

Imagine
GREATER BENDIGO

Engagement report summary



CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO

Imagine Greater Bendigo is a three-stage project that aims to understand what you, the community, love, value and want to see improved or changed in the future. The feedback and ideas you provided in stage 1 will be used to develop a Community Vision, Council Plan, Financial Plan, and Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan by October 2021. An Asset Plan will also be developed in 2022. It is a requirement of the new Local Government Act (2020) and Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008) for every Council to engage with the municipal community to complete this work.

This report summarises the outcomes of stage 1 community engagement, providing essential information to inform the deliberative engagement process in stage 2. For more information about the community engagement approach and detailed engagement findings, see the full engagement report on the City of Greater Bendigo's engagement platform Let's Talk Greater Bendigo – www.letstalkgreaterbendigo.com.au/imagine

Stage 1 engagement overview

From February 2 to March 9, using a variety of engagement methods, we heard from:

- 539 people at listening posts and via postcards
- 194 individual people through the Let's Talk website, generating 194 individual survey responses
- 24 groups, taking in the feedback from at least 160 people (representing many more)
- 27 submissions to the short online 'visioner tool', available on Let's Talk Greater Bendigo
- 98 people contributed to the Imagine it – Draw It project

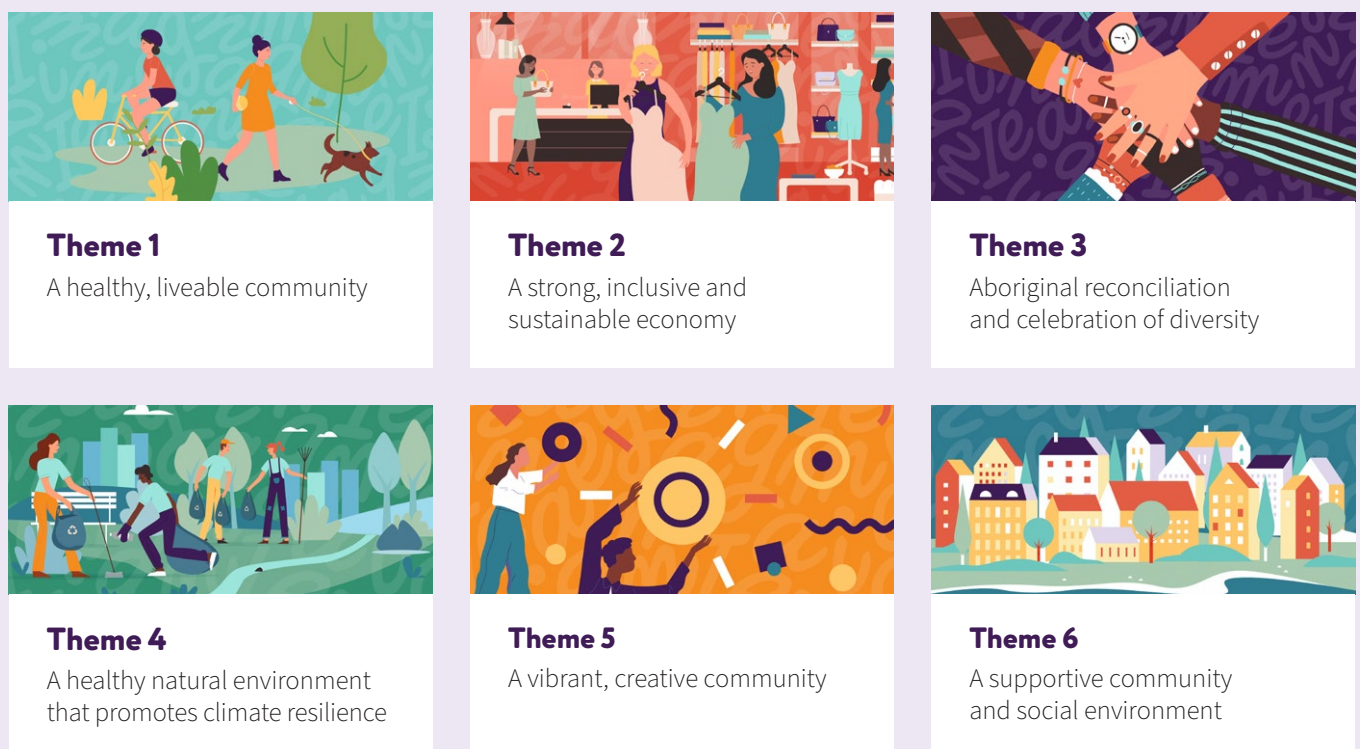
**This approach
reached more
than 1,000 people
in stage 1**

The postcards, listening posts and visioner tool focused on two high-level questions:

1. What makes Greater Bendigo a great place to live now?
2. What would make Greater Bendigo an even better place to live 30 years from now?

In addition to these two questions, the online survey and toolkit asked what people valued across six themes (Figure 1), which were developed from a review of recent community engagement and priorities identified by residents.

Figure 1: Imagine themes



What makes Greater Bendigo a great place to live now?

Responses to this question provided an understanding as to what the community values and wants to see protected or strengthened into the future. Overwhelmingly, what is loved most about Greater Bendigo is:



I love the big-country-town feel: the air is fresh, it lacks that big-city grime, the countryside is all around, it's a 'city in the forest'; you bump into someone you know just about anywhere you go, see familiar faces everywhere, but there's plenty of diversity'

– survey participant

What would make Greater Bendigo an even better place to live 30 years from now?

The responses to this question helped understand the community's strongest future priorities. Again, a healthy, liveable community was the top priority for stage 1 participants, followed by a strong, sustainable and inclusive economy.

In the detailed online questions, participants emphasized building on the things they already value about Greater Bendigo, with the top three priorities being:

A green (as in treed) landscape that helps ameliorate the impacts of increasing temperatures. Transport infrastructure that encourages physical activity. This would mean enhancing neighbourhood business centres rather than focusing everything to the Bendigo CBD. An economy that has reduced the inequality across Bendigo by ensuring meaningful, secure and reasonably remunerated employment.

– survey participant



Some new priorities also emerged that participants believed would make Greater Bendigo an even better place to live in 30 years. Not everyone agreed on how to approach these priorities, but there was a clear top four:

1

Hargreaves Mall

Participants were divided on what should be done with the Mall, with some suggesting it be turned into an attraction and others wanting it demolished.

2

Water

Most commonly people were concerned with a secure water supply into the future, but water spaces and pools were also mentioned.

3

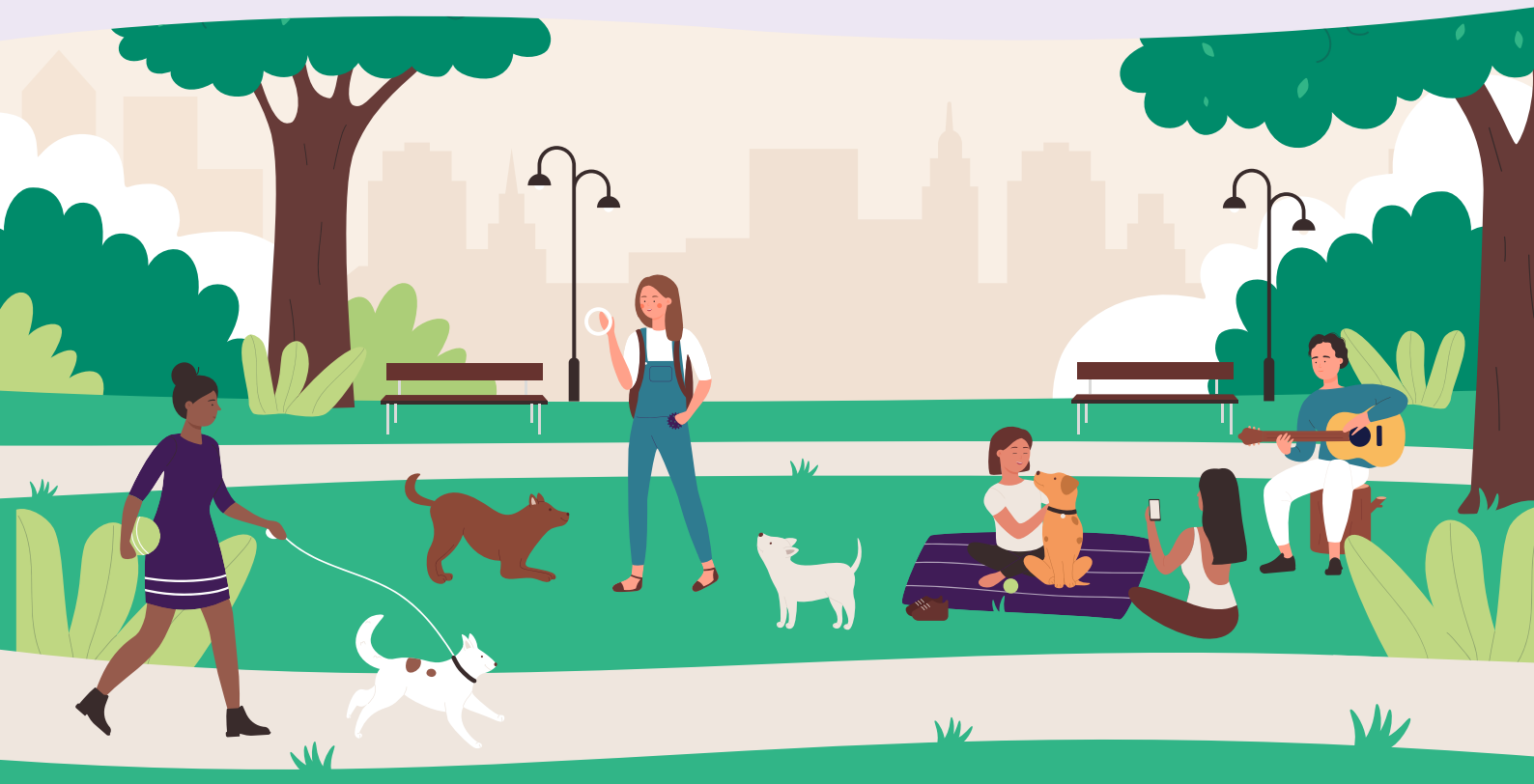
Planning for our future

Roads and parking were mentioned most often, but participants were proud of our beautiful heritage sites, both built and natural, and want to preserve them.

4

Inclusion and recognition for rural communities

Social inclusion and infrastructure were most mentioned.



Theme 1: Healthy, liveable community

Theme 1 focuses on the community's priorities for a healthy and liveable community. The City of Greater Bendigo Community Plan 2017-2021 defines a liveable community as 'one that enables people to live healthy, safe, harmonious lives in attractive and affordable settings'. Table 1 shows participant priorities from most valued to least. The seven priorities identified in previous engagement (in bold) were all reinforced in survey responses and six new priorities were identified.

Inclusion of fitness equipment and distance markers along paths was also mentioned numerous times and 11 responses specifically mentioned the concept of all bike and walking paths linking together to create a network that provides access to neighborhoods, workplaces, shopping and services to encourage active transport.



| Table 1: Theme 1 – Priority areas | Mentions |
|---|----------|
| Cool, shady, and green streets with accessible parks and play spaces | 98 |
| Walking and cycling paths for people of all ages and abilities | 77 |
| Better access to public transport and walking and cycling paths to move around | 77 |
| Growing more food locally in schools, community gardens and on farms | 52 |
| Access to cheap healthy food | 42 |
| Environmental sustainability | 39 |
| Community facilities – sport and recreation | 36 |
| Affordable, safe and secure housing | 30 |
| Better access to healthcare for older (AND other) residents | 29 |
| Social inclusion and connection | 27 |
| Education, training and employment | 21 |
| Planning and urban sprawl, density, walkable neighbourhoods | 21 |
| More support for rural areas and smaller communities of Greater Bendigo | 14 |

Theme 2: Strong, Inclusive, Sustainable Economy

All priorities reported from previous engagement (in bold) were reinforced in survey responses. Support for local artists and businesses, particularly after the effects of COVID-19, was the most common response. A total of 79 responses highlight that they would like to see more support for small local businesses and creatives, including from Council. Retaining local manufacturing and attracting new industry was also important to respondents.

Another strong emerging priority with 74 responses was the need for an economy that addresses disadvantage for marginalised and vulnerable members of the community, and the need for improved employment opportunities.

A total of 69 responses wanted more job opportunities for young people and people with a disability, with 11 people mentioning that pathways for disengaged young people are important.

| Table 2: Theme 2 – Priority areas | Mentions |
|--|----------|
| Support for local artists and businesses, particularly after COVID-19 | 79 |
| An economy that addresses disadvantage | 74 |
| More job opportunities for young people and people with a disability | 69 |
| More opportunities for young people to go to university or TAFE so they can stay in Greater Bendigo | 62 |
| An economy that attracts visitors | 41 |
| Promote and sell a wide variety of local produce in the community | 36 |
| An economy that is sustainable | 34 |

Theme 3: Aboriginal Reconciliation and Diversity

All priorities reported from previous engagement (in bold) were reinforced in survey responses. Seeing more examples of Aboriginal culture and history across Greater Bendigo was expressed strongly with 117 responses. Respondents want to see this through education, celebration of language and culture, greater visibility and representation generally, more Aboriginal place names and dual names, truth telling and more public monuments.

Support for increasing community understanding of cultural practices and values of Traditional Owners is mentioned in 87 responses, five of which specifically noted the need for genuine integration into the fabric of our community rather than simplistic or tokenistic approaches.

The third most-represented priority, with 84 responses, is working together to build a welcoming city and region by addressing racism. Responses generally focused more on multicultural communities, examples of how this may be achieved included hosting festivals and educational opportunities to promote understanding of diverse cultural groups that form part of the local community.

| Table 3: Theme 3 – Priority areas | Mentions |
|--|----------|
| Seeing more examples of Aboriginal culture and history across Greater Bendigo | 117 |
| Increasing community understanding of the cultural practices and values of Traditional Owners | 87 |
| Working together to build a welcoming city by addressing racism | 84 |
| Seeing the goals of Traditional Owners reflected in long-term plans for Greater Bendigo | 42 |
| Better job opportunities, procurement and improved economic outcomes for Aboriginal people | 42 |
| Working together to meet the needs of refugees and people seeking asylum | 25 |
| Aboriginal families and children being supported to connect to their culture | 22 |

Theme 4: A healthy natural environment that promotes resilience to a changing climate

Survey participants had the most to say about this theme. All seven priorities identified in previous engagement (in bold) were reinforced in survey responses and six new priorities were identified. There is an observed overlap with Theme 1 in the desire for more trees and green space, sustainable or active transport, and the repeated concern about water. Theme 4 responses also had a strong emphasis on renewables and sustainability, though not explicitly with reference to COVID-19 as reported from previous engagement.

| Table 4: Theme 4 – Priority areas | Mentions |
|--|----------|
| Create well-designed spaces that are mindful of our future climate | 125 |
| Minimise impacts to local wildlife, plants and trees as Greater Bendigo grows | 76 |
| Protect existing trees, improve habitats and support conversation | 66 |
| Plant more indigenous plants | 66 |
| More trees/greening/green spaces/shade | 53 |
| Focus on water | 53 |
| Create a more climate resilient built environment (planning controls, incentives, retrofits, solar, access to green space) | 52 |
| Do more to promote uptake of renewables | 47 |
| Recognise Traditional Owners' connection to the land and local knowledge | 37 |
| Strengthen connection and relationship between farmers/producers, schools and the general community | 30 |
| Create a circular economy/more recycling | 30 |
| Stronger Council leadership on climate change and sustainability | 20 |
| Urgency of doing more on climate change/ climate emergency/drastic emissions reduction | 19 |
| Use the COVID-19 recovery as an opportunity to invest in projects that have positive impacts on the environment (e.g. improve energy efficiency of housing and buildings) | 16 |



Theme 5: Creating vibrant, creative communities

All priorities reported from previous engagement (in bold) were reinforced in survey responses, with one additional priority identified. Recognising the importance and benefits of creativity received the most mentions, with the benefits of creativity for wellbeing, mental health and building community resilience specifically raised by respondents.

Support for activating public and private spaces was mentioned in 64 responses, with the need to focus beyond the city centre on small communities and suburban areas identified.

The third most-represented priority, with 53 mentions, is the desire for connection and collaboration opportunities with artists. In particular, participation in creative activities by community members was important to respondents, as were the desire for inclusive activities and events and opportunities for children and young people to participate. An additional priority around the need for inclusive spaces and infrastructure to support community participation in creativity also emerged (22 mentions).

| Table 5: Theme 5 – Priority areas | Mentions |
|---|----------|
| Recognition of the importance and benefits of creativity | 70 |
| Activation of public and private creative spaces | 64 |
| Opportunities for connection and collaboration with artists and the wider community | 53 |
| Support and opportunities for local artists and their initiatives* | 46 |
| Inclusion of culturally diverse people in local arts and creative industries | 29 |
| Opportunities to grow networks that are supportive and inclusive | 26 |
| Greater understanding and representation of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and creative practices | 25 |
| Inclusive spaces/infrastructure to support community creativity | 22 |

Theme 6: A supportive community and social environment

All priorities reported from previous engagement (in bold) were reinforced in survey responses. The strongest priority was the need to support community sport, recreation and community groups to increase social connection after COVID-19 (99 mentions). Related to this in the responses was volunteering, the need to support volunteers, and for quality community facilities and hubs that enable social connection.



Working together to make Greater Bendigo feel 'safe, welcoming and inclusive for all' was the second-strongest priority that emerged from responses (78 mentions). This priority from previous engagement was recognised as 'working together to make Greater Bendigo feel safe and welcoming for all and preventing family violence' but inclusion as an element of responses was particularly important to respondents. As was the prevention of family violence and the need to address safety issues in Hargreaves Mall and the city centre.

The third most-represented theme, with 67 mentions, was working together to address loneliness and social isolation. Support for older residents and rural and isolated people were also important to respondents.

| Table 6: Theme 6 – Priority areas | Mentions |
|--|----------|
| Support for community sport, recreation & community groups to increase social connection after COVID-19 | 99 |
| Working together to make Greater Bendigo feel safe and welcoming for all and preventing family violence | 78 |
| Working together to address loneliness and social isolation | 67 |
| Improving support and services for mental health, homelessness and financial stress | 61 |
| Family-friendly events and activities for people from different generations | 61 |
| Improving internet access, especially for rural residents and households with no internet | 29 |
| The way the community has banded together during COVID-19 | 22 |

Long-term financial planning/future finance

Deliberative Engagement – a method of engagement involving a select group of participants. The process focuses on a defined issue. It weighs up options and provides recommendations to decision-makers.

Given the Imagine Greater Bendigo deliberative engagement process will be drawn on to develop the City's long-term financial plan, two optional survey questions sought community input around financial challenges facing the City.

The first question was: How should Council prioritise which services it delivers to our growing and changing community, while also maintaining infrastructure it is responsible for and investing in new projects as they are needed? There were 197 responses received and nine themes identified:

| Financial planning themes | Mentions |
|---|----------|
| Better scoping, planning, monitoring and evaluation of projects (to avoid cost blow outs and to help prioritisation) | 52 |
| Prioritise health and wellbeing/equity | 51 |
| Prioritise climate risk/environmentally sustainable design (to address climate change and save on energy/renewal costs) | 38 |
| Reduce operating costs and improve productivity/efficiency | 34 |
| More regular informed community consultation on prioritisation | 29 |
| Find more ways to generate income | 18 |
| Prioritise investment in rural/suburban areas/outside the city centre and mall | 13 |
| Advocate for more state and federal funding | 12 |
| Co-management/co-investment of facilities with community | 7 |

The second question asked: If you had to choose how Council funded future services and new projects, which of the below options would you prefer? The response options for this question were:

1. Pay a slightly higher rates bill to continue to fund new and current services and infrastructure, meaning the City would need to apply to the Victorian Government to raise rates above the set rate cap.
2. Prioritise and reduce current services so as not to pay more in rates

Of the 191 responses to this question, 109 (57 per cent) opted for a slightly higher rates bill, while 82 (43 per cent) opted for prioritising and reducing current services to avoid a rate rise.



Conclusion

This report summarises the community engagement approach and themes identified from stage 1 responses, which will inform the deliberative engagement process and targeted stakeholder engagement in stage 2 of the Imagine Greater Bendigo project.