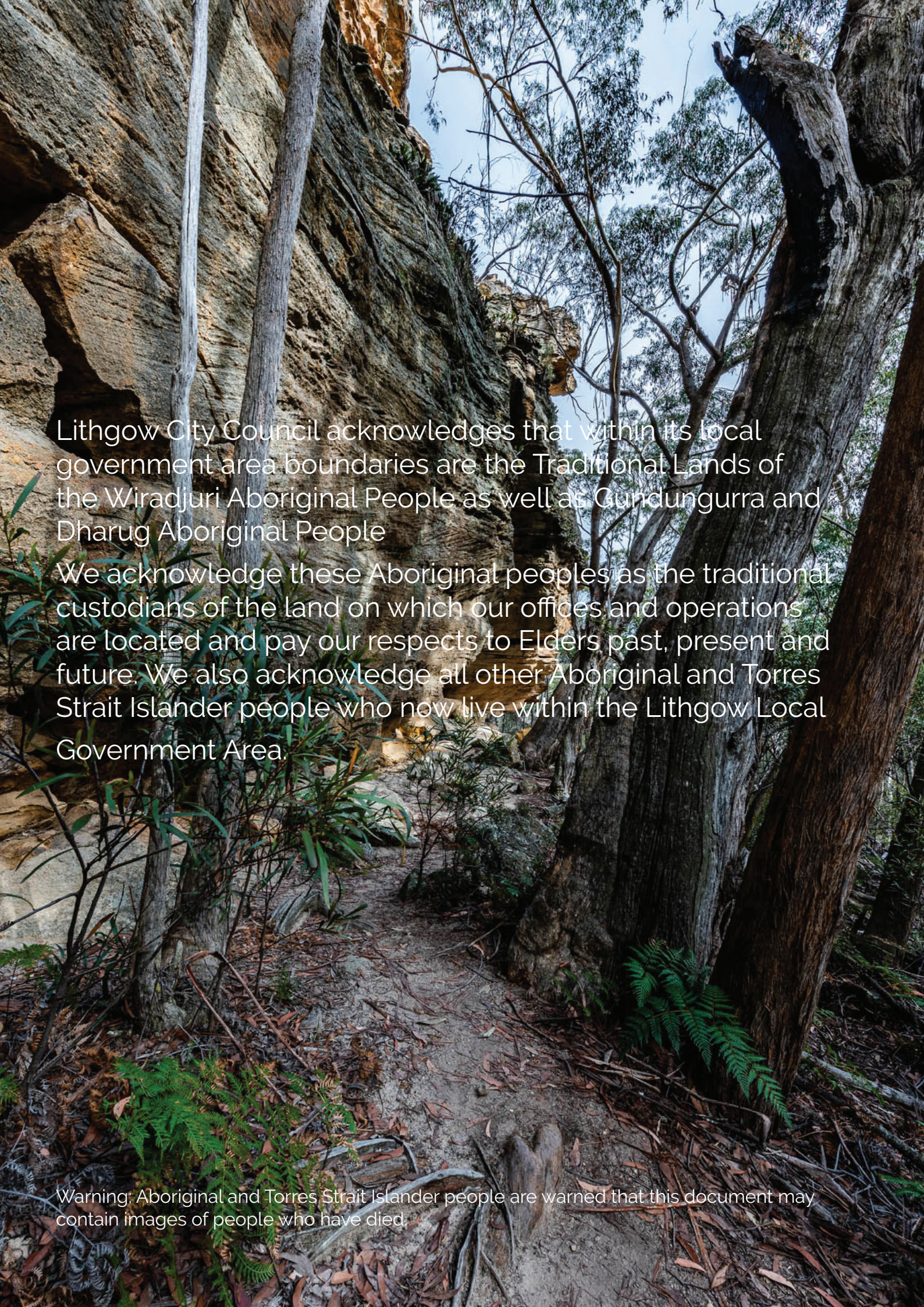


# Our Place Our Future

## Community Engagement Strategy





A photograph of a forest path. On the left, there is a large, layered rock formation. Several thin, vertical tree trunks stand in front of it. On the right, a large, thick tree trunk is visible, with more trees and foliage in the background. The ground is a dirt path covered with fallen leaves and some green ferns.

Lithgow City Council acknowledges that within its local government area boundaries are the Traditional Lands of the Wiradjuri Aboriginal People as well as Gundungurra and Dharug Aboriginal People

We acknowledge these Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices and operations are located and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now live within the Lithgow Local Government Area.

Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this document may contain images of people who have died.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework	8
Our community	20
Financial Sustainability Plan	26
Engaging with our Community	36
Community Engagement Action Plan	50

# INTRODUCTION

This Community Engagement Strategy provides a guideline for Council's engagement with the community to:

- Develop the Community Strategic Plan 2035 and associated documents in that form the Integrated Planning Framework.
- Engage with the community on how best to achieve affordable and acceptable levels of service.



Council has a high level of commitment to engaging with the community and actively seeks community input and advice into its strategic plans and processes on a regular basis.

Over the coming months Council will be continuing to seek community input into the development of its Integrated Planning Framework and its proposal to ensure a balanced budget and secure future for the Lithgow LGA.

Throughout this process we will:

- Be seeking your validation that the Vision and Key themes in the Community Strategic Plan are relevant;
- Be working with you to identify a hierarchy of future projects for the Lithgow LGA;
- Create awareness around Council's role and the roles the community and State and Federal Partners have in the implementation of the Community Strategic Plan 2035;
- Seek to gain an understanding of your satisfaction with Council Assets and what you believe are the asset funding priorities for the future;
- Seek your views on Council's current and future service level priorities and levels;
- See your input to a pathway to financial sustainability to secure the future of the LGA. Subject to Council endorsement, the options to be put forward are:
  1. Support for improved service levels - 8% SRV + rate peg
  2. Support for service levels maintained - 5% SRV + rate peg
  3. Support for reduced service levels/No increase to rates above rate peg.







This Community Engagement Strategy guides how Council will engage with the community to develop the Community Strategic Plan 2035 and associated documents and consideration of financial sustainability options to be implemented by 1 July 2023. It:

- Provides an overview of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework and how we intend to ensure a sustainable future for the LGA.
- Presents the overall approach to community engagement, including level of engagement planned, key messages, guiding principles and key target groups being consulted and engaged.
- Presents the detailed Community Engagement Action Plan.



# INTEGRATED PLANNING & REPORTING FRAMEWORK

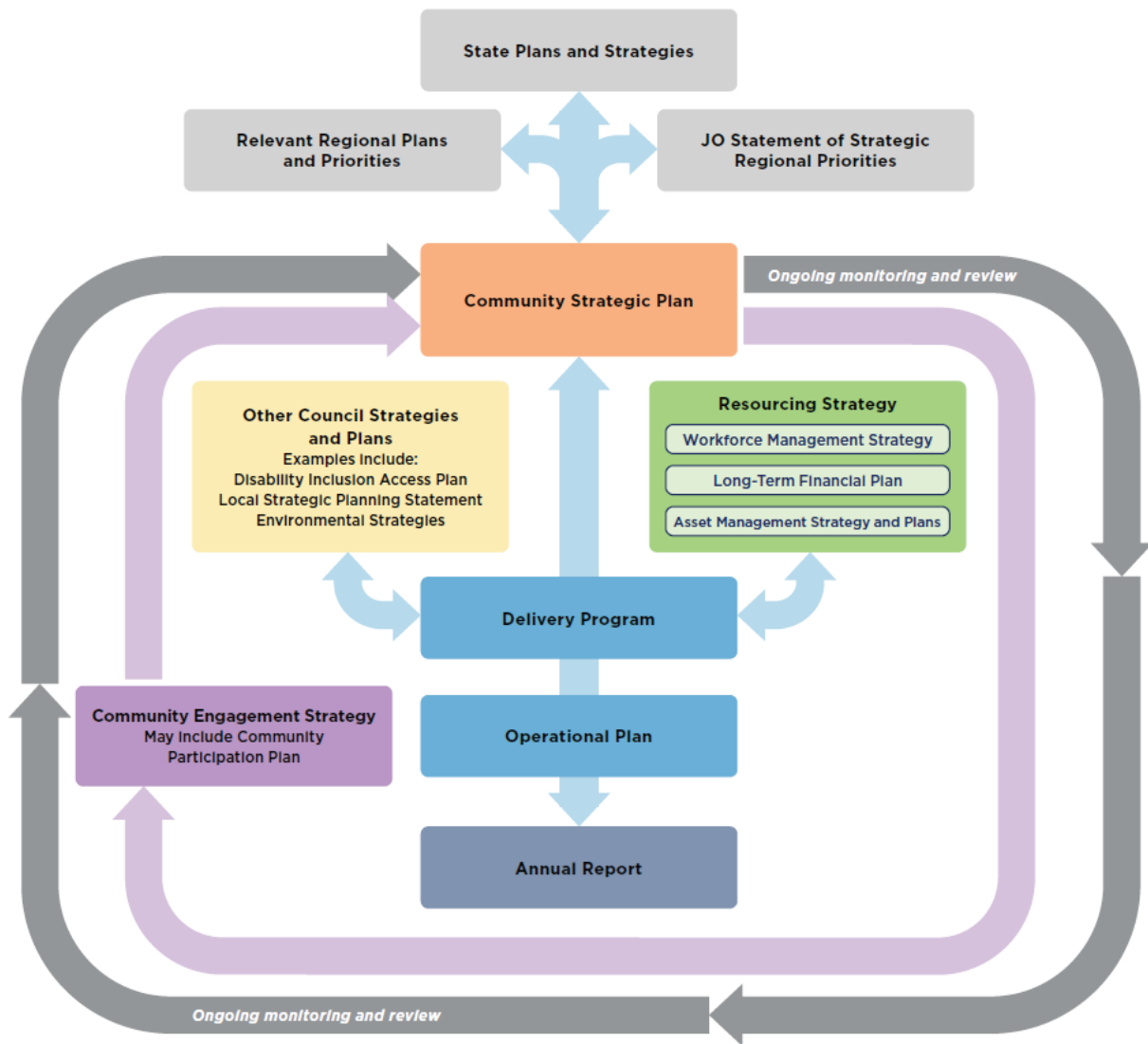
## Our place Our Future

In October 2009, NSW Parliament passed the Local Government Amendment (Planning and Reporting) Bill 2009, requiring all NSW local Councils to develop a Community Strategic Plan in consultation with the community and endorsed by Council.

The Community Strategic Plan must identify the communities vision and priorities for the future of the local government area for a period of, at least 10 years.

The Community Strategic Plan must establish strategic objectives and strategies to achieve social, environmental, economic and governance issues in an integrated manner.





A key component of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework is for Councils to adopt a Community Engagement Strategy for the development of their Community Strategic Plan. This strategy will also be used as a guide for engaging with the community for the development of all strategic documents which comprise of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework.

This Community Engagement Strategy guides how Council will be engaging with the community to develop the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) 2035 and associated documents in the Framework.

Council has a high level of commitment to engaging with the community and actively seeks community input and advice into its strategic plans and processes on a regular basis.

Throughout this process WE WILL be seeking your validation that the Vision and Key themes in the CSP are relevant.

WE WILL be working with you to identify a hierarchy of future projects for the Lithgow LGA.

WE WILL create awareness around Council's role and the roles the community and State and Federal Partners have in the implementation of the CSP 2035.

Over the coming months in 2020/21, Council will be seeking community input into the development of its Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. The Framework is made up of an integrated suite of documents which will guide the actions that Council, the community and key stakeholders will take to meet the aspirations and priorities of a changing, vibrant and dynamic community.

The Framework will ensure that Council can plan within its means for sustainable maintenance and renewal of infrastructure and provision of services.

# INTEGRATED PLANS

## Community Strategic Plan

Council, in the first instance, is required as part of the Integrated Planning process to develop a Community Strategic Plan. The Plan will guide Council for the next 10 years, with a review of the Plan to occur every 4 years within 9 months of the Council elections.

Following significant community engagement, Council has developed a suite of strategic documents and now has extensive information that will inform the new Community Strategic Plan.

## Resourcing Strategy

A Council must have a long term Resourcing Strategy for the provision of resources required to implement the strategies established by the Community Strategic Plan that Council is responsible for (Integrated Planning & Reporting Manual p.64). The Resourcing Strategy must include:

### Long-Term Financial Plan

The Long-Term Financial Plan (LTFP) must be for a minimum of 10 years. It tests the communities aspirations and goals identified in the Community Strategic Plan against economic pressures, economic growth and community priorities.

The LTFP must be used to inform decision making during the finalisation of the Community Strategic Plan and development of the Delivery Program/ Operational Plan.

### Strategic Asset Management Plan

The Strategic Asset Management Plan includes the Council's endorsed Asset Management Policy and identifies assets that are critical to the Council's operations outlining risk management strategies for these assets.

This document is supported by Asset Management Plans for Council's physical assets i.e.. Buildings.

### Workforce Plan

The Workforce Plan is a four year plan, developed to address the human resourcing requirements required to implement Council's Delivery Program.

## Delivery Program

The Delivery Program details the principal activities Council will undertake to achieve the objectives of the Community Strategic Plan within the resources available under the Resourcing Strategy.

The Delivery Program is for the four year period commencing 1 July following the ordinary election.

## Operational Plan

The Operational Plan is adopted by 30 June each year outlining the activities to be undertaken commencing 1 July as part of the Delivery Program. The Operational Plan must include the Statement of Council's Revenue Policy.



# INTEGRATED REPORTING

## Quarterly Reporting

Council is required to report quarterly (except the June Quarter) on the budget in the Operational Plan.

## Six Monthly Progress Reporting

Council also reports six monthly on the implementation and effectiveness of the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

## Annual Report

The Annual Report focuses on Council's implementation of the Delivery Program and Annual Operational Program. It is required to be reported to Council and the Office of Local Government by 30 November each year.

## End of Term Report

The End of Term Report is a review of progress in implementing the Community Strategic Plan during the Council's Term of Office. It is reported to the final meeting of the outgoing Council and included as a supplement to the Annual Report to be reported to the Office of Local Government. This report informs the development of the Community Strategic Plan.



# The Community Strategic Plan, a vision for the future of the Lithgow Region

The Community Strategic Plan (CSP) reflects the changing needs of the community and maintains a 10 year minimum horizon.

The CSP is the highest level plan that Council will prepare. It takes into consideration the community's main priorities and aspirations for the future of the Lithgow region.

The plan reflects the changing needs of the community. It takes into consideration the issues and pressures that may affect the community and the level of resources that will realistically be available to achieve its aspirations.

The CSP is a document by the community, for the community. It is a vision for future growth and development and for the long-term sustainability of the Lithgow local government area.

The Community Strategic Plan addresses four key questions for the community:

- Where are we now?
- Where do we want to be in ten years' time?
- How will we get there?
- How will we know when we have arrived?

Lithgow City Council looks forward to working in partnership with the community and State and Federal Government agencies to implement the CSP 2036 making the Lithgow LGA a brighter place to live, work and invest for everyone.



In 2007, Council adopted the following vision developed by the community following extensive consultation for the development of the first Strategic Plan; Our Place...Our Future.



A centre of Regional excellence that:

- Encourages community growth and development
- Contributes to the efficient and effective management of the environment, community and economy for present and future generations.

In 2019, Council adopted a modified version of the original vision as part of the development of the Lithgow 2040 Local Strategic Planning Statement. This 20-year vision for the LGA is drawn from the vision statements of the 5 key themes in the CSP and is reflective of the our community and its desire for a resilient future.



The Lithgow region is an ideally located strategic centre with an evolving economy and a resilient and connected community which embraces its proud heritage and world class natural environment.

This engagement strategy will test community support for the new futuristic statement as the overarching vision for the Lithgow LGA.

# Integrating the Lithgow 2040 Local Strategy Planning Statement & the Community Strategic Plan 2036

In March 2018, the Department of planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) amended the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act) to introduce new requirements for local councils to prepare Local Strategic Planning Statements (LSPS). This change sought to shift the planning system to be proactive, rather than reactive, to development thereby enshrining the role of strategic planning at a local council level in Section 3.9 of the EP&A Act.

The council's LSPS sets out:

- The 20-year vision for land use in the local area (see p12);
- The shared community values to be maintained and enhanced;
- How future growth and change will be managed; and
- The special characteristics which contribute to local identity.

Although the Lithgow 2040 LSPS was developed to align with regard to the Community Strategic Plan 2030, it is now time, to further cement the integration of these two important planning instruments.

Moving forward the Community Strategic Plan will be developed to align with the LSPS themes of Environment, Liveability, Infrastructure and Economic with the inclusion of Resilient.



# KEY THEMES

## Community Strategic Plan 2030

### Caring For Our Community

We retain, respect and strengthen both our overall sense of community, and the unique linked communities of groups, rural areas, villages and towns that make up the Lithgow LGA.

### Strengthening Our Economy

Providing for sustainable and planned growth through the diversification of the economic base, the development of diverse job opportunities and the provision of a broad range of formal and non-formal educational services.

### Developing Our Built Environment

Providing a choice of effective public and private transport options, suitable entertainment and recreational facilities, and lifestyle choices while enhancing the existing rural areas, villages and towns that make up the Lithgow LGA.

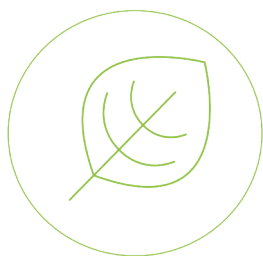
### Enhancing Our Natural Environment

Balancing, protecting and enhancing our diverse environmental elements, both natural and built, for the enjoyment and support of both current and future generations.

### Responsible Governance & Civic Leadership

Developing community confidence in the organisation by the way it is directed, controlled and managed.

## Community Strategic Plan 2035



ENVIRONMENT



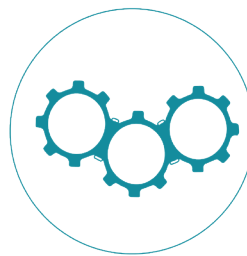
LIVEABILITY



INFRASTRUCTURE



ECONOMIC



RESILIENT

# VALUES & CHALLENGES

“Council has a high level of commitment to engaging with the community and actively seeks community input and advice into its strategic plans and processes on a regular basis (p5).

## Caring for Our Community

We retain, respect and strengthen both our overall sense of community, and the unique linked communities of groups, rural areas, villages and towns that make up the Lithgow LGA.

The most valued aspect of the Lithgow area is considered to be the 'friendliness and spirit of the community'. Community services such as health are seen as strengths while the aging population and supporting youth and keeping them in Lithgow were seen as challenges.

Although an ageing population provides opportunity for increased employment, as the sector grows to accommodate the needs of senior citizens moving forward Council must take into consideration the impacts on:

1. Current services and facilities.
2. Rate income due to increased demand for pensioner rebates.
3. Availability of appropriate infrastructure to enable easy access to services and facilities.
4. Telecommunications networks
5. Sustainable growth throughout the LGA.
6. Retention of young people in the area
7. Provision of Care Services - paid or unpaid care.
8. Provision of Child Care facilities



## Enhancing Our Natural Environment

Balancing, protecting and enhancing our diverse environmental elements, both natural and built, for the enjoyment and support of both current and future generations

## Developing Our Built Environment

Providing a choice of effective public and private transport options, suitable entertainment and recreational facilities, and lifestyle choices while enhancing the existing rural areas, villages and towns that make up the Lithgow LGA.

The most valued aspect of the Lithgow area is considered to be the location, providing a rural lifestyle in a beautiful area whilst still being within relatively close proximity to Sydney.

The Natural Environment and Heritage were listed in the top 4 values with "clean air, low noise, no traffic and location - scenic attraction being listed as attributes to be valued.

Growth potential (availability of land), tourism, education, transport connections and location were seen as strengths. However, environmental management was seen to be the greatest challenge for Lithgow over the next 10 years.

Challenges which will impact this include:

1. Managing and sustaining the environment
2. Climate change
3. Natural disasters
4. Population growth.
5. Transitioning from a coal based economy to renewable energy
6. Creating a "smart city" mentality within the LGA.
7. Parity of pricing for electric vehicles

The most valued aspect of the Lithgow area is considered to be the location, providing a rural lifestyle in a beautiful area whilst still being within relatively close proximity to Sydney.

Growth potential (availability of land), tourism, education, transport connections and location were seen as strengths. Managing change - that is, ensuring that any changes are made whilst retaining the natural heritage and rural community spirit of the area was seen to be the greatest challenge for Lithgow over the next 10 years.

Challenges which will impact this include:

1. Creating employment and business opportunities.
2. Improving standards within the community e.g.. Main Street Revitalisation and infrastructure.
3. Coping with an aging population.
4. Population growth.
5. Managing & sustaining the environment





## Strengthening Our Economy

Providing for sustainable and planned growth through the diversification of the economic base, the development of diverse job opportunities and the provision of a broad range of formal and non-formal educational services.

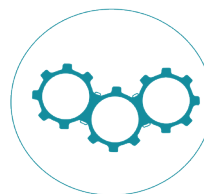
The most valued aspect of the Lithgow area is considered to be the 'location providing a rural lifestyle in a beautiful area whilst still being within relatively close proximity to Sydney. Growth potential, tourism, education, transport connections and location were seen as strengths.

Community services such as health were seen as strengths while the aging population and supporting youth and keeping them in Lithgow were seen as challenges.

Since 2014/15, the Lithgow LGA has suffered major blows to the local power and coal generation industries which in turn have had major flow-on effects to business relying on these industries. In order to build a more economically diverse and sustainable region, Council and the community must plan for a future beyond coal.

To ensure a sustainable future for the Lithgow Local Government Area we need:

1. To provide leadership and communications that foster collaboration which maximises Lithgow's economic potential.
2. To ensure population stabilisation and sustainable growth that supports population and business growth.
3. To ensure the long-term sustainability of infrastructure and land that underpins and supports current and future industry and business.
4. To facilitate and encourage the ongoing development, diversification and sustainability of the local business and industry base.
5. To encourage and facilitate the provision of appropriate business support services to assist growth.
6. To encourage employment and skills development to address industry needs and promote self development.
7. To manage land use conflict.
8. To provide employment and learning opportunities for young people in the LGA.



## Responsible Governance & Civic Leadership

Developing community confidence in the organisation by the way it is directed, controlled and managed.

The most valued aspect of Lithgow Council is considered to be its position as a major employer in the LGA and its ability to advocate on behalf of the community for improved services.

Assessment of Council assets to see whether development opportunities could be created by selling unused land within the centre of Lithgow. The sale of surplus land/properties to create a reserve of funds for the LGA that could be used to support the projects and plans was identified as an opportunity for Council.

Challenges which will impact this include:

1. Population growth.
2. Natural disasters
3. Cost shifting from other levels of government

To ensure a sustainable future for the Lithgow local government area we need:

1. To provide services to meet demand
2. Population growth.
3. To facilitate the transition from a coal based economy to renewable energy
4. To develop strategies and reserves to 'shock proof' Council against natural disasters
5. Ensure communication to the community is open and accessible,



## Council's Role

Council has a custodial role in initiating, preparing and maintaining the CSP on behalf of the Lithgow Local Government Area. However, it is not wholly responsible for its implementation. Other partners, such as state and federal government, non government organisations and community groups may also be engaged in delivering the long-term objectives of the plan.

# OUR COMMUNITY

The Lithgow local government area is located on the western ramparts of the Blue Mountains, 140 kilometres from Sydney. The Lithgow Local Government area totals 4,567 square kilometres from the Capertee and Wolgan Valleys in the north, Little Hartley in the east, Tarana in the south and Meadow Flat in the west.

The major urban centre of Lithgow nestles in a valley of that name, overlooked by the sandstone escarpments of the Blue Mountains.

In addition to the major urban centre of Lithgow, the Lithgow local government area has 12 villages/ localities with mining or farming backgrounds. These smaller centres have proven to be attractive rural residential areas, along with the broader rural areas.

The Lithgow LGA lies almost wholly within the Wiradjuri Aboriginal nation, with the Gundungurra nation situated to the south and the Darug nation to the east.

Lithgow was previously perceived to be an inland mining and industrial centre, however, recent developments have seen Lithgow recognised as an important tourism destination, heritage centre and a desirable residential area as well.

The Lithgow local government area includes World Heritage listed National Parks and State Forests, making Lithgow an important leisure destination for Sydney residents.

Lithgow has unlimited opportunities for outdoor activities such as bush walking, mountaineering, camping, orienteering, hang gliding, horse riding, off road 4wd, fishing, sailing and water skiing.

Financial challenges facing NSW councils, and the Lithgow Local Government Area are the result of real costs rising faster than available revenue, rate pegging (limiting the amount by which rates can rise), cost shifting from other levels of government, and councils only collecting approximately 3% of total tax revenue (through rates) but having responsibility for provision of approximately 36% of built assets and infrastructure (much of which is old and in need of renewal and upgrade)

Due to the size of the area Lithgow City Council has a number of challenges, including:

- A large proportion of the Lithgow LGA is unrateable being National Park or State Forest.
- Service provision to Lithgow, Wallerawang and Portland and across 12 villages and localities from Capertee and the Wolgan Valleys in the north, Little Hartley, Kanimbla and Megalong Valleys in the east, Tarana in the south and Meadow Flat in the west.
- Additional expenses arising for emergency management responsibilities, as the area is prone to costly natural disasters, especially bushfires and storms
- Increased resident expectations for high levels of service particularly in the rural areas.
- Significant pockets of isolated households located in the rural areas not serviced by public transport -- including a growing number of older people with disabilities.



# Lithgow City Council Local Government Area



# OUR COMMUNITY



11%

OLDER COUPLES  
NO CHILDREN

22%

COUPLES WITH  
CHILDREN

21,605

POPULATION

30%

LONE PERSON  
HOUSEHOLDS

5.7%

ABORIGINAL &  
TORRES STRAIT  
ISLANDER  
RESIDENTS

79%

RESIDENTS BORN  
IN AUSTRALIA

1,306

LOCAL  
BUSINESSES

\$1.60

BILLION

Gross Regional Profit - 2019

9%

RESIDENTS BORN  
OVERSEAS

45

MEDIAN AGE

8,846

EMPLOYED  
RESIDENTS

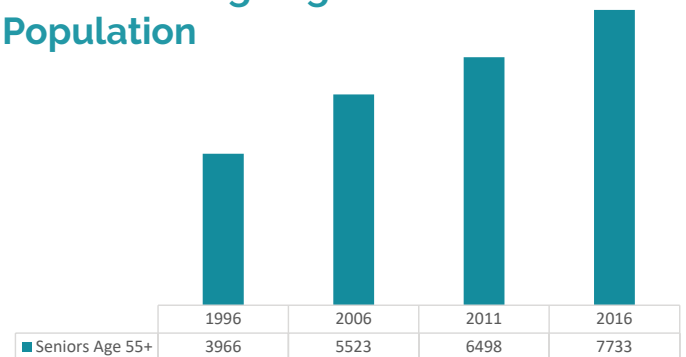


# OUR COMMUNITY

Analysis of the service age groups of Lithgow City in 2016 compared to Regional NSW shows that there was a lower proportion of people in the younger age groups (0 to 17 years) and a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (60+ years).

Overall, **20.6%** of the population was aged between 0 and 17, and **29.0%** were aged 60 years and over, compared with 22.1% and 27.2% respectively for Regional NSW.

## Increase in Ageing Population



From 2011 to 2016, Lithgow City's population increased by 915 people (4.5%). This represents an average annual population change of 0.89% per year over the period.

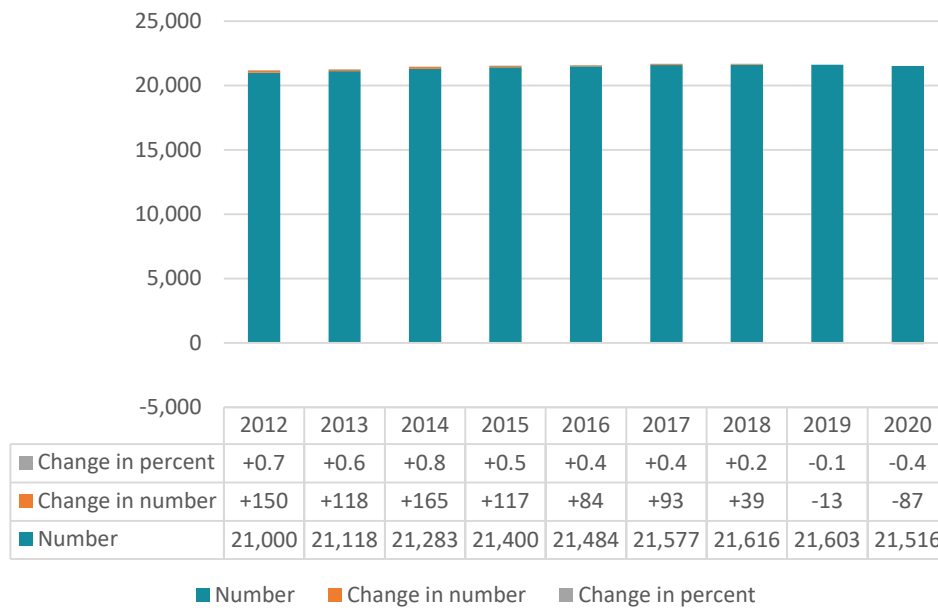
The major differences between the age structure of Lithgow City and Regional NSW were:

- A larger percentage of 'older workers & pre-retirees' (15.1% compared to 13.8%)
- A larger percentage of 'seniors' (12.4% compared to 11.4%)
- A larger percentage of 'empty nesters and retirees' (14.1% compared to 13.1%)

The largest changes in the age structure in this area between 2011 and 2016 were in the age groups:

- Seniors (70 to 84) (+585 people)
- Parents and home builders (35 to 49) (-319 people)
- Empty nesters and retirees (60 to 69) (+292 people)
- Young workforce (25 to 34) (+278 people)

## Estimated Residential Population 2012 - 2020



## Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage Lithgow City Council's small areas and benchmark areas

Area	Disadvantage		Advantage & Disadvantage	
	2016 Index	Percentile	2016 Index	Percentile
Rural South - Little Hartley	1032.7	66	1018.3	66
South Bowenfels - Littleton - South Littleton	1012.7	53	983.8	62
<b>New South Wales</b>	<b>1001.9</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>10011.0</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Bathurst Regional Council area</b>	<b>1001.0</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>973.0</b>	<b>39</b>
Rural North - Marrangaroo	986.0	37	959.2	32
<b>Regional NSW</b>	<b>972.9</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>959.0</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Central West SA4</b>	<b>964.0</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>951.0</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Mid-Western Regional Council Area</b>	<b>960.0</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>942.0</b>	<b>24</b>
Wallerawang - Lidsdale	935.5	17	909.0	13
<b>Lithgow Local Government Area</b>	<b>923.0</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>908.0</b>	<b>13</b>
Portland	909.7	11	888.1	9
Lithgow Urban Area	895.1	9	883.6	9
Lithgow - Hermitage Flat & District	892.1	9	878.3	8
Morts Estate - Oakey Park - Vale of Clwydd	871.3	7	860.8	6
Bowenfels	793.3	3	806.8	3

- Index of relative socio-economic disadvantage contains only disadvantage indicators (i.e. Unemployment, low incomes or education levels, lack of internet access etc..)
- Index of relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage contains all of the disadvantage indicators plus indicators of advantage (i.e. Professional occupations, high income, higher education levels, larger homes etc..)

Our Governance and Civic Leadership vision Statement is to be:

“A Council that focuses on strong civic leadership, organisational development and effective governance with an engaged community actively participating in decision making processes affecting their future.

Lithgow City Council seeks to ensure a sustainable future for the Lithgow Local Government Area. Our Community Strategic Plan (CSP), Our Place, Our Future 2030, outlines key environmental, social, economic and civic leadership objectives for making the Lithgow Local Government Area a better place.

Key strategies previously endorsed by the community to achieve this, include:

- GL1 - Our council works with the community.
- GL2 - Moving towards a sustainable council.
- GL3 - We are all valued citizens.

**This Community Engagement Strategy has been developed to guide community engagement on how best we can achieve levels of service that are both affordable and acceptable, given the significant financial challenges our LGA faces.**







# FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

As part of the Council's integrated long-term resource planning, three alternative funding options have been developed that community input and engagement is being sought on. These options, and their varying impacts, will be detailed in the following Integrated Plans that will be on public exhibition in April 2022 (subject to Council endorsement):

- Community Strategic Plan 2035
- Delivery Program 2022-2025 /Operational Plan 2022/23
- Resourcing Strategy 2022/23 - 2032/33 which is made up of:
  - Long Term Financial Plan 2022/23 - 2032/33
  - Strategic Asset Management Plan 2022/23 - 2032/33
  - Workforce Plan 2022/23 - 2025/26.



What the council is doing to be efficient and address the Lithgow local government area's financial challenges.



1. **Through sound financial planning**, this strategy positions us to manage risks and cope with unexpected events, such as natural disasters and lower interest income.
2. **Council's Resourcing Strategy implements and resources the vision of the Community Strategic Plan** with clear priorities. For example, the Long Term Financial Plan identifies how additional assets will be funded, or existing assets renewed or upgraded and what provisions are made for changes to services.
3. **Costs have been rising faster than revenue** and Council must efficiently deliver the services which can be provided within our means. For example services reviews will need to consider available funding.
4. **Council has commenced reviews of its service delivery to ensure it is meeting community needs** and providing 'value for money'. Council will work with the community to set affordable levels of service. Areas recently reviewed include Waste Management, Library Services and Ranger Services.
5. **Council will continue to advocate for a fair share of resources for the Lithgow area.** We will continue to build partnerships with neighbouring and Western Sydney Councils as well as State and Federal Governments. For example, advocacy efforts have assisted Council to obtain over \$15M in grants in 2020/21 and to gain health support for the COVID-19 pandemic.



# BALANCING THE BUDGET



Like many other NSW Councils, our roads, footpaths, buildings, drainage and other community assets are ageing and need to be renewed or upgraded...To improve our public assets we need to spend more money on maintaining and renewing these assets to ensure that they meet the needs of our community.

## What is the Rate Peg?

As things currently stand, Council's revenue is regulated under the rate peg. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) sets a rate peg which limits the amount by which councils can increase their rate revenue from one year to the next.

For many years, the rate peg limit has not kept pace with the funding needs of Councils in NSW, including costs shifted from other levels of government, and residents' needs for appropriate services.

## What is a Special Rate Variation?

After IPART announces the rate peg for the upcoming year, Councils can then have a conversation with the community as to whether the increase is sufficient to continue to deliver the existing range and standard of services available, whilst also ensuring there are sufficient funds to maintain and renew infrastructure. If they feel the increase is insufficient, Council can request an increase above the rate peg limit. These increases are known as a Special Rate Variation (SRV).

Applications for increases above the rate peg limit are assessed by IPART. IPART has stringent criteria which a Council must meet before approving any application. This includes extensive community consultation and clearly showing to the community the impact of the proposal on ratepayers.

## Why would Council Consider Options including a Special Rate Variation?

Like many other NSW Councils, our roads, footpaths, buildings, drainage and other community assets are ageing and need to be renewed or upgraded. We know that our community places a high value on these assets, in particular our road network. Our assets in their current state are continually deteriorating and need costly maintenance. To improve our public assets we need to spend more money on maintaining and renewing these assets to ensure that they meet the needs of our community.

If a Special Rate Variation option was preferred by the community, it would be an important step towards improving the maintenance and renewal of our current assets to ensure that we deliver service in line with community expectations and also to become financially sustainable for the future.

## Why can't my current rates pay for the additional maintenance and renewal works?

The role of local Councils has come a long way since the days of roads, rates and rubbish. Today, we now fund many more services to meet our community's needs and expectations. Some of these include:

- Parks, sports grounds, playgrounds and community halls;
- Libraries, arts and culture;

- Community development services for children, youth, older people, people living with a disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People;
- Public and environmental health;
- Environmental sustainability projects and invasive species management;
- Transport services including roads, footpaths, car parks, road safety and traffic facilities;
- Business development, events and tourism;
- Development services, such as development applications and certification;
- Land use and natural environmental planning;
- Stormwater and flood management;
- Emergency management;
- Community and council strategic planning;
- Executive, communication and support services

We are engaging with the community on how best to achieve affordable and acceptable levels of service. p4

# THREE OPTIONS FOR ENSURING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

“The three scenarios which have been developed for community consideration will have varying impacts on our assets and service quality.

The community will be engaged on three scenarios for ensuring a sustainable future. In communicating these options, the Council will outline the following:

- The magnitude of the financial challenge and infrastructure funding shortfall facing the LGA over the next 10 years and its impact on service levels
- The need to consider community “capacity” to pay additional rates in determining the options to be presented.
- The need for residents to be able to have their say on whether or not they are prepared to pay additional rates to maintain and/ or improve service levels.

The three scenarios, which have been developed for community consideration, will have varying impacts on our assets and service quality.

## **Scenario 1- Service Levels Improved**

**8%** SRV + rate peg (additional funds for improved levels of asset maintenance & renewal).

## **Scenario 2 - Service Levels Maintained**

**5%** SRV + rate peg (sufficient funds for maintenance & renewal of assets in their current condition).

## **Scenario 3- Service Levels Reduced**

**0%** SRV + rate peg only (we continue to constrain costs and reduce service levels over time to balance the budget).



# WHY WOULD COUNCIL BE CONSIDERING SPECIAL RATE VARIATION OPTIONS?

Council is proposing to increase funding for the following assets.

- Transport (sealed roads, unsealed roads, footpaths, cycleways, bridges and road drainage)
- Stormwater Drainage
- Buildings

Increasing the level of funding for these assets will allow council to renew those which are currently in a poor condition. It will also ensure that the number of assets in poor condition does not continue to grow. It is essential that our community assets are safe, in working order and meet community expectations.

**Scenario 1 will ensure that the Fit for the Future asset benchmarks are met over time.**

## Impact on Council Revenue

**\$1.53m p.a**

Scenario 1

**Service Levels improved**

**\$1.1m p.a**

Scenario 2

**Service Levels maintained**

**Rate peg only**

Scenario 3

**Service Levels reduced**









“Lithgow City Council cannot live beyond its means. Living within available funding will responsibly manage risks and prioritise the allocation of available funding to achieve the best possible outcomes for the community.”



# THE PURPOSE OF THIS ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

This Strategy includes a detailed Community Engagement Action Plan which seeks support for a complete and comprehensive suite of integrated planning and reporting documents which includes the proposed options for a balanced budget.

This strategy aims to ensure within available resources, that the general community and stakeholders:

- Are aware of opportunities to have a say in the development of 'Our Place, Our Future' – Community Strategic Plan 2035; and
- Are aware of and have access to relevant information on the three financial sustainability options for resourcing our future.

This strategy and documentation developed to support the community engagement process demonstrates the Council's commitment to consulting and seeking feedback on the future priorities and strategies to issues facing the community.

Throughout the process, Council will Inform the community of issues likely to impact on our community across social, environmental, economic and civic leadership themes over the next decade. This includes demonstrating council's commitment to financial sustainability and that Council is not just seeking to increase rates without first doing everything possible to address our financial challenge.

This commitment includes:

1. Avoiding Shocks – The Council is pro-actively implementing sound financial planning to ensure we live responsibly within our means, manage risks and prioritise resources to achieve best outcomes.
2. Balancing the Budget – Given that costs are rising in real terms more than income, the Council is taking action to balance its budget by finding efficiencies and cost savings.
3. The Council is committed to borrowing only for key infrastructure projects which are assessed on a business case basis including consideration of life cycle costs. The Council manages its borrowings within industry benchmarks, which measure borrowing and repayment capacity.

4. Increasing Income – The Council is seeking to maximise income where appropriate.
5. For every dollar residents pay in rates and annual charges, the Council matches it from other funding sources. Over the past five years the Council obtained over \$34 million in specific purpose grant funding for the community.
6. Reviewing and adjusting services – The council is committed to ongoing review of its services to ensure we are providing quality, value for money services responsive to the changing requirements of the community over time.
7. Increasing Advocacy and Partnerships involves advocating to other levels of government for a fair share of funding and reduced cost shifting onto local government and building partnerships to achieve positive outcomes.

The development of the Community Strategic Plan and suite of documents which make up the Integrated Planning & Reporting Framework involves:

1. A broad range of stakeholders in the development and implementation of strategies and actions to address identified issues.
2. Collaboration with community groups, government agencies and the community to identify solutions and accountabilities.

## Our objectives

1. To provide a range of opportunities for the community to meaningfully participate and contribute to the review and update of the Community Strategic Plan.
2. To ensure the community is aware of Council's financial situations and to gain agreement on acceptable service levels to be provided.
3. To ensure community engagement is well planned, meaningful, timely and accessible.
4. To ensure the update of the Community Strategic Plan is adequately informed by sound research strategic planning and the results of community engagement.
5. To take into consideration and build upon other relevant community engagement and research processes, initiatives, plans and strategies that have already been effectively implemented.
6. To provide feedback to participants on the results of the engagement processes.
7. To monitor, evaluate and review the effectiveness of implementation of this Community Engagement Strategy.

# HOW WE COMMUNICATE & ENGAGE

council  
meetings

Information  
booth (display/  
exhibition)

We are talking to  
the community  
about...and we'd  
love to hear your  
views.

Fantastic, I have  
some great ideas  
about...

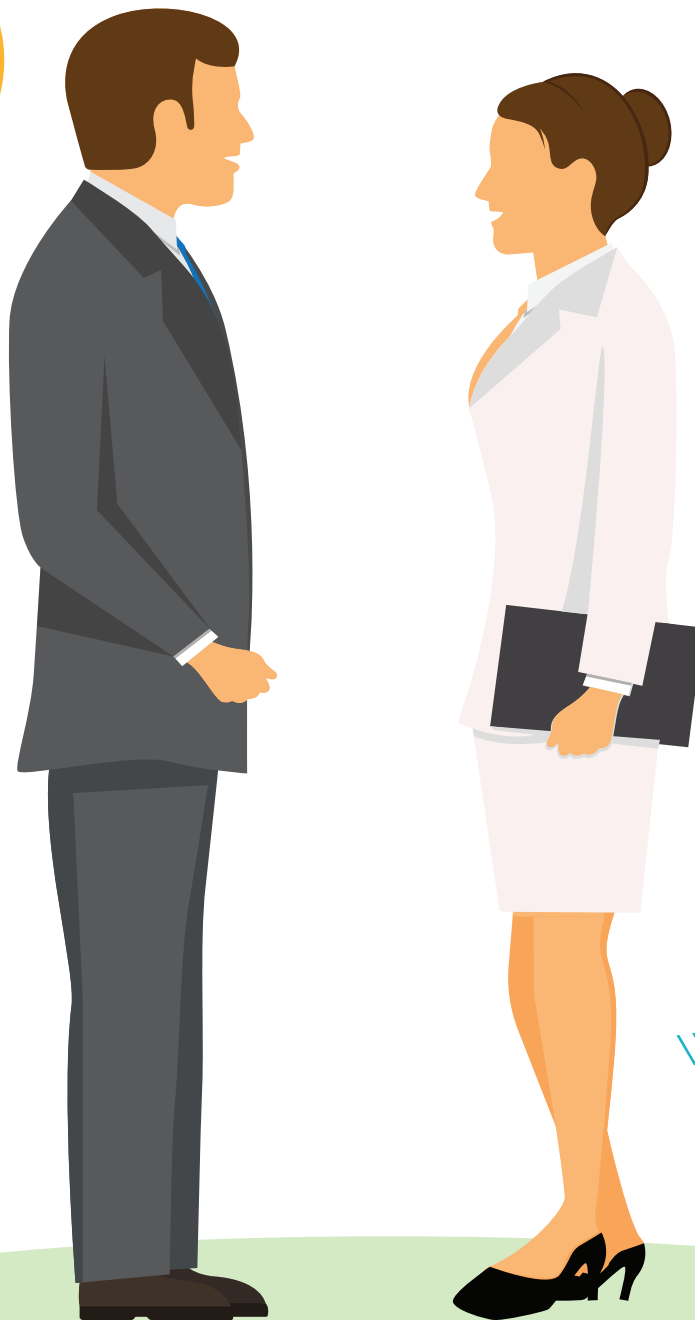
drop-in sessions

FACE  
TO  
FACE

events

workshops

Focus groups



Council's community engagement framework is based on the fundamental principles for engagement of social inquiry and justice.

• Inclusiveness and diversity	• Openness, respect & accountability
• Leadership	• Purpose
• Information sharing	• Feedback and evaluation
• Resourcing and timing	



Council's engagement strategy is based on the five pillars of community engagement which can be defined as follows:

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Giving information to our community	Seeking feedback from our community	Working directly with our community	Creating partnerships with our community to produce recommendations and solutions	Putting final decision making in the hands of our community.



# ENGAGING WITH OUR COMMUNITY

## Key Stakeholders

- General community
- Ratepayers – residential, business, farmland and mining.
- Local community groups and organisations
- State and Federal Government
- Non-government agencies and organisations
- Council

## Social Justice Principles

Council's Community Engagement is based on the fundamental principles for engagement of social equity and justice.

Equity	Everyone will have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of our community, by inclusive engagement and planning processes which protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances.
Access	Everyone will have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life.
Participation	Everyone will have maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.
Rights	Everyone will have the opportunity to participate in community life while respecting cultural, linguistic and religious diversity.

## Guiding Principles for Engagement

Inclusive	<p>Everyone should have an opportunity to participate in shaping the future of our LGA. Council recognises and values the diversity of the community. Engagement processes will be inclusive, endeavouring to capture the range of values and perspectives of the community including the silent majority and those hard to reach.</p> <p><b>Key questions we will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What range of engagement techniques and processes are required to enable all voices to be heard?</li><li>• What promotion is required to encourage participation?</li></ul>
Accessible	<p>Community engagement processes will be accessible to the community.</p> <p><b>Key questions we will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How can we ensure our engagement is accessible e.g. in terms of venue, and engagement methods?</li><li>• How can we provide participants with the information they need to be able to reflect and contribute in a meaningful way?</li><li>• How can we achieve clear, easy to understand communication that does not use jargon?</li></ul>

Respectful	<p>Community engagement processes will be implemented with integrity and respect. Outcomes of engagement will not be pre-determined. Engagement will aim to promote dialogue and genuine discussion. While it may not lead to agreement or consensus, it can support better understanding of issues and foster mutual respect for different views.</p> <p><b>Key questions we will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will community contributions be recognised and valued?</li> <li>• Will engagement processes be able to accommodate changing community views on significant issues?</li> <li>• How can we ensure the views of participants are heard and valued?</li> </ul>
Transparent & Accountable	<p>Council will aim to implement community engagement processes that are transparent and accountable. Participants will be provided with an understanding of how their input will be used and the extent to which it will inform Council policy and /or decision making processes.</p> <p><b>Key questions we will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we ensure open, transparent and accountable engagement processes?</li> <li>• How can the results of engagement be considered and assessed in a transparent and accountable way?</li> <li>• How can we ensure timely feedback to participants on the outcomes of engagement processes?</li> </ul>
Civic Leadership	<p>We will demonstrate civic leadership seeking the best possible outcomes for current and future residents. The Council will foster and grow partnerships with the community, other levels of government, agencies, business sectors to support the review, update and implementation of the plan.</p> <p><b>Key questions we will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can engagement processes support best possible outcomes for current and future residents?</li> <li>• How can we foster and strengthen partnerships with the community and other agencies and organisations?</li> </ul>
Sustainable	<p>We will encourage development of a sustainable Community Strategic Plan that enhances the quality of life for residents of the Lithgow LGA now and into the future.</p> <p><b>Key questions we will consider:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we support achievement of a more sustainable Lithgow LGA - socially, environmentally and economically.</li> <li>• How can we best meet the needs of our community whilst ensuring a balanced budget.</li> </ul>

# ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

The community engagement process will provide an opportunity for the community to identify their priorities and aspirations for the Lithgow LGA and the level of service that they are willing to accept.

## Key questions our community engagement will address include:

- What progress have we made in implementing our Community Strategic Plan?
- What are the key issues, challenges and opportunities currently facing the Lithgow LGA?
- What will the Lithgow LGA look like in 2035?
- Do we need to change the Vision, Objectives and Strategies in Our Place, Our Future Community Strategic Plan 2035.

## Engagement in the time of COVID-19

Council remains committed to ensuring the community and other key partners have the opportunity to have their say and provide meaningful input into the update of the Our Place, Our Future - Community Strategic Plan 2035.

In 2020/21 we moved to better utilisation of online platforms engaging with our community through Facebook Live - Streaming videos on key issues for the community and enabling interaction through question & answer forums. This technique is now a valuable part of our engagement toolkit as it provides an accessible way to reach members of our community who are unable to attend face to face engagement.

Online technologies enable a mix of creative, online engagement techniques encouraging interactive, deliberative conversations.

We will use face-to-face sessions where appropriate and achievable in line with social distancing protocols. This will include taking advantage of opportunities to attend or coordinate meetings with key community organisations in the LGA.

Surveying will be undertaken utilising a variety of methods to ensure we capture a wide range of opinions:

- Online
- Hard copies available at Libraries and Administration Centre
- Telephone surveys utilising specialist engagement consultants.

In order to reach our rural communities we will seek to connect with local forums/ village associations and networks via virtual 'kitchen table' conversations. This will provide these groups with an opportunity to facilitate community-led discussions. This approach will enable our communities to come together in informal settings to have casual but important conversations. It will encourage the sharing of stories and experiences, investigation of solutions to so-called 'wicked problems' - those that are difficult complex and can't necessarily be solved by traditional methods.

Although we are uncertain what the immediate future holds in terms of being able to meet with our community face-to-face, Council is committed to adopting a range of techniques to ensure that our community and other partners have an opportunity to have their say and provide meaningful input into the update of Our Place, Our Future Community Strategic Plan 2035 and the proposed options for achieving a balanced budget and acceptable service levels for a sustainable future.

## How will we do this

- We will inform the community about the process using a variety of mediums.
- We will implement community surveys utilising a variety of methods throughout the engagement period 2021-2023.
- We will engage with existing networks and expert groups.
- We will implement community and stakeholder consultation across the LGA.
- We will create a dedicated web page for the community to 'have their say' and have access to all information, fact sheets, rates calculators, surveys and reports.
- We will disseminate publications and

information sheets via email, rates notice inserts, through Council Administration Centre and libraries.

- We will publish media releases, interviews, advertising and live stream consultation sessions for community information.
- We will publicly exhibit all documentation and call for submissions.

## Building on previous community engagement

To avoid duplication and over consultation we will build on what you have already told us and test to see if this is still relevant. This includes considering:

- Recent community surveys
- Engagement informing newly developed strategic plans.
- Community feedback from the Local Strategic Planning Statement consultation with respect to the future of the Lithgow LGA, areas of optimism and concern and priorities and challenges for the future.

## Background research

To inform and prepare for the engagement process and update the Community Strategic Plan, analysis of new and existing research will be undertaken to compile background information to ensure that the community's participation and engagement is informed. This will include:

- Identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Lithgow LGA.
- Assessment of key national, state, regional and local issues and change drivers.
- Analysis of key socio-economic, demographic trends and census data.
- Preparation of the End of Term Report
- Results of the Local Strategic Planning Statement engagement process.
- Review of the Councils Resourcing Strategy; Long Term Financial Plan, Strategic Asset Management Plan and Workforce Plan
- The NSW State Plan & Premiers Priorities and regional planning priorities.



# UPDATING THE

The Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework requires that the revised and updated Community Strategic Plan and supporting documents are endorsed by Council by 30 June 22.

DATE	ACTION	PERFORMANCE TARGETS
Jun 2021 - Apr 2022	Background research and preparation for Community Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop community profile - assessing key demographic and socio- economic trends</li> <li>Desk top review of plans and strategies undertaken since 2016</li> <li>Preliminary preparation for End of Term Report.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assess progress to-date in implementing Community Strategic Plan</li> <li>Identify progress highlights, key strategic issues, challenges and opportunities going forward</li> </ul> </li> <li>Establish process to record stakeholders, community engagement and capture key findings.</li> <li>Undertake forecasting and financial analysis of rating scenarios</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review of past achievements, current issues, challenges and opportunities completed.</li> <li>Community profile prepared</li> <li>Engagement processes documented and established.</li> </ul>
Aug -Sept 2021  Jan - Apr 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revise Community Engagement Strategy</li> <li>Community Engagement Strategy adopted.</li> <li>New Council briefed on Community Engagement Strategy and process to date.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategy adopted by Council</li> </ul>
Oct 2021 - Apr 2022	Implement community engagement plan for Community Strategic Plan and raise awareness of the options for financial sustainability.	Community Engagement Plan implemented in accordance with the key principles and objectives of this engagement strategy.
Nov 2021 - Apr 2022	Review and assess outcomes of community engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify required changes to the Community Strategic Plan.</li> <li>Consult with representative from all target groups to review proposed changes and finalise the draft plan for exhibition.</li> </ul>	Draft plan finalised
Apr - Jun 2022	Community Strategic Plan exhibited and endorsed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Public exhibition April - May 2022</li> <li>Plan endorsed June 2022</li> </ul>	Council endorsement of revised Community Strategic Plan

# COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

DATE	MILESTONE
Sept 2021	Community Engagement Strategy adopted
Oct 2021 - Apr 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community/Stakeholder Engagement</li> <li>Draft Community Strategic Plan and Integrated Planning document suite (Long Term Financial Plan, Strategic Asset Management Plan, Workforce Plan, Delivery Program, Operational Plan) prepared and endorsed for exhibition.</li> </ul>
Nov 2021	End of Term Report - to last meeting of outgoing Council
Apr - May 2022	Public exhibition of draft Community Strategic Plan and Integrated Planning document suite.
Jan - Apr 2022	Stakeholder engagement with new Council <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Integrated Planning &amp; Reporting Framework</li> <li>Visioning</li> <li>Council planning and budgetary processes</li> </ul>
Jun 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Updated Community Strategic Plan endorsed and adoption of the Integrated Planning document suite.</li> </ul>
Jul - Oct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder engagement undertaken to raise awareness and ascertain support for one of the three financial sustainability options and related service levels.</li> </ul>
Nov 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Endorsement of Council for Special Rate Variation Application.</li> </ul>
Dec 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Notification to IPART of intent to apply for Special Rate Variation (if this is the preferred option).</li> </ul>
Jan 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Council meeting to endorse Special Rate Variation (if this is the preferred option)</li> </ul>
Feb 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Application for Special Rate Variation completed and forwarded to IPART (if endorsed by Council).</li> </ul>
May 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IPART notification of outcome of Special Rate Variation (if Council proceeds with an application).</li> </ul>
Jun 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adoption of revised Long Term Financial Plan, Strategic Asset Management Plan, Delivery Program &amp; Operational Plan</li> </ul>
Jul 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special Rate Variation implemented (if endorsed by Council)</li> </ul>

# ENGAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

Effective engagement requires a range of methods to be employed to keep participants willing to be involved throughout the process, or alternatively participate in a time and manner of their choosing. It is important that we build on past experience and avoid the notion of 'over consultation', where stakeholders feel they have provided the same opinion and advice to Council on the same or similar issues. It is also important that contributors' are acknowledged.

Our engagement will aim to:

- Acknowledge people for their contribution.
- Keep people engaged during the process via regular updates.
- Provide feedback mechanisms and ongoing opportunities for people to be involved in the refinement and evaluation of the 'Our Place, Our Future Community Engagement Strategy'.

## Success Indicators

A range of qualitative and quantitative measures will be used to assess the success of the 'Our Place, Our Future' community engagement process.

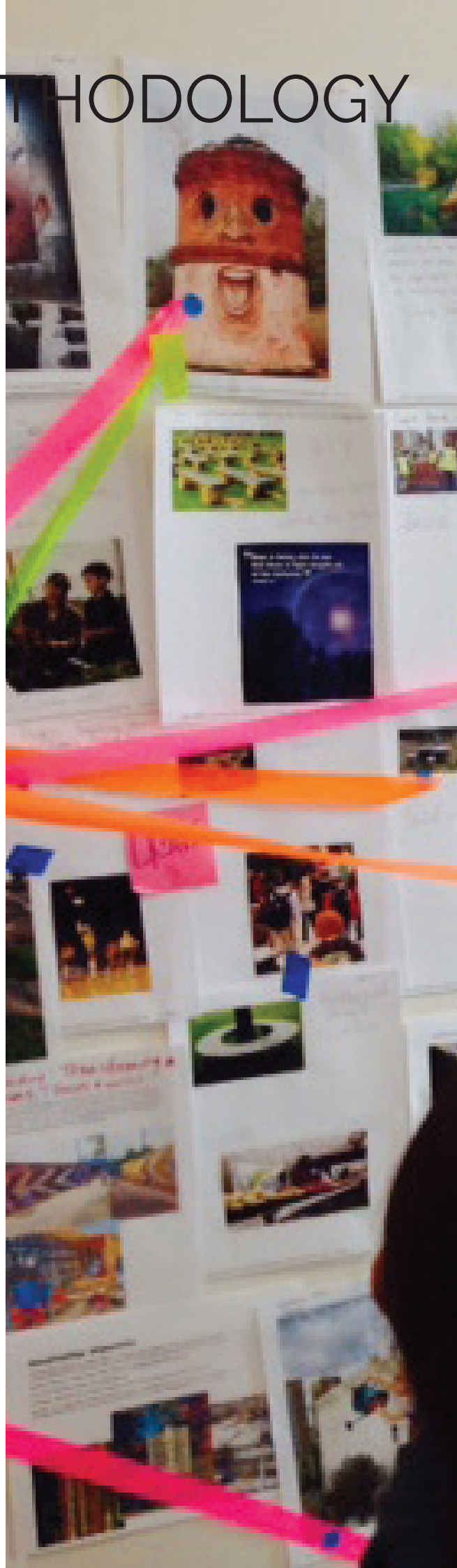
This will include:

- Number of presentations at community/ stakeholder forums
- Number of people attending online/face-to-face sessions
- Number of visitors to 'Our Place, Our Future' webpage
- Contributions people make to 'Our Place, Our Future' at workshops, meetings and on-line forums
- Formal submissions received.
- Media coverage
- Number of questionnaires responded to
- Adoption of the plan by Council.

## Learning and Reporting

The result of engagement activities will be compiled in report format and provided to Council, as well as placed on Council's website.

The results of this feedback will also contribute to the development of Council's overall community engagement process and tools used to engage with our community.







# QUESTIONS TO ADDRESS

During the engagement process a number of questions will be raised by the community. Some of these have been anticipated and how they will be managed is set out in the table below. Throughout the process, matters raised on social media will be addressed through media releases and fact sheets on the Have Your Say website, including a frequently asked questions fact sheet.

Question/comment	Proposed Response
<p>Stop wasting money on the unnecessary enhancement of Main Street.</p> <p>Cancel Halloween that will save \$100,000.</p>	<p>The role of local Councils has come a long way since the days of roads, rates and rubbish. Today, we now fund many more services to meet our community's needs and expectations. Some of these include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating vibrant public spaces and amenities to attract economic growth and visitation.</li> <li>• Developing and encouraging events which are unique to the area for the wellbeing of the community and to attract visitation.</li> </ul>
<p>How can the Council best show that it is efficient?</p> <p>OR How do I know the Council is being efficient?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case studies have been prepared and are available on the Have Your Say website which document how Council has contained expenditure, achieved cost savings and efficiencies and generated additional revenue.</li> </ul>
<p>How has the Council considered the capacity of the community to pay?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Council has completed a full analysis of the community's capacity to pay additional rates and this will be detailed in the Draft Long-Term Financial Plan 2022-2032 and the Draft Operational Plan 2022/23 being publicly exhibited in late April 2022.</li> <li>• Within available funding, the Council is committed through its integrated planning to building a sustainable future for the Lithgow Local Government Area – that supports the creation of a vibrant economy / town centres providing increased local employment opportunities and to advocating for the provision of services and facilities that meet the needs of all age groups and special needs groups.</li> <li>• The Council has a Hardship Policy to accommodate the special needs of those unable to pay their rates in full on time. The Council is committed to working with such ratepayers to agree on affordable payment plans.</li> </ul>
<p>How will I know that the funds from the SRV are being spent in my area?</p>	<p>Council places its Draft Operational Plan on public exhibition each year in April /May for the Community to review and make submissions. The Draft Operational Plan provides a detailed list of Capital Works to be undertaken and identifies the budget area that the works are funded from. Members of the community are invited to make submissions during this period which are considered by Council prior to adoption of the Operational Plan in June.</p>