

Towards a More Sustainable Future



A Summary of Trends Issues and Key Ideas

Paper No 14c
Blue Mountains Our Future



March 2002



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Introduction

The wider context

People live in communities throughout the world. The global community is an interconnecting network of people in groups much as the world's environment is an ecosystem of interconnecting communities in nature. Similar to diversity in nature, communities of people are diverse with a complex range of spiritual, ethnic and cultural differences. Many believe the impact of globalisation is producing a 'one-dimensional' world culture at the expense of the diverse cultural richness of individual communities.

Communities are more than just houses, roads, shops, office buildings and places of worship. The way communities work affect how people live, move and perceive their world. An emerging theme is that of "social capital" (Hart, 1998 – 2000), often used to describe the bonds of trust and mutual concern that arise through socialising, volunteering and participating in community organisations and associations. Research suggests that social capital pays off in many ways – for example promoting the transmission of new ideas and improving children's education and nurturing.

Trends indicate that "social capital"(Hart, 1998) is declining in the Western world. Rising income inequality has played a big part in eroding social capital outside the home, whereas changes such as the advent of working women has affected social capital in the home.

In order to provide equal support and nurturing for individual people and species, healthy communities rely on diversity, on strong and healthy connections and on maintaining balance between the different parts. In communities of people this translates to every individual having a basic right to food and shelter and to a humane and democratic society.

In the Blue Mountains

Blue Mountains people are part of the Blue Mountains community that comprises many different 'nested' communities living in a number of villages, towns, neighbourhoods and suburbs. Each group of people has its own sense of community and community



experience. Blue Mountains residents are highly diverse in terms of age, incomes, education levels and family structures.

Similar to trends in the wider context, rising income inequality, a significant number of people commuting to work, increasing urban development sprawl, an ageing population and young people leaving are all factors which are impacting on the quality of life for many Blue Mountains people and their communities.

The past decade has also seen a growing trend for centralising key community and health services in larger population centres. This has resulted in the need for Blue Mountains residents to travel further to access them.

There has also been a significant shift in responsibility for the delivery of many community services from Government to community. Many critical services are “community managed”, inadequately funded and dependent on a shrinking pool of unpaid volunteers.

Community safety is also of growing concern despite our low crime levels relative to other areas.

Changing family structures in the Blue Mountains along with low incomes are creating demands for more choice and affordability in housing. At least one in four households comprise lone person dwellings. There is a mismatch between need and our existing housing stock which is dominated by single detached dwellings (96%) . Only 4% of our population lives in town houses, flats or units. Existing public housing stock is inadequate to meet needs. The availability of emergency, crisis and supported accommodation is insufficient.

Meeting the need of the diverse Blue Mountains population is particularly challenging in view of our physical topography and dispersed settlement pattern. This has led to considerable pressure for the duplication of services and facilities across the Local Government Area. At the village level particularly in the smaller more isolated settlements, many key services such as banks and medical services have been closed down.



The 2001 Community Survey strongly identified “youth issues” as being of particular concern to Blue Mountains residents. A survey of 600 Mountains teenagers (2001) identified problems related to drugs/ alcohol and the lack of recreational activities as the overriding concerns.

While local people are well educated there are few “local” opportunities for work and further education, leading many to commute. This is affecting how much time many people have to spend with their families and friends.

How can we strengthen and sustain our communities?





Where we are now

What you said in surveys focus groups and workshops

- There is a need for more local employment opportunities particularly for young people
- A survey of 600 Mountains teenagers (2001) identified problems related to drugs/ alcohol and the lack of recreational activities as the overriding concerns (BMCC, Draft Youth Strategy)
- The community as a whole could do much more to understand and help its younger population
- Access to affordable housing is rapidly decreasing
- The gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged is increasing
- You see inequities in the allocation of resources between the Upper and Lower Mountains
- Community managed volunteer dependent services in particular are under pressure from accountability and funding requirements - straining their ability to deliver quality services
- Limited financial and human resources are straining the provision of human services
- There has been closure of essential services in smaller communities and relocation of services to larger centres often outside the Blue Mountains
- You are concerned about loss of 'sense of community' due to the spread of Sydney, suburbanisation, population growth and the loss of the corner store
- Community safety is of growing concern to many (BMCC, Community Survey 2001)
- 82% of Blue Mountains people feel the existing population level is about right for the City (BMCC, Community Survey 2001)



What other research is telling us

- Between 1993 and 1997 the rate of suicide for males in our local health area rose (Wentworth Area Health Service, 2000)
- There is an increasing number of people living on their own—at least one in five households (ABS, 1996)
- On a broad range of indicators Upper Mountains residents are experiencing greater levels of disadvantage in terms of household income, car ownership, employment characteristics and proportion of single parents (ABS, 1996)
- The Blue Mountains population is highly mobile with 40% of households having a different address in 1996 than they did in 1991 (ABS, 1996)
- There is a mismatch between housing need and our existing housing stock, which is dominated by single detached dwellings (96%) (BMCC, Background information, Draft LEP 2002)
- Access to affordable housing is decreasing due to the pressure on available land
- The provision of services and facilities is not in line with the changing population - increasingly ageing
- In the year 2000 median house prices in the Blue Mountains rose by 10.3% as compared to 1.1% in the Sydney Statistical Division (Department of Housing, 2000)
- The Blue Mountains population has a lower than average annual income at \$25,278 compared to the NSW average (ABS, 1996)
- There are significantly lower proportions of 20-35 year olds in our population relative to NSW possibly as a result of out migration (ABS, 1996)



Where we are heading

What the research is telling us

- Between 1996 and 2021 the Blue Mountains population is projected to grow from 72,506 to 84,600 people– a growth rate of 16.6 %. This contrasts with a growth rate of 98% for the equivalent period from 1971 to 1996 (BMCC, Background Information, Draft LEP 2002)
- In 1996 one in five people were aged 55 years or older. By 2011 it is projected that one in four will be in this age group (BMCC, Background Information, Draft LEP 2002)
- Mental illness particularly depression is considered a “growing health problem” in our local health area (Wentworth Area Health Service, 2000)



Where do we want to be?

Your key ideas

- There are adequate services and facilities to meet diverse community needs
- Young people have things to do
- A community that cares for its people
- Quality educational opportunities are available to all
- There are abundant recreation opportunities
- A safe community
- The Blue Mountains is celebrated as a centre for arts and culture
- Quality health and welfare services exist
- There is a diverse range of affordable housing
- Increased access and services for less mobile people
- A population with a balance of young, middle aged and old people



Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

- The ageing population, young people leaving and the lack of affordable housing for families is affecting the make up of the population so that it predominantly comprises older people
- There is a mismatch between housing needs and the existing available range of housing stock which is dominated by single detached 3 bedroom dwellings
- Increasing housing costs are reducing the opportunities for young people and families with small children in particular to access housing
- The drive for economic efficiencies is closing critical local services – these and other services are being relocated out of the Blue Mountains to bigger centres
- Lower income levels combined with isolation and limited employment opportunities mean that many Blue Mountains residents are disadvantaged
- Modern living is fragmenting communities
- The dispersed and isolated settlement pattern in the Mountains constrains the ability of people to access limited services
- A relatively small revenue base reduces funding available for many community and recreation facilities

Opportunities

- Small villages can engender a community spirit
- Building on the distinctive identity of each village and town in the Blue Mountains
- The rich cultural, built and natural heritage within the Blue Mountains offers opportunities for developing community development initiatives and gaining resources to provide cultural and creative experiences for visitors and residents