



OUR WOLLONGONG JOIN THE CONVERSATION



New Helensburgh Community Centre and Library

Engagement Report

November 2024

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The information in this report is based on data collected from community members who chose to be involved in engagement activities and therefore should not be considered representative.

This report is intended to provide a high-level analysis of the most prominent themes and issues. While it's not possible to include all the details of feedback we received, feedback that was relevant to the project has been provided to technical experts for review and consideration.

Executive Summary

Over the past few years, we have asked the Helensburgh community to provide their feedback on their preferred look and feel for the new Helensburgh Community Centre and Library. This engagement is the final check in with the community before the design is prepared and construction of the new facility is commenced.

A newsletter was delivered to each Helensburgh household in September 2024 announcing the site of the new centre and indicating that a consultation process would be starting soon. The engagement period ran from 9 to 31 October 2024, where we invited the community to join the conversation about the new Helensburgh Community Centre and Library.

Methods

We published a project webpage on our.wollongong.nsw.gov.au, which included an online community survey, a quick poll, summary of 2017 and 2020 community feedback and Frequently Asked Questions. We installed corflute signs on the fencing surrounding the site for the new Community Centre and Library and at the existing Library. A QR code on the signs linked to the project webpage. Posters with a QR code were also displayed at the Post Office in Helensburgh.

People could access information about the project from the existing Library and several engagement activities, including drop-in information sessions at three local locations on 9 October, 17 October and 26 October 2024. A presentation to Neighbourhood Forum 1 also provided an opportunity for the community to learn more about this project.

We issued a Facebook post on 11 October and a media release on 23 October 2024. An article appeared in the Bulli and Clifton Times on 24 October, the Illawarra Mercury on 26 October and the Illawarra Flame on 31 October and 1 November 2024.

Feedback

We heard from the community via surveys (55), emails (2), quick poll (29) and dotmocracy activities (147). Children also had the opportunity to contribute to the engagement, by creating art to demonstrate what inspires them about Helensburgh or the local area.

Important features in the new centre

We asked the community to confirm that the features they considered important in 2017 and 2020 were still important today. From the feedback provided in this engagement period, all were still relevant with flexible rooms being ranked higher than any other feature.

Characteristics of the Helensburgh area such as the beautiful bushland and vibrant country village were considered the most important to those residents that participated in the quick poll and dotmocracy activities in this engagement.

Additional needs to consider if the budget allows

The community told us in this consultation, that multiple, flexible spaces and facilities; distinctive design; sufficient parking; space for indoor sport; suitable landscaping and a large hall should be considered by Council if the budget allows. Helensburgh Community Preschoolers requested special spaces within the centre, things to do and read and outdoor features to enjoy.

Next steps

Feedback received during this engagement will be reviewed by the Project Team. Community feedback is one factor of the decision-making process for Council.

Background

Council has been committed to providing a suitable and appropriately located community centre and library facilities for Helensburgh. The Helensburgh Town Centre Plan 2020-2045 proposed an integrated Community Centre and Library and several site options have been considered and put before the community over the last couple of years. At the Council meeting on 18 July 2022, it was resolved that the draft Helensburgh Park Plan of Management (PoM) be referred to the State (Crown Lands) to be endorsed for public exhibition.

The draft PoM proposed that the area known as Helensburgh Park be changed to the following land categories - park, general community use, and area of cultural significance. (Helensburgh Park refers to the land area that includes Rex Jackson Park, Charles Harper Park, Helensburgh Pool as well as the tennis courts and cricket grounds). This change in land category allowed for a new combined Community Centre and Library for Helensburgh to be co-located with the pool.

Council has received permission to adopt Helensburgh Park PoM from Crown Lands. A series of Councillor briefings were held during 2024 which outlined several location options for the Library and Community Centre. In August 2024, the Ward 1 Councillors agreed that the site for the new combined Library and Community Centre should be in Walker Street.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders identified prior to the start of the engagement period included:

- Local residents
- People who had participated in the 2017 and 2020 Community Centre and Library engagements
- Neighbourhood Forum 1 members
- Local children

Methods

Our Methods

Table 1: Details of Communication and Engagement Methods

Methods	Details of Methods
Communication Methods	
Emails	Emails with a link to the webpage were sent to 275 people who participated in the 2017 and/or 2020 engagements.
Our Wollongong website	<p>The project webpage hosted background information and supporting documents, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequently Asked Questions • An online community survey • A Quick Poll

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Information on how children could contribute, using art or craft via the Helensburgh Library.
On-site signs	<p>Corflute signs that included a QR code linking the project webpage were installed in multiple locations in the Town Centre. An image of one of the signs appears below:</p> 
Media release	<p>A media release Join the community conversation on Helensburgh Community Centre & Library City of Wollongong about the engagement was distributed on 23 October 2024. An article appeared in the Bulli and Clifton Times on 24 October 2024, Illawarra Mercury on 26 October 2024 and two articles in the Illawarra Flame on 31 October and 1 November 2024.</p>
Social media Facebook	<p>New Helensburgh Community Centre and Library The post published on 11 October 2024 appears below.</p>  <p>Reach: 7,502, Interactions: 37, Link clicks: 5</p>
Engagement Methods	
Our Wollongong website	A survey was used to capture participants comments.
Email	People emailed in written submissions.
Creative Exercise for Children	Children were invited to participate in the engagement by getting creative and showing us what inspires them about Helensburgh Library or the surrounding area.
Dotmocracy	Visitors to the Drop-in Information Stand at the Helensburgh Lions Country Fair had the opportunity to participate in a dotmocracy activity to select what characteristics of the Helensburgh area that were most important to them.

Results

The Helensburgh community were invited to review the summary of 2017 and 2020 engagements and confirm if the needs identified then were still relevant for the new Centre. We also asked them if there were other needs which could be included, should the budget allow. An online quick poll and portable dotmocracy board asked the community to select what characteristics of the Helensburgh area that were most important to them.

Engagement participation, results from the survey, the quick poll and the portable dotmocracy board appear in this section.

Engagement Participation

This section provides details on the participation in engagement activities during the engagement period. Details appear in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Online and engagement activities participation

Online and engagement activities	Participation
Online Participation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aware – total number of people who viewed the project webpage Informed – total number of people who clicked a hyperlink, e.g. to download FAQ Engaged – total number of people who actively contributed to the project, e.g. by submitting comments via the survey 	313 152 57
Face to face engagement activities* Drop-in information sessions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 October 2024 in Otford Community Hall (21) 17 October 2024 outside Helensburgh Library (70) 26 October 2024 at Helensburgh Lions Country Fair in Charles Harper Park (254) 	345

***Face-to-face engagement activities** for the Helensburgh Community Centre and Library and the Location Options for the Helensburgh Men's Shed were held together. The participation number reflects the total number of people attending.



Helensburgh Lions Country Fair 26 October 2024



Helensburgh Library 17 October 2024

Submission results

We received feedback from the general community, children and the Helensburgh Historical Society. Any comments made on social media are not considered formal submissions, however the sentiments raised in social media reflect the general feedback received. Table 3 below shows the types of submissions received.

Table 3: Submission types

Submission type	Number of participants
Open – Emails	2
Online surveys	37
Hard copy surveys	16
Quick Poll (29 online, 16 answered hard copy survey quick poll question)	45
Portable Dotmocracy	146

Surveys

People could complete either an online or paper survey. The paper survey included the quick poll questions. Responses from the online and hard copy surveys have been combined and appear in the following section.

Important features in the new Community Centre and Library

The community told us in 2017 and 2020 the important features for the new community centre and library. We asked the community to confirm those that still apply. All of the features were still considered important by the community. Flexible rooms were selected more than any other feature. The results appear in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Important features in the new Community Centre and Library

Important features	Number of responses
A welcoming, comforting and accessible space with ample parking	35
Flexible room for activities such as reading, relaxing, learning, performing, working, playing and exercising	39
Plenty of natural light, views of the bush and eco-friendly	32
A building that has a distinctive design such as modern, country feel or coastal.	25
Artwork and history display	25
Better internet and technology	33

Additional needs we could consider if the budget allowed

The community were asked if there were any other needs Council could consider for the new Helensburgh Community Centre and Library if the budget allowed. Two people stated they hoped the centre was built sooner, as the community has waiting too long already. Not everyone completing the survey answered this question. The responses have been themed and appear in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Additional needs to consider if the budget allows

Themes	Number of comments
Multiple spaces and facilities	23
Specific design features	16
Parking within the complex	10
Existing library land to be used rather than sold – various uses suggested	7
Space for indoor sport	5
Landscaping suggestions	4
Larger hall like Thirroul Community Centre and Library	4
Out of scope comments	7

Multiple spaces and facilities

The need for multiple flexible spaces and/or rooms in the new centre was mentioned in many of the submissions. Soundproof and movable walls were suggested as a way to help make this possible. Spaces for children, youth, study, co-working and historical displays were requested. Size of the facility was also raised, with a clear desire for the centre, especially the hall, be large enough to accommodate the wide variety of community uses it serves.

Facilities such as toilets, baby changing/feeding areas, low sensory features, showers, reading nooks, power outlets, plenty of chairs and tables, printers and a sound system were included in the feedback. Several people wanted the centre to include a bin for recycling batteries and x-rays. A request for a separated library with more books and journals was also raised. Future proofing with consideration of technology needs now and in the future with cable access in ceiling spaces, 3 phase power and access for good internet for disaster recovery, live streaming, film and events.

Concerns were raised about the practicality of using moveable shelving and furniture, with commentary that some areas needed to be permanent use such as the library space.

Design features suggestions

The community made many suggestions about the design of the new centre. These included sustainable features and construction, accessibility, reference to Aboriginal culture, the local Hindu temple, the historical nature of Helensburgh and indoor/outdoor spaces with weather protection.

Singular suggestions included: a three-storey building with residential spaces, a design that reflects the natural environment and a design competition to encourage creativity around public spaces.

Parking suggestions

Sufficient parking for the new Community Centre and Library was a concern raised in many submissions. Suggestions ranged from rooftop or underground parking, a pick-up and drop off area with a two-

driveway system and more parking, as the minimum number required by DA approval isn't considered enough for the number of visitors to the library by day and hall by night.

Access was requested from both Walker Lane and from the roundabout at Walker and Lilyvale Streets.

Additionally, include truck access for deliveries in the design.

Existing library land

Council's plan to sell the existing library land was criticised in some submissions. Several people said the new Centre should be built on the land, including a larger hall. Others suggested it be kept for parking or green space.

Indoor sport

Some members of the community felt a multi-sport indoor space, like the area in the existing Community Centre, was needed in the new centre.

Large Hall like Thirroul Community Centre and Library

The need for a large hall similar in size and design to the one in Thirroul Community Centre was mentioned in some of the submissions. One resident suggested the hall should have the capacity for live performances, a stage, dressing room and a lighting rig. This was reiterated in the Neighbourhood Forum feedback.

Landscaping suggestions

The landscaping around the new centre was important to some residents. Generous landscaping to improve environmental values and enhance aesthetics and connectivity to adjoining bushland, green space for herbs, fruit, vegetables, a mini community garden, outdoor space on the forest side and a deck for sitting and reading were suggested.

Out of scope comments

Some out-of-scope comments were received during the engagement period. These included general comments on the reduced parking in Walker and Parkes Street, non-accessible footpaths outside Coles, need for more sporting facilities and criticism of the Stanwell Park playground and Bald Hill designs.

Several people stated they hoped the new Helensburgh Community Centre and Library was built sooner rather than later or within the timeframe Council has stated.

Email submissions

Two email submissions were received. One of these answered the survey questions and their responses have been incorporated into the survey themes above. The Helensburgh Historical Society suggested Council should include the existing library land in the design for the new centre. The specific requests from the Society included:

- An area for local history resources for research purposes
- Sufficient space to display the quilts which show some of the history of Helensburgh
- Sufficient space to display historical artifacts
- Sufficient parking at the new Centre.

Neighbourhood Forum 1 submission

The Neighbourhood Forum 1 made many suggestions about the design of the new centre that were also reflected in other community feedback. They seek greater engagement in the design stage of this important local project. Other feedback included:

- Style reflecting Helensburgh, it's history and bushland setting
- Easy access to the centre for deliveries and for users, including adequate parking
- The Centre needs to cater to many users and be adaptable and accessible
- The Library needs its own space
- A range of specific, detailed suggestions were made regarding current and future usage
- Suggestions for improvement include a full catering kitchen, youth facilities, usage as a disaster recovery centre, youth facilities and staff, accessibility for the stage, functionality for live theatre including lighting and cabling.

Quick Poll and Dotmocracy Results

In previous engagements, the community told us they want the new Community Centre and Library to have a distinctive design. The aim of the quick poll question and dotmocracy activity was to help define what they consider the characteristic that best describes Helensburgh or is most important to them. The beautiful bushland of Helensburgh was the most popular feature, followed by Helensburgh is a vibrant country village. The Quick Poll and Dotmocracy is displayed below.

The image shows two parts of the community engagement process. On the left is a screenshot of the 'Quick Polls' online form. It asks 'What features best describe Helensburgh?' and lists five options: 'the beautiful bushland', 'our mining history', 'our proximity to coast', 'Vibrant country village', and 'Passionate sporting community'. There are radio buttons for each option, a 'View Results' button, and a 'SUBMIT' button. On the right is a photograph of the 'Dotmocracy' activity. It features a poster titled 'OUR WOLLONGONG JOIN THE CONVERSATION' with the instruction 'Put a sticker next to what is most important to you'. The poster lists the same five features as the poll, each with a corresponding image and a grid of dots. The dots represent community votes, with 'the beautiful bushland' having the most dots.

The results of the Quick Poll and Dotmocracy activity appear in Table 6 below.

Table 6: Quick Poll and Dotmocracy activity results

Features	Quick Poll online responses	Quick Poll via hard copy survey*	Dotmocracy responses	Totals
The beautiful bushland	15	12	60	87
Our mining history	1	4	8	13
Our proximity to coast	0	2	23	26
Vibrant country village	13	6	43	62
Passionate sporting community	0	2	13	15

*Four people answering the Quick Poll question via the hard copy survey selected more than one option.

Contribution from children

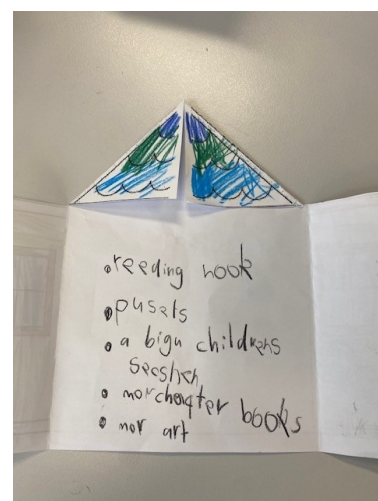
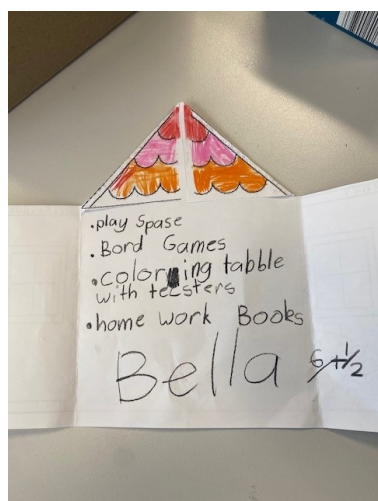
Children also had the opportunity to contribute to this engagement. Twenty-seven children from the Helensburgh Community Preschool completed drawings showing what they wanted in the new Helensburgh Community Centre and Library. Thanks to the teachers who scripted the diagrams.

Feedback from the Preschool children has been themed and appears in Table 7 below. Their requests included special spaces within the centre, things to do and read and outdoor features.

Table 7: Feedback from children

Themes	Details
Special spaces	Play spaces, baby sleep area, spaces for families, big children section, reading nooks
Things to do and read	Board games, toys (including dolls), colouring tables and texts, homework books, a bubble machine, more art, science stuff and squash
Outdoor areas	Butterfly garden, grass areas, carpark, pathways, a maze to get to the library, a lookout, a twirly slide and wobbly bridge

Samples of the drawings submitted by the Helensburgh Community Preschool appear below



Next steps

Feedback received during this engagement will be reviewed by the Project Team. Community feedback is one factor of the decision-making process for Council. Council has committed to keeping the community updated on the progress of the design and construction of the new Helensburgh Community Centre and Library.