INTRODUCTION

The Hills Shire Plan consists of The Hills Future Community Strategic Plan, Four-Year Delivery Program including the Resourcing Strategy, Annual Operational Plan which contains the Draft Budget and the Fees and Charges. These documents have been prepared under the Integrated Planning and Reporting Guidelines (IPR) set out by the Division of Local Government.

The Hills Future Community Strategic Plan sets the strategic direction for The Hills Shire. It has been prepared to ensure that the organisation has a clear direction which guides the allocation of resources over the long, medium and short term. This document articulates The Hills Shire community and Council’s shared vision, values, aspirations and priorities, with reference to other local government plans, information and resourcing capabilities. This is a dynamic strategy that is evaluated annually and comprehensively reviewed after three years. It integrates asset, services and financial plans so that Council’s resource capabilities are matched to our community’s needs and shows how we are working towards achieving a better quality of life for all who live, work, visit and play in the shire.

The Hills Future Community Strategic Plan is structured around five themes. These themes reflect the highest priority issues raised by the community. Under each theme there are outcomes including what Council will deliver and how we will measure their effectiveness.

These themes are:

1. PROACTIVE LEADERSHIP
2. VIBRANT COMMUNITIES
3. BALANCED URBAN GROWTH
4. PROTECTED ENVIRONMENT
5. MODERN LOCAL ECONOMY

The Delivery Program responds to The Hills Future Community Strategic Direction and its main purpose is to communicate what Council will deliver to the community over its four year term.

This sustainable Communities Plan corresponds directly with the Vibrant Communities and Proactive Leadership themes with The Hills Shire Plan.
BACKGROUND

The Sustainable Communities Plan provides an overview of the current strategic direction of The Hills Shire Council’s Community Development Team that provides support to the local community sector. It is an action plan that has been informed by community consultation and stakeholder engagement, research and strategic planning. It provides a framework for stakeholders to effectively engage with Council and understand Council’s overall aims and objectives for community support and development. The Sustainable Communities Plan articulates Council’s response to the identified priorities and outlines its actions such as facilitation, funding, project management, monitoring, review and promotion.

In mid 2014 Council coordinated a community services forum attended by local service providers, community groups, government representatives and the broader community to discuss and mobilise action around identified community needs with the aim of creating positive change in The Hills Shire. Much of the feedback and discussion provided at this forum informs the priority areas identified throughout this plan and will be reviewed annually.

The Sustainable Communities Plan is not the Council Plan. However, it does significantly guide and inform Council’s Community and Economic Development team’s own actions and allocation of resources. This plan is consistent with the Proactive Leadership and Vibrant Communities themes in The Hills Future Community Strategic Plan. It is also a key reference document to be used to work with our community, government departments and local community organisations to achieve sustainable outcomes for The Hills Shire community sector.

Therefore this document aims to:

- Respond to identified and agreed key priorities with specific actions;
- Provide transparency for Council’s approach to community engagement and communication processes with the community sector; and
- Improve the connection between state and local government priorities and those at regional, local and neighbourhood levels.
1. COMMUNITY SAFETY & WELLBEING

Ensuring the safety and well-being of the community is integral to strengthening our community. Issues of community safety require a diverse range of support and response from local services. Council needs to continue to strengthen its relationship with local police services, local support services and network groups such as The Hills Community Safety Precinct Committee to ensure local programs, services and facilities are positioned to promote the safety and well-being of local residents. Recently, domestic violence prevention has been increasingly discussed in the public domain as an urgent priority area for contemporary Australian society. The Hills Shire community sector has also responded to this as a local priority area. The local police service has provided research and information on key factors of domestic violence in The Hills Shire and members of The Hills Domestic Violence Prevention Committee have identified the type of services and programs needed to assist those affected by domestic violence.

AIM
To have a women's shelter set up in the Hills for domestic violence victims.

ACTION REQUIRED
Council’s Sustainable Communities team to continue to work closely with the local police and The Hills Domestic Violence Prevention Committee members to provide further support and strategic direction for local programs and initiatives, in particular by providing opportunities, brokering key stakeholder relationships and assisting with advocacy for key issues such as domestic violence prevention.
2. COMMUNITY ACCESS

Access to community support services, information and resources is also essential for building communities. This is particularly important for those most vulnerable amongst the community. The Sustainable Communities Forum identified the need for further development in support for these potentially vulnerable communities such as culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and newly arrived refugee and migrant communities. In particular, ensuring services are accessible to all members of the community. The Hills Shire has an increasingly CALD population who contribute much to the local community and cultural identity. These communities also have a diverse range of needs and interests. Therefore it is in the best interest of Council to review and develop strategies to increase access to community services and resources for diverse communities. The following key priority areas have identified to achieve this:

Engage relevant community leaders, groups and service providers to:
- Review existing information currently available within the community sector;
- Identify gaps within the sector that may create barriers for CALD communities such as language barriers and cultural sensitivities;
- Research cross-cultural support and training opportunities for the community sector; and
- Promote information to targeting groups through accessible communication processes.

AIM
To have the community information directory available through key CALD community networks.

Action Required
Council to facilitate a Project Working Group with relevant community members and representatives to review current access to services by CALD communities and develop strategies to ensure relevant services adhere to cultural sensitivities and provide accessible services to a diverse range of community members. This will also include developing promotional strategies to effectively inform these communities.
3. COMMUNITY ARTS & CULTURE

Supporting cultural and creative activities is vital for communities to flourish. Nurturing opportunities to explore new experiences can help communities shape their identity and develop new ideas for the future.

The Hills Shire Council has long supported cultural, heritage and creative activities, and consolidated this commitment with a vision for the future in the finalisation of the Cultural Action Plan.

The community consultation process in developing this plan confirmed that people from the Sydney Hills enjoy taking part in these activities or events and would benefit from expanded opportunities to participate.

The Cultural Action Plan outlines the approach Council will take to support community arts and culture while ensuring resources are effectively used to achieve these goals.

Key focus areas to further support include:
- Performing arts
- Visual arts
- Music and musicianship
- History and Heritage
- Libraries and Literature
- Cultural and community celebrations

AIM

Deliver a Sydney Hills Interpretation Plan for heritage engagement.
To commence the connection of the new pioneer theatre to the performing arts sector.
4. COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING

Volunteer development is also an important part of strengthening local communities. In 2015 the Community and Economic Development team will launch Council’s revised volunteer program. The Sydney Hills Volunteer Program outlines Council’s approach to promoting volunteering in The Hills Shire, creating new volunteer opportunities and further engaging our current network of over 850 volunteers.

Key focus areas include:
• Increase the numbers of volunteers in our community annually;
• Encourage the community to look to Council for connection with volunteering opportunities; and
• Be recognised as an organisation that harnesses volunteers as an asset and leads the way in its recognition program and utilises its volunteer network.

As the volunteer strategy identifies, this will be achieved through further developing Council’s governance and management of volunteers, providing a range of training, educational and skills development programs, increasing recognition and networking opportunities for volunteers and creating specific marketing and promotion of Council’s volunteer program.

AIM
Implement the new Sydney Hills Volunteer Program including 12 month training program.

ACTION REQUIRED
Effectively implement the key strategies of the Volunteer strategy in these communities.
5. COMMUNITY SPORT & RECREATION

Sporting activities and active lifestyles are an important aspect of the Hills Shire community and assist in building and connecting communities. The Hills Shire includes a wide range of sporting clubs, codes and facilities. Community groups provide fitness programs, social engagement and volunteer opportunities which a large portion of the local population engage in.

Key priority areas to support the growth of sporting opportunities and active lifestyles are:

- Education & training opportunities for local sporting clubs and community groups to grow, develop and become sustainable;
- Provide funding opportunities through Community Grants and Donations Program; and
- Encourage collaborative partnerships between sporting groups and other community groups (where relevant).

**AIM**

Connect major league clubs with the local community to inspire sport involvement.

**ACTION REQUIRED**

Further development of the partnership with the Office of Sport and Recreation for education and building closer relationship with associations and clubs.
Clear communication and consultation processes and strategies allow Council to effectively engage the community and include them in decision making and planning. The Sustainable Communities Forum identified the need for more avenues for active participation by the community sector to participate in the development of community plans and policies. The following key priority areas have been identified to increase opportunities for community engagement and inclusion:

• A focus on working more **COLLABORATIVELY** with local service providers, community groups, volunteers, sporting clubs, government agencies and the broader community to achieve outcomes for the area;
• Create more clear and frequent lines of **COMMUNICATION** both within Council departments and with external stakeholders and create opportunities for community groups to engage with different sections of Council and partners;
• Increase more formal lines of **NETWORKING** and **CONSULTATION** for planning purposes such as focus groups, community forums, online surveys, etc; and
• Work strategically with local service groups to **PROMOTE** avenues of communication for the broader community particularly those most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

**AIM**
Deliver the community forum and conference to encourage further collaboration, communication and networking.

**ACTION REQUIRED**
Council to create an Information Referral Working Group of members from a diverse range of community services to work collaboratively with the Sustainable Communities team. Further expand Council’s community expo and community conference events to achieve the above aims. Facilitate communication opportunities between community groups and other sections of Council.
Community facilities provide important infrastructure for strengthening our community and providing support to local communities groups and organisations. The Sustainable Communities Forum highlighted the need for an expansion of the roles of community centres so that they become community resource hubs, providing spaces for learning, human service delivery, recreational and cultural activities.

Suggestions include:

• To establish, based on thorough needs analysis, a community-based hub model that services the information, access and service needs of client groups offering specialist co-located services with a person centred approach, with appropriate geographic coverage across the different areas. (Likely hub bases would be established communities, new developments, and remote areas and may require a range of solutions to meet the needs of the communities in those areas);

• Enhance a web-based online “hub” directory leveraging off current directories that is issue based rather than service-based focused on The Hills area;

• Council to facilitate discussion with Castle Hill Local Area Command, PCYC and local service providers and stakeholders to plan for the establishment of a PCYC or a similar facility in The Hills Shire LGA; and

• Council to work with local service providers and stakeholders to develop a headspace (youth service supporting young people aged 12-25) in the The Hills Shire LGA.

**AIM**

Partner with potential stakeholders to plan for future Hills PCYC.

Develop a web-based interactive directory for the community.
The Sustainable Communities Forum identified the need for further development and support with governance for the purpose of collaborative partnerships. In particular the need for more formalised agreements and MOUs between service providers to achieve more effective partnerships with sustainable outcomes and support for clients. Council’s leadership in the facilitation of collaborative partnerships as well as providing support and resources for existing networks and interagencies will ensure a consistent strategic direction throughout the sector. Establishing a set of working principles and formalising these principles for MOUs, working agreements or contracts is essential to achieving this. This set of working principles provides an overall framework and clear direction for service providers and community groups to form effective collaborations between stakeholders with a client or community focus.

Key priority areas for the **PRINCIPLES** are:
- An additional change from service focused to client or community activity;
- Leveraging other organisations to support the client/community;
- No wrong door—suggesting any services can identify generic needs for referral, care or engagement purposes;
- Reciprocity – exchange of services and resources; and
- Following up and removing barriers for clients/community so appropriate services or facilities are accessible.

**AIM**  
To deliver governance training for not for profit services or community organisations

**ACTION REQUIRED**  
Formalise a set of working principles and prepare for distribution. Provide additional support for existing programs and create new educational opportunities so organisations have access to information and resources to ensure governance processes and partnership development.
Further development of Council’s stakeholder engagement and collaboration with the community sector was also identified at the Sustainable Community Forum as integral to building a strong and supported sector. This includes the need for proactive leadership from Council to facilitate two-way relationships and establish formal processes of communication and engagement with the community sector with the aim of involving them effectively in community planning and decision-making.

The following key priority areas have identified to achieve this:
• **RECONNECT** with the community sector by attending relevant local community events, activities, forums, interagency meetings and coordinating strategic planning opportunities. Such events to engage key organisations, information referral groups and research and development;
• **DEVELOP STRATEGIC SUPPORT** for local community venues and facilities so local organisations and community groups can better utilise these spaces; and
• **PROVIDE** information and education opportunities for the local community sector for the purpose of capacity building particularly in regards to grant applications and funding initiatives.

**AIM**
Increase the use of Council’s community facilities by services, clubs and community groups to better utilise for the growth of their organisations and purpose.

**STAKEHOLDERS**

**ACTION REQUIRED**
Create clear strategic documents accessible to the community sector, further refine The Hills Shire Council’s Community Grants Program 2015-16 and further develop Council’s 2015 Sustainable Communities Forum.
NEXT STEPS

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES PLAN
The Sustainable Communities Plan has been prepared to communicate to local community service providers, community groups, government agencies and to the broader community opportunities that have been identified in The Hills Shire. The document also outlines specific strategies that have been developed to attend to these opportunities and includes Council’s role and responsibility in addressing each area. This document complements the new priorities for the 2015/16 Community Grants Program and will be reviewed annually.

SIGNPOSTS OF SUCCESS AND GOOD OUTCOMES
The Sustainable Communities Plan cannot stand alone. To ensure good outcomes and success in integrating and developing capacity for community identified actions, they are imbedded within the organisation to ensure we are reporting on our achievements and measuring outcomes for the benefit of the community of The Hills Shire.