

Draft **Community
Gardens**
Strategy 2022-2032



Acknowledgement of Country

Shellharbour City Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and recognise their continued connection to the land. Council pays it's respect to Elders past present and emerging and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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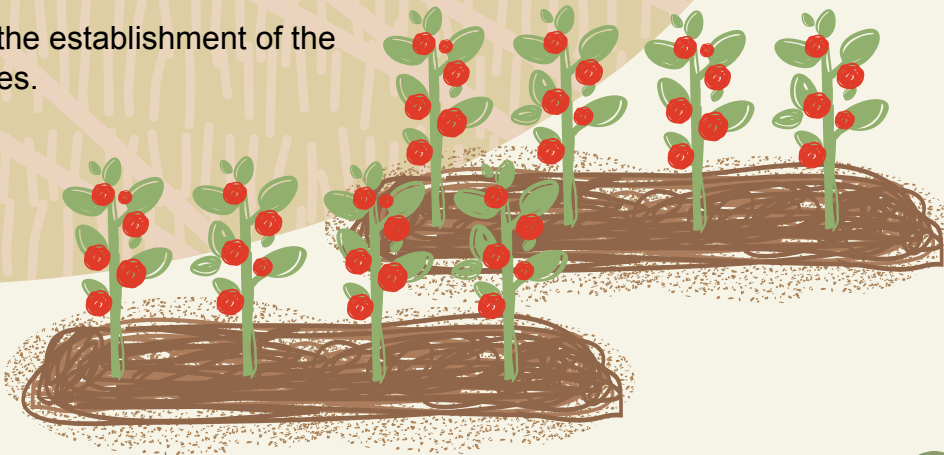
What is a community garden?

In Shellharbour City, community gardens are areas of allocated space on Council owned community (public) land, which operate for the primary purposes of growing fresh food and promoting food security through educational, social, cultural and environmental activities.

There are many types of community garden models:

- Communal Garden Model: The garden is managed collectively, with members all participating in decision making and garden maintenance. The group meets on harvesting days and shares produce.
- Allotment Garden Model: Garden users have their own garden bed for growing and maintaining personal crops. Harvest is not usually shared between members of the garden group, but with those within the allotment garden bed.
- Hybrid or Combination Garden Model: In these gardens, members share knowledge and harvest with other members and the wider community. Allotment gardens may be present, but communal (or shared) areas exist too.

Council supports the establishment of the above garden types.



Why do we need a Community Gardens Strategy?

The Shellharbour Open Space and Recreation Needs Study and Strategy (2020) identified an ongoing demand within the community for the provision of community gardens, highlighting the importance of continued maintenance and support by Council. The Strategy identifies the following Action 1.10 *Develop a Shellharbour Community Gardens Strategy designed to encourage all-age access and use of specified open spaces.*

The Community Gardens Strategy provides a strategic focus for establishing and expanding the Community Gardens network across Shellharbour City. Council encourages residents of all ages and abilities to enjoy local open spaces through the provision of space for features such as community gardens.

Project Context

The development of the Community Gardens Strategy supports the following objectives and strategies of the Community Strategic Plan (CSP) the Community’s vision for the City.



CSP Objective:	1.1 Vibrant, safe, creative and inclusive
Strategy:	1.1.4 Provide a liveable community that is accessible and inclusive
Strategy:	1.1.6 Provide responsive community services and programs across the City
.....	
CSP Objective:	1.2 Active and Healthy
Strategy:	1.2.1 Provide access to services and facilities where people can live, learn and play
Strategy:	1.2.2 Provide diverse opportunities for sport, recreation and enjoyment in the City’s parks, open spaces and facilities
.....	
CSP Objective:	2.2 Practices sustainable living
Strategy:	2.2.3 Reduce our ecological footprint
.....	

Throughout this Strategy, there are a number of actions identified that will be implemented over the next 10 years. Actions will be reported on every 1, 4 and 10 years in line with Council’s Operational Plan, Delivery Program and Community Strategic Plan.

Council's role in community gardens

Shellharbour City Council is responsible for implementing the actions within this strategy, and assessing and responding to garden requests, in accordance with relevant legislation.

Council at times, has also found itself responsible for the maintenance and removal of community gardens that cease to operate. Council's experience with previous community gardens and community consultation has identified the need for a formal strategy, policy and process to be developed, informing community, developers and Council of processes to establish, maintain and sometimes decommission gardens that cease to operate.

What does a community garden group look like?

- Must be an incorporated association
- Is made up of interested local residents willing to participate
- Provides support to the existing and new garden group members
- Has a Garden Management Group
- Has the skills to organise, manage and maintain a community garden group, or have a mentor to assist in garden management
- Demonstrates the capacity to fund the garden and the ongoing maintenance requirements of the garden
- Complies with Council's policies and this Strategy
- Pays for all fees and charges prevailing at the time
- Responsible for removal if garden ceases to operate

Why an Incorporated Association?

A private or commercial organisation will not be permitted to operate on a community land, hence the requirement to be a registered not for profit/an incorporated association. This requires a management committee, annually elected office bearers and commitment to holding regular meetings. This arrangement promotes responsibility to be shared among members, and maintains transparency within the group, as all documents (including minutes and budgets) can be shared if required. Becoming an incorporated association can impact the longevity of the garden by enabling the group to open a bank account and apply for government grants.



Community gardens and sustainability

Shellharbour's Local Strategic Planning Statement defines the aspiration that

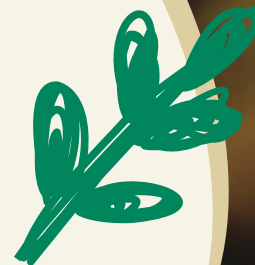
'In 2040, Shellharbour City is a leader in sustainability. Our local infrastructure, assets and environment are adaptive and resilient in a changing climate.'

One of Council's five core values is Sustainability. Supporting community gardens and the growing of plants that are adapted to our changing local climate, and encouraging local fruit and vegetable production, can support Council in achieving its Environment and Sustainability goals.

As our community and built environment change, it is anticipated that interest in, and demand for, community gardens will also change. Expansion of our community gardens network should be strategic and sustainable, with considerations given to:

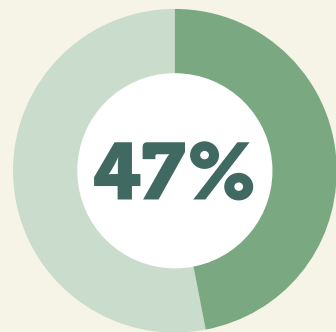
- proximity to residential areas
- co-location with other appropriate land uses and facilities
- availability of facilities and services on site
- educational engagement for all the wider community, including garden and demonstration days

Council is an active member of Food Fairness Illawarra, a coalition with representatives from local councils, NSW Health, Healthy Cities Illawarra and Wollongong University, working together to make healthy and sustainable food affordable and accessible for all in the Illawarra.



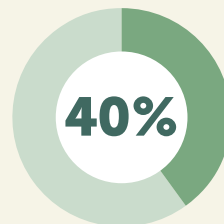
What does the community of Shellharbour think about Community Gardens?

Council undertook a survey using the Let's Chat engagement portal, the survey captured feedback on various elements of community gardens. The survey results and themes captured have informed the preparation of this Strategy and its actions.

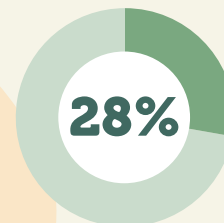


of respondents participated in a Community Garden at the time of the survey.

Community gardens are mostly attended



Several times a week



Once a week



What the community likes about community gardens:

- culture
- knowledge sharing
- connection to community
- growing and gardening
- events



What the community dislikes about community gardens:

- restricted access
- located on temporary sites
- security
- lack of infrastructure and maintenance

Should community gardens always provide public access?

YES
37%

The garden is a community resource

NO
25%

Vandalism concerns

UNSURE
38%

What does the community of Shellharbour think about community gardens?

Important features in a community garden:

- Sustainable
- Supporting infrastructure
- Permanent storage
- Easy to find and access
- Open to community and welcoming
- Public transport or footpath access
- Car parking
- Co-located with recreational facilities



Guidance requested from Council:

- Tools/Templates
- Learning Sponsorship/Partnerships
- Funding Partnerships
- Assurance via licence agreement



How can community garden experiences be enhanced?

- Mentoring
- Events – workshops, education, open days
- Culture
- Start-up funding and grant opportunities
- Group structure and expectations setting
- Infrastructure – Water, shade, seating, hub
- Open access / Open days for communities
- Amenities



Getting started: How to establish a community garden

Council recognises that many members of the community are interested in the idea of establishing or joining a community garden however, are not sure where to start. The development of a Community Garden Guide will assist community in site selection, organisation and planning for community gardens. It will provide instruction to community members and assist in structuring their community garden application to Council.



Insurance and Risk Management

It is the responsibility of a Community Garden Group to be aware of their duty of care for members and community, ensure safe access into and within the garden site is maintained and that potential risks are managed.

Ensure gardeners are aware of:

- Community garden aims and objectives
- Names and positions of other members
- Their rights and responsibilities in the garden
- Health, safety and risk management practices in the garden
- Available training and learning opportunities

Funding and resourcing the garden

Each community garden will have varied financial goals to assist in the delivery of garden aims and objectives, depending on the focus of the community garden. When planning to establish a community garden, a garden group should consider income sources for necessary financial expenditure and develop a budget.

Community gardens and our open space network

The Shellharbour City Local Government Area has approximately 200 parks and reserves as part of a broad open space network. Council is committed to ensuring that our open spaces provide variety and opportunities for the wider community; this means providing different open space experiences, such as community gardens.

It is important that when planning for community gardens that the following elements are considered:

- Accessibility
- Provide variety
- Inclusivity
- Location, gardens are provided equitably
- Suitable soil and landscape
- Proximity to other open space uses
- Proposals are consistent with relevant legislation and guidelines





Community gardens groups in Shellharbour City must:

- Be approved through a licence agreement with Council
- Ensure the garden offers inclusive design features which cater for the needs of all ages and abilities
- Be a community initiative
- Provide easy to read signage including garden contact details and how community can become involved
- Ensure the garden remains open to the general community
- Ensure the garden is made available for educational or community demonstrations
- Keep the garden free from domestic animals
- Use soils from an approved supplier, or if donated, be tested by Council staff before use in the garden
- Use the Application Form to identify and discuss garden aims and objectives
- Demonstrate the role of the garden in the community through yearly reporting mechanisms

Community gardens can have potential negative impacts on surrounding lands, it is important that proposed community gardens address these potential impacts at the planning stage so as to mitigate and manage any outcomes.



Reporting on the community garden

Reviewing the ongoing progress of community gardens ensures the garden is operating in accordance with garden group aims and objectives, community expectations, Council procedure, strategy and policy.

Reflecting on community garden aims and objectives provides an opportunity for feedback and assessment of what has occurred over time, this can help to inform the next iteration of the community garden.

Community Garden Actions

This Strategy is based on a number of Actions that will be implemented by Council over the next 10 years. These actions will be reported on every 1, 4 and 10 years in line with Council's Operational Plan, Delivery Program and Community Strategic Plan.

Recommended Action

1. Council to provide guidance and a process in establishing a range of community gardens, in accordance with feedback and interest from Community and Customers
2. Develop Community Gardens Business Process
3. Develop Community Gardens Policy
4. Devise Community Garden Guide that addresses roles and responsibilities of community garden groups
5. Council to ensure community gardens address sustainability at design stage
6. Devise a Community Garden Guide to assist community groups and Council with the planning and development of a community garden
7. Ensure Community Garden Guide addresses funding and budget considerations for the group
8. Council to communicate any funding opportunities to Shellharbour Community Garden groups
9. Devise site selection criteria for potential community garden sites
10. Ensure all community garden applications are supported by a detailed garden design and layout map
11. Devise reporting mechanisms for community garden groups to utilise every 12 months
12. Facilitate an equitable spread of community garden locations across the Local Government Area (LGA)
13. Establish a community garden page on Council's website including register of community gardens
14. Include mitigation and management of potential impacts in Community Garden Guide

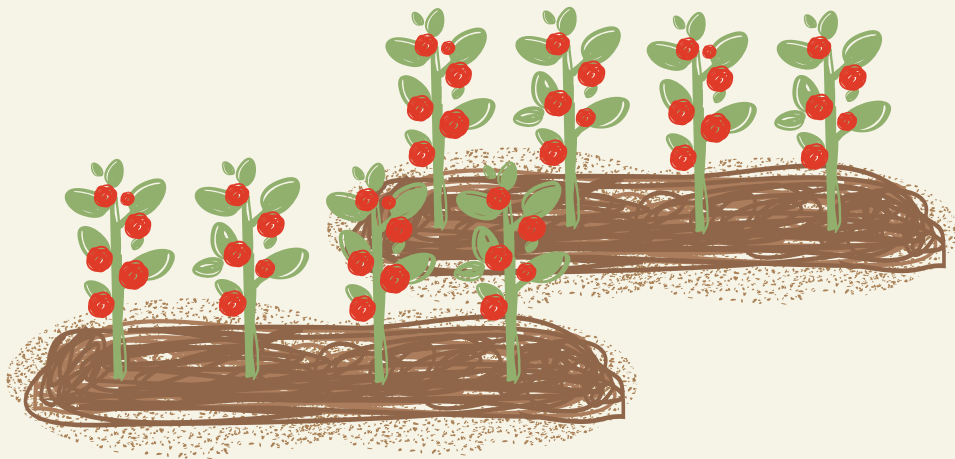


Periodic Review

This Strategy should be reviewed 12 months after adoption and every 5 years afterward, or as required.

References

- Shellharbour City Dog Friendly Spaces Strategy, 2019
- City of Freemantle Community Gardening Guide
- Shellharbour Open Space and Recreation Strategy, 2020
- City of Sydney Community Garden Guidelines, 2016
- Community Gardens Australia, webpage





Enquiries and feedback should be made to:
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