central highlands
COUNCIL



ANNUAL PLAN 2026/2027

Current Councillors on 16 June 2026



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PREFACE

The 2026-2027 Annual Plan for the Central Highlands Council has been prepared and adopted by Council in accordance with Section 71 of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

The Plan outlines Council's strategic goals and objectives for the coming year.

Council adopted its 2026-2027 Budget Estimates at the Ordinary Council Meeting held at Bothwell on **Tuesday, 16 June 2026**.

Council has increased the General Rate by **6%** and its Fees and Charges by **5.6%.**

All properties within the Central Highlands will contribute towards Council's solid waste costs with a solid waste charge and/or garbage charge being placed on all properties. As an offset, all ratepayers and residents will have free access to the Hamilton Refuse Disposal Site and Council Waste Transfer Stations. Disposal of tyres will incur a charge.

Pensioners may be eligible for a remission. Conditions apply as follows:

- You must be in receipt of one of the following concessions as of the 1 July 2026:

- Pensioner Concession Card (PCC), Health Care Card (HCC), Repatriation Health Card (i.e. Gold Card endorsed Total or Permanent Injury (TPI) or War Widow/Widower DVA.)

- You must have owned the property or be the eligible ratepayer listed on the property on or before the 1 July 2026.

- You must occupy the property as your principal place of residence on or before the 1 July 2026.

If you have already applied for a pensioner rate remission, please check that the remission is printed on your rates notice. If it does not appear on this notice, then please contact Council.

If you have not applied for a pensioner rate remission and the property is your principal place of residence, then please read the eligibility criteria above. If you believe that you are eligible to receive this remission, then you will need to fill out an application form by visiting the Council Office in Bothwell or Hamilton. Alternatively, you can contact Council and request a form to be sent to you or access this form from Council's website. However, applicants will need to provide a photocopy of their card along with their completed application form.

The Department of Treasury and Finance confirms your eligibility. They also set a maximum amount that can be claimed each year, and this is dependent on whether or not you also receive a remission on your water and sewage charges with TasWater.

All applications for a pensioner rate remission for the 2026-2027 financial year will need to be completed on or before the **31 March 2027.**

SUMMARY OF BUDGET ESTIMATES 2026-2027

Estimated Revenue of Council –	**$10,761,735**
Estimated Capital Income of Council –	**$1,347,271**
Estimated Expenditure of Council –	**$11,454,220**
Estimated New Borrowings of Council –	**N/A**
Estimated Capital Works Program for Council -	**$3,026,551**
Estimated Operating Surplus (Deficit)	**($692,485)**

***Budget Estimates may be altered during the financial year because of decisions of Council or amendments.**

Our Strategic Intent

In essence, people want to experience, enjoy, share in and contribute to, a liveable, prosperous and resilient place. One which is a good place to live, caters to diverse interests through people's life stages, provides the opportunity to participate socially and economically and to enable us to handle and shape our lives in the face of change. As with any business model, it requires a clear articulation of purpose, why we do what we do, so people can connect to it and we can measure it.

Our strategic objectives and long-term impact we target provide the compass point for each decision made across our roles and responsibilities. Our approach to delivering this impact is focused on four key, interdependent objectives:

1. Strong community leadership and governance

2. Natural and built environment and amenity

3. A strong, productive and diverse economy

4. Community participation, prosperity and wellbeing

Objectives

The strategic focus on liveability, prosperity and resilience, and the associated four strategic objectives define our purpose and is based on the following conclusions:

Leadership and governance, delivery efficiency, opportunity and risk management

Leadership occurs across societies and communities as well as within our governance mechanisms. People take formal and informal leadership roles, often within community organisations and by demonstrating as "first movers" reflecting "what is possible".

Council is committed to supporting and complementing this leadership as part of our formal governance role, particularly by supporting groups, bringing opportunities and risks to the table for consideration, and by taking a lead in pursuing best beneficial practice and by bringing the community's interests and needs to the attention of other levels of government. We will measure our performance in ensuring we comply with legislation and regulations, how we're contributing to the four strategic objectives, community respect and support and the sustainability of the civic resource base and management.

Environment and amenity

This focus is on our footprint on the place, how our built environment, infrastructure and land use patterns frame our experience of place, what the place is like to live in and how it passes into future hands. This requires management of our natural environment, its landforms, seasons, differing ecologies, our settlements, their attractiveness and liveability, the stock of land available for building and importantly their infrastructure and the services which make them attractive, connects them up, keeps them in order, deals with waste and protects from hazards. We will measure our performance through the condition and changes to water quality, natural ecosystems and biodiversity and the balanced approach to retaining/developing key landscapes and townscapes that characterise Central Highlands.

Strong, productive, diverse economy

Our economy has always produced renewable, natural products, much for export markets. Its trend towards increased diversity and production intensity is working to reduce the periodic peak and trough cycle. Investment and climate trajectories are combining to strengthen the economy further and deliver new and more fulltime and seasonal job opportunities. Our objective is to support economic development, increase our resident population and to improve the profile of education, health and community risk management activity and services to improve liveability and to also underpin our capacity for increased economic development – a virtuous circle.

Community participation, prosperity and wellbeing

Central highlands is a diverse community with specific and often overlapping interests and values which influence where and how people choose to live and the focus of their time. As lifecycles evolve, so do priorities. The link between local economic operations, employment and resident population is important. As people age, the place also needs to accommodate their needs if people are to remain as residents. This connects liveability and our individual and collective capabilities to wellbeing and the role that the mix of services and facilities play at various lifecycle stages and in the transition from one stage to another, e.g. childcare through school and employment/training. Similarly with social interaction, health and residential care through to multi-generation residential liveability and wellbeing.

FUNCTIONS OF THE COUNCIL AND COUNCILLORS

The Central Highlands Council is a body corporate established under the provisions of the *Local Government Act 1993*. Council's formal policy setting and decision making role is vested in its nine elected Councillors who meet every month in open Council. The Mayor is Council's chairperson and principal spokesperson.

Under Section 28 of the *Local Government Act 1993* -

(1) A councillor, in the capacity of an individual councillor, has the following functions:

(a) to represent the community;

(b) to act in the best interest of the community;

(c) to facilitate communication by the council with the community;

(d) to participate in the activities of council;

(e) to undertake duties and responsibilities as authorised by council.

(2) The councillors of a council collectively have the following functions:

(a) to develop and monitor the implementation of strategic plans and budgets;

(b) to determine and monitor the application of policies, plans and programs for –

(i) the efficient and effective provision of services and facilities; and

(ii) the efficient and effective management of assets; and

(iii) the fair and equitable treatment of employees of the council;

(c) to facilitate and encourage the planning and development of the municipal area in the best interests of the community;

(d) to appoint and monitor the performance of the general manager;

(e) to determine and review the council's resource allocation and expenditure activities;

(f) to monitor the manner in which the services are provided by the council.

(3) In performing any function under this Act or any other Act, a councillor must not:

(a) direct or attempt to direct an employee of the council in relation to the discharge of the employee's duties; or

(b) perform any function of the mayor without the approval of the mayor.

(4) A councillor is to represent accurately the policies and decisions of the council in performing the functions of councillor.

COUNCIL REVENUES

Council's principal funding is derived from the levying of rates, user pay charges and government grants. Rates are levied upon properties in relation to their Assessed Annual Value (AAV). The AAV is provided to Council by the Valuer-General. In the 2021–22 financial year the Valuer General provided fresh valuations of all Central Highlands properties. These valuations were effective for rating purposes from July 1, 2022.

The General Rate will be levied upon all rateable properties to provide the resources for all Council's activities, except for those services funded directly by a Service Charge. A charge of **$421** will be levied on each household that has available the Garbage and Recycling Collection Service and applicable businesses will be charged **$745**.

To help offset the cost of providing waste management to the Central Highlands by way of waste transfer stations, roadside domestic bins and the Hamilton Refuse Disposal Site, a Solid Waste Charge of **$281** per annum applies to all non-vacant properties that are not on Council's door-to-door Garbage and Recycling Service with a charge of **$169** for vacant properties and a charge of **$712** for commercial properties.

Council has budgeted for an **6%** increase overall in the General Rate with 50% of the total General Rate Revenue being spread evenly over all ratepayers (**$524.45 each**) and the remaining 50% General Rate has been calculated at 2.6523398 cents per dollar of the assessed annual value.

Pursuant to section 107 of the local Government Act 1993, Council declares by absolute majority that the general rates is varied according to the use or predominant use of land as follows:

(a) For land used for wind farm electricity generation-private purposes, vary the general rate to 99.00 cents in the dollar of assessed annual value.

Ratepayers have the opportunity to pay by four instalments but should note that a penalty of **10%** is applied on the amount of each instalment unpaid by the due date.

Ratepayers may also make more frequent payments. Payment options have been expanded and include payments by telephone, BPay and Internet facilities. Eftpos, cash and cheque facilities are available at both the Hamilton and Bothwell offices. Payment can also be made at Post Offices and over the phone to Service Tasmania Shops.

Council collects the Fire Levy on behalf of the State Government. A minimum Fire Levy of **$52** will apply to all rateable properties.

Upon application and prior to the 31 March 2027, eligible pensioners or Health Care Card Holders will be granted a remission on the rates payable on their principal residence. The remission is funded by the State Government.

Councils Statement of Strategic Principles and Practice as per strategic plan

1 Legislative & standards compliance, policy

Council's authority comes from the Tasmanian Government Local Government Act 1993 and other legislation focused on specific governmental functions.

Compliance with the Act is non-negotiable. To ensure this Council's focus is to:

- Promote continuous improvement and self-assessment to ensure compliance and standards are achieved to deliver performance and sustainability.
- Encourage ongoing compliance by raising awareness of the obligations under the legislation. Inherent in this is a focus on consequences of non compliance.
- Increase accountability and transparency of our performance.

Also inherent in this is awareness of how changes in policy creates new opportunities for the Central Highlands to pursue specific development initiatives and associated funding.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Continually monitor and review Council's financial situation and report findings to Council, in a clear and transparent format on a monthly basis.
- Encourage staff to undertake training to further develop their skills.
- Support Elected Members to take advantage of seminars, training and workshops that assist them in their position as a Councillor and their duty to engage in ongoing professional development.
- Review the Risk Register at each Audit Panel Meeting.
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all legislation, regulations and codes of practice which impact upon Council.
- Continue to provide information to our community and ratepayers via newsletters, Council's article in the Highland Digest, our website and our Facebook page.

2 Community Communication Representation and Engagement

The Central Highlands community is widely dispersed, with diverse needs and changing life stage and circumstantial priorities. Understanding the factors which impact Central Highlands liveability and wellbeing is important if we are to attract and retain population and visitors, to support our socio-economic viability.

In addition to elected community representation on Council, wider community and specific purpose participation from people, the organisations and the businesses that have a stake in the future of the Central Highlands and are likely impacted by Council decisions is a requirement and guiding principle of effective Local Government.

Council recognises and respects the voluntary leadership and community contribution people make through organisations and as individuals. This is critically important in a smaller LGA where public resources are limited.

Council will ensure a program of engagement at the Council, Community Development Committees and Officer level with communities, community organisations and stakeholders to inform our decision making and support community interests and benefits to ensure our focus is aligned to changing needs.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Continue support of local organisations and groups.
- Continue support of community groups and clubs through in-kind assistance as well as through Council's Community Grants Program.
- Continue the annual allocation of funds to local schools to assist with their programs for school children.
- Provide annual bursaries for a child at each local school continuing further education and annual citizenship awards.
- Continue to allocate funds and support for the provision of medical services to Bothwell and advocate for the reopening of services at Ouse.
- Support programs and activities that promote the health and wellbeing of our community.
- Continue to support regional groups of benefit to Central Highlands residents.
- Advocate on behalf of our community on regional, state and national issues.
- Continue to support and participate as a member of the Health Action Team Central Highlands (HATCH).
- Develop, in partnership with community organisations and members, to provide annual events in the Municipality like the Hamilton Show and Bushfest.

3 Strategy, Policy and Operational Planning

Council's strategic plan identifies how we will meet our responsibilities under the Local Government Act, outlining the strategies and operational approaches needed to develop the long-term physical, social and financial sustainability necessary for our community to meet community need, priorities and aspirations.

It provides context, purpose and focus for our financial, asset management and annual operating plans. Also, and importantly, our future focused economic and health and wellbeing plans ensuring they are all connected and jointly contributing in an effective, productive way.

The strategic plan is Council's reference point for challenges which emerge, providing a tool to frame our decision making.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Annually review Council's Long-Term Financial Plan and Strategy, as well as all the Long-Term Asset Management Plans.
- Continually monitor and review Council's financial situation and report findings to Council, in a clear and transparent format on a monthly basis.
- Review the Risk Register at each Audit Panel Meeting.
- Continue with implementation and support the priorities listed in the Central Highlands Health & Wellbeing Plan.
- Ensure ongoing compliance with all legislation, regulations and codes of practice which impact upon Council.
- Continually review Council policies and update as required.

4 Land Use Planning and Development Approval

Council operates as a land use planning authority under the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993. Development application assessment and subsequent refusal or approval is its independent statutory planning role.

Council also has a strategic land use planning role, identifying what land use is desirable, where to encourage and facilitate desirable development which is aligned to its strategies and the identified environmental and socio-economic benefit. The land use zoning initiatives proposed by Council at this level are subject to Tasmanian Planning Commission approval.

Council uses strategic land use planning tools such as the "Structure Plan" to align zoning to our preferred future and other non-statutory tools such as special purpose

precincts to guide our development focus and to ensure these locations are investment ready for both government grants and private investment.

Council's focus is to ensure the Southern Tasmania Regional Land Use Strategy (STRLUS) Review delivers the necessary planning tools to ensure development is achieved in Bothwell, Ouse, Hamilton, Miena and across smaller settlements and rural areas, while also supporting sustainable development from renewable energy access and in conjunction with traditional land uses and value adding.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Operate as a land use planning authority under the Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993.
- Council has a strategic land use planning role, identifying what land use is desirable, where to encourage and facilitate desirable development which is aligned to its strategies and the identified environmental and socio-economic benefit.
- Uses strategic land use planning tools such as the "Structure Plan" to align zoning to our preferred future and other non-statutory tools such as special purpose precincts to guide our development focus.
- Ensure the Southern Tasmania Regional Land Use Strategy delivers the necessary planning tools to ensure development is achieved in Bothwell, Ouse, Hamilton, Miena and across smaller settlements and rural areas.
- Supporting sustainable development from renewable energy access and in conjunction with traditional land uses and value adding.
- Work with the State Government in the development of social and affordable housing to combat housing pressures.,
- Aligning new development areas with transportation networks, utilities, and public amenities.

5 Revenue and financial management

Financial management focuses on using revenue for productive, valued service delivery, risk and opportunity management while creating surpluses to provide a buffer for unforeseen shocks. It also focuses on ensuring an acceptable return on investment, or benefit-cost relationship, and from a capital investment perspective, a strong community benefit-cost relationship for programs and capital works. The scope of this work includes financial plans, setting up financial controls, and strategic/daily financial decision making.

The financial plan is aligned to Councils Strategic Plan, designed to sustainably fund operations to achieve its defined objectives by precisely identifying and quantifying

Council's available and potential resources. This enables annual and specific purpose budgets as the primary mechanism to allocate finances and other resources towards achieving its goals. This includes monitoring operational financing items like expenditure, revenues, cash flow, and accounts receivable and payable.

From a longer-term perspective, financial management also considers the lifecycle management of assets, their acquisition and disposal in line with Council strategy.

The development of bundled investment is important and will continue as a priority. This includes, for example, the investment in a facility which has multiple, complementary roles and joint venture investment combining, federal, state and local government funding and potentially, private funding.

In a period of rapid and largescale economic transition, some of the established methods of raising revenue for investment in shared community benefit, no longer delivers an equitable community outcome compared with the private or statewide benefit which accrues from use of the common wealth resources of the Central Highlands community. Renewable energy development is the major change in Central Highlands economic output. To address this, Council will continue to progress the ability for Council to apply equitable rating of wind farms, solar farms and battery storages by pursuing these matters with the developers, State and Federal Governments and other stakeholders.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Identify appropriate grant funding to leverage Council funding for projects.
- Continue participation in Council Shared Services and South Central Sub-Region Group, and identify other services that can be resource shared.
- Continually monitor and review Council's financial situation and report findings to Council, in a clear and transparent format on a monthly basis.
- Ensure Annual Financial Statements are completed within the legal statutory timeframe.
- Manage finances and assets in a transparent way to allow the maximisation of resources to provide efficient and consistent delivery of services.
- Identify revenue streams that could complement/substitute for existing resources.
- Encourage development to expand Council's rate base.
- Apply equitable rating of wind farms, solar farms and battery storages.
- Ensure that staff are provided with continual training opportunities especially in Council's new financial software and records management systems.

6 Organisational, intergovernmental and business relations advocacy and facilitation

Communities work as systems, connecting people, governing mechanisms, businesses, community organisations, services and facilities. The way these combine, interact with and shape the built and natural environment they're located within, determines their liveability, wellbeing and resilience.

Council sits at the centre of this, playing a role in representing interests, making sense of differing views and ensuring the views, needs and priorities of community are expressed to other levels of government, with the result of "joined up", effective services and support to meet current community needs and support its sustainability.

Council's objective is to strengthen sustained dialogue and influence with the State and Federal Government and key industry sectors to progress the needs and aspirations of the Community and deliver mutual benefit.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Strengthen sustained dialogue with State and Federal Government.
- Work with key industry sectors to progress the needs and aspirations of the Community and deliver mutual benefit.
- Continue to work at regional and state levels to improve services and infrastructure.
- Continue participation in Council Shared Services and South Central Sub-Region Group, and identify other services that can be resource shared.
- Actively participate as a member of the Southern Tasmanian Regional Waste Authority.
- Encourage expansion in the business sector and opening of new market opportunities.
- Encourage the establishment of alternative industries to support job creation and increase permanent residents.
- Develop partnerships with State Government, industry and regional bodies to promote economic and employment opportunities.
- Continue as a member of Destination Southern Tasmania.
- Continue as a member of Southern Tasmanian Councils Association (STCA) and Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT).

7 Recurrent operations and services

Much of Council's resources are applied to meeting our day-to-day operational responsibilities associated with statutory roles, the provision of road and stormwater infrastructure, public buildings and conveniences, recreation facilities, parks and public facilities. We have a significant focus on ensuring that there is a foundation of key community medical, housing, care and emergency management/response capability to ensure both the wellbeing of the community and its safety. Council recognises the importance of these, along with education as necessary to translate the employment growth opportunities over the next decade into resident population.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Manage Council's physical assets in an efficient and effective manner.
- Allocated appropriate funds to ensure that existing services and assets are maintained effectively.
- Annually review the 10-year Asset Management Plan to include all classes of assets.
- Ensure that the standard of existing assets and services are maintained in a cost-effective manner.
- Continue to work at regional and state levels to improve transport and infrastructure.
- Seek external funding to assist with upgrading of existing infrastructure and funding of new infrastructure and facilities.
- Continue with existing waste minimisation and recycling opportunities.
- Monitor the usage of Council waste transfer stations, roadside bins and refuse site to ensure that the facilities meet the needs of our ratepayers and are maintained at an acceptable standard.
- Provide education and encouragement of recycling within the Municipality to extend the life of the Hamilton Refuse Site.
- Facilitate regular meetings of the Central Highlands Emergency Management Committee and ensure that the Central Highlands Emergency Management Plan is reviewed and remains current.
- Complete as many Capital Works Projects within the Annual Budget Estimates 2026-2027.

8 Capital investment and leverage

Council utilises funds to maintain and upgrade the local road network which connects properties and provides interconnections between the State Road network to provide all season access. Within townships and settlements, this street infrastructure is complemented with open spaces and pathways to enable access to services, retail and hospitality and recreational facilities. Solid waste disposal services are provided to match the population density of towns.

Capital for new facilities or major reconstruction is periodically important to ensure the Council's asset profile matches contemporary needs. This investment is guided by benefit-cost analysis framed by Council's strategic plan.

Plant and equipment forms part of Council's asset base. It is important to day-to-day operations, private works contracts and as part of the response to major events and emergencies. The use levels, cost of ownership and emergency access play a part in own/hire decisions.

Council seeks to leverage best value for our expenditure and investment, actively targeting grant programs and seeking contributions where there is mutual benefit for both the community and key business interests to offset costs and to delivery additional community benefit. Similarly working with and supporting community groups and volunteers plays an important role in creating community capital.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Manage Council's physical assets in an efficient and effective manner.
- Allocated appropriate funds to ensure that existing services and assets are maintained effectively.
- Review annually, Council's Long-Term Financial Management Plan and Long-Term Asset Management Plan.
- Ensure that the standard of existing assets and services are maintained in a cost-effective manner.
- Continue to work at regional and state levels to improve transport and infrastructure.
- Seek external funding to assist with upgrading of existing infrastructure and funding of new infrastructure and facilities.
- Complete as many Capital Works Projects within the Annual Budget Estimates 2026-2027.

9 Commercial Activities

Council operates a range of facilities and services which are designed to provide a direct and flow-on benefit to residents and business. Some, such a private works contracts return a profit, others are designed to break even, while others, such as the swimming pool, are based on a fee structure which reflects value to the community and therefore delivers only a proportion of full cost recovery. The principle which underpins provision of these facilities and services is based on the consideration of the socio-economic benefit which directly flows or will flow over time to the community compared with the cost. This includes social and economic perspectives in addition to the single financial return perspectives.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Encourage expansion in the business sector and opening of new market opportunities.
- Support the implementation of Irrigation Schemes.
- Encourage the establishment of alternative industries to support job creation and increase permanent residents.
- Promote our area's tourism opportunities, destinations and events.
- Support existing businesses to continue to grow and prosper.
- Develop partnerships with State Government, industry and regional bodies to promote economic and employment opportunities.
- Continue to support the annual Highlands Bushfest event and Hamilton Show.
- Work with the South Central Sub-Region Group through the South Central Workforce Network to provide training for jobseekers and connecting job seekers with relevant local employers.
- Allocated funds to continue our support of the Derwent Catchment Project to implement on ground projects and provide a link between Council and the community on natural resource management issues.
- Where efficiency gains can be identified, resource share services with other Local Government councils.

10 Monitoring, reporting and evaluation

To plan and program without performance measurement is a job part done. While the budget and annual report provide specific financial results and an overview of achievement, Council is committed to a journey of strong performance in meeting our strategic objectives, providing services and assets which are fit for purpose and productively delivered. The data to support this is in place, it is now a matter of using it in a more active way to support our operational and strategic decision-making processes and provide transparency to and confidence in, our operations and strategy.

While this has a management and statutory role, it is considered part of our ongoing connection with the community.

As a component of this practice, Council will –

- Regularly report to the Community through media releases, The Highland Digest and Council newsletter(s) with the progress that has been made on the matters of greatest interest to our residents and ratepayers,

- Hold regular workshops in all areas of the Municipality to report on progress on matters of Community interest and develop new strategies to ensure progress is for the betterment of the Municipality.

2026-2027 Initiatives

- Continue support of the Highlands Digest to enable it to provide community information to residents and visitors.

- Support and encourage community participation and engagement.

- Ensure that customers receive quality responses that are prompt, accurate and fair.

- Council decision making will be always made in open council except where legislative or legal requirements determine otherwise.

- Continually monitor and review Council's financial situation and report findings to Council, in a clear and transparent format on a monthly basis.

- Continue to provide information to our community and ratepayers via newsletters, Council's article in the Highland Digest, our website and our Facebook page.

Public Health Statement

Council will:

- Ensure that Council complies with Public Health requirements.
- Conduct immunisation sessions as required and promote the need for immunisation.
- Ensure proper provision of on-site effluent disposal in compliance with the current regulatory framework, codes, standards and best environmental practice.
- Undertake routine inspection of places of public assembly, food premises, public health risk activities and water carters to ensure compliance with relevant legislation.
- Promptly investigate environmental health complaints.
- Maintain an effective analysis program for food, recreational waters and general complaints.
- Continue to promote safe food handling through the provision of the I'M ALERT free online food safety training program.
- Provide staff and Councillors with Influenza vaccinations if desired.

ANNUAL BUDGET ESTIMATES 2026 - 2027

Annual Budget Estimates Summary document forms Appendix A of this document.