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Purpose of Report

To present the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy to Council for consideration and endorsement prior to placing the draft strategy on public exhibition for a minimum of 28 days.

Background

The Albury landscape is diverse and offers potential for a variety of accessible experiences for mountain biking. AlburyCity has identified that mountain biking is a growing sport locally and is looking to ensure trail and facility development is undertaken in a sustainable way.

At the Council meeting held on 13 July 2020, Council resolved:

That Council Officers:

- a. Develop a strategic approach to supporting the growth of mountain biking in Albury, including but not limited to:
 - i. maintenance plans for current trails;
 - ii. provision of additional infrastructure such as parking, shade, toilets, bike repair stations, safe connectivity for cyclists, and signage;
 - iii. possible sites for future trails of varying difficulties including pump tracks with the preference for land that is not zoned for environmental conservation; and
 - iv. prevention of unauthorised trail construction and associated safety and environmental risks, and rehabilitation of said unauthorised trails.
- b. That this be developed in consultation with key stakeholders including but not limited to mountain biking clubs, bike shops, Youth Council, the Sustainability Advisory Committee, Friends of Nail Can Hill, Wiradjuri representatives, bushwalkers; and
- c. Report the above to Councillors no later than March 2021.

A Request for Quotation was advertised seeking a suitably qualified consultant to assist in undertaking the development of the strategy. The scope of works included:

- the *Have Your Say* community engagement phase;
- key stakeholder engagement; and
- development of the Mountain Bike Strategy.

Following evaluation of the submissions, Common Ground Trails Pty Ltd was awarded the contract and commenced the project in October 2020.

Common Ground Trails has now completed the stakeholder engagement and synthesised an extensive amount of information as part of the gap analysis and assessment of future opportunities, to develop the Draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy (attachment 1).

The focus of this strategy has been to understand more fully:

- the characteristics of a sustainable mountain bike development;
- local and broader trends in mountain bike trail and facility provision;
- the local rider profile and desires in terms of trail styles; and
- the potential within the Albury landscape to provide sustainable and engaging mountain bike experiences with the intention of taking pressure off Nail Can Hill trails.

This report seeks to summarise the key points of the strategy and present the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy to Council for consideration and endorsement prior to placing the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy on public exhibition for a minimum 28 days.

Issues

Albury has an established community of riders who ride locally and further afield regularly. Nail Can Hill and Hunchback Hill (in Wodonga) are the key trail networks locally which are complemented by a range of smaller mountain bike facilities including pump tracks and skills tracks.

As part of the strategy development, Common Ground Trails completed a detailed gap analysis through their engagement with key stakeholders, riders, and the broader community which highlighted a range of gaps in the current situation including:

- limited opportunities for rider entry into mountain biking and progression;
- quantity of trail and facilities insufficient, placing increased pressure on what is available;
- lack of diversity in trail styles and facilities;
- insufficient support infrastructure such as car parking, event spaces, signage;
- a need for refined and strategic approach to governance and planning; and,
- missed opportunities to tap into the growing cycle tourism market.

A broad assessment of the Albury landscape highlighted significant potential for development of a suite of mountain bike trails and facilities which provide for a diversity of trails, riding styles and abilities. However, the Albury landscape also contains significant ecological and cultural heritage values which have been factored into the development of the overall vision and objectives of the strategy as follows:

Vision

Albury will be a vibrant hub of mountain biking activity and a must ride destination for locals and visitors alike. The region's unique attributes will provide a diverse suite of sustainable riding opportunities while recognising and respecting ecological and cultural values.

In achieving this vision, four key objectives have been defined to help focus priorities:

- **Protection of environmental and cultural values** – ensure trail development minimises impacts, and where possible, improves existing values.
- **Quality trails and infrastructure** – develop a suite of sustainable mountain bike experiences which respond to identified demand and current trends.
- **Collaboration and Community** – strengthen the mountain biking community and foster strong connections between key stakeholders.
- **Planning and management** – establish sustainable governance and management models.

The draft strategy provides an overview of the mountain biking industry including trends, trail types, supporting infrastructure required and economic benefits. A priorities action plan has also been developed for the strategy that is directly linked to the four main objectives. However, in summary, there are four key opportunities that have been identified as priorities for mountain bike trail and facility development in Albury. These key opportunities will provide a core suite of diverse riding experiences which will engage local riders and entice visitors:

- **Nail Can Hill Network** - *The terrain on offer within Nail Can Hill Reserve presents the most exciting opportunity within Albury for the development of trail styles which will meet the identified rider demand. Further work will need to be undertaken to develop a master plan for the reserve that meets all user needs. The master plan should review unsanctioned trails and investigate expanding the trail network while considering the environmental and cultural values of the site.*
- **Eastern Hill Trail Network** – *Eastern Hill provides opportunity for a small-scale trail network that complements the offer at Nail Can Hill with the different trail styles. This will not only provide a local opportunity for East Albury Residents, but also reduce pressure on the Nail Can Hill network.*
- **Local Scale Facilities** – *The scale of the AlburyCity LGA means small local scale facilities which provide for local catchments are required to ensure equitable access for residents across the region. These facilities also offer opportunities to create a diverse suite of facilities across the city, each with a different focus.*
- **Community Managed Jump Tracks** – *Further diversifying the mountain biking offer jump parks provide opportunity for expression and creativity. There is also opportunity for riding community involvement in design, construction, and maintenance of the facility. This will play an important role in preventing the establishment of unsanctioned trail and jumps development that have a significant detrimental impact on the environment. Further investigation is required on exact location, design, construction, risk management and maintenance for this opportunity. Investigations will also include discussion with existing Councils such as Geelong and Wagga Wagga who already have or are building these facilities.*

In summary, the strategy recommends that Albury focus on getting the mountain bike offer right for locals first, including provision of the right mix of trails and facilities and nurturing further development of a vibrant and welcoming riding community. This community, combined with quality trail developments, will quickly establish Albury as a must visit destination for riders enabling capitalisation on tourism potential.

The proposed new suite of mountain bike trails and facilities will establish Albury Wodonga as a regionally significant mountain bike trail destination. This change, when combined with effective marketing and promotion, could deliver significant visitation from outside the local and regional area, and it is estimated that the current economic impact of mountain biking in the region can be grown from the current level of \$3M per annum up to potentially \$14M per annum in direct and indirect economic impacts.

Community Engagement

Following the July resolution of Council, over 45 emails were received regarding the Mountain Bike Strategy resolution. The emails received were provided to Common Ground Trails as part of their inception meeting. A Stakeholder Engagement Plan was included in the project management framework. The plan was developed to support the community consultation process, and ensure all stakeholders were meaningfully engaged in accordance with the Council resolution.

There were 12 key identified stakeholders and partners directly engaged throughout the development of the strategy including:

- Wodonga City Council;
- NSW Crown Land;
- Albury Wodonga Mountain Bike Club;
- Albury Local Aboriginal Lands Council;
- Local bike shops;
- AlburyCity Youth Council;
- AlburyCity Sustainability Advisory Committee;
- Friends of Nail Can Hill;
- Border Bushwalking Club;
- Murray Valley Bushwalkers;
- Parklands Albury Wodonga; and
- Private landowners adjacent to Nail Can Hill.

These stakeholders were engaged through various means including a project introduction email, online survey, meetings, and phone calls.

Broader community consultation occurred through the Have Your Say process (2 November – 27 November 2020), which was primarily promoted by social media. It involved the establishment of an interactive map and survey through social pinpoint while stakeholder partners were involved in one-on-one meetings with Common Ground Trails. A community drop-in session was held at the Council offices whereby 14 people attended.

A total of 376 survey responses were submitted and 147 comments dropped onto the interactive map.

The information obtained through the direct stakeholder engagement and the broader community Have Your Say process was used by Common Ground Trails to develop the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy (attachment 1).

Councillors were also informed of the strategy process and key points through a Pre-meeting Briefing Session in April.

Placing the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy on public exhibition will provide an additional opportunity to enable key stakeholders and the wider community to have input into the strategy.

Albury 2030 Plan

Theme One – A Growing Sustainable Economy

1.8 Albury's infrastructure and assets are well managed and maintained.

- 1.8.1 Determine infrastructure and service levels through balancing community needs, future growth, sustainability, and heritage values.*

Theme Two – An Enhanced Environment

2.1 Albury has improved environmental outcomes.

- 2.1.5 Promote sustainable development that complements and respects the natural environment.*

2.2 Albury is prepared for changing environmental conditions.

- 2.2.3 Protect and enhance bushland areas and ensure connection between corridors.*

Theme Three – A Caring Community

3.3 The health and wellbeing of the Albury community improves.

- 3.3.4 Ensure appropriate infrastructure including accessible path networks/encourage active lifestyles.*

3.4 Albury offers a diverse and accessible range of facilities and activities for all ages.

- 3.4.3 Promote and encourage healthy lifestyles through development and efficient use of sporting, recreational, educational, and cultural facilities, and infrastructure.*
- 3.4.5 Increase and promote activities and infrastructure available for children and young people.*

Related Strategies

Regional Natural Environment Strategy – This is a Two Cities One Community strategy. It identifies Albury Wodonga's significant environmental assets, the major threats to these assets, as well as key actions to be undertaken in relation to managing biodiversity. It will be the key strategy to support decision making relating to environmental land, parks and gardens management, nature-based recreational projects, and community engagement initiatives across Albury Wodonga.

Plan of Management for Community Land 2016 – The Plan of Management outlines how Council manages Community Land. The majority of sites identified in the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy are included in the Plan of Management. The activities associated with the Mountain Bike Strategy align with permissible use of the land category.

Two Cities One Community Strategic Plan – Wodonga Council has been identified as a key stakeholder for the strategy. With mountain bike tracks and pump tracks located throughout Wodonga, these facilities have been considered as part of the strategy.

Legislation – Areas such as Nail Can Hill have a vegetation type of Box-Gum Grassy Woodland and are listed as endangered ecological community, and at a State-level are protected under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*, and at a Federal level protected by the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

Financials

The strategy has prepared a high-level opinion of probable costs associated with the priority trail and infrastructure recommendations, which is estimated at approximately \$4.2M (excluding annual maintenance costs).

Currently, there is a range of funding identified in the draft four-year delivery program to commence implementation of some of the Mountain Bike Strategy actions including:

Project Name	Year 1 (2021/22)	Year 2 (2022/23)	Year 3 (2023/24)	Year 4 (2024/25)
Eastern Hill Activation Plan	\$75,000			
Nail Can Hill Walking/Cycle Track Rationalisation and Upgrade	\$0	\$20,000		\$25,000
Mountain Bike Audit and Strategy Implementation	\$218,075*	\$150,000	\$100,000	

* Includes Crown Land Improvement Fund grant \$143,075

Upon Council endorsement of the final version of the Mountain Bike Strategy, Council officers, in conjunction with key stakeholders, will identify priority projects for inclusion into future budget processes for Council's consideration, as well as identify future grant funding opportunities.

Environmental Impact

The existing mountain bike trail network on Nail Can Hill has evolved with minimal planning or design. An independent audit has been undertaken on a large portion of the trails with maintenance/upgrades identified and planned to commence in the 2021/22 financial year.

The draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy provides for the enhancement of the trail network and facilities at a number of sites in a more coordinated manner, along with relevant environmental approvals to ensure a more sustainable trail network. It is anticipated that implementation of the key

recommendations will significantly reduce the proliferation of unsanctioned trails, which are currently impacting the ecological values of environmental assets such as Nail Can Hill. There are also opportunities at some sites identified in the strategy to enhance the environmental values (for example Eastern Hill).

Risk

- **Business Risk** – A detailed funding strategy will be developed following Council endorsement of the final version of the Mountain Bike Strategy. The funding strategy will identify priority elements that require funding, as well as grant funding opportunities, and community group/stakeholder in-kind contributions.
- **Corporate Risk** – Developing long term strategies provides a direction for all key stakeholders and Council. There are actions that will require further funding and planning prior to committing to on-ground works; however, some of the works can commence in the short term. Managing expectations of the mountain bike community and general community will be critical.
- **WHS and Public Risk** – WHS and risk management have been considered at a high level for the strategy. Further risk management consideration will be required when working through each action. More specifically, detailed analysis and risk management systems will need to be implemented for the proposed jumps track identified in the strategy.
- **Environmental Risk** – Mountain biking is typically associated with bushland. The majority of bushland around Albury has high conservation and cultural values. Prior to on ground works, the appropriate environmental and cultural assessments are required. These processes have been integrated into the strategy.
- **Delivery Program Risk** – The adoption of a draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy will allow Council to take a considered approach to improving mountain biking facilities across the city. The draft Strategy provides a prioritised action plan. Following adoption of the final version of the strategy, consideration can be given to programming and inclusion of projects in the project management framework for Council's future consideration during the budget process, noting existing projects identified under the Financial Impact section of this report.

Options

1. Endorse the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy and place the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy on public exhibition for a minimum of 28 days. **This is the preferred option** as completion of the Have Your Say processes and initial stakeholder engagement has provided valuable information for inclusion into the draft strategy. Placing the draft strategy on public exhibition will enable the community to have further input into the strategy by suggesting changes for consideration; or
2. Do not endorse the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy and request amendments. **This is not the preferred option** as the community is likely to provide comments on the draft strategy that could lead to amendments to the strategy. Placing the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy on public exhibition will provide this opportunity.

Conclusion

The Albury landscape is diverse and offers potential for a variety of accessible experiences for mountain biking. AlburyCity has identified that mountain biking is a growing sport locally and is looking to ensure trail and facility development is undertaken in a sustainable way.

At the 13 July 2020 Council meeting Council resolved to develop a strategic approach to supporting the growth of mountain biking in Albury. Common Ground Trails was engaged to undertake community and stakeholder engagement and develop the Albury Mountain Bike Strategy.

A broad assessment of the Albury landscape highlighted significant potential for development of a suite of mountain bike trails and facilities which provide for a diversity of trails, riding styles and abilities. However, the Albury landscape also contains significant ecological and cultural heritage values which have been factored into the development of the overall vision and objectives of the strategy.

The draft strategy recommends that Albury focus on getting the mountain bike offer right for locals first including provision of the right mix of trails and facilities and nurturing further development of a vibrant and welcoming riding community. This community, combined with quality trail developments, will quickly establish Albury as a must visit destination for riders enabling capitalisation on tourism potential.

The information obtained through the community engagement process has been used as the basis to inform the development of the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy. Upon Council endorsement, the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy will be placed on public exhibition, which will enable key stakeholders and the broader community to provide comment on the draft Strategy. At the conclusion of the public exhibition period, the comments received will be reviewed and, if applicable, the draft will be amended to produce the final version of the Albury Mountain Bike Strategy which will be presented back to Council for consideration.

Recommendation

That Council:

- a. Receives and endorses the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy;
- b. Places the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy on public exhibition for a minimum of 28 days;
and
- c. If no submissions are received through the public exhibition, the draft Albury Mountain Bike Strategy be adopted as the final version.