

Upper King Valley

Community
Action Plan



2024 to 2027

Foreword

People make a place. Here in the Upper King Valley, we have a beautiful natural environment – a gateway to the Victorian Alps, the King River, Lake William Hovell, Paradise Falls, and more. For us, it is both the social and physical environments that make it a special place to live. We are known for being relaxed, friendly and welcoming communities.

We have experienced our fair share of bush fires (2006/07, 2020 among others), floods and destructive storms. This has made us resilient, however, each recovery after a natural disaster, has left us feeling slightly less resilient. Covid didn't help either. Over the last 20 years, we have lost these local services that support a rural community – the local doctor, community health services, kindergarten, visiting library service, waste transfer station, etc. and this has made us less self-reliant.

So, what makes us strong? A 'can-do' attitude, high community participation (over 30 community groups in a population of about 800 people in the district), an ability to embrace change in our agricultural sector (vegetables, dairy and beef to tobacco to vineyards), and the spirit of the people who live here and choose to stay.

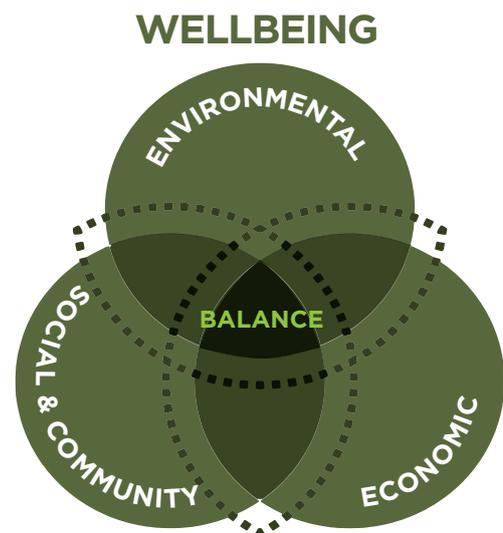
This Community Action Plan has been a positive opportunity to bring us together (instead of just rallying together during disasters!).

This Plan brings together the dreams and visions we have for the Upper King Valley. We now have a framework on which to build our future. It is our hope that our smaller communities within the Upper King Valley will embrace this Plan, that they developed, as an opportunity for change and growth that is aligned with the values of our people.

Here's to a brighter future for the Upper King Valley, caring for our people and our environment.

King Valley Residents Association Committee,

November 2023



King Valley Residents Association

Acknowledgements



We thank Rural Aid for their support and for providing us with Peter Kenyon's facilitation skills and experience in working with small rural communities.

Thank you to the Whitfield Recreation Reserve Committee for use of the Rec Reserve venue for the Community Opportunities Workshop and the All-Day Conversations. Our grateful thanks to our local caterers – Ally and Petra; Hobbledeyhoy Café and The Oven bakery.

The King Valley Residents Association Committee have driven this Community Planning process and developed an inclusive process for the extensive community consultations. We thank all the people who contributed their views and ideas for this Community Action Plan.

Our Story



The King Valley is situated in north-east Victoria and is known nationally for being a fine wine making district, with beautiful agricultural land.

We are so much more in our history, people, natural environment, the climate, location and economy. We see a bright future ahead if we can BALANCE our social needs, our environmental concerns, and our economic challenges.

The King Valley's fertile soil, access to the waters of the King River for agriculture and high rainfall attracted farming enterprises. Initially, market gardens with the Chinese migrants; then dairy and beef farms; followed by tobacco farms with the Italian migrants; and now vineyards are the predominant industry. This has led to the development of food, hospitality, and tourism related businesses.

Beef cattle and Dairy farms are still a part of the rural economy, with some specialisations in the district, such as blueberry farming at Whitlands, and local Hops and Walnut farms.

Our story will focus on the Upper King Valley – the Valley from Edi Cutting to Lake William Hovell that dams the King River. It is a district story that includes the settlements of Cheshunt South, Edi Upper, Edi, Rose River and Whitlands. Our two small towns are Whitfield and Cheshunt, rural villages that nestle in the Valley that service the district.

Entrepreneurship has been a strong theme to the lives of our people. Solutions had to be found to make a living in conditions that could be harsh, and an area that is somehow remote perhaps due to the Victorian Alps being the end point to our Valley. An example of this is a remote manufacturing enterprise - Whitlands Engineering, employing 36 people in ongoing jobs which also provides young people with apprenticeships.



Our Story CONTINUED



Our history covers the Dairy Train that stopped at farms and took the milk to Wangaratta – sometimes it took people too! Tobacco growers, who had four families living on a farm, everything bought on credit till the tobacco was harvested and the crop sold – profits could then assist those families to buy their own homes. The story goes, that John Brown (of the iconic Brown Brothers) asked the tobacco growers to grow grapes for him – those who foresaw the demise of the tobacco industry made the change to grapes.

Typo Station, at Rose River, is a strong part of recent history – an early example of social enterprise. Matt Pfahlert (CEO of Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship - ACRE), is now based at Beechworth. Matt started his first social enterprise, Typo Station in 1993 at the age of 23, working with ‘at risk’ young people in wilderness settings. Local people strongly supported Typo Station, at that time, as community volunteers.

The Creative Arts have contributed significantly to the Valley by supporting the values held by us of beauty, creativity and bringing people together. An example is the Annual King Valley Art Show, organised over 24 years by local volunteers.

Our future needs to focus on sustainability with diversification in farming and tourism, with nature-based tourism a growth expansion possibility. Biodiversity also needs to be a very important focus area for us. Due to climate change, we will have to adapt to more frequent natural disasters – so our resilience as a community, as neighbours, and the service nature of our townships, will have increasing importance. As will the role of emergency management services.

We have much to build on and are ready to do so with this Community Action Plan.

Our Vision

Our vision is for the beautiful King Valley with its pristine environment to be left for future generations better than we came to it, and for our communities to be socially cohesive, economically viable and environmentally responsible.

Our Goals

Below are the five community goals which guide our community aspirations.

- To provide a living and working environment that enables families with young children, skilled people and businesses, and older people to live and prosper in the Upper King Valley.
- To facilitate opportunities that build upon local assets, as well as the capacities and creativity of all community members.
- To treasure our environment and ensure the King River, mountains, waterways, and lakes are preserved and kept at a pristine level for all to enjoy.
- To encourage and support an innovative and collaborative business environment that strengthens and diversifies our local economy.
- To retain strong sporting, cultural and community groups; local police and emergency services; local services and community facilities.



Our Guiding Values

The following five guiding values and attitudes provide the context for our communities' identified actions and initiatives.

Community Connection and Pride

Ensuring all residents experience community connection, inclusion, participation, and a sense of pride in our uniqueness, history, local assets, and achievements.

Mutual Respect Striving for community relationships built on integrity and understanding while recognising and respecting the differences that exist in our communities.

Rural Lifestyle Retaining our simplicity of life and sense of community that comes from living in small villages and settlements where we know our neighbours and support each other during adversity and change.

Respect for Environment Valuing and protecting our unique natural environment and rural landscapes.

Active Citizenship Fostering attitudes and behaviours that encourage greater community engagement and ownership of actions that help us build a wonderful future for the people of the Upper King Valley.



Our Challenges

Like many small inland rural communities, our community needs to respond creatively to a series of demographic, social, economic, and environmental challenges. These include:

Lack of appropriate social, digital, community services and physical infrastructure

- Poor Information and Communications Technology (ICT) connectivity - poor mobile phone coverage; parts of our community can only get internet service via satellite.
- Limited housing availability for new families who wish to settle here and for workers required by local businesses.
- Lack of health services - no local doctor, limited district nursing services, very limited palliative care services. There are NO health services based geographically in the Upper King Valley.
- Older people not being able to 'age in place' due to lack of neighbours, lack of extended family living in the area, lack of support services & aged care services, etc.
- Limited support for mental health challenges.
- The poor state of key roads such as the Wangaratta Whitfield Road and the Benalla Whitfield Road (a key link road that has 6 kilometres still unsealed).
- Lack of foresight from our local government with managing waste with the increasing visitor numbers / tourism, despite residents raising this issue with our Local Government Councillors over the last five years.

Natural Disasters and Emergency Management

- Susceptibility to, and frequency of, bushfire, flood, storms and lightning strikes. High potential for natural disasters - significant bush fire area; regular flooding of the King River; storms; lightning strikes (due to the mineral content in the rocks).
- Evacuation of Upper King Valley visitors / tourists during major emergency management events - particularly with parts of our area that have "one road in and one road out" and an unsealed Local Government LINK Road being used by emergency management agencies for evacuation purposes.

Business

- Limited business networking and cross referral to other local businesses in Upper King Valley.
- Balancing the growth potential for the 'big economic players' and the smaller businesses in the Upper King Valley.
- Winter closing season.

Attaining Wellbeing and Balance

- Obtaining a balance between economic growth and protecting our pristine environment.
- Loss of local people, particularly families and the flow on impact to primary school populations.
- Insufficient and ineffective engagement processes with impacted communities, reducing overall community wellbeing and creating a divide between our community and our local government.
- Limited understanding of interrelationships between wellbeing, emissions reduction, and economic investment strategy.
- Recovering and regrouping as a community since COVID.



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natural environment, the climate, location
and economy.*

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Our Assets

Social Networks

- 30+ community groups - some examples:
 - King Basin Landcare Group, Edi Black Range Landcare Group
 - King Valley Arts
 - Sustainable King Valley
 - King Valley Tourism Association
 - King Valley CWA
 - Craft at Cheshunt Hall
 - Whitlands Progress Association Inc.
 - King Valley Residents Association
- Sporting Clubs & Physical activity – King Valley United Football and Netball Club, Edi Tennis Club, Whitfield Tennis, Tai Chi, Yoga, Whitfield Golf Club, Fishing Club
- Churches – Catholic, Anglican, Church at Cheshunt Hall
- Social media groups including Whitfield & Surrounds Facebook Page
- Community lunches – alternate between Edi & Cheshunt Halls
- Pangerang Neighbourhood House – Cheshunt Community Hub.

People

- 862 residents
- History of community ‘can do’ initiatives
- Farming skills, trade skills, engineering skills
- Passionate locals, strong community leaders, bunch of wise oldies willing to contribute
- Artists
- Young people, young business leaders
- Historical local knowledge by long-time residents
- King Valley Good Neighbour Program
- Networking opportunities through websites (whitlands.org) and Social Media (Whitfield & Surrounds Facebook Page)
- Whitfield Matters, Wangaratta Chronicle - King Valley Page on Wednesdays
- Community noticeboards
- School newsletters.

Physical

- Rural landscapes, village atmosphere, biodiversity
- Foothills of the Alpine National Park
- Heritage buildings - Cheshunt Hall, churches, Old railway shed
- Community halls
- Recreation reserves, Swinburne Pavilion, golf course, tennis courts, netball courts, playground, walking trails, camping areas
- Waterfalls, Lake William Howell, Power’s Lookout
- Camping areas
- Vineyards
- Moyhu Transfer Station
- Community Trailer.

Our Assets

Economic

- Strong farming community - dairy, beef cattle, grape growers, orchards, blueberries, walnuts, honey bees / apiary, olives, agricultural contractors
- King Valley Tourism Association
- Alpine National Park - campers, 4WD, hunting, fishing
- Food Hub - Sustainable King Valley
- Local General Stores - Cheshunt General Store, Whitfield General Store / petrol station, 2 Post Offices - located at the General Stores
- Food businesses & Hospitality - King Valley Fine Foods, Adele's Pasta, Mountain View Pub, Hobbledehoy Café, The Oven bakery, King River Brewing, Chrismont Restaurant, Gracebrook Restaurant, A Tavola! Cooking School at Pizzini Wine
- Wellbeing businesses - Valley Soul Yoga, King Valley Myotherapy
- Trade/Engineering business - Whitlands Engineering, Whitfield Garage, King Valley Motorcycles, Electricians, Plumbers, Builders
- Rose River Run Equine Adventure Park
- Jackson's Sawmilling/Firewood
- Local professional services - High Country Bookkeeping, Sartori Legal
- Accommodation Businesses - 33 Bed and Breakfasts; Gentle Annie Caravan Park; Valley View Caravan Park
- Cellar doors at Wineries - Red Feet; La Cantina, Gracebrook, King River Estate, Dal Zotto, Pizzini, Politini, Chrismont, Darling Estate; and numerous vineyards
- Transport businesses - Dyson school bus service; King Valley Wine Tours, Fallons Bus Services
- Trash & Treasure at King Valley Community Memorial Hall
- 590,000 annual visitors and Tourism dollar return.

Culture, Stories & Sources of Pride

- King Valley Arts (KVA) - Film Club, KVA Presents (live shows), community grants
- Special annual events - KVA Annual Art Show, Cheshunt Flower Show, Winery Weekends - La Dolce Vita, Autumn Harvest Event, Whitlands Easter Party
- Whitlands History book, Whitlands DVD - Living in the regions (ACMI, Melbourne)
- Italian heritage, tobacco industry heritage
- Old railway
- Chinese heritage and aqueducts
- Tobacco kilns
- Bushranger heritage
- Jessie's Creek Project
- Fishing, water sports, bird watching, hunting.

Institutions

- Whitfield Community Childcare Centre
- Education - Primary Schools x 3 (part of a 5 school cluster)
- Local Police
- Rural City of Wangaratta
- CFA (Cheshunt, Whitfield) & SES
- Parks Victoria
- Tourism North East
- Regional Development Victoria.

Our Strategies & Actions

Strategy 1: Actively maintain a clean King River & restore Biodiversity

ACTIONS

1

- Establish a water quality baseline for the King River.
- Implement a local-specific native revegetation program to enable variety of plant and animal life (biodiversity).
- Establish a problem-solving Working Group targeting waste management in the Upper King Valley (refer to KVRA Waste Management Plan).

Strategy 2: Build Community Connections

ACTIONS

2

- Hold annual community social event (Picnic at Lake William Hovell).
- Revisit the Good Neighbour Program (don't reinvent the wheel).
- Revisit Small Towns Transformation Project - Building Bridges (Community Arts).
- Establish a program for year-round Sports activities considering range of age groups, eg Seniors, young people.

Strategy 3: Enhance local community services

ACTIONS

3

- Develop Ageing in Place Plan (Rural Model of Aged Care for the Upper King Valley and advocate for Commonwealth funding to implement the Model) and ensure local support services are provided for older residents.
- Advocate to retain and expand presence of local police in Whitfield to service the Upper King Valley and surrounding districts and local emergency services.
- Revisit the work on re-establishing local health services, eg GP / local doctor service.
- Establish a Working Group to advocate for improving mobile phone coverage and internet connectivity.
- Establish a Working Group to advocate for improved road maintenance.

Strategy 4: Strengthen local business base

ACTIONS

4

- Support the Business Breakfast initiative to encourage improved networking.
- Pay-it-forward program - Businesses & Community.
- Community Education program to develop an understanding the Upper King Valley economy (farms, tourism, education, trades).

Our Strategies & Actions

LEAD GROUPS

Social connections & Creative Arts

Sustainable King Valley
King Valley Arts
King Valley CWA
Craft Group – Cheshunt
Community Lunches – Cheshunt & Edi
Birthday Bash
Trash & Treasure – King Valley Community Memorial Hall
Whitfield Recreation Reserve Committee
Cheshunt Hall Committee
Whitland's Progress Association Inc.
Whitfield Matters Community Newsletter
Whitfield & Surrounds Facebook Page

Environmental

King Basin Landcare Group
Edi Black Range Landcare Group

Education & Early Childhood

Whitfield Community Childcare Centre
Whitfield Primary School – School Council & Parents and Friends

Sport

King Valley United Football & Netball Club
Edi Tennis Club
King River & District Fishing Club
Whitfield Golf Club

Business

King Valley Tourism Association
Wines of the King Valley

Emergency Management

Whitfield CFA
Cheshunt CFA
Whitfield Police

POTENTIAL PARTNERS

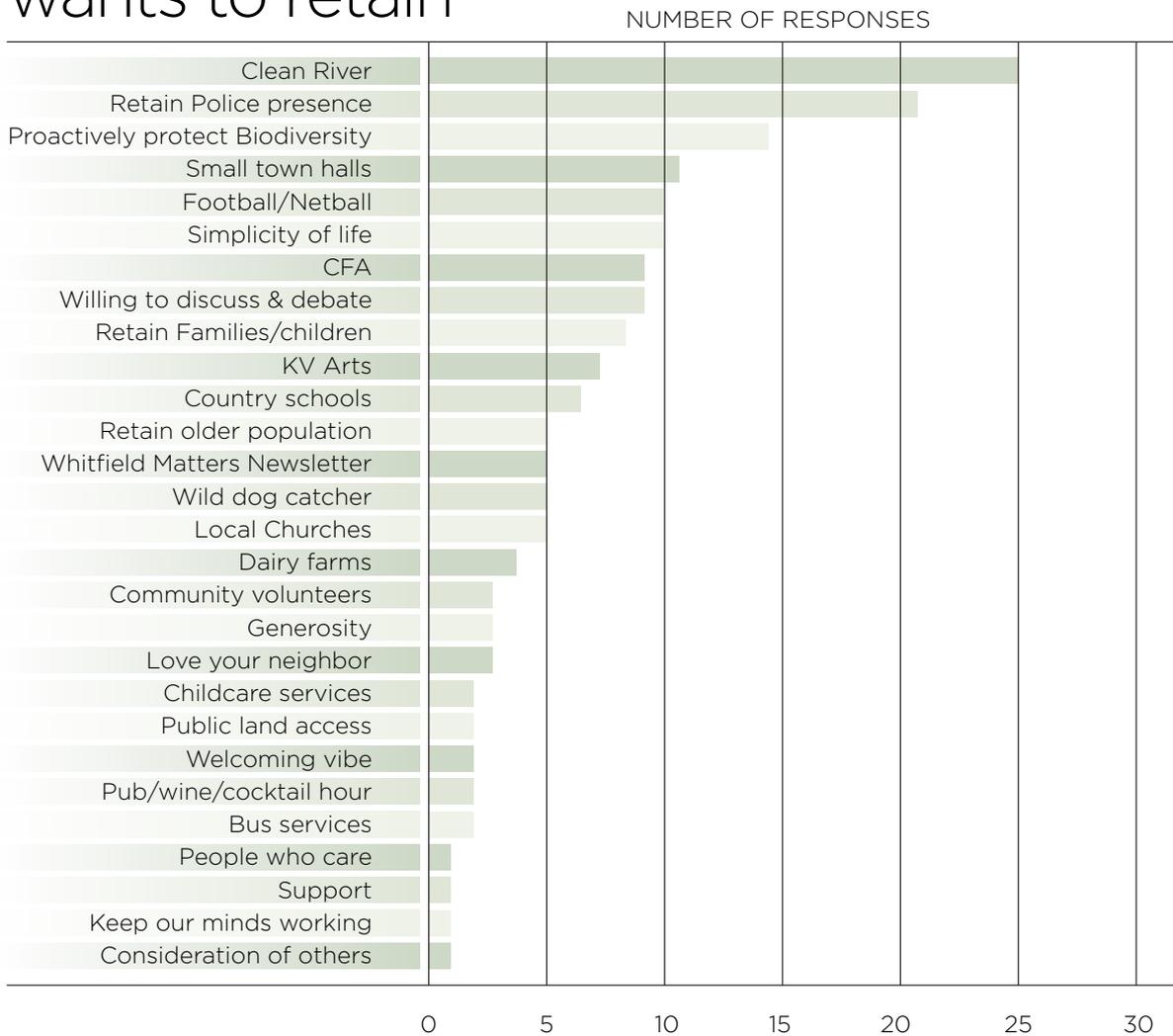
Rural City of Wangaratta
Member for Indi (Federal)
Member for Ovens Valley (Victorian)
North East Catchment Management Authority
Goulburn Murray Water
Tourism North East
Creative Victoria
Regional Arts Victoria
Department of Energy, Environment & Climate Action
Regional Development Victoria
Regional Development Australia Hume
Victoria Police
Northeast Health Wangaratta
Gateway Health
Royal Flying Doctor Service
Rural Aid
Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal

Abbreviations

BOI	Bank of I.D.E.A.S.
CFA	Country Fire Authority
KV CWA	King Valley Country Women's Association
FRRR	Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
KB LG	King Basin Landcare Group
KVA	King Valley Arts
KVRA	King Valley Residents Association
KVTA	King Valley Tourism Association
RCoW	Rural City of Wangaratta
RDA Hume	Regional Development Australia Hume
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
TNE	Tourism North East
DEECA	Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action
NECMA	North East Catchment Management Authority



What the community wants to retain



Age distribution in the King Valley



A
R
O
T
C
I
V

Upper King Valley

