

# REVIEW OF SKIPTON COMMUNITY PLAN – September 2017

## Summary

This report provides advice to Council on the review of Skipton's Community Plan – *Community Priorities for Township Development 2013 - 2023*.

## Introduction

Skipton's 10 year Community Plan was prepared over the period from April to July 2013, and received by Council on 23 August 2013. Participation was open to any person with an interest in Skipton and its future. The Plan involved a town survey, a 'Soapbox' event and two public meetings to deliberate on and rank identified township priorities. The town survey identified 117 ideas for Skipton. Some 48 people, or 14 per cent of the adult urban population of 452 (ABS, 2011) participated. The plan listed a total of 20 township priorities. These priorities cover a range of social and economic issues, with strong themes around business and economic development, town development and maintenance, town promotion, recreation and sport and provision of services.

As the first step in the planning process locals were asked what they value most about Skipton. The 'Recreation Reserve and sporting clubs' topped the list, followed closely by 'Hospital and medical services and pharmacy' then the 'Mechanics Institute Hall' and the town's many businesses and services. The town's strong community spirit and friendly people came in for special mention. This assessment no doubt reflects the interests of the mature age-group residents which are proportionately over-represented in the town population in comparison to the State average. Not only is Skipton an 'ageing town', it is also a town experiencing a slow but steady erosion of its population. The proportion of older people in Skipton's population is three times the State average. The record floods of 2010 and 2011 were also a heavy blow to bear, denting local optimism. The Skipton Hotel and some other town centre shops are still closed to business seven years on.

Skipton also identifies as a town 'on the edge' of Corangamite Shire – 68 kilometres north of the Corangamite Shire offices in Camperdown. The town looks to the east and to the north for services not available locally, being 51 km south-west of Ballarat and 30 km south of Beaufort. While it is recognised that Skipton's interests would be lost if it were part of a big city municipality, it is also felt locally that there are challenges for the town's interests to have primacy when it is located 'on the periphery' of Corangamite Shire. One outcome of this perspective is that Skipton has looked to private interests rather than government to solve its problems. There is also a palpable sense that some of the broader issues Skipton is facing are not amenable to local influence.

In the development of all community plans various agencies and organisations are identified as the lead for projects to proceed. In Skipton's case, only two priorities were counted as potential 'community projects', with six priorities potentially addressed as Council/Community partnerships. Nine key priorities were identified as the responsibility of private business interests, including six of the top ten priorities. Two priorities were the province of State Government and only one the sole responsibility of Corangamite Shire. At the time it was noted that it remained open to individuals and groups to advocate for any of these 20 objectives through the range of channels available to them.

Sifting through the many ideas that were offered in regard to the town's future prosperity, three fundamental themes emerged.

- The attraction of new businesses and industry (and retention of existing businesses) is seen as a primary means of rebuilding the township population.
- Upgrading and integrating assets for the benefit of both locals and visitors (and promoting those assets) is seen as an essential step in making more of what Skipton has to offer.
- Improving town appearance and amenity through tree-planting, landscaping and maintenance and the development of public realm assets over the long term is expected to make Skipton an attractive and desirable place to live – a 'leafy oasis on the surrounding plain'.

The review of Skipton's Community Plan occurred four years on from the original formulation in 2013. Following on from the successful completion of several township priority projects, the review was presented as an opportunity to celebrate what has been achieved, to check whether current priorities are still relevant, and to put forward ideas for new township priorities. The design of the review process was determined by the local community. It involved a dialogue through the Skipton Community News, the Skipton Primary School community, the Progress Association and Shire and local Facebook groups. In all, some 45 people participated in the Skipton Plan Review, a similar number to that for the initial plan formulation. Two public meetings were held, on 27 July and 17 August 2017, and a revised list of twelve (12) township priorities was determined. The outcomes of the review process and revised priorities were published in an article in the Skipton Community News.

While it is the identification and implementation of projects – a focus on action and change – that generates interest and engagement, it is easy to overlook the more fundamental community development purpose of Corangamite Shire's community planning initiative. Over the course of the current *Plan for Skipton* a significant percentage of the Skipton community has taken an active part in broader activities within the township. This included the numerous events held to celebrate Skipton's 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2014, the creation of a local Op Shop by a consortium of community groups as well as the design and implementation of several other community projects, such as the Cemetery Gates project. These projects have encouraged the local community to get involved in opportunities to shape their destiny. Along the way new networks have been formed (within and across communities of influence), ideas have been exchanged, and learning and experience obtained across a broad range of community issues. The process of Plan formulation has brought together local interests to transparently arrive at a common appreciation of the unique community that is Skipton, and the historical and current forces which underline its identity.

### **Issues**

The Skipton community initially prioritised five of its top-ten priorities as a focus for initial action. It made full use of the seed-funding provided by Council to secure external funding and complete its two prime 'community project' priorities – the Town Entrance Signage and the Rail Trail Development. The town has made limited progress on its other three 'first-five' priorities. The number 3 priority to provide for limited overnight camping and caravanning has come to nothing so far, and is a major disappointment to those involved. Some tree-planting and landscaping has occurred in partnership with the Shire, and some new businesses have been attracted yet others have closed. Good progress has been made on several of the other priorities, including those in the hands of private business interests, as reported below.

Consultation and engagement activities to review Skipton's community plan began with the seeking of advice through meetings of the Skipton Progress Association. A date was set for a public meeting on Thursday 17 August 2017. An A5 printed flyer 'What Next for Skipton?' was circulated in the local community and published in the Skipton Community News newsletter and featured in Corangamite Shire and local Facebook posts.

In the lead up to the 17 August meeting a proposal was put forward by Corangamite Shire to sell vacant land at 12 – 14 Montgomery Street, with Council officers taking local soundings and reporting advice and recommendations to Council. A number of Skipton residents were of the view that this site could play an important role in the revitalisation of Skipton, and a public meeting was called by the Skipton Progress Association for Thursday 27 July 2107.



17 people attended the public meeting and considered the following questions:

*Is it in the best long-term interests of the Skipton community to sell this land?*

*What would be the best use of this surplus land for Skipton?*

*Should it be incorporated into an enlarged Jubilee Park?*

*Could it be used in a way which contributes to the town's tourism economy?*

*Should the Skipton community seek to purchase or lease the land?*

*How could the annual costs of holding this land be recouped?*

A motion was passed unanimously that the land should remain in public ownership. Council approved a stay of decision on the sale of the land to allow consideration of a lease arrangement with the Skipton Progress Association, however the Committee of the Association met and concluded that it did not have the ongoing financial capacity to enter into a long-term lease of the Montgomery Street land on behalf of the Skipton community. This matter has been carried over into the revised 2017 priority list, where the creation of a 'linear park' (between Jubilee Park and Stewart Park) is listed as Priority 7 on a shortened list of 12 priorities. There has been some talk of a group of local people assembling to seek to purchase the land on the community's behalf, but that appears unlikely at this time.

The first item of business at the 17 August 2017 public meeting was to go through the existing list of 20 priorities and to remove completed projects and those deemed no longer relevant. The opportunity was also taken to consolidate some priorities under the same heading. Items removed from the priority list were as follows.

***Town entry signage (priority 4)***

The construction of Town Entry Signage was a long standing township priority since the old bluestone bridge across the Mount Emu Creek was demolished in 2003. Bluestone blocks were stored in the Council depot at Skipton, but despite a number of attempts the project could not be activated. With seed-funding from Corangamite Shire's community planning initiative, a grant of \$30,000 was secured from the Victorian Government, which finally allowed the project to proceed. The project was managed by a small local project committee, supported by Corangamite Shire, and completed in 2015.



Local graphic designer Lyn Heenan (front left above) prepared three designs and a vote was taken by the local community to select the preferred one – a brand identity for Skipton based on its eminent history in sheep farming and grain production. The four Skipton Town Entry Signage structures are positioned prominently on the major east, west, north and south approaches to the town, providing exposure to the hundreds of thousands of travellers annually on the Glenelg Highway, as well as to travellers on the Lismore, Beaufort and Rokewood Roads.

#### ***Rail trail development (priority 6)***

The Linking Skipton project was aimed at improving the experience of rail trail users by connecting the Ballarat – Skipton Rail Trail to the town centre, with its public amenities and retail services. The project was realised in three stages. The first was the construction of the walking/cycling trail on the east side of the Skipton – Rokewood Road between the Glenelg Highway and the Rail Trail crossing, financed by Corangamite Shire. This part of the project was completed in 2014, and included directional signage funded by the Foundation of Regional and Rural Renewal (FRRR). The second stage involved the construction of two new sections of footpath, one adjacent to Jubilee Lake and the other along Montgomery Street. This work was funded by the State government and carried out by Corangamite Shire.



The remaining works were completed in late 2015 and involved earthworks, new gates and fencing at the Rail Trail terminus, and the construction of 28 tree guards for the planting which took place in the winter of 2016. The project cost was some \$54,000 excluding voluntary contributions and donations.

### ***Indoor heated swimming pool (priority 16)***

This proposal was removed from the list as it was considered impractical. Where it might be thought possible to construct such a facility the ongoing recurrent operational costs were considered prohibitive.

### ***Skate Park (priority 15)***

There was no current support for investment in a Skate Park, with investment in other types of recreational assets seen as more desirable.

An invitation was extended to propose new priorities, which led to the nomination of six new ideas. Members present then voted on the adjusted list (each with five votes to apply across 18 proposals), leading in turn to a revised priority listing of twelve (12) items.

#### **PRIORITY PROJECTS AND ACTION AGENCY**

<b>P17</b>	<b>PRIORITY PROJECTS</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>V17</b>	<b>S13</b>	<b>V13</b>	<b>G13</b>	<b>P13</b>	<b>AGENCY</b>
1	RE-OPEN PUB	Get the Hotel going; Re-open the hotel; Need Hotel open	2	28	2	-	1	PRIVATE BUSINESS INTERESTS
2	RE-OPEN SHOPS	More businesses in the main street; Restore main street – don't use shops for storage	2	17	2	-	2	PRIVATE BUSINESS INTERESTS
3	CARAVAN PARK/ CAMPING	Provide for overnight caravan /camping area by the pool or other suitable area	9	15	8	2	3	COMMUNITY WITH PARTNERS
4	INDOOR GYM/ STADIUM	Build indoor sports centre; Gym/ Stadium (like Linton); Make it a 'youth club' place	11	5	1	-	14	COUNCIL/ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
5	MORE COMMUNITY GET-TOGETHERS	Develop activities of interest to a range of age-groups; Movies, for example	11	-	-	-	-	COMMUNITY WITH COUNCIL SUPPORT
6	MORE TREES/ IMPROVE LANDSCAPING	Plant more trees, Improve landscaping of town; Maintain parks and streetscapes	4	8	1	1	5	COUNCIL/ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
7	ESTABLISH LINEAR PARK	Link Jubilee Park and Stewart Park by converting vacant Montgomery Street land to parkland; Retain in public ownership	7	-	-	-	-	COUNCIL/ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP
8	IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT	North-south to Camperdown, Transport to Ballarat; Access jobs and services	7	-	-	-	-	STATE GOVERNMENT
9	ATTRACT MORE BUSINESSES AND INDUSTRY	Provide encouragement and support for more businesses and industry; Attract small industries, Establish town bakery; Food shop; Takeaway; Coffee shop, Another sandwich bar (now includes P9 and P17)	5	7	5	-	7	PRIVATE BUSINESS INTERESTS WITH COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY
10	SLOW DOWN TRUCK TRAFFIC	Slow down truck traffic; Reduce speed limit in town to 50km	6	4	3	-	19	VICROADS/ STATE GOVERNMENT

11	PAINT AND MAINTAIN TOWN CENTRE BUILDINGS	Repaint town in heritage colours; Provide assistance to owners, Shopfronts need attention	3	6	-	-	10	PRIVATE BUSINESS INTERESTS
12	CLEAN UP MOUNT EMU CREEK	Clean up the area along the mount Emu Creek and maintain the Creek banks	5	5	1	2	13	GLENELG HOPKINS CMA/ COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

P means priority, S means survey mentions, V means votes at public meeting, G means 'gold sticker' applied to top individual priority.

P17	PRIORITY PROJECTS	DESCRIPTION	V17	S13	V13	G13	P13	AGENCY
	RAIL TRAIL DEVELOPMENT	Develop Rail Trail terminus as a 'destination'; Provide camping ground area	2	7	8	2	6	COMMUNITY WITH PARTNERS
	UPGRADE TENNIS TOILETS	Upgrade/ fix the toilets at the tennis courts	2	5	5	-	11	COUNCIL
	LAND FOR DEVELOPMENT	Open up land for development – housing and industry	-	4	1	3	18	PRIVATE BUSINESS INTERESTS
	IMPROVE NBN SERVICE	Advocacy for fixed wireless service for Skipton	3	-	-	-	-	COMMONWEALTH
	BUSINESS DIRECTORY	Moderate and tidy up Skipton Business Directory	2				-	COMMUNITY/ LOCAL BUSINESSES
	PROVIDE MORE LOCAL RESPITE CARE	Provide a small number of local respite care places at the Hospital	1				-	STATE GOVERNMENT

The preceding priority list is based on both the 2013 and 2017 voting. The pattern of voting is affected by many factors, not the least being the limited number of votes each person had to apply. Some highly-ranked priorities are seen to be 'in hand', and therefore seen as no longer in need of a precious vote. The top three projects remain in place because of the original level of support. Priorities 5, 7 and 8 are new priorities. Priorities 3, 4, 9, 11 have either had their scope modified or combine two previous priorities. There is a tail of six project ideas which cannot yet be called 'priorities', given the limited support these three previous and three new proposals attracted. Notes are offered on the status of each project proposal.

### **1 Re-open Pub**

Substantial and fine stonework has been completed on the foundations, structural walls and interior of the Skipton Hotel, in a steady rebuilding project. An opening date has yet to be reported, however there is some expectation that the Hotel will reopen this financial year.

### **2 Re-open shops**

The owner of the Skipton Hotel has also taken some steps towards offering three shops for lease. These high profile premises may potentially be open for business within this financial year. The issue of the use of some closed shops and other shopfront premises remains a matter for their owners and tenants.

### **3 Caravan park/ camping**

Proponents of previous proposals to provide for some limited camping and caravanning facilities in Skipton have almost given up on the idea due to their inability to find any active support from the Shire. Venues other than 'adjacent to the swimming pool' were canvassed, and a proposal for camping at the Rail Trail Terminus suggested (see also list of unranked items.)

### **4 Indoor gym/ stadium**

This priority was elevated from its previous ranking of 14 to Priority 4. It has been strongly supported by a younger demographic including parents of younger children, and inspired by the facility constructed at Linton. The proposal reflects a concern that facilities are needed to retain and support families with children as a key strategy to grow the town's population and restore its vitality.

### **5 More community get-togethers**

This new priority underlines broad recognition of the importance of structured activities which not only build social capital but which stimulate and contribute to the social economy of Skipton.

## **6 *More trees/improve landscaping***

There has been some significant tree-planting in Skipton which will leave a valued legacy in Skipton, such as the *Grevillia robusta* street plantings by the Shire, plantings in Stewart Park and the removal of senescent pines in Jubilee Park. There are further opportunities the community sees to work towards making Skipton 'a leafy oasis' on the treeless plain.

## **7 *Establish linear park***

One idea for making best use of the Council-owned land at 12 to 14 Montgomery Street is the creation of a linear park joining Jubilee Park with Stewart Park and the riparian zone along Mount Emu Creek. This is new priority. Given Council's subsequent confirmation of the sale of this land, realisation of this proposal will rely upon the formation of some community consortium to purchase and maintain the land in question, potentially as a social enterprise.

## **8 *Improve public transport***

This is a new priority, but reflects longstanding local complaints about the configuration of public transport services, particularly to the timing (and utility) of the weekday bus service to Ballarat and return. Mention was made of the need for services to Camperdown and to Beaufort.

## **9 *Attract more businesses and industry***

This current priority 9 (previously 7) now includes both the previous priorities 9 and 17 (Takeaway/ coffee shop and Bakery). Action has occurred with the attraction of two new rural supply stores, but other businesses have closed. The proprietors of the Skipton supermarket did establish a café, (fulfilling priority 9), however it has since closed and is now the home of the town's community Op Shop. A community project was completed with the development of a website for the Skipton Business Directory, but this has been abandoned due to a lack of maintenance, lack of local uptake and colonisation by non-Skipton-based firms.

## **10 *Slow down truck traffic***

This previous priority 19 is now elevated to priority 10. Local concerns relate to enforcement of existing speed limits as well as reducing speeds outside the kindergarten and school crossing. The gradients of the roadway into and out of town are seen to contribute to the reported concern of excessive speed of heavy vehicles.

## **11 *Paint and maintain town centre buildings***

Two Skipton business have participated in Corangamite Shire's Business façades improvements initiative to date. This priority taps into layered concerns about the presentation of Skipton to the significant volume of passing traffic.

## **12 *Clean up Mount Emu Creek***

Work was carried out on cleaning up the banks of Emu Creek as part of an array of State-funded recovery initiatives following on from the 2010/ 2011 floods. The current concerns relate primarily to fire hazard posed by the stands of tall, dry grass either side of Mount Emu Creek, which winds through the Skipton township.

A list of six other proposals (including two new ones, and two modified ones) was not rated as these ideas attracted few votes this time round. The Rail Trail Development idea called for further works to create a 'destination' at the trail terminus, in addition to the completed project, with the possibility of providing camping sites (which links back to Priority 3).

Once again, there are few project priorities which the Skipton community can work on unless it is in partnership with other agencies. Four of the twelve priorities rely upon activity by private business interests. Apart from calls to improve existing services and expand some recreational infrastructure, the Skipton community believes the town needs what is elsewhere referred to by governments as a comprehensive 'place-making' initiative. While there are avenues to source external funding for such a 'town-building' initiative, above all Skipton needs energetic leadership to develop a practical and realistic plan which can be progressively implemented. Such leadership would need to essentially involve the Skipton community, but may not be readily found within existing community structures.

## **Policy and Legislative Context**

The Council Plan 2017-2021 outlines Corangamite Shire's community planning initiative (Pages 10 and 11) and describes how, over the past six years, it has systematically surveyed local residents and assisted them to develop Community Plans. Recognising the many benefits of community planning and supporting its delivery, the new Council Plan includes a 'commitment to support Council's Community Planning Program' under its Theme 4 Objective to 'Engage with and listen to our communities' (Page 23), and under the Theme 1 Objective to 'Advocate strongly in relation to ... community priorities' (Page 13).

Importantly, the Skipton Community Plan review process contributes to Council's Vision: 'We strive for a thriving and connected community' (Page 4) and gives expression to Council's Values of Respect, Innovation and Collaboration (Page 8).

## **Internal / External Consultation**

Consultation and engagement activities to review Skipton's 10 year community plan began with the seeking of advice through meetings of the Skipton Progress Association, where decisions were made over several months on process and timelines. An A5 printed flyer 'What Next for Skipton?' was circulated in the local community and published in the Skipton Community News newsletter and featured in Corangamite Shire Facebook posts. The outcomes of the review process and revised priorities were also published in an article in the Skipton Community News.

## **Financial and Resource Implications**

This report is for information only and does not entail any recommendations relating to increased or reduced financial and other resources. The provision of \$70,000 in seed-funding by Council has provided the impetus and the means for the local community to identify and pursue projects to strengthen the Skipton community, to build public participation in decision-making affecting Skipton's future and to improve the liveability of the township through development projects. A number of Skipton Community Plan priorities have been and will continue to be considered as part of the formulation of future Council budgets or as part of Council's advocacy programs on behalf of Corangamite Shire communities.

## **Conclusion**

The community of Skipton has worked assiduously and inclusively to achieve its two prime 'community projects', identified in its original 2013 Community Plan. Both projects uncovered unheralded talents and skills in the community, which were contributed generously by everyone involved in realising these long-held ambitions. The co-operation and support of Corangamite Shire has been significant in not only the management and execution of these projects, but with a whole host of infrastructure projects such a footpath construction, tree-planting, public toilets improvements, flood mitigation (and recovery) works, and ongoing maintenance activities across the town, including Skipton's much-loved Mechanics Institute Hall. Skipton has made ready progress on those project proposals in its own hands, but still waits on the outcome of work in train to finally see the Skipton Hotel reopened and the reactivation of a number of Montgomery Street shops.

The conduct of a heavy schedule of activities and events through Skipton's 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations through 2014 drew in many community members, and gave added impetus to the program of town improvements conducted by the community and the Shire. This work is indicative of the capacity of the community to come together, to form partnerships and to take active steps to achieve their goals. The completion of these projects provides unequivocal evidence of the value to communities of committing time and effort to Council's community planning initiative. This value relates to project outcomes for communities and for Council, but especially to the building of trust which is essential to all productive partnerships to enhance the liveability and prosperity of Skipton.



Corangamite Shire’s community planning initiative is one of the few programs which is designed to provide a specific focus on the development of place-based communities – places which are important to surrounding rural-based residents as well as to visitors. Whereas Skipton has benefitted from Council’s commitment to community planning and the provision of seed funding which has enabled it to secure external grant funding to realise its priorities, there is a sense that a focus on completion of small discrete projects will not satisfy the broader ambition of Skipton’s updated Community Plan. The Skipton community believes the town is in need of a comprehensive ‘place-making’ initiative, with energetic leadership to develop a practical and realistic plan which can be progressively implemented. While such leadership would involve the Skipton community in an essential way, it may not be readily found within existing community structures.

Post Details
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**Corangamite Shire Council**

Published by Comms Corangamite (7) · August 14 at 9:06am · 🌐

A lot of things have changed for Skipton since the town’s community plan was prepared back in 2013, thanks to the efforts of local people and to support and seed-funding provided by Corangamite Shire.

While the Skipton Pub is yet to re-open (priority 1), substantial work has been done towards that end, including impressive stonework and restoration of the building. Some new shops have opened (priority 2), including the Community Op Shop, but others closed. The Town Entry Signage project has been successfully completed (priority 4), some new trees planted (priority 5), and the Rail Trail terminus and town walking circuit also completed (priority 6). Skipton has been successful in attracting a number of new businesses to establish in town (priority 7), and a website has been created to help profile what local businesses have to offer. Work continues with regional tourism authorities to promote the attractions of Skipton, as well as on the project to establish an overnight camping facility.

Four years on, the time has come to review Skipton’s community plan. It is a time to celebrate what has been achieved, to check whether the current priorities are still relevant, and to put forward any new ideas which can make Skipton a more prosperous and liveable place. Everyone with an interest in Skipton is invited to come along and contribute their thoughts and to vote on the revised list of township priorities.

**WHAT NEXT FOR  
SKIPTON?**

**IT’S TIME TO REVIEW SKIPTON’S COMMUNITY PLAN**

**WHEN:** Thursday 17 August 2017, from 7 pm to 8:30 pm

**WHERE:** Skipton Mechanics Institute Hall

**HAVE YOUR SAY AND VOTE ON PRIORITIES**

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998 people reached
Boost Post

👍 K&L MODEL RAILWAYS, Judith Mary and 3 others

👍 Like
💬 Comment
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**Performance for Your Post**

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**998** People Reached

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**5** Likes, Comments & Shares

<b>5</b> Likes	<b>5</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares
<b>0</b> Comments	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares
<b>0</b> Shares	<b>0</b> On Post	<b>0</b> On Shares

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Source: Extract from Minutes of Ordinary Council Meeting 26 September 2017