

# Engagement Summary Report

2026-27 Council Budget



**East Gippsland Shire Council**  
Phone 5153 9500  
Email [feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au](mailto:feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au)  
Web [eastgippsland.vic.gov.au](http://eastgippsland.vic.gov.au)

# Background

Our annual budget sets out how Council will fund services and capital works for the coming financial year, while ensuring ratepayers' money is managed responsibly and delivers value for the community. The budget is part of an integrated planning framework that supports our long-term Community Vision and our medium-term Council Plan.

Through the budget, Council plans for the management of more than \$1.2 billion in community property and infrastructure, and the delivery of services including libraries, emergency management, local roads, waste and recycling, sport and recreation facilities, public health services and local laws.

Each year, Council is required under the *Local Government Act 2020* to prepare and adopt a budget for the upcoming financial year and the following three years. The budget outlines proposed rates and charges, along with other key financial and service information required by the Act and the *Local Government Regulations 2020*.

## Engagement overview

### Public engagement period

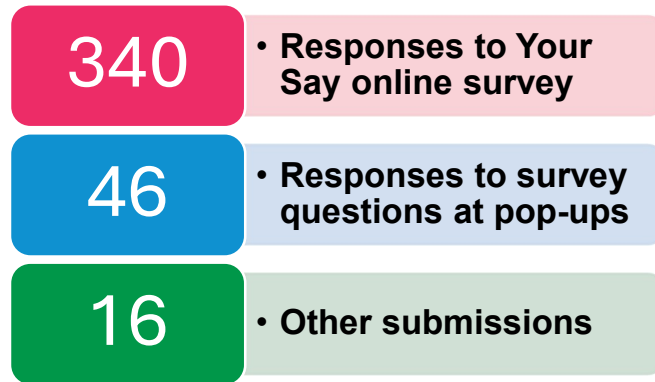
To help shape our 2026-27 Annual Budget and plan future capital works and initiatives, Council invited community feedback between 22 January and 9 March 2026. Community members were encouraged to share their ideas and priorities for the projects and services that matter most to them.

### Who did we reach?

We engaged with the community through a range of channels, including direct emails, face-to-face conversations, media coverage, community meetings and social media.

- 3 community pop-up sessions in Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance and Paynesville
- 1,100 visits to our online Your Say page
  - 933 aware participants
  - 424 informed participants
  - 337 engaged contributors
  - Single-day peak of 205 visitors
- The budget survey itself received 582 visitors, 337 contributors (340 complete submissions).
- Notification of engagement process to our 13,400 Facebook followers
- Engagement with Youth Ambassadors
- Stakeholder group presentations in Omeo, Orbost and Mallacoota
- Direct emails to sporting groups and committees of management
- Discussions with East Gippsland Marketing Inc, Business and Tourism Associations and the Agriculture Sector Advisory Committee
- Engagement with the East Gippsland Ratepayers' Association
- Engagement with First Nations representatives
- Direct email to the East Gippsland Community Panel
- Direct distribution of information and promotion of engagement opportunities to arts and culture, place-based, environment, aquatic and recreation, and business databases

## What we heard

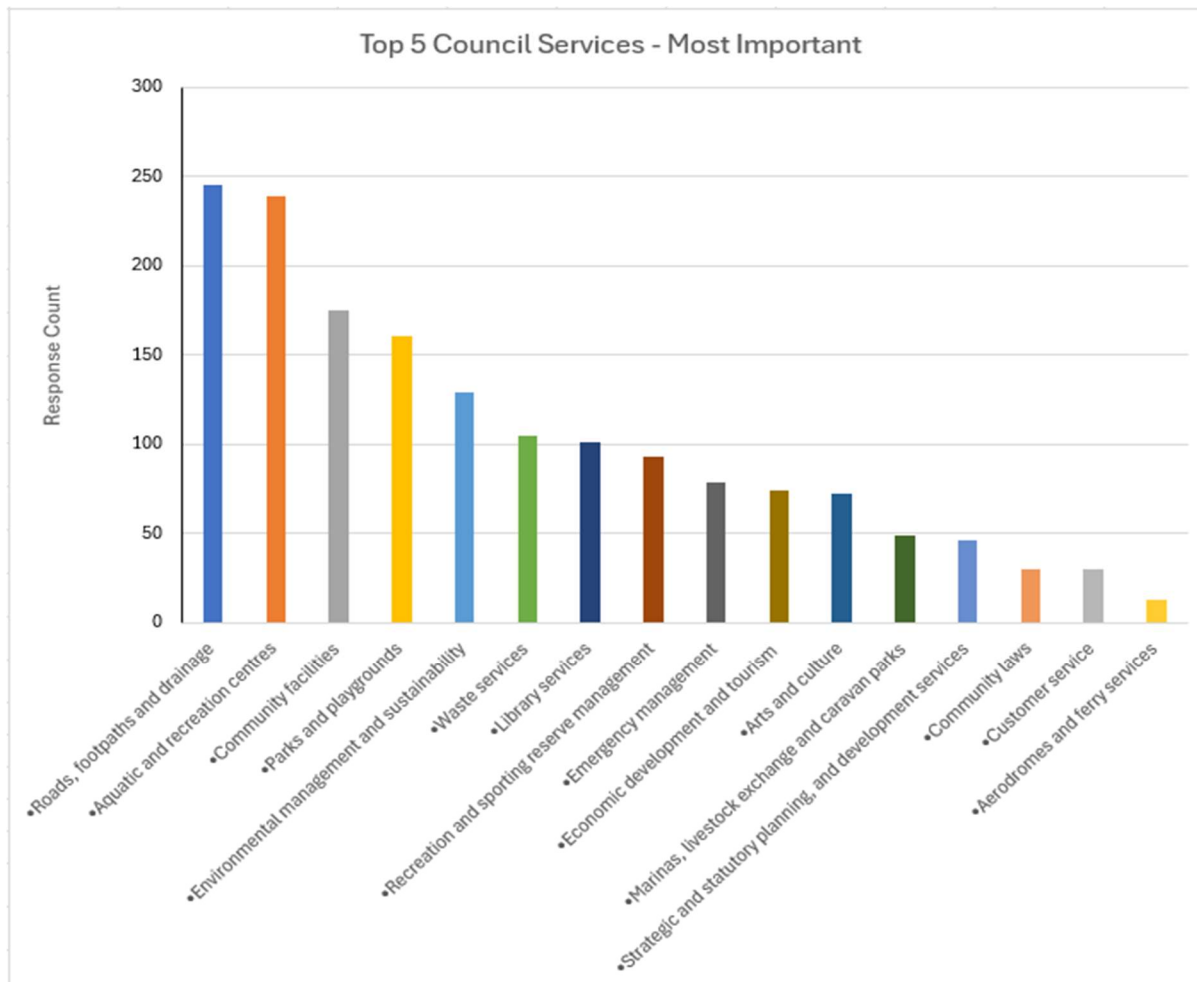


Community feedback closely aligns with Year 2 Council Plan priorities, particularly in relation to core infrastructure, asset maintenance and transparency.

# Engagement summary

This section summarises the key themes raised through community feedback and details how these insights will inform our planning and decision-making for the year ahead.

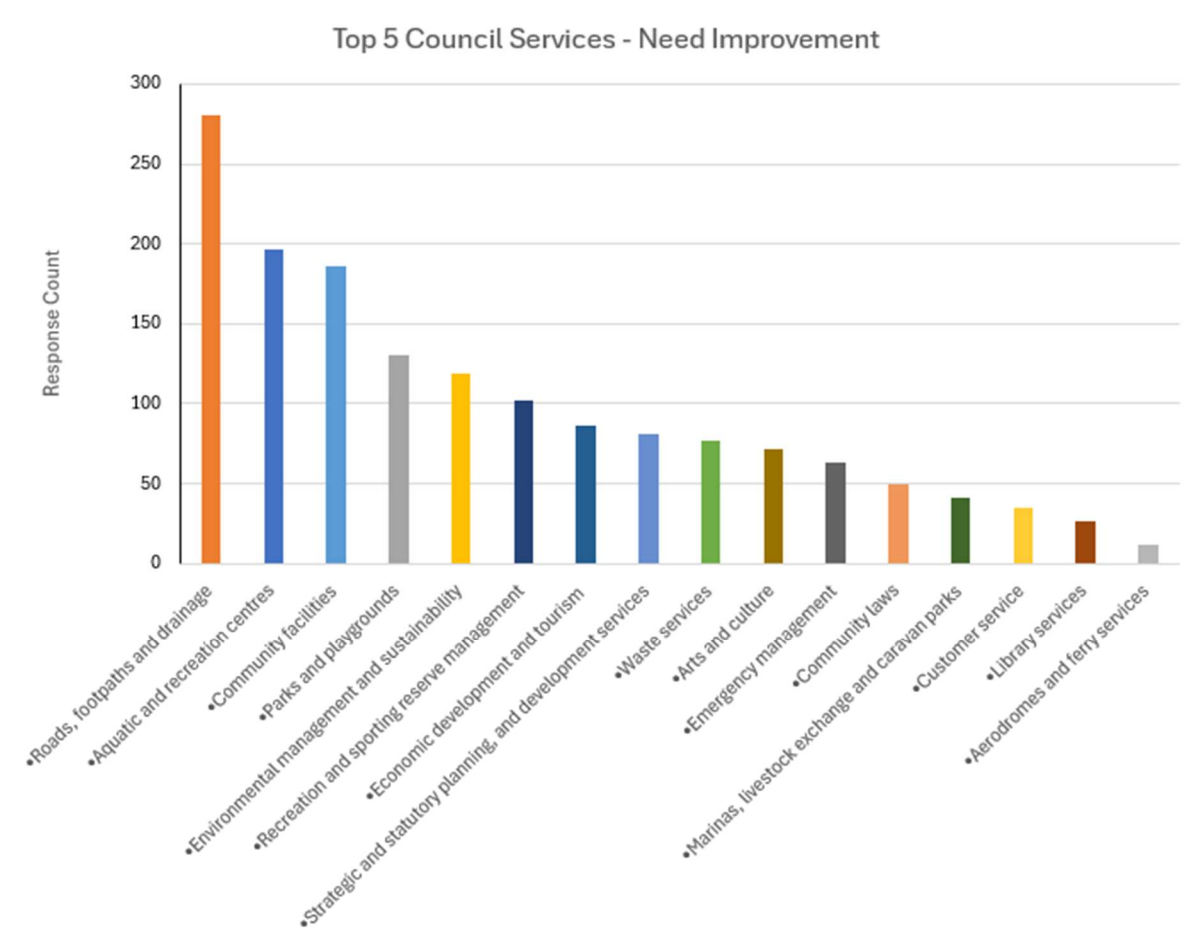
**Question 1 - Please select the top five Council services that are most important to you.**



## 2026 ranking compared to 2025 budget engagement

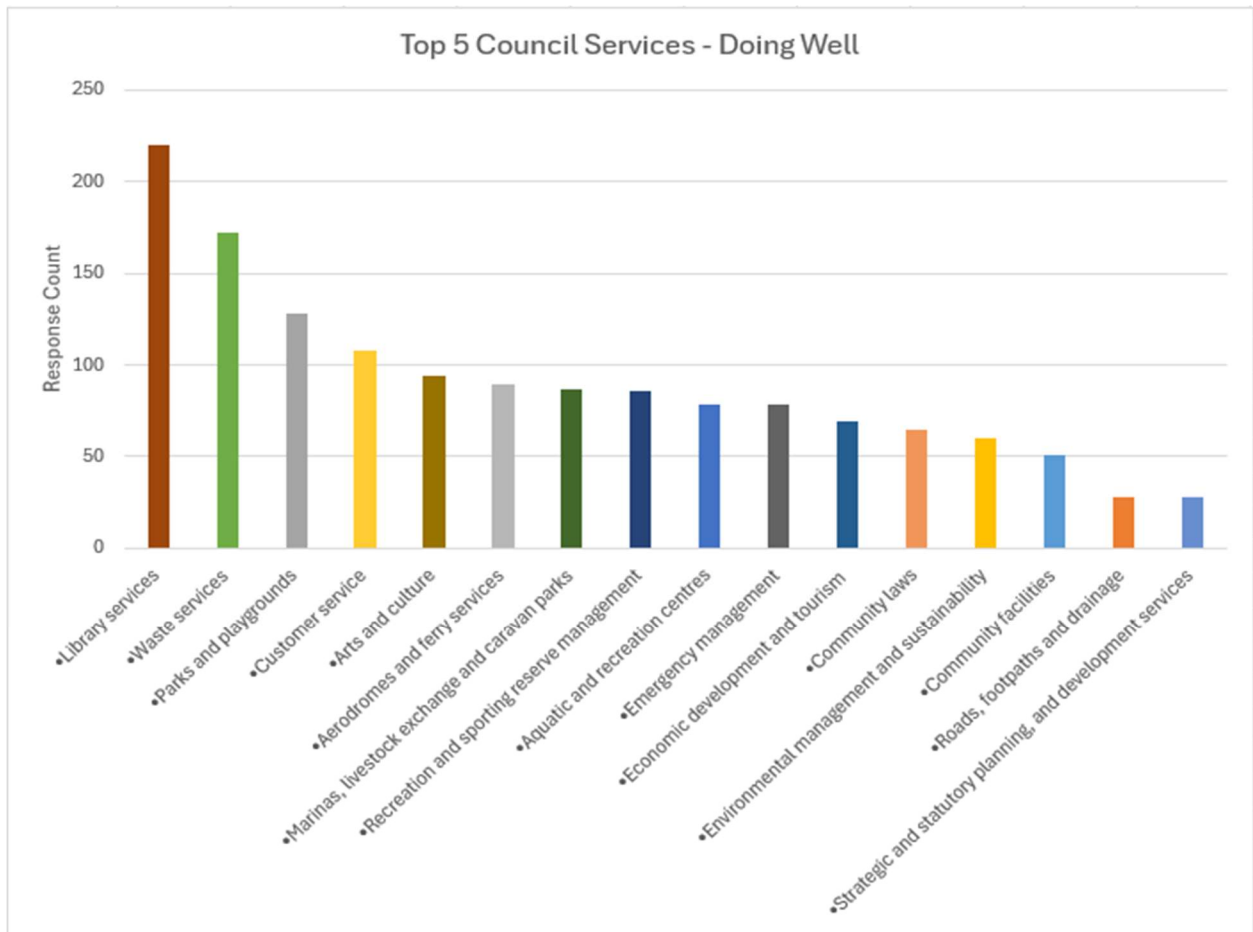
	2026 Engagement	2025 Engagement
1	Roads, footpaths and drainage	Aquatic and recreation centres
2	Aquatic and recreation centres	Roads, footpaths and drainage
3	Community facilities	Parks and playgrounds
4	Parks and playgrounds	Environmental management and sustainability
5	Environmental management and sustainability	Community facilities

**Question 2 - Please select the top five Council services that you believe need improvement.**



Top 5 Services that need improvement	
1	Roads, footpaths and drainage
2	Aquatic and recreation centres
3	Community facilities
4	Parks and playgrounds
5	Environmental management and sustainability

**Question 3 - Please select the top five services that you believe Council are doing well**



Top 5 Services that are doing well	
1	Library services
2	Waste services
3	Parks and playgrounds
4	Customer service
5	Arts and culture

## **Question 4 - What would be on your wish list, keeping in mind Council has a limited discretionary budget?**

### **Summary of responses**

- Strong demand to fix and renew core community infrastructure – particularly the Bairnsdale outdoor pool, indoor sporting facilities, playgrounds, footpaths and public toilets, which are seen as essential to health, wellbeing and liveability.
- Back-to-back focus on roads and connectivity – widespread calls to improve road condition, drainage and dust control, complete missing footpaths, and deliver safer walking and cycling connections within and between towns.
- Desire for more vibrant, safe and attractive town centres and public spaces – including action on the Nicholson Street Mall, better parks and foreshore areas, improved amenity, and places that support families, young people and social connection.
- Expectation that Council prioritises maintenance, fairness and everyday services – with investment spread more equitably across towns, better care of existing assets, and practical outcomes that residents can see and use.

### **Topics raised**

A line-by-line review of responses to this question found that 254 items are capital works related ideas (with 135 ideas concentrated on aquatic and indoor sport infrastructure).

- 135 ideas relating to Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool, BARC/Aquadome upgrades and additional courts.
- 37 ideas relating to footpaths, shared paths, trails and boardwalks.
- 29 ideas relating to road and drainage renewals.
- 22 ideas relating to parks and playground upgrades.
- 15 ideas relating to public amenities (toilets, shelters, seating and shade).

### **Key themes**

The subsequent pages present all survey feedback organised according to the five Council services that have been determined to be of highest importance to the community:

- Roads, footpaths and drainage.
- Aquatic and recreation centres.
- Community facilities.
- Parks and playgrounds.
- Environmental management and sustainability.

## 1. Roads, footpaths and drainage

Roads, footpaths and drainage was the most important service and ranked the most important in terms of improvement.

*Note - It is important to note that feedback relating to roads may refer to assets that are not managed by Council.*

### Summary of responses:

Number of responses	Summary of responses
108 responses	Roads (general requests about road condition, maintenance and upgrades/repairs across the shire, often framed as roads need maintenance / improve roads).
65 responses	Footpaths (general calls for more/connected footpaths, finishing missing links, improving safety and accessibility).
13 responses	Pedestrian safety measures (crossings, traffic lights/roundabouts/safer crossing points linked to walking access).
9 responses	Specifically mentioned the Nicholson Street Mall, raising concerns about safety, activation, traffic flow and the need for redevelopment.
9 responses	Drainage / stormwater (drainage issues, drainage pipes, kerb and channel, flooding references).
7 responses	Bike/shared paths and active transport links (bike paths/shared paths/active transport strategy type requests).
6 responses	Rail trail maintenance/access (maintenance, weeds, entrances/exits, promotion).

### Current Council Plan Year 1 deliverables that respond to this feedback:

Council is delivering its scheduled and responsive road maintenance program across sealed and unsealed roads, including pothole repairs, pavement defect treatments, grading and re-sheeting, responding directly to widespread concerns about road condition. Work is also underway to develop a business case to bring proactive drainage cleaning and investigations inhouse, addressing community feedback about blocked gutters and drainage performance.

In parallel, Council continues integrated water management and stormwater planning to improve network resilience and align drainage outcomes with asset management and climate risk planning. Priority footpath construction and renewal is progressing through the Access and Mobility Framework, focusing on missing links, accessibility and safety improvements, and a shire wide prioritisation to guide future footpath delivery.

### Planned Council Plan Year 2 initiatives that respond to this feedback:

- 1.1.1.4 Commence Active Transport Strategy
- 1.1.1.4 Priority footpath works and multi-year delivery program
- 3.3.1.2 Roads, drainage and footpath maintenance
- 3.3.1.2 Scheduled and responsive road and drainage maintenance
- 3.3.1.5 Asset Renewal Programs

## 2. Aquatic and recreation centres

Pools and recreation centres were the second most important service and ranked second in need of improvement among those who participated in the survey.

### Summary of responses:

Number of responses	Summary of Responses:
163 responses	Restore and reopen the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool (including fix/repair, revamp, redevelop, keep it open, and upgrade/replace) often being describing it as an essential summer, school and public-health facility.
16 responses	Requests relating to indoor sport and BARC, people most asking to expand the BARC stadium capacity by adding/expanding basketball courts (including multiple mentions of the basketball association and court shortages).
13 responses	Upgrade BARC's gym and associated amenities (modern equipment, more space, air-conditioning, more classes, change rooms, parking and similar internal improvements).
9 responses	New or upgraded 50-metre pool (often framed as an Olympic size/competition-standard pool, sometimes linked to the broader aquatic precinct).
6 responses	Upgrades/expansion to the Lakes Entrance Aquadome (make it bigger, gym updates, more classes, hydrotherapy).
4 responses	More badminton courts/line marking at BARC.
3 responses	Upgrades to the Orbost Outdoor Pool (lighting/access/operations).
1 response	Request for an indoor pool at Metung.

### Current Council Plan Year 1 deliverables that respond to this feedback:

Council is considering the independent safety assessment of the Bairnsdale Outdoor Pool as part of the year one Council Plan action to present future options for the Pool. Council is also developing an Aquatic Strategy that will be considered to inform future decision making of aquatic facilities across East Gippsland.

Key upgrades currently underway include the completion of Stage 1 of the BARC reroofing project and stadium scoreboard upgrades, alongside commencement of planning for the Lakes Entrance Indoor Stadium. Improved access has also been delivered through revised operating hours at the Orbost Outdoor Pool, implemented following community consultation to better meet peak period demand.

### Planned Council Plan Year 2 initiatives that respond to this feedback:

- 1.1.1.3 Deliver programs through recreation centres
- 1.1.1.11 Finalise the East Gippsland Aquatic Strategy
- 3.3.1.3 Finalise the Aquatic and Recreation Facility Asset Maintenance Program

### 3. Community facilities

Community facilities were identified as the third most important service and ranked third in need of improvement among those who participated in the survey.

#### Summary of responses:

Number of responses	Summary or Responses:
67 responses	Community members are calling for improved and expanded sport and recreation facilities, particularly indoor courts, gyms and stadiums.
41 responses	Many respondents raised concerns about the safety and upkeep of foreshore infrastructure, including boardwalks, jetties, marinas and Coast Guard facilities.
35 responses	Community members identified public toilets and amenities as a priority, particularly their availability, cleanliness and condition in busy areas.
20 responses	Community members called for improved maintenance and support for community halls and centres, particularly in smaller communities.
18 responses	Respondents see libraries, neighbourhood houses and service centres as key community hubs and want improved access and availability.
16 responses	Community members want well maintained, accessible arts and cultural facilities that support local artists and community events.
8 responses	Council should help support a permanent home for the Paynesville Coast Guard ( <i>note this is not a Council service</i> )

#### Current Council Plan Year 1 deliverables that respond to this feedback:

Council is progressing the Sporting Facilities Plan to guide upgrades and future expansion of major facilities, including advancing draft concept planning for the Lakes Entrance Indoor Stadium toward detailed design. The Public Open Space Strategy has been adopted and has moved into early implementation, with site specific master planning and prioritisation underway, including master plans for Swan Reach and Benambra recreation reserves.

Work is also progressing on marine and foreshore infrastructure through development of maintenance and dredging strategies for the Bastion Point Boat Ramp and scoping of maintenance responsibilities for the Paynesville canals in collaboration with State agencies. Council has commenced a Public Amenities Service Review, supported by extensive community feedback to inform future service levels, maintenance standards and renewal priorities. In parallel, an Asset Optimisation Review and targeted accessibility audits and upgrades across community facilities and service centres are supporting more inclusive, sustainable and well-maintained community infrastructure.

#### Planned Council Plan Year 2 initiatives that respond to this feedback:

- 1.1.1.7 Implement the Sporting Facilities Plan and the Public Open Space Strategy
- 1.2.1.3 Complete the design for the Lakes Entrance Indoor Stadium and pursue funding
- 3.3.1.1 Commence implementation of recommendations from the Asset Optimisation Review
- 3.3.1.4 Undertake accessibility audits of priority Council infrastructure
- 3.3.1.7 Subject to resourcing, commence the implementation of the endorsed recommendations from the Public Amenities Service Review

## 4. Parks and playgrounds

Parks and Playgrounds was identified as the fourth most important service and ranked fourth in need of improvement among those who participated in the survey.

### Summary of responses:

Number of responses	Summary of Responses:
47 responses	Community members want safer, more inclusive parks and playgrounds, with shade, seating and improved facilities, especially in outlying towns.
8 responses	Requests to upgrade, renew or improve existing playgrounds/play spaces (including making them safer or more fit-for-purpose).
6 responses	Calls for more play spaces, including new playgrounds and ideas like splash-type play or additional facilities in towns that feel overlooked.
4 responses	Requests for shade, seating/tables, better amenity around parks and play areas (comfort and usability).
2 responses	Mentions that focus on maintenance and condition/safety of playgrounds or park facilities.
2 responses	Requests for improved dog parks/off-leash areas (location, safety, convenience).
1 response	A specific call for more all-abilities play equipment (e.g. swings), linked to accessibility.

### Current Council Plan Year 1 deliverables that respond to this feedback:

Council has responded to community feedback by adopting the Public Open Space Strategy and commencing implementation, including site-specific master planning and prioritisation to guide future park and playground upgrades across the shire. Master planning is underway for reserves such as Swan Reach and Benambra, supporting improved play spaces and local amenity, while the Sporting Facilities Plan continues to guide upgrades to recreation reserves that support both formal and informal play.

Accessibility audits and targeted upgrades are improving inclusion across community facilities, and the Public Amenities Service Review, supported by extensive community feedback, is informing amenity, safety and maintenance priorities in parks and foreshore areas. An Asset Optimisation Review is also underway to ensure future investment in parks and playgrounds is strategic, equitable and sustainable.

### Planned Council Plan Year 2 initiatives that respond to this feedback:

- 1.1.1.7 Implement the Sporting Facilities Plan and the Public Open Space Strategy
- 1.1.1.7 Continue the planning and design work for the West Bairnsdale Reserve to progress future development
- 3.3.1.4 Undertake accessibility audits of priority Council infrastructure
- 3.3.1.5 Complete and commence the implementation of the Asset Renewal Programs for key asset classes

## 5. Environment management and sustainability

Environmental Management and sustainability ranked fifth in order of importance and need for improvement.

### Summary of responses:

Number of responses	Summary of Responses:
12 responses	People asked for more shade/trees and greening/beautification ideas (including shade in parks/playgrounds and shade trees in town centres).
8 responses	This includes requests to increase recycling, improve bin options (e.g., paired refuse and recycling), hard rubbish collection, and changes like green waste settings / waste management fees.
6 responses	People specifically referenced roadside vegetation clearing, spraying/slashing, and verge management, often linked to safety and fire prevention.
4 responses	This includes calls to proactively manage bushland reserves, protect flora/fauna, retain old growth/canopy trees, and protect critical habitat (including advocacy for stronger protection).
3 responses	Comments included protecting waterways, references to Gippsland Lakes and actions to prevent damage to habitat affecting waterways.
1 response	Includes mentions of climate resilience/disaster preparedness, and energy-related sustainability ideas such as community batteries / renewables.
1 response	One response explicitly called for wildlife protection including removal of feral cats and enforcement.

### Current Council Plan Year 1 deliverables that respond to this feedback:

Council has progressed key Year 1 actions responding to environment feedback by progressing the Waste and Recycling Service Review and Transition Plan (endorsed) and is commencing implementation, advancing circular-economy and organics initiatives including a compost facility EOI and tender shortlisting, delivering the roadside weed management program and progressing the roadside fire-slashing season, appointing a consultant to develop the East Gippsland Bushland Strategy, and strengthening climate resilience through ongoing emergency preparedness delivery, including updated LIMPs and new CEMPs, plus continued work with partners on Gippsland Lakes health and water planning.

### Planned Council Plan Year 2 initiatives that respond to this feedback:

- 3.1.1.1 Finalise the East Gippsland Bushland Strategy
- 3.1.2.1 Climate Risk Assessment Tool pilot
- 3.1.2.5 Kerbside collection contract transition
- 3.1.2.6 Waste Transition Plan implementation
- 3.3.1.6 Deliver the roadside weed management program
- 3.3.1.7 Fire slashing season review

**Question 5 - Is there anything specific Councillors should consider when developing the Council Budget?**

- Focus on the basics and value for money – strong calls to prioritise roads, drainage, footpaths and public amenities, deliver existing projects well, and demonstrate disciplined spending and accountability.
- Renew and maintain key community assets – clear expectations to address ageing aquatic, sporting and recreation facilities as essential infrastructure that supports health, participation and young families.
- Be fair, transparent and listen better – residents want clearer priorities, better engagement, and more equitable investment across all towns, not just major centres.
- Plan for the future while protecting what we have – support for economic development and local jobs, alongside environmental protection, climate resilience and community safety.

**Question 6 - Do you have any further feedback you'd like to provide in relation to the Council Budget?**

- Strong call to get back to basics and maintain what Council already owns – repeated emphasis on fixing roads, footpaths, public toilets, pools, halls and community facilities before investing in new or “nice-to-have” projects.
- Frustration about spending priorities, efficiency and accountability – concerns about perceived waste, over-reliance on consultants, project delays and cost overruns, with expectations for tighter financial discipline and better value for money.
- Desire for fairer investment and stronger focus on families, youth and smaller towns – feedback stresses equity across the Shire, more family-friendly facilities and activities, and ensuring smaller and inland communities are not overlooked.
- Expectation of genuine engagement, transparency and practical outcomes – residents want Council to listen more, communicate decisions clearly, act on feedback, and deliver visible improvements that make towns cleaner, safer and more liveable.