

Recreation Plan



2
VOLUME

ISSUES
PAPER



About this document

This document is a **Issues Paper** presented to Indigo Shire staff, the Project Steering Committee and the community as part of the development process for the Shire's Municipal Recreation Plan. It has been produced for the purposes of further discussion and consultation.

This document is the first of three prepared for Indigo Shire as part of the Recreation Plan.

The other documents to be prepared for the Recreation Plan are:

Volume 1. Strategy and Actions, and

Volume 2. Demand and Consultation findings.

An inventory of facilities was also prepared for this project and submitted as a separate database.

The purpose of this Issues Paper is to stimulate debate and discussion about Council's future role and what the priorities are for Council to address in terms of recreation in coming years.

Issues raised in this document stem from community and stakeholder consultation, as well as preliminary data research and inspections of the Shire's recreation facilities.

Note: This Issues Paper has not been submitted to, or formally adopted by the Indigo Shire Council.

Following discussions with relevant staff, project steering committee and then community about directions in this paper, and issues raised will be prioritised and a strategic plan will be prepared for exhibition.

Acknowledgements

This project was sponsored by Sport and Recreation Victoria.

@leisure wishes to acknowledge the support and assistance provided by the Project Steering Committee, in particular:

- David Koren, Recreation & Community Development Co-ordinator
- Sally McCarron, Manager, Health & Well Being
- Phil Prior, Assets Manager.

@leisure also wishes to thank residents who completed and returned a householder survey, and sporting and recreation clubs and community groups that participated in telephone interviews.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Methodology

This Issues Paper follows an information collection and analysis stage that included:

- a review of Council's 1997 Recreation Plan
- a review of relevant literature, including Council policies and strategies
- site inspections of key open space and recreation facilities
- analysis of state and regional recreation participation data and trends
- analysis of local area population data and demographics
- telephone interviews with local and regional stakeholders
- telephone interviews with a range of sport and recreation clubs, community groups and schools
- a *householder survey* distributed to 5,800 households in the Indigo Shire – 758 survey responses were received and analysed. Significant reference is made throughout this document to the analysis of results and responses from this survey.

1.2 Summary of issues

The key challenges for Council arising from an analysis of existing recreation provision and an assessment of recreation demand are:

- refining Council's role in recreation in context with available funds
- meeting increased and changing demand
- diversity in aquatic provision
- enhancing provision for cycling and walking
- access to – and availability of – recreation facilities
- better marketing and distribution of information
- enhancing the condition of facilities and experiences.

The following chapters provide an overview of each of the above challenges, and the key issues and suggested preliminary directions for future consideration by stakeholders.

1.3 Priorities

Key themes within each of the seven main challenges have become evident and prioritised by asking three key questions:

- how do we address the areas of greatest need?
- how do we increase participation in sport and recreation?
- how do we achieve results within tight budgetary constraints?

Three priority areas for Council's focus were identified:

Promoting existing opportunities and their value

- through a greater focus on marketing, and the collection, distribution and interpretation of information about recreation facilities and opportunities.

Getting better value from existing infrastructure

- by providing strong leadership in planning and design processes, by replacing ageing infrastructure, by supporting clubs and committees and by ensuring facilities are shared and their use maximised.

Facilitating walking and cycling

- through supporting development of an expanded network of trails and path circuits and providing connections to major rail trails and townships.

1.4 Principles

The following principles address the challenges, issues and context in which recreation services are delivered across the Indigo Shire.

1.4.1 Encouraging participation

- Council will promote the benefits of healthy lifestyles and life long participation in physical and social recreation activities, as well as advocate for recreation activity as a means of personal development, community building, and to foster social connections and a sense of place.
- Council will provide infrastructure and information about available opportunities, as well as support community groups, schools and clubs to encourage participation in physical and social recreation activities.
- Council will increase the likelihood of currently marginalised groups participating, by overcoming physical and attitudinal barriers that may restrict access to older, and less mobile people, and those with a disability.

1.4.2 Maximising choice and opportunity

- Where Council provides facilities, it will resource marketing and ongoing management in order to maximise the value of those facilities.
- Council's responsibility in recreation is to provide opportunities and choice, particularly where the private sector does not provide them.
- Council will seek to maximise the diversity of opportunities and leisure and recreation experiences available to residents by influencing the provision and nature of recreation and sporting facilities, open space and other leisure settings.

1.4.3 Enhancing sustainability

- Council will work closely with other land managers, schools, community groups, the health sector and private enterprise to deliver integrated, affordable and cost effective services, and promote them to the community and visitors alike.
- Convenient access to leisure and recreation services and settings will be facilitated by co-location, connectivity with community hubs and provision of off-road trails.
- Leisure and recreation settings should be designed to maximise the range of uses by the widest possible age range, without compromising their primary purpose.
- Council will seek to minimise the consumption of potable water and energy, and maximise opportunities to recycle waste and water and reuse energy in recreation facilities and infrastructure.

1.4.4 Maintaining equity

- Council will seek to ensure that leisure services are relatively equitably distributed to serve the largest proportion of the population, including those in rural areas.
- Council will aim to support a similar level of service in settlements of a similar size.
- Council will ensure all recreation services and facilities are inclusive of all people regardless, of age, gender, income, ability or cultural background.
- Council will target those groups who have limited access to recreation due to social disadvantage, stage of the lifecycle, location or other such barriers.

1.5 Demographic context

In 2001 the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated the Indigo Shire's residential population at 14,716¹. Some key characteristics of the estimated resident population include:²

- a relatively large proportion of people aged 5 to 14 years
- a relatively small proportion of people aged 15 to 24 years
- a small proportion of people born overseas
- a significant proportion of people who only speak English at home (92.8%).

The main population centres³ in the Indigo Shire are the townships of Beechworth, Rutherglen and Chiltern, the largest being Beechworth with a population of 2,971. Other significant characteristics of these townships include:

- the larger centres of Rutherglen, Beechworth and Chiltern have experienced declining populations since 1991
- Barnawartha is the fastest growing township with substantial growth identified between 1991 and 2001 (approximately 190% growth)
- main population centres have reported increasing numbers of adults aged over 55 years, as well as a declining number of young people – Beechworth however, has seen declining numbers across all age groups
- the total number of people living in rural areas in the Shire is similar to the total number of people living in the three larger centres.

¹ Source: ABS, Catalogue No 3218.0 Preliminary data only.

² ABS Population by Age and Sex (2004) Cat No. 325.2

³ Townships with an estimated 1,000+ residents.

The following table shows the population change of the Shire's main population centres, between 1991 and 2001.

Table 01: Indigo Shire township population size and change (1991 – 2001)

Towns	1991 population	2001 population	Change in population	% Change in population
Beechworth	3,136	2,791	-345	-11%
Rutherglen	1,876	1,846	-30	-2%
Chiltern	1,157	1,039	-118	-10%
Wahgunyah	597	699	102	17%
Yackandandah	601	629	28	5%
Barnawartha	183	531	348	190%
Tangambalanga	320	406	86	27%
Rural balance	5,568	5,987	419	8%

Source: Towns in Time data, 2001 (DSE)

Of note is the rural balance population of the Shire, which in 2001 contributed an estimated 43% of the total residential population.

Population projections for the Indigo Shire, provided by DSE, estimates the Shire's population to grow by about 14% from 2001 to 2021⁴. Much of this growth is likely to come from an increase in the number of people aged over 55 years, with the number of young people projected to decline.

The estimated population growth will be influenced in part by the expected fast growth of the City of Wodonga to the north east of the Shire. Wodonga is expected to see the fastest growth of any local government area in Victoria. It is likely that residential population growth in the western area of Wodonga will impact mainly on the population areas of the Yackandandah and Beechworth corridors.

The *Indigo Planning Scheme Review 2006/07* (discussion document as at February 2007) predicts that the Shire's population will continue to grow over the next 20 years. The settlement review conducted identifies the townships of Yackandandah, Barnawartha and Kiewa/Tangambalanga as likely to experience the greatest growth (between 100% and 300% growth)⁵, up to the year 2025. The table below shows the population projections for the major townships of the Indigo Shire at high and low growth scenarios to the year 2025.⁶

Table 02: Township specific population projections (2025)

Town	Population 2001	Population projections (2025)		Estimated growth	
		Low	High	Average	%
Beechworth	2,791	3,884	4,012	1,157	41%
Rutherglen	1,846	2,589	2,614	756	41%
Chiltern	1,039	1,490	1,608	510	49%
Wahgunyah	699	970	1,088	330	47%
Yackandandah	629	1,478	2,533	1,377	219%
Barnawartha	531	1,281	1,406	813	153%
Kiewa - Tangambalanga	406	825	1,302	658	162%

Source: Indigo Planning Scheme Review - Discussion document (February 2007)

⁴ Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria in Future, 2004.

⁵ Indigo Planning Scheme Review 2006/07 – Discussion document, February 2007.

⁶ Indigo Planning Scheme Review 2006/07 – Discussion document, February 2007.

1.5 Implications for recreation

The changing age structure of the Indigo Shire residential population will have a significant impact on the future community sport and recreation needs.

An additional 3,437 residents aged over 55 years are expected to live in the Shire by 2021. With an emerging trend in older adults becoming and staying physically active later in life, it is likely that there will be an additional need for specialised recreation programs and services, as well as safe and warm indoor facilities to cater for this population group. Opportunities or facilities to walk, swim, fish, play tennis and socialise will become increasingly important to serve demand from this population.

Population projections anticipate 832 fewer young people aged 5 to 25 years living in the Indigo Shire by 2021. Traditionally, this group contributes a large majority of organised sporting participants, particularly in the team sports of Australian Rules football, soccer, cricket and netball, and it could be expected that the ability to fill teams and maintain existing competition levels may be constrained. This impact has been experienced around the state, with particular impact being felt in smaller rural townships.

With significant population increases in some smaller towns (eg. Yackandandah and Barnawartha) the range, quality and level of sport and recreation facilities and services may need to be reviewed in the short to medium term. Increased player and participant expectations could be expected if growth is in the area of *'sea or tree change'* residents, as well as the need to provide safe facilities, should there be an increase in younger children. Upgrading of existing facilities to meet the increased local demand will be important in these areas.

Almost half of the Shire's residents are based outside of the main townships and population centres, creating a different set of challenges for recreation provision. The settlement pattern of residents will impact on the demand for connections and trails into main townships, as well as increase the need for at least basic level facility provision that is well distributed around the Shire to limit travel for those living outside of main townships.

It would be likely that effective marketing and promotion of recreation activities, particularly through electronic mediums, will also be more important for those that are not in regular contact with central communication points and structured recreation facilities.

2. Council's role

The issues

2.1.1 Being output focused

Council's core business, in terms of sport and recreation, is to provide the necessary leadership, settings and opportunities that result in specific benefits to the community. Council's focus, therefore, needs to be on the community's leisure and recreation experiences as opposed to just its facilities, since the latter are simply inputs to the process.

As council has limited resources, the key roles it plays are; providing basic community infrastructure, and supporting community groups to manage facilities and deliver a wide range of activities and sporting competitions that Council is not able to do.

2.1.2 Availability and provision of services

The householder survey conducted specifically for this study identified very strongly that having *'suitable programs and classes'* would encourage more people to do recreation activities than anything else, with the exception of having *'more conveniently located facilities'*.

'Programs and activities for people with disabilities' and for *'children and youth'* were perceived as the services least well provided of all Council's services (along with indoor sporting facilities).

Programs were viewed by survey respondents as being important, but their provision was perceived to be lacking. Community consultation identified a significant need to provide quality programs for youth across the Shire. In addition to the provision of activities, consultation also indicated that there was a need for knowledgeable coaching staff to operate and administer such programs in order for participants to gain maximum benefit from them.

With limited resources and community funding, greater support and a stronger facilitation role may be a more effective one for Council as a way to improve the management and delivery of recreational opportunities throughout the Shire.

2.1.3 Planning and design

Council is the one collective group of people with broad municipal experience and knowledge in a breadth of community and planning services, and as such, are in the best position to prioritise key planning and development opportunities to influence community development.

Council also provides key design and technical skills in facility and capital development that many community groups and individual management committees do not have. Providing leadership, technical planning and design advice and project management skills to assist shire-wide facility improvement and development will be increasingly important in the future.

2.1.4 Information and communication

Council are in the best position to appreciate the broad municipal context and can easily facilitate the collection of information, and marketing and promotional opportunities to address the current lack of recreation information available. In particular, marketing could refer to good information on Council's website, communication with users, signage at parks and reserves and the regular monitoring of community needs (eg. conducting demand assessments and liaising with peak bodies and organisations).

Informing the community about available leisure opportunities or matching needs with what is currently available is also an important role. A good understanding of what opportunities are being provided by others, and who uses what facilities and when, is essential in being able to match needs with available opportunities as well as to plan for changing needs. By shifting emphasis from provision of facilities to marketing them and facilitating their use, more opportunities could be offered to more people for the same cost.

2.1.5 Enhancing sustainability

With current constraints on finances, Council is not able to undertake a direct service delivery role in facility management or program development. Therefore, Council needs to better support current users and community organisations in undertaking these tasks. Key focus areas for Council regarding enhancing sustainability and maximising their efforts in this area should include:

- facilitating the sharing and multiple use of existing infrastructure to maximise use and reduce long-term management costs for Council and community groups
- ensure any support is equitable and is consistently monitored
- develop partnerships with education and other service providers (eg. Regional Sports Assembly) to assist in the delivery of training programs to enhance the viability of community groups
- assist with identifying funding opportunities, and writing and applying for funding grants.

Council's aim in recreation

Council's key aim for recreation should be to *'encourage participation in physical activity and social recreation activities through improving the quality of recreation settings, the sharing of information and the management of resources.'*

Suggested directions

- ☑ The community would see greater benefits if Council was to support and encourage better utilisation and improvement of existing facilities before investing in new.
- ☑ Adopt a shire-wide approach and framework to the provision and support for recreation, before focusing on individual township needs. Enhancing Council's role in marketing and information distribution is a key example of this, which will assist the matching of residents and visitors desire for activities and recreation settings with those available in the Shire.
- ☑ Replicating and analysing regular recreation surveys and demands assessments to continually monitor changes in community need and recreation demand will help to predict potential activity trends.
- ☑ Provide recreation planning input into land use planning (ie. to aid co-location of services, ensure footpaths and off road trails are provided, sports facilities are designed to be viable etc).
- ☑ Ensure adequate leisure and recreation opportunities are planned for in all new residential development.
- ☑ Planning service delivery and communicating with schools, land management agencies, community groups, clubs and private partners.
- ☑ Continuing to coordinate the design and project management of local infrastructure development.

3. Meeting increased demand

Demand for a number of key sport, leisure and recreation activities was identified through the householder survey and from analysis of local, regional and state participation data.

Locally, 'walking', 'swimming' and 'cycling' were the three activities participated in by most residents, with an estimated 5,500 people expected to walk for recreation by 2021. These three recreation activities are also the main recreation activities participated in across Victoria, all of which have experienced growth in recent years.

The householder survey conducted for this study highlighted a range of leisure and recreation activities undertaken by respondents. Similarly, through the development of the previous *1997 Recreation Plan*, local recreation activity participation rates were collected. The following table presents the top ten recreation activities for 2006, with the relevant activity comparison rates of participation from the 1997 Plan.

Table 03: Comparison of estimated participation rates between 1997 and 2006

Activity	2006	1997	% Change
Walking	32.6%	21.4%	+52%
Swimming	19.3%	15.3%	+26%
Cycling (Road)	17.5%	11.5%	+52%
Golf	11.1%	12.2%	-9%
Tennis	9.9%	24.4%	-59%
Fishing	7.9%	12.2%	-35%
Walking (Bush)	6.7%	16.8%	-60%
Lawn Bowls	5.5%	-	-
Netball	4.9%	-	-
Camping	4.6%	-	-

There are some limitations to directly comparing participation rates, as survey methodologies may slightly differ. However, some general conclusions regarding changes in activity participation can be drawn.

- The activities that have seen the greatest participation increases are those that are more unstructured in their nature, such as *walking, swimming and cycling*.
- *Tennis and bush walking* have seen a significant decline in their participation.
- *Lawn bowls* was not in the top 12 activities in 1997, but was the 8th participated activity in 2006 and is likely to continue to increase as the population ages.

Estimated participation rates from the householder survey have been applied to projected Indigo Shire population figures in order to provide an overview of the potential estimated future local demand for recreation activities (refer to Table 04 below). Note the following figures relate to activities participated in by people aged 15 and over.

Table 04: Estimated number of residents likely to participate in selected recreation activities (2006 – 2021)

Activity	2006	2011	2021
Walking	4,996	5,168	5,473
Swimming	2,958	3,060	3,240
Cycling (Road)	2,682	2,774	2,938
Golf	1,701	1,760	1,863
Tennis	1,517	1,569	1,662
Fishing	1,211	1,252	1,326
Walking (Bush)	1,027	1,062	1,125
Lawn Bowls	843	872	923
Netball	751	777	823
Camping	705	729	772

Using available participation data for the Goulburn-Ovens-Murray Statistical Region⁷ it is possible to estimate the likely market demand for key recreation activities.⁸ The following table also takes into consideration the changing age structure of the community and future population projections to 2021.

Table 05: Estimated likely number of participants in selected activities, using projected regional demand figures

Activity	2001	2021	Change	%
Walking (other)	4,641	6,159	1,518	32.7%
Golf	1,234	1,633	399	32.3%
Swimming	1,328	1,486	158	11.9%
Aerobics / fitness	1,259	1,445	186	14.8%
Cycling	1,279	1,395	116	9.1%
Tennis	1,134	1,261	126	11.1%
Walking (bush)	754	933	179	23.8%
Running	741	711	-30	-4.1%
Netball	746	688	-57	-7.7%
Australian rules football	684	615	-69	-10.0%

Both locally and regionally, walking remains the activity that the largest number of people in the Shire are likely to participate in by 2021, with over 6,159 people or 43% of the population expected to walk. The increase in participation is expected given the significant aging of the population. Similarly golf, swimming and aerobic/ fitness are shown to be in likely high demand, whilst the participation rates of club competition and higher impact sports (Australian Rules football, netball and running) are shown to be decreasing.

⁷ The Goulburn-Ovens-Murray Statistical Region incorporates the following municipalities – Alpine, Campaspe, Delatite, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogie, Towong, Wangaratta and Wodonga.

⁸ Only activities where a participation rate greater than 5% was identified through the community survey have been supplied. Figures provided are for people aged 15 and over.

The size of the market for organised sport, leisure and recreation activities for children (aged 5 to 14 years) in the Indigo Shire is estimated to decline overall, mainly as a result of the declining numbers of people in this age group. Cycling and skateboarding/ rollerblading amongst children are the two activities with the highest likely demand.

Of the main sporting activities undertaken, swimming and soccer are shown to have the highest likely number of participants aged 5 to 14 years.

Note: these statistics are based on available national participation rates and local trends. The availability of opportunities is likely to have a significant affect on the end number of participants. The table below shows the estimate likely demand for sport and recreation activity in children aged 5 to 14 years⁹.

Table 06: Estimated number of children (5 to 14 years) participating in selected activities

Activity	2001			2021		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Cycling	846	716	1,562	671	561	1,232
Skateboarding/ rollerblading	337	204	540	267	159	426
Swimming	190	211	401	151	165	316
Soccer (outdoor)	226	74	300	179	58	237
Netball	1	200	201	1	157	158
Australian Rules	159	10	170	126	8	134
Tennis	92	76	169	73	60	133
Basketball	85	66	151	68	52	119
Cricket (outdoor)	116	5	121	92	4	96
Martial Arts	70	34	104	56	26	82
Rugby League	91	3	95	72	3	75
Gymnastics	18	64	82	15	50	64

⁹ Figures based on ABS, Children's participation in Culture and Leisure Activities, April 2006.

A further indication of potential future demand for activities can be identified through identified unmet demand for recreation activities. The householder survey asked respondents '*what activities they would like to do, that they don't currently do*'. The following table identifies the top 10 activities that people would like to do. When percentages rates are applied to the estimated 2021 population, the likely number of residents that may wish to do identified activities can be estimated (refer to Table 07 below).

Table 07: Potential unmet demand for identified activities, and estimated number of residents likely to participate in them

Activity	% Rate of unmet demand	Estimated number of residents 2021
Swimming	9.5%	1,358
Cycling (road)	4.7%	670
Gym/ fitness	4.2%	598
Cinema	2.0%	290
Dance	2.0%	290
Yoga	1.8%	254
Fishing	1.5%	217
Golf	1.5%	217
Walking	1.5%	217
Walking (bush)	1.5%	217

4. Swimming

The issues

4.1.1 Participation in swimming

The householder survey identified an estimated 19% of residents (or 2,911) participate in ‘swimming’. The survey further indicated that more females regularly swim than males (22% compared to 16%).

‘Swimming’ was the second most participated recreation activity (regularly and away from home), with ‘walking’ being the most participated activity (33%). The local participation rate identified for swimming is slightly higher than state averages for people aged 15 and over.

Across all major Shire townships, swimming was represented in the top three recreation activities participated in. Of note was the male participation in Chiltern, which was significantly lower than all other township areas.

There is clearly an expressed demand for swimming within the Shire, which is surprising considering the limited opportunities to swim locally outside of the swimming pools provided. Research also identified a strong latent demand for more swimming opportunities, with many more survey respondents suggesting that they would want to swim, but currently did not.

Of the people that indicated that they would like to do a – or additional - recreation activities that they currently didn’t, more people wanted to swim than any other activity, approximately 9.8% of total respondents (equating to an estimated further 1,516 people across the Shire). Key townships for those wanting to swim were Barnawartha and Wahgunyah with residents aged between 30 and 49 years, the key age group.

The table below indicates the type of things that would encourage more people to swim (with frequency of survey responses indicated in brackets).

Table 08: Things that would encourage more people to swim

Females	Males
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities conveniently located (38) Provide better quality facilities (31) Availability of suitable programs/classes (22) Information about what is available and where (15) Schedule activities at more convenient times (14) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilities conveniently located (12) Provide better quality facilities (10) Information about what is available and where (6) Availability of suitable programs/classes (5) Schedule activities at more convenient times (5)

Without providing new facilities (ie. facilities more conveniently located), there are opportunities for Council to provide improvements in a number of different areas. The most likely improvements would include service enhancements, such as provision of hot showers, increased accessibility of facilities, extending opening hours, heating of pools (or consider the part-enclosure of one or more pools¹⁰), and extending marketing and programs and classes available.

4.1.2 Existing swimming facilities

The Indigo Shire owns and operates five outdoor swimming pools located in the townships of Beechworth, Chiltern, Rutherglen, Tangambalanga and Yackandandah.

The following table provides a summary of the facilities available facilities and services.

¹⁰ Such as undertaken at Toora in South Gippsland.

Table 09: Indigo Shire Swimming Pools

Location/Name	Facilities
Beechworth Swimming Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25m Outdoor pool (6 lanes) - Learners pool (9m x 4m) - Toddlers pool (12sqm) - Change rooms/toilets - First-aid room - Shade covers - Kiosk/kitchen - PA system, extensive grass areas, BBQ/tables and asphalt area for volleyball
Chiltern Swimming Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25m Outdoor pool (6 lanes) - Learners pool (8m x 8m) - Toddlers pool (5m x 5m) - Change rooms - Kiosk - Shade cover
Rutherglen Swimming Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 33m Outdoor pool (6 Lanes) - Toddlers pool (4m x 10m) - Kiosk/reception - Change rooms - Swimming club rooms
Tangambalanga Swimming Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25m Outdoor pool: 7 lanes - Learners pool (5m x 14m) - Toddlers pool - Kiosk/reception - Change rooms
Yackandandah Swimming Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 25m Outdoor pool - Toddlers pool (3m x 5m) - Change rooms/toilets - Kiosk/entry - Shaded seating - Shade cloth over toddlers pool - Small slide entering 25 pool

4.1.3 Use of swimming pools

Swimming pools ranked 10th with householders in terms of recreation facility use across the Shire, which is surprising given that swimming was also identified as the second most participated activity.

There are no indoor or heated swimming pools located in the Shire, with the closest facilities of this nature located in Wodonga and Wangaratta.¹¹ The householder survey identified a significant latent demand for swimming (9.8%), with almost 60% of those wanting to swim indicating that they would like to 'swim indoors'.

Consultation with schools indicated that a large number of them currently used swimming pools located outside the Shire, in particular Wodonga and Wangaratta. However, local schools continue to use their local swimming pools when open.

4.1.4 Importance and value of swimming pools

Local outdoor swimming pools in regional areas are often the only opportunity that children may have to learn-to-swim or to experience water familiarisation. Swimming pools provide a safer environment than the creeks, rivers and waterways that are often used in inland regional communities. Additionally, the demand for the outdoor swimming experience in areas with extreme climates in summer months is likely to be high.

Swimming pools are highly valued by the local community and were identified as the second most important recreational service or facility across the Shire (after support for local community groups and clubs) with 11% of householder survey respondents indicating that swimming pools are 'very important'.

¹¹ The Beechworth swimming pool has previously been solar heated, however at the time of writing the solar system had failed and was requiring replacement.

17% of household survey respondents indicated the standard of provision of swimming pools was 'very good'. The Chiltern Swimming Club also indicated the facilities that they use to be very good since their recent redevelopment.¹²

Swimming pools are highly important for local schools, particularly for water familiarity and the development of foundation level swimming skills.

Both males and females identified swimming pools as the 'highest priority' of all recreation services for further provision or improvement, should funds be available.

4.1.5 Viability of new facilities

Council does not believe it is able to meet the demand for additional or indoor swimming facilities in the Shire within current budget constraints and rate base, particularly in the immediate future.

Demand for new and indoor facilities is equally spread between a number of townships and determining its potential location will be problematic. Even if Council were able to fund one additional facility, it would not meet demand in other places. It would be unlikely that Council could provide a facility that would adequately compete with other existing facilities provided in surrounding municipalities, that are already used by local residents (eg. Wodonga, Wangaratta).

¹² \$1 million dollars worth of funding was injected into the five Shire pools in early 2000, funding the replacement of pool plant and associated equipment, as well as assisting the construction of new change, toilet and entry / reception areas.

Suggested directions

- ☑ Whilst many of the local pools are unlikely to meet the need of elite competition swimmers or the leisure destination markets met by major indoor aquatic facilities in the region they can provide for: people wanting to train or swim for fitness, and local families or independent young people looking for aquatics facilities that are conveniently located close to home, are affordable and offer a basic range of services and somewhere to go with friends and family.
- ☑ Council would benefit from having a plan outlining their expectations and commitment to swimming pools, their operation and maintenance, and the services offered so as to align with community expectations.
- ☑ There may be minor facility improvements that would make a significant difference to participation and visitation levels. It would be desirable for Council to prepare a prioritised capital works program and identify improvements that could be made on an incremental basis. Priority should be given to providing basic service enhancements such as hot water showers and increasing the levels of accessibility into water space.
- ☑ Before undertaking major facility works, Council could consider a review of pool heating, membership packaging across venues, opportunities to expand or facilitate more programs and classes, operational hours, and marketing etc.
- ☑ Council should also continue to monitor usage and prepare and implement cyclic maintenance program for all pool plant, equipment, pipe work, pumps etc.

5. Cycling and Walking

The benefits of walking, cycling and riding are clear: they include the health benefits of physical exercise, the benefits of getting outdoors and connecting with other members of the community, and the benefits of an improved sense of well being through the release of tension and escaping from normal routines and surroundings. Encouraging more people to do these activities, which can be spontaneous and are highly accessible to the majority of the community, should remain a focus for Council.

There is a well-developed cycling movement in Indigo, particularly in mountain biking and off-road trail riding, with some well established networks already existing, including Beechworth to Yackandandah rides and the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail.

The issues

5.1.1 Participation in walking and cycling

About one third of the Indigo Shire population *'regularly walk'* for recreation. Much of this is likely to occur with dogs.

The householder survey identified *'walking'* as the recreation activity that most respondents regularly participated in (33%), followed by *'swimming'* (19%) and *'cycling'* (18%). 39% of female respondents and 25% of males indicated they walked, which when applied to the Shire's resident population, equates to almost 5,000 participants across the Shire. Using the same methods, an estimated 2,688 people regularly cycle.

An additional 7% of respondents identified *'bush walking'* as a regular recreation activity.

Survey respondents from Beechworth and Yackandandah returned above Shire average participation rates in cycling, which may reflect the strength of the local cycling movement and the provision of off-road trails in these areas. Beechworth is also home of the Beechworth Chain Gang, a well-known local cycling club.

People of all ages suggested that they walk and cycle for recreation, with walking being most participated activity by people aged over 50, whilst cycling had strongest representation by males and females aged younger than 50. The householder survey also identified high participation by females in *'horse riding'*, with the age groups of 15-19 years and 40-45 years recording the highest participation rates.

The householder survey identified limited unmet demand for walking. However, of all males who indicated that they *'would like to do a recreational activity they don't currently do'*, more wanted to *'cycle (on-road)'* than all other activities, with the exception of swimming. Female respondents identified *'cycling (on-road)'* as their third preference after *'swimming'* and *'gym/fitness'* activities.

Council could encourage more people to cycle through the *'provision of better quality facilities, more conveniently located'*. *'Having someone to go or participate with'* was also identified as an influence on whether people chose to walk or cycle.

5.1.2 Use of walking and paths

'Bicycle paths/ walking trails' were identified as the 2nd most commonly used facilities across the Shire, after *'lakes and riverside parks'*. However, the four most used facilities for recreation activities (identified by householder survey respondents) could all be used for walking and/or cycling activities.

The *'provision of more cycling tracks, paths or trails'* were listed as opportunities that would enhance and encourage more people to cycle. *'Making cycling trails safer and providing additional signage'* were also identified as ways to improve sport and recreational facilities in the Shire.

'Cycling paths and trails' were identified, by survey respondents, as the recreational service or facility of second most priority for the allocation of future funds.

Further community consultation identified the need to have cycle paths (in particular mountain bike trails) formalised so more people could access them, and in circuits.

5.1.3 Meeting future demand and requirements

The key challenge for Council is to be able to meet the demand for the wide range of different path based activities, that all have slightly different requirements. The further development and expansion of an integrated shared trail network throughout the Shire would help to satisfy the majority of demand for cycling, as well as horse riding. Whereas, the provision of township circuit and major recreation reserve perimeter pathways may assist to further encourage more people to walk, more often.

Walking and cycling are important activities to residents in the Shire, but are also vitally important to visitors and the local economy. A recent study completed by Latrobe University suggested that there were clear and vast benefits of rail trails, citing particular examples of economic benefits to local townships along the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail.¹³

Not only supporting the development of the regional trail network, but also providing opportunities to meet local and visitor demand by extending the rail trail network and filling in any gaps would be desirable. Consideration should be given to all possible links from townships to existing adjacent rail trails, and creating circuits for people to take that add interest and encourage social behaviour.

Community consultation identified the opportunity to enhance the safety and user experiences of existing trails through better signage.

Suggested directions

- Consider updating the Bicycle Plan to reflect changes in demand, particularly to capture increasing demand for off-road cycling, as well as the demand for better on-road infrastructure.

- In conjunction with any further township development or urban design frameworks, consider planning shared bicycle and walking paths as a major priority.
When planning future off-road trails, consider:
 - The benefits of developing shared trails suitable for equestrian use could be considered
 - Opportunities to create a hierarchy of trails to meet the range of community
 - Developing interlinking trail circuits needs.
 - The development of circuit paths along existing waterways and in around the perimeter of major recreation reserves/precincts.
 - Investigate the provision of circuit path routes in all future reserve/precinct master plan project briefs.
 - Continue to support the ongoing use, development and promotion of the extensive and highly valued rail trails, in particular the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail
 - Investigate new connections to existing rail trail networks, particularly from key township centres
 - Create a Shire promotional brochure (or promote and provide existing) of rail trails, track and trail networks, key shared trails and associated facilities located in the Shire. Promote via the visitor information centres and Council 's website.
 - Promote the walking school bus program and support the development of suitable paths and connections to schools.
 - Ensure footpaths are provided in new sub-divisions to enhance mobility where future residential development occurs and encourage developers to provide footpaths and linkages into main community hubs and town centres.

¹³ In recent times funding has been allocated for the extension of the Murray to Mountains Rail Trail from Rutherglen to Wahgunyah.

6. Accessibility

The issues

There are three key aspects to the issue of accessibility:

- convenient location of facilities and services
- the ability to get to an opportunity, and
- physical access to facilities and infrastructure.

6.1.1 Convenient location of facilities and services

Convenience is a major factor in determining whether people use facilities, but so is quality. Local communities build strong links within individual townships. However, equitable provision of facilities between townships in large Shires is a challenge because of the expectations relating to quality. To provide more facilities close to all residents with the same budget means facilities need to be lower or varied in quality and standard. Most people prefer to use local facilities and will build loyalty, and as such there is often demand to provide the same suite of recreation facilities in each major township across the municipality.

When asked *'what would enable or encourage residents to do activities that they would like to do'*, the most frequent response was provide *'facilities conveniently located'*.

'Facilities more conveniently located' was a consistent response for many activities, although the most relevant activities were *'swimming'*, *'cycling'* and *'gym/fitness activities'*.

A base level of recreation and facility provision should be incorporated into key population centres, over and above which communities can resource themselves. Where particular communities can find the resources to provide a higher level of service, Council should support their initiatives where possible.

6.1.2 Physical access to facilities and infrastructure

Local government plays a key role in ensuring that recreation and associated facilities provide opportunities to build a more active, inclusive and supportive community. Physical barriers to participation not only prevent health benefits being realised for a wide range of the population, but they can be a source of social exclusion. Accessibility of many Shire recreation assets and facilities is poor, predominately due to their age.

When asked about what recreation facilities and services should be a priority, householder survey respondents mostly said *'more accessible toilets'*, *'better wheelchair access to community areas'* and *'better recreation opportunities for people with a disability'*. Respondents also identified a lack of disability access at swimming pools and a limited understanding and knowledge of disability issues.

Site inspections identified that there is a very limited range of park furniture that is accessible to people using wheelchairs, few reserves have accessible paths of travel and no swimming facilities have accessible entries to water space.

When asked how Council performed on a range of services, after *'provision of indoor facilities'*, *'programs for people with a disability'* were perceived to be the second least well provided.

Benefits may be achieved through enhancing or expanding the role and partnership opportunities for Indigo's Disability Advisory Committee (IDAC) to include advice and research regarding the future provision of recreation services.

6.1.3 The ability to get to an opportunity

Commonly, participation in recreation and sporting activities can be limited for those that cannot easily get to facilities, programs and services (eg. children, schools, people with disabilities, older adults etc).

School and community groups identified accessibility to be an issue for young people within the Indigo Shire. Cost of transportation, distances that need to be travelled to get to sports facilities and the variety of sports within close proximity were issues.

Access to skate facilities was also raised. As with many small communities the low critical mass of young people makes it difficult to fund substantial skate facilities and for high use to be maintained to create the energy and atmosphere that makes them successful.

The settlement pattern of the Shire creates the need for the majority of residents to travel some distance to access a full range of recreation activities and/or facilities. As with many rural municipalities, there is a lack of public transport between Indigo townships and connections to the larger transport hubs of Wangaratta and Wodonga. Limited accessible transport has the greatest impact on younger people as they are mostly reliant on transport systems and parental support to access recreation opportunities.

Council may be in the position to influence or enhance existing, and create new partnerships to assist community and sporting groups to regularly and affordably access community transport options.

Additionally, to serve the greatest number of residents and convenience of access, it would be desirable for Council to continue to provide and develop major recreation facilities in key townships. Opportunities to extend and promote greater use of facilities, including offering transport alternatives and flexible scheduling (ie. around school times) may assist to engage a greater number of the Indigo population in recreation activity.

Suggested directions

- ☑ Seek to establish a hierarchy of recreation facilities that is closely matched to viability issues surrounding smaller population centres. This would assist Council to manage community expectations about facility provision in a transparent manner, and provide a basis on which to determine suitable standards of development and maintenance.
- ☑ Review accessibility of existing community facilities, swimming pools and key parks as a priority.
- ☑ Design a suite of standard park furniture that is accessible and prepare a basic guide to making key elements of parks and paths accessible.
- ☑ Work closely with the Indigo Disability Advisory Committee (IDAC), the Shire's Rural Access worker and the Regional Sports Assembly to survey clubs and people with a disability in the Shire to ascertain opportunities for engagement, demand for recreation programs and services, and priorities with respect to making community facilities accessible.
- ☑ Through the IDAC, create a database of buddies to assist people with a disability or those with mobility constraints to access recreation activities. Some activities suggested by the community included, *'exercise classes and fishing'*.
- ☑ Consider likely local organisations and community health networks that could deliver recreation programs to people with a disability who currently can't easily access recreation activities and would benefit significantly from participation.
- ☑ Continue to partner community transport providers, and consider private enterprise assistance to enhance the provision of community transport options for schools, sporting clubs and others who have restricted access to sport and leisure options.

7. Marketing and information

The issues

7.1.1 Knowing what to promote

The range of sport and recreation activities that Indigo Shire residents participate in is extensive. Some 100+ different activities were identified through the householder survey, from traditional team sports through to *'gardening with friends'*. However, recreation in regional areas is traditionally strong in only a core group of regular activities that residents regularly participate in. Diversity of opportunities could be better achieved if residents knew *where and how they could participate* in other activities.

Making recreation choices should be made *'easy'* for people. *'Information about what is available and where'* was among the top three things that would encourage people to participate in recreation activities. However, the Shire produces and promotes a limited range of information regarding recreation opportunities, and often the promotion of specific activities, clubs and facilities is left to the responsibility of individual operators.

Opportunities also exist for Council to better use information for marketing and promotion and to better match people's needs with what is available.

7.1.2 Council's role

The collection, distribution and promotion of information are vital roles of local government and Council are in the best position to monitor and use information for the benefit of the local community.

Information was seen to be one of the top five most important recreation facilities and services that Council offers, but also among the five least well provided services by the Shire. 11% of householder survey respondents rated the *'provision of information'* as being poor, with a further 11% rating the *'provision of information'* as average.

Of all services and facilities across the Indigo Shire, the 3rd largest gap between service importance and provision was identified in information provision about *'what recreation activities were available and where'*.

Information regarding funding grants and assistance in applying for funding was identified through community group consultation as an area where Council could provide better service in.

As Council does not directly provide all programs available in the Shire, an important role is to identify available programs, activities and services and promote them widely. If knowledge of existing recreation services and facilities, and the clubs and organisations that operate them are accurate, centralised and regularly updated, information can be used as an effective tool to market available opportunities.

Council's existing community facilities (eg. libraries, community buildings, swimming pools, information and transaction centres) could work closely to devise information that targets different types of clients and develop information hubs where relevant local and regional information could be sourced – and local facilities and programs promoted.

7.1.3 Communication and information management

Keeping a regular dialogue with all recreation stakeholders is vitally important for Council and maintaining accurate records of contacts (both hard copy and electronically) is always a challenge. An up-to-date community directory and a map and inventory of recreation opportunities, open spaces, trails and facilities (and characteristics which make them relevant for specific groups) would assist with future planning, with answering public enquiries, and with marketing of recreation, both within and outside the Shire. The use of electronic and website promotion will be important in informing visitors to the Shire of what is available and where.

An overview of community spaces and facilities and their capacity to house different activities and groups would be best centralised. Council could coordinate or present all the available information to influence sport and facility programming and scheduling, thus allowing for greater opportunities to experience a wider range of activities.

Sport and recreation clubs and groups said they *'would like more opportunities to meet with others of a similar nature'*, and to also meet with Council to share information and to discuss issues and ideas. Council, since it often needs to make contact on a regular basis (eg. for bookings and permits), is in a good position to facilitate more dialogue with, and between, stakeholders and peak bodies. Council, working with peak bodies, and the Sports Assembly) could encourage and assist clubs to:

- establish email addresses for clubs and organizations and a database of those and update them when office bearers change
- establish a recreation activity website with links to peak bodies and SRV, DVC, CARN etc
- attend regular forums (eg. bi-annually) to discuss issues and directions
- market their activities to a broader range of people.

Additionally, signage plays an important role in creating an image and conveying information, including warnings and advice about conditions of use. Most reserves would benefit from improved signage. Note: the signage in Beechworth is an exemplary.

Up to date contact details about tenant clubs at key facilities and via the Shire's website (and community directory) would add value and further encourage people to become participants.

Suggested directions

- ☑ Prepare an inventory of recreation facilities, groups and activities – publish it and regularly update it – in order to promote opportunities more widely.
- ☑ Update the recreation link on the Shire's website to at least provide basic information regarding recreation opportunities, including; list of sport and recreation clubs (and their contact details) and a list of recreation facilities (including their features) and the activities and/or services they provide.
- ☑ Work with Visitor Information Centre and their staff to prepare township maps locating recreation facilities, including trails and spaces available for hire by groups.
- ☑ Engage in regular dialogue with information centres to ensure feedback and demand for information is monitored and adjusted to cater for resident and visitor needs.
- ☑ Replicate the householder recreation survey periodically to continually source information about changing community preferences and demand.
- ☑ Regularly produce recreation marketing and promotional information for publication in a range of media (eg. Council newsletters, local newspaper columns, visitor information brochures, rate notices etc).
- ☑ Where possible target information towards specific population groups (eg. youth, older adults etc) using different media and distribution channels to encourage participation from a broader range of people.
- ☑ Continue to improve design and consistency of signage at recreation reserves and facilities and trail routes.

8. Infrastructure provision and use

8.1 The issues

8.1.1 Capacity to meet current and future needs

The project brief called for an evaluation of the capacity of existing infrastructure to meet current and future needs of the community.

A review of the Shire's facilities and infrastructure has identified a range of issues that will ultimately impact and constrain existing infrastructure to meet changing community needs, be flexible in their use and to keep pace with increasing player and participant expectations.

Key recreation facilities and infrastructure identified by the community and in @leisure's site inspections as priority areas for Council include:

- indoor multi-use sports courts
- recreation reserves and sporting grounds
- skate, BMX and mountain bike facilities
- golf courses
- outdoor sports courts (tennis and netball).

8.1.2 Quality of recreation facilities

The provision and quality of sport and recreation facilities is an issue for many councils', both rural and metropolitan. An aging stock of recreation assets and limited resources to develop new and improved facilities is a common scenario.

An injection of funds will be required to bring sporting assets into line with Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) and accessibility standards, and address risk management issues (for players on-field and facilities off-field). In addition, future investment will be required to meet peak body requirements and player expectations (the improvement in selected netball courts around the Shire is an example of successful targeted investment). Cyclic maintenance and facility improvement programs, as well as an integrated process controlled by Recreation, Health and Well Being Departments (in conjunction with Asset Management) would enhance club and facility sustainability, viability and relevance to the population they serve.

8.1.3 Management, funding and support

Community consultation confirmed that some facilities could be better managed by additional sharing particularly between summer and winter sports.

Clubs interviewed also identified the need for greater assistance from Council in the management and improvement of facilities through such things as *'help with mowing of ovals'*, *'assistance with grant applications'* and *'more funding for maintenance and upkeep of facilities'*.

Issues of facility ownership and responsibility also impact of the management of facilities (mainly recreation reserves), with a range of Council and DSE appointed Committee's of Management requesting support from Council.

Committee's of Management and tenant clubs / groups are required to make major contributions to the management, maintenance and replacement of community facilities, particularly sporting grounds and pavilions, which they say is often difficult. Council does provide limited funds to assist with maintenance of community buildings, (mostly less than \$3,000 is annually allocated per facility).

Committees generally feel they need for support, and greater Council control of the use, management and financial operation of facilities and greater resources to the monitoring and support of facilities and Committee's of Management would be beneficial if funds were available.

Overall, in terms of importance of existing services provided, the community said *'support for local community groups and clubs was more important than facilities'*.

The top three suggestions made through the householder survey as to how to best provide, improve and manage sporting facilities in the future were *'improve levels of support'*, *'improve, maintain existing facilities'* and *'providing funding and grant assistance'*.

Indigo's community grant scheme is highly valued (but not necessarily understood by all) organisations in the Shire. Refinements would now be beneficial and possible annually to more actively prioritise capital works programs, target priority groups and projects, and importantly implement the findings of this plan.

Council has an assets management program where it funds some 85 committees to look after community assets: many of which are buildings of recreational nature. The cost of this program to Council in 2006/07, was in order of \$100,000. The program collects very useful information about each (in order to determine levels of funding) that identifies few committees have an ability to raise their own funds and few have strategy plans for example.

Further investigations into both opportunities to assist committees with funding, and whether more effective and equitable funding mechanisms are available will be conducted as part of this plan.

7.1.3 Facility planning and design

Maximising use and viability of community recreation facilities should be an achievable goal for Council. If council were to take a stronger leadership role, provide technical planning and design advice and continue to provide project management skills there could be fewer separate buildings, more co-location and sharing, design for multiple use, and enhanced planning, and quality design.

Providing specialist recreation advice in future land use planning of new residential areas, and ensuring appropriate demand and feasibility assessments are conducted for the development of new facilities will also provide ongoing benefits to Council.

8.2 Indoor multi-use sports courts

There is a limited range and variety of dedicated indoor sports courts available across the Shire, with the key townships of Rutherglen and Beechworth providing the main indoor sports courts / centres. Both facilities provide single multi-purpose sports courts and are provided in conjunction with secondary schools.

At the time of writing, a master plan was being conducted at the Yackandandah Sports Park to progress planning for the proposed (and partially constructed) indoor multi-use sports court.

The householder survey indicated that more than 50% of respondents said they *'never use indoor sporting facilities'* located in the Shire, with Wangaratta and Wodonga identified as preferred and/or alternative locations. In terms of encouraging people to use indoor sporting facilities more, *'provision of better quality facilities'* was the key types of encouragement. Schools interviewed also identified a *'limited range of accessible indoor sporting facilities'* as a key issue that Council should address as a priority.

The provision of indoor sport and recreation facilities were also viewed as important throughout the wider community. The existing provision of indoor sporting facilities was identified by survey respondents as the least well provided recreation facility / service by Council.

The recreational facilities that the Indigo community see as a priority if funds were available include:

- *'swimming pools'* (addressed in previous chapters)
- *'walking / cycling tracks'* (addressed in previous chapters)
- *'indoor sporting complex'*.

Additionally, an analysis of potential gaps in service and facility provision identified *'indoor sporting facilities'* as having the greatest gap between importance and provision.

8.3 Recreation reserves and sporting grounds

Although there are few indoor sporting facilities provided within the Shire, provision of new additional facilities was not seen as the greatest priority, compared with the provision of new swimming pools and cycling / walking tracks. However, there are many community benefits to be achieved through the provision of indoor facilities, particularly given an aging population, the increase in demand for social sports, the slow transition of many sports indoor or to include indoor training, and weather conditions. Additionally, an increased range of sporting and recreational activities can be achieved through multi-use facilities at a reasonable cost to Council and the community.

Future proposals for the upgrade of community centres and halls and sports pavilions should consider multiple sports and physical activity uses and the benefits of potential income from these. Opportunities to develop facilities with partners especially schools should be pursued as a priority, to ensure day and night use.

It would be desirable for Council to support the provision of at least one full-size indoor multi-purpose sports court (that is large enough for netball) in each main population centre, being Beechworth, Rutherglen and Yackandandah. Should population and activity demand reach projected levels in the areas of Chiltern and Barnawartha, consider commencing research and initial planning into the provision on a multi-purpose indoor sports court (or similar facility).

Support the implementation of the Draft Yackandandah Sports Park Master Plan and the preparation of a Business Case for the development and management of an indoor sports court on site.

Indigo has a number of large sporting grounds and reserves, predominately serving the traditional sports of Australian Rules football and cricket.

In most cases, sports grounds have considerable support facilities and pavilions catering for a range of sporting groups. Many of these have been built incrementally and are either functionally obsolete or in the need of work to bring them up to required standards. Some reserves and clubs would benefit these facilities being consolidated and made accessible, and then surplus facilities being demolished. This will require an increase in shared facilities.¹⁴

The stock of buildings and pavilions is ageing, with Council and clubs limited in their available resources to provide necessary improvements. An injection of funds will be required to bring sporting assets in-line to address issues of quality and risk management. In addition, investment in infrastructure will be required to meet increasing peak body requirements and increasing player and community expectations.

Recreation reserves and sports playing fields are commonly single ovals with associated support facilities that have limited resources and space to provide multiple playing fields at the same site. This may potentially limit the range of opportunities on the one site and in the longer-term; club viability. Limited funds and constraints (such as water restrictions) may provide an incentive for clubs to consider more co-location, sharing and joint developments.¹⁵

Committee's of Management tend to manage recreation reserves and sporting grounds and Council has a limited control over their use, scheduling, management, marketing, maintenance and development.

¹⁴ Particular note should be given to sporting grounds that provide separate pavilions and buildings for a range of range of sports, such as Australian Rules football, cricket, netball tennis etc.

¹⁵ Council's Sustainable Water Use Plan (September 2006) identified sporting grounds as one of Council's five significant water users, including consumption for surface irrigation, public toilet flushing and change room / shower / kitchen usage.

Almost half of the householder survey respondents indicated that sporting facilities could be best improved and managed in the future by increasing the level of sharing of existing grounds and facilities to provide more resources to develop selected reserves.

A number of townships have single use grounds (ie. one for Australian Rules football and one for cricket). The promotion of the benefits of ground sharing, particularly in terms of future resource allocation and club viability could be enhanced by Council, with the targeting of specific reserves for priority support and development.

Council may see the benefit in assisting Committee's of Management to develop (and then monitor) seasonal ground allocation and usage agreements in order to maximise the use of existing grounds before investigating new. Council may wish to review the use of all sporting grounds without a winter tenant to ascertain opportunities for new or emerging sports (for example, introducing soccer at the Yackandandah Sports Park).

Presently, Council support the 50+ community facility Committee's of Management (including reserves, community halls, golf courses, youth centres etc) with annual maintenance grants that vary between \$350 and \$5,000, with an average allocation per facility of around \$2,000.

Water and its availability for ground maintenance is a key issue for outdoor sporting clubs. Many clubs through the consultation process identified a range of issues they face associated with the lack of water:

- poor quality playing surfaces
- risk of injury due to surface deterioration and hardness
- potential season shortening and subsequent loss of revenue
- loss of players if grounds cannot be used
- potential high costs associated with buying water for irrigation.

It may be desirable for Council to consider a programmed or staged approach to the conversion of playing surfaces to warm season grasses

(drought-tolerant species) to help reduce the demand for water at key grounds across the Shire. Additionally, Council may also wish to support Committee's of Management to investigate, and support where appropriate, the implementation of water recycling initiatives to reduce demand on potable water. Initiatives may include installation of water harvesting systems or rain water tanks, bore water investigation or grey water recycling.¹⁶

In addition to the cost and availability of water, other facility related issues (identified by clubs) raised regarding recreation reserve and sporting grounds included:

- *'lack of shade for spectators'*
- *'the need for assistance to upgrade facilities'*
- *'limited funding available to upgrade facilities'*
- *'the need for floodlighting'*.

Lack of shade for spectators at sporting grounds, as well as netball and tennis courts was observed from site inspections conducted by consultants. In almost all cases, spectator seating was well provided around playing areas, however with very limited natural or permanent shade structures provided.

¹⁶ Council secured recent drought relief funding for the installation of a new irrigation system at Coulston Park. Additionally, irrigation and surface improvements have recently been undertaken at Baarmutha Park to improve surface quality.

8.4 Skate, BMX and mountain bike facilities

It could be expected that with a large younger person and school aged population across the Shire, that skate and BMX activities will be important activities that younger people will want to do, outside of organised sport and recreation activities. However, the younger age groups that would be expected to regularly undertake activities – and contribute their main participation - were under-represented in the householder survey.¹⁷

The issues of providing recreation for young people are of concern in most rural areas throughout Victoria. The main emphasis on provision is the more traditional and organised sporting activity. Stakeholders are concerned about the lack of transport for young people to get to sport and other activities.

There is limited provision of dedicated facilities for young people. Skate parks are provided in the Shire's main population centres of Beechworth, Yackandandah and Rutherglen. Skate park locations are considered appropriate, with all being provided in key recreation facility hubs and precincts.¹⁸

Skate and/or BMX facilities were listed in the top 10 facilities that should be a priority if funds became available. A greater diversity of elements and some minor additions, as well as improved maintenance, would increase their use. It would be beneficial to embark on a strategic skate park development program and devise a specific management program for existing facilities.

Almost two-thirds of the surveyed population had '*never used the skate/ BMX/ mountain bike*' facilities provided in the Shire, with the remaining third

indicating that they use the skate/ BMX/ mountain bike facilities either '*occasionally or regularly*'.

The Shire has an active mountain biking community, as well as off-road trails and rides that attract many visitors from outside the Shire. The nature of mountain biking promotes the spirit of adventure and the creation of new rides and routes, often through state (public) and privately owned land. It would be desirable for Council to work with mountain bike clubs (of which there are several in the Shire) and riders, as well as landowners to formalise popular off-road trails, as well as to promote the legitimate areas appropriate for off-road riding. Incorporating formal trails and their planning into any proposed update of the Shire's Bicycle Plan is highly recommended.

8.5 Golf courses

There are five golf courses provided in the Indigo Shire, based in the main townships of Beechworth (18 holes), Rutherglen (18), Chiltern (9), Yackandandah (9) and Barnawartha (9). All courses vary in quality and consultation with clubs suggested that facilities were '*currently adequate to serve the majority of club / player needs*'.

Most clubs reported similar issues in terms of '*access to water for irrigation*', '*funding for course maintenance*' and '*a limited ability to generate new memberships*'. There is no golf course in the Indigo Shire with grass greens (all are sand-scrape greens), which is likely to impact on use, membership and the ability to attract new players from outside or near the Shire boundary.

¹⁷ Females and males aged 10 to 25 years were significantly underrepresented in the survey sample with only 4.36% of respondents being females in the 10 to 25 year cohort and only 4.06% males in the same age bracket. The population of the Indigo Shire within this age range are 17.82% and 15.93% for females and males respectively.

¹⁸ The Beechworth skate bowl is situated directly in front of the Beechworth Youth Centre, offering good connectivity to the centre, its staff and available programs and activities.

Local participation in golf is high, with 11% participation identified through the householder survey. An estimated 1,700 residents *'regularly participate in golf'*.¹⁹ Additionally, golf was the fourth most regularly participated activity overall, after *'walking', 'swimming' and 'cycling'*. The state average for participation in golf has been consistent at around 8% for the past four years²⁰, with participation in the Goulburn-Ovens-Murray Statistical Region slightly higher at around 10% (as identified in ERASS data).²¹

The township of Barnawartha has the largest number of golf participants. Within Barnawartha, golf was the 2nd most regularly participated activity after walking, with 24% of respondents living in Barnawartha playing golf. The majority of golfers, as recorded in the householder survey, were over 50 years of age.

Golf was also in the top 10 recreational activities that people would like to do, but currently didn't. Of the respondents that would like to play golf, 67% reside in Beechworth, with most being males in the 40 to 64 year age cohort. These figures suggest a significant opportunity for Beechworth Golf Club to capitalise on an identified growing market, particularly with an ageing in population expected over the next 10 years. Householder survey respondents identified the following things that would encourage them to play golf:

- *'provide better quality facilities'*
- *'information about what is available and where'*
- *'availability of suitable programs/ classes'*

The localised nature of golf courses provides a township culture of provision and limits the need for players to travel. However, ultimately the quality of

experience that can be provided will impact on the long-term participation in golf. *'Developing a golf complex'* was identified through consultation as a potential way to better provide for golf across the Shire. Additionally, *'further assistance from the Shire to help maintain facilities'* was a key requirement of clubs.

It would be desirable for Council (and the golfing community) to prioritise one centrally located golf course to be upgraded to provide irrigated grass and a driving range etc.

Continued support and promotion of all golf courses, and their activities and programs, may also assist to better service the community and to maintain current strong levels of participation.

Council may also wish to seek partnership support from golf's peak bodies and associated coaching networks to offer a greater range of instruction and coaching programs for residents and school networks.

¹⁹ It could however be expected that many participants could also play at golf courses located outside the Shire, where better quality facilities and grass greens are available. Participation at courses outside the Shire would most likely be by better players or those seeking a more enjoyable golfing experience. In these instances, cost of playing may not be a particular issue.

²⁰ Participation in Exercise, Recreation and Sport Surveys (2001- 2005).

²¹ The Goulburn-Ovens-Murray Statistical Region, as documented in ERASS data for Victoria, includes the municipalities of Alpine, Campaspe, Delatite, Greater Shepparton, Indigo, Mitchell, Moira, Murrindindi, Strathbogrie, Towong, Wangaratta and Wodonga.

8.6 Outdoor sports courts

8.6.1 Provision and surface quality

The traditional sports of tennis and netball are vital to recreation provision in rural areas. In most cases, netball courts are provided in conjunction with Australian Rules football / cricket grounds and clubs. Tennis courts are often provided within the same precinct (eg. Wahgunyah Recreation Reserve, Yackandandah Sports Park, Coulston Park, Chiltern Park Recreation Reserve, Barnawartha Recreation Reserve).

Despite the high level of outdoor court provision, there are significant issues in the range and quality of courts provided. Many are in a state of disrepair. Council, in conjunction with local football / netball clubs have begun implementing programmed improvement of netball courts, with funding provided through Sport and Recreation Victoria (SRV) grant programs. However, at the time of writing, no such program existed for the provision and upgrading of tennis courts, either by Council or the sports peak body.

In a few examples observed through site inspections (eg. Barkly Park, Rutherglen), the quality of court resurfacing has been an issue for some recent netball court upgrades, with some surfaces failing to meet expected standards. It would be desirable for Council staff to oversee the project management of any future surface improvement projects, particularly where State Government funding has been granted to ensure overall quality is maintained, and the surface type is consistent with an agreed strategy for the Sport and the Shire.

8.6.2 Tennis facilities

Participation in tennis is relatively strong across the Shire, with a local 10% participation rate identified through the householder survey, which is consistent with regional and statewide levels. However, the 1997 *Recreation Plan* identified 'tennis' as the most participated recreation activity, with an estimated 24.4% participation, some 3% greater than the second participated activity of 'walking'.

The 2006 householder survey identified the age of tennis participants as being highest in the 10 to 24 year age range for females and 40 to 50 year range for males. However, generally participation was relatively consistent across age groups, through to those aged 70 to 74, thus offering a good range of opportunities for participation.

Wahgunyah and Barnawartha had the lowest recorded tennis participation rates of 2% and 5% respectively, with participation rates of greater 6% recorded in all other main population centres. Tennis was not listed in the top 10 activities that survey respondents would like to do, however a small percentage (2%) of males aged 35+ said they would like to play tennis, should '*better facilities be provided*'.

Whilst many tennis facilities in smaller township and rural settlements are not considered to be in a playable or good condition, many larger club facilities provide a range of courts with supporting amenities, including clubrooms and floodlights (eg. Yackandandah Sports Park, Coulston Park, and Chiltern Recreation Reserve).

A significant opportunity exists for Council to develop a hierarchy of tennis facilities to assist in their future use, management, planning and development / improvement, and to help develop the sport. A hierarchy may assist with prioritising facility improvements where courts are located within close proximity to schools or within major sporting precincts. Council may also wish to encourage and support a basic level of tennis provision (ie. one or two court / multi-sport facilities) in smaller rural areas to encourage participation in a range of different activities.

A shire-wide tennis facility hierarchy could consider the elements of provision detailed in the table below.

Table 10: Possible tennis facility hierarchy

Hierarchy level	Example of basic level of provision
District	4-6 courts (with a quality surface – not asphalt or concrete), all floodlit, access to pavilion/toilet/change facilities, provided in a main population centre, club managed. Location example: Beechworth, Rutherglen, Chiltern, Yackandandah.
Small township	2-4 courts (any range of surfaces), preferably minimum of 2 floodlit, small shelter, access to toilet / social facilities, club managed or committee of management. Location example: Wahgunyah, Tangambalanga (Coulston Park) ²² , Barnawartha, Chiltern Valley.
Rural settlement	1-2 free access courts (preferably shared or provided in conjunction with multi-use netball or school courts), optional floodlighting, small shelter, access to toilet facilities, school or committee managed. Location example: Stanley, Wooragee.

It should be noted that Council have recently supported *'in-principle'* a preliminary plan for the relocation of the Beechworth Tennis Club from its current location to Wallace Park, Beechworth. Whilst the move is anticipated to have a positive impact on tennis locally, the number of courts, preferred court surfaces and a future site management or development plan should be carefully considered to ensure minimal impact on existing operations and maximum benefit for the community, and the sport.

²² Funding has been secured for the upgrading of court surfaces (4 courts) at Tangambalanga.

8.6.2 Netball facilities

The provision of netball courts are all linked to the local football / netball leagues and club playing fields, with competition facilitated through league fixtures. There is no district or regional level netball complex or competition. League requirements for netball competition currently require at least one netball court to be supplied at each competing club venue. Clubs are currently meeting requirements, although the quality and safety of surfaces at some facilities require improvement.

Many netball court upgrades have been recently funded by local and state government sources including courts at Rutherglen (plus floodlighting), Wahgunyah and Chiltern.

Council could continue to support and implement a programmed replacement of netball court surfaces (seeking grant funding from SRV), and prioritising those with strong football and community partnerships. Priorities may include courts at Coulston Park (in conjunction with master plan implementation), Baarmutha Park (relocate and replace 2 courts) and Barkly Park (resurface court closets to main pavilion).

It would be desirable for Council to liaise with – and seek technical advice from – peak netball and tennis bodies when considering the provision of new or replacement surfaces, taking into account levels of estimated use, life-cycle costs and issues of local climate etc.

Council could assist clubs and Committee's of Management with design input, project management and final contract supervision / sign-off for all surface works projects to ensure sustainability and quality of works.

Suggested directions

- ☑ Support the provision of at least one viable full-size indoor multi-purpose sports court (that is large enough for netball) in each main population centres (Beechworth, Rutherglen and Yackandandah, followed by Chiltern and Barnawartha- when there is demand.
- ☑ Investigate the opportunities to refine the assets grants scheme to target specific issues arising from this plan.
- ☑ Increase incentives for committees of reserves to ensure grounds serve both summer and winter sports.
- ☑ Promote the benefits of ground sharing, through resource allocations and target specific reserves for priority support and development.
- ☑ Continue to assist committees to consolidate, upgrade make accessible and replace aging and functionally obsolete facilities on reserves.
- ☑ Assist clubs and Committee's of Management with strategic decisions concerning the nature of tennis surfaces in line with what is good for the sport and across the Shire; and assist tennis and netball clubs with design input, project management and contract supervision / sign-off for all surface works
- ☑ Develop a hierarchy of tennis facilities and then seek to roll out a major sponsored scheme to selective upgrade tennis facilities across the Shire
- ☑ Assist facility user groups to review scheduling, management, marketing, maintenance and development of facilities to increase use and enhance viability.
- ☑ Seek to introduce a combination of structure and planting for shade at all recreation facilities.
- ☑ Support Committees of Management investigating and implementing programs to access grey water from agriculture or industry, water recycling and other initiatives to reduce both the amount of water required and demand for potable water.
- ☑ Embark on a strategic skate park development program and devise a specific management program for existing facilities.
- ☑ Work with mountain bike clubs and other land managers to formalise popular off-road trails, and promote legitimate areas off-road riding.
- ☑ Support and promote golf opportunities in the Shire and prioritise one centrally located golf course to be upgraded to provide irrigated grass and a driving range etc.

