

## **Streamlining the planning process and supporting local identity and character – can the two exist?**

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### **Abstract:**

The consultative frameworks that support local government strategic planning and land use planning seek similar outcomes: to prioritise local issues that inform council programs and services and determine the future urban and regional form of the local government area. The former is primarily derived from a collaborative process involving local residents and stakeholder and the latter is framed within a more consultative position that must also align with sub-regional and regional strategies and targets. The community strategic plans required by the Local Government Act 1993 (NSW) and the proposed Local Plans envisaged under the Planning Bill 2013 (NSW) are to be informed by the local community and seek similar outcomes that define how a local area will be managed, planned and will change over the next 10 years. From a strategic perspective there would be significant benefits to align the 'operational' planning of local government and land use planning so that there is a seamless integration between how suburbs and centres are managed, what services are offered and how and where new development will be supported that reflects community aspirations, the council's resources and capacity and is consistent with broader planning priorities. Local councils are committed to the integrated planning and reporting reforms introduced some years ago. The current NSW Government planning reform lay the foundation for greater strategic planning and inclusive community involvement within a clearly articulated priority of economic growth and propose a nested hierarchy of plans from the state to local level. With two similar processes accessing the same community it raises the questions of how local government strategic plans and land-use plans can complement each other, align service and infrastructure delivery and co-exist with their respective consultative frameworks and legislative objectives. This paper outlines preliminary research that explored 16 community strategic plans in the context of how they inform land use planning and concluded that there is much work to do.

### **Introduction**

The Green Paper on the planning reform in NSW outlined four aspects to change the current planning laws to a 'simplified, strategic and more flexible performance based system' (NSW Government 2012, p3). These included: to engage communities as an integral part of making key planning decisions; to use evidenced based decision making when preparing strategic plans; to streamline development assessment processes; and to integrate infrastructure and strategic planning. Underpinning this reform is the principal objective to facilitate and manage growth and economic development. Since the release of the Green Paper in July 2012, the Government has progressed its reform following community and stakeholder input with the White Paper and Exposure Bill in April 2013 (Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2013a,b), subsequent releases from the Minister for Planning (Hazzard 2013a) and the second reading of the Planning Bill to the NSW Parliament (Hansard 2013). Foreshadowing the strategic focus, the state government has also commenced the regional and sub-regional planning for Sydney and the Lower Hunter (eg: Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2013c).

A parallel reform initiated by the current state government is examining local councils with a primary focus on how to improve their strength and effectiveness. This is examining their financially sustainable, ability to support the current and future needs of their local communities, whether they have the capacity to deliver necessary services and infrastructure and how to ensure local representation and decision-making (<http://www.localgovernmentreview.nsw.gov.au/home.asp>). These reform goals relate back to the individual strategic plans that councils must prepare that links their financial, workforce and asset bases through the production and implementation of their community strategic plan (CSP).

Both reform agendas position community and stakeholder involvement as critical elements in the strategic planning and decision making process albeit from slightly different perspectives.

The timing of the planning and local government reforms will converge at the end of 2013. This will set in train a framework for each council to prepare a Local Plan (to replace their current Local Environment Plan) that must align with the Sub-regional Delivery Plan and Regional Growth Plan set by the NSW Government as well as the council's current CSP (noting that CSP are to be updated by newly elected councils as part of the 4-year local government election cycle). This paper provides a snapshot of how the two processes can complement and integrate drawing on 16 case studies of current community strategic plans across urban and regional councils in NSW. The conclusions have broader relevance than just NSW as all state and territory jurisdictions have separate local government and planning laws with each requiring some form of strategic planning (Tan and Artist 2013) that aim to create better places for their communities.

### **NSW Government Planning reforms**

The context of the planning reforms builds on a number of independent reports that alleged various failings of the current planning system. In the Minister's second reading of the bill to Parliament he noted that "...the proposed reforms are consistent with leading practice for planning systems as identified by the Productivity Commission [Productivity Commission, 2011], the Council of Australian Governments reform Council [COAG Reform Council 2011] and the Grattan Institute, meeting 33 of the 42 leading practice principles." (Hazzard 2013b).

The White Paper and Planning Bill 2013 are based around what are described as five 'transformative' reforms that reflect recommendations of policy reviews, including:

- a new "delivery" culture for planning
- a legislative requirement for communities to participate in the preparation of new plans and in defining the vision for their local areas
- a focus on strategic planning
- a performance based development assessment system where decisions are made faster and more transparent, with significantly greater use of code complying development
- coordinated provision of growth infrastructure to support new development.

To achieve these objectives a hierarchy of strategic plans are proposed that will have statutory recognition and will include State, regional, subregional and local plans with a clear 'line of sight' to be maintained between each plan and supported by state planning policies to inform development of regional growth plans, subregional delivery plans and local plans to ensure consistency in how planning objectives can be achieved (Part 3 Planning Bill 2013).

### **NSW Local Government reforms**

The review into the sustainability of local government in NSW commenced in March 2012 and it is being overseen by an independent panel appointed by the Minister for Local Government. The terms of reference of the panel broadly relate to developing options for new governance models, structural arrangements and boundary changes.

The final report from the panel will be handed to the Minister for Local Government in early October 2013 (at the time of writing this was not publically available) although interim reports, notably the Future Directions for NSW Local Government Twenty Essential Steps (Independent Local Government Review Panel 2013a) has set the likely recommendations that among other matters would see the number of councils in the Sydney metropolitan area decrease from 49 to around 15 with the creation of major new cities centred around Sydney CBD, Parramatta and Liverpool and the establishment of around 20 'new look' County Councils to undertake regional level functions outside the metropolitan area.

Following the release of the Future Directions report, independent opinion polling was undertaken for the panel that found among other matters (Independent local government review panel 2013b):

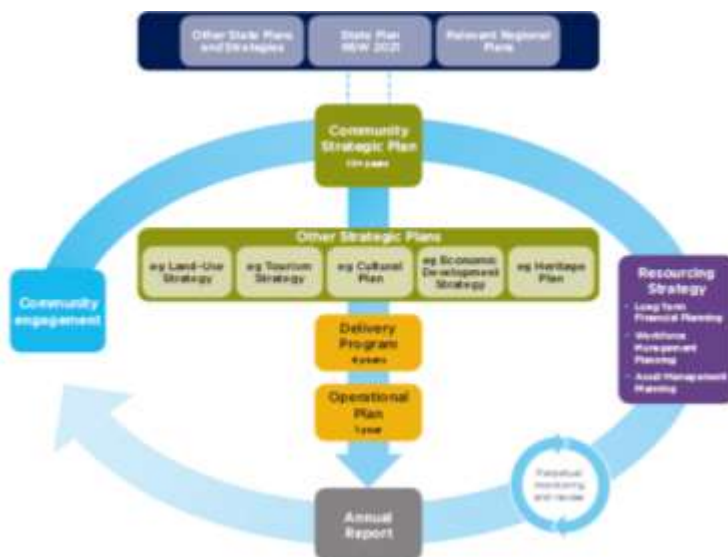
- a majority of respondents did not support amalgamation of councils due to concerns about local government areas becoming too large and loss of local representation and identity. On the other hand, nearly half of respondents thought that amalgamations could lead to cost-savings, and a substantial minority also saw scope for better services; and
- Whilst councils performance in delivering adequate basic services is rated quite highly, satisfaction with other aspects of their role, such as understanding community needs and expectations, communicating effectively, improving the local area or getting things done in the community's interests, is noticeably lower.

Politically, Premier O'Farrell has stated that forced council amalgamations would not occur as an election promise during his 2011 campaign and it remains unclear how the government would otherwise encourage voluntary mergers or implement the reforms once it has considered the report from the independent panel (Government News 2013).

### **Community strategic plans**

The purpose of the CSP is to identify the highest priorities and aspiration for the future of the local area and to plan strategies to achieve these priorities. The introduction of the CSP process brought together four plans previously prepared by councils including the Management Plan, Social Plan, Annual Report and State of the Environment Report. Under the CSP framework a single 10-year strategy is required to be prepared by each newly elected Council that outlines their community's main priorities and aspirations and how the council would achieve these goals (Division of Government 2013).

As noted in the Planning and Reporting Manual (Division of Government 2013), a council is not solely responsible for implementing the entire CSP. Rather the plan needs to set out the role and need to partner with other levels of government and the community for the delivery of specific services and functions. In doing so the CSP must also consider relevant State and regional plans and strategies (Figure 1). It is this element that embeds, in theory, urban and regional planning into the local council's CSP effectively providing the nexus between the *Local Government Act 1993* and *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (Figure 2). As noted by the Division of Local Government, CSPs set the high level objectives that relate to land use planning but the specifics are set in the LEP in accordance with the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and regulations (Division of Local Government 2013). These provisions will continue under the new planning reforms.



**Figure 1** Indicative relationship between the integrated planning and reporting framework, land use planning strategies and other councils strategies (Division of Local Government 2013 p52)



**Figure 2** Relationship between strategic planning and other state plans and reforms (Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2013a p67)

### Community engagement

Engaging with the community and other stakeholders to establish local government services and priorities and the direction urban and regional planning are key aspects under the current CSP process and the planning reforms. Frameworks and guidelines have and will be established by Division of Local Government and the Department of Planning and Infrastructure that will inform process, intent and review mechanisms. These enable councils and sub-regional planning bodies to decide the best mechanism (procedures) for consultation, rather than establishing or legislating a prescriptive 'do lists' as a one-sized fits all approach

The NSW Government's planning framework seeks to guide its community involvement through the development of a community participation charter (Part 2 Planning Bill 2013). This has seven themes (Part 2 clause 2.1 (1)): partnership, accessibility, early involvement, right to be informed, proportionate, inclusive and transparent. Guidelines on how to achieve these principles in the development of strategic plans are yet to be developed by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure. However, all planning authorities (including the Department of Planning and Infrastructure, regional planning bodies and councils) must follow the guidelines and their consultation plans that are required to be prepared by the planning authority prior to commencing their planning. An external review process is also proposed to ensure consultation has been undertaken against the community participation charter and approved consultation plan and as a recent change to the planning reform, appeal rights regarding the making of regional and sub-regional plans have been introduced in the Planning Bill 2013 to protect this participation process (Hazzard 2013b).

The community participation charter does not explicitly advocate a community governance (i.e. where decision-making and ultimate outcomes are firmly in the control of the community) or other engagement model, such as IAPP2 spectrum (IAP2). It does however emphasise a shift from the current deterministic practice of planning authorities that 'tell' the community what is proposed and invite their comment. In this context, the consultation reforms recognise the role of the central planning authority to set a strategic direction at state and regional scales, with a shared state and local responsibility for sub-regional plans and the local council for the preparation of the local plan. This is not to say tensions will not exist where a local community is resistant to or disagrees with the imposition of the regional strategic direction, for example, increasing housing density within their local government area. However empowering the

community to develop creative ways to accommodate change in the context of 'place' or 'geography' rather than focusing on a single site or option (such as high-rise) is likely to yield greater ownership, understanding and support (McKinlay Douglas Limited 2013).

CSPs, on the other hand, have sought to embrace a community governance model that reflects a slow and steady movement by local residents to advocate for participatory democracy in setting the local agenda (as discussed in Prior and Herriman 2010). The Division of Local Government references the participatory scale developed by the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) (Division of Local Government, 2013) as a framework for the development of CSPs and highlights the 'collaborate' sphere as the preferred method (Figure 3) for the development and ongoing refinement of the plans.

A notable difference between the two approaches is that the planning reforms could be described as more structural relying on principles that do not necessarily infer (although does not exclude) a collaborative or empowering form of decision-making approach, while the CSP process references a spectrum of participatory decision-making with a clear expectation of collaborative decision-making (refer to Figure 3). This is not to say the urban and regional planning cannot shift to a more collaborative or empowering participatory position nor does it suggest the NSW Division of Local Government excludes a lesser participatory approach (refer to Figure 3). For local government many drivers such as resources, political and administrative will, capacity and competing priorities will influence the quality of their plans (eg: Bass 2012)

In terms of linking the two processes together, the White Paper (Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2013a) suggests the need for better integration of the community engagement requirements that underpin CSP and that will be required under the new planning system. It proposes that the Department of Planning and Infrastructure will prepare community participation guidelines that will collate real examples of good current practice and explore how community participation for planning will link with the preparation of CSPs by councils (Department of Planning and Infrastructure 2013a p47). Such guidelines have not as yet been produced and it would be suggested that in keeping with the emphasis on evidenced based decision making, would be informed by reviews such as provided in this paper.

### ***Priorities and approaches***

From a review of current practice (Bass 2012, Healy 1998, McKinlay Douglas Ltd 2013, McKinlay et al 2011 and Tan and Artist 2013) three aspects would seem to be essential in establishing a successful framework for undertaking strategic planning at a local level:

1. Valuing local identity and place
2. Recognising the community capital that has already been invested in local planning (that includes both statutory and strategic)
3. Acknowledging the complexity of government policy and law, particularly around urban and regional planning and approval processes.

### ***Local identity and place***

The issue of size (the extent of an area) and place (that may be how the community identifies to that area) have and remain key challenges community consultation that has as one of its outcomes setting appropriate planning controls and criteria (Dahl and Tufte 1973). In a review of planning by local government in Australia and internationally, McKinlay et al (2011) conclude:

- Land use planning should not artificially divide communities (as can occur with council and regional boundaries).
- Communities that live and work in the same locality tend to have greater connection and or time to get involved in consultation as opposed to those that commute outside their area for work.
- Established populations with lower population turnover may have greater connection with their local area. [This presents a challenge for the planning of new suburbs and growth areas where strategic planning is likely to be completed well before the first residents move in and for the dormitory suburbs at the fringe where residents commute long distances to their place of work].

- Placed based planning rather than functional planning centred on administrative or technical disciplines can engender greater cooperation and collaboration within an organisation that in turn enables more meaningful and holistic consultation with a community. [For the planning profession this suggests the need to focus on place first not the zone.]
- People want to have more involvement in decisions that affect them personally and their community. This reflects the need to engage at the smaller scale and prepare place based plans that can roll up to the LGA wide plan.

Researchers have reported the 'ideal' size of population to be engaged in a community governance model varies significantly. For local scale planning this can range from 5,000-10,000 while regional planning may involve 50,000-70,000 (McKinlay Douglas Ltd 2013). Further confusion can also occur as to what the various partners consider to be local or regional. For example the definition of regional planning envisaged by current NSW government planning reform is much larger than 70,000 suggested by McKinlay Douglas Ltd (2013) with the metropolitan area for Sydney defined as a single region with a population of 4.4 million (Census 2011), with the sub-regions having many hundreds of thousands of residents. Local plans under current council boundaries can have more than 200,000 residents and this will increase either as part of proposed amalgamations and or through natural and planned growth supported by draft metropolitan plan for Sydney (NSW Government 2013).

Pickering and Minnery (2012) in their study into regional scale planning (at a scale more aligned with the planning reform) found that effective consultation is difficult, resource intensive and only partially effective. They suggested that the approach used not rise above the *consultation* phase, as depicted in the IPA2 model (Figure 3).

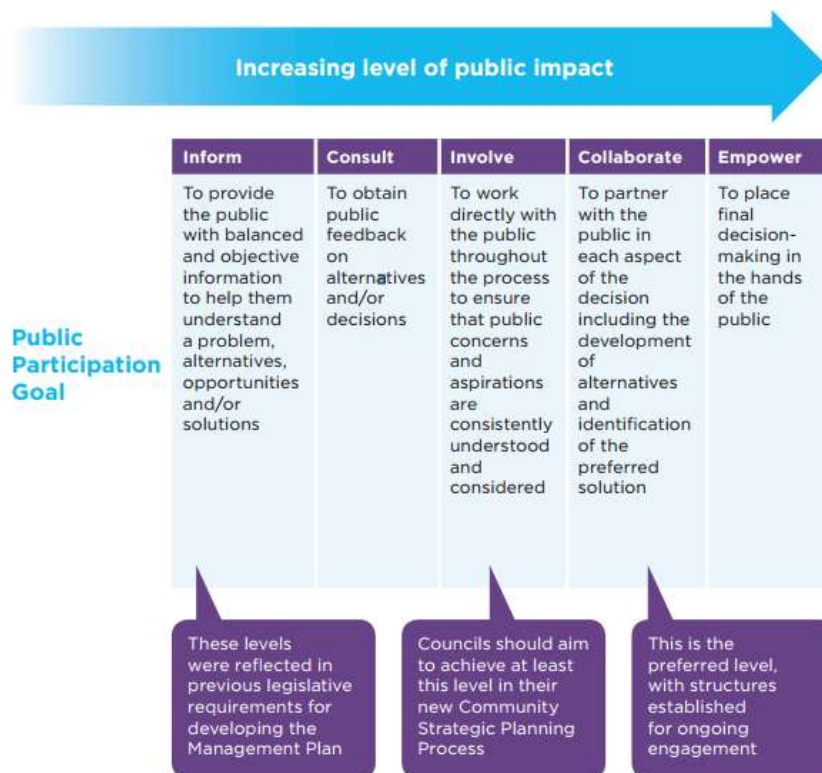
From a power or influence perspective Forster (2006 p160) has noted that as the size of the area and in turn stakeholders increases, multi-national companies, national development agencies and umbrella groups representing development interests can exert greater influence than the individual or collective resident. This presents yet another set of challenges for both state and local government planners.

### **Community capital**

Local communities have been deeply involved in the development of many local plans and policies including their CSPs, LEPs and other strategies over many years. The commitment of time and energy to attend meeting, provide comment on proposals, develop ideas and in general be actively engaged in decision making processes has led to the creation of, and investment in, community capital. Governments at all levels need to harness capital this through genuine and targeted engagement. However this capital can rapidly erode where government continually shift their priorities particularly where these do not align with previously articulated visions and requesting more community input can lead to consultation fatigue, burnout or worse disengagement. Consistency in the strategic setting and ensuring engagement is meaningful, reflective, non-repetitive and is not perceived as just process must be foremost in any engagement strategy.

### **Complexity**

Coupled to the notion of community engagement and dealing with changing circumstance is how to reconcile the inherent complexity of planning law and policy. This has been seen as a barrier to successful participatory models that have sought to engage in urban and regional planning (McKinlay et al 2011 p. 35). While a planning 'expert' has a key role in seeking to unpack and explain the nuance of law and policy and how it may apply to various scenarios, enabling multiple 'knowledges' where locals, among others, have a say irrespective of their planning expertise based on their experience, perceptions or intuition is a key to good consultative practice (Healy 1998). Under a more engaged model, the expert planner has to listen more and reflect on the input and be one part of the decision making process. As members of a community become more familiar with the law and policy they will increasingly become specialists in their own right as evident in recent challenges to planning decisions (for example Friends of Turramurra Inc v Minister for Planning [2001] NSWLEC 2010).



**Figure 3** Integrated planning and reporting consultation structures (Division of Local Government 2013 p 38)

**Importance and satisfaction of planning by local government**

Local government has and will continue to have a key role in development assessment and strategic planning. How well the sector is perceived to perform in this area is important to understand in the context of determining future consultative approaches that link a council’s own priority planning and how this integrated with local and regional land use planning.

A review by Elton Consulting (2012) on local council community surveys found a notable gap between levels of importance and satisfaction of the development assessment and strategic planning functions undertaken by local government throughout NSW. Town-planning (strategic) functions were seen as having a high to low level of importance with performance generally low. By comparison development assessment functions reported lower importance and lower satisfaction. This should send alarm bells to planners in general as to how their work is perceived to contribute to the shaping of cities and places.

**Review of community strategic plans**

An analysis of 16 local council CSPs was undertaken in August 2013 to identify common themes in structure and the degree and strength urban and regional planning directions and priorities (Table 1). Eight metropolitan and one regional council were selected within the Georges River Catchment and seven regional councils were selected from the Division of Local Government’s list of CSP as examples of good practice (2013 p22). In all cases the consultation methods undertaken by the councils relied on multiple lines of evidence and approaches. Whether each council achieved the *collaborative* participation goal as supported by the Division of Local Government is difficult to assess on the basis of their plans

and would require supplementary analysis through additional survey methods of those coordinating, facilitating, analysing and drafting the final plans.

Table 1. Summary of case study councils

<b>Council</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Area (km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>Category</b>
Bankstown	188,814	77	Urban
Bega	33,925	6,277	Regional
Bellingen	13,450	1,602	Regional
Campbeltown	153,222	312	Urban
Fairfield	196,567	102	Urban
Gloucester	5,181	2,952	Regional
Hurstville	80,823	23	Urban
Kogarah	59,200	16	Urban
Liverpool	185,481	306	Urban
Rockdale	103,164	28	Urban
Snowy River	8,188	6,029	Regional
Sutherland	220,835	334	Urban
Tamworth	59,461	9,894	Regional
Tweed	90,090	1,309	Regional
Wentworth	7,120	26,267	Regional
Wingecarribee	46,960	2,689	Regional

(NSW Division of Local Government, 2013)

### ***What is the local community?***

A common theme in the vision statements was that councils identified one 'community' within their local area. This suggests a sense of homogeneity, irrespective of the population and geographic size and demographic diversity of the council. In regional centres discrete communities may be more prevalent where towns and villages are separated by distance, there are distinct land use changes and histories may have evolved separately that create the sense of individual 'localness' or place. In contrast, the metropolitan setting can be far more blended in its demographic and spatial profile with local identity often shaped by gradations of change to their surrounding settings, irrespective of jurisdictional boundaries. Residents are likely to associate with the parts of their local and regional setting that they have stronger social and economic connections than simply 'the council'. From a consultation perspective, recognising the presence of discrete communities that may form part of a larger collective community is important when seeking to undertake local and suburban planning (McKinnlay et al 2013) and similarly broadening consultation beyond LGA boundaries can be used to capture the input of those otherwise connected but not proximate as well as the relationship of relevant regional issues.

### ***How populous is the local community?***

This notion of the geographic size of a local council and its population has been considered by the independent review of local government as part of its deliberations on the right size or catchment for a council (Independent Local Government Review Panel 2013). Submissions to the review panel have stressed the importance of sense of place and community identity that may be lost with amalgamations, that effectively means larger and more populous councils. In considering this issues the panel found no evidence that creating larger local government areas necessarily results in a loss of local identity (Independent Local Government Review Panel 2013 p10). This conclusion would seem to be reflected in the rather similar vision statements and to some degree similar generic planning priorities set by many council's in their CSP irrespective of their physical size (that ranged from 16 to more than 26,000 km<sup>2</sup>) or population base (that ranged from 5,000 to 220,000).



### ***Governance and accountability***

Thematically, the CSPs tended to group priorities around 4-6 themes that covered community, economic, environmental, infrastructure (that may have included or separated transport) and most often with a separate governance or leadership theme.

Thirteen of the council's had a separate governance or leadership theme that was primarily focused on local government processes and decision-making. Rarely did this mention the link to urban and regional planning despite most councils stating that their CSP gave consideration to related state plans and strategies (that is a requirement of the CSP process in any case).

One of the strengths of the NSW CSP process is the end of council term review that requires a 4-year reflection on what the council did or did not do as part of its term of office. While this end of term review was not assessed in this study, there exists opportunities to use this mechanism to reinforce the connection between the CSP and LEP process, particularly under the new planning reforms and how local plans are meeting regional and sub-regional targets. From a participatory perspective, the audit of the consultation plans and methods for both the CSP and those undertaken for sub-regional and local plans should be integrated within broader governance arrangements that should inform internal decision making and process of councils as well as sub-regional planning boards.

### ***A planning priority or planning as a multi-disciplinary endeavour***

For 14 councils urban and regional strategic planning was incorporated across multiple themes reflecting the multi-disciplinary nature of planning. Only two councils had a specific planning theme to group all strategic and development assessment functions under the titles '*managing development and service delivery whilst retaining what we value*' and '*a region for the future*'. Both of these were smaller regional councils and this more departmental rather than broader thematic approach may reflect the inherent limitations of smaller councils and their capacity to develop more integrated structures (Bass 2012), notwithstanding the regional councils were drawn from the Division of Local Government's better practice list. From a structural perspective reporting in strategic plans by departmental area such as planning or engineering runs a risk of reinforcing narrow silos and can serve to isolate rather than integrate service and infrastructure delivery and land use planning. However for those smaller councils with less resources and capacity to undertake strategic planning, a more siloed approach can suggest each department has contributed to the strategic process although arguably less integrated.

As evidenced by this review the lack of specificity in how the CSPs related to urban and regional planning suggests that many planning departments may have been somewhat removed from the process altogether.

### ***Specificity***

The identification and specificity of planning priorities and how they articulate into LEPs and in future Local Plans were mixed across the councils. Fifteen CSPs contained general statements that inferred a need to integrate land use planning to reflect or accommodate changing circumstances. Four directly referenced the LEP process and only some of these specified where changes in land use will or should occur. Examples of general planning statements without geographic or place specificity included:

- *Keep local character and respect the city's heritage and cultural diversity*
- *Address town planning issues that result from an increasing population*
- *Review processes/regulations and encourage a variety of businesses (including large corporations) to move to the [council name] LGA*
- *Deliver an efficient planning system which embraces sustainable urban renewal and development.*
- *Promote high quality, well designed and sustainable development that enhances the city*
- *Ensure an adequate supply of appropriately zoned land for development*
- *Establish planning controls that balance the need for urban growth, agriculture and protection of the environment.*

Priorities that reflected the importance of geographic and character difference between localities that are more easily translated into local planning instruments and policies included:

- *Support each township to develop their unique character*
- *'[council name] has maintained a distinct character of separate towns and villages'. Supporting this priority were associated statements such as, 'retain the rural landscape between towns and villages', 'ensure growth of towns and villages does not compromise separation distance between those towns and villages' and 'encourage responsible compact development and usable community space within the current urban growth boundary of each town and village'.*
- *Retain prime agricultural land, farm viability, manage rural subdivision and associated landscape impacts*

Stronger place specific planning statements included:

- *Promote Campbelltown as a regional city*
- *Employment / industrial areas, especially Smithfield / Wetherill Park and town centres, are viable so they provide jobs and service to the community*
- *Growth areas Kalaru and Wolumla, Cobargo, Candelo promoted*
- *Implement plans for urban expansion including Cobaki and Bilambil Heights. Complete assessments of Terranora 'Area E' and Kings Forest. Retain green belts or buffers between settlements.*

## **Opportunities for integration**

The data in this study points to a need for greater community awareness and understanding of the role of strategic planning and how it informs council services and programs including urban and regional planning. This must extend from collating generalised statements such as wishing to have liveable and connected cities to more descriptive and specific place based outcomes. Similarly consultative techniques must be tailored to account for the community's level of planning knowledge and the implications of how local to regional strategies will shape their locality in the future.

### ***Strategic focus and the importance of effective engagement***

The White Paper states clearly how the NSW Government sees the new planning system working: *'Plans will be developed based on a vision shared by a well informed and properly engaged community'*, and *'...all the effort at the strategic planning stage is designed to have an agreed vision for an area and to make it easier when applying to develop. It will be easier to get approval if the application is consistent with the strategic plan, with rigorous assessment and consultation for more complex proposals'* (Department of Planning and Infrastructure (2013b), p24). Further the planning reforms will *'explore how community participation for planning will link with the preparation of community strategy plans by councils'* (Department of Planning and Infrastructure (2013b) p47) and that the CSP review process provides an opportunity to integrate council and urban and regional planning.

The emphasis in the planning reforms towards more engagement at the strategic level, and less at the development assessment stage, highlights the need for effective community engagement at all levels of strategic planning but particularly at the Subregional Delivery Plan and Local Plan making stages. These plans will respectively include housing, employment and other planning related targets and zone land within the 35 current standardised local plan zones. The bulk and scale of new development will largely be informed by zoning and development codes that once agreed to pave the way for significant change in the character of urban areas particularly in the identified high growth areas and if the proposals comply there will be limited opportunities for community comment or objection. This reinforces the importance of establishing locally based character statements through the complementary (or combined) consultative process that can inform local controls to ensure that the character of centres in the future reflects community sentiment.

For the urban planning profession, this is likely to mean that the CSP process will become critical to granular level planning and in turn inform what controls should be developed to inform future change.

Vision statements in CSPs need to be more specific and nested within a hierarchy based on detail and geography that provides consistency to regional and sub-regional planning (the top down approach) but also accommodate a bottom up approach at the local level. For example this would mean the locality statements that describe the future character of distinct areas would be located in Part 1 of the Local Plan. It becomes, then, necessary, rather than desirable, for engagement with the whole community, that would include development interests, when developing CSPs to deliver outcomes that can be directly translated into the strategic context provisions of the Local Plan, if the communities' priorities and aspirations are to be taken into account.

### ***Engagement and alignment***

The review of 16 CSPs reveals real opportunities to build on engagement already being undertaken by many councils. Development of place specific planning statements will enable issues of local character to become an integral part of the development assessment process. They will also inform standards and performance measures around any code assessed development the council chooses to include in their Local Plan. Well drafted place based statements will retain the required 'line of sight' to local, subregional and state strategic planning outcomes. A focus on collaborative engagement at this level can provide a sound platform for integration and build community capital by demonstrating that time spent in consultation is valuable.

### **Conclusions**

The basis of this research was to identify if and where the CSP process and the new planning reforms are or can be integrated. The analysis and findings have drawn from a qualitative review of 16 CSP and professional observations and practice, noting however that further research is required. From a consultative perspective, three main points are made:

- Communities should not be arbitrarily defined strictly by LGA or other artificial boundaries, rather they should be based on who associates with, uses, lives and works there in the context of the local demographics – this means councils and other planning agencies must engage with those 'outside' their defined geographic boundaries and also appreciate the nuances of communities within communities. Added to this expanded definition should be those that develop within the community as this sector can provide a valuable insight as to what may be feasible and likely to take the plan to implementation stage.
- Community engagement that seeks a more deliberative input needs to be undertaken at a very local scale (i.e. suburb or parts thereof). This will enable the local community, who are the ones that live or work or recreate in the area to understand the higher level planning context and then contribute to setting the granular detail that will inform the future planning instruments.
- Regional scale planning, that would include regional and sub-regional plans as envisaged by the planning reform and for larger councils with populations well in excess of 100,000 will require substantially different consultation techniques in the development of their strategic plans. The larger the population and possibly area (for regional councils) this is likely mean less collaboratively and more consultative approaches.

In the context of urban and regional planning and alignment to the CSP process the following observations are made:

- The CSP process should facilitate the development of specific priorities for localities that in turn need to be incorporated in the local planning framework. Presently this is poorly done and the reasons why and how require further analysis.
- The CSP process currently used by local government is maturing as a robust process that informs the direction, priorities and capacity of councils. While this may experience some hurdles as part of future amalgamations (that may or may not align to sub-regions identified by the Department of Planning and Infrastructure) the existing foundations and community capital should overcome any short-term challenges as a result of the local government and planning reforms.

As a final comment there remains further work on how to reconcile objectives set from top-down approach as positioned by the planning reform and a more partnered bottom-up approach advocated for the CSP process (and participatory advocates such as the Better Planning Network), particularly where there maybe diametrically opposed views (such as urban consolidation). Framing consultation processes around contentions issues will require considerably more attention and represents one of the more significant areas of community concern from advocates of participatory decision making. An opportunity exists for local government to streamline their strategic planning in the next round of CSP to ensure their processes can inform their local plans as well as prioritising council services and programs. Streamlining does not necessarily imply faster or shorter rather the participatory processes should be integrated and complementary and able to engage conversations on what is important, why and where and how can the local area adapt to change, questions that are common to all jurisdictions.

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