EMERALD

Identity & Function Assessment

Aug
2026





Privacy and 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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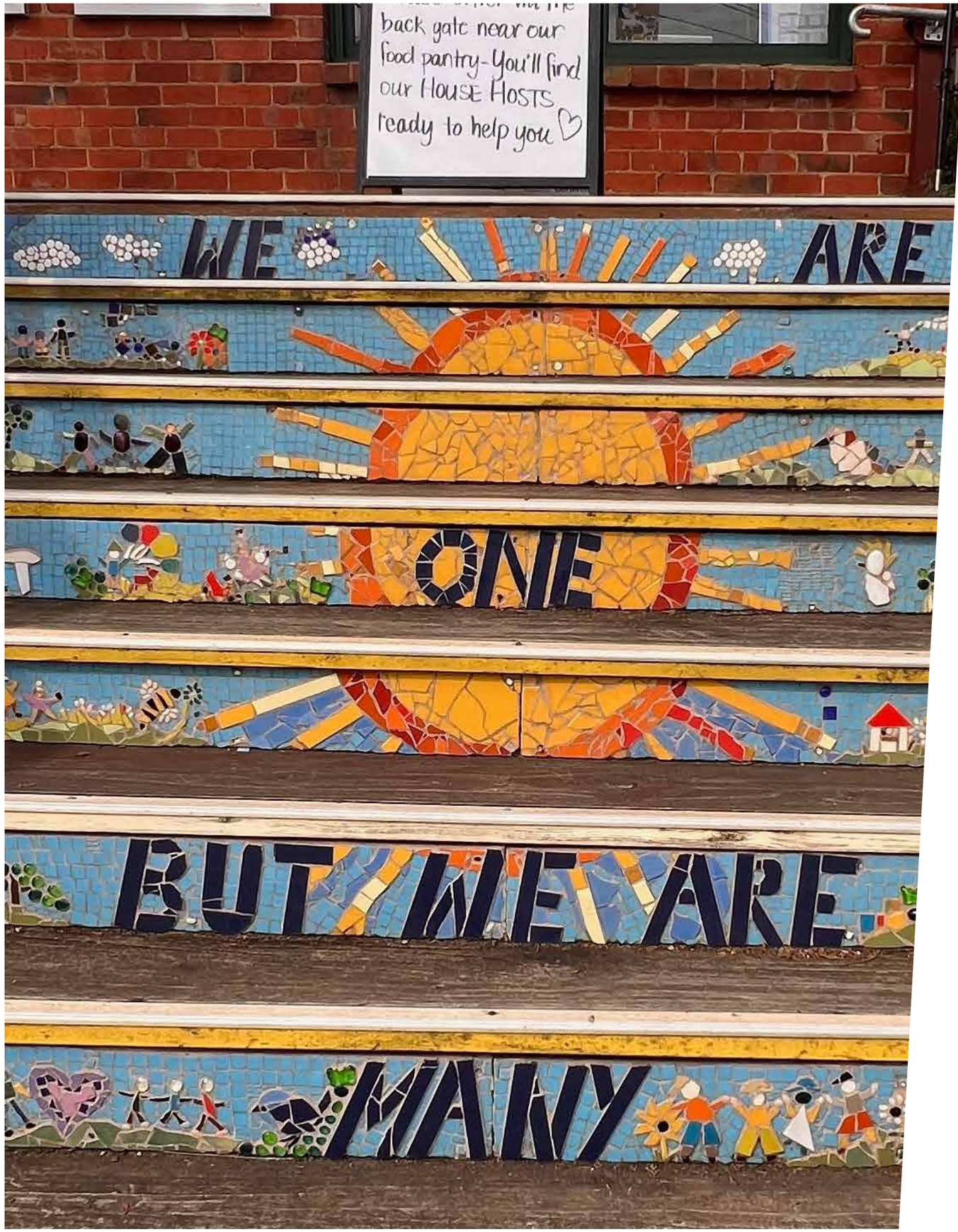


Introduction

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

The project asked, in different ways, "What is Emerald?" 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 Emerald Town Centre Urban Design Assessment, regional Structure Planning 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 Emerald*** 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 Emerald town centre in the context of the wider hills area, including its connection to Gembrook and the Puffing Billy train route. The core activity area includes the Main Road and Kilvington Drive retail areas, the Hills Hub and Woolworths precinct, Puffing Billy Place Reserve and the Emerald railway precinct, the links between these centres, 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 Emerald's strengths.

Photo credit: Hello City



1. Crowning the Ridge

Ridgeline vistas, hills views, steep terrain, twin town centres

Emerald is defined by its position along the ridge and the long views that open across the Dandenong Ranges and towards Western Port. The sweep of Belgrave-Gembrook Road connecting the two town-centre precincts is core to the experience of place, with tall trees and steep terrain framing the town. Emerald Lake, Puffing Billy Place Reserve and Nobelius heritage sites add further points in the landscape setting.



2. Heart of the Hills

Friendly, welcoming, familiar, meets all day-to-day needs

Emerald is the heart of the hills district, and the centre of a network of hills towns. Puffing Billy Place Reserve is the trusted village green that sits in the heart of Emerald. The friendly bustling vibe of the town is supported by shops, schools, health services, sport and community facilities that meet the practical, social, civic and cultural needs of day-to-day life.



3. Stories along the Line

Puffing Billy, nursery, museum, war memory, connection to Country

The history of Puffing Billy, timber, potatoes, generations of day trippers, the shape of development, Nobelius nursery, the packing shed, Emerald Museum, the RSL and Anzac Walk all connect to the railway line. First Peoples' connections with Country, biodiversity, significant trees, arts and community and the thrilling whistle of the steam train are still carried on the line today.



4. Capable and Creative

Volunteers, artists, makers, organisers, resilience

Can-do attitudes and making things happen are part of the culture. Volunteers, civic leaders, artists, makers and organisers bring practical and expert knowledge, energy and long-term commitment to the town.

The strength of local leadership is seen in the day-to-day efforts of EVA, EDRA, U3A, the RSL, Rotary, Lions, schools, Gemco Players, Emerald Museum, environmental groups and artists' work.



5. Beautifully Green

Mature canopy, Emerald Lake, walking, biodiversity, Emerald Star-bush, green refuge close to Melbourne

Green, verdant, lush nature touches every part of life in Emerald. Trees, parks, Emerald Lake, walking routes and the rail corridor bring greenery, wildlife and changing seasons into the centre of town. The deep forests of Emerald so close to the city gives locals the best of both worlds.

A shared sense of responsibility to protect the fragile and unique ecosystem, forests, waterways and walking tracks shapes how locals live in the area.

Five Strengths of Emerald

These Five Strengths define Emerald's strongest and truest attributes

Research, Engagement and Analysis

Hello City carried out local research into Emerald'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 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 Emerald.

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

Engagement with Bunurong Land Council Aboriginal Corporation, Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and Aboriginal stakeholders is planned for later stages of the Emerald 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 local community members to carry out face-to-face vox pop interviews in Gembrook and Emerald and to support a Citizen Planning Place Audit of Emerald's Town Centre.

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

Walking Audits

Both guided and self-guided walking audits were used to gather spatial evidence about how people experience the town centre. Community members 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.

Promotion

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 Emerald Star-bush (Asterolasia asteriscophora subsp. albiflora), a critically endangered flowering plant.

Community members were invited to suggest sticker ideas that captured the spirit of Emerald and the Hills

The Conversation In Numbers

240 people took part across the hills region

10,000+ facts and data points collected

143 people engaged about Emerald specifically

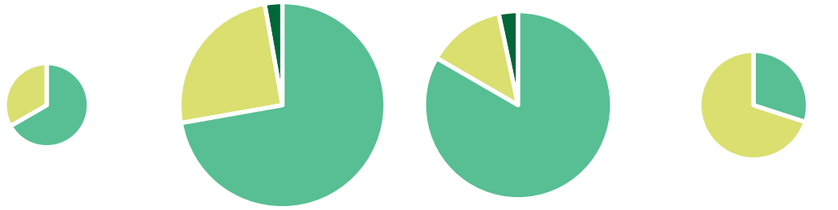
6,000+ answers to the question "What is Emerald?"

124 vox pop responses

13 walking audit participants

6 stakeholder interview participants

SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPANTS



19% other broad, multiple or unstated age/gender response

18-34 years old

4% women

2% men

35-54 years old

26% women

9% men

1% open

55-74 years old

25% women

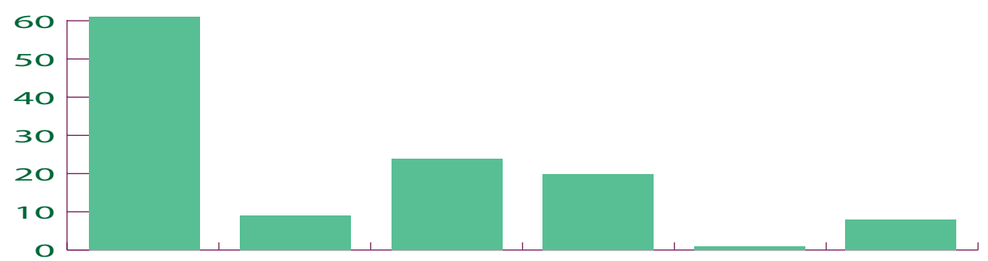
4% men

1% open

75+ years old

4% women

7% men



61% live in Emerald or within walking distance

9% work in Emerald

23% live elsewhere in the Hills or within 30 minutes

20% visit Emerald regularly

1% rarely pass through

8% have children at school in the areas

What We Heard

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

1. Crowning the Ridge

Emerald's identity is shaped by its ridge-top position and long views towards the Dandenongs and Western Port. The sweep of Belgrave-Gembrook Road along the ridge connects the town's two centres and many of the locations most important to locals.

Tall trees and steep terrain were described as framing views, streets and buildings, while the steep topography shapes movement, orientation, access and built form.

The Kilvington Drive and the Puffing Billy Station area is the main commercial centre. The Hills Hub, Woolworths and Worrell Reserve form a dual centre with Emerald Lake, Nobelius and Puffing Billy Place Reserve serving as nodes within the broader townscape.

While the twin-hub nature of Emerald is seen as core to its identity, engagement participants also had concerns about conflicts, disconnection and complexity arising from the dual layout.

Loss of important views from the ridge, building height and the future of mixed-use, vacant and underused land on the north side of Main Road are a focus of local concern.

Participants saw Puffing Billy's central landholdings, adjoining Council-owned land and proposed operations as important to the town's future. There was strong interest in developing a shared vision for the town centre and stronger links between Puffing Billy and the town.

Linking the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail through the town centre is a key community ambition. Other ideas and concerns include development that doesn't reflect the built form character of the town, and ways to improve rear interfaces and hidden land to improve the arrival experience. The spatial complexity of narrow rear access constraining development between the two centres and difficult road, railway, cycling and pedestrian crossings were discussed in detail during the walking audits.

"Emerald is sitting on top of a ridge line."

"Emerald Lake Park is a jewel in the crown."

"The view over Pepi's Land to Western Port"

2. Heart of the Hills

Emerald is the practical service centre for surrounding hills communities. Locals expressed pride in the completeness of the offer in Emerald and overall satisfaction with the shops, supermarkets, schools, health services, sport and professional services available. A recurring theme was friendliness, familiar faces, smiles, conversations with traders, social contact and relationships between locals and independent shops and long-standing businesses that form part of the town's social fabric.

Puffing Billy Place Reserve and the playground are seen as the village green. The playground is described as the trusted, well-loved place where people gather to celebrate, socialise and play and where children are watched over by the wider community. There is a desire in the community to have a stronger role in shaping the future of this precinct, especially te playground area.

The primary school is a civic anchor connected to the town centre. The Hills Hub, RSL and community facilities are well used, with the local University of the Third Age (U3A) providing a number of popular learning opportunities and activities.

Local businesses support community groups, events and activities. Strong family life is bringing growing demand from young families, while there are limited places and activities for teenagers and young adults and limited smaller housing for older residents who want to remain in Emerald.

Emerald also has a continuing commuter and dormitory-town function, with different weekday, school, commuter, visitor and market rhythms. Lost Woods Market is valued as a major gathering place and visitor draw, however market days also create pressure on parking and access to shops and daily errands for locals.

Residents see potential for stronger local benefit from Puffing Billy and Emerald Lake that might help issues around vacant shops, inactive properties and weak investment.

"(Emerald) is the centre for those surrounding places."

"People trust that space and de facto, it's become the town centre"



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

3. Stories Along the Line

Puffing Billy and the rail corridor shape the identity, form and function of Emerald. Emerald Station, Nobelius Siding sites and Lakeside are seen as important elements of the town centre, even though the lake is some distance to the east. Participants valued Emerald Station's surviving original fabric and spoke about the sights and sounds of the train as it passes through the town.

Much of Emerald's history is centred around Puffing Billy, including timber, potatoes, farming, nurseries, holidays and day trips from Melbourne into the Hills. Nobelius Nursery, the packing shed, Emerald Museum and Nobelius Heritage Park retain much of this history.

Puffing Billy is a part of Emerald's civic and cultural life and there is a desire to strengthen this connection. The RSL, Anzac Walk, poppy displays and the railway salute during the dawn service link the line with remembrance. Gemco Players, poetry, visual art and the former Lakeside kiosk art space link it with local arts activity.

There is a strong call in the community to knit these places together more strongly through walking and cycling, heritage, arts and environmental projects along the corridor.

More visibility, celebration and learning of First Peoples' relationships with Country is wanted. There is a call for unified action to protect significant trees, habitat and critically endangered plants and creatures specific to Emerald's highly localised ecosystem in the corridor.

There is a desire to tell and hear the untold stories of the region, including those of Aboriginal communities, the contributions of women to the railway and the impacts of historical organisational malpractice within Puffing Billy.

Participants highlighted the importance of recognising the impacts of historical events and continuing to build positive relationships between Puffing Billy, Council and the Emerald community. New Puffing Billy leadership have a mission of ongoing collaboration, transparency and community engagement to help strengthen trust and connections into the future.

Locals expressed frustration that trains travel through Emerald without bringing enough passengers or spending into the town centre and a desire for more opportunities to ride on the Puffing Billy and have it be a stronger part of their day-to-day life.

Locals recounted memories of the paddle boats, model railway and holiday-style activities of Emerald Lake and expressed hopes for a revival of its old charm.

"Emerald Station is the only heritage station left on the whole line."

"There is this idea of linking the heritage of the railway, the heritage of the towns, the arts activity in the towns and the extraordinary environment."

4. Capable and Creative

Emerald has a large volunteer base and a core group of people who regularly organise and deliver local projects. Emerald Village Association, Eastern Dandenon Ranges Association, Rotary, Lions, University of the Third Age (U3A), the Emerald RSL Sub-Branch and environmental groups are part of this network.

Emerald Museum demonstrates local skills in collecting, curating and presenting the town's history. Gemco Players, arts groups, poets and other local networks maintain a long history of arts activity. The primary school is willing to participate in community projects.

Several projects show what local groups can deliver. The skate park came through sustained community campaigning. The former Lakeside kiosk was converted into a popular art space. Local businesses provide money, goods and time to clubs, events and community groups.

Long-term residents and retired professionals contribute specialist skills and knowledge of the town. Local advocacy around trails, planning, roads, heritage and the town centre shows knowledge of Council processes, funding and project delivery. Emergency support and community care networks add another layer of practical local organisation.

"The level of volunteerism is extremely high."

"There are half a dozen people who can make something happen if they get behind it."

"I am still amazed at the level of interest in the arts."

5. Beautifully Green

Emerald is defined by trees. Mature canopy and dense vegetation extend through streets, parks, properties and the railway corridor. Trees provide shade, habitat and enclosure and are visible through much of the town centre.

Emerald Lake is one of the town's major landscapes for residents and visitors. Parks, forest, waterways and green corridors extend from the surrounding Hills into the centre.

The railway corridor is also a habitat corridor. It contains significant trees, historic planting, and many critically endangered plants and creatures such as the Emerald Star-bush and Sherbrooke Amphipod *(Austrogammarus haasei)*. Birds, wildlife and seasonal changes in vegetation are regularly noticed and valued by residents.

Walking and cycling routes connect the town with the surrounding landscape. The Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail is an important part of this network, although its missing town-centre connection remains unresolved. Emerald's vegetation and topography also give the town a sense of separation from metropolitan Melbourne despite its proximity to it.

Tree removal and damage to habitat are recurring concerns. Residents and local groups are involved in protecting forests, waterways and trails. Vegetation management also has to account for bushfire risk.

The former golf course remains a large unresolved landscape and recreation site which attracts considerable local concern and interest. Participants also want Emerald Lake and other visitor places to work better for local use, with facilities such as bike parking, drinking water, toilets and safe walking and cycling connections.

"The jewel of the Dandenongs."

"Beautifully green, with faces I know."



Critically Endangered Emerald Star Bush (Asterolasia asteriscophora ssp. albiflora)



Mapping the Strengths

Important Places

A Emerald Station, Puffing Billy Place Reserve and railway precinct

B Main street shops, Kilvington Drive Area

C Emerald Lake Park and Lakeside

D Puffing Billy railway and rail corridor

E Nobelius Heritage Park, Emerald Museum, Nobelius Siding and Packing Shed

F Main Road ridge, views, trees and surrounding hills

G Hills Hub and Worrell Reserve precinct

H Lost Woods Market and railway-side grounds

I Pepi's Land

Focal Points

1 **Main Road between Kilvington Drive and the Hills Hub**: connection between the two centres, crossings, walking and cycling, development and built form

2 **Emerald Station, Puffing Billy Place Reserve and playground precinct**: village green, rail activity, play, pedestrian movement and possible future station precinct changes

3 **Missing Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail link**: unresolved town-centre connection, road and rail crossings and route continuity

4 **Mixed-use and vacant land on the north side of Main Road**: underused land, constrained access, rear interfaces and possible future development between the two centres

5 **Emerald Lake and Lakeside**: local recreation, visitor activity, facilities and walking and cycling connections

6 **Lost Woods Market precinct**: valued gathering place with parking and shop-access pressure on market days

7 **Wellington Road entry, IGA and service-station area**: town arrival, vehicle movement, pedestrian access and presentation

8 **Ridge views and mature tree canopy**: protection of views and trees alongside building height and development

9 **Former Emerald Country Club and golf course**: unresolved future use, biodiversity and recreation

10 **Hills Hub**: eastern town-centre anchor and connections to Main Road, Woolworths and Worrell Reserve



Touchpoints

We have captured a snapshot of the places, things and elements that are important to Emerald locals and to stakeholders, why they matter and the ideas, concerns, ambitions and desires the community have for each 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. Crowning the Ridge					
1.1	Town structure and linked centres	• Emerald has two town-centre cores: the railway station and Kilvington Drive centre, and the Hills Hub, Woolworths and Worrell Reserve centre • Main Road links the two centres, with Emerald Lake, Nobelius and other destinations extending further east • Connect the two centres more clearly through wayfinding, interpretation, activity, traffic management, visual elements and design, streetscape, walking and cycling links • Some locals refer to the railway and bakery area as the Puffing Billy precinct and the Hills Hub and shops as the Lakeside precinct	*"It is almost like having two town centres"* *"Emerald is quite disjointed. There are bits and pieces"* *"Where the bakery is, I call that the Puffing Billy precinct. Where the Hills Hub and those shops are, I call that the Lakeside precinct"* *"Linking those two precincts is one of the key things we need to do through placemaking and streetscaping"*	Railway station and Kilvington Drive centre, Hills Hub, Woolworths, Worrell Reserve, Main Road and connections between the two centres	Preserve + Evolve
1.2	Main Road town spine	• Main Road connects Emerald's two centres and other key destinations but also acts as a barrier due to traffic and congestion • Reduce traffic dominance and make it easier to move between the two sides of Main Road • Improve walking and cycling along and across Main Road	*"Traffic is very disruptive, need to promote more walking and cycling"* *"There is really only one main road through"* *"You have this hub at one end of town, then the other one, and then this intervening piece of road"*	Main Road / Belgrave-Gembrook Road, Kilvington Drive roundabout, Woolworths round-about, crossings and adjoining shopfronts	Evolve + Lose (traffic
1.3	Local streets, lanes and secondary routes	• Railway Road, Heroes Avenue and other local streets carry school, local and peak-hour traffic • Address congestion, narrow access, potholes and unsafe crossings • Improve local connections and alternatives to Main Road	*"Car chaos in Railway Road and Heroes Avenue at peak times"*	Railway Road, Heroes Avenue, Beaconsfield-Emerald Road, Kilvington Drive, Wellington Road, Ferres Road, rear lanes and local streets	Evolve + Lose (conges-tion and unsafe
1.4	Ridge, views and town entries	• Emerald's ridge position and long views towards Western Port and the Dandenongs are strongly valued • Protect important views when considering building height and development • Improve town entries and visible rear interfaces	*"The view over Pepi's Land to Western Port"* *"The ridgeline and landscape is what defines Emerald"*	Emerald ridge, Main Road views, Western Port outlooks, Wellington Road entry, Pepi's Land vista, rear interfaces and visible town edges	Preserve + Evolve
1.5	Footpaths, crossings and public amenities	• Improve pedestrian crossings and complete missing footpath links • Provide bike parking, drinking water, seating and reliable public toilets • Small amenities such as dog tie-up points and EV charging were also suggested		Main Road crossings, Beaconsfield-Emerald Road crossings, footpaths, toilets, drinking fountains, bike rings, seating, dog tie-up points and EV charging	Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
1.6	Development, built form and rear interfaces	• New development should reflect Emerald's small Hills-town character, landscape setting and important views • Recent development between the two centres was criticised for its scale, appearance and impact on views • Vacant and underused land behind Main Road has redevelopment potential but access is constrained by narrow rear lanes and limited Main Road access • Improve poor rear interfaces and backs of buildings visible from streets and town entries	*"New builds need to fit into what Emerald is, a small hills town"* *"It is not designed to reflect what Emerald is"* *"They are pretty ugly buildings and they take a lot of views"*	Mixed-use land north of Main Road, rear laneways, backs of Main Road shops, IGA rear interface, newer developments and visible town-entry interfaces	Preserve + Evolve + Lose (poor rear interfaces and development that erodes character)
2. Heart of the Hills					
2.1	Station playground and village green	• Puffing Billy Place Reserve and the playground are Emerald's village green and a central gathering place • People gather here for birthdays, after-school activity, family visits, play and milestone events • Clear sightlines and informal supervision allow children to use the space with a level of independence that people value • The playground land is owned by Puffing Billy and licensed to Council • Any future railway precinct changes should retain the playground and village-green role as a core town-centre function and take care not to alter key elements that make the space trusted and loved	*On Puffing Billy Place Reserve: "People trust that space and de facto, it's become the town centre"* *"Birthdays happen there. Everyone has their birthdays there. They come straight from the school"* *"If you treat the playground area and its wider environment, it is a natural town centre village green"* *"We own that land, but it is licensed to Council for the playground"*	Emerald Station, Puffing Billy Place Reserve, playground, village green, RSL, Anzac Walk, school, shops and railway land	Preserve + Keep + Evolve
2.2	Hills Hub, Woolworths and Worrell Reserve precinct	• The Hills Hub, library, arts spaces, Worrell Reserve, skate park and Woolworths form Emerald's second town-centre core • This part of Emerald predates the railway-centred commercial area and remains an important civic, recreation and retail anchor • Strengthen walking and visual connections between this centre and the railway station centre • Some locals refer to this area as the Lakeside precinct, although it is separate from Emerald Lake and Lakeside Station	*"Emerald started up near the Hub and Worrell Reserve. Then when the train came, the station was down where the town centre is now"* *"Where the Hills Hub and those shops are, I call that the Lakeside precinct"* *"The presence of Hills Hub and the role it plays is part of the glue of the town"*	Hills Hub, Emerald Library, Arts Space, Worrell Reserve, football ground, skate park, Woolworths and Main Road connections	Keep + Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
2.3	Schools, preschool and youth spaces	• Schools are important civic anchors and connect directly with town-centre life • Improve safe walking, cycling and traffic movement around schools • Give schools and young people opportunities to shape town projects • Create more places and activities for teenagers and young adults	*"They're creating a town walk... based on the old heritage walk... turning it into a maths test for kids"* *"As soon as you go to the school with an idea, they jump on board. They love being connected to the community"* *"There is not a lot for teenagers"*	Emerald Primary School, Emerald Preschool, Emerald Secondary College, Dandenong Ranges Steiner School, skate park and school-to-town routes	Keep + Evolve
2.4	RSL and Anzac Walk	• The RSL, Anzac Walk, poppy displays and dawn service are major parts of Emerald's civic and remembrance traditions • The RSL also operates as a community club and meeting place • The Anzac Day dawn service was estimated to attract around 4,000 people • Soldiers from the district travelled on Puffing Billy when leaving for service during the First World War, giving the railway salute at the dawn service a strong historical connection to the RSL and Anzac Walk	*"We made a real effort to make the RSL a community club"* *"We have a huge Anzac Day ceremony, probably 4,000 people at the dawn service"* *"It is the equivalent of the Anzac Day you would see in a city of 100,000 people"* *"A lot of soldiers went on Puffing Billy in the First World War, so there is a very big community connection between the RSL and Puffing Billy"*	Emerald RSL, Anzac Walk, Emerald Station, poppy displays, dawn-service gathering areas and railway interface	Preserve + Keep
2.5	Community learning, support and meeting places	• U3A, community houses, the Men's Shed and support services provide learning, practical support, making and social contact • These facilities draw people from Emerald and the wider Hills • U3A is a particularly strong regional draw	*Asked about a valued local experience: "U3A at the hub"* *"People are coming from all sorts of places to go to the U3A because it's so good and the facilities are so good"*	Hills Hub rooms, U3A, Emerald Community House, Centre of Hope and Outreach, Men's Shed and other community facilities	Keep + Evolve
2.6	Independent retail	• Independent shops and familiar traders are central to shopping in Emerald • People value being recognised, talking with traders and being able to buy useful goods locally • Protect the mix of long-standing local businesses and practical services	*"Shopping locally and seeing people I know, and conversing with traders"*	Emerald Bakery, Emerald Fruit Barn, butcher, newsagent, hardware shop, post office, Penny & Pickle, The General and other independent shops	Preserve + Keep + Evolve
2.7	Supermarkets and larger retail anchors	• Ritchies IGA and Woolworths help Emerald meet a wide range of local shopping needs • Improve Ritchies IGA and its frontage as part of the Wellington Road arrival experience • Cockatoo IGA was cited as an example of a supermarket with a stronger frontage and integrated cafe • Improve pedestrian links between larger retail anchors and surrounding shops	*"The takeaway food options, the brilliant IGA, the fact it has Woolworths and Emerald Lake Park..."* *"Ritchies IGA really needs a massive facelift"* *On Cockatoo IGA: "They built a wonderful supermarket, put a coffee shop in it and gave it a beautiful frontage"* *"It looks scrappy and unorganised"*	Ritchies IGA, Woolworths, Emerald Plaza, Wellington Road entry, service station, car parks and adjoining retail frontages	Keep + Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
2.8	Health, safety and professional services	• Doctors, allied health and professional services help Emerald serve the wider Hills • Improve access to medical and emergency services • Limited police opening hours and ambulance access were concerns	*"Love the trees, nature, doctors, gym and community"*	Police station, medical facilities, Hills Physio, dentists, accountants, gym and mixed-use Main Road properties	Keep + Evolve
2.9	Sport and recreation facilities	• Tennis, football, netball, skating and other recreation facilities are important to families, clubs and young people • Improve connections to recreation facilities • Provide recreation options across different age groups	*Asked about a favourite local experience: "My local club. Emerald Tennis Club"* *"Sporting clubs are a huge part of Emerald"*	Emerald Tennis Club, Worrell Reserve, football ground, netball courts, school recreation areas and skate park	Keep + Evolve



Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
3. Stories Along the Line					
3.1	Emerald Station and Puffing Billy town-centre precinct	• Emerald Station is one of three main Puffing Billy touchpoints in Emerald, alongside Nobelius Siding and Lakeside Station • Regular services were described as passing through Emerald Station for Lakeside, while some special services stop there • Explore regular passenger stops at Emerald Station to bring visitors directly into the town centre and support walking and cycling journeys along the rail corridor • Puffing Billy owns substantial land around Emerald Station, including the playground land which is licensed to Council, and holds properties around Kings Avenue • Explore the implications of Puffing Billy growth for Emerald, including operational activity, employment, visitor movement and town-centre activity • Possible future changes to be explored include precinct planning, land ownership and governance changes, enhanced green space, a train-viewing area, additional engine servicing, maintenance and workshop activity, staff based in Emerald, new facilities and commercial-facing uses • The precinct is complex: Emerald Station is heritage listed in the Cardinia Planning Scheme; rail and trail projects involve road authorities, level crossings and the national rail-safety regulator; and the railway sits directly beside the RSL, Anzac Walk, playground, school and commercial centre • Coordinate future railway investment with the village green, community facilities, shops, trails and pedestrian movement • Build stronger collaboration between Puffing Billy and the Emerald community and increase local benefits from railway activity	*"Puffing Billy used to stop in Emerald. It was such a good thing for the community"* *"There are a lot of other retailers and they resent the fact that Puffing Billy does not stop at Emerald anymore"* *"We really want to build up the sense that Puffing Billy is a real part of the community"* *"There will be more activity using Emerald for trains"* *"That opens the possibility of the whole station complex becoming a tourist feature and attraction"* *"There are possibilities for people to get off, walk to the next station, ride an e-bike or whatever it is"*	Emerald Station, heritage station building, railway land, Kings Avenue properties, engine-servicing and workshop areas, Puffing Billy Place Reserve, playground, RSL, Anzac Walk, primary school, shops, level crossings and trail connections	Preserve + Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
3.2	Emerald Lake and Lakeside Station	• Lakeside Station and the Visitor Centre sit within Emerald Lake Park, creating a close relationship between railway operations and the wider park • Lakeside is Puffing Billy's main passenger destination in Emerald and a major visitor arrival point • Emerald Lake is also highly valued by locals for walking, recreation, family outings, events and its landscape setting • The Visitor Centre does not connect well with the surrounding park and stronger integration is wanted • People miss former activities including paddle boats, the model railway and water play • The former kiosk has become a successful art space • Future work being explored includes changes to the Visitor Centre's internal layout, more food options and stronger connections into the park • Recognise Lakeside as both a major visitor destination and a local recreation place in plans and investment	*"The third touch point is Lakeside Station at Emerald Lake"* *"What a great place the Emerald Lake precinct was in its heyday. It has steadily declined, but it's still a great opportunity"* *"There are going to be substantial changes made in the way we organise the internal space and provide more options in terms of food"*	Emerald Lake Park, Lakeside Station, Lakeside Visitor Centre, former kiosk, former paddle boats, former model railway, water-play areas and walking paths	Preserve + Keep + Evolve
3.3	Nobelius Siding and heritage precinct	• Nobelius Siding connects Puffing Billy with Nobelius Heritage Park, Emerald Museum and the Packing Shed • The precinct carries Emerald's nursery, horticultural and railway history • The Nobelius Packing Shed is on the Victorian Heritage Register • Protect and restore the Packing Shed and strengthen its relationship with the museum, heritage park and siding • More activity and events around the siding and heritage precinct are being explored • Connect the precinct more clearly with the Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail and wider railway corridor	*"The second touch point is Nobelius Siding, next to Nobelius Heritage Park"* *"The Emerald Museum is a very well-run, highly credentialed museum... associated with the old Nobelius Packing Shed"* *"There is planned substantial work to restore and develop it"* *"We have the Nobelius siding... which Puffing Billy is going to work on as well. There are options there"*	Nobelius Siding, Nobelius Packing Shed, Nobelius Heritage Park, Emerald Museum, former nursery landscape and Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail	Preserve + Evolve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
3.4	Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail and missing link	• The Eastern Dandenong Ranges Trail is highly valued but its missing town-centre section is difficult to navigate • Complete a safe and legible connection through Emerald • Use the trail to connect railway heritage, town history, arts, environment and key destinations • Route planning must respond to level crossings, road crossings, the playground and operating railway	*"This is the missing link in the trail. It's too hard for people to navigate"* *"Many places have a rail trail, but we have a rail trail with a railway"*	Missing town-centre link, Menzies Creek-Emerald section, route behind Emerald Primary School and Gemco, playground precinct, Lost Woods Market area, Pepi's Land-Nobelius route and Wellington Road crossing	Keep + Evolve
3.5	Historic commercial places and lost town fabric	• Protect the remaining older buildings and places that carry Emerald's commercial and village history • Loss of the former guesthouse, pub and other older fabric affects how the town is experienced • New development should respond to the scale and character of the remaining historic townscape rather than generic suburban development	*"Where the IGA and service station are, there was once a wonderful historic guesthouse"* *"What a great thing that would have been to see as you came in"*	Former guesthouse site, former Emerald pub, older commercial buildings, railway-era town fabric and Main Road/Kilvington Drive streetscape	Preserve + Evolve + Lose (develop-ment that erodes town character)
4. Capable and Creative					
4.1	Lost Woods Market and market grounds	• Lost Woods Market is a successful visitor event and gathering place • The market is viewed by some as being primarily for visitors rather than locals • Its popularity creates parking pressure and can make it difficult for locals to access shops on market days • Improve access and encourage market visitors to spend time in the wider town centre • The railway-side market area is also a possible route for the missing trail connection	*"The Lost Woods market has been almost too successful"* *"I think about 90 per cent of those people are from out of town"* *"It upsets a lot of locals because you cannot go to the butcher or the newsagent"* *"The town is packed with people from out of town"*	Lost Woods Market, railway-side grounds, surrounding streets and parking, butcher and newsagent access, former Rotary market area and possible trail alignment	Keep + Evolve
4.2	Arts, theatre and creative spaces	• Emerald has a strong arts culture spanning theatre, visual art, poetry, festivals and local making • Make public art and creative activity more visible through the town • Strengthen links between arts activity, the railway, trail and Emerald Lake • The former Lakeside kiosk shows how underused buildings can become active creative spaces	*"It's a pop-up art space but it's more than that now. It's become a focal point"* *"There is a piece of art with geese and the water tower out the front of the IGA carpark... it's such a great insider perspective of cool elements of Emerald"*	Gemco Players, Emerald Lake art space, Arts Space at Hills Hub, Emerald Art Society spaces, PAVED festival sites, murals and public art	Keep + Evolve

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4.3	Civic organisations and volunteer networks	• Emerald has a strong volunteer network and a core group of people who regularly get local projects moving • Community organisations bring practical knowledge, professional skills, local memory and experience in advocacy and project delivery • Volunteer organisations support arts, heritage, recreation, education, emergency response and community care • Ageing committees and changing patterns of volunteering put pressure on some long-standing groups	*"There are extraordinary networks of people"*	Community associations, service clubs, U3A, RSL, Emerald Museum, Gemco Players, schools, environmental groups and community project sites	Keep + Evolve
4.4	Vacant shops and inactive commercial properties	• Activate vacant and boarded-up shopfronts • Improve tired commercial buildings and poorly maintained properties • Inactive properties and weak investment reduce activity and presentation in the town centre	*"There are some pretty run-down businesses in the centre of town"* *"We have to make our frontages look better. We have to activate some of the space"*	Vacant and boarded-up shopfronts, tired commercial buildings and inactive properties along Main Road and Kilvington Drive	Evolve + Lose (vacant and poorly
4.5	Cafes, restaurants and hospitality	• Cafes and food businesses are important places for social contact • People value local businesses where they know traders and other customers • Strengthen distinctive local hospitality and give visitors more reasons to stay in Emerald	*"Coffee in town and always having a friendly chat with locals"*	Over the Road Cafe, Elevation, Flying Fox, Tinkars, pizza, fish and chips, takeaway businesses and other hospitality venues	Keep + Evolve
5. Beautifully Green					
5.1	Mature canopy, habitat and Emerald Star-bush	• Mature tree canopy is central to Emerald's identity • When asked to suggest iconic images for Emerald, the endangered Emerald Star-bush, Puffing Billy Park and eucalyptus were mentioned • The railway corridor, parks, waterways and forest edges form an important habitat network • Protect rare and endangered plant habitat while managing bushfire risk • Protect mature canopy, significant trees and connected habitat through the town centre and surrounding landscape	*Asked to suggest an iconic image for Emerald: "the Puffing Billy park, eucalyptus and the star bush"* *"Puffing Billy has spent a lot of time looking at biodiversity along the corridor and it is absolutely outstanding"*	Mature town canopy, significant trees, Emerald Star-bush habitat, railway corridor vegetation, parks, waterways, forest edges, eucalyptus and fern vegetation	Preserve

Ref	Touchpoint	What we heard	*Quote*	Physical context	Direction
5.2	Pepi's Land	• Pepi's Land is valued for open space, dog walking, views and local memory • Retain public access and landscape character as its future is considered • The land forms part of the trail network and has wetland restoration potential	*"Visiting the cafes with friends and walking the streets with my dog, taking in the village vibe, views and Pepi's Land vista and hearing Puffing Billy toot"* *"It is basically a giant dog-walking park now, but it is a great piece of public space"*	Pepi's Land, Sunnyside, former potato farm, wetland restoration area, dog-walking areas and trail route	Preserve + Evolve
5.3	Former Emerald Country Club and golf course	• Protect the environmental values of the former golf course • The site is a large unresolved green asset with strong community interest in its future • Find a meaningful community use that works with its biodiversity and landscape values	*"Leap of faith that Council can build a meaningful future for the golf course"*	Former Emerald Country Club, former golf course, vegetation, habitat areas and surrounding residential interface	Preserve + Evolve
5.4	Parks, waterways and green corridors	• Parks, waterways, railway vegetation and forest edges bring nature into and through Emerald • Protect connected habitat and green corridors • Retain places for walking, wildlife, play and quiet • Keep birds, trees and vegetation present between the town's main destinations	*Sticker idea: "Emerald, gem of the hills", framed with tall gums and fern fronds* *"You can hear birds singing on your walk between the Hub [and] the Kilvington Drive shops"*	Emerald Lake, Pepi's Land, Nobelius, railway corridor, creeks, forest edges and green links through the centre	Preserve + Keep
5.5	Walking and cycling support facilities	• Make walking and cycling routes easier to use with continuous paths and clear wayfinding • Provide bike parking, drinking water and reliable toilets • Connect town-centre routes with Pepi's Land, Emerald Lake and the wider trail network	*"A more walkable, rideable town centre with consistent tree planting and presentation"* *"Walking around Pepis and the Lake paths, getting coffee from Penny & a Pickle"* *"No bike rings for me to tie up my bike"*	Bike parking, drinking water, toilets, trail links, safe paths, crossings and active-travel wayfinding	Evolve



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