



October 2015

APPIN WORKSHOP; GROWTH IN AND AROUND APPIN

Part B - What can we learn?

| Deconstructing Conflict

DeconstructingConflict

ABN: 93 260 920 558

Strathfield

Phone: 0418 459 849

Email: wayne@deconflict.com.au

Contents

List of Figures.....	2
Overview	3
Methodology	3
Participation.....	3
Meeting the Workshop Objectives.....	3
The Workshops.....	5
Feedback from Initial Workshop: 10th & 17th June 2015.....	5
Feedback from Focused Workshop: 15th July 2015	11
Additional Questions.....	16
Conclusion.....	19

List of Figures

Figure 1: Questions for Preliminary (Initial) Workshop	5
Figure 2: Initial Workshop – Response to Task 1(a)	5
Figure 3: Initial Workshop - Response to Task 1(b)	7
Figure 4:: Initial Workshop - Response to Task 2 (a), (b) and (c)	8
Figure 5: Questions for Focused Workshop	11
Figure 6: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Environment Group	12
Figure 7: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Environment Group	12
Figure 8: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Infrastructure Group	13
Figure 9: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Infrastructure Group	13
Figure 10: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 3 for Infrastructure Group.....	13
Figure 11: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Heritage & Rural Living Group	14
Figure 12: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Heritage & Rural Living Group	14
Figure 13: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 3 for Heritage & Rural Living Group	15
Figure 14: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Communication & Transparency Group	15
Figure 15: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Communication & Transparency Group	15
Figure 16: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 3 for Communication & Transparency Group	16
Figure 17: Additional Questions sent to volunteers for focused workshop	16
Figure 18: Response to Additional Question No.1	16
Figure 19: Response to Additional Question No.2	17
Figure 20: Response to Additional Question No.3	18

Overview

The workshop objectives were discussed and agreed prior to the facilitation process. It was agreed that, considering the purpose of the process (see Part A, Outcomes & Objectives) that workshops would be designed to maximize community involvement and provide current and applicable feedback to Council. Given the limitations and purpose of the mediation process it was not considered appropriate to meet the outcome requirements and a workshop facilitation model was adopted.

Methodology

Questions (tasks) were designed on standard group-work theory and practice to encourage and promote robust discussion and exploration within the groups. Further questions (Choose the top three from your list?) were designed to encourage participants to refine and focus their thoughts and discussion on more specific and manageable issues.

The size of the groups (number of participants) is an important factor in group design. Large groups tend to limit input, “we follow the strongest member (voice) and this limits individual contribution” because we are fearful that we will not be accepted into the group (see Mlodinow 2012, Churchland 2002). The optimum number for short discussion groups is between 4 and 10 participants. On the night workshop groups contained four (4) to six (6) participants per group.

Participation

A total of 81 people attended the information sessions, from these 39 participants stayed to take part in workshops one (1) and two (2). In workshop three (3), 19 residents attended the information session and 17 stayed to contribute to the tasks exercises.

Meeting the Workshop Objectives

Initial Workshops (1 & 2)

- **Objective four:** “To inform residents about the strategic planning process and what current processes affect Appin”

To satisfy this requirement, information sessions were provided in the initial workshops (1&2) by Chris Stewart (Wollondilly Shire Council) and Brendan O'Brien (with David Fitzgibbon NSW Department of Planning and environment). They provided detailed information regarding the planning process and legal and

statutory requirements that determine the process. Information sessions were followed by open question and answers. These sessions were provided prior to the workshop sessions.

In workshop three Chris Stewart presented on the key identified issues outlining the Council's obligations and considerations on each issue. Wayne Nugent provided an overview of the preliminary workshops and current feedback.

- **Objective one:** *"To hold workshops to enable residents and other local stakeholders to have a broader discussion about growth in and around Appin."*
- **Objective two:** *To identify the concerns held by residents and other local stakeholders about growth in and around Appin.*

To satisfy these objectives Workshops One (1) and Two (2) were designed to elicit open dialogue with and between participants and further for participants to feedback issues and concerns to Council.

The first task (question) was structured to promote broader exploration and discussion of issues (*see Initial Workshops, Task Q1(a) below*). Part (b) of this task was to focus participants and to further identify and define the issues, this provides for more manageable or organized feedback of ideas.

Task two (*see Initial Workshops Q2 (a & b below)*) was designed to encourage dialogue and provide Council with a deeper understanding of the participants' experience in communicating with Council. Together with part (b) it can help to provide ownership (*what is your solution?*) and to specify the practical or 'on the ground' experience of participants. It has a greater capacity to inform Council about community attitude and interpretation.

Focused workshop.

- **Objective three:** To further explore key identified issues.

Workshop three consisted of participants who had attended past workshops and who had elected to contribute to the final workshop. There were 24 nominees, 19 attended the session though two left after the presentations and consequently did not contribute to the workshop.

The workshop focused on the four key issues selected in the previous sessions (those that were most often chosen as the top three issues). Participants were divided in to four groups, each dealing with a single issue. A Council representative was assigned to each group to provide information and assistance.

The Workshops

Feedback from Initial Workshop: 10th & 17th June 2015

Figure 1: Questions for Preliminary (Initial) Workshop

Questions for Preliminary (Initial) Workshop
Task 1: (a) What do members see as being the major growth/planning issues in and around Appin? (Groups were asked to note down as many as possible) (b) Choose (and list or highlight) the top three issues from your list.
Task 2: (a) What are the constraints to community involvement in the growth/planning process? (b) Choose the top three constraints from your list. (c) For each constraint list ONE means for overcoming the problem.

Figure 2: Initial Workshop – Response to Task 1(a)

Response to Task 1 (a); What do members see as being the major/planning issues in and around Appin? (Note down as many as possible)	
Issues	Specifics/Comments
Environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air pollution/quality• Loss of native habitat and bushland• Loss of native animals (endangered species/ecological communities)• Aboriginal heritage• Preservation of river and creek system• Feral pests• Toxicity of land (Spraying, general waste & rubbish dumping)• Noise pollution• Agriculture sustainability• Mining

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health concerns (Lupus high rates) • Bushfires, mining, gas, subsidence • Water catchment
Retaining Rural Aspects/ Atmosphere/Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic village • Block sizes • Sympathetic design (architecture/style) • Historic promise to renovate Old Inn • Heritage sites/monument • Destruction of significance
Suitable Planning – Infrastructure ahead of growth <i>The notion of forward planning was very strong</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of forward planning • Roads • Land/Block Size • Dual Occupancy • Green Areas (Parks/Recreation) • Public transport • Schools • Employment • Medical Facilities (hospital) • Access to healthcare • Appin Road, Broughton Pass • Water pressure • Electricity – Some outages already experienced. • Entertainment • Appin Bypass • Police (Growth In Crime) • Facilities for older residents • Safety crossings and lights • Buffer zone between Appin and Mt Gilead • Mt Gilead and urban renewal along Macarthur line • Major freight corridor to south coast
Information (Lack of, or perceived to be misleading)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developers not following through with Voluntary Planning Agreements (VPA's) • Rezoning of council/community lands • Transparency from Council (consistent theme) • No social impact study
Land Affordability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Uncertainty*	<i>*See note below.</i> Consistent theme
Amalgamation of Councils	

Where is Section 94 Money going?	
Need for Social Impact Study	None conducted
Community Consultation	
Proportional growth in Appin	
Section 94 Contributions/VPA's for the benefit of Appin community	Where do they go?
SRV Works Program	How will Appin residents benefit?
Lack of community club	
Asset Maintenance/ revitalization program	Sport and recreation facilities
Conservation of green belt proposed G.M.S	
Lack of Appin representation on WSC decisions	

Figure 3: Initial Workshop - Response to Task 1(b)

Response to Task 1(b); Choose (and list or highlight) the top three issues from your list	
Issues that were identified by groups as being their 'top three'	Number of times issue was identified as being top three
Environment	6
Infrastructure (Planning)	5
Rural Lifestyle (Heritage)	4
Information/Communication (Transparency)	4
Land/Block Size	3
Employment	3
Community Consultation	3
Social Impact Study	2
Affordability	2
Council amalgamations	1


 Top issues raised.

Figure 4: Initial Workshop - Response to Task 2 (a), (b) and (c)

Response to Task 2 (a), (b) and (c);	
Constraints	Solutions
<p>Lack of transparency & community & by Council to the community.</p> <p>No communication with community until there were protests – Too Late!</p> <p>Often aren't aware of proposals.</p> <p>The community does not know what the growth/planning process is.</p> <p>Lack of understanding of process/council workings.</p> <p>Technical disadvantages – No Facebook, no local papers.</p> <p>Method of communications – lack of access to internet, email, etc. (by much of the community).</p> <p>Emails are not always replied and when they are, answers are generic.</p> <p>Lack of Master Plan – “Hot Spot” developments in absence of master plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community engagement – more events like tonight. • More locally delivered information. • Involve community at initial planning stage. • Letterbox drops. • History room. • Use community noticeboards. • Development newsletter • Information Centre – Permanent Heritage Centre - (Tourist, office, WWW, Men's Shed) • Newsletter, Council notice board – for Appin in shops. • Plain language Information • Minutes to community forums. • Video community forums. • Personalized responses to concerns • Councils to act on consensus achieved at forums
Lack of trust in Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build relationships with Council – council could hold council meetings in different localities.
Lack of trust in developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep promises and keep commitments. • Be responsive to community concerns, • Empathy for community concerns.
<p>Timing of consultation to fit with working hours – people in Appin commute.</p> <p>Timing - meetings (forums) are hard to get to.</p> <p>Time – people are just busy getting on with survival - no time to investigate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Group to report back. • Flexible times – Sunday meetings, etc. • Maybe online forums.

<p>issues fully, formulate ideas, arguments and proposals and put them appropriately into submissions/presentations.</p> <p>Poor facilities for meetings – lack of heating, etc.</p> <p>Inability to vote against change or type of change. Feel powerless –why bother?</p> <p>Individual landowners can't compete against large corporations with time, money and specialists on their side.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heat the Community Hall
Complicated procedures.	
Initial proposal of developments are changed - changing goalposts.	
Other Constraints (Other constraints to community involvement which were identified but not listed as top three)	
Finances	
Fear of community backlash, ridicule.	
Time – length of process	
(An) Attitude (?) – can't stop development so don't participate.	
Conflicting info from Council.	
Health effects due to long drawn out battles with Council.	
Councillors say "I will answer that later" and don't.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Answer questions in person so we can get real answers and ask follow up questions
Social division – Old versus New	
Lack of support from state and federal MP's.	
Pressure from developers.	
Lack of interest by some people in the village.	

Comments/statements.	
Wollondilly is larger than just Picton	
Council representing developers	
No local representation of community by Councilors	
Poor Representation of the community	
Feels like Council are just following formalities to placate concerned community members. Nothing will really change or be prevented.	
Threats to residents. <i>(These were not allegations of threats by or on behalf of Council)</i>	
Bought land with lifestyle & it's changed, as a developer wants to change zoning.	
Feel like no one is listening.	
Stand down Council.	

These were the constraints identified within each group as their top three.

Feedback from Focused Workshop: 15th July 2015

Figure 5: Questions for Focused Workshop

Focused Workshop	
Group Topic	Workshop Questions
ENVIRONMENT	<p>Task 1: What ENVIRONMENTAL issues do you see as the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?</p> <p>Task 2: List three ways community and Council can work together to preserve the environment?</p>
INFRASTRUCTURE	<p>Task 1: What INFRASTRUCTURE issues do you see and the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?</p> <p>Task 2: List the three most pressing issues and solution for each</p> <p>Task 3: How can the community and Council work together to plan for future infrastructure needs?</p>
HERITAGE & LIFESTYLE	<p>Task 1: What HERITAGE & LIFESTYLE issues do you see and the primary considerations for your community in the immediate futures?</p> <p>Task 2: List the three most pressing issues and a solution for each.</p> <p>Task 3: How can the community and Council work together to plan for future heritage and lifestyle needs?</p>
COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY	<p>Task 1: What COMMUNICATION & TRANSPERNCY issues do you see as the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?</p> <p>Task 2: List the three most pressing issues and a solution for each.</p> <p>Task 3: How can the community and council work together to plan for future heritage and lifestyle needs?</p>

Figure 6: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Environment Group

ENVIRONMENT - Response to Task 1
<i>What ENVIRONMENTAL issues do you see as the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Protection of threatened (native) species in their native habitat.• Endangered Ecological Communities (EEC's)• Waterways – quality, pollution, stormwater runoff, sediment/chemicals/pollutants• Semi-Rural Environment (retained) – larger lots, rural amenities, balance of with development (development with integrity)• Green Open Space – Natural bushland & park areas.• Air Quality – Dust, coal dust, wood smoke, vehicle emissions.• Intergenerational Equity – What's going to be left for Future generations?• Illegal Dumping – Soil, Styrofoam/plastics. Developer integrity, council compliance. Resources to manage• Environmental Heritage/Aboriginal Heritage – Impact on carving stones.• Impact on the Town Centre – Street trees, historic houses. Making more consistent protection of the natural & heritage values.• Sustainability.

Figure 7: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Environment Group

ENVIRONMENT - Response to Task 2
<i>List three ways Community and Council can work together to preserve the environment</i>
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Insist on caveat on each development that preserves the environment. E.g. Plantings, weed control, design, removal of waste (illegal dumping)2. LEP/DCP's – Review of shire wide strategic review on how our towns and villages are developing. Implement slower growth and staged growth.3. Local elected Councilor to advocate local concerns (where are they tonight?)4. Environmental Protection Committees – resident representatives.

Figure 8: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Infrastructure Group

INFRASTRUCTURE - Response to Task 1	
<i>What INFRASTRUCTURE issues do you see as the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roads • Water and sewage • Electricity (there was some discussion about outages) 	

Figure 9: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Infrastructure Group

INFRASTRUCTURE - Response to Task 2	
<i>List the three most pressing issues and a solution for each.</i>	
Most Pressing Issues	Solution
1. Roads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade prior to further development • Special attention was drawn to Appin Road. Namely fear of loss of native vegetation and animals (habitats) from development of new roads. "Traffic travels from Wollongong for work" solution = Too Late?
2. Water and sewage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade prior to further development
3. Electricity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upgrade prior to further development

Figure 10: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 3 for Infrastructure Group

INFRASTRUCTURE - Response to Task 3
<i>How can the community and Council work together to plan for future infrastructure needs?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transparency & Truthfulness/Communication

Figure 11: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Heritage & Rural Living Group

HERITAGE & RURAL LIVING - Response to Task 1	
What HERITAGE & LIFESTYLE issues do you see as the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preservation of Heritage and Lifestyle. • Greenbelts – Upkeep not enforceable • Deteriorate • State Heritage list properties in Appin • History Room • Small Historic Village • Small Acreage • Bushland heritage • Aboriginal Heritage • Farms and fields – rural animals • Village landscape • Children – loss of green space • DCP for Appin (Development Control Plan) 	

Figure 12: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Heritage & Rural Living Group

HERITAGE & RURAL LIVING - Response to Task 2	
List the three most pressing issues and a solution for each.	
Most Pressing Issues	Solution
1. Lack of proactive approach to preserve heritage (buildings, landscape (visual), Aboriginal heritage, historical values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with historical society (State & Council) to better manage historical items – Council to apply for state listing. Nominate new items. Heritage Landscape Conservation – like Menangle.
2. Character and setting of small village in farmland setting (new developments in keeping with the character of the village)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear boundaries for Appin written in GMS.
3. Urban style development for a rural setting – i.e. block size, type of dwelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DCP for Appin (Development Control Plan to be implemented). Local Environmental Plan – Height, block size, maximum number

	capped for minimum lot size – i.e. 5 blocks of 1000m ² .
--	---

Figure 13: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 3 for Heritage & Rural Living Group

<p>HERITAGE & RURAL LIVING - Response to Task 3</p> <p><i>How can the community and Council work together to plan for future infrastructure needs?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not answered directly, though some answers embedded in the solutions offered to Task 2.

Figure 14: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 1 for Communication & Transparency Group

<p>COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY - Response to Task 1</p> <p><i>What COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY issues do you see as the primary considerations for your community in the immediate future?</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Method of communication – reliance on internet • Timing – Notice • Lack of information and answers • Clarity of information • Confusion of planning processes and when to intervene • Use of acronyms • Lack of interest by community due to lengthy process • Conflicting information between info supplied by council & info supplied by development (<i>perhaps developer?</i>) • People's capacity to participate or gain information • Feelings that we are not being told the full whole story • Apathy (powerlessness to stop it)
--

Figure 15: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 2 for Communication & Transparency Group

<p>COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY - Response to Task 2</p> <p><i>List the three most pressing issues and a solution for each.</i></p>	
Most Pressing Issues	Solution
1. Method of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Centre in village on streetscape
2. Clarity of information	

<p>3. Feelings that we are not being told the whole story – Apathy (powerlessness)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Newsletters – not just using the internet • WEB casting and/or more face to face kiosks • Answer the questions asked – not in a round about way • Informal approaches by Council towards community – e.g. stalls at markets, attend footy, etc.
--	--

Figure 16: Focused Workshop - Response to Task 3 for Communication & Transparency Group

<p>COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY - Response to Task 3</p> <p><i>How can the community and Council work together to improve future COMMUNICATION & TRANSPARENCY issues?</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Again, this was not answered directly, however the solutions contain this content also.

Additional Questions

Additional questions were to be asked of the workshop. However, due to time constraints, they were addressed via survey after completion of the workshop.

Figure 17: Additional Questions sent to volunteers for focused workshop

<p>Additional questions; Next Steps</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What other information/discussion sessions would you like to have? 2. What do you think would be the best way to continue the dialogue between residents and Council now and into the future? 3. If further sessions were held in the future, who would you like to take part?

Figure 18: Response to Additional Question No.1

<p>Responses to Question 1; What other information/discussion sessions would you like to have?</p>

- Development and review of a Master Plan for residential development in Appin.
- Further discussions on proposed planning and development approvals in the area following the conclusion of the DoP [Department of Planning & Environment] investigation into the Greater Macarthur Investigation Area. What are the proposed SRV revitalisation works/infrastructure maintenance programs to be undertaken in the Appin area?
How and where will residents benefit from these projects?
Council's proposed measures/steps to ensure the environmental protection of the Appin's semi-rural environment and its protected species.
Measures to improve the delivery of essential utility services in Appin by other state government agencies.
- Report back to a meeting of final draft.
- More discussions with the council representatives where smaller groups are able to discuss their concerns with each representative in turn.
- No response.
- I would like Council to organise a meeting with all State Government Ministers relating to roads, electricity, water/sewage and environment with the Appin community.
- There is no point in discussing anything when council cannot even tell us what the masterplan looks like for Appin. *(This reply also included some allegations and named individuals).*

Figure 19: Response to Additional Question No.2

Responses to Question 2; What do you think would be the best way to continue the dialogue between residents and Council now and into the future?

- Web page with progress updates and Q & A
Community rep to act as an email distribution point.
- Email, e/Newsletters, community consultation evenings (held in the area so that residents are able to attend), letterbox drops, correspondence.
- Open meetings.
- Consistent communication about ANY further development to ALL Appin residents and the opportunity for the residents to actually have a say that makes a difference.

- No response.
- Developments of this size and nature – decisions should not be made by Council alone.
(See additional comments below)
- Through the local action group Help Save Appin NSW Inc.

Figure 20: Response to Additional Question No.3

Responses to Question 3; If further sessions were held in the future, who would you like to take part?

- Yes. Councilors that represent EAST WARD. Ben Banasik, Ray Law, Kate Terry. State MPs for Planning – Water & sewage, Electricity and roads. Definitely NO estate agents or developers.
- Yes providing they were done in the correct way.
- Not sure your question makes sense, but it is difficult to answer your questions without a pool of choices. So my first suggestion would be myself; and then my second would be the Ex Director of the Department of Environment and Planning Mr Brendan O'Connor. Thank you.

Conclusion

Comments on final survey questions

The small number of replies to the survey is typical of surveyed responses. Many of the answers indicated that the final question (which was posted after the initial on-line survey) might have been misinterpreted. One respondent had objection to some of the participants who attended the sessions, made comments regarding a pecuniary interest issue and described the session as a “waste of time”. While these concerns are to be respected, privacy and due process (under the various Acts and Statutes), as well as the group agreement made at each session, prohibit the naming of individuals.

Issues of process and propriety.

There were a small number of issues/allegations of proprietor and process, such as council not enforcing compliance to EPBC Act, Council's treatment of developers, conflict of interests, truthfulness. These would need further discussion and appear, in some cases, to be matters that should be directed to the formal complaints procedures.

Conclusion

Apart from identifying the issues there were a number of reoccurring themes that became evident at each session. Though the real-world issues of environment, infrastructure and lifestyle where predominate the issue of communication is possible the most telling issue to arise from the workshops.

Communication is very difficult to define, as it is not so much about what we do in order to communicate, but how it is interpreted and reinterpreted. Bohm (1996) describes communication, as a “continual flow of meaning” where each response and counter response illustrates what has been understood. There was a clear message that participants felt that information (communication) was either; not accessible, not clear (or user-friendly), not complete, changed without notice, or not available at the necessary time in order for people to respond or give feedback.

The notion of not being heard, or simply ignored, was probably the most consistent message in all sessions. This leads to feelings of frustration and anger and heightens the sense of uncertainty. Kahnemann (2011) suggests that uncertainty, or lack of control, leads to “risk averse responses” which inhibit valid discussion and negotiation. What becomes problematic is that the audience stops engaging and messages simply do not get through. It's well known in conflict literature that it is not agreement that resolves conflict but rather the “feeling that we've been heard”. What was clear is that some groups did not feel as that they were being understood or that they had a voice in how their community was changing.

Communication, old versus new

Digital communication has many advantages. The problem with digital communications is that it is not fully integrated into all of society. While the younger segment is well, if not over wirelessly informed for many it is not always effective.

We utilize communication and information storage and retrieval very differently. A strong message, and it is well illustrated in the communication responses across all workshops, is that the form or manner of communication simply does not work for all residents. The responses to the Initial Workshops Q2 (Constraints -Solutions) as well as Focused Workshop Q2, all suggest greater distribution of written and more traditional forms of communication including face to face, and more locally delivered information through letterbox and community noticeboards, and newsletters. Facebook is popular, however it is likely to connect with only a small section of the community. Many people may or may not have computers, however they all use digital communication very differently.

Engagement

The sessions provided a unique opportunity to measure engagement with the community. While the attendance demonstrated that the community wishes to engage with Council, the communication message was not consistent with the engagement theme. From the psychological perspective engagement and communication are interchangeable. Given that communication is a two-way activity it simply means that the community also wishes to be heard. A strong theme in educating young lawyers is to teach them to first let their client speak and that they will get more information, more efficiently then by asking too many questions. In short we engage by listening and validating first. More than one comment was made regarding reply to letters and emails that was “impersonal”, “seemed like a standard reply”. Again in engagement terms, it can send a message that “your concern is not important”, encouraging a feeling of lack of standing, disconnection.

In July I attended a Community (Council) Forum, an excellent way for residents to engage directly with council. There is little doubt that this, as an existing forum for discussion, holds great promise as part of a solution to the engagement issue. Though, again, on observation, there were a number of aspects that illustrate a lack of engagement, somewhat two sides talking with little space for exchange of meaning.

On a number of occasions it was suggested that Councilors were not accessible, or at least easy to access, by the constituents. This was usually in the context of them and us, or divided community. Feelings of isolation or non-inclusion tend to create disharmony and lead to disengagement and can be counterproductive to the necessary “community as a safe haven”.

There were a number of encouraging comments regarding the forum process such as “more events like tonight”, “maybe on-line forums”. These, together with the attendance illustrate a strong desire from the community to engage with Council in the growth and development of the community issues.

Uncertain futures

If it could be said that there was an underlying theme it would certainly be that of uncertain futures. One group did not deliver a list as requested but instead wrote a short piece about family history dating back to pre 1816. Here is a short extract “We

can't imagine ever living anywhere but Appin. All our land was frozen in 1973 to create the third city in the TriCity Plan. Since then all our families have had to move away from Appin, as we can't subdivide a block for each of our children. We desperately need rezoning to get on with our lives. We need development in Appin, as the farming community is no more."

Development was not necessarily an objection, but the pace of change, the type of change, and retaining the lifestyle (and environment) that participants, and their families, had invested in was strong. One participant said, "I don't object to change (development), but it needs to be done right!"

Scope

The workshops were not designed to answer all of the complex questions that exist in a diverse and multifaceted community such as Appin, particular in that it exists in unique and natural environment on the edge of urban advance.

The scope of the workshop was to explore the issue and was based on the specific outcomes:

- Establish open lines of communication with Appin residents
- To establish that the Council's approach to strategic planning matters, which relate to growth in and around Appin will be based on a solid understanding of the resident's views.
- So that Appin residents will have a greater understanding of the planning process and Council's decisions.

While some residents may have been disappointed (understandably) that their individual concerns were not addressed, and certainly that was the objective of some, this was not an objective of the workshops. Further engagement processes may be required to address these specific issues.

Where to from here?

Further reading of the feedback from the workshops can provide a well-founded insight into community feeling and perception. What is evident is that community engagement is complex and requires a systemic response. There were many comments made by participants during the process that illustrate the diverse and complex community of Appin. Some participants did not stay for the workshops "because nothing will change". Some participants hoped that this would be a place where their questions could be answered (see above). Most participants demonstrated their concern for their community and for their future and the future of their families.

How the Council manages community engagement in the future will determine community sentiment.