

# My Muswellbrook: Mapping Place Identity and Pride in Place





## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Custodians of New South Wales. We recognise and acknowledge that Aboriginal peoples have a deep cultural, social, environmental, spiritual and economic connection to their lands and waters. We value and respect their knowledge and the contributions of many generations, including Elders, to this understanding and connection. We wish to pay particular respect to the Awabakal people, whose country we live and work on, and the Wonnarua/Wanaruah people, whose traditional lands this project was conducted on and to which this report refers.

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## Recognition of Funding

This project had been funded by BHP Mt Arthur Coal's community investment program.





This summary report presents an overview of the findings from a qualitative research project that engaged community members across Muswellbrook Local Government Area (LGA) in a participatory research process exploring what Muswellbrook means to them and their views on what the future closure of BHP’s Mt Arthur coal mine might mean for Muswellbrook as a place. The project, which has been funded by BHP Mt Arthur Coal’s community investment program, was conducted by researchers from the University of Newcastle, who undertook workshops with community members in Muswellbrook from March to December 2024.

The project was initiated in response to the announcement that BHP will close the Mt Arthur coal mine in 2030. Mine closures can impact local communities dramatically, presenting economic, social, cultural and environmental uncertainties. In this context, advancing insight into what people value about the place they call home is a critical step toward understanding how to best safeguard communities against negative impacts of closure.

The present study is an independent research project that explores local residents’ experiences of, and attachment to, Muswellbrook as a place and their hopes and concerns for the future. We offer the perspectives of Muswellbrook residents as a foundation for closure planning that recognises their sentiments, hopes, fears, and priorities.

Through 13 workshops conducted with a total of 69 participants, we listened to residents’ narratives of place. Rather than starting from the premise of closure, we centred the workshops and conversations around place attachment and place identity. From this, we sought to craft a narrative about the future that builds from grassroots sentiments and ideas, and to offer recommendations for community-endorsed pathways towards closure. The final report for the project offers both a story about Muswellbrook as a place to live, told by those who live there, and a contribution towards BHP’s efforts to understand community perspectives on closure.

The project sought to answer three key research questions:

- What is the meaning of Muswellbrook as a place for the people who live there?
- What are the core values that shape people’s attachments to Muswellbrook as a place?
- What do Muswellbrook local residents want to see in the future?

In addressing these questions, we aimed to move beyond the general description of Muswellbrook as a ‘mining town.’ While coal mining is a central part of Muswellbrook’s history and remains the town’s primary industry, the lived experience of the place is more deeply defined by family, community, and connection to place. Residents have strong emotional ties and an ongoing commitment to Muswellbrook, which

they deeply value as ‘home.’ Through an innovative workshop approach that used maps to bring out stories about place and highlight place-based values, we identified the following core community values:

- sense of home and belonging
- community spirit and volunteering
- connection to place and environment
- heritage and cultural identity
- economic opportunity and local prosperity
- youth, family and social wellbeing.

Through the workshop conversations, residents expressed how much they cherish their connections with natural surroundings, people, and the town’s history and heritage. The stories shared highlight the value of community spirit, with strong emphasis on family, local connection, and investment in community life. Participants demonstrated a strong volunteering ethos and a deep belief in giving back to the community. This sense of reciprocity was also extended to mining companies, including BHP, who are seen as having a reciprocal obligation to leave a positive legacy on the local environment, economy, and community as they close. Environmental connections were a strong theme: residents prioritised rehabilitation, greening, and environmental rejuvenation for the future. Local history and heritage—both Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal—were valued as evidence of the town’s resilience, reflecting its capacity to adapt through earlier periods of change. Young people were recognised as a vital stakeholder group, with residents eager to see initiatives that support youth opportunities. There was also strong emphasis on programs that strengthen social cohesion and justice, and that address social disparity and disadvantage. Although people are concerned about how the closure of Mt Arthur will impact the future of the town, they are hopeful that the closure process will facilitate investment and programs that target and prioritise local needs. The closure of Mt Arthur is understood as part of a broader process of economic diversification. While BHP’s responsibilities are limited to the closure of its own mine, local residents hold expectations and hopes that extend well beyond this remit. They see the closure as a pivotal event that will set a precedent for future mine closures and, in doing so, position Mt Arthur within a wider narrative of regional transition and post-mining futures.



# Key Findings

## The research revealed nuanced community perspectives that encompass strengths, concerns, and forward-looking aspirations for Muswellbrook's future.

### Positive attributes

- Reflecting community strengths, values, and current capacities, we found a community that:
- Cares deeply about the place they call home.
- Values the Indigenous heritage of the place.
- Takes pride in its agricultural and industrial history, specifically as this is linked to powering the nation.
- Treasures opportunities to connect to people and place, and values community infrastructure, green spaces and places where people can gather, learn and connect.
- Exhibits a strong community spirit and a commitment to give back to the community and work to address social issues through volunteering and community work.
- Is passionate about its youth.

### Challenges and Concerns

- Highlighting risks, vulnerabilities, and tensions, we found a community that:
- Observes and experiences social disadvantage, poverty and inequity.
- Recognises there are limited opportunities for young people.
- Holds concerns about the future, with growing fears around economic decline, inadequate post-mining rehabilitation, environmental degradation, shrinking population, and weakening social ties.
- Besides a few strong voices, is disengaged in the question about what mine closure will mean for the community.
- Would benefit from greater education around the social, economic and environmental risks and benefits associated with individual mine closures and the cumulative impacts of mine closure for the region.
- Is fatigued by consultation and engagement.

### Aspirations and Opportunities

- Indicating forward-looking desires and possible directions for action, we found a community that:
- Exhibits cautious optimism about the future, relative trust in the mining industry's commitment to serve the community as it prepares for closure, and hope that new life can be injected into the region as it moves into a post-mining era.
- Recognises that inclusion and equity will be critical in ensuring that no one is left behind as mines close, and wants to see programs that will benefit the community as a whole—not just affected workers.
- Aspires to see environmental healing and cultural heritage restoration embedded in mine closure plans.
- Wants a genuine voice in shaping its future and opportunity to be actively involved in decision making.
- Wants to see a future in place for young and old.

Building on these key findings, we offer **12 general recommendations** organised under five broad themes. These general recommendations are drawn from what the workshop participants identify as central tenants for securing Muswellbrook's future in the face of mine closure. The 12 recommendations are broad in scope and relevant not only to BHP, but to all actors within the transition ecosystem. However, they can—and should—be understood as part of what community perceives as BHP's responsibility as it plans for closure.

The 12 recommendations are translated into **nine key principles** for a place-based, community-endorsed closure strategy. Building on these principles, we propose **two social legacy initiatives and a series of early activation events**, which we recommend BHP develop collaboratively with the community and key stakeholders through deliberative and inclusive co-design processes.

# Recommendations

In order to address community hopes and concerns, and build a positive social legacy at closure, we make the following recommendations:

## Theme 1: Community Identity, Connection and Inclusion

**Recommendation 1: Invest in social infrastructure** and support for programs that sustain community identity and cohesion, provide opportunities for young people, and enable cultural connection and exchange.

**Recommendation 2: Integrate heritage and cultural preservation and restoration** as integral to rehabilitation and to the maintenance of identity and connection to place.

**Recommendation 3: Prioritise equity and access**, ensuring disadvantaged and marginalised groups are not left behind in the closure process.

## Theme 2: Youth and Indigenous Futures

**Recommendation 4: Invest in training, upskilling, and employment programs** for the whole community, with tailored initiatives for young people and Indigenous residents.

**Recommendation 5: Position youth within closure strategies** through training, employment pathways, and participation in post-mining projects and future industries.

**Recommendation 6: Develop Indigenous enterprise and employment strategies** to ensure long-term inclusion and benefit from land-use change.

## Theme 3: Land use, Environmental and Cultural Knowledge

**Recommendation 7: Engage in collaborative planning** for post-mining land use—particularly buffer lands and mining voids—with a focus on sustainable industries, conservation areas, recreational alternatives, and long-term environmental and social benefits.

**Recommendation 8: Incorporate Indigenous knowledge** in land-use planning and rehabilitation, supporting Indigenous-led restoration and pathways to cultural and land ownership.

## Theme 4: Economic Transition and Local Benefit

**Recommendation 9: Advance local procurement, business investment strategies, and community-ownership models** to ensure jobs are retained in Muswellbrook and local workers benefit from rehabilitation and post-mining development.

**Recommendation 10: Support community-run social enterprises** that strengthen local economies, build skills, and foster social connection.

## Theme 5: Governance, Engagement and Capacity Building

**Recommendation 11: Create transparent, inclusive and compensated governance structures** to ensure community participation in closure decisions.

**Recommendation 12: Deliver community education and closure literacy** initiatives to support informed, proactive engagement in the closure of Mt Arthur.

# Principles to Guide BHP's Closure Planning and Social Legacy at Mt Arthur

We recommend that BHP adopts the following nine principles as the guiding framework for closure planning and investment in social legacy:

1

## Support Place-Based Social Wellbeing

Invest in the long-term social and cultural wellbeing of Muswellbrook by enhancing social infrastructure, strengthening community identity, and supporting programs that foster belonging, inclusion, and intergenerational connection.

2

## Prioritise Locally Anchored Economic Development

Ensure that economic benefits from closure and rehabilitation are retained in the local region by prioritising local procurement, supporting business development, and enabling community ownership of new enterprises.

3

## Build Pathways to Community-Owned Legacy Projects

Evolve BHP-supported initiatives into sustainable, community-run enterprises that reflect local values, meet local needs, and continue delivering benefit well beyond the closure period.

4

## Foster Collaborative Land Use Planning

Centre community voices in decisions about post-mining land use and future regional visioning by facilitating inclusive, transparent, and co-designed planning processes that prioritise environmental restoration, cultural values, and public benefit.

5

## Invest in Future Skills and Inclusive Employment

Support the community in adapting to a changing economy by investing in education, skills development, and job pathways tailored to future economic growth in the region—especially for youth, Indigenous people, and vulnerable populations.

6

### Embed Indigenous Knowledge and Custodianship

Respect, integrate and support Indigenous cultural knowledge, aspirations, and rights in all aspects of closure planning, from land rehabilitation to enterprise development and site stewardship.

7

### Protect and Celebrate Cultural Heritage

Preserve and restore cultural and historical assets as a foundation for community pride, identity, education, and tourism—recognising both Indigenous and settler histories.

8

### Promote Transparent Communication and Closure Literacy

Build community confidence and engagement through regular, accessible, and co-designed communication that increases literacy in closure processes, manages expectations, and supports informed participation.

9

### Ensure Community-Led Governance and Legacy Oversight

Establish lasting governance structures—such as a social legacy fund and community legacy board—to support locally determined investment, monitor outcomes, and hold all stakeholders accountable.



# Social legacy initiatives

Drawing on the project’s key findings, the 12 overarching recommendations, and the nine closure and social legacy principles, we recommend that BHP, in its next stage of community engagement, collaborate with the community and key stakeholders to develop two main social legacy initiatives alongside a series of early activation events.

The two key initiatives are:

**Investment in community-led social infrastructure and programs through a community-owned social enterprise.**

**Collaboratively explore mine land re-use opportunities with the community.**

These projects will maintain and enhance social cohesion and capital by:

- Delivering a community-owned, sustainable social enterprise (a multi-purpose community hub), which will strengthen social connection and inclusion, support local jobs and skills development, celebrate cultural identity and heritage, promote environmental sustainability, and empower the community; and,
- Bringing the community in as an active and engaged stakeholder in the closure process, build ownership, agency and confidence about mine land re-use opportunities, and enhance closure literacy.

The proposed initiative for a community-owned social enterprise can take many forms, but at its core is the development of a multi-purpose community hub: a welcoming and accessible space that brings together people, services, programs, and opportunities under one roof—designed with and for the community. Drawing on the findings of this project, which highlighted the value people place on spaces that connect them with nature, each other, and their history

and heritage, their desire for more opportunities for young people and Indigenous culture, and their need for programs that address social vulnerability and disadvantage, it is recommended that the hub integrate elements that enable such connections and provide meaningful support. More details of what this can include are outlined in Appendix A.

The latter initiative will deliver a community-owned and endorsed plan for mine land re-use, which: (a) contributes detail to BHP’s masterplan for post-mining land use on the Mt Arthur site; (b) engages and educates the community about post-mining land and mine land re-use alternatives; (c) identifies community perceptions and priorities of mine land re-use within the masterplan’s key zones; (d) maps opportunities to create community-owned businesses on post-mining land, as well as potential tangible legacy projects that can reflect local stories, places and values; and, (e) generates community dialogue around procurement, training and future jobs. The details of this proposal are outlined in Appendix B.

The two recommended initiatives will address the key findings of this project regarding the sense of consultation fatigue (by not only engaging and consulting but driving projects that have tangible outcomes for community), the community's desire to have a voice in the future of the place they call home, the aspirations for projects that sustain and foster social cohesion and engagement, and the desire to explore opportunities for renewal and restoration as part of mine land re-use.

Because both these initiatives are longer-term, it would be valuable to begin with a series of pilot events and temporary activations that respond to the findings of this report, reflect the vision for the community hub and lay the groundwork for its development, and demonstrate BHP's commitment to building and maintaining social cohesion through the closure process. These events will build trust in BHP's ambition of leaving a positive legacy and delivering a sustainable post-closure legacy project.

Pilot events and early activation initiatives might include pop-up markets, storytelling nights, cracker nights, community meals, community sports carnivals, open mic nights, community concerts or dances, repair cafés, youth-led activities, and/or site-visits and tree planting days. They can help build momentum, test ideas, foster community ownership, and demonstrate the hub's potential, as well as build community interest and engagement in the closure process and future projects. Over time, successful elements of these pilots could be integrated into the permanent design and programming of the community enterprise. It is recommended that BHP develops these early activations in collaboration with the community, and include a youth-focussed and an Indigenous-led event. Further details are outlined in Appendix C.

In summary, the specific recommendations for social legacy initiatives are:

- **Support, fund and facilitate the development of a multi-purpose community hub**, following the principles of co-design and community engagement outlined in Appendix A.
- **Support and fund a follow-up closure literacy and engagement initiative that collaboratively explores mine land re-use opportunities** with the community, as outlined in Appendix B.
- **Implement a series of early activation events**, as outlined in Appendix C.

# Appendix A

## Initiative 1: Invest in community-led social infrastructure and programs through a community-owned social enterprise

### Legacy outcome: A thriving, self-sustaining community hub rooted in local values

The details of this initiative—including its location, its relationship with existing community assets such as The Melt, TAFE, and the proposed Pocket Park currently under development—should be developed collaboratively through a community-led co-design process. It can take many forms but, at its core, such a multi-purpose community hub would be a welcoming, accessible space that brings together people, services, programs, and opportunities under one roof—designed with and for community.

Drawing on the findings from this project, which identified how people value places to connect with natural surroundings, people and history and heritage, desire more opportunities for young people and Indigenous culture, and the need for programs that address social vulnerability and disadvantage, it is recommended that the hub includes elements that will enable and facilitate such connections and support. This could include:

- flexible indoor/outdoor spaces for events and concerts, workshops, markets and community gatherings;
- a community garden and café (inspired by the Green Connect Farm and Café in Wollongong and CERES in Melbourne), which offers community members opportunities to grow food and buy affordable and local produce, socialise, train, learn and work (paid or voluntary);
- a community farm supporting the hub and cafe, offering opportunities for training and experience, as well as affordable and local produce (examples from elsewhere include Pennypack Farm and Education Centre and Rushton Farm at Rushton Woods Preserve, both in Pennsylvania, USA);
- a community exchange-and-repair hub, inspired by successful models like the Repair Cafe movement—to foster skill-sharing, sustainability and social engagement;
- rooms for training, co-working and education,

- as well as for community activities (e.g. yoga, choir, arts workshops and exhibitions, youth music programs, drumming circles etc.);
- a youth zone with study spaces, digital access, mentoring and leadership programs (with transportation support between the high school and the hub);
- storytelling features that showcases local history and heritage;
- a cultural room or Indigenous-led space for storytelling, language and ceremony;
- pop-up service delivery points for mental health, social services and legal advice; and,
- sustainability features that reflect future-forward values, such as solar panels, native gardens, rainwater harvesting etc.

**Examples of multi-purpose community hubs can be found in other former coal-mining communities, including:** C-mine in Genk, Belgium; Redhills Durham Miners Hall, Durham, UK; Loos-en-Gohelle, France; Appalshop, Whitesburg, Kentucky, USA; and, Zeche Carl, Essen, Germany. In some places, such initiatives have formed part of the broader rehabilitation process, with some coal mining regions having transformed the industrial landscape and mining infrastructure through adaptive reuse. There are examples of industrial sites being repurposed into vibrant spaces for culture, education, recreation, and innovation— notable examples include Landschaftspark Duisburg Nord and Zeche Zollverein in Germany—and of architectural and design innovation being integrated in social legacy projects and, in some cases, contribute to tourism appeal, as seen in projects like The Rusty Nail in Germany's Lusatian Lake District.

Whilst initiatives from other locations can provide inspiration, it is essential that any local project is grounded in the specific values, needs, and aspirations of the Muswellbrook community. The core purpose of the proposed multi-purpose community

hub is to foster social cohesion, connection, and community wellbeing, with local voices guiding the process. The ultimate aim is for the hub to become a community-owned and community-managed space—one that reflects the needs and aspirations of Muswellbrook residents, that is embedded in local values, and that remains locally governed, sustainable, and responsive beyond the life of Mt Arthur.

At its core, this initiative should be a project developed with and for the community. The vision for how the hub will serve the community—its roles, functions, and activities—should be shaped through a co-design process led by local voices. The co-design process will begin with the creation of a community vision for the hub, which will require multi-stakeholder engagement, including Muswellbrook Council and other relevant representative bodies. This will be the first of seven stages, which include:

**Stage 1:** Creating a community vision for the hub

**Stage 2:** Translating the vision into a strategic plan

**Stage 3:** Feasibility and technical planning

**Stage 4:** Securing funding and partnerships

**Stage 5:** Delivering pilot projects

**Stage 6:** Delivering and building

**Stage 7:** Sustaining and growing

**Stage 1: Creating a community vision for the hub**

- Engage the community in a co-design process to collectively define the purpose, values, desired functions, and guiding principles of the hub. This should involve diverse voices, including youth, Indigenous representatives, and local organisations.
- It will include the establishment of a Community Advisory Group (CAG), the recruitment of an independent project coordinator or facilitator, collaboration with Muswellbrook Council and other relevant representative bodies, gap analysis and background research, community-wide engagement, review and endorsement.
- The vision will be shared with BHP, who will support the next steps by helping to identify a possible site and contributing further funding. Importantly, the community's preferred option may be realised at a different location and does not have to be tied to BHP-owned land.

**Stage 2: Translating the vision into a strategic plan**

- With the support of key stakeholders (e.g. Council, The Melt, TAFE), facilitators and technical advisors, the CAG works to turn the vision into a practical action plan. BHP is

a critical partner in this as the project's main sponsor. This includes identifying priorities, programs and functions, design principles, site selection criteria, and governance options.

**Stage 3: Feasibility and technical planning**

- Engagement of professionals (planners, architects, quantity surveyors etc.) to explore sites (repurpose vs new build, zoning and planning approvals, construction and operational costs, environmental and cultural assessments).
- The vision must be at the centre of technical decisions.

**Stage 4: Securing funding and partnerships**

- Use the shared vision and action plan to apply for further funding.
- Formalise BHP's contribution
- Approach philanthropic foundations, NGOs and corporate partners
- Develop a budget and funding plan (capital and operational)

**Stage 5: Delivering pilot projects**

- Host a series of early activation events or programs to test ideas, build momentum, strengthen partnerships, and increase community engagement. These pilots can shape the final design and programming of the hub.
- These pilot projects are to be based on the vision and can be, for example:
  - A pop-up community café
  - A storytelling event
  - A mobile repair and exchange hub
  - A seasonal market
  - A youth activity
- The pilot projects may be linked to the early activation events (Appendix C).

**Stage 6: Delivering and building**

- Finalise site and design based on vision and feasibility
- Apply for development approvals if required
- Build or fit out the site
- Recruit and/or train local staff
- Set up governance and management structures (e.g. cooperative, community board, partnership with local NGO).

**Stage 7: Sustain and grow**

- Establish feedback mechanisms for the community
- Track progress using success measures identified during co-design

- Adapt and grow offerings based on use and emerging needs
- Transition leadership and management to full community ownership over time.

**This initiative will address:**

- the community's desire and need for places to connect with people, environment and culture,
- the lack of opportunities for young people and limitations of spaces for them to come together, learn new skills and gain work experience,
- the community and volunteering spirit, and the deep desire to address disadvantage and marginalisation,
- the desire to advance local opportunity and skill-building, and
- the need for programs that sustain and strengthen community identity and social cohesion, and that creates a sense of ownership and belonging.

**The initiative is linked to core values**

**of place and attachment by:**

- providing a visible, stable place that belongs to the community and grows with it;
- reinforcing Muswellbrook as a place of meaningful connections, history, resilience, creativity and care;
- offering a space for intergenerational connection where elders and youth can exchange knowledge, culture, and aspirations; and,
- embodying the principles of community care, voice and agency, and fostering pride, participation and local empowerment.

# Appendix B

## Initiative 2: Collaboratively explore mine land re-use opportunities with the community

### Legacy outcome: A community-owned and endorsed plan for mine land re-use

This is an **engagement and education initiative** that will result in a community-owned and endorsed plan for mine land re-use at the Mt Arthur site. It builds on the current project and advances several of the general recommendations outlined in this report, including:

- enhancing community understanding of the closure process (12);
- advancing possibilities for local procurement, business investment strategies and community-ownership models (9);
- engagement in collaborative planning for post-mining land use (7);
- integrating heritage and cultural preservation and restoration (2);
- incorporating Indigenous knowledge (8);
- positioning of youth initiatives within closure strategies (5); and,
- establishing transparent and inclusive community governance structures that ensures community members have a voice and meaningful role (11).

Furthermore, it will:

- educate the community about BHP's masterplan for post-mining land use at the Mt Arthur site;
- engage the community in discussion about what will and can happen to the land post closure;
- enhance community literacy around the closure process and possible mine land re-use alternatives; and,
- develop a community-endorsed map of future land use options, adding critical detail to BHP's current masterplan.

In contrast to the current project—which invited participants to engage in a speculative, imaginative exercise—this initiative should be grounded in BHP's masterplan for post-mining land use and supported by existing studies on feasible land use alternatives and opportunities.

The initiative will provide BHP and potential future landowners with insight into community sentiment regarding potential land uses, allowing the values and concerns of the broader community to be considered in future land use planning.

The recommendation is for BHP to work with CRC-TiME (<https://crctime.com.au/>) and researchers from Federation University and the University of Newcastle, who bring a proven methodology for community engagement and education around post-mining land use.

Taking BHP's masterplan for the Mt Arthur site as its starting point—which outlines potential future land use mixes for the mine site—the initiative will involve three distinct and parallel deliberative processes with young people, Traditional Owners, and community members of the Muswellbrook and Upper Hunter regions. These sessions aim to engage the community in discussions about mine land re-use alternatives, build community literacy around the closure process and land use opportunities, and identify needs, aspirations, and support for specific land use options across different zones.

The objectives of this project will be to facilitate deliberations on future land use aspirations with the public through three separate forums:

- Demographically-representative community panel/s
- Indigenous community reference group/s
- Youth design summit/s

Each deliberation will be delivered using methodologies most appropriate for the target groups, with supporting reference materials and visual aids. **These processes will produce increased literacy and community agency in mine closure and mine land re-use.**

This project will deliver:

- Factsheets, videos and other communication materials designed for the community to increase literacy around BHP's mine closure, mine rehabilitation and mine land re-use alternatives.
- Individual reports detailing the process and outcomes of the three deliberative processes – in each target community.
- A synthesis report on the future vision of the mine lands of Mt Arthur that identifies the aspirations, concerns and opportunities elucidated by each group, including commonalities and differences.

The project will not only deliver a community-endorsed plan for future post-mining land at the Mt Arthur site. The process of this project will be a social legacy outcome in its own right through how it will facilitate community engagement and connection and offer a mechanism for care of place, community repair and future-making.

**This initiative will address:**

- the community's call for meaningful engagement in shaping Muswellbrook's future.
- the need to strengthen community understanding of the closure process, explore sustainable land use options, and ensure that post-mining land use planning reflects local priorities and values.
- the community's emphasis on embedding Indigenous knowledge and aspirations, and empowering young people through participation in planning.
- the need for inclusive governance that ensures meaningful community involvement.

**The initiative is linked to core values of place and attachment by:**

- enhancing lived experience and local knowledge, and valuing the deep emotional and historical ties people have to place.
- strengthening voice and agency, offering the community meaningful influence over mine land re-use and reinforcing sense of ownership, identity and belonging.
- honouring cultural and environmental values through incorporating Indigenous knowledge and exploration of regenerative land uses.
- building social cohesion and intergenerational connection through a collective future vision anchored in place.
- enabling people to envisage a future in place for young and old.

# Appendix C

## Initiative 3: Early activation events

**Legacy outcome: A foundation of community trust, engagement and co-ownership established through inclusive, locally led events that reflect core values and build momentum for long-term social legacy.**

Early activation events will seed long-term community engagement and ownership by empowering local groups to lead inclusive, values-based activities that strengthen social connection, celebrate identity, and build trust. These events will lay the groundwork for a future social legacy framework by demonstrating tangible support for youth, Indigenous leadership, local culture, environmental restoration, and community skill-sharing—helping to establish new habits of collaboration, co-design, and participation in the transition process.

Based on the findings of this research and the emphasis that participants placed on young people and Indigenous culture, the role of and pride exhibited around sport, active living and Muswellbrook’s art and music scene, the emphasis on environmental restoration and green spaces, and the desire for projects that address social disadvantage, we propose the following strategies for early activation:

- reaching out to Muswellbrook High School to identify 5 youth representatives who will work with an independent facilitator to identify 3-5 youth-centred events, which the Muswellbrook High School students subsequently are asked to vote on. Fund and support this event as early activation.
- reaching out to Indigenous groups to identify 3-5 Indigenous representatives who will work with an independent facilitator to identify a First-Nation led event for community. Fund and support this event as early activation.
- reaching out to local sporting clubs to identify 3-5 representatives who will work with an independent facilitator to plan a community sports carnival that celebrates Muswellbrook as a place of sports and active living. Consider a Heritage Hockey Competition as part of this, in recognition to Muswellbrook’s history of having had a strong hockey competition that many today speak nostalgically about. Fund and support this event as early activation.
- reaching out to the creative arts scene, including the conservatorium, to identify 3-5 representatives who will work with an independent facilitator to plan a cultural event. Fund and support this event as early activation.
- organising a tree planting day on site that also presents community with information about rehabilitation plans and progress charts.
- organising a pop-up community repair and exchange day, that brings the community together for a day of learning and exchange. This can involve specialised workshop where BHP brings technical experts from their workforce (for example around bike and car maintenance) and sources experts from the community (for example on how to compost or make a home vegetable garden).



Summary Report

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**BHP**



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REGIONAL FUTURES**