



Lithgow City Council

Prepared by: Micromex Research
Date: 3rd February 2025

Councillor Workshop Report: Informing the 2025 Community Strategic Plan



A community survey was conducted in September 2024 (timed one week after Lithgow Council elections) with N=400 residents to determine community priorities, views on living in the area and support for future projects. Following results Council sought to conduct a workshop with Councillors and Council Staff to discuss findings and future actions.

Objectives:

The session was designed to address three broad themes:

- Where are we now – A summary presentation of the community survey findings with regional NSW benchmarking
- Where do we want to be in 10 years – Guided by the 5 CSP Pillars, community results and discussion amongst Council staff/Councillors about strengths and challenges
- How will we get there – Discussion of Council staff/Councillors of areas of focus to help address the long-term goals guided by community feedback

Sample:

Total of 12 Participants (4 groups of 3 per table)
8 Councillors and 4 Executive Council Staff

Timing:

Workshop held on the evening of Monday 20th January, 6.00pm to 8.30pm

Executive Summary



Snapshot Summary

Key strengths to be supported:

- Sense of community/values
- Natural environment and settings
- Proximity to major population centres
- Livability in terms of affordable housing (comparative to Sydney & other metro areas)

Key challenges to be improved:

- Connectivity to Sydney
- Job prosperity (esp. for youth)
- Greater funding & access to services
- Enhance civic pride

3 Key areas of opportunity and how this positively impacts Lithgow LGA:

1. Get Expressway (Bells Line) and/or Freight to Lithgow LGA
 - To provide greater connectivity East to West and position Lithgow LGA as an employment hub
2. Advocate for a Health Forum
 - To improve serviceability to regional communities that need it most, by forming a working group that talk directly to the providers
3. Attract and spotlight Tourism opportunities
 - To leverage the eco-tourism opportunities of the natural settings, and market existing attractions with improved signage & social media visibility. This then fuels the economy and jobs for the broader community.

How these areas link back to the Community results:

- What residents want prioritised: Economic development, roads, more infrastructure/services/facilities.
- Resident attitudes these 'signature projects' address:
 - 71% disagree there is sufficient planning for local economic growth & development.
 - 71% disagree council is focused on the future & plans well to help secure the community's long-term future.
 - Source: Lithgow LGA Community Research Report (Sept 2024).



There is alignment between Council and Community on the path forward with **a mutual desire for initiatives to fuel the Lithgow LGA economy**, generate prosperity and more serviceability to its residents.



Future State: Key 'Signature Projects' across CSP Pillars



Out of the 72 dots placed on Pillars, 24 were assigned to **Strengthening the Economy** and 15 assigned to **Built Environment** goals. These are areas identified for improvement, whilst there was also recognition of the important role on advocating for Community and **transparent Council Governance**.

Top initiatives & the pillars they cover:

- Improved Expressway and Freight Connectivity to Sydney
- Health Forum and advocate more funding for specific services e.g. mental health, drug/alcohol rehabilitation
- Attracting tourism via Entertainment precincts, eco-tourism, recreational activities with event comms
- Beautification, streetscape planting/lighting and re-igniting the 'night economy'
- Greater communication & transparency from Council to Community
- Creating job opportunities and career pathways for youth and retain families
- Improve signage and upgrade infrastructures (Glen Davis, adjoin Modern arts building with admin centre etc.)

	Economy (24/72)	Built Environ. (15/72)	Community (13/72)	Natural Environ (10/72)	Governance (10/72)
Improved Expressway and Freight Connectivity to Sydney	✓	✓			
Health Forum and advocate more funding for specific services e.g. mental health, drug/alcohol rehabilitation			✓		
Attracting tourism via Entertainment precincts, eco-tourism, recreational activities with event comms	✓	✓			
Beautification, streetscape planting/lighting and re-igniting the 'night economy'	✓	✓	✓		
Greater communication & transparency from Council to Community			✓		✓
Creating job opportunities and career pathways for youth and retain families	✓		✓		
Improve signage and upgrade infrastructures (Glen Davis, adjoin Modern arts building with admin centre etc.)	✓	✓	✓		

Stacked bar chart representing the proportion of dot voting (out of 72) per pillar

Investment in these signature projects has a compounding positive impact across multiple pillars.

Workshop Outcomes



Where do we want to be in 10 years time?

Key findings

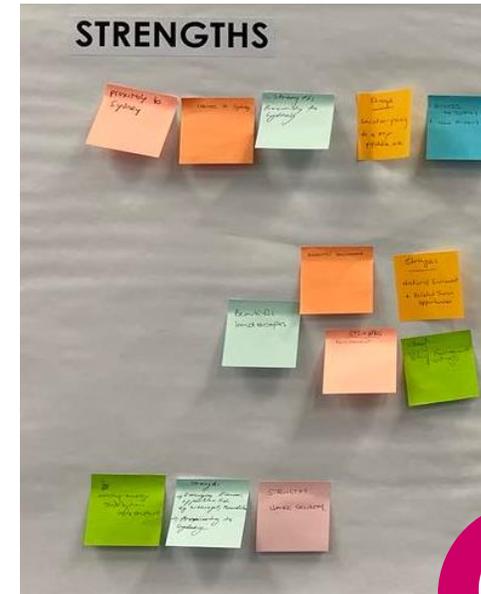
Participants acknowledged the cost of living crisis impacting communities, and the challenges (but opportunities) that come with SRVs (noting SRV coincided with survey collection). Observations were made where the Lithgow LGA community results fell short of Regional benchmarks, particularly liveability metrics in services/facilities (shops, recreation), infrastructure, planning and decision-making. There was also discussion of Lithgow LGA's appetite for more initiatives, investment and accessibility to more information from Council.

Micromex presented the community survey findings to the Participants focusing on the unprompted open-ender results for areas the community loves (would like to Retain), would like to Change and Priorities.

After the summary, Participants were asked to write down on post-it notes the **top 2 existing strengths** of the area to be supported/sustained over the next ten years; and then write down on two post-it notes the **key challenges** within the area to be improved or enhanced over the next ten years. These post-it notes were then summarised and discussed collectively under 'Strengths' and 'Challenges' boards.

The next few slides shows the community (survey %)s and Participant (post-it note) results for focus areas to support/sustain, improve or enhance.

How we got to these themes:



Key strengths to retain and support

Participants aligned on three of the four most loved aspects from the Community survey results: Liveability/ Sense of Community, Location, and the Environment.

Affordability also was raised by Participants, however, this did not come through as a prominent strength within the community results. Additionally, other more specific economic and infrastructure opportunities were put forward during the workshop as areas for support.

The following shows the distribution of 24 post-it notes from the workshop. The top three strengths are consistent across both Participant and community results.



Sense of community / liveability

Post-it notes **7/24**

- “Sense of community” (x2)
- “Liveability” (x2)
- “The unique qualities of our communities, Lithgow, Wang, Portland”
- “Perseverance & fight for keeping jobs ”
- “A burgeoning arts & cultural sector”

Survey results **29%**

Natural environment / beautiful clean area / scenery

Post-it notes **6/24**

- “Natural Environment” (x2)
- “Beautiful landscapes”
- “Natural settings”
- “Unique environment”
- “Related eco-tourism opportunities”

Survey results **29%**

Convenient / central location

Post-it notes **5/24**

- “Proximity to Sydney” (x2)
- “Closeness to Sydney”
- “Location – proximity to a major population centre”
- “Access to Sydney & the new airport”

Survey results **24%**

Affordability

Post-it notes **2/24**

- “Affordability of property”
- “Plenty of residential land”

Survey results **2%**

Other economic related

Separate Post-it notes **4/24**

- “Emerging economic opportunities e.g. Greenspot, Foundation”
- “Water security”
- “Existing energy distribution infrastructure”
- “Accessing Govt Grant funding”

Survey results **~6%**

← Higher saliency for Participants (vs. community) →

A key strength to celebrate is the Lithgow LGA community spirit, its prime location, and the unique natural setting



Strong community values

“When you are walking up main street and you have a fall, you are going to have 5 or 6 people run up to you to make sure you are ok?”

“When we do get jobs here, we do fight tooth and nail to keep them...and the community will have major uproar when jobs are cut”

“I was asked to join and participate in the sporting organisations here, I’ve always felt welcomed”

“We actually do care about each other?”

“I find it an extremely liveable place”



Desirable natural environment/location

“We have great proximity... to Sydney, to Katoomba/Blue Mountains, to the new airport but the connectivity to the East is challenged”

“Unique qualities of the different towns and the settings... walking and bike trails”

“Plenty of residential land opportunities”

“There are tourist opportunities with our natural landscapes and the beauty surrounding the region”

Key challenges to improve and enhance

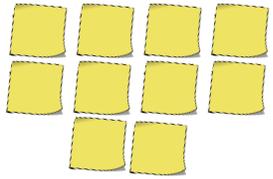
Participants generated a lot of discussion around interlocking challenge areas, particularly focused on transitioning the economy to sustain the Lithgow LGA population demands, and how best to fuel prosperity, for younger generations to stay and raise families in their community.

The following shows the distribution of 24 post-it notes from the workshop. Participants focused on major challenges with macro impacts, whereas the Community results spontaneously raised more specific needs.



Economic growth and employment

Post-it notes
10/24



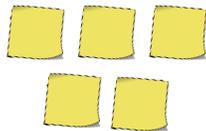
- “New & sustainable employment at all scales” (x2)
- “Jobs for youth”
- “Developing our labour force”
- “Attract large business to area”
- “Transitioning economy”
- “Attract new development, maintain infrastructure”
- “Funding services”
- “Tourism”
- “Prompt involvement of other levels of Gov’t in economic transition”

Survey results **34%**



Community pride & connection

Post-it notes
5/24



- “Build community confidence”
- “Civic pride (reduce stigma within community)”
- “Developing individual characters of Lithgow, Wang & Portland”
- “Find like-minded people & communities (beyond sport)”
- “Informing community better on projects & what’s happening”

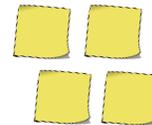
← Higher saliency for Participants (vs. community) →

Survey results **5%**



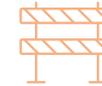
Population & ageing

Post-it notes
4/24



- “Static population growth”
- “Transitioning by educating workers to retain families in our area”
- “Ageing infrastructure & servicing”
- “Health services to meet specific needs of pop e.g. mental health, Paediatrics”

Survey results **2%**



Roads/ transport

Post-it notes
2/24



- “Future Bells Line Expressway needed”
- “Transport connectivity to Sydney”

Survey results **32%**



Other liveability related

Separate Post-it notes
3/24



- “Affordable housing”
- “Recurring natural disasters and recovery”
- “Urban design/setting & aesthetics”

Survey results **~12%**

Challenges unpacked discussion on where Council can advocate for civic pride and greater connection within the community



Minimise stigma perceptions (instead instill confidence)

“Stigma is about Lithgow LGA being associated negatively in the past, some time ago but some of that comes from within. Making Lithgow an attractive place to live and where people want to come, stay here”

“Civic pride is about having faith in their Council, and faith in the people that are leading them, feeling they are doing a good job”

“I would like us to challenge the stigma a bit more about the sh@t hole that is Lithgow because that hasn't been my experience. A lot of people go back to the sulphuric acid smog sitting on top of town and still hear about it on social media”



Need for connection

“People who didn't get into sports, and came here found it hard to fit... they felt like outsiders”

“Also help people move through different stages of life, help them look for different activities and things that interest them”

“Everybody needs their people to connect with”

“We can build these document stations (welcome packs), whether they're in music, whether they're in arts, whether in sport, whatever the thing is. We've got to help newcomers find their people and connect to the community. And for me, it was sport at the time and I found that very welcoming”



Resourcing for Population projections

“The Bureau's got their population projections, and Lithgow pop itself will only improve by 18. Whether that's right or wrong, we need to look at that. But it was 420 for the outlying areas (as in Portland or Wang/Wallerawang) & the rural and northern, southern regions”

So realistically that's only 200 properties over the 10 years. So 400 is bugged all and this will impact the schools, the health and then why would I invest money in health based on those projections.”

“Whereas the council projections is actually quite positive”

“We have planning proposals approved....and we have in place like GreenSpot proposal for 1,300 residential lots”

How will we get there?

The task:

Each table was provided with a summary of the 5 CSP Pillars. Participants were asked to develop signature projects or plans for each of the five CSP Pillars, using the Strengths and Challenges as context and guidance. Each pillar chart moved from group to group so that ideas continued to build on one another (minimising duplication).

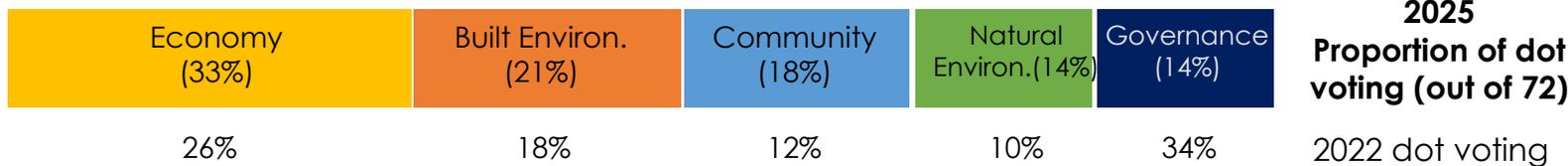
Participants were given approximately 30 minutes (5-6 mins per chart) to discuss and develop the goals and projects and then report back to the room.

Then, as a final exercise, Participants were each provided with six sticky dots that they could place on any of the goals/ projects that they felt were priorities.

The results:

The distribution of the 72 dots by CSP Pillar (ranked by # of dots):

- Economy 24
- Built environment 15
- Community 13
- Governance 10
- Natural environment 10



Note: %s are a qualitative observation to be used in context of full report findings. 2022 used 50 dots in total.



In 2025, we did see a greater focus on conversations around how to 'Strengthen the Economy' for Lithgow LGA. This aligns to community feedback and the broader 'cost of living' crisis impacting residents across communities nationally.

CSP Pillars – Areas of Focus

Strengthening our economy

Strengthening our economy: Goals/Signature Projects

Transport Bells Line Expressway (current limitations for connecting East to West) 10

Energy transition: Wind, Solar & Pumped Hydro. Nuclear Waste to energy 5

Review staffing levels & capacity for strategic planners 4

Develop training opportunities: micro courses to enable workers to retrain or develop business 1
Develop tertiary/post secondary education facilities, university hubs maintained & expanded

Key worker accommodation 1

Wang as the LGA Centre and be the Employment Industrial Hub (connect with Newcastle Port) 1

Wang as a freight Hub railroad interplay 1

Passenger/Freight (Frequency 7 days a week) 1

Intercity Rail Link (Lithgow to Orange & Mudgee)

Harness the WSI opportunities (Western Syd International)

Focus on small & medium manufacturing to be less dependent on Gov't policy
and provide more local employment

GreenSpot opportunities

Developing our built environment

Caring for our community

Enhancing our natural environment

Responsible governance & civic leadership

Note: number in dots represent the number of sticky dots placed in support of proposed goal/project
Economy: total of 24 dots.

Table Discussions

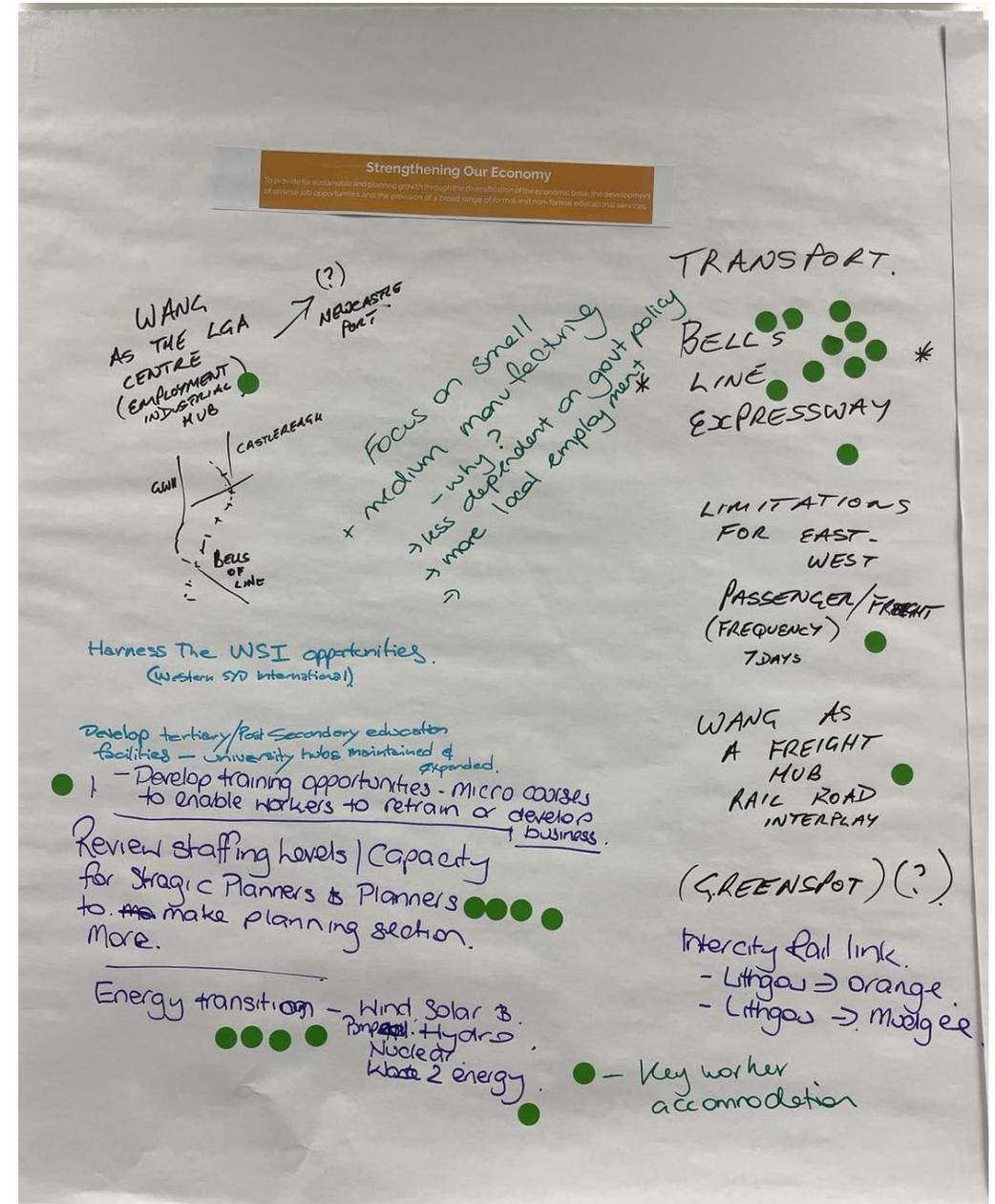
“Connect to Sydney... you can't, only way is a Bells Line Expressway.

Blue Mountains is stuffed. It's a gridlock at the moment over the Blue Mountains 7 days a week. 2,200 trucks go through, 26 sets of lights. We can't get to the airport. 9 times out of ten there's a traffic incident or issue”

“Blue Mountains line has a heavy passenger load. We've been championing a Bells Line Expressway which is a Northern link to our town and North West Sydney... perhaps a more effective line”

“The kids of today are not looking to stay as a checkout chick. They are looking to rise up and get a proper pay check... going up the ladder”

“A lot of councils will be aware of Castlereagh interaction & the Great Western Hwy, it's a very strategic transport hub. Wang should be the employment centre of Lithgow region. Its positioning of all the major roads, linking the East Coast to the Central West”



CSP Pillars – Areas of Focus

Strengthening our economy

Developing our built environment

Developing our built environment: Goals/Signature Projects

Modern arts buildings incorporated in new Council admin centre 3

Wolgan Road Access progressed 2

Glen Davis upgrade of community facilities to capture emerging tourism from Gardens of Stone walking (regional tourism outcome, grants) 2

Entertainment Precinct 2

Entertainment, civic centre: Min. 1-2k seating capacity 1

Support Night economy for tourism economy 2

Showground displays: car & bike etc. 1

Pool movie nights (Lithgow & Portland) or other options 1

Sporting fields – regional or state level at minimum (not focused all on Lithgow) & progress Tony Luchetti Master planning) 1

Road infrastructure enhancements (greater capacity, connectivity)

High class/Premium accommodation for Tourism

Diverse Housing Typology

Caring for our community

Enhancing our natural environment

Responsible Governance & civic leadership

Note: number in dots represent the number of sticky dots placed in support of proposed goal/project
Built Environment: total of 15 dots.

Table Discussions

"We're talking about those sort of projects (Glen Davis, Gardens of Stone) that we need to be prepared to develop and be shovel ready so that when grants come, we're ready to go"

"If you're not ready to go with state and federal government grants, you'd literally get nothing. And you put it in this one, you put it in the next one, so it's ready to go"

"I'm talking about the night economy. It wasn't too long ago when I was a teenager you could go up and down Main St, in and out of all the pubs"

"Courthouse hotel had a great music scene"

Developing Our Built Environment
 To provide a choice of effective public and private transport options, suitable entertainment and recreational facilities and lifestyle choices while enhancing the existing rural areas, villages and towns that make up the Lithgow LGA.

Glen Davis - upgrade of community facilities
 ●● to capture the emerging tourism from Gardens of Stone walking. — PROJECTS SHOVEL READY (GRANTS) (A) (REGIONAL TOURISM OUTCOME)

●● Wdgan Road Access - progressed.

(A) × Intercity - Lithgow → Orange } TRAIN.
 - Lithgow → Mudgee

● Sporting fields - regional or state level at minimum.
 *Not focused all on Lithgow.
 *Progress Tony Luchetti masterplanning.

● Entertainment - Civic Centre - min 1-2k seating capacity.

●● Modern arts buildings incorporated in new Council Admin Centre

- Road infrastruct enhancements (greater capacity, connectivity)

●● Entertainment precinct

- High class accommodation (tourism)

- Program of Bands/Music in the park

● Showground displays - car & Bike etc.

● Pool movie nights [Lithgow + Potters] or other options

NIGHT ECONOMY ●

(A) ●

↓

TOURISM ECONOMY

[DIVERSE HOUSING TYPOLOGY.]

CSP Pillars – Areas of Focus

Strengthening our economy

Developing our built environment

Caring for our community

Caring for our community: Goals/Signature Projects

Advocacy for Health Forum **4**
(connects to Youth Services, State & Federal Services & consult with service providers, Primary Care, active living)

Health advocacy & accessibility (incl. drug/alcohol/mental health), **2**
help those with travel requirements

Strong community events/event calendar **2**

Instillation of civic pride **2**

Welcome signage – placemaking (Instagram-able) e.g. Hartley & Capertee entrances to LGA,
Welcome to Wiradjuri Country/dual naming on interpretative place **1**

Proactive & inclusive of rural communities **1**

Instagram-able light show in QE Park **1**

Lighting for walkways down Main Street (support night economy, see built environment pillar)

Actively listening & talking to community

Better comms from council to community

Better promotion of volunteer groups

Enhancing our natural environment

Responsible Governance & civic leadership

Note: number in dots represent the number of sticky dots placed in support of proposed goal/project
Community: total of 13 dots.

Table Discussions

“Better communication means just a constant supply of information so the community feel like they're in a loop”

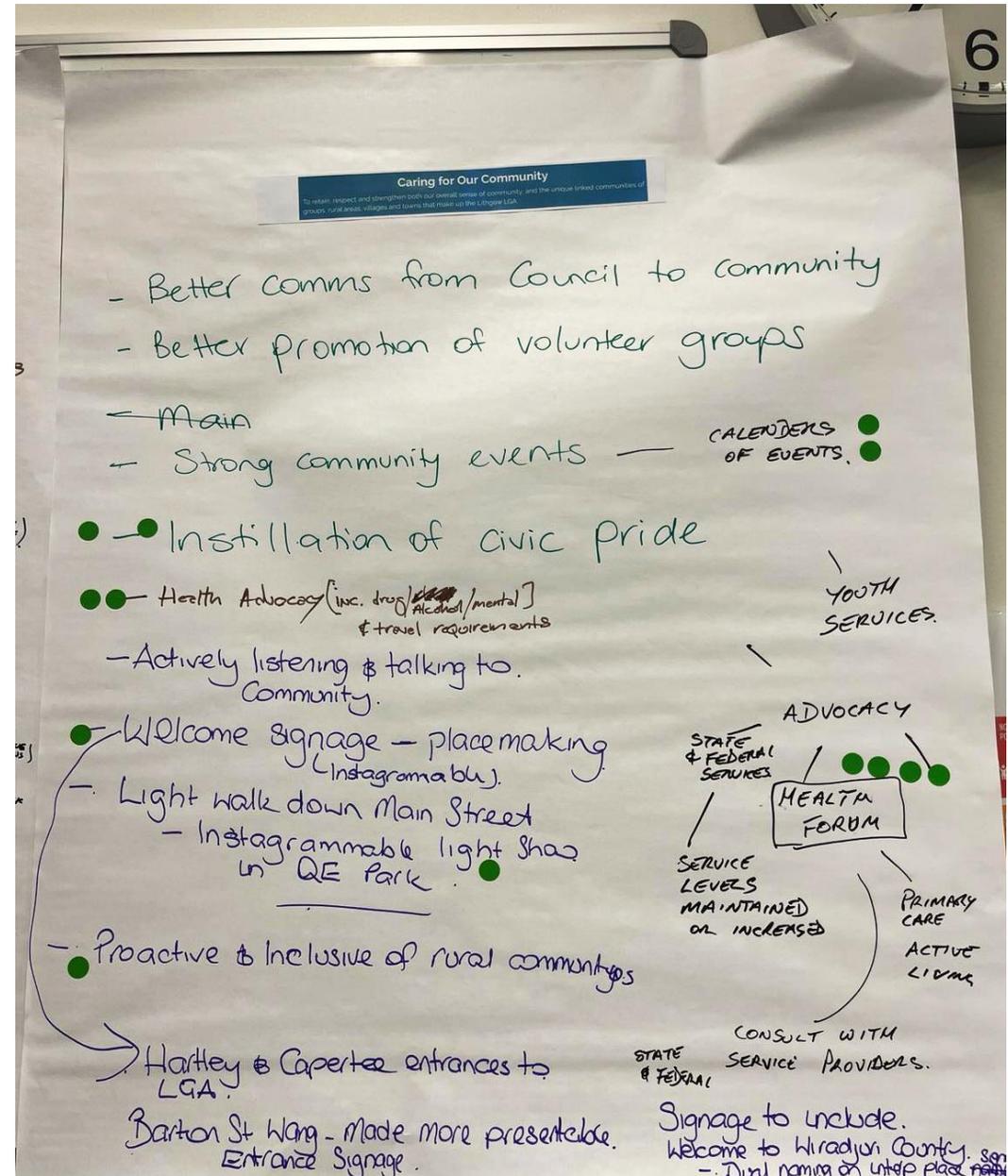
“Accessibility to medical services is hard. For example, I travel to Richmond four times a year for my daughter's paediatrician appointments”

“We've had numerous people that had to stay in the Nepean or down Westmead, because their loved ones had to be flown out to other hospitals”

“Lighting links back to the idea of creating a more vibrant space to have a nighttime economy as well. It also provides sense of safety”

“The presentation and that the placemaking of those areas (Hartley & Capertee), are important as you can say are the entrances to our LGA”

“The Health Forum links all these specialised services... there are no mental health beds between Katoomba and Orange...so people who have an episode are taken away from their community when they're most vulnerable. It's a significant experience for that person and having no family support around them. So, a health working group, may provide an opportunity for us to demand rightly, but we don't talk directly to the service providers. We actually wanna talk to the factory floorers rather than talk to the head at West Health Services”



CSP Pillars – Areas of Focus

Strengthening our economy

Developing our built environment

Caring for our community

Enhancing our natural environment

Enhancing our natural environment: Goals/Signature Projects

- Streetscape plantings **3**
(planned/appropriate/site strategically placed; part of Street tree Masterplan)
- Utilise natural assets to enhance sense of place, community pride, and place a visit **1**
- Incorporate community into natural area management – Landcare, Indigenous programs, youth orientation **1**
- Farmers Creek walk – greater interpretation using creative arts, Indigenous, accessible signage **1**
Glen Davis Landcare group linking the creek, reserve and Coorongooba **1**
- Hassan Walls: toilet facilities **1**
- Waste management: look at how it's managed in open spaces **1**
- Manage risk to air quality and environment from industry uses/applications **1**
(Sympathetic use of environment for recreational facilities)
- Exercise equipment, walking/jogging park run to encourage outside running (contact Ridgy Didge – Glow Worm Running Festival), Mountain Biking (Rydal Mountain)
- All lookouts to be better managed, maintained
(e.g. weed management, overgrowth, signage, Road/car park, rubbish)
Naturer based recreation (i.e. turns Lithgow to Darby)

Responsible Governance & civic leadership

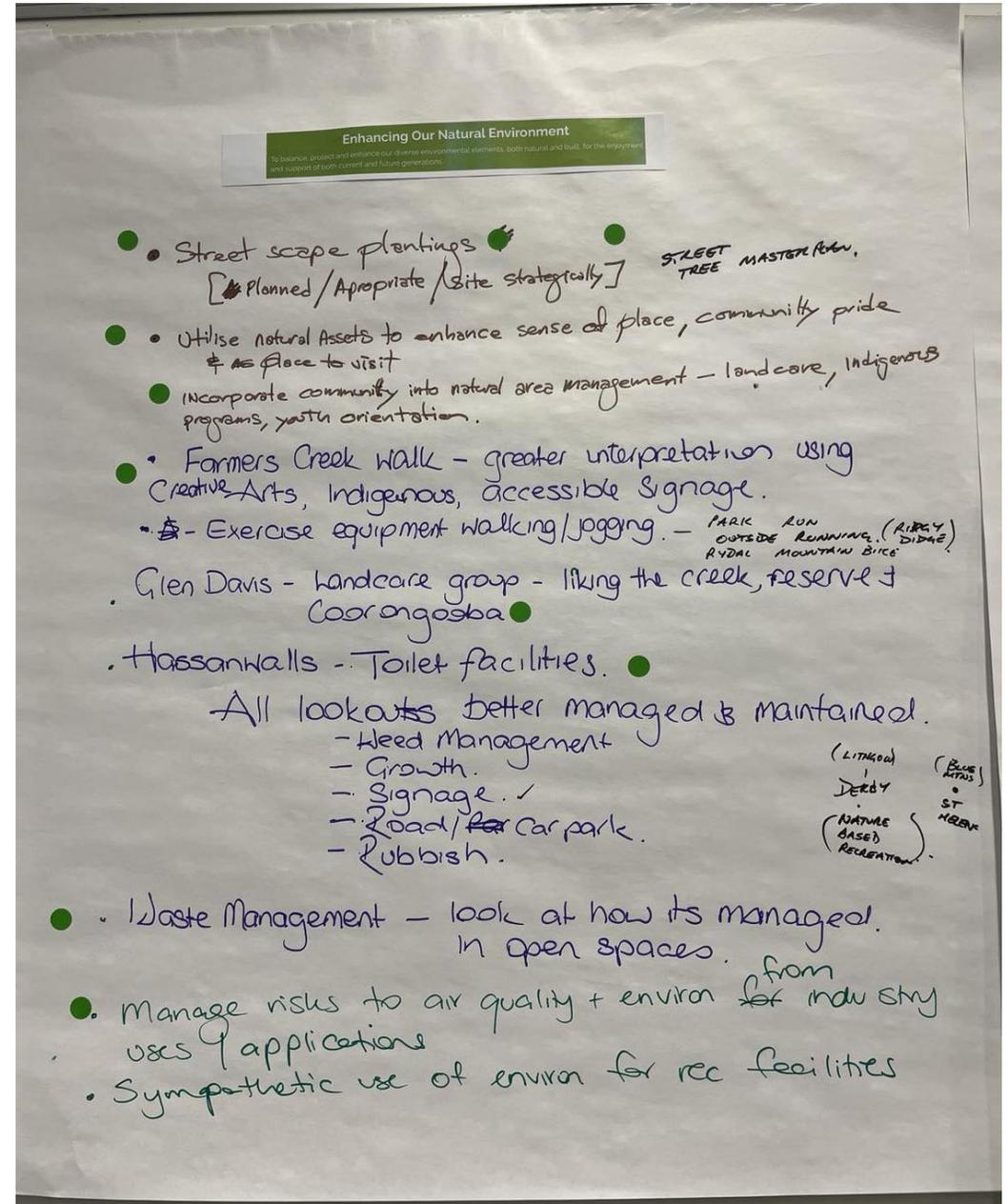
Note: number in dots represent the number of sticky dots placed in support of proposed goal/project
Natural Environment: total of 10 dots.

Table Discussions

“We're just comparing the Darby (TAS nature valley) to the Three Sisters, which has 4,000,000 visitors, only 40 minutes from here. We get people to come and stay here, have that experience, and there's a lot of other nature based, tourism, particularly with Gardens in Stone, which will be comparable to what Darby has on offer in North East Tasmania”

“It will become, I believe, a national point of interest for nature based recreation given our proximity to Blue Mountains and the natural setting here”

“Because once a ride (mountain bike riding) gets to a certain distance its of national interest to riders... they want to do all day rides... this is the big opportunity in my mind about how people want to interact with nature here”



CSP Pillars – Areas of Focus



Responsible governance & civic leadership: Goals/Signature Projects

Communication (sharing the narrative) 4

Transparency (being open and honest) 3

Digital communication 2

Active listening 1

- Empathy
- Actively talking/engaging
- Validate how the community feel
- Meet the directors (give them access)
- Giving them a voice (advocating for the community)

Focus on multiply communication touch point

- Digital +
- Face-to-face, Pop-ups
- Hardcopy
- Mail etc

Promotion of both the positive (and not so good)

Note: number in dots represent the number of sticky dots placed in support of proposed goal/project

Governance: total of 10 dots.

Note we discussed this pillar as a collective group at the end (the other 4 pillars were circulated and passed between each of the 4 tables.)

Table Discussions

“We need to get out there into the community. Tell them what projects we've done, what the good things we've been doing.
We don't do that enough”

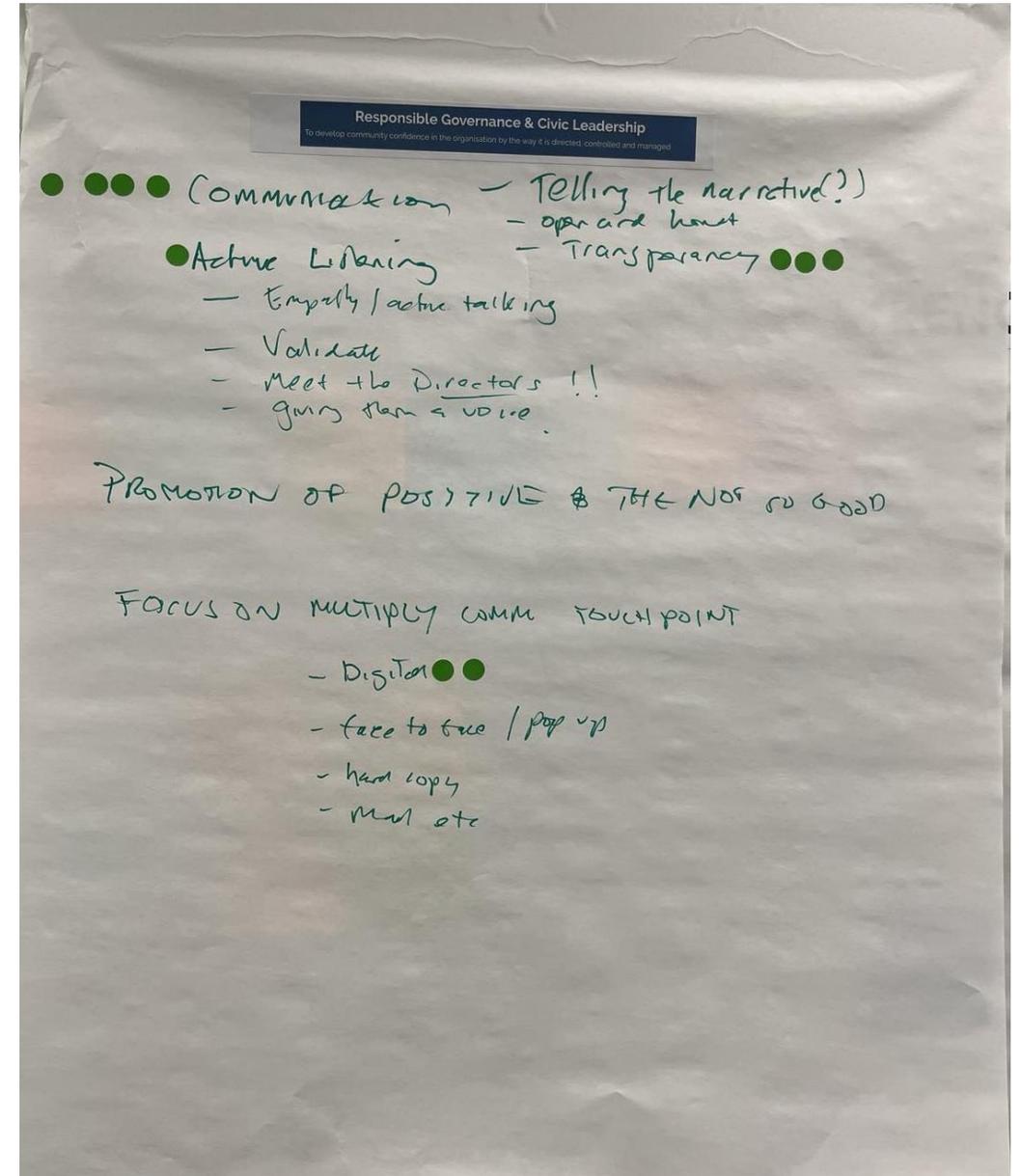
“I think promotion as well. So, letting the community know when good things are being achieved, which is equally important as being transparent”

“There's a lot of good things Council have done that the public don't realise or don't know about”

“Active listening is not about being lip service but actually taking on board what they have to say... we can try it but no promises but we will understand where the community is coming from and that we get their concerns”

“Council last year did some nights when they invited the community, to meet with all the directors, and I thought it was a great initiative. And I think that should be kept going”

“Give the community access... to the directors but to the Councillors are well. They want access”



Moderators Guide



Introduction: (15 mins)

1. Council/Micromex to explain:
 - Intros, Acknowledgement of Country, etc (Deb)
 - IP&R and the role of a CSP (Deb)
 - Purpose of session (MMX):
 - Big picture/strategic issues
 - Being recorded
 - Bathrooms
 - In case of emergency
 - Phones to silent

Where are we now? (15 mins)

2. Micromex to summarise key community survey findings from Survey (Council to provide a handout to all participants)

Where do we want to be in 10 years' time? (35 mins)

3. Micromex to ask all to write down on post it – top 2 existing strengths of the area to be supported/sustained over the next ten years
4. Micromex to ask all to write down on post it – key challenges within the area to be improved/enhanced over the next ten years
5. Participants to place post-its on 'Strengths' and 'Challenges' boards – Stu and Jayne to summarise themes, discuss/clarify where needed

BREAK: (10 mins)

- Bathroom
- Snack

How will we get there?

6. Each table of three or four participants to identify 'signature projects' or plans for each of the five pillars (five flip-charts, one per pillar, charts to be moved from group to group every 5-6 mins). **(30 mins)**
7. Five charts placed on wall, MMX to summarise suggestions for each pillar – discussion/clarification where required. **(20 mins)**
8. Participants then given 6 dots to nominate their favourites/priorities. **(10 mins)**
9. Final thoughts. **(5 mins)**



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research

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