

MARK APELDOORN*Director**TDG*

mark.apeldoorn@tdg.co.nz

TRAFFIC PLANNING FOR UNANDERRA TOWN CENTRE: WHO'S RUNNING THE SHOW?

The paper examines some questions on consultative representation. The matter goes to fairness, equity, risk and balance, but also to what's right, best and who's to determine that. Interests and motivations are often varied, and at times competing. This paper considers firstly the obligations, principles and methods of consultation. It then evaluates as a Case Study, community and stakeholder engagement and influence on the Unanderra Access and Movement Strategy. It develops some guiding principles to assist practitioners working within similar environments.

1. Introduction

The question "*who's running the show*" goes to the heart of fairness and equity. It goes to representation, balance and weight. Perhaps too, it also goes to questions like "*has to most appropriate solution been recommended and who's best placed to determine this?*" We've all seen the results of design-by-committee. The "*camel and horse*" turn of phrase comes to mind. So how effective are our consultative processes?

A Town Centre Master Plan and Access and Movement Strategy have recently been developed for the Unanderra Town Centre, Wollongong. They included a range of public, stakeholder and related industry consultations.

The degree to which a consultation strategy involves, and is then influenced by its responses impacts on study outcomes and recommendations. Where are the thresholds? Who manages them? How should an expert, a professional, specialist advisor respond, and what is the role of the project principal? Where is the point of ultimate decision making?

These and other matters are examined in the following paper. The paper doesn't set out to recommend consultative procedures, there's ample guidance and direction on that, some of which is referenced for further consideration. The relationships between the various roles key advisory and external parties have on a study are assessed in the Case Study and some guiding principles developed to assist practitioners working in this space.

**2. Primary Objectives**

The primary objectives for the paper are to:

- Develop an understanding around stakeholder representation and the consultative needs;
- Examine the various, and at times competing, interests and motivations of stakeholders and how they influence Plan and Strategy outcomes;
- Understand how the community and stakeholders influenced outcomes in the Unanderra Town Centre Master Plan and Access and Movement Strategy; and to
- Identify some key learnings and guiding principles to assist practitioners.

3. Understanding Stakeholder Representation and Consultative Needs

A range of legislative, policy and guidance processes require consultation to be undertaken and inform how best to deliver it. These are perhaps most plainly seen in:

- Local government legislation;
- Funding authority policy; and
- Council Policy direction.



New South Wales

It's necessary to understand these requirements in order to fulfil their obligations. They're briefly considered as follows:

3.1 Legislative Obligations

Legislative requirements are obligatory and must be applied if an outcome or action is to be confirmed. It's a pre-requisite to any physical action being achievable.

Statutory consultative obligations exist in the Local Government Act 1993 as follows:

Chapter 3 What is a council's charter?

Introduction. *The charter contained in this Chapter comprises a set of principles that are to guide a council in the carrying out of its functions. A council may add other principles not inconsistent with those in the Chapter.*

8 The council's charter

(1) A council has the following charter:

- *to provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively*
-
- *to exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and promotes social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights*
- *to facilitate the involvement of councillors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government*
-
- *to keep the local community and the State government (and through it, the wider community) informed about its activities*
-

(2) A council, in the exercise of its functions, must pursue its charter but nothing in the charter or this section gives rise to, or can be taken into account in, any civil cause of action. [Emphasis added].

Key observations from the Act requirement can be summarised as follows:

- A set of principles are provided as a guide to Councils and can be added to;
- Council's may vary the principles, but not be inconsistent with them;
- Councils are expected to consult based on the following principles:
 - Adequate;
 - Equitable;
 - Appropriate;
 - Efficient;
 - Effective;
 - Accessible;
 - Participative;
 - Facilitative; and

- Informed.
- Councils are obliged to pursue their charter.

A key and particular reference within the Act is set out at section 406 as follows:

406 Integrated planning and reporting guidelines

- (1) *The Departmental Chief Executive is to establish integrated planning and reporting guidelines (referred to in this Chapter as **the guidelines**) for the purposes of this Chapter.*
- (2) *The guidelines can impose requirements in connection with the preparation, development and review of, and the contents of, the community strategic plan, resourcing strategy, delivery program, operational plan, community engagement strategy, annual report and state of the environment report of a council.*
- (3) *In particular (but without limiting subsection (2)), the guidelines can impose requirements in relation to any of the following:*
 - (a) *the procedures to be followed in the preparation, development or review of plans, strategies, programs and reports,*
 - (b) *the matters to be addressed or provided for by plans, strategies, programs and reports,*
 - (c) *requirements for consultation in connection with the preparation, development or review of plans, strategies and programs.*
 - (d) *the matters to be taken into account or to which regard is to be had in connection with the preparation, development or review of plans, strategies, programs and reports.*
- (4) *A council must ensure that the requirements of the guidelines are complied with.*
- (5) *The guidelines can include other material for the guidance of councils in connection with the plans, strategies, programs and reports to which this section applies.*
- (6) *The Departmental Chief Executive may review and amend the guidelines from time to time.*
- (7) *The guidelines and any amendment of the guidelines must be posted on the Department's website and notified in writing to each council by the Departmental Chief Executive. [Emphasis added].*

Notably, the statutory requirements are referred to as “guidelines”, notwithstanding the obligation (“must”, refer 406(4)) for the guidelines to be complied with.

Clearly there is sound direction in law to consult.

3.2 Funding Authority Policy Direction

Shared funding authorities, apart from being a key stakeholder in most consultations, establish guidance to and require consultation (otherwise referred to as “engagement”). While not a statutory obligation it does present as a pre-requisite for access to funding and in that context is necessary.

By way of an example, the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) policy on consultation states:

Stakeholders and the Community

We are committed to open consultation with stakeholders and the community. Our stakeholders include local government, state and federal government agencies, industry, peak organisations and community groups.

We also offer opportunities for members of the public to share your feedback on our exhibitions.

When are we required to consult?

Under the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, the Department is required to consult about certain decisions.

We consult with:

- *local councils about proposed new Local Environment Plans;*
- *public authorities about environmental assessment requirements for major projects;*
- *the community about environmental assessments of major projects which have been submitted to the Department.*

What do we consult on?

- *We also exhibit all public consultations on our website's Get involved page, and publicise them on major and relevant local newspapers.*
- *We also exhibit all state significant development proposals at our Information Centre at 23-33 Bridge Street Sydney. Both places will explain how you can make submission on a major project.*
- *The Department also exhibits other developments, draft policies and plans.*

3.3 Council Policy Direction

Councils principal decision making bodies exist at the political level. Within that context however there are a number of layers of decision making that occur in the process that leads to an ultimate Council decision to proceed with and commit funding to a work.

Most Councils have established policies in relation to Community Engagement. The motivation for this is driven through Section 8 of the Local Government Act 1993, The Council's Charter. An example policy from Wollongong City Council is as follows:

POLICY STATEMENT

Wollongong City Council is committed to engaging the community in an effective, timely and transparent manner so their views can provide input into decision making. Council will actively encourage the participation of community members who may be affected by, or are interested in a decision.

The method of engagement will be appropriate to the project and the needs of the affected community. Council recognises its obligations under the Local Government Charter (section 8 and throughout the Local Government Act 1993) as they relate to consultation, participation and engagement. [Emphasis added].

There are a number of key elements to the policy, underlined in the quoted reference. It is evident that they strongly reflect the guidance of the Local Government Act, as would be expected.

The Wollongong policy example goes further to describe "What is engagement". This starts to provide some guidance as to *who's running the show* on consultation. The policy states that:

- It's "... about asking the community to help Council make better decisions."
- It also goes on to describe that the level of engagement will vary according to the project.

Council is clearly retaining the decision making authority for itself in this case. Not only is the decision retained, but the extent that the community can participate in the process is a matter that Council retains control over as well. In Wollongong Council's case, the policy helpfully provides some guidance on levels of engagement.

This is firstly based on the nature of engagement it expects to undertake in each case and is described within four "levels of engagement" being to:

- Inform;
- Consult;

- Involve; or
- Collaborate.

For each level of engagement, the Goal, Council's Promise (its commitment) and the techniques for engagement are set out. In each instance the policy provides guidance as to its intended methodology. It's of note here that we can start to see and understand the difference between the terms "consult" and "engage". Without doubt, "Engagement" encompasses a wide range of community contact, one form of which includes a commitment to "consult".

3.4 Research, Guidance and Other Sources

Some other knowledge and resource areas are set out as follows for reference purposes.

3.4.1 RMS:

RMS describes its Community Engagement purpose in part as follows:

Roads and Maritime strives to engage with customers and the community to understand their needs and consider these when making decisions. In undertaking community and stakeholder engagement activities, our goals are to:

- *Enhance its transparency and public accountability*
- *Ensure that its decision-making is inclusive of diverse community ideas and opinions*
- *Ensure that its strategic planning, project development, and service delivery meets the balance of community needs and expectations*
- *Create a more efficient organisation based on collaborative decision-making and enhanced public trust*

Other reference sources include the following:

- Roads and Maritime Community Involvement and Communication: A resource manual for staff; and
- Roads and Maritime Community Involvement Policy.

3.4.2 TfNSW:

TfNSW describes its Community Engagement purpose in part as follows:

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) works closely with stakeholders and the wider community to continually improve services and achieve better outcomes for our customers.

For TfNSW, stakeholder and community engagement is all about establishing and maintaining a connection with our communities. We work hard at improving stakeholder relationships by maintaining a general presence within the community, and by initiating and encouraging open dialogue between Transport for NSW, the wider community and other stakeholder groups.

Our aim is to ensure effective public participation through meaningful communications and engagement opportunities.

3.4.3 Quality Planning NZ – Resource Library

- The Quality Planning NZ resource library includes reference on:
 - Introduction to consultation for resource consents;
 - Why should an applicant consult;
 - Who to consult and the applicants role;
 - What should an applicant do;

- Consultation before notification;
- Consultation after lodgement;
- How to consult; and
- Effective forms of communication.

3.5 Summary and Findings

It's apparent in these sections and references, as it is perhaps in some of the policy, that differing interpretations apply to the interchange between the terms consult and engage. Notwithstanding this, it's clear from the various agency perspectives, that it's their intention to quite strongly retain ownership of the decision making processes and therefore retain control when it comes to "running the show." But..... how effective is this for the engaged?

4. Stakeholder Influence in Consultation

Three key elements affect stakeholder influence on consultative processes. These can be defined as *Purpose*, *Parties* and *Methods*. These elements are examined in the following sections.

4.1 Purpose

Broadly speaking, Purpose can be described as encompassing those elements that establish the objectives, principles, and processes for consultation. All three of these have the potential to influence the way in which the persons being consulted can communicate their views, their representations, and therefore how effective they are in exercising influence on the outcomes.



4.1.1 Objectives

The objectives establish the broad terms of reference within which the consultation is to occur.

Councils for their part typically define their community engagement objectives in the context of their Vision, Goals and Values. These are somewhat broad references that principally communicate goodwill or intent. At a project level however, defining consultative objectives can impact both the nature of the information received and also the value of it. Significant care is necessary in defining project specific consultation objectives.

4.1.2 Principles

Principles define an organisations commitment to its engagement. Principles defined for a specific project, plan or undertaking have the potential to constrain who is consulted and what is consulted on. In general the establishment of consultative principles should have regard for matters such as commitment to engagement; improved consulted community satisfaction; avoidance of consultation fatigue; continuous improvement cycles; effective information flow; and effective methods.

4.1.3 Processes

Process is about the consultative methodology. The actual engagement methods are wide and varied, however there are some key considerations that can inform selection of the most effective process for an undertaking. For example in the Wollongong Community Engagement Policy these are:

- What is the decision that has to be made? Take a multi-disciplinary, multi-faceted, multi-representational approach to designing the engagement process.
- Stakeholder analysis. Identify key affected/interested groups or communities, government and non-government agencies, businesses, residents or visitors and understand degree affected.
- When to consult? Time engagement with relevant stages of work and avoid external conflicts.

- How the community will participate? Evaluate the range of options (consultative methods), how these are expected to correlate with Objectives and Principles, how they most effectively provide for affected persons to participate.
- What happens with the feedback? Consider how timing, form and validity of feedback will be evaluated and communicated. Consider how the feedback will be analysed, summarised and reported on.
- How the decision is made? Is the decision a Council one, or is there delegated authority to officers? Are there policy, financial, legislative, technical, professional or environmental measures that affect the basis for decision making? Ultimately, consider how the decision is to be communicated.
- Feedback, how will the effectiveness of process be evaluated?

Before embarking on any consultation process, there should be a clear understanding of its Purpose and this should be communicated to those being consulted. Based on Quality Planning NZ guidance, defining the Purpose could include:

- Stating the need/motivation for the work;
- Communicating the process and key messages;
- Identifying issues and ways to resolve them;
- Ascertaining community views and opinions in order to achieve better results;
- Meeting the statutory requirements for consultation; or
- Addressing community concerns over particular issues.

4.2 Parties

The parties potentially involved in consultative processes are of-course many and varied, a few of the key and more common ones are set out in the following sections. Selection of parties impacts directly on how interested sectors can participate and if at all. This in turn affects the nature of engagement responses and the value it might provide to a project or undertaking.

Careful consideration needs to be given to how consulted parties are selected and why. To develop an understanding of who might most appropriately be provided with a consultative opportunity, it's useful to first understand the roles in consultation. Both of these areas are assessed as follows.

4.2.1 Understanding the roles in consultation processes

Key roles in consultation processes according to Quality Planning NZ guidance includes:

- Facilitator of the process;
- Recorder of the views expressed during consultation;
- Participant in consultation as an involved party;
- Technical expert;
- Political representative.

A person may hold a combination of the above roles at different stages of the consultation process. For example, with the exception of political representation, practitioners may fill any of these roles in any consultation process. Because of this, practitioners should carefully consider and clearly define their role in consultation with regard to how the consultation will transfer into the work or the plan.

Councillors have an important role in consultation processes as the Council is the primary decision-maker on any Plan and also in relation to public investment in capital and maintenance works.

It is therefore important that Councillors:

- Have early awareness or buy-in to consultation processes;

- If possible, complete consultation within one electoral cycle to avoid political change (provided this does not curtail sufficient time for effective and meaningful consultation);
- Play a positive role in consultation; there is often value in having a champion (Councillor or Mayor) who secures resources and speaks with the community - so they get to know the parties and issues early on are kept up to date with the results of consultation.

The use of external professionals experienced in projects or Plan development and consultation may also be useful. Although this option may be costly, it can promote community understanding and prove to be cost-effective in the long term.

Trained professionals, such as independent facilitators, can often have a useful and important role in consultation exercises. Consider using independent facilitators when:

- A neutral position is preferable;
- Council staff wish to listen and not appear to be leading the process;
- Council staff are otherwise busy or unable to attend consultation meetings;
- Council staff are required as technical experts during consultation;
- There are difficulties in the relationship with those being consulted and/or other problems.

It might also be appropriate to consider seeking expert advice from communications specialists. They can assist with managing media, and possibly preparing information packs for the public and special interest groups.

Technical experts can also be useful in consultation exercises by:

- Educating the community on technical matters and options;
- Offering potential solutions to problems;
- Providing independent or alternative views on technical or complex issues; or
- Identifying constraints to various approaches.

4.2.2 Selection of parties to be consulted

The selection of parties to be consulted can be a complex and sensitive task. The implications of getting it wrong can be significant and lengthy to put right. Therefore getting it right in the first instance is key.

Many Councils are silent on the matter of who'll they'll consult. Wollongong City Council's Community Engagement Policy for example describes that it will conduct a stakeholder analysis process to do this. In doing so it identifies "*community*" as "*all people and groups interested in the future of Wollongong.*" That said, it specifies, as most do, that it will "*target engagements to stakeholders directly and indirectly impacted by a decision and those likely to be impacted by a decision.*"

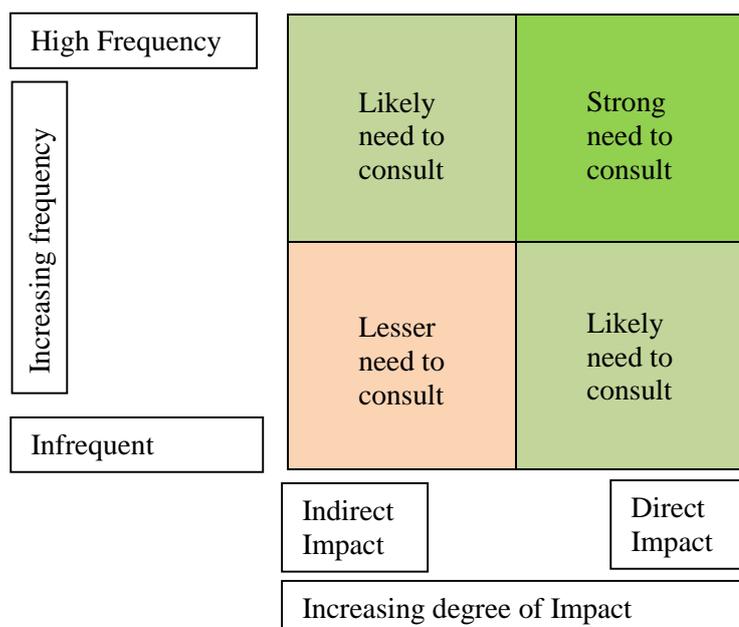
Some key considerations and guidance when on selection of consulted parties is as follows:

- Participating Party Representation:
 - Different methods better suit different parties and therefore have the potential to change the weight with which submissions are received;
 - The sliding scale of weight is a matter for evaluation. Consider the influence of a sole loud voice, versus a well prepared and presented group representing a minority, versus a high number of pro-forma responses in the form of a petition with little evidential basis, versus expert evidence based representations. How does one consider the weight or merit to be attributed to the variously represented parties?

- Extracting the best degree of response is a key outcome for consultation. Ideally facilitating each party to make their most effective representation should be a key objective.
- Affected parties, who to involve? Consider the following sample of representation sources:
 - Legislative requirement to consult,
 - Funding stakeholder;
 - Political accountability;
 - Cultural or heritage stakeholder;
 - Asset owner / manager / planner;
 - Directly affected – physical impact e.g.: land take;
 - Commitment or prior undertaking;
 - Community representative group – consider demographics tools to help inform this;
 - Industry representative groups – other tools (road safety database / GIS mapping, land owner / occupier database, ratepayers, Automobile Association / public transport industry groups / environmental groups);
 - User representative group such as Accessibility Groups, Cycle Action Groups or Walking communities. Public Apps and tools such as Strava / MapMyRide / MapMyWalk, other App based indicators can assist in identifying the degree to which routes might be utilised by these groups. While sampled and subject to bias, they’re an indicator tool if interpreted in the right way.
 - Indirectly affected individuals;
 - Interested party or person.

Assessing degree affected and therefore the merit in involving an organisation in consultation is a necessary step in the process. The extent or frequency that a party is affected and the degree of impact are material considerations. A simple four quadrants of effect tool can help to inform the process of consideration as follows:

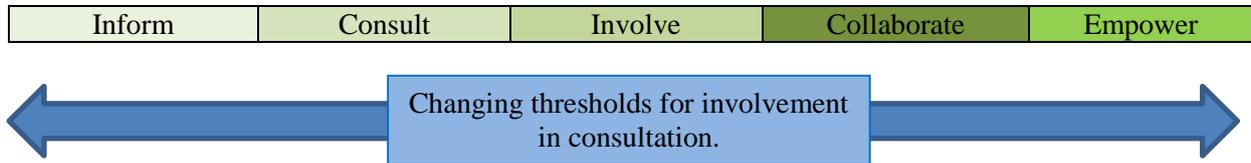
Figure 1: Consultative Need Matrix



- Determining thresholds for involvement. Drawing on guidance around “Levels of Engagement” is a useful indicator tool here. In this system, it is quite likely that some organisations/groups may be involved in later stages but not at some earlier stages. Levels of

Engagement established by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation can be represented as follows:

Figure 2: Levels of Engagement Spectrum



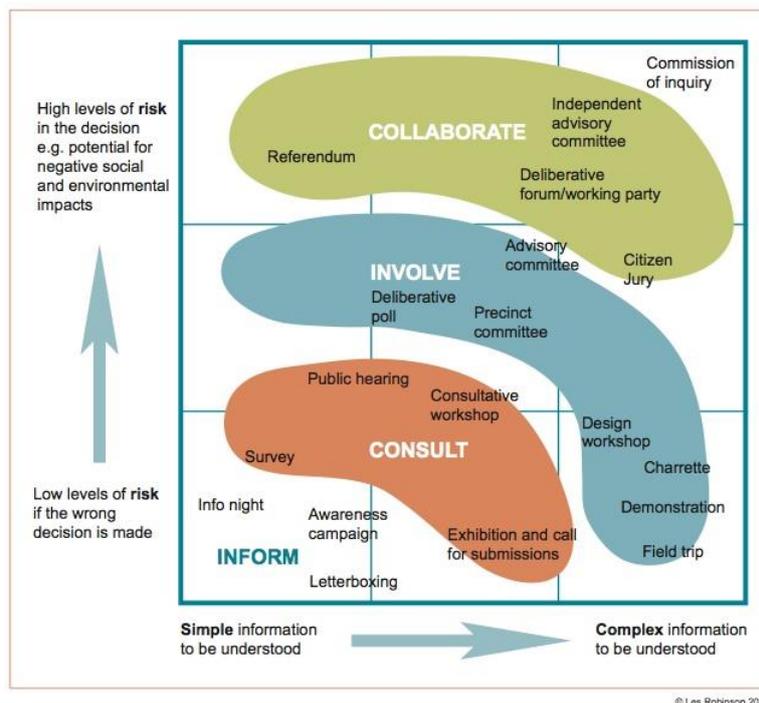
4.3 Methods

Consultative method selection is obviously a critical consideration and will materially affect the degree of engagement by consulted parties as well as the quality of consultative response.

When planning a consultative process, consideration should be had for how community engagement will evolve over the life and differing stages of the project. Early stages of engagement should form part of the larger picture of community engagement, seeking to solicit responses appropriate to the project stage and contributing to an appropriate representation both at each stage and overall for the project as a whole. Generally it is expected that engagement will take different forms as the project progresses so as to avoid consultation fatigue and to generate added value in responses. It's also important to consider what other consultation is planned within the same timeframe, and involving the same groups. Consideration should be had for combining consultations, even if projects are staged within the same engagement session. Again, it's desirable to keep communities and stakeholders engaged in the process and avoid creating an apathy towards the processes.

Two principle considerations are therefore evident in Method selection. These are Risk and Complexity. Both elements are managed through analysis across a spectrum of community participation moving from Informing through to Collaboration. This is perhaps best demonstrated in the following matrix of methodical approaches produced by Les Robinson (2002), Enabling Change.

Figure 3: Public Participation Matrix: Les Robinson 2002



© Les Robinson 2002

It can be seen that there is a correlation between method selection and the parties to be consulted. The individual methods are not addressed here, suffice to say they are wide and varied. Such a range of options provides a great opportunity to tailor consultative processes to particular needs. The consultative process should be a planned process across the life of the project / work.

Most Councils will provide some guidance as to the forms of consultation and engagement they'll adopt. Wollongong City's "Levels of Engagement" table within the Community Engagement Policy is an example of this form of guidance. By way of example some other policy approaches are listed in the References section. In particular, the Hills Shire Council has developed a useful and comprehensive Tool Kit for Community Engagement that attaches to the Policy.

5. The Unanderra Plan & Strategy – Case Study

Unanderra is a suburban Town Centre with a population of just under 6,000 persons. It's defined as a Major Town in Regional Planning instruments, servicing the local community.

It sits adjacent to the four lane Princes Highway which carries about 20,000 vehicles per day (vpd). A major Train Station is located adjacent to the Town Centre and all passenger services stop at the Station. Public transport (bus) services provide a degree of access for the Town Centre, however predominantly service the through and commuter peak demands accommodated on the Princes Highway.

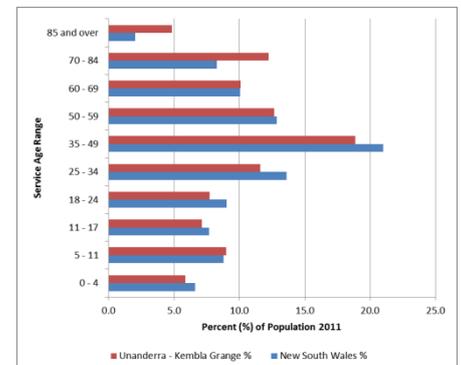


5.1 Consultative Processes

The community was consulted in two stages during development of the Town Centre Master Plan. The first stage involved wide community consultation with the second round involving more targeted engagement.

Community engagement included:

- Residents and landowners of Unanderra and neighbouring communities;
- NSW Government agencies;
- The Neighbourhood Forum;
- Shops@Unanderra Group;
- Seniors Activity Group and Community Centre;
- The local school;
- Youth Project Group; and
- Residents Association.



Methods included post card surveys, in community conversation kiosks, workshops, meetings, web forums, letters to key stakeholders, public notices and interviews. The engagement sought out the communities vision for and use of the Town Centre.

The second round of consultation was similarly wide in relation to methods and community engaged. The object of engagement was however more focussed on the Draft Plan feedback and in particular the developed Strategies and Principles.

The Master Plan identified Access and Movement as a key issue for the Town Centre and a Strategy was subsequently commissioned. Key findings from the earlier engagement processes were analysed to inform the development of Principles in the Access and Movement Strategy. These developed Principles were put to stakeholder engagement involving a more focussed community group including:

- Local community (Town Centre) business owner/operator representatives;
- An officer Steering Group involving a range of Council departmental representations;
- RMS and TfNSW;
- An Active Transport Reference Group;
- Bus, Taxi and Train operational representative organisations;
- Council’s Community Development Worker;
- Accessibility stakeholders;

Methods included workshops in-house and in the community, meetings and interviews.

Following development of the Access and Movement Strategy draft report, Council adopted it for the purposes of a further and more full consultative process, and that process is currently underway. It involves:

- Public notification and access to hard copies at Administration and Library centres;
- A web site to access information;
- Portals including phone contact, e-mail, web-based response forums.

So, how do these processes stack up against Policy, and how have responses influenced the Plans and Strategies. These are considered in the following sections.



5.2 Engagement Methods Compared with Policy

The Town Centre Master Plan engagement processes commenced with engagement at the “*Inform*” level and then once the Plan was more developed, have moved to the “*Consult*” phase. The more focussed Access and Movement Strategy moves considerations into the “*Involve*” level of engagement. A comparative evaluation of the techniques adopted is set out in the following Table.

Table 1: Comparative Engagement Techniques

Wollongong Council Level of Engagement - Techniques	Adopted Methods in each of the Studies
<p>Inform:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Council’s website and online media channels ▪ Council Newsletters ▪ Letters and e-mails ▪ Fact sheets ▪ Customer service ▪ Events and festivals ▪ Kiosks and information sessions 	<p>Phase 1: Master Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Council’s website and online media channels ▪ Postcard survey ▪ Letters to property owners, government agencies, stakeholders, community organisations ▪ Notice in local newspaper ▪ E-mails to schools ▪ Face to face kiosks during peak Saturday shopper times ▪ Attendance at a range of community forums and group meetings ▪ Informal drop-in discussions with retailers
<p>Consult:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public access forums ▪ Ward meetings ▪ Community forums ▪ Kiosks ▪ Surveys and submissions ▪ Online engagement ▪ Community channels 	<p>Phase 2: Master Plan:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Council’s website and online media channels ▪ Repeat postcard survey and submissions ▪ Letters to government agencies, stakeholders, community organisations ▪ Notice in local newspaper ▪ Hard copy information available for review at Administration building and libraries ▪ Face to face kiosks during peak Saturday shopper times

Wollongong Council Level of Engagement - Techniques	Adopted Methods in each of the Studies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Independent hearing and assessment panel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Attendance at a range of community forums, the school and group meetings ▪ One on one with key stakeholders ▪ Project Control Group workshop ▪ Meetings with government agencies
<p>Involve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ward meetings ▪ Community forums ▪ Reference and advisory groups ▪ Focus groups ▪ Workshops ▪ Online engagement ▪ Communications channels 	<p>Phase 3 & 4: Access and Movement Strategy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community forum and workshop ▪ Project Steering Committee and stakeholder workshop ▪ Letters to stakeholders ▪ One on one with Active Transport reference Group ▪ Interviews with transport supplier organisations ▪ Informal drop-ins with local interest groups, stakeholders, retailers and transport operators ▪ Stage 4 – Letters to residents, owners, occupiers ▪ Council’s website and online media channels ▪ Web-forum submissions portal

The analysis in the table demonstrates there has been a wide range of techniques adopted at each level of engagement. There is some overlap of engagement and participation level that results from the techniques selected. Similarly, engagement has been wide reaching across local as well as neighbouring communities.

5.3 Did Community Responses Influence the Plans and Strategies

The degree to which community engaged feedback has been integrated into the eventual Plans and Strategies is a measure of the ability of the engagement techniques value and success. It demonstrates that the engaged parties have a voice and that voice has some influence. There are often areas where influence on a Plan or Strategy is sought but cannot be committed to, for example in relation to works to be programmed and funded by third parties. Notwithstanding, and where there is merit, there are usually ways in which the engagement response can be communicated within the Plan or Strategy. The following assessment describes a sample of the range of engagement response areas and the extent that they were integrated as recommended outcomes. It also describes where they were partially or not able to be adopted and explores the reasons and factors impacting decisions.

Table 2: Comparative Engagement Techniques

Engagement Response Area	What the Community/Stakeholders Wanted	Influence, Reasoning and Consideration
Improved Town Centre amenity, safety, feel	Cafes, restaurants, lighting, rubbish bins, maintenance and cleaning, smooth footpaths, connectivity, views, public amenities	Infrastructure, maintenance, personal safety and amenity items were able to be directly incorporated into the planning. Cafes, and restaurants are privately operated and could not be directly provided, however the developed design evolved in such a way as to encourage and facilitate an environment where these outcomes would be achievable.
Develop facility for a temporary community	Maintain the pleasant shopping and places to meet friends. Parking is important. The idea of events like food	Reorientation of the main shopping street to create functional people based focus of shopping activity supports the pleasant and meeting place objectives.

Engagement Response Area	What the Community/Stakeholders Wanted	Influence, Reasoning and Consideration
space over parking areas	and wine festivals, run by local businesses are good.	Event space in parking areas is a physical conflict in priorities that cannot be resolved in the same space. Alternative and enhanced parking supply was identified to address temporary loss.
Traffic, transport and parking	Fix parking congestion, make cycling safe, make pedestrian crossing places safe, reduce speeds.	<p>Parking areas were redesigned to deliver additional supply in the same geographic area and address congestion. Dedicated and shared cycle, smoothed, repaired and additional pedestrian crossing facilities were integrated into the Plans. Speed reductions were achieved through design rather than regulation.</p> <p>The local community sought reduced speed on the 4 laned Princes Highway. The road's primary function was for moving traffic, speed reductions were achievable through additional signalised intersections and changed operations. The enhanced shopper street experience, currently on the Highway was planned by reorientating the shopping centre street away from the highway.</p>
Access to the train station	The station is only able-bodied accessible at present, establish a lift and full accessibility.	Train and station operations are not a Council responsibility, this rests with TfNSW. The improvements were on longer term prioritisation plans for TfNSW. There was evidence of strong community feeling and political intervention over many years. The Plans and Strategies were able to reflect the engaged community objectives, support these in prioritisation and planning, but could not assure or commit to programmed implementation, and therefore alternate measures such as enhanced infrastructure around the station were developed as alternate, yet contributing outcomes.

It's evident that, where measures are not able to be delivered directly, Plans and Strategies can readily reflect the engaged community wishes and desires in many other ways. These might include:

- Delivering desired objective outcomes in different geographic spaces;
- Improving the efficiency of use of existing spaces;
- Supporting prioritisation of engaged community wishes without committing to delivery, supporting advancement of the idea;
- Establishing alternate pathways / programmes / measures where somewhat “*idealistic*” or “*optimistic*” outcomes are sought;
- Planning to facilitate and enable a range of potential futures, keeping open the prospect of changed futures;
- Achieving desired outcomes indirectly, for example reducing speeds through inherent design.

At times however, there will be direct and physical conflicts, such as the removal of parking to create event space. The impact can be managed by limiting the time period of the effect, increasing the potential for business generating demand to off-set accessibility, alternating use of space, targeting periods of low demand etc. These impacts need to be worked through and engaged directly with the most affected parties, to develop and demonstrate the value of alternative arrangements.

6. Key Learning Observations for Practitioners

The key practitioner learnings and some helpful observations derived from the engagement processes on these projects can be summarised as follows:

Who's running the show?

- Legislative accountability dictates that Council leads and controls engagement processes;
- Councils can position themselves as impartial facilitators;
- Advisors are external and are there to inform and recommend;
- Engaged communities provide perspective, diversity, and are generally singularly motivated;
- Council, as decision maker, must weigh and balance the relative and competing motivations.

Stakeholder and community motivations:

- These come from a diverse range of sectors, organisations and persons;
- Each has a particular motivation / purpose;
- Statutory obligations are a prime motivator in some organisations;
- The ability to leverage a Plan or Strategy for implementation funding will impact both the way it's prepared, its content and also the relevant stakeholder contribution;
- Council policies and best practice guides empower communities, groups, organisations and individuals to engagement and participation. With-holding engagement can be expected to generate negative goodwill. It should be taken as motivation to broaden consultative involvement if there's doubt.

Engagement and Influence:

- There are three key elements that affect influence: Purpose, Party and Method;
- Understand where the current work sits on the consultative spectrum;
- Frame objectives and principles to demonstrate a willingness and openness to engagement;
- Understand other related and un-related consultative demands - avoid consultation fatigue;
- Understand submitter biases and be open to them;
- Design processes to spark interest and encourage participation;
- Plan consultation and engagement over the long term of the work;
- Create multiple channels of engagement;
- Tailor techniques to suit engaged party preferences;
- As an advisor, inform and recommend;
- In reporting, describe assumptions and bases for conclusions, put findings in context;
- Ensure feedback loops are in place;
- Understand that decisions are for Council.

Success in Unanderra – Case Study?

- Engagement purposes were well tailored to the stage of work;
- Party participation was wide and diverse;
- Engagement levels strongly reflected Policy direction;
- Good evidence of community influence in the Plan and Strategy;
- Some areas likely reflected different outcomes than communities initially anticipated. These were carefully explained and carried through to successive consultative engagements.



Success? Well, ultimately the engaged community will be the judge. But, in all that one thing is clear, Councils are well in charge when it comes to “*running the show*”.

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