

SOUTH GIPPSLAND SHIRE COUNCIL

Draft Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Strategy 2022-26



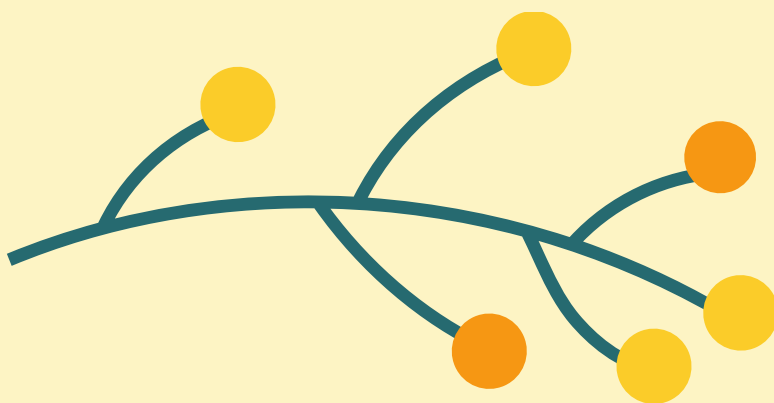
South Gippsland
Shire Council

Thank you

Council would like to acknowledge and thank the arts, creative industries and community representatives involved in this report. We thank them for meeting the project team, attending engagement sessions, and providing feedback throughout its development.

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Bunurong and Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of South Gippsland and pay respect to their Elders, past, present, and future, for they hold the memories, traditions, culture, and hopes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.



Purpose of this document

This Draft **Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy** is a key document that describes how Council can address the six objectives of its proposed Council Plan through support and investment in its arts, culture and creative industries.

For the purpose of public exhibition, this draft document is presented without the final graphic design and layout, which will be developed for the final version.

Message from the Mayor

[To be included]

Message from the CEO

[To be included]

INTRODUCTION

Creative industries are an evolving mix of sectors spanning arts, culture, screen, design, publishing, and advertising. They cover disciplines as diverse as game development and graphic design, fashion, and filmmaking, performing arts and publishing, architecture and advertising, media and music, comedy, and craft. They include activities that are commercially driven, and community based, experimental and export intense.

Creative Victoria: Creative State 2025.

South Gippsland has a unique decentralised creative ecology, with diverse arts and culture activity spread across the Shire in small towns of distinctive character, in various spaces and places.

The multi-disciplined creative sector is rich and naturally inclusive, collaborative, and inter-connected with economic development and the visitor economy.

There is even distribution of small close-knit populations through South Gippsland, and all are touched by cultural activity.

This is an important distinction that differentiates the region from other rural and regional communities; creative talent is spread across the Shire and can attract new residents to the area.

The Small Halls network is a lifeblood of the community, a hub of creative and cultural activities as well as community events of all kinds.

Each town adds its own flavour to arts and cultural activities, creating cultural distinctions across the Shire which are a source of great local pride.

The local farmer is on the Arts Council or small hall committee, takes the grandkids to dance class and is president of the local cricket club. There is no 'us vs the arts' in South Gippsland

Community Stakeholder

South Gippsland has several historically significant sites that are currently in the spotlight for renewal, redevelopment and repurposing, and these considerations and their potential impact and opportunities for the creative sector are explored in detail in our Strategy.

Arts, culture, and the creative industries are integral to the health, prosperity, and vitality of our communities. They help us to connect to each other, to appreciate our natural environment and unique heritage, and encourage personal growth. They foster creativity and innovation and provide employment.

Council recognises that the creative sector can enhance community identity, contribute to well-being, cultural tourism, and economic development.

Council recognises that the vibrancy of the creative sector is improved by its broad participation in arts and culture activities, and that there are significant opportunities for participation in collaborative partnerships across Council, in communities, and with the commercial sector.

South Gippsland currently has ongoing input and commitment to Creative Gippsland, a collaborative arts initiative comprising all six Gippsland Councils, working together to promote diverse talent, rich heritage, unique environment, and creative culture throughout Gippsland.

Development of the Strategy

This Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy is a living document; a planning tool providing Council with a clear set of priorities for the enhancement of arts, culture and creative industries facilities and initiatives across the Shire over the next four years.

Council has a close and active relationship within the community through its Economy, Community and Investment service areas. It's diverse functions support and encourage the attraction, growth and development of businesses and critical infrastructure within the Shire. It aims to strengthen community resilience and participation while developing and promoting the area's attractions, arts and culture to visitors, prospective residents and new investors.

The development of the Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy is strategically aligned to Council's Economic Development and Visitor Economy Strategies and will provide an opportunity to specifically support the sector with an appropriate structure and resources.

This Strategy presents an opportunity for South Gippsland Shire Council to strengthen the connection with the creative community in the region, understand the depth and breadth of practice and the changes that have occurred because of the pandemic.

The Strategy is linked directly to the proposed six Council Plan themes.

Leading with Integrity

Connecting Our People and Places

Economy and Industry

Healthy Communities

Protecting and Enhancing Our Environment

Sustainable Growth

The Strategy:

- acknowledges that we have much to learn from the culture and storytelling practices of traditional owners, as we progress reconciliation and healing.
- illustrates how arts and culture can sit alongside and impact upon other public policy domains.
- Is flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of initiatives that contribute to Council's vision.
- is based on community values and a diverse spread of community needs and aspirations.
- recognises our strengths in arts and culture and responds to changing needs in our community.
- tells the story of the potential, and contribution, of our creative community.
- highlights the value of arts and cultural activities and the role they play in contributing to a vibrant and rich culture in the region.
- supports and empowers our creative community
- enriches the development and growth of our region through cultural infrastructure and financial investment.

[Note – 'This is South Gippsland' - an infographics page with population, map of main towns and villages, where venues/creative work takes place, economic impact etc. will be added to the final draft, showing the breadth of activity across the Shire.]

In addition to Council's indicators for measuring success in quantitative terms, we work with measurable cultural outcomes developed by the Cultural Development Network (CDN).

The Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy will be supported by an Implementation Plan that will focus on measurable outcomes for each of these key priorities and identify the actions to be delivered.

The actions in the Implementation Plan will be detailed in the second part of this strategy drawing on an agreed planning and evaluation framework.¹

Engaging with our Community

To discover what is most important to the South Gippsland community for arts, culture and the creative industries now and in the future, CDN conducted extensive engagement with all relevant stakeholders and collected the broadest possible range of perspectives.

The purpose of this was to:

- understand the breadth of arts, culture, and creative industry practices in the Shire
- ascertain the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and gaps that a new Strategy can address.
- explore how Council and the creative sector can work together in delivering and supporting arts and culture engagement for the whole Shire.
- understand community views about critical cultural infrastructure such as Leongatha Memorial Hall, Coal Creek Heritage Museum, the Great Southern Rail Trail and the Small Halls Network.

The findings of the consultations have been used a major part of our evidence base for the Strategy and incorporated into the objectives.

Three distinct groups were involved in the initial engagement process

- Council internal stakeholders
- Arts and Culture peak bodies
- Arts, Culture and Creative Industries stakeholders and practitioners within South Gippsland Shire.

The internal group included Council employees from every area impacting on arts, culture and creative industries. Creative Victoria, Regional Arts Victoria, Regional Development Victoria represented peak bodies and the local member for Gippsland South, Mr Danny O'Brien MP, took part in an individual consultation.

The practitioner and stakeholder group included: visual artists – painters, sculptors, muralists, photographers, and gallerists; musicians and music promoters; performers and theatre practitioners; architects; filmmakers; graphic designers; printmakers; authors, local arts and culture councils and cultural heritage groups; festival and event promoters and organisers; arts and music educators in primary and secondary schools.

In all, 84 people were directly engaged and consulted across 42 in-depth consultations with eight (8) written submissions, making a total of 92 engagements for the initial engagement process, a unique response when 20-30 is the norm, and 50 is rare.

There was a strong willingness to participate, which speaks to the value the community places on culture and creativity.

¹ Further information on CDN planning framework in Appendix 1

CDN also reviewed relevant Council documents which are strongly allied to arts and culture, in particular Shaping South Gippsland Community Vision 2040, the South Gippsland Visitor Economy Strategy, the South Gippsland Economic Development Strategy, and other documents from peak bodies, external stakeholders, published research and literature.²

What we heard

The common key findings consistent across all three groups are:

- Strong support for a new Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Strategy across all stakeholder groups.
- More visual recognition and engagement with local Aboriginal culture and knowledge. Support for a Council Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Celebration of South Gippsland's heritage to include cross cultural collaboration with Aboriginal and other artists to strengthen Aboriginal representation in the region.
- Appreciation for Council's commitment to providing cultural programs during the pandemic.
- Appreciation that Cultural Industries are included in the Strategy, hoping that this means Council can recognise and address needs to build creative capital. Some stakeholders under the creative industries umbrella felt there was little for them in the Shire.
- Decisions to be made about cultural and tourism infrastructure.
- Improved service delivery in arts and culture across the Shire, with support for natural environments, integration with local food production and disaster recovery.
- Closer collaboration between Council and the creative sector, to bring creative skills to the development of the region.
- Partnership with creative sector could produce small and cost-effective wins, for example in marketing and tourism campaigns.
- Better integration of creative thinking and practice within Council.
- Council as an enabler and facilitator for creativity, not just as a grant provider and primary funding source, engaging regularly with creatives, hosting networking opportunities, sourcing external funding.
- Exploration of possible ways developers could 'give back' to the community through small 'percentage for art' schemes
- Council leading on cultural tourism and involving the creative sector in developing tourism strategies that benefit the whole Shire.
- Recognition that there are few creative opportunities for youth across Gippsland, which is problematic
- There are few post-secondary and TAFE level training opportunities in creative practice across Gippsland since Federation Training ceased operations, leaving many young people no option but to leave the region to continue their education.
- Encouragement and support of contemporary practices such as fashion, gaming, design, digital media could engage younger and emerging artists, attract visitors and new people into the region.

² Appendix 3 Documents Reviewed.

- There is a need for multi-generational leadership.
- Opportunities for Public Art to enliven the region, particularly to enhance the landscape.
- Exploration of new uses of public space.
- Recognition of under-used and under-performing infrastructure and the need for review.
- Issues with decline in volunteers and over-reliance on volunteerism.
- Recognition that better skills training is required across the creative sector.
- Recognition of opportunities to share resources with other councils across Gippsland, possibly through Creative Gippsland.

Council Objective: Leading with Integrity

Integrity, care, good governance, accountability, outward focus, building trust with community.

Strong leadership, effective service delivery, connection with and care for community are cornerstones of responsible Council governance.

We know that best planning practice and service delivery has community values at its heart, so we will ensure that this Arts, Culture, and Creative Industries Strategy represents community aspirations, puts culture on an equal footing with other policy domains, focuses on measurable outcomes and is regularly reviewed and evaluated.

We will look for cultural activities that promote beneficial linkages between the community and Council services.

We will ensure that community opinions are welcomed, respected, and valued; encourage civic pride resulting from interaction between the community and Council, and encourage civic trust by providing strong leadership, operating fairly, transparently and for the good of the community.

What we already know about leading with integrity from consultations, evidence, research, and practice knowledge:

- The development of this Strategy for the next four years is evidence of Council's recognition of the importance of appropriately resourcing art, culture and the creative industries for the benefit of community and visitors.
- Culture impacts on all other policy domains.
- Including measurable cultural outcomes in arts and culture planning provides valuable insights into previously intangible and immeasurable aspects of cultural engagement.
- Consistent evaluation of the Strategy and data collection builds up a strong knowledge base to guide future decisions.
- Stakeholders are strongly in favour of a new Strategy; they felt it was timely given a new Council and going into post-pandemic regeneration and recovery.
- Stakeholders stressed the desire for creative collaboration with Council. The depth and breadth of community responses in recent engagement shows firm support for the new Council and this Strategy, and a strong desire to participate and work together.

Strategic actions to support Leading with Integrity:

- Recognise this Strategy and the cultural domain alongside the social, economic, environment and governance domains of public policy within all Council planning.
- Establish an Arts Advisory Group to help develop and review the Implementation Plan.
- Maintain a clear focus on measuring outcomes and annually review the Strategy actions throughout its life.
- Foster civic pride through arts and cultural activities and the community.
- Involve artists and creative businesses in Council planning.
- Celebrate local successes.

We all know that South Gippsland's a gem, they just have to start telling that story louder
(Peak body stakeholder)

The new strategy has to break down walls and facilitate connections...
(Community stakeholder)

Council Objective: Connecting Our People and Places

Improving visitor and community experience - roads, transport, connectivity, and basic services.

A major strength of South Gippsland's cultural ecology, and a defining factor in the region's appeal, is in the decentralisation of the creative sector and visitor economy spread across small towns.

The community values and takes pride in the diversity of the small towns' cultures and identity.

Council will therefore maximise opportunities for the local arts, culture and creative industries sector, as well as visitors, to contribute to cultural tourism.

This will be achieved through ensuring that the road network provides safety, ease of passage and connection between towns; internet and wi-fi connectivity is optimised for community, the sector, and visitors; and practitioners are involved in public art and signage to enhance local environments and streetscapes.

For *all* our key priorities, we are looking for cultural activities that spark imagination and creativity encouraging creative expression; stimulate special sensory experiences that are outside the everyday – joy, beauty, discomfort and wonder.

We encourage creative thinking and deeper understanding; promote the value of diverse cultural life experiences in our community and deepen the sense of belonging to a shared history and heritage.

We will also look for cultural activities that increase knowledge and experience to inform creative practice leading to increased productivity and efficiency; develop skills to gain employment; increase economic wellbeing and resources to meet living costs; and support our local economy to gain direct and indirect benefit from cultural activities.

What we already know about connecting our people and places from consultations, evidence, research, and knowledge:

- Internet and wireless technology are essential public utilities.
- Fast internet is essential for the attraction and growth of contemporary art practice; graphic design, architecture, animators, and game developers are just a few of the disciplines that depend on reliable connectivity.
- Better internet connections open doors to online business opportunities and connections to the global economy. Reliable and fast connections can unleash new innovations for example, in crop harvesting and other innovations in agriculture.
- Better internet connections assist in emergency and disaster management.
- Stable connectivity can retain families and bring people back to rural areas thanks to enabling remote working, telemedicine, and online services.
- Safe transport connections between towns are essential to grow the visitor economy.
- Strong community support exists for the Great South Rail Trail.

Strategic actions to support connecting people and places:

- Advocate for high-speed reliable telecommunications and internet services Shire-wide.
- Work with Creative Gippsland and other partners to investigate shared infrastructure, resources, and opportunities, e.g., transport for residents to attend performances across the region.
- Engage artists to deliver public art and signage across Shire highways, streetscapes, and the environment.
- Establish and fund a recurrent Public Art Program within townships and along selected areas of the Great Southern Rail Trail, including interpretive digital panels at new infrastructure sites and digital signage.
- Develop hybrid and immersive collaborative cultural experiences across the Shire, e.g., a digital 'Open Studio' program, streaming of small events. Investigate and establish Night-time activations such as projections and light shows.

Australia is currently facing a digital and infrastructure access divide between those living in metropolitan areas and those living regionally.

This prevents our regional communities from participating fully in the digital economy.

The Regional Connectivity Program is helping to improve Australia's economic security, equity, and growth by increasing access to key communications infrastructure in regional communities.

Infrastructure Australia 2020

For those living in rural and remote areas, and young people especially, the internet's 'information highway' is a road out of isolation, a pathway to education, understanding, wider opportunities and a richer life. This enrichment is key to growing socially responsible communities and empowered individuals.

EU Broadband Competence Office: Rising to the Connectivity Challenge, July 2020.

Council Objective: Economy and Industry

Growing the economy, welcoming innovation, and investment in key industries - agriculture, tourism, and the arts

Cultural industries are an essential part of a thriving economy and vibrant ecology of a region.

Council knows that cultural activities and a skilled creative sector can contribute to the local economy and attract cultural tourism, therefore we will support capacity building for creative practitioners and businesses to participate in a range of opportunities to stimulate the sector.

We also know that there are decisions to be made on heritage and cultural infrastructure that will materially affect the region's creative sector, so we will involve the sector in redevelopment and new infrastructure projects to maximise economic opportunities and sector growth for the future.

Council will also look for cultural activities that: increase knowledge and experience to inform creative practice leading to increased productivity and efficiency; develop skills to gain employment; increase economic wellbeing and resources to meet living costs; and support our local economy to gain direct and indirect benefit from cultural activities.

What we already know about economy and industry from consultations, evidence, research and knowledge:

- The creative sector would like greater collaboration with Council and vice versa.
- A dedicated Arts Officer and Council funding support through the Cultural Support Package (SCP) during the pandemic has shown the possibilities for cultural activation when human and financial resources are present in Council.
- Support for a Council-led approach to cultural tourism and building the capacity of the sector to grow and be sustainable.
- The creative sector in South Gippsland work at grassroots level to contribute to local communities.
- Few training opportunities currently exist for creative practice training.
- Some local arts organisations risk closure as members age and retire, threatened also by a lack of succession planning and/or generational change.
- Council is best placed to be an enabler rather than simply a funder.
- Council should factor in the creative sector to decisions made in relation to the redevelopment of existing infrastructure.
- The Blueprint for Community and Economic Infrastructure 2021-2036 Strategy and Audit identifies community facilities and open space sites throughout the Shire.
- The creative and tourism sector will benefit from the proposed new and redeveloped infrastructure at Korumburra and Leongatha Railway Station precincts.
- Heritage tourism activities contribute to longer stays, as well as attracting new visitor markets to regional Australia - for example, the success of the Silo Art Trail has brought flow on benefits for small rural communities in regional Victoria.
- The world of work in the future will require skills inherent in the creative community; empathy, creativity, collaboration, and leadership.ⁱ

Strategic actions to support economy and industry:

- The lesson from the pandemic indicates that business support is necessary into the future to ensure that SG arts businesses are sustainable throughout the whole year and under any economic circumstance.
- Undertake business cases and cultural impact assessments where appropriate for all major infrastructure considerations.
- Use the Blueprint for Community and Economic Infrastructure 2021-2036 Strategy and Audit to determine what spaces could be put to greater creative use at minimum cost to practitioners.
- Connect young artists with established professionals to assist in skills development, continue to support the FReeZa program in South Gippsland.
- Continue support to small business and creative industries through facilitating training, mentorship and education opportunities in specific skills, e.g., production, lighting, sound, gallery management.
- Partner with local entrepreneurs to offer young people attachment opportunities in booking, event management, artist support and marketing.
- Encourage South Gippsland arts boards and councils to seek out young people to join and take up essential roles and promote a future focussed agenda for local arts organisations.
- Deliver comprehensive and regular up to date communications between Council and creative sector.
- Investigate models towards a successful creative industry network.
- Brand South Gippsland as a creative Shire, promote the depth and breadth of the creative sector as well as its unique character within and outside the region and collaborate on festivals and events.
- Partner with the creative sector to develop clever ways to advertise and market creativity in the region.
- Investigate and review support mechanisms for the vibrant galleries network in the region.
- Undertake case study research of other decentralised arts and culture clusters to learn from other successes, for example, Corangamite Shire, *Off the Rails* arts space in Dunkeldⁱⁱ
- Continue to support local events, event attraction and cultural tourism development through our partnership with Destination Gippsland
- Develop an Events Policy that supports the growth of cultural event tourism in the region.

We're ready, what can we do?

(Community Stakeholder)

Smart councils build capacity within their communities just like they would do professional development with their staff. Employ local producers and creatives to make interesting online 'how to' content – it creates jobs and empowers the community.

(Peak body stakeholder)

Artists are small businesses; we're good at business and know how to make money

work for us. A sustainable arts business and a sustainable community, it's the same thing, essentially'.

(Community stakeholder)

Council Objective: Healthy and Engaged Communities

Building healthy communities with a strong sense of belonging and purpose, living physical, social, and cultural active lives, investing in people, partnering with community in planning.

Council understands that cultural activity plays a vital role in healthy, inclusive, and connected communities.

It enhances the quality of life, contributes to health, well-being, and social cohesion. It encourages creativity and inclusivity and the expression of diversity, so we will offer a range of arts and cultural activities and opportunities throughout the Shire to support our community to live enriching creative lives.

We will also look for cultural activities that empower our community, form bonds between people who share common interests; strengthen understanding between people of different social identity; and encourage a sense of self-worth when an individual's achievements are recognised by family, friends and people who are important to them.

What we already know about healthy communities from consultations, evidence, research and knowledge:

- Council recognises that the creative sector can enhance community identity and contribute to well-being.
- There is a desire for more understanding and knowledge about traditional owners' cultural practice.
- Community stakeholders are less interested in direct funding than opportunities for income generation.
- Younger artists feel that if Council wishes to attract new creatives into the region, there is a need to engage with new forms of practice which could be a point of difference, and opportunities and infrastructure that can produce work that travels beyond the Shire borders.
- Creativity is strong in the regions; residents of regional Australia are as likely to participate in the arts as residents of metropolitan Australia ⁱⁱⁱ
- Around 75 per cent of regional Australians agree that Indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture (78 per cent); feel proud when Australian artists do well overseas (76 per cent); agree that artists make an important contribution to Australian society (76 per cent); agree that the arts in Australia reflect Australia's cultural diversity (74 per cent).^{iv}
- Four in five Australians agree that indigenous arts are an important part of Australia's culture.^v
- Based around the core pillars of relationships, respect and opportunities, Reconciliation Action Plans provide tangible and substantive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, increasing economic equity and supporting First Nations self-determination.^{vi}
- Rural communities can be activated through arts projects. Factors influencing sustainability for arts in rural communities include appreciation of local culture, history and heritage, local people,

enthusiastic local leadership, positive attitudes, local entrepreneurship and investment, and a focus on retaining young people.^{vii}

- Libraries in regional areas are places of cultural meaning and significance, gathering places, important for social outcomes, as incubators of creativity, as cultural connectors, as supporters of multiculturalism, and as nurturers of the spoken and written word.^{viii}
- Supporting people to come together and find a shared interest and purpose are key drivers of enhancing wellbeing.^{ix}
- Arts and cultural activity and engagement bring many direct and sometimes immediate benefits to society, also value to individuals and society by creating conditions for change, spaces for experimentation, risk-taking, reflection about personal community and societal challenges.^x

Strategic actions to support healthy communities:

- Support and encourage Shire-wide participation in arts and cultural activities.
- Recognise, respect, and celebrate our cultural heritage through stronger engagement with traditional owners, including the development of a Council Reconciliation Action Plan.
- Embed artists into the development of Council cultural infrastructure projects early in planning stages for maximum impact by recognising them as a key stakeholder group.
- Support a breadth of activity that encompasses contemporary practice to engage young and emerging artists, and potentially attract new residents.
- Enable night-time activation of larger towns and community parks and attractions.
- Develop structural support that enables local cultural activity through council programs and in partnerships with local organisations.
- Promote and broadcast cultural activation activities and events through current and new communication and marketing methods.
- Encourage and include local providers and food producers into arts and culture festivals and events.
- Develop a comprehensive Public Art Policy, to include community representation.

...it's great to see the Council prioritising a new arts and culture strategy. We do so much for South Gippsland that goes unrecognised"

(Community Stakeholder)

Focus too much on traditional arts and Council will miss out on innovations, you know, new things that are happening here. That's where your marketing is, and more tourists come to see

(Community stakeholder).

The Council should be adventurous and bold; take some risks. There's already so little opportunity for young people in the arts, what does Council have to lose if they get it wrong trying to get it right?

(Community stakeholder).

Council Objective: Protecting and Enhancing our Environment

A healthier integrated environment for future generations, regeneration, and revegetation, expanding biodiversity, reducing emissions, encouraging community reduction, reuse, and recycling.

South Gippsland is highly regarded as a unique region of striking natural beauty; its landscapes, coastlines and ecosystems are inherently valued by its residents and visitors.

Its heritage, pre and post-colonisation, is indelibly linked to the natural environment and agricultural practices and is a cornerstone of our character.

Our inspiring environment is the reason many residents live here, and why non-residents visit.

We know that cultural activities can stimulate awareness and understanding of environmental issues, so we will activate those that celebrate the local environment and build a sense of awareness and care for our local environment.

We will also prioritise cultural activities that illuminate the meaning of our natural and built environments and how we interact with and value it, that increase our understanding of sustainability and the impact of environmental issues and increase a sense of responsibility to care for our environment, and to value our natural world.

What we already know about protecting and enhancing our environment from consultations, evidence, research, and practice knowledge:

- Environmental art can build understanding through 1) exchanging ideas and providing dialogue 2) building a sense of place 3) clarifying and enhancing the understanding of information and issues 4) generating concern.^{xi}
- The community values our natural world and heritage.
- Stakeholders are keen for Aboriginal art and land practices to be more visible in the community.
- There are opportunities to grow cultural tourism with a focus on the environment.
- Environmental art across the Shire was part of the CS Program during the pandemic.
- Stakeholders are keen to see a reimagining of current heritage infrastructure and its relationship to the environment
- Stakeholders stressed the value of creative input into the beginning of planning processes for infrastructure development and creative space activations.
- Council acknowledges that public art plays a significant role in enhancing the built environment of the municipality for local residents and the business sector and acts as a visitor attraction.
- There is a strong desire for more public art in the Shire, and stakeholders can see many opportunities.

Strategic actions to support the protection and enhancement of the environment:

- Engage with Recognised Aboriginal Parties and local Aboriginal artists to develop cultural and environmental events together with non-Aboriginal art community.
- Deliver art activation in towns to highlight environmental issues.
- Plan for climate resilience in new public and cultural infrastructure through a blend of public art and sustainable design.
- Involve creatives in new infrastructure planning at the outset.
- Work with local artists to assist Council with environmental messaging.
- Encourage craft-making cultures and spaces within new infrastructure that use natural products, such as reclaimed wood, natural wool, and pigments, sourced from local suppliers.
- Encourage projects and events that educate and engage the community about environmental values.

Climate change affects all of us and acting on it is fundamental to our future as a thriving, resilient and creative state. Our creative industries can help meet this challenge. As individuals, organisations, businesses, institutions and government, we need to rethink the way we make, share, present, tour and consume creative product; how we can reduce our environmental impact; and how we can champion change more broadly.

(Creative State 2025: Creative Victoria).

I would like us to be well connected to Country. This includes understanding the uses of our local plants and correct original names where known for local landmarks

(Shaping Gippsland Community Vision 2040, young person participant).

Council Objective: Sustainable Growth

Plan for sustainable growth, advocate for external funding, protect our small-town character, include community knowledge and experience in importance change decisions and processes.

Our community is rightly proud of our small towns; places of unique character in a special natural environment, where inclusive social and cultural life attracts visitors and new residents.

The Small Halls Network is the lifeblood of cultural, civic, and social activity in the Shire.

We will therefore ensure the vibrancy of our small-town life is enhanced through cultural activity that strengthens identity, reinforces local character, encourages enjoyable social connections and respects the environment.

We will look for cultural activities that empower our community, form bonds between people who share common interests; strengthen understanding between people of different social identity.

We will also look for cultural activities that illuminate the meaning of our natural and built environments and how we interact with and value it, that increase our understanding of sustainability and the impact of environmental issues and increase a sense of responsibility to care for our environment, and to value our natural world.

What we already know about sustainable growth from consultations, evidence, research, and practice knowledge:

- There is a unique decentralised creative sector in South Gippsland, deeply grounded in community.
- Our small-town communities carry a wealth of knowledge about the heritage and history of the region.
- Our small towns engender strong civic pride.
- The Small Hall Network is a great asset to the Shire, contributing to a strong sense of place and is facilitated by Council to skill share and offer support for activities.
- There is a diverse range of activity in our small towns; live music is strong.
- Stakeholders see Council as an enabler that can assist in sourcing funding from other sources. They are keen to work with Council to develop structural support that enables creative activity, attracts visitors, and facilitates a strong creative network through the Shire.
- Creative place making and public art can encompass not only traditional methods of artmaking such as murals, music, sculpture, lighting, but also more general creative work, such as creatively engaging stakeholders and residents by using space in novel ways. It can also improve community safety by promoting empathy and understanding, influencing policy, providing employment, supporting well-being and advancing the quality of built environments.^{xii}

Strategic actions to support sustainable growth:

- Examine the potential of an annual arts forum to connect with the sector and provide inspiration through a program of guest speakers and updates on council actions from the strategy.
- Investigate a redevelopment or rebranding of small halls information and promotion on digital channels, including the Small Halls website.
- Engage the local community to access knowledge when planning activities and events to improve community and visitor experiences.
- Develop Placemaking strategies and promotions involving local creatives to establish a 'vibrant village' network
- Engage artists to collaborate with Council to deliver innovative messaging about sustainability to the community and visitors.
- Partner with local businesses, community associations and promoters to support and market events in small towns.
- Encourage more Small Halls committees to participate in the Small Halls Network

We would love to work more closely with artists in our planning. They get how to activate things, make them more lively.

(Council internal stakeholder)

It is critical that arts and culture be seen as an essential component of placemaking development and initiatives. Placemaking and revitalising of public spaces is far more than just an engineering exercise

(Community stakeholder)

Placemaking is about creating fun and imaginative public spaces, events and gatherings that are loved by locals and admired by visitors. Placemaking is about thinking outside the box to make your community smile. A giant rainbow mural in the middle of town? Tinder for dogs?! A human library? Yes, really!

(Rural City of Wangaratta Placemaking project)

Cultural Heritage and Infrastructure

A key responsibility of Council is its investment in the development and maintenance of community-owned infrastructure. It is evident in the period to be covered by this Strategy that Council will need to make important decisions on the future of some of the cultural heritage facilities and sites within the Shire.

In the initial community engagement, there were many robust discussions, multiple views and positions on Council's significant sites including Coal Creek Community Park and Museum, Leongatha Memorial Hall, the Great Southern Rail Trail, Korumburra and Leongatha Railway Station precincts, and the Small Halls Network.

The notion of a Performing Arts Centre for the region has been a subject of discussion in the community for many years. Other main cultural assets in the Shire include Foster Museum and Port Welshpool Maritime Museum.

In the period of this Strategy, Council will also need to consider an equitable framework for art gallery support.

Currently there are two galleries that operate from Council-managed facilities; the Stockyard Gallery and Leongatha Art Gallery, that sit alongside many other community-run and privately-run galleries.

An investigation and review of support mechanisms for galleries in the Shire is included as a strategic action in Economy and Industry.

Council recognises the value of the creative economy for the Shire, and infrastructure will be a key driver of that economy in the future.

Considerations of these infrastructure challenges are explored below, and potential cultural solutions are indicated in each of the relevant goals, considering this evidence and discussion.

Key points to consider for all Council infrastructure are:

- The principles that underpin investment decisions are about function, cost and meaning.
- Council needs a clear position on the purpose of each asset for the community and the Shire, incorporating, community benefit, cultural activation, tourism attraction and job creation.
- What is the current investment by Council to sustain and manage the asset? If the asset is under-performing, then what is the cost to achieve and maintain the desired level of functionality?
- What value do different parts of the community put on the cultural asset? Divergent views are inevitable with this consideration. Community stakeholders often begin with meaning and value of an asset before considerations of function and cost.
- Council will not be able to satisfy all stakeholders, but can consider the balance of function and cost, considering expenditure and operational costs against the cultural, social and broader economic impacts that can influence meaning.

Coal Creek Community Park and Museum

Coal Creek opened in 1974 and has a long and respected history as a public and local community space in South Gippsland. The Park and its museum infrastructure came from a collaboration of local and state governments, and the Korumburra community.

Local community and volunteers have been the backbone of the Park, donating their skills, trades, family collections, buildings and monies with the intention that Coal Creek generate income through tourism visitation.

A series of reports with financial and operational recommendations for Coal Creek have been initiated with these largely relating to infrastructure maintenance and revenue raising.

Coal Creek is a significant cultural heritage asset that needs attention and to be brought into this Shire-wide Arts, Culture and Creative industries Strategy for attention over the next four years.

Initial Stakeholder feedback and function

Coal Creek was discussed extensively in the community consultations, producing the most disparate views. It is evident that the asset has suffered under pandemic restrictions of 2020 and 2021, and many of the attractions were only starting to reopen at the start of 2022. Council currently requires a significant amount of investment on maintenance to keep the venue in its current state, which is one of slow decline.

It is a large 27-hectare site with multiple assets including historical buildings and collections, open parks, mining structures, rail tracks, a locomotive and carriages, and a lake with a band rotunda.

At face value, the curatorial model is diffuse and unclear. Some of the buildings are clearly of significance, including the oldest lathe and plaster building in Gippsland, and the first schoolhouse, to others sourced from outside South Gippsland with varied heritage significance or connection to the region.

Stakeholders who love Coal Creek frequently call it 'an important tourist attraction for the region', reflecting what it means to individuals rather than what its function is. For some stakeholders, it is a memorial to a former time.

If considered a tourist attraction, it must be able to be quantified in terms of daily, seasonal, and return visitations, hospitality turnover and gift shop sales. If these figures are sustainable or better, then the asset is functionally viable and can justify current and future investment.

Its value to the community is defined by geography. For many Korumburra locals, it is an asset that represents the history of South Gippsland; it is also 'part of the furniture'. To many people living further away in other areas within the Shire, the significance is not as fully appreciated.

There were numerous positions on Coal Creek that called for Council to dispose of the asset and transfer any saving to other viable assets and services. There was also a middle ground, where stakeholders believed that the site had lost its meaning but could reinvent itself with Council investment.

Cost was the least understood part of the discussion. Most stakeholders are unaware that the Council spends significant amounts on current maintenance, let alone what an increased investment simply to stop deterioration might look like, or the sizeable sum required to make the venue a genuine tourism asset.

Future direction

The ongoing function of Coal Creek will be a focus for Council.

The contribution and support of the local community also needs to be harnessed in determining its future with an achievable vision.

As it stands today, it is a historical museum that reflects an important period in the settlement of South Gippsland and its full potential as a regional and national significance is yet to be fully explored and developed.

Currently the items in the collection are static and represent different eras and require a more cohesive underpinning narrative to connect them. There needs to be a commitment to the collection changing over time or that new objects are displayed, so there is an increase in repeat visitation.

The community and Council recognise the requirement for increased maintenance and a plan forward and this should be done with an eye to contemporary museum displays and attractions, which are generally about interaction, play and immersive engagement.

Accessibility is an issue with a priority to provide best practice for wheelchair access, and people with limited mobility, or with young children in pushers, to navigate the steep unpaved pathways and access all the buildings and display opportunities.

The current reliance on volunteers as a free source of labour has provided a valuable underpinning resource to the maintenance of Coal Creek, but it is not sustainable for in future redevelopment.

Ongoing operational costs, a permanent staffing plan, and marketing strategies will be required as a baseline for any redevelopment.

Strategies moving forward

The current function can only be sustainable if there is new investment in the site to transition into a contemporary and significant cultural tourist attraction. This would involve:

- Research and development of technology for arts, culture, and creative industry engagement to reactivate the site long term to drive visitation and in particular return visitation.
- Multi-year increased financial commitment from Council
- A commitment to substantial upgrade and renovations.
- A clear view on what the site represents and communicates a contemporary cultural tourism asset.
- Investigate rebranding and renaming in line with contemporary use and function

To assist Council in deciding on the future of Coal Creek, there needs to be a rigorous business case, community engagement and a cultural impact assessment carried out as soon as possible to enable the longer-term planning for a future use of the site to be determined.

Leongatha Memorial Hall as a performance space

There is great interest in a performing space in South Gippsland.

The Shire is surrounded by a variety of Performing Arts Centres (PACs) in Warragul, Traralgon, Sale, Wonthaggi and a Cultural Centre soon to be in Cowes, and stakeholders spoke of South Gippsland 'missing out' by not having a centralised PAC.

The Leongatha Memorial Hall is recognised as the most appropriate site for redevelopment into a performance centre, the only one of scale and functionality.

Initial Stakeholder feedback

Most of the discussions around a performance space focussed on two functions – the role of a performance space and an arts or creative hub. The most common view from community was for the development of Memorial Hall to include a professional, flexible 400 seat performance space with adequate dressing/green rooms and smaller rehearsal/studio spaces for artist use.

A scoping exercise by the Leongatha Lyric Theatre drew a conclusion that it and other performing groups recognised that the Memorial Hall is the most suitable site. While that has been recognised, it cannot overlook the anxiety from other townships that one large, centralised venue could over-shadow the investment in other suitable, albeit smaller, performance venues in the Shire.

Other performing artists were most concerned with functionality beyond a performance space, to a complex of multi-functional practice, rehearsal, and performance space.

The Memorial Hall has a sizeable footprint with multiple spaces that could become viable rehearsal rooms and studio spaces. It already has meaning for the South Gippsland community, and many see it as an asset waiting to be reinvigorated. Many local groups travel to the Wonthaggi Union Community Arts Centre for rehearsal and performance, and this is seen as a negative economic and cultural impact on the South Gippsland community.

Being clear on construction and operational costs that Council can support unaided by other financing avenues is essential. There is no cost-neutral PAC or regional art gallery, so Council must be clear on its financial capability to create an active centre. People can point to numerous examples of regions with seemingly successful PACs, but that success has come at the expense of funding for other towns or an arts officer to work with the broader creative community.

Around 50 per cent of the 79 Victorian local government areas have PACs and fewer have centralised art galleries.

The key concern over the future development of the Memorial Hall as a PAC is related to cost. In consulting the peak bodies and agencies on the future of a PAC in South Gippsland is the large capital cost of large-scale centralised infrastructure and that a rigorous business case establishes the benchmark for proceeding, considering the current and future market, the supply of product and the capacity for the venue to not only provide a cultural attraction, but to have a positive flow on to the network of additional venues in the Shire.

Strategies moving forward

Council will consider undertaking a business case and feasibility study for the redevelopment of Memorial Hall – investigating current and future use, demographics, population growth, benchmarking, demand, impact on small towns, and whether operational costs can be supported and maintained.

A strong case for State Government and Commonwealth Government support and contribution towards capital works can only be made if underpinned by a solid business case that has a forward projection extending over 25 years.

The Great Southern Rail Trail & Korumburra and Leongatha Railway Precincts

The Great Southern Rail Trail is a flagship tourist attraction and is emerging as a future tourist link across the Shire.

It offers opportunities for longer journeys and holidays through the Gippsland region. It has the potential to increase the tourist economy. It provides local communities with walking and bicycle tracks through parts of the Shire recognised for their natural beauty.

The Rail Trail adjacent to Korumburra and Leongatha Station precincts provides a natural delivery of visitors to the precinct as a destination, or significant stop over.

Open space, a redevelopment of the railway station, surrounding community infrastructure and proximity to the town centres means there is strong potential for cultural activation all year round.

There are excellent opportunities for multi-function spaces and open-air events at the site, and great potential for local creative sector involvement.

There is broad consensus and robust support for the redevelopment of the Korumburra Station complex in particular, and agreement that it has positive benefits and meaning for the whole Shire.

There is also recognition and acceptance that this will require significant investment from Council.

Existing funding allocated by VicTrack to the station provides an immediate investment and planning.

The Great Southern Rail Trail has the potential to attract visitors to the region and by developing a public art presence that enhances the rail trail with stimulating, enriching sculpture, murals and arts objects that can be unique and spread the art and the visitors through the rail trail pathway.

Strategy moving forward:

The Council reviews its current Public Art Policy to strengthen its objectives and processes and include the input and curation by the local communities that sit adjacent to the Rail Trail.

The current planning and redevelopment of the Korumburra Railway Station Building must examine the potential of the site as a creative hub for lost arts (artisan crafts) and new arts for a Shire-wide public art initiative. Using the current sheds and new studios has the potential to become a creative industries precinct.

In the life of this arts, culture and creative industries strategy, time must be taken to look at other national and international models of integrated arts and creative industries development that can inform an integrated approach to the redevelopment of the Railway precinct in Korumburra, and Leongatha, the Great Southern Rail Trail and Coal Creek Community Park and Museum.

The potential inclusion of Aboriginal heritage and sites of significance, along the Rail Trail and to highlight rare or special environmental features and flora, and the option to replenish the Coal Creek Community Park and Museum site.

Small Halls Network

There are over 50 small halls across the Shire, seen as the lifeblood of the local community, hosting a wide range of arts, culture, and community events. The network represents approximately 15 of the venues. Council has ownership of 13 halls across the entire network.

The Small Halls website is currently regarded as in need of urgent redevelopment and a small investment in the site to bring it up to current functionality could increase promotion of events in the halls through the different social media platforms and by being an active current site.

Several halls need refurbishment, and others are close to needing replacement. Some stakeholders suggested that a part-time Halls coordinator could be supported to organise bookings support the marketing through Council communications channels and oversee the maintenance and development of the venues.

Halls in larger population areas are active all year round, e.g., Foster, Meeniyah and Venus Bay, smaller township halls are open infrequently according to need, and others are mostly closed. The active halls are community hubs and economic drivers for the town. Events at the halls draw visitors into towns, with flow-on effects to local businesses.

Many stakeholders have strong loyalty to the small halls, especially community artists. The halls are valued for low-cost hire rates, and accessibility. There is broad agreement that the small halls are a showcase for the decentralised arts and culture model in South Gippsland

Tour promoters see the small halls as vital infrastructure for smaller touring acts that would have trouble filling 400 seat venues. Several halls are in the 100-200 seat range, attracting full houses.

In the view of stakeholders, live music events have a strong following and better marketing in collaboration with promoters could lead to more events.

Visual artists use small halls as exhibition spaces, and spaces for workshops and engagement events that can generate income.

There are concerns about the impact of a centralised PAC, and that most of the available funding would be directed to it at the expense of small halls.

Any strategy for small halls across the Shire needs to be done in concert with planning for a central PAC if it is to proceed in Leongatha.

Strategy moving forward:

Factors that need to be addressed in the term of this Strategy are the contribution to the costs of all halls that are under Council remit and a future rationalization and decision on which halls, if maintained or upgraded provide the best network of venues to service the entire Shire.

Stakeholders are aware that Council could not and should not assume responsibility for the operations of the small halls and the Council can play a significant role in partnership with local communities and halls management committees.

Implementation Plan and Actions

The list of **strategic actions** for each Council Objective will be expanded upon in an implementation plan outlining activities with areas of responsibility and any potential partners.

This will be presented in a similar format to other key Council strategies.

The Implementation Plan will be presented to Council once this Strategy has been endorsed and has been out for public exhibition, where it will accommodate any changes to the Strategy and consequently its implementation.

Appendix 1: Cultural Development Network

The Cultural Development Network has developed six essential steps that enable us to undertake outcome focussed planning and evaluation.

These essential steps are:

- Based on values
- Directed towards goals
- Focused on outcomes
- Informed by evidence
- Underpinned by a theory of change
- Respondent to evaluation

Based on values

The Strategy responds to the collective values of the community that underpin the strategy. Gained from existing documents and supplementary consultations to complete information or test assumptions. Values will be evident in the council's stated goals (vision, purpose, mission etc.).

Directed towards goals

The Strategy is directed towards goals, the desired long-term futures determined by Council and articulated in the Council Plan's Themes and will enable specific measurable achievement towards the goals.

Focussed on outcomes

The Strategy is focused on outcomes, that is, the difference our work will make to those we are responsible to serve, rather than the activity undertaken to get there. Measurable outcomes help us determine whether objectives were met, and therefore addressing the goals.

Informed by evidence

The Strategy will articulate decisions informed by evidence. This includes practice knowledge, published research or data that provides information about the local context, the issues being identified that will help or hinder the way forward, and approaches to reaching the intended outcomes

Underpinned by a theory of change

The Strategy uses a theory of change to assist and explain choices of activities Theory of change is the reason why we do what we do. It can be represented by this short summary:

We are looking for . . . (this strategic objective), and we know . . . (this evidence), therefore, we will do . . . (these activities)

This section is where the previous four sections come together to form the 'plan' into strategic objectives which are unique to the organisation, given the context above.

Measurable Outcomes

The schema of measurable outcomes of cultural engagement is based on the premise that cultural products and activities do not hold intrinsic value in and of themselves. Value is generated or experienced as humans engage with the artwork or experience, with different individuals perceiving or receiving this value in different ways. Therefore, the outcomes are not assessing 'quality' or 'excellence' of the cultural experience, but the impact on the person who engages with it.

Implementation and Evaluation.

An Annual Implementation Plan will outline how Council will deliver activities that contribute to outcomes, with timeframes, areas of responsibility and any partners. An annual review and summary report will be shared with Councillors and key stakeholders.

The Strategy includes evaluation consistently as part of the normal work process. Evaluation findings are used to inform future decision-making ongoing during the Strategy.

The Strategy will be evaluated for its efficacy and contribution to the operations of the Council. Assessing its success and improving its next iteration is essential to building the capability, increased productivity, and value of cultural development activities to the Council.

Evaluation will determine the effectiveness of this Arts Culture and Creative Industries Strategy. The evaluation process should occur at different times throughout the life of the Strategy: from when it is just written; as it is being used; and as it reaches key thresholds.

Takso Outcomes Planning Platform is an option for planning, recording and evaluating the activities identified in the Strategy.

Takso is a new platform developed for the arts sector that until now has not had a consistent method for measuring the impact of its activities. The framework that underpins this Strategy is also used at the activity level and every activity of Council can be recorded in a consistent method, contributing to a larger community of interest including other councils large and small, artists and producers, arts, and cultural organisations

Appendix 2: Community Consultation data

Report by Dean Merlino

Appendix 3: Documents reviewed

References to existing frameworks, policies and documents covering consultation evidence

Appendix 4: Evidence citations

- ⁱ Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia, David Throsby and Katya Petetskaya, Australia Council for the Arts, 2017.
- ⁱⁱ *What It Means: A Creative Industries Strategy for South West Victoria 2020-2024 Regional Arts Victoria.*
- ⁱⁱⁱ The Arts in Regional Australia: a research summary: November 2017
- ^{iv} Ibid.
- ^v Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts Australia Council for the Arts.
- ^{vi} Reconciliation Australia
- ^{vii} Developing and Revitalizing Rural Communities Through Arts and Creativity: Kim Dunphy, Cultural Development Network
- ^{viii} CREATIVE COMMUNITIES The cultural benefits of Victoria's public libraries Summary Report, State Library of Victoria.
- ^{ix} Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life Age UK 2018
https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/health--wellbeing/rb_apr18_creative_and_cultural_activities_wellbeing.pdf
- ^x Understanding the value of arts and culture – The AHRC Cultural Value Project 2016 – Geoffrey Crossick and Patrycja Kazynska
- ^{xi} <http://noosabiosphere.org.au>
- ^{xii} Creative Placemaking, Ann Markusen, Anne Gadwa
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