



Image: Sunrise at Lake Illawarra

Wollongong City Council

State of our City Report July 2022-June 2024

Endorsed 25 November 2024



Image: Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony, Blue Mile Tramway, Wollongong

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our city is built, Dharawal Country. We recognise and appreciate the deep connection to this land, waters and the greater community. We pay respect to Elders past, present and those emerging and extend our respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who call this city home. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the first people to live in the area. We respect their living cultures and recognise the positive contribution their voices, traditions and histories make to the city.

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Image: North Beach, Wollongong
Photo Caitlyn Phanith (Unsplash)



Lord Mayor's Message

Wollongong's heart is its people. As a community, we celebrate the diversity of those who call Wollongong home, we embrace our differences and our similarities. We're a city that comes together in times of difficulty, and we celebrate joyously when the opportunity arises.

This report reflects on the term of Council prior to me being elected Lord Mayor. However, as a Councillor and Deputy Mayor during this term of Council, I'm keenly aware of the challenges we faced and our efforts and hard work to lift our city. We engaged with difficult issues like climate change, access to housing and housing affordability, and the continued cost shifting to local government. We also faced the challenges of managing and improving ageing infrastructure while also being asked to stretch our budgets further than ever before.

Council has worked hard to establish and maintain good governance structures within the organisation. This has enabled Councillors to fulfill their role effectively on behalf of the community and focus on financial stability in an organisation that manages a \$5 billion asset base.

I believe that the decisions and investment made by Council has made Wollongong a better place to live, work and play. Here's a snapshot of some key essential community-focused work prioritised in this term of Council.

Live:

We're part of the NSW Government's e-scooter trial that helps us to explore ways to be more environmentally sustainable by being less reliant on cars, and more active in our transport options.

Our 17 beaches are patrolled September to April – with North Wollongong Beach patrolled year-round – and we make sure we have lifeguards on these beaches to keep our community and visitors safe. Plus, we support the volunteer life savers on Sundays and Public Holidays. We've also worked to maintain our 18 pools, which are a combination of rock, saltwater and chlorinated pools.

We're investing in planning for the city's housing. Most recently, we prepared a draft Affordable Housing Policy and Procedure, we're developing master plans for West Dapto, and seeking Biodiversity Certification of the West Dapto Urban Release Area. We've also supported affordable housing in the past financial year by entering into a funding agreement for a \$5 million affordable housing scheme with Head Start Homes, which is in line with our focus within the Wollongong Housing Strategy to improve housing opportunities across the city.



Work:

Council set an ambitious jobs target in its 2019 Economic Development Strategy of 10,500 net new jobs by the year 2029. In July 2024, we announced we only have 415 jobs to go to hit that target.

This is an extraordinary achievement – particularly given the past few years where we’ve experienced a global pandemic and a very challenging financial environment.

We’re seeing significant growth in sectors like green energy and health in Wollongong which is helping create previously unseen jobs in the city and providing exciting opportunities for existing residents as well as those drawn to the city for the work-life balance that is offered here.

This will only continue to grow as we see the evolution of advances in science, technology and green energy.

Play:

Whether it’s community-focused events like National Reconciliation Week, Refugee Week, Comic Gong, the Botanic Garden Open Day or New Year’s Eve celebrations, we deliver the opportunity for people to be a part of their local community.

In this term of Council, we’ve opened some phenomenal facilities that I am very proud of. Top of this list would have to be the award-winning Stuart Park All Ages All Abilities Playground in North Wollongong that really makes play accessible to all.

A close second would be the Cringila Hills Recreation Park, which turned a neglected piece of land in one of the city’s most disadvantaged areas into a nationally recognised recreation space.

However, I’m equally proud of our investment in our young netballers with refurbished courts at Fred Finch Park, the construction of a brand new criterium track in Unanderra, and the delivery of the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong in the city.

There is so much that happens to make a city function and be a great place to call home. Wollongong is in a good position and has a bright future ahead of it.

**Lord Mayor of Wollongong
Councillor Tania Brown**



Image: North Beach, Wollongong
Photo Caitlyn Phanith (Unsplash)



General Manager's Message

Our community are our customers and they're at the heart of all we do at Wollongong City Council.

Over the past two years we've really focused as an organisation on delivering on the promises we've made to our customers.

We've emphasised ways to ensure Wollongong's liveability has continued to improve, especially as we came out of the unsettling time that was the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Our energy has been on getting the basics right – making sure parks and gardens are vibrant green spaces for people to enjoy and that playgrounds are refurbished. We've invested significantly in improvements to footpaths and cycleways because our community have told us it's important to them to be more sustainable, to be active and to have alternative transport options to cars.

In doing this, we've made further enhancements to missing links along the Grand Pacific Walk, we've introduced a dedicated on-road cycle lane in Wollongong's Smith Street, and we put our hands up to participate in a NSW Government-led trial for shared e-scooters.

The additional benefit of this investment into cycling infrastructure was that we were well prepared for the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong in September 2022. The cyclists raced routes from Helensburgh to Wollongong via Mount Keira and images of our beaches, escarpment and city were broadcast to millions of people around the world.

We've focused on working towards our net zero target emissions for Council facilities, and for the city, through an extensive campaign to build community awareness and uptake of our Food Organics Garden Organics or FOGO scheme as part of household waste collections, and we signed a power purchase agreement in November 2022. The city's streetlights and largest facilities now operate on 100% renewable energy.

We also saw the impacts of climate change in action with multiple natural disasters impacting our residents, property and Council owned or managed land and infrastructure. The event on 6 April 2024 left a bill of more than \$5.6 million to address the immediate impact of the storm. However, the legacy of this impact will be affecting our community and Council's budget for years to come.

We've been focused on building strong relationships with the State and Federal Government to support us to respond to natural disasters and their aftermath, but also to be able to meet our community's needs in terms of roads, facilities and services.

While our work is supported by a continued focus on good governance, financial sustainability and informed decision making, there can be no doubt Council is being asked to do more, with less. We're seeing more costs being allocated to Council and our budgets are already stretched. Like our community, we're trying to get more and more out of each dollar we have and financial support through government grants allows us to work towards the delivery of major pieces of infrastructure.



We're grateful that in this term of Council we received a number of grants including \$9 million towards Stage 1 of the Darkes Road Sporting and Community Hub project from the Federal Government, \$2.6 million from the NSW Government for the Get Active program and \$11.2 million from the NSW Government for the Regional and Local Roads Repair funding program.

These are just three examples of funding grants which helped to supplement the work we do to make Wollongong a great place to live, work and play.

As we welcome the Councillors and Lord Mayor elected in September for the 2024-2028 term, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work, dedication and passion of the outgoing Councillors. Their efforts and focus have left a legacy that, I'm confident, leaves Wollongong in great shape.

I would particularly like to recognise the outgoing Lord Mayor Gordon Bradbery AM for his leadership and service to community. He was Lord Mayor of Wollongong for 13 years. Throughout that time he never wavered in his focus of prioritising service to community, and his support of the organisation. We remain grateful for his dedication to public office.

Our future is a really positive one and Wollongong City Council will continue to strive for the best for our residents.

**Wollongong City Council General Manager
Greg Doyle**

Councillor Information

The following Councillors were in office for the period of this Report



**Lord Mayor
Councillor Gordon Bradbery AM**

**Ward
1**



Councillor Mithra Cox



Councillor Richard Martin



Councillor Janice Kershaw



Councillor Cameron Walters

**Ward
2**



Councillor Cath Blakey



**Councillor Tania Brown
(Deputy Lord Mayor)**



Councillor David Brown



Councillor John Dorahy

**Ward
3**



Councillor Elisha Aitken



Councillor Dom Figliomeni



Councillor Linda Campbell



Councillor Ann Martin



Our City

The Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA) is located on Dharawal Country. It is divided into three wards with four Councillors elected to represent each ward. The Lord Mayor is elected by all voters and represents the entire Wollongong LGA.

Wollongong Local Government Area Map

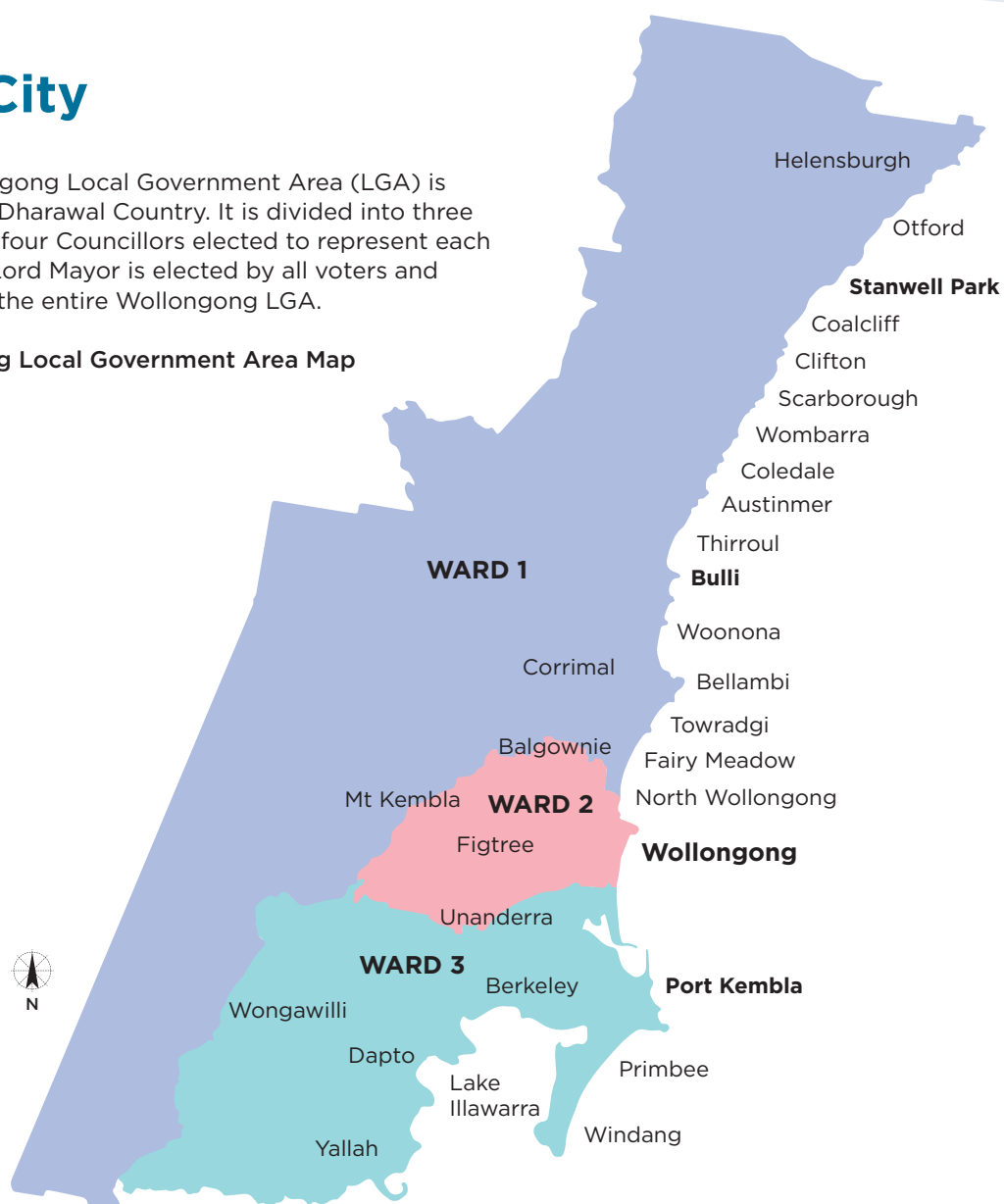




Image: Flagstaff Point
(Wollongong Head)
Lighthouse

Snapshot of the Wollongong Community



Wollongong is said to originate from the Aboriginal word Woolyungah, meaning Five Islands. The fourth largest city in New South Wales and 11th largest city in Australia in terms of population (ABS - significant urban areas).



The median age of the population of Wollongong was 39 years. We have an ageing population, 18.6% of our community are age 65+.



In 2021, 23.8% of households earned a high household income (\$3,000 per week or more) and 18.6% of households earned a low income (\$0 to \$650 per week).



In June 2024, 5.8% of Wollongong's working age population were eligible to receive jobseeker allowance or youth allowance (excluding students), up from 5.6% in January 2024.



A total of 74.9% of the population of Wollongong stated they were Australian born (4.8% not stated). Of the 20.3% born overseas the five main countries of birth were UK, North Macedonia, Italy, India, and New Zealand.



Separate housing provided accommodation for 68.4% of the Wollongong LGA population 20.5% occupied a medium density dwelling; while 12.3% occupied high density dwellings. In Wollongong City, 66.2% of households were purchasing or fully owned their home, 31% were renting privately, and 2.8% were in social housing in 2021.

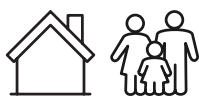


In 2021, there were 214,700 people counted as living in Wollongong (estimated resident population). It is projected that the population will increase to 242,182 residents by 2032.

Information was taken from .id Community Demographic Resources 2024, 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, compiled and presented by .id



Image: Children on Corrimal Beach



In 2021, 43.4% were couple families with children, compared to 44.2% in 2016.



And 16.8% were one-parent households compared to 18.1% 2016.



26.4% of households were one person households, with almost half of these people over the age of 65.



74.7% of people employed in the Wollongong Local Government Area also reside in the Wollongong Local Government Area.



Wollongong LGA's unemployment rate is above the state average at 5.9% in June 2024 compared with 3.7% for New South Wales.



In 2021, there were 7,990 people in the Wollongong LGA who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, representing 3.7% of the total population (estimated resident population).



English was stated as the only language spoken at home by 79.8% of the population. The four most common languages other than English spoken at home are Macedonian, Italian, Mandarin and Arabic, with Mandarin as the fastest growing language.



In 2021, 51.3% of people who live in Wollongong indicated they travel to work in a motor vehicle, 0.7% travelled by train, 0.7% travelled by bus. 26.6% worked at home. 2% used active transport.

Information was taken from .id Community Demographic Resources 2024, 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, compiled and presented by .id

About This Report

This report outlines Council's progress in implementing the Community Strategic Plan, Our Wollongong Our Future 2032. The report covers the term of the previous Council and provides information for the community and incoming Council on the progress against the delivery of the Community Strategic Plan goals. It also sets out the context for planning the next Community Strategic Plan and opportunities for the Wollongong Local Government Area and our community into the future.

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 is a whole of community plan that outlines our community's agreed main priorities, aspirations and desired future for the Wollongong Local Government Area. It sets the long-term direction for Wollongong with a Vision and six community goals.

While Council has a custodial role in initiating, preparing and maintaining Our Wollongong Our Future 2032, we are not wholly responsible for implementation and as such other partners such as state agencies and community groups may also be involved in the delivery of the Plan and therefore their work is also included in this report.

Image: Children enjoying activities at the Discovery Centre on Botanic Gardens Day





Vision and Goals

Image: Fun activities at the Discovery Centre on Botanic Gardens Day

Vision

From the mountains to the sea, we value and protect our natural environment and will be leaders in building an educated, creative, sustainable and connected community.

Goals

We value and protect our environment

We have an innovative and sustainable economy

Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city

We are a connected and engaged community

We have a healthy community in a liveable city

We have affordable and accessible transport



Image: Illawarra Cycle Club, Sea Cliff Bridge

Our Planning and Reporting Framework

Community Strategic Plan

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 represents the highest level of strategic planning undertaken by Council. Council has many other strategies and plans for specific focuses that are developed following planning and engagement. Our plans and strategies do not exist in isolation and are all connected to deliver community outcomes. However, until the actions in these plans are enabled through resourcing and included in the Delivery Program and Operational Plan, they remain aspirational.

Delivery Program and Operational Plan

Our Delivery Program and Operational Plan responds to the community's vision and goals and outlines the services, projects, programs that Council has capacity to deliver. It is a result of rigorous planning and prioritisation and aims to provide the best value services to the community.

Resourcing Strategy

The Resourcing Strategy outlines the finances, assets, workforce and information management technology that are available and will be used to achieve the Program and Plan. Attachment A to this report provides a progress update against the Resourcing Strategy.





*Image: King George V
Oval basketball court, Port Kembla*

Monitoring and Reporting How we Measure Progress

The State of our City Report tracks progress of the Community Strategic Plan by considering:

Key achievements and progress in implementing our Community Strategic Plan

This report provides an overview of progress in implementing our Community Strategic Plan utilising the progress against the Delivery Program and Operational Plan under each of the six Community Strategic Plan goals and their associated objectives and strategies.

Performance against the Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Indicators

Community indicators exist to measure progress towards delivering the outcomes of the Community Strategic Plan. These indicators were selected to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of actions taken by Council, other organisations and the community across the Wollongong Local Government Area.

Each indicator is tracked using data collected directly by Council or through the Community Satisfaction Survey and the Community Wellbeing Survey, other government agencies and community organisations. The Community Satisfaction Survey tracks Council's performance in service delivery, identifies priority areas and evaluates Council's customer services, organisational skills and communication. The Wellbeing Survey assesses performance against Community Strategic Plan indicators and provides insight into how the community feels about the city, their perception of safety, and whether they are satisfied with life. Key information gathered from both surveys is reported through the Community Indicators section in each of the Goals.

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Summary



How will we get there?

Goal 1 We value and protect our environment



1.1 The community is actively involved in the expansion, improvement and preservation of our waterways, green corridors and other natural areas connecting the escarpment to the sea.

1.2 Manage and effectively improve the cleanliness, health, biodiversity of land and water including creeks, lakes, waterways and oceans.

1.3 Increase our resilience to natural disasters and a changing climate to protect life, property and the environment.

1.4 Work together to achieve net zero carbon emissions and reduce waste going to landfill.

1.5 Maintain the unique character of the Wollongong Local Government Area, whilst balancing development, population growth and housing needs.

1.6 West Dapto urban growth is effectively managed with facilities and spaces to support the future community.

1.7 Develop and implement programs and projects that achieve proactive heritage management, education and promotion.

Goal 2 We have an innovative and sustainable economy



2.1 Support educational and employment opportunities that retain young people and local talent, attract new workers and provide opportunities for the unemployed.

2.2 Continue to diversify and grow Metro Wollongong economy as the Illawarra's regional capital and employment centre.

2.3 Increase and attract new business investment and enterprise to Wollongong while supporting and growing existing local businesses.

2.4 Encourage an innovative economy, which drives entrepreneurship and research capability in the Wollongong Local Government Area.

2.5 Work with partners to facilitate sustainable and green industries.

2.6 Support growth sectors to assist in the ongoing transition of Wollongong's economy.

2.7 Promote the Wollongong Local Government Area as an event, conference and visitor destination.

2.8 Continue to build Wollongong as a vibrant, modern city with a revitalised city centre and an active evening economy.

Goal 3 Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city



3.1 Using community art and cultural development practices, our places and spaces reflect the creativity, history and identity of our people.

3.2 We encourage innovation and creativity.

3.3 Museums and galleries are promoted as part of the cultural landscape.

3.4 We work in partnership to reduce inequity and build on opportunities to strengthen vulnerable communities.

3.5 Provide communities with access to quality local spaces and places to meet, share and celebrate.

3.6 Enable signature events and festivals where communities and visitors can gather and celebrate.

Image: Lake Illawarra
Photo Liam Pozz (Unsplash)

Goal 4 We are a connected and engaged community



- 4.1 Provide our community with equitable access to information and opportunities to inform decision-making.
- 4.2 Improve digital access and participation across all communities.
- 4.3 Partner with First Nations People and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities on programs and projects.
- 4.4 Build awareness and understanding of Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage and histories.
- 4.5 Our community strives for social harmony and values and respects differences.
- 4.6 Support and strengthen the local community services sector.
- 4.7 Demonstrate responsible decision-making based on our values, collaboration, and transparent and accountable leadership.
- 4.8 Council's resources are managed effectively to ensure long term financial sustainability.
- 4.9 Excellent customer service is core business.
- 4.10 Wollongong's role as a Learning City is supported by lifelong learning initiatives.
- 4.11 Quality services, libraries and facilities are available to communities to access and gather.
- 4.12 Technology is used to enhance urban planning and service provision for our community.

Goal 5 We have a healthy community in a liveable city



- 5.1 Accessible and appropriate medical services are available to the community.
- 5.2 Urban areas are created and maintained to provide a healthy and safe living environment for our community.
- 5.3 Work towards enabling all people in our community to have access to safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainably produced food.
- 5.4 Provide a variety of quality and accessible public places and opportunities for sport, play, leisure, recreation, learning and cultural activities in the community.
- 5.5 Provide safe, well-maintained and accessible beaches and aquatic recreation facilities.
- 5.6 Healthy, active ageing programs are provided and promoted in partnership with government agencies and community organisations.
- 5.7 Provide an appropriate range of active and passive open spaces and facilities to cater for traditional and emerging recreational pursuits.
- 5.8 Housing choice in the Wollongong Local Government Area is improved, considering population growth, community needs and affordability.
- 5.9 Integrated services are provided to residents in need of urgent shelter.
- 5.10 Partnerships continue to strengthen and achieve a safe, accessible and resilient community.
- 5.11 Local crime continues to be prevented and levels of crime reduced.
- 5.12 Plan and deliver an accessible, safe, clean and inviting public domain.

Goal 6 We have affordable and accessible transport



- 6.1 Plan for the delivery of multi-modal public transport together with sustainable transport modes such as the Gong Shuttle, walking and cycling to meet the community's needs.
- 6.2 Wollongong continues to build infrastructure and programs to fulfill its role as a UCI Bike City.
- 6.3 Effective and integrated regional transport with a focus on road, bus, rail and freight movement (including the port of Port Kembla).
- 6.4 Plan and provide sustainable infrastructure for safe and liveable places integrated with the environment and accessible to key transport routes.
- 6.5 Advocate for strong transport links within the Local Government Area and connections to Sydney, the South Coast, and the Southern Highlands to provide physical and economic opportunities.
- 6.6 Improve active transport links and connectivity to our unique places and spaces, including marine access along the Local Government Area and accessibility from the Central Business District to the foreshore.
- 6.7 Maintain the service levels of our roads, footpaths and cycleways to an acceptable standard.
- 6.8 Community transport options for frail older people, people with disabilities and the transport disadvantaged are actively promoted and available.

We value and protect our environment

We have an innovative and sustainable economy

Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city

We are a connected and engaged community

We have a healthy community in a liveable city

We have affordable and accessible transport

Community Strategic Plan

Resourcing Strategy

Delivery Program and Operational Plan delivered through Council Services

Development Assessment

Emergency Management

Environmental Services

Land Use Planning

Natural Area Management

Regulatory Compliance

Stormwater Services

Waste Management

City Centre Management

Economic Development

Tourist Parks

Cultural Services

Engagement, Communications and Events

Aged & Disability Services

Community Programs

Corporate Strategy

Integrated Customer Service

Libraries

Property Services

Youth Services

Aquatic Services

Botanic Garden & Annexes

Community Facilities

Leisure Centres

Memorial Gardens & Cemeteries

Parks & Sportfields

Public Health & Safety

Transport Services

Support Services

Employee Services, Financial Services, Governance & Administration, Infrastructure Strategy & Support, Information Management & Technology



Our Wollongong Our Future

From the mountains to the sea, we value and protect our natural environment and will be leaders in building an educated, creative, sustainable and connected community.

Image: Coledale Beach

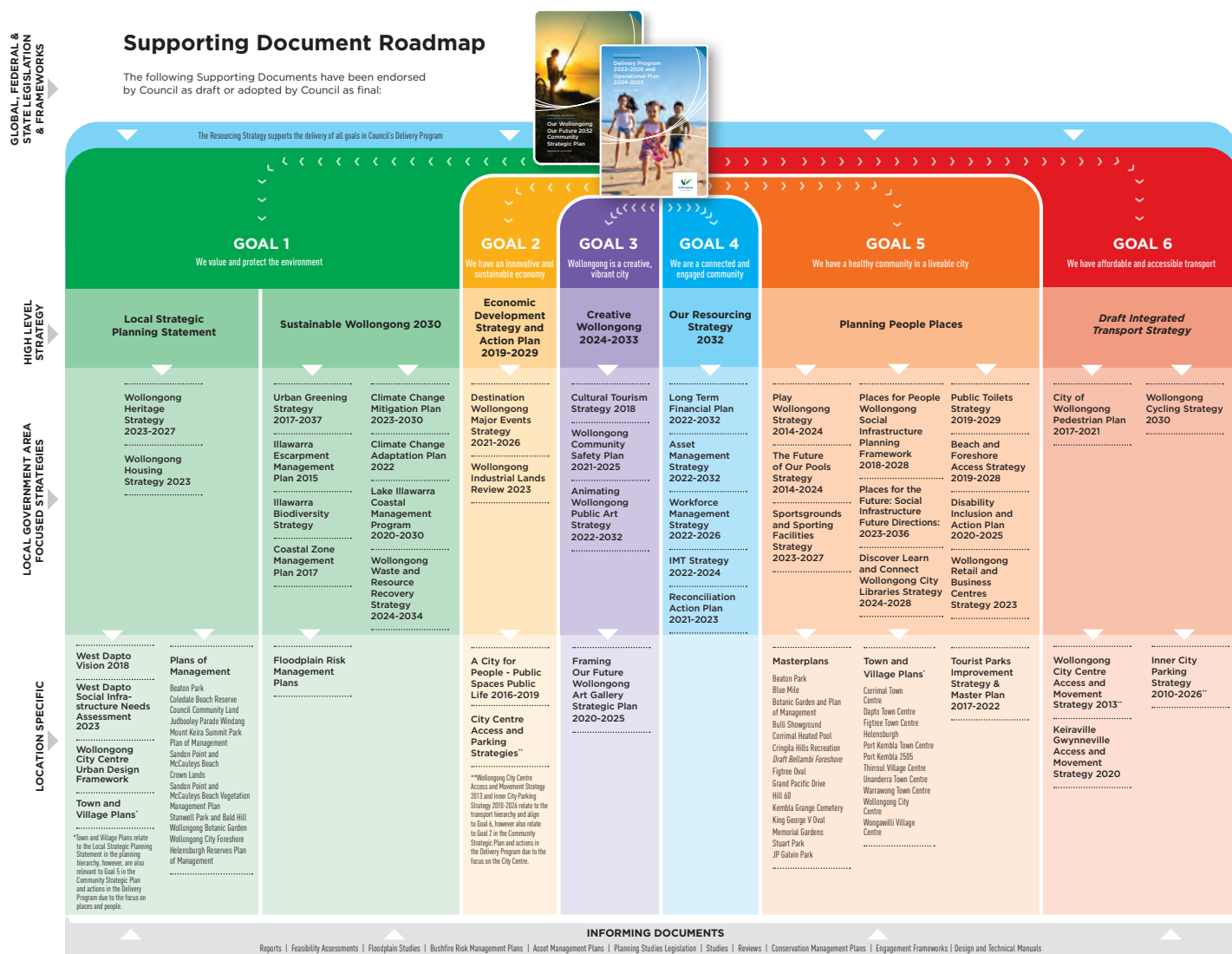
Council's Supporting Document Roadmap

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan represents the highest level of strategic planning undertaken by Council. Council has many other strategies and plans for specific focuses that are developed following planning and engagement.

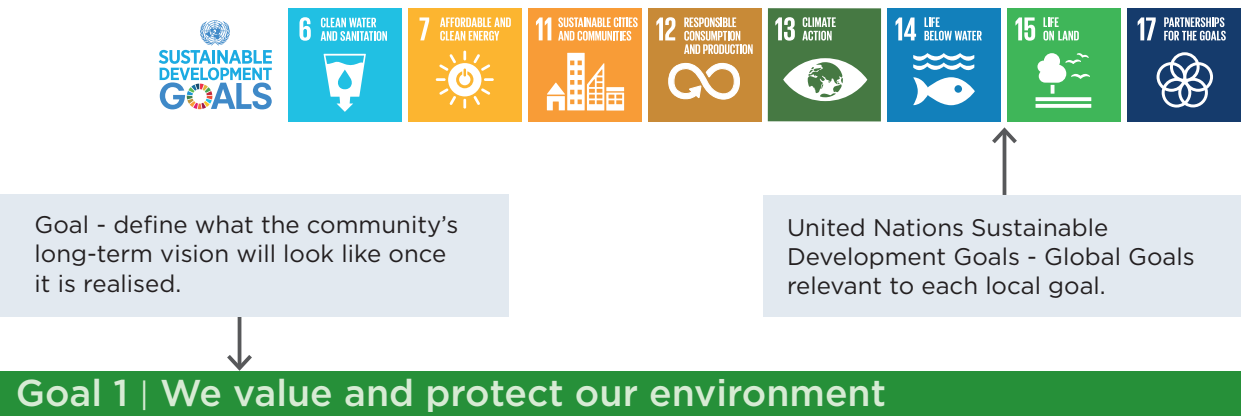
Council refers to its adopted strategies and plans as Supporting Documents. These direction setting documents support the development of the Community Strategic Plan, Council's Resourcing Strategy, Delivery Program and Operational Plans.

These documents include goals, strategies and actions specific to a project or location. However, until the actions are enabled through resourcing and included in the Delivery Program and Operational Plan, they remain aspirational.

Council's Supporting Documents have been considered in the development of the Community Strategic Plan. These Supporting Documents have been informed by extensive data, research and community input, making them an important source for consideration in the future vision and goals for the Wollongong Local Government Area.



How to Read this Report



Objectives

We will work together to reduce emissions and the effects of a changing climate.
Our natural environments are protected, and our resources will be managed effectively.
Development is well planned and sustainable and we protect our heritage.

How did we progress?

1.1 The community is actively involved in the expansion, improvement and preservation of our waterways, green corridors and other natural areas connecting the escarpment to the sea

Coordinate Council's waste, volunteer, environmental and conservation programs, activities and events.

Strategies highlighting how the vision and goals were achieved or progressed.

Actions highlighting how the Strategies were achieved or progressed.

Goal 1 Community Indicators		
How we'll measure progress		
Indicator	Target/ Desired Trend	Results
Proportion of beaches sampled for recreational water quality through the NSW Beachwatch Program rated as good to very good	100%	

Community Indicators are used to measure our progress toward achieving the goal. They may be the responsibility of more than one stakeholder. These indicators are tracked and will be reported in the State of the City Report.



Image: FOGO Heroes Campaign

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan

Goal 1 | We value and protect our environment

Objectives

We will work together to reduce emissions and the effects of a changing climate.

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How will we get there?

1.1 The community is actively involved in the expansion, improvement and preservation of our waterways, green corridors and other natural areas connecting the escarpment to the sea.

1.2 Manage and effectively improve the cleanliness, health, biodiversity of land and water including creeks, lakes, waterways and oceans.

1.3 Increase our resilience to natural disasters and a changing climate to protect life, property and the environment.

1.4 Work together to achieve net zero carbon emissions and reduce waste going to landfill.

1.5 Maintain the unique character of the Wollongong Local Government Area, whilst balancing development, population growth and housing needs.

1.6 West Dapto urban growth is effectively managed with facilities and spaces to support the future community.

1.7 Develop and implement programs and projects that achieve proactive heritage management, education and promotion.



Image: FOGO Heroes Campaign

Key Highlights

Adopted a new Climate Change Mitigation Plan 2023-2030 that will drive the implementation of strategies and projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Wollongong.

Maintained all Global Covenant of Mayors milestone badges and compliance throughout this term.

Progressed the Underground Petroleum Storage System (UPSS) program and responded to major water pollution incidents.

Developed Natural Disaster Response and Recovery plans and worked on an Urban Heat Strategy.

Carried out a proactive surveillance and inspection program of known dumping hot-spots and conducted over 1,300 investigations of illegal dumping incidents within the Local Government Area.

Continued to replace removed trees at the ratio of 2:1 in public areas and 1:1 on private land.

Adopted the Wollongong Heritage Strategy 2023-2027 and managed many of our significant sites that have State-level heritage significance including; North Beach Bathers Pavilion and Kiosk and Gleniffer Brae.

Goal 1 | We value and protect our environment

Objectives

We will work together to reduce emissions and the effects of a changing climate.

Our natural environments are protected, and our resources will be managed effectively.

Development is well planned and sustainable and we protect our heritage.

How did we progress?

1.1 The community is actively involved in the expansion, improvement and preservation of our waterways, green corridors and other natural areas connecting the escarpment to the sea

Coordinate Council's waste, volunteer, environmental and conservation programs, activities and events.

The summer foreshore parks enhanced cleansing and public place recycling project undertook roaming education for residents and visitors to Wollongong's foreshores about litter, additional bins and recycling with a highlight on coffee cups.

Waste education workshops included webinars, Chemical Cleanout and waste drop off events, *Plastic Free July* campaign, National Tree Day event, Volunteer recognition events and Clean Up Australia Day event.

A concentrated *FOGO Roadshow* educational program was completed. Summer walks and talks were popular with Bushcare volunteers including best practice and cultural awareness workshops. A poem forest planting in collaboration with Red Room Poetry and Farmborough Road Public School at Allans Creek, Unanderra was a successful new venture as part of our Urban Greening Strategy.

Rise and Shine programs and World Enviro Day events were held. A waste-wise event management plan was reviewed for Council run events.

Garden waste drop off events were held at Berkeley, Corrimal and Helensburgh. National Volunteer week was celebrated with a recognition event for Botanic Garden, Rise and Shine and Natural Areas volunteers at the Towri Centre.

A new recycling talk was developed for adults with the first delivery to 100 Probus (an association of retired and semi-retired people) attendees at Dapto.

Large scale events attended by the Green Team included Saltwater Festival at Warrawong and Thirroul Seaside Festival.

Coordinate natural area restoration works at priority sites.

In 2022-2023, a tender panel of ecological contractors was established with 61 active contracts across the city. There were a total of 166 active restoration sites across the city, including Bushcare sites. Volunteers contributed 9,289 hours with a value of \$278,000. Over 20,000 trees, shrubs and ground-covers were planted in natural areas. There were six Vegetation Management Plans completed for priority sites.

The vertebrate pest management program continued with Council supporting South-East Local Land Services with the Illawarra Feral Deer Management Program, while Council led the Myna Bird program and the control of rabbits and foxes.

In 2023-2024 we were successful in acquiring \$410,000 in external funding aimed at supporting environmental restoration around Lake Illawarra, Port Kembla Dunes and Puckeys Dunes, Fairy Meadow.

Continue to implement priority actions from the Dune Management Strategy.

Dune management continued, with vegetation management occurring across patrolled beaches. Works as part of the Sydney Water agreement commenced at City Beach Wollongong, Perkins Dunes Windang and East Corrimal in accordance with the Vegetation Management Plans for each site. Safety continued to be a key focus following storm activity throughout the period with erosion scarps managed as required to ensure public safety for beach users.

Implement annual bushfire hazard reduction works program for Asset Protection Zones on Council managed lands.

Council complied with all requirements of the Illawarra Bushfire Risk Management Plan in managing fire trails and Asset Protection Zones.

Highlights include:

- Fourteen burn pile sites attended to by Fire and Rescue NSW, from Mount Pleasant to Austinmer.
- Nine community meetings held in conjunction with the Rural Fire Service and partner agencies.
- Fourteen FiReady groups continue to be supported with 25 active volunteers.

- Adoption of the Mount Kembla Community Protection Plan.
- Acquiring over \$35,000 of external funds from Rural Fire Service for the annual bushfire reduction program.
- Completion of a full review of bushfire risk within the Local Government Area and Council's Operational Plan was completed in September 2023.
- Formation of a new Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation Bushfire network.

Deliver priority actions from the Urban Greening Program.

Together we achieved strong community collaboration and support for Urban Greening. We partnered with the National Poetry Red Room prize, resulting in a new tree planted in Wollongong for every poem submitted nationwide which saw 6,400 trees being planted in Wollongong as part of this initiative, working to increase our tree canopy coverage. We continue to replace removed trees at the ratio of 2:1 in public areas and 1:1 on private land as conditioned with Tree Permits. A new integrated Tree Management Policy and plain English Customer guide came into operation from 1 July 2023.

The first Koala Feed Forest was planted and is establishing well at Eleebana Parade Koonawarra. This was completed with the local school community, volunteers and project partners Symbio Wildlife Park.

Council's Tiny Forests project received the Highly Commended award at the 2023 NSW Local Government Excellence in the Environment Awards in the Natural Environment Protection & Enhancement: On Ground Works category.

Tiny Forests bring the benefits of forests to our suburbs. Small spaces are identified and are designed to deliver big impact. By swapping grass with a range of plants and trees, these multi-layered forests create 30 times more green surface area than grass alone. Tiny Forests can thrive in busy, polluted, built up areas where they can offer many benefits including shade and cooling, provide habitat for animals and insects, restore local biodiversity, absorb carbon dioxide to reduce the impacts of global warming and help maintain clean air and water.

1.2 Manage and effectively improve the cleanliness, health, biodiversity of land and water including creeks, lakes, waterways and oceans

Develop a Coastal Management program for the Open Coast and prepare and implement the Wollongong Coastal Management Program.

A scoping study was prepared and endorsed identifying the priorities of the Coastal Management Program (CMP) for the Wollongong coastline allowing work to progress to Stage 2.

Council was successful in receiving funding from the NSW Coastal and Estuary Program to assist with the preparation of a Coastal Management Program (CMP) for a Coastal Wetlands and Littoral Rainforest Mapping project, an Identification and Vulnerability Assessment of Aboriginal Cultural Values and Assets Study, Coastal Hazards Studies and subsequent preparation of the CMP. To date, work has commenced on the innovative Aboriginal Cultural Values and Assets Study in collaboration with the Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council.

1.3 Increase our resilience to natural disasters and a changing climate to protect life, property and the environment

Deliver commitments made under the Global Covenant of Mayors (GCoM) and support Council's climate emergency declaration.

Major actions achieved throughout 2022-2024 include:

- Council signed a Power Purchase Agreement, with the city's streetlights and 17 largest facilities operating on 100% renewable energy.
- Partnering with Endeavour Energy to upgrade the city's streetlight network to efficient Light-Emitting Diode (LED) fixtures.
- Adoption of the Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Infrastructure on public land policy.
- Increased landfill diversion rates through the implementation of strategies and programs, including the Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) program.
- Development of a Sustainable Buildings Program and Electric Vehicle charging infrastructure.

Policies and projects to support Council's commitment under the GCoM initiative are ongoing. The GCoM is based on three pillars: climate change mitigation; adaptation to climate change impacts and access to clean and affordable energy.

Progress throughout this term includes:

- Badge compliance for GCoM maintained for 2023 for mitigation (emissions reduction) and adaptation pillars;
- Investigations for development of energy access and poverty;
- Draft Regional Energy Strategy and pathway document development through the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation;
- Community renewable energy program investigations;
- Investigations to update community emissions profile data.

Throughout 2023-2024 Wollongong community emissions reduced by 1% attributed to electrification and decarbonisation of the electricity grid.

All Global Covenant of Mayors milestone badges and compliance have been maintained throughout this term.

Prepare the Climate Change Mitigation Plan 2022-2026.

Council worked throughout 2022-2023 to draft the Climate Change Mitigation Plan (CCMP) 2023-2030 with extensive community engagement undertaken. 2023-2024 saw the adoption of a new Climate Change Mitigation Plan 2023-2030 that will drive the implementation of strategies and projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Wollongong. The Plan adopts three key targets: net zero by 2030 for Council's corporate emissions; 50% decrease in community emissions by 2030 and net zero by 2050 for our community emissions.

Key actions delivered to decrease our corporate emissions included:

- Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure installed at Council's Administration Building;
- Transitioning Council's fleet to EV vehicles.
- Development and adoption of a sustainable design toolkit for Council's projects.
- Grant application prepared to electrify key Council buildings.

Key actions delivered to decrease our community emissions included:

- *Electrify Wollongong* campaign and toolkit on our website.
- Promotion of solar power grants.
- EV charging for community and businesses through various channels and enabling policies (public land).
- Support to deliver kerbside pole mounted EV chargers.

Over the period, Council emissions reduced 19%, largely attributed to the commencement of the renewable Power Purchase Agreement.

Develop and implement the Floodplain Risk Management Plans.

Council adopted the Mullet Creek Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan in May 2023, the Towradgi Creek Floodplain Risk Management Study and Plan (FRMSP) in June 2023 as well as drafting the Wollongong Flood Risk Management Study and Plan. Throughout 2023-2024, key plans including those for Fairy, Cabbage Tree, Allans, and Collins Creeks, advanced through public consultation stages and received endorsements for adoption or exhibition.

Plan and deliver stormwater maintenance, renewal and upgrade works.

In 2022-2023 16 stormwater asset renewal projects and six projects involving upgraded or new infrastructure were constructed. Designs for 13 projects were also completed.

In 2023-2024 we completed 14 stormwater asset renewal projects and constructed new water quality and flood mitigation infrastructure. This included debris control structures at Russell Vale Golf Course, Gordon Hutton Park, Bulli and Brompton Road, Bellambi and flood mitigation works adjacent to Holy Spirit College, Bellambi.

Develop an awareness campaign to educate the community on landowner's obligations for managing creeks and waterways on private land.

Council has developed and drafted a guideline and Frequently Asked Questions for the management of waterways on private property. We produced a series of videos available on our website to increase understanding of floodplain management on private land. This information informs residents on how to better manage vegetation when they own a portion of a creek and includes practical workshops led by Council staff and/or contractors.

Deliver a rolling program of flood and stormwater infrastructure condition and safety inspections.

In 2022-2023, the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and pit inspections program saw approximately 33,100 metres of stormwater pipe and 1,441 stormwater pits inspected and in 2023-2024 1,243 pipes totalling 23,445m were inspected and condition rated.

Monthly surveillance inspections for Council's Declared Dams were completed in accordance with our obligations under the Dam Safety Act 2015.

Collaborate with Shellharbour City Council and Kiama Municipal Council under the Illawarra Emergency Management Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).

Council continues to work with emergency services and other agencies to plan for, respond to and recover from all types of emergencies. Council also continued to support the NSW Police in coordinating significant response efforts during emergency events including severe storms, flash floods, heatwave and landslips.

Prepare resilience and response plans to respond to unforeseen events.

Council has undertaken work to develop Natural Disaster Response and Recovery plans, working in collaboration with the NSW Reconstruction Authority. Work on the Urban Heat Strategy, as well as designing community centre evacuation requirements, enhanced our resilience and response planning. Council engaged with various stakeholders to identify suitable community buildings that can serve as places of refuge during extreme weather events.

Continue to progress design and construction of a new Wollongong State Emergency Services unit.

Council maintained a collaborative partnership with the State Emergency Service (SES) to address requirements across the Local Government Area. We have partnered with the SES to deliver upgrade works to the Wollongong unit located in Montague Street, North Wollongong. These works will be funded by the NSW SES. The SES will continue to define their service requirements to support the Wollongong Local Government Area (LGA).

Implement a research and development program targeting waste diversion from landfill with the University of Wollongong.

The University of Wollongong (UOW) completed its research project into Automated Waste Contamination Detection throughout 2022-2023. The project focused on plastic bags as a contamination source and delivered a 63% detection accuracy related to white plastic bags in recycling collected. Council continues to investigate applied technologies to assist with reducing waste contamination.

Continue to monitor environmentally sustainable actions for charitable waste.

Council contributed toward sustainable actions for charitable waste by introducing Waste Management plans for Community Service Organisations including charities.

1.4 Work together to achieve net zero carbon emissions and reduce waste going to landfill

Implement priority actions from the Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2022 and 2023-2027.

A highlight being the Council endorsement of the Urban Heat Strategy. Progress on actions was made across a broad range of actions including the revision of the Local Emergency Management Plan to reclassify the risk of heatwaves risk rating which has implications towards future emergency responses and planning for heatwaves. We have undertaken a range of communication and engagement activities to help increase community understanding of the increased risk of hazards from climate change.

Carry out a proactive surveillance and inspection program of known dumping hot-spots and implement education and awareness raising programs aimed at reducing illegally dumped waste.

Council conducted over 1,300 investigations of illegal dumping incidents within the Local Government Area. We collaborated with the Department of Communities and Justice Housing with proactive hotspot patrols to educate the community and decrease illegal dumping incidents. Highlights include the Cordeaux and Mount Keira – Enhanced Surveillance and Clean Up Project completed in June 2023 focusing on illegal dumping in escarpment areas. As a result, dumping incidents have been reduced within the project area by 42% compared to the previous 12 months. The project was jointly funded by the NSW Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) and Council.

Educate and continued to deliver waste diversion programs aligned with problematic waste streams and continue to educate the community on waste principles – avoid, reduce, reuse, recycle to increase waste diversion from household waste streams.

This was achieved with Council's Green Team delivering:

- a webinar through one of the larger strata managers across the region promoting the Food Organics Garden Organics program (FOGO);
- conducting two competitions to promote FOGO to residents and students;
- commencement of a *FOGO Roadshow*, waste education and data capture at Helensburgh, Berkeley and Corrimall as part of green waste drop off events;
- a new recycling talk was developed for adults with first delivery to 100 attendees at Dapto.

We continued to carry out sustainability and environmental education programs.

Implement priority actions of the certified Coastal Management Program for Lake Illawarra.

All of Council's milestones for active grant funded projects are on track.

Highlights achieved by Council include:

- Finalisation of a Community Engagement and Participation Strategy.
- Litter prevention initiatives undertaken at hotspot locations as part of the Luv the Lake campaign were successful in achieving up to a 40% reduction in key littered items between February and June 2023. This initiative was completed in partnership with Shellharbour City Council and the NSW Environment Protection Authority.
- Water quality monitoring continued at 21 sites around the Lake catchment.
- Stage 2 weed removal and revegetation works over 37 hectares of Lake foreshore reserve areas were completed, with 3,000 native seedlings planted in 2022-2023.
- Applications for NSW Government funding have been successful to extend the catchment water quality monitoring program.
- Completion of a bathymetric survey report of Lake Illawarra and its tributaries.

Continue to develop and implement the landfill gas management system at Whytes Gully.

Throughout 2022-2023, the monthly average of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) avoided was 1,596 tonnes which equates to over 19,000 tonnes per year. In 2023-2024, a total of 20,000 tonnes of equivalent CO₂e was captured and diverted from the atmosphere. Additional gas wells were installed in February 2024 resulting in significant increases to gas volumes collected. Currently, landfill gas generation is two-thirds of that required for energy production. Continued expansion of the landfill gas system is planned.

Deliver a Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) program across the LGA and options for a FOGO trial for multi-unit dwellings.

Throughout 2023-2024 we delivered options for a Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) trial for multi-unit dwellings with FOGO services continuing to be expanded in multi-unit dwellings through normal service delivery.

Waste audits completed in February 2023 indicated that 74% of households are participating in FOGO program. In 2022-2023, 37,000 tonnes of FOGO material were collected and diverted from landfill.

1.5 We maintained the unique character of the Wollongong Local Government Area, whilst balancing development, population growth and housing needs

Administer Design Review Panel in relation to key sites or significant development.

Council continues to work with the Design Review Panel to achieve design excellence in assessing and determining Development Applications. The Panel provided valuable advice on a total of 86 matters throughout the period contributing to enhancing the quality of significant projects across the Local Government Area. Collaborative efforts ensured that design standards were met, resulting in better outcomes for the community.

Administer the Wollongong Local Planning Panel.

Council continues its work with the Wollongong Local Planning Panel to finalise the assessment and determination of Development Applications. The Panel considered a total of 64 matters throughout the period.

In 2024 a new panel was introduced in response to directions from the Minister for Planning for all NSW councils. The panel operations have also evolved from an online process, triggered in response to COVID-19, to in person attendance for both the community and expert panel.

In conjunction with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment administer the Southern Regional Planning Panel.

Council continues to work with the Southern Regional Planning Panel to finalise the assessment and determination of significant Development Applications. Throughout the period, the Panel determined a total of 22 matters and received briefings on an additional 115 applications. Their collaborative efforts contribute significantly to shaping the region's development landscape.

Review the Local Strategic Planning Statement.

The draft Local Strategic Planning Statement is being prepared for presentation to Council in 2025. The draft Statement will be informed by Council's adoption of the Wollongong Housing Strategy, Wollongong Retail and Business Centres Strategy, Industrial Lands Review and other strategic documents. The draft Statement will be guided by changes to NSW Government housing policy and housing targets.



Image: Whytes Gully, Waste

Carry out the OneCouncil integration project with the New South Wales planning portal.

Continual upgrades and adjustments made by NSW Planning required Council to continually adapt and adjust the project. The project is in its final stages of testing and is anticipated to be in operation by July 2024.

Review the customer experience around access to information related to Development Assessment as part of the Service Optimisation Program.

Through this review, Council specifically looked at the information we provide and the customer service we deliver to help applicants and the community through the development application journey. This project was completed in June 2024, and resulted in a number of improvement recommendations which once implemented will deliver enhanced customer service, improved communications and simplified navigation through Council's website and online self-service portal.

Partner with the Greater Cities Commission with the development of the Region and Cities Plan.

Council partnered with the Greater Cities Commission (GCC) on the development of the Region and Illawarra Shoalhaven City Plans. Council participated in vision setting workshops and provided feedback on the GCC Six Cities Discussion Paper. The Greater Cities Commission was absorbed into the broader NSW Department of Planning and Environment in January 2024.

Engage with NSW Government, agencies, development/building industry and the broader community to achieve improved development outcomes.

Council worked with the Department of Planning and Environment on Faster Local Approvals and the evolution of the NSW Planning Portal integration with Council systems.

Local Government Area Wide Retail Centres Study, South West Sydney Development Impacts Study and Local Government Area Industrial Lands Study.

The Wollongong Retail and Business Centre Strategy was completed and adopted by Council on 20 March 2023, and endorsed by the Department of Planning, Housing and Environment on 27 July 2023. Implementation commenced with Council adopting the updated Development Control Plan chapter B4 'Development in Centres and Peripheral Sales Centres'.

The South-West Sydney Growth Impacts Study consultant reports and data dashboards were completed in 2023. These resources act as informing documents to a range of Council processes.

The Local Government Area Industrial Lands Study review was adopted by Council in December 2023.

1.6 West Dapto urban growth is effectively managed with facilities and spaces to support the future community

Continue the review of West Dapto Land Release Area by developing a Local Infrastructure Plan.

This is a council initiative aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of the West Dapto region. The recommendations from this assessment were formally adopted by Council on 28 August 2023.

The draft West Dapto Development Contributions Plan 2024 underwent public exhibition, with Council considering submissions from the community. Council resolved to endorse the draft plan for submission to the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) for review. IPART's assessment will continue throughout 2024. This comprehensive strategy ensures coordinated development and infrastructure provision, fostering a sustainable and thriving community.

In 2023-2024 we were successful with securing Commonwealth and NSW Government infrastructure grants to contribute to the early delivery of important local West Dapto infrastructure. This includes a \$9 million grant from the Commonwealth Priority Community Infrastructure Program toward Stage 1 of the Darkes District Sporting facility and \$19.9 million announced in the NSW 2024-2025 budget toward the first three stages of the Cleveland Road urban upgrade. The two projects will help meet the social infrastructure needs of the growing community while also helping to enable delivery of housing through the Cleveland Road upgrade.

In collaboration with key agencies, facilitate the West Dapto Review Committee to deliver the West Dapto Urban Release Area.

This Committee plays a pivotal role in Council's governance arrangements for delivering the West Dapto Urban Release Area. Chaired by the Lord Mayor and includes Ward 3 Councillors, the Committee collaborates closely with key agencies including the NSW Department of Planning and Environment and Illawarra Shoalhaven Urban Development Program committee.

Review West Dapto recreation needs in line with the bi-annual review of the West Dapto Development Contribution Plan.

Council prepared and adopted the West Dapto Social Infrastructure Needs Assessment. The document guides decision making around social infrastructure for the West Dapto community and includes a list of actions for implementation.



Image: FOGO Heroes Campaign

1.7 Develop and implement programs and projects that achieve proactive heritage management, education and promotion

Council continues to respect and acknowledge those who came before us, the Traditional Custodians of the land on which our City is built, and all of those who have contributed to the City of Wollongong.

We worked with our community to identify, conserve, record and celebrate our City's heritage that includes heritage places, objects, records, stories and memorials. In October 2023, we adopted the Wollongong Heritage Strategy 2023-2027 developed with input from the Wollongong Heritage Reference Group. Council continued to manage many significant sites that have State-level heritage significance including; North Beach Bathers Pavilion and Kiosk; Gleniffer Brae at Wollongong Botanic Garden; Hill 60, Port Kembla while also looking after Waterfall General Garrawarra Cemetery.

Goal 1 | Community Indicators

Wollongong's commitment to environmental stewardship is reflected in ongoing efforts to enhance urban greening, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and preserve our natural resources. The city has shown notable achievements in areas such as tree planting, where we exceeded the target planting ratio.

Indicator	Current	Target	Baseline
Ratio of Trees Planted vs. Trees Removed	4.4:1	2:1	New Measure
Participation rate in environmental programs (<i>environmental programs include Bushcare, FiReady, Indian Myna Bird Program, Greenplan, Tours/events, Discovery Centre, Community Cleanups, Community Service Personnel, Greenhouse Park, Waste promotions and education, and Botanic Garden events</i>)	66,399 [^]	At least 85,000 per annum	85,574 ^{^1}
Proportion of beaches sampled for recreational water quality through the NSW Beachwatch Program rated as good to very good	100%	100%	100% ²
Proportion of sites sampled through the Lake Illawarra Estuary Health Monitoring Program rated as fair to good	100%	100%	100% ²
Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Council	105,000 Tonnes CO ₂ -e*	Zero by 2030	New Measure
Greenhouse Gas Emissions: Community	11,532,000,000 Tonnes CO ₂ -e*	Zero by 2050	New Measure
Average Urban Tree Canopy Cover	27.5% ⁴	Increase	17% ³
Proportion of residents satisfied Council's development controls facilitate sustainable outcomes	3.00 on a scale of 5.00	Increase	New Measure
Proportion of residents satisfied with Council's management and preservation of our heritage	3.30	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.40 ⁵

¹ Source: Internal measure 2021

² Source: Beachwatch State of Beaches Report 2021

³ Source: University of Technology Sydney Institute for Sustainable Futures 2017 (data source no longer available)

⁴ Source: MetroMap Insights - Vector Trees Layer 2023 © Aerometrex Ltd 2024.

This data may include shrubs as well as trees. It is intended to use this data source in future reporting.

⁵ Source: Wollongong City Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2021

* Carbon Dioxide Equivalent

[^] Data (including baseline) is an annual figure

Future Opportunities

Natural Environment

The City of Wollongong is located between the Illawarra Escarpment and the coast. Residents and visitors value the natural beauty of our beaches, parklands and bushland, with spectacular views of the coast. Council maintains 507 hectares of natural areas as well as providing services to manage beaches, coastal dunes and access roads in the Illawarra Escarpment. These areas require ongoing efforts to control weeds, reduce bushfire risk and reduce erosion. It is a challenge for Council to maintain these natural areas within our available resources. In addition to maintenance is the added impact of natural hazards such as coastal storms, bushfire and heatwaves. These natural hazards are becoming more frequent and intense with Climate Change.

Climate Change

We are already seeing several climate change-related impacts in the Wollongong region, with increased damage to the region from bushfire, flooding, extreme winds and coastal storms within the last five years. Climate modelling suggests this is likely to continue and include:

- Increased average temperatures and heatwaves
- Increase in bushfire frequency and intensity as average temperatures increase and water availability decreases
- Increase in intense low-pressure systems (East Coast Lows) which bring damaging winds and extreme rainfall as has been seen over the last five years
- Sea level rise will continue to impact on our coast.

Councils also own or directly manage a range of assets that will be impacted by climate change. Wollongong City Council has prepared and adopted plans including the Climate Change Adaptation Plan, Urban Heat Strategy and the

Climate Change Mitigation Plan which set out actions to further reduce the impact of climate change. A Coastal Management Program for the Open Coast is under development to plan for ways to manage the impacts of climate change, including sea level rise and coastal processes on the Wollongong coast into the future.

Local Government is on the frontline to not only manage the impact of climate change on communities but also limit the future extent of climate change by reducing green house gas emissions. Our commitment is to achieve net zero Council's emissions by 2030 and net zero community emissions by 2050. The Wollongong Community Emissions for 2021-2022 = 11,532,000K Tonnes CO₂-e, representing a 3.5% reduction from 2019-2020. This reduction is mainly attributed to a de-carbonisation of the electricity grid through introduction of renewable generation sources. The Wollongong community is contributing to sustainable outcomes with 5,100 registered Electric Vehicles and Hybrid vehicles and 32% of homes having installed rooftop solar.

Our community plays a significant role in minimising climate change through day-to-day actions. The Food Organics Garden Organics (FOGO) system; choosing public transport, walking or cycling over driving a car; replacing gas with electric appliances and utilising renewable energy are some of the ways the community can get involved in climate action initiatives.

Protecting our environment into the future is a challenge and opportunity and requires collaboration between government, industry and the community to mitigate impacts on the environment.

Urban Development and Heritage Management

In February 2023 Council adopted the Wollongong Housing Strategy which proposed to increase housing supply in appropriate locations and increase the amount of available Affordable Rental Housing. The strategy noted that on average Council approves 1,200-1,300 new dwellings each year, however only 800 dwellings are constructed annually. The strategy noted that the State had a housing target of 1,400 dwellings per annum.

In May 2024 the State Government released new housing targets which require the Wollongong Local Government Area to provide 9,200 dwellings over the next five years, or 1,840 per year which is substantially higher than existing housing supply. The State has also introduced Transport Oriented Development Precincts (TOD) around Corrimal and Dapto Stations, with North Wollongong scheduled to commence next year. The TOD precincts permit six storey residential apartment buildings. The State is also proposing to introduce other Low and Mid-Rise Housing reforms later this year. The State has also introduced bonus height and floor space provisions for Affordable Rental Housing, which are proving popular in the Wollongong City Centre which has higher building height limits.

The 2024 result for 'Proportion of residents satisfied Council's development controls facilitate sustainable outcomes' was 3.0/5 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024). The State Government's and Council's housing initiatives for increased housing will see the character of some areas change and development outcomes may not always align with community preferences. To address the housing crises additional housing is needed, and locations with existing transport, shops and community services are appropriate locations.

It's not just about increasing development opportunities in suitable locations. Some parts of our city are in constrained locations that are not suitable for increased development, such as the Illawarra Escarpment and Northern Villages. A review of zonings and planning controls in these locations is also a part of Council's urban agenda. This highlights Council's role in balancing urban development with local character and protection of sensitive locations. Further, the 'Proportion of residents satisfied with Council's management and preservation of our heritage' declined from 3.4/5 in 2021 to 3.3/5 in 2024 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024), and is an opportunity for further focus in the future.

Housing development will continue in the regionally significant West Dapto Urban Release Area. Over the next few decades, it will become home to around 19,000 new homes and more than 50,000 people. West Dapto will also bring new employment land and job opportunities to Wollongong. The challenge to provide infrastructure, amenities, facilities and public spaces for current and future West Dapto residents will require partnerships, funding and advocacy in a coordinated and timely way.

Resilience and Response Readiness

Between 2019 and June 2024, there have been seven natural disasters declared for Wollongong demonstrating an upward trend of the impacts of a changing climate. Some of the readiness activities Wollongong City Council supports are outlined below.

Council engages in bush/grass fire mitigation strategies and manages close to 400 Asset Protection Zones to provide a defensible space for fire-fighting and reduce radiant heat impact. Council works closely with Fire and Rescue NSW and the NSW Rural Fire Service to plan and undertake burning within public land, to manage fuel loads.

Coastal erosion is one of Wollongong's larger risks as a result of the 60 kilometres of coastline - from the Royal National Park in the north to Lake Illawarra in the south. This includes beaches, dunes, cliffs, headlands and rock platforms that are all vulnerable to coastal erosion. Council's current Coastal Zone Management Plan includes beach nourishment, dune stabilisation, and constructing coastal protection structures to safeguard these areas. A new Coastal Management Program is in preparation to provide a contemporary understanding and response to coastal processes and issues.

Council addresses the risk of heatwave by promoting urban greening, increasing planting and shade. Furthermore, public health campaigns, in partnership with NSW Health, provide residents with vital information on staying safe during extreme heat events. In addition, Council's Urban Heat Strategy is a key action of the Wollongong City Council Climate Change Adaptation Plan 2022.

The impacts of flooding across the city are an ongoing focus for Wollongong City Council, and there is a program of drainage infrastructure underway across the Local Government Area. On 6 April 2024, Wollongong experienced a severe weather event, inundating many suburbs resulting in significant damage to community assets, many Council buildings and critical infrastructure. Similarly, severe weather was again experienced on 4 June 2024, with both these events declared natural disasters. Council works closely with the State Emergency Service (SES), ensuring a rapid response to storm events and supporting community recovery, as well as sustained advocacy for funding from the State and Federal Government to support disaster recovery and future resilience. Council is working with the Reconstruction Authority on the ongoing recovery of impacted properties across the Local Government Area.

Council takes part in exercising plans as per the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act as a member of the Local Emergency Management Committee. Council manages and provides an operationally ready Local Emergency Operations Centre during response to large scale emergencies, working closely with all agencies involved during multi agency response.

There is an opportunity to take initiatives such as climate change mitigation and adaptation, improvement and investment in weather resilient infrastructure, improving emergency response and strengthening community preparedness.

Waste

Sustainable waste management is a shared responsibility for Wollongong City Council and the community. Our current global rate of consumption of non-renewable resources is not sustainable and it's crucial that as we look at alternatives to non-renewable resources, we're also more efficient at managing and recovering existing resources. We need to do this in a way that minimises environmental impacts and maximises the value of recovered materials to ensure we are caring for country and protecting our environment. Reducing waste and increasing gas capture at the landfill site are significant opportunities for our greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitment.

The Wollongong Waste and Recovery Strategy 2024-2034 was adopted by Wollongong City Council in June 2024 and sets out four focus areas for the next 10 years:

- Reduce waste to landfill
- Transition to a circular economy
- Reduce our waste related submissions
- Improve our waste management

Community feedback indicates sentiment from the community to reduce the impact on the environment. Key themes from community feedback for the Wollongong Waste and Recovery Strategy 2024-2034 include: recycling of soft plastics, continuation of FOGO, education as an opportunity, sustainable decisions, advocacy required to reduce plastics and packaging, weekly general waste and recycling is preferred. The participation rate of residents involved in community programs, including waste education programs, has increased (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024) and provides an opportunity to further improve community behaviour and awareness of sustainable waste practices.



Image: Spinfest 2022

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan

Goal 2 | We have an innovative and sustainable economy

Objectives

The region's industry base continues to diversify and local employment opportunities increase.

Wollongong is established as the regional capital of the Illawarra-Shoalhaven.

We are leaders in innovative and sustainable research and development of new industries.

How will we get there?

2.1 Support educational and employment opportunities that retain young people and local talent, attract new workers and provide opportunities for the unemployed.

2.2 Continue to diversify and grow Metro Wollongong economy as the Illawarra's regional capital and employment centre.

2.3 Increase and attract new business investment and enterprise to Wollongong while supporting and growing existing local businesses.

2.4 Encourage an innovative economy, which drives entrepreneurship and research capability in the Wollongong Local Government Area.

2.5 Work with partners to facilitate sustainable and green industries.

2.6 Support growth sectors to assist in the ongoing transition of Wollongong's economy.

2.7 Promote the Wollongong Local Government Area as an event, conference and visitor destination.

2.8 Continue to build Wollongong as a vibrant, modern city with revitalised city centre and an active evening economy.



Image: Bulli Beach Tourist Park

Key Highlights

In September 2022, Wollongong hosted the Olympic-scale event, 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW.

Achieved 96% of the 10-year jobs within the first five years of our Economic Development Strategy 2019-2029.

Secured grant funding for key tourism infrastructure including Illawarra Performing Arts Centre upgrades, Helensburgh Park Multisport Facility upgrades, refurbishment of Fred Finch Netball Courts.

Built three new cabins at Windang Tourist Park in partnership with TAFE.

We revised the Wollongong CBD Night time Economy Policy and in 2023-2024, Destination Wollongong reported Wollongong has surpassed pre-pandemic visitation numbers.

Partnered with *Invest Wollongong* to host more than 160 stakeholders at Parliament House in March 2024 to launch *Invest Wollongong's* 2024 Investment Prospectus.

Delivered city centre and Crown Street Mall activation initiatives and events including *SpinFest* and the *Luminous Festival*.

Goal 2 | We have an innovative and sustainable economy

Objectives

The region's industry base continues to diversify and local employment opportunities increase.

Wollongong is established as the regional capital of the Illawarra-Shoalhaven.

We are leaders in innovative and sustainable research and development of new industries.

How did we progress?

2.1 Support educational and employment opportunities that retain young people and local talent, attract new workers and provide opportunities for the unemployed

Deliver the Economic Development Strategy 2019-2029.

Data released from 2022-2023 found there were 102,802 local jobs in the Wollongong Local Government Area. This represents 96% of the 10-year adopted jobs target set out in the Economic Development Strategy 2019-2029 has been achieved in the first five years of the plan. This equates to an increase of 10,161 jobs (11%) from 2017-2018 to 2022-2023.

Council collaborated with Service NSW Business Connect to deliver 'Business Health Checks' for our local businesses. During NSW Small Business Month in October 2023, a number of events were held for local businesses, including the Illawarra Aboriginal Business Expo, cybersecurity workshop on 'How to protect your business' and a workshop on 'Planning your website for success'.

In November 2023, BlueScope unveiled its masterplan to develop 200 hectares of surplus land adjacent to the Port Kembla steelworks. This area is larger than the size of the Melbourne CBD with the potential to create up to 20,000 jobs.

Council hosted a series of business events throughout 2024, including the Skills Roundtable, CEO Roundtable and Tourism Accommodation Roundtable.

As partner of *Invest Wollongong*, we hosted more than 160 stakeholders at Parliament House on 20 March 2024 to launch the *Invest Wollongong 2024 Investment Prospectus*.

Inside Industry commenced their new 'Clean Energy tours' which showcase the activities underway in the clean energy sector. In partnership with Department of Regional NSW, we supported these sessions that run every third weekend of the month.

The RLB Crane index was released in the first quarter of 2024, showing 12 cranes across Wollongong and Shellharbour. Within the

Wollongong CBD, the new Lang's Corner building, Wollongong's largest commercial office building opened with Mercer Financial Services joining in September 2022 as their major tenant.

Advocacy continued on several key projects, including enhanced transport connectivity, employment lands and business attraction projects.

Continue to support growth of our local small business sector.

Council continued its enhanced business engagement via the monthly newsletter to over 10,000 local businesses. Council hosted a *Doing Business with Council Procurement* event in May 2023 and also in 2023, delivered the revised CBD Night-time Economy Policy.

The 2022 Business Survey was undertaken and provided insights on a range of issues impacting businesses across the Local Government Area. In 2023, we sponsored the 'Excellence in Innovation' award category at the annual Business Illawarra Awards and was the major sponsor of the i3Net Manufacturing Showcase event.

2.2 Continue to diversify and grow Metro Wollongong economy as the Illawarra's regional capital and employment centre

In conjunction with the Local Organising Committee, prepare for and support the delivery of the 2022 UCI Road World Championships - September 2022.

In September 2022, Wollongong hosted the 2022 UCI Road World Championships - Wollongong NSW. This prestigious global, Olympic scale event was the largest event ever hosted by the city and featured over 670 riders from 65 countries competing in championship races over eight days and welcomed over 240,000 spectators. Council delivered *Spin Fest*, a city wide celebration involving a free program of live music, art, entertainment, food and a beach party. Legacy outcomes from hosting the event include attraction of funding to support active transport infrastructure, increasing opportunities for participation in cycling and sport, developing education programs for cyclists and tourism opportunities.



Image: UCI Road World Championships 2022

In June 2023, Council delivered the Host City Post Event Summary, reporting on the impact and legacy of the event.

Deliver increased City Centre marketing and activation initiatives to support local and regional economic recovery in response to COVID-19.

Council's support of outdoor dining continued to be a focus area.

The extended live entertainment program to complement the 2022 UCI Road World Championship – Wollongong NSW event, *SpinFest*, was staged throughout Wollongong CBD. The *Luminous Festival* included community activities, creative programming and lighting projections. We celebrated Christmas's within the Crown Street Mall with decorations and added vibrancy to business shopfronts. The *We Shop the Gong* buy local campaign was reactivated in November 2022 and widely promoted.

Council's marketing and activation efforts focused on promoting businesses and engaging new audiences, reaching more than 620,000 people and directly engaging viewers more than 68,000 times throughout 2022-2023. We continued a strong focus on activation activities and business support initiatives throughout 2022. These include family friendly free events such as City Skate 2024 and Lunar New Year celebrations.

2.3 Increase and attract new business investment and enterprise to Wollongong while supporting and growing existing local businesses

Work with other levels of government and the business community to respond to the post COVID-19 pandemic economic recovery.

Council continued to support local business through our Buy Local Campaign and We Shop the Gong, in the leadup to Christmas 2022. Outdoor Dining initiatives included providing additional dining areas outdoors and waiver of outdoor dining fees across the Local Government Area. We collaborated with Enterprise Plus on a new initiative 'business health check' available for local businesses that provided free advice on a range of topics.

2.4 Encourage an innovative economy, which drives entrepreneurship and research capability in the Wollongong Local Government Area

Contribute to the promotion of tourism in the Wollongong Local Government Area through the management of Council's three tourist parks at Bulli, Corrimal and Windang.

Council implemented the Parks Marketing Strategy throughout 2023-2024 to assist with improving occupancy over the cooler months when occupancy is at its lowest. This has provided over \$200,000 and bolstered bookings during these quieter periods. Tourist parks saw a continued post COVID-19 boom with improvements in the parks centred around grounds and cabin maintenance.

In partnership with NSW Government and the University of Wollongong, deliver the *Invest Wollongong* program.

Invest Wollongong continued to facilitate several significant enquiries in the clean energy sector. *Invest Wollongong* was a sponsor of the Business Illawarra Clean Energy Expo at BlueScope, at which was launched a new clean energy video showcasing the scale of opportunity locally within the clean energy sector.

Invest Wollongong continued to participate in and host various events including: Celebrating Wollongong: where business and lifestyle grow together at NSW Parliament House, Tech Connect, targeted towards Wollongong's start-ups, a hospitality event for the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW at the Old Wollongong Courthouse and an end of year event in Mercer's offices at Lang's Corner. In July 2023, *Invest Wollongong*, in conjunction with Investment NSW, hosted an event highlighting the opportunities for exporters following on from the announcement of the Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement, outlining the benefits of doing business in India and how local companies can maximise the benefits of the free trade agreement.

A successful digital marketing campaign was delivered, targeting external stakeholders and raising awareness of Wollongong as a desirable alternative CBD location for businesses. All elements of the campaign have been successful, with LinkedIn advertising delivering 1.3 million impressions and 297 downloads of the Investment Prospectus; the Australian Financial Review digital partnership attracting more than 1.38 million impressions through digital banners and the Google Search campaign delivering 108,755 impressions and 5,340 clicks to the *Invest Wollongong* website.

Deliver and report against the five pillars of the Destination Wollongong Funding Agreement 2021-2026 including: Marketing, Major Events, Business Visitor Economy, Tourism Infrastructure and Product Development and Cycling.

Destination Wollongong has continued to focus on enhancing the region's appeal as a premier destination for both tourism and sports events. Following the success of the UCI World Championships – Wollongong NSW, we worked with Destination Wollongong and Destination NSW to secure a three-year deal with World Triathlon and hosted the World Darts Masters for the third consecutive year, cementing our reputation as a world-class venue for international sporting competitions. Destination Wollongong has been actively advocating for sustainable mountain bike trails in the Illawarra Escarpment.

Wollongong successfully hosted the prestigious Australian Cruise Association Conference, a notable event that underscores the city's growing importance in the cruise tourism sector.

In 2023-2024, Destination Wollongong reported that Wollongong has surpassed pre-pandemic visitation numbers.

Seek funding for key iconic tourism infrastructure.

Council submitted grant applications for a range of grants and funding initiatives, aiming to enhance resilience, upgrade facilities and preserve important heritage sites. Successful grant applications included Illawarra Performing Arts Centre upgrades, Helensburgh Park Multisport Facility upgrades, refurbishment of Fred Finch Netball Courts, Berkeley and amenity and lighting upgrades at Lindsay Mayne Park, Unanderra.

2.5 Work with partners to facilitate sustainable and green industries

In 2023, the NSW Government declared the Illawarra as one of five Renewable Energy Zones (REZs) with the potential to unlock a prospective 44 projects worth \$43 billion in investment. Council continued to work with the NSW Government and industry partners to establish Port Kembla as Australia's first 5 GW+ green hydrogen hub to service domestic and export markets by 2030. Wollongong is now home to one of Australia's most advanced Clean Energy Hubs, with over \$750 million in supportive major energy projects expected to be complete by the end of 2024 and nearly 1.7GW of green hydrogen projects proposed. Major projects include Coregas – Australia's first hydrogen refuelling station; Squadron Energy's LNG Energy Terminal; Jemena's Port Kembla pipeline duplication and upgrades to the Eastern Gas Pipeline and Energy Australia's construction of Tallawarra A & B.

In June 2024, the Australian Government declared an offshore wind area off the coast of the Illawarra with the potential to produce up to 2.9GW of renewable energy. To inform the community and showcase all the work underway in this sector, we, together with the NSW Government, have supported Inside Industry to launch monthly Clean Energy tours which began in September 2023.



Image: Full Set Festival, Globe Lane Wollongong

2.6 Support growth sectors to assist in the ongoing transition of Wollongong's economy

Support the ongoing development of key target sectors.

Council continued to work in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including those outlined in the Economic Development Strategy 2019-2029 and the Invest Wollongong program of Professional Services; Tech; Scaleups; Clean Energy; Advanced Manufacturing/Defence Industries.

We worked closely with a number of local industry bodies including i3net; RDA Illawarra, Business Illawarra, the Property Council of Australia and Screen Illawarra to continue to grow their respective sectors and seek new jobs and investment for the region. Wollongong's creative sectors have also developed, with growth in Wollongong's night time economy, including the adoption of Council's Wollongong CBD Night Time Economy Policy, to encourage low impact businesses to extend their operating hours. We have seen significant growth in the screen industry through increased filming in the region and showcasing the region's assets to major production studios through an annual festival.

2.7 Promote the Wollongong Local Government Area as an event, conference and visitor destination

Commercially manage Council's three tourist parks at Bulli, Corrimal and Windang to optimise service delivery and contribute to Council's financial sustainability.

The tourist parks continued to perform well with over 102,000 people having stayed at the parks throughout 2023-2024. We continue to invest in our tourist parks by keeping customer satisfaction high. We surveyed each customer after every stay and in 2023-2024 received an overall guest rating of 9.12 out of 10 across all three parks from over 3,500 responses received.

2.8 Continue to build Wollongong as a vibrant, modern city with revitalised city centre and an active evening economy

Progress the City Centre Planning Strategy.

The exhibition of the City Centre Planning Strategy was deferred by Council in December 2020 with a resolution to progress with two other major studies. One of the supporting strategies, the Wollongong Retail and Business Centres Strategy was adopted by Council in early 2023. The second,

the City Centre Movement and Place Plan (Access and Movement Study) is being considered in conjunction with the Wollongong Integrated Transport Strategy. We have been progressing the actions of the 2020 resolution and considered a phased approach for implementation of the Strategy.

Implement a range of activation initiatives across the City Centre Precincts.

Council implemented strategies focused on attracting visitors back into the Wollongong CBD. This included both Crown Street Mall and the Arts Precinct receiving new furniture, planter boxes, refreshed plantings and artwork.

Deliver an integrated marketing campaign that reflects the 'city experience'.

Various integrated marketing campaigns were delivered to support the local economic recovery by focusing, leveraging and engaging with Wollongong CBD's social media following. Marketing campaigns included the promotion of the *SpinFest* celebration as part of the 2022 UCI Road World Championship – Wollongong NSW event, Luminous Festival, Christmas 2022, What's on in Wollongong, and Wander Wollongong – Art City Skate 2024 and Lunar New Year, as well as campaigns for *It's On in Wollongong* and *Celebrate the Season* Christmas campaign.

We used a range of marketing mediums in these campaigns including radio advertising, media releases, outdoor banners, signage, and business dressing, as well as digital mediums including social media, Google ads, and website content. In 2023-2024 we achieved over 180,000 page views on wollongongcbd.com.au content.

Develop and implement City Centre Wayfinding.

The Globe Lane Creative Wayfinding Project was completed in April 2023 elevating the profile of Globe Lane as a destination. Council continued to progress the design scope for the Ethel Hayton walkway with the final design due to be delivered in 2024-2025.



Image: Lunar New Year

Goal 2 | Community Indicators

Wollongong's economy has shown positive momentum in recent years, with growth in local jobs and investments in non-residential developments. The city's Gross Regional Product (GRP) has maintained a stable proportion within the broader Illawarra region, indicating resilience and economic diversification.

Indicator	Current	Target	Baseline
Number of Local Jobs	102,802	Increase	97,740 ⁶
Total value of Wollongong Non-Residential Building Approvals	\$347,278,186	Increase	New Measure
Wollongong City's Gross Regional Product (GRP) as a proportion of the Illawarra	57.60%	At least 58%	58.36% ⁶
Jobs to Worker Ratio	0.9:1	Increase	0.92:1 ⁶
Wollongong Local Government Area Unemployment Rate (12-Month Average)	5.9% (Wollongong) vs. 3.7% (NSW)	Maintain in line with NSW average	6.1% (Wollongong) vs. 6.0% (NSW) ⁷
Number of people movements within Crown Street Mall	1,200,000 ⁸	Increase	New Measure

⁶ Source: National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) ©2024.

Compiled and presented in economy.id by .id (informed decisions)

⁷ Source: Jobs and Skills Australia, Small Area Labour Markets, June quarter 2024 and ABS Labour Force Detailed

⁸ Estimated using Mall entry points where technology is available to count

[^]Data (including baseline) is an annual figure

Future Opportunities

Wollongong Employment and Economy

Over the last two decades, Wollongong's economy has become increasingly diversified. Whilst traditional industries, such as manufacturing remain critically important, the Wollongong CBD now accounts for around one third of jobs, supporting a range of positions in Health Care, Professional Services, Technology and other knowledge-based sectors.

Tourism is another economic opportunity for the local government area, and in particular for the Wollongong CBD. Council has listened to the tourism and development sector about challenges facing hotel and tourist accommodation investors and we recently released a draft Tourist Accommodation Strategy that seeks to amend planning controls to incentivise and support investment across the city.

Since 2020, the Wollongong CBD has seen a 50% uplift in A-grade Office Space which provides a sound foundation and opportunity for the Wollongong CBD to develop as a legitimate alternative location outside of Sydney for Knowledge Services with the right ongoing investment and promotion. Wollongong is also at the forefront of NSW's Clean Energy transition with the establishment of the Illawarra Renewable Energy Zone and the Port Kembla Hydrogen Hub.

The latest jobs data from the National State of the Region's data set, shows that Wollongong has achieved 96% of the 10-year jobs target within the first five years of Council's Strategy. The sectors with the largest job gains over the past five years were Health Care and Social Assistance; Construction; Public Administration and Safety; and Professional, Scientific and Technical Services. The achievement of the jobs target aligned with

a period of historically low unemployment in Wollongong reaching a 50 year low of 2.7% in June Quarter 2023. The latest result of 5.9% in June 2024, remains a relatively low level when compared with levels experienced over the past two decades.

While Wollongong's recent economic achievements have been substantial, there is an ongoing need to continue to attract investment to support Wollongong's growing residential population and maintain strong local jobs growth with low unemployment.

Significant economic changes in the local economy include the emergence of the Clean Energy Sector, BlueScope Masterplan, changes in the way of the we work post pandemic, 30,000 sqm of A grade office space delivered in the CBD (50% uplift) and another 50,000 sqm in the future pipeline. These challenges will be considered through the mid-term review of Council's Economic Strategy which has commenced.

Wollongong City Council has a long track record of investing in assets for the use and benefit of the community. We are pleased that the State Government has recently commenced a range of strategic projects focused on the development of master plans for important State assets that provides an exciting opportunity to build on Council's investment for the benefit of the city. Council looks forward to the finalisation of plans for the Illawarra Sports and Entertainment Precinct, Wollongong Train Station and Wollongong Health Precinct and encourages the government to move forward with implementation of these plans and others including the Wollongong Harbour Master Plan.



Image: Comic Gong

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan

Goal 3 | Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city

Objectives

Creative, cultural industries are fostered and thriving.

Community have access to the arts, and participation in events and festivals is increased.

Strong diverse local cultures are supported.

How will we get there?

3.1 Using community art and cultural development practices, our places and spaces reflect the creativity, history and identity of our people.

3.2 We encourage innovation and creativity.

3.3 Museums and galleries are promoted as part of the cultural landscape.

3.4 We work in partnership to reduce inequity and build on opportunities to strengthen vulnerable communities.

3.5 Provide communities with access to quality local spaces and places to meet, share and celebrate.

3.6 Enable signature events and festivals where communities and visitors can gather and celebrate.



Image: Culture Mix Festival

Key Highlights

Delivered the Culture Mix festival in October 2023 with over 12,000 attendees across the day.

Held the 'Sculpture in the Garden' exhibition in March and April 2023 attracting over 40,000 visitors.

Coomaditchie: The Art of Place exhibition held. This celebrated 30 years of Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation.

Conducted over 180 community engagements on a range of Council projects, policies and plans including Library Strategy, Hill 60, Mobile Skate Parks and Future West Dapto Centres.

Wollongong Art Gallery acquired 147 new art works to the collection.

Delivered civic events that recognised and celebrated the city's people and held our large community events such as New Year's Eve and Australia Day.

Grew our social media channel followers to approximately 77,000 followers.

Goal 3 | Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city

Objectives

Creative, cultural industries are fostered and thriving.

Community have access to the arts, and participation in events and festivals is increased.

Strong diverse local cultures are supported.

How did we progress?

3.1 Using community art and cultural development practices, our places and spaces reflect the creativity, history and identity of our people

Deliver community cultural development festival.

Culture Mix festival was a showcase of Wollongong's diverse multicultural community. The event attracted around 12,000 attendees across nine venues and eight hours of programming. The community enjoyed free performances, workshops, installations, and food from around the world at multiple venues in the Wollongong CBD.

Other events included a community arts and cultural event as part of the *SpinFest* program of events during 2022 UCI World Road Cycling Championships – Wollongong NSW, attended by approximately 1,500 people. As part of the *Luminous Festival* in October 2022, over 2,000 people attended a program of diverse acts including African Drumming, Samba Dancing and a local Latin power band as well as a night market for local artists and makers and an interactive public art installation.

Develop a new Cultural Plan.

Creative Wollongong 2019-2024 has guided us to support, deliver and enhance arts, heritage and culture in Wollongong over the past five years. With this strategy at the end of its timeframe a new cultural strategy, *Creative Wollongong* 2024-2033 has been developed to continue this strategic direction and enhance our commitment to creative life in Wollongong. The draft Strategy provides a strategic framework which will guide Council to effectively respond to opportunities and challenges presented by our city's cultural and creative landscape. It details the actions to be delivered and demonstrates Council's commitment to creative life in Wollongong. The draft Strategy was informed by an extensive community, creative industries, and internal engagement and was adopted by Council on 29 June 2024.

Involve children in the design of public art features within key regional play space renewals.

Eighty eight local children were engaged about what they would like to see at a new playground at Unanderra and 63 local children as part of the redevelopment of Figtree Playground. We engaged with several schools in the design of public art as part of the wider delivery of the Stuart Park and JP Galvin Park Master Plan adopted by Council in March 2023.

3.2 We encourage innovation and creativity

Deliver and review Creative Wollongong Implementation Plan 2019-2024.

Highlights from the delivery of the implementation plan included the following events:

- Free 'Sculpture in the Garden' exhibition held in March and April 2023 and attracted over 40,000 visitors. The biennial acquisitive sculpture prize was won by local artist Deborah Redwood for her sculpture, 'Banksia', which is now permanently installed in the Wollongong Botanic Garden;
- The 'Hooka Park Place of Healing' renewal project;
- 'Artward' artist in residence program and Youth Services Artist in residence;
- The cycling exhibition by Sam St Jon, Breakwater Battery Collection audit and catalogue;
- Free Creative Dialogue workshops;
- The WEAVE artist network directory in partnership with three local councils;
- Induction of new artists into the Creative Wollongong Studios;
- Creative Wollongong Short Film competition;
- *Luminous* festival held in October 2023;
- *SpinFest* held in September 2022.

We provided financial assistance in various forms, including the Small Cultural Grants program, the low-cost Creative Wollongong Studio spaces, and direct opportunities for creatives through Expressions of Interest for the Lower Town Hall Artists' Studio. We continued to advocate for creative industries to industry and government and supported and championed opportunities to enrich our community's cultural life.



*Image: Ghost Trees
by artist Greer Taylor,
Sculpture in the Garden
at Wollongong Botanic
Garden. Tad Souden
Photography*



Image: Luminous Festival

3.3 Museums and galleries are promoted as part of the cultural landscape

Facilitate the Lower Town Hall as a creative space.

The refurbished Lower Town Hall studios saw a total of 16 artists provided with the opportunity to develop and deliver their creative skills. In June 2023 as part of the Wander Wollongong Art initiative, two open days were held at the Lower Town Hall with approximately 150 visitors coming to see the studios and meet the artists.

Implement priorities from Framing our Future: Wollongong Art Gallery Strategic Plan 2020-2025

During the period, Wollongong Art Gallery acquired 147 new art works to the collection, presented 26 new exhibitions in the main program, 22 community exhibitions, 16 exhibition openings and 10 Council and After Dark events. Over 500 education and public program activities were delivered, with total visitation reaching over 103,000.

The Gallery contributed to the Luminous Festival in October 2023, where over four days and nights the Gallery offered a festival of creativity which included light projections and an all-ages program of live music.

The exhibition, Coomaditchie: The Art of Place, which was the 30-year celebration of the establishment of the Coomaditchie United Aboriginal Corporation, continued to be a highlight. A modified version of the exhibition was exhibited at the Sydney Living Museum in March 2024.

Implement the 'Animating Wollongong: Public Art Strategy 2022-2032.

We delivered a range of public art offerings from large to small community arts projects. Jane Cavanough's sculpture "Spin" was unveiled at Lang Park, Wollongong works by Aboriginal artists were supported, including a terrazzo work at Hill 60 by Uncle Steven Russell and artwork panels by Coomaditchie artists at William Beach Reserve, Brownsville. We provided ongoing support for early career artists through the Curio Gallery on Church Street, Wollongong and commissioned a new series of portraits for Bonacina Walkway in partnership with Illawarra Community Housing Trust. Our public art maintenance team were busy across the Local Government Area, repairing, maintaining and cleaning many of the 150+ works in the collection.

3.4 We work in partnership to reduce inequity and build on opportunities to strengthen vulnerable communities

Review and adapt the Volunteering Illawarra program in line with changes to funding contracts and the volunteering sector.

This was delivered until the closure of Volunteering Illawarra services in August 2022.



Image: Comic Gong

3.5 Provide communities with access to quality local spaces and places to meet, share and celebrate

Delivered the Comic Gong Festival.

The Comic Gong Festival is an annual event and during the reporting period was held twice.

In 2023, Comic Gong celebrated its 10th anniversary with a family friendly event at Corrimal Library where Comic Gong began as well as a Cosplay Ball in the Wollongong Town Hall. In 2024, Comic Gong was held on 11 May 2024 and adapted to the weather and availability of locations and venues. It involved Cosplay competitions, K-pop workshops and the huge artist and trade exhibition, to gaming and robotics, Comic Gong and was an unmissable day of fun and discovery for all ages.

Supported the delivery of programs providing social connection for frail aged people and their carers.

We expanded the range of social activities being offered to frail older people including bus outings to shopping malls, shows at the Wollongong Town Hall and lunch at local clubs, Wollongong Art Gallery and the launch of an Op Shop Trail program. Results of a 2022-2023 customer satisfaction survey were released, with 76% of those who responded to the survey rating themselves 'very satisfied' with services.

Initiate opportunities and projects to support the community specifically in response to COVID-19 pandemic.

We undertook research into the impacts of COVID-19 on local services. The findings indicated the need for digital inclusion for our vulnerable communities and a community of practice was established to address digital disadvantage.

Council's COVID-19 recovery package in the CBD included Council's Business Support Programs, buy-local campaign - 'We Shop the Gong', and changes to outdoor dining policies. A waiver of outdoor dining fees was implemented throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and continued throughout 2022-2023 to support businesses. Several live music support initiatives were also established to assist businesses and artists by supporting live gigs in the public and private domain.

Council continued to support our creative community with the artist in residence and mentorship program and events re-emergence support as well as enhanced city centre marketing and activation. Council also continued to apply the Debt Recovery and Hardship Policy where required.

3.6 Enable signature events and festivals where communities and visitors can gather and celebrate

Host six major events reflecting priority sectors and contributed to the acquisition and management of signature events.

These events included:

- Junior State Surfing Championships;
- Bowls State Championship;
- NSW Darts Masters;
- Stihl Timbersports Australian Championships;
- Ride Wollongong Festival of Cycling;
- The Beach Rugby 5's;
- Aquathon;
- Illawarra Folk Festival;
- Thirroul Music Festival;
- Mid-Amateur Golf Championship;
- Men's Masters Hockey Indoor State Championships;
- Gridiron NSW State Challenge;
- 2024 World Triathlon Cup;
- CrossFit Down Under Championships;
- Australian Masters Road Cycling Championships.

The Arts and great outdoor sectors were also celebrated, including:

- National Girls Youth Football Tournament;
- Yours & Owls Festival;
- National Women's Veterans Cricket;
- Summer of Surf Ironman Classic;
- Australian Surf Rowers' League;

Destination Wollongong estimated in 2022-2023 major events contributed \$27 million in economic benefit to the area. Throughout 2023-2024, Destination Wollongong supported 19 major events representing our key priority sectors.

Deliver civic activities which recognised and celebrated our city's people.

Over 25 civic events were delivered, some of the highlights included; hosting the Legacy Torch Relay, a commemorative tree planting to honour the late Councillor, Vicky King; the Annual City of Wollongong Giving Tree and Bikers Run and the delivery of the City of Wollongong Awards, which attracted a record number of nominations. A Mayoral Welcome Reception for the 2022 UCI World Road Cycling Championships – Wollongong NSW; Freedom of Entry for HMAS Wollongong; hosting the Consul General of India and presentation of Keys to the City to the late Professor Justin Yerbury AM were other notable highlights.

Collaborate with Destination Wollongong to encourage local sporting associations to host and facilitate events.

Council and Destination Wollongong continued to be active in sourcing and securing events for the city and worked closely to deliver a number of initiatives as part of the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW event. Other highlighted events included Football Australia Youth League, Veterans Women's Cricket Event, Tri The Gong Triathlon World Cup, NSW Mid-Amateur Golf Championship and the UniSport Australia Indigenous Nationals. A dedicated video was created to attract High-Performance Training Camps to the region with Destination Wollongong partnering with an industry broker to bid for these elite sports training camps.



Image: Culture Mix Festival

Goal 3 | Community Indicators

Wollongong continues to foster a dynamic cultural landscape, with significant achievements in promoting arts, culture, and diversity. The community's strong agreement that cultural diversity is valued and celebrated, alongside a high rate of participation in cultural events, highlights Wollongong's success in being a vibrant city.

Indicator	Current	Target	Baseline
Number of events secured by Destination Wollongong on behalf of Council. (events secured across all priority sectors including: the Great Outdoors, Sport, Arts and Technology, Cycling and Food and Beverage)	19	20+ events contracted annually	New Measure
Number of event application approvals issued per annum.	29 [^]	Increase	New Measure
Proportion of residents who agree cultural diversity and creativity is valued and celebrated	4.00	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.00 ⁹
Proportion of residents who agree it's a good thing for society to be made up of people from different cultures and communities	4.50	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.60 ⁹
Proportion of residents who agree there are enough opportunities to attend arts and related cultural activities	3.70	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.60 ⁹
Proportion of residents who agree Wollongong's cultural history and creativity is reflected in built environment	3.40	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.30 ⁹
Proportion of residents who participate in arts and related cultural activities	61%	75%	New Measure

⁹ Source: Wollongong Local Government Area Wellbeing Survey 2021

[^]Data (including baseline) is an annual figure

Future Opportunities

Arts and Culture

The current economy and high cost of living continues to impact the arts and creative industries, with underfunding and low rates of pay a significant challenge. Creative Wollongong 2024-2033 highlights the cost-of-living impacts on artistic practice/output and the need for a commitment to fair pay for fair work in the arts. The increase to materials and infrastructure costs has significantly impacted commissioning fees and the cost to make large scale public art. The museums sector in the region is largely run by an ageing volunteer workforce posing a risk to our heritage collections, their safe-keeping and stories.

During the development of Creative Wollongong, Council heard from the wider community on the positive effects a rich art and cultural landscape can have on mental health, a sense of belonging and community connectiveness and social cohesion. In line with the National and State cultural plans, Council has committed to championing local First Nations stories, employ culturally safe practices, put artists at the centre and forward think for all our creative industries into the future. There is opportunity to engage, advocate for and partner with stakeholders leading 'gamechanger' projects like the Bluescope Land Transformation Project, the Office of the 24-Hour Economy Commissioner and the WIN Entertainment Centre Development.

The 'proportion of residents who agree there are enough opportunities to attend arts and related cultural activities' scored 3.7/5 in 2024 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024). To maintain and improve this score, increased opportunities, funding and support for our arts, and cultural practices is required to maintain Wollongong's reputation as an industry leader for creativity and liveability.



Image: Corrimal Library

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan

Goal 4 | We are a connected and engaged community

Objectives

Residents have easy and equitable access to information and play an active role in the decisions that affect our city.

There is greater awareness and understanding of Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage and histories.

Our council is accountable, financially sustainable and has the trust of the community.

How will we get there?

4.1 Provide our community with equitable access to information and opportunities to inform decision-making.

4.2 Improve digital access and participation across all communities.

4.3 Partner with First Nations People and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities on programs and projects.

4.4 Build awareness and understanding of Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage and histories.

4.5 Our community strives for social harmony and values and respects differences.

4.6 Support and strengthen the local community services sector.

4.7 Demonstrate responsible decision-making based on our values, collaboration, and transparent and accountable leadership.

4.8 Council's resources are managed effectively to ensure long term financial sustainability.

4.9 Excellent customer service is core business.

4.10 Wollongong's role as a Learning City is supported by lifelong learning initiatives.

4.11 Quality services, libraries and facilities are available to communities to access and gather.

4.12 Technology is used to enhance urban planning and service provision for our community.



*Image: Safer Cities,
MacCabe Park*

Key Highlights

Enhanced our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Programs by reviewing our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy.

Delivered the Internal Audit Program and completed 19 internal audits including Customer Service and Complaints Management.

Installed Child Safe signage in Council facilities as part of the Child Safe Implementation Plan.

Delivered a range of youth opportunities including Rainbow League, Girls Cafe, Dungeons and Dragons, Teenz Connect.

Partnered with Illawarra Indigenous Business Network to host the first Illawarra Aboriginal Business Expo.

Consolidated our information technology systems and platforms and implemented the final module in a four year program of the OneCouncil program.

Physically loaned 1,950,799 library items and 652,964 Audiobook and ebook loans.

Goal 4 | We are a connected and engaged community

Objectives

Residents have easy and equitable access to information and play an active role in the decisions that affect our city.

There is greater awareness and understanding of Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, heritage and histories.

Our Council is accountable, financially sustainable and has the trust of the community.

How did we progress?

4.1 Continue to provide our community with equitable access to information and opportunities to inform decision-making

Deliver a diverse range of community engagement opportunities to receive feedback and guide council services.

Engagement was carried out across many engagement projects to provide an opportunity for the community to have input including:

- Warrawong Town Centre;
- Discover, Learn and Connect WCC Libraries Strategy 2024-2028;
- Climate Change Mitigation Plan 2023-2030;
- West Dapto Master Planning;
- Safer Cities Her Way;
- Illawarra Escarpment Mountain Bike Strategy.

Targeted engagement was undertaken with local Aboriginal communities about a range of projects including:

- Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP);
- West Dapto Master Planning, Marshall Mount Town Centre; Safer Cities: Her Way;
- Collins Creek Floodplain Risk Management Studies and Plans;
- Creative Wollongong; Hill 60 Stage 1 Upgrade;
- Southern Suburbs District Community Centre and Library;
- Lake Illawarra Entrance Options Study;
- William Beach Park blade signage.

Continue to implement the Cyber Security strategy.

Implementation of the Strategy has seen a marked improvement in our Cyber Security position. We are working with the Australian Cyber Security Centre and New South Wales Government to further protect Council's Systems and the information of customers. Implementation of the Australian Signals Directorate Essential 8

Requirements continued and progress made with a score 45/57 in relation to progressing the implementation the NSW Government's Cyber Security Policy Mandatory Requirements.

Coordinate the preparation and review of Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

During in the reporting period we prepared in consultation with the community the Delivery Program 2022-2026 and Operational Plans 2023-2024 and 2024-2025.

Upgrade Customer Contact Centre system.

During the reporting period a tender process was undertaken and testing occurred. The final rollout and upgrade will be completed in early 2024-2025.

Work to finalise the Information Technology Cloud Transformation Program.

We undertook migration of our applications and Information Management Technology infrastructure such as cloud email and decommissioning of old legacy platforms along with the new Wollongong Art Gallery website.

Implement the Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Strategy.

We upgraded our CCTV servers and platform migration with upgrades at Beaton Park and Lakeside Leisure Centre, the replacement of end of life cameras across the City Surveillance Network, Southern Works Depot. The newest CCTV site was established at Bald Hill Lookout which has seen a reduction in vandalism at this site.

4.2 We improved digital access and participation across all communities

Review and enhance Council's customer service and engagement channels with a focus on inclusion and participation.

Work continued on expanding digital options for customers to interact with Council. A review of workflows behind online forms was undertaken to ensure the request is being directed to the most appropriate team to facilitate the timeliest



Image: Reconciliation
Action Plan Launch

response. Work continued to increase accessibility into our processes with the development of a Customer Experience concept plan to increase and embed our customer experience culture.

Develop and deliver an organisational brand strategy.

A Communications Strategy which outlines the City of Wollongong's communications objectives, audiences, as well as articulating Council's brand narrative was developed. Marketing and advertising campaigns are now part of ongoing activities to bolster community awareness and understanding about Council activities and services.

4.3 Partner with First Nations People and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities on programs and projects

Develop and install the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place Interpretive Strategy and Indigenous Art Project.

Four interpretive signs were erected as part of the Sandon Point Aboriginal Place Interpretive Strategy. Consultation with stakeholders continued on the proposed installation of artworks that tell appropriate stories relating to the Aboriginal place and culture.

4.4 Build awareness and understanding of local aboriginal and Torres strait islander culture, heritage and histories

Review and deliver the Reconciliation Action Plan.

During 2022-2023 Council launched the Dharawal People, Places and Stories short films and Coomaditchie: The Art of Place exhibition was held at Wollongong Art Gallery. Other highlights included the Ngaraba-aan Trail blades installation at Fisherman's Beach, Port Kembla. Aboriginal artists were also engaged in the Hooka Creek refurbishment and Mullet Creek interpretative panels.

To celebrate Reconciliation and NAIDOC week, Nandhi (Look) Ngara (Listen) was launched in 2024. Libraries delivered themed story times and Aboriginal collections and resources were promoted. A two-day Reconciliation Conference was delivered which fostered connections between Aboriginal Elders and organisations.

In October 2023 Council partnered with Illawarra Indigenous Business Network to host the first Illawarra Aboriginal Business Expo with 30 businesses exhibited on the day and over 300 people attending.

Council commenced planning for the new Reconciliation Action Plan including extensive engagement with staff and Aboriginal community and organisations.

4.5 Our Community strives for social harmony and values and respects differences

Deliver a range of community development activities and programs that focus on diversity, access, inclusion, and capacity building.

Events and initiatives included Living Books, the Illawarra Refugee Challenge, the Lord Mayor's School Starter Picnic and the Reconciliation Conference. We launched the 250 Stories project aimed to increase children's vocabulary and general knowledge through reading, singing, songs, dancing, talking or yarning with others as well as a campaign to raise awareness of elder abuse within multicultural communities.

Two Refugee Week celebrations were held across the period. Refugee Week 2023 celebrations were held at the Wollongong Town Hall which saw newly arrived and former refugees come together to share in performances, workshops and food. As part of Refugee Week 2024, Council supported the inaugural Refugee Futsal World Cup, led by the NSW Service for the Treatment and Rehabilitation of Torture and Trauma Survivors and NSW Multicultural Health.

An Australian Early Development Census data planning day was held with children and family service providers and the The Paint the Gong REaD reading tent was delivered across sites including Port Kembla Community Christmas Feast, Saltwater Festival at the Bundaleer Estate, Warrawong and Dapto Mall, Dapto.

Deliver the Disability Inclusion Action Plan 2020-2025.

To celebrate International Day of People with Disability throughout 2022-2023, workshops and an exhibition launch with an Auslan interpreter were delivered with the d/Deaf community at Wollongong Art Gallery. 2023-2024 activities included 'Conversations About Inclusion' held with supervisors. A calendar of events to celebrate International Day of Persons with Disability was developed in partnership with Shellharbour City Council.

A range of support opportunities for social enterprises that provide employment for people with disability were delivered.

We developed the Accessible and Inclusive Events Guidelines.

Diversity Awareness and Autism Awareness sessions were provided to Council staff.

Deliver library programs that recognise, reflect and celebrate the cultural diversity of our community.

Three hundred and sixty six culturally diverse regular events were held by the library throughout the period attracting over 3,900 participants. These included: NAIDOC Week Storytimes Chinese Community Outreach, Salvation Army English Conversation, Coomaditchie Homework Help, Multicultural Communities Council of Illawarra English Conversation Class and High School Tutoring, Multicultural Health Week, Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation Outreach, Indigenous Literacy Outreach, Multicultural Storytime. We continued to celebrate events such as Multicultural March and Harmony Week.

Deliver a range of youth development opportunities with a focus on engagement, inclusion, skill development, sector development and support.

Opportunities delivered included Rainbow League; Girls Café for young women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Crafts and Chat, Dungeons and Dragons, Fit Youth, *Bundaleer Connect*, *Teenz Connect* and workshops on sport, art, mindfulness, mental health, work readiness, resume writing and cooking.

In 2023 the Youth Forum election was held in local high schools and community centres cross the Local Government Area. Eight young people were elected to be part of the young leader's program who met regularly and curated some of the Youth Week calendar of events.

4.6 Support and strengthen the local community services sector

Provide support and participate in the Illawarra Domestic and Family Violence Trauma Recovery Centre Consultative Working Group.

The Illawarra Domestic and Family Violence Trauma Recovery Centre successfully obtained \$25 million in federal funding for its opening in 2024.

4.7 Demonstrate responsible decision-making based on our values collaboration and transparent and accountable leadership

Review and implement the Workforce Strategy 2022-2026.

The 2022-2026 Workforce Strategy was adopted in June 2022. Since its adoption we have implemented a number of actions including the endorsement of Council's Equal Employment Opportunity Management Policy and Plan. Four Peer Collectives (First Nations, Women and Allies, LGBTQA+ and Allies, People with Disability and Carers) were established as part of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging. We became a Diversity Council Australia organisational member.

We continued to build the capability of the workforce by delivering formal training including Extraordinary Leaders program; Leaders Connect; Diversity Awareness; Cultural Intelligence; Autism Awareness; Bullying and Harassment; Safety Leadership and Mental Health Awareness.

Deliver the Internal Audit Program.

This was achieved through our adopted three year strategic Internal Audit Plan which was adopted on 5 September 2023. The plan is reviewed on an annual basis by the Audit, Risk and Improvement Committee in conjunction with our Internal Auditor. A variety of Internal audits were undertaken including: Integrated Planning and Reporting, Customer Service and Complaints Management, Management and Maintenance of Community Facilities, Art Gallery Collections, Light Fleet Vehicle Management and Fire Safety. In 2022-2023 twelve audits were finalised and in 2023-2024 seven audits were finalised.

4.8 Council's resources are managed effectively to ensure long term financial sustainability

Develop a Service Optimisation (Service Review) methodology and coordinate the Service Optimisation program.

Council completed the design of the Service Optimisation review methodology which supports Council's continuous improvement approach. The final approved methodology and approach builds on industry best practice and introduces an evidence-based approach to the prioritisation of services to be included in the program. The Service Optimisation Program commenced during 2023-2024 which focused on the customer experience around access to information related to Development Assessment. The recommendations from this review have been endorsed, and improvements are being planned to be delivered during 2024-2025 and beyond.

During the period, work progressed on the next round of evidence-based prioritisation which resulted in two services being chosen to be reviewed during 2024-2025: road signage management and the customer service journey across targeted, high priority operations. They have been included in the Delivery Program 2022-2026 and Operational Plan 2024-2025.

Implement Safety and Wellbeing Programs.

Council undertook a review of Workplace Health and Safety Management System procedures, operational procedures and the Critical Risk and Control Management Framework in 2022-2023. Mental Health training program commenced in 2023 with over 225 employees completing the mental health awareness program. Council established 55 accredited mental health first aid officers across the organisation. We partnered with Lifeline for suicide prevention training. We reshaped our People and Culture team through the creation of the Work Health Safety Operations team and Preventative Health Team to provide greater focus to these areas.

Enhance Council's Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Programs.

We reviewed Council's Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy in accordance with Council's Policy Framework resulting in changes to reflect Council's purpose. Council's definition of diversity has also been refined to better reflect our community.

We trained our staff in cultural intelligence, diversity awareness and bullying and harassment. We provided targeted roles through our Cadet, Apprentice and Trainee intakes. Throughout 2023-2024, we participated in the Council for Intellectual Disability's (CID) Inclusion Works – Inclusive Employment Project for Councils. This is an initiative promoting inclusive employment practices for people with intellectual disability in NSW councils. We have implemented Gender Affirmation/Transitioning Guidelines that outline the process and support available when an employee is seeking to affirm/ transition their gender. We continue to review our Recruitment, Training and Onboarding Child Safe Procedure to ensure continued alignment with the relevant legislation and operational practices.

Refreshed Council's Attraction and Retention Strategies.

We undertook a Recruitment Review Project that has delivered enhanced attraction and recruitment strategies and a more contemporary recruitment service.

Support Council's Cadet, Apprentice and Trainee program.

Council employed during the 2022-2024 Cadet, Apprentice and Trainee (CATS) intake, 36 new CATS. The program that CATS undertake at Council varies between one to seven years. This means Council has had 40-45 CATS across the organisation at any given time.

Develop and regularly review Asset Management Plans to ensure appropriate investment in Council's asset base.

A comprehensive review has been completed and an asset management plan covering all assets has been drafted. It considers the future demands, challenges and risks that influence decisions regarding investment over the lifecycle of assets. The plan includes over 180,000 assets across transport, stormwater and floodplain, open space and recreation, buildings, plant and equipment, library collection, information management and technology, and artwork.

Continue to consolidate information technology systems and platforms.

Human Resources and Payroll was the final module in the OneCouncil program that went live on 31 July 2023. This was the final module of the consolidated information technology systems and platforms project, which had spanned four years. We are now in a process of embedding business processes and optimising performance of the system.

OneCouncil has fundamentally changed the way we work. It facilitates data sharing between different functional areas mitigating the need for data duplication; digitisation of business processes reducing the reliance on paper-based processes as well as facilitates the capacity to work from any place, at any time on any device. We continue to explore the range of benefits and capability the technology has to offer.

Identify and implement business improvement initiatives to enhance commercial returns on Council's property portfolio.

We continued to liaise with relevant stakeholders to progress the sale of properties identified as part of the review. Since the action commenced, Council has progressed the reclassification and sale of eight properties with 27 identified to be retained following internal consultation. A review of Council's CBD land holdings, in addition to Council's land rationalisation list, commenced with information used to inform the overall strategy of the review. We regularly review our property leasing portfolio to ensure rent reviews are applied and opportunities to maximise revenue are taken up.

4.9 Ensure that excellent customer service is core business

Identify and implement customer service improvement opportunities.

Customer service improvement opportunities continued with the promotion of our online services. Highlights included resourcing adjustments to improve service levels for digital channels, modifying the 'On Hold' messaging in response to customer trends and verification of thousands of Council's online customer portal registrations to facilitate self-service. We are creating processes that will lead to first contact resolution through expanding the information available to Customer Service staff.



Image: Kids enjoying reading at Corrimal Library

4.10 Wollongong's role as a Learning City is supported by lifelong learning initiatives

Implement the Wollongong Learning City Project based on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation framework and principles.

The Learning Strategy draft has been further refined, building on previous community engagement, Global Network of Learning Cities' requirements and existing Council strategies. The project aims to see Wollongong become a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Learning City in 2025.

Council has contributed to the Australian Learning Communities Network, participating in networking, forums and learning from Wyndham City's Learning Festival.

Implement the Child Safe Implementation Plan.

We worked with the Office of the Children's Guardian to develop a Local Government training program. A series of videos to promote child safety were developed. We participated in the Local Government Child Safe Network and presented at the Child Safe Forum. Child Safe signage has been installed in Council facilities and training was provided to all new lifeguards as part of the onboarding process.

4.11 Ensured quality services, libraries and facilities are available to communities to access and gather

Implement a customer voting system for new titles to be added to the library catalogue.

The customer voting system was implemented in the third quarter of 2023. This system continues to be embraced by our customers as a way to vote for new book titles; as well as movies and music.

Deliver customer driven, evolving library collections.

The community physically borrowed 1,950,799 items from 2022-2024. Audiobook and ebook loans for the period totalled 652,964. We listened to our customers by prioritising online collections by increasing our budget allocations and additional content and copies of high demand titles purchased in digital formats. Our customers continued to heavily utilise the available variety of channels, online or in person at library service points, for requesting titles for purchase which we then aimed to acquire.

Deliver tailored library programs to facilitate access and participation of people with disability.

Sensory Gardens were delivered as part of the Luminous Festival, celebrating International Day of People with Disability across two libraries, Sessions of Vision Impaired Yarners, Dementia Awareness Exhibition, Taiko drumming workshop for the vision impaired community. All libraries welcomed groups from various National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) providers to join in pre-school story times.

Plan for a new Community Centre and Library at Warrawang to serve Wollongong's southern suburbs.

Significant work on this significant social infrastructure project was undertaken. A number of grant applications have been submitted to support this project, however these have not been successful. We continue to pursue and advocate for funding for the project and surrounding town centre improvements as a priority.

Plan for a new Community Centre and Library to meet the needs of the community in Helensburgh and surrounding suburbs.

We lodged and received approval to exhibit a draft Plan of Management that would enable the site on Helensburgh Park to be used for the purpose of an integrated Community Centre and Library (CC&L) with the Helensburgh Swimming Pool amenities project. Our plans continue with the Plan of Management adopted for Helensburgh Park. The scope, site selection and budget for this project is being finalised for resolution by the end of 2024.

4.12 Technology is used to enhance urban planning and service provision for our community

Pilot and expand the use of robust SMART technologies across Council.

The road artificial intelligence trial concluded in May 2023 following a 12-week trial with a business case developed to continue the roll out of road artificial intelligence more broadly. This initiative involves smart cameras attached to garbage trucks, which collect road condition data and assess for defects. Council can then use this information to better plan and schedule maintenance and repairs throughout our road network.

Throughout 2022-2023 we successfully completed a trial of bin sensors along foreshore areas to detect when bins were full, scheduling crews more efficiently to collect the rubbish. Completion of a dashboard to report on Council's progress towards net zero emissions was also created, as well as development of a safety scorecard to report on Workplace Health and Safety across the organisation.

The Sportsfield Monitoring project has completed the first of six installations to enable us to investigate automating field closure notifications, as well as better understanding the servicing of sportsfield assets.



Image: Corrimal Library
Tech & MorningTea



Image: Corrimal Library Knitting Nannas

Goal 4 | Community Indicators

Wollongong strives to build a connected and engaged community where residents actively participate in civic life and have a voice in important decisions. Recent successes include engagement with First Nations culture through curated art exhibitions, highlighting the city's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Community satisfaction with Council's overall performance remains relatively positive.

Indicator	Current	Target	Baseline
Number of curated art exhibitions engaging with First Nations heritage and culture	5 [^]	Increase	New Measure
Proportion of residents who feel they have their say on important issues	2.90	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	New Measure
Proportion of residents satisfied with Wollongong City Council's overall performance	3.50	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.70 ⁹
Proportion of residents who know how to contact their local councillor and/or Member of Parliament (MP)	75% Councillor 67% State MP 56% Federal MP	100%	82% Councillor ⁹ 72% State MP ⁹ 65% Federal MP ⁹
Proportion of residents who are satisfied Council acts with the best interests of the community in mind	3.20	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.40 ⁵

⁵ Source: Wollongong City Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2021

⁹ Source: Wollongong Local Government Area Wellbeing Survey 2021

[^]Data (including baseline) is an annual figure

Future Opportunities

Reconciliation

Wollongong City Council acknowledges reconciliation as an ongoing commitment and is deeply committed to advancing our work across current and future Community Strategic Plans. We understand that in order to heal as an organisation and nation, we must work alongside community, forming and strengthening relationships that are based off mutual trust and respect. We acknowledge the closing the gap statistics, and the work we must do to improve better outcomes for us all. We appreciate the strength and resilience of Traditional Custodians across the lands, seas and skies of Australia and are privileged to share Dharawal Country with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In addition to this, we hold in our hearts and minds, the outcome of the referendum. We understand that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have unique views regarding the voice to parliament, however, remain firmly committed to continuing the work outlined in the Uluru Statement of the Heart. We recognise the principles that underpin self-determination, and that collaboration is our way forward, together.

To advance reconciliation internally and externally, Council launched the 2021-2023 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in November 2021. Council is committed to taking practical steps that turn good will into real action, enabling the organisation to measure progress. Council report to Reconciliation Australia annually in September along with reporting to staff, Aboriginal Community Health Organisations and the Aboriginal Community Reference Group throughout the year. Our second RAP commenced development in 2024 and is anticipated to be released in 2025.

Source: Senior Aboriginal Policy Advisor

Resident Access to Information and Participation in Decision Making

While many residents feel connected, there is opportunity to increase public participation in decision-making processes, particularly by improving accessibility for diverse groups. The 'Proportion of residents who feel they have their say on important issues' was 2.90/5 in 2024, below the target set by Wollongong City Council of 3.75/5 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024). While Council has numerous opportunities to access information and provide feedback through channels including online and face-to-face, further work is required to support the community to have their say.

There was also a decline in the 'number of residents knowing how to contact their Councillor' (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024). A connected and engaged community requires knowledge and access for residents to actively participate in civic life and have a voice in important decisions. This data is useful and will be considered in the review of the Plan to ensure residents can access the information they need and connect with leaders and local representatives on matters that affect them.

Technology

Technology presents opportunities for the future. SMART technologies and artificial intelligence can offer data to inform decision making for organisations. Examples include using artificial intelligence to proactively identify defects on road surfaces and the deployment of SMART technologies to monitor the moisture of turf on play fields improving the efficiency and effectiveness of grounds management techniques.

Conversely, technology presents challenges as not everyone has access to digital technologies and services, which is referred to the digital divide. This divide exists as some people still lack internet access due to prohibitive costs, unavailability of services, and digital illiteracy. It is more pronounced among low-income households, seniors, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities and people with disability. Without adequate access to technology, these groups may find it difficult to engage with digital services, access information, or participate fully in community life.

Public libraries play a critical role in closing this 'digital divide' and increasing digital inclusion through access to Wi-Fi and computers, training and support.

Digital inclusion is about using technology to improve skills, enhance quality of life and promote social inclusion. Public libraries provide services such as intergenerational learning, technology training for culturally diverse groups, digital access to local history collections, helping people become tech savvy, running coding classes, and providing local communities with opportunities to interact with robots, virtual reality and other advanced technologies. We reach some of the least connected people in society, with the purpose of helping people connect to the internet, have positive online experiences, improve their digital skills, build their confidence and be prepared for the next wave of technological innovation.

Government can help address these challenges through providing to affordable internet connectivity, computers, and other necessary devices. Further, organisations can plan for digital platforms and services to be designed in a way that is accessible to all, regardless of their abilities. By addressing these barriers, we can enable individuals to participate.

Financial Sustainability

While the Community Strategic Plan is a whole of community plan, Council plays a large role in the delivery of the community's aspirations. Council does not have infinite resources and the cost of providing services is increasing.

The Wollongong Local Government Area has several significantly aged facilities and buildings that require maintenance or replacement as they have reached the end of their useful life. The balance of service delivery, maintenance of assets and provision of key social infrastructure that will enhance the liveability of places is an ongoing challenge for Wollongong City Council.

In late 2022, global and Australian economic conditions became unstable, resulting in high inflation and supply shortages for employees, contractors and materials. As a result, long term sustainability has become more challenging as the cost of delivering Council services and maintaining long lived infrastructure has increased while rates revenues have not increased at a proportionate level. The recorded value of Council assets has substantially increased, indicating a higher cost of renewal in the long term and an immediate increase in the depreciation amounts reported by Council.

Council has responded financially to these issues to date by restraining costs, delaying some works where reasonable value could not be achieved, utilising existing reserves and through the assistance of additional funding from other levels of government. During this time, Council has been able to broadly maintain its financial strength and has continued to exceed expectations in certain areas allowing some savings to be retained as restricted assets.

Council's Financial Strategy requires new actions to achieve long term financial sustainability that will maintain existing levels of service into the future without abnormal rate and pricing impost. As Council has limited resources, funded primarily by the Wollongong community, there are goals and tasks included in the current Operational Plan that aim to improve the capacity of the organisation to respond to increases in service cost and demand.

Council's Transport and Stormwater asset revaluation at the end of 2022 resulted in a significant increase of recorded asset values and a \$20.5 million per annum increase in depreciation compared to budget. The asset valuations are based on existing asset management plans and accounting estimates that are currently being tested through a substantial review of Council's Asset Management Plans. Asset valuation changes have negatively impacted Council's Key Financial Performance Indicators (KPIs). This does not impact the deliverability of the current Delivery Program, although rising costs and future asset renewals will need to be addressed in the medium term to ensure continued financial sustainability. Council's ability to increase services, service levels, or manage the increased cost of asset renewal, will remain limited in the short term. While asset costs are represented as the primary cause of changes to the underlying financial sustainability of Council, the issue is caused by the mismatch between revenue, primarily rates and the cost of managing those assets to provide the continuing services levels agreed.

On the positive side, Council has continued to obtain State and Australian Government funding. Some of which is related to disaster recovery (primarily flooding) and some related to planned new and enhanced infrastructure that improve service and reduce reliance on Council's own funds for construction.

Unprecedented Rate of Change and External Influences

The unprecedented rate of change is an area that Local Government is adapting to, this includes changing policies and legislation and importantly the cost shifting and extra responsibility that is being put on Council. Legislative change and enhancements in technology puts additional pressure on Local Government to meet increasing and changing expectations.

In addition to these changes, the broader global context and areas instability may also have an impact at the national or even local level. The 2020 COVID-19 Pandemic demonstrates that world issues can directly impact the Wollongong community.

At a local scale, the impacts of cost shifting, or redirected rates are having a direct impact on the community. Councils are also occasionally required to fund the continuation of several funding programs that were instigated by the NSW Government, but for which funding commitments have, over time, either been reduced or removed entirely.

Other areas of impact include the waste levy that is collected by Local Government through rates on behalf of the State Government, as well as additional rates from emergency service contributions, rate exemptions (such as waived pensioner rates), imposing additional regulatory contributions and cutting or failing to adequately continue to fund programs for services that need to continue, Council absorbing market gaps (Source: LG NSW Cost Shifting Report 2023).

With finite resources and income, these additional costs and services will continue to put a strain on service delivery for Local Government.



Image: King George V Oval playground, Port Kembla

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan

Goal 5 | We have a healthy community in a liveable city

Objectives

There is an increase in the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our community.

Our community participation in recreation and lifestyle activities increases.

Residents have improved access to a range of affordable housing options.

Suburbs and places are liveable and safe.

How will we get there?

5.1 Accessible and appropriate medical services are available to the community.

5.2 Urban areas are created and maintained to provide a healthy and safe living environment for our community.

5.3 Work towards enabling all people in our community to have access to safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainably produced food.

5.4 Provide a variety of quality and accessible public places and

opportunities for sport, play, leisure, recreation, learning and cultural activities in the community.

5.5 Provide safe, well-maintained and accessible beaches and aquatic recreation facilities.

5.6 Healthy, active ageing programs are provided and promoted in partnership with government agencies and community organisations.

5.7 Provide an appropriate range of active and passive open spaces and facilities to cater for traditional and emerging recreational pursuits.

5.8 Housing choice in the Wollongong Local Government Area is improved, considering population growth, community needs and affordability.

5.9 Integrated services are provided to residents in need of urgent shelter.

5.10 Partnerships continue to strengthen and achieve a safe, accessible and resilient community.

5.11 Local crime continues to be prevented and levels of crime reduced.

5.12 Plan and deliver an accessible, safe, clean and inviting public domain.



Image: Coalcliff Rock Pool

Key Highlights

Wollongong's first criterium cycling track, Lindsay Maynes Criterium Track in Unanderra opened late 2022.

New bike skills track opened at Cringila Hills Recreation Park.

'Places for the Future' - Social Infrastructure Future Directions Plan 2023-2036 adopted in May 2023.

Implemented the on-site waste water program as part of public health and safety.

Completion of Stage 1 - Fred Finch Park Berkeley netball courts.

Worked on planning for Skate Parks for the Northern Suburbs and Wollongong City Centre.

Adoption of the Sportsground and Sporting Facilities Strategy 2023-2027 in May 2023.

Goal 5 | We have a healthy community in a liveable city

Objectives

There is an increase in the physical and mental health and wellbeing of our community.

Our community participation in recreation and lifestyle activities increases.

Residents have improved access to a range of affordable housing options.

Suburbs and places are liveable and safe.

How did we progress?

5.1 Accessible and appropriate medical services are available to the community

Advocate accessible and appropriate medical services are available to the community.

Wollongong Council is working with State agencies to develop a Wollongong Health Precinct Strategy, focused on the Wollongong Hospital and its surrounding neighbourhood. This project will capture long term planning for healthcare, training and related business outcomes within a broader precinct which also includes a range of housing options as well as shops, community services and high amenity public spaces.

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District is also a member of the Illawarra Shoalhaven Strategic Plan Coordination and Monitoring Committee which is chaired by Lord Mayor Councillor Bradbury. This forum provides opportunities for discussion about health infrastructure planning across the region.

5.2 Urban areas are created and maintained to provide a healthy and safe living environment for our community

Develop and implement an education and awareness raising program regarding swimming pool barriers.

Our Swimming Pool Safety Barrier Program included social media messaging to promote swimming pool safety, an educational booklet was distributed to schools to assist in promoting the importance of swimming pool safety barrier compliance, educational posters displayed at Council's aquatic facilities, libraries and community facilities with QR codes linked to our website and mail outs to Real Estate agents addressing the need for all swimming pools to be registered prior to being sold or leased.

Work continued to ensure private swimming pools are compliant. Compliance Certificate Applications

for private swimming pools were processed, Notices and Orders to rectify non-compliant pools and responding to customer service requests. During the period, we processed over 229 Compliance Certificate Applications, responded to over 490 customer service requests and issued 55 notices and orders to rectify swimming pools not compliant with the Swimming Pool Act 1992.

Undertake targeted compliance of subdivision and residential building sites for sediment and erosion control, hours of operation, waste management and dust control.

Throughout the period, over 1,000 building site inspections were conducted. Eighty one fines were issued, over 210 written and verbal warnings issued. Our Building Sites Compliance Program continued with a focus on proactive building sites inspections and education regarding erosion and sediment control, waste management and hours of operation. Council worked on amending Conditions of Development Consent to help protect the environment during construction and assist in taking compliance and enforcement action where it is required.

The building sites program has been successful in achieving positive environmental outcomes through education initiatives and compliance action.

Enhance the management of Council owned water and wastewater assets.

This was enhanced with our water systems monitored by telemetry to provide early warning alerts used to mitigate potential events. Council concentrated on optimising the existing telemetry by importing data to allow for real time monitoring. Some of the sites we have worked on to make data more reliable include our Waste Water sites at Southern Gateway Centre and Bald Hill. This included installing sensors to allow reliable data reading and enabling the building of coordinates to predict where potential faults may occur. At Bald Hill we overhauled the alarm system to better enable our coordinators to act on critical alarms, removing septic system overflows.

Water Treatment site works occurred at Loddon Creek/Sublime Point and Mt Keira.



Image: Austinmer Sunrise

Complete Community Needs Analysis for social, cultural and recreational infrastructure for emerging West Dapto communities.

The Draft West Dapto Community Facilities and Open Space community needs analysis was placed on public exhibition in January-February 2023 and adopted in July 2023. This tool is now being used to aid decision making around community facilities.

Complete Social Infrastructure Feasibility Studies at Bong Bong Road, Yallah/Marshall Mount and Figtree.

The feasibility studies for planned community facilities at Yallah/Marshall Mount Town Centre was completed in June 2024. The findings and recommendations of this study will be presented in the second half of 2024. A Bong Bong Town Centre Feasibility Study will be initiated once a town centre master plan and neighbourhood plan has been prepared for the Bong Bong Town Centre by the landowner. It is unknown when a plan will be prepared. Funding to complete a feasibility study to scope the extension and re-purposing of the Figtree Community Centre is scheduled to occur between 2027-2031.

Maintain inspection programs for public swimming pools, places of shared accommodation and mortuaries.

Council has a responsibility to monitor and regulate compliance with the Public Health Act 2010, which includes completing inspections and taking regulatory action where required.

We completed proactive inspection programs regarding public swimming pools, places of shared accommodation and mortuaries during the reporting period. During the period we inspected nine mortuaries, 80 swimming pools and 59 places of shared accommodation. The inspection programs that were completed identified a very high level of compliance with the Public Health Act. Customer service requests were also actioned and responded to during the reporting period.

5.3 Work towards enabling all people in our community to have access to safe, nutritious, affordable and sustainably produced food

Inspect all medium and high-risk retail food premises annually.

During the period, Council undertook over 3,890 inspections and issued over 62 improvement notices. Development Application referrals were actioned to ensure conditions of development consent were appropriate for food businesses and our food surveillance program remains on track to meet requirements under the Food Act 2003 (NSW) and NSW Food Authority's Food Regulation partnership. Throughout 2023-2024, new Food Safety Standard was introduced to the Food Standards Code. We worked with businesses to educate and ensure smooth transition.



Image: Skate Park Berkeley

Support local food security outcomes through advocacy, sponsorship, partnering and local initiatives.

These included delivery of education on food waste avoidance, facilitation of enquiries relating to community gardens, and publication of the Low Cost and Free Meals Directory. Public interest in communal gardening activities is supported by Council's Community Gardens Policy.

5.4 Provide a variety of quality and accessible public places and opportunities for sport, play, leisure, recreation, learning and cultural activities in the community

Deliver the renewal and relocation of Beaton Park Tennis Courts in accordance with the Beaton Park Masterplan.

Council continued to progress this project with the redevelopment planned to be completed in December 2024, that will see all courts completed, including new floodlighting, court surfacing, fencing and supporting infrastructure.

Collaborate with Destination Wollongong and the Australian Baseball League to establish Wollongong as a home base location for a National Baseball League team.

In collaboration with Destination Wollongong, we investigated a number of sites that may be suitable for hosting a team as part of the National Baseball League. Investigations included site suitability that incorporated electrical assessment, permanent and temporary amenities and other factors required to support a National Baseball League Competition with analysis and investigations ongoing.

Complete the drainage project at Guest Park, Fairy Meadow training ground of the Illawarra Stingrays.

This was completed in October 2023 with additional soil provided in March 2024 to help support the future growth of the grass and levelling of the field.

Maintain a proactive compliance program for companion animals in public places, including beaches, foreshore areas and parks.

We patrolled our beaches and foreshore locations monitoring dog ownership and dog owner behaviour. We issued penalty notices, written and verbal warnings including educational discussions to provide dog owners with an awareness of their responsibilities under the Companion Animals Act 1988 and Council Dogs on Beaches and Parks Policy. Signage relating to dogs was upgraded at Sandon Point, McCauley's Beach, Scarborough Beach, Wombarra Beach, Coniston Beach, Thomas Gibson Park, MacCabe Park and Beaton Park.

Design and implement Stage 1 of the North Wollongong Beach Seawall Renewal.

Stage 1 of the seawall (in front of the North Wollongong Surf Club building) was completed in December 2023 which included installation of concrete bleachers, seawall, beach access ramp and associated landscaping. Council designed Stage 2 of the North Wollongong Beach Seawall Renewal project which extends south to the North Beach Pavilion with preliminary piling investigation works occurring throughout 2024. The current program will allow for tenders to be called in 2025 with on-site construction programmed to commence early in 2026. Council has submitted a request to NSW State Government under the Coastal and Estuary Grant Program for financial assistance in accordance with this program.



Image: Cringila Hills Mountain Bike Track

Plan, design and complete the renewal of the downstairs Lifesaving building of North Wollongong Surf Life Saving Club.

Council worked in partnership with funding bodies to re-construct a new state of the art Surf Lifesaving Building at North Wollongong Beach, these improvements were completed in time for the 2022-2023 Summer season. This new facility provides improved facilities and amenities as well as a compliant accessible building that supports our Volunteer Lifesavers at one of our busiest beaches in Wollongong. These works also included the remediation and rectification of structural issues, asbestos removal and renewal of the electrical and lighting systems.

Progress concept plans, investigations, and detailed designs for a Community Recreation & Aquatic Centre at Cleveland to service the Southern Suburbs.

Council has continued to progress the planning and development of a new Community Recreation & Aquatic Centre to support the growth area and surrounding suburbs of West Dapto. During this period Council has engaged a consultant to undertake investigations on the proposed site that included community expectations, industry best practice and trends and future uses of the surrounding area.

Progress planning and construction of Wongawilli Hall extension and refurbishment.

Concept designs were developed to address identified building defects with engagement programmed to commence in late 2024. We will finalise designs in 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 financial years with construction in the 2026-2027 financial year.

Finalise the Bulli Showground Masterplan.

During the period work continued with regard to the Bulli Showground Masterplan including consultation with the community. We are now considering the Transport for NSW community consultation in regard to Bulli Bypass impacts with the Masterplan site.

Prepare the Bellambi Foreshore Precinct Plan.

We worked towards preparation of the Bellambi Foreshore Precinct Plan with investigations into land ownership, planning constraints, and cultural significance of the site. We continue to meet with major stakeholders including Homes NSW, NSW Environment and Heritage, and Illawarra Local Aboriginal Land Council to coordinate the future planning of this precinct. New amenities have been constructed at the Bellambi boat ramp.

Implement the Landscape Masterplan recommendations for Hill 60 Reserve, Port Kembla.

During the period, Council was successful in acquiring \$500,000 in funding to deliver Stage 1A of the Hill 60 Landscape Masterplan. We finalised the detailed Plan for Stage 1A with public exhibition commencing June 2023. Construction of Stage 1A is progressing and is set to be completed during 2024. We are continuing to investigate opportunities for the re-use of the tunnels within Hill 60.



Image: Accessible beach mat, Austinmer

In partnership with South32, develop a plan that reflects the values and aspirations of the Mt Kembla and Kembla Heights stakeholders.

South32 have provided Council with funding across two years to develop a plan that reflects the values and aspirations of the Mount Kembla and Kembla Heights stakeholders. It will include an informed and realistic implementation plan that incorporates actions by local and state government, South32, other peak bodies and industry to support local community's aspirations.

A range of engagement activities have been undertaken with the community and interested stakeholders which has informed a draft vision, guiding principles and proposed actions. We will now check in with the community to ensure what we've heard throughout the engagement so far is represented in the drafts. A final draft document 'Kembla Vision, a plan by the community for the community' will be presented to the community for feedback in coming months.

Provide opportunities for young people to develop skills, experience and exposure in creative industries.

A range of weekly workshops were delivered including guitar, art, comic book, live band jam, DJ sound and lighting. We provide a fully equipped music rehearsal space and performance space at the Youth Centre, hosted bands, open mic nights, world music nights and DJ. We delivered a 12-month Youth Artist in Residence opportunity in 2023-2024 and Youth Power Hour podcast program.

Complete a Community Needs Analysis for City Centre Social Infrastructure.

We completed the needs analysis for people living in the Wollongong CBD in October 2022. Findings of this assessment informed the development of the Places for the Future Social Infrastructure Future Directions Plan: 2023-2036 that was subsequently adopted on 8 May 2023.

Enhance Botanic Garden visitor experience with programs, interpretation, education, events and priority actions from the Masterplan.

The Botanic Garden supported the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW event, via presentation and promotion of banners along the fence line, planter pots placed at entrances and supporting messaging on the live television broadcasts, website and social media.

We held Botanic Garden events including; the Wollongong Conservatorium of Music's 50th Birthday music event held in September 2022 attracting approximately 1,000 attendees over two days, held Shakespeare in the Garden, Sunset Cinema seasons and Botanic Gardens Days. Botanic Garden staff and volunteers gathered with the Lord Mayor to plant a ceremonial 50th Birthday Tree and view the time capsule to be opened in 2071. The Poem Forest competition commenced in March 2023 with aims to see 5,000 trees planted in our Local Government Area. The Cycad collection was completed on 25 May 2023.

During 2022-2024, the nursery produced 111,703 locally sourced native plants including 49,010 Greenplan plant sales to a total of 5,513 residents. There were a total 578,471 visitors to the Botanic Garden throughout the period.



Image: Towradgi Rock Pool

Finalise the review of the Botanic Garden Plan of Management, including future uses of Gleniffer Brae.

The Plan of Management for Wollongong Botanic Garden (including Gleniffer Brae and Kooloobong Oval) was adopted by Council in 2020. The Gleniffer Brae Conservation Management Plan was endorsed by Heritage NSW in 2023. Council is currently preparing a Masterplan for the Botanic Garden to prioritise future works over the next 10 years in line with these two strategic documents.

Implement priority actions from the Botanic Garden Masterplan.

Due to impacts of natural disasters resulting in the reprioritisation of Council's capital program, construction projects at the Botanic Garden were deferred for future years. Three capital projects remaining in design phase: a new fully accessible amenities block, new rainforest boardwalk/ accessible pathway and nursery propagation glasshouse renewals.

Manage Council's commercial businesses to optimise service delivery at Wollongong Memorial Gardens and cemeteries.

This continued by constructing a number of areas to ensure our community's needs are continuing to be met including; new ash gardens at Scarborough Cemetery, a rose garden at Wollongong Memorial Gardens as well as a dedicated Jewish area at Wollongong Lawn Cemetery. We have identified a number of vacant sites at the previously closed Scarborough and Bulli Cemeteries that have been made available for at-need interments. We established a 'Friends of the Cemeteries' group to include opportunities across all Council sites.

5.5 Provide safe, well maintained and accessible beaches and aquatic recreation facilities

Implement funded actions from The Future of Our Pools Strategy 2014-2024.

During this period, Council continued to implement funded actions, this included obtaining partial grant funding to support the improvements required at Helensburgh Swimming Pool to ensure the facility is fit for purpose over the next 50 years. In addition to this, Council has continued its planning for the West Dapto area as well as continue the planning for Beaton Park Leisure Centre and precinct. Dapto Swimming Pool has recently undergone improvements to better support year round operations with the replacement of the failing heating system. The new heating system will continue to support the operations of the facility, whilst supporting a sustainable approach through more efficient heating systems.

Implement funded actions from the Beach and Foreshore Access Strategy 2019-2032.

We delivered a new access ramp at Port Kembla Beach that allows beach users to safely enter the sand from an accessible ramp from the promenade. This ramp allows easier access for beach users to the accessible facilities adjacent to Port Kembla Swimming Pool building. We continued to provide accessible beach mats across a number of beaches in the Local Government Area and improved our booking process for beach wheelchairs.

5.6 Healthy, active ageing programs are provided and promoted in partnership with government agencies and community organisations

Provide a variety of affordable senior programs at the Leisure Centres.

We developed innovative classes for our senior community and have four specialised classes running each week including yoga, active seniors, aquarobics and Health Moves Plus (a low to moderate intensity workout). We also visited local community centres to deliver programs directly to seniors.

5.7 Provide an appropriate range of active and passive open spaces and facilities to cater for traditional and emerging recreational pursuits

Plan, design and undertake renewal works at Council's Community, Commercial Pools and Ocean Rock Pools in accordance with the Infrastructure Delivery Program.

We completed the replacement of intake lines at the Continental Pool, Wollongong and installed an accessible ramp at Port Kembla Pool. We sought community input into the future form of Helensburgh Pool following the award of a \$3.24 million grant from the NSW Government and are now finalising the site concept plan for upgrade of the Helensburgh Pool facility which includes the replacement of the 25m pool, water filtration and other supporting works. Short term repairs at the Western Suburbs Toddlers Pool were proven successful and ensured continuity of service while a review of the design and procurement method for the water play space is undertaken.

Progress the planning and development of a Wollongong City Centre Skate Park.

We investigated a number of appropriate sites across the city centre area. We have engaged a consultant that has supported the investigation and engagement for the new City Centre Skate Park with further due diligence to occur on the preferred site. We will then progress to the detailed design and construction of the City Centre Skate Park.

Progress the planning and development of a Northern Suburbs Skate Park.

Engagement has taken place in Thirroul to support identification of a suitable space for the future Northern Suburbs Skate Park, with planning and site selection underway. Concept planning is the next step to help support the identification of a future site.

Progress the development of the Lang Park Masterplan.

Council has begun its work on delivering a new vision and plan for Lang Park through the development of a Master Plan. To date, Council has engaged with internal stakeholders as well as Venues NSW to ensure the vision of Lang Park is aligned with the future plans for the Entertainment and Sporting Precinct that Venues NSW are currently preparing. It is envisaged that broader engagement will take place in 2025 with the community on how we plan and deliver an exceptional experience at Lang Park.

Finalise the draft licence with Illawarra Stingrays for a home ground at JJ Kelly Park, Wollongong.

We continued to support the Illawarra United Stingrays in planning for their home ground and issued a proposed Licence Agreement for the outer fields of JJ Kelly Park in 2022 including an action in our Operational Plan 2023-2024, 'Finalise the draft licence agreement with Illawarra Stingrays for a home ground at JJ Kelly Park, Wollongong.' This action is now no longer required as we work with the Illawarra Stingrays to enter into an agreement for the use of Lakelands Oval along with Dapto Phoenix Football Club who were successful in securing significant funding to support improvements at Lakelands Oval.

Continue to deliver funded sportsfield irrigation and drainage infrastructure projects.

We completed improvements across three sporting fields in 2023-2024 including drainage and irrigation for Judy Masters and Cawley Park, with Guest Park also receiving drainage on the sportsfield. Lakelands Oval drainage project was deferred due to timing constraints and will be completed in the 2024-2025 financial year.

Implement key projects identified in the Cringila Hills Recreation Masterplan.

Council successfully received grant funding to complete a number of improvements at Cringila Hills in line with the Master Plan. We received funding from Public Spaces Legacy, Resources for Regions Round 7, Local Roads & Community Infrastructure Phase 1 and 2, as well as Community Building Partnership 20. These contributed to the pump track, mountain bike skills area and the mountain bike track as well as other facility



Image: Illawarra Criterium Track

improvements such as parking. Stage 2 of the pathways improvements were completed, including an additional 1,575m of pathway. We continue to work with the community on the management and operations of Cringila Hills Park. The Cringila Hills Recreation Park was awarded the prestigious Park of the Year awards at the Parks and Leisure NSW Conference Awards in October 2023.

Develop the Sportsgrounds and Sporting Facilities Strategy 2022-2026.

The Strategy was endorsed in May 2023 and used to inform rounds of Sports grants allowing sporting groups to apply for funding to support improvements at Council owned or managed sporting facilities. The Strategy supports the continued development of sporting infrastructure as well as supporting participation across the Local Government Area.

Manage the multi-use criterium cycle track at Lindsay Maynes Park, Unanderra.

The track was opened in late July 2022. The track was developed to support the Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030 and provides a safe space for the community and visitors to cycle on a Criterium Track within the Wollongong Local Government Area.

5.8 Housing choice in the Wollongong Local Government Area is improved, considering population growth, community needs and affordability

Deliver the Council Resolution for Affordable Housing (targeting of commonwealth funding) and Round 3 of the Commonwealth Funded Affordable Housing Grant Program.

The Illawarra Housing Trust has commenced work at Dapto and 'turned the sod' at its Wollongong site to deliver outcomes from Round 1 in the next financial year. Most recent progress includes undertaking a tender process to determine the provider for Round 3 of the Program with a contract executed with Head Start Homes to provide Affordable Housing, Rent to Buy and Empowerment Services.

Finalise the development of the Housing Strategy and commence implementation on initial priorities.

We adopted the Wollongong Housing Strategy in February 2023 and in February 2024 considered the first annual progress report.

A number of implementation actions have been progressed or completed including;

- Development Application fees and development contribution exemptions for Affordable Housing providers, Emergency Housing providers and Accessible Housing providers.
- Approved a Funding Agreement for Head Start Homes for an Affordable Home package.
- The Cleveland Road Local Environment Plan (LEP) amendment (Phase 1) was made, and Phase 2 endorsed to be finalised which has the potential for 3,000 residential lots.
- Exhibition of the draft Affordable Housing Policy and Procedures.
- Progression of a Planning Proposal to facilitate appropriate development outcomes on larger residential lots in the Illawarra Escarpment foothills.

Council responded to State Government planning policy changes, including the introduction of Affordable Housing bonuses, Transport Oriented Development and the proposed Low and Mid-Rise Housing initiatives. In June 2024, the State Government released an aspirational 5-year Housing Target for Wollongong of 9,200 dwellings which represents a significant increase from the number of dwellings produced in the previous 5-year period.

5.9 Integrated services are provided to residents in need of urgent shelter

Explore opportunities to work in partnership with other relevant agencies that provide services for the homeless.

Council continued to work with Housing NSW, Wollongong Homeless Hub and Housing Services, Mental Health Assessment Team and NSW Police to connect people experiencing homelessness with accommodation service providers to meet their needs. We participated as a member of the working group of The Rough Sleeper count conducted in February 2023. Council participated as a member of the working group.

5.10 Partnerships continue to strengthen and achieve a safe, accessible and resilient community

Deliver the Safer Cities: Her Way Wollongong Initiative, in partnership with the community.

This was delivered as a co-design process involving site audits, internal stakeholder meetings, development of design plans and scoping practices. The project resulted in a range of interventions to increase perceptions of safety in Wollongong, Port Kembla and Dapto for women, girls and gender diverse people. This project was made possible by a grant from Transport for NSW.

5.11 Local crime continues to be prevented and levels of crime reduced

Deliver the Community Safety Action Plan 2021-2025.

This was delivered through initiatives such as distributing Graffiti removal kits to the community and working on our Graffiti Removal Program to remove graffiti from non-Council assets. We worked on Graffiti prevention murals with a diverse range of artists on traffic signal boxes. We held the Reclaim the Night events, reviewed Alcohol Free Zones and conducted community safety audits at locations including Edney Laneway, Rawlinson Laneway, Helensburgh Branch Library, and MacCabe Park. Engagement was conducted with women, girls and NSW Police for the Safer Cities: Her Way Project to determine interventions.

5.12 Plan and deliver a safe, accessible, clean and inviting public domain

Develop and deploy 'Places for People' Forward Directions Plan 2022-2036 (Implementation Plan).

In May 2023, Council adopted the 'Places for the Future' - Social Infrastructure Future Directions Plan 2023-2036. In May 2024, we reviewed the implementation phase for the strategy with the results showing all actions were underway with some actions already completed. Actions include: Dapto Ribbonwood, lift replacement design underway for the Wongawilli Community Hall as well as the Bong Bong Community Centre and Library feasibility study to commence next financial year.



Image: Wollongong Botanic Garden

Work with the North Wollongong Surf Life Saving Club to explore storage options.

Council provided a temporary option for consideration by North Wollongong Surf Lifesaving Club for surf boat storage while we investigated a suitable longer-term solution. We have identified this project as part of the 2024-2025 Operational Plan.

Implement recommendations of the Public Toilets Strategy 2019-2029 to improve accessibility.

Council continues to implement recommendations from the Strategy. Bellambi boat ramp public toilets works were completed during 2023-2024.

We worked on amenities at the Lindsay Maynes Criterium Track and Figtree Oval to provide additional and improved accessible toilet facilities.

Manage the Mt Keira Summit Park in accordance with the Plan of Management.

We continue to partner with The Illawarra Aboriginal Land Council at Djeera/Mt Keira Summit Park. Botanic Garden nursery staff provide plant expertise to support on site vegetation works.

Goal 5 | Community Indicators

Wollongong continues to strive for a healthy, active, and liveable community. Results indicate a high proportion of residents who feel their neighborhoods are good places to live, with positive scores for safety and satisfaction with local sports and recreational opportunities.

Indicator	Current	Target	Baseline
Proportion of residents who agree they have enough opportunity in local area to participate in sport and recreational activities	4.10	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.20 ⁹
Proportion of residents who participate in a sport or recreational activity	65%	Increase	59% ⁹
Proportion of residents who agree their neighbourhood is a good place to live	4.50	Continue investing in recreational facilities and programs	4.40 ⁹
Proportion of residents satisfied with access to affordable fresh food	3.70	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.20 ⁹
Wollongong City's (Local Government Area) personal wellbeing index	77.6	At least 80 on a scale of 100 by 2028	79.0 ⁹
Proportion of residents who feel safe in their home and in their local area during the day	4.70	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.80 ⁹
Proportion of residents satisfied with access to housing they can afford to rent or buy	2.90	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.10 ⁹

⁹ Source: Wollongong Local Government Area Wellbeing Survey 2021

Future Opportunities

Increasing Demand for Recreation Facilities and Assets

Wollongong is the third largest city in New South Wales and the tenth largest city in Australia, with a predicted population increase of 14.47% from 2021 to 2036, representing an additional 32,203 people in the area. Given this anticipated increase, the supply and effective management of quality sports and active recreation facilities including pools, will be essential to support the delivery of community sport and active recreation opportunities across the city. In 2024, 'the proportion of residents who agree they have enough opportunity in the local area to participate in sport and recreational activities' was 4.1/5 and above the target of 3.75/5 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024). While the Wollongong Local Government Area has many open spaces and sports facilities, the following challenges and opportunities relate to sport and recreation in the Wollongong Area into the future -

- Ongoing sports facility and sportsground maintenance costs of sportsgrounds, ocean pools, public free and heated pools
- Provision of fully inclusive and gender equitable amenities, which cater to the needs of all participants (also an opportunity)
- Planning for the availability of land for new sportsgrounds is limited to the West Dapto area (also an opportunity)
- Climate adaptation and responding to the impacts of significant weather events
- Expectations associated with Council's involvement in pathways to support elite sports development
- Escalating costs of sports infrastructure.

There is opportunity to plan for the future recreation needs of the community-

- Provide a diverse range of sustainable, functional and flexible infrastructure that supports active, safe and inclusive participation in sport and recreation across the city

- Provide quality, playing surface that will be available for future communities, and able to be adapted to changing recreation needs
- There are opportunities through partnerships and external grant funding opportunities to support community sport.

Ageing Population

The Wollongong Local Government Area, as in most parts of the world, is experiencing major population changes due to declining birth rates and increasing life expectancies. Between 2021 and 2031, the age structure forecasts for Wollongong City Council indicate a 7.4% increase in population under working age, and in contrast a 22.6% increase in population of retirement age and 9.3% increase in population of working age (Source: ID Community Profile, 2024).

Seniors are a significant and growing part of local communities. This demographic trend will lead to new opportunities and challenges in local government. By considering the issues now, government and the industry can work to possibly minimise the negative impacts of an ageing population on local communities and maximise the opportunities it presents.

One of the current challenges facing government and the aged care industry is the residential aged care shortages across the Illawarra and Shoalhaven. A new funding agreement between the NSW Government and the Commonwealth will enable additional beds in the Illawarra Shoalhaven to open under the Transitional Aged Care Program. Council is working with the regional Bed Block Taskforce to better understand this issue.

The Australian Local Government Association has pointed out that local government can lead by example in promoting the positives of an ageing population, for example, by recognising older volunteers and carers and through policies and practices that are aimed at attracting and retaining mature workers. This may assist councils address skills shortages.

Housing

Linked to urban development, housing affordability continues to be a topical issue as a consequence of increased house and land prices, higher interest rates, available land supply and infrastructure costs. The proportion of residents satisfied with access to housing they can afford to rent or buy has declined from 3.1/5 in 2022 to 2.9/5 in 2024 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024) and lower than the baseline of 3.1/5 recorded in 2022. While Council does not directly control the affordability of housing stock, it does have a role in planning for housing stock through planning policies and development assessment processes.

To increase housing supply, Council has:

- Rezoned land at Cleveland Road West Dapto capable of supporting an additional 3,000 dwellings
- Rezoned the former Corrimal Coke Works site, which is capable of supporting some 550 dwellings. Council has also approved a Planning Agreement for the provision of 6.5% Affordable Housing to be provided on-site
- Rezoned the former Port Kembla School Site, which is capable of supporting some 110 dwellings. Council has also approved a Planning Agreement for the provision of 5% Affordable Housing to be provided on-site
- Rezoned part of the Wilga Street, Corrimal block to enable retail and shop top housing outcomes
- Approved Neighbourhood Plans for urban development at West Dapto
- Improved development assessment processing timeframes for subdivisions and residential development
- Reviewed State Government housing proposals
- Reviewing planning controls to increase sustainability measures.

Council's endorsed housing strategy addresses the full housing continuum. It includes strategies to assist people who require assistance and talks about working closely with housing and homeless service providers. Strategies to address homelessness, social housing, accessible housing and affordable housing include advocacy, concessions on fees and development contributions, affordable housing targets and introduction of an affordable housing contributions scheme.

To encourage additional Affordable Rental Housing, Council has:

- Waived development application fees and development contributions for not-for-profit Community Housing Providers, as well as for Emergency and Accessible Housing providers
- Adopted an Affordable Housing Policy and Procedures
- Approved Planning Agreements for the provision of Affordable Housing at the former Corrimal Coke Works site and former Port Kembla School site
- Resolved to include the Affordable Housing clause in the Wollongong Local Environmental Plan 2009
- Set a target of 10% Affordable Rental Housing floor space for residential rezonings and for larger residential developments, the latter being introduced gradually to allow the market to adjust.
- Commenced the preparation of a draft Affordable Housing Development Contributions Scheme
- Supporting the State Government affordable housing initiatives.

Council is working with Homes NSW on initiatives to increase the amount of Social Housing and renewal of older social housing stock. In addition, the NSW Government has recently announced a series of measures to increase the provision of Affordable Housing through amendments to the Housing State Environmental Planning Policy 2021.

It will take time to increase the amount of available Affordable Housing and more initiatives and actions will be required. A whole-of-government approach and collaboration with industry and community housing providers is required to build capacity, facilitate partnerships and address challenges relating to the supply of diverse and affordable housing.

Council is also upgrading infrastructure and planting trees to improve the amenity of towns and suburbs and increase shade. Council is also reviewing planning controls for Town Centres and Industrial/Employment zones to ensure that there continues to be local job opportunities and services for residents.

Safety

Safety and perception of safety is a key indicator of liveability. In 2024, the 'proportion of residents who feel safe in their home and in their local area during the day' scored 4.7/5 and well about the target of 3.75/5 (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024). While this indicates residents feel safe in their local area, there are other statistics and reports that indicate the need for a continued focus on safety that are impacting our community.

Domestic or family violence is a leading driver of homelessness for women and children and continues to be an ongoing issue in our region. Council supports and advocates for local services that provide frontline services to victims through Illawarra Committee Against Domestic Violence.

Women's Safety in public places is an area for improvement. Transport for NSW found that majority (64%) of the women surveyed from the Wollongong LGA said that they feel 'Not so safe' or 'Not at all safe' after dark. Council has been working on the Safer Cities Her Way Project to create safer places for women in our city through infrastructure improvements such as enhanced public lighting.

Property crime is increasing, especially for stolen motor vehicles which leads to fraud and break and enters. Police have advised that approximately 90% of these crimes are a result of unlocked cars. The majority of crimes are under-reported by our community and promotion of safety information and reporting will be rolled out by Council.

Wollongong City Council partners with the Wollongong Local Area Police to promote positive behaviours and address areas of safety and crime through policy and planning, and regulation where required.



Image: Illawarra Cycle Club,
Sea Cliff Bridge

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan

Goal 6 | We have affordable and accessible transport

Objectives

There is an increase in sustainable transport use including public transport, walking, and cycling.

Transport links and connection to Sydney, the South Coast and Southern Highlands are strengthened.

The community have access to a safe, affordable and reliable transport network.

How will we get there?

6.1 Plan for the delivery of multi-modal public transport together with sustainable transport modes such as the Gong Shuttle, walking and cycling to meet the community's needs.

6.2 Wollongong continues to build infrastructure and programs to fulfill its role as a UCI Bike City.

6.3 Effective and integrated regional transport with a focus on road, bus, rail and freight movement (including the port of Port Kembla).

6.4 Plan and provide sustainable infrastructure for safe and liveable places integrated with the environment and accessible to key transport routes.

6.5 Advocate for strong transport links within the Local Government Area and connections to Sydney, the South Coast, and the Southern Highlands to provide physical and economic opportunities.

6.6 Improve active transport links and connectivity to our unique places and spaces, including marine access along the Local Government Area and accessibility from the Central Business District to the foreshore.

6.7 Maintain the service levels of our roads, footpaths and cycleways to an acceptable standard.

6.8 Community transport options for frail older people, people with disabilities and the transport disadvantaged are actively promoted and available.



Image: e scooter

Key Highlights

Wollongong E-scooter trial commenced on 29 September 2023 with over 141,000 trips taken and a total distance travelled of over 277,000kms.

Work progressed on Cycling Network Plan and Program which is delivering on multiple actions of the Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030.

Work commenced on the Integrated Transport Strategy plan with a draft exhibited in May 2024.

Received \$11.2 million under the New South Wales Government Regional and Local Roads Repair funding program in 2022-2023.

Established a Safer Routes to School Working Group to find safer ways to school.

Received “Get NSW Active” grant funding for the design of Grand Pacific Walk Headlands Avenue to Coledale Avenue.

Bought four e-bikes now included in our fleet.

Goal 6 | We have affordable and accessible transport

Objectives

There is an increase in sustainable transport use including public transport, walking, and cycling. Transport links and connection to Sydney, the South Coast and Southern Highlands are strengthened. The community have access to a safe, affordable and reliable transport network.

How did we progress?

6.1 Plan for the delivery of multi-modal public transport together with sustainable transport modes such as the Gong Shuttle, walking and cycling to meet the community's needs

Implement a community safety and parking awareness raising programs based on scheduled patrols of schools and identified high risk areas.

Scheduled Council patrols of schools and identified high risk areas saw over 1,439 patrols conducted on school days throughout the period. These efforts have greatly improved community safety and parking awareness in school zones across the Local Government Area. Considerable planning and delivery of parking compliance were undertaken in preparation for the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW event.

Collaborate with the New South Wales Government to fund and deliver the Safer Routes to School Program.

Council has established an internal Safer Route to School Working Group. The Group complete onsite audits, meet with Principals and Parents and Carers to deliver a Safer Routes to School report and action plan. Council's website contains a dedicated Safer Routes to School page to deliver proactive messaging and outcomes of the program. We continue to work with the 80+ schools in our Local Government Area, to establish a plan that considers the school's and Council's priorities, and then making recommendations for improvements in the short, medium and long term. Some of the facilities and infrastructure we might look at include signs, line marking, paths, crossings, pedestrian islands, and links between schools and public transport unique to each school. Having these action plans will also help us work with other stakeholders like Transport for NSW and may assist in applying for grant funding as opportunities become available for high priority recommendations.

6.2 Wollongong continues to build infrastructure and programs to fulfill its role as a UCI Bike City

Implement actions from the Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030.

The Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030 was adopted on 16 November 2020. The development of the four year Infrastructure Delivery Program incorporates the initial implementation of the strategy.

In conjunction with the Local Organising Committee, Council was heavily involved in the planning and delivery of the 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW event which raised the profile of cycling in the city.

In addition to this during the period the following occurred:

- Progressed a Cycling Network Plan and Program which is delivering on multiple actions of the Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030. A final draft is anticipated to be finalised by end of 2024.
- Opened Illawarra Criterium Track at Unanderra and the bike skills park at Cringila Hills Mountain Bike Park.
- Reviewed and completed our cycling maps and delivery of CBD popup cycleway way-finding and cycling route markers from several train stations to the Grand Pacific Walk.
- Continued work on the Wollongong Cycling Network Plan that sets the network for the Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030 commitments of length and access over a 10-year horizon.
- Council was awarded the contract for the Lake Illawarra Active Transport Master Plan. This project is fully funded by the NSW Government Resources for Regions Program.
- Participated in the National Walking and Cycling Participation Survey in 2023.
- Purchased four e-bikes in 2022-2023 included within Council's fleet.
- Successful in receiving grant funding with Get NSW Active grant funding for the design of Grand Pacific Walk, Headlands Avenue to Coledale Avenue.

6.3 Effective and integrated regional transport with a focus on road, bus, rail and freight movement (including the port of Port Kembla)

Develop and implement the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS).

The Integrated Transport Strategy project commenced with stakeholder workshops held in late 2023. On 8 April 2024, Council resolved to place the Draft Integrated Transport Strategy on public exhibition for community input. The exhibition period ran from 30 April to 27 May 2024 with review of feedback underway. The new Council will be briefed on feedback received and proposed amendments.

6.4 Plan and provide sustainable infrastructure for safe and liveable places integrated with the environment and accessible to key transport routes

Work with key agencies and partners to progress the Illawarra Regional Transport Plan.

The Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan was released on 11 August 2021. A large number (46 of 71) initiatives proposed in the plan are of benefit to the Wollongong Local Government Area.

We have been working towards strategic alignment with our key transport projects and Transport for New South Wales committed projects. We are a key stakeholder with Transport for New South Wales, Wollongong Station Master Plan Precinct Plan. We continue to seek information on timing of Transport for New South Wales Illawarra Public Transport Services Plan and the future Transport Strategy as these are two key pieces of work from the Regional Transport Plan.

Three major Transport for New South Wales initiatives commenced in 2023-2024 being Mount Ousley Interchange, M1 South facing ramps (Dapto), and Bulli Bypass.

We continue to encourage Transport for New South Wales to actively engage on traffic and transport solutions for increased congestion in the Northern Suburbs and hosted two multi agency round tables.

We have initiated a Regional Transport Plan quarterly meeting with Transport for New South Wales to ensure the delivery of the regional transport plan initiatives. These meetings are an opportunity to have local priorities within our Community Strategic Plan 2032 delivered through the initiatives of the regional transport plan.

We attend Workshops and Project Working Groups relating to the Mount Ousley Interchange, M1 South facing ramps, Strategic Cycling Corridors networks project and Strategic Merit Test (SMT) for the Bulli Bypass Project.

6.5 Advocate for strong transport links within the Local Government Area and connections to Sydney, the South Coast, and the Southern Highlands to provide physical and economic opportunities

Advocate for the provision of expanded public transport services and support the provision of existing services

We continue to liaise with Transport for NSW on plans to support access to public transport, primarily the rail network. We continue to advocate for expanded services, including urban release areas of West Dapto.

6.6 Improve active transport links and connectivity to our unique places and spaces, including marine access along the Local Government Area and accessibility from the Central Business District to the foreshore

Develop road safety programs, education and promotion of sustainable multimodal transport options.

The Wollongong E-scooter trial commenced on 29 September 2023 offering the community a smart and sustainable transport option around several areas of the Wollongong Local Government Area. Over 141,000 trips have been taken with a total distance travelled of over 277,000 kilometres (as at 18 June 2024).

We participated in Road Safety Week in 2024 and turned the Wollongong Lighthouse yellow to promote road safety across the City. We presented strategic and community assistance to Refugee Families group to build capacity among multicultural communities of Wollongong with road safety advice and messages, guidance, and support. An 'All Ages Bike Skills Workshop' was held in February 2024 with over 150 people attend.

We held several road safety events including: Driver Licencing Access Program (DLAP) for culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups including a Graduation; helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers via online workshops for parents, carers and supervising learner drivers; Learner Driver Log Book Runs; School Fence Banner Program with 26 schools participating in the program; Festival of Cycling (Ride Wollongong); Pedestrian Safety with CALD groups - Middle Eastern nationality (Arabic) Tour of library, morning tea and pedestrian safety presentation of road rules and staying safe around the road environment and engaged with Ride Nation to provide safe cycling activity for preschoolers before starting school.

6.7 Maintain the service levels of our roads, footpaths and cycleways to an acceptable standard.

Explore funding for the design and implementation of tactile and braille street signage to support navigation and wayfinding throughout our city.

Council staff are continuing to explore potential grant funding for the design and implementation of tactile and braille street signage on Transport for NSW assets, to support navigation and wayfinding. Council has commenced investigations into further standardising of its wayfinding around the Wollongong Local Government Area. The design and implementation of tactile and braille street signage on Council assets to support navigation and wayfinding will form part of these investigations

Progressively implement the Asset Management Improvement Program.

Council prioritised the actions identified in our Asset Management Strategy and Plans with a focus on improving data confidence and documentation of processes and structures. Our current improvement plan includes a total of 25 actions against the three focus areas of Strong Leadership; Informed Decision Making; and Robust Systems and Processes.

Significant progress has been made on implementing all actions on the Improvement Program. Several actions have been addressed

as part of the review of the comprehensive Asset Management Plan. A revised Improvement Plan, reflecting the current challenges and opportunities, has been included in the review of the Asset Management Plan. An Improvement Plan reinforces good asset management practice continues to evolve and improve over time.

Seek external funding to support core services that Council provides in the Infrastructure Delivery Program.

We applied for external funding to support the delivery of several key projects within the Infrastructure Delivery Program. More than \$41.5 million of funding in 2023-2024 was applied for supporting the delivery of projects across the city, including; Southern Suburbs Community Centre and Library, North Wollongong Seawall Renewal Project (Stage 2), Darkes Sporting and Community Hub (Stages 1 and 2), Thomas Gibson Park Sporting Amenities and Ursula Rd Flood Mitigation Scheme. We were successful in being awarded \$19.1 million worth of infrastructure grant funding; the largest of these being \$9 million towards Stage 1 of the Darkes Road Sporting and Community Hub project and \$4 million towards Stage 2 of the North Wollongong Beach Seawall Project. Council was notified in May 2024, the application for \$15 million in funding under the Growing Regions Economies Fund Program for the Southern Suburbs Community Centre and Library, was unsuccessful.

Develop and regularly review Asset Management Plans to include latest methodology, asset condition and performance data to ensure appropriate investment in Council's asset base.

A comprehensive review was completed throughout 2023-2024 and an Asset Management Plan covering all assets drafted. The draft Plan considers future demands, challenges and risks that influence decisions regarding investment over the lifecycle of assets. The Plan includes over 180,000 assets across transport, stormwater and floodplain, open space and recreation, buildings, property, plant and equipment, the library collection, information management and technology and the extensive artwork collection. The exhibition and adoption of the plan will be coordinated with the review of the Resourcing Strategy during 2024-2025.

Overall highlights included:

- The completion of a program for asset class revaluation that aligns with audit requirements.
- The completion of a draft Asset Management Plan covering all of Council's major infrastructure asset classes, including roads, pathways, stormwater, buildings and pools infrastructure.
- Required investment across a 10 year planning horizon to maintain levels of service to the community.



Image: Community Transport

- Forecast growth in assets within the asset class – largely driven by development of the West Dapto Urban Release Area.
- Review of asset useful lives – a key driver of annual depreciation. The draft AMP identifies that Council has historically applied particularly conservative useful lives to some asset classes.
- Review of asset classification structure (an action from Asset Management Strategy 2022 in and of itself).
- Roles and responsibilities across the asset lifecycle (an action from Asset Management Strategy 2022 in and of itself).
- An asset class specific improvement program and an improvement program to globally improve Council's asset management practices.

6.8 Community transport options for frail older people, people with disabilities and the transport disadvantaged are actively promoted and available.

Deliver the Community Transport Services Program across the Wollongong and Shellharbour Local Government Areas.

Community transport services continued to focus on activities to increase the number of trips delivered to the community with a focus on rebuilding its customer base post COVID-19. We introduced new bus trip options to connect older people with social events and outings including Merrigong Theatre's Music in the Morning concerts, trips to the Sea Cliff bridge and ten pin bowling.

We focused on reconnecting with the local Aboriginal community by engaging with local Elders, Aboriginal specific community groups and service providers who work closely with the Aboriginal Community in Wollongong and Shellharbour to promote access. We delivered a cultural awareness information session for staff and volunteers to assist us in delivering culturally responsive and safe services to the community. The trips provided to our community during the period was over 94,000 trips .

Develop and deliver a marketing strategy for community transport.

The strategy was developed and included delivery of promotional activities such as online event listings, social media, radio advertising, newsletters and media releases. Promotion and uptake of subsidised bus hire for other community organisations ensured support to diverse community groups.

Investigate options for alternative service delivery models for Community Transport, in response to Commonwealth and NSW Government policy.

The Commonwealth Government continues to implement reform of the aged care sector in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care. However, final details of the new funding and service model for the community care sector have not been released. Delays in new Aged Care Act beyond 1 July 2024 has meant delays in the release of relevant information about the new Support at Home model for community transport. Council did however, accept the extension of the current funding contract until June 2024, with a further extension to 30 June 2025.



Image: Family at Coniston Village Shops on a shared pathway



*Image: Grand Pacific Walk
Sea Cliff Bridge*

Goal 6 | Community Indicators

Wollongong is making progress in supporting accessible and affordable transport, with residents increasingly using non-car transport options such as walking and train services. However, satisfaction with public transport services and the availability of footpaths and cycleways suggests there are opportunities for further improvement.

Indicator	Current	Target	Baseline
Proportion of residents satisfied with access to public transport	3.80	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.00 ⁹
Proportion of residents satisfied with their ability to access private or public transport to meet their mobility needs	4.00	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	4.10 ⁹
Percent of residents who use non-car transport options to undertake various activities	25% Walk; 7% Train; 7% Bus; 2% Shuttle; 3% Bike	Increase	New Measure
Proportion of residents satisfied with public transport	3.60	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.70 ⁹
Proportion of residents satisfied with availability of footpaths, cycleways, and shared-use paths	3.60	At least 3.75 on a scale of 5.00	3.70 ⁵

⁵ Source: Wollongong City Council Community Satisfaction Survey 2021

⁹ Source: Wollongong Local Government Area Wellbeing Survey 2021

Future Opportunities

Transport

Wollongong's topography, existing public transport provisions as well as established driving habits, are significant challenges when it comes to transport. These challenges have been identified through feedback from our community, targeted stakeholder engagement and analysis of the existing transport network, industry operations and travel behaviour (Integrated Transport Strategy 2024).

The proportion of residents who are satisfied with availability of footpaths, cycle ways and shared use paths was 3.6/5 in 2024 down from 3.7/5 in 2022. Further, Roads and Traffic (41%), Footpaths and cycleways (24%) and Parking (23%) were identified requiring improvement in the 2023 Community Satisfaction Survey. Conversely, residents reported a high satisfaction score of 4/5 for their ability to access private or public transport to meet their mobility needs (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024).

There is an opportunity to promote active and multi-modal transport with a low percentage of residents using active or public transport. In 2024, the percent of residents who use non-car transport options to undertake a variety of activities including work, shopping, school, dining out, socialising' were walk (25%); train (7%) bus (7%); shuttle (2%); and bike (3%) (Source: Wellbeing Survey 2024).

Planning for sustainable development of the transport system to support growth across the Local Government Area is an ongoing challenge for the Wollongong Local Government Area. Several plans at local and state government levels have been developed to guide transport and connectivity investment. Council will need to develop high functioning public domain and social infrastructure to support the increased demand around transport orientated development areas.

Effective collaboration and advocacy when working with the NSW Government will be critical to securing the public, active and general transport enhancements including key infrastructure and services. Community perceptions and behaviour contribute significantly to transport outcomes; continued investment in road user education and promotion programs will be needed to help achieve the community's goal for accessible and affordable transport. Council is looking to the State Government to meet its commitment to invest in public transport infrastructure and services to support its ambitious housing policies and Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan (IS RTP).

In the IS RTP, the State Government commits to providing more reliable, high-capacity rail services by:

- Increasing peak services between Wollongong and Sydney to every 15 minutes and every 30 minutes during off peak periods
- increasing from 8 to 10 carriages
- increasing the number of commuter train stations



The relationship between the Community Strategic Plan and other Strategies and Plans



Image: Knitting Nannas at Wollongong City Library

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Global Goals)

The Global Goals were agreed and adopted by the United Nations member states, including Australia, in September 2015 as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Seventeen Goals underpinned by 169 targets will guide efforts to increase global well-being by addressing some of society's key challenges.

As the goals relate to the global environment, some of the issues that are explored are not as relevant to Wollongong as they are to developing

countries. There are other goals, such as Sustainable Cities and Communities that are very relevant to Local Government, and focus on urban planning and accessible transport.

Each of the Global Goals have been considered in the preparation of the Plan, and where there is alignment, the Global Goals have been mapped to each strategy in the Community Strategic Plan, and linked to our local goals below.

Our Wollongong Our Future Goals												
We value and protect our environment			6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION 	7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION 	13 CLIMATE ACTION 	14 LIFE BELOW WATER 	15 LIFE ON LAND 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 		
We have an innovative and sustainable economy					1 NO POVERTY 	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	13 CLIMATE ACTION 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 		
Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city					5 GENDER EQUALITY 	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 		
We are a connected and engaged community				4 QUALITY EDUCATION 	5 GENDER EQUALITY 	8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH 	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 		
We are a healthy community in a liveable city			1 NO POVERTY 	2 ZERO HUNGER 	3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	5 GENDER EQUALITY 	10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	14 LIFE BELOW WATER 	15 LIFE ON LAND 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	
We have affordable and accessible transport							3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING 	9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE 	11 SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES 	13 CLIMATE ACTION 	17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	



Image: Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony,
Viva la Gong Festival, Wollongong

 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS
17 GOALS TO TRANSFORM OUR WORLD





Image: FOGO Food Organics Garden
Organics Campaign

State and Regional Plans

There are a number of state strategies and plans that Council works towards and these documents have been considered in the development of Our Wollongong Our Future 2032.

These include the Premier's Priorities, Future Transport 2056 (2020), Building Momentum - NSW State Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2042, NSW 2040 Economic Blueprint, Net zero plan stage 1 2020-2030, Illawarra Shoalhaven Regional Plan 2041, Illawarra Shoalhaven Transport Plan 2056, Illawarra-Shoalhaven Regional Transport Plan, Ageing Well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021-2031 and the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation Statement of Regional Priorities to name a few.

There are several key projects Council is working toward that align with state priorities. Some of these include:

- Infrastructure and access planning
- Climate Change - State zero emissions
- Clean Energy
- Coastal Management Program for the Open Coast
- Affordable Housing
- Plans of Management for Crown Reserves
- Floodplain Planning



Image: Wollongong Botanic Garden

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 Community Strategic Plan Planning Principles

Our Wollongong Our Future 2032 is underpinned by the Social Justice Principles of equity, access, participation and rights. These principles are our community's 'rights to the city' and are reflected throughout this document via the provision of infrastructure, recognition of our diverse population, and through democratic and effective governance.

These principles have also been applied in the development of the Delivery Program and Operational Plan.

Our Community Engagement Policy outlines Council's commitments and principles for engaging with our community. In developing the Community Strategic Plan, we wanted to push our engagement goals further than we have before and aimed to:

Increase the accessibility of our engagement

Use Plain English, Easy English, translated materials and various engagement methods.

Increase the diversity participants

Use methods to reach people with disability, Aboriginal people, CALD, LGBTQIA + community, the homeless, young people and children.

Understand the aspirations of our community

Undertake meaningful engagement, ask purposeful questions and use methods to ascertain the vision our community has for Wollongong.

Create a memorable, innovative campaign

Use new and creative approaches to spark interest and engage with our community.



Long Term Financial Plan - Progress Report 2024

Introduction

Wollongong City Council is committed to the principles of financial sustainability and sound financial management. Council will use ratepayers' money, together with other available funding sources, wisely to provide prioritised services, improve long-term financial sustainability and manage Council's \$7.03B of assets.

The 2022-2024 term of Council initially marked the beginning of a new journey for financial sustainability. The financial objectives of the **Securing Our Future** program had been achieved and Council well placed for its long term financial stability.

Council adopted the current Financial Strategy in 2021. The Strategy recognised that Council had reached its targets for financial sustainability and made commitment to maintain that position. In late 2022, global and Australian economic conditions became unstable, resulting in high inflation and supply shortages for employees, contractors and materials. As a result, long term financial sustainability is more challenging as the cost of delivering Council services and maintaining long lived infrastructure has dramatically increased while revenue generated by rates have not increased at a proportionate level. The recorded value of Council assets has substantially increased, indicating a higher cost of renewal in the long term and an immediate increase in operational depreciation reported by Council.

Council is responding to these factors by restraining costs where appropriate, delaying some works where reasonable value could not be achieved, utilisation of existing reserves, and obtaining additional funding from other levels of government. During this time, Council has been able to broadly maintain its short to medium term financial strength and has continued to exceed expectations in certain areas allowing some savings to be retained as restricted assets.

Financial Strategy

Financial sustainability has been defined where the planned, long term service and infrastructure levels of Council cannot be met without unplanned increases in rates or disruptive changes to services. Sound financial management requires a deep understanding of the short and long term financial impacts of decisions – past, present and emerging. It requires careful consideration of potential impact of external influences on decisions of Council that may impact on the long term financial sustainability of Council.

The Council's Financial Strategy sets the parameters Council must act within to provide financial stability, affordability, focus and efficiency (value for money), over the short, medium and longer terms. Key performance indicators are identified in the Financial Strategy and are supported by clear targets to allow continuous measurement of financial sustainability. The Financial Strategy is reviewed on an ongoing basis and targets modified over time to reflect Council's financial sustainability, maturity, evolution and to respond to crisis and external influences.

The current Financial Strategy has clear objectives with the following outcomes noted at 30 June 2024:

Indicator	Objective	Progress on indicator
Available Funds	Council will aim to maintain Available Funds between 3.5% and 5.5% of Income from Continuing Operations (pre-capital).	Exceed high limit primarily due early payment of 2025 Financial Assistance Grant.
Operating Result surplus	Council will plan to maintain a small Operating Result surplus (average over three years) in the future.	Council's Financial Strategy requires new actions to achieve long term financial sustainability that will maintain existing levels of service into the future without abnormal rate and pricing impost. There are goals and tasks included in the current Operational Plan that aim to improve the capacity of the organisation to respond to increases in service cost and demand. This work will be carried out over the next year and will lead to an updated Financial Strategy in the next planning cycle, inclusive of actions that provide for long term financial sustainability.
Budget Allocation	Council's annual allocations to Operating and Capital Budgets will generally not exceed anticipated cash inflows. Where the Available Funds level is above minimum requirements, additional funds will be transferred to the Strategic Projects Restricted Asset and consideration given to the allocation of funds through the Strategic Planning process.	Achieved, however, as noted above, the 2024-2025 Budget is under allocated due to early cash receipt of 2025 Financial Assistance Grant.

Funds Available from Operations	Council will plan for Funds Available from Operations to at least equal depreciation.	Council's Financial Strategy requires new actions to achieve long term financial sustainability that will maintain existing levels of service into the future without abnormal rate and pricing impost. There are goals and tasks included in the current Operational Plan that aim to improve the capacity of the organisation to respond to increases in service cost and demand. This work will be carried out over the next year and will lead to an updated Financial Strategy in the next planning cycle, inclusive of actions that provide for long term financial sustainability.
Whole of life costs	In determining the approval of budget for additional or enhanced assets, Council will ensure that the whole of life cost is considered and is able to be sustainably accommodated within future forecasts.	Achieved and Ongoing.
Debt	Council will actively consider borrowings through its Resource Strategy and Capital Budget as a source to finance timing mismatches between cash availability and expenditure requirements and to provide for intergenerational equity where it is determined to be applicable.	Council continually considers debt as part of its planning process and will continue to do so into the future.

The Journey

While Council's journey to financial sustainability began in 2008, it wasn't until 2012-2013 that Council took an affirmative and holistic approach to building financial sustainability through the Securing Our Future program.

At the beginning of 2012-2013 Council's short to medium term financial capacity was very sound; however, the long-term path was not sustainable. A financial sustainability program, Securing Our Future, was established and was aimed at securing Council's long term prospects through deliberate actions and cost saving initiatives. Long term financial sustainability was recorded as being achieved during 2021-2022, with the long term financial model illustrating 10 years of forecast surplus in accordance with Council's adopted Financial Strategy. This position has been significantly deteriorated since the adoption of the 2022-2023 Operational Plan primarily by two factors negatively impacting the operating result; increased depreciation resulting from asset valuations since June 2022, and a gap in revenues generated from Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal of New South Wales (IPART) restrained rate increases and the introduction of a new rate peg methodology.

Impact of asset revaluations

Council's approach to asset valuation is based on existing asset management plans and accounting estimates that are currently being tested through a substantial review of Council's Asset Management Plans. In the last few financial years, asset valuations, which are reflective of future costs to renew, have negatively impacted Council's Key Financial Performance Indicators (KPIs). This does not impact the deliverability of the current Delivery Program, although rising costs and future asset renewals will need to be addressed in the medium term to ensure continued financial sustainability. Council's ability to increase services, service levels, or manage the increased cost of asset renewal, will remain limited in the short term.

Council's Transport and Stormwater asset classes were comprehensively revalued at the end of 2022 resulting in a significant increase in asset values of \$643M and a \$20.5M per annum increase in depreciation recorded in the Operating result compared to the long term budget. The increase in depreciation turned the long term surpluses into annualised deficits, deteriorated by the value of depreciation.

The increase in asset values in 2022 was driven by external market forces, with materials and labour in short supply negatively impacting on the cost of delivering capital projects across the economy. Increases in asset costs have continued since 2022 with Council continuing to revalue its long-lived assets annually. Council continued to complete indexation on all major asset classes in 2023 to reflect the material movement in these costs that led to an increase in the carrying value of assets of approximately \$287M. Comprehensive revaluations were completed on Council's building and other structure asset classes, with indexation adjustments made to asset classes deemed to have moved materially over the year, which resulted in Council recording an increase in asset costs of \$328M.

The above movements in asset values saw Council record \$1.26B in revaluations resulting in the gross replacement costs of Council's assets exceeding \$7.03B and a carrying value of \$4.06B.

Council has been responsive to the continuing elevation of capital illustrated through the forecast deficits deteriorating less than the increases in depreciation expense each year (see Figure 2). While asset costs are represented as the primary cause of changes to the underlying financial sustainability of Council, the issue is caused by the mismatch between revenue, primarily rates and the cost of managing those assets to provide the continuing services levels agreed.

Impact of Rating Revenue Increases vs Depreciation Expense

Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal updated the Rate Peg methodology in 2023-2024 to reflect current economic conditions, including:

- Consumer Price Index
- Producer Price Index
- Wages
- Superannuation guarantee
- Emergency Services Levy changes

However, the 2023-2024 Rate Cap was based on outdated indices (July 2021 to June 2022), which didn't account for the high inflation of 2022-2023. This created a substantial gap in Council's rating income when it was introduced that negatively impacting long term financial sustainability.

In essence, the updated Rate Peg methodology is more accurate, but its implementation missed the high inflation period, causing financial challenges for Council. The subsequent increases in rating income have been far outpaced by the increases in depreciation expenses experienced from Council's increasing replacement cost of its long-lived asset. The following graph highlights the continuing growing gap between Rates Growth and Depreciation Expense.

Based on the presented estimates and assumptions, Council's position will be responsibly managed with actions in place to control spending to offset some of the short term rates shortfall. Further actions are being developed to address longer term asset management and lifecycle cost issues. It is considered that options are available to review the asset management assumptions and life cycle cost estimates to better reflect optimised practices available for some asset classes. It is also acknowledged that in line with increasing values, additional revenue may be required to maintain assets in future periods.

On the positive side, Council has continued to obtain State and Australian Government funding. Some of which is related to disaster recovery (primarily flooding) and some related to planned new and enhanced infrastructure that improve service and reduce reliance on Council's own funds for construction. This funding is now a vital part of balancing the Financial Plan for the next two years of the Delivery Program and has required some rephasing of the Infrastructure Delivery Program over the term of the Plan.

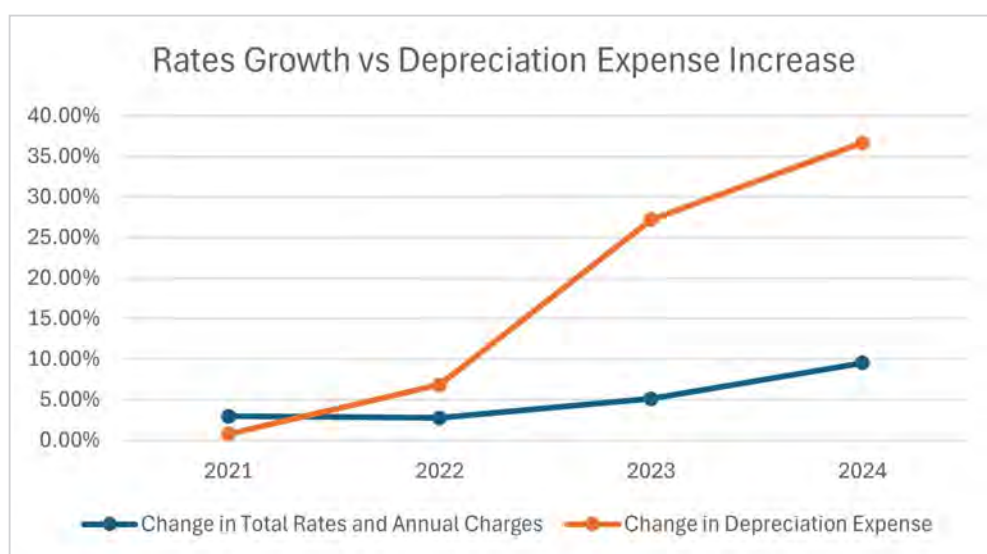


Figure 1: Rates Growth vs Depreciation Expense Increases

Financial Key Performance Indicators

Operating Result [pre capital]

Council's Financial Strategy targets a small operational surplus [pre capital] (average over three years). The Operating Result [pre capital] is one of the main indicators of the long term financial sustainability of Council. The long term nature of Operating Result is often misunderstood by reflection on single year surplus or deficit results that may be impacted by unusual circumstances or events.

In broad terms, a deficit from operations over time indicates that Council is not earning sufficient revenue to fund its ongoing operations (services) and renewal of assets, which are an integral part of that service when required. This measure should be viewed over the long term as annual results may be impacted by timing.

The graph below illustrates the changing landscape of this indicator between the adoption of the 2022-2023 Operational Plan & 2024-2025 Operational Plan. The 2022-2023 Operational Plan included the increased depreciation from the 2022 Transport and Stormwater asset revaluation and forecasts future deficits of circa \$6.5M to \$11.1M from 2025-2026, averaging \$8.2M deficits to 2031 2032. The 2024 -2025 Operational Plan, over the same period, averages \$16.9M in deficits. The deterioration between the adopted plans results primarily from increases in depreciation expense from the impacts of annual fair value review of Council's long-lived assets. Note the 2024-2025 Operational Plan does not include the impacts of asset revaluations undertaken in 2024 given the timing completion of this work.

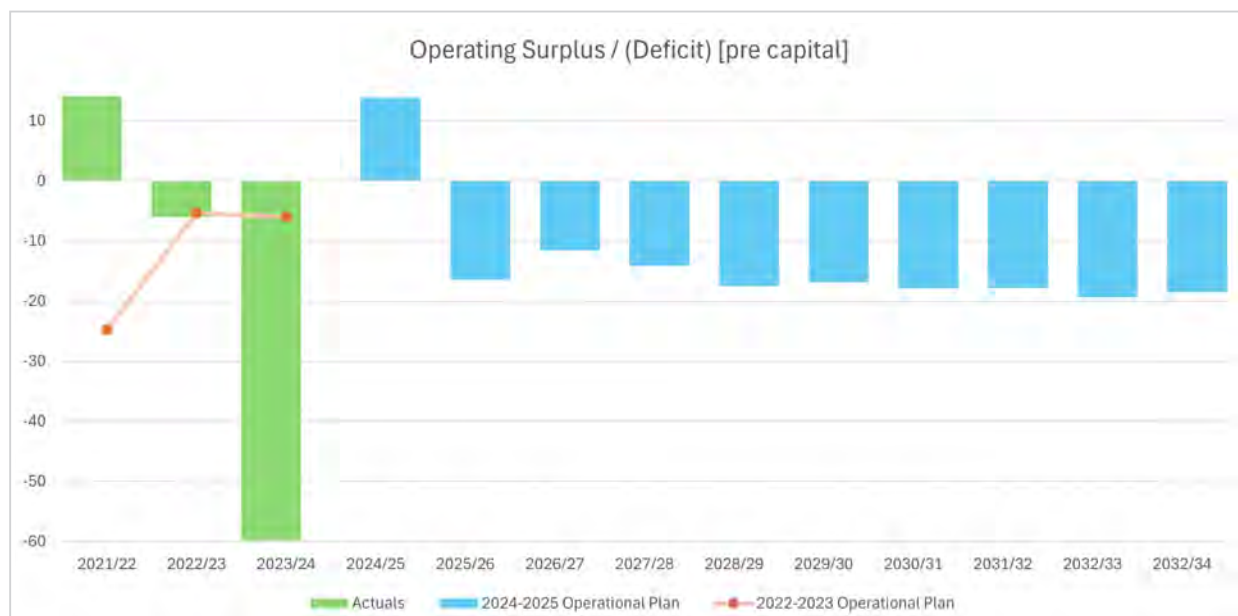


Figure 2: Operating Surplus / (Deficit) [pre capital]

Operational Performance – Funds Available from Operations

This indicator is intended to demonstrate Council's capacity to generate sufficient funds from operations to meet the required level of asset renewal. The depreciation target is effectively used as a proxy for the long term annual funding required to replace Council's assets. It is intended that the current review of the Asset Management Plans will provide an improved maturity that allows refinement of this target. The chart below shows the evolution of financial sustainability and longer term commitment.

The below graph outlines the ongoing deterioration of the indicator relative to increases experienced in annual depreciation. Significant work has been undertaken on renewing Council's Asset Management Plans that will direct long-lived asset maintenance best practices to ensure Council is allocating resources as efficiently and effectively as possible in extending the useful life and appropriately reducing these assets whole of life costs.

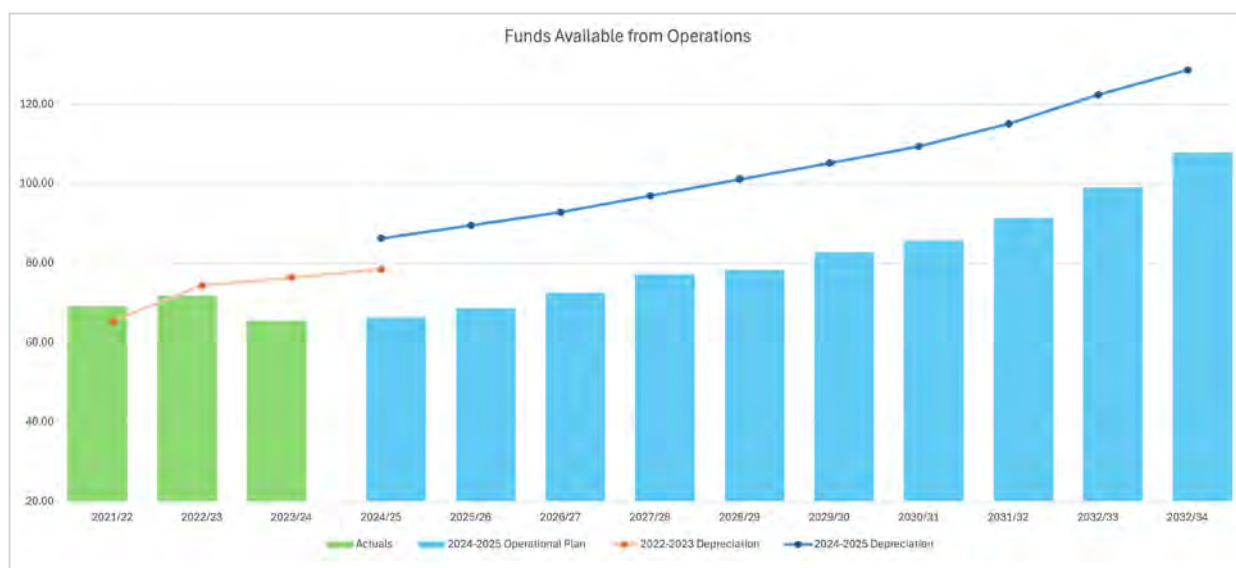


Figure 3: Funds Available from Operations

Available Funds

Available Funds are uncommitted funds of the organisation that assist in meeting short term cash requirements, provide contingency for unexpected costs or loss of revenue and provide flexibility to take advantage of opportunities that may arise from time to time. Council's target for this is between 3.5% and 5.5% of operational revenue (pre capital).



Figure 4: Forecast Available Funds Balance

Debt

At the commencement of this term, Council had subsidised borrowings through the Local Infrastructure Renewal Scheme (LIRS) program that was offered by the NSW Government as incentive to councils to accelerate infrastructure renewal. The LIRS program between 2012 and 2017 had a total value of \$40.5M. These loans have been used to accelerate the City Wide Footpaths, Shared Path Renewal, Missing Links Construction Program, building refurbishment works for a number of Council facilities and to support the West Dapto Access Fowlers Road project. These loans were taken over a 10 year period and will be completed by June 2025. The loan repayments associated with the West Dapto Access Strategy are funded from developer contributions and additional rate revenue from the West Dapto subdivision. Council currently has, and is forecasted, a Debt Service Ratio well below Council's upper limit of 4% outlined in the Financial Strategy.

Challenges and Achievements

Council has commenced a response to its long term financial sustainability impacted by increasing asset valuations and revenue gaps generated through IPART's new rate methodology. These challenges are being managed while remaining focused on balancing the demand for increased service, threats to the cost of providing services and improving the efficiency in the delivery of services. Council also remains focused on significant challenges that have included the West Dapto funding gap.

West Dapto

The West Dapto development is the largest standalone growth area for Wollongong that over a 40 to 60 year period is expected to result in an estimated 19,000 additional dwellings and population increase of 57,400. It is expected that through the nature and size of this development there will be ongoing challenges to be managed over time.

There is community cost and further significant risk associated with the West Dapto development and exposure created through the gap between the IPART approved payments set for developers and the funding required to buy and build the assets directly related to the new development. Council was able to successfully apply for funding under the Local Infrastructure Growth Scheme (LIGS) program to support this gap. The LIGS scheme ended on 30 June 2020. In total Council received \$12M of funding under this scheme. The West Dapto Developer Contribution plan was subject to a review by IPART during May 2020 and the recommendations from this review were incorporated in the revised plan that is no longer subject to State capped contributions.

Capital Program

During the previous term of Council, Council continued to deliver significant projects to the community. There has been focus on balancing the delivery of new assets to the community and ensuring existing assets continue to deliver exceptional amenity through a comprehensive renewal program.

As part of Council's focus on delivering meaningful assets and services to the community, Council delivered the following capital program and service improvements over the last term of Council:

Capital Program	2022	2023	2024
New	60,848	65,158	92,171
Renew	43,769	65,048	64,335
Total Capital Program	104,617	130,206	156,506

Capital Program

- Wollongong's first criterium cycling track, Lindsay Maynes Criterium Track in Unanderra opened late 2022.
- Bike skills track opened at Cringila Hills Recreation Park.
- Completion of Stage 1 - Fred Finch Park Berkeley netball courts.
- Worked on planning for Skate Parks for the Northern Suburbs and Wollongong City Centre.
- Wollongong Art Gallery acquired 147 new art works to the collection.
- In September 2022, Wollongong hosted the Olympic-scale event, 2022 UCI Road World Championships – Wollongong NSW.
- Gained \$11.2M under the New South Wales Government Regional and Local Road Repair funding program in 2022-2023.
- Installed Child Safe signage in Council facilities as part of the Child Safe Implementation Plan.
- Built three new cabins at Windang Tourist Park in partnership with TAFE.
- Secured grant funding for key tourism infrastructure including Illawarra Performing Arts Centre upgrades, Helensburgh Park Multisport Facility upgrades, refurbishment of Fred Finch Netball Courts.

Enhancement to Services and Delivery of Significant Events to the Community

- Enhanced our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Programs by reviewing our Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Policy.
- Delivered the Internal Audit Program and completed 19 internal audits including Customer Service and Complaints Management.
- Delivered a range of youth opportunities including Rainbow League, Girls' Cafe, Dungeons and Dragons, Teenz Connect.
- Partnered with Illawarra Indigenous Business Network to host the first Illawarra Aboriginal Business Expo.
- Consolidated our information technology systems and platforms and implemented the final module in a four year program of the OneCouncil program.
- Delivered the Culture Mix Festival in October 2023 with over 12,000 attendees across the day.
- Held the 'Sculpture in the Garden' exhibition in March and April 2023 attracting over 40,000 visitors.
- Conducted over 180 community engagements on a range of Council projects, policies and plans

including Library Strategy, Hill 60, Mobile Skate Parks and Future West Dapto Centres.

- Grew our social media channel followers to approximately 77,000 followers.
- Adopted a new Climate Change Mitigation Plan 2023-2030 that will drive the implementation of strategies and projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Wollongong.
- Progressed the Underground Petroleum Storage System (UPSS) program and responded to major water pollution incidents.
- Developed Natural Disaster Response and Recovery plans and worked on an Urban Heat Strategy.
- Continued to replace removed trees at the ratio of 2:1 in public areas and 1:1 on private land.
- Adopted the Wollongong Heritage Strategy 2023-2027 and managed many of our significant sites that have State-level heritage significance including North Beach Bathers Pavilion and Kiosk and Gleniffer Brae.
- We revised the Wollongong CBD Nighttime Economy Policy and in 2023-2024, Destination Wollongong reported that Wollongong has surpassed pre-pandemic visitation numbers.
- Delivered city centre and Crown Street Mall activation initiatives and events including SpinFest and the Luminous Festival.
- Wollongong E-scooter trial commenced on 29 September 2023 with over 141,000 trips taken and a total distance travelled of over 277,000 kms.
- Work progressed on Cycling Network Plan and Program which is delivering on multiple actions of the Wollongong Cycling Strategy 2030.
- Work commenced on the Integrated Transport Strategy project with a draft exhibited in May 2024.
- Established a Safer Routes to School Working Group to find safer ways to school.
- Got "Get NSW Active" grant funding for the design of Grand Pacific Walk Headlands Avenue to Coledale Avenue.
- 'Places for the Future' - Social Infrastructure Future Directions Plan 2023-2036 adopted in May.
- Worked on planning for Skate Parks for the Northern Suburbs and Wollongong City Centre.
- Adoption of the Sportsground and Sporting Facilities Strategy 2023-2027 in May 2023.
- Installed Child Safe signage in Council facilities as part of the Child Safe Implementation Plan.
- Physically loaned 1,950,799 library items and 652,964 Audiobook and e-book loans.



Image: Bald Hill Lookout, Stanwell Park



Our Wollongong Our Future

From the mountains to the sea, we value and protect our natural environment and will be leaders in building an educated, creative, sustainable and connected community.

We value and protect our environment

We have an innovative and sustainable economy

Wollongong is a creative, vibrant city

We are a connected and engaged community

We have a healthy community in a liveable city

We have affordable and accessible transport



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