

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens Plan of Management

A Plan of Management is a public document that sets out how community land is to be used, improved, managed, and maintained. Council develops Plans of Management under the *Local Government Act 1993* and assigns one or more category to the land which will govern how the land can be used.

The purpose of the PoM is to provide a comprehensive framework for the management of the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens in order to protect its scenic, environmental, social, education, research and passive recreation values.

The revised PoM will be updated to reflect current community and Council priorities and issues, incorporate changes in grant funding, legislation or Council directions and to recognise completed actions.

Wingecarribee Shire Council actively seeks the involvement of the community in the preparation of its Plans of Management. The purpose of community engagement in this process is to identify the community values attached to the land and to provide a forum in which to collect and understand related community issues.

As well as ensuring the Plan complies with the community engagement requirements of the *Local Government Act 1993*, the main advantages of involving the community in the process are that it:

- Ensures management objectives are community owned and understood
- Promotes active participation of residents in activities that affect community life
- Utilises and acknowledges community knowledge and understanding
- Advises and keeps the community informed



THE CONVERSATION

In early 2023, engagement was conducted in preparation for a revised Plan of Management for the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens (SHBG). Consultation began with a workshop held with the SHBG Directors at the Botanic Gardens on Tuesday 21 February 2023. The general community was then invited to provide feedback on how they use the reserve and key issues via Your Say Wingecarribee. Feedback was collected over four weeks, from Monday 3 April through to Monday 1 May 2023.

Online Survey

An online survey was open during the consultation period on the *Your Say Wingecarribee* website for the community to provide feedback and share their thoughts on the challenges and improvements that they would like to see. The page received 403 visits and a total of 181 surveys were completed.

WHO WE ENGAGED

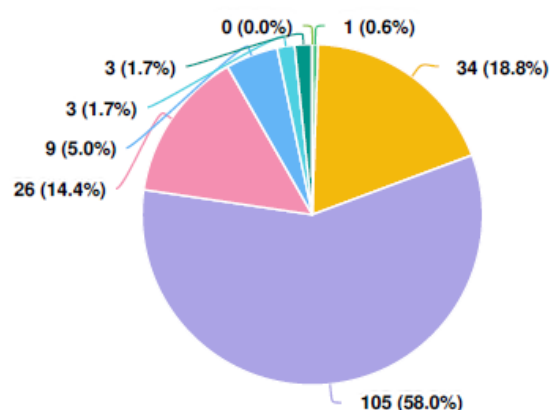
The consultation targeted Wingecarribee residents but did not exclude those who visit from outside the area.

The consultation was promoted via numerous channels including the Your Say Wingecarribee newsletter, Community Update, Social Media, Council's newsletter, radio, along with emails to identified groups.



WHAT WE HEARD

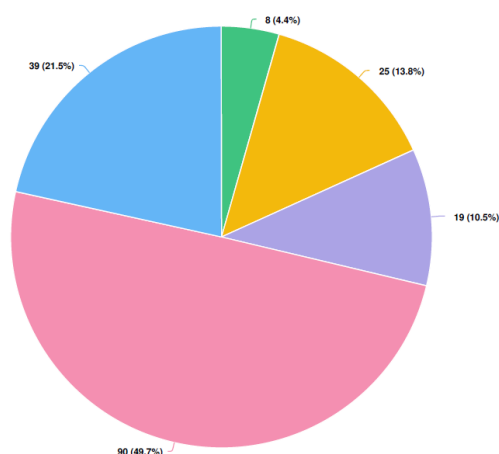
Postcodes nominated within the survey:



Question options

2571 2575 2576 2577 2578 2579 Other (please specify) 2574

How often the participants visited the SHBG:

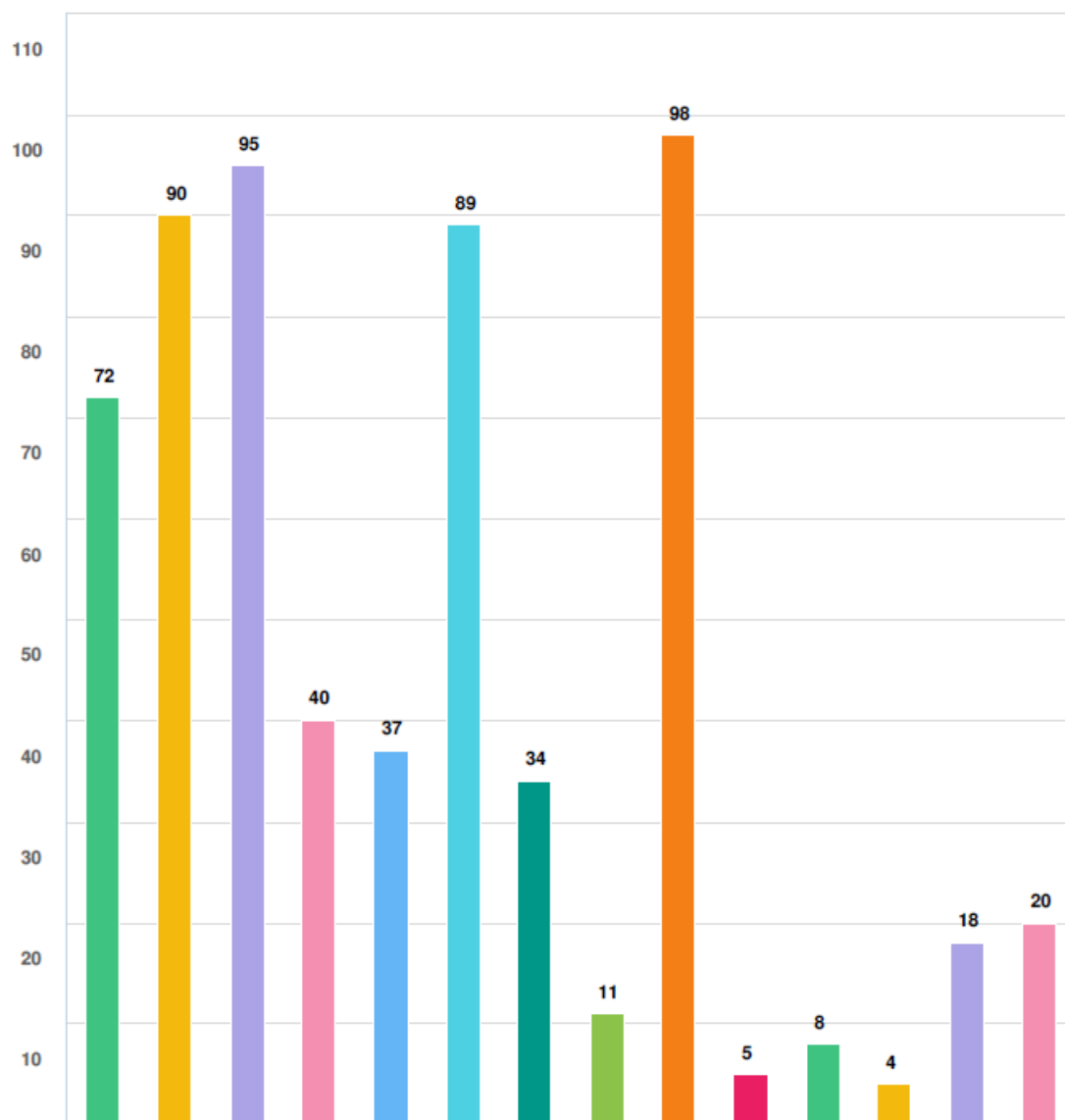


Question options

At least several times a week Weekly Several times a month Several times throughout the year
Less than once a year



Primary activities whilst visiting the SHBG:



Question options

- Visiting exhibitions (e.g. Earth Hour)
- Attending events
- Purchasing plants and/or getting garden advice
- Volunteer gardening and/or plant nursery work
- Wildlife watching
- Enjoying the outlook and nature
- Visiting the playground
- Picnicking
- Walking
- Running
- Cycling
- Other exercise activities (e.g. yoga, park run)
- Educational activities
- Other (please specify)



Other activities included:

- ❖ Admiring and looking at plants and planting's
- ❖ Viewing public art
- ❖ Have not visited
- ❖ Informal gatherings
- ❖ Latham Snipe count
- ❖ The Autumn Fair

Most Valued at the SHBG:

Major themes included:

- ❖ Highly value the Botanic Gardens as a great community asset
- ❖ Learning about plants and horticulture
- ❖ Natural landscape values
- ❖ Open space with good facilities

Representative sample comments

- *A unique feature for the district for residents to enjoy and an excellent attraction for tourists.*
- *I value the unique resource it offers residents of our area it provides information and a social function plus education all within a beautiful setting- there is nothing to match it in the highlands.*
- *That it provides local communities the opportunity for both adults and children to enjoy a valuable resource and to learn the importance of maintaining green space for leisure.*
- *The Southern Highland is renowned for its beauty and the wide range of cool climate plants that grow here. It is only fitting then to have a dedicated area to showcase them.*
- *I'm enjoying seeing it coming along as time goes by. From nothing, a beautiful garden has been created which symbolises how our family and our area have changed over time.*
- *It is a beautiful new Botanic Garden suitable to our climate. It has added a great deal to my and my family's enjoyment of life.*
- *I'm pleased that eventually we will have a botanic garden to reflect our 4 season cool climate environment. It is a great green space that has the potential to provide enjoyment, education, recreation and connection for locals and visitors. A pity it is not happening as quickly as it could!*
- *It is a horticultural experience, you can see plants that are grown extensively throughout our region, can buy plants, and you can help support it through volunteering. It's a community hub.*
- *The green open space (pleasure gardens) for gentle recreation and observation; and the waterway potential for wildlife which will be greatly enhanced by suitable native vegetation planting and the potential for improving the biodiversity corridor connections.*



- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ <i>It should feature native species especially endangered and especially endemic to the Southern Highlands.</i>→ <i>The open space and the wetlands which contain a variety of local waterbirds as well as significant migratory birds including Latham's Snipe.</i>→ <i>I think it excellent to be involved in making a wonderful space that will be a haven for people, birds and wild life for generations to come.</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ <i>Fully fenced playground, the gardens, the space, amenities, parking</i>→ <i>The great playground and wide open spaces. Our kids love the koala statues!</i>→ <i>It's accessibility, it's peaceful atmosphere. Watching it grow is fantastic. Seeing so many volunteers helping it grow.</i>→ <i>Pleasant surrounds, birdlife. the ponds area. Seating. The picnic tables are very useful.</i>→ <i>It is a fantastic green space breaking up the suburban look, Potential to be a great park.</i>→ <i>Easy access for everyone. Peaceful and beautiful community space - with more attention required.</i>→ <i>Peace and quiet, beautiful natural environment.</i> |

Main challenges/management issues that are impacting the SHBG:

Major themes included:

- ❖ Funding for the development of the gardens
- ❖ Implementing the master plan in a timely manner
- ❖ Management of a high maintenance garden and lacking native species
- ❖ Maintaining ongoing support by volunteers
- ❖ Increased support needed from Council
- ❖ Transparency around current management
- ❖ Engaging the community to use the gardens
- ❖ Protection of the native landscape
- ❖ Lack of native and endemic species
- ❖ Parking and access issues



Representative sample comments

- *Funding. The slow progress of developing the gardens is having a negative effect. It is not yet widely recognised as a Botanic Garden and a place to visit and enjoy.*
- *It seems to be a lack of funds to continue the build process. I look forward to the complete plan being finished as it seems that there's so much more opportunity there, and it's half done.*
- *The very scale of the task at hand. Sufficient finances.*
- *Too much emphasis, in the early stages, on infrastructure and not enough on planting. It takes many years for most trees to grow to an interesting stage.*
- *How to grow, develop the property, and stage events in a way that both attracts usage/visitors AND protects the peace and quiet, privacy and outlook of neighboring properties, and does not lead to traffic and noise issues.*
- *However, current plans have great potential but I would like to see consideration given to the long term management which includes not creating high intensity work (e.g. the parterre garden) but always keeping a simplification process in mind.*
- *The original idea of creating an arboretum for the community to enjoy and to see mature trees of species they may be considering planting in their gardens seemed a sound and practical idea as the concept, if properly planned would require less and less maintenance as the trees grow and enthusiasm for labor dwindles.*
- *I feel that while the current concept of an educational entertainment park is attractive, the enormous expense and labor intensive gardening may prove difficult in the future. The payment of entry fees will become a limiting factor when it might have been a fenceless, open to all forest, requiring only labels on the trees, toilets, mowing of rambling paths, rubbish bins and weed control once established.*
- *Not in a position to identify the management issues, however, the current management approach prioritises exotic plantings and a view of the role and purpose of botanic gardens I, and perhaps more importantly, my visitors are not interested in visiting.*
- *There are pleasing flower beds and plantings but these are almost all exotic. There do not seem to be any significant plantings of native trees or shrubs to showcase our important native species and attract more birdlife.*
- *Maintaining funding; maintaining ongoing support; succession planning both administration and ageing volunteers.*
- *As the gardens expand, more and younger volunteers will be needed.*
- *Maintaining enough volunteers to look after the gardens going forward. How do you attract younger volunteers when most need to work now.*
- *Lack of WSC support*
- *Lack of Council assistance or involvement.*
- *The SHBG needs full time staff provided by the WSC to help maintain the grounds.*



- *Although it is often touted to be a community based project it does seem to be tightly controlled by a small group of people. While acknowledging that there needs to be a central curator of the collection, there seems to be very limited, if no, opportunity for community members to be meaningfully involved.*
- *There needs to be greater transparency as regards strategy and finance. There does not seem to be any public availability of finances even via ACNC. This is not an appropriate situation as the project involves the use of public lands.*
- *Management is very motivated and has the foresight to get the gardens fully developed as quickly as possible. Money and volunteer man hours are the only impediments that at this time are slowing the development. More help from outside to help current gardens management would be appreciated but not at expense of keeping the independence of the SHBG.*
- *Keeping up the public interest and support in maintaining the garden and completion of the various projects and plans.*
- *Lack of access and awareness in the community*
- *It needs to have more native plants and information about what native plants grow well here in the highlands.*
- *There is not enough tree planting to provide future protection and habitat.*
- *There do not seem to be any significant plantings of native trees or shrubs to showcase our important native species and attract more birdlife.*
- *Development, feral animals dominant bird life squeezing out the smaller species.*
- *The car park is quite rough and it would be great if there were more undercover spaces and picnic tables*
- *I also wonder about having the space locked up - as a community space I feel it's more appropriate to have it open to the public at all hours.*

Improvements/activities would you like to see help protect and manage the

SHBG:

Major themes included:

- ❖ Increase capacity of facilities
- ❖ Ensure ongoing funding
- ❖ Greater transparency in management
- ❖ The use of native and endemic planting
- ❖ Protection of waterways
- ❖ Increase educational opportunities
- ❖ Early planting establishment
- ❖ Better access and parking
- ❖ Operational management



- ❖ Enhance tourism potential
- ❖ Improve awareness of volunteer roles

Representative sample comments

- *Develop the site for multiple parkland uses. Currently appears undeveloped and unkept in many areas and lacks interest to make it a destination for a variety of age groups and uses.*
- *Perhaps a nice facility for morning coffee, afternoon tea or even nice high tea for special occasions. With plenty of space to sit outside.*
- *Provide eating/dining facilities to cater for a larger group of the community- eg. walkers, cyclists, visitors to Bowral.*
- *Community art workshops*
- *The way it was set up was wrong from the beginning and a project of this size will not be achieved by volunteers it needs Council, state and federal involvement.*
- *Adequate resources to employ additional specialist staff to guide and oversee the development of the gardens.*
- *Increasing funding, build the visitor centre with facilities such as a cafe. This will help make it a place for people to meet.*
- *Better management in assessment of priorities for development.*
- *An independent professional board to oversee and direct.*
- *I would like to see council more involved in the development of the garden, eg, assisting to find suitable grant funding through which the garden could complete its development. By this, I mean council and the garden could work more closely together to seek grant funding to develop the garden. Council could also do more to promote the garden as a venue for community events.*
- *More transparency with financial statements and where the money goes. Who is in charge of the "purse strings" is that scrutinised? I cannot believe they charge to go to the plant fair. Tulip Time I can visit Corbett Gardens without paying. My rates are high enough that I should be able to visit whenever.*
- *Plant natives to attract wildlife and stop mowing under every tree.*
- *The planting of more native species; involving community groups to provide fundraising activities to support maintenance.*
- *An increase in the area for native plants especially those endemic to the Southern Highland possibly with help from Mount Annan Botanic gardens to source the plants not available in retail or wholesale nurseries.*
- *More planting of indigenous species for wildlife habitat.*
- *The waterways need cleaning and protecting from pollutants entering from stormwater runoff. Dedicated islands for safe breeding for water fowl.*
- *Protect the waterways.*



- *The site will be greatly enhanced once the planned education centre and shed facilities are a reality since at the moment all education activities rely on good weather and the gardens are running out of space to store tools and equipment efficiently.*
- *More information on the birds that visit and care of native plants.*
- *Education of school children with regard to growing food and looking after the environment*
- *Planning to establish 'large tree' plantings now being prioritised so that the waiting time for them to reach maturity is minimized.*
- *Full development of walking tracks ASAP and starting planting of all areas so large trees can start the growing process.*
- *Improved and adequate parking space, free of trucks and water filling activities*
- *Educational activities e.g. school groups to use this great resource. Busy times parking can be an issue. Work with council to advocate for connecting bike paths e.g.*
- *Making sure the gardens are well promoted and given high priority in Highlands Tourism campaigns is vital.*
- *Increased public information about the gardens and their contribution to the Shire.*
- *Encourage more residents to participate in the ongoing development and upkeep of the gardens.*
- *Although there are a lot of community members who volunteer at the garden, I would also like to see some more people offer their services for a management role. People might think that volunteers only do gardening at the garden. But there are many more jobs that do not require gardening work. We have a lot of skilled and highly qualified people in the community who are now retired and they could offer their skills to the garden during their retirement and make a huge positive impact going forward.*
- *Campaign to attract younger volunteers.*
- *More volunteers to help grow and maintain the garden*

WHATS NEXT

Feedback from phase one consultation will assist in the draft Plan of Management for the Southern Highlands Botanic Gardens. Once a draft plan has been created we will then reach out to the community once again.

Updates will continue to be provided via the YourSay page. If you have any questions about this project or would like to be kept updated on its progress, please email mail@wsc.nsw.gov.au

THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK

