Braidwood Community Association

**Comments on the QPRC Draft Community Engagement
and Participation Plan**

Summary and main conclusions

The Braidwood Community Association (BCA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) Draft Community Engagement and Participation Plan. The BCA believes it is vital that QPRC fully engages with its stakeholders on a consistent basis if it is to effectively and efficiently deliver services, programmes and projects.

The BCA accepts that true community engagement is not easy and takes commitment by all interested parties. The BCA was encouraged by the ambition set in the policy framework, but believes the draft plan is still a work in progress and in its current form represents a step backwards from the commitments made in the policy framework. Many of the proposals by the BCA are to reinsert this ambition.

The draft plan is silent on the question of training for community engagement and community participation in planning. A key recommendation by the BCA is that the plan includes joint training for both QPRC staff and interested stakeholders. This way, not only are working relations developed during the training process, but there should be a shared understanding about what constitutes community engagement / community participation in planning, how to achieve it, and the constraints on each party. Such a process would promote knowledge mobilisation, which may in turn transform the engagement / planning process.

The BCA would also like to see the plan expanded in key areas with greater elaboration and prescription about how the values statements are to be achieved.

The BCA stands ready to have discussions with the author(s) of the draft plan to elaborate further on its views.

Introduction

The BCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the QPRC Draft Community Engagement and Participation Plan (referred to as the 'draft plan' thereafter). The BCA believes it is vital that QPRC fully engages with its stakeholders on a consistent basis if it is to effectively and efficiently deliver services, programmes and projects.

The BCA believes the experience with the Ryrie Park Playground is a perfect example of how full, albeit informal, community engagement with a project can lead to much better outcomes with a significantly enhanced delivery of project and subsequent greater community ownership of the asset.

The BCA also notes that the project for possible smart hubs in the Braidwood heritage QPRC building, formerly the Braidwood Literary Institute, began poorly with no consultation. However, it now appears to be progressing well with excellent consultation and with all stakeholders moving towards a cost effective consensus.

The BCA also commented on the Draft Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy Framework (referred to as the 'policy framework' thereafter) and the comments made then remain valid (submission attached in Annex 1).

The BCA was also provided by QPRC staff the Community Engagement Toolkit (referred to as the 'toolkit' thereafter) which provides the totality of the guidance QPRC staff and community members about how community engagement will work in QPRC.

This submission was drawn up after a 'kitchen table' discussion of interested BCA members and has been endorsed by its executive committee as there was insufficient time to consult with its full membership.

As a general comment the BCA observes that parts of the plan seem to be more targeted at QPRC staff (eg Part 2 of Section 1 on project planning for Council Staff), while others seem to be targeted at community members (eg whole of Section 2). This makes the plan somewhat confusing and lacking focus.

Section 1 – Community Engagement

The BCA would welcome the adoption of a policy framework, plan and toolkit which delivers the ideal of meaningful community input into decision-making, taking it beyond isolated examples that occur through one-off collaborations or political advocacy.

A general observation is that the plan/toolkit would benefit from greater elaboration and prescription about how the values statements are to be achieved and perhaps with references to the national and international goals and resources.

The BCA accepts that true community engagement is not easy and takes commitment by all interested parties. The BCA was encouraged by the ambition set in the policy framework, but believes the draft plan is still a work in progress and in its current form represents a step backwards from the commitments made in the policy framework.

Indeed, the draft plan seems to be more about community consultation than community engagement. As outlined below, and in the policy framework, they are different.

Not only does community engagement take effort, but it also requires knowledge. The BCA believes that training in community engagement should be a key feature of the final plan. The draft plan is silent on the issue of training, which needs to be corrected in the final plan.

The BCA would also like to propose that not only does QPRC train its relevant staff but also key individuals from interested organisations. This way, not only are working relations developed during the training process, but there should be a shared understanding about what constitutes community engagement, how to achieve it, and the constraints on each party. Such a process would promote knowledge mobilisation, which may in turn transform the engagement process.

Part 1.   Background

Much of this section comes from the policy framework, but there are some notable variations which should be corrected:

1.1   Council's Engagement Framework

Para 1 This is a cut-and-paste from para 3.13 of the policy framework except it excludes the last sentence. This is an important sentence and was added as a result of the consultation process. This sentence should be added and reads:

"These documents will also highlight the importance of two-way engagement and identify how community groups, associations and individuals can engage with Council."

1.3   How can the community engage with Council?

The policy framework contained some useful definitions of community engagement and community consultation. The BCA believes it would be helpful for QPRC staff and

stakeholders alike to have these spelt out in the plan (inserted at the beginning of 1.3) to provide clarity on what they are and what is the difference, namely:

It should be recognised that there is a difference between Community engagement and Community consultation, the definitions of each are as follows:

Community engagement – the process whereby Council and the community engage in a two-way conversation. This can be via formal or informal engagement processes. Community engagement relies on a two-way approach with both Council and the community actively seeking to engage with each other

Community consultation – a more formal process that generally relates to the 'consult' section of the IAP2 spectrum. Consultation generally involves Council presenting an idea, policy or proposal to the community for input.

The current first paragraph is essentially a cut-and-paste from the 7.20 of the policy framework, except the first sentence in the draft plan refers to "*Community engagement is necessarily a two-way communication that requires communities and stakeholders to actively engage with Council*". While the policy framework refers to "*Community engagement is necessarily a two-way street and requires communities and stakeholders to actively engage with Council*".

The BCA submits that the latter is more ambitious and more closely reflects the definition as it refers to a more significant community engagement (rather than community consultation) and that the wording should either revert to the original text in 7.20 or better still to the wording in the definition of community engagement of "*a two-way conversation*".

The listing of ways to engage with Council is again a cut-and-paste from 7.20 of the policy framework, except one of the bullet points added as a result of the consultation is missing, (8th bullet point), namely:

- *Community groups or associations inviting Council staff along to meetings to address specific subjects*

The third bullet point in the list refers to "attending community meetings". The BCA noted that on 24 April 2019, QPRC adopted a [Community Meetings Policy]. This provides some useful information to both staff and community members about how these meetings are run. This policy should be referenced in the final policy, together with any other relevant policy statements. This would be of assistance to staff and stakeholders alike.

Part 2 Project planning for Council staff

2.1 Do I need to undertake community engagement

The BCA welcomes the implementation of a clear decision-making tree. This should empower staff to follow due process and avoid the situations where an individual's 'pet project' just appears in QPRC's work programme.

The first sentence under the decision-making tree "*Other factors that might influence whether you commit to community engagement include:*" is ambiguous and should be amended so it can only be read to mean that subsequent bullet points as factors leading to community engagement. A possible text could be:

 "Staff should also commit to community engagement where:"

2.3 When do you need to start engagement?

The second sentence of the second paragraph states "*Council generally engages with the community for a minimum of 28 days*". This is a much weaker statement than the wording in section 7.13 of the policy framework which states:

"Council will implement a minimum 28-day consultation timeframe on all matters, unless there are exceptional circumstances, which will be communicated".

The policy framework wording should be used here for clarity.

The BCA welcomes the 'stop-the-clock' provision in the third paragraph of any community engagement over the Christmas/New Year period (any days between 20 December and 25 January will not contribute to the total engagement period). This is important to ensuring that stakeholders are given a proper opportunity to be involved.

Part 3   Stakeholder analysis

3.1   Who are our stakeholders

The ACT Government is identified, but what about other surrounding local authorities? The ACT bullet point should be amended to:

- *"surrounding local authorities, including the ACT"*

For clarity, the bullet point on General community could be expanded to include the definition of community from the policy framework (p12), namely:

- *"Community – including those who live, work, play and visit our region"*.

More significantly, the community plan is silent on how staff might contact any of these stakeholders and who the key individuals are. Whilst it is not expected that these be spelt out in the community plan or the toolbox, a generic contact of the area responsible for keeping such information should be provided (eg QPRC's Communication and Engagement Team). Similarly, a generic contact should be included in the plan for community members to contact when they wish to progress an issue, but do not know who is responsible (the switchboard is not always very helpful in this regard).

Part 4   Improving community engagement

The BCA believes this important part of the draft plan needs significantly more work to expand it and provide more direction. Without this, there is a high likelihood of inconsistent application of community engagement by key staff and councillors.

4.1   Actions we will take to improve community engagement at QPRC

This is a key section and does not have any real structure or outline any process on how each of these bullet points will be implemented. The toolkit does not provide much further clarity. This whole section needs to be significantly expanded.

By way of example the first bullet point simply states:

- *Strengthen our relationship with community groups and associations within the QPRC area*

While the BCA welcomes this statement, it would like to know how this will be achieved and using what mechanisms. This is not unreasonable given the response to the BCA's points in the policy framework on providing support for community groups, where QPRC staff stated:

"*This will be addressed in the Community Engagement Plan*" (p76 of the Ordinary meeting of QPRC held on 27 March 2019). The BCA does not believe it has been addressed, but as offered previously, the BCA is happy to engage in discussions with QPRC on how this could be achieved.

4.2   Increase staff and councillor awareness of their community engagement responsibilities

- *Provide key staff members with the Community Engagement Plan and Toolkit to assist with developing engagement plans*

The BCA believes that just providing the documents is insufficient. Community engagement is complex and demanding and key staff should also be provided with training.

- *Ensure that Councillors have a clear understanding of their role in the community engagement process.*

The BCA believes this section should be elaborated upon to set out what is the Councillors' role in the community engagement process. In this respect, the BCA recollects that the policy framework states:

Councillors at QPRC attend Council meetings and hear the views of those people presenting at public presentation sessions. They are also required to consult regularly with community organisations and other key stakeholders to ensure they are best informed to make decisions on matters affecting the community (para 3.9 on p7).

The BCA believes that this statement should be included in the final Community Engagement Plan, together with any other roles Councillors may have in the community engagement process.

Section 2 – Community participation in planning

Community participation in relation to planning matters is an important part of modern public governance and it is nearly 30 years since these frameworks were introduced around the world.

This section effectively outlines just the current legislative requirements. The BCA would like QPRC to go further and propose some 'best practice' actions.

The BCA would welcome the inclusion of proposals from QPRC to develop a number of model planning programs (including training modules for staff and citizens to help them learn to collaborate, plan and resolve disagreements in a structured way) through which citizens can develop a shared vision of a preferred future for their community and have meaningful input in a consistent manner, perhaps through membership of planning panels or such like.

As with community engagement, The BCA would also like the plan/toolkit to make provision for training and other activities whereby relationships are strengthened between QPRC and external actors and agencies and which promotes knowledge mobilisation which may in turn transform the planning process.

Part 3.   Development Assessment

3.2   Minimum Notification Periods

This section outlines the minimum legislative requirements for public consultation, which is useful for community members. However, it is silent on the actual consultation periods and what flexibility and criteria QPRC would use to extend a notification period. The BCA believes the scope for flexibility should be set out in the final plan.

By way of example, the previous section correctly sets out a 'stop the clock' facility over the Christmas/New Year period for community engagement. To provide clarity, this section should reiterate the relevant 'stop the clock provisions' for planning, with a statement along the lines of:

If the public notification period is over the Christmas/New Year period, any days between 25 December and 1 January will not contribute to the total notification period (i.e. those days will not be included when calculating a notification period).

3.3   Notified Development

Table 3 sets out the current means for informing stakeholders for various types of development which is again useful for community members.

However, the BCA would question whether this fully meets the *EP&A Act principles* (p12), particularly:

- *Community participation will be inclusive and Council will actively seek views that are representative of the community*

Placing a notice in a local newspaper or putting the notice on the QPRC's website cannot be described as actively seeking views, and while sending a notice to adjoining owners does actively bring the proposed development to their attention, these individuals cannot be considered as representative of the community.

3.4   Making a submission

On the QPRC website there is a Development Application Guide and a range of Development Application Checklists which are very useful for those making development applications. The BCA can find no similar guide on how to make a submission, what aspects are relevant, and who to send their submissions to. Indeed the website appears to be silent on the whole aspect of submissions. If this is correct, then this situation needs to be corrected.

To be consistent, the BCA suggests that the QPRC develops a submission form and submission checklist.

Submitted by Sue Murray

BCA President

On behalf of the Braidwood Community Association

18 November 2019

Braidwood Community Association

**Comments on the QPRC Draft Stakeholder and Community Engagement
Policy Framework**

Summary and main conclusions

The Braidwood Community Association (BCA) welcomes the Queanbeyan-Palerang
Regional Council (QPRC) Draft Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy
Framework, in particular the principles and commitments. To make it effective the BCA
believes QPRC needs to commit to:

- Full engagement with the community, including key groups like the BCA, by providing
  genuine opportunities to raise issues and influence Council's projects, proposals, plans,
  programs and service delivery prior to decisions being finalised;

- Giving communities sufficient notice of new projects, plans or policies for their area and
  sufficient time to consider and contribute; and

- Providing advice on how Council has considered community feedback and how it has
  influenced its decision making.

The BCA recognises that the implementation of this policy framework will present
significant challenges for QPRC and stands ready to assist in the development of the
community engagement plan and the community engagement toolkit for staff and their
implementation.

The BCA would like to thank QPRC for considering this submission, and the BCA looks
forward to achieving many mutually beneficial outcomes as a result of improved community
engagement and consultation.

About the Braidwood Community Association

The BCA was created in July 2018. Following the amalgamation of the former Palerang
Council with Queanbeyan City Council, our community had no direct voice on the current
QPRC Council. We had no existing organisation to represent the whole community, so we
came together to create one.

Our aim is to provide a voice for residents of Braidwood and surrounding areas. Our
meetings are open to all, and we are setting up communication links to enable participation
by as many local residents and organisations as possible. We currently have almost 70
financial members and growing, and a contact group of about 120 people. Our monthly
meetings are attended by 25-30 people and we have a representative Committee of 12
residents, who meet monthly to guide the process of establishing our role as community
representatives. We are also working with other community groups to create productive,
supportive links. The BCA has already set up constructive links with a number of QPRC
staff. In particular, we have an excellent relationship with the Urban Landscapes team. We
have worked together towards the creation of a new children's playground in North Ryrie
Park, and this partnership has been a very positive learning experience.

Further detail on the aims, activity and structure of the BCA is provided in Annex 1.

Introduction

The BCA welcomes the opportunity to comment on the QPRC Draft Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy Framework (referred to as the draft policy framework thereafter) and appreciates the extension given to the consultation period.

The draft policy framework is to be welcomed. In particular, the BCA welcomes the principles and commitments given in Table 1 on p8 (reproduced in Annex 2), all of which need to be fully implemented.

The BCA would like to highlight statements like:

 "*Community engagement should not be viewed as a 'box- ticking' exercise, or something that is only undertaken to pacify the vocal minority. Good community engagement involves a two-way flow of information. Community engagement can be a very effective way of increasing community understanding of an issue, and a way to increase support for council policies and decisions.*" (p7)

 "*Participatory democracy is the process by which community members are actively involved in decisions that affect them. The community can participate through a variety of community engagement processes and activities that influence and shape the elected Council's decisions.*" (p8)

These are encouraging and suggest that QPRC is sincere about having a rigorous and robust policy framework.

In stating this, there are some elements which could be improved or made clearer. Furthermore, until the draft community engagement plan and the draft community engagement toolkit for staff are released it will not be known how QPRC proposes to actually fulfil the commitments given in table 1 and elsewhere. It is expected therefore that there will be full consultation on the 'draft community engagement plan' and the 'draft community engagement toolkit for staff'. The BCA stands ready to assist in their development and implementation.

Moreover, from the BCA's perspective, the implementation of the policy framework will require a significant enhancement in the way QPRC Councillors and QPRC staff interact with the community, compared to current practices, and hence will present significant challenges for QPRC.

The special situation of Braidwood and the need for even greater engagement

The draft policy framework notes that: "… *the recent amalgamation brought some rural communities into a new Council with no formal or informal relationships between these 'newly-adopted' communities and councillors or Council officers.*" (p4).

 Also "… *councillors represent the entire local government area, rather than wards*" (p7).

As a result of this and the demographics of QPRC, the town of Braidwood and surrounding areas do not have any resident councillors from the local area elected to represent them. This democratic deficit is even more significant because, as noted in the document, "*QPRC recognises that the amalgamation has brought together several communities which have different characteristics, demography, and views. The most notable differences are size and urban form. For example, the characteristics of Queanbeyan, a major urban centre, are markedly different from the small heritage village (sic) of Braidwood*" (p4).

In other words, the councillors elected from Queanbeyan and other parts of the LGA, despite their best efforts, may simply not understand the needs of Braidwood and surrounding areas.

This makes the need for real community engagement even more important for places like Braidwood.

Accordingly, QPRC needs to provide <u>genuine opportunities to influence council decisions</u> by fully following the participatory democracy principles (p8), and to operate mainly in the collaborative and empowering end of the spectrum of public participation (p14).

Further, given the acknowledgement that our small heritage town is markedly different from the major urban centre of Queanbeyan, it is important that <u>all</u> Councillors become familiar with our community. Without any direct representative, we rely on <u>all</u> Councillors to understand our community and its unique character. Every councillor has an equal vote on matters affecting our community, so it is incumbent on <u>all</u> Councillors to take an active and genuine interest in our community.

Council decision making - local democracy

The BCA has a number of observations on this section, and the challenges presented.

"It is important that the community can contact and meet with councillors to discuss and contribute their views and ideas." (p7)

Because of the distance between Braidwood and Queanbeyan, it is difficult to arrange face-to-face meetings between residents and Councillors. All Councillors should take the opportunity to come to local meetings, especially those organised by Council, and to visit the region informally as well.

*"**Councillors** seek the views of their communities to understand the issues and opportunities for Council (and) the community to work together."* (p7)

The sentiment expressed here is welcomed, but is this really currently happening in practice?

"They are also required to consult regularly with community organisations and other key stakeholders and keep them informed of Council's decisions and activities." (p7)

This statement places the onus on Councillors to initiate the flow of information to community organisations. This is not happening at present. Information of a generic nature is circulated to the community via newspapers, social media and the QPRC newsletter, but there is very little direct communication to the BCA from Councillors on matters which affect our community. Council staff reply to our communications and act on them, but this is not a two-way process at the moment. We often have to search through Council documents to find out for ourselves about matters which directly affect our community.

The BCA has a communication network of members and supporters which could be used by Council to disseminate specific information on Braidwood.

We further note the following statements:

"Good Community engagement involves a two-way flow of information…" (p7)

"The Community can participate in Council decision making through planned community engagement processes and activities. QPRC engages community members in several ways, to:

- *determine strategic plans, budgets assets maintenance and service levels*
- *identify community issues, needs and priorities*
- *plan, change or evaluate infrastructure programs, facilities or services under its "five pillars"; community, choice, character connections and capability*
- *meet legislative obligations under various Acts*

- *obtain input to other matters where either may be impacts, either perceived or real, on stakeholders and communities*
- *principles and commitments.* (p8)

So far there has been minimal participation by the community on infrastructure programs which affect us, with the exception of the playground in North Ryrie Park. For example, for the Wallace and Lascelles Streets intersection where money has been allocated, there is no information available to the community on what the plans are for that intersection. It is a very significant intersection for both local and through traffic. The BCA has asked about this, but no useful information has yet been provided, with no suggestion of consultation made to date.

Principles and commitments *(p9)*

As stated above, these are welcomed and are excellent on paper. If these are implemented and followed there would be a real and significant improvement in the current engagement practices. These principles put the onus for initiating and following through on community engagement in the hands of Council, to actively seek input and work with the community.

The BCA stresses the importance of the following in the draft framework policy:

"We will listen to the community and other stakeholders when developing our engagement plans"

"We will advise you of how we have considered your feedback and how it has influenced our decision making"

Stakeholder and Community Engagement Policy Framework

The BCA stresses the central importance of the following principles in the proposed Framework:

- Full engagement with the community, including key groups like the BCA, by providing genuine opportunities to raise issues and influence Council's projects, proposals, plans, programs and service delivery prior to decisions being finalised;

- Giving communities sufficient notice of new projects, plans or policies for their area and sufficient time to consider and contribute; and

- Providing advice on how Council has considered community feedback and how it has influenced its decision making.

How does the community want us to engage? *(p12-13)*

The BCA completely agrees with the ideas expressed in this section. We would like to highlight the importance of the Council delivering on the following:

"They want to have sufficient notice of new projects, plans or policies for their area and sufficient time to consider and contribute."

"The community wants access to their Councillors and acknowledgement and assistance from them as their elected representatives."

"The community wants timely information and wants to be provided with feedback on how their suggestions and information has been used in the decision making."

How do we engage? (p13)

The draft policy framework states "*Council commits to engaging in an honest and transparent manner, clearly communicating any limitations or impediments that impact on our ability to engage effectively as well as clarifying early in the engagement process about how much community may influence decision making. This will include clearly stating what can be negotiated and what cannot be negotiated and the reasons why (p13).*"

The BCA believes that it should be made clear in this policy framework that any exclusions from full engagement would be seen as an exception to the norm, and avoid exclusion becoming the normal *modus operandi* of QPRC.

The draft policy framework states "*In addition to targeted engagement activities and effort, Council will also maintain relationships and practices with community and stakeholders th[r]ough advisory committees, public voice at Council meetings, regular community meetings in the community centres and by providing support to community groups*".

The BCA would like to make some observations on how these mechanisms have operated in the past and provide suggestions on how they can be improved, which may be relevant for developing the draft community engagement plan and the draft community engagement toolkit for staff:

Advisory Committees: It is assumed that the reference to Advisory committees refers to the whole range of Organisational, Statutory Committees, Advisory Committees, Local Area Committees, S.355 Committees and Regional Committees.

These should provide an important mechanism for detailed discussion on local issues. The BCA believes these committees need to meet regularly (at least quarterly) and that all members should be able to propose agenda items if they are to be an effective mechanism for consultation, and not one where members merely report on what they are doing without detailed discussion.

Further, there should be full transparency on the following:

- What Advisory committees there are;
- What are their roles;
- Who are all the members on these Advisory committees (both community and QPRC representatives), together with their contacts;
- Date and agenda for next meeting;
- The minutes of previous meetings (these should be easy to access, rather than being 'buried' somewhere in the Council meeting business papers which are often very difficult to find through searches).

This would allow other members of the community to understand past issues discussed and raise issues with members prior to meetings. Transparency could be achieved via separate web pages on each committee on the QPRC website. It is acknowledged that there is already some partial information on the QPRC website, but it is hard to find.

Regular community meetings: The holding of biannual local community meetings is welcomed and it is appreciated these are still a relatively new initiative and still at a formative stage. However, from the BCA's perspective the agenda is being driven by QPRC. As a result, the main issues considered are the 'top-down' Council issues, with limited time for 'bottom-up' community issues.

Furthermore, at least in the experience in Braidwood, those present for QPRC are not always fully briefed on issues of concern or on the status of particular projects and given the period between meetings no proper answers are ever given.

The BCA proposes three suggestions to improve the operation of the QPRC community meetings:

1) The agenda should be developed jointly with the local community association, with the opportunity for the BCA and individual community members to add agenda items and with the agenda made available beforehand;

2) A table should be presented to every local community meeting, summarising every project proposed and being implemented for the locality. This table should also outline their status (eg concept stage, planning stage, grant application, tenders sought, commenced work …), next milestones / steps in the project, when work started/is expected to start, when the project is expected to be completed, and its budget. This information should already be readily available to QPRC staff, and so, it is only a matter of collating the information initially, then updating it at subsequent meetings. Such a table would not only provide essential transparency of the status of the QPRC's projects, but also provide all the Councillors with an easy 'ready reckoner' to use when dealing with community members and tracking the progress of the projects;

3) If QPRC representatives at these meetings are unable to fully address a question from the floor, then they should take the question on notice and email the written answer to all those at the meeting who provided their email addresses and to the local community association for distribution amongst their members.

Providing support to community groups: The Policy Framework is silent on how QPRC intends to provide support to community groups. It is expected that this will be fully elaborated upon at the next stage of consultation on the draft community engagement plan and the draft community engagement toolkit for staff. The BCA is happy to engage in discussions with QPRC on how this could be achieved.

How can the community engage with Council? *(p15)*

The BCA applauds the statements:

"Community engagement is by necessity a two-way street…";

"Joining a local special interest or community group which has mechanisms for dialogue with Council"; and

"Direct contact with local Councillors"

The BCA would like to explore with QPRC how it can engage more effectively with Councillors and staff on a systematic basis, in addition to its membership on the Local Area Committee. We look forward to creating improved mechanisms for dialogue with Council.

Other issues

QPRC papers

The draft policy framework is silent on the issue of access to Council papers. Currently papers of Council meetings are uploaded onto the QPRC website. Whilst this provides some transparency regarding the issues being considered by the Council, the 'bundling' of all the papers into a few very large documents does negate this and necessitates the downloading of some large documents in terms of both the number of pages and Megabytes (eg the Agenda for the meeting held on 23 January 2019 is 101 pages long and is a 17Mb download, with the attachments totalling 47Mb). The uploading of each business paper as a separate document would make access much more user friendly.

Further, we suggest that several hard copies of Council's reports, consultation papers and other important documents should be made available to the community at Council offices and libraries. Many people do not use computers and/or find the website hard to use. The cost of printing can also be a barrier to obtaining hard copies. Also, the Braidwood area does not have the same high standard of broadband access as exists in other more urbanised areas of the QPRC.

The BCA would appreciate receiving at least one copy of all consultation documents. We would also like to be notified as soon as any consultation documents are available for comment.

QPRC website

The QPRC website could be made easier to navigate and much more user-friendly. Other councils have created more accessible websites (eg Alpine Council and Eurobodalla Council).

By way of example, the QPRC is going through a process of developing policy frameworks and plans on a whole host of issues. While some of the completed plans are quite accessible and are listed together on the QPRC website, some other plans and programmes are listed elsewhere (eg Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Resourcing Strategy). Other plans still in development can be quite difficult to find, particularly if you do not know exactly what you are looking for (eg when you search for the Integrated Transport Strategy on the main QPRC website very little comes up, but it does when you search on the Your Voice website).

It is suggested that all adopted policy frameworks and plans without exception should be in one place on the QPRC website and that there should also be a page bringing together all the policy frameworks and plans still in development on the QPRC website.

It is important that individual submissions to 'Your Voice QPRC' can be truly anonymous, without identities being revealed to Councillors or staff. For some the need to remain anonymous is important, for example where their employer has a close relationship with the Council, their willingness to comment could be curtailed if their identity was revealed. This is particularly important on controversial issues in a small town where everyone knows each other. We note that assurances are given on the website that submissions are anonymous, but believe it is important to stress this point.

There is a need for QPRC Councillors and staff to communicate in plain English, both in writing and orally, when communicating with the community. They should avoid, as far as possible, using technical jargon and acronyms which the wider community may not be familiar with. The greater use of plain English may also encourage people to engage more in community consultations.

Submitted by Sue Murray

BCA President

On behalf of the Braidwood Community Association

15 February 2019

Braidwood Community Association

1. Introduction

The Braidwood Community Association (BCA) was formed on 25 July 2018 at a public meeting. It began as an initiative of Sue Murray who called a public meeting on 17 May 2018, which led to the formation of a working group which made recommendations on how the BCA should be structured. The BCA is still in the process of fully being established and is yet to become an incorporated organisation and develop a website. It holds monthly public meetings and has an elected committee which also meets monthly.

2. Aims

 i. Object

To promote and develop Braidwood and its surrounding areas, with the view to further enhance the well-being and sustainability of its community.

ii. Objectives

a. Provide a forum to discuss issues affecting the Braidwood community and the development of collaborative strategies to address these challenges;
b. Promote broader understanding of these issues;
c. Reflect the interests of the Braidwood community to all levels of government;
d. Help strengthen local community capacity through networking and supporting activities of other community organisations in the Braidwood and its surrounding areas; and
e. Assist in activities that will help enhance the natural and built environment of Braidwood and its surrounding areas, including the provision of community facilities.

iii. Guiding Principles

a. Inclusive organisation which treats everyone's views with respect and politeness and seeks to bring residents together in a harmonious way;
b. Seeks to utilise the diversity of Braidwood as a strength; and
c. Have a focus on consensus. The Association will facilitate and broker respectful discussion on issues with the intention of developing a better understanding of all sides and if possible building a broad consensus of community opinion. Where there is no consensus, the Association will not take a position.

3. Activities

i. Hold regular meetings and forums to discuss issues;
ii. Networking and supporting activities of other community organisations;
iii. Communications to the community (eg website, Facebook page, calendar, newsletter, community notice boards, where these are not already available); and
iv. Representation to all levels of government, both in response to government policy and activity and on any proactive Braidwood community initiatives.

4. Other issues

i. Geographical coverage

Braidwood and surrounding areas. How it relates to other community associations adjoining Braidwood on issues of common interest will be developed on a 'learning by doing' basis.

ii. Membership structure

Individuals who are a full or part-time resident of Braidwood and its surrounding areas. It will not be an association of associations, but will have an important networking and supporting role between associations.

Table 1: Principles and commitments

Principle	Commitment
Respect	- We will actively ask for your views and opinions to support and have input to decision making - We will value and consider all feedback - We will keep you informed - We will not seek community input if the decision is already made
Integrity	- We will clearly explain why we are asking you to participate - We will be open about the level of influence that you have - We will communicate how your input was used in our decision making and work
Continuous Improvement	- We will review and improve our community engagement practices to keep pace with best practice - We will listen to the community and other stakeholders when developing our engagement plans
Participation and inclusion	- We will provide opportunities for all the voices in our diverse community - We will provide a variety of ways for community members to participate and actively seek new voices in our communities - We will communicate with you in a timely manner and when your input is most influential - We will communicate with you in plain language
Responsive approach	- We will undertake our engagement in a planned, coordinated and well-resourced manner - We will provide you with all the information that you need to enable you to meaningfully contribute - We will work together with you and share information and results - We will evaluate our engagement activities regularly to see where we can improve - We will advise you of how we have considered your feedback and how it has influenced decision making"