

Loddon Mallee

REGIONAL FOOTBALL (SOCCER) DEVELOPMENT PLAN



PART A

FUTURE DIRECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OCTOBER 2013

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sport and leisure planning



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About this document

The Loddon Mallee Regional Football (Soccer) Regional Development Plan is delivered in three parts.

Part A – Regional Principles and Recommendations (THIS DOCUMENT)

Provides the broad principles and strategic framework to support the future development, growth and viability of soccer across the Loddon Mallee Region, in addition to documented future directions, strategies and actions for each participating municipality.

Part B – Background, research and consultation findings

Provides a detailed project, region and sporting context analysis, literature and policy review, facility inspection reports and findings, stakeholder consultation program and identification of club needs. All background information and research collected during the development of the Plan is also provided in Part B.

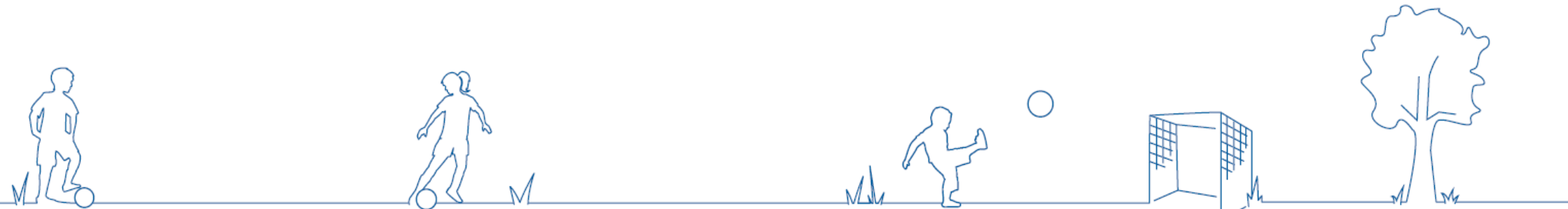
Part C – Soccer Facility Audits

Provides details of the site information and condition audits undertaken for all soccer venues across the Loddon Mallee Region.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Loddon Mallee Regional Football (Soccer) Development Plan is a partnership project between the State Government (via Regional Development Victoria), Football Federation Victoria (FFV), and the 10 Local Government Authorities (LGA's) that make up the Loddon Mallee Region.

The LGA's of Yarriambiack and Hindmarsh fall outside the State Government's defined Loddon Mallee Region but are included in this study as they form part of FFV's Loddon Mallee Zone.

For the purposes of this Plan, and to reflect the language and terminology commonly used in the region, the sport will be **referred to as soccer** rather than football.

The Loddon Mallee is considered one of the more prominent regions for soccer across the State, with 21 clubs, three major leagues, almost 4,000 registered players and a regional level venue in Bendigo which hosts a range of community to elite level programs, tournaments and events.

The key regional cities of Bendigo and Mildura, along with the Shire's of Campaspe and Macedon Ranges provide the bulk of soccer facilities and the majority of registered players in Loddon Mallee.

Whilst soccer is strong in these areas, there are many parts of the Region such as Buloke, Loddon, Gannawarra and Yarriambiack that currently have no soccer clubs or facilities. The development of the sport in these areas is possible, but will require a coordinated approach by key sport and government stakeholders with a focus on schools, shared use facilities and providing opportunities through casual and entry level soccer.

A spike in soccer participation across both Victoria and the Region after Australia's qualification in the 2006 Soccer World Cup, has been followed by an 8% decline in the number of registered players in Loddon Mallee since 2009.

The reasons behind this decline reflect that soccer is not considered one of the dominant sports in the Region and is not engrained in the regions sporting landscape. Traditional sports including AFL, netball, cricket and hockey dominate the Region and in many areas are considered the lifeblood of some of the Region's smaller townships and outlying rural areas.

The decline in population in some parts of the Region in recent years and limited isolated growth areas identified in Loddon Mallee is impacting participation. The demographic of the Region is predominantly Anglo-Celtic, and with very few migrant communities who consider soccer as their chosen sport it has been difficult for soccer to continue to build participation and get a strong foothold in the sporting market across the region.

FFV are active across the Region, providing support and resources to the various leagues, associations and clubs operating in Loddon Mallee. FFV is responsible for the planning, delivery and development of the sport and have staff in key areas of the region to deliver competition management and elite pathway programs, club and player development, facility planning and event delivery.

Through the development of this plan, and in consultation with local leagues, associations and clubs, it was apparent that the role and the amount of support and resources being provided by FFV was not meeting the needs and expectations of the region. The perception that soccer is more expensive to play than other sports and that FFV representation in the Region is limited is a concern for the sport and is impacting the brand and image of soccer in Loddon Mallee.

A key issue for soccer clubs in the Region is the standard and provision of existing facilities. Through on-line surveys conducted, clubs have indentified that the existing condition and performance of change rooms, sports field lighting and spectator amenities and infrastructure were well below the requirements for the sport and are significantly impacting participation.

The upgrade of existing change rooms, provision of additional amenities to support junior and women's soccer, club capacity and the need to provide appropriate floodlighting to training standards are the highest priority infrastructure requirements identified to activate and sustain the sport in Loddon Mallee.

Despite the current standard and quality of existing soccer facilities, the number of pitches and associated soccer infrastructure is generally appropriate for the number of clubs and registered players. The expected future population growth in Macedon Ranges and Bendigo will trigger the need for additional soccer facilities, whilst a satellite facility in Robinvale should be considered to compliment the proposed Loddon Mallee Facility Hierarchy model, service local need, and provide players to FFV Sunraysia leagues.

Executive summary continued...

This Plan proposes a set of regional principles and strategic priorities designed to guide the future direction of soccer in Loddon Mallee. The strategies and recommendations provided aim to maximise participation, improve facilities, increase club support, provide clear competition and player development pathways and build the profile of the sport in Loddon Mallee.

The growth and popularity of soccer over the next few years will be assisted by the national teams qualification in the 2014 World Cup and the hosting of the 2015 AFC Asian Championships. Off the back of these events, and with a focused and coordinated approach on the implementation of this Plan, soccer has the opportunity to strengthen its position and ensure its long-term viability in Loddon Mallee.

Glossary of terms

For the purpose of this study and the readability of the report, the Project Steering Group agreed to the use of the term **soccer** rather than football to describe the sport. It is particularly relevant for the study area (Loddon Mallee) where the World Game is referred to as soccer and AFL or Aussie Rules is referred to as football.

Other government, stakeholder and soccer related terms used frequently throughout the report are defined in the adjacent table.

Term / Abbreviations	Definition/ Explanation
FFA	Football Federation Australia, the governing body of football (soccer) in Australia.
FFV	Football Federation Victoria, the governing body for football (soccer) in Victoria.
BASL	Bendigo Amateur Soccer League (Competition Administrator)
BDSA	Ballarat and District Soccer Association. a Competition Administrator
GNFA	Goulburn North East Football Association (Competition Administrator)
LGA's	Local Government Authorities
RSA's	Regional Sports Assembly, of which there are three operating in the study area: Mallee Sports Assembly, Sports Focus and Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly
Loddon Mallee LGA's	Refers to the ten LGA's defined by the Loddon Mallee Region and for the purposes of the study also includes the LGA's of Hindmarsh and Yarriambick.
Local soccer providers	Refers to the variety of local administrative entities in the region, including the Competition Administrators for local leagues (BASL, GNFA,, BDSA), the hybrid club/league entities (Echuca Moama Soccer Association, Swan Hill Soccer Association) which organise local competition for juniors and participate as clubs in other leagues and FFV Sunraysia which is the administrative arm of FFV located in Mildura.
Soccer (football)	Played between two teams of eleven players on an outdoor turf or artificial grass field and is often referred to as the World Game.
SSF	Small-Sided Football (SSF) is an FFA mandated modified version of the game designed for development of players aged 5 – 11 years and is played on smaller sized fields with fewer numbers of players per team and shortened game times. SSF competitions are not played for points are there are no league tables or championships.
Futsal	A format of the sport officially recognised by FIFA. Futsal is played on a small indoor hard court surface with a small ball and five players per side and shortened time frame.. The court is delineated by lines and not walls or boards like five a side soccer. In Australia Futsal is often played on courts marked for netball.
NPLV	National Premier Leagues - Victoria. The NPL is an FFA initiative and will be established in each state by 2014 to provide a national second-tier for Australian senior football and a consistent approach to the development of Australia's talented junior footballers.
ZDO	Zone Development Officers are responsible for the coordination and development of coaches, players and referees in a region. There is a ZDO operating on a part-time basis in Echuca who also services Swan Hill. The Goulburn North East ZDO services the Kyabram clubs..

2. INTRODUCTION

Project scope

The Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan is designed to guide decision making for the development, growth, management and promotion of soccer in the Loddon Mallee Region.

The Plan will shape the future provision and development of soccer facilities, clubs and leagues, and provide a clear direction regarding the development of soccer, with the aim to increase participation, establish strong recreational links across Councils and generate event, tourism and economic interest for the Region.

The scope of the Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan investigates key areas of participation, competition and club and player development structures and future facility development. The following proposed objectives have been adopted:

- To support opportunities for participation in competitive and recreation soccer throughout the Loddon Mallee Region.
- To identify effective competitive, recreational and player development structures to support current and projected participation levels.
- To identify support structures that will ensure the sustainability and viability of local leagues and clubs.
- To investigate facility development requirements to meet current and projected growth in soccer participation.

The project delivers clearly defined action plans for each participating LGA. The action plans outline priority activities, costs, timeframes and key stakeholder roles and responsibilities and the development of a soccer facilities hierarchy to inform the overall strategic plan for the implementation of key project outcomes.

Our approach

The Loddon Mallee Soccer Development Plan has included extensive research and consultation with state and local government representatives, state sporting bodies and a large cross-section of the national, state and local soccer community.

The project commenced in October 2012 and was completed in the following five key stages:

Stage	DESCRIPTION
ONE	Project Establishment
TWO	Situation Analysis
THREE	Supply Analysis
FOUR	Participation and Demand Assessment
FIVE	Draft Football Development Plan
SIX	Recommendations and Reporting

Key outcomes

The Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan delivers the following key project outcomes:

- An understanding of current and potential participation in soccer in the Loddon Mallee Region.
- An audit of existing conditions of soccer facilities and participation.
- A methodology for, and an analysis of, the social and economic impact / contribution of soccer to the Loddon Mallee Region.
- Strategic advice to develop soccer within the Loddon Mallee Region.

A clearly defined implementation plan to guide the Loddon Mallee Regional Management Forum, Council's and local communities in the delivery, of the Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan has been prepared, incorporating a list of actions with appropriate costings, timelines, funding options and prioritisation.

Study area

The Loddon Mallee Region covers a total area of approximately 70,000 square kilometres with a population of over 321,000 residents. The most heavily populated areas include Mildura, Bendigo and Swan Hill which contribute almost 75% of the entire population across the Region.

The Loddon Mallee Region is located in the north west of Victoria and is bordered by the Hume Region to the east and the Grampians Region to the south as defined by the Victorian Government. The area incorporates a total of ten LGA's including the cities of Mildura, Swan Hill, Greater Bendigo and the Shires of Loddon, Macedon Ranges, Mount Alexander, Campaspe, Buloke, Gannawarra and Central Goldfields.

The Shires of Hindmarsh and Yarriambiack are located outside the Loddon Mallee Region (in the Grampians Region) but are included in the soccer development plan as they form part of the FFV's Loddon Mallee Zone.

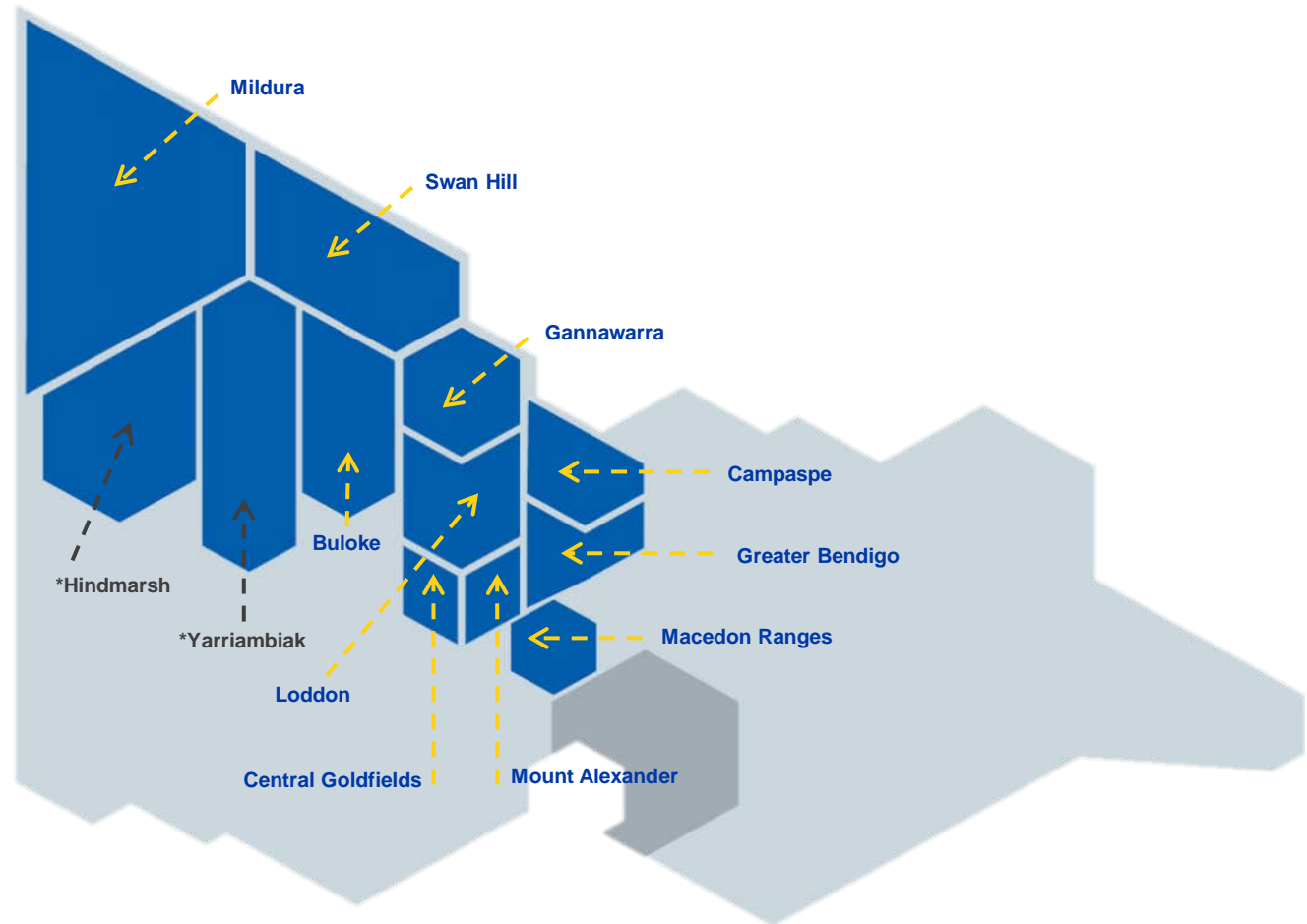


Figure 01: Regional Study area

3. VISION, PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

The following report section establishes the vision and key principles for soccer in the Loddon Mallee Region and provides five key strategic directions identified as having a significant influence on the preparation of the Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan.

Vision for Soccer

The agreed and adopted stakeholder vision for soccer in the Loddon Mallee Region is:

‘Soccer - Loddon Mallee’s most accessible sport’

Regional Principles

1. Increase the profile and reach of soccer across the Region and establish soccer in key growth areas.
2. Improve access to soccer facilities, services and programs for Loddon Mallee residents.
3. Support the development of local soccer providers and clubs to build capacity and ensure their long term sustainability.
4. Deliver targeted soccer programs that meet the needs of diverse communities and respective LGA’s.
5. Ensure alignment of sport, government and community stakeholder needs and objectives and encourage partnership approaches to develop soccer.
6. Maximise participation and diversify the range of programs and activities to get more people to play soccer.
7. Invest in facilities and infrastructure that increase opportunities to participate in all forms of competitive and recreational soccer.
8. Deliver health, economic and social benefits through the provision of soccer programs, events and activities across the Region.
9. Engage and build strong relationships with schools to promote soccer’s brand and deliver positive messages around the benefits of participation.

4. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The five key strategic directions identified as having a significant influence on the preparation of the Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan include:

1. Participation

Understanding participation trends for soccer across the region and ensuring the right mix of programs, competitions and venues are delivered to address key barriers and limitations to participation.

2. Facilities

Understanding local and regional facility requirements and expectations, develop a consistent approach to facility provision and identify shared use and cost effective facility development options.

3. Club development

Identifying the specific needs of clubs regarding management, governance, capacity building and volunteer retention and ensure clubs remain viable and sustainable and continue to provide for the sport across the region.

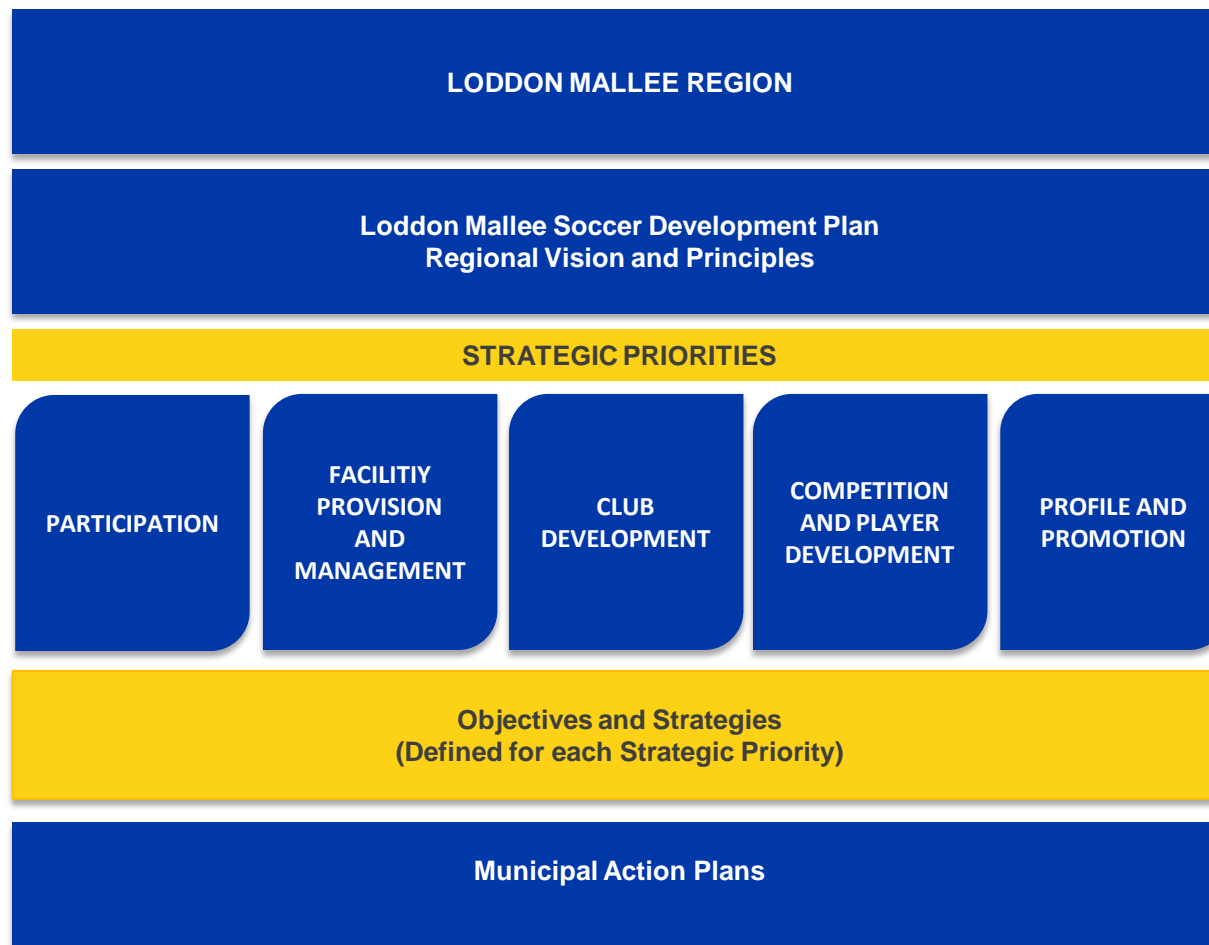
4. Competition and player development

Identifying effective competition and player development structures and pathways to address participation decline, enhance economic development opportunities and address club, competition and talented program viability issues.

5. Profile and Promotion

Ensuring that soccer continues to build its profile and contributes to the local economy through events and other activities and is recognised as a safe, active and healthy sporting option.

The following table outlines the strategic framework, structure and key drivers for the development of soccer in Loddon Mallee and how these strategies will guide the future direction for soccer in Loddon Mallee.



The following report section provides a summary of each strategic priority and its associated objectives, recommendations and proposed implementation.

Figure 02: Strategic framework for soccer in the Loddon Mallee Region

5. STAKEHOLDER ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

A summary of the overall roles and responsibilities of the Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan stakeholders is provided below.

Identifying stakeholder involvement and allocation of roles, responsibilities and resources provides a focussed approach to delivery and implementation and strategic alignment with organisational core business and workforce capacity.

Sport & Recreation Victoria

The role of Sport and Recreation Victoria is to develop policy to address key issues and state-wide direction setting for sport and recreation. Their role is central to building stronger communities through sport and active recreation.

SRV is the lead agency in delivering on the Victorian Government sport and recreation policy and has a focus on: *community facility improvement, targeted participation programs, athlete performance and results and sporting event attraction and delivery.*

For soccer in Loddon Mallee, SRV will be required to support the development and capacity building of soccer clubs and facilities and support the allocation of sustainable resources to deliver on the objectives of the soccer development plan.

Local Government Authorities

The twelve LGA's included in the study area have responsibility to deliver sport specific participation, infrastructure, governance and planning initiatives.

The core role of LGA's in the implementation of the Regional Soccer Development Plan is to plan and develop sustainable multi-use facilities, identify and secure resources and facilitate stakeholder relationships.

It is recommended that all LGA's formally acknowledge the regional vision and guiding principles proposed in the Plan and then individually adopt their own municipal action plans. Participation in future implementation and ongoing review of recommendations is also required.

FFV and Competition Administrators

As the governing body for soccer across the state and as the key facilitator of soccer competitions and programs in Loddon Mallee, FFV will have a significant role to play in the coordination and implementation of this Plan.

From the research and consultation undertaken throughout this study it was evident that FFV will need to focus on strategies that increase its presence and strengthen its reputation and brand in the Region. FFV will also require an increased focus on providing resources to support the needs and priorities of key soccer stakeholders and providers.

The following immediate priorities have been developed to assist and guide FFV's future role, function and strategic approach to supporting the needs of soccer clubs and to continue to grow and develop soccer in Loddon Mallee.

- Build stronger relationships with local soccer providers to increase programming, improve soccer's brand and image and deliver sustainable participation opportunities.
- Increase the range and frequency of contact with local soccer leagues, association, clubs and RSA's to continue to build club capacity, strengthen player development and competition pathways and drive soccer in the region.

- Review the current structure, role, function and funding of ZDO's to enable effective participation, coach and referee development across the region in partnership with local soccer providers.

In partnership with local soccer providers:

- Actively increase schools visits and the number of modified and development programs introduced into schools in the lead up to the 2014 Soccer World Cup and 2015 Asian Cup (being hosted in Australia).
- Review playing costs imposed by the sport, including clubs, to minimise the cost premium over other sports.

Regional Sports Assemblies

The three RSA's that service the Loddon Mallee Region exist to promote and strengthen community sport, recreation and health opportunities for all people across the Region.

Key focus areas for RSA's will be to support the initiation, growth and development of soccer in Loddon Mallee, promote the development of schools, clubs and sporting links, and support clubs in the development of healthy, safe and inclusive environments through ClubHELP and other related training and education programs.

Schools

Local schools will be needed to support the delivery of local soccer programs, participate in development opportunities with local associations, clubs and government, and promote soccer opportunities to students and parents.

6. REGIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides a set of regionally focussed directions and recommendations for each of the five identified strategic objectives for soccer in Loddon Mallee.

The proposed regional recommendations are designed to assist sport, government and community stakeholders to prioritise and allocate appropriate level of resources, work collaboratively and respond to emerging opportunities to help grow the sport, identify future funding requirements, and collectively support the growth and development of soccer across the region.

The financial impact of implementing the proposed recommendations has not been determined, however it is critical that key stakeholders, as well as potential funding providers adopt a coordinated approach to the scoping and delivery of these recommendations and recognise the need for multiple funding partners.

The ongoing ownership and delivery of the Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan, and the regular monitoring of key regional actions and recommendations will require some further thought from the relevant State and Local Government Departments and local soccer providers.

It is suggested that the Loddon Mallee Regional Network which is made up of representatives from State and Local Government and should include an annual review of progress on the Plan in association with FFV.

Implementation

In addressing the strategic directions outlined within this Plan, the delivery of the following series of actions and recommendations will be imperative to achieving a successful outcome.

The implementation of the proposed regional recommendations and action plan requires internal and external stakeholders to play three important roles in delivering actions:

Initiate

Refers to the planning, scoping, and coordinating the range and timing of actions to be delivered.

Deliver

Refers to on the ground delivery of identified actions and the management of key partner and stakeholder contributions.

Support

Refers to organisational support for action delivery through the provision of resources, people, skills, funding, equipment and/or promotional activities.

The Loddon Mallee Regional Soccer Development Plan is as a ten year plan (2013 – 2023) designed to provide practical and achievable strategies and actions for key stakeholders.

Each recommendation has been allocated a level of priority based on their relative impact on delivering the desired outcomes.

High

Important action that underpins the delivery of the sport across Loddon Mallee.

Medium

Action that contributes to meeting overall Development Plan objectives.

Low

Action that contributes to the overall improvement of soccer in Loddon Mallee.

Ongoing

Action that will require an ongoing commitment by key stakeholders or a long-term change in systems and procedures resulting in ongoing consideration and implementation.

It should be acknowledged that priorities can change and are based on funding availability. The presentation of new or unknown opportunities or changes in community demands can also alter priorities.

The stakeholder acronyms used to identify delivery responsibility in the following implementation plans are defined below:

- FFV - Football Federation Victoria
- RSA – Regional Sports Assembly
- SRV – Sport and Recreation Victoria
- LGA – Local Government Authority
- LSA – Local Soccer Association
- LC – Local Soccer Club
- FO – Facility Operator
- SC - Schools

OBJECTIVE 1: Participation

To address the decline of registered players across the region and continue to maximise the range of soccer programs to introduce new people to the sport and promote growth in the diversity of soccer participants.

By 2023 all LGA's in the Region will have some formalised opportunity to participate in soccer at both a competitive and recreational level.

Proposed Participation Recommendations	Priority	Stakeholder Responsibility		
		Initiator	Deliverer	Supporter
1. Address the significant drop out from SSF through to junior competitions, and the transition to senior competition through increased contact with schools and targeted programs and marketing campaigns that focus on player retention.	HIGH	FFV	LGA	LA / LC
2. Review the role and capacity of FFV Zone Development Officers and address key geographical and financial challenges that are currently impacting on the delivery of soccer across the Region.	HIGH	FFV	FFV	LA / LC
3. Explore the potential market and local demand for soccer in Robinvale, Kerang and Loddon with local schools and soccer stakeholders through the development of shared facilities and introductory soccer programs.	MEDIUM	FFV	FFV / LA	LGA / RSA
4. Identify and develop key strategic actions that target female participation and explore opportunities to promote soccer as an addition to traditional female sports such as netball.	HIGH	FFV	LA / LC	LGA
5. Identify and develop key strategic actions that target indigenous and CALD participation where these communities occur across the region.	MEDIUM	FFV	FFV / LA / LC	LGA / RSA
6. LGA's to work with local soccer providers to develop a small / rural towns approach to introducing soccer programs that target physical activity, social play and connection to existing clubs, where there is currently no soccer being provided.	LOW	LGA	LA / LC	FFV, RSA
7. Recognise the variety of ways that people can participate in the sport, either as a player, coach, volunteer or administrator, and provide the appropriate level of support and resources to attract people to these roles.	LOW	FFV	LA / LC	LGA, RSA
8. Work with local providers and facility owners to facilitate and encourage the growth of indoor soccer in Loddon Mallee and recognise the health, fitness and skill benefits in future sports development plans and strategies.	MEDIUM	LGA	LA / LC / FO	FFV
9. Acknowledge the popularity of AFL and other sports in the Region and manage the scheduling of soccer activities to provide opportunities for people to participate in more than one sport if they choose.	LOW	FFV / LA	FFV / LA	LC

OBJECTIVE 2: Facility Development

Develop a regional approach to facility development through the adoption of the proposed soccer facility hierarchy model and support projects that prioritise the enhancement and development of infrastructure and assets that increase the range and use of soccer facilities. There are many facilities that exist and are available for soccer use across the Region. Facility development aims to focus on getting the most out of what facilities are available. Refer to Part B Appendix 1 for the proposed facility hierarchy model.

Proposed Facility Development Recommendations	Priority	Stakeholder Responsibility		
		Initiator	Deliverer	Supporter
1. Adopt a decentralised model for future facility development and improvement that focuses on the delivery and enhancement of club level competition facilities that provides opportunities for clubs to be more sustainable and connected.	HIGH	SRV	SRV / FFV	LGA / LA
2. Consider the development of a sports field lighting strategy for existing outdoor soccer venues that incorporates an audit of existing lighting infrastructure including current provision, lighting levels and impacts on soccer programs and provides an implementation plan for the future upgrade of sports field lighting across the Region.	HIGH	SRV	LGA / SRV	FFV
3. Ensure any future park or reserve master planning considers provision for informal soccer areas with goals and a flat open area to promote casual use.	LOW	LGA	LGA	FFV
4. Develop a consistent and formalised set of facility development guidelines for the sport to assist Council's, leagues and associations in planning for future provision and delivery of soccer infrastructure.	MEDIUM	SRV / FFV	FFV	LGA
5. Redevelop existing soccer facilities to better accommodate the provision and usage by multiple teams, in line with FFV facility development guidelines and universal design principles, and ensure the adequate provision of spaces to accommodate and encourage female and junior participation.	HIGH	FFV / LGA	LGA	SRV
6. Further explore facility development opportunities in key population growth areas including Bendigo and Macedon Ranges and ensure any future plans for facilities in these locations are in line with the regional facility hierarchy.	MEDIUM	LGA / FFV	LGA / FFV	SRV / LA / LC
7. Consult with schools to identify any planned or possible sports facility developments on school land to ensure integration with local and regional facility development needs.	MEDIUM	LGA / FFV	LGA	FFV
8. Investigate the availability and capacity of existing indoor sports courts in Loddon Mallee and identify any existing underutilised AFL and hockey venues to accommodate future growth and identify facility options for SSF and informal soccer activities.	LOW	LGA / FFV	LA / FFV	FFV
9. Consider government funding for all future infrastructure projects that support local soccer clubs to upgrade existing or develop new facilities to maximise participation opportunities.	HIGH	LGA	LGA	FFV

OBJECTIVE 3: Club Development

Create an environment where Leagues, Associations and Clubs feel supported, engaged and acknowledged through the provision of club development initiatives designed to build club capacity and strengthen the viability and sustainability of the sport in the Loddon Mallee Region.

By 2023 there will be more soccer clubs operating in the Loddon Mallee Region, all supported by appropriate levels of planning and governance to grow the sport within their local community.

Proposed Club Structure Recommendations	Priority	Stakeholder Responsibility		
		Initiator	Deliverer	Supporter
1. FFV to develop stronger relationships with local soccer providers and clubs across the region to ensure a clear and consistent approach to the delivery of soccer at all levels.	HIGH	FFV	FFV	RSA / LA
2. Support local soccer providers to develop plans that consider the recommendations of this development plan and FFV's future directions and local influences and capacities.	HIGH	FFV	RSA / FFV	LGA / LA / LC
3. FFV, Councils and Regional Sports Assemblies to collectively address the needs of clubs by providing a greater role in the delivery of community soccer programs, the recruitment, training and retention of coaches and volunteers, assistance with funding applications and the development of business plans and strategies to ensure the long term financial sustainability of clubs.	HIGH	FFV / RSA	FFV / RSA / LGA	LA / LC
4. Build stronger relationships with RSA's to address the development needs of the sport and implement a shared model for delivering targeted programs to diverse communities, clubs and schools in Loddon Mallee.	MEDIUM	FFV	FFV / RSA	RSA
5. Promote and encourage all clubs and local soccer providers to actively engage in the range of club development programs and services offered by local Councils, FFV and RSA's across the Region (such as ClubHELP, FFV Facility Development planning).	MEDIUM	FFV / LGA	LGA / RSA	SRV
6. Support the development of new clubs being considered in growth areas including Bendigo and Macedon Ranges and adopt a coordinated approach across stakeholders to ensure appropriate levels of facilities and resources are provided.	LOW	LGA / FFV	LGA / FFV	SRV

OBJECTIVE 4: Competition and Player Development

Provide an aligned regional competition structure with clear pathways for players, coaches and officials in Loddon Mallee from social and entry level programs to elite level competitions.

By 2023, an increased number of locally trained and accredited coaches and referees will operate throughout the Loddon Mallee Region.

Proposed Competition and Player Development Recommendations	Priority	Stakeholder Responsibility		
		Initiator	Deliverer	Supporter
1. Monitor any impacts (positive and negative) of the NPLV in the Region and work with FFV to support the development of elite player pathways, regional soccer academies and elite programs, events and activities.	MEDIUM	LGA / LA / LC	LGA	FFV / SRV
2. Ensure existing clubs, schools and non soccer areas are being serviced and soccer is being promoted throughout all parts of the Region.	HIGH	FFV/LA	FFV/LA	LGA / LC
3. Support the growth and development of social and recreational soccer including indoor soccer, 5-a-side and summer sevens.	MEDIUM	FFV	FFV / LA / LC	LGA
4. Explore existing opportunities to introduce entry level and social soccer programs in Kerang and Robinvale and engage with local schools, LGA's and local soccer enthusiasts to develop new programs and activities.	MEDIUM	FFV	LA	LGA
5. Support each local soccer provider to develop a Strategic Plan that identifies their core role, focus area, management and governance structure, programs and services, and a resource plan for its implementation.	HIGH	FFV / LGA	RSA / FFV	LA / LC
6. Support FFV Sunraysia in expanding the Sunraysia league, including introducing new teams from South Australia.	LOW	FFV	FFV	LGA
7. Address the negative community perception around the process and challenges regarding the 'My Football Club Registration' and cost to play soccer.	MEDIUM	FFV	FFV	LA / LC

OBJECTIVE 5: Profile and Promotion

Increase the profile and strengthen soccer's brand in Loddon Mallee.

By 2023, all schools in Loddon Mallee to have some form of soccer program offered or be involved in school soccer tournaments and events.

Proposed Profile and Promotion Recommendations	Priority	Stakeholder Responsibility		
		Initiator	Deliverer	Supporter
1. FFV and local soccer providers create a higher presence in schools, including providing more student clinics, coach education for teachers and marketing collateral promoting the sport.	HIGH	FFV	FFV / LA	LC / SC
2. Following review, confirm the role of ZDO's and communicate this to Councils, leagues and clubs to ensure responsibilities are clearly defined and understood and to address the negative perception many clubs and Council's have around the current level of support being provided .	HIGH	FFV	FFV/LA	LGA / LA / LC
3. Adopt strategies that encourage ZDO's to have regular contact with Councils and local soccer providers regarding the needs and aspirations of soccer and consider the development of a 'sub regional working group' to ensure these needs are being considered regularly by key stakeholders.	HIGH	FFV	FFV / SRV / LGA	LA / LC
4. Develop and strengthen relationships with key media outlets to increase the level of media coverage and reporting of soccer events and activities in Loddon Mallee and encourage leagues and associations to submit regular media releases on good news community stories relating to soccer.	MEDIUM	LA	LA	LGA
5. Increase the presence of high profile soccer players in the region by forming stronger relationships with A League and W League Clubs and NPL Clubs to deliver positive messages to schools and community events about the benefits of playing soccer.	MEDIUM	FFV	FFV / LA	LGA
6. Explore opportunities to host A League pre season matches and W League and other feature matches in the region and develop aligned marketing and promotional strategies to maximise community participation and economic benefit.	MEDIUM	FFV / LA	FFV / LA	SRV / LGA

7. MUNICIPAL PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS

This section provides an overview and summary for each Council located in the Loddon Mallee Region and proposes an action plan and future recommendations for the development of soccer under each key strategic priority.

The action plans will provide each Council with an understanding of the current and future needs of soccer in their municipality and offer clear directions and strategies to assist them in determining how soccer should be supported in the future.

insideEDGE has developed the action plans in conjunction with the relevant Council officers and considered existing local sports development plans and strategies and preferred future directions for each individual Council.

The action plans are designed to align and integrate with existing Council policies and directions, identify key priorities and future directions for soccer and promotes a collaborative approach to the delivery and implementation of key recommendations.

The needs and aspirations of Local Clubs and Associations were also considered in the development of the proposed recommendations based on individual responses to the online soccer survey. A summary of survey responses received from Clubs and Associations have been included in the actions plans.

Local action plans have been developed for the following Councils:

- Mildura Rural City Council
- Swan Hill Rural City Council
- Gannawarra Shire Council
- Campaspe Shire
- City of Greater Bendigo
- Mount Alexander Shire
- Macedon Ranges Shire
- Central Goldfields Shire
- Loddon Shire
- Buloke Shire
- Yarriambiack Shire
- Hindmarsh Shire

The Shire's of Yarriambiack and Hindmarsh do not have specific actions plans due to the limited number of clubs and interest in soccer in these areas. However a summary of local area demographics, sports participation and potential opportunities to introduce soccer locally has been provided.

Mildura Rural City Council

Mildura is located in the far north west of the Loddon Mallee Region and is classified as one of Victoria's major regional cities. Mildura has a total estimated population of 55,000 people according which is projected to increase by 18% to over 60,000 by 2031.

The key township of the municipality is the suburb of Mildura, which has an estimated population of around 31,000. Other key population areas are Red Cliffs, Merbein, Merbein South, Koorlong, Irymple and Nichols Point. The main industries in Mildura are dry land farming and irrigated horticulture. The nature of farm work and the timing around the planting of crops impacts on volunteer time and commitment to key roles and responsibilities regarding the operation of local sports clubs.

Mildura currently has 630 registered soccer players participating across six clubs, but there has been a slow decline in player numbers since 2009. In 2009 Mildura had 776 registered players but this has decreased by approximately 18% due to players transferring to other sports and moving out of the area. The demise of local soccer club culture due to the centralisation of the local soccer competition to the Aerodrome Sporting Complex (Aero Ovals) has significantly impacted participation levels.

FFV directly operates soccer in the Sunraysia region through FFV Sunraysia. The Sunraysia Football Committee has been established under an FFV By Law as an advisory body with all clubs represented and the role of providing advice to FFV's CEO on relevant issues, including the annual operating plan and budget for the region. FFV employs a Regional Administrator who is located in Mildura and who provides local services and links to the services provided out of FFV's central administration in Melbourne.

FFV Sunraysia covers the following clubs:

- Mildura City
- Mildura United
- Irymple Knights
- Nichols Point
- Three Colours
- White Stars

FFV Sunraysia offer competition for senior men, senior women, juniors and SSF.

Competition matches are centralised at the Old Aerodrome Sporting Complex (known colloquially as Aero Ovals), Mildura's premier outdoor sporting precinct, although some senior men's matches now being played at clubs' home venues.

Three clubs are based at Old Aero for training -White Stars, Three Colours and Mildura United. The other three clubs have a home base in the outlying suburbs of Mildura (known as "satellite" venues).

The decision, over ten years ago, to develop a regional soccer hub at Aero Ovals to accommodate the local soccer competition has created some issues for the clubs who have their own facilities elsewhere and are finding it difficult to generate any revenue, build social capacity and a strong club culture. The decision by FFV Sunraysia to remove the gate entry fee for spectators and operate the kiosk in-house has also contributed to the clubs' inability to generate their own revenue.

Council and FFV should consider decentralising soccer in Mildura and developing the club-based satellite venues, bringing them up to standard for hosting competition matches. Council and the Mildura City Soccer Club have successfully partnered to obtain a State Government grant for improvements to Kenny Park in Merbein as a venue to support the hosting of competitive matches.

Other opportunities include Nichols Point and Irymple Knights, which would support the growth and development of the local competition and provide opportunities for Club's to establish stronger links within their local community.

The Mildura City Council Recreation Strategy identifies the need to plan for the future growth of soccer and ensure facilities continue to be improved and upgraded to meet the requirements of the sport and the expectations of clubs.

In line with the existing 2009/10 FFV Sunraysia Strategic Plan, FFV and Council have been considering plans to improve the facilities at Aero Ovals, including the development of a new centre of excellence for the sport. With the changes that have occurred over the past three years the plan needs to be reviewed and updated. The key findings, directions and recommendations outlined in this plan should be re-considered before making any decision on the future development and investment in infrastructure at Aero Ovals.

A summary of soccer club survey responses received from Club's based in Mildura is provided below.

- Five of the six clubs are providing junior soccer programs but only two of the six clubs have a junior girls team.
 - All clubs have at least one senior men's team and five of the six clubs have a senior women's team.
 - Approximately 50% of the clubs believe there will be a slight increase in SSF and junior soccer in the next three years.
 - Only one club expects participation by women and social soccer programs to increase.
 - Clubs indicated a lack of appropriate facilities, social rooms and cost as the key barriers to participation.
 - Four of the six clubs don't have a business plan in place and only two have completed a strategic plan.
 - Only one club has completed FFV's facility development plan and one other has commenced the process.
 - Five of the six clubs are members and currently use the service provided by the Mallee Sports Assembly (MSA).
 - 50% of the clubs indicated that they required further support with business planning, funding acquisition, coach education, volunteer retention and grant applications.
 - No clubs indicated that they required 'no assistance'.
- Those clubs who require support with business planning believe this should come from the MSA or Council, whilst 50% of clubs believe volunteer retention should be supported by FFV.
 - All clubs identified that FFV should be providing more support with coach education and accreditation.
 - Clubs believe the MSA should be providing more assistance with web site development and access to facility planning information.
 - Only two clubs indicated that they have received any funding for facility improvements in the last three years.
 - Only two clubs believe that their pavilion is appropriate to support the needs of their club, with approximately 80% indicating that they do not receive enough support from Council in maintaining their facilities.
 - Improvements to floodlighting and the provision of social spaces are Clubs most immediate priorities.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>FFV to review and update the existing FFV Sunraysia Strategic Plan to reflect the new situation and opportunities, including the recommendations of this Regional Football (Soccer) Development Plan.</p> <p>Key stakeholders to work in partnership with FFV on the expansion of the Sunraysia league to include additional teams from across the South Australian border.</p> <p>With the support of FFV, local soccer providers to investigate options to develop soccer in the Robinvale area through the local schools and provide competition options in the Sunraysia leagues in the future.</p> <p>Mildura City Council to work with FFV to support participation of Indigenous and CALD background children and adults in soccer.</p> <p>FFV and Clubs to review playing costs imposed by the sport, including clubs, to minimise the cost premium over other sports and ensure these are not a significant barrier to participation.</p>
Facility Development	<p>As part of the review and update of the existing FFV Sunraysia Strategic Plan revisit the facilities development proposals at the Old Aerodrome Sporting Complex and satellite venues.</p> <p>Increase the capacity the Aerodrome Sporting Complex through the provision of additional change facilities and social space to accommodate the needs of female and junior soccer participants.</p> <p>Plan and support the development of match standard lighting on at least one pitch at the Aerodrome Sporting Complex to enable the venue to host night matches and to attract regional level events and competitions.</p> <p>Review the Master Plan for Kenny Park Reserve and continue to invest in infrastructure improvements and upgrades that improve traffic management and provides opportunities for increased female and junior participation and the hosting of local competition matches.</p> <p>Review the Master Plan for the Nichols Point Recreation Reserve and develop detailed plans for a new pavilion that caters for the needs of tenant clubs including soccer, cricket and rugby. The future of the disused hall should be considered as a low cost alternative to the provision of adequate change facilities and clubrooms for club and community use in the immediate term.</p>
Club Development	<p>Encourage all six Clubs to become members of the Mallee Sports Association and actively participate in club development programs and activities.</p> <p>FFV and the Mallee Sports Assembly to address the needs of clubs and build the capacity of volunteers by offering affordable and accessible coach accreditation programs and referee courses.</p> <p>FFV to actively promote and encourage clubs to participate in the Club HELP program offered by the Mallee Sports Assembly (via Leisure Networks) to improve club management capacity and volunteer resourcing.</p>

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Competition and Player Development	<p>Adopt a decentralised approach to the current competition structure and actively seek opportunities to fixture matches at satellite facilities outside of the Old Aerodrome Sporting Complex to strengthen the local competition and build club capacity, including consideration of financial contributions from FFV and local clubs .</p> <p>The Mildura Rural City Council and FFV to continue to support the growth and development of the Sunraysia Academy of Sport as the identified development pathway for elite players in the northern parts of the Loddon Mallee Region.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Develop a strategy to attract A League and W League Clubs to Mildura to generate interest in the sport and strengthen the partnership between FFV and Council to support future elite level competitions and events to the area.</p> <p>Mildura City Council, in partnership with FFV, to develop a strategy to attract participation events to Mildura to promote the sport and generate tourism revenue.</p> <p>Encourage clubs and FFV Sunraysia to partner with the Mallee Sports Assembly to promote their activities and programs and take up the opportunity to advertise in the MSA calendar.</p>

Swan Hill Rural City

The Swan Hill municipality is located in the north of Loddon Mallee. In 2011 the estimated population was 22,275 people, which is projected to rise by 10% to around 24,500 by 2031. Swan Hill is accessible from the north and south via the Murray Valley Highway.

The main townships within the municipality are Swan Hill and Robinvale, with smaller towns in Lake Boga, Nyah, Manangatang, Nyah West, Ultima, Woorinen South and Piangil.

All soccer activity in Swan Hill is played at the Ken Harrison Reserve, located in the centre of Swan Hill. The Swan Hill Soccer League is recognised as the hub for soccer between Bendigo and Mildura and draws on a catchment of approximately 100km. The Swan Hill Soccer League provides a variety of levels of soccer from community participation in SSF and junior competitions pathways to senior level participation within the Bendigo Amateur Soccer League.

In 2012 the Swan Hill Soccer League had 258 registered players, significantly less than the 426 players the league had in 2009, which represents a decline of almost 40% in three years. There was further decline in player numbers in 2013 with the total falling to 218.

The league believes much of this decline is due to a lack of appropriate facilities, including change rooms and social spaces and for their existing pavilion and grounds being unable to adequately cater for the growth of soccer.

There is a significant gap in the provision of suitable soccer facilities at the Ken Harrison Reserve which is impacting participation and the League's capacity to operate effectively. The collaboration between the Soccer League and the Swan Hill Tennis Club to establish a shared vision for facility improvements and upgrades provides an opportunity to address the facility issues and should be strongly supported by Council, FFV and the State Government.

Council's Recreation Reserves Master Plan 2007 recommended the enhancement and improvement of facilities at Ken Harrison Reserve to accommodate the current and future needs of soccer. This included the expansion of the existing tennis building to cater for the needs of soccer and the upgrade of soccer fields to cater for future growth.

A summary of soccer club survey responses received from the Swan Hill Soccer League is provided below.

- The Swan Hill Soccer League indicated that they occupy the soccer facilities at the Ken Harrison Recreation Reserve all year round under an annual license agreement with Council.
- The facilities are shared with a number of other sports, school groups and community events such as the Murray River Marathon and regional tennis tournaments (including Country Week).
- The league is currently running a large SSF program (24 teams), six junior boys teams, two senior men's teams, one senior women's and a futsal competition with 22 teams. There is currently no junior girls team.

- The league anticipates future growth in the SSF program and the futsal program in the next three years.
- The lack of adequate facilities, changing demographics, declining volunteers and competition from other sports are the biggest barriers to increasing participation identified by the league.
- The league has a current business plan and strategic plan to support their operation and management and have commenced the development of a facility plan to guide future infrastructure development and delivery.
- The league indicated that they require further assistance in all aspects of club development including funding acquisition and grant applications, governance and management, volunteer retention and coach education.
- The league believes that FFV have a greater role to play in the delivery of soccer programs and activities, assistance with governance and management, funding applications and business and strategic planning.
- The league indicated that no funding has been received from government or the sport for facility improvements in the past three years.

- The league is currently satisfied with the fees charged to use the facilities, however they feel strongly that the on-field and off-field infrastructure provided is currently not meeting their needs and they have outgrown the spaces they currently use.
- The league's top priority for improving on-field facilities include floodlighting improvements and expansion.
- The league's top two priorities for improving off-field facilities include the provision of additional player change rooms and an appropriate canteen and social space.
- The league indicated that they would like to see an increased FFV presence in the region and provide more support for local coaches and referees and assist with volunteer retention.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Prioritise the development and expansion of facilities at the Ken Harrison Recreation Reserve to accommodate the current and future needs of soccer, including the provision of additional playing fields in line with the 2007 Master Plan for the Reserve.</p> <p>The Swan Hill Soccer League to expand the range of soccer programs to include social outdoor 5-a-side, outdoor 7-a-side and outdoor small sided competitions following the upgrade and agreement to use the hard court tennis courts at Ken Harrison Reserve.</p> <p>Support FFV to develop soccer in the Robinvale area through the local schools and potentially provide competition options in the Swan Hill Soccer League or the Sunraysia leagues.</p> <p>Partner with various Indigenous programs via FFV and SRV to ensure quality and consistent program delivery.</p> <p>FFV and Clubs to review playing costs imposed by the sport, including clubs, to minimise the cost premium over other sports and ensure these are not a significant barrier to participation.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Council to work with the Swan Hill Soccer League and the Swan Hill Tennis Club to develop detailed design plans and costings for an extension to the existing tennis pavilion at the Ken Harrison Reserve to enhance the use and functionality of the building. Development should include multi-purpose unisex change facilities, referees room, social area, canteen and meeting space to support the League's current and future programs and activities.</p> <p>Upgrade the existing lighting provision at Ken Harrison Reserve to training standards to accommodate the League's training requirements and maximise the use of the grounds by catering for the needs of other sporting groups including AFL, conditional on there being time available after soccer needs are met.</p> <p>Review the suitability of existing turf cover at Ken Harrison Reserve and ensure any future ground redevelopment plans consider the playability of current sporting events and activities, including the winter Soccer League and tennis country week.</p> <p>Council to work with the Swan Hill Soccer League and the Swan Hill Tennis Club to resurface the existing hard court tennis courts with an artificial compound material to create a multipurpose space suitable for the needs of soccer and tennis programs.</p>
Club Development	<p>The Swan Hill Soccer League and the Swan Hill Tennis Club to strengthen their relationship through a memorandum of understanding that outlines the agreed principles and future directions for shared Reserve buildings and grounds.</p> <p>FFV to actively promote and encourage clubs to participate in the Club Help program offered by the Mallee Sports Assembly (Leisure Networks) to improve club management capacity and volunteer resourcing.</p>

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Competition and Player Development	<p>Council to acknowledge the work of the Swan Hill Soccer League on the development of their Strategic Plan and note the sport's requirements regarding facilities, sports development, maintenance, partnerships and pathways.</p> <p>The Swan Hill City Council and FFV to continue to support the growth and development of the Sunraysia Academy of Sport as the identified development pathway for elite players in the northern parts of the Loddon Mallee Region.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>The Swan Hill Soccer League to engage with Council and increase its presence and involvement in local community events and activities such as the Swan Hill Show to increase the profile of the sport.</p> <p>FFV to provide an increased presence in local schools and build the capacity of sports teachers to enable ongoing delivery of soccer programs in the school curriculum.</p>

Gannawarra Shire

The Gannawarra Shire is located in the north east of the Loddon Mallee Region and in 2011 had an estimated population of 11,500. This population is expected to decrease by 2% to 11,000 by 2031. The major townships within the municipality are Cohuna, Koondrook, Leitchville, Quambatook, Murrabit, Lalbert and Kerang.

There is no formal soccer club operating in Gannawarra however there is some local interest in the development of informal social soccer. The highest outdoor participation sports in Gannawarra include AFL, netball, cricket and tennis, with emerging sports such as hockey and junior basketball becoming increasingly popular.

A review of FFV player registrations identifies only 11 soccer players reside in the Gannawarra Shire, with all of these either travelling to Swan Hill or Bendigo to participate. There was some significant interest in soccer in Kerang and surrounding areas following Australia's success at the 2006 World Cup, which culminated in a 'one off' indoor tournament at the local basketball stadium, attracting over 80 participants.

Although the interest in soccer fell away there are still some active local players that exist and who arrange an infrequent and informal 'kick around' at the local tennis courts during summer. There is opportunity to support these players and develop interest in the sport at a social level.

Council has developed a number of Recreation Reserve Master Plans recently which did not identify any unmet demand or recommend the development of any soccer facilities in Gannawarra.

Council however is open to considering soccer in the future development of any multi use sports facility (indoor or outdoor) and support and continue to encourage the existing informal arrangement for a small group of soccer players currently using the Kerang Tennis Club.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Capitalise on Australia’s recent qualification in the World Cup by supporting local interest in hosting a futsal (or indoor soccer) tournament at the local basketball stadium, similar to what occurred following Australia’s qualification in 2006. Council and FFV could support this event by way of resourcing equipment and negotiating facility access.</p> <p>Council and FFV’s ZDO to provide support, equipment and resourcing to the development of an outdoor five-a-side competition on the hard court tennis courts at the Kerang Tennis Club to activate soccer and provide opportunity for locals to participate in the sport.</p> <p>FFV to continue to drive participation and interest in soccer through the school network and build the profile of the annual schools soccer competition held at Cohuna each year to ensure participation from school in Gannawarra and surrounding areas. Consideration can then be given to the potential viability of a local SSF program.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Whilst the recent developments of Master Plans for each active recreation reserve identified no unmet demand for soccer, it is equally the case that these facilities can cater for casual or formalised soccer activity now and into the future. Council should be mindful that any future upgrades or improvements at these reserves continue to allow for the provision of flat, unfenced and accessible spaces for social and casual soccer.</p> <p>It is recommended that Council and FFV engage with local soccer enthusiasts currently operating the casual five a side soccer program to determine the facility needs and requirements at the Kerang Tennis Club to ensure this activity continues.</p> <p>Council should consider the future growth of soccer, particularly indoor soccer, in any plans for the potential future development of a multi-purpose indoor facility in Kerang or redevelopment of the existing Kerang Basketball Stadium.</p> <p>The Kerang Secondary College is the recommended site for any future requirements from the local community for an outdoor soccer pitch. A user agreement with the school, a co-tenancy arrangement for use of the athletics pavilion, and improvements to the existing playing surface, would be required to adequately cater for the needs of a community soccer club.</p> <p>It is recommended that Council adopt the principles of the soccer development plan for Loddon Mallee and recognise the need to provide an appropriate level of local infrastructure to cater for casual soccer activities.</p>
Club Development	<p>There are currently no clubs operating in the Gannawarra Shire and it is unlikely that a viable club will be able to be established until participation and facility development actions are initiated.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>Registered players in Gannawarra (Kerang) are travelling to Swan Hill and Bendigo to play competitive soccer. Due to the projected decline in population, and the current absence of soccer, it is feasible to suggest that any additional interest in competitive soccer from Gannawarra residents will be catered for in these leagues.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Create stronger links with local schools to integrate soccer programs into the school curriculum and explore opportunities to develop a school ambassador program to build interest in soccer. Council should continue to engage with FFV, the Swan Hill Soccer League and BASL to help drive the sport through the schools.</p>

Campaspe Shire

In 2011 the Campaspe Shire had an estimated population of 39,000 which is projected to increase by approximately 17% to 45,500 by 2031.

The major townships in the Campaspe Shire are Echuca, Kyabram, Rochester, Rushworth and Tongala.

The Shire is located on the Victorian side of the Victoria/ NSW border with the Murray River dissecting the main townships of Echuca (Victoria) and Moama (NSW). The Murray River is a main source of tourism for the Shire, with many people visiting the area for skiing, swimming and paddling.

Soccer players in Campaspe are currently being serviced by three clubs. These include the Moama Echuca Raiders Soccer Association, the Kyabram Phoenix Soccer Club and the Kyabram Knights Soccer Club.

The Moama Echuca Border Raiders is the largest soccer provider in the area. Despite the Raiders Soccer Association being located outside Loddon Mallee (Moama), the majority of their members are residents of Echuca and surrounding areas.

The number of registered players at the Moama Echuca Border Raiders has reduced by 11% from 438 in 2009 to 388 in 2012. In 2013 the total player registrations rose 2% to 395. The key reasons behind the previous decline include the competition from AFL for players, the lack of social facilities at the club and many people in the 17 to 25 year age group moving to Melbourne or other major cities to study or work. The majority of current players are sub-juniors participating in SSF and junior competitions organised by the Association.

The Kyabram Phoenix Soccer Club is located at the Northern Oval in Kyabram and plays in the Goulburn North East Football Association. In 2012 the club had 75 registered players, 17 fewer than in 2009. Council has recently developed a Master Plan for the Northern Oval which the Club shares with the local cricket club, netball association, fire brigade and junior football club. The Master Plan has identified a number of management issues and recommends increased use of the clubrooms by the soccer club to accommodate female players.

FFV's Loddon Mallee Zone Development Officer (ZDO) is based in Echuca and supports the growth and development of soccer in Campaspe, Gannawarra and Swan Hill. ZDO's play a critical role in developing and implementing strategies for the sport in regional areas. Consultation highlighted a lack of resources and the geographical distance between key townships and schools as impacting on the development of the sport in Loddon Mallee.

The Kyabram Knights Soccer Club is based at the Kyabram Secondary College, Haslem Street Oval. The Club plays in the Shepparton Junior Soccer Association and fields approximately 12 junior teams including a SSF program. Exact player registration numbers are not able to be provided by FFV due to the special nature of the registration/team arrangements for SJSA and the Club's facilities were not inspected as part of the facilities audit.

The Echuca Moama Recreation Plan investigates the future sports facilities required in these townships based on provision ratios and population projections. This study identified that by 2016 an additional three outdoor pitches will be required to accommodate the projected growth in soccer participation.

Despite research undertaken as part of this study identifying a greater need to upgrade and improve existing facilities, there is an opportunity to provide an additional outdoor soccer pitch in the new Echuca West growth area development.

A summary of information collected at a meeting with the Kyabram Phoenix Soccer Club is provided below. The club commenced the on-line survey but did not complete it entirely.

- The Club is finding it difficult to operate under the existing shared usage arrangements with a junior AFL Club.
- The Club currently run six teams made up of juniors and seniors and are expecting this to grow marginally in the next three years.
- The Club identified a large turnover of players in recent years and are concerned that participation will continue to decline unless they receive ongoing financial and operational support from Council and FFV.

A brief summary of survey responses from the Border Raiders Soccer Association is provided below.

- The Club has a very large SSF program (28 teams) and believe their current participation rates are likely to remain the same in the future.
- There is increasing pressure from the AFL to attract local kids which is impacting on participation in soccer.
- The club is aiming to build their junior program and develop a point of difference with the ability to entice more young people to play soccer.

A survey from the Kyabram Knights Soccer Club has not been received.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
<p>Participation</p>	<p>Address the recent decline in player registrations at the Kyabram Phoenix Soccer Club by reviewing the clubs strategic plan and program delivery model and develop targeted strategies to increase junior and female participation.</p> <p>Recognise and acknowledge the popularity and strength of AFL in Campaspe and the broader region and ensure that soccer positions itself to provide opportunities and choices for people to participate by minimising fixture clashes with other sports.</p> <p>Continue to support the growth and development of indoor soccer during summer by engaging existing club based players in Echuca and Moama and promote to the broader community the health and fitness and benefits of the sport to engage off season AFL players to participate.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to expand the number of females playing soccer in Campaspe by offering an alternative sporting option to the surplus of netball players currently being experienced in Echuca, promoting accessibility, enjoyment and maximum game time.</p>
<p>Facility Development</p>	<p>Consider the recommendations identified in the recently adopted Northern Oval Master Plan and develop a rolling infrastructure development program that improves and upgrades facilities and amenities at the reserve, improves access for females and juniors and provide opportunities for the club to enhance connections with the community.</p> <p>Provide an appropriate level of funding and investment into the redevelopment of on-field infrastructure at the Northern Oval. The scope of works should include improvements to existing irrigation and drainage and consideration of a relocation of the boundary fence to facilitate construction of a rectangular multi-use playing area to accommodate one senior cricket oval and two senior soccer pitches.</p> <p>Identify opportunities at existing soccer venues or green field sites to develop purpose built five a side and SSF pitches to accommodate the growth and interest in modified and social soccer activities.</p> <p>Ensure the development of a soccer pitch is provided as part of the new Echuca West residential development to activate the sport in Echuca.</p>
<p>Club Development</p>	<p>Review the existing management arrangements at the Northern Oval to ensure the soccer club is provided with equitable access to the playing facilities and social facilities during the winter season and that the existing shared use arrangements with the AFL tenant does not constrain the grow and development of soccer.</p> <p>Consider the benefits of amalgamating the two soccer clubs currently based in Kyabram to centralise resources, maximise participation outcomes, and provide stronger volunteer and recruitment strategies that support local soccer.</p> <p>In the context of the overall ZDO review, FFV to consider the current structure, role, function and funding of the Echuca based ZDO to enable effective participation, coach and referee development in Campaspe in partnership with local soccer providers, including consideration of an additional resource to support clubs and promote soccer in schools in other areas.</p>

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Competition and Player Development	<p>Through improved communication and promotion of the sport, ensure players are aware of existing player pathways and opportunities to compete in regional teams.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Promote soccer as an inclusive, healthy, low contact and affordable sport and build stronger partnerships and participate in programs delivered by the Regional Sports Assembly.</p> <p>Introduce a high profile 'local champion' to help promote and expose the local community to soccer.</p>

City of Greater Bendigo

The City of Greater Bendigo has the largest population base of all cities and townships in the Loddon Mallee Region and is one of its fastest growing areas.

In 2011 Bendigo had an estimated population of 105,000 people and makes up approximately 30% of people living in the region. Bendigo's population is projected to increase by 32% to 140,000 people by 2031.

The key population areas within the municipality outside of Bendigo are Heathcote, Marong, Redesdale, Elmore, Goornong and Axedale. The major industries in the municipality are Health Care and Social Assistance, Retail, Manufacturing, Construction and Education. The main township of Bendigo and its surrounding suburbs form the focal point within the City of Greater Bendigo, with significant retail and tourism industries present.

Bendigo is the largest provider of soccer in the region with six clubs and over 1,800 registered players currently participating in the Bendigo Amateur Soccer League (BASL). Clubs from Bendigo participating in the BASL include:

- Strathdale Soccer Club
- Spring Gully United Soccer Club
- Epsom Football Club
- Colts United Football Club
- Golden City Soccer Club
- Eaglehawk Soccer Club

Epsom and Strathdale have both experienced reasonable membership growth in the past three years whilst all other clubs have seen a slight decline in the number of registered players.

BASL is affiliated with FFV and has delegated responsibility to coordinate and deliver the local soccer competition. The competition is made of a total of ten clubs and caters for over 2,300 players from as far afield as Swan Hill, Moama, Echuca, Castlemaine and Kyneton. BASL also provides a futsal competition in the off season which is currently attracting over 40 teams. The board of BASL is made of a representative of each of the ten affiliated clubs.

Bendigo has a total of 21 soccer pitches spread across the municipality with two of these being synthetic pitches, the only synthetic pitches in the region. The Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve is considered the regional venue for soccer and boasts multiple grass pitches, a full size synthetic pitch with lighting to match standards and compliant change rooms and amenities. This facility caters for a wide range of soccer programs and competitions and hosts major events including the Country Championships and the FFV Regional Challenge Cup.

A summary of soccer club survey responses received from club's based in Bendigo is provided below.

- Over half of the Bendigo clubs are sharing their facilities with other sports including AFL and cricket, with some clubs either sharing the club rooms or pitches.

- All clubs are currently providing for SSF with a total of 66 teams registered with BASL. Similarly all clubs are providing for junior mixed teams but only one of the clubs indicated that they are catering specifically for junior girls.
- Each club has a number of senior men's teams and at least one women's team.
- Clubs indicated that competition with AFL, sub standard facilities (in particular lighting) and the high cost to participate are the main barriers to increasing participation in soccer.
- None of the clubs that responded to the survey indicated that they have a current business or strategic plan in place and only one indicated that they have a plan in progress (Golden City). Golden City was also the only club that indicated they have a facility development plan in place.
- All clubs, with the exception of Golden City, reported that they are currently using Sports Focus to deliver club development programs.
- The highest priority for club development includes grant applications, sponsorship and funding acquisition followed by support with development of strategic plans, volunteer management and coach education.
- Only three of the clubs are using their free web site offered by FFV, with most of the clubs choosing to use Sportzvault which BASL uses.
- The majority of clubs believe that Council should be providing more assistance with funding applications and BASL and FFV providing shared support greater advocacy, marketing and promotion.

- Approximately 50% of clubs surveyed indicated that their on-field and off-field facilities are well looked after by Council, while the remaining 50% are requesting improvement in this area
- Golden City and Eaglehawk reported that they have outgrown their current fields and require more space, whilst Colts United and Golden City indicated that they have outgrown their pavilion and change facilities
- The following table outlines the top three on and off field development and improvement priorities identified by each club through the survey.
- Spring Gully Soccer Club did not complete the survey but have indicated to Council officers their on and off-field priorities.

Club	On field priorities	Off field priorities
Colts United Football Club	Team benches Synthetic pitch / training area Portable goals	More player change rooms Making facilities more suitable for females Canteen / kiosk
Golden City Soccer Club	Improvement to existing floodlighting Additional floodlighting Additional natural grass pitches	More player change rooms Making facilities more suitable for females Accessible amenities and toilets
Strathdale Soccer Club	Improvement to existing floodlighting Additional floodlighting Synthetic pitch / training area	Spectator seating Car parking Equipment and storage
Eaglehawk Soccer Club	Upgraded pitch Synthetic pitch / training area Pitch fencing	Spectator seating Car parking Public toilets
Epsom Football Club	Pitch fencing Additional floodlighting Portable goals	Licensed bar Canteen / kiosk Spectator seating
Spring Gully Soccer Club	Additional pitch at Stanley Avenue Improved pitch lighting Improved playing surface	Additional change rooms at Stanley Avenue Improved spectator facilities Purchase of additional properties to facilitate space for future development of additional pitches

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
<p>Participation</p>	<p>Continue to oversee the usage and scheduling of sporting competitions and events at the Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve to ensure that soccer is receiving an appropriate level of access and that competition for space from other sports is managed.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities to expand the use of the Bendigo South East Secondary College Synthetic Pitch to offer additional soccer programs and activities in conjunction with BASL and the education department.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities to introduce a futsal program at the indoor stadium at Truscott Reserve and align the program with the Eaglehawk Soccer Club.</p> <p>Work closely with the Colts United Football Club to increase the use of the floodlit multi-purpose training facility at the Strathfieldsaye Sports Club.</p> <p>Support BASL in the facilitation and co-ordination of their participation working group and help to drive the future development and management of soccer programs and events being considered at a sub-regional level.</p>
<p>Facility Development</p>	<p>Recognise the Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve as the only regional soccer venue in the Loddon Mallee Region and support its ongoing growth and development by progressing further works to bring it to main grass pitch (pitch 5) to A class standard, including; additional floodlighting and fencing to accommodate elite level soccer competitions and events, additional parking and on-site storage, and investigation into the provision of additional change rooms to support pitches 1 and 2.</p> <p>Council to increase its involvement with the BASL Facilities Working Group and provide input, advice and recommendations into future priorities identified by the group to ensure soccer facilities are planned and delivered in a coordinated way.</p> <p>Investigate options to provide an additional natural turf pitch for the Spring Gully Soccer Club at the Latrobe University Bendigo Athletics Complex (LUBAC) to cater for current provision and secure funding for the Stage 2 upgrade of the pavilion.</p> <p>Improve car parking at Truscott Reserve to provide safe off street parking and seal roadways to improve pedestrian and vehicle access to the site and eliminate ongoing maintenance requirements.</p> <p>Develop a detailed Master Plan for Shadforth Park to guide the future enhancement, development and management of the reserve. The Master Plan should investigate appropriate treatments and recommendations that increase community use of the reserve including lighting upgrades and improvements to the playing surface.</p> <p>Review the internal configuration of the Strathfieldsaye Sports Club and investigate options to provide additional change rooms to accommodate greater female use.</p> <p>Work with existing soccer clubs to ensure they are well placed to cater for the training needs of current and future members by prioritising improvements to sports field lighting and the installation of more synthetic pitches to accommodate increased training loads.</p> <p>Ensure the future development of the Marong township and any proposed outdoor sporting reserves includes provision for at least two full size rectangular soccer fields and associated infrastructure to service the areas of Morang, Maiden Gully and Kangaroo Flat.</p> <p>Support the role of the BASL in the facilitation and co-ordination of their facility development working group to ensure facility development proposals and funding applications are being considered at a sub regional level.</p>

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Club Development	<p>Identify any potential opportunities for the future development of new soccer clubs in growth corridors including Marong, Maiden Gully and Strathfieldsaye, and ensure infrastructure requirements to support the establishment of new clubs is considered in any future planning.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>Review the structure of the local SSF/sub-junior soccer program (under 7's) and consult with clubs to determine any impacts of a decentralised model for hosting matches and programs away from the Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve.</p> <p>Continue to explore and support the opportunities and benefits for local players by establishing a future Bendigo based club in the NPLV.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>In partnership with BASL and FFV investigate the feasibility of hosting A league pre-season matches and W League matches at the regional soccer venue Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve.</p> <p>Continue to support the delivery of major regional and state level soccer events at the Epsom Huntly Recreation Reserve including FFV's Regional Challenge Cup, FFV's Boys FC tournament and the State Futsal Championships at the Bendigo Stadium.</p> <p>Provide support to BASL and advocate to local media outlets to provide more media coverage for the sport, in particular the coverage of key regional events and new initiatives.</p>

Macedon Ranges Shire

The Macedon Shire is situated in the southern part of the Loddon Mallee Region and is bounded by the Mitchell Shire in the east, Moorabool Shire in the south, Hepburn Shire in the west and the Mount Alexander Shire in the north.

In 2011 the estimated population of the Shire was 43,000 people. This is projected to increase by 36% to 59,000 people in 2031. The key population centres of the Shire include Gisborne, Riddells Creek, Romsey and Woodend.

There is a large population base in these townships that commute daily to Melbourne for work, using either the Calder Freeway or Vline train service as the main forms of transportation.

Tourism is significant to the Shire and is the greatest source of economy for the region, with the native landscapes (including Mount Macedon and Hanging Rock) contributing strongly to tourist numbers. Equine breeding and training and agriculture are also prominent industries within the Shire.

Council's 2006 Leisure Strategy Plan predicted a potential shortfall in the future provision of soccer pitches across the Shire, rapid growth in participation and requirement to improve the standard to existing soccer facilities.

As at 2013 Macedon Ranges is home to three clubs:

- Gisborne Soccer Club which participates in the FFV's league competitions. with senior men, senior women, junior boys, junior girls, boys SSF and girls SSF teams
- Kyneton District Soccer Club which has senior men's teams in FFV's Metropolitan Leagues , senior women in FFV's State League and junior teams in the BASL junior leagues

- Bullengarook Soccer Club with SSF teams in FFV's leagues following a split from Gisborne SC

Gisborne Soccer Club currently has 19 teams playing on four natural turf pitches and the Kyneton District Soccer Club's 9 teams using two pitches.

The Shire has experienced the most soccer participation growth of any of the LGA's in the region increasing its number of registered players from 298 in 2009 to 358 in 2012. Many of the talented soccer players in Macedon choose to travel to Melbourne to play due to the higher standard of competition offered.

The Gisborne Soccer Club alone has contributed to this growth with registrations at the club increasing by 45% in the last three years. This is predominantly due to the introduction of two women's teams and participation in the club's SSF program increasing by 18%, and male registrations increasing by 30% since 2009.

The Gisborne Soccer Club shares the Dixon Field Reserve in Gisborne with five other sporting groups and Kyneton Districts shares Barkly Square Reserve in Kyneton with a dog obedience club, skate park and a small bore rifle club.

Both Gisborne and Kyneton clubs have plans to improve and increase the capacity, use and accessibility of their home venues. Council recently developed a Master Plan that identified priority facility enhancements at Barkly Square, and the Gisborne Soccer Club, in conjunction with their co-tenants, submitted a facility development proposal to Council for the upgrade of Dixon Field.

Bullengarook Rangers FC uses a cricket ground in Bullengarook, a hamlet 7 km west of Gisborne to service its 21 SSF players.

A summary of soccer club survey responses received from Macedon Ranges based soccer clubs (with the exception of Bullengarook) is provided below.

- Gisborne Soccer Club utilise the facilities at Dixon Field Reserve all year round.
- Gisborne Soccer Club predict their membership to remain the same in the next few years, while Kyneton Districts believe it will increase participation across the board with improved facilities.
- Both clubs believe the main barriers to participation are the current poor standard of existing facilities, in particular lighting, and the cost to play for juniors compared to AFL.
- Both clubs are developing a business plan and facility development plan in conjunction with Council, with a view of presenting these to a number of potential funding providers.
- Both clubs are aware of and regularly use the services offered by a number of sport and government agencies to build capacity, develop the sport and engage in funding programs. These agencies include Sports Focus, SRV, Council and FFV.
- Both clubs believe their current facilities are in poor condition and are not suitable to the clubs needs, specifically around the size and functionality of the pavilion and change amenities.
- Both clubs selected the need for additional floodlighting and grass pitches to cater for more matches as their top priorities for improving on-field amenities.
- The priority for off field amenity needs for Gisborne were the provision of additional change facilities to cater for women and girls. The priority for Kyneton Districts was the provision of social rooms and more player change rooms.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Continue to promote and support the growth and demand for indoor soccer by ensuring equitable access to indoor court space is maintained in comparison to other indoor activities and investigate opportunities to use the Riddells Creek Leisure Centre for indoor soccer competitions.</p> <p>Council to better facilitate links between local clubs and schools to encourage more young people to participate and to ensure schools continue to have a reasonable level of access to club facilities to grow interest in the sport.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Review the existing Master Plan for Dixon Field having consideration for the recent proposal developed by the current users to upgrade Reserve infrastructure and amenity at the Reserve.</p> <p>The submission to upgrade and improve infrastructure at Dixon Field identified the following facility development principles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for suitable and functional facilities to cater for the current and future needs of the five tenant clubs and other casual users. • The need to create a safe, welcoming and functional, multi-purpose and shared facility that serves as a community hub and maximises the use of the surrounding quality playing fields. • Detailed planning and design for the improvement of Dixon Field (i.e. Master Plan). • Secure funding and commitment for the capital development of Dixon Field. <p>Develop detailed plans to secure funding from external sources to upgrade and extend lighting at Barkly Square for Kyneton SC.</p>
Club Development	<p>Work with FFV on the potential introduction of a soccer club in Romsey to respond to population growth and identify a key local person to drive soccer and advocate on behalf of the sport in this area.</p> <p>Council and FFV to increase and improve communication with local clubs and deliver the necessary training and club development initiatives to build club capacity and sustainability.</p> <p>FFV to ensure Macedon Ranges clubs are aware of and utilise FFV programs for player, coach, referee and administrator development and other specialist services and that these are available locally where possible.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>FFV to support Macedon Ranges clubs to develop their services to players so that the prevalence of local residents joining clubs beyond the municipality is minimised.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Ensure Macedon Ranges clubs are connected to FFV programs and initiatives relative to the metropolitan area and deliver an appropriate level of support and awareness for soccer in the local area.</p>

Mount Alexander Shire

The Mount Alexander Shire is bounded by the City of Greater Bendigo in the north-east, Mitchell and Macedon Ranges Shire in the east, Central Goldfields Shire in the west, Loddon Shire in the north and Hepburn Shire in the south.

In 2011 the estimated population for the Mount Alexander Shire was 18,400. This number is projected to rise by 19% to a modest 22,000 in 2031. The key population areas within the municipality are Maldon, Harcourt, Elphinstone, Taradale, Chewton and Castlemaine.

The largest industries in the area include health care and social assistance, manufacturing, retail and education and training.

The Castlemaine township is accessible via the Pyrenees Highway in the west and east, and the Midland Highway in the south and north. V-line also passes through Castlemaine as part of the Bendigo line, offering multiple daily services.

Based on investigation of sporting club membership data conducted in 2009, as part of Council's Recreation Reserves and Playing Surfaces Review, the most popular sports in the Mount Alexander Shire include AFL, netball and cricket. Soccer ranks in fourth place just ahead of tennis.

Council recently adopted a strategic plan to guide the future development of sports infrastructure and the investment in sport across the Shire. This document identified soccer as one of the growth sports that will require an appropriate level of sporting infrastructure to accommodate future demand.

The Castlemaine Goldfields Football Club is the only soccer club located in the Mount Alexander Shire. In 2012 the club had 227 registered players, lower than the 255 players registered in 2009, playing on 1 senior and two junior pitches.

The club currently offers SSF programs, mixed junior competitions, senior men's and women's teams, a summer competition. All teams participate in the BASL.

The club's facilities at Chewton Soldiers Memorial Park were upgraded in 2011 with the refurbishment of the pavilion completed at a cost of approximately 350,000. The pavilion now provides male and female change facilities, universal access toilets and showers, social room, kiosk, umpire facilities, club office and additional storage.

Council's recently completed Reserve Improvement Plan provides an overview of existing infrastructure at the Chewton Soldiers Memorial Park, its current usage and key recommendations for future improvement. The Improvement Plan outlines a vision for the Reserve as providing for the recreational needs of local residents as well as providing a comfortable, restful stopping place for tourists.

A summary of soccer club survey responses received from the Castlemaine Goldfields Football (Soccer) Club is provided below.

- The Club has exclusive use of the Chewton Soldiers Memorial Park between January and October each year.
- The Club runs a strong SSF program and also caters for juniors, seniors, veterans and school groups.

- The Club predicts participation in their junior and modified soccer programs will continue to increase over the next three years but will lose players in their veterans program.
- The Club doesn't have a business plan at present and would like some assistance from FFV and Sports Focus to develop one. They are currently working through FFV's Facility Development Plan template and have previously completed a Club Strategic Plan.
- The Club indicated that they require more support in a range of club development areas including governance and management, volunteer retention and coach and specialty first aid training.
- The Club believes they would benefit from more support and interaction from FFV, BASL and Council in managing on and off-field activities, maintaining facilities, and developing targeted strategies to build soccer participation and increase player retention.
- The Club indicated that they have outgrown their current playing facilities and believes the standard of the existing fields are below the standard required for their level of competition.
- Additional playing fields and improved lighting are the Club's highest priorities for improving their on-field activities.
- In regards to off-field facility development priorities, the Club indicated that additional storage, more change areas and a fully functional canteen are the highest priorities although these are not as important as the on-field priorities identified above.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Further investigate opportunities to increase membership through specific female participation programs and develop and implement strategies that positions the Club as a point of difference for female sporting opportunities in the local area.</p> <p>Participate in ongoing discussions with FFV and BASL to identify strategies to address the high drop out of players from junior to senior competition and provide more opportunities for high standard senior competitions locally.</p> <p>Through FFV, identify the Zone Development Officer responsible for providing support and resources to the Castlemaine Goldfields Football Club to maximise participation in club programs and activities.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to introduce soccer into Mount Alexander Shire 's growth area of Campbell's Creek through school visits.</p> <p>Explore opportunities to reintroduce indoor soccer to the local area and provide opportunities for regular season players to participate in off-season soccer programs.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Redevelop the playing area at Chewton Soldiers Memorial Park to facilitate a second full size pitch to accommodate existing participation and expected club growth. It will be important to also retain the designated training area as part of the ground reconfiguration program.</p> <p>The playing field upgrade should include improving drainage and irrigation and levelling of the playing surface to increase the capacity of the reserve and accommodate current and future club needs.</p> <p>Design a new sports field lighting system and seek external funding to implement a uniformed lighting system across the playing and training areas at the Chewton Soldiers Memorial Park that meets Australian Standards for training.</p> <p>Explore external funding opportunities to continue to implement the Chewton Soldiers Memorial Park Reserve Improvement Plan and prioritise the recommended facility upgrades identified above and consider the future provision of additional storage and canteen facilities.</p>
Club Development	<p>FFV to ensure ongoing support and leadership is being provided to the Castlemaine Goldfields Football Club and work collaboratively with other stakeholders to ensure all FFV initiated programs and services are being offered and players have access to the same programs as other registered players across the region.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>FFV to strengthen its support of soccer clubs participating in the BASL, particularly those located outside of Bendigo and ensure talent management and elite pathway programs are available and accessible to local players.</p> <p>Ensure local players are provided and are aware of the existing elite pathway system for soccer in the region and connect these players into any future Bendigo based NPLV club.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Improve the profile of the Castlemaine Goldfields Football Club by engaging the help of Sports Focus and FFV to increase its internet and on-line advertising activity and consider the use of FFV's club website template.</p>

Central Goldfields Shire

The Central Goldfields Shire is bounded by Mount Alexander Shire in the east, Loddon Shire in the north, Northern Grampians and Pyrenees Shire in the west and Hepburn Shire in the south.

In 2011 the estimated population of Central Goldfields Shire was 12,000. This is projected to increase by 9% to 14,000 by 2031. The key townships in the region include: Carisbrook, Dunolly, Talbot and Maryborough, with smaller centres at Moliagul, Majorca, Bealiba and Bowenvale.

The largest township in the municipality is Maryborough, which attracts regular visitors to its popular harness racing facility and for major events. Gold fossickers also frequent the region as the area has a strong history of gold mining.

The Central Goldfields Shire is an active community with strong participation in casual indoor activities such as aerobics, with the most popular outdoor competitive sporting activities being AFL and netball.

Soccer participation remains fairly stable in the Shire, with the current number of registered players at the Maryborough Soccer Club being 142, slightly lower than the 149 in 2009. The club's home base is now located at the Frank Graham Oval in Maryborough, but the club has moved around multiple venues trying to establish and consolidate a long-term home for soccer in Maryborough.

The club runs a SSF program and enters juniors, women's and men's teams in the FFV affiliated Ballarat and District Soccer Association.

Council's Recreation Strategy identified the need to upgrade Frank Graham Oval as the main centre for soccer in the Shire and the development of a shared synthetic facility at the Maryborough Education Centre (MEC).

The shared synthetic facility at the MEC was recently constructed through a partnership with the Shire, Department of Education and State Government. The facilities usage and management arrangement, and access by the Maryborough Soccer Club is still being finalised.

The suitability and future use of the Frank Graham Oval by the Maryborough Soccer Club is being reviewed by Council. This follows the recent adoption of a Master Plan for the site which recommended that soccer be relocated to the Peel Street Reserve (Department of Education Land) due to the insufficient space at Frank Graham Oval to grow the sport.

A summary of survey responses received from the Maryborough Soccer Club is provided below.

- The club shares its facility with a local cricket club during the off season and are currently finding it difficult to recruit and retain volunteers.
- The current standard of existing facilities, including the club rooms and ground surface, are the main barriers to increasing participation.

- The club has no business plan or strategic plan in place and is looking for assistance and direction from Council to guide their current and future operations and facility improvement ideas.
- The club currently use a Facebook page to communicate with members and promote its programs and activities and would like assistance in developing a club web site.
- The need for volunteers to travel long distances to participate in coach accreditation and training courses is a major issue.
- The club have not received any funding for facility improvements in the last five years but believes their existing facilities are well looked after by Council.
- The club indicated that they do not require any additional playing space however stated their club rooms were well below standard and are currently not meeting the club's requirements.
- In terms of on-field facilities, the club indicated that an upgraded pitch and the introduction of floodlighting were the highest priority.
- The club rated the upgrading of their club rooms, including better provision of change facilities and a referees room as the highest priority.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Connect with the local schools and explore opportunities to coordinate a junior indoor soccer program or come and try day at the Maryborough Sport and Leisure Centre and the Tullaroop Leisure Centre to generate interest in the sport.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities and develop strategies to expand the existing program base at the Maryborough Soccer Club to include opportunities for veterans, social and five-a-side soccer.</p> <p>Key stakeholders including FFV (ZDO), Council and Sports Focus to identify and provide opportunities and direction on how non playing participants can get involved in soccer through volunteering, coaching, administration and governance.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Council to develop a water management plan for the Shire that considers the value of irrigating sports fields, providing a sustainable water solution to improve the standard of playing surfaces, and engagement with key user groups to contribute to the cost of water and associated infrastructure.</p> <p>Prepare an appropriate building condition report and appropriate documentation to support a funding application to State Government for the upgrade of the existing change rooms , field lighting and referees room at the Frank Graham Oval, to increase the club's capacity to cater for junior and women's soccer programs.</p> <p>Failing a suitable upgrade to the pavilion at Frank Graham Oval, explore opportunities longer term to purchase the Peel Street Recreation Reserve from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (or other suitable venue) to potentially relocate soccer from Frank Graham Oval to better accommodate the club's needs.</p>
Club Development	<p>The Maryborough Soccer Club to reach agreement with the Maryborough Education Centre for community access to the synthetic playing field for club training in winter and potentially to accommodate a summer sevens competition.</p> <p>The Maryborough Soccer Club to continue to utilise the services of Sports Focus and Council in the development of a business plan to guide the current and future operations of the club and assist with funding applications and advocacy to government for the upgrade and improvement of their existing facilities at Frank Graham Oval.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>Key stakeholders to review the development pathway for registered players of the Maryborough Soccer Club and ensure the Ballarat and District Soccer Association is providing the appropriate levels of support to ensure local players are provided opportunities to participate in representative soccer and regional events and tournaments.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Identify a local champion with a passion for soccer and provide them with the appropriate resources and skills to develop a local social soccer program to get people involved in the sport and more active in the community.</p> <p>Develop an active website to encourage communication and promotion.</p>

Loddon Shire

The Loddon Shire covers an area of approximately 6,700 square kilometres, making it the seventh largest municipality (in area) in Victoria.

The Shire is within the area that forms part of the Central Victorian Goldfields and contains the area largely recognised as Victoria's 'Golden Triangle'.

The Shire's current population is approximately 8,600. This number is projected to decrease 4% to 7,600 in 2031. A large portion of local people leave the Shire for work and study but return to the area in their mid 30's to raise a family.

Agriculture and Council employees make up the majority of employment in the Shire, with the other key industries being Forestry and Fishing, Health Care and Social Assistance, Manufacturing and Retail.

The Shire is characterised by a number of small towns dispersed throughout the area. The key population centres of the municipality are Bridgewater, Tarnagulla, Pyramid Hill, Boort, Serpentine, Inglewood and Wedderburn. Wedderburn is the largest township in the Shire.

There is presently no soccer club in the Loddon Shire and according to FFV records there is currently only seven soccer players registered in affiliated FFV competitions. Some local schools are offering soccer activities through their curriculum.

The Loddon Shire currently has an appropriate level of sporting infrastructure and recreation reserves to cater for the active sporting needs of the local community. The most popular sports in the Shire include AFL, netball, tennis and hockey, whilst participation in indoor sports such as basketball and indoor hockey are currently very popular in Wedderburn.

Participation in junior football (AFL) in the Shire is declining and there is increasing competition between sports such as AFL and hockey for player numbers.

The Loddon Shire Recreation Strategy recommended the development of alternative sporting opportunities including soccer, with the potential to accommodate indoor soccer programs and activities.

The arrival of migrant communities in the town of Pyramid Hill provides an opportunity for Council and FFV to introduce social soccer. This can be achieved without the development of any additional infrastructure by using existing playing fields or open space and with support from Sports Focus.

FFV believe it would be possible to develop a soccer club in the Loddon Shire through the introduction of development programs and working in conjunction with the BASL. The link to schools and the promotion of the sport through 'come and try days' and school holiday programs is the key to generating more interest in the sport.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Recognise and acknowledge the popularity and strength of AFL and hockey in Loddon and ensure that soccer positions itself to provide opportunities and choices for people to participate by avoiding fixture clashes with these sports and promoting soccer as a safe form of physical activity that can also complement the training requirements of the AFL.</p> <p>Create stronger links with local schools to integrate soccer programs into the school curriculum and explore opportunities to develop a school ambassador program to build interest in soccer. Engage with FFV and BASL to help drive the sport through the schools.</p> <p>Council to work with FFV to support participation in soccer locally and/or in BASL clubs by children and adults with a CALD background.</p> <p>Council to develop a youth and family engagement strategy in conjunction with the Buloke Shire, with the aim of adopting a framework for the inclusion, provision and delivery of programs and services. The strategy should address the sporting, recreation and leisure participation needs of young people in the Loddon Shire.</p> <p>Investigate opportunities to establish sporting needs and potentially activate soccer within the small local migrant community located at Pyramid Hill.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Identify opportunities for soccer to share existing hockey or tennis facilities to accommodate any future demand for entry level or modified soccer programs such as SSF or five-a-side.</p> <p>Council should ensure that any future upgrades or improvements to Council reserves considers the provision of flat, unfenced and accessible spaces suitable for social and casual soccer.</p>
Club Development	<p>There are currently no clubs operating in the Loddon Shire and club establishment should be evaluated in-line with the successful delivery of participation related actions.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>Existing registered players living in Loddon are participating in the BASL. Due to the projected decline in population, and the current absence of soccer on the Shire, it is feasible to suggest that any additional interest in competitive soccer from Loddon residents will be catered for in the BASL.</p> <p>FFV and BASL should consider Boort as a potential location for a satellite facility to potentially host representative soccer or an exhibition match. Boort is centrally located between Swan Hill and Bendigo which would significantly reduce travel time for a number of Loddon Mallee residents participating in representative soccer in Bendigo.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Identify a local champion with a passion for soccer and provide them with the appropriate resources and skills to develop a local social soccer program to get people involved in the sport and more active in the community.</p>

Buloke Shire

The Buloke Shire covers more than 8,000 square kilometres of the Loddon Mallee Region in the state's northwest, stretching between Lake Tyrrell, Victoria's largest salt lake, and the northern reaches of the picturesque Avoca River.

In 2011 the estimated population of Buloke was 6,925 people, with over 40% of the population aged over 55. Population in the Shire is projected to decline slightly by 6% to 6,500 people in 2013.

The townships of Charlton, Wycheproof and Sea Lake are accessible from the north and south via the Calder Highway, Birchip and Donald to the west of these locations are accessible via the Sunraysia Highway from north and south.

With farming communities at its centre, Buloke Shire is Victoria's true agricultural heartland and serves the communities of Wycheproof, Charlton, Donald, Birchip and Sea Lake, as well as the smaller townships of Berriwilllock, Culgoa, Nandaly, Nullawil and Watchem.

Agriculture, specifically grain production, is the primary source of income and employment in the area. Other forms of farming, education, retail, community service sectors and light industry also provide employment and income.

The highest participation sports in the Buloke Shire include AFL, netball and hockey. Basketball is also popular and is supported by the provision of a number of indoor sports courts in the townships of Birchip, Sea Lake, Charlton, Wycheproof and Donald. Participation in summer sports such as cricket, little athletics and tennis has decreased due to people's work commitments, the lack of volunteers and the demands on agriculture.

Advice from Council indicated that the low population base in the Shire is impacting on the growth and development of local sport. Many of the same people are participating in multiple sports and the governance and delivery of sporting competitions is being compromised due to the demands and capacity on volunteers.

There is currently no soccer club in the Buloke Shire and according to FFV records there is only one soccer player registered and participating in an FFV affiliated competition. Culturally there has been a lack of interest from the community in the introduction of any new sports. This should be taken into account when considering the feasibility of introducing soccer into the Shire.

Council recently developed a Synthetic Sports Ground Feasibility Study to understand the overall demand, cost, management and ongoing viability of a synthetic surface to cater for a variety of sports and activities including soccer.

The key driver of this study was to investigate the need for a centralised synthetic facility predominantly for use by hockey, however it was determined that this would not be feasible as it would impact on the development and growth of other sports such as AFL, netball and hockey.

Council indicated that there would be opportunity to potentially develop soccer in the Shire through engagement and promotion in schools and the use of indoor facilities for social soccer, futsal or five-a-side.

Strategic Priorities	Proposed Recommendations
Participation	<p>Council to develop a youth and family engagement strategy in conjunction with the Loddon Shire, with the aim of adopting a framework for the inclusion, provision and delivery of programs and services. The strategy should address the sporting, recreation and leisure participation needs of young people in the Buloke Shire.</p> <p>Recognise the need for Council, the MSA and FFV to develop a partnership approach to build additional resources to assist in the development of soccer and drive promotion, governance and growth in the game.</p> <p>Investigate existing indoor court use and the availability of school facilities to introduce social and non competitive soccer programs, as well as recognising the availability of outdoor recreation reserves to accommodate casual soccer activity.</p> <p>Investigate the potential to share resources and develop programs in conjunction with the Loddon Shire to deliver and promote introductory soccer programs, given the shared sporting objectives, similar demographics and limited resources available for both Council's.</p> <p>Develop entry level soccer programs and activities that complement the training programs and requirements of the dominant sports such as AFL, netball and hockey and ensure any soccer activity being delivered provides a point of difference to these sports. With summer sport participation in the Shire declining due to people's work commitments, a winter introductory program would provide the best opportunity to activate the sport.</p>
Facility Development	<p>Review Council's Hockey Feasibility Study and engage with the North Central Hockey Association to undertake further investigation into enhancing existing hockey facilities to facilitate shared use with soccer. Increasing the standard and level of infrastructure, including improving the quality of the playing surface and upgrading the lighting and change room amenity, will be a key consideration.</p>
Club Structure	<p>There are currently no clubs operating in the Buloke Shire and club establishment should be elevated in-line with the successful delivery of participation related actions.</p>
Competition and Player Development	<p>Existing registered players living in Buloke are participating in the BASL. Due to the projected decline in population, and the current absence of soccer, it is feasible to suggest that any additional interest in competitive soccer from Buloke residence will be catered for in the BASL.</p>
Profile and Promotion	<p>Create stronger links with local schools to integrate soccer programs into the school curriculum and explore opportunities to develop a school ambassador program to build interest in soccer. Engage with FFV and BASL to help drive the sport through the schools.</p>

Yarriambiack Shire

Yarriambiack Shire covers an area of 7,158 square meters and is bounded by the Northern Grampians Shire in the south-east, Horsham Rural City Council in the south-west, Hindmarsh Shire in the west, Mildura in the north and Buloke Shire in the east.

In 2011 the estimated population in Yarriambiack was 7,500 people. This is projected to decrease by approximately 8% to 6,900 people by 2031.

The key population townships with more than 200 residents include Warracknabeal (2,421), Murtoa (748), Hopetoun (586), Minyip (437), Rupanyup (399) and Beulah (370).

There are a number of smaller townships within the region which have less than 200 residents. The Warracknabeal township is accessible via the Henty Highway in the north and south, and Borung Highway in the south-west and east.

Yarriambiack is not located in the State Government's Loddon Mallee Region but has been included in the soccer development plan as they form part of FFV's Loddon Mallee Zone.

There is currently no outdoor or indoor soccer being played in the Yarriambiack Shire and advice from Council indicated that there is virtually no interest in the sport locally.

Some schools have experimented with ad-hoc/informal soccer programs but no formal soccer competition currently exists.

Council is reviewing its Municipal Recreation Plan in the next few years but officers predict little or no demand for soccer.

There is a lack of interest, awareness and appreciation of soccer in the Shire and currently no dedicated facilities to accommodate the sport.

The dominant sports in the Shire are AFL, cricket and netball, with golf, bowls, basketball, hockey, swimming, tennis and fishing also very prominent.

Council does not believe there is an opportunity to develop soccer within the Yarriambiack Shire as there is little interest in the sport and culturally young people are born into more traditional and historically strong sports such as AFL, netball and cricket

For soccer to work in these areas it needs to be promoted and integrated into the school system.

The expansion of A league pre season matches into regional and rural areas would generate more interest in the sport and assist its growth and development in the Loddon Mallee Region.

Hindmarsh Shire

The Hindmarsh Shire is the sixth largest municipality in Victoria; however it provides the fifth lowest population.

The 2011 estimated population for the Hindmarsh Shire was 6,054 people, projected to decrease 9% to 5,000 people.

Hindmarsh is bounded by West Wimmera in the south and west, Mildura Rural City in the north, Yarriambiack Shire in the east and Horsham Rural City Council in the south-east.

The key population areas within the region include Jeparit, Rainbow, Nhill and the major township of Dimboola. Dimboola is accessible via the Western Highway in the south-east and north-west, and Dimboola and Nhill are serviced by Vline trains travelling to Melbourne daily.

Hindmarsh is not located in the State Government's Loddon Mallee Region but have been included in the soccer development plan as they form part of FFV's Loddon Mallee Zone.

There is one soccer club based in Hindmarsh, the Nhill Soccer Club, which is primarily made up of members of the Karen community, an ethnic group from Burm. The club played in the Ballarat and District Soccer League in 2012 and play most of their home games in Horsham to reduce travel for Ballarat teams. Continued participation by Nhill proved not sustainable and the team did not compete in season 2013.

Soccer is becoming recognised as the area becomes more populated with new arrivals who place soccer on the top of their most preferred sport list.

A key role of the Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly's (WRSA) is to assist new arrivals by linking them with mainstream clubs by way of Come and Try Days first, then by directing them to the local club.

The WRSA are currently working with the Nhill Soccer Club on its welcoming and inclusive policies and providing them with up to date information designed to assist with the assimilation of the Karen community into soccer.

The WRSA played a major role in establishing the soccer program with the main focus now being to grow participation and field junior teams.

As soccer is still being established it is still considered a minor sport in the region, and the barriers to increasing participation will be challenging.

As the Nhill Soccer Club is primarily based around the Karen community, the inclusion of other cultural groups will need to be carefully managed. The low population base of people between 5 and 35 in Yarriambiack, the lack of infrastructure for soccer and the need to travel significant distances to play will also impact on future participation rates.

To ensure soccer remains a viable sport for the Nhill community FFV, the Ballarat and District Soccer League, WRSA and Council will need to work collaboratively to ensure the appropriate level of support and infrastructure is provided and that local people are actively involved in the development and management of the sport.

The Horsham Soccer Club will also have a role to play in building the profile of soccer in this part of the region by providing opportunities to host major events from their new home at the Horsham Showgrounds.

Stronger connections between Horsham and Nhill should be encouraged to rationalise resources and to support and promote the sport.