

TAMWORTH REGIONAL COUNCIL

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# ASTRONOMY & SCIENCE CENTRE

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## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY, OUTCOMES AND FINDINGS



*Gary Cooper & Phil Betts have their sights set on an Astronomy & Science Centre for Tamworth*



*“This strategy details the combined efforts of the Tamworth Astronomy Club and Tamworth Regional Council to engage with the community for the proposed Astronomy and Science Centre touted for the Victoria Park Precinct.*

*By involving the community and Victoria Park stakeholders in the vision for this unique project, we aim to make decisions that are evidence-based and reflect the views and ideas of the Centre’s future customers”.*

# Contents

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Introduction	4
Our commitment to community engagement	5
Principles guiding community consultation	6
Why we engage	7
Who we engage	7
Levels of engagement	8
How we will engage	9 & 10
What we will do with what we learn	11
What we achieved	12 & 13

# Introduction

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Tamworth Regional Council has received a formal request from the Tamworth Regional Astronomy Club Inc. (TRAC) to establish an Astronomy and Science Centre within Victoria Park. The Victoria Park Section 355 Coordination Committee has discussed this proposal and has no concerns regarding the Astronomy Centre being built within the Victoria Park precinct.

The Tamworth Regional Astronomy Club has been gifted a 36 inch Dobsonian Telescope which is one of the largest amateur portable telescopes in Australia. Mr Lindsay Lowe has also donated a 16 inch Newtonian Telescope. TRAC also has access to the Lindsay Lowe Observatory at Bendemeer which has a 32 inch telescope.

TRAC will provide educational services in the science field to schools, other clubs, community groups and the general public. This will be done through a large display room showing visitors what can be found and seen in the night sky.

Council is very supportive of an Astronomy Centre and is willing to support the concept through the provision of a suitable parcel of land. It is considered that the overall concept of an Astronomy Centre would add to the Victoria Park Precinct as a valued educational resource and as a significant tourism asset

The proposed Astronomy Centre would occupy approximately 600 square metres adjacent to the Miniature Railway and the car park.



# Our commitment to community engagement

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Tamworth Regional Council is committed to being a leader in local government in Australia.

We believe that good community engagement will:

- give us a better understanding of community and stakeholder needs and expectations
- help us identify issues and perspectives which would not otherwise be known
- assist in building positive relationships with the community and our stakeholders
- increase understanding of our projects or plans
- ensure that the community is informed about our responsibilities and actions
- enable community ownership of outcomes, and
- increase awareness in regard to the responsibilities of Council, the community and stakeholders.

To help us achieve these principles, improve our service delivery and respond to our community's needs, you can expect Tamworth Regional Council to:

**Be accessible and inclusive by:**

- actively listening to our community's needs and expectations so that they may be understood and considered.

**Actively seek input into our decision-making by:**

- encouraging the community to provide meaningful input and feedback;
- enabling genuine community participation and collaboration by using best practice consultation tools and techniques; and
- using emerging innovative communication technologies to engage, plan and encourage information sharing with our community.

**Be open and transparent by:**

- using plain and clear language in documents and public communications that is more engaging and understandable for citizens than technical language and jargon.
- informing the community and stakeholders about how their input was considered and adopted or why it was not adopted in Council projects, initiatives and policy development
- sharing information about Council services, activities and decisions; and
- regularly promoting and celebrating the achievements of Council and the local community.

# Guiding Principles

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## SOCIAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES

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Our strategy is built on the principle that all members of the community have a right and responsibility to contribute to their community and its prospective plans.

The Community Engagement Strategy is guided by the principles of social justice, which are:

- Equity

There should be fairness in decision making, prioritising and allocation of resources, particularly for those in need. Everyone should have a fair opportunity to participate in the future of the community. The planning process should take particular care to involve and protect the interests of people in vulnerable circumstances.

- Access

All people should have fair access to services, resources and opportunities to improve their quality of life.

- Participation

Everyone should have the maximum opportunity to genuinely participate in decisions which affect their lives.

- Rights

Equal rights should be established and promoted, with opportunities provided for people from diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds to participate in community life.



## Why we engage

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Community and stakeholder engagement fosters a sense of belonging and community ownership of project outcomes. It engages a higher level of responsibility around creating a people-centred region.

Local Councilors are elected to oversee the everyday running of the Council. In order to help them do this, they ask for the views of the community to help them make sustainable decisions and better understand local issues and needs.

Stakeholder and community input improves the quality of policy - at the time it is being developed - ensuring the end result is relevant to the needs of the community.

Well planned engagement provides ideas and an opportunity for a diverse range of voices to be heard on any issue, promotes a higher standard of customer service, a better understanding of the 'decisions to be made,' and more opportunity for meaningful feedback.

## Who we engage

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Tamworth Regional Council engages a broad range of people who make up the Region and who have unique interests and a role to play in the co-creation of our future.

Stakeholders are recognised as organised groups, agencies or government bodies who are located in or service our Region, who have an interest in Council's decision-making and who are affected by Council's decisions.

Businesses, retail outlets, State and Federal Governments, community groups, Local Government and not for profit organisations are considered stakeholders. Stakeholders may also be groups or organisations who have a role to play in policy development, program or service delivery.

The community includes all other individuals or groups who have an interest in Council's decision-making and who are affected by our decisions.

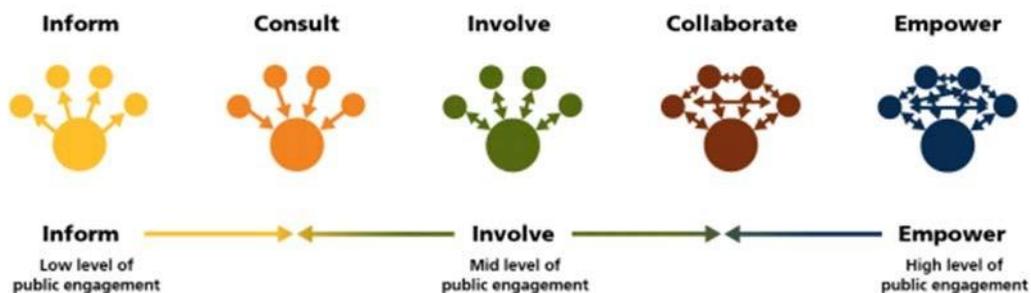
These individuals or groups may be identified as residents and voters, ratepayers, business owners, Tamworth Regional Council committees and working groups, our customers, contractors or suppliers, local community interest groups, and hard to reach groups.



## Levels of engagement

The International Association for Public Participation’s (IAP2) spectrum of participation is a recognized global standard for identifying the different levels of participation. Five levels of engagement, referenced from the IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum, will be used in Tamworth Regional Council’s community engagement activities.

IAP2’s Public Participation Spectrum shows the possible types of engagement with stakeholders and communities. The spectrum also shows the increasing level of public impact progressing through the spectrum beginning with “inform” through to “empower”.



## How we will engage

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This Community Engagement Strategy builds upon the current regime of engagement activities undertaken by the Tamworth Regional Astronomy Club including an extensive range of community events, publicity and through Tamworth Regional Council's Community Strategic Planning Process

<b>Action</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Traditional media and publicity</b>	Since December 2015, the Astronomy Club has embarked on a campaign to firstly educate the community on their club, and to then garner wide support for a dedicated centre to be established in Tamworth, within the Victoria Park Precinct.
<b>Comments and submissions invited</b>	In December 2015, Council agreed to amend the draft Plan of Management for Victoria Park and the Victoria Park Masterplan to reflect the inclusion of an Astronomy Centre. Public comment on the proposed amendment to the Victoria Park Masterplan was openly sought.
<b>Pop up activities</b>	Pop up engagement stalls will be hosted by TRAC in shopping centres, at high profile street markets and annual agriculture shows to engage with the community and invite them to have their say through interactive displays and surveys
<b>Community Speaker Program</b>	TRAC will seek opportunities to speak to schools, service clubs and community groups on the current services offered by the Astronomy Club and to overview the positive impact a dedicated facility would have on the region – educationally and as a tourism asset.
<b>Electronic and Social Media</b>	TRAC will develop social media tools including Facebook and Instagram to direct to notify the community of coming events and as a vehicle to ask questions or show support for a purpose built facility.  TRAC will also launch a dedicated website to engage and inform.

<b>Stakeholder workshops</b>	A range of workshops and one-on-one meetings will be hosted with key stakeholders, agencies and community groups including the Victoria Park Management Committee, Visitor Information Volunteers, Destination Tamworth and Tamworth Business Chamber.
<b>Community Events</b>	A series of high profile community events including guest speakers, will be hosted by TRAC and Council to promote plans for a dedicated Astronomy and Science Centre
<b>Briefing notes &amp; Fact Sheets</b>	Briefing notes and fact sheets will be produced to help inform stakeholders of the process and to guide discussions with key stakeholder groups.
<b>Online surveys and polls</b>	Surveys and polls for opinion response will be available online through both Council and TRAC's websites to gather information from community members who cannot participate in physical engagement activities.
<b>Council's Community Strategic Plan</b>	Council will present the concept for a dedicated astronomy and science centre to the community during its extensive consultation to revitalise its 2017 – 2021 Community Strategic Plan

The above methods provide a range of opportunities for participation by residents and ratepayers, visitors, businesses, community and relevant agencies.



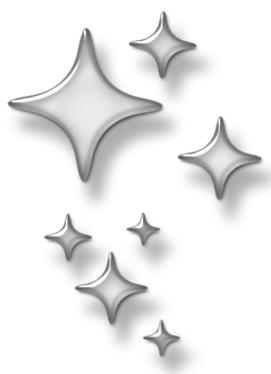
## What we will do with what we learn

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Once consultation is complete and the feedback and data is analysed, Council and TRAC will:

- utilise constructive to refine the project, where appropriate;
- identify ways to ensure the project remains top-of-mind with the community until funding is secured;
- actively advocate for the project to the State and Federal Governments, and
- continue to play an active role in the growth and development of the Victoria Park Precinct support the various community groups helping to deliver community aspirations at a grassroots



# What we achieved

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## Traditional Media and Publicity

Since 2015, dozens of stories about the project have appeared in print via the Northern Daily Leader, Tamworth Times, Barraba Gazette and Manilla Express newspapers, and also via local television stations Prime 7 and NBN and Radio 2TM, ABC and 88.9.

A rough estimate of the value of free media and editorial generated over this time exceeds \$100,000.

Dedicated media was conducted by Council at the start of the engagement journey when the community was first asked to provide comment on the proposed changes to the Victoria Park Precinct Master Plan to include an astronomy and science centre.

Comments extracted from online copies of the stories include:

*"Yes, there can be no doubt that an Observatory near Tamworth could be of great financial beneficial for Tamworth".*

G. Archbold of Tamworth

*"This is fantastic news! How soon will you start building?"*

T. Small of West Tamworth

*"This will be a great edition to that precinct. Families will travels from miles around if we have an astronomy centre to go with the marsupial park and the miniature railway. And it will be great for Tamworth to be known for more than just country music".*

J. Trevitt of East Tamworth

There has been no negative publicity or online negativity towards this project recorded through Council's media and social media monitoring (paid) services.

## Pop Up Activities

The Tamworth Astronomy Centre has been busy over the past 12 months hosting a promotional stall at the following locations to garner support for the project and build awareness of Club services:

- Shopping World Tamworth (April, May & June 2016)
- Coonabarabran Spring Annual (October 2016)
- Calrossy School Careers Night (May 2017)
- Model Engineers Running Day (July 2017)
- Festival of Abilities (August 2017)
- Walcha Star Safari Night for Westpac Rescue Helicopter (August 2017)
- Bunnings Fathers Day Night (August 2017)
- Victoria Park Family Day (September 2017)

## Community Speaker Program

An intensive list of free speaking engagements has been achieved by TRAC, and they have successfully gained the support of the following schools, service clubs and community groups:

- Sunrise Rotary Club, Tamworth
- Tamworth Historical Society
- Tamworth Rotary Club
- Kootingal Primary School
- Warwick Schofield Small Business Breakfast
- Newcastle Astronomy Club
- Tamworth Probis Club
- Calrossy School
- South Tamworth Public School
- Currabubula Public School
- Zonta Club Tamworth
- Peel High School
- Country Women's Association

## **Electronic and Social Media**

TRAC has established a member based page with an active membership of 500 committed amateur astronomers. All events and activities of the Club have also been driven through Council sites including Destination Tamworth which has a tourism following of over 25,000.

TRAC have also successfully delivered a club website which provides detailed information on the project and steps necessary to achieve their vision. This can be found at [www.tamworthastronomy.com.au](http://www.tamworthastronomy.com.au).

## **Stakeholder Workshops**

For this project to be achievable, the support of the Victoria Park 355 Management Committee is essential. A dedicated workshop was conducted in 2015 with the Committee to garner their in-principle support for the centre, and to ascertain whether an astronomy and science centre would complement this growing tourism precinct.

The Victoria Park Committee has given their support to this project, and is being updated on project milestones at regular intervals.

The Committee did express their concern about parking onsite and a lack of public amenities. This feedback has been applied to the current design of the facility.

Other crucial stakeholders to the project are the Tamworth Chamber of Commerce and Destination Tamworth, both of which play a significant role in the marketing and promotion of tourism in the region. Meetings with these bodies has given Council and TRAC great comfort in knowing, should the Centre proceed, marketing support will be generously forthcoming.

## **Community Events**

Aside from the pop-up events, shopping centre stalls and guest speaker activities, TRAC continue to host regular public events that promote the club and its vision for a dedicated astronomy and science centre. Most notable activities include:

- Monthly Viewing Nights at the Botanic Gardens
- Professor Stephen Kane Public Lecture Night
- MoonGazing Tamworth – Public Astronomy Night

## **Online Polls & Surveys**

An online survey was conducted using Survey Monkey and driven through Council and TRAC digital platforms and database.

A total of 1119 responses were received over 72 hours with 100% support for the development of an astronomy and science centre in Tamworth.

89% of respondents agreed such a facility would have tourism value.  
92% of respondents believe the facility will offer educational value to the Region.

Similarly to the Victoria Park 355 Committee, some respondents raised concern over parking, access and public amenities. This feedback will be further addressed in the continued refinement of the Precinct masterplan.

## **Community Strategic Plan**

Council conducted a review of its community strategic plan in March of this year, with a strong community response of more than 1200 participants.

Strongly recognized in this process was the community's desire to see this project come to fruition, leading to its inclusion in the tourism action plan aligned with economic development, recommending Council support TRAC in its funding efforts.