

CM13.5. Proposal to Integrate Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy and Albury Open Space Strategy

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FURTHER ENQUIRIES TO	David Christy City Development	PHONE	6023 8111
AUTHOR	Sonia Dalitz & David Armstrong		

Purpose of Report

To present a proposal to combine the scopes, timeframes, and Stakeholder Engagement Plans for the development of the Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy and the Albury Open Space Strategy resulting in a single Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy document for public exhibition.

Background

Council previously endorsed the proposed scope, timeframes, and Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the preparation of an Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy at the Council meeting held on 14 November 2022.

Council also endorsed the proposed scope, timeframes, and Stakeholder Engagement Plan for the preparation of an Albury Open Space Strategy at the Council meeting held on 1 February 2023.

Both reports to Council emphasised that the development of these two city wide strategy documents will assist Council to meet a range of existing policy commitments, most notably producing findings that will help inform the Thurgoona Wirlinga Precinct Structure Plan Review project. Both reports also stated that project timings would seek to ensure appropriate consideration of each other and where possible, common tasks such as community consultation would align.

The Requests for Quotation (RFQs) to assist Council with the development of both the Social Infrastructure Strategy and the Open Space Strategy were advertised concurrently during March 2023. Vendors were invited to submit conforming submissions to each RFQ and were given the opportunity to submit an alternative submission outlining a proposal to complete both RFQ projects. This approach resulted in:

- eight conforming quotations received for the Social Infrastructure Strategy project;
- eight conforming quotations received for the Open Space Strategy project; and
- two alternative conforming quotations received to complete both the Social Infrastructure Strategy and the Open Space Strategy.

Three separate assessment panels were held during April 2023, under guidance from the Procurement Team, which resulted in Cred Consulting being assessed as the preferred company for both the Social Infrastructure Strategy project and the Open Space Strategy project. Cred Consulting demonstrated the highest overall capability, experience, approach, resources, and availability for a 'combined offer', along with a 10% price discount for being successful in both project bids.

Since the commencement of the work programs for developing the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy, the following project tasks have been completed:

- joint project inception meeting and site visits (18 May 2023);
- joint project staff workshop with Cred Consulting (28 June 2023);
- Cred Consulting participated in Growing Thurgoona Wirlinga Community session (27 June 2023) and Industry session (29 June);
- Cred Consulting team introduced both projects at CEO workshop (3 July 2023); and
- internal steering group meetings between City Planning, Community & Place, and City Landscapes teams to assist with project coordination (ongoing).

Emerging similarities in project purpose and methodology suggest there are several advantages to Council further advancing alignment of both projects into a single Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy project plan and end strategy document.

Issues

Council is rethinking the best approach to future social infrastructure and open space planning through the development of strategies that take a more networked approach to realising better design, consolidating assets, and considering how spaces like parks and community centres might be delivered under 'community hub' models.

In addition to having a common project purpose and methodological approach, emerging similarities between the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy projects have led the internal project teams and Cred Consulting to propose adopting a fully integrated approach. This is likely to yield a better outcome than continuing the current approach of parallel project alignment.

Towards Albury 2050

Combining the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy remains aligned with the following outcomes:

- 3.2.2 Support initiatives and facilities that encourage social inclusion and community connections to achieve better mental health outcomes.
- 3.2.3 Partner and advocate to improve, promote and facilitate equitable access to human services and facilities for all with a focus on our seniors.

3.4.2 Advocate for improved access to formal and informal lifelong learning opportunities, facilities, and services.

3.6.1 AlburyCity will create vibrant and interesting public and cultural spaces and places that support and encourage the development of participation in and celebration of arts and culture.

The development of a combined Social Infrastructure and Open Space Strategy remains directly related to other Council strategies, including:

- Local Strategic Planning Statement;
- Disability Inclusion Action Plan;
- Asset Management Strategy;
- Thurgoona Wirlinga Precinct Structure Plan Review; and
- Cultural Plan Review (commencing 2023).

Benefits of combining the projects

1. In line with best practice social and recreation planning.

It is increasingly common for Local Government to adopt the broadest definition of social infrastructure to refer to all facilities, spaces, places, or services that support the quality of life and wellbeing of our communities. Some recent examples of Councils that have adopted a combined approach to planning social infrastructure and open space include:

- City of Greater Geelong – Social Infrastructure Plan (June 2020)
<https://www.geelongaustralia.com.au/sip/default.aspx>
Structure is a single body document titled 'Our community places, spaces and services' including an appendices series of 'Social Infrastructure network reports' for each type of social or open space infrastructure. These 'network reports' are also available for download as individual standalone 'chapters'.
- City of Parramatta – Community Infrastructure Strategy (July 2020)
<https://www.cityofparramatta.nsw.gov.au/community-infrastructure-strategy>
Structure is a series of separated 'chapters', including a shared introduction and separate 'chapters' for each type of social and open space infrastructure, and a shared chapter on 'high growth areas' to inform specific considerations for infrastructure planning in emerging areas of new residential development.
- City of Newcastle – Social Infrastructure Strategy (in Draft pending adoption, 2022)
<https://haveyoursay.newcastle.nsw.gov.au/draft-social-infrastructure-strategy>
Structure (Draft) is a single document titled 'Bringing our people together' with infrastructure types broadly divided into places (community facilities) and spaces (open space).

2. Further support a network approach to strategic planning.

Both the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy emphasise the importance of infrastructure not being planned in isolation but being considered part of a broader network of facilities that work together to meet a range of community needs across a neighbourhood, suburb, catchment, and region. This integrated, strategic approach allows facilities to provide a different but complementary range of offerings. By considering assets as part of a network, duplication of resource allocation can be avoided.

Early audit and mapping results undertaken by Cred Consulting show that this issue is particularly relevant in the Albury Local Government Area, with numerous multipurpose sites showing overlapping locations of community, parks, and sporting infrastructure (notably the Greenfield Park/J C King/Billson Park area of North Albury). Combining the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy projects will highlight Council's commitment to collaboration and 'joined up' planning.

3. Improve team capacity to deliver community engagement through enhanced efficiencies between engagement plans.

The appointment of the external consultant, Cred Consulting, to both projects provides an opportunity to improve day-to-day project management efficiencies. Presenting the Social Infrastructure Strategy and the Open Space Strategy as a joint project in a combined document would:

- Reduce duplication of information being presented to the community. Presentation via a single document will allow for combining upfront document chapters of common, shared, and similar information including demographics, trends in infrastructure provision, principles for future provision, catchment boundaries and descriptions.
- Prevent repetition of community consultation activities, for example having a single online survey and social pinpoint map where people can leave comments on either social infrastructure or open space facilities. Combining the projects will also maximise the time the consultant spends in Albury 'in-person' running community workshops and drop-in sessions on both subject matters together.
- Allow for community members to make submissions to a single public exhibition process, reducing the participation burden, especially relating to sites containing multiple types of social and open space infrastructure.
- Minimise time spent by internal teams on project administration including internal coordination meetings, finances, media management and advertising, and development of joint consultation materials.

Risk

- **Business Risk** – the external consultant, Cred Consulting, who are assisting with the preparation of both the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy, are supportive of combining the projects into a single program of community consultation and combined document for public exhibition. Cred Consulting has recent experience working on combined approaches to social infrastructure and open space planning. Community consultation will be carried out by AlburyCity teams. Combining the Strategies is likely to improve community perception that AlburyCity is committed to realising the community's aspirations through an integrated planning approach.
- **Corporate Risk** – both projects are being guided by Stakeholder Engagement Plans that have aligned approaches and timing. These plans both identified that a potential risk for both projects was/is confusion arising from concurrent consultation with each other and the Thurgoona Wirlinga Precinct Structure Plan Review. The plans indicated that to minimise this risk, regular internal coordination meetings would assist with alignment and clear messaging. The internal coordination and steering group consider that formally combining the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy early in the Project Program may assist in further managing this current risk associated with community expectations as compared with the two projects continuing to be developed separately. Refer to further information provided in Community Engagement Section below.
- **WHS and Public Risk** – Cred Consulting will be providing advice which may include findings relating to any risks posed to staff and hirers of facilities across the LGA. This includes looking at geographic impediments such as road corridors and drainage that can make it difficult for people to physically access community facilities and open space, as well as perceptions of safety, such as levels of passive surveillance. Combining the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy will assist in ensuring collocated open space and community facilities remain usable to the community and have a defined land purpose to avoid user conflicts.
- **Environmental Risk** – for Council owned facilities or land, both projects include high level examination and assessment of environmental sustainability features. The projects are likely to include recommendations around the financial sustainability of existing and future Council owned facilities, including consideration of operational costs including energy running costs.
- **Delivery Program Risk** – the timeframes of both projects aim to complete key elements of findings and recommendations to directly inform the review of community facility and open space provision within the Thurgoona Wirlinga Precinct Structure Plan Review. Combining the projects will further assist alignment of community engagement sessions with strategy development.

Community Engagement

Access to social infrastructure and open space is an issue that affects most residents. There is considerable early community and stakeholder interest in the project, supporting that effective engagement will be key to the success of both strategies.

To assist with simplification of messaging and management of community engagement expectations, the Communications and Engagement Team supported the creation of a combined Have Your Say project platform for both projects. This was initially designed with the aim of assisting to minimise confusion and duplication between the projects, but also allows for a seamless transition into combining the projects from a community perspective. Titled, 'Planning our networks of social infrastructure and open space', the Have Your Say page focuses on the agreed purpose of both projects being 'Creating great places for our community to enjoy'.

(<https://haveyoursay.alburycity.nsw.gov.au/planning-our-networks-social-infrastructure-and-open-space>).

As Stage 2 of both projects is approaching, a decision needs to be made if the collection of information on the community's values, preferences, issues, and concerns about the current levels of open space and community facilities provision should be progressed separately, or together. As it stands, the scope of both projects allows for continuation of a combined Have Your Say platform for the gathering of insights and ideas on open space and community facilities improvement priorities, but would be required to be separated for Stage 3 formal feedback (public exhibition) of each draft Strategy.

Options

1. Endorse the integration of the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy into a single Social Infrastructure Strategy. **Recommended.**

This option will develop a considered and evidence-based framework for Council's future planning and decision making about the full range of types of community facilities and open space into a single strategy document.

2. Continue to separately develop a Social Infrastructure Strategy project and an Open Space Strategy. **Not Recommended.**

This option will develop a considered and evidence-based framework for Council's future planning and decision making about open space types in one strategy document, and community facility types in a second strategy document. Where possible and practical, Cred Consulting and the project teams will continue to coordinate timeframes and stakeholder engagement.

Conclusion

This report outlines a proposal to combine the scopes, timeframes, and Stakeholder Engagement Plans for the development of the Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy and the Albury Open Space Strategy into a single Albury Social Infrastructure Strategy document.

Appointment of the same external consultant team to assist with both projects and emerging similarities in the project aims, methodology and engagement programs has led the project teams to the opinion that the potential benefits of integrating the projects outweigh any potential risks.

Combining the Social Infrastructure Strategy and the Open Space Strategy would be in line with leading industry practice, support a network approach to planning, and assist with further day to day project management efficiencies including streamlined community and stakeholder engagement.

A combined Social Infrastructure Strategy will provide guidance on the same range of community facilities and open space types already endorsed but will be presented as a single framework to assist in future delivery that better meets the health and wellbeing needs of our growing population.

Recommendation

That Council endorses the integration of the Social Infrastructure Strategy and Open Space Strategy into a single Social Infrastructure Strategy.