

# Sustainable Neighbourhoods

## Council Staff Survey Results

April 2017



## About Sustainable Neighbourhoods

Lake Macquarie City Council initiated the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program in 2008 to empower residents to act on local environmental and sustainability issues. The program aims include the following.

- Increase community responsibility and management for sustainable outcomes.
- Protect and enhance the natural environment.
- Reduce individual, household, and collective resource consumption.
- Increase community capacity to prepare for and respond effectively to environmental threats such as natural disasters.
- Encourage community spirit, and increase community resilience, connectedness and wellbeing.
- Encourage and enable people to participate fully and equitably in community life.

The program has established a network of active, skilled and supported citizens who make a meaningful contribution to local community life and address local sustainability challenges.

As part of the program, Council has worked with Sustainable Neighbourhood volunteers to establish the Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance Incorporated (the Alliance). The Alliance was established in 2011 as an incorporated, not-for-profit community group, and currently supports 15 active Sustainable Neighbourhood groups. The Alliance provides the governance and support structure for groups to operate effectively, without each having to duplicate processes and resources.

## Review of Sustainable Neighbourhoods

In July 2016, Council staff together with Alliance Board members initiated a review of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program in order to:

- Identify the current status of the Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance and network; and
- Assist with the development of an Alliance Strategic Plan.

The review process includes a range of engagement and research activities to gather input from various stakeholders to the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program.

This report details the results of a survey of selected Council staff members, conducted in April 2017.

An additional report will be produced, summarising the results of all of the review activities.

## Further information

### **Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance (Inc)**

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### **Lake Macquarie City Council**

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# Summary of results

## Survey responses

The survey achieved an 85% response rate (39 responses) from selected Council staff members. Respondents represented nine different Council departments.

## Overall results

The survey results suggest that staff's experience with and impression of Sustainable Neighbourhoods is largely positive. In particular, Council staff recognise that Sustainable Neighbourhood groups are a valuable source of active, engaged citizens.

*"They are a group of motivated, passionate and engaged citizens with specialist knowledge on the social and environment needs of the local area."*

Over 50% of respondents agreed that Sustainable Neighbourhoods has made an impact in the Lake Macquarie community. In particular, that:

- The community is more aware of environmental issues and solutions
- The community has an effective forum to raise and address local issues; and
- Community members are more likely to know each other.

When prompted about positive impacts of Sustainable Neighbourhood groups, 13% of respondents reported no positive impacts on their day-to-day work. With one exception, this appears to be because those staff members have had limited involvement with Sustainable Neighbourhood groups.

For many staff members (36%), Sustainable Neighbourhood groups are a valuable way to help promote their work, and have consistent objectives to their work roles.

Staff have mainly been in contact with a Sustainable Neighbourhood group to respond to a request (64%) and/or to provide support or assistance (62%) to the group. Of the respondents, 41% have sought feedback from Sustainable Neighbourhood groups.

*"At times individuals within particular groups have been demanding where a solution could easily have been achieved by lodging a service request."*

When prompted about negative impacts of Sustainable Neighbourhood groups, 62% of respondents reported no negative impacts. The primary negative impact, reported by 13% of respondents, was that Sustainable Neighbourhood groups "have unreasonable expectations about Council services or infrastructure".

A number of staff members suggested that increased input from a range of relevant Council staff during the Sustainable Neighbourhood planning process would be beneficial, and to ensure that the group's aspirations and expectations are more realistic.

Some staff members also suggested that they would like to have more involvement with Sustainable Neighbourhoods.

*"...there may be opportunities to make better use of the collective knowledge of the members of Sustainable Neighbourhood groups to inform Council initiatives."*

communities working together



## Appendix 1. Methodology

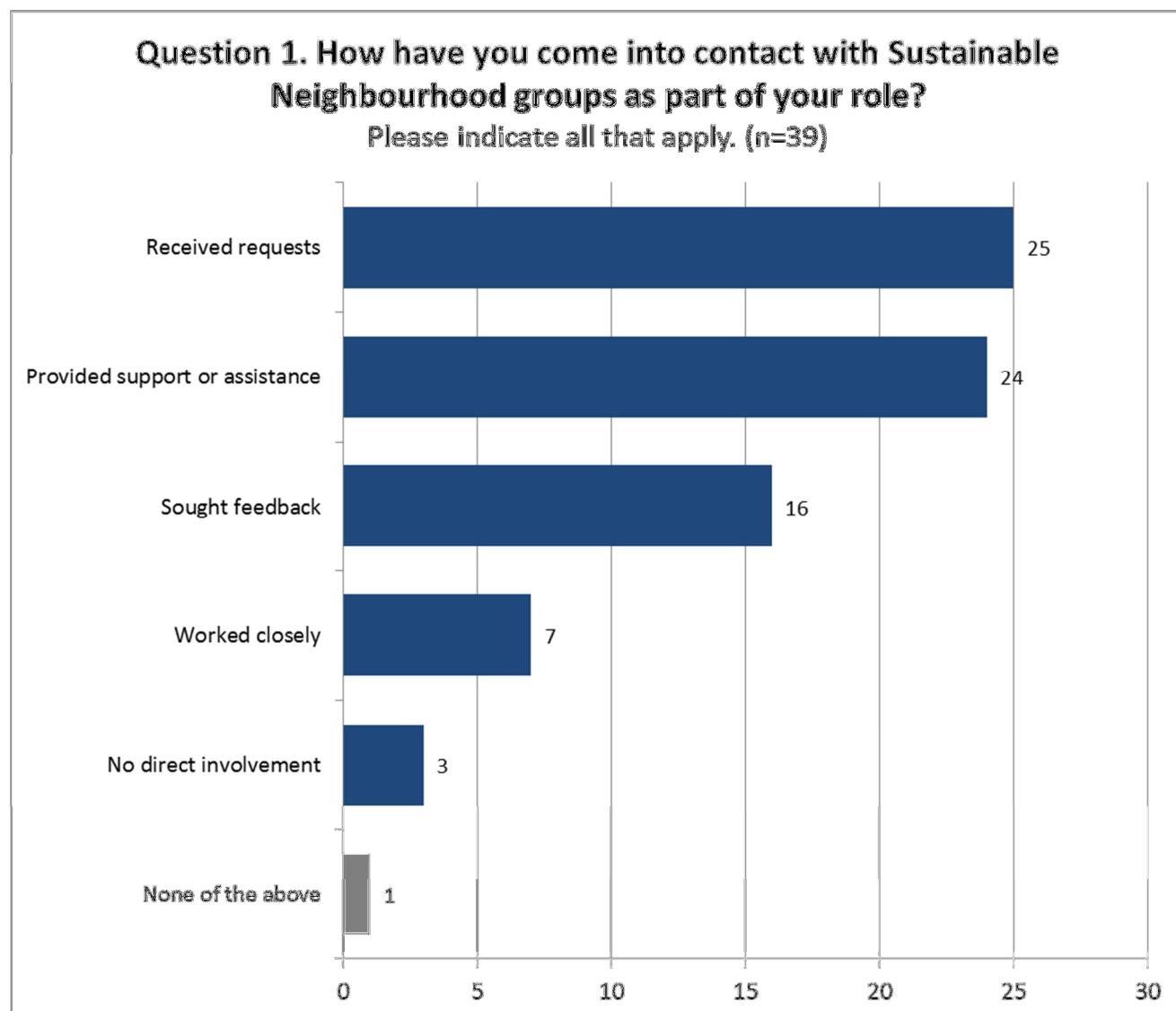
The survey was developed using [www.surveymonkey.net](https://www.surveymonkey.net), and an invitation to complete the survey was emailed directly to 46 Council staff members. Staff members were selected according to their likelihood of having come into contact with Sustainable Neighbourhood groups as part of their role.

There were a total of 39 responses, which is 85% of the invitations. All respondents completed the survey. Respondents came from nine different Council departments.

Department	Number of respondents
Asset Management	5
Communications	4
Community Planning	12
Cultural Services	1
General Manager's Secretariat	2
Integrated Planning	3
Property	1
Sustainability	9
Waste Environment and Rangers	2

## Appendix 2. Detailed Survey Results

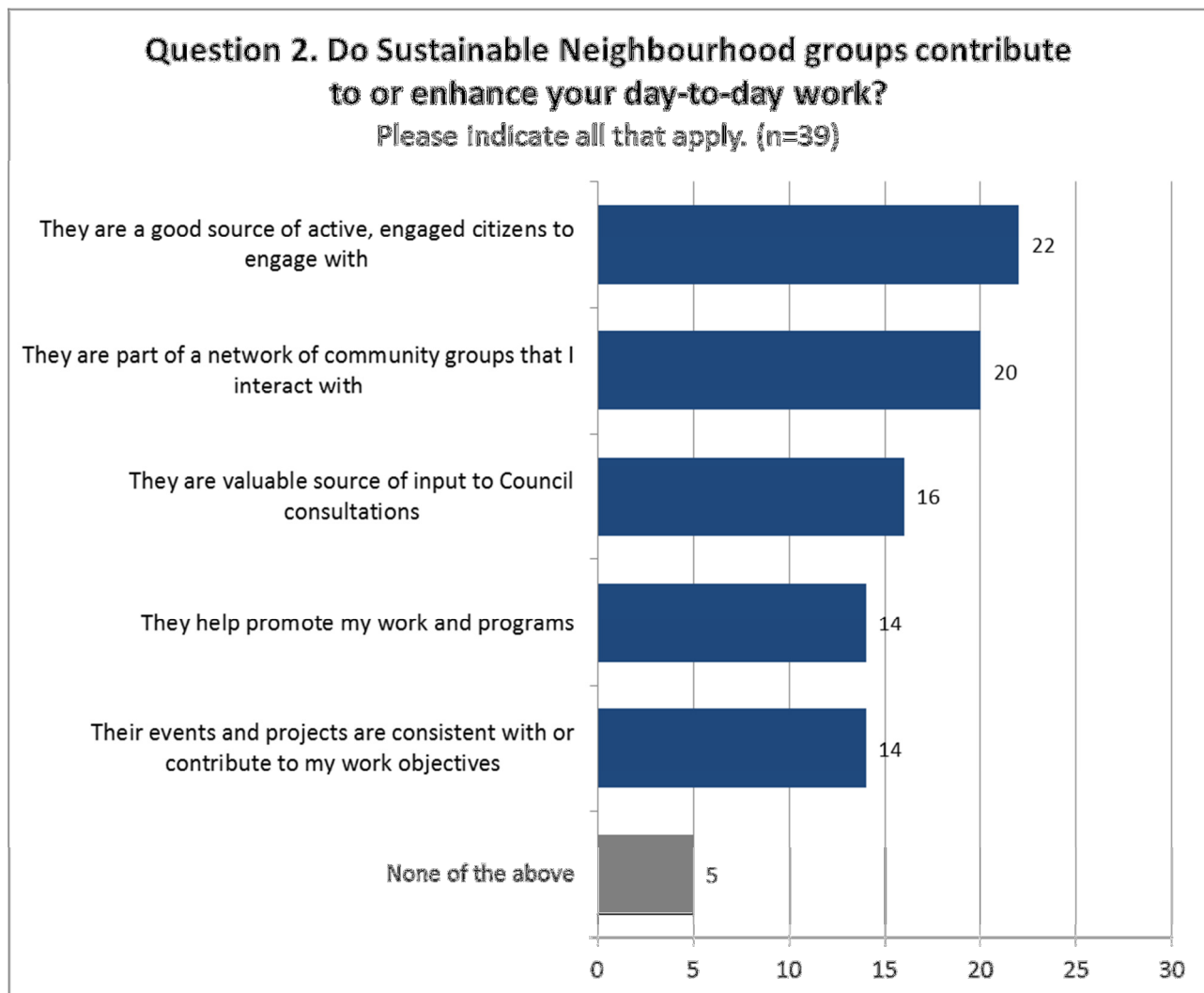
### Question 1. Contact with Sustainable Neighbourhood groups



Additional comments were provided by seven people, describing how they have been involved with Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups, including:

- As part of a local area adaptation planning process;
- To inform the group of a project in their area;
- To provide feedback to a group;
- To seek assistance or feedback from groups regarding local community facilities or ideas; and
- To provide a presentation about Council support and services for Sustainable Neighbourhoods.

## Question 2. Positive impacts

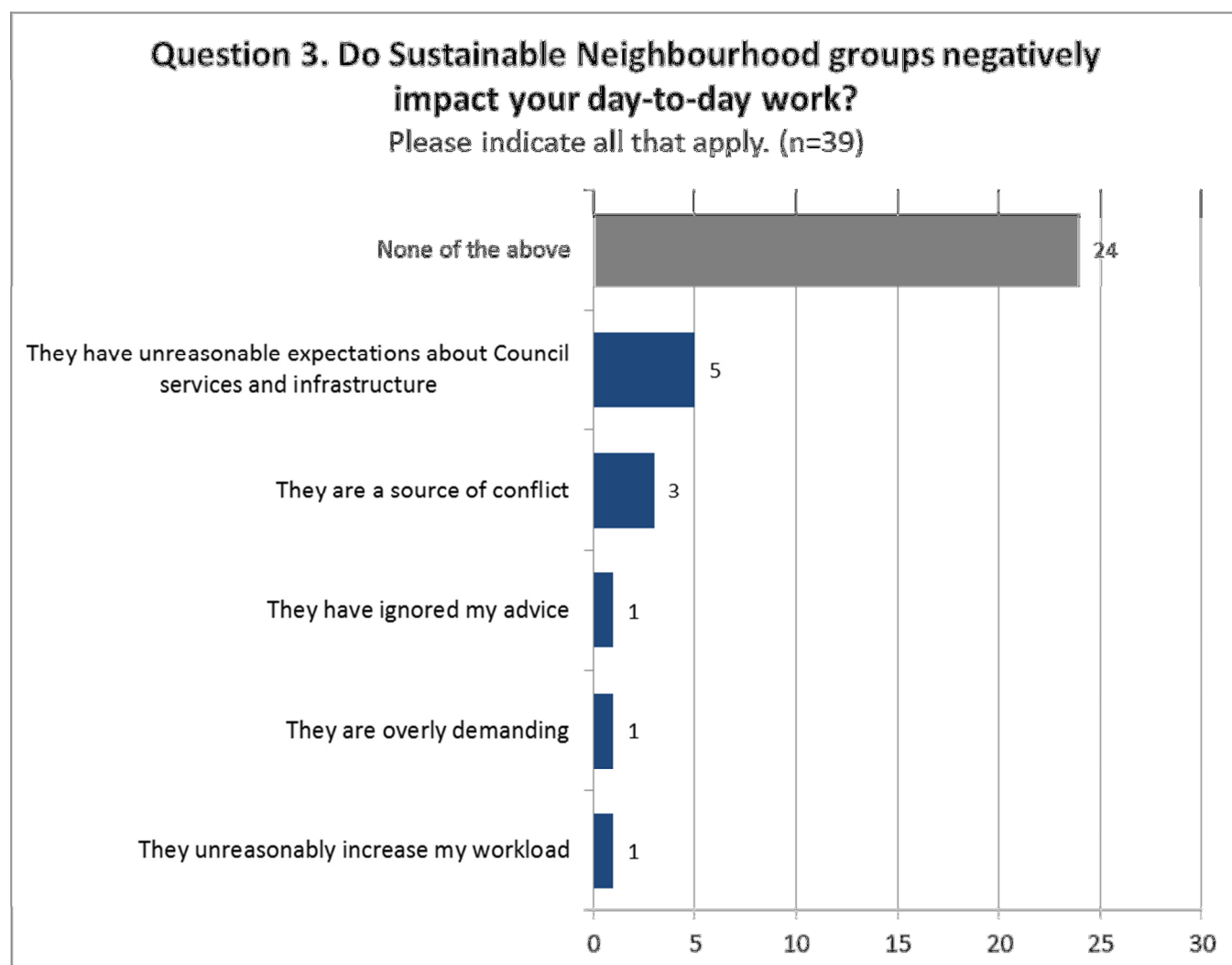


Additional comments were provided by eight people, including:

- Would like to connect more with Sustainable Neighbourhood groups – particularly in relation to natural environment projects in their local areas; and to utilise collective knowledge to inform Council initiatives.
- Use Sustainable Neighbourhood projects as an example when talking with other community groups.
- Sustainable Neighbourhood events and projects reflect broader community needs.
- Difficult to say, as don't generally deal with groups directly / potential for all the impacts listed.



### Question 3. Negative impacts

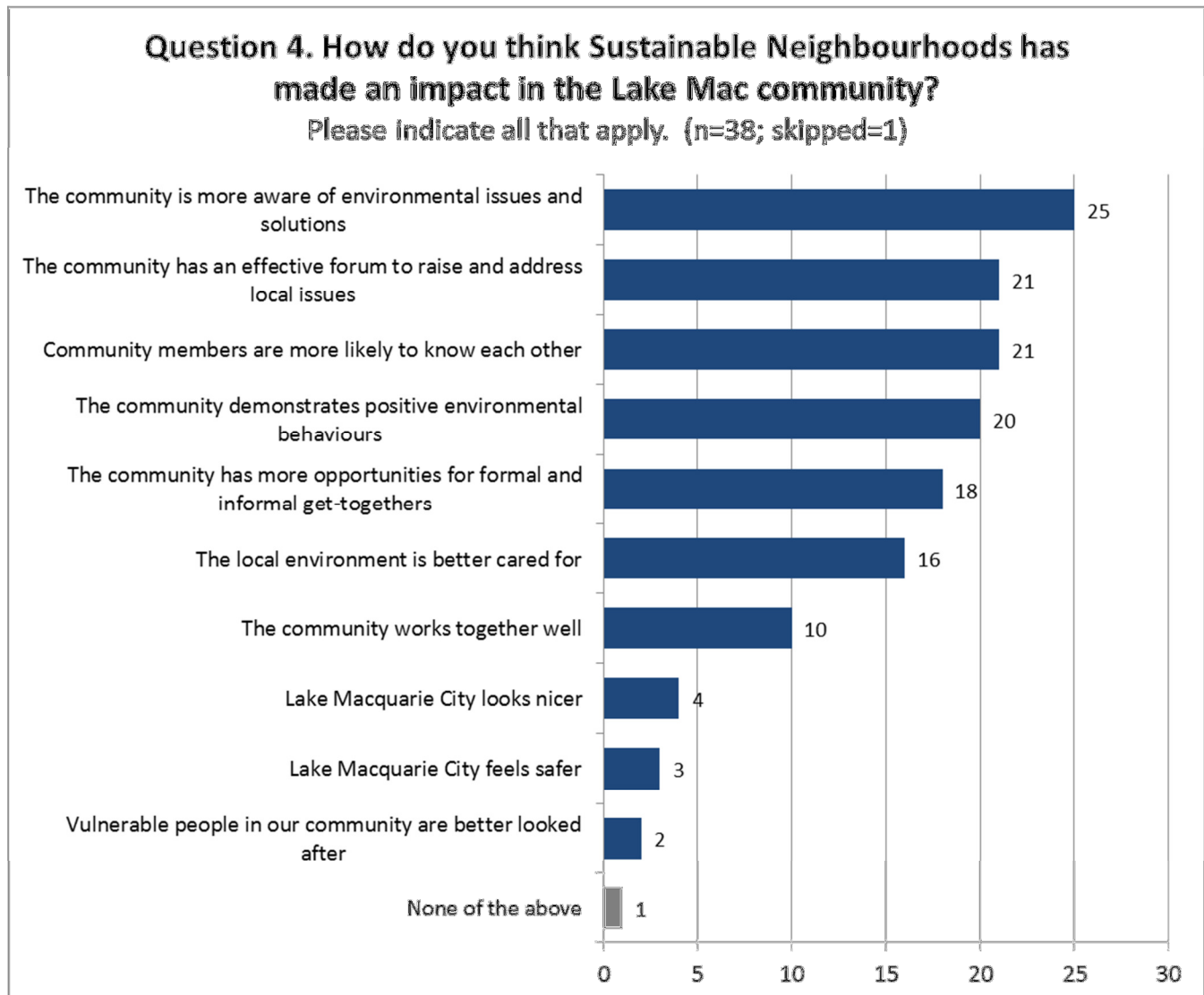


Additional comments were provided by 18 people.

- Sustainable Neighbourhood groups provide a voice for residents, and are a worthwhile process for engaging with the community.
- Some groups expect more than the level of service Council could provide, have unrealistic expectations, or appear overly ambitious in what they can achieve. They sometimes appear frustrated that multiple departments may need to be involved in an issue.
- Additional information provided to Sustainable Neighbourhood groups and/or more involvement of relevant Council staff, when developing their action plans may help prevent disappointment when Council is unable to support the desired outcome.
- In one instance, an issue was dealt with negatively when it could have been more productively dealt with by informing Council staff members.
- Sustainable Neighbourhood groups can increase workload, but the benefits of working directly with the community are that programs can be more effectively communicated and implemented.
- At times individuals within particular groups have been demanding where a solution could easily have been achieved by lodging a service request.
- Impacts can depend on the individual or group involved.

- Have observed that groups can often get frustrated because of the complexity of approvals and consultation required across Council's multiple business areas / bureaucracy.
- There have been minor issues based on misconceptions of available support or program objectives, but these have improved over the last five years.

#### **Question 4. Impact on Lake Mac community**



Additional comments were provided by 10 people, including:

- Don't feel confident to answer this question
- The community is more aware of relevant local community matters
- Sustainable Neighbourhood volunteers do very valuable work in their local environment
- Impact relies on involvement from the wider community, rather than a small number of active volunteers
- Council staff support is critical to ensure continuance of groups as volunteers dwindle
- Established group for new residents to connect with



- A draw card for bringing new residents to an area and to help promote the city and council to wider audiences
- Sustainable Neighbourhood groups are important because enhancing local sustainability is not generally a priority for existing community groups
- Opportunity for Sustainable Neighbourhood groups to engage more with other organisations (eg rotary, lions)
- Social and economic sustainability are not generally well understood
- True strength and value of Sustainable Neighbourhoods is yet to be realised
- Groups are currently limited to the areas where the groups have successfully launched. This may unfairly skew the allocation of resources across the city