



WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM CHARTER

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1 Introduction

Wollongong City Council is responsible for the provision of services, facilities and regulation to the Wollongong community. For Councils to effectively carry out their functions they must understand the needs and aspirations of their communities. Council aims to provide leadership and direction in local issues, in planning for the future, and in meeting everyday challenges.

Wollongong City Council is now in Administration and it is important that the community as a whole is able to consult with Council through a variety of opportunities. Neighbourhood Forums provide such an opportunity for members of the community to meet and discuss local issues.

This Charter sets out the governing principles for Neighbourhood Forums operating in the Wollongong Local Government Area.

2 What is a Neighbourhood Forum?

A Neighbourhood Forum is an independent community group that:

- operates within a geographic boundary covering an area with common interests and is located within the Wollongong Local Government Area;
- its members live and/or work within the geographic boundary covering that area;
- complies with the Neighbourhood Forum Charter;
- is formally recognised by Council with a Certificate of Recognition;
- has the general support and confidence of the neighbourhood community to:
 - distribute information
 - facilitate discussion
 - represent fair and balanced views of that community.

A Neighbourhood Forum provides an opportunity for the community and Council to work together. A Neighbourhood Forum also provides an opportunity for community members to meet other people in their area and discuss local issues.

Neighbourhood Forums are independent from Council, however will receive Council support as outlined in this Charter. Neighbourhood Forums are coordinated by a Neighbourhood Chair and assisted by a Co-Chair.

There will be eight Neighbourhood Forums across the Wollongong Local Government Area. There will be one Neighbourhood Forum per area. The boundaries for these Forums are outlined on the map attached as Appendix 1.

3 Role of Neighbourhood Forums

Neighbourhood Forums provide an opportunity for members of the community to:

- meet, raise and discuss local issues;
- find solutions to local community problems;
- promote community development within their local community;
- discuss issues and ideas with Council;
- develop and maintain communication and understanding between the community and Council;
- encourage social networking and participation within the local community;
- provide Council with an opportunity to inform the local community about its services, facilities and projects.

Council will provide the following information to Neighbourhood Forum Chairs:

- promotion of Council's Website and Advertiser Column for the list of Development Applications, new plans and public notices for the boundary area;
- a response to issues raised at previous Forum meetings;
- invitations to provide feedback on Council business as required.

Council will consult with the Neighbourhood Forums in accordance with the Community Consultation Policy, Customer Service Charter and the provisions of this Charter.

Decision Making

Neighbourhood Forums have a role to play in Council's decision making processes through providing an opportunity for community consultation.

Council decisions are influenced by a number of sources including:

- relevant legislation, Council policy and Council's Management Plan;
- submissions provided by organisations, businesses, individuals or groups;
- submissions provided by a Neighbourhood Forum;
- budget constraints;
- research and benchmarking;
- any other available data including demographic and specific community engagement information such as survey results or specific technical studies.

4 Who is a Neighbourhood Chair/Co-chair?

A Neighbourhood Chair/Co-chair is someone who lives or works within the geographic boundary covering that particular Neighbourhood Forum area.

The Neighbourhood Chair/Co-chair is someone who will, in performing Forum duties:

- act honestly and in good faith;
- perform duties in a manner that engenders public trust in the integrity, objectivity, and impartiality of the position;
- exercise the care, diligence and skill that would be expected of a reasonable person in comparable circumstances.

5 Role of Neighbourhood Chairs

Each Neighbourhood Forum will be coordinated by a Neighbourhood Chair. Their role is to:

- welcome participants to the meeting and encourage and facilitate equal and fair discussion;
- chair each meeting;
- ensure that the Neighbourhood Forum Charter is enforced at each meeting;
- ensure that discussion remains relevant to the agenda topic;
- provide leadership in the development of community;
- provide their contact details for inclusion on Council's Website;
- represent or nominate a representative from the Neighbourhood Forum to attend the Community Leaders' Meetings with Council's Administrators;
- assist in evaluation of Neighbourhood Forums;
- undertake training provided by Council as required.

6 Role of Neighbourhood Co-Chairs

Each Neighbourhood Forum will have a Co-Chair.

Their roles are to:

- assist the Neighbourhood Chair as required;
- stand in for and take up the roles of the Neighbourhood Chair when required.

7 Election of Neighbourhood Chairs and Co-Chairs

Neighbourhood Chairs and Co-Chairs will be elected by members of the Forum. The first election will be held within the first three meetings after a Neighbourhood Forum is formed.

The following conditions will be followed:

- the term of a Neighbourhood Chair or Co-Chair is twelve months;
- the role of Neighbourhood Chair or Co-Chair can only be held once in a three year period;
- the Neighbourhood Chair will be the person who receives the most votes;
- the Neighbourhood Co-Chair will be the person with the second highest number of votes;
- a new Neighbourhood Chair and Co-Chair will be voted in at the first meeting of each calendar year.

8 Meetings

Frequency of meetings

Neighbourhood Forums will hold 10 meetings per year. This represents 1 meeting per month excluding the holiday periods of December and January.

Timing of meetings

Meetings will be held at a fixed time, day and venue in order to maximise attendance. The meeting time will be arranged in conjunction with Council to ensure that an officer can attend.

Location of meetings

Neighbourhood Forums will meet in a Council run facility that is accessible and appropriate and is covered by Council's insurance policy. Use of these facilities will be provided free of charge for Neighbourhood Forum meetings.

The venues (subject to availability) will include:

- Helensburgh Community Hall
- Coledale Community Centre
- Thirroul Senior Citizens Centre
- Corrimal Library and Community Centre
- Wollongong City Library or Old Court House
- Unanderra Community Centre
- Dapto Ribbonwood Centre
- Warrawong Community Centre
- Berkeley Community Hall or Port Kembla Senior Citizens Centre
- Windang Senior Citizens Centre.

Format of meetings

Each Neighbourhood Forum meeting will be run according to the following format and allow for a maximum two [2] hours duration of any meeting:

- The meetings will be attended by a Council officer.
- Discussion will be about Council related business.
- The Council officer will provide information, record issues for action and provide follow up information.
- The Council officer will act as a liaison between meeting participants and Council where required.

Record of attendance

A record of attendance will be circulated at each meeting to record the names, email and/or postal address of participants. This information will be used to distribute information about meetings and issues raised, as well as evaluating the success of the Neighbourhood Forums.

These details will be maintained in a database and will only be used for Neighbourhood Forum related business.

Conduct

Council aims to ensure all participants at Neighbourhood Forums are treated respectfully whilst encouraging robust and healthy discussion.

Council staff will:

- abide by Council's Corporate Values and Code of Conduct.

Participants will:

- listen respectfully to each point of view;
- contribute and participate in discussion;
- be fair and equitable;
- treat each other with courtesy;
- abide by the Customer Service Charter.

Council has introduced a Customer Service Charter that provides the standards that you can expect from Council during business hours. To lodge a complaint about Council's service that does or does not relate to Neighbourhood Forums, please contact Council's Customer Service Team on 4227 7111.

9 Agenda

Questions or agenda items can be made to Council's representative in advance with additional agenda items permitted on the night. The agenda will be sent out at least one week before the meeting. The second section of the meeting will follow the set agenda, however additional agenda items can be added on the spot.

10 Minutes

The Council Officer will not record minutes of each session however a record of actions required will be made on an Action Template. The actions will be responded to by an appropriate Council Officer. Council will send the completed Action Template to the Neighbourhood Chair and members of the Neighbourhood Forum. The completed Action Template will also be placed on Council's Website. The Council Officer will also endeavour to address each action at the next meeting.

11 Membership of Neighbourhood Forums

The Forums will be free to join and attend and will be open to anyone who lives and/or works within the Wollongong Local Government Area.

The members of the Neighbourhood Forum will encourage residents within the geographic boundary covering that area to attend meetings, including those from hard to reach communities such as young people, families with children, people with a disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

When attending a Neighbourhood Forum participants will adhere to the conditions set out in this Charter.

Finding a Neighbourhood Forum

Community members can find their local Neighbourhood Forum through the following methods:

- Log on to Council's website www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au A list of contact details for all Neighbourhood Forums will be available in the Have your say section.
- Contact Council's Communications and Strategy Division on 4227 7096.

12 Promotion of Neighbourhood Forums

Council will aim to promote Neighbourhood Forums in a variety of ways such as Council's Website, newspapers and flyers, in order to encourage membership and participation at Neighbourhood Forums.

Council may also work with specific target groups such as young people to encourage participation.

13 How to start a Neighbourhood Forum

Community members can apply to start a Neighbourhood Forum if one does not currently exist in their area.

The following steps must be followed:

- 1 Check the boundaries for Neighbourhood Forum areas and confirm that a Forum does not already exist in this area.
- 2 Contact Council to obtain a Neighbourhood Forum Registration Form.
- 3 Complete the form including all relevant details.
- 4 Send the form to The General Manager, Wollongong City Council, Locked Bag 8821, Wollongong NSW 2500 - Attention Communications & Strategy Division.
- 5 The form will be assessed against this Charter.
- 6 The applicant will be contacted by Council to discuss the proposed Forum.
- 7 If the application is approved, a time will be arranged with the appropriate Council Officer to convene the first Neighbourhood Forum.
- 8 Once a Neighbourhood Chair and Co-Chair have been elected the Neighbourhood Forum will be presented with a Certificate of Recognition.

The application may not be approved if:

- There is already a Neighbourhood Forum operating in the boundary area as per attached map.
- Insufficient details have been provided.
- The Neighbourhood Forum is unable to meet the minimum required meetings.
- The Neighbourhood Forum is unable to comply with this Charter.

14 When will a Neighbourhood Forum cease to operate?

A Neighbourhood Forum will not be recognised by Council if:

- Council receives a written request from the Neighbourhood Chair to dissolve the Forum;
- There is evidence that members have failed to comply with the Neighbourhood Forum Charter.
- There is evidence that the Neighbourhood Forum has ceased to function.

15 Other meetings and organisations

There are many other residents' groups in the Wollongong Local Government Area that are not recognised as Neighbourhood Forums. These other groups are encouraged to continue to meet and use any of Council's consultation opportunities to engage with Council including the opportunity to attend Neighbourhood Forums.

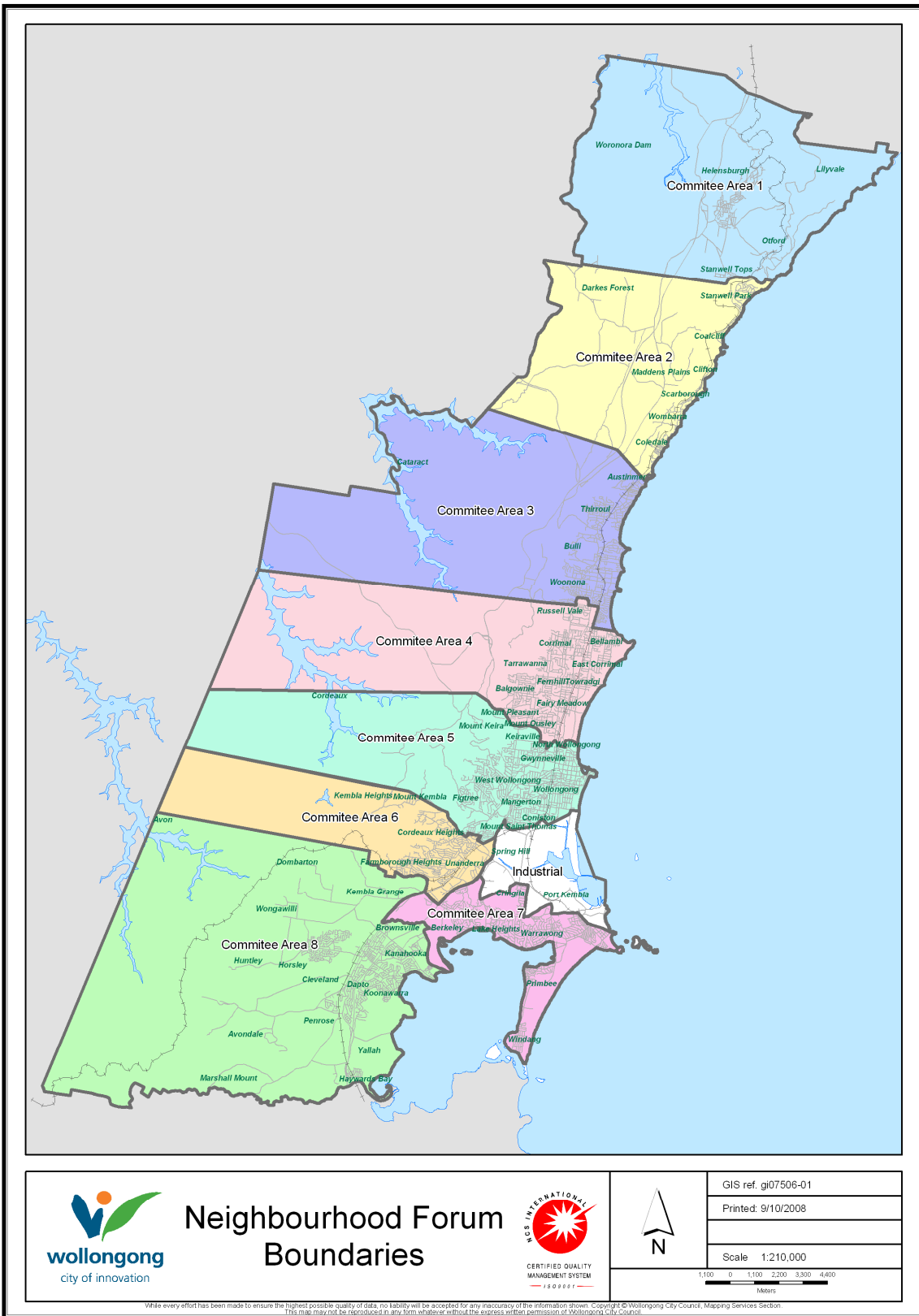
16 Evaluation of Neighbourhood Forums

The operation, attendance, promotional methods and Neighbourhood Forum Charter will be evaluated regularly to ensure that the Forums are improved and are operating in line with this Charter. Evaluations will be conducted in line with the re-election of the Chair and Co-Chair and will form part of an Annual Audit of Neighbourhood Forums.

Appendix 1

Neighbourhood Forum Area Boundaries

There will be eight Neighbourhood Forums across the Wollongong Local Government Area. There will be one Neighbourhood Forum per area. The boundaries for these Forums are outlined on the map attached.



Neighbourhood Forum Boundaries



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Scale 1:210,000



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