

9.1 Wollongbar - Planning and Environmental Study and Strategic Plan

Delivery Program Strategic Planning

Objective To outline the progress of the Wollongbar 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 Operational Plan 2015/16 (now Action HE3.1d of the 2018/19 plan). This action relates to ensuring that plans are implemented that balance the built environment with the natural environment. In this context, the review of the planning framework for 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 Wollongbar. These strategic actions have been examined through the environmental study process.

The strategic actions under the Growth Management Strategy pertaining to Wollongbar are:

- Accommodate further population growth through implementation of the Development Control Plan for Wollongbar Urban Expansion Area (WUEA) via the development assessment process.
- Plan for the provision of additional sporting facilities to service the increasing population.
- Maintain the urban buffer/inter-urban break between Wollongbar and Alstonville.
- Revisit the Third 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 Wollongbar Planning and Environmental Study (WPES) a community consultation program was initiated. This program consisted of the following elements during April to June 2017:

- 1000 pamphlet letter box drop to Wollongbar residential properties inviting feedback via an on-line survey;
- Pop-up display at Wollongbar shopping centre on two week day afternoons – 43 people interviewed;
- Door knocking of residential premises on two consecutive Saturday mornings – 31 people interviewed;

- Letters to property owners in the Russellton Industrial Estate;
- Letters to owners of large undeveloped lots and commercial properties within Wollongbar township;
- Community Connect story;
- Ballina Shire Advocate notices;
- Press release, Facebook posts, advertising on Paradise FM and radio interview; and
- On-line surveys and web background content established.
- Presentation to Wollongbar Progress Association on outcomes and findings from community consultation process.

In response, 65 on-line surveys were completed and additional comments were provided by 74 people in face to face interviews. The comments and survey responses received in respect to the pre-study community engagement activities assisted to establish the direction of the draft WPES and the various issues that it has examined.

The draft WPES comprises Attachment 1 to this report.

The draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan 2018 – 2038 has been prepared based on ideas currently contained within the draft WPES. The draft strategic plan is comprises Attachment 2 to this report.

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council with 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 Wollongbar
- Community engagement

Information

Overview

The philosophy adopted when preparing the WPES was to examine a range of factors impacting on the Wollongbar township, examine relevant data and then draw conclusions based on the data provided.

The draft WPES is 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 WPES, and accompanying draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan 2018 – 2038, when finalised and adopted by the Council following public exhibition, are proposed to form the basis for Wollongbar township strategic planning decision-making in the 20 year period to 2038.

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 Wollongbar 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 sense of community and wellbeing present in Wollongbar is maintained
- Ensuring that Wollongbar continues to grow so as to facilitate well planned housing choice and employment opportunities
- Ensuring that infrastructure such as footpaths, parks, as well as shops, services and jobs continue to be provided and enhanced for the convenience of residents.

The community's vision for Wollongbar township 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 WPES include the following:

Residential Land Supply

- Residential land supply is limited, with an estimated potential 860 conventional lots / potential dwellings remaining as of December 2017. This includes a potential 78 lots outside of the WUEA, and a total of 62 vacant subdivided residential lots.
- Of the potential 720 unsubdivided lots / dwellings located in the WUEA, approximately 370 potential lots are contained within 32ha of zoned residential land owned by the United Protestant Association (UPA). This land may not be developed for conventional greenfield lots by the UPA. If this occurs then only 350 potential residential lots remain within the WUEA.
- Based on estimated annual growth to 2038 (2.65%pa) an additional 850 dwellings would be required to accommodate this growth.
- To replace the conventional lots which may not be provided upon UPA land would require planning for an alternative land supply to commence by 2022. A preliminary assessment of a number of sites which may be suitable to accommodate residential lots, outside the WUEA, has been undertaken and only one site has been found suitable.
- To facilitate housing choice within the established township (outside of WUEA) dual occupancy – duplex development is nominated as potentially suitable. This is subject to it being initially limited to certain larger lots (minimum 900m²) and not subject to slope exceeding 20%.

Industrial Land Supply

- Approximately 16ha of vacant industrial land exists within the Russellton Industrial Estate (RIE). Site topography (slope) is a major constraint for existing industrial zoned land within the RIE.

- Council's 28 lot industrial subdivision (Kays Lane and Northcott Crescent, not yet released) may be the last viable industrial subdivision within RIE.
- Industrial land (employment land) is estimated to conservatively generate 20 – 30 jobs per hectare.
- Sites potentially suitable for the expansion of the RIE have been the subject of preliminary evaluation. One site located in Dulcet Lane, with an area of 23ha, has been identified as potentially suitable for industrial use. If ultimately rezoned, it has the potential to accommodate 500 – 700 jobs.

Demographic Characteristics (ABS data)

- Population increased by 432 people (+18%) in the five year period to 2016.
- An additional 246 dwelling houses (+27.6%) were built in the five year period to 2016.
- The median age of Wollongbar residents was 42 years in 2016. This is the same as it was in 2011. The median age across Ballina Shire increased from 45 to 48 years in the same period, and in Alstonville from 48 to 50 years.
- Unemployment has increased from 4.6% in 2011 to 6.3% in 2016. This is contrary to the Ballina Shire result which saw unemployment reduce from 6.3% to 5.9% during that period. Alstonville's unemployment rate also increased from 5.6% to 5.9% in the same period.

Sustainability Considerations

- **Environment**

The strategic direction outlined in the draft strategic plan is one based on maintaining a supply of greenfield housing lots at Wollongbar over the next 20 year period. This may require the release of suitable additional land within close proximity to the village. The expansion of the Russellton Industrial Estate is also canvassed as a means through which additional jobs may be able to be provided in close proximity to Wollongbar.

If additional land is eventually released for residential and employment usage this will impact on land otherwise used for agricultural purposes. It may also impact on the inter-urban buffer between Wollongbar and Alstonville. The environmental consequence associated with such a strategy still requires detailed evaluation to determine whether a substantive case can be made in support of such action.

- **Social**

Significant social benefits are envisaged to result from strategies that result in increased housing choice opportunities and additional jobs being located in close proximity to an expanding urban area.

- **Economic**

Local economic activity is anticipated to be stimulated by strategies that result in more residential building and local job opportunities.

Legal / Resource / Financial Implications

It is proposed that the Wollongbar strategic planning process now progress to the public exhibition of the draft WPES 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 Wollongbar strategic planning documents on public exhibition commencing late August 2018 to October 2018. 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. A letter box drop of all residential properties in Wollongbar is also proposed.

An electronic survey has again been prepared and will be used to canvass the level of support for the various ideas discussed within the draft WPES and in particular, the possible housing and employment land initiatives.

Letters are also proposed to be forwarded to property owners of land identified as having potential for evaluation for urban purposes, as well as various Government departments.

At this stage arrangements have not been made to launch the WPES at a specific event. The Wollongbar Progress Association will however be contacted and offered a presentation relating to the WPES.

However, depending on how the exhibition proceeds and the level of community interest, arrangements for additional community-based meetings could be made prior to the matter being reported back to the Council.

A compilation of the results obtained from the pre-study community consultation held during April – June 2017 comprises Attachment 3 to this report.

Options

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

1. Endorse the exhibition of the draft WPES and draft strategic plan for Wollongbar 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 significantly delay the release of the 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 Wollongbar.

This approach, whilst not recommended, could be taken as a consequence of the information contained within the draft WPES and if the Council is of the view that its preferred position in respect to Wollongbar is not to encourage growth beyond what is already planned to occur.

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 11 July 2018 and extensive research and community engagement underpins the draft exhibition documentation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Council endorses the public exhibition of the draft Wollongbar Planning and Environmental Study and draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan 2018 – 2038.
2. That Council give further consideration to the draft Wollongbar Planning and Environmental Study and draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan following public exhibition.

Attachment(s)

1. Draft Wollongbar Planning and Environmental Study (Under separate cover)
2. Draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan 2018 - 2038
3. Community Consultation Results - 2017 (Under separate cover)

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260718/1 RESOLVED

(Cr Eoin Johnston/Cr Sharon Cadwallader)

1. That Council endorses the public exhibition of the draft Wollongbar Planning and Environmental Study and draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan 2018 – 2038.
2. That Council give further consideration to the draft Wollongbar Planning and Environmental Study and draft Wollongbar Strategic Plan following public exhibition.

FOR VOTE - All Councillors voted unanimously.

ABSENT. DID NOT VOTE - Cr Phillip Meehan, Cr Jeff Johnson and Cr Ben Smith