

Greater Bendigo Lawn Bowls Facilities and Participation Plan

CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO

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About this document

The Greater Bendigo Lawn Bowls Facilities and Participation Plan provides a strategic framework to guide the future development, management and sustainability of lawn bowls across the municipality.

The Plan captures the needs of the bowls community, assesses the condition and capacity of existing facilities and highlights the short and longer-term aspirations of clubs.

Through audits and analysis, the Plan outlines constraints and opportunities for participation growth and provides evidence-based recommendations to prioritise facility investment.

A key component of the Plan investigates the feasibility of a regional standard bowls venue with a covered synthetic green. A significant gap in the provision of a regional bowls venue for the Bendigo Campaspe Goldfields (BCG) Bowls Region was previously identified in the Bowls Victoria Strategic Facilities Plan (2020–2030).

The Plan will assist the City of Greater Bendigo (the City) in supporting clubs to deliver inclusive participation opportunities, strengthen governance, and ensure facilities provide broader community benefit. It positions the Greater Bendigo bowls community within the wider regional and state context, aligning local priorities with broader strategic directions.

The Plan builds on the State of Play Report for lawn bowls, which preceded this work and included all background information, detailed analysis of club engagement, facility audits, needs assessment and bowls participation trends.



Acknowledgement of Country

The City of Greater Bendigo is located on the traditional lands of the Dja Dja Wurrung and the Taungurung Peoples of the Kulin Nation. They are the traditional custodians of this land.

CITY OF GREATER BENDIGO



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BOWLS CONTEXT

Lawn bowls has a well-established presence in Greater Bendigo, with 13 clubs operating across the municipality. 12 clubs are in the Bendigo competition, while one – Elmore Bowls Club – sits in the Campaspe Playing Area. All clubs are affiliated with Bowls Victoria and the Bendigo Campaspe Goldfields (BCG) Bowls Region, which oversees the sport locally and provides governance and development support.

There are 30.5 greens in Greater Bendigo, including four synthetic. Two additional synthetic greens are currently being developed at the Bendigo Bowls Club. Ownership and management arrangements are mixed, with 7 clubs located on City-managed land, five privately owned, and one (Elmore) on Crown land (State managed). While the Plan will consider the needs of all clubs, particular focus will be directed towards facilities on City managed land.

PARTICIPATION TRENDS

Club membership is declining but overall participation in bowls across Greater Bendigo is increasing. 2025 data supplied by Bowls Victoria is presented below.

- Over 9,000 total experiences at clubs.
- 5,058 total participants in regular competition.
- 1,151 club members (average 96 per club).
- 70% of members are male and 30% female.
- 41% of club members are aged 60+ and 44% are between the ages of 60 to 75.
- Less than 1% of club members are under 18 and 7% are aged between 18 and 39.

Club membership has declined by 9% since 2022, highlighting the need to broaden participation and strengthen retention strategies.

ISSUES & CHALLENGES

The following issues and challenges have been identified for lawn bowls in Greater Bendigo.

- No strategic direction for the sport locally.
- Oversupply of clubs to service current demand and club membership numbers.
- Limited insight into club and facility capacity, restricting the ability to plan, develop, maintain and manage bowls effectively.
- Declining club membership, with female numbers being significantly impacted.
- Clubrooms are mostly ageing and approaching end of life, and many have accessibility and compliance issues.
- No venue in the region has a covered green or ‘dome’ that can facilitate year-round use, attract major events and grow the sport.

KEY DRIVERS

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

- Lack of existing strategic documents specific to lawn bowls in the municipality.
- Need for a consistent, strategic approach to guide the future development, management, and sustainability of lawn bowls facilities and clubs across Greater Bendigo.
- Bowls Victoria Strategic Facilities Plan (2020–2030) identifies Bendigo as a priority location for a regional facility with a covered synthetic green.
- Opportunity to align with the City's broader policy frameworks such as the Active and Healthy Greater Bendigo Framework and Fair Access Policy.

FACILITY PROVISION

- Understand the service catchments, condition, capacity and accessibility of existing facilities to inform decision making and create sustainable clubs and venues.
- Demand for green lighting to enhance the capacity of bowls venues and respond to the growth of social and barefoot bowls and corporate/social events.
- Recognised gap in the provision of a covered/undercover regional-standard bowls venue that attracts events to Greater Bendigo.
- The need to develop a clear facility hierarchy for bowls with service standards to guide future investment, consolidation and renewal.

SITE PLANNING

- Proposed relocation of Golden Square Bowls Club identified in the Golden Square Recreation Reserve Master Plan (2020).
- Direction of the Rosalind Park Master Plan (2014) and the influence of upgrades to the Bendigo Bowls Club led by the Victorian Government.
- Proposed upgrades to the Marong Bowls Club identified in the Malone Park Master Plan (2022) - new clubrooms, green conversion to synthetic and lighting upgrades. No additional green was recommended. Projects are unfunded and investment from other levels of government will likely be required.
- Strathfieldsaye Precinct Plan recommends redevelopment of the former bowls club building into a shared community space.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

- Greater Bendigo's growth areas will see increases in residents aged 60+, including Huntly (+817), Strathfieldsaye (+1,671) and Maiden Gully (+494) over the next decade.
- Bowls is strongly supported by residents aged 60+, but participation remains heavily concentrated within this cohort.
- There is potential to engage underrepresented groups – including young people, women, culturally diverse communities, and people with a disability.
- Greater Bendigo's population is projected to grow by +19,396 people between 2025 and 2035, creating demand for accessible bowls facilities in strategic locations.



GUIDING PILLARS

The following pillars align with the Active and Healthy Greater Bendigo Framework and will guide future decision-making and investment for lawn bowls clubs and facilities.

- **Value sport and active recreation**
  Value and enable active lifestyles through balanced planning and provision of sport, recreation and open space infrastructure.

- **Engage with all stakeholders**
  Foster shared responsibility and strong partnerships through inclusive and responsive engagement in sport and active recreation.

- **Equity with industry benchmarked planning principles and process**
  Deliver equitable and sustainable sport and recreation opportunities through evidence-based planning that responds to diverse community needs.

- **Participation by varied opportunities**
  Support a healthy, vibrant community through diverse, measurable participation in sport, recreation and public spaces.

Private bowls clubs
There are six bowls clubs in Greater Bendigo located on non-City managed land. While the City does not own these facilities, it has a role in supporting them. Under the City's Community Asset Policy, funding may be considered for non-City facilities where an identified gap in service need can be demonstrated and addressed.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The Strategic Framework will guide the future of lawn bowls in Greater Bendigo, focusing on community need, equitable access, and sustainable growth. It sets a clear vision to lead the priorities and actions which will support and strengthen participation growth and facility improvements across the region.

VISION	A sustainable, inclusive and connected bowls network across Greater Bendigo.
PURPOSE	To grow and support diverse community participation and strengthen the long-term viability of lawn bowls clubs and facilities.

GUIDING PILLARS	Value sport and active recreation	Engage with stakeholders	Equity in planning and process	Participation opportunities

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

1. **Participation and inclusion**
   Increase opportunities across all cohorts, especially under-represented groups, and support social formats to encourage a diverse audience.
2. **Facilities and infrastructure**
   Improve the accessibility, capacity and sustainability of lawn bowls facilities and investigate development of a regional hub.
3. **Partnerships and advocacy**
   Partner with Bowls Victoria and the Bendigo Campaspe Goldfields Bowls Region to support clubs with governance, financial management and volunteer retention.

FRAMEWORK INPUTS

City Plans and Policies

- Community Vision & Council Plan *Mir wimbul* 2025-2029 (incorporates the City's Community Asset Policy & Asset Plan)
- Active & Healthy Greater Bendigo Framework & Pillars
- Greater Bendigo Public Health & Wellbeing Plan

Bowls Australia

- Strategic Plan – Play Well, Win Well, Tell Our Story, Grow Financially
- Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Strategy
- Women in Bowls Strategy

Bowls Victoria

- Facilities Strategy – Towards 2030
- Covered Greens Initiatives

Other

- Bendigo Campaspe Goldfields Bowls Regional Strategic Plan

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

1. PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Strategic objectives	Goal	Targets to 2035
1. Broaden participation across all age groups	• Expand bowls opportunities for young people, families, and working-age residents through social, school and casual play, while continuing to support seniors as a core participant base.	• Retain bowls club membership numbers. • All clubs performing to a high standard (above 70%) for participation in the Bowls Australia Club Health Check. • All clubs to offer a social bowls program by 2028. • Achieve a balanced age profile where at least 30% of new bowlers are under 50 years old.
2. Promote gender equity and diversity in participation	• Actively increase female participation and gender diversity by providing inclusive programs, welcoming environments and pathways for women and girls to become players, officials and leaders within clubs.	• Support the return of a dedicated female only weekly bowls competition across the Bendigo club network. • Aim for a 60/40 split of overall male to female club members. • Use and apply the City's Fair Access Policy.
3. Enhance accessibility and diversity	• Remove barriers and create targeted initiatives that encourage participation by culturally diverse communities, people with a disability and under-represented groups, ensuring facilities and programs are welcoming and accessible.	• 50% of new programs/events targeted toward under-represented groups (women, CALD, disability, first nations, LGBTQIA+, youth). • Attract an all abilities bowls event to Bendigo annually.
4. Leverage health and wellbeing outcomes	• Position bowls as an activity that supports physical activity, social connection, and positive ageing, highlighting the mental and physical health benefits of participation for individuals and communities.	• Improve the rating for general wellbeing and health in older adults reported in the Active Living Census. • Increase the proportion of bowls participants reporting improved physical activity levels and social connection.
5. Support inclusive facility environments	• Deliver facility upgrades (on and off green) that improve accessibility, inclusivity, and social spaces to ensure everyone can participate comfortably and equitably, regardless of ability, age or background.	• Ensure accessibility to clubrooms and greens on City managed land are rated good or better. • Achieve full gender-inclusive compliance for toilets and changerooms across all bowls facilities located on City managed land.

ACTION PLAN – PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Local bowls clubs, with support from Bowls Victoria, Bowls Australia and the BCG Bowls Region, will be responsible for leading the delivery of participation and inclusion initiatives. Where appropriate, the City of Greater Bendigo will consider community grant applications that assist clubs to deliver these programs. The following table recommends the high priority actions to be delivered to achieve the objectives, goals and targets under this strategic priority.

Priority actions	Timeline	KPI	Lead/s	Partner/s
1. Clubs to develop a tailored membership recruitment and retention program with support from Bowls Victoria.	2026 – 28	100% of clubs have an active recruitment & retention plan by 2028.	Clubs	Bowls Victoria
2. Clubs to participate in the Bowls Australia Club Support Program via CLUBMAP.	2026 – 28	100% of clubs participating in the Club Support Program by 2028.	Clubs	
3. Clubs to participate and complete the Bowls Australia Club Health Check via CLUBMAP.	2026 – 28	100% of clubs performing above 70% for participation in the Club Health Check by 2028.	Clubs	
4. Clubs to establish a targeted social bowls program with resources and facilities in mind. Consider Jack Attack, barefoot bowls and twilight social competitions with short seasons.	2026 – 29	All clubs to offer a form of social bowls by 2029.	Clubs	
5. Ensure all clubs align with the City's Fair Access Policy by adopting gender equitable practices in facility use, programming and governance.	2026 – 29	100% of clubs can demonstrate compliance with the City's Fair Access Policy by 2029.	Clubs	The City
6. Clubs to adopt the principles of the Bowls Victoria Women in Bowls Strategy as part of their individual strategic or business plan.	2026 – 29	100% of clubs have a strategic plan that includes women in bowls principles by 2029.	Clubs	
7. Clubs to actively engage and seek support from the Bowls Victoria Country representative to focus on delivering inclusive programs and connecting with under-represented groups.	2026 – 29	100% of clubs demonstrate annual engagement with the Bowls Victoria Country representative and deliver at least one inclusive program by 2029.	Clubs, Bowls Victoria	

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

2. FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Strategic objectives	Goal	Targets to 2035
1. Renew and modernise bowls facilities at existing venues.	• Support ongoing renewal and upgrade of bowls greens, clubrooms, and supporting infrastructure to maintain safe, compliant, sustainable and fit-for-purpose facilities across the network.	• All bowls clubrooms on City managed land to meet minimum compliance and condition standards. • Deliver a sustainable water source for green irrigation at all bowls venues on City managed land.
2. Improve access and inclusion at existing bowls venues.	• Ensure bowls facilities are accessible, inclusive and equitable. Focus on inclusive inclusions such as ramps, pathways and gender-neutral amenities.	• All bowls venues on City managed land achieve DDA compliance for access to clubrooms and greens. • All bowls venues on City managed land provide gender-inclusive amenities.
3. Deliver an optimal facilities mix to meet need and demand.	• Provide a balanced hierarchy of facilities that meets current and future demand, including development of a regional-level covered green venue capable of hosting major events.	• Investigate the feasibility of a regional-level covered green venue. • Deliver one major bowls venue and a mix of district and local venues that meet service levels and future demand. • Ensure bowls is well serviced and accessible to residents in key growth areas such as Strathfieldsaye and Huntly.
4. Support more flexible and social participation through infrastructure improvements.	• Expand opportunities for casual and social bowls by investing in lighting, shaded spectator areas, and flexible social spaces that encourage greater community use and activation.	• 80% of primary greens at existing bowls venues with LED lighting suitable for social bowls. • All bowls venues to have a covered and functional outdoor social space to support evening/social bowls.
5. Explore co-location or rationalisation to create a more sustainable and efficient bowls network.	• Apply a strategic, evidence-based approach to co-location and rationalisation of bowls venues where appropriate. Ensure investment is directed to sustainable and efficient venues with long-term viability.	• Provide clear opportunities and options for clubs to consider co-location or rationalisation. • Investigate opportunities to host multiple clubs at a proposed regional bowls venue. • Prioritise investment in fewer, higher-quality bowls venues to strengthen participation and long-term sustainability.

ACTION PLAN – FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

The City of Greater Bendigo will lead all planning and delivery of infrastructure upgrades for Clubs located on City-managed land. Bowls Victoria and the BCG Bowls Region will provide strategic support and project advocacy, while local clubs will partner with the City to ensure facilities meet community needs. The City's investment will also be linked to sustainable clubs and the outcomes of club health checks. Infrastructure recommendations have been informed by venue audits and club consultation. The following table outlines the high-priority actions to be delivered to achieve the objectives, goals and targets under this strategic priority.

Priority actions	Timeline	KPI	Lead/s	Partner/s
1. Undertake light testing at all clubs to determine lux levels and quality of existing lighting infrastructure.	2027	Undertake light testing at all bowls venues by the end of 2027.	The City	Clubs
2. Deliver new LED green lighting at high priority locations to support social bowls and build the capacity of the venue.	2026 – 2036	Deliver New LED green lighting at high priority locations, as determined following completion of light testing, to support social bowls and build the capacity the venue.	The City	Clubs, Sport and Recreation Victoria
3. Complete accessibility audit at all bowls venues.	2028	Complete accessibility audits at bowls venues located on City-managed land by the end of 2028.	The City	Clubs
	2028	Recommend accessibility audits at bowls venues located on non-City-managed land by the end of 2028.	Clubs	The City
4. Improve accessibility at bowls clubs through capital upgrades at high priority locations. Projects to include DDA-compliant and gender inclusive toilets, access ramps and paths to greens, car park and entry upgrades.	2026 – 2036	100% of high-priority clubs complete DDA-compliant and gender-inclusive accessibility upgrades by 2036.	The City	Clubs

ACTION PLAN – FACILITIES & INFRASTRUCTURE

Priority actions	Timeline	KPI	Lead/s	Partner/s
5. Upgrade and enhance shade, shelter and social spaces at the Heathcote Bowls Club and South Bendigo Bowls Club. Further investigate the needs of the broader network to provide safe and inclusive facilities.	2026 – 2031	All City owned bowls venues provide safe, inclusive shade and social spaces by 2031.	The City	Clubs
6. Continue to investigate Bendigo East and Bendigo Bowls club sites with regards to an upgrade to a regional standard venue with a covered synthetic green.	2026 – 2030	Preferred site and detailed business case to support funding developed by 2030.	The City	Clubs, BCG Bowls Region, Bowls Victoria, Sport and Recreation Victoria
7. Undertake basic renewal works at all City-owned bowls venues to ensure facilities remain safe, functional and fit-for-purpose. Works to include essential maintenance, compliance upgrades, and replacement of ageing infrastructure.	Ongoing	All bowls venues on City-managed land receive high priority renewal works by 2035.	The City	Clubs
8. Support the club to renew the synthetic green at Eaglehawk Bowling Club.	2026 – 2031	Renew the synthetic green by 2031.	The City	Eaglehawk Bowling Club

STRATEGIC PRIORITY

3. PARTNERSHIPS & ADVOCACY

Strategic objectives	Goal	Targets to 2035
1. Strengthen alignment with governing bodies.	• Partner with Bowls Victoria and the BCG Bowls Region to guide future facility development, align with statewide strategies and support long-term club sustainability.	• All bowls facility projects in Greater Bendigo will align with statewide and regional strategies. • Bowls Victoria and BCG Bowls Region are engaged in City projects and policy decisions regarding bowls.
2. Advocate for major facility investment in bowls.	• Following feasibility investigations advocate to State and Federal Government and regional stakeholders for investment into a covered regional bowls venue to deliver all-weather play, community access and event attraction.	• Establish a Project Control Group following feasibility work to drive the development and investment into a regional level bowls venue in Greater Bendigo. • Financial commitment secured from the Victorian Government for a regional covered bowls venue, following feasibility investigations.
3. Build collaborative partnerships with all bowls clubs.	• Engage all bowls clubs (including private clubs) in a coordinated planning framework to ensure a sustainable, accessible and efficient bowls facility network across Greater Bendigo. • Support investment in facilities that support healthy and sustainable clubs and provide planning assistance to low performing clubs to build their capacity and long-term viability.	• All clubs participating in the Bowls Australia Club Health Check and Club Development Program. • Support for clubs that prioritise community access, inclusion and governance initiatives. • Private clubs are considered and engaged in the development of future planning frameworks.
4. Connect with education and community partners in developing bowls.	• Enhance partnership opportunities with schools, tertiary institutions, age care providers and retirement villages to foster life-long involvement and enjoyment in bowls.	• Financial support for the bowls community to deliver at least 3 participation programs targeting community organisations / local service providers annually.
5. Create stronger links between bowls and community health and wellbeing outcomes.	• Collaborate with health organisations, disability services and wellbeing providers to position bowls as an inclusive low-impact sport that supports physical, mental and social wellbeing.	• Improve the rating for general wellbeing and health in older adults reported in the Active Living Census. • Reduce the rate of residents with reported mental health issues from 12.6% to 10% (regional average 10.9%). (source – Profile Id.)

ACTION PLAN – PARTNERSHIP & ADVOCACY

Responsibility for delivery of the following actions will be shared equally by all stakeholders and organisations. Clubs, Bowls Victoria, the BCG Bowls Region and the City of Greater Bendigo will work together to strengthen advocacy, share expertise and foster partnerships to support and advance the bowls community. The following table recommends the high priority actions to be delivered to achieve the objectives, goals and targets under this strategic priority.

Priority actions	Timeline	KPI	Lead/s	Partner/s
1. Establish a Project Control Group by June 2028 to guide the planning and advocacy for a regional standard covered bowls venue.	2028	Project Control Group established by June 2028 with terms of reference endorsed.	The City	Clubs, BCG Bowls Region, Bowls Victoria, Sport and Recreation Victoria
2. Require all clubs (including private) to participate in the Bowls Australia Club Development Program to remain eligible for City funding and support.	Ongoing	100% of clubs complete the Bowls Australia Club Development Program each year as a condition of eligibility for City funding and support.	Clubs	
3. Provide training and support to clubs on the City's Fair Access Policy, enabling them to embed the policy's principles directly into their planning, governance, and day-to-day operations.	Ongoing	Bowls clubs demonstrating alignment with policy principles when applying for City funding.	The City	Clubs
4. Support clubs to host at least three education/community programs or events annually (e.g. Rookie Rollers in schools, aged care activation sessions).	2026 – 28	By 2028, at least 80% of clubs will have completed Fair Access Policy training and updated their policies or operational practices to reflect compliance with policy principles.	Clubs	Bowls Victoria
5. Collaborate with stakeholders to attract and host regional, state and national bowls events to maximise social, health and economic benefits.	Ongoing	A minimum of two bowls events hosted in the region per year.	Bowls Victoria	
6. Encourage clubs to access grants to support business planning / club development. Target clubs who are performing below standard according to Bowls Australia's Club Health Check	Ongoing	All clubs performing at or above standard according to Bowls Australia's Club Health Check by 2035.	The City	Clubs



BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

The Greater Bendigo Lawn Bowls Facilities and Participation Plan aims to provide the City with a strategic approach to the development and management of lawn bowls facilities and clubs in the municipality.

A Project Control Group (PCG) was established to act as a high-level steering committee responsible for ensuring project outcomes are achieved.

The City of Greater Bendigo would like to acknowledge PCG representatives from the following external organisations who provided valuable guidance to inform delivery of the Plan.

- Sport and Recreation Victoria
- Bendigo Campaspe Goldfields Bowls Region
- Bowls Victoria

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The Plan will provide the City with the following outcomes.

- Assess the current state of lawn bowls, covering facilities, participation, club sustainability and administration.
- Analyse existing and potential facilities, identifying gaps and opportunities.
- Establish a facilities hierarchy with service standards and development requirements.
- Create a framework for local and regional facility planning, upgrades, and club development to support sustainability.
- Recommend strategies to grow participation, particularly among underrepresented groups.
- Undertake a feasibility study and business case for a regional all-weather facility.

METHODOLOGY

The following provides a summary of project tasks undertaken in developing the Plan.

- Reviewed strategies, documentation and data from the City, Bowls Australia and Bowls Victoria.
- Analysed membership, participation trends and demographic drivers.
- Conducted site audits of all Bendigo bowls facilities to assess provision, condition and functionality.
- Met with local clubs to discuss health, participation, facilities and aspirations.
- Engaged City staff, Bendigo Campaspe Goldfields Bowls Region and the City's Disability Inclusion Committee and Youth Council.
- Consulted Bowls Australia and Bowls Victoria on participation trends and club health.

BOWLS CLUBS

OVERVIEW

There are 13 bowls clubs in Greater Bendigo providing a total of 31 greens. Clubs operate across a mix of City, private and Crown-owned land, with the majority under City ownership. A map of bowls clubs in Greater Bendigo is provided in the appendices.

- 7 City-owned facilities (Bendigo, Bendigo East, Eaglehawk, Heathcote, Marong, South Bendigo, Strathfieldsaye) provide 19 greens and are leased directly by tenant clubs.
- 5 privately-owned facilities (Golden Square, Kangaroo Flat, North Bendigo, White Hills, Woodbury) provide 10 greens.
- 1 Crown land site (Elmore – Campaspe) has 2 greens.

SUMMARY OF CLUB CONSULTATION FINDINGS

- Financial sustainability, declining membership numbers and a lack of volunteers are the biggest concerns for clubs.
- The cost to employ a curator to maintain grass greens and climbing water rates are putting clubs under financial pressure.
- Clubs are focussing on offering more barefoot bowls and hosting tournaments to engage with their local community and drive additional revenue.
- Most clubs are hiring their facilities for non-bowls related activities to diversify their revenue streams. Bingo nights, card clubs and live bands are examples of non-bowls activities being offered.
- Clubs highlighted the lack of a covered synthetic green in the region and an oversupply of clubs relative to player numbers.
- Clubs also highlighted that the oversupply of clubs is contributing to membership fluctuations. Members are moving clubs to play at a higher level or for club cultural reasons.

CLUB HEALTH

The Bowls Club Health Check is a Bowls Australia initiative designed to assist clubs in identifying strengths and weaknesses across 12 administrative and operational areas. Eight clubs completed a recent health check survey, with high level findings below, while five clubs chose not to submit a health check survey.

High Performing Clubs

- Two clubs are consistently strong across governance, committee operations, volunteer engagement, membership, and participation.
- These clubs demonstrate strong organisational capacity, high levels of volunteer support, and effective governance frameworks.

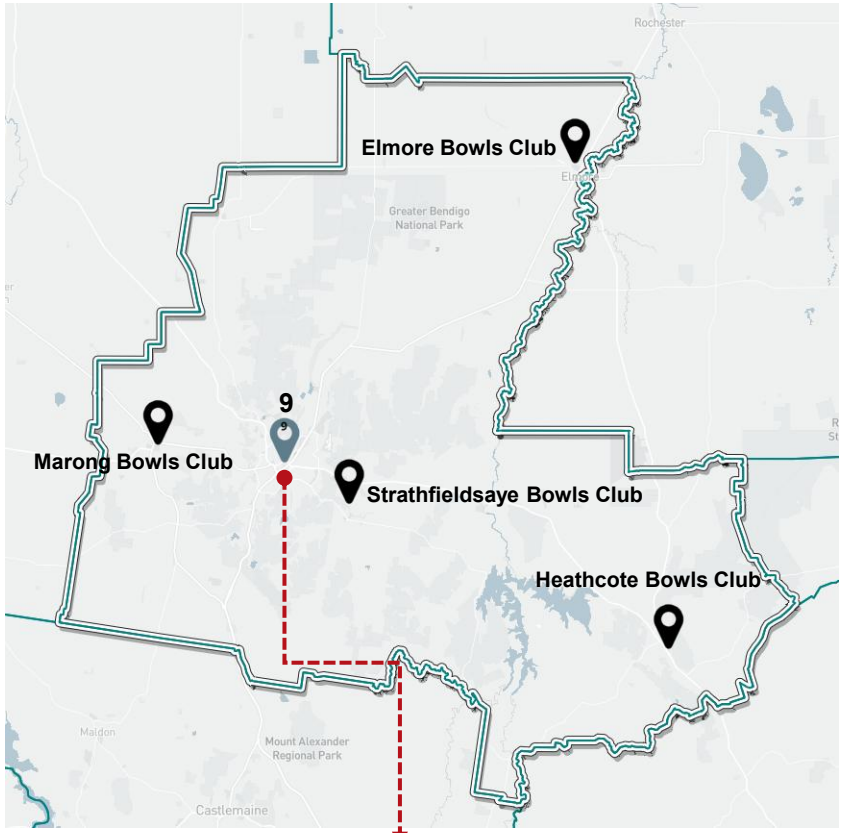
Moderately Performing Club

- Two clubs are performing at an acceptable level, though both show weaknesses in areas such as fundraising, sponsorship, and digital communication.
- One club is marginal, with governance and financial performance adequate, but weaknesses in membership and communication.

Low Performing Clubs

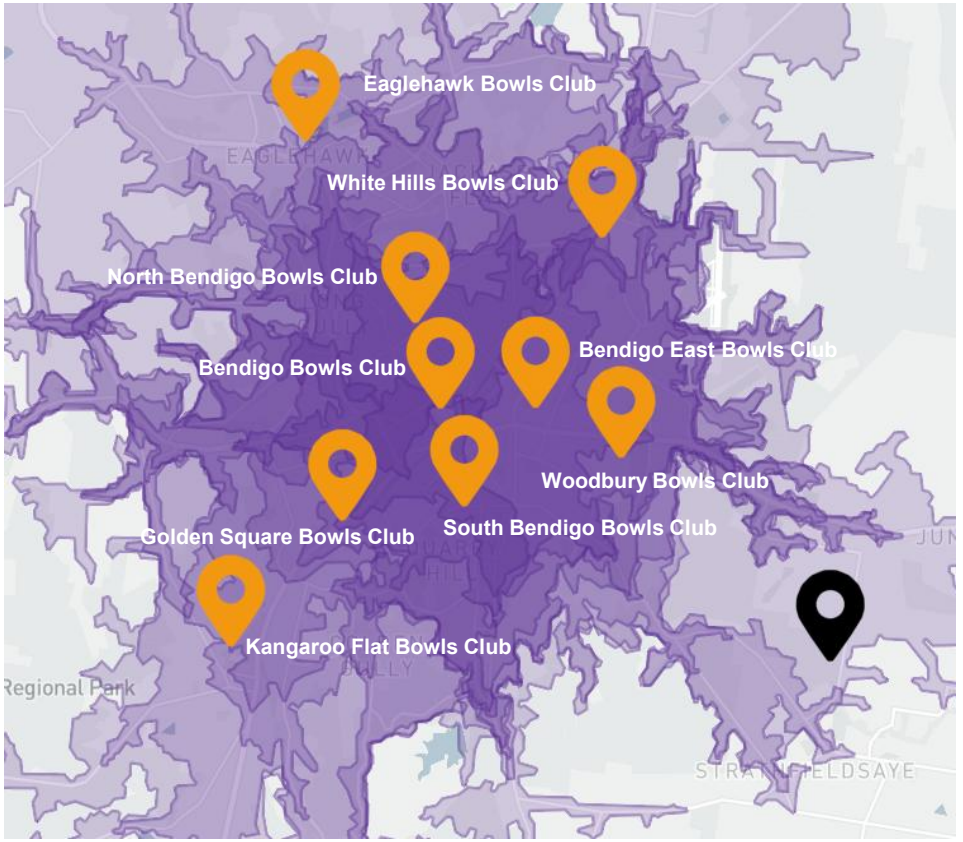
- Three clubs are underperforming in most categories. Common challenges include membership retention, sponsorship, fundraising, digital communication, and reliance on limited volunteer capacity.

CLUB NETWORK



Bendigo central bowls clubs

1. Bendigo Bowls Club
2. Bendigo East Bowls Club
3. Eaglehawk Bowls Club
4. Golden Square Bowls Club
5. Kangaroo Flat Bowls Club
6. North Bendigo Bowls Club
7. South Bendigo Bowls Club
8. White Hills Bowls Club
9. Woodbury Bowls Club



Catchment analysis (10m drive time catchment)

- The map illustrates the 10-min drive catchments for the 9 clubs in Bendigo Central, highlighting a significant overlap across club catchment areas.
- 889 of the 1,149 players (77%) are members of clubs in this catchment.
- 74% of the total number of bowls greens are in this catchment.
- Population in the catchment is 58,500 (46% of the total GB population).

PARTICIPATION ANALYSIS

ACTIVE LIVING CENSUS (2019)

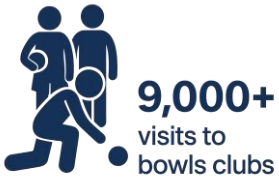
The City's 2019 Acting Living Census identified 1.1% of the Greater Bendigo population playing lawn bowls in the previous 12 months. Bowls accounted for 7.1% of the activities undertaken by males 70+yrs and 4.5% of the activities undertaken by females 70+yrs.

MEMBERSHIP TRENDS

- Overall membership declined of 9% between 2022 (1,265 members) and 2025 (1,151). Clubs identified the reasons for membership decline were natural attrition, time commitment for pennant and the change to gender balanced pennant bowls.
- 8 of the 13 clubs have experienced a decrease in club membership numbers since 2022. The largest club in 2022 dropped from 194 members to 149 in 2025, while another club more than doubled its membership (up to 129) across the same period.
- Club membership growth was experienced to varying degrees at three clubs, while membership numbers were stable at two clubs and declining to varying levels at eight clubs.
- Overall visits and participation at bowls venues is strong. For season 2024/25 the BCG Bowls Region reported 285 social members, 2,525 barefoot bowlers and 12,945 social function bowlers.



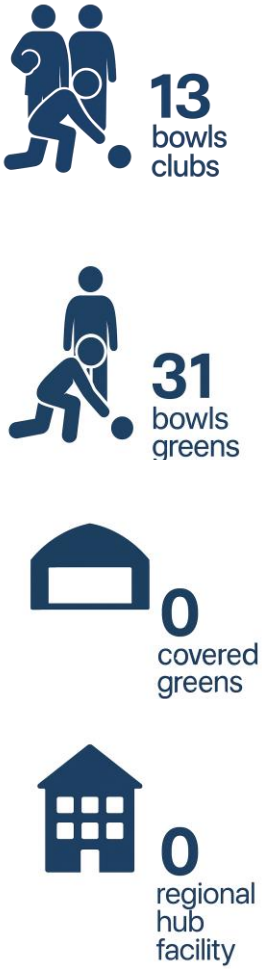




BOWLS INVENTORY

The Bowls Facilities Inventory below provides a clear snapshot of ownership, hierarchy, and the provision of greens and clubrooms across Greater Bendigo. Baseline facility information is provided from on-site audits and hierarchy levels are from the Bowls Victoria Facilities Strategy.

Club / location	Ownership	Hierarchy	No. of Greens	Green lighting	Clubrooms	Accessibility
Bendigo Bowls Club	The City	District	4	No	Yes	Poor
Bendigo East Bowls Club	The City	District	3	Yes	Yes	Poor
Eaglehawk Bowls Club	The City	District	3 (1 synthetic)	Yes	Yes	Poor
Heathcote Bowls Club	The City	District	2 x synthetic	Yes	Yes	Good
Marong Bowls Club	The City	District	2	Yes	Yes	Poor
South Bendigo Bowls Club	The City	District	3	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Strathfieldsaye Bowls Club	The City	District	2	Yes	Yes	Good
Golden Square Bowls Club	Private	District	2	Yes	Yes	Poor
Kangaroo Flat Bowls Club	Private	District	3 (1 synthetic)	Yes	Yes	Good
North Bendigo Bowls Club	Private	Local	2	Yes	Yes	Poor
White Hills Bowls Club	Private	Local	2	Yes	Yes	Moderate
Woodbury Bowling Club	Private	Local	1	No	No	Moderate
Elmore Bowls Club	Crown	Local	2	-	-	-



Note: Elmore Bowls Club was not audited. Bendigo Bowls Club facilities will change following current development project.

FACILITIES SUMMARY

GREENS

Audits of bowls greens across Greater Bendigo found most grass surfaces to be in good condition, supported by specialist greenkeeping provided by clubs. The four synthetic greens across the network were mixed in quality, with the Heathcote Bowls Club rated highly.

Green capacity is restricted, with many rinks smaller than regulation size, limiting competition opportunities and clubs face operational challenges with high costs for water.

Accessibility to and around greens is generally poor, and while 72% of greens are floodlit, lighting is mostly inadequate for competition and extended social bowls use. Shade and shelter provision around greens is reasonable but inconsistent, with several ageing structures requiring renewal.

CLUBROOMS AND SUPPORTING AMENITIES

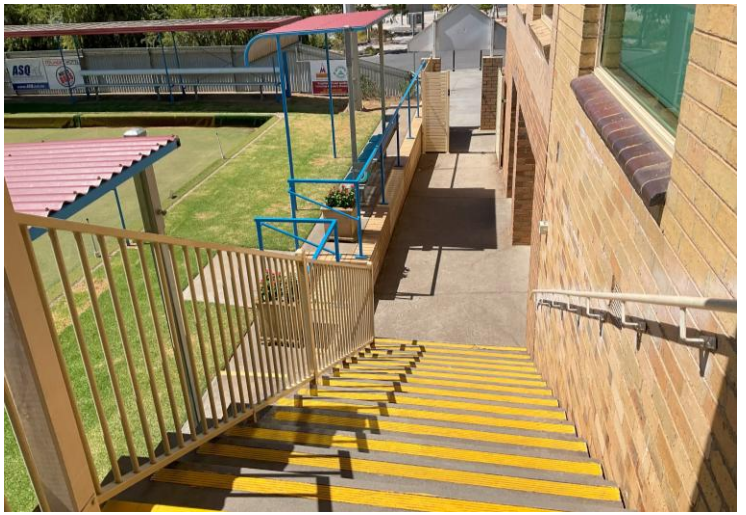
All bowls clubs have access to clubroom facilities that provide a consistent, yet basic, level of amenity. These typically include a social or multi-purpose room, licensed bar, kitchen, toilets, office/administration space and storage.

While these spaces are generally well presented and maintained, they are limited in function and do not extend beyond essential provision. The average age of bowls clubrooms is approximately 60 years, with the majority constructed during the post-World War II era of the 1950s and 1960s.

Many clubrooms are at or approaching the end of their functional life. Strathfieldsaye Bowls Club is the exception due to its recently developed, modern facility as part of the Strathfieldsaye Community Hub. with the Strathfieldsaye development being the most significant. Several facilities present accessibility issues due to site topography and the presence of non-compliant toilets and car parking.



Grass greens are considered 'first class' and are maintained by clubs.



The City contribute funding to upgrade essential services at bowls clubs. Most buildings are experiencing accessibility and functional issues.

SUPPLY & DEMAND ASSESSMENT

A supply and demand assessment provides an evidence-based understanding of the capacity of existing lawn bowls facilities and the extent to which they meet current and future community needs. Factors to be considered in the supply and demand assessment include:

- Number, type, and condition of existing greens and supporting facilities.
- Geographic distribution and accessibility of facilities.
- Membership and participation levels and trends.
- Population growth and demographic change.
- Financial sustainability and health of existing clubs.
- Land ownership and ability to secure government funding.

FINDINGS FROM STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

There is a consensus amongst existing bowls clubs that the current supply of facilities is exceeding demand, especially for the number of club members requiring access to greens.

Clubs also noted that a minimum membership base is needed to ensure long-term club sustainability and support day to day operations, with many identifying this threshold at around 80 or more full-paying members.

STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

- The optimisation and rationalisation of bowls assets should be considered and aligns with the City's community asset management policy position.
- The upgrade of Bendigo Bowls Club will provide an additional synthetic green and enhanced offering within the central catchment.
- Proposed relocation of Golden Square Bowls Club identified in the Golden Square Recreation Reserve Master Plan.



SUPPLY & DEMAND ASSESSMENT cont..

PROVISION BENCHMARKS

A high-level analysis of provision ratios and population data indicates whether the number of greens in Greater Bendigo currently meets, exceeds or falls below industry benchmarks. The industry benchmark used for bowls is 1:10,000 greens per population.

Based on the calculations of provision alone there is an oversupply of bowls greens for the current and future population of Greater Bendigo.

The current green to population ratio in Greater Bendigo is 1:4,247.

It should be noted that provision ratios only provide an indicative level of provision to be achieved and should be used with other analysis such as participation and demand modelling and facility quality and capacity analysis. The findings are explored in greater detail in the table below.

POPULATION, AGE AND GENDER

The future demand for lawn bowls will also be impacted by the location, age and gender of current and potential participants.

The typical profile of a lawn bowls participant in Greater Bendigo is predominantly male between the ages of 60 to 80. The local population of empty nesters aged 60-69, and seniors aged 70 to 84, will influence future participation numbers in the sport.

Analysis of population growth in the 60–80 year age cohort shows that by 2036, Strathfieldsaye will experience the largest increase and overall concentration of older residents in Greater Bendigo. Other notable growth areas include Kangaroo Flat and Maiden Gully, but they do not reach the same scale as Strathfieldsaye.

The table in the appendices provides the change in resident population for the 60+ age cohort between 2026 and 2036 by local area.

No. of greens	Provision Benchmark	2026 Green to population ratio	Green numbers exceed benchmark by	2036 Green to population ratio	Green numbers exceed benchmark by	2046 Green to population ratio	Green numbers exceed benchmark by
31	1 : 10,000	1:4,247	+17	1:4,865	+15	1:5,556	+13



REGIONAL COVERED GREEN FACILITY

FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT

This Strategy recommends that the City undertakes a feasibility study on a Regional Bowls facility that considers the following:

- Identification and recommendation of potential sites (either existing or new).
- Demand and market analysis (participation, competition, events, tourism).
- Capital cost estimates, funding options and staging scenarios.
- Operational and management models (e.g. City-run, shared management, commercial).
- Economic, social and health benefits.
- Risks, constraints and mitigation strategies.
- Implementation roadmap (timelines, stages, funding sources).

STRATEGIC SUPPORT

The Bendigo Campaspe Bowls Region doesn't have a fully compliant regional venue. This is despite strong participation, a healthy club network and demand for a facility that can support year-round access.

The Bowls Victoria Strategic Facilities Plan 2020–2030 recommends that the Bendigo Campaspe Region requires access to all aspects of the sport, including a venue with a covered green that can host higher-level competitions.

Any regional facility would require multiple greens, covered surface, large clubhouse, event amenities and 70+ carparks. Other bowls venues would be feeder sites in a hub-and-spoke model.

COVERED GREENS INITIATIVE

The Covered Greens Initiatives Report by Bowls Victoria also supports a covered / regional bowls venue in the Bendigo Campaspe Region.

The report provides support for a covered, regional-standard bowls facility in Bendigo Campaspe to address a clear infrastructure gap and unlock year-round participation, social inclusion and economic benefits. The report also emphasises that:

- Bowls participants in regional Victoria should be able to access a covered venue within 60 minutes of home.
- The most effective approach is the provision of covered greens at existing facilities rather than new builds.

COVERED GREENS IN REGIONAL VICTORIA

There are 18 covered bowling greens across Victoria, with 10 located in regional areas. The nearest covered green to Bendigo is at the Moama Bowls Club in New South Wales, about 100 km north-east. The next closest are Shepparton Park and East Shepparton Bowls Clubs, approximately 130 km east of Bendigo.

Region (approx.)	Venue(s)	Type / Scale	Notes
Gippsland / Latrobe Valley	• Traralgon Bowls Club • Morwell Bowls Club	• 1 indoor green, 3 grass greens • 2 covered greens	Hosts Victorian Open; large spectator/event capacity
Shepparton / Goulburn Valley	• Shepparton Park Bowls Club • Shepparton East Bowls Club	• 1 covered, 2 grass • 1 covered, 2 synthetic	Able to stage state and national events year-round
Warrnambool / South West Coast	• Warrnambool City Bowls Club	• 2 covered, 2 grass	Strong regional club sustainability and event attraction
Colac / Western District	• Colac Bowls Club	• 1 covered, 1 synthetic, 1 grass	Supports social and competition bowls all year
Murray River (Barham / Moama / Echuca)	• Barham Services Bowls Club • Moama Bowls Club (NSW)	• 1 covered, 1 grass • 2 covered, 2 grass	Moama has national-level hosting capacity (e.g. Bowls Premier League)
Ballarat / Central Highlands (Sebastopol)	• Sebastopol Bowls Club	• 1 covered, 2 grass	Identified as a regional-level hub in Central Victoria

The Greater Shepparton region has a population of 70,000 people with 2 covered bowling greens.

In comparison, Greater Bendigo has a population of 125,000 with no covered green.

Greater Bendigo is one of only three key population centres in regional Victoria without access to a covered green facility. The other areas are Horsham (population 20,000) and Wodonga (population 45,000).

BENEFITS TO THE REGION

Outside the clear provision gap that currently exists for a regional-standard bowls venue with a covered green, the facility would deliver a broad range of social, health, economic and community benefits for the broader Bendigo region.



MAXIMISE PARTICPATION OPPORTUNTIES

- Weather is not a barrier - a covered green will enable bowls to be played in all weather conditions all year.
- Extend bowls opportunities for all ages and abilities, including social, barefoot, school, para and competition formats.
- A covered green will enhance accessibility for older adults and people with mobility issues by offering a safe, shaded, low-impact activity.
- Narre Warren Bowls Club membership more than doubled, and overall participation rose from 400 to 2,500 after two greens were covered.



HEALTH & WELLBEING OUTCOMES

- A covered green supports increased physical activity and reduces sedentary behaviour, particularly among older adults.
- The facility would also support social connection, which has proven mental-health benefits and helps reduce isolation, especially in regional communities.
- A covered green offers sun and weather protection, reducing risks associated with UV exposure and extreme heat/cold.



ECONOMIC & EVENT BENEFITS

- A covered green can attract regional, state and national tournaments, corporate functions and social events, generating local economic activity.
- Support growth of local hospitality and accommodation sectors through increased visitation.
- Enables local clubs to host programs and events outside traditional seasons, improving financial sustainability.



A STRONGER CLUB NETWORK

- A covered green would create a stronger club network by having access to a flagship facility where clubs can gather for tournaments, pennant finals, training and coaching programs.
- The facility would also create a base for coach, umpire, and volunteer training, lifting the capability of all clubs.
- A covered green would also be a site for talent identification and player development, supporting pathways from grassroots to elite level.

LIKELY COST

Bowls Victoria estimates the cost to install a covered green facility is approximately $1.6 million per site (includes design, construction and cost escalation).

Case studies shown in the Bowls Victoria Covered Greens Initiatives Report (2024) emphasises that actual investment levels vary depending on design, scale and funding model type.

Narre Warren Bowls Club

- 2 canopies installed in 2021
- Cost $2m
- Funding mix - Federal and State Government, the City and club/community

Karingal Bowls Club

- 1 canopy installed in 2021
- $1.57m
- Self-funded by club

Geelong City Bowls Club

- 1 canopy installed in 2018
- $650,000
- Supported by State Government and club land sale

Costs are influenced by the number of greens (single or double), roof type (open-sided or fully enclosed), site works, lighting, supporting infrastructure, contribution levels from government, the City and clubs.

Indicative range is $1.3m to $2m per green for the canopy. With $1.6m regarded as a reasonable planning benchmark for new installations. The cost for a new synthetic green is approximately $300,000.



***Image**: Narre Warren Bowls Club*



***Image**: Karingal Bowls Club*

DEVELOPMENT & FUTURE COST CONSIDERATIONS

Additional elements to consider before installing a cover over a bowling green:

- **Synthetic Greens Only:** Covered greens at this stage in the technology lifecycle can only be applied over synthetic grass, due to the need for sunlight to grow natural grass.
- **Significant Capital Investment:** Constructing a covered green is a major infrastructure project, often requiring substantial funding, planning permits and architectural input.
- **Ongoing Maintenance of the Structure:** While reducing surface wear, covered facilities introduce new maintenance requirements – such as lighting, roofing materials, ventilation, and structural integrity inspections.
- **Space and Zoning Constraints:** Not all clubs have the physical space to accommodate a covered green. Zoning regulations or neighbourhood aesthetics may also restrict construction.

The following table provides the estimated cost of ownership of a synthetic green and canopy cover over a 20-year life-cycle. Costs do not factor in the original cost of installing the infrastructure, but it does factor in management, maintenance and renewal costs for each component.

Green surface	Estimated surface life expectancy	Planned surface life (years) of greens	Estimated surface replacement cost at end of life	Average annual green maintenance & minor repair costs	Estimated additional known management expenses	Annual surface renewal / replacement cost	Total estimated annual cost of ownership	Total cost over 20 years	Average annual cost over 20 years
Synthetic Green x1 (covered)	12-15 years	14	$210,000	$1,800	$1,200	$15,000	$18,000	**$437,353**	**$21,868**
Canopy cover (covered green)	20 years	20	$425,000	$8,500	$ N/A	$21,250	$29,750	$739,188	$36,959

Assumptions

Assumptions used in the development of the life-cycle cost model above include:

- The synthetic surface of a covered green is expected to last around 14 years, with replacement planned in Year 14 due to reduced exposure to weather.
- Annual costs factor in a 2% cost increase annually.
- Canopy cover replacement have been factored in for Year 20.
- Annual infrastructure maintenance, repair and cleaning costs have been assumed at 2% of their replacement cost.



CLUB PROFILES

ENGAGEMENT

As part of the development of the Greater Bendigo Lawn Bowls Facilities and Participation Plan, all lawn bowls clubs across the municipality were directly consulted to ensure local priorities, issues and opportunities were captured.

Individual discussions with clubs provided valuable insights into membership trends, participation programs, governance, and future aspirations.

In addition, on-site facility assessments and audits were undertaken at each venue. These audits considered the provision, condition and functionality of bowls greens, lighting, clubrooms, amenities, accessibility, and supporting infrastructure.

The engagement process established a clear evidence base on club health and facility provision.

CLUB PARTICIPATION CHALLENGES

- Many clubs are experiencing falling or ageing membership bases, with some losing up to 30% of members in recent years.
- Female pennant participation is declining, partly linked to the historical shift to mixed-gender pennant formats.
- Club membership is heavily concentrated in the 60+ age cohort, with minimal engagement from younger players.
- Despite the growth in social and barefoot bowls, clubs are struggling to convert casual/social players into long-term members.
- The density of clubs in Bendigo leads to movement of members between clubs, further weakening smaller clubs.
- Some clubs reported challenges filling key governance and operational roles.

CLUB FACILITY CHALLENGES

- Most clubrooms are 50-70 years old, with major compliance and accessibility issues.
- Many clubs have access and safety issues, lacking compliant toilets, car parking, ramps, and pathways.
- Clubs with multiple grass greens (e.g., Bendigo East) face high water and curation costs.
- Outdated or inadequate lighting restricts evening and social bowls at several clubs (e.g., Marong, South Bendigo, Strathfieldsaye).
- Clubs in growth suburbs such as Marong and Strathfieldsaye reported demand for new greens but are limited by site capacity or masterplans.
- No covered greens exist in Bendigo. Most clubs advocated strongly for one in the region to support all-weather play and events.

CLUB IDENTIFIED PRIORITIES

Facility Upgrades & Renewals

- Many clubs seek upgrades to ageing clubrooms, including new meeting rooms, kitchens, toilets (gender neutral / accessible), air conditioning, and roof/carpet replacements.
- Some clubs have prioritised upgrades to pathways, ramps, and compliant toilet facilities to improve safety and inclusivity.
- Shade structures, shelters, BBQ areas, and spectator facilities are commonly requested.

Greens

- Lighting upgrades was a recurring priority across clubs to support more evening and social bowls.
- Clubs with growing membership in growth suburbs recognise a need for an additional green to meet future demand.
- Strong support for a regional covered facility to attract events and provide weather-independent play.

Participation & Membership Growth

- Social and barefoot bowls. Clubs are prioritising growth in casual formats to attract younger participants and families.
- Clubs are conscious of the decline in female membership and see inclusive initiatives as a priority.

Financial Sustainability & Governance

- Smaller clubs highlight a need to strengthen fundraising and secure external funding.
- Several clubs identify the need for strategies to attract and retain volunteers.



