



Shellharbour City Council

Business Paper

17 December 2019

Item 10.3.4 Attachment 3 to
Endorsement of Draft Shellharbour
Open Space and Recreation Needs
Study and Strategy

**Draft Shellharbour Open Space and
Recreation Needs Strategy**

Shellharbour OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Strategy 2020



This Strategy was prepared by the Institute for Public Policy and Governance (IPPG), University of Technology Sydney (UTS). We are an interdisciplinary research, consulting and training organisation providing leadership and expertise in public administration, policy, research, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning and capacity building. We utilise a unique combination of skills, techniques and perspectives to offer long-term sustainable solutions to governments, organisations, businesses and communities.

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Acknowledgement of Country

This Study acknowledges the Wodi Wodi and Dharawal people as the Traditional Owners of the land which is now known as Shellharbour local government area. The authors of this Study pay their respects to Wodi Wodi elders past, present and future, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within this area.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Shellharbour City Council Open Space and Recreation Strategy outlines Council's ten year plan to support residents to remain active, healthy, connected and relaxed across the Shellharbour Local Government Area (LGA).

The Strategy will guide Council's decision making in respect to planning, investment and use of its open space and recreational facilities. It covers both active activities, such as organised sports, as well as passive activities, such as walking or enjoying nature.

The Strategy is built on a set of principles, with actions shaped around seven directions. These will be systematically planned for, implemented and reviewed between 2020 and 2030, with opportunities for community input along the way.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 Needs Study and Strategy

In 2018, Council commenced work on developing a new Open Space and Recreation (OSR) Needs Study and OSR Strategy to replace the 2010 study on the same topic. The Institute for Public Policy and Governance, within the University of Technology Sydney was contracted to develop both documents, providing independent research and development of recommended actions based on the research findings.

The **OSR Needs Study** reviewed Shellharbour's current open spaces and recreational infrastructure and identified community expectations now and in the future. It maps available infrastructure, and analyses population trends and community feedback, together with relevant policy information.

The Needs Study contains a set of detailed findings that has informed the development of this Strategy. The Study, together with extensive data files in a separate Appendix, are both available as a compendium to this document.

The purpose of the **OSR Strategy** is to guide how Council will plan, implement and manage current and future open space, sport, recreation, aquatics and associated community infrastructure throughout the LGA.

Informed by changing population needs and community expectations identified through the Needs Study, the Strategy provides the blueprint for OSR planning up to 2030, and beyond. It outlines a coordinated, all-of-Council approach, including a set of guiding principles to inform decision making and a suite of practical actions focused on current and future use of Council's public spaces and facilities.

1.2.2 Policy context

This OSR Strategy was developed within the context of the NSW Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, expanding upon commitments made in Shellharbour's *Community Strategic Plan 2018-2028* and complementing other operational plans as illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The Shellharbour Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework



Source: Shellharbour Community Strategic Plan 2018-2028

This OSR Strategy also utilises the same quadruple bottom line agenda used across Council, namely to enhance the *Community- Environment- Economy and Leadership*.

The companion OSR Needs Study contains a list of other Council Plans and Policy documents that have influenced the preparation of this Strategy.

Finally, the Strategy is designed to reflect each of Council's core values- *Collaboration- Accountability- Integrity- Respect and Sustainability*.

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2 About the Shellharbour Area

2.1 About the Local Government Area

2.1.1 Geography

Shellharbour City is located in the Illawarra Region of New South Wales, approximately 100 kilometres south of Sydney. The Shellharbour LGA spans 147 square kilometres and in 2019 was home to approximately 72,290 people.

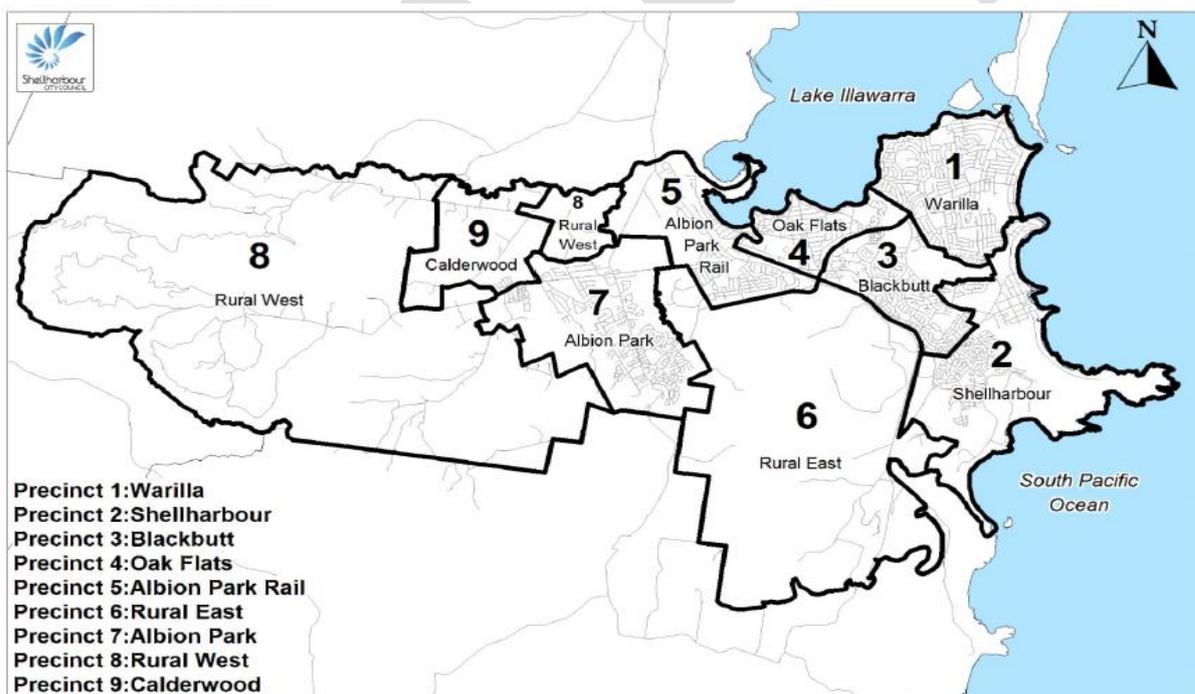
Shellharbour City Council's neighbours are Wollongong LGA to the north, Kiama to the south and Wingecarribee to the west.

2.1.2 Precincts

The LGA is divided into nine precincts, as shown in Figure 2 below. Each precinct falls within the East or West portions of the LGA, defined by their respective side of the Princes Highway.

Additional information on each precinct is contained in the companion OSR Needs Study.

Figure 2: Precincts of Shellharbour



Source: Shellharbour Local Infrastructure Contributions Plan 2019

2.2 Major planning and population trends

2.2.1 Topography and urban Development

The urban distribution of the Shellharbour LGA largely reflects the natural geography of the area. In particular, Shellharbour is influenced by its coastal location which includes the Pacific Ocean coastline to the east, as well as the foreshores of Lake Illawarra in the north (which extend between Shellharbour and Wollongong), and the significantly smaller Elliot Lake estuary, south of the Lake.

The Illawarra Escarpment in the west is another significant topographic landmark in the region. In particular, the escarpment acts as a natural barrier to western expansion of the urban area.

These topographic features have influenced the pattern of urban development of Shellharbour, resulting in a historical concentration of development along the coastline and eastern portion of the LGA. More recently, residential development has expanded west along Illawarra Highway (for example in Precinct 9 at Calderwood and Tullimbar) and to the south (in Precinct 2 at Shell Cove).

2.2.2 Population Profile

There is a wide diversity of ages, household types, incomes and cultural heritages amongst the over 72,000 people who resided in the Shellharbour LGA in 2019.

From 2016 census data, we know that the LGA has higher than the state-wide average of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, representing 3.8% of the population, the majority identifying as local Wodi Wodi and Dharawal people. We also know that significantly more of the Shellharbour population compared to the NSW average were born in Australia (78% compared to 66%), and are proficient in English (98.4% compared to 95.5%). The median age of the LGA is 39 years. This is similar to the NSW average of 38.

Compared to similar LGAs, the Shellharbour LGA is home to high numbers of young people and families, with under 25-year-olds representing approximately a third of the population (33%) in 2019, a percentage which is expected to remain similar into 2031 (32%). Many of these young people will live in new release areas of Shell Cove, Flinders, Tullimbar and Calderwood.

In contrast, established suburbs such as Warilla, Mount Warrigal, Barrack Point and Barrack Heights have a higher proportion of older residents. By 2031, over 60-year-olds are expected to rise to close to 30% of the population. Both geography-based age trends are expected to continue across the next 10 years.

It is estimated that by 2031, the population will have increased to 86,245 people, equating to an additional 13,956 people (16% growth) in the LGA.

This population growth presents some opportunities, as well as challenges, for the Shellharbour City Council, particularly around the use and availability of open space. This includes how to optimise existing assets in established suburbs, while at the same time working to meet the needs of new residents into the future.

The diversity of age and interests across the LGA requires careful consideration to ensure all residents can access appropriate open spaces and recreation opportunities.

2.2.3 Household and Dwelling Type

The most common household type in Shellharbour is couples with children, who represent a little over 34% of all households – slightly above the NSW average of 31.5%. Between 2016 and 2031, couples without children will see the fastest growth of any household type in Shellharbour, however couple families with children will remain the most common household type.

Approximately 80% of the existing housing stock in Shellharbour consists of separate houses, with a further 19% consisting of medium-density dwellings (semi-detached, row, terrace, townhouses and villa units, plus low-rise flats /apartments in blocks or attached to houses). There are less than 1% high density dwellings (flats/apartments in three or more storey blocks) across the LGA, which is in stark contrast with most other non-rural LGAs in NSW.

Over the next decade there will be a shift from low density towards more medium density housing stock. This trend means a slow decrease in access to private outdoor space, that is likely to bring shifts in community expectations, creating more demand for public open spaces and access to other recreational facilities.

2.2.4 Socio-economic Disadvantage

The diversity of socio-economic characteristics is another important variable in planning access to open space and recreational facilities across the Shellharbour LGA. While the median weekly household income is only slightly less than the NSW average (\$1,343 compared to \$1,486), this can mask the very high levels of disadvantage that exist in suburbs such as the Warilla precinct, where average weekly household incomes were generally lower than that of the rest of Shellharbour. Warilla Precinct 1 also has lower levels of car ownership, highlighting the importance of considering access to quality open spaces and affordable recreation opportunities within walking distance of homes.

The Shellharbour LGA also has a higher proportion of the population who are unemployed, at 6.9% compared to the NSW average of 6.3%.

The OSR Strategy has been prepared to reflect the diversity that exists across the LGA. More details on population and planning trends, including on a precinct-by-precinct basis, can be found in the companion OSR Needs Study.

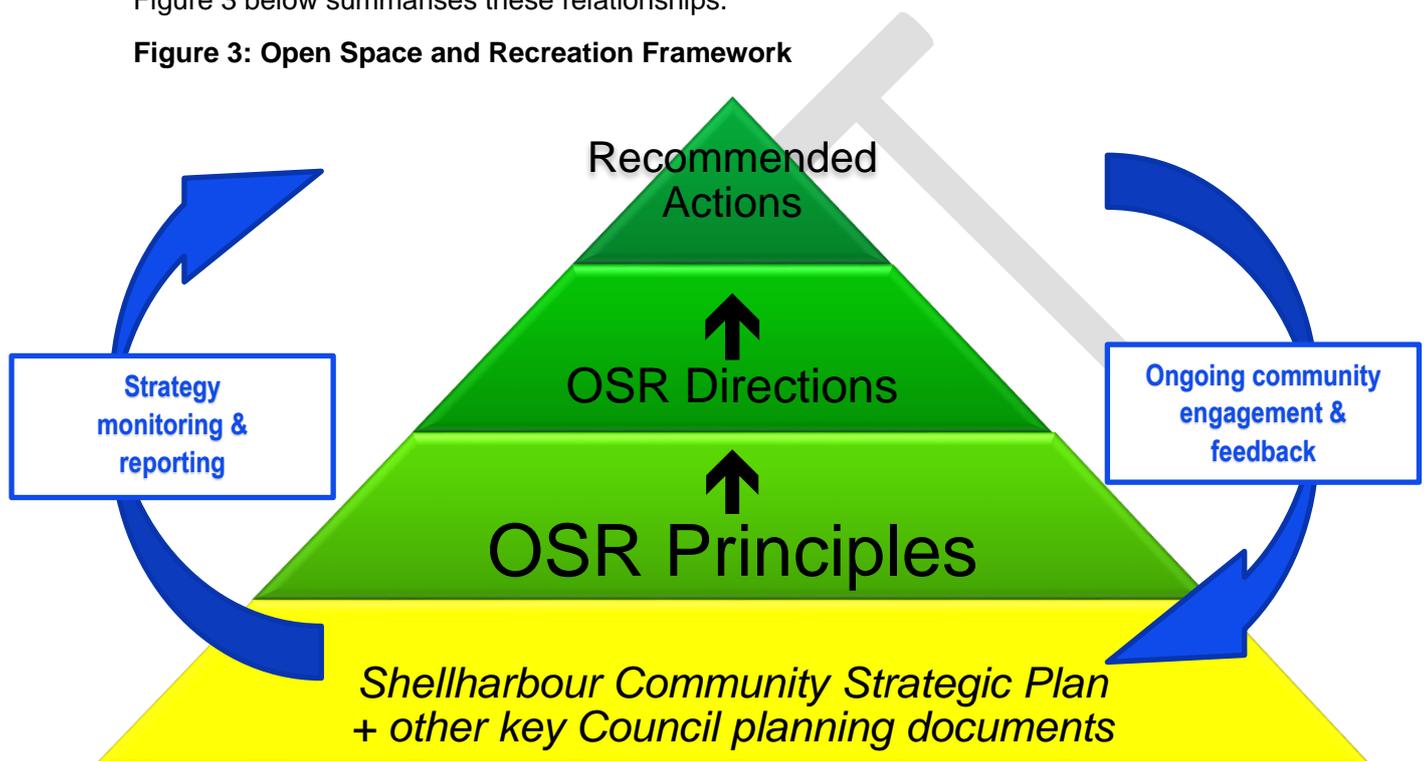
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3 Active-Healthy-Connected-Relaxed OSR Framework

3.1 About the Framework

The OSR Strategy comprises a number of components that will guide how Council effectively plans, implements and manages open space and recreation facilities for the 2020-30 period. Figure 3 below summarises these relationships.

Figure 3: Open Space and Recreation Framework



Source: IPPG, UTS OSR Planning Strategy Planning Cycle

In addition to the community feedback detailed in the OSR Needs Study, the OSR Strategy has also been shaped by the priorities and commitments contained in the Shellharbour Community Strategic Plan and other key Council planning documents. Next:

1. The Strategy is founded on a set of six **Principles** designed to inform decision making at all levels of Council (see 3.2 below).
2. The Strategy comprises seven **Directions** that define the key focus areas for Council (see 3.3 below and expanded upon in Section 4)
3. Under each Direction, are a set of **Recommended Actions** that have been identified as priorities based on the community engagement findings and other population and planning trends (see Section 4 and consolidated with indicative timelines and funding options at Section 6)
4. In order to know the Strategy is on track, some **monitoring and reporting mechanisms** have been developed, including a set of success measures (see 3.4 below and expanded upon in Section 5)

5. Finally, the success of the Strategy is dependent on ongoing community engagement and feedback measures (see various actions under Direction 6 and also measures listed at Section 5.3).

3.2 Principles underpinning the Strategy

Drawing from core elements in the Shellharbour Community Strategic Plan, the OSR Strategy is built on six principles intended to guide decision making at all levels of Council. All principles are of equal importance.

When planning, allocating resources or assessing the future uses of Council's open space, sports and recreation facilities, decision makers will assess how the option delivers on the following Principles:

a) Maximises the Shellharbour area's strengths and positively contributes to the area

The initiative is reviewed holistically with due consideration to its impact on the area's natural and built advantages. It appropriately balances competing factors and demands, making an overall positive contribution to the area.

b) Contributes to the vibrancy and liveability of the area

The initiative is designed to enhance the quality of life of the community and contribute to improved vibrancy and liveability of the area. It takes into account local impacts, as well as district and City-wide considerations.

c) Responsive to local demand and inclusive of diverse needs now and into the future

The initiative is responsive to community needs, noting that a diversity of views will exist on most matters. In addition, it considers future trends and changes in demand and can be justified from a forward planning perspective.

d) Considers safety and connections between people, supportive of a range of experiences

The initiative is consistent with promoting community safety and wellbeing. It gives consideration to linking-up and connecting members of the community in a positive way, potentially supporting both active and passive enjoyment.

e) Promotes access for people of all ages, abilities and interests, matched to a fair distribution of resources across the LGA

The initiative benefits a range of people, and reflects different age, interests and community needs. It factors in access and equity considerations, recognising that people have different abilities and also socio-economic capacity across the LGA.

f) Sustainable, financially viable and of good quality.

The initiative represents good value-for-money and has factored in issues such as long term viability, maintenance costs, impacts on the environment and the enduring benefits for generations to come.

Each principle will be used as a type of check list when OSR proposals are being considered by Council, with cost-benefits factored into the decision making process.

3.3 Core Directions

The OSR Strategy covers seven domains which are summarised in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Seven Domains of the OSR Strategy 2020-2030



As expanded upon in Section 4, each domain has been written as a direction statement under which sits the recommended actions.

- 1. Shape open spaces to encourage public recreation and relaxation**
- 2. Ensure sports grounds and facilities support active participation**
- 3. Improve access to aquatic facilities and activities**
- 4. Encourage sustainable enjoyment of the natural environment**
- 5. Activate open spaces and facilities to broaden public participation**
- 6. Work in collaboration with stakeholders to achieve our Strategy**
- 7. Provide effective management, maintenance, and monitoring.**

These Directions also inform the success measures described at Section 5.1

3.4 Timeframe

While this Strategy is designed to guide Council’s decision making for the 2020-2030 period, it has been drafted to address emerging trends that are likely to span beyond this 10 year period.

All actions listed in Section 4 have been classified as short, medium and long term initiatives. These are relisted in Section 6, together with possible funding options.

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4 Strategy Directions and Actions

This section outlines the major directions and recommended actions of the OSR Strategy, together with some background and context information.

All actions are informed by the findings from the comprehensive OSR Needs Study which is available as a companion report to the Strategy.

All recommended actions are again listed at Section 6, together with proposed timeframes for implementation and indicative funding source.

Direction 1: Shape open spaces to encourage public recreation and relaxation

Context

The Shellharbour LGA has approximately **200 parks and reserves** as part of a broad open space network. These parks and reserves form part of a 'hierarchy' of open space, meaning that each area primarily services either the local, district or LGA-wide community. Each park or reserve generally offers facilities and amenities correspondent to its level on the open space hierarchy.

We know from community feedback that most parks and reserves across Shellharbour are highly valued, and are regularly used for a variety of purposes. These include for children's play, picnics and social gatherings, walking, other forms of exercise, or other types of relaxation, including meditation.

To get to these parks, the majority of residents indicated that they would walk to their local park, although they would generally drive to access larger district and other higher order parks across the LGA.

The community has indicated that most open spaces are being used by different ages and interest groups, though more could be done to ensure that spaces are accessible to the whole community.

Having access to quality open spaces brings a number of tangible community benefits, including:

- Improving resident health and wellbeing by connecting with nature and enjoying an outdoor activity, including dog-walking
- Improving physical fitness by providing space for exercising
- Supporting community cohesion by facilitating opportunities for unstructured, social interaction
- Promoting a sense of place, belonging and community pride
- Enhancing child and youth development through play and recreation.

Between 2020 and 2030, access to public open spaces will continue to play an essential and valued part of Shellharbour community life, particularly with consideration to:

- Pressure from population growth and changes to our local demographic mix

- Increased urban density and reduced access to private backyards
- Land use competition associated with demand to expand residential, commercial and retail areas
- Increased costs of maintenance, including mitigating for reduced rainfall and climate change.

In addition to these demographic and structural changes, the community told us that there are some issues that need to be managed by Council to meet **changing community expectations** around open space provision. These include:

- An increasing focus on quality design and safety, with specific consideration given to lighting
- Improved maintenance, and the availability of playgrounds, parks and reserves that retain their quality and relevance over time
- Provision of additional infrastructure or embellishments in open spaces, including park benches, fences, shade, sealed pathways, plus access to toilets and drinking fountains
- Ability to better connect from one open space to the next
- Making more open spaces inclusive and accessible to a wider-cross section of the community, through adding facilities and features (natural and built) suited to different age, interest and ability groups such as play equipment for children; bike paths or skateboard facilities for young people; graded walking paths and seating for seniors; and water fountains and outdoor exercise equipment for active adults.
- Repurposing or reconfiguring some underutilised or surplus parks and reserves, to other public uses of benefit to the community¹.

There was also important input gathered from key Council consultative groups and group specific planning, including the Disability Access and Inclusion Plan, the Healthy Ageing Strategy and the Shellharbour Youth Plan.

We learnt that there a number of useful, updated park hierarchies and design standards that can inform how Council plans for, maintains and upgrades its open spaces in the future². In addition, there are numerous revised state and national guidelines and policies for different age and interest groups, and covering other key open space challenges (including mitigating against risk, flooding and extreme weather events) that provide other evidenced-based benchmarks to inform Council decision making³.

Appropriately located, inclusive, well designed and maintained public open spaces will continue to play a crucial role in the life of the Shellharbour community over the next ten years and beyond.

¹ For example, this is might be relevant to selected smaller parks, where an alternative park is also within 400m walking distance of an alternative open space or park. See detailed maps in OSR Needs Study.

² Appendices X-X of the OSR Needs Study lists all the relevant standards and hierarchies.

³ An extensive listing of these policies and guidelines can be found in Section X of the OSR Needs Study.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 1, Council commits to:

1.1	Adopt and apply open space design principles and standards , as outlined in OSR Needs Study, when undertaking future open space planning and maintenance.
1.2	Conduct a review of Shellharbour open spaces using the updated park hierarchies outlined in the OSR Needs Study.
1.3	Informed by the outcomes of 1.1 and 1.2, develop an updated Community Assets Management Plans to guide Council decision making.
1.4	Conduct a review of existing play spaces and develop an updated, inclusive Shellharbour Play Strategy .
1.5	Continue to initiate, resource and implement master plans for key open spaces informed by the OSR Needs Study.
1.6	Undertake a new Shellharbour Foreshore Master Plan .
1.7	Undertake a Shellharbour walking and cycling network review and identify opportunities for better linking suburbs and residents to open spaces and facilities.
1.8	Conduct regular open space assessments, including usage and quality audits , to inform ongoing scheduling, capital works and maintenance.
1.9	Instigate a review of underutilised or surplus open spaces (including small parks under 3,000 square metres), and identify alternative options for Council and community consideration.
1.10	Develop a Shellharbour Community Gardens Strategy designed to encourage all-age access and use of specified open spaces.
1.11	Continue to implement the Dog-Friendly Spaces Strategy to provide positive experiences for dog-owners and other residents across the Shellharbour LGA.
1.12	Prioritise precinct-specific open spaces for staged upgrades informed by the OSR Needs Study.

Also see:

→ Action 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 related to monitoring open space hierarchies, ratios and design standards.

→ Action 7.10 related to translating open space planning decisions into other internal planning instruments.

Direction 2: Ensure sports grounds and facilities support active participation

Context

The Shellharbour LGA is home to over **95 sports fields, including more than 31 courts** (suitable for netball, basketball and tennis), as well as a regional **multi-use sports facility** in the form of Croom Regional Sporting Complex, which includes Shellharbour City Stadium.

Across these facilities, the community has access to extensive infrastructure that supports opportunities for training and competitions for a wide range of organised sports, including athletics, BMX riding, cricket, equestrian, various football codes (AFL, football (soccer), rugby league and rugby union, Oztag and touch football), gymnastics, hockey, netball, triathlon and tennis.

Sports participation across the Shellharbour LGA is high, with over 40% of the community consulted reporting that they or a member of their household was a part of a sports club or association. Additionally, almost a quarter of respondents said they participated in organised sport on a weekly basis, noting some variations between precincts, as documented in the OSR Needs Study. For example, there were particularly high reported participation rates in the western suburbs of the LGA, with 38% indicating that they participate in organised sport on a weekly basis.

Through engaging with local sports clubs and associations, we know that there is ongoing demand for access to quality sports facilities, with many sports expecting an increase in participant numbers in the coming years. Trends include increasing levels of female participation across football codes, plus a continued strong presence of junior participants in most organised sports.

Other points raised by the community include:

- The need for targeted upgrades to ensure local sport facilities meet code standards and participant expectations
- Shortcomings in some local sports infrastructure, including shortages of female change rooms, lighting for afterhours activities, and adequate access roads and parking at some high demand sports grounds
- Maintenance concerns, particularly around sports ground fencing and the quality of ground cover especially after extended dryness
- Need for planned investment in new or upgraded sport infrastructure to assist sport clubs cater for growing demand.

Furthermore, feedback from local sporting bodies underscored the importance of the Council working in close collaboration with local groups to ensure that the delivery and management of public sports grounds and facilities continue to deliver positive health and participation outcomes for local participants, while also contributing to sport participation and advancement at district and above levels.

Given the ongoing, and at times competing demand, for access to sporting grounds and facilities, there was an identified need to ensure that sports facilities across the LGA are:

- Used and shared in an inclusive, efficient and effective manner

- Maintained and updated in response to use patterns, community demands and sporting code standards
- Incorporate embellishments and additional facilities into new, upgraded or retrofitted sports facilities to expand participation, not just to other age and interest groups, but also to encourage multi-purpose use, including between active and passive participants. This includes giving consideration of features such as:
 - Water fountains
 - Benches and shade
 - Additional change rooms, toilets and, in some facilities access to showers, catering for males, females plus users requiring unisex or accessible access
 - Linked-up cycle and walking paths network, with secure bicycle parking facilities.

As documented in the OSR Needs Study, the research highlighted the need for Council to be more proactive in managing changing demand for specific sports codes, and at the same time as having mechanisms to manage:

- Emerging trends in active participation, including how to support new sporting options
- Ensuring facilities can evolve and/or accommodate multi-functional usage catering for than one code or type of organised sports

Similar to the findings regarding open space planning, the Needs Study documents various sporting code standards, benchmarks and design guidelines that will help inform how Council plans and manages its sports grounds and facilities into the future⁴.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 2, Council commits to:

2.1	Establish a Shellharbour Shared Use Sporting Facilities Plan in collaboration with local sporting and community representatives (<i>Linked to Action 6.1</i>).
2.2	Conduct regular sportsground facilities' assessments, including usage and quality audits , to inform ongoing scheduling, capital works and maintenance.
2.3	Update the Sportsfields User Policy , and incorporate new measures to encourage shared-use, promote multiple-purpose, and facilitate wider active and passive community participation.
2.4	Continue to instigate a master planning program for key sports facilities , inclusive of whole-of-life costing, informed by the OSR Needs Study.
2.5	Investigate options for adding safe and accessible public walkways though the Shellharbour Links Golf Course . (<i>Linked to Action 2.1</i>)

⁴ For example, the Heart Foundation's 'Healthy Active by Design'. See Section X of the OSR Needs Study for other relevant sports and active participation guidelines.

2.6	Investigate opportunities for sports clubs and the community to access non-Council owned sportsgrounds and facilities (such as in schools) for training or other after-hours use.
2.7	Establish a formal process for assessing community requests for upgrades of Council's open space and recreational facilities.
2.8	Continue to investigate the joint development and management of Mountain Trail Bike (MTB) facilities.
2.9	Ensure future sports ground and facility scheduling, planning, and management is informed by evidence-based policy and sports trend information , including those referenced in the OSR Needs Study.
2.10	Continue to implement sportsgrounds and facilities maintenance works and upgrades informed by regular usage and quality audits (<i>See Action 2.2</i>).
2.11	Ensure all Council planning instruments - including the Shellharbour Delivery Program, the Operations Plan, the Long Term Financial Plan and the Contributions Plan - accurately reflect the full cost of required maintenance works and upgrades .

Also see:

- Action 6.1 related to establishing an Active Recreation Working Party.
- Action 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 related to monitoring open space hierarchies, ratios and design standards.
- Action 7.10 related to translating open space planning decisions into other internal planning instruments.

Direction 3: Improve access to aquatic facilities and activities

Context

The Shellharbour LGA has a **strong connection to water**, bounded to the east by the South Pacific Ocean, and to the north-east by Lake Illawarra. Residents in the area has access to extensive amounts of ocean and lake foreshore, as well as access to multiple beaches, river systems and bays providing a range of opportunities for boating and other water sports. Shellharbour's strong water-based culture is supported by **two surf-life saving clubs**, plus a variety of rowing, sailing, swimming and surfing clubs.

Shellharbour hosts **four public pools for swimming**, including the open-access Beverley Whitfield Ocean Pool.

These aquatic facilities are popular with both local residents and visitors alike. For example, the Beverley Whitfield Pool (built in 1894) is historically and socially significant for generations of swimming club members, school children, residents and visitors, including those who stay at the nearby Shellharbour Holiday Park. The pool has been recognised as a cultural heritage item by the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage.

Community feedback on local aquatics facilities demonstrated that there is a high value placed on access to pools. National data, as well as local resident feedback, highlight that swimming remains a popular passive and active activity across age brackets, gender, cultural backgrounds as well as abilities.

Due to available options, most local swimmers reported regularly swimming in outdoor and ocean pools. There was also a recorded preference for swimming in pools closest to home, albeit many respondents reporting a willingness to drive to access more extensive aquatic and other recreational features outside the LGA, such as those available at the Kiama Leisure Centre.

Other points raised by the local community include:

- Desire for the Shellharbour LGA to have more swimming options
- Strong support for access to a local, full-length heated indoor pool, with disabled access, to support range of swimming and pool based activities across all seasons
- The need for local pools to cater for a range of swimming abilities and interests, including improved protection from the elements.

While the Council plays a less direct role in other non-pool related aquatic facilities and activities (for example in sailing or rowing clubs), it is important that strong working relationships are maintained to ensure that these other types of water-based active and passive participations are available for the benefit of the community on an ongoing basis.

Similarly, Council should work in collaboration with stakeholders, including the state government and neighbouring councils, to ensure residents have improved and evolving access to quality aquatic facilities, plus water-based events into the future.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 3, Council commits to:

3.1	Work with NSW Government and neighbouring Councils to pursue the establishment of a major new Regional Leisure and Aquatic Centre accessible to Shellharbour residents.
3.2	Investigate the feasibility of a new heated indoor pool in the Shellharbour LGA to support year-round access to swimming and pool related activities.
3.3	Investigate the feasibility of a new ocean pool in the Shellharbour LGA to support increased access to ocean swimming and pool related activities.
3.4	Conduct regular pool assessments, including usage and quality audits , to inform ongoing scheduling, capital works and maintenance.
3.5	Identify open space locations and playgrounds suitable for water-play infrastructure . <i>(Linked to 1.4 Play Strategy)</i>
3.6	Undertake dialogue with boating and water-sports bodies, clubs and businesses to identify options for improving community access and enjoyment of Shellharbour's local beaches, ocean and lakes.

Also see:

→ Action 7.1, 7.2 and 7.3 related to monitoring pool ratios and design standards.

Direction 4: Encourage sustainable enjoyment of the natural environment

Context

Within the Shellharbour LGA, there are a number of open spaces, parklands, walkways and reserves that provide important opportunities for connection with local flora and fauna and passive enjoyment of the natural environment.

Key open spaces, with high natural value include:

- Bass Point Reserve
- Blackbutt Reserve
- Croom Reserve
- Killalea State Park
- Lake Illawarra and Shellharbour foreshores
- Macquarie Pass National Park.

Importantly, ownership and management of a number of these spaces falls across different local, state and national agencies, meaning that Shellharbour City Council is not responsible for funding and maintaining all of the above. Nonetheless, Council has an important role to play as an advocate, stakeholder and point of liaison for all of these areas. Council also has a role to play in assisting residents to become aware of the natural environment, and to support sustainable ways of enjoying nature at the same time as protecting biodiversity and scarce natural vegetation. This might include assisting with provision of features such as clear access routes, fenced pathways, interpretative signage, and linked-up nature networks.

While environmental reserves, and state and national parks, are not generally counted towards open space provisions, it is important to highlight the value of such areas in providing space for alternative recreational opportunities. This includes, though is not limited to, bushwalking and birdwatching, low impact picnics, or responsibly managed and sustainable bike options.

Sustainable access to well managed and protected nature areas also provide important opportunities for the community to learn about, and become engaged with, other key social and environmental issues including:

- Aboriginal and cultural heritage
- Opportunities to get involved in Bushcare and Landcare volunteer groups
- Benefits of having a green canopy and providing natural breathing spaces particularly to assist in heat regulation
- Habitat for local fauna and flora, including nature corridors between other open places
- Appropriately managing drainage and stormwater management
- A reprieve for residents wishing to relax, escape the built environment and reconnect to nature to assist their wellbeing.

Community feedback indicated that residents place value on having good access to nature and the natural environment close to where they live. Furthermore, enhancing sustainable access and enjoyment of local natural spaces within and adjoining Shellharbour, adds significant value to the LGA as a preferred place to live and work, as well as a destination for tourists and other visitors seeking a variety of outdoor experiences.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 4, Council commits to:

4.1	Adopt a whole-of-council and community approach to protecting biodiversity and culturally significant sites when planning for, managing and maintaining open space and recreational facilities across Shellharbour.
4.2	Identify, enable and promote sustainable, passive recreational activities for all-ages and abilities- such as bushwalking and bird watching- in appropriate Shellharbour bushlands, waterways, wetlands, and other open spaces
4.3	Consider undertaking new plans of management and masterplans for Blackbutt Reserve and Bass Point Reserve.
4.4	Continue dialogue with NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and other state government agencies to ensure the good management, maintenance and monitoring of state managed parks and reserves in line with the OSR Strategy.
4.5	Work with local and regional Aboriginal groups and community elders to enhance recognition and celebration of Aboriginal culture and heritage , including in the natural environment.
4.6	Investigate sustainable options to better connect existing environmental reserves to each other, and to other open spaces.
4.7	In collaboration with neighbouring Councils, investigate establishing a linked-up Illawarra scenic coastal walk.
4.8	Pursue recreational opportunities to make Lake Illawarra and its foreshore a location for enjoying nature , consistent with the Lake Illawarra Coastal Management Program 2019-2029.

Direction 5: Activate open spaces and facilities to broaden public participation

Context

Capitalising on its strong community network and attractive open spaces, Shellharbour City Council organises, sponsors or supports a variety of activities and community events each year. Such events celebrate and encourage community involvement in sport and recreational pursuits in the LGA. In addition, some sports fields, facilities and open space areas in Shellharbour host events organised by community groups and sports clubs.

These types of events and public community activities bring benefits to the LGA and the community, including:

- Encouraging residents to come together, thereby fostering community cohesion and integration
- Facilitating different members of the community to connect and share an experience that can lead to ongoing friendships and networks of interest
- Exposing people to specific open spaces, or different types of passive and active recreation, for the first time, that may encourage further participation and enjoyment
- Making a positive economic contribution to the area, supporting local businesses, clubs and associations, as well as promoting the area as a tourist destination.

Given these benefits, there is a clear role for Council in not only maintaining quality open spaces and facilities suitable for community events, but also playing an active role in broadening public participation by activating what is already there. Importantly, these types of activities need to focus on accessibility, while also being flexible and adaptable to cater for a wide range of activities and participants.

Community engagement and background research highlighted a number of options for Council to consider including:

- Partnering with key stakeholders and community groups to assist in planning and delivering quality events that deliver tangible community benefits catering for different ages, interests and abilities
- Upgrading, and promoting select open spaces and facilities for use multi-purpose uses, ensuring universal access and a capacity for flexible usage patterns
- Developing and implementing an annual schedule of events that caters to a variety of interests and demographics.
- Promoting and engaging with the community about the range of open space and recreational facilities to broaden their use and enjoyment.

Between 2020 and 2030, Council will develop and implement numerous other plans - including on, though not limited to: safety, young people, Aboriginal people, cultural heritage, people with disability, older people, and the environment. Each of these has the potential to add to this commitment to activate open spaces and consolidate Council's broader commitment to inclusion.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 5, Council commits to:

5.1	Continue to raise awareness of the number and potential uses of Shellharbour's open spaces, sport and recreational facilities , targeting local residents and businesses, as well as visitors and tourists.
5.2	Adopt a whole-of-council and whole-of-community approach to hosting or supporting more community based activities and events , particularly at under-utilised open spaces and sports facilities.
5.3	Develop and promote more multi-purpose parks, reserves and sporting grounds , including by adding facilities and features that attract a wide cross-section of the community.
5.4	Initiate a review of OSR facilities fees and charging policies with consideration given to differential pricing to help manage demand and encourage use of less popular assets.
5.5	Take steps to increase community knowledge and appreciation of Shellharbour's built and natural assets , and the roles residents and local businesses can play in sharing, maintaining and protecting them for future generations.
5.6	Utilise other Council planning instruments and teams to implement other measures designed to further activate public spaces and broaden public participation. <i>These include, though are not limited to, Council initiatives related to: safety; Aboriginal and cultural heritage; the environment; public information; arts; tourism; as well as practical inclusion measures for specific target groups including people with disability, older people, children and young people.</i>
5.7	Continue to work through the Illawarra Shoalhaven Joint Organisation to develop and promote events and competitions that encourage Shellharbour residents to participate and also attract visitors to enjoy our healthy lifestyle.

Direction 6: Work in collaboration with stakeholders to achieve our Strategy

Context

Delivering a high quality and well-rounded suite of sport and recreational facilities and quality open spaces requires advice, input and collaboration between Council and a wide range of users and stakeholders. For example, local sports clubs and associations play a key operational role in delivering sport and recreation opportunities across the LGA, as do licensees and private operators (including nearby café owners and food outlets) who all play a role in supporting the community to remain active, healthy, connected and relaxed.

To achieve this Strategy however, we need to engage and collaborate with others beyond our local community. This includes working with neighbouring Councils, regional bodies and associations, NSW and Federal Government agencies, as well as research and industry bodies. Each has an important role to play in supporting healthy communities, including through setting policy directions, establishing benchmarks and guidelines, providing types of funding or delivering other forms of support our actions.

Clearly, there is a need for strong collaboration between stakeholders to ensure open spaces and sport and recreational facilities not only support a wide variety of active and passive recreation, but also cater for the full range of participants, covering different age groups, abilities and interests. To this end, Shellharbour City Council uses the advice and input of a number of consultative groups - such as the Disability Access and Inclusion Advisory Committee and Aboriginal Advisory Committee- as well as directions outlined in specialist policies such as the Healthy Ageing Strategy and the Shellharbour Youth Plan.

While Shellharbour exceeds most benchmarks in respect to the supply of open spaces and recreation facilities based on population ratios, it is important that they can be shared and accessible to different user groups. Further, it is important that assets are maintained to a high standard that meets local needs.

Ensuring strong and effective collaboration between Council and stakeholders is essential for the delivery of open spaces and facilities as it allows changing community needs to be addressed over time. It also helps ensure Council's decision making remains evidence-based and sustainable, at the same time as adaptive to demographic shifts into the foreseeable future.

Further, a commitment to collaborating can:

- Help identify gaps and opportunities in the planning and delivery of open spaces and recreation facilities
- Gain community and industry support to explore options for open space and facility provision
- Engage stakeholder about the interrelationships between different components on the OSR Strategy and other Council commitments
- Ensure that open spaces and recreation facilities meet both current and emerging expectations and needs
- Build coalitions and opportunities for new sports and recreation initiatives, while at the same time enabling the expansion of existing users and assets.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 6, Council commits to:

6.1	Establish a Shellharbour Active Recreation Working Party ⁵ , comprising local sports clubs and associations, together with other community groups, to help facilitate an inclusive, shared-use approach to sportsgrounds and facilities. <i>(Linked to Action 2.1)</i>
6.2	Continue to engage with Council advisory groups and committees to gain their advice and input on specific components of the OSR Strategy as they progress.
6.3	Explore opportunities to work with district and state level sporting associations to enhance the provision of sports facilities in Shellharbour.
6.4	Collaborate with tourism agencies, business groups as well as regional and state sporting bodies to promote Shellharbour as a key recreation, sports, aquatic and nature destination .
6.5	In consultation with local advocacy groups and services (including those representing people with disability, Aboriginal people, and those from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds), identity priority initiatives for improving universal access to active and passive recreation opportunities across the Shellharbour area.
6.6	Utilise the findings of the OSR Needs Study to identify and action precinct-based actions that require local input and collaboration .

⁵ Replacing and expanding on the current sports user meetings.

Direction 7: Provide effective management, maintenance, and monitoring

Context

With a significant portfolio of open and environmental spaces, sports grounds and other facilities, in addition to pools and playgrounds, careful consideration must be given to how Council proposes to manage, monitor and maintain its facilities over the coming decade.

As local sporting groups and community members observed, key management challenges for Council to address include:

- Maintaining, or in many instances improving on, the maintenance and asset quality available in open spaces and recreational facilities across the LGA
- Reducing and deterring vandalism and littering
- Scheduling and delivering timely upgrades to open spaces and facilities
- Responding to high volumes of maintenance requests
- Ensuring that open spaces and recreational facilities have adequate amenities to encourage and support their use across a range of age, interests and abilities, as well as at different times of the day or week.
 - This requires giving additional consideration to providing further embellishments including shade, seating, drinking fountains, walking paths, after-hours lighting, bins, accessible toilets plus other special interest equipment such as outdoor gyms etc.
- Balancing demand and encouraging use of facilities and open spaces through a range of practices including:
 - Clear usage policies and practices
 - Good access, including through walking and cycling networks, roadways and parking
 - Pricing policies and hours of operation
 - Promotion and signage
 - Scheduling of recreation activities, events and group activities.

Recommended Actions

Under Direction 7, Council commits to:

7.1 Continue to monitor and apply open space standards and park hierarchies (as documented in the OSR Needs Study) to preserve positive open space ratios over the next 10 years. *(Linked to Actions 1.1)*

7.2 Continue to monitor and apply sports and aquatic facilities standards and design principles (as documented in the Needs Study) to maintain quality across the LGA. *(Linked to Actions 1.2- 1.3)*

7.3	Use the OSR Strategy and Shellharbour open space hierarchies and design principles (as documented in the Needs Study) in discussions with state and local government agencies in planning discussions that impact on the LGA.
7.4	Promote and showcase Shellharbour’s open space and recreation assets and opportunities widely. <i>(Linked to Action 5.1 and 5.5).</i>
7.5	Instigate improved data collection and demographic analysis of aquatics and sports facilities usage patterns. <i>(Linked to Actions 1.8, 2.2 and 3.3).</i>
7.6	Apply life-cycle budgeting to upgrades and maintenance to new open spaces, sporting and recreational facilities upgrades to better inform planning and maintenance.
7.7	Continue to engage with key stakeholders and the community regarding OSR planning and implementation. <i>(Linked to Actions 6.2 and 6.5).</i>
7.8	Continue to gather community feedback (including through Council’s ‘Let’s Chat’ channel and other community surveys) to inform the ongoing planning and implementation of the OSR Strategy
7.9	Proactively seek local business, commercial operators and other interested bodies support and collaboration regarding the OSR Strategy.

Also see:

- Actions 1.8, 2.2 and 3.3 related to conducting regular usage and quality audits of open space, sports and recreational facilities.
- Actions 2.10 and 2.11 related to ensuring adequate maintenance and funding of required works.

* * * *

5 Putting the Strategy into Action

5.1 OSR Strategy Implementation Plan

To put the Strategy into action, Council will prepare (at least on an annual basis) an **OSR Strategy Implementation Plan**, documenting the status of each action and noting those that are being deferred until a subsequent year as indicated in Section 6.

The implementation plan will list who the lead unit is, other stakeholders, the indicative timeframes and specific milestones. The plan will also document any emerging issues or new developments that need to be managed against any specific action.

The implementation plan will be provided to Council's senior management and elected officials for noting and consideration. This will provide accountability and transparency regarding the Strategy's progress.

5.2 Success Measures and Benchmark Reporting

To measure the success of this Strategy overall, Council will develop a set of simple measures to assess the degree to which each of the Strategy Directions is progressed in a systematic and timely manner.

The key success measures (also to be reviewed at least once per annum over the ten-year life of the Strategy) will assess quantitative and qualitative changes in:

- 1) Recreation and relaxation in Shellharbour's **open spaces**
- 2) Active participation in **sports grounds and facilities**
- 3) Access to **aquatic facilities** and other activities
- 4) Sustainable enjoyment of the **natural environment**
- 5) Broad participation in **activated open spaces and facilities**
- 6) **Productive collaborations** with stakeholders
- 7) **Effective management**, maintenance, and monitoring.

In addition to assessing progress on each direction, Council staff will annually monitor and report on key measures listed in the Shellharbour Parks and Recreational Space Guidelines listed at Attachment 1 of the OSR Needs Study including on:

- **Population: open space ratios**
- **Park Hierarchies**
- **Dwelling: open space distance ratios**

plus, all other measures and actions listed under Direction 7 above.

These reporting mechanisms will be included in Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting framework.

5.3 Ongoing Community Involvement and Feedback

In addition to the Active Recreation Working Party (see *Action 6.1*), Council will regularly gather community feedback on its open space, sportsgrounds and recreational facilities via a **Community Satisfaction Survey**.

Council will also closely review any feedback received on open space and recreation via it's **'Let's Chat'** feedback channel (see *Action 7.8*).

In addition, Council will continue to utilise its relevant **standing committees, working parties and advisory groups** to continuously test approaches, and gather feedback on specific plans developed under the Strategy.

Together, all feedback from the community and other stakeholders will be systematically collected and communicated to specific Council teams and staff responsible for managing the implementation of the relevant action.

* * * *

6 Consolidated Actions

NOTE: This section has not been populated at this stage. Following public exhibition, it will relist all the recommended actions outlined in Sections 4, together with indicative timeframes and possible funding options.

As the Strategy is designed to inform planning over the next ten years:

- **Short term** refers to actions suited to early consideration and implementation- potentially through Council's annual Operational Plans
- **Medium term** refers to actions suited to mid-period consideration- potentially through Council's Delivery Plans
- **Longer term** refers to actions suited to late decade consideration- potentially through Council's Operational Plans.

In addition, a number of actions are designated **ongoing** as they primarily relate to ongoing practices or modified changes in approach, that do not require any new substantial financial commitment by Council.

Three potential funding sources have also been listed against each action:

- General Revenue of Council (GR),
- External Grant Funding (GF)
- Developer Contributions under s.7.11 (DC).

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source GR/ GF/ DC
D1)	Shape open spaces to encourage public recreation and relaxation		
1.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
1.2	etc		

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source
D2) Ensure sports grounds and facilities support active participation			
2.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
2.2	etc		

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source
D3) Improve access to aquatic facilities and activities			
3.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
3.2	etc		

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source
D4) Encourage use and enjoyment of the natural environment			
4.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
4.2	etc		

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source
D5) Activate open spaces and facilities to broaden public participation			
5.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
5.2	etc		

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source
D6) Work in collaboration with stakeholders to achieve our Strategy			
6.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
6.2	etc		

#	Recommended Action	Suggested Time frame	Possible Funding Source
D7) Provide effective management, maintenance, and monitoring			
7.1	TO BE ADDED after public exhibition		
7.2	etc		

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