

# Community Strategic Plan 2025-2035



## Acknowledgement of Country

Muswellbrook Shire Council would like to respectfully acknowledge the local Aboriginal People who are the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land.

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## Acknowledgements

Muswellbrook Shire Council would like to acknowledge and thank all community members, businesses, partner agencies, and other stakeholders who participated in the consultation process. Your valuable contributions have helped shape our shared vision and priorities for the future, fostering a collaborative path forward for our community.

# Message from the Mayor



I am proud to have worked so closely with the community to develop the Muswellbrook Community Strategic Plan 2025–2035. This plan reflects our shared vision for the future, shaped by the hopes, ideas, and values of our community.

Muswellbrook has a strong proud history as a leader in energy generation and coal mining, but as our economy changes, one of our biggest challenges, and opportunity, is to prepare our community and business for new possibilities to prosper. This plan marks the start of an exciting new chapter in the history of Muswellbrook Shire.

Our region is in a unique position to lead Australia's renewable energy future, attracting innovation, investment and opportunity to our region for years to come.

We've listened closely to residents, businesses, and community groups to learn what matters most to you. Your input has helped shape this plan, which focuses on creating a thriving, inclusive and sustainable future for everyone.

This plan is more than a guide – it's a promise to work together to keep Muswellbrook a place we're all proud to call home.

I encourage you to stay involved, share your ideas, and help us bring this vision to life.

Together, we can build a brighter, more connected community and thriving future for Muswellbrook.

**Councillor Jeff Drayton**  
Mayor  
Muswellbrook Shire Council

# Message from the General Manager



Council is committed to engaging and empowering the community to be involved in setting and delivering the future direction of the Shire. Through our recent community engagement, you told us that attracting new businesses, supporting business growth, and planning for the future are top priorities. You also expressed a deep love for our Shire and a strong desire to protect and improve your quality of life by investing in better infrastructure and connectivity.

Council has an important role in working with the community to create the Community Strategic Plan. This plan is required by the NSW Government under the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework. It guides all of Council's strategic plans, like the Resourcing Strategy, Delivery Program, Operational Plan, and key strategies such as the Environmental Strategy, Disability Inclusion Plan and Local Strategic Planning Statement.

Council is committed to delivering projects that reflect the community's values and goals. We will maintain a strong financial plan to support important projects while being responsible with our budget. Our goal is to make our Shire more liveable, vibrant, and easy to access.

Our work focuses on delivering services that support economic growth and improve quality of life.

We will focus on five key areas to ensure together we:

**are a strong community**

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**support a vibrant regional centre**

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**have a thriving economy**

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**create a great place to live**

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**are working together.**

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Our community has shared their vision for the next 10 years, and we're committed to making it happen. We will align your goals with Council's priorities and work with State and Federal Government agencies and other partners to bring this vision to life.

**Derek Finnigan**  
General Manager  
Muswellbrook Shire Council

# 1. Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework

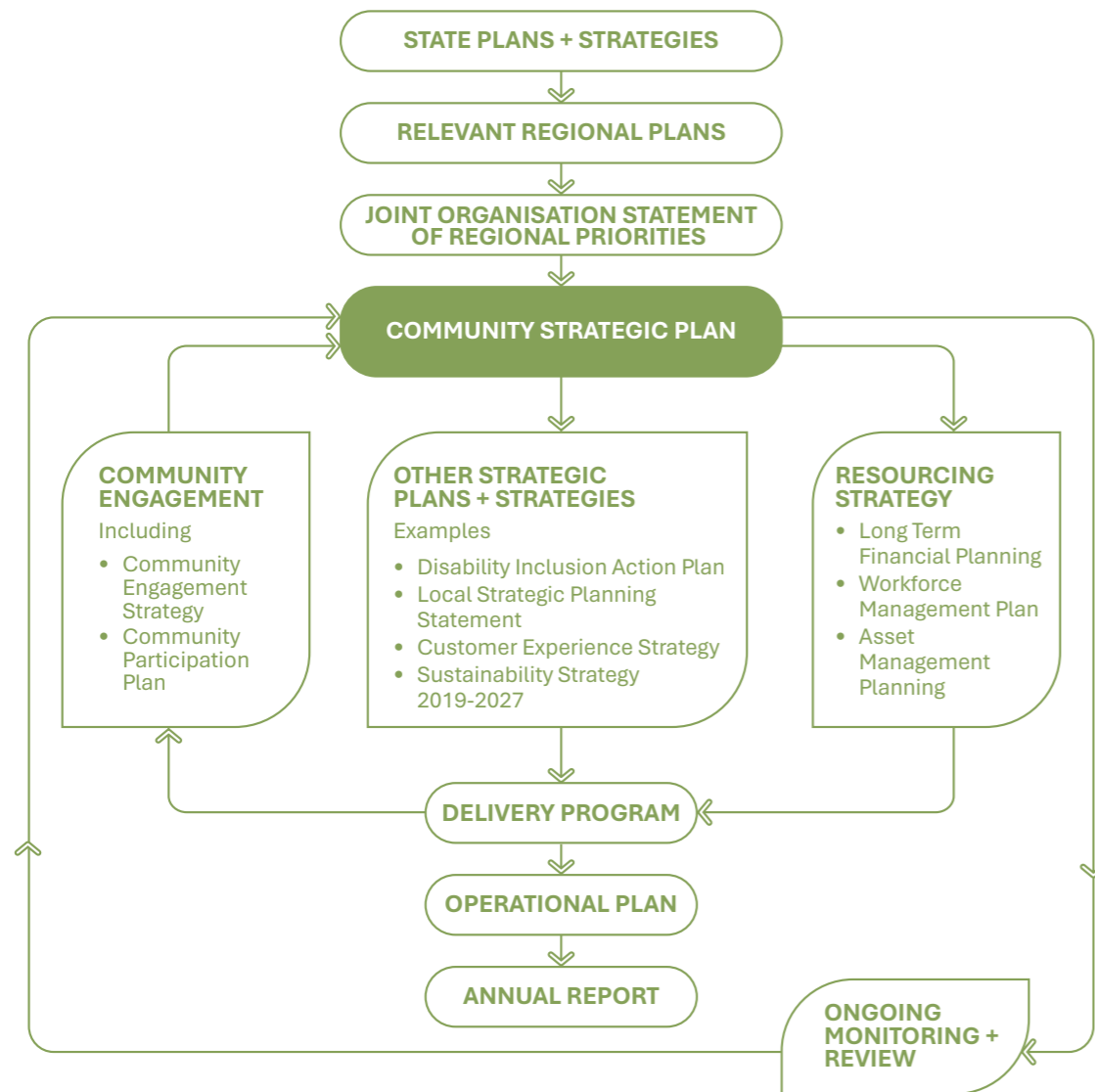
Muswellbrook Shire Council's goals and daily operations are guided by the NSW Local Government Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework. The Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework links all council plans together, so planning is completed in a more coordinated way.

## Community Strategic Plan

The Community Strategic Plan provides a strong base for long-term planning for both Council and the community. The Plan includes a shared vision for the future, connecting the community's goals with Council's decisions over the next 10 years. It will guide Council's plans, strategies, and policies, such as the Resourcing Strategy, Delivery Program, Operational Plan, Environmental Strategy, Disability Inclusion Plan and Local Strategic Planning Statement. This community vision will also be shared with other agencies, government departments, and stakeholders to help guide their long-term planning.

The diagram below outlines the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework and how the Community Strategic Plan is connected to other Council strategies and plans

Diagram 1 – Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework



# 2. Community Vision

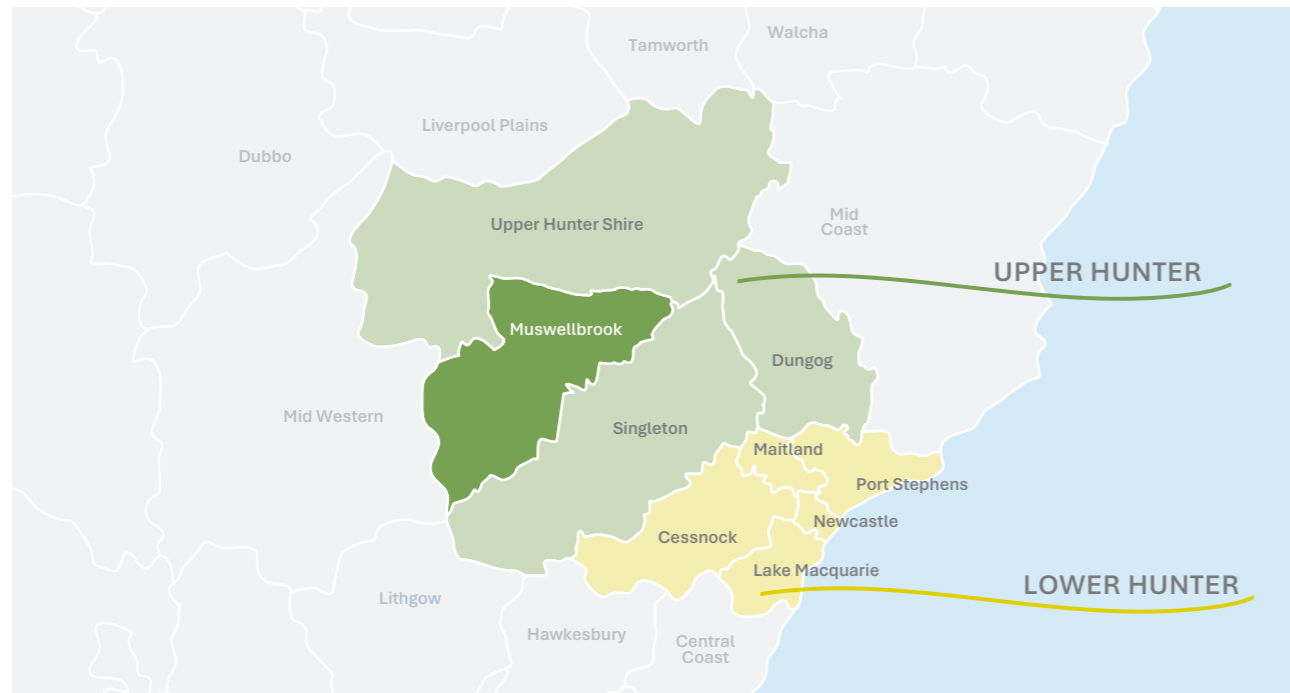
**Our Shire is powered by opportunity, with space to grow and shape a thriving future.**









# 3. Community Snapshot

## Location

Muswellbrook Shire is located in the Hunter Region of New South Wales, Australia. It is a lively and diverse area known for its rich history, beautiful landscapes and strong industries. Muswellbrook, approximately 130km north-west of Newcastle. The Shire consists of two large towns, Muswellbrook and Denman, and outlying rural communities including Sandy Hollow, Wybong, Baerami, Martindale, Widden, McCullys Gap and Muscle Creek.








-  **3,402km<sup>2</sup>**  
land area
-  **43%**  
of land coverage is National Park
-  **8**  
State Heritage registered items
-  **4,473**  
recorded Aboriginal sites

-  **16,778**  
population
-  **20,320**  
projected population by 2036

0-9 yrs	13.8%
10-19 yrs	13.7%
20-29 yrs	12.2%
30-39 yrs	13.8%
40-49 yrs	12.6%
50-69 yrs	23.5%
70+ yrs	10.2%

## Main industry

Muswellbrook Shire is the main centre for New South Wales' power generation capacity.

-  **69.6%**  
Mining
-  **11.9%**  
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services
-  **3.5%**  
Construction
-  **3%**  
Manufacturing
-  **2.3%**  
Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services

## Economy

-  **\$12 billion**  
Economic output
-  **11,341**  
total jobs
-  **3,751**  
mining jobs
-  **869**  
electricity, gas, water and waste services jobs
-  **764**  
construction jobs
-  **655**  
retail jobs

## Council Services

-  **628km**  
road network (approx)
-  **47km**  
footpaths and cycleways (approx)
-  **86km**  
storm water drainage (approx)
-  **1**  
community recycling centre
-  **7**  
sporting fields
-  **4**  
parks
-  **2**  
libraries
-  **2**  
swimming pools
-  **11**  
Rural Fire Stations
-  **3**  
cemeteries

# 4. Strategic Risks, Challenges and Opportunities

Like many local governments, Muswellbrook Shire Council faces a range of challenges due to its unique location, economy and demographic makeup. These challenges can impact Council's ability to deliver services, manage growth and plan for a sustainable future. Some of the key challenges for Muswellbrook Council include:

## Mining and the economy

Muswellbrook has long been economically reliant on coal mining, with major industries such as coal extraction and power generation driving much of the local economy. With the global shift toward renewable energy and the closure of coal-fired power stations like Liddell, our region faces the challenge of diversifying its economy.

Coal mining plays a crucial role in our region's history and economy, providing employment and driving infrastructure development. Mining is a significant employer in Muswellbrook and the Hunter region, providing jobs directly in the mines as well as supporting industries such as transport, engineering and services.

Council will keep planning for the shift to renewable energy, as well as agriculture and tourism, to ensure long-term economic sustainability. We will also put strategies in place to retrain workers and attract new industries that create job opportunities.

## Planning for population growth

Muswellbrook has experienced limited population growth in recent years. However, demand for short term accommodation y driven by the mining industry and construction projects will continue to put pressure on our housing availability, our infrastructure (such as roads, public transport, and utilities) and community services.

The Shire is planning for a significant increase in our population as a desirable and comparatively affordable place to live, work and learn. As population growth continues, the demand for affordable housing is rising. Council faces the challenge of ensuring that there is enough housing available for all income levels, particularly in a market that can be influenced by the wealth generated in the mining industry.

## Health and social services

With a growing and ageing population (27% of our population is over 55 years old), Muswellbrook faces challenges in providing sufficient health services and infrastructure. Council will continue to work with NSW Health to address the challenges our local hospital and health facilities face like regional maternity care, aged care, and mental health services.

## Access to transport

While Muswellbrook is well-connected to regional hubs and major cities like Sydney and Newcastle through key road and rail networks, we recognise that our community and businesses still face challenges in accessing transport that meets their needs.

We know that public transport options in Muswellbrook can be limited, which can be a barrier for residents who rely on it for commuting or accessing essential services. Council will continue to explore solutions, such as improved bus services, active transport and better connections to regional transport networks.

## Education

While education opportunities in Muswellbrook are well-supported across primary and secondary schools, we know that supporting students at vocational and higher education level remains a challenge. Our schools provide strong academic programs alongside vocational training, preparing students for a variety of post-school pathways. However Council is committed to ensuring students can continue learning locally by providing higher education opportunities.

Council will continue to advocate for ongoing access to vocational education training (VET) through high school, specialised training providers, and apprenticeship programs linked to relevant local industries.

We believe in making life-long learning accessible to everyone, with resources for adult education being key for those seeking career advancement or development.

## Tourism

Muswellbrook Shire is the cornerstone of the Upper Hunter's equine and wine industries and is home to boutique producers of olives, cheese, camel milk and other artisan goods, enhancing its appeal as a destination for visitors seeking unique experiences.

Additionally, major transport routes like the New England Highway, Golden Highway and Bylong Valley Way connect the Shire to key regions, including the New England, Central West and Lower Hunter, making it an accessible and attractive stop for travellers.

Tourism contributes significantly to Muswellbrook's economy, with the total output from accommodation and food services valued at approximately \$82.6 million, representing 0.6% of the region's total output. This sector supports an estimated 505 jobs, accounting for 5% of the local workforce.

Most visitors to Muswellbrook Shire come from New South Wales, with Sydney being the largest source of travellers in recent years. People from regional NSW and Queensland also visit, making our Shire a popular destination for both local and regional tourists.

Council is committed to supporting the growth of tourism in the region.

## Government services

As a regional centre, Muswellbrook hosts several regional offices for State and Federal Government agencies, including:

**Hunter New England Local Health District**

**Corrective Services**

**Juvenile Justice**

**Department of Family and Community Services**

**NSW Police Local Area Command**

**Department of Human Services**

Muswellbrook's central location between the New England and Lower Hunter regions gives it a strategic advantage, making it easier for government agencies to serve the nearby areas. This position has helped make Muswellbrook an important hub for administration and services in the Upper Hunter.



## 5. Council's Role and Services

**Council plays an important role in providing services, building infrastructure and managing regulations for our community. The decisions we make at the local level directly affect life in our Shire.**

We deliver everyday services like bin collection, fixing local roads and running public swimming pools in Denman and Muswellbrook. We also manage key utilities, such as water and sewer systems, across the Shire (only 89 out of 128 councils in NSW provide water services).

In addition to essential services, Council supports culture and community activities. We run facilities like the Regional Art Centre, Denman Memorial Hall and local libraries, we also organise events for residents and visitors, like the Rock'n the Brook and partnering with Community events such as Denman Food, Wine and Film Festival.

Council also, drives policy change, influences decisions and plans for our community's future through land use planning and preparing for new industries.

Council works with local businesses, key stakeholders, governments, and community groups to meet the needs of our community. We will deliver the goals in this strategic plan by:

 <p><b>Delivering</b></p> <p>When Council directly manages an asset, infrastructure, or program, we can meet community needs using our own operating budget and resources.</p>	 <p><b>Partnering and collaborating</b></p> <p>When Council doesn't have control over things like emergency services, we will form partnerships, seek support, or work with other organisations and providers to help achieve results.</p>	 <p><b>Advocating</b></p> <p>Council can speak up for our community to ask for more funding or better outcomes for things like public transport or health care services.</p>
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## 6. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are 17 goals created in 2015 to help solve global problems and build a better future for everyone by 2030. These goals focus on challenges like poverty, education, clean energy, and protecting the planet.

In this plan, we show how our community goals match the Sustainable Development Goals and how Council will work towards these goals. This helps both Council and the community understand their role in making a difference, not just in our Shire but as part of a bigger, global effort.



# 7. Engaging Our Community

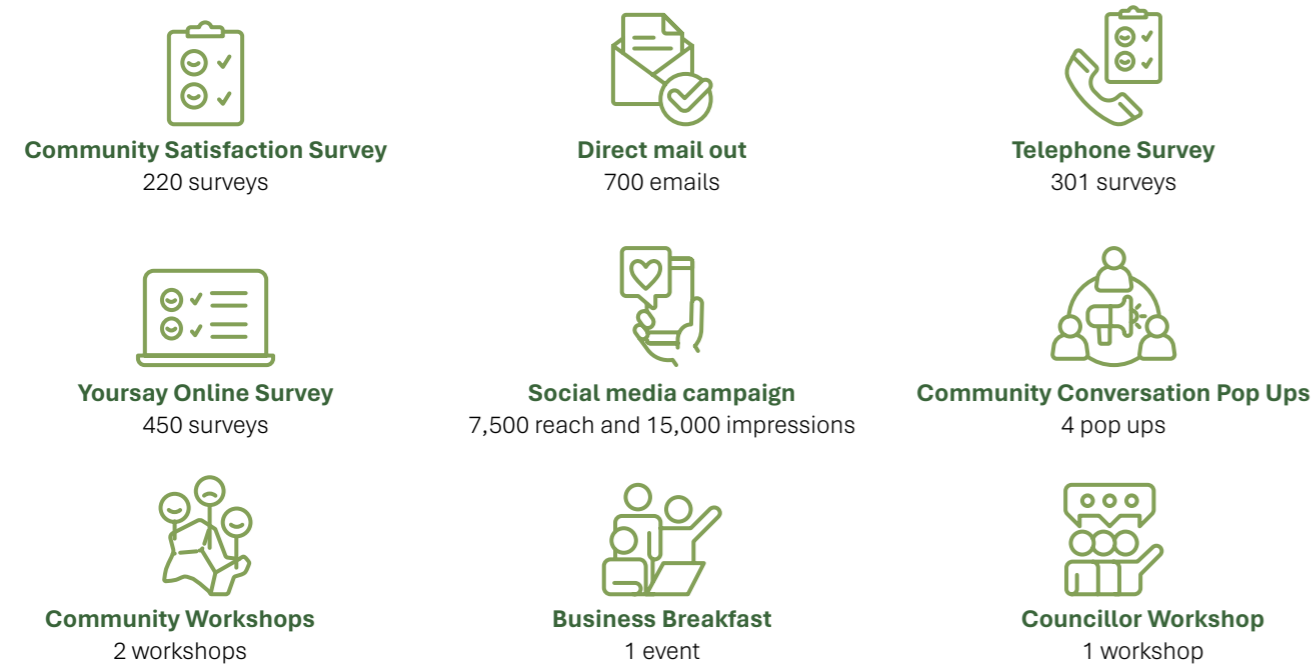
## Community Consultation

Council is committed to engaging with the community in the planning and delivery of Council's plans. Over a five (5) month period between July to November 2024, Council worked closely with the community to understand their hopes and priorities for Muswellbrook Shire over the next 10 years.

Our engagement program followed the Local Government Act 1993 and the Integrated Planning and Reporting framework and spanned a wide range of ages and demographics in our community, including hard to reach community groups. This wide range of insights helped us understand what our community values and what they want for the future of the Shire.



### How we engaged



Community Conversations Pop-Ups – Muswellbrook Fair



Bengalla Open Day Pop Up – Muswellbrook Show Ground



Business Breakfast Workshop

## What you told us

The key findings showed that you want Council to focus more on planning, development and economic growth.

We heard an emphasis on the importance of attracting new businesses, supporting existing ones, and preparing for future industry needs. On the other hand, there was less focus on community facilities like libraries and swimming pools, with residents preferring these services to stay as they are.

### Most loved aspects of our Shire

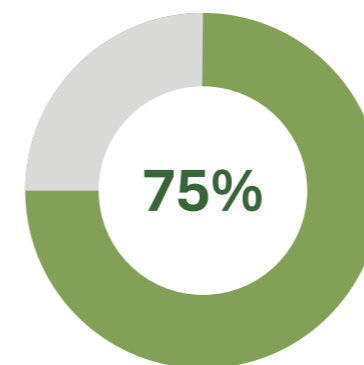
You also told us that location, family and friend connections, employment and a sense of community is what you most love about living, working and visiting the Muswellbrook Shire.

### Best things to have happened to the Shire in the last four years

You told us that the best things to have happened to the Shire over the last term of Council (4 years) has been improvements to sports and recreational opportunities, improvements to local services, facilities and infrastructure, more community events and the improvements to the Hunter Beach (Tarinpa) as part of the Hunter Beach Project.

- 27% valued the improvements to sports and recreation facilities including the BMX track, swimming pool upgrade and parks for kids.
- 17% highlighted the improvement to services, facilities and infrastructure.
- 12% said that there were more community events and activities.
- 11% valued the Hunter Beach/Hunter River improvements with a further 10% recognising the beautification and upgrades to main areas and improvements in general maintenance.

## Snapshot Summary



### Quality of life

Of residents rate their quality of life as *good*, *very good* or *excellent* living in Muswellbrook Shire

### Highest rated agreement statements

- I feel safe during the day (**81%**)
- I can call on a neighbour or local relative if I need help (**76%**)
- It is a safe place to live/I feel safe in my neighbourhood (**72%**)
- I talk positively to visitors about community (**67%**)
- People in the area have fair opportunity to participate in community life (**64%**)

### Lowest rated agreement statements

- There is a vibrant night life in this Shire (**9%**)
- Housing in the local area is affordable (**15%**)
- I am able to access adequate transport during the night (**16%**)
- Council listens to community concerns and views in making decisions (**17%**)
- Council offers good value for money (**17%**)

## 8. Aspirations and Measuring Success

### Vision

**Our Shire is powered by opportunity, with space to grow and shape a thriving future.**



### Themes



*We are a...*  
**strong community**



*We are a...*  
**regional centre**



*We are a...*  
**thriving economy**



*We are a...*  
**great place to live**



*We are...*  
**working together**



# We are a... strong community

## Community Outcome

Our community contributes to community life,  
is safe and has access to services and facilities.





# We are a... strong community

## What you told us

- 76% of residents can call on a neighbour or local relative if they need help.
- 64% of residents believe they have a fair opportunity to participate in community life.
- Only 27% of residents believe that hospital, medical and mental health services in the area are accessible and adequate. Those who identify as living with disability had significantly lower levels of satisfaction with access to adequate health services.
- 45% of our residents volunteer and get involved in our community.

*“I love the community we live in.  
That’s what it’s all about here.”*

Amy, Nurse - Muswellbrook

## How will we get there?

Deliver services and infrastructure aimed at improving community health at all stages of life



Advocate and collaborate with government and private partners to improve services relating to health with a strong focus on aged care, mental health and maternity services



Facilitate and support services and activities which promote inclusion and healthy lifestyles



Provide opportunities for all residents to participate in community life and feel a part of the community



Deliver programs, campaigns, facilities and infrastructure which improve community safety



Provide and support events and activities to encourage community pride and connection



Celebrating who we are and where we have come from with projects and events that showcase and preserve our history



Provide accessible and well maintained sport, leisure and recreation infrastructure for community use



Develop programs to enhance the capacity of volunteers and volunteer organisations in Muswellbrook



## How will we know we are there?

- Satisfaction with family and community services such as aged, disability and home care. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Satisfaction with Council’s facilities, services and programs. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Sense of personal safety during the day and at night for all ages and genders. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Satisfaction with belonging in the community. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Levels of crime in the Shire (NSW Bureau of Crime. Statistics and Research)
- Satisfaction with protecting our heritage assets and buildings. (Community Satisfaction Survey)

## Who will we work with to get there?

- NSW Department of Health
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care
- Department of Social Services
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- Community
- Businesses
- NSW Police
- Local Schools
- Historical societies
- State Library of NSW
- Local Aboriginal Land Councils
- NSW Department of Creative Industries, Tourism, Hospitality and Sport
- Upper Hunter Homelessness Support
- Upper Hunter Youth Services
- Upper Hunter Support Services

## Our role



Delivering



Partnering and collaborating



Advocating



# We are a... regional centre

## Community Outcome

Our community can easily move around to access regional services, infrastructure and facilities including education, transport, sports, recreation and entertainment facilities.





# We are a... regional centre

- 38% of residents believed that the road network across the Shire is effective and efficient.
- 21% of residents felt that public transport in the Shire was adequate and accessible for their needs, with only 16% of residents feeling that there is adequate public transport at night. Those identifying as living with disability are significantly less likely to agree they are able to access public transport during the day and night.
- 52% of residents believe that there are adequate education and training opportunities available.

***“What I like most about living in Denman is that it’s a nice, small, friendly community that makes you feel safe.”***

**Ben, Electrician - Denman**



## How will we get there?

Provide and maintain local transport infrastructure, including roads and footpaths to allow safe and easy movement around



Advocate for effective public transport networks and alternative options. Manage increasing transport demands on our roads to ensure the community has safe and prioritised access



Advocate and provide services and facilities expected of a regional centre



Maintain accessible sport, leisure and recreational infrastructure and facilities for all of our community



Manage land use and transport planning to ensure our infrastructure provides residents with convenient options to move around the shire



Advocate and collaborate with government and educational providers to expand access to education opportunities which allow students to study locally



## How will we know we are there?

- Satisfaction with public transport options within the Shire. (Community satisfaction survey)
- Satisfaction with ease of driving and parking in the Shire. (Community satisfaction survey)
- Amount of road and footpaths sealed and rehabilitated and Pavement Condition Index. (Council)
- Completion of Muswellbrook New England Bypass.
- Community satisfaction with spaces for sporting and recreational activities. (including sports grounds and swim centres)
- Number of people enrolled in educational institutions. (Australian Bureau of Statistics)
- Attendance at our regional facilities.

## Who will we work with to get there?

- Transport for NSW
- Private transport providers
- Local sporting groups
- Department of Regional NSW
- NSW Department of Education

## Our role



Delivering



Partnering and collaborating



Advocating



# We are a... thriving economy

## Community Outcome

Our community has opportunities for employment, business and training and we drive investment into our economy to benefit our community.





# We are a... thriving economy

- 42% of residents agree there are long-term job opportunities in the Shire and that the local economy provides a range of work opportunities.
- There is very low agreement for a vibrant night life in the Shire, and only 21% of resident believing that there are diverse retail options available to meet their needs.
- 9% of residents agreed that the Shire has a vibrant night life, and only 21% of residents believe that there are diverse retail options available to meet their needs.

**“We have had our shop for 22 years. We love the people we get to meet in this great town.”**

**Jody and Louise, Shop owners**

## How will we get there?

Support the diversification of the local economy, including attracting new industry and businesses



Support businesses to grow and prepare for the opportunities of the future



Support the growth of tourism, a diverse retail and hospitality offering and a vibrant nightlife



Collaborate with key stakeholders and government to secure investment and long-term employment



Provide access to support innovation and reskilling for future workforce needs



Plan for reuse of former mining and energy generation land for employment, recreation and environmental purposes



## How will we know we are there?

- Number of businesses operating in the Local Government Area. (Australian Bureau of Statistics available for 2021 and 2026)
- Number of jobs and employment numbers in the Shire. (Australian Bureau of Statistics available for 2021 and 2026)
- Employment diversity. (Australian Bureau of Statistics available for 2020-21 and 2025-26)
- Unemployment data. (DATA)
- Number of visitors. (day trips and overnight stays) (Tourism Data)
- Estimated economic impact of events and festivals. (Remplan data)
- Satisfaction with Council run community events and festivals. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Attendance at Council run community events. (other data analytical where available)

## Who will we work with to get there?

- Muswellbrook and Denman chambers of commerce and industry
- Businesses
- Community groups
- Tertiary education providers
- Destination NSW
- Tourism operators
- Tourism marketing organisations
- Department of Regional NSW
- Department of Premier and Cabinet
- NetZero Authority
- Future Jobs and Investment Authority
- Hunter Joint Organisation

## Our role



Delivering



Partnering and collaborating



Advocating



# We are a... great place to live

## Community Outcome

Our community offers a great lifestyle  
in a healthy natural environment.





# We are a... great place to live

- 75% of residents rate their quality of life as good, very good or excellent living in Muswellbrook Shire.
- 15% of residents believed that housing in the local area was affordable and 21% of residents believed that development is being well planned and managed. Households with children at home and those who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are significantly less likely to agree that they can afford a reasonable standard of housing in the area.
- Air quality and biodiversity/habitat protection were deemed as very important, with water conservation and waste reduction and recycling key focus areas for residents.

***“I love the connection to the people and the community I live in. I love living near family.”***

**Debbie, Administration Manager - Muswellbrook**



## How will we get there?

Advocate and facilitate investment in a variety of housing, including affordable housing, to meet the needs of current and future residents



Manage development to protect our natural environment and heritage and be resilient to natural hazards



Protect and enhance Council-managed water infrastructure and mitigate environmental and man-made impacts



Advocate for clean air and improved natural environment



Manage the use of water and waste wisely, efficiently and sustainably to facilitate growth and economic opportunity



Reducing emissions of Council owned assets to reach Net Zero targets



Maintain and enhance our open and public spaces and natural areas



## How will we know we are there?

- Satisfaction with the range of housing types and sizes. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Satisfaction with protection of the natural environment. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Air quality ratings. (NSW Air Quality Data)
- Uptake of FOGO and recycling, reuse and landfill diversion rates (Council data)
- Household and Council’s water consumption. (Council data)

## Who will we work with to get there?

- NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure
- Property developers and builders
- Community housing providers
- Land and Housing Corporation of NSW
- NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

## Our role



Delivering



Partnering and collaborating



Advocating



# We are... working together

## Community Outcome

Our community is involved in our decision making and we manage our resources to align with our communities' values and priorities.





# We are... working together

- 70% of Muswellbrook residents are at least somewhat satisfied with the performance of Council over the last 12 months.
- 33% of residents believe that Council communicates well about its activities and services but only 17% believes that Council listens to community concerns and views in making decisions.
- 38% of residents believe that Council communicates well about its services and activities.
- 23% believe that Council plans well for the community's long-term future.

***“We love the community spirit and we couldn’t imagine living anywhere else.”***

**Rob and Joy, Retired small business owners - Denman**



## How will we get there?

Increase community awareness and understanding of Council business



Ensure a wide range of community engagement programs to enable effective Council decision making



Deliver sustainable projects, services and programs through sound financial management



Ensure Council has long-term financial sustainability



Improve efficiency of Council systems



Ensure Council attracts and retains adequately skilled staff



Support the elected Council to enable effective leadership



## How will we know we are there?

- Increase overall satisfaction with the performance of Council across all areas and functions. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Increase number of people reached in Council engagement programs. (Council data)
- Satisfaction with opportunities to participate in Council decision-making. (Community Satisfaction Survey)
- Financial (Council Annual Report)
- Staff turnover and satisfaction. (Council data)

## Who will we work with to get there?

- Our Community
- NSW Government
- Office of Local Government NSW

## Our role



Delivering








Partnering and collaborating



Advocating

# 9. State and Regional Priorities

Our Community Strategic Plan aligns and integrates with the following State and Regional plans, strategies and priorities.

State / Regional Plan	 Strong community	 Regional centre	 Thriving economy	 Great place to live	 Working together
NSW Government Hunter Regional Plan 2036	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hunter Joint Organisation Strategic Plan 2032	✓		✓	✓	✓
Transport for NSW Future Transport Strategy	✓			✓	✓
Transport for NSW Draft Hunter Regional Transport Plan 2041	✓	✓	✓	✓	
NSW Government Plan Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030	✓		✓	✓	✓
Infrastructure NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2042	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hunter Region Transport Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	





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