

Port Stephens Pathways Plan 2026

Enhancing connectivity and accessibility for our community.



GUUDJI YIIGU

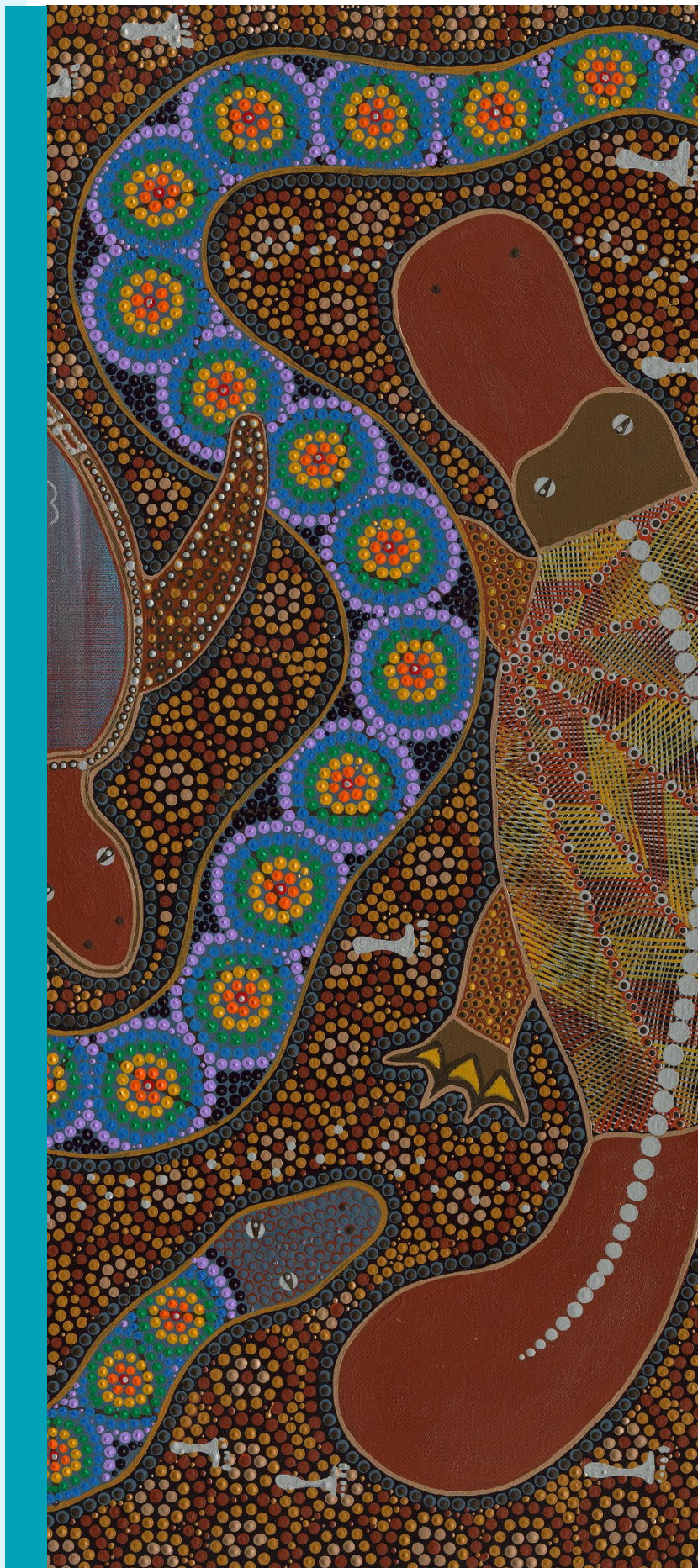
(GOO-JEE IK-KOO)

We welcome you to Port Stephens – part of the Worimi Aboriginal Nation. Port Stephens Council acknowledges the Worimi people as traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waterways on which we all live, learn, work and play.

We value and respect the Worimi people and the legacy 60,000 years of Aboriginal Nation traditions and culture brings with it. As part of Council's culture of acceptance, diversification and harmony we walk alongside the Worimi people on a journey of listening and learning.

Together we will strive to make this a better place for all peoples. As guardians of these lands, we ask that you tread lightly to help preserve the biodiversity and respect those who came before as well as those who will follow.

Artwork by Regan Lilley.



Contents

Mayor's message.....	4
Introduction	5
Why are pathways important?	6
How does Council deliver pathways?	7
How does the plan align with other Council plans and strategies?	9
How does the plan align with National and State strategies?	11
Methodology.....	12
The purpose of this methodology	13
Prioritisation methodology and scoring	13
Conclusion	24





Mayor's message

In recent years, we've seen a big shift in how our community lives, works, and connects. These changes have highlighted how important safe, accessible neighbourhoods are, and the role that quality footpaths and pathways play in our everyday lives.

Whether it's our kids walking to school, residents accessing local shops and services, or enjoying a stroll through one of our beautiful parks, our pathways play an important role in making Port Stephens a more connected, inclusive and liveable place. They support healthy and active lifestyles, encourage our community to get out and interact, and enhance the character and vibrancy of our towns.

The Port Stephens Pathways Plan sets out a clear strategic vision for how we'll prioritise and invest in our pathway network, both now and into the future. It identifies where our greatest needs are and provides a fair and transparent method for prioritising new projects, and ensures our resources are directed where they'll make the biggest difference for our community.

This plan is a reflection of what our community values. It responds to your feedback and supports Council's broader vision for sustainability, equity and place-based planning. It will help us advocate for funding, guide future development, and deliver the essential connections that improve the daily lives of our residents.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to have their say and share their voice during this process. With your continued support, we'll work together to create a safer, more connected Port Stephens.

Leah Anderson

Mayor of Port Stephens

Introduction

The Port Stephens Pathways Plan shows the existing network of footpaths and shared paths throughout Port Stephens and identifies locations for future pathways construction. The plan assists Council in prioritising new pathway projects and securing funding to improve connectivity by addressing missing links in the network.

Council has resolved to undertake a review of Council's Pathways Plan with updated mapping and a greater emphasis on providing pedestrian access surrounding schools, aged care facilities, shopping districts and where our community live.

A prioritisation methodology has been developed to help identify the areas most in need of new pathways. The methodology applies two distinct scoring streams to reflect the different roles pathways play across Port Stephens. One stream focuses on connection pathways that improve access to essential services and fill gaps in the network, while the other focuses on destination pathways that support recreation, tourism and place-based experiences. This approach allows Council to prioritise projects fairly and supports better decision making when funding opportunities present themselves.



Why are pathways important?

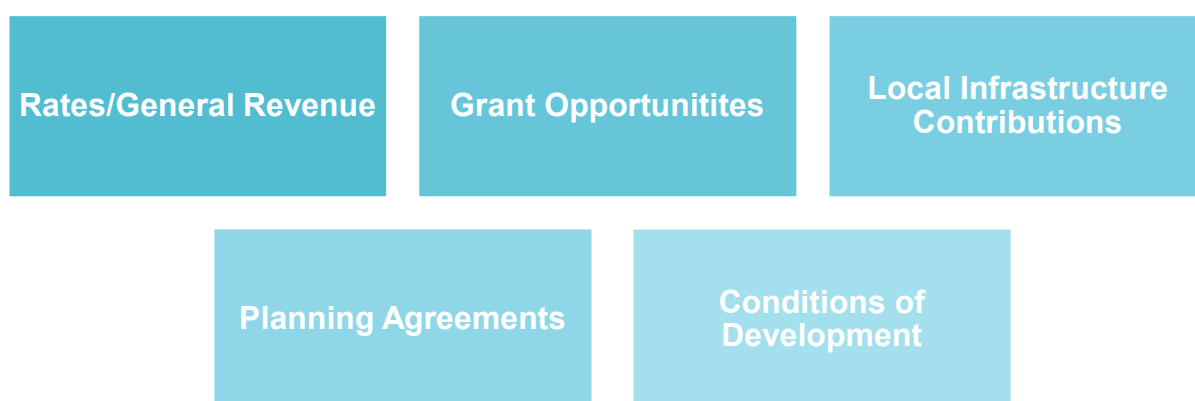
Pathways play a crucial role in creating vibrant, liveable, connected communities. They serve as essential infrastructure that enhances the accessibility of various services, including schools, shops, public transport and recreational spaces. Pathways are the backbone of active transport, promoting mobility and independence for all residents, including recreational users, who use pathways for health and fitness, as well as those who rely on walking or cycling as their primary mode of transportation.

Feedback from our community, through the 2024 Port Stephens Liveability Survey, highlighted that pathways were considered the most valued aspect of public infrastructure. Over 50% of Port Stephens residents listed safe and connected pathways as a priority for creating an ideal community. Our community also emphasised that an increased investment in pathway infrastructure would be beneficial to their overall quality of life. Additionally, Pathways were identified as a top priority during the consultation for Place Plans across the Local Government Area (LGA). These plans, developed in collaboration with residents and stakeholders, underline the shared vision for a more connected community.

Pathways are more than just walkways, they're vital public spaces that facilitate social interaction, enhance community connection and contribute to the overall character of a place, acting as a bridge between buildings and the broader community. Beyond the social and environmental benefits, pathways offer economic development opportunities. A well-maintained network of pathways can act as a main attractor for tourists and residents alike. Numerous local and regional examples have demonstrated the increase of tourism by encouraging visitors to explore our region on foot or by bike. Local businesses, particularly those in tourism-dependent sectors, can thrive from increased foot traffic, leading to enhanced sales and service uptake. Investing in pathways is not only important for improving accessibility for residents but also supporting local economies and tourism.

How does Council deliver pathways?

Council actively seeks and utilises a number of funding sources to maintain, deliver and enhance pathways across the LGA, Council may use any combination of the following to ensure that investments in pathway infrastructure are sustainable and aligned with community priorities:



- **Grants:** Council actively pursues external funding through grants provided by State and Federal government programs. These grant opportunities are essential for supporting the development of major pathway projects and for addressing gaps in the current pathway network. Grants may partially or completely fund a project and by leveraging these funds, Council can implement ambitious projects that would not be possible using other funding sources.
- **Local infrastructure contributions:** Council collects local infrastructure contributions from developers to support the delivery of local infrastructure and facilities, including pathways. Contributions are mandated under Section 7.11 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* and help to ensure that as our community grows, the necessary infrastructure is in place to keep residents and visitors connected.
- **Planning agreements:** Council may enter into planning agreements with developers to ensure the delivery of a specific pathway. This may include a Works in Kind Agreement, a Material Public Benefit Agreement or a Voluntary Planning Agreement where a developer constructs a local pathway and receives a discount on their local infrastructure contribution. This is a flexible option for Council to prioritise the delivery of pathways needed to support the community as a result of development.

- **Development conditions:** Council requires developers, who increase population density or demand for pathways, to provide new pathways to support their development. These works are required as a condition of consent and are in addition to any applicable contribution fees.
- **Rates / general revenue:** Council collects property rates in order to provide a range of different infrastructure and services to the community. One of these services includes maintenance of the existing pathway network. However, there is currently no allocation of general revenue funding within Council's budgets for the construction of new pathways.

DRAFT

How does the plan align with other Council plans and strategies?

The Port Stephens Pathways Plan is a critical component of Council's broader vision to build a connected, liveable, and sustainable community. This plan does not operate in isolation; it directly supports and reinforces the objectives outlined in several of Council's strategic and statutory planning documents. The strategic alignment of the Pathways Plan with other key Council plans has been outlined below.

Resourcing Strategy

The delivery of the Port Stephens Pathways Plan is closely aligned with Council's Resourcing Strategy, which ensures that the organisation has the financial, asset and workforce capacity to deliver objectives set out in the Community Strategic Plan. A key component of the Resourcing Strategy is the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP), which provides a long-term framework for managing Council's infrastructure assets, including pathways.

The SAMP outlines how Council will maintain, renew and upgrade its infrastructure to meet both current and future community needs. From this, the 10-Year Capital Works Plan is developed to translate the long-term strategies into a practical, annually reviewed, program of works. The Pathways Plan directly informs both the SAMP and the Capital Works Plan by identifying priorities for new pathways, and highlighting areas of high demand, network growth and asset renewal.

By aligning pathway planning with these documents, Council ensures that investments in pathway infrastructure are financially sustainable and strategically coordinated. It also supports long-term asset lifecycle planning, ensuring Council has the capacity to maintain any new pathways constructed as a result of the Pathways Plan.

Local Infrastructure Contributions Plan (LIC Plan)

The Pathways Plan plays an instrumental role in informing the Port Stephens Local Infrastructure Contributions Plan (LIC Plan). As growth occurs and development progresses, the LIC Plan ensures that adequate infrastructure is funded and delivered. The prioritisation framework outlined in the Pathways Plan will guide which pathway projects are included in future versions of the LIC Plan, helping to ensure developer contributions are directed toward high-need areas and that new developments are well connected to the existing pathway network.

Place Plans

The Place Plans developed by Port Stephens Council for specific towns and localities are shaped through direct community engagement and reflect the unique needs and aspirations of the community in each area. The Pathways Plan incorporates feedback and priorities identified during Place Plan consultations, which highlighted the community demand for improved pathway connectivity. The Pathways Plan will assist Place Plans by outlining which pathway projects are the highest priority in each area. These projects can then be represented clearly within Place Plans as actions.

Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan (PAMP)

The Pathways Plan advances the objectives of the Pedestrian Access and Mobility Plan (PAMP) primarily through the connection pathways prioritisation method. This method focuses on identifying missing links and improving access, safety and connectivity around key destinations such as schools, aged care facilities and commercial centres. Together, the two documents support a more accessible and connected pathway network.

Park Masterplans and Public Domain Plans

Council's Park Masterplans and Public Domain Plans aim to improve the usability, accessibility, and amenity of public spaces across Port Stephens. The Pathways Plan supports these goals by prioritising pedestrian connections to, from, and within these areas. By aligning pathway planning with these plans and strategies, Council promotes greater community and recreational use of public spaces and contributes to more connected, inclusive and enjoyable public spaces.

Community Strategic Plan

At the highest level, the Pathways Plan supports the Port Stephens Community Strategic Plan, particularly the goals related to a connected, healthy, and active community. By promoting sustainable, active transport options, the Pathways Plan contributes directly to community wellbeing.



How does the plan align with National and State strategies?

The Port Stephens Pathways Plan is not only informed by local community needs and Council priorities—it also aligns with broader national and state-level strategies that aim to promote active transport, public health, environmental sustainability and equitable infrastructure planning. This alignment strengthens the Plan’s credibility and enhances opportunities to secure external funding.

NSW Future Transport Strategy 2056

The NSW Future Transport Strategy 2056 sets out a vision for an integrated, safe and efficient transport system that supports the movement of people and goods across the state. It emphasises walking and cycling as fundamental modes of transport, particularly for short trips and first/last mile connections. The Pathways Plan contributes to these goals by enhancing pathway infrastructure across Port Stephens, supporting safe and accessible walking and cycling routes to key destinations such as schools, shops, aged care facilities and transport hubs.

NSW Active Transport Strategy

The NSW Active Transport Strategy promotes walking and cycling as essential components of a balanced, sustainable transport system. It prioritises investment in infrastructure that supports active lifestyles and reduces car dependency. The Port Stephens Pathways Plan supports this strategy by identifying and prioritising pathway projects that improve safety, connectivity, and accessibility, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children, older people, and those with mobility challenges.

NSW State Infrastructure Strategy

The State Infrastructure Strategy calls for a more integrated and sustainable approach to infrastructure delivery, with an emphasis on infrastructure that supports population growth and enhances liveability. By targeting pathway connectivity in areas of strategic growth and local importance, the Pathways Plan aligns with these aims, ensuring pathway delivery is tied to future development and urban planning objectives.

NSW Public Spaces Charter

The Pathways Plan supports the principles of the NSW Public Spaces Charter, which encourages local governments to create inclusive, well-connected, and accessible public spaces. Pathways are critical elements of public space networks, acting as connectors and social enablers. The Plan’s focus on enhancing links to parks, public domains, and local centres aligns with this state-level commitment to inclusive place-making.

Methodology

The demand for pathways in Port Stephens currently exceeds the amount of funding available to Council for pathway construction.

This plan provides a clear and transparent methodology for prioritising the allocation of Council's limited resources.

This strategic approach ensures that investment in pathway infrastructure is targeted, efficient, and aligned with both community needs and the broader objectives of the local government area.



The purpose of this methodology

The key purposes of the plan have been outlined in detail below.

- **Prioritising investment:** Council recognises that available resources are limited and careful planning is necessary to determine which pathway projects should take precedence. The prioritisation methodology considers factors such as pedestrian traffic volumes, proximity to key destinations (e.g. schools, parks, and transport hubs), safety, and community feedback to guide the decision-making process. This ensures that funding is directed toward projects that deliver the highest value and impact for the community.
- **Supporting grant applications:** The plan provides a clear and evidence-based framework to support applications for external funding from State and Federal government programs. By identifying priority projects and their anticipated benefits, Council is better positioned to secure grants to fund the construction of pathway infrastructure. These grants are critical for supplementing Council's revenue, reducing the financial burden and ensuring that pathway projects can proceed without delay.
- **Aligning with Council Strategies:** The plan integrates with Council's strategic planning framework as mentioned above. It promotes a coordinated, cross-departmental approach to prioritise infrastructure planning, funding and delivery, ensuring that pathway projects are strategically aligned across the organisation.
- **Broaden community understanding:** By clearly outlining the methodology used to determine pathway priorities the plan promotes transparency and helps the community understand how decisions are made. This builds trust in Council's planning processes and demonstrates that decisions are based on data, community need, and fairness, rather than reactive requests or political pressure.



Prioritisation methodology and scoring

The prioritisation methodology consists of two scoring methods that aim to achieve the following pathway outcomes.

- Connection Pathways, and
- Destination Pathways.

Splitting our priority scoring into two different methods allows us to identify key locations for new pathways that will benefit our community, but in different ways.

Connection pathways are those that primarily improve access to essential services, support everyday travel, enhance safety, or fill missing links in the existing network. Destination pathways are those that primarily support recreation, leisure, tourism or place-making, and where the pathway experience itself is a key outcome.

Each proposed pathway project is scored using both the Connection and Destination pathways prioritisation methodology. Projects that score highly using either methodology are then recorded as either high priority Connection or high priority Destination projects, depending on in which method they scored higher. Pathways scoring in the medium or low priority categories are not specified as Connection or Destination pathways.

The prioritisation methodologies for both methods consider several important factors that help determine the importance and feasibility of new pathway projects. These include:

- Community Benefit - How much value the pathway provides to the broader community.
- Equity – ensuring fair access for all people, including vulnerable and mobility impaired users.
- Deliverability – the practicality and likelihood of completing the project.
- Cost – the cost of the project and whether it represents value for money.
- Data reliability – the quality and accuracy of the information used in the decision-making process.

From these factors we have identified several scoring categories which use key data sets to ensure they are represented when scoring our planned projects. Both the Connection and Destination methods combine a unique combination and weighting to the scoring categories to calculate the priority score. The table below outlines the factors and their respective weightings. Further detail on how each factor is scored is provided in the next section

Scoring Category	Connection Weighting	Destination Weighting
Pathway location	10%	15%
Travel distance	35%	35%
Neighbourhood feedback	10%	0%
Community wellbeing	10%	0%
Network continuation	35%	35%
Recreational opportunity	0%	15%

Factors we consider

Pathway location

The need for new pathways is assessed in part by their location, specifically the type of road or area they adjoin. This factor influences both pedestrian safety and potential usage.

For Connection pathways, roads with higher traffic volumes, such as sub-arterial and distributor roads, typically receive priority, due to high risks to safety and greater pedestrian demand. In contrast, local access streets and cul-de-sacs, which have lower traffic volumes, reduced pedestrian demand and present fewer safety risks, are scored lower.

For Destination pathways, parks and open space areas are typically better for recreation and tourism than busy, high-speed roads. Additionally, roads that are favourable for neighbourhood walking, running, cycling, or dog walking loops have been considered as higher priority for destination pathways.

The following tables outline how different road hierarchies and types of open space are scored for each method within the prioritisation methodology.

Road hierarchy

Road Hierarchy	Connection Score	Destination Score	Reasoning
Arterial	8	4	High commuter use due to major traffic corridors; lower recreational value due to noise and speed.
Sub-Arterial	10	5	High importance for active transport and local commuting; moderately useful for recreational connections.
Distributor	7	6	Balances commuter & recreational access between main and local roads; connects key destinations.
Collector	6	8	Moderate traffic roads in residential areas - serve commuters and are often used for local recreation.
Local	5	7	Lower commuter value but highly valued for local walks, dog-walking, and active recreation.
Access Street	3	5	Low transport importance but often used for local recreation.
Access Place	2	3	Typically cul-de-sacs - minimal commuter function but can be part of short recreational walking routes.

Park and reserve hierarchy

Park/Reserve Hierarchy	Connection Score	Destination Score	Reasoning
Regional	4	10	Destination parks attract tourists and regional visitors; less relevant for everyday commuter use.
District	5	8	Well-used by residents for local recreation; may form part of school or workplace connections.
Local	4	6	Important for community recreation and local amenity; low commuter significance.
Uncategorised Open Space	2	2	Typically drainage reserves or bushland; limited formal use or connectivity, low priority for either method.

Travel distance

Pathways play a vital role in connecting people to essential services and community places. To ensure the infrastructure we are funding is fulfilling this role, we look at each proposed pathway project and assess its proximity to important points of interest around the LGA.

For Connection pathways, priority is given to proposed pathways that improve access to key locations such as schools, shops, and aged care facilities, with consideration of other community points of interest.

For Destination pathways, we have identified several recreation and tourism specific points of interest and prioritised pathway projects that connect or give access to them. Examples of these points of interest include places in the community such as beaches, playgrounds, sports facilities, and holiday parks.

Councils mapping systems team measures the travel distance from each proposed pathway to these locations. This data driven approach ensures that new pathway infrastructure enhances connectivity where it is needed most and delivers meaningful benefits to the community. The scoring criteria for each method can be found on the following page.

Connection method

Location	Criteria	Pathway Score
Schools	10-minute walk	1
	5-minute walk	2
Shops	10-minute walk	1
	5-minute walk	2
Aged Care Facilities	10-minute walk	1
	5-minute walk	2
Other points of interest	Connects to 1 point of interest per 100m	2
	Connects to 2+ points of interest per 100m	4

Destination method

Location	Pathway Length	Criteria	Pathway Score
Destination points of interest	<100m	Connects to 0 points of interest	0
		Connects to 1+ points of interest	2
	>100m	Connects to 0 points of interest per 100m	0
		Connects to 1 point of interest per 100m	5
		Connects to 2 points of interest per 100m	8
		Connects to 3+ points of interest per 100m	10

Community wellbeing

Council is committed to ensuring equitable access to the broader community for everyone in Port Stephens. For this reason, we consider the socioeconomic status of an area when assessing new pathway projects. Areas with lower socioeconomic status are given a higher priority than those with a higher socioeconomic status. This approach reflects several key considerations including:

- Residents in lower socioeconomic areas may rely more on walking and cycling as their primary mode of transport.
- Prioritising these areas supports greater equity and inclusion across our community
- These areas may have a greater need for improved access to essential services such as healthcare, education, retail and employment.

Council uses data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to assess the socioeconomic status of different areas. The scoring framework for this factor is outlined below.

Socioeconomic Indicator	Pathway Score
Lowest Socioeconomic Areas	10
-	9
-	8
-	7
-	6
-	5
-	4
-	3
-	2
Highest Socioeconomic Areas	1

Neighbourhood feedback

Community feedback is a key consideration for guiding the pathway priorities. Council gathers this input through the Port Stephens Liveability Survey, which includes a Place Score assessment. This survey helps us understand what residents value most in their neighbourhoods and identifies areas where improvements are needed.

Two key indicators that we consider when prioritising pathway projects are:

- The perceived safety and ease of walking, cycling and using public transport.
- The community's desire for improved connections between homes and local amenities.

Each community is assigned a numerical score for these indicators through the Place Score system. These scores are then averaged to determine the priority level for pathway improvements in each area.

Network continuation

Port Stephens already benefits from an extensive network of existing pathways. To maximise the functionality and efficiency of this network, we prioritise new pathways that connect to existing ones. This helps to reduce gaps in the network, improves accessibility and supports safer, continuous routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

Council's mapping systems team evaluates and scores each proposed pathway based on its ability to enhance connectivity within the existing network.

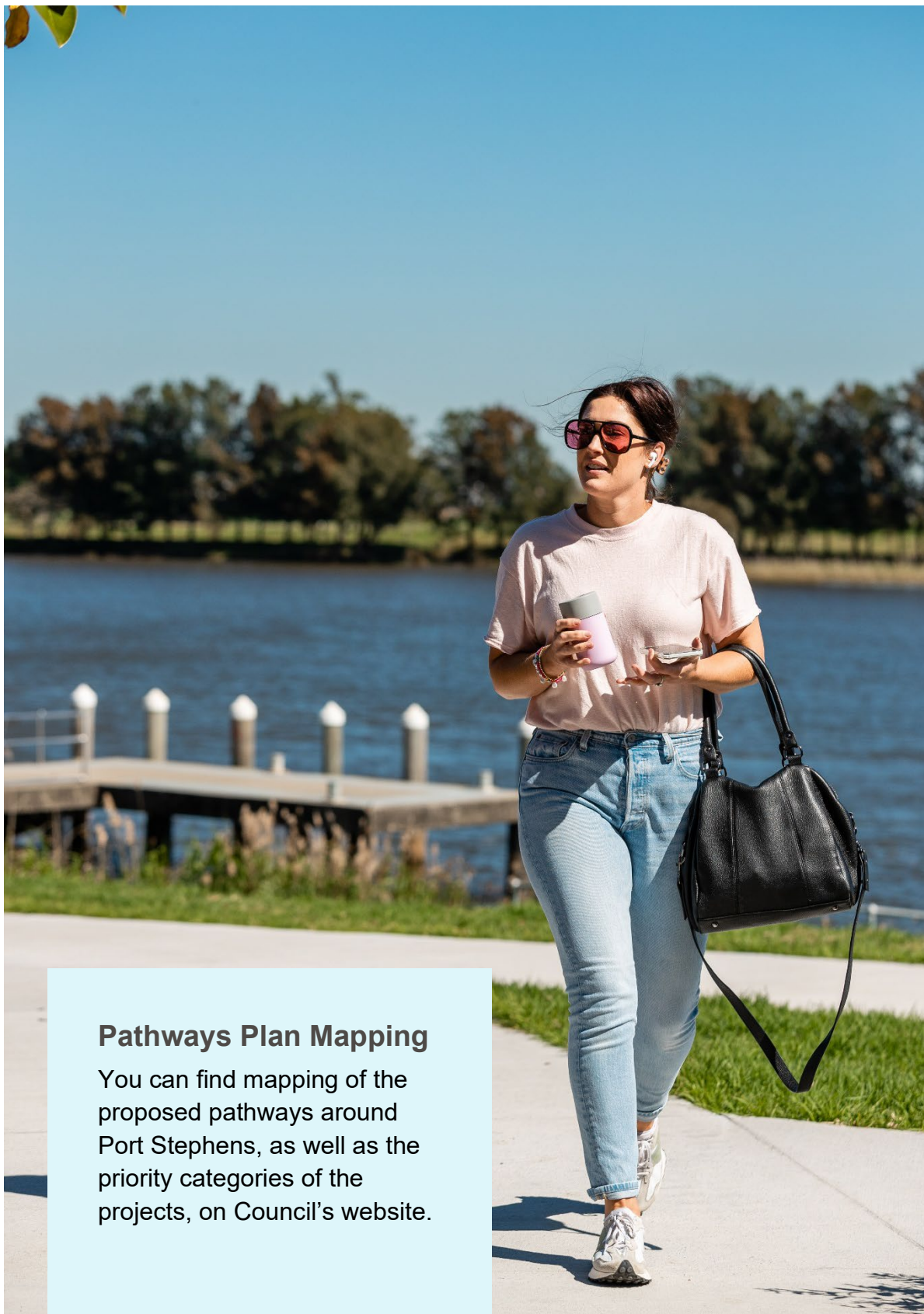
Connection	Pathway Score
Fills in a missing link between existing paths	10
Extends an existing path	6
Doesn't connect to the existing network	2

Recreational opportunity

One of the primary uses for pathways in Port Stephens is for recreational activities such as walking and running. It is a priority for Council to provide a pathway network that can accommodate these activities and one way that we can do this is by providing infrastructure in areas where path users are already exercising. We do this by using data from the Strava application to track what routes walkers and runners are using around the LGA. From this we can identify areas that are lacking in infrastructure and prioritise the construction of new paths along these popular routes.

We have access to active transportation data which we can use to calculate the number of recreational trips per day on each planned pathway route. From this we get the following scores.

Trips/Day	Pathway Score
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5
6	6
7	7
8	8
9	9
10+	10



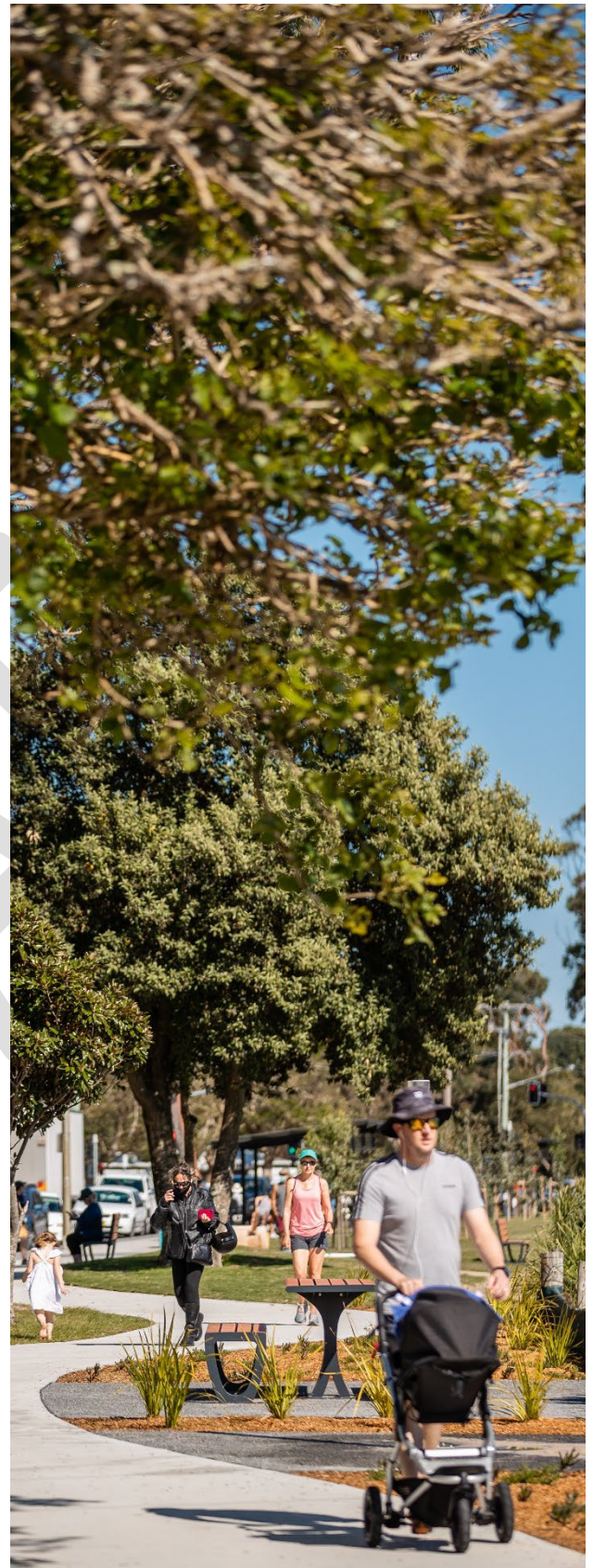
Pathways Plan Mapping

You can find mapping of the proposed pathways around Port Stephens, as well as the priority categories of the projects, on Council's website.

Conclusion

The development and maintenance of pathways are integral to creating a connected, accessible and vibrant community. Through this Pathways Plan, Council commits to prioritising projects that enhance connectivity, improve liveability and stimulate local economic growth. With a clear decision-making methodology and funding from grants, developer contributions and general revenue, this plan provides a framework for creating a comprehensive pathway network that meets the needs of both current and future generations.

The Pathways Plan is more than just a tool for infrastructure development, it is a vision for a connected, sustainable community where people can easily access essential services and enjoy a higher quality of life. As Council continues to invest in this vital infrastructure, the community can be confident that their needs and aspirations are guiding our actions toward improving liveability for our community.





PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL