

6.12.1

Community Planning Review: Phase 1 Summary Report

Executive Summary

The Community Planning Review Project has reviewed the eight community plans developed in 2019 for the communities of: Bealiba, Bet Bet, Carisbrook, Dunolly, Majorca, Maryborough, Talbot and Timor.

The review has been undertaken to help both Central Goldfields Shire Council and communities to learn about and reflect on the achievements, challenges and implementation needs of our place-based community plans since they are now almost halfway through their ten-year life.

Consultation focussed around eight communities where community plans are already in place:

- Bealiba & district
- Bet Bet & district
- Carisbrook & district
- Dunolly & district
- Majorca & district
- Maryborough & district
- Talbot & district
- Timor & district

Additionally, three Councils were researched to better understand their model/approaches for supporting communities to implement their community plans.

Councillors nominated community leaders to interview who were actively volunteering in their community, through key community groups. During the review phase we heard from:

- 30 key community leaders, groups and partners who have been involved in implementing community plan activities
- 4 Central Goldfields Shire Council staff members involved in community planning work and previous 'community champion roles'
- three other successful community plan projects were reviewed
- a workshop with combined communities in late May will further inform directions for this work and will be added to this report.

Overall, a total of 34 people shared their thoughts, experiences and ideas for improvement for community planning in Central Goldfields.

The review highlighted a number of KEY FINDINGS:

Community awareness of community plans was low.

This was for a range of reasons with Covid disruptions being the most common. Other contributing factors were:

- community members assuming Council would lead Community Plan implementation
- community Plans not sitting alongside any community group or structure
- no 'action or implementation' mechanism to activate Community Plans
- Community Plans were not broadly promoted

A number of community plan priorities have been achieved over the past three years. Despite low awareness of community plans, a number of achievements were noted across townships with many of these linked to community plan priorities. The Federal Government's Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program – rounds one and two – enabled Council to deliver a range of upgrades across townships.

There aren't any nominated groups responsible for leading the implementation of community plans in any community.

Conversations revealed that Community Plan implementation has not been the responsibility of any group. Adding to this, a number of community leaders assumed that it was Council's responsibility to lead the implementation of community plans. This highlights a lack of community ownership of the plans and understanding of the concept of community planning.

The current capacity of Central Goldfields communities to lead the implementation of community plans is low.

The capacity for communities to lead implementation of their community plans has been challenged by a number of things:

- lack of volunteers and ageing volunteers
- knowledge gaps about community development and how to do community planning
- knowledge gaps about Council and for sourcing and writing grants
- low numbers of 'activated community leaders'; and
- low awareness of community planning and community development approaches.

There are many ways to do 'community planning'.

Conversations with community leaders and the desktop review of other community planning programs has revealed that there isn't one 'right way' to do community planning. Developing flexible and sustainable place-based implementation structures was revealed as key to community led implementation and ownership.

Community development principles and approaches underpin good community planning work.

Community planning is grounded in community development principles. To do this work well community and Council would benefit from a strengthened understanding of how to embed these principles in their work together.

Improved partnerships, systems and alignment with Council's planning framework are needed.

Community leaders highlighted the need for stronger partnerships and support from other communities, key partners and most importantly from Central Goldfields Shire Council. Community volunteering, leadership and simpler Council systems to support implementation of community plans were highlighted as needs. A clear alignment of community planning priorities with the Community Vision, Council Plan and key Council Strategies and Plans was suggested.

Resourcing, support and tools are needed to ensure the success of community planning in Central Goldfields.

The current capacity and structures within Central Goldfields Communities cannot support successful community planning. Consultation revealed that communities lack structures and tools to support implementation, have low leadership and volunteer capacity, are without resources to achieve even small 'quick wins' in their plans and there is a lack of overall knowledge, skills and experience in community planning and development principles.

Adding to this, it was identified that staff across Council could be better supported to understand and apply community development principles in their work with communities.

THE REVIEW HAS CULMINATED IN FIVE OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

(Supporting actions can be found in the succeeding section of this report).

Recommendation 1: Build awareness of community planning and its benefits and achievements across Central Goldfields communities and Council departments.

Recommendation 2: Apply a flexible approach to community planning that is place based and recognises the uniqueness of each community.

Recommendation 3: Build on existing community assets to strengthen the community's capacity and empower them to effectively lead and implement community planning.

Recommendation 4: Facilitate partnerships, systems and approaches that support the achievement of community plan priorities and strengthen alignment with Council's planning framework.

Recommendation 5: Council to demonstrate commitment to community planning by providing resourcing, support and tools that are needed to ensure success.

The findings of this report will guide Council's work together with key community groups and leaders to design and support processes for improved community planning and implementation.

INTRODUCTION

In 2019, 1035 residents across eight districts - Bealiba, Bet Bet, Carisbrook, Dunolly, Majorca, Maryborough, Talbot and Timor - came together to outline a ten-year plan for each of their communities.

Community were engaged through:

- Community listening posts
- Drop-in sessions
- An online survey
- Postcards
- Focus groups
- Children's drawing activities; and
- Community workshops.

Daisy Hill & district was not included in the 2019 work and a separate piece of work is currently being progressed to develop their community plan.

It is an ideal time to learn about and reflect on the achievements, challenges and needs of our place-based community plans since they are now almost halfway through their ten year life.

The review has focused on:

- Progress of activities (what has been fully delivered, partially delivered and what hasn't been delivered and why)
- Level of community involvement/engagement in activities
- The role of partnerships and key stakeholders
- Enablers, constraints and barriers for community led implementation of activities
- Common areas of need across townships and communities; and
- The role of Councillors.

We did this by:

- talking with key community leaders, groups and partners in the eight townships who have been involved in implementing community plan activities so we can understand progress, achievements, challenges and ideas for improvements
- talking with Councillors and key Council staff; and
- working together with key community groups and leaders to design a local process for implementing community plans.

Desktop research was undertaken to learn from successful community plan implementation work at three other Councils; examining:

- Processes/model for community plan implementation
- Resourcing
- Enablers, constraints and barriers
- Key learnings

We want to learn about how we can do better, so we can get really good at community planning, and we want to empower communities to be great at it to.

WHAT IS COMMUNITY PLANNING?

The evidence on community planning is limited and the approaches are broad and can differ greatly. The desktop scan looked at how Yarra Ranges Council, Golden Plains Shire Council and Loddon Shire Council are doing community planning. The scan revealed three unique approaches to community planning implementation. This highlights that there is no 'one way' to do community planning and the importance of place-based locally informed and owned approaches.

Under the Victorian Local Government Act 2020 Council has a statutory obligation to develop a long-term Community Vision, Financial Plan and Asset Plan, and a four-year Council Plan using deliberative engagement approaches (see Appendix 2). Community planning provides a continued avenue for informing the community's long-term vision and Council Plan.

Community planning is grounded in community development principles. Community development is a holistic approach grounded in principles of empowerment, human rights, inclusion, social justice, self-determination and collective action (Kenny, 2007).

The key role of community development practitioner is to resource and empower the community (Kenny, 2007). Community Planning is based on the principle that local people are invariably the best source of knowledge and wisdom about their surroundings, and better decision making delivers results for everyone if this is harnessed.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a version of community development that begins the development process by identifying and building on a community's "assets" rather than needs. Assets include physical spaces, skills, local knowledge, local groups and associations and networks as well as financial resources (Kretzman & McKnight, 2005).

Capacity building is an approach to development that builds independence. Capacity building increases the range of people, organisations and communities who are able to address problems, and in particular, problems that arise out of social inequity and social exclusion.

Community Planning is based on the principle that local people are invariably the best source of knowledge and wisdom about their surroundings, and better decision making delivers results for everyone if this is harnessed.

How are other Councils doing community planning?

GOLDEN PLAINS SHIRE COUNCIL

Community planning has been operating in Golden Plains Shire since 1999. Currently there are twenty-three communities in Golden Plains with active Community Plans.

What are the features of the program?

Local residents known as '**Community Coordinators**', volunteer their time to coordinate the development and implementation of their community plan with their local community.

An **independent professional facilitator** (contracted by Council) assists communities to develop and implement Community Plans. The facilitator provides the community members with advice, training, ideas and support to make it possible.

Seed funding of \$7500.00 is provided to each community to kick start the implementation of their three year community plan.

Council will partner with community on some occasions to deliver a community project. In these instances, the community and Council work together, contributing time and resources to make it happen.

YARRA RANGES COUNCIL

Yarra Ranges Council have a clearly articulated 'community-led' community planning process with five key steps: Formation, Information, Involvement, Presentation, Implementation.

What are the features of the program?

Council's Community Development Officers work together with interested community members to form a community planning group to lead community planning. Council has small grant funding to support running an information session to attract other interested community members.

The community then gather information, consult with the community, write and present the plan and then implement the community plan.

Yarra Ranges Council provide mentoring, support, advice, encouragement, information, training and seed funding along the way through community grants.

LODDON SHIRE COUNCIL

Loddon Shire Council's Community Planning Framework articulates five key steps: engagement with the community, development/renewal of community plans, Council endorsement of plans, Council assessment and assistance and implementation.

What are the features of the program?

Loddon Shire Council supports community planning through planning, delivery, funding, advocacy and community development. The Community Planning Framework provides a structure and governance guidelines for the program.

Loddon Shire Council provide \$250,000 annually in funding across its five wards. Funding is available equally to each ward. A further \$50,000 is allocated annually to the Community Plan Strategic Fund, which notionally rotates between the wards, and provides funding or seed funding for a project of significance that has been identified as a priority by the community through the community planning process.

In addition to funding, Council commits internal staffing resources to guide and facilitate planning groups in developing and implementing their community plans.

What are the success factors of the reviewed programs?

The review has highlighted a few key learnings from the featured Councils that have contributed to the success of their approaches.

- Having a structured program/framework for community planning and implementation
- Demonstrated commitment by Council through allocated resources and funding
- Articulating clear roles and responsibilities for community and Council
- Community Plans are led by an identified group in each community
- Providing training to community volunteers
- Mentoring community volunteers
- Providing funding to kick start plans
- Providing tools and templates to guide communities e.g. community plan template, meeting template, community engagement tools
- Offering a range of flexible opportunities for involvement (e.g. whole plan or project focussed)

What are the benefits of Community Planning?

There are a number of benefits for both Council and community to get better at Community Development:

- Develops a shared vision for the community
- Identifies and prioritises community needs
- Increased community skills and knowledge
- Builds community spirit, connections and pride
- Builds civic/community involvement

- Helps Local Government and other stakeholders understand the needs and aspirations of communities
- Guides local decision making
- Strengthens relationships between community and Council; and
- Council is attuned to community needs and aspirations.

Review Findings

Councillors nominated key community groups and leaders to interview. A combined summary of what communities have told us is included below.

How well known were local community plans?

The overall awareness of local Community Plans was low. Of key community groups/leaders interviewed across the eight communities 55% were unaware or had low awareness of their town's community plan.

"It hasn't been widely distributed or talked about in the community."

"I have had a read through it and was involved in the development so know a bit about it."

"I have only seen the Community Plan today."

"I was at the meeting a few years ago but to be honest I haven't thought about it since then."

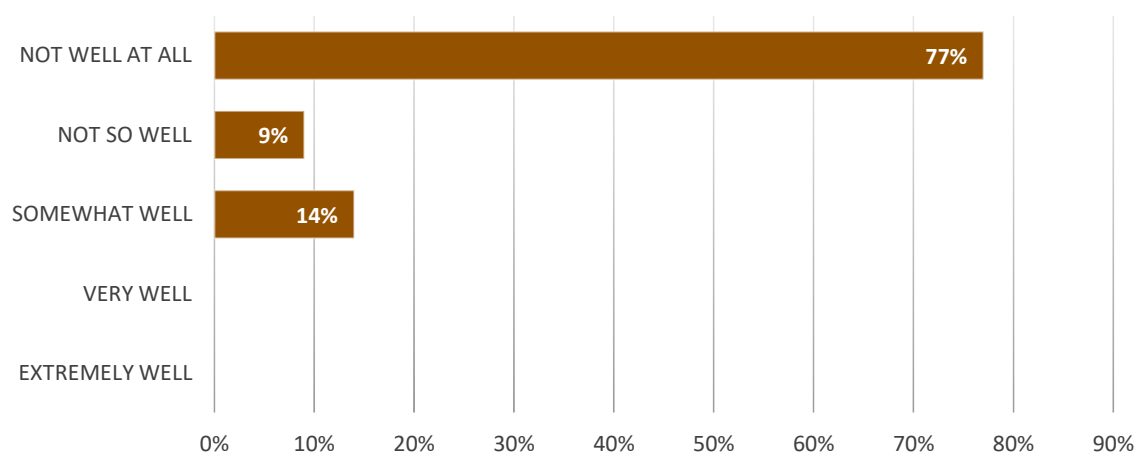
45% had read the community plan either when it first came out or recently when contacted to participate in the review.

"I was involved, and I read it when it came out, I have seen it in print."

"I haven't read the Community Plan in a while."

"I saw the plan at the time when it was completed but with Covid we didn't hold meetings or anything, so haven't picked up the plan since."

Community leaders who were interviewed were asked **how well they thought their wider community understood the community plan.**



Of those interviewed 77% said that they felt community's level of understanding of their community plan was not well at all, 14% understood their plan somewhat well and the remaining 9% said not so well.

"I can't recall anyone referring to the Community Plan in the past few years."

"It would only be people on committees; the people in the town wouldn't know (about the community plan)."

"We have a lot of new community members; a lot of people have moved out of town."

"I think if you asked 100 people in Talbot about the community plan only 5 would know about it."

"Not everyone is connected to higher Strategic or longer term priorities."

Why was awareness so low?

It was felt by those interviewed that low awareness was largely due to pandemic disruptions across communities.

Additional insight from community members shared that low awareness could also be attributed to:

- community members assuming Council would lead Community Plan implementation
- Community Plans not sitting alongside any community group or structure
- no 'action or implementation' mechanism to activate Community Plans
- Community Plans were not broadly promoted

What could we do to raise community awareness about the plans?

When asked what could be done to raise awareness of local Community Plans; key community leaders and groups suggested:

- Through Councillors
- Existing community groups
- Social media
- Mailbox drops
- Word of mouth
- Notice Boards
- Promote in windows of local buildings
- Council's newsletter
- Local Newspapers-adverts and stories
- Local newsletters
- Email bulletins to ratepayers
- Sharing project achievements and link work back to community plans
- Hold community conversations
- Approach people to get involved
- Develop an easy 'plan on a page' summary

- Promote in places where community frequent
- More community discussions about projects/initiatives

“I think the letter box drop is the one things that gets to everyone, some older folk don’t use email or internet at all.”

“We need email bulletins – we need consistency, we used to get email bulletins regularly but now we don’t.”

“If you want to develop community plans that people have an investment in, Council need to communicate.”

“The plan needs to be accepted by the community and communication is vital for acceptance.”

“I think you need word of mouth, a lot of people don’t read the advertiser, word of mouth works.”

“Use Councillors to promote Community Plans.”

“Let people know why the Community Plans are beneficial.”

Projects/Activities/Achievements over the past 3 years?

Although many community members that were interviewed had a low awareness of their community plan, they did share a number of community achievements over the past three years. A large number of these projects were in fact linked to goals that were captured in Community Plans.

A full list of township upgrades that were delivered by the Federal Government’s Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program is provided in the appendix.

Bealiba & District

Achievements	Key Partners
- Working bees at the Reservoir	- DEECA
- Reservoir Committee has been reformed	- Consumer Affairs Victoria
- Unification of some community committees	- Local Community groups
- Showcase of community groups and volunteers	

Bet Bet & District

Achievements	Key Partners
- BBQ shelter at Hall	- DEECA
- Signage for Hall	- Central Goldfields Shire Council
	- Hall Committee

Carisbrook & District

Achievements

- Levy Project
- Cleaning up the Creek
- Town Hall restoration project
- Road projects
- Market Reserve upgrade
- Recreation Reserve
- Installation of outdoor exercise equipment
- Water station
- Community Garden
- Footpaths

Key Partners

- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Ratepayers Association
- Recreation Reserve
- Central Highlands Water
- Carisbrook Football/Netball Club
- Lions Club
- Bowls Club
- Carisbrook Projects Inc
- Victorian Government
- The community
- Carisbrook Mercury

Dunolly & District

Achievements

- Dunolly Goldrush Festival
- Streetscape
- Signage
- Renewed playground
- Delidio Reserve Scoreboard
- Fundraising for community projects
- Shop Local Project

Key Partners

- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Dunolly District Inc
- Football/Netball Club
- Local Business

Majorca & District

Achievements

- Christmas get together
- Town Hall upgrades
- Park upgrades
- Tree planting
- Erosion control

Key Partners

- Town Hall Committee
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- DEECA

Maryborough & District

Achievements

- Art Gallery
- Skate Park
- Town Hall
- Drinking fountains
- Pride Festival
- Open Garden Weekend
- Energy Breakthrough
- Climate Action
- Youth Council

Key Partners

- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Community members
- Youth Council
- Schools
- Young people

Talbot & District

Achievements

- Market Square
- Talbot Futures-Sewage
- Light Up Talbot
- Community Building Upkeep Work
- Roadworks
- Gym Equipment at park
- Avenue of Honor
- Road and footpath improvements
- Free swimming pool
- Town beautification

Key Partners

- Talbot Action Inc
- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- RSL
- Community members/groups
- Volunteers
- DEECA

Implementing Community Plans

What partners/stakeholders would you like to focus on engaging more?

Community members who were interviewed shared a number of stakeholders that they would like to place a stronger focus on engaging. The most frequent stakeholder mentioned across communities was Central Goldfields Shire Council.

- Central Goldfields Shire Council
- Local State MP
- Anne Webster Federal
- Newer community members
- Senior Citizens Clubs
- CFA
- Community members
- Farming sector

- Other nearby Councils
- Schools
- Volunteer Resource Centre
- Volunteer groups
- Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre
- Central Highlands Water
- Service groups e.g. Lions
- Parks department
- Community service organisations
- Community Houses
- New residents

“More community engagement, the community should have more input.”

“More support from Council to help us keep on track with our plans.”

“We need more collaboration with community plans.”

Who is responsible for leading the implementation of your community plan?

Respondents did not identify any ‘lead group’ for driving their community plan. To date Community Plan implementation has not been the responsibility of any group. Conversations revealed that a number of community leaders had assumed that it was Council’s responsibility to lead the implementation of community plans. This highlights that the concept of community planning is new for communities, resulting in confusion around who owns the community plan and who drives implementation.

“The Community Plan is not actively being led, projects are happening, but the community isn’t necessarily aware that these are a part of the Community Plan.”

“98% of the community don’t know anything about the community plan.”

What are the challenges for your community in leading the implementation of your plan? What has been hard/tricky?

Community leaders who were interviewed shared a number of challenges for implementing their local Community Plan:

- Lack of community leadership
- Community not being aware of Community Plans
- Personality clashes/egos
- The number of community groups/committees in some communities
- Siloed community groups/committees
- No one being responsible for implementation
- Volunteer shortages/burnout
- Low community spirit/participation
- Not knowing where to go in Council to get support/advice
- Not having support from Council to implement the plans
- Anti-government attitudes
- Council red tape
- Permits and planning process hurdles
- Council staff turnover

- Keeping momentum
- Ageing population
- Volunteer burnout/lack of volunteers
- Community members who don't want change
- Same community members involved in everything
- Lack of younger voices

“Council turnover is high- every time you have to explain things to a different person, you have to keep going over things very and over again.”

“Older people are dropping off volunteering and younger people are not actively volunteering.”

“Our human capital is ageing, and it doesn't matter what you put before them, they have limited ability to execute.”

“If you want to develop community plans that people have an investment in you need to communicate.”

What would assist the community to better lead the implementation of their plan?

- Promote the plans and their benefits
- Promote opportunities for the community to be involved
- Regular communication from Council about community grants
- Share community achievements (and connect to community plan)
- A dedicated Council position to support community plan implementation
- Provide training to write grants
- A regular bulletin on grants
- Allocate/form a structure to lead implementation of the community plan
- Build community capacity to lead plans/projects
- Make it easy for people, less Council red tape- implement simpler systems
- Get Councillors involved
- Build the capacity of young people to get involved
- Youth friendly committees
- Boost and support volunteers and provide incentives
- Change the way we do volunteering- more short-term project-based volunteering
- Mentorship
- Activate plans through quick win funding/seed funding
- Set a few shared priorities to focus on
- Develop yearly action plans
- Connect Central Goldfields communities together to learn from each other
- Strengthen community leadership
- Strengthen the culture of community spirit/participation
- Strengthen connections between community groups

- Explore opportunities for community committees to join up
- Clear responsibilities and accountability for implementation
- New thinking for community structures

“We need Council’s help to reinform people about the Community Plans”.

“We need someone to step up and lead these things, we don’t have anyone wanting to do this.”

“We need to build peoples capacity to drive projects rather than relying on Council to deliver.”

“In an ideal world you would have someone in a paid Council position to assist with community planning.”

“We need an action plan for the community plan.”

“We are seeing high unemployment but nearly zero volunteering.”

“We need renewal in human capital and attitudes and approaches to doing things.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

The community planning review highlighted the achievements, strengths and opportunities for getting better at community planning. The recommendations below have been drawn from the review’s findings.

Recommendation 1: Build awareness of community planning and its benefits and achievements across Central Goldfields communities and Council departments.

1. Develop a communications strategy to sit alongside community planning.
2. Broadly promote community plans through social media and newsletters and newspapers.
3. Develop a plain language ‘quick grab’ one pager for each community plan to support ease of community understanding.
4. Celebrate and share community planning achievements and stories.
5. Educate Council staff across departments on community planning and its links to their work.
6. Close the loop through yearly community plan progress reporting back to the community.

Recommendation 2: Apply a flexible approach to community planning that is place based and recognises the uniqueness of each community.

1. Support communities to review and refine community committee structures and relationships to strengthen collaboration and group dynamics and lessen the load on volunteers.
2. Work together with communities to identify or form a place-based structure to actively lead their community plan.
3. Source and /or develop resources and tools that support flexible place-based approaches for community planning, engagement and implementation.

Recommendation 3: Build on existing community assets to strengthen the community’s capacity and empower them to effectively lead and implement community planning.

1. Connect Central Goldfields communities to learn from each other about community planning and community development approaches.
2. Develop and circulate a regular grants bulletin for communities.
3. Provide regular grant writing resources and training for communities.
4. Expand the community leadership base through mentorship, community participation opportunities, resources and training.

5. Support communities to adopt contemporary and flexible volunteering approaches and strengthen their capacity to engage and support young volunteers.

Recommendation 4: Facilitate partnerships, systems and approaches that support the achievement of community plan priorities and strengthen alignment with Council's planning framework.

1. Build a human centred, place-based approach to working with communities to achieve their goals and aspirations.
2. Explore and support opportunities for communities to partner together on shared priorities such as volunteering and community leadership.
3. Examine ways to make Council systems simpler for community volunteers.
4. Facilitate connections with Council departments to assist communities to implement priority projects.
5. Align community planning priorities with the Community Vision, Council Plan and key Council Strategies and Plans.
6. Explore and develop partnerships and facilitate connections with partners that can support shared community plan priorities.

Recommendation 5: Council to demonstrate commitment to community planning by providing resourcing, support and tools that are needed to ensure success.

1. Create and resource a dedicated Council 'Community Planning Officer' position to support community plan implementation across Central Goldfields.
2. Build the capacity of ALL Council staff to apply community development principles in their work, ensuring it is customer and community focused and grounded in community need.
3. Link Council's community grants funding to community plan priorities.
4. Develop a yearly action plan template to assist communities to guide implementation of community plans and track and report on progress.

References

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