



Operational Plan 2021-22

PLANNING FOR OUR PEOPLE
OUR PLACE OUR FUTURE

Exhibition Draft

12 April 2021

Adopted by Council on xxxxx

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Cessnock City Council acknowledges that within its local government area boundaries are the Traditional Lands of the Wonnarua people, the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung people. We acknowledge these Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices and operations are located, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now live within the Cessnock Local Government Area.

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Mayor's Message



BOB PYNSENT MAYOR

I am proud of the Operational Plan 2021-22 and this Council's track record of successfully delivering for our community. The outlook for the Cessnock Local Government Area is a positive one. The last twelve months have been a challenge for many and Council was no exception. In the face of uncertainty I am pleased to say our organisation and its operations are stable.

As we embark on another Operational Plan Council's commitment to servicing the needs of our community remains paramount. Council remains in a financially sound position and has a full agenda planned for the year ahead with a substantial Capital Works Program totalling more than \$35 million.

As the Mayor of Cessnock I understand the desire for more upgrades to be delivered to roads. This is recognised and a shared goal of Council. This is why we continue to apply for more funding to enable the delivery of critical upgrades to roads.

In fact, for road related projects alone we have bolstered Council's budget with more than \$6 million secured in grant funding for our roads renewal programs (local and regional) and safer roads program. Some key projects that will be undertaken include Old Maitland Road and a section of Wollombi Road, Millfield. These upgrades will be welcomed by all of us who frequent these roads and the visitors travelling to our area.

We will also have the opportunity to replace a number of bridges including Yango Creek bridge in Wollombi, Kline Street bridge in Weston and demolition of the Cunneens bridge in Wollombi. The bridge construction program is valued at a healthy \$2.5 million.

This year our community will participate in the local government elections and Council will prepare the next Community Strategic Plan. This Operational Plan provides a fantastic insight into how our Council is tracking and provides information on the current priorities. It is a useful resource for any community member who wants to play a role in developing and contributing to the vision for our community that will guide Council's decision making over the next 11 years.

“

*The outlook for
the Cessnock Local
Government Area is a
positive one.*

”

General Manager's Message

LOTTA JACKSON GENERAL MANAGER

It is an exciting time to be General Manager of Cessnock City Council as we look forward to achieving for our community in the year ahead.

Council has another ambitious plan that will provide key infrastructure upgrades under our substantial Capital Works Program. We have a number of exciting projects programmed that are an investment in our communities future and align with the community vision to be a thriving, attractive and welcoming place to both live and work.

A few highlights include the Cessnock Airport, installation of the Cessnock Pool Splash Pad ready for this pool season and the delivery of critical road maintenance and renewal of roads across the Cessnock Local Government Area. We understand local residents want to see more works completed on roads and this Plan will see us deliver over \$10 million on the renewal of local and \$2 million on regional roads.

Our Capital Works Program totalling over \$35 million is possible due to our continued success in applying for grants. In fact, our Capital Works Program is primarily funded by grants, to the tune of over \$20 million.

Following a year of uncertainty, as we navigated COVID-19 and its impacts on our operation, we anticipate a year of more stability. Yet, as an organisation we have learnt from the challenges posed by the pandemic. Our organisation has demonstrated it can be dynamic and flexible and maintain services to the community despite challenges posed by changing operating conditions.

Every decision of this Council is driven by the community and what our community tell us. Council will soon be developing the next Community Strategic Plan and we look forward to your ongoing participation to allow us to develop a Plan that truly reflects the community aspirations of residents.

If you are a community member interested in your own local area and want to see what your local Council will provide, take the time to read this plan and understand the role you Council plays in ensuring Cessnock is a great place to live, work and visit!



Our Capital Works Program totalling over \$35 million is possible due to our continued success in applying for grants.



Section 1

Introduction



Our community vision:

Cessnock will be a cohesive and welcoming community living in an attractive and sustainable rural environment with a diversity of business and employment opportunities supported by accessible infrastructure and services which effectively meet community needs.

CESSNOCK -
*attractive, thriving
and welcoming*

Our Council

The Council derives its authority from the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act), the regulations and other legislation. The Act:

- Provides the legal framework for the system of local government for NSW,
- Sets out the responsibilities and powers of councils,
- Provides for governing bodies of councils that are democratically elected,
- Facilitates engagement with the local community,
- Provides a system of local government that is accountable to the community and is sustainable, flexible and effective.

Mayor & Councillors

Councillors comprise the governing body of a council in the same way that a Board of Directors is the governing body of a corporation.

The governing body of elected councillors, set the

strategy and monitors the performance of the council, and the administrative body of the council.

Cessnock Council consists of 13 Councillors who are elected from four (4) Wards, with three (3) representatives from each Ward. The Mayor is elected by popular vote and is also deemed to be a Councillor.

The Mayor is the leader of the council and a leader in the local community.

A council's governing body monitors the implementation of its decisions via reports by the general manager to council.

General Manager

The general manager is the most senior employee of a council and is the only member of staff selected and appointed by councillors.

It is the role of the general manager to conduct the day-to-day management of the council in

accordance with the strategic plans, programs, strategies and policies of the council.

The general manager is responsible for the appointment of staff in accordance with the organisation structure determined by the council and the resources approved by the council. The general manager is also responsible for the management, direction and dismissal of staff.

Council staff

General managers employ council staff to carry out the day-to-day operations of the council and implement council policies and other decisions, as directed by the general manager.

The general manager is the primary link between the elected body and its employees.

Council staff are responsible to the general manager, who is responsible for the conduct and performance of council staff.

Our Councillors



Paul Dunn
Councillor
Ward A



Mark Lyons
Councillor
Ward A



Allan Stapleford
Councillor
Ward A



Di Fitzgibbon
Councillor
Ward B



Ian Olsen
Councillor
Ward B



Jay Suvaal
Councillor
Ward B



John Fagg
Councillor
Ward C



Anne Sander
Councillor
Ward C



Anthony Burke
Councillor
Ward D

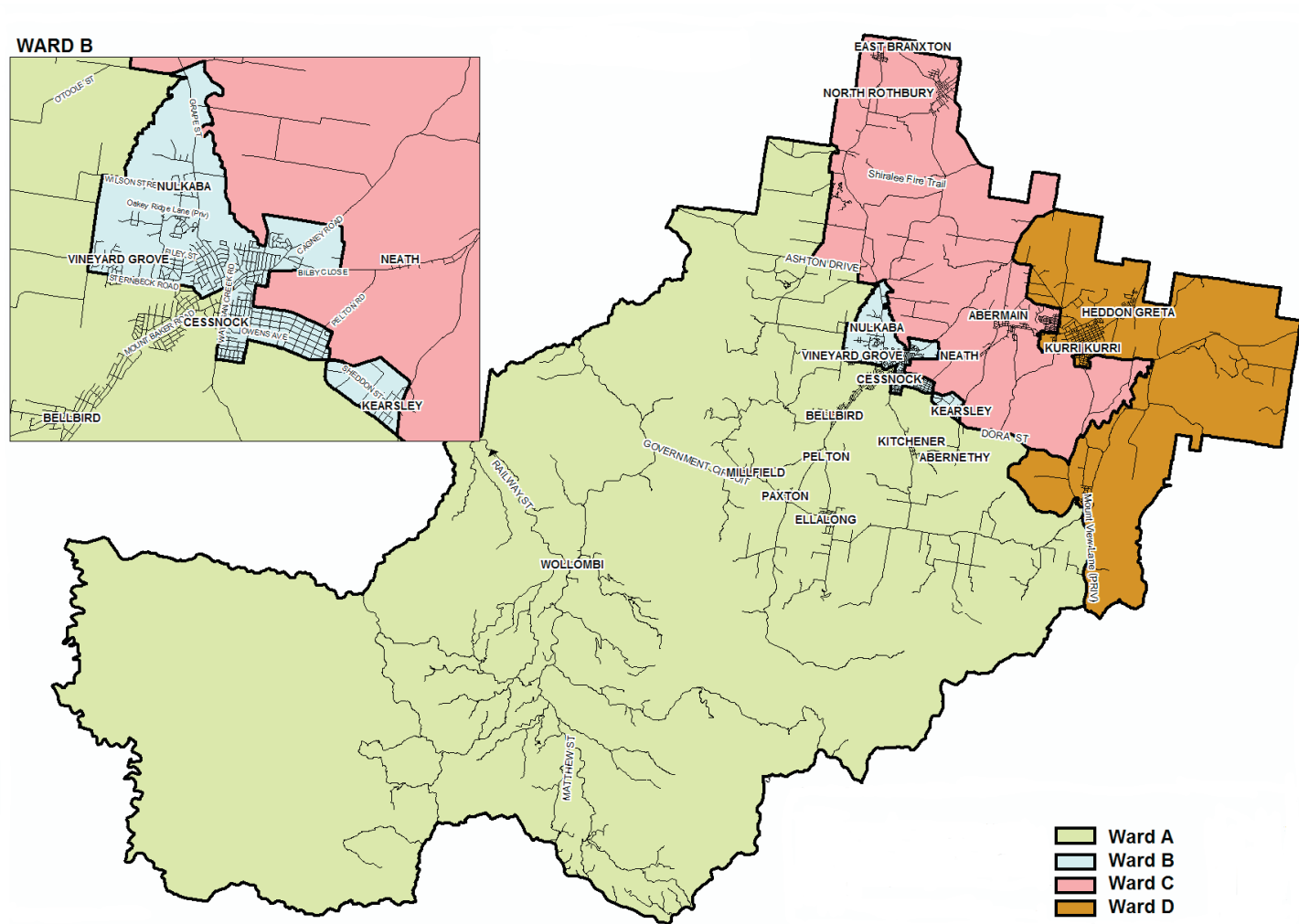


Rod Doherty
Councillor
Ward D



Darrin Gray
Councillor
Ward D

Cessnock LGA Ward Map



Local Government Area

OUR REGION

Located just 120 kilometres north of Sydney and 40 kilometres west of Newcastle, the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA) covers 1,966 square kilometres within the beautiful Hunter Valley, NSW.

Our region is now home to close to 60,000 residents and the towns and villages within it are sustained by a diverse business environment, with a backdrop of our famous wine and tourism industry.

The Hunter Valley is Australia's oldest wine producing region with around 4,500 acres under vine and the wine tourism industry is worth an estimated \$521 million.

Offering 28 schools, childcare options, 72 parks, playgrounds, great libraries, an entertainment centre and the Hunter Valley Zoo, the Cessnock LGA is a great place to live and bring up a family.

We also have a wide range of open spaces and recreation facilities for our community, organisations and sporting groups to enjoy. These include 34 sports grounds, three swimming pools, eight tennis courts, three netball facilities, 28 cricket wickets and a regional hockey facility.

We work hard at Council to ensure our LGA continues to be a great place to live and visit.

Our rich heritage

The majority of the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA) lies upon the Traditional Custodian country of the Wonnarua Nation and also includes Darkinjung and Awabakal lands.

Within the lands of the Wonnarua Nation are many significant Aboriginal sites. Wonnarua means 'land of hills and plains'. Our LGA is home to many localities and places with Aboriginal names and histories. Mount Yengo, located in Yengo National Park, is of particular significance to Aboriginal peoples. It's the place from where Baiame jumped to return to the spirit world after he had created the lakes, rivers, mountains and caves in the area. When Baiame jumped towards the sky, he flattened the top of Mount Yengo, and that flat top can still be seen today. Mount Yengo and its surrounds are home to many important sites of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural association.

The Wollombi Valley is also home to many other significant sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage. Towns, villages and localities in the LGA bearing Aboriginal names include Kurri Kurri (meaning 'the beginning' or 'the first'), Wollombi (meaning 'meeting place' or 'meeting of the waters'), Congewai, Nulkaba, Laguna and Kalingo.

European settlement of the Cessnock LGA has seen a diverse range of agricultural production, the rise and

fall of heavy industry, the impact of World War II on local infrastructure and the enduring influence of our world-class vineyards. It's a rich and complex history, one which makes us proud of our enduring heritage.

The importance of the Great North Road

The Great North Road was built to link Sydney with the fertile Hunter Valley. After ten years of construction, the convict-built road reached Wollombi in 1836 and brought settlers in from the south, particularly from the Hawksbury district. It opened up road transport routes the other way, allowing easier movement of goods from Maitland, to Wollombi and then on to the Central Coast.

The road continued on to Singleton, connecting Singleton to Wollombi to Sydney. It branched off at a T-junction at Wollombi, creating a transport route the other way to Cessnock and on to Maitland. The road is so significant it's listed on the Australian National Heritage List and the UNESCO World Heritage List.

In Wollombi, convicts cleared the native bushland and newly arrived farmer-settlers grew maize, barley, oats, wheat, tobacco and potatoes. There was also a significant timber industry which harvested the beautiful cedar and rosewood forests of the district and gave nearby Cedar Creek its name.

Wollombi's central position on the Great North Road saw it become a prosperous commercial and administrative centre boasting its own court house, bank, three hotels, a post office and a resident Police Magistrate. By 1858 the population of the Wollombi Valley was 1,519. By comparison, in the same year the sleepy hamlet of Cessnock had between seven and 11 adult residents. For most of the 19th century Wollombi remained the largest settlement in what is now the Cessnock LGA.

Today, Wollombi is a significant tourist destination with visitors admiring the beautifully preserved heritage buildings, visiting the old court house (now a museum) and walking or driving on the historic Great North Road.

The rise and fall of the coalfields

When significant coal deposits were discovered in the late 19th century, it generated rapid and extensive land settlement across the Cessnock LGA. The current pattern of townships, road and rail transport, location of hotels and residential streets still reflect this earlier industrial landscape, one which soon dominated the area. Colliery companies built towns adjacent to their mines and rail lines to and from pit tops.

Men poured into newly formed towns and existing small townships, to work in the local coal mines. The local population grew rapidly. It's estimated tens of thousands of men worked in over 30 collieries at the height of the mining boom. Coal mines were established at Abermain, Aberdare, Abernethy, Bellbird, Branxton, Cessnock, Greta, Heddon Greta, Kearsley, Kitchener, Kurri Kurri, Millfield, Neath, North Rothbury, Pelaw Main, Pelton, Stanford Merthyr and Weston.

This 'coal-rush' became the catalyst for considerable and far-reaching social and economic change which continued for decades. The coalfields in the Cessnock LGA were the most extensive in NSW until the underground coal mining slump of the 1960s. The collieries dominated the social, cultural and working lives of the residents. So much so that large swathes of the Cessnock LGA were known as the South Maitland Coalfields, or simply 'the coalfields'.

Coal mining was dirty and hazardous. A significant number of men were maimed or injured in the industry and an unknown number suffered long-term health effects. Nevertheless, coal mining brought local prosperity as service industries sprang up to support the newly created 'coal towns'. Cessnock became an important retail, commercial and administrative centre with a vibrant social and cultural life, which continues today.

The Hunter Valley becomes 'wine country'

Grapevines were planted in Sydney soon after European Settlement in 1788. As settlers moved north and west up towards the Hunter Valley and the Hunter River the colonial government authorities actively encouraged the planting of vineyards. The first major planting in the Hunter Valley was in 1825 on land between the rural settlements of Branxton and Singleton.

These early vignerons were passionate about their craft, with vineyard owners travelling to Europe and South Africa to gather cuttings from vineyards there in order to expand the varieties of grapes grown. In 1847, the Hunter Valley Viticulture Society was founded. Its aim was to expand the knowledge of viticulture, improve planting and harvesting

techniques, improve the quality of the grapes grown and expand the variety under cultivation.

Most of the early vineyards of the Hunter were located in the northeast section of the valley in the fertile alluvial plains along the Hunter River. The river functioned as a road, providing an easy transport route for the wine down to the port of Newcastle and on to Sydney. Part of the success of the early Hunter Valley wine industry was due to this proximity to Sydney, which linked the Valley to the city and allowed the development of trade networks.

By the mid-19th century, wines from the Hunter Valley began to attract international attention and acclaim. At the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1855 Hunter Valley wines won many awards, but there was even a more prestigious recognition. A sparkling wine from the Hunter Valley beat the French champagnes for the honour of being the champagne of choice to be served at the table of Emperor Napoleon III during the closing ceremonies of the Paris Exhibition.

By the 1860s, vineyards began to move further south and west towards the foothills of the Brokenback range near Pokolbin and Rothbury, today a centre of production for world-renowned wines of every kind. The heritage of this area is a source of pride for local residents and vignerons. Our local iconic wine is widely considered to be Semillon, but the wide variety of wines sets the region apart, including Shiraz, Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon and Verdelho.

Today, this part of the Hunter Valley is known as 'wine country', home to award-winning cellar doors and restaurants, fine food production and dining and is also a major entertainment centre hosting major international acts in our vineyards. It's a major NSW tourism region, with a long and venerable history.

Integrated Planning & Reporting Framework

The integrated planning and reporting framework comprises an inter-connected set of documents that plan holistically and sustainably for the future of the local government area.

Community Strategic Plan

The community strategic plan is the highest level plan that a council will prepare. Its purpose is to identify the community's main priorities and aspirations for the future and to identify strategies for achieving these goals.

In doing this, the planning process will consider the issues and pressures that may affect the community and the level of resources that will realistically be available to achieve its aims and aspirations.

While council has a custodial role in initiating, preparing and maintaining the community strategic plan on behalf of the local government area, it is not wholly responsible for its implementation. Other partners, such as State government agencies, business and community groups may also be engaged in delivering the long-term outcomes.

Delivery Program & Operational Plan

The delivery program is a statement of council's commitment to the community and is the single point of reference for all principal activities undertaken by the elected council during its term of office. All plans, projects, activities and funding allocations must be directly linked to this Program.

Supporting the delivery program is an annual operational plan. It spells out the details of the program: the individual projects and activities that will be undertaken each year to achieve the commitments made in the delivery program.



Resourcing Strategy

The delivery program provides a vehicle to achieve long-term community aspirations. However, these will not be achieved without sufficient resources (time, money, assets and people) to actually carry them out.

The resourcing strategy consists of three components:

- asset management planning;
- long term financial planning;
- workforce planning.

The resourcing strategy focuses in detail on matters that are the responsibility of the council.

Annual Report

The annual report is one of the key points of accountability between a council and its community.

The annual report focuses on the council's implementation of the delivery program and operational plan (because these are the plans that are wholly the council's responsibility).

The report also includes some information that is prescribed by the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005.

Community Consultation

Community consultation is an important part of the integrated planning and reporting framework. Extensive consultation was undertaken in 2010 to develop the original community strategic plan. Council then went back to the community in 2013 and 2016-17 to confirm that the documented outcomes and objectives were still relevant.

In addition, Council has undertaken biennial community research with a representative sample of 400 residents to monitor perceptions of the progress against the desired outcomes in the community strategic plan and satisfaction with the services offered by Council.

More recently, Council has consulted with the community to determine what is meant by a "satisfactory standard" with regards to the condition of infrastructure assets. The community has determined that, at this stage of Council's asset management maturity, Council should aim for all assets to be in an "average" condition.

Community consultation for the next community strategic plan commenced in February 2021.

Reporting Our Progress

The Local Government Act 1993 requires the General Manager to provide regular progress reports to Council with respect to progress against the principal activities detailed in its delivery program with reports provided at least every six months.

The quarterly budget review statements, required under clause 203 of the Local Government (General) Regulation 2005, provide financial information in regards to estimates of income and expenditure and are separately reported to Council.

At the end of each quarter (September, December, March and June) a report is prepared to assess our progress against delivery program actions and the capital works program.

Financial Sustainability

In September 2014 the NSW Government announced the Fit for the Future reform package, its response to the Independent Local Government Review Panel's final report on NSW Local Government Reform. The reform package included proposals for councils across NSW to strengthen efficiency, performance and move towards a more sustainable position.

While Council achieved a positive outcome by being assessed as a "fit for the future" organisation, there is still work that needs to be done to achieve greater efficiencies across the organisation and provide the best value-for-money for our community.

The Financial Sustainability Initiative (FSI) was adopted to ensure Council continues to generate sufficient funds to provide the levels of service and infrastructure agreed with our community.

The FSI is an umbrella initiative for a series of projects that contribute to Council's fiscal future by focusing on reducing costs, increasing revenues and improving value-for-money.

FSI and other projects that contribute to Council's ongoing financial sustainability have been incorporated into Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting documents. These projects are identified throughout this document as follows:

* Project supporting financial sustainability

