

Maitland Community Engagement Strategy 2009



Community Engagement Strategy

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GLOSSARY of TERMS and ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Capacity Building</i>	The ongoing development of awareness, knowledge, skills and capability by certain groups and individual, normally the community, to achieve their purpose.
<i>Community Consultation</i>	The process of informed communication between Council and the local community on an issue prior to the Council making a decision or determining a direction on those issues. Consultation is a process, not an outcome and recognizes that Council has the mandate to be the decision-maker.
<i>Community Engagement</i>	The broad and ongoing range of interactions between Council and the whole of the local community to build capacity and partnerships. Community engagement is an outcome and is characteristic of democratic governance.
<i>Communities of Interest</i>	A community of people who share a particular experience, common interest or characteristic. This could include but is not limited to: young people, gender and faith groups; indigenous people, resident groups, environmental groups, social groups and sporting groups.
<i>Communities of Place</i>	A community of people within a defined geographical area, such as East Maitland, Rutherford
<i>Local Community</i>	The term 'local community' refers to all residents, interest groups, community organisations, business persons and those who have a vested interest in the future direction of the Maitland LGA.
<i>Partnership</i>	The process whereby parties work collectively towards an agreed objective or aim. This might include the community, government and non-government organisations.
DA	Development Application
DCP	Development Control Plan
LGA	Local Government Area

REFERENCES

This strategy has been based on research and the varied experience of staff. A number of community engagement strategies from Councils, both national and international were also used as a guide of best practice in the preparation of this strategy.

- Bang the Table 2008 '*Why Engage On-line*' <http://corporate.bangthetable.com/howtoguides> Access 30 March 2009.
- International Association for Public Participation (2004) '*IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*' www.iap2.org Accessed 31 March 2009
- Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment (2007) '*Effective Engagement*' <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/DSE/wcmn203.nsf/childdocs/-0B996EB412EAB883CA2570360014F01A-6BC40C338B25036ECA257036001555F2?open>. Accessed 31 March 2009.
- Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) 2006 '*Best Value Victoria Community Consultation Resource Guide*'

Executive Summary

- i. Community engagement and consultation is a regular and important part of Council's everyday services, involving the interaction of Council, partners and the local community in a variety of settings and circumstances. The Community Engagement Strategy aims to:
 - Provide a consistent approach across Council departments as to how Council engages with the local community;
 - Strengthen the partnership between Council, government stakeholders, service providers, local organisations and the local community through ongoing community engagement;
 - Improve knowledge and skills of Council staff and to improve internal coordination; and
 - Be proactive and open to innovative ways to consult with the whole of the community.
- ii. For the purpose of this strategy, the term 'Community Engagement' is used to describe the overall outcome that Council is aiming to achieve. While the term 'Consultation' is used to describe the actual practice and tools used to engage with the community.
- iii. Effective community consultation should be a first thought, not an afterthought for any project. This strategy is based around a set of principles to ensure Council engages with and encourages the local community to participate in consultation processes that influence our enjoyment of this City as residents, workers, investors and visitors. The seven principles of this strategy are:
 - *Inclusiveness and Diversity* – Council recognises and values the diversity of its local community and the different strengths each group and individual has to offer.
 - *Openness, Respect and Accountability* –To ensure consultation processes and engagement with the local community is approached in an open and respectful manner with clear lines of accountability.
 - *Leadership* –Council taking the initiative for engagement, seeking support and partnerships. To support and facilitate discussion which represents the wider community interests and encouraging leadership within Council and the local community.
 - *Purpose* – To provide clear direction and guidance for the local community, key stakeholders and Council itself as to the reason for the consultation being conducted.
 - *Information Sharing* – Providing clear, easy to understand information in a timely manner and sharing information that is as accurate as possible. Information sharing also relies on the involvement of participants and a commitment to be open to different views.
 - *Feedback and Evaluation* –Informing participants as to how their opinions and information have contributed to the preparation and decision of Council is vital and understanding the views of participants specific to the consultation process itself is a valuable learning tool.
 - *Resourcing and Timing* – Staff training requirements and the physical and financial resources involved in conducting consultation must be considered both for the individual project and the overall needs of Council departments.
- iv. The Community Engagement Strategy is an evolving document. It will be reviewed regularly to ensure the strategy and allocation of resources reflects current best practice and current legislative requirements. Where appropriate, the level of engagement, the appropriate method of consultation and the financial, timing and resource implications for each project will be noted in a report to Council.

1. Strategic Context

Introduction

- 1.1. Maitland City Council aims to inform, involve and effectively engage with the local community in the preparation of strategies, plans and policies, the implementation of projects and Council activities.
- 1.2. The preparation of this Community Engagement Strategy demonstrates a clear commitment of Council to actively engage the local community through best practise consultation methods. It also sets out Council's approach by identifying a set of principles that will shape how to encourage government partners and the local community to play an active role in the way it plans for the future of Maitland and its community.
- 1.3. This document outlines an understanding of community engagement. The adoption of the stated principles as a consideration for all consultation processes enables Council to engage more effectively with the local community.
- 1.4. Various legislation, such as the Local Government Act (1993) and the Environment Planning and Assessment Act (1979) set out minimum standards for community consultation and engagement. Therefore, community consultation is an integral component in the preparation of a variety of Council's strategic and corporate documents and plans and the delivery of Council's programs and services.
- 1.5. Council recognises the importance of internal consultation between Council departments. Maintaining a high level of communication between Council departments will ensure effective and coordinated engagement. The role of Councillors is a link to and advocate for the local community. This also emphasises the importance of openness and an agreed process for sharing information.
- 1.6. Maitland City Council's Community Engagement Strategy is an evolving document. It will change over time in response to legislation and to reflect best practice consultation guidance. Once adopted, it will be reviewed regularly to ensure the strategy and allocation of resources reflects current best practice techniques and current legislative requirements.

Aims of this Strategy

- 1.7. Maitland City Council aim to build a cohesive and sustainable community by being responsive to the needs of our community; to engage and encourage the local community to participate in activities that influence our enjoyment of this City as residents, workers, investors and visitors.
- 1.8. The overall aims of this strategy are to:
 - Provide a consistent approach across Council departments and ensure that all consultation processes and community engagement activities are conducted according to the adopted 'Principles of Effective Consultation and Community Engagement';
 - Strengthen the partnership between Council, government stakeholders, service providers, local organisations and the local community through ongoing engagement. Also to encourage partners to be well informed and proactive about the issues that may directly affect them;
 - Facilitate an environment in which Council and the local community can exchange views, ideas and information, therefore resulting in policies, projects and Council activities that are more responsive to local needs, concerns and priorities;
 - Improve communication and information sharing between Council and the local community;
 - Improve knowledge and skills of Council staff and to improve internal coordination between Council

departments; and

- Be proactive and open to new and innovative ways to consult and maintain ongoing engagement with the whole of the community.

Relationship with Council's Notification Policy

- 1.9. A Development Control Plan (DCP) has been in place since 2000 which relates to consultation for Development Applications (DAs). The objectives of the Advertising/Notification of Development Applications DCP (as amended 13 November 2007) are to:
- Clearly define the types of development which will be advertised and/or notified in accordance with this policy;
 - Adopt a format in which that advertisement/notification will take place;
 - Identify land which will be considered as "adjoining" for the purposes of this plan; and
 - Explain the process of determining an application, which is the subject of a submission.
- 1.10. As clearly outlined in the DCP, in some instances, adjoining landowners will also receive individual written notice of development proposals.
- 1.11. This Community Engagement Strategy does not overrule the provisions of Council's Advertising/Notification of Development Applications DCP. In most circumstances, consultation specific to DAs will conform to the requirements of that plan. However, in situations when it is deemed necessary for wider consultation to occur on a development proposal, the process would need to demonstrate adherence to the principles of this strategy.


What do we mean by 'Community Engagement' and 'Consultation'?

- 1.12. "Community engagement is achieved when the local community is and feels part of the overall governance" (VLGA 2006: 5). The International Association of Public Participation defines community engagement as: *"any process that involves the public in problem-solving or decision-making and uses the public input to make more informed decisions"*
- 1.13. The terms 'community engagement' and 'community consultation' mean a variety of things to different people. For the purpose of this strategy, '**community engagement**' is used as a generic, inclusive term to describe the broad and ongoing range of interactions between Council and the whole of the local community. (*DSE 2007: 'What is Community Engagement'*). Therefore, by this definition, community engagement is an outcome.
- 1.14. The term '**consultation**' is used in this strategy to describe the actual practice and tools used to engage with the community and are part of the overall concept of community engagement. Consultation includes a variety of approaches and/or methods to achieve outcomes, such as information delivery, involvement and collaboration in decision-making and empowered action in informal groups or formal partnerships.
- 1.15. Engagement with the local community is a regular and important part of Council's everyday services and involves the interaction of Council and stakeholders in a variety of settings and circumstances. Whether it is as simple as a telephone enquiry, an over-the-counter discussion, or a letter regarding a specific policy or project, all of these situations aim to better inform residents and engage with the local community.
- 1.16. Formal consultation processes are conducted for a variety of projects and Council activities and will take a number of forms depending on the desired outcome of the particular policy, project and/or activity and consideration of any relevant legislative requirements.

- 1.17. The methods of formal consultation can range from the public exhibition of a Council strategy, plan or policy; focus groups, online or written surveys; workshops, e-forums, newsletters and media releases. The use of particular consultation methods will depend on the purpose, timing and resources available.

Model of Community Engagement

- 1.18. Community engagement occurs for a variety of levels for public influence. The Public Participation Spectrum developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) identifies the possible methods of consultation relative to the level of impact that the community would have on decision-making.
- 1.19. The types of engagement include inform, consult, involve, collaborate and empower. Figure 1 shows the type of engagement, the engagement purpose or promise and some examples of consultation methods that could be used to achieve the goals and promises.

INCREASING LEVEL OF PUBLIC IMPACT 				
INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:	Public Participation Goal:
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problems, alternatives and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:	Promise to the Public:
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Example Tools:	Example Tools:	Example Tools:	Example Tools:	Example Tools:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fact sheets • web sites • open houses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • public comment • focus groups • surveys • public meetings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • workshops • deliberate polling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizen advisory committees • consensus-building • participatory decision-making. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • citizen juries • ballots • delegated decisions.

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Figure 1: Public Participation Spectrum (International Association for Public Participation)

Source: International Association for Public Participation (2004) IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum (www.iap2.org)

- 1.20. Council will require different levels of engagement depending on the project or the issue, and its impact on the local community. Table 1 uses the types of engagement within the public participation spectrum and identifies the level of engagement based on its goal.
- 1.21. Where appropriate, the identified level of engagement, the appropriate method of consultation and the financial, timing and resource implications for each project will be noted in a report to Council.

- 1.22. Maitland City Council aims to identify genuine opportunities for the opinions, expertise and concerns of the community to play a part in our activities and projects. For this to occur, we must ensure that the consultation methods used are appropriate to the stated purpose or goal; deliver on what we said we would do and preserve the Council's Principles of Effective Consultation and Community Engagement.

Level 1	Inform	Giving information to the local community.
Level 2	Consult	Seeking feedback from the local community.
Level 3	Involve	Working directly with the local community.
Level 4	Collaborate	Creating partnerships with the local community to produce recommendations and solutions.
Level 5	Empower	Putting the final decision making in the hands of the local community.

Table 1: Levels of Community Engagement

How we will consult

- 1.23. Council will utilise a range of consultation methods to engage with the community. This also includes ensuring that effective internal consultation occurs. To assist in determining the specific method, resources and evaluation appropriate for the consultation process each Council department, where appropriate will outline specific consultation plan which support the principles within this strategy and the level of community engagement (see Table 1). Other resources, such as consultation toolkits may be developed to support the preparation of these plans.
- 1.24. Effective internal consultation is important to the outcome of many projects. Coordinated service planning and consultation within Council will ensure quality information is shared between department to help make informed decisions and make certain that consultation processes are coordinated, resourced and timely. This will avoid the local community feeling fatigued whilst building capacity and strengthening partnerships to ensure services and programs are delivered effectively and efficiently.
- 1.25. Informed communication with Councillors is also important to achieve more effective consultation. Local Councillors are a vital link between the local community and Council. Council officers must ensure that Councillors are informed about the policies and projects that Council are consulting on and the program for engagement with the community.
- 1.26. How Council will consult the local community will depend on the purpose, stage and desire outcomes of the consultation program for the particular policy or project. Where appropriate, consultation may occur as part of, though not limited to:
- Planning the strategic direction of Council;
 - Developing Council policies and plans;
 - Changes to a site or facility that may have an impact on the community or service delivery; and
 - When issues are brought to Council.
- 1.27. Some common forms of informing and engaging with the community that Council will continue to use include, but not limited to:
- Letters – are an effective method to provide information regarding the preparation and/or implementation of specific policies or projects. When informing the local community about specific consultation, they should include information on how and where people can obtain copies of the document and the way in which comments can be submitted.

- Leaflets, Flyers and Newsletters – are a way to provide information in an ‘eye-catching’, easy to read summary. They are used to highlight the main issues and let the local community know how to be involved in the consultation program. Both are also a way to regularly keep the local community up to date via electronic means or post about the activities of Council;
- Notices in local newspaper and media releases –can be used to regularly keep the local community informed about specific policies and projects. Media releases allow for more information to be provided while notices are to inform the local community about consultation events and specific details on the consultation of specific policies and projects.
- Maitland City Council Website and E-mail – is a valuable communication tool. It enables information to be provided to a large number of people which is cost effective and environmentally sustainable.

E-Consultation

- 1.28. E-Consultation or electronic consultation is the use of the internet, e-mail and other web tools to enable participation in, and sharing of ideas regarding specific policy issues and the preparation of strategies and/or projects. Importantly, the use of e-consultation methods is an effective way of maintaining ongoing engagement with the local community.
- 1.29. The most ardent of community members are much easier to engage with and will always find a way to make comment. However, there are many other community members that wish to participate but who are unable to access or are uncomfortable in environments created by traditional consultation methods. E-consultation encourages informed public participation and engagement between Council and the local community, while also allowing the individual to choose when and where they are engaged.
- 1.30. Used in conjunction with existing consultation methods and techniques, e-consultation is the way forward in terms of ‘bringing more people into the conversation’. Like all other consultation methods, the use of e-consultation must establish parameters for the discussion upfront. This includes moderation rules, closing dates, how this sits with the decision process and what feedback people should expect.
- 1.31. Maitland City Council is already using e-consultation methods simply by providing documents and information on line, utilising e-mail to inform the local community and receiving comments on specific policy issues via email. The next step is for Council to move e-consultation tools from a way to inform and encourage its use as a way to interact and open a new dialogue with the local community.
- 1.32. Some advantages of e-consultation include, but are not limited to:
- The potential to reach, quickly and easily a wide and diverse audience;
 - The opportunity for people to participate and provide input at a time which is convenient to them and to respond interactively and register their views via email, rather than by post;
 - The opportunity for more informed consultation and ongoing engagement, by providing access to further information through links to online resources;
 - The opportunity to filter and analyse responses automatically as they are received electronically;
 - The ability to conduct sustained discussion over time, allowing ideas to grow and develop which is not always possible in a one-off, face-to-face consultation. It is also an effective way of maintaining an open line of communication to foster ongoing engagement with the local community; and
 - The opportunity to generate feedback and to provide them with a flow of information and updates through email alerts when future, similar consultation programs are launched.

- 1.33. Some of the common e-consultation tools include:
- | | |
|--|---|
| Internet forums (also known as “e-forums”); | Webinars (online seminars or meetings); |
| Blogging and the use of social networking sites; | Webcasting meetings; |
| Online polls; | Podcasting; and |
| Online Surveys; | Electronic Voting; |
| Online feedback forms; | |
- 1.34. Despite the significant increase in the number of households in the Maitland LGA with access to a computer and the internet, Council also acknowledges that not all people in the local community have access to or ability to use the internet. Therefore, e-consultation should be used in conjunction with a range of consultation methods to make sure engagement with the community is inclusive.

Who we will consult

- 1.35. Maitland is a mosaic of individuals, groups and communities. Communities can be defined as *communities of place* and also as *communities of interest* (as defined in the glossary). Maitland City Council is committed to encourage participation of these communities and individuals to ensure that we are effective engaging with the community as a whole.
- 1.36. Government Department and Agencies are key partners with Council in preparing and implementing a number of policies and projects. For project with large scale infrastructure and other complex planning matters, Council will ensure that the relevant government departments and agencies are consulted to make certain that funding is available, proposals are supported and that they can be delivered to the local community in a reasonable timeframe.
- 1.37. Most people do not associate with the administrative boundaries of local authorities. Therefore, ongoing engagement and partnership with adjoining LGA's is vital. This enables cross boundary collaboration to resolve issues and plan in the context of the wider community.
- 1.38. Many residents and organisations have had varying experience and have different capabilities to participate in consultation processes. Community groups, local organisations, advisory groups and societies often represent many local residents, landowners, business owners and workers. Building partnerships allow for greater inclusion and can reach people that may not have otherwise participated.
- 1.39. These groups include, but are not limited to:
- Environmental groups;
 - Social groups and service clubs;
 - Businesses, Chambers of Commerce and other business/commercial network groups;
 - Volunteer and Not For Profit organisations; and
 - Community and sporting groups.
- 1.40. Using legitimate local groups and community organisations to reach individuals, particularly from disadvantaged backgrounds is an effective approach. This approach to community engagement is particularly valuable for more complex or technical consultations where individuals may not feel confident to express their views.

- 1.41. Council acknowledges that there is a need to specifically reach out to people who are less likely to participate in conventional methods of consultation or have been traditionally 'hard to reach'. The Council continues to work hard to develop initiatives to improve community engagement with these groups.
- 1.42. Some of these groups include, but are not limited to:
- Youth and Children;
 - People with a disability;
 - People with carer's responsibilities;
 - Older people;
 - People from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) backgrounds; and
 - People from Culturally and Linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- 1.43. It is expected that all consultation processes will ensure that specific consultation requirements as set out in relevant government legislation are adhered to. This may relate to how we consult with specific groups, the minimum length of time required for an exhibition and which individuals and/or groups we are required to engage with.

2. Principles for Effective Community Consultation and Engagement

- 2.1. Effective consultation should be a first thought, not an afterthought for the preparation of any strategy, policy or project of Council. Maitland City Council's Community Engagement Strategy is based around a set of principles to ensure that these are embedded in the consultation processes that Council implement to effectively engage with the local community.
- 2.2. To be effective, consultation programs must be based on openness, trust, integrity, mutual respect for the legitimacy and point of view of all participants. How to effectively consult and engage with the local community will be considered in the initial stages of planning for any policy, project and/or activity of Council according to the following principles.
- 2.3. Maitland City Council's seven principles for effective community consultation are:
 - Inclusiveness and Diversity;
 - Openness, Respect and Accountability
 - Leadership
 - Purpose
 - Feedback and Evaluation;
 - Information Sharing; and
 - Resourcing and Timing.

Inclusiveness and Diversity

- 2.4. Council recognises and values the diversity of its local community and the different strengths each group and individual brings to the implementation of Council projects and activities as well as the preparation of Council strategies and policies.
- 2.5. Council will work to promote equality of opportunity and empower people to have their voices heard through effective, appropriate and safe consultation practices. Council aims to proactively reach out to better engage with the whole of the community and seek to widen participation by taking steps to be accessible and inclusive.
- 2.6. To achieve this, Council will:
 - Ensure that all consultation programs use accessible venues for participants and where possible, consultation methods facilitate equal access for individuals and groups;
 - Seek to identify, empower and protect stakeholder groups and individuals that experience barriers to participation or have traditionally been challenging to engage (such as people with a disability, young children and people who speak a language other than English);
 - Ensure written information provides reasonable opportunities for participation (eg. providing translated information, large print, audio etc). All written materials should provide clear and easy to understand information, considering the differences of the intended audience (eg. literacy and education levels; age; cultural background);
 - Be proactive in identifying the demographic and cultural changes that occur over time and be responsive to change. This means that Council will aim to anticipate the need for supporting new groups that arise from any demographic changes, aiding participation and representation from the whole of the local community; and
 - Seek to engage and empower communities and individuals from under-represented groups directly, particularly where they do not have the necessary infrastructure and groups to articulate and promote their interests.

Openness, Respect and Accountability

- 2.7. Maitland City Council aims to ensure consultation processes and engagement with the local community is approached in an open and respectful manner with clear lines of accountability.
- 2.8. This does not mean that consultation will always lead to agreement or that decisions are subject to consensus; however, it should lead to a better understanding of the issues, a mutual respect for different points of view and contribute to secure workable solutions.
- 2.9. To maintain the integrity of all Council's consultation processes, it is vital that the outcome of any consultation is not predetermined. Council will ensure that all consultation with the community is conducted as openly as possible to preserve credibility with both the local community and of the document, project and/or activity itself.
- 2.10. The understanding of project and consultation objectives, purpose, and expectations of both Council and the local community is essential; the agenda and process should be clear and any constraints should be considered from the outset of the project.
- 2.11. To achieve this Council will:
- Communicate clearly and promptly with the local community the aims; intended process of consultation and reporting/feedback mechanisms by using appropriate communication methods and establishing clear and consistent lines of communication;
 - Inform participants how and where feedback and results of the consultation process will be published and in what format they will be available.
 - Council will respect and acknowledge the accepted cultural practices and values of its diverse community;
 - Be open and honest about the level of engagement and the influence that they may have over the outcome (see table 1). Where a specific reference group or targeted consultation is being conducted, Council will have an agreed and well publicised process for selecting participants;
 - Ensure that participation in consultation processes is accessible to those who wish to be involved, is voluntary and that participants can withdraw at any time;
 - Ensure that all personal information gathered is subject to the *'Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998'* and other relevant privacy and freedom of information legislation. Council must also respect the trust that participants bestow when they are actively engaged with Council; and
 - Ensure that community engagement with minors will adhere to relevant Child Protection legislation, best practice and duty of care guidelines.

Leadership

- 2.12. Leadership is not about telling others what to do. Rather it is the ability to support and facilitate discussion through best practise consultation and engagement to represent the wider community interests and ensure that recommendations do not only represent specific sectional interests.
- 2.13. Leadership involves taking the initiative for the activity and seeking support and partnerships. It also involves ensuring that consultation promotes the building of leadership within Council and the local community.
- 2.14. Effective and ongoing engagement with the local community aims to create strong partnership. This helps to build capacity between Council and the local community and creates a shared ownership and commitment to specific consultation processes.
- 2.15. To achieve this Council will:
- Ensure that all of Council's consultation processes and community engagement activities are

conducted within the endorsed community engagement framework;

- Provide a well planned and resourced approach for all consultation processes and community engagement activities;
- Be prepared to tackle difficult issues and ensure that the consultation method chosen is flexible to facilitate discussion of these issues and employ good conflict resolution skills as required;
- Be proactive in developing and strengthening partnerships with all levels of government, service providers, and the local community. Council will also seek to better understand the strengths, aspirations and issues of the local community through the variety of consultation and community engagement activities;
- Assess the needs of the strategy and/or project and consult all relevant stakeholders and members of the local community. Where deemed appropriate, Council will conduct wider consultation in developing the future direction and purpose of any strategy and/or project; and
- Employ a logical methodology when trying to resolve and represent conflicting interests. Whether individuals, legitimate local community groups and/or other interested stakeholders all views deserve equally consideration; and
- Ensure that Council, for all consultation processes adhere to best practise health and safety principles and legislation. Council must also recognise the risk management issues and acts on its duty of care to all participants.

Purpose

- 2.16. It is critical that a clear purpose is established for all community consultation activities. It provides a sound foundation for the planning, review and evaluation of all projects, and ensures that the types of consultation methods employed are appropriate to the project outcomes.
- 2.17. Having a clear purpose provides direction and guidance for the local community, key stakeholders and Council itself as to the rationale for the consultation being conduct. When clearly communicated to all participants, it also provides realistic expectations, understanding and transparency of the consultation process.
- 2.18. To achieve this Council will:
- Provide a clear purpose statement for all community consultation and engagement activities. It is critical to consider how to engage with individuals and groups to whom the issue is most relevant; plan who should be involved, at what stage and set the parameters for how the information will be used.
 - Conduct a thorough identification of key stakeholders with regard to the policy and/or project that is being consulted on. It is important to also include other Council departments who can contribute to or who are affected by the outcome of the consultation process;
 - Clearly communicate the specific purpose of the consultation to ensure participants have a understanding as to their participation and an expectation as to their involvement in the decision making process; and
 - Ensure that the most appropriate method of consultation is being used for the prescribed purpose and develop strategies to ensure that purpose is achieved in an appropriate manner with participants and other stakeholders.

Information Sharing

- 2.19. Providing clear, 'jargon-free' information in a timely manner is the basis of quality engagement and effective consultation with the local community and stakeholders. Well communicated information can motivate, increase interest and a willingness to be engaged in a specific project.

- 2.20. Critical to making informed decisions, information shared and gathered should be as accurate as possible and true. Information sharing must be reciprocal and relies on the involvement of participants in maintaining a flow of information and the commitment to be open to different views and issues.
- 2.21. Information can be provided in a number of formats such as written and verbal submissions; through group discussions; e-consultation; statistical information; maps and plans; graphs; photographs; narratives and art.
- 2.22. Information sharing between Council departments is critical. Decisions by all parties to the project will be determined by the quality and timing of the information obtained and shared.
- 2.23. To achieve this Council will:
- Ensure participants have timely access to relevant information that is accurate and unbiased, providing opportunities for them to form sound opinions and decisions;
 - Will ensure that participants are provided with relevant background information prior to any consultation and the way in which information is shared between Council and the local community is appropriate to the particular project and is in place during the early stages;
 - Provide information that is concise, written clearly and is in plain English. In particular, where the information is technical in nature, supporting explanatory information will be provided in an easy to read format;
 - Endeavour to provide all reasonable opportunities for access to information in other formats (eg: large print, audio, electronically etc) and community languages;
 - Consider a range of information and formats as well as written to encourage wide participation and engage with new or previously disengaged groups and individuals;
 - Provide reasonable timeframes that accommodate effective information sharing, analysis and feedback; and
 - Provide guidelines and ethical parameters, in line with the *'Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998'* and other relevant legislation for the process of information sharing and gathering.

Feedback and Evaluation

- 2.24. Closing the 'consultation loop' and informing participants as to how their opinions and information have contributed to the preparation and decision of Council is vital. Providing participants with feedback is important in respecting the partnership and maintaining ongoing engagement with the local community.
- 2.25. The views and comments of participants specific to the consultation process itself is a valuable learning tool. Candid evaluation at the conclusion of each consultation program will ensure that Council continues to improve how consultation is carried out in the future. It should include questions regarding the values of the process; whether the stated objectives and purpose was clear and achieved and whether the methods used were suitable.
- 2.26. To achieve this Council will:
- Aim to include details about the evaluation component in the planning of the project. This will ensure that issues are given due consideration in a methodical manner and where appropriate changes be made to the strategy and/or project to reflect the needs and priorities expressed by the local community;
 - Clearly outline and communicate the evaluation/feedback mechanisms and decision-making process with participants at the earliest possible stage of the project;
 - Use feedback and evaluation to review and improve the planning, design and delivery of

community engagement and consultation practices;

- Provide regular project updates and/or feedback on how decisions were made in a timely manner. Within a reasonable timeframe at the conclusion, Council will ensure that the results and reports are made available in a range of formats and in a variety of venues as determined at the commencement of the project; and
- Provide, where appropriate, opportunities for feedback through a variety of means. This could include written submission via post or email; feedback forms; verbally through meetings and workshops or web-based methods, such as discussion boards or e-forums etc.

Resourcing and Timing

- 2.27. Building capacity may take time, particularly in engaging those who are “hard to reach” and disengaged. Council and the local community may require time to develop relationships, and the consultation methods and approach must consider this.
- 2.28. It is important that participants have a realistic idea of how much time consultation is likely to take in the overall preparation and implementation of the specific project. Timing of consultation also ensures quality feedback and engagement with the local community. In terms of gaining maximum participation possible, the local community should be advised of any consultation at the earliest possible stage of the project. It is important that the timing of any consultation process must consider previous, current and future engagement activities of other departments to avoid consultation fatigue by the local community.
- 2.29. The specific financial costs involved in conducting consultation must be understood when planning any consultation process or activity. Where practical, consideration should be given to the coordination between Council departments for the coordination of consultation processes. The sharing of information and resources can provide a reduction in financial costs while still achieving positive outcomes and wide participation.
- 2.30. To achieve this Council will:
- Provide the necessary resources and support to ensure the principles of the Community Engagement Strategy are implemented throughout the various departments of Council engaged in consultation;
 - Ensure that the Community Engagement Strategy is regularly reviewed and evaluated to ensure best practice community engagement and consultation methods are being considered;
 - Ensure each project includes appropriate resource allocation and appropriate timeframes to deliver the stated goals and objectives of its consultation process;
 - Identify what skills are required to devise and conduct consultation and engagement activities and to provide opportunities for staff training to build organisational capacity and the necessary skills to effectively engage with the local community through the use of best practice community consultation methods.
 - Facilitate good governance through the commitment of adequate resources to effective engagement with the local community. These include, but are not limited to financial resources; time; staff experience and expertise; quality information; corporate systems and policies and adequate materials. Once identified, resource requirements should be explored fully as part of Council's consultation processes and engagement activities.