

Social Wellbeing Position Paper

July 2004



Foreword

The Social Wellbeing Position Paper is one of a series of reports that have been developed to assist Council and the community of Parramatta to develop a long term Strategic Plan for the LGA. This is one of three position papers; the others explore our environmental wellbeing and economic wellbeing.

The Social Wellbeing Position Paper provides an initial exploration of the social environment of the Parramatta, to identify current pressures and impacts, as well as future trends that will affect the future wellbeing of the LGA.

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1 Parramatta Twenty25 and the Triple Bottom Line Strategies

The position papers have been prepared to guide the development of three '**Triple Bottom Line' Strategies** (i.e. Economic, Social and Environmental) which will then be integrated into one 'city wide' strategic plan called **Parramatta Twenty25**.

The Triple Bottom Line Strategies outlines the desired future, provides a description of what that destination might look like for different issues and list the strategies required to get there.

Parramatta Twenty25 will bring these strategies together to ensure consistency, minimise conflict and maximise synergies between social, economic and environmental factors. Parramatta Twenty25 will also provide direction in the preparation of future Council Management Plans and other mechanisms for the allocation of resources.

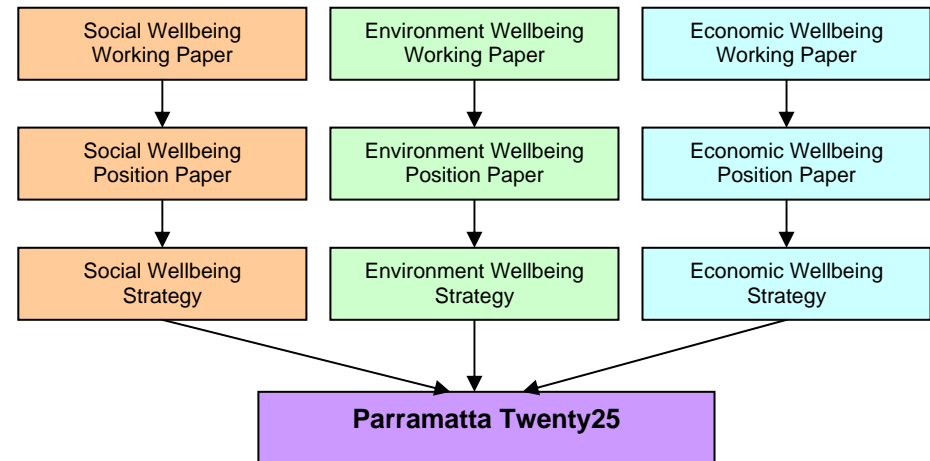
1.1 Objectives

The objectives of the Position Paper are to:

- ❖ identify the major pressures on the environment
- ❖ describe the existing trends
- ❖ identify future challenges and gaps in both knowledge and processes
- ❖ To promote discussion on the challenges we face and how we can begin to address them
- ❖ To form a basis and way forward for producing the TBL strategies

This information has been summarised from a **Working Paper** which explored the following questions:

- What is the current environment (global, national, state, local) in which we are operating?
- Where are we now?
- What are the trends or changes that are occurring?
- What are the future issues and challenges we face?
- How is Council and the community responding to these challenges?



2 Why is social wellbeing important?

For a community to be sustainable, social issues must be in balance with economic and environmental wellbeing. All things are interconnected and influence social wellbeing. This is acknowledged at levels of society, from global organisations such as the United Nations to local government authorities and community organisations.

But what does social wellbeing mean? What issues does it embrace and how do they tie in with environmental and economic factors?

One author defines it as “a community in which all have an opportunity to live a satisfying life, the responsibility to secure for everyone a humanising education, living wages, public safety, equal justice under the law and unfettered religious and political participation.” (Lara-Braund 1999)

For the purposes of this paper, this is the meaning we infer. Community wellbeing flows from a mix of social, cultural, economic and environmental factors. The aim of Council in developing a triple-bottom line strategy is to strive for the right balance for this mix.

Council, like other layers of government, has no overarching social wellbeing strategy to date. Council has, however, developed a significant number of policies, action plans and programs to address many issues including cycleways, recreation, access and equity, arts and culture, homelessness, affordable housing, Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, traffic plans and safety, to name but a few.

Council is establishing a method by which the social needs of our community are effectively planned for the future. This must be done through the collaboration of many parties.

This paper outlines issues broadly contributing to Social Wellbeing and identifies where additional research, knowledge and services may be required for further consideration.

3 Major Pressures on social wellbeing

Globalisation is a significant force driving social change internationally. More skilled and semi-skilled jobs have moved to developing countries, which have lower labour costs, while developed nations have shifted towards service and knowledge industries that require higher education levels. Social change has been further shaped by an ongoing displacement of people through war, occupation, political changes and natural events such as drought.

While international organisations have formulated global social policy to ensure basic rights, these developments have had little impact at national level. National policy has been concerned primarily with Australia's economic performance. Social services, such as charities, churches and private organizations, are now fulfilling functions once performed by government. With funding pressures being felt in health, education, housing and the arts, local governments are now under more pressure to provide services with limited opportunities to raise funds.

Meanwhile, migration levels have remained high, with a large number of migrants settling in Western Sydney. Parramatta's steadily increasing population has led to greater demand for open space, better access to shops, transport and housing in times of decreasing housing affordability.

The changing demographic make-up of Parramatta has reduced the capacity of the community to work together. The population is

more mobile, travelling further afield to find appropriate employment. It is also more diverse in language and cultural background with increased economic gaps in income and in education.

4 Social Wellbeing Trends

Parramatta has emerged as a culturally diverse regional centre, a hub for transport, employment, education and medical research. Its residents hail from more than 120 countries, though the six major countries of origin for migrants are China (5.6percent in 2001 Census), Lebanon (4.2), UK (3.1), India (2.3), New Zealand (2) and Korea (1.7).

More than 50 percent of people holding Temporary Protection Visas (TPV) – about 3000 people – now live in the Western Sydney area where they are close to their ethnic communities.

Statistics show that movement into the Parramatta LGA is predominantly by people under 40. Almost 47 percent of the new arrivals have children, while lone households account for almost 23 percent.

In terms of social disadvantage, Parramatta has more than Baulkham Hills to the north but less than neighbouring councils to the south, west and east.

Rezoning of some areas in 2001 has resulted in increased housing density, and a greater need for more open space, transport, contemporary heritage interpretation and community connectivity in those areas.

Below is a summary of key social wellbeing areas followed by recent initiatives in Place Management and Partnerships. The conclusions are in the Key Findings

1. Community Care
2. Housing
3. Health,
4. Education
5. Heritage
6. Recreation
7. Transport
8. Culture
9. Arts
10. Safety
11. Social Capital

4.1 Community Care

Council adheres to the belief that people of different life stages should have fair and equal access to services, facilities and opportunities, including the capacity to be involved in community activity and decision-making. This is the hallmark of a cohesive community.

To this end, Parramatta Council works with charities and volunteer organisations to provide the following services and facilities.

- Volunteers for Community Support program
- Carers support
- Child care centres
- Meals on Wheels
- Visits to isolated residents
- People with Disabilities
- Seniors Leisure Learning Centre
- Lawn Mowing Service

- Welfare Support
- Granville Youth and Community Recreation Centre
- Meeting spaces for community groups

Council also provides grants for community development, support and advice. Tangible results include the increasing use of community facilities, and the improved services for people with disabilities, despite funding cuts from State and Federal governments.

In addition, Council offers a pensioner rebate of \$100 on Council rates in addition to the State Government rebate of \$25.

Plans and policies covering community care began with the Community Services Plan 1994 which addressed: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Children, Disability, Family Support, Health, Housing, Library Services, Non English Speaking Background, Older People, Women, Young People. Recent plans include:

- Parramatta Social Plan 2000
- Holroyd Neighbour Aid Funding Agreement
- Plan for Children & Families 2002 and Beyond
- Libraries and Information Services Unit – Strategic Plan 2003 -2007

4.2 Housing

New research shows that housing has become less affordable in Parramatta. It now takes three years longer to pay off the average mortgage – 11 years up from eight years in 2001. And while the average salary rose by 20.7 percent, the average house price rose 63 percent from \$249,000 to \$407,000, according to a study from

the Western Sydney Region of Councils (WSROC) on *Housing Affordability in Greater Sydney 2004*.

The largest cost increase for mortgage and rent has been in suburbs such as Epping, Carlingford, Eastwood, Dundas Valley and Ermington. Housing Indicators show half the residents in the north-eastern areas of the LGA own their own home, with 42 percent of Granville/Guildford residents having the second highest home ownership.

Among existing dwellings there appears to be a rise in the number of owner-occupied households. However, many of the new medium and high-density dwellings have attracted investors. Households with owner-occupiers owned as a percentage of all dwellings actually has decreased slightly.

The Local Government Area of Parramatta has one of the highest levels of social housing in NSW with 10.2percent. Blacktown LGA has over 11percent. An additional 15percent of dwellings with the Parramatta area receiving Commonwealth Rental Assistance pay more than 30percent of their income in rent.

The Department of Housing has identified housing stock that is not suitable for current clients' needs while more than 1,000 dwellings have reached an age where they need replacing.

The Department is committed to regenerating the area south of Granville, which has up to 30percent social housing. The renewal of this size includes careful consideration of the social and economic needs of the area. The Department is also planning the redevelopment of clusters of properties that are spread across the LGA.

The current policy of the Department of Housing and Parramatta Council is to ensure redevelopment of public housing is undertaken in such a way that the public and private housing is 'seamless' and not identifiable. The decreasing affordability of housing and the increasing waiting list for public housing is likely to continue to change the housing mix in Parramatta.

Parramatta Council is currently reviewing the Residential Development Strategy and the Development Control Plan. These planning instruments can positively influence the use of land and density of housing. They have a direct impact on the area's social wellbeing through encouraging better design of housing, providing adequate open space, preserving heritage and a greater housing mix.

To address the needs of an estimated 100 people who sleep roughly or live in abandoned buildings, Council has developed a Homelessness Strategy. In partnership with the Parramatta Coalition Against Homelessness, Council is working with Community Services and the Housing Department to coordinate services and provide future accommodation.

Three land use plans have a major impact on housing: Parramatta Regional Environmental Plan 28, Parramatta Local Environmental Plan and the Development Control Plan (DCP). The Residential Development Strategy which is currently being reviewed, provides the rationale for the zoning in the plans. Other housing needs are addressed in the Homelessness Strategy and the Parramatta Affordable Housing Scheme.

4.3 Health

Health is a complete state of physical, mental and social wellbeing and not just the absence of illness, according to the World Health Organisation, which established social determinants to ensure that the city, school, workplace, neighbourhood and home provide greater opportunities for promoting health.

As an example of responding to these determinants, Council aims to design neighbourhoods that encourage people to get out of their car and walk to local shops and parks because there is a direct relationship between the level of exercise and physical and mental health.

The emerging partnership between the Department of Health and Council will identify opportunities where Department policies and programs to improve health standards can be implemented in the Parramatta area. Public health initiatives such as *Simply Active* are currently operating. A health audit across the LGA in the three residential areas and the primary centre would show the impact of health issues on social wellbeing. It is anticipated that local health planning will be integrated into other planning documents, such as master planning, redevelopment and social programs.

In terms of infrastructure, Parramatta is aided by the creation of a new biomedical precinct in Westmead, with two major public hospitals and related facilities sited there.

Council provides health protection services through Education on Public Health Awareness, Control of Mosquitoes, Needle Disposal Facilities and through Monitoring of Food Preparation on Premises. Council also provides supporting services to alleviate the strain on community care networks, to reach out to elderly who are isolated, to people with disabilities and to those who care for them.

In working to ensure health becomes a major driver of lifestyle changes, Council also has the Parramatta Social Plan covering the health of different groups which are considered at risk.

4.4 Education

Parramatta is an education centre for secondary schools, coaching colleges and post-secondary levels and has a tertiary education rate that is very similar to the whole of the Sydney region.

This sector appears to be strong. The Rydalmere Campus of the University of Sydney has greatly expanded opportunities in the LGA. The number of those with a degree or higher education is rising while the percentage of those without a qualification has dropped. In response, the local library has had to provide more study areas and improved Internet facilities. Council is working to ensure the number of schools complements the forecast increase in population, particularly in the Granville area.

Council provides Education, Culture and Leisure services through five Libraries that maintain an extensive collection of books and audio visual material and assist people in finding information. The libraries promote community information, target language and age groups, provide access and training in technology and the use of the internet which assists in bridging the gap in the 'digital divide' and equips users for employment.

4.5 Heritage

The Parramatta Regional Environment Plan promotes heritage as integral to the identity of the city and indeed the foundation of the

country. Local heritage represents all social classes, with examples from Indigenous, contact heritage and contemporary social life. Parramatta is also the location of community heritage organisations such as the National Trust and many small 'house' museums such as Elizabeth Farm.

Council has cherished this heritage by establishing the Parramatta Heritage Centre. Its role is to connect residents to the events and memories of Parramatta and to extend awareness of the area's distant and contemporary past.

Council preserves the heritage it proclaims through the two environmental plans. Heritage is being increasingly well documented and interpreted. For example, Council requires master plans to incorporate the heritage of the area in public art on the site.

4.6 Recreation and Sport

The Parramatta Open Space Plan (2003) researched local community needs and developed plans for passive and active recreation activities. This plan also addressed the need for local parks which are the new "backyard" for residents of townhouses and units.

A recent Western Sydney Region report identified the need for informal parks for culturally diverse groups for whom large social gatherings are an important part of life. Access to water, interaction with nature and travel on trails and routes for walking, cycling, jogging and rollerblading were other strong demands.

Council has noted significant increase in demand for its sports grounds and its pools. These results are not surprising given the area's expanding population.

Other reports on participation in sport have noted increasing demand for soccer, AFL and Gridiron, and other casual games played by groups unaffiliated with formal sports clubs. Council staff have also noted ongoing requests for indoor sport and recreational facilities, such as inline skating tracks.

Council has developed plans for Recreation and Open Space. Given that such recreation activities and enjoyment of the natural environment contribute greatly to social wellbeing, the question now is how to maintain access to open space and to expand participation in recreation activities.

4.7 Transport

Transport, including mobility and access, is considered a major contributor to social wellbeing. In this regard, traffic planning is part of all major developments, and land-use activities are integrated with the transport network to ensure developments complement existing public transport services.

Parramatta residents travel more by train than their Sydney counterparts. Yet the car is still the preferred method of getting to work. The number of households with two or three cars also increased by more than 10 percent between 1996 and 2001.

In the Regional Environmental Plan, the State Government and Council have set a target of 40 percent of the population travelling to work in Parramatta using public transport. The introduction of the T-Ways area will improve the transportation system – how? What is

the T-ways area?. Council is working for a frequent and affordable system by negotiating with State Rail and bus operators.

Council has taken initiatives in transport and mobility with extensive cycle ways, improved pedestrian movement within the city centre and a new traffic strategy. Council also subsidises community buses.

4.8 Culture

Culturally, Parramatta can report many positive trends. The value of heritage appears to have strengthened. The role of Indigenous heritage has been acknowledged. Parramatta City Council has made a formal apology to Indigenous people for past wrongs and has an ongoing dialogue with the Aboriginal people of the area.

The conservation and interpretation of colonial heritage plays a vital role in defining Parramatta's identity and the Heritage Centre has a museum of the local social history.

There is greater recognition of the different cultures living in the Parramatta area and recent events have heightened awareness of Islamic culture.

The Arts and Culture Plan has outlined a greater initiative for Council in developing creative places for arts, increased support for festivals and events that celebrate our city's culture, and ways of nurturing the creative spirit.

4.9 Arts

Council has long been a leader in public art and the arts generally remain a growing area of importance. Parramatta has a history of lobbying for the development of arts centres. The establishment of the Riverside Theatre development in the late 1980s and the Parramatta Heritage and Visitor Information Centre in the late 1990s addressed some of these concerns. However, there is a continued demand for an art gallery as part of the ongoing development of the City. Council is discussing with providers and State Government the development of additional arts facilities.

4.10 Safety

The Parramatta Community Safety and Crime Prevention Plan has led to partnerships that formed a whole-of-community responsibility for issues of crime and public safety. It has contributed to improvements in safety. This issue requires the continual collaboration between Council, the local police and the community.

Often an area can be deemed unsafe due to poor perception. Factors such as a badly designed built environment, the presence of homeless people, the presence of large groups of youth and people begging all contribute to this impression. Some areas of Parramatta are perceived as being unsafe but the actual trends in recorded crime statistics in the Parramatta LGA from 1999 to 2003 show a marked decrease in criminal activity.

Council promotes safer communities by providing street lighting, improving road safety, removing graffiti and running community safety programs. It also provides emergency management services

for cleanup and recovery in times of need and contributes financially to State Emergency Services in the LGA.

4.11 Social Capital

What is meant by social capital? It is a sense of community, belonging and interconnectedness. People cooperate more when they are well-connected to others. In fact, the Productivity Commission research shows that well-connected individuals are more likely to be “hired, housed, healthy and happy”.

The more connected the community is, the more easily people pass around information that spreads skills, knowledge and innovation. This, in turn, increases the level of co-operative and socially minded behaviour so that less is spent on security and insurance policies.

Council provides civic leadership to build up social capital. Civic functions recognise the events that have contributed to the history and wellbeing of Parramatta and strengthen belonging to the community. Council has promoted civic participation by informing and engaging community organisations, advisory committees and individuals in Council's decision-making processes. Council is introducing structured panels as a more reliable and consistent way of involving residents in planning and decisions that impact them or their neighbourhood.

5 What are our future challenges to a more sustainable social environment?

5.1 Place management and building sustainable communities

Council provides place managers for its five wards as well as the CBD, and has many plans and policies governing neighbourhoods from streetscapes to neighbourhood regeneration.

Place planning is an initiative of Council that builds on the strengths of the local community while taking into account the needs of target groups.

Council has worked with communities to discover how a place works and what is important to its diverse communities. Place management focuses on looking at the everyday activities of people and what supports or hinders these activities. It seeks to find out where the place and its people would like to be in the future. The role of the place manager is to work with the community to identify strategies and actions to help achieve improvements in day-to-day living and to improve overall wellbeing into the future.

5.2 Building better partnerships

After a review of the value of partnerships, Council's Partnership Plan developed a commitment to engage State Government and community organisations in providing services throughout the Parramatta area.

A number of partnerships, agreements and regular meetings with other layers of government have been established. Council has strategic alliances with the Department of Housing and NSW Police. Also in place are programs with community-based organisations such as Information and Cultural Exchange. Council also has a variety of sponsorship and funding relationships.

The range of relationships with outside organisations is vast. In the case of homelessness, for example, Council has a formal agreement with Parramatta Mission to provide grooming facilities on behalf of Council. In other situations, Council provides professional advice and support to community organisations. Local people actively participate when provided with opportunities – for example, through bush care and parks committees. Council is committed to working collaboratively to provide social wellbeing services through partnerships that merge services and maximise the use of resources.

The changes in social structure that have taken place over time have led to significant changes in the way social wellbeing is maintained and enriched. Historically, people have supported each other in extended families or in close communities and developed the capacity to create vibrant communities people.

For example, “meals on wheels” began as a church initiative with volunteers supporting the elderly and disabled, then it became a

community organisation and is now a Council-run community service which is viable through the generosity of volunteers.

As needs have become more complex there is no simple solution and no single organisation with the resources to meet the all the needs of such a diverse community. In Parramatta, the Department of Community Services and three churches in Parramatta have combined their separate services in a coordinated program for homeless men called "Pathways out of Homelessness". The Department of Housing and Council are supporting this initiative by providing long- term housing solutions at the end of the Pathways program. Note: the Department of Community Services is the key department in this from the public sector.

The current and emerging challenges to social wellbeing will require creative solutions that draw on existing services and strengthen the capacity of the community to generate new ways of enriching social wellbeing. The networking of government and non government sectors through the creation of partnerships is critical.

6 Key findings

Undoubtedly Council has made a major difference in some key areas of social wellbeing in recent years, and both non-government and State Government agencies have contributed greatly to social wellbeing.

The area's social wellbeing is sustained by an extraordinary variety of services provided by funded organisations and Government agencies as well as the volunteer groups.

The review has shown that Social Wellbeing can only be improved by Council working in partnership with other agencies and community leaders.

An upgrade in basic services such as health, education, housing, transport and safety will flow from closer cooperation between the providers in the planning and delivery of services.

Council has a leadership role in expressing the cultural identity of Parramatta and strengthening its profile as a leading city in the area of social wellbeing.

However, low levels of funding limit the services it can provide and there are no high-level policies that coordinate and prioritise services.

Council sees the need to strengthen the capacity of community networks to take an active role in issues that have impact on them.

The ongoing renewal of buildings and public areas requires Council to work with developers, businesses and private owners to upgrade the quality of neighbourhoods in a way that develops strong and healthy communities while respecting the heritage that characterises the city of Parramatta.

The issues that have arisen from the research and consultation for this paper will form the basis of a social wellbeing strategy.