



Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve

Draft Masterplan Community Engagement - 19 Jan – 15 Feb 2026

Hepburn Shire Council (HSC) will create a high level or conceptual master plan for the Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve (HMSR or the Reserve). The Reserve, located in the town of Hepburn Springs, Victoria, is a 30 hectare public open space nestled within the larger Hepburn Regional Park. HMSR is home to several historic and popular Mineral Springs, the premium commercial facility *Hepburn Bathhouse*, a café, BBQ, public toilet, play areas, walking tracks and picnic areas. The site is already a key visitor destination but has the potential to become a site of greater tourism significance.

This report is a summary of feedback from the second of three stages of engagement. This engagement phase – the draft masterplan stage – aims to gather community sentiment regarding the proposed project list or actions that have been developed for the future of the space. The next stages for this work are finalisation of the masterplan document and adoption by Council. The final stage of engagement will see the adopted masterplan released with proposed next steps for its implementation.

Funding for the development of this master plan is provided jointly by a grant from State Government's Enabling Tourism program of \$80,000 with a contribution of \$20,000 from Hepburn Shire Council.

1 Executive Summary

Feedback on the draft Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve showed general support for the proposed masterplan. The community showed strong support for retaining and enhancing the natural beauty and mineral springs character that exists within the Reserve. Given that, many respondents across engagement methods were concerned that changes to the reserve bringing an increased amount of visitation may conflict with this character. There was support for improving existing spaces like the cafe, pavilion, soundshell, walking paths and gathering areas however some felt that new works to create an area for large events or the lighting activation (uplighting of key features like springs and trees) were perhaps out of step with what the reserve should be.

There was also concern expressed regarding if HMSR could and should be a 'premier' destination for visitors with many citing that the nearby Victoria Park and its recent masterplan or Lake Daylesford would be a more suitable place for larger events.

The Daylesford Macedon Tourism Destination Management Plan 2024 – 2029 and State Government's Victorian Mineral Springs Masterplan 2025 – 2032 provide guidance that Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve has importance at a regional, state and international level given its status as the first location for mineral springs bathing, presence of co-located Hepburn Bathhouse, heritage context, established amenities, proximity to Daylesford and Hepburn Springs as well as its location next to the Hepburn Regional Park's diverse walking trails and tracks. This strategic work provides clarity that the Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve should be a place for locals and visitors alike.

This masterplan focuses on a moderate approach to improve and enhance the character of the reserve and its status as a heritage influenced space and proposing new features that offer increased interest and accessibility; enhance the reserve's rejuvenating qualities; improve the telling of the story of First Nations People while working toward the ultimate goal of setting up Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve as a local, state and international visitation destination.

A Gender Impact Assessment has been completed for this master plan. Recommendations include:

- Consider lighting in main parking area adjacent to the Hepburn Bath House to a standard to allow facial recognition and access to parked cars at night.
- Repair low level path lighting Reserve to allow for timed ambient lighting to public toilets, secondary parking areas, Springs and access to 9th, 10th and Main Streets.
- Ensure all park furniture located on the sealed central path is accessible allowing for use by individuals with prams, walking frames, wheel chairs and other mobility aids.
- Upgrade the public toilet near the BBQ to include improve passive surveillance, a baby change area, accessible toilet cubicles, timed lighting and unisex cubicles.
- Improve the accessibility, signage and surveillance of the public toilet near the café.
- Implement a clear signage suite in all of the Reserve's internal roads, trails and major visitation areas with maps identifying attractions, connections, parking, amenities, exits and walking times. Signage should focus on wayfinding, interpretation, behaviour and other site specific details.
- Remove all old or redundant signage to improve the clarity of information.
- Signage should be clear, graphic heavy and contain information for 24 hour contact.
- Implement Emergency Markers at points within the reserve and adjacent trails.
- Implement wayfinding signage in the town to direct visitors to the reserve and identify connections from the reserve to the local street network.
- Ensure that the central pedestrian path is accessible with a high grade, solid paved surface, 1.5 metre width and well signed.
- Ensure that there are accessible paths leading from the parking areas near bathhouse and BBQ down to the Reserve's main path.
- Create opportunities to encourage passive surveillance around the main visitation area of the reserve for daytime use. Casual night time use is discouraged until visibility, passive surveillance, wayfinding and lighting indicate it.
- Improve the seating, picnic and play areas to be accessible, diverse with a high degree of passive surveillance.
- Ensure maintenance of the reserve's main visitor area is undertaken regularly and to a high degree of quality. Provide a contact number or method for visitors to report hazards or maintenance needs.

- Manage vegetation on the main visitor area paths, path junctions and parking areas to allow for a clear line of sight.

Projects proposed in this conceptual masterplan set the vision and direction for changes to the reserve and will proceed to further design as funding becomes available. Engagement with community and stakeholders will feature in the implementation of individual projects nominated by the masterplan at the time of their design.

2 Engagement Process – Masterplan Development

Development of a master plan for Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve will take place across several stages that will take place within the 2025/2026 financial year (Figure 3). These stages are detailed in Figure 1 and have been updated to show current project tracking.

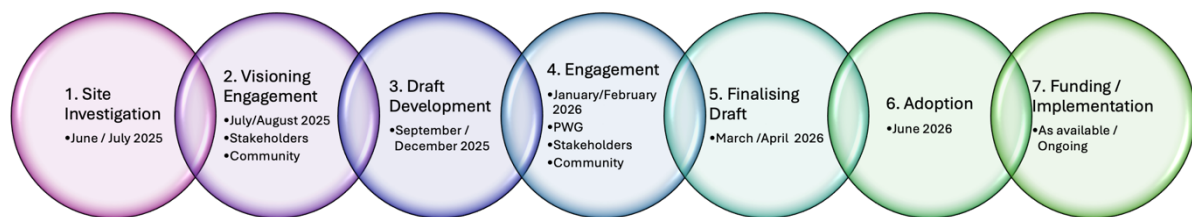


Figure 1: Diagram showing stages in the development of a master plan for Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve

What can the community influence?

Engagement features strongly in the process to prepare a master plan for HMSR. There are three phases of the master plan development process where the community can influence the outcome. This phase, the Draft Masterplan stage is the second stage in the process.

These stages are:

- **COMPLETE.** Visioning (Stage 1 - The Visioning Engagement took place between 4 July – 1 August 2025)
- **CURRENT.** Draft Masterplan (Stage 2 - Current)
- **FUTURE.** Final Masterplan (Stage 3 – Planned June 2026).



Figure 2: Community influence in HMSR masterplan

While there are some things that are non-negotiable, there are many things that the community can influence including the priority and type of improvements, character of the reserve and vision (Figure 2).

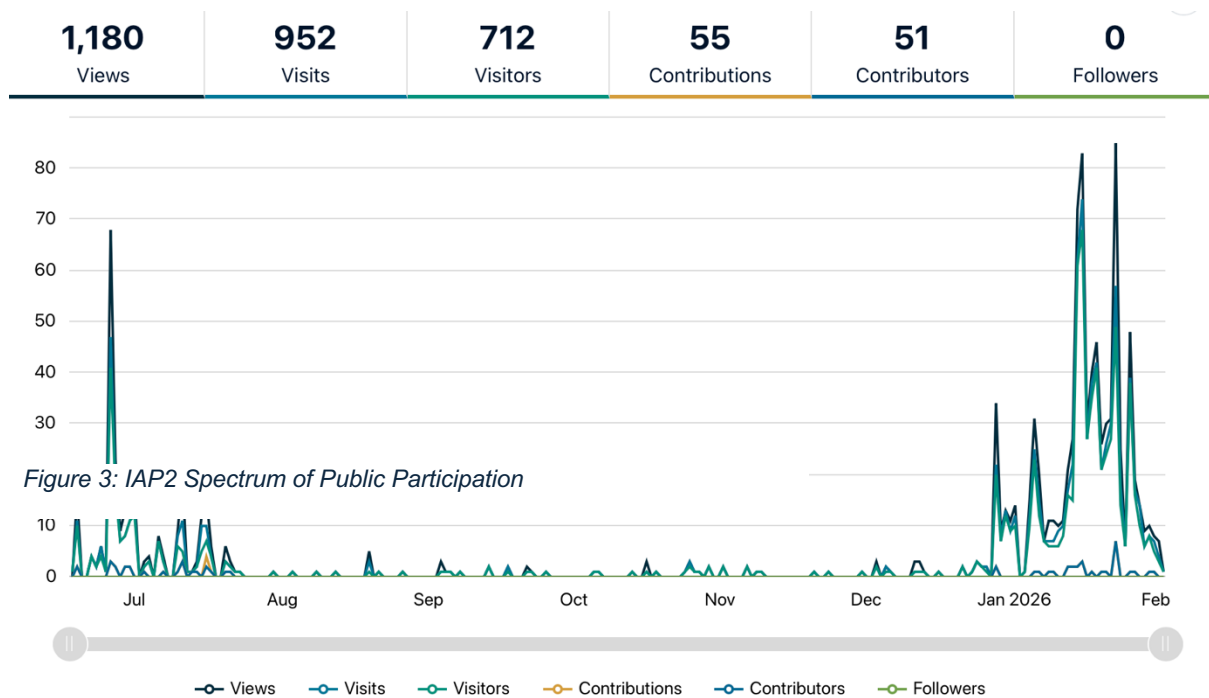


Figure 4: Graph showing visitation to the Participate Hepburn Page across the first two stages of engagement

Community engagement for the HMSR has been designed to be in line with Hepburn Shire’s Community Engagement Policy 2021 and the IAP2’s Spectrum of Public Participation (Figure 2). Ratings on the IAP2 spectrum for each of the stages of engagement for the HMSR masterplan are:

- Visioning - Involve
- Draft Masterplan - Consult
- Final Masterplan – Inform.

Whole of Project Engagement

Engagement for the development of the HMSR masterplan began with the Visioning Engagement which took place between 4 July – 1 August 2025. The outcomes of this engagement process were used in part to develop the featured experiences and proposed projects or actions. Other materials considered included the Daylesford Macedon Tourism Destination Management Plan 2024 – 2029, Hepburn Mineral Springs Conservation Management Plan (Hepburn Shire Council, 2003), Victorian Mineral Springs Strategic Masterplan 2015 – 2014 (Mineral Springs Committee, 2015), Victorian Mineral Springs Masterplan 2025 – 2032 (State Government, 2024), Heritage citations and various strategic documents.

Engagement on the Hepburn Mineral Springs masterplan has been modest with the Participate Hepburn page receiving 1,180 views across both stages of engagement with 845 of them during the second stage of engagement on the draft masterplan.

The current phase of engagement on the Draft Masterplan presents a proposed list of projects or actions to the community and stakeholders for comment. These projects have been developed using feedback from the earlier Visioning Engagement.

Community engagement on the draft masterplan for HMSR was planned for 19 January – 8 February 2026, a period of three weeks. Due to a request from a member of the community, the engagement period was extended for an additional week to close on 15 February.

Promotion of the draft masterplan was through:

- Council's social media platforms – 4 posts
- Sponsored Facebook post
- Inclusion in the January Business Newsletter
- Inclusion in the Shire Newsletter
- Email to key stakeholders
- Promotion at Information centres
- Four A0 size, full colour signs onsite.

Engagement Activities included:

- Participate Hepburn Page with officer contact details
- Masterplan map with 20 proposed projects and descriptions
- Online Survey with directed questions
- Two drop-in sessions at the Reserve
- One Q&A session in the Council Chambers.

Responses to the engagement activities were:

- Online Survey – 29 Responses
- Two drop-in sessions at the Reserve – 7 people attended across both sessions
- One Q&A session in the Council Chambers – 0 people attended
- One meeting with local business owner
- One individual engagement conversation
- 5 email submissions
- 50 Intercept Surveys (informal conversations with park users)

The **purpose** of the engagement was to test the draft projects with the community and understand sentiment, support and concern for the proposed changes.

Engagement with Heritage Victoria

The draft masterplan has been tested with Heritage Victoria (HV) to understand their views on each of the proposed projects. Only projects that were exempt from permit or were in line with HV's expectations for the Reserve were included in the draft masterplan map.

Any projects noted in this masterplan will require additional consideration from Heritage Victoria as part of the design and implementation process.

Engagement with First Nations People

Engagement with Djaara / Djandak began with contact in June 2025. Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve is identified with actions in the Dhekunya Dja – Joint Management plan for the Dja Dja Wurrung Parks (2018). The action specifically reads:

Explore and plan options for a gateway facility adjacent to the Parks, owned and led by Dja Dja Wurrung People, with a collaborative approach to design and construction. Together with Hepburn Shire Council, Parks Victoria, current lessees and occupiers, and the community consider how and whether partnerships, lease arrangements and re-development of Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve, and Hepburn Bathhouse and Spa can be such a major information centre for all the DDW Parks.

Figure 5: Snip from Dhekunya Dja relevant to HMSR

Engagement with Djaara and Djandak continues.

3 Identity of Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve in the Shire's Open Space Network

Hepburn Shire Council does not have a guiding document (like an Open Space Strategy) that provides a strategic identity, character or intended use for its parks and open spaces.

With that said, Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve has been used as a tranquil, healing and social space where closeness to nature, walking, wellness and partaking of mineral springs waters are primary activities. If this is accepted, only works that are in line with that character should be considered.

The Daylesford Macedon Tourism Destination Management Plan 2024 – 2029 and State Government's Victorian Mineral Springs Masterplan 2025 – 2032 provide guidance that Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve has importance at a regional, state and international level given its status as the first location for mineral springs bathing, presence of co-located Hepburn Bathhouse, heritage context, established amenities, proximity to Daylesford and Hepburn Springs as well as its location next to the Hepburn Regional Park's diverse walking trails and tracks. Therefore, this masterplan includes improvements that are suitable to locals and visitors alike with the ultimate goal of setting up Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve as a visitation destination.

4 Engagement Outcomes

In Person Sessions

The in person sessions were not well attended with only 7 people attending across the three in person sessions. Most people attended the session to find out more information on what was proposed or to present their opinions on certain projects. Feedback shared at the sessions was consistent with the information from the surveys and other submission methods.

Intercept Surveys

Intercept surveys are an informal engagement methodology that involves approaching individuals or groups using a space and asking a series of questions in a conversational style. Across the engagement timeframe, approximately 50 individuals were approached and asked questions similar to those proposed in the survey. These individuals were a mixture of locals and visitors of all age groups using the reserve alone, in groups or with pets.

Generally, users of the space reported that their experience was positive with appreciation for the peacefulness, beauty and pleasantness of the space and amenities. Many asked questions about what to see in the reserve or nearby or how to access walking tracks or certain springs. The majority of users were seated at the BBQ area, walking or having a look around after a treatment at the Bathhouse. During this time, very few people were observed using the play area or seating with most walking or interacting with the mineral springs water.

Reserve users were mostly families, older couples caravanning, individuals, small groups, bushwalkers and dog walkers. They were observed to be an equal mix of locals using what is their local park and visitors who stopped by to use the amenities, go for a walk, collect mineral springs water or explore. Several locals were aware of the masterplan engagement, but did not participate in the advertised engagement methods.

Digital Survey Responses

4.1.1 Question ONE

The first question tested if respondents had seen a copy of the masterplan. The majority of people (93%) who completed the survey had viewed the masterplan. The masterplan map and list of projects was linked from the Participate Hepburn Page, referred to in the preamble to this question with direction on how to find it and posted onsite.

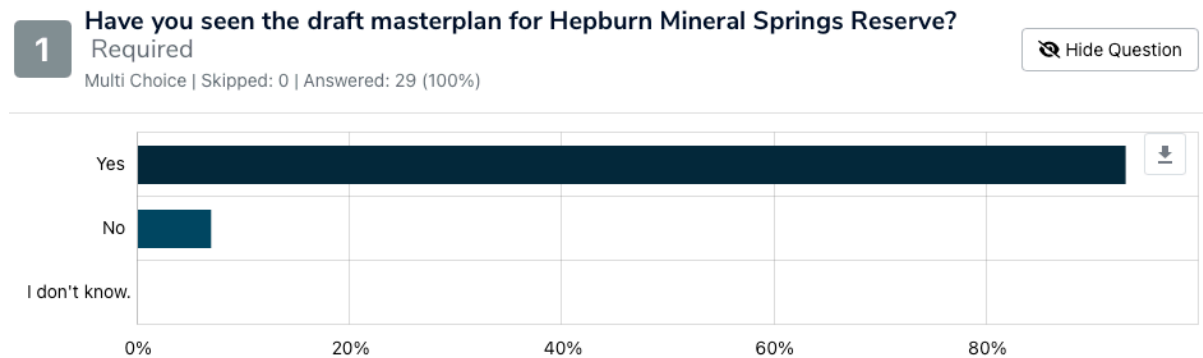


Figure 6: Graph of survey responses.

4.1.2 Question TWO and THREE

The second and third questions include the masterplan's draft Vision Statement and asked for feedback. The vision statement was presented as:

"Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve is the region's premier place to experience the mineral spring waters, outdoor events and destination for meaningful rejuvenation close to nature."

The Reserve is a natural and peaceful sanctuary, a place for locals and visitors to partake in the mineral spring waters, bathe, gather, share a meal, celebrate and care for land and water preserving it for generations to come.

The Reserve blends a heritage place with the Dja Dja Wurrung people's connection to Country in a peaceful and natural environment."

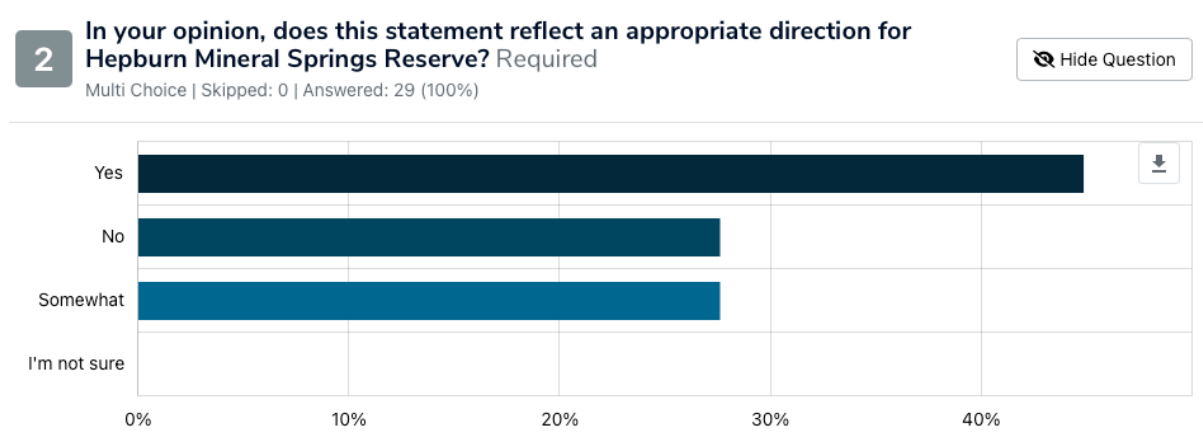


Figure 7: Graph of survey responses.

The majority of respondents (44.83%) agreed that the vision statement was an appropriate direction for Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve.

Of those answering 'Somewhat' (27.59%), the commentary focused on concerns about how the changes would impact the current experience, the neighbouring residential area and if increased visitation would put too much strain on the fabric of the reserve. Concerns raised in this group were about the appropriateness of the events area, night time use, overcommercialisation negatively impacting the character of Hepburn Springs and the Reserve, excessive noise and increasing the areas where there was a fee for use. Generally, this cohort supported improving existing infrastructure, increasing the focus on mineral springs water and improving accessible access including paths and seating. There was a general sentiment that there was no budget for implementation.

Of those responding 'No' (27.59%), concerns were around dislike of previous improvement works particularly around Locarno Springs, statements that maintenance and weed removal should not be part of a masterplan, concerns that increasing visitation is in conflict with peacefulness and rejuvenation, desire for the reserve to be left as it is, concerns about fee for bathing, wanting to retain the old furniture and concerns about what funding was available to undertake these works.

4.1.3 Question FOUR and FIVE

Questions four and five reflect on the experience categories that the master plan identified which include - Walking and Nature, Visitor Experience, Heritage Fabric, Connection to Country, Improving Existing Infrastructure and Features, Accessibility, Lighting and Signage/Wayfinding.

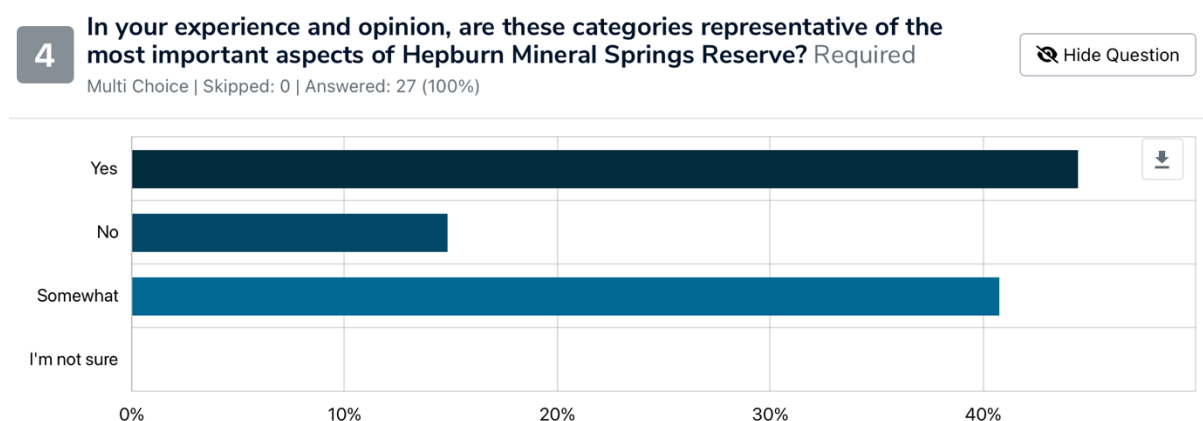


Figure 8: Graph of survey responses.

The majority of respondents replied 'Yes' (44.83%) or 'Somewhat' (41.38%). Those replying 'Yes' did so because they felt that the reserve was well used and provides a positive experience for visitors and users. Of those replying 'Somewhat', comments included an increased focus on accessibility, concerns that changes would damage the current character, support for categories that included walking, nature, heritage and cultural heritage only; concerns about lighting, belief that the focus should be mineral springs and nothing else as well as comments about unhappiness for other items not related to the Reserve.

Those responding 'No' (13.79%) did so because they felt that the focus should be only on mineral springs water, they held dislike for previous improvements (Locarno) and the belief that the Reserve should not be changed.

4.1.4 Question SIX and SEVEN

The next set of questions explored which of the experience categories were most important. In this category, the higher the response the greater the preference.

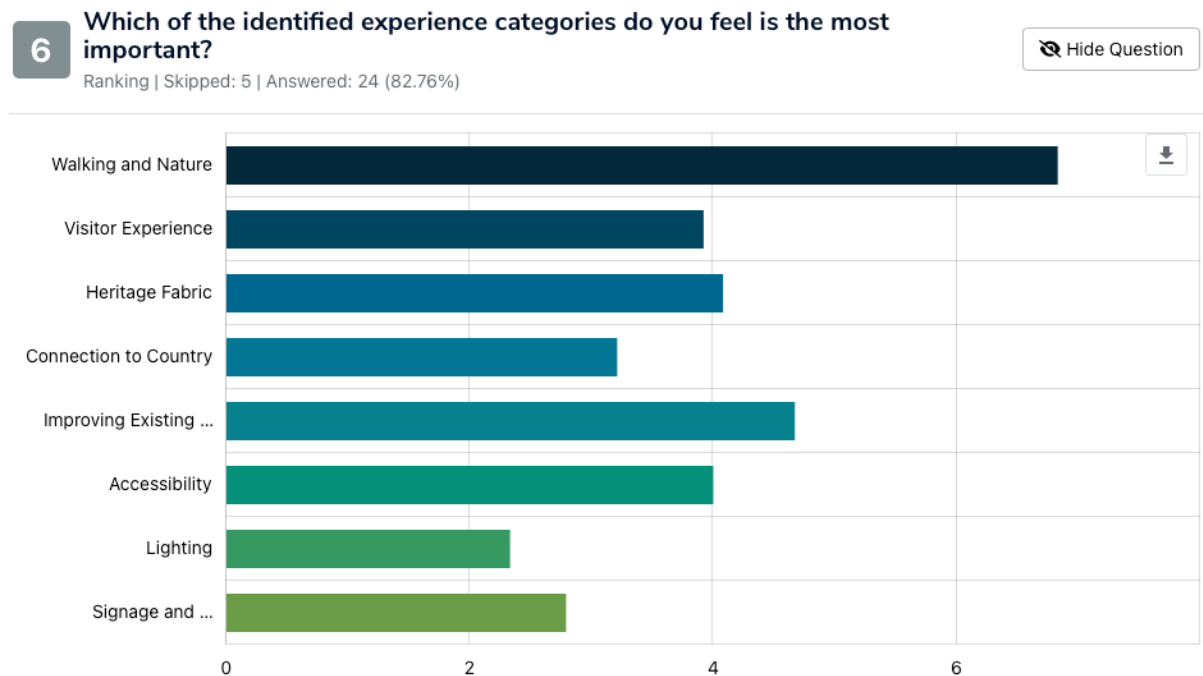


Figure 9: Graph of survey responses.

Of those responding, there was a clear preference for Walking and Nature (6.8 score) followed by Improving existing features and infrastructure (4.67) and Heritage Fabric (4.08). This is consistent with feedback from the first stage of engagement. Commentary around this question repeated earlier sentiment regarding the importance of mineral springs water and nature. Two respondents stressed that they felt that the heritage considerations should be downplayed as it was 'holding back' the reserve's improvements.

4.1.5 Questions EIGHT and NINE

The next set of questions asked which of the identified proposed projects respondents felt would be most beneficial.

The top scoring projects were:

Improvements to existing features and infrastructure, Heritage Hepburn Pool and Native Vegetation Regeneration and Waterway Health each with 51.72% of the preference, followed by New and improved seating (44.83%) and Renewed Toilet (37.93%). Most of the commentary expressed concern about some of the other projects in line with previous feedback.

8

Which projects do you think will offer the MOST benefit or positive change if implemented? Required

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 29 (100%)

Hide Question

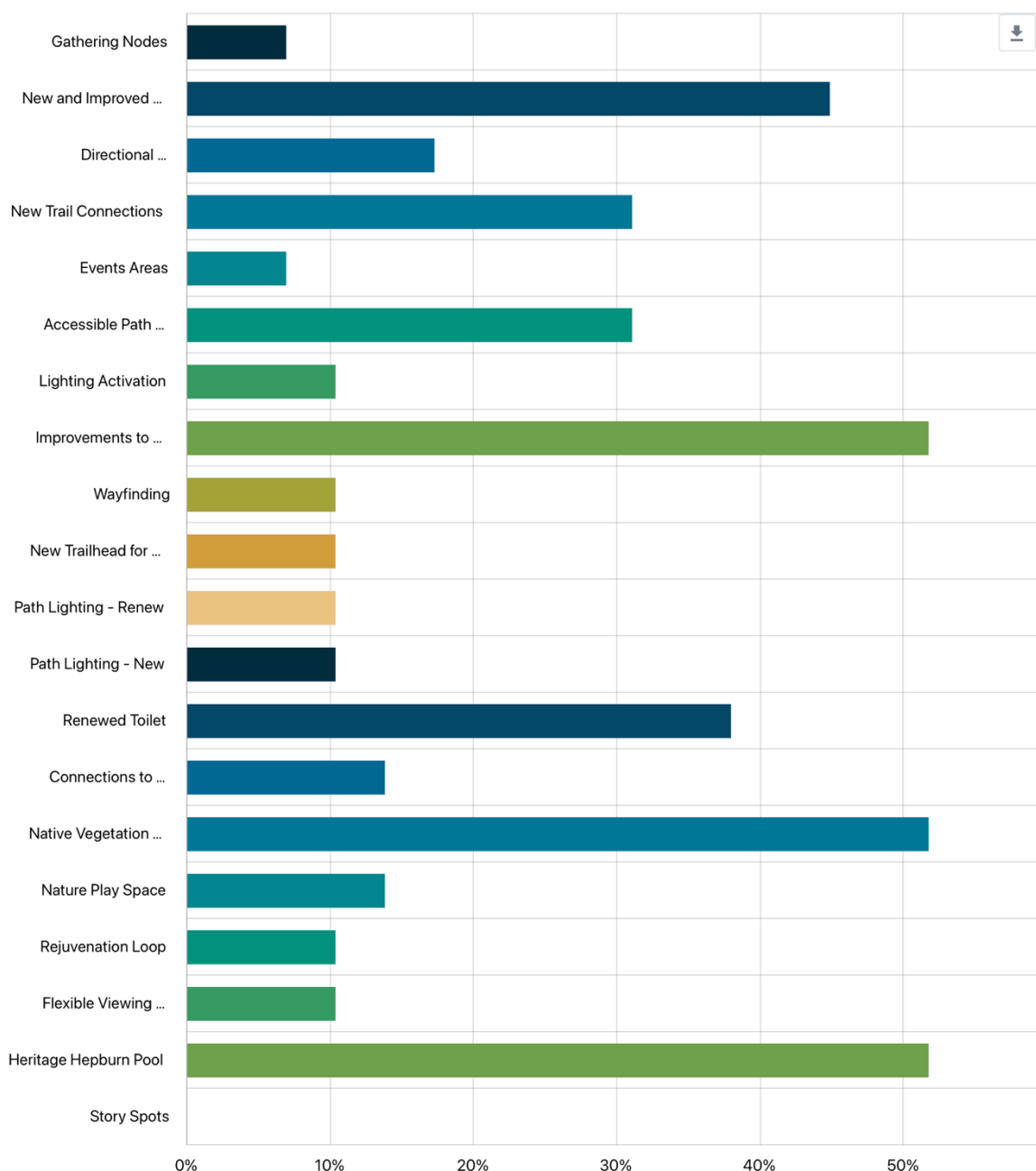


Figure 10: Graph of survey responses.

4.1.6 Question TEN and ELEVEN

Questions ten and eleven asked participants which of the identified draft projects offered the least benefit.

The least supported projects are the Lighting Activation (44.83%), Events Area (34.48%) and Gathering Nodes (31.03%). The reasons these projects were the least supported included concerns around light and noise pollution, duplication of existing soundscape events area and concerns around cost of use of some of elements. The last concern makes clear that some people think that you will need to pay to use the features of the masterplan.

10

Which projects do you think will offer the LEAST benefit or positive change if implemented? Required

Hide Question

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 29 (100%)

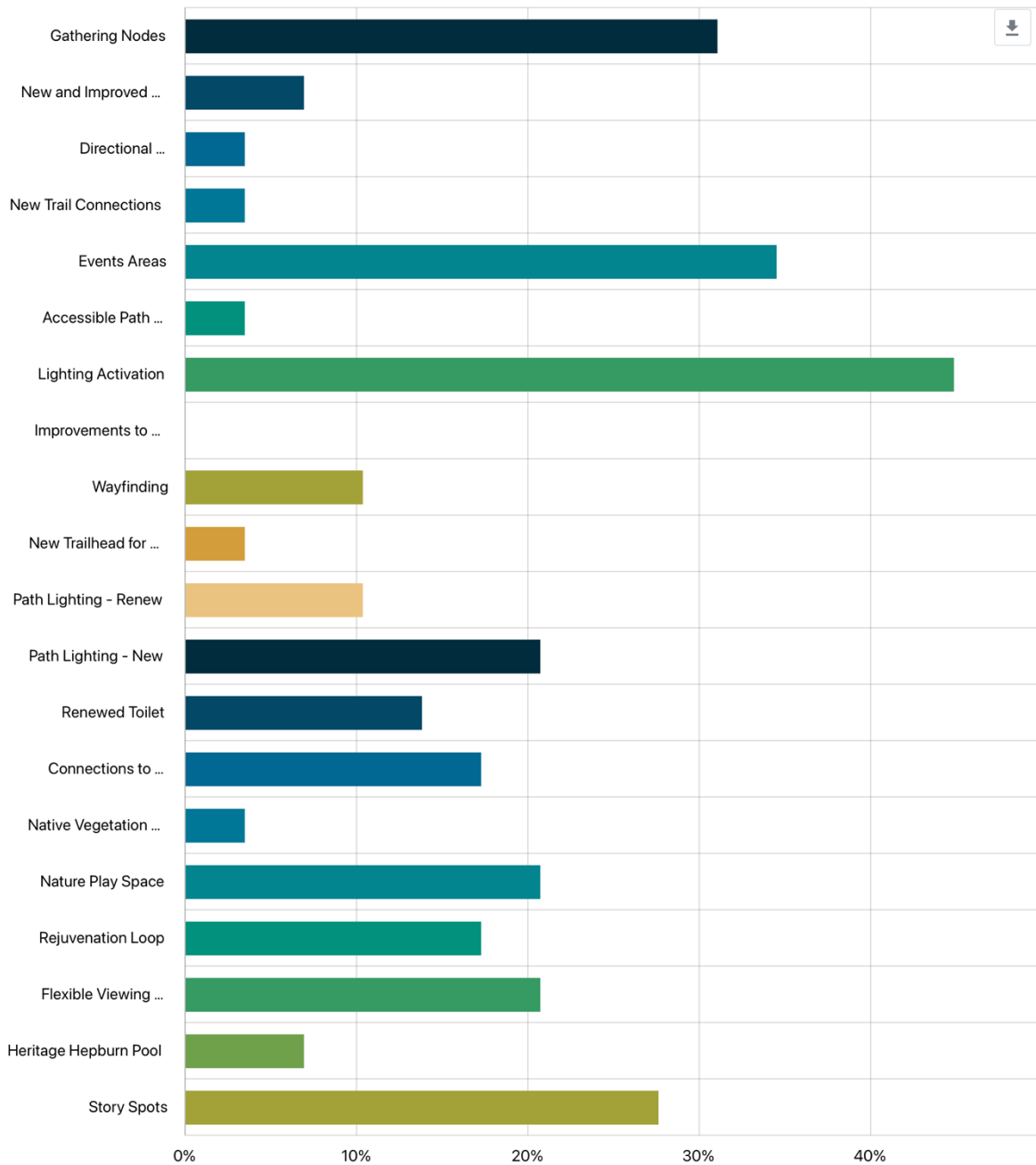


Figure 11: Graph of survey responses.

4.1.7 Question TWELVE and THIRTEEN

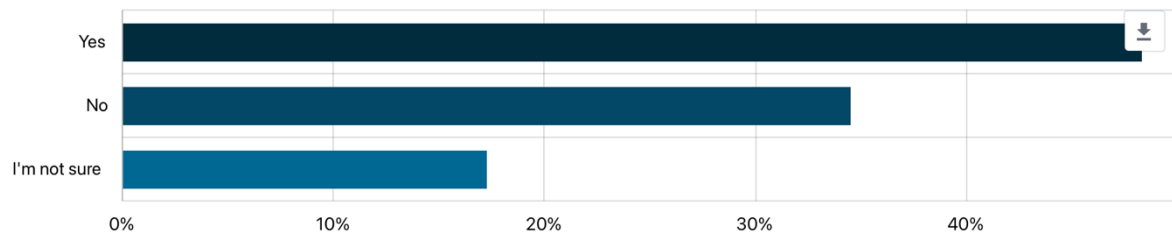
Questions twelve and thirteen explored if respondents felt that the proposed changes in the masterplan would have a positive impact on visitation and/or businesses in the region.

12

In your opinion, will implementing the changes proposed in the masterplan have a positive impact on Visitation to the region? Required

[Hide Question](#)

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 29 (100%)



14

In your opinion, will implementing the changes proposed in the masterplan have a positive impact on Businesses in Hepburn Springs and the region? Required

[Hide Question](#)

Multi Choice | Skipped: 0 | Answered: 27 (100%)

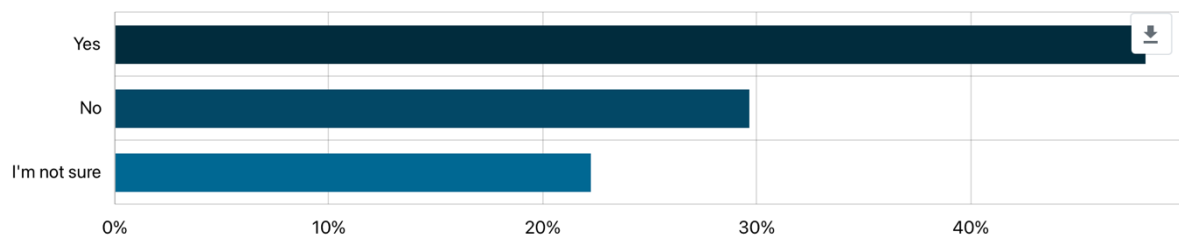


Figure 12: Graph of survey responses

The overall response for these questions was that people did feel that the improvements would have a positive impact to visitation and business. There was also a strong degree of scepticism reported with more than half of respondents reporting a 'No' or 'I'm not sure' response.

Written Submissions

Submissions were received from five individuals as part of the engagement process. Generally, the responses reflected the engagement responses from the survey, but went into greater detail regarding proposed projects that were preferred or not preferred by the individual.

The responses expressed the following sentiments:

- Support for retention of the existing concrete/wood furniture palette stating that these items were part of a fundraising effort by the community in the 1950s.
- Concerns regarding inclusion of the large events area. Proposal that the area instead be a more natural area for local users.
- Concerns about the proposal for the heritage pool (waterhole), but did not share an opinion as to what the preferred outcome should be.
- Concerns about the lighting activation.
- Support for the masterplan to consider State Government strategic work for mineral springs and heritage.
- Support for improving accessibility in the reserve including parking, paths and lighting.
- Support for weed management, vegetation maintenance and improving existing features.

- One response listed objections to new wayfinding signage, gathering nodes particularly the one at the Soldier's Memorial, increased detail for the Caretaker's Cottage and vehicular access to the pavilion and supported returning the soundshell in particular to original 1950s brutalist style.

5 Analysis

Generally, there was support for the draft masterplan's vision and projects that enhanced existing features, improved existing amenities and enhanced the natural and peaceful character of the reserve. There is division within the community regarding any improvements to the reserve with some expressing a desire for change and others concerned that change would be detrimental to the existing character of the reserve.

It is clear that the reserve holds a place of positive regard and nostalgia for many who visit with significance across several periods throughout history including pre-colonization, late 1800's, 1930s, 1950s and modern times. Across all of those time periods, Hepburn Mineral Springs Reserve has been widely regarded for its rejuvenating character, proximity to nature and mineral springs water.