

Mansfield Visitor Servicing Review & Recommendations Report



**Mansfield
Shire**

**Mansfield
Shire Council**

Executive Summary

The Visitor Servicing Review and Recommendations Report provides Mansfield Shire Council (MSC) with a review of MSC's visitor information services and identifies a best practice visitor servicing model for Mansfield Shire (Mansfield). The report:

1. Recommends whether Council should continue to provide visitor services
2. Recommends a visitor servicing model across the shire
3. Defines Council's future role in the delivery of visitor servicing
4. Documents a transition plan towards the successful implementation of the visitor servicing model.

MSC is recommended as the lead agent for delivery of a new visitor-centric servicing model across Mansfield to ensure that maximum benefits can be gained for the local economy and community. Private sector delivery is not supported because commercial imperatives could not be achieved while delivering economic and social benefits to the shire.

The recommended model is co-location of a visitor information centre within a new signature attraction that establishes Mansfield as a destination in its own right, and encourages high value visitors to travel to the shire and spend in the local visitor economy.

The model:

- Incorporates an omni-channel, or multi-channel approach to meet visitors' information needs online and face to face
- Positions Mansfield to service the Lifestyle Leaders market from Melbourne, high value visitors that offer the greatest potential to drive economic growth and sustainable tourism development through increasing visitor yield.

The elements of the model seek to extend the reach of Mansfield's online and face to face visitor servicing to multiple touchpoints across the shire. These elements include:

- Physical, bricks and mortar VIC co-located within the signature attraction
- Strong online presence with inspiring Mansfield web content and online chat system
- Coordinating volunteers to support visitor servicing at the VIC, key visitor touchpoints and at local festival and events
- Local business experience experts to become recognised local ambassadors providing visitor information kiosks, brochure racks and information
- Tourism North East's (TNE) digital servicing plans (High Country website content, app, and digital signposting)
- Signage and wayfinding

Determining the best fit model involved analysis of best practice case studies, macro trends in visitor servicing, critical success factors for visitor servicing and stakeholder aspirations. The analysis highlighted three areas of focus for MSC's visitor servicing activity to provide a clear framework for Mansfield to maximise the economic and social outcomes from visitor engagement.

1

Provide accurate, quality and timely information to visitors where and when they need it (online and face to face).

2

Build a destination brand and identity for Mansfield and increase brand awareness, appeal and advocacy amongst high value visitors.

3

Increase yield from visitors across the shire through growth in spend and/or average length of stay.

Actioning these three focus areas will optimise MSC's return on investment in visitor servicing and provide direct benefits for local businesses and residents.

While MSC is the lead in the overall management of visitor servicing, an omni-channel approach with its many touchpoints requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders taking a partnership approach to the implementation and ongoing delivery of the visitor servicing model.

A phased approach over five years is proposed for the successful transition to the model.



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PART A:

**Best Practice Mansfield Visitor
Servicing Model**



Introduction

The purpose of this Visitor Servicing Review and Recommendations Report is to provide Mansfield Shire Council (MSC) with a review of MSC's visitor information services and identify a best practice visitor servicing model for Mansfield Shire (Mansfield) where future services are:

- Being delivered as efficiently and effectively as possible
- Meeting customer needs
- Meeting industry needs
- Delivering value to ratepayers.

The report:

1. Recommends whether Council should continue to provide visitor services
2. Recommends a visitor servicing model across the shire
3. Defines Council's future role in the delivery of visitor servicing
4. Documents a transition plan towards the successful implementation of the visitor servicing model.

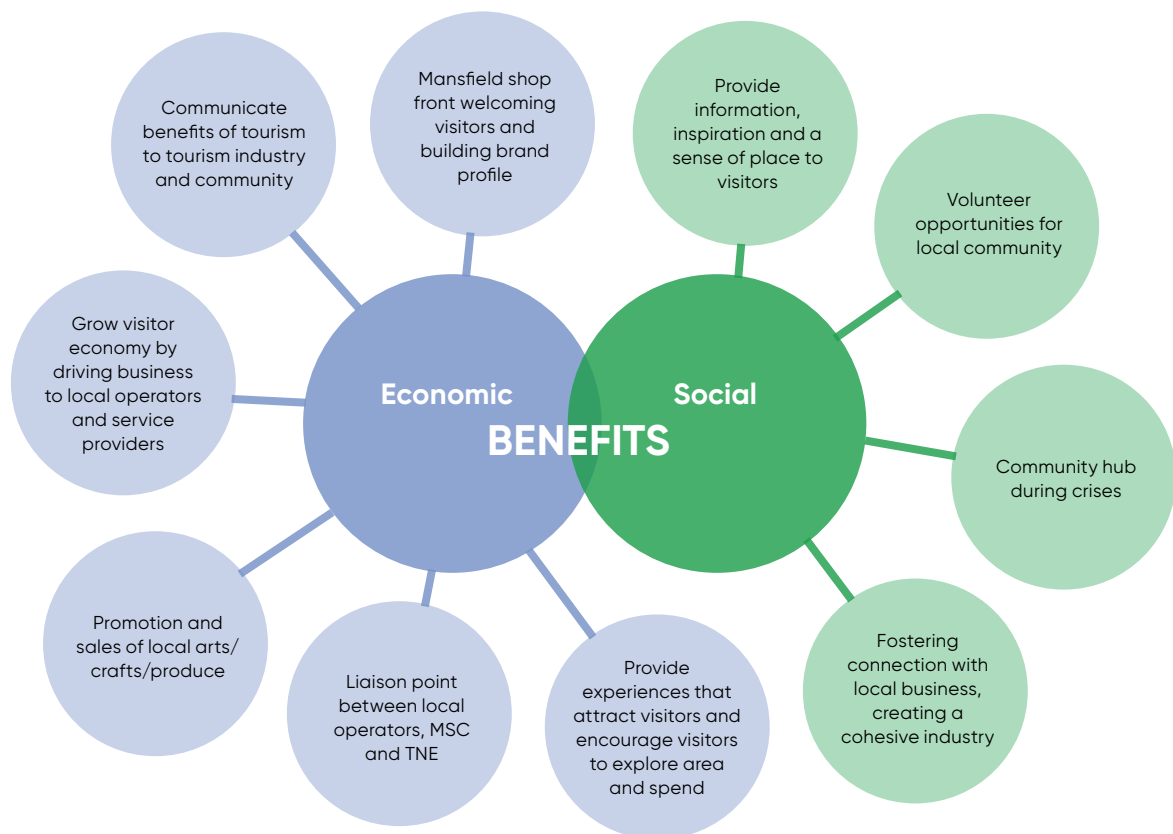
The analysis was undertaken through a visitor lens; identifying the services required to meet visitor expectations, and increase visitor stays, expenditure, and advocacy for the destination. The vital element is providing visitors with the information they require where, when and how they need it at every point on their journey. This means from when they start thinking about a holiday, through to more detailed planning and booking, then experiencing the destination, and sharing memories with friends and family.

The recommended model reflects the findings of a desktop review, including consideration of best practice models across Australia, macro trends, target markets, and stakeholder engagement (see Part B of this report for details and Appendix 1 for the list of stakeholders consulted). The insights gathered from the desktop review and initial engagement were documented in a Findings Paper, which also identified potential scenarios for visitor servicing that emerged from the engagement process (see Attachment 2 for the scenarios considered). The Findings Paper was shared and workshopped with a Project Reference Group comprising a representative group of local businesses and a MSC staff member. Their feedback coupled with research into best practice visitor servicing models has informed the recommendations in this report.

The need for MSC to provide visitor servicing

Successful visitor servicing offers communities a range of economic and social benefits, as illustrated by Figure 1. MSC is recommended as the lead agent for delivery of a new visitor-centric servicing model across Mansfield Shire to ensure that maximum benefits can be gained for the local economy and community. With all tourism functions managed internally, MSC can have oversight of visitor servicing across the entire visitor journey, can create and promote Mansfield’s own brand and take deliberate, targeted action to attract high spend visitors to achieve the best outcomes for Mansfield, while continuing to participate in High Country marketing and experience development initiatives.

Figure 1. Economic and social benefits from visitor servicing



If visitor servicing is left for private enterprise to deliver, growth in the visitor economy would be limited. Where commercial imperatives solely drive decision making, services delivered are limited to those providing direct financial return such as bookings and retail. With visitors increasingly booking directly with tourism operators, bookings through visitor information centres (VICs) represent a declining revenue opportunity, reducing attractiveness for private businesses. Also, private sector provision of visitor information does not offer the assurance of quality information that is accurate, timely and objective. Local government across Australia delivers visitor servicing or funds regional or local tourism associations or not-for-profit community groups to ensure economic and social benefits can be fully realised.

While it is recommended that MSC lead the management of visitor servicing, a partnership approach with Tourism North East (TNE) and local stakeholders will be required as each have a part to play. Visitors are accessing travel websites, mobile apps, online travel agents, and social media for information when they want it. Then within the destination, visitors are engaging with cafés, retailers, tourism attractions, and service providers who are influencing their travel decisions and overall quality of experience. (The various roles of MSC and stakeholders are detailed in a later section, Recommended Resourcing.)

Recommended visitor servicing model

A proposed vision to guide visitor servicing for Mansfield Shire is:

To inform, inspire and influence visitors through exceptional visitor servicing that connects visitors with Mansfield's people and places, and supports a sustainable visitor economy.

Based on stakeholder engagement and best practice visitor servicing, three areas of focus emerge that provide a framework for Mansfield to maximise the economic and social outcomes from visitor engagement. The visitor servicing model has been chosen for its ability to deliver on the three areas.



1

Provide accurate, quality and timely information to visitors where and when they need it (online and face to face).



2

Build a destination brand and identity for Mansfield and increase brand awareness, appeal and advocacy amongst high value visitors.



3

Increase yield from visitors across the shire through growth in spend and/or average length of stay.

Actioning these three focus areas will optimise MSC's return on investment in visitor servicing and provide direct benefits for local businesses and residents.

The recommended model to effectively respond to the three focus areas is co-location of a visitor information centre within a new signature attraction that establishes Mansfield as a destination in its own right, and encourages high value visitors to travel to the shire and spend in the local visitor economy.

"In the past, people proactively sought out the visitor centre. Now, if visitors happen to find one, they will probably wander in; why not? But they no longer see it as a must-do as soon as they arrive. That's a fundamental change."

Destination Think



The model:

- Incorporates an omni-channel, or multi-channel approach to meet visitors' information needs online and face to face
- Positions Mansfield to service the Lifestyle Leaders market from Melbourne¹.

The model will provide visitors with convenient, relevant and innovative omni-channel (online and face-to-face) access to information that is accurate, objective and consistent across visitor touchpoints. The elements of the model include:

- Physical, bricks and mortar VIC co-located within the signature attraction
- Strong online presence with inspiring Mansfield web content and online chat system
- Coordinating volunteers to support visitor servicing at the VIC, key visitor touchpoints and at local festival and events
- Local business experience experts to become recognised local ambassadors providing visitor information kiosks, brochure racks and information
- TNE's digital servicing plans (High Country website content, app, and digital signposting)
- Signage and wayfinding

Development of a new signature visitor attraction at the Station Precinct in Mansfield is proposed given its location on the drive route from the main visitor market. While the details of the attraction need to be determined as part of a broader tourism and events planning and branding process, it is recommended that it:

- Celebrate the natural and cultural strengths of the area
- Activate the heritage assets at the precinct
- Support the efforts of the Mansfield Historic Society in promoting the area's heritage stories.

The current Mansfield Station Precinct Master Plan identifies space for a Community Civic Hub and Complementary Use area (together with Rail Trail facilities) which could be configured for the new attraction, an associated VIC, and a café (or other food and beverage option).

Provision of a bricks and mortar VIC co-located with the new attraction is recommended to increase foot traffic into the VIC and enable staff and volunteers to engage with visitors and encourage them to stay longer and spend more locally. A survey² of the use of Victoria's VICs highlighted the value of VICs in encouraging longer stays and greater spend.

90
PERCENT

Of visitors visited attractions or places that they otherwise wouldn't have

\$186
DOLLARS

Average additional amount spent per respondent as a result of visiting the accredited VIC

18
PERCENT

Of visitors stayed longer in the region as a result of the VIC

These statistics are averaged across a range of destinations with varying numbers of commercial visitor attractions, therefore, the level of additional expenditure is not directly transferable to Mansfield's situation. However, the results do highlight a real impact of effective visitor engagement. With the development of a new signature attraction and the activation of an omni-channel visitor servicing approach, Mansfield will be positioned to encourage visitors to spend more, increasing the overall contribution to the local economy.

The new co-located VIC would be designed to welcome visitors and provide information, facilitate bookings and sell retail items for both the VIC and the new attraction. VIC staff and volunteers could operate across the VIC and the attraction to maximise operational efficiencies for both activities.

Co-location of Winton's VIC with its Waltzing Matilda Centre provides a relevant case study example because of the way the VIC forms an important element of the Centre's engagement with visitors, and the staffing arrangement provides efficiencies across the museum and VIC operations.

¹ Based on TNE's and Visit Victoria's market research, the Lifestyle Leaders market are high value visitors that offer the greatest potential to drive economic growth and sustainable tourism development through increasing visitor yield.

² VTIC VIC User Survey, 2019-2021

Omni-channel elements

The other elements of the omni-channel approach seek to extend the reach of Mansfield's online and face to face visitor servicing to multiple touchpoints across the shire, as illustrated by Figure 2.

Figure 2: Online and face to face visitor information touchpoints



Case Study: Co-location of a VIC with a signature attraction

The Winton Waltzing Matilda Centre and Visitor Information Centre in Queensland's outback is a contemporary example of a co-located VIC that gives visitors a reason to stop and explore. The Waltzing Matilda Centre is a museum that tells the stories of the Waltzing Matilda legend, Aboriginal and cultural history, opal mining, the dinosaur trail, and the origins of Qantas. It is an anchor attraction in the Winton CBD that attracts visitors.

When visitors walk through the door, they are greeted by VIC staff and volunteers who sell tickets to the museum, and handle bookings for tours, attractions and accommodation to encourage increased length of stay and spend. Staff also manage exhibition and function spaces, and a retail space selling local souvenirs and gifts. A café which attracts visitors and locals is operated under a separate tenancy within the footprint of the building, positioned just outside of the Centre.

Further details: www.matildacentre.com.au



The following new activity is recommended to activate the omni-channel approach:

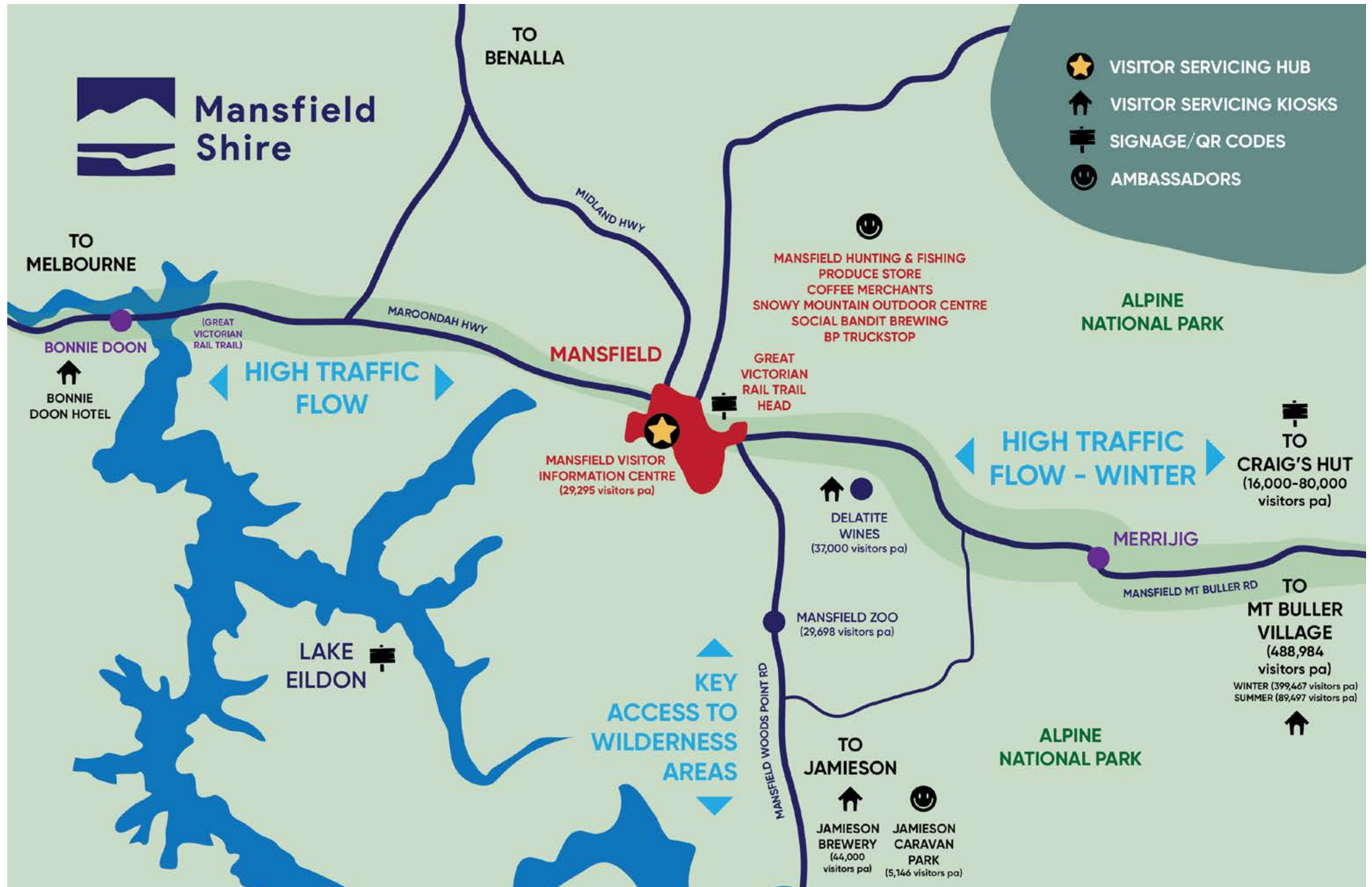
NEW ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
<p>Create a dedicated Mansfield online presence managed by MSC, with inspiring Mansfield-specific content, a fresh brand, and representation of Mansfield based on target visitor markets and including regularly updated itineraries and packages for different interests and traveller needs (e.g., families, and short and longer stays), event information and packages, local stories, and recommendations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital content is often the first and primary form of information visitors seek out when deciding where to holiday, what to see and do while there, and where to stay. • Mansfield-specific web content is critical to build a strong sense of the Mansfield brand and competitive positioning in the minds and hearts of visitors. • Online tools such as itinerary planners enable potential visitors to start to engage with the destination. • Ease of navigation, and ability to make decisions and book instantly is key to attracting visitors to the shire.
<p>Provide an online chat system on the destination website to enable potential visitors to engage with local experts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides visitors with the ability to have their questions answered in real time or within a short space of time. • Creates a sense of ease and welcome with the destination. • Instant responses encourage visitors to go ahead and book their travel, limiting hesitation and change of mind.
<p>Manage a proactive social media tourism presence, sharing news and stories to inspire and inform, and ensure visitors are receiving accurate and timely information.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables the VIC to increase engagement with visitors and ensure queries are answered with accurate and timely information. • Enables the VIC to build awareness of what the shire offers and encourage visitors and locals to explore.
<p>Establish a group of volunteers to support visitor servicing from the VIC in the Station Precinct and at events and key visitor touchpoints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages community involvement in the VIC, creating a sense of pride and ownership in the centre. • Enables the VIC to extend its reach by using roving volunteers at events to engage with visitors and locals. • Provides an opportunity for local students to gain hands-on tourism experience through involvement in specific volunteer projects; and for local retirees to have a sense of purpose and contribution in the community.
<p>Coordinate a group of local business experience experts across the shire to become recognised local ambassadors providing visitor information kiosks.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises visitors will seek out information from touchpoints such as businesses to gain their insider information and insights on local secrets and 'must-dos'. • Harnesses the enthusiasm and expert knowledge of local businesses who are already acting as unofficial local ambassadors. • Provides a mechanism to support local businesses with resources such as consistent answers to 'frequently asked questions', latest news and tips, and maps and brochures, to make their role easier and ensure accuracy of information provided.



NEW ACTIVITY	RATIONALE
<p>Support TNE’s digital servicing plans, in particular the new High Country website content, visitor app, and digital signposting at iconic sites to encourage visitors to explore the shire.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognises that visitors prefer planning using online sources. • Boosts awareness of the High Country offering online. • Enables businesses to connect with visitors who are in the destination via the app, providing deals, insider tips, etc, to encourage visitors to spend time and money in the community. • Digital signposting will help visitors navigate with confidence and learn quirky information and facts about sites of interest.
<p>Review and update wayfinding signage to ensure it makes it easy for visitors to find the VIC from the different entrances to Mansfield and parking areas including those for RVs, caravans, and camper trailers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables visitors to more readily find the VIC regardless of the direction of approach. • Appealing signage on the main route into Mansfield will encourage visitors to enter the Station precinct. • Provides a sense of ease and welcome when signage about parking places is clear, particularly for RVs, caravans and camper trailers.
<p>Review and update interpretive signage at sites of significance (incorporating digital signposting as appropriate).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital signposting will help visitors navigate with confidence and learn quirky information and facts about sites of interest. • Provides a means of sharing the area’s stories and building awareness of what makes Mansfield unique.

Potential sites of local ambassadors/visitor information kiosks are the key visitor touchpoints – those attracting high numbers of visitors relative to other locations. The following map (Figure 3) provides an overview of the main visitor flows into and through Mansfield and some of the key visitor touchpoints, however this is indicative only and not all possible locations are noted.

Figure 3: Visitor touchpoints in the Mansfield shire



Rationale for the model

From analysing best practice visitor servicing across Australia, a number of common factors emerge that can be considered critical to the success of visitor servicing. The recommended visitor servicing model readily delivers on these critical success factors as follows.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS	HOW THE MODEL DELIVERS
<p>1. Applying a visitor lens in visitor servicing: where the needs and preferences of the visitor is central to the visitor servicing model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Model developed which delivers information where and how visitors are seeking it.
<p>2. Located where visitors are: with information available online and offline where visitors need and expect it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers multiple points of engagement (online and offline) with visitors.
<p>3. Delivers a 'Wow' experience: provides an experience that compels target markets into the VIC and increases dwell time</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addresses a gap in Mansfield tourism attractions, providing an anchor experience at the Station Precinct that provides a compelling reason for visitors to stop and spend time and money in Mansfield rather than passing through to the lake and wilderness areas. It envisages an attraction that celebrates the natural and cultural strengths of the area and celebrates the destination brand. Provides Mansfield with an attraction to draw high spend visitors such as the Lifestyle Leaders from Melbourne (see Part B target market profiles for details), and increasing visitor yield for local businesses and contribution to the visitor economy, compared to the lower yielding Habitual Visitors and Visiting Friends and Relative markets. Encourages visitors to use the VIC when co-located with an attraction, learn more about what's on offer, and be inspired to explore the area. Mansfield's high percentage of holiday homes and the limited tourism attractions within Mansfield township highlights the necessity of the VIC being an attraction in its own right or co-located with a new popular attraction to draw foot traffic.
<p>4. Valued by local businesses and residents: draws visitors to the destination, generates expenditure with local businesses, and meets the needs of the community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeks to attract and encourage expenditure by the high value market, Lifestyle Leaders. Optimises the Station Precinct as a compelling hub in Mansfield for visitors to stop and explore from. The Station Precinct's location on the main drive route for visitors from Melbourne (the main visitor market), and alongside the trailhead for the Great Victorian Rail Trail is well suited to become a destination hub for visitors coming into Mansfield town and shire, and increases the site's appeal for the local community.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS	HOW THE MODEL DELIVERS
<p>5. Able to monitor and measure performance: data gathered to demonstrate performance against key performance indicators</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables MSC to take a lead role in the planning and development of Mansfield as a destination and engaging with visitors across their journey to ensure a quality visitor experience. • Enhanced data collection systems planned (see Transition Plan).
<p>6. Delivers quality, objective information (recognised through accreditation): processes in place to ensure the consistent delivery of quality information by all visitor touchpoints</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enables MSC to maintain Level 1 Accreditation for the VIC and the core benefit of MSC having access to state and federal grant funding for VIC and visitor servicing in the shire. With new funding programs becoming available through economic recovery initiatives, it is timely for MSC to leverage the accreditation status and seek funding support. • Co-location within an attraction will assist MSC in meeting accreditation requirements such as staff numbers, operating hours and facilities offered. • Harnesses the expertise and passion of popular visitor touchpoints to become local ambassadors providing information beyond the reach of the VIC.
<p>7. Is financially sustainable: generating economic and social benefits, and delivering sufficient commercial return</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decreases the servicing cost per visitor with increases in the number of walk-in visitors. • Makes the best use of human and financial resources, enabling MSC to concentrate its resources on maximising the reach and value of visitor servicing activities, and on destination and experience development. • Recognises that increased investment in the existing VIC building is unlikely to deliver an ROI without the VIC becoming an attraction in own right that is sufficiently compelling and unique to attract the target visitor markets.
<p>8. Governed by effective leadership and management: with a governance structure in place that enables efficient and effective visitor servicing activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes an updated management structure as part of a transition plan to the new model. • Having all tourism functions (including visitor servicing and digital marketing) managed by MSC provides increased efficiencies and an enhanced ability to better service visitors from dreaming and planning through to experiencing and sharing.

The quality, immersive cultural experience provided by Spirits of the Red Sand offers an illustration of what could be possible for the new signature attraction at the heritage precinct. With a focus on interactive theatre using new and existing heritage buildings, it represents a viable case study for Mansfield.

Case Study: Creating an immersive experience

Spirits of the Red Sand in south Brisbane, Queensland, transports guests to the 1800s during a time of great conflict between colonisers and Traditional Owners. A storyteller weaves the tale of three Aboriginal brothers in an immersive 'roving theatre' re-enactment where guests become a part of the story as it is told in a variety of historical venues in a colonial village and an Aboriginal village, such as a church and a jail. The performances of the cast are raw and powerful because they are telling the true story of their forefathers; they are the direct descendants of the brothers.

Spirits is at the same time, challenging, poignant, and uplifting. The audience is, in turn, shocked, saddened and inspired. Moving the audience around the village as the story progresses provides time for reflection, allowing guests to emotionally process what they have experienced.

After the performance, as the audience enjoys a bush tucker dinner, they have the opportunity to mingle with the cast and staff (all Aboriginal, and all from the same extended family) to ask them questions about Aboriginal life and culture, then and now - no topic is off the table.

Success factors relate to providing a meaningful, emotional, and fully engaging transformational experience that challenges and stretches visitors, including:

- Immersion in an authentic setting instead of a theatre, using the buildings and outdoor spaces of Beenleigh Historical Village
- Audience inclusion in the performance; for example, while the minister rails about the 'natives', using phrases from sermons from the day, the audience sits in the pews as his congregation
- Truth-telling and authenticity
- Provoking strong emotional reactions while providing time for reflection, absorption and discussion of difficult themes, and ending on an uplifting note
- Deepened understanding of, and pride in, Indigenous culture.



Recommended resourcing

As noted earlier, while MSC is the lead in the overall management of visitor servicing, an omni-channel approach with its many touchpoints requires the involvement of multiple stakeholders taking a partnership approach to the implementation and ongoing delivery of the visitor servicing model. The following outlines the key stakeholders and their roles.

STAKEHOLDERS	ROLE IN VISITOR SERVICING
Mansfield Shire Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operate and resource the VIC activities including a bricks and mortar VIC and roving volunteers at high-traffic areas and events to encourage dispersal and spend across the shire Refer visitors to local businesses Ensure visitors have access to accurate and timely information on road and weather conditions across the shire, things to see and do and how to get to them. Address gap in current services with a program to coordinate volunteers and local ambassadors, and provide training and resources to ensure consistent messages to visitors Support the development and maintenance of a Mansfield destination website and social media content, to build Mansfield's competitive positioning and profile within visitor markets (managed in-house or outsourced) Work with TNE on High Country marketing and experience development Maintain quality signage and wayfinding as a Council service Secure grant funding Attract private investment into local attractions
Local ambassadors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide local, expert information to visitors Provide space for a visitor information kiosk if appropriate Provide a warm welcome as a face of Mansfield Refer people to the VIC for more information
Other local businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a warm welcome as a face of Mansfield Refer people to the VIC for more information
Local residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a warm welcome as a face of Mansfield Refer people to the VIC for more information
Buller Holidays and Alpine Resort Management Board (BHARMB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain Mt Buller website content Manage Mt Buller bookings systems Work with MSC in cooperative marketing opportunities
Tourism North East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain High Country website and social media content Roll out the High Country app and signage at key sites Undertake High Country marketing campaigns Coordinate training and networking opportunities for High Country VICs and operators
Victoria Tourism Industry Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training and networking opportunities for Victoria's VICs Undertake and share VIC research Manage the Victorian VICs accreditation program
Victoria Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As owner of the accredited VIC brand, protect the integrity of the VIC brand Provide grant funding opportunities

For MSC to take on these roles and manage visitor servicing, will require consideration of the resourcing allocation to the Tourism Team within the Community and Economic Development Unit. In addition to the existing full time Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events and the part time Visitor Information Officers, it is recommended that MSC recruit an additional full time Economic Development Officer - Tourism Development position to enable them to deliver on all tourism functions. The following table provides an overview of the functions of each role.

Senior Coordinator Community and Economic Development	Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events	Economic Development Officer - Tourism Development	Visitor Information Officer
Full Time	Full Time	Full Time	Part Time (0.5 Full Time)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversee the strategic development of tourism and events Manage the team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer and ambassador program Signage and wayfinding Events Industry Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Destination marketing Product and Experience development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customer service at the VIC

It is important that MSC undertake these roles to be able to achieve the visitor servicing vision and become a recognised destination.





Transition Plan

Phased delivery

A phased approach over five years is proposed for the successful implementation of the model. The key project milestones are highlighted in Figure 4.

Phase 1 (2022 – 2024): Introduce an omni-channel approach to visitor servicing
Phase 2 (2025): Develop a signature attraction at the Station Precinct

Figure 4: Transition timeline



Implementation of Phase 2 is envisaged once a business case has been completed, and grant funding and an appropriate operator for the attraction secured. All of the Phase 1 elements would be maintained with the exception of use of the existing VIC building which would be made available for other supporting activities. The Station Precinct Master Plan will require a revision to reflect this new activity.



Actions

Actions are outlined for each of the three areas of focus and prioritised across a four-year time frame from 2022 to 2025 to transition to the new visitor servicing model.



1

Provide accurate, quality and timely information to visitors where and when they need it (online and face to face).



2

Build a destination brand and identity for Mansfield and increase brand awareness, appeal and advocacy amongst high value visitors.



3

Increase yield from visitors across the shire through growth in spend and/or average length of stay.

Actions in subsequent years, or specific elements within each, may be brought forward if funding becomes available.

MSC staff time and cost is assigned when no additional budget is identified. How staff are allocated and any changes in staffing requirements will need to be considered as part of annual planning process. Some of the actions will replace current activity while others will be additional tasks.

2022 Priority Projects

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
1. Tourism and Event Strategy and Activation Plan, and supporting destination brand	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Secure funding to deliver this project as a priority. Engage a consultant to work with MSC and industry to create a Tourism and Event Strategy and Activation Plan that considers product and events development, marketing, infrastructure, and governance, and provides a roadmap for destination development and activation, including recommendations on the most appropriate visitor attraction at the Station Precinct. Refine the staff structure as per the recommended resourcing model within this plan Engage a consultant to develop a fresh destination brand that positions Mansfield as an appealing destination that can leverage Mt Buller and High Country but can also stand alone, and provides Mansfield's tourism and events industry with clarity on their story and how it links into the regional story. (This may be a joint project with the development of the Tourism and Event Strategy and Activation Plan, with cost savings achieved across a combined project.) Ensure that industry is closely engaged through this process to ensure a sense of ownership. Work with a creative agency to create a new photo and video library that brings the brand to life. Create an industry brand kit (as part of the destination brand scope) that supports operators in integrating the brand story into their own business and marketing. Launch the brand and plan at an industry function. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Senior Coordinator Community and Economic Development</p> <p>Partners: Local operators, TNE</p>	<p>\$50,000 Tourism strategy</p> <p>Funding opportunity: Building Better Regions Fund (BBRF) – Community Investments Stream</p> <p>\$60,000-\$80,000 Destination brand (may be reduced if combined with the tourism plan project)</p> <p>\$40,000-\$60,000 for photo and video library content</p> <p>\$5,000 launch event (part of BBRF application)</p> <p>\$80,000 for new FT staff position</p>
2. Signature attraction business case	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a business case, based on the recommended attraction outlined in the proposed Tourism and Event Strategy and Activation Plan, that defines a viable operating model for the attraction. Update the Station Precinct Master Plan to incorporate the signature visitor attraction and the inclusion of a co-located VIC. This will also need to consider how to repurpose the current VIC building (for example, as a community hub). Work with the Mansfield Historical Society to reimagine the heritage experience as part of the broader tourism and event development planning for Mansfield. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Senior Coordinator Community and Economic Development</p> <p>Partner: Mansfield Heritage Society</p>	<p>\$70,000 for business case and updated master plans of precinct</p> <p>Funding opportunity: BBRF – Community Investments Stream</p>

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
3. Data collection systems	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review and update VIC data measuring systems to be able to demonstrate the economic and social value the VIC generates. Data to capture includes: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. visitor origin b. length of stay c. reason for visit d. activities undertaken or seeking to do e. satisfaction with experiences f. information sources used in trip planning g. accommodation type. 2. Consistently capture visitor data and insights via phone, online and face to face, and share these with industry bodies and operators. 3. Investigate the placement of traffic counters at popular visitor spots, i.e., Craig's Hut, rest spots, walks 4. Provide quarterly reports to Council on the outcomes and ROI metrics. 5. Undertake a visitor survey at key visitor touchpoints during peak visitor season to gain an understanding of visitors and their behaviour, collecting the same data as the VIC survey, as well as visitor use of the VIC. 	Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism Development	MSC staff time/cost
4. Volunteer program	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop a volunteer program to support visitor servicing, collaborating with the Historical Society and drawing on local retirees and school students; with the volunteers rostered within the bricks and mortar VIC, roving at high traffic areas and supporting specific events. 2. Undertake a recruitment drive throughout the local community. 3. Induct volunteers and manage via a roster system. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Facilitate training on topics such as customer service, VIC procedures, visitor markets, and itinerary development. 2. Coordinate regular industry familiarisation tours (famils) to ensure staff and volunteers have strong local knowledge, particularly on new and updated experiences, and to build relationships with industry. 	Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events Partners: Local operators, local community, Mansfield Historical Society	MSC staff time/cost

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
5. Online content	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bring content development for the destination website and social media channels inhouse to MSC from TNE. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Move website hosting to MSC. 	Lead: MSC	MSC staff time/cost
6. Story bank	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assign team member(s) the responsibility of managing the story bank. 2. Collect and craft a repository of local stories able to be accessed, leveraged, and shared by other stakeholders (e.g. of local characters, Indigenous creation, and local producers and artisans) 3. Encourage stakeholders to use these stories to create a deeper emotional connection with visitors, and to bring the region to life and make it memorable for visitors. 4. Drip feed the stories via media releases, and a blog on the website and social media (once media have had an opportunity to publish first). 	Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism Development Partners: Local community	MSC staff time/cost
7. Signage and wayfinding review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Undertake a signage and wayfinding review. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Identify where signage improvements are needed across the shire. b. Identify other visitor information points such as local community noticeboards, rest areas, and digital signposts or QR codes at popular visitor locations. c. Link with TNE's digitally-enabled signage network project, identifying those products, experiences and sites where digitally-enabled signage would be valuable to connect visitors with local businesses, and to learn more about specific sites. 2. Secure funding to undertake the works recommended in the review. 	Lead: MSC- Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events Partner: TNE	In-house if capacity permits \$40,000 if external contractor required Funding opportunity: Stronger Regional Communities Program

2023 Priority Projects

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
<p>1. Destination website refresh</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop the project brief and source funding. Be sure to engage with TNE and BHARMB so websites and content are linked and leveraged. 2. Prepare itineraries, packages, event calendar, and other content for the website. 3. Commission a photo and video shoot to provide fresh new content for the website and marketing activity (undertaken as part of the new brand development: see 2022 Priority Projects, Project 1). 4. Add new content to the website, such as: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Link to TNE and Mt Buller websites b. Integrate social channels c. Include an online chat service d. Include a 'build your own itinerary' service e. Include an online booking service for experiences and events 5. Engage an online booking system to manage the booking of experiences and event tickets from the website. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Undertake an audit of the various booking platforms to determine which one best meets the needs of Mansfield b. Report regularly to industry on enquiries and bookings to maintain support and motivation. 3. Work with TNE to gain feedback and advice on the website. 4. Launch the refreshed destination website at the VIC with industry present, and showcase the new digital visitor services (consider combining this with the launch of the ambassador program and destination brand, etc). 	<p>Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer – Tourism Development</p> <p>Partners: TNE, BHARMB, local operators</p>	<p>\$20,000 for website refresh</p> <p>Budget noted at 2022 Project 1 for photo and video library</p> <p>Funding opportunity: Stronger Regional Communities Program</p>

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
<p>2. Strategic and always on social media</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement a social media content plan that allows for the delivery of proactive content that resonates with target visitor markets, including local stories and happenings to inspire and encourage visits. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Determine the social media content's pillars and themes to ensure consistency in brand messaging. b. Establish #hashtags and @handles for use by all industry bodies and operators. c. Include a daily snow and road conditions report in winter and peak seasons (as required). 2. Monitor social media channels and review sites daily, and actively respond to queries and comments. 3. Maintain close contact with TNE, BHARMB, Parks Victoria, Visit Victoria, and other strategic partners to share and distribute Mansfield content when relevant. 4. Share new activities and events on local community Facebook pages to encourage locals and Habitual Visitors to explore and invite friends and relatives to visit the shire. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism Development</p> <p>Partners: TNE, BHARMB, Parks Victoria, Visit Victoria, local community</p>	<p>\$30,000/year to outsource to a professional agency</p> <p>Or in-house if staff have suitable skills and using new, professional images and video content</p> <p>Funding opportunity: Stronger Regional Communities Program</p>
<p>3. Local ambassadors</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assign management of a local ambassador program to a VIC staff member. 2. Establish a local ambassador program with the key visitor touchpoints: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Incorporate online training on topics such as customer service and local stories. b. Provide each ambassador with a base level of digital and print information that will be delivered electronically to visitors via tablet and face to face as appropriate to the business and resourcing availability. c. Invite ambassadors to participate in families with volunteers to gain firsthand knowledge of local experiences. 3. Support the establishment and promotion of a cycle friendly network in the shire as visitor touchpoints (incorporating within the ambassador program as appropriate). 4. Provide regular emails to all local businesses updating them on new attractions, experiences, and any changes to businesses' operating hours, to encourage provision of consistent messages to visitors. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events</p> <p>Partners: Local operators</p>	<p>MSC staff time/cost</p>

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
4. Visitor Information Kiosk(s)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invite expressions of interest from local ambassadors to host a visitor information kiosk within their operation. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ambassadors would be required to make space available for a VIC desk, brochure content, and signage. The kiosk would be operated by VIC volunteers or local operators (or a combination). b. Preferred locations, based on visitor numbers and spread across the shire, include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mt Buller Village • Bonnie Doon Hotel • Jamieson Brewery • Delatite Winery 	<p>Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events</p> <p>Partners: Local ambassadors</p>	<p>To be negotiated with ambassadors</p>
5. Product bundling and itinerary development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Continue to work with industry to design and distribute itineraries that inspire the target visitor markets to stop, stay, and play in the shire. Ensure the itineraries align with the destination brand and cover the experience pillars, while fulfilling the needs of the target visitor markets. 2. Load itineraries onto the destination website and use them in the VIC to make it easier for visitors to plan their stay. 3. Encourage TNE to use the itineraries for campaigns and seasonal initiatives. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism Development</p> <p>Partners: Local operators, TNE</p>	<p>MSC staff time/ cost</p>

2024-2025 Priority Projects

PROJECTS	ACTIONS	RESPONSIBILITY	ESTIMATED INVESTMENT & POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCE
1. Industry collaboration and capacity building	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assign the responsibility of industry development to a staff member. 2. Develop an industry prospectus outlining the opportunities for industry to engage in visitor servicing. 3. Work with TNE in providing workshops to increase the digital capacity of visitor servicing staff and operators. 4. Work with local operators to help them list on the Australian Tourism Data Warehouse (ATDW). 5. Increase referrals for local businesses through itineraries and social media content, and regularly report to them so that they can see value. 6. Introduce industry support initiatives including: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Providing feedback to operators from visitors, e.g., barriers for visitors purchasing experiences or accommodation. b. Identifying business opportunities and gaps in the market, and encouraging local business start-ups and expansions. c. Promoting the Buy from Mansfield online store to attract regional and metropolitan Victorian markets to purchase local produce from the shire. d. Handling bookings, and itinerary creation. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Economic Development Officer - Tourism and Events</p> <p>Partners: TNE, local operators</p>	MSC staff time/cost
2. Phase 2 – Signature Attraction and Co-located VIC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Implement business case. 2. Establish a VIC as a co-located arrangement within the new attraction. 	<p>Lead: MSC - Senior Coordinator Community and Economic Development</p> <p>Partner: Commercial operator</p>	<p>To be determined via business case (2022, Project 2)</p> <p>Funding opportunity: BBRF – Infrastructure Projects Stream</p>

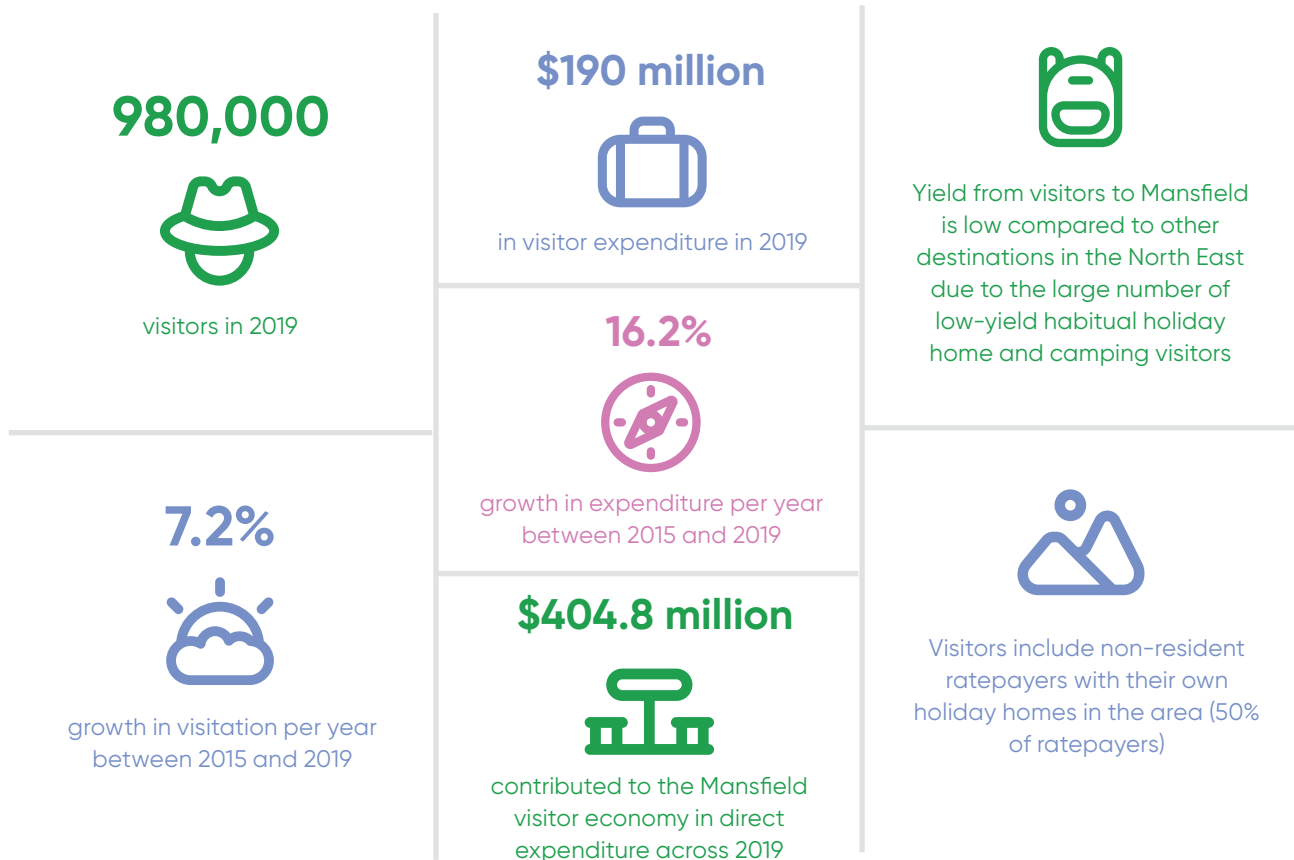
PART B:

Mansfield Visitor Servicing Review Background

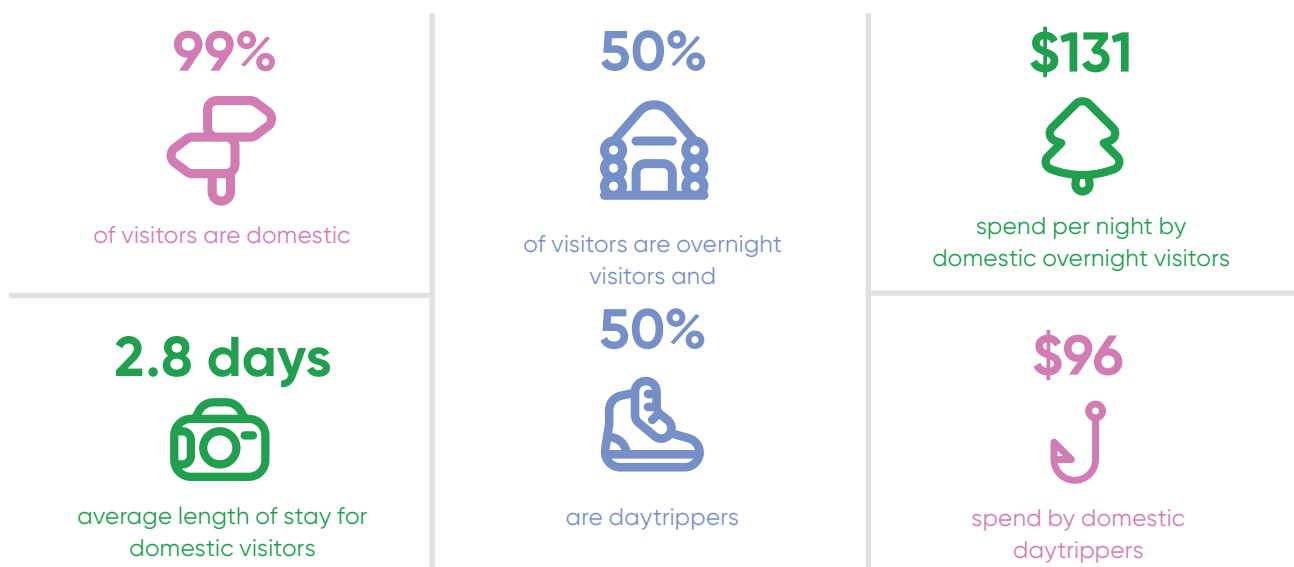
This section provides an overview of the findings from the desktop review and stakeholder engagement and assessment of the current servicing model.

Visitor market context

Visitation to Mansfield^{3,4}



Visitation to the High Country⁵



³ Due to the impact of COVID-19 on visitation, 2020 and 2021 visitor data is excluded, with data referenced for year ending 2019 to provide a picture of typical visitation.

⁴ Tourism Research Australia, 2015-2019, noted in Mansfield Shire Business Recovery Plan 2020.

⁵ High Country Regional Tourism Summary, December 2020.



Mansfield visitor market profiling

The main visitor markets to Mansfield are profiled as follows to better understand their information needs, the sources available, and visitor servicing gaps and opportunities.

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT MSC PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
				
<h3>LIFESTYLE LEADERS</h3>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Couples • Families with older children • Singles • Educated, professional and progressive (enjoy seeking out new information and being the first to try new products) • Higher level of discretionary expenditure • Looking to escape city life and embrace nature, outdoors and new discoveries • Seek high quality accommodation, food and beverages, attractions, and activities • Generally, time-poor due to work commitments • Digitally savvy, using social media and online booking sites • Include segments Inspired by Nature, and Food & Wine Lifestylers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personalised, VIP experiences • Best café/ dining experiences • Best distilleries/ breweries • Where to find local produce/ artisan products • Drive/road conditions • Hiking/cycling trails • Hire equipment (camping) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Social media • Review sites • Friends/ colleagues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommendations from local businesses • Website content • Brochures • Visitor guides • Maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online inspiration • Concierge service to help plan and book tailored local experiences • Digital itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do (seasonal) • Quick guide on common questions (FAQ) • Event information and tickets

CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT MSC PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
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HABITUAL VISITORS (REGULAR, REPEAT VISITORS, INCLUDING THE NON-RESIDENT RATEPAYERS WHO HAVE THEIR OWN HOLIDAY HOMES IN THE AREA.)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families • Couples • Singles • Groups (hunting/ fishing) • Fairly fixed visitation patterns/habits • Self-catering • Majority stay in caravans and camp • Drawn to activities such as hunting, 4WDing, hiking, and enjoying nature and the area's tranquillity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive/road conditions • Camping/ park permit requirements • New things to see and do 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Social media • Review sites • Visitor guides • Personal recommendations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website content • Brochure content • Visitor guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top 10 things to do (seasonal) • Event information and tickets
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CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT MSC PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
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VISITING FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ages • Families, couples, singles • Motivated by the desire to visit friends and family • Many stay at the homes of their friends/ family • Travel with leisure in mind • Participate in commercial attractions, events and other experiences, largely with the family and friends they are visiting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key things to see and do • New events and experiences • Itinerary suggestions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Friends • Internet • Visitor guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website content • Brochure content • Visitor guides • Social media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do (seasonal) • Concierge service to help them plan and book local experiences • Event information and tickets
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CHARACTERISTICS	INFORMATION SOUGHT	SOURCES USED	WHAT MSC PROVIDES	POSSIBLE GAPS/ OPPORTUNITIES
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GREY NOMADS/LONG STAY OLDER TRAVELLERS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interstate travellers • Retired/semi-retired • Aged 55+ • Travelling for leisure • Seek value for money • On a long-haul trip/ not particularly time sensitive • Towing a caravan or camper trailer or in a motorhome • Growing number are online and using social media to connect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive/road conditions • Suitable parking including short term overnight stays • Camping places • Dump points • Potable water • Camping/ park permit requirements • Key things to see and do • Itinerary suggestions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VICs along the way • WikiCamps app • Other travellers (word of mouth) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information (usually verbal) for walk-in visitors • Information by phone for visitors planning trips • Website content • Social media • Brochure content • Visitor guides • Maps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Itinerary planner • Top 10 things to do (seasonal) • Quick guide on common questions • Concierge service to help them plan and book local experiences • Information at rest stops and en route
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SNOW SEASON VISITORS

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families • Singles • Couples • Travelling to ski/snow board and snow-based events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Snow quality • Drive/road conditions • Accommodation • Activities/events • Things to see and do when not skiing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Websites • Social media • Review sites • Friends 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website content • Maps • Visitor guides 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Top 10 things to do (winter season) • Concierge service
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The Mansfield Visitor Information Centre

Visitor Information Centre Operation

The existing VIC is located on the western access into Mansfield and on the northern side of Maroondah Highway, the main drive route from Melbourne. The VIC is within the Station Precinct which also includes the heritage rail station building, Scarred Tree, Mansfield Mullum Wetlands, and the trailhead of The Great Victorian Rail Trail (GVRT).

The Mansfield VIC is accredited as part of a national accreditation system for visitor centres, managed by the state tourism industry body, Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC). The VIC is a Level 1 Accredited Visitor Centre, which means it must be open for a minimum number of hours, seven days per week.

The VIC is managed and funded by MSC, receiving \$144,704 in the 2020/21 budget (excluding one-off consultancy fees). Looking ahead to 2021/22, the VIC will receive \$132,229, representing 27% of the MSC's total tourism budget of \$485,958.

PROGRAM	2021-22 FORECAST
Total	485,958
Visitor Information Centre	132,229
Operations – Tourism & Events	123,729
Events & Festivals	105,000
TNE Cooperative Marketing ⁶	100,500
Tourism Industry Development & Promotion	19,500
Shows & Expos	5,000

Of the budget allocation to the VIC's operation in 2020/21, 74% (\$106,804) was for the salaries for three staff each working 24 hours per week, 13% was for building operational costs (electricity, internet/telephone, security and cleaning), and the balance for supporting activities such as training, materials, printing and contractor fees. The return on investment for MSC in current VIC staffing equates to a cost of \$5.25 per visitor based on the number of walk-in visitors to the VIC in 2021.

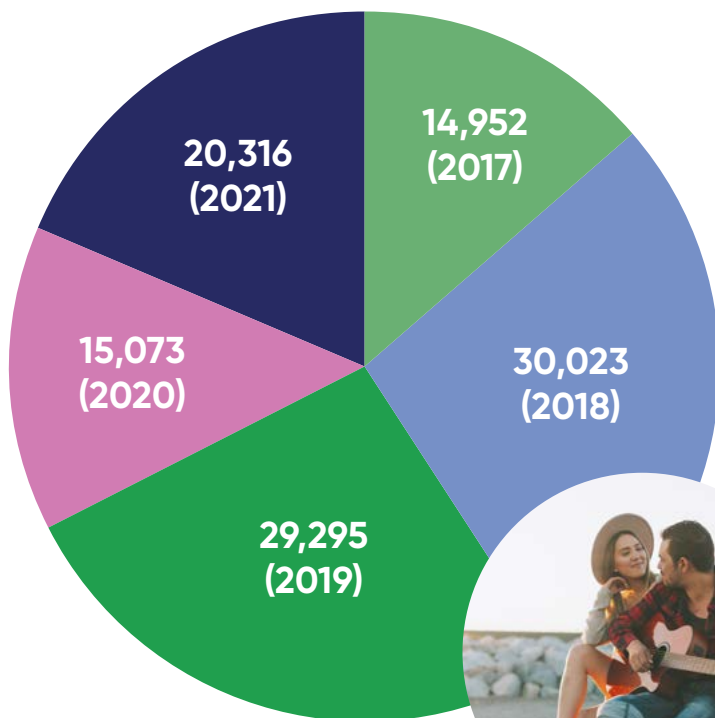
The current operating model highlights scope for improved efficiencies through measures such as introducing volunteers, co-location with an attraction, and ensuring the best balance of staff to deliver increased product development and marketing activity.

⁶ Includes \$38,000 for TNE membership, \$30,000 for the management of socials and website and approx. \$30,000 for regional marketing buy in and industry development

Visitation to the Visitor Information Centre

The number of visitors using the VIC (walk-in, phone and email) are summarised in Figure 5. The 2017 figures include only July to December and the unprecedented circumstances of 2020 and 2021 are likely to have impacted numbers, therefore it is not possible to identify a distinct trend. An amalgam of visitor data for 2017 to 2019 suggests 8% of domestic overnight visitors and 9% of those visiting the region for holiday or leisure visited the VIC.

Figure 5: Mansfield VIC Visitor Numbers Walk-ins (2017-2021)



Visitors to the VIC can be segmented into the following demographic groups⁷:

- 10% Visiting friends and relatives (VFR)
- 30% Travellers in campers/ caravans (nomads)
- 30% Young people in couples or groups of friends
- 30% Families with children



Visitor journey mapping

Visitors have different needs across the five stages of their travel journey from when they start thinking about where to holiday through to planning, making bookings, arriving in destination and experiencing what it offers, then sharing their memories while in the destination and when they return home.

In our analysis we have examined the touchpoints that influence visitors' decision making about choosing a destination, activities to do, and the quality of their experience when they are in the area. Optimising these touchpoints along the travel journey is key to ensuring the shire can maximise benefits from visitor information servicing.

Visitor servicing has traditionally operated within the 'experiencing' stage of the journey, when customers are in-region and requiring information, with some expansion to include bookings, and initiatives to encourage sharing and returning. However, VICs have an opportunity to provide support to customers much earlier in the journey if they embrace digital services. Inspirational content and easily accessible information that can be customised to assist in trip planning and making bookings enables VICs to connect with visitors before they arrive, and encourage them to keep in contact during their stay for any further information needs. In a crowded online environment with destinations and booking platforms vying for attention, accredited VICs can offer peace of mind to visitors that they are receiving the most accurate and objective information to meet their needs.

⁷ Estimates supplied by staff at the Visitor Information Centre and based on current visitors, which may be skewed by COVID conditions.

Where Mansfield’s visitor servicing currently plays a role in fulfilling visitors’ needs and the opportunities for greater involvement across the visitor journey include as follows:

DREAMING →	PLANNING →	BOOKING →	EXPERIENCING →	SHARING
Inspiration	Information	Peace of mind	Connection	Advocacy
CURRENT TOUCHPOINTS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TNE digital content • Visit Victoria content • High Country print collateral • Special interest content online and print (cycle, fishing, hunting, hiking, snow sports) • Word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TNE digital content • High Country print collateral • Mansfield/Mt Buller content • VIC phone, email and face to face service • Special interest content online and print (cycle, fishing, hunting, hiking, snow sports) • Review sites • Phone and email contact with tourism operators • Word of mouth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booking engines/ OTA’s • Business websites, phone and counters • VIC phone, email and face to face referral service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In region with local attractions, experiences • Local touchpoints providing recommendations/ answering questions • VIC face to face recommendations/ answering questions • Online content (social media, review sites, search engines) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media • Review sites • Word of mouth
GAPS IN TOUCHPOINTS				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspirational, Mansfield branded web content • Mansfield-specific social media content (Insta, Facebook) • Responding to online reviews and feedback to help inspire others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social media engagement and responses to queries • Visitor information service at events and high traffic areas • Printed map and digital map of area and experiences • Online/digital chat service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Itinerary development • VIC phone, online and face to face bookings for experiences (are available only directly via operator) • Digital chat service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local ambassadors • Signage/ information boards and wayfinding providing information digitally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visitor satisfaction surveys to determine service and experience strengths and gaps

Macro trends

The following macro trends will continue to shape how visitor information needs are best met and ultimately Mansfield's visitor servicing's ability to encourage visitors to extend their stay and spend in local area, and become passionate destination advocates.

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
DIGITAL METHODS		
<p>The shift to digital, online, and mobile-based methods for communicating, gathering information, making purchasing decisions, and planning/booking travel continues to increase in importance for travellers, who are looking for trusted information delivered via online sources (e.g. review sites and destination websites) and like-minded people.</p>	<p>Visitor service providers must be proactive, continuing to evolve and adapt to engage with visitors where and how visitors want to be served, by using the right tools and resources in collaboration with stakeholders, and maximising economic benefits.</p>	<p>Use an omni-channel approach of engaging with visitors via a blend of online digital channels together with offline face to face engagement, providing information in a consistent and coherent way, how and where visitors need it across the multiple stages of their journey. These may include a combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online concierge service offering local personalised advice • Online chat services • Social media engagement • Fact sheets online for FAQ, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Pet friendly information – where visitors can and can't go with dogs into natural areas » Kid-friendly information » Food and wine » How to get to Craigs Hut
TRAVELLER EXPECTATIONS		
<p>Today's traveller is sophisticated, knowledgeable, and confident about making travel plans. They are looking for experiences that are authentic, unusual, and express the local flavour and culture. They have an expectation of information immediacy and ability to book directly and easily.</p>	<p>Need for continuity and best-practice service between customer service channels throughout their travel experience, from all businesses and destinations. The increasing demands and expectations of the consumer must be kept in mind at every step of their experience from googling 'Mansfield' to walking into the VIC and into local businesses.</p>	<p>Digital destination content and an app that offers current information, enables customisation of content based on needs, and has direct links to booking platforms.</p> <p>Digital content links with online chat service and phone and email as other options.</p>



INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
LOCAL PERSPECTIVE		
<p>Face to face information is sought when a local's perspective and knowledge is required e.g., road closures, weather conditions, info on cafes/restaurants, lesser-known things to see and do (local secrets), and creating itineraries that best meet individual and group needs.</p>	<p>On the ground, physical delivery of a visitor information service is required that delivers servicing using innovative methods to attract visitors and locals.</p>	<p>Providing a combination of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concierge service • Passionate local volunteers/ hosts • Local ambassadors • Pop-up VIC at key visitor touchpoints
MULTIPLE TOUCHPOINTS		
<p>Successful VICs understand the centre is one of many touchpoints that visitors are accessing to learn more about how to experience the destination.</p>	<p>Identifying the main touchpoints and supporting them in delivery of consistent, quality information to visitors to provide a seamless experience.</p>	<p>Providing a local ambassador program involving local businesses.</p> <p>Ensuring signage delivers wayfinding and site-specific information to give visitors a greater depth of understanding if they're interested.</p>
EXPERIENCE DELIVERY		
<p>Visitors don't come to a destination to visit a visitor centre; they're coming for an experience.</p>	<p>VICs need to provide reasons to visitors to come in, and while there, learn about what's on offer across the area.</p>	<p>Co-location with an experience that delivers 'Wow' moments for visitors and encourages use of an adjacent VIC's services.</p>

Mansfield's current visitor servicing

The following table draws together the findings from a desktop review and engagement with local businesses and other stakeholders. The insights build onto the macro trends, and provide a summary of visitor servicing currently, the implications, and potential responses.

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
GENERAL		
<p>Visitors use multiple touchpoints when travelling to and through Mansfield and surrounds. These touchpoints influence the quality of the visitor experience and decision making on what to see and do.</p>	<p>TNE's research into the visitor servicing needs and preferences of the destination's target markets highlights the importance of an omni-channel and multi-touchpoint approach to visitor servicing.</p> <p>It's critical that all touchpoints in the destination are engaged and aligned, and feel valued.</p>	<p>Introduce an omni-channel approach to visitor servicing which delivers convenient, relevant and innovative omni-channel access for visitors to information that is accurate, objective and consistent across multiple online channels and at visitor touchpoints including VICs, local businesses, events, and sites of interest.</p>
<p>VIC accreditation and the associated yellow and blue <i>i</i> branding, demonstrates to visitors and local community that the information service provided is objective, accurate, and high quality, typically with local knowledge provided that can't be sourced readily elsewhere.</p>	<p>The presence of a bricks and mortar VIC is required to maintain VIC accreditation and maximise VIC grant funding opportunities.</p> <p>Enables MSC to ensure visitors receive accurate and timely information on the latest road and weather conditions; what to see and do, how to get to them and are upsold with information customised to their needs.</p>	<p>Retain a bricks and mortar VIC presence in conjunction with other multi-channel options to optimise visitor engagement.</p>
<p>Mansfield is a service centre for visitors travelling through to other destinations and wilderness areas, with no attraction that draws visitors to stop and stay in Mansfield.</p>	<p>There is an opportunity for Mansfield to attract investment into a new product or experience that becomes an important part of Mansfield's brand story.</p>	<p>Through investment in a strategic tourism and events planning process, identify the best fit signature experience for Mansfield to attract investment for its establishment at the Station Precinct; and explore the opportunity for co-location of a VIC service alongside.</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
ONLINE VISITATION		
<p>TNE encourages visitation and spend through marketing campaigns and online destination content that capture visitors' attention in the dreaming, planning and sharing phases of the visitor journey.</p>	<p>Mansfield content needs to be compelling to encourage visitation and dispersal across the shire.</p>	<p>Ensure Mansfield has its own positioning online (rather than only as part of Mt Buller and the High Country) to build profile and awareness, and that the online content responds to market needs.</p> <p>New experience development and enhancements to provide a fresh, attractive offering for high-value visitor markets.</p> <p>VIC to ensure relevant location-based listings such as parks and sites of interest are provided to ATDW and Google My Business (alongside product listings).</p>
<p>Planned development by TNE of a 'High Country Brain' web portal and app to attract visitors and support their planning.</p>	<p>Increasing High Country's capacity to engage with visitors digitally, and encourage them to visit, explore and spend. With promotion by local operators, this will help ensure consistency of information.</p>	<p>Encourage local businesses to share and promote the app to their guests through their websites and when booking.</p>
<p>VIC staff are unable to provide responses to comments on social media to ensure accuracy and timeliness of information due to MSC's current social media policy.</p>	<p>Potential for visitors to receive inaccurate and inconsistent information.</p>	<p>VIC to deliver social media proactive content (local stories and happenings), and respond to and engage with queries and reviews.</p>
<p>VIC not being actively promoted as a call to action in destination campaigns.</p>	<p>Involvement of the VIC enables the staff to answer queries to drive bookings.</p>	<p>Incorporate the VIC in calls to action.</p>
BOOKINGS		
<p>Experiences and attractions are under-represented on booking platforms.</p> <p>Lack of booking service at VIC, particularly for attractions, activities, and tours.</p>	<p>Mansfield is losing spend in the local economy because visitors are unaware of experiences, and no booking mechanism supports instant decision making and confirmation which can result in visitors deciding not to book.</p>	<p>Provide an online chat service including answering enquiries from tourism businesses in the area on behalf of their visitors to help with building their itineraries.</p> <p>When budget allows, introduce an online reservations system at the VIC for local attractions, tours, and experiences, and work with event organisers to provide event ticketing.</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
ONSITE VIC INFORMATION SERVICE		
<p>The VIC's three staff have extensive local knowledge – especially of wilderness and natural areas, hunting, 4WD, cycling and hiking trails, Mansfield and the broader Mt Buller/Mt Stirling area. They provide personalised, accurate and timely local information to assist decision making, face to face and via phone and email.</p>	<p>VIC has the expertise to provide detailed information and responses to visitor queries during their planning stage and when looking to book. However, staff tend to be reacting to enquiries rather than proactively attracting visitors to use the centre (online or offline).</p>	<p>Introduce a face to face concierge approach to warmly welcome visitors as they come through the door and determine their information needs so they can be directed. Then provide advice, itinerary suggestions, bookings, and wayfinding support.</p>
<p>Opening hours means visitors need to wait until 10:00am or arrive before 4:00pm to seek information to help plan their visit.</p>	<p>Some visitors choose not to use the VIC for advice because the timing doesn't suit their plans.</p>	<p>Change visitor hours based on seasonal demand, including taking into account ski traffic. Aim to extend hours by adding a team of volunteers.</p>
<p>VIC staff have fostered a good relationship with land managers across the shire and broader region (such as Victoria Parks and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning) to enable the staff to answer queries related to these areas.</p>	<p>The many different land managers can create confusion for visitors unsure of who to go to for more information, permits, and camp site bookings.</p>	<p>Establish a partnership agreement with other land managers offering space for agency-specific information in the VIC. Have the VIC provide centralised, accurate information on land managers' behalf to save visitors having to go to multiple sites. Explore the opportunity for this partnership to include the handling of park and other camping bookings and ski lift passes.</p>
<p>Potential volunteers within retired and student communities.</p>	<p>Volunteers provide an opportunity to engage locals within the VIC, create local pride in the VIC service, and deliver social benefits for the local community (e.g. enhanced social engagement, meaningful contribution, and mental health for retirees, and new skills and confidence for school students).</p>	<p>Introduce a volunteer program to service the VIC (on site and at determined high-traffic areas).</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
BUILDING AND FACILITIES		
<p>Architecturally designed building to evoke a high country hut, celebrating the high country landscape and stories.</p>	<p>While an attractive building, the VIC's exterior entrance does not encourage people to venture inside, and provides no clear sense of what services and facilities are available.</p> <p>Potential of the interior space is not fully realised including the large back of house area. The space can appear dark and cold.</p>	<p>Relocate VIC function to co-locate within the proposed new attraction at the Station Precinct, and use the existing space for an appropriate function for the local community.</p>
<p>Lack of activity within the VIC to attract visitors and lengthen stay, including lack of digital imagery to inspire visitors to explore the area. A limited range of quality merchandise reduces income generated and reasons for visitors and locals to use the VIC as a source of gifts.</p>	<p>VIC is a key touchpoint to set the tone of the visitor experience. The precinct has an opportunity to provide 'Wow' moments that draw visitors to the site and encourage them to use the VIC while there.</p>	<p>Redevelop the Station Precinct to incorporate a signature experience for the destination based on the identity of the area, with the VIC co-located.</p>
<p>Places for visitors to sit, browse information, and make bookings can help to increase dwell time.</p>	<p>Current layout constrains visitor flow, and constrains opportunities to provide displays and activities to keep visitors in the centre.</p>	<p>Create a comfortable space for visitors to sit, browse information, and plan their time in the area.</p>
<p>Touchscreen in entrance available 24 hours to assist visitors after hours with general information and ideas on things to see and do in adjacent regions.</p>	<p>Touchscreen content needs to be regularly maintained to provide current content that responds to common questions and enquiries for the local area.</p>	<p>Review touchscreen usage (frequency, information sought) and remove the touchscreen if it is not delivering value for visitors.</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
LOCATION AND ACCESS		
<p>Well located for drive traffic approaching from Melbourne, and alongside the start of the GVRT and heritage assets.</p>	<p>Location is highly favourable for a visitor information touchpoint, however, increasingly visitors need a reason to stop as information is not sufficient of a reason for most visitors.</p>	<p>Introduce new experiences as per Building and facilities above.</p>
<p>Current site has ample parking for visitors.</p>	<p>Parking on the land alongside the VIC would address the lack of parking in the town centre and designated parking for RVs, caravans, camper trailers and boats in Mansfield which currently discourages visitors from stopping and spending money at local businesses.</p>	<p>Establish the shire as RV/caravan friendly by providing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24–48 hour stay parking for self-sufficient RVs, caravans, and camper trailers at the VIC precinct to encourage stopping and spending in town • Signage and maps of locations of parking, dump points and potable water for RVs, caravans, and camper trailers.
<p>No coordinated approach to signage and wayfinding, and a lack of signage linking the VIC with the town centre for pedestrians, and at other entry points for drive traffic, including limited signage from the Whitfield entrance to direct visitors to VIC.</p> <p>Signage is in place for the GVRT, providing trail information at the trailhead at the precinct, but there is no connection with the VIC to encourage visitation.</p>	<p>Signage is a key part of visitor servicing, encouraging visitors to explore and influencing the quality of their experience. Without appealing signage, visitors unaware of VIC may drive past and miss the opportunity to learn more about the area.</p>	<p>Undertake a signage and wayfinding review as part of the tourism and events development and activation planning process, with the review to identify where signage improvements are needed across the shire, including other visitor information points such as local community noticeboards, and digital signposts or QR codes at hot spots.</p>
<p>The VIC operates alongside the Mansfield Historical Society at the old Mansfield Railway Station, where the focus is on preserving and promoting the history of Mansfield and surrounding districts.</p>	<p>Lack of contemporary experience of heritage assets to appeal to high spend travellers.</p>	<p>Work with the Historical Society to reimagine the heritage experience as part of broader tourism and event development planning for Mansfield.</p>
<p>The Station Precinct Master Plan identifies ways to better activate the space with new facilities and services, with the potential to increase dwell time at the VIC.</p>	<p>Uncertainty around the potential to attract commercial interests to operate a café and other service providers.</p>	<p>Implement the Master Plan to incorporate a signature visitor attraction and a VIC.</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
MOBILE SERVICE		
<p>When in operation, the mobile VIC was well received at events and seasonal activities.</p>	<p>Sufficient staff will be needed to support a mobile VIC service.</p>	<p>Consider the provision of a pop-up stand staffed by volunteers to provide information for events and in the main street during peak season, when budget allows.</p>
OTHER VISITOR TOUCHPOINTS		
<p>Some local businesses are independently providing information to visitors and/or referring to the VIC where required.</p>	<p>Need to ensure all information provided is consistent, current and accurate, and the service encourages visitors to spend time and money in the area.</p>	<p>Establish a local ambassador program with the key visitor touchpoints that</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incorporates online training • Delivers a base level of information electronically and/or face to face <p>Support the establishment and promotion of a cycle friendly network of operators in the shire as visitor touchpoints (incorporated within the local ambassador program as appropriate).</p> <p>Provide regular emails to local businesses updating them on new attractions, experiences, any changes to businesses' operating hours, and consistent messages to provide visitors.</p> <p>TNE team to continue building knowledge of visitor servicing amongst local operators.</p> <p>Initiate a regular famil program for VIC staff and volunteers to visit and learn from operators about their experience offering.</p> <p>Negotiate with interested business to include a VIC kiosk within their business.</p>



INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
COMMUNITY ACTIVATION		
<p>Repeat visitors and non-resident ratepayers, who also may attract friends and relatives, are a mainstay of Mansfield’s current visitor markets.</p>	<p>Encourage those visitors already coming to the area to be passionate advocates for others and provide a warm welcome.</p>	<p>Develop VFR campaigns aimed at residents, particularly during quieter seasons; and share new activities and events on the community Facebook pages to encourage regular repeat visitors to spend more money.</p>
<p>VICs are important custodians of an area’s stories, bringing them together in a coordinated way to share with visitors and residents.</p>	<p>The sharing of local stories in ways that are inspiring and accessible can attract visitors and locals into VICs.</p>	<p>Establish the VIC as an important element of the area’s storytelling through the services it offers alongside the proposed signature attraction.</p>
<p>Limited use of the VIC by local residents.</p>	<p>Creating reasons to use the Station Precinct and associated social media activity connecting with the local community will encourage use of the VIC.</p>	<p>Share new activities and events on local community Facebook pages; host community open days at the Rail Station Precinct; and create a presence in the community through the use of pop-up stands at events.</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
VISITOR SERVICING SUSTAINABILITY		
<p>While operators are aware of the VIC, many are not clear of ways to work with the VIC, or the economic and social value VICs can contribute to their business and the broader visitor economy.</p>	<p>There are opportunities for the VIC to work with the community and tourism businesses, providing direct referrals and information support, and outstanding service experiences.</p>	<p>Introduce the volunteer and local ambassador programs noted above.</p> <p>Review and update VIC data measurement to be able to demonstrate the economic and social value the VIC generates.</p> <p>Develop an industry prospectus outlining how industry can engage with the VIC, and distribute it to tourism operators.</p> <p>Coordinate a regular famil program to build relationships with local operators whilst providing staff and volunteers with detailed knowledge of local product and experiences.</p> <p>Host open days at the VIC and precinct for local businesses and residents to attend to create awareness of what services and facilities are offered by the VIC.</p> <p>Develop 'This Month in Mansfield' video content to share with visitors to inspire them to visit and explore, and to create awareness amongst locals of local offerings.</p> <p>Introduce industry support initiatives including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing feedback to operators from visitors e.g., barriers for visitors purchasing experiences or accommodation • identifying business opportunities/gaps in the market, and encouraging local business start-up or expansions • promoting the Buy from Mansfield online store to attract regional and metropolitan Victorian markets to purchase local produce from the shire. <p>Explore introducing new income streams to the VIC such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanded retail sales • Event and experience ticketing • Advertising

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
VISITOR SERVICING SUSTAINABILITY cont.		
<p>TNE undertake a number of industry development programs across the regions, providing efficiencies to the LGAs and helping to achieve consistency in capability levels of tourism and event operators.</p>	<p>Success of the programs is dependent on industry take up.</p>	<p>MSC's Economic Development, Tourism and Events team to promote the programs and encourage industry to participate.</p>
<p>Regular repeat visitation has enabled tourism visitation to grow unplanned, however the Mansfield Shire Business Recovery Plan 2020 identifies the need for a Tourism Development Strategy for the shire that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes tourism product and experience development, governance, visitor servicing assessment, and events development • Provides a blueprint to guide strategic tourism development • Develops greater connection between Mansfield Shire's key assets of Lake Eildon, Mansfield township, Jamieson, Goughs Bay, Bonnie Doon and Mt Buller and Tolmie areas. 	<p>The disruptions created by COVID are placing greater pressure on destinations to rebuild their visitor economies which will drive increased competition for the visitor dollar. To compete, Mansfield needs clear direction and understanding of how to achieve outcomes sought, including the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders (MSC, TNE, local businesses) in visitor servicing and development of the visitor economy.</p> <p>MSC requires a plan that will ensure tourism and event development is aligned with visitor expectations, and therefore a catalyst for driving visitation and expenditure in local communities.</p> <p>A plan will also support MSC and local businesses in applying for funding as it demonstrates to funding bodies there is clear rationale for a project that has buy in from stakeholders.</p> <p>The Victorian Visitor Economy Recovery Plan will provide funding of \$3 million to support partnerships with industry to implement improved approaches and technology for visitor services that meet contemporary visitor needs.</p>	<p>Review tourism and event activity and develop a tourism and event development and activation plan that provides a holistic approach to growing the Mansfield visitor economy, with clear roles and responsibilities of stakeholders on delivering the outcomes required, and a list of prioritised projects with the specific elements involved, in order to become shovel ready for grant funding and investment.</p>

INSIGHTS	IMPLICATIONS	POSSIBLE RESPONSES
MARKETING MANSFIELD		
TNE provides tourism marketing and development support for LGAs across the High Country.	To effectively leverage TNE's regional marketing, MSC needs a clear understanding of the activity that will deliver the most value for Mansfield.	Undertake a tourism and events development and activation planning process that identifies the priority areas of focus and actions.
Mansfield does not have its own destination brand, relying on TNE's High Country regional brand for building awareness and attracting visitors.	Mansfield tourism and events industry are not presenting a clear identity and competitive positioning in the hearts and minds of visitors, and an understanding of their place in the High Country story.	Undertake a destination branding project that allows Mansfield's tourism and events industry to gain clarity on their story and how it links into the regional story.
HUMAN RESOURCING		
Mansfield has a wealth of retirees with knowledge and time, and school students looking for experience in tourism and hospitality that could be harnessed as part of a volunteer program/greeters program providing knowledge and stories to visitors. The Mansfield Historical Society has a team of volunteers active in sharing the stories of the region's past who could be encouraged to become part of the VIC's volunteers program.	Volunteers provide an opportunity to engage locals with the VIC, create local pride in the VIC service, and deliver social benefits for the local community (e.g., enhanced social engagement, meaningful contribution, and mental health for retirees, and new skills and confidence for school students).	Introduce a volunteer program to service the VIC (onsite and at determined high traffic areas) drawing on local retirees and school students.
MSC's Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team is reliant on direction from TNE for marketing, industry capacity building, and product and experience development.	A tourism and events development and activation plan is required to provide an understanding of the critical areas of focus for MSC in growing the visitor economy.	Review the structure of MSC's Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team to reconsider the roles and skillset required to support implementation of tourism and events development and activation planning.
Many different stakeholders are involved in tourism across Mansfield.	There is potential for duplication of effort, and gaps and inconsistencies in service delivery to visitors, and no clear point of contact for operators.	Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team to be responsible for playing a facilitation role to bring everyone together regularly to ensure there is a cohesive approach and sense of connection for operators.

Visitor servicing assessment

The critical success factors noted in Part A were used to provide robust assessment criteria for determining the effectiveness and efficiency of the current Mansfield visitor servicing model and where change is needed. A rating of strong, average and limited was applied to the current performance.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS	MANSFIELD PERFORMANCE	IMPROVEMENTS REQUIRED
<p>1. Applying a visitor lens in visitor servicing: where the needs and preferences of visitors is central to the visitor servicing model</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average: Servicing visitors is the primary focus of the VIC. However, the current model does not respond to the changing and growing expectation of modern-day travellers by having information available digitally and at popular touchpoints. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce an omni-channel approach of engaging with visitors via a blend of online digital channels (website, social media) together with offline face to face engagement (VIC, local ambassadors, VIC kiosks, and pop up VICs at events) providing information in a consistent and coherent way, how and where visitors need it across the multiple stages of their journey.
<p>2. Located where visitors are: with information available online and offline where visitors need and expect it</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited: VIC building is currently only servicing approximately 9% of holiday visitors to Mansfield and digital engagement is limited as VIC staff are unable to provide responses to comments on social media and the website is not optimised with itineraries and bookable packages to encourage visitation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operate an accredited VIC as the main hub together with local ambassadors, visitor information kiosks, and roving staff/ volunteers at high traffic areas and events to reach visitors where they are. • Update website and social media activity to be both proactive and responsive in engaging with visitors.
<p>3. Delivers a 'Wow' experience: provides an experience that compels target markets into the VIC and Station Precinct and increases dwell time in the VIC.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited: The VIC's displays do not attract visitors into the VIC, although they help to increase dwell time for some visitors. The Station Precinct draws a limited number of visitors for its heritage and cultural assets and the trail head for the Great Victorian Rail Trail. Combined or alone, these assets are not a major drawcard for Lifestyle Leaders and are not commercial experiences that generate direct spend in the local economy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure funding and private investment in a new signature attraction for Mansfield at the Station Precinct. • Co-locate VIC to share staff and volunteer resources and encourage visitors to use the VIC.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS	MANSFIELD PERFORMANCE	IMPROVEMENTS REQUIRED
<p>4. Valued by local businesses and residents: draws visitors to the destination, generates spend with local businesses, and meets the needs of the community.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited: While operators are aware of the VIC and acknowledge the referrals created, they have limited interaction, particularly as more visitors book their accommodation online. The VIC offers little reason for locals to use it. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the VIC is the call to action for destination marketing campaigns. • Undertake VFR campaigns and local open days at the VIC (when co-located with new attraction). • Develop an industry prospectus outlining the opportunities for industry to engage with the VIC. • Facilitate local business involvement in capacity building opportunities. • Increase referrals for local businesses through itineraries and social media content, and regularly report to them so that they can see value.
<p>5. Able to monitor and measure performance: with data gathered to demonstrate performance against key indicators.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average: VIC online and offline traffic is monitored. Limited data collected, with the focus on visitor use online and offline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand VIC data collection activity to measure performance against key indicators such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Visitor origin » Length of stay » Reason for visit » Activities undertaken or seeking to do » Satisfaction with experiences » Information sources used in trip planning » Accommodation type. • Undertake a visitor survey at key visitor touchpoints during peak visitor season to gain an understanding of visitors and their behaviour, collecting similar data to the VIC survey as well as visitor use of the VIC.
<p>6. Delivers quality, objective information (recognised through accreditation): processes in place to ensure consistent delivery of quality information by all visitor touchpoints.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average: The VIC team are delivering quality, objective information to visitors and locals. Local businesses such as cafes, retailers and camping supply stores provide visitor information, however there is no assurance of accuracy or objectivity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Harness local experts in a local ambassador program, where they are supported with consistent information (FAQs, where to find latest road conditions, new experiences etc) and recognised as part of a Mansfield network of ambassadors.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS	MANSFIELD PERFORMANCE	IMPROVEMENTS REQUIRED
<p>7. Is financially sustainable: generating economic and social benefits, and delivering sufficient commercial return.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited: The VIC generates minimal income from retail sales only. Visitor data collected provides little insights into the impact of the VIC. The VIC's social benefits are small due to limited engagement with the local community. The VIC is fully dependent on salaried staff. The introduction of volunteers provides an opportunity to increase the VIC's engagement with visitors and locals. A volunteer program will not necessarily mean cost savings in salaries, as additional functions will be added such as a VIC coordinator. However, it provides an opportunity to increase the effectiveness of the VIC in servicing visitors across the customer service journey (see Attachment 2: Visitor Journey Mapping) for the range of touchpoints VICs can have with visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand the retail range, with a focus on local produce and crafts. • Provide bookings for experience packages. • Expand data collection activity to better quantify impact. • Initiate a volunteer program to engage locals, create local pride and build local skills and capacity. • Implement VFR marketing campaigns aimed at the local community to create strong advocates encourages friends and family to visit and spend locally. • Rent meeting space to local business and community groups.
<p>8. Governed by effective leadership and management: with a governance structure in place that enables efficient and effective visitor servicing activity.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Average: MSC acknowledges the importance of holistic visitor servicing and has an existing Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team. However, Mansfield's tourism development is reliant on direction from TNE for marketing, industry capacity building, and product and experience development, which has a High Country focus. While this offers some efficiencies for MSC, Mansfield needs to ensure it has compelling product and experiences to stand out and attract visitors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review and update the structure and roles of MSC's Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team to ensure they can effectively implement the actions of this report and associated tourism and events development. • Seek cost efficiencies in VIC staffing through introducing volunteers to reduce reliance on paid staff, and move towards co-location of VIC with an attraction and sharing staff across the operations.

Attachment 1: Stakeholders consulted

ORGANISATION	CONSULTEES
Mansfield Shire Council	Kaylene Conrick (CEO) Councillors Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team
Project Reference Group	Community Bank Mansfield and District - Emma Wikin Delatite Winery - Polly Ritchie All Terrain Cycles - Narelle Rademaker Mansfield District Business Association - Wes Mudge Mansfield Shire Council Economic Development, Tourism and Events Team - Saskia Van Bever
VIC Staff - Mansfield Visitor Information Centre	Pam, Colleen and Jennie
McCormack's Trail Rides	Cass McCormack
Snowy Mountain Outdoor Centre	Helena Simpkin
Alzburg Resort	Ramesh Edumban
Delatite Hotel & The Produce Store	Dean Belle
Mansfield Travellers Lodge	Ken Everett
Jamieson Caravan Park	Fränzi Bennett
Bonnie Doon Hotel & The Bounty	Tom Calderwood
Merrijig Motor Inn	Mandy Aistrope
Mansfield Hunting & Shooting Zone	Mandy Kirley
Tourism North East	Dean Cleave-Smith
VTIC Victoria Tourism Industry Council (VTIC)	Grace Maynard
Victoria Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources	Paul Albone

Attachment 2: Scenarios assessed

Seven scenarios were discussed and debated with the Project Steering Committee. The recommended best practice visitor servicing model is Scenario 1.

1. Development of a signature attraction at the Station Precinct

This scenario responds to the identified gap in tourism experiences that attract visitors to Mansfield. It envisions the development of a new signature visitor attraction at the Station Precinct. While the details of such attraction need to be determined as part of a broader tourism and events planning process, it is recommended that this attraction celebrates the natural and cultural strengths of the area; for example, a high country version of the Waltzing Matilda Centre museum and gallery space in Winton, Queensland, or the Gold Coast attractions Outback Spectacular or Spirits of the Red Sand which provide dinner and a story-centred show, and attract visitors and locals.

This new attraction would be co-located with a MSC-funded VIC providing face to face information to visitors, supported by digital and brochure content and associated retail.

The scenario also includes MSC managing a local ambassador program and providing a volunteer presence at events, plus TNE's digital servicing plans and signage/totems at key visitor touchpoints (trailheads, heritage sites, near boating spots, etc), and other signage.

PROS:

- An attraction built around the area's strengths will build brand, enhance the area's competitive strength, and attract visitors across all seasons
- Co-location of the VIC alongside an attraction will encourage visitors to use the VIC and in turn, inspire them to explore the area and spend locally
- VIC could be supported by volunteers, with the focus on providing local information and stories
- Reduced ongoing VIC operating costs for MSC
- Will satisfy the needs and preferences of visitor markets
- Will help deliver on the three areas of focus.

CONS:

- Reliant on attracting external investment for the attraction
- Reduced physical VIC presence, limiting display content
- MSC may lose some control over the day-to-day operation of the VIC (e.g., opening hours, brochure space)

2. Upgrade the existing VIC and expand servicing to become a Welcome Centre for Mansfield

This scenario involves retaining the existing VIC building, with the following upgrades:

- New digital content including digital screens showcasing local iconic sites and experiences
- Seasonal and event theming
- Concierge process with volunteers greeting visitors on entry and directing them based on their needs
- Expanded merchandise including local products and arts and product tastings
- Immersive displays including a VR experience
- Spaces for changing exhibitions and displays and areas to sit and browse information
- Hosting small events/shows
- Reconfiguration of back of house to optimise space either through a new gallery space, meeting rooms, or co-working space
- Introduce more light into the space and improved heating to increase its appeal and comfort.

Supporting the VIC with the following services:

- Strong online presence with more inspiring Mansfield/Mt Buller web content and online chat system
- Establishing a group of volunteers to support visitor servicing in the VIC and a pop-up VIC
- Local businesses/experience experts to become recognised local ambassadors
- Provision of a pop-up information service during events and in high traffic areas during peak season. (A pop-up VIC rather than a mobile van is recommended as sufficient to meet the shire's needs.)
- TNE's digital servicing plans (High Country website content, app and digital signposting)
- Signage and wayfinding

PROS:

- Contemporary visitor servicing facilities
- Provides more reasons for visitors to stop in Mansfield, and be encouraged to explore the area and spend locally
- Profiling of local producers and artisans
- Volunteers will encourage community involvement in the precinct
- VR could become a visitor drawcard in its own right
- Harnessing the expertise and passion of local ambassadors
- VIC is providing information where and how visitors are seeking it
- Will meet the needs of all visitor markets if the online and offline upgrades undertaken address the needs and gaps of each target market
- Has the potential to help deliver on the three areas of focus, depending on the quality of the upgrades.

CONS:

- The substantial investment required is unlikely to deliver a strong ROI unless the VIC is seen as an attraction in its own right for target visitor markets
- Attracting more foot traffic is dependent upon the ability of the displays including VR to be an attraction in their own right- they will need to deliver something that is sufficiently compelling and unique
- The investment is drawn away from much needed tourism planning and experience development activity to help build Mansfield's profile and provide more reasons for visitors to come and spend locally across the shire.

3. Co-locate with an existing attraction

This scenario involves identifying a popular visitor touchpoint that attracts the target visitor markets and where visitor information would be complementary to the existing operation, e.g., gallery, brewery, distillery, café or retail and negotiating to incorporate a VIC kiosk alongside.

The level of service delivery possible will determine if the kiosk can be accredited. Co-location as an accredited kiosk is only possible when associated with a larger VIC hub centre.

As per Scenarios 1 and 2, the VIC kiosk would be supported by local ambassadors, volunteer presence at events, social media and digital content (in conjunction with TNE's digital servicing plans), and signage/wayfinding.

PROS:

- The existing attraction would encourage visitors to engage with the VIC to find out more about what's on offer in the area
- Kiosk could be supported by volunteers, with the focus on providing local information and stories
- Reduced ongoing VIC operating costs for MSC
- Will meet the needs of all visitor markets if the online and offline upgrades address their needs and the location is in a popular touchpoint for the target markets
- Has the potential to deliver on the three areas of focus, depending on the quality of the offline and online service.

CONS:

- VIC not seen as offering objective information unless designed and delivered as per accreditation requirements
- Reduced physical VIC presence, limiting display content
- MSC may lose some control over the day-to-day operation of the VIC (e.g., opening hours, brochure space)
- Location may preclude use by some visitor markets
- VIC's space and opening hours may preclude accreditation
- Staff losses or need for their reallocation to other areas within MSC.

4. No fixed VIC presence

In this scenario, the current VIC is closed, with the building repurposed, and visitor servicing is through other visitor touchpoints.

The focus for MSC will be on coordinating a network of local ambassadors, providing a volunteer presence at events, managing social media and digital content (in conjunction with TNE's digital servicing plans), and providing signage/totems at key visitor touchpoints and directional signage/wayfinding.

PROS:

- Low operating costs, permitting more funding for marketing, product/experience development
- Fully flexible approach to delivering information where visitors are.

CONS:

- Loss of branding/reputation of accreditation, which could influence grant funding opportunities
- Loss of a central welcome hub
- Limited ability to ensure accurate and objective delivery of information
- While a VIC Coordinator will be required, there may be some staff losses or need for their reallocation to other areas within MSC
- Wholly dependent on local ambassadors to meet needs of visitors markets seeking printed collateral
- No capacity to provide community information
- Will be limited in ability to maximise spend, length of stay and dispersal if not supported by itinerary development and personalised advice online and offline.

5. Managed by an external provider

In this scenario, the existing VIC at the Station Precinct is managed by an external provider (e.g. Mansfield Historical Society or other community group). This would require a service agreement that stipulates the specific services and facilities to be provided. This scenario is likely to result in the VIC becoming an adjunct to the Mansfield Historical Society's core focus on promoting the area's heritage values (or the core focus of another community group). Unless the services and facilities outlined in Scenario 2 are incorporated, visitors to the site are likely to be primarily those interested in the heritage assets.

The VIC facility could be supported by MSC managing a network of local ambassadors and providing a volunteer presence at events, alongside TNE's digital servicing plans including signage/totems at key visitor touchpoints and directional signage/wayfinding.

PROS:

- Tap into an existing volunteer base
- Encourage greater community involvement in the precinct
- Low overheads
- Potential to increase foot traffic to VIC by leveraging location with the experience offered by the external provider.

CONS:

- MSC loses some control over the day-to-day operation of the VIC and the activity of the VIC as a welcome hub for Mansfield
- Potential for VIC to lose foot traffic if experience offered isn't compelling to target visitor markets
- Potential for some staff losses or need for their reallocation to other areas within MSC
- Limited ability to meet visitor needs if the upgrades in Scenario 2 are not incorporated
- Will not help deliver on the three areas of focus if the VIC loses foot traffic.

6. Regional VIC

This scenario involves coordinating with other High Country LGAs to establish and jointly fund a Regional VIC that operates as a central, coordinating hub. Each LGA would provide local information kiosks and other services (digital content, local ambassadors), and this would include TNE's digital servicing plans including signage/totems at key visitor touchpoints and signage/wayfinding.

PROS:

- Increased operating efficiencies through sharing of common services
- Build VIC awareness and value amongst visitors through extended services and profiling using the existing High Country brand
- An online chat service could be redirected to each LGA for localised information
- Local kiosks will be accredited as part of the broader regional network
- Pooled resourcing will enable greater investment into providing a contemporary visitor servicing, potentially providing a High Country Experience Centre.

CONS:

- Challenge of securing support and agreement from High Country LGAs for a regional hub
- Identifying a single location that is representative of the High Country and relevant for visitors in their experience planning
- VICs are largely used for localised information, limiting ability of the scenario to meet the needs of visitors when they are in Mansfield
- Regional VIC will need to offer an attraction/experience to draw visitors to the Experience Centre
- Less likely to achieve the outcomes of building awareness of Mansfield's brand and being valued by local businesses and the community through the connection and services offered.

7. Status quo

In this instance, MSC would continue to support VIC operations at the Station Precinct as they are currently and embrace TNE's digital servicing plans.

This scenario is not recommended because the current model is not effective in meeting the information needs for visitors to Mansfield and the broader High Country. Continued investment in the existing VIC facility is likely to deliver a diminishing return on investment without the upgrades and extended servicing outlined in the other scenarios.

PROS:

- TNE's digital servicing plan will assist Mansfield in attracting visitors and help encourage them to explore the High Country.

CONS:

- Falling behind other destinations in contemporary visitor servicing
- Not maximising the ROI for MSC
- Gaps in visitor market needs
- Not able to effectively deliver on the three areas of focus.



**Mansfield
Shire**