



1<sup>st</sup> July 2020

Dear Community,

Re: Forrest and District Plan – Version 2

Thank you for your inputs to the Forrest and District Plan V1. We have taken on-board all of your valuable contributions and have redrafted the Plan incorporating your suggestions and ideas. We've also brought the future directions of the Plan to the front of the document, and you can read this within the first few pages.

The V2 draft can be found on the Forrest Website, and hard copies will be available at the General Store / Post Office.

Next steps:

1. Please provide additional comments / inputs on V2 by July 15. Email [forrestgatewayproject@gmail.com](mailto:forrestgatewayproject@gmail.com)
2. Complete Forrest Community Infrastructure Survey Monkey by July 15. Go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/forrestcipphys>
3. Attend the FDCG AGM (mid-August) for the official launch of the Plan

Meanwhile, we'll be checking this document with peers and relevant agencies, and aim to finalise the Plan by July 30.

Thanks again,

Emma, Katrina & Sharon

# FORREST AND DISTRICT PLAN: Towards 2030

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**JULY 1, 2020**

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Forrest is a small rural township in the Otway Ranges (the Otways), Victoria, Australia. It is surrounded by the smaller hamlets of Barwon Downs, Gerangamete and Barramunga. This collective region is known as Forrest and District. At the 2016 census, Forrest had a population of 230. The population of Forrest and District is 473 people.

The traditional owners of the area are the Gulidjan people from the Colac Otway region and the Gadubanud people from the coastal Otway region. The Eastern Maar Nation of south-western Victoria are custodians of the land.

### A community-owned Plan for the future

In April 2020, the Forrest and District community (the Community) began writing a community development plan for the near-term future, titled the Forrest & District Plan: Towards 2030.

In the years from 2015-2020, the community participated in multiple extensive community consultations for a range of different projects, and a considerable amount of information was collected about the community's aspirations for the future.

The initiative to produce a comprehensive document (a Plan), was a rare opportunity to combine all the consultations and reports into one place: a synthesis that articulates key themes, community values, concerns and aspirations. The document aims to support future planning for the community over the next 10 years (2020-2030), acknowledging the key characteristics and driving forces to encourage sustainable development.

The Plan is a resource coordinated and owned by the community. It has been prepared collaboratively with the local community, Forrest and District Community Group (FDCG), Deakin University's Local Sustainable Development Goal Program Team, Colac Otway Shire Council, and the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

The Plan reflects the community's priorities as determined by the work that Deakin University and DELWP have undertaken in their localisation of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals for Forrest, and draws on the framework of Regional Development Victoria's Transitioning Towns Toolbox.

### A transition town

Over the past 20 years, the local Community has experienced significant changes. Following a 150-year history in forestry (logging and milling) that ended around 2008, Forrest reinvented itself to connect with the forests in a new way through tourism, hospitality and recreation, capitalising on the natural landscape and becoming the Gateway to the Otway Ranges. Around the same time, there was a decline in local agriculture, which the community adapted to by evolving agricultural and food systems.

This document tells of the transition by the Community to the current-day drivers of tourism, growing population and increasing climate change. It aims to support the Community to achieve its goals of a stable society, economy, and environment into the future.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *A 10-year vision*

The community of Forrest and District has set itself a Plan for the next 10 years – from 2020 to 2030. This dynamic rural community has demonstrated its capacity to be resilient and adaptive, and now looks forward to a future that uses a thoughtful and robust framework for community development.

### *Strategic Direction*

As a gateway town, Forrest offers an opportunity to connect with the natural environment and maximise enrichment of the Otways experience. A resilient rural population requires innovative and proactive approaches to create a greater understanding of the environment, protect assets and provide safety to our diverse populations.

The community has expressed a desire for a future that is proactive with ideas to support self-sufficiency (e.g. solar microgrids and community farming/gardening projects). It has been empowered by taking opportunities to protect its built assets (DELWP sites hand-over in 2019) and created a community centre to support bushfire safety. The community of Forrest and District engage with agencies and organisations to achieve their larger infrastructure goals.

### *Forrest and District's Five Goals*

The community has expressed their aspirations for the following five goals, following five years of engagements and consultations.

- 1. A bushfire-safe community:** Forrest and District's location at the edge of the Great Otway National Park puts it at high bushfire risk. A bushfire refuge and increasing bushfire safety is a community priority.
- 2. A diverse and sustainable economy:** Tourism in Forrest and District is here to stay, but working in tourism isn't for everyone. Diversifying the sorts of jobs that can be done in the area will make for a more resilient and better long-term outcome for all.
- 3. Great public and private infrastructure:** Improving infrastructure is at the heart of any community rural plan and will ensure the long-term viability of the townships.
- 4. A cared-for community:** Forrest and District are a supportive and inclusive community. This goal encompasses community programs, support for disability and accessibility and community governance, but also the health and wellbeing of residents, which has a strong connection to the beautiful natural environment.
- 5. A secure future:** There are many threats which could affect the community. Resilience against threats such as climate change and bushfire is a community priority.

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### *Key projects*

To help achieve these goals, a number of projects – both larger and more expensive, and smaller have been identified by the community. Some projects might be the responsibility of state or federal governments, COS, public or private enterprises or organisations, and others might be projects the local community can take on.

### *Recommendations*

*This section is still in draft form and will be finalised after community and stakeholder input*

DRAFT

### *Acknowledgements*

We would like to thank Deakin University's Local SDGs program team, and DELWP for providing their time and expertise for writing this plan and assisting with community engagement.

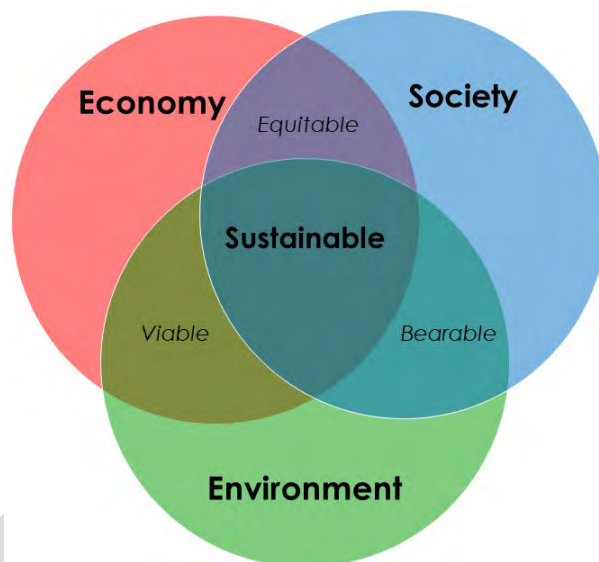
The coordination and writing of this plan was made possible by funding from the State Government's Virtual Center for Climate Innovation (Emma Ashton) and The Ian Potter Foundation (Katrina Szetey). Sharon Bradshaw, in her role as secretary of the Forrest and District Community Group volunteered her time to consult on the writing of this Plan.

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## 2 TOWARDS 2030

### 2.1 Sustainability principles of the Plan

The Plan is underpinned by the three pillars of sustainability – society, economy, and environment. Researchers from Deakin University are working with the Forrest community to find ways to make Forrest socially inclusive, with a thriving economy and healthy local environment, guided by the principles of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs are a set of 17 goals adopted by all UN member states, based on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (see Appendix).



The SDGs can empower local communities and give them an autonomous voice to advance their own local sustainability ideas. To guide long-term planning and decision-making, researchers, governments and communities must work together to achieve sustainable futures. As part of the Deakin research, six scenarios of possible futures for Forrest were created, based upon different combinations of social, economic, and environmental priorities, informed by the current trajectories of driving forces in the community (see Appendix). They provide a thought-provoking description of possible future outcomes depending on the community's determination of priorities for their future direction.

### 2.2 The Community's 5 Goals

Using the data collected through the Forrest Futures II engagement process in 2019 (see section 4), five specifically tailored Goals of the Forrest and District community were developed.

These Goals are:

- 1. A bushfire-safe community:** Forrest and District's location at the edge of the Great Otway National Park puts it at high bushfire risk. A bushfire refuge and increasing bushfire safety is a community priority.
- 2. A diverse and sustainable economy:** Tourism in Forrest and District is here to stay, but working in tourism isn't for everyone. Diversifying the sorts of jobs that can be done in the area will make for a more resilient and better long-term outcome for all.
- 3. Great public and private infrastructure:** Improving infrastructure is at the heart of any community rural plan and will ensure the long-term viability of the townships.
- 4. A cared-for community:** Forrest and District are a supportive and inclusive community. This goal encompasses community programs, support for disability and accessibility and community governance, but also the health and wellbeing of residents, which is has a strong connection to the beautiful natural environment.
- 5. A secure future:** There are many threats which could affect the community. Resilience against threats such as climate change and bushfire is a community priority.

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Some of the ideas provided by the community during Forrest Futures II are listed below, with their associated Goal.

### *1. A bushfire-safe community*

*"If fire impacts town – plans already in place for best-practice rebuild. Transition to a real fire-adapted town"*

*"Clean energy, sustainable agriculture, revegetation of carbon dense forest"*

*"Parks Vic to maintain forest tracks for fire-fighting access"*

### *2. A diverse and sustainable economy*

*"Encourage businesses that cater to local as well as tourist needs"*

*"Environment, health, ecology, coastal science, forest conservation, community development – all jobs that would be good to create in Forrest"*

### *3. Great public and private infrastructure*

*"Channel routes – Colac-Forrest Rd, Birre-Forrest Rd, Apollo Bay-Forrest Rd, require urgent attention"*

*"Rail trail – an extended rail trail would link biking culture with food trail opportunities and sustainable tourism/transport"*

*"Improve wireless internet as reception poor on outskirts"*

*"Sewerage still remains a big issue and prevents new growth and new business"*

*"Electric car chargers"*

### *4. A cared-for community*

*"Facilitate sharing of produce; local markets; reducing travel to Colac; increasing intake of healthy, fresh wholefoods; increasing local income"*

*"Training in progressive farming techniques"*

*"Better maintenance of tracks would allow for more walking – good for health"*

*"Services and access to keep me living in Forrest as I age"*

*"Education focused on keeping children in the area. Focus on future-proofing employment/growth/sustainability"*

*"More support for Neighbourhood House to deliver health and social services on a needs basis"*

*"Lack of transport to access support services – opportunities for community transport? Community minibus?"*

### *5. A secure future*

*"Explore housing/land and farming co-operatives"*

*"Be a model sustainable, adaptive town that demonstrates what is possible for others"*

*"Co-housing using environmental and social design – ensure a variety of affordable options for all socioeconomic groups"*

*"Consider how waste water can be used for production"*

*"Solar farm/microgrid for town and sustainable power for low-income households"*

*"Community energy plan"*

## 2.3 Community ideas for town improvements towards 2030

The Community was invited to comment and suggest ideas for improving Forrest and District over the next 10 years, after the first draft of the Plan was completed in June 2020. Below are all the ideas that were received for town improvements. They are listed with the goals they are aligned with, and sorted by the number of goals which they will help achieve, to indicate the potential importance of each idea.

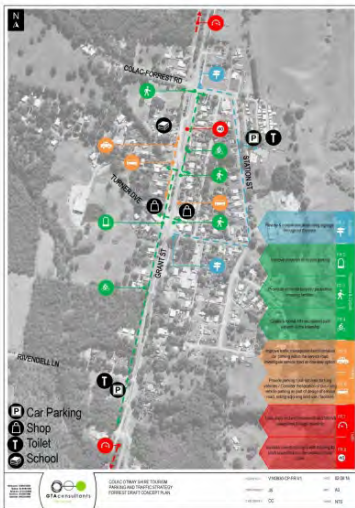
<b>IDEAS</b>	<b>GOALS</b>
	<b>FIVE GOALS</b>
Forrest Gateway to the Otways Centre (incorporating a Bushfire Safer Place)	Bushfire Safe, Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Change town planning character overlay (post-bushfire)	Bushfire Safe, Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Integrated water management plan (water supply, tanks, reuse and stormwater)	Bushfire Safe, Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
	<b>FOUR GOALS</b>
Housing options for local workers, including encouraging more permanent housing at caravan park	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Options for farms to build second dwellings (change to zoning laws)	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
More permanent housing options	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Enabling housing for long-term residents rather than B&Bs	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Increased options for short-term accommodation	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Upgrade facilities at Mountain Bike Trail hub for tourist and community use	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Better access to public transport (e.g. use the rail trail to link to Birregurra or improve bus service)	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Build a new caravan park at the Rec Reserve/use it as camping overflow at times of high tourist congestion	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Access for non-powered boats including canoes and kayaks on Barwon Reservoir, either open access or permitted access for annual triathlon	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Epic Mountain Bike Trail around the perimeter of the Barwon Reservoir	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
	<b>THREE GOALS</b>
Roundabout at Brewery corner & proper crossing	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Creative in-town wayfinding signage designed with local art groups	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Art gallery and studio (perhaps at old CFA building)	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Upgrade hall to remove asbestos and improve facility for performances	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community

<b>IDEAS</b>	<b>GOALS</b>
Upgrade heating/air conditioning at the hall	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Connect Barwon Downs and Forrest with a walking/horseriding/ bike track (not necessarily rail trail)	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Continue Rail Trail to Barwon Downs and then Birregurra	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Roof-top solar program for community observing social equity	Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Public art on the water-tower	Economy, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Street art on reservoir wall	Economy, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Health and wellbeing precinct	Economy, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Arts trail & sculpture walk along Barwon River	Economy, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Investigate alternative crops to encourage new businesses	Economy, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Stock the Barwon Reservoir with estuary perch, a native fish species	Economy, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
All-abilities infrastructure access to the reservoir for fishing	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Swimming hole, swimming platform on the river's edge, downstream from the catchment	Economy, Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
More action on wastewater	Economy, Infrastructure, Secure Future
Wastewater treatment (for reuse e.g. crops)	Economy, Infrastructure, Secure Future
Waste to energy	Economy, Infrastructure, Secure Future
Expand the Common to full 5 acres	Infrastructure, Cared-for Community, Secure Future
	<b>TWO GOALS</b>
Bushfire Safer Place	Bushfire Safe, Infrastructure
Second CFA truck	Bushfire Safe, Cared-for Community
Greater access to tennis courts	Economy, Cared-for Community
Citizen science projects/school education	Economy, Cared-for Community
Coordinated plan to promote Forrest as a foodie destination	Economy, Secure Future
Solar farm	Infrastructure, Secure Future
Public toilet improvements	Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Better road signage on Turner Dve (40km/hr), traffic calming measures (e.g. speed humps)	Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Footpath on eastern side of road from town to Barwon Reservoir	Infrastructure, Cared-for Community
Community gardens (possibly at school or caravan park)	Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Link the school with the arts proposals (listed above)	Cared-for Community, Secure Future
Microgrid(s)	Cared-for Community, Secure Future
	<b>ONE GOAL</b>
Remove native trees from roadsides	Bushfire Safe
Service road carparking	Economy
Bus parking	Economy

## 2.4 Small Town Community Infrastructure

Small Town community infrastructure is a function coordinated and supported by the local government authority, Colac Otway Shire Council. Council supports the initiative by communities to prepare their own community plan for the future. Each year, Council allocates funds for investment in community infrastructure. The identification of works is a combined effort of community-identified priorities and council budget.

Communities in rural areas generally aspire to the same standards of services as their metropolitan counterparts at the same rate/tax base; however, the costs of delivering these services in regional areas are significantly higher.



In terms of infrastructure, services include: clean water, proper sanitation, connectivity (roads, public transport and telecommunications), access to health services, waste management and long range infrastructure planning.

A township assessment considers the setting and the natural environment, heritage issues, streetscape and public land issues, infrastructure improvements/needs, opportunities and constraints. The Community recognises and protects a range of existing and prospective infrastructure facilities, as listed below.

The previous strategy, released in 2012, proposed the following infrastructure changes:

1. Northern threshold to the town centre defined by a village green incorporating landscaping, seating and sculptural play feature (this was not

achieved).

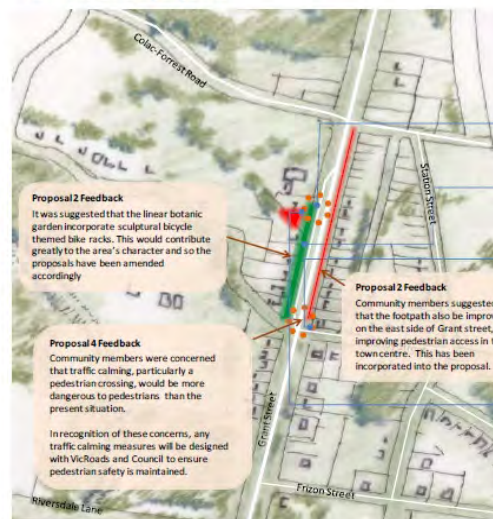
2. Linear botanic garden showcasing the area's native landscape character. Incorporate improvements to footpaths and the road edge, landscaping, seating, sculptural features and information about the plants growing there. This proposal would need to be undertaken in conjunction with the future drainage review (this was partially achieved).

3. Southern threshold to town centre to incorporate improvements to parking adjacent to the Forreast Brewery and Café, traffic calming to facilitate safe pedestrian crossing (subject to VicRoads agreement) and sculptural gateway feature (this was partially achieved).

4. Signage strategy (this was not achieved).

A 2020 update to the Community Infrastructure Plan forms part of this Plan (see section 2.5) and will supersede the Forreast part of the 2012 Birregurra and Forreast Township Community Infrastructure Plan.

### 4.5 Forreast CIP proposals



## 2.5 2020 prioritisation of Community Infrastructure

Based on Community Infrastructure ranking and feedback, the following projects have been identified as priority projects over the next 5-10 years. This list and ranking was developed in consultation with the community, through submitted comment, online facilitated discussion, and a survey (results due after 15 July).

### Large-scale projects

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

### Small-scale projects

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

<b>EXISTING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE</b>	
<b>Open Space and Recreation</b>	Mountain Bike trails
	Mountain Bike shelter/trailhead
	Mountain Bike skills park
	Walking paths (multi-use)
	Tiger Rail Trail
	Forrest Common, Tennis court and BBQ facilities, Yaugher Terminus Historical point
	Forrest Caravan Park
	West Barwon Reservoir and River walks
	Forrest Recreation Reserve and Horseriding Club
<b>Community and Cultural Facilities</b>	Public Toilets for tourists / visitors
	Community Hub (47 Grant St): Neighbourhood House; Community Gym; Studio Forrest (Art studio); Multipurpose room for meeting hire; CFA Station
	Community Hall
<b>Early Years</b>	Forrest and District Men's Shed
	Forrest pre-school (and after school care)
<b>Primary School</b>	Forrest Primary School (and after school care)
<b>Emergency Services</b>	Forrest CFA
	Police station

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## 2.6 Recommendations

*This section is still in draft form and will be finalised after community and stakeholder input*

While these are not the only achievable ideas from the list in section 2.3, many of these recommendations are projects already in progress and completing them could pave the way for achievement of further ideas.

### *Forrest Gateway to the Otways Centre*

The Gateway to the Otways Centre, incorporating a Bushfire Safer Place, will help achieve all five community goals. This project has already been through one round of community consultation and, barring funding, is well on the way to realisation.

### *New wastewater infrastructure*

While this is only relevant to three of the five community goals, it is clear that the lack of suitable wastewater facilities in Forrest are an impediment to community development. Installing new wastewater infrastructure will help advance many other improvements in town, such as residential development and health and wellbeing, so this is a critical priority for Forrest.

### *Integrated water management plan*

This idea would help achieve all of five of the community goals. However, this is a relatively new idea and would need to be incorporated within the wastewater strategy. A new wastewater system is a clear priority for community development and developing an integrated water management plan may slow down the wastewater infrastructure process.

### *Changes to zoning laws to allow residential development on agricultural land*

The lack of housing for residents is a central problem in the community. While improvements to wastewater is one step toward fixing this problem, changes to zoning laws would be another. This would help with four community goals, as well as permit the advancement of other community ideas.

### *Regular public transport links*

A once-weekly bus to Birregurra, Colac and Apollo Bay is a clear lack of accessibility. More frequent bus services to local centres would provide mobility for local residents and reduce reliance on private cars, improving health and wellbeing. This would help with four community goals.

### *Upgrade facilities at Mountain Bike trail hub*

Upgrading the MTB facilities would help achieve four community goals, and has already been through one round of community consultation. With funding, this project can be realised quickly.

### *Community garden*

An integrated community garden with the Learning Centre would help with two community goals, and would be easily achievable as the garden at the school already exists.

### *Second CFA truck*

While this only fulfils two community goals, it will go a long way toward assisting with bushfire safety, and is a 'quick win' for which there has been strong community support and fundraising.



includes hunting for traditional game such as kangaroo and duck and the harvesting of edible plants such as the Daisy Yam and Pigface.

### 3.2 Forrest and District – since 1890

The settlement at Forrest was established in 1890, named after state MP Charles Forrest, who advocated for the rail line extension to Forrest. Historically, the region was a timber town with four sawmills in Forrest and neighbouring Yaugher. All of these mills are now closed.

After the cessation of logging in the Otways in 2005, the Victorian Government made funds available for the creation of dedicated mountain bike trails in the Yaugher area. The project was the first time in Australia that mountain biking had been used as a driver for tourism and economic development. It was seen as an addition to the burgeoning local eco-tourism industry, and now makes up a large portion of the economy in Forrest, with over 60 km of sign posted "single track" in the area.




Forrest swiftly became one of the best holiday destinations in the Great Ocean Road hinterland, situated just a 30-minute drive through the Otways from the iconic coastal route.

The rural communities of Forrest and District lie at the northern gateway to the Otways. Forrest acts as a central hub for the area, which is known for mountain biking, hiking, camping, fishing, wildlife watching, beer, food, wine and relaxation. The West Barwon River flows through the township and it is near the West Barwon reservoir, which services Geelong.

### 3.3 Topography and landscape

#### *Forrest in the Otway Ranges*

The Otway Ranges (the Otways) is characterised by diverse forest environments, and the communities of Forrest and District are situated on its northern slopes. The mountain range rises to 500-600m off the surrounding plains and coast, and Forrest sits at the foot of the ranges at 182m above sea level.

<b><u>Coordinates</u></b>	38°31'0"S 143°43'0"E <a href="#">Coordinates:</a>  38°31'0"S 143°43'0"E
<b><u>Population</u></b>	230 ( <a href="#">2016 census</a> ) <sup>[1]</sup>
<b><u>Postcode(s)</u></b>	3236
<b><u>Location</u></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 158 km (98 mi) SW of <a href="#">Melbourne</a></li><li>• 84 km (52 mi) W of <a href="#">Geelong</a></li><li>• 27 km (17 mi) SE of <a href="#">Colac</a></li></ul>
<b><u>LGA(s)</u></b>	<a href="#">Colac Otway Shire</a>



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risk profiles within Colac Otway Shire (Otway District Bushfire Planning Collaboration, 2016). This is due to a range of factors including the extent and proximity to dense vegetation, weather, climate, and the likelihood of fire reaching town and with the potential for significant house loss.

The surrounding topography has the ability to increase the severity of bushfires through the development of large convection columns, which can create bushfire-induced wind storms and support the launching of embers well ahead of a fire. With the increasing impact of climate change, the risk factors are predicted to increase, particularly around the drying of the vegetation, the length of fire seasons and the increased number of high-risk fire weather days.

### *Barwon River and West Barwon Reservoir*

The Barwon River begins in the creeks of the inland slopes of the Otway Ranges. The Upper Barwon sub-catchment is located along the inland slopes and plains of the Otway Ranges to the north of Lorne and east of Colac, and comprises 1,822 km of rivers and streams.

In 1965, the West Barwon Dam was constructed near Forrest by the then Geelong Waterworks and Sewage Trust. This reservoir is now owned and managed by Barwon Water, and is the major water supply for Geelong.



This water system forms part of the Barwon catchment and has some of the state's most flow-stressed waterways. Significant population growth and a changing climate are expected to place increasing pressures on the health of the catchment's waterways and its natural landscapes. Parts of both the Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park are within this landscape; however, grazing for livestock (beef, sheep and dairy) and forestry dominate land use in the area, bringing significant economic benefits to the region.

A key threat to the area's waterways is uncontrolled stock access to waterways that, if stock are not fenced out, can erode banks, damage riparian vegetation and reduce water quality through sedimentation and effluent contamination. Further threats include bed instability and degradation, changes in flow regimes and reduced riverine connectivity, degraded riverbank vegetation and loss of instream woody habitat. Willows (*Salix* spp.) and reed sweet-grass (*Glyceria maxima*) threaten a number of waterways in the upper section of the Barwon.

In sections along the Upper Barwon, water has ceased to flow at times of drought. The Upper Barwon also experienced a large-scale fish death event in June 2016, linked to an acid event that impacted water quality and the health of the river. In 2019, the Corangamite CMA in partnership with Barwon

Water coordinated the release of 485 ML of water from the West Barwon Reservoir as part of a new 1 gigalitre (GL, billion litres) entitlement of water for the environment recovered through the Central Region Sustainable Water Strategy. The aim has been to improve river health of the upper reaches by flushing sediment, wetting riparian vegetation and connecting habitat pools that provide a refuge for native fish and other fauna.

In early 2019, The Victorian Government established the Barwon River Ministerial Advisory Committee (Barwon MAC) to facilitate a community-led approach to the future management and protection of the Barwon catchment. The Barwon Action Plan aims to ensure the iconic Barwon catchment can thrive and be enjoyed as a natural treasure for many years to come. The Action Plan will be released in late 2020.

### The regional context

The community sits within the Colac Otway Shire Local Government Authority. The Shire has a population of approximately 21,000 people, with about 13,000 people living in the shire’s major centre of Colac. Colac Otway Shire are part of the larger G21 Geelong Region Alliance.

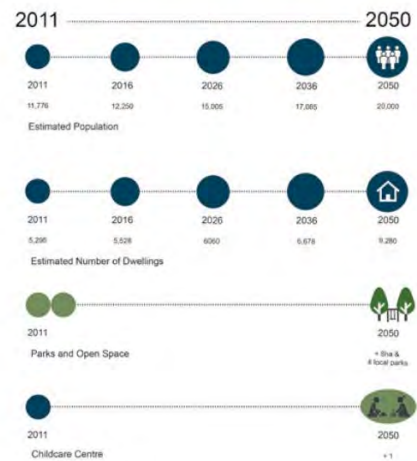
To the east and south of Forrest, within 30km, is access to the Great Ocean Road. The Great Ocean Road is a National Heritage-listed 243km stretch of road along the south-eastern coast of Australia between the Victorian towns of Torquay and Allansford. The Great Ocean Road region receives over 3 million domestic daytrip and over 785,000 international daytrip visitors each year (Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism Board, 2019). Colac Otway Shire currently receives just over one million visitors per year. Forrest is an important hinterland township for the Great Ocean Road, and tourism provides direct and indirect jobs.

The G21 region is forecast to grow to 500,000 by 2050 (G21 Geelong Regional Alliance, 2015) and Council believes Colac Otway Shire, and in particular Colac, is well positioned to cater for some of that growth. The Colac 2050 Growth Plan (Colac Otway Shire, 2019) is a long-term strategy that guides the location of new housing, associated servicing infrastructure (e.g. water drainage), and open space for the township of Colac. The plan sets an aspiration to expand the township’s population to 20,000 persons by 2050.

In November 2019, the duplication of the Princes Highway West from Winchelsea to Colac was completed. The Princes Highway Duplication project is a key route for regional commuters, freight traffic and tourists as a gateway to the Great Ocean Road.

Melbourne’s western region is one of the fastest growing in Australia. The area covered by the West Growth Corridor Plan will eventually accommodate a population of 377,000 or more people (Victorian Planning Authority, 2011). This growth, along with planning for the Regional Rail Link and Outer Metropolitan Ring Transport corridor, will forge stronger connections and relationships between regions, particularly between Geelong and the recreational opportunities of the Otways.

Colac from 2011 to 2050: A Snapshot



## 3.4 Historical timeline

# Forrest Historical Timeline

### First inhabitants - Gadabanud and Gulidjan peoples

1800s	<b>1880s</b>	<b>European settlers arrive in the Barwon Valley at Yaughar. Begin farming hops, root crops and running dairy cows</b>
	1885	School opens at Yaughar (settlement near current football ground)
	<b>1890</b>	Town of Forrest surveyed and first land sales held
	1891	Completion of rail line to Yaughar Valley, renamed <b>Forrest</b> after politician Charles Forrest. Tramways built to feed timber from the bush mills to the Forrest rail head.
1900s	<b>1900s</b>	<b>Forrest grows rapidly exporting timber and agricultural produce by rail. Private businesses flourish</b>
	1902	Mechanics Institute built (Public Hall)
	1906	School moved to Forrest township
	1913	Police Station opens and Forrest Commission commences
	1915	Bush nursing service inaugurated
	<b>1920s</b>	
	1926	Daily road motor coach service to Colac commences. Football ground in town relocated to better site at Yaughar
	<b>1930s</b>	
	1932	Geelong water channel work started at Forrest
	1932	Forrest Dramatic Society formed due to Depression conditions impacting town
	1937	'The Tiger' rail car introduced for improved passenger service
	1939	Black Friday bushfires burn around Forrest
	<b>1940s</b>	<b>Royal Commission into the '39 fires orders relocation of bush mills to townships</b>
	1942	War conditions throttle town activities
	1943	First proper Post Office started in a shop, formerly at Railway Station
	1947	Three sawmills set up in town
	<b>1950s</b>	
	1952	'The Tiger' rail car stops running
	1953	Lake Elizabeth formed due to landslide following heavy rains
1956	Mains electricity connected to Forrest. Electrical goods shop opens.	
1956	Peak year for native forest logging at the back of Forrest	
1957	Railway ceases operation as uneconomic for traffic being offered.	
1959	Shire opens rubbish tip, first one for town	
1959	Fire Brigade formed	
<b>1960s</b>	<b>Timber allocations decline and mills begin to close</b>	
1963	Town holds its first Debutante Ball	
1963	Infant Welfare Centre opens	
1964	Long established bakery burns down. No more local bread.	
1965	West Barwon Reservoir opens and gives Forrest water service	
1966	New Public hall opens after fire destroyed earlier building	
1969	Town has three general stores, all profitably operating	
1970s	<b>1970s</b>	
	1972	Pre- school centre opens
	1972	Otway Shire buys north end railway yard for public purposes. Sawmill buys south end.
	1972	Town sawmills reduced to one operator
	1974	Citizen committee establishes caravan park
	1974	Methodist and Catholic churches close
	<b>1980s</b>	Shire identifies town subdivision opportunities
	1982	Football Club opens new rooms. Old facilities condemned
	<b>1990s</b>	Closure of primary schools and churches in nearby towns leave Forrest with the last remaining primary school and Anglican/Uniting church in the area.
	1992	Up market Guest House opens
1994	Arts Gallery set up in old Church	
1996	Inaugural Otway Harvest festival held	
1996	Fire destroys Terminus Hotel, rebuilt 1997	
2000s	<b>2000 to 2020s</b>	
	2003	Last operating sawmill quits town site
	2003-2010	Decline in dairy farm operations
	2004	Great Otway National Park established
	2004	Forrest SoupFest commenced
	2005	Forrest Mountain Bike Trails opened
	2007	Neighbourhood House opens at the hall, auspiced by Otway Health
	2009	Public infrastructure investment in mountain bike trails increases tourism and encourages new businesses
	2011	Tiger Rail Trail opens
	2014	AirBnB accommodation venues begin to flourish
2016	DELWP relocates from Forrest to Barwon Downs	
2016	Forrest Football Club goes into recess	
2018	Forrest Gateway project – climate change investigations & 47 Grant Street feasibility studies	
2019	DELWP site handed to community management	
2020	Forrest & District Plan for the next 10 years is produced	

## 4 COMMUNITY ANALYSIS

### 4.1 Community Snapshot (Census data)

The rural communities of Forrest, Barwon Downs, Gerangamete and Barramunga are similar in composition. The population is ageing, with the median age 11 years older than for the state, and the percentage of people under 25 falling.

The median weekly income is one-third lower than for the rest of the state. The median rent and mortgage repayments are concurrently lower than for the whole of Victoria, however, and there is a lower percentage of Forrest's residents under rent stress (>30% of household income). Forrest has a slightly higher percentage (0.6%) of its population under mortgage repayment stress (>30% of household income) than the rest of Victoria. This paints a picture of a community which is less well-off, whose homeowners are having a little more difficulty paying off mortgages, and whose renters pay less in rent, than the state average.

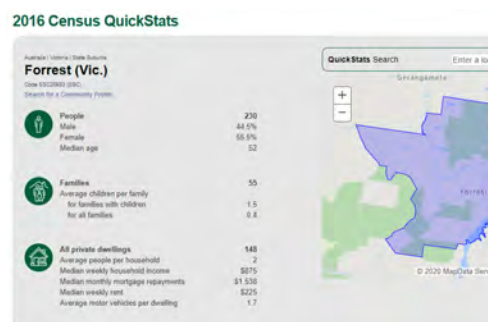


Table 1: 2016 Census data for all communities – Forrest, Barwon Downs, Gerangamete and Barramunga

	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga	AVERAGE
All People	230	131	105	7	473 (TOTAL)
Male	44.5%	57.5%	52.3%	100%	
Female	55.5%	42.3%	47.7%	0%	
Median age	52	52	42	45	48
Families	55	37	19	0	
Average children per family, for families with children	1.5	2	2.3	0	1.9
For all families	0.4	0.5	0.9	0	0.45
All private dwellings	148	96	50	12	
Average people per household	2	2	2.8	2	2.2
Median weekly household income	\$875	\$866	\$1,374	\$949	\$1,016
Median monthly mortgage repayments	\$1,538	\$1,165	\$1,400	\$0	\$1,368
Median weekly rent	\$225	\$166	\$200	\$0	\$197
Average motor vehicles per dwelling	1.7	1.8	2.4	2	2

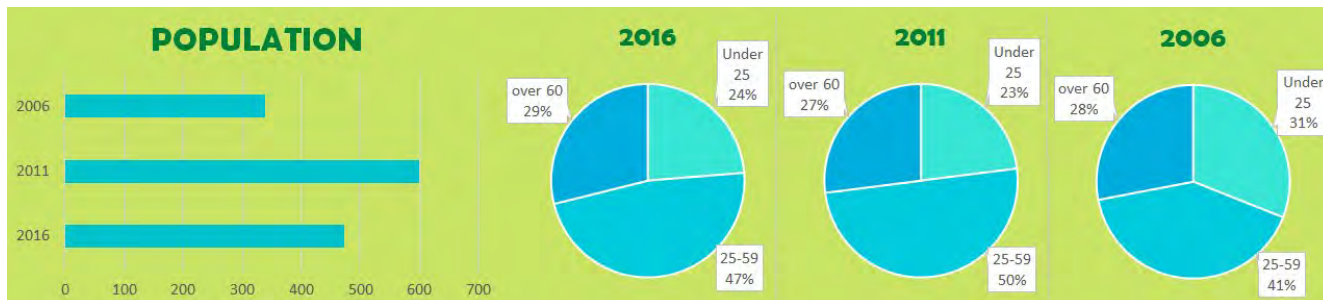


Figure 1: Population changes from 2006 to 2016 in Forrest and District (data not available for Gerangamete and Barramunga for 2011 and 2006).

Table 2: Demographic changes over time in Forrest, with comparisons to Regional Victoria and Australia

Measure	Forrest	Regional Victoria	Australia
Population (2016)	230	1,433,805	23,401,945
Population (2011)	238	1,368,451	21,504,691
Population (2006)	170	1,300,506	19,855,287
% change 2011 to 2016	-3.5%	+4.8%	+4.8%
% change 2006 to 2011	+40.0%	+5.2%	+8.3%
% under 25 years old	22%	30%	32%
% between 25-59 years old	48%	43%	47%
% over 60 years old	30%	27%	21%
M/F % split	44.5%/55.5%	49.1%/50.9%	49.3%/50.7%
% with non-Australian ancestry	30.2%	59.9%	66.4%
% Indigenous population	1.3%	1.6%	2.8%

## 4.2 Community Strength

### *Liveability and Community*

*The information below may sometimes only address Forrest, as opposed to Forrest and District. In part, this is due to the central nature of Forrest's location and services – it is a hub for the surrounding communities. The future of Forrest and its services (economic and social) will have a significant impact on the district townships.*

The Community has a sense of pride about their region. It is regarded as a pleasant place to live, with access to open spaces, recreation options, and has a small-town charm. Since the increase in tourism, the hub of Forrest now enjoys multiple places to congregate for coffee, lunch or a beverage at various venues. This has attracted a number of part-time residents and Forrest's population swells at weekends. The Primary School is held in high regard, and is a drawcard for many young families.

Unique attributes for Forrest & District include: small-town charm; West Barwon reservoir; Lake Elizabeth; a Learning Centre that incorporates a Primary school, Kindergarten and after-school care; DELWP Forest Fire Management Depot at Barwon Downs; world-class Mountain Bike trails; and close

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proximity to the coast and Great Ocean Road. Forrest and District's position at the gateway to the Otways and bordering on agricultural regions means it is a nexus for land and asset managers.

One of Forrest's greatest assets is access to the natural environment, with the bush within immediate access, and visible from most people's houses. This is a drawcard for tourism (discussed below), but studies show that spending time in contact with nature is associated with good health and wellbeing (White et al., 2019), which is important for permanent residents. One common theme identified from community engagement activities is connection with nature.

The following is a sample of responses from the community survey in 2015 regarding what people like most about living in Forrest:

- fresh air and stress free living,
- Historic, Biodiversity and Cultural significance. Community of artists.
- School community is awesome.
- just very pleasant and not far from everything
- Not a convenient location without public transport
- The peace quiet trees nature birds

And, how can we make Forrest a better place to live (environmentally, socially, recreationally)

- The Colac-Forrest road is dangerous! Movie nights in the hall - winter or summer book club? Ladies catch-up group? CWA is great but everyone is already busy - having just a catch up for a chat group once a fortnight or week for whoever is around?
- Elderly: mini-bus tours around Forrest and District on weekends Youth: internet cafe maybe Entertainment: Band (live music) at hall inside or out
- Leave it alone so you won't bugger it. And clean up a few local houses. Just bring a little pride in the town. Farmers: also thistles, ragwort terrible.
- A ban on people playing music outdoors, and loud music generally!
- Sewer treatment plant
- Change rooms for mountain bikers
- A public toilet on the main road
- Clubroom/meeting place, pool table entertainment: chamber music/arts adult education: new reading group
- Swimming pool - for both elderly and younger picture theatre Skip spending money on anything else, the bushfire refuge is the most important. My car's suspension gets a little bit more wrecked with the patch-up jobs that never work
- Very appreciative of full-time presence of police officer (and of present incumbent)
- Old time dance and theatre for elderly, upgrade hall to include air conditioning for somewhere to go on hot days Youth Group, better playground Movie and music nights Art art and more art
- Special Neighbourhood House program for elderly people, including education, outings, social activities Film nights

Forrest and District has a reputation for being a highly engaged community, and has had high participation in consultation activities over the past five years. Almost half of Forrest's population attended the Forrest Futures engagement process (see section 5.3). Some locals have suggested this enthusiasm could be because of the community's size - residents are able to have a sense of connection to community, while also remaining private if you choose. Locals feel there is a sense of

belonging to place. This sense of belonging and connection is demonstrated by the pride that local residents have in their community, and by the levels of engagement – with nearly 30 community groups for a population of 473 people.

Volunteerism in the community averages 38% of the district’s population, almost twice the percent of the population compared to a national scale (19%), and Victorian scale (19.2%). There are a large number of community groups and clubs in the district – almost 30 for a population of about 450.

## Economy

The community’s full-time employment levels are slightly lower than average at 49.3%, with part-time employment slightly higher than average at 37.5%. Whilst Forrest offers local employment, a considerable number of residents who may live in the area for lifestyle and family reasons travel to major centres such as Colac and Geelong for work.

The highest percentage of employment across the region is in a professional or management capacity at 25.9%.

Employment in technicians and trades is 14.15%, and community and service, clerical and admin in 16.9%.

The most common employment industries are:

- Government and health (Colac Otway Shire, DELWP, Barwon Water, Colac Area Health, Forrest Primary School)
- Tourism and hospitality
- Agriculture
- Building and construction

Table 3: Employment information for Forrest and District

	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga	Australia
Employed full time	41.5%	51.3%	55.8%	No data	57.7%
Employed part time	41.5%	38.2%	32.7%	No data	30.4%
Unemployed	7.6%	5.3%	11.5%	No data	6.9%

Occupation	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga	Average
Professional	28.8%	16.4%	7.0%		17.4%
Managers	14.4%	37.7%	51.2%	No data	34.5%
Labourers	16.2%	14.9%	18.6%	No data	16.5%
Technicians & trades, machinery operators & drivers	22.5%	10.5%	14.0%	No data	15.6%
Community & Personal Service, Clerical & Admin	18.0%	16.4%	16.3%		16.9%

Table 4: Industries worked in by residents of Forrest and District

Industry	Forrest	Barwon Downs	Gerangamete	Barramunga
Government and Administration	17.2%			
Hospitals, and other social assistance services	15.5%	13.6%		No data
Accommodation, cafés and restaurants	13.8%	15.9%		
Beef and dairy cattle farming	8.6%	29.5%	83.3%	No data
Building & other industrialised services	6.9%			

Nature-based tourism is one of the largest income generators for the region, relying upon the natural assets of the hinterland forests of the Otway Ranges and the Great Ocean Road coastline. Large numbers of national and some international tourists come to the region to visit waterfalls and the rainforest, go fishing and bird-watching, and other adventure activities (Arup, 2018).

Building on these assets, Forrest has capitalised on the development of world-class mountain bike trails and access to walks and waterfalls. The local hospitality and tourism businesses provide a critical infrastructure to support this growing economy, with great places to eat, relax and enjoy fresh air. Additionally, local events such as the Otway Odyssey Mountain bike race and Forrest Soupfest are further economic drivers for the town.

In addition to the regional tourism drivers, the Shire attracts 32,000 cyclists per year to Forrest’s and other mountain bike trails. There are 16 trails in Forrest, ranging from ‘easy’ to ‘very difficult’. The trails are located on Crown Land to the north and south of the Forrest township, with the trails network crossing a number of land tenures including the Otway Forrest Park, Great Otway Forest Park, and land managed by Barwon Water.

### Services

Forrest and District have access to most services within a 30 minute drive – principally these are located in the regional centre of Colac. However, without regular and frequent public transport services in the towns, attending these requires access to a car.

Table 5: Services and the time it takes to travel to them by car from Forrest

	Within town	Within 30 min drive	Within 1hr drive	Within 2hr drive
Supermarket		●		
Chemist		●		
Clothing store		●		
Petrol station		●		
Car service		●		
Post office	●			
GP		●		
Dentist		●		
Chiro/Physio		●		
General hospital		●		
Surgical hospital		●		
Maternity hospital		●		
Nursing home		●		
Kinder/day care	●			
Primary school	●			
Secondary school		●		
P-12			●	
University			●	
TAFE		●		
Football team		●		
Basketball team		●		
Heated pool		●		
Multi-purpose community centre	●			
Movie theatre		●		
Gallery	●			



**Forrest Youth Group** are a group of teenagers who meet regularly for social activities and have participated in community building activities.

In 2010, a parcel of land from Colac Otway Shire was acquired by an active bunch of locals to set up the **Forrest and District Men’s Shed**, a member of the Australian Men’s Shed Association. During 2017-18, the Men’s Shed received funding to construct a new facility, to offer education, training, and community engagement opportunities for the men of the Community, and their families and friends. This Shed also has a meeting place with kitchen facilities. In October 2019, the Men’s Shed was officially opened by dignitaries from the Colac Otway Shire following many years of hard work from the members, and \$68,000 in federal, state and local government grants. The Men's Shed provides an ideal forum for people to share interests and activities and socialise in a safe, secure and non-judgemental environment. The Men’s Shed is also home to the King Parrot pickers, a local bluegrass band who regularly get together for jam sessions and fun on alternate Sunday afternoons.

Forrest and District has almost 30 groups, clubs and committees including:

Forrest and District Community Group	Forrest Mountain Bike Club
Forrest Gateway Project	Forrest Horse Riding Club
Forrest Public Reserves Committee	Forrest Recreation Reserve
Forrest and District Neighbourhood House CofM	Forrest and District Historical Society
Forrest Primary School Council	Forrest and District Lions Club
Forrest CFA	Forrest and District Men’s Shed
Youth Group	Forrest Special Events Club (Forrest SoupFest committee)
Book Club	Gerangamete CFA
Studio Forrest	Barwon Downs Tennis Club
Forrest Cricket Club	Otway Harvest Trail
Anglican Church and Op Shop	Country Women’s Association
Forrest Football/Netball Club	Upper Barwon Landcare Group

### *Human capital*

Members of the community have been the drivers of many town projects such as the wastewater investigation, Forrest Common re-development, Forrest Mountain Bike revitalisation strategy, and the Forrest Gateway to the Otways Project.

In April 2019, three former DELWP sites including 47 Grant St were transitioned to community management, as a result of the participation, energy, vision and activism of the community. The Community Hub at 47 Grant St is managed under a DELWP Category 3 Management Committee, known as the Forrest Public Reserves Committee. Tenants of this site include the Neighbourhood House and Forrest CFA. It is also anticipated this will become the Forrest Gateway to the Otways concept development.

Service organisations and local committees in the community support festivals and have attracted events, such as Forrest SoupFest. In 2004, the Forrest and District Lions Club started this festival with approximately 200 attendees. It has grown in size and popularity, and in 2019 attendance was over 7,000. The committee estimates this festival brings in over \$100,000 to the local economy during the June long weekend.

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### *Economic capital*

The natural environment of Forrest and District is not only a drawcard for residents, but also tourists. Investment in tourism infrastructure, both publicly and privately owned, has increased over the past five years. This not only provides employment opportunities, but also offers socialising and recreation opportunities for residents and tourists alike. The community has undertaken extensive consultation regarding an upgrade to the Mountain Bike Trail network, as detailed in the next section.

Since 2015, tourism and hospitality venue growth in town has reflected the increased tourism demand and popularity of the township, and includes the following businesses:

Forrest Brewing Co	Forrest General Store
Terminus Hotel	Forrest Caravan Park / Wonky Stables
Forrest Guesthouse (and Bespoke Harvest Restaurant 2013 – 2018)	Forrest Hire Bikes (and formerly Forrest Corner Store café/bike hire 2012-18)
Platypi Chocolate Café	Susanna Weddell Jewellery
Antiques on Station St	Forrest Op Shop
Top Bike Tours	Trees Adventure (Yeodene)
Otway Eco Tours (platypus tours)	

In addition, Forrest offers a range of accommodation venues, with approximately 40 providers, and over 180 beds.

Festivals and events are a regular feature on the Forrest calendar, and have included:

Otway Odyssey Mountain Bike competition	Forrest 6-hour ride
Forrest SoupFest	Run Forrest trail run
Forrest Festival (no longer operating)	

Aside from tourism, there are a number of other businesses that contribute to the local economy. These include Evans Earthmoving, Forrest Foods, Wattle and Wire, and a range of primary producers.

# 5 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT- 2015 to 2020

## 5.1 2020 Vision

In November 2019, members of the community participated in a visioning workshop conducted by DELWP Community Engagement specialists and Deakin University researchers, as part of the Forrest Futures II community engagement process.

Forrest Futures II is a collaboration between the Forrest and District Community Group, Deakin University, and DELWP to localise the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be relevant for Forrest, and to find ways to implement those local goals by 2030.

This workshop led to the following description as a vision for Forrest by 2030:

*“In 2030 Forrest will be a leader in sustainable energy, a leader in food sharing, a leader in caring for all citizens, and an economically thriving community”*

**Forrest Futures II, November 2019**

Participants were invited to participate in writing a newsletter of the future (see appendix for full size):

**FORREST FUTURES**  
10 YEARS SINCE STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTED

It has been ten years since the Forrest Future II strategy plan was launched. It was time to look back at the progress made and the challenges ahead. On a walk around Forrest, we can see some of the changes. The Forrest Hotel has been overhauled to take into account the history and the environment. The Point, Children and playgrounds that got a new spruce and a new scientific landscape. Alongside this there are boutique shops and multi-use walking spaces.

People are happy and friendly, and there are many community hubs. Businesses support one another and are successful. The place is thriving and is a great place to live. Powered by energy generated by the town windmill. The hub is central to the town and community activities of our area.

People are happy and friendly, and there are many community hubs. Businesses support one another and are successful. The place is thriving and is a great place to live. Powered by energy generated by the town windmill. The hub is central to the town and community activities of our area.

**CLOSED FOR 2 YRS GREAT OCEAN ROAD**

Long term closure of the Great Ocean Road due to sea level rise and landslides which the State government own in hopes of the road. There is a new main access road to Apollo Bay and to St Albans.

**SOLAR PV ARRAY OPENED VAST ARRAY IN FORREST**

On Monday 30 Nov, 100 people attended the opening of a new solar PV array on West Street. The array will generate enough electricity to power 200 houses.

**LIGHT RAIL LINK**

Plans announced for a light rail connecting the town of Forrest to the coast. The link will be a 100 metre wide - small to a large town. It will be a light rail connecting the town of Forrest to the coast. The link will be a 100 metre wide - small to a large town.

**2027 FIRES**

2027 fires impacted the town and community of Forrest. The town of Forrest is a great place to live. The town of Forrest is a great place to live.

**FORREST HOPS**

Forrest Hops is a great place to live. The town of Forrest is a great place to live.

**HCL CENTRE**

History and Cultural Learning Centre is a great place to live. The town of Forrest is a great place to live.

**THE HUB WORKSHOPS THIS MONTH:**

1st Saturday: Literacy and numeracy skills. Forrest Hub.

2nd Saturday: Vertical Food Walls.

3rd Saturday: Community education.

4th Sunday: How to start a business.

5th Sunday: Forrest and produce from the local area. Meet with the local area. Meet with the local area.

**SINCE 2020 FORREST'S ACHIEVEMENTS**

COMMUNITY SPACE AT THE HUB

- Community groups
- Neighbourhood Solar Panels
- Meeting rooms
- Cafe
- Tours and workshops

We have achieved the recognition of the community. The town of Forrest is a great place to live. The town of Forrest is a great place to live.

Previous shared visioning exercises have produced the following:

*“The vision for Forrest is to be a place that revitalises and engages people and maximises opportunities for living, working and recreation by utilising the Otway’s unique rural and environmental qualities and assets”*

**Forrest Structure Plan 2011**

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## 5.2 Key themes

Common themes were identified in the Forrest Futures II engagement, and they included six main areas:

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### **NATURE**

Beautiful landscape  
Otways & Great Ocean Road  
Connection to Country

*“Natural environment in your actual backyard”*

*“Understanding that we have something precious”*

*“Green, rural, close to Colac, close to the beach”*

*“Ensure planning overlays for Forrest include “Township – Character” requirements that link to natural aesthetics, rural setting and ecological development”*

*“Lots of visitors enjoying the natural environment and contributing economically to the local community”*

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### **COMMUNITY**

Supportive and connected  
Small-town charm  
Includes young and old

*“Engage kids in multi-generational conversations about the future”*

*“Co-housing using environmental and social design. Ensuring a variety of affordability options for all socioeconomic groups”*

*“Services and access to keep me living in Forrest as I age”*

*“Focused activities on building kindness and continued tolerance because these shared skills will see us through changes positive and*

*negative”*

*“Indigenous knowledge (especially land management, fire use) being centrally used in discussions – equal relationships for land management with Indigenous locals and agencies solving challenges together”*

*“Talking about change – people have very different ideas of change. Many projects – don’t assume funding will be approved for all”*

*“Small town diversity – different voices heard”*

*“Cultural divide between older residents and newer city-arrivals. But relationships still exist and don’t suffer. Everyone has to get along and they do. People help others who are struggling”*

*“Engage and learn from traditional owners and practices”*

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### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

Inadequate wastewater system  
Mountain Bike Trail development  
Key assets reflect town character

*“Sewerage still remains a big issue and prevents growth and new business”*

*“Consider how wastewater can be used for production”*

*“Encourage microgrids, self-sustainable lifestyles, be a beacon for future-proofing local economies – embrace the environment”*

*“Explore planning overlays (plus other incentives) that encourage more business and permanent residential accommodation options”*

*“Parking plan developed for Forrest by Council – need focus on funding and implementation, not just plans”*

*“NBN has not improved internet access”*

*“Fall-back place of refuge to help avoid loss of life in bushfire”*

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## RECREATION

Tourism, Mountain Biking, sport,  
camping, horse-riding, arts  
Infrastructure

*"Maintenance of mountain bike trails and improvements to ensure that Forrest remains a viable tourist attraction (a lot of competition in the space now)"*

*"Challenge the balance of housing and Airbnb/tourism accommodation"*

*"Attract different skills – e.g. recreation (massage, healing centre,*

*spa centre, conference)"*

*"Encourage businesses that cater to local as well as tourist needs"*

*"How to engage owners of accommodation places in town/planning needs?"*

## CHALLENGES

Bushfire vulnerable  
Climate change  
Agricultural adaptation

*"Reduced access to healthcare in the town; e.g. 20 minute drive when no petrol in the car means people won't visit the doctor when required"*

*"Who will own the land and farms and work them in 20-30 years?"*

*"Everyone's a farmer but how do we manage runoff pollution in the rivers?"*

*"Increasing cost of insurance. Shift in space will come through in 2-3 years"*

*"Plan upfront for a fire disaster scenario. Don't rebuild town to burn again. A higher standard than current standards"*

## THE FUTURE

Sustainability aspirations  
Food systems and sharing  
Energy independence

*"Starting up a community supported agriculture (CSA) program with local growers and organic producers"*

*"Food processing facility in Forrest – jobs, food miles"*

*"Embed town landscape as edible landscape – create a large community garden"*

*"Clean energy, sustainable agriculture, revegetation of carbon dense forest"*

*"Sustainability included in school curriculum – embedded through all subjects, teach problem solving"*

*"Education focused on keeping children in the area. Focus on future-proofing employment/growth /sustainability"*

*"Explore joint build opportunities for new home buyers (UK and Holland have some good models)"*

*"Off grid – microgrid, solar passive, built for our environment – utilise larger blocks better; subdivision of larger blocks/tiny homes"*

*"Employment on farms? Training in progressive farming techniques"*

*"New jobs should focus on: home based working (good internet required); small scale/community farming; incentives for tourism-based employment, such as guided walk tours in Otways"*

*"Environment, health, science, ecology, coastal science, forest conservation, community development – all jobs that would be great to create in Forrest"*

*"A future to look forward to"*

**Forrest Futures II, September 2019**

## 5.3 Community Surveys

The communities were involved in extensive consultation over the years 2015 to 2020. The following is a summary of these engagements.

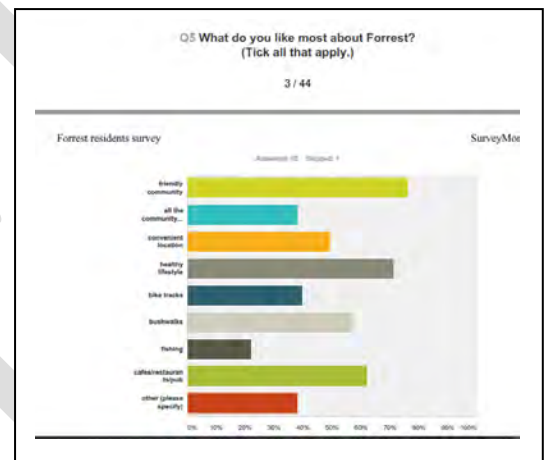
### 2015 – Forrest and District Community Group (FDCG) survey

An initiative of the FDCG, in 2015 the Community was surveyed about their thoughts on living in Forrest. A total of 61 participants (local residents and visitors) completed the survey, and questions included:

1. What do you like most about Forrest?
2. How can we make Forrest a better place to live (environmentally, socially, recreationally, other)?
3. The Forrest Learning Centre now offers a variety of educational and childcare services. Which of the following were you aware that the Centre offers?
4. Thinking of future activities you would like to see happen at the hall, what improvements are needed for these to occur? For example, do there need to be changes to layout, infrastructure or equipment?
5. How important is the continuation of the Forrest Football-Netball Club?
6. The Forrest Soupfest is an initiative of the Forrest and District Lions Club. There are opportunities for others to get involved with planning and managing this event in the future. Does this idea interest you? If so, in what ways?
7. How important is the continuation of the Forrest and District Historical Society?
8. *Forrest and District Neighbourhood House (A little history...The Forrest and District Neighbourhood House (F&DNH) is funded by a State Government grant to employ a co-ordinator to run the program for 10 hours each week. Otway Health originally auspiced and supported F&DNH with extra funding and resources, but this was recently reviewed. At a community meeting in August 2014 the Forrest community decided to take ownership of the program and a committee of management was formed. F&DNH became incorporated, which enabled the committee to apply for a further 10 hours of co-ordination funding for a total of 20 hours per week. Money to pay expenses such as hall rental, purchase of equipment and the running of events and courses is achieved by fundraising and applying for grants, and is part of the coordinator's role. What would you like to see happen at the Neighbourhood House?*

Responses included:

- \* 76.19% of respondents said Forrest's friendly community is what they liked most about the town
- \* 64.06% of respondents wanted more public transport to Colac, Geelong, Lorne, Apollo Bay as a way to make Forrest a better place to live, followed by 60.94% for better road maintenance
- \* Other suggestions included: movie nights, regular music nights, NBN, swimming pool, sewer treatment plant, social and youth activities, leave it alone so you won't bugger it
- \* 39.68%, of respondents will be leaving Forrest in the morning or the night before a Code Red Day, and 26.98% staying to defend your house



## 2017 – Forrest Futures Project (Community at Centre of Decision Making, DELWP)

The Forrest Futures Project was initiated to explore community interest in utilising additional public land in the Forrest Township. Over 100 participants were involved in a multi-stage consultation process over six months.

The announcement in 2015 by DELWP to relocate and develop a new work centre at Barwon Downs, 7km north of Forrest, meant that three public land sites in Forrest became surplus to DELWP needs. A conversation in May 2015 between Forrest and District Community Group and the Otway District Manager David Rourke occurred, with a reassurance that the relocation would in no way place the Forrest community at a greater bushfire risk due to DELWP's departure.

This project was seen as a significant opportunity by DELWP to apply an engagement process that sought to empower community to make decisions and take control of the management processes under agreement with DELWP. To this end, the project team set out its aim to "Transition the DELWP Forrest work centre sites to possible community use under an agreed DELWP management structure (defined under negotiables and non-negotiables) that meets the needs and aspirations of the Department and of the Forrest Community".

### Community Engagement Events 2017

#### **DELWP Open House – 27th & 28th January 2017**

- Community Participation – Day 1 = 52; Day 2 = 47. Total 97 people providing 103 contributions

#### **DELWP Workshop 1 – 21 May 2017**

- World Cafe – 57 people and narrowing contributions down to 30 options

#### **DELWP Workshop 2 – 18 June 2017**

- Market Place – 38 people and narrowing contributions down to 10 options

#### **First Community Group led Community Forum**

- 30 people attending. Led by community groups to seek community centred decision-making regarding which committee of management would lead the transition process

DELWP staff at the Open House heard a broad range of ideas, ranging from easy to complex possibilities; this included five comprehensive written submissions. There were many ideas with similar themes and were combined into a summary for each site.

#### The Camp:

Bike and Café Hub – School camp – Neighbourhood Safer Place – Markets – Garden and Native Nursery – Multipurpose Centre – Community Activities – Sell the site – Public toilets.

#### The Car Park:

Leave as carpark – Sell the site – Exhibit large historic items.

#### The Main Depot:

Market place – Historic and Cultural Hub – Tourist Interpretative Centre – Physical Activity Centre – Move the buildings – Sell the site – Neighbourhood Safer Place – Combined CFA and Neighbourhood Safer Place – Combined Community Hub and Neighbourhood Safer Place – Multi-Purpose Centre – CFA Shed – Historical Society Centre – Nursery/Garden Centre – Youth Centre – School Camp – Business Activity Centre – Art Space – Public Toilets – Community hub.



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Final thoughts from participants (as written) both days:

- Forrest needs a safer place
- Want building 14 for N/H House interests
- How about an Entry Arch – Forrest – Gateway to the Otway's
- Better signage in town, hard to find things in town and get about, e.g. bike trails/walking tracks and Lake Elizabeth
- BMX track
- Great community engagement opportunity, would be nice to know if \$\$ avail for a solid proposal and the amount
- Go CFA
- Good that you're trying to keep them in the community
- Lots of good ideas
- Let's promote Forrest business development
- Forrest to make the decision!
- Important that the sites stay as a community space and important to think out of the box/no preconceptions
- Really good display
- Thank for the investment in our town
- We need \$\$ commitment to fund feasibility
- Funding opportunities for Environmental, social, economic risk reduction – GREEN BONDS ethical investment scheme
- Funds generated by community enterprise, training, education, produce, - Community employment and enterprise
- Great to see DELWP genuinely committed to helping Forrest

The engagement process resulted in agreement to use the space for a bushfire place of last resort, a community hub (including the Neighbourhood House and the Historical Society), and a CFA station. The agreement was to use the sites as they currently stood until funding could be obtained to re-develop them.

### *2017 – Forrest Wastewater Investigation (Barwon Water and Colac Otway Shire)*

In 2017, Barwon Water and Colac Otway Shire conducted community engagement in Forrest to investigate opportunities for improved wastewater management. Community feedback over recent years told of a range of system issues leading to amenity and odour issues around the town, exacerbated during peak tourist periods.

Wastewater in Forrest is managed by home owners via individual on-site wastewater management systems (on-site systems) with approval and performance regulated by Council. An audit of existing on-site systems determined there was a problem across the township with a large proportion of systems deemed inadequate for managing loads from existing houses in the town (60% - 70% of systems considered to be failing and/or impacting on health and the environment).

Community consultation was undertaken to determine the key issues that were seen to be facing Forrest, including bad smells, polluted environment, risks to public health, community disruption when there are many visitors, and business disruption when there are many visitors.

Extensive consultation and investigations were undertaken for this project, and a number of potential options were then developed with the community and formulated into four Solution Packages for Forrest. While there was a range of views, Solution Package 3 received the highest level of support from the community and was therefore nominated as the preferred solution for addressing wastewater issues. This solution involves a combination of on-property and off-property treatment and irrigation of recycled water. This provides the dual benefits of providing water for use by

residents whilst also reducing the treatment and irrigation requirements at the local water recycling system.

### 2018 – Forrest Common Masterplan (Colac Otway Shire)

The development of a master plan for the Forrest Common was a 2017/18 Small Town Improvement Program (STIP) funded project. A draft master plan was endorsed for public consultation at the 26 September 2018 Ordinary Council Meeting and documents were on public exhibition from Monday 1 October 2018 to Monday 12 November 2018.

Fifteen formal submissions were received during this period. Council officers worked with the Forrest Common Master Plan Working Group to consider the feedback and it was determined during this process that some members of the community were concerned that the draft and proposed changes didn't capture how the community wanted to see the park developed.

Council officers continued to work with delegated community representatives and interested groups to prepare a revised master plan more representative of the collective community vision. Following extensive engagement and input from the local community, the final Forrest Common Master Plan was presented to Council at the November 2019 meeting for consideration and endorsement.

The plan was supported by Council, and will guide future development, upgrades and renewal within the Common. The implementation of the master plan is subject to future Council budget considerations and the ability to access funding from other external funding sources.

### 2019 – Forrest Gateway Project survey

Following the Forrest Futures process by DELWP in 2017 to transition public land to community management, the Forrest and District Community Group auspiced funds to conduct feasibility assessments and proof of concept to redevelop the DELWP sites in Forrest. This project was known as the Forrest Gateway Project.

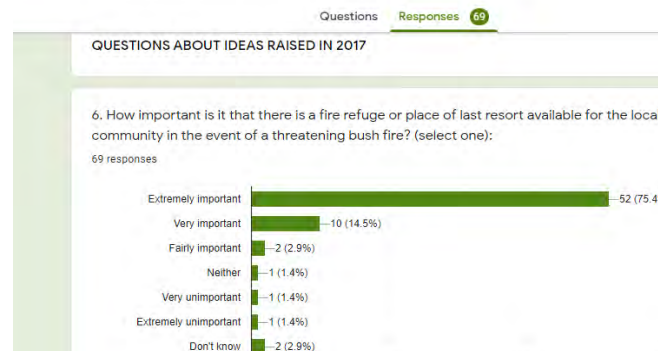
In 2018, the group received a \$250,000 grant through the Victorian Government's Virtual Centre for Climate Change Innovation to conduct a two-year feasibility study into the Forrest Gateway to the Otways centre. In March/April 2019, a community consultation process invited community feedback regarding possible uses of the site. Survey questions included:

1. *How important is it that there is a fire refuge or place of last resort available for the local community in the event of a threatening bush fire?*

2. *How important are the following community facilities and services (which have potential to be located on the site)?*

*\* Neighbourhood House \* Physical Activity Centre (Gym) \* Historical centre \* Youth space \* Art Space \* Children's space \* Meeting rooms*

3. *Preserving Forrest's history as part of the site was strongly supported by the local community during consultation in Dec 2017. Your current opinion is that a Historical Discovery Centre is:*



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4. A new state-of-the-art fire safe facility for the community will require government development funding. How important is it to you that this is prioritised and built, rather than simply making best use of the existing buildings?

5. How supportive are you of the creation of a research facility in collaboration with universities or research organisations on this site?

6. Exploring some sort of interactive tourism experience for visitors to Forrest is another option for generating revenue at the site. How supportive are you of increasing tourism in Forrest to increase employment and income?

A total of 69 respondents provided these most popular responses:

Respondents generally felt that having a fire refuge or bushfire place of last resort was either extremely important (75%) or very important (15%) – combined 90%

Preserving Forrest’s history by having a Historical Discovery Centre as part of the site was seen to be extremely important to 29% and very important to 33% - total 62%

The majority of people (total 71%) were either extremely supportive (52%) or very supportive (19%), of a research facility in collaboration with universities or research organisations on the site.

The majority of respondents (total 76%) were either extremely supportive (35%) or very supportive (41%) of increasing tourism in Forrest as an option for generating revenue at the site and for increasing employment and income. Responses overwhelmingly highlighted the importance of keeping this nature-based tourism and there were some important cautions highlighted in the comments.

### *2019 - Forrest Mountain Bike Trails Design Project (Colac Otway Shire and Dirt Art)*

Colac Otway Shire in conjunction with consultants, Dirt Art, conducted community engagement in Forrest to gauge community opinions around revitalizing the Forrest Mountain Bike trail network. The project included auditing existing trails, detailed design for current and proposed trails, a signage audit, design of traffic treatments, and master planning of the Forrest and Yaugher Trail Heads.

Residents and riders were invited to submit project ideas and questions via an online portal and via a social media survey. 340 supportive comments were made via the portal and social media platforms. Council also conducted four open house sessions with the community in May (two sessions), July and October 2019. A total of 102 different community members attended these session.

All forums provided Shire and the project consultants a valuable insight on the work required to meet the needs of the community and create a nationally significant mountain bike facility in Forrest. Key community consultation outcomes included:

- Overwhelming general support for the project
- Members of the horse community seeking shared trail access and development
- Residential concerns regarding trails being developed close to local houses
- Concern around environmental impacts
- Concern around access Forrest Mountain Bike Trails Design Project 21
- Desire for horse-riding loops at the Yaugher Trail Head

## 2020 – Forrest Futures II: Localising the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Forrest

Following on from the Forrest Futures groundwork laid in 2017 by DELWP, the project entered a second phase of consultation with the community, facilitated by DELWP but in collaboration with Deakin University. The purpose of this was to prepare a town plan for Forrest for 2030 and beyond using the SDGs as a framework (see section 2.1).

The United Nations SDGs are a global framework to support action on the greatest challenges of our time such as climate change and inequality. To complement and augment national implementation, the UN has encouraged local authorities and communities to implement the SDGs at the local scale. Researchers from Deakin University began actively working with the Forrest community in June 2019. Their project focused on comprehensive research using mixed qualitative (participatory) and quantitative (modelling) methods to assess options for improving multiple socio-economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability. This project is co-funded by the Ian Potter Foundation, and in collaboration with Monash University.

There were a range of community engagement activities to determine the shared aspirations and views of the community for their future.

*Listening Post, Sept 2019* – each community member who participated was allocated three stickers to vote for their three top issues of concern for Forrest, framed by the SDGs (55 participants)

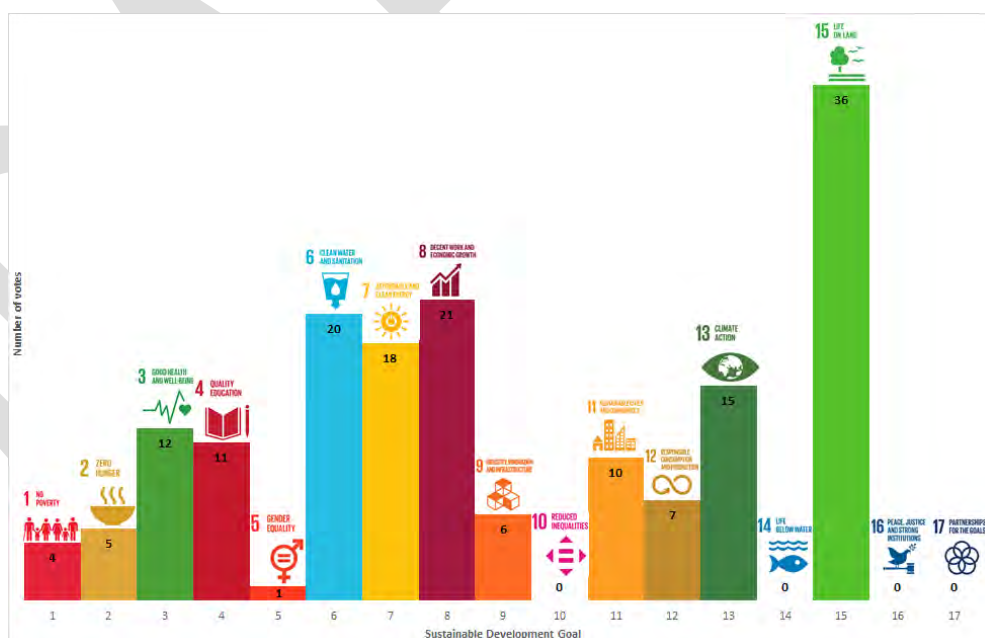
*Kitchen Table Discussion, Sept 2019* – this was facilitated by DELWP with eight people of diverse experiences (a farmer, a local tourism business operator, a school administrator, and a government employee) to discover what they considered important for the future of the community

*Semi-structured interviews* were conducted with employees of Colac-Otway Shire to gain an understanding of the community priorities from a local government perspective

*Open House, Oct 2019* – To extend and confirm the research from the Listening Post and Kitchen Table Discussion, an Open House event presented the information gained from the previous activities. Visitors were invited to provide feedback and further ideas

*Open House, Oct 2019* – To extend and confirm the research from the Listening Post and Kitchen Table Discussion, an Open House event presented the information gained from the previous activities. Visitors were invited to provide feedback and further ideas

*Visioning and Ideas Workshop:* To have the community articulate a shared vision for a sustainable future for Forrest in 2030, we conducted a Visioning and Ideas Workshop. To elicit this vision, the facilitator took the group through a guided visualisation which described a hypothetical walk through the town in 2030, and each attendee wrote down the changes they saw. Then, in small groups, the participants collated these visions into a mock newspaper template, and shared them as ‘news articles’ with the larger group.



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## 5.4 Recent projects in Forrest and District

### *Forrest Mountain Bike Trail project*

Initial trail investment 2007 \$500,000

Investment so far, excluding in kind:

- The Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Strategic Plan 2015 cost was \$80k (\$20k COS, \$20k DSE and \$40K State).
- The Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Economic Analysis 2018 \$15K (COS)
- The Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Detailed Design Plan - \$200k (\$100k Federal/ \$100k COS)

Total infrastructure ask Forrest Mountain Bike Trail upgrade(s) \$4.25 million (less \$750k: \$500k State/\$250K Colac Otway Shire)

The township of Forrest is known for its mountain bike trails which attract many domestic and international cycling enthusiasts each year. It is a council priority to procure funding to complete the implementation of the Forrest Mountain Bike Strategic Plan (G21 Geelong Regional Alliance, 2019). When completed, the completed Mountain Bike Trail strategic plan is estimated to draw up to 40,000 cycling enthusiasts per year, which will support more employment and increase demand for accommodation, resulting in an increased annual economic benefit of \$8.4 million for the Forrest region. REMPLAN provides data specifically for Colac Otway which indicates the following for 2016-17 (based on a four-year average from 2013-2016):

- Jobs supported by tourism: a total of approximately 950 jobs were supported by the tourism sector, representing 9.6% of total employment Colac Otway.
- Tourism wages: tourism generated \$39.9m in wages in 2016-17, representing 6.5% of total wages in Colac Otway.
- Tourism GVA (Gross Value Added): tourism accounted for \$74.3m in GVA, representing 6.2% of GVA in Colac Otway.

### *Forrest Gateway to the Otways Centre - \$250k invested so far, total ask \$12M*

Through a grant from DELWP's Virtual Centre for Climate Change Innovation, the community has undertaken studies to assess options for improving socio-economic and environmental sustainability and resilience for the community in the context of climate change. A central outcome of the studies is the design for the Forrest Gateway Centre, which is to be built on one of the vacated DELWP sites. This will be a state-of-the-art building functioning as a bushfire place of last resort, while also housing community facilities and the CFA station, together with a multipurpose centre for interactive visitor experiences and climate change education and research.

Community management of these sites presents a unique opportunity for Forrest to establish and strengthen a range of community services and assets sorely needed in the township and surrounding districts. This process has enabled the consideration of long-term community development aspirations that serve not just the Forrest community, but also the many visitors who come to Forrest to experience the Otway region. Whilst there are many dimensions to resilient communities, designing new community infrastructure that responds to our changing climate and potential bushfire impact will be vital for Forrest's community resilience. The residents of Forrest identified this as one of their highest priorities as part of the Forrest Futures engagement process and this seeks to

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address aspects related to developing a fire-adapted community building as a central pillar within the community's broader aspirations.

### *Forrest Wastewater Investigation*

Investment so far, feasibility 2017 – 2020 \$120k+ (TBC)

Total infrastructure ask for preferred solution is \$10.1 million

The Forrest and District Community Group approached the Victorian Water Minister in late 2016 to raise concerns about wastewater issues that were affecting the town. As a result, Barwon Water and Colac Otway Shire Council partnered with the Forrest community to investigate opportunities for wastewater improvements across the township. This partnership acknowledged the growing role tourism plays in Forrest and the regional economy, and the increasing stress this may place on existing wastewater systems in the town.

Council commissioned an initial audit of the existing on-site systems to determine the extent of the problem. This work confirmed there were widespread problems across the township where a large proportion of existing systems were inadequate for managing loads from existing houses in the town. The audit indicated that the total number of systems that were considered to be failing and/or impacting on health and the environment at approximately 60% - 70%.

It was determined that the township was currently (and would continue to be) well below the World Health Organisations target for Disease Protection due to discharge of wastewater off-site (four times below the WHO threshold). Many of the smaller properties in the town centre are too small to safely contain wastewater on-site under current EPA standards.

A full description of the options can be found [here](#). While there was a range of wastewater infrastructure solutions presented to community, Solution Package 3 received the highest level of support from the community and was therefore nominated as the preferred solution for addressing wastewater issues. This solution involves a combination of on-property and off-property treatment and irrigation of recycled water. This provides the dual benefits of providing water for use by residents whilst also reducing the treatment and irrigation requirements at the local water recycling system. The proposed solution is to be delivered and managed by a single responsible management entity. All on-property systems would also be managed by the management entity and not individual homeowners.

Barwon Water has now engaged Marsden Jacob Associates (MJA) to undertake a cost-benefit analysis for the preferred Forrest wastewater solution. The aim of MJA's work is to collect the data required to understand the costs and benefits of the system holistically. This will help us plan any next steps.

### *Forrest Common Masterplan*

- \$15,000 on preliminary drawings
- Implementation as per drawings estimated at \$1.7 million
- Optional minimum stage 1 would be \$500,000

The Forrest and District Community Group were successful in receiving a funding allocation under Council's 2017/18 Small Town Improvement Program (STIP) to develop a master plan for the Forrest Common. The Forrest Common is located on Station Street, Forrest and is used by locals and visitors,

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including caravan park patrons, people using the local mountain bike trail network and Tennis Club members. The Forrest Common is 1.5ha in size and is classified as township parkland as per the Colac Otway Public Open Space Strategy (2011). The parkland has the following existing features:

- BBQ and shelter
- Playground
- Limited natural shade areas
- Picnic tables and seats
- Bike racks
- Lawn area
- Interpretive signage / information board for the Forrest History walk
- Tennis courts
- Skate pad
- Car parking area.

The community advocated for the Forrest Common to be developed with guiding themes and stories, represented through the installation of bespoke, unique and customised elements that represent the character and history of Forrest. The proposed development of the Forrest Common Master Plan is supported by the Colac Otway Public Open Space Strategy (2011). However, the level and standard of development proposed is higher than the Standards for Open Space Development for a Township park as outlined in the strategy. The estimated cost for full implementation of the plan is \$1,696,569 over four or more stages, with an additional, ongoing maintenance cost annually of approximately \$25,000 following completion of the works. Officers have prepared a minimum stage 1 scope of works that would see a portion of the play and path network development completed in line with Council's typical spend and may assist the community in leveraging funding for further improvements. The total cost of minimum stage 1 works is estimated to be \$311,751. The implementation of the master plan is subject to future Council budget considerations and the ability to access funding from other external funding sources.

Adjoining this land is the Forrest Caravan Park. As at June 2020, the community were consulted about an Expression of Interest process. The purpose of this community consultation is provide an opportunity for the Forrest and District community to comment on the area of land included, but also to better understand what the Forrest community wants to achieve from the caravan park lease. The lease for the Forrest Caravan Park, which was originally drawn up in 2001, expires in April 2021 (negotiations are currently underway for a one year extension). The Colac Otway Shire Council has decided to test the market by inviting Expressions of Interest (EOI) from operators interested in running a new caravan park.

### *Tiger Rail Trail*

The "Tiger" Rail Trail was official opened on Sunday 12th June, 2011 and was held in conjunction with the Forrest Soup Fest. Currently 7km of the trail is completed from the Forrest end. The trail begins in Forrest, across the road from the Terminus Hotel on Henry Street. It is a short but well maintained trail, with interpretative signage along the way.

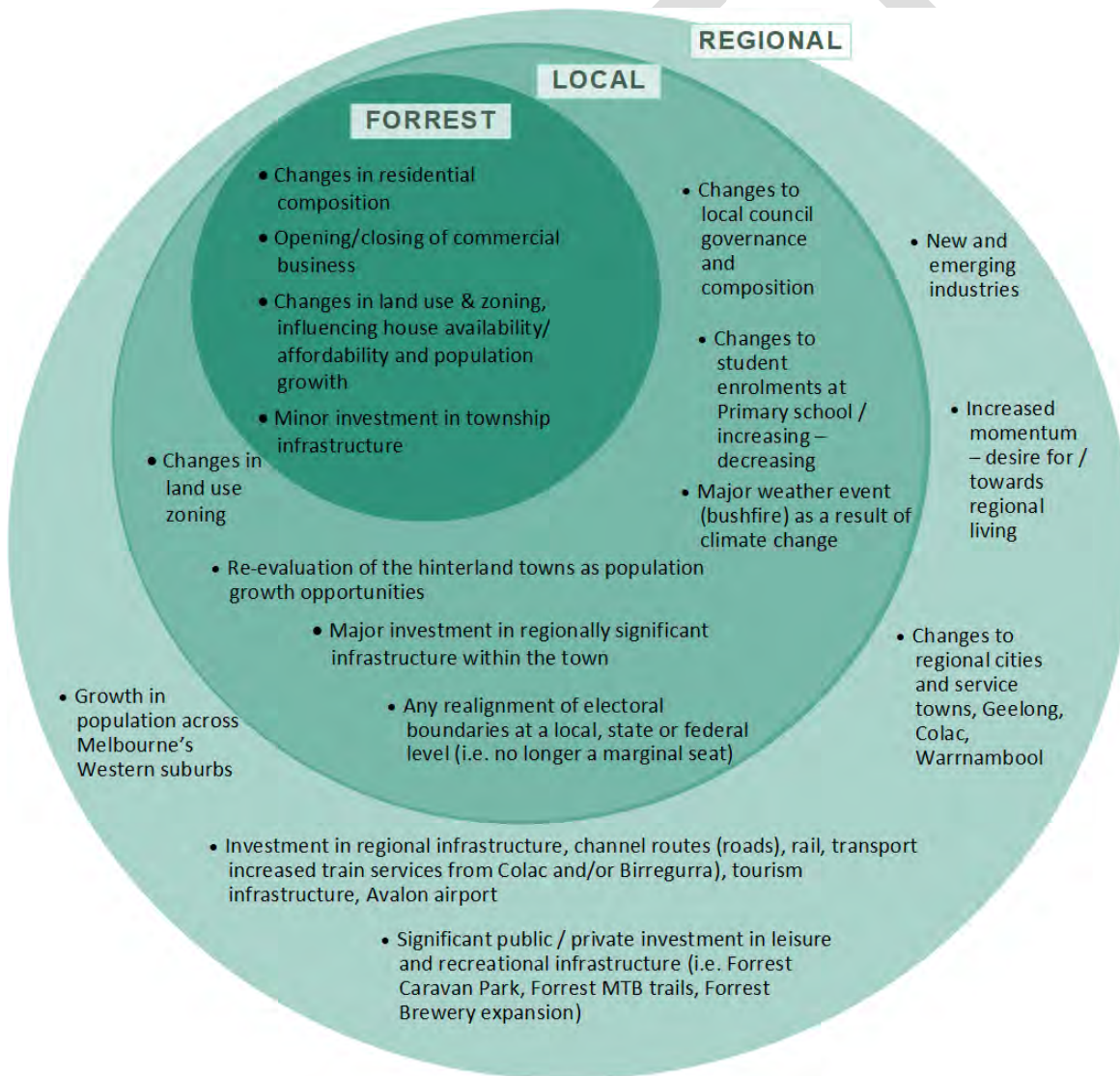
The trail's "Tiger" moniker comes from the days when trains stopped running between the towns of Barwon Downs. A converted Dodge sedan, painted black and yellow, ferried passengers instead.

The original construction of the rail line to Forrest from Birregurra began in 1889 and was completed at a cost of 96,000 pounds. It was opened to Deans Marsh on December 19, 1889 and to Forrest on June 5, 1891. The line was used by tourists bound for the coastal resorts of Lorne and Apollo Bay. The Forrest line was closed in 1957.

The grand vision for this trail was to start in Birregurra, on the main Melbourne - Warrnambool rail line, meander along the old railway formation, through Deans Marsh, to the existing section near Barwon Downs and on to Forrest, for a total length of 30km. A feasibility study in 2015 for this extension found it unviable due to opposition from landowners whose land the trail would run through, and because of an estimated \$9 million cost for replacing 22 bridges along its length.

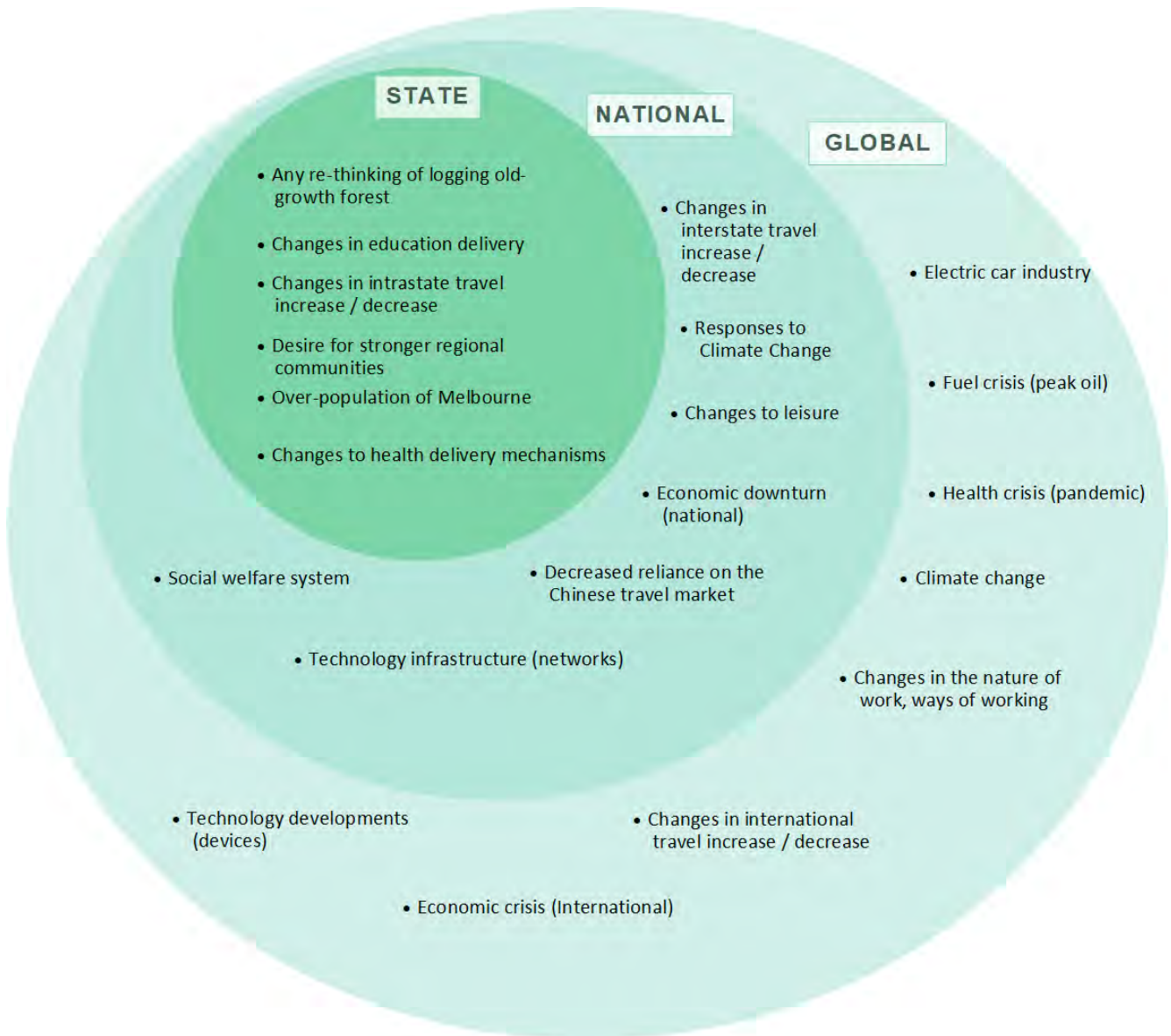
## 6 FUTURE CHALLENGES

### 6.1 Drivers of change (future scanning)



## Population and demographics

Between 2006 and 2016, Forrest experienced a 35% increase in population. Over that time, the number of children aged 0-14 decreased by 14% and people over 55 increased by 26%. The median age of a person living in Forrest has increased from 41 to 52. Forrest has a slowly increasing and ageing population, which will influence the needs of residents in the future.



## Residential land development

Colac Otway Shire have designated that Forrest remain a low growth community and estimated a release of 3.5 permits per year for residential land development. There has only been one permit issued per year since 2011, so development has been below expected levels. Planning laws prohibiting more than one dwelling per 40 hectares (100 acres) in Farming Zone land has been noted

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by local residents as an obstruction to development. Additionally, new housing cannot be built without a new wastewater system, making this a critical priority for community development.

### *Affordability of property and suitability of housing*

Cost and availability of housing has become an issue in Forrest over the last decade. Tourism businesses purchase properties for accommodation, removing them from the pool of available residential housing. This in turn drives up prices due to scarcity of supply. In addition, local tourism businesses must look outside of Forrest for staff, who then have to travel some distance as they cannot find local housing. Other potential new residents also struggle to find housing, and anecdotally must wait until existing residents move away or travel.

Median house prices have increased 188% since 2009, while median rents have only increased by 30%. This should be viewed from the perspective of the limited supply of housing stock – the largest number of house sales in any year over that period has been nine, and the rental turnover is even smaller at a maximum of five per year. While it is still far cheaper to buy or rent in Forrest than in a metropolitan centre, the chances of locating a property are much smaller.

### *Inequality*

Along with this issue of housing, Forrest also grapples with inequality. In the greater Otway region, 19% of people live in poverty and the median family income in Forrest is 55% lower than for the rest of Victoria (2016). Twenty percent of all families in Forrest are single-parent families (and all single parents are women). The SEIFA score (a measure of socio-economic conditions) puts Forrest in the 30% most disadvantaged areas in the country, and the 20% most disadvantaged in Victoria. However, Forrest is a supportive community and provides assistance to those in need, for example community lunches and foodshare.

### *Local economy*

Forrest experienced a major shift in local industry with the cessation of logging in 2008 and the decline of agricultural industries. The development of the Mountain Bike Trail system began the transition to a primarily tourism-based economy, capitalising on Forrest's beautiful environment. This transition was enhanced with private investment in local small businesses catering to both tourists and local residents. The expansion of the tourism industry is obstructed by limited housing supply for both accommodation and employees, and by ageing and failing infrastructure.

The G21 Colac Otway region profile identifies a number of economic development opportunities through the greater Colac Otway region, including dairy farming and processing; green energy; transport and logistics; tourism; and health care and social assistance. It also notes that the Forrest Common and Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Strategy projects are likely to have positive impact on future economic growth in the Shire.

The local community are happy to have tourism in Forrest, except where there is conflict with housing availability, but have expressed a desire for diversification of the economy so there are other options for employment growth within the town. Local small businesses are dominated by tourism/hospitality and farming. Additional businesses are prevented from being created due to lack of housing and office space (e.g. having service businesses move into the area - accountants, hairdressers, tradespeople etc) and poor connectivity (internet and transport). Agriculture is still a major part of Forrest and District, with local dairy and beef farms and mushroom growers.

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## *Environment*

Forrest's placement as the Gateway to the Otways means it is located in an enviably beautiful environment. The area is located in a biodiversity hotspot, and the Great Otway National Park provides protection for some of that biodiversity. This, along with the mountain bike trails, are the biggest drawcard of the local tourism industry. The local residents are proud of their pristine surroundings and dedicated to ensuring they remain so. Climate change and potential bushfire impact are both threats to the local environment.

Forrest is a hub for regenerative agriculture – where the land is improved as a result of agriculture, rather than stripped of nutrients as in traditional farming. This limits the use of fertilisers, which reduces agricultural runoff into waterways, improving local water quality and the environment generally.

## *Major infrastructure projects*

Forrest currently has several major infrastructure projects in planning (see Section 5.4).

### The Gateway Project

In 2019, three parcels of land were transferred to community ownership from DELWP. The Gateway Project is developing plans to build a multipurpose building incorporating a Neighbourhood Safer Place/Bushfire Place of Last Resort, which can also be used by the community as a meeting place throughout the year.

### Wastewater

The issue of sewerage and wastewater infrastructure has been developing for some years in Forrest and has recently come to a head. Ageing septic systems that don't meet current safety standards are no longer adequate and new infrastructure is urgently needed. This affects the local environment and biodiversity, the local economy (by limiting tourism), wellbeing of local residents, and additional development in the town.

### Mountain Bike Trails

The Forrest Mountain Bike Trails were first opened in 2005, encompassing over 60km of trails. A proposal was released in December 2019 to increase the Mountain Bike trail network by approximately 38kms, including restructuring the existing trails and creating a new Trail Head. This plan is aimed to revitalise mountain bike tourism and re-establish Forrest as a nationally significant mountain bike destination.

### Forrest Common

Colac-Otway Shire have been consulting with the Forrest community to revamp and reinvigorate the Forrest Common.

## *Transport and connectivity*

Forrest lies on the route between Apollo Bay and Colac. It is a feeder route to tourism along the Great Ocean Road and the Great Otway National Park. State government are currently upgrading some portions of the Forrest-Apollo Bay Road, and are planning to undertake surfacing work on the Birregurra-Forrest Road near Seven Bridges Road. Recent upgrades to the channel routes to Forrest,

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such as the Princes Hwy between Winchelsea and Colac, and the Great Ocean Road, make it easier for tourists to visit the area, and safer for residents to drive.

There is one bus line that runs through Forrest, the Colac-Marengo route. This service runs only on Wednesdays and only once in each direction. During summer months, a more bus frequent service is offered for tourists. There is a V-Line station in Birregurra, but apart from the once-weekly bus, there is no connecting service from Birregurra to Forrest, and there is no alignment of the bus timetable with the train timetable. This puts a severe limit on residents who may want to avoid driving, and for tourists who wish to visit that do not drive.

The NBN has been rolled out in Forrest, but the service can be poor. NBN Fixed Wireless is known to suffer from congestion issues, and the distance to the fixed wireless tower can also affect internet speeds. The nearest tower to Forrest is in Barwon Downs, and towers have an effective range of 14kms, which can be disrupted by terrain (trees, mountains, etc.), and precipitation. There is also limited mobile reception throughout Forrest. Improved internet access (fixed and mobile) would encourage new businesses which rely on connectivity, and better support the existing residents and businesses.

### *Local school*

In the period from 1993-2001, schools in the neighbouring areas of Barwon Downs, Gerangamete, Yeodene and Barongarook closed down. That left the Forrest Primary School as the only primary school in the district (schools in Colac, Birregurra, Apollo Bay and Carlisle River being closest). Forrest Primary School contains the Forrest Pre-School (also the central pre-school for the district, the nearest being in Apollo Bay, Colac and Birregurra), in addition to long day-care and out of school hours care, assisting parents who need to travel longer distances for work outside of Forrest. The school is a significant employer with three full-time and eight part-time staff, and one trainee. The school has offered traineeships to local residents for over 20 years.

With Forrest Primary School being the central school, pre-school, and childcare service for the community, it creates traffic for local businesses in town, such as the General Store. It also works with many of the community groups in Forrest. If Forrest were to lose its primary school, there would be many negative knock-on effects causing harm to Forrest's future.

### *Climate change*

Human-induced climate change is a problem that will require a united, global effort to combat. However, the effects of climate change do and will continue to affect Forrest at a community level. Such effects include increasing temperatures, drying climates, increased and more serious bushfires, droughts, and more extreme weather. As the Gateway to the Otways, Forrest is vulnerable to bushfires and drought, and the effect of climate change on biodiversity is a serious threat by itself, but may also affect Forrest's eco-tourism economy. Increasing temperatures will also affect Forrest's residents, especially as the community is ageing. More frequent heatwaves will put older people, more susceptible to heat-induced illness, at risk. Forrest is occasionally subject to flooding (e.g. the spillover of Barwon Dam in 2012), and with the increase in extreme weather events this could become more frequent. To remain safe and stay resilient in the face of climate change, Forrest must anticipate more frequent bushfires, flooding and drought, and develop plans for sustainable recovery.

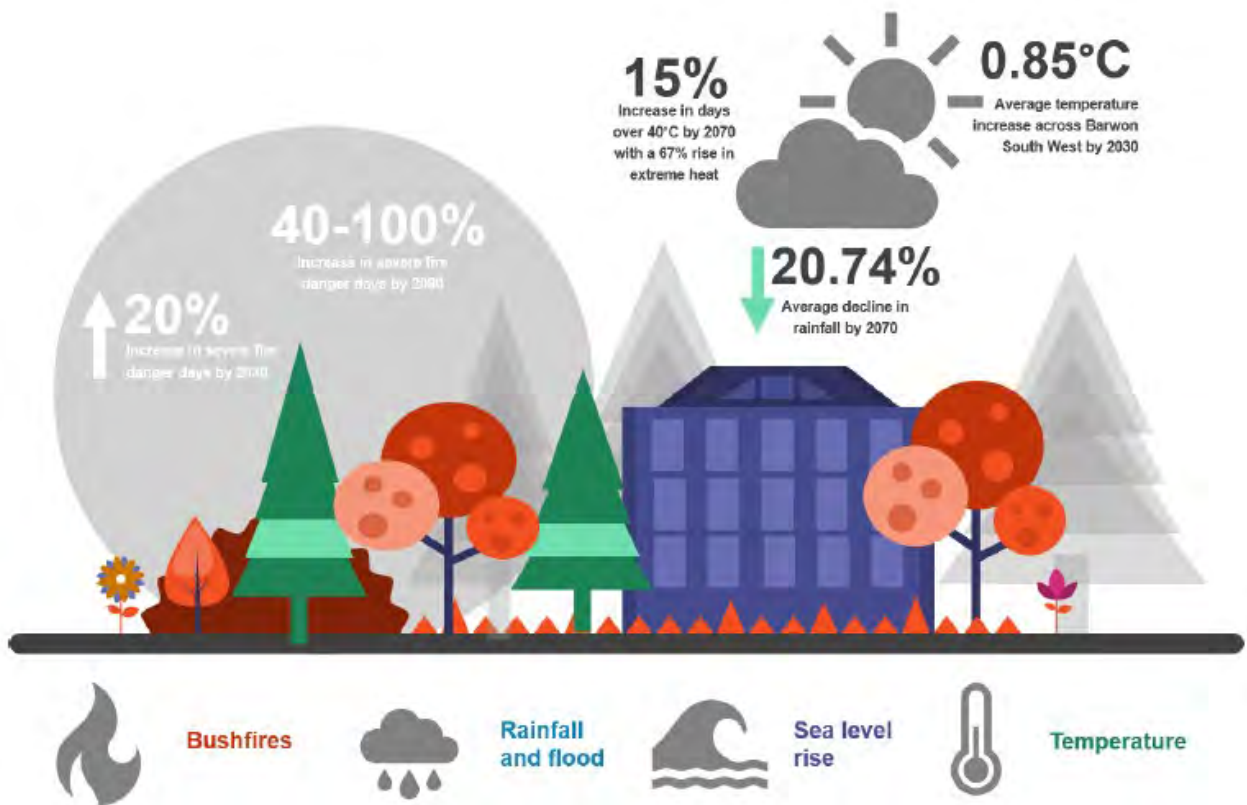


Figure 2: Projected climate change impacts in Barwon South West (Geelong Regional Alliance, 2018, CSIRO, 2015)

## 6.2 Current Government objectives

The following is a list of Federal/State/Regional and Local Stakeholder policies which may influence the future of Forrest:

<b>NATIONAL</b>	
Federal government policies covering issues such as regional development, agriculture, water, digital connectivity (NBN), health, climate change, energy, biodiversity and threatened species, climate change, bushfire recovery, forestry, and land use.	
Regional Institute of Australia	Project Agenda(s) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Future of Regional Jobs</li> <li>• Mid-Sized Towns (Colac, as it impact / relates to Forrest)</li> <li>• Regions in Transition</li> <li>• Effectiveness of place-based transition packages</li> <li>• Investing in Regional Development – Competition and Collaboration</li> </ul>
Tourism Australia	Tourism2020 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grow demand from Asia</li> <li>• Ensure tourism transport environment supports growth</li> <li>• Build industry resilience, productivity and quality</li> </ul>
Regional Development Australia	2011 The Great Ocean Road World Class Tourism Investment Study - A Product Gap Audit  Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF)
<b>STATE</b>	
Regional Development Victoria	Victoria's Regional Statement  2016 – 2020 Victorian Visitor Economy Strategy Action Plan  Grants and Programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stronger Regional Communities Program</li> <li>• Regional Tourism Infrastructure Fund</li> <li>• Regional Infrastructure Fund</li> <li>• Regional Community Leadership Program</li> </ul>
Regional Roads Victoria	Fixing Country Roads Program

<p>Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning</p>	<p>2003 DSE A New Future for the Otways</p> <p>2009 Caring for Country – the Otways and You: Great Otway National Park and Otway Forest Park Management Plan</p> <p>Protecting Victoria’s Environment – Biodiversity 2037</p> <p>Victoria’s Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2017-2020</p> <p>State of the Environment 2018</p> <p>Victoria’s Climate Science Report 2019</p> <p>Current Corporate Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Zero emissions, climate-ready economy and community</li> <li>• Safe, sustainable and productive water resources</li> <li>• Reliable, sustainable and affordable energy services</li> <li>• A safe and quality built-environment</li> <li>• Sustainable and effective local governments</li> <li>• Reduced impact of major bushfires and other emergencies on our people, property and the environment</li> </ul>
<p>VisitVictoria</p>	<p>2013 – 16 Victoria’s Regional Tourism Strategy</p> <p>Victoria’s 2020 Tourism Strategy</p> <p>2014-2024 Victoria’s Trails Strategy</p>

**REGIONAL**

<p>G21 Geelong Regional Alliance</p>	<p>G21 Adventure Trails</p>
<p>Eastern Maar Aboriginal Corporation</p>	<p>Eastern Maar Country Plan</p>
<p>Barwon Water</p>	<p>2017 Forrest Waste Water Investigation</p> <p>Strategy 2030</p>
<p>Great Ocean Road Regional Tourism</p>	<p>2015-2025 Strategic master plan for the Great Ocean Road Region Visitor Economy</p> <p>2015-2017 Destination Action Plan: Otways</p>

**LOCAL**

<p>Colac Otway Shire</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002 Colac Otway Stormwater Management Plan (vol 1&amp;2)</li> <li>• 2004 COS Economic Development and Tourism Strategy</li> <li>• 2006-2010 Recreation Strategy</li> <li>• 2007 Rural Land Strategy</li> <li>• 2010-2018 Environment Strategy</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2011 COS Rural Living Strategy</li> <li>• 2011 COS Open Space Final Report</li> <li>• 2013-2015 Environment Action Plan</li> <li>• 2013 Roadmap for a Carbon Neutral Plan</li> <li>• 2015 Domestic Wastewater Management Plan</li> <li>• 2017-2021 COS Council Plan</li> <li>• 2017-2021 COS Health and Wellbeing Plan</li> <li>• 2017-2027 Climate Change Adaptation Plan</li> <li>• 2019 COS Tourism Parking and Traffic Strategy</li> <li>• 2019-2024 Economic Development Strategy</li> <li>• 2020 COS Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan</li> <li>• Colac 2050 Growth Plan</li> </ul>
Surf Coast Shire	2019 Rural Hinterland Futures Strategy
Forrest and District	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2002 Nature-based tourism strategy</li> <li>• 2004 Angahook-Otway Investigation</li> <li>• 2005 Feasibility Study Into Increased Economic Activity In Forrest</li> <li>• 2007 Reviewed Forrest Township Masterplan</li> <li>• 2010 Forrest Structure Plan 2010</li> <li>• 2011 Forrest Small Town Infrastructure Plan</li> <li>• 2015 Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Strategic Plan</li> <li>• 2015 Tiger Rail Trail Feasibility Study</li> <li>• 2016-2019 Forrest Primary School Strategic Plan</li> <li>• 2018 Forrest Mountain Bike Trail Economic Analysis</li> <li>• 2019 Forrest Gateway to the Otways Assessing feasibility, building collaboration</li> </ul>