



Sustainability Advisory Committee

6.00 pm Tuesday 19 September 2023

**Council Chambers
209 Comur Street, Yass**

Committee Members: Cr A Cameron, J Connelly, P Davidson, S Ecker, N Elliott, A Elvin, L McAlary, C Nelson, A Tewes, A Wardle

SUSTAINABILITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NOTICE OF MEETING

A meeting of the Sustainability Advisory Committee will be held in Council Chambers, 209 Comur Street, Yass, on Tuesday 19 September 2023, commencing at 6.00pm.

AGENDA

Page No.

Acknowledgement of Country

Yass Valley Council recognises the Ngunnawal people, the Traditional Custodians of the land, water, and sky. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and future emerging leaders. We extend our respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live in the Yass Valley Local Government Area.

1. Apologies

2. Declarations of Interests

3. Confirmation of Minutes

Minutes of Sustainability Advisory Committee held on 1 August 2023

4. Presentation

4.1 Generating Community Interest in Sustainability

5. Reports

5.1 Food Organics and Garden Organics Service8

5.2 Policy Review Schedule10

5.3 Smart Meters in Yass Valley11

5.4 Revised Renewable Energy Policy 12

6. Next Meeting – 17 October 2023



Minutes of the Sustainability Advisory Committee

Tuesday 1 August 2023

6.00pm

Council Chambers

209 Comur Street, Yass

Table of Contents

1.	Apologies	2
3.	Declarations of Interest	2
4.	Confirmation of Minutes	2
4.	Staff Reports	2
4.1	Sustainability Policy - Community Feedback and Implementation	2
5.	Committee Member Reports	3
5.1	Community Batteries Research Paper	3
5.2	Active Transport - Yass Spur Rail Trail	3
6.	Next Meeting	4

Minutes of the Sustainability Advisory Committee held on 1 August 2023

Present

Cr Adrian Cameron (Chair), S Ecker, N Elliott (online), A Elvin, L McAlary (on line from 6.40pm), C Nelson (online from 6.24pm), A Tewes, A Wardale

1. Apologies

John Connelly, Peter Davidson

3. Declarations of Interest

Nil

4. Confirmation of Minutes

COMMITTEE DECISION

That the minutes of the Sustainability Advisory Committee held on 30 May 2023 be taken as read and confirmed.

(Tewes/Ecker)

4. Staff Reports

4.1 SUSTAINABILITY POLICY - COMMUNITY FEEDBACK AND IMPLEMENTATION

SUMMARY

At its meeting on 25 May Council endorsed the recommendation of the Committee that the revised Sustainability Policy and the Sustainability Assessment Framework, as circulated to members offline, be endorsed. It further determined that the Policy be placed on public exhibition for a period of 28 days and adopted if no significant objections were received.

The Policy was duly placed on exhibition to 29 June.

It is appropriate that the Committee (i) consider any submissions received and (ii) discuss how it can assist Council in the implementation of those Policy elements not being addressed by other means.

COMMITTEE DECISION

That the submission on the Sustainability Policy be noted and reported to Council for consideration.

(Elvin/Elliott)

5. Committee Member Reports

5.1 COMMUNITY BATTERIES RESEARCH PAPER

SUMMARY

The Committee has previously identified the options for renewable energy hubs in Yass Valley – most probably in the form of community batteries and solar PV - as one of its research priorities.

At its meeting on 20 April the Committee considered an approach to Council from Infra Pty Ltd proposing Yass Valley join a project called “Town Power”. Infra Pty Ltd is a private for-profit business that is looking to establish arrangements with up to 80 local councils to provide some 2 gigawatts of embedded generation capacity and 4 gigawatts of storage.

Upon consideration of the approach, it was decided by the Committee that it would be best if it first familiarised itself with the various models and ownership arrangements for distributed energy generation and storage and the ‘pros’ and ‘cons’ associated with each model.

COMMITTEE DECISION

That:

- 1. The contents of the research report on community battery models be noted.***
- 2. Contact be made with the ANU, ACT government and other smaller regional communities to gain further insights on community batteries.***

(Elvin/McAlary)

5.2 ACTIVE TRANSPORT - YASS SPUR RAIL TRAIL

SUMMARY

As part of its research and engagement agenda the Committee noted that Council is seeking to use the Yass Spur Line as an active transport corridor and noted that additional options for further active transport corridors are being considered in the *Open Space Strategy*.

At its meeting on 29 June, Council considered a Strategic Assessment of the Yass Rail Trail (**Attachment A**) and determined that opportunities to fund the detailed design, community consultation and construction of the Yass Rail Trail should be pursued.

It is timely for the Committee to consider where its efforts might best be directed either in support of the Yass Rail Trail or the furtherance of active transport options across the rest of the LGA.

COMMITTEE DECISION

That the Yass Spur Trail needs to have an emphasis on social and community benefits rather than just the economic perspective.

(Wardle/Tewes)

6. Next Meeting

Thursday 21 September 2023, at 6.00pm in Council Chambers 209 Comur Street, Yass

Minutes of the Sustainability Advisory Committee held on 1 August 2023

Action:

Business papers for the September 2023 meeting to include:

- FOGO report
- Policy Review report
- Presentation by Director Corporate & Community and Communications & Media Manager to discuss promotion of sustainability within the community etc.

It was noted that a review of waste operations to be undertaken following the recruitment of a Manager Waste

The meeting closed at 7.08pm

5.1 FOOD ORGANICS AND GARDEN ORGANICS SERVICE

SUMMARY

In April 2023 the Committee considered a report on the FOGO (Food Organics and Garden Organics) Threshold Questions. Staff advised in May 2023 that a discussions paper on the design of a FOGO service was being prepared for consideration by the Committee.

RECOMMENDATION

That the design of a FOGO service for Yass Valley be based on:

- *Using the Discussion Paper as the basis for Council undertaking a community survey and/or small group discussions on FOGO and what the service could look like*
- *Options be developed for a FOGO service based on community comments and waste staff input*
- *The community be consulted on the proposed FOGO service options*
- *A prefer FOGO service option be selected for Council consideration*
- *The preferred FOGO option be implemented along with a community education campaign on how to use the service*

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of a FOGO service will have financial implications for Council which needs to be identified as part of the design of a scheme.

POLICY & LEGISLATION

- Waste Management Policy

REPORT

Following the presentation of the FOGO Threshold Questions Paper in April 2023, Committee members were subsequently advised in May 2023 that staff were preparing a discussion paper to examine options for the design of a service and its introduction in the Yass Valley Local Government Area.

A draft Discussion Paper has been prepared and is included in **Attachment A**.

There are two options for FOGO collection i.e.

- Kerbside collection
- Reliance on residents to take their FOGO to a waste transfer station

A hybrid option could be to extend the existing kerbside waste collection service in towns and villages and allow rural residents to deliver FOGO to a waste transfer station.

There are two options for FOGO processing i.e.

- Establish and new processing facility in Yass Valley
- Transfer FOGO to an existing processing facility within the region

Establishing a new processing facility in Yass Valley also involves identifying potential users of the processed material. This would not be necessary if FOGO is transferred to an existing processing facility.

It is recommended that the design of a FOGO service in Yass Valley be based on:

- Using the Discussion Paper as the basis for Council undertaking a community survey and/or small group discussions on FOGO and what the service could look like
- Options be developed for a FOGO service based on community comments and waste staff input
- The community be consulted on the proposed FOGO service options

- A prefer FOGO service option be selected for Council consideration
- The preferred FOGO option be implemented along with a community education campaign on how to use the service

ATTACHMENTS: A. Draft FOGO Discussion Paper [↔](#)

5.2 POLICY REVIEW SCHEDULE

SUMMARY

The Committee requested a policy review schedule be presented to enable priorities for the input from the Committee to be determined.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee determine the policies it wishes to have input into any review.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil

POLICY & LEGISLATION

Policy

REPORT

A register of current Council Policies is included in **Attachment A**.

The list of policies indicates:

- Policy author
- Review frequency
- Next review date

Several of the scheduled review dates will need to be updated.

It should also be noted that several planning and engineering policies are currently being incorporated into a Comprehensive Development Control Plan (DCP). The DCP will supersede the need for these policies.

It is recommended that the Committee determine which policy reviews it wishes to have input into.

ATTACHMENTS: A. Policy Register [↗](#)

5.3 SMART METERS IN YASS VALLEY

SUMMARY

The question of how many smart meters are currently installed throughout Yass Valley. Essential Energy have provided a breakdown of meters by locality.

RECOMMENDATION

That the information on smart meters provided by Essential Energy be noted.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil

POLICY & LEGISLATION

Nil

REPORT

The question of how many smart meters are currently installed throughout Yass Valley was raised at the last meeting. This information was followed up with Essential Energy and a breakdown of meters by locality has been provided (refer following table). This data is only for solar customers within these towns, villages and localities.

Postcode and Town	BASIC meter	Smart Meter	Grand Total
BANGO	2	6	8
BERREMANGRA	1	3	4
BINALONG	1		1
BOAMBOLO	5	5	10
BOOKHAM	21	6	27
BOWNING	41	49	90
BROADWAY	1		1
CAVAN	2	1	3
GOOD HOPE	10	11	21
JEIR	12	27	39
JERRAWA	8	10	18
KANGIARA	1	8	9
LAVERSTOCK		1	1
MANTON	13	23	36
MANTON PARK		1	1
MARCHMONT	10	34	44
MULLION	2	4	6
MURRUMBATEMAN	212	501	713
NANIMA	3	9	12
RYE PARK	1		1
SPRINGRANGE	3	2	5
WALLAROO	1		1
WEE JASPER	9	12	21
WOOLGARLO		1	1
YASS	346	635	981
YASS NORTH	4	2	6
YASS RIVER	2	11	13
BINALONG	42	47	89
GUNDAROO	58	163	221
SUTTON	57	145	202
NANIMA		1	1
Total	868	1,718	2,586

ATTACHMENTS: Nil

5.4 REVISED RENEWABLE ENERGY POLICY

SUMMARY

Following the recent consideration of the proposed Wallaroo Solar Farm and the comments made in Council's submission to the Springdale Solar Farm at Sutton, Council requested a review of its *Renewable Energy Policy*. Councillors made some suggested changes to the policy at a Workshop in August 2023.

In August 2023 a revised policy was presented to Council. Council determined that the revised *Renewable Energy Policy* be placed on public exhibition for 28 days and adopted, if no significant objections received.

The revised policy is now presented to the Sustainability Committee for input as part of the public exhibition process.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee consider the revised Renewable Energy Policy and provide comments.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Nil

POLICY & LEGISLATION

- Renewable Energy Policy

REPORT

In June 2023 Council considered an application for the Wallaroo Solar Farm. At this meeting Councillors sought a workshop on the *Renewable Energy Policy* to determine if it needs to be further reviewed. A workshop was held on 8 August 2023.

In August 2023 Council determined that the revised *Renewable Energy Policy* be placed on public exhibition for 28 days and adopted, if no significant objections received (refer **Attachment A**).

The revised policy is now presented to the Sustainability Committee for input.

The original policy was developed in response to the community debate around wind farms in Yass Valley.

In June 2018 Council held a Planning Forum on windfarms with speakers for and against the land use. From the Forum and a subsequent Councillor Workshop a policy position was developed on renewable energy projects in Yass Valley which was adopted in October 2018.

In October 2019 there was an administrative update to the policy was endorsed but this made no fundamental changes (refer **Attachment B**).

While the policy had its origins in the windfarm debate it was structured to be applicable to all renewable energy projects.

The policy position indicates that while supportive of renewable energy projects, further large scale wind turbine sites are opposed.

The policy also indicates that despite its position on windfarms it would consider further proposed renewable energy projects on their individual merits with the following matters being taken into consideration:

- The location being consistent with the *Yass Valley Settlement Strategy*
- The infrastructure (e.g. turbines, panels, substations) not being within view lines of villages and towns or areas of closer settlement
- The infrastructure not having an adverse impact on the amenity of other dwellings
- The impact of infrastructure (e.g. turbines, panels) on the rural landscape and tourism values of the Yass Valley

- Roads being used by any heavy vehicles being upgraded to the appropriate standard in Council's *Roads Standards Policy* prior to commencement of works on site
- A sharing the benefits scheme(s) with the host landowners, immediate neighbours and a Community Enhancement Fund (as per Council policy)
- Noise impacts at adjoining dwellings being consistent with the applicable standards
- The project to commence within 5 years of a Consent being issued and completed within 5 years of commencement
- The impacts of the infrastructure (e.g. panels, turbines) on the heritage values of the site and Yass Valley
- The economic and social impacts on local communities and Yass Valley
- Any community and Rural Fire Service concerns in relation to the bushfire risks and any impediments to firefighting operations

The policy relates to all renewable energy projects including windfarms and solar farms.

Following the discussions at the Councillor workshop on 8 August 2023 the policy has been revised (refer **Attachment C**) to include:

- Reference to the Department of Planning & Environment (DPE) *Large Scale Solar Energy Guidelines 2022*
- A reference to the buffer area along the NSW/ACT border identified in the *Yass Valley Settlement Strategy* as an area not suitable for renewable energy projects
- In the view lines criteria to replace 'areas of closer settlement' with 'clusters of rural dwellings'
- A reference for the need to address the impacts associated land contamination as a result of grass and bushfires
- A requirement for projects to develop housing solutions for their workforce

It is recommended that the Committee consider the revised policy and provide comments on any further changes.

Committee Member Comments

Both the current policy, and the suggested minor amendments workshopped by Councillors in August 2023, have significant ongoing ramifications for Council and the Yass Valley community which have not been fully articulated to date. These are detailed in the following comments, along with several possible improvements that the Committee might wish to put forward to Council. These comments concludes with an outline of what a fully updated and detailed *Renewable Energy Policy* for Council to consider.

The following comments are made in respect of the current policy and the proposed revision:

- The policy statement is not a "renewable energy policy" as such. Renewable energy policies at the Local Government level typically set targets to become more energy efficient or 'green' and detail what the organisation will do to meet those targets, eg. buying only renewable energy, converting away from gas, improving the heating efficiency of community buildings, etc. The better policies also detail measures to support those in the community wanting to both reduce their energy bills and help the environment, eg. making appropriate provisions within planning instruments, providing administrative support to community groups wanting to promote or build renewables, disseminating within the community educational materials, managing small scale grants and loans, etc.
- The existing policy rather appears to be a 'political' statement responding to parts of the community which were upset about several large-scale wind turbine developments under consideration in 2018. However, the language used in the policy and its overall negative framing of the issue is likely to adversely impact upon Council's ability to get traction with relevant parties – developers and the DPE - when it comes to negotiating results that mitigate the impacts of large-scale developments. In

short, the policy is self-defeating and places Council in a poor negotiating position when arguing for the best outcomes.

- The decision-making authority for renewable projects deemed State Significant Development rests with the State Government of course. Yet the policy makes no acknowledgement of this fact. Rather, the minimal influence that Council has in determining large-scale development projects is being misrepresented in the policy wording and is being misinterpreted by the community as suggesting the Council has some level of authority, when it does not. This is clearly evident, for example, in the reporting on 30 August 2023 in the *Yass Valley Times* of the proposed policy revisions and the decision to seek public comment.
- The Council minutes of June 2018 in relation to the development of a Renewable Energy Policy included a decision that **“Council will, following consultation with the community, develop a comprehensive policy on renewable energy generation within the Yass Valley and the matters Council should focus on”**. The June 2018 resolution also identified 11 considerations to be taken into account **“until a more detailed policy position is developed”**. However, the policy as presented to Council four months later in October 2018 was in substance no different from the June 2018 resolution which identified the 11 specific considerations. The covering report of October 2018 gave no details as to what consultations had occurred with the community, what issues had been raised during those consultations, where those views aligned or were in contradiction. As such, it might be reasonable to conclude that nothing actually happened in fulfilment of Council’s resolution between June and October 2018 to genuinely engage the community. *CEO Comment: the Council resolution in October 2018 was to place the draft policy on public exhibition. Council considered the submissions received in December 2018 and determined to adopt the policy.*
- The adoption of the policy in 2019 saw Council expelled from the Cities Power Partnership; a collection of some 180+ Local Councils across Australia sharing expertise and resources in support of the move to net-zero emissions. This was an embarrassing outcome which has impacted upon - and still impacts – Council’s reputation within the Local Government industry and environment sector. A revised, positively-framed policy could provide Council a path back to membership, if it so desired.
- The issues that are identified in the current policy reflect the concerns of some members of the community with wind and solar farms – the visual impact, disruptions during the build phase, habitat impacts, the effect on local housing supply etc. These are no different to impacts which come with many large-scale developments and are properly dealt with through planning processes and controls. The singling out of renewables as a particular source for such impacts is extraordinary, particularly as Council has not adopted a Development Control Plan (DCP) to secure better environmental outcomes from the developments it has under its control. In wishing to support those citizens impacted adversely by large scale renewable projects – and be recognised for doing so - Council would arguably be better served by directing its efforts towards advocating for greater rigour and protections in State and Federal planning processes and environmental laws. *CEO Comment: in the absence of a comprehensive DCP Council has adopted from time to time planning policies – these policies have been used as de facto DCPs.*
- A revised policy should acknowledge and respond to broader and growing community concerns over climate change and the belief that all levels of government need to respond to the climate crisis. Whilst there is no data specific to Yass, it is worth noting that the Lowy Institute 2023 Poll found that **56% of the National population agreed with the statement “Global warming is a serious and pressing problem. We should be taking steps now even if this involves significant costs”**. The 2022 Lowy Poll found that **90% of the sample agreed with “providing subsidies for the development of renewable energy technologies”**. In 2021 **74% agreed that “the benefits of taking further action on climate change will outweigh the costs”**. A Climate Council survey conducted with Beyond Blue found in 2022 that most Australians (**80%**) reported **“experiencing some form of disaster at least once since 2019”**. And more than half (**51%**) of Australians are **“very (25%) or fairly worried (26%) about climate change and extreme weather events in Australia”**. Such sentiments are likely to be shared by the people of Yass Valley given we have been subject to significant weather and flooding events in the past two years. Events that have also severely impacted Council’s operations and budget.

- In developing a response to expected future climate events, Council's *2022 Climate Change & Natural Disaster Risk Assessment* identified the vulnerability of the energy network in the LGA as a major risk. The recommended response was to opt for "local renewable energy generation" in the interest of diversified supply (see pages 5, 20 and 55 of the report). The updated policy should both reference this finding and respond to it accordingly.
- Grant funding for Local Governments is increasingly being tied by the Federal and NSW Governments to the fulfillment of their climate change / net zero objectives. Examples include the previous State Government's Climate Change Fund, the current NSW Government's \$1.8 billion commitment to energy security, and the \$400 Federal ARENA Community Batteries Fund. The ALGA itself has been advocating for a \$200m Climate Response Partnership Fund and this proposal is in fact is referenced and supported by Council in its October 2022 Advocacy Paper for Funding Priorities. LGNSW's policy platform highlights the need for greater funding in support of climate change mitigation measures as well as legislative and regulatory change in support of environmental objectives. Council arguably needs a policy position which allows it to access these current and future funding sources, not one which is likely to work counter to its financial interests. Even if the policy does not directly disqualify Council from these funding sources, the reputational damage it has suffered by virtue of its current policy position reduces the chances of success.
- The policy wrongly, if indirectly, implies that there is a significant likelihood of additional wind and solar farms in Yass. Apart from the Engie and Wallaroo proposals, which have both been on the books in one form or another for several years, it is understood no new wind or solar farms are currently proposed. Council is not in one of the five Renewable Energy Zones established by the State Government as loci for renewables. As such, further large-scale renewables in the Valley is unlikely and this should be communicated to the community, rather than their being made anxious without good cause.
- An up-to-date policy would allow the Yass community to take a greater level of control over its transition to a new renewables energy future and there is significant potential to shape both the look and scale of renewables in the Yass Valley through the policy. Council could support the deployment of community batteries and the upgrading of commercial buildings to become more energy efficient, consistent with its own 2021 decision to introduce a trial program of Environmental Upgrade Financing. It could invest itself – or support others to invest - in solar farms that blend with our environment. This is happening now in Goulburn Mulwaree with its community-led and community-built \$5m community-built solar farm. There are further examples, in Bega and Albury. Such developments in Yass Valley would not only provide an additional revenue source but could limit the need for new transmission and distribution infrastructure like Humelink; noting that network costs now represent the largest percentage of power bills and reducing these, through embedded capacity, presents generators and retailers with the greatest opportunity to find a competitive advantage.
- Finally, the renewables policy should commit Council to building energy efficient carbon-neutral communities henceforth when designing new developments like North Murrumbateman. Several examples of how this can be done are available in both the ACT and NSW. For example, the Narara Eco-Village on the Central Coast provides an interesting model. This could and should be reflected in Council's master-planning processes and the long delayed DCP that guides local development outcomes.

Given the above points a possible outline of an updated renewable policy is included in **Attachment D**.

Also attached for information are Council Minutes June 2018 (refer **Attachment E**), Council Report and Minutes October 2018 (refer **Attachment F**) and Council Report and Minutes December 2018 (refer **Attachment G**)

- ATTACHMENTS:**
- A. Council Report and Minutes Aug 2023 [⇒](#)
 - B. Current Renewable Energy Policy (Sept 2019) [⇒](#)
 - C. Revised Renewable Energy Policy (Aug 2023) [⇒](#)
 - D. Possible Outline of an Updated Renewable Energy Policy [⇒](#)
 - E. Council Minutes June 2018 [⇒](#)
 - F. Council Report and Minutes Oct 2018 [⇒](#)
 - G. Council Report and Minutes December 2018