



Community Engagement Strategy

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	page
1. INTRODUCTION	2
2. WHO WE ARE	2
3. BACKGROUND	2
4. THE ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK, PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES	3
Framework.....	3
Engagement Principles.....	3
Objectives	3
5. RECENT ENGAGEMENT	4
6. RESOURCING REQUIREMENTS	4
Resources.....	4
7. ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES.....	4
Engagement Tools.....	4
Tools for Oberon Council.....	4
Visitations	5
Newsletters and Advertising	5
Public Exhibition Processes.....	5
8. ENGAGEMENT FOR THE DRAFT COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN	6

1. INTRODUCTION

This Community Engagement Strategy has been prepared to explain how the Oberon Council will consult and engage with the community in future planning and decision making processes.

The Strategy confirms the Council's commitment to meaningful engagement and collaboration with the community in general and with specific local organisations and groups.

Council wants to ensure that all groups and members of the community have an equal opportunity to participate in the development of the Community Strategic Plan, Delivery Program and Operational Plan as well as in general decision making by the Council that will affect parts or all of the Oberon Local Government Area (LGA) community.

The Strategy will also provide a guide as to how the Council will consult with and engage with the community on other specific issues, such as topical State Government and Federal Government initiatives and other issues referred directly from segments of our community.

2. WHO WE ARE

Our Community

The Oberon Council LGA consists of a community of with a resident population around 5,500 and an area of 3660 square km. The main centre of population and commercial "hub" is the town of Oberon, with three smaller communities at Black Springs, Burruga and O'Connell, together with a number of other rural localities.

The character of the LGA is mainly rural/agricultural with softwood forest plantations, and an emerging tourism industry. A large proportion of the Oberon LGA consists of National Parks and State Forests, which are non-rateable.

The town of Oberon is the base for many commercial businesses that service the local community and industries. The Oberon Timber Complex which processes the softwood timber produced in the area employs over 500 people when in full production.

The area prides itself on the relaxed lifestyle enjoyed by residents and with the natural beauty that can be enjoyed by both visitors and locals alike.

Our Council

Oberon Council is a relatively small local government area however the efforts of Council are highly visible and highly scrutinised by ratepayers and residents. The Elected Council consists of nine Councillors, with a Mayor and Deputy Mayor elected annually by the Elected Council.

The Council is responsible for making "strategic decisions" with the General Manager responsible for the day to day management of employees and in the operational aspects of Council work.

The work done by Oberon Council is considered more obvious than in larger towns and cities because what we do is so crucial to basic expectations, like having decent roads to travel on. Nearly everyone who lives in the Shire knows several people who work for Council, and the Elected Councillors themselves are generally well known within the community.

3. BACKGROUND

As part of the process of preparing and adopting a Community Strategic Plan (CSP), Council is required to adopt a Community Engagement Strategy (CES).

This Strategy will guide Council on how to engage the community and the tools and techniques it will use to be more effective.

Outside the town of Oberon and the village areas of Black Springs, Burruga and O'Connell the population is generally quite remote and this provides a practical challenge in engaging with the whole community.

In addition to this challenge, new long-term financial sustainability and accountability requirements along with increased reporting have placed an increased emphasis on community engagement. This means that Council decisions need to be made with the knowledge of community aspirations and preferences. This does not mean that Council will "abdicate" its decision making, but rather when making key decisions that Council will consider the views of the community.

One of the new requirements is the development of a Community Strategic Plan. The CSP seeks to identify the community's main aspirations and priorities over the next 10 years including establishing objectives and strategies to help achieve these priorities. An integral part of developing the CSP is engaging with the community to determine these aspirations and priorities.

The Community Engagement Strategy will guide Council in its community engagement initiatives.

4. THE ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK, PRINCIPLES & OBJECTIVES

Framework

Council's community engagement activities will focus on providing information to, consultation with and involvement of the community. Council will use involvement techniques and collaborative engagement processes where these are practical.

Engagement Principles

Oberon Council is committed to meaningful community engagement. In order to meet this commitment the following principles will apply:

- **Social Justice** – All parts of the community should have an equal opportunity for input
- **Creating the right debate** – Council will seek to inform and educate the community on the key issues and available options when decisions are made that affect the community.
- **Community input is valued** – Council is open to ideas and values all contributions. All input will be considered and acknowledged.
- **Engage Creatively** – The community will be creatively and actively engaged to maximise the value and range of feedback. This may involve multiple methods of engagement.

Objectives

Through the application of the engagement principles above and the application of selected engagement tools, the community engagement process will:

- "ground truth" previous assumptions made by Council;
- ensure residents are informed and educated on key issues
- identify and confirm community views on issues, challenges and priorities;
- focus discussion on the strategic issues facing the Council and the community;
- seek to create community "buy-in and ownership" of local issues and strategies;
- provide input for future decision making by Council;
- develop ongoing community partnerships and shared responsibility for local issues.

A successful community engagement process will deliver on the majority of these objectives. Council will measure the success of these methods of engagement by:

- a reasonable level of community involvement in the engagement process;
- the representative nature of those individuals or groups who are engaged;
- the level of support for the identified strategic directions.

5. RECENT ENGAGEMENT

Due to the nature and size of the Oberon LGA community, Councillors and key employees know personally many people within the community. This can greatly assist in keeping in touch with the views of the community.

The Council however does not wish to ‘over consult’ its residents when it already has considerable community feedback on key issues, nor does Council want to ignore, nor appear to have ignored, the valuable information that came from earlier engagement processes, which have included:

- Proposed Fluoridation of Town Water Supply – Information Session & Community Forums
- Land Use Strategy (LUS) developed for the current Local Environmental Plan (LEP) Review process (final Public Exhibition of these documents in May 2013);
- Our first Community Strategic Plan adopted in June 2012; and the Oberon CSP 2013
- Social and Community Plan reviewed in 2010;
- Management Plan adopted in June 2011 (and previous versions);
- Regular “Informal” Meetings with residents of Black Springs, Burruga and O’Connell;
- Consultation on specific issues (for example proposals for waste management facilities at Black Springs and Burruga).

6. RESOURCING REQUIREMENTS

Resources

This Community Engagement Strategy (CES) will be undertaken by Council employees, mainly through the direction of the General Manager, and with the involvement of the Elected Councillors.

In addition there will be involvement from external resources on an ‘as needs’ basis, particularly with respect to specific skill sets that are not held by current Council employees. For example with “heritage issues”, a Heritage Consultant has been engaged to assist as required.

7. ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Engagement Tools

There are a number of different and complimentary engagement tools available when seeking to engage with the community. The characteristics of Oberon Council and its community means that the techniques used should be selected for their “appropriate fit” to our local circumstances.

To be effective the engagement techniques must take into consideration Oberon LGAs:

- Geographic area
- Population size, density and location
- Demographics (age, ethnicity, education, etc.)
- Social structure
- Cultural sensitivities

Tools for Oberon Council

From previous experience the most effective consultation techniques for Oberon LGA are those that engage directly with the community. The preferred means of consultation is a combination of:

- Visitations – to villages and other locations;
- Small meetings & focus groups – as a result of a specific request or on a needs basis;
- Newsletters – distributed to either selected groups or the whole community;
- Formal Submission and Public Exhibition processes;
- Individual letters and letterbox drops for specific projects.

In addition electronic engagement tools including social media will be used where practical. However given the community demographic, this form of engagement will not be used as a primary tool.

Where Significant Community Engagement is important the following **five stages** will be used:

A. Prepare:

- a. Define the purpose of the engagement;
- b. Review and select engagement tools;
- c. Plan engagement;
- d. Review relevant information;
- e. Develop supporting information.

B. Awareness - create awareness of the engagement initiatives among:

- a. Councillors;
- b. Employees;
- c. Community.

C. Engage- implement an Engagement Plan.

D. Respond:

- a. Summarise engagement;
- b. Advise participants of result.

E. Validate – Submissions and Public Exhibition.

Visitations

A visit to village areas by Councillors and key employees is seen as a key component of the engagement process. Personal representations to those individuals and groups directly affected and those who live away from the town of Oberon is also integral to the consultation process.

Management staff and Councillors will arrange Informal Visits to meet with groups and individuals:

- October – Oberon
- December – O’Connell
- March – Black Springs
- June - Burruga

The Informal Visits will be without an Agenda and will follow a format of “*we’re here to listen*”

Newsletters and Advertising

Newsletters sent directly to residents and ratepayers are a useful engagement tool. This may also include linking into promotional material for local events and will be a means of engagement as well as informing the community of road shows or the attendance at events.

Other appropriate methods of advertising to be considered include:

- Rate Notice Insertions – for particular topical issues, and also printed messages on Notices
- Regular Newsletter – Oberon and Surrounding Villages Community Newsletter as well as Oberon Council e-newsletter (generally issued each month)
- Newspaper Insertion – a feature Oberon Council single page advertising is now in place.
- Australia Post-delivery or other mail-outs for topical issues.

Public Exhibition Processes

Council is required by legislation, regulations and guidelines to have a formal Public Exhibition of documents and to invite submissions. This must be done in accordance with those requirements.

For all Public Exhibition of documents copies will be available at the Oberon Library and the Oberon Council Administration Centre. All documents will contain a QR Code with a link to the Oberon Council Website and all Notices will include the QR Code. Notices will be placed on the Community Notice Boards in Black Springs, Burruga, O’Connell and Oberon.

8. ENGAGEMENT FOR THE DRAFT COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

Council and Management Staff (General Manager and Department Directors) will identify a range of key stakeholders and will endeavour to ensure that each group or individual is engaged in and able to participate in the initiatives below:

Public Exhibition – the period for Public Exhibition of the draft documents will be determined by a Council decision and documents will be available on the Oberon Council website www.oberon.nsw.gov.au and hard copies available at the Oberon Library, Visitor Information Centre and Council's Administration Centre.

Meetings and Visits – these will be held in Oberon and the villages of Black Springs, Burruga and O'Connell with Councillors and Management Staff attending. At these meetings a PowerPoint presentation (or similar) is to be made and an **Information Sheet** to be available as well as a **Submission Form** to facilitate written submissions. Councillors and Management Staff will also be available to meet with smaller groups and attend meetings and to make a brief presentation or answer questions relating to the draft CSP documents.

Advertising & Promotion – this should be generated to maximise community awareness of the Public Exhibition of the DRAFT CSP. This will include the Weekly Single Page Advertising in the Oberon Review, and placement of a copy of the formal advertisement in the Community Noticeboards plus details on the Oberon Council Facebook Page.

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