YOUR CHANCE TO HAVE A SAY

There are many opportunities for you to make your views known to Council. You are welcome and encouraged to have your say - the wants, needs and opinions of the Shire’s residents are a very important factor in Council’s decision-making processes.

You may be asked to respond to a specific issue where Council must make a decision, such as a development in your area or a management plan. You may also wish to take the initiative and bring something to Council’s attention.

Occasionally you may want to obtain information from or about Council and its operations. Generally, you will find most information is publicly available from Council’s website at http://www.thehills.nsw.gov.au or from the Customer Services Centre or local libraries. However, in some instances, you will need to apply for information under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA Act) (formerly Freedom of Information Act). Forms can be downloaded from our website http://www.thehills.nsw.gov.au/Access-to-Council-Information.html

PHONE US
By phoning 9843 0555 who will be in contact with Council’s Customer Service Centre. A Customer Service Officer will be the first point of contact for your enquiry and will be able to assist you with your enquiry, or your call will be channelled to the applicable department. Council’s website also details the different areas in Council and the direct contact phone numbers.

PHONE YOUR COUNCILLOR
Your Councillors are elected to represent you in the community and they welcome an opportunity to assist you. A full list of Councillors and contact details are available on Council’s website or by phoning Council on 9843 0555.

COUNCIL MEETINGS
Ordinary Meetings of Council are held twice each month (2nd and 4th Tuesdays), however whilst Council is in recess in January each year, Delegated Authority Meetings are held - the Mayor and General Manager are delegated the authority to consider matters at these meetings. The dates and times of all Council meetings and Delegated Meetings are advertised on Council’s website and in the local newspapers - the Hills Shire Times and the Rouse Hill Times.

The matters for discussion at each Council meeting are contained in the Business Paper and listed on the Agenda Line (9843 0130) after 5.00pm on the Friday before the meeting. Copies of the Business Paper are available from local libraries from Saturday before the meeting; a copy can also be obtained by
phoning 9843 0123 with collection from the Customer Service Centre from the Monday before each meeting.

You will be advised when a matter will be considered by Council if you have made a submission to Council (see public submissions) about a particular issue.

Council may hear representatives from both sides of a discussion before making a decision at a Council Meeting. Addressing Council is subject to approval by the Mayor. However if one side is permitted to address Council, the other side is usually afforded the same opportunity. People wishing to speak on a matter on the Agenda need to be registered by 4.30pm Monday before the meeting by phoning 9843 0277.

COMMUNITY FORUM

Soon after the commencement of a Council Meeting, the Mayor may invite those present in the public gallery to ask a question of Council on any matter as part of Community Forum. Questions in Community Forum must not relate to any matters on the Agenda for that meeting. If an answer cannot be immediately provided because further information and/or research is required, the matter will be taken on notice and a written response provided.

CONCILIATION CONFERENCES

Conciliation conferences are most often held in relation to planning services matters and are an opportunity for applicants and concerned parties to discuss a proposal before the matter is reported to Council. Conciliation conferences are facilitated by a mediator (Councillor or Council Officer) and other Councillors can also attend. In some instances, conferences may be conducted by mediators external to Council.

Significant developments are listed in the local press when they are received by Council and, where a development is to take place on an adjoining property, neighbours may be personally notified. A conciliation conference may be held if a significant number of objections (10 individual or more within the exhibition period) are made on an application. Conferences are generally held outside normal working hours and all those who have made a submission are given adequate notice of the date and time and invited to attend.

At the start of the conciliation conference, a Council Officer advises of the planning restrictions and requirements which relate to the development. All attendees are invited to comment about their issues of concern. Sometimes, residents will organise themselves and elect spokespeople. The applicant is then afforded the opportunity to respond to the comments made.

Conciliation conferences are most productive when those speaking are well informed about the matter, can support their arguments with facts and have a ‘conciliatory’ approach to the meeting.

PUBLIC SUBMISSIONS

Council may advertise for and invite public submissions regarding a wide range of issues. Some examples include changes in policy, financial and management plans, community plans, major development applications lodged with Council and general planning matters. Where public submissions are sought, Council will advertise in the local papers and on its website.

Should you wish to make a public submission you are encouraged to submit your submission via the “e-Submission to a Development Application” request system on Council’s website. Select ‘Customer e-Requests’ from the “Online Services” box on the left-hand side of the screen.

COMMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

Even if you aren’t invited to comment about a specific matter, Council welcomes your views on any issue. You may wish to comment or make a suggestion about any aspect of Council’s operations and services. The best method is to put it in writing and address it to the General Manager, PO Box 75, Castle Hill, NSW 1765, or use the email link on Council’s website.

Your comments and suggestions will assist us in providing better services.

GOVERNMENT INFORMATION (PUBLIC ACCESS) ACT 2009 (GIPA ACT)


If documentation you are seeking is not available on the website, you can apply by completing an “Informal” GIPA Application. The information will be provided to you taking into account any public interest considerations.

In limited circumstances, access to information will require a “Formal” GIPA Application, with an application fee of $30.00 on lodgement (20 working days is allowed for a formal application to be responded to). People have a right to access information in this way unless the GIPA Act provides a reason to withhold the information.

PRIVACY AND PERSONAL INFORMATION

With the introduction of The Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act (PIIPA) the personal and private information of submissions/objections received by Council is protected from release. All personal information collected by Council can generally only be used for the purpose for which it was collected and cannot be released. Contact Council’s Public Officer on 9843 0555 if you would like more information about GIPA or privacy issues.