



Donnybrook-Balingup Economic Development & Tourism Strategy

Consultation Summary

Report prepared for

Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup

June 2026



lucid

/ˈluːsɪd/

adjective

1. expressed clearly; easy to understand

2. bright or luminous



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Acknowledgement of Country

Lucid Economics acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Elders of Country throughout Australia, and their connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and emerging.

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1. Introduction

Lucid Economics Pty Ltd (Lucid Economics) has been engaged by the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup to provide an Economic Development and Tourism Strategy. This work will support and inform an updated Community Strategy Plan as well as future land use planning work across the Shire.

The Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup is located in the South West region of Western Australia, renowned as the apple capital of Western Australia given its fertile soils and perfect growing conditions.

Centred around the township of Donnybrook, the Shire is situated approximately 200 kilometres south of Perth, making it around a two-hour drive. It also lies 40 kilometres south-east of Bunbury and 60km east of Busselton, providing residents and visitors with convenient access to major urban amenities while retaining a distinctive country charm. The area is celebrated for its great mix of produce, heritage and nature.

This report provides a summary of the engagement phase of the project.

2. Consultation Process

2.1 Structure of the Consultation

The consultation process for the Donnybrook-Balingup Economic Development and Tourism Strategy was designed to capture informed, experience-based insights from a broad range of local stakeholders, while ensuring consistency and comparability across all engagements.

Engagement was undertaken through a combination of individual stakeholder interviews and facilitated workshops held within the Shire. The majority of consultation was conducted on a one-on-one basis, allowing for detailed and candid discussions with individual businesses, community organisations and industry representatives. This approach enabled stakeholders to share practical, experience-based insights regarding the local economy, tourism sector and broader community dynamics.

In addition to individual interviews, two in-person workshops were undertaken in Donnybrook and Balingup, respectively. These sessions provided an opportunity to engage a broader cross-section of stakeholders and capture collective perspectives on key issues affecting the Shire.

The consultation program was largely undertaken in early May, reflecting stakeholder availability and the need to engage across geographically dispersed locations within the Shire. While timing of engagement varied, all consultation was undertaken using a consistent discussion framework.

Each consultation followed a structured, but flexible format. Rather than relying on a rigid set of questions, discussions were guided by a common set of themes, allowing stakeholders to raise issues of particular importance while ensuring consistency across interviews.

Across all consultation, discussion was typically structured around the following key areas:

- An overview of the stakeholder's organisation, business or role within the local economy or community
- Perspectives on the key strengths and competitive advantages of Donnybrook-Balingup as a place for economic development and tourism
- Identification of current and emerging opportunities to support economic growth, diversification and visitor attraction
- Key barriers and challenges impacting businesses, industries and community outcomes within the Shire
- The role of the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup in supporting economic development, tourism and broader place-based outcomes

This approach ensured that consultation captured both consistent core themes and location-specific insights, reflecting the diversity of perspectives across Donnybrook, Balingup and surrounding areas.

2.2 Stakeholders Consulted

Stakeholders were identified in collaboration with the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup, with additional input from Lucid Economics to ensure representation across key sectors of the local economy, tourism industry and community (based on the Background Report).

The consultation program was designed to capture a broad cross-section of perspectives, including businesses, industry organisations, community groups and tourism operators with direct, on-the-ground experience within the Shire.

Specific stakeholders engaged as part of the consultation process included¹:

- Balingup Fruit Wines
- Balingup Medieval Carnivale
- Balingup Progress Association
- Balingup Village Pedlars
- Balingup Visitor Centre
- Barr and Standley
- Blue Moon Packing
- Community Resource Centre
- Donnybrook Artisans
- Donnybrook District High School
- Donnybrook Hotel
- Donnybrook Regional Tourism Association
- Donnybrook–Balingup Chamber of Commerce
- Elders
- Gallery 18
- Harvest Highway
- Licciardello's
- Preston Press
- Solarfruit (Air Dried Fruit)

This stakeholder mix reflects the structure of the local economy, with representation across agriculture, tourism, small business, events and community organisations. Importantly, the consultation captured perspectives across both Donnybrook and Balingup, recognising the differing roles, identities and economic functions of each township within the Shire.

¹ Accurate as at report publication.

3. Consultation Findings

3.1 Competitive Advantages

Stakeholder consultation identified a clear and consistent set of competitive advantages that underpin Donnybrook-Balingup's economic and tourism potential. These advantages are strongly place-based and are primarily centred around the Shire's natural environment, lifestyle offer, agricultural strength and central position within the South West region.

Key competitive advantages identified by stakeholders included:

- **Natural environment and landscape:** Stakeholders consistently identified the natural environment as the Shire's defining asset. Forests, rivers, orchards, parks and the broader landscape were described as fundamental to both lifestyle appeal for residents as well as visitor attraction. These environmental qualities underpin the region's tourism offer and differentiate Donnybrook-Balingup from more urbanised destinations. The presence of highly regarded natural assets, including Golden Valley Tree Park and an extensive network of trails and forest areas, reinforces the role of the natural environment as core economic infrastructure for both tourism and liveability.
- **Lifestyle and regional living appeal:** The Shire is widely regarded as an attractive lifestyle destination, particularly in the context of increased regional migration following COVID-19. Stakeholders highlighted the area's affordability, space, community character and relaxed feel as key drivers attracting families, semi-retirees and lifestyle migrants. Importantly, this lifestyle offering is complemented by proximity to the services of larger regional and metropolitan centres, including Bunbury and Perth. This allows residents to enjoy a high-quality regional lifestyle while maintaining access to major health, education and retail services. This combination of lifestyle and accessibility was consistently linked to both population attraction and workforce attraction, with stakeholders noting that people are increasingly seeking locations that balance amenity, affordability and access to services.
- **Strategic location within the South West:** Stakeholders consistently identified the Shire's central location within the South West as a key advantage. Donnybrook-Balingup is positioned within close proximity to Bunbury, Busselton, Margaret River and the Southern Forests, providing strong connections to major tourism destinations and regional centres, a benefit for residents and potentially visitors as well. This central positioning allows the Shire to function as a logical base within the region, rather than simply a pass-through location, supporting its potential to capture a greater share of regional visitation and economic activity, so long as suitable visitor accommodation is accessible.
- **Agricultural base and production capability:** The strength of the local agricultural sector was highlighted as a core economic foundation. The Shire's fertile soils, water availability and established orchard systems support a diverse range of agricultural production, particularly in high-value crops. Stakeholders highlighted the depth and diversity of the local agricultural production as well as the sector's ability to adapt and adjust to market trends in terms of changing crops when necessary. Stakeholders also cited the divergent trends of larger growers becoming larger, while many smaller growers continue to focus on niche crops and accessing the market more directly through farmers markets and/or roadside stalls or local shops.

- **Community strength and local networks:** Stakeholders identified an active and engaged community as a key advantage. The presence of local organisations, volunteers and community groups contributes significantly to place identity, events and general liveability. However, this strength is accompanied by a recognised fragmentation between Donnybrook and Balingup, with stakeholders noting differences in identity, priorities and community dynamics across the Shire.
- **Established tourism assets and events:** The Shire benefits from a number of established tourism assets, including the Apple Fun Park, Golden Valley Tree Park and a range of trails and nature-based experiences. In addition, stakeholders highlighted the importance of major annual events, including the Donnybrook Apple Festival, Balingup Medieval Carnivale and other local events, which attract significant visitation to the region and contribute to both economic activity and place identity. Together, these assets and events provide a strong foundation for the visitor economy, although stakeholders consistently noted that further development and integration of these assets as well as more accommodation is required to maximise their potential.

3.2 Future Growth Opportunities

Stakeholders identified a range of growth opportunities that build directly on the Shire's existing strengths, particularly in tourism, agriculture, housing and the visitor economy. These opportunities are largely centred on leveraging existing assets rather than creating entirely new economic directions.

These opportunities include:

- **Tourism development and diversification:** There is strong consensus that tourism represents one of the Shire's most significant growth opportunities. Stakeholders identified substantial potential to expand nature-based tourism, including trails, forest experiences and eco-tourism. Additional opportunities were identified in agritourism, festivals and experiential tourism, where visitors engage directly with local produce, landscapes and community.
- **Tourism accommodation:** A consistent and widely recognised constraint is the lack of tourism accommodation across the Shire. Stakeholders identified a need for a broader and higher-quality accommodation offer, including motels, serviced apartments, farm stays and expanded caravan and camping capacity. The absence of sufficient accommodation is limiting the Shire's ability to capture overnight visitation and extend visitor stays, resulting in visitors simply driving through the area or staying in nearby locations rather than within the Shire itself.
- **Residential housing:** Stakeholders identified that there is a lack of housing across the Shire. In addition to overall supply constraints, there is also a need for a more diverse range of housing options. This includes housing suitable for workers, families, older residents and those relocating from metropolitan areas. Ensuring an adequate and diverse housing supply was seen as critical to supporting population growth, workforce availability and long-term economic development.
- **Agriculture and related activities:** Stakeholders identified a range of opportunities to build on the Shire's strong agricultural base across three key areas.
 - **Grow agricultural production:** there is an opportunity to continue the expansion of agricultural production in the district across products that will be in demand by consumers into the future. The Shire and the surrounding area are a significant growing region for Western Australia and, given the relative isolation and growing

population of the State, there will be increasing demand for many of the agricultural products that can be grown locally.

- **Value-added agricultural products:** there are opportunities to expand value-added products and processing, including using agricultural products to create higher-value goods or further processed products, particularly utilising second-grade produce that is not suitable for major grocery retailers and does not otherwise generate significant revenue.
- **Value-added agricultural services:** stakeholders identified opportunities for value-added agricultural experiences, including roadside farm experiences, farm stays, farm tours or similar offerings that allow visitors to engage directly with the agricultural landscape in an authentic and meaningful way. Such activities can also help smaller growers diversify their income streams and better reach consumers directly.
- **Additional retail services and town centre activation:** Stakeholders identified the need for additional retail services and experiences to occupy vacant shops and improve overall amenity within town centres. This could include more restaurants, hospitality and retail offerings, contributing to increased activity and vibrancy of town centres. Improving the availability of services, particularly in the evening, was seen as important to both resident amenity and the visitor experience.
- **Improved visitor servicing and experience:** Stakeholders consistently identified the need for improved visitor servicing and a more coordinated visitor experience across the Shire. This includes establishing a clearer and more consistent place identity, better integration of tourism assets and enhancing the overall visitor experience. Improving these elements would increase dwell time, encourage overnight stays and support higher levels of visitor expenditure.

3.3 Role of the Shire

Stakeholder feedback regarding the role of the Shire was clear and consistent, with a strong expectation that the Shire plays a significant role in both economic development and tourism as a facilitator and enabler.

- **Planning and approvals:** Stakeholders recognised the statutory planning and approval function of the Shire as the local regulatory authority, particularly in relation to development approvals and other necessary permits. This function has a direct and significant influence on investment outcomes. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of clear, consistent and timely planning processes, with the view that delays, uncertainty or overly complex requirements can act as a barrier to investment and development.
- **Facilitator and enabler:** Stakeholders consistently emphasised that the Shire's role is to act as a facilitator and enabler of outcomes, rather than a direct provider of all services or development. This includes supporting private sector investment, coordinating stakeholders, assisting in removing barriers and creating an environment where businesses and community initiatives can succeed.
- **Building relationships and local coordination:** The Shire is seen as having a critical role in building and maintaining relationships across businesses, industry groups, tourism operators and the broader community. Ongoing engagement and communication were identified as essential to understanding local needs, aligning efforts across different stakeholders and supporting coordinated economic development outcomes across the Shire.

- **Marketing and promotion:** Stakeholders expect the Shire to play a leading role in promoting the Shire as a place to live, visit and invest. This includes developing and communicating a clear and consistent narrative for the region, raising its profile within the broader South West and supporting initiatives that attract visitors and new residents.
- **Strategic investment and advocacy:** Stakeholders identified the Shire's role in advocating for infrastructure investment and regional development as a key function. As the local level of government, the Shire is well placed to engage with State and Commonwealth Governments to secure funding and support for infrastructure and initiatives that are necessary to unlock economic and tourism growth as well as improve connectivity and access across the district.

4. Summary and Implications

The consultation process has provided clear and consistent insight into the Shire's competitive position, its key economic and tourism opportunities and the role that the Shire should play in supporting future growth.

Stakeholder feedback reinforces the findings of the Background Report, particularly in relation to the Shire's strength and future opportunities in agriculture and tourism. Stakeholders identified the Shire's core advantages in natural environment, lifestyle appeal, agricultural production and its central location within the South West. These attributes provide a credible and well-defined foundation for future economic development and tourism positioning, while also shaping the types of opportunities that are both realistic and aligned with the Shire's character.

The consultation findings also highlight that future growth within the Shire is not driven by a need to fundamentally change economic direction, but rather to better leverage and build upon existing strengths. Key opportunities identified through consultation, including tourism development, improved accommodation, residential housing supply, expansion of the agriculture sector, are all directly connected to the Shire's existing assets and capabilities.

A consistent theme throughout the consultation is the recognition of the Shire's role as a facilitator and enabler of outcomes, rather than a direct provider of all economic activity. Stakeholders clearly expect the Shire to support private sector investment, coordinate stakeholders, remove barriers where possible and create an environment that enables businesses and community initiatives to succeed.

Importantly, the ability of the Shire to effectively perform this role is closely linked to its capacity to maintain strong relationships and consistent communication across the community. The consultation highlighted the importance of ongoing engagement with businesses, tourism operators and community organisations to ensure alignment, identify emerging opportunities and support coordinated action across the Shire. This is particularly relevant in the context of differing perspectives and identities between Donnybrook and Balingup, reinforcing the need for the Shire to play a central role in connecting and aligning stakeholders.

In addition, stakeholders identified that the Shire has a critical role in providing clarity and consistency across planning, approvals and regulatory processes, as well as promoting the region and advocating for infrastructure and investment. These functions are essential to enabling development outcomes and supporting long-term economic growth.

Overall, the consultation findings provide a strong and practical evidence base that clearly articulates both the opportunities available to the Shire and the role required to realise them. This information, in conjunction with the Background Report, will be used to inform and draft the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy for the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup.



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