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Hornsby Shire Council

Focus Group Study Research Report

**Part B of a Community Engagement Survey
amongst a cross-section of residents of Hornsby Local Government Area**

**(Forming Part Two of a Community Engagement Strategy
designed to inform the preparation of
a Community Strategic Plan)**

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Executive Summary

- Residents have chosen to live in the Hornsby Shire primarily because of the 'semi-country' feel of the area, the fresh air, the variety of good schools, affordable housing and the train line.
- Council's maintenance of the bushland has not been generally noticed, apart from isolated major works.
- Residents consider there is no need for more/newer bush tracks. This will impact on the natural bush. A far greater priority is to advertise more widely those that already exist.
- Water catchment works are not understood by the majority of residents. There is confusion between the responsibilities between Council and Sydney Water. Residents are largely unaware of drainage or wetland works. There is a considerably negative attitude towards Council for lack of maintaining current drains i.e. removal of rubbish.
- The major issues affecting the environment in the Hornsby LGA are a) the increase in population and b) the resultant traffic (and the pollution it creates).
- Public transport. The train service was very well regarded. The local bus service was criticized for its lack of timetable coordination with the train service, the considerably reduced service beyond peak times, the circuitous routes around suburban streets and the tight time frames of the school bus services.
- Bicycles were almost exclusively used for recreational transport. To use a bicycle on the roads across the Hornsby Shire was regarded as too dangerous with other traffic, the area is too hilly and the train stations and other central points do not cater sufficiently for bicycle lock-ups. Bicycle maps were an unknown product.
- Communication. Current Hornsby local press advertisements are recognized primarily from the Council logo, the illustration within the main banner, the overall layout and the strong blue at the base of the ad. Future advertisements need to ensure they are not too 'wordy', contain well segmented sections of information, prominently feature Facebook, Twitter etc icons and have a variety of completely new pieces and general information on a regular basis.

- Other forms of communication favoured by residents were: - emails for news alerts, street banners for special events, posters for regular events, letterbox drops for specific council services i.e. Council clean-ups.
- When given a selection of words from which to choose the most appropriate to describe Council, the following images of Council appear:

Hornsby Shire Council is seen by all respondents to be:

Conservative, Knowledgeable and Active but not Courageous.

However, when comparing panel members versus open recruited residents, it appears that panel members are more convinced than recruited residents that Council is: -

Accessible, Relevant, Bureaucratic, Inclusive, Risk Averse and Obstructive.

Open recruited residents are more convinced that Council is: -

Honest, Fair, Cautious and Accountable.

On the negative side, Panel members are more convinced that Council is:

Not Honest, Not Accountable, Not Trustworthy, Not Engaging and Not Progressive.

Background

This study and report is a component of the overall study being undertaken as part of the Community Engagement Strategy, designed to inform the preparation of a Community Strategic Plan.

In this study, a total of 8 focus group discussions were undertaken amongst a cross section of the residents of the Hornsby local government area. Seven of these focus groups were recruited from residents who were part of Council's own panels and one group was recruited by an independent market research company from residents chosen at random from across the Shire

Focus groups were conducted in Hornsby, Pennant Hills, Berowra and Dural with each focus group lasting approximately 1 ½ - 2 hours. In total 62 residents participated in this study. All groups were moderated by Mhairi Clark of OWL Research & Marketing, with three of these groups also being observed by a member of Council.

All groups were conducted during July 2012, in order to be out of field prior to the commencement of the 2012 Council election period.

The following report details the findings from this study.

Living in the Hornsby Shire.

As with studies conducted in previous years, residents of the Hornsby Shire have primarily chosen to live in this part of Sydney because of the 'naturalist' feel of the area. This appears to be almost equally true of those who live in the more urbanized areas of the Shire, such as Epping or Hornsby or Thornleigh as it does for those who live in the northern suburbs of Berowra, Hornsby Heights, Galston or Arcadia.

10 mins walk and I'm in the bush

The proximity of water and water views was another strong benefit of the area. Living in the Hornsby Shire enabled residents to quite easily access the Hawkesbury River, Berowra Waters and Brooklyn – another alternative for recreation when they did not want to go into the bushland.

Berowra Waters and the Hawkesbury are just so beautiful

Apart from the proximity of the bushland, the major benefits of living in this LGA, as voiced by respondents, were the affordability of 'decent' family housing, the range and quality of schooling throughout the area and the first-rate train service the full length of the Shire.

There are excellent schools just about everywhere here

It's a really family friendly area

I want to stay in Hornsby because it is so easy to get on a train and go to Sydney

In addition to these benefits, there is the ease of being able to travel away from Hornsby, with the close proximity of good roads and freeways to enable residents to travel north, south or west.

Great location for getting north, south or west, we're so lucky with all the freeways being so accessible from here.

Of all the benefits mentioned above however, the overriding emotional connection residents have with living in the Hornsby LGA is the closeness, the ambience and the availability of living near to bushland, either in the form of bush tracks, more formal parks or general streetscapes.

With all the gum trees – I feel as though I'm in the country

It's clean and fresh and at the end of the day you get out of your car and you can actually smell the bush

Bushland Maintenance

There was very little awareness from the majority of respondents, of substantial bushland maintenance or restoration works having been conducted. The only exceptions were a couple of isolated instances of a specific path being maintained and a drain having been installed to stop a bush track from flooding. Respondents were quite often a little confused as to whether this type of work was the responsibility of Council or the responsibility of the Department of National Parks and Wildlife.

Council should organise the bush care groups better to maintain the bush – they can't do it themselves but they need to get bush care groups to do it more. There's a group down at Thornleigh Oval who do that.

Three respondents from this study had in the past, or currently did, belong to organised bush walking groups. These respondents were generally only vaguely aware of Council maintenance works, but were unable to nominate anything specific they had seen in recent years. With all respondents it was more of an assumption that Council must carry out some maintenance works, rather than direct, specific knowledge.

Bush walking was one of our decisions to live here – somewhere you could just go for a walk when you felt like it.

Council need to explain carefully – this is a park and you can take your dog – or this is a bush walk of so many kilometers Some places have notices put up at the start of the walk – but not all

When asked what ideas they had for Council to better restore and protect the bushland, the strongest responses were invariably for Council “to be consistent”. As an example, respondents spoke of their perception of inconsistent priorities by Council in terms of bushland maintenance. Noxious weeds were extremely harmful on the bush, but Council did not help to prevent this by not maintaining their own parks, drainage areas, wasteland and streets. Respondents spoke of very poorly maintained general Council areas, as well as not conducting sufficient advertising to householders, about not only which plants were harmful and which were not, but most importantly how to dispose of undesirable plants responsibly so they did not spread into the bush.

Council restrict what you can cut down but they don't restrict what you can plant –all the plants and weeds that invade into the bush.

I've never seen a leaflet from Council that says these trees are inappropriate to plant. I think the nurseries should get involved too.

There was also criticism of Council in not monitoring the age and health of native trees, both in parks and on the streets. This frequently posed potential hazards for the public, with falling branches and the spread of unhealthy undergrowth.

They also need a weed control program. So many people plant things in the garden that are bad for the bush. Once Council put out pamphlets – but I think they should put it out in different languages as well. Many migrants don't understand that there are types of bushes that are harmful. Often pretty things – but not good for the native bush. You used to be able to get these pamphlets from the Council – but this was a long time ago.

Should Council create more bushland walks?

When asked if there is a need for more bushwalking tracks in the Hornsby Shire, the majority considered this was not necessary. Here again, there was an assumption there were plenty of bush tracks available, it was just the fact that residents (including these respondents) were not aware of many of them. There was also the strong argument that too many tracks would diminish the bush with too many areas being opened up for the general public.

They need to promote bush walking or bush activities that already exist. Many people are not aware of what is available or where.

There are quite a few bushland walks already. Heaps of walks around – it is just that people don't know about them.

The need here was seen to advertise the existing tracks more widely, and, at the entrances to these existing tracks, erect more prominent sign boards nominating the name of the track, the distance, and the level of walking difficulty. Respondents with young families also voiced a request for an icon to be displayed on the entry signpost. This icon was to indicate the suitability or otherwise of any bush walking track which would accommodate children's push chairs, as this was frequently a major factor in young families being able to undertake any bush walk.

Also they need to explain – the round circuit is xxx kilometers long and put the degree of walking difficulty on this notice as well. Some do, but only a few.

Forks are not always well marked.

The awareness of bushland track advertising was very low amongst these respondents, with once again the only people being aware of any brochures or promotion on the website, being those who belonged to walking groups.

Not sure if it is Council who put it out – but years ago there was a small booklet showing all the walks

Water Catchments.

As with bushland maintenance, there was very little awareness amongst respondents of Council's involvement with water quality, wetlands or works such as pollutant traps. It was only a few individual respondents who could recall a specific drainage or creek improvement, usually in their own, or nearby street.

I think there is a certain amount of storm water drainage clearance by Council – but only up to a certain point and then it comes under the Office of Water

Respondents were critical of Council in their lack of maintenance of large drains along the side of suburban roads or in flood prone wastelands. Very frequently these drains were block with rubbish washed down the street, or were blocked from overgrown weeds and grasses. Here again, respondents spoke of the need for Council to be more vigilant in the maintenance of existing drains, before any new installations were commenced.

Its only ME writing them a letter telling them of a problem that anything ever happens

They should check the drains after heavy rain so it doesn't flow through get out all the rubbish in there.

I really don't know what you do to improve the water in creeks I understand you can test it – but that's not cleaning it up. What can you actually do to improve it?

As with general confusion about who owns/is responsible for roads, so to there is confusion as to which authority installs or maintains drainage alongside major roads or suburban roads or is responsible for large scale drainage issues across common grounds. Sydney Water and Council are frequently mentioned synonymously.

No respondents could recall any wetlands located in the Hornsby Shire.

I don't know, but I assume Council does works to clean up the waterways.

In discussion about improving water quality, respondents were quite unsure whether this was feasible or not. The task was seen to be so enormous and far reaching, as to be almost impossible for any one Council or authority to tackle. Hence any specific advice or actions undertaken to improve water quality was "too hard" for respondents, other than to stop the amount of rubbish thrown into the water and to carefully monitor any industries or other businesses which might be disposing their waste into the water streams.

I really don't know – I don't think Council can honestly do a thing – other than fine businesses who pollute.

They can test it – but not sure they can improve it

Water coming down from the Hawkesbury makes the job too hard – we down here collect all the filth from the Hawkesbury.

The general consensus was that the water in local streams and waterways was in fact getting worse, often regardless of how the actual water looked. Several respondents were only aware of an isolated creek or pond near to where they lived or regularly walked. These small water catchments were often rubbish or weed filled, which leant the observer to assume the quality of the water was degenerating over time.

There's a small stream just outside Normanhurst station and the water in there is bright orange. I've rung up about it. They say it is iron leaching out of the soil, but iron doesn't have that oily slick on it.

Berowra water looks clean – and people catch fish – but I wouldn't eat those fish!

When they started cleaning up the creek at the bottom of our way – the biggest problem was the overgrown weeds Years ago there was a waterhole at the bottom of that creek where the kids used to swim - but then later on you wouldn't dare let them swim in it.

Major Environmental Issues.

At each focus group, the question was asked of the group as a whole, "what are the two top environmental issues facing Hornsby Council at this present time?. The two 'issues' mentioned quickly and strongly in all eight groups were, 'traffic' and 'increased population'.

The surge in population across the Shire, has, and will continue to have, a dramatic environmental impact according to all respondents. The sheer numbers of people will increase the amount of traffic (and therefore particle pollution from cars), the volume of waste generated (and the need to dispose of this). The number of new homes being built (thereby reducing the natural environment) will also put a strain on the shire and the increased demand for services (will stretch Council resources, thereby reducing effectiveness).

Apart from these two frequently mentioned areas, specific mentions were, privet and other noxious weed control, control of wood fire smoke, and the need for increased maintenance of trees to monitor age, decay and the correct lopping of branches.

As to how Council should be addressing the issues of population and traffic, respondents were completely silent, there were no solutions being offered. In terms of controlling noxious weeds and better maintenance of trees, the response was to be more vigilant in these areas.

Public Transport

There are two overriding factors which appear to govern local household's use (or non use) of public transport, with these being a) lack of parking at railway stations and b) lack of coordination between bus and train timetables.

Respondents spoke at length and angrily about the lack of sufficient parking at all railway stations across the Shire. Any available parking was taken up very early in the mornings, occupied all day and not available until those workers returned to their cars in the evening. This resulted in anyone wanting to travel outside peak hours having to park in suburban streets, frequently quite a distance from the station – with the result this often became “too hard” and so the car was used for the entire journey.

Parking in the Council precinct at the station is a problem. If you have to drive to the station – you have to leave the car somewhere, and Hornsby is absolutely appalling. Waitara extended the parking a little bit – but it is still difficult.

With young children – we are too far to walk to the train station 2.5 klms but to get a park anywhere near a train station in the middle of the day you've got to walk almost a kilometer down – there's no parking that's restricted for families to go during the day. With the kids I'll only catch it once or twice a month because my son thinks its wonderful to catch a train or a bus (he's 3).

Another problem, at locations such as Hornsby and Normanhurst was that people working in nearby businesses, parked their vehicles in the station car parks, again all day, instead of the employer providing sufficient parking for all staff.

Several respondents also spoke of very poor bus services at various times of the day, especially after hours. Whilst they might be willing (and sometimes do) take a train to their destination, it was the lack of buses on returning home, that precluded them from not using their own vehicle to travel from the station to their home. In addition, the problem of an infrequent bus service in the middle of the day, was another inconvenient factor, due to the extremely circuitous route these trips took to reach a main road or a station.

I get the train to work everyday. Drive to the Station. When kids were younger I used to catch the bus – just horrendous juggling the bus timetable with the train timetable. The buses around here are just not coordinated to the trains and the routes can go around the world. Especially if you have an hour on the train to get to work and then you add the bus trip on top of that .

Buses take too long – they are too large and often empty. We need more smaller buses and increased routes.

We bought a house very close to the station and we use the trains a lot rather than buy a second car.

Generally, respondents were not averse to the principle of train travel, in fact in many regards they praised the service, and considered this one of the benefits of living in the Hornsby Shire. However to increase usage of this service either themselves for work, or shopping, or for their children to reach school, there was a dire need for both increased parking and increased 'drop-off zones' adjacent to the stations.

Coming back home (to Berowra) even a little bit late – How do you get home from the station? There's no taxis, no bus, and its always, well, do we bother getting the train, because how do we get home from the station?

In addition, there is the need for the school bus service to be both increased in number during peak times and extended beyond peak times. Parents spoke of having no alternative but to drive their children to school when the child had to be at school either earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon after sport or other extra curricular activity. The suggestion here was to employ more, but smaller capacity buses to service these extended needs.

Concerning geographic gaps in the public transport system, there were no definitive answers given here. Almost all respondents who did not live within 500 meters of a train station, considered their area to be inadequately serviced. Larger or smaller or growing pockets of population did not generally feature in respondent's thinking when discussing transport. Transport, or lack of it, was always a very individual and parochial issue.

For respondents in this round of focus groups, the answer to being able to use their own private vehicles less each week, centred around each of the issues mentioned above i.e. more station parking, coordinated bus/train timetables and an increased and more efficient bus transport coverage. Aspects such as car pooling or making bus travel cheaper were not considered viable. Respondents wanted independence and were prepared to endure inconveniences for this.

Bicycles:

Each group of respondents was initially asked how many attending, currently rode a bicycle specifically for reasons of transport, with only one person claiming to do so. Each group was then asked how many rode a bicycle for pleasure/recreation purposes with 14 people saying they currently enjoyed this form of recreational transport. When asked if their children rode a bicycle to school, only three parents allowed their children to do this, although several more stipulated their children rode bikes when in parks, on holiday etc.

Every Friday another Mum and I take it in turns to get the 12 kids all to ride together to school. At least we know they get there.

The reasons for not allowing children to ride to school centred as much around "it is not safe on the roads" as to claiming the schools themselves discouraged their pupils to travel to school by bicycle. This was because of safety (both road safety and stranger danger safety) as well as the schools themselves having limited bicycle storage facilities, and the problem of stealing.

I don't think my kids are allowed to ride to school – no where for them to chain their bikes.

I've never seen any kids riding a bike to school.

Its not very cool to be seen to ride a bike to school when you're in high school.

Parents spoke of themselves having ridden bikes to school, but nowadays, the lack of safety on increasingly busy roads and crossing main roads, was too great to allow their children to travel this way.

Bike lanes on roads too narrow and not consistent along full length of a road

Respondents did not consider they would ever use their bicycles for reasons other than recreation and then only in places which were away from high traffic areas. Riding at weekends around some of the small suburban streets was an option and undertaken by two respondents. Riding in designated parks, or when away on holiday in country towns was the best and most frequent way they enjoyed bicycle riding. There was some discussion of the lack of a bicycle culture in Sydney which prohibited the uptake of this form of transport. Respondents spoke of a positive bike culture existing in Canberra, in some Far North Queensland towns such as Cairns as well as in many European countries. There was also the observation that bicycle riding was more prevalent in places which had a predominantly flat landscape, a situation which certainly did not apply to the Hornsby Shire.

We lived in Canberra for 7 years – their bike tracks are phenomenal – you can take the kids for 7 kilometers.

A different inhibitor to riding a bicycle for adults, especially if travelling to work, was the clothing that had to be worn. Some respondents spoke of the impracticality of having to wear special clothing and head wear to ride on the main roads, which would then necessitate having to change clothes upon arriving at work.

Can't go to work dressed like that.

With the lack of bicycle storage at stations, there was also the problem of what to do with your bicycle once at the station.

To take your bike on the train – you have to buy a ticket for it. No one is going to buy 2 weekly tickets to ride their bike to the station.

Only one respondent to these groups, was aware of Council providing maps of bicycle tracks. The majority claimed to have never been informed such maps existed, and had never investigated Council's website for such. As a result, it was not practical to discuss what new networks or new links were needed in these current groups.

Whether they were bicycle riders or not, respondents agreed that bicycle riding might be increased if Council were to install wider and divided pathways along the busiest roads. Half the walkway for pedestrians and half for bicycle riders. This had the advantage of removing the bicycles from the roads altogether, and would therefore encourage both adults and children to use them.

I lived in Perth for many years. Over there 90% of children ride their bikes to school – it's a better planned environment for bikes and the kids are trained from a young age to ride their bikes everywhere, so when they get older there's a lot more adults riding bikes. There's bicycle infrastructure all through the city.

Another avenue was for Council to considerably increase the number of bicycle lock-ups at all stations and major entertainment centres and to advertise these widely, throughout the community.

Communication

A series of six council press advertisements were shown to all respondents as part of the discussions concerning communication. There were 2 Hornsby, 1 Marrickville, 1 Warringah, 1 Leichhardt and 1 Pittwater advertisement. Both Hornsby advertisements were shown at the beginning of this part of the discussions, the competitive councils were then shown in rotation with the two Hornsby advertisements being shown again for comparative comment.

Hornsby Council

The Hornsby Council page within either the Hornsby Advocate local paper or the Northern District Times local paper was easily recognized by the majority of respondents. The point of recognition was firstly the Council logo, secondly the overall layout of the advertisement and then to a lesser extent, the predominant blue colour scheme. Respondents were also under the impression this advertisement was usually a full-page.

Another strong feature were the dominant headings within the advertisement – “What’s On”, “Events”, “Development Applications” etc. These headings considerably focused attention onto which parts of the advertisement would be read, and which ignored. Another positive feature of these advertisements, was their well spaced layout, making easier reading. After seeing competitive council advertising it was noted that quite frequently, other council pages put too much body copy into their advertisements, thereby making it appear cluttered and off-putting to read, whereas Hornsby did not have this problem.

Due significantly to familiarity, respondents spoke in praise of the ‘wave’ underlying the main banner and the ‘gentleness’ and ‘appropriateness’ of the bird illustration for a bushland shire.

After viewing other council advertisements, and upon more reflective consideration however, it was frequently remarked that the Hornsby Council page was rather pedestrian and tended to look ‘old fashioned’.

I think it's always a full page isn't it?

It's always set out the same.

Its blue – everything in that paper is blue anyway – so to me that page doesn't stand out as being the council page.

The Hornsby one looks to me – without reading it – like a kid's school composition. The Pittwater one is better.

You can tell by looking at that page – its only that department that is doing it – they are not talking to the marketing department or the library department – its just the development applications department who puts their stuff in there or the environment department.

As with other council pages shown in these groups, the editorial and/or commercial advertisements surrounding the Hornsby advertisement often strongly influenced whether the whole of it was read or not. If the surrounding editorial contained some council, mayoral or community news, there was frequently the supposition that this was all part of council's advertisement. If however, the surrounding commercial advertisements were dominant, they often detracted from the council advertisement, which would then initially be overlooked.

(The second/smaller HSC ad)

That's better, because they are not advertisements all around it, just stories and articles

Respondents to these groups preferred The Mayor's Column to be separated from the main Council advertisement. The rationale for this being the Mayor's column was often political and of general news, whereas the advertisement was more factual and contained specific information.

After viewing all six advertisements, when the Hornsby pages were again shown to the groups, the following suggestions were made: -

What would be really nice if they had a section called "What's New" – bike maps or get your newsletter by email or whatever. Only 4 or 5 points but it would be really nice to see something else that they are doing apart from the regular stuff.

They should have things like "the photo of the month" it's such a nice area – to see a different photo each month.

They should have competitions – kid's drawing competition or something – to alert your eye to the page.

Marrickville Council

This Council page was regarded as being 'very bold' due primarily to its colour scheme. The positive aspects here were the regularity of the layout, the clearly defined segments i.e. 'News', 'Events' and 'Development Applications'. The different coloured shading within the advertisement also made it easy to quickly locate areas of interest.

The negative aspects were the inclusion of the Mayor's message and the bland main banner. This was described as unexciting and lacking any character about the area it was representing.

Looks like a real estate ad (2 people)

I like the fact that it is bordered.

Don't like the colouring – very officious

I like the regularity of the layout

I like the large "Events"

The shading within columns makes it easy to locate subject areas.

Leichhardt Council

This Council page received very mixed reactions. On the positive side was the strong identification that it was Leichhardt Council, the 'boxed' layout of the content and the clearly identifiable headings within the advertisement.

On the negative side were the chosen colour schemes, the closeness of the body copy, the dominant space given to the Mayor's message and the lack of clearly identifiable segmentation under each heading i.e. under 'What's On' - the small ineffectual titles such as "HSC Seminars".

Very clear banner headline

Clear it is Leichhardt Council

Again clear segmentation of subject areas

That colour scheme is awful

Warringah Council

This council advertisement was the least liked of the five council pages shown. The Warringah Shire Council page was described as 'very messy' 'confusing' and 'too much to read'.

The apparent lack of structure to this advertisement reflected for some, the lack of authority of the whole advertisement. It was seen as an entertainment page, rather than an informative one. Only two respondents (both under the age of 35 years) responded well to this advertisement, focusing on the top music concert segment, but for these respondents the tie back of this to Warringah Council was very debatable.

Messy

Too wordy

Poor Council identification you can't really tell where it is from

Way too casual and low key

Pittwater Council

This council advertisement was generally regarded as the best (of the competitor advertisements) by the majority of respondents. Pittwater Council advertisement was very clear to read, it covered the full page, and was well laid out.

The main banner of this page was discussed as being very appropriate for the location of Pittwater; respondents liked the title of 'Community Noticeboard' as well as the clear identification of Pittwater Council itself. The colour scheme of blue and the 'wave' under the titles were described as very suitable for the area.

*Terrific – lots of things happening If I really want to know about it – I know where to go
appeals to me – all the little icons I'd flip through those and see 'that's interesting'*

This page was quite frequently referred to as looking like a web page. This is now seen as a positive comment with people becoming increasingly familiar with a variety of web pages and how to visually navigate around them.

Under the heading of 'What's On', the illustrations highlighting each event were referred to by most, as 'icons' and were liked for their clarity and relevance to the event they were describing. Another feature liked about this page was the 'Did you know' section at the bottom of the page. This feature was discussed as being a good one for Hornsby Council to incorporate, where news such as the availability of bicycle tracks could be promoted.

It's quite appealing actually Look at What's On then general Notices. The headings are in bold so they are easy to select, and you need not read the others.

What's On section is fantastic Its got everything you might need – even if you don't need it.

Again for younger respondents, the large icons for Facebook, Twitter etc were noted with approval, showing that Council were using more modern forms of communication in addition to this advertisement.

On the negative side, the highlighting in green, of the word 'Community' in the top banner was not understood by respondents and the various vignettes across this advertisement were seen as irrelevant and possibly expensive, although visually appealing.

Council information channels

Respondents were generally very conservative in their opinions as to the most effective ways for Council to communicate with them regarding events, information and general news.

The major and individual local newspapers were still seen as the most widespread communications vehicle, but letterbox dropped leaflets and brochures were also regarded as being very useful to 'spread the word' to all residents whether they were owners or renters of their properties.

Email was also a popular method for communication, providing the content of the email was brief. In this regard residents did not like the idea of substituting via email, the Council's page in the local press for the same information, but rather a short email merely listing topics and highlights. Anything of interest to the reader to then be accessed via links from this email to more detailed information – but not however, merely a link to council website.

Street banners were suggested as being very suitable for event advertising, as these were clearly seen from cars and public transport. Posters in bus shelters and along station platforms were also good for advertising specific events.

Posters in libraries, were also mentioned, although this would naturally only impact on regular users of these services.

When mentioned, Facebook and Twitter were discussed with some trepidation by the majority of these respondents, due primarily to their lack of familiarity with these digital sites. Here again, the few younger (under 35 years) respondents attending these groups were far more amenable to council communicating with them in this way, providing once again the communications were brief and stimulating.

Does Council have a Facebook page – that is quite effective I find if you join that group – you'd get a lot of information. This is another avenue.

Twitter and Facebook. Council clean-up this week. Go to our website to check out our bike maps. Information that comes up all the time that you can read or ignore. A newsletter is fine but – I still have to go and open it and read it but on Twitter or Facebook I can see it right there

Council's current website was discussed as having being accessed at various times in the past by the majority of respondents. It was not a website that any respondents visited purely from curiosity, or to generally find out what was happening in their local areas. This site was only accessed if the respondent was seeking specific information on a given subject, and whilst on the site they 'might' have a search around into other areas.

On their website if you want to download DA files –it's really really hard to print off. Although its in word its in some weird format. Should be in pdf format easier for us to download. Looks like a word document but when try to download it takes you somewhere else.

I agree with that, I think it's a docx document

Words

At the conclusion of each focus group, respondents were asked to write down in their own words:

- a) How they would describe Hornsby Shire as a **place to live** to someone who knows nothing about the area and,
- b) What words/adjectives would they use to describe Hornsby **Council**.

Group 1 – Pennant Hills 10am

What words would you use to describe Hornsby Shire to someone who has never lived here and knows nothing about it?

Family
Schools
Nature
Community
Space
Traffic

Bushland
Lots of birds and wildlife
Has everything – restaurants – movies
Churches
Parks
Good neighbours
Peaceful settings

Green Accessible
Community

Quiet
Bush
Retail Centre
Semi-rural
Somewhat village type

Outer urban
Rural fringe
Leafy
Homes with backyards
Community
BUT – Changing rapidly

Leafy
Shopping Centres
Schools
Parks
Transport

Trees
Bush
Restaurants
Parks
Trains
Schools
Birds
Libraries
Clubs
Friends
Ovals
Families

What words would you use when thinking about Hornsby Shire Council?

Library
Festival
Community

Forward Planning
Transport
Approachable

Library Services
Streets
Parks

Fair
Reasonable
Involved
Diversified

Officious
Limited resources
Quarry to Thornleigh
Brickpit planning errors

Good services
Focused on some minor issues

Recycling
Pedantic
Obstructive
Intrusive
Expensive
Libraries
Community

Group 2 – Pennant Hills 6.15 pm
Words used to describe Hornsby Shire
to someone who has never lived here
and knows nothing about it?

Bush – Trees - Large blocks
Facilities
Proximity to....
History

Convenient - Trains
Schools
Bushland - Suburbia
Un-spoilt

Clean
Peaceful - Community
Environmentally concerned
Friendly

Natural
Green - Bush
Peaceful - Pleasant

Schools
Shopping Centres
Libraries
Churches
Traffic
Medical Services
Dog friendly areas

Bushland Shire
Green
2 Train lines - Convenient

Bushland Shire
One hour to City/Airport
Convenient

Safe
Lovely Parks and trees
Beautiful waterways
Some areas poor for public transport
Good location for getting away – F3/M2
Pennant Hills Road – bad traffic

Good for Kids
Clean Air
Lots of trees
Lots of playing fields
Good for Bushwalking

Leafy
A community
Diverse
Multicultural

Group 2 – Pennant Hills 6.15 pm
Words used when thinking about
Hornsby Shire Council?

Arrogant
Unwilling to listen
Improving
Wasting rates
Incompetent?

Unresponsive - Out of touch
Lack of community focus – civic centre
Too much politicking
Efficient

Trying
Sustainably focused

Broad
Active
“Green Thumbed”

Traditional

Not very helpful
Not very informative
Basic jobs done well

Bureaucratic
Young Mayor
Ambitious

Helpful staff
Incompetent (re-pool)

(No comments made)

Average
Attempting to be collaborative

Group 3 – Hornsby 10 am
Words used to describe Hornsby Shire to someone who has never lived here and knows nothing about it?

Convenient to transport, shops, schools
Bushland setting
Quiet - Wildlife

Convenience of transport, Shopping, recreation facilities
Hospitals

Green – lots of trees
Great facilities
Good schools
Very convenient public transport if near train line
Good libraries
Good sporting facilities

Tranquil -Rural
Safe
Quiet

Trees
Trains
Many shops
Easy to get out of Sydney F3
Pennant Hills Road
Homes - Gardens vs high rise flats
Traffic noise
Birds

Bush environment
Proximity to Central Coast + beaches and City
Quiet
Not (too) congested yet
Fear of over development

Bushland
Rail transport
Young growing area
Community Spirit

Green - Colourfull
Peaceful - Sounds of birds
Nature
Lacks interest with difference of shops
Needs regenerated business area

Family friendly
Leafy and green - Safe
Easy access to public transport
Easy access to welfare facilities

Group 3 – Hornsby 10 am
What words would you use when thinking about Hornsby Shire Council?

Captured by a select few
Indecisive - Slow
Controlled by the Liberal Party

Sender of Rates Notices
Fairly invisible other than local paper
Good library

Adequate
Reasonable communication
A bit too development oriented (residential)
Slow to move on upgrading facilities (eg pool, Old Pacific Hwy walkway, station parking facilities)

Black and White – no grey areas
Revenue raiser
Archaic

Environmentally conscious
Interested in recycling
Quick and reasonable to deal with (DAs)
Responsive
Have a difficult task pleasing all stakeholders!!

Conservative politically
Not proactive in maintaining appropriate streetscape maintenance (trolley dumping/apartment waste dumping)
Regulations need to be enforced
More consultation (forums) for residents

Conservative
Reactionary
Staid
Pro development

Unproductive - Dormant
Inability to create change
Don't listen to small business
Don't work along with small business (eg parking) and keeping the area clean
Walkway from station to Westfield Centre looks like a dump. Forgotten west side

Good communication with residents
Good services such as: libraries, e-library, park maintenance, bushwalk and trail maintenance, festivals, home and community care.

Group 4 – Hornsby 6.15 pm
Words used to describe Hornsby Shire
to someone who has never lived here
and knows nothing about it?

Green trees
Polluted – traffic
Untidy
Overcrowded

Green Bushland - Space
Culturally diverse
Great restaurants
Quiet
Great Schools
Train line
Amenities good – pool/train

Green
Close to Central Coast and its beaches
Spacious
Many parks
Good commute to City
Quiet

Bushland
Suburbia
Open spaces
Good transport rail links
Recreation
Treescaped streets

Bushland area
Quiet residential area
Convenient public transport
Many schools – excellent schools
Nice shopping mall

Good schools
Good transport
Not too crowded
Close to bushland recreational areas

High maintenance – rotting roofs and
gutters
Insensitive Council
Too many regulations
Bush Fire threat
Leaves everywhere
Can't get out of Westfield
Poor infrastructure
Isolating

Quiet
Leafy
Nice
Good train line
Spacious

Group 4 – Hornsby 6.15 pm
Words used when thinking about
Hornsby Shire Council?

Global not local

Accommodating
Helpful

Helpful
Responsive

Provider of services
Staff okay

Informative
Friendly
Curb side cleaning not enough

The tail wagging the dog
Fails to listen to ratepayers

Slow
Self serving – corrupt?
Lost any good staff they have
Unresponsive
One rule for them another for us
Detrimental to business
Drives businesses out of the area

I have had little experience with Council
Seem to be doing okay

Group 5 – Dural 6.15 pm

Words used to describe Hornsby Shire to someone who has never lived here and knows nothing about it?

Great
Rural
Quiet
People
Community

Rural
Peaceful
Bushland
Natural
Green
Birdlife
Horses
Market gardens (flowers, vegetables, fruit)
Quiet

Green
Bad roads
Little upkeep

Atmosphere
Bushland
Rural
Villages
Gorges
Waterways
Ferry
Bushwalking
Railway

Variety of lifestyles from isolated, rural, suburbia and high density living
So if moving to Hornsby Shire explore the whole shire to find the lifestyle of choice
Hence services follow the level of development

Rural
Suburbia
Isolated
Quaint
Horses
Lifestyle
Retirement
Safe
Friendly

Hornsby Shire is a vast area stretching from suburbia in the south to glorious bushland in north.
It has some lovely dotted villages in its northern area, which offer lifestyle living.

Group 5 – Dural 6.15 pm

What words would you use when thinking about Hornsby Shire Council?

Lacking response for Roads, paths and weeds
Great parks ie Fagan Park and Galston Park Oval

Road works
Conservation
Rubbish pick-ups
Educational programs eg energy savings
Recycling

They are not spending any of our rates in our area.

Council
Signs
Legalistic
Officious
Bureaucratic

Inconsistent in their dealing with community services eg notices to residents to remove weeds but council makes little effort to keep weeds under control on street verges.
Seems one department does not communicate with others and tasks are not done or doubly done.

Difficult
Unreasonable
Slack
Silent
Expensive

HSC tends to adopt a discriminatory approach to its ratepayers.
It seems to look after its suburban ratepayers far better than its ratepayers in more rural areas.

Group 6 – Berowra 2 pm

Words used to describe Hornsby Shire to someone who has never lived here and knows nothing about it?

Rural-seeming
Bushland
Safe
Friendly
Well-services
Slower pace
Quiet
Peaceful

Leafy
Bushland – absolutely beautiful
Pleasant atmosphere
Friendly people
Environmental planning by Council is excellent
Not too busy

Hornsby Shire is a great place to live.
There are all the conveniences you could want for you and your family. The people of the Shire are mostly friendly with plenty of choice for your choices

Bush
Clean
Large
Quiet

Convenient
Semi-rural
Friendly
Outdoor
Spacious
Relaxed
Efficient

Quiet
Bushland
Expansion imminent
Retail Café and Restaurants
Recreation
Variety
Population
Accommodation

Group 6 – Berowra 2 pm

What words would you use when thinking about Hornsby Shire Council?

Adequate
Lazy
Willing
Frustrating
Friendly

Some incompetent planning (Quarry, Equestrian Centre, The Maze that didn't get built – thank goodness)
Need to get priorities straight
Who bribed who?
Day by day service is excellent

Staff – great job with resources at hand
Councillors – lack vision – lack integrity

Incompetent
Missing
No supervision
Facilities dirty
Grass and Grounds not properly maintained

Helpful
Limited

Underhand
Unfair
Developer friendly
Walkover
Dictatorial

Group 7 – Berowra 6.30 pm

Words used to describe Hornsby Shire to someone who has never lived here and knows nothing about it?

Close to the City but far enough away
Family friendly
Hornsby CBD has a lot of high risers
Quiet location
Close to water
Close to rural

Bushland
Birds and other wildlife
Away from the city rat race but close enough for a night out
Uncrowded
Well services
Generally clean

Long way north from city
Near the National Park
Not as nice as Ku-ring-gai, but cheaper
Some lovely views towards the beaches
Connected to the city by train
Please, no more high rise.

Scenic
Beautiful
Greenery
Hear in pin drops (silent)
Serene
Clean
Beautiful people
Friendly
Space

Multi-cultural
Semi-urban
Semi-rural

Parts are quiet
Civilized living
Family friendly
Safe environment
Bushland surrounds

Group 7 – Berowra 6.30 pm

What words would you use when thinking about Hornsby Shire Council?

Needs to be transparent in communication
Provide more activities for youth

Collects the garbage every week
Twice yearly clean up

Tries to use funds to satisfy all the interests however disparate
Good website
Tries hard to communicate.

Organizes events regularly
Community
Library

Un-trustworthy
Some departments OK but generally they "consult" the public then do what they want to do.

More communication between departments with ONE goal in mind.

Group 8 – Hornsby 10 am
Words used to describe Hornsby Shire to someone who has never lived here and knows nothing about it?

A place to live/Community feel
 Bushland
 Enjoyable
 Lucky
 Relaxing

Green/Open
 Safe
 Child friendly
 Educated
 Public transport friendly
 Traffic
 Well resourced

Safe/Warm
 Brush
 Environmentally friendly
 School
 Transport

Convenient
 Friendly
 Has something for everyone
 Close to all amenities
 Has a lot of free things to do

Happy/Friendly
 Enjoyable
 Welcoming
 Convenient access

Quality living
 Safety and secure/Friendly
 Good education
 Bushy and leafy
 Affordable
 Good transport

Community/Eventful
 Polite
 Enjoyable
 Multicultural
 Accessible to other areas
 Sparse
 Natural

Bushland
 Friendly/Good Community feel
 Young
 Relaxed

Lots of space to move
 Plenty of bushland
 Near the bush, near the city

Group 8 – Hornsby 10 am
What words would you use when thinking about Hornsby Shire Council?

Boring
 Informative
 Helpful

Responsive
 Green
 Competent
 Community minded

Home
 Parks
 Rubbish pick up

Friendly
 Accessible
 Has lots of things happening

Informative
 Reliant

Not working hard enough
 Not efficient
 Room for improvement

Busy
 Outdated
 Predictable
 Bureaucratic
 Effective

Swimming pool!
 Progressive

Approachable
 Accessible
 Effective
 Inconspicuous

Having done this, and returned their written responses to the researcher, a selection of 20 word cards were then placed on the table*. Once again respondents were asked to choose as many words as they wished, to describe what they considered Hornsby Council Was/Was not.
 *This concluding exercise was only conducted with the final four groups.

Total Number of mentions – All respondents Groups 5 - 8

Hornsby Shire Council	IS	IS NOT
Local Services	18	3
Conservative	17	0
Knowledgeable	15	4
Accessible	15	3
Active	14	4
Honest	12	9
Relevant	12	4
Bureaucratic	12	1
Cautious	12	1
Old fashioned	11	6
Inclusive	10	7
Risk Averse	10	4
Obstructive	8	6
Fair	7	9
Accountable	7	11
Trustworthy	6	9
Engaging	5	11
Progressive	3	10
Courageous	0	10

Total Number of mentions – Respondents Professional Group ONLY

Hornsby Shire Council	IS	IS NOT
Honest	8	0
Conservative	6	0
Active	6	0
Knowledgeable	6	0
Fair	5	0
Old fashioned	5	3
Local Services	5	0
Cautious	5	0
Relevant	4	0
Accountable	4	3
Accessible	4	0
Inclusive	2	1
Bureaucratic	2	1
Risk Averse	2	3
Engaging	2	3
Trustworthy	2	0
Obstructive	1	2
Progressive	1	3
Courageous	0	5

END OF REPORT