



# Key Principles for Effective Renewable Energy Development in the Shire of West Arthur

NOVEMBER 2024



*Forest to Wheatbelt*

## Executive Summary

With the announcement of the Federal and State Government legislation to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050, it has become clear that the Shire of West Arthur will play a pivotal role in the energy transition for the State of Western Australia. The proposed development of renewable energy projects will result in a substantial transformation to the Shire's existing landscape, economy and community.

The Shire, acting on behalf of the community, has assumed a proactive role in ensuring that the community's desires and needs are heard, acknowledged and factored into the decision-making process for all stakeholders through the creation of this document. A transition of this magnitude could present various opportunities and issues for our small community.

The West Arthur Shire Council has endorsed the following position statements in relation to renewable energy developments within the Shire.

***Council supports the development of renewable energy in the Shire.***

***The Shire's main industry is agriculture, and Council considers the development of a renewable energy industry should complement this existing agricultural industry.***

***Council considers that the transition is a rare opportunity that could bring significant financial benefits and opportunities to the area. It is essential that the energy transition currently underway delivers economic opportunities, ensures reliable and affordable electricity, develops legacy infrastructure and maximises the benefits for the community.***

***Council acknowledges that the introduction of a new industry also brings with it significant challenges.***

***Council will support the development of renewable energy projects and endeavour to foster long term positive benefits for the community.***

***Council will aim to maintain existing community infrastructure that may be impacted as a result of the developments.***

Community consultation identified issues and opportunities for our community. Developers involved in renewable energy initiatives, along with professionals in related fields, are urged to ensure they address the following principles throughout their project development process to guarantee their projects are supported by the community and benefit the community both now and in the future.

***Partnership*** – *Developers actively partner with the community and West Arthur Shire Council, government and other parties when looking to invest in our region.*

***Collaboration*** *to create efficiency and coordination: Council will facilitate the collaboration of different project developers with each other, to find efficiencies. The Council commits to working collaboratively with neighboring LGAs to leverage regional opportunities.*

**Community Participation** – Council and developers undertake continuous engagement with the community to ensure that continuous learning about the transition occurs. Like the Hay Shire council in NSW, we want to ensure that the change is “happening with us, not to us,”<sup>1</sup>.

**Long-term thinking** – This transition is a once in a generation opportunity to develop our community. Decisions need to take into account the long-term legacy of the projects for future generations.

**Transparency** – Council expects clear communication, no hidden agreements.

**Economic Diversification** - for greater stability and less vulnerability.

**Build Resilience** - We have the chance to strategize and adjust to these circumstances by capitalizing from the renewable energy transition and through clever management of impacts and opportunities.

**Leadership** – Shire of West Arthur will lead thinking in relation to multiple developments as part of the clean energy transition and assist other regional Councils and communities to do the same.

Photo credit (front page): Caro Telfer

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<sup>1</sup> Fundamental Principles for Successful Renewable Development in Hay LGA, (2024)

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## Purpose

This document outlines the position, expectations and priorities of the Shire of West Arthur concerning the advancement of renewable energy transition within the Shire and its neighboring areas. The aim is to ensure that these developments are undertaken in a manner that contributes to the prosperity of the region and establishes a legacy for our community.

It also outlines the impacts, opportunities and challenges of these proposed developments as identified by the community. This document details the Council's position in relation to the development of the wind farms and was endorsed at the December 2024 council meeting.

The information in this document will provide developers with an understanding of our community and the expectations of our community when developing their projects in the area.

## Context

Western Australia is undergoing an energy transition that is being driven by the Federal and State Government legislation to reach Net Zero emissions by 2050. The State Government has also committed to reducing its own emissions by 80% by 2030 which includes retiring the State-owned coal fired power station in Collie.

The proximity of our Shire to existing power infrastructure such as power plants, existing 220kV line which extends through the north of the Shire and the two existing 132kV power lines through the southern part of the Shire makes the area attractive to developers (Figure 1).

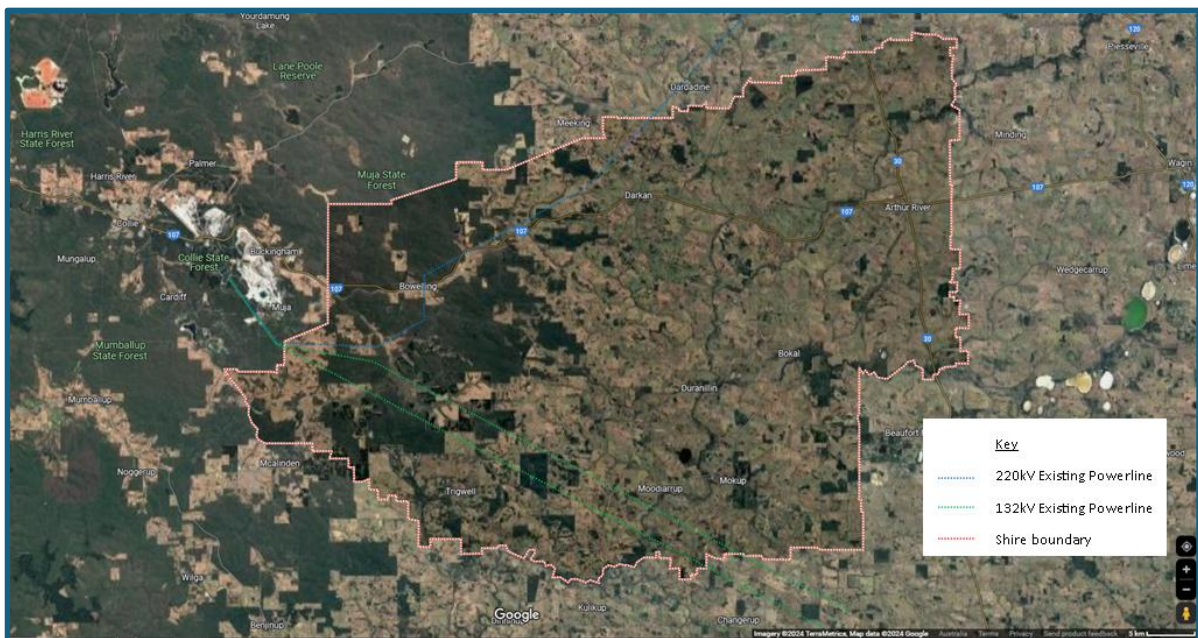


Figure 1: Location of existing power lines in the Shire of West Arthur.

At the time of writing, there had been announcement of two projects within the Shire boundaries; the announcement of a project on the northern boundary of the Shire (but located in the Williams Shire); and two projects in development (but not yet announced). Other developers have also been in discussions with the Shire over the past 18 months. The development of these projects will require the upgrading of existing power transmission

infrastructure, however no formal announcements by the State Government have been made to date.

Energy production is a new industry for the Shire of West Arthur. This will mark a substantial change to the community that will impact individuals, the way land and water resources are managed, and the community's identity. Traditionally, industry in our Shire has predominantly been centered around primary agricultural production. According to the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) 70% of income in the West Arthur Shire is generated from agriculturally based businesses. Given that the existing sector of agriculture or agriculturally based employment is a major economic driver for the Shire, wind farm proponents need to ensure that renewable energy and agriculture can coexist.

In community consultation undertaken by the Shire, 71% of participants that engaged in the sessions indicated they understood the necessity for a transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy. However, only 37% of individuals demonstrated enthusiasm for the potential opportunities that the shift could offer. This highlights the apprehension within the community regarding these developments.

## Listening to the Community and Learning about Developments

Through a series of community consultation events and surveys, Council has facilitated in-depth discussions about community concerns, expectations and aspirations. Appendix A outlines the community consultation that has been undertaken and the results of this consultation.

Consulting with the community is also a core requirement of the Shire's strategic planning process and information from these strategic documents has also been considered. More details on these can be found in Appendix B.

Energy production is a new industry for our Shire, and Shire staff, Council and community members have had to learn about how a renewable industry develops and operates. We have engaged in discussions with developers, the State Government, as well as other local governments and stakeholders to understand the progression of this emerging industry.



## Council's Position on Renewable Energy Projects

Council has had extensive discussions about the development of renewable energy in the Shire of West Arthur. By endorsing this document, Council seeks to inform the community of its position and to communicate to developers its expectations in relation to developer contribution to the community that they are will become part of. Council has endorsed the following position statements.

***Council supports the development of renewable energy in the Shire.***

***The Shire's main industry is agriculture and Council considers the development of a renewable energy industry should complement this existing agricultural industry.***

***Council considers that the transition is a rare opportunity that could bring significant financial benefits and opportunities to the area. It is essential that the energy transition currently underway delivers economic opportunities, ensures reliable and affordable electricity, develops legacy infrastructure and maximises the benefits for the community.***

***Council acknowledges that the introduction of a new industry also brings with it significant challenges.***

***Council will support the development of renewable energy projects and endeavour to foster long term positive benefits for the community.***

***Council will aim to maintain existing community infrastructure that may be impacted as a result of the developments.***

## Challenges and Opportunities

Our community identified the following as the main concerns associated with renewable energy development:

- Community division
- Decommissioning
- Change in our community structure (agriculture vs renewable energy)
- Lack of resources for development
- Lack of regulations guiding development
- Environmental Impacts
- Transparency of agreements and discussions
- Housing shortages
- Construction and location of worker accommodation
- Management of waste
- Inconsistency of benefits provided
- Impacts on existing infrastructure such as roads
- Noise pollution
- Potential rate increases

The findings are illustrated in word cloud format in Figure 2, where the larger words represent the most significant concerns of the community.



Figure 2: Community concerns associated with renewable energy development

***“We want transparency and a consistent process. We want to be able to trust these wind farm companies” (Shire-led Workshop Session participant)***

Refer to Appendix A for a more comprehensive description of community feedback on impacts, challenges and opportunities identified by the community.

Development of a new industry can also bring benefits. Our community identified the following opportunities (Figure 3):

- Population influx
- Legacy infrastructure post construction
- Collaborative initiatives between the Shire and Energy companies
- Advancing local businesses
- Drought-proof land holders (diversification)
- Renewable energy spokesperson
- Assist small land holders
- Assist with the clean energy transition
- Provide job opportunities





Figure 3: Opportunities identified by the local community

***“We need to ensure that we capitalise on this, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity” (Workshop participant)***

## Financial Benefits

The development of renewable energy projects can result in significant financial benefits for a community, allowing strategic projects to be undertaken that would otherwise not be possible. Financial benefits can be delivered in a variety of forms including;

- Payments to landholders hosting the developments
- Payments to neighbours adjacent to the project
- Community Benefit or Enhancement Funds (CBF/CEF) from each project during and after construction
- Council rates or Payments in Lieu of Rates (PILOR)
- Sponsorship during early phases of development

Community benefit funding arrangements are established during the planning process for each project and typically delivered once the operational phase of the project begins. The community has identified projects of strategic importance that could benefit from increased funding as identified by the local community (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Suggested projects to benefit from increases in funding.

Other economic benefits for our region include local jobs, procurement, increased use of local services and businesses, provision of training services and development of new community services.

## Council and Community Expectations

Developers are urged to partner with the West Arthur community by interacting with the Council and taking an active role in the community to ensure that their objectives are aligned with expectations of council and the community. These expectations are:

- Open communication
- Transparency
- Striving for inclusivity - preventing division
- Contributing to the community – change in landscape/visual amenity and lifestyle – the whole community needs to reap the benefits
- Being part of the community
- Creating Partnership between the Shire and the renewable energy industry
- Collaboration amongst developers to minimize cumulative impacts
- Long term strategic thinking to develop our community

## The Way Forward

### Timeline

Most renewable energy projects follow a similar process for development although it is not uncommon for the timelines for these projects to differ. An example project timeline is shown in Figure 5.

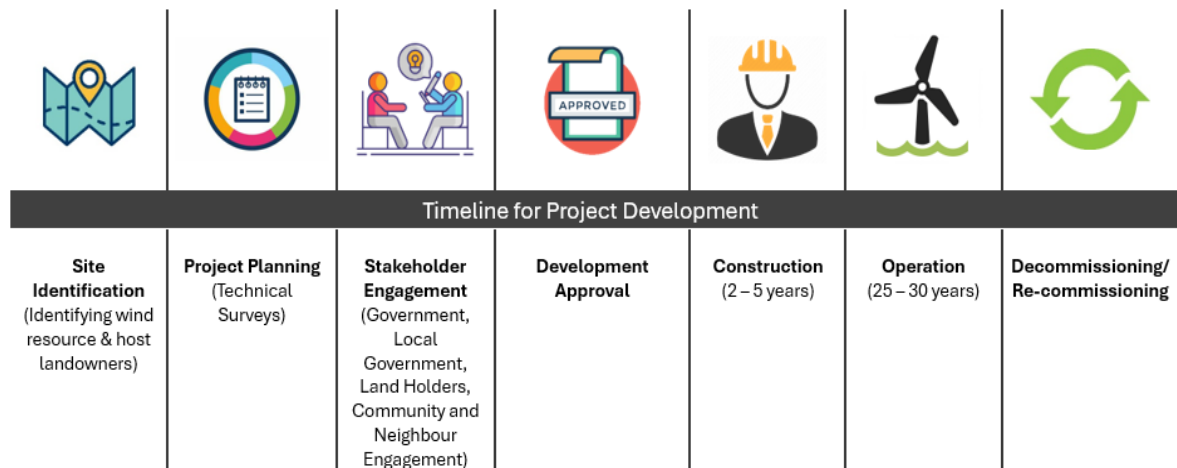


Figure 5: Process for the development of renewable energy projects

### The Integration of Renewable Energy and Existing Sectors

Our region is beginning to experience a drier climate creating new challenges for the agriculture sector in our community. When farmers are impacted, all businesses in the community are impacted.

The integration of renewable energy projects into our economy will help relieve the impact of changing weather conditions by providing an additional reliable income stream for host landowners. This will create more stable economic conditions.

Developers are urged to engage with land holders, environmental specialists, and other local business stakeholders to seek advice on current agricultural operations within the Shire. This approach will ensure that developments complement existing operations rather than detract from them.

When undertaking socio-economic assessments of proposed wind farm developments, developers are encouraged to involve the Shire and the community through regular meetings, and community consultation sessions to gain an understanding of our community.

***“If this is to go ahead, how can we ensure that the services we have in town support this kind of development? We want local businesses to get first opportunity to provide a service rather than developers going and spending their money elsewhere” (Local Business Owner)***

## Creating efficiencies

The impact of multiple new developments in the Shire can create burdens for local government and the community. Coordination and collaboration will reduce these burdens and make the process easier. We are a very small community, and the impacts of these developments could be minimized through focus and coordination to create efficiencies that make the process easier.

## Community Participation

Community participation in the process of development will ensure that there is community ownership of the distribution of the benefits. We encourage the community to actively participate and continuously learn about the renewable energy transition. Council will facilitate conversations to ensure that the community is engaged. Working together, even if we have differing views on the developments, will ensure that we create the best outcomes for our community.

## Principles to apply

Developers of renewable energy projects (and other industries if applicable) are asked to apply the following principles to the development of their projects to become genuine members of our community:

1. **Partnership** – Developers actively partner with the community and West Arthur Shire Council, government and other parties when looking to invest in our region.
2. **Collaboration** to create efficiency and coordination: Council will facilitate the collaboration of different project developers with each other, to find efficiencies. The Council commits to working collaboratively with neighboring LGAs to leverage regional opportunities.
3. **Community Participation** – Council and developers undertake continuous engagement with the community to ensure that continuous learning about the transition occurs. Like the Hay Shire council in NSW, we want to ensure that the change is “happening with us, not to us,”<sup>2</sup>.
4. **Long-term thinking** – This transition is a once in a generation opportunity to develop our community. Decisions need to take into account the long-term legacy of the projects for future generations.
5. **Transparency** - clear communication, no hidden agreements.
6. **Economic Diversification** - for greater stability and less vulnerability.
7. **Build Resilience** - We have the chance to strategize and adjust to these circumstances by capitalizing from the renewable energy transition and through clever management of impacts and opportunities.
8. **Leadership** – Shire of West Arthur will lead thinking in relation to multiple developments as part of the clean energy transition and assist other regional Councils and communities to do the same.

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<sup>2</sup> Fundamental Principles for Successful Renewable Development in Hay LGA, (2024)

## Conclusion

This document has been prepared by the Shire of West Arthur and conveys a message from our Community to the State Government, other Local Governments, key stakeholders and renewable energy developers associated with the renewable energy transition. The key points we wish to communicate are.

- We are supportive of the renewable energy transition
- We aim to make this a positive experience by continuing to provide support through coordination and collaboration with the community
- We ask developers to apply to the principles set out in this document to enhance collaboration and achieve favourable outcomes for our community
- We want to ensure that renewable energy development compliments existing practices and plays a role in fostering the economic development of the community
- We will place an emphasis on prioritising strategic projects that can be undertaken because of the financial benefits

## Appendix A – Community consultation

### *Wind farm forum*

The Shire's initial community engagement occurred in July 2023 after it became aware of developers beginning discussions with local land holders. This session was intended to be an information session for the local community which included presentations from legal experts, government departments, noise experts, wind farm proponents, and other renewable energy professionals. This session was attended by 150 people.

### *Shire-led Workshop session*

Peta Ashworth, the Director of the Curtin Institute for Energy Transition facilitated two community consultation sessions in the second half of 2024. The first session was an initial targeted stakeholder meeting in October 2024. The purpose of the meeting was to gauge community sentiment regarding the proposed developments, assess the level of understanding among the participants, and gather information to share with the broader community. This meeting encouraged a robust, and transparent discussion and provided information to the participants to disseminate to their peers.

This was followed by an open wind farm community consultation session in November 2024 which was informed by the session in October. Again, this was facilitated by Peta Ashworth and the invitation to this event extended to the wider community. Guest presenters included Jai Thomas, Deputy Director General – Coordinator of Energy and leader of Energy Policy WA, and wind farm representatives from Acciona, Lacour, RES, and Green Wind. The evening's agenda consisted of presentations delivered by the guest speakers, which were followed by an interactive session using the application Slido to capture the data. Subsequently, a panel discussion featuring a question-and-answer session took place. The responses are compiled at the end of this Appendix.

### *Surveys*

As a part of the Shire-led community consultation session a survey was distributed to residents in the community in October 2024. The purpose of the survey was to contribute to the research into the social impacts of the renewable energy transition being undertaken by Curtin University.

### *Other Local Governments*

The Shire has also been engaging with other Local Governments that are currently hosting wind turbines or who are likely to host renewable energy projects to gather a comprehensive understanding of their interactions with developers, and the opportunities and issues they see resulting from the developments in their Shire and to provide a coordinated approach to these developments.

### *Outcomes*

Through the forum, community consultation session and surveys the Shire has fostered a comprehensive understanding of the community's concerns regarding the proposed renewable energy developments.

- **Community division** - Will these developments create a division within the community regarding the distribution of benefits among community members?

- **Decommissioning** - As the turbine reaches the end of its life, the question arises regarding the party responsible for its decommissioning. Does the responsibility fall upon the landowner, and if that is the case, does the owner possess the necessary resources or budget to carry out the decommissioning process?
- **Challenges of Change** – people’s strengths and attachment to Darkan is challenged by the change so change management needs to be implemented.
- **Lack of resources** – It will be necessary for the local government to allocate resources towards the development of sewage, water supply, housing initiatives, planning and other related areas to effectively manage the challenges posed by the change.
- **Lack of regulations** – The State Government has offered minimal support for the transition to renewable energy, and due to the absence of regulations and guidelines, wind farm proponents are left without any rules to follow.
- **Environmental impacts** – How will wind farms impact plant and animal life? The ongoing presence of foreign vehicles onto properties may elevate the risk of introducing invasive pests or disease.
- **Transparency** - Landowners, and individuals are receiving contradicting information from wind farm proponents and Western Power. When can the community expect the release of clear maps detailing the location of the turbines, and a map detailing the location of the proposed transmission line? A trust needs to be built between the government, renewable energy developers and the community.
- **Housing shortage** – If existing housing stock is utilized by the wind farm companies this will highlight the housing shortage in Darkan. It is undesirable to construct housing at a minimal cost, as such developments may not be attractive to residents upon completion of the project. Not having housing stock means we are unable to capitalize on the possible benefits such as increasing our population.
- **Construction of worker accommodation** – Is it beneficial to establish a construction camp in the Shire. What opportunities does this present for the community? The community does not want the workers to adopt the fly in fly out (FIFO) lifestyle. Will the construction of this accommodation leave legacy infrastructure?
- **Management of waste** – The expenses associated with the removal of effluent raise the question of how this process will be managed. Additionally, is there a possibility for resource circulation?
- **Challenging the norm (agricultural production)** – The Shire is a prosperous mixed farming region characterized by a diverse range of activities including wool, sheep, grain, and forestry. Need to ensure that the relationship between wind energy and agriculture can co-exist and not work against each other.
- **Inconsistency of benefits** – It is essential for the entire community to reap the benefits of the change, rather than solely the host landowners.
- **Impacts on existing infrastructure** – Who holds the responsibility for the continuous upkeep of roads? How will traffic be regulated to reduce the wear and tear on these surfaces?
- **Noise pollution** – How will this be managed? Who is responsible for ensuring that wind farms adhere to safe separate distances from noise-sensitive premises? And, what about new constructions – how will these be impacted?

- **Potential rates increase** – Will there be a change in rates as a result of these developments? In the instance of an increase in rates who will be responsible for paying this, the windfarm proponent of the landholder?

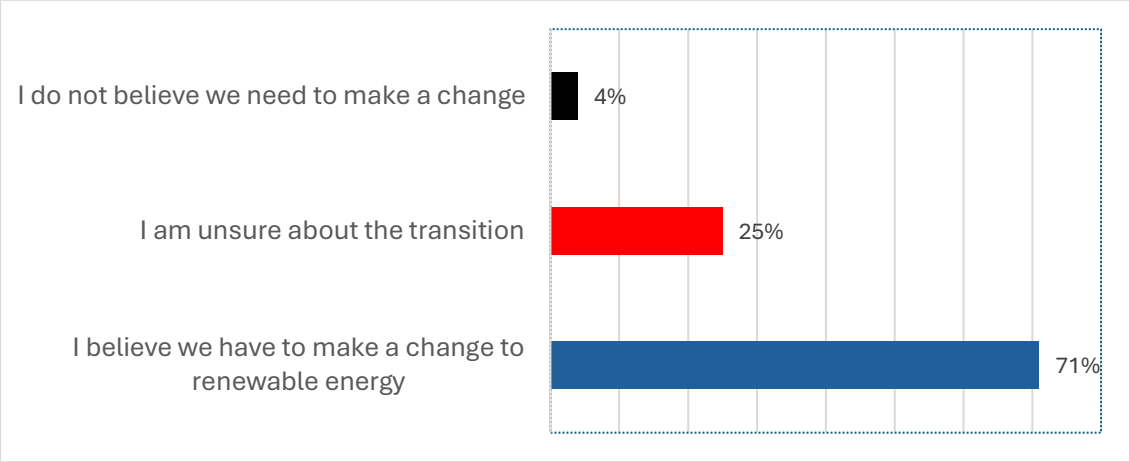
Furthermore, through the consultation process listed above the Shire has gained insight into the opportunities recognized by the community that are expected to arise from these developments.

- **Population influx** – If permanent staff reside in the town this may lead to an increase in the number of young families relocating to the town, thereby enhancing enrollment in the school and childcare facility.
- **Legacy infrastructure post construction** – The development of high-quality housing that can be modified or repurposed in the future to address the housing shortage, and provide accommodation for key workers, the elderly or social housing in the community.
- **Collaborative initiatives** – Energy companies and the West Arthur Shire working together to improve existing infrastructure that benefits both the developers and the Shire during the construction phase and further benefits the Shire in the future. For example, educational facilities, childcare facilities, recreation facilities and roads.
- **Advancing local businesses** – Support local businesses through community enhancement funds to strengthen their operations and broaden the range of services they can offer to the developers during the construction phase and to the community moving forward.
- **Drought-proof land holders (diversification)** – With 70% of the community solely relying on agriculture as their main source of income, diversification of agricultural enterprises through renewable energy projects ensures sustainability and longevity of farm businesses during challenging periods.
- **Renewable energy spokesperson** – Engage a person with sound knowledge in the renewable energy sector to represent and advocate on behalf of the community. Assist the community with understanding the transition, and the planning processes.
- **Assist small land holders** – The implementation of renewable energy on farms has potential to render previously unprofitable small businesses economically viable.
- **Clean energy transition** – Assist the government with reaching their net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.
- **Provide job opportunities** – The growth of the renewable energy sector in rural towns could create numerous job opportunities which could contribute to the construction phase or permanent workforce.

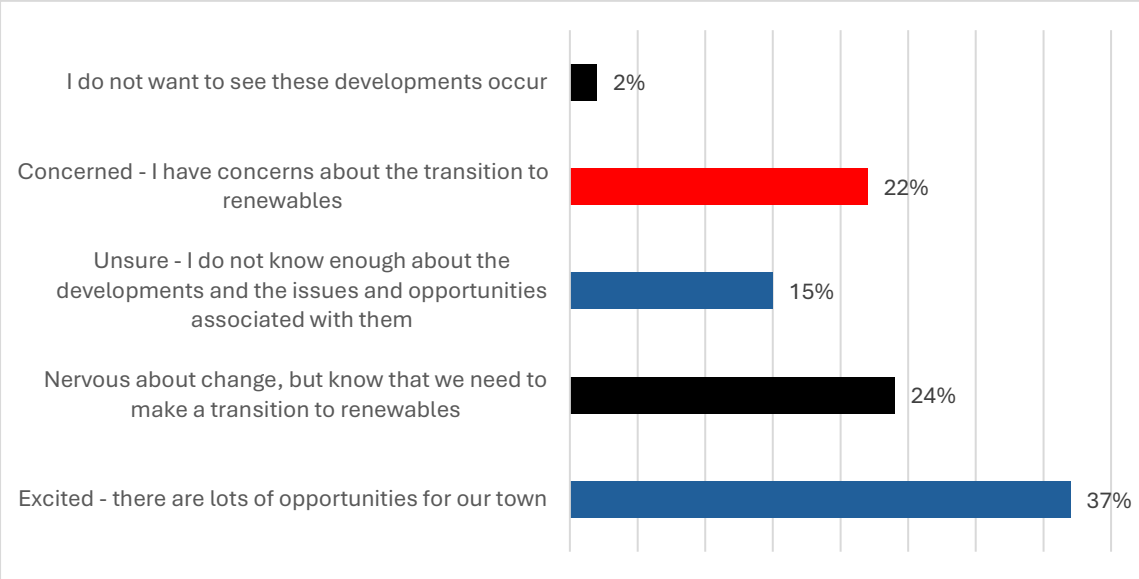
Questions formulated by the Shire and presented to the public during the community consultation session held on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November and the public responses are listed below. Some questions are shown in the main body of this document in the form of “word clouds”



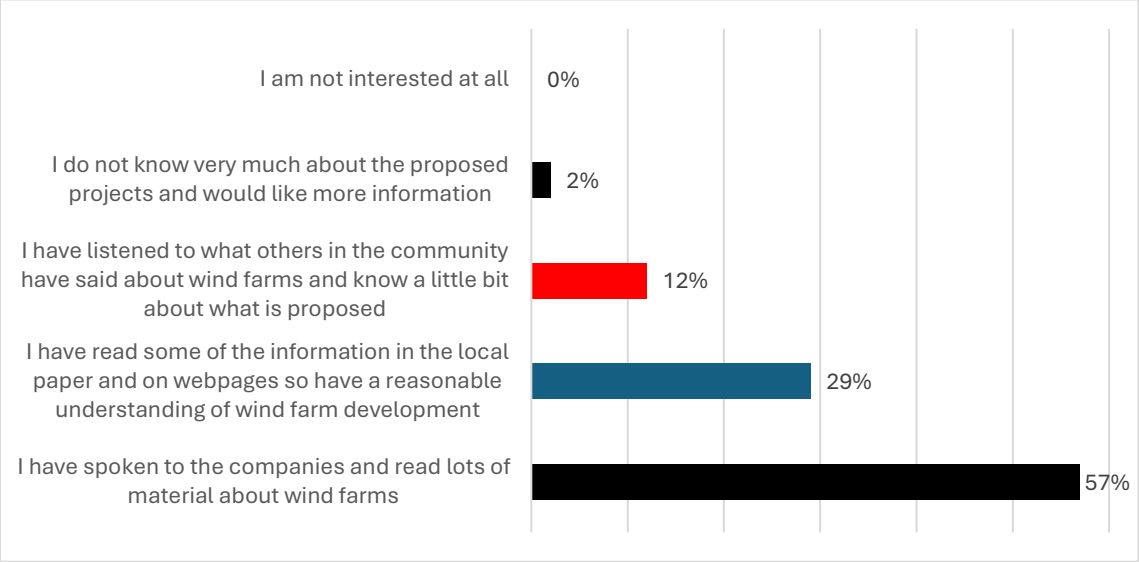
How do you feel about the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy? (48 people responded)



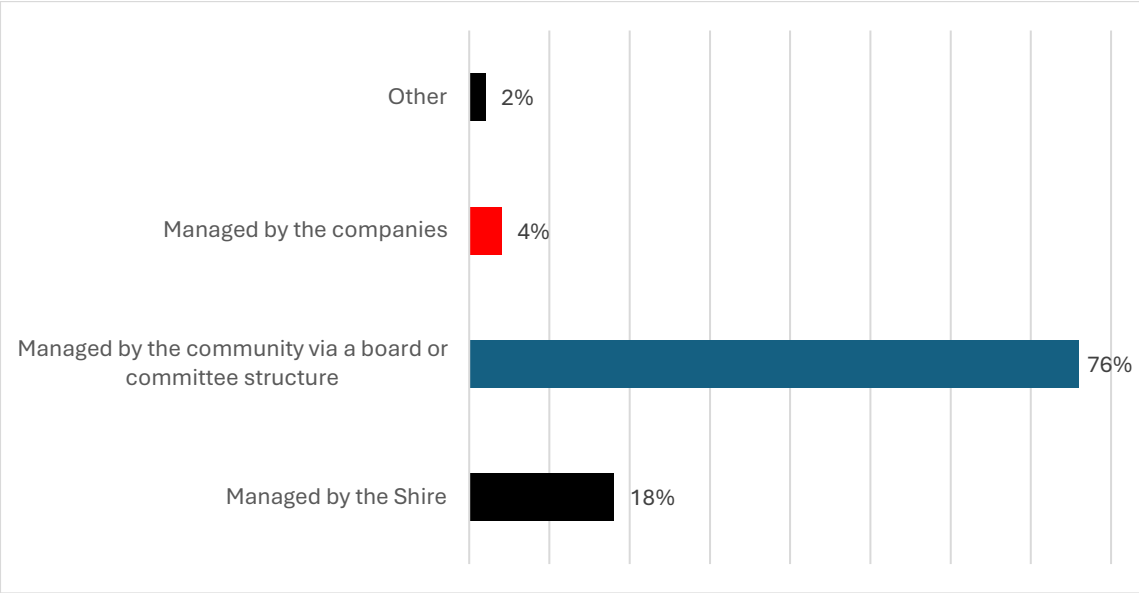
How do you feel about the proposed developments in the Shire of West Arthur? (41 people responded)



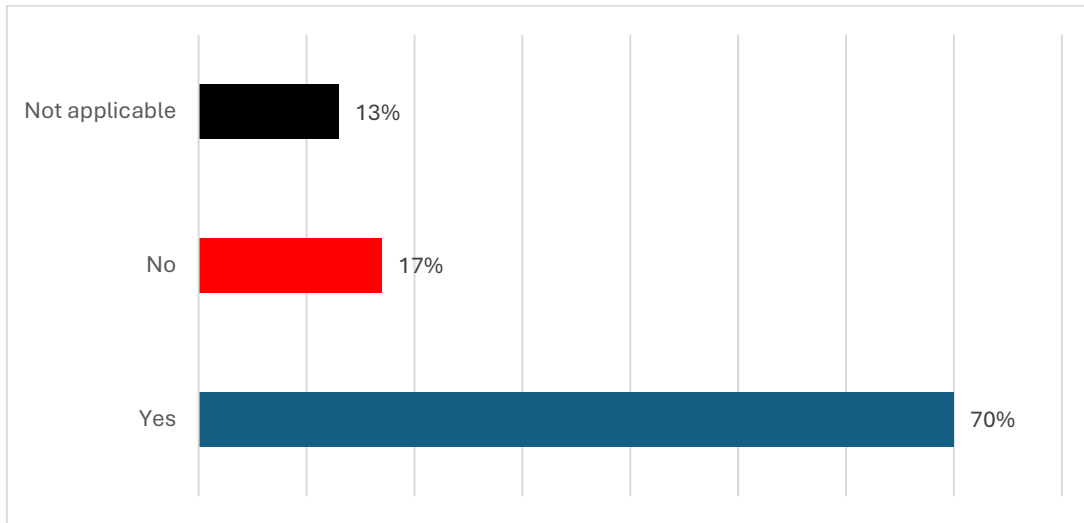
How much do you know about wind farms?



Many companies now provide a community benefit fund - how do you think this should operate?



If you are planning to sign a lease agreement with a wind farm, would you like to have a coordinated "farmer group" to discuss the proposal?



What other issues in relation to the proposed development should the shire consider? (list three)



Questions that were presented to the panel during the community consultation session held by the Shire on November 6<sup>th</sup> are listed below. The answers provided are based on responses given by the panel members, Jai Thomas - Deputy Director General – Coordinator of Energy and leader of Energy Policy WA, James Townsend (Lacour Energy), Graham Pearson (Acciona Energy), Farooq Mannan (RES), Patrick Ragan (Green Wind), Vin Fordham Lamont – Shire CEO, and the Shire’s planning officer Joe Douglas.

**If a landowner signs a contract stating that the wind company is responsible for decommissioning and goes bankrupt will the state overwrite that?**

The wind farm developers include a decommissioning bond in their lease agreements. The nature of the bond will vary between developers, but in most cases the bond is valid for at least the last 5 years of the project. Wind farm projects have significant value through their infrastructure, grid connection and landowner agreements making it highly likely that a project can be sold to a new owner if the existing project owner is no longer viable. In this instance, and the project is sold (in whole or in part) the new project owner(s) would be bound by the terms of the lease agreements in place with the host landowners, as well as the environmental, planning approvals and obligations for the project which includes the decommissioning obligations. Despite this, most developers are incentivised to recommission the assets after the initial 25–30-year periods.

Acciona responded to the Shire’s request for further information and indicated that it prides itself on developing, building, owning and operating its energy projects in Australia which is also applicable to the Bellwether Wind Farm project. Acciona’s lease agreements with landowners, including those related to the proposed Bellwether Wind Farm project specify that the obligations regarding decommissioning, mandate the removal of turbines within 12 months following the lease expiration.

**Are proponents working together, and working with the Shire, on the design of community benefit schemes (and any consultation and assessments that inform them) so we can avoid over-consultation, duplication, and potentially conflicting schemes?**

The Shire has previously raised the idea of having a combined community benefit scheme where little response was given from the wind farm proponents. The proponents are happy to work together at the right time but indicated that it is currently too early to discuss community benefits.

Not all projects proposed for the Shire will go ahead at the same time, so it is difficult to have a fund that is cooperatively managed by a specific date. As the project is approved, and construction dates are firmed up there is an opportunity to work together for a community benefit fund and construction funds. The wind farm proponents will liaise with the Shire about the structure of the fund.

**Longer hotter summers – will windfarm companies provide firefighting equipment if aerial bombing is not possible?**

It is a myth that aerial bombing is not possible with wind turbines. Wind farm proponents have indicated that they would support aerial bombing and firefighting procedures. In the instance of a fire the Emergency Response Coordinator on site liaises with emergency services and the turbines can be remotely shut down and parked in a ‘Y’ shape to assist aircraft conducting water bombing activities.

Acciona indicated that it has prepared an aviation impact assessment which has been submitted to the Shire. This considers the impact of wind farms on planes. Other existing projects owned and operated by Acciona have community benefit funds which have funded water tankers for the local fire brigades.

**What safeguards are going to be in place to reduce or repair damage to infrastructure, such as roads, the environment, such as removing vegetation to enable transport of turbines and people's livelihoods, when they need to 'compete' with large convoys, during the build phase?**

All these measures are heavily regulated by the State. There is a noise safeguard document in place and proponents must have construction management plans, traffic management plans, and environmental management plans undertaken. These take into consideration the timing of moving equipment, and the roads which the equipment must be moved on. There are environmental approval frameworks if any changes in the environmental status are to occur.

**Will any of the wind farm developers be offering neighbourhood agreements to those not hosting wind farms but heavily impacted by the developments. What examples are there of Compensation or Neighbour Agreements, and how can landholders in WA negotiate them with no information, no examples to assess and all details kept secret? When will the compensation and neighbour agreements be offered?**

Once the key land for the wind farm is established then neighbours will be spoken to regarding the project. This could provide neighbours with opportunities such as providing resources for the development or potentially joining the project.

As the project progresses, there will be many opportunities for input from the local community to assist with shaping a fund that is specific to both the needs of the community and those of the surrounding communities. Proponents often offer a small grants program, legacy investment programs and scholarship programs to support local people and initiatives.

Acciona indicated that due to the early stage in development details cannot be provided at this time.

Other wind farms indicated that they provide a direct financial offering and landscaping options to screen views to those closest to the wind farms.

**What parallels and lessons are we learning from other rural and regional areas in Australia, where renewable energy proponents are engaged in getting projects going, or are we just going to reinvent the wheel, and potentially lose community harmony or projects themselves in all the noise?**

In the Eastern States a group called Energy Co. assist with community engagement in relation to the renewable energy transition. This group is made up of 250 employees. A similar structure has formed here in WA called Powering WA. This group has 14 people employed to date and it's mission is to provide on the ground engagement which will commence at the end of this year. Events like this consultation evening provide advice and information to the State Government. WALGA are facilitating events with all local governments that have an interest in this area or who are impacted by these developments.

**How can Acciona build a 3,000 MW windfarm when the amount cannot be absorbed by the grid?**

All renewable energy developers in the area rely on Western Power delivering a new transmission line. Western Power determines the timeframe and the route of the new line. The

existing 220kV transmission line has no capacity to add new generation; the 66 kV transmission line to the east of the Shire of West Arthur is too small to connect a wind farm.

Acciona indicated that its Bellwether project would need to connect into the proposed new transmission line being delivered by Western Power. The preliminary layout of Acciona's projects indicates that it will be approximately 3GW. Currently, the peak demand is 4,500MW which is set to grow to 20,000MW by 2050. It is a long process of building and decarbonising the state and these developments may not all eventuate.

### **Can all these projects practically be built? Who is going to be left out?**

A key factor impacting the ability of a wind farm project to proceed is access to Western Power's proposed new transmission line; a project without access to the new transmission line is unlikely to progress. All renewable energy developers in the area need to undertake two years of continuous bird and bat monitoring, and detailed flora and fauna surveys prior to construction.

Acciona indicated that it is developing the Bellwether Wind Farm with confidence of moving to construction approximately 2028/29.

### **Would the state government develop a policy around reusing/decommissioning turbines?**

Wind farms are high value assets and long-term there needs to be underpinning policies surrounding recycling and decommissioning. Some of this needs to be left to the sector to self-manage. Items such as steel will have a significant value at the end of life of the turbines and will be sold. Solar panels also have a life of 25 years so the recycling process for these needs to be considered as well.

### **Western Australia erected the first Australian wind turbine in 1987 which was decommissioned recently. Over 37 years why is there not stringent WA State Government policy already in place for wind farm fire control, low frequency illness, neighbour landholder compensation and decommission bonds?**

The development of renewable energy guidelines is a part of the State planning engagement, and these guidelines need to be uplifted to reflect the current situation and new technology that emerges. There are other mechanisms to develop community benefit funds, these are not new, and all projects have a form of a community benefit fund. These funds may not be fit for purpose 10 years on so there may be opportunities to review these. Funds need to be consolidated to hit larger infrastructure fund needs.

### **What measures will be taken regarding accommodation/hospitality taking into consideration money that will come in because of the project?**

The Shire has been liaising with the proponents about their proposed locations of housing and accommodation. Until the proponents know that there is a permanent project in place they cannot confirm where the construction camps will be and furthermore cannot pinpoint the accommodation options they wish to pursue. If the Shire is aware of where the construction camps are going, they can look at rezoning the land, to support this kind of development. The proponents indicated that they are aware that this is an opportunity to create jobs, however that they also need to consider the current workforce and don't want to take away workers from farmers, the Shire or other businesses. There is an opportunity to invest in businesses to support them rather than taking away from them or clearing the shelves.

**Can Acciona explain how they calculated the size of the project? Are they only short-term access agreements? Why is land under other developers included?**

Acciona has entered access licenses with almost forty landowners covering an area of approximately 110,000 hectares. Based on this, the preliminary layout for the Bellwether Wind Farm indicates that the size of the project is approximately 3GW. Until this point, it has not been appropriate to sign 30-year lease agreements and bind landowners.

The access licenses include confidentiality clauses, and the map shown during the wind farm community consultation event on the 6th of November intentionally did not identify specific landowners. The 'blob' map showed Acciona's land area with a buffer around the boundary.

**How many is too many turbines for the Shire?**

The power in WA does not connect to the east coast. The volume of renewable energy is roughly 36% and the record of renewable energy at one given time is roughly 86%. There is the need for renewable energy in the southwest to match the demand plus more (see slide in Jai Thomas's presentation. The Kojonup wind farm has been listed as the best performing wind farm in the country over the last three months.

**Parron wind farm in Badgingarra has committed \$1000/MW/year to a community investment fund. Is there potential to have this fund in this area?**

There is a desire from the wind farm proponents to collaborate with the community. The projects are in early stages and what each Community Benefit Fund looks like is still being determined. The fund is developed by the community for the community and will have Shire involvement. The Clarke Creek wind farm is 450MW and has a community benefit fund of \$200,000/year. In WA there is not a prescribed number but there will be a range that has to be hit, or the proponent and the fund won't be looked at very fairly by the community. Best practice from elsewhere is roughly \$500-\$1500/MW.

Acciona indicated that the community will benefit from the Bellwether Wind Farm in numerous ways. While it is too early for Acciona to confirm the exact size of the Community Benefit Fund, as a minimum Acciona will develop a small grants program, legacy investment program and scholarship program to support local people and initiatives. Similar programs are run for other wind farms across Australia. Examples of benefits may include.

- Upgraded roads
- Improved council services through rates contribution
- Community grants
- Tailored neighbour benefit programs and landscape screening
- Scholarship programs
- Approximately 100 jobs during operation, including turbine technician and maintenance jobs
- Approximately 400 jobs during construction and
- Increased economic activity in the local community

**Is it ludicrously ironic that small rural towns like Darkan are going to be losing their connection to the state power supply, being fobbed off with limited power alternatives that are proving problematic in other parts of the state, while being expected to host major renewable energy projects?**

A total of 3% of power consuming customers are in regional areas. Regional power supply challenges will continue as there is a lot of pressure on Western Power to deliver. The hosting of wind turbines does not necessarily mean good reliability in the town as it is connected to the distribution network. Western Power are currently investigating stand-alone power systems and retiring networks such as those that are on a 6km line which only services one customer.

**What impact will turbines have on farmers who will have planes for crop spraying?**

Turbines are strategically designed in 'straight' strings to support crop spraying with little disruption. Farmers can notify the wind farm, and the turbines can be remotely shut down and put in park 'Y' shape to assist aircraft conducting crop spraying. When considering the placement of turbines, the wind farm proponents consult with aerial professionals.

The pilots would conduct flight plans considering potential obstacles. Pilots would consider turbines as being like other obstacles such as telecommunication towers.

**When you sign a commercial lease suddenly that land is operating commercially on land that is zoned rural. Can this be done?**

The use class 'wind farm' is not expressly listed in the Zoning Table of the Shire of West Arthur Local Planning Scheme No.2.

As such any development application received for a wind farm must be processed and assessed in accordance with the following clause in Local Planning Scheme No.2 as it applies specifically to uses not listed in the Zoning Table of the Scheme:

- 4.4.2 If a person proposes to carry out on land any use that is not specifically mentioned in the Zoning Table and cannot reasonably be determined as falling within the type or class of activity of any other use the local government may:
- a) determine that the use is consistent with the objectives of the particular zone and is therefore permitted; or
  - b) determine that the proposed use may be consistent with the objectives of the particular zone and thereafter follow the advertising procedures of clause 9.4 in considering an application for planning approval; or
  - c) determine that the use is not consistent with the objectives of the particular zone and is therefore not permitted.

Any development application received for a use not listed in the Zoning Table of any Local Planning Scheme in Western Australia is classed as complex under the Planning Regulations and must therefore be advertised for public comment for a minimum required period of 28 days irrespective of the abovementioned clause in Local Planning Scheme No.2.



**When will the wind farm companies submit Development Applications and confirm to their clients that their projects will proceed?**

All renewable energy developers in the area need to undertake two years of continuous bird and bat monitoring, and detailed flora and fauna surveys.

Acciona indicated that it intends to submit a Development Application for its met mast as soon as a cultural heritage survey is completed. They will also submit their environmental approval documents when they are complete.

**What confidence should we place in companies & government agencies who are selective in the timing and extent of their environmental surveys, such as waiting until summer, after everything has senesced or reduced their daytime movements, due to high daily temperatures and limited moisture?**

All renewable energy developers in the area need to undertake two years of continuous bird and bat monitoring.

Acciona indicated that for a Project the size of the proposed Bellwether project, this means that three seasons of flora and fauna surveys are likely to be required. As a part of the environmental approval submission Acciona will share the results of its bird, bat, and flora and fauna surveys.

**We've been told by renewable energy proponents that they can't support local towns who will host renewable energy projects, to access subsidised rooftop solar, battery storage, cheap energy etc, yet a Victorian town will be doing so, with a French wind and solar project proponent. Why can't we?**

Acciona indicated that due to the early stage of the projects, these details cannot be provided right now. As the projects progress, there will be many opportunities for input from the local community, to help shape benefits that are specific to their needs and those of the surrounding communities.

**Will the developers share the results of their fauna surveys, namely birds and bats with the shire and other landowners? This information should be freely available given the shire is promoting and trying to improve biodiversity.**

Acciona has indicated that it will share the results of its bird, bat, and flora and fauna surveys as part of the environmental approval submission. Acciona have just commenced the required two years of continuous bird and bat monitoring.

**If CY O'Connor got water to Kalgoorlie over 100 years ago, why can't wind turbines be placed in the middle of WA on non-arable land?**

The Shire understands that wind farm developers are interested in developing in the area because of the proximity to the existing infrastructure including power lines and power stations in Collie. Any new power lines are likely to extend through the shire and as a result there is significant interest in developing the wind farms in this area.

**If local government is against any wind farm proposal, do they have the power to totally shut it down?**

There are three assessment pathways that renewable energy applications can be determined under:

- Local Government development assessment
- Development Assessment Panels (DAPs)
- Development Assessment Unit (SDAU)

Due to the significant scale of these projects, and the limited resources at the Shire applicants primarily choose one of the other pathways to determine their renewable energy applications. The Development Assessment Panel pathway must still take into consideration the local planning framework and give due regard to any local planning policies. The State Development Assessment Unit can make a decision that conflicts the local planning scheme where the scheme is more than 5 years old, and where the application raised matters of State or regional significance. Either of these assessment pathways allow Local Government to have input into the Development Assessment process but will not be the decision-making authority.

**The remaining questions have all been noted and passed to the various participants in the community consultation events but have not yet had a response.**

What government owned infrastructure needs upgrading and /or locating across West Arthur Shire? What compensation is there for impacted landowners?

What government support & assistance is there for land holders negotiating contracts and agreements with non-transparent wind farm developers in WA?

Why can't government heavily subsidise residential/industrial/business rooftop solar and battery storage avoiding costly transmission line upgrades, rural amenity loss and rural community discord?

What part of WA is the most cost-effective location, per unit of deliverable power + cost of install/running costs to build renewable energy projects? Does locality economic contribution, state investment in infrastructure & opportunity cost during the build phase, form part of this consideration?

Are large wind turbines in Ag regions the ONLY solution for future energy needs in WA? Are all potential generation methods being considered? Such as community owned and managed solar/wind/battery and/or dams as energy store projects.

How will the State Government support small rural and regional towns, who are being expected to plan and provide for increased demands on infrastructure if wind farms or other renewables are established?

The turbines will add value to a property. What is the risk that local farmers can no longer expand their business by buying that local land? Is it possible that only big businesses will be

able to buy the inflated price land, and plant the wind farm to trees resulting in depopulation on the local area?

Will the state government consider a statewide renewable energy planning policy like NSW rather than expecting small under resourced shires to develop individual local planning schemes that developers just ignore?

If there is a change in State Government next year, what are your thoughts regarding the renewable energy transition. Will it still be a top priority for the state? Or will the money already invested in the process just go to waste?

## Appendix B - Informing Documents

### *Community Strategic Plan*

The Shire of West Arthur's Community Strategic Plan ([strategic-community-plan-towards-2031](#)) provides the overarching guiding vision for the Shire for the next 10 years and is the Council's commitment to implementing the community's aspirations.

In the process of developing the plan, community engagement was undertaken through various forms, providing all individuals the opportunity to contribute to the strategic direction of the Shire council.

Through that process the community identified the following key aspirations for the next 10 years:

- Our community – safe, friendly, inclusive
- Local Economy – stable, sustainable agricultural industry, a dynamic and growing business sector
- Natural environment – our natural assets are valued and meet the needs of the community
- Built environment – well maintained roads and infrastructure which reflects our identity
- Leadership and management – inspirational, dynamic, transparent

### *Economic Development Strategy*

The Shire of West Arthur's Economic Development Strategy document is a 10-year roadmap which is being used to pursue the Shire's economic development vision. The Economic Development Strategy sets priorities, objectives, and actions based on a multifaceted approach to fully build on our strengths and capture new opportunities for economic growth.

Results of the research and stakeholder consultation undertaken as part of this document will be taken into consideration when considering the renewable energy transition. The document outlines the Shire's existing position and strategic opportunities, whilst showcasing what matters to our community, and the Council's commitment to ensuring this strategy is delivered.

Renewable energy companies can contribute to the direction of the Shire and fulfill key objectives identified in the Economic Development Strategy Document as outlined below ([westarthur.wa.gov.au/documents/667/economic-development-strategy](http://westarthur.wa.gov.au/documents/667/economic-development-strategy)):

- **A vibrant town centre and activated spaces within our townsite** – Wind farm proponents offering community benefit/enhancement funds could play a significant role in transforming the town centre into a lively and dynamic space.
- **Built infrastructure that is well maintained and meets the needs of our community** – The availability of additional funds could allow for upgrades to existing infrastructure and the establishment of additional facilities to ensure they adequately support the needs of the permanent workforce associated with these developments, as well as the growing population.
- **A growing and diverse business community** – By leveraging the potential of introducing a new type of business into the community, the Shire is diversifying its source of income, thereby decreasing its dependence on agriculture for the town's economic support.

- **A thriving visitor economy that leverages our natural and heritage assets**
- **Great economic resilience through industry diversification** – Whilst the agricultural sector is the main source of income for the Shire, the over reliance on this sector could have a negative impact during times of hardship. Renewable energy may offer an alternative source of income to assist with economic resilience.
- **New industry development and diversified job opportunities** – There is a loss of labour and economic opportunities as a result of the lack of housing in the Shire, the increase in farm sizes and the automation of farming. Wind farms could increase the number of employment opportunities in the Shire therefore boosting the town's population.
- **Sufficient allocation of resources to successfully drive our strategy forward**