Community Consultation and the ‘Hard to Reach’

Nillumbik Shire Council Case Study Report
Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan 2005-06

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The **Hard to Reach Project** is a collaborative research venture with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association and researchers from Swinburne University of Technology. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council and partner organisations.

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Published May 2007 by  
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Introduction

This report is part of a series of case study reports for the Community Consultation and the ‘Hard to Reach’ research project. The project is investigating how community consultation is currently practised by Victorian councils, especially in relation to multiple publics and groups that councils can find hard to reach.

The project is a collaborative research venture with eight Victorian local councils, the Victorian Local Governance Association and researchers from Swinburne University. The three year project is jointly funded by the Australian Research Council, the Cities of Boroondara, Darebin, Maribyrnong, Melbourne, Moreland, Port Phillip and Whittlesea, and the Shire of Nillumbik. The eight participating councils comprise inner city as well as city fringe locations, homogenous and highly ethnically and culturally diverse populations, economically advantaged and disadvantaged areas, well established and newly developing areas, municipalities with a long-standing commitment to community consultation as well as those which are still developing their policies and practices. While the councils chosen may not be statistically representative, the range of contexts and socio-demographic characteristics reflect the attitudes and practice of community consultation as it is currently taking place in Victoria.

As part of this research, a detailed case study is being conducted with each partner council. In order to gain a balanced insight into current practice, case studies were matched to provide examples of a range of levels of consultation:

- high level strategic planning
- place based issues
- service reviews
- issue based consultations
- consultations aimed at involving specific ‘hard to reach’ groups
- community development.

The matched case studies will assist the greater Community Consultation and the ‘Hard to Reach’ project to provide some useful resources for each of the partner councils, as well as a broader commentary and analysis of the challenges faced when councils attempt to consult with or engage their communities.

Why the case study was chosen

The Strategic Resource Plan (SRP) and review of the Council Plan 2006-09 was chosen as an example of a consultation about a high level strategy or plan which affects all members of the Nillumbik community. Consultations associated with the development of future-oriented high level strategic documents such as Council Plans, Municipal Strategic Statements and Municipal Health Plans are usually considered particularly difficult in terms of attracting community interest and contribution from
participants that are broadly representative of the community. People tend to be reluctant to get involved, due to the complexity and multi-faceted nature of some strategy documents. It is difficult to persuade them to see the immediate impact of a policy or strategy, or its relevance to their own lives. Involving a wide range of community members in such planning exercises involves considerable time and resources and it is often felt that, in such cases, everyone is hard to reach.¹

All councils are required to produce a Council Plan, which is a four-year document that identifies key strategic areas, as well as indicators for achieving these. The SRP is linked to the Council Plan and specifies how the priorities identified in the Council Plan can be resourced. The Nillumbik Council Plan 2006-09 names the following key service areas:

- Environment (natural, built and cultural)
- Health and wellbeing
- Community assets
- Governance and community engagement.

Another aspect of the consultation lay in Council’s desire to do real community consultation (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a). In the Council Plan 2006-09 the Shire pledged itself to listening to the community to gather information about community needs, which will inform and direct the work of Council. Council is therefore committed to strengthening its consultation processes to engage a diverse range of local people and show them that their input has made a difference. As a consequence, a subset of the consultation was concerned with exploring how people would like to be consulted.

As part of the case study methodology, Nicola Brackertz, a researcher from Swinburne University, attended most of the consultation workshops and liaised closely with Council staff and the consultant. To gain a good understanding of the process, interviews were conducted with Jacky Close from Council’s Social Planning Unit and Mike Tierney from Tierney Andrews Consulting at key stages of the consultation process. Council also facilitated access to background information about the consultation, reports and other relevant data.

¹ Compare Brackertz, Zwart et al. (2005).
Who is hard to reach and why?

In the context of local government, ‘hard to reach’ is a term sometimes used to describe those sections of the community that are difficult to involve in public participation. It is useful to take a step back and look at the usage of the term in the literature more generally, as many of the issues raised there are also applicable to local councils.

Problems with ‘hard to reach’ terminology

There is a lack of clarity about what exactly is meant by ‘hard to reach’ and the term is employed inconsistently; sometimes it is used to refer to minority groups, such as ethnic groups, gays and lesbians, or homeless people; other times it may refer to broader segments of the population, such as old or young people or people with disabilities (Jones and Newburn 2001:vii). In the service context, ‘hard to reach’ often refers to the ‘underserved’, namely, minority groups, those slipping through the net and the service resistant (Doherty, Stott and Kinder 2004). An alternative term for ‘hard to reach’ used in the sampling context is ‘hidden populations’ (Atkinson and Flint 2001; Duncan, White et al. 2003) – as in they are hidden from the point of view of sampling. Hidden populations may also actively seek to conceal their group identity, as for example in the case of illicit drug users, gays and lesbians, and sexually active teens (Duncan, White et al. 2003).

The problem with using the term ‘hard to reach’ is that implies a homogeneity within distinct groups which does not necessarily exist. Thereby it defines the problem as one within the group itself, not within your approach to them’ (Smith 2006). This sentiment is echoed by Murphy (2006).

From what has been discussed so far, it is not surprising that ‘hard to reach’ is a potentially stigmatising terminology. Freimuth and Mettger (1990:323) offer an illustrative summary of prejudices about hard to reach:

Hard-to-reach audiences have been called obstinate (2), recalcitrant (3), chronically uninformed (4), disadvantaged (5), have-not (6), illiterate (7), malfunctional (8), and information poor (5).

Origins and usage of ‘hard to reach’

‘Hard to reach’ is often used in the context of social marketing (Beder 1980). The aim of many social marketing initiatives, especially in the field of health, is to affect change in behaviour using marketing tools and techniques adopted from the private sector (Walsh, Rudd et al. 1993). Social marketing is a consumer focused approach that believes nobody is impossible to reach – it just depends on the approach taken. Paul Vittles commented that ‘no-one is hard to reach, just more expensive to reach. It is important to put more
effort and creativity in reaching these
groups’ (Wilson 2001:1).

This is borne out in medical and
health research where ‘hard to reach’
often appears in relation to the ability
to health services to reach out to
certain segments of the population
who are difficult to contact (or difficult
to influence using existing
techniques) (Freimuth and Mettger
1990; Walsh, Rudd et al. 1993;
Faugier and Sargeant 1997;
Burhansstipanov and Krebs 2005).
Here the ‘hard to reach’ are also
equated with the ‘underserved’,
which can mean that either there are
no services available for these
groups or, more often, that these
groups fail to access the services
that are available (Earthman,
Richmond et al. 1999; Barlow,
Kirkpatrick et al. 2005;
Burhansstipanov and Krebs 2005).
The reasons ‘hard to reach’ are of
such concern in the medical and
educational fields is that they tend to
have poorer health and educational
outcomes, which is why ‘hard to
reach’ is of particular concern to
those working with young people and
in youth services (Earthman,
Richmond et al. 1999; The Reading
Agency 2006).

Who is identified as hard to
reach?
With the renewed emphasis on
governance and community
engagement, councils are now also
focusing on those population
segments that do not usually
participate. Many organisations, but
councils in particular, identify ‘hard to
reach’ populations using
demographic definitions (young
people, rural people, people with
disabilities, ethnic groups), but it is
important to acknowledge that
attitudinal aspects are a contributing
factor. For example, people could be
hard to reach because they think
council does not care about them,
that council does not listen or even
that it is irrelevant to them (Wilson
2001). It is these attitudes that can
be even harder to overcome than
demographic aspects.

In addition to demographic and
attitudinal characteristics, there are
practical reasons why some people
are hard to reach. In the medical
context, the most frequently reported
barriers to participation in the US
Head Start programme were prior
commitments and schedule conflicts
(Lamb-Parker et al. 2001 as cited in
Barlow, Kirkpatrick et al. 2005). This
is of relevance for scheduling public
participation processes in councils as
well.

Interviews and focus groups
conducted with the partner councils
identified culturally and linguistically
diverse communities, indigenous,
young, elderly, disabled and
homeless people as hard to reach. Other
groups included drug users,
sex workers, those on low incomes,
high rise apartment dwellers, faith
based communities, businesses
(traders), single parents, newly
arrived residents, gay and lesbian
people, homeless, problem gamblers
and residents of hostels and
boarding houses. Some rural
populations were considered to be
hard to reach, while some groups of
people (in particular, those who were
asked to regularly respond to service
reviews) were becoming over-consulted and increasingly reluctant to participate. To this illustrious list should be added persons who would like to have a say in local issues, but do not know how to access council processes. Also identified were unresponsive people, such as the time poor (people who are in full-time work and/or work outside the council area); persons who have a low commitment to the local area or no vested interest in local issues (e.g. renters); and disengaged people, who are disillusioned with, or feel disconnected from the political process.

However, a list of groups is not necessarily a useful tool to identify and establish relationships with ‘hard to reach’; all the more, because certain groups may be hard to reach in some contexts or locations and not in others. A more fruitful approach is to identify characteristics of ‘hard to reach’ groups and link these to successful approaches to contact or involve them (Brackertz 2007; Health and Safety Executive 1994; Jones and Newburn 2001). The wide connotations associated with and imprecise usage of the term ‘hard to reach’ calls into question its utility. A number of groups and population segments have traditionally been underrepresented in councils’ public participation but, in reality, few are hard to reach if the right approach is used.

Common to many writings is the recognition that those wishing to involve ‘hard to reach’ need to overcome their own prejudices about the people they wish to contact, while at the same time having to work to address the preconceptions (often misconceptions) of those with whom they wish to consult (Freimuth and Mettger 1990; Barlow, Kirkpatrick et al. 2005; Burhansstipanov and Krebs 2005). An alternative way to view the ‘disinterest’ or ‘lack of motivation to contribute or become involved’ often associated with ‘hard to reach’ groups is by emphasising differences rather than deficits. The difference thesis suggests that when people are motivated to acquire information and when this information is functional in their lives, they will make use of it. This notion has import for the sampling of ‘hard to reach’.

**Sampling ‘hard to reach’**

In sampling, the term ‘hard to reach’ is used frequently in relation to the need to include certain population segments to obtain a representative sample (Messeri, Aidala et al. 1995; Rhodes, Kling et al. 2004). In relation to participatory practice in councils, representativeness is linked to the need to include all those affected by a particular issue to secure democratic legitimacy. The method and tool of public participation used will affect the representativeness of those participating. The degree to which particular groups are hard to reach is context specific and depends on the population targeted, the participation method used and the issue consulted upon.

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2 Discussions here relate to the inclusion of blacks, HIV positive people, drug users etc.
Van Meter (1990 cited in Faugier and Sargeant 1996) distinguishes extensive and intensive data collection methodologies. Descending methodologies (quantitative strategies executed at the level of general populations) require highly standardised questionnaires, population samples and traditional statistical analysis. These quantitative methods rely on ‘representative’ sampling strategies to make inferences about the whole population. Survey studies in the general population that rely on closed questions are inherently limited by the data obtained and may yield little understanding of the phenomenon under study, which is particularly limiting when exploring new or sensitive areas (Hendricks and Blanken 1992 as cited in Faugier and Sargeant 1997).

Ascending methodologies, on the other hand, use qualitative sampling designs and are usually non-generalisable, but provide a high degree of insight into a social process. Typical methodologies use snowball sampling, life histories and ethnographic monographs with analysis adapted to suit the specific techniques employed (Faugier and Sargeant 1997). Snowball sampling is an example of a special technique that was developed to attempt to include ‘hard to reach’ and hidden populations (Atkinson and Flint 2001). It is a link-tracing methodology that is used most often for qualitative research. In essence it relies on a series of referrals that are made within a circle of people who know each other or are loosely connected. The respondent is asked to name other persons who fit the criteria described by the researcher. The newly identified persons are then interviewed and in turn asked to nominate others who fit the criteria, and so on.

In councils, involving the ‘hard to reach’ is usually done through a combination of targeting public participation tools and reaching out to communities in ways which they are likely to respond to. The case study described below examines how this was played out in relation to Nillumbik Shire Council’s public participation problem (i.e. involving a representative portion of the local community in a discussion on a high level consultation on strategic issues) and the outcomes that resulted from the choices made.
Case study context

The case study raises a series of issues about the challenges facing local government authorities when consulting on high level strategic documents. Questions relate to:

- the extent to which a representative sample of the community can (or is willing to) contribute
- the suitability of various methods of public involvement to facilitate that input
- the legitimacy of public participation in council decision making in the context of an already established framework of democratic representation
- the effectiveness of public participation in terms of its influence on outcomes.

Legitimacy of the participation process

One of the key issues for Nillumbik Shire is to make decisions about the allocation of scarce public resources in a prosperous community, which expects a high degree of amenity and environmental niceness, but which does not provide Council with a high rate base. Due to its structure, 90% of the rate base is domestic and rates are low on a per capita basis. The success of the consultation about the Council Plan and SRP can therefore be measured by the extent to which the processes assisted in prioritising resource allocation and raising community awareness about the Shire’s financial limitations. It can also be evaluated in terms of the representativeness of the community members who contributed to the consultations. To give political legitimacy to decisions made and priorities set on the basis of what the community says, it is necessary to be able to show that those involved in the consultation are representative of the municipality’s population. Otherwise results are open to criticism and complaint and can be subject to challenge on the basis that they do not reflect the interests of the wider community.

In the context of councils’ public participation processes, ‘representative’ means those affected by the issue consulted upon. In the case of the Nillumbik Shire Council Plan and SRP, the entire community is affected, therefore representation in the strictest sense would require inclusion of all residents of the municipality. Clearly this is not practicable. The alternative is to aim to consult with a sample that mirrors the spread of age groups, genders, language and cultural groups, socioeconomic status, levels of education and employment, and interests of the Council’s population. This, too, is no mean undertaking, as it is time, skill, and resource intensive to involve a wide spectrum of people in consultation on complex issues.

This is why consultations that require wide representation are often advertised publicly, thereby (at least in theory) providing everyone with an
equal opportunity to participate. In reality, those who do respond are usually people who read council publications or the local paper, those who are politically aware or those who have a vested interest in the issue. While the participants in a publicly advertised consultation – sometimes called ‘the usual suspects’ – are not necessarily representative of the wider community, at least the argument can be made that others, if they felt strongly enough, could have become involved and raised their concerns.

The problem is that it is not easy to involve a large number of people. Surveys are perhaps the preferred means of eliciting information and opinion from a large sample. They appeal also because they can be quantified, thereby lending scientific validity and confidence to the responses received. However, especially where complex, future-oriented and abstract planning is concerned, surveys are limited because they impose simple options on complex questions.

Workshops, meetings and other face to face group consultation methods tend to be resource intensive and difficult to do well. Their success depends on the quality of the participants and the skill of the facilitator. Their value is in providing deliberative forums that can be used to elicit qualitative information and cast light on why opinions are held and decisions are made. They also help Council listen to people and provide assurance to participants that they are being heard.

Surveys and face to face methods are often used in conjunction. The difficulty lies in balancing the need for representation with the ability to gain deeper understanding and insight about the issues. It is often hard to decide how much weight should be given to a workshop, which provides in-depth information, as opposed to a survey, which has greater numbers of participants.

Democratic legitimacy of public participation

The problem with open invitation workshops is in evaluating their place, scope and effectiveness. They attract varying levels of attendance and, in terms of representation, their profile is patchy. Theoretically this dilemma can be framed using two key dimensions of democratic legitimacy: procedural legitimation and the ability of political institutions to provide outcomes.

*Procedural legitimation* refers to the way in which democratic processes are conducted to secure the consent of the governed (Klausen and Sweeting 2002). The notion is linked to the fundamental tenets of representative democracy where general acceptance of political decisions is predicated on the principle that each vote counts equally when electing representatives and that, beyond elections, everybody has the same right to attempt to influence political decision making through lobbying and advocacy. In the case of public participation in local government decision making, procedural legitimation is closely linked to issues
of representativeness and opportunity to become involved. Consultations may not require full inclusion, but should at least aim to involve a representative sample of the municipality’s population. In reality, however, due to their complexity, consultations on major policies and strategies that affect the entire municipality (e.g. Corporate Plan, Strategic Resource Plan or Municipal Strategic Statement) are often carried out involving only a small number of community members who are often not representative of the broader demographic. Consultations that relate to a service review or an operational matter are usually aimed at a subset of the municipality’s population and do not usually require full inclusion (though they may benefit from it). Even in these instances, only a small proportion of the affected citizens take part in the consultation process.

The other key dimension of democratic legitimacy is the effectiveness of political institutions which hinges upon the ability to deliver outcomes and address emerging issues and needs as they arise (Hanssen, Klausen et al. 2003; Klausen and Sweeting 2002). Here it is not so much the representativeness of public participation that counts (although representation remains an issue), but the outcomes that result.

While the two dimensions of democratic legitimacy are a useful test of the validity of public participation, decisions about doing and using the results of consultation are inevitably tempered by practical considerations. As outlined in an earlier report for the Community Consultation and the ‘Hard to Reach’ project (Brackertz, Zwart et al. 2005), something can be learned about the desired level of community involvement in decision making from pluralistic and purpose based models of public participation.

Models of public participation

As outlined in the second report to councils (Brackertz, Zwart et al. 2005), there are numerous ways in which community consultation, participation and engagement can be conceptualised and evaluated. Arnstein’s (1969) ladder of participation describes community engagement from the perspective of a community activist and places participation on a continuum of activity depending upon the range of influence that citizens have over decision making. For writers such as Arnstein, participation should involve a transfer of power from the council to the community, and ensure that final decision making is left in the hands of the various stakeholders. Arnstein argues that community engagement processes that do not make a genuine attempt to consider the views of citizens may be tokenistic or even a form of manipulation that will lead to a greater degree of public cynicism. Assuming that open and transparent processes will automatically lead to an empowered citizenry is problematic, however, as it raises the question of where authority should lie in a system of representative democracy. It also ignores the issue
of who is likely to participate and how decision making will be improved, given that providing opportunities for participation may simply increase the power of those who already have it. Nevertheless, Arnstein rightly points out that governments should be open about why they engage the public, and should not use consultation processes to simply justify a decision that has already been made.

An example of a more pragmatic and pluralistic model, which views public participation as an activity that should be shaped by the policy problem at hand, is the influential International Association for Public Participations (IAP2) Spectrum (<http://www.iap2.org.au/spectrum.pdf>) (Table 1). The model outlines the choices that organisations have when doing public participation, depending on the degree to which citizens are expected to be actively involved in the decision-making process. The IAP2 Spectrum is particularly useful for local authorities, because it combines the goals of public participation (such as to obtain feedback or work directly with the public) with the implicit promise this approach holds for the community (e.g. information, consultation or empowerment), thereby directing organisations to think through the public implications of their participation processes.

This shows that a genuine commitment to engage the public does not necessarily involve handing over power to those who take part. The IAP2 spectrum takes on board the concerns of Arnstein but does not subscribe to her normative emphasis to transfer power to citizens.

The spectrum demonstrates a variety of options that organisations have when engaging their communities. At one end of the spectrum, organisations can choose to simply inform their citizens of a decision that has or will be made. At the other, they can delegate decision making to the public. The IAP2 spectrum also suggests a small range of techniques that can be used, depending upon the level of involvement required of citizens, although it should be noted that some can be used for a range of engagement levels. The IAP2 spectrum is useful for thinking about the degree to which organisations want citizens to contribute to decision making, and emphasises the need to be clear about the messages provided to the public. Nevertheless, it does little to address a range of other issues that are important to consider when undertaking community consultation. Among these is the manner in which ‘the public’ is invited to participate and how information from the process is used in decision making.
Table 1: IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inform</th>
<th>Consult</th>
<th>Involve</th>
<th>Collaborate</th>
<th>Empower</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal</strong></td>
<td><strong>Public Participation Goal</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions</td>
<td>To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions</td>
<td>To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered</td>
<td>To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution</td>
<td>To place final decision making in the hands of the public</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public</strong></td>
<td><strong>Promise to the Public</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We will keep you informed</td>
<td>We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced that decision</td>
<td>We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision</td>
<td>We will look to you for direct advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decision to the maximum extent possible</td>
<td>We will implement what you decide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example techniques to Consider</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example techniques to Consider</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example techniques to Consider</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example techniques to Consider</strong></td>
<td><strong>Example techniques to Consider</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Fact sheets</td>
<td>• Public comment</td>
<td>• Workshops</td>
<td>• Citizen advisory committees</td>
<td>• Citizen juries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Websites</td>
<td>• Focus groups</td>
<td>• Deliberative polling</td>
<td>• Consensus building</td>
<td>• Ballots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Open houses</td>
<td>• Surveys</td>
<td>• Participatory decision making</td>
<td>• Delegated decisions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Methods for participant recruitment

Although recruitment of participants for community consultation can be undertaken in many ways, there are only a few key options available to councils when deciding who should take part; these are selection, self-selection or random selection. These options are available for consultation with stakeholder groups (such as businesses, community groups or representative organisations) and the general residential population.

The first option is purposive selection of participants based on one or more characteristics. For instance, particular stakeholder groups may be chosen because they are seen to represent the interests of a group of people, organisation or cause. Alternatively, they may have special expertise that will assist in making decisions. Selection of participants is frequently also used when a balanced sample of population segments (based on factors such as age, gender, occupation, education, knowledge or geographical location) is desired. In each case, it is important to think about why certain groups or individuals are being included and excluded, and whether it is important to have a diverse range of representatives or simply a diverse range of views. If it is critical that some groups participate, then it may be necessary to use personal methods of contact and even incentives to improve their likelihood of doing so.

The second option is participant self-selection which, at least in theory, gives all people who have an interest in an issue the opportunity to participate. In this way, no attempt is made to limit participation, beyond perhaps considerations based on citizenship status. The benefits of this form of recruitment are that all citizens or stakeholders with an interest are given the opportunity to take part, and can represent their own interests in whatever manner is provided. It is perhaps for this reason that self-selection remains a very popular method for recruiting participants. Nevertheless, there is a significant drawback to any form of recruitment that encourages citizens to choose themselves. As Carson and Martin (1999:56) have suggested about the traditional council advisory committee:

Inevitably, such committees attract the strongly interested and highly educated – those who want to change the way things are currently done and those who enjoy serving on a committee, talking, and making decisions. Meetings of advisory committees usually are held outside of business hours, so members are inevitably drawn from those free to attend...A portrait is therefore emerging of the usual committee member: educated, middle-aged, and male.

Clearly, the degree to which the characteristics of participants matter depends upon the aims of the consultation exercise. If the aim is to simply inform citizens of a proposal or to seek new ideas, then it may not matter who provides input. But if the
aim is to understand what a cross-section or particular segment of the population thinks about a particular issue, then strategies involving self-selection are inadequate and some other form of selection should be considered. One such method is random selection.

Random selection works on the principle that citizens, organisations or groups have an equal chance of being selected, and is particularly valuable when other methods create the possibility of bias or conflict of interest. There are a number of ways in which random selection can be used: to make decisions directly, to judge opinions or to choose decision makers (Carson and Martin 1999:14). For councils, the judgement of community opinion is probably the area where random selection can be most beneficial, and can be understood by thinking about the rationale used in opinion polls. Opinion polls do not require that everyone in the population needs to be consulted, as a relatively small sample of randomly selected participants can give a statistically accurate result. The key is to choose the sample carefully to ensure that it has the same characteristics as the population as a whole. One way of doing this is to have a stratified sample that divides the general population into groups, and sets quotas for each group. A separate random sample must be selected from each of the subgroups, rather than just taking a single random sample from the entire group. The process is slightly more time consuming and will require a greater number of people to be surveyed, but this technique can be very valuable as it is likely to produce a more accurate result (CustomInsight 2006). If participation from some groups is initially low, it may be necessary to follow up by contacting people personally to encourage them to participate. Otherwise, as Carson and Martin (1999:26) note, policy makers may base their decisions on biased poll results.

It is important to note that all methods of participant recruitment involve an element of self-selection, as people can always refuse to take part in any consultation process. Nevertheless, some forms of recruitment provide a much better chance of obtaining the input of particular segments of the population than others. These can be categorised as selection, self-selection and random selection, and can also be used in combination with each other at different stages of a consultation process.

The context makes clear that community consultation as it occurred in the Nillumbik case study examined here does its best to wrestle with some difficult issues about:

- why consultation should be done
- how consultation can be made a legitimate part of democratic decision making
- how consultation can be made representative.
Background to the consultation

In late 2005 and early 2006 Nillumbik Shire Council conducted a series of consultations to ascertain community priorities in relation to Council’s strategic commitments as outlined in the Nillumbik Shire Council Plan 2005-09 (Nillumbik Shire Council 2005) and to assist in formulating its SRP. The consultations provided an opportunity for community members to identify priority issues for Nillumbik over the next three to four years, consider how these link to the goals of the Council Plan and discuss how resources should be allocated towards achieving identified priorities.

In order to understand the implications of the case study from the point of view of representativeness, especially in relation to ‘hard to reach’ groups, it is necessary to consider the demographic and other characteristics that shape Nillumbik’s community. The following short summary is elaborated by a more detailed profile below.

Shire of Nillumbik\(^3\) profile summary

Nillumbik Shire is located less than 25 kilometres from the centre of Melbourne; it is bounded by the Yarra River in the south and extends 29 kilometres to Kinglake National Park in the north. The Shire stretches approximately 20 kilometres from the Plenty River and Yan Yean Road in the west to the Yarra escarpment in the east, comprising urbanised as well as rural areas. It includes the townships of Arthur’s Creek, Bend of Islands, Christmas Hills, Cottles Bridge, Diamond Creek, Doreen, Eltham, Hurstbridge, Kangaroo Ground, Kinglake, North Warrandyte, Nutfield, Panton Hill, Plenty, Research, Smiths Gully, St Andrews, Strathewen, Watson’s Creek, Wattle Glen and Yarrambat.

The Shire covers an area of 430 square kilometres and has an estimated population of 58,161. The average population density is 1.34 per hectare, with most living in the south and south-west sectors (Diamond Creek, Eltham, Eltham North, Research, Greensborough, Hurstbridge and Wattle Glen). Nillumbik has a large area with a low population base and density compared with other Melbourne Local Government Authorities (LGAs) (27th out of 31).

\(^3\) The name Nillumbik comes from an Aboriginal word used by the Wurundjeri people, thought to mean ‘shallow earth’.
The majority of Nillumbik’s residents are well educated, well informed and characterised by strong community and environmental values (Department for Victorian Communities 2005). People generally feel connected, safe and part of the community, with low levels of transience contributing to their sense of stability. While being of the opinion that multiculturalism makes life better (Department for Victorian Communities 2005), residents are overwhelmingly from English-speaking backgrounds, and the population is relatively culturally uniform. The community is characterised by low levels of disadvantage, high levels of employment, relatively high incomes and a high proportion of home ownership. Nevertheless, residents of Nillumbik face challenges as the Shire is not well serviced by public

Figure 1: Nillumbik Shire boundaries
transport and there is a divide in the levels of advantage and disadvantage faced by the rural and more urbanised areas of the Shire (Brackertz, Zwart et al. 2005). Pockets of disadvantage persist.

Due to its largely residential base and relatively large average household size, Council has a low rate base and consequently faces resource restrictions. While rates are high per property, they are not high per capita. This has led to prolonged underspending on the service and roads infrastructure over the past decade and Council is at times struggling to provide services equitably across Nillumbik. Adding to this is increasing pressure on the roads and infrastructure due to the fast growth and expansion of neighbouring councils, especially Whittlesea.

Nillumbik Shire is an interface council and confronts the challenges of providing services and balancing the needs of its rural as well as urban populations. A mixture of rural and metropolitan communities, as well as geographic spread and social isolation, place special demands on service provision – demands that differ from those faced by metropolitan councils.

Nillumbik self-identifies as a Green Wedge Shire and there is a high level of awareness of environmental issues. Nevertheless, within Council and the community, there is a degree of tension between the advocates of development as outlined in Melbourne 2030 and those who prioritise neighbourhood character and environmental issues.

The townships within the Shire are not well connected by public transport, nor is there an adequate connection to wider Melbourne. Consequently there is a high incidence of ownership of motor vehicles. Long commutes and work hours for many residents mean that they have little time to become involved in the community; they are time poor. Despite this, residents – especially long-term residents – feel strongly connected to their community.

Demographic Indicators

Social and Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

Nillumbik’s high rankings on the SEIFA Indexes show that the Shire has high levels of advantage and low levels of disadvantage compared to the Melbourne Statistical District (MSD).

The Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage does not offset households in advantage against those that are disadvantaged and is therefore a better indicator of disadvantage. Here Nillumbik ranks fourth out of 31 LGAs, indicating a lack of disadvantage. The index draws on attributes such as income, educational attainment, unemployment and dwellings without motor vehicles, relatively lower educational attainment and high

4 Unless otherwise indicated, information is based on 2001 data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).
5 For a more detailed discussion of the SEIFA indexes, see Brackertz, Zwart et al. (2005).
unemployment. While Nillumbik as a whole ranks highly on this index, there are areas within the Shire, specifically in the east and north, that are more disadvantaged.\(^6\)

On the Index of Education and Occupation, the Shire ranks tenth in the MSD, attesting to residents’ high levels of education and a large proportion of the population working in professional occupations. This is supported by the Index of Economic Resources where Nillumbik ranks sixth out of 31 LGAs, indicating relatively higher incomes and status of residential tenure (i.e. more people own or are purchasing their own home, as opposed to renting).

**Transience**

Nillumbik’s population is relatively more stable than that of the MSD as a whole. In the previous year, 11% lived at a different address. Five years previously, 35% (42% MSD) lived at a different address.

### Table 2: SEIFA rankings for participating LGAs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Government Authority</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Advantage Disadvantage</th>
<th>Disadvantage</th>
<th>Economic Resources</th>
<th>Education &amp; Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Rank* Index</td>
<td>Rank* Index</td>
<td>Index Rank*</td>
<td>Index Rank*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boroondara</td>
<td>150,233</td>
<td>4 1,173 1</td>
<td>1,122 1</td>
<td>1,154 2</td>
<td>1,180 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nillumbik</td>
<td>58,161</td>
<td>27 1,104 7</td>
<td>1,108 4</td>
<td>1,104 6</td>
<td>1,079 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Phillip</td>
<td>77,541</td>
<td>25 1,135 5</td>
<td>1,079 7</td>
<td>1,114 5</td>
<td>1,161 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>57,808</td>
<td>29 1,145 3</td>
<td>1,038 13</td>
<td>1,115 4</td>
<td>1,179 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moreland</td>
<td>131,359</td>
<td>9 995 21</td>
<td>985 25</td>
<td>981 26</td>
<td>1,015 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Darebin</td>
<td>123,708</td>
<td>13 989 22</td>
<td>967 26</td>
<td>978 27</td>
<td>1,008 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Whittlesea</td>
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<td>15 949 29</td>
<td>962 27</td>
<td>977 28</td>
<td>927 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maribyrnong</td>
<td>57,907</td>
<td>28 972 27</td>
<td>915 30</td>
<td>968 29</td>
<td>989 21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Out of 31 Melbourne LGAs

(16% MSD) of Nillumbik residents

\(^6\) For a more detailed analysis, see Brackertz, Zwart et al. (2005).
There is a higher proportion of home ownership (86%) (70% MSD) and a much smaller proportion of households renting (9%) (23% MSD).

The proportion of employed people in Nillumbik is significantly higher (71%) than in the MSD (58%) and a smaller proportion of residents are outside the labour force or unemployed (27%) (38% MSD). Nillumbik consistently has the lowest unemployment levels of any LGA in Victoria (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

When compared to the MSD, Nillumbik has a much higher proportion of households in the highest income quartile (39%) and a much smaller proportion in the lowest income quartile (13%).

Compared to the MSD (36%), a higher proportion (45%) of the Shire’s residents are working the traditional 35-40 hours a week, but
fewer (22%) work more than 41 hours (30% MSD). Typical of urban areas with a small industrial base, the most common occupations include clerical, sales and service workers (education, health and community services), professional (finance, insurance and business services), and tradespersons (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a). There are limited opportunities for local employment within Nillumbik. Approximately four out of five of the Shire’s population travel to work outside the municipality. The top two destinations are Melbourne and Banyule, followed by Whittlesea, Darebin and Hume. The vast majority (95%) of local businesses employ fewer than 10 persons (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

**Journey to work**

Nillumbik has a much higher proportion of households with motor vehicles (95%) than the MSD (86%). The average two way journey to work is about 64 minutes for Nillumbik south/south-west and about 80 minutes for the more rural areas. The problem is exacerbated by the limited availability of public transport. Only 6% of the Shire’s working population use public transport as their preferred mode of travel to work, compared to 7.5% for the MSD and about 10% for inner metropolitan LGAs (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

**Household Composition**

Nillumbik has a high proportion (47%) (23% MSD) of households made up of couples with dependent children and a relatively low incidence of lone person households (12%) (23% MSD). This is reflected in the fact that the average household size is 3.12. A four person household is the most commonly occurring household size in Nillumbik.

Nillumbik has a relatively young population, with 18% in the 5-14 years age group and only 5% being 65 or over. However, the biggest projected changes are increases in the 50-69 age group, which is expected to double by 2021 (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a). This is also due to the fact that Nillumbik has the highest life expectancy for males (85.2 years) and the second highest for females (86.2 years) out of all of Victorian LGAs (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

**Country of birth**

Nillumbik’s population is relatively homogenous. Only 14% of residents were born overseas (29% MSD). The majority of these come from English-speaking countries (5% from the United Kingdom and 1% from New Zealand), with Italians and Germans (each 1%) forming the other two major migrant communities in the area. Consequently, 90% (69% MSD) of Shire residents speak only English at home. The largest non-English-speaking language groups are Italian (2%) and Greek (1%).

**Indicators of community strength**

In 2005 the Department for Victorian Communities published its *Indicators of Community Strength at the Local*
Government Area Level in Victoria. Nillumbik recorded higher results than the state average for 10 of the 15 indicators, including perceptions of:

- ability to get help from family, friends and neighbours
- feeling safe in the street alone after dark
- being a member of an organised group
- attending community events
- feeling multiculturalism makes life better
- ability to raise $2,000 in two days in an emergency
- liking living in their local area (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

These results point towards a connected community where residents are able to benefit from good relationships with their family, friends and neighbours, feel safe, and care about their local environment.
Who is hard to reach in Nillumbik?

The demographic profile presented above shows that Nillumbik has a relatively homogenous community with low levels of disadvantage, low levels of transience, and where people generally feel safe and connected. Nevertheless there are segments of the Shire’s population that are potentially hard to reach based on their social, demographic and geographic characteristics:

- people who live within the less advantaged areas of Nillumbik as identified by the SEIFA indexes, primarily in the north and south-east
- people in rural areas who are more geographically isolated and are not as well connected to the service infrastructure
- young people, who make up a large proportion of the Shire’s population, and who are difficult to engage unless targeted specifically using appropriate methods
- time poor residents who spend much of their time commuting and working outside Nillumbik
- parents with young children who have little time to attend face to face consultations and who make up a large proportion of the population
- Socially isolated persons and those who lack access to personal transport.

The degree to which these population segments are hard to reach depends on the issues consulted upon, the consultation tools used and the way in which they are asked to contribute to the process. Some segments may be able to be reached if the right tool and approach is used, while others are willing to attend if special provisions are made for them, e.g. offering childcare or transport.

Consultations on strategic issues face additional complications because of their abstract and future-oriented nature, which means that many residents may be disinclined to become involved as they do not see the relevance to their own lives or feel that they have anything to contribute. The endemic problem is that it is just these high level strategic issues that affect the entire community, adding weight to the requirement that participants be representative of the Shire’s wider population so that all voices can be heard, providing a legitimate basis for decisions made as a result of community input.

There is no ‘one size fits all’ method of public participation. Rather, a combination of consultation methods is needed to engage different segments of the community, including those unlikely to get involved unless targeted.

Melbourne 2030

The State Government’s Melbourne 2030 plan will continue to affect many planning and development issues in Nillumbik, and has in the past divided the community on such issues. Melbourne 2030 aims to drastically alter the traditional pattern
of the city’s urban development, by nominating principal and major mixed use activity centres in the existing metropolitan area, and introducing a legislated urban growth boundary. The existing metropolitan area is nominated by the government to contain 70% of the planned 620,000 new dwellings by 2030, with the remainder located in development corridors on the urban fringe. The new dwellings will constitute a 50% increase on the current 1.2 million dwellings, three-quarters of which are detached. Moreover, implementation of the plan will result in a large increase in the number of new dwellings in activity centres, from 24% to 41% (Buxton and Tieman 2005:141). Despite the massive urban consolidation envisaged, the plan sees this as occurring without detriment to the character or amenity of established residential areas due to the application of Rescode, the medium density housing code (Melbourne 2030 Principles).

Melbourne 2030 identifies metropolitan Melbourne as having a network of around 1,000 activity centres of various types and sizes. They are focal points for the community and meet a wide range of needs. Within Nillumbik, Eltham and Diamond Creek are designated as major activity centres. These townships, together with Hurstbridge, face the challenge of trying to retain their distinctive local character in the push towards medium density development.

Community concern about planning and development issues has been evident in the results of recent Council elections. In November 2004, the field was hotly contested with a record 114 candidates standing. The results saw only one sitting member returned. Andrew Rowe of the Victorian Local Governance Association commented, ‘There’s been a clear pro- and anti-development argument in Nillumbik, and it seems the community has taken Council in a more community direction’ (Khadem and Boulton 2004).

Identification as a Green Wedge Shire is core to the Shire’s vision for itself:

Council’s vision is to lead The Green Wedge Shire in environmental best practice and foster an engaged, healthy and culturally vibrant community (Nillumbik Shire Council 2005).

This is based on Nillumbik’s natural heritage and water catchment areas (Diamond, Arthur’s and Watson’s Creeks catchments as well as part of the Plenty River’s eastern catchment). According to the Council Plan, Nillumbik’s status as a Green Wedge Shire is geographical, environmental and philosophical (Nillumbik Shire Council 2005).

The term Green Wedge Shire also appears in Melbourne 2030 where it is used to describe 12 non-urban areas that surround the built-up areas of Melbourne. These green wedges are located outside the urban growth boundary of Melbourne and include areas set aside for conservation, recreation, agriculture, airports, sewage treatment plants.
and quarries. The areas of Nillumbik which are located outside the urban growth boundary of Melbourne form part of a conservation, agricultural, tourism and recreation green wedge with a strong environmental sustainability focus.

In referring to itself as a Green Wedge Shire, Nillumbik sets the context within which it wishes to be understood in relation to wider Melbourne. It sees its intrinsic value as linking the urban and rural areas, preserving the natural areas that surround the city and providing the lungs of Melbourne.

Being a green wedge shire brings special challenges. Maintaining a quality natural and built environment requires major expenditure on environmental planning, protection and preservation of natural areas, and support for a range of community facilities and programs which promote environmental objectives. These costly activities focus on large areas of public land which generate no rate revenue.

**Interface council**

Due to its geographic location at the interface between metropolitan Melbourne and rural Victoria, Nillumbik faces a series of special challenges:

> We’re at the interface between bush and city and this means there’s a mix of urban and rural communities. While there might be a high level of activity, with lots of demand for growth and infrastructure, there’s also the pressure of environmental issues (Marston, Morgan et al. 2003:9).

Along with other interface municipalities (Wyndham, Whittlesea, Melton, Hume, Yarra Ranges and Mornington Peninsula), Nillumbik faces a number of unique challenges for Council service delivery and community consultation:

>The number one issue for service provision from my experience is the greater need and proportion of socially and geographically isolated people in the outer rural areas of this shire (Marston, Morgan et al. 2003:9).

In their study of Human Service Gaps at the Interface, Marston, Morgan et al. (2003:92) identified four key differences between Interface and other municipalities:

- each interface municipality has a mixture of both rural and metropolitan communities
- geographic spread and social isolation are key features of the interface
- traditional models of service delivery are not appropriate to needs at the interface
- the interface is in transition and this places demands on infrastructure which are not present in other municipalities.

This unique social and spatial character – the city on one hand and the country on the other – means that Nillumbik has to plan for the different dynamics of growth and demand for human services of its urban and rural populations. The Shire has quite concentrated
populations, close to the centre of services, but also faces the challenge of providing adequate services to small numbers of residents who live further away and in more isolated settings. Financially this means that there is a high cost associated with providing these services and that there are few economies of scale (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

Interface councils also face difficulties in accessing funding. They are frequently excluded from applying for rural and regional funding programs to deliver services to their non-urban areas (Marston, Morgan et al. 2003; Nillumbik Shire Council 2005). The characteristics of the Nillumbik population and high ratings on health and welfare indicators translate into poor eligibility for specific purpose government grants which target areas of high social need. Although 90% of Nillumbik’s land is non-urban, the Shire is classified as urban by central government and is therefore ineligible for significant amounts of government funding going to rural and regional councils (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

Financial issues

Nillumbik’s financial issues stem from the fact that it has a relatively low rate base. Less than 10% of rate revenue comes from commercial or industrial sources and consequently Council is highly dependent on residential rates. Unlike inner urban LGAs, the Shire derives no substantial income from parking fees or fines. In addition, rate increases have not kept pace with state averages or real costs – in the past 10 years Nillumbik’s rates have increased on average by 4.1% per annum, the seventh lowest increase in the state (average 6.5%) (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a). The larger than average household size creates additional pressure for Council because it results in a lower rate base.

Due to these financial restrictions, Nillumbik is not a high spending council. A benchmark financial analysis of 17 comparable LGAs in 2003-04 showed that Nillumbik ranked fourth lowest in expenditure per capita. Larger than average household sizes mean that three to four persons per rating assessment need to be serviced, compared to other LGAs where the ratio is only two persons. Total Council expenditure per capita was $785 for Nillumbik, compared to a median of $1,151 for the 17 councils. The situation is compounded by the loss of general purpose grants, which means that Nillumbik faces a reduction of up to $2 million over a four year period (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

The pressure of the past decade to keep rate increases low, combined with an aging and poorly maintained infrastructure, has resulted in inadequate funding to many community assets. In 2003-04 Nillumbik ranked last out of the 17 comparable councils, with a per capita expenditure of only $17 (median $170). This deficit requires significant budget commitments over the next five to ten years to restore
Consultation on Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan

roads, streets, drainage systems, parks, reserves, recreational facilities and community buildings so that they reflect contemporary standards.

Other critical areas relate to the inadequacy or lack of public transport, the pressure put on the local roads and infrastructure due to population growth within the Shire and in neighbouring municipalities (notably Whittlesea) and the ensuing environmental, pressures.

Implications for resource planning

Council provides a wide range of services to the community, including public health and safety, community services, planning and environment, leisure and recreation, infrastructure and assets, and business support and economic development (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a:7). The revenue to provide these services is generated through property rates, fees, charges and government grants. Due to the characteristics of Nillumbik Shire outlined above, there are significant limitations on Council’s ability to generate revenue and consequently this limits the extent to which new major capital projects and improved services can be funded (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

Consequently, difficult decisions about prioritising expenditure need to be made. A key issue for discussion is how to strike the balance between the level of residential rates paid and the high expectations of council services, facilities and programs within a municipality with a fairly affluent community, but which has limited resources to provide services to those at the margins and in the rural areas of the Shire.

The significance of the consultation on the Council Plan and SRP in this context is that Council needs to get residents’ input about choices and priorities for expenditure within budget constraints. In particular it needs to raise public awareness about Council’s financial situation and the need to increase revenue if it is to maintain and improve the level of services provided.
Consultation on the Nillumbik Strategic Resource Plan

The consultation on the Nillumbik Shire Council Plan 2006-10 and the SRP has to be understood in the context of the particular issues facing Council – a relatively well off, well educated, well connected and environmentally aware community that nevertheless includes pockets of disadvantage and faces challenges in providing services for the rural and urbanised areas alike and that is limited in its ability to raise financial resources.

More generally, the consultation serves as a case study of a high level strategic consultation on issues that affect all members of the community. In this context, issues about Council’s ability to involve a representative cross-section of the population become particularly important because the legitimacy of decisions made as a result of such consultations rests on the ability to demonstrate that decisions were made according to community priorities. Vexedly, it is just when representativeness of participants is most important, as in the case of high level consultations, that people are least likely to want to become involved. The complexity, abstract nature and future-oriented nature of the issues can act as deterrents because their relevance to people’s lives is not immediately apparent or because people feel they have nothing to contribute. The interesting questions here are which sections of the community respond to which types of consultation method, the extent to which participants are representative, and the confidence with which decisions can be made and priorities set on the basis of what the community says.

Community consultation on the SRP and Council Plan is a statutory requirement prescribed by the Victorian Local Government Act 1989 which stipulates the production of a Council Plan outlining objectives and priorities over a four year period. The SRP, which is to be reviewed annually, complements the Council Plan and details the resources required to achieve the strategic objectives. In 2006 Nillumbik Shire Council committed to developing a comprehensive four year SRP that goes well beyond the statutory requirements (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

To this end Council’s Social Planning unit, together with a consultant, Michael Tierney from Tierney Andrews Consulting, planned a series of nine community workshops, with further opportunities for community input using surveys to ascertain priorities in relation to Council’s strategic commitments as outlined in the Nillumbik Shire Council Plan 2005-09 (Nillumbik Shire Council 2005). It was hoped that community workshops would:

- [Identify] community views regarding priorities for the future of Nillumbik, infrastructure (roads, footpaths and buildings) and services to the community
- [Test] community response to Council’s current priorities as outlined in the Council Plan 2005-09
- [Encourage] informed community debate regarding possible constraints involved in achieving our goals for Nillumbik
- [Agree] about how we can best ... work together and continue to ensure that we are listening to and hearing each other (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a).

The workshops were conducted in December 2005 and February/March 2006. The survey was available on-line and through the Nillumbik News in February 2006 (Appendix 5). Outcomes from these consultations were intended to inform the following year’s Council Plan and the SRP.

**Workshops**

The workshops were planned jointly with Council’s Social Planning Unit and the consultant. In the planning stages there were discussions about the possibility of having sessions that would be targeted at specific segments of the population using demographic information and knowledge of specific ‘hard to reach’ groups. Ultimately a decision was made in favour of nine publicly advertised workshops that would be open to all through self-selection. These were planned around a neighbourhood based model in different locations around the Shire. Timing of the workshops was scheduled to include daytime as well as evening sessions on weekdays as well as weekends to enable a range of people to attend (Table 4).

In addition to eliciting community preferences about Council’s strategic and financial priorities, attitudes and ideas about community engagements would also be tested.

Questions for discussion included:

- What do you think are the key issues for Nillumbik over the next three to four years?
- What is Council’s role in meeting community expectations regarding representation and advocacy, planning, infrastructure (roads, footpaths, buildings, parks etc) and services to the community?
- What priorities should Council focus on over the next three to four years and how should these be reflected in our financial/resource planning process?
- How can Council and the community improve the way we work together? (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006a)

**Promotion**

Advertising for the sessions used a range of media in an effort to maximise participation.
The workshops were advertised in the November issue of the *Nillumbik News* (Council’s newsletter, which is distributed to all residents of the Shire) in the November 2005 and February 2006 editions, and in the local paper (*Diamond Valley Leader*, 22 November 2005). In addition, a flyer was sent to people on Council’s specific mailing list (N=300, which includes representatives of community groups and key organisations Council is aware of) in mid-November, with a follow-up letter in mid-January. There was also a media release. Promotional material informed the community about the purpose, time and location of the proposed workshops (Appendixes 1-3) and asked people to register their interest by calling the number provided or by sending an email.

Those who registered their interest in attending the workshops were sent an information kit in the mail. This contained:

- background to the consultation
- key questions for discussion
- background demographic information about the Shire
- a summary of key social and economic trends
- information about services and programs Council provides
- a summary of Council’s financial issues, including Council budget highlights

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7 Email communication from Jacky Close, 23 Nov. 2005.
Consultation on Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan

- a summary of Council’s recent consultation and statement of commitment to consultation
- a summary of the Council Plan.

Internally the workshops were promoted by the Social Planning Coordinator who informed staff via email that the consultation would be taking place and suggested that they should make sure specific interest groups were aware of the workshops and could have their say. As a result, Youth Services mentioned that they were interested in talking about how to engage young people and suggested the use of their mailing list. Subsequently an email about the consultation was sent to 3,000 people on this list.

Although the workshops were widely advertised, it was sometimes difficult to get people to attend them. Attendance varied from three to 23 to participants, with a total of 100 persons attending the consultations (Table 4). The workshop on 7 December was postponed due to low registration numbers. The Diamond Creek area had been engaged in extensive community consultation in November-December for its proposed area structure plan, perhaps leading to consultation fatigue. By contrast, the workshop in Hurstbridge on 5 December had a record 23 attendees, perhaps due to an active recruiting drive by one of the local councillors who had called and emailed potential participants and who also attended the workshop. A session at Panton Hill scheduled for 22 February also had to be postponed due to low registrations but was well attended when it was held on 1 March 2006.

Reasons for low attendance may have to do with the timing of the workshops in December and February when people are preoccupied with the Christmas and holiday season. More likely, however, reasons are linked to the fact that community members are generally reluctant to become involved in consultations around future-oriented, high level strategic documents. This reluctance can be partly explained by the complexity and multi-faceted nature of some strategy documents. People often do not see the relevance of such planning to their own lives and can find it difficult to connect with the abstract nature of the concepts consulted upon. The language used to describe these plans can also be a deterrent and some community members feel they need a ‘translator’. Consequently, involving a wide range of community members in such planning exercises involves considerable time and resources and frequently requires active recruitment through personal contacts and persuasion. This was also evident in Nillumbik where workshops that had the highest number of attendees were those where councillors played an active role in recruiting.

8 Email communication from Jacky Close, 23 Nov. 2005.
9 Email communication from Jacky Close, 23 Nov. 2005.
10 Refer also to Brackertz, Zwart et al. (2005).
participants through their personal contacts (Hurstbridge and the first Eltham workshop).

**Workshop format**

The workshops were run by the consultant with assistance from Council’s Social Planning Unit. They varied slightly depending on the number of attendees, but generally followed this format. A welcoming speech was given by the mayor (or other councillors, who attended almost all workshops), setting the scene for the discussions. Following this the mayor (and/or councillors) assumed a listening brief. Participants were then asked by the consultant to briefly introduce themselves, stating their name, any organisations they were part of or represented, and what they saw to be the main issues for the workshop. The consultant who was assisted by two Council employees, then asked the group:

- What do you think the major priorities for the Nillumbik Shire community are over the next three to four years (challenges, issues, opportunities)?
- What should Nillumbik Shire Council’s major priorities over the next three to four years be to help achieve preferred future/s, e.g. Council roles/governments, infrastructures/assets, programs/services, finances/resources?

Each question was discussed for approximately 45 minutes, with key points being documented on butcher’s paper. For groups of eight or more persons, at the conclusion of discussions about the second question, the consultant used a ranking technique (Nominal Group Technique) to establish the group’s priorities from the notes taken during the session. Each participant was given five differently coloured sticky dots, with allocated values from one to five points (e.g. gold = five points, red = four points, etc.). As a way of indicating their priorities, participants were asked to rank the discussion items captured on the butcher’s paper by sticking a dot next to those they considered important. At the conclusion of this, the facilitator added up the votes for each discussion item and compiled a list of the issues considered most important by the group. These were then summarised on a separate piece of paper and presented back to participants for evaluation and approval. In most instances, participants agreed that the issues identified using the technique were the most important. On occasion, further issues were added. For smaller groups, discussion and identification of priorities was relatively informal, with key points recorded on butcher’s paper but not voted for.
Discussions tended to be constructive and, in the majority of workshops, participant contributions were thoughtful and of high quality. In some of the larger workshops, notably those where participants had been actively recruited through councillors’ personal contacts, discussions were liveliest and most politicised. Attendees tended to be already socially and politically active and had strong viewpoints about their preferences. Rather than contributing to a constructive discussion of the questions posed, some took to political grandstanding, thereby drowning out the voices of less politicised attendees who felt overlooked. On occasion, the facilitator struggled to contain the debate and emotions ran high.

Another point of contention was the ranking technique. Many participants felt confused by the process and found it hard to commit priority to any one issue. Sometimes it was felt that there was overlap between the issues captured on butcher’s paper. Therefore committing votes to one particular issue, rather than a related one, was effectively splitting the vote and would result in a lower ranking. This could have been remedied if there had been a summarising and consolidation process of issues raised in discussion prior to the voting taking place, but time constraints made this impractical. Others were opposed to ranking issues and felt that this was an inappropriate form of decision making. After some persuasion, however, all attendees took part in the ranking process and at the conclusion of the sessions were satisfied that the most important matters had been identified appropriately.

**Representativeness of workshops**

At the time of the workshops, no detailed demographic data was collected from participants. However, following the workshops, participants were sent a questionnaire asking them to evaluate the consultation process. A total of 82 questionnaires were sent out and 34 completed surveys were returned, giving a response rate of 41.5%. A breakdown of demographic characteristics shows some startling asymmetries (Fig. 2). While 18 respondents were female and 16 were male, providing a fair balance of genders, no surveys were
received from persons under the age of 35, and of the respondents in the 35-44 year age group (21%), all were female. The majority of respondents fell into the 55 years and over age group (71%), with only minor differences in the number of men and women in this category. Overall, three main age cohorts emerged (Fig. 3): xx women aged 35-44 (21%), women aged 55 years and over (29%), and men aged 55 years and over (41%).

It is not surprising, then, that 44% of respondents indicated that they were retired, with 24% being in full-time work and a low 3% each being students and full-time parents/carers. None of the respondents indicated that they spoke a language other than English at home, which is consistent with the overall demographic make-up of the Shire where 90% of residents speak only English at home.

Most respondents heard about the workshops through the local paper, closely followed by word of mouth or a personally addressed letter from Council (Fig. 4). What this means in terms of accessibility of the workshops is that while respondents rated workshops to be accessible, the demographic spread of those who actually attended is limited and weighted towards older and retired persons. Most striking is the absence of the younger demographic. The figures become even more significant when it is considered that the highest proportion of households in Nillumbik is made up of couples with dependent children (47%), a demographic that was not well represented at the workshops. No men under the age of 45 attended, indicating perhaps their heavy work commitment and long hours spent travelling to and from work (67% of Nillumbik residents are in full-time work). As a result they may not be so dependent on Council services and perhaps choose to spend their available leisure time with their families rather than engaging with the wider community. Younger women, especially if they are mothers caring for young children, tend to be more frequent users of Council facilities and therefore have a greater vested interest in having a say about Council services.

The voices of young people of school age were largely absent from the workshops although they make up a significant proportion of the Shire’s population and despite the effort to inform them about the consultation using the Youth Services email list. No attempts were made to engage young people through schools, although the possibility had been raised at early planning sessions for the workshops. From participant

12 Compare Brackertz, Zwart et al. (2005:158).
observation it is known that only two teenagers attended workshop sessions; it is not clear whether this was as a result of the mail-out or whether they responded to general advertising. A Council staff member commented that ‘young people look towards the city and do not see Nillumbik as their future’. Reasons for this have not been fully explored, but young people may not have felt that a consultation on the SRP was of relevance or interest to them, possibly because they did not understand potential implications for their life experience within the Shire.

While no persons under the age of 35 returned the participant evaluation questionnaire, participant observation of the workshops shows that a few (though not many) in this age group attended. Reasons for the low numbers are speculative, but one may assume that many of them have heavy work commitments or are caring for young families and have little time to spare for community consultation. A few mothers who attended the workshops brought their young children/toddlers with them. This shows that mothers felt comfortable attending together with their children; however, it also hints at a lack of options for childcare during the workshops and may have meant that mothers were not able to fully participate, as they had to also placate and entertain their offspring.

Reasons for the absence of a more representative sample of community members may be that they did not hear of the workshops (perhaps younger residents do not read the local paper and are not included on Council’s mailing lists), did not feel comfortable attending a workshop format, did not think their contribution was valuable or would make a difference, did not see the need to attend, needed further encouragement or support to attend, or the timing or location was not convenient. Consequently, one may conclude that the workshops were accessible only to a limited section of the Shire’s community and the spread of attendees was not representative of the Shire’s population.

The need to engage a wider and more representative sample of the community was also noted in the consultant’s report which recommended the use of complementary approaches, including surveys and targeted consultations in emerging priority areas, involving younger people (through schools and youth networks), road and public transport users, and community arts and cultural groups. To this should be added socially and geographically isolated persons, people in rural areas and people in their 20s to early 30s. This supports the finding that community consultation, especially when representativeness of participants is important to add legitimacy, requires careful planning and multiple approaches to include a wide sample of community members. In particular, this highlights the point that self-selection of participants needs to be complemented with purposive sampling and active recruitment to achieve a representative balance.
Participant Evaluation

In addition to eliciting information and ideas from the communities, consultations also aimed to engage and educate people and make them feel they were listened to. To evaluate what participants thought about this aspect of the consultation, they were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from the framework developed by Rowe, Marsh and Frewer (Rowe and Frewer 2000; Rowe, Marsh et al. 2004) and asked information about the suitability of the

Table 5: Criteria and questions for participant evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accessibility</strong></td>
<td>The participation exercise should be held at a time and in a location that makes it easy for participants to attend.</td>
<td>The location of the workshop was convenient for me (e.g. public transport available, disability access, safety, parking). The timing of the workshop made it easy for me to attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resource accessibility</strong></td>
<td>Participants should have access to the appropriate resources to enable them to successfully fulfil their brief.</td>
<td>Information at the workshop was presented in a clear and understandable way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Task definition</strong></td>
<td>The nature and scope of the participation task should be clearly defined.</td>
<td>I am clear about my role in the consultation process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structured decision making</strong></td>
<td>The participation exercise should use/provide appropriate mechanisms for structuring and displaying the decision-making process.</td>
<td>The recommendations that came out of the workshop reflected the discussion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opportunity to contribute</strong></td>
<td>Participants should have the opportunity to express their views and concerns and all participants should be given a fair hearing during the consultation process.</td>
<td>At the workshop there was enough time for participants to have their say. At the workshop I was given enough opportunity to make a contribution and voice my concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Representativeness</strong></td>
<td>The participants should comprise a broadly representative sample of the affected population.</td>
<td>I think everyone affected by the issue consulted upon has a fair opportunity to participate in the consultation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Independence</strong></td>
<td>The participation process should be conducted in an independent (unbiased) way.</td>
<td>I thought the workshop was well facilitated. The workshop was run in an unbiased way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Influence</strong></td>
<td>The output of the procedure should have a genuine impact on policy.</td>
<td>I think Council will listen to community views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency</strong></td>
<td>The process should be transparent so that the relevant population can see what is going on and how decisions are being made.</td>
<td>I am clear about the purpose of the workshop.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
workshop format as a deliberative forum in which all have an equal chance to contribute and be heard. The questionnaire used a set of key criteria to assess multiple dimensions of the participation process. Table 5 summarises the key criteria and questions that were used (Appendix 4). Participants were asked to respond to the questions by circling preferences on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

Summary data for the key criteria of successful consultation shows that participants rated most aspects of the workshops highly to very highly (Fig. 5). There was near unanimous agreement that the process had been transparent (94%), the task clearly defined (91%) and the workshops had been accessible (91%). A very high percentage also thought the resources required for them to participate successfully had been accessible (82%) and the structuring of the decision-making process had reflected the content of the workshop contributions (82%). A high number of participants agreed that the consultation was run in an independent way (70%) and that they had an opportunity to contribute during the process (72%). More respondents agreed than disagreed that those participating were broadly representative of the wider community (68%) and that they would be able to influence decision making as Council would listen to their views (63%).
Asked whether they were clear about the purpose of the workshops (transparency), their role in the consultation (task definition) and whether they thought that the information provided to them during the workshop was presented in a clear and accessible way (resource accessibility), for both genders, a very high number of respondents were inclined to agree (94%, 91% and 82% respectively) (Fig. 6).

When respondents were asked whether they thought that everyone affected by the issue consulted upon had a fair opportunity to participate in the consultation process (representativeness), 68% agreed, but interesting differences emerged in perceptions between the age cohorts (Fig. 7). While 86% of older men and 86% of younger women agreed that everyone affected had a chance to participate, only 40% of older women thought this was the case and 40% disagreed with the statement. This could indicate a greater awareness by older women of other groups within the community that did not have an opportunity to participate.

Considerable difference between women’s and men’s perceptions of the consultation process were also expressed in relation to their ability to contribute during the workshops, the degree to which the recommendations arising from the workshops reflected the discussion, and their ability to influence the final outcome of the consultation (Fig. 8).

In aggregate, 72% of all respondents agreed they had an opportunity to contribute to the consultation (Fig. 5). However, when divided into age cohorts, differences emerge. A full 60% of older women disagreed or were unsure that participants had sufficient time to have their say, and 40% disagreed or were undecided whether they themselves had opportunity to voice their concerns.
Consultation on Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan

(Fig. 8). This contrasts starkly with the figures for the other age cohorts, which showed very high levels of agreement on these items.

Older women were also less likely to agree that their contributions were adequately reflected in the recommendations that came out of the workshops, with 40% disagreeing or being unsure. This contrasts sharply with the perceptions of younger women and older men, who all agreed the recommendations reflected the discussion (Fig. 9).

When asked whether they thought Council would listen to their views, a distinct difference in perception emerged between the genders. Only 47% of women (regardless of age group) thought their contribution would make a difference, while 80% of men were confident this was the case (Fig. 10).

Perhaps the divergent ways in which the different age cohorts and men and women perceived the consultation process were partly due to their perceptions of how the workshops were facilitated. While 70% of all respondents thought the workshop passed the criterion of independence (was well facilitated and run in an unbiased way), the majority of older women disagreed or were undecided that it was well facilitated (60%). Only 40% of older women thought it was well run, while 83% of younger women and 71% of older men thought this was the case.

Older women also disagreed or were undecided whether the workshop was run in an unbiased way (40%), while all younger women (100%) and most older men (86%) thought this was the case.

Participants’ general comments on the workshop showed that they were pleased to have been given the opportunity to contribute and put their ideas to Council. While there was some scepticism about whether their suggestions would be taken up by Council, most were optimistic that this would happen.

Workshop outcomes

While the consultation workshops were being undertaken, summaries of each workshop were posted on Council’s website as they became

Figure 10: Participant perception of influence on decision making

Well facilitated

Was run in an unbiased way

Participants (N=32) Younger women (N=6) Older women (N=10) Older men (N=14) Agree Neither Disagree

Participants (N=32) Younger women (N=7) Older women (N=10) Older men (N=14) Agree Neither Disagree
available. Upon conclusion of the workshops, a final report was provided to Council by the consultant.

The report summarised community responses in relation to Council’s four major strategic objectives: 1. environment (natural, built, cultural; 2. health and wellbeing; 3. community assets; and 4. governance and community engagement. The report noted that:

Analysis of responses shows that environmental considerations dominated discussions. Numerically there were significantly more comments relating to the natural, built, and cultural environment than for the other three Council Plan strategic goals combined (Tierney 2006:2).

Eight key community priorities were identified by the report:

1. Promotion and protection of the Shire’s natural environment/local character – through reaffirming Council commitment to the ‘green wedge’ vision and effective planning controls.

2. Promotion and protection of local community identity, including the ‘village character’ of the Shire’s diverse local communities.

3. Effective management of roads/traffic issues throughout the Shire and in specific local communities – including congestion, pollution, safety, lengthening journeys to work, and reduced amenity.

4. Significant improvement in current public transport/community transport options.

5. Strengthened partnerships and cooperative planning between Council and local community networks.

6. Increased support for visual/performing arts, crafts and cultural activities.

7. Building/reinforcing community health and wellbeing including support for: bicycle/pedestrian trails; community services/support for older residents; community health centres; neighbourhood houses; and increased range and diversity of youth facilities.

8. An integrated planning approach which balances population/development pressures and economic development with needs of local communities (Tierney 2006:1)

In relation to the thorny issue of Council’s financial sustainability and ability to deliver services, the report noted that:

There was almost no adverse comment in any of the workshops regarding the recent significant increases in rates/charges introduced by Council in the 2005-06 budget...A recurring theme was that although most participants see the current residential rate level as comparatively high, they are seen as representing ‘good value’ in terms of reinforcing the local environment, supporting
local amenity, and providing essential community facilities. Overall, there was support for moderate rate increases over the next three-four years to finance improvements in community assets, infrastructure and services – provided Council continued to ‘sell the case’ in terms of finding community needs (Tierney 2006:2).

Participants’ awareness of Council’s need to increase revenue to be sustainable was matched by their understanding that rate increases would need to be ‘sold’ to the community through education about revenue issues. Effectively this means that workshop participants understood the need to prioritise expenditure according to practical and strategic needs and that it was unlikely there would be major new initiatives that were cost intensive. This was matched by the understanding that in the long term Council cannot rely on rate increases alone for financial sustainability, but must also seek to expand its revenue base through exploring other revenue raising options and through lobbying the State Government to provide financial support of costs of maintaining the green wedge.

A theme that ran through many workshop sessions, but was not fully explored in the consultant’s report, was the option of increasing the range of services and facilities available to the community by making better use of existing resources. What became apparent in discussions about available services and facilities was that there were considerable information gaps. On numerous occasions, workshop attendees suggested the need for a certain service or facility, only to be told by other participants that it was already being provided. Numerous opportunities for providing additional resources to community members through better use of existing facilities were also raised, such as the option of using school rooms after hours, or making better use of community halls as dance or exhibition spaces. A number of the workshops suggested that there was a need for an information hub where community groups and Council could exchange information about groups, services and facilities available in Nillumbik. It also became apparent that the Nillumbik News and other Council information were not delivered to all areas within the Shire, meaning that not all community members were informed about the latest developments and initiatives.

The Survey

Information from the survey was an important supplement to the workshops, since surveys are usually able to reach a larger number of people, thereby increasing the representativeness of the consultation. Data collected using a survey format, however, differs substantially from the rich and qualitative information that results from workshops. Rather than following the open ended questions used in face to face sessions, the survey was more structured, using a multiple choice format to allow respondents to indicate their
preferences in relation to Council’s strategic priorities as stated in the Council Plan. The survey also asked respondents to indicate their perceptions of Council’s overall performance and ability to effectively represent the community, and whether they thought Council provided enough opportunities for residents to become involved in decision making on local issues. The vexed issue of proposed rate increases was mentioned only in a roundabout way when towards the end of the survey respondents were asked:

*After collating all responses to the survey, Council will need to consider the financial implications of increasing efforts/outputs in any area. In Nillumbik the majority of Council finances are obtained through residential rates. Would you like to comment on this issue?*

The survey was made available on Council’s website from mid-February 2006 and was included in a paper based return post form with the February 2006 edition of the *Nillumbik News*. Council had an overwhelming response to the survey in the *Nillumbik News* (N=20,000) with over 2,000 surveys being returned in the first week alone. The online survey had a very poor response rate, with only three or four surveys being completed in the same time period. This disparity hints that Nillumbik residents, despite being relatively well off and having access to the Internet, are not given to seeking out Council’s website as a means of participating in decision making.

**Representativeness of survey respondents**

The survey was very successful in reaching a large number of Nillumbik residents. Of the 20,000 surveys distributed, 2,127 were returned, giving a high response rate of 10.6%. There were only slight gender differences in the proportion of female (59%) and male (41%) survey respondents. Unlike the workshops where the majority of attendants had been over the ages of 55, the majority of survey of respondents (69%) fell into the 30-59 year old age groupings. It is interesting to note that in the 20-29 and 30-39 years age groups there were more than twice as many female as male respondents (4.7% female, 1.8% male; and 18% female, 9% male respectively). In the 40-49 and 50-59 years age groups females still predominate, but the difference is not as pronounced.

Looking at the representativeness of respondents it becomes apparent that the survey format was a suitable way to engage large numbers of people, especially in the usually busy 30-59 years age groups. This included those segments of the population who are time poor because they are working long hours or are caring for children and dependents. Younger women especially showed a high level of uptake. In this instance a survey was not, however, a suitable means of contacting young residents, as is evident by the extremely low number
(0.6%) of replies received from this demographic. Perhaps young people do not read the local paper or visit the Council website and would have to be contacted by an alternative means.

The survey increased the representativeness of the consultation process by contacting and receiving information from a large number of people. It is unclear, however, to what degree survey respondents reflected the demographic and socioeconomic composition of the Shire, as detailed information was not asked for. A breakdown of respondent characteristics along the lines of age and gender shows that young people remain underrepresented as respondents.

**Survey results**

The survey was an excellent way of getting clear indications of people's level of agreement with the Shire’s strategic priorities. It was however, limited in terms of its ability to elicit feedback and discussion beyond the parameters of the survey questions; i.e. it was not, nor was it intended to be, a suitable tool to identify new or emerging priorities, or those that were not already captured in Council's strategic statements. This was the role of the workshops.

A ranking of community priorities in relation to Council’s four strategic goal areas showed similar results to the workshops. Community health and wellbeing was considered to be the most important, closely followed by the environment and community assets, with governance and community engagement being considered slightly less important (Fig. 13).

Council was briefed that a summary of the ‘do more’ and ‘do the same’ responses across Council’s four strategic goal areas showed support to the following levels:\(^{13}\)

1. Environment (natural, built, cultural): 90%
2. Health and wellbeing 90%
3. Community assets: 87%

![Survey respondents by gender and age group (N=1740)](image1.png)

![Community priorities for strategic areas](image2.png)
4. Governance and community engagement: 85%

Mirroring findings from the workshops, the survey showed that improvements to transport and infrastructure were the most significant priority areas for the community, with 70% of respondents stating that Council should do more in these areas.

The survey’s findings on community attitudes to rate increases contrasted somewhat with the workshop results. The survey asked: ‘Council will need to consider the financial implications of increasing efforts/outputs in any area. In Nillumbik the majority of Council finances are obtained through residential rates. Would you like to comment on this issue?’ While workshop participants had been largely in favour of low to moderate rate rises, survey respondents were not clear on this issue. Councillors were briefed that preliminary findings from the survey analysis (N=303) indicated that 60% (N=183) of respondents did not provide a comment, 8% (N=24) supported a small to moderate rate rise, 26% (N=79) opposed a rate rise, and 10% (N=39) made a general comment but did not indicate whether or not they supported a rate rise. The fact that 60% of respondents made no comment about rates could mean either that they had no strong opinions about the issue or had insufficient information to make a comment. Alternatively the high proportion of non-responders on this question could indicate that many persons felt comfortable leaving decisions about rates up to Council and did not oppose rate increases.

A number of reasons could have contributed to the disparity in attitudes between survey respondents and workshop participants to proposed rate increases. It is possible (though not likely, given the Shire’s demographic characteristics) that the majority of survey respondents were less able to afford proposed rate rises. A more plausible explanation is that workshop attendants developed different attitudes to proposed rate increases because the process of discussion and the information provided in the Participant Information Kit educated them about Council’s financial situation and the services it provides, thereby making them more understanding of the need to increase revenue.

Council Plan 2006-2010

Workshop outcomes and survey results were used to brief councillors on the degree of community support for the Shire’s goals, strategic direction and community attitudes to proposed rate increases.

Despite the discrepancy in findings about community attitudes to proposed rate increases (workshop attendants were supportive, while survey respondents were not), overall the information gathered from the consultation was interpreted as indicating that Council was on the right track and that there was

14 Briefing paper prepared by Jacky Close as an update for councilors on the progress of the community consultations, 16 May 2006.
community support for the Shire’s strategic aims and no strong opposition to proposed rate increases. This suggests that despite the large number of people responding to the survey, the opinions of those who attended the workshops were given more weight in respect to their attitudes to rate increases. This could be because councillors were present, and thereby able to directly ‘hear’ community voices at the workshops, or because it was thought that the issue of revenue raising was contextual and depended on respondents having an informed opinion that was shaped by information and discussion, as was the case during the workshops. Alternatively, the choice to emphasise workshop attendees’ approval of moderate rate increases over survey respondents’ reluctance to do so may have been necessitated by Council’s financial viability.

Amendments made in the drafting of the 2006-10 Council Plan and SRP were changes in emphasis and the addition of a number of strategies and indicators rather than a change in direction. The strategic objectives articulated under the goal Environment (natural, built and cultural) were refined from Environment to Natural and Built Environments; Resources to Sustainability; and Cultural Heritage to Cultural Identity; with all others remaining unchanged.

The draft Council Plan 2006-10 was released for public comment on 24 May 2006 for a period of two weeks. Notification of the public consultation was placed in the Diamond Valley Leader and Age newspapers on the same day. Information about the consultation was also posted on the Council website, and flyers requesting community comment were placed at the Shire Office, on community information stands and in the Libraries and Living and Learning Centres across the Shire. Copies of the draft Council Plan were also sent to participants in the nine community consultation workshops held from December 2005 to March 2006. Closing date for submissions was 7 June 2006. In response, five written submissions were received and one verbal presentation was given to Council at the Policy and Services meeting on 13 June.

Three of the submissions were from people who had attended the workshops. Two of these noted that the changes to the draft Council Plan 2006-10 represented a shift in emphasis that reflected the feedback received from the community at the workshops. A further submission expressed support for the addition of new strategies in the draft plan that related to emergency management and undertaking research and planning to ensure that ‘we are meeting the needs of the community’. Three submissions raised concerns that the Council Plan was too broad and did not give enough detail about how and when it would be implemented or the specifics of the real and or tangible objectives being undertaken by Council.

In response to the submissions, a number of minor changes were made...
to the Council Plan and two new strategic indicators were included. Council noted that:

The consultations conducted over the last 12 months, as part of the 2006 review of the Council Plan, reaffirmed that the vision, values and four key goal areas of the current Plan remain relevant to the Nillumbik community. These sections of the current Plan have, therefore, not been amended. However, some minor changes have been made to the strategic objectives, strategies and strategic indicators and these were included in the draft Council Plan 2006-2010.\(^{(15)}\)

The Council Plan 2006-2010 was formally adopted by Council on 27 June 2006. Reflecting the discussions of the workshops, key changes related to environmental issues (built and natural) and sustainability, reflecting the pressures of development and change in the Shire. For example, a new strategy was added under the objective Sustainability, which reads ‘Encourage environmentally sustainable building design and the use of energy efficient infrastructure within residential and commercial premises’. Two new strategic indicators were included under the objective Natural and Built Environment. One, under the objective Resources, identifies change in the use of sensitive building design and reductions in energy use. Another, under the objective Neighbourhood Character, measures the number of Council decisions upheld and those overturned or excessively modified by VCAT. The description of the objective Prosperous Community was also changed to emphasise sustainability. The new phrasing is ‘Foster prosperous communities that are socially and economically sustainable’.

However, despite the clear indication that transport congestion, roads infrastructure and public transport were major issues for the community, this was not evident in changes to the Council Plan or its emphasis. This may be a reflection of the tight financial situation and the fact that roads and service infrastructure are costly to provide. Public transport is a particularly vexed issue, as the Shire has only limited influence over its provision; Council’s main role in this regard is limited to advocacy and lobbying. However, some community suggestions, such as the provision of adequate car parking at train stations and the availability of buses or other transport connecting areas within the Shire, would be well within Council’s reach.

Strategic Resource Plan and Budget Kit
Consultation outcomes also informed the development of the SRP and the subsequent release of the Planning and Delivering Sustainability Budget Kit 2006-2007 (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006b). Citing findings from the survey, the 2006-07 budget reflects community feedback by ‘delivering moderate growth in

services, infrastructure renewal and maintenance and by beginning to deliver on the key projects which the community is expecting’ (Nillumbik Shire Council 2006b).

In terms of financial planning, the SRP emphasised that in order to meet its financial and service commitments the Shire will need to increase overall charges and rates by 6% to 7% over five years. For the financial year 2006-07 this means that overall rates and charges per assessment will increase by 9.81%. This figure constitutes an increase in the waste management charge by 5.4% from $247.30 to $260.65 per annum, an increase in the municipal charge from $20.00 to $52.00 per assessment, and a rate rise of 7.95%.
Implications for the ‘hard to reach’ project

The public participation problem underlying the Nillumbik Council Plan and SRP case study was how to engage a representative portion of the local community in a high level consultation on strategic issues and make tough choices about revenue raising and resource allocation. Research for the case study documented the approach taken by the Shire to observe how the problem was addressed in terms of the consultation and recruitment strategies chosen and the resulting outcomes. In addition, a questionnaire was used to evaluate how participants in the workshop consultations experienced the process.

Engaging a representative sample of the population in community consultation is difficult at the best of times. Council documents on public participation routinely recommend consultation of people who will be affected by an issue and Nillumbik is no exception (Nillumbik Shire Council 2004). Deciding who is affected by an issue may be linked to place or particular issues, it can be confined to the users of a service, or could include all citizens of the municipal area. There are no clear guidelines to help decide who is affected and how to involve them. However, demographic information and knowledge of the local community and its issues are helpful in identifying ‘hard to reach’ groups for any given consultation process.

Nillumbik Shire Council has a good grasp of the demographic characteristics of its community, which are summarised in the Council Plan 2005-09 and documented on its website. The time poor, young people, people living in rural areas and residents facing barriers to participation because they lack transport or are economically disadvantaged were identified as potentially hard to reach prior to the consultation taking place. Although the need to include these segments of the community was recognised, ultimately this information was not used to design a consultation process and recruitment strategy that specifically targeted ‘hard to reach’ groups. Rather, publicly advertised workshops and a survey aimed at all residents were chosen as a means of providing opportunity for all interested community members to become involved.

While this approach based on self-selection theoretically allows everyone to become involved, the research documented above demonstrates that in actuality certain groups are more likely to participate than others. Groups identified as hard to reach prior to the consultation taking place were underrepresented. This confirms that designing a successful consultation strategy that is inclusive of a representative sample of the community needs to actively target community members using a range of techniques.

The Council Plan 2005-09 emphasises Nillumbik Shire’s commitment to community consultation and engagement.
Finding ways by which Council and the community can improve how they work together was also an identified objective of the consultation (Nillumbik Shire Council 2005). Nillumbik’s leading role in the ‘hard to reach’ project attests to this commitment. Involvement by the mayor and Councillors in most of the workshop sessions underlined this and demonstrated that Council was serious about listening to community views. The presence of elected representatives added political weight to the consultation workshops, as ideas and information arising were heard directly by Council and did not have to be mediated by Council officers. In this way, the community had the ‘ear’ of Council.

However, due to restrictions of time and resources, the goal of making consultation processes more representative was obscured. Participants noted on numerous occasions during the workshops that certain segments of the community were not represented. Discussions during meetings led to several excellent suggestions about how to involve other groups, but these were not followed up. Young people especially were conspicuously absent.

This comes back to the question of the degree to which the legitimacy of decisions made on the basis of consultation depends on the representativeness of those consulted. Two different requirements of representativeness emerge, depending on the issues consulted upon. Consultations that are carried out to secure procedural legitimation of democratic processes, that is, those processes which serve to secure the consent of the governed, may require full inclusion (Klausen and Sweeting 2002). In local government, even consultations on high level plans and strategies which affect the entire community may not require full inclusion, but should at least aim to involve a representative sample of the municipality’s population to ensure the legitimacy of decisions made on the basis of public participation. In reality, however, due to their complexity, consultations on major policies and strategies are often carried out involving only a small number of community members who are often not representative of the broader demographic, as was the case here.

The other key dimension of democratic legitimation is the effectiveness of political institutions, which hinges upon the ability to deliver outcomes and address emerging issues and needs as they arise (Hanssen, Klausen et al. 2003; Klausen and Sweeting 2002). Consultations that are based on a functional premise, such as a service review or an operational matter, are usually aimed at a subset of the municipality’s population and do not usually require full inclusion (though they may benefit from it). However, even in these instances, only a small proportion of the affected citizens take part in the consultation process.

The need for representativeness, the requirement to provide outcomes using transparent processes and the
question of the role of consultation in the decision-making process are all issues with which all councils struggle, especially as the design of inclusive processes and the setting of priorities are often driven by pragmatic considerations.

The consultation on the Nillumbik Shire Council Plan and SRP elicited informed and high quality feedback through the workshop process and gathered community preferences from a large number of residents using a questionnaire. Information drawn from the survey largely supported the findings from the workshops, with one notable exception. Unlike the workshops, the majority of survey respondents were not in favour of rate increases. This highlights the need for Council to make tough decisions about revenue raising in the face of opposing public opinion if it is to remain sustainable. The need to increase rates may have been a foregone conclusion necessitated by Council’s financial realities even prior to the consultation taking place. Given the requirement to increase Council’s revenue if it is to remain financially viable, the role of the consultation was to gauge community opinion and inform them about the Shire’s financial needs, rather than to engage in an actual debate about whether or not to increase rates and fees. While educating and informing the community is a valid outcome of consultation, care must be taken not to raise false expectations about the outcomes that will result from any given public participation. Nillumbik’s *Planning and Delivering Sustainability Budget Kit 2006-2007* which draws on the outcomes of the consultation analysed here is a useful document feeding back to the community why certain decisions were made and why rate rises were necessary.

Another development is that, shortly after the conclusion of the consultations, staff from Shire’s Social Planning – which had been instrumental in conducting the consultation – left Council. Unfortunately the knowledge gained from the consultations is now no longer retained by Council, and the skills and insights gained by staff are lost.

Nillumbik Shire Council is committed to engaging and listening to all facets of its community. Council is aware that extra efforts need to be made to involve those who are not usually inclined to participate. To this end, the Shire is initiating new, more representative ways of engaging and involving the community. Nillumbik Talkback, a community panel, has been set up to facilitate greater representativeness in future consultations. Nillumbik Talkback will comprise a panel of 1,000 community members who will participate in four to five surveys or discussion groups a year.

Nillumbik is continuing to collaborate in the ‘hard to reach’ project to develop new strategies, resources and share knowledge that will assist councils to face the challenges of public participation. The result will be clearer goals linking targeted consultation and resources to strengthen governance and democratic processes.
Recommendations

The Shire of Nillumbik has to manage the competing demands of its rural and urban populations to provide adequate services to both. In the process, it has to make difficult decisions about resource allocations. This case study of the consultation on the Council Plan and SRP has shown the Nillumbik community to be informed, engaged and passionate about the place they live in and the issues affecting them. Council has made an effort to involve the public through workshops, calls for submissions, and a survey, which had a very high response rate.

As always there is scope for improvement. A number of measures could be taken to enhance the representativeness of the consultation processes and increase the benefit to Council of their outcomes.

Participation strategy

Choosing the right participation process for the type of information sought and outcomes desired is critical to the success of the consultation. For example, if Council wishes to elicit community feedback about complex choice questions, then deliberative and face to face methods of consultation are more appropriate than a survey based format. This also applies if Council wishes to educate the community about difficult decisions it faces.

Most consultations use multiple methods to facilitate community participation. When selecting these, care must be taken to ensure that each is compatible with the outcomes desired and is suitable for the target audience. For example, comparing community responses to complex issues resulting from a process of education and deliberation with results based on a minimum of information or multiple choice is like comparing apples with oranges.

*It is recommended that Council carefully consider the degree to which participatory mechanisms chosen as part of a consultation strategy are compatible and facilitate the identified aims and outcomes of the consultation.*

Representativeness of the consultation

The representativeness of the consultation process is crucial to ensuring its democratic legitimacy and gives Council a credible basis for decision making. Not all community members are equally likely to participate. Public responsiveness depends on the avenues for involvement offered; the way in which people are invited to participate, ease of access and the way the issue is presented as being relevant to the community. In the case study examined in this report, people under the age of 35 and rural communities were significantly underrepresented. This highlights the fact that populations that Council can find hard to reach are not necessarily minority groups.
It is paramount that efforts are made to actively reach out to populations that are underrepresented in the consultation process, especially young persons. This can be facilitated through active outreach, by better utilising already established relationships between Council and the community, choosing appropriate consultation mechanisms, and facilitating access (e.g. provision of community transport, childcare, use of engaging language and location for young people).

Decision making based on consultation outcomes

The way information from a consultative process is used by Council affects the quality of the outcomes as well as the credibility of decisions made. For example, if the community preferences expressed during a consultation are at odds with Council’s preferred course of action, then it is necessary to communicate to the community why certain decisions were made and how community feedback was used in the process. If consultation outcomes are simply ignored it may create the impression in the community that they have not been listened to and that their opinions have been ignored.

It is recommended that, at the conclusion of the consultation, Council take steps to actively promote the outcomes of the process to the community to avoid perceptions that the community is not being listened to.

It is suggested that Council consider, prior to a consultation taking place, how the community preferences will inform decision making, what to do if opinions expressed during the consultation do not fit with Council’s intentions and how this will be communicated to the public.

Planning and resource allocation

It is important Council consider at the outset of the consultation the resources required, in the form of staff time, available venues and money.

Skills development

Skills in planning, implementing and evaluating consultative techniques greatly affect the effectiveness of the participatory process. Council provides some guidance to its staff about how to conduct community consultation. However, they may struggle to use these resources effectively without supplementary training.

Council could consider extending the current framework for training staff to include community consultation. This would equip staff across all departments with a common understanding about how to conduct effective and inclusive community consultation.

Knowledge management

To maximise the benefits of a consultation to the organisation, information garnered from the process needs to be disseminated widely across Council. This also avoids ‘consultation fatigue’ which can be experienced by the
community if they are repeatedly consulted on related issues in a short period of time.

_Council should consider implementing a mechanism to manage data and knowledge transfer between staff and consultants and across Council more broadly. This could be in the form of a central shared electronic resource for consultation data. Another successful way of doing this is to appoint a dedicated staff member to coordinate consultation efforts across departments._
Consultation on Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan

References


Beder, HW (1980) ‘Reaching the hard-to-reach adult through effective marketing’, New Directions for Continuing Education, 8, pp. 11-26


Nillumbik Shire Council (2004) *Nillumbik Shire Community Consultation Template and Guidelines*, internal document


Nillumbik Shire Council (2006a) *Community Consultation Workshops: Participant Information Kit*

Nillumbik Shire Council (2006b) *Planning and Delivering Sustainability Budget Kit 2006-2007*


Appendix 1

Flyer advertising community workshops in December 2005
Community Workshops

Tell us your thoughts on …

✓ Key issues for Nillumbik in the next 3 to 4 years
✓ Priorities for Council in the next 3 to 4 years
✓ How we can work better together

Please come along and have your say at our first group of community workshops:

Hurstbridge Community Hall: Mon 5 Dec (12pm-2.30pm)
(Melways Ref: 263 A8)

Emergency Operations Centre/
Kangaroo Ground Hall: Wed 7 Dec (7.30pm-10pm)
(Melways Ref: 271 E9)

Eltham Community Reception Centre: Thur 8 Dec (12pm-2.30pm)
801 Main Road Eltham
(Melways Ref: 21 J6)
Appendix 2

Flyer advertising community workshops in February 2006
Consultation on Council Plan and Strategic Resource Plan

Workshop dates and venues

**Thursday 23 February**  (10am -12.30pm)
Council Offices Greensborough:  (Melway: 11 A10)

**Thursday 23 February**  (7.30pm -10pm)
Diamond Creek Bowling Club  (Melway: 12 A6)

**Sunday 26 February**  (12.30pm - 3pm)
Hurstbridge Community Hall  (Melway: 263 A8)

**Monday 27 February**  (7.30pm -10pm)
Emergency Operations Centre/ Kangaroo Ground Hall  (Melway: 271 E9)

**Wednesday 1 March**  (7.30pm -10pm)
Panton Hill Living & Learning Centre  (Melway: 263 K9)

**Thursday 2 March**  (7.30pm -10pm)
Eltham Community Reception Centre  (Melway: 21 J6)

**Friday 3 March**  (12.30pm - 3pm)
Warrandyte Community Centre  (Melway: 23 F11)

**Wednesday 8 March**  (7.30pm -10pm)
Yarrambat Golf Club  (Melway: 184 F5)

Refreshments will be provided

RSVP: Megan Andrews megan.andrews@nillumbik.vic.gov.au or 9433 3210
Appendix 3

Personalised invitation to the community workshops
Dear (As addressed)

**Nillumbik Shire Council invites you to a community workshop**

Council would like to invite you (or a representative of your organisation) to attend a workshop to discuss community priorities for Nillumbik. Three workshops are planned for early December and another seven will be held in February 2006. Further details are provided in the attached invitation.

The workshops provide an opportunity for community members to identify priority issues for Nillumbik over the next 3-4 years, consider how these priorities link to the goals of the Council Plan and discuss how resources should be allocated towards achieving identified priorities.

Questions for discussions will include:

- What do you think are the key issues for Nillumbik over the next 3-4 years?
- What is Council's role in meeting community expectations regarding representation and advocacy, planning, infrastructure (roads, footpaths, buildings, parks etc) and services to the community?
- What priorities should Council focus on over the next 3-4 years and how should these be reflected in our financial/resource planning process?
- How can Council and the community improve the way we work together?

These workshops are the start of a process for gaining greater community involvement in Council’s planning and decision making processes. All community members are welcome to attend. Individual invitations have also been sent to specific community groups to encourage representation from a broad range of age and special interest groups within the community.

We hope you are able to attend and we look forward to meeting you at one of the workshops. To register your interest, please contact Megan Andrews by email at megan.andrews@nillumbik.vic.gov.au or by phone on 9433 3210.

Yours sincerely

Cr Greg Johnson            Bill Forrest
Mayor                     Chief Executive Officer
Appendix 4

Participant evaluation questionnaire
Participant evaluation of Nillumbik Shire Council Consultation Process

The Shire of Nillumbik invites your feedback on the workshops you recently attended. This is part of an evaluation of the consultation process, which is being undertaken by the Institute for Social Research at Swinburne University and may be also used by council.

Below are some statements about the consultation process. Please circle your preferred response, from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A) I am clear about the purpose of the workshop.</td>
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<td>B) I am clear about my role in the consultation process.</td>
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<td>C) Information at the workshop was presented in a clear and understandable way.</td>
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<td>D) At the workshop there was enough time for participants to have their say.</td>
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<td>E) At the workshop I was given enough opportunity to make a contribution and voice my concerns.</td>
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<td>F) I thought the workshop was well facilitated.</td>
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<td>G) I think everyone affected by the issue consulted upon has a fair opportunity to participate in the consultation.</td>
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<td>H) The workshop was run in an unbiased way.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I) The recommendations that came out of the workshop reflected the discussion.</td>
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<td>J) I think council will listen to community views.</td>
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<td>K) The location of the workshop was convenient for me (eg public transport available, disability access, safety, parking etc).</td>
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<td>L) The timing of the workshop made it easy for me to attend.</td>
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</table>
M) How did you hear about the workshop?
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N) I know of others who would have liked to attend the workshop but weren't able to for the following reasons ...
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O) Is there anything else you would like to say about the consultation?
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..................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................
..................................................................................................................................

P) I am □ male □ female
Q) My age group is
☐ under 18
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55-64
☐ over 65

R) I mainly work
☐ Full time
☐ Part time / casual
☐ Unemployed
☐ Retired
☐ Student
☐ Full time parent / carer
☐ Other

S) Do you speak a language other than English at home? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, please specify the MAIN language you speak at home.

................................................................................................................................................

T) What is your postcode? .................................................................
FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW

As part of the project evaluation, researchers from Swinburne may want to contact you to ask some follow up questions, either in person or on the phone. If you are willing to answer some follow up questions, please provide your contact details below.

All responses will be confidential.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
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<td>Email:</td>
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<td>Phone:</td>
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Appendix 5

Paper based survey for community consultation used in February 2006
Have your say about the future of Nillumbik

At a recent series of community workshops Council has been talking to community members about what they feel are the most important issues Council should be focusing on over the next three to four years. We would like to invite you to add your views to those that we have already heard by completing the survey below. Through this process we hope to involve more of the community in this important discussion.

Surveys should be completed and returned to Council, using the paid panel on the reverse, by 10 March 2006. The survey can also be completed online at www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au.

Please rank the following Council priority service areas as High (H), Medium (M) or Low (L) priority.

- THE ENVIRONMENT (NATURAL, BUILT AND CULTURAL)
- COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLBEING
- COMMUNITY ASSETS (BUILDINGS, ROADS, FOOTPATHS)
- GOVERNANCE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
The following provides more detail about the work Council undertakes in each of the above four areas. Please indicate by ticking one box under each heading indicating whether you think Council should be doing more, the same or less work in relation to this issue. If you do not feel you are able to comment you should tick the box marked ‘unable to comment’.

1. The Environment (natural, built and cultural)

**Natural environment:** Preserving and enhancing Nillumbik as the Green Wedge Shire, a valuable local and wider community asset.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Resources:** Practicing and encouraging efficient and effective management of nature resources (air, water and energy), reduction of waste and enhancing biodiversity.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Neighbourhood character:** Protecting and enhancing the character and local amenity of local urban and rural areas.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Cultural heritage:** Expand understanding of our cultural heritage and create opportunities to develop Nillumbik’s cultural identity.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Transport:** Achieve a transport network that provides for the needs of the people of Nillumbik.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment
2. Community health and wellbeing

**Physical activity**: Enhance the health of the people of Nillumbik by creating opportunities to participate in physical activity.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Strengthening communities**: Enhance social and emotional wellbeing by creating opportunities for all people to feel valued and connected.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Services for the community**: Plan and deliver a range of services for the community which meet current and future needs and provide an environment which reduces risks to health.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Prosperous community**: Foster a prosperous community which is characterised by a successful tourism sector, thriving townships and local employment opportunities.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

3. Community assets

**Infrastructure**: Build and maintain accessible, safe community infrastructure (roads, footpaths, drains etc) which meets the needs of the community now and into the future and demonstrates environmental best practice.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Open space**: Maintain and develop open spaces including parks, reserves, roadsides and trails.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment

**Community facilities**: Manage the upgrade, renewal and expansion of community and recreational facilities and assets to meet current and future needs while ensuring ecologically sustainable best practice.

- [ ] do more
- [ ] do the same
- [ ] do less
- [ ] unable to comment
4. Governance and community engagement

**Good governance and community engagement:** Provide good governance and foster community engagement to develop respect and confidence in our decision-making processes.

- [ ] Do more 
- [ ] Do the same 
- [ ] Do less 
- [ ] Unable to comment

**Partnerships:** Focus on strengthening existing relationships and create new partnerships to maximise Council’s potential for responding to community issues.

- [ ] Do more 
- [ ] Do the same 
- [ ] Do less 
- [ ] Unable to comment

**Financial sustainability:** Ensure transparent and efficient financial and risk management practices which build the financial sustainability of Council.

- [ ] Do more 
- [ ] Do the same 
- [ ] Do less 
- [ ] Unable to comment

**Customer service:** Provide an effective, efficient and responsive service to the community.

- [ ] Do more 
- [ ] Do the same 
- [ ] Do less 
- [ ] Unable to comment

**Staff support:** Foster a vibrant, enjoyable, productive and safe work environment.

- [ ] Do more 
- [ ] Do the same 
- [ ] Do less 
- [ ] Unable to comment

**Statutory requirements:** Ensure we meet our statutory requirements and identify opportunities to improve these processes.

- [ ] Do more 
- [ ] Do the same 
- [ ] Do less 
- [ ] Unable to comment
It's very important that Governments truly represent their people, we'd like to ask you a few questions about how your local government could improve that...

Does Council provide enough opportunities for you to be involved in decision-making on local issues? Please tick the circle.
1 Yes, very involving (excellent)  
2 Somewhat involving (good)  
3 Adequate – an acceptable standard  
4 Need some improvement  
5 Needs a lot of improvement  
6 Unable to comment

Does the Council represent this community (or lobby to other levels of government) effectively? (For example, roads, sporting and recreation facilities, land use planning, family and community services funding for local projects.) Please tick the circle.
1 Yes, they represent us very well (excellent)  
2 They are doing a good job  
3 Adequate – an acceptable standard  
4 Need some improvement  
5 Needs a lot of improvement  
6 Unable to comment

How should Council represent you more?

________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

How satisfied are you with the Council's overall performance? Please tick the circle.
1 I'm very satisfied with the Council's overall performance  
2 I'm satisfied with the Council's overall performance  
3 The Council is giving an adequate performance  
4 I'm dissatisfied with the Council's overall performance  
5 I'm very dissatisfied with the Council's overall performance  
6 Unable to comment
Are there any other key issues/priorities Council ought to be addressing?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

After collating all responses to the survey, Council will need to consider the financial implications of increasing efforts/outputs in any area. In Nillumbik the majority of Council finances are obtained through residential rates. Would you like to comment on this issue?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

To allow us to analyse the data correctly, we just need to ask you a bit about yourself.

What is your age? 10-20  20-30  30-40  40-50  50-60  60-70  70 plus

Your postcode? __________  Male  Female

Thank you for taking the time to compete this survey

Printed in Nillumbik on 100% recycled paper.