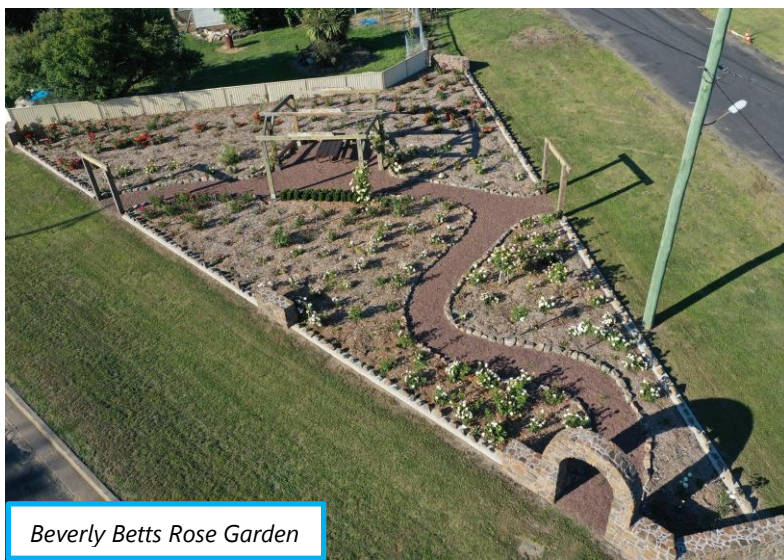




2022 – 2023

Annual Report



Beverly Betts Rose Garden

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Council Chambers
Walcha NSW 2354
P – 02 6774 2500

PO Box 2
Walcha NSW 2354
E – council@walcha.nsw.gov.au

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Office Hours:

Cashier & Enquiries: 9:00am to 4:30pm
P – 6774 2500 from 8:30am to 5:00pm

Service NSW/RMS: 9:00am to 4:30pm
P – 6774 2500 from 8:30am to 5:00pm

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- Appendix G: Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009 (GIPA) 2022 – 2023 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
(deceased July 2023)



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

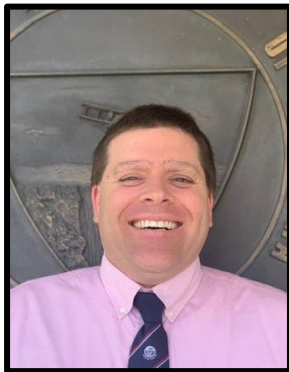
Phillip Hood
General Manager



Alan Butler
Director Infrastructure & Development



Christian Martin
Director Corporate & Community



Council Services

Council Meetings

Council Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month at 3pm in the Council Chambers, 2W Hamilton Street, Walcha. Members of the public are invited and welcome to attend open Council Meetings. Business papers are available on Council's website.

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 Council's 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 Advisory Committee (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 Advisory 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.

Walcha Motorcycle Rally Advisory Committee: Purpose is to provide support and advice to Council on matters related to Walcha's Motorcycle Rally

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

Mayoral Report



It is an honour again to present the 2022-2023 Annual Report on behalf of Walcha Council. This report summaries the achievements and challenges that we faced in the delivery of our program of works and our path to comply with legislation compliance. It details the vision and aspirations of community and how we have delivered these.

The resignation of General Manager Barry Omundson in February due to family health reasons led to the appointment of in-house Director Phillip Hood to the Interim General Manager role while the process of appointing a new General Manager is followed.

The biggest challenge this year saw Council engage and inform our community on the need for a Special Rate Variation. This is not an easy decision or path, but with a thorough analysis of our long term slide towards an unsustainable financial position, and with the community support our application to IPART was successful. Our assurance to our ratepayers is that we will repay this endorsement by being prudent in our operations. It is now up to Councillors & Staff to manage our finances in line with the commitment we made.

The establishment of Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors, led by Walcha, has been an excellent avenue for Councils impacted by the renewable energy push to collaborate and lobby on a joint position. This also allows us access to learnt knowledge from Councils who have experience in this area. Renewable energy will remain a significant issue on Council's Agenda for the coming year.

Negotiating a Voluntary Planning Agreement for any renewable energy projects, that are successful through the Development Application process, to leverage community benefits continues and is approaching the public exhibition stage. This sits separately to ensuring our infrastructure is fully maintained by construction traffic impacts.

The State Government initiated Joint Organisation model is faltering and our participation in the Namoi Joint Organisation presents challenges. Funding to

operate and comply with statutory requirements has eroded funds that were targeted for project delivery.

The appointment of a new Audit Risk & Improvement Committee will continue Council's path of compliance and risk mitigation. There is so much regulation and liability surrounding Councils operations that the oversight from an independent body is important.

The continued fallout from COVID19, bushfires, drought and rain impacted Council's operations and infrastructure, leading to funding and delivery challenges. This coupled with rising costs across this industry put pressure on our resources. Not an uncommon theme amongst any delivery based organization and the opportunities have certainly outweighed these obstacles. These projects are included elsewhere in this Report.

I now look forward to another successful year for Walcha Council. A continuation of our funded and own source program delivery and a reversal of our financial decline. Without the backing of the community and the dedication of our staff this would not and cannot be achieved and Council gives their wholehearted thanks for your support. I encourage you to read this Report, it is a report on YOUR Council and its operations.

Sincerely
Clr Eric H Noakes
Mayor of Walcha

General Manager's Report



Hello to all the good folk in Walcha and please take your time to read through the 2022-2023 Annual Report.

I did not envision when I started (not that long ago) in the Director Infrastructure position at Walcha Council that I would be preparing the General Manager's Report in 2023 – but here we are. 2022-2023 continued to see massive changes within Council as we bid farewell to General Manager Barry Omundson in February 2023 – myself taking on the Interim General Manager's role until recruitment took place. Spoiler alert: Councillors saw fit to keep me on in the role permanently and I'm extremely pleased to continue to roll out improvements internally, and deliver exceptional service to the community where we routinely 'punch above our weight' as a small rural Council.

For those interested, I've come from a career that has focussed on Local Government almost exclusively – having worked at neighbouring Councils Mid-Coast, Tamworth Regional and Upper Hunter Shire. My specialty is water and sewer engineering, and surviving the last drought as Water Manager at Upper Hunter was certainly a challenge. Water was delivered by tanker truck for 18 long months to the town of Murrurundi during that drought, so I am very relieved that this year saw Walcha complete the new 300ML Off-Creek Storage Dam to massively increase our water security into the future. Works will continue into 2023-2024 on pump station and river intake improvements, and I commend Director Infrastructure & Development (previous Manager Water and Waste) Alan Butler on all his efforts to keep this \$11M project moving and on budget.



June 2023 – Drone Picture of Off Creek Storage



November 2023 – Panoramic View of Off Creek Storage

Speaking of budgets, we've tried extremely hard to stick to ours – having identified our unsustainable financial position and getting community support to apply for a special rate variation (SRV) which was approved in full. The SRV was a necessary financial hit to the ratepayers in Walcha, and our end of the bargain was to continue to etch out efficiency gains in our service delivery and maintain tight control on our finances. Since taking the Interim General Manager position in February I have worked with our two Directors to complete a comprehensive review of our organisation structure and implement changes as required. This was not a staff cutting exercise – in fact during the SRV consultation process Professor

Joseph Drew confirmed that for the size of our Council and the services we deliver, we were not excessive with regard to total staff numbers. However, there was scope to make our service delivery more efficient by adjusting our structure – deleting some roles, creating new roles and changing reporting lines. We now have a structure that is less top heavy, with greater capacity to deliver works internally rather than engaging with expensive consultants and contractors. There is far greater accountability across the board with better role definition, and opportunities have also been extended to existing staff to take on new challenges and also take on leadership positions.

While working hard to implement these changes, and in an environment of stretched financial capacity, Council have still managed to deliver near record levels of capital infrastructure and renewals, predominantly via various sources of grant funding. Council received \$9.25M in capital grants funding in 2023, up 50% from 2022. We were also able to capitalise over \$1M in staff wages to capital activities, another critical element for our long-term financial sustainability and an area that we continue to improve. This year saw Council complete construction of three more bridges, Tia Diggings 1 & 2 and Niangala Bridge on Aberbaldie Road. Solar Lighting was installed along the Apsley River Levee Bank, new white picket fencing was installed at Fenwicke Oval, and the Lions Park received a massive overhaul, complete with a 'John Deere green' tractor feature that has proved immensely popular.

Peter Fenwicke Oval White Picket Fence Before & After Photos:



Lions Park Upgrade – Before & After Photos:



Our roads crews had a massively productive year, continuing great work on the Oxley Highway via our Road Maintenance Construction Contract with Transport for NSW, while maintaining our local road network during some trying wet periods that persisted through to the start of 2023. Council took delivery of a brand new Jet Patcher which has been immediately put to work to undertake sealing of heavy patches, filling of cracks and potholes, and undertaking private works on driveways and access roads which provides a source of revenue back to Council.

The 2024 financial year has an even larger capital budget, as many of our projects progressed through scoping, design and tendering stages in 2023 with construction set for 2024. Some major projects, such as the Derby Street Upgrade, were pushed from 2023 to 2024 as Council managed to secure additional grant funding for the project in order to deliver without dipping into Council reserves. The project budget is now over \$6M and the final result will be a substantial improvement on what was originally proposed.

Similar approaches have been taken with our pool refurbishment, skate park upgrade and bridge replacement projects. For example, the skate park tenders came back over our current grant funded budget, and Council officers have been seeking additional funds to deliver the project as it was intended (of which we are very hopeful). The funding variation request for Army Bridge replacement has also been successful after a very long wait, and the bridge now has a construction tender awarded to be completed in 2024 at no cost to Walcha ratepayers.

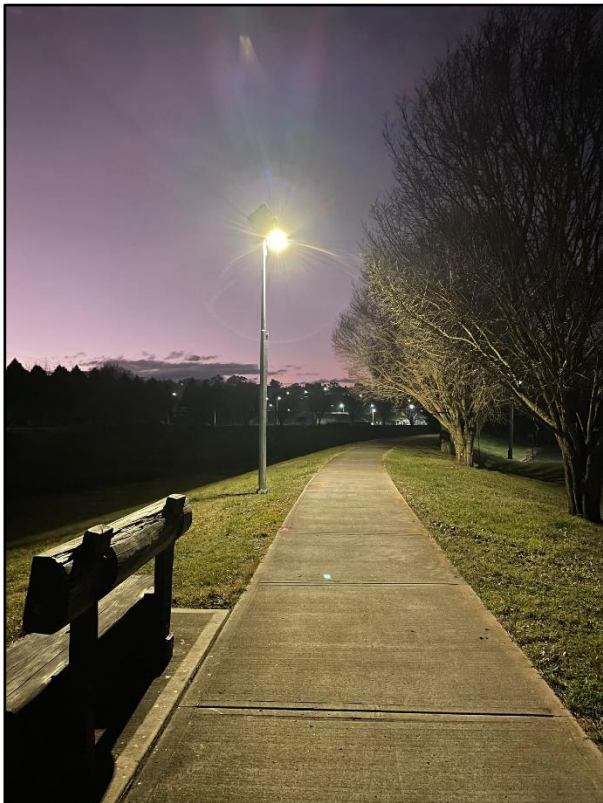
Further successes have been via \$1.5M in transport infrastructure flood repair claims – that is claims to the State Government to reimburse Council undertaking flood repair activities – washouts, culvert replacement, potholes. Separately Council received another \$1M in Flood Recovery funding from the Office of Local Government, and Council will utilise this money for three causeway renewals and repair works to the levee bank near the Walcha Bowling Club. Across the state local Council's received pothole repair grants (part of Fixing Local Roads), and Regional and Local Road Repair funding which is over \$4M for Walcha Council. This money will boost our road maintenance operations for the next 3 years. Design work is also well underway for a massive \$3.7M investment in pathways around Walcha – including connecting John Oxley Oval and Summervale to town – courtesy of GetActive NSW. Across all our functional areas, Council has continued to provide exemplary service to the Walcha Community.

I regularly receive positive feedback regarding our preschool, community care and youth services, parks & gardens, customer services and tourism. Our staff go 'above and beyond' with such regularity that it is easy to take for granted how hard working and dedicated all the staff of Walcha Council are. But I know that their efforts are acknowledged and appreciated by the community – this was no more apparent than via the support we received in the SRV process – and I want to thank both the staff for another very successful year, and the community for their continued support of Council and the work that we do. It is a pleasure for us to serve the Walcha Community and I look forward to sharing more of our successes in future years.



Niangala Bridge, Aberbaldie Road

Sincerely
Phillip Hood
General Manager



Levee Bank Lighting

Statutory Reporting

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

The State of our Council 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 as Appendix A: End of Term 2016-2021 Report.

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 2023 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 were:

- Lehman's Dividend \$29,095
- McCullough Robertson \$26,437

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	\$2,255
Local Government NSW Conference	Hicks & Reilly	\$3,018
Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors	Noakes	\$607
Country Mayors Association Meetings for the Year	Noakes	\$2,068

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 Councillors" 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	\$126,960
Councillors Mobile Phone & iPads	\$2,615
Councillors Conferences in NSW	\$5,681
Councillor Conferences interstate	\$2,990
Councillor Training	\$659
Councillors Expenses \$3,352 + Travel Allowance \$11,450 =	\$14,802

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 2022 – 2023 was \$368,493. 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 2022 – 2023:

Contract:	Awarded to:	Contract Value GST excl \$:
Bushfire generated Green Waste Clean-up & Processing Program	OK Earthmoving	227,273
Town Planning Service to Walcha Council	New England North West Planning Services	171,810
Walcha Swimming Pool Refurbishment Design	Built Environment Collective	151,250
Design & Construction of the Walcha Lions Park Play Space	Moduplay Group Pty Ltd	329,857
Design & Construction of 3 Bridges	Fulton Hogan Industries	1,704,518
Aerodrome Access Road & Runway Rehabilitation	Aitken Civil Pty Ltd	735,656
Derby Street Upgrade	Collin Williams Pty Ltd	267,278
Namoi Unlimited Consultancy Agreement (all Namoi Unlimited)	Hunter H20	1,826,720
Kerb & Gutter Middle, North & Pakington Street	Engineering & Civil	398,384

Preservation of the Environment

Council has been involved in several initiatives throughout the year to enhance and preserve our environment. Council has developed and adopted its Waste Strategy and is now in year one of implementing the deliverable within the strategy.

Council is actively involved in recycling continually looking at ways to improve recycling rates and reduce waste going to landfill, working to reduce overall waste generation and improving waste management with the assistance of Northern Inland Regional Waste Group.

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

Over the last 12 months Council has implemented an algae management control strategy to best manage ongoing Algae outbreaks after the successful conclusion of treatment trials in the treated affluent discharged into the Apsley River. 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 2022 – 2023 the following contributions were made.

Contributions:

Amount:

Floral tributes & Retirements	338
Staff Christmas Party & Service Recognition	2,268
Westpac Rescue Helicopter	5,000
Life Education Van	1,644
Rate Refunds	1,471
Sporting grants to Youth	3,100
School Scholarship	250
Arts North West	4,758
Walcha Support Group Insurance	575
Hall Subsidies	3,500
Other Sporting Groups	500
	\$23,231

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

- Walcha & District Historical Society; and
- Walcha Gun Club Inc.

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 \$87,836 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.
- Coalition of Renewable Energy Mayors (CoREM), established by Walcha Council and is an excellent avenue for Councils impacted by renewable energy projects to collaborate and lobby on a joint position.

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 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 developmental stages and potential. Each room develops an individual play based program designed around children's interests, stage of development and individual needs.

This year's Highlights:

There has been quiet a few highlights for this year, we have a lot of visitors and incursions this year.

- The arrival of the chickens at the beginning of the year, our Chook pen was installed by the outdoor crew and we had a family generously donate 6 chickens to preschool.
- Celebrations of NAIDOC week with Cassie cooking traditional Torres Strait Islander food for us, it was delicious.

- We have had the fire truck visit to teach the child what to do in an emergency this lines up with our emergency procedure that we are required to follow and practice every three months.
- The ambulance visit, they also taught the children what to do in a medical emergency and how they care for a patient in the ambulance.
- National simultaneous story time, which is a nationwide story time that is held every year, where everyone tunes in and reads the same story at the same time.
- Science on the move, is a yearly visit that is an interactive time for children to learn all things science.
- Book week: always a fun week for all children, involved in dressing up all week and having a parent's morning tea
- Visit from Al Sloggett the travelling musician, he had the children very entertained with all of his magic tricks.

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.



The past 12 months has seen the program flourish, particularly in regards to Group Social Support and Meals on Wheels. We have 194 clients and many of them receive multiple services from us.

We have hosted monthly morning teas and regular excursions that have been consistently well attended. We have been to visit a wide range of our New

England neighbours including Werris Creek, Quirindi, Inverell, Armidale, Tamworth, Chaffey Dam, Copeton Dam, Currabubula, Glen Innes, Uralla, Bendemeer and Dorrigo to name a few.



We have also done a lot of local socialising! We spent the winter months supporting local businesses, including all local eateries. We did our own Melbourne Cup lunch and also had our Christmas party at the Bowling Club which was a huge success and very well attended.



Meals on Wheels continues to grow, as the need of the community grows. We continue to see a higher number of clients require meals during the winter months rather than the summer. We have also taken on the financial aspect of the program, managing our own invoicing and taking the payments fortnightly in order to take the pressure off the Council staff and to maintain accurate records.

Youth Services

The library and youth events are intertwined, with a program of holiday activities that includes events held at the library, such as Baby Booktime, Storytime, craft workshops, robotics and Lego workshops. 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.

This year joining forces with Walcha Lions club to contribute to the re-opening of the Lions Park with activities for the youth, which was integrated into the school holiday program.

Some of the youth programs resulting from community feedback including 'Little Lego Masters' for younger children, board game tournament, star gazing and astrology night, and cooking workshop, as well as annual event staples like the Summer Pool Party. It was also very interesting to note that library and youth staff have taken opportunities to build rapport with local students by visiting local schools as guest speaker for Literary Festivals, assemblies and careers expos. This helps build relationships that encourage dialogue, create a safe space to give honest input and relevant feedback regarding youth activities.



There were some huge excursions and events this year, which were possible due to the Office of Regional Youth’s Holiday Break Program funding. They included a 2 day visit from Lego Masters, Andrew and Damien. Which entertained hundreds of local families. Bus trip adventures to Tamworth paintball, Tamworth Escape room, skating, bowling, 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 the Youth Advisory Committee, which led to a Youth Week Workshop Group. The group arranged activities, brainstormed ideas which complemented the initial youth-led idea of an excursion and a disco to celebrate this annual celebration. The two-parts to the festival meant that young people could choose which activity suited them and their friends best. The excursion gave young people who wouldn’t be able to otherwise afford to, the opportunity to visit regional centres for activities. Then the night time disco, with DJ, involved a series of youth-driven games & activities (including craft, table tennis & pizza tasting), a State Library of NSW Drug Info stand (with interactive display, quiz and ‘mocktails’), and an expression station (to gather ideas, feedback and opinions of local young people in a fun photo booth).

Staff worked with Walcha youth (ages 12-24) to submit an application for the NSW Governments 2023 Youth Opportunities Project. With the seed idea coming directly from Youth Advisory Meeting discussions when the new Council gym was opened. Despite Covid-19 restrictions forcing delays in this kind of program, further consultation resulted in the plan going ahead. Meetings, online surveys and

consultation face to face with young people at Council youth events provided enough information to submit the application, which was approved.



Tourism Activities

The Walcha Visitor Information Centre had an average of 300 - 400 people visiting per month.

Extensive marketing and promotion of Walcha as a desirable destination to visit has been undertaken. Some as general tourism promotion and some targeted to a particular demographic, such as cyclists, motorcyclists.

We now have 12 evergreen promotional videos promoting Walcha that are rolled out on social media and on the Walcha Tourism website www.walchansw.com.au covering: Food & beverage, Art, Shopping, Motorcycling, Cycling, Prominent Local artists, Autumn, Winter, Pioneer Cottage, Apsley Falls and Tia Falls.

Walcha promotional campaigns have been undertaken in the following publications (both digital and online): Australian Traveller magazine, Tamworth Country Music Festival magazine, Go55s magazine, Australian Geographic, FOUND Regional magazine.

We also engaged with a travel digital content creator, who stayed in Walcha and captured content, collaborating with Walcha Tourism and sharing travel content on Walcha to his 169K followers.

Our collaboration with New England High Country (NEHC) saw successful tourism campaigns delivered in The Wanderer magazine, We Are Explorers, Australian

Traveller, Campervan & Motorhome Club of Australia and most recently Cyclist Australia/NZ magazine.

Several tourism resources/brochures have been produced or updated including a new Visitor Guide & Map for NEHC, Walcha visitor handouts including bushwalking, fishing, eating out guide and accommodation guide.

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 2022 to 30 June 2023.

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	0
Total number of PIDs received by Walcha Council	2
Of the total received, the number in each of the following categories:	
◆ Corrupt conduct	0
◆ Maladministration	0
◆ Serious or substantial waste	0
◆ Government intervention contravention	0
◆ Local Government pecuniary interest contravention	2
Number of PIDs finalised in this reporting period	2

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 2022-2023 year concerning the operations of Walcha Council.

Modern Slavery Act 2018 Compliance

Goods and services procured by Council during the 2022-2023 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*



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.

Development applications (DAs) are slightly down this year however are within the last 6-year average. The increased cost of living may be linked to the downturn in applications along with challenges related to the recovery post prolonged drought, bushfires, floods and COVID-19 as seen in Figure 1. The data outlines a strong number of residential developments, with 14 new dwellings (Figure 2). The total yearly development values are slightly down compared to last year however comparative data over the last six years show this is linked to the number of DAs and in line with the average over the duration, as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 1

Development Application Number Trends

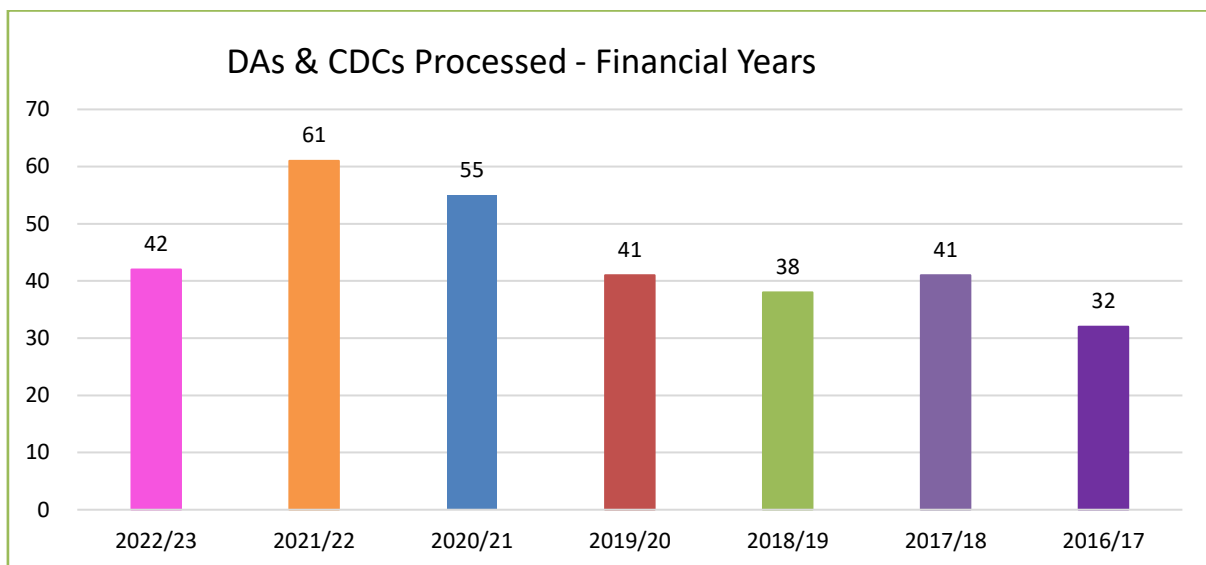


Figure 2
Development Applications – Number of new dwellings

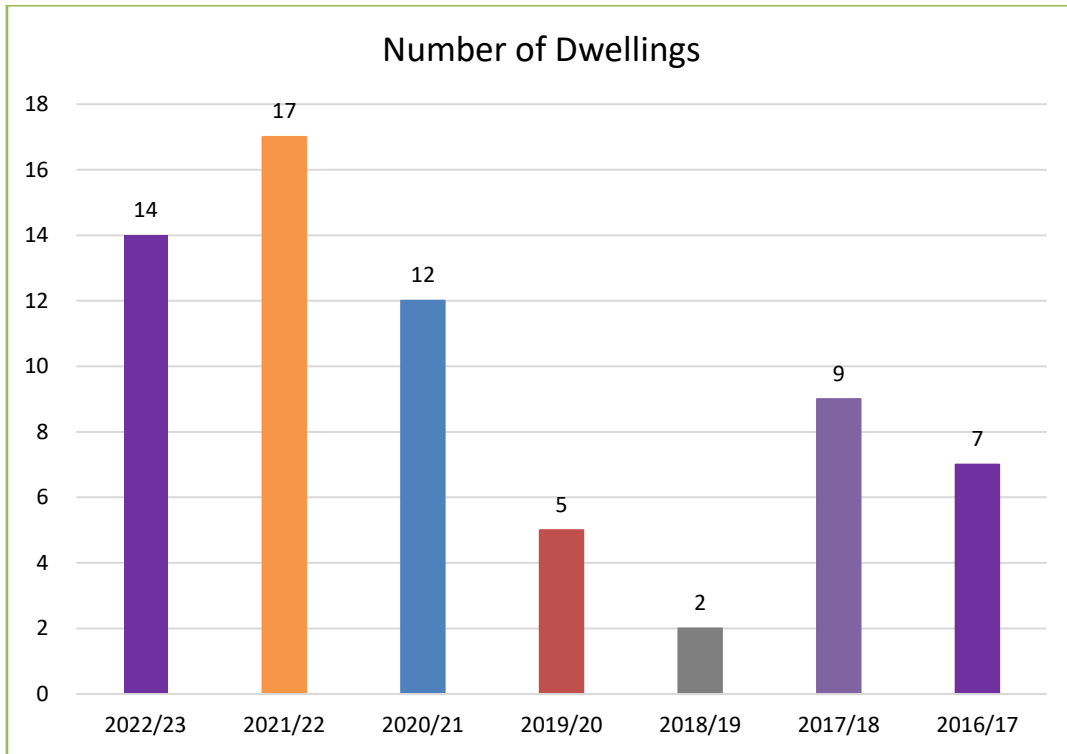
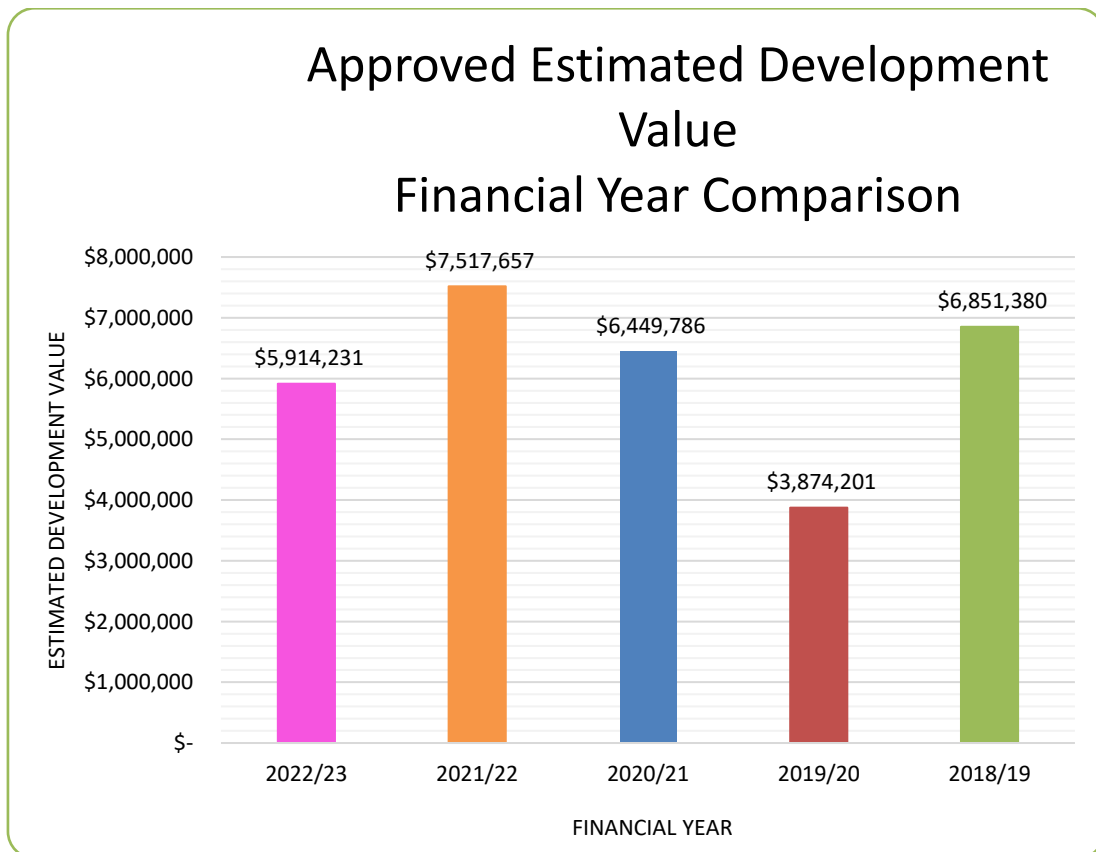


Figure 3
Development Application Value Trends



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.

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.

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 2032*.



Ranger Services

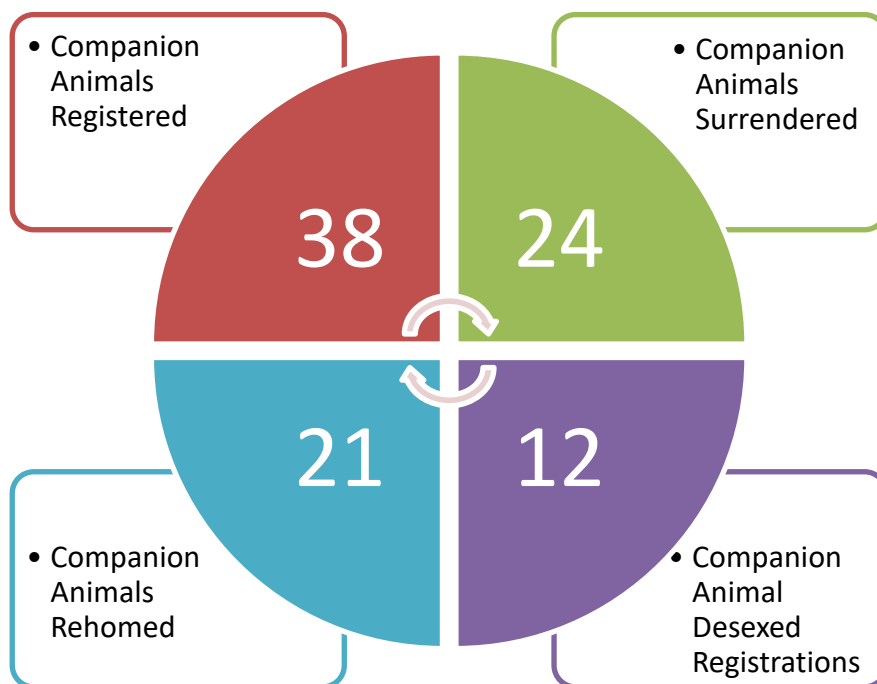
Council actively enforces the *Companion Animals Act 1998* through the following activities:

- 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 2022-2023 financial year Council received 19 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 59 roaming dog and 32 roaming cat complaints, with 19 barking dog complaints.



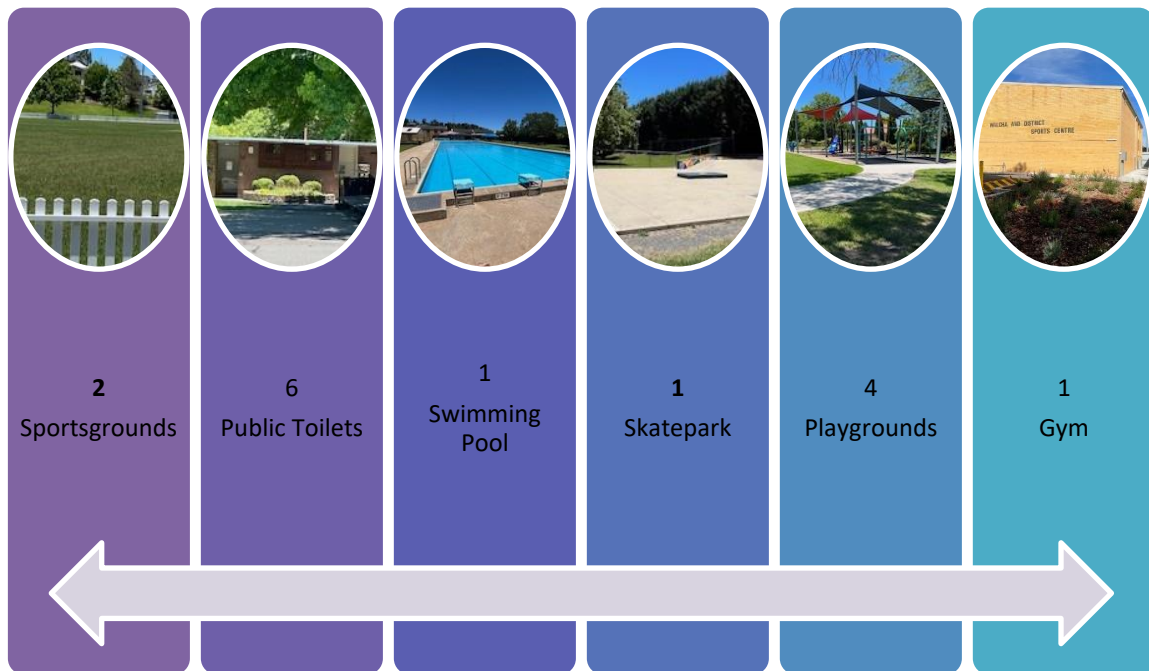
Animals are seized only when necessary and during the 2022-2023 period Council seized 53 animals, had 24 animals surrendered, released 9 animals, rehomed 21 animals and euthanised 21 animals. We transfer suitable unclaimed / surrendered animals from its pound to the Animal Welfare League for rehoming.

Cemetery Management

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



Public Buildings & Amenities



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 utilising the swimming pool and membership to the gym increasing in popularity.

Food Surveillance



Food Surveillance

- **32**
Fixed food premises Registered
- **11**
Primary Inspections Conducted
- **7**
Temporary & Mobile Premises

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.