

CULTURE AND CREATIVITY STRATEGY 2023-2033



EAST GIPPSLAND
SHIRE COUNCIL



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

East Gippsland Shire Council acknowledges the Gunaikurnai, Monero and the Bidawal people as the Traditional Custodians of this land that encompasses East Gippsland Shire, and their enduring relationship with Country. The Traditional Custodians have cared for and nurtured East Gippsland for tens of thousands of years and Council values their living culture, practices and right to self-determination. We pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in East Gippsland and their Elders past, present, and future.

In developing this Strategy, East Gippsland Shire Council engaged with Aboriginal peoples, organisations and creative practitioners. Their voices and perspectives have deeply informed the development of this work.

THANKS

East Gippsland Shire Council would like to thank all the community members, organisations, businesses and Traditional Owners who shared their insights and perspectives in the development of this Strategy. Your contributions have been invaluable to shaping the outcome.

Artwork *Bogong Moths* by Patricia Pittman

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1 MESSAGE FROM THE MAYOR

We really are blessed out here in East Gippsland. Not only do we live in one of the most beautiful corners of the world, we're part of an extraordinary community – strong, resilient, creative, and steeped in history.

It has been some time since Council had a strategy to guide its contributions to the cultural life of the Shire. This *Culture and Creativity Strategy 2023–2033* lays out an ambitious vision for the future and a roadmap for how to get there. It's designed to build on our strengths and set us up to show the rest of the state, the country – and indeed the world – what makes us unique.

Achieving these goals will require a whole of community approach. That's why the foundation of this Strategy is about empowering the Shire's cultural and creative communities and building trusting relationships. We also need to deal ourselves back in to the policy conversations at a regional and state-wide level to reconnect with the wider cultural sector and bring more resources and opportunities to East Gippsland.

Life out here can be pretty good. We want to make it even better. I look forward to going on this journey with you all.



Councillor Mark Reeves, Mayor, East Gippsland Shire Council

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The East Gippsland Culture and Creativity Strategy is Council's guide to fostering a thriving cultural life across the Shire.

The Strategy aims to cultivate the conditions that will allow the region's cultural and creative communities to thrive and deliver cultural experiences to our local community and visitors.

Council is making a commitment to:

- » Foster the growth of the cultural and creative communities
- » Support communities to undertake their own initiatives
- » Champion the region's diverse cultures and creative activities, and
- » Embed creativity into the fabric of the Shire.

Eight strategies have been identified to deliver on these goals. They are:

1. Facilitate professional development opportunities
2. Expand cultural and creative activity across the Shire
3. Foster a new generation of organisers and producers
4. Enhance access to resources and spaces
5. Promote the cultural and creative life of the Shire
6. Capture, preserve and share our diverse cultures and heritage
7. Advocate for new cultural and creative outcomes across the Shire, and
8. Optimise use of Council's resources.

Over the Strategy's 10-year horizon, four-year Action Plans will be developed in consultation with the community to articulate what Council will do to support the cultural and creative communities across the Shire.

3 INTRODUCTION

East Gippsland is a unique and special place. Our location, natural environment, strong and diverse communities and rich histories combine to tell the story of – and shape the future for – our region. This Culture and Creativity Strategy builds on and responds to these strengths.

The Strategy sets out a shared vision for the creative life of the Shire and guides how Council will work with the artists, heritage groups and creative organisations that make up the region's cultural and creative communities to achieve it.

East Gippsland is geographically disconnected from the wider arts sector. This is both a strength and a challenge. The distance can make it hard to bring touring artists in and adds a layer of complexity for local artists seeking opportunities to present their work outside the region. This challenge exists within the Shire itself, as the distance between towns can limit connection between communities. At the same time, there is no lack of creative energy, spurred on by a deep pride in place, community and culture.

There are incredible communities of artists and practitioners across East Gippsland. A wide range of musicians, visual artists and performers exist in every pocket of the Shire. Hubs are located in Bairnsdale, Lakes Entrance, Orbost and Mallacoota, where there are higher concentrations of creative organisations and public venues for their activities. However, artists can be found in every town. The region's various cultural histories are preserved by dedicated and passionate heritage associations across the Shire. Much of this activity is undertaken on a volunteer basis.

First Nations artistic and cultural activity is strong across East Gippsland and several high profile First Nations artists call the region home. There are a number of Traditional Owners groups working hard to support their communities and the continuation of strong traditions, diverse cultural practices, and new forms of creative expression and engagement. A lot of activity is currently facilitated by Gunaikurnai Lands and Waters Aboriginal Corporation (GLaWAC), who are investing in development and presentation spaces at their site. There is a groundswell of enthusiasm among First Nations creative practitioners and groups looking for further opportunities to express their work and represent their cultures.

Council currently fulfils a range of functions and activities that contribute to the cultural and creative life of the Shire. It maintains and programs the Forge Theatre and Arts Hub in Bairnsdale and owns community spaces across the region. It also provides funding to a number of heritage organisations and makes a significant contribution to operations of the East Gippsland Art Gallery in Bairnsdale. A range of projects and initiatives are also supported through the annual community grants.

This Strategy aims to leverage all these assets to foster the growth of the Shire's cultural and creative communities and allow them to thrive. Their success is critical to achieving a flourishing cultural life across the Shire and to delivering the social, cultural and economic benefits that follow.

4 INVESTING IN CULTURE AND CREATIVITY

4.1 How we developed the Strategy

Significant investigations into East Gippsland's creative and cultural communities were undertaken to inform development of this Strategy. This included:



An online survey with 141 respondents



Six public forums across the Shire engaging 87 community members



Engagement with Traditional Owner groups and Aboriginal-run organisations and services and one First Nations workshop drawing together 15 people



34 individual and small group consultations with cultural sector stakeholders



Site visits to key spaces in townships throughout the Shire



Review of relevant Council strategies, policies and data

These investigations highlighted that:

- » There are strong communities of creative and cultural practitioners across the Shire
- » There are a limited number of organisers and producers
- » There are limited production and technical support resources
- » Cultural and creative activities and groups are siloed, disconnected and often invisible to each other and their audiences
- » There are limited opportunities for young people
- » Formal education opportunities are limited or non-existent
- » Access to suitable space for development and presentation of creative and cultural work is limited
- » The expansive nature of the Shire, combined with limited transportation options, can make it hard to participate in activities or access opportunities, and
- » There is a perception that arts and culture isn't valued by the wider community.

First Nations consultations indicated alignment between the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the rest of the creative population. Artists, organisations and other facilitators all highlighted needs for space, development opportunities and support. However, there were a number of findings specific to First Nations peoples, such as the need for greater representation and engagement with their cultures, improved cultural competency across the region, and an increase in the number of Aboriginal-run and focussed spaces for the community to gather in a manner that is culturally safe.

To further investigate the situation, a high level assessment of the Shire was undertaken against the Creative Ecologies¹¹ framework, looking at a range of conditions required for a thriving creative community.

They are that:

Participants are connected and engaged

Creative communities thrive when their participants connect with each other and the wider community. Artists never exist in isolation. They are always embedded within a community, society and locale. This is why the cultural value of a project or product should factor in the communities themselves, as they are the point from which an expression of both economic opportunity and place identity commence.

There are local opportunities and the possibility of growth

Both artists and audiences need opportunities for development. Creatives need avenues to present their work and develop their skills, while the community benefits from exposure to new ideas and novel experiences. Without access to these opportunities locally, the sector's growth is stifled. Practitioners struggle to progress and audiences are hard to develop. There needs to be the possibility of growth.

Audiences are central

Audiences are a central component of a thriving creative community. Their consumption of cultural goods and participation in creative experiences builds demand and grows the market. This has an impact on the civic life of a region, as engagement with the arts becomes a normal part of everyday life. As such, consideration of the audience by artists, producers and commissioning bodies is essential.

Experimentation is encouraged

Experimentation is a central driver of a creative community's development. It fosters artistic growth amongst practitioners, exposes audiences to new ideas and ways of thinking, and develops capacities for critical thinking in the community. Encouraging experimentation is essential to growth.

Resources are available

The production of creative goods requires practical inputs alongside the artist's conceptual vision. It could be material supplies (such as paint and canvases), technical expertise (like event staging and production), supportive networks (both formal and informal), space to develop or produce work, or financial contributions (such as grants). The level of access creatives have to these resources either supports or inhibits their output.

The contribution of the arts is recognised by the wider community

Recognition takes many forms, from celebration of an endeavour to acknowledgement of its material and community benefits. Both are equally important. Visibility extends reach and grows audiences while providing recognition to artists. Establishing connections between the arts and other arms of civil society (such as education, health and justice) formally acknowledges and reinforces the value of creative activities.

There is a diversity of creative output and supporting communities

Creative communities are made up of multiple cultures, each with their own underlying purposes, values and expressions. The combination of these sub-cultures and their associated activities give the community strength by providing options and possibilities to both audiences and artists. Because of its social character, creativity is an excellent conduit by which communities can navigate differences and similarities and bring down barriers to access and understanding.

¹¹ The Creative Ecologies project is a research initiative developed by Future Tense and creative sector partners around Australia. For more information visit <https://creativeecologies.net/>.

East Gippsland's creative ecology has been assessed against these conditions in terms of whether they are emergent or embedded within the region.

	Emergent	Minimal	Developing	Established	Embedded
Participants are connected and engaged		→			
There are local opportunities and the possibility of growth		→			
Audiences are central		→			
Experimentation is encouraged	→				
Resources are available		→			
The contribution of the arts is recognised by the wider community	→				
There is a diversity of creative output and supporting communities		→			

This assessment was informed by observation of the region's cultural and creative activities and input from the community shared through public forums, consultations and survey responses (the key findings of which are highlighted above). The process shows our strengths and highlights areas where we can focus our energies. The Culture and Creativity Strategy has been developed to respond to these needs.

4.2 Our aspirations for the cultural and creative life of the Shire

It is essential to know where we are heading and where we want to get to. In 2021 Council engaged with the community in a process to better understand what the residents' vision for the Shire was. This led to the development of a long-term Community Vision for East Gippsland that drives Council's planning and delivery efforts:

In 2040 our people, place, environment, and economy will be connected, in balance and resilient. Our unique and diverse communities will be accessible, inclusive, well connected and safe. We will value and care for each other and our natural environment. Our economy will support existing and emerging industries by being agile, innovative, and sustainable. Our Community Vision 2040 expresses the aspirations, values and priorities of the East Gippsland community. It emphasises the importance of people, the environment and the economy to East Gippsland.²

This is further Supported by the vision of the Council Plan that states:

East Gippsland is an inclusive and innovative community that values our natural environment, puts community at the centre of Council decision-making, and creates the conditions in which communities can thrive.³

Culture and creativity have an important role in realising this vision. Building on the vision, the following statement articulates the community's aspirations for the cultural life of the Shire and describes where we aim to be by 2033:

East Gippsland is a creative place to live and visit. It is home to a multitude of cultural groups, artists and creative professionals, whose work is a vital part of life across the Shire.

The community are actively engaged with their heritage and use their abundant creative energies to realise a sustainable and harmonious future. The region is known as a hub of cultural activity, where practitioners can thrive, and this is one of the attractions for new residents and visitors.

² East Gippsland Shire – Shaping the Future: Our Community Vision 2040, June 2021.

³ Council Plan 2021-2025, June 2022.

4.3 Roles and responsibilities

This Strategy reflects the aspirations of the Shire's cultural and creative communities. It is their activities that will be the primary driver of progress. Council's role is to support these communities, foster their development and growth, and connect them to opportunities across the region and abroad.

Council will do this by:

- » **Advocating** – Using Council's position to advocate for the cultural and creative needs of the Shire at local, regional, state and national levels
- » **Enabling** – Providing or facilitating access to resources and spaces for cultural and creative activities
- » **Connecting** – Acting as a central information hub for the cultural and creative communities, providing connection to opportunities and facilitating collaborations, and
- » **Planning** – Proactively engaging with and responding to the cultural and creative needs of the community and Shire.

These areas of focus are intended to facilitate the initiatives and projects of the Shire's artists, heritage groups and creative organisations. The cultural and creative communities' role is to:

- » **Conceive** – Generate the ideas and concepts for cultural and creative initiatives and lead on the programming of activities and events, and
- » **Own** – Drive the development and delivery of activities and initiatives

The work of the community will drive the cultural and creative life of the region, Council's role is to provide the necessary support to allow it to happen.

4.4 Strategic context

East Gippsland Shire Council's activities are driven by the Community Vision and articulated through three key strategies themed around the triple bottom-line principles of sustainable development. These interdependent strategies set Council's direction for a diverse range of services and support the work of external agencies and our community. The Culture and Creativity Strategy is designed to contribute to these key strategies.



Council's Culture and Creativity Strategy is also informed by the goals of the Victorian Government's Creative State 2025 strategy and the Australian Government's cultural policy, *Revive: A Place for Every Story, A Story for Every Place*.

4.5 Underlying principles

Council will apply the following principles when undertaking its work to deliver the Strategy:

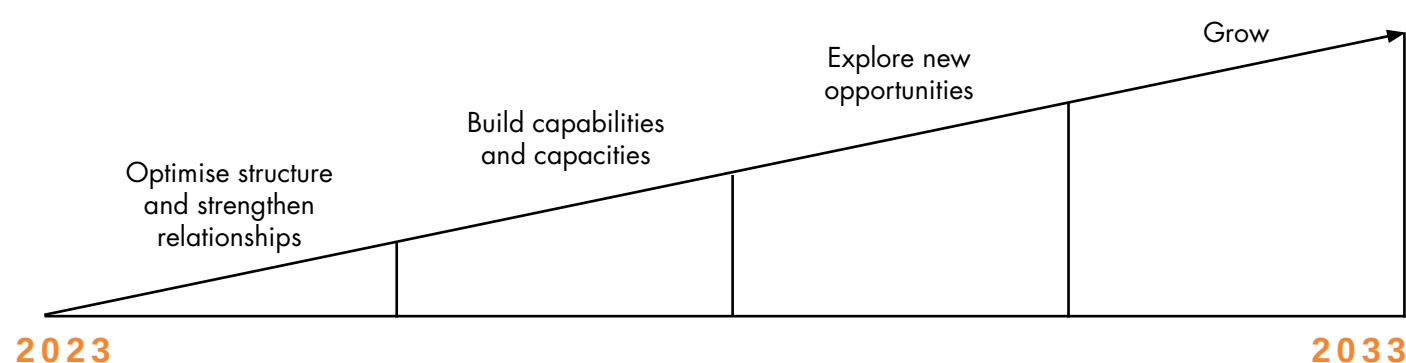
- » **Centre First Nations peoples** – Give agency to First Nations people and support visibility and expression of their living cultures
- » **Prioritise local communities and place-based practices** – Focus on cultural and creative activities and initiatives where local communities are the primary audience as well as initiatives that reflect and celebrate the uniqueness of their region
- » **Build on existing activities and energies** – Acknowledge and work with those organisations and individuals already in place across the Shire rather than replicate their activities
- » **Provide equitable access to opportunities** – Provide resources, spaces and opportunities to cultural and creative practitioners and communities across the Shire
- » **Actively engage with the Shire's cultural and creative communities** – Council will go out into the community to understand what is happening across the Shire, who is driving it, and what the needs and opportunities are
- » **Provide enthusiastic support and advocacy** – Always look for ways to positively help the community with their cultural and creative initiatives and projects
- » **Deliver through collaboration and partnerships** – Where Council does undertake delivery of a cultural or creative project or service, ensure it is done with the relevant communities, and
- » **Demonstrate the value of culture and creativity** – Be a champion of the Shire's cultural and creative communities and their work and promote them as an essential part of life in the region.

5 OUR STRATEGY

Council has identified four high level goals and eight supporting strategies to guide its contribution to the cultural and creative life of the Shire. They are intended to provide an environment in which the Shire's communities can execute their initiatives and thrive.

GOALS			
Foster the growth of the cultural and creative communities	Support communities to undertake their own initiatives	Champion the region's diverse cultures and creative activities	Embed creativity into the fabric of the Shire
OUTCOMES			
Creative and cultural practitioners have the opportunity to sustainably develop their skills and abilities, leading to a higher quality and volume of activities.	The community has the capability, capacity and resources to devise and execute activities that meet their specific needs.	The region's multifaceted heritage is central to our identity and used to build an open, rich and harmonious community.	Ensure innovative thinking informs how we plan, manage and enjoy our towns and environment.
STRATEGIES			
1. Facilitate professional development opportunities	3. Foster a new generation of organisers and producers	5. Promote the cultural and creative life of the Shire	7. Advocate for new cultural and creative outcomes across the Shire
2. Expand cultural and creative activity across the Shire	4. Enhance access to resources and spaces	6. Capture, preserve and share our diverse cultures and heritage	8. Optimise use of Council's resources

Four-year Action Plans will guide the implementation of the Strategy, allowing for the activities to be progressively consolidated and built upon over the ten years.



5.1 Goal One: Foster the growth of the cultural and creative communities

5.1.1 Strategy 1 – Facilitate professional development opportunities

What do we mean:

Provide opportunities for cultural and creative practitioners to develop their professional skills within the region. This could include finding ways to connect people with local skilled practitioners or work with external groups and funding bodies to bring new opportunities to the region.

Why this is important:

Expanding the skills and capabilities of cultural and creative practitioners is essential to increasing and enhancing offerings across the Shire.

Council's role:

Identify and facilitate opportunities or initiatives to meet this need or support organisations that can.

5.1.2 Strategy 2 – Expand cultural and creative activity across the Shire

What do we mean:

Contribute to the activation of spaces that can accommodate different cultural, creative, and technical needs and, where appropriate, commission works to be presented in them. This could include gigs, performances, exhibitions and events, or the presentation art in public spaces.

Why this is important:

Providing more spaces for the presentation of cultural and creative works will increase the amount and types of activities, enhance community life, and facilitate the sector's development.

Council's role:

Support the development and activation of spaces that present cultural works.

5.2 Goal Two: Support communities to undertake their own initiatives

5.2.1 Strategy 3 – Foster a new generation of organisers and producers

What do we mean:

Grow the number of people with the skills and abilities to conceive, plan and deliver creative and cultural projects and activities, and enable their access to resources that create further opportunities.

Why this is important:

Organisers and producers are critical to stimulating greater amounts of activity and fostering innovation across the Shire. This is particularly important in East Gippsland because of the vast distances between communities.

Council's role:

Develop and deliver programs to build these capacities, facilitate access to external development opportunities, and encourage communities to undertake activities.

5.2.2 Strategy 4 – Enhance access to resources and spaces

What do we mean:

Proactively engage with cultural and creative communities to understand their various needs and find ways to either meet them or connect them to supports that can. This could include facilitating connections between groups, notifying about grant opportunities, helping navigate government bureaucracies, or advocating to external funding bodies for required resources.

Why this is important:

While Council is not able to meet every need, it can connect groups to other sources and support efforts to secure more resources.

Council's role:

Engage with communities, understand their needs, connect them with the required support where possible, and advocate on their behalf to relevant external organisations and funding bodies.

5.3 Goal Three: Champion the region's diverse cultures and creative activities

5.3.1 Strategy 5 – Promote the cultural and creative life of the Shire

What do we mean:

Council will make it its business to be engaged with the Shire's various cultural and creative communities, understand the breadth of their activities, and be a tireless champion of them. This will mean being proactively involved and connected to what is happening across the Shire and the people behind those activities.

Why this is important:

Greater awareness of the breadth of cultural and creative activity across the region will build audiences, improve the viability of initiatives, and transform the region's reputation with visitors and the wider cultural sector.

Council's role:

Engage with, capture information on, promote, celebrate the cultural and creative communities of the Shire and their activities.

5.3.2 Strategy 6 – Capture, preserve and share our diverse cultures and heritage

What do we mean:

Ensure the unique histories and cultures of the Shire are preserved and promoted, as well as celebrate the diversity and depth of our communities, traditions and futures. This means building an understanding of the different cultures that make up our region, from Traditional Owners to colonial settlers and recent migrants, as well as the influence of different industries and activities.

Why this is important:

Heritage is central to how we build our identities, build pride in ourselves and break down barriers.

Council's role:

Support conservation, facilitate creative collaboration, and promote the region's stories.

5.4 Goal Four: Embed creativity into the fabric of the Shire

5.4.1 Strategy 7 – Advocate for new cultural and creative outcomes across the Shire

What do we mean:

Look for opportunities across Council's various activities, as well as through regional collaborations, and state and federal funding programs. This includes participating in the regional-level planning forums and representing the cultural and creative needs of the Shire to other tiers of government.

Why this is important:

Continually advocating for new funding will enhance visibility of the Shire's cultural initiatives amongst regional, state and federal bodies and lead to increased support.

Council's role:

Identifying and securing new sources of funding from within Council and other government bodies.

5.4.2 Strategy 8 – Optimise use of Council's resources

What do we mean:

Ensure Council's resources are organised to facilitate creative and cultural outcomes both internally and through its interactions and support of the community. This means ensuring Council's investments are focused on creating the conditions that will allow the cultural and creative communities to thrive across the Shire.

Why this is important:

It is essential Council uses the resources at its disposal to the greatest effect.

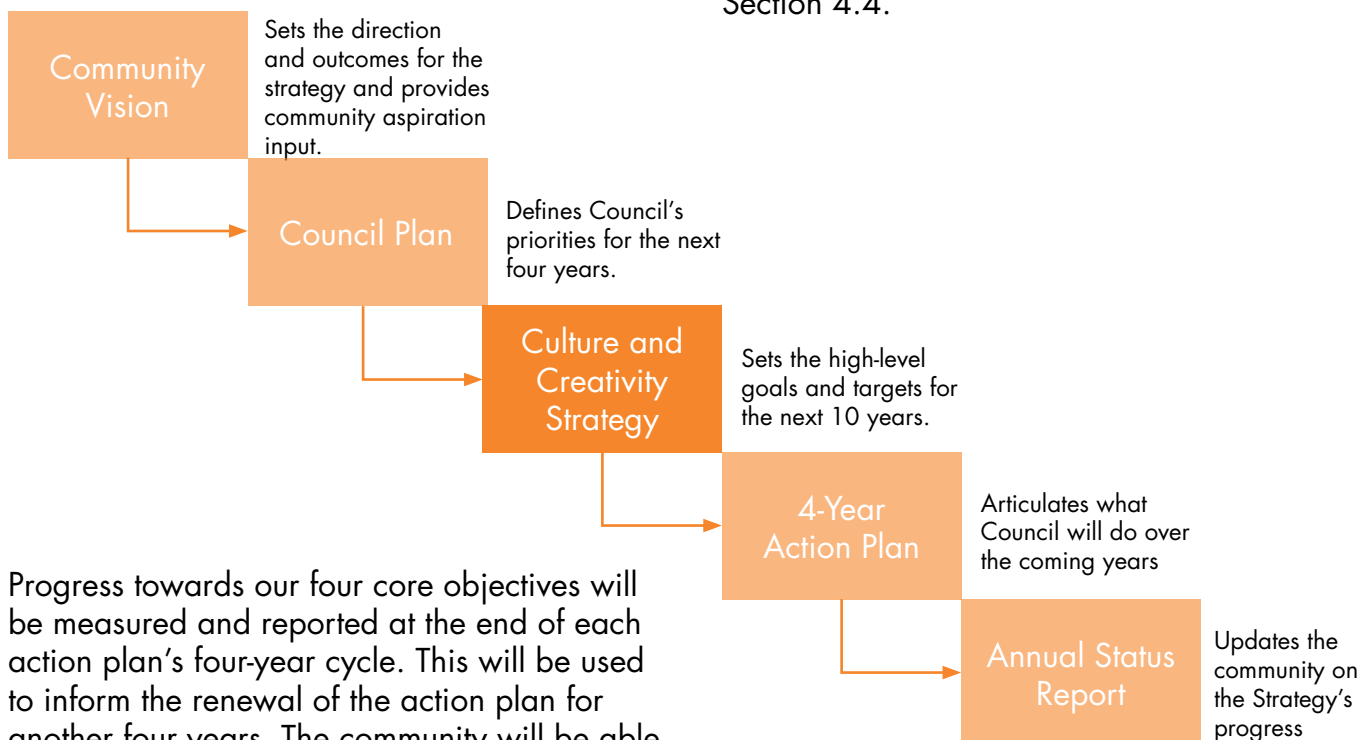
Council's role:

Optimise use of Council human and financial resources and assets to deliver Strategies 1–7.

6 IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGY

The Strategy provides a 10-year roadmap for how Council will invest its resources and energies to achieve the aspirations for the creative and cultural life of the Shire. The eight identified strategies will remain constant, while four-year action plans will allow for different ideas and approaches to be tested and refined.

The relationship between this Strategy and the other parts of Council's integrated planning framework is demonstrated in the diagram below. This also shows how the Strategy will be implemented. The actions will be driven through Council and department business planning and guided by the underlying principles outlined in Section 4.4.



Progress towards our four core objectives will be measured and reported at the end of each action plan's four-year cycle. This will be used to inform the renewal of the action plan for another four years. The community will be able to feedback on our progress and suggest where improvements can be made over the life of the Strategy.

- » Four-year Action Plans will be developed to outline activities under each of the eight strategies
- » Ongoing feedback from the sector and place-based groups will be collected via regular engagement activities
- » Advisory groups will be formed to advise Council where appropriate
- » Annual monitoring reports will be prepared documenting progress against the action plan and commentary on the situation across the Shire. These will be used to inform renewal of the next Action Plan and

- » As the Strategy approaches the end of its life, its impact will be evaluated and the findings used to inform development of the next 10-year Strategy.

Throughout the life of the Strategy, Council will share updates with the community via its various communications channels. These will include success stories, new opportunities, and profiles of the groups and individuals that make up the Shire's rich diverse cultural community.

7 GLOSSARY

Art

When we talk about art in this Strategy we mean all kinds of creative expressions, whether it's painting, drawing, sculpture, music, dancing, acting, writing or making. It's all art.

Creative practice

This refers to the type of art and, much like the definition above, encompasses all types of creative expression, such as the visual arts, performance, design, fashion, games and craft.

Cultural and creative communities

This is made up by the people and organisations that undertake creative and cultural work. This includes individuals, businesses and community organisations and runs the gamut from enthusiastic amateurs to professional practitioners.

Culture

This is how we define and express ourselves. It includes the beliefs, norms, knowledge and self-perception that drive and shape how we live in our communities.

Heritage

We are referring to the act of capturing, preserving and sharing our rich and diverse cultures, from those of the First Peoples, through to settlement and subsequent waves of migration.

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