GEMBROOK

Identity & Function Assessment

Aug
2026





Privacy & confidentiality

From time to time Cardinia Shire Council and Hello City collect personally identifiable and confidential information. We meet our responsibilities under the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth), the Australian Privacy Principles and the Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic). Our professional practice is guided by the Australian Market Research Association Code of Conduct, the Local Government Act 2020 (Vic) and Cardinia Shire Council's Community Engagement Policy 2025-2029.

Consultation

Cardinia Shire Council and Hello City take reasonable steps to support the accuracy and authenticity of information presented in this report. We take our responsibility to present participant views accurately, however we cannot verify every statement made through engagement. Where gaps or omissions are identified, we will work to fill or correct them within the scope of the project.

Equity

Hello City acknowledges that this work exists within a dominant social and cultural framework that makes some objects, experiences and facts visible while rendering others invisible. This may continue and reinforce existing inequalities and create an incomplete picture of place.

Readers with insights, perspectives or experiences that are missing from this report are invited to contact the Hello City team directly. Where possible, we will expand the evidence base and correct the report to reflect new information.

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Introduction

In April 2026, Cardinia Shire commissioned Hello City to undertake research and an assessment of Gembrook Town Centre. The purpose of the work is to understand the qualities, dynamics and tangible elements that make Gembrook recognisably itself.

The project asked, in different ways, "What is Gembrook?" Thousands of answers were collected through research, stakeholder interviews, vox pop surveys, intercept engagement and walking audits. These were distilled into Five Strengths, a concise set of emerging signals and a map of tangible touchpoints.

Together, these findings provide a foundation for the Gembrook Town Centre Urban Design Assessment, township structure planning, connection to Emerald and future place-based decision-making. They identify what should be protected, what should be strengthened and where change should be handled carefully.

How to use this document

- ***Five Strengths of Gembrook*** define the town's strongest identity and function attributes.
- ***Research, Engagement and Analysis*** section explains how the findings were developed.
- ***What We Heard*** section summarises the main evidence patterns beneath each strength.
- ***Mapping the Strengths*** section translates the Five Strengths into tangible places, features and dynamics that can be mapped spatially and identifies ***Important Places*** and ***Focal Points*** that are either especially valued or need care.
- The ***Touchpoints*** section provides a strategic matrix that identifies significant places, assets, and elements, capturing the clear strategic direction emerging from community research and stakeholder engagement.

Study Area and Scope

The study focuses on Gembrook town centre in the context of the wider hills area, including its connection to Emerald and the Puffing Billy train route. The core activity area includes Main Street, the Gembrook Puffing Billy stations, JAC Russell Park, the school and preschool precinct, the eastern town entry and nearby streets, trails, parks and community facilities that support town-centre life.

Later work should build on these findings, close evidence gaps and identify delivery mechanisms for protecting, expanding or adapting Gembrook's strengths.

Photo credit: Hello City



1. Rolling Hills and Potatoes

Rolling country, red soil, potatoes, horse riding, working farms

Potatoes and farming are linked to all aspects of the town from rolling fertile pastures to farmhouses, sheds, tractors, grazing horses, from wide views of ploughed fields and open farmland skirted by forest, to the history of Puffing Billy hauling sacks of potatoes with locals riding on the sills.

Potatoes are part of Gembrook stories of hardship and enterprise with dieldrin-related decline and new businesses like Three Spuds Vodka.

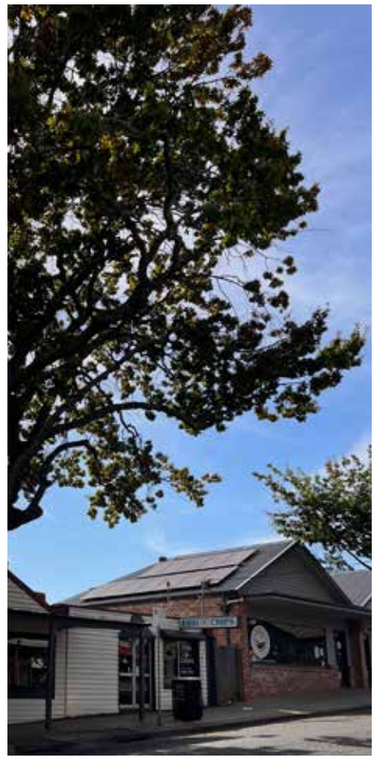


2. Heritage Village at the End of the Line

Peaceful haven connected to the rhythms and history of Puffing Billy and historic buildings

A quiet refuge, separate from the city sprawl but with the city in reach. Crowds of daytrippers bring ripples of bustle and activity, which settle back into peaceful rhythms of village life.

The thrilling whistle of Puffing Billy, the historic fabric, old Spencer Store, Station House, The Motorist, the old pub site and First Nations culture are at the heart of the village identity.



3. Gem in the Forest

Forest edge, greenery, wildlife, rail trail, walking, cycling

The village is set on the edge of the forest, open country and a wider network of trails through the Dandenongs.

The lush green setting touches every part of daily life in Gembrook and physically connects Main Street to walking trails like the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail, cycling, bridle tracks and nearby places such as Bunyip State Park, Kurth Kiln and Gilwell Park.

Locals share a sense of responsibility to protect the fragile and unique ecosystem, forests, waterways and walking tracks.



4. Street Life

Familiar faces, local food, third places to socialise, friendly rural village

Main Street is the social heart of Gembrook. The bakery, cafes, restaurants, pub, distillery, IGA, post office and local shops give people places to meet, eat and see familiar faces.

Locals' loyalty to their local traders is strong, and much of daily life centres around meeting with friends or welcoming visitors to enjoy coffee, local produce, hospitality and good spirits.



5. A Place to Grow

Safe nurturing community, with opportunities to learn and grow

Schools, preschools and childcare are knitted into the community and the village works together to raise little Gembrookians and to support new ventures and ideas.

Locals invest time in the village centre to create, preserve and enjoy safe places and opportunities to play, explore and learn.

Five Strengths of Gembrook

These Five Strengths define Gembrook's strongest and truest attributes

Research, Engagement and Analysis

Hello City carried out local research into Gembrook's issues, history, retail environment, character, icons and assets. This included review of previous consultation, strategic documents, the Cardinia Planning Scheme, Cardinia Shire heritage material and Council's community engagement policy.

The research also drew on ABS Census and profile.id material, local history sources, Puffing Billy Railway material and digital anthropology analysis of social media, Google reviews and local community websites.

This desktop research identified five starting lenses for the Hills region:

Lush and Green: nature, hills, terrain, views and topography

Knitted Together: connections between towns, trails, Puffing Billy, movement and shared resources

Kind-Hearted: neighbourliness, mutual support and everyday care

Small but Tough: resilience, independence, storms, bushfires, outages and infrastructure

Unpolished Charm: local character, built form, heritage, land use and change

These lenses were tested and refined through engagement with people who live, work, visit and invest in Gembrook.

Council and Stakeholder Engagement

The engagement was led by urban design staff from Cardinia Shire's Planning, Strategy and Urban Design team with support from Council's Community Engagement team and delivered by Hello City. An internal inception survey allowed Council officers from across Council teams to shape the approach and contribute local insights, resources and target areas.

Formal stakeholder interviews were conducted with Derek Jones from Gembrook Community Group, Stefanie Straub from Puffing Billy Railway, Lynne Trensky from Eastern Dandenong Ranges (EDRA) and Trevor Budge from Puffing Billy Railway and Emerald Village Association (EVA), along with Peter Maloney and Dona Martin as EVA representatives.

Engagement with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Aboriginal stakeholders is planned for later stages of the Gembrook township planning process. This document may be reviewed to incorporate new insights and findings from that engagement.

Face-to-Face Engagement

Hello City engaged two known and trusted Gembrook locals to carry out face-to-face vox pop interviews in Gembrook and Emerald and to support a public engagement event in Emerald Town Centre as part of the wider Hills engagement program.

The engagement asked people to record everyday experiences, memories, associations, local icons and a single image or phrase that summed up Gembrook. Online surveys were also circulated through Council's engagement platform, local networks, email, social media and paper copies.

Walking Audits

Walking audits were used to gather spatial evidence about how people experience the town centre. Community stakeholders and local groups were invited to walk the centre around a specific theme, concern or opportunity. The audits identified valued places, movement problems, visual character, public-realm issues and possible improvements.

Broad participation was encouraged with direct invitations to community leaders, emails and visits to community groups, wide promotion on Council social media pages, and supportive coverage in the Emerald Village Association newsletter. Finally, a poster and sticker campaign was supported by local traders, depicting the local flower Long Pink-bells (Tetratheca stenocarpa), a rare flower associated with Gembrook. Community members were invited to suggest sticker ideas that captured the spirit of Gembrook and the Hills.

Future engagement should build on this research to engage further with families with children, youth and members of local Aboriginal communities and groups.

The Conversation In Numbers

240 people took part across the Hills region

10,000+ facts and data points collected

88 people engaged about Gembrook specifically

4,000+ answers to the question "What is Gembrook?"

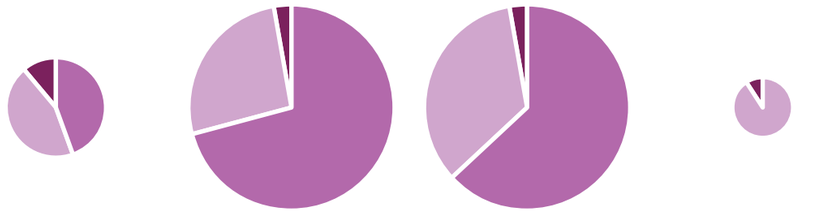
76 vox pop responses

8 walking audit participants

6 stakeholder interview participants



Snapshot Of Participants



18-34 years old

4% women

4% men

1% open

35-54 years old

27% women

10% men

1% open

55-74 years old

24% women

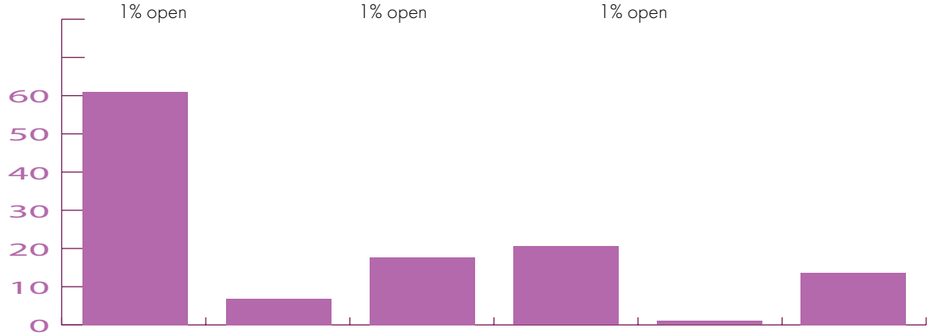
13% men

1% open

75+ years old

0.2% women

3% men



55% live in Gembrook

7% work or volunteer in Gembrook

16% live within 30 minutes

20% visit regularly

2% rarely pass through

14% have children in local schools

What We Heard

We received thousands of stories, facts, insights, opinions and histories in response to our question "What is Gembrook?". We've summarised key insights below.

1. Rolling Hills and Potatoes

People talked of Gembrook's rolling agricultural country, long rural views, red volcanic soil, potatoes, flowers, grazing and livestock. Farming and working land remain visible around the town and continue to shape its roads, buildings, views, businesses and local memory.

Potatoes are a central identity symbol, even as potato farming has declined to a small number of remaining growers. Dieldrin contamination and the losses associated is still felt and seen as a significant influence on agriculture, land use, subdivision, diversification and retirement options for farmers. The detailed knowledge of place held by farmers and long-term landholders is valued.

The working-land story appears through open paddocks, ploughed fields, sheds, tractors, farmhouses, trucks, grazing horses and rural business traffic moving through the village. Flower farms and other agricultural uses continue the district's identity around primary industry. Horses, horse-riding and bridle routes are a visible part of rural life and active recreatiion.

Newer enterprises show how Gembrook's farming and working-town history can be reworked through visitor experiences. Three Spuds Vodka draws directly on potato history, while The Motorist and car culture connect to the town's former rural servicing economy.

Key tensions include farm viability, dieldrin and decline of potato farming, subdivision pressure, dirt roads, issues relating to the rise of hobby farms, changing agricultural economics and the risk of suburban-style development weakening rural character and loss of farming knowledge and identity.

"Small town rural character with glorious surrounding views."

"If you asked me what Gembrook is, it is potatoes and history."

"Potatoes are Gembrook."

"The line was built so timber and potatoes could get to Melbourne in a cost-effective way."

2. Heritage Village at the End of the Line

Gembrook is valued as a peaceful retreat at the end of the line. Locals see Gembrook as a peaceful village separated from suburban and metropolitan sprawl, but that is still connected to the city. This connection is in part about how easy it is for locals to get to the city, but also about the rhythms of quiet weekday life contrasting with the bustle of daytrippers on weekends and holidays.

Puffing Billy is sits at the core of this *end of the line* identity. Even though locals no longer travel to the city on the line, Puffing Billy still brings the world to Gembrook. This core dynamic is highly valued, however problems arise if the balance of visitation intensity threatens the sense of peaceful retreat.

Puffing Billy's history as a railway serving Gembrook's farms and timber mills is part of the story, and the whistle, steam train, station arrival and end-of-line experience are part of the town's sensory identity. The historic station and newer township station create an unusual two-station arrangement with different roles and passenger capacities.

Economically Puffing Billy is recognised as a major gift and economic driver, but weak physical and commercial links between the railway, JAC Russell Park, Main Street and local traders cause concern. Timetable changes, short visitor dwell times, coach movements and uncertain visitor flows affect local business confidence. Conflicts around traffic, parking and tourism overwhelming local infrastructure were also raised, especially in relation to the previous Day Out with Thomas event. There was a clear desire for better communication, partnership and precinct planning between Puffing Billy, Council, traders, landowners and the community. Locals would also like it to be easier for them to take a ride on the Puffing Billy as part of local life.

Historical organisational malpractice within Puffing Billy has an ongoing impact. New Puffing Billy leadership have a mission of ongoing collaboration, transparency and community engagement to help strengthen trust and connections into the future.

Heritage buildings carry strong identity value because little heritage fabric remains. Spencer Store, Station House, The Motorist, the old pub site, churches and older shopfronts were repeatedly identified as places that still speak clearly to Gembrook's character. The old pub site was described as a major absence in the town centre.

Locals would like to build on and celebrate First Peoples' history preceding railway, farming, forestry and mining.

"A lot of locals moved here because they like that it is small and quiet and does not have too much visitation."

"There are probably half a dozen buildings that speak specifically to Gembrook."

"Gembrook is the end of the line. It is quaint, it is beautiful and it has kept the most heritage of the three townships."



The words and themes most frequently used by participants to describe Gembrook, with larger text indicating more frequent responses.

3. Gem in the Forest

Gembrook is valued as a village at the meeting point of forest, farmland and open country. Bunyip State Park, Kurth Kiln, Gembrook Park, Gilwell, the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail and surrounding natural areas all contribute to its forest-edge identity.

People described walking, cycling, horse riding, wildlife, birds, wombats, forest experiences, waterways, tree ferns, mature trees, oak trees and landscape planting as part of everyday life. The Avenue of Honour, heritage trees and other mature planting were identified as part of both the landscape and heritage experience.

The trail network is one of Gembrook's strongest assets. The Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail links recreation, landscape, town arrival and regional movement. The station precinct also works as a gateway to surrounding landscapes, with potential to better connect the rail trail, Main Street, JAC Russell Park and Puffing Billy.

More visibility, celebration and learning of First Peoples' relationships with Country is wanted.

Challenges and issues raised included road shoulders, missing paths and gaps in safe links reducing walking and cycling comfort. There are opportunities to interpret natural and agricultural landscapes together, improve wayfinding and protect the small village setting at the edge of a much larger landscape.

Community care for forests, waterways, wildlife, walking tracks and trees was a recurring theme.

"Gembrook, a little village by a vast wilderness."

"A gem surrounded by forest."

"Truly local, a gem hidden away in the forest."

"Quiet, friendly, peaceful. Wombats, owls, parrots visit my home. My own piece of wilderness."

"Walking the rail trail. It is our best asset."



4. Street Life

Main Street is the social heart of Gembrook. Cafes, the bakery, restaurants, the pub, distillery, IGA, post office and local shops give people places to meet, eat, run errands, welcome visitors and see familiar faces.

Locals are loyal to local traders. Independent operators and personal relationships with businesses are part of the town's social fabric. Food, coffee, dining and hospitality define much of Gembrook's everyday and visitor experience. Hospitality businesses also carry a large share of Main Street activity.

Weekday activity is typically quiet, with stronger evening, weekend and event activity. Participants raised the need for a better balance of retail, hospitality and everyday services to support both locals and visitors. The IGA area, vacant sites, tired frontages and uneven presentation were identified as weakening the Main Street experience.

There is a desire for a more complete offer, including GP access, pharmacy, childcare, retail and hospitality that serves both locals and visitors. This is seen as necessary to prevent people shopping in larger regional centres rather than in Emerald or local main streets.

The street also has functional pressures. Numerous driveways, turning movements, road crossings, parking and vehicle traffic create conflict between local movement and village life. Public toilets, seating, lighting, paths, maintenance, signs and interpretation shape whether Main Street feels cared for and easy to use.

Participants saw opportunities in stronger trader coordination, shared programming, markets, lighting, railway-linked events, multilingual visitor information and better wayfinding. Village Lane and rear access were raised as possible servicing or circulation opportunities. The functional town centre was also understood to extend beyond the shops to the station, park, school and recreation reserve.

"Seeing recognisable faces walking down the street, stopping for a chat and knowing the community."

"The variety of good quality food/dining options."

"Walking along the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail to Gembrook Village to collect mail, have a coffee, say hello to locals."

"Walking to Gracies, saying hello to other locals on the street, kids riding their bikes."

"Morning coffees at Gracie's and walking the Main Street."

"Walking down the main road and seeing the variety of old architecture."

5. A Place to Grow

Gembrook is shifting from a farming settlement to a peri-urban family and commuter town. Strong family-friendly and community-minded qualities were described with schools, preschools, childcare, parks, the skate park, recreation spaces and community facilities supporting everyday life.

An openness to ideas and willingness to support and nuture local enterprise, environmental care and community-led change was evident. Newer businesses and experiences mentioned during engagement include Three Spuds Vodka, The Motorist, Coffee and Cars, food partnerships, markets and railway-linked offers

The elements needed for local enterprise to work were identified as; a clearer retail and service offer, businesses that understand the community, good presentation, stronger marketing, trader coordination and better links to Puffing Billy, Main Street and local events.

Increasing participation through schools, local issues, campaigns and short projects, alongside pressure on traditional committee and volunteer capacity were described. The Roads Action Team and other local groups are active in advocating around making the public realm safe and welcoming to all.

Community gardening, tree planting and nurture of landscapes shape the town centre. Community planting, creation of tree avenues, care of parks, green spaces, forest edges, waterways and links and beautiful front gardens were raised as examples of Gembrook's love of all things green.

Pressures are primarily around systems and infrastructure that allow participation in township life including school traffic, unsafe crossings, missing footpaths, limited public transport, childcare demand, lack of GP and pharmacy access, road conditions, telecommunications, power resilience and sewerage constraints.

"A family friendly town."

"Always got my back."

"For any new business, they need to connect with the community."

"There is a big transition going on in this area... shifting from historical rural communities into peri-urban commuter towns."

"Community creates connection and care."

"A community that looks after each other."

"Areas for kids to play."

"The number of kids around the school, or parents with preschool kids now is huge."

"Our family are Gembrookians. Kids went to school there, we live life there."

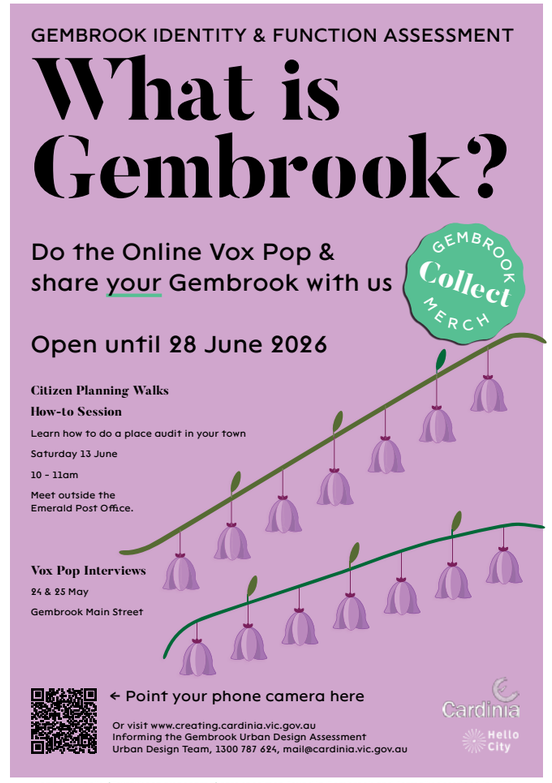
Shared Systems and Governance

Several issues cut across all Five Strengths. Each Hills town has a distinct identity, but people, services, community organisations and personal networks extend across Gembrook, Emerald, Cockatoo and nearby settlements. Emerald functions as a larger service hub, while Gembrook retains a rural village and end-of-line role.

Puffing Billy, the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail and the wider landscape corridor connect the towns physically and culturally. At the same time, tourism brings income and activity alongside pressure on parking, access, quietness and everyday town life.

Many of the systems that shape Gembrook are controlled by different parties. Council, Department of Transport and Planning (DTP), Puffing Billy, utility providers, schools, private owners, traders and community groups all influence parts of the same places and networks. This affects roads, crossings, driveways, coaches, buses, station links, public transport, sewerage, emergency resilience, wayfinding and town-centre boundaries.

"Each has its own identity: Cockatoo, Gembrook and Monbulk, for example. But when you scratch the surface there is a commonality about the people and why they are there."



Long Pink-bells (Tetratheca stenocarpa) rare specimen found in Gembrook and formally described in 1952

Mapping the Strengths

Important Places

A	Main Street
B	Gembrook Puffing Billy stations and railway precinct
C	Spencer Store, Station House, The Motorist and other heritage buildings
D	Old Gembrook pub site
E	Rolling farmland, potato country and the Cockatoo-Gembrook approach
F	Avenue of Honour and mature heritage trees (shown with dashed line)
G	JAC Russell Park
H	Gembrook Park and surrounding forest
I	Hospitality cluster, including The Independent, The Local, Station House and the distillery
J	Gembrook Primary School and preschool precinct

Focal Points

1	Main Street	Rural village character, traffic, crossings, driveways and tired public areas
2	IGA and Post Office crossing	Pedestrian safety around busy shop entrances and driveways
3	Eastern town entry	Safer movement for children, buses, industrial traffic and rail users
4	School and preschool frontage	Pick-up, parking, speed, crossings and child safety
5	Old pub site and heritage buildings	Restore the vacant site and protect remaining heritage
6	Two stations and connecting area (shown with dotted line)	Better links to Main Street, parkland, parking and local businesses
7a 7b	Village Lane and rear access	Test rear servicing and circulation to reduce Main Street pressure
8	IGA and surrounding public realm	Improve access, parking, paths and presentation

Surrounding area

Station Road and bus stops	Complete safe footpath links to buses, school, station and trails
Rural and gravel roads	Safety, maintenance, sealing and access for trucks, farm vehicles and horses



Touchpoints

We have captured a snapshot of the places, things and elements that are important to Gembrook locals and to stakeholders, why they matter and the ideas, concerns, ambitions and desires the community have for each element in the future.

Strategic direction terms:

Preserve: retain intact

Keep: retain essential characteristics and function

Evolve: retain but allow adaptation or improvement

Lose: removal, reduction or substantial change is acceptable where the element weakens identity, amenity, access or function

Avoid: prevent introduction or development where it would weaken the strength

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
1. Rolling Hills and Potatoes					
1.1	Working land, potato farms and rural production	• Potato fields and farming remain a valued feature of Gembrook's rural landscape • Potato farming has declined due to dieldrin contamination and changing farming economics • Help farmers address dieldrin contamination and diversify horticulture • Smaller rural lots and changing agricultural uses are reshaping farming around Gembrook	*Asked "What's the biggest myth about Gembrook?": "That farming is 'finished' in Gembrook. Help farmers clean up the dieldrin, subdivided into rural but small farms, and diversify horticulture."* *"There were 38 potato farms in the district and now there are three and a half"* *"The economics of farming in historical broadscale cropping are not there"*	Remaining and former potato farms, flower farms, open paddocks, red volcanic soil, farmhouses, sheds, tractors and grazing land	Preserve + Evolve
1.2	Rural views, view corridors and approach landscapes	• Rural views around Gembrook particularly along Station Road and approaches to town are valued • Farmland, paddocks, valleys, forests and changing views are common favourite experiences	*"The views along Station Rd. The heritage buildings. The clean air and cleanliness"* *"The views coming into town"* *"Its leafy, attractive, small town character. And the glorious views over farmland"*	Station Road, Cockatoo-Gembrook approach, open paddocks, valley outlooks, ploughed fields and forest edges	Preserve
1.3	The Motorist	• The former Motorist Museum has reopened as The Motorist Distillery • 3 Spuds Vodka connects the venue with Gembrook's potato-growing history • The venue combines potato history and car culture • The venue provides live music while food is supplied by nearby businesses	*"The old motor museum [has been turned] into something unique: The Motorist Distillery and 3 Spuds Vodka. Potatoes are Gembrook"* *"Inside, it is quirky and eclectic. It has Gembrook history, from potato farming through to car culture"* *Sticker idea: "The old motorist sign"*	The Motorist building, former motor museum, old Motorist sign, Station House and The Independent nearby	Keep + Evolve
1.4	Road trippers and motoring culture	• Gembrook Coffee and Cars and classic-car visits bring large numbers of vehicles into town • Motoring culture reflects Gembrook's history of garages and service stations serving farms, trucks and cars • Manage weekend speeding, noise and parking pressure associated with cars and motorbikes	*"As a result [of the decline of potato farms] there was eight service stations, garages in town, mechanical, servicing trucks, cars, whatever. Now there's one"* *"Gembrook Coffee and Cars... is huge... there's hundreds of cars that come up"* *"They come through all the townships on the way, and now they come almost every week"* *"The family go out for a trip and they drive and surprise surprise they end up in Gembrook outside The Motorist"* *"Weekend crowds, cars blocking streets and driveways"*	The Motorist, scenic approach roads, former garages, service stations and workshops, remaining service station and visitor parking areas	Keep + Evolve + Lose (speeding, noise and parking conflict)
1.5	Horses and horse riding	• Horses and horse riding remain part of rural life around Gembrook • Increased traffic on former rural roads has made some riding routes less safe • Consider bridle paths beside sealed roads where needed to retain safe horse access	*"Visiting my horses after work to attend to their daily needs in a beautiful setting, a view of an amazing valley in Gembrook"* *"I used to love riding my horse down there as a kid. Well, there are 600 cars a day on that road now. The area has changed and it has been subdivided. It is a peri-urban street now, not a nice horse track"* *"You could put a bridle track beside the roadway"*	Gembrook Riding Club, rural roads used by horse riders, road verges, bridle routes and farming areas	Keep + Evolve + Lose (unsafe horse access on busy rural roads)
2. Heritage Village at the End of the Line					
2.1	Puffing Billy Precinct	• Connect the two Puffing Billy stations, JAC Russell Park and Main Street as one precinct • The wider precinct includes the old pub site and The Motorist • Resolve the mismatch between station capacity, facilities, passenger arrival points and land ownership • Improve walking and wayfinding between the historic station, township station and Main Street • Find a viable use for the township station building	*"There needs to be a reason for people to visit Gembrook even if they are not travelling on the train"* *"The dilemma is that [Puffing Billy] have the beautiful township station, with hospitality and retail facilities, but the train needs to stop at the historic platform because [Puffing Billy] send large trains up there"* *"JAC Russell Park would definitely be part of [the precinct design] solution"* *"[Puffing Billy's] station precinct needs to be a destination in its own right"*	Township and historic stations, JAC Russell Park, Main Street, old pub site, The Motorist, station-to-town routes and Council and Puffing Billy land	Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
2.2	Township Puffing Billy station	• The township station sits on Council-owned land close to Main Street and JAC Russell Park • Its short platform accommodates trains carrying around 150 passengers • The station building has hospitality and retail facilities but larger trains cannot use the short platform • Find a viable use for the township station building	*"They built the station in the heart of town on Council-owned land"* *"The township station, right on the main street, can only accommodate a short train of about 150 people because it has a short platform"* *"[Puffing Billy] do not operate hospitality or retail out of the township station building because it is not economically viable to have staff and stock there"*	Township station building, short platform, Council-owned station land and adjoining JAC Russell Park	Keep + Evolve
2.3	Historic Gembrook station	• The historic station sits on Puffing Billy-owned land a couple of hundred metres from the township station • Its full-length platform accommodates trains carrying around 400 passengers • The station has no visitor parking • Larger trains use the historic platform, placing passengers further from Main Street	*"Now we have two stations in Gembrook"* *"There is no parking at the historic station. [Puffing Billy] own that land"* *"The historic station has a full-length platform and can hold a train with about 400 people"*	Historic station, full-length platform, station parklands, Puffing Billy-owned land and lack of visitor parking	Preserve + Keep + Evolve
2.4	Daytrippers	• Puffing Billy can bring 250–400 passengers into Gembrook in a short period • Small businesses can struggle to scale up for short visitor peaks • Summer fire-risk cancellations can leave businesses with rostered staff but no visitor income • Visitors sometimes arrive when shops are closed or find there is little to do • Short dwell times limit how long visitors can spend in town • Coordinate train times, local trading hours and visitor information	*"The biggest complaint we get from visitors... is that they get to Gembrook and there is nothing to do. There are no shops open"* *"The difficulty is that [Puffing Billy] have between 250 and 400 people on a train"* *"[Gembrook] did not have the ability to serve 250 people in one hour"* *"In summer [Puffing Billy] may have to close at short notice because of fire risk or total fire ban days"* *"By the time people got off the train and walked into town safely, and then walked back, they only had about half an hour in the townships"*	Station arrival points, Main Street businesses, coach and minibus transfer areas, one-way journeys and visitor walking routes	Evolve
2.5	Sounds and sights of Puffing Billy	• Puffing Billy's whistle, steam train, stations and end-of-line role are closely associated with Gembrook • Puffing Billy and the station were among the most common images chosen to represent Gembrook	*"The older architecture. The friendly people. The sounds of the train"* *Sticker idea: "Puffing Billy's destination Gembrook"* *"The end of the line"* *"Potatoes, Puffing Billy, rolling hills"*	Steam trains, railway corridor, whistle, rail crossings, platforms, stations and station arrival points	Keep

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
2.6	Old Gembrook pub site	• The loss of the former pub remains important to the community • The vacant site remains highly visible opposite the railway precinct • Strong community support formed around rebuilding the pub after the fire • Rebuilding the pub was proposed as a future use for the site	*Least favourite experience: "Seeing the empty block of land where the old pub used to be unused"* *"It was an absolute tragedy for the town"* *"Thousands of people jumped on a Facebook page saying, 'Let's rebuild the pub'"* *"It's a shame that the pub wasn't rebuilt"*	Former Ranges Hotel site opposite the railway precinct	Preserve + Evolve + Lose (long-term vacancy)
2.7	Heritage buildings and historic streetscape	• Protect Spencer Store, Station House, The Motorist, churches and other remaining heritage buildings • Relatively few older buildings remain in Gembrook • Manage new development to retain Gembrook's village character • Strengthen heritage protection for Spencer Store and other remaining historic buildings • The Motorist, Station House and JAC Russell Park have been used to represent Gembrook in external advertising	*"the variety of old architecture"* *"My concern is that Spencer's Store does not necessarily have adequate heritage protection"* *Discussing the Mazda commercial: "Every shot shows The Motorist, Station House Pizzeria... and part of Jack Russell Park"* *Sticker idea: "The old motorist sign, the oak trees, Puffing Billy station... Spencer's storefront and churches/ older buildings with character"*	Spencer Store, Station House, The Motorist, Curiosity Shop, churches, St Hilda buildings, older Main Street shopfronts and former pub site	Preserve + Keep + Evolve
2.8	Main Street shopfronts and street presentation	• Improve the presentation and upkeep of Main Street shopfronts • Retain older buildings and historic street character • Address long-term vacancies and tired frontages that make parts of Main Street less appealing to walk	*"Some shops are very well presented whilst others are not"* *"Street appeal and aesthetics - need to retain more history and create consistency"* *"The shopping area is dead during the day, except for peak dining times at night and generally from Thursday to Sunday"* *"There are long term closed shops making the street feel unappealing to wander along"* *"Loss of character, village feel"*	Main Street shopfronts, older buildings, vacant shops, thresholds, footpaths, planting and building frontages	Preserve + Evolve + Lose (tired frontages and long-term vacancies)

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
2.9	Wayfinding, signs, maps and interpretation	• Improve wayfinding between Puffing Billy, Main Street, trails and local businesses • Provide clearer information for international visitors including signs that work across language barriers • Repair or replace the damaged town map • Tell Gembrook's history in modern ways	*"To retain and tell the history in modern ways"* *Challenge: "Signage"* *"There should be better signage and communication for those visitors, including people from different language backgrounds"* *"Signage and wayfinding should support the businesses as much as the customers"*	Damaged Curiosity Shop map, JAC Russell Park interpretation, Puffing Billy signs, trail wayfinding, station-to-town directions and town-entry signs	Evolve + Lose (damaged and unneces-sary signage)
3. Gem in the Forest					
3.1	Gembrook Park and surrounding bush	• Gembrook Park and surrounding bush are part of Gembrook's forest-edge setting • Forests, quiet and walking feature strongly in descriptions of Gembrook • Gilwell Adventure Park is a nearby family, nature and event destination with potential flow-on activity for the town	*"Gembrook Park is... not far away from the town centre and has some beautiful forest"* *"The rolling hills, paddocks, surrounded by forests"* *"Gilwell Adventure Park is another big opportunity"*	Gembrook Park, bush trails, fern gullies, forest edges, nearby Bunyip State Park and Gilwell Adventure Park	Preserve + Keep
3.2	Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail and Station Road walks	• The Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail is one of Gembrook's most valued walking assets • People use the trail to reach town for mail, coffee, walking and meeting others • Complete missing footpath links around Beenak East Road and the eastern approach	*"The rail trail walk"* *"Local walking tracks and scenery"* *"Lack of walkability from Beenak East Road to Gembrook Village"*	Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail, Station Road walking route, Cockatoo-Gembrook trail connection, Beenak East Road and missing footpath section	Keep + Evolve
3.3	Trees and streetscape	• Mature trees and planting along Main Street and around Gembrook are valued • Tree ferns, mountain ash, oak trees and tall trees feature strongly in descriptions of the town • Tree-lined streets and approaches are an important feature of arriving in Gembrook	*Sticker idea: "The trees that line the strip"* *"Large trees, the steam railway, farming"* *"Enjoying the surroundings and trees"*	Main Street trees, town-centre oaks, roadside planting, trail-side planting and town entries	Preserve + Keep
3.4	Avenue of Honour and heritage trees	• The Avenue of Honour is a valued feature of travelling through Gembrook • Avenue planting is important to Gembrook's streetscape character • Continue community planting and care of tree avenues	*"The supermarket, post office and driving through the Avenue of Honour, the heritage older style homes and shops, keeping that style"*	Avenue of Honour, Redwood Road, significant trees, town-centre oaks and older houses along the avenue	Preserve + Keep
3.5	Birds and wildlife	• Birds, wildlife and plants are common symbols of Gembrook • Wombats, owls, parrots, possums, cockatoos, ferns, tree ferns, mountain ash, oak trees and forests appear throughout community responses • Wildlife is part of daily life around homes and walking routes	*"Possums, see them all the time on morning walks"* *"Fern, wombat, Puffing Billy"* *"Trees, hills and birds"* *"Hills, wild animals, potatoes"* *"Puffing Billy and mountain ash trees and birds"*	Gembrook Park, forest edges, walking routes, tree ferns, mountain ash and habitat around homes	Preserve + Keep
4. Street Life					
4.1	Main Street offer	• Coffee, food, shopping, collecting mail and seeing familiar people are valued Main Street experi-ences • Local shops provide places to run errands, meet people and stop for a conversation • Improve access to a chemist and doctor and increase retail, supermarket and childcare choice • Create a better balance of hospitality, practical retail and services • The IGA, Post Office and bakery are key local anchors	*"We need a chemist, we need a doctor, we need a butcher"* *"Meeting locals when I pick up my mail at the post office"* *"Shopping and bakery"* *"Going to all our lovely small businesses"* *"The lack of basic services like a chemist or a doctor"* *"Getting a balance of retail and hospitality businesses to service locals and visitors"*	Main Street, IGA, Post Office, bakery, Gracie's, shops and service premises	Keep + Evolve
4.2	Active edges, informal gathering spaces and third places	• Gracie's, the Post Office, shopfronts and the footpath outside The Local are informal gathering places • People value bumping into others and stopping to talk • Gracie's is a regular place to meet for coffee and talk with other locals • Space outside shops and cafes allows people to wait, meet and stay	*"Patrons at The Local, spilling out on to the footpath"* *"Meeting people outside the local shops to chat"* *"Coffee at Gracie's"* *"We met other locals at Gracie's who we haven't met before and can strike up a conversation"* *"The community stand outside the post office"* *"Meeting up for coffee"*	Gracie's frontage, Post Office stand, The Local footpath, cafe and shop thresholds, outdoor seating and waiting areas	Keep + Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
4.3	Pedestrian movement and crossings	• Install a marked pedestrian crossing between the IGA and Post Office • Reduce the number of driveways opening onto Main Street • Reduce vehicle speeds through Main Street • Improve visibility at key intersections • Make Main Street safer for children and people using mobility aids	*"You cannot cross the road safely, ie. there is no pedestrian crossing"* *"Crossing the main street with small kids"* *"Trying to cross the main road from IGA to postoffice"* *"Comfort level severely compromised by crossing the road especially between IGA and the Post Office"* *"For pedestrians and those with mobility aids the numerous driveways cause discomfort when using Main Street pathways"* *"No marked crosswalks"* *"Reduce speed to 40km in Main Street"*	Main Street, IGA-Post Office crossing point, commercial driveways, school crossing and Main Street intersections	Evolve + Lose (unsafe crossing conditions and excess driveways)
4.4	Village Lane and rear circulation	• Restore rear circulation through Village Lane to reduce the number of driveways opening directly onto Main Street • Use rear access to reduce vehicle and pedestrian conflicts along Main Street	*"I think there are 14 driveways in this little 300-metre stretch of road"* *"Village Lane... is closed to through traffic"* *"A proposed doctors surgery was knocked back because there would be too much traffic coming out onto Main Street"*	Village Lane, rear access behind Main Street, Innes Road and the closed through-traffic section	Evolve + Lose (unnecessary Main Street driveways)
4.5	JAC Russell Park	• JAC Russell Park is an important place in the centre of town • The park sits beside the township Puffing Billy station opposite The Motorist • Its mature trees and railway-edge setting are recognisable features of Gembrook • Include JAC Russell Park in future station precinct planning and strengthen its connection to Main Street	*Walking audit, destinations and activity centres: "Jac Russell Park. Station House and The Motorist Distillery"*	JAC Russell Park, mature canopy, fencing, signage, interpretation boards, township station edge and The Motorist opposite	Keep + Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
4.6	IGA and retail anchors	• The IGA is an important local retail anchor • Improve the upkeep of the IGA car park, gardens and surrounding public space • Fix the overgrown garden bed between the bakery and IGA	*"The appearance and upkeep of the town centre. Particularly the upkeep of the IGA and surrounding area car park, and lack of vibrant shops"* *"The overgrown garden bed between the bakery and the IGA supermarket"* *"Bare earth and protruding tap near the IGA parking area"* *"Gardens at the IGA do not enhance town-centre amenity"*	IGA, IGA car park, garden beds, bakery-to-IGA edge, driveway and surrounding footpath	Keep + Evolve + Lose (poorly maintained car park and garden beds)
4.7	Hospitality, dining and accommodation	• Food and dining are common favourite experiences in Gembrook • Station House and The Independent are recognised dining destinations • Gracie's, the bakery, The Local and The Motorist add to the food, coffee and evening offer • Ranges Inn and Wombat's Den provide nearby accommodation • Hospitality is a major strength but practical retail and service gaps remain	*"Gembrook is very top-heavy with hospitality"* *"Great for coffee and/or lunch"* *"Coffee, food, beer, great walk"* *"Country vibe and cafes"* *"Live music at the pub"* *"The restaurants - Station House and The Independent"*	Station House, The Independent, Gracie's, bakery, The Local, The Motorist, Ranges Inn and Wombat's Den	Keep + Evolve
4.8	Markets, festivals and events	• Create more variety in the existing market offer • Create more markets as a flexible way to cater for visitor peaks • Develop farmers' markets, night markets and other events that bring activity into town • Coordinate markets and events with Puffing Billy arrivals so more visitor spending reaches local businesses • Use temporary stalls to give local makers, food businesses and new retailers opportunities to trade	*"Sunday market lacks a lot of variety"* *"The market could be better, more diverse"* *"It would be great to have a farmers' market"* *"Food, coffee and markets"* *"Having coffee in Gembrook Market"* *"If you speak to stallholders, they say it does nothing for them because people are contained and fed while they are there"* *"Why do you not have a night market, or put lights up to Gembrook and have the town of lights so people could go into town?"* *"Better range of retail, improved street scaping, community events"*	Market and event spaces around Main Street and the station precinct, old pub site, Puffing Billy event areas and temporary stall locations	Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
4.9	Public toilets, seating, paths and amenities	• Keep public toilets working and improve the process for reporting faults • Clear vegetation blocking paths • Repair cracked paths, trip hazards, damaged seating and missing pavers	*"Sometimes the public toilets aren't working and when pressing the app to report to Cardinia Shire the app won't work"* *"Vegetation obstructing parts of the path"* *"Rotting bench outside Catholic Church"* *"Repair cracks in the pavement at various locations"* *"Missing pavers in retaining wall near the primary school"*	Main Street toilets, benches, footpaths, Telstra pits, vegetation obstructions and missing pavers near the primary school	Evolve + Lose (out-of-order toilets, trip hazards and damaged seating)
5. A Place to Grow					
5.1	Roads and footpaths	• Repair poor road surfaces and potholes • Reduce speeding and manage truck and weekend traffic • Former rural roads now carry much more traffic as subdivision and population increase • Complete missing footpaths on the eastern approach and around the Puffing Billy crossing • Make routes safer for children walking and cycling to school • Consider pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders in road upgrades	*"Gembrook Launching Place Road is a race track starting at Main Street intersection"* *"It was designed for 100 cars a day. When I put down a counter, there were over 600 going down our road"* *"It is a blind corner with no verge and nowhere to walk"* *"Kids are riding to school on bikes, doing the right thing"* *"There is a 300-metre section of road with no footpath"* *"The roads. Both sealed and unsealed roads are terrible"* *"Potholes"* *"The dirt roads that aren't maintained and lack of street lighting"* *"Tourism, loud motorists in large groups speeding through town and massive trucks speeding since 5am"*	Main Street, Belgrave-Gembrook Road, Station Road, Redwood Road, Gembrook-Launching Place Road, Beenak East Road, gravel rural roads, road verges and missing footpath sections	Evolve + Lose (potholes, unsafe speeds and missing footpaths)

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	Quote	Physical context	Direction
5.2	Young people and schools	• A dramatic increase in the population of families with children is changing Gembrook • Gembrook Primary School was reported as growing from around 140 students to around 280 • Improve school pick-up and drop-off, walking and cycling safety • Create more activities and places for young people and teenagers • Involve children and young people directly in future planning	*"For young people and teenagers, there is very little on offer"* *"There is a big gap for the whole youth and young adult market: where they can go and what they can do"* *"The school is growing. As far as I know, there are 280 kids there. It was probably 140 not that many years ago"* *"Traffic racing through Main St and traffic congestion at Gembrook Primary School at school pick up. This must be fixed!"*	Gembrook Primary School, preschool, kindergarten, school frontage, car park, pick-up and set-down areas and walking and cycling routes	Keep + Evolve
5.4	Youth play and recreation spaces	• Places for children and young people to play are valued • JAC Russell Park, Gembrook Leisure Centre and the skate park are important recreation places • Improve safe walking and cycling connections to recreation spaces	*"Jac Russell Park, Gembrook Leisure Centre/skate park, hospitality venues"* *"Areas for kids to play"*	JAC Russell Park, Recreation Reserve, Gembrook Leisure Centre and skate park	Keep + Evolve
5.5	Community, civic and faith facilities	• The RSL and other community facilities support local activities and social connection • Friday night free food at the RSL is a valued local experience	*"Friday night free food at Gembrook RSL"* *"The kind community"* *"Connecting with community"* *"The community knowing everyone"*	Gembrook Hall, Community Centre, RSL, churches, CFA land and Puffing Billy meeting room	Keep + Evolve



Stills from 2025 Mazda commercial showing JAC Park, main street, surrounding forest and The Motorist Distillery staged to look like a vintage store







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