

Benalla and District Community Plan

Draft - July 2016

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1. Introduction

The Benalla and District Community Plan describes how the community and the Council will work in partnership to achieve maximum health and wellbeing for our community over the next 20 years. It outlines broad objectives and actions for building on liveability, sustainability, inclusivity and resilience under seven themes:

- Community wellbeing and sense of place
- A well-connected and accessible community
- A vibrant, thriving and progressive economy
- Planned population growth
- A sustainable environment
- Benalla a destination of choice
- Leadership and community spirit

The Community Plan although funded by the Council is a plan driven and owned by the community. The Community Plan will reflect the aspirations of the Benalla and District community. It is not Council's plan, but a plan that will be taken by the community to the Council for endorsement.

The Community Plan will be a strategic document guiding the Council and other organisations and groups in planning for our future.

For the purpose of this plan, unless otherwise stated, Benalla refers to the whole municipality including the urban area, rural townships and rural communities.

2. Development of the Plan

Development of the plan has been overseen by a community-based steering committee with twelve independent community representatives from across the municipality. The steering committee was formed to provide advice and feedback on the community consultation and the development of the plan.

The community-based steering committee includes:

- Cr. Barbara Alexander AO (Chair) Benalla, (Extensive experience in business and community services, previous President Benalla Health, active member of a number of community groups and organisations, Councillor since 2008 and keen advocate in disability field)
- Freida Andrews, Chesney Vale (Extensive experience in community sector, active member of a number of local groups)
- John Barry, Benalla (Legal background, ANZAC Commemorative Partnership Project Committee, local history groups)
- Doris Billingsley, Benalla West (Benalla Wide Advisory Committee, Waminda, Friends of Benalla Library Bookshop and previously Advancing Country Towns & Foodshare)
- Mark Foletta, Swanpool (Local farmer, Farming Forum Working Party, Director Happy Wanderer Festival, Lecturer at University of Melbourne)
- Michael Hedderman, Benalla (Landcare, CFA, L2P Mentor, Rural City of Wangaratta Community Plan)
- Cath Marriott, Goomalibee (Benalla Sustainable Futures Group, Benalla VFF, Goomalibee CFA, Violet Town Market committee, Landcare)
- Graham Nickless, Taminick (Economic development background, significant input into the Hume Regional Plan)
- Rob Roach, Benalla (Board member Coinda, President Legacy Benalla/Euroa/Violet Town Group)
- Renee Scott, Benalla (GOTAFE student, background in disability services and a passion for advocating for programs and activities for young people)
- Joy Shirley, Benalla (Various volunteer activities including PEEP and BPACC, Information Technology background)
- deSales Turner, Tatong (Former Tatong Market Coordinator, CFA, Chair Tatong Lighthouse Steering Committee, and exhibiting artist, North East Artisans)

The community based steering committee is supported by Council staff:

- Jane Archbold (Manager Community Development)
- Sheree Brown (Community Government and Advocacy Coordinator)
- Tony McIlroy (Chief Executive Officer)
- Jilian Mulally (Manager Arts, Communication and Events)

With the assistance of Rob Carolane (Twin Prism Consulting) and Kate Lumb (Kate Lumb Consulting)

A comprehensive community consultation program was facilitated for the development of the Community Plan, with over 600 community members having provided feedback through workshops, kitchen table conversations, postcards and via the online website www.talkingbenalla.com

The community consultation and engagement program identified:

- What people value about their community
- The aspirations of the Benalla community over the next 20 years
- The assets (social, economic, environmental) of the Benalla community that need to be fostered, enhanced or created
- The issues currently perceived by the Benalla community that need to be recognised

Two rounds of consultation were undertaken. The outcomes from the first phase of consultation informed the development of the draft Community Plan. A second phase of consultation is now being conducted to gather feedback on the draft plan. The final Benalla and District Community Plan will be completed by the end of August 2016 and will be a strategic document guiding and informing our community over the next 20 years.

It is anticipated that once the Community Plan is adopted an implementation plan will be developed in partnership with the community, to prioritise opportunities and actions going forward.

3. Benalla and District

Benalla is located in north east Victoria, 193kms north east of Melbourne, and is centred on the Broken River valley. The current estimated resident population of Benalla is 13,597, with approximately 9,000 living in the Benalla urban area. The population forecast for 2031 is 14,834.

Being a vast, flat floodplain, Benalla was established as an agricultural and pastoral district in the 1840s following long habitation by the aboriginal people. The rural area was characterised by wheat, oat and potato growing, alongside some vineyards and mining. It was proclaimed a city in 1965 and Lake Benalla was artificially created in the centre of the city in 1973.

The geography of Benalla is divided by the Hume Freeway with hills, valleys, grazing land and forests on the south of the freeway. The communities include those of Swanpool, Tatong, Moorngag, Winton, Glenrowan West, Lurg, Mollyullah, Lima, Samaria, Warrenbayne, Baddaginnie, Boho South and Archerton.

The north side of the freeway is characterised by plains, rolling hills, and cropping and grazing land. The communities include those of Goomalibee, Stewarton, Broken Creek, Devenish, Thoona, Goorambat, Bungeet, Boweya, Chesney Vale, Taminick, Boxwood and Tarnook.

The Benalla economy is focused on Benalla's regional centre role, agricultural production, tourism, and manufacturing. It is dominated by employment in the manufacturing, retail trade, and health and community services sectors. The proportion of people employed in agriculture is above the state average.

Unique tourism attractions include Winton Motor Raceway, Winton Wetlands, State Gliding Centre, and the Benalla Art Gallery.

The rural areas of the municipality are acknowledged for their good soils and access to irrigation water in parts. The major agricultural industries are prime lamb and beef production and broad acre cropping, with wheat and fodder crops being the dominant grains. There is some irrigation and dairying. More recently, diversification has resulted in viticulture, more intensive forms of horticulture, and forestry.

Benalla offers a supported lifestyle with several schools and a TAFE college, comprehensive health services, and a wealth of lifestyle opportunities including theatre, sport, music, wine and art. Lake Benalla and the surrounding gardens and walking track is a key attraction located within the town. Well-developed services within Benalla include disability, aged care, and child care.

There is a strong rural community within Benalla, and many active community and service groups.

4. Our Vision and Values

Our Vision

The text below provides two slightly different vision statements. We will be seeking feedback on our preferred vision statement during consultations in July.

Benalla – Creating our future together

Benalla is a district that is welcoming and friendly, thriving and prosperous, innovative and industrious, caring and supportive for all residents and visitors – a place that people want to move to and call home.

We know that to achieve this, we will all have to **work together in partnership** for the common good and prosperity of all people who live, visit and invest in Benalla Rural City.

Our common values have developed through past times of adversity, prosperity and hard work. These values are cherished in the present. These are the values that will need to be maintained and strengthened over the next 20 years and which will help us build on the Benalla Rural City we love now and wish to have into the future.

Benalla – Your choice, your destination, your lifestyle

Benalla is a district that is welcoming and friendly, thriving and prosperous, innovative and industrious, caring and supportive for all residents and visitors – a place that people want to move to and call home.

We know that to achieve this, we will all have to **work together with people making individual choices that will support** the common good and prosperity of all people who live, visit and invest in Benalla Rural City.

Our common values have developed through past times of adversity, prosperity and hard work. These values are cherished in the present. These are the values that will need to be maintained and strengthened over the next 20 years and which will help us build on the Benalla Rural City we love now and wish to have into the future.

Our values

Location

We value Benalla for its natural environment and location on the Broken River in north east Victoria. This gives us a beautiful heart to our community with the lake, art gallery and botanical gardens. Benalla allows us to choose between an urban, small township or rural lifestyle where we can make safe and secure homes. Benalla allows us to travel

easily to other destinations within our municipality or beyond to enjoy the benefits of Melbourne and the many beautiful and exciting destinations in north east Victoria, including rivers, mountains, gourmet food and wine.

Community Spirit

We value the community spirit that makes us feel welcomed and safe. This community spirit embodies the sharing of a smile and a cheery hello when passing in the street, and the support for people in times of need and emergencies. This community spirit is demonstrated by a strong base of volunteers, individuals, and organisations supporting people requiring extra assistance to play a full role within our community. This community spirit welcomes newcomers and diversity for the richness of culture and experience provided.

Community Support

We value the community services that support all aspects of community life. Community services include physical infrastructure such as transport, telecommunications, recreation, and sporting facilities. Community services also include the many organisations providing education, preventative and primary health care, security, sport, culture, arts, philanthropy and community support. Access to a high quality and comprehensive range of services supports our community life.

Diversity

We value a community which welcomes diversity. Diversity encompasses many things including age, income, social circumstances, health, sexuality, cultural and religious beliefs. Diversity is part of what makes it possible for people to find individual friendships and community groups where they can contribute to community life.

Innovation and community leadership

We welcome innovation and leadership as a culture of solving problems and leading change. Leadership is demonstrated throughout the Benalla community by individuals, groups, and organisations. Good community leadership is fundamental to how Benalla operates - it inspires participation and development. Our culture of innovation, where great ideas are recognised and supported with a 'can do' attitude, rewards community leadership and creates positive change.

Arts and Culture

We value that arts and culture have a rich tradition in Benalla, and that cultural and arts activities, festivals, and events bring our communities together to interact, learn, celebrate and grow. We also value that Benalla has a broad view of culture. We value

art, music, sport and many other activities as important parts of the Benalla culture, providing a range of benefits to the community.

Age and life stages

We value that people can live their entire lives in Benalla as they move from early childhood, through to youth, young adulthood, parenthood and ultimately becoming senior members of our community. We recognise that different life stages require different support and options for friendship, recreation and activity. We value that Benalla identifies and supports these changing circumstances. The opportunity to live a fulfilling life while in Benalla will mean that people hold the area in high regard. If they have left Benalla, this regard may lead to their return some time in the future

Sport and Recreation

We value that sport and recreation have a rich tradition in Benalla. Our sport and recreation facilities and clubs encourage physical activity and social interaction in many ways. Physical activity in its many forms, including organised or individual activity, builds personal and community wellbeing.

These values have equal status and all contribute to Benalla community life regardless of where residents live and their community participation.

5. Our Future Challenges and Opportunities

Limited Population Growth

Benalla has experienced slow population growth since the year 2000. This affects social networks, services, job growth and business opportunities. A well-planned approach to population growth is required, including agreement on the level of growth and planning to manage growth in such a way that living standards are protected and enhanced.

Ageing Population

We respect and value our ageing residents who are vital to the prosperity of our community through their skills and experience, volunteering, mentoring and wisdom. It is also acknowledged that our ageing population will require access to health, social and accommodation services to meet their changing needs. It is important to find ways to plan and provide for adequate services, facilities and the workforce to support our older residents.

Global Economy

Benalla is exposed to the effects of international markets and economic cycles. A diverse economy with ongoing investment and good decision making will help us manage both the challenges and opportunities this presents.

Population Turnover

There is a churn of people coming and going across all age groups within the Benalla municipality. It is important to ensure that the community is as vibrant and attractive as possible helping to encourage people to come, stay and return to Benalla. Population turnover creates opportunities for communities to reinvigorate themselves through innovation, new ideas and fresh community interaction.

Young People

Young people are the future. Trends such as online communication digital technology advances, cultural diversity and globalisation may reshape Benalla's future. Encouraging and empowering young people to build their skills and knowledge as well as good citizenship will be important to ensure continued youth involvement and participation. Creating a community in the future that is inclusive, socially cohesive and welcoming that will build resilience and promote opportunities for young people living in Benalla. Benalla has higher than average rates of educational disengagement and early school leaving. Reengaging young people through education, employment and training is crucial for a thriving and prosperous community.

Climate Change

Benalla may experience more extreme weather events such as fire, drought and flood due to the impacts of climate change. Planning and preparing for these events will help minimise long-term impacts on our local communities, infrastructure and the environment.

Vulnerable Communities

Benalla has been identified as a relatively disadvantaged postcode in Victoria on the two latest "Dropping Off the Edge; The Distribution of Disadvantage in Australia" Vinson Reports. The challenge for Benalla moving forward is to ensure that our community is no longer identified as a socially disadvantaged community. Consideration also needs to be given to opportunities to support and where possible, revitalise rural communities, many of whom are at risk of decline.

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6. A Plan for Benalla

Based on our vision for Benalla and District, we have developed a series of actions that will move us towards the future we seek. These actions take into account the values of our community that we wish to maintain and strengthen.

We have identified seven key areas of activity that will focus future actions. The areas are:

- Community wellbeing and sense of place
- A well-connected and accessible community
- A vibrant, thriving and progressive economy
- Planned population growth
- A sustainable environment
- Benalla, a destination of choice
- Leadership and community spirit

Each of the key themes includes a brief description of our vision for our community in 2036, our objectives and our journey.

Successfully implemented over time as we move towards 2036, we believe the identified actions will build towards the future we see for Benalla and District.

6.1 Community Wellbeing and Sense of Place

Our Objective

In 2036 we will be a vibrant, creative rural city celebrating our valued and progressive lifestyle, diversity, and cultural heritage. All our communities will be working together in partnership to strengthen our community wellbeing and sense of place.

Our District in 2036

In 2036 Benalla

- Has welcoming, strong and self-reliant communities across the municipality
- Has embraced and developed strong communication strategies and partnerships helping to ensure our community is kept well-informed
- Has safe, healthy, active, connected and engaged communities supported by energetic community groups and volunteers
- Actively encourages informal and formal lifelong learning for all
- Respects and acknowledges all members of the community, including embracing the wisdom of older people and the enthusiasm and ideas of younger people
- Celebrates and promotes our diversity through arts and cultural activities and by preserving our history and aboriginal heritage.

Our Journey

1. Utilise a variety of strategies to increase two way communication flow within and between communities, groups, organisations and individuals.
2. Ensure that local and regional strategies and plans that support health, education and social services are actively developed and implemented
3. Actively celebrate and encourage cultural diversity, our history and aboriginal heritage
4. Ensure that young people have varied opportunities to participate in cultural and community activities and are actively involved in the life of their community.
5. Work in partnership to build opportunities to strengthen communities especially our vulnerable communities
6. Plan and enhance opportunities for learning and innovation through improved access to education and lifelong learning.
7. Continue to support community driven responses to key issues of concern such as family violence, mental health etc.
8. Continue to offer a diverse range of sporting, recreational and leisure services, programs and events to encourage active lifestyle choice to achieve high levels of community participation.

6.2 A Well-Connected and Accessible Community

Our Objective

In 2036 we will be a well-connected and accessible community with quality and well-maintained infrastructure, including integrated transport and advanced telecommunications.

Our District in 2036

In 2036 Benalla

- Provides access for all to a wide range of community services and facilities
- Provides access to reliable and efficient telecommunication networks
- Promote and create safe, accessible and well-maintained infrastructure, including transport systems, roads, drainage and age specific services.
- Provides access to places that enhance our great lifestyle within the environment, arts, tourism and sport
- Utilises latest technologies to develop and maintain infrastructure and facilities that minimise resource consumption

Our Journey

9. Continue to lobby for the best possible telecommunications system to ensure it meets the needs of community, industry and business across Benalla

10. Plan for and offer improved integrated transport services and networks within Benalla, building on best-practice models
11. Plan for improved services and infrastructure that provides benefits to all people and communities within Benalla
12. Continue to lobby state government to upgrade north east rail to handle velocity trains and increase frequency and reliability of train services
13. Plan for well designed, maintained and equipped community facilities to enhance community participation and maximise utilisation
14. Work in partnership with young people to co-design and maintain functional youth friendly space/s
15. Explore innovative approaches to encourage the integration of a mixture of housing types across Benalla.

6.3 A Vibrant, Thriving and Progressive Economy

Our Objective

In 2036 Benalla will boast a diverse, robust and resilient economy attracting ongoing investment, providing a destination of choice for new industry and job opportunities.

Our District in 2036

In 2036 Benalla

- Has a diverse and robust economy with resilient and innovative industries
- Is encouraging and attracting new investment to build on Benalla and the region's strengths, competitive advantages, and resources
- Actively encourages industry and development that minimises resource use, minimises waste and meets the needs of climate change
- Demonstrates and celebrates excellence in social enterprise
- Attracts and retains a skilled workforce by promoting our region as a lifestyle destination
- Has quality training and education access, thereby strengthening our workforce skills base to meet business and industry development
- Has good collaboration across industry, government and community to share information and strengthen partnerships
- Provides job opportunities to a wide range of skills and age groups
- Has a prosperous, diverse and thriving agricultural sector ensuring sustainable land stewardship and productivity

Our Journey

16. Actively attract investment and support and promote business and business opportunities across all sectors of the economy to foster economic diversity and population growth
17. Increase collaboration and share information about innovation, best practice and successful initiatives to support and enhance business growth and prosperity
18. Support social enterprise and entrepreneurs by exploring and refining ideas, identifying opportunities for funding and providing mentoring and advice
19. Facilitate appropriate and sustainable development by providing clear communication on the types of developments that will be supported
20. Support the development of agriculture and agri-business and enable the farming community to respond to market opportunities, build resilience and attract investment
21. Promote Benalla as a destination of choice for new industry, and job opportunities, alongside a relaxed, safe and welcoming lifestyle

6.4 Planned Population Growth

Our Objective

In 2036 Benalla will have an increased population, and a strong, skilled and innovative workforce. Diversity will be embraced, the welcoming community feel of Benalla will be well-maintained, and growth will be sustainable and planned.

Our District in 2036

In 2036 Benalla

- Has expanding industries as well as workers familiar with new ideas and best practice
- Has an increased population, generating demand - stimulating investment and leading to new technologies
- Has social and cultural richness and diversity
- Has increased prosperity, delivering a larger, better-skilled labour force and more vibrant community
- Provides greater workforce opportunities for young people
- Demonstrates innovative industries and growth which caters for a changing climate and global economy

Our Journey

22. Support and encourage a diversity of residential and commercial development in Benalla CBD and surrounds, including opportunities for innovative urban renewal

23. Develop a strong advocacy position to encourage government to implement a population dispersal strategy
24. Develop a proactive plan for population growth in Benalla with a target of 1.5% - 2% annual increase, in line with regional Victoria projections
25. Ensure that the plan includes relevant support services and facilitates sustainable growth, maintaining the welcoming community feel and values of Benalla

6.5 A Sustainable Environment

Our Objective

In 2036 we will continue to enjoy our natural landscape. Good urban and landscape design has enhanced our environment, open space, and historic and cultural resources, and renewable energy is widely embraced by the community

Our District in 2036

In 2036 Benalla

- Is actively using, promoting and supporting adoption of renewable energy sources
- Is minimising waste disposal to landfill by reducing, reusing and recycling
- Has healthy water-ways, water catchments and landscapes to enhance and maintain our bio-diversity, water and air quality
- Has urban and landscape design that protects and enhances the environment, open space, historic and cultural resources
- Supports robust and resilient communities that are well-prepared for natural disasters and a changing climate
- Retains the unique scenic landscape and natural, historical and cultural resources of the region

Our Journey

26. Ensure that local and regional strategies and plans that support environment, waste, sustainability, and climate change are actively delivered and implemented
27. Develop a masterplan to capitalise on the lake, art gallery and botanical gardens precinct incorporating cultural, recreational and commercial activities and protecting environmental and cultural assets
28. Explore opportunities for private sector investment in the precinct in line with the masterplan
29. Promote renewable energy sources to support economic development and protect the environment
30. Ensure that robust programs are in place for emergency management for all communities and locations within Benalla

31. Advocate for community resilience funding with regard to natural disasters, and climate change to protect and enhance existing communities and public infrastructure

6.6 Benalla, a Destination of Choice

Our Objective

In 2036 Benalla will be a destination of choice. Benalla will host a diverse range of arts, sport and cultural initiatives, programs and events which support a range of participation and employment opportunities for the local community. Social inclusion, participation and connection will be supported and encouraged and the scenic landscape, natural and historical resources will be maintained and enhanced.

Our District in 2036

In 2036 Benalla

- Is a destination of choice based on a thriving and strong tourism and arts industry, and its natural, cultural and historical resources
- Hosts a diverse range of arts, sport and cultural initiatives, programs and events
- Provides diverse employment opportunities for the local community based on tourism, sport and the arts
- Encourages sport and active recreation including jogging, walking and cycling
- Encourages social inclusion and provides opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to participate and connect

Our Journey

32. Ensure that local and regional strategies and plans that support business and tourism growth are actively delivered and implemented
33. Identify opportunities to enhance assets within Benalla and develop at least one more asset to a state or national significance level
34. Encourage collaborative marketing efforts between owners and operators of commercial, retail and tourism enterprises
35. Continue to advocate for the NE Rail Trail Strategy to connect and enhance significant tracks and trails and enhance cycle tourism growth in Benalla and the region
36. Improve branding and marketing of Benalla as a destination of choice including improving entry points to Benalla
37. Explore opportunities to further refine festivals and events, realising a point of difference, enhancing visitation and yield

38. Develop a major event attraction strategy for Benalla that sets out clear directions for events within the municipality ensuring coordination across communities, businesses and facilities.
39. Plan to develop an Arts and Culture Strategy for the municipality which outlines a future where culture is central to community wellbeing, enhancing Benalla's reputation, liveability and economic growth.
40. Develop a strategy to increase a variety of accommodation options throughout the municipality

6.7 Leadership and Community Spirit

Our Objective

In 2036 Benalla will have a strong and distinctive spirit and character. Our community will be recognised for its strong leadership, collaborative partnerships and high level of community engagement and participation

Our District

In 2036 Benalla

- Has a strong community spirit that continues to foster strong and effective leaders
- Has a strong 'sense of place' and identity strengthened by a network of volunteers and community leaders working to deliver our vision
- Actively encourages community participation in local decision making by applying effective governance and community leadership
- Provides resources for programs to support volunteers and community groups

Our Journey

41. Resource, encourage, support and celebrate volunteers and community groups
42. Encourage and support community events that engender community spirit
43. Support ongoing community governance, philanthropy, mentoring and leadership development
44. Develop strategies to encourage community participation in local decision making through inclusive engagement
45. Commit to working collaboratively to lead and deliver the Benalla and District Community Plan
46. Develop a process to monitor and implement the Benalla and District Community Plan

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