



# COMMUNITY SPORT & RECREATION PLAN 2026-2032



## Executive Summary

The Community, Sport and Recreation Plan 2026–2032 (the Plan) provides a strategic framework to guide the planning, provision, and enhancement of sport and recreation opportunities across the Etheridge Shire. The Plan recognises the critical role that sport, recreation, and informal social activity play in strengthening community wellbeing, social connection, resilience, inclusion, and long-term community sustainability in remote and regional contexts.

Developed iteratively through consultation with community members, stakeholders, and Council representatives between 2024 and 2026, the Plan responds directly to locally identified needs while aligning with Etheridge Shire Council’s Corporate Plan. The Plan identifies existing community and sporting groups, audits current events and facilities, and establishes clear, place-based priorities for future infrastructure investment informed by community consultation.

To support delivery of the Corporate Plan, the Community Sport and Recreation Plan is structured around three interrelated strategic priorities, collectively framed as ‘AIM’:

- **Activate** sports and community life through inclusive events, social gatherings, and opportunities that foster connection, participation, and community identity;
- **Improve** and optimise existing infrastructure by enhancing, upgrading, and better utilising current sport and recreation facilities to meet changing demographic and accessibility needs; and
- **Maximise** strategic investment in intergenerational and “hero” projects that strengthen regional identity, attract participation and visitation, and provide long-term benefits for current and future generations.

Collectively, these priorities directly contribute to Council’s social, economic, and governance aims by supporting an active and culturally aware community, enhancing quality social infrastructure, strengthening local identity, and delivering long-term benefits through strategic investment in community, sport, and recreation facilities across the Shire.

As a practical roadmap, the Plan will guide Council decision-making, inform funding applications, and support partnerships with government, community organisations, and regional stakeholders. Through a strategic focus on activation, improvement, and meaningful investment, this Plan positions sport and recreation as key enablers of Council’s Corporate Plan for a resilient, connected, and thriving Etheridge Shire.

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## Background

### Overview and Purpose of the Plan

As a remote Australian community, Etheridge Shire faces distinct and compounding challenges, including geographic isolation, limited access to services, smaller population bases, volunteer fatigue, and increased vulnerability to social isolation. Within this context, evidence consistently demonstrates the essential role of sport and recreation that extends beyond leisure provision, functioning as critical social infrastructure supporting community wellbeing, strengthening social cohesion, place-based identity, and long-term liveability. Opportunities for physical activity, informal recreation, and community gathering are central to maintaining quality of life, supporting mental and physical health, and fostering community resilience. The provision of inclusive, accessible, and flexible sport and recreation opportunities is critical in supporting equity across age groups, abilities, and cultural backgrounds. These opportunities can assist in engaging young people, supporting ageing populations, strengthening intergenerational connection, and reducing patterns of rural-urban population drift.

This Community Sport and Recreation Plan has been developed to guide Council planning, and delivery of community, sport, and recreation facilities and opportunities across the Etheridge Shire. The Plan provides a strategic, evidence-informed framework that responds to community needs, reflects the unique characteristics of the Etheridge Shire, supports equitable access to recreation opportunities, and ensures that existing and future assets are planned, managed, and prioritised in a sustainable and coordinated manner.

The Plan supports the long-term strategic objectives of the Etheridge Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025–2029 by contributing to quality social infrastructure, economic diversification, and long-term community sustainability.

The Plan aligns with broader state and national policy directions that recognise the role of sport, recreation, and active lifestyles in promoting health, social inclusion, and community resilience. In the lead-up to the 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Plan seeks to strengthen regional liveability, improve community wellbeing, and deliver lasting social and infrastructure legacies.

Contemporary policy frameworks emphasise the importance of equitable access to recreation infrastructure, particularly in regional and remote communities where opportunities for participation may be constrained by distance, population size, and service availability. Through a focus on place-based planning, asset optimisation, and strategic investment, the Plan positions the Etheridge Shire to leverage future funding opportunities and partnerships that support inclusive and resilient communities.



- Desktop audits and site visits of facilities, programs, and events
- Review and analysis of relevant policy and planning documents
- Analysis of demographic and population data to identify trends relevant to participation, access, and long-term planning
- Targeted consultation with community members, stakeholders, and Council staff

Relevant Council strategies and policy documents, in particular the Etheridge Shire Council Corporate Plan 2025–2029, informed the alignment of this Plan with Council’s strategic objectives. Internal consultation with Council officers and external consultation with key stakeholders provided operational insight into current challenges, opportunities, and capacity considerations, to support integrated planning and investment decision-making.

Community consultation was undertaken, both formally and informally, across the four towns within the Shire to capture place-specific perspectives on recreation needs, barriers to participation, and aspirations for future facilities and programs. While a low response rate from the community was experienced after multiple waves of direct contact to key community members directly involved in local sport and recreation activities, formal feedback was supplemented by informal feedback at social gathering places and events. This community engagement informed the Plan to reflect local knowledge and lived experience, while balancing feasibility, asset management principles, and long-term sustainability, to guide future community, sport, and recreation provision.

## Identified Gaps in Community Sport & Recreation Provision

The following key findings highlight the structural, demographic, and lifestyle factors influencing the Shire’s sport and recreation participation, providing the context for understanding the current gaps in sport and recreation provision.

- Community and sporting associations play a central role in the provision of sport and recreation across Etheridge Shire, contributing significantly to social connection, volunteer engagement, and community identity. Participation in formal sport and organised activities, however, is largely dependent on fixed schedules, volunteer availability, and structured formats. While these models remain important, they do not always accommodate the diverse needs, capacities, and lifestyles of all residents, particularly in a remote context characterised by shift work, seasonal employment, travel distances, and an ageing population.
- Opportunities for informal, unstructured, and casual recreation are limited across much of the Shire. The lack of accessible walking trails, informal exercise spaces, and flexible recreation infrastructure restricts participation for individuals and families who may prefer low-cost, self-directed, or non-competitive activities. This gap highlights the importance of broadening recreation provision beyond traditional club-based models to support everyday physical activity and social interaction.
- Demographic analysis indicated the Shire is experiencing a gradual shift toward a younger population profile, likely influenced by inward migration associated with employment

opportunities. Almost 60 per cent of residents are now under the age of 44, a cohort that typically demonstrates higher levels of engagement in sport, recreation, and active lifestyles. At the same time, a substantial proportion of residents are older adults, reinforcing the need for recreation opportunities that cater to a wide range of ages, abilities, and participation preferences.

- Employment growth within the Shire further reinforces the importance of accessible and well-distributed community infrastructure. The increasing workforce places additional demand on local facilities and public spaces that support physical activity, social connection, and wellbeing outside of work hours. In remote communities, such infrastructure plays a critical role in supporting liveability and retention by contributing to quality of life and community satisfaction.

These findings informed the way the following document is structured to consider and underpin the issues raised by the community. The Plan's three key strategic priority areas focus on the existing and future community, sport, and recreation needs of the community. These are:

1. **Activate** sports and community life
2. **Improve** and optimise existing infrastructure
3. **Maximise** strategic investment in inter-generational and 'hero' projects

The Plan aligns initiatives with the Council's Corporate Plan as noted in Table 1 below.

**Table 1. Alignment of AIM with Etheridge Shire Council Corporate Plan Aims**

AIM Strategic Priority	Description	Corporate Plan outcomes supported
A – <b>Activate</b> sports and community life	Supports sports excellence, inclusive events, social gatherings, and informal sport and recreation opportunities that foster participation, connection, and community identity across the Shire.	4.1 An active community with a variety of recreational activities 4.2 An invigorated community with a variety of multi-age services 4.3 A culturally aware community
I – <b>Improve</b> and optimise existing infrastructure	Focuses on enhancing, upgrading, and better utilising existing community, sport, and recreation facilities to improve accessibility, safety, and functionality.	1.1 Improved footpaths, access, and local connectivity 4.1 Review and enhancement of parks, gardens, and recreational facilities 4.3 Strengthened social infrastructure
M – <b>Maximise</b> strategic investment in intergenerational and hero projects	Prioritises high-impact projects that deliver long-term social, economic, and cultural benefits and strengthen regional identity and visitation.	3.2 A diversified economic base including tourism and events 3.3 Large-scale projects provide a legacy for communities

## Activate Sports and Community Life

The Shire has a long and proud history of community-led sport and recreation, supported by a network of clubs, volunteers, and grassroots organisations that bring residents together. Council already plays an active role in this ecosystem, delivering signature community events, providing financial assistance through grants and maintaining sporting fields and facilities.

Table 2 lists all the events the Shire organises and/or supports and Table 3 details the community and social groups within the Shire.

**Table 2. Etheridge Shire Events Calendar**

Month	Events
January	Australia Day, Australia Day Awards
March	Clean up Australia Day
	International Women's Day
April	Easter at Einasleigh
	Anzac Day
	Georgetown Annual Golf Day
June	Queensland Day
July	Oak Park Races
	Pigs and Rigs
	Einasleigh Campdraft
August	Forsyth Turnout
	Georgetown Campdraft
September	Georgetown Rodeo and Motor Bike Sports
October	Bushman's Ball
	Georgetown Bush Races
	Seniors' week
November	Remembrance Day
	Christmas Markets

**Table 3. Social, Community and Sporting Activities [group names to be updated with latest info]**

Georgetown	Forsyth	Einasleigh	Mt Surprise
Bushman's Ball	All Sports Club	Oak Park Race Club	Parents and Citizens Association
Cricket club	Forsyth Improvements Group	Progress Association	Rural Fire Brigade
Etheridge Carers	Forsyth Centenary Group Inc.	Rodeo Association	Sport and Recreation Club
Golf Club	Gun Club	Race Club	
Horse & Pony Club	Hospital Auxiliary	Rural Fire Brigade	
Horse Sports Association	Parents & Citizens Association	Sports Club	

Georgetown SES	Rural Fire Brigade	Kidston Progress Association	
Masonic Lodge	Queensland Country Women's Association		
P & C Association			
Progress Association			
Queensland Country Women's Association			
Rodeo Association			
Rural Fire Brigade			
Georgetown Bush Races			
Turf Club			
Stockman's Challenge Club			

However, the situational analysis shows that clubs and community groups need stronger support in governance and capacity building to remain sustainable. Volunteers running these clubs face heavy administrative workloads, growing compliance demands and shifting participation preferences.

To activate sports and community life, the Council will offer a coordinated package of initiatives, building on existing support with governance tools, self-service activation, expert capacity building, and an online portal. This will create stronger, better-resourced clubs, broader participation, and enhanced social cohesion and well-being, supporting Corporate Aims 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 5.1.

## 1.1 Community and sports club toolbox

A dedicated online toolbox will be developed to support sports and community clubs and groups. This toolbox will be available on the Council website and as a printed handbook. The toolbox will be the one place clubs, committees, and volunteers go for ready-made templates, training, and practical guidance. It will be organised around two core components, club governance and volunteer management, two main pressure points facing local clubs.

- Club governance toolkit

Club governance resources include editable templates and guidance materials for daily club operations. These cover role descriptions for committee members, codes of conduct, health and safety guidelines, incident report forms, meeting templates, and grant writing guidelines. Clubs can download and customise each template to their specific needs while ensuring the use of consistent, standardised content.

The toolkit will also provide practical guidelines to help clubs identify issues early, such as warning signs, declining attendance, burnout, and conflict. It provides step-by-step self-help advice for lower-risk problems. Clear escalation triggers and steps to seek outside support, ensuring serious issues are addressed promptly by the appropriate experts.

- Volunteer toolkit

The volunteer management resources will provide a library of editable templates, including volunteer role descriptions, induction checklists, codes of conduct, health and safety guidelines, and incident report forms, that clubs can customise to suit their local needs while benefiting from consistent, standardised content.

## 1.2 Volunteer passport

The volunteer passport, a recognised certification throughout the Shire, enables the creation of a Shire-wide volunteer pool that can support various clubs, sports, and events seamlessly. To obtain the passport, interested community members can simply complete the online, self-paced training modules available through the volunteer toolkit. These modules, designed to be brief and accessible in a mobile-friendly format, include short videos, quick knowledge checks, and a digital certificate of completion. By earning the volunteer passport, volunteers become certified, confident, and well-prepared from day one, which supports retention and helps clubs build a sustainable, capable volunteer base.

Sports and community clubs can direct their new recruits to obtain this passport, eliminating the need for individual clubs to run their own induction sessions, significantly reducing the administrative burden on committee members and event organisers.

## 1.3 Expert-led sports excellence

The Council will expand its sports initiatives by leveraging experts from various fields to promote excellence in sports. Capacity-building workshops will be designed to align with key national dates, such as National Volunteer Week in May and National Sports Day in October. To ensure the program benefits from top expertise, the Council will partner with state sporting organisations, peak volunteering bodies like Volunteering Australia and Volunteering Queensland, and academic institutions to source speakers and presenters for workshops. These sports capacity-building events will be tailored to the broader community, local schools and specialised sports and community clubs. Aligning activities with these dates will boost engagement, link the Shire's efforts to national campaigns, and establish a consistent yearly schedule of opportunities for residents to learn, connect, and excel in sports.

## 1.4 Sports and community club open day

In partnership with the local clubs, the Council will organise an annual Sports and Community Club Open Day, gathering all of the Shire's sporting and community groups in one place for a day. The open day will provide an opportunity for the community to try various sports and learn about the sports and community clubs in the shire, to encourage club sign-ups. This event aims to lower entry barriers and offer clubs a prominent chance for recruitment.

## 1.5 Support community gatherings

To enhance community engagement and foster socialisation, the Council will strategically utilise existing tourism infrastructure across the Shire to establish accessible spaces for gatherings and celebrations. The new outdoor deck at the Terrestrial Centre will be positioned as a prominent venue for art exhibitions, community events, civic ceremonies, and school showcases. By transforming tourism assets into versatile community spaces, the Council aims to reinforce local identity and promote inclusivity.

## 1.6 Activation kits for self-organised activities

To support residents who are time-poor or who prefer informal, self-organised activity, Council will develop easy-to-use activation kits available through the Council website. These kits will contain clear instructions, step-by-step guides, safety checklists, and basic materials such as recorded exercise videos and warm-up routines. Printed versions will also be available from the Council to ensure accessibility for all residents, including those with limited internet access. These kits will be particularly useful for residents who are busy, especially shift workers unable to participate in scheduled activities. The community can self-organise these activities at times and locations that best suit them.

## 1.6 Centralised Community Services

To meet the community's need for accessible locations for organisations and essential services such as health, education, family support, and outreach programs to have access to central locations within each town, the council will establish these services in Council-owned spaces. This approach will ensure that services are provided in central, easily accessible, and dependable venues, boosting community wellbeing and resilience. Such spaces also serve as key sites for visiting service providers, enabling programs such as mobile health clinics, mental health support, training, and employment services to be delivered locally. co-location increases service access for residents and promotes equity by ensuring smaller communities are not disadvantaged due to their remoteness. The new online portal can also act as a point of coordination and communication for the use of Council facilities for community services.

## Improve and Optimise Existing Infrastructure

The situational analysis identified existing community, recreation and sporting facilities, that may need to be enhanced or upgraded. The following facilities are specific to the regional localities of Georgetown, Forsayth, Einasleigh and Mt Surprise. Consultation findings confirmed that each of the four towns within the Etheridge Shire has distinct characteristics, levels of existing infrastructure, and locally specific needs. While common themes emerged across the Shire, including the need for improved walking infrastructure, informal recreation opportunities, and centralised community spaces, place-based differences require tailored responses. Table 4 below summarises the facility improvements identified by each community, with potential timeframes for implementation.

*Table 4. Community identified minor/major projects*

Project	Project Description	Timeframe	Corporate Aim #
<b>Forsayth</b>			
Upgrade Forsayth Park walking trail	Add lighting, seating, signage, and shade to improve safety, usability, and inclusivity, particularly for older adults and families.	2027	3.2.1, 4.1.1, 4.1.3
Extend trail to Charleston Dam Picnic Area	Build a 4.5 km extension from Forsayth to Charleston Dam to improve foot access and provide a longer exercise route.	2029	2.3.1, 2.3.2, 4.1.2, 4.1.4
Enhance Charleston Dam recreation facilities	Expand picnic facilities and family recreational opportunities at the dam. The current BBQ and shaded seating area can be expanded to include a kids playground to provide an all-round recreation facility for families.	2029	4.1.2, 4.1.4, 4.3.1
Expand Charlston Dam facilities for water sport	Expand infrastructure to complement the existing boat launch jetty to include space for fishing, kayaking, paddleboarding, and swimming to transform the Dam into a more usable recreation facility for locals and visitors.	2029	4.1.2, 4.1.4, 4.3.1
<b>Einasleigh</b>			
Erect Anzac Cenotaph	Install a cenotaph as a central point for the community and visitors to honour Australia's war veterans	2026	4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.3.5
Upgrade Copperfield Gorge accessibility	Upgrade the access to the gorge and replace the outdated seating near the gorge entrance. A new picnic facility and a sheltered seating area will be added to provide the community a place to gather and socialise.	2026	3.2.1, 4.1.1, 4.1.3
<b>Mt Surprise</b>			
Erect Anzac Cenotaph	Install a cenotaph as a central point for the community and visitors to honour Australia's war veterans	2026	4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.3.5
<b>Georgetown</b>			
Upgrade Gregg Bethel Memorial Oval storage	Upgrade storage capacity and security at the oval to address community-identified challenges for school and community groups, alongside broader oval infrastructure improvements.	2027	4.1.4

Upgrade pathways access to facilities	Develop safer paved pathways linking residential areas with key community services. Improved access is needed to facilities such as the hospital, police station, QGAP, and dental clinic, as well as parks, sporting grounds, the swimming pool, recreation centre and the Riverwalk.	2027	1.1.1, 4.1.1, 4.1.3
Upgrade outdoor area at the Sports centre	Add a BBQ facility and staged seating adjacent to the tennis court nets to create an inclusive community hub and encourage greater use of the recreation centre.	2027	4.3.1
Provide facility for online exercise class	Create a dedicated, connected space for remote and in-person fitness programs. Flexible scheduling and a wide variety of classes to suit different ages, fitness levels, and preferences would increase mental well-being, and physical health contributing to long-term community resilience and quality of life.	2027	3.2.4, 4.3.1
Install a skate/bike/jump park in Georgetown	Install a skate/bike/jump park in the previously proposed space at the Heritage Park, one block south of the Peace Park, and central to Georgetown, addressing the lack of informal recreation opportunities for younger age cohorts.	2027	4.1.1, 4.1.4, 4.3.1
Upgrade Swimming Pool complex	Replace damaged concourse concrete, repair broken handrails, fix amenity-block drainage, and install a new shade structure. Consider solar heating and accessible entry/exit options to extend usability for older and mobility-impaired users into cooler months.	2028	4.1.4, 4.2.3
Extend heritage walking trail through Peace Park	Extend the walking trail through Peace Park to Terrestrial Centre recreational deck to form a heritage walk.	2028	4.1.1, 4.1.3, 4.3.3
Georgetown Equestrian Centre	Investigate alternative options including the relocation of the Georgetown Campdraft & Rodeo Facilities to develop a professional equestrian sport facility.	2031	3.2.1, 3.2.2, 3.3.2, 4.3.4

## Strategic Investment in Intergenerational and Hero Projects

Expanding community, sport and recreation facilities in the Shire creates opportunities to build on existing rural traditions and interests, such as music festivals, rodeos, gymkhanas, camp drafts, livestock judging, and agricultural displays. These events bring communities together across vast distances, celebrating rural life while offering inclusive, recurring opportunities for social connection across all age groups. Leveraging these facilities to host broader regional events, particularly given the Shire's strategic position at the gateway to the Savannah Way, can increase visitation.

Community consultation, in each town, identified the need for specific facilities to be built where none currently exist. Table 5 presents a list of community identified hero or intergenerational pieces.

**Table 5. Community identified Hero Pieces**

Community identified Hero Pieces	Location	Timeframe	Corporate Aim #
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Extend the trail around Charleston Dam	Forsayth	2028	3.2.2, 3.3.2, 4.1.2, 4.3.4
Construct a multi-function sports centre	Mt Surprise	2026	3.2.2, 3.3.2

### 3.1 Extend the trail around Charleston Dam

Extending the walk and bike trail around Charleston Dam would offer the community a venue for intergenerational gathering. This extension would enhance the Shire's capacity to attract events and competitions, such as a triathlon. The site's distinctive features enable it to host a triathlon, positioning Charleston Dam as a prominent place for communal gathering.

Installing educational signage would attract visitors to an environmental trail promoting environmental awareness and stewardship. A formal trail around the dam will provide easier access for habitat restoration, and native landscaping works, and improved water management practices.

The upgrades to expand the picnic area and extend the trail, as proposed earlier, will help establish Charleston Dam as a popular destination for sports and recreation, benefiting both locals and visitors.

The extension would offer benefits such as:

- promoting health by expanding safe, accessible options for walking, cycling, swimming, paddling, and outdoor recreation for residents of all ages and abilities.
- attracting sporting events and competitions such as triathlons at local and regional levels, leveraging the site's distinctive natural features to position the Dam as a recognised destination,
- boosting the local economy and creating long-term opportunities for regional growth and employment through event and tourism-related spending
- providing young people with quality local recreation, training, and event opportunities that support youth retention and build community pride

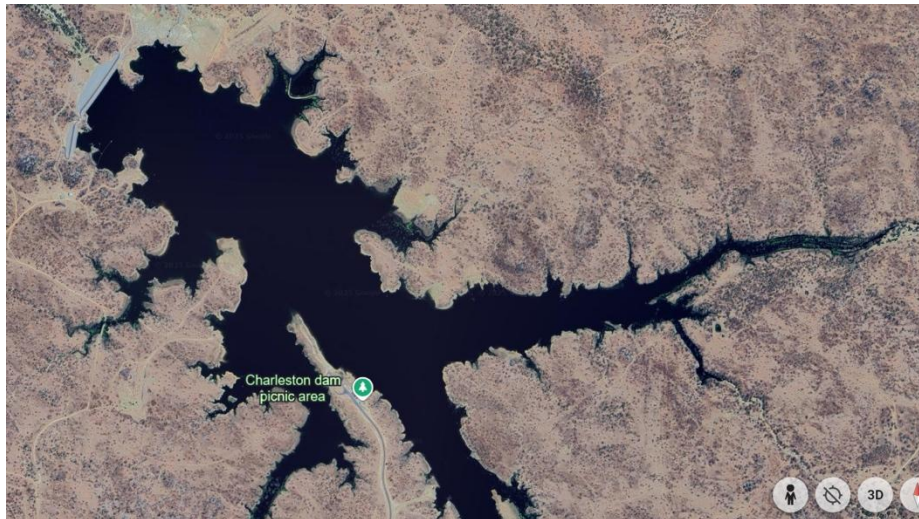


Figure 2. Potential Charleston Dam trail area

### 3.2 Construct a staged multi-function sport centre in Mt Surprise

The development of a multifunction facility in Mt Surprise, would serve as a focal point for community interaction and social engagement, and address a gap in Shire wide facility provision, meet community identified need.



Figure 3. Artist's impression of multi-function centre

This facility could assist in strengthening local identity, encourage inclusive participation, and enhance the capacity of Mt Surprise to support both its residents and visitors through a versatile, multi-use community asset. The proposed facility could accommodate a variety of sporting activities, with change rooms and a social area. The inclusion of a meeting room and kitchen would enhance usability by the community, offering a central space for local collaboration and initiatives, and as a venue for educational workshops, health programs, and other outreach services.

The new facility would offer benefits such as:

- becoming a focal point for community interaction and social engagement, providing a versatile, multi-use asset that strengthens local identity and encourages inclusive participation.
- enabling indoor and all-weather sports extending the sporting calendar through the summer heat and wet season.
- supporting school sport and physical education by giving Mt Surprise school access to a quality indoor facility for curriculum delivery and after-school programs.
- extending value beyond sport through the inclusion of a meeting room and kitchen, enabling use as a central venue for educational workshops, health programs, and other outreach services.

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