



Muswellbrook Shire Council  
**Community  
Strategic Plan**  
2017-2027



**muswellbrook  
shire council**

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## What we want

We want community wellbeing to be at the heart of everything we do and every consideration we make.

We want to be inclusive. We want everyone to enjoy full participation in our community.

We want to be culturally rich and diverse with our Shire's communities having strong identities and a shared 'sense of place'.

We want a local economy with full employment in a diverse range of high value industries.

We want to be leaders in environmental sustainability.





## Message from the Mayor



Muswellbrook Shire is one of the State's economic and social 'heavy lifters'. For over four decades it has been at the heart of the State's energy industry. The Shire's two baseload power stations provide 40% of the State's baseload energy requirements. It is also the home of Australia's oldest continuing coal mining operation, Muswellbrook Coal, and the Shire's thermal coal industry provides 25% of the State's total thermal coal exports. It is the home of the two largest thoroughbred horse studs in the southern hemisphere and approximately 40% of the value of thoroughbred bloodstock in Australia is reared within the Shire. It accounts for some 40% of the Hunter's viticulture and is home to the largest dairy industry in the Hunter.

Socially, Muswellbrook has played an important part in lifting people out of social disadvantage. With over 450 social housing dwellings, Muswellbrook has a proud history of providing skills and jobs to people coming to live in Muswellbrook's social housing from across New South Wales – predominantly into the energy industry but also into agriculture and the retail services industries.

The economic and social heavy lifting, however, is taking a toll. The volatility of the thermal coal market has had enormous social ramifications including rapid rises in unemployment. Between December 2012 and December 2015, unemployment rose from 3.1% to 12.4%. During the same period, a housing shortfall, that had forced more than 40 families to live in camping grounds across the Shire, reversed into a housing supply glut with more than 280 unoccupied dwellings and a consequential drop in the mean price of a three bedroom Muswellbrook home by some \$105,000. Land use conflict between the Shire's main export industries has also weighed heavily on social cohesion within the Shire.

Socially, the transfer of the community housing

management from the NSW Government to a private sector provider has seen a substantial deterioration in key performance outcomes including the stability of social housing tenants – approximately 30% of tenants coming to live in Muswellbrook's community housing now transition out within twelve months. Moreover, 44% of tenants coming to live in Muswellbrook's social housing were homeless at the time of placement and 94% of tenants are in the highest categorisation of need. The issues of social disadvantage with which the Muswellbrook community presently deals are much more complex and layered than ever before.

This Community Strategic Plan (the Plan) sets a clear direction, reflective of community expectation, that there be a reduction in the volatility of the local economy by diversifying into other more sustainable industries, an immediate support for job creation, initiatives to stabilise the tenancy turnover in Muswellbrook's social housing and transitioning Muswellbrook into a Regional centre.

Much has already been done in this regard, Council during its last term achieved a balanced budget and the community's Future Fund now generates a \$1m annual dividend to Council's General Fund – approximately a third of the way to achieving our target of being in a position to offset the deterioration of the mining category of the general rate from 2019. We improved access to higher education by working with the University of Newcastle to establish a University research centre in Muswellbrook, built the Sam Adams Residential Student College, built a new home for the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music and worked with Hunter TAFE on a new Town Centre Campus for its business courses. We worked with Calvary Aged Care to develop a new fully graduating aged care facility, upgraded substantial parts of the Muswellbrook Town Centre, helped seed-fund a cinema and built a Regional playground. We undertook the first projects in support of the Denman Town Centre revitalisation and made substantial improvements to the Denman Recreation Area. Importantly, we made substantial commitments to improve our consultation with you by establishing listening posts, more community consultations and by making significant investments in communications.

This Plan has been the culmination of twelve months of consultation and careful planning. Council thanks the General Manager and his staff officers for the preparation of the document and we commend the Plan to the community.

Martin Rush - Mayor

# The Governing Body

The Governing Body of the Council consists of twelve (12) councillors elected for four years. The Chair of Muswellbrook Shire Council (the Mayor of Muswellbrook) and the Deputy Chair are elected by councillors every two years.

## The Mayor and Councillors

The Mayor holds a number of Council delegations and some statutory responsibilities to make determinations on behalf of the Governing Body of the Council between Council meetings. The Mayor is responsible to the Governing Body for the determinations he or she makes. The Governing Body has also provided certain delegations to Councillor Spokespersons for Council's principal activities to speak on behalf of Council and make policy determinations between Council meetings with respect to those specific principal activities.



Cr Martin Rush - Mayor



Cr Scott Bailey



Cr Mark Bowditch



Cr Janelle Risby



Cr Jason Foy



Cr Michelle Green



Cr Jacinta Ledlin



Cr Graeme McNeil



Cr Steve Reynolds



Cr Rod Scholes



Cr Stephen Ward



Cr Brett Woodruff

# The Integrated Planning and Reporting framework

The Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework was established in 2009 by the New South Wales NSW Government. This legislation requires all Councils to have the following plans developed in consultation with the community:

## The Community Strategic Plan 10 year plan

The Community Strategic Plan is an overview document that identifies the community's main priorities and visions for the future. It covers a minimum time frame of 10 years.

## The Delivery Program 4 year plan

The Delivery Program is a four-year plan. It is the point of reference for all activities undertaken by the Council during its term of office. The Delivery Program details the strategies Council will undertake over a four year period, working towards achieving certain visions in the Community Strategic Plan.

## The Operational Plan Annual plan

The Operational Plan is a sub-plan of the Delivery Program. It directly addresses the strategies outlined in the Delivery Program and identifies actions, programs and activities Council will be undertaking within the current financial year. The Operational Plan also allocates responsibilities for each action or set of actions and it identifies suitable performance measures for determining the effectiveness of the activities undertaken.

## Resourcing Strategy

The Resourcing Strategy demonstrates how Council will resource achievement of the Community Strategic Plan and Delivery Program. Council does not have full responsibility for implementing or resourcing all the community aspirations, state agencies, non-government organisations, community groups and individuals also have a role to play in delivering these outcomes. Council's Long Term Financial Plan, Asset Management Plan and Workforce Management Plan have been developed to outline how Council intends to resource the actions identified in the Delivery Plan and objectives of the Community Strategic Plan.



# Community strategic plan in context – local issues and global mega-trends

The Shire's economy is closely linked to the fortunes of the energy industry and, in particular, the international thermal coal industry and the domestic power industry. Between the extraction of thermal coal, power generation and transmission, the energy industry employs more than 35% of the Shire's workforce and imports labour from neighbouring local government areas – the totality of which means that the Shire is a net importer of labour.

When the last community strategic plan was adopted, the prevailing focus had been on managing the rapid tripling in size of the thermal coal industry over the forward decade.

In addition to the rapid expansion of thermal coal extraction, a concept approval for a third thermal coal baseload power station – to be known as 'Bayswater B' had been granted which would have been a significant driver of employment growth in the Shire had it moved into construction and operation.

The Community's focus had been on air quality and dust management, visual impacts and on other community impacts – such as housing supply, childcare and health services. Council's 2013 Baseline Data Survey indicated that 50% of people requested

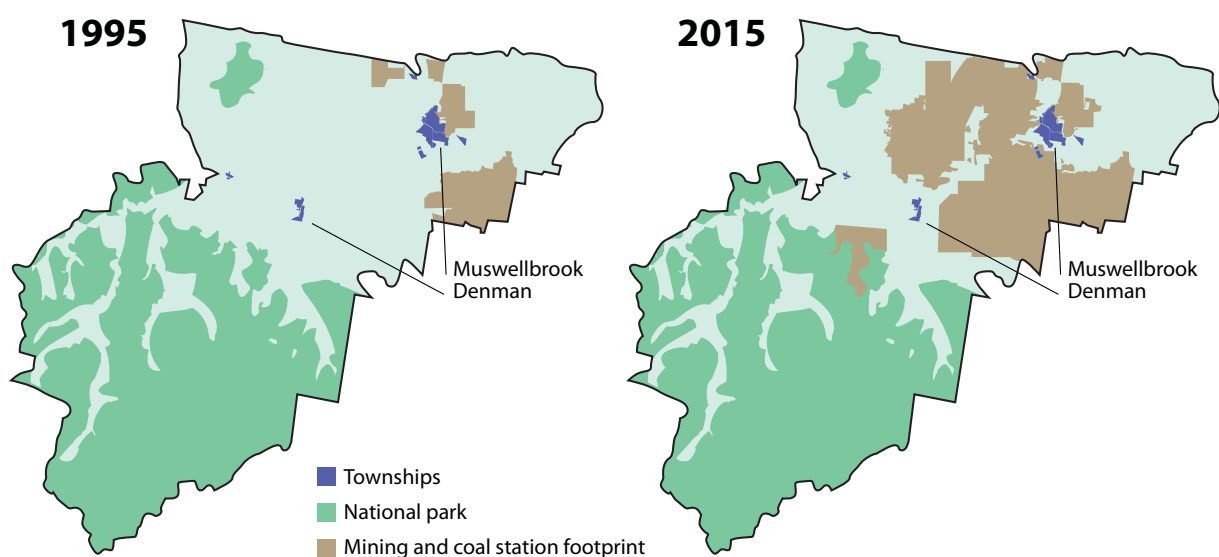


*Muswellbrook Shire's economy is closely linked to the fortunes of the energy industry.*

a reduction in excessive mining noise and dust and 52% wanted improved medical services. Similar data was reflected in Mt Arthur's then community survey which also noted a need to focus on housing supply and childcare services.

Much of Council's corporate focus had been on ensuring sufficient revenues were in place to support the growth of the State's energy industry in the Shire culminating in a Mining Affected Road Network Study and a Thomas Mitchell Drive Contributions Plan and, ultimately, a special rate variation in the mining category to bridge the projected

## Muswellbrook Shire Mining Footprint



*Figure 1 – the Shire's Mining Footprint illustration as it appeared in previous Council integrated planning documents.*



shortfall in necessary local road funding. Council was also focused on hospital expansions, childcare capacity building, and the facilitation of housing development.

Since that time there has been a strong and sustained reversal in the long term projections for traded thermal coal and substantial local job losses. The recent closure of Drayton Coal in November 2016 and the planned closures of Muswellbrook Coal, Liddell Coal and Mangoola Coal will have a substantial impact on local employment – although partially offset by the anticipated commencement of mining at Mt Pleasant Coal. Moreover, AGL Macquarie, the owner of the Shire's two existing base load thermal coal stations, has announced closure dates for both its local stations<sup>1</sup>. The loss of the associated 600 jobs is expected to have a further substantial impact on the local economy.

Indeed, the community's focus has changed



*The community's focus has turned towards economic prosperity, social equity, environmental sustainability, cultural vitality, community infrastructure and community leadership*

markedly to jobs, economic diversification and resilience, transition to a low carbon future, education and skills, and for Muswellbrook to develop and emerge as a Regional Centre.

This has been borne out in a process of extensive and diverse consultations undertaken by Council of its community over the last twelve months. Residents have been invited to attend community forums, participate in both telephone and face-to-

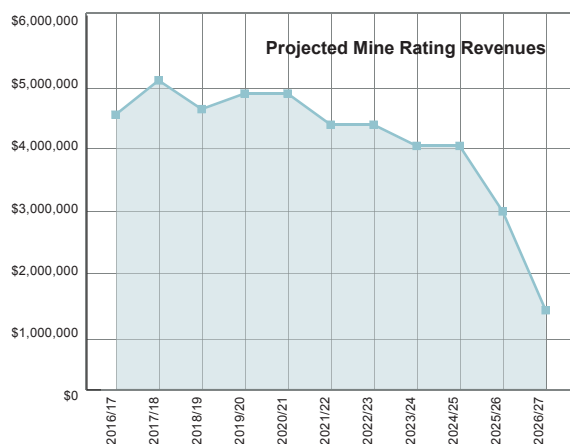


Figure 2 illustrates the Muswellbrook LGA unemployment rate between December 2012 and December 2015:

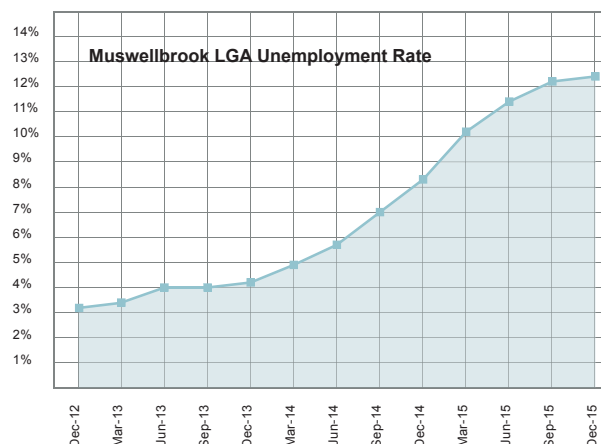


Figure 3 illustrates projected mine rating revenues for Muswellbrook Shire Council between 2016/17 and 2026/27:

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Small Area Labour Market September 2016

Alongside mine closures and job losses, there has also been a marked contraction in the mining services industry in the Shire's heavy industrial estate, including the collapse of large publically listed companies Subzero and ResCo Services, amongst others (with approximately 480 jobs lost in that sector).

The reversal in the long term projections for traded thermal coal is also expected to result in a substantial projected decline in the mining category of Council's general rating as illustrated in the following figure.

<sup>1</sup> 2022 (Liddell Power Station) and 2036 (Bayswater Power Station)



face surveys, and to make submissions in response to strategic documents such as the Denman Town Centre Strategy, the Muswellbrook Town Centre Strategy and the Local Environmental Plan.

Most recently, Council completed a series of community engagement Listening Posts at key locations around the Shire in which the community identified their priorities for the future of economic prosperity, social equity, environmental sustainability, cultural vitality, community infrastructure and community leadership over the next ten years and beyond.

The community has made it clear they are proud to live in Muswellbrook but are concerned about future job opportunities. They believe that Muswellbrook should be the Regional Centre for the Upper Hunter with infrastructure that is matching – such as a Regional Convention and Performance Centre, a children's water park and a new exhibition and show facility.

The community is rightly concerned that Council respond rapidly and effectively in its strategic response to the issue as well as the other local issues and/or mega-trends that have been identified in surveys or in community or councillor feedback.

### A non-exhaustive list of these local issues and/or mega-trends is set out below.

These are, in broad terms, the key issues and challenges that the community – either through its State or Regional planning or through its local consultation has asked the Council to 'own' and, in response, to develop clear strategies to meet.

#### Local economic prosperity issues

Structural decline or uncertainty in the thermal coal industry, associated job losses, and the need to diversify the Shire's economic base

A rising middle class – particularly in south east Asia, and an associated growing demand for agricultural products

The growth of the knowledge, creativity, and digital economy and a reshaping labour market

The continued growth of the services sector and the concentration of services in Regional centres

A growing visitor economy

The movement from a linear to a circular economy

#### Local cultural vitality issues

A variety of opportunities for cultural participation

Opportunity to experience high quality national and international arts and culture

#### Local community infrastructure issues

Integrated footpath & cycleways

Improved accessibility to Council's facilities

Maintain and expand infrastructure to support Muswellbrook achieve Regional Centre status.

Ageing Water and Wastewater Infrastructure

#### Local community leadership issues

Community consultation and participation in council planning

Workforce and asset management

Business Improvement

#### Local social equity issues

An aging population and changing retirement patterns

Social disadvantage and social exclusion – particularly in Muswellbrook South

Early childhood education and social advantage indicia

Improving local liveability and amenity

Easily accessible venues to appreciate and participate in arts and culture

#### Local environmental sustainability issues

Climate change

Loss/re-establishment/rehabilitation of native vegetation and vegetation connectivity

Poor riparian environments and poor public access to waterways

# Overview

Over the past twelve months, Council has undertaken a comprehensive program of consultation with its communities and stakeholders as part of the development of this Plan.

Residents have been invited to attend community forums, participate in telephone and face-to-face surveys and make submissions as part of the preparation of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework and a range of whole-of-community strategic planning exercises.

Council is determined to meet the challenges set out in Chapter 1 head on. Whilst surveys indicate that the community is increasingly happy with the way that Council is tackling the “big issues”, the surveys also indicate that the community is asking Council to do much more and sooner. This Plan sets out the overarching goals that will provide a framework for the strategies, which Council, through consultation with the community and key stakeholders, has adopted in order to best meet the challenges of the present and future.

Council has particularly focussed on a whole of local government approach, integrated closely with the Hunter Regional Plan 2036, Premier’s Priorities in Action and State Priorities. Council realises that the ambit list of possible projects and programs vastly exceeds the available resources and in the prioritisation of projects and programs, Council proposes to elevate those projects and programs which deal with multiple issues, achieve multiple goals or have the greatest benefit to cost outcomes.



*Face-to-face surveys were conducted at key locations around Muswellbrook Shire*

The community’s goal outlined in this Plan have also been informed by, and aligned with the priorities and actions endorsed in the Premier’s Priorities in Action, and NSW State Priorities and other NSW Government plans to grow the economy, deliver infrastructure, protect the vulnerable, reduce human impacts on the environment and improve health, education and public services across NSW. Specific elements of those goals are also aligned with the goals and directions identified in the vision outlined in the Hunter Regional Plan 2036 which will guide the delivery of greater prosperity for communities across the Hunter region, including those in the Muswellbrook Shire.

# 1. Economic Prosperity

Jobs and job security continues to dominate as the primary economic issue in the Shire. In the Baseline Data Survey, just twelve percent of people agreed that there were good employment prospects for locals within the area. "Increased employment" was also the highest response to the question "If you had a magic wand, and could fix one thing what would that be?"

Between December 2012 and December 2015, unemployment rose from 3.1% to 12.4%. There is also a feeling of uncertainty about the future of thermal coal mining and the consequential impact of the decline on that industry on the community's economic viability.

Underpinning that feeling of uncertainty, are planned closure dates for a number of coal mining operations and power stations including: Muswellbrook Coal, Mangoola Coal, Liddell Coal, and Liddell Power Station within the next ten years. The impact of the job losses will only partially be offset by the development of Mt Pleasant Coal.

Traded thermal coal is an industry in structural decline, and this is also building into the pessimism around jobs.



*Job security continues to dominate as the primary economic issue in Muswellbrook Shire*

## Goal 1: Support job growth

The community told us their top concern is for the future of job opportunities in the Shire. There is, however, optimism about the future because of the Shire's natural and built advantages. The Shire has well maintained road and rail infrastructure, proximity to major domestic markets (Sydney and Newcastle) and, through the Port of Newcastle, international markets – including South Eastern Asia, and an abundance of natural resources – including water, minerals and soils.



*Muswellbrook Shire has well maintained road and rail infrastructure.*

## Goal 2: Diversify the economy, facilitate the development of intensive agriculture and other growth industries, make the Shire a more attractive place to invest and do business

Consultation around the review of the Local Environmental Plan, has reinforced the community's desire to make better use of mining 'buffer' land for intensive agriculture and other value-adding purposes.

A stated outcome of a number of consultations and plans including the Upper Hunter Diversification Strategy and the Hunter Regional Plan is to diversify and build a more resilient Upper Hunter economy.

## Goal 3: Facilitate greater access to higher education and participation in the knowledge and creativity economy

The need to transition the local economy also creates a need to help facilitate the reshaping of the local workforce. The local workforce has relatively low levels of education – particularly higher education.



Over the next ten years, it is anticipated that a number of trends will impact upon the workforce including increased automation and a higher demand for knowledge and creative skills. Council has been working closely with Hunter TAFE and the University of Newcastle on projects such as the Sam Adams Residential Student College, the Tertiary Education Centre, the Upper Hunter Innovation Hub, and the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music in an effort to increase opportunities for locals to pursue higher education. Council has also been working closely with the University of Newcastle to encourage research and innovation in industries in which the Shire has a comparative advantage – such as rural based renewable energy development and intensive agriculture.

#### **Goal 4: Develop Muswellbrook as a regional centre**

Our community was also clear that they see Muswellbrook as the regional centre of the Upper Hunter, which is backed by the NSW Government's Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan. It is argued that the growth of the town will generate demand for jobs and services that will help offset some of the long term decline in the thermal coal and power industries. The development of Muswellbrook as a Regional centre has been reinforced in the Hunter Regional Plan.

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants its towns, villages and rural areas to be well planned and managed, with respect for the Shire's history, heritage and environment. The community wants the town centres to encourage economic and cultural growth and have attractive open civic and green space that are active, attract investment and cultural activity. The Muswellbrook Shire community wants Muswellbrook to be a 'Strategic Centre' for the Upper Hunter.



*Martin Rush at the opening of the Upper Hunter Tertiary Education Centre in August 2016.*

### **How Muswellbrook's Community Goals align with NSW Government Priorities and Plans:**

#### **Premier's Priorities In Action:**

Creating Jobs; Improving education results.

#### **State Priorities:**

Strong budget and economy; encourage business investment; boosting apprenticeships; Improving Aboriginal education outcomes.

#### **Hunter Regional Plan 2036:**

to be the leading regional economy in Australia; enhance inter-regional linkages to support economic growth; transform the productivity of the Upper Hunter; greater housing choice and jobs; protect the economic functions of employment land; strengthen the economic self-determination of Aboriginal communities; develop advanced manufacturing, defence and aerospace hubs; promote innovative small business and growth in the service sectors; grow tourism in the industry; protect and enhance agricultural productivity; manage the ongoing use of natural resources; diversify and grow the energy sector.

## 2. Social Equity and Inclusion

Whilst the Baseline Data Survey indicated that a majority of residents of the Muswellbrook Shire are engaged, feel a sense of pride in their communities and feel safe and secure in their homes, there remain a number of indicators where the community is seeking more, specifically in youth services, facilities and services for older people and a desire for support for local communities. There has also been considerable support for past liveability and amenity improvements such as the seed funding of a cinema, provision of a Regional quality playground, construction of a new home for the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music and Town Centre renewal. There is an expectation that these improvements will continue.



*The community seeks more youth and aged care facilities and services.*

### **Goal 5: Continue to improve the affordability, liveability and amenity of the Shire's communities**

The community supports Council's concerted effort to advocate for improvements in Muswellbrook South and other parts of the Shire with high concentrations of social disadvantage. The community continues to raise the need for action to address the significant structural issues associated with the built environment and lack of support services for residents living in these areas, all of which contribute to social isolation and inhibit access to existing services.

### **Goal 6: Stabilise the tenancy turnover in the Shire's social housing**

Since the last community strategic plan, there has been a marked deterioration in the stability of social housing tenants – approximately 30% of tenants coming to live in Muswellbrook's

community housing transition out within twelve months. Moreover, 44% of tenants coming to live in Muswellbrook's social housing were homeless at the time of placement and 94% of tenants are in the highest level of need. The issues of social disadvantage with which the Muswellbrook community presently deals are much more complex and layered than ever before.

This is placing enormous demand on social welfare services as well as on education, health and other social services. There is also evidence that the service provision is less effective because of the instability in the social housing tenancies.

### **Goal 7: Build social inclusion and improve the delivery of social services**

The Wollombi Road residential area has a history of socio-economic and geographic disadvantage, for which the community continues to want change. Council has drafted a Wollombi Road Residential Precinct Master Plan which offers a way for revitalisation of this neighbourhood. The NSW Government, which has primary responsibility for social welfare and which owns the majority of the social housing in the Wollombi Road neighbourhood has indicated support for the Master Plan but is yet to provide any significant financial support to achieve its outcomes. Nonetheless, the NSW Government and its private sector management contractor have committed to working with Council to build social inclusion and improve the delivery of social services into the Shire.

### **Goal 8: Retention and expansion of quality and affordable child care services.**

Community members continue to call for enhanced support for, and increased access to, early childhood education, childcare facilities and the associated children's services in the Muswellbrook Shire region. Since that time new services and additional places have become available however it, remains that not everyone in the community with young children knows what services are available, understands the value of early learning and the importance of removing barriers to early learning. In response, Council, in partnership with Mt Arthur Coal, developed the Muswellbrook Children's Services Strategic Plan which identified that all children require care and early learning opportunities prior

to the commencement of school – at home and outside of home. The Strategic Plan has identified measures to address specific gaps and opportunities, particularly for families that may be experiencing social disadvantage and exclusion, including single parent families; transient families; those children who have not attended child care, preschool or a ready-for-school program, and children in need of ongoing speech pathology and occupational therapy. Each of these issues has the potential to contribute to existing and future social exclusion. In response to these ongoing needs, the Community Strategic Plan sets out a goal to continue to address this area of need.

### **Goal 9: Facilitate opportunities to expand seniors living.**

By the standards of other Local Government Areas, Muswellbrook Shire has a small ageing population. One of the factors in the past is that many residents, upon retirement seek a lifestyle away from Muswellbrook because there has been a lack of supported and integrated seniors' living. Whilst the development of the Calvary Muswellbrook Retirement Living has gone some way to address this market gap, it remains a concern of the community of the community that as the mega-trend towards an ageing population and changing retirement

patterns emerges, Council has a responsibility to facilitate options for its residents to be able to enjoy their latter years in their own communities, with the support of responsive care and health services, and their families and friends.

### **Goal 10: Further the process of Aboriginal reconciliation in the Shire**

Council has been an active partner in the reconciliation process with local Aboriginal people since 1997 at which time Council convened a Reconciliation Committee in partnership with the Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council. The Committee has achieved a number of significant milestones including the commissioning of a Reconciliation Mural. There is, however, much still to do. Council is keen to partner with the Land Council on a number of new initiatives involving the ecological and cultural enhancement of land it holds in the Shire together with other projects of cultural significance.

## **How Muswellbrook's Community Goals align with NSW Government Priorities and Plans:**

### **Premier's Priorities In Action:**

Reducing domestic violence; tackling childhood obesity; improving education results; protecting our kids; reduce youth homelessness; improving government services; creating jobs; building infrastructure; improving service levels in hospitals.

### **State Priorities:**

Increasing housing supply; creating sustainable social housing; increasing cultural participation; improving Aboriginal education outcomes; reducing violent crime

### **Hunter Regional Plan 2036:**

Thriving Communities; create healthy built environments through good design; enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces; revitalise existing communities; greater housing choice and jobs: promote housing diversity; deliver infrastructure to support growth and communities.aerospace hubs; promote innovative small business and growth in the service sectors; grow tourism in the industry; protect and enhance agricultural productivity; manage the ongoing use of natural resources; diversify and grow the energy sector.



### 3. Environmental Sustainability

The Shire has an enviable ecological environment situated between the Barrington Tops and the pristine wilderness of the Wollombi National Park World Heritage Area (which comprises 43% of the Shire). Nonetheless, a substantial part of the Shire

**43%** of Muswellbrook Shire  
is national park

has been disturbed for the purpose of open cut coal mining and the community has expressed concern about the ongoing rehabilitation of mined land, air quality, and noise associated with coal mining.

#### **Goal 11: Higher quality final landforms with shallower voids and more emphasis on progressive rehabilitation with local workforce participation**

There is strong community concern about the quality of the final rehabilitation of mined land and final landform voids and the long term appearance of the post-mining landscape including the overburden emplacements.

The community has expressed a view that it wants the final landform voids to be 'filled in' and the overburden emplacements to look much more natural.

#### **Goal 12: Enhance native vegetation connectivity across the Upper Hunter**

Agricultural and mining practices over many years have reduced native vegetation connectivity across the Hunter Valley floor and between the Wollombi National Park World Heritage Area and the Great Eastern Ranges. The community supports initiatives to enhance native vegetation connectivity in these areas.

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants to see the native vegetation of the Shire connect with corridors of remnant endangered vegetation across the Upper Hunter to maintain the natural beauty of the region and a connection with history and heritage of the Shire.

#### **Goal 13: Our local rivers and creeks are enhanced, utilised and valued**

In the Baseline Data Survey, just 31% of people agreed that local rivers and creeks were healthy.

It was also noted that the rivers and creeks were largely inaccessible to the public. The survey is consistent with analysis which demonstrates that the Shire's rivers and creeks are in very poor ecological condition.



*In August 2016 non-indigenous trees were cleared along Muscle Creek, near Bell Street, then replenished with Australia Natives.*

#### **Goal 14: Support initiatives which reduce the community's impact on the environment**

The community has long been supportive of efforts to reduce its impact on the environment and became the first local government area in the Hunter to deploy a three bin waste management system many years ago. It also has one of the highest recycling rates in the Hunter and reuses 100% of its waste water. The community continues to express its view that it must minimise its impact on the environment but has increasingly emphasised that efforts to minimise waste – particularly landfill waste, must not become unaffordable. This is particularly so since the introduction of the NSW Government's

Environmental Waste Levy which now accounts for approximately 60% of the fees at Council's waste management centre. It has led to substantial fee increases at the waste management centre over a relatively short period of time which, in turn, appears to have dampened enthusiasm for further waste reduction initiatives in community surveys

Nonetheless, the need to continue to reduce waste is an emerging mega-trend as our economy moves from being linear to circular in terms of inputs. There are emerging economic opportunities for the Shire in becoming a leader in this field. For that reason, Council continues to support initiatives which reduce community impact on the environment.



*In 2016 Council buildings were fitted with a total of 237kw of solar panels.*

### **Goal 15: Support Federal and State initiatives to reduce the human impact on climate change**

Although climate change does not feature as a significant issue in Council's Baseline Survey, the evidence is clear that human development has had a substantial and permanent impact on the world's climate. The consequences for the Shire, being a relatively dry part of the planet, are substantial – particularly on agriculture and water security.

Moreover, Council acknowledges that the Muswellbrook local government area makes one of the largest contributions to global warming of councils in NSW as a result of its economic reliance on thermal coal and thermal coal power generation.

While the Federal and NSW Governments have primary responsibility for transitioning the Shire's economy to a low carbon future, Council is committed to being a partner in that exercise.

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants to see improved regeneration and greening of mined lands, improved air quality and the protection of biodiversity and remnant endangered flora and fauna.

## **How Muswellbrook's Community Goals align with NSW Government Priorities and Plans:**

### **Premier's Priorities In Action:**

Keeping our environment clean.

### **State Priorities:**

A biodiversity-rich natural environment; protect and connect natural areas; sustain water quality and security; increase resilience to hazards and climate change.

### **NSW Draft Climate Change Fund Strategic Plan:**

NSW Aspirational objectives: achieve net-zero emissions of 2050; NSW is more resilient to a changing climate; lead by example to reduce emissions in government operations.

## 4. Cultural Vitality



*Students attending the annual Aboriginal Flag Raising Ceremony in front of the Reconciliation Mural.*

The Shire has a rich and vibrant array of cultural activities. The Regional Art Gallery is highly regarded with a valuable collection of contemporary Australian works from almost all the well regarded Australian artists from the 1950s onwards. It also hosts an Art Prize which boasts the highest prize value of any regional gallery in Australasia at \$70,000. The Shire is also home to the Upper Hunter Conservatorium of Music, the Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter Eisteddfod, the Muswellbrook Amateur Theatre Society, Arts Upper Hunter and a number of other cultural bodies.

### Goal 16: Conserve the Heritage and History of the Shire

The heritage and history of the Shire is core to its identity, culture and vitality. Council recognises that heritage requires protection and conservation if it is to be enjoyed by future generations. Places of heritage significance provide a link to the past informing us about our cultural history and providing a sense of identity and community. They may consist of landscapes, places, buildings, structures, relics or works which are valued not simply because they are old but because they are associated with our history, people and events of meaning. It is a goal of Council to protect and ensure the long term conservation of the Shire's heritage for the benefit of present and future generations.

### Goal 17: Facilitate options to improve cultural activities in the Shire.

Over the last four years Council has been exploring ways to improve local events and cultural activities as a way of meeting the community's desire for a

'sense of place' improve liveability and encourage visitors.

The community is justifiably proud of its cultural vitality but has repeatedly indicated that the quality of performances, particularly from the Amateur Theatre Society and the UHCM Concert Orchestra (amongst other groups) warrants the construction of a Regional Performance Space.

### Goal 18: Facilitate cultural activities and events which engage the community and visitors, and which create a 'sense of place' and identity.

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants to grow and expand community cultural activities and events and wants to attract growing numbers of visitors to the region. The community wants to expand the Blue Heeler Film Festival, the Bottoms Up Festival, the Shire's Shows and Events that feature and promote the strengths and values of the Shire, of love for family, community, heritage, history, the land and agriculture.

### How Muswellbrook's Community Goals align with NSW Government Priorities and Plans:

#### Premier's Priorities In Action:

Creating jobs; building infrastructure.

#### State Priorities:

Improving Aboriginal education outcomes; increasing cultural participation.

#### Hunter Regional Plan 2036:

Transform the productivity of the Upper Hunter; grow tourism in the region; create healthy built environments through good design; enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces; revitalise existing communities; deliver infrastructure to support growth and communities; strengthen the economic self-determination of Aboriginal communities.



## 5. Community Infrastructure



*This new intersection at Crinoline Street in Denman improves safety*

Council maintains a road network of almost 700 km; Council has approximately 73 kms of stormwater drainage measures and over 1,000 rural culverts; 45 maintained carparks; 170 km of kerb and guttering; \$12.4M worth of traffic safety and control devices; and 40 km of footpaths and cycleways.

The community has high expectations of its infrastructure and Council has over many years worked to ensure that the renewal backlog has been addressed through significant investment. The level of service of our mining affected roads network has in large part been upgraded to ensure the needs of the mining industry and the jobs it supports are being met.

In the Baseline Data Survey from 2016, a desire for improvements in the Shire's road network continues to rate highly, and Council continues to commit significant resources to properly maintain these crucial community assets.

There is however more to do with respect to other asset classes, including upgrades to the Shire's aquatic centres, Council owned buildings and recreation spaces and new footpaths and cycleways. Well maintained community infrastructure helps enable Council to provide quality lifestyle infrastructure in support of our residents and to attract and sustain further economic and population growth.

### **Goal 19: Our community's infrastructure is planned well, is safe and reliable, and provides required levels of service.**

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants safe, reliable, roads, foot paths, cycle ways, car parks and drains that are well designed and built to support economic growth and public health. The community wants clean and inviting civic precincts that provide opportunity for community interaction, are easy to access and provide pleasant enjoyable environments.



*Footpath, street furniture and landscaping works in Bridge Street Muswellbrook completed in 2016.*

## **Goal 20: A safe, secure and reliable water supply and sewerage services are provided to all residents that will ensure public health.**

Council provides water treatment and reticulated drinking water supply services to the urban areas of Muswellbrook, Denman and Sandy Hollow and sewerage reticulation and treatment to the urban areas of Muswellbrook and Denman. The fully regulated Hunter River provides a high reliability source for both Muswellbrook and Denman. Sandy Hollow relies for its water supply on the Goulburn River, which over the course of the last drought proved reliable for the village at its current size.

Muswellbrook Shire Council meets each of the water quality benchmarks set by the NSW Office of Water and will continue to do so.

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants clean, affordable and healthy water and waste management services that are sustainable and have a low impact on the environment.



*Council water technician testing water from the Hunter River.*

## **Goal 21: The road, footpath and cycleway networks are integrated and allow for the safe movement of residents around the Shire**

The community seek well planned, maintained and safe footpaths, cycleways and carparks to assist with connectivity through the urban areas and across the Shire.

## **How Muswellbrook's Community Goals align with NSW Government Priorities and Plans:**

### **Premier's Priorities In Action:**

Building infrastructure.

### **State Priorities:**

Improving road travel reliability.

### **Hunter Regional Plan 2036:**

Thriving communities: enhance access to recreational facilities and connect open spaces; Greater housing choice and jobs: deliver infrastructure to support growth and communities; A biodiversity-rich natural environment: sustain water quality and security.

## 6. Community Leadership

Council enjoys a high overall satisfaction rating among members of its communities. Civic and community leadership plays an important role in ensuring that the needs and aspirations of the community can be and achieved by Council.

It is vital that those sections of the community and individuals whose voice may not normally be heard in community discussions are included in community decision making. Those from culturally diverse backgrounds, young people, those experiencing social exclusion and people in geographically isolated areas, single parents and the elderly are often not heard. The Baseline Community Survey indicated that Council has room for improvement in the way communicates with the community and involves them in decision making.

Council strives for transparent and collaborative leadership, which is essential for good governance and maintaining ongoing community support for Council's activities.

Residents and community groups are encouraged and empowered to participate in their communities, building capacity to help influence decision making outcomes to bring about positive change in the community now and going forward into the future.

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**Goal 22: Collaborative and responsive community leadership that meets the expectations and anticipates the needs of the community.**



The Muswellbrook Shire community wants leadership that is proactive and honest, that genuinely communicates with the community, listens to what the community has to say and advocates with other levels of government on behalf of the community.

**Goal 23: Genuine and well informed community participation in decision making.**

A well-functioning, properly resourced and efficient Council is crucial in helping the community achieve its vision for the future, and to ensure that its desires and expectations are able to be met. Council will continue to build capacity within the organisation, seek improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the services and infrastructure it delivers, and be a responsive and consultative Council deeply engaged in its community.

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**Goal 24: A council that is well managed, efficient and properly resourced and that is responsive to its communities and stakeholders.**

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants Council to spend public money wisely, to provide friendly and quick customer service, to be open and provide information on council activities that is up to date and easy to understand.

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**Goal 25: A sustainable council that is a best practice employer providing a safe, happy and productive workplace.**

The Muswellbrook Shire community wants Council to employ the best people for the job, to be a fair and equitable workplace that is focused on providing excellent service to the community.

### How Muswellbrook's Community Goals align with NSW Government Priorities and Plans:

#### Premier's Priorities In Action:

Improving government services; faster housing approvals; driving public sector diversity.

#### State Priorities:

Delivering strong budgets; Better Government digital services.



# Appendix 1 – Summary of community goals

## Economic Prosperity

- Goal 1: Support Job Growth
- Goal 2: Diversify the economy, facilitate the development of intensive agriculture and other growth industries, make the Shire a more attractive place to invest and do business
- Goal 3: Facilitate greater access to higher education and participation in the knowledge and creativity economy
- Goal 4: Develop Muswellbrook as a regional centre

## Social Equity and Inclusion

- Goal 5: Continue to improve the affordability, liveability and amenity of the Shire's communities
- Goal 6: Stabilise the tenancy turnover in the Shire's social housing
- Goal 7: Build social inclusion and improve the delivery of social services
- Goal 8: Retention and expansion of quality and affordable child care services.
- Goal 9: Facilitate opportunities to expand seniors living.
- Goal 10: Further the process of Aboriginal reconciliation in the Shire

## Environmental Sustainability

- Goal 11: Higher quality final landforms with shallower voids and more emphasis on progressive rehabilitation with local workforce participation
- Goal 12: Enhance Native Vegetation Connectivity Across The Upper Hunter
- Goal 13: Our local rivers and creeks are enhanced, utilised and valued
- Goal 14: Support initiatives which reduce the community's impact on the environment

- Goal 15: Support Federal and State initiatives to reduce the human impact on climate change

## Cultural Vitality

- Goal 16: Conserve the Heritage and History of the Shire
- Goal 17: Facilitate options to improve cultural activities in the Shire.
- Goal 18: Facilitate cultural activities and events which engage the community and visitors, and which create a 'sense of place' and identity.

## Community Infrastructure

- Goal 19: Our community's infrastructure is planned well, is safe and reliable, and provides required levels of service.
- Goal 20: A safe, secure and reliable water supply and sewerage services are provided to all residents that will ensure public health.
- Goal 21: The road, footpath and cycleway networks are integrated and allow for the safe movement of residents around the Shire.

## Community Leadership

- Goal 22: Collaborative and responsive community leadership that meets the expectations and anticipates the needs of the community.
- Goal 23: Genuine and well informed community participation in decision making.
- Goal 24: A council that is well managed, efficient and properly resourced and that is responsive to its communities and stakeholders.
- Goal 25: A sustainable council that is a best practice employer providing a safe, happy and productive workplace.