



BRAIDWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

COMMENTS ON THE QPRC DRAFT INTEGRATED PLANS 2024-25

The Braidwood Community Association (BCA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) Draft Integrated Plans for 2024-25, in particular the Draft Revenue Plan and the draft Operational Plan.

The comments given are also informed by the recent Braidwood community meeting held on 16 May and the supporting [Braidwood Major Projects Update](#) documentation.

SUMMARY

Draft Revenue Plan

- The 18% increase in general rates as a result of the SRV will further exacerbate the hardship being suffered by households in QPRC and it is therefore even more important that Council delivers, and be seen to deliver, its services to ratepayers in an efficient, timely and cost-effective manner.
- The proposed 15.6% increase in Palerang water access charge is not justified because of the changed situation regarding investment in new growth infrastructure in Bungendore. The increase was required and approved by the previous Council *‘as a result of the staged borrowing proposed’*. But no additional borrowings have been taken out and so there is simply no justification for the proposed increase.
- The BCA therefore requests that Council overturns the decision of the previous Council and instead resolves that water charges increase by 4.5%, the same as for Queanbeyan water users. This is our most significant point in the submission.
- The BCA welcomes the continuation of the pensioner rebates and encourages QPRC to take all steps to bring this to the attention of eligible pensioner ratepayers.

Draft QPRC Operational Plan

- The BCA warmly welcomes the new \$3m in Federal funding to progress the carpark behind 88 Wallace Street and the additional \$656,750 to be provided by Council and looks forward to further consultation on this and on the future use of the overall site, including the Council Works depot.
- The BCA similarly welcomes the proposed \$4m for Nerriga Road upgrade, \$2.6m in funding to stabilise Nerriga and Cooma Roads, funding of culvert installations, and various small local road stabilisation and sealing projects as well as the \$1.2m increase to roads maintenance and grading budget funding.
- Last year the BCA called for a review of the Braidwood Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan (PAMP) and is pleased to see funding for a review of all such plans in QPRC in the draft Operational Plan.
- The BCA understands that securing Braidwood’s water supply is being considered as part of the refresh of the Palerang Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) Strategy/Plan. The BCA is pleased that the process has commenced and looks forward to commenting on the Issues Paper which is currently in preparation.
- The 15 Year Review of Braidwood’s Heritage Listing by Heritage NSW is dragging on into its third year. The BCA appreciates the action taken by QPRC to date but urges Council to continue to lobby the NSW Government to get this review completed expeditiously.
- Blackspot mobile/internet issues remain real problems for residents in rural areas and the BCA is disappointed that the Draft Plan is again silent on this issue. We note that the 2022-23 Operational Plan had an action to *‘lobby Government (State/Federal) to address blackspot mobile/internet issues in QPRC’*. The BCA requests that such an action again be included in the final Operational Plan.

- Affordable Housing in the Braidwood region is a major issue and is only getting worse. The BCA is pleased that a Working Group has been established to progress the QPRC Affordable Housing Strategy and planning resources have been allocated to address Affordable Housing. The focus of these activities must be to find and implement solutions to this pressing issue. The BCA appreciates being included in the QPRC Affordable Housing Strategy Working Group's monthly meetings.
- The BCA notes with concern that the Environment Health activities appear to be reduced yet again, although it welcomes the appointment of a second Tree Officer in 2023.
- Flooding at Braidwood Rec Ground and Braidwood Life Centre has been an ongoing problem for several years. The BCA is pleased that Council is allocating \$200,000 to address the problem.
- The BCA would like to thank Council for taking actions to encourage people to join its Family Day Care Program and for their support for community efforts to replace the Early Childhood Education Centre in Braidwood that recently closed. It hopes this support will continue.
- The BCA welcomes the intention to have a budget allocation of \$28,000 to continue controlling European wasps throughout QPRC.

Draft QPRC Long Term Financial Plan 2024-34

- The BCA fully agrees with the decision by Council not to take a dividend from the water and sewer funds. The BCA urges Council to minimize the use of loans to fund major projects and believes it would be prudent to consider the consequences of a water pipeline to Bungendore in its planning activities sooner rather than later.
- To facilitate the use of grants the BCA believes QPRC should consider creating a second grant officer position.

Other Reviews

- The BCA notes that there are a range of other reviews underway, namely: Braidwood Structure Plan, Braidwood Community Plan, Heritage NSW '15-Year Management Review of the State Heritage Register listing of Braidwood and its Setting', and the next stage of the Transport NSW 'Braidwood and Bungendore Transport Study'. The BCA urges that the synergies arising from these four processes are fully exploited.

Progress by Council to advance the 6 Braidwood priority projects/issues

- In a review of the effort and progress by Council to advance the 6 Braidwood priority projects/issues identified by the BCA in consultation with the Braidwood community prior to the last election, the BCA rates Council's performance as 'Just under Average' in aggregate.

DRAFT REVENUE PLAN FOR 2024-25

Special Rates Variation

General rate charges are to increase by a further 18% in 2024-25. The cost-of-living crisis is becoming more severe and while the reasons for this significant rate increase are well understood, it must be acknowledged that this increase will further exacerbate the hardship being suffered by many households in the LGA.

Understandably, this is leading to considerable antagonism towards Council by some ratepayers. In this environment it is even more important that Council delivers, and is seen to deliver, its services to ratepayers in an efficient, timely and cost-effective manner.

15.6% increase in Palerang water access charge

This issue is the BCA's major point in its submission.

The previous Council on 28 April 2021 agreed to an increase in Palerang targeted water charges of 23.2%. This was based on a Typical Residential Bill (TRB) for water of \$1,060 (in 2019/20 prices) per assessment and a new 10% lower targeted usage of 167kL. It also agreed the TRB

should increase to \$1,160 (in 2019/20 prices) per assessment in 2024/25. This has resulted in the proposal by Council staff to increase the water access charge by 15.6% and the water usage charge by 3.5%, which would lead to an increase in total water charges of 9.2% for Palerang based on targeted usage. In comparison Queanbeyan water charges are increasing by less than half as much by just 4.5%.

The 28 April 2021 Council paper on this item states that regarding the 2024-25 increase ‘*This step is required as a result of the staged borrowing proposed*’. (p26 of the agenda).

In the papers accompanying this proposal it was anticipated that the following new loans would be taken out:

2022-23	\$2,000k
2023-24	\$5,000k
2024-25	\$5,000k
2025-26	\$3,000k

However, since that decision was made much has changed regarding Palerang water supply, and particularly for Bungendore. The planned investment was predicated on further groundwater access entitlement. This was not agreed to by the NSW Government and other options are now being considered, notably a pipeline from the ACT water supply.

As a result, the intended investment in new ‘growth’ facilities has not taken place and rather than taking out the planned new loans above, the existing loans have been reduced. In the papers accompanying this proposal and in information provided by Council staff, the balance on loans covered by Palerang Water Fund are as follows:

June 2019	\$5,383k
June 2021	\$4,803k
June 2022	\$4,585k
June 2023	\$4,376k
June 2024	\$4,120k

Without additional borrowings there is simply no justification for the proposed increase.

The BCA is grateful to Council staff for providing some recent data on some of the key indicators for the water fund, even though our questions were received too late to be considered as a Question on Notice. The data provided and the assumptions used in the modelling to determine the water charges are given below.

Year	Balance on Water Fund	Developer Contributions (\$'000)		Residential Assessments (No)		Non-Residential Assessments (No)		Pensioner Assessments (No)	
		Actual	Modelling	Actual	Modelling	Actual	Modelling	Actual	Modelling
Assumptions in modelling									
2018-19			800	2279		239		270	
			Average of previous 3 years in current prices		2018-19 + 2.7% pa		2018-19 + 2.7% pa		2018-19 + 2.7% pa
2020-21	TBC	403	824	2,389	2,404	373	252	330	285
2021-22	TBC	1,934	861	2,458	2,469	349	259	333	292
2022-23	TBC	147	921	2,469	2,535	349	266	332	300
2023-24	TBC	2,626	962	2,617	2,604	351	273	334	308
Total 2020-24		5,110	3,568						

As a result of our questions Council staff identified a minor error in the calculation of the closing balance on the water fund and so this data could not be provided until the error is rectified. This will provide important information on the financial health of the Palerang Water Fund.

The income from Developer Contributions has been around \$1.5m more in total over the past 4 years than the modelling used to justify the higher water charges. While the assumptions for

number of users are closer to the outcome, they still underestimated income in the order of \$318k based on constant water usage¹. From a revenue perspective the Palerang Water Fund has had greater income than the modelling suggested and should be in a sounder position.

Further, the ‘refresh’ of the Integrated Water Cycle Management Strategy for the Palerang Communities has already commenced and may well result in a different outcome for water charges. Also, it is possible that water charges will be harmonised when the outcome of this review is implemented, should Council decide to do so.

Braidwood has the lowest incomes in QPRC² and to impose such exorbitant increases in water charges appears to show no concern for equity or ability to pay.

Under the current proposals, and based on the same water usage, Palerang residents will be paying \$280 more than their Queanbeyan counterparts for their water.

The BCA therefore requests that Council overturns the decision of the previous Council made on 28 April 2021 that the TRB should increase to \$1,160 (in 2019/20 prices) per assessment in 2024/25, and instead resolve that water charges increase by 4.5% in 2024-25, the same as for Queanbeyan water users.

The impact of this would be to reduce the average increase in Palerang water users’ water charges by around \$60 per assessment. This would reduce Water Fund revenue by around \$176k based on 2,968 residential and non-residential assessments and the targeted water usage.

Pensioner rebates

The draft Operational Plan highlights that Council will continue to provide an extra voluntary rebate of \$40 to all pensioners in QPRC, in addition to the compulsory rebates for general rates, domestic waste, water charges, sewerage charges to all eligible pensioner ratepayers. This brings the total maximum pensioner rebate to \$465 per annum.

The BCA welcomes this proposal. The number of pensioner assessments in Palerang have only increased by 4 persons over 4 years (see table above) while demographic data suggest bigger increases. It appears therefore some pensioners may be missing out on these rebates. The BCA encourages QPRC to take all steps to bring this to the attention of eligible pensioner ratepayers, including the rebates being more prominent in Rates and Charges Notices.

DRAFT OPERATIONAL PLAN FOR 2024-25

Braidwood and District Projects in the Draft Plan

The BCA is pleased to see that there are 12 separate BWD and one NRG new projects listed in the Draft Capital Works Program (see Attachment 1) for a total cost of \$4.9m. These exclude the recently announced \$3.7m for the Off-street Carpark behind 88 Wallace Street and the \$4m referred to elsewhere in the Draft Plan for Nerriga Road Upgrade (p76).

The BCA notes that 96% of the funds for all the Braidwood and district projects come from new grants, internal reserves³ and external reserves⁴. This compares with 84% of the funding for the Draft Capital Works Program for the rest of QPRC coming from grants, internal or external reserves (an improvement on only 68% in 2023-24). In this time of austerity and rapidly increasing rates, the BCA believes that capital works should be funded wherever possible by grants and dedicated charges rather than by general rates or new loans.

¹ Unfortunately, we neglected to ask for actual water usage, and have used the targeted water usage of 167kL per assessment, which was 10% lower than the actual in 2018-19.

² The Assessment of Capacity to Pay: Queanbeyan-Palerang Local Government Area Report (ECM 1902344 v5, April 2024) says that Braidwood is the most disadvantaged Rural Village area with 55.8% of households below the median equalised weekly household income level, and 27.8% in the lowest quartile. The comment on Most Disadvantaged areas is “Braidwood (27.8%) and Rural East (26.3%) have more households in lowest quartile than the NSW comparison data.

³ The BCA understands these are largely from water and sewerage charges.

⁴ The BCA understands these are largely previous grants quarantined for a purpose.

The BCA notes that the Depot gates and repair to workshop have been rolled over again (4th time since 2020-21).

The BCA also understands that Council staff, as they did last year, will be presenting a separate Carryover Report around the end of the financial year of current projects, and will be rolling the uncompleted projects into the 2024-25 Operational Plan.

Off-street Carparking and Renewal of 88 Wallace Street

The BCA warmly welcomes the new \$3m in Federal funding for a Car Park behind 88 Wallace St, and the additional \$656,750 to be provided by Council, which will lead to the construction of a small car park (approximately 25 car spaces) and associated infrastructure.

The BCA would appreciate confirmation that the associated project Stage 1 of [Renewal - 88 Wallace Street](#), with funding of \$1.4m from NSW RHF and \$800,000 from QPRC, will be rolled over into the 2024-25 Operational Plan.

The BCA looks forward to further consultation on both these elements and on the use of the broader site including the current Works Depot. The BCA would like to again highlight the importance of this project to addressing the parking issues on the main street of Braidwood but notes that the overall site has the potential to be used for other purposes as well, such as for affordable housing.

Roads

The BCA welcomes the proposed \$1.2m increase to roads maintenance and grading budget funding. It recollects though that for 2023-24, we were told that expenditure on roads was being cut by \$1.5m, from \$3.6m to \$2.1m, so we are still to get back to previous levels of funding.

In the agenda papers on the 2024-25 Integrated Plans at the Council meeting held on 8 May 2024, it states that this increase is *‘to employ an additional crew, including a grader, roller and water cart’*. At the QPRC Braidwood Community Meeting on 16 May it was stated that the \$1.2m increase would *‘probably’* be used for this purpose, while the Operational Plan is currently silent on the use of the additional funds. This may be because this is a new initiative and there has not been time to include it in the text of the Operational Plan.

The addition of a third grading team will be very much welcomed and should help address the delays in the grading schedule and improve the condition of rural roads.

Nerriga Road is deteriorating while Cooma Road is a perennial issue. Accordingly the BCA is pleased to see funds devoted to ‘stabilising’ these roads. Funding for four Causeways in the district is also welcome. The BCA asked whether Council considers that the Wyanbene Causeway is also in need of replacement?

Funding for four local roads in Braidwood and Majors Creek slated to be ‘stabilised’ is welcomed, as is the funding for resealing of 9 local roads within Braidwood town (See Appendix 1 of the Draft Plan on Road Maintenance for detail).

Footpaths and Pedestrian Refuges

Paths are an important issue for Braidwood and a priority for all ages of the community, in particular older persons (some with significant mobility issues, with an increasing usage of mobility scooters), children and teenagers. Braidwood has the highest percentage (12.3%) of people who walk or cycle compared to the rest of the LGA⁵ and yet the town is still to have a proper network of foot and bicycle paths completed.

Increasing numbers of home-based workers and a growing population have increased the need for footpaths.

The BCA is pleased to acknowledge that several new shared/foot paths were installed during 2023-24 (Lascelles St, Elrington St and Coronation Avenue). It notes that other projects have

⁵ p49 of the QPRC Draft Local Strategic Planning Statement “Towards 2040”.

not yet progressed (Duncan St path, refuge island on Lascelles St / Elrington St and another refuge island on Lascelles St / Monkitee St).

Last year the BCA called for a review of the Braidwood Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan (PAMP) and is pleased to see funding for a review of all such plans included in QPRC in the draft Operational Plan.

A recreational path around the outskirts of Braidwood for the benefit of residents and visitors alike remains a priority for the community, including the concreting of the current washed out gravel path along Bombay Road to Garvey Street.

There is a need to have better and safer access to footpaths from roads. This issue has been raised many times by our residents, especially those who use mobility scooters or walking frames. We believe this would only require a small investment in concrete verges at intersections.

Braidwood's water supply

Despite three years of wet weather, drought-proofing Braidwood's water supply remains one of the most important issues to be addressed. The BCA understands this issue is being considered as part of the refresh of the Palerang Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) Strategy/Plan. The BCA is pleased that the process has commenced and looks forward to commenting on the Issues Paper which is currently in preparation.

The BCA is concerned that QPRC is moving to secure Bungendore's water supply with a possible [pipeline](#) from the ACT. This would be a major capital project and initial estimates suggest it would cost in the order of \$65m, more than twice the cost of the total capital works in the current IWCM Strategy/Plan.

While BCA understands that the intention is that it would be paid for by developer contributions received for water supply or by external grants, experience with the current IWCM Strategy/Plan is that this is not the case. The BCA submits that the existing charges for water users in Palerang are already too high due to an error in the methodology for calculating the charges under the IWCMS⁶ with water users effectively paying for part of the growth investment. If this is not rectified, and/or there are cost overruns in the construction of the pipeline, by the nature of the way the charges are currently calculated, water users will have to make up any shortfall in developer contributions.

The BCA again asks for a firm commitment from Council that existing water users in Palerang will never have to contribute towards the cost of the installation of Bungendore's water supply pipeline.

The BCA welcomes the opening of discussion on a Drought Resilience Plan for our region and appreciates the opportunity to be included in community consultations on this.

Heritage

The BCA is pleased to note that at the QPRC Braidwood Community Meeting on 16 May, Council staff announced the intention to double the resources to QPRC's Heritage Advisory Service. However, this does not seem to yet be included in the draft Operational Plan.

Similarly, the BCA welcomes the proposal by QPRC Planning staff to undertake a review of the Heritage Listings in Schedule 5 of the QPRC LEP 2022, which is also not included in the draft Operational Plan.

The BCA notes that the Draft Plan has \$26,000 allocated for Heritage Grants, up slightly from \$25,000 in 2023-24, which is savagely down from \$150,000 in 2021-22. The BCA understands that it is easier to make cuts to discretionary spending like community grants in a period of

⁶ The number of new houses assumed were based on historical numbers built and not the expected higher level of future numbers. For detail see: https://www.braidwoodcommunity.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Palerang_Water_Charges_Note_Final.pdf

budgetary austerity but hopes Council will be able to increase the funding for these grants as soon as it is feasible.

The 15 Year Review of Braidwood's Heritage Listing by Heritage NSW is an important process which has been dragging on for too long. The BCA notes that QPRC has been helpful in lobbying for progress in this process and in providing their comments on the draft Milestone 3 Report.

The outcome of this review will potentially have significant impacts on heritage management controls in Braidwood and consequently on the Braidwood Structure Plan and the Braidwood Development Control Plan.

The BCA urges Council to continue to lobby the NSW Government to get this review completed without further delay.

The BCA notes that Braidwood's heritage listing and the town's historic centre are significant economic assets for QPRC. To preserve the town's unique character, and to realise the economic potential identified in QPRC's tourism strategy, the BCA urges Council to advocate for more funding and assistance for owners of heritage listed properties in Braidwood.

Blackspot mobile/internet issues in QPRC

Blackspot mobile/internet issues remain real problems for residents in rural areas, while good connectivity and fast speeds are something those in urban areas take for granted. The BCA is disappointed that the Draft Plan is again silent on this issue. The 2022-23 Operational Plan had an action to '*lobby Government (State/Federal) to address blackspot mobile/internet issues in QPRC*'. The BCA requests that such an action be reinstated in the final Operational Plan.

The planned introduction of 5G and ceasing of 3G is causing concern for those residents not close to transmitter towers. While the life of the 3G networks has been extended slightly (to the end of August for Telstra and end of September for Optus 2024), some residents are claiming that 3G has already disappeared, which is not the case.

To assist in bringing greater transparency to what is actually happening, the BCA is auspicing a meeting with Telstra in association with The Hon Kristy McBain MP's Office on 19 June 2024. It is hoped that Council will take an interest in this meeting and send a representative along.

Affordable Housing

This is a major issue and is only getting worse. The BCA is pleased that the QPRC Affordable Housing Strategy was adopted in April 2023 and the QPRC Affordable Housing Strategy Working Group has been formed, with the BCA having representatives on this group.

We note also that planning resources (50% of a planner's time) have been allocated to address Affordable Housing.

The focus of these activities must be to find and implement solutions to this pressing issue, in collaboration with other levels of Government and other stakeholders.

Nevertheless, the Draft Plan contains no new actions to address this, and simply repeats two passing motherhood references to Affordable Housing from previous Operational Plan, namely '*Support a diversity of housing stock, including affordable housing, by identifying strategies in collaboration with Council, other levels of Government and stakeholders*'. [p53] and '*Use council land or other property to seed affordable housing ...*' [Appendix 3: Property Overview p104].

The BCA would like to see reference to the Affordable Housing Strategy and the formation of the Working Group included in the Operational Plan

Environmental Programs

The BCA notes with concern that environmental actions appear to be continuing to be cut at a time when the effects of climate change are exacerbating extreme weather events, thus increasing the need for action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the varying impacts of a changing climate. This is illustrated by the table below showing extracts on the income and expenditure on Environmental Health for the last 3 years [for 2024-25 see p58].

<u>Environmental Health Income and Expenditure (\$000)</u>			
<u>Year</u>	<u>Income</u>	<u>Expenditure</u>	<u>Net cost</u>
2022-23	302	1,580	(1,278)
2023-24	325	1412	(1,087)
2024-25	537	1290	(753)

The BCA does not know why this is happening but given the priority many ratepayers put on environmental enhancement this is of concern. The BCA would like to receive an explanation for this downward trend.

On the positive side, the BCA applauds the recruitment of a second tree officer in 2023. While there are good arguments for three tree officers (one for compliance, one for maintenance of existing trees and one for new plantings), this represents a positive step forward, particularly given the current financial constraints on Council.

Flooding at Braidwood Rec Ground and Braidwood Life Centre

Flooding at Braidwood Rec Ground and the Braidwood Life Centre has been an ongoing problem for some time, disrupting the operation of the Life Centre and the use of the playing fields. The BCA is pleased that Council is allocating \$150,000 for drainage design and \$50,000 for sportsground drainage. The BCA would appreciate advice on whether this will solve the problem of the Life Centre flooding? Similarly, given the bulk of the funding is for design, what are the next steps in this process and the timelines?

Early childhood education and care

The sudden closure of Braidwood's Early Childhood Education Centre has left many families with no local childcare. This in turn has a negative impact on women's workforce participation. The BCA urges Council to continue to support all initiatives to provide a replacement service, either as a private business or as a community-run facility.

Community Transport

Given the age profile of Braidwood's population and its relative isolation, access to transport is important to enable community members to access necessary services in larger centres. The BCA is aware of a demand for subsidised community transport for Braidwood residents. Medical transport to larger centres is limited and most residents rely on friends and relatives to drive them to essential medical appointments and treatment. Our senior residents have identified a need for transport to larger centres for shopping and social outings. There is no public transport and limited private bus transport from Braidwood to regional cities. The BCA has researched the Community Transport system operated by Eurobodalla Shire Council and other Councils. This is funded from a number of sources and provides a successful model that could be followed by QPRC. The BCA urges Council to investigate the need for this service, and ways to implement it.

European Wasps

Braidwood is suffering a serious and ongoing wasp infestation. Residents are doing what they can to address this problem through the Braidwood European Wasp Offensive (BEWO). Under the BEWO there are now 140 lure traps in and around the town, with thousands of wasps being caught. The BCA is pleased that Council has also been actively trapping and baiting wasps and disposing of nests on public land this year and welcomes the intention to have a budget allocation of \$28,000 to continue controlling wasps throughout QPRC.

DRAFT QPRC LONG TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2024-34

The BCA notes that the QPRC Long Term Financial Plan (LTFP) provides Council with a mechanism to model the impact of significant structural issues and particular major projects and propose solutions to the challenges they present.

The BCA fully agrees with the decision by Council not to accept the consultant's recommendation to take a dividend from the water and sewer funds. To do so would only increase water and sewer charges and be a back-door way of increasing rates.

The BCA also believes that Council should be very careful in using loans to fund major projects, as the level of debts has escalated very rapidly in recent years and puts QPRC's financial viability at risk. Grants should be the first preference.

In this respect, the BCA believes more resources should be devoted towards taking full advantage of grant opportunities. This includes the possibility of creating another Grants Officer position to assist the current officer to keep both Council staff and the community fully informed about grant opportunities and to undertake the work involved in administering successful grants.

The BCA notes that considerable attention is being given to the Queanbeyan Sewer Treatment Plant which is expected to cost \$171m over the next 3 years. The LTFP though is silent on solving Bungendore's water supply issues, with a pipeline anticipated to cost in the order of \$65m. The BCA understands that this may not be included in the current draft because no decision has yet been made, but a pipeline would significantly add to Council's financial challenges should it go ahead, and it would be prudent to focus on it in the overall conversation about long-term financial commitments.

OTHER REVIEWS

The BCA notes that the draft Braidwood Structure Plan is now due to be presented in late 2024 for further consultation and that the process of developing a Braidwood Community Plan is at an advanced stage. These two plans will be very important contributions to the next iteration of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, with the BCA keen to continue to work closely with Council on them.

These plans are interrelated and are linked to the Heritage NSW '15-Year Management Review of the State Heritage Register (SHR) listing of Braidwood and its Setting' and to the next stage of the Transport NSW 'Braidwood and Bungendore Transport Study'.

The BCA urges that the synergies arising from these four processes are fully exploited.

REVIEW OF THE PROGRESS MADE ON THE SIX PRIORITY PROJECTS / ISSUES FOR BRAIDWOOD AND SURROUNDING DISTRICT DURING THE CURRENT TERM OF QPRC

Members of the community who are actively involved in interactions with Council have been impressed and appreciate that quite a number of Councillors have been engaged with and have visited Braidwood regularly. The BCA is encouraged by this, and thanks all those Councillors who take their role of representing the whole of QPRC seriously.

In the lead-up to the 2021 Queanbeyan and Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) elections the Braidwood Community Association (BCA) identified 6 priority projects/issues to be progressed during the current term of Council. As this is an election year, the BCA has reviewed progress and effort by Council in advancing these 6 projects/issues.

It has rated Council's performance so far as:

Projects / issues	Rating
Better maintenance of unsealed roads	Good, with staff effort 'Very Good' at times
Long-term strategic plan for Braidwood	Average
Securing Braidwood's water supply	Average
Environmental enhancement	Poor-Average
Preservation of Braidwood's heritage	Average
Harmonisation of water, sewage, and waste charges across QPRC	Very Poor

In aggregate this gives a 'Just below Average' performance on Braidwood's priority projects/issues. The BCA recognises this is a subjective exercise, and notes that the length of the current Council was shorter than usual, and it has been a period of austerity due to QPRC's financial difficulties. The BCA hopes that Council's performance will improve in the future. Details on this review is given in Attachment 2.

Thank you for your consideration.

Submitted by Sue Murray
BCA President
On behalf of the Braidwood Community Association
7 June 2024



QPRC Draft Capital Works Program 2024-25 for Braidwood and District

¹ including Braidwood and district projects either too new to be included or omitted.



BRAIDWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

Attachment 2

Review of the progress made on the six priority projects/issues for Braidwood and surrounding district during the current term of QPRC

Summary

In the lead-up to the 2021 Queanbeyan and Palerang Regional Council (QPRC) elections the Braidwood Community Association (BCA) identified 6 priority projects/issues to be progressed during the current term of Council. The BCA rates the Council's performance so far as 'Good' on one priority, with the effort by staff 'Very Good' at times on one; 'Average' on three; 'Poor to Average' on one; and 'Very Poor' on one priority. In aggregate this gives an "Just below Average" performance on Braidwood's priority projects/issues.

Approach used

The BCA undertook an inclusive exercise to determine priority projects / issues for Braidwood and surrounding district the community wanted to be progressed during the term of the current Council. This exercise identified 6 priority actions (see [here](#)) with candidate Councillors then asked to commit to progressing the community's priority projects / issues. Most, but not all, candidates committing to most of the priority projects (responses [here](#)).

With this being the final year of the current Council, the BCA has reviewed the progress made on the six priority projects / issues and rates Council's performance (from very poor to very good).

This rating has been done on a subjective basis using the information available and tangible progress made. The rating exercise is further complicated with difficulties in determining which are a result of initiatives and actions by Councillors and which are initiatives by Council staff. The BCA also notes that the length of the current Council was shorter than usual, and it has been a period of austerity due to QPRC's financial difficulties.

1. Better maintenance of unsealed roads

Road maintenance and repair has been a significant challenge for QPRC staff during the period of this Council with numerous extreme weather events damaging both sealed and unsealed roads (often requiring repairing the same stretch of road multiple times). The BCA acknowledges that Council's road crews worked extremely hard during these periods to repair our roads, often having to repeatedly repair the same potholes and damaged roads.

There is good transparency on the status of grading of roads with an [unsealed roads grading schedule](#) updated monthly. This shows 18% of all roads graded are delayed (43 out of 234) and 24% of the distance graded (166km out of 693km). The delays vary between 1 and 23 months with a weighted average delay of 4.2 months (delay x distance / total distance, with a simple average delay of 5.5 months).

We do not have the data for earlier periods to know whether this is a reduction or deterioration in the delays to scheduled grading, but any delays mean that the residents along the roads affected will have to live with their roads in a poor state of repair for a longer period.

Action DP4.2 of the Delivery Program 2022-26 is to 'Improve Council's network of unsealed roads' with activities planned every year. There has been no reporting on what has been done to achieve this action.

The Delivery Program Updates and Annual Reports issued state that the annual target for grading roads is 749.6km. The performance given for 2020-21 is 97%, 2021-22 is 72% and 2022-23 is 106% and for July-December 2023 is 30%. This is quite variable and, in some cases, would be considered as 'Critical' in the traffic light system used. It is difficult to know the cause of this, but no doubt the heavy rains will have been a significant factor and so some allowance should be given.

In the draft Operational Plan for 2024-25, a \$1.2m increase to roads maintenance and grading budget to employ an additional crew, including a grader, roller and water cart to increase maintenance of our local roads should be explicitly included. This will be very much welcomed and should help address the delays in the grading schedule and improve the condition of rural roads.

The BCA rates QPRC staff's efforts as 'Very Good' during exceptional weather events, with performance overall as 'Good'.

Long-term strategic plan for Braidwood

During the period of this Council there has been consultation on an Issues Paper for a Braidwood Structure Plan, with a draft plan now not expected until December 2024, after the term of this Council. This is an important document, particularly with regards to planning and new development areas, but it is not a strategic plan.

Similarly, there has been consultation on a Braidwood Community Plan, with the draft plan at an advanced stage. Again, this is a useful document, but currently it is more of a long wish-list of ideas to be developed should grant funding become available, and not a prioritized strategic plan.

Both these documents, when completed, could form the basis of a long-term strategic plan for Braidwood, but further significant work would need to be done to achieve this.

The BCA rates QPRC's performance on a long-term strategic plan for Braidwood as 'Average'.

1. Securing Braidwood's water supply

During the last drought the town of Braidwood reached Stage 4 water restrictions in late 2019/early 2020. 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.

A study was subsequently undertaken of 'Braidwood Water Supply – Water Security Assessment and Drought Contingency Plan' which was completed in March 2021. This report was not released until 2023 and has never been subject to any real scrutiny, with the BCA questioning some of its findings. The report implicitly concludes that the current restriction policy provides a short-term solution if restrictions are implemented well in advance of a serious water shortage. The report also noted the very high level of 'non-revenue water' use and recommended action to reduce this. It was silent on any long-term solution to Braidwood's water supply in response to potential town expansion and the impact of climate change.

This issue has been raised on multiple occasions by the BCA during the term of this Council and it has been discussed at times with Council, most notably at a QPRC Braidwood Community meeting in October 2023.

There now appears to be recognition that, with higher expected future population growth than previously estimated, there is a problem with Braidwood's water supply. However, the issue has been overshadowed by the more pressing issues with Bungendore's water supply and has simply been deferred to consideration in the review of the Integrated Water Cycle Management (IWCM) Strategy for the Palerang Communities.

In response to 'Questions on Notice', Council staff stated on 14 March 2024:

'The process of reviewing the IWCM is well underway. The first draft of a new Issues Paper is expected in the second half of March 2024. When this document is finalised efforts will then focus on the development of an Options Study and then a final Strategy document. The extent to which these final two stages of the project are issued for consultation will be determined by Council as the project progresses.'

While this answer is helpful, it appears that the IWCM review process will not be completed during this term of Council and so no decision will be made on whether any action will be taken to securing Braidwood's water supply by this Council.

The BCA recognises that the process has started, but little progress has been made during the term of this Council and in the light of this would rate the Council as 'Average' on this issue.

2. Environmental enhancement

Many Braidwood residents consider that environmental enhancement is crucial to their current and future wellbeing.

As part of the austerity measures introduced in 2023-24, we were informed that funding for environmental works were cut from \$1.5m to \$1.3m. It appears that there are further cuts proposed in 2024-25.

The 2022-23 Annual Report has a number of relevant KPIs to environmental enhancement:

- Environmental programs for the community to increase awareness of environmental issues and to encourage good environmental practice.
- Reviews are undertaken on a five-yearly cycle - 100% of principal local environmental plans are reviewed during the five-year period.
- Revegetation, protection and enhancement of natural areas for connectivity and habitat protection in accordance with Plans of Management. (2 areas targeted for landscape improvement projects each year).

According to the Annual Report, these KPIs were fully met for this year.

In response to 'Questions on Notice', Council staff on 14 March 2024 gave a detailed response (found [here](#)) on the status of implementing the actions items in the Urban Forest and Cooling Strategy adopted in March 2022.

There were 14 immediate actions ('quick wins') in this strategy of which 1 has been completed, 5 completed and ongoing, 3 ongoing, 2 commenced and 3 not commenced. While a number of these actions were easy to undertake, the three not commenced are crucial actions which were intended to lead to a cultural change in QPRC, namely:

- Set urban forest targets to guide future planning and evaluation such as tree canopy cover, biodiversity, number of trees planted and tree health. Incorporate these targets into relevant planning documents and policies.
- Establish a cross-departmental working group to take ownership of this Strategy, promote and coordinate action across Council as well as ensure alignment with the Climate Change Action Plans, Resilience Plan, asset management and maintenance plans and other relevant policy and strategies.
- Include urban forest impacts as an item in Council reporting/decision-making.

There are also 18 medium term actions (2-5 years), with 2 completed or completed and ongoing, 8 commenced and ongoing, ongoing, or in progress and 8 not progressed.

One medium term action completed by Council, which is of considerable importance, is the recruitment of a second tree officer. While there are good arguments for three tree officers (one for compliance, one for maintenance of existing trees and one for new plantings), this represents a positive step forward, particularly given the financial constraints on Council.

The BCA rates Council's performance on environmental enhancement as 'Poor to Average'.

Preservation of Braidwood's heritage

Heritage is important to Braidwood's residents as the only town in NSW to be State heritage listed.

There have been at least two contentious Development Applications during the term of this Council, where members of the community were opposed to applications in the centre of

Braidwood, namely the development of the Nutrien Ag site and the subdivision of the Albion site with the proposal to remove some of the sheds there.

On both these issues a majority of Councillors supported the objections of community members. The Council decision on the Nutrien Ag site was overturned by a Land and Environment Court decision and a mediated solution was reached. Re the Albion Hotel site, Council resolved that the T-Shaped metal sheds should be relocated within the Albion Hotel site. We await the implementation of this decision.

The 15 Year Review of Braidwood's Heritage Listing by Heritage NSW is an important process which has been dragging on for too long. QPRC has been helpful in lobbying for progress in this process and in completing their comments on the draft Milestone 3 Report, so the blame for the delays has to be attributed to Heritage NSW and not to Council.

The outcome of this review will potentially have significant impacts on heritage management controls in Braidwood and consequentially on the Braidwood Structure Plan and the Braidwood Development Control Plan.

Other QPRC annual heritage activities include the Heritage Festival in April and the awarding of Heritage Grants and awards. The funding for Heritage Grants was savagely cut from \$150,000 in 2021-22 to just \$25,000 in 2023-24 and proposed to increase to \$26,000 in 2024-25.

At the QPRC Braidwood Community Meeting on 16 May, Council staff announced that the intention is to double the resources to QPRC's Heritage Advisory Service. This is to be welcomed, as is the proposal by QPRC Planning staff to undertake a review of the heritage listings in Schedule 5 of the QPRC LEP 2022.

The BCA rates Council's performance on the preservation of Braidwood's heritage as 'Average'.

3. Harmonisation of water, sewage, and waste charges across QPRC

Since the amalgamation of Queanbeyan and Palerang Councils into QPRC considerable progress has been made in harmonising rates and waste charges across QPRC. However, no progress has been made on water and sewerage charges, with residents in Palerang paying significantly higher water and sewerage charges than those in Queanbeyan and surrounding areas. (see below).

The proposed increase in Palerang water access charges of 15.6% in 2024-25, leading to an overall increase in total water charges of 9.2% is more than double the 4.5% rise in Queanbeyan.

	Queanbeyan				Palerang				Difference (Palerang - Queanbeyan)			
	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Water access	\$283	\$290	\$303	\$317	\$556	\$570	\$596	\$689	\$273	\$280	\$293	\$372
Water Usage ¹	\$698	\$715	\$748	\$782	\$621	\$636	\$666	\$690	-\$77	-\$78	-\$82	-\$92
Total Water	\$981	\$1,005	\$1,051	\$1,099	\$1,177	\$1,206	\$1,262	\$1,379	\$196	\$202	\$211	\$280
Sewerage	\$736	\$769	\$819	\$872	\$1,133	\$1,161	\$1,214	\$1,268	\$397	\$392	\$395	\$396
Waste	\$80	\$166	\$225	\$234	\$362	\$307	\$225	\$234	\$282	\$141	\$0	\$0
Garbage	\$315	\$328	\$343	\$355	\$315	\$328	\$343	\$355	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Stormwater	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Sum	\$2,137	\$2,293	\$2,463	\$2,585	\$3,012	\$3,027	\$3,069	\$3,261	\$798	\$656	\$524	\$584

¹ Water usage assumed at 167kL, the targeted usage for Palerang (Queanbeyan current targeted usage is 40% higher at 233kL)

In response to 'Questions on Notice', Council staff stated on 14 March 2024:

'Any decision to harmonise the water and sewerage charges across all serviced areas within the Local Government Area is a Council decision. The current Palerang Communities IWC refresh includes a task to model such a proposition. This will require the import of data from the recent inaugural Queanbeyan IWC as well as that from the current Palerang project. Work will also be required on a number of development servicing plans (s.64 contribution plans). A model will be developed as part of the current IWC project and either presented to Council for adoption as part of the IWC or separately shortly thereafter. If such

harmonisation is approved, it is not expected that any new charges would be applied until the 2025-26 financial year.'

While this answer suggests this issue is on the agenda, it implies that a decision is yet to be made by Council. Even if a decision is made, it will not be finalised during this term of this Council.

The BCA contends that Council could have made such a decision much earlier and made it a task in the Queanbeyan IWC, which we understand is at an advanced stage.

The BCA therefore rates Councillors' performance as 'Very Poor' on this priority action.
