

# WEST WIMMERA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2024-2029





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# Abbreviations

<b>CAPEX</b>	Capital Expenditure
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus disease
<b>EOI</b>	Expression of Interest
<b>F&amp;B</b>	Food and beverage
<b>IVS</b>	International Visitor Survey
<b>LGA</b>	Local Government Area
<b>NPS</b>	Net Promoter Score
<b>NVS</b>	National Visitor Survey
<b>PV</b>	Parks Victoria
<b>RDV</b>	Regional Development Victoria
<b>VV</b>	Visit Victoria
<b>YE</b>	Year End
<b>WSMD</b>	Wimmera Southern Mallee Development

# 1. Executive Summary

## 1.1. Vision

West Wimmera will continue to sustainably grow its economic base and local employment, offering towns that are attractive and welcoming to support growing communities and small business.

## 1.2. Economic Development Strategy for West Wimmera

This West Wimmera Economic Development Strategy (WWEDS) captures the ideas, thoughts and aspirations of our business and community groups to build upon our strong foundations and capitalise on new and emerging opportunities to deliver long-term, inclusive, and sustainable growth for West Wimmera Shire (Council) and its community.

This WWEDS is deliberately aligned to the Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) for the Wimmera Southern Mallee Region of Victoria, which is the umbrella economic development strategy prepared by the Victorian State Government.

This WWEDS sets out our vision for the economy of the Council and the strategies and actions to achieve that vision. It is an overarching framework that will be used to guide economic development and articulates our role, priorities, and approach. It provides the rationale for engaging with identified priority sectors and delivering outcomes through implementation plans.

Importantly, this WWEDS recognises that economic development is not merely about quantitative outcomes: there are a range of social, community, cultural and environmental outcomes that contribute to economic growth, wellbeing, and quality of life. This WWEDS is, therefore, focused on economic, social, cultural, and environmental outcomes.

Profiling the Council as a high-quality lifestyle destination, supporting existing industries and attracting value-adding industries will be important to support liveability and maintain the lifestyle our community expect.



### 1.3. West Wimmera Current Economy

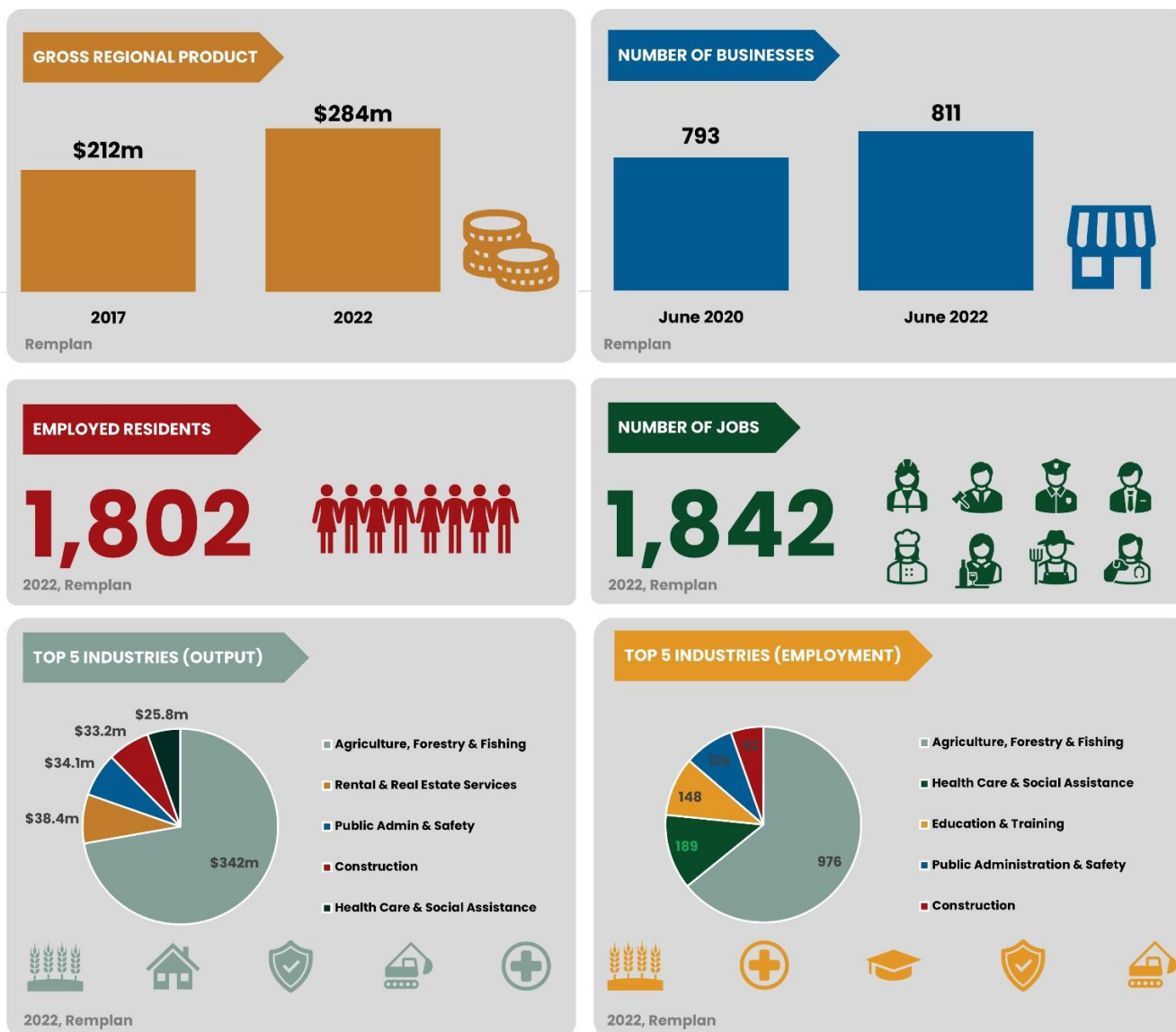
The Shire is a prosperous agricultural-based region, situated in the western most part of Victoria adjacent to the South Australian border. The has fertile land and good quality water in most areas, and because of this, the economy is largely agriculturally based (with the sector accounting for 61% of total output and 53% of all jobs). The agricultural sector has also supported the GDP growth, with total GDP growing from \$212 million in 2017 to \$284 million in 2022 (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup>

The Shire’s population has remained relatively constant, and this is as attributable to the strong agricultural sector along with its attractiveness as a location for retirees.

Despite rises and falls, our economy has shown growth over the past ten years and is set to continue. Enhancing the economy, however, will not just be determined by the agricultural sector, but support growth of:

- enhancing the ability to attract a growing resident population.
- opportunities to create water capture and irrigated cropping.
- growth in tourism and the visitor economy.
- improving liveability overall for the community through the provision of recreational, social, and other service.

Figure 1 : Our Economy in a Snapshot





## 1.4. West Wimmera Economic Development Pillars

The WWEDS includes four pillars that have been designed to guide how opportunities and recommendations can be delivered. The WWEDS aims to leverage the municipality's competitive advantages to attract and foster a community that strives for an economy that is strong and resilient.



1.

Continue to support the growth of the agricultural sector throughout the municipality.



2.

Enhance liveability to increase amenity and grow the appeal of the municipality's towns.



3.

Support small business growth.



4.

Focus on the introduction of additional commissionable tourism product to grow the municipality's visitor economy.



## 2. Context

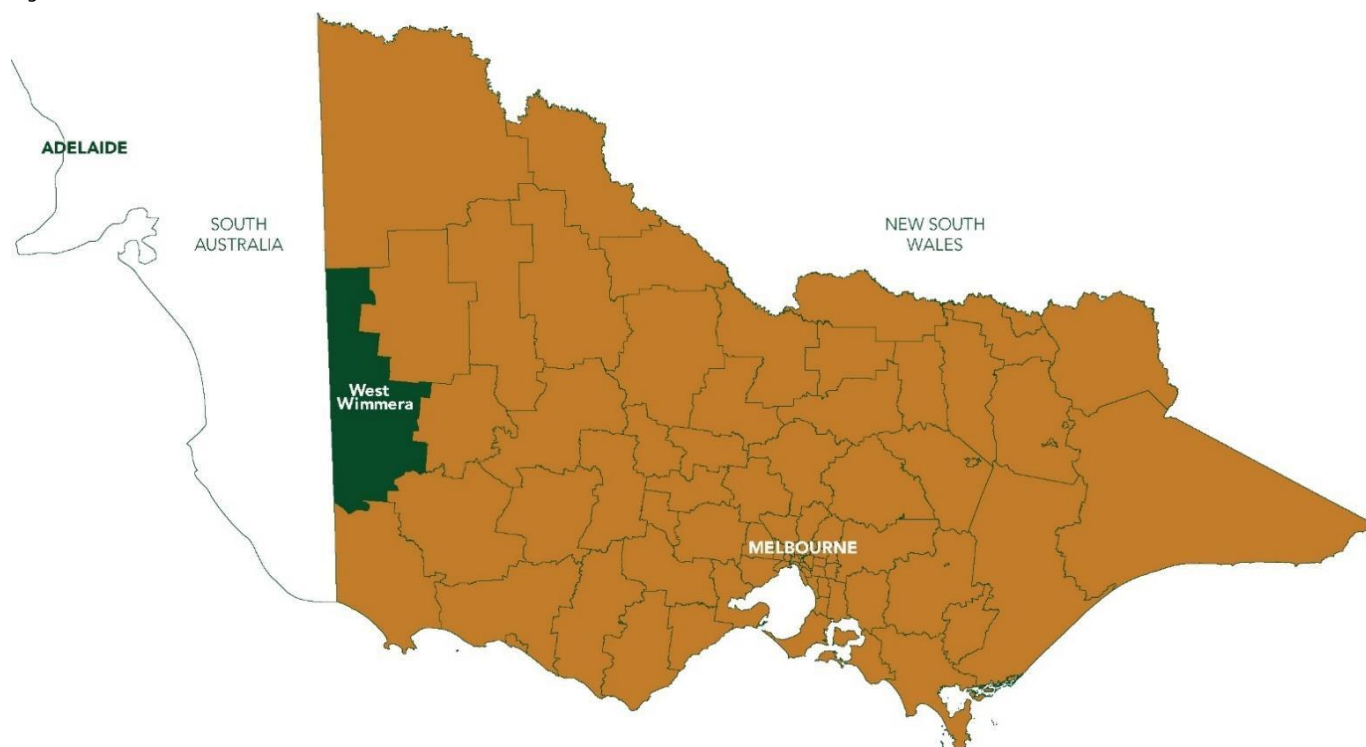
The following reflects the demographic profile of the Shire whilst also denoting some challenges. This WWEDS aims to help address the challenges which are seen to be holding back economic growth potential. A sustainable and growing population base is an essential outcome to support future proofing of the West Wimmera broader economy.

Factors which are potentially hindering population growth, are therefore seen as challenges which need to be properly addressed to help activate market interest in new investment and development. Without even a modest uplift in population, it is more difficult to actively encourage development interest for expanding current businesses and motivating a number of new ones to establish.

### 2.1. About West Wimmera Shire Council

The Shire covers approximately 9,108 square kilometres and is situated along the Victoria and South Australia border, about halfway between Melbourne and Adelaide. To the north is Mildura Rural City Council, to the east Horsham City Council and Hindmarsh Shire Council, to the south are the of Glenelg Shire Council and Southern Grampians Shire Council, and along the western side is the border of South Australia.

Figure 2: West Wimmera Shire



The Shire has a plethora of wetlands and lakes – comprising an estimated 25% of Victoria’s inland wetlands.

The main townships are Edenhope, Kaniva, Harrow, Goroke, and Apsley, with smaller townships of Serviceton, Chetwynd, Dergholm, Lillimur, and Miram.

Edenhope lies on the Wimmera Highway and is built on the banks of Lake Wallace. With a population of around 930 residents, Edenhope is also the southern administrative hub of the Shire. Kaniva is the northern hub with a population of approximately 800 people. Located on the Western Highway and the Melbourne-Adelaide Railway, Kaniva is a popular stopping place for people travelling between Melbourne and Adelaide, and we note that approximately 800,000 vehicle movements (in both directions) occur annually.

From an economic perspective, the Shire has a very strong agricultural-focused economy with smaller additional sectors that are responding to community and business needs. Separately, a tourism strategy was undertaken over 2022-2023 which focussed on the townships and the various lakes and wetland areas, which enable visitors to camp and recreate (fishing, jet skiing, swimming, boating etc.).

Whilst the visitor economy is noted in the Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Economic Development Strategy developed by the State Government as one of four principal pillars for the wider region’s economic growth to focus on, because West Wimmera already just completed a detailed Tourism Strategy, this visitor economy pillar is not focussed on heavily in this WWEDS.

Reference should be noted, however, that though the visitor economy is a relatively small economic sector currently, its growth potential could be significant should investment be allocated for the various priority projects already identified for the sector as per the tourism strategy.

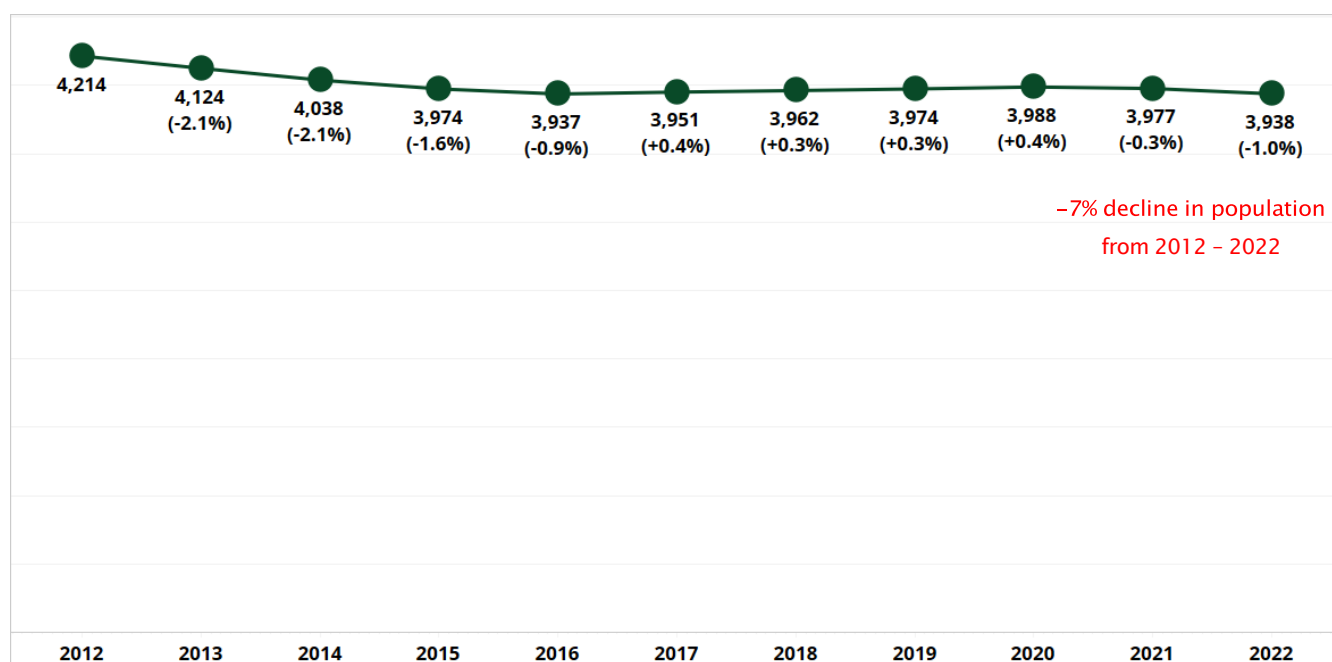
## 2.2. Demographics

### 2.2.1. Population Change

As shown in Figure 3, the municipality’s population has been in a gradual decline since 2012. Arresting this decline is an essential outcome of this WWEDS as without the critical mass of local residents, the ability to retain businesses and create new ventures becomes increasingly difficult. In addition, we note that changes in technology and agricultural innovation, for example, have led to the consolidation of farms over the last 40 years and greater mechanisation of cropping and other sectors has gradually resulted in a lower number of farm workers required.

However, this has also generated the need for higher skilled workers to service and maintain equipment and a greater need for allied services such as diesel mechanics and related support, agronomists and other computer-based product monitoring and testing personnel, and the use of drones and related technology and related skilled workers. The challenge is that many of the suppliers of these allied services have increasingly established in surrounding towns and regions (including in cross-border towns such as Bordertown, Mount Gambier, and Naracoorte), rather than within the municipality.

Figure 3: West Wimmera Shire’s Population Change (2012 – 2022)<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA26890>

## 2.2.2. Population Age

The age breakdown of residents reflects a much older median age than the state or national average and with a noticeably older percentage of the population over 50 years of age. Delivering ongoing health and social services to an aging population puts additional pressure on the health system and reflects the need for increasing the amenities and facilities to cope with the growth of the aging population.

This offers a growth opportunity, however, to encourage more workers for the health and allied social service sector to support expanded health services and facilities in Edenhope and Kaniva especially, but also smaller facilities in other towns in the municipality such as Goroke, Harrow, and others.

Figure 4: West Wimmera Shire's Population Age Structure (2021)<sup>2</sup>

	West Wimmera	Victoria	Australia
<b>0-4 years</b>	5.4%	6.3%	6.3%
<b>5-9 years</b>	5.9%	6.2%	6.4%
<b>10-14 years</b>	5.9%	5.8%	6.0%
<b>15-19 years</b>	5.4%	6.0%	6.1%
<b>20-24 years</b>	3.8%	7.0%	6.7%
<b>25-29 years</b>	4.4%	7.4%	7.1%
<b>30-34 years</b>	4.6%	7.6%	7.3%
<b>35-39 years</b>	4.0%	6.8%	6.7%
<b>40-44 years</b>	5.2%	6.8%	6.8%
<b>45-49 years</b>	6.9%	6.8%	6.8%
<b>50-54 years</b>	8.4%	6.4%	6.5%
<b>55-59 years</b>	8.1%	6.0%	6.2%
<b>60-64 years</b>	7.3%	5.4%	5.6%
<b>65-69 years</b>	7.7%	4.9%	5.1%
<b>70-74 years</b>	5.6%	3.7%	3.8%
<b>75-79 years</b>	4.8%	2.8%	2.8%
<b>80-84 years</b>	3.2%	2.0%	2.0%
<b>85 years and over</b>	3.4%	2.2%	2.1%
<b>Median age</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>38</b>

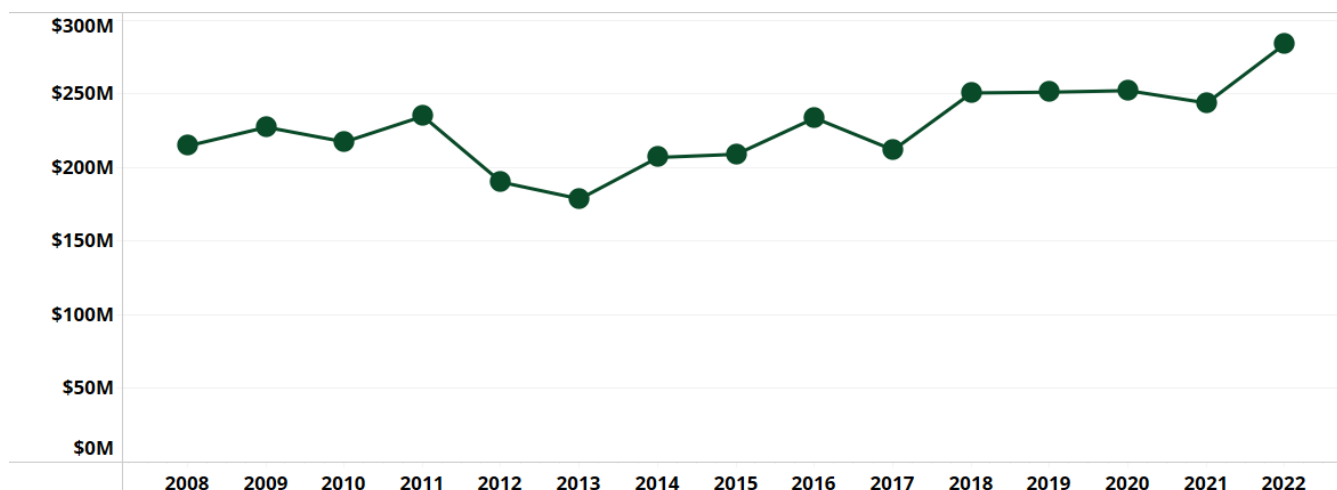
<sup>2</sup> <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/LGA26890>

## 2.3. Economic Profile

### 2.3.1. GRP

The gross regional product reflects mostly constant growth since 2017 especially, with a noticeable uplift in 2022 as a reflection of higher commodity prices for farm produce (crops and livestock).

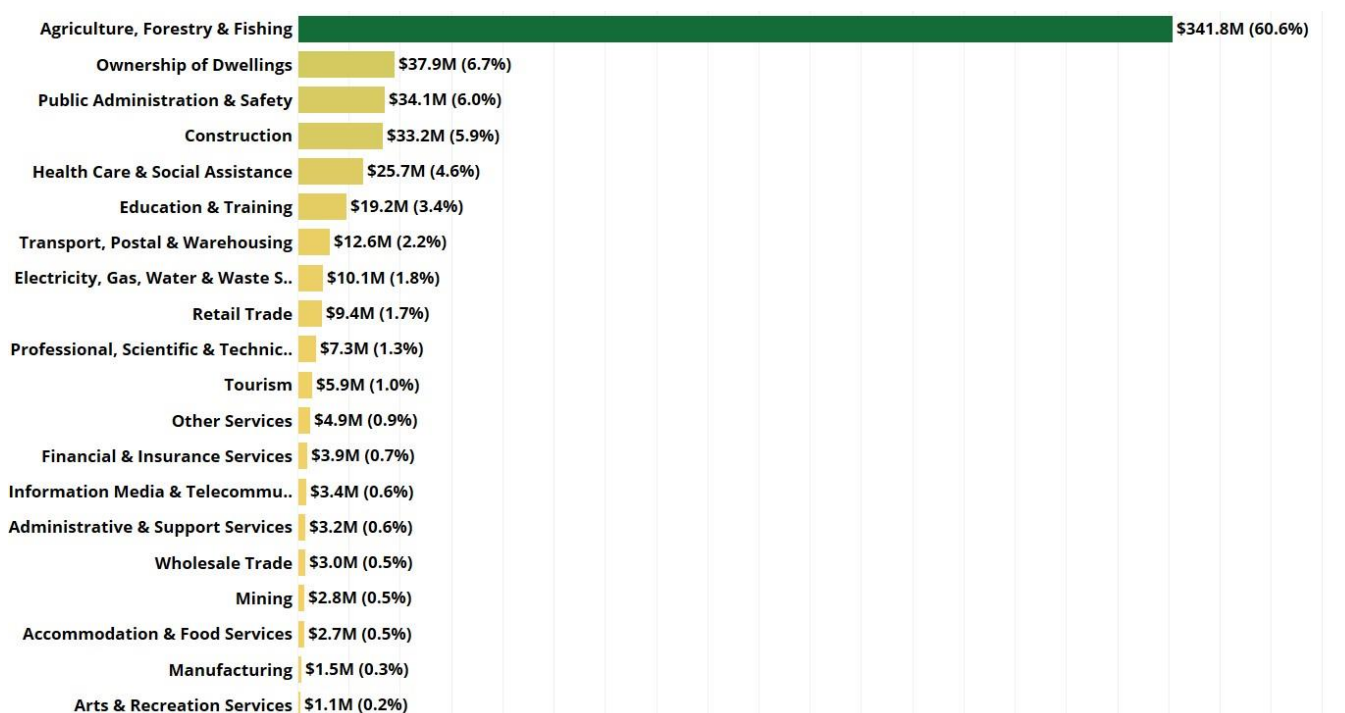
Figure 5: West Wimmera Shire's GRP (2008 – 2022)<sup>3</sup>



### 2.3.2. Major economic sectors

Figure 6 illustrates the significant size of the agricultural sector especially, which represents nearly 61% of total economic output by sector. Output data represents the gross revenue generated by businesses/organisations in each of the industry sectors in a defined region. Gross revenue is also referred to as total sales or total income. By comparison, the next largest sector is ownership of dwellings which is under 8% and public administration which is 6%.

Figure 6: West Wimmera Shire's Output by Sector (2021)<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup> Remplan 2022

<sup>4</sup> Remplan 2021

### 2.3.3. Change in employment by sector

Figure 7: West Wimmera Shire Major Changes in Employment by Industry, 2001 –2021<sup>5</sup>

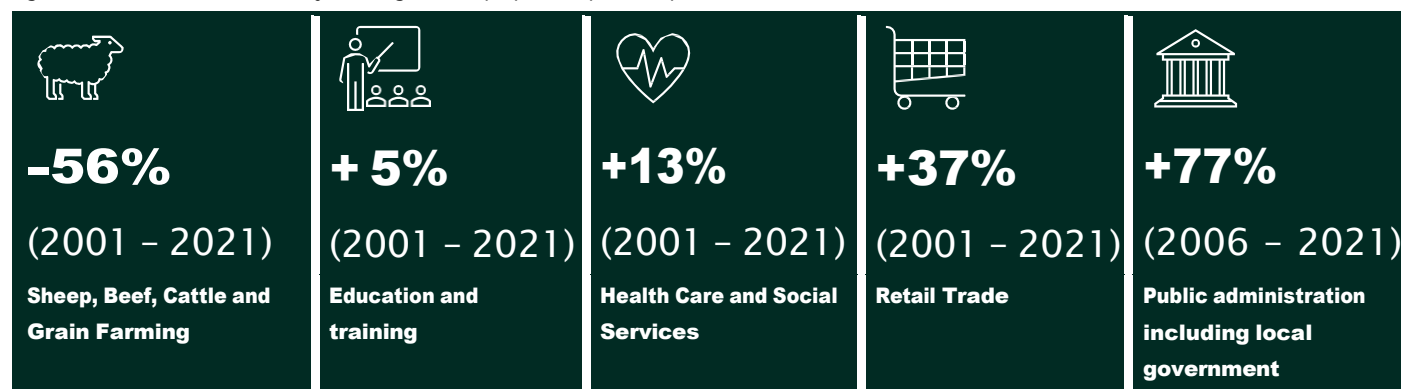


Figure 7 illustrates trends in select industries of employment in the municipality and reflects:

- Growth in retail sector employment.
- Decline in the agricultural sector employment.
- A slight growth in the healthcare and social assistance sector.
- Strong growth in the public administration and safety sector.
- Marginal growth in education and training.

It is important to note that the categorisation of economic sectors has changed from 2001 to 2021 so there are likely to be some margins of error. Regardless, the results reflect that the largest sector of the West Wimmera economy (agriculture including forestry) has seen a large reduction in employment due to consolidation of farms and ongoing greater mechanisation of farming processes and techniques along with constant technology improvements. These result in most cases in demand for fewer agricultural workers.

This trend is important to note, as the agricultural and forestry sector are the major economic generator within the municipality by a significant margin, compared to all other sectors (61% of gross economic output) of the economy.

For the broader health sector, increasing demand exists for health care and social assistance workers to meet both current community needs and to support a rapidly aging community which also reflects the same trend in the wider region. If the supply of staff was able to meet the estimated demand, the growth in sector employment could be much greater.

For the retail trade sector, growth has occurred but from a very small base. A declining population base coupled with very limited tourism has impacted growth in the broader retail sector (including food services). An uplift in population and visitors could see significant growth in this sector.

In 2001 the population of the municipality was 4,549 compared to 3,938 in 2022, a decline of 13%.

The lack of accurate visitor economy employment and visitation data in 2001 prevents a similar assessment for visitor numbers in the municipality over the same period. However, the recent 2023 Tourism Strategy for the municipality shows visitor growth from 45.3k in 2012 to 103k visitors in 2022, an increase of 227%. The recent Tourism Strategy also forecasted visitor growth to 216k visitors by 2032, based on several assumptions. Though the visitor economy employment base is very small (estimated at 54 in 2021) it could potentially grow significantly.

What appears evident is that the municipality cannot rely on its major economic revenue output sector to be the generator of employment growth (and population uplift) for the foreseeable future unless changes for example to move to higher intensity forms of farming which may require far more labour occurs.

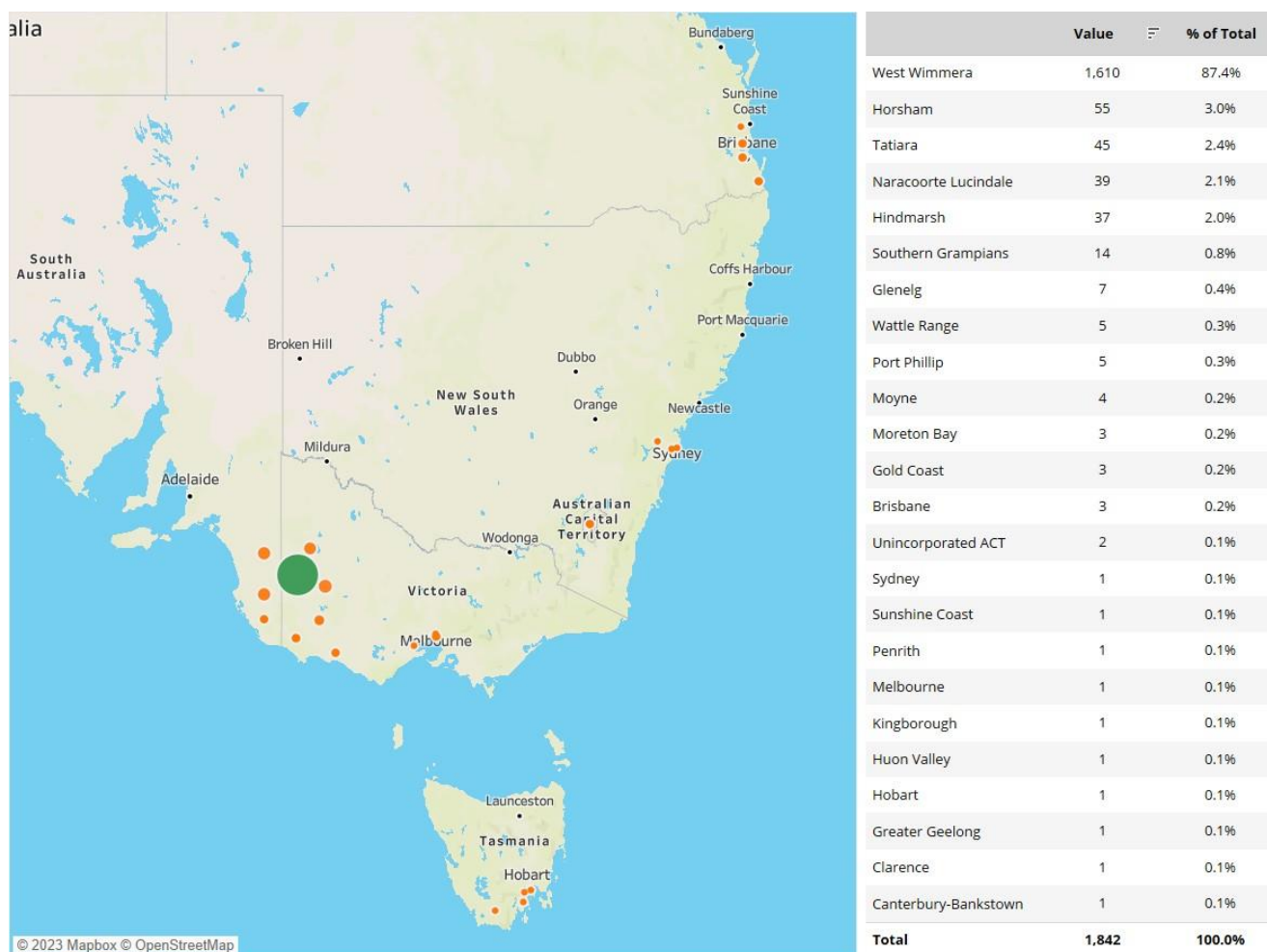
<sup>5</sup> ABS Quickstats, West Wimmera, 2001 – 2021. It is important to note that discrepancies exist between annual Remplan data and official Australian Bureau of Statistics data. For the West Wimmera Shire.

### 2.3.4. Place of residence of employees

Figure 8 is interesting, in that it illustrates that several employees (232 or close to 13% of all employees) don't reside within the municipality. 3% (55) reside in Horsham and a further 4.5% (84) reside across the border in South Australia.

The relevance of this is important to note as workers often have families with them and the economic uplift from being located within the municipality and using local retailers, schools, health providers and other core allied services is an important economic benefit that currently is leaking out of the municipality for those residents elsewhere.

Figure 8: Place of residence of West Wimmera Shire's Employees 2022<sup>6</sup>



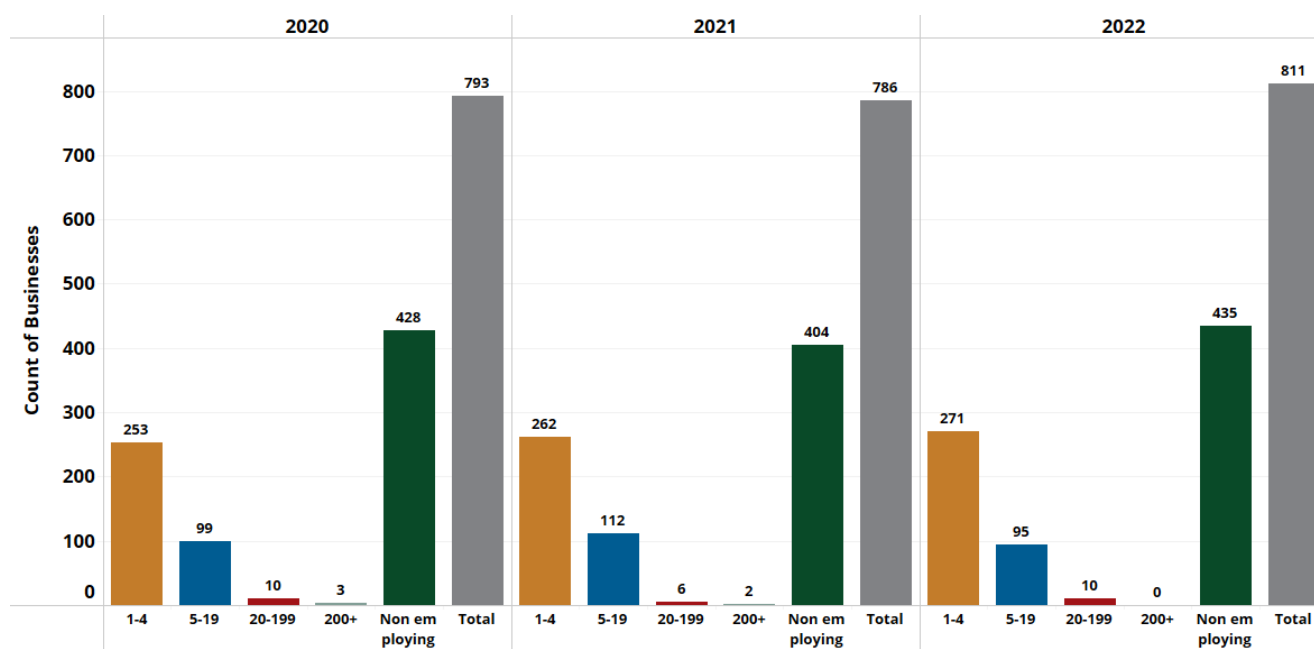
<sup>6</sup> REMPLAN, 2022



### 2.3.5. Change in business numbers

The change in the number of businesses indicates that the number of smaller businesses has increased from 428 to 435 (non-employed businesses) along with the number of businesses employing 1-4 staff increasing from 253 to 271. Unfortunately, the number employing 5-19 staff has reduced from 112 to 95, those with 20-199 have remained static and those with 200+ staff have reduced from 3 to 0 businesses.

Figure 9: West Wimmera Shire’s Change in business numbers by staff size (2020–2022)<sup>7</sup>



<sup>7</sup> REMPLAN, 2022

## 2.4. Macroeconomic Context

The following external macroeconomic factors require consideration as they will likely continue to have implications on the economy of the municipality and the broader region.

Table 1: Macro economic factors

Factor	Description
Business recovery	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound influence on the global and national economies. Consumer-facing industries (e.g., retail, food, and hospitality) were hit hardest, with major revenue cutbacks and job losses. As a result, many industries have had to transition to more innovative business practices in response to shifting consumer trends.</p> <p>The widespread floods experienced in recent years along with forecast wildfire season will continue to have a significant impact on the national economy, particularly in the regions, causing significant losses to crops and livestock as well as infrastructure.</p> <p>Furthermore, as a result of these losses, there will be continuous secondary economic effects that will harm a wide range of industries, including retail and hospitality.</p>
Rise of remote and flexible working arrangements	<p>The increase in remote working (which accelerated with the advent of COVID-19) has allowed employees to be more flexible in where they live. This has driven population growth into many regional areas throughout the country as regional areas are considered to offer greater liveability, lifestyle, and increased housing affordability.</p>
Workforce shortages in key service sectors	<p>Skills shortages in key industries such as hospitality, tourism, construction, childcare, community, and aged care sectors will likely continue to impact business operations and service provision for residents.</p>
Global economic uncertainty	<p>External economic and environmental shocks have increased global supply-side constraints and commodities price volatility. As the length of these events remains unclear, resulting in short-term global economic uncertainty and a decline in consumer and industry confidence.</p>
Climate resilience and environmental sustainability	<p>There has been a concerted effort by the government to reduce emissions, with environmental sustainability increasingly impacting local government and influencing business and consumer decisions.</p> <p>As a result, there is a greater demand for investment in new, clean energy technology to improve energy efficiency, cut emissions, and migrate to more sustainable circular economy practices.</p>
Growing demand for healthcare	<p>As Australia's population ages, demand for health care will increase and significantly grow healthcare-related spending, demand for public health facilities and workforce requirements to meet demand.</p>



## 3. Consultative Process



### 3.1. Overview

Stafford Strategy (Stafford) was commissioned by West Wimmera Shire Council (the Council) to develop a West Wimmera Economic Development Strategy (WWEDS).

This WWEDS is deliberately succinct, to focus on a few initiatives which Council can realistically deliver on, and to encourage real opportunities that the municipality and its stakeholders can resource and achieve.

### 3.2. Objectives

The overriding objectives of the WWEDS include the following.

- To develop a strategy for West Wimmera Shire Council addressing its future directions and activities in economic development.
- To review progress and relevance of regional strategies in which West Wimmera Shire is an active participant (including those of Wimmera Southern Mallee Development Association, Wimmera Southern Mallee Regional Partnership, and Regional Development Australia Grampians).
- To review progress and relevance of existing, related Council strategies and plans (as input to the development of the new strategy).

In addition to the following sub-objectives.

- Identifying new and emerging opportunities.
- Identifying the extent of support for new and existing businesses by Council.
- Identification of specific gaps which are inhibiting economic development in the municipality.
- Identification of collaborative partnerships (community, government, business, neighbouring or “like” councils).
- Alignment with Council, regional and state plans, and other Council strategies.
- Defining performance measures and an action plan for monitoring and evaluation.

### 3.3. Industry and Community Consultation

The input received from the community and industry was invaluable and provided a key resource the WWEDS' preparation. The following consultation was undertaken.

- Industry consultations (one-on-one sessions) along with several workshops and focus group sessions with a variety of stakeholders across the municipality.
- Ongoing discussion with groups such as town progressive associations and local community committees.
- A community-business survey was sent out and generated 100 responses across the municipality.

This Strategy was developed via a 12-stage process, which is outlined in Figure 10. We wish to express our thanks to all of those within the municipality especially, those who generously gave up time to be involved in the process.

Figure 10: The process followed



### 3.4. SWOT Analysis

Table 2 provides an economic development-focused SWOT analysis for the Shire, focusing only on economic development-related strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

It has been created after discussions with various industry and government stakeholders and from the research and analysis undertaken.

It is important to note that many of the challenges (weaknesses and threats) facing West Wimmera are also similar to many other rural and regional communities across the country. Regardless, there are several solid strengths to build from and most importantly, a good range of opportunities to investigate and activate.

As seen with other economic development strategies, often too many options are suggested to be focussed on, when the ability of communities and councils to activate these is beyond the resource base available, in both human resources and financial. Being selective, in what can realistically be achieved, is, therefore, a far more pragmatic yet aspirational way forward.

Table 2: SWOT Analysis

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High-quality agricultural land, especially beef and sheep, and cropping.</li> <li>▪ Resilient communities.</li> <li>▪ Health facilities and amenities including allied health, aged care and disability services offered.</li> <li>▪ Education opportunities including a range of public and Catholic schools across the region.</li> <li>▪ Halfway point between Melbourne and Adelaide.</li> <li>▪ Major road transport routes.</li> <li>▪ Successful farming community.</li> <li>▪ Proximity from surrounding towns as service centres.</li> <li>▪ Range of waterways and wetlands for recreational use.</li> <li>▪ Growing capacity of Wi-Fi connectivity in towns.</li> <li>▪ Attracting retirees and rural lifestylers.</li> </ul>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of housing for residents.</li> <li>▪ A small declining population base. The ageing population will continue to put pressure on limited age care health and medical facilities and the need will continue to grow quickly.</li> <li>▪ Limited diversity of retail product.</li> <li>▪ Lack of workers and skilled labour.</li> <li>▪ Lack of staff/worker accommodation.</li> <li>▪ Lack of profile and awareness of the municipality.</li> <li>▪ Strong competition from surrounding Shires.</li> <li>▪ The cost of transporting produce and livestock and bringing in supplies and materials is expensive due to the distances from markets and the lack of economies of scale.</li> <li>▪ Relative isolation from major markets.</li> <li>▪ Variable road quality, with more funding needed for VicRoads major roads and for the municipality's secondary road network managed by the Council.</li> <li>▪ Demand for potable water is high and the use of bores is often problematic. Greater supply is needed to support population growth and development.</li> <li>▪ Wi-Fi connectivity outside of towns.</li> <li>▪ Variability of water levels in lakes and wetlands.</li> <li>▪ Lack of infrastructure for high volume renewable energy options.</li> <li>▪ Lack of consistent medical practitioners and access to specialist medical services are limited.</li> </ul>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Green waste management plant and recycling depot.</li> <li>▪ Worker accommodation hostels.</li> <li>▪ Unit development for health sector workers.</li> <li>▪ Major renewable energy farms (wind, solar etc.) with improved transmission infrastructure.</li> <li>▪ Small residential sub-divisions in various towns.</li> <li>▪ Updated planning scheme with more flexible zoning.</li> <li>▪ Worker accommodation cottages and cabins on farmland allowed.</li> <li>▪ New commissionable tourist product introduced.</li> <li>▪ Improved reliable supply of potable water.</li> <li>▪ Wi-Fi and mobile connectivity throughout the municipality.</li> <li>▪ Expanded retail and food and beverage offer throughout the municipality.</li> <li>▪ Allied and support services for the agricultural sector such as vet services to locate in the municipality.</li> <li>▪ New water pipeline for irrigation into the municipality.</li> <li>▪ Activation of waterways for more recreational pursuits.</li> </ul>	<b>THREATS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic downturn overall (ongoing recession).</li> <li>▪ Population decline continues.</li> <li>▪ Lack of industry support for Council initiatives.</li> <li>▪ Climate change impacts and no move to renewable energy supply.</li> <li>▪ The updated planning scheme is slow to be implemented.</li> <li>▪ Constraints accessing land for development because of perceived environmental challenges.</li> <li>▪ Limited workforce capacity will impact the economy's ability to rebound.</li> <li>▪ Managing expectations with limited resources within the Council and from the State Government for activation of recommendations within this WWEDS.</li> </ul>

## 4. West Wimmera Economic Development Pillars

The following strategic framework has guided the development of this WWEDS and should be used to direct economic development in the West Wimmera region going forward.

### 4.1. Vision

The vision for West Wimmera's economy is suggested as follows.

West Wimmera will continue to sustainably grow its economic base and local employment, offering towns that are attractive and welcoming to support growing communities and small business

### 4.2. Pillars



1.

Continue to support the growth of the agricultural sector throughout the municipality.



2.

Enhance liveability to increase amenity and grow the appeal of the municipality's towns.



3.

Support small business growth.



4.

Focus on the introduction of additional commissionable tourism product to grow the municipality's visitor economy.

# 5. Implementation Plan

## 5.1. Summary of the Recommendations

Table 3 summarises the recommendations that have been identified to support economic growth across the municipality and industry sectors. These align with the vision and pillars created as part of the Strategic Framework.

Table 3: WWEDS Recommendations



### Agricultural Sector Growth

- Aim for highest value agricultural sector results.
- Advocate - Road to Rail, Road to Port
- Build local business capacity and capability.
- Investigate programs for artisanal agriculture.
- Advocate for animal health providers for both livestock and domestic pets
- Potable water mains system for Harrow, Goroke and Apsley.
- Support young farmers in development programs
- Updated business case for major irrigation pipeline project.
- Water security and climate change impact mitigation for the agri-sector.
- Major renewable energy farm.



### Liveability & Amenity

- Advocate for funding for childcare services and expanded amenities to support youth activities.
- Advocate for worker accommodation.
- Advocate for improved water pressure in our towns.
- Development of investment prospectus.
- Industrial estates promotion.
- West Wimmera Lakes marketing and water levels app.
- Identify initiatives to address housing shortage.
- Introduce uniform and consistent directional and interpretative road signage across the municipality.
- Investigate the development of dog-friendly parks (off-lead).
- Advocate for Improved data connectivity throughout the municipality with annual upgrades planned and introduced.
- Implementation of the targeted town settlement strategies.
- Mainstreet improvements.
- Activation Plans for the municipality's major towns.
- Advocacy for road upgrades.



### Small Business Growth

- Better Approvals - Business Concierge Service.
- Business Assistance & Business Streetscape Grants
- Business training and development.
- Business Hubs.
- Tradie Hubs.



### Visitor Economy Growth

- B&B planning scheme workshops.
- Formalised caravan and trailer parking on the main street of Kaniva.
- More commissionable tourism product.
- Lake Bringalbert and Dunbopperty Swamp facilities development.
- Upgraded and expanded cabin capacity at lake-side holiday parks for visitor accommodation and seasonal workers.

Table 4 - Table 7 provides the implementation plan to assist in delivering the various projects identified in this WWEDS. They highlight the activations needed to implement the priority projects; key agencies who should collectively be engaged to drive public projects; and an estimated time frame for effective activation noting that many may change over time as resources are revised and priorities potentially change;

This implementation plan needs to be considered a working document and, as such, it needs to remain fluid to take account of the needs of different stakeholders and their ability to undertake actions along with their other responsibilities.

## 5.2. Pillar 1: Agricultural Sector Growth

Table 4: Pillar 1 – Agricultural Sector Growth – Implementation plan

Recommendation	Source	Action	Who	When
Aim for highest value agricultural sector results	State Government (Agriculture Victoria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to monitor agri-sector results annually.</li> <li>Regularly evaluate options for diversification where possible.</li> <li>Encourage timely distribution of updated agri information to support farmer decision-making.</li> <li>Accurately map soil and water resources to identify high-value sites for intensive agriculture.</li> </ul>	Agriculture Victoria, the farming community	Short term - ongoing
Advocate - Road to Rail, Road to Port	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify linkages required and locations.</li> <li>Prepare advocacy document.</li> </ul>	Council, RDV	Short term - ongoing
Build local business capacity and capability	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In conjunction with RDV, connect local businesses to business support programs, grants, investment opportunities and broader initiatives.</li> <li>Develop an annual calendar of capacity building events.</li> <li>Delivery of workshops and training sessions.</li> </ul>	Council, RDV	Short term - ongoing
Investigate programs for artisanal agriculture <sup>8</sup>	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify programs for the research, development, and funding of programs to support this form of agri development and possible avenues for support.</li> </ul>	Agriculture Victoria, the farming community	Short term - ongoing
Advocate for animal health providers for both livestock and domestic pets	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify initiatives to encourage more vet care services to relocate to the municipality.</li> </ul>	Council, the farming community	Medium – long term
Support young farmers in development programs	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess support requirements for young farmers.</li> <li>Determine how program gets rolled out and time frame.</li> </ul>	Council, RDV	Short term - ongoing
Water security and climate change impact mitigation for the agri-sector	State Government (RDV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing lobbying for infrastructure support to address impacts.</li> </ul>	Agriculture Victoria, Council, the farming community	Medium – long term
Potable water mains system for Harrow, Goroke, and Apsley	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess the current level of bore use and implications.</li> <li>Determine the benefit-cost of connecting to a mains system and reduce reliance on bore water.</li> <li>Introduce a program for improving the potable water supply.</li> </ul>	Council, state government	Long term
Updated business case for major irrigation pipeline project	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated business case to re-evaluate the capital cost and benefit-cost ratio required (previously estimated at \$100m).</li> <li>Assuming the irrigation pipeline is accepted as a priority project by the state government and a positive benefit-cost outcome is achieved, move into a planning and development phase.</li> <li>Resolve land acquisition and other possible issues.</li> </ul>	GWMWater, Council, RDV, WSMD	Long term
Major renewable energy farm.	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate options for solar and wind farms in the Shire.</li> <li>Advocate for energy transmission upgrades.</li> </ul>	Council, RDV, sector developers-suppliers, Cross Border Commissioner	Medium – long term

<sup>8</sup> Such as block garlic, paddock to plate initiatives, and other high-value produce such as honey production, mushrooms, micro greens, aquaponics, hydroponics, aeroponics, flowers etc.

## 5.3. Pillar 2: Liveability & Amenity Improvement

Table 5: Pillar 2 – Liveability and Amenity Improvement – Implementation plan

Recommendation	Source	Action	Who	When
Advocate for funding for childcare services and expanded amenities to support youth activities	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine priority locations for childcare centres.</li> <li>▪ Identify staffing needs and funding for trained personnel.</li> <li>▪ Identify facilities to support youth support re sports centres, music, and dance hubs etc.</li> </ul>	Council, state government	Short term - ongoing
Advocate for worker accommodation	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a plan for specific worker accommodation sites throughout the municipality including size and scale.</li> <li>▪ Assess current planning scheme limitations or challenges.</li> <li>▪ Promote as an investment opportunity via an investment prospectus for the municipality.</li> <li>▪ Identify builders and developers.</li> </ul>	Council, state government and business community	Short term
Advocate for improved water pressure in our towns	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Determine staging of upgrades required.</li> <li>▪ Develop advocacy paper.</li> </ul>	Council, state government and business community	Short term
Development of investment prospectus	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify and prioritise major capital projects that require additional government and/or private contributions.</li> <li>▪ Develop investment prospectus to raise state-wide awareness of new investment opportunities in the municipality.</li> <li>▪ Set annual goals for new investments introduced.</li> <li>▪ Prepare an advocacy plan and pitch document to promote investment and funding requirements, focusing on municipality's needs, as well as economic and social benefits to be realised.</li> </ul>	Council, community and WSMD	Short term
Industrial estates promotion	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Develop a clear plan for the promotion of the Kaniva Industrial Estate and investigate the potential to expand the Edenhope Industrial Estate.</li> </ul>	Council, WSMD	Short term
West Wimmera Lakes marketing and water levels app	Council Tourism Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Secure state government grant to develop an app for informing on lake water levels and facilities.</li> <li>▪ Engage appropriate skilled app development company.</li> <li>▪ Monitor and update data on the app on a monthly basis.</li> </ul>	Council, State Government	Short term
Identify initiatives to address the housing shortage	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Explore the development of the rural living zone and township zone small sub-divisions for Kaniva and Edenhope.</li> <li>▪ Rural living zone sub-divisions in Apsley, Harrow and Goroke for lifestyle blocks.</li> <li>▪ Identify sites for smaller-scale subdivisions.</li> <li>▪ Work with the state government for infrastructure support.</li> <li>▪ One new subdivision planned and released by 2026.</li> </ul>	Council, Dept of Planning and RDV	Short - medium- term

Recommendation	Source	Action	Who	When
Introduce uniform and consistent directional and interpretative road signage across the municipality	Tourism Strategy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Secure a state government funding grant to undertake a full municipality signage audit to cover all directional signage and all interpretative signage.</li> <li>Assess where new signs are required.</li> <li>Secure state government funding grant to design and develop new signage and then introduce skins over existing signs where possible along with additional signage.</li> </ul>	Council, State Government	Short – medium- term
Investigate the development of dog-friendly parks (off-lead)	Community Tourism Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to support pet travellers and local recreational needs.</li> </ul>	Council	Short – medium- term
Advocate for Improved data connectivity throughout the municipality with annual upgrades planned and introduced	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for digital investment funding from relevant government authorities and telecommunication providers to enhance digital infrastructure in the municipality.</li> </ul>	Council, State Government, Federal Government, Telco providers, NBN	Medium term
Implementation of the targeted town settlement strategies	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to develop the municipality’s settlement strategies to stimulate residential development and investment.</li> <li>Once developed, implement, and deliver the recommendations of the strategy.</li> </ul>	Council, Dept of Planning and RDV	Medium term - ongoing
Mainstreet Activation Plans for the municipality’s major towns	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider the development of Mainstreet Activation Plans for the townships of Edenhope, Kaniva, Goroke, Harrow and Apsley,.</li> <li>Deliver recommendations to promote activation of the main streets and improve amenities, including placemaking initiatives, public art installations, public realm improvements, etc.</li> </ul>	Council, Dept of Planning and RDV	Medium term
Advocacy for road upgrades	Council Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for VicRoads within the municipality to be prioritised for upgrading due to expanded heavy trucking movements.</li> <li>Establish a priority upgrade roading program for both Vic Roads and council-managed roads.</li> <li>Find a program solution to address roadside vegetation clearing.</li> </ul>	Council, Vic Roads, RDV	Long term



## 5.4. Pillar 3: Small Business Growth

Table 6: Pillar 3 – Small Business Growth – Implementation plan

Recommendation	Source	Action	Who	When
Better Approvals - Business Concierge Service	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide advice and support for new and expanding businesses. Streamlined process to reduce time taken to obtain required permits.</li> </ul>	Council	Ongoing
Business Assistance & Business Streetscape Grants	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to support small businesses through Council grant opportunities</li> </ul>	Council	Ongoing
Business training and development	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide training and development opportunities via our website and coordinate the Small Business Bus visits to our towns.</li> </ul>	Council, Business Victoria	Ongoing
Business Hubs	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lease unused Council buildings for small business use.</li> </ul>	Council	Ongoing
Tradie Hubs	Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Advocate for Tradie Hub development in the industrial zones.</li> </ul>	Council, RDV	Ongoing

## 5.5. Pillar 4: Visitor Economy Growth

Table 7: Pillar 4 – Visitor Economy Growth – Implementation plan

Recommendation	Source	Action	Who	When
B&B planning scheme workshops	Tourism Strategy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitate a series of 2-3 workshops for local interested community members and other parties.</li> <li>Facilitated by the Council and offering a ½ day workshop in major towns.</li> <li>Development of a check sheet to encourage informed and more structured approaches to planning for bed and breakfast style of accommodation approvals.</li> </ul>	Council, RDV	Short term - ongoing
Formalised caravan and trailer parking on the main street of Kaniva	Tourism Strategy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designate 10-20 formal parking bays on or close to the main street of Kaniva for caravan and trailer parking.</li> <li>Ensure signposting of these is provided.</li> <li>Introduce highway signage sufficiently far in advance of Kaniva to inform caravaners etc. of available parking spaces.</li> </ul>	Council	Short term
More commissionable tourism product	Tourism Strategy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work with new visitor economy partnership regional entity to facilitate new paid-for tourism experiences.</li> <li>Ensure the tourism committee within the municipality attends regional tourism development and marketing workshops.</li> <li>Upskill local industry for a stronger social media presence.</li> <li>Encourage greater economic uplift from the visitor economy to align with the wider REDS.</li> </ul>	New visitor economy partnership regional entity, local businesses, Council	Short term

Recommendation	Source	Action	Who	When
Lake Bringalbert and Dunboperty Swamp facilities development	Tourism Strategy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working with PV, undertake an assessment to look at appropriate upgrades to Lake Bringalbert and Dunboperty Swamp including bird-watching hides, picnic table facilities and a nature play area.</li> <li>Assess potential grant funding streams that could be applied for works.</li> <li>Work with PV to determine the potential for a mobile pop-up F&amp;B operator to establish seasonally on site.</li> </ul>	PV, Council, DJSIR, RDV	Short – medium-term
Upgraded and expanded cabin capacity at lake-side holiday parks for visitor accommodation	Tourism Strategy Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the short-medium term, assess potential grant streams that could be applied for to introduce a further 6-8 cabins at each caravan park throughout the municipality.</li> <li>In the longer term, complete a pre-feasibility assessing the viability of a new destination holiday park within the municipality.</li> <li>Complete a site assessment investigating potential sites where a destination holiday park could be suitably located. If shown to be viable, take pre-feasibility to potential major destination holiday park operators to gauge interest.</li> </ul>	PV, Council, DJSIR, RDV	Medium term

## 5.6. Strategic Directions linked to the Wimmera Southern Mallee REDS

To support alignment with initiatives being driven by State Government for regional economic development, the same strategic directions have been applied as exist within the current Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) for the Wimmera Southern Mallee REDS. Based on the four strategic directions for the REDS, the following illustrates how these align with projects identified by stakeholders as priorities for West Wimmera specifically.

Table 8: Strategic Directions linked to the Wimmera Southern Mallee REDS

Agriculture and Food Product and manufacturing strengthened via diversification	Growth and development of the visitor economy leveraging natural assets and aboriginal heritage	Support and expand economic opportunities in growing sectors such as health and social services	Position the region to benefit from emerging growth opportunities in natural resources
Diversify sheep breeds to potentially include higher-value wool and meat options	Introduce uniform and consistent directional and interpretative road signage across the Shire	Targeted town settlement strategies need to address the lack of housing in all towns and the need for small subdivisions	Development of solar energy to help feed back into the grid and reduce power costs
Assess grain storage facilities within the Shire	Lake Bringalbert and Dunboperty Swamp facilities development	Need for an investment prospectus to help attract land developers for 5-10 lot subdivisions in most towns throughout the Shire	Road upgrades to support economic growth, especially for the agri sector addressing narrow road width and the need for road strengthening to handle larger heavier trucks now used
Assess rail line siding extension to take grain via rail rather than road direct to market	Lake Wallace recreation infrastructure introduced	Incentive packages required to attract skilled health workers offering discounted housing to rent	Wi-Fi and internet connectivity to be expanded to create greater coverage beyond town boundaries

Agriculture and Food Product and manufacturing strengthened via diversification	Growth and development of the visitor economy leveraging natural assets and aboriginal heritage	Support and expand economic opportunities in growing sectors such as health and social services	Position the region to benefit from emerging growth opportunities in natural resources
Assess diversification into wildflowers and other boutique products	Upgraded and expanded cabin capacity at lake-side holiday parks for visitor accommodation	Introduce more childcare facilities to support families relocating to the Shire and to support those households wanting to get back into the workforce and needing childcare	Fire safety issue with lack of maintenance of roadside verge areas covering VIC Roads and local roads
Major pipeline irrigation project for agricultural purposes to help mitigate climate change risks	West Wimmera Lakes marketing and water levels app	Investigate a nursing training and upskilling facility for the Shire	Address the lack of potable water and overuse of bore water in Harrow, Goroke, and Apsley. Only Edenhope and Kaniva on potable mains water supply
Ensure targeted settlement strategies throughout the Shire allow for farm worker accommodation within the rural planning zone	Formalised caravan and trailer parking on the main street of Kaniva	Create a rentable housing facility for health services in Edenhope to offer a mix of single-bedroom apartments and 3-bedroom family units	Encourage smaller professional firms to establish in the Shire (engineers, quantity surveyors, planners, engineering design firms etc)
Introduce allied services for the agri sector including diesel mechanics and equipment servicing in each town, and steel fabrication (to reduce economic leakage out of the Shire)	B&B planning scheme workshops	The inability to attract agency nurses or casual nurses is seen as too far from major towns-cities, so hence an accommodation facility to incentivise visitation and relocation	Establish an Innovation Platform to encourage new smaller ideas
Encourage precision farming techniques as technical support via the use of drones, agronomist technology	Boutique whisky, tequila, or vodka distillery; craft brewery or cider house as food and beverage processing option and visitor attraction	Better synergy and coordination between Grampians Health Services (covering Edenhope, Apsley and Harrow), and Kaniva and Goroke, which are covered by West Wimmera Health Services.	Recognition of the recreational and tourism value of the wetlands and supporting amenities in the Shire and the need for quality infrastructure support for both local use and visitors and sustainable natural assets
Investigate programs for artisanal agriculture such as block garlic, paddock to plate initiatives, and other high-value produce such as honey production, mushrooms, micro greens, aquaponics, hydroponics, aeroponics, flowers etc	Caravan/camping marketing campaign (family market & couples)	Look at improving policy alignment between Victorian health services and South Australian health services with several West Wimmera towns close to the border and accessing SA health services	Introduce more vet care services for both farm livestock and domestic pets
	Formalisation of regional drive and motorbike trails	Look at ways to improve demand for sites within the Kaniva Industrial estate	Address water security and climate change impact mitigation for the agri sector but via illustration of strong environmental benefits
	Dog-friendly parks (off lead) to support pet travellers and local recreational needs	Need for improvements in housing quality to attract more professionally skilled people to relocate to the Shire	

## 6. Case Studies

The following case studies demonstrate why a number of new businesses have chosen to start their journey in the municipality.

### 6.1. Beetanicals



Every so often, someone comes along and despite our learned cynicism, the questions over what they are really seeking, the queries about the product, they emerge squeaky clean and cause us to start believing in people all over again.

Tanya Stanley is standing in a dry paddock, sons Cooper and Toby washed and scrubbed for the occasion, and boxes of humming bees at a safe distance and she is just bursting to talk about the benefits of the Beetanicals skin balm range. She is 100% focused not on sales, or on appearance, but on the excitement, she gets from the legions of customers who are contacting her to thank her for her product.

It's a skincare range she has created with thousands of hours of research, in world-class packaging, with new success stories from users coming in by the day, all conjured from the kitchen of her home in Douglas, a speck on the map 70 kilometres southwest of Horsham.

She could be boasting about the rapid uptick in sales, the achievements of creating a vibrant new business in rural Victoria while on maternity leave from her career in financial planning, or the juggle of raising two kids alongside her husband, third-generation beekeeper Warren.

But instead, Tanya's answers are a stream of credit for others. She wants to credit Warren, whose knowledge of bees and beekeeping set her on the path to natural skincare queen; her employers, who have strongly supported her to create the enterprise with extended maternity leave and her kids – in particular Cooper, whose had a skin condition from birth inspired her to try to find a natural, effective skincare balm.

"Initially I was making it for my son and had other people interested in it. I was big on getting it right, I wanted to connect with the right experts before sharing it with family and friends and it has just evolved over time."

The basic balms she brewed in her kitchen had great results on Cooper, and requests for the balm continued to grow as word spread. Ever cautious, with a keen focus on safety and effectiveness, she enlisted cosmetic chemists to help her formulate a range of balms and after four years of work, was finally ready to launch the Beetanicals range in September 2018.

An online business course run by the online Women's Business School played a key role in preparing the business for launch.

"Completing the business skills course online from here in Douglas was incredible; there is a whole network out there of mums and women in business than opened up contacts to me so I could establish the business from Douglas," Tanya says.

"We have been overwhelmed by the response – the support for the product and the stories from people, knowing that they are putting something natural and effective on their children's skin. I'm overwhelmed by how it is making people feel."

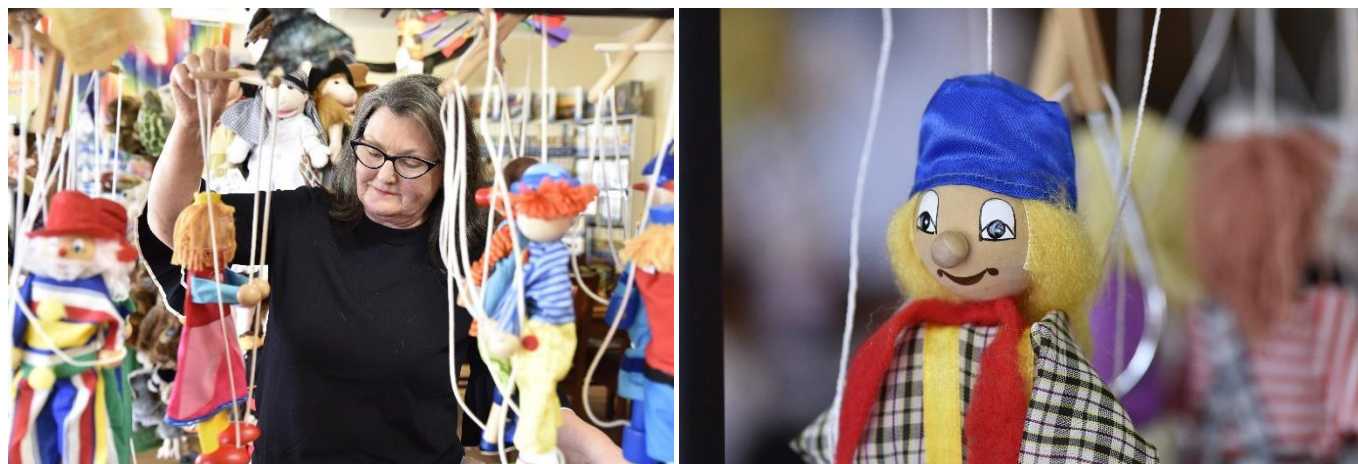
Chemists, baby boutiques and retail outlets have been in touch, wanting to stock the range and Tanya has also been approached by a number of people interested in export, but the potential financial windfall from sending Beetanicals overseas holds little allure.

"There are so many people in Australia that need help with their skin, I haven't made any plans to export it at the moment," she says.

**Living in Douglas, in the West Wimmera municipality, has ended up being an important part of the success story of the br.**

**“Because we are out here in a beautiful environment, with Warren being a third-generation beekeeper, using natural ingredients to help people with stories like our own, I think people have really responded well to our products,” Tanya says.**

## 6.2. Kaniva Puppet Shop



Rural Australian towns used to have a newsagent, a fish and chip shop, a store, several pubs and if you were lucky, a Chinese restaurant. But times they are a-changing.

Kaniva, on the bustling – Melbourne-Adelaide route, has many attractions, but the one that sets the town apart sits beneath a jaunty red awning on the main street – the Kaniva Puppet Shop.

The landmark business was established in 2017 and is thriving, serving not just the local and passing trade, but also a growing online market.

The business was established by the indomitable Julie Finch, who came to Kaniva to retire, but not content with renovating her picturesque cottage, decided to renovate a substantial double-fronted shop and residence in the heart of town as well, creating a puppet shop complete with puppet theatre.

Indoors, the store is festooned with puppets, imported from around the world, a manifestation of Julie’s many years in the puppet trade. She had run a puppet shop in Hahndorf in South Australia for many years, and lived in the Adelaide Hills, but moved to Kaniva after falling in love with the town.

“I could have stayed in retirement but that would have been really boring. I wanted to have a bit of a wow shop in Kaniva with something a bit different,” Julie says.

“I thought I would have a smaller shop but I fell in love with this one.”

When she retired in Adelaide, she resolved to move to Kaniva for a change of scenery.

**“I thought, ‘Why should I retire in the Adelaide Hills, where I have lived most of my life, when there is this beautiful little community just over the border?’” Julie says.**

“When I bought the cottage here, there was no power, but the first night I arrived, neighbours just put electrical cords through the window and the community support has just continued from there.

“It’s a beautiful town and one of the things I love most is the night sky. If you wake up at 2am you can see the Milky Way in all its glory. I haven’t seen the night sky like it is here since I was a child.”

Ever since she was eight, Julie has had an abiding love for puppets.

“In 1957 I went to a matinee by a Sydney puppet company and fell in love with the marionettes, which were of Australian animals. To see all our animals a metre high just enthralled me and I haven’t put puppets down since,” Julie says.

**“My passion is the key to my success.**

“Puppets appeal to all age groups, my oldest customer was 94 years old. You are never too old to have a puppet.”

