



# **2010 Community Consultation Report**

**Report prepared by Hands on Community Solutions**

**March 2010**

## **Introduction**

This executive summary is an overview of the results gathered during the second phase of community consultation for the development of the 2009 – 2012 Indigo Shire Council Plan.

In November 2008, a consultation plan was developed to ensure broad community input to support the Council Plan. The first community survey was completed in 2009 with 930 responses.

Out of these, 639 residents registered for ongoing involvement in the community consultation process and 286 completed surveys in phase two. Surveys were collected using either an electronic survey tool (170 responses) or through a hard copy format which were distributed via a mail out to all community groups and those on the mailing list from last year's survey, as well as being available at Council's customer service centre's (28 responses) and finally as an insert in the local paper (88 responses).

Despite wide circulation of the survey, the number of participants was significantly less than last year. We attribute this drop in response rate to the fact that residents expressed their comments in great detail last year and more than likely felt that they had already raised their concerns either through the survey or at one of the workshops that were also held in early 2010. It should also be taken as a positive result, given that in general terms survey respondents are more likely to provide comment if they have something negative to comment about and are more likely to remain silent if they are satisfied with how things are progressing. In the first survey, local people were also employed to collect face to face surveys which assisted in the number of responses.

Each section of this summary report incorporates the most essential information gathered during the consultation process. Individual survey results for each category are also available, which provide a complete overview of the responses in more detail.

A feature of this report is that it compares the results with the 2009 community survey. This gives Council a unique insight into how the Indigo communities perception's has changed over 12 months, and how, in many cases, priorities have remained the same.

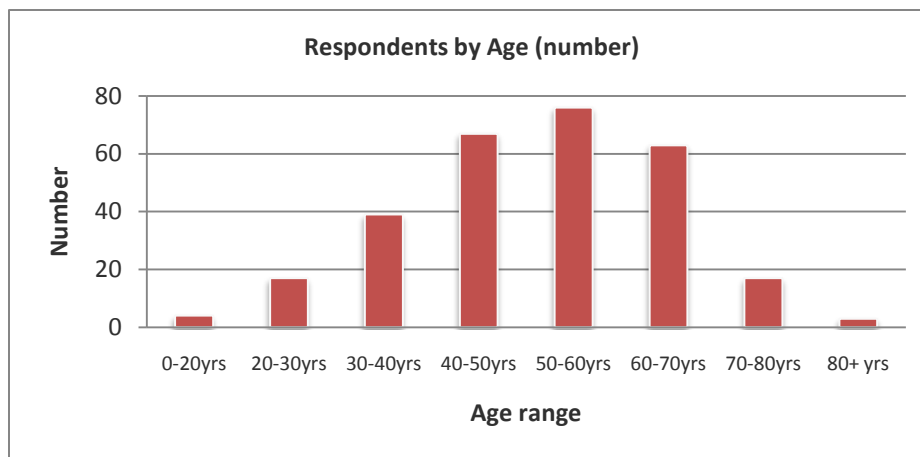
Like phase one, there is extensive documentation and survey data that encompasses many practical solutions and comments generated by the community that will be an excellent resource in future Council and community projects.

## Demographics

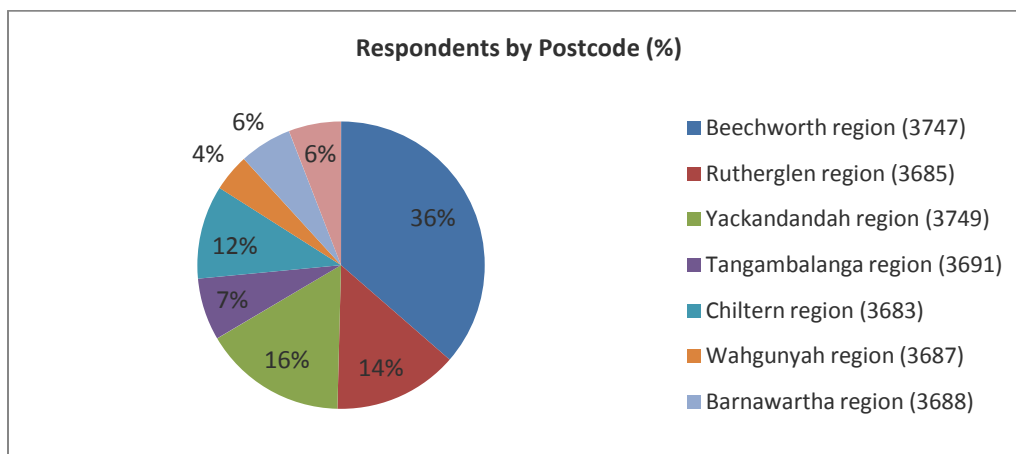
There is a good cross section of residents who responded to the second community consultation survey.

Of the 286 respondents, 76 were aged between 50 and 60 years. This age bracket attracted the highest response rate in 2009 also. The results show a greater response rate from the older population with the 40-50 and 60-70 year age brackets the second and third highest response rates respectively. Also, there was less participation by young people in the 2010 survey.

Over half of the respondents were female at 66%, 34% were male.

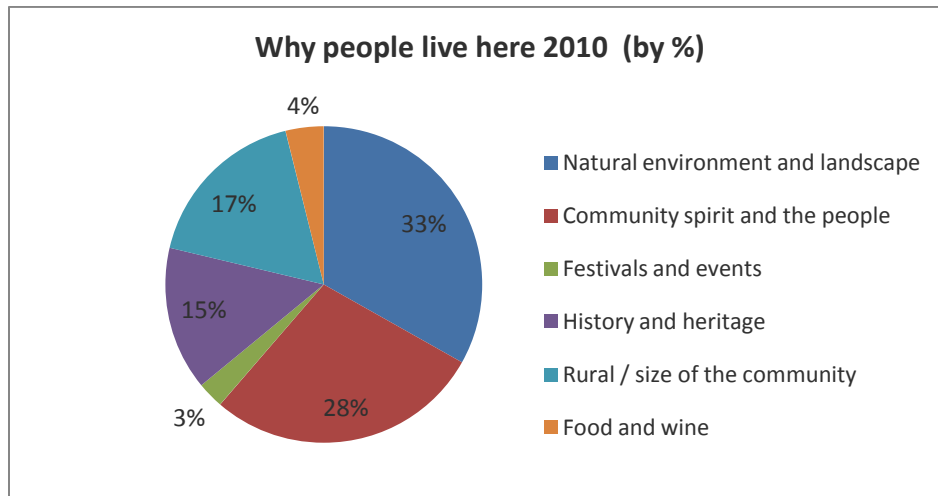


A good response rate was achieved by each region, reflective of their population.

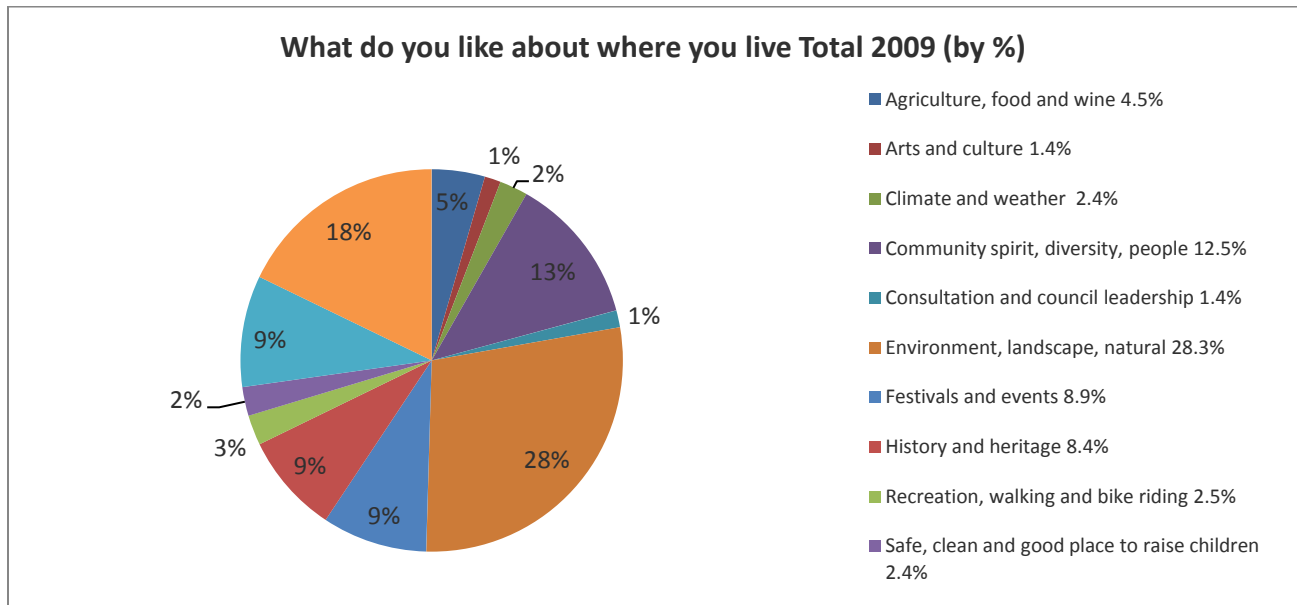


## What do you like?

Respondents were asked what they liked most about Indigo.



Like 2009, the *Natural environment and landscape* is what residents like most about living in Indigo (33%). However, the results changed slightly from then on compared to last year, with *Community spirit and the people* now higher on the agenda (28%). Residents are still favoring the elements of rural living, while being located in close proximity to essential services (17%) and *History and heritage* is also more recognised this year (15%).

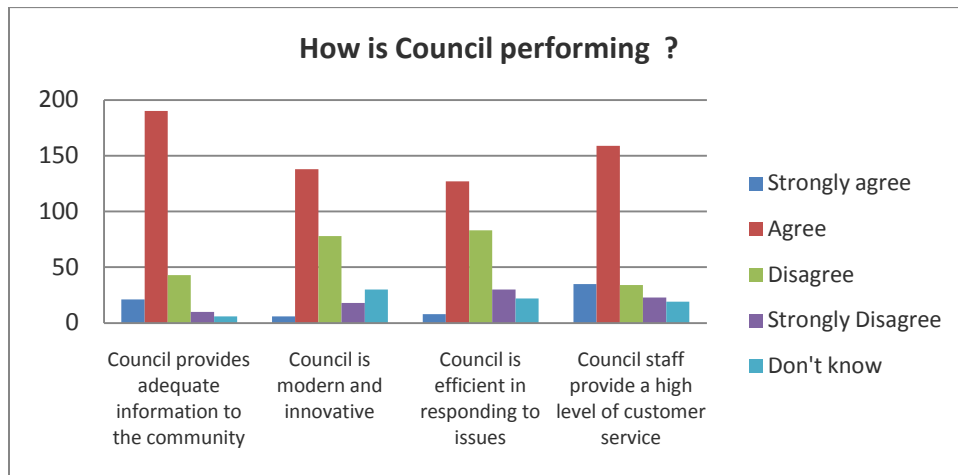


It is interesting to note that many of the respondents' comments centred on enjoying the 'best of both worlds'. It is clear that residents embrace a village atmosphere of quiet, rural living yet appreciate the easy access to larger cities and the services they offer. According to survey respondents, this seems to be Indigo's strongest attraction.

## Council Performance and Improvement

Respondents were asked how they thought Indigo Shire Council was performing in the areas of communication, innovation, addressing issues and customer service.

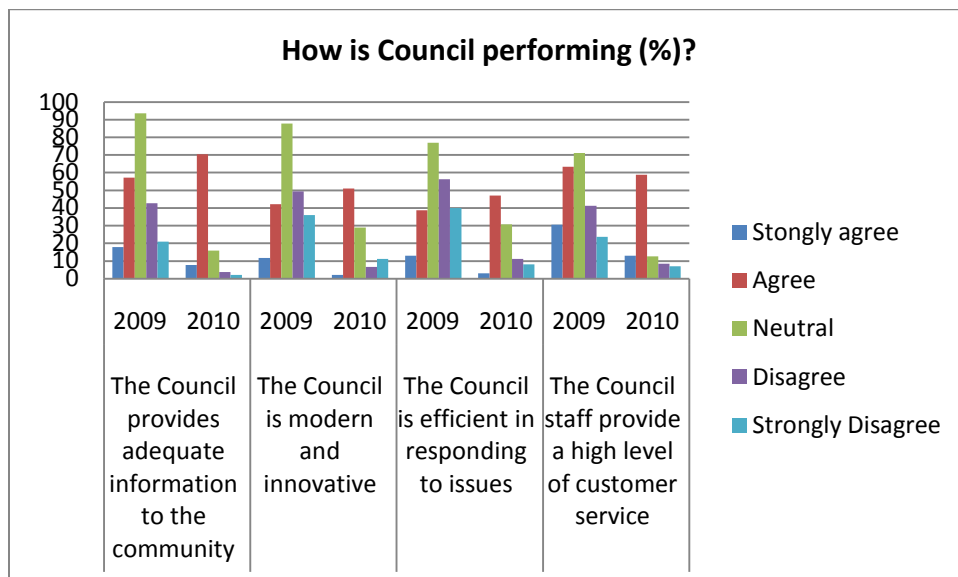
It is pleasing to see that the majority of residents *agree* or are satisfied with Council's performance in the areas raised in this question.



There is a marked difference in the results of Council's Performance from last year's survey, with the majority of respondents indicating a neutral response in all areas in 2009.

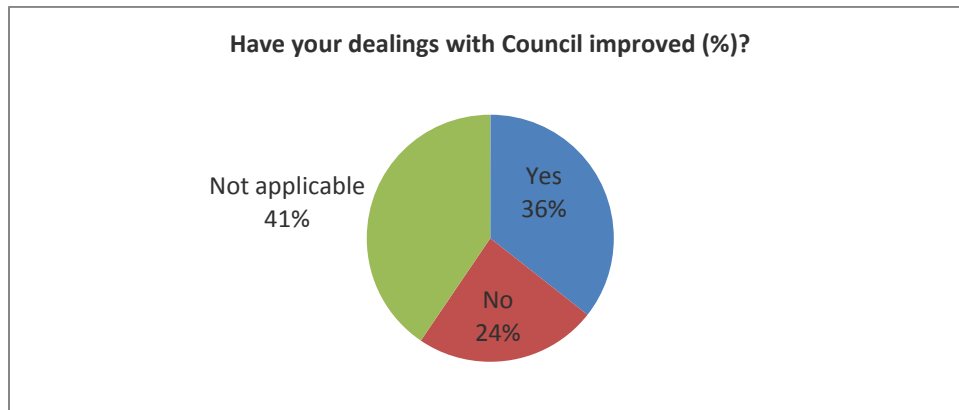
It is often the case that a 'neutral' or 'don't know' response is used when someone does not feel they have adequate information to answer the question.

A response to every performance area this time around demonstrates the community is better informed about Council's progress and is more comfortable to answer the question.



## Council Improvement

Thirty-six percent of respondents said their dealings with Council had improved over the last 12 months.

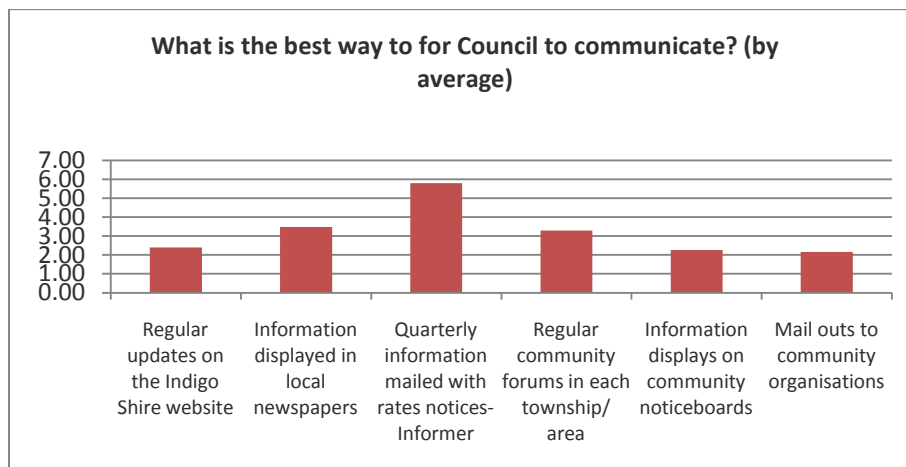


Some of the positive feedback centred on the respondents feeling that Council staff had a renewed sense of actually wanting to communicate and enjoying the results of such relationship building. The respondents also felt that Council was beginning to understand its community better by making a concerted effort to listen.

Many had recognised that Council’s community consultation techniques had improved, which in turn gave respondents the impression that Council was more approachable. Twenty-four per cent of respondents felt their dealings with Council had not improved. Feedback from the surveys generally puts this down to a poor response rate, generally by phone.

## Communication

Respondents were asked to rank the best ways in which Council could communicate with them. The *Information with rates notices/ Indigo Informer* was ranked the highest with 150 respondents indicating it was the most effective means of communication. This was followed by providing quarterly information with the rates notices (57) and communication through local newspapers (40).



The survey results showed that respondents do not generally see the Council website as a form of communication with the highest score received for least effective at 68. However, 59% said they used the website to gather information.

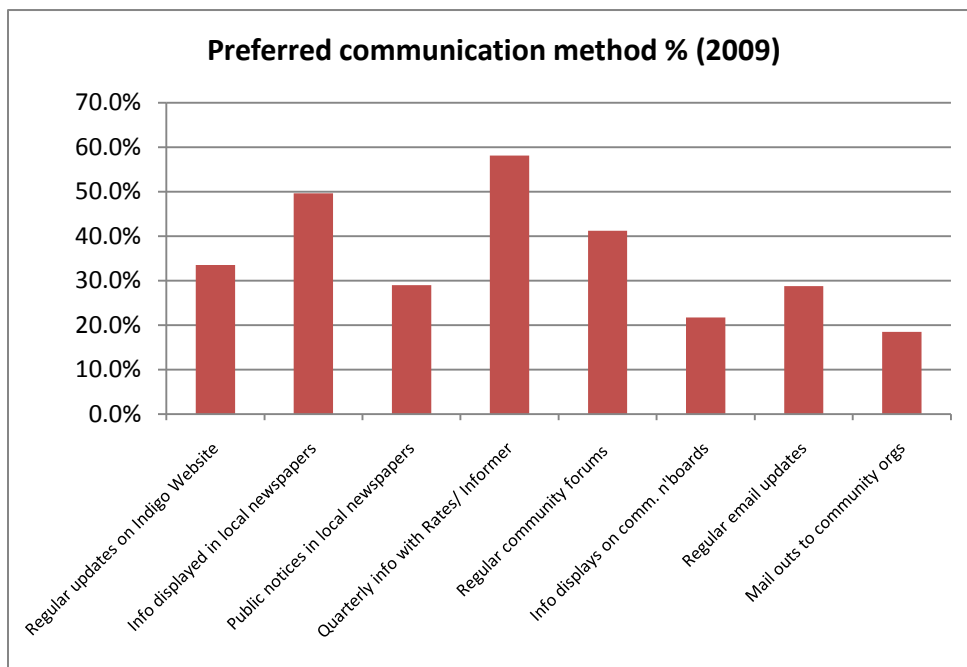
Do you visit the Council website for information?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	59.2%	158
No	34.1%	91
No access to internet	6.7%	18

There is a high percentage 40.8% who do not access the Council’s website. For this reason it is important for Council not to rely on the website as the only option for communication with the public in the future. It will also be important to continue to use communication mediums like the Indigo Informer and newspapers.

Feedback from the survey respondents centred around the website being “out of date” and “in need of an upgrade”. Respondents said the website was difficult to navigate and did not meet Council’s direction of being modern and innovative.

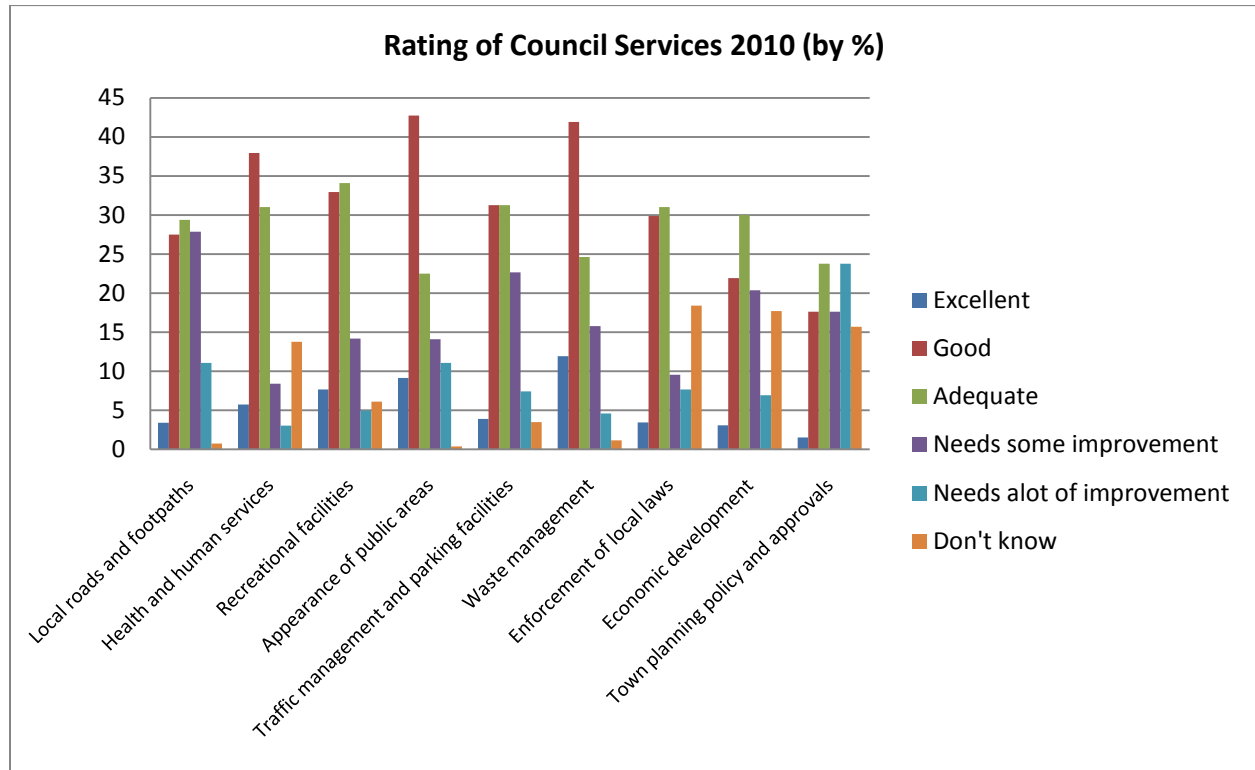
There was also a feeling that Council could be using email more effectively as a means of communicating with the public, with many respondents preferring to receive Council updates to their work email.

In 2009, the mail out with Council rates was the most effective communication tool.



## Council Services

Respondents were asked to rank their level of satisfaction in how Council is delivering the following services:



Although none of the services were ranked as *Excellent*, all were rated as *Good* or *Adequate*. It is not surprising that *Appearance of public areas* is ranked highest with 43% rating this area as the *Natural environment and landscape* ranked highest for what residents like most about where they live.

Respondents seem satisfied with the delivery of *Health and human services* and *Recreational facilities*. Although ranked as *Adequate*, the results show that *Local roads and footpaths* could do with some improvement, along with *Traffic management and parking facilities*.

The area that showed a need for the greatest improvement was *Town planning policy and approvals* at 24%. This is interesting considering the response rate for *Good* had doubled compared to last year to 18%. Similar to this is *Recreational facilities* with both *Good* and *Needs Improvement* ratings increasing. Perhaps it is the result of the community seeing the potential in the good work that has already been done in the last 12 months.

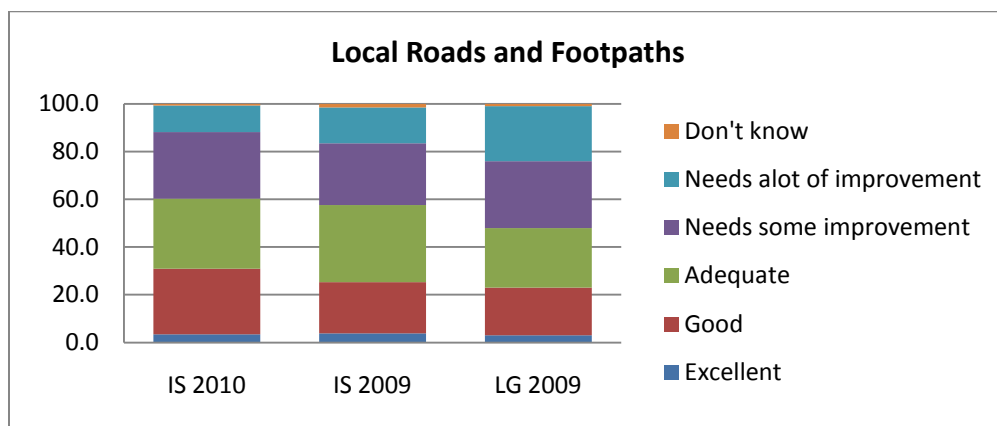
Some of the respondents' concerns outlined in the feedback section of the Council Services survey related to issues that were not directly under Council's jurisdiction; like improvements to the Beechworth Hospital and a replacement Police Officer.

Although satisfaction with *Waste Management* had improved, many comments centred around more frequent recycle collection and the return of hard rubbish collection.

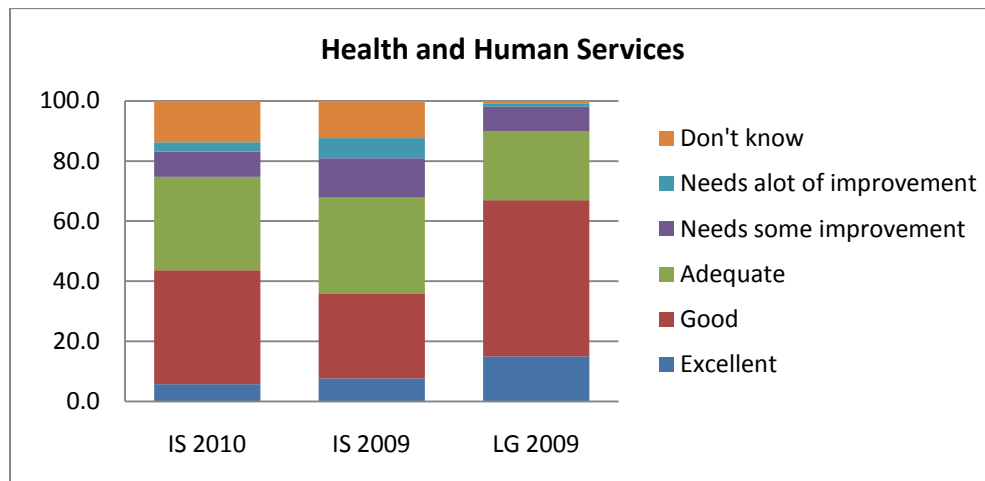
The issues with *Town planning policy and approvals* focused on fears of urban development. The community would like a facilitative approach to Town Planning before any decisions are made.

This question in the Indigo Survey is exactly the same as the Local Government Satisfaction Survey. We have compared the results with the 2009 Local Government Survey with the 2010 Indigo Survey to consider how they compare.

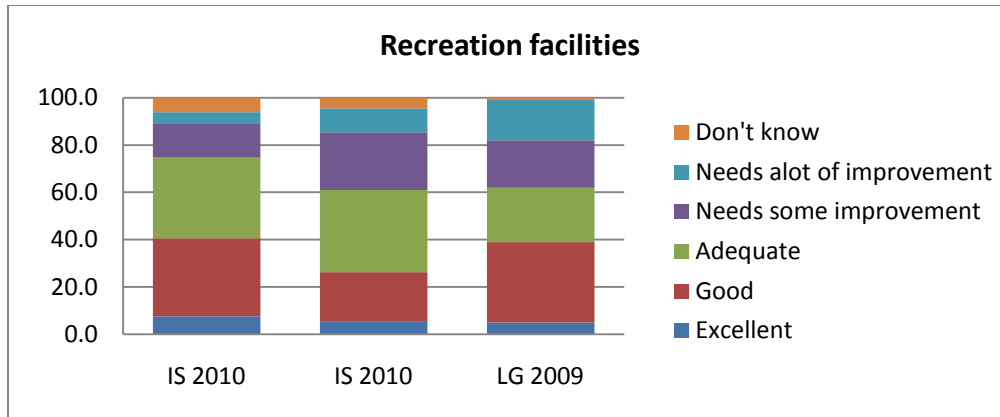
Over the following graph's you are able to compare the 2010 Indigo Survey (IS), the 2009 Indigo Survey (IS) and the 2009 Local Government Survey (LG) for each service area.



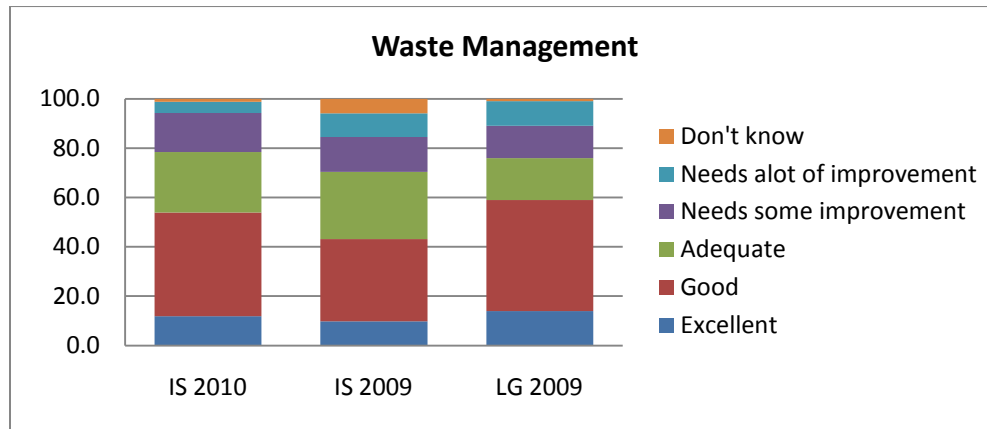
Results for *local roads and footpaths* were consistent across the three surveys.



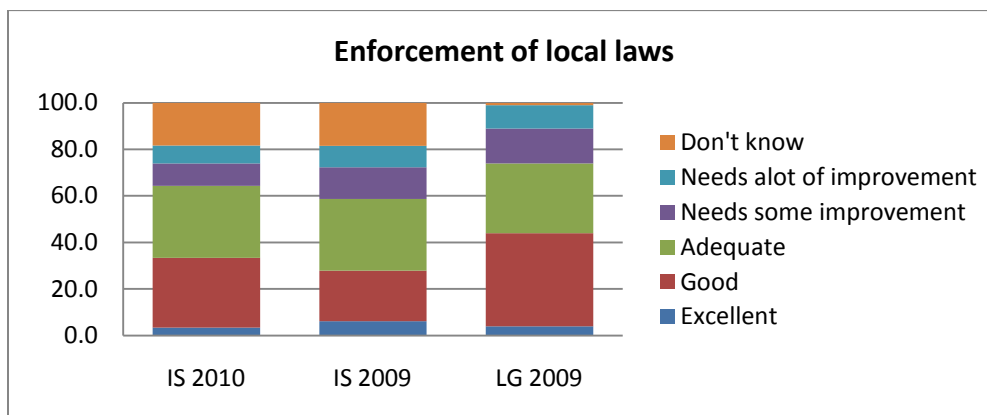
The higher percentage of *don't know* in *health and human services* questions may be around the fact the Local Government survey is completed over the telephone with an explanation.



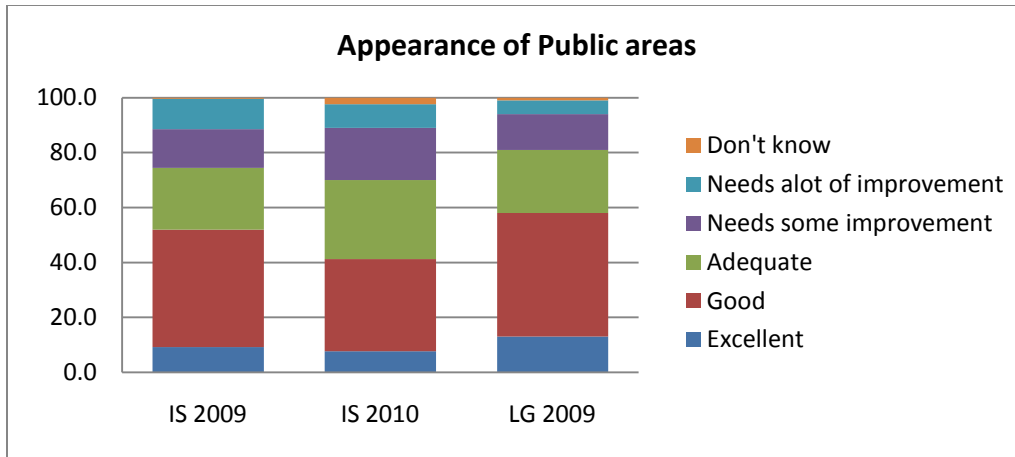
There was a slightly higher perception of *Recreation facilities* in the Indigo Surveys with the LG survey receiving a higher percentage of *Needs a lot of improvement*.



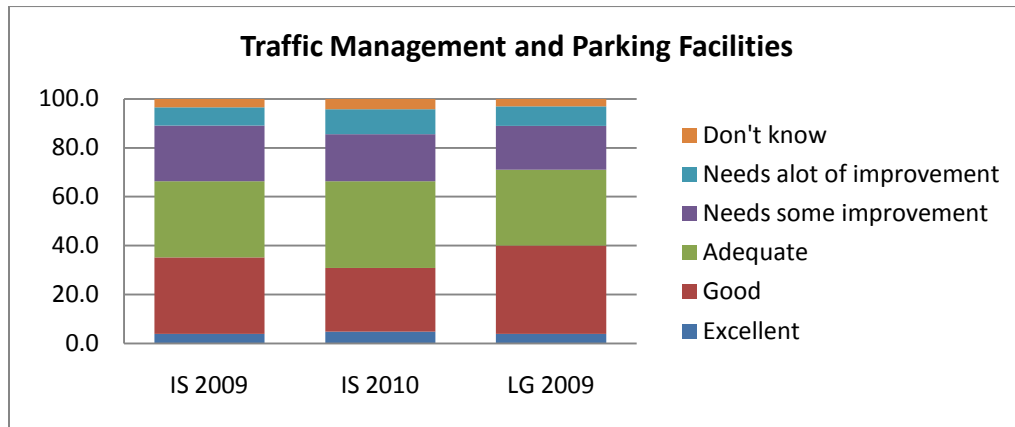
Fairly consistent results across the three surveys with a positive trend around *waste management services*, negative comments are generally around the lack of hard waste collection.



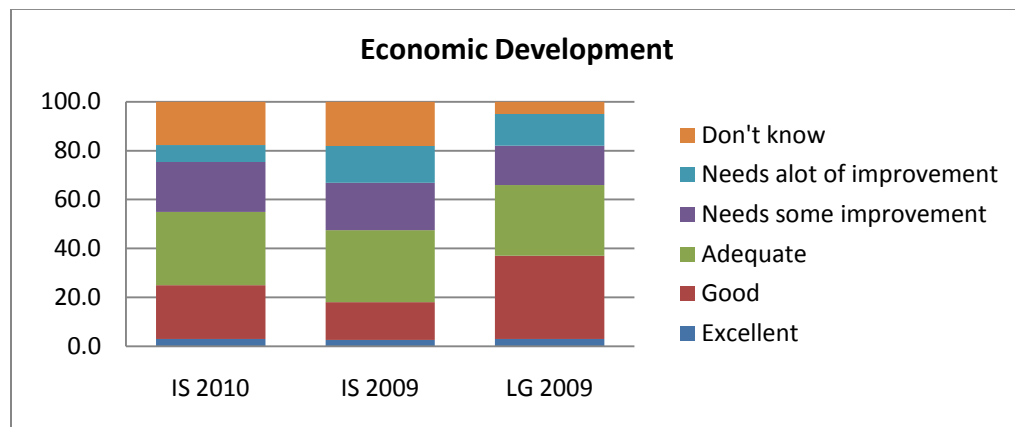
Again, the Indigo Surveys reflected a high percentage of *don't know* which suggests that residents are unsure about what services are being provided. Negative survey comments a lack of local law enforcement in relation to dogs being off leash in public areas and dogs wandering the local streets.



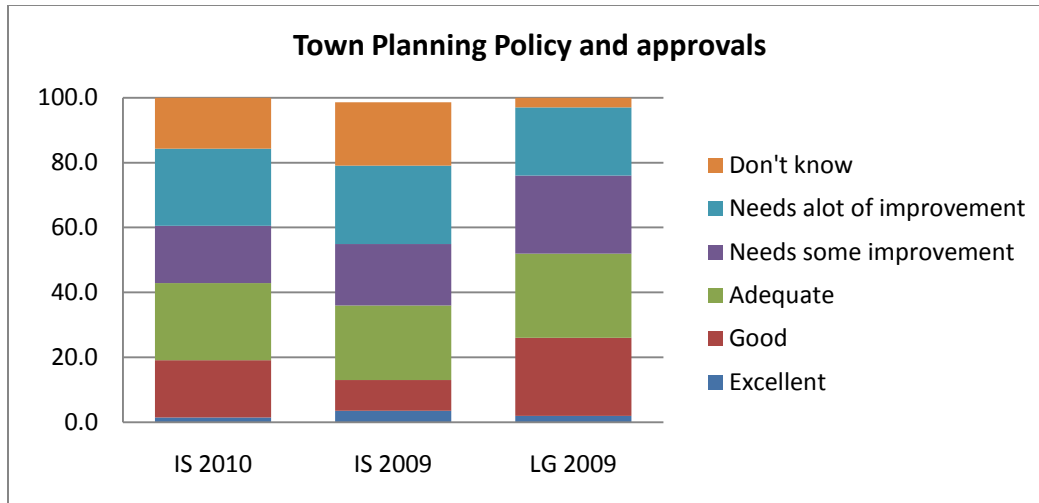
There is generally higher satisfaction in the *appearance of public areas* however those were not satisfied presented a strong opinion about the need for improvement.



Consistent results across the three surveys, for *traffic management and parking facilities*.



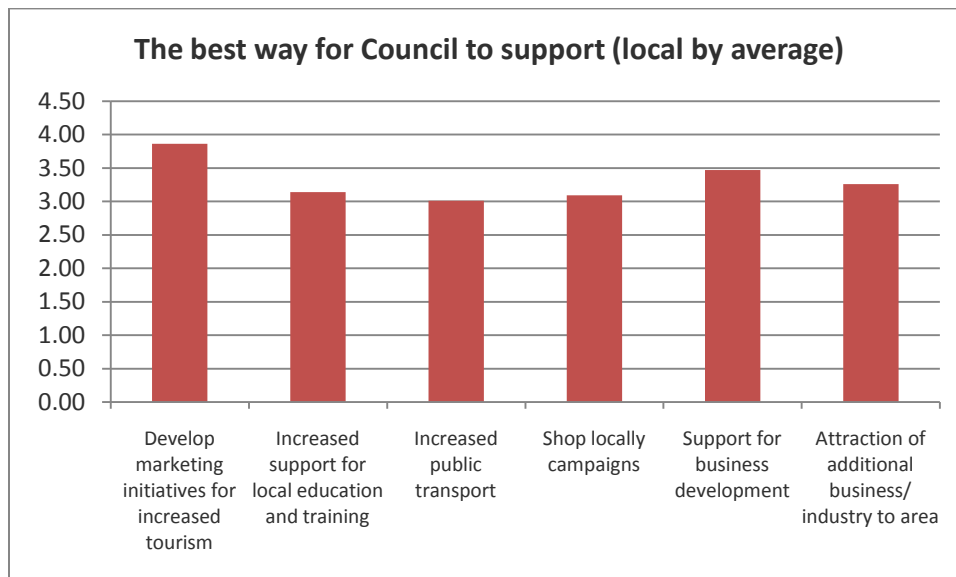
Again the Indigo Surveys reflected a high percentage of *don't know* which suggests that residents are unsure about what services are being provided. The survey results overall reflect generally strong support for the development of tourism and support for business development, with a limited numbers of responses from local residents that feel that it is not Councils role to support local business.



There is some variance between the three surveys, however the trend reflects that there is a strong need for improvement when compared against other survey areas. The Indigo Surveys also reflect that the community may not understand town planning and the approval process; this can also lead to a negative perception.

## Economic Development

Respondents were asked how Council could best support local business. Initiatives to increase tourism attracted the highest response once again this year with 79 ranking it as the most effective. *Support for business development* is ranked as an effective means of improving local business and the community would like to see new business and industry settle in the area.



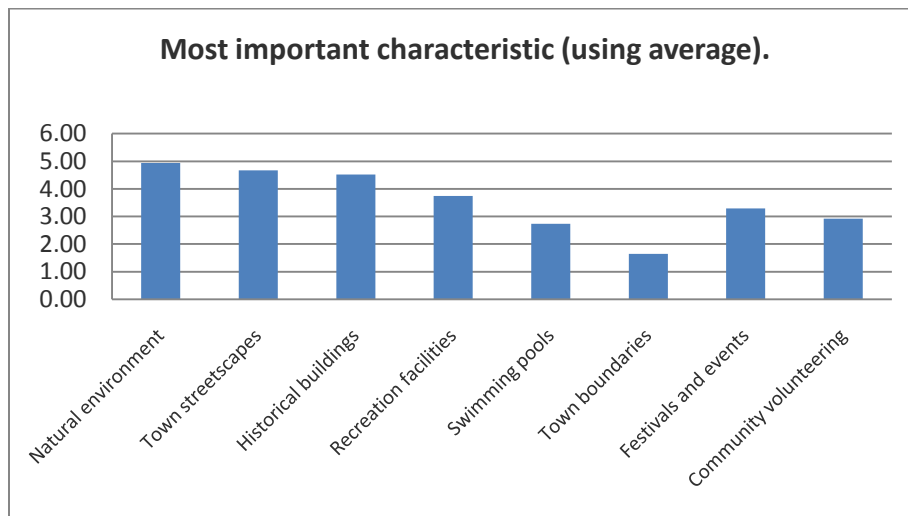
All of the responses attracted a similar rating, which demonstrates that more could be done in all areas to support local business. The same occurred last year with respondents placing similar importance for all initiatives. *Improving Council's website for the purpose of supporting local business* was ranked lowest in both years, with 98 respondents rating it as least effective in 2010.

Much of the feedback contained in the survey demonstrated the community's belief that linkages must be made with Council, tourism, education and training for local businesses to thrive.

Unlike some rural communities, Indigo residents seem welcome to visitors and indicate a willingness to embrace the tourism industry. This not only demonstrates a sense of pride in one's community, but it seems residents can see the monetary value of such initiatives and the long term economic benefits.

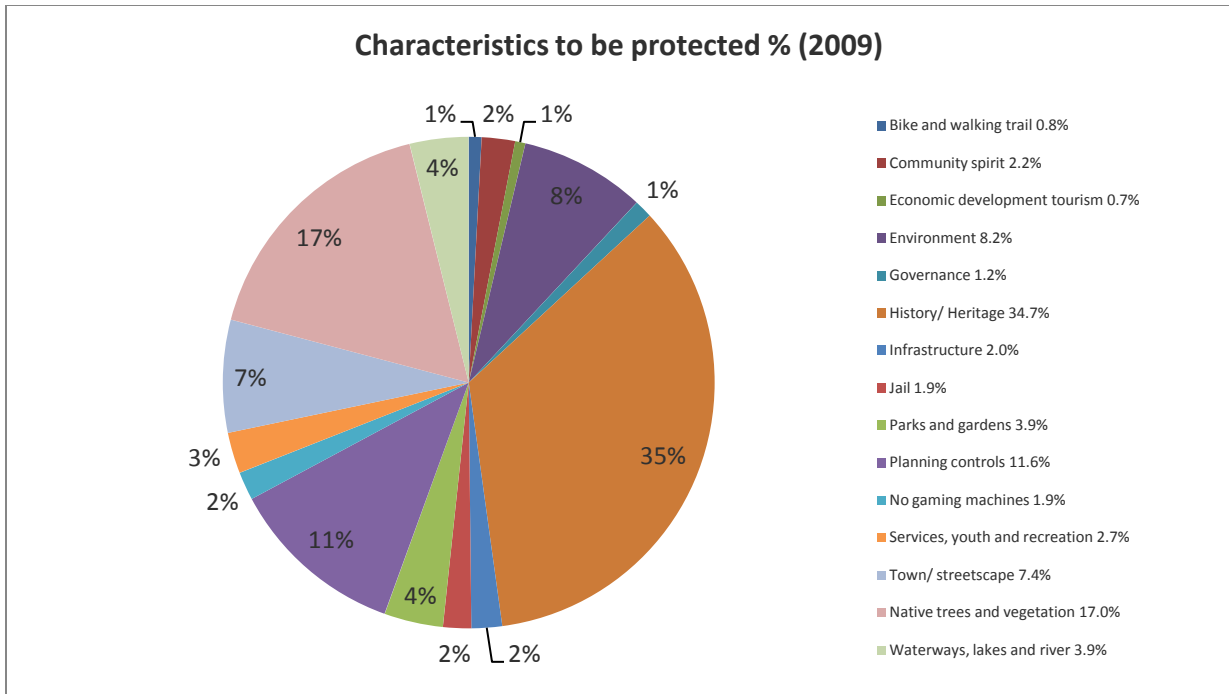
### Key characteristics

Respondents were asked what they would like to see preserved and enhanced in Indigo:



As is the case in the sections of Council Services and What do you like? the *Natural environment* is ranked the highest here. In this instance, the community wants to preserve and enhance what they believe is an important characteristic that makes them want to live here and attract tourists visit.

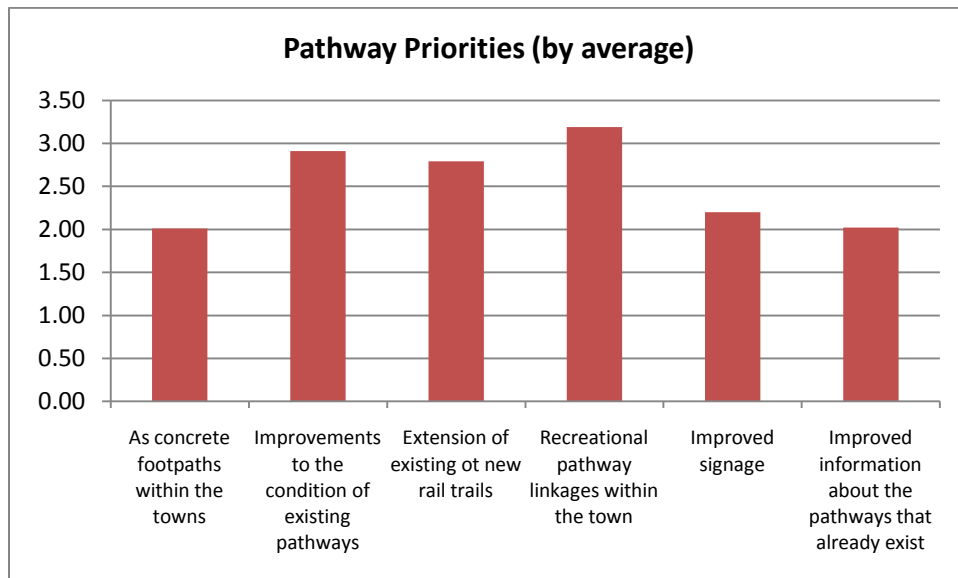
*Swimming pools* and *Town boundaries* are not ranked as highly as key characteristics that give a town its identity. What seems most important is the impression one gets from respecting an area's heritage and improving streetscapes. This was more evident in last year's survey with 35% of respondents ranking the Protection of the region's history as the most important. Protecting the *Natural environment* came in second at 17% this year.



## Pathways

Walking trails and cycling paths were identified as an important priority for the community in the 2009 survey. It is thought that pathways are not only useful as an alternate means of transport; they provide recreational opportunities and add aesthetically to a town. If done right, pathways can feature as a key characteristic – aiding locals and attracting tourists.

This year, respondents were asked to prioritise their pathway options:

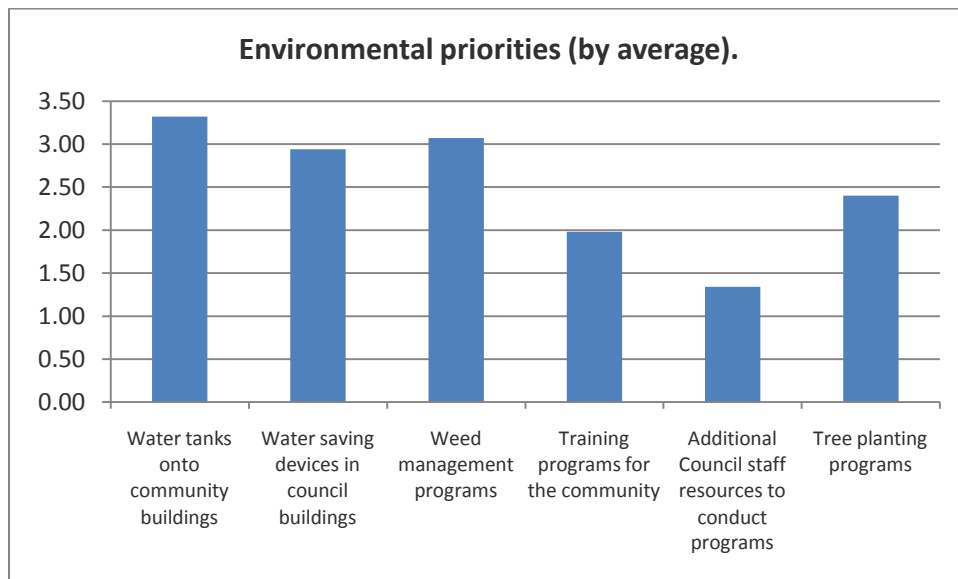


The feedback from respondents was overwhelming. Linkages within and between towns is the number one priority for the Indigo community. Respondents ranked the preservation and enhancement of Indigo’s heritage high and their response to Pathways complimented this. They understand concrete paths are not appropriate in some areas and believe they can even detract from the historical element of the region.

## Environment

Respondents strongly believed Council was environmentally aware and proactive in protecting the natural environment; 133 - **Yes** to 40 - **No** (64 Unsure).

A number of environmental initiatives were identified by the community in last year’s survey. This year, they were asked to rank them:

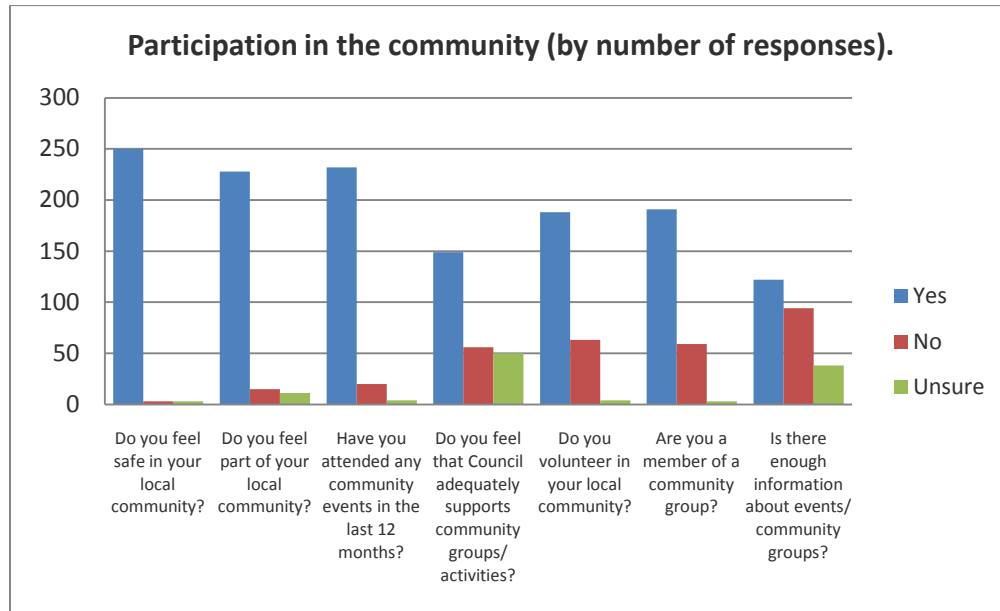


The community believes *Water tanks on community buildings* is the most important priority, followed by *Weed management* and *Water saving devices in Council buildings*.

This is opposed to *Planning controls and development* last year, *Increased Council resources and support*, and *Increased information and awareness*. It seems the community favor more practical solutions this year.

## Community participation

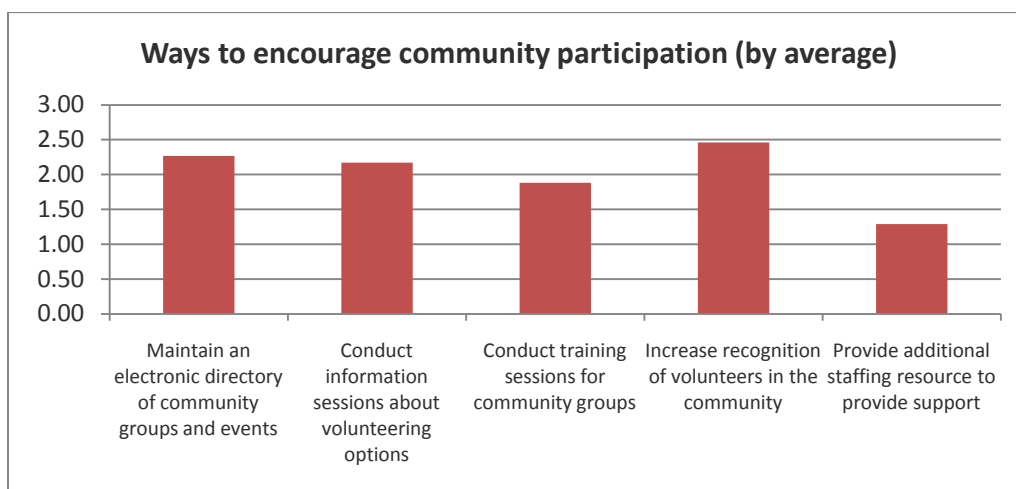
Respondents were asked to answer a series of questions that gave insight into what determined their participation within the community. The results are overwhelmingly positive:



All but six of the respondents indicated they felt safe in their local community. Three said they didn't and three were not sure. Almost all of the respondents also felt a part of their local community (228) and had attended community events regularly (232).

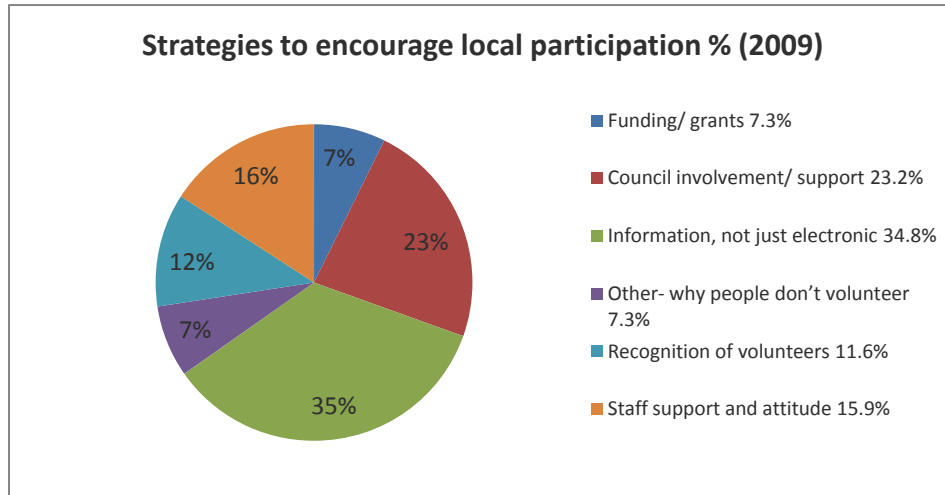
Most felt Council adequately supported community groups and activities with close to all of the respondent's members of community groups themselves (191). This reflected in the number of respondents who volunteer in the local community (188). The results were very similar to last year.

### Ways to encourage participation



There is an obvious difference in the priority of strategies for encouraging and maintaining community participation from last year to this year.

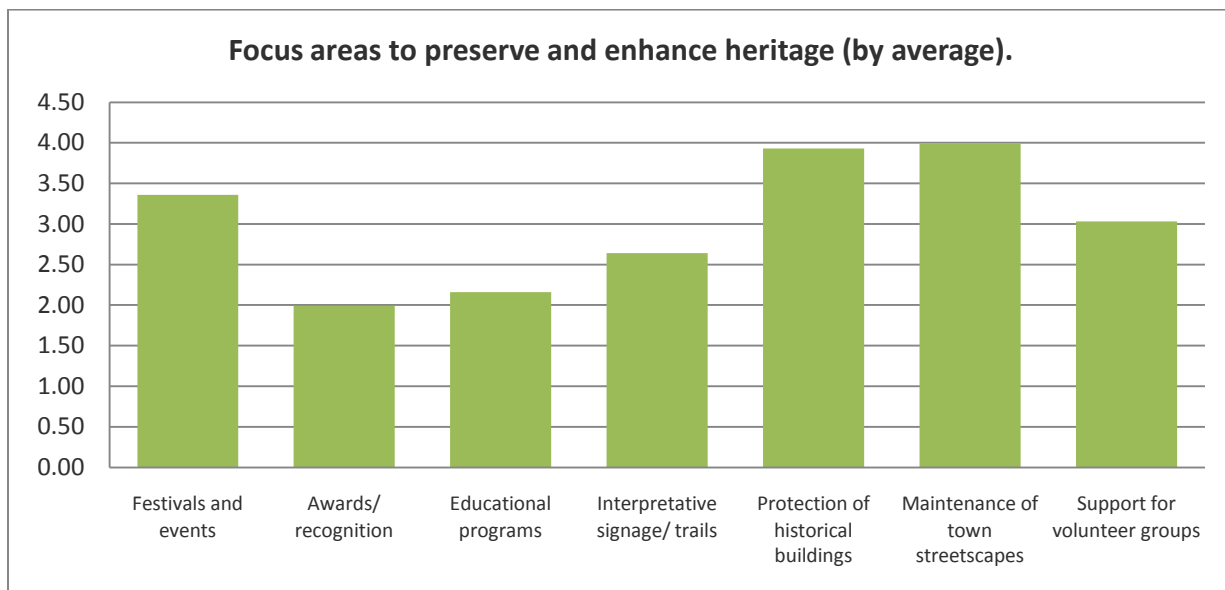
In 2010, respondents ranked *Increase recognition of volunteers in the community* as their first priority. In 2009, this strategy was ranked fourth at just over 11%.



In the feedback from respondents, there is some mention of expanding the role of Neighborhood Houses to encourage community participation, but in all there is an element of culture change that respondents know will take time.

## Town Identity

In the 2009 survey, respondents were asked to identify a number of priorities that the community and Council could focus on to preserve and enhance the heritage aspects of their towns. This year, they were asked to rank them:



Throughout the survey, respondents have placed much emphasis on the *Natural environment*, rating it and the region's landscapes and streetscapes highly. It was not surprise that the *Maintenance of town streetscapes* was ranked highest in this instance. The community seems determined to maintain the historical aspect of Indigo rating the *Protection of historical buildings* high. Adding to the community's strong sense of community belonging are *Festivals and events*, and the *Support of volunteers* to help preserve and maintain Indigo's identity.

## Other comments

The following is a summary of the additional comments made by survey respondents:

- Small business needs some attention
- The demolition of the Stone Cottage in Yackadandah is a step backwards in maintaining our history
- Council should do more to protect native vegetation
- Council offices should not be split
- Still waiting on community consultation on the Rating Strategy Review
- Enhance the Burke Museum in Beechworth
- Locals need to be more educated about our region. This will encourage appreciation
- We do not need to be thanked for paying our rates. It was a waste of paper
- I look forward to being involved in the Cycle Reference Group
- I would like the opportunity to comment on the performance of Council staff and councilors
- Ensure planning controls are enforced. Beechworth is losing its charm
- The town of Stanley needs more support
- Equal financial support for events throughout the Shire
- More support for Wahgunyah
- Developing better partnerships between community, agencies and Council
- Communication with residents has improved
- Capitalise on Lake Sambell's potential
- How is Council tackling climate change?
- Chiltern needs respite care
- Rates are increasing too fast
- Council staff are friendly and helpful
- Fight to keep the local health service and aged care
- Storm water drainage is an issue
- What is the future of Lake King?
- Would the Council consider amalgamation?
- Improve roadside tree management
- Improve dress standards at Council
- Council more forward thinking
- Can Council protect the Skeleton Ridge line?

## **Conclusion**

It is important for Council to prioritise and value feedback from the communities of Indigo. Again in 2010 residents have provided detailed comments that will help to guide the work being done by Council over the coming 12 months.

The survey has reflected the effort being made by Council to engage and provide information to the community and it is important to recognise this as a key role for all Council staff and Councilors in the future.

It is also important that detailed survey data is provided to key staff for analysis and incorporation into work programs and strategic planning exercises, as community feedback can be difficult to obtain and should be actioned wherever possible.

These elements should continue to be a priority for the 2010-2013 Council Plan along with improving Council service areas as identified throughout the survey and a redevelopment of the Council website as resources allow.