

10.11.Engagement Strategy - Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study

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ATTACHMENTS:

1. Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study Community Engagement Strategy Nov 2022
(1) [10.11.1 - 9 pages]

PURPOSE:

To advise Council of the engagement process proposed for the preparation and refinement of the Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

After the rescission of the Military Road Corridor Planning Study by Council in January 2022, a Council report was tabled in May 2022 outlining the broad scope of the planning study foreshadowed for the precinct.

A critical part of this work will be the stakeholder engagement. Whilst the previously endorsed planning study was rescinded, significant levels of engagement were undertaken in the preparation of that study, which remains relevant to inform early stages of the work to be undertaken. The ongoing preparation and refinement of the planning study for the precinct will nonetheless be characterised by comprehensive engagement and consultation with stakeholder groups and the broader community generally.

Building on the significant level of detailed feedback already received, Council staff propose to initially undertake more targeted engagement, to develop options to secure what Council has required as “a better balance between development height and the provision of additional public open/plaza space” and other community improvements, compared to what was previously outlined in the rescinded planning study. This engagement will broadly target three stakeholder segments:

- a) Representatives of the most proximate Precinct Committees and Chambers of Commerce/Streetscape Committees;
- b) Representatives of the wider community in the proximity of the Neutral Bay Town Centre; and
- c) Landowner stakeholders with development aspirations.

The purpose of this targeted consultation will be to efficiently develop various options that seek to achieve improvements to the Neutral Bay Town Centre and preserve and/or enhance its employment capacity in a manner that enables more in depth and informed discussions prior to the wider community consultation that is expected in late 2023.

This report describes this process in more detail.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

The preparation of the Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study to replace the rescinded Future Directions Report will occur in the second half of the 2022/23 financial year with a budget of \$150K for the 2022/23 financial year. This will largely be directed to specialist consultant input-and the stakeholder engagement as described in this report.

RECOMMENDATION:

1. THAT the report be received.

LINK TO COMMUNITY STRATEGIC PLAN

The relationship with the Community Strategic Plan is as follows:

1. Our Living Environment

1.3 Clean and green places

2. Our Built Infrastructure

2.1 Infrastructure and assets meet diverse community needs

2.2 Vibrant public domains and villages

2.3 Prioritise sustainable and active transport

2.4 Efficient traffic mobility and parking

3. Our Innovative City

3.1 Our commercial centres are prosperous and vibrant

3.3 Distinctive sense of place and design excellence

4. Our Social Vitality

4.1 North Sydney is connected, inclusive, healthy and safe

5. Our Civic Leadership

5.1 Lead North Sydney's strategic direction

5.2 Strong civic leadership and customer focussed services

5.3 Community is engaged in what Council does

BACKGROUND

In May 2018, Council resolved to prepare a Planning Study for the Military Road Corridor. When the Military Road Corridor Planning Study process commenced, there was recognition that the Neutral Bay precinct was experiencing significant development pressure. It was also acknowledged that there was ongoing erosion of employment floor space facilitated by Council's existing planning controls. The planning study was to address these matters, and to ensure that development sought to meet the needs and expectations of the community as well as ensuring that tangible public benefits could be derived from any future development.

The first phase of the project in mid-2018 included a community survey seeking preliminary feedback re what local stakeholders value about the centre, and initial views about its future form and function.

Further consultation occurred in mid-2019 with the preparation of a discussion paper for public input.

The draft study in its entirety was exhibited in mid-2020.

These phases are described in more detail below.

Subsequent to this, at its meeting in January 2022, Council rescinded that February 2021 endorsement and resolved:

1. *THAT Council notes the submissions received and the issues raised during the exhibition.*
2. *THAT Council notes the strong community feedback on the height and scale of the existing report received during the recent election.*
3. *THAT Council does not adopt the Future Directions Report (dated 22 February 2021), as amended, as the strategic development framework for the Neutral Bay Town Centre.*
4. *THAT Council conduct a briefing on the rescission of the Future Directions Report prior to proceeding to Point 5 below.*
5. *THAT Council adds to its program and budget, the creation of an updated strategic development framework for the Military Road Corridor including Neutral Bay Centre by engaging with the community and stakeholders to prepare a revised recommendation that has a better balance between development height and the provision of additional public open space.*

Each phase of the engagement process included very significant levels of public and stakeholder consultation and input. Whilst further engagement and consultation will clearly underpin the work required as part of the January 2022 Council resolution, the feedback and input provided in the previous phases of the consultation process remain valid and are being harnessed to prepare the new planning study.

Councillor Briefings were held 2 May 2022, 14 June 2022 and 7 November 2022.

CONSULTATION REQUIREMENTS

Community engagement will be undertaken in accordance with Council's Community Engagement Protocol.

DETAIL

Given the first two points in Council's resolution on 24 January 2022, community engagement in the preparation of a new planning study is important. The rescinded study included three distinct consultation points. These occurred as follows:

1. July/August 2018 – preliminary consultation was undertaken to understand local values, issues and aspirations. Almost 500 survey responses were received. The preliminary feedback was used to inform a Discussion Paper.
2. August/September 2019 – the exhibited Discussion Paper outlined some preliminary built form options and public domain ideas. Inform methods used to promote the feedback opportunity included a mail-out of over 11,000 inclusive of reply-paid envelopes, 227 emails to those on the keep-informed list, social media and

engagement with Precinct Committees. 268 total responses were received together with significant social media feedback.

3. April to July 2020 – consultation regarding the final draft built form, height, density and public domain improvements. Over 11,400 individual letters were sent to local residents and stakeholders, over 300 individual letters were sent to previous subscribers, and the usual social media and newspaper advertisements were placed. The initial exhibition period was impacted by the COVID pandemic which meant that planned face-to-face inform methods could not be implemented. The exhibition period was extended, with 435 submissions received.

Given this prior extensive consultation, and that an understanding of the local values, issues and aspirations has been ascertained, much of this initial engagement will not need to be undertaken again. There is a breadth of feedback that Council can use to inform a renewed planning study, in the context of the revised objectives.

The community feedback received between 2018 to 2020, landowner aspirations and the most recent Council resolution, will be used to prepare options that ‘better balances development height and the provision of additional public open space’ as required by Council.

1. Promotion and Awareness

On-site information sessions will be undertaken to advise the local community of the commencement/progress of the Neutral Bay Town Centre Study in early 2023.

This will take the form of pop-up information stalls and online information. The intent of this preliminary engagement phase is to advise stakeholders that work has commenced, to detail its broad objectives and timelines, and to explain how the previous feedback received will be a foundation of that work.

2. Preliminary Engagement

A targeted stakeholder engagement process will be undertaken to assist Council staff with the initial options development. The purpose is to enable more detailed and direct conversations with stakeholders prior to a wider, more comprehensive community consultation process.

In the context of the large number of submissions and other feedback received 2018-2020, targeted and focused smaller group discussions are considered an ideal way to consultatively develop and refine draft options, and exchange ideas and information in preparation for a wider consultation process in 2023.

The targeted engagement would broadly capture three key stakeholder segments:

- a) Representatives of precinct committees most impacted (Brightmore, Harrison, Parks, Neutral, Bennett, Willoughby Bay and Cremorne Point), and Chambers of Commerce/Streetscape Committees;
- b) Random but representative selection of residents of the wider local community; and
- c) Landowner groups.

The input and feedback of the first two are proposed to be externally facilitated with Council's guidance.

In terms of the landowner groups with development aspirations at various stages of the development process, Council staff will continue to meet at the discretion of the Director City Strategy, and provide advice and feedback as required.

3. Wider Community Consultation

With the benefit of the targeted engagement described above, Council can then consult more widely with the broader community as it did during the formulation of the Military Road Planning Study from 2018 to 2020. This will be comprehensive and far-reaching, and is expected to occur in late 2023.

The attached Community Engagement Plan details the stakeholder consultation proposed for this project.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study



Prepared November 2022

Councils are required under the *Local Government Act 1993* to inform the community of particular issues that potentially affect their way of life. North Sydney Council is committed both in principle and in practice, to engaging on matters affecting the North Sydney community.

1. Introduction

This Community Engagement Strategy outlines the steps Council will take to engage stakeholders in the preparation of the Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study. Council is committed to engaging stakeholders to prepare a Planning Study that retains and strengthens employment characteristics of the Centre, embellishes and improves the public domain, whilst striking a balance between these factors and any additional density and height associated with private development. Community engagement opportunities will be provided across a range of 'engagement' levels.

1.1 Council's Community Engagement Protocol

This strategy has been prepared in accordance with Council's *Community Engagement Protocol*. The Protocol is used to determine the level of 'level(s) of impact' applicable to this project/decision (proposal). This proposal has been determined as:

LEVEL OF IMPACT	LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT
Local - High	Inform / Consult

Council used the framework shown below in Table 1.1 to select the most appropriate 'level(s) of engagement' for this proposal to ensure an appropriate range of engagement 'levels' and methods were offered:

LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
Inform	Providing balanced and objective information to help the community understand problems, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions
Consult	Obtain public feedback on alternatives and/or decisions
Involve	Work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered
Collaborate	Partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution

Table 1.1 Derived from the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

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2. Background

In May 2018, Council resolved to prepare a Planning Study for the Military Road Corridor. The first phase of the project included a community survey seeking preliminary feedback about what local stakeholders' value about the centre and initial views about its future form and function. The survey was open to the public through July and August 2018. A total of 497 responses were received. The feedback was reported to Council in September 2018 providing valuable input into the preparation of several Discussion Papers.

In July 2019, Council resolved to place the Military Road Corridor Planning Study, Stage 1 - Discussion Papers on public exhibition between August and September 2019. The outcomes were reported to Council in October 2019. A total of 268 responses/submissions were received.

In April 2020, Council endorsed the Future Direction Report for the Military Road Corridor Planning Study for public exhibition, which ran from April to July 2020. This third public exhibition/engagement process occurred over an extended period of 14 weeks, extended in response to the first wave of the COVID pandemic. A total of 435 submissions/responses were received.

The Military Road Corridor Planning Study (MRCPS) was subsequently endorsed by Council at its meeting in February 2021. However, on 24 January 2022, the new term of Council subsequently rescinded the MRCPS and resolved that Council *“engage with the community and relevant stakeholders to prepare a revised recommendation that has a better balance between development height and the provision of additional public open space”*.

In May 2022, Council resolved to commence a revised planning study for the Neutral Bay Town Centre, known as the Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study. The new Planning Study seeks to:

1. address the decline of employment land in the centre which result from Council's current planning controls and encourage a greater degree of housing mix;
2. facilitate carefully planned development which may include targeted modest increases in height and density while maintaining and enhancing the village atmosphere of the centre; and
3. secure a range of public benefits from planned and limited growth.

3. Community Engagement Strategy

3.1 Who are our community stakeholders?

The Community Engagement Strategy identifies the following groups to engage with in the local community:

- Local residents
 - Property owners and tenants within the Neutral Bay Town Centre

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- Property owners and tenants immediately surrounding the Neutral Bay Town Centre
- Local business
 - Business owners and tenants within the Neutral Bay Town Centre
- Other community members
 - Submitters to the previous MRCPS engagement
 - Community members who registered interest in the previous MRCPS
 - Local workers
 - Local students
- Precinct Committees, in particular
 - Neutral Precinct
 - Brightmore Precinct
 - Harrison Precinct
 - Parks Precinct
 - Bennet Precinct
 - Willoughby Bay Precinct
 - Cremorne Point
- Local Chamber/Streetscape Committee
 - Neutral Bay Chambers of Commerce
 - Neutral Bay and Cremorne Streetscape Committees
- Neutral Bay Community Centre
- Local schools
- North Sydney Council
 - Councillors
 - Project Control Group

3.2 Key Communication Messages

- **Reason(s) for proposal**
 - Council is preparing a Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study (NBTCPS) to guide future development proposals within the Neutral Bay village which may include targeted modest increases in height and density while retaining the village atmosphere
 - By preparing the NBTCPS, development pressures will be better managed within a consultative and informed development framework
 - Council's intention is to retain and strengthen the employment opportunities within Neutral Bay in line with community desire to work close to home
 - Council has previously consulted the community and recognises the strong connection the community has to the village
 - This second round of consultation is targeted qualitative research with key stakeholders to provide a better understanding of the concerns and aspirations expressed in the first consultation
 - The Planning Study will create an opportunity to improve the public domain and local facilities
 - Council is seeking to strike the right balance between public benefits and any additional density or building height allowed for in the Planning Study

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- **Key opportunities for community input**
 - **Initial information provision – Information kiosk - To inform**
 - **Goal:**
to advise the local community that this work has commenced, its broad objectives and timelines and that the previous feedback received will be a foundation of that work.
 - **Stakeholders:**
Local community members
 - **Method:**
Set up an information stall at the Grosvenor Lane car park site, with staff and a fact sheet.
 - **Material:**
A fact sheet of the summarised main community's concerns from MRCPS and the Council's responses. An indicative timeline for each key milestone and a project background will also be included in the fact sheet. An online webpage will be generated to support this engagement.
 - **Targeted engagement – Focus group / key stakeholder sessions - To consult**
 - **Goal:**
To obtain community and landowners' feedback on draft design options and public space upgrade opportunities prior to public exhibition.
 - **Stakeholders:**
The targeted engagement would broadly capture three segments of the stakeholder spectrum:
 1. Representatives of precinct committees most impacted (Brightmore, Harrison, Parks, Neutral, Bennet, Willoughby Bay and Cremorne Point Precinct Committees) and Chambers of Commerce/Streetscape Committees
 2. Random but representative selection of residents of the wider local community
 3. Landowner groups.
 - **Method:**
Council will engage an external community engagement consultant to assist Council to plan, prepare and conduct the in-person focus group sessions. A summary of the feedback will also be prepared by the external consultant. Council needs to have thorough considerations on the selection criteria for the representative community members, budget, selected meeting location and incentive to the participants.

Three focus group workshops will be planned, including two workshops with local community members (a demographically representative sample of the

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local community), and one workshop with precinct committees (“opinion leaders” from precinct committees) and Chambers of Commerce/Streetscape Committees. Each workshop will have 15-20 members. It is important to ensure the representative community members are in a wide age range.

The engagement with landowners will be organised through separate meetings by Council staff. The key landowner groups may include the identified opportunity sites 1 (Coles), 2 (Arkadia and others) and 3 (Equitibuild and Woolworths) under the MRCPS.

- **Material:**
Plans, diagrams, and images to explain the draft design options and the public space upgrade opportunities.
- **Wider community consultation - Public exhibition – To consult**
The focus group / key stakeholder engagements will provide feedback to refine the final draft set of recommendations for the public exhibition. During the public exhibition, community will be provided opportunities to participate in refining the Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study as identified later in this document.
- **Council decision making**
 - Initial approach to the revised planning study was reported to Council on 23 May 2022.
 - The project progress, initial options and preparation of the community engagement were presented to Council on 7 Nov 2022.
 - Initial findings of the targeted engagement may be presented to Council in Q1 2023/24.
 - Detailed final draft recommendations may be presented and reported to Council in Q1 2023/24 for public exhibition in Q2 2023/24.
 - Final report post exhibition is likely to occur in Q3 2023/24.
- **Final proposal(s)**
After adoption by Council, a wide information campaign will be undertaken to explain the changes proposed and pathways for their achievement.

3.3 Timetable

Community and stakeholder engagement will occur at various times during the process. The focus group engagement will provide feedback to refine the final set of draft recommendations for public exhibition. The key project development phases are outlined in the following table:

Phase	Timing
1. Project Review and Gap Analysis	Aug - Sep 2022
2. Draft Design Options Development & Promotion and Awareness Engagement	Sep - Feb 2023

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3. Preliminary Engagement	Mar - May 2023
4. Draft Planning Study Preparation	May - Sep 2023
5. Public Exhibition of the Draft Planning Study	Sep - Dec 2023
6. Final planning study	Dec - Mar 2024

Note: In accordance with Council's Community Engagement Framework described on page 1, the 'level of engagement' per engagement method is indicated.

3.3.1 Phase 1 - Project Review and Gap Analysis

This phase involved the assessment of previous community submissions in the context of the Council's January 2022 resolution and the identification of gaps and work required.

3.3.2 Phase 2 - Draft Design Options Development & Promotion and Awareness Engagement

Between September 2022 and February 2023, Council will identify the opportunities and challenges based on the submission review in Phase 1 and develop draft design options and public domain opportunities for Neutral Bay Town Centre. This work will be built on the scoping conducted in Phase 1 and will rely heavily on a Project Control Group (PCG) comprising various internal stakeholders.

Briefs for the engagement of external engagement consultant, financial feasibility/economic analysis consultant and landscape architect will be prepared. Additionally, Council will engage consultants to prepare the Economic Analysis, initial public domain design and prepare for the Phase 3 engagement.

In February 2023, Council will undertake early engagement with emphasis on the community that preparation of the revised Planning Study is commenced, and that the community's concerns from the previous feedback rounds has been taken into consideration.

Method	Target Stakeholders	Engagement Level	Purpose
Councillor Briefing	Councillors	Consult	Seek feedback on the preliminary thinking/ideas/options, community engagement plan and potential appointment of consultants
Webpage (Have Your say)	All	Inform	Inform the community that Council acknowledges the community's concerns and is preparing a revised Planning Study
Fact Sheet	All	Inform	
Social Media	All	Inform	
Information Stalls	All	Inform	
Workshops	PCG	Collaborate	Develop draft design options and public domain opportunities

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3.3.3 Phase 3 - Preliminary Engagement

Between March to May 2023, the draft design options developed in Phase 2 will be tested with a respective stakeholder sample consisting of members of the public, businesses, Precinct Committees representatives and Chambers of Commerce/Streetscape Committees, and landowners. These focus group sessions allow stakeholders to provide feedback on the draft design options. Council will engage a consultant to recruit the focus group participants and conduct the sessions.

Regarding landowner groups with development aspirations, Council staff will continue to meet with these (as necessary and desirable) and provide advice and feedback as required.

At the end of Phase 3, a summary of consultation outcomes will be produced and the results of the previous work, including feedback received, will be presented to Council.

Method	Target Stakeholders	Engagement Level	Purpose
Focus Groups	Representative sample	Consult	Seek feedback on the draft design options
Landowners (optional)	Site 1, 2, 3 and other landowners with development aspirations	Consult	Landowners to provide feedback on the draft design options
Councillor Briefing	Councillors	Consult	Councillors to provide feedback on the community engagement outcomes and the draft design options

3.3.4 Phase 4 - Draft Planning Study Preparation

Between May and September 2023, all inputs from the preceding phases will be synthesised to create the recommendations for the Draft Neutral Bay Town Centre Planning Study. This will include internal (PCG) and external (consultant) discussions and Councillor Briefing. This refined draft work will be reported to Council for the purposes of endorsement for minimum 42 days public exhibition.

Method	Target Stakeholders	Engagement Level	Purpose
Workshops	PCG	Collaborate	Develop recommendations for draft Planning Study
Councillor Briefing	Councillor	Consult	Provide a project briefing on the draft planning study for feedback

3.3.5 Phase 5 - Public Exhibition of the Draft Planning Study

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Council will offer various methods by which stakeholders can participate in this phase, including face-to-face and online, allowing the community to participate at times that best suit their needs and commitments. Not listed in priority order:

Method	Target Stakeholders	Engagement Level	Purpose
Webpage (Have Your say)	All	Inform/Consult	To inform stakeholders of the opportunity to provide feedback and provide a central repository of information
Advertisement	All	Inform	To inform as widely as possible and direct to website as above.
Fact Sheet	All - in particular targeted to property owners, tenants, local workers and local school - students and parents		
Video	All		
Media Release	All		
Social Media	All		
Information Stalls	Users of the precinct who may not necessarily be local community members e.g. shoppers	Inform/Consult	To raise awareness amongst those that visit, work in, or have other direct interests in the precinct and provide direct communication to Council staff to pose questions/enquiries.
Online Information Session	Users of the precinct who may not necessarily be local community members e.g. shoppers		
Signage	Users of the precinct who may not necessarily be local community members e.g. shoppers		
Notification letters	Property owners, tenants, previous submitters, and local schools.	Inform/Consult	To notify stakeholders that may have a direct interest and encourage feedback.
Precinct Committees	Precinct Committee members (esp. Brightmore, Harrison, Neutral, Parks)	Inform/consult	To provide Precinct Committees with an avenue to understand proposals and pose questions/discussion. Staff available to present to Committee meetings.
Submissions	All	Inform/consult	Collect community inputs and feedback on the draft planning study via (online and hard copy) feedback form or free form submission

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At the end of this Phase, a summary of consultation outcomes (raw data) will be produced and distributed to participants and key stakeholders as well as posted on Council's website.

3.3.6 Phase 6 - Final Planning Study

Informed by the community feedback from Phase 5, the Planning Study will be finalised. At the end of this Phase, a summary of public exhibition outcomes and the amended Planning Study will be reported to Council for adoption. Depending on the outcome further consultation may be required, in which case this strategy will be amended.

<i>Method</i>	<i>Target Stakeholders</i>	<i>Engagement Level</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
Councillor Briefing	Councillors	Consult	Present public exhibition outcomes and final Planning Study ahead of post-exhibition report seeking adoption

4. Opportunity Cost/Rationale

Engaging the community in this proposal may entail financial costs to Council to achieve a high-quality engagement process. If the process is robust community ownership of the decisions made will ensure efficient outcomes. Insufficient or poor-quality engagement can result in poor long-term decisions requiring further resources to rectify. The aim of a high-quality community engagement process is to make sustainable decisions. The engagement process will help Council staff and/or Councillors to understand the related recommendations rationale.

5. Further Information

For further information contact Council's A/Team Leader Design - Jing Li, of City Strategy Division:

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