ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DISCUSSION PAPER

GROW Wellington

PREPARED BY

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL
SEPTEMBER 2026

Executive Summary

Wellington Shire Council is preparing a new Economic Development Strategy to guide economic development activity over the next ten years. The Strategy will provide a framework for supporting business growth, investment attraction, industry development, employment opportunities, and community prosperity across Wellington Shire.

This Discussion Paper has been developed to support early engagement with businesses, industry, government, community organisations, and residents. It presents a range of proposed ideas, priorities and opportunities identified through preliminary research, economic analysis, and consultation.

The purpose of the Discussion Paper is to test whether the emerging direction reflects the aspirations, opportunities and challenges facing Wellington Shire's Economy and to identify areas where further work or refinement may be needed.

The paper includes:

- A snapshot of Wellington's economy.
- A proposed Vision for 2037.
- A proposed role for Council in economic development.
- Proposed Growth Principles and Guiding Principles.
- Proposed economic priorities and opportunities.
- Key themes emerging from consultation.
- Proposed strategic themes and example actions.
- Discussion questions to support feedback.

This is not a draft strategy.

The ideas presented in this discussion paper are proposed and have been developed to encourage discussion and feedback. Feedback received through consultation will help shape and refine the final Economic Development Strategy.

Council is seeking input on the proposed vision, priorities, opportunities, and actions to ensure the final Strategy is practical, evidence-based and aligned with the needs and aspirations of businesses, industries, communities, and investors across Wellington Shire.



Purpose of this Discussion Paper

This Discussion Paper has been prepared to support an open and informed conversation about Wellington Shire's economic future. It brings together preliminary research, economic analysis and stakeholder insights to present the emerging vision, priorities, opportunities and actions proposed for consideration.

The paper is not a draft Strategy. Its purpose is to test ideas, encourage discussion and gather feedback from businesses, industry, government, community organisations, residents and investors on the issues that matter most to Wellington's economy.

Feedback received through this process will help Council confirm the strategic direction, refine priorities and shape practical actions for inclusion in the Economic Development Strategy 2027–2037.

The final Strategy will provide a clear, evidence-based framework for Council and its partners to support business growth, attract investment, strengthen key industries, create employment opportunities and build a resilient and prosperous economy across Wellington Shire.



Why Now?

Wellington Shire is entering a period of significant economic change and opportunity. Emerging opportunities in energy, agribusiness, defence, aviation, tourism, manufacturing, and the circular economy have the potential to support future investment, business growth, and employment.

At the same time, workforce shortages, housing availability, infrastructure demands and increasing competition for investment are creating challenges for businesses and communities across regional Australia.

Broader trends including technological change, evolving workforce needs, climate adaptation, changing supply chains and Australia's transition to from traditional industries such as native timber harvesting, oil, gas, and coal-mined power stationsare reshaping regional economies and influencing future investment decisions.

These changes present both opportunities and challenges for Wellington Shire. By building economic resilience, strengthening investment readiness, and supporting business, industry and our community, Wellington Shire will continue to remain competitive, prosperous, and well-positioned for the future.

This discussion paper seeks feedback on how Wellington Shire should respond to these opportunities and challenges and what priorities should inform the Economic Development Strategy 2027-2037.



How This Discussion Paper Fits?

This Discussion Paper does not sit in isolation. It has been informed by Wellington Shire Council's broader strategic planning framework, including the Community Vision 2041 and the Council Plan 2025-29. Together, these documents establish the long-term aspirations of the community and Council's priorities for delivering outcomes across Wellington Shire.

The Community Vision 2041 identifies a future of connected and inclusive communities, a thriving economy, a resilient environment and a sustainable future, while the Council Plan 2025-29 includes a strategic objective focused on supporting a dynamic and diverse economy.

The proposed vision, principles, priorities and opportunities presented in this Discussion Paper have been developed with these broader directions in mind. Community and stakeholder feedback will help test these ideas, identify any gaps, and inform the future direction of economic development in Wellington Shire.



Strategic Objective Two

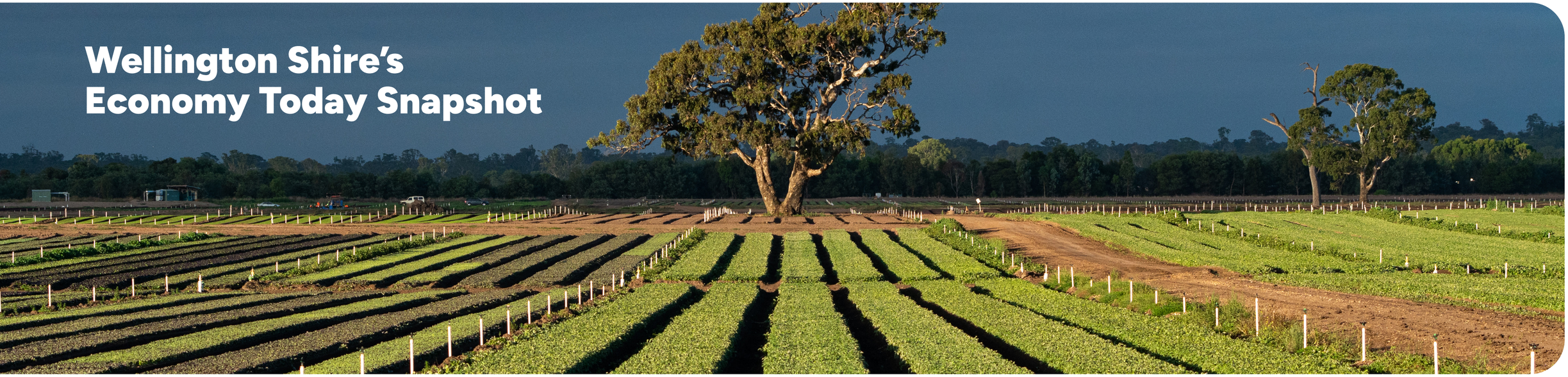
Dynamic and Diverse Economy

An economy that enables sustainable growth, enhancing the social environment, lifestyle and unique characteristics of our communities.

Strategies: what we will deliver

Supporting job growth and diversification of our economy.	Leveraging our natural environment and community assets to promote tourism, events and activation.	Planning to support future growth and changing needs of our community.	Guiding responsible, sustainable development that protects, values and celebrates our unique heritage.

Wellington Shire's Economy Today Snapshot



This snapshot provides a high-level overview of Wellington Shire's economy and is intended to inform discussion about the region's future economic priorities, opportunities, and challenges.

Wellington Shire is supported by a diverse economy, underpinned by industries including health and community services, agriculture and agribusiness, construction, government services, retail, education, manufacturing, tourism, energy, transport, and small business. This broad industry mix supports local employment, drives economic activity, and contributes to the region's resilience in responding to changing economic conditions.

The Wellington economy supports an estimated 19,915 jobs, representing 15.2% of all jobs across the Gippsland Region, 0.6% of Victoria's workforce, and 0.2% of Australia's workforce. Within the municipality, Sale is the largest employment centre, containing the highest number of jobs.

Wellington's largest employing industries include Health Care and Social Assistance, Agriculture, Forestry, Construction, Public Administration and Safety, Retail Trade, and Education and Training.

Together, these sectors play a critical role in supporting jobs, services, investment, and community wellbeing across the Shire.

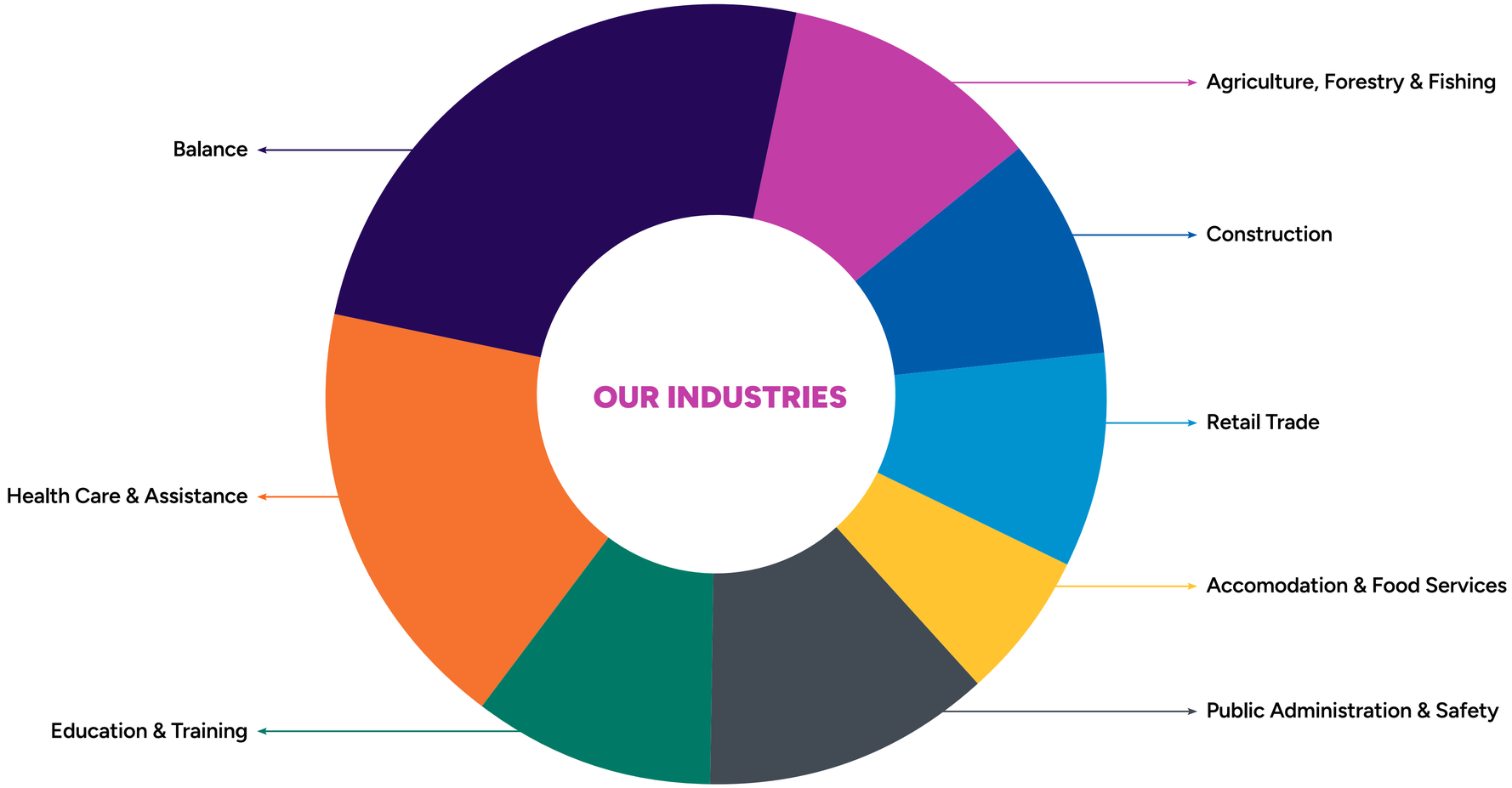
Health Care and Social Assistance is Wellington's largest employment sector, supporting an estimated 3,506 jobs and reflecting the region's role as a key service centre for Central Gippsland and surrounding communities.

Wellington also benefits from a range of strategic advantages, including its strong agricultural production, nationally significant energy assets, transport connections, natural environments, and growing visitor economy. These assets provide a solid foundation for future economic growth and investment.

At the same time, the region faces a range of challenges and opportunities that will influence its future economic performance. These include workforce availability, housing supply, population change, infrastructure needs, industry transition, investment attraction, and the ongoing diversification of the local economy.

Understanding these strengths, challenges, and emerging opportunities will help shape a shared vision and identify the priorities and actions needed to support sustainable economic growth and prosperity across Wellington Shire over the coming decade.

Wellington Shire's Economy Today Snapshot CONTINUATION



Wellington Economy, Jobs, and Business Insights | Employment, Industries | REMPLAN

Economic Opportunities and Challenges

Consultation and analysis have identified several opportunities and challenges that may influence Wellington's economic future. Recognising these factors will help shape priorities and actions within the final Strategy.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Growth in agriculture, agribusiness, and value-added food production.
- Expansion of defence, aviation, and aerospace-related opportunities.
- Investment in renewable energy, bioenergy, and circular economy initiatives.
- Growth in tourism, events, and visitor experiences.
- Strategic land and precinct development opportunities.
- Population attraction linked to lifestyle, liveability and regional employment opportunities.
- Emerging technologies and innovation.

CHALLENGES

- Workforce shortages across multiple industries.
- Housing supply and workforce accommodation constraints.
- Industrial and commercial land availability.
- Infrastructure capacity and investment requirements.
- Digital connectivity in some locations.
- Industry transition and economic resilience.
- Competition for investment and skilled workers.
- Climate adaptation and natural hazard impacts.
- Cost of living pressures.







What We've Heard So Far?

This Discussion Paper is an opportunity for the community, businesses, industry groups and other stakeholders to help shape Wellington Shire's economic future. The feedback gathered through this process will help Council understand what matters most to people across the Shire and what should be considered in the final Economic Development Strategy.

WHO WE'VE SPOKEN TO?

Early conversations have already taken place with a range of groups and representatives.
These discussions have helped identify local strengths, challenges, opportunities and priorities for economic development in Wellington Shire.

So far, Council has spoken with:

- Wellington Shire Councillors
- Wellington Shire Council's Economic Development Team
- Wellington Shire Council's Business Boost Forum
- Business and tourism associations
- Business owners and community representatives
- Food and Fibre Gippsland
- Progress associations and community groups
- Tourism stakeholders

WHAT WE'VE HEARD?

- Council should be responsive, practical and easy to work with.
- It should be easy for businesses to start, grow and invest in Wellington Shire.
- Local businesses need support to adapt, innovate and access new opportunities.
- Workforce, skills and training pathways are important for future economic growth.
- Housing choice and availability affect business growth, workforce attraction and community wellbeing.
- Tourism, events and visitor experiences can play a stronger role in supporting local towns and businesses.
- Town centers, precincts and strategic assets should be activated and promoted.
- Wellington Shire should confidently promote its strengths, industries, places and opportunities.
- Strong partnerships between Council, industry, government and the community will be needed to deliver outcomes.
- Council can improve how teams work together to support businesses, investment and community priorities.
- Agriculture and agribusiness remain major strengths, with opportunities to support value-added production and innovation.

Proposed Vision

The following proposed Vision has been developed through preliminary analysis and consultation.
It is intended to provide a long-term direction for Wellington's economy and is presented for discussion and feedback.

By 2037, Wellington Shire will continue to grow as a **resilient, diverse,** and **investment-ready economy** that supports local businesses, attracts investment, creates jobs and opportunities, and builds on Wellington's unique strengths, industries, and communities.

Achieving this vision will require Council, business, industry, government, and community partners to work collaboratively to strengthen Wellington's economy and leverage emerging opportunities.

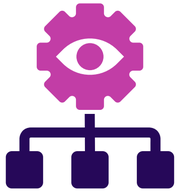
The Role of Council

Economic development is a shared responsibility. The following roles outline how Council can contribute to economic growth, investment and prosperity while working alongside business, industry, government, and the community. During initial consultation, stakeholders consistently described Council's role as a leader, enabler, facilitator, connector, advocate, investor and promoter of Wellington's economic future.



Lead

Provide strategic leadership and, recognise and champion opportunities that support Wellington's economic future.



Enable

Develop ways to improve processes, reduce barriers, and support timely decision-making.



Connect

Create platforms and forums to build relationships between businesses, industry, investors, government, and community.



Advocate

Pursue policy, funding and infrastructure outcomes that support economic growth.



Invest

Support enabling infrastructure, assets and initiatives that deliver long-term economic benefits.



Promote

Position Wellington as a place to live, work, visit and invest.

Key Partners

Economic development is driven by the combined efforts of businesses, industry, government, education providers, community organisations, investors and Council. No single organisation can deliver long-term economic prosperity alone. Strong partnerships, collaboration and shared commitment will be essential to identifying opportunities, overcoming challenges and achieving Wellington Shire's economic vision.

CATEGORY	KEY PARTNERS	
Agriculture & Natural Resources	Food & Fibre Gippsland Gippsland Agricultural Group Gippsland Dairy	Irrigation Groups Sawmills Timber Towns Victoria
Business, Investment & Industry	Business and Tourism Associations Chambers of Commerce Committee for Gippsland Committee for Wellington	Local Real Estate Agents One Gippsland Peak Industry Bodies
Defence, Aviation & Aerospace	Airport Operators and Tenants Civil Aviation Safety Authority Defence Industry Bodies	Department of Defence Wellington Defence Alliance
Education, Skills & Workforce	Federation University Local Jobs Program	TAFE Gippsland Workforce Australia Providers
First Nations	GLaWAC	
Government	Agriculture Victoria Department of Defence Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions Destination Gippsland Gippsland Councils	Global Victoria Invest Victoria Regional Development Australia Regional Development Victoria Southern Rural Water Tourism Australia Visit Victoria

Proposed Guiding Principles

The following proposed Guiding Principles are intended to support decision-making and help ensure Council's economic development efforts remain focused, practical, and aligned with community expectations.



Community Focus

We listen to and respond to the needs, aspirations and priorities of the community.



Balanced Financial Responsibility

We make responsible financial decisions and prioritise investments that deliver the greatest value and lasting benefits to our community.



Partnerships and Shared Responsibility

We collaborate with businesses, community groups, government agencies and other stakeholders to achieve shared outcomes.



Leveraging Local Strengths

We build on our unique natural places, assets, people and communities to maximise opportunities across Wellington Shire.



Enabling Growth and Participation

We create opportunities by building capability, fostering connections and supporting individuals, organisations and communities to succeed.



Strong Communities and Places

We support initiatives that strengthen participation, belonging, liveability, visitation and community pride.

Proposed GROW Principles

The following proposed GROW Principles provide a simple framework to guide future priorities, actions, and investment decisions. They describe the outcomes Council seeks to influence through its economic development activities.



GROW Business

Support local businesses to start, grow, and succeed.



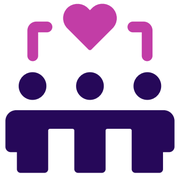
GROW Industry

Strengthen key industries and encourage new opportunities.



GROW Places

Activate places, precincts and assets that drive investment, jobs, and visitation.



GROW Communities

Support prosperous, connected, and inclusive communities.



GROW Connections

Build partnerships that unlock economic opportunities.



GROW Tomorrow

Prepare for future growth through workforce, housing, innovation, and resilience.

Our Key Industries

These key industries form the foundation of Wellington shires economy and will continue to play an important role in local employment, services, and economic activity. The following industries have been guided by consultation undertaken to date, and workforce data.



Health, Education and Government Services

Health care, education, and government services represent some of Wellington's largest employing sectors. These industries support community wellbeing, provide stable employment, and help attract and retain residents.



Agriculture and Agribusiness

Agriculture remains one of Wellington's defining economic strengths, supported by productive land, established supply chains and strong industry capability.

Opportunities exist across food and fibre production, value-added processing, innovation, bioenergy and emerging agricultural markets.



Construction, Manufacturing and Trades

Construction, manufacturing and trade services support housing, infrastructure delivery, industrial activity, and skilled employment pathways. These sectors are essential to regional growth and investment.



Retail, Hospitality and Small Business

Small businesses, retailers and hospitality operators are critical to local jobs, town centres, visitor experiences and community vitality across Wellington's towns and communities.

Key Growth Industries

These industries build on Wellington Shire's competitive advantages and present opportunities for future investment, innovation, and economic diversification.



Defence, Aviation and Aero skills

Wellington is uniquely positioned to build on defence and aviation-related opportunities through strategic assets such as RAAF Base East Sale and West Sale Airport. Opportunities include training, aero skills services, maintenance, advanced manufacturing, and sovereign capability.



Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy

Tourism supports local businesses, generates visitor expenditure, and showcases Wellington's natural, cultural, and recreational assets. Opportunities exist to strengthen destination development, event attraction, and visitor experiences.



Energy and Circular Economy

The transition to renewable energy and emerging circular economy industries presents opportunities for investment, innovation, and economic resilience. Areas of interest include bioenergy, waste-to-resource initiatives, renewable energy supply chains, and low-emissions technologies.



Arts, Culture and Creative Industries

Creative industries contribute to liveability, place activation, cultural identity, and visitation. They support local enterprise, storytelling, and the distinctive character of Wellington's communities.

Enablers of Wellington Shires Economy

Several factors influence the success and growth of all industries across Wellington.



Workforce and Skills

Access to skilled workers, training pathways and workforce retention is critical to business growth and investment attraction.



Housing

Housing is both a community and economic development issue. The availability, affordability and diversity of housing influences workforce attraction, business growth, population retention, and investment decisions.



Strategic Land and Infrastructure

Industrial land, transport networks, utilities, telecommunications, and community infrastructure are essential enablers of economic growth.



Investment and Innovation

Creating an environment that encourages investment, entrepreneurship, innovation, and business confidence will be essential to Wellington's future prosperity.

Proposed Strategic Themes and Actions

The following proposed strategic themes and actions represent focus areas for the final Economic Development Strategy. They are presented for discussion and will be refined based on feedback and Council priorities.

STRATEGIC THEME 1:

Open for Business

Create a business-friendly environment that supports growth, investment, and innovation.

ACTIONS

a. Strengthen Council's Business Concierge service as a clear entry point for businesses and investors.

b. Improve referral pathways and cross-department coordination.

c. Review business-facing processes to identify opportunities that make it easy to do business with Council.

d. Deliver regular business visits and engagement activities.

e. Maintain accurate online information about Council services, grants, and support.

f. Regularly monitor business sentiment and identify emerging issues.



STRATEGIC THEME 2:

Industry Development, Diversification and Resilience

Support existing industries while encouraging emerging opportunities and economic resilience.

ACTIONS

a. Support priority industries including agriculture, agribusiness, defence, aviation, tourism, energy, manufacturing, construction, health, government services, small business, and creative industries.

b. Support value-added agriculture and food processing opportunities.

c. Explore circular economy, bioenergy, and waste-to-resource initiatives.

d. Support industry forums and capability-building activities.

e. Monitor emerging economic opportunities and risks.



STRATEGIC THEME 3:

Investment Attraction & Advocacy

Position Wellington as investment-ready to attract and facilitate private and public investment.

ACTIONS

a. Develop and maintain a Wellington Shire Investment Prospectus.

b. Prepare investment-ready profiles for priority sites and precincts.

c. Maintain a register of major projects and investment opportunities.

d. Hold regular investor and developer engagement activities.

e. Develop a clear value proposition that promotes Wellington's investment advantages.

f. Develop a compelling and targeted advocacy framework that supports Council's priorities.



STRATEGIC THEME 4:

Strategic Land and Precinct Activation

Activate strategic land, infrastructure, and precincts to support investment, employment, and economic growth.

ACTIONS

a. Progress activation opportunities at West Sale Airport and Yarram Aerodrome.

b. Support the activation for the West Sale Industrial Precinct.

c. Monitor industrial and commercial land supply and demand.

d. Promote strategic sites and Council-owned assets where appropriate.

e. Advocate for infrastructure that unlocks employment land and investment.

f. Support investment-ready planning for future employment precincts.



STRATEGIC THEME 5:

Workforce, Housing and Economic Enablers

Support the critical enablers required for long-term economic growth and investment.

ACTIONS

a. Strengthen partnerships with schools, TAFE, universities, and training providers.

b. Support workforce attraction and retention initiatives.

c. Promote apprenticeships, traineeships, and employment pathways.

d. Advocate for increased housing supply and workers accommodation.

e. Support initiatives that retain young people and attract skilled workers.

f. Advocate for transport, freight, telecommunications, utilities, and enabling infrastructure.



STRATEGIC THEME 6:

Tourism and Events

Promote Wellington Shires unique natural, cultural and community assets to grow visitation, activate places and support local economic activity.

ACTIONS

a. Support signature, seasonal and community-led events that increase visitation, overnight stays, and local economic activity.

b. Package and promote Wellington Shires visitor experiences through The Middle of Everywhere brand.

c. Develop a coordinated events program, supported by an events framework

d. Activate strategic tourism assets, including the Port of Sale, rail trails, waterways, parks, gardens, cultural attractions, and coastal destinations.

e. Leverage Wellington's natural, cultural and heritage assets to enhance liveability, strengthen regional identity and support tourism growth.



STRATEGIC THEME 7:

Regional Identity and Promotion

Strengthen Wellington Shires reputation as a place to live, work, visit and invest.

ACTIONS

a. Strengthen and promote The Middle of Everywhere as Wellington Shire place, tourism, and investment brand.

b. Showcase Wellington's strengths, assets, industries and success stories through coordinated marketing and promotion.

c. Develop consistent messaging, tools and resources that support partners to promote Wellington Shire.

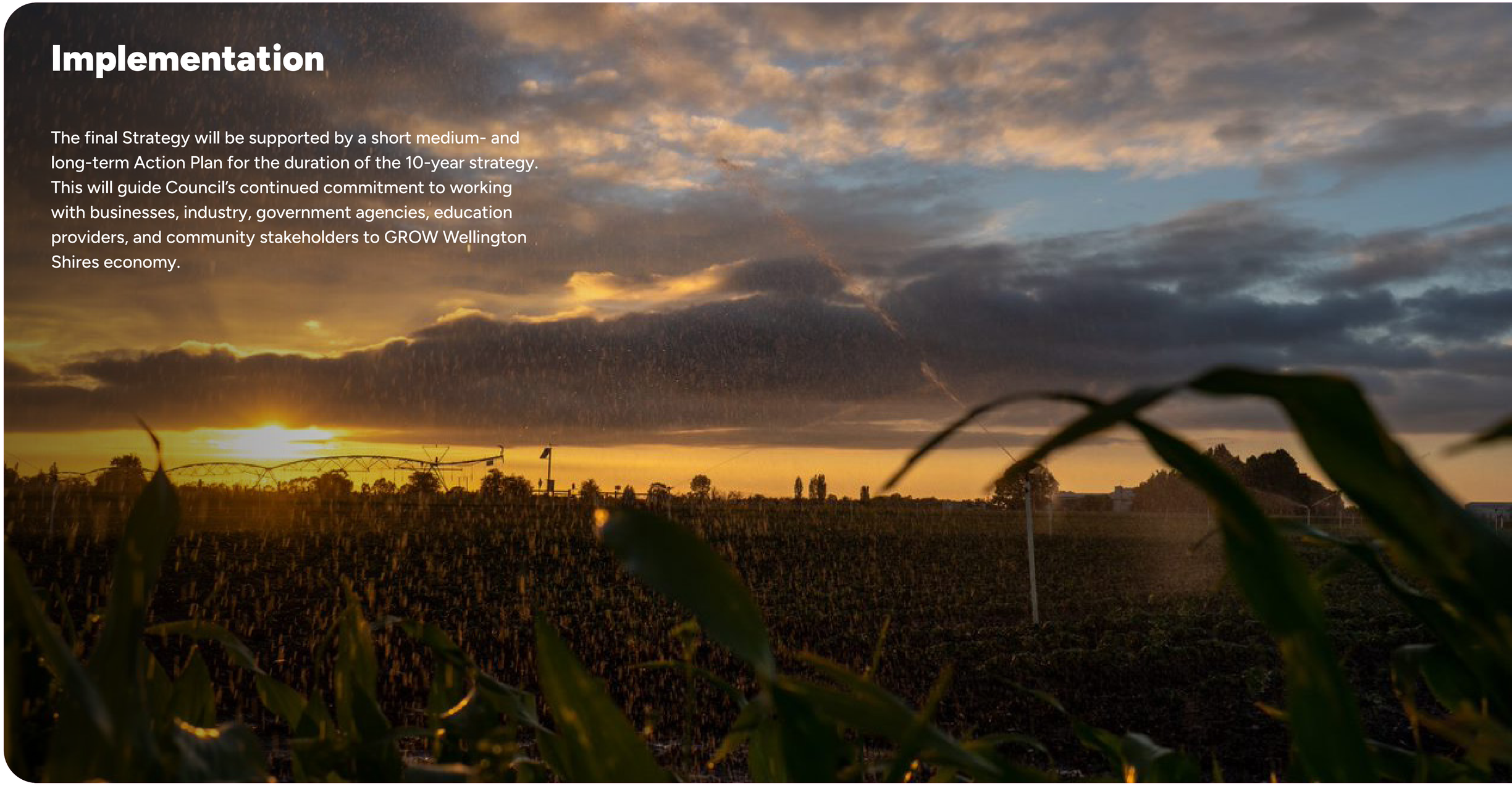
d. Support township and micro-region identities that contribute to a strong and connected regional narrative.

e. Position Wellington as an attractive destination for investment, visitation, business growth, and lifestyle opportunities



Implementation

The final Strategy will be supported by a short medium- and long-term Action Plan for the duration of the 10-year strategy. This will guide Council's continued commitment to working with businesses, industry, government agencies, education providers, and community stakeholders to GROW Wellington Shires economy.



What's Next?

This discussion paper will guide our engagement over the next six weeks and provides the foundation for conversations about Wellington Shire's economic future. During this period, we invite you to share your feedback on the proposed vision, priorities, and actions that will help shape the final Wellington Economic Development Strategy 2037.

These questions below will help to stimulate your thoughts and ideas and get the conversation going.

Questions

1. Does the proposed Vision reflect the economic future Wellington should aim for by 2037?
2. Do the proposed Guiding Principles provide the right basis for decision-making?
3. Is Council's proposed role clear, realistic and aligned with community and industry expectations?
4. Which strategic themes are most important for the next one to three years?
5. What actions should be prioritised, refined, or removed?
6. Do the proposed economic priorities reflect Wellington's key strengths, opportunities, and future potential?
7. Are there any industries, opportunities or economic enablers that should receive greater focus in the Strategy?
8. What major projects, precincts or investment opportunities should Wellington prioritise?
9. How can Council better demonstrate an Open for Business approach?
10. How can tourism, events, arts, culture, and place activation contribute more meaningfully to economic growth?
11. What is your favourite event that is hosted locally?
12. What places do you like to visit on your weekends?
13. What workforce, housing, or infrastructure issues most limit business growth?
14. What are the biggest barriers to economic growth in Wellington today?
15. What should Council stop doing, start doing or do differently to support economic development?
16. What measures would demonstrate success over the next ten years?
17. What should Wellington be known for in 2037?