

Positive Ageing
Strategy 2008-2013

Prepared by
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October 2008

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Acknowledgements

In acknowledging the effort to bring this plan to fruition, the consultants, 100 Monkeys Pty Ltd would particularly like to thank the people of the Moira Shire who, through their service roles in many clubs, groups, and organisations generously and with good humour, assisted in the distribution of surveys. Without a doubt, the research that sits behind this report contains a level of rich information that can be directly attributed to the number of surveys distributed and subsequently received from the community.

It is with much gratitude that we acknowledge the population aged 55 years and over in Moira for their input either through the completion of surveys, involvement in the community workshops or for their participation in interviews. We are grateful for your time and effort in support of this project.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all the business, industry, agricultural, health community and human services leaders for sharing their time, knowledge and insights with us.

We would like to thank the Council staff who gave willingly of their support to advance this work. We also acknowledge and thank the staff at the Moira Healthcare Alliance for their support in making this plan happen.

This plan was funded by MAV/ COTA and Moira Shire



Introduction

Ageing has become the focus of governments, with the realisation that the portion of older people in the population is set to grow unlike any other time in our history. Focus on ageing is, in itself, providing an opportunity to prove that many of the changes needing to occur for older people, are also those changes needed to grow and sustain all other sectors of the community.

Moving into an era of an increased older population should be viewed as a transition and not an upheaval. After all, as a country we have been long aware that our older population will increase significantly from 2012 onwards and now is the time to make sure planning is focussed on that transition. On the whole, many of our structures and practices need to adjust rather than change to be inclusive of older people. The challenge is to make this transition with an emphasis on the health and wellbeing of the older population so that they can continue to enjoy and contribute fully to the life of our communities.

Moirashire Council will need a “whole of council” approach to meet the challenges of the impact of an ageing population. At the same time the Shire must address these matters hand in hand with its role in strategically influencing and guiding the liveability and sustainability of the Shire.

The Positive Ageing Plan builds upon the five pillars outlined in the Council Plan.

- A liveable shire
- Healthy living
- A growing shire
- Our environment
- Working together

Both now, and more so into the future, communities within the Shire will be empowered to bring projects and initiatives forward as a legitimate means of community planning. The growth of decision-making within the community will more fully drive decision-making at council (and other levels of government too) including the allocation of budgets, policy making and work plans for council departments. This strategic plan is evidence of community engagement as a mechanism for informing decision-making and planning in Moirashire.

Background

The population of Moirashire is nearing 29,000 residents. People aged 55 years or more currently comprise up 34.4% of the population or 9,976 people. Into the future, the population is predicted to grow to 34,100 by 2020. At this time the portion of people 55 years or more will increase to 38.4% or 13,094 people. Some of the largest inflows of people into the community are retirees and empty-nesters, therefore the growth of the “older” population is increasing at a greater rate than other sectors of the population.

Projected figures for 2021 of the 60 year plus population in Moira are significantly higher (38%) than the Victorian average (25%) and also higher than the average Victorian regional figure (31%). The number of residents aged over 55 years exceeds the percentage of older people in the neighbouring municipalities; with Wodonga at 20%, Greater Shepparton at 26% and Wangaratta at 33%. The implications regarding future planning for older residents within Moira Shire are paramount to the long term sustainability of the Shire.

When looking at the important health issues that determine the quality and length of life, there are four lifestyle illnesses that impact significantly on the older population in Victoria. These are cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, cancer and mental illness. A health profile of Moira Shire identifies that its ageing population has a higher incidence of cardiovascular disease, respiratory disease and cancer than the rest of Victoria; however mental illness is slightly less in incidence.

Each individual has a responsibility to maintain their health at a level that allows for their active and enjoyable participation in life. Council too plays a significant role in providing public health services, and environments in which people can improve or maintain a healthy and active life. Other community services, organisations and business each play an integral role in the health and wellbeing of the ageing population.

The Moira Shire Positive Ageing Plan captures the elements of ageing, explores the possibilities for the future and makes recommendations to drive the mechanisms that will provide quality environments in which older people can enjoy and benefit from.

Overview of the Strategic Planning Process

The lead up to this project began with Moira Shire's commitment to a whole of Council Positive Ageing plan as set out in the 2006/07 Council Plan. Council also outlined a commitment to improving the lives of the older population in Moira in the Social Plan 2007/10 and the Municipal Public Health Plan 2007/09. The Positive Ageing Plan will provide information and data that is specific to the 55 years and over population in Moira Shire and builds upon this existing work.

The study captures the current and future needs of the target population in Moira Shire in relation to health, wellbeing and security across a number of parameters, short and long-term vision and aspects of living in Moira that older people felt could improve their enjoyment of life.

Capturing the data and information from the community was achieved through both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies conducted using the following means:

- ◆ A survey was developed with quantitative questions relating to age, town and self-rated measures of health and wellness. The survey also included opportunities for free

comment on a number of subject areas as well as an opportunity to add anything that the respondent felt important to say. Two thousand five hundred (2500) surveys were distributed within the community. The surveys were accompanied by a covering letter and reply paid envelope.

- ◆ Interviews with key stakeholders were held across the shire, these included people from the health, community and local government sector, councillors, business leaders, representatives of seniors clubs and groups and farming organisation representatives. All were asked similar questions that were framed to suit their particular interest or enterprise with a specific focus on ageing.
- ◆ Community workshops were held in three locations within the Shire. Each workshop gave participants an overview of the research and projections relating to an ageing population and then explored the ideas and concepts people had to improve or enhance the ageing experience in Moira. When all ideas were fully explored, the groups identified their top three priorities.

Surveys were distributed throughout the Shire, many through the community coordinators, libraries, council offices, Moira Healthcare Alliance, shops, post offices etc. There were 339 surveys returned, for collation and analysis within the allotted timeframe. The surveys consisted of a mix of qualitative and quantitative questions. By applying a thematic analysis to the qualitative questions, the majority, or prevalent thinking about a range of subjects was captured and is reported below. The quantitative questions provided important basic data, and allowed for cross referencing analysis of the various parameters contained in the surveys.

Interviews were held with identified key stakeholders in the Shire, including representatives from Council (including councillors), Health services, businesses and clubs/groups. Each representative was asked the same questions revolving around the ageing population as well as being given an opportunity to add whatever opinions or comments they had that related to the topic. These interviews were collated and studied for thematic responses as well as ideas or concepts that would prove beneficial to the community.

As with any project, a level of **background research** is usually undertaken as a means of understanding the area of interest and for gathering current data to inform the development of the project. Further research was also conducted specifically looking at data from State, Federal and other local government sources that allowed for comparisons and contrasts between Moira and other areas to be made. Research into specific ideas or trends that emerged from the consultations was also undertaken to enhance information or background knowledge pertinent to this study.

Three **community workshops** were convened to provide people with the opportunity to share their ideas for the 55 years and over generation into the future. A total of 30 people attended the workshops and identified their preferred priorities for supporting and enhancing the future of older people in Moira.

Research Results

Community Workshops

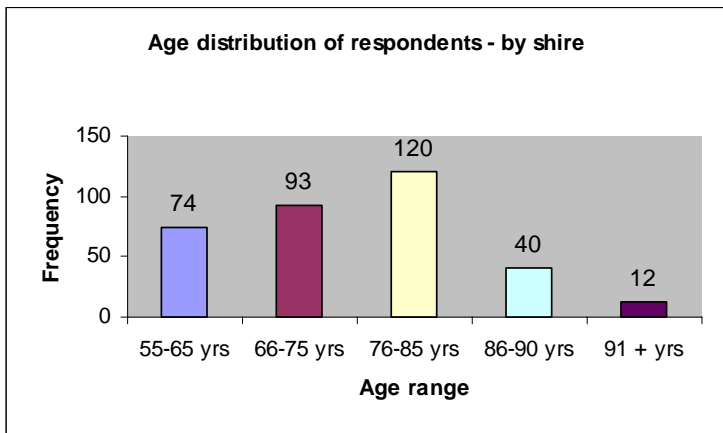
During each community workshop, a number of ideas to improve residents' experience of living in Moira Shire were canvassed. These ideas were presented by participants, then everyone voted for the priorities they considered to be the three most important from those put forward. Each priority was developed into a condensed proposal. Below is the table with the three top priorities from each workshop.

Town/Priority	Key Area	Proposal
Numurkah One	Accessibility within shopping precincts.	Council to produce a long-term plan to improve path infrastructure, access to shops and services and conduct scooter (Gopher) education sessions.
Two	Transport to and from neighbouring communities for shopping and services.	Weekly service providing access to main towns for shopping and access to services and supports.
Three	Enhance the Council Community Leadership program.	Increase the program to be delivered into four towns, two programs being offered each year on a rotational basis.
Cobram One	Printed resource that provides up to date and comprehensive information on 'what's on' for the over 55's.	Shire, service providers and community groups meet quarterly to develop and maintain this resource as well as planning and co-ordination of activities. Distribution through a range of community places and groups/clubs.
Two	More available and accessible transport for people with a disability.	Increase the range of transport and provide buses with ramps. Trains at platform level with easy access.
Three	Increased aged care facilities.	Increase the number of available places and facilities. Increase the amount of Respite available each year
Yarrawonga One	Transport increased to and from rural areas. More transport suitable for people with disabilities including Taxis.	Easy access for residents throughout the Shire. Increase community cars in each major town.
Two	More information about groups and activities, and transport to these.	Improved system for disseminating information about groups and activities. Improved mechanisms to enable people to attend groups and activities.
Three	Central coordination and contact point for access to	Clients wishing to access specialist services or allied health make one call –

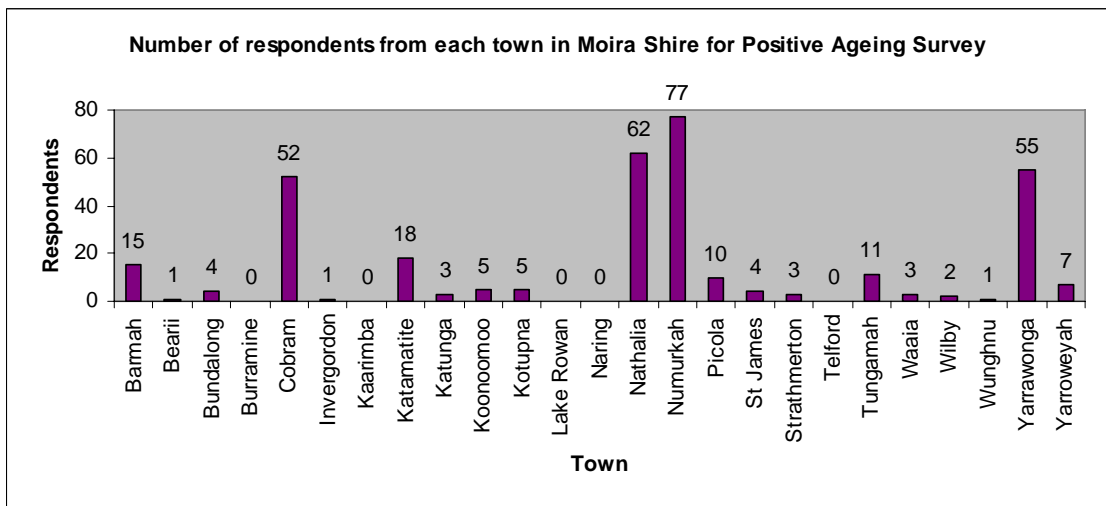
	specialist and allied health services.	this provides date, time and coordinated transport to and from the appointment if required. Specialists and allied health professionals are brought into key locations to provide the service.
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Survey Results

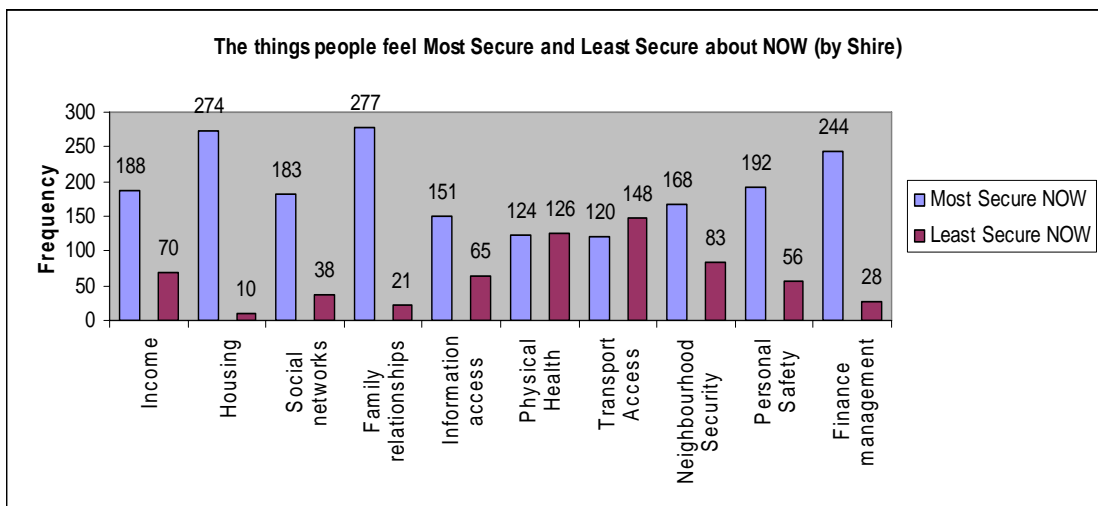
The following represents the key findings from the 339 surveys submitted by residents from 20 of the 25 communities across the Shire.



The largest single group of survey respondents was in the 76-85 year old cohort, with strong representation in each of the age groupings consistent with the demographic profile of the Shire.

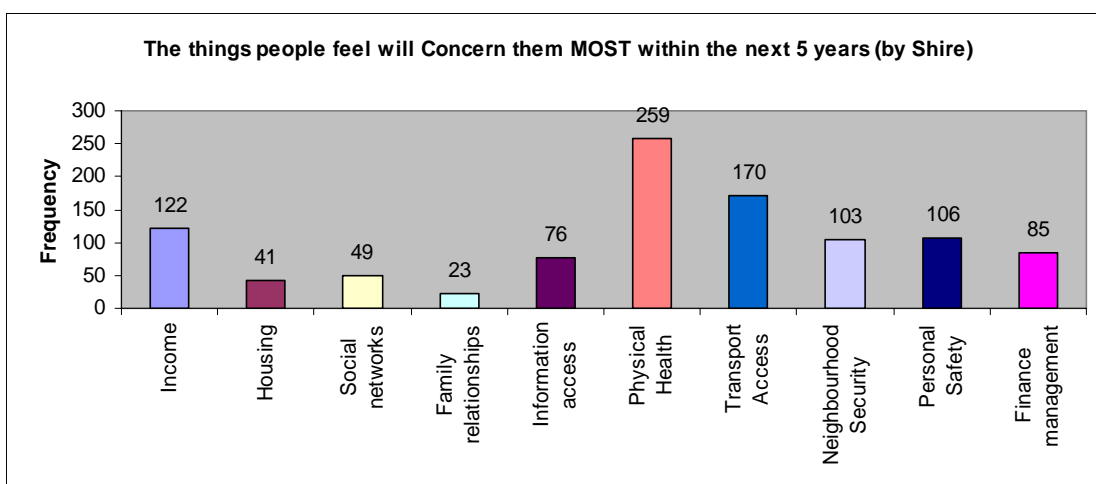


The sample size from Yarrawonga appears low in comparison to its population and to the array of opportunities for accessing surveys in that community. Numurkah and Nathalia on the other hand, are very well represented. There was a good spread of respondents from the smaller rural towns across the Shire. Of the 25 towns, only five small localities were not represented in the study.



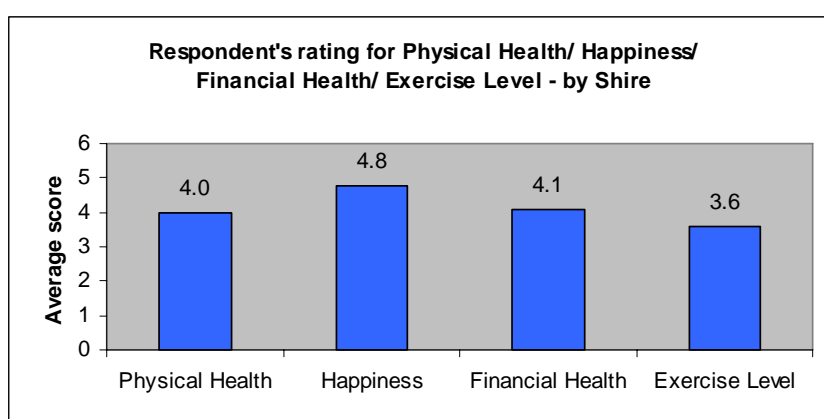
Respondents identified feeling “most secure” about family relationships (277), closely followed by housing (274) indicating a high level of home ownership; and next was their ability to manage their finances (244). It should be noted that this does not necessarily indicate a strong financial position, only an ability to manage what they have.

Most significantly in the feeling “least secure” category was access to transport (148) and physical health (126). Neighbourhood Security rated less, but still at a level that suggests some action needs to be implemented.

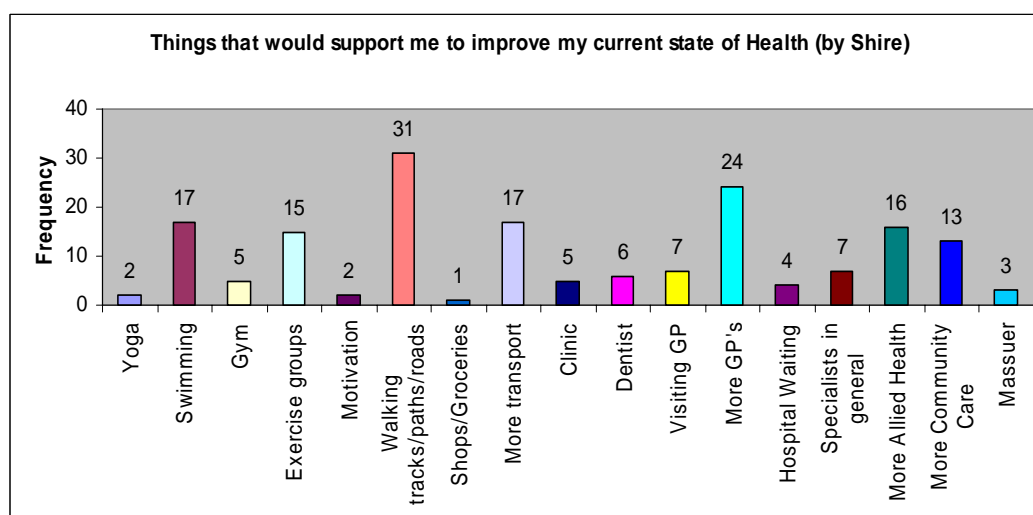


Looking into the future, within the next 5 years, the things that will MOST concern respondents are physical health (259) access to transport (170) and income (122). It is interesting to note the shift from the results contained in the previous graph where access to transport rated higher than physical health in the respondents current situation. This suggests people expect a decline in their physical health within the next 5 years.

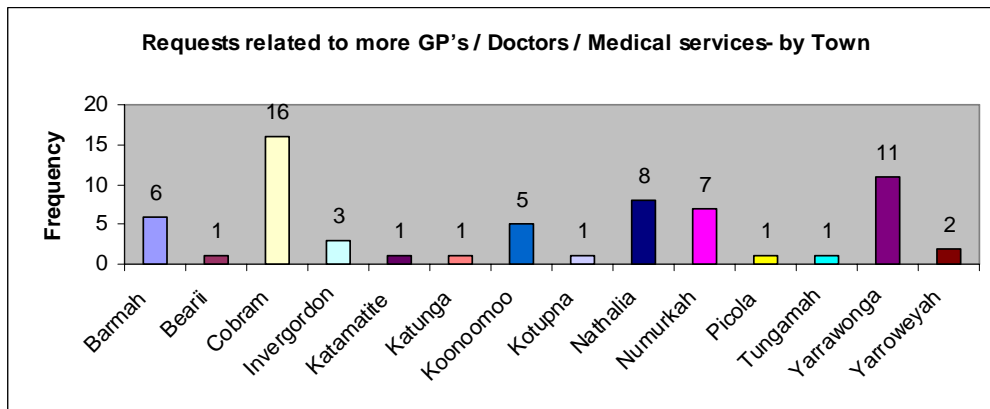
There is also a decline in the feeling of personal safety in that time period. People are currently feeling quite secure about personal safety (192) and then this transforms into a concern for many (106) within five years.



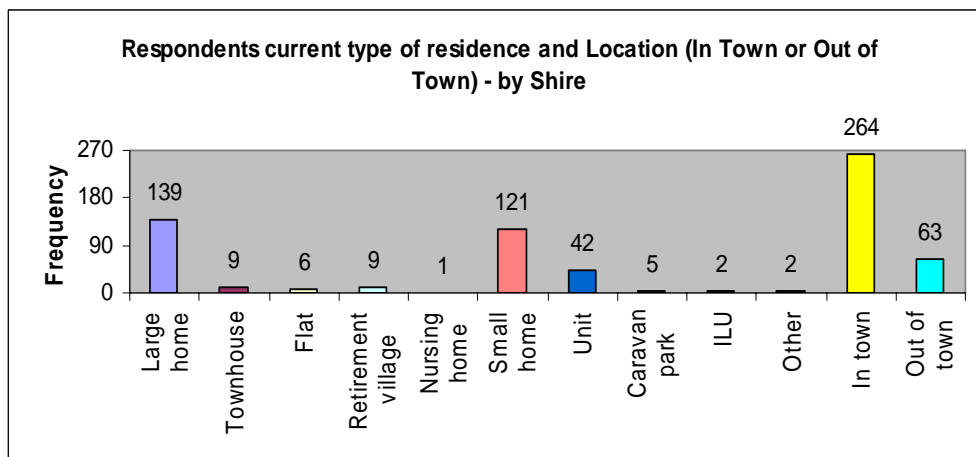
Whilst self-rated happiness (4.8) is quite high overall, physical health (4.0) and exercise level (3.6) have the lowest scores.



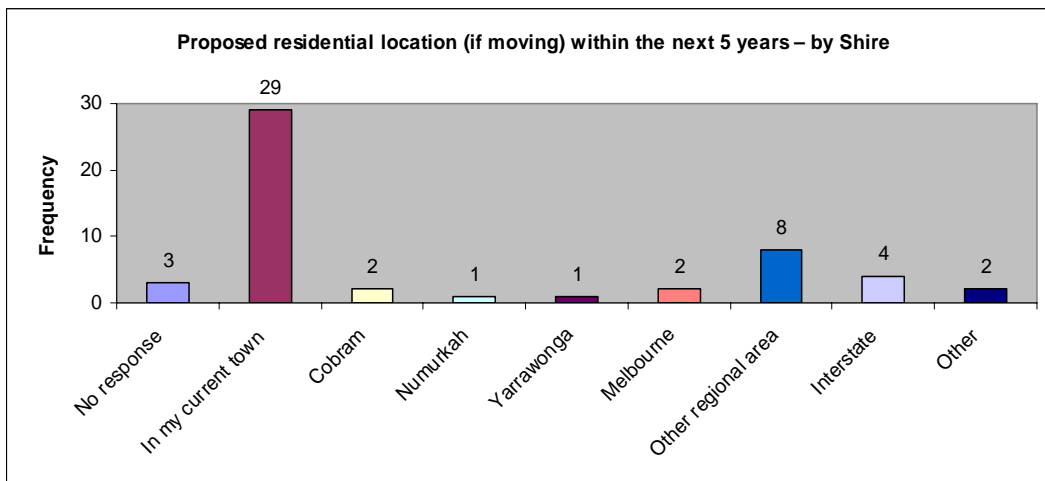
These priorities suggest that people are willing to be pro-active in maintaining and enhancing their health status, given the basic infrastructure and support. The total requests for more GP's and medical services are broken down to an individual town level below.



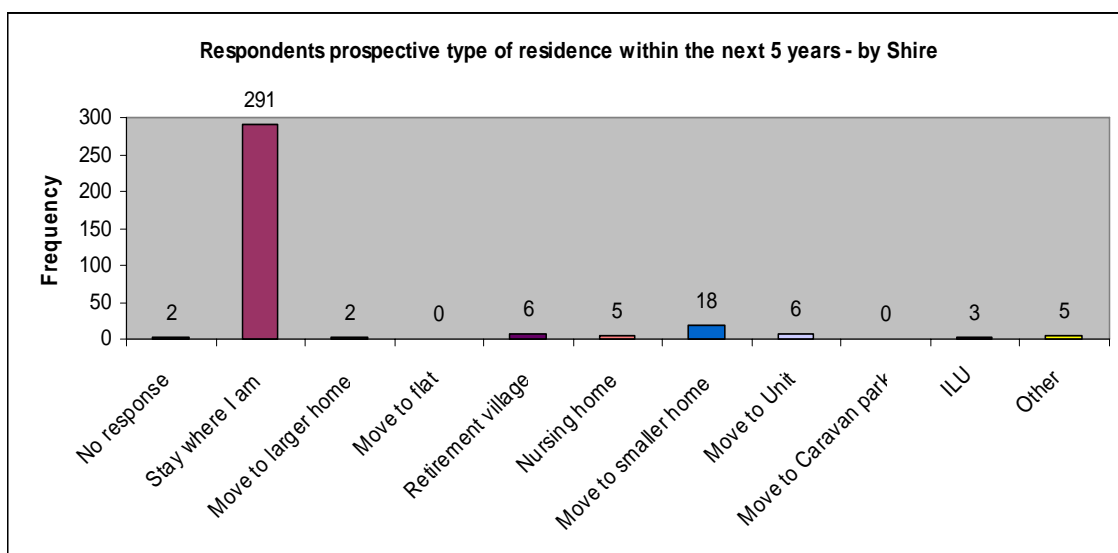
The number of respondents from Cobram was lowest of the four large towns in Moira, yet the requests for increased GP and medical services were the highest.



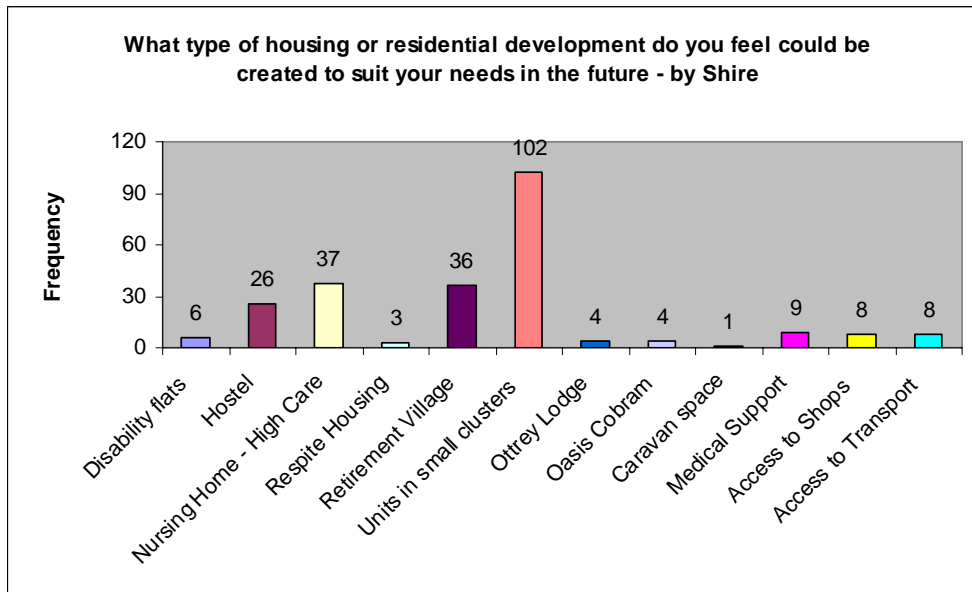
The majority of respondents stated that they currently live in large homes (139), with a similar number (121) living in small homes, and significantly fewer (42) living in units. The majority of respondents live in towns (264) and the remainder (63) living out of town.



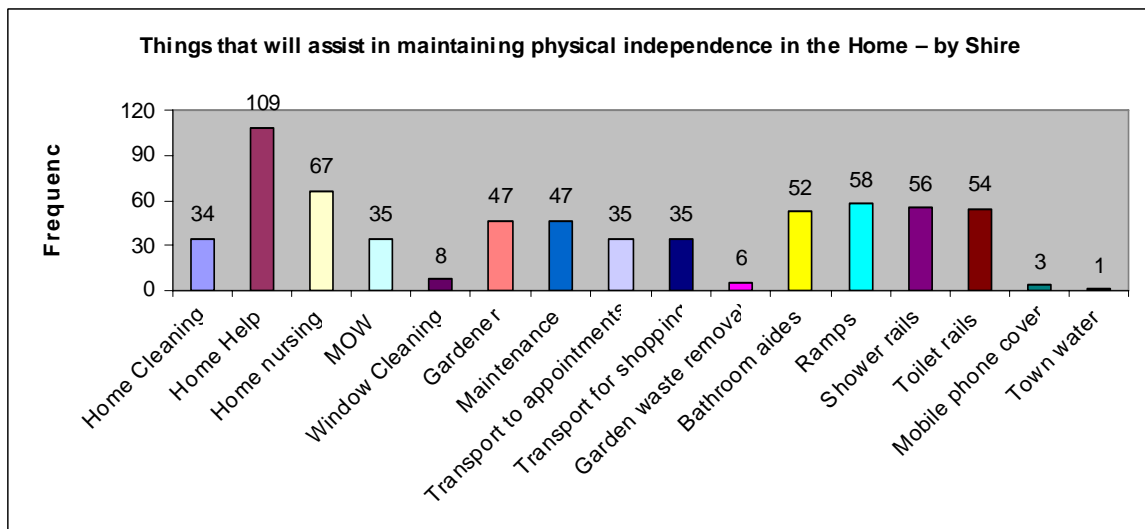
Only 49 respondents identified that they would move within the next five years. Of those the majority (29) planned to move within their current town. A small number were moving from out of town into a larger centre within Moira Shire (4) and the remainder (16) were moving away from the Shire.



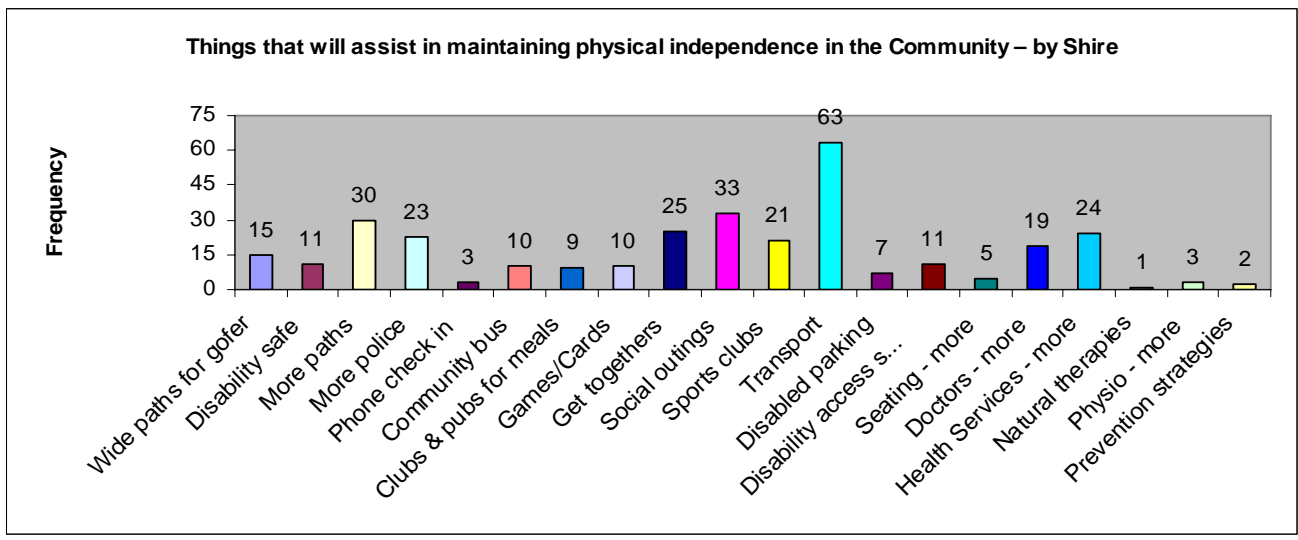
Eighty six percent (86%) of respondents intend to stay in their current residence and only 5% intend to move to a smaller home, less than 2% to a unit or retirement village, 1.5% to a nursing home.



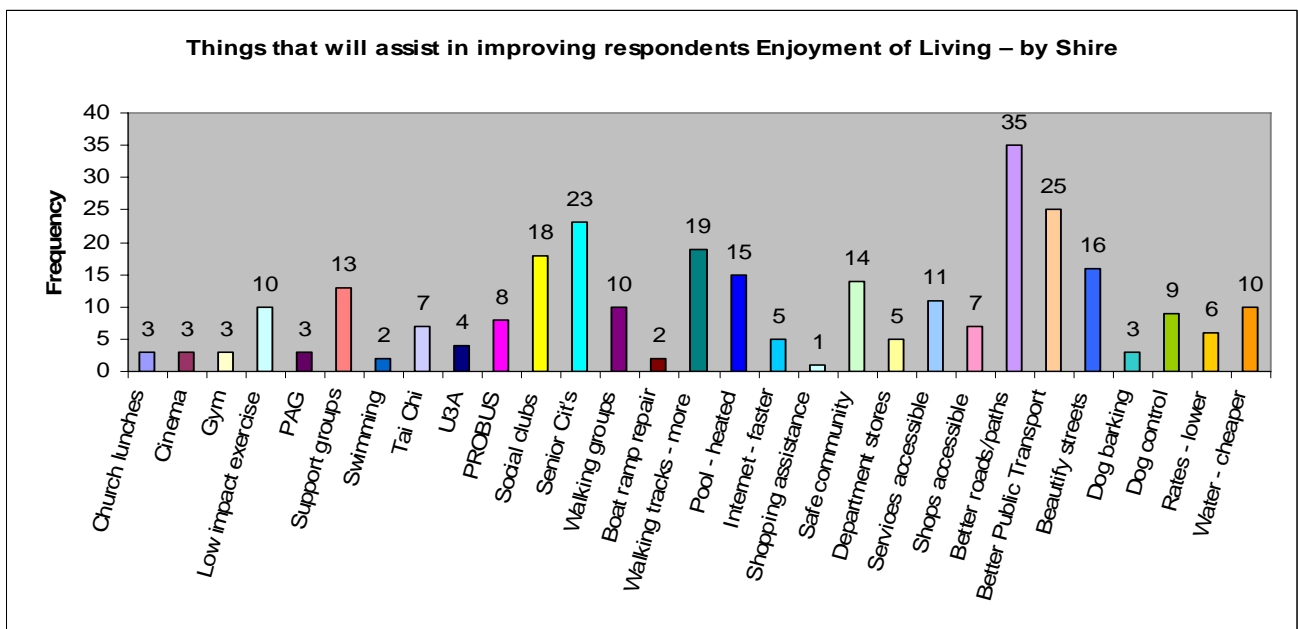
The majority of respondents stated that they intend to remain in their current residence. However, when asked to consider the type of accommodation that might suit their needs, respondents overwhelmingly identified units in small clusters as the preferred option.



The majority of respondents identified Home Care (213 responses) as a primary means to maintain physical independence in their homes. These were listed as Home Cleaning (34), Home Help (109), Transport to Appointments (35) and Transport to Shopping (35). Occupation therapy and associated home modifications accounted for 220 responses in the surveys. District Nursing (67) also ranked highly.



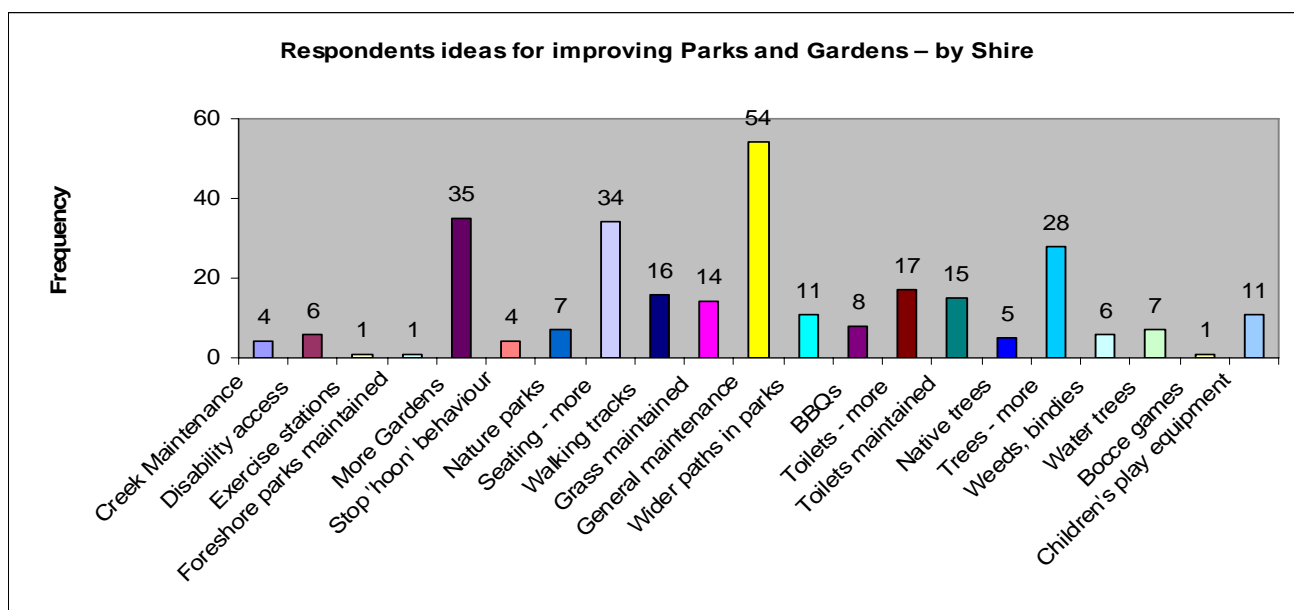
The priority for most respondents in maintaining physical independence in the community related to **mobility**, be that through transport options (63), Community Bus (10), or improved and expanded footpaths (more paths-30, wide paths for gofers-15). **Social connection** was also the second highest priority and included social outings (23), get togethers (25), games (10), visiting clubs and pubs for meals; followed by increased access to doctors (19) and health services (27). It is worth noting that 23 respondents saw an **increased police presence** as improving their independence in the community.



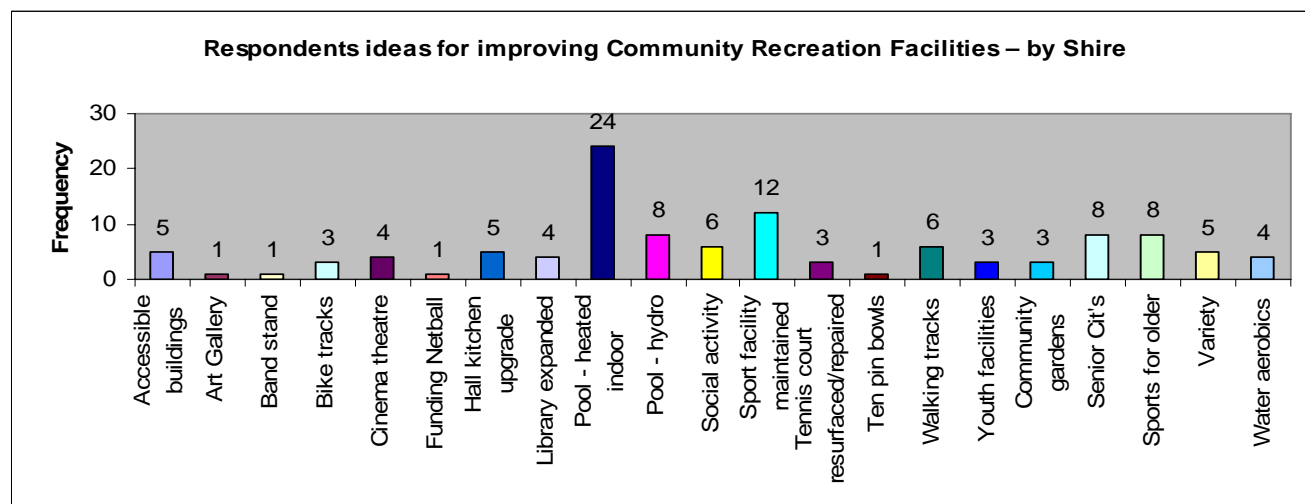
When identifying things that could contribute to respondents' enjoyment of living; **mobility** was again the highest priority, with better roads and paths (35), better public transport (25) and more

walking tracks (19). The second priority was **Social-growth** options (t=56) which included Senior Citizens (23), social clubs (18), PROBUS (8), U3A (4) and PAG (3). **Physical activity options** ranked third with requests for more sporting groups (13), low impact exercise (10), walking groups (10), Tai Chi (7) and access to gyms (3).

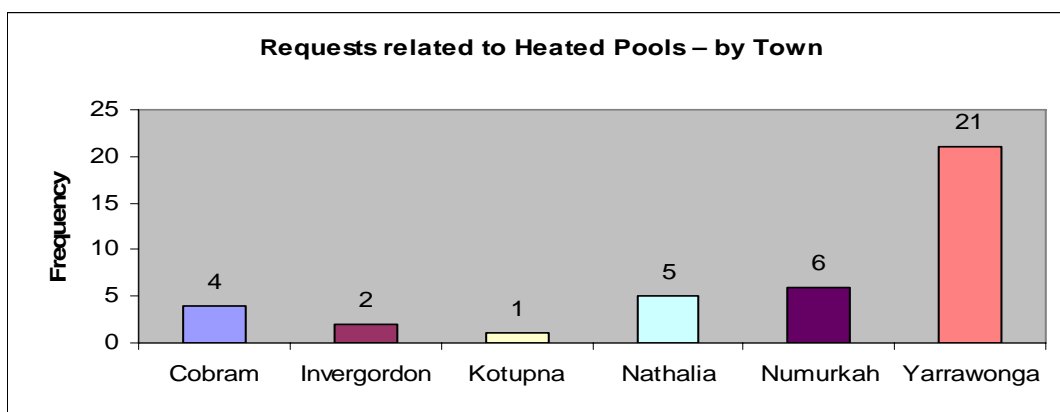
Although dog control only had (9) mentions, it should be noted that these related to Nathalia.



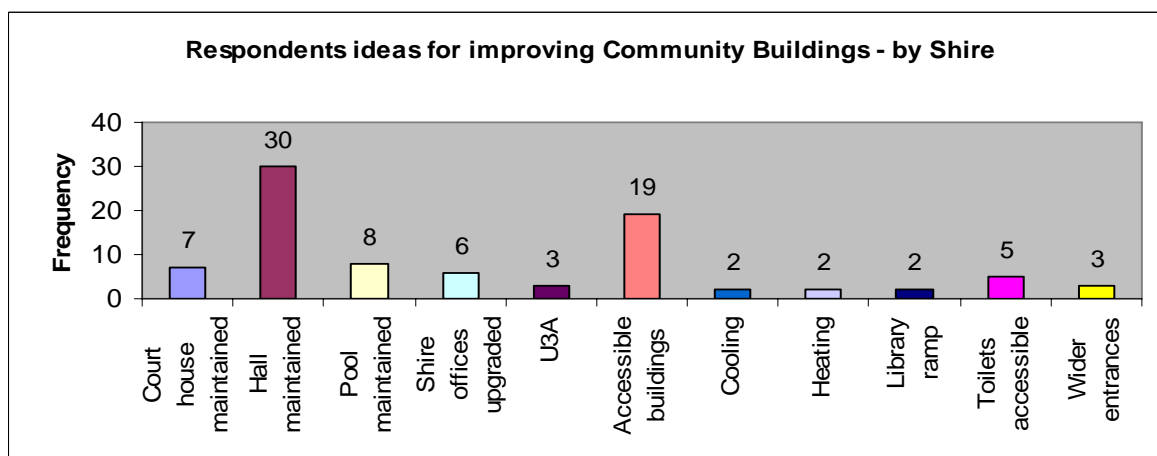
When asked what residents would like to see in relation to Parks and Gardens, respondents requested an increased level of maintenance (54), especially grass (14) and weed control; more gardens (35) and in particular, more flowers and more trees (28), with a strong reference to indigenous species. In addition, a higher level of general amenity with increased seating (34), increased and better maintained toilets (32), more walking tracks that were also disability friendly (22), more children's play equipment (11), and more BBQ's (8).



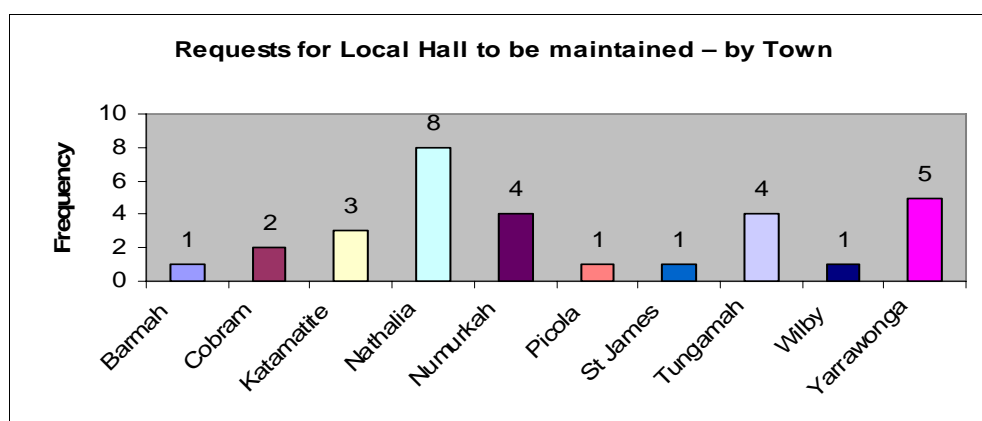
When asked what residents would like to see in relation to recreation facilities, some form of heated indoor pool for swimming was the highest response (t=32) followed by the maintenance of sporting facilities (12). In addition suggestions related to better maintenance of existing facilities, increased social and recreational activities, and greater accessibility.



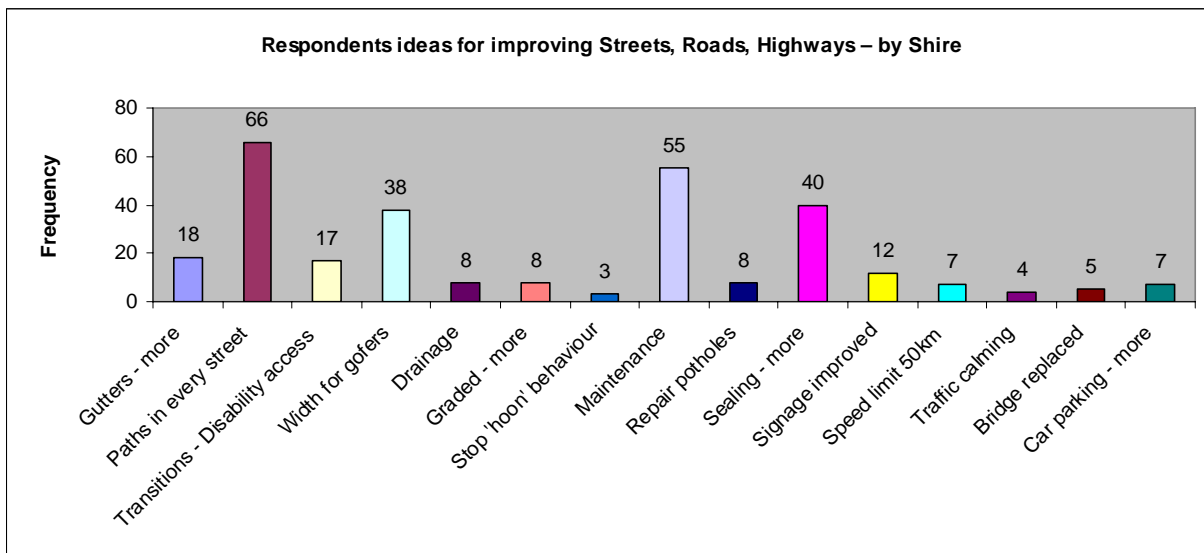
Further breakdown analysis of the heated pool/hydrotherapy figures show that Yarrowonga respondents have the highest weighting for this priority.



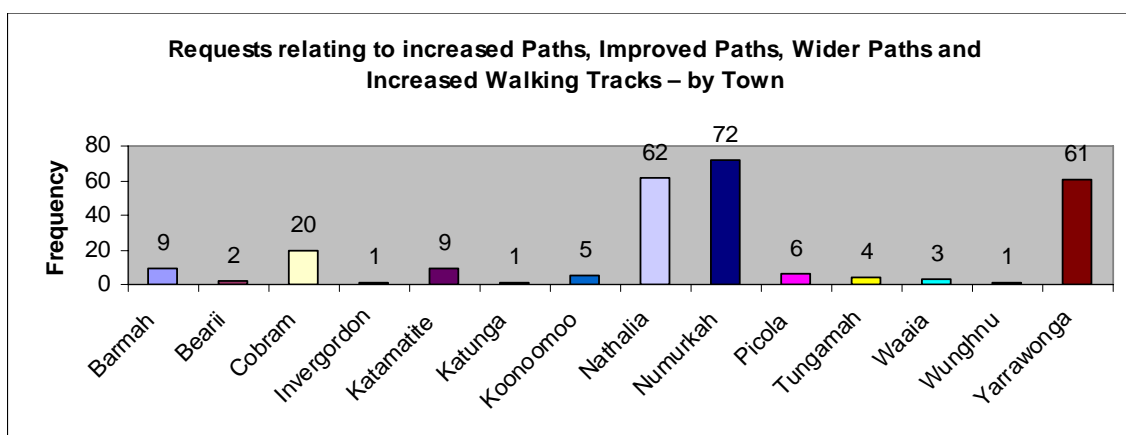
When asked what residents would like to see in relation to community buildings, maintenance (30) and access (t=27 including access to toilets and wheelchair accessibility) were the two main areas for improvement of community buildings.



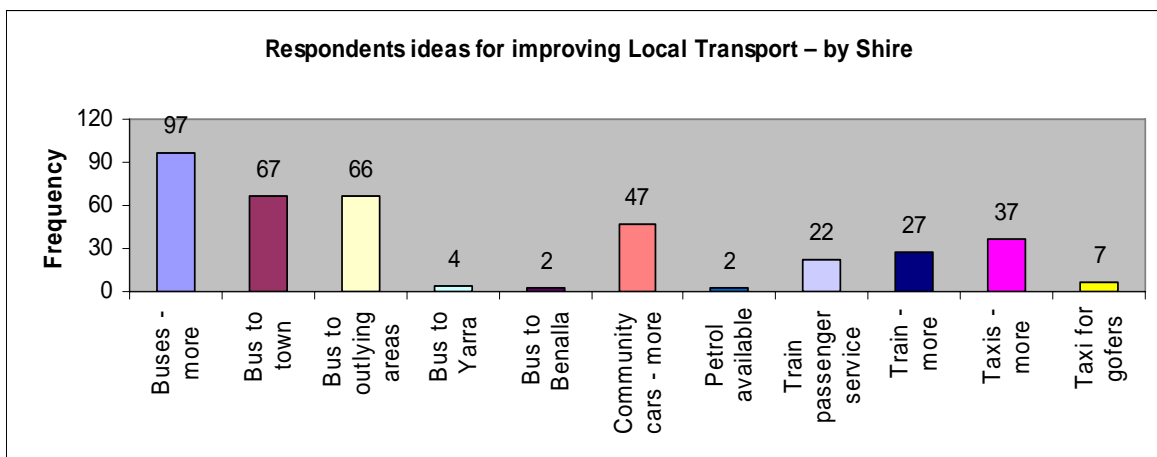
Requests for hall maintenance was broken down into individual towns, however the number of responses indicates that each of the towns listed above have some level of concern relating to hall maintenance.



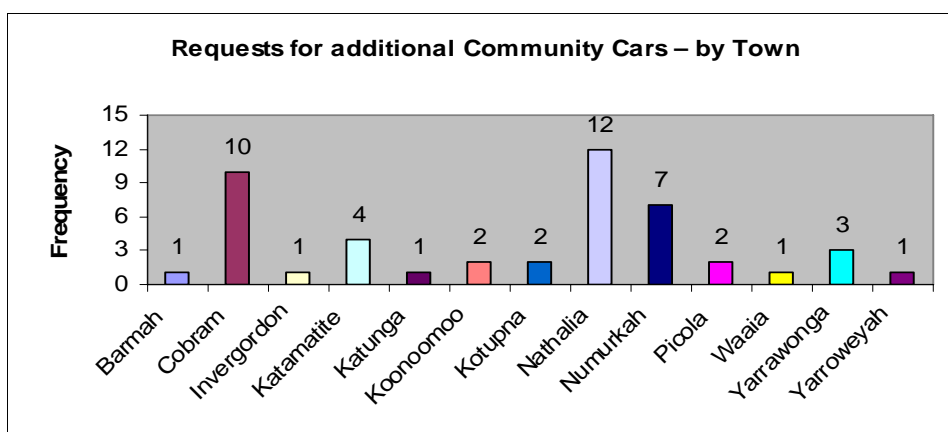
When asked what residents would like to see in relation to streets, roads and highways; the development of a wide, safe, integrated network of paths appears to be among the highest priorities for this group. Across the survey there were a total of 195 suggestions relating to paths and 72 relating to walking tracks made by respondents. The focus by respondents for this question has been on the development of paths in every street (66), followed by general and regular maintenance and upgrading of roads.



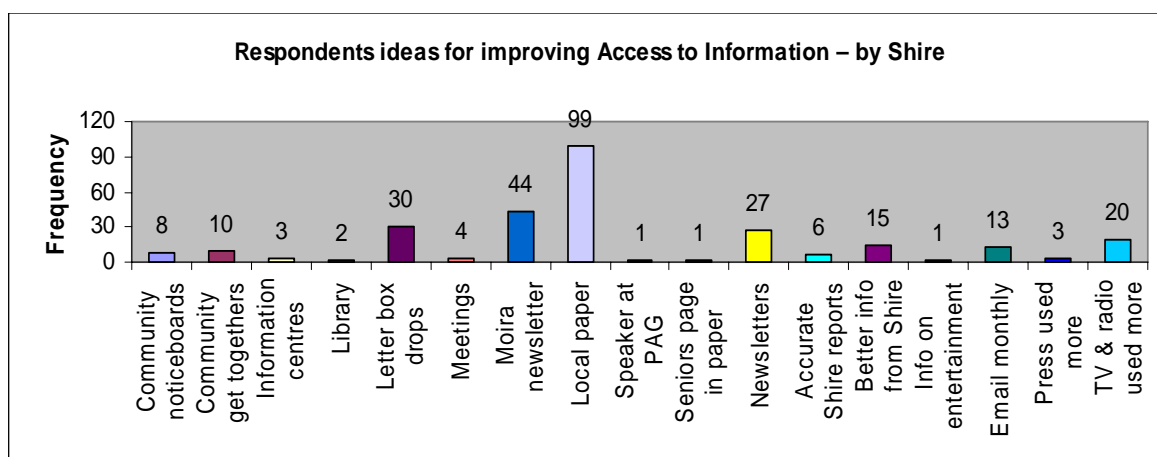
This graph identifies the level of interest in upgrading, improving and maintaining paths by towns. Nathalia (62) Numurkah (72) and Yarrowonga (61) are highly represented however in Cobram (20) it would appear to be much less of an issue.



Buses featured in 236 responses to ideas for improving local transport. The need for additional community cars rated highly (47) as did the combined responses for trains (t=49).



Requests for additional community cars came largely from Nathalia (12) followed closely by Cobram (10) and then Numurkah (7). It is also important to note that whilst the graph depicts a small numeric response to this subject from many small towns, the requests for community cars is generally proportionate to the total survey response from those communities.



When asked to identify the ways in which residents wanted to remain informed about what was happening, the preferred mechanism for respondents was the local paper (99). Additional information from council was requested in the form of newsletters delivered directly to homes (t=101).

Note: In the experience of the consultants, surveys from people in the higher age brackets tend to be represented at minimal levels in this type of research. However, in the Moira research, the higher rate of older people (80 years plus) responding to the surveys led to comparisons being made with neighbouring populations to identify if the percentage of that population group was disproportionately higher.

When comparing the populations of Moira with its near neighbour of Greater Shepparton, it is interesting to note that the “older” of the ageing population, that is people aged 80 years or more, are proportionately higher in Moira Shire. Information gleaned from the HACC client data shows that the “older” population of Greater Shepparton is 1.21% of the total population whilst the same cohort in Moira makes up 2.54% of its population – more than double Greater Shepparton.

It was not within the scope of this project to examine the funding arrangements for HACC across the region. It would however be worthwhile asking whether the level of funding for HACC services is reflective of the respective population differences. Consideration also needs to be afforded to Moira in the light of the dispersed nature of the population and the associated cost of service delivery.

Key Stakeholder Interview Analysis

Interviews were held with 27 key stakeholders across a broad range of organisations from within the Moira Shire including representatives and leaders from business, industry, health, community services, agriculture and local government. Moira Shire and the health sector organisations are advanced in their planning for the future; all are making transitions to cater for increasing numbers of older people in their communities within the scope of their existing financial and resource capabilities. Of the private sector businesses, there is an equal representation of those that are planning well for the future and those who remain reactive, rather than proactive in their approach to the ageing population.

The need for additional aged care beds, the provision of residential care for people with dementia, increasing services for people with chronic disease and access to those services are some of the major concerns for health related organisations. In addition, the need for more accessible transport options for people to lead an active and fulfilling life is a major concern for both private and public sector organisations in Moira.

There was a recognition that the transition from the current generation to the next will mean that some forms of community service may be lost and perhaps the next generation will volunteer differently. Organisations maintained by volunteers are slowly diminishing; groups such as Lions, Rotary, Red Cross and CWA will continue to decline unless they are prepared to make significant transitions to meet the interests of the upcoming generations to sustain them into the future.

“... the median hours of voluntary work have decreased across most age groups since 1995. The greatest decrease in median annual hours has been for those aged 35-44. Men’s median annual hours fell by almost half from 74 hours in 1995 to 38 hours in 2006. Over the same period of time in that age group, women’s median annual hours fell from 78 to 58 hours.”

*Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs*

Currently there are many services, supports and social activities available to older people in the community, with Senior Citizens being generally well supported with Probus clubs, sporting clubs and activities that promote health. Small communities however are experiencing a decline in these types of organized social activities, where it could be argued, they are most in need.

It is pleasing to hear the regard in which all the key stakeholders held people over 55 and valued them as resources in their organisations. Some employers noted their desire to employ older people because of their experience, stability, commitment and work ethic.

When looking at future shortages, some health sector employers were concerned about their ability to recruit nurses, allied health professionals and other qualified staff. Although this is already an issue, the need for higher levels of qualified staff into the future is seen as posing an even greater challenge. Many voiced the need to adopt creative approaches in the way professionals are trained, recruited and nurtured. An example of this type of creative approach is

demonstrated in the model utilised by the Moira Healthcare Alliance to train nurses within Moira Shire (rather than requiring them to leave the area to train) as a successful succession planning tool.

For some organisations, the remuneration offered to certain professional groups in cities or large centres was not able to be matched locally, limiting the opportunity to recruit qualified staff to the region. At times, the private sector also placed additional strain on the public sector workforce locally by offering higher wages.

The loss of knowledge was also raised as a concern for some. Older people who hold a significant amount of knowledge and history in relation to their role and the organisation will create a knowledge gap when they retire. The next generation of employees is much more likely to change jobs much more frequently and therefore the knowledge and history they develop is unlikely to remain.

Without exception, all key stakeholders saw transport as the major shortfall or gap in services for the 55 years and over age cohort. Many older people were not able to fully participate in social, health and family related activities because there was not the transport infrastructure to support them to do so. Older people living on farms or outside of towns were also seen to be overlooked in the system. There were concerns expressed about the increasing isolation of these older people with the diminishing size of many communities, smaller congregations and decreasing numbers of churches and a reduction in social activities.

When key stakeholders were asked if the community understood the likely impact and changes required to meet the needs of an ageing population, most felt there was little preparedness within the community to address the increase in aged population. Business generally was highlighted as not being in touch with the needs of older people and that the few that were, or who structured their businesses soon enough, would reap the rewards. Some sectors of Council were criticised for maintaining a silo approach to business and ignoring the impact of their decisions upon the wellbeing of the ageing population. People would like to see Council partnering and collaborating with other sectors of the community on a much larger scale to attract funding for projects and infrastructure to support the growing aged sector.

“The changing needs of older people and the changing locations of ageing will have a major effect, not only on investment but also on local economies and demand for services. As such, encouragement of employment opportunities and enterprise creation, which older people can contribute to and benefit from, will be important to local communities as the Australian population ages.”

Australian Local Government Association

It was unanimous that older people were highly valued and respected in the Shire although concerns were raised that this high regard did not translate into visionary planning or investment for the future growth in the number of older residents.

Discussion and Recommendations

Health

General

Survey respondents rated their current level of physical exercise at 3.6 (averaged) on a scale from 1 – 6, and rated this lower than their current physical health at 4.0 (averaged). When asked to look into the future at the things that most concerned them, respondents identified their physical health as of most concern (259 responses). People were therefore mooting the possibility of a significant decline in physical health within five years.

It would appear that there are two major influences in determining a person's ability to maintain their physical health. The first being their own ability to maintain an active lifestyle and the second being access to appropriate medical and allied health services.

People spoke at length about the lack of access to doctors and to specialists in general. Respondents spoke about the transport limitations placing barriers to them maintaining their health through access to regular check ups. They also saw few options to exercise regularly and safely due to the lack of safe paths for walking or lack of organised activities to maintain their physical health.

Individual Maintenance of Physical Health

The types of opportunities people requested for maintaining their own physical health were activities such as walking, swimming, exercise groups (age appropriate), yoga and use of a gymnasium, with transport available to access these activities.

A range of activities are already available to older people in Moira Shire. Survey respondents requested that some activities such as gentle exercise, strength training and swimming be made age specific, rather than being shared with other age groups.

The provision of these activities is often based in health-related organisations and therefore a perception of being unwell may be associated with them. It is important to have some of these activities associated with other mainstream business, community or sporting sectors therefore offering greater choice for people to maintain wellness. It also promotes increased social connection and can therefore create incidental health benefits.

Tobacco use is the highest contributor to ill health nationally – second to tobacco is physical inactivity. Estimates of \$600 million in savings to Australia's health care budget would be achieved if 10% more people participated in regular physical activity.

Walking is one of the best ways for older people to maintain their physical health. The importance of walking as a regular activity is well documented in the prevention of heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, falls, colon cancer, hypertension, osteoporosis, depression and lower

back pain. Walking also improves psychological well-being, metabolism, muscle strength, flexibility, endurance, respiratory function, concentration and memory. Other benefits include strengthening the immune system, increasing energy levels and management of weight.

Evidence shows that walking, as a means of improving physical and mental health, is very important. Other benefits realised through increased pedestrian traffic include improved community spirit and increased social contact. The level of passive surveillance from walkers improves neighbourhood safety and humanises the environment. Independence and confidence are also increased by regular walking activities.

“I would like to see community recreation facilities developed to allow people to walk. Some areas need walking and riding tracks in and around smaller towns.”

Numurkah resident

Council is currently implementing the Bicycle and Walking Strategy which contains recommendations for the upgrading of high use pedestrian areas within the Shire. These upgrades also include additional footpaths and walking tracks, linkages between walking/cycling paths and new infrastructure to support the use of these facilities.

A deterrent to walking for residents is their perception of their personal safety. Although many people identified feeling relatively safe, the research revealed a number of respondents from Nathalia commented on their fear of roaming dogs and the possibility of dog attack. This fear also translated into an unwillingness to walk through their neighbourhood.

“I would like to walk more but can’t due to lack of footpaths and the poor state of walking paths. Also the number of dogs not contained in yards or on leashes.”

Nathalia Resident

Respondents asked that council give consideration to higher levels of enforcement of animal control laws and also to the banning of savage breeds of dogs. There is evidence in other research that identifies older people and children as the main victims of dog attack. It should be noted that Council recently introduced DNA testing for dangerous dog attacks.

The need for equitable and harmonious access to public spaces can be marred by the presence of uncontrolled dogs. Not only can they pose a risk of injury through tripping or attack, but they also pollute the environment when they defecate in public spaces – another deterrent of pedestrians.

“Cities that have spent the late 20th and early 21st centuries actively moving away from car dependence towards connected, walkable environments will find themselves much better placed to flourish and thrive in the low carbon future.”

City of Port Phillip – Walk Plan 2006

Access to Medical and Allied Health Professionals

Of equal importance in accessing medical and allied health professionals are the availability of those professionals, and the means of getting to them. We will deal with availability of medical and allied health professionals here and speak to the transport issues under the heading of “Transport” later in this report.

Because of the disparate nature of the towns and their health services, there is not one major central point from which specialists or allied health professionals can work. In addition people often need to travel to Albury, Melbourne, Shepparton or Wangaratta for their medical care needs to be met.

Overall there is an increase in the primary health care needs of the population of Australia. At the same time, general practice is becoming less popular to medical students, and the type of lifestyle sought by many younger doctors is not on offer in rural areas. At the same time the prevalence of chronic disease is rising and the need for medical services is placing ever increasing demands on the health system.

“There is a lack of general practitioners in rural areas and an overall shortage of general practitioners with obstetrics. Recruitment and retention of GPs remains a major issue for our Division.”

Goulburn Valley Division of General Practice

Australian standards recommended a GP to patient ratio of 1:1400 and although the GP to patient ratio for the Goulburn Valley Division of General Practice is 1:1589 (189 people per GP over the recommended). A large range of allied health professions are subject to the same or similar challenges as are being experienced in relation to attracting GPs. It is therefore sometimes as difficult to attract an Occupational Therapist, Dietitian, Physiotherapist or Chiropractor as it is to attract a GP to rural areas.

As people age, their means of accessing health services can become limited either physically (loss of licence, no transport to services or because of disability) or financially (unable to afford to travel to, or pay for a health service). As people age, their need for health services generally increases, especially in the final years of their lives.

Access to adequate medical care in rural and remote locations is an ongoing and increasing problem for those populations. However there are ways of overcoming the difficulties by applying creative and proactive approaches. The Moira Healthcare Alliance has already boosted its nursing capacity through a model of nurse practitioner training that allows hospital and healthcare staff to upgrade their qualifications without having to travel away from the Shire for study.

Health professionals need to be attracted to working in rural practice and to have a level of job satisfaction that will help maintain their interest in remaining longer term. Universities are now establishing rural health streams or clubs to capture the interests of young GPs and allied health

professionals prior to the completion of their studies. GPs rarely move from a city based practice to the country, so capturing new graduates with an interest in country practice is seen as an effective way to recruit health professionals.

Whilst looking at the ways in which communities can grow their numbers of health professionals, communities may also consider how they can reduce the need for people for such services. Increased health promotion, the continued fostering of community cohesion and innovative approaches to planning are just a few of the means by which communities can be supported to participate in reducing their reliance on health practitioners.

Nurse on Call is a Victorian service where people can seek medical advice 24 hours a day 7 days a week for the cost of a local call. Rural callers currently make up only approximately 25% of users of Nurse on Call. Analysis of the Nurse on Call program shows that 32.3% of calls result in self-care regimes rather than visits to GP's or Emergency Departments. This is one means of reducing the demand on local health services.

Promoting individuals to maintain and improve their own health can be assisted by creating opportunities to participate in structured activities, sports and hobbies. It is the role of communities, council and health organisations to develop and maintain environments for these opportunities to be realised. As mentioned earlier, Moira Shire recently commenced the implementation of its walking and cycling strategy and continues to fund the maintenance and extension of walking tracks within the Shire each year. By building upon and continuing these measures, more opportunities will be realized for individuals to take higher levels of responsibility for their health into the future.

Recommendations - Health

Individual Maintenance of Physical Health

People tend to want to “have a go” at something before they commit to it. As a leader in the community, Council can support and promote various “come and try days” at local sporting clubs, social clubs or recreational groups aimed specifically at people aged over 50 years. It is recommended that Council incorporate the come and try days into Seniors Week.

Walking needs to be promoted to all sectors of the community, not just the 55+ sector, with a view to creating a cultural change in the attitude of people to walking. A multifaceted approach to increase the amount of walking, both for recreation and transportation is recommended in the Moira Shire.

Adopt an “action plan for walking” as part of the Walking and Cycling Strategy:

- ◆ All Council departments to identify their individual and combined roles in creating an action plan to increase walking and the walk-ability of the Shire.
- ◆ Future neighbourhood design to consider walking distances to shops, schools and transport.

- ◆ Identify community health promoting activities that target walking (or cycling) for transport and recreation.
- ◆ Footpath trading guidelines are promoted and enforced to allow for free and easy pedestrian access.
- ◆ Support the expansion of health initiatives that promote walking, such as community developed walking clubs and activities associated with responsible dog ownership.

In relation to the issue of roaming dogs deterring people from walking, it is recommended that Council expands its pet education program by promoting higher levels of responsible pet ownership throughout the Shire. This program should include clarification of the on leash, off leash requirements within the Shire and an additional registration amnesty in 2010 that allows pet owners to register their pets without penalty, whilst promoting the benefits of pet registration and responsible pet ownership. At the same time, updating of the Council web site to include:

- ◆ Pet ownership responsibilities
- ◆ Benefits of Animal Registration
- ◆ Dog obedience training
- ◆ Links to DPI responsible pet ownership site
- ◆ Information on “On and Off Leash” areas in the Shire
- ◆ Information on animals in the pound
- ◆ Links to pet selection sites

Access to Medical Support

Diverting people from using local health services as the “first port of call” and contacting the Nurse on Call will assist in alleviating some of the visits and promote empowerment of people in relation to their health care needs. It is recommended that Nurse on Call is promoted throughout the Shire for people of all ages to utilise.

It is recommended that the feasibility of setting up a central coordination and contact point for access to specialist and allied health services is considered by the Moira Healthcare Alliance. This should include the co-ordination of visiting specialists, allied health professionals and the setting of appointments and arranging of transport for those who require it. In order to create this service, sufficient demand needs to be demonstrated. This project may require the collaboration of the Department of Human Services, medical services and the Regional Managers Forum.

Public and Other Transport

Pathways

Including pathways under public and other transport is not a mistake. Walking is one of the most cost efficient means of transport and can be used by nearly all age groups within a community. It is non-polluting and very effective in the maintenance of physical health.

Rising costs associated with transport and the increased incidence of cardiovascular disease, and obesity, are key issues for our communities. Walking should therefore be considered seriously as a legitimate and effective means of transport.

Moira Shire has approximately 88km of pathways, the 2008/09 budget allocation for new paths is \$40,000 and an additional \$123,000 is allocated for footpath maintenance. Council requires new developments to include pathways so that no cost is borne by ratepayers for new infrastructure. Additional funds will be raised through special charge schemes for new pathways in existing residential developments without pathways. The nature and size of the main towns in the Shire requires many more kilometres of pathways to promote the confident use of walking especially for older people. Providing clear, unobstructed pathways free from overhanging branches, encroaching vegetation and improperly parked vehicles is a key factor in motivating people of all ages to move into the outdoors.

Approximately 19.5% of the Australian population is made up of people with disabilities, the majority of who can participate in pedestrian activities. It is particularly important for this sector of the community to have access to clear pathways that have disability transitions between the path and roadways. Main street paths should ideally have multiple crossing points, shade and weather protection as well as lighting and seating.

Lighting plays a significant role in the use of pathways. Lack of illumination of paths and the inability for people to be passively observed whilst walking are two elements that can create insecurity.

Respondents reported Bindiis being a problem for walkers and people using cycles or pavement vehicles. Understandably this weed is an issue because of its thorns that penetrate shoes and tyres. During the prolonged dry conditions the amount of Bindiis has increased and therefore created a significant impact on pavement users. The Council Cycling and Walking Plan (2005) states:

“Bindiis (Soliva pterosperma) are a common problem all through Moira Shire, and can be a serious deterrent to potential walkers and cyclists. Council needs to establish a strategy to actively and regularly control this weed each winter to early spring.”

Active management and removal of Bindiis should continue with support from the community in identifying problem areas. It should be noted that weed spraying currently consumes in excess of \$130,000 per annum of Council’s budget.

Pavement Vehicles

Increasing numbers of older people are using motorised scooters or gophers as a means of local transport. Their use is legal on footpaths and low speed public roads in Victoria. (It should be noted that they are not recognised legally as a motor vehicle if they are unable to exceed 10kph). Many people expressed concern at the lack of suitable paths for people with gophers to safely

negotiate their journeys, together with the perceived danger of gophers being used on local roads.

“there needs to be a footpath on at least one side of each street for the safety of pedestrians and aged people in electric carts.”

Yarrowonga Resident

Council has provided opportunities for training in the use, selection and safe driving of scooters or gophers for their users in each of the four main towns in the Shire. Also available from Council is a booklet “Stay Safe” which is a comprehensive guide to the safe use of pavement vehicles. For a section of the population aged over 55 years, gophers are the only means of transport for shopping, social and health related activities.

Users of pavement vehicles sometimes need to recharge their gopher or motorised wheelchair if they intend to participate in a long trip. The lack of available places to recharge can mean that people need to employ other means of transport for those trips. Having recharging points within the town shopping precinct can provide opportunities for more independence for users of pavement vehicles, but also act as a catalyst for higher level integration with the community through the incidental connections made with traders providing the infrastructure for recharging.

Community Transport

Community transport is organised from four locations within the Shire, Moira Healthcare Alliance manages two cars in both Cobram and Numurkah and Nathalia has one car owned by the hospital and managed by the Community Association, whilst Yarrowonga Hospital owns and manages another.

The uncoordinated manner in which the cars are currently used within the Shire leads to many duplications, crossovers and unnecessary journeys by each car. For instance, the Yarrowonga car might be travelling to Melbourne 3 times in a week with only one or two passengers, whilst at the same time a community car from Cobram might also be going to Melbourne on the same day/s with only one or two passengers. Whilst people valued the use of the community cars; 47 respondents expressed concern about the lack of availability. Nathalia featured most prominently (12) in requests for additional community car services followed by Cobram (10) and Numurkah (7).

In order to provide a more efficient and comprehensive service to people requiring community transport, the integration of services should be considered. Coordination that involves networking with the Goulburn Community Transport Service may also provide increased efficiencies especially for transporting people to the larger hospitals in Melbourne.

In addition to community cars, other community transport options would benefit smaller and outlying towns within the Shire. Because of its isolation and lack of public transport, Nathalia would be an ideal location to test a pilot community transport program for older people needing to shop at larger centres. Ideally the project would be established in partnership with the Goulburn

Valley Transport Connections Program. Community support for the project would be paramount with guaranteed numbers on shopping trips to make the service viable.

Public transport

The presence of public transport throughout the shire is fairly low, and the cost of private transport is relatively high. Three hundred and seventy eight (378) suggestions were made in the surveys in relation to transport. Transport has also featured in a number of other aspects of this study; and clearly because of this volume of comment, is a primary issue for older people.

The people most in need of public transport are often the ones who have the least power in our society. Children, older people and people with disabilities often rely on public transport to fulfil their personal, social and recreational needs. For this reason, the focus of any changes to public transport should ensure that these groups are well catered for.

“Public transport needs to have better disability access”

Cobram resident

The V-line buses that service the shire do not provide consistent disability access. This is a major impediment for older people wishing to travel to other centres. If residents wish to travel to Melbourne from any of the four main towns in the Shire, their journey will begin sometime between 5:30am and 7:30am. Spending more than two or three hours in Melbourne means that the earliest possible return time is 10:00pm. Many older people would find travelling for that many hours a very daunting experience. There are also limited opportunities to travel between the towns within the Shire on V-line buses.

Goulburn Valley Transport Connections has been established to assist in identifying transport issues in communities and working with those communities to find solutions. The program is under the auspice of the City of Greater Shepparton, and also covers Moira and Strathbogie Shires. The community may benefit from forming local transport interest groups to inform the transport connections project about their specific issues and ideas for improvement. Nathalia currently has no local public transport options and may benefit greatly from working with the Transport Connections project.

“In Nathalia local transport is totally non existent. No planes, buses, trams, trains, taxis, rickshaws.... Nothing!”

Nathalia resident

Local public transport needs to be supported through patronage in order to be maintained over time. In particular, Australians of driving age are difficult to attract to public transport. Changes in travel behavior on a larger scale needs to be achieved to grow local transport services. Cobram has a relatively under-developed transport infrastructure and requires new or upgraded bus stops including shelters, timetable displays, tactile strips and signage.

“Public transport is poorly publicised and timetables difficult to find”

Cobram resident

Many bus services have their timetable information on the internet and some in printed timetables for the public. Unfortunately many older people do not use or have access to the internet to secure this information. To promote the use of bus services more widely, some form of printed resource could be developed and distributed in the main towns and could also have the local bus timetable printed on it.

Recommendations - Public and Other Transport

Pathways

In addition to pathways identified in the Walking and Bicycle Strategy, Council incorporates a pathways program that identifies further high demand priority routes for pedestrians in each main town centre. These pathways should be recognised as legitimate transport corridors and budgeted accordingly into the future.

New paths to be made at a minimum width of 1500mm where possible to allow for both pedestrian and pavement vehicles to safely traverse. Council planning policy to ensure that at least one path is included in each residential street.

Council currently has a “Roving Eye” footpath maintenance program where footpaths throughout the shire are examined for cracks, faults and other safety hazards. To further promote the safety of pedestrian traffic, there needs to be a mechanism for the minimisation of hazards such as overhanging trees or plants that encroach on footpaths. Cars parked across footpaths are also hazardous to the pedestrian environment and should also be a focus. It is recommended that council engage in a community awareness program to highlight the responsibility of owners to maintain clear pathways. That this program is initiated in conjunction with the announcement of a pathways program.

The importance of lighting in promoting walking needs to be considered in all new developments and upgrades to existing lighting within the Shire to ensure that lighting illuminates pathways as well as roadways. Residents are invited to contact Council with suggestions for where additional lighting is required within the Shire.

It is recommended that Council continues to explore avenues to manage and maintain a bindii eradication program that invites community members to report problem areas on or beside pathways and that the aim of the program being to ensure the risk of damage or injury from thorns is minimised.

Pavement Vehicles

The increasing number of pavement vehicles in Moira has raised concerns about safety for drivers of those vehicles and other pedestrians. It is recommended that Council continue to

provide education on the use and selection of pavement vehicles for residents of Moira Shire in order to keep pace with their growing use.

To enable people with pavement vehicles to have greater autonomy in the town centres, it is recommended that a pavement vehicle recharging program is instigated. The program could be a partnership between Council and local businesses to identify shops and services that would be willing to provide access to a power point for people to recharge their pavement vehicle. The cost of recharging equates to approximately 20c per hour. Similar projects in other municipalities have been successfully instigated with shops displaying a sticker in their windows to indicate that people are welcome to recharge their pavement vehicle there.

Community Transport

In every community throughout Australia there are people for whom it is not possible to access private or public transport to meet their health, education or social needs. This is either because public or private transport is not suitable or not available for them. In order to minimise this disadvantage within Moira Shire, it is recommended that the current community car transport for HACC eligible people is reviewed with view of developing central coordination of the four services.

The aim of the central co-ordination is to reduce the duplication of trips, increase the number of people receiving the service, value add to other Community Transport Schemes and to boost the cost efficiency of the cars as a resource.

One centralised vehicle booking system that has links to Goulburn Valley Community Transport will allow both services to provide a higher level of integration and efficiency. Each town in Moira will retain the existing cars, but the use of the cars will differ. For example, someone travelling from Nathalia to Albury for a specialist medical appointment may pick up another person from Yarrawonga to go to Albury. This then frees the Yarrawonga car to go to Peter McCallum in Melbourne and the Yarrawonga car may pick up an additional person from Numurkah or Shepparton who is also going to Peter McCallum on the same day.

In its newly established lead role as a partner in the Goulburn Valley Transport Connections, it is recommended that Moira Shire engage with the community of Nathalia to develop and trial a community bus shopping service for older residents of Nathalia and surrounds.

Public Transport

It is recommended that Council raise awareness of the Goulburn Valley Transport Connections program through clubs and activities for seniors and invites interested persons to form transport representative groups. These groups would represent their local communities and assist in shaping new strategies for improving transport and access to transport for the Shire.

Older people, who use the Cobram bus service to do their shopping, require an additional bus stop to be made available at Safeway. It is recommended that Council consider a designated

bus park outside Safeway and that this park be signed to allow car parking other than on Tuesdays and Fridays when the bus is running.

Business and Community Infrastructure

Business

This research highlighted that businesses, except perhaps for clubs and hotels, were generally not looking at the opportunities available for enhancing their business activities through engagement and targeting the 55+ age groups.

Demographic profiles of the Shire point to the existing higher levels of people in the older cohort continuing to grow, and therefore tremendous opportunities exist to enhance or establish businesses or services to meet the market demands of older consumers. Older people are frequently leaving the Shire to shop in larger centres such as Albury/Wodonga, Shepparton, Wangaratta or Melbourne.

Heated Pool

At the time of writing this report, Council expenditure on pools was at \$586,000 per year to maintain 7 pools in the Shire. The 2008/09 budget will increase spending to a total of \$679,000.

Residents indicated their desire for a heated pools and/or hydrotherapy pools a total of 47 times within the survey. In a breakdown of the data, Yarrawonga residents made the most requests for a heated/hydrotherapy pool. Currently there is one group of older people travelling by bus to Wangaratta each week to access the indoor heated pool.

Council has indicated a willingness to provide appropriate support to private entities for the establishment of a heated pool facility in Yarrawonga. Plans for an indoor heated pool have already been approved in the new Silverwood development.

There has been a long-standing desire, and some attempts to establish an indoor heated pool facility in Yarrawonga. The cost of maintaining and staffing pool facilities is significant. The level of patronage needed to support such a facility requires a large population base. No doubt, Yarrawonga is the fastest growing town in Moira and therefore will have the potential to support this type of facility, either public or private, into the future.

Community Buildings

Survey respondents place a high value on community buildings as spaces for community connection and activity. There was a call for increased maintenance to be undertaken and for buildings to be upgraded to meet current regulations and standards of amenity.

The need for all community spaces to be made accessible is a theme throughout the surveys and is seen as particularly important for public buildings.

The Council Grants program assists in funding many of the upgrades required for community buildings. The capacity for small communities maintaining their local halls through the committee structure is diminishing. Up and coming generations have far less connection to the facilities and little experience of the past social connections provided by activities at the local hall. Consideration therefore needs to be given to these community assets and their management into the future.

Natural Gas

Nathalia residents and residents from some of the smaller surrounding communities expressed the desire to have natural gas in their communities. This would require an extension from the existing gas pipeline into those areas. Some time ago, Nathalia had been promised a natural gas pipeline, however this did not eventuate.

There are two significant issues contributing to this desire for natural gas. Firstly older people who live on low incomes or pensions have difficulty affording expensive electric heating for their homes. Secondly, because electric heating is expensive, many older people maintain their open or combustion fires as their primary means of heating and for some their hot water heating mechanism. As a result, they become exposed to higher levels of risk to their health through having to chop and fetch wood for the fire constantly throughout winter. Having natural gas as a cheap and easy form of winter heating is therefore an alluring concept for many older people.

Unfortunately gas is not likely to be piped to Nathalia into the future. Since the privatisation of gas, the only extensions to gas lines are into areas that are highly profitable to the gas suppliers. In rural Victoria, extension of gas infrastructure is only likely to occur where a town can attract one or two large industries that require significant volumes of gas for production.

Overcoming the issues of high cost electricity and safety may be tackled through community education that highlights the alternatives, or choices available to the community. In particular, Moira has opportunities to benefit from the amount of sunlight that is available to power solar equipment.

Recommendations – Business and Community Infrastructure

Business

It is recommended that Council share the information in this report with business representative bodies for their consideration. It is up to individual businesses to use the information, or not, for their planning and development.

Heated Pool

There are many options to consider in the establishment of pool facilities. Partnerships may be formed with business, schools or clubs to provide a pool in Yarrawonga. There is also the possibility of a private provider establishing a heated pool facility in Yarrawonga. It is

recommended that Council explore options with prospective partners regarding the feasibility of establishing an indoor heated pool facility for Yarrawonga.

Community Buildings

It is likely that within the next 10 years the viability of local halls may diminish. It is recommended that Council ensures management structures are supported in a way that will allow communities to maintain those assets so that they remain viable into the future.

Council to complete works identified in its 2007 audit of community buildings in the shire. Council is to prioritise those buildings that require alterations to meet disability access standards.

Natural Gas

As natural gas is not an option for Nathalia, alternative means of providing low cost heating and hot water systems for homes need to be examined. The initial affordability of changing from one system to another can be prohibitive.

It is suggested that Council support the community to form an interest group to investigate the most cost efficient systems available, including heat pumps, solar hot water and solar electricity. Research should include the cost of purchase and installation along with the available State and Federal Government rebates.

The level of interest from residents will determine if people choose to participate in a group purchase scheme, arrange a microcredit facility for people with low incomes to fund energy efficient heating systems or simply provide advice and information on the most cost effective and efficient heating and hot water services available and where to source them.

Housing and Accommodation

Large and Small Homes

Survey results indicated that 86.7% of respondents intended to stay in their current home into the future. There were also a significant number (41.5%) of people who indicated that they lived in large homes. Although significant numbers of respondents stated their wish to remain in their current home, it is inevitable that a portion of these people will eventually move to smaller accommodation, supported living or nursing facilities as they age.

A significant number of respondents (274) identified feeling most secure about housing, suggesting a high level of home ownership.

It would be reasonable to speculate that both the large and small homes are on traditional sized allotments with the associated maintenance requirements.

For those who intended to move within the next 5 years, the majority intend to move within their current town, 16 intend to leave the Shire and 4 intend to move to other towns within the Shire.

From a planning perspective, this would suggest that other than in-flows, there will be very little change in the distribution of the 55 year plus cohort across towns and within the shire.

By remaining in large family homes as people age, they are often faced with increasing maintenance expenses. Unfortunately older people can become trapped in their home ownership because there are no other affordable options for them. This can become a cycle of the deterioration of financial and psychological health.

For people to remain in their homes for longer periods of time, home modifications can increase their safety and confidence to do so. Modifications that make it easier or safer for residents to go about their everyday activities, such as cooking, bathing and entering or exiting their homes, will support their chosen lifestyle. Modifications are available to people who are eligible for HACC services. Ramps, rails and other minor modifications are available, however plumbing and major alterations are not. For many, the cost of modifications would be a significant investment.

“I am quite happy where I am, I now get home help from Moira Health Care fortnightly which is a great help. Thank you”

Cobram Resident

The decision of people to remain in their existing large or small homes has significant implications for the demand on existing services such as home care, home help, transport to appointments and shopping, meals on wheels, gardening and handyman services. Other services common for this age group (District Nursing, Occupational Therapists, and Aged Care Assessment Services) will see an additional demand as residents negotiate the challenges of remaining in homes which lack the design features to accommodate their changing needs. It should be noted that respondents identified cost as a key consideration within the context of requests for support of this type.

Incorporating standards of access into new buildings is one way of alleviating some of the financial burden of modifications into the future. Additional structural framing in wet areas and near steps (to attach rails to if necessary), single level dwellings, walk-in showers (no lip) and wide doorways are just a few of the options for minimising the need for expensive modifications into the future.

Units in Clusters

When asked about the type of housing or residential development people would need in the future, the majority 102 respondents identified a preference for units in clusters. Many spoke of the social networks this afforded, the security of having others nearby, the ability to have shared resources such as BBQ's, gardens and for some, the inclusion of a pool was seen as desirable.

“The town is in need of units 2 – 3 units suitable for singles or couples”

Katamatite Resident

There was also the recognition that gardening and maintenance costs could be shared and therefore reduced. The units were seen as being centrally located within easy walking distance of shops and other services and facilities, connected by safe, wide paths.

“... units with shared facilities such as recreation room, heated pool. This would allow people who are feeling less secure or lonely in their own houses to enjoy such a setting whilst they maintain good health.”

Yarrowonga Resident

This vision is consistent with a new urbanism approach to planning and development that concentrates housing in close proximity to community hubs where people can access shops and services easily.

Retirement Villages

Relatively few people (36) indicated their desire to move into retirement villages within the next five years. It could be reasonably expected that more people will choose retirement villages in the future. With the influx of older people, many of whom retire to Moira Shire, the developments of attractive retirement village living will increase the retirement village population. It is extremely important that these developments are designed so as to support the residents for as long as possible in the most appropriate ways.

Forward planning, including the identification of preferred locations, infrastructure requirements and recommended design will add to the liveability of retirement villages.

Recommendations – Housing and Accommodation

Large and Small Homes

There is a role for council in both encouraging developers to provide seniors housing across all market sectors and ensuring that those housing options meet standards that ensure safe and age-friendly accommodation for older people.

It is recommended that Council establish a standard that outlines the additional ageing in place design features that may be incorporated into all housing developments. Developers who adopt these features in their design should be provided with a certificate from Council outlining the type of ageing in place design options incorporated as a selling feature of the home.

For many older people, their home provides important social ties, informal support systems in their neighbourhood and the security of a familiar environment. For these reasons, the modification of a home is sometimes a better option than moving. However, other services, such as delivered meals, home care, personal care, Community Aged Care Packages (CAPS) and respite care will most likely have to change to meet the level of demand into the future.

It is recommended that Moira Healthcare Alliance identifies their projected service requirements for the next 10 years with a view to planning for increased service demands.

Units in Clusters

Housing affordability is often an issue for people as they age. With the interest expressed for small clusters of units, it is recommended that Council assists with the formation of interest groups (i.e. people who may wish to join with others to create a unit cluster) and bring together key-stakeholders. Joining forces with other interested parties may allow individuals to create their own joint development that remains within their financial means.

Council can provide information on planning and building processes, good design principles and strategies for working with developers. The groups will be brought together purely to identify interest and to establish their own partnerships to further this concept. Council's role is purely instrumental in bringing the parties together and supporting the establishment of the groups. The ownership and governance of the groups will remain with the membership.

Retirement Villages

Design of retirement villages is important to encourage opportunities for active living, socialisation, safe independent living and connections with the community. Good initial design will assist in the minimisation of future requirements for maintenance and modifications as people age. The application of good design principles will enable older people with some mobility restrictions to continue to live independently.

It is recommended that Council include specific design features relating to Retirement Villages in their standards for good ageing in place design (as mentioned above).

It is recommended that Council identify the preferred locations for retirement village developments in the Shire. There should be an emphasis on location to support walk-ability and access to essential infrastructure.

Communication and Education

Communication and Consultation

Moira Shire has initiated and supports many opportunities both in the past and into the future for the community to communicate and consult with council. Dialogue with the community happens through public meetings, forums and community meetings. Regular information is sent out in the form of the Moira Messenger (quarterly newsletter) and other information is printed regularly in the local newspapers. Moira also has a comprehensive web site. In recent years, councillors went into to communities for scheduled visits to meet with and discuss matters of interest with individuals and groups. This program was withdrawn due to lack of interest.

“We would like communication by council to all rate payers and especially our senior citizens about what is being done on their behalf”

Cobram resident

Despite the apparent plethora of communication and consultation opportunities, respondents were still asking for more. People from smaller towns wished to be included regularly in newsletters and public meeting schedules, and expressed a need for greater community inclusion in the process of decision making.

Education/Leadership

Council provides a leadership program which is available to any resident of the Shire who wishes to grow their leadership skills. The program has a limited number of places so people must apply and be accepted into the program.

At present the program is administered and run from Cobram with participants attending 10 sessions over a six month timeframe. Consideration could be given to offering the program in other locations within the Shire should there be sufficient demand to do so.

U3A

Provincial areas experience a competitive disadvantage in terms of access to educational facilities. There are fewer opportunities in provincial areas for older people to access CEC's, TAFE's or Universities.

Requests for University of the Third Age to be established came from residents across the Shire. A University of the Third Age is a learning cooperative for older people that encourage healthy ageing by enabling members to share educational, creative and leisure activities. U3A is considered a low cost, self-help educational organisation. They can be run within a community organisation (e.g. neighbourhood house) or by the membership of the group. There are seventy four (74) U3A's in Victoria with a peak body (U3A Network-Victoria) that provides resources and support to groups. U3A is free and requires no entry prerequisites or exams.

In line with the current Moira Shire Social Plan, U3A groups are currently being established throughout the Shire.

Recommendations – Communication and Education

Communication and consultation

The level of communication and consultation with the people of Moira Shire is significant. Council staff attend over 300 night meetings each year with community members. There have been 24 community action plans established in partnership with individual communities, and many other opportunities for people in Moira to be involved in decision-making with their local government.

To support direct forms of communication with Council for individuals or groups, it is recommended that Council staff pro-actively promote the opportunities for individuals and groups to engage with councillors and council staff through formal mechanisms. Education and empowerment of the community to request “the ear” of Council on matters of interest to them should be provided through information in the newsletter and as a flier in rates notices.

The successful engagement of Council in a community matter that is achieved through such a process could then be highlighted in the promotion of such a program. This would further endorse the means by which the community can access and influence Council through these communication mechanisms.

Education/Leadership

Council’s leadership program is held in high esteem by the community and evidence of the success of the program is clearly demonstrated through participants’ involvement in the development of a wide range of community projects. It is recommended that Council expand the Leadership program by providing two programs per calendar year and that programs are delivered in the four main towns in Moira, two in one year and the other two the next year. In addition, that transport subsidies be promoted for participants who live outside the host town.

U3A

It is recommended that Council continues it’s planning to establish U3A’s in the Shire.

It should be noted that there is an Australian On-line U3A. If there are not enough community resources available to support the establishment of a group (i.e. tutors and subject matter) then groups could use the on-line facility to choose and participate in courses.

Parks, Gardens and Reserves

Parks, Gardens and Reserves

Parks and gardens were viewed positively by survey respondents. Parks were valued as places to exercise, enjoy nature and spend time with children. Respondents were seeking an increased level of maintenance (54), especially grass (14) and weeds; more gardens (35) and in particular, more flowers and more trees (28), with a strong reference to indigenous species. The most recent Council budget has increased the garden maintenance budget by \$65,000 from the previous year.

“Continued indigenous plantings and upgrade of Boosey/Broken catchment”

Tungamah resident

With the impact of prolonged drought, reduced water reserves and the need to develop more sustainable practices in relation to all resources, public parks are likely to become more important reference points for communities. This will require the development of sustainable

water reserves, the creation of clearly articulated management strategies and the development of a shared approach to management with the community.

“Maintain the rose garden in St James and the Grove in Yarrawonga”

St James resident

In addition, people sought a higher level of general amenity in parks with increased seating (34), increased and better maintained toilets (32), more and disability friendly walking tracks (22), more children’s play equipment (11), and more BBQ’s (8).

Street Scaping

The entrances to towns and overall street scaping were seen as needing an increased level of care and attention. Respondents felt that these often reflected poorly upon the community and encouraged a more proactive approach by Council in design and maintenance.

To assist towns create their own unique and welcoming atmosphere Council has established working groups with community coordinators to design and develop their street scapes.

Recommendations – Parks, Gardens and Reserves

Parks, Gardens and Reserves

Interest in local parks and reserves is high among the 55+ population. It is recommended that Council supports the continued growth of “friends of” groups to work closely with Council, Catchment Management Authorities or National Parks. “Friends of” groups can play a role in tree planting, seed collection and plant propagation, monitoring of birds and wildlife, organising park activities and obtaining community grants to enhance the parks or reserves.

Street Scaping

Council continues to work with communities to develop a unique vision for streetscapes in each town. It is recommended that Council acknowledge the support and participation of community members in the streetscape development process.

Sustainability

Decline of Small Towns and Farming Communities

Farming and other rural business is currently experiencing the impact of prolonged drought conditions. This is placing a lot of pressure on the sector and continued drought could mean the demise of some farms and associated agri-business into the future.

Council has been instrumental in providing support to affected communities through the Drought Social Recovery Committees, business development and community capacity building for over

six years. It would appear however, that the changing weather patterns indicate that drought conditions are most likely to feature into the future.

Farms and other rural enterprises are coming under pressure to become larger in order to make the cost-saving benefits required to be more viable and attractive to their markets. This shift is likely to create greater hardship for small towns with likely reductions in those populations. If we look back at the history of farming we can see that many towns have experienced these declines previously.

Many respondents acknowledged this decline, and expressed a sense of helplessness in not knowing what to do to maintain their communities and the history of their towns into the future.

From the time of the soldier settlements, we have seen the gradual increase in farm sizes as a necessary change to make farming enterprises viable. At the same time there has been a decline in the size of many rural towns as the farming population diminished. Services also became centralised in larger communities as the inefficiencies of maintaining them in rural towns became apparent and economically burdensome. During the 1980's many towns saw the loss of banks, schools and other services that had previously fed and sustained the local economy.

In many ways, history is repeating itself. The move to larger landholdings will again see the decline in population and the inevitable decline in amenity of a number of the local townships.

Recommendations – Sustainability

Decline of Small Towns and Farming Communities

Unfortunately it is inevitable that over time some of the small towns in Moira are likely to disappear. Those towns that do survive will achieve this through local innovation and the united community spirit that will bring enterprise and economic viability. This need for innovation may also be the catalyst for towns to combine their efforts to ensure that they not only survive, but to grow and thrive into the future.

Council has the capacity to assist towns to grow their ideas for sustainability through community building programs. It is important that each town or group of towns take the initiative to develop their own ideas to maintain their sustainability. What is often important in creating innovative ideas to improve liveability and economic viability is to take into consideration the features and opportunities that are on offer in the local area and value add or capitalise on these.

For example, can your town attract a state-wide competition related to water sport – canoeing, rowing, fishing etc? Or because the terrain is largely even, it may provide an environment for cycling, marathons, fun runs etc. What arts based or cultural activities could be linked to a particular town, groups of towns or event? Is your community ideally placed to establish a community run cooperative solar power generation plant that will sustain the town and attract new business and tourism?

It is recommended that Council encourage and support communities to explore opportunities to increase sustainability and grow their economic base through innovative and unique projects.

Other

Public Art

Although public art was mentioned in the research, it is a topic that applies to the whole of a community, not just older people. Public art can play an important role in communities. Public art is a contemporary term, yet it has a long history in every culture and civilization throughout the world as demonstrated in the sculptures on buildings and artwork in community spaces. As a young country, Australia has yet to fully realise the potential and benefit of public art in its communities.

Public art is usually visual art such as sculptures, murals, mosaics, water features, banners, paintings, pavement and wall treatments. Public art can also be incorporated into functional objects in communities such as tables, chairs, bike racks, power poles, notice boards, bins or lighting.

Public art has many benefits to offer the Shire. It can strengthen the identity of communities, rejuvenate otherwise ordinary public spaces, provide opportunities for recognition of local artists and promote tourism. Another benefit can be that public art does not usually require watering!

Public art can be a source of excitement, amusement and at times a challenge to the observer. Overall, public art will play an important role in the cultural development of the Shire.

Recommendations – Other

Public Art

It is recommended that Council develop a shire-wide public art policy to support the growth and development of public art throughout the Shire.

It is recommended that Council forms an alliance with existing artists or members of art associations within the Shire to form a curatorial panel to drive a public art program for the Shire.

Recommendations Matrix

* Note – These recommendations build on existing Council and other stakeholder initiatives and need to be addressed by all involved in aged care service delivery.

Recommendation	Built	Social	Economic	Natural
Promotion of “Come and Try” days for all types of sport and activities.	Maximises the use and valuing of existing resources	Increased social networks.	Growth of local clubs and organisations.	
Following on from the existing strategy, develop a whole of Council action plan for walkability	Walkability included in town planning, path construction, walking tracks etc.	Enhanced social experiences through community connection. Establishment of walking groups.	Reduced transportation costs. Reduced pollution. Healthier population.	Increased use and valuing of natural public space for exercise and recreation.
Continue neighbourhood design to consider walking distances to shops, mail boxes, schools and transport	Design principles to support development of walkable communities.	Increased social interactions through incidental meetings.	Less vehicle infrastructure required.	Increased opportunities to enjoy natural environment
Continue promotion of walking/cycling activities as preferred modes of transport.	Reduced degradation of roads, reduced parking requirements	Opportunities for group or individual activities	Promotion of the most cost efficient means of transport.	Environmentally sustainable transport.
Footpath trading guidelines to be promoted and enforced to allow for free and easy pedestrian access.	Accessible shopping precincts.		Positive benefits to traders who comply	
Continued support for walking initiatives such as community developed walking clubs and activities associated with responsible dog ownership.		Improved health and physical wellbeing.	Low cost or cost neutral activities. Fewer injuries related to uncontrolled dogs.	Reduction in pollution from dog faeces.
Continue pet education program to promote responsible pet ownership.		Safe environment for walking and other outdoor activities.		Less environmental pollution from dog feces.

Recommendation	Built	Social	Economic	Natural
Possible pet registration amnesty in 2010 allowing pet owners to register their pets without penalty.		Improved pet management with positive benefits for neighbours and community	Promotion of pet registration and owner responsibility.	
Continue to upgrade Council website to include information on pet ownership and responsibilities.		Better dog breed selection may result in reduced risk to other residents.	Easily accessible free information all aspects of pet ownership.	Better use of natural environments by pet owners through education.
Promote the Nurse on Call program throughout the Shire	Reduced pressure on existing health facilities	Increased individual and community agency (or empowerment or locus of control)	Alleviate the demand on medical services.	
Feasibility study into the centralised co-ordination of specialist and allied health service provision.	Improved use of current medical infrastructure within the shire.		Reduce the cost of travel for patients. Alleviate the demand on community cars for medical appointments.	
Development of a pathways program to identify high priority pedestrian routes in each main town centre.	Additional pathways to cater for increased pedestrian traffic use.	Improved interaction in the community.	Promotion of pedestrian traffic for local trips.	Environmentally sustainable transport.
New paths to as wide as possible, 1500 would be optimal if feasible for the development.	Provides for pavement vehicles and multiple path users.	Enables users of mobility aides to journey with able bodied people.		Promotes walking and mobility and reduces reliance on cars.
Continue community awareness program highlighting the need for clear pathways.	Safe walking environments.	Increased awareness of social responsibility	Reduces the risk of accidents.	Encourages appropriate management of domestic vegetation

Recommendation	Built	Social	Economic	Natural
Promote a lighting standard for new developments to incorporate pedestrian lighting.	Improved neighbourhood security and safer walking environments.	Increased perception of personal safety		Promotes walking as an alternative means of transport during all hours of the day.
Continue Bindii eradication program to include encouraging residents to report bindii's on or near pathways.		Engage individuals and groups in community betterment activity.	Minimises injury and damage to pedestrian vehicles and bicycles.	Reduce the spread of Bindii.
Continue to provide information and education for pavement vehicle users throughout the Shire.		Promotes the safe and confident use of pavement vehicles within the community.	Improved safety for pedestrians, motorists and pavement vehicle users.	
Information from the pavement vehicle training program to be distributed in booklets to services within the Shire.	Continue to promote safe pedestrian environments.	Shared understanding of rights and responsibilities.		
Investigate pavement vehicle recharging program town centres.		Increases interaction between traders and pavement vehicle users.	Small cost to traders, high perceived value to beneficiaries.	
Review community car transport programs with a view to central co-ordination.			Increased value for money services. Increase in numbers transported in relation to cost.	Decrease in the amount of vehicle emissions.
Goulburn Valley Transport Connections program to develop and trial a community bus shopping service in partnership with residents of small rural towns (Nathalia, Katamatite, Tungamah).		Improved social contact for socially isolated people.	Economic benefit to service users in relation to cost of transport and consumables.	

Recommendation	Built	Social	Economic	Natural
Council to continue to support the formation of transport representative groups to work with Goulburn Valley Transport Connections to improve access to transport within the Shire.		Increased sense of individual and community agency.	Affordable transport options for older people. Potential increase in spending locally.	
Council to investigate a bus park outside Cobram Safeway.	Easy access to shopping for older people.		Potential increase in residents accessing shops.	
Council to share the report findings with business owners and aged care service providers in the Shire.		Residents may benefit from any changes made.	Potential to increase local buying through provision of products and services for the 55+ age cohort.	
Council to continue to explore options with prospective partners or private enterprises regarding the feasibility of establishing an indoor heated pool facility for Yarrawonga.	May provide additional private/public infrastructure as a shared resource for the community.	Increased social and physical health.	More residents able to use pool facility for exercise and maintenance of wellbeing.	
Council to support management structures to sustain the ongoing upkeep of local halls and other similar infrastructure.	Planning to maintain community infrastructure into the future.	Preservation of social gathering places for communities throughout the Shire.	Provides ongoing opportunities for fundraising with flow on to business and community.	
Council to continue to action community building audit to meet disability access standards.	Equitable access to all community buildings within the Shire.	Reduced barriers to participation of people who have a disability or mobility issue.	Increased use of public buildings for a range of activities.	
Council officers to work with the community co-coordinators in Nathalia to investigate alternatives to natural gas.	May lead to the development of additional community infrastructure.	Increased individual and community empowerment.	Education/information on efficient and affordable heating for homes. Possible group purchase scheme etc. for residents.	Reduction in electricity use.

Recommendation	Built	Social	Economic	Natural
Council to continue to develop standards that outline the ageing in place design features that may be incorporated into all housing developments.	Builders to consider ageing in place design as “good practice” in constructing homes.	Assists in maintaining people in their own homes and neighbourhoods for longer.	Future savings in the modification of homes for older people.	
Moira Healthcare Alliance to identify their projected service requirements for the next 10 years to plan for increased service demands.	Planning for the necessary infrastructure to support the population and the service.	Planning for increased and additional social options for clients.	Establish funding targets in line with service demand into the future.	
Council supports through facilitation, the formation of interest groups to create self funded unit cluster housing.	Desirable, functional, low maintenance housing for older residents.	Increased social cohesion, increased community empowerment.		
Council to continue to include recommended design features and livability principles relating to Retirement Villages in their standards (as mentioned above) for ageing in place design.	Improved standard of infrastructure.	Improved quality of life for residents.	Attractive investment for purchasers of high standard ageing in place designs.	
Council to identify preferred locations for retirement village developments within the Shire according to the existing planning documents of Council.	Increase the walkability of the Shire.	Provide for mixed social opportunities (rather than single age cohort and physical isolation)	Reduce the hardships associated with older people living away from town hubs and community resources.	
Councillors and Council staff to pro-actively promote the opportunities for engagement with Council through the existing communication strategy.		Improve communication between Council and community. Increase community valuing of Council and Councillors.	Possible reduction in need for unplanned community meetings.	

Recommendation	Built	Social	Economic	Natural
Council to consider offering the leadership program within in locations within the Shire. This would be directed by evaluation and budget consideration.		Enhanced leadership within the communities resulting in higher levels of self directed community action.	Possible increase in social and economic activity as the result of increased participation in local leadership initiatives.	
Council continues with the development of U3A throughout the Shire.		Increased friendship networks. Enjoyment of life through education.		
Council to identify interest in the formation of further “friends of” groups to work closely with Council, Catchment Management Authorities or National Parks to support local parks and reserves.	Higher level involvement of community in maintaining and advancing parks and reserves.	Opportunities for more community connection with like-minded people.	Cost effective means of maintaining and advancing parks and park infrastructure. Improved monitoring of parks.	Opportunities for greater levels of preservation of natural surroundings including flora and fauna.
Council to continue support of working groups to develop a vision for the town’s streetscapes.	Improved visual amenity.	Increased pride and enjoyment of towns by locals.	Possible increase in visitation to towns.	Possible increase in or enhanced preservation of natural environment.
Council to continue to encourage and support communities to explore innovative and unique ways to grow their economic base.	Increased viability for individual towns.	Enhanced community connection and leadership through agreed activities/projects.	Opportunities to maintain the economic viability of smaller towns.	
Further development of a public art policy to support the growth and development of public art throughout the Shire.	Arts based infrastructure to enhance the streetscapes and parklands in Moira.	Increased cultural development of communities.	Increased interest from tourism.	Possible inclusion of natural landscape in designs
Investigate the establishment of a curatorial panel to drive the Shires public art program.	Local ownership and pride in public art infrastructure.	Development of community input into public art infrastructure.	Stimulation of small business and interest in cultural events or festivals.	

