



# BRAIDWOOD COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION

## Comments on the Review of Council Committees

May 1<sup>st</sup> 2022

The Braidwood Community Association (BCA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the [Review of Council Committees](#).

We agree that the list of Committees needs review, but would expect a more complete consultation document which more thoroughly examined shortcomings of the current system and the implications of proposed changes.

The BCA is not sure what Council is trying to achieve with the proposed changes, other than reduce the demands on Councillors' and staff time in attending committee meetings. Some changes are needed but the proposals in the staff report to Council do not improve the consultative mechanisms and are therefore contrary to the aspirations set out in the Community Strategic Plan.

We appreciate the opportunity to work with Council to create more effective ways of communicating with the different communities throughout the QPRC region.

### 1. Area Committees.

These were previously called Locality Committees. The Background Report states that they rarely met and that some did not meet at all. That statement is incorrect for Braidwood. The Braidwood Locality Committee met in April and October each year, from April 2018. The meetings ceased due to Covid and have not been held since October 2019. The BCA was represented by Sue Murray who attended 3 of these meetings. The Locality Committees were based on the allocation of different areas to different Councillors. Records will show that the Councillors did not always attend meetings.

The BCA respectfully suggests that the way these committees operated, which was determined by council, was the reason they did not function as anticipated. In our experience these meetings operated mainly as a forum to report on the activities of the s355 Committees and Community Associations. In Braidwood some s355 Committees were represented at meetings, but not all of them. Community representatives were told that these meetings were not the place to raise issues, but a forum for reporting on our activities. If more open discussion had been permitted, they would have been much more useful. Similarly, if community members had more say in setting the agenda they may have been more successful.

These Area or Locality Committees are the only formal mechanism for our rural villages and localities to communicate with Council on their specific needs. Every village and locality is faced with unique challenges, particularly following the 2019-2020 bushfires and later the unprecedented rain and floods. We note that the Bushfire Recovery/Renewal meetings held after the 2019-20 bushfires were very valuable in sharing essential information and creating links between our rural communities. These could provide a model for the ongoing Area Committees we propose.

The BCA proposes that Council creates one or possibly two 'Area Committees' for our 2622 region, and that they meet at least twice a year, preferably 3 times a year. They would consist of representatives of the Community, Progress, and other Associations. S355 Committee reps could be included as well - this will depend on what Council decides to do re the proposed Council Facilities and Reserves Committee. All Councillors would be invited – not allocated. These would not be open public meetings but targeted to specific areas and their nominated representatives. Open discussion would be encouraged. If this structure was to be adopted and made to work, the need to create the proposed Council Facilities and Reserves Committee may be eliminated.

We note that it is proposed to continue the Bungendore Town Centre Committee. Why is that the case? If so, why is there not a Braidwood Town Centre Committee? We also note that there are 3 Committees for the Lake George district, including a Lake George District Liaison Committee. Is this different from the Area Committees which are proposed to be abolished?

## **2. Council Facilities and Reserves Committee. (ie s355 committees).**

The proposal is: *To enhance the efficiency of the Committee, and ensure Councillors' time is best allocated, Council has proposed the creation of an overarching QPRC Reserves and Facilities Committee. This committee would meet three times a year and be chaired and attended by Councillors. It would also include one representative from each of the current reserve and facility committees.*

In the absence of a draft terms of reference for the *QPRC Reserves and Facilities Committee* it is not possible to judge whether this is a good idea or not. There is a whole raft of questions which need to be answered before any judgements can be made. These include: What will be its role? How will it function? How will be the outcome of its deliberations be implemented?

Furthermore, there is no clarity about how each facility will now be managed. Will the local s355 Committees continue to meet, supported by Council staff, but without a Councillor present? Or will they be abolished, as suggested by their absence from the listing of committees in the Background Paper?

The BCA has significant reservations about the proposal as most community representatives will principally be interested in the management of their facility and not in the running of other facilities or the strategic overview. Meetings of s355 Committees in each area could be useful. We note the points made in the recent Zoom consultation on 21st April, that s355 committees are managing Council assets and have specific governance requirements. They may be better served by an annual meeting with Council to ensure that these are met. As well, they require opportunities for detailed discussions with Council staff to deal with issues as they arise, rather than scheduled meetings 2 to 3 times per years. A designated single point of contact at Council would assist them to have these issues dealt with more efficiently.

The BCA supports the following suggestions made by the Araluen Progress Association that:

- Facilities and assets that are managed by paid staff and supported by a budget do *not* come under the committee structure; and
- When council assets and facilities are managed by council with the support of local volunteers, there is an agreement with council about
  - the application of s355

- the roles and responsibilities of council and of the local volunteers
- the way that volunteers will be supported- eg, capital development; regular and exceptional maintenance;
- points of contact with council staff to ensure that there is an expectation of a relationship between the local group and the council
- which councillor will be the link to council to ensure the ongoing community use of these assets and facilities. <sup>1</sup>

We note that in the list of committees in the proposed Council Facilities and Reserves Committee, the Braidwood Historic Cemetery Committee is included. This committee no longer exists, and has not functioned for several years. Local volunteers and Council staff maintain the cemetery but there is no s355 Committee.

### **3. Heritage Committees**

The proposal is to combine the Braidwood Heritage Advisory Committee and the Heritage Advisory Committee. There is no justification given for this and no draft terms of reference provided for this new Heritage Committee. Representatives not only need to have a full understanding of the complexity of heritage issues and how they apply to planning and development applications but also to have local knowledge of the properties in question and their heritage values. The fact that Braidwood is the only Heritage listed town in NSW and that heritage considerations are guided by the Braidwood Development Control Plan 2006 underlines that a separate Braidwood Heritage Advisory Committee is required.

Further, there are a number of unresolved issues about the relationship between Heritage NSW and QPRC and some unique anomalies and ambiguities caused by the State Heritage listing of Braidwood. Until these are resolved the local Braidwood community are best placed to understand both the progress made so far and the future work needed.

We believe that more attention needs to be given to Heritage issues in Braidwood, not less. At the moment it seems there is a reasonably balanced workload between the two Heritage Committees and if this all fell to just one committee some heritage issues may not get the attention they deserve and need.

The BCA therefore rejects the proposal to combine the Braidwood Heritage Advisory Committee and the Heritage Advisory Committee.

### **4. Transparency**

The names of all community members serving on each Council committee should be public and given on the Council website (currently only some of the names are provided). Also, the reports of all the Council committees and the date of their next meeting should be published on the Council website where the committee membership and terms of reference are given. Currently minutes are only provided as attachments to Council meeting papers and are not easy to find.

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<sup>1</sup> Review of Council Committees – Submission from Araluen Progress Association

## **5. Open Community Forums**

These are integral to wider Community consultation. Nominally, these are held every 6 months, although the last in Braidwood appears to have been in May 2021.

The BCA believes these Open Community Meetings should continue to be held. The BCA is pleased to note that Council intends reviewing the way the Community Forums are conducted to permit greater community discussion around matters that are important to that community.

As Councillors represent the entire QPRC region, and the Braidwood district does not have a local representative on Council, these meetings are an important way for Councillors and staff to meet local communities to discuss local issues.

We are happy to elaborate on any of the points made above.

Submitted by Sue Murray

BCA President

On behalf of the Braidwood Community Association

1 May 2022