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introduction

## What is a Community Plan?

The Wyong Shire Community Plan 2008 - 2013 is a document that reflects the challenges, aspirations and key social issues facing our community. It is intended as a guiding document for government and non government agencies, community groups and the local community for working together to make Wyong Shire an even better place to live.

The Community Plan 2008 – 2013 comprises this Main Report and a Summary Report.

The process of developing a Community Plan aims to investigate and respond to the challenges and aspirations of all people who live in, work and visit the Shire. The planning process identifies demographic and other trends; community strengths and challenges; and an action strategy to assist in improving the quality of life of our community.

## Why do a Community Plan?

Developing a Community Plan is a statutory requirement for Councils. The Local Government (General) Amendment (Community and Social Plans) Regulation 1998, requires all Councils in NSW to develop a Social/Community Plan every 5 years and to include information about access and equity activities in their Management Plan and Annual Report.

The purpose of the Community Plan is to clearly identify:

- Who makes up our community?
- What is important to our community?
- How can Council and others improve the quality of life of our community?

## What are the Objectives of the Community Plan?

The objectives of the Community Plan are:

- To provide an understanding of the Wyong Shire population and demographic trends;
- To develop an understanding of the challenges and opportunities of the growing population within the Shire;
- To engage the community in the planning process and provide opportunities to participate in decision making processes;
- To develop diverse, strong and sustainable relationships between community members, with government and with other key stakeholders working in Wyong Shire;
- To acknowledge and build social capital in the Shire through the development of ongoing community networks and structures providing informal support to local residents;
- To improve Council's ability to respond to changing community priorities;
- To integrate the social aspects of sustainability with the broader sustainability principles and strategic planning processes of Council; and
- To set the strategic direction and actions for Council in providing current and long term direction for social planning and community development in the Shire.

## What Principles have we Used in Developing the Community Plan?

The Department of Local Government Social/Community Planning and Reporting Guidelines highlight that the desired outcomes for Social/Community Plans are to:

- Promote fairness in the distribution of resources, particularly for those most in need;
- Recognise and promote people's rights and improve the accountability of decision makers;
- Ensure that people have fairer access to economic resources and services essential to meeting their basic needs and improving their quality of life; and
- Give people better opportunities for genuine participation and consultation about decisions affecting their lives.

These outcomes are based on the four interrelated principles of equity, access, participation and rights.



For local government this means a commitment to ensuring:

- There is fairness in the distribution of resources;
- Rights are recognised and promoted;
- People have fairer access to the economic resources and services essential to meet their basic needs and to improve their quality of life; and
- People have better opportunities for genuine participation and consultation about decisions affecting their lives.

Council acknowledges that not all groups and individuals have equal access to services and resources and that strategies and actions need to be developed to address any potential barriers such as age, disability, language, race/religion, culture, etc. At the same time, Council needs to ensure the planning and development of new services and facilities takes into account the diverse needs of all individuals and groups across Wyong Shire.

The Community Plan has been developed from a strengths based approach in accordance with the following principles:

### **Community**

While the word community is used as an umbrella term, there are two recognised definitions: Communities of place and communities of interest.

Communities of place are defined by geographic characteristics and context. Communities of interest are defined by the mutual identity and interests shared across particular groups of people which can exist within or across communities of place.

The Community Plan provides information at both a Shire Wide and social planning district level as well as providing information on target groups.

### **Social Capital**

Social Capital has been described as the 'social glue' that binds people together as a community. It can be measured in terms of the strength and quality of social interactions and the network of social connections that go beyond family and friends.



It can be defined as:

*“The fabric that holds the community together” (Robert Putnam).*

Social Capital is built when community members have many opportunities to work, live and socialise together and feel the cooperation and goodwill of others. In communities with high levels of social capital, people feel confident to play an active role in local affairs, to deal with conflicts and competing interests, and to work collectively to tackle issues of common concern and opportunity.

*“Much hard evidence has accumulated that civic engagement and social connectedness are practical preconditions for better schools, safer streets and even healthier and longer lives” (Robert Putnam).*

The Community Plan process can assist in facilitating the building of social capital in our communities.

### **Assets Based Community Development (ABCD)**

Traditional approaches to community development usually involve top down or outside in approaches that are needs based focused largely on deficiencies in the community. *“All the historical evidence shows significant community building/community development only takes place when people in the local community are committed to investing themselves and their resources in effort. That’s why you can’t develop communities from the top down or from the outside in” (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993, 1997).*

An alternative approach is asset based community development which involves identifying the capacities of individuals, associations and institutions and mobilising these for development purposes:



*“As communities attempt to build a healthy future, they must often struggle against a development perspective that encourages them to see only what happens when they focus solely on what is missing in their community and they know that this approach does not produce positive results. In fact every community has needs, problems and deficiencies; the choice for community groups is whether that is all they want to focus on. Like a glass of water filled to the middle which can be viewed as either half empty or half full, a community can be seen as a half empty place comprised of clients with needs and deficiencies or as a place half full of citizens with capacities and gifts to give” (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1997).*

Focussing on a community's assets does not imply that the communities do not have issues or need additional resources from the outside. Rather, Kretzmann argues that issues will be much more effectively used if the local community is itself fully mobilised and invested.

### **A Strengths Based Approach**

Working from a strengths based approach means that we operate on the assumption that people have strengths and resources for their own empowerment. Engaging people from a strength based approach is a process that recognises the barriers that constrain people's empowerment and addresses these constraints using strategies that enable the people we work with to control the process of change.

A strengths based approach is based on the principles of:

- **Respect:** For peoples' intrinsic worth, rights, capacities, uniqueness and commonalties;
- **Sharing:** Of information and 'knowledge', resources, skills, decision-making;
- **Collaboration:** Teamwork and partnership, consultation and inclusion;
- **Social Justice:** Equity, access, 'equality', participation, self-determination; and
- **Transparency:** Having things out in the open, open information and communication.

*Source: Wayne McCashen, St Luke's Innovative Resources, 1998.*



## Community Capacity Building

Community capacity describes a community's ability to draw on available resources for valued purposes and is dependent upon social capital, a prerequisite for collective action. Community development remains a practice that can build these abilities. Community strengthening and capacity building are based on an appreciation of how communities and government can work together in social, economic and environmental spheres to achieve and maintain sustainable outcomes.

## What is Council's Role?

Wyong Council has established an important role in providing current and long term direction for social planning and community development in the Shire. Council provides leadership to the community and is a strong advocate for Wyong Shire on the key issues and challenges faced by the community. It is recognised however, that the main responsibility for funding and the direct provision of many social and community services rests with State and Federal government agencies in association with non-government sector and voluntary sector organisations.

Council's role is to:

- **Provide leadership.** Council is committed to demonstrating social leadership, implementing good practice and building positive community relations and developing the capacity of its communities;
- **Provide services** across a range of quality community facilities and services in response to community needs. Provision of community facilities and services that enhance the quality of life of all by providing accessible, quality, safe, needs-based and multi-functional spaces for people to come together for social, cultural, recreational, and civic activities;
- **Promote just and equitable social structures.** This is aimed at reducing causes of social disadvantage;
- **Develop joint ventures and partnerships** with government, non government and private organisations to improve the planning and provision of human services and facilities for the community;



- **Work collaboratively** with government, non government agencies and the private sector to improve the planning and provision of human services and facilities;
- **Research** and advocate for services and facilities to ensure they are commensurate with population growth. Through applied social research and effective community consultation and participation, Council seeks to understand local challenges, strengths and opportunities, and applies this understanding to the formulation of policies and strategies to address priorities;
- **Advocate** on behalf of communities to influence decision making in other levels of government and the wider community, in order to enhance the quality of life of the community;
- **Provide information** keeping all communities well informed with a broad range of information, available in a variety of mediums and languages (where needed);
- **Strengthen communities** through an Asset Based Community Development approach;
- **Promote** the Shire;
- **Encourage and enable** public participation. Council supports and creates opportunities for all community members to participate in making decisions that affect them;
- **Integrate** social and cultural planning processes with the urban planning, economic development and environmental protection processes; and
- **Minimise the negative social, economic, environmental and cultural impacts** of development while promoting those positive impacts that contribute to quality of life.



## How does the Community Plan link with other Council Activities/Plans?

The Community Plan is a key part of Council's overall planning framework and is the main comprehensive planning document for guiding the activities of Council and the community in relation to the enhancement of social and community outcomes.

The Community Plan links into Council's management planning and strategic planning framework.

The Community Plan has direct linkages with other Council plans and policies as follows:

### Shire Strategic Vision

The Shire Strategic Vision is currently being developed by Council and will set the direction for the community over the next 20 years. The vision will look at *our community*, *our economy* and *our environment* with further consideration given to *infrastructure* and *governance*. The work undertaken in developing the Community Plan, including the results of the extensive community consultation process and quality of life research, will feed directly into the vision process and will assist in setting the directions for the 'community' aspect of the vision. A key outcome of this process will be ensuring Council focuses its resources on the issues that are most important to our residents and their future.

### State of the Shire Report

State of the Shire is a reporting process to examine where the Shire is heading in the longer term and what we should be doing in response to this long term direction. The State of the Shire process aims to integrate social, economic and environmental needs in a sustainable manner in order to achieve a better quality of life. While an earlier State of the Shire Report was produced in 2001, it is proposed to produce this report annually from 2007/08.

### Wyong Shire Council's Management Plan

The Management Plan outlines the key issues to address over the coming financial year and determines how we are going to achieve our long term strategy with short term actions. The Management Plan focuses on the triple bottom line of *a better community*, *a better economy* and *a better environment* for Wyong Shire.



The Community Plan is Council's primary planning instrument for specifying the strategies and actions of Council in relation to the enhancement of social and community outcomes. It is therefore an integral input into the Management Plan.

### **CSIRO Central Coast Quality of Life and Sustainability Report 2007**

An important component of the Community Plan has been the Central Coast Quality of Life Project. In 2006 Council partnered with the CSIRO and Gosford Council to identify what quality of life means for local residents and to consider the best approach to measure and monitor this.

A key outcome of the project was that quality of life helps to measure social progress and that quality of life:

- Is affected by people's internal and personal attributes;
- Is affected by people's external living environment; and
- Is measurable at individual and community levels using facts and perceptions (objective and subjective data).

As part of this research, a framework was developed to measure quality of life based on seven life domains:

- Standard of living (includes income, wealth and housing);
- Health;
- Achievements in life (includes employment, life balance and education);
- Personal relationships;
- Safety;
- Community connectedness (includes social interaction, the built and natural environment); and
- Future security (includes employment and the environment).

It was highlighted that the subjective aspect of quality of life is particularly important as it reflects how people feel about their own personal situation and their living environment.



The quality of life framework provides both Councils with a sound scientific basis to measure and monitor quality of life across the Central Coast. The Community Plan provides the vehicle for Council to move forward with establishing this baseline of subjective and objective quality of life data as per the recommendations in this report.

### **Quality of life on the Central Coast: A Community Survey of Central Coast Residents**

In August 2007 the Central Coast Research Foundation (CCRF) was contracted to conduct the Central Coast Quality of Life Survey. The aim of the survey was to obtain information about resident's attitudes and perceptions about the seven quality of life domains, as well as resident's overall wellbeing.

Over the longer term, the research is expected to provide greater insight into the influences of quality of life and assist with the identification of issues that affect the way residents live in Wyong Shire.

### **A Cultural Plan for Wyong Shire 2005**

The Cultural Plan provides an immediate and long term direction for culture and the arts for Wyong Shire. It is designed to guide the activities of Council and the community over the term of the plan and provide a foundation for cultural development into the future. The key goals of the Cultural Plan include: Ensuring cultural facilities and programmes for the local community; Encouraging and supporting cultural diversity and expression; Celebrating our past; Encouraging personal and professional artistic development; Promoting cultural development across the Central Coast Region; and Working with Government, arts and other organisations.

### **State of the Environment Report 2007**

The State of the Environment (SOE) Report is the annual report card on ecological sustainability and covers environmental protection and management within the Shire. It is an annual report required by the Local Government Act. The SOE report is part of a continuous improvement framework that helps to identify areas that need attention now and in the future. It is closely linked to Council's Management Plan and other strategic documents such as the Community Plan. As of the 2007/08 report this will be contained within the State of the Shire Report.



The Community Plan also has regard for broader strategic planning documents such as the NSW State Plan, Metropolitan Strategy and Draft Central Coast Regional Planning Strategy.

## How did we Develop the Community Plan?

The Wyong Shire Community Plan 2008 – 2013 is the culmination of an extensive consultation and research process and has been developed from evidenced based research.

Development of the Community Plan involved the following key stages:

### Stage 1 - Developing a Framework for the Community Plan Process

This stage involved:

- Developing a project brief; and
- Establishing Community Plan Steering Committees.

### Stage 2 - Background, Research and Review

This stage involved:

- Reviewing relevant Wyong Shire plans and policies;
- Reviewing the 2002 Community Plan (Appendix A);
- Reviewing relevant regional, state and federal plans and policies;
- Reviewing relevant statistical data from the 2006 Census; and
- Developing a community consultation framework.

### Stage 3 - Talking to the Community (Community Consultation)

This stage involved:

- 5 month community consultation phase;
- Individual community consultations;
- Focus groups;
- Quality of Life Survey;
- Ideas forums; and
- Community Art projects.



**Stage 4 - Identification of the Themes, Strengths and Challenges**

This stage involved:

- Identifying key themes, strengths and challenges.

**Stage 6 - Development of Strategies and Action Plans**

This stage involved:

- Developing actions and strategies relating to the key themes, strengths and challenges.

**Stage 7 - Preparing the Draft Community Plan****Stage 8 - Exhibition of the Draft Community Plan****Stage 9 - Adoption of the Wyong Shire Community Plan 2008 – 2013****Stage 10 - Implementation****How was the Project Overseen?**

The Community Plan was co-ordinated and developed by the Social Planning Team which is within the Future Planning Unit of the Planning Department of Council.

Internal and External Steering Committees were established to oversee the development of the Community Plan.

Representatives on the Steering Committees were from a wide cross section of the community. Certain representatives played more or less of an active role depending on the stage of the project.



Stakeholder representatives were selected as a key people to participate in the community plan process because:

- They brought a range of skills, experience, knowledge, information, creative ability and expertise;
- They had a working knowledge of the Wyong Shire community;
- They could bring a different perspective to the process;
- The work they do is very important to the local community;
- They will encourage the development of strong links between all organisations to create a better quality of life for our community; and
- The actions and strategies developed as a result of the Community Plan process would benefit from their involvement, input and direction.

The Internal Working Team consisted of:

Kerrie Forrest	Senior Social Planner
Belinda McRobie	Social Planner (Chair)
Christine Bramble	Cultural Planner
Boyd McMillan	Landscape Architect
Julie Vaughan	Manager Community Development
Jean McBride	Manager Library Services
Mary Dallow	Community Development Policy Officer
Ian Rhodes/Stephen Prince	Open Space and Recreation Officers
Karen Douglas	Senior Ecology and Sustainability Officer
Danielle Hargraves	Community Education Team Officer

Representatives on the External Community Advisory Team were:

Desrae Cameron	NSW Premier's Department
Tom Mangan	NSW Department of Community Services
Pari Batha	Central Coast Multicultural Project
Jillian Hogan	San Remo Neighbourhood Centre
Sue Ellis	The Benevolent Society
Craig Forshew	Darkinjung Aboriginal Land Council

The working teams met as required to guide and provide feedback on the process, theming and the development of strategies and actions.



## How was the Community Consultation Process Conducted?

The consultation phase was conducted between June and November 2007 and was a joint initiative between Council's Social Planning and Community Development Sections. The community has invested significant time and energy into the Community Plan. Over 1300 people were engaged and valued the opportunity to be involved.

The purpose of the consultation phase was:

- To identify who makes up the Wyong Shire community;
- To identify what is important to our community;
- To identify ways Council and others can improve the quality of life of the Wyong Shire community;
- To develop diverse, strong and sustainable relationships between community members, with government and with other key stakeholders working in Wyong Shire;
- To generate information from the community that will contribute to more effective community planning in Wyong Shire;
- To engage with community members in opening a broader range of opportunities for community participation in planning for a good quality of life in Wyong Shire;
- To build social capital in the area through the development of ongoing community networks and structures providing informal support to local residents; and
- To inform other decisions made by Council.

The key principles were:

- **We will Focus on Collecting Qualitative Information**

The consultation stage utilised qualitative methods for collecting information from residents rather than objective measures. Objective and subjective measures are equally important to measure Quality of Life. Objective measures encompass things like repeatable statistics – e.g. Crime rates, education level etc (and are incorporated in Chapter 2: Profile of key Census Data in the Community Plan), while subjective measures reflect how people feel about issues. Subjective data was not previously being collected or not being collected well.



- **We will Talk to Residents First**

In previous consultations undertaken by Council, views, priorities and opinions of residents have been taken into consideration equally with that of services, organisations and agencies who work in the area.

With the 2008 - 2013 Community Planning process, we recognised that the people who have the most experience of living in their communities are the residents who actually live there (not the services, agencies and organisations who work there). Community members have local knowledge and can provide a local perspective and can often offer a simple solution to a local issue.

During the consultation stage, we spoke to local residents first. This was undertaken through the community conversations and focus groups. At the end of the community consultation, we held a forum with services, agencies and organisations, where sector professionals added their own thoughts experiences and knowledge to the information already provided by residents.

- **We want to ensure Ongoing Participation of the Community in Council Processes**

Participation involves people being active in decision making processes and issues which affect them. As residents of our community, people need opportunities to participate in all aspects of community life. All people make valuable contributions to communities and are empowered themselves when they participate.

Involvement in the community is an enjoyable and rewarding experience. It can help develop skills, generate new friendships and influence positive change. Overall, people's participation makes our Shire and society a better place to live and is something that should be valued and encouraged.

The consultation process was the initial contact point for all the people involved to become further involved and connected to Council planning processes. All people involved in the consultations expressed a desire to be further involved in future programmes, projects and activities within their own and the wider community of Wyong Shire. Initially, Council's Community Development Section will be responsible for linking in and communicating with these people.



## What were the Community Consultation Methods Used?

Council officers researched and utilised a number of best practice research methods to undertake the consultation process. These methods were undertaken based on an appreciative enquiry technique which emphasises the telling of stories from local residents about what it's like to live in Wyong Shire, rather than satisfaction with Council's services.

The consultation methods were as follows:

- **Individual Community Conversations**

Conversations were held with individual residents regarding what it's like to live in Wyong Shire in 2007. The conversations were conducted with identified community members who were considered as "social glue." Social Glue can be defined as: "someone that binds together to satisfy the human desire for community" (*Wikipedia, 2007*). Forty people participated in an individual community conversation.

A list of known residents involved in the focus groups and individual conversations is provided in Appendix B.

- **Focus Groups**

Council sought to engage with a broad range of age, population, interest, cultural groups across a broad geographical location within the Shire. Each focus group took the form of a structured discussion around set questions. The consultations were conducted with existing community groups in Wyong Shire. For example, University of the Third Age, playgroups, Environmental Groups, service clubs, etc. Thirty five focus groups were held with over 400 residents participating.

A copy of the questions used, and responses gained in the focus groups and conversations are included in Appendix C.



- **Central Coast Quality of Life Survey**

In October 2007 Wyong and Gosford Councils engaged the Central Coast Research Foundation to undertake a Central Coast Quality of Life Survey to establish a baseline of subjective quality of life data. 1,500 Central Coast residents (700 from Wyong Shire) participated in the 25 minute random telephone survey. The survey had an excellent response rate of 67%.

- **Community Art Project**

*Photovoice*

Photovoice is a creative community consultation process by which people can identify, represent and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique. The photos and commentary were used to launch the Community Plan.

- **Ideas Forums with Services and Organisations**

Two ideas forums, utilising the world café technique were held with Services, Agencies and Organisations working in Wyong Shire. Over 50 agencies were involved in the forums.

Services, Agencies and Organisations were asked to:

- Consider the information gained from Wyong Shire residents;
- Add value, knowledge, and experience to this information; and
- Suggest practical ways and ideas for moving forward.

- **Internet/Website**

The Council web site was utilised to allow people to have their say or complete a questionnaire. It was also a medium for the promotion of the community plan consultation phase and keeping people informed along the various stages of the community plan process.



- **Councillor Briefings/Updates**

Regular Councillor Briefings and Councillor Updates were held at key stages of the Community Plan process to keep the Councillors informed and supportive of the project.

### **How was the Information from the Community Consultation Phase Collated?**

Information from the community consultations was documented and analysed for common themes in relation to each individual question, target population group and geographic locality. Analysis was qualitative using the technique called 'grounded theory'. In grounded theory technique, themes are coded, grouped and sifted, with common themes emerging from the analysis until a set of overarching themes are established.

The Community Plan provides a vibrant rich tapestry of qualitative information about what it's like to live in Wyong Shire: Why people came here, the strengths, the opportunities, and challenges of living in the Shire in 2008 and what people's hopes are for the future. What we have collected is stories as told through the experience of a very broad range of local residents. The findings from the community consultation phase were utilised to inform the development of priorities, strategies and actions.

### **How will the 2008 – 2013 Community Plan be implemented?**

Implementation of the Community Plan will require a partnership approach which brings together the local community, all spheres of government, non government services and agencies and the private sector.

The goal is to build on the existing strengths of the community, and address the challenges facing the community by working in partnership to improve people's quality of life.

It is important to emphasise that implementation of the Community Plan is a social and community planning process, with people as the focus.

Council has an important role to play in leading and facilitating action, planning, and co-ordinating the delivery of services in an equitable and strategic manner.



We also need to move towards a 'whole of community' approach to identify and respond collectively to local issues and build community capacity. It is important that we identify, mobilise and build upon the assets and skills within our community and we, as a community, start to be responsible for our future.

Evaluation and review of the Community Plan will be ongoing. Progress will be monitored and reported by the Social Planning Team.

Many of the actions require adoption by Council and the outcomes of other actions will be reported to Council regularly. In conjunction with the ongoing review of Council's Management Plan, the Community Plan will be evaluated taking into consideration those actions, which require greater priority and where needs have changed. The allocation of resources will also be reviewed at this time. The Community Plan will also be subject to consideration with other priorities and work programmes of Council.

Many of the challenges raised in the Community Plan cannot be resolved by short term solutions but require a commitment by all stakeholders in the community over the longer term.

