



2021 – 2022

Annual Report



Contents

Members of Council	5
Councillors	5
Ward A.....	5
Ward B.....	5
Ward C.....	5
Ward D.....	5
Executive Staff.....	6
Council Services	7
Council Meetings.....	7
Meetings with Residents.....	7
Property Identification.....	7
Correspondence.....	7
Advisory Committee Meetings.....	7
Appointments with Executive Staff.....	7
Garbage Collections	8
Bush Fire Control	8
Library.....	8
Mayoral Report	11
General Manager’s Report	14
Statutory Reporting.....	17
End of Term Report	17
Achievements in Implementing Council Delivery Program	17
Audited Financial Statements	17
State of the Environment Report.....	17
Infrastructure Assets.....	17
Legal Proceedings	17

Mayoral/Councillor Fees, Expenses and Facilities.....	18
Staff	19
Contracts.....	19
Preservation of the Environment	19
Cultural and Linguistic Diversity.....	20
Subsidised Private Works	21
Contributions and Donations.....	21
Human Resource Activities	22
Equal Employment Opportunity	23
External Bodies Exercising Council Functions	23
Interests in Companies	23
Co-operatives and Joint Ventures	24
Overseas Visits Funded by Council	24
Children’s Services.....	24
Community Care Services.....	25
Youth Services	26
Tourism Activities	27
Access to Services	27
Access and Equity Activities.....	27
Rates and Charges Written Off.....	28
National Competition Policy	28
Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA).....	29
Public Interest Disclosure Activity (PID).....	29
Anti-Slavery Commissioner Issues.....	29
Modern Slavery Act 2018 Compliance.....	29
Development.....	29
Development Assessment.....	30
Heritage	32
Local Strategic Planning Statement.....	33
Housing and Land Monitor.....	34
Contaminated Lands Project	36

Community Participation.....	36
Environment.....	36
Ranger Services.....	37
Cemetery Management.....	38
Public Buildings & Amenities.....	38
Food Surveillance.....	39

Appendices:

Appendix A:	Achievements of the Delivery Program
Appendix B:	General Purpose Financial Statements
Appendix C:	Special Purpose Financial Statements
Appendix D:	Special Schedules
Appendix E:	State of the Environment Report
Appendix F:	Payment of Expenses & Provision of Facilities for the Mayor, Councillors & Staff Policy
Appendix G:	Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA) 2021 – 2022 Annual Report

Members of Council

Councillors

Walcha Council is divided into four (4) Wards and each Ward has two Councillors:



Ward A

Clr Mark Berry &
Clr Greg Schaefer



Ward B

Clr Eric Noakes -
Mayor &
Clr Anne-Marie
Pointing



Ward C

Clr Scott Kermode –
Deputy Mayor &
Clr Nena Hicks



Ward D

Clr Aurora Reilly &
Clr Kevin Ferrier



Executive Staff

Barry Omundson
General Manager



Lacey Latham
Director Environment & Development



Phillip Hood
Director Infrastructure



Karen Kermode
Director Community & Tourism



Council Services

Council Meetings

Council Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 3pm in the Council Chambers, Hamilton Street, Walcha. Members of the public are invited and welcome to attend open Council Meetings. Business papers are available at the meeting upon request to the General Manager.

Meetings with Residents

Council held Regional Meetings throughout the local government area annually. Council holds these meetings to inform residents of and to receive public input into its activities.

Property Identification

Residents are requested to ensure that their property is clearly, correctly and prominently identified. Council has a standard rural address sign available for purchase. Please visit our website: www.walcha.nsw.gov.au to fill in the form or alternatively contact Council Office. Various services such as ambulance and trades regularly draw attention to problems associated with inadequate property identification. If residents of Walcha are in doubt about street numbers, please contact Councils office.

Correspondence

Correspondence for inclusion in the Business paper closes 12 noon on the Monday, nine days prior to the Council Meeting.

Advisory Committee Meetings

Walcha Council Community Care (WCCC): provides services that support people to stay at home and to be more independently in the community. It is auspiced by Walcha Council and jointly funded by Commonwealth and State Governments. The Committee provides advice to Council on policy matters and programs specifically for our community.

Walcha Beautification & Tidy Towns Committee: advises Council on matters relating to the beautification of the town and district and tree planting program. Citizen representation sought.

Walcha Preschool Advisory Committee: advises Council on policy matters and strategic issues regarding the management of the Walcha Preschool.

Walcha Arts Advisory Committee: advises Council on future public art projects.

Walcha Tourism Advisory Committee: advises Council on future tourism promotion.

Walcha Youth Advisory Committee: Purpose is to engage with the youth of Walcha and allow for their input into the Youth programs developed in the Walcha area.

Walcha Aboriginal Advisory Committee: Purpose is to advise Council on Aboriginal matters.

Appointments with Executive Staff

Staff endeavour to make themselves available to meet with the public, however business commitments take them out of the office on occasions. This particularly applies to

Infrastructure and Planning & Development staff who are required to carry out field work. There are occasions when members of the public call at Council's offices only to be told that the person they wish to see is out of the office. In an endeavour to avoid this, it is suggested that whenever possible, an appointment be made.

Garbage Collections

Garbage bins are collected on Thursday morning each week throughout the whole of the local government area. The Recycling and Green Waste bins are collected alternate weeks – to see the Waste Collections dates please log onto our website: www.walcha.nsw.gov.au under Infrastructure or call into our Office. Residents are requested to ensure that mobile garbage bins are placed as close to the kerb as possible with the handles facing the footpath. Plastic bags and cardboard boxes are not approved garbage receptacles and the contractor will only collect Council supplied mobile garbage bins. When dumping rubbish at the Waste Transfer Station, please ensure that garbage is placed in the appropriate designated areas. Residents are requested to ensure that when transporting rubbish to the garbage depot, the load is securely covered.

Bush Fire Control

Landholders can assist in the prevention of bushfires by maintaining fire breaks and reducing excess vegetation before the onset of the Bush Fire Danger Period which commences on 1 October each year and runs through until 31 March of the following year unless otherwise varied. The lighting of fires in the open during this period is prohibited unless a Permit to Burn is obtained from the Rural Fire Service. You can contact the New England Zone Office on 6771 2400 or the Permanent After Hours Duty Number 6732 4473. Please report all fires by dialling 000.

Library

The Walcha Branch of the Central Northern Regional Library (CNRL) is situated in Derby Street and affords residents a comprehensive collection of material including books, magazines and compact discs.

Library hours are:

Monday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Tuesday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Wednesday:	Closed
Thursday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Friday:	8:30am to 1:00pm; 2:00pm to 5:00pm
Phone	6774 2550

This year, the Library has continued to be a popular facility amongst the community, as a place to meet, share and access resources. The Walcha branch currently holds approximately 7000 items, with a further several hundred if the increasingly popular Seed Library and Puzzle Library are included. Staff have continued to maintain this collection

with regular weeding, ordering new or requested items (including changes in the magazine subscriptions) and re-arranging or genrefication to make the collection easier to access.

2021-2022 Highlights:

- The new Speech Pathology Collection was launched by CNRL and the Walcha Library not only displayed and promoted it in the Library and online, but also provided a series of information sessions and 'Baby Booktime' sessions for parents and carers.
- Library staff have intentionally structured social media content to promote the Library, its events and its functions such as registration, eLibrary use, reservations and delivery processes.
- The KidsSpace continues to encourage children and families to read through the use of themed displays, regular monthly and special themed Storytime and Baby Booktime events, the Baby's First Library Bag program and activities such as Riverview Pen Pals program and Summer Reading Challenges.
- The Library continues to provide a quiet space for tertiary students and professionals working remotely, using the public access computers, free wifi, tablets and printing facilities.
- There was an increase in drop-in technology support provided by Library staff, especially for seniors following on from last years Tech Savvy Seniors sessions.
- Library staff have worked with local schools in a number of ways including:
 - participation in a Careers Expo,
 - NAIDOC celebrations; and
 - hosting authors and illustrators as part of the Walcha Literary Festival.
- The Library's volunteer program was proactive with volunteers from the community and school students (via Duke of Edenborough and school based work experience program) assisting with collection processing and maintenance projects.
- The Housebound delivery service provided to Riverview residents and elderly library members who have trouble getting into the library was extended with the help of the volunteers.
- The two Bookclubs have continued with another group of local readers interested in using the Library Bookclub kits.



Staff – Completed regular online library training, manual handling training, and local history training. Staff were also involved in implementing new duress procedures, to ensure the safety of isolated Library staff.

Council Librarian participates in Walcha Central School NAIDOC Ceremony



Spring Storytime Craft in the Park



Mayoral Report

This Annual Report of Walcha Council covers a period of general prosperity for the Walcha Local Government Area (LGA). Continuing wet seasons and favourable commodity prices have reflected well on our community. However, counteracting this is a period of increasing inflation and financial pressure that has effected the bottom line of our businesses, families and Council.

On a positive note the appointment in June 2021 of Barry Omundson as General Manager has seen both organisational structure changes and a recognition of the true financial position of our Council. Walcha Council, with a small rate base and large infrastructure portfolio needs to constantly review their organisational structure and resourcing to remain on the front foot. This not only gives focus on the present, but needs to recognise the challenges of a changing workforce and resourcing environment. Recognition of this along with aligning all the statutory plans of Councils under the Integrated Planning and Reporting guidelines will give a solid foundation to build a more resilient Council. The IPART capping of rate increases at 0.7% with inflation running much higher than this bought the realisation that while Council is solvent in the short term, it's long term financial position is challenging. To this end this report is written in the midst of Council delving into our current and future position which may well lead to a Special Rate Variation. This is a common theme amongst rural councils and indicates a change in the way Local Government is financed by the State Government is necessary. Far more autonomy is required to allow this sector to maintain services.

Despite our challenging financial position your Council has continued to deliver excellent outcomes for the community. After years of seeking funding and designing the long awaited Off Creek Storage to secure Walcha's urban water supply has seen the land purchased and a civil contractor engaged to build this infrastructure. Constantly referred to as a game changer with work to start in August, and by mid 2023 we are hopeful this necessary infrastructure will be commissioned, and once full will be of immense value to our community.

The levee bank solar lighting project is complete, and whether for security, a scenic walk, fitness run or romantic stroll this will bring a great outdoor activity available to all. Our small role in the building and completion of the Men's Shed, an important outlet for men and a necessary reprieve for their wives was completed and stands as a testament to a passionate group who have worked hard for this outcome. Our local swimming pool will see close on \$2m invested in refurbishment and repairs. Like our water and waste water systems so much of this asset sits underground, therefore remaining unseen but requiring constant maintenance, and usually at a large cost.

As the Thunderbolts Way Strategy to spend \$11m on this important link draws to a close the improvement in its road surface has our section in better condition than our neighbours. With the amount of wet weather at this time the maintenance of our road asset is certainly challenging, a cause of frustration for both the public and Council engineers.

On the downside, the constant closure of the Oxley Highway to the east continues to cause economic damage to our businesses. Understandably this project needs to be completed but 3 years of disruption is hard to take.

Looking forward there are some large infrastructure projects in the funded pipeline. The long promised and awaited rehabilitation of the Derby Street entrances to town will be achieved, along with moving the Lions Park into a modern fit for purpose park. The skate park will also be updated and a white picket fence around Peter Fenwicke Oval should make this central sporting precinct a spectacle.

Finally I would like to thank my fellow Councillors, our dedicated Staff and Local Members. Midway through this year delayed Council elections saw five new Councillors come on board to guide our path. These Councillors stepped into a Council in the midst of structural changes and financial issues. They have rallied as a group and their individual inputs and knowledge have created a healthy and productive team environment. To the five departing Councillors, you should be proud of your five years of work, you have made our community stronger and more resilient through your strategic input.

Small councils generally struggle to attract staff in this competitive environment. Under our current GM the recruitment of staff has led to the important seats being filled with not only highly qualified staff, but more importantly dedicated and collaborative people. The amount of work required to apply for, scope and acquit

grants is onerous and our success rate is high. Our community is grateful that those who work on Council, your dedication to making this town what it is should never be taken for granted.

To Kevin Anderson, our State Member who is only a phone call away thank you for your dedication to Walcha. Adam Marshall who currently holds the seat of Northern Tablelands has been a regular visitor to our community and we thank him for his early engagement.

The Honourable Barnaby Joyce continues to take a keen interest in our community. His passion for us never wavers and his constant engagement to see if he can help in any area is appreciated. Grant funds supplied by these two levels of government are what deliver so many of our projects and the continual flow of this funding is paramount to our future. As a community we are thankful for their lobbying and advocacy.

By the time I write my next Annual Report Column I hope Walcha Council will be headed into a much stronger position. The future and independence of our community as it stands should never be taken for granted. A dynamic Council has the responsibility of keeping communities united and independent but this cannot be achieved without the support of our residents. The road ahead is challenging but united we will achieve.

Sincerely
Clr Eric H Noakes
Mayor of Walcha



General Manager's Report

It is with great pleasure that I provide the 2021 – 2022 General Managers Report.

In a very testing environment the essence of what is Walcha has once again stood up - our Councillors, our Staff and our Community have combined wonderfully to enable a small council to achieve big things.

In December we saw the election of a new Council with five new Councillors out of eight selected. Former Deputy Mayor Jen Kealy and Councillor Rachael Wellings chose not to stand, as did former Mayor Bill Heazlett and long serving Councillor Peter Blomfield. Councillor Clint Lyon, a former Deputy Mayor also bid farewell to Council for this term. We thank our former Councillors for their dedication and service to the Walcha community.

Congratulations to the re-election of Mayor Eric Noakes who continues to lead this community admirably, and congratulations also to Councillor Scott Kermode who was elected by his peers as Deputy Mayor. Long serving Councillor Kevin Ferrier again picks up the reigns and his experience in this next term will be invaluable.

Congratulations also to our new councillors, in Aurora Reilly, Nena Hicks, Greg Schaefer, Anne-Marie Pointing and Mark Berry.

The cultural transformation continues as we see a handing over of the baton as a number of longer term staff bid farewell and we welcome new faces. A structural review has commenced that will see by the end of the year a new structure, capable of ensuring our internal environment reflects what is going on in our external environment. Organisational culture is not only an ingredient to the quality of service delivery, it is the key ingredient. How we do things around here – culture – defines our service delivery offer. Our culture is evolving and our community should expect an increase in our service delivery over the next several years.

The cost for service delivery is of course a key determinant in levels of service. With two consecutive deficit budgets adopted by Council it was time to ascertain our financial sustainability. In late May, after a competitive process, we engaged Professor Drew of the University of Technology Sydney to undertake a preliminary

view of Walcha Councils financial sustainability. That initial review found that Council was financially unsustainable and has been so for the last decade, at least. A full review has now been unanimously approved by Council and work has commenced in ensuring Walcha retains its own identity.

Even with the challenging sustainability environment we, and a number of other rural councils' face, Walcha Council has nonetheless continued to punch above its weight in terms of service delivery. During the year Council approved the creation of the Capital Advisory Committee (CAC), where engineering expertise meets the practicality of success on the ground. The CAC board, now comprising of three Councillors – Mayor Eric Noakes, Deputy Mayor Scott Kermode and Councillor Mark Berry, along with our Manager Corporate and Finance Christian Martin and with the participation and acceptance by our staff has seen what was over a very large percentage of capital projects either or both going over budget or over time, now eliminated. It is one thing to have good intent, one must also ensure the scope and risks of any project are well known and documented. Walcha Council is now ensuring best value for money in our capital delivery service.

To this end the engagement of new Director Infrastructure Phil Hood has proven a benefit for Council and the community, building an infrastructure team capable of delivering on promises. There is of course much work to do in this space, yet the first steps have been taken.

The unusual wet weather has seen a deterioration of our road network. This is against the backdrop of our teams doing what they can and when they can. One only has to drive across New South Wales, indeed eastern Australia and see the extensive damage to regional road networks.

A shout out to Councils many Advisory Committees and their dedicated community members. It is a pretty unique place where in a small community so many offer their support, assistance and expertise free of charge.

Councils largest ever capital project, the Off Creek Storage is travelling on plan and budget, with Councils' Alan Butler as Project Manager the primary reason for this. Mayor Eric Noakes who initially provided the inspiration for this project some six years ago, remains closely connected to the delivery of this critical project.

In what has been a period of change I would like to thank the previous Council and or new Council for their continued support, after all is said and done, still able to work as the one team. I know our staff and community appreciate this. A big thank

you to the Walcha Council team, who as always do what and when is required and still have a smile on their face. To my senior team, thank you, and a special thanks to my ever reliable assistant Liz Hobbs, who goes well beyond and above daily. Mayor Eric – a pleasure working with you. You are the finest leader I have had the pleasure to work with and a credit to Walcha.

Sincerely
Barry Omundson
General Manager

Statutory Reporting

The *Local Government Act, 1993* imposes various reporting requirements upon the Council. In compliance with those requirements the following information is provided:

End of Term Report

In the year of an Ordinary Election the Annual Report must also include an outline of achievements in implementing the Community Strategic Plan. This was attached to the 2020-2021 Annual Report in anticipation of the Election in September 2021, however the Election was postponed to December 2021.

Achievements in Implementing Council Delivery Program

Under *Section 428 of the Local Government Act 1993* Council is required to report on its achievements in implementing its Delivery program. These achievements are detailed in Appendix A of this report titled "Achievements of Delivery Program".

Audited Financial Statements

Included with this Annual Report is a copy of the Auditor's Report to Council for the financial year ended 30 June 2022 and a full set of audited financial reports as Appendix B, C & D.

State of the Environment Report

The NSW *Local Government Act 1993 Section 404* states that the annual report in the year of the ordinary election must include a report (State of the Environment Report) as to the state of the environment in the local government area in relation to the objectives for the environment established by the Community Strategic Plan. A complete State of the Environment Report is attached as Appendix E.

Infrastructure Assets

Residents are referred to Schedule 7 of the Special Schedules Reports (Appendix D) for details as to the condition of Infrastructure Assets.

Legal Proceedings

All legal proceedings for this year were for action to collect outstanding rates, charges and debtors. All costs associated with the collection of outstanding debts are recovered from the debtors. Legal costs in the amount of \$14,029 for Human Resources issues – legal advice.

Mayoral/Councillor Fees, Expenses and Facilities

Councillors are provided with an I-pad for the purpose of carrying out their civic duties. A Council car is made available to Councillors for use on Council business. Councillors are provided with stationery and secretarial support. The Mayor is provided with an office, stationery, telephone and secretarial support and limited entertainment assistance.

Council meets education and training costs for all Councillors.

Council meets all accommodation costs and, in addition, out-of-pocket expenses (max. \$100 per day) incurred by all Councillors when attending conferences, seminars etc., or on the approved business of the Council. Council also provides afternoon tea and dinner in conjunction with Council meetings. This year the following costs were spent on Functions:

Function:	Councillor/s:	Amount:
ALGA – Australian Local Government Assoc – Annual Conference in Canberra	Noakes	\$1,617
Public Libraries of NSW Conference	Heazlett	\$254
Country Mayors Association Meetings for the Year	Noakes	\$1,435

Council may also meet the legal costs of Councillors who are the subject of an inquiry or against whom legal action is taken in connection with their civic duties, provided that the outcome of the inquiry or action is substantially favourable to the Councillor and subject to such assistance being reduced by the amount of any monies that may be recouped by the Councillor. A complete copy of Council’s “Payment of expenses and provision of facilities for the Mayor, Councillors & Staff” Policy is attached as Appendix F.

In addition, fees are paid to all Councillors in accordance with the Local Government Act. 1993.

A summary of the cost of these fees, expenses and facilities is set out below:

Mayoral & Councillor Fees	\$123,092
Councillors Mobile Phone & iPads	\$2,854
Councillors Conferences in NSW	\$1,690
Councillor Conferences interstate	\$1,618
Councillor Training	\$659
Councillors Expenses \$3,519 + Travel Allowance \$9,379	= \$12,898

Staff

The General Manager is, for the purposes of the Local Government Act, the only employee designated as “Senior Staff”. The total remuneration paid to the General Manager in 2021 – 2022 was \$203,131. This amount included salary, fringe benefits and oncosts. Fringe benefits included the provision a telephone and full private use of a motor vehicle. Oncosts included leave entitlements and superannuation. Superannuation charged to the remuneration package was calculated in accordance with the formula for contract employees who are members of the defined benefits Local Government Superannuation Scheme. This formula is based on the long term notional super contributions rate rather than the actual employer contribution paid by Council in any year. Further information on this formula can be obtained by contacting the Local Government Superannuation Scheme or Council’s Chief Financial Officer.

Contracts

As per the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005 cl 217(1)(a2)(i)(ii)*, Council entered into the following contracts over \$150,000, which are required to be reported, during 2021 – 2022:

Contract:	Awarded to:	Contract Value GST excl \$:
Purchase of Land and Construction Access Agreement	AC Ireland	\$480,000
Design, supply and installation of Solar Pathway Lighting	Highlux Pty Ltd	\$255,000
Supply and install fencing at Peter Fenwicke Oval	Terrworx trading as CJ & SL Lute	\$206,184

Preservation of the Environment

Council was involved in several programs to enhance and preserve the environment during the year.

Council is actively involved in recycling, working to reduce overall waste generation and improving waste management with the assistance of Northern Inland Regional Waste Group. Council also undertakes a number of education programs to encourage recycling and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.

Council continued its kerbside recycling service within the urban area and continues to operate a licenced waste management facility, being the Walcha Waste Depot, along with two rural waste transfer stations to service the small settlements and rural communities of Woolbrook and Nowendoc.

Council also continued its ongoing tree planting program. Attention was given to the replacement of dead and damaged trees.

Over the last 12 months Council has conducted treatment trials to best manage ongoing Algae outbreaks in the treated effluent discharged into the Apsley River. Two trials in particular have been carried out one with solar powered ultrasonic device emitting a low frequency noise to disrupt the Algae's reproductive cycle. Unfortunately, this has limited affect on the blue green algae that causes the most significant concern for discharge to waters. The second trial that was conducted is a new copper based product being introduced into the Australian market from America. Typically uses less than 1% of the traditional copper levels to treat Algae, the trials were conducted and have so far proven to be very successful and is now an adopted part of Council's short to medium term strategy for Algae management.

Council regularly tests sewage effluent to ensure that it complies with Environment Protection Authority standards.

Council is a member of the New England (Noxious Weeds) County Council and through that Organisation, has a commitment to the control and eradication of noxious weeds.

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

According to the 2021 ABS Census data, a total of 129 people living in Walcha were born overseas. As noted in Council's adopted Strategic Plan, this group represents a very small proportion of our local government area population and all appear to be well integrated into the community. Due to the size and nature of our community, cross cultural awareness training for staff is not considered necessary.

226 people (6.5% of the LGA's population) are of indigenous origin. Council engaged in a number of programs which provided services to our local Aboriginal community and culturally and linguistically diverse groups. These programs were provided under the auspices of Council's Community Care Program and comprised:

- Aboriginal Group meetings, known as the Wanderers. These meetings are held twice a month and are of a recreational, social and educational nature.
- Medical drives
- Frozen Meals on Wheels
- Health Forums
- Bus to Tamworth on the Last Friday of the Month
- Bust to Armidale every Thursday.

The Office of Local Government is obliged to report to the Ethnic Affairs Commission on local government activity in relation to ethnic affairs. The Department uses the following three key result areas when reporting to the Commission:

- Social justice
- Community harmony
- Economic and Cultural Opportunities

Council is therefore required to identify which of the three key result areas apply for each significant activity or strategy aimed at assisting people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, that have been included in this Annual Report.

- a) Social Justice
 - Meals on Wheels Programme.
 - Social Support Programme.
- b) Community harmony
 - Aboriginal Group Meetings.
- c) Economic & Cultural Opportunities
 - Valuing the presence of these groups as a community resource.

Subsidised Private Works

No such works were carried out during the year.

Council has developed a policy aimed at encouraging employment generating projects to establish in the Walcha local government area. This policy provides for Council to, among other things, carry out subsidised works. Council has not yet had the opportunity to implement this policy.

Contributions and Donations

Section 356 of the Local Government Act, 1993 provides that Council may, by resolution, contribute money or otherwise grant financial assistance to persons for the purpose of exercising its functions. While the Act also provides that financial

assistance may be granted to persons who act for private gain. In 2021 – 2022 the following contributions were made.

Contributions:	Amount:
Floral tributes & Retirements	615
Staff Christmas Party & Service Recognition	2,750
Westpac Rescue Helicopter	5,000
Life Education Van	3,582
Rate Refunds	2,449
Sporting grants to Youth	3,200
NAIDOC Sponsorships	500
Arts North West	4,585
Walcha Support Group Insurance	575
Hall Subsidies	3,500
	\$26,756

Council also supports the following organisations by offering rate relief as per the Donations Policy, which is included above*:

- St Paul’s Presbyterian Women’s Association
- Walcha & District Historical Society;
- Walcha Gun Club Inc; and
- Tennis Courts Reserve Trust.

Human Resource Activities

The Council recognises that its staff is its most important asset and is conscious of the need for training and development. During the year a comprehensive training program was undertaken. Training places are offered on a perceived needs basis and on the appropriateness of the training programs available. Training is offered both “in house” and externally and some staff members are currently undertaking full time courses in appropriate disciplines. Council has a Staff Training Policy and Code. As a part of the Integrated Planning and Reporting Regime Council developed a comprehensive Workforce Plan which is available on Council website.

Training opportunities are also offered for Elected Members. Council meets the cost of all approved training. Training plans have been prepared and Council’s training program is available to the entire workforce.

Several employees are undertaking an ongoing course of study with other staff members attending short courses and seminars etc., as appropriate. Training was provided in such areas as:

- Professional Development.
- Finance and Administration.
- Confined Spaces Training.
- First Aid Training
- Traffic Control Training.
- Pool Operators Training.
- Human Resource Training.
- Work Place Health & Safety Training
- Health & Building.

Council spent a total of \$106,788 on all training activities during the year. The Council has three Committees that deal with human resource issues. These are the Staff Consultative Committee, the General Manager's Performance Committee and the Workplace Health and Safety Committee.

Equal Employment Opportunity

Council has adopted an Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Plan as required by the Local Government Act, 1993. Council has also earlier conducted a survey of staff to ascertain information which will be used in the implementation of the plan:

- Employees of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.
- Employees of non-English speaking background.
- Female employees.
- Employees with disabilities.

Council has in place a Grievance Policy and a Protected Disclosures Policy and Procedure.

External Bodies Exercising Council Functions

During the year the following external bodies exercised functions on Council's behalf:

- New England (Noxious Weeds) County Council - Noxious Weed control.
- Central Northern Regional Libraries - Library service.
- Mid North Weight of Loads Group.

Interests in Companies

Council does not hold any interest in any companies.

Co-operatives and Joint Ventures

Council is a member of the following organisations:

- NAMOI Unlimited, a group of Councils whose interests lie specifically in matters of Local Government member Councils are Tamworth Regional, Liverpool Plains, Gunnedah and Walcha.
- Mid-North Weight of Loads Group, a group of Councils covering parts of the Hunter, the New England and the Mid-North Coast who provide an inspectorial role in relation to overloaded heavy vehicles.
- Local Government NSW, the peak organisation of Local Government in NSW.
- Statewide Insurance, a Statewide Local Government Mutual for liability, building insurance and motor vehicle.
- State Cover Insurance, a Statewide Local Government mutual for workers compensation insurance.

Overseas Visits Funded by Council

There were no overseas visits funded by Council this financial year.

Children's Services

Council provides a number of services that are used by the youth of the area including the library, playing fields, the swimming pool, squash courts, skate board area and playing grounds.



Council helps the local schools by assisting with the transportation of the North West Life Education Van and by paying the entry fees of all students in our local government area into the Van. In addition, Council provides grants to local sporting organisations for junior sport development. Council makes an annual contribution to pay Niangala Hall and Walcha Anglican Hall hire fees for the families attending the Gubi Gabun Children's Mobile Service early childhood program. 576 people (16.5% of the LGS's population) are under the age of 15 (2021 Census).

Council operates the Walcha Preschool and also provided an Early Intervention Service for children with learning disabilities. The early childhood years are a time of rapid growth and development. Walcha Preschool is committed to providing an environment that nurtures each child development stages and potential. Each room develops an individual play based program designed around children's interests, stage of development and individual needs.

Preschool highlights from this year include:

- All the children attended an excursion to Tamworth Library to listen to a local author read the story she had written called "Buster follows his nose", they were also given the opportunity to participate in some science experiments.
- Science on the Move visited. They have age appropriate science experiments for children engage in, they explained to them how they work and then the children were given the opportunity to have a turn, the experiences included magnets, air water and oil and movement.
- Healthy Harold visit, usually an annual visit, however since COVID this was the first year Healthy Harold has visited. He talks about the importance of healthy eating, regular exercise, healthy sleeping habits for strong growth and development.
- We have received funding for a new Cubby House and Chook Pen.
- Funding for the inclusion of Aboriginal artworks and a Yarning Circle to be built, we contracted a local artist by the name of Tyler Stackman to complete our art works.

Community Care Services

Walcha Council Community Care is funded using Commonwealth Home Support Program and Community Transport Funding. We provide services such as Community Transport, Meals on Wheels, Individual and Group Social Support.



Walcha

Council Community Care has had a big 12 months which has been full of changes, loss, illness and adversity with the challenges of COVID-19 disrupting many plans.

While this has been hard to

manage, it has also encouraged us to revisit the program, go back to the core aspects that give the most to our clients and refocus our efforts. This has paid off in many ways, including a great resurgence of client engagement. We are now enjoying excursions around the New England



area, cooking great meals at the centre and enjoying all of the offerings available in Walcha. Community Café is back once a month and the Art Group continues to go from strength to strength.

We have many other big plans for next year!

Youth Services

The library and youth events are intertwined, with a program of holiday activities that includes events held at the library, such as Storytimes, craft workshops, robotics workshops and Lego club. These activities form the standard framework for each holiday period, and additional activities are added, depending on funding and feedback from families or young people.



One such example of the youth programs working with community feedback was the integration of a 'Kids in Business' workshop in the Winter school holidays, which stemmed from discussions with the Walcha Farmers Markets Committee, who wanted help to provide some skills to young people, to support them to engage in the farmers markets as stallholders.

There were some huge excursions as well, which were possible due to the Office for Regional Youth's Holiday Break Program funding. They included adventures such as the Tamworth Escape room, skating, bowling, inflatable world, marsupial park, cinemas, laser tag and even a daytrip down the mountain to Stoney Aquapark. Many of these excursions would otherwise be too expensive for Council to sponsor or local families to afford.



The Youth Week Festival was planned in consultation with Walcha's young people, including a Youth Advisory Committee meeting, which led to a Youth Week Working Group. The group arranged food, music, craft activities and games, which complemented the hire of the much-anticipated Ninja Warrior Course, from

Queensland, that has been postponed for a number of years due to COVID-19 restrictions.



Tourism Activities

The Walcha Slow Tourism campaign was again utilised this year with positive feedback.

Access to Services

Each year Council conducts a series of regional meetings throughout the Walcha local government area. These meetings offer residents in the outlying areas an opportunity to meet with the Councillors and Senior Staff and to be informed of the Council's activities and services.

In addition to the Annual report, Council also prepares an annual Ratepayer Information Sheet that is posted with the rate notices.

Access and Equity Activities

Council is responsible for making sure that their facilities and services are appropriate for, and accessible to, everyone in their community. The Council also has a potential advocacy role to help residents to gain access to other required services and resources that may be the responsibility of other levels of government.

Access and Equity activities or strategies are defined as those which benefit both the broad community and/or particular target groups and are aimed at helping councils to:

- promote fairness in the distribution of resources, particularly for those most in need.
- recognise and promote people's rights and improve accountability of decision makers.

- ensure that people fairer access to the economic resources and services essential to meeting their basic needs and improving their quality of life.
- give people better opportunities for genuine participation and consultation about decisions affecting their lives.

To help achieve these objectives, Council has prepared a Disability Inclusion Action Plan. It is available on Council's website: www.walcha.nsw.gov.au and becomes part of Council's Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework, directly tying into the goals listed in the Community Strategic Plan – Walcha 2027.

Rates and Charges Written Off

There were no rates and charges written off during the period 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022.

National Competition Policy

In accordance with National Competition Policy requirements, Council is required to categorise its business activities as either Category 1 Businesses, which is those business activities that have an annual turnover in excess of \$2m or Category 2 Businesses, those activities that have an annual turnover of less than \$2m per annum.

Council does not have any Category 1 Business Activities. Council has however identified the following of its activities as Category 2 Business Activities:

- The Walcha Water Supply Service.
- The Walcha Sewerage Service.

Council has also established a Competitive Neutrality Complaints Handling Mechanism as part of its general complaints handling procedures. This mechanism was publicised at the time that it was implemented.

Council has complied with Competitive Neutrality implementation requirements and has:

- identified its business activities that are subject to the policy.
- established a Competitive Neutrality Complaints Handling Mechanism.
- implemented full cost attribution in those business activities.
- identified that there will be subsidies to Water and Sewerage Service consumers due to the depreciation of the assets of those services being only partially funded.

Council is also required to prepare Special Purpose Financial Statements for its Business Activities and a copy of these accounts is included elsewhere in this Report as Appendix C.

Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA)

Section 125 of the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 requires the preparation of an Annual Report. This report is attached as Appendix G.

Public Interest Disclosure Activity (PID)

Section 31 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 1994* and Clause 4 of the *Public Interest Disclosures Regulation 2011* required Council to report annually on its public interest disclosure activity and the table below meets our obligations under this legislation:

Statistical Information on Public Interest Disclosures	
Number of public officials who made PIDs directly	1
Total number of PIDs received by Walcha Council	0
Of the total received, the number in each of the following categories:	
◆ Corrupt conduct	0
◆ Maladministration	1
◆ Serious or substantial waste	0
◆ Government intervention contravention	0
◆ Local Government pecuniary interest contravention	0
Number of PIDs finalised in this reporting period	1

Anti-Slavery Commissioner Issues

Under Section 4(c) of the *Local Government Act 1993*, there were no issues identified or raised by the Anti-slavery Commissioner during the 2021-2022 year concerning the operations of Walcha Council.

Modern Slavery Act 2018 Compliance

Goods and services procured by Council during the 2021-2022 year were under Council's Procurement Policy and were not the product of Modern Slavery as defined in the *Modern Slavery Act 2018*.

Development

Our goal is for Walcha's distinct and diverse natural and built environment to be protected and enhanced, as well as protecting the productivity of our rural land

whilst maintaining the character of Walcha and its villages. Strategies for achieving this include:

- a) Promote sustainable development and protection of our natural resources through the planning system
- b) Provide the framework for improvements in efficiency and liveability of a range of compatible land uses and development types
- c) Manage land contamination through the planning and development control process
- d) Maintain the character of the Walcha LGA through orderly development of the natural and built environment
- e) Ensure that sufficient land is available to meet the demand for appropriate land uses
- f) Prevent agricultural land from being developed in ways that reduce its productivity
- g) Preserve, support and promote the history of Walcha

Council has undertaken the following services to achieve the goals and strategies established in the Community Strategic Plan, *Walcha 2027*

Strategic Land Use planning	Contaminated Lands Project	Development Assessment
Heritage Action Plan	Housing and Land Monitor	Community Participation

Development Assessment

The Walcha Council LGA is a desirable place to work, live and play; Council is supportive and welcoming of developmental growth in accordance with its planning instruments.

Despite the community facing challenges related to the prolonged drought, bushfires, floods and COVID-19; development within the LGA has increased considerably as seen in Figure 1. The 2021-2022 financial year saw a substantial rise in the number of development applications determined; at 61, it was almost double that of the numbers in the previous four years. The data outlines a high number of residential developments, with 17 new dwellings (Figure 2), 12 alterations and/or additions to existing dwellings, and 12 new garages / sheds. The total yearly development values are the highest Council has seen since compiling comparative data over the last eight years, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 1

Development Application Number Trends

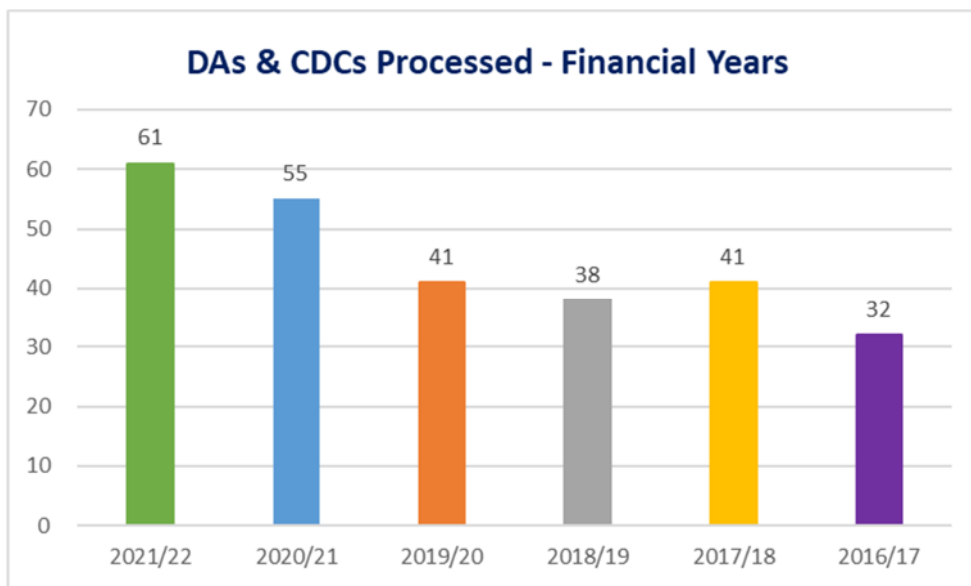


Figure 2

Development Applications – Number of new dwellings

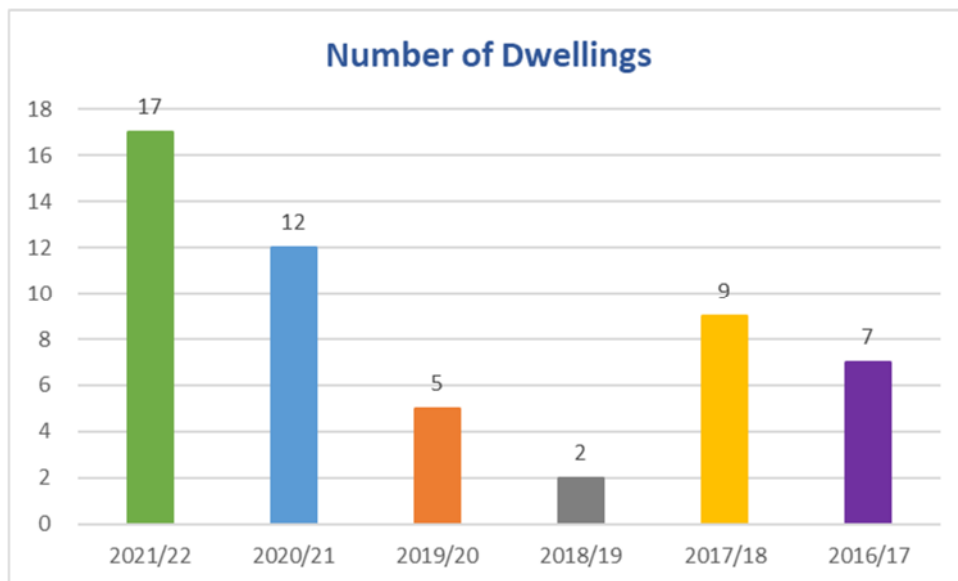
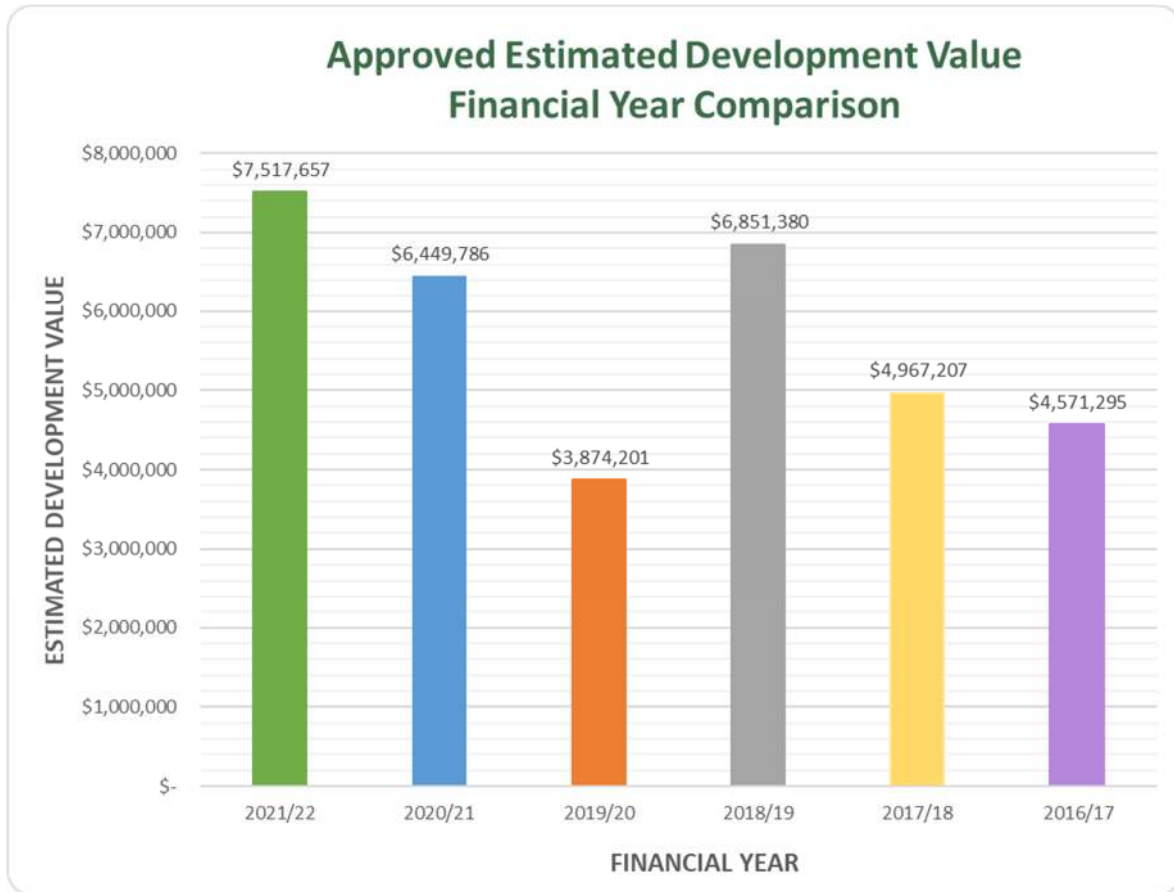


Figure 3
Development Application Value Trends



Heritage

Walcha’s natural, built and story heritage is recognised as a captivating asset in the LGA; Council adopted (2019) a 10-year Strategic Heritage Action Plan. Its intention is to outline our commitment to the conservation and celebration of the region’s rich heritage, by guiding Council’s heritage work program in relation to the identification, protection, management and promotion of Walcha’s heritage. Completed Action Plans Items are:

Action Number	Action	Year Completed
1.5	Work with local businesses to stock & sell the Hema New England High Country NSW Motorcycle Touring Map.	2019/20
Comment:	They were for sale in the Newsagency & Walcha Royal Café. They sold out and Council is currently in discussions as to whether a re-print is required. New England High Country (NEHC) now have the same great Hema map as part of our NEHC Map & Guide (which Council has just finalised an update of). The NEHC Map & Guide is given out free to visitors and boxes of the updated reprint will be sent to all Visitor Information Centres.	
1.6	Update the 'Walcha Tourism Website – Where Wild Rivers Run' to include information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reference to Motorcycle Touring Map; - Reference to Mountain Bike Trails; - Reference to Heritage Walking Trail; and - Reference to Events and Activities, such as the 'Autumn Colours'. 	2019/20
Comment:	This has been well received by the public.	
3.6	Update the 'Walcha Tourism Website – Where Wild Rivers Run' to include information about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reference to Motorcycle Touring Map; - Reference to Mountain Bike Trails; - Reference to Heritage Walking Trail; and - Reference to Events and Activities, such as the 'Autumn Colours'. 	2019/20
Comment:	This has been well received by the public.	
4.2	Production of four short films that promote the heritage of Walcha	2019/20
Comment:	This has been well received by NSW Heritage and the public.	
4.3	Investigate a footbridge at the eastern end of the southern walkway.	2021/22
Comment:	The investigation has revealed a footbridge in this location is not feasible due to the cost of construction.	
4.8	Provide solar lights along the existing walkway along Aspley River	2020/21
Comment:	This has encouraged the more utilisation of the of the existing pathways, particularly in the darker periods of the day.	

Local Strategic Planning Statement

A 20-year land use vision for the Walcha Local Government Area is detailed in our Local Strategic Planning Statement, a plan for a thriving and prosperous Walcha

region that outlines a strategy to meet Walcha’s future economic, social and environmental needs.

The vision, to utilise our strategic location at the crossroads of the Oxley Highway and Thunderbolts Way to develop our diverse and productive agricultural activities, support the growth of Walcha Township and connected villages and captivate visitors with our vibrant natural and cultural tourist attractions.



The statement identifies five clear planning priorities to address the planning and development issues of strategic importance as well as support and develop our local identity, values and opportunities. The priorities set actions to deliver the priorities and vision.

Housing and Land Monitor

The Department of Planning and Environment collects data from Council for the New England North West Housing and Land Monitor that provides valuable information for regional planning and an annual review of housing and employment land data to help guide priorities for future service provision and infrastructure investment. The monitor is used to analyse trends in residential dwelling approvals, commencements, housing mix and employment land development.

The NSW Planning Portal, was introduced 1 July 2020 and is an initiative of the New South Wales Government. It is an online environment designed to provide public access to a collation of digitised planning services where community, industry and government can work together to better understand and meet their obligations under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

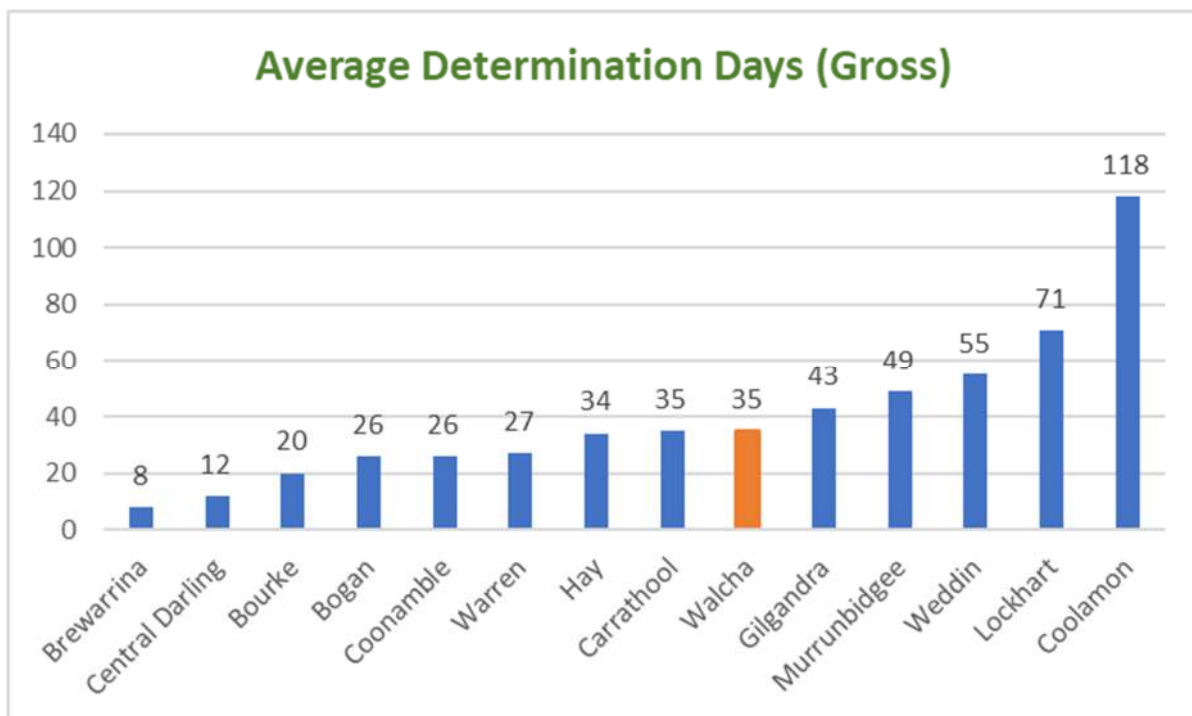
Set up under the Act, the NSW Planning Portal is the legal repository for certain planning documents, such as Ministerial Orders, and houses a range of digital planning services, mapping tools and reporting tools that cover entire the planning lifecycle. This planning process is utilised by a wide-range of users across the state.

The near real-time data about the use of the NSW Planning Portal for individual councils, is utilised by NSW Office of Local Government who reports on grouped council. This allows for statistics to be compared between similar councils. Our Council is categorised as being a Rural Council and is grouped with 14 other like Councils.

It regularly monitors and publishes planning performances in regards to average determination days for development applications. The average determination day figure is calculated by dividing the total number of days taken to determine all applications by the total number of determined applications. Determination days are measured as gross days – the total number of days lapsed between the lodgement and the determination of the application. Determination days includes the time taken for applicants to respond to requests for information from consent authorities.

For the 2021/22 year period the state average determination days were 83 days and our Council average determination days was 35. We were ranked number 9 in out Council grouping. The figure below shows the comparative performance of all Councils within this group.

Figure 4
Average Determination Days for the Rural Council Group



Contaminated Lands Project

Namoi Unlimited has been funded by the NSW Government to provide training and assistance to planners and compliance officers with Council to regulate contaminated, or potentially contaminated land. As part of Council's planning and development process, we must consider contamination, specifically when considering and making strategic planning and development decisions.

We are working with the NSW Government and the community to identify lands that could be at risk to human health or cause harm to the environment as a result of contamination.

Community Participation

We recognise community participation in our planning system delivers improved planning results for our community. Our recently adopted Community Participation Plan sets out how and when we engage with our community on the planning functions Council performs; effective community consultation ensures that a proposal has been fully explored and that the community concerns are identified and considered.

Environment

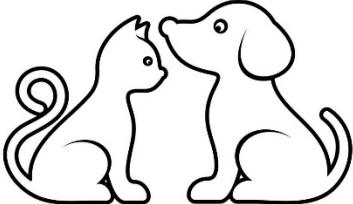
Our goal is for the public health and wellbeing of the community to be protected and enhanced. Strategies for achieving this include:

- a) Ensure that the disposal of liquid waste in rural areas is carried out in a healthy manner without negative environmental impact
- b) Maintain cemeteries in accordance with the community's needs and expectations
- c) Protect and enhance biodiversity, native vegetation, river and soil health
- d) Develop and promote responsible ownership of animals

Council has undertaken the following services to achieve the goals and strategies established in the Community Strategic Plan, *Walcha 2027*.

Environmental Health	Public Health	Ranger Services
Cemetery Management	Public Buildings	Public Amenities

Ranger Services

	<p>58 Companion Animals Registered</p>
<p>14 Companion Animals Rehomed</p>	<p>22.4% Companion Animal Desexed Registrations</p>

Council actively enforces the *Companion Animals Act 1998* through the following activities:

- a) Regular patrols of the local government area
- b) Companion Animal Lifetime Registration audits and reminder letters
- c) Dangerous and restricted dog audits and inspections
- d) Attending to complaints and ensuring that companion animals owners adhere to the *NSW Companion Animals Act 1998* and regulations


Council provides one off-leash dog exercise area at John Oxley Sportsground, Darjeeling Road, Walcha. This off-leash area is not to be used while public events are being held.

Over the 2021/22 financial year Council received 13 reports of alleged dog attacks. A dog attack can include any incident where a dog rushes at, attacks, bites, harasses or chases any person or animal (other than vermin), whether or not any injury is caused to the person or animal.

Further, there were 44 roaming dog and 31 roaming cat complaints, with 24 barking dog complaints.

Animals are seized only when necessary and during the 2021/22 period Council seized 11 animals, had 15 animals surrendered, released 5 animals, rehomed 14 animals and euthanised 7 animals. We transfer suitable unclaimed / surrendered animals from its pound to the Animal Welfare League for rehoming.

Cemetery Management

	<p style="text-align: center;">4 Cemeteries</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">29 Burials</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">24 Reservations</p>

Council has care control and maintenance of Walcha General, Walcha Catholic, Woolbrook and Nowendoc Cemeteries.


Public Buildings & Amenities

<p style="text-align: center;">2 Sportsgrounds</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">6 Public Toilets</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">1 Swimming Pool</p>
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<p>1 Skatepark</p>	<p>4 Playgrounds</p>	<p>1 Gym</p>
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Walcha’s spacious gym was built and opened in 2020 – 2021 courtesy of a grant from the Stronger Country Communities Fund and features a large equipment area as well as a separate group fitness room looking out over the town swimming pool. Both centres are well frequented with the 2021 – 2022 year seeing 8,605 visitors utilising the swimming pool and membership to the gym increasing in popularity.

Food Surveillance

	<p>32 Fixed food premises</p>
<p>21 Primary inspections conducted</p>	<p>8 Temporary & Mobile premises</p>

Due to COVID-19 routine monitoring inspections were impacted, some regulated businesses were closed, any available for inspection were undertaken during the reporting period in accordance with NSW Food Authority requirements.