A critical challenge

There is global scientific consensus that climate change poses significant risks to the environment, countless species, and humans.

The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s (IPCC) Special Report Global Warming of 1.5°C outlines the risks of excessive climate change, while highlighting that pathways to mitigate its worst impacts still exist and are achievable.

Sustainability Victoria’s research into the community’s perceptions on climate change found that 80% of those in our region agree that urgent action on climate change is required right now.

The recent community petition for Mount Alexander Shire Council to declare a Climate Emergency carried more than 1,640 electronic signatures and was supported by an online pledge of personal action from more than 750 signatories.

Council has heard the community’s concerns and supports efforts to radically reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address climate change vulnerability.

The story so far

Our first greenhouse gas action plan was adopted in 2000 and began a process that has resulted in diverse emissions reduction projects being implemented over the past two decades.

We have set ourselves an ambitious target of carbon neutrality for council operations by 2025, which is just one of many actions set out in our Climate Change Action Plan for 2016-2020. And it is an important step in walking the talk.

Council’s corporate emissions have been steadily falling in the past few years, thanks in large part to significant and ongoing energy efficiency upgrades in our buildings and street lighting infrastructure, as well as investment in rooftop solar.

We are confident we can meet our carbon neutral target and will be reporting in early 2020 on progress against all of our commitments. We also recognise we have some way to go in meeting a number of these.

Working in partnership

Mount Alexander Shire Council is blessed to be part of a strong network of councils acting on climate change in our region and state. For small councils such as ours, the ability to pool resources, learn from each other and advocate together to State and Federal levels of government for better policy is very valuable.

Council receives in-kind support through a number of partnership programs such as the Central Victorian Greenhouse Alliance, the Climate Council of Australia’s Cities Power Partnership, the Better Buildings Finance initiative, and the Business Renewables Council of Australia; and we

1 2018: Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty. Published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)
2 2017: Victorians’ perceptions of climate change report. Published by Sustainability Victoria.
have MOUs with local groups such as the Mount Alexander Sustainability Group, The Hub Foundation and Connecting Country.

We understand that our greatest opportunities for addressing climate change across our shire will be achieved in partnership with our community. We expect that the Community Forum on Climate Change in 2019 will feed into the process of defining our role in this space and ensure that we move forward on this critical issue with as many voices represented in our community as possible.

The actions outlined here are a summary of what Council has recently achieved and is progressing in 2019. This will be updated in 2020 as we roll out further initiatives and listen to the needs and views of our community.

Our recent climate change projects

**LED street lighting**

In 2015, almost 900 street lights were upgraded from the old mercury vapour style lighting to 18 Watt LEDs. The new lights are up to 75% more efficient and save 308 tCO2e each year. Prospective developers are now required to install highly efficient ‘category P’ lighting. Council is now pursuing the retrofit of 342 non-LED lights on major roads which, if successful, will deliver an additional 1,780 tCO2e over the next 20 years.

**Rooftop solar**

Council has a strong track record of delivering solar PV on the rooftops of its own facilities. With 158kW generation capacity currently installed across 25 Council owned buildings, this supplied 38% of the Council’s 2018 energy consumption. There is a further 15kW planned in for this financial year.

**100% Renewable electricity**

Council is currently signed up to participate in a tender process with 48 Victorian Councils to form Australia’s largest ever buying group to switch to 100% renewable electricity. If this goes forward the effect will be to further reduce the Council’s own carbon emissions by an estimated 888 tCO2e per year from 2021.

**Electric vehicle feasibility**

Mount Alexander Shire Council is one of 43 Victorian regional Councils partnering on a feasibility study, *Charging the Regions*, that will enable Councils to understand the opportunities for a joint investment program for a dense and coordinated network of EV charging across the state.

**Walking and cycling**

Council will be reviewing and updating the 2010 - 2020 Cycling and Walking Strategy this financial year. The revised document will be an innovative guide that identifies why, where and how Council will invest in encouraging and increasing the number and proportion of people in the Shire who regularly walk and/or ride bicycles for transport and recreation. The document will identify what can be done by Council and will also be a key advocacy tool for attracting investments from external grant sources. It will guide Council’s continuing investment in upgrading footpaths and trails.
Environmental upgrade agreements

Through our partnership with Better Buildings Finance, Council is enabling building owners, tenants and investors to better access long term finance for environmental upgrades, including LED lighting and solar energy, to existing commercial and non-residential buildings on attractive terms.

Land management rate program

Council supports and encourages responsible land management that improves the condition of the natural environment on privately owned land across Mount Alexander Shire. Successful applicants receive a 20% reduction off their property rate.

Waste management

In 2020 the Castlemaine landfill will close and general waste destined for landfill will be collected and processed by contractor, Veolia, at their Patho site. A landfill rehabilitation plan will be implemented over 2020-2022 that will see the site’s fugitive emissions capped and flared resulting in an expected decrease in locally generated greenhouse emissions by up to 80%. Council will be investing in a resource recovery centre at the site and investigating actions to assist the community in reducing waste to landfill in line with our long-term goal of towards zero waste.

Green team

The Green Team, which is made up of Council staff, is tasked with assisting in the integration of climate change and environmental concerns across Council operations and enabling changes to staff behaviours so that consumption of resources and energy is minimised in the workplace.

Sustainable living workshops

Since 2013 Council has been offering a series of workshops to assist community in reducing their environmental impact and adapting to climate change. Over 600 people have participated over the past five years. Council is currently examining how to improve the reach of these workshops.

Climate adaptation plan

In 2014 Council adopted the Regional Climate Adaptation Plan which identifies the risks, vulnerabilities and priority climate change adaptation actions for six partner Councils in the Southern Loddon Mallee Region. In 2019-2020 Council will be working in partnership with the ADAPT Loddon Mallee Program of the State Government to assist our community tomeaningfully contribute to the Regional Climate Summit in July 2020.

“Cool It” project

In 2020 Council will undertake priority heat vulnerability mapping of towns within our shire to further inform implementation of existing an emerging streetscape plan and design standards, including mapping for priority locations for street tree planting programs to improve the community’s resilience to increasing heat in regional Victoria.
Planning Scheme

The Mount Alexander Planning Scheme outlines strategies to increase the shire’s resilience to the adverse effects of climate change by discouraging certain land use and development activities that would place society at greater risk, and encouraging developments that capture and re-use water, for example. The scheme also seeks to minimise risks such as flooding, soil degradation and bushfire risk through a range of targeted strategies, guidelines and strategic work specific to our region.

Integrated Water Management

Council acknowledges the aim of Integrated Water Management (IWM) and the importance of managing water supply and demand carefully within our climate impacted environment. Council has recently commissioned an IWM plan for Castlemaine to assist with the protection of waterways, to gain advice regarding climate resilient water supply and assess options for water sensitive urban design in future developments within Castlemaine.

Emergency management

Local government plays a significant role in engaging local communities, building resilience and helping communities plan for emergencies and disasters. Through our Integrated Municipal Emergency Management Plan, Council works with other councils, various agencies and the community to undertake prevention and mitigation activities to reduce the likelihood, or minimise the consequences, of emergencies that may occur in the area, including floods, bushfires, heatwaves, pest incursions and disease.