

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022



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Kempsey Shire Council acknowledges the land of the Thunggutti/Dunghutti Nation.

We pay respect to Elders past and present.

We acknowledge the role of emerging leaders to continue to guide us in the future.

We acknowledge the Stolen Generations and the need to change practices to be inclusive.

This land always was and always will be Thunggutti/Dunghutti land.



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Introduction

Kempsey Shire Council believes that the best outcomes are reached when our community is engaged in the decision-making process at the earliest opportunity.

We are committed to working together to deliver the community vision outlined in the 20-year community strategic plan 2042: Your Future.

From the mountains to the sea, our people are given the opportunities and infrastructure to build a safe, sustainable and welcoming community

Marrungbu

This document outlines Council's passion for one of our key foundation stones: Community Engagement.

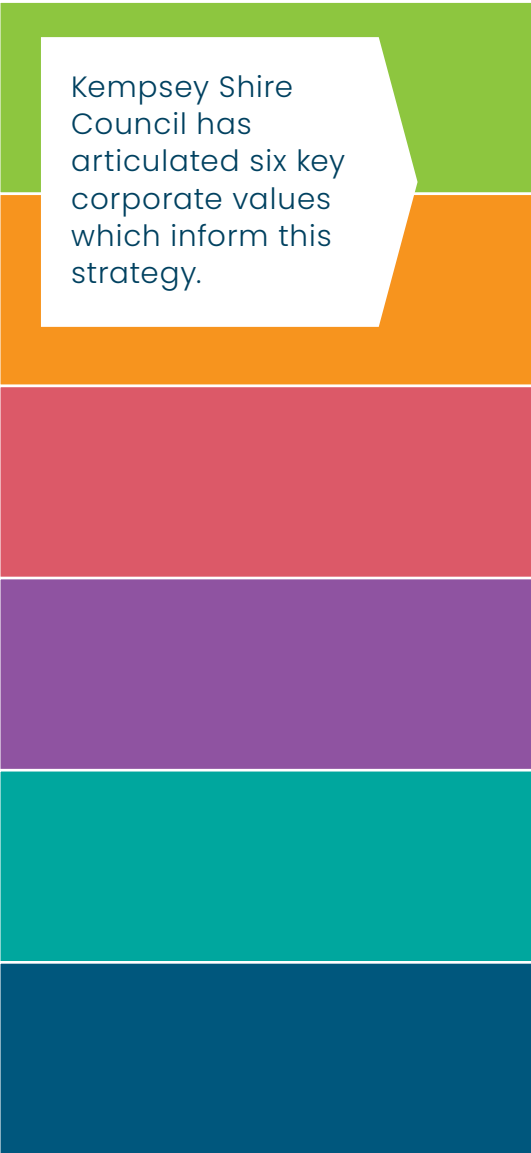
The 2020 Micromex independent survey of Kempsey community priorities highlighted "Council decision-making reflecting community opinion" and the "opportunity to participate in Council decision-making" as two key priorities.

This Community Engagement Strategy outlines our guiding principles and approach to giving the community an authentic voice.

It should be read in conjunction with the Community Participation Plan, which explains how the commitments outlined in this strategy will be delivered.

We aim to engage early and broadly and to continue to improve access to information and our community engagement processes.

We welcome the combined experience, imagination and common sense of the Kempsey people to help guide Council decision making.



Kempsey Shire Council has articulated six key corporate values which inform this strategy.

We approach our work with enthusiasm and drive; We inspire others with our thirst for excellence; We take pride in the work and service we deliver.

PASSION



We will do as we say; We will act ethically and honestly; We build the trust and confidence of the community and the staff; We are reliable, accountable and fair.

INTEGRITY



We challenge the status quo and have the courage to take risks, to achieve creative and efficient solutions; We encourage and embrace positive change in the way we work.

INNOVATION



We ensure open communication for all; We actively listen and consult; We provide timely and accurate information.

COMMUNICATION



We consider our workmates, community, the workplace and environment; We treat people as we would like to be treated.

RESPECT



We work together to achieve a shared vision; We are connected and care for each other; We encourage and pay attention to those around us.

COLLABORATION



What is community engagement?

Effective community engagement is inclusive, open, easy, meaningful, relevant and timely. It involves a two-way conversation between Council and the community.

Community engagement is a dynamic process that ensures members of the community have an opportunity to be informed or provide feedback on Council-led strategies and projects.

Council will inform and involve individuals, businesses, community groups, not-for-profits and other government organisations in decisions relating to Council plans, policies, procedures, service delivery and development applications.

Engagement does not necessarily aim to achieve consensus among all participants. It does, however, provide an opportunity to understand the critical issues and attitudes associated with projects before a decision is made.

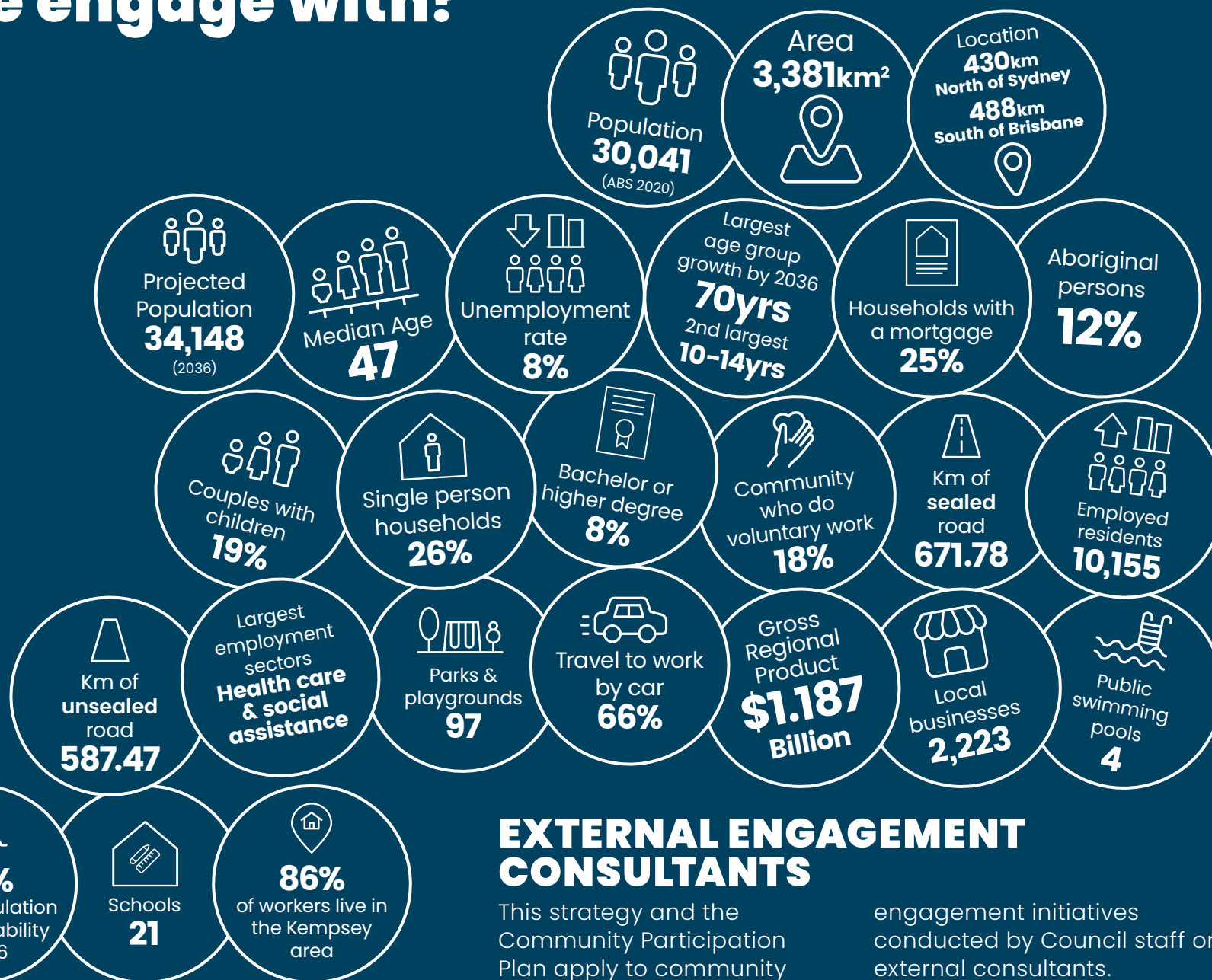


Who do we engage with?

When Council engages with our community, we are mindful we are engaging with a complex and diverse range of stakeholders.

Our shire is home to a great mix of people, sharing interests, characteristics and geographical locations, with a unique relationship with, and understanding of, Kempsey Shire.

The community's range of experiences, interests and histories is essential in shaping the decisions that affect our shire and its villages.



EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT CONSULTANTS

This strategy and the Community Participation Plan apply to community

engagement initiatives conducted by Council staff or external consultants.

Why do we engage?

Community engagement is focused on connecting with the community to identify their needs, aspirations and priorities and ensure Council delivers projects with real benefits.

Effective engagement plays a key role in informed decision making and ensures transparency between Council and the community.

Successful engagement provides Council with a range of perspectives from across the community and allows us to foster strong relationships with community members and agencies and provide sustainable outcomes for the shire's future.

For the community, public participation and engagement with Council can create a greater

sense of belonging to your community and ownership of the infrastructure and services it provides.

The benefits of effective community engagement include:



HOW DO WE ENGAGE?

The following 12 principles spell out the underlying values that ensure Kempsey Shire Council engages with the community in a meaningful and transparent way.

1 EMPOWER ALL STAFF TO ENGAGE

Engagement is a core part of Council's work. Every Council staff member is involved in some way in engaging with the community – from running community engagement forums to asking an individual what they think on a project.

2 PROVIDE GOOD INFORMATION

Good engagement requires good information. Council will engage with the community in a relevant, appropriate and timely manner to ensure the community has factual and balanced information to develop an informed opinion on any project.

3 ENGAGE BEFORE DECISION MAKING

As listening is a foundation stone of engagement, Council will consult with the community before decisions are made to ensure feedback can be evaluated and concerns addressed before beginning a new project.

4 BE AUTHENTIC, UPFRONT AND OPEN

When engaging with the community, Council will be clear about our intentions, the type of feedback being sought, how it can influence decision-making and the process being followed. We will clearly explain the issues faced and the next steps in the decision-making process. Council will only ask for feedback where community and stakeholders can genuinely impact the outcome.

5 DON'T OVER-ENGAGE

Council has collected community opinions for years, and in some cases ample research and community engagement results are available to reference. Too much community engagement can result in the community feeling like Council is not listening to their feedback. Council will assess existing feedback as part of project research to avoid wasting stakeholder time.

6 BE REPRESENTATIVE

Council will tailor the engagement process and aim to ensure community engagement reflects the communities impacted by a project.

7 RESPECT ALL VIEWS

Council will respect all views and opinions and keep in mind that the community holds significant expertise and knowledge of the local area. Council staff and representatives will treat community members with respect during engagement initiatives and it is expected that the community will reciprocate.

8 DISTINGUISH ENGAGEMENT FROM AGREEMENT

Community engagement does not aim to achieve agreement or consensus on all topics and issues.

9 KEEP COMMUNICATING

Council will keep the community regularly informed of the progress of current and historic projects. Communications should include clear explanations of the nature of the project, constraints, decision-making steps and any delays throughout the life of the project.

10 PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Council will provide the community with direct and publicly accessible feedback on how its input has been used, the next steps in the decision-making process and whether there is further opportunity for input.

11 CLOSE THE LOOP

Council values the time our community and stakeholders commit to provide their input and feedback about Council projects. At the conclusion of a community engagement process, Council will inform people who have made a submission and the wider community of the final decision and share the relevant information.

12 EVALUATE THE PROCESS

Council is committed to continually improving its approach to community engagement and will evaluate its performance through internal reviews, stakeholder feedback and community surveys.

How deeply do we engage?

Council uses the International Association for Public Participation IAP2 Spectrum of engagement to help inform the development of community participation and engagement strategies.

This ensures that community and stakeholders are appropriately involved on projects or matters that affect them.

The IAP2 approach is widely considered the best practice

benchmark for community engagement.

The role of the community and stakeholders in influencing decision making under IAP2 is shown in the chart below.

There are five levels of engagement. Each level outlines how you can be involved in community engagement and the level of impact your involvement will have on the outcomes.

Level of Engagement	Engagement Goal	Council's Promise	Role of Community
Inform	Provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	We will keep you informed. We will show draft plans to you and seek feedback before adopting them.	Listen
Consult	Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	We will listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations. We will provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	Contribute
Involve	Work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed.	Participate
Collaborate	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions. We will incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	Partner
Empower	Place final decision making in the hands of the public.	We will implement what you decide.	Decide

Level of Engagement	What it may look like	Example Engagement Methods
Inform	We update our community on the status of a development proposal, draft strategy, plan, action, or policy as it progresses. We make relevant documentation publicly available.	Factsheets Websites Social media Media Notices Newsletters Displays in venues
Consult	We consult with our community and invite comment on a development proposal, draft strategy, plan, action, or policy before it is finalised.	ABOVE PLUS Call for submissions Public exhibition Online or written surveys Focus groups Public meetings
Involve	We conduct a range of both targeted and broad engagement activities designed to collect stakeholder ideas, issues, concerns, and views. We take these into account in the development of a development proposal, draft strategy, plan, action, or policy.	ABOVE PLUS One-on-one meetings Workshops Site visits Community forums Deliberative polling
Collaborate	We work together with our community to develop an understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions for a development proposal, draft strategy, plan, action, or policy.	ABOVE PLUS Advisory committees Reference groups Working party Community summit or panels
Empower	*'Empower' provides final decision-making power to the public. Under the Local Government Act 1993, the only decision-making power that will be placed in the hands of the public is that of electing Councillors every four years. The Act empowers an elected Council to make policy, strategic and budget decisions except where delegated to staff, a committee, or a subsidiary. Delegations for decision-making cannot be made to the public.	

When do we engage?

Outside of legislative requirements there are no projects that have a mandatory engagement process.

However, Council will endeavour to carry out community engagement for any project that fulfils any of the following, unless it is determined that there are specific aspects to the project that prevent it:

Is this a new strategy or plan?

Will the project make changes to an existing policy or procedure?

Will there be a significant impact on residents during the delivery or construction of the project?

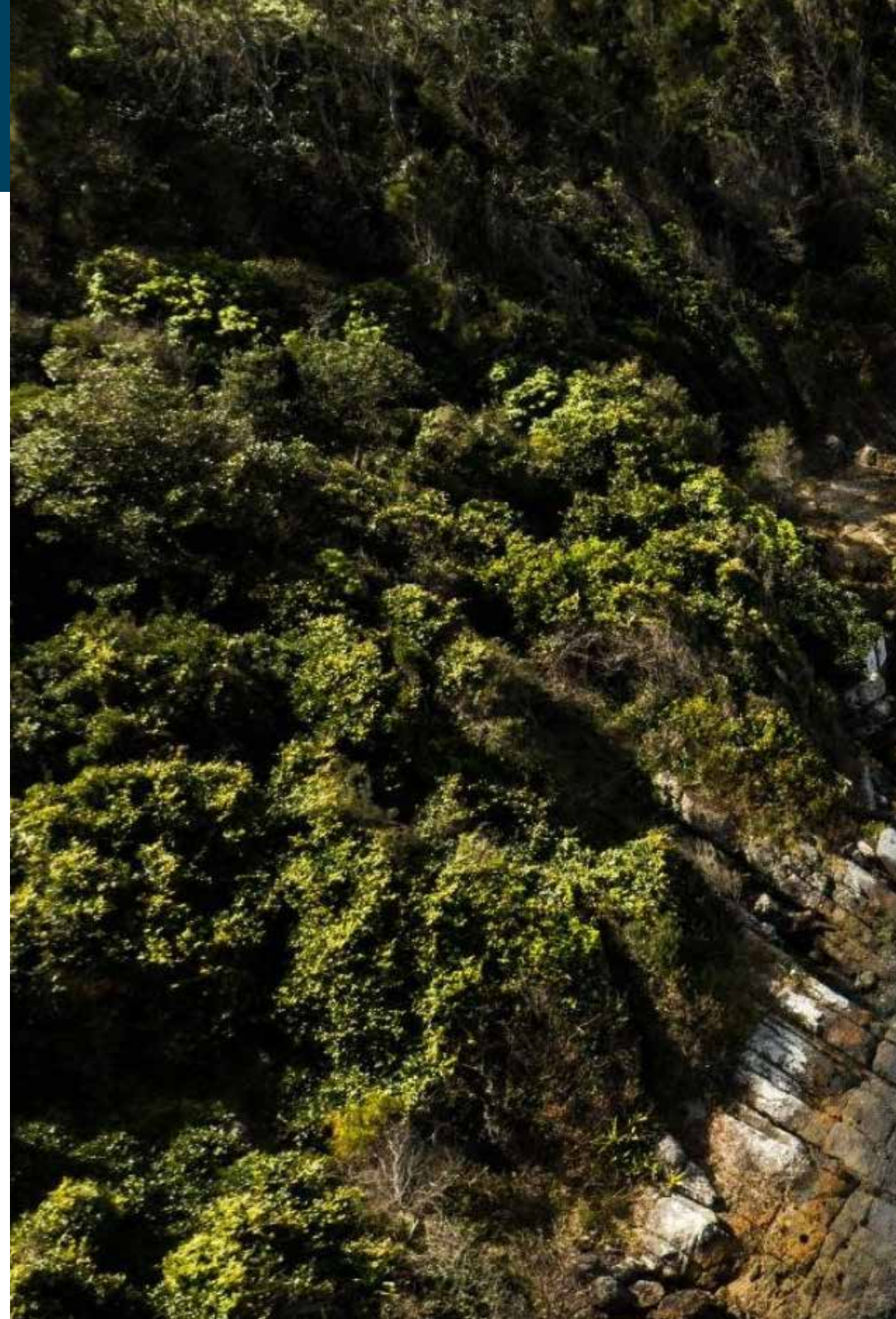
Will the project make changes to the level of existing public environment, space, accessibility or convenience?

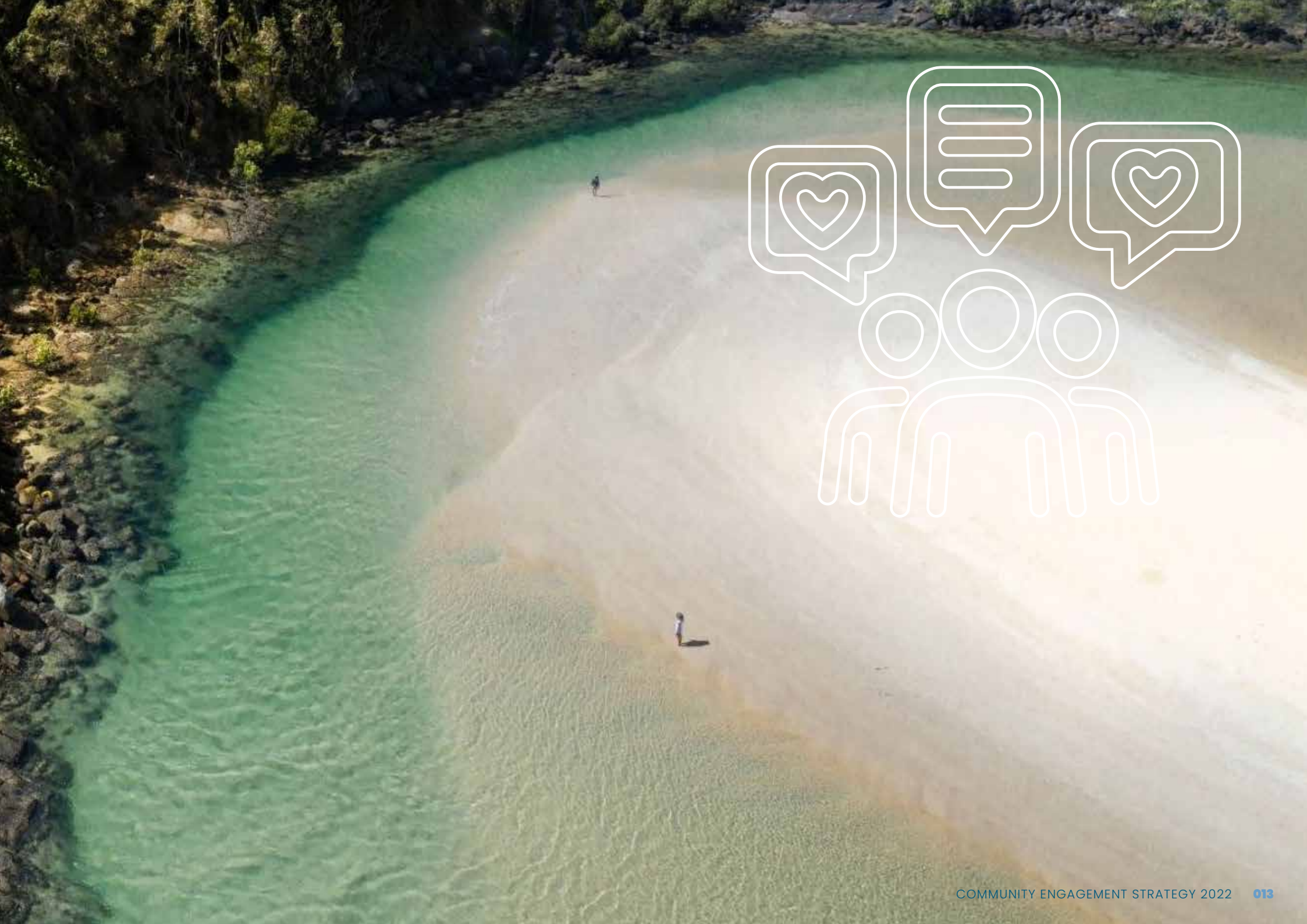
Will the project make a change to the actual provision of a service to the community?

Can the project include an opportunity for stakeholders to influence a project or outcome of a decision?

Is there a likelihood of significant issues being raised by the community about this project or decision?

Is there a legislative requirement for engagement or public exhibition?

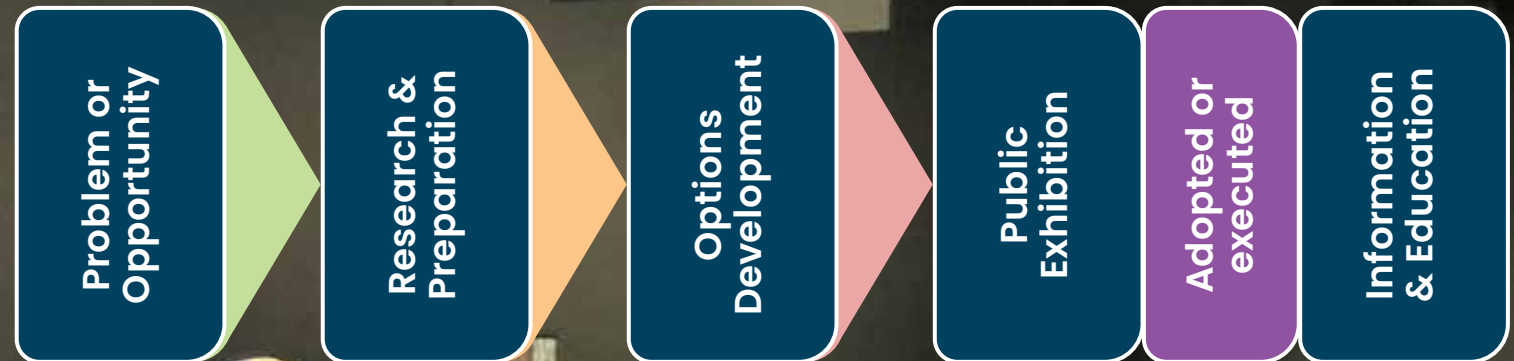




What decisions do we engage on?

There are five distinct decision making phases that could involve public participation.

The desire for engagement in any or all phases must be balanced with the scope and resources of the project.



PROBLEM OR OPPORTUNITY

This is the spark that prompts the need for a decision. It may come from a new opportunity, an identified issue, or a new idea.

ENGAGEMENT

Kempsey Shire Council is always interacting with and listening to the community as a baseline level to ensure we are aware of the needs and opportunities present in, and for, our community.

MILESTONE

This phase ends when a project is commenced. This is communicated internally. If there has been public engagement in this phase the results will be communicated and published.

RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

A need or opportunity has been identified and assigned to a staff member or team

ENGAGEMENT

Project teams may conduct specific engagement and investigation to further understand the situation, history and the community's view of the circumstances and context. Relevant past engagement projects will be analysed.

MILESTONE

The phase is complete once the facts of the situation are clear, comprehensive and understood. This will be communicated internally to senior staff and councillors. If there has been public engagement in this phase the results will be communicated and published.

OPTIONS DEVELOPMENT

Based on the comprehensive view of the situation the potential solutions or responses are identified, assessed, and prioritised.

ENGAGEMENT

This is an ideal opportunity to conduct meaningful community engagement to develop and test options and alternatives relevant to the decision to be made.

MILESTONE

The phase ends once a recommendation is ready and communicated to decision makers. If there has been public engagement in this phase the results will be communicated and published.

PUBLIC EXHIBITION

The recommendation is published for review and feedback

ENGAGEMENT

The preferred option or options should always be presented to the community before final adoption, if possible, to assess the community acceptance for the proposal, to understand any barriers to acceptance and to define the required communications and education.

MILESTONE

The decision itself is the key milestone. It will be communicated to all stakeholders. The results of the exhibition will be part of this communication as will an explanation of the way all engagement rounds informed the decision.

INFORMATION AND EDUCATION

The final decision could prompt immediate action or may lay foundations for future action. Communication tools will be used to make all stakeholders aware of the rationale for the decision, address concerns and misconceptions and inform on the next steps.

ENGAGEMENT

The engagement here reflects that at the Problem or Opportunity phase, in addition to informing the community of the decision and any other outcomes Kempsey Shire Council is always interacting with and listening to the community at a baseline level to ensure we are aware of further needs and opportunities in the area.

MILESTONE

This is an ongoing process that should last at least as long as required to demonstrate community awareness and understanding.

What does effective engagement look like?

When a round of engagement is conducted, at any stage of decision making, it takes the following steps.

In many cases these steps will not be conducted formally but they will always be part of effective engagement. The need for formal or documented action at each step will be determined by the individual project leaders based upon the scale and requirements of the larger project.

- STEP ONE: SCOPE THE ENGAGEMENT**
- STEP TWO: ASSESS THE LEVEL OF IMPACT**
- STEP THREE: IDENTIFY THE STAKEHOLDERS**
- STEP FOUR: ASSESS THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
- STEP FIVE: CHOOSE THE ENGAGEMENT METHOD(S)**
- STEP SIX: ASSESS RESOURCES AND PAST ENGAGEMENT**
- STEP SEVEN: PREPARE AN ENGAGEMENT PLAN**
- STEP EIGHT: DELIVER AND ADAPT THE ENGAGEMENT PLAN**
- STEP NINE: ANALYSE THE RESPONSES**
- STEP TEN: EVALUATE THE ENGAGEMENT**
- STEP ELEVEN: REPORT AND CLOSE THE LOOP**

STEP ONE: SCOPE THE ENGAGEMENT

We will carry out an assessment of the need for community engagement.

We will also identify whether there has been relevant previous research or community engagement on this or another project to ensure there is no duplication of effort and that we do not waste stakeholders' time.

STEP TWO: ASSESS THE LEVEL OF IMPACT

We will assess the impact of the decision on the community.

The decision will be ranked at one of four levels of impact as defined by the IAP2 methodology. This measures both the degree (high or low) and the spread (shire wide or localised to an area or group) of impact the decision will have.



What does effective engagement look like?

STEP THREE: IDENTIFY THE STAKEHOLDERS

We will conduct a stakeholder assessment to identify groups, members of the community and others to whom this project is relevant. We will then identify the appropriate ways to connect with these stakeholders.

STEP FOUR: ASSESS THE LEVEL OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

We will determine the level of public participation appropriate for the project, using the five levels outlined earlier in this document and drawn from the IAP2 spectrum.

The level will be based on a variety of factors. While the Level of Impact is a major factor, not all high-impact projects or issues will be appropriate for a high level of community involvement.

STEP FIVE: CHOOSE THE ENGAGEMENT METHODS

We will identify the appropriate engagement methods to make the community engagement inclusive, transparent and successful in fulfilling its objectives.

The choice of methods will be made to enable and deliver the identified level of public participation and to increase accessibility and interest for stakeholders.

STEP SIX: ASSESS RESOURCES

We will consider if we have the resources necessary to deliver effective engagement.

STEP SEVEN: PREPARE AN ENGAGEMENT PLAN

We will develop an individual communications plan and if required a separate engagement plan that articulates how the community will be informed about and participate in the project.

For projects that have a level of engagement of Involve or higher, a detailed community engagement plan will be used.

These plans will specify the objective for the communication and engagement and how the success of the engagement will be measured.

STEP EIGHT: DELIVER AND ADAPT THE ENGAGEMENT PLAN

We will convert the plan we have prepared into action, meeting with the community directly or indirectly as required.

At any time developments in either the overall project or the engagement may require the engagement plan to be altered. It may be necessary to reassess the scope or requirements of the project and vary the engagement approach accordingly. It may be necessary to reassess the execution of the engagement.

STEP NINE: ANALYSE THE RESPONSES

We will collate all the information collected during the community engagement, make legitimate interpretations and draw authentic conclusions on which to base recommendations or actions.

We will carry out this process objectively, remembering that we control the process but not the outcome.

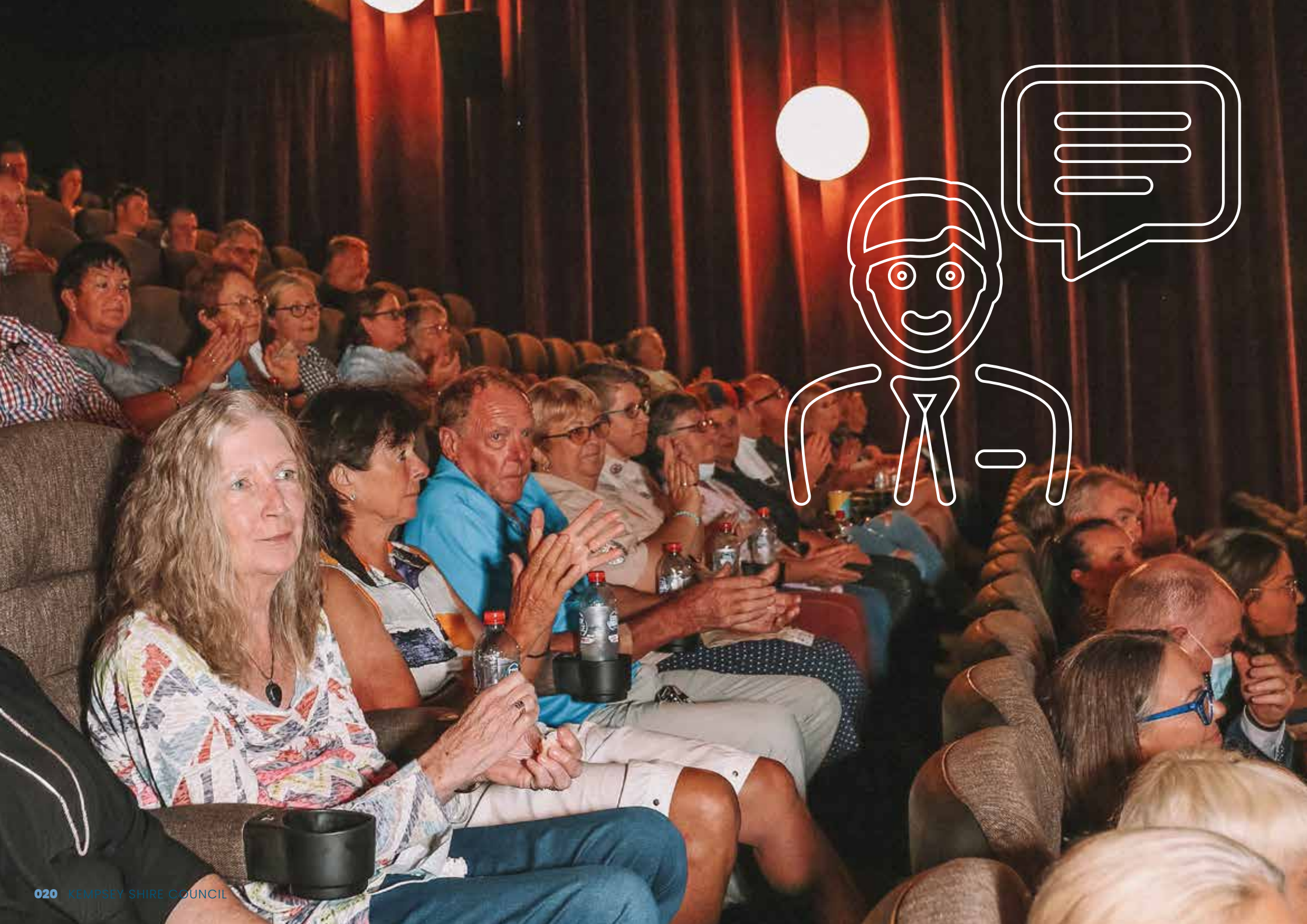
In every step of collation, analysis and reporting we will adhere to the privacy policies of Council.

STEP TEN: EVALUATE THE ENGAGEMENT

At the end of the engagement process we will evaluate the outcomes and how they compare against the agreed measurements for the objective. This may be a formal or informal assessment depending on the scale of the project.

STEP ELEVEN: REPORT AND CLOSE THE LOOP

We will communicate about the engagement activities in the context of broader communications about a project's nature, timeline and progress.



What do we engage about?

Our community strategic plan, 2042: Your Future, outlines how Council will continue to work with residents, ratepayers and businesses to deliver our community vision.

In developing the plan, we sought community opinion about priorities to establish our strategic directions.

The plan helps us achieve our community's aspirations and guides everything we do. We will engage with you on a broad range of topics, aligned to these strategic directions and focus areas.

This may include engagement about our strategies, policies, plans, services and assets.

YOUR FUTURE ENVIRONMENT

What are we working towards?	How will we get there?
Our rivers, beaches and water catchment are protected and thrive.	We focus on technology, recycling and regenerating in managing our water and waste. We restore and maintain the quality of our waterways. We value and protect our natural assets, wildlife and ecosystems.
Changes to our towns and villages balance the needs of built and natural environments.	Our growth and development is planned, sustainable and considers housing affordability. We use building controls that recognise the character and existing natural and cultural assets. We collaborate with industry and community to balance environmental, social and economic needs of present and future generations.
Everyone has access to healthy and safe lifestyles.	We have recreation and play facilities that make the most of our environment. All levels of government work to keep our community safe. Government and business deliver health services that meet population need.
The risks of natural hazards and climate change are recognised and acted upon.	Our people are prepared for and resilient to the impact of emergencies. We understand the environmental impact of our personal choices. Our natural landscape is maintained to help minimise the trauma of emergencies.

What do we engage about?

YOUR FUTURE ECONOMY

What are we working towards?	How will we get there?
Our local economy is strong and provides diverse employment.	We offer memorable visitor experiences through a vibrant tourism industry. We support each other to create local jobs and career pathways. Our agricultural and industrial businesses can adapt to new and emerging opportunities.
Opportunities for work, education and entertainment are available across the Shire.	We encourage and foster new technology and innovative ways to do business. We provide quality education and lifelong learning experiences for people of all ages. We host and develop events that create investment and visitation. We empower our Indigenous communities to develop business capabilities.
Quality transport and communication infrastructure makes it appealing to live in, work in and visit the Macleay.	We plan and invest in transport that serves our changing demographics. We actively maintain and improve the roads and bridges network. We encourage innovation and connection to a global economy.

YOUR FUTURE COMMUNITY

What are we working towards?	How will we get there?
Our diversity, heritage and creativity are proudly embraced.	A range of government and community services will support social inclusion and equity. We acknowledge, celebrate and empower our Aboriginal residents. We create opportunities for artistic and cultural expression and enjoyment. We support a community led approach to prioritising projects and support.
Strong physical and emotional connections boost our quality of life.	We will host inclusive events, festivals, sporting, cultural and community activities. Government and community will support the vulnerable and disadvantaged. We encourage and expand volunteering opportunities. Our public spaces and facilities will keep pace with community needs. We maintain a sense of place in our towns and villages, while responding to change. We acknowledge and celebrate the Macleay River in defining our identity and connections.

YOUR FUTURE LEADERSHIP

What are we working towards?	How will we get there?
Meaningful informed partnerships, and evidence guide our decision making.	We provide and participate in genuine community engagement opportunities to influence decision making. All levels of government use research and data to effectively advocate and respond to the needs of our community.
Community and civic leadership create pride in our Valley and its reputation.	We will collaborate across government and non-government leaders and community, sharing knowledge, opportunities, and solutions. We will identify and embrace chances to work with regional partners. The community will have a greater understanding of how decisions are made. We will support a culture that values achievement, innovation, safety and cultural diversity.
Council is a trusted community focussed organisation.	We will provide strong corporate and financial management that is ethical, fair and accountable. Council's workforce, services and programs will represent value for money, delivered under a strong governance framework. We will manage Council's assets to meet the needs of current and future community.

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