



## *Save the Dandenongs League Inc.*

*P.O. Box 146 Kallista, Victoria 3791*

### **SUBMISSION**

#### **Draft Yarra Ranges Heritage Strategy 2026–2036 and Draft Heritage Policy**

10 May 2026

Strategic Planning Team  
Yarra Ranges Council  
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Dear Strategic Planning Team,

### **1. Introduction**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Draft Yarra Ranges Heritage Strategy 2026–2036 and the Draft Heritage Policy. This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Save the Dandenongs League Inc. (SDL).

The Save the Dandenongs League was founded on 9 October 1950 when 200 residents gathered at the Kalorama Memorial Hall at the initiative of Miss May Moon MBE, Professor John Turner, and Cr Eric Leane of Ferntree Gully. For 75 years the League has maintained a continuous and active public advocacy for the protection and orderly development of the Dandenong Ranges, including their natural beauty, historical significance, native habitat, watersheds, and cultural landscapes. The League is a not-for-profit, non-sectarian, non-party organisation and an active member of the Yarra Ranges Heritage Network.

We commend Council for developing its first-ever Heritage Strategy and Policy, a milestone that community groups—including the League—have advocated for over more than two decades. We also commend the broad community consultation process, including the community heritage group workshop held at Montrose Township Centre in April 2026.

SDL acknowledges that the long-awaited Strategy follows the adoption of the Council Community Vision 2036, builds upon the Yarra Ranges Heritage Study, and draws on the consultant Thematic Environmental History (2000).

### **2. Overall Position**

**SDL strongly supports the adoption of both the Draft Heritage Strategy and the Draft Heritage Policy.** We endorse the Strategy as well structured, accessible, and visually engaging. We support its guiding principles, its overview of Council’s role in heritage, and its alignment

with Heritage Victoria's Municipal Heritage Strategies guidance and The First Peoples' Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing framework.

We commend the identification of key issues, challenges, and opportunities, and we endorse the Action Plan as a clear response to the pivotal role Council plays in understanding, protecting, and celebrating the heritage of the Yarra Ranges municipality.

We strongly endorse the inclusion of traditional and evolving perspectives on natural environmental heritage and the recognition that heritage encompasses First Peoples' cultural heritage, European and post-contact heritage, natural heritage, cultural landscapes, and intangible heritage including stories, traditions, and community memory.

While we commend the overall direction, this submission provides both general comments and specific recommendations to strengthen the documents as they are finalised for consideration by Council.

### 3. General Comments

#### 3.1 The Central Role of Council in Heritage Protection

Under the Planning and Environment Act 1987, Council is obliged to conserve and enhance buildings, areas, or other places of local heritage significance. To protect sites of local significance, Council must ensure heritage values are described and listed in the Municipal Planning Scheme.

The Yarra Ranges is a municipality where many Victorians and visitors—interstate and international—engage with heritage as a major focus of interest. With 443 Heritage Overlay listings and 26 places on the Victorian Heritage Register, Yarra Ranges Council plays a central role in providing leadership for how we recognise, protect, and celebrate buildings, natural features, and listed landscapes. The Strategy must give full expression to this leadership role.

#### 3.2 Statutory Planning and Heritage Landscape Protection

SDL has a significant concern that statutory planning decisions made by Council and higher planning authorities have, in some cases, caused adverse impacts to the protection of heritage-listed landscapes through the approval of development applications in the Green Wedge.

Lysterfield Valley is cited as a case in point. The League has long advocated for its protection alongside other community groups. Historically, the Lysterfield Valley has been subject to planning permit applications for various development, subdivision, and boundary realignment proposals. A number of these applications have been approved with conditions that, in the view of our group, risk threatening the integrity of the heritage landscape values of this significant area.

**SDL asserts that protection of heritage landscapes and their values must be given greater weight in the determination of planning permit applications.** The challenges posed by development applications in heritage-listed landscapes should be explicitly acknowledged in the Strategy.

We acknowledge that Council utilises a Significant Landscape Overlay derived from the Upper Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges Regional Strategy Plan. However, emerging technologies

and evolving cultural knowledge offer opportunities to better articulate, interpret, and advocate for the inherent values of listed heritage landscapes, and thereby to elevate the importance of their recognition and protection in decision-making.

***Recommendation:** The Strategy should explicitly address the relationship between statutory planning decision-making and heritage landscape protection. It should commit to reviewing the adequacy of existing planning controls, including the Significant Landscape Overlay, in light of contemporary heritage practice and emerging technologies for landscape assessment.*

## 4. Specific Comments on the Draft Strategy Action Plan

### 4.1 Goal 1: Review of Local Heritage Citations

SDL strongly supports a timely review of local heritage citations, particularly regarding the landscape context of buildings and places. The Yarra Ranges Heritage Study 2000 and its statements of significance for heritage places do not conform to contemporary standards and community expectations.

Landscape context, cultural associations, and environmental attributes are increasingly regarded as highly important in articulating the significance of heritage places and in supporting more evidence-based decision-making and resource allocation.

***Recommendation:** The Strategy should commit to a rolling program of heritage citation reviews across the municipality, with clear timelines and dedicated budget allocation. Priority should be given to citations where the landscape and environmental context of a place is currently inadequately described, and where development pressures are greatest. Community heritage groups should be actively involved in identifying priorities and providing local knowledge to inform professional assessments*

### 4.2 Goal 4: Appointment of an Internal Heritage Adviser

SDL strongly supports the establishment of a dedicated Council Heritage Adviser position. A suitably experienced and qualified Heritage Adviser represents a more sustainable and cost-effective means of providing timely, informed advice to Council departments, councillors, and the community on heritage matters.

***Recommendation:** This position should be established as a matter of priority, with a clear mandate spanning strategic planning, statutory planning, asset management, and community engagement. The Heritage Adviser should have the authority to provide independent heritage advice on planning permit applications affecting heritage places and to coordinate heritage work across all Council departments.*

### 4.3 Goal 4: Partnerships with Tertiary Institutions

Graduate and postgraduate studies in heritage are conducted by institutions including Monash University, the University of Melbourne, Deakin University, and RMIT. Many programs include requirements for industry placement and investigations into heritage-related planning matters.

**Recommendation:** Council should seek to establish formal working relationships with relevant tertiary institution faculties to foster collaboration between the academy, Council departments engaged in heritage matters, and community groups with heritage interests. Such partnerships may facilitate student placements, applied research projects, and investigations that benefit both the municipality's heritage outcomes and emerging heritage professionals.

#### 4.4 Goal 4: Integration of First Peoples' Perspectives

SDL strongly supports the proposed engagement with Indigenous Advisory Committees for the integration of First Peoples' perspectives into heritage listings, statutory planning documentation, and respectful interpretation. Any such work must be undertaken with appropriate Cultural and Indigenous Intellectual Property agreements in place.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands and waterways of the Dandenong Ranges and broader Yarra Ranges. We support the Strategy's commitment to working in partnership with the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and note the national significance of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station.

**Recommendation:** First Peoples' cultural heritage should be integrated across all themes of the Strategy and Policy, not confined to a single section. The voice and authority of Traditional Owners in relation to their cultural heritage must be paramount in all Council heritage work.

#### 4.5 Goal 4: Heritage Interpretation of Council-Managed Assets

SDL believes that many Council-managed heritage-listed assets—particularly buildings, natural features, and landscapes—are not physically identified or lack adequate interpretation. In recognition of the growing public interest in heritage and in natural and cultural environments by residents, schools, and visitors, the use of modern interpretive technologies presents a significant opportunity.

**Recommendation:** Council should develop interactive QR code-based interpretation for attachment to existing and proposed on-site and online signage at heritage places. The currency of the information linked to QR codes must be maintained through a regular review cycle. This initiative would significantly enhance public engagement with heritage at minimal ongoing cost.

#### 4.6 Goal 4: Resource Kit for Heritage Property Owners

SDL strongly supports the proposed development of a Resource Kit for owners of heritage properties, detailing external funding opportunities and supporting information for restoration and protection. We endorse the short-term timeframe identified for this action.

**Recommendation:** The Resource Kit should be developed in consultation with heritage property owners and community heritage groups, and should include practical guidance on conservation approaches consistent with the Burra Charter (the Australia ICOMOS Charter for Places of Cultural Significance), as well as information about grants, rate relief, and other incentive mechanisms.

## 4.7 Goal 5: Heritage Collections and Accessibility

SDL strongly supports the entirety of the proposed actions relating to heritage collections and the findings of the Heritage Network Needs Analysis, which acknowledge the challenges faced by volunteer-run heritage groups across the municipality.

The Yarra Ranges Heritage Network comprises 18 member organisations that collectively hold over 100,000 heritage items. These groups undertake research, cataloguing, public engagement, and advocacy that would cost Council millions of dollars if delivered through consultants or paid staff. They require sustained support including storage, digitisation assistance, insurance, and training.

With regard to the resources and collections held by the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum, with its permanent collection of over 14,000 items, SDL makes a strong recommendation for the development and implementation of an action plan enabling annual programs of travelling exhibitions. Such exhibitions, potentially co-funded by external government grants and private benefactors, could explore local and broader heritage themes and be displayed at suitable locations throughout the main towns of the Yarra Ranges, including libraries and customer service centres.

***Recommendation:** Council should commit to ongoing, dedicated funding streams for community heritage groups; practical support including storage, digitisation, and insurance assistance; and a program of travelling exhibitions drawing on the Regional Museum's collection and the holdings of Heritage Network member groups.*

## 4.8 Goal 6: Heritage Guidelines and Council's Own Stewardship

SDL strongly advocates that the proposed Heritage Guidelines for the protection, upgrading, and alteration of heritage buildings and places must also apply to the day-to-day management of, and compliance with planning controls for, Council-managed properties. Council has a stewardship role in demonstrating best-practice asset management and compliance with planning scheme controls for heritage places under its management.

We cite the example of the Council-managed Birdsland Reserve, subject to Heritage Overlay HO 119 in the Planning Scheme. Previous works undertaken within the curtilage of the caretaker's residence—including a large array of visually prominent solar panels and auxiliary structures attached to the dwelling—were allegedly carried out without regard to the planning permit approval process required for Heritage Overlay-listed properties.

***Recommendation:** The Strategy and Policy should include specific provisions requiring heritage impact assessments before any works to Council-owned heritage places, maintenance standards consistent with the Burra Charter, and internal compliance mechanisms to ensure Council meets the same planning permit requirements that apply to private property owners. Council must lead by example.*

## 4.9 Goal 6: Database of Council and Publicly Owned Heritage Assets

SDL strongly endorses the proposed development of a detailed heritage database and catalogue for Council and community-group-owned assets.

Prior to the amalgamation of the former four local governments to form the present Yarra Ranges Council, each shire possessed paintings, photographs, artefacts, and other items with a strong local cultural, historical, and social focus. SDL is unaware of the existence of a publicly accessible Council database of such items that respects their historical context and provenance.

***Recommendation:** Development of a comprehensive, illustrated, and digitised database of the entire Council-held collection—with full documentation of the historical and cultural associations of each item and its municipality of origin—should be treated as a high priority action.*

#### **4.10 Goal 6: Heritage Awareness, Education, and National Trust Partnership**

SDL makes a strong recommendation for Council to develop a beneficial working relationship with The National Trust of Australia (Victoria), particularly for the Trust's work in heritage-listed property protection and management within the Yarra Ranges. The National Trust brings decades of expertise in significant landscape assessment, significant tree protection and designation, and heritage property conservation, much of it undertaken in collaboration with community volunteers.

***Recommendation:** Council should formalise its relationship with the National Trust as a key partner in heritage awareness, education, and the identification and protection of significant landscapes and trees across the municipality.*

### **5. Resourcing and Implementation**

A strategy without adequate resourcing is an aspiration, not a plan. SDL is concerned to ensure that the Strategy, while comprehensive in its vision, is accompanied by the necessary resources to deliver on its actions over the 10-year timeframe.

***Recommendation:** The Strategy should include an indicative resourcing plan identifying staff positions, budget allocations, and external funding sources. Progress against the Strategy should be reported annually to Council and to the community, with a formal review at the five-year mark.*

### **6. Climate Change, Bushfire, and Heritage Risk**

The Dandenong Ranges and broader Yarra Ranges face significant and increasing risks from bushfire, storm damage, and climate change. The January 2025 bushfires are a recent reminder of the vulnerability of heritage places and collections. Heritage assets—whether historic buildings, significant trees, archival collections, or cultural landscapes—are uniquely at risk because they are irreplaceable once lost.

***Recommendation:** The Strategy should explicitly address disaster preparedness and climate adaptation for heritage. This should include heritage risk assessments, disaster response plans for significant places and collections, and support for community groups to develop their own emergency preparedness for the heritage materials in their care.*

### **7. Conclusion**

Save the Dandenongs League again commends Council on the release of the Draft Heritage Strategy and Heritage Policy. These documents represent a significant and long-awaited step toward comprehensive heritage management in the Yarra Ranges.

**We strongly advocate for the provision of the necessary resources to ensure the Strategy's effective implementation, ongoing review, and transparent reporting to the community.**

Heritage is not merely a record of the past; it is the foundation upon which communities build their identity, resilience, and sense of place. The Dandenong Ranges and the broader Yarra Ranges deserve a heritage framework equal to their significance.

Should further information or clarification be required regarding any aspect of this submission, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned.

Yours faithfully,

Louis Delacretaz

President

**Save the Dandenongs League Inc.**