

Understanding Local Geography through your Local Government Area: Hornsby Shire

Martin Pluss, Head of Department
Social Science Northholm Grammar School

Introduction

Schools are in Local Government Areas (LGAs) and students live in LGAs. Sometimes they are the same LGAs and sometimes they are not. Either way local councils are a rich source of primary and secondary information for geography teachers and students.

My school and where I reside are within the boundaries of Hornsby Shire Council. Attending most Council meetings since 2015 and every meeting in 2022 has been most informative and useful to build an understanding of local geography.

My intention is to encourage students and teachers to take explicit interest in local council activities from a geographical perspective. This article will share the key geographical issues addressed in 2022 by Hornsby Council staff, Councilors and the community.

Hopefully this will provide ideas for teachers to consider about their own LGA and in their classroom. Where lists of information are provided in this article, for example with flood management, the goal is to provide content starters for further investigation in your local area.

Hornsby Shire LGA

In 2022 Hornsby Shire's population was 159138 people and it is expected to grow by 12.8% to 179 582 people in 2036. The number of dwellings in the Shire is expected to rise 17% from 56 904 (2022) to 66 632 (2036). (Figure 1) Operationally, the council has its eyes on the present and planning for a growing population and state government dwelling compliance (Figure 2).

Reading Council documentation, attending council meetings and engaging in community groups are ideal ways to develop an understanding of geographical issues in your local area. Hornsby Council meetings are on the second Wednesday of each month except for January. The business papers are online on the first Monday of the month.

Agenda items and reports are based on the council's organisational structure which is as follows: Office of General Manager, Corporate Services Division, Community and Environment Divisions, Planning and Compliance Divisions and Infrastructure and Major Assets Divisions. Each division provides insights into geographical issues from delivery of services and facilities, provision of social and economic infrastructure, sustainable practices for waste management, protection and management of the environment and planning for future needs across the shire and in specific places. Each division writes detailed reports from which geographical data can be gleaned.

The meetings also have Confidential Items, Mayoral Notes and public individuals and community groups are afforded the opportunity to present for three minutes, on agenda items and in the public forum. The public forum enables students to engage in active citizenship.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

The meeting format includes the national anthem, prayer from a local church group and welcome to the Country by a local Durag or Garigal indigenous elder(s). Agenda items are passed by the exception method, that is, if no member of the public or the council wishes to speak to the item. All other items are addressed during the meeting.

Prior to the last two terms of council, councils were the main decision maker for Development Applications (DAs). Currently, if there are more than ten objections to the DA or the development is considered as state significant the Council is limited in what it can do about a DA. The decision is passed to the Northern Sydney or the Hornsby Planning Panels. Students find this useful information to share with their parents if they have concerns about developments in their local area.

The year 2022 was the first year of a three-year cycle until the next election in September 2024. In the beginning of each year, an Operational Plan, based on strategic planning, was formulated and presented to the community. This is where the community can discover what is planned for local paths, footpaths, services & facilities and events.

What did 2022 look like in Hornsby? How can it provide insight into school geography? How can it contribute to student primary and secondary research? How can students be engaged in local geographical issues? Who are the active local community groups in the area? What are the opportunities available for active citizenship?

Some answers to these questions come through an investigation of Shire wide projects and initiatives. Figure 1 indicates a series of agenda items, with geographical implications, in meetings throughout 2022.

Shire Wide Geographical Issues

Hornsby Shire projects and initiatives have impacts across all Hornsby. In 2022 the following three Shire wide issues provided examples and an avenue for further research by students and teachers. A similar opportunity would be available in your LGA.

Some projects and initiatives in 2022 include the Community Strategic Plan 2022–2032, Design Excellence Planning Panel, Disability Inclusion and Social Inclusion Plan, a renewable energy infrastructure initiative, Healthy Aging Hornsby, Draft Flood and Risk Management Strategy, Agri Business Tourism reforms and approaches to telecommunication facilities. The work of various committees fed into decision making and these committees had specific agenda items in 2022. Committees of human geographical interest are

the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Consultative Committee (HATSIC), the Heritage Advisory Committee and the Arts and Culture Advisory Group.

Here are three Shire wide initiatives with geographical content, processes and management strategies which can be aligned to syllabus content. They are presented as Hornsby examples and hopefully provide insights into what is possible in your local government area.

Community Strategic Plan 2022–2032

<https://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/council/forms-and-publications/publications/community-plan>

The Community Strategic Plan is a significant Shire wide initiative with geographical implications as Agenda Item 2 in March 2022, The Community Strategic Plan 2022–2032 – Your Vision, Your Plan. It is based on a ten-year plan divided into a four-year plan for delivery and a one year operational plan to be documented through annual, bi-annual and quarterly reports. Each document provides substantial data, graphs and maps.

The council's role is to provide transparent decision making and supporting strategic documents including a local strategic planning statement and a resourcing strategy including a long-term financial plan, a workforce management strategy, and an asset management strategy and plans.

The guiding principles for the management of human and environmental resources include working with other councils and state government, securing services for community needs, acting fairly without bias for the community and recognising diversity needs and interests. Specific social justice considerations such as access, equity, participation, and rights are recognised. Finally, the long term cumulative social, environmental, economic and civic leadership are to be considered.

Hornsby is linked to the Greater Sydney Commission North District Plan. Hornsby deals with the following geographical challenges such as the rate of population growth (Figure 2), traffic and transport, housing supply (Figure3), housing affordability and diversity, climate change and environmental sustainability, resilience and planning and the natural environment. There are a multitude of stakeholders such as traditional owners, state and federal government and community groups. There is a wealth of resources for all Sydney based teachers through the Greater Sydney Commission.

The community plan is designed around the principles of Hornsby being livable, sustainable, productive and collaborative. This is a valuable framework which could be adopted by teachers and students because it investigates geographical issues and provides a

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

framework for measuring progress which would be useful for their own research.

Four questions are addressed for each theme.:

- What is measured?
- How is it measured?
- What is the baseline for comparison?
- What is the target?

For the theme of Liveable Hornsby what is measured is a connected and cohesive community. The measurement comes from looking at the detail of the strategic direction. In Hornsby's case this is "caring for community where the built environment and people combine to create a sense of belonging and support." The community indicator base line for comparison is measured by volunteer participation rates, compared to a 2016 baseline of 24.9% The target to increase or maintain this participation.

This approach is replicated for the three other themes, and all provide local research opportunities for students. *A Sustainable Hornsby* is measured by the ability to recover from natural disasters, strategies for net zero emissions, recycling and organic waste and sustainable resource uses, tree canopy of private land and transition to a water sensitive city. *A Productive Hornsby* with integrated and accessible transport can be measured by safety on the roads, reliance on private motor cars, use of sustainable transport such as E Vehicles. *A Collaborative Hornsby* the quality of the services provided to Council Customers and the opportunities to participate in council decision making.

All LGAs will have a Community Strategic Strategy which is most useful for Stage 4 Place and Livability – access to services and facilities, community and enhancing livability.

Disability Inclusion Action Plan (Social Inclusion).

Sometimes a geographer needs to dig around to find the geographical implication of the Shire wide initiative, for example, in the April Council meeting Item 7 included the Disability Inclusion Action Plan (Social Inclusion). There were four themes and sub themes treated: developing community attitude and behaviour, creating liveable communities, supporting access to meaningful communities and improving access to services through better systems and processes.

On a closer examination the accessible geographical implication for students is via the theme of creating livable communities. A geographer would need to be engaged in the provision and maintenance of accessible paths, kerb ramps, and crossings. Accessibility

and safety of footpaths requires an understanding of the natural environment and the human interactions of such environments. Improving travel and access to transport in Hornsby provides an opportunity to understand the processes and the impact on the natural and built environment of private and government transport organisations. In addition the focus on disability is well suited to the section in Stage 5 Human Wellbeing – Human Wellbeing in Australia and the following syllabus item: "...*examination of the reasons for and the consequences of differences in human wellbeing for TWO groups of people in Australia.... people with disabilities.*"



*View of Berowra Waters from the Benowie Track.
Source: Wikimedia Commons*

Flood Risk Management Strategy

The Flood Risk Management Strategy was Agenda Item 5 in the October Council Meeting. Most LGAs would have areas that are subjected to flooding, this was particularly the case for Hornsby. There are fourteen main catchments in the Shire and 52 sub catchments with the dominant form of flooding overland flow. Flooding affects the whole Shire but mainly the lowlands along the Hawkesbury River and the townships of Brooklyn & Wisemans Ferry (Hornsby LGA) Spencer & Gunderman (Central Coast LGA). Major tributaries to the estuary include Mangrove, Berowra, Mooney Mooney, Mullet and Cowan creeks. Most of the foreshore and adjacent land is national park, with much of the foreshore only accessible by boat.

The key issues raised and a focus for student research include the size of the flood, effective warning time, flood readiness, rate and rise of flood water, duration of flooding, ease of evacuation, effective flood access and the type of development on the floodplain. Students then need to consider the environmental and social

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

characteristics of the area such as population size, structure and distribution, soils, contaminated lands, water management, threatened flora and fauna, aboriginal heritage and acre sites.

All these issues provided detailed content to explore Stage 4 Water in the World in a range of suburbs (Figure 4) such as Beecroft, Castle Hill, Cheltenham, Cherrybrook, North Epping, West Pennant Hills. This enables a local consideration of the following syllabus points: water cycle, water scarcity and management and a natural hazard.

What's next?

In 2022 there were dozens of Shire wide initiatives with geographical implications for students to engage in further primary and secondary research. Some of these initiatives are in response to state government requirements and as such would be similar projects and policies in place for your LGA. Such resources and documents would be online for your community and if you were prepared to go one step further and attend a few meetings you would learn more.

It is now up to you, the geography teacher, to align what you can learn from your LGA in your geography teaching, linked to a variety of syllabus points. The starting point should be maps of your LGA and the Wards (Figure 5). These will provide a breakdown of

the suburbs (Figure 4) you can investigate and then students can follow up the ABS Quick Stats for more data. Local Government Areas are a common factor in all local geography for NSW geography students. If leveraged well, council activities can provide considerable insight and relevance to syllabus points in the geography classroom.

A possible future article in this local geography series could focus on the place based initiatives and projects in Hornsby Shire. This will examine place-based approaches to community engagement and management strategies in Hornsby Shire to assist students develop local geographical understanding.



Hornsby Shire Council Chambers. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 1: Hornsby Council Meetings 2022

AGENDA ITEMS OF GEOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE	
February 2022	Agenda Item 5 Sydney North Planning Panel and Hornsby Planning Panel – local and community members.
March 2022	Agenda Item 3 Draft Community Strategic Plan 2022–2032. Agenda Item 5 Design Excellence Panel – Panel Members.
April 2022	Agenda Item 6 Dual Naming and Renaming of Council Facilities Policy Agenda Item 7 Disability Inclusion Plans (Social Inclusion)
May 2022	Agenda Item 4 Realignment of suburban boundary between Middle Dural and Glenorie. Agenda Item 6 Byle's Creek Planning Study – a Report on submissions. Agenda Item 7 Onsite Sewage Management System Policy.
June 2022	Agenda Item 8 Draft Rural Lands Study.
July 2022	Agenda Item 4 Draft Disability Inclusion Action Plan. Agenda Item 6 Planning Proposal Old Northern Road. Agenda Item 7 Planning Proposal 7 City Road Pennant Hills. Agenda Item 8 Hornsby Town Centre Master Plan.
August 2022	Agenda Item 2 Deferred Report Car Parking Management Brooklyn. Agenda Item 7 Hornsby Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (HATSIC) Membership. Agenda Item 12 Expression of Interest- Provision of Renewable energy infrastructure.

UNDERSTANDING LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

September 2022	Agenda Item 7 Healthy Aging Hornsby. Agenda Item 8 Arts and Culture Advisory Group. Agenda item 11 Exhibition of Cherrybrook Station Precinct and State Significant Planning proposal.
October 2022	Agenda Item 5 Hornsby Shire Draft Flood Risk Management Strategy and Plan. Agenda Item 6 Public Domain Guidelines and Improvements Beecroft Town Centre.
November 2022	Agenda Item 1 Hornsby Shire Council Report 2021–2022.
December 2022	Agenda Item 6 Draft Healthy Aging Hornsby Strategy. Agenda Item 8 Mark Taylor Oval Indoor Cricket Lease. Agenda Item 9 Community Events Grants Program. Agenda Item 10 Planning Proposal Byle’s Creek. Agenda Item 11 Agri Tourism Planning Reforms. Agenda Item 14 Proposed Co-location of Telecommunications Facilities at Normanhurst.

Figure Two: Hornsby LGA Population 2022–2036

YEAR	PEOPLE	PERCENTAGE GROWTH
2022	159 138	
2032	174 894	9.9%
2036	179 582	12.8%

Figure Three: Hornsby LGA Dwellings 2022–2036

YEAR	DWELLINGS	PERCENTAGE GROWTH
2022	56 904	
2032	64 247	12.9%
2036	66 632	17.0%

Figure Four: Hornsby LGA Wards and Suburbs

WARD A	WARD B	WARD C
Asquith, Arcadia, Berowra, Berowra Heights, Brooklyn, Berrilee, Calabash, Cowan, Canoelands, Dangar Island, Dural, Fiddletown, Forest Glen, Glenorie, Galston, Glenhaven, Hornsby Heights, Laughtondale, Mt Colah, Mt Kuring-gai, Maroota, Middle Dural and Singletons Mill.	Hornsby, Normanhurst, Pennant Hills, Thornleigh, Wahroonga, Waitara, Westleigh.	Beecroft, Castle Hill, Cheltenham, Cherrybrook, North Epping, West Pennant Hills.



UNDERSTANDING LOCAL GEOGRAPHY

Figure Five: Hornsby LGA - Sydney Context



Resources

Hornsby (2022) Community Strategic Plan 2022–2032

<https://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/council/forms-and-publications/publications/community-plan>

Hornsby Map Reference

<https://profile.id.com.au/hornsby/about>

Download a Report for the Key Geographical Characteristics of Hornsby

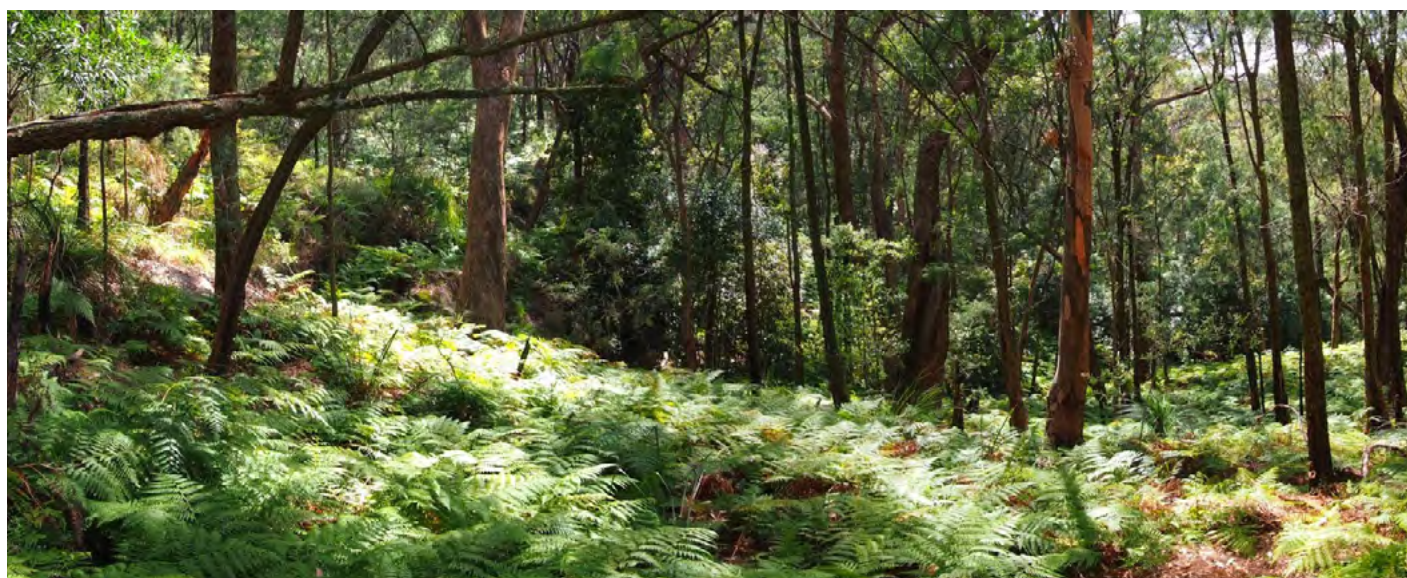
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Hornsby Business Papers

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Birrawanna Track. Source: Wikimedia Commons