



PORT STEPHENS  
COUNCIL

# Port Stephens Local Housing Strategy Review

Communications and engagement report

May 2024





## Summary

Port Stephens is growing with the NSW Government predicting another 20,000 residents over the next 20 years.

This growth will place further pressure on housing in Port Stephens. With limited opportunity for new housing developments, housing prices and low rental vacancies have begun to push middle income families out of the market. This impacts local businesses that struggle to attract workers, particularly in the aged care, hospitality and health sectors.

The impacts of housing prices and low rental vacancies are also forcing more people to either relocate or choose housing options that are not ideal with more people sleeping on our streets, couch surfing, or seeking social housing.

It's a significant issue for Port Stephens and one that impacts all of us, driving the review of the Port Stephens Housing Strategy.

The communication and engagement program for the revised Port Stephens Local Housing Strategy consisted of 3 phases (see Figure 1). The first phase reviewed data available about housing in Port Stephens found in existing key documents and associated community engagement findings. There were no new engagement findings for this phase.

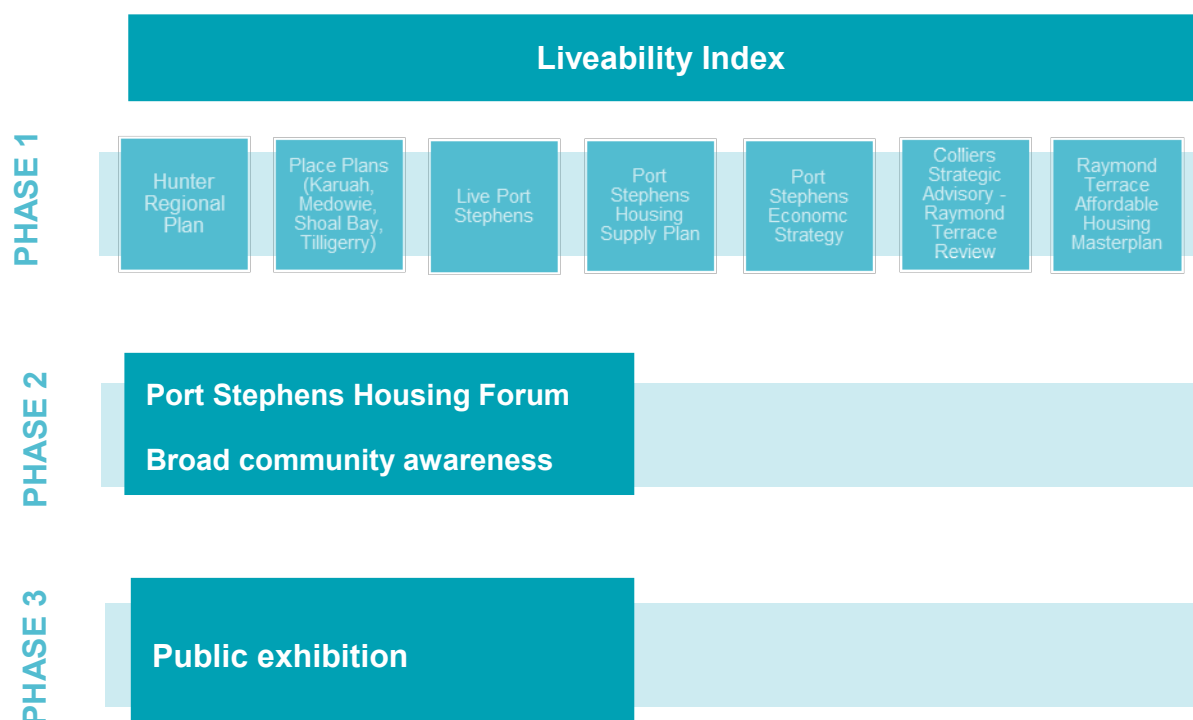
The second phase featured a targeted engagement approach through a housing forum to discuss the housing crisis as well as share ideas and perspectives on how we as a community can address the crisis. The Port Stephens Housing Forum was the primary community engagement method for this phase and was held on 10 November 2023 at Pacific Dunes, Medowie.



The third phase included public exhibition held from 2 April to 29 April 2024.

This communication and engagement program has encouraged residents and businesses to share their thoughts on how we can encourage more diversity of housing, what we need to do to increase the density of housing in our town centres and how we can support more affordable housing close to shops, services and public transport.

**Figure1: Community engagement program**



The objectives of all phases of engagement were to:

- Use existing community engagement outcomes to inform the strategy review.
- Increase awareness of State Government housing targets, economic growth and the need to diversify housing types across Port Stephens.
- Provide an ongoing conversation with residents and business on the social and economic impacts of housing supply, diversity and affordability.
- Seek stakeholder and community feedback on the proposed direction for housing in Port Stephens.

## Communication and engagement methods

COMMUNICATIONS METHODS		
ACTIVITY	DESCRIPTION	REACH (people)
<b>Media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media release 28 March 2024" New Blueprint for the future of housing in Port Stephens"</li> </ul>	Unknown
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2HD Newcastle radio interview 18 April</li> </ul>	5,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ABC Newcastle radio interview 2 April</li> </ul>	Unknown
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2NURFM radio interview 3 April</li> </ul>	2,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>News of the Area article 11 April</li> </ul>	2,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Newcastle Herald 8 April</li> </ul>	45,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>NBN News Newcastle 7 April</li> </ul>	65,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Port Stephens Examiner 2 April and 7 April</li> </ul>	2,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Intouch Magazine Newcastle</li> </ul>	Unknown
<b>E-newsletters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your Port April 2024</li> </ul>	2,699
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your Business April 2024</li> </ul>	1,017
<b>Print advertising</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>News of the Area October 2023 and April 2024</li> </ul>	10,000
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Port Stephens Examiner October 2023 and April 2024</li> </ul>	31,000
<b>Rates notice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>April rates notice print and electronic</li> </ul>	26,264
<b>Print editorial</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>News of the Area Mayors column 28 June 2023</li> </ul>	10,000*
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>News of the Area Mayors column 15 November 2024</li> </ul>	
<b>Website</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Local Housing Strategy webpage</li> </ul>	1,090
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have Your Say page</li> </ul>	2,296
<b>Direct contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Special interest groups</li> </ul>	111
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Community Organisations</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Port Stephens Housing Forum participants</li> </ul>	
<b>Social media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facebook post 23 October 2023</li> </ul>	2,300
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facebook post 4 April 2024 (including video)</li> </ul>	1,300
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instagram post 11 April 2024</li> </ul>	191
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instagram post 8 April 2024</li> </ul>	140

\*Not included in reach total as reach is duplicated through another method (for example print advertising).



ENGAGEMENT METHODS		
ACTIVITY	METHOD	PARTICIPATION
Housing forum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All day workshop with businesses, community organisations, state agencies, health, defence and community representatives</li> </ul>	54
Key stakeholder session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online zoom session for housing forum participants</li> </ul>	6*
Drop in sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raymond Terrace Library – 14 April 2024</li> </ul>	4
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Medowie Community Hall – 18 April 2024</li> </ul>	0
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tomaree Library – 22 April 2024</li> </ul>	12
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facebook Live – 2 April 2024</li> </ul>	35
Submissions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submissions received via email and letter</li> </ul>	46

\*Not included in participation total as duplicated through another method.

## Results and key findings

The communication methods used throughout phase 2 and 3 to inform the community of the Local Housing Strategy review and the engagement opportunities reached over 199,000 people. The engagement opportunities for both phases had 150 people directly participate.

### Phase 2: Targeted stakeholders – Port Stephens Housing Forum

This phase of the Port Stephens Local Housing Review included the Port Stephens Housing Forum. Key housing stakeholders were invited, including local community groups, businesses, industry groups, developers, real estates, health and aging sector representatives and individual community members. Over 60 invitations were issued, with over 50 acceptances received.

Following feedback from Council's Communications and Engagement Advisory Group in September 2023, community expressions of interest (EOIs) were called to confirm a cross-section of interested people had the opportunity to attend the forum that might be associated with an existing group, industry or business. This EOI was open from 18 October 2023 to 6 November 2023, with 31 submissions received. Following a selection process, 12 community members were invited to participate in the Port Stephens Housing Forum.

The forum began with a presentation from Gyde Consulting, providing an overview of the current and projected population, employment and housing trends for NSW, the Hunter Region, and Port Stephens. During the workshop component, attendees were presented with 4 questions to discuss on their assigned tables, and conversations were captured by table facilitators via an online ideas board and mapping tool. Questions included:

- How is the housing crisis impacting you, your business and your community?
- What are the opportunities and challenges of greenfield and infill housing development?
- What do you think people need to help embrace a more diverse housing mix?
- What can we do to encourage more housing types in Port Stephens?

The online mapping tool was circulated to participants for 1 week post the forum for additional comments to be added. Over 458 contributions and ideas were made from the forum day and examples are provided in Figure 2 and 3.

Key input from the Port Stephens Housing Forum is summarised below.

- A need to balance greenfield development in rural areas, particularly in response to known environmental constraints.

- There is a lack of diversity in housing choice. We need more units, townhouses, and smaller homes. People are drawn to the area because of the scenic quality and environment.
- There is a real homelessness crisis impacting the Local Government Area (LGA) that is putting a lot of pressure on community housing and support services.
- Businesses are struggling to attract and retain staff due to low rental availabilities and high rental prices.
- Key workers often cannot live near their workplace particularly on the Tomaree Peninsula due to the high house and rental prices.
- The frequency and reliability of public transport services needs to be improved.
- The community can see that Council has tried to encourage more housing.

**Figure 2: Example of contributions and ideas on ideas board**

### Session 1 - Housing Supply Q1

How is the housing crisis impacting you, your business and your community? (max 140 characters).

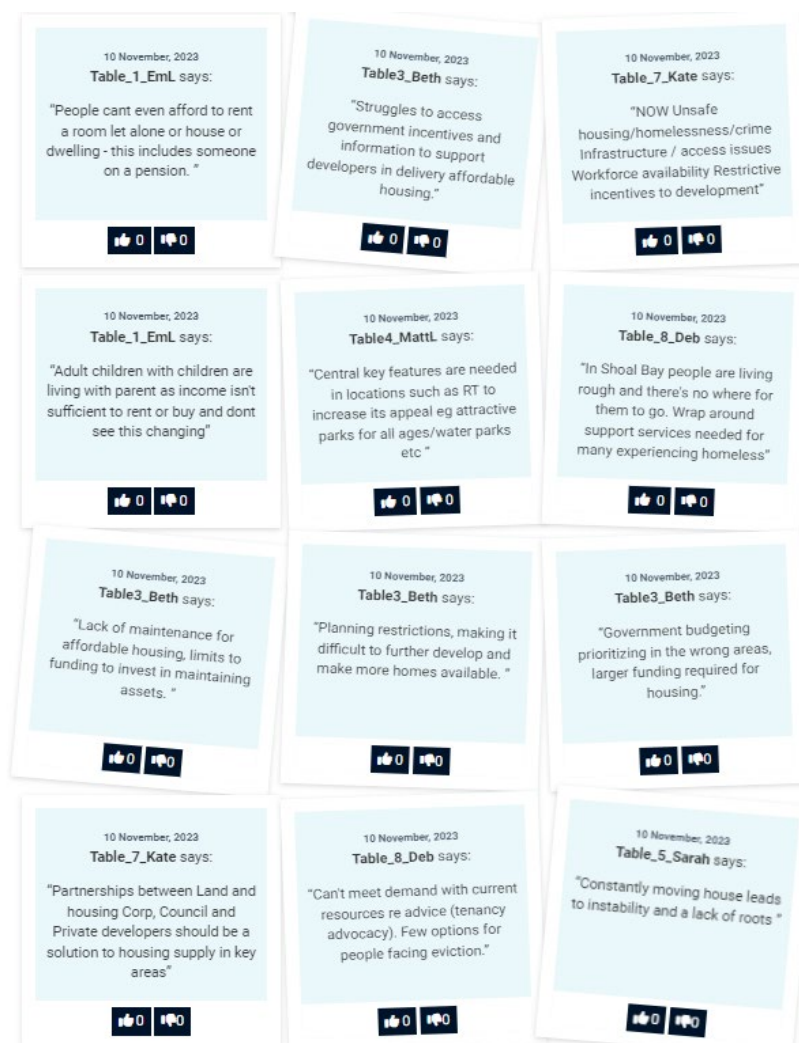
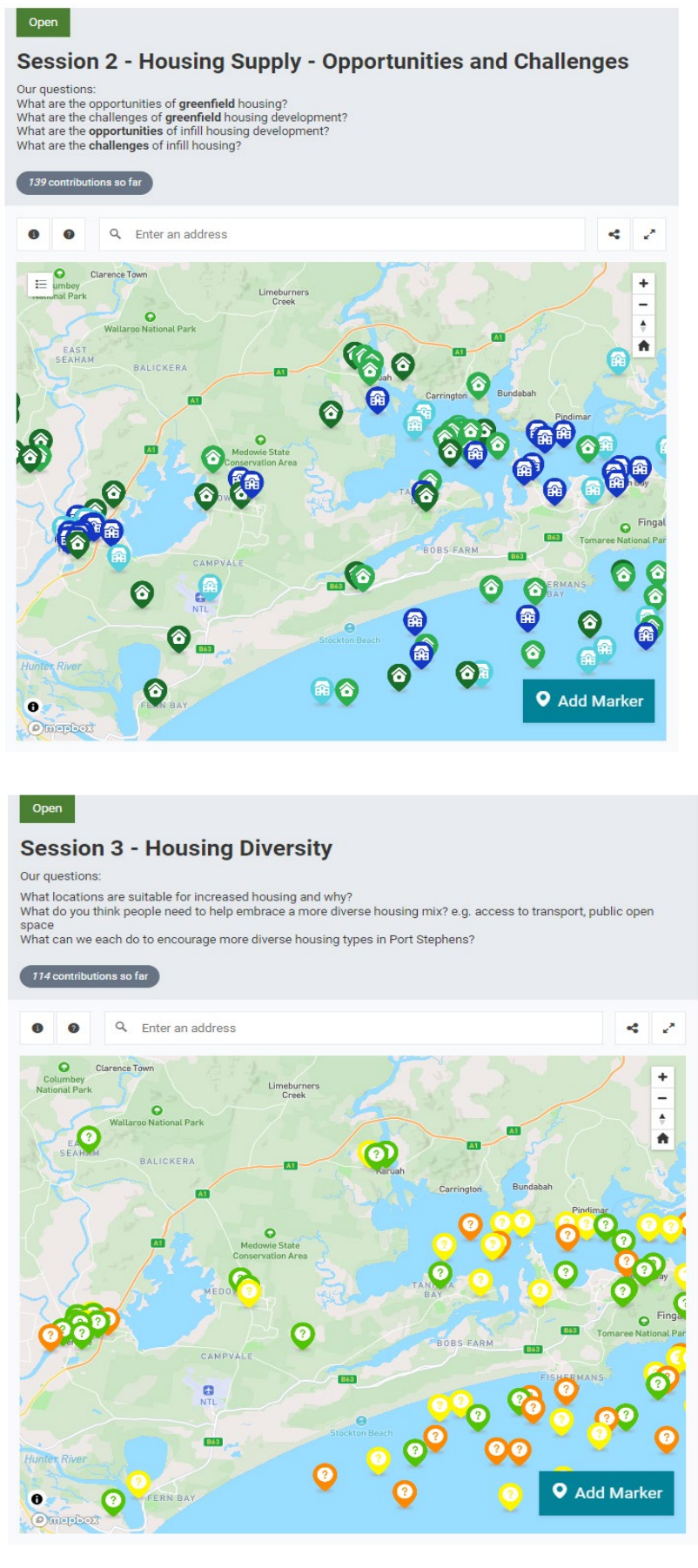




Figure 3: Examples of contributions and ideas via online mapping tool.





## Phase 3: Public exhibition

The public exhibition period opened from 2 April to 29 April 2024.

### Port Stephens Housing Forum Participants

Those that participated in the Port Stephens Housing Forum during Phase 2 were invited to the first engagement opportunity during the public exhibition via an online zoom session on 10 April 2024. Participants were notified by invitation email and 6 previous participants attended. The session presented proposals for the revised strategy and an opportunity for participants to ask questions and provide feedback.

Questions and comments expressed concerns about the lack of detail in the plan and whether what's proposed can be delivered with the lack of infrastructure to support future growth especially in Raymond Terrace. One participant identified that rural residential in the western areas of the LGA was clearly discouraged and that the rural residential criteria should be revisited. There was also a suggestion to shade the infill and greenfield proposals differently. A further participant expressed concern that something definitive would need to occur to enable the proposed change to happen such as the purchase of a block of properties in the east rather than the reliance on individual lot changes.

### Facebook Live event

A Facebook Live event was held on 11 April 2024. This session was held after hours to attract residents and stakeholders that work during the day, have carer commitments or were unable to attend one of the three face to face drop in sessions. 34 people watched the Facebook Live with a constant 28 people across the whole session. Questions rolled in throughout the session ranging from affordable housing, Air BnBs and holiday letting, over 55's villages, building heights and supporting infrastructure. Positive feedback thanking the Council for their time and information was provided by participants at the end of the session.

### Drop in sessions

Three further face to face drop-in sessions were held, one in each ward of the LGA. Sessions were held from 4:30pm-6pm to maximises possible attendance for those that work, carer for others or have retired. Only 16 people attended these sessions with no attendance at Medowie.

Feedback in the west ward session focused on making Raymond Terrace more attractive for investment with beautification projects, more events, improved open spaces and parks and recognition of the history of the area. Feedback in the east ward ranged from specific property impacts and discussions around why some areas were not included in the Plan, to parking impacts in Shoal Bay and ensuring that sufficient resources and infrastructure are provided to support the forecast population growth.

## Submissions

50 submissions were received during the public exhibition period. Submissions comments and responses have been provided in detail as part of the Council report for 25 June 2024 with key feedback including:

- The need for additional infrastructure to support the predicted population growth
- Concerns regarding short term accommodation and create incentives for owners to return these properties to the long term rental market
- Continued protection of the natural environment as development occurs
- Improve public transport to create better connections between residential, commercial and community infrastructure
- Fear of the impact multi story housing will have on a place's character
- Advocacy for and provision of additional financial support to residents who are struggling with increasing rental costs
- The need to properly address homelessness
- Over development concerns for of Raymond Terrace and Shoal Bay

Feedback from the Port Stephens Local Housing Strategy three phased communication and engagement program has been used to develop the revised draft Port Stephens Local Housing Strategy being presented to Council on 25 June 2024.

