

Aerial view Buchan, Kate Hodge 2021

Executive Summary

Buchan, Gelantipy & Districts Community Renewal Plan

2025–2030

Buchan • Buchan South • Gillingal • Murrindal
Timbarra • Gelantipy • Wulgulmerang • Butchers Ridge
Bete Belong North • Suggan Buggan • Black Mountain • W Tree



Acknowledgments

The Buchan, Gelantipy & Districts Renewal Association (BG&DRA) acknowledges the Gunaikurnai people as the Traditional Custodians of the land that encompasses the area, and their enduring relationship with the country. The Traditional Custodians have cared and nurtured the area for tens of thousands of years. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the area and their Elders past and present. The community members have contributed significantly to the development of this plan, completing the community survey and attending meetings and workshops. For many, that involved travel and time commitments during an incredibly stressful period of time after the 2019/20 bushfires, through the Covid-19 pandemic and then the Boxing Day 2023 storm and flood event. The commitment of the community to the process, despite facing external delays and frustrations, is a testament to their passion for the future of their communities.

Preparation

Between early 2020 and late 2022 the BG&DRA undertook broad community engagement through community meetings and a survey, to identify the vision, values and priorities of the communities. Warm Corners Consulting synthesised a draft version of this plan, which underwent further community engagement through a survey and community feedback sessions between December 2022 and March 2023. Further community engagement was undertaken between May and November 2024 by Sierracon, to consider the impacts of the storm-flood event.

This plan responds to that feedback process and presents the collated, agreed position of the community. The Plan was updated by Sierracon in 2024.

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Summary

We have prepared our Renewal Plan as a dynamic document, informed by extensive community and stakeholder input. Our Plan reflects our community's priorities as we continue to recover from the devastating 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires and the subsequent 2023 storm-flood event. This Plan seeks to:



Guide our Renewal Association in its community-led recovery and advocacy roles



Provide a resource for our community organisations



Enable our external funding and service delivery partners to understand how to best work with us to meet our recovery needs



Support communication between community, government and agencies



Advocate for individuals, families and community groups



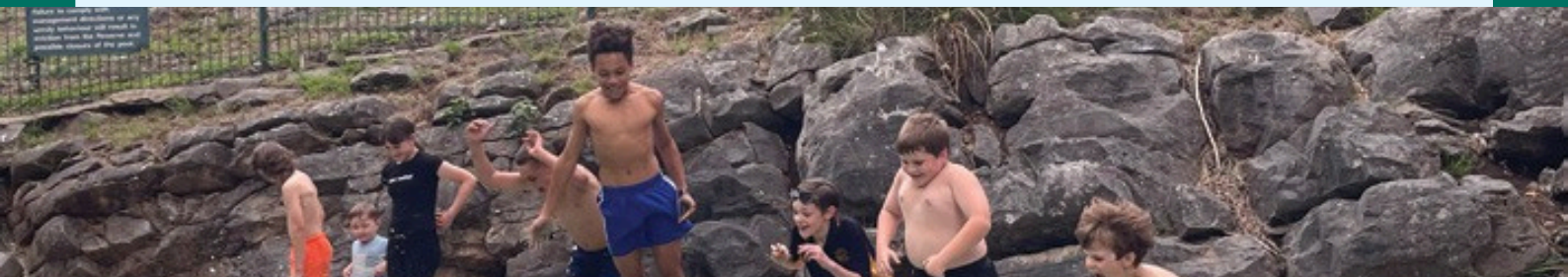
Contribute to making Buchan, Gelantipy and districts a better place to live and visit.

The first version of our Renewal Plan was prepared in response to the devastating 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires. Our community members contributed significantly to the development of the initial version, completing a community survey and attending various meetings and workshops. Their willingness to provide input during such a challenging time is a testament to their passion for their communities' future. In 2024, further community engagement was undertaken to consider the impact of the destructive Boxing Day 2023 storm-flood event, and the experiences, reflections and insights from the years following the Black Summer bushfires. This engagement confirmed the general direction and key content of the Renewal Plan, with an updated version prepared in late 2024 which focuses on revisions to project prioritisation.



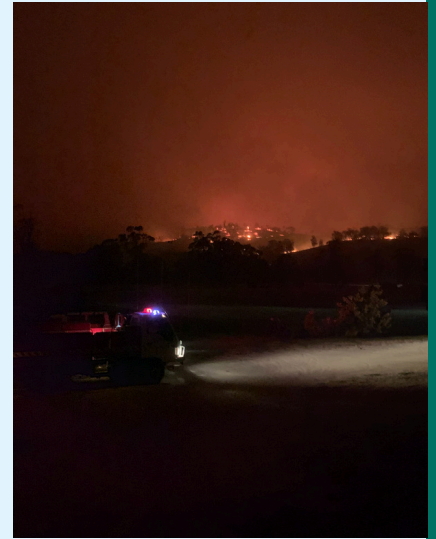
Our Districts And Our Recent Experience

Buchan, Gelantipy and districts has a total population of around 450. It is a relatively remote agricultural area that also supports a tourism industry. The central township of Buchan has grocery, postal, meals, accommodation and fuel services available. It is 81km (approx. 1hr 30min drive) between Buchan and the northernmost locality, Suggan Buggan. The top three industries of employment are 1) Agriculture, 2) Healthcare and Social Assistance, and 3) Accommodation and Food Services. Buchan is a one-hour drive from the regional centre Bairnsdale. The districts are home to the iconic Buchan Caves system, one of Australia's most extensive and best-decorated cave systems, which is a key tourist attraction. Around 120,000 people visit the Caves reserve annually, with around 65,000 taking a cave tour.



IMPACT OF THE BUSHFIRES, AND STORM-FLOOD EVENT

The Black Summer bushfires of 2019/20 had a severe impact on the districts, resulting in the tragic loss of two lives, 44 dwellings being destroyed or deemed uninhabitable, the loss of 96 sheds, and thousands of kilometres of fencing plus substantial other damage. There was considerable damage to community and tourism assets, with the closure of Buchan Caves Reserve, the Snowy River National Park, and key access roads. This triggered a major downturn in local business. This disaster was followed by a major storm-flood event on Boxing Day 2023, where sadly there were a further two fatalities. Considerable damage to both private and public roads, infrastructure, and the closure of the Caves again caused a major downturn in local business. The Buchan, Gelantipy and Districts Renewal Association (BG&DRA or "Renewal Association") was established in direct response to the bushfires and provided support following the storm-flood event. The BG&DRA is responsible for implementing this Plan on behalf of the districts.



Our Vision

Our districts will be known for our vibrant, welcoming, inclusive and cohesive communities, flourishing nature-based tourism and agricultural industries, creative opportunities and sustainably managed natural environment.

Our Renewal Plan is focused on delivering results towards achieving the following outcomes:



Healthy, resilient and connected communities



Thriving economy



Healthy and sustainable environments

Our Community Values

Community: We are caring, supportive and generous with one-another and strive to be resilient, have fun together, are open-minded and hopeful. We recognize the importance of education, our history and our cultural identity.

Liveability: Access to active, healthy and safe lifestyles, with valued and supported services that enable community wellbeing, diversity and connectivity.

Sustainability: A sustainable, healthy and diverse natural environment that can be enjoyed, and a built environment that is sensitive to our catchment's natural attributes, including our important Buchan Caves and forest natural assets.

Productivity: A progressive community that encourages business, including nature-based tourism and agriculture, to thrive and develop sustainably.



KEY FOCUS AREAS

Two key focus areas have been identified for the districts:

- **Diversifying the local economy, with reduced dependence on Caves-based tourism**

The full closure of the Caves for around three months after both the bushfires and storm-flood, and other longer specific cave and site closures following the bushfires, had a major impact on the local community and economy. This highlighted the need to reduce reliance on Caves tourism, while maximising opportunities from this iconic attraction.

- **Local economic development and housing availability**

There are limited local employment opportunities, which has been a challenge to maintaining the local population. A barrier to pursuing economic opportunities is the local housing shortage. To address this, it is proposed to undertake a residential land study and develop a Buchan Structure Plan. This will be combined with ongoing exploration of local economic opportunities.

Our Priority Projects

Several priority projects have been identified as part of the updated Renewal Plan. These are projects that have strong merit in making the area a better place to live and visit. Key projects identified for implementation are listed below, categorised according to the extent of BG&DRA's involvement in each project:

PROJECTS WE WILL MAKE HAPPEN:

1. Undertake Buchan Recreation Reserve improvements. This includes the major works of new netball and tennis courts and a new pavilion which are being managed by Council. Subprojects include the Pony Club pavilion and possible future subprojects are the oval realignment, new cricket pitch and nets, and showers with pay per use.
2. Undertake play space, and possibly pump track, site selection and design through community engagement, and develop a proposal for future funding and implementation.
3. Further progress the concept of a pathway to Bluff Reserve for funding and implementation. Other smaller local enhancements to the visitor experience and amenity: improved tourism signage, shelter at Bluff reserve, investigate potential for additional lookouts/viewing platforms.
4. Undertake additional upgrades to the Gelantipy Hall to enhance its role as Gelantipy's key community facility and venue for community gatherings. This could include repainting, other refurbishments, backup power, and fire protection (including sealing against embers and consideration of rooftop sprinklers), with public access to toilets to support local camping.
5. Investment in improvements at Wulgulmerang Recreation Reserve, including improved water supply (tank and pump), additional picnic table(s), anti-bird building enhancements and improvements to toilet facilities, and backup power. This is to enhance the Reserve's role as the key Wulgulmerang community facility, including for emergency management, and to support visitation and camping at this location.
6. Construction of a community shed at Suggan Buggan to house firefighting equipment and to support the operation of Suggan Buggan Community Fireguard operations (self-managed community fire protection activities based on CFA training).

7. Completion of specific upgrades to community facilities, such as a retaining wall at Buchan Hall, and other subprojects across the districts – identified through ongoing engagement.
8. Implement priorities from the Tourism Opportunity Report. Create an enhanced, consistent and interlinked online tourism presence for the districts, including an events calendar and additional visitor information. Develop a strategic and operational tourism plan for the next three years.
9. Identify and communicate private sector business opportunities, including coordinated pop-up businesses to support the peak season and to expand the tourism offering (without detracting from local businesses). This includes discussion with Parks Victoria on potential private sector opportunities at the Caves Reserve.
10. Progress the consolidation of the number of local community organisations
11. Backup power at the Buchan General Store and other backup power opportunities.
12. Review of BG&DRA structure, role, resourcing and operations.

PROJECTS TO PARTNER IN:

13. Pursue specific tourism opportunities such as showcasing megafauna, gravel bike riding, four-wheel driving and car and motorbike club visits
14. Support the Heritage Group to further develop the Butter Factory Master Plan, ensuring the preservation and communication of local history.
15. Support a jointly managed environment.

PROJECTS WE WILL ADVOCATE FOR:

16. Establish an RV dump point in Buchan.
17. Support for progressing the new Buchan bush nursing site, and independent living at the current bush nursing site (after site relocation.)
18. Engage with Council to undertake a residential land study and develop a Buchan Structure Plan.
19. Improved telecommunications.
20. Rebuild homes lost in the bushfires.
21. Investigate long-term opportunities for public housing.
22. Improved education opportunities and youth engagement outcomes.
23. Support farming and industry development.
24. Improved health services.

25. Continued government support for improved environmental, social and economic outcomes.

Our Completed Projects

Projects and activities that have already been successfully implemented under the Renewal Plan, are:

1. Some upgrades to halls and recreation facilities in the districts: Gelantipy and Buchan Halls, Buchan and Wulgulmerang recreation reserves.
2. Development of designs and specifications for major Buchan Reserve upgrades.
3. Wellbeing and support worker in place to reconnect and coordinate mental health and psychological recovery services.
4. Progress of play space site selection and concept development.
5. Reopening of Caves Reserve Swimming Pool.
6. Funding in place for initiatives by the Buchan Business and Tourism Association.
7. Successful establishment of RV camping at the Buchan Recreation Reserve.
8. Buchan Main Street drainage and road civil works.

Ideas Bank

We have also developed an ideas bank for other potential future projects based on community input and review of the districts' previous community plans.

