

The background image shows a vibrant city street scene. In the foreground, two women are walking towards the camera, smiling. The woman on the left is wearing a dark blue sleeveless top and a long, patterned skirt, carrying a brown paper shopping bag with the 'Ibex' logo. The woman on the right is wearing a white t-shirt and a black skirt, also carrying a brown paper shopping bag. They are walking on a sidewalk lined with shops. In the background, there are signs for 'JINDARA THAI MASSAGE' and 'EL GORDO BENDIGO'. The street is lined with brick buildings and greenery.

TRANSFORMING THE CITY CENTRE ACTION PLAN 2018-2023

JUNE 2018

More people, more often



CITY OF GREATER
BENDIGO



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The ancestors and descendants of the Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung are the traditional owners of this Country.

The City of Greater Bendigo acknowledges that they have been custodians for many centuries and continue to perform age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.

We all acknowledge their living culture and their unique role in the life of this region.

Bendigo's retail sector is going through a period of rapid transformation as technology changes the way we shop, record low wage growth means we have less money to spend and the changing preferences of consumers' means that people are no longer buying the things they once did. We can see the impact of these changes playing out in real life with the current oversupply of retail floorspace resulting in a spike in the number of vacant shops clustered in and around the higher rent area of Hargreaves Mall.

It is not all doom and gloom when it comes to retail however, as those 'bricks and mortar' stores that have been able to respond to customers' needs, provide great customer service, create unique in-store experiences and increase their digital presence are performing relatively well, albeit in a very competitive market.

From a built form perspective there are also positive signs with new mixed-use buildings being proposed or under construction across central Bendigo. Their continued roll-out will inject new life and a residential population right into the heart of Bendigo and make it a much stronger destination. Mixed-use city centres have also proven to be more resilient to economic downturns. In the words of renowned urban planner and economist, Joe Minicozzi, who visited Bendigo in 2016, "mixed-use development is the golden goose of urban economics and the best bet for cities that want to prosper in the long run".

While the City of Greater Bendigo can't really influence the global or national issues impacting the retail sector, we do have a role in facilitating the delivery of actions that have the common objective of getting *more people more often* into the City Centre. You will hear this phrase used regularly, as it really is the best way to increase the opportunities for the private sector to prosper and to make the most of increasingly scarce public resources.

To achieve *more people more often* in the City Centre, there needs to be a reason for people to come in. Some of the immediate priorities relate to getting our underperforming Hargreaves Mall working better, getting the proposed large scale developments, such as GovHub, 'out of the ground' and incrementally improving the amenity and experience of the City Centre and creating a high quality destination that people want to visit.

This Action Plan attempts to consolidate Bendigo specific actions that respond to the wide range of challenges that all city centres are facing, and to put in place a program of action that can be delivered over the next five years. The Plan is relatively short, but it has drawn upon the knowledge and expertise of the numerous Bendigo City Centre stakeholders whom have contributed to three roundtable discussions, retail industry experts such as Brian Walker from the Retail Doctor Group (www.retaildoctor.com.au), and through information and research gathered from industry bodies such as Mainstreet Australia (www.mainstreetaustralia.org.au).



TRANSFORMING THE CITY CENTRE
 SMALL- & LARGE-SCALE OPPORTUNITIES

Action Plan

Short term (within 1 year)	Medium term (1-3 years)	Long term (3+ years)
1.1 Facilitate the restoration of heritage building façades .	2.1 Construct a high quality parents' room / toilet facility in the Mall precinct.	3.1 Undertake a review of traffic management across the city centre to prioritise access for those coming 'into the place' ahead of those travelling 'through the place'.
1.2 Finalise the location and design of a high quality parents' room / toilet facility in the Hargreaves Mall precinct.	2.2 Subject to the outcomes of the design review process, design and construct a large scale shade structure, display screen and other recommendations.	Ongoing actions/actions underway
1.3 Install a pop-up park in the central section of the Mall with synthetic turf, umbrellas, moveable seats and potentially a catenary rope system for public art.	2.3 Deliver improved bus passenger facilities (seats and shade) on the southern side of Mitchell Street (in partnership with PTV).	4.1 Continue weekly inspections and increase cleaning and maintenance of public spaces as required.
1.4 Complete a Design Review of the Hargreaves Mall and prepare a Management Plan . This will include large scale shade , a large display screen , potential for water play and the repurposing of the bus waiting facility.	2.4 As part of the CBD Plan review, investigate rezoning the land in the southern part of the city centre , between Edward Street and Myrtle Street, from a commercial to a residential zone.	4.2 Continue repainting street furniture (if it doesn't move, paint it!)
1.5 Increase funding for the activation of public spaces to enable more events to be held to attract people into the city centre.	2.5 Support industry partners to deliver a program of staff and small business development training.	4.3 Improve the presentation of vacant shops with colourful window wraps .
1.6 Continue working with Myer to explore opportunities that reinforce the role of the department store as a City Centre anchor.	2.6 Continue making the city centre an easy place to move around on foot for people of all ages and abilities.	
1.7 Improve pedestrian safety through the removal of delivery vehicles from the Mall and install additional loading bays in Mitchell and Williamson Streets.	2.7 Repurpose the bus waiting facility in the Mall into something more commercially focussed (food and beverage).	
1.8 Investigate repurposing one of the existing toilets into a micro 'hole-in-the-wall' tenancy. Tenants could be curated to match with events or seasons.	2.8 Undertake a review of the waste management system for commercial mixed use areas to tailor a system that is more efficient (particularly with more residential apartments coming online).	
1.9 Develop marketing collateral / branding for the Bendigo City Centre.	2.9 Upgrade the foyer, toilets and façade of the Hargreaves Street multi-storey car park , and consider extended hours of access and improved signage.	
1.10 Develop a Retail Precinct Plan and Investment Prospectus and target specific business to complete the tenancy mix.	2.10 Investigate a shuttle bus to improve access and connect major city centre destinations.	
1.11 Establish a Partnership Group with a diverse range of stakeholders.		
1.12 Install wayfinding signs at either end of the Mall (to complete existing wayfinding signs across the city centre).		

CAN WE (RE)ACTIVATE THE BENDIGO CITY CENTRE?

In short, yes, but it will need an integrated and collaborative approach to deliver actions that all result in attracting *more people more often*. This hasn't really happened in the past as it wasn't really needed, but since the global financial crisis and the structural changes impacting the retail sector, greater competition from other centres and the evolution that all city centres are going through, it has become increasingly important to take a holistic 'place based' approach to make sure we get the best outcomes possible. While it would be nice to think that there was a 'silver bullet' solution that would solve all of today's problems, the reality is that there isn't.

What we do know is that we need to focus on the basics, such as ensuring the place is clean, well presented and feels safe. This will be an ongoing challenge and may need additional resources. We also need to work on actions that build on our unique attributes and strengths, such as our wonderful gold rush heritage, our diversity of locally owned or operated businesses and our growing reputation as a food, arts and cultural tourism destination. We need to let people know what we have on offer and look at new ways at marketing the City Centre to a broader audience using a variety of channels. We also need to facilitate some of the larger projects that would add additional people to the City Centre on a daily basis, such as the development of new law courts and the repurposing of the existing heritage buildings, GovHub office development and the many proposed mixed use and residential developments. Research in capital cities has found that each office worker spends close to \$10,500 per annum on retail goods and services while they are in the city for work (before and after work and during breaks). You only need to look at the businesses in close proximity to the Bendigo Bank building to see the impact that around 1,000 office workers can have on a precinct. Finally, we also need all of our stakeholders to do what they can to support this collaborative effort, as the cumulative impact of lots of little actions will be much more significant than working in isolation.

We also need to remind ourselves that it is not all 'doom and gloom' and that many parts of the City Centre are actually doing quite well. Our food and beverage sector has grown significantly in recent decades and it continues to do so. We are also seeing very strong growth in tourist numbers. Over the past 10 years there has been an increase in domestic overnight visitors to our region by 44 per cent (to 2.5M nights), driven in part by the great programming of the Bendigo Art Gallery and a constant stream of both sporting and cultural events and festivals. We have also seen some great investment in undergrounding powerlines, planting street trees and upgrading footpaths. This has made a significant difference to the look and feel of the City Centre, but being delivered incrementally means that many people don't even notice the changes until it is pointed out to them.

However, at the moment it is clear that the precinct centred on the Hargreaves Mall is not performing as well as it should or needs to be. At the time of writing there were 10 vacancies out of 39 properties. We haven't seen vacancies of this scale in recent memory, and for this reason we are placing a particular focus on this precinct. When we get it right it will benefit the entire City Centre, municipality and the broader region.

OUR VISION FOR THE BENDIGO CITY CENTRE

The following vision for the City Centre was developed as part of the Bendigo CBD Plan that was adopted in 2005. While it is over a decade old and a little long, the vision is still extremely relevant. It is ambitious and something to strive for and we may never get there, but even if we only achieve it in part, Bendigo will be a better place for it.

“The Bendigo City Centre is a colourful, vibrant and exciting place that showcases the best of Bendigo’s cultural, economic and community life. The City Centre projects an inviting and inclusive image, appealing to and welcoming people of all ages and interests.

The streets are safe and pleasant places to walk, with frequent spaces for entertainment and exhibitions, quiet relaxation and eating. Laneways and arcades provide opportunities to explore and discover.

The depth and richness of Bendigo’s history is celebrated, evident in the grand heritage buildings, their settings and streetscapes, and the variety of buildings and activities. New development reflects the quality of the City Centre’s heritage, while adding to the City’s future heritage. The strong sense of civic pride and responsibility, enterprise and creativity that founded the City Centre is maintained by embracing opportunities to improve and move forward.

The economy of the City Centre thrives, providing a myriad of shopping experiences and employment opportunities. The City Centre is a place to visit at all times of the day, evening, week and year, with new experiences always available. The City Centre is a cohesive, coordinated and effective entity, and recognisable as uniquely Bendigo.”

Source: Bendigo CBD Plan 2005

Note: The vision will be reviewed and refined when the 2005 Plan is updated during the 2018/19 financial year.



WHAT WILL THE CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO DO?

In the short term we will continue our renewed focus on cleaning and maintaining our public realm – the streets, footpaths and public spaces that we all use. Busy places get dirty; we just need to increase the cleaning regime to reflect their higher use. We will also continue the program of repainting street furniture and infrastructure (benches, bollards, light poles, etc) to ensure they are presented to a high standard. We need to ‘roll out the welcome mat’ to visitors and users of the City Centre and bring the maintenance standard of our public realm up to a similar standard to that of our fabulous parks and gardens (which are second to none). This also includes the need to provide a higher quality public toilet facility incorporating a parents’ room / baby change right in the middle of the city. This would enable the public toilets in the two lantern structures to be repurposed for small scale tenancies (a hole in the wall florist for example), or for them to be removed or replaced with some other more acceptable use. We also need to continue to focus on the ‘little gems’ that you stumble across that add interest to the urban environment – public art is a key component of this and there are some great examples in Chancery Lane.

Undoubtedly taking this approach will cost more than it currently does to maintain and manage the City Centre, but it should be remembered that this is where the highest property rates are paid (per square metre), where significant revenue is generated through parking fees and fines, and where the bulk of economic activity takes place. The City Centre is the engine room of our municipality and it performs a regional capital role for a catchment of around 300,000 people for work, education and access to higher order goods and services.

The City will also focus on short term actions to activate our key public spaces, with a particular focus on the public space of Hargreaves Mall. There is no disputing that the Mall is one of the most talked about public spaces in the municipality, and generally not for the right reasons! It is acknowledged that when it was redesigned around a decade ago, it missed the mark on a number of levels. However, despite its shortcomings it has also proven to be a successful events space for things like the Moonlight Market, vintage car shows or school holiday family fun days. The challenge is that while it works as an event space once or twice a month, we need it to increase its pulling power and be used more often for more things that will attract more people. Ultimately this will have a positive impact on all businesses in the precinct, noting that not every trader will benefit directly from events all of the time – it is all about creating a positive association for visitors to the Mall and understanding that it is a public space as much as it is a retail space. Community consultation on the Mall identifies three common criticisms of the design – it lacks shade, colour and softness. These are things that can be addressed in part in the short term, with relatively low cost interventions to be trialled to create a more attractive and usable space in the central section of the Mall. Another option is to trial a Micro Mall (a number of micro tenancies; little cubes for example), a Bus Shelter Pop-Up, or other commercial activities that could be leased for seasonal start-up businesses looking to test the market. The primary focus of these actions is to complete the offer of the Mall, rather than compete with existing businesses.

Also in the Mall precinct, the City will work with leasing agents and landowners to improve the presentation of vacant stores. Ideally we don’t want stores to be vacant for too long, and a simple action that we have commenced is installing some colourful window wraps to help improve the look of vacant stores while still allowing for leasing agents to incorporate their signage and to market the properties to potential tenants.

We will also continue to work with our major retail anchor, Myer, on strategies to better align their product offer with our evolving city centre customer base. This could take the form of comprehensive market research with people in their target demographic, perhaps in partnership with a couple of large employers such as the Bendigo Bank and Bendigo Health. On a larger scale, discussions with Myer have also identified an opportunity to reimagine their site together with surrounding sites as a large scale redevelopment that could deliver a multi-level mixed use building with a much more efficient store footprint built into it. The new Myer Hobart store is an example, where a hotel has been built on top of the new store. Preliminary thinking needs to be completed as a priority given the portion of the store currently owned by Myer may soon be offered for sale (Myer own only three sites across Australia and all three are intended to be sold. Myer will now only lease sites).

Much of the discussion to date has been on ‘what the City of Greater Bendigo will do’, but it must be remembered that the City’s role is actually limited when it comes to creating an active and vibrant city centre – we lay the foundations but we rely on the private sector to do much of the heavy lifting and actually provide the things that people want to visit! In saying that, the City is responsible for the long term planning, the public realm (roads, footpaths, parks and gardens), servicing (garbage collection, parking, cleaning) and coordinating the activation of our public spaces. It is the role of landowners and developers to provide buildings at competitive rents and in formats that businesses are looking for. It is the role of leasing agents to match potential properties and businesses. And it is the role of the businesses themselves to supply the products and services that the community are looking for (the primary reason many people come into the City Centre). As you can imagine, this is quite a balancing act. Looking at the amount of floorspace as just one example, we know that if there is too much floorspace then rents are forced down and it is not financially viable to invest in redeveloping sites and build new buildings. Although, it is good for the businesses leasing the sites. Conversely, if there is a shortage of floorspace, rents are forced up (which is not so good for tenants) and new buildings become more viable to develop. Even with the best of planning, the structural changes that have occurred in the retail sector over the past decade have disrupted the previous equations and we find ourselves with too much floorspace for the size of our catchment. This is likely to be a short term blip, with our population growth and increasing numbers of visitors helping to soak up additional capacity in the coming years, but we do have to manage the consequences in the meantime.

Priority actions for consideration

- Increase cleaning and maintenance of the key public spaces
- Replace the Hargreaves Mall toilets with a higher quality facility with a parents room
- Increase funding for activation of public spaces / consider alternative funding streams
- Implement a short term low cost ‘pop-up’ park / Micro Mall or Bus Shelter Pop-Up in the Hargreaves Mall while a longer term rejuvenation plan is prepared
- Improve the presentation of vacant shop fronts with colourful window wraps
- Work with Myer and relevant landowners on redevelopment plans

ACTIVATING THE HARGREAVES MALL



For the Hargreaves Mall to become the beating heart of Bendigo's retail ecosystem it needs to attract many more people to it. As we know, the look and feel of the Mall needs to be reviewed to ensure that it can incorporate the additional colour, softness and shade that many people in the community have commented that it lacks. From a review of successful public places, we also know that it is not simply a case of 'build it and they will come', and that we need to schedule more events and activities into the space to appeal to a broader range of visitors. We currently host around 100 activities each year in the Mall, some small, some large. At the extreme end of the activation scale, Melbourne's Federation Square has around 1,200 different events and activities scheduled each year.

Another of the missing elements that is needed for our Mall to become successful might also be one of the most difficult to achieve. The Mall needs a greater degree of coordinated 'management'. While the City owns the public space, there are approximately 30 different landowners, 39 different properties, numerous leasing agents and a range of different businesses, each with their own particular interests and motivations. We need all of them to be working together. This could be as simple as traders coordinating a sidewalk sale, or leasing agents working together to put together a package of properties to target specific retailers that we want, or all stakeholders contributing to a marketing campaign.

From an operational perspective, the central section of the Mall has also proven difficult to use during the summer months due to the lack of shade. To address this issue properly will require some detailed design work and ultimately, a significant budget allocation. Another operational limitation of the central events space relates to the lack of a large screen to show community events, live sports or even movies. Clearly there was an expectation that the two large lantern structures were going to perform this role, despite them only being designed to project images onto them at night. This has resulted in much of the negative community comment around the Mall. While we can't undo the past, recent trials using mobile screen trucks to show movies and sporting events has proven to be effective. Once again, to incorporate a large scale screen into the Mall will require detailed investigations and a significant budget allocation. Both of these issues will be investigated as part of an independent design review of the Hargreaves Mall that will be completed in 2018.

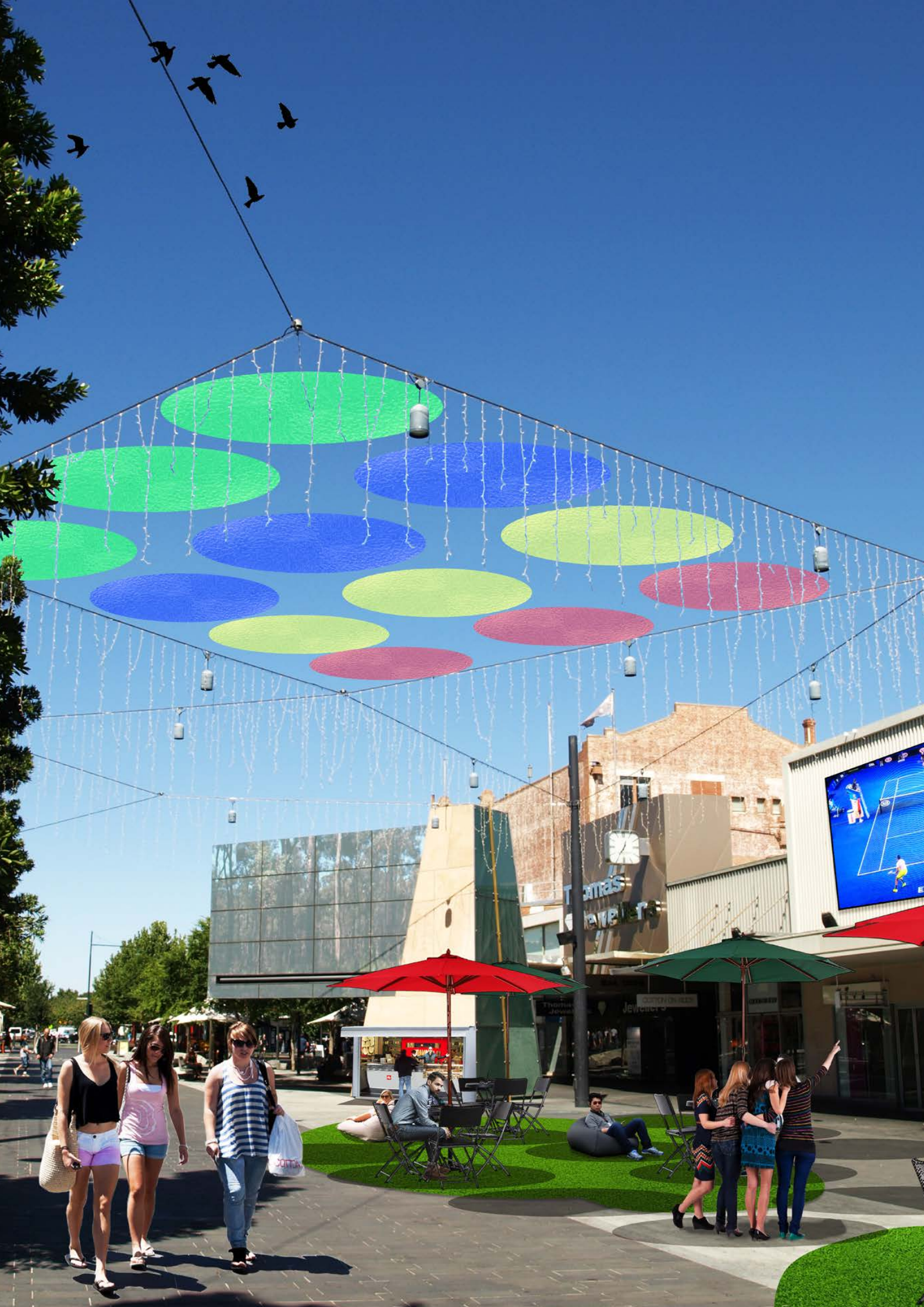
Until such time that a budget allocation can be made for the higher cost items, it is proposed to install some lower cost quicker items such as a pop-up park with synthetic turf, a catenary hanging system, large scale umbrellas and additional moveable seating. This will be designed to enable it to be used by the Moonlight Market, or any other market that may be held in the Mall. The pop up park is not expected to provide a permanent solution, but rather to enable different scenarios to be tested. An added advantage is that it will instantly provide a splash of colour into the central section of the Mall at a time that it needs it most.

A large number of ideas and suggestions for the Hargreaves Mall have been made by the community in recent years. These can be categorised into three or four key themes and relate to the need for more colour, shade, softness and activity. Some of them would be relatively inexpensive to implement, while others would be require further planning, design and to go through the budget process. The great thing about most of the comments is that people want the Mall to be better and have offered genuine suggestions, rather than just commenting that they like the old mall better than the new one. As a community we need to acknowledge the mistakes and work with what we've got and make it better.

A table of examples of the communities / stakeholders suggestions are on the following page.

Examples of the communities / stakeholders suggestions include:

Big pots / planters of flowers	Red bricks (change of surface materials)	Softer street furniture	Show off architecture (reuse upper levels)	Work closely with landowners	Commercial lease of some of the spaces	Drop in some PODS / small tenancies	Storage space for activation materials
Pole top planters	Moonlight Cinema	Shade in the central section	A cluster of pop-up businesses	Night time activation	Remove toilets from lanterns	Not so linear	Remove the bus waiting area
Power upgrade needed (more 15Amp plugs for food trucks)	Catenary hanging system in central section	Tables and chairs under the awnings (associated with new micro tenancies)	Chestnut roasters / pancake makers / Spanish donuts / Creperie	A big screen (that could also be interactive – Atari style)	There are some good food places – need more	Repair water misters adjacent to water jets (and some suitable for adults in summer)	Serviced public toilet area in Mall proximity somewhere
Closely link activity with Events (Blues and Roots, Easter, etc)	Coloured lighting of trees. White light during winter lock-up times	Wireless sound system – plug and play usability for events	Fix up Officeworks frontage (make more active)	Convert lanterns into small flexible or short term micro tenancies	Champagne / Wine bar (could be a pop up / container bar)	Fun Loong is great	A large section of Astro Turf to sit on
Need to get some new key retailers in there	Colourful banners on poles	A food market / hawkers market, farmers market relocation?	Refresh the art on the lanterns (similar to 121 View Street)	Art competition for screens	The Chinese Elm trees are very good	A mini splash park at the Mitchell Street end	A fantastic merry go round
Make sure it is high quality	Planter boxes with seats incorporated (Vic Market eg moveable)	Get some good food – get Allan's Walk happening	Brunetti would be great. Harris Scarf also	Good buskers	A beach / beach volley ball / sandpit in summer	Need a larger population / student housing	Bean bags and free format seating
Warmer elements for winter months (even just warm colours)	Container CUBE micro tenancies	Lightweight LED screen to be retrofitted to lantern	"Welcome to Hargreaves Mall" signage	A raised performance space / soapbox	Green wall covering the lanterns	Ice skating rink	Upgraded CCTV
Giant Theremin (interactive sound sculpture) (Check You tube)	All weather table tennis table	Clean the space regularly and well	Replace the umbrellas with new, more colourful ones	shopbendigo website, app and pop-up booth during promotions	Central large scale water feature (something people can gather around, sit at the edge of, etc)	Remove clutter (e.g. rocks) and avoid adding more	Add medieval stocks for community eggings
Create a busy food hub with evening events with food and live music	Purchase tables and chairs and games and set up for a few hours each week	Family Friendly Movie night in the Mall monthly BBQ & Food trucks	Run giant games nights – Chess Jenga, Scrabble	Run an annual activities market Gyms, sports clubs, dance clubs with stage showcase	Daily school hols activities	Have more street performers, puppet shows, magicians, living statues etc	Create a special section as an open air Library
Monthly Art Cart	Run a Bendigo Buskers Festival	Blackboard for messages	Visitor information booth	Food truck Friday	Catenary (overhead) art installation	Incorporate pasteups/art such as Chancery Lane	Concrete or permanent chess tables/chairs
Buy local campaign (Check out Totally Locally)	Interactive temporary public art installation (eg House of Mirrors)	Mass public art using catenary system (eg. umbrellas, Chinese lanterns, beach balls)	Elmore Field Day off-site thing (country in the city)	Dance classes / Zumba / tai chi	'Long drop' litter bins (audio of object falling and hitting the bottom)	Create an astro turf putting green	Shade/Canopy over the centre specifically or purchase 'big top' style tent for events
Vacant shop window decals promoting shopbendigo	Façade upgrade scheme to get shop fronts freshly painted or cladding removed	Visual merchandising training / shop window of the month prize	Disloyalty card	A higher cleaning standard – make it spick and span	A higher cleaning standard – make it spick and span	Relocate the cardboard collection to the end of the Mall	Get delivery vehicles out of the Mall
Get fundraisers (unless events) out of the Mall impact on business – puts people off	Retrofit/ modify seating to something unusual or themed (like Brunswick street)	Etch/add hopscotch and other games into the surface –snakes (or dragons) and ladders – in colour	Giant umbrellas that could be placed in the centre and removed for events, with beanbags etc	Make it a Christmas wonderland with decorations and installations so you walk one end to the other	Add to the playground, it is 5 in 2018 add new features toys? More sensory stuff	Bird noises/ nature noises over the sound system-certain weeks, endangered species etc.	Is there something that could make FunLoong Roar? A button to press but a nice roar not a scary one
Uplighting in the Mall surface under the verandahs	Get Apra Licence for the Mall (if a specific one is needed)						





REIMAGINING THE MYER BLOCK

The block bounded by Hargreaves Mall, Mitchell Street, Pall Mall and Williamson Street has been our retail core ever since it was surveyed in 1854. It still has some fantastic heritage properties, but it has also lost a few great buildings as well. It includes a number of laneways and arcades and it is home to our major department store, Myer.

The Myer business started in Bendigo and they have had a long association with their current site. Their store footprint runs over a number of properties with a number of different landlords. Myer currently own a part of their store, however as with the other two sites that they own in other parts of Australia, they are looking to sell all three properties. Myer have commented that they are retailers, not property owners, and that they have been progressively moving towards leasing all of their stores. It should be noted that the sale of the property is not linked to the operation of the store. Its sale could be the catalyst for a major reinvestment into this city block. Without the sale it is highly unlikely that Myer would be in a position to consider a major refurbishment at any time soon.

Opportunities to be explored include the potential for a large scale mixed-use building to be developed on this block. This could include hotel accommodation on upper levels overlooking Rosalind Park for example. Or, it could include a number of levels of office floor space sitting above the department store footprint. It could be limited to the existing Myer owned property parcels, or it could involve the consolidation of a number of adjacent parcels to make a larger development site. Either way, any redevelopment on this block should also look to create a network of mid-block pedestrian links that connect the soon to be redeveloped Allan's Walk, Mitchell Lane, Victoria Lane and the two open air laneways adjacent to Myer. Some of these links will be laneways or arcades, while others can be through large format stores such as Myer.

WHAT WILL THE PRIVATE SECTOR DO?

When it comes to the private sector, we need landowners and leasing agents to take a proactive approach to the maintenance and presentation of their properties. As with public spaces, we need shopfronts to be clean and well maintained. Faded awnings, peeling paint and dirty windows and doors do nothing to encourage customers to come in and are inconsistent with the ‘high quality’ message that we need to be sending. Engaging shop windows that are regularly refreshed are also very important. Shop keepers that are reliant on passing foot traffic have around three seconds in which to entice a potential customer into their stores. This is a similar strategy that a shopping centre uses, where customers park once and then walk past many dozens of shops on their way to and from the centres anchor stores.

We also need small business owners and operators to be on top of their game. Structural changes to the retail sector, the growth of online shopping, record low wage growth and the shift towards experiential retailing are all factors that today’s retailers need to be across if they are to thrive into the future. There is an opportunity for groups such as Be.Bendigo to continue in their role of developing and delivering professional development for our city’s retail sector stakeholders.

Priority actions for consideration

- Continue to upgrade building facades, shop fronts and store fitouts to contemporary standards
- Develop a program of engaging shop window displays that are linked to major exhibitions, events, seasons or sales
- Invest in staff and business development in partnership with relevant industry groups to ensure the customer experience is engaging
- Continue to evolve and develop retail experiences that provide customers with a unique experience that is not easily replicable
- Continue to evolve to build a ‘retail ecosystem’ and blur the boundaries between physical stores and online



WHAT WILL WE DO TOGETHER?

With so many different landowners, around 1,000 businesses of all types, government agencies with their narrow focus, numerous leasing agents and a variety of investor motivations and interests, it can be difficult to reach consensus on even the most basic of issues. If you compare this to an internal shopping centre, where there is one landowner, one centre manager, one leasing agent and a highly curated selection of retailers, you can start to see why it is a hard job to develop relationships and partnerships. However, if we can achieve it and end up taking a more hands-on management approach we can focus our efforts on working together for the one common purpose.

To do this we may need to form a Partnership Group with representatives from all the different subsectors that have a strong interest in the City Centre. This could be a formal or informal group, but either way it will need to serve as the primary network that will develop, test and distribute actions that need a collaborative effort to implement.

An example of one of the projects that this group will influence is the development of a Retail Precinct Plan, where the preferred retail mix for an area is identified and once agreed, will assist landlords and leasing agents to target the right type of businesses for a particular area. If the plan is well executed, then all businesses in the precinct will receive additional benefits above and beyond what they might otherwise have. The aim is to work together to provide a broad framework in which to work within, not to overly restrict who leases what to whom, but over time to develop a cohesive 'retail ecosystem' that goes from strength to strength for the benefit of landlords, tenants and visitors to the City Centre.

Priority actions for consideration

- Establish a Partnership Group with a broad range of representatives
- Develop a Retail Precinct Plan for the sub-precincts across the City Centre
- Develop marketing collateral / branding for the Bendigo City Centre
- Develop a prospectus to target specific businesses that will complement our existing retail offer
- Continue to work with Victoria Police and agencies to address anti-social behaviour

FUTURE STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

Getting in and moving around is critical to a well-functioning city centre. We need to ensure that there is a variety of options for people to access the City Centre, and being an outdoor environment, primarily it needs to be a good place for people to walk around. It needs shady trees in summer, safe pedestrian crossings that don't unnecessarily delay people on foot (who are out in the weather) and it needs to have convenient car parking that balances customer turn-over with opportunities for longer stays. In some respects this is mirroring what happens at a large shopping centre, where people park once and visit multiple destinations or undertake numerous activities prior to returning to their car. This gives small businesses the greatest chance of enticing passing foot traffic in and it allows visitors to experience our fantastic city and (generally) nice climate. Having someone drive in and get a park out the front of the shop that they want to go to and then leave, while sounding ideal, is actually the pathway to a slow decline. There simply isn't enough space to put enough customer car parks in front of every shop that someone might want to visit. Our focus has to be on creating a place that is good to be in and with enough enticing things on offer that parking becomes a secondary issue for visitors. Most of us don't remember great places because of their parking, we remember them because of the great experience that we had when we were there!

Since the mid-1990s Bendigo has been very active in improving the look and feel of the City Centre - powerlines have been relocated underground, hundreds of shady street trees planted in their place and footpaths upgraded with bluestone and asphalt. This has created a good network of streets that are pleasant to walk around, however we still have some way to go to make sure that our City Centre pedestrian network is actually connected and it is (and perceived to be) a safe place to walk around no matter what your age or ability. In a city centre environment it is all about access, not speed. People on foot, particularly parents with small children and older people, need vehicle speeds to be low to ensure that if they happen to make a minor mishap (someone trips or a child runs loose for example) doesn't end in a tragedy. It is worth remembering that 'the time you lose as a driver giving way to a person on foot, you gain once you park and become a person on foot - it all balances out in the end'.

We are also seeing growth in the number of people accessing the City Centre by bike (and now even on e-bikes). Similar to people on foot, people on bikes are vulnerable in mixed traffic environments and the best way to increase safety is to reduce car speeds. While legally this can be done relatively easily by reducing the speed limits, all evidence suggests that physical works are also needed. This could be through additional raised pedestrian zebra crossings (which are great for older people, people in wheelchairs or parents with prams, as they don't have to go down onto the road and back up again), such as the ones in Hargreaves Street (between Mitchell and Edward), or by tightening-up intersections such as has been done at the intersection of Hargreaves and Mitchell Streets (on the southern side of the intersection that has significantly reduced the crossing distance), by redesigning roundabouts to slow speeds so that drivers are more aware of pedestrians and cyclists, or by changing the sequencing of traffic lights to enable people on foot to cross streets safely without having to wait for extended periods (which can reduce the likelihood of customers venturing across busy streets). Charing Cross is a particularly bad intersection to cross for pedestrians as it takes two traffic light cycles to get from one side to the other. The ultimate aim is to make the City Centre a place where people are comfortable wandering around and popping into as many small businesses as possible. Prioritising the people who are 'in the place' over those that are travelling 'through the place' will marginally increase travel times, however we need to remember that traffic management in and around activity centres must acknowledge that the needs of vehicles will generally be of secondary importance in planning, design and management of the centre. This isn't an anti-car approach, it is a

pro-people and places approach.

In addition to some of the smaller incremental changes that are proposed above, there are several streetscapes that are in need of a significant overhaul if we want them to be successful, people friendly spaces. The lower part of Williamson Street, between Pall Mall and Queen Street, is in need of work. There is an enormous amount of asphalt dedicated to cars at the moment, with people on foot squeezed to the sides. The following are some design principles when considering a redesign of this section of this street:

Williamson Street streetscape must haves:

- Wider footpaths to allow for increase in outdoor dining and street trading opportunities.
- Large canopy trees ideally set back a bit further from the property line to lesson impacts on buildings and allow for the reintroduction of traditional verandahs where appropriate. Trees to be located behind the kerb line if possible (to protect the trees and make street sweeping easier).
- Maintain the supply of convenient customer car parking. Kerbside parking helps buffer pedestrians and outdoor dining areas from traffic. There is an opportunity to consider centre parking in this scenario as well.
- Incorporate delivery vehicle parking.
- Ensure there is a safe cycle connection through to Rosalind Park given this street is our designated priority bicycle link.
- Improve the safety of pedestrian crossings, particularly around Hargreaves Street/Mall.
- Incorporate our paving design including bluestone at corners and outdoor dining areas, bluestone banding and asphalt pads, bluestone kerbs (avoid coloured concrete).

What we don't need:

- Five traffic lanes at the intersection of Williamson and Pall Mall.
- Multiple lanes at roundabouts.
- Poor quality materials.
- An overly complicated design. Replicate streets that work and tailor it to suit.

The Mitchell Street and View Street corridor has also been identified as needing review. This is the primary pedestrian connection between the Bendigo Station, our commercial core and the visitor focussed activities of View Street and Rosalind Park. Any review needs to take place in close consultation with Public Transport Victoria as it accommodates a significant amount of bus services and bus passengers. It will always be a challenge to balance the needs of all users, however the lack of large scale street trees and the dominance of traffic and higher speeds makes this street stand out as a less than people friendly space.

Given the cost involved, the time taken to deliver and the disruption that infrastructure works can cause, we need to carefully develop our future works program to provide the best value for money. Sometimes relatively small scale works may actually have a bigger impact than a much larger scale project. No matter what works are proposed they must be designed and delivered to improve the overall operation of the City Centre for all users.

Priority action for consideration

- Commence a program of small scale infrastructure works to better connect the pedestrian network and make it easier for people to move around on foot.

HOW ARE WE GOING TO FUND IT?

It costs a lot to clean, maintain and manage city centres, but they are also the location that generate the most amount of income through municipal rates and through user pays fees such as car parking. Across Australia the most popular way to fund higher levels of service (which is essentially what has been proposed in this document) is through a Special Rate (a levy on ratepayers within a clearly defined benefit area). One of the most successful programs operating in Victoria can be found in Geelong (www.centralgeelong.com.au), which generates around \$1M in revenue per annum and has a very high level of support from landowners and traders. Closer to home, the Shepparton Show Me program (www.facebook.com/SheppartonShowMe) is another example of a city centre marketing and promotion program. In this instance it is funded through general rates rather than through a special rate. Overseas examples often use a slightly different revenue source, the most popular being a portion of car parking revenue collected in an area, that must be spent in that same area. While the science behind paid parking is a proven method of encouraging customer parking turn-over (the price is set based on balancing supply and demand, not on revenue projections), the overseas examples highlight the major benefit as being retailers and customers seeing the benefit of paying for parking through improvements to their local area, be that through improved cleaning, better footpaths, street trees or gardens.

Priority action for consideration

- Investigate funding options to deliver an increase in the level of service (required to implement the actions listed in this report)



APPENDIX A:

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The City has had a relatively limited role when it comes to working directly with the retail sector and the mix of small businesses that operate within it. We have no control over what shops go where or how much rent someone pays – this is all left to the market. However, in recent times the City has become much more active in working with the broad range of stakeholders to address two big issues that have been negatively affecting our city centre – the rise in anti-social behaviour occurring in the Hargreaves Mall and an increase in the number of vacant shops. In response several existing City staff are now working more closely with our retail stakeholders and are looking to facilitate action in response. As a first step, the Retail Doctor Group (RDG) was engaged to provide some fresh, independent and expert eyes on the City Centre and to contribute to the actions needed.

Several Retail Roundtables have also been held with a diverse range of stakeholders. These roundtables were held in partnership with Be.Bendigo and together they identified what the guiding principles, key outcomes, actions and measures of success for Bendigo's retail sector should be. Participants generally agreed that:

- We want to create a retail sector that is uniquely Bendigo that draws on our fantastic heritage.
- We want to create a great experience for customers and for Bendigo to becoming a retail destination of choice.
- We need to take a collaborative approach and get some good business and strategic planning in place, including both short and long-term actions. We need to be very clear on whom we are trying to attract and why.
- We need to monitor and report on measures of success such as decreases in vacancy rates, increases in the number of people visiting, increases in the hours of operation and increases in the inner city residential population.

This information has informed the preparation of this Action Plan, and it has helped tailor and adapt the actions identified by the Retail Doctor Group for our unique set of ever changing circumstances.

APPENDIX B:

STRATEGY MAPPING

This Action Plan attempts to integrate a range of previous commitments and actions that have been developed and endorsed in recent years and consider them within the context of supporting our retail sector by increasing the activation of our City Centre. Below is a very brief summary of the key documents that provide the context for this Action Plan.

Bendigo CBD Plan 2005

This document informed the planning controls for the City Centre including a Design and Development Overlay that identifies preferred building heights, setbacks, weather protection and other urban design issues for most parts of the city centre.

The plan is based around the following four key themes:

1. Reinforcing the CBD as the centre of activity
2. Celebrating cultural and heritage identity
3. Creating an accessible place
4. Designing a high quality environment.

The document is primarily used by investors, landowners, architects and planners when considering redeveloping sites.

The Action Plan has been substantially implemented and is in need of updating. A slightly wider study area needs to be considered when the review of the Bendigo CBD Plan is undertaken, which will commence in the second half of 2018.

Bendigo CBD Parking Strategy 2008

This document is centred on the City's commitment to deliver a 'sustainable' movement network within the City Centre. A sustainable movement network is one where people can move around easily by foot, bicycle, public transport or private vehicle. Key outcomes of the document included reduced car parking ratios for various land uses, a cash-in-lieu option, waivers for parking when restoring and reactivating a heritage building. The planning scheme has been updated to reflect the recommendations of the document. The strategy will also be reviewing in conjunction with the review of the CDB Plan 2005 and commence in the second half of 2018.

Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy (ITLUS) 2015

This document sets out how Greater Bendigo will grow and how people and goods will move within it in the future through:

- preventing urban sprawl and strengthening connections between people and places
- improving health and wellbeing through much better public transport and/or active travel
- using the capacity of our networks to better move people and goods
- changing individual travel behaviours through strengthening partnerships and building community support
- leading through innovation and good governance

The Connecting Greater Bendigo: Integrated Transport and Land Use Strategy is a call to action to:

- progressively reduce the many short local trips that are unnecessarily made by car in urban Bendigo; especially accessing places in our local neighbourhoods, commuting to work in the city centre and travelling to and from school
- use clever and innovative city design to support far greater levels of walking, cycling and better public transport to better connect people and places and make big improvements in the health of everyone, particularly children; and
- further develop and strengthen existing innovative partnerships between Council and the key organisations and businesses that support the ITLUS objectives and work with Council to implement a series of agreed actions

Commercial Land and Activity Centre Strategy 2015

This document updated the Activity Centre Hierarchy for Greater Bendigo and provides information on the demand for future commercial floorspace. For the City Centre it forecasts additional floor space demand between 2015 and 2031 of:

- 44,400sqm of office
- 96,800sqm specialty retail and hospitality
- 10,500sqm department store

Future demand is driven by population growth, an evolution of the economy to be more service based, and a focus on locating future larger scale office developments in the City Centre.

Plan Greater Bendigo 2018

Plan Greater Bendigo is a first-of-a-kind collaborative plan that aims to identify key infrastructure projects that will support a projected population of 200,000 people by the middle of this century. It is a joint project between the City and the State Government, through a partnership with the Victorian Planning Authority. Eighteen transformational projects have been shortlisted.

Greater Bendigo Community Plan 2017-2021

This document contains Council's commitment to six key goals / strategic directions over the period 2017-2021. Relevant actions include:

- Implement projects to facilitate the safe movement of people on foot and bicycle around the Bendigo City Centre.
- Install additional pedestrian crossings, including at Bendigo Art Gallery, Hargreaves and Mundy Streets, and Queen and Edward Streets.
- Develop an improved cleaning and maintenance standard for the Hargreaves Mall.
- Activate public spaces in the city centre, including completing a design and development plan for the Hargreaves Mall.
- Investigate the development of a web-based portal for the city centre retail sector using www.shopbendigo.com.au.
- Ensure parking efficiency and accessibility for all visitors by introducing contemporary approaches to parking and conducting patrols that promote turn-over and reviewing the Bendigo CBD Parking Strategy in 2018-2019.
- Review the operation of the bus passenger waiting facility in Hargreaves Mall.
- Develop an action plan in partnership with landowners to upgrade building facades in the city centre, particularly in Pall Mall.



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