughlin re Aboriginal Roundtable
16/06/25	Aboriginal Community Round Table
9/07/25	Natimuk Economic Development Committee
Other Council Activities	
16/06/25	Meeting with Steven Kingshott Meeting with CEO Council meeting
18/06/25	Horsham Showgrounds tour with Andrea Cross Citizenship Ceremony
19/06/25	HRCC Audit and Risk Committee - meeting with CEO
20/06/25	Induction of Rev Jacob Yang
23/06/25	Meeting with Steven Kingshott Meeting with CEO Council meeting
30/06/25	Meeting with CEO Council Briefing meeting
1/07/25	Conversation with ECA CEO - Samantha Page re ECEC Challenges in Rural Communities
2/07/25	Farewell for Graeme Harrison and Fiona Kelly
3/07/25	Councillor Conference Update
4/07/25	Balmoral Bush Nursing Centre
7/07/25	Meeting with CEO Council Briefing meeting
10/07/25	Webinar: Community Benefit Fund, SEC Renewable Energy Park
13/07/25	MND Charity Shoot, Natimuk Field and Game
14/07/25	Meeting with CEO Council Briefing meeting
17/07/25	MAV Regional Meeting - Ararat
18/07/25	Call with Virginia Reddin
21/07/25	Meeting with CEO Council Briefing meeting
23/07/25	Horsham Information Forum - Mining & Renewables What's The Future?
24/07/25	Meeting with Lauren Jenry – ACE Radio Meeting with the CEO, The Wesley Redevelopment Committee (Mary Starr & Merryn Eagle)

Cr Cam McDonald

Committee Representation	
Date	Description
24/06/25	Wimmera Southern Mallee Development Association online teams meeting. 1.00-4.00pm
Other Council Activities	
2/06/25	Council Briefing
6/06/25	3.00PM Meeting with Kevin O'Brien re Parking meters. 4.00pm Meeting with Brad, Manager at Petstock re. Truck parking.
10/06/25	Council Briefing Transmission Plan
16/06/25	Council Briefing
18/06/25	Tour of Horsham Show grounds with Andrea Cross Meeting with Mr Steven Kingshott Citizenship Ceremony Council Chambers
23/06/25	Council Meeting Moved Cr Cam McDonald, Seconded Cr Angie Munn, 1. Decrease funding to WSMDA to \$100,000 2. Give notice to withdraw membership of WSMDA BY 30/06/2026, Carried. Moved Cr Cam McDonald, Seconded Cr Angie Munn, 1. Parking Meters are not reintroduced in the Horsham CBD. Carried.
26/06/25	Second meeting with Mr John Walsh Re. Arnotts Bore and Arnotts Rd. Sent submission to council re. Arnotts Bore.
29/06/25	Attended Horsham Lions Club 70 th Birthday celebrations in a private capacity.
30/06/25	Council Briefing

Cr Todd Wilson

Committee Representation	
Date	Description
	Nil
Other Council Activities	
24-27/06	NGA Canberra
30/06/25	Briefing
2/07/25	Catch up with CEO Gail Gatt
2/07/25	Farewell Morning tea for Fiona Kelly and Graeme Harrison
7/07/25	Briefing
9/07/25	Art Exhibition opening at Town Hall for NAIDOC week
11/07/25	Tour of TFI Meatworks in Stawell
14/07/25	Briefing
21/07/25	Briefing & CEO ERC meeting

Cr Bec Sluggett

Committee Representation	
Date	Description
	Nil
Other Council Activities	
24-27/06	Australian Local Government Association's National General Assembly of Local Government 2025 in Canberra <i>Report from Cr Todd Wilson & Cr Rebecca Sluggett attached.</i>
30/06/25	Council Briefing Meeting
10/07/25	<p>Webinar: Community Benefit Fund: SEC Renewable Energy Park – Horsham <i>Attendees were given the opportunity to have input and ask questions on how the Community Benefit Fund proposed by the SEC Renewable Energy Park will be spent and coordinated. SEC have also been running information sessions and an online survey which closed on Friday 25th July.</i></p> <p><i>Construction update given at start of meeting.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>- The build is currently on schedule, currently working on the mechanical aspect of the build which will soon move to the electrical section on the build. Currently those driving past may see a big dome in place that is used for the morning briefings by those working onsite. It is only a temporary structure. The native vegetation screening is to be planted after the winter frosts. The prototype row is now complete and once that is inspected and signed off the rest of the rows will follow. Local businesses are being used where possible and SEC (Owner), OX2 (Main Contractor) and PSP (Sub-Contractor) are liaising with neighbours as questions arise. Local and regional businesses can register with PSP to express interest in work.</i>
14/07/25	Council Briefing Meeting
21/07/25	Council Briefing Meeting

11. URGENT BUSINESS

12. PETITIONS AND JOINT LETTERS

12.1 COMMUNITY PETITION MARDON DRIVE

Director:	John Martin
Directorate:	Infrastructure
File Number:	F14/A09/000001

Officer Conflict of Interest

Officer disclosure in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 130:

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Status

Defined as confidential information in accordance with *Local Government Act 2020* – Section 3(1):

☐ Yes ☒ No

Reason: Nil

Appendix

Petition as received (**Appendix 12.1A**)

Purpose

To present the community petition received by Council regarding the planting of street trees in Mardon Drive Horsham.

Summary

- Council has a program of planting trees on vacant nature strips as part of the Greater Greening Horsham Strategy.
- Mardon Drive is one of a number of streets where gaps in nature strip trees have been identified and is planned to be planted this year
- A petition was received from 50 residents of Mardon Drive dated 12 June 2025 requesting that trees not be planted in their nature strips.
- An initial meeting with residents has been conducted to hear their concerns directly. A further report will be prepared for Council consideration taking into account the petition and consideration of the issues raised at the meeting.

Recommendations

That Council receive and note the Petition by residents of Mardon Drive requesting that trees not be planted in the street and request a further report on the matter as soon as possible.

REPORT

Background

Council's Greening Greater Horsham Strategy proposes the increased planting of street trees for a range of reasons, including increased amenity (shade) for pedestrians on footpaths and to enhance the local micro-climate to assist in mitigating the impacts of climate change.

Council received a presentation on progress with this Strategy at its 5 August 2024 briefing meeting, at which it heard that a recent inventory identified that there were 2389 vacant nature strips (i.e. no tree in them) across urban Horsham. Since 2023 approximately 980 trees have been planted in these vacant nature strips, and a further 168 trees are planned to be planted this year.

Mardon Drive is one of the many streets scheduled for this year's plantings with 18 of the 73 properties proposed to receive a new street tree in their vacant nature strip. Most of these new trees will be planted along the eastern end of Mardon Drive as other properties already have a street tree or have infrastructure that prevents the planting of a street tree.

In April 2025, all residents in the Horsham streets where tree planting will occur this year received a letter notifying of the planned planting, including information on the Greater Greening Horsham Strategy.

This letter was followed up by a further letter in May 2025 (only to those properties receiving a tree) and following works to identify the vacant nature strips suitable for new street trees. This letter outlined that a tree will be planted on their nature strip and included a fact sheet on the tree species being planted.

Subsequently, the petition as included as **Appendix 12.1A** was received by Council which summarised the residents' combined concerns.

Discussion

Council's Governance Rules state the following regarding petitions:

57. Petitions and Joint Letters

- 57.1 Unless *Council* determines to consider it as an item of urgent business, no motion (other than a motion to receive the same) may be made on any petition, joint letter, memorial or other like application until the next fixed *Council meeting* after that at which it has been presented.

As with previous petitions regarding this type of matter, a preliminary meeting has been held to hear more from the residents about their concerns and determine if an agreed way forward can be resolved. This meeting was held on 2 July 2025, in Mardon Drive. The meeting was attended by 13 residents, Cr O'Loughlin and several Council staff. Key issues raised included:

- Safety concerns relating to vehicle egress from properties, re visibility of other road users.
- The litter from some existing gum trees.
- Tree maintenance.

A further report on this matter will be presented to Council including an assessment of the matters raised in the petition and at the meeting.

Options to Consider

Options for consideration will be presented in a subsequent report to Council.

Risk Implications

Residents have identified potential risks primarily relating to road safety which need to be considered.

Sustainability Implications

The Greater Greening Horsham Strategy aims to achieve a number of outcomes which include improving character and aesthetics of the City as well as addressing a number of sustainability and climate change issues.

The Strategy discusses the benefits to the immediate environment from planting trees including:

- Providing clean air and filtering pollution
- Carbon sequestration
- Reducing urban heat within the city
- Providing shade and sun protection
- Providing biodiversity and attracting a variety of wildlife species

Planting trees is an investment in the future, the benefits from these street trees to our local environment will ensure that Council is taking all necessary steps to respond to the effects of climate change and create a sustainable and liveable environment for our community, now and into the future.

Community Engagement

A preliminary meeting was held on 2 July 2025 to hear more about the residents' concerns.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Not applicable

Collaboration

Not Applicable

Financial Implications

The street tree planting program is part of Council's current budgeted operation. Any changes to the scope of the program as a result of the petition will be presented in the subsequent report.

Regional, State and National Plans and Policies

The DELWP (now DEECA) publication "Trees for Cooler and Greener Streetscapes – Guidelines for Streetscape Planning and Design" identifies a series of key policy drivers for cooler and greener streetscapes consistent with the principles developed in Council's Greening Greater Horsham Strategy.

Council Plans, Strategies and Policies

As part of the development of the Greening Greater Horsham Strategy, a supporting policy was also prepared which was adopted at the same time as the Strategy.

The Tree Management Policy includes the following principles derived from the Strategy:

4.1 Tree Planting and Establishment

HRCC will proactively carry out annual tree planting in nature strips, parks and reserves and other Council managed land to meet the following objectives:

-
- To improve shade cover over our townships and contribute to the canopy cover targets set within
 - Greening Greater Horsham
 - To preserve and enhance the local character of the distinct areas within our townships
 - To reinforce plantings along entrance ways and main streets into our townships
 - To reinforce habitat links and improve biodiversity outcomes across the Shire
 - To ensure that every urban residence has at least one healthy street tree on the nature strip.

This policy indicates that all nature strips should have a tree.

Conclusion

A further report will be presented to Council to discuss the considerations for the matters raised in the Mardon Drive Street Tree Petition and the on-site meeting.

13. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

13.1 INFORMAL MEETINGS OF COUNCILLORS – RECORD OF MEETINGS

- Council Briefing Meeting held on 30 June, 7, 14 and 21 July 2025.

Refer to **Appendix 13.1A**

13.2 SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

Nil

13.3 INWARD CORRESPONDENCE

Nil

13.4 COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

- Natimuk Economic & Social Plan Project Advisory Committee meeting held on 11 June 2025

Refer to **Appendix 13.4A**

Recommendation

That Council receive and note agenda items:

- 13.1 Informal Meetings of Councillors – Record of Meetings
- 13.2 Sealing of Documents
- 13.3 Inward Correspondence
- 13.4 Council Committee Minutes.

14. NOTICE OF MOTION