

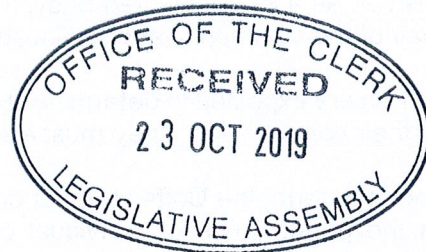


**The Hon. Shelley Hancock MP**  
Minister for Local Government

Ref: A637815

Ms Helen Minnican  
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly  
Parliament of New South Wales  
SYDNEY NSW 2001

By email: [helen.minnican@parliament.nsw.gov.au](mailto:helen.minnican@parliament.nsw.gov.au)



Dear Ms Minnican

I refer to the petition lodged by the Member for Coffs Harbour, Mr Gurmeh Singh MP, on 16 September 2019 requesting that I intervene to pause the Coffs Harbour City Council Cultural and Civic Space Project and direct Council to undertake further community consultation.

I acknowledge the petitioners concerns and herein provide my response.

Under the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) and the *Local Government (General) Regulation 2005*, councils are required to meet rigorous planning and reporting requirements to ensure their decisions and actions meet the needs of their community.

The legislation requires that, under the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework, councils must develop a Community Strategic Plan, four-year delivery program and an annual operational plan. In addition, councils are required to develop a community engagement strategy.

Coffs Harbour City Council has a Community Strategic Plan, a four-year delivery program and an operational plan. Council has also developed a community engagement strategy in compliance with its obligations under the IP&R framework. In addition, Council has developed a Coffs Harbour City Centre Masterplan 2031 to guide the future development of its city centre.

I am advised that Council's strategic priorities, as presented in its 2017-2021 delivery program, identify the implementation of the City Centre Masterplan, including investing in the Cultural and Civic Space Project.

Councils must publicly exhibit their IP&R plans for a period of not less than 28 days. Many councils do much more than just exhibit the plans - they engage actively with their communities through a range of community consultation methods. This activity is guided by their community engagement strategy. These are the opportunities for communities to express their views on what is being proposed.

While councils must appropriately engage their communities and, where necessary, comply with specific statutory consultation measures, as Minister for Local Government, I do not have a role in specifying the consultation strategy to be used in each circumstance.

While there have been complaints about the lack of consultation undertaken by Coffs Harbour City Council with respect to the Cultural and Civic Space Project, Council has a significant amount of information available on its website. It is apparent the community is now aware of what is being proposed and have been bringing their concerns to the attention of their local councillors.

I am advised that the Office of Local Government has not identified any evidence that indicates Council has breached its statutory obligations in pursuing the Cultural and Civic Space Project.

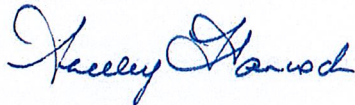
I recognise that some council decisions do not have unanimous support in the community. However, as a locally elected body, the Council is the appropriate body to make decisions on behalf of the community about allocating public resources to projects such as this.

Councils are expected to determine spending priorities and major projects in close consultation with their communities. They must also ensure value for money for ratepayers.

In the long term, the Coffs Harbour community can demonstrate its support or dissatisfaction with the performance of individual councillors or Council when voting at the next council elections in September 2020.

I have also requested that the Office of Local Government continue to monitor the council.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Shelley Hancock". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**The Hon. Shelley Hancock MP**  
Minister for Local Government

CC: Mr Gurmeh Singh, Member for Coffs Harbour

22 OCT 2019