

TITLE: [PR-CM] Planning Reform Unit - Priorities Work Plan 2014/15

SUBMITTED BY: Planning Reform Unit



Civic Leadership

LINKAGE TO INTEGRATED PLANNING AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK:

1	Civic Leadership
1.5	Manage and plan for a balance between population growth, urban development and environmental protection and the retention of economical viable agriculture land
1.5.2	Land use plans and development controls will be applied and regulated rigorously and consistently and consider the requirements of development proponents, the natural environment and those in the community affected by the proposed development

SUMMARY OF REPORT:

This report has been prepared to provide Tweed Councillors with the option of resolving to identify their strategic town planning priorities, which will assist in the formulation of a work plan for the Planning Reform Unit.

A Councillor workshop was held on 15 April 2014 to discuss options for allocating resources to projects based on their perceived benefit and their likelihood of them being delivered within reasonable time horizons. This preceded a further workshop on 22 May at which a priority led assessment matrix was tabled, along with a draft Project Plan for 2014-15.

Councillors demonstrated a preference for a move away from the previous format of work programmes, which centred on timeframe based resource allocation, which had been used since 2009. This was in recognition that projects with an apparent greater benefit to the Tweed community were often being delayed while lesser benefiting/value projects were resourced for no other reason than being commenced earlier in time.

A meaningful work plan is an essential project management tool. It assists staff with the allocation of finite resources as well providing a useful aid for advising the broader community about the Council's strategic planning priorities. They may also assist prospective applicants determine time associated risks with their own project forecasting.

A work plan based on priority opposed to first in-time is amenable to change and better signifies Council's intention to deliver outcomes. It is more flexible but inherently less certain for proponents as there must be a limit to the quantum of high priority projects meaning that marginal projects may be downgraded as resources are redirected or allocated.

This report presents a strategic planning project prioritisation plan based on feedback from the elected Council, which manifests the key areas or project of priority to the Council. A Work Plan 2014-15 representing the Organisation's Divisional resource response to the Council's priorities is also provided. Both are recommended for adoption and endorsement.

RECOMMENDATION:

That the:

1. **Council's strategic planning project prioritisation plan detailed in Table 1 through to Table 4, as detailed in the report, is adopted.**
2. **Planning Reform Unit's priority project Work Plan 2014-15, identified as Table 5 within the report, is endorsed.**

REPORT:

Background

As part of the on-going project management of Council's strategic town planning resources the Planning Reform Unit's Work Program is reviewed annually and where appropriate revised to reflect and 'match' resource-to-commitment.

First adopted in June 2009 and employed successively up to and including June 2014 it has been effectively utilised to manage expectations arising from speculative requests and investigations as well as genuine development strategic/opportunity proposals arising either through Council or from the private sector.

The major challenge for the work programmes has been the inflexibility inherent with the allocation of resources on a first-in-time basis. This arises in part because it raises an expectation with the project proponent that once their project is 'in' and resourced it will remain so for the duration of the project. Projects that are later-in-time, despite any apparent greater net benefit, are then forced to wait until resources become available, and this has given rise to significant tension between the interests and priorities of the proponent and the Council. The net result has been a gradual and unsustainable increase in the number of projects expected to be resourced and delivered by the Planning Reform Unit. The effective result is that projects are fundamentally treated as having the same level of priority, which in totality of the quantum of projects to resources available means they each rank relatively low, and that higher priority allocation is typically reactive, short-lived, and responsive only to matters of conflict or complaint.

Prior to preparing this report a Councillor workshop was held on 15 April 2014 to discuss options for allocating resources to projects based on their perceived benefit and their likelihood of being delivered and within a reasonable timeframe. Councillors were briefed on sixteen project reports and were provided with an overview of each project, the time that each project had been with the Council, the technical issues, progress and an opinion on the proponent's and Council's performance with regard to progressing a project. Evident from the project overview is that many projects had been with the Council exceeding 3 years, and many were delayed by factors beyond the Council's control. Reasons for want of progress are many and varied and driven equally by many factors; economic, technical, communication, willingness, public reception and the like. No matter the cause, the translation of Council's resource commitments to tangible planning outcomes has consistently yielded less than expected returns.

Through detailed discussion it became quite apparent the format of the Planning Reform Unit's work program was not delivering the right information to enable the Council's Operational Division to allocate and reassign resources. The first-in-time allocation of resources was proving inflexible essentially locking valuable resources to projects that for many reasons, including the public interest, are not warranting of that commitment.

Preceding a further workshop on 22 May the 15 April workshop was decisive for the Councillors because it was clear their expectations of strategic planning were not being achieved. Their clear preference for a priority assessment of projects led to the development of a priority based assessment matrix and this was tabled at 22 May workshop, along with a draft project Work Plan 2014-15. Both the matrices and draft Work Plan were presented and discussed in detail at the workshop. Important to the development of the matrices is the acknowledgement that it is a tool of the elected council for representing their priorities, opposed to those of the Council Officers who recast the priorities into their resource based work plan.

Priority Planning Projects

Tables 1 to 4 below have been development for and in consultation with Tweed Councillors, and reflect the current list of projects and their priority to the Council.

For the reasons highlighted above there is an imperative for the Council to prioritise projects and for resources to be allocated to those projects perceived to have the greatest benefit to the Tweed.

OPTIONS:

1. Adopt Tables 1-4 and in so doing express the collective view of the Council on the priority level of projects currently being managed by the Planning Reform Unit, and in association endorse the draft Work Plan 2014-15, or
2. Amend or defer either or both the table(s) of priorities or draft Work Plan.

Option 1 is recommended.

CONCLUSION:

There is an essential need for Council to indicate its collective preference with regard to the strategic planning priorities within the Tweed Shire, and without which the Operational Division of the Council has no overriding guidance as to where the Planning Reform Unit's scarce resources should best be allocated.

It is well known and understood that the strategic planning priorities of the Council are established by the elected body, whereas the allocation of resources remains an operational activity under the jurisdiction of the General Manager and their delegates. These two functions are each a dependant on the other for the efficient and effective delivery of policy that can effectuate tangible outcomes.

Using the information gathered from the Councillor workshops held in April and May, a list of projects and their relative strategic priority has been compiled, and is used to form the basis of an operational work plan. Both are presented in the body of this report.

The rationale behind the change in approach from a work plan based on first-in-time to one of priority is that it better defines the areas of strategic planning where the Council believes the public interest would be best served. This may originate through resourcing projects that have an environmental, social or economic benefit for the greater community, over individual interests or those of a small class or group. This correlates with the notion that public resources should be used to obtain and secure the best and highest public benefit.

Inevitable with a priority based work plan is that in times of high demand for scarce resources projects perceived or with an apparent lower level of public benefit relative to others will remain the least resourced. This may be seen as unfair by their proponent because they perceive their project to be justified irrespective of the level of benefit it may bring to the broader community. It is the first-in-time basis of the previous work plan methodology that has provided a greater opportunity to access resources for those proponents however, it has been established that in terms of managing finite resources that are under considerable demand the most appropriate way for achieving the greater good of the community is to design a strategy that prioritises the public interest over any other interest. Council has recognised the need to prioritise projects for that purpose. In doing so the Council is responding to its statutory and civic duties as it endeavours to allocate its scarce public resources during these continuing periods of high demand.

The rationale for the prioritisation of strategic planning projects is sound. It provides clear guidance to the community and development industry about where the Council priorities are for the present time. It also provides a clear direction that operation Divisions of the council can use to define work plans for the allocation of their resources.

Tables 1-5 comprising the strategic planning project prioritisation plan and the Work Plan 2014-15 are recommended for adoption and endorsement respectively.

COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS:

a. Policy:

Corporate Policy Not Applicable

b. Budget/Long Term Financial Plan:

Escalation of strategic planning strategies and the introduction of new strategies may have implications for the long term financial plan if they require funding. At this stage and based on the Work Plan 2014-15 detailed in this report no additional funding is being sought.

c. Legal:

There are no apparent legal matters arising from the prioritisation of projects or from the Work Plan 2014-15.

d. Communication/Engagement:

Not Applicable.

UNDER SEPARATE COVER/FURTHER INFORMATION:

Nil.
