

# **Strengthening Sustainable Neighbourhoods**

**July – December 2016**

## **Reviewing the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program**

After 8 years of the development and implementation of the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program, it is timely for Council staff to evaluate progress and achievements, and to provide information to inform strategic planning for the future of the Sustainable Neighbourhood network.

In the short term, there is an expectation that Council will continue to provide staff time, funding and other support for the program. However it is prudent to consider potential for Council priorities to change in the future. It is important to ensure that the valuable work of the Sustainable Neighbourhood network can continue into the long term, regardless of any changes in Council support.

## **The overall objective of the review**

Support the Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance and network to ensure they can operate effectively in the long term.

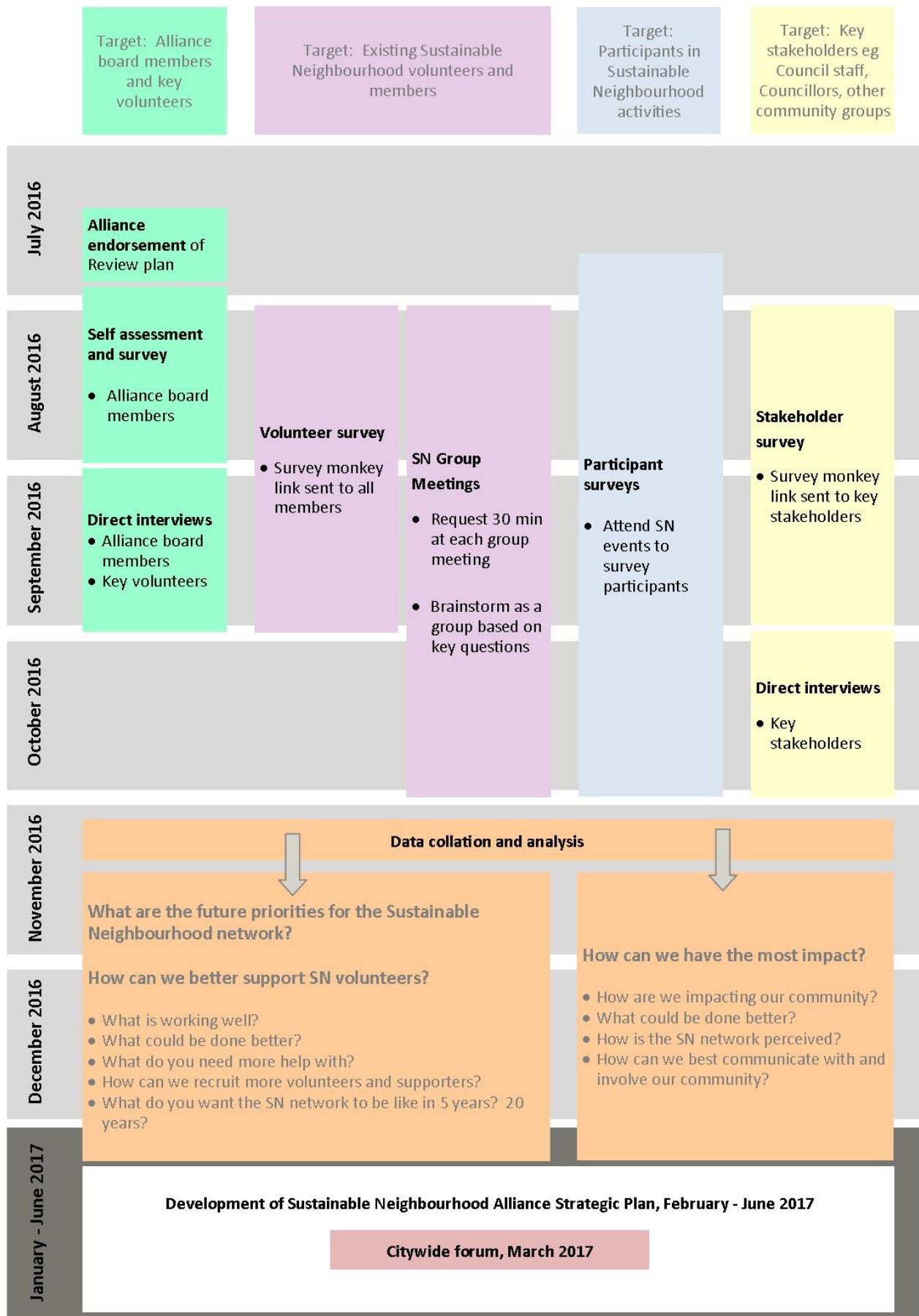
- Review the Sustainable Neighbourhoods program and current status of the Alliance and network.
- Assist with the development of an Alliance Strategic Plan incorporating a Business Plan, including contingencies to address potential for changes in future Council support.

Note: A *Strategic Plan* outlines the overall vision and strategy for the organisation in the long term. A *Business Plan* or *Operating Plan* details the tasks and actions that need to be taken to achieve the vision.

## **The goals and expected benefits of a Sustainable Neighbourhoods Review**

- Provide a baseline of current status.
- Provide direction for Alliance board and identify priorities for strategic planning.
- Identify how the Alliance can best support the Sustainable Neighbourhood network.
- Identify how Council can best support the Alliance and the network.
- Celebrate achievements to date.
- Promote cohesiveness between local Sustainable Neighbourhood groups and the Alliance.
- Strengthen and build capacity of volunteers and groups.
- Identify and evaluate impact of Sustainable Neighbourhood program so far.

# Sustainable Neighbourhoods Review - Process and Schedule



## **Sustainable Neighbourhoods program background**

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 over 15 Sustainable Neighbourhood groups. The Alliance provides the governance structure for groups to operate effectively, without each having to duplicate processes and resources. The Alliance provides the following.

- Legal standing as an incorporated community group .
- Insurance and risk management framework for member groups' activities.
- Independence from Council to enable the Sustainable Neighbourhood network to effectively advocate to Council and other bodies.
- Resources, capacity-building and mentoring.

The Alliance is governed by a group of up to 12 volunteer board members who take responsibility for the broader strategic direction of the network as a whole, advocating on behalf of the network, and supporting Sustainable Neighbourhood groups and their activities. Board members also take responsibility for overseeing risk management, financial management, promotion and other day to day aspects to support the wide range of projects and events of Sustainable Neighbourhood groups.

## **Current status**

The success of the Sustainable Neighbourhood network lies in the variety of projects and relevance to the local community. Projects are created by residents to directly address local issues and priorities. The huge variety of successful projects showcases the excellent environmental and community outcomes that small groups of active citizens can achieve by working together for a common goal, and include activities such as:

- education and awareness raising events;
- practical on-ground environmental projects;
- advocating for improved infrastructure;
- clean up days;
- community-building events;
- encouraging active citizenship;
- expert walks and talks; and
- skills workshops.

Examples of the range of projects and activities are available on the website [www.sustainableneighbourhoods.org.au/success-stories](http://www.sustainableneighbourhoods.org.au/success-stories).

The Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance has over 300 financial members, along with many other hundreds of supporters. Our volunteers undertake thousands of hours of work to plan, manage and deliver the broad range of activities described above. Volunteers regularly demonstrate their competence in all aspects of project management and planning, risk management, fundraising, marketing, grant writing, volunteer management, event management and more, as well as technical skills such as expertise in environmental science, public art and engineering.

As of 30 June 2016:

Number of Sustainable Neighbourhood Action Plans (SNAPs) developed	22
Number of active Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups	15
Number of Sustainable Neighbourhood Groups in development	3
Number of financial members of the Lake Macquarie Sustainable Neighbourhood Alliance (Inc)	303
Number of subscribers to the 'Sustainable Neighbourhood News' e-newsletter	530
Number of households directly invited to participate <i>(have been sent the Sustainable Neighbourhoods survey)</i>	24,264

In the 2015-16 financial year:

Total number of Sustainable Neighbourhood events and activities held	150
Total number of Sustainable Neighbourhood volunteer attendances <i>(Volunteers contributing their time to plan, organise and run projects)</i>	1201
Estimate of volunteer hours contributed	2910.5 hours (Equivalent to <b>\$72,763</b> @ \$25/hr)
Total number of attendances / participation at Sustainable Neighbourhood events <i>(Members of the public attending Sustainable Neighbourhood events and projects)</i>	11,439
Estimate of total volunteer and participation contribution	14,350 hours (Equivalent to <b>\$358,738</b> @ \$25/hr)