

9. Strategic and Community Facilities Group Reports

9.1 Alstonville Planning and Environmental Study and Strategic Plan

Delivery Program Strategic Planning

Objective To outline the progress of the Alstonville Strategic Plan project and seek direction from the Council concerning further community engagement through a public exhibition process.

Background

The Council, at its Ordinary Meeting held on 28 April 2016 resolved to proceed with the preparation of a place-based strategic planning process for the urban areas of Alstonville and Wollongbar [Minute No 280416/12].

Council's decision was in response to Action HE3.1.2b of the Delivery Program and Operation Plan 2015/16 (now Action HE3.1.2c of the 2016/17 plan). This action relates to ensuring that planning instruments reflect current and future needs. In this context, the review of the planning framework for Alstonville and Wollongbar was proposed to be undertaken through a planning and environmental study process, inclusive of a community engagement program.

The adopted 2012 Ballina Shire Growth Management Strategy identified a number of strategic actions for Alstonville and Wollongbar. These strategic actions as they relate to Alstonville have been examined through the environmental study process (note that a separate planning process will be undertaken for Wollongbar, with community engagement commencing this financial year).

The strategic actions under the Growth Management Strategy for Alstonville are:

- Identify opportunities for additional seniors' living facilities.
- Investigate the potential for infill development intensification.
- Review planning controls for the village centre following construction of the Bruxner Highway bypass.
- Preserve the integrity of the village footprint.
- Maintain the urban buffer / inter-urban break between Wollongbar and Alstonville.
- Revisit the Third Plateau Village concept.
- Manage and/or promote Aboriginal, European and other non-Aboriginal cultural heritage values in accordance with relevant stakeholders.

Prior to commencing work on the draft Alstonville Planning and Environmental Study (APES) a public consultation program was initiated. This program consisted of the following elements during June and July 2016:

- 3000 letters posted to all land owners within Alstonville township and adjacent rural areas;
- Pop-up street stall established for three mornings on the corner of Daley and Main Street;
- Meetings held with Chamber of Commerce and Alstonville and District Football Club. Invitations extended to other organisations to discuss planning, such as Alstonville High School;
- Press release prepared which resulted in interviews on ABC radio and NBN News during July 2016; and
- On line survey and web background content established.

Submissions received in respect to the pre-study community engagement assisted to establish the direction of the draft APES and the various issues that it has examined.

The draft APES was distributed to Councillors prior to the Councillor briefing on the project held on 7 March 2017. This draft is also attached to this report under separate cover.

The draft Alstonville Strategic Plan 2017 – 2037 has been prepared based on ideas currently contained within the draft APES. The draft strategic plan is contained within Attachment One.

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the draft study and plan preparation process and seek direction on the public exhibition of the documentation.

Key Issues

- Strategic planning for Alstonville.
- Community engagement.

Information

Overview

The philosophy adopted when preparing the APES was to examine a range of factors impacting on the Alstonville township, examine relevant data and then draw conclusions based on the data provided. The draft APES was also used as a means of proposing a variety of change ideas, some of which were derived from comments made by community members during the pre-study consultation.

The draft APES and accompanying draft Alstonville Strategic Plan 2017 – 2037, when finalised and adopted by the Council following public exhibition, are proposed to form the basis for Alstonville township strategic planning decision making in the 20 year period to 2037. Regular review of the strategic plan will also be required to ensure that it remains contemporary and adequately addresses issues as they arise.

A draft community vision for the future of Alstonville township has been developed using comments made by community members in response to the public engagement initiatives undertaken to date.

The draft vision consists of the following elements:

- Ensuring that the township's character, sense of community and quiet lifestyle is maintained;
- Providing new housing opportunities that are affordable and provide choice for people to meet changing life needs;
- Enhancing connectivity through the provision of walking paths, cycle ways and a town square;
- Fostering employment opportunities; and
- Maintaining and enhancing our natural environment.

The community's vision for Alstonville village is proposed to be achieved through the mechanism of the strategic plan and the strategic actions that it contains.

Significant Findings and Conclusions

More significant findings and conclusions drawn from data contained within the draft APES include the following:

- Without planning policy intervention Alstonville is likely to have a population increase potential of approximately 775 people above the 2016 estimated level of 5844 people. Capacity currently exists to accommodate approximately 356 additional dwellings. Through the provision of this additional housing Alstonville has capacity to increase its population to approximately 6,600 people. In the 20 year period to 2037 the Alstonville population has been estimated to increase to approximately 6160 – 6315 people.
- In October 2016 only 24 vacant R2 zoned residential lots existed in Alstonville with an estimated potential for an additional 10 lots to be subdivided under existing planning controls.
- The R3 zoned areas within the township have capacity to provide for approximately 274 new dwellings. Having regard to current property acquisition and building costs, the economic viability of developing new medium density housing products in the short term, in accordance with current density controls, is questionable. Existing detached housing within the township currently has a median sale price well below what it is likely to cost to develop medium density housing products close to the commercial centre.
- A number of options exist to create greater housing choice within the township over the life of the strategic plan. These options include increasing the density applicable to R3 zoned areas, rezoning additional areas in close proximity to the commercial centre to permit medium density residential development, increasing the areas in which dual occupancy development is permitted, and increasing the permitted building height in the commercial centre from 9 to 10 metres so as to better facilitate shop top housing.
- A small expansion (approximately 2 ha) of the area south of the existing Adventist seniors' living development on Pearces Creek Road is canvassed. If ultimately enabled, it may assist in integrating the Adventist facility with the remainder of the Alstonville township. It is estimated that in the vicinity of 20 dwellings, providing self-care

housing facilities for approximately 30 people, could be realised on this land.

- It was estimated that if all of the housing choice initiatives examined in the study were implemented then Alstonville could accommodate approximately 1865 additional people as opposed to the 775 additional people under existing controls. This would then result in Alstonville having a maximum population potential of approximately 7700 people.
- The existing Gap Road - Tuckombil Quarry and associated buffer areas were examined for their suitability to provide additional residential accommodation opportunities. Privately owned areas to the west and south of the quarry site have the capacity to accommodate in the vicinity of 550 dwellings. It is considered too early to designate this area as a potential growth location due to current quarry operations and expansion plans.
- Connectivity of residential areas with the commercial centre and community facilities was an issue identified as requiring action through increased foot and shared pathways over the next 20 year period.
- Provision of a town square within Main Street and the commercial centre was examined. Whilst potentially feasible, it was considered to be unlikely to be realised within the next 20 year period due to funding limitations and the largely private ownership of the land. Nevertheless, it remains an aspirational goal through the draft vision statement for Alstonville.
- Employment potential was identified through marketing the Main Street commercial area and facilitating the continued evolution of this area into a restaurant, café and arts and craft hub. The fostering of rural hinterland tourist destination activities, including farm stay accommodation, was also suggested as a means to provide economic depth and income producing potential for this area.
- The future potential of the hinterland was explored having regard to potential international demand for agricultural products and the potential competitive advantage afforded by proximity to the Ballina Byron Gateway Airport for local producers.
- Alstonville residents were found to have typically good employment opportunities with the 2011 unemployment rate (3.8%) significantly below the then shire rate (6.3%). In excess of 90% of Alstonville's employed residents had jobs within a half hour travel time of their homes.

The draft Alstonville Strategic Plan 2017 – 2037 contains a total of 23 strategic actions aligned with the five locality objectives derived from the vision statement contained within the draft APES. The basic premise of the plan in relation to urban development is to maintain the inter-urban break between Alstonville and Wollongbar whilst enabling infill development within the existing urban footprint of Alstonville.

It is intended that actions will be prioritised by a high, medium and low designation having regard for feedback received from the public exhibition of the draft plan. It is envisaged that actions with a high priority will be considered for implementation within a maximum 5 year period, medium priorities within 10 years and low priorities beyond that time or as resources permit. Not all actions are the responsibility of Council to implement, with

various stakeholders being suggested. In cases where Council is not directly responsible for delivering an action an advisory or advocacy capacity could be assumed.

It is recommended that the next step in the Alstonville strategic planning process is to place the draft APES and strategic plan on exhibition for community comment subject to incorporation of any amendments or suggestions that the Council may have.

Following the Councillor briefing on 7 March 2017 arrangements have been made for the exhibition launch to take place at the Alstonville Plateau Bowls & Sports Club commencing at 6:30 pm on Monday 3 April 2017.

If the study and plan are endorsed for exhibition, staff will proceed with the launch and formally commence the public exhibition phase on Wednesday 5 April 2017, continuing until Friday 12 May 2017.

Following the exhibition process the Council would then again have the opportunity of considering both documents together with community feedback prior to their adoption.

Separately, work is also presently underway on background research associated with the draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan. In this respect community consultation initiatives will be commenced in the coming months and may overlap with the Alstonville process. It is presently anticipated that a draft study and plan will be compiled for Wollongbar by about late 2017.

Sustainability Considerations

- **Environment**

The strategic direction outlined in the draft strategic plan is one based on providing for increased housing choice and limited population growth predominantly within the existing urban areas of Alstonville township.

Such a strategy results in the preservation of surrounding farmland and the inter-urban buffer between Alstonville and Wollongbar apart from one small exception which relates to the Adventist Care site. It is envisaged that the consolidation housing choice strategy will result in net environmental benefits compared to a greenfield residential release strategy.

- **Social**

Significant social benefits are envisaged to result from strategies that result in increased housing choice opportunities and the greater connectivity resulting from a township serviced by more foot and shared pathways.

- **Economic**

Local economic activity is anticipated to be stimulated by strategies that result in more residential building opportunities, potential for increased tourist visits, and policies which actively encourage hinterland based activity.

Legal / Resource / Financial Implications

It is proposed that the Alstonville strategic planning process now progresses to the public exhibition of the draft APES and strategic plan documentation.

This phase of the project does not give rise to any significant legal, resource or financial implications for Council.

Consultation

It is proposed to place the draft Alstonville strategic planning documents on public exhibition from 5 April 2017 until 12 May 2017. During this period persons who previously made submissions and key stakeholders will also be provided with written advice of the exhibition. Advertisements will be placed in the Advocate newspaper prior to the exhibition commencing and a press release will be issued.

An electronic survey has been prepared and will be used to canvass the level of support for the various ideas discussed within the draft APES and in particular the housing choice initiatives.

Letters are also proposed to be forwarded to property owners of land identified as having potential for rezoning to R3 Medium Density Residential and key Government departments. Letters will also be forwarded to organisations identified as being primarily responsible for the delivery of key actions contained within the draft strategic plan.

It is proposed to launch the public exhibition of the APES and strategic plan at the Alstonville Plateau Bowls & Sports Club on 3 April 2017. At this stage of the process additional public meetings are not proposed to be scheduled. However, depending on how the exhibition proceeds and the level of community interest, arrangements for community-based meetings could be made prior to the matter being reported back to the Council.

A mass mail out to property owners (3000) as previously undertaken is not proposed due to the relatively low response rate previously generated and the associated costs.

Options

Options available to the Council to progress this matter include the following:

1. Endorse the exhibition of the draft APES and strategic plan for Alstonville in accordance with the consultation strategy outlined in this report and subject to any additional amendments nominated by the Council.

This is the preferred option as it will enable the documents to be reviewed by the community and comments received to be considered by the Council.

2. Conduct further targeted community engagement prior to a broader exhibition process. For example, a steering committee could be formed from persons who previously made submissions in response to the pre-study consultation and any other interested persons.

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A committee or other targeted stakeholders could be asked to review the documents and if judged satisfactory endorse them for public exhibition. This approach is not recommended as it could potentially further significantly delay the release of subject documents and opportunity is available for all interested parties to engage with the draft study and plan through the recommended exhibition process.

3. The Council could determine not to further progress work in respect to strategic planning for Alstonville.

This approach, whilst not recommended, could be taken as a consequence of the information contained within the draft APES and if the Council is of the view that its preferred position in respect to Alstonville township is a no growth scenario. Adopting this option would also be problematic for the Council as there is now a community expectation that strategic planning documents would be available for comment in the early part of 2017.

4. The Council could defer the matter and seek additional information.

This option is not recommended on the basis that a Councillor briefing was held on the project in early March and extensive research and community engagement underpins the draft exhibition documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council endorses the public exhibition of the draft Alstonville Planning and Environmental Study and draft Alstonville Strategic Plan 2017 – 2037.
2. That Council give further consideration to the draft Alstonville Planning and Environmental Study and draft Alstonville Strategic Plan following public exhibition.

Attachment(s)

1. Draft Alstonville Strategic Plan 2017 - 2037
2. Draft Alstonville Planning and Environmental Study (Under separate cover)