Submission from the Pennant Hills District Civic Trust

Dear Mr Head,

Thank you for inviting submissions to the Draft Operational Plan 2020/21 for Hornsby Shire Council. The Plan is comprehensive and very well written around the GSC focus points of Liveability, Sustainability, Productivity and Collaboration.

The Pennant Hills District Civic Trust has gathered and collated a number of points which we believe are important to the residents and which we think should be included. You will find these submissions below.

Please feel free to contact me if there is anything you wish to discuss.

With kind regards,

Otte Homan
President, PHDCT
ottie.homan@gmail.com
0466 399 352
2020 has opened our eyes to the new realities that negatively impact our community. Longer fire seasons, longer droughts, months of hazardous air quality, wild storms creating havoc on our transport systems, more frequent and longer lasting power outages, infectious diseases and increased demand on medical services, Local businesses were struggling before any of this occurred. Banks have closed their smaller suburban branches and there are swathes of empty shops throughout the shire. With Covid-19 came panic buying and distress. This is not thriving!

To create a truly liveable, sustainable, productive and collaborative community we support

- A plan that prepares us for the real external threats.
- A plan that creates local supply chains, supports and employs the local community and has long lasting positive effects on our community and environment now and into the future.
- To design with nature to provide for our current and future needs without jeopardising the needs and wellbeing of future generations.
- a plan that serves the local needs in line with state government requirements

What is missing from this document? A plan for preparedness!

Preparedness for:

- Hazardous air quality during fire season, heat waves, ferocious storms
- More frequent and longer lasting power outages, public transport disruptions
- Drought , threat of bushfire
- Social isolation, personal hardship, local food security

Focus areas

Liveable

1A.A1 - Asset management, Identifying, protecting, creating and providing places and spaces for people

Problem - $50,000 went into repairing vandalism and graffiti in 2016/17. Cost and issue that leaving damage 'begets' proliferation.

Proposed solution - Invest into youth engagement projects to reduce the incidence of graffiti and vandalism: e.g. explore together with youths what they would like to see more in this shire (towards support of the youths and young adult groups, typically underrepresented in funding efforts, to live and thrive in the shire, and be creative in this environment, without damage to properties).

1C - Manage and administer the provision of community and cultural facilities to promote the physical, cultural and emotional wellbeing of our community

Problems:

- Community facilities are in high demand yet short supply
- Community facilities are not affordable for many small community groups
- Community facilities are not off grid
- Lack of community facilities equipped to operate as crisis centres in times of disruption/need
Proposed solutions:
- Upgrade community facilities to be multi functional/beneficial.
  The Trust notes and welcomes the plans for the Minor Capital Works planned for the Pennant Hills Community Centre and for the Pennant Hills Library.

1D - Provide diverse and interesting events for our community to participate in and enjoy

Problems:
- The general population doesn't know the history they are literally standing on - ecological and cultural.
  Very little public appreciation of this country's greatest treasure, 65000 years of ancient culture!

Proposed solution:
- Community events to showcase and celebrate local talent, local food, local businesses and must be zero waste
- Community events could be rotated throughout the different Wards and use a variety of venues: schools, large sporting fields, parks, parking lots etc
- Welcome to Country by an Indigenous Person is strongly encouraged at every opening and event.

1E - Manage and coordinate design and construction of civil works

Problems:
- Concrete is highly destructive to the environment
- Unbalanced focus on roads
- Too much concrete, need more permeable paths
- Footpaths don’t allow significant room for trees
- Lack of places to sit outdoors
- Heat waves - not mentioned in the entire document.

Proposed solutions:
- Source and invest in green alternatives to concrete.
- Design for connectivity - pedestrians and social gatherings first (including mobility vehicles and prams), then bikes, then public transport and lastly roads.
- Expand footpaths around cafe/restaurants to activate street side eating - added bonus of more revenue for Council;
- Do a gap analysis on missing links in the footpath network around Pennant Hills, ensuring that residents can always have a safe walking option as a means of transport;
- Water sensitive urban design to capture water runoff while increasing canopy and reducing urban heat.
- Convert car lanes into bike lanes and acquire railway land for connecting bike routes. Always aim to separate human powered traffic from car vehicle traffic per common global best practices around human powered traffic, to ensure safety of bike riders - placing bike riders in danger zones on the road has not proven to attract riders, creating separate paths: riders travel from far to ride.
- Seating nooks, spaces for contemplation, designed into our town centres - The Pennant Hills Civic Trust has made one such application to Hornsby Council already in April 2020, and is looking forward to the implementation.
- Initiatives required to rapidly reduce urban heat. The current park next to the Pennant Hills Library is a fantastic example of managing heat for a wider age group of the community from very young to very old
1F - Assess applications for building development, subdivision and land use proposals

- Incentivise retrofitting and greening of existing housing stock
- Protect mature trees, plant more new trees, increase overall tree canopy.
- Prioritise long term community needs over individual developer needs
- Increase ratio of green space to hard surfaces

1H & 1J - Manage parks and sporting facilities, plan future improvements and identify areas for future green space or open space acquisition and protection

- Focus on sporting facilities and school grounds to be multi functional community resources - Maximise/Extend usage across day, night, weekday, weekend. Remove, or at least open up fencing around locked community spaces, with wider stakeholder reviews to ensure protection of the buildings and area remains guaranteed while pressure on public green spaces is reduced. To protect assets, use CCTV surveillance instead on key installations, strictly within the legal boundaries.
- Focus on developing safe off grid community facilities to be crisis centres in emergencies.

1H.1 - Develop Walking and Cycling Plan for commuter and general recreation activities (Action of Active Living Hornsby Strategy)

- Gain access to land adjacent to railway lines to be converted to cycle paths and green corridors. Positive social and environmental connectivity.
- The Trust has submitted a low cost / high gain "Six Places Walk" proposal to Council in 2019, and is looking forward to it being implemented.
- Hornsby bike plan - The Trust, together with BikeNorth, have presented a proposal for a Pennant Hills to Epping Cycle Path, and is looking forward to its implementation.

1H.6 Exhibit and adopt a Shire-wide Play Plan to identify opportunities for renewal of existing playgrounds

**Problem:** Particularly Pennant Hills has very little field space for sports and recreation. New real estate and maintenance is costly and recurrent.

**Proposed Solution:** Shared community use and shared Council/State maintenance of existing Public School Facilities outside of school hours similar to Cherrybrook Community Centre/Oval. Approach already presented by members of the Civic Trust to the Mayor, Councillors and Managers (4 Sept 2019) with “in principle” endorsement, pending discussion with State MP, Matt Kean.

1H.7 Public Domain

- Develop public domain plans in accordance with adopted community and stakeholder engagement for the following priority areas: Asquith-Mount Colah corridor, Galston Village, Waitara, Thornleigh, West Pennant Hills and Beecroft.

**The Trust is requesting that Pennant Hills is included in this list,** as we have discussed this with the new Council Place Management Team in February 2020.
Sustainable

The recommendations below all fit in the Outcomes 2.1 (The local surroundings and environment are protected), 2.2 (People in Hornsby Shire support recycling and sustainability initiatives) and 2.3 (The Shire is resilient and able to respond to climate change and stresses), in particular to Focus Areas FA7 (using resources wisely), FA8 (adapting to a changing environment) and FA10 (Advocating with the NSW Government for the infrastructure needs of the local area. Services 2A, 2C, 2D, 2G and 2H are all affected in one way or another.

We recommend that Council develop, adopt and implement clear strategies ...

- to redirect any current direct and indirect investments into fossil fuels and related industries away into renewable and sustainable energy sources and industries [FA7/8/10;2A/C/D]
- for the installation of solar PV or solar heating, as well as energy storage solutions for all major council buildings - aquatic centre, sports centre Thornleigh, Waste Management Centre, Libraries, Council Community Preschools, Museums and Art Centres, etc. [FA7/8/10;2A/C/D/G/H]
- to cooperate with other large building owners on improving the use of solar PV and heat for sustainability purposes - Scentre (Westfield), NSW State Government (schools, hospitals, police, ambulance buildings), churches, NSW Rail (railway stations), etc., as well as along railroad, M1, and other major infrastructure on NSW State Government land [FA7/8/10;2A/C/D/G/H]
- on a Hornsby Shire Council Virtual Power Plant (HSCVPP)- to stimulate residents and businesses alike to generate and store electricity from solar PV and other means independently from any major energy retailer, and sell directly to other members of the HSCVPP in the shire, reducing the need for and reliance on High Voltage Transmission infrastructure and the associated costs. Council, as a managing shareholder, could - apart from saving on its own energy bill - even generate a revenue out of this. [FA7/8/10;2A/C/D/G/H]
- to collaborate with neighbouring Councils to start a North Shore Virtual Power Plant together, sharing their PV Solar energy, and saving on energy costs [FA7/8/10;2A/C/D/G/H]
- to start collaboration with suppliers (e.g. Chargefox and others) on the number of EV charging stations in the Shire, especially around Train and Bus stations; [FA7/8;2A/C/D/G]
- to extend the Hornsby Active Living Strategy and the Hornsby Leisure Strategy to expand the active transport network (cycling and walking)
  - remove incentives for motorised transport by introducing 40kmh zones,
  - removing parking, or introducing paid/metered parking,
  - converting two-lane roads into single-lane roads with bike/walk lanes, etc.
- Work with businesses and State Government Operators to introduce secure bicycle parking at public transport interchanges; [FA7/8/12/13/14;2A/C/D,3C/D/H]
- to map out the opportunities and to work the the Member for Hornsby and the Minister for Energy and Environment to stimulate getting a large scale (>150MW) photovoltaic plant into the Shire, using e.g. bare agriculture resources, along the M1 highway, etc. to allow other renewable energy plants such as ammonia or hydrogen to develop.
  - This should be able to create revenue (Council could be a shareholder in the plant), create jobs (during construction as well as for maintenance afterwards, and for production for H2 or NH3 plant); [FA7/8/10/11/13/14;2A/C/D/G]
- to attract a large scale domestic waste incinerator for energy production into the Shire
  - Waste is currently being dumped at Kimbriki tip and naturally releases large quantities of methane gas, as well as simply burying large quantities of flammable waste materials.
  - Instead these should be incinerated in a combined heat/power energy facility, and the energy inherently stored in the waste material can be reused in the form of electricity or heat.
This is standard practice in many European countries, including Switzerland (7M inhabitants, operates 30 incinerators, converting around 4M tonnes of waste into valuable energy, 2017 data), Germany and Sweden (10M inhabitants, 34 incinerators, <1% waste to landfill, 2018 data)

- Modern incinerators have excellent dust filtering capabilities, and the emissions from the smokestack (mainly water vapour) are demonstrably better than the emissions from the tip. An incinerator can create a significant number of permanent unskilled and skilled jobs.

- Depending on the location, the excess heat from the incinerator can be used to heat swimming pools, homes or industrial processes [FA7/8/12,DMW/WMRR].

2C Conserve and enhance natural resources

- Reserve management - maintaining a connected network of natural areas linking essential green corridors. The Trust recommends that Council identify these corridors and develop them to link essential green corridors, e.g. from the Berowra Valley NP, Berowra Creek, the former Pony Club at the end of Laurence St / Schofield Pde, through Pennant Hills into Pennant Hills Park, Byles Creek, Lane Cove NP.

- Pollutants removed from waterways via catchment remediation devices: extend this to monitor the effects of stormwater and sewage overflows into ZigZag creek and other creeks around Pennant Hills, avoiding public health issues such as bacterial infections and algae bloom downstream [2C.D2]

2C.2 Implement catchment health monitoring program to inform management priorities

**Problem:** There is not the confidence that Sydney Water are monitoring adequately. The Creeks regularly stink

**Proposed solution:** Is there opportunity here for the IOT, permanent online monitoring with a widespread sensor network?

2C.A15 Implement program to inspect private land for priority weeds

**Problem:** Proliferation of weeds if not kept in check

**Proposed solution:** Provide for a Council App for people to quickly report where they see instances. Make use of volunteer groups (plogs) also to assist in removal.

2C.2b % of nutrient guideline exceedances at Hornsby Industrial site

**Problem:** There is an ongoing problem of sewage at multiple points. Sydney Water attends to call outs, but the problem returns and persists year after year; West Hornsby Wastewater effluent always stinks and looks like a No1 priority. Effluent from developers at multiple points attaching sewage to stormwater needs resolutions within the plan timeframe.

**Proposed solution:** Active monitoring at multiple points and Council rather than residents hold Sydney Water to their responsibilities. Perhaps revert to smart sensor IOT network use where possible.

2D Living within a changing environment

- 2D.A1 Implement the bushland walking track master plan. The Trust very much welcomes this and has proposed a low cost / high gain “Six Places Walk” proposal to Council in 2019, and is looking forward to it being implemented.

2D.3 Adopt Water Sensitive Hornsby Plan and prepare work plan to implement

**Problem:** The Plan is not currently implemented and not fully costed?
2020-2022 DRAFT DELIVERY PROGRAM INCLUDING THE OPERATIONAL PLAN 2020/21
Submission from the Pennant Hills District Civic Trust, Inc.

Proposed solutions: The cost is likely to be bigger than Council resources allow. We recommend to see Dialogue with Sydney Water and NSW State Government for funding, particularly as the Hawkesbury River is affected.

2D.A18 Implement community education program for water sensitive urban design and catchment management

Problems:
- The Community has insufficient awareness of the consequences of their actions regarding water
- Landscapers routinely put garden debris down the stormwater drains. There are even reports of Council contractors doing the same.

Proposed solutions:
- Engage with State Education Department to show Attenborough “Blue Planet II” episodes at Primary and High School. Consider engaging visiting celebrities respected by youngsters to reinforce the “taboo” of litter. Engage with schools to have each class do an hour’s cleanup themselves to see what arrives in the creeks. Expand the Water Catchment Remediation education – make a film and get a visit to at least one installation.
- Expand the Catchment Remediation trips for residents. Circulate a short youtube video explaining where something going into the stormwater drain goes.
- Provide an App for residents to report infringements, and issue penalties/fines to recoup the cost.

2F Protect and conserve trees on public and private lands [FA6]
- 2F.3 Create an Urban Forest Strategy
- 2F.3 Create a Biodiversity Management Plan
These are excellent initiatives and the Trust supports these.

Problem: The Shire Vision does not seem entirely clear. The Ecology has to be holistic and not looked at in the respective isolation of Public, Private, Bushland etc. The Private part in particular is missing the right questions in the Plan Document, as well as understanding “corridor” concepts.

The Canopy is forcibly changing in the Shire along with urban density increase, changing DCP over the years (does not favour trees), & 10:50 rules etc. having resulted in a substantial loss of trees over the past few years. The reality is that e.g. Tall Gum trees will entirely disappear within 30 years within residential housing and only exist really in Bushland. We are only discussing the pace of their decline, and no new ones are being planted. We ask, what then is the plan for 2030, 2040 and 2050 of what the Canopy of the Shire will look like, particularly that part within the control of the Residents

Proposed solutions:
- Commission a study to include the Private Component to decide what to expect residents to have in the Yards – what types of tree and what heights, and what KPIs. It needs to be achievable within demands for rooftop Solar PV and heating, etc.
- If this really wants to be “The Bushland Shire”, residents need to accept that there is a collective contribution in terms of nuisance of leaves and cost of tree surgery. There needs to be an agreed policy document within the Shire, and potentially signed off by new Residents. People with little concept of Ecology need a “one pager” or Video explaining the connection between their keeping minimum of trees, and preservation of the Ecosystem, and what species we are trying to help. We believe a consultation or education programme may be useful in this context.
2F.19 Develop and deliver a Schools program on a range of waste issues including: recycling, composting, worm farming, littering and smart shopping

**Problem:** We observe daily evidence of littering on Ramsay Rd between Station and PHHS, and in and around PHHS grounds. This indicates that students a) do not feel “taboo” about littering and b) do not understand the microplastics issue. They do not realise that garbage in Ramsay Rd is quickly in the Creek and then the Ocean.

**Proposed Solutions:**
- This links in with [2D.A18 Implement community education program for water sensitive urban design and catchment management], and we recommend the same approach through education.
- Encourage Cleanup Australia Day participation in schools within the Shire.

2G.19 Develop and deliver a schools program on a range of waste issues including: recycling, composting, worm farming, littering and smart shopping

- The Trust welcomes this initiative very much - residents are complaining about **huge amounts of littering in the area**, in particular on the transit routes between the train station / bus interchange and the Pennant Hills Public and High Schools, Education is as always the key to improvement.

**Productive**

- Plan for local food security - Protect rural lands from development and expand local farms and local harvest trail
- Develop Local electric mini-van shuttle-service to reduce car ownership
- Source local goods and services first
- Employ locals to remove noxious weeds and regenerate the land
- Create local food composting programmes to reduce landfill
- Actively work with the NSW Government and the Local Member to return local waste levies so they can be reinvested into local waste strategies (refer to above)
- Reduce food waste by diverting food to local charities.

3C.31 - Commence a review of the Pennant Hills Road Corridor between Pennant Hills and Thornleigh following the opening of NorthConnex

- This should include the “Returning Local Streets to Local Residents”, discourage rat runs, and increase the chance for small and medium sized enterprises to sprout along the corridor, creating jobs and amenity for the local people.

3D Manage traffic flows, parking, access to public transport and road safety

- Complete annual review of traffic, parking and road safety data. The Trust has engaged with the Council Traffic Management section to introduce a permanent 40km/h speed limit and traffic calming measures in a **High Pedestrian Activity Area** around the Town Centre of Pennant Hills [3D.A5]

3G. Collecting, transporting, recycling, disposing and monitoring of waste materials from local businesses to assist them achieve resource recovery and sustainability outcomes

**Problem:** Businesses/Contractors like those from the Construction Industry are not clients, and are not careful. Significant debris of construction sites and roadworks is frequently left on the kerb during and after the job. Certifiers are not fulfilling their duties.
Solution: Make a reporting app to make it easy for residents to notify the council. This will additional funding for more ranger staff to react and respond. It can provide a cost recovery mechanism via compliance, as the Shire gets known for monitoring and enforcement.

Collaborative

The Trust is very positive to see that Council is aiming to commence the **Pennant Hills Town Centre Review** [3C.29], and to produce a **Pennant Hills Place Plan** and outline actions for consideration in the Delivery Program [3H.4]. The Trust has recommended this for several years now, has supported the “**Picture Pennant Hills**” survey and has contributed its own survey with similar outcomes.

At this time (early 2020) many small businesses and larger service providers have closed, and many shops are empty. A Trust survey among owners and tenants has told us that tenants are reluctant to move in and sign leases with eviction clauses because of the ongoing uncertainty about the short and medium term future of the Town Centre. A Place Plan will lead to more certainty in the local business community, which is good for business, recreates jobs, and offers amenity to the residents.

The Trust has observed a very worrying trend with the **business confidence in Pennant Hills**. Over the past 18 months, the following **businesses have closed**: The Corner Cafe, Byblos, Java Lava, Westpac Bank, The Craft Depot, Belmonte’s Pizzeria, Chinese Private Dining, The Wool Shop, 2 hairdressers, Tulip Cafe, San Pathology, MLC, the Two Dollar shop, and Asal’s Persian Treats. It is rumoured the newsagent on Yarra Rd is next. With the exception of two shops inside the “Market Place”, no new shops have opened up in the past two years.

The owners of each of those failed businesses is statistically more likely lose their house, get divorced suffer depression and commit suicide. These are not just empty shops. Admittedly retail times are tough but the Trust believes that the closures in Pennant Hills are higher than we would expect other than from a tough retail climate alone.

The Trust was talking to a successful business owner in Pennant Hills, about the **redevelopment of Pennant Hills Town Centre**. This business owner did not expect to survive a major redevelopment, after watching the redevelopment of Beecroft Place. A lack of certainty around the redevelopment is affecting business.

This lack of certainty is resulting in
1. no capital expenditure on the premises by the landlord or the tenants: who wants to invest in a building that may be knocked down in a year or two?
2. demolition clauses in Leases. Admittedly Council has indicated that it will be "some time" until the redevelopment occurs. But are business owners willing to bet the house and family on this loose assurance. Would Councillors bet theirs?
3. companies that are breaking even or worse are closing their doors. Why would a business owner invest time and money into redeveloping a business that may be forced to close in the near future.

We need **Council as a body** and **Councillors individually** to fight this battle for the residents of Pennant Hills, it is time to stand up for Pennant Hills and help solve this issue.

Businesses need certainty. If it is 10 years or more to the redevelopment, then Council should shout it from the rooftops and let businesses and landlords know if it is less, then Council needs to let business know so that business owners and operators can navigate their way, and not lose their house or family. We invite any suggestions of how Council can help address this matter. Business should not be left in the dark. **This is about much more than simply empty shops.**

The Trust is positive about the February 2020 meeting with the Council Place Management Team, and **strongly recommends** that the community led Place Plan for Pennant Hills proceeds in 2020/21 [3C/4J]. A Place Plan is about much more than just to improve functionality and appeal of the town centre - it is about viability, economy, jobs, physical and mental health, and families.