

Braidwood Community Association

Comments on the QPRC Draft Operational Plan 2020-21

The Braidwood Community Association (BCA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) Draft Operational Plan for 2020-21 (Draft Plan).

The comments given are also informed by the recent very useful virtual QPRC Braidwood Community Meeting held on 21 May 2020 and the supporting documentation which provided some further clarity on the Draft Plan.

Priorities of the members of the BCA

The BCA recently surveyed its members and followers (133 individuals) and invited them to list their top three priority projects for 2020-21. The summary results of the 56 individuals (42% of those surveyed) who responded are as follows (with more detail in Attachment 1):

Responses to BCA questionnaire on priority projects by QPRC in 2020-21

Project	Number of votes	Aggregate score
1. Greater resilience and sustainability in Braidwood and surrounding villages' infrastructure	27	71
2. Heritage protection of our natural and built environment	13	32
3. More footpaths and bike paths within town	18	31
4. Bike path and footpath around outskirts of Braidwood	17	28
5. Youth Performing Arts Centre	13	28
6. Swimming pool refurbishment	11	20
7. Footbridge over Monkittee Creek	9	19
8. After-school care centre	8	18
9. Skate Park at the Rec Ground	9	15
10. Security lights in North Ryrie Park playground	6	13
11. Re-development of D&S Motors site and the Council Depot	7	12
12. Bubbler and water refill station in North Ryrie Park	7	8
13. Maintain library services	4	8
14. Lascelles Street improvements	3	7
Total	168	336
Number of individuals responding	56	

The aggregate score is given by giving a score of 3 to the first priority, 2 to the second priority and 1 to the third priority

Elaboration on these identified priorities are as follows:

1. Greater resilience and sustainability in Braidwood and surrounding villages' infrastructure

This is by far the issue of greatest concern to members of the BCA, with nearly half (48.2%) of those responding having this in their top 3 issues. This is not a surprise given the recent drought and severe bushfires truly tested the resilience and sustainability in Braidwood and surrounding villages' infrastructure.

During the drought the town of Braidwood reached Stage 4 water restrictions. This was due to the Shoalhaven River ceasing to flow and the off-river storage dam of 72ML capacity being insufficient to meet demand. The reservoir was constructed after the 1980s drought and was expanded after the 1990s drought. Since then the population of Braidwood has expanded significantly (eg between 2006 and 2019 the Braidwood's population increased by 31.6%). The current dam is no longer adequate when the Shoalhaven River ceases to flow and is therefore in need of significant expansion, and/or alternative water supplies need to be found. The BCA is encouraged by the statements during the virtual meeting that "the security of water for Braidwood is important to Council" and that it is investigating the possibility of increasing / augmenting storage capacity and will seek government assistance for upgrades. The BCA fully supports these actions which should be pursued as a matter of priority.

The bushfires showed that communications, power and water supplies in rural areas were not sufficiently robust and are in need of considerable enhancement. Some people had no means of communication when the fires came through their properties. Especially important in this respect is the establishment and enhancement of emergency evacuation centres spread throughout the region and also in Braidwood. In light of the funds available in the aftermath of the bushfires, the BCA believes this provides a one-off opportunity for QPRC to take advantage of all possible grant sources.

Sustainability and resilience require, as a central component, housing infrastructure. Secure and affordable housing is probably a greater impediment to family welfare than any other factor, particularly for single working mothers. Further, given the incomes of a number of Braidwood residents, some relying purely on Government pensions, they are finding it increasingly difficult to pay the escalating rental costs which are being inflated by miners and those commuting to Canberra, both with higher level of incomes. There is therefore a need for an appropriate supply of affordable housing to ensure the sustainability and inclusivity of the community. More affordable housing would also contribute to the economic development of the town and the region.

2. Heritage protection of our natural and built environment

The town of Braidwood was State Heritage listed in 2006. This was a recognition of its unique 19th century townscape, with a curtilage which preserves the distinction between the town and its surrounding landscape. Many studies since the 1970s have drawn the conclusion that with the right investment, Braidwood can become a major destination for Heritage Tourism. This is a value-added advantage of preserving our built environment. Despite its Heritage listing, Braidwood has received very little investment from Local or State Governments to preserve and restore some of our most significant buildings. There have been inconsistencies in applying Heritage guidelines. In addition, there is a need to preserve the natural landscapes in the area which still survive. Some of these have been severely impacted by the recent fires eg the Bombay Reserve on the Shoalhaven River and the Monga Forest

3. More footpaths and bike paths within town

The third highest priority is more footpaths within the town of Braidwood. This is a priority for all ages of the community, in particular older persons (some with significant mobility issues, with an increasing usage of motorized scooters), children and teenagers. The BCA

notes that the Community's strategic priorities include "maintenance of public areas, including pedestrian and bike paths" (p18). The BCA also notes that Service 31. Transport under Strategic Pillar 4 "Connection" (p61) identifies funding for "Paths/Cycleways" of \$1,007k throughout QPRC but does not specify where. However the draft plan is silent on the implementation of the [Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Plans](#) for Braidwood, Bungendore and Queanbeyan adopted on 25 September 2019 as part of the Integrated Transport Strategy with clear prioritized schedules of works. As highlighted on p49 of the QPRC Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement "Towards 2040", Braidwood has the highest percentage (12.3%) of people who walk or cycle to work compared to the rest of the LGA and yet the town is still to have a proper network of foot and bicycle paths. The BCA therefore wants to see the Operational Plan to include actions to commence the implementation of the schedules of the Braidwood Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities Plan. The BCA is aware that the implementation of this plan is dependent on grant funding and stands ready to assist in any grant application.

4. Bike path and footpath around outskirts of Braidwood

As noted above, Braidwood has the highest percentage (12.3%) of people who walk or cycle to work compared to the rest of the LGA, and there is clearly a lot of local interest in developing such a resource. The curtilage of Braidwood is part of the town's heritage values and a bicycle / foot path around the town would provide a new tourist attraction as well as benefiting the health and wellbeing of the local community. There are already some paths such as along Bombay Creek and an extension of these could provide a starting point, with the Braidwood Urban Landcare Group already having initial conversations with Mayor Tim Overall about an extension of this path. The BCA urges QPRC to explore these possibilities.

5. Youth Performing Arts Centre

Braidwood has an active Youth Performing Arts Association (BYPAA) which creates opportunities for children from 3 to youth up to 20 and supports local talent. The Braidwood Dance Studio is a primary project for BYPAA, as it has no permanent location to run classes and currently operates out of the Braidwood Servicemens Club. As a licenced premise with gambling it is not an ideal location even though all steps are taken to ensure that the students do not enter these parts of the club. The search for a more suitable venue for the Dance Studio and BYPAA's school holiday activities is an ongoing vision for BYPAA and the proposed office smart hub/cultural space within the Braidwood council building (originally the Braidwood Literary Institute where some of the more mature members of the community learnt to dance) provides the best current opportunity. The draft Capital Works Programme 2020-21 proposes an office smart hub/cultural space with a budget of \$3,090,000 (p32). If this space could again host both youth and adult performing arts and be available for other community uses, the BCA believes it would be an important new asset to the Braidwood community. The BCA would like to engage in full and meaningful discussion with QPRC to ensure that this development meets the needs of the whole community.

6. Swimming pool refurbishment

The current works program includes \$513,600 to [replace underground plumbing infrastructure and pool tiling](#). A further \$1m grant was promised as part of a NSW Government election commitment to improve heating, change-rooms and kiosk. At the virtual meeting it was confirmed that "Council formally applied for funding for Braidwood Pool in 2019 and anticipates an announcement soon. A line item was included in the 2019-20 capital works program in anticipation of receiving the grant funding. This project will be carried forward to the 2020-21 financial year." The BCA is encouraged by this statement and assumes that it was a simple oversight not to have this activity in the draft Capital Works Programme 2020-21 and that it will be reinstated in the final Operational Plan for 2020-21.

7. Footbridge over Monkittee Creek

This is a long running safety issue with some children and adults living to the north of Braidwood having to cross the current narrow and dangerous bridge on a daily basis. The increase in traffic movements of heavy trucks is only exacerbating the problem. A footbridge over Monkitee Creek was included in the Capital Works Programme 2019-20 (cost estimate of \$750,000) with QPRC reporting at the virtual meeting that “Council is seeking funding assistance to progress this project. At this stage, we have not been successful in obtaining funding.” The BCA’s recognises this project involves the co-operation of Transport for NSW, which is responsible for the Kings Highway, and stands ready to make representations to the Transport for NSW as it believes it is important that this project proceeds. The BCA would therefore like to see this re-instated into the draft Capital Works Programme 2020-21.

The BCA would also like to raise a possible cheaper and quicker option, which would be to have Armco barriers on the bridge and a pathway from the northern end of the Bridge around the corner to Solus St. This would not preclude the pedestrian bridge being constructed at a later date.

8. After-school care centre

The lack of available after-school care is a serious issue for the working-age population of Braidwood. Parents (mainly women) are effectively prevented from working full time hours due to its unavailability. Further, the Braidwood library acts as a de facto child care centre after 3 pm, which affects other users and imposes extra demands on Council staff. It would be much better for those in the community who use the library, for the librarians and for the children themselves if they could use an after-school care centre until their parents can collect them. The BCA would welcome an engagement with QPRC on the possibility of an after-school care centre in Braidwood.

9. Skate Park at the Recreation Ground

During 2019-20, QPRC undertook an extensive assessment of the possible location of a skate park in Braidwood and after a period of public consultation which had a high level of response from the local community, decided on the Recreation Ground as the preferred location. This will require the further extension of the drainage channel and the construction of the skate park with a project cost estimate of \$52,000 for design and approximately \$600,000 for construction.

The Capital Works Programme 2020-21 does have an allocation for \$150,000 for a Recreation Ground drainage channel and \$250,000 for “Braidwood Recreation Ground Construction, but it was confirmed during the virtual meeting that these do not relate to the Skate Park, with both projects to be funded from Section 94 payments from Dargues Gold Mine (the purpose remains unspecified though). Other documentation provided at the virtual meeting states that a “Detailed design complete by June 2020” and that QPRC will “Seek grant funding for construction”. Given these statements, and the local support for the construction of a skate park, the BCA believes this project also needs to be included in the draft Capital Works Programme 2020-21.

10. Security lights in North Ryrie Park playground

This would be a relatively small project which could make use of the energy generated by the windmill installed in the playground and stored in renewable batteries. Security lights would not only increase the safety of the wonderful new playground which is an important new asset to the Braidwood community, but would also reduce the chances of any damage or graffiti. An added benefit is that a functioning windmill adds to the brilliance of the playground, inspiring other communities to take similar initiatives. The BCA would hope that QPRC would be able to find the funds for this project out of its own reserves and not need to seek a grant.

11. Re-development of D&S Motors site and the Council Depot

The BCA believes that off-street parking behind the National Theatre and in front of the Council Depot and accessed via Duncan St (described as Wallace St parking in the draft plan) is a useful initiative and hopefully will lead to more parking opportunity for passing traffic in Wallace St. However, with the purchase of the D&S Motors site by QPRC and the intention to move the Council Depot in the future there is an exciting opportunity for a significant development in the centre of Braidwood. This can be so much more than just off-street parking and the BCA would like to engage in a constructive conversation with QPRC on a possible vision for this site before any work commences on this site regarding off street parking.

12. Bubbler and water refill station in North Ryrie Park

Linked to the completion of North Ryrie Park playground is the installation of a Bubbler and water refill station (Note: a number of respondents to the survey listed both points 10 and 12 together as one, but only the first given was taken as their priority). This again is not an expensive project, and an essential addition to the playground, which services the community and attracts tourists. The BCA has a sum of about \$1,300 in unspent donations towards the playground, which we would be very happy to contribute to the cost.

To underline the local community's ongoing commitment to the playground area (in addition to initial financial contributions and design input), the Braidwood Garden Club has indicated that it is prepared to establish a small sensory garden in the forthcoming Spring as foreseen in the plans for the playground.

13. Maintain library services

A number of the members of the BCA are concerned that the library services in Braidwood may be under threat. The BCA does not know if these concerns are justified, but would appreciate a commitment by QPRC that the Braidwood library services will be fully maintained for the foreseeable future.

14. Lascelles Street improvements

The Lascelles Street improvements project receives considerable support. It is in receipt of a Stronger Community funding and is identified as "in progress" (p93), but for some reason is not identified in the Capital Works Programme 2020-21. Nor is it listed in the project updates provided at the virtual meeting. However, the presentation at the virtual meeting provided an update of this project with construction procurement and construction delivery both due to start in the fourth quarter of 2020. The BCA therefore has no reason to believe that this important work will not go ahead. It stresses though that the works are justifiable as a high priority due to the bad state of the road (Braidwood is known for its quilters, but even they could not design such an intricate pattern as the current road pavement!), the flooding risk and the general high level of foot traffic on the corner of Lascelles and Wallace Streets. Real and substantial safety issues will be left unaddressed unless this project proceeds. The BCA believes the proposed tree plantings in Lascelles Street will add to the long-term amenity of the street.

General comments on the Operational Plan

The BCA observes that the annual Operational Plan is one of the QPRC's key documents in guiding its work program for the year and hence it is crucial that the plan reflects the desires of the respective local communities throughout its jurisdiction.

Not only is the plan of crucial importance, but of course its delivery. The main way to demonstrate this is through the Annual Reports and the six-monthly Delivery Program Report (p7). The BCA notes that the Annual Report 2018-19 is available on the QPRC [website](#), but the six-monthly Delivery Program Report which should be a more timely report does not appear to be available on the website. This leads to a diminished accountability by QPRC.

Braidwood and its surrounding district were severely impacted by the recent brutal bushfires. The BCA would like to express its appreciation to QPRC for its significant efforts in the disbursement of the \$1m bushfire assistance from the Federal Government (p25).

The BCA notes that the total rates income will be increased by the rate peg of 2.6% set by the NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (p25). It also notes the rates harmonization structure has been adopted and reflects the lower level of services provided in Braidwood (p25).

The BCA encourages QPRC to take every opportunity to apply for as much anticipated fast tracked infrastructure expenditure by the Federal and State governments within the regions as part of the COVID recovery (p27). An example of this is the recently announced [Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program](#).

Financial Overview – Capital Works Program for 2020-21

The Capital Works Program for 2020-21 represents the crux of the operational plan. As such it is difficult to fully understand without explanations of the individual items and also to compare with previous years. The virtual meeting was timely and provided useful clarification of many of the questions on the draft Capital Works Program.

The discussion above on the priority projects arising from the BCA's questionnaire represents its preferred projects to be included in the Capital Works Program for 2020-21.

Road works

The BCA welcomes the proposed work under the local roads reseals, rehabilitation and resheeting program (p88-9) and the gravel resheeting program (p91). The amount of work being proposed is necessary and reflects the poor state of roads both within Braidwood and the surrounding district.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by Sue Murray

BCA President

On behalf of the Braidwood Community Association

29 May 2020

Priorities of the members of the BCA

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Bike path and footpath around outskirts of Braidwood	17	28
Youth Performing Arts Centre	13	28
Swimming pool refurbishment	11	20
Footbridge over Monkittee Creek	9	19
After-school care centre	8	18
Skate Park at the Rec Ground	9	15
Security lights in North Ryrie Park playground	6	13
Re-development of D&S Motors site and the Council Depot	7	12
Bubbler and water refill station in North Ryrie Park	7	8
Maintain library services	4	8
Lascelles Street improvements	3	7
Majors Creek Road (due to mine traffic)	3	7
Restoration and restructuring of public spaces in Council building	4	5
Braidwood Adult and Community Education Centre	2	4
Off-street parking	1	3
Braidwood Creative and Performing Arts Association engagement space	2	2
Business support and tourism promotion	1	2
Lascelles St / Wallace St corner	1	1
Replacing the Albion buildings' original traditional heritage railings	1	1
Bubble over the swimming pool	1	1
Total	168	336
Number of individuals responding	56	

The aggregate score is given by giving a score of 3 to the first priority, 2 to the second priority and 1 to the third priority