

yass valley council



the country the people

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

(including the Community Participation Plan)



Message from the Mayor

Our Community Engagement Strategy reflects Council's mission to serve and enrich the lives of the people who live and work in the Yass Valley.

At Yass Valley Council, we strive to ensure engagement with us is both meaningful and accessible. The Community Engagement Strategy places community feedback at its core. It recognises the challenges faced by our residents in providing feedback and offers a framework to overcome those barriers.

We want to make it easier for everyone to help shape our region's future.

This strategy is developed with the community and their voices at its core. We want to ensure community engagement in Yass Valley is not just about getting constructive input and feedback, but ensuring those voices are at the heart of our decision-making process.

This strategy is designed to foster trust, enhance transparency and strengthen our connection with our unique communities. It represents our commitment to making Yass Valley a better place for everyone.

Together we can build a future that reflects the needs, aspirations and priorities of our beautiful region.

Mayor Jasmin Jones

Introduction

Community engagement is at the heart of local government. It helps communities to be active participants in shaping their own future and play a part in positive changes. Council has a vital role to play in providing opportunities for people to be involved in creating good public policy and ensuring relevant, quality services.

Yass Valley Council is committed to engaging the community in a transparent, accessible, open, and accountable way. The Community Engagement Strategy and Participation Plan 2025-2029, presented in two sections within the document, has been developed in response to increasing community expectations and their right to have a say on Council's decision-making and to align engagement practices with State government legislation.

Glossary

Community

For the purpose of this document, community refers to anyone with an interest in decisions made in the Yass Valley Local Government Area including stakeholders from the public and private sector.

Stakeholder

An individual or group with a strong interest in the decisions of council or directly impacted by their outcomes. Community becomes stakeholders when a project or issue directly affects them.

IAP2

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is an organisation advancing the practice for public participation. IAP2 supports people who implement participation in public decision-making processes.

Council's Corporate Values

Our corporate values form the foundation on which our Community Engagement Strategy is built. This strategy will play a key role in Council achieving our vision of being a trusted community partner.

 <p>Collaboration</p>	<p>Collaboration <i>Moving Forwards Together</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We share knowledge, skills & experience with others to achieve the best outcomes • We work with our community, Councillors, customers & colleagues to achieve shared goals. • We act as one organisation & give support where needed.
 <p>Service</p>	<p>Service <i>Delivering for Everyone</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are responsible to the needs of our internal and external service users. • We provide quality service. • We make a real difference to our community. • We value feedback.
 <p>Sustainability</p>	<p>Sustainability <i>Thinking about Tomorrow</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We care for the environment for generations to come. • We consider the long-term impact of the decisions we make today. • Innovation & continuous improvement are 'business as usual'.
 <p>Integrity</p>	<p>Integrity <i>Being Respectful & Honest</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are responsive to the needs of our internal & external service users. • We provide quality service. • We make a real difference to our community. • We value feedback.
 <p>Accountability</p>	<p>Accountability <i>Taking Responsibility</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We take ownership of our actions, decisions and mistakes. • We welcome scrutiny whenever it is needed. • We put Council's values and objectives ahead of our own for our community.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement, also known as ‘public participation’ is about involving the community in making decisions that shape their lives.

Engaging people on ideas, issues and opportunities is crucial for building a place where people want to live, work, and visit.

Robust community engagement is the basis for understanding decisions, sharing perspectives, improving outcomes and building trust between Council, the community and other partners.

Effective engagement will:

- Ensure community needs and expectations are understood and reflected in the decisions and actions of Council result in better, more sustainable decisions
- Build trust and improve accountability through transparency of decision-making
- Value local knowledge and foster local problem-solving
- Improve understanding of Council’s planning, prioritising and resourcing
- Identify critical issues and opportunities early
- Optimise use of limited resources and maximise efficient resource allocation
- Feedback to the community the result of the engagement process
- Result in better, more sustainable decisions

Community Engagement Strategy

The Community Engagement Strategy Outlines Council’s approach to engagement. It provides transparency and clarity for all stakeholders so they can understand their role in decisions they are interested in or impacted by, in order to achieve better outcomes for our community and environment. The strategy applies a principles-based approach and defines who, when and how we will engage. The level of community involvement varies depending on the project and the potential impact of the decision.

This document covers legislative requirements for mandatory public engagement for all of Council’s planning functions. It builds on the approach established by the Community Engagement Strategy and includes specific information about community participation on planning and development decisions.

Legislative requirements

Local Government Act 1993, Section 8A and Section 402A

Council must establish and implement a Community Engagement Strategy based on social justice principles, for engagement with the local community when developing its plans, policies and programs and for the purpose of determining its activities (other than routine administrative matters).

Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (the EP&A Act)

Schedule 1 Community Participation Requirements and Part 2, Division 2.6 Community Participation

Our Community

A broad range of community voices are required to shape Yass Valley. This is why your feedback is important. Listening to residents, rate payers as well as visitors from different age groups, suburbs, cultural backgrounds and life stages helps Council get a better understanding of how a decision affects different people in our community. The more information we have about the impacts of a decision, the closer we are to achieving an outcome that benefits the wider community.



POPULATION
17,647

Aboriginal
or Torres
Strait
Islander

3.1%

Residents prefer to
contact Council Online or
through the website.



15.4%
Children (0-11)



49.5%
Adults (18-59)



5.4%
Have a need
for assistance
with a core
activity



7.4%
Teenagers (12 – 17)



15.4%
Seniors (59+)



10.9 %
**Born
Overseas**

TOP % ANCESTRY Australian, English, Irish, Scottish, Australian Aboriginal

There are occasions where Council may choose not to engage with the community. This will occur where the impact to the community is minimal or applies a currently adopted policy. This may occur when:

- Council is confident that current and accurate data or information is available to make an informed decision
- Matters are administrative or routine management
- External timeframes imposed on council do not permit the inclusion of an engagement process
- Decisions are imposed by external agencies
- There is an emergency situation.

Engagement Challenges

Addressing these challenges requires tailored engagement strategies that consider the unique needs of our communities, including both in-person and digital methods of engagement, clear communication, and ongoing efforts to build trust and inclusion.

Community engagement in Yass Valley, like in many regional areas, faces several challenges. Some of the key challenges include:

Geographic Dispersion: Yass Valley is a large, regional/rural area with communities spread out over a wide region. This can make it difficult to engage people who live in more remote areas, especially when events or activities are concentrated in one central location.

Population Size and Demographics: Yass Valley has a relatively small population, with many residents being older, which can impact the level of participation in community events. Older demographics might also have less familiarity with digital engagement tools.

Connectivity Issues: While improving, internet access and digital connectivity can still be a barrier in our communities. Many residents may struggle to engage with online platforms or may not have access to technology to participate in virtual consultations.

Resource Constraints: Yass Valley Council has limited resources for community engagement activities. This may hinder our ability to conduct wide-reaching or frequent consultation efforts, especially in terms of organizing events, producing materials, or utilising advanced engagement tools.

Lack of Awareness: If community engagement opportunities are not effectively communicated, residents may not be aware of the available platforms or initiatives. This is particularly true for less visible projects or more specialised events.

Diverse Interests and Needs: Yass Valley is home to a range of different groups. Engaging these diverse groups with different interests, priorities, and concerns can be challenging, requiring consideration of tailored approaches.

Limited Local Media: The media presence is limited, meaning that opportunities for engagement may not reach all areas effectively. Some residents may not be tuned into local radio or print publications, limiting the outreach of engagement campaigns.

Scepticism and Trust: In some of our communities, there may be a lack of trust in Council, which makes it harder to engage residents effectively. This might stem from past experiences or general cynicism about the impacts of engagement efforts.

Volunteer Fatigue: Our region relies on volunteers for local events, activities, and engagement initiatives. Consideration about the level of volunteer fatigue, especially when events and projects demand significant time and effort with limited returns.



How we engage

Our approach to engagement can vary depending on the need and impact of the project and is guided by the IAP2 (International Association of Public Participation) Spectrum.

The role of the community as well as other stakeholders in a decision-making process is identified in five different levels of participation. Each level outlines how you could be engaged and the level of impact your involvement will have on the outcomes of the decision. This is dependent on the goals, timeframes, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.

The IAP2 spectrum is recommended by the Office of Local Government for preparation of Community Engagement Strategies. Importantly, the spectrum defines the public's role in any community engagement program and sets out the promise being made to the public at each participation level.

Where the community or stakeholders can impact the outcome or as required by legislation, Council will ask for feedback.

The levels of engagement and how we may engage are outlined below and should be thought of as building blocks; with inform being the first level of engagement, and each progressive level of engagement from consult to empower presenting more opportunity for community participation in the process. Please note that the techniques listed are examples only. Engagement plans are tailored to suit the project needs, stakeholders and level of engagement

A broad framework for community engagement in Yass Valley has been developed based on IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum and is detailed below.

Who we engage with

A vital component of undertaking community engagement includes identifying and understanding who the key stakeholders are who will be impacted by or who have an interest in a decision. Given the extensive scope of Council's work it is necessary that a range of views are heard. This will at times require engaging with communities outside of the LGA. The list of stakeholders is long and varied and by no means definitive. Stakeholders would be determined based on what Council is engaging on.



What is our approach to Community Engagement?

Meaningful engagement helps shape the strategic direction of our region, as well as informing the various policies and plans that support this vision.

Our engagement is governed by the requirements specified in the Local Government Act 1993.

When Council can control the outcomes of a decision, we are committed to providing best practice engagement. We have chosen to follow the internationally recognised International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) as the framework for determining how we engage and on what issues.

Our engagement approach can vary depending on the need and impact of the project.

Legislation sets the minimum requirements for planning-related projects.

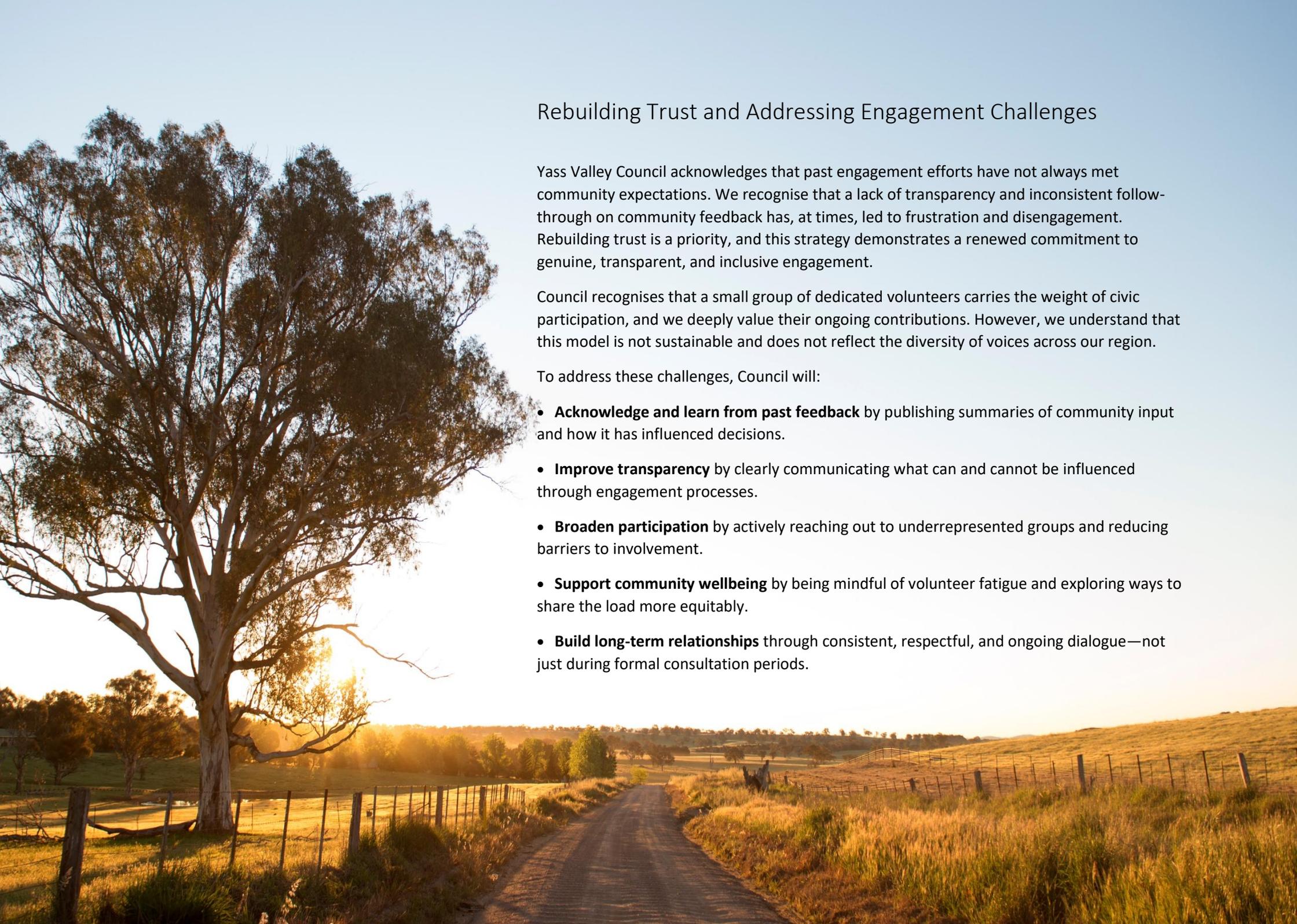
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION SPECTRUM

Increased impact on the decision 

	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER*
GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public
PROMISE	We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible	We will implement what you decide
EXAMPLE TECHNIQUES	Website e-newsletters	Public exhibitions Surveys	Workshops Drop-in sessions	Community-centred Council committees Community and stakeholder reference groups	Deliberative processes

Source: IAP2 International Federation

* Empower will only be recommended for specific complex projects as part of a broader engagement plan endorsed by Council resolution.



Rebuilding Trust and Addressing Engagement Challenges

Yass Valley Council acknowledges that past engagement efforts have not always met community expectations. We recognise that a lack of transparency and inconsistent follow-through on community feedback has, at times, led to frustration and disengagement. Rebuilding trust is a priority, and this strategy demonstrates a renewed commitment to genuine, transparent, and inclusive engagement.

Council recognises that a small group of dedicated volunteers carries the weight of civic participation, and we deeply value their ongoing contributions. However, we understand that this model is not sustainable and does not reflect the diversity of voices across our region.

To address these challenges, Council will:

- **Acknowledge and learn from past feedback** by publishing summaries of community input and how it has influenced decisions.
- **Improve transparency** by clearly communicating what can and cannot be influenced through engagement processes.
- **Broaden participation** by actively reaching out to underrepresented groups and reducing barriers to involvement.
- **Support community wellbeing** by being mindful of volunteer fatigue and exploring ways to share the load more equitably.
- **Build long-term relationships** through consistent, respectful, and ongoing dialogue—not just during formal consultation periods.

A principles-based approach

Council is committed to the following engagement principles based on the social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights.

PRINCIPLE	OUR COMMITMENT	IN PRACTICE
Tailored and Inclusive	We remove barriers to participation to ensure we hear from as many people as possible, with particular efforts made to identify and hear from underrepresented community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying groups impacted by a decision or project. • Choosing methods that suit their needs. • Identifying gaps and building relationships with groups we don't reach. • Being flexible in the way we collect feedback
Clear and timely communication	We provide clear, accessible and prompt information about how you can have your say to give you time to provide informed feedback.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing information early • Using language which is easy to understand and concise • Providing updates on progress and on the final outcome
Meaningful and genuine	We facilitate genuine opportunities to listen to and understand your aspirations, ideas, needs and concerns so you can inform the outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarifying what can and can't be influenced by the engagement • Respecting the time and effort of those who participate in the engagement • Listening openly and applying feedback objectively
Work in partnership	We work in respectful partnerships, with the understanding that community and government are responsible for shaping the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a vision together • Agreeing on shared goals • Fostering openness and trust • Ensuring engagement opportunities are regular and feedback is communicated

How we engage – Implementation overview

The following table explains how we will engage with our community about plans and strategies, as well as other work we do, so our community knows what to expect from us. Planning-related projects have specific exhibition timeframes that must be met, which are outlined in the following pages.

PROJECT	ENGAGEMENT LEVEL	HOW	WHAT TO EXPECT	EXHIBITION PERIOD
Key long term plans including: Community Strategic Plan Delivery Program Resourcing Strategy Community Engagement Strategy Local Strategic Planning Statements Other plans and Strategies	Involve	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities/channels for the community to share their views. Prior to public exhibition there may be multiple rounds of engagement undertaken to develop a draft plan	Reflect community concerns and aspirations in the finalised plan	28 Days
Annual Operational Plan, Budget and fees and charges	Involve	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities/channels for the community to share their views	Reflect community concerns and aspirations in the finalised plan	28 Days
New capital works (eg. Skate parks, playgrounds) and consultation to prepare draft master plans prior to exhibition	Involve	Involve the community to ensure priorities are reflected in the decision. Provide a range of opportunities/channels for the community to share their views	Reflect community concerns and aspirations in the finalised plan	Minimum 21 Days
Key Policies including: Code of Meeting Practice Payment of expenses and Provision of Facilities to Councillors Policy Others as required	Consult	Councils Website	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	28 days or 42 days as specified by legislative requirements or Council resolution.

PROJECT	ENGAGEMENT LEVEL	HOW	WHAT TO EXPECT	EXHIBITION PERIOD
Planning proposals for local environmental plans, subject to a determination	Consult	For site-specific amendments, a letter/ email will be sent to landowners and adjoining landowners. Minor amendments or general amendments that do not affect a specific site may not be notified by letter/email. Council's website. NSW planning portal.	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	28 days (or as specified by the Gateway Determination, which may find that no exhibition is required for a minor proposal).
Reclassification of land Land in Council ownership must be classified for either community or operational use under the Local Government Act 1993.	Consult	Council's website. Letter/Email.	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	28 days (or as specified by the Gateway Determination, which may find that no exhibition is required for a minor proposal).
Local Approvals Policy The Local Approvals Policy identifies low-impact activities that can be undertaken without approval from Council such as community events, footway dining and mobile vending, provided they meet certain criteria	Consult	Council's website.	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	As per legislative requirements

PROJECT	ENGAGEMENT LEVEL	HOW	WHAT TO EXPECT	EXHIBITION PERIOD
<p>Draft development control plans and guidelines Development Control Plans and Guidelines provide controls to guide new development, which are considered in the assessment of development applications.</p>	Consult	<p>Council's Website</p> <p>If the Development Control Plan amendment is site-specific (for example, area plans which only apply to certain sites in the city) we notify landowners and adjoining landowners by letter/email. Minor amendments or general amendments that do not affect a specific site may not be notified by letter/email.</p>	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	As per the EPAA (28 Days)
<p>Draft development contribution plans A plan that levies new development for facilities such as transport, community and recreational facilities required to service new development.</p>	Consult	Council's website.	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	As per the EPAA (28 Days)
<p>Draft planning agreements Planning agreements entered into between Council and a developer. The planning agreement allows contributions for land dedication, recreation, community and transport facilities in lieu of development contributions under EPA Act (1979)</p>	Consult	Council's website.	Consider points raised and provide feedback on how public input was considered in the decision.	As per the EPAA (28 Days)

PROJECT	ENGAGEMENT LEVEL	HOW	WHAT TO EXPECT	EXHIBITION PERIOD
Development applications Application for development consent (other than for complying development certificate, for designated development or for State Significant Development)	Consult	Council's website. Letter/Email. Refer the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 and Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021 for when notification is not required.	Consider points raised and provide information on how public input was considered in the assessment.	14 days* *Council may extend the public exhibition period without further notification to those already notified.
Development application consent for designated development Designated developments as detailed in Schedule 3 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2021.	Consult	Letter/Email. Council's website Site Notice	Consider points raised and provide information on how public input was considered in the assessment.	28 Days
Council-related development applications Council has a policy which sets out how to publicly exhibit Council related development applications, which is available on Council's website.	Consult	Letter/Email. Council's website	Consider points raised and provide information on how public input was considered in the assessment.	28 days* * Council may extend the public exhibition period without further notification to those already notified.
Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) – obtained under Division 5.1 EIS's prepared for development under Part 5 of the EPA Act.	As required by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment	These are managed by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment and will be viewable on the department's website.	As required by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment.	28 Days

A council related development application means a development application, for which a council is the consent authority, that is-

- a made by or on behalf of the council, or
- b for development on land of which council is an owner, a lessee or a licensee, or otherwise vested in or under the control of the council.

Note: land vested in or under the control of the council includes public land within the meaning of the Local Government Act 1993.

Notification of development applications or modification request may not be required for proposal that are:

- Consistent with the principal land uses permitted by the zoning
- Comply with the requirements of the Yass Local Environmental Plan
- Comply with the requirements of or meet the objectives of any applicable development control plan or planning policy
- Unlikely to have a significant impact on adjoining or opposite properties

Planning proposal/LEP amendments will be notified for the minimum period specified in the gateway determination for the proposal. If the gateway determination does not specify a period due to the minor nature of the proposal, no notice will be given.

Note: the period between 20 December and 10 January (inclusive) will be excluded from the calculation of a period consultation.

If written submissions are requested, they must be forwarded to Council during the period of notice concerning the matter. Before determining the matter notified, Council must consider all submissions made to it.

If a development application or planning proposal receives 10 or more submissions, a planning forum will be held with the applicant and submission authors. The forum provides the opportunity to address Councillors and provide a better understanding of issues prior to making a decision.

Council will advise the community of all development application determined on its website including the decision and date. The assessment report will also be made available if required which includes reasons for the decision and how community views were taken into account.

Submissions

Public exhibitions play an important role in enabling the community to participate in the planning process, and anyone is welcome to make a submission regarding a plan, planning and development application or other matter during the period of its public exhibition.

Submissions may be received online or by email or in writing by post or in-person submission at Council's Customer Service Centre.

While it is not a requirement, submitters are encouraged to include their name, suburb and a contact (email, phone or address) with their submission. This allows Council staff to keep submitters informed as the plan, planning and development application or matter progresses.

Form letters (i.e. templated letters with standardised content) will be considered as individual submissions. If form letters are received during public exhibition, the number of form letters received will be included in the Council report and/or assessment report alongside the total number of submissions received.

Multiple submissions received from the same person during the same exhibition period are considered as a single submission. Duplicate submissions will be counted as a single submission even if received across several notification periods.

Petitions, including e-petitions, will be considered as a single submission. Refer to Council's Code of Meeting Practice for more information on submitting a petition to Council.





Responding to your feedback

We want to ensure the feedback of people we engage with is considered when decisions are made. Once feedback has been considered, Council staff will recommend next steps or outcomes

When an item has been placed on public exhibition or has been out for community consultation, any resulting report to Council will present the findings of the community engagement undertaken including statistics and data. The Council report will include a high-level summary of engagement including:

- what engagement and communication methods were used
- statistics of participation and promotion, including the location and age of contributors
- information about submissions/ feedback received.

The report will also include an attachment that summarises the submissions received and provides a staff response. Following a Council resolution, we will email everyone who has provided feedback (and requested updates) of the outcome.

Development applications

We will acknowledge submissions at the end of the exhibition period. We will consider the matters raised in submissions received during public exhibition in the assessment of the application, and details will be published on Council's website.