

Submitter and Key Points	Officer Response
<p>1. [REDACTED]</p> <p>I am very disappointed no money is earmarked for removal of the Diamond Creek level crossing. Our town comes to a standstill with the ever increasing number of often near empty trains bringing traffic to a halt. So much money goes into sports and playgrounds yet this infrastructure issue is repeatedly ignored by all.</p>	<p>While recognising that there would be significant positive outcomes to level crossing removal across the Shire, particularly within Diamond Creek, the decision to remove the crossing and the project itself fall outside the control of Council. This responsibility is with the State Government's Level Crossing Removal Authority (LXRA). Whilst the LXRA have identified 110 crossings to be removed across Melbourne, unfortunately Diamond Creek does not feature as a priority.</p> <p>Council will continue explore opportunities to improve traffic flow around the Shire and advocate for these where they fall outside of Council's authority.</p> <p>In the draft 2025/2026 budget, Council is proposing to spend \$15.67 million across capital works on community infrastructure, including \$4.81 million on roads, traffic management, drainage, footpaths and trails to maintain and improve our community's ability to travel around the Shire, and will continue to advocate for greater public transport availability and access across our suburbs.</p>
<p>2. [REDACTED]</p> <p>Looks to be on track</p>	<p>Submission noted.</p>
<p>3. [REDACTED]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is estimated that you will have a budget surplus of \$4.9 million . Why then are you planning to borrow another \$2.1 million which will have an interest cost ?? • The new medical hospital that was to be built. I understand that this was approved yet there has been no physical activity. When might we expect this facility to be finished? • The second was the BMX facility that should have been completed by now just off allendale rd . When will this project start and be completed? • And finally what is the hold up with the toilet facilities in Alister park being opened? 	<p>The surplus quoted in the Income Statement is prepared in compliance with Australian Accounting Standards. The accounting surplus includes capital grants and capital contributions, while the corresponding expenditure is recognised in the Statement of Capital Works. The budgeted borrowings have been proposed to fund capital works projects.</p> <p>The Eltham Area Community Hospital is a State Government project on State Government owned land. Council was not involved in the decision made to situate the hospital at this location. Any questions or concern about the hospital should be directed to the Victorian Health Building Authority at communityhospitals@health.vic.gov.au.</p> <p>At the time of writing this report, Diamond Creek BMX project has to be re-located. Following extensive investigations into both Cultural Heritage Management and flood assessments, the original site was found to be unfeasible and a new site has had to be found. Planning and development investigations are underway on determining the suitability a new site within close proximity to the original site. Once a suitable site is confirmed, Council will then be briefed on the new location and new project timelines before being asked to approve a public consultation process. Until such time that the new location for the project is approved, new start and completion timeframes cannot be provided. It is expected that new project timelines will be able to be provided as part of the public consultation process.</p> <p>The opening of the Alistair Knox Park Changing Places and amenities facility has been delayed largely due to contaminated soils on site and significant delays encountered for service connections. The new facility is scheduled to be operational at the beginning of May.</p>
<p>4. [REDACTED]</p> <p>Good morning, I'd like to see Dingley Dell Road , North Warrandyte sealed as part of the unsealed roads policy. It sits at number three on the list of roads identified as needing attention. The condition of the road has continued to deteriorate, the culvert drains are no longer fit for purpose and the run off in heavy rain makes the road almost impossible to drive on and causes damage to properties. The grading schedule is not frequent enough to maintain the road and the response times after a rain event often run into weeks. Furthermore those unfamiliar to the road (tradies and delivery drivers) often end up in the drains and need to be towed out. Council cars have also gotten stuck in the drains and have required a tow. In the event of a speedy evacuation for a fire event, it is highly likely a car will come off the road which will result in a death or serious injury. Several votes have been held for a special charge scheme, but fail owing to the large cost on the residents. It is no longer a road just used by residents it has become a thoroughfare and as such needs an urgent upgrade.</p>	<p>All unsealed roads in the Shire have been assessed against Council's Unsealed Roads Improvement Prioritisation Policy (June 2024). The Unsealed Roads Priority List (December 2024) shows the results of the assessment and is available on Council's website.</p> <p>Dingley Dell Road received a score of 26 and is the third project on the list. The road received a relatively high score against many criteria, including criteria associated with traffic volume, through traffic use, road standard and community safety.</p> <p>Youngs Road is the first project on the list and has been budgeted for road sealing in 2024/2025. Cassells Road, which is the second project on the list, has been included in the draft budget for road sealing in 2025/2026. Dingley Dell Road may be considered for funding in 2026/2027 or thereafter, dependent on the availability of funding and competing funding demands.</p>

<p>5. [REDACTED]</p> <p>I recommend consulting with the Victorian Government to reallocate the \$2 million intended for the “Edendale / Eltham Dog Park Trail Connection ” to a more critical infrastructure project: a safe formal pedestrian rail crossing between Coolabah Reserve and the Eltham North Adventure Playground.</p>	<p>Council officers are in current dialogue with the Department of Transport and Planning to discuss the feasibility of the proposed pedestrian railway crossing at Coolabah Reserve, including funding opportunities to deliver on this project.</p>
<p>6. [REDACTED]</p> <p>May I ask why is it necessary to increase the council rates notice every year given that Nillumbik residents are paying the second highest rates charge in Victoria. What is the council doing to gain additional revenue and halt additional spending so that the Nillumbik residents in future are paying council rates closer to the mid table in terms of average council rates.</p>	<p>Council levies rates and charges under the Local Government Act 1989 in order to fund, deliver, and maintain essential community infrastructure and services. The increase to rates is in compliance with the rate-capping framework established by the Victorian State Government and is reflective of the continued provision of services, which have been maintained at existing levels, and capital works program delivery. Council continues to pursue grant opportunities and review available revenue streams.</p>
<p>7. [REDACTED]</p> <p><u>Assumption of Zero Growth</u></p> <p>The budget is based on a primary assumption of zero growth in NSC service capacity, and the 3.00% increase in rates is caused by cost increases (inflation) alone. There appears to be no or minimal allowance for any housing/rateable property growth which would affect forecast revenues and expenditure through increased demand for services. This shortcoming gives an inaccurate and potentially misleading view of the budget projections and should be addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does NSC plan to provide services and infrastructure to meet either current growth in dwellings, or the State government housing target of 6,500 new dwellings by 2051, and why is this not reflected in the budget and discussed in the assumptions? • Why aren't risks to Council's future financial health caused by growth uncertainties explored in the budget? <p><u>Level of Detail on Expenditure</u></p> <p>There is insufficient detail in the Section 2, Service Area expenditure/revenue/net cost tables to ascertain where the funds are to be directed, especially for large expenditure items.</p> <p>In particular, we note the budget introduction refers to 'budget allocations to multiple climate and biodiversity initiatives'. We also note an increase in expenditure of some \$1.2 million or 16.8% in Parks and Reserves Maintenance. However, this large service area includes parks, sportsgrounds, conservation reserves, street trees and roadsides, and it is impossible to see where additional funding is planned. Similarly, there is no detail under the Service Area for Environment and Conservation, with a \$0.2 million or 16.5% funding increase.</p> <p>We request further detailed information be made openly available by NSC.</p> <p><u>Expenditure for Environment, Biodiversity and the Green Wedge</u></p> <p>While there appears to be an increase in expenditure for Parks and Reserves Maintenance and Environment and Conversation, there is no specific mention of the critical actions or expenditure relating to the Green Wedge Management Plan 2019, the Biodiversity Strategy 2024 or the Urban Tree Canopy Strategy 2024-2040. Specific mention and budget allocations to these strategies are necessary.</p> <p><u>Service Performance Outcome Indicators</u></p> <p>There are no service performance outcome measures relating to environment, biodiversity and climate action, despite monitoring and outcome performance being integral to commitments in these various strategies. Appropriate service performance outcome indicators are requested for these items.</p> <p><u>Capital Replacements and Renewals</u></p> <p>Allocation of funds to capital replacements and renewals is below desired levels of funding over the forecast 10-year period. Council could potentially fund some of this shortfall through its operating surpluses and increasing cash reserves to maintain infrastructure and facilities to their required service levels.</p> <p>We ask: Does our community want Council to have cash in the bank or roads with fewer potholes and facilities that are safe? We certainly do.</p>	<p>Currently, the budget is modelled on an increase of 130 properties per year, which is below the Government led housing targets, however it is reflective of historical and anticipated growth under non-accelerated circumstances.</p> <p>For this budget cycle a conservative approach has been taken, waiting for further understanding on the implications of these targets, as at a very high level, the additional (new) rates income will offset (or at least partly offset) any additional expenditure/ investment into infrastructure.</p> <p>The Budget document is a statutory document prepared in line with the Local Government Model Budget and is prepared in accordance with legislative and regulatory requirements and better practice. Risks and uncertainties are explored within the modelling processes undertaken annually.</p> <p>Service performance indicators are developed and set by Local Government Victoria. There are no indicators currently directly linked to environment, biodiversity or climate action outcomes planned for the 2025/2026 reporting period. All full listing of indicators can be found on the “Know Your Council” website, www.vic.gov.au/know-your-council</p> <p>The surplus quoted in the Income Statement is prepared in compliance with Australian Accounting Standards. The accounting surplus includes capital grants and capital contributions, while the corresponding expenditure is recognised in the Statement of Capital Works rather than in the Income Statement.</p> <p>Each year Council considers the capital works program and prioritisation of projects within the constrained financial environment. Council has made strategic and informed decisions surrounding the allocation of capital works programming for the next financial year, which includes considerations of the underlying renewal requirements of local community infrastructure.</p>

8. [REDACTED]

I have three major questions regarding the draft 2025-2026 budget which appears to have slashed funding to support for our large and ageing community and for children and families.

In summary, my three questions are as follows:

- Q 1. What is the justification for the huge reduction (93%) in Age and family services? (p45)
- Q 2. How will State and Federal Government grants (p41) for these services be spent?
- Q 3. What became of Council's Strategic Objective for Community and Connection in 2024-2025?

Q 1. Re 4.1.10 p 45 -Other expenses "Expenses are forecast to decrease by 14.53% (\$1.06 million) mainly as a result of reductions in aged and family services related expenditure "

What is the justification for this decrease in Aged and family services?

2024-2025 \$444,000

2025-2026 \$ 33,000

Q 2. 4.14 Grants p41

Commonwealth Government

Operating grants

Aged Care

2024-2025 \$133,000

20245-2026 \$137,000

Family and Children

2024-2025 \$237,000

2025-2026 \$264,000

Non-recurrent

2024-2025 \$307,000

State Government

2024-2025. \$473,000

2025-2026 \$300,000

Non recurrent

2024-2025 \$390,000

Total Grants Received in 2024-2025 for Aged and family services.

Aged \$133,000 plus Family and Children \$1,100,000 = \$1,233,000

Council budget 2024-2025 was \$444,000.

What happened to the remaining \$777,000 in State and Commonwealth Grants?

2025-2026 Grants

Aged \$137,000 plus Family and Children \$264,000 (State) plus \$300,000 (Comm)= \$701,000

BUT Council draft Budget 2025-2026 has combined Aged and family services \$33,000

What is happening to the remaining \$688,000 grant money allocated for this purpose?

ALSO (See **Other Services**) funded by large recurrent grants e.g. Maternal and Child Health \$831,000 (2024-2025); 205-2026 \$661,000 (2025-2026) are not accounted for. How will these funds be spent?

Q 3. What was the outcome of Council's 2024-2025 budget objective to support Nillumbik's ageing community? If achieved, how was the money spent? **Stated Strategic objective: Community and Connection Community health and wellbeing, support for Nillumbik's ageing community (\$1.86 million)**" .

Aged and Family Services expenditure within Council's budget is spread across wages, contracts and materials, and other expenditure. The 2025/2026 budget document compares the 2024/2025 forecast versus the 2025/2026 budget allocation. The decrease in the Other Expenditure component of the Aged and Family Services budget, which is the figure referred to, is due to the year-end forecast including unspent grants from prior year that were brought forward into 2024/2025 financial year.

Nillumbik promotes and supports our ageing community with a focus on the overall health, wellbeing and independence of individuals, families and community groups through services, programs, lifelong learning opportunities, infrastructure and initiatives.

<https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Council/News-and-publications/Latest-news/Budget-focuses-on-liveability-in-Green-Wedge-Shire> “

The above budget-related questions relate to large sums of money which may affect the lives of many community members who are entitled to answers. More clarity is needed about how funding is allocated and more budget details to improve ratepayers’ understanding and participation.

9. [REDACTED]

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft budget 2025-26.

Major initiatives: I am delighted to see the inclusion of the six major initiatives within the Sustainable and Resilient Theme. All of these are important pieces of work which will contribute to our commitment to addressing climate change and protect and enhance biodiversity, as outlined in the Climate Action Plan and the Biodiversity Strategy.

Developing the specific outcomes and indicators to demonstrate real progress towards our climate change and biodiversity goals will be a critical next step to ensure these initiatives bring about meaningful changes.

Staffing I note that the FTE across all Units is predicted to be stable across the next ten years, if this remains the case it is difficult to see how the 22 new actions described in the Biodiversity Strategy Year 1 2024-25 implementation plan, can be achieved. Whilst some redirection may be possible, in general, new initiatives will require new resources, particularly in light of the fact that capacity to continue current and ongoing actions already seems stretched.

Many of the new actions in the current (2024-25) biodiversity strategy implementation plan have not yet commenced or achieved their intended outcomes, so no doubt will roll over into the 2025-26, and subsequent budget years. Without increasing resources to undertake these actions it is likely that they will be little more than aspirational intentions. Understanding that there is no new money (other than some potential grants) I suggest that Council adopt a policy of reviewing all vacancies arising in all Units and allocate FTE to priorities arising from the Council plan and other key Strategies such as the Climate Action plan and the Biodiversity Strategy ; to include allocation to a different Unit.

Whilst it may be challenging to predict where specific opportunities will arise at this point of budget development, this may be one of the few ways that resources can be made available to resource the stated intentions. This approach, although longer term, would also avoid the need to offer expensive redundancies and avoid the anxiety, disruption and waste that accompanies restructure.

External Grants I would also like to suggest Council exercise extreme caution when accepting external funding that requires a “matched” Council spend. Whilst such opportunities may seem attractive, and be difficult to refuse, they are often infrastructure related and therefore expensive, escalate as they are implemented and do not necessarily reflect community wide priorities. A further, and very significant downside is that they take scarce resources from other priority spends.

New Builds In respect of construction, Council should not commit to any new building construction in this current term. Construction costs for new builds are extremely high and usually “blow out”, creating the same impact as stated above, ie resources have to be diverted from other priorities to complete a build, as once it is started it is a complete waste of the money if it cannot be finished. I would rather see Council maintain and possibly undertake small expansions or upgrades to the buildings it already has.

Service Performance Outcome Indicators Recognising that “Council is required by legislation to identify major initiatives and service performance outcome indicators in the Budget and report against them in the Annual Report to support transparency and accountability.” Pg 12, it is difficult to understand the rationale for the selection of service performance outcome indicators that have been chosen. For none of the four themes areas do they provide a measure of the full range of identified responsibilities in that theme, and some of the choices are quite perplexing For example: • Community and Connection: despite a wide range of services being listed here, service performance data is only required for MCH and library usage • Place and space: again, with the wide range of service areas only three areas have identified service performance outcome indicators and in the case of leisure facilities and services it only relates to use of aquatic facilities, not even

Council has dedicated Environment team who support the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy. Council continues to explore grant opportunities in order to facilitate temporary additional EFTs, although this is not something we can anticipate or budget for. Council does review all vacancies arising to ensure resources are allocated appropriately.

Council reviews each grant opportunity on the basis of service and/or infrastructure needs and priorities. All opportunities, both fully funded and those requiring co-contributions are assessed against parameters such as existing asset condition, required service levels, user demand, industry standards, available funding and the existing capital works program or service provision. Co-contribution grants are considered where the opportunity provides significant value to both Council and the community and is financially sustainable.

Likewise, new builds are only ever considered when either an existing facility can no longer provide the required level of service for which it was intended or there is no facility providing a service in that area which the community require. Prior to any new build being considered, an existing facility would first be fully assessed to determine whether the desired outcome in terms of service levels and safety can be achieved through an expansion or upgrade of that facility.

Service performance indicators are developed and set by Local Government Victoria as part of the Local Government Performance Reporting Framework (LGPRF). The indicators in the Budget are those audited by the Victorian Auditor-General’s Office, and are not the full suite of performance indicators, as there are others from the LGPRF and the Council Plan that are reported in the annual report each year. There are currently no indicators directly linked to environment, biodiversity or climate action outcomes planned for the 2025/2026 reporting period. All full listing of indicators can be found on the “Know Your Council” website, [Know Your Council | vic.gov.au](https://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au).

<p>the full range of the leisure services, this seems strange. • Sustainable and resilient – the only data required relates to waste collection, important yes, but not comprehensive. • Responsible and accountable – reporting on the three indicators chosen for this theme do not provide the community with a coherent sense of a responsible and accountable Council . At the very minimum an indicator relating to complaints management and outcomes should be included. Having such a limited range of service performance outcome indicators, with no clear rationale for the selections, does not support transparency and accountability, rather it does the opposite. This approach causes the reader to question why those particular services and indicators have been selected, and wonder how accountability is to be demonstrated for the others. Do the choices only reflect easily reported or required targets? Understanding too that performance indicators for the major initiatives are yet to be determined, so this comment does not apply to the indicators for these.</p>	
<p>10. ██████████ Nillumbik Draft Budget 2025–26 Comments ██████████ Ecologist and Conservation Teacher</p> <p>It's very difficult to understand how much funding biodiversity and reserve management actually receive. Presumably, conservation matters are deliberately lumped into broader categories.</p> <p>For example, under Nillumbik rates spending, "conservation management" is included within the category Environment, Parks & Open Space. But open space is hardly conservation — in fact, it's often the direct opposite. Parks can also include playgrounds and dog parks, which are not conservation-focused either.</p> <p>So, from the \$14.89 out of every \$100 of rates attributed to this category, how much actually gets spent on genuine conservation, as opposed to parks and open space? I'd like to know.</p> <p>Under services, conservation seems to also be lumped into Parks and Reserves Maintenance. Straight away, the word "maintenance" doesn't imply conservation. It suggests cutting back branches from walking paths and managing weeds that the public complains about — which, frankly, is about all Nillumbik Council seems to do in some reserves. Again, why is a parks budget lumped together with reserves? They are very different matters!</p> <p>And would you believe it — sporting grounds are also considered part of Parks and Reserves Maintenance. Why? Sport is already under the leisure services category and receives a huge amount of funding!</p> <p>The way I read the draft budget from a conservation standpoint is: you could spend money upgrading already well-maintained sports grounds or maintaining public paths, and it would give the appearance of supporting conservation — simply because the money is coming out of the "reserves management" allocation. To me, this is highly unprofessional and not good enough.</p> <p>The environment is already suffering. As a sports fan and an ex-tennis coach, I can tell you there are already excellent tennis clubs and facilities throughout the shire. It was one of the first things that struck me when I arrived here 10 years ago. Spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on two Panton Hill tennis courts, and taking that money from a reserves budget, absolutely stinks in my opinion.</p> <p>However, I could be mistaken, and funding for reserve management may instead fall under Theme 2.3 – Environment and Conservation. From my reading, however, it appears that a significant portion of this funding is likely to be allocated to education programs, Edendale operations, and threatened species protection. These are all highly worthy initiatives.</p> <p>Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that biodiversity lives and persists within the Shire's reserves and across private land. These natural areas urgently need direct protection and active management if we are serious about safeguarding the Shire's biodiversity values for the future.</p> <p>In summary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spend more directly on biodiversity and conservation. Be upfront about what you're actually spending on conservation matters. Create a separate category called Reserve Management. Environment and conservation 	<p>The proposed budget allocation for conservation related expenditure for 2025/2026 is \$1.51 million.</p> <p>The Service definitions are reflective of the 2021-2025 Council Plan. This feedback will be considered as part of the development of the 2025-2029 Council Plan service definitions, and included in the next budget developed.</p>

11. ██████████ (Greensborough Hockey Club)

Greensborough Hockey Club

Budget Submission to Nillumbik Shire Council Draft Budget 25/26

Greensborough Hockey Club (Club) is grateful for the opportunity to provide a submission to Nillumbik Shire Council (Council) budget 2025-26.

The Club would like Council to consider including \$180,000 in the capital budget to enable the 25 year old sportsground lighting (Eastern pitch) to be replaced with compliant and more efficient LED lighting. This amount is based on a quote provided to Council in 2022 when we were advised the lighting upgrade had been included as a priority project in the 10 year capital works plan.

The club is currently having this quote updated and understands Council officers are also arranging for its preferred lighting upgrade supplier to provide a quote for this work. The club appreciates Council has finite resources and is required to balance needs across the municipality. This submission is to ensure that the importance of the sport ground lighting upgrade is clearly understood and the potential risk and safety concerns are noted.

The Club is based at Plenty Park and operates under a lease agreement. While this agreement provides the Club with exclusive use of the facilities it also requires the club to fund several aspects of the site infrastructure. The Club takes this responsibility seriously as is demonstrated by the Club's contribution of \$150,000 towards the pavilion upgrade in 2020, and is currently servicing loans totalling \$480,000 which have been taken out to meet the ongoing renewal costs of the two hockey pitches.

In 2023, the metal halide globes on the lighting poles on the western pitch were replaced, costing the club \$15,000, and increasing the lighting levels to meet standards, it is anticipated these lights with the new globes will provide sufficient lighting for the next 10 years.

However, the lighting on the Eastern pitch is now critical. A lighting audit has been completed by Council, which shows the average horizontal maintained illuminance (lux level) is 234.9 lux. This is well below the Australian Standard 2560.2.7.5 (2021) which states 350 lux for local games and training while 500 lux is recommended for high level competition. The club understands that based on the age of the lighting infrastructure, simply replacing the globes on the Eastern pitch will not provide the required lighting levels so full lighting upgrade is needed. The audit also notes that the existing switch access is unsafe for users as it is not external to the distribution board which should typically only be accessed by qualified electricians.

While the club has proactively met its infrastructure obligations, through loans where required, the lighting infrastructure including poles, fittings, wiring and fuse boxes are Council assets and therefore Council's responsibility to maintain and replace, this is also detailed in the lease agreement.

It should also be noted that the longer it takes to replace this lighting infrastructure, the more expensive the club's electricity costs are as the new lighting would be far more efficient and environmentally conscious LED lighting. For reference, the clubs annual electricity cost is \$25,000 which is predominantly the power required to run the pitch lighting. LED lighting uses approximately 75% less electricity and the globes last 5 - 10 times longer which will be a significant financial saving and overall reduction in power usage.

The sports ground lighting is required for both competition matches and training. The club currently has 25 teams, which is made up of 45% female and 55% male players with ages ranging from 7 to 70 years. This family club offers intergenerational playing opportunities from under 10 junior level, through senior levels and into masters with players over 65 still playing competitive matches on a weekly basis. The club plays an important role in genuinely ensuring people of all ages, genders and abilities can play and remain socially connected to the club through various life stages.

It is estimated that 900+ hours of our games and training is now undertaken annually under lights since Hockey Victoria introduced "twilight" competition to improve accessibility and participation rates for Juniors and Masters (35+) competition. Another 200 hours per year is used by School Sports Victoria as its state team training venue, Hockey Australia Masters as its Victorian training venue and Hockey Victoria to host the U16 Junior Country Championship. We also provide a training facility for local Cricket & Football clubs for their pre-season training and a social soccer competition is also played on Monday evenings.

The lights are below the current minimum standard, endorsed by Hockey Australia, which is a safety concern. The minimum standard for hockey is higher than the minimum requirements of sports such as AFL and soccer as the ball is smaller and harder which increases the injury risk.

As part of the Nillumbik Sports Ground Lighting Audit 2019, the lighting on the Greensborough Hockey (Eastern Pitch) was identified as a high priority for replacement due to the age of the lights and low LUX levels. Since then, Council has been exploring grant opportunities to help fund the replacement. Council officers will continue collaborating with the club on potential grant options. The 2025 Local Sports Infrastructure Fund will be proposed as a possible funding source for councillor consideration in late 2025.

If, it is not possible to allocate the required funding in the 2025-26 financial year, the club requests a meeting as soon as practicable with senior officers to discuss the funding requirements and to plan for how the lighting upgrade can be achieved as soon as possible to ensure the club can continue to operate and to mitigate the risks of non-compliant lighting.

12.

Comments on the Nillumbik Shire Council draft Budget, 2025-26

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Council's draft budget for 2025-26. As a long term resident of the Shire, I welcome the chance to examine the underlying finances of Council.

I bring over 40 years of experience in public policy, economic analysis, and management consulting, including 20 years' operating my own management consulting firm specializing in health and community services. I hold a Bachelor of Economics (Honours) and an MBA from Monash University and held senior executive positions in the Victorian health and community services departments, senior finance roles in Commonwealth and Victorian central finance agencies, and advisory roles in large global consulting firms.

Overall Budget Parameters and Macro Settings

Councillor's must be congratulated for the underlying fiscal responsibility demonstrated by the draft budget:

It is noteworthy that that the overall budget shows minimal shifts in many of the key parameters that drive Council's financial performance:

- Increases in projected 2025-26 operating expenditure are relatively small – a rise of around \$0.77m (0.7%) to \$113.040m, and
- Total revenue from rates and charges is projected to increase by \$3.04m (3.7%), broadly in line with the State Government's Fair Go Rate System mandated increase for council rates

It is important to note the projected comprehensive operating surplus will fall by over \$10.3m from \$15.207m to \$4.895m. However, a large proportion of this shift is attributable to a reduction in grants beyond the Council's control, namely grants – capital (-\$9.716m) and grants- operating (-\$2.217m).

Commitment to Biodiversity

As a co-convenor of the Friends of the Eltham Copper Butterfly and a founding member of Nillumbio, an advocacy group for biodiversity enhancement, I strongly support Councillor's demonstrated commitment to additional resourcing in the draft budget for biodiversity measures, namely:

- Continue to deliver Nillumbik Forest Health Monitoring Program
- Enhance promotion and support of 'Friends of' groups and opportunities for environmental volunteers
- Deliver the Nillumbik Gardens for Wildlife Program in partnership with community volunteers
- Reassess the vegetation condition of Council's bushland reserves.

Community members look forward to working with Council officers to explore how these additional investments translate to meaningful improvements for the well-being of nature 'on the ground'.

Scope for Improved Reporting and Rate Payer Accountability

While appreciative of Council's demonstrated commitment to strong financial stewardship and new measures to support biodiversity enhancement, I remain concerned about the lack of transparency surrounding budget expenditure at a detailed thematic and service area level. Specific areas of concern include:

- Within each of the four budget themes (e.g; place and space and sustainable and resilient) the draft lists major initiatives for 2025-26. However, without disclosing individual budget allocations for these initiatives, ratepayers have no assurance that new allocation of funds aren't simply being funded from a reduction in existing core service budgets
 - Other levels of government identify the funding value of new policy initiatives.
Why doesn't this standard apply in our own local government area?
- There is minimal historical and projected performance of the Council in each service area. The table below compares the number of services within each thematic area with the number of reported

Budget allocations for Major Initiatives will be included in the Adopted Budget based on the feedback from this and other submissions.

Service performance indicators are developed and set by Local Government Victoria. There are currently no indicators directly linked to environment, biodiversity or climate action outcomes planned for the 2025/2026 reporting period. All full listing of indicators can be found on the "Know Your Council" website, [Know Your Council | vic.gov.au](https://www.knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au)

EFT detail by Directorate is included in the Budget document on pages 34 and 35.

indicators. Without reporting at the service area, rate payers can have little visibility of service quality and performance at an activity level:

BUDGET 'THEME'	NO. OF SERVICE AREAS WITHIN THE THEME	NO. OF INDICATORS / PERFORMANCE MEASURES REPORTED IN THE DRAFT BUDGET
Community and connection	8	3
Place and space	10	3
Sustainable and resilient	3	1
Responsible and accountable	13	3

- This level of accountability should also extend to:
 - reporting FTE staffing levels by service area, and
 - development of performance measures that are outcome focussed rather than purely input focused.

I would be pleased to further elaborate on these comments if that would assist.

13. [REDACTED]

COMMENTS RE NILLUMBIK SHIRE COUNCIL DRAFT BUDGET 2025-2026

Introduction:

The World Economic Forum's *Global Risks Report 2025* states the following:

Environmental risks - from longterm concern to urgent reality

The impacts of environmental risks have worsened in intensity and frequency since the Global Risks Report was launched in 2006, as discussed in depth in Section 2.6: Looking back: 20 years of the Global Risks Report.

Moreover, the outlook for environmental risks over the next decade is alarming – while all 33 risks in the GRPS are expected to worsen in severity (Figure E) from the two-year to the 10-year time horizon, environmental risks present the most significant deterioration. Extreme weather events are anticipated to become even more of a concern than they already are, with this risk being top ranked in the 10-year risk list for the second year running. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse ranks #2 over the 10-year horizon, with a significant deterioration compared to its two-year ranking.¹

It is also important to note that of the ten top global risks ranked by severity for a ten year period, the top four are all associated with *environmental factors*.

Nillumbik Shire Council's emphasis on ecosystems and climate change in the Introduction to the Draft Budget 2025-2026² is to be commended. It gives some assurance that Council holds awareness of the issues and associated need to prioritise relevant action.

Having said that, Council's statements could be strengthened to reflect the severity of risk and urgency of need to act.

It is also important to note that climate change is not the only significant threat to ecosystems, and Council's statement could be amended to reflect this fact. Biodiversity in Nillumbik faces significant threats – and is degraded daily – by invasion of introduced species (both animal and plant), habitat loss and fragmentation, increases in hard surfaces, pollution, and other impacts of urbanisation.

Major Initiatives and Service Performance Outcome Indicators:

Council should be commended for the inclusion of the 6 initiatives described in the Sustainable and Resilient theme.

Council has dedicated Environment team who support the implementation of the Biodiversity Strategy. Council continues to explore grant opportunities in order to facilitate temporary additional EFT although this is not something we can anticipate or budget for. Council does review all vacancies arising to ensure resources are allocated appropriately.

Council reviews each grant opportunity on the basis of service and infrastructure needs and priorities. All opportunities, both fully funded and those requiring co-contributions are assessed against parameters such as existing asset condition, required service levels, user demand, industry standards, available funding and the existing capital works program or service provision. Co-contribution grants are considered where the opportunity provides significant value to both Council and the community and the contribution is financially sustainable.

Council is heavily invested in exploring circular economy opportunities to assist in Council achieving the target set out in our climate action plan. This particularly involves the exploration of sustainable design, reuse, recycling, repurposing, refreshing, maintaining, repair and minimising waste throughout our capital works construction and maintenance program. This is a key focus of all necessary construction and maintenance works is to explore these opportunities moving forward.

It will be important for strong indicators of success to be developed and evaluated appropriately for each of these initiatives. This is currently not reflected in the Budget. Council's own document states that, 'Council is required by legislation to identify major initiatives and service performance outcome indicators in the Budget and report against them in the Annual Report to support transparency and accountability.'

Such indicators are essential for best practice leading to best outcomes, for demonstrating transparency, and nurturing community trust.

Given full time staffing remains stable across the next ten years, how will Council achieve the projects needed to reverse the decline of biodiversity and mitigate against climate change? This needs careful consideration given there is already an overstretching of capacity to attend to current actions.

What will happen given many of the actions described in Year 1 of the Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plan have not commenced or been achieved? Will these be rolled into the coming year with additional allocation of resources to ensure success?

Other concerns:

When Council accepts grants from sources that require matched funds, it means those funds from Council cannot be spent elsewhere. There is significant opportunity cost that must be reconsidered. The funds are often for infrastructure that then needs ongoing maintenance, adding to future costs.

Council needs to err on the side of caution before receiving such funds, no matter how appealing the sum is. Also, in a time when we urgently need to reduce our consumptions of all resources, Council should take the lead in clever revitalisation of buildings/infrastructure and see it as an opportunity to educate the community of relevant issues at the same time.

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¹ https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2025.pdf

¹ "Council acknowledges the numerous threats facing all communities and ecosystems as a result of climate change and continues to commit to the implementation of the Climate Action Plan. This is reflected across the 2025-2026 financial year with budget allocations to multiple climate and biodiversity initiatives."