

A4. Economic Analysis and Market Summary

Dinner Plain Masterplan

Recommended Areas of Focus and Opportunities for Further Investment

Tract and FMSEA

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Independent insight.



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1 FOCUS AREAS

1.1 Recommended Areas of Focus

While year round visitation is a long term goal, Dinner Plain's role as an Alpine Resort was highlighted in the consultation rounds. If the winter season is not operated well this will have consequences for Dinner Plain's overall reputation and ability to attract visitors in any season. Stakeholders identified the need for further investment in signage, consistent road grooming and shuttle buses to assist in a successful winter season. The quality and consistency of winter activities is key to the sustainability and economic success of Dinner Plain.

Below, we have identified the suite of product offerings that could best maintain and promote the unique history, culture and natural Alpine environment of Dinner Plain to future visitors while meeting the high quality, low cost and resource minimal requirements identified in the extensive previous research. These requirements also align with the insights gained through the latest round of consultation held with residents and business owners within the Dinner Plain community. More specifically, community members would like to ensure that Dinner Plain maintain its village feel and allow the history and unique environment of Dinner Plain to play the leading role in attracting visitation.

Attracting Group Visitation

Dinner Plain has a number of opportunities to attract groups. The North East Tourism Gap Analysis indicates that *unique accommodation that is sympathetic to nature* is likely to appeal to a broad range of visitors including experience seeking couples and families and is likely to be more readily viewed as being 'truly unique' in the Victorian context.

Also, experience seeking couples and groups are attracted by iconic walking products while experience seeking families are attracted by iconic alpine visitor interpretation and experience activities that showcases Aboriginal & European cultural heritage.

Best practice in facilitated nature based activities

In addition to offering an activity for the visitor to participate in, best practice nature based facilitated activities tend to cater to smaller groups, enabling visitors to feel as at one with nature as possible, and far away from their busy lives and crowds.

At a more functional level, best practice nature based facilitated activities make it as easy as possible for the visitor to become immersed in an activity, not concerned with logistics such as with transport connections, luggage storage and preparing their own meals. To this end, nature based activity products tend to be all inclusive, providing accommodation, guides, catered meals using local and seasonal produce, luggage storage and transfer facilities, and transport connections.

The key 'must haves' for facilitated nature-based activities are:

- Responding to and respecting the natural environment while providing the visitor a unique experience that they cannot easily gain by free and independent means.
- Pre-organised itineraries and planning to make it easier for the visitor - Lifestyle Leaders tend to be highly researched and take time to plan their holidays. As such, it is important that any

facilitated nature-based activities have a strong web presence, including the ability to make internet bookings.

- Allowing the visitor to connect with the natural environment in a way that avoids degrading that environment and, where possible, enhancing it.
- Possibly catering to smaller groups.
- Providing visitors with local knowledge and information.
- Offering all inclusive options for visitors seeking a more indulgent and/or passive experience.

The ‘Mountain Loop’ Trail

The ‘Mountain Loop’, a three part looping trail totalling 12kms beginning and ending in Dinner Plain will cover Flora and Fauna, Indigenous history and European heritage (cattleman) establishing Dinner Plain as an interpretation centre for high country history pre and post European settlement. The Marketing Strategy identified potential plans to approach an elder to reconstruct an authentic indigenous heritage and cattleman history journey. The trail will be available for multi-purpose use – walking, cycling and horse riding.

The Mountain Loops’ greatest strength is that it incorporates a broad range of vegetation from river flats, to snow gums, mountain ash regions, natural saddles and open high plains. It provides a natural environment to tell the story of the history of the region from Indigenous land carers to European settlement.

European Settlement – Grazing, Huts, Mining, Exploration, Early Ski Touring

Many of the historical attributes still exist in the form of huts, mining sites, and cattle/horse yards. A movement to effectively communicate this history surrounding these high country relics is underway. Cultural heritage is central to identity and to community and individual’s feeling a ‘sense of place’.

Integrated Trail Network

The development of a well maintained and signed network of graded walking and cycling paths connecting within and providing loops around Dinner Plain. The aim is also to connect Dinner Plain trails with other broader trails connecting to other parts of the high country.

Dinner Plain promotes mountain bike riding as a summer activity and one local tour operator hires bikes and runs mountain bike tours. The Marketing Strategy states that Dinner Plain has excellent cross country mountain biking offer incorporating some private land, state forest and national park. The downside is the trails are not regularly maintained and signage in some areas is poor.

Combined Interpretative and Visitor Centre

The planning of a new CFA building could offer the opportunity for a combined facility which could incorporate a:

- CFA bushfire museum or interpretive centre which identifies the history of bushfires in the region
- Community centre which was identified in the *Recreation and Leisure Strategy*, and
- Visitor centre.

The museum could play an important part in engaging the community and visitors in disaster preparedness and response and contribute socially, spiritually and economically to a community’s recovery following a bushfire.

Education

The operation of a year round school within Dinner Plain was identified as the ‘top suggestion’ when respondents were asked about the type of development that would encourage people to visit the area more.

Bright P-12

The Bright P-12 College operates an annexe at Dinner Plain during the winter ski season; the annexe housed at Yak 'n' Yeti Lodge, Dinner Plain, caters for students from Year 7-12 and the Dinner Plain Community Centre school caters for students from Prep-Year 6. Consultation with stakeholders representing the Bright P-12 College indicated that there were plans to create a true primary to year twelve experience for students that offer a rigorous and innovative curriculum. The school would need to renovate so as to accommodate all students on one campus in Dinner Plain. This will require the support of the DEECD.

Alpine School Campus – School for Student Leadership

School for Student Leadership is the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's initiative offering a unique residential education experience for Year 9 students. The curriculum focuses on personal development and team learning projects sourced from students' home regions.

The potential for further development of the School and the possible inclusion of primary school students could be examined as well as its current and future integration with the local community. For example the Alpine School, Gnurad-Gundidj Campus partnered with Landcare to protect and enhance environmentally sensitive areas along the Rail Trail. The students worked with Landcare to construct a boardwalk that would allow visitors to walk the trail while minimising the impact to the local flora.

1.2 Key Opportunity for Further Investment

An opportunity that requires a more significant initial capital investment but also makes the best use of existing facilities and provides synergies with the activities recommended above is the establishment of an *Elite High Altitude Training Facility / Conference Facility*

Elite High Altitude Training Facility

The Dinner Plain Alpine Elite Training Facility is proposed to be a collection of infrastructure and services that supports the training and conditioning of elite athletes who attend as part of a team or in small groups. The elements of the elite training facility are the Dinner Plain High Country Oval, a gym and indoor pool, physiotherapy and massage facilities, running and bike trails, conference and meeting rooms, high quality accommodation and athlete focused catering.

Teams undertaking training at Dinner Plain need a variety of meeting rooms. These rooms need state of the art display technology for a video review of athlete performance. The required rooms vary from small meeting rooms that sit up to 10 people to large conference style rooms that seat up to 90.

There is currently a 15 metre indoor pool and well-equipped gym in the Onsen Retreat and Spa at Dinner Plain. The Onsen also has rooms that can be used for physiotherapy, massage and taping.

In addition to elite training, the oval could be used for the Annual Geebung Polo Match, as an off-lead area for residents and visitor dogs (important for marketing Dinner Plain as the only dog friendly resort in the Australian High country) as the village's primary helicopter landing pad, and in the event of bushfires.

Participants in the *Dinner Plain Living* consultation rounds were supportive of such a facility and noted that the oval could be utilised by school students, be an overflow for camping/ caravans and attract other activities such as dog shows to Dinner Plain. A partnerships approach with a sports club i.e. AFL club, could attract some private investment and existing businesses such as the Onsen spa could capitalise on the increased and regular visitation.

Developing a Conference Market

The forecast demand for conference events is closely aligned with the economy and in particular, the strength of the local economy. An assessment of the conference market in Regional Victoria and Gippsland indicated that low level growth is forecast in the short to medium term for government, associate and corporate sectors.

Dinner Plain is located within an iconic destination and can potentially utilise the nearby airport located in Mount Hotham, Dinner Plain also boasts a unique and substantial accommodation offer and a local spa facility for visitors to enjoy. However, the low occupancy rates during the summer season, the lack of a strong local economy capable of driving business, the lack of supporting tourism infrastructure and the relatively long drive distance from Melbourne reduces dinner Plains ability to compete as a main conference event destination.

Dinner Plain's best chance to achieve conference and business event investment is likely through the development of multi-purpose/ niche facilities, where conferencing is a part, but not the dominant function of the venture. Therefore there may be synergies between the development of an elite high altitude training venue and a conference market at Dinner Plain. The combined demand from athletes and corporate groups may support year round use of corporate facilities and justify the capital investment.

In order to be more competitive, Dinner Plain must differentiate itself from other competitors and raise awareness to business event buyers. If an Elite High Altitude Facility was established Dinner Plain could not only promote its unique Alpine setting but also take advantage of visiting professional athletes that could participate in guest speaking roles and promotional events for the corporate sector.

Dinner Plain could also utilise the Business Events Victoria (founded by the Regional Victoria Conference Group) that is a growing, membership-based group that has been operating since 1996. It operates as a collective group of conference venues, accommodation providers, tour operators, local councils, regional tourism organisations and service providers who have identified the need for a coordinated and cooperative industry approach to the marketing and promotion of business events for regional Victoria. Business Events Victoria's aim is to grow regional Victoria's share of the meetings, conference and events market by working collaboratively to demonstrate the quality and diversity of conference venues, services and settings in regional Victoria.



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