



DRAFT

Upper Hunter Shire Council

**LOCAL STRATEGIC
PLANNING
STATEMENT
2020**





Title: Upper Hunter Shire Council Local Strategic Planning Statement

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1. ABOUT THIS PLAN

This Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) is Upper Hunter Shire Council's plan for our community's social, environmental and economic land use needs over the next 20 years.

The LSPS provides context and direction for strategic land use planning the Upper Hunter Shire. Its objectives are to:

- a. establish a strategic basis for land use planning decisions and development control;
- b. identify the key social, environmental and economic issues;
- c. develop a vision for how the Shire will be in 2040;
- d. establish the key planning priorities and specific strategic planning actions; and
- e. formalise a system of monitoring and reporting on the achievement of the strategic actions.

The LSPS also responds to regional planning initiatives and to what the community has told us is important for the future of our Shire. It sets planning priorities to ensure that the Upper Hunter Shire is sustainable, and that future development is appropriate for the local context.

2. POLICY CONTEXT

The LSPS gives effect to a number of strategic documents. First, the LSPS provides a local government focus to the Hunter Regional Plan (NSW Planning and Environment, 2016), implementing the directions, priorities and relevant actions at the local level. It also outlines how Federal and State initiatives will create changes at the local level.

The LSPS integrates with the Upper Hunter Community Strategic Plan 2027 (CSP) which has a similar but broader role in setting out how Council will work to meet the needs of its community. The CSP key focus areas include: Community Life, Built and Natural Environment, Economy and Infrastructure, and Leadership.

The Upper Hunter CSP aims to deliver a number of community priorities, of particular relevance are:

1. Protect the natural environment.
2. Support and provide community services which promote health, wellbeing and the celebration of culture.
3. Increase focus on local business, shop occupation and revitalisation of the town centres.
4. Facilitate a stronger economic base to attract and retain residents, particularly our young people.
5. Provide well maintained, safe, reliable and additional infrastructure, including sporting fields, parks, family and cultural facilities.
6. Rural lifestyle and country feel are valued and protected and that the Upper Hunter Shire remains quiet, safe, healthy and welcoming.
7. Facilitate increased and innovative tourism and visitor opportunities.

The LSPS aligns with the CSP's seven key themes as the same themes for our Shire's land use future. LSPS's planning priorities, strategic directions and actions provide the basis for decisions about how we will use our land resources and assets to achieve our community's broader goals.

The current Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy 2017 (UHLUS) was adopted by Council on 22 March 2017 and conditionally endorsed by NSW Planning and Environment on 21 July 2017 with no endorsement given to preliminary investigation areas. The UHLUS provides directions for land use and development to support local planning objectives and broader state planning objectives. In addition to the implementation of the strategic directions of the HRP, the LSPS will provide a stronger link to the directions, policies and strategic actions in the UHLUS, along with other regional strategic planning such as the Upper Hunter Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022 (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2018).

Overall the LSPS will ensure a clear line-of-sight between these four important documents.

3. STRATEGIC CONTEXT

3.1 Population and settlement

Upper Hunter Shire is a large local government area (LGA) with an area extending to around 8,100km². Although this makes up around a quarter of the broader Hunter Region's total land area with approximately 14,112 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census, 2016), the LGA is home to around 3% of the region's population.

Around 60% of the LGA's population live in four major settlement areas, all of which occur along either the New England Highway or Golden Highway. These highways have served as longstanding trade routes between regional NSW and national and global markets in Newcastle, Sydney and Brisbane. They generate a significant amount of traffic through the LGA every day and afford residents convenient connections to jobs and services in larger urban centres within the Hunter and adjoining regions.

Scone, situated on the New England Highway, is the largest urban centre with around 5,050 people, it accommodates over a third of the LGAs total population. Scone is also the LGA's administrative capital, and is the predominant location for the majority of its jobs and services. These include retail, commercial and industrial businesses as well as tertiary education and health facilities. Other larger settlements occur along the New England Highway at Aberdeen (population approximately 1,894) and Murrurundi (population approximately 888) and along the Golden Highway at Merriwa (population approximately 979).

The balance of the LGA's population (5,240 persons) lives in smaller villages and rural areas. These settlements are more dispersed and may service rural communities far beyond their borders. Parkville, Wingen, and Blandford, situated along the New England Highway between Scone and Murrurundi, are afforded more convenient connections to urban networks and services, whereas Cassilis, Bunnan, Gundy and Moonan Flat are more remote.

The Upper Hunter Shire population grew moderately (by 350 people) over the five years from the 2011 census to the 2016 census. Figure 1 shows there was minimal change in the population of Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa, Murrurundi and the Rural Balance (rural areas, villages and localities) from 2001 to 2016. However when broken down into specific towns there was some population increases particularly for Scone and Aberdeen. Notwithstanding the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment's 2019 population projections for the Upper Hunter Shire indicate there will be a population decline by 1,650 people from 2016 to 2041 (NSW Government, 2019).

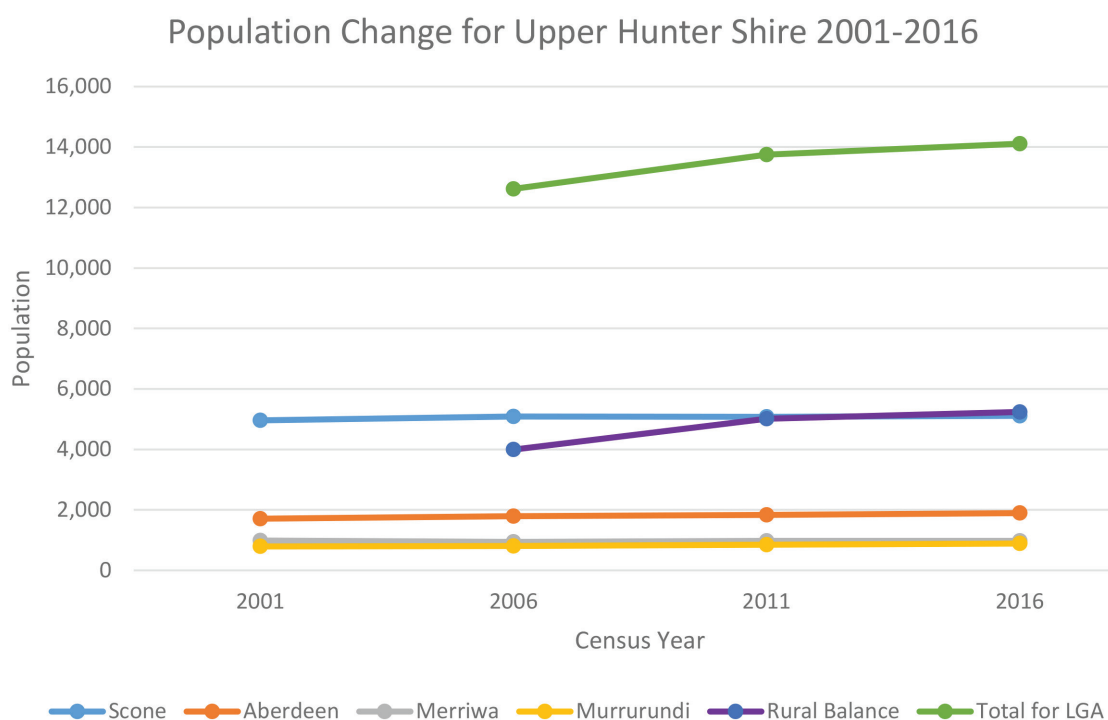


Figure 1 Population change for the Upper Hunter Shire 2001-2016

3.2 Infrastructure

The provision of infrastructure throughout the Upper Hunter Shire reflects the settlement pattern and economic activity. The Shire is serviced by a number of a road types including highways, urban roads, sealed rural roads (317km) and unsealed rural roads (1,162km) The Shire is also part of the National Land Transport Network with the New England Highway and Main North Rail Line, supporting significant through freight movement. Storm water drainage infrastructure, including kerb, guttering and piping is provided in existing urban areas. Reticulated water supply service is provided to Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa, Murrurundi and Cassilis. Reticulated sewer services are available to all the major urban areas. There are sewerage treatment plants at Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa and Murrurundi.

Council operates four landfill sites in the Upper Hunter Shire at Aberdeen, Scone, Murrurundi and Merriwa, and there is a waste transfer station at Cassilis. Service areas for waste collection are Bunnan, Gundy, Moonan Flat, Parkville, Wingen and Cassilis. These landfills and their life expectancy are as follows: Scone 10 years, Aberdeen 10 years, Merriwa 20 years. The existing Murrurundi waste facility is being converted to a waste transfer station. Domestic waste is now being transported to Muswellbrook waste facility via a Memorandum of Understanding. Kerbside recycling commenced in August 2006 in all urban areas.

3.3 Economy

The economy of the Upper Hunter Shire is predominantly based on agriculture, with a value of \$482,703 million (being the highest in the LGA) creating 1,344 jobs. Of the reported labour force of 6,615 people the Upper Hunter Shire has 60% in full-time employment, 29.9% in part-time employment and 4.8% were unemployed (ABS, Census, 2016).

Rural industries represent the predominant land uses, and/or help drive the LGA's economic performance. Key economic and employment sectors include primary production (beef cattle), horse farming (equine), coal mining, meat processing and local government administration.

3.4 Natural Environment

The Upper Hunter Shire supports a diverse range of native flora and fauna species and ecosystems as a result of its topography, geology and climate. It includes parts of the Sydney Basin, Brigalow Belt South, and NSW North Coast Bioregions . Some small areas in the north and north east are within the Nandewar and New England Bioregions¹. Large proportions of vegetation communities have been cleared, with the result that much of the remaining native vegetation is significant. Although approximately 7.5% of the total area of the Upper Hunter Shire is included within dedicated conservation reserves (mainly in Goulburn River, Barrington Tops, Towarri, and Coolah Tops National Parks), this protects a limited range of vegetation types and ecosystems occurring within the area.

The Sydney Basin in the south of the Upper Hunter Shire represents an extremely species diverse region with prominent ecological communities. The Sydney Basin has rich mineral resources, as well as being one of the most species diverse regions in Australia. Mineral extraction and land clearing for agricultural and equine purposes compromises the natural territorial and grazing habits of native animals and plants, increasing pressures on population size and diversity. Flood plains and watercourses previously host to areas of forest red gum and river oak (Hunter Catchment Management Trust, 2003), are scattered as remnant vegetation patches due to competing industry pressures.

The primary conservation areas occur within alpine regions which include a variety of ecologically diverse communities along riverine flats. The Barrington Tops plateau hosts a variety of tall forest species on its fertile soils including snow gum, ribbon gum and white gum as well as silver-top stringybark (Hunter Catchment Management Trust, 2003. p15). The subtropical rainforests are a great asset to the region and through conservation, remain largely untouched.

The Upper Hunter Shire is dissected by a number of rivers and streams running from west to east. They originate predominantly in the Liverpool and Mount Royal ranges and flow through the escarpments along well defined drainage lines. The principle river systems situated are:

Pages River, Isis River, Hunter River and Goulburn River. There are a number of other major stream systems that are important water sources, including: Dart Brook, Middle Brook, Wybong Creek, Merriwa River, Krui River, Moonan Brook and Stewarts Brook. There are also extensive groundwater systems associated with shallow alluvial aquifers and deep regional aquifers.

Good water quality is important to the Upper Hunter Shire as many of its villages rely on drawn groundwater and majority towns on flowing waterways. Continuous assurance of ecosystem health in Barrington Tops recharge zone will ensure catchment water quality. Agricultural practices along river flat waterways have the potential to exacerbate algal blooms and land degradation. Silting of waterways due to flooding and nutrient runoff is a particular risk (HCCREMS, 2010 p.46) to the LGA and stabilisation of river banks and plains through vegetation regeneration measures will minimise future risk.

¹ A bioregion is a relatively large area of land characterised by broad, landscape scale natural features and environmental processes that influence the function of entire ecosystems (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service 2003) and they provide a broad framework for assessing and planning biodiversity.

3.5 Land Use Constraints

The *Situation Analysis* (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2015) reviewed key land and water issues within the Upper Hunter Shire. This summarised information relating to topography and geology, land capability and degradation, water resources, flooding, bushfire and contaminated land.

The ability of a landscape to sustain land use is a function of its physical characteristics and biological features, and is related to steepness, rockiness, soil depth and nutrients, drainage and vegetation. A recent assessment of rural land capability in the Upper Hunter Shire shows that, excluding conservation reserves and Glenbawn Dam catchment foreshores, approximately 19% of the area is capable of supporting regular cultivation; 39% is capable of supporting grazing with occasional cultivation; and 32% comprises land with low agricultural value and high erosion potential best retained with natural vegetation.

Soils vary widely throughout the Upper Hunter Shire, and are closely related to the geology. Deep fertile soils occur on the flood plains of the Hunter River and adjacent streams, and there are extensive areas of high to moderate fertility. Soils in the Upper Hunter Shire are susceptible to a range of issues such as erosion, low fertility, sodicity and salinity.

Parts of the Upper Hunter Shire are subject to flooding (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2015) including partial impact on the towns of Aberdeen, Murrurundi and Scone. Various rural parts of the LGA are also subject to flooding, generally coinciding with alluvial lands. Major flood events in the Upper Hunter Shire were the 1955 and 1971 floods. There have been a number of flood studies and flood mitigation works undertaken in the Upper Hunter LGA. Indicative flood prone land is shown on mapping in the Upper Hunter Development Control Plan 2015 for Scone, Aberdeen, Murrurundi and Blandford. This flood prone land provides a significant constraint to the urban development particularly for Scone and Murrurundi.

A significant proportion of the Upper Hunter Shire is identified as bush fire prone land based on mapping undertaken by the NSW Rural Fire Service. The location of bushfire prone land is important as, without vegetation modification, it often imposes a significant constraint on the location of future settlement. In this respect, while existing residential areas are relatively isolated from bushfire prone land, rural areas, villages and rural residential areas have significant exposure. Should future residential land be located in proximity to these residential areas, bushfire is unlikely to be a significant constraint to future development. Bushfire is, however, an issue in the location of rural and rural residential dwellings throughout much of the area. Bushfire vegetation categories within the LGA are mapped.

Current bush fire maps need to be kept up to date as development progresses, and should be reviewed in conjunction with future vegetation mapping.

3.6 Climate Change

The current climate of the Upper Hunter is sub-tropical to temperate. Rainfall varies from the higher elevations of the Barrington Tops (more than 1100mm per year) down to 600mm per year in the lower areas. Rainfall tends to be higher in summer and autumn. There are distinct seasonal variations in temperature. In summer the average temperatures range from 22-24°C, with cooler temperatures of 16-22°C. In winter the temperatures range from a 0-2°C on the Barrington

Tops to 4.9°C to 18°C at Scone.

There are temperature extremes. Much of the Hunter Valley experiences 10-20 days each year where the maximum temperature is greater than 35°C (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, 2014). In the Barrington Tops there are fewer hot days per year. The number of cold night per year where the minimum temperature is below 2 °C mostly occurs on the Barrington Tops and the Liverpool Range.

Climate change is expected to result in new climate trends in the Upper Hunter in relation to temperature, hot days, cold nights, rainfall and fire weather. This has implications for strategic land use planning. The NSW Office of Environment and Heritage (2014) have established climate change projections based on scenarios for the near future (2030) and the far future (2070), compared to a baseline climate (1990-2009). This period incorporates the planning horizon in this LSPS and therefore the timeframes and climate trends have been adopted.

The Upper Hunter is expected to experience an increase in all temperature variables (average, maximum and minimum). These temperature projections are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1 SUMMARY OF TEMPERATURE FOR NEAR AND FAR FUTURE

Variable	Near Future (2030)	Far Future (2070)
Max. Temperature	Increase by 0.4-1.0°C	Increase by 1.6-2.6°C
Min. Temperature	Increase by 0.5-0.9°C	Increase by 1.5-2.5°C

Summer and spring are likely to experience the greatest changes in temperatures with maximum temperatures increasing by 2.3°C by 2070. The Upper Hunter is expected to experience more hot days in the near future and the far future. The greatest increase in hot days is projected for the Upper Hunter with an additional 5–10 days in the near future and over 20 additional hot days by 2070 (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, 2014). Increased temperatures are known to adversely impact on human health by causing heat stress and increasing the number of heatwave events. Prolonged hot days increase the incidence of illness and death, particularly among vulnerable population groups such as the elderly, children, those with pre-existing medical conditions or those with a disability. Hence planning strategies need to be developed to create cooler buildings and cooler spaces, including refuges during heatwaves.

The Upper Hunter is also particularly susceptible to a decrease in the number of cold nights in the near future and far future. This translates to a decrease of 30-40 cold nights per year by 2070 along the Liverpool Range and Barrington Tops. Cold nights are important for the maintenance of natural ecosystems and agricultural/horticultural industries.

Climate change is likely to result in changes in rainfall patterns in the Upper Hunter. Overall rainfall is projected to decrease in spring and winter and to increase in autumn. Changes in rainfall patterns have the potential for widespread impacts. The implications of these changes are impacts on native species' reproduction cycles as well as impacting on agricultural productivity (e.g. crops that are reliant on winter rains), and changes in extremes such as floods and droughts. Climate change is also predicted to result in an increase in severe fire weather in spring and summer (NSW Office of Environment and Heritage, 2014).

This LSPS needs to ensure that appropriate planning actions are in place to both adapt to and contribute to addressing the causes of climate change.

3.7 Heritage

The Upper Hunter Shire landscape is rich in diverse historical land use patterns and colonial history. Heritage items and built environment as well as visually important landscape areas create a narrative of early settlement and industry in the local area. Current thematic histories of the local area date back to 1797 at the discovery and naming of the Hunter River (CoAssociates Pty Ltd, 2007). The township, built out of consequence to host the flow of movement toward the northern coastal regions, hosted early settlers from as early as 1820 establishing significant horse breeding, agriculture and grape growing industry ventures prior to 1836. With Scone formally gazetted in 1837, and Merriwa in 1840, this region has continued to grow as a viable and profitable settlement land.

Archaeological evidence can be found throughout the Upper Hunter LGA, as evidence of long term Aboriginal occupation of the landscape. The shire overlaps with six Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs) with council acknowledging another 40 parties with registered interest in regard to consultation for projects (RPS, 2019). The area has a wide range of sites ranging from

camp sites, rock engravings, axe grinding grooves, scarred and carved trees, bora grounds and burial sites. There are historic areas and landscape features in addition to archaeological sites. The area falls mainly within the lands of the Wanaruah (or Wonnarua) people, and Aboriginal groups in the LGA maintain ongoing connections to the land (Planning Workshop Australia, 2006).

The Upper Hunter Shire Council has undertaken the Upper Hunter Shire Aboriginal Heritage Study in 2019, which provides an annotated thematic history of the Aboriginal people in the region (RPS, 2019). This study identifies areas and site specific places of heritage and cultural significance, creating a stronger understanding of the land use pre-colonisation and providing a framework for increased advocacy and recognition of ceremonies and traditions. Within the LGA 552 Aboriginal sites have been identified, characterised primarily by remnants of artefacts, scarred trees, grinding grooves and potential archaeological deposits. There are currently no items with Aboriginal cultural heritage significance included on the State Heritage Register (SHR) for the Upper Hunter Shire. These recorded sites are concentrated to two general areas of the central lowlands around the Hunter River and Goulburn River valley. This study was prepared in consultation with Wanaruah Local Aboriginal Land Council, community, other Aboriginal groups and local historical societies and museums.

3.8 Housing

The total population of the Upper Hunter Shire is currently forecast to increase by around 8% in the Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy timeframe (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2017). There will be variability in trends over time (ranging from 0.9% to 0.5% per annum), and between different locations. Housing and settlement requirements are also expected to change over this timeframe. The approach taken in the Strategy, once finalised, will affect the distribution of urban development, and the long term settlement structure of towns and villages.

Population growth and change is likely to be influenced by national and Sydney metropolitan trends, as well as growth in local and regional employment and work commuting patterns. As family sizes decline and the population ages, the rate of growth is expected to decline and it is likely that higher demand for smaller sized dwellings will occur, including single storey dwellings for aged persons. Housing affordability and providing adequate seniors accommodation are expected to continue to be significant issues over the life of the Strategy.

Demand for new dwellings is projected to be about 50-60 per year in the LGA, of which 35 to 45 would be in towns, with the remainder principally in villages. The majority of development is expected to occur in Scone. Residential lands released in towns and villages will accommodate this projected dwelling demand, although take-up of residential lots may depend on the extent of rural residential demand, and the proportion of dwellings in multiunit housing.

The main population centres of Scone and Aberdeen offer the opportunity to meet population growth and reduce the need for housing developments in rural and natural areas. At this same time this will allow for greater diversity of housing types, along with improving affordability and sustainability by aligning housing type, design and location with community needs.

UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL

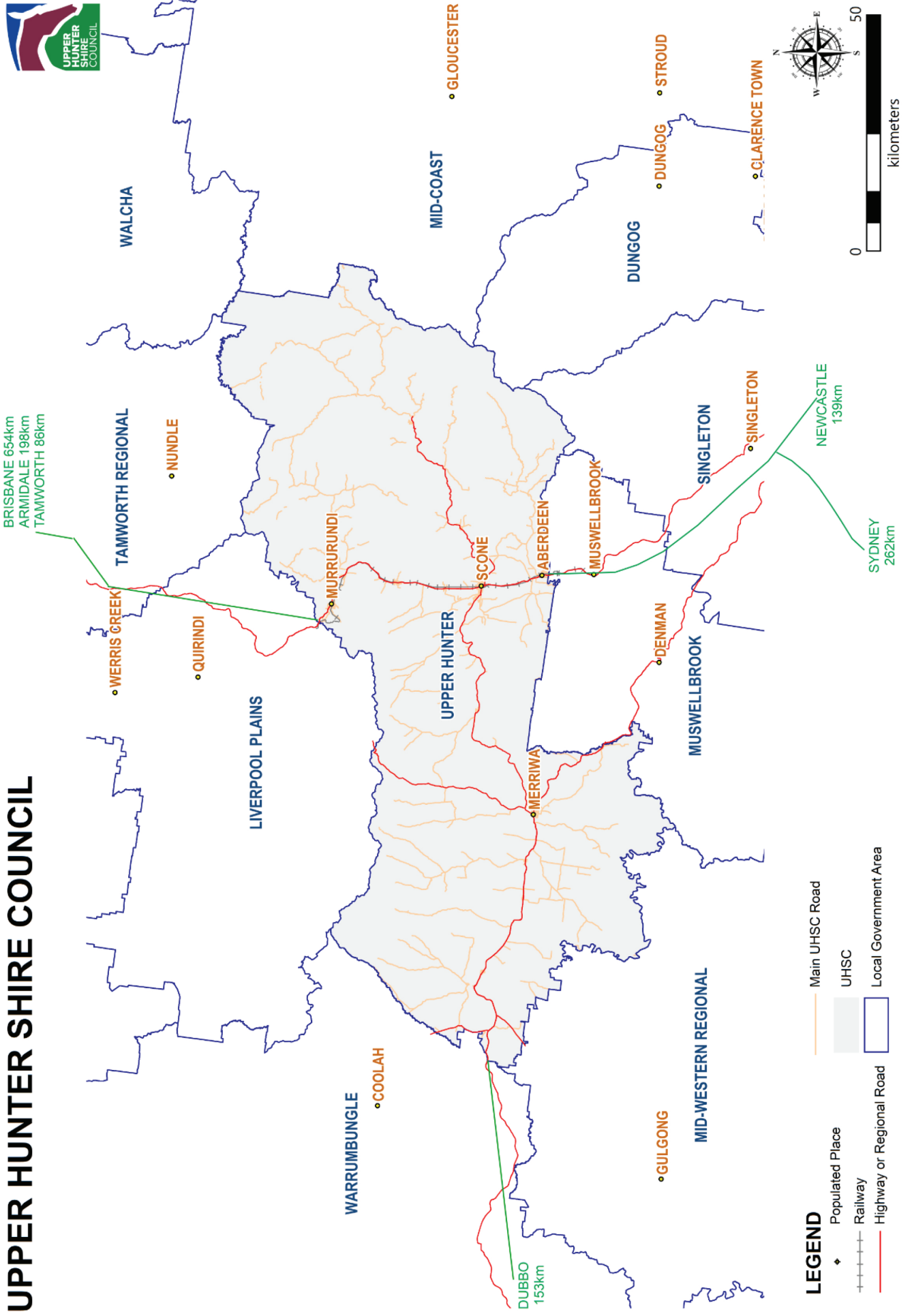


Figure 2 The Upper Hunter Shire

4. LOCAL STRATEGIC PLANNING VISION

By 2040 the Upper Hunter Shire is distinguished by a quality rural lifestyle in a vibrant, caring and sustainable community. The population growth has been moderate and consolidated into town and villages that provide a high quality rural living environment. People have strong connections to community and an affinity to the landscape. The character of urban and rural locations has been enhanced, and they continue to be attractive places to live, work and play for people of all ages. Scone offers a diverse range of housing, retail facilities, services, recreational facilities, along with employment opportunities. The town's parks, heritage architecture, culture and local history have been enhanced to provide a vibrant family-friendly town with offers of many activity options.

Aberdeen will be a quiet, family-friendly town offering great schools, bicycle connectivity to neighboring towns like Scone and Muswellbrook and a large variety of recreational opportunities, including the annual celebration of the Highland Games. The Hunter River, the showcase of the town will be part of a corridor of riparian vegetation with protected ecological values. Both Merriwa and Murrurundi are strategically located and accessible towns that grow to support a friendly rural community with a range of low to medium density living options. The identity and rural character of these towns is defined by their heritage, parks and local history. Merriwa's Festival of the Fleeces is an important annual event building on its fertile soil resource. Murrurundi being at the top of the Pages River is a vibrant rural town and known as an important arts and food destination integrated with annual events, rural retreats and markets. The villages of the Shire offer a quiet semi-rural living option that support annual events, recreational activities along with basic camping facilities.

Agriculture is an important part of the economy, providing both direct and indirect employment, as well as supporting the towns, villages and broad rural settlement of the Shire. Strong measures are in place to ensure that all agricultural land is protected from inappropriate rural land subdivision, the effects of climate change and depletion of the supporting natural resource base. The need to respond to climate change is better recognised and the Shire is a leader in renewable energy technology. The ongoing productivity and profitability of agricultural industries is important to the LGA's local economy and its communities. The implications of climate change have been profound in some areas agricultural viability, resulting in changes to the growing season (including number of frosts) and availability of water (including lower rainfall and higher evaporation). In some cases, longer growing seasons and higher temperatures have supported the introduction of new crops, while lower effective water availability has increased the frequency of drought conditions. A great effort has been made to prevent further native flora and fauna extinctions through the protection and enhancement of natural ecosystems through the creation and enhancement of biodiversity corridors and important patches of remnant native vegetation.

Overall the Upper Hunter Shire will be a rural area the supports rural industries, other businesses, a range of housing and lifestyle options and recreational facilities. It will continue to face a number of challenges such as climate change adaptation and ensuring the natural resource base is not depleted through inappropriate planning and development.

UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL STRUCTURE PLAN

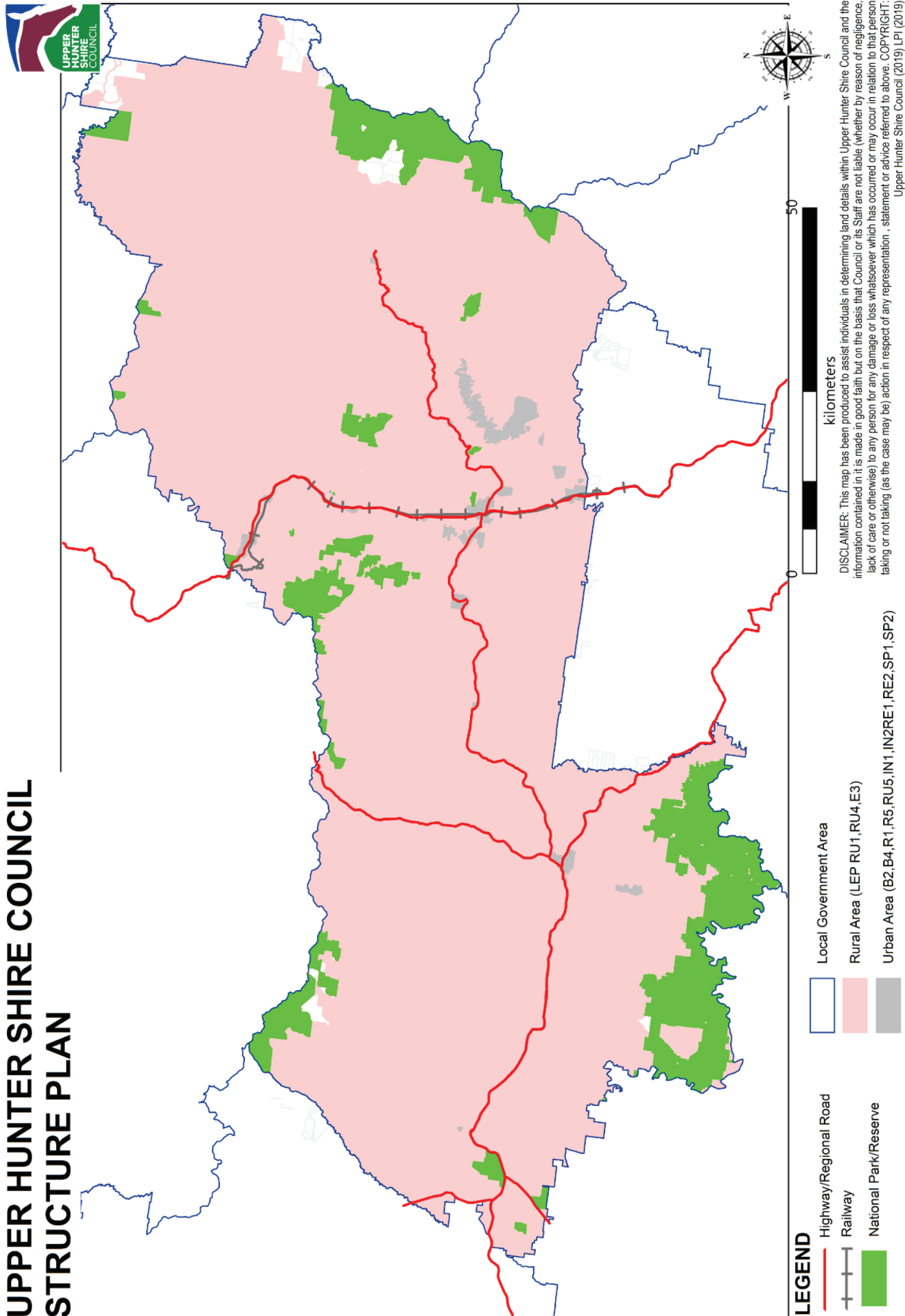


Figure 3 Upper Hunter LGA Structure Plan Map

5. SETTLEMENTS OF THE UPPER HUNTER

5.1 Scone

Scone is known as the Horse Capital of Australia, and is the gateway to the second-largest concentration of stud farm region in the world. The town provides an important focus for market and service-based activities associated with surrounding agricultural industries, particularly horse breeding and beef cattle production. These industries are important to Scone's identity, local economy and labour market, represented by major facilities including the veterinary practices, a large livestock selling centre and a meatworks.

The town is an increasingly popular destination for visitors, as the key node for accessing a range of the Hunter's unique natural landscapes, including the Barrington Tops, Burning Mountain, the Wingen Maid and a variety of rural landscapes. The Horse Capital theme is celebrated each year through the Scone Horse Festival.

Services and employment-generating activities are focused in:

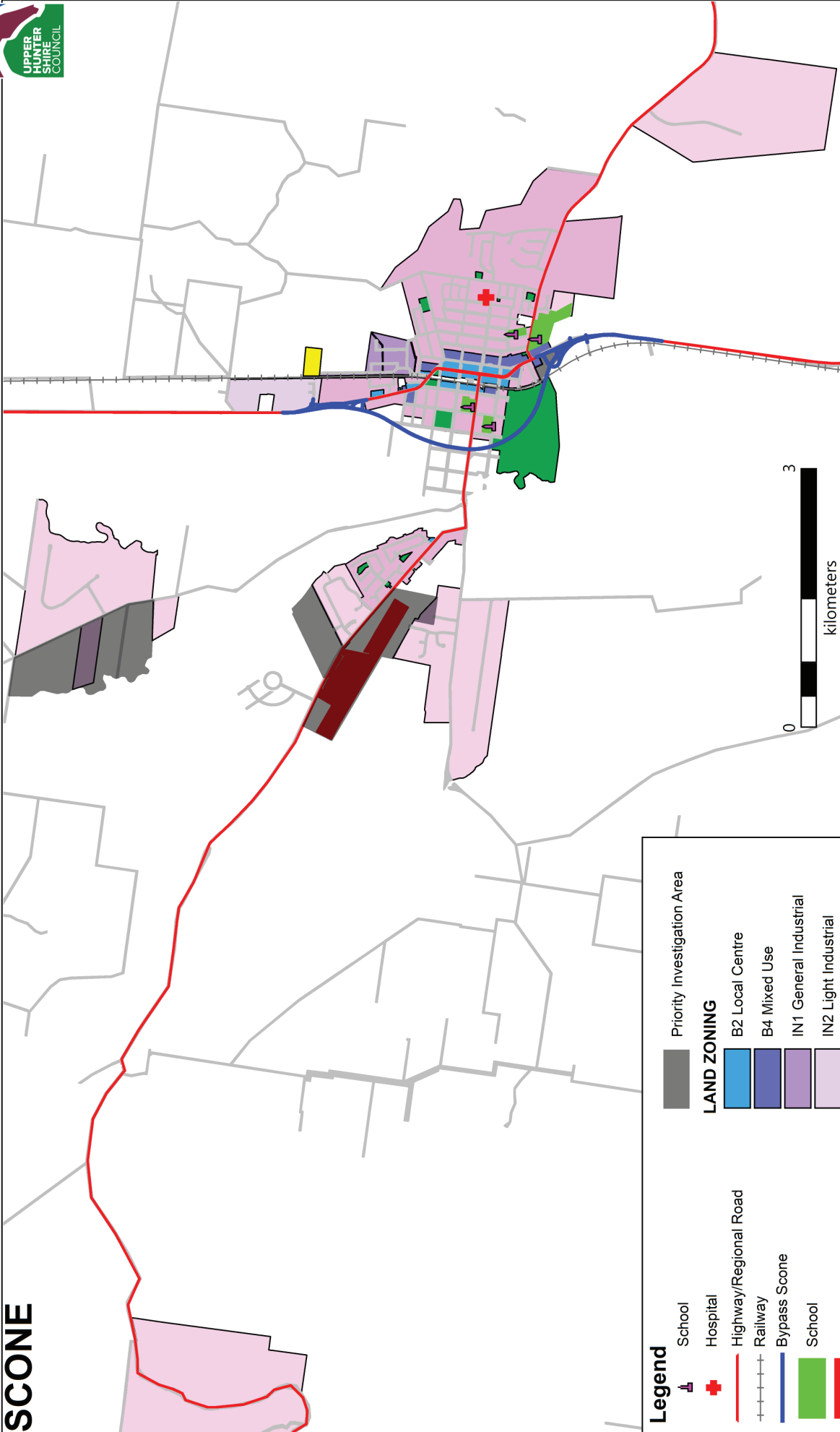
- Scone's town centre, comprising a range of retail and service businesses centred on Kelly Street. Businesses and services have historically benefitted from passing trade associated with the Highway, and the town centre is serviced by a train station. The change in traffic flows arising from completion of the Scone Bypass may have an influence on the future role and function of the town centre. The Scone Town Centre Master Plan has been developed to revitalise the public realm and encourage economic activity and investment to support and enhance the viability of the precinct.
- Scone's industrial area, to the north of town, centred on Muffett Street. This area offers further capacity to accommodate industrial-related uses on lands fronting the New England Highway and accessible to the heavy rail line. Broader (regional) economic drivers will continue to influence take-up of industrial lands. The location of new industrial uses within this area will need to consider impacts arising from growth in the adjoining residential area to the south.
- The specialised area centred on Satur Road, to the west of town, already accommodates the Scone Airport, the Equine Centre and tertiary educational institutions. The co-location of these facilities makes the area an important destination for staff, students and tourists. These services and the specific operational requirements of each facility may offer further opportunities for commercial developments during the Strategy timeframe.

Scone's well-established residential neighbourhoods are predominantly characterised by single dwellings on large residential allotments. An increasing number of dual occupancies and multi-dwelling residential buildings have been delivered closer to Scone's Town Centre, with further opportunities for small-scale renewal of an aging housing stock. Facilitating further residential infill within and around the Town Centre will be an ongoing challenge. To the west of town, the suburb of Satur offers a mix of traditional residential and rural fringe housing options, as well as accommodating the Airport and the Equine Centre. Flood prone lands, predominantly associated with the Kingdon Ponds watercourse, will continue to provide a rural-natural break between Scone's traditional core and Satur.

More broadly, Scone is home to the LGA's largest regional health and educational facilities, including a public hospital, TAFE campus and connected learning centre. The town also provides a range of cultural, sporting and recreational facilities, including a library, Bill Rose Sporting Complex, White Park, Murray Bain Oval, Scone Golf Course, Elizabeth Park and Scone Park. The town is also serviced by a train station, situated in the Town Centre, offering passenger services to Sydney, Newcastle, Tamworth, Armidale and Moree and an airport facility.

The long-term strategy to accommodate new development around Scone is provided in the UHLUS (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2017). There are also plans to revitalise the Scone town centre and expand tourism potential. The overall development strategy for Scone acknowledges the constraints to urban expansion imposed by natural systems (e.g. floodplain, bushfire hazard, salinity and poor drainage), the need to protect agricultural land, the existing and planned industrial area to the north-east and changes imposed by the Scone Bypass. It aims to limit the urban residential expansion and encourage greater residential densities and diversity in and around the town centre.

UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL SCONE



Legend

- School
- Hospital
- Highway/Regional Road
- Railway
- Bypass Scone
- School
- Airport
- Road
- Regional Livestock Selling Centre
- Priority Investigation Area

LAND ZONING

- B2 Local Centre
- B4 Mixed Use
- IN1 General Industrial
- IN2 Light Industrial
- R1 General Residential
- R5 Large Lot Residential
- RE1 Public Recreation

May 2020

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Figure 4 Scone Town Map

5.2 Aberdeen

Aberdeen is the second-largest settlement in the LGA situated on the New England Highway, approximately 14km south of Scone and 12km north of Muswellbrook. The population growth has been heavily influenced by mining employment opportunities available in Muswellbrook and Singleton. Aberdeen's well-established residential neighbourhoods are characterised by single dwellings on larger lots, set within a grid pattern of local streets. The future housing demands anticipated in Aberdeen during the Strategy time frame will continue to be accommodated in the large area released for this purpose to the south east of town.

Aberdeen has a small town centre, with shops and businesses centred on McQueen Street, which forms part of the New England Highway. This area is considered to have sufficient capacity to accommodate demands for commercial development during the Strategy timeframe. The Strategy also supports a greater diversity of housing in and around the Town Centre, including medium density housing, low income housing and seniors' accommodation.

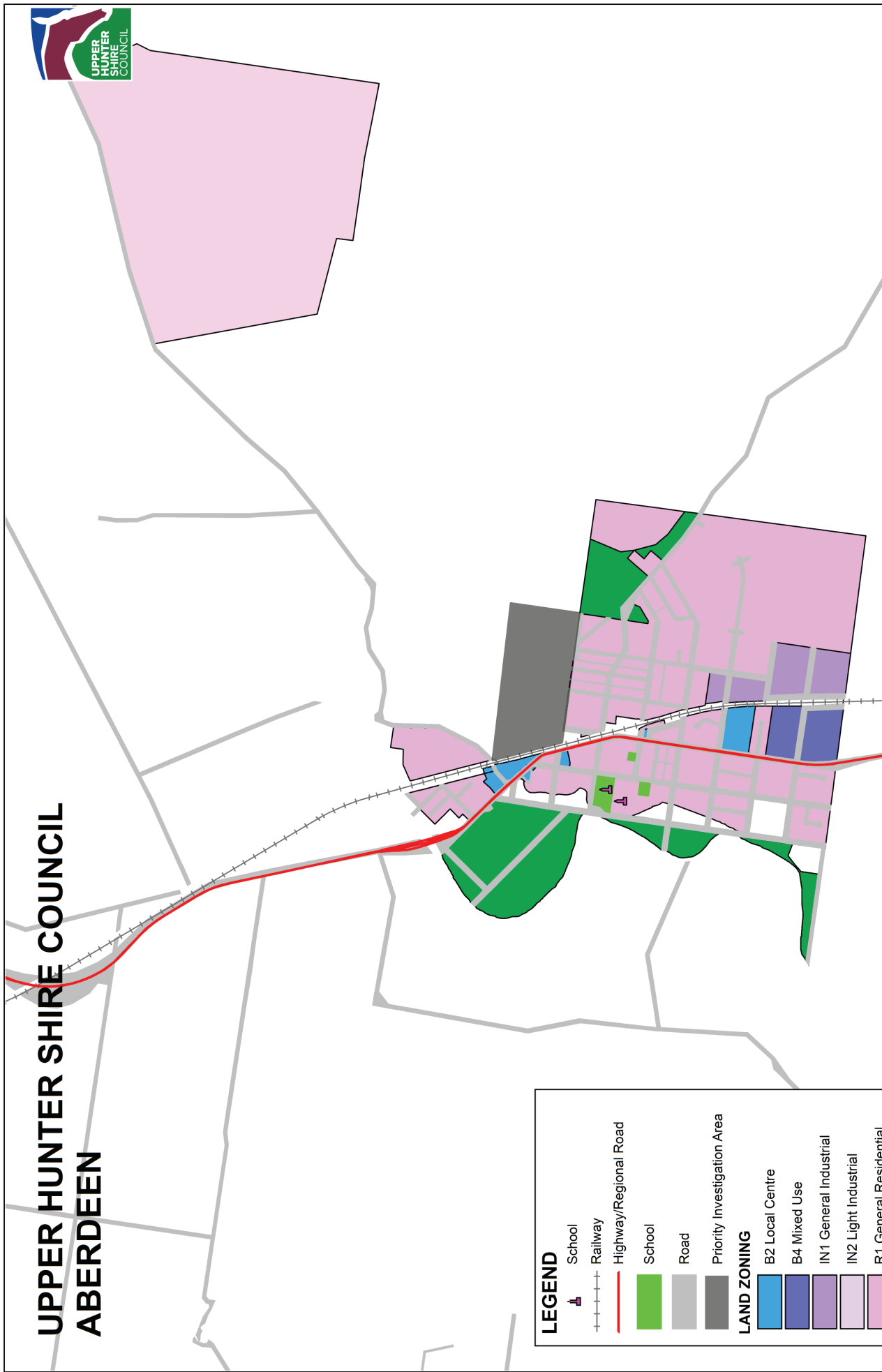
Lands have also been allocated to accommodate a range of employment-generating uses to the south of the town, including:

- A mixed-use area at the southern entrance to the town, with dual frontage to the New England Highway and rail line; and
- An industrial area to the east of the rail line, adjoining a growing residential area.

The UHLUS focuses on planning investigations to rationalise Aberdeen's existing supply of residential and employment lands, recognising that the current supply of lands far exceeds demands anticipated during the Strategy timeframe. These investigations should establish a preferred urban structure and staging programme to coordinate the development of new lands and infrastructure.



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL ABERDEEN



LEGEND

- School
- Railway
- Highway/Regional Road
- School
- Road
- Priority Investigation Area

LAND ZONING

- B2 Local Centre
- B4 Mixed Use
- IN1 General Industrial
- IN2 Light Industrial
- R1 General Residential
- R5 Large Lot Residential
- RE1 Public Recreation



May 2020



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Figure 5 Aberdeen town plan

5.3 Merriwa

Merriwa is a rural town situated on the Golden Highway 185km west of Newcastle and 215km east of Dubbo in an agriculturally rich area of the Upper Hunter Shire. It services a broader district of rural communities and is a popular rest stop for travelers on the Golden Highway.

The town maintains strong ties with agricultural production and agricultural industries which remain a major employer for the town and surrounding rural communities. The area was traditionally known for quality wool and fat lambs, with broadacre grain production and beef cattle more recently becoming dominant commodities.

Merriwa has a strong small business sector providing a wide variety of goods and services to locals and visitors. Commercial activity is centered on Bettington Street, which forms part of the Golden Highway, catering to local demands and passing trade. More broadly, the town also provides a range of community facilities including a local hospital, aged care facilities, primary and secondary schools as well as various sporting facilities that cater for the broader district.

There is an existing industrial area, to the west of town, which represents one of the only industrial areas currently available along the Golden Highway. While demand for industrial development is anticipated to remain low, the Council maintains support for long-term industrial growth in this location.

Merriwa's residential areas are predominantly characterised by single storey dwellings on large allotments and based on a traditional grid pattern with wide streets. Residential growth rates are anticipated to remain, low with development predominantly accommodated in a new release area in the southeastern part of town.

A large part of the town is identified as a heritage conservation area, which contains a number of buildings and places of heritage significance. While infill development has the potential to contribute to residential growth and renewal, it will be influenced by heritage protection and management requirements.

State-driven plans to develop and diversify NSW's energy resources sector may lead to demands to further develop renewable, including wind resources on rural lands surrounding Merriwa. This may influence growth and change within the town, both up to and beyond the year 2040.

Overall the long-term strategy is to accommodate growth and change in and around Merriwa by recognising the full capacity of existing residential and industrial zoned land, encourage the co-location of light industrial uses by expanding the existing industrial area and expanding the rural fringe residential area to the east (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2017).

UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL MERRIWA

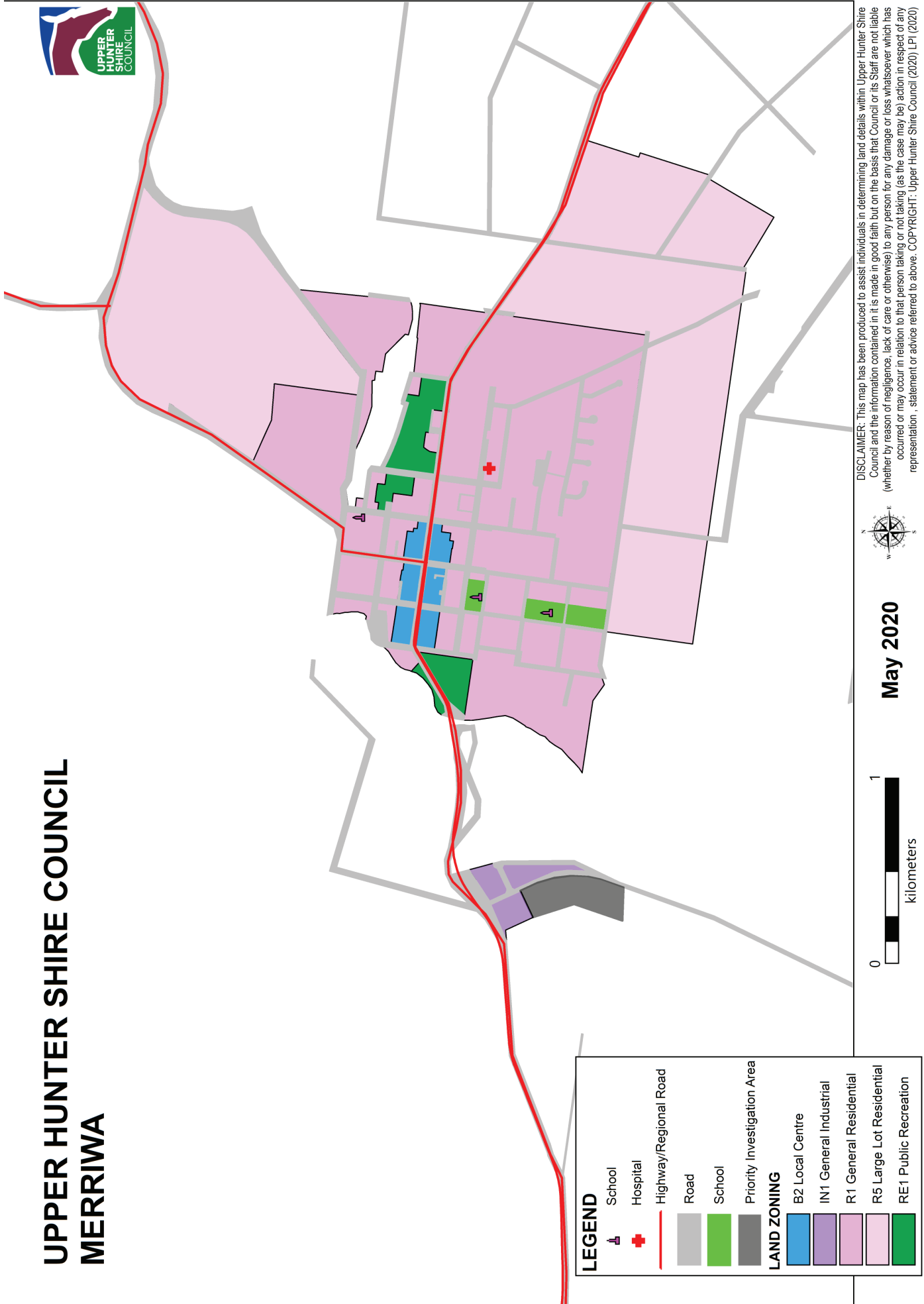


Figure 6 Merriwa town plan

5.4 Murrurundi

Murrurundi is situated on the New England Highway approximately 200km north of Newcastle and 90km south of Tamworth. The town is at the base of the Liverpool Ranges and is bisected by the Pages River, which runs through the centre of town. Murrurundi while more remote from the larger centres of Scone (40km south) and Tamworth, services a broader district of rural communities. It is also a popular rest stop for travelers along the New England Highway.

Agricultural industries, particularly beef cattle production and horse breeding, remain the predominant employment sector for the town and surrounding rural communities. The future establishment of an industrial area may support additional employment opportunities.

The town has an emerging art industry and contains numerous historic buildings and sites of heritage significance. Commercial activity is centred on Mayne Street, which forms part of the New England Highway. Murrurundi's popularity with highway through-traffic is demonstrated through the take-up of lands within the highway corridor for arts and crafts businesses, food and drink premises and cottage industries. Local retail, hospitality and service type businesses are also increasingly important employers.

The town's layout is based on a traditional grid pattern of wide local streets. The town centre and adjacent residential areas have been designated as a heritage conservation area. Some residential areas are predominantly characterised by older style single storey dwellings and cottages, while others are characterised by single dwelling houses on large allotments. Residential growth will continue to occur primarily in a new release area in the northeastern part of town. Some infill development may also provide residential growth and renewal in the older established parts of town.

More broadly, Murrurundi provides a range of community facilities including a local hospital, medical centre, aged care facilities, library, pre-school and primary school. Local sporting facilities include Wilson Memorial Oval, tennis courts, public swimming pool and golf club. The town is also serviced by a train station offering passenger services to Sydney, Newcastle, Tamworth, Armidale and Moree.

The flexibility of historic planning controls has previously allowed home-based businesses, including light industrial uses, to occur within residential areas. Council recognises the changing nature of industry, and the need to provide separation between some industrial activities and residential uses. Establishing a new industrial area for the town will assist in accommodating re-located and new industrial uses, and may provide greater opportunities for Town infill.

The long-term strategy to accommodate growth and change in and around Murrurundi is to: create additional capacity for residential growth and expansion, provide opportunities to co-locate new health-related facilities and services close to the existing hospital to the south west of town and identify a preferred location to support the future establishment of an industrial area (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2017).



UPPER HUNTER SHIRE COUNCIL MURRURUNDI



LEGEND

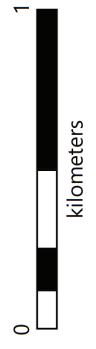
- School
- Highway/Regional Road
- Railway
- School

LAND ZONING

- B2 Local Centre
- IN1 General Industrial
- R1 General Residential
- R5 Large Lot Residential
- RE1 Public Recreation



May 2020



DISCLAIMER: This map has been produced to assist individuals in determining land details within Upper Hunter Shire Council and the information contained in it is made in good faith but on the basis that Council or its Staff are not liable (whether by reason of negligence, lack of care or otherwise) to any person for any damage or loss whatsoever which has occurred or may occur in relation to that person taking or not taking (as the case may be) action in respect of any representation, statement or advice referred to above. COPYRIGHT: Upper Hunter Shire Council (2020) LP1 (2020)

Figure 7 Murrurundi town plan

6. OUR THEMES AND PLANNING PRIORITIES

Four related themes identified as the community's vision for the Upper Hunter Shire include; quality living, a rural economy, a vibrant community, caring community and a sustainable environment.

These themes will be monitored against identified measures over time and implemented through the planning priorities. The planning priorities will be delivered through strategies to guide land use decisions and actions. In addition, the Upper Hunter Shire comprises four urban areas of Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa and Murrurundi, each with distinctive characteristics and particular issues that necessitate specific planning actions.

These actions will be undertaken by Council or by Council in collaboration with government and/or other key stakeholders.

TABLE 2 SUMMARY OF LOCAL PLANNING PRIORITIES

Sustainable environment	Caring community	Rural economy	Quality and healthy living	Vibrant towns
Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority
Avoid long-term degradation of natural environmental systems.	Protecting people and property from hazards.	Promote sustainable primary industry.	Provide for the housing needs of the community.	Town Centre Revitalisation
Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority
The development of land and infrastructure is orderly and economical.	Towns and villages offer the services and housing that communities need.	Protect agricultural land.	Provide connection to areas of natural landscapes and cultural heritage.	Facilitate tourism
Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority	Planning Priority
Protection and rehabilitation of biodiversity and ecosystems	Planning anticipates and responds to the rapidly ageing nature of the Population.	Agriculture is the largest and most visible land use.	Country towns are rich in heritage and reflect the character of the local community.	Encourage economic diversification
Planning Priority		Planning Priority	Planning Priority	
Planning for climate change.		Provide a sufficient supply of land to accommodate employment-generating activities.	Providing healthy places to live and work	
Planning Priority				Planning Priority
Facilitate the use of renewable energy				Promote infill development in towns.

7. ACTION PLAN

The following Action Plan is divided into the five planning themes set out in Table 2, Sustainable environment, Caring Community, Rural economy, Quality and healthy living and Vibrant towns. Each of the planning priority sub-sections is then divided into:

- **Rationale** - providing a contextual basis for why particular actions need to be implemented.
- **Policy Position** - setting out Council's position in relation to the issue.
- **Actions** - listing the measures Council will implement to satisfy the planning priority.
- **Responsibility** – these have been broadly assigned to the relevant directorates within the Council's existing structure and Council itself. These are denoted as follows: Director Environmental & Community Services – Director of Environment and Community Services; Director Infrastructure Services – Director of Infrastructure Services; Director Corporate Services – Director of Corporate Services and Council.

7.1 Sustainable Environment

The future wellbeing of people in our community depends on the Upper Hunter Shire being environmentally, socially and economically sustainable. In the actions and decisions we make today, we need to consider the future generations that will live, work and play in the Upper Hunter and the kind of region we want to leave them.

7.0.1 Planning Priority: The use, development and management of land avoids the long-term degradation of natural environmental

Rationale:

Land is not a blank canvas that allows any development or use to occur but rather there are many processes going on that determine its capability and suitability for development. Land use planning investigations therefore need to give consideration to the appropriateness of lands for particular development in relation to constraints such as slope, groundwater vulnerability, soil quality and salinity.

Policy Position:

- Update planning controls with relevant information and mapping of hazards and constraints.
- Protect important water supply catchments.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
1.1	Develop land use constraints layer and associated local planning provision (acid sulphate soils, salinity, groundwater vulnerability, slope stability) for LEP.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.2	Undertake urban salinity investigation for Scone township and surrounds and develop salinity management strategy.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.3	Amend the Drinking Water Catchment map in the Upper Hunter LEP to include the actual catchment area for Glenbawn Dam (not just the foreshore area).	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.2 Planning Priority: The development of land and infrastructure is orderly and economical.

Rationale:

Land development has the potential to place demands on infrastructure and public resources in a number of ways. The cost of upgrading infrastructure and maintaining service networks to support dispersed development can be expensive, and may become uneconomical for some service providers. There are a range of funding mechanisms, including local contributions, to maintain and, where possible, improve service provision to support the Upper Hunter Shire's rural communities. Within the LGA, rural services are provided by Upper Hunter Shire Council as well as other State government agencies and, increasingly, private companies. The implications for service infrastructure and capacity of development in rural areas, including to support new dwellings, will continue to be a key consideration for planning during the Strategy timeframe.

Policy Position:

- Ensure development within rural areas should not adversely affect rural infrastructure or existing service levels, particularly for road and electricity networks.
- Ensure developers fully fund the capital costs attributable to their development to upgrade all necessary services required by Council policy.
- Council will seek opportunities to levy funds for infrastructure through a range of funding mechanisms, including planning agreements (made under s7.4 of the EP&A Act) and contributions plans

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
1.4	Develop a policy that target specific areas for the use of Voluntary Planning Agreements to provide for infrastructure and services.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.5	Review Section 94/94A Contributions Plans in relation to the provision of appropriate infrastructure.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.6	Prepare policy guidelines or planning provisions (e.g. DCP) relating to service standards and requirements.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.7	Council will review its land use zones to ensure development aligns with infrastructure capacity, unless funding mechanisms are in place to provide appropriate upgrades.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.8	Work with TfNSW to consider the need and location of additional infrastructure for a range of road users including the provision of heavy vehicle rest areas along the major freight corridors.	Medium	Director Infrastructure Services
1.9	Work with TfNSW to consider the provision of cycleways	Medium	Director Infrastructure Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.3 Planning Priority: Protection and rehabilitation of biodiversity and ecosystems

Rationale:

Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems underpin the functioning of all human constructed systems. The Upper Hunter Shire contains a diverse range of natural ecosystems comprising forest, woodland and native grassland communities as identified in the Situation Analysis (City Plan Services, 2015) that was used to support the Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy. While there remain large areas of remnant native vegetation, there are also many fragmented and isolated patches. The Upper Hunter contains a number of threatened flora and fauna species and endangered ecological communities. Conserving and restoring biodiversity and natural ecosystems is a key principle underpinning the concept of ecologically sustainable development.

Policy Position:

- Recognise the value of biodiversity and healthy ecosystems in land use planning and development.
- Promote restoration of degraded vegetation within identified biodiversity corridors on private land.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
1.10	Work with DPIE and adjoining Councils to investigate potential regional, sub-regional and local wildlife and habitat corridors and incorporating these within an LEP overlay map, with appropriate provisions and/or environment zonings with suitable permissible and prohibited uses. Consideration may be given to zoning land E2 Environmental Conservation.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.11	Prepare a DCP section to guide the implementation of appropriate biodiversity legislation during determination of development applications (Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016, Fisheries Management Act 1994 and the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999).	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.12	Respond to new Biodiversity Stewardship sites through appropriate land use zoning.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.4 Planning Priority: Planning anticipates and responds to the implications of climate change

Rationale:

Climate change has potentially significant implications for land use in rural areas as well as urban areas. There is a long term likelihood of greater frequency of extreme events (storms, bushfires and flooding), increasing temperatures, evaporation, and potential changes in seasonal patterns.

The implications of climate change on agricultural viability is particularly relevant in the LGA.

These are expected to result in changes to the growing season (including number of frosts) and impact the availability of water (including total rainfall and higher evaporation). A longer growing season and higher temperatures may benefit the introduction of new crops, while lower effective water availability may increase the frequency of drought conditions.

The global response to climate change is also driving greater advancements in renewable energy technology. This is leading to development of rural areas to accommodate renewable energy generation and distribution infrastructure.

Policy Position:

- The implications of climate change on local rural land uses, industries and communities will be taken into account, drawing on best available research and information.
- Review its plans and policies to respond to new and emerging evidence on climate change, storm events, flooding and bushfire.
- Developments associated with new enterprise opportunities emerging as a result of changing climatic conditions will be encouraged.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
1.13	Review and implement the Drought Management and Emergency Response Plan. Consider demand management in review to support improved water management practices, assist local producers to adapt to greater rainfall variability and to manage extreme weather incidents such as floods and bushfires.	Medium	Director Infrastructure Services
1.14	Review flood studies with consideration to the potential impacts of climate change.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.15	Develop a program of community activities/events focussing on the impact and adaptation to climate change in the local area, rural areas in particular.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.16	Distribute Beat the Heat information prepared by Hunter Councils across the LGA to increase awareness of heatwave preparedness.	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services
1.17	Adopt a DCP section to support sustainability in certain types of developments.	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.5 Planning Priority: Facilitate the use of renewable energy

Rationale:

Council recognises the adverse impacts of non-renewable energy sources and their contribution of CO2 emissions which is resulting in climate change. As per the Position Statement on Coal Mining and Coal Seam Gas (Upper Hunter Shire Council, 2015). The Council would like to encourage the use of renewable energy systems by supporting both large scale and small scale renewable energy projects.

Policy Position:

- Facilitate the increasing use of solar energy systems on dwellings by providing information and access to relevant state/federal government schemes.

- Encourage wind energy farms and other renewable energy projects in the Upper Hunter.
- Support renewable energy facilities in appropriate locations.

Action:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
1.18	Facilitate Upper Hunter and Liverpool Wind Farms and any other potential new renewable energy ventures by developing a public position supporting renewable energy development.	Long	Council
1.19	Support the investigation of renewable energy opportunities throughout the region and infrastructure requirements.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.2 Caring Community

7.0.6 Planning Priority: Protecting people and property from hazards

Rationale:

Natural hazards are accepted as constraints to land use in order to limit damage to life and property. Within the rural areas of the Upper Hunter LGA, these are predominantly flooding and bushfires. Policy for natural hazards is primarily determined by NSW Government guidelines. A summary of available information and references is included in the Situation Analysis.

Various parts of the Upper Hunter LGA are subject to flooding, but little information exists other than for some urban areas, including Scone, Aberdeen, Murrurundi and the village of Blandford. With the exception of Aberdeen, where a recent flood study has been undertaken, available flood risk information is not current. Updated flood plain risk management studies and associated flood plain risk management plans are needed for all towns, and for Blandford.

Existing residential areas are relatively isolated from bushfire prone land, although significant areas of bushfire prone land in the LGA have potential to impact upon the location of rural residential areas and other rural development.

Policy Position:

- Adopt a consistent flood standard for the Upper Hunter LGA, in accordance with floodplain management studies.
- Appropriately consider bushfire, flooding and salinity as natural hazards in LEP provisions.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
2.1	Upgrade and maintain spatial information systems on natural hazards for planning overlay maps to be included in proposed LEP provisions.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.2	Review and Update floodplain risk management studies for Aberdeen, Scone and Murrurundi.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.3	Undertake preliminary investigation of the need for a flood study for Merriwa. Implement relevant recommendations.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
2.4	Work with Rural Fire Service update bushfire mapping, and Planning for Bush Fire documents	Ongoing	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.7 Planning Priority: Villages and rural areas offer the services that communities need

Rationale:

The LGA's seven villages are a valuable reflection of the area's built history and play an important role in delivering local services, including education, health, recreation and retail facilities, to support their surrounding rural communities. Each has distinct character and planning issues.

Demand for additional residential development in all villages is expected to be relatively low, compared with larger towns. The Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy recognises that residential growth may be higher, proportional to population growth, due to the rapidly aging nature and shrinking household size expected in villages and their surrounding rural communities. Some villages may experience stable or declining populations over the next 20 years.

Providing sufficient capacity and maintaining services across dispersed villages will continue to be a planning challenge. Villages throughout the Upper Hunter currently have minimal infrastructure services. With the exception of Cassilis, none of the villages currently have reticulated water supplies, and many are subject to constraints in relation to onsite effluent disposal.

It is likely that there will be moderately higher growth rates in villages located near Scone, in particular, (Parkville and Wingen) and along the New England Highway more generally (Blandford) than those located elsewhere. This will assist in affording more residents easy access to larger service areas located in towns and provide more opportunities to extend infrastructure networks and services into villages, where financially sustainable. For example, the proposed water supply pipeline from Scone to Murrurundi presents opportunities to connect Parkville, Wingen and Blandford to the reticulated water supply network. This opportunity needs to consider the potential for higher levels of water usage and resulting in greater loads on on-site waste water management systems.

Policy Position:

- Encourage the use of existing villages to accommodate population change.
- Provide reticulated waste water supply services in unsewered areas, where satisfactory arrangements are in place to ensure adequate and safe wastewater disposal.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
2.5	Investigate the potential provision of a reticulated water supply to the villages of Parkville, Wingen and Blandford in line with the delivery of the proposed pipeline from Scone to Murrurundi	Long	Director Infrastructure Services
2.6	Review the objectives and permissible uses identified in the LEP for the RU5 Village zone, and consider including additional provisions to reflect existing Village characteristics.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
2.7	Investigate the possible expansion of the zoned boundaries of Gundy and Moonan Flat, subject to demand, locational considerations, land use constraints, biodiversity/high environmental values.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.8	Investigate the possible expansion of the zoned boundary of Parkville, subject to locational considerations, land use constraints, biodiversity/high environmental values and the provision of reticulated water supply services.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.9	Investigate the potential to vary the minimum lot size for subdivision and construction of a dwelling house in each village, for the purpose of improving environmental outcomes, increasing dwelling density or supporting infrastructure utilisation and efficiency. Where this is considered, the minimum lot size: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In unsewered areas, must be based on onsite wastewater disposal requirements; In all areas, should consider potential impacts to surrounding properties (including separation distances between dwellings) as well as local character and landscape setting, to maintain the village's rural outlook. 	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.8 Planning Priority: Towns offer the services that communities need

Rationale:

The towns of the Upper Hunter Shire play an important role in providing services and housing to support the population. Such services include ensure communities have a range of housing types and tenures and community transport facilities.

Policy Position:

- Ensure that towns have adequate utility infrastructure services including water supply, sewerage disposal and stormwater management systems.
- Ensure towns have adequate social infrastructure such as public open space, sporting and cultural facilities and health services.

Action:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
2.10	Investigate the possibility of expanding the range of housing types could be included in the B2 Local Centre Zone without compromising the availability of commercial space. There may be capacity housing to be provided at the rear of commercial premises in some cases.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
2.11	Investigate adequacy of supply and quality of seniors living accommodation in Aberdeen, Scone, Merriwa and Murrurundi.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.12	Undertake an investigation into the provision of affordable housing and housing accessibility in the Upper Hunter.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.13	Work with relevant parties to develop supported living strategy	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
2.14	Support/work with TfNSW to undertake review of available community transport facilities.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.3 Rural Economy

7.0.9 Planning Priority: Promote sustainable agriculture

Rationale:

Agriculture is a \$456,025,000 industry in the Upper Hunter LGA, its ongoing productivity and profitability is important to the local economy and its communities. There are a range of agricultural types including; cereal crops, other broadacre crops, fodder crops, vegetables, grapes, fruit, wool, dairy, beef cattle, goats, pigs and poultry. In addition, the Upper Hunter and the Scone area in particular is regarded as the key equine region of Australia and the second largest in the world.

Successful and adaptive commercial agriculture is an essential driver for ongoing economic, social and environmental sustainability.

While production systems and activities will vary, there is a fundamental need to preserve land in a size, subdivision pattern and condition that will provide for its continued use and adaptation to other forms of agricultural production over time. Here the additional key sector priorities are:

- Social and ancillary services for agriculture are identified and provided in compact, self-contained rural towns and villages within clearly defined urban boundaries.
- Ecosystem services and rural amenity provided by agricultural land are protected from incompatible land uses.

Policy Position:

- Maintain a critical mass of industries through the retention of agricultural land and continued access to the agricultural supply chain: specific services, infrastructure, processing facilities and markets.
- Encourage diversification and value-adding in agriculture by recognising the diversity of modern agricultural enterprises and facilitate their growth through the Upper Hunter LEP.
- Infrastructure is provided and maintained to critical and strategic rural enterprises.
- Manage land use conflict through appropriate planning controls.
- Control the form and scale of permissible development in rural areas.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
3.1	Incorporate the Land Use Strategy's local framework for assessing impacts to agricultural lands into statutory planning provisions (e.g. LEP) or, alternatively, DCP to mandate the preparation of an Agricultural Impact Assessment for certain developments that occur within areas identified as important to agricultural industries; and	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.2	Review current planning provisions (e.g. LEP zoning use tables) to discourage incompatible land uses and activities in agricultural zones and establish suitable separation distances, using the criteria outlined in the Land Use Strategy.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.3	Adopt appropriate statutory provisions (to be included in the UHLEP) to afford greater protection of Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Lands (BSAL).	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.4	Respond to Department of Primary Industry agricultural lands mapping project to identify and map important agricultural lands categories.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.5	Work with relevant stakeholders including DPIE, councils, communities and industry, to prepare land use plans that respond to the lifecycle of resource activity for active and emerging mining areas.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.10 Planning Priority: Protect agricultural land.

Rationale:

The promotion of agriculture relies on the protection of the agricultural land resource. Agricultural resource lands requires a size and critical mass to maintain its viability. The fragmentation of resource land is where portions of the land are subdivided from a larger holding, which then allows the smaller portions to be sold off as separate holdings. The alienation of resource lands is when they are enclosed, surrounded or partially surrounded by other non-compatible land uses or activities. Agricultural land in the Upper Hunter Shire is potentially at risk of fragmentation and alienation and as such that is a need to ensure agricultural land and surrounding lands are adequately protected.

In the Upper Hunter Shire there has been a proliferation of unauthorised rural lifestyle lots which in effect also cause the fragmentation and alienation of agricultural land. There are many historical rural lots intended for primary production that do not have a dwelling entitlement. These are increasingly being marketed by real estate as 'lifestyle blocks' and sold to people who illegally occupy the land using rural sheds and 'weekenders'. This situation is not conducive to the "orderly, environmentally sustainable and economic use and development of land for primary production and rural development".

Policy Position:

- Ensure that planning decisions avoid rural land fragmentation.
- Ensure minimum lot sizes reflect broad scale land capability/suitability.

- Ensure that any proposals to rezone rural land to urban land are consistent with the Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy.
- Additional rural subdivision should ensure that adequate infrastructure and services are provided to new lots (including roads, electricity and telecommunications).
- Ensure that new subdivision do not to result in the creation of a right or expectation of additional water rights (e.g. by ensuring no creation of additional lots with river frontage, requiring onsite water provision, or by prior purchase of water entitlement).
- Discourage the proliferation of unauthorised rural lifestyle lots.
- Ensure rural development occurs in accordance with State Environmental Planning Policy (Primary Production and Rural Development) 2019.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
3.6	Undertake a strategic rural use study that investigates appropriate minimum lot sizes to support the protection of agricultural land and consideration of the implications of climate change.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.7	Undertaken an investigation of unauthorised rural lifestyle lots and develop a strategy for responding to complaints and approaching regulatory action.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.8	Assist the DPIE with the review of the Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.9	Develop guidelines for preparing a Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment for assessment of planning proposals and development applications.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.11 Planning Priority: Accommodate employment-generating activities.

Rationale:

Providing a sufficient supply of land that is zoned and serviced to accommodate employment generating activities is important to the wellbeing and resilience of Local communities as well as the growth and diversification of the Upper Hunter Shire’s economy. Dedicated employment lands cater predominantly for industrial, commercial, recreational or institutional (e.g. health and education) uses within or close to urban areas.

Policy Position:

- Maintain an adequate supply of employment-generating land.
- Maintain and enhance the existing network of centres to support commercial, retail, community and civic developments.
- Facilitate opportunities for incubator spaces for technology and non-technology early stage businesses, and ensure opportunities for new and emerging enterprises are encouraged.
- Ensure infrastructure is appropriate to support commercial and industrial lands.
- Council will prioritise investigation areas as identified in the Strategy to assist with managing the industrial lands supply.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
3.10	Review (and amend planning controls if necessary) the supply of floor space within commercial centres in Towns and Villages.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.11	Investigate the industrial land supply in Merriwa and Murrurundi.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.12	Develop partnerships with stakeholders to enhance development guidelines in relation to development within the vicinity of the Scone Airport.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.13	Work with TfNSW, RMS and DPIE to develop planning controls for land adjoining the Scone Bypass.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
3.14	Review planning controls in Upper Hunter Local Environmental Plan 2013 and Upper Hunter Development Control Plan 2015 to assist home-based businesses become established.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.4 Quality and Healthy Living

7.0.12 Planning Priority: Manage for the housing needs of the community

Rationale:

The Upper Hunter Shire already provides diverse housing choices to suit a range of lifestyles in towns, villages and rural living areas, and demands for new dwellings are expected to vary across different localities. The population is expected to change and the local economy is expected to grow and diversify. More dwellings will be required to meet growth in some areas especially in Scone and Aberdeen, and a greater diversity of dwelling types is expected to be required in all towns.

Policy Position:

- Maintain a minimum of 5 years and maximum of 15 years supply of zoned residential land to meet projected demand in each town and village.
- Ensure residential land is suitable for the purpose in relation to infrastructure provision, land use conflict, access to services and land use constraints.
- Direct urban growth to areas where effective use could be made of existing urban infrastructure/reserve where capacity is available.
- Where practical maintain a minimum of 2 development fronts in separate ownership in each town to maintain market place competition.
- Ensure the identified investigation areas are developed consistent with the aims of the Upper Hunter Land Use Strategy.
- Ensure potential public transport accessibility for all residential development, and provision of shopping and other facilities within walking distance where practical.
- Consider urban sustainability issues in the determination of new areas for urban expansion (e.g. servicing limits to allow future water recycling, protection of biodiversity values, road and subdivision layout to provide optimum orientation for solar access).
- Regularly review Local Contributions Plans to support long-term growth to be financially sustainable and facilitate delivery of the preferred urban structure.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
4.1	Prepare policies to facilitate planning agreements for large development proposals that support the preferred long term urban structure.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.2	Consider available infill opportunities, especially opportunities to retain large lots allowing residential accommodation diversity and facilitating institutional use, through demand and supply analyses.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.3	Incorporate future climate change adaptation and responses in future planning instruments and documents, including water saving, solar lot orientation and water reuse.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.13 Planning Priority: Provide connection to areas of natural landscapes and cultural heritage

Rationale:

The Upper Hunter Shire Council recognises Aboriginal people as custodians of the land and recognises the significance of their spiritual and cultural connection to the land. This connection with the land long pre-dates European settlement, with evidence of Aboriginal occupation area dating back thousands of years. Despite physical modification of the land, many places of significance to the unique spiritual and cultural connection to the land remain.

The Aboriginal Heritage Management System is maintained by the NSW Government, and is subject to confidentiality policies to protect sites. It identifies at least 488 sites of Aboriginal significance in the LGA, most of which are located in rural areas. There is also potential for many more to be identified.

Policy Position:

- Identify, protect and maintain objects and places of Aboriginal cultural significance.
- Encourage development which celebrates and shares the stories of Aboriginal communities and their connection to the landscape.
- Encourage public domain design to leverage indigenous art and culture, and acknowledge the history of the traditional owners of the land in locations of cultural significance.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
4.4	Seek opportunities to collaborate with Aboriginal communities and the Local Aboriginal Land Council to identify opportunities to share Aboriginal cultural heritage where appropriate.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.5	Support the Department of Planning and Environment to develop a statutory land use controls to facilitate economic development of Aboriginal land.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
4.6	Support the implementation of recommendations of Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Assessment.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.14 Planning Priority: Country towns are rich in heritage and reflect the character of the local community

Rationale:

The Upper Hunter Shire's rural areas contains many sites of heritage significance. There are also landscapes with scenic and cultural values, which provide important social and economic benefits. Part of the protection of rural character relates to environmental amenity, including maintaining air quality and a quiet acoustic environment.

The need to conserve the Upper Hunter rural area's built heritage is important for tourism and maintaining identity and cultural history. Approximately 250 heritage items and 5 heritage conservation areas (Merriwa, Cassilis, Murrurundi, Scone West, Scone Central) are currently listed in Schedule 5 of the LEP.

Policy Position:

- Manage built heritage in accordance with the Burra Charter (1999) best practice conservation principles of the NSW Office of Environment and Heritage guidelines.
- Encourage the adaptive re-use of heritage items by permitting a range of land uses which would otherwise not be permitted, subject to these not adversely affecting the heritage significance of the item.
- Manage development near heritage items to ensure it is respectful and sympathetic of surrounding items and conservation areas.
- Preserve areas of identified heritage significance and carefully manage their interface with the urban environment.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
4.7	Prepare heritage inventory sheets for each heritage item in the LGA to support protection and development assessment.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.8	Undertake a heritage study of Upper Hunter Shire to review current listings within the LGA and to identify additional items for listing in the LEP (Schedule 5).	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.9	Develop character statements for the villages to establish and maintain a local character.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.15 Planning Priority: Provide healthy places to live, work and visit by encouraging the provision of shade

Rationale:

It is likely that the Upper Hunter Shire will experience more frequent, longer and more extreme periods of uncomfortable summertime heat and heat wave events in the future.

The provision of quality places with shade throughout the LGA will be one of the most cost-effective ways to address this situation in the long term, and has the co-benefit of protecting us from UV exposure. Natural and built shade can be easily included in planning processes for developments, particularly in urban areas. Well-designed shade, effectively planned and correctly positioned, can also alleviate concerns about needing to remove or modify trees to address engineering, wiring or maintenance issues.

Well-designed shade uses a combination of natural and built shade to provide protection from UV radiation where it is needed, at the right time of day and at the right time of year (Cancer Council NSW, 2013 and NSW Department of Planning and Environment 2019).

Policy Position:

- Consider the provision of well-designed shade, both natural and built, in the provision of all public infrastructure, from large developments such as major recreation facilities, public buildings and town centre upgrades, to the smallest public domain improvements such as bus shelters.
- Encourage the provision of well-designed shade in all private developments, particularly recreation facilities and those that adjoin public places, such as commercial developments.
- Consider the co-benefits of shade in all decisions about infrastructure provision and maintenance.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
4.10	The Upper Hunter Development Control Plan 2015 will be reviewed to incorporate design considerations regarding the provision of well-designed shade, with reference to the latest shade guidelines.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.11	The Upper Hunter Engineering Guidelines for Subdivisions and Developments will be updated to include specifications for the provision of well-designed shade.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.12	Council will prioritise well-designed shade in its provision of new and upgraded public infrastructure and spaces.	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.13	Council will consider retrofitting current public infrastructure and spaces to include well designed shade.	Long	Director Infrastructure Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.16 Planning Priority: Provide healthy places to live, work and visit by creating walkable and bicycle-friendly neighborhoods

Rationale:

Ill health and death in Australia is caused by chronic conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer and circulatory diseases. The greatest risk factors for these conditions are lack of a lack of physical activity and overweight/obesity (National Heart Foundation, 1999). Creating urban environments that encourage walking is therefore important for health reasons. “Walking is both an important transport mode and a valued leisure and recreational activity” (NSW Government, 2018).

Policy Position:

- Where possible ensure new subdivisions are designed to provide opportunities and encouragement of walking and cycling.
- Ensure new subdivisions including adequately designed and facilitated public open space (parkland) within walking distance from each residential lot.
- Ensure infill subdivisions and new developments where necessary provide connection to the existing or planned

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
4.14	Adopt DCP sections that requires residential subdivisions, residential development and commercial developments to incorporate pedestrian and cycle paths.	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services
4.15	Review DCP section to clearly articulate the type of development where bicycle parking facilities should be provided.	Short	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.5 Vibrant and Creative community

7.0.17 Planning Priority: Town Centre Revitalisation

Rationale:

The Upper Hunter Shire comprises the towns of Aberdeen, Scone, Merriwa and Murrurundi. The town centres are at the heart of the local community. As recognized by the Town Centre Master Plans they are shared spaces that not only provide for the daily needs of the community but also a place for people to come together for events and social activities. Ensuring that town centres are attractive, well maintained and flourishing provides benefits not only for the businesses in the centre but also the wider community throughout the region.

Policy Position:

- Provide attractive and functional town centres and support revitalisation projects.
- Facilitate the making of places where people want to be.
- Encourage appropriate retail and commercial businesses to remain and locate in town centres.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
5.1	Implementation of Town Centre Master Plans for Aberdeen, Scone, Merriwa and Murrurundi	Medium-Long	Director Infrastructure Services
5.2	Review Upper Hunter Development Control Plan 2015 to ensure consistency with Town Centre Master Plans.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.18 Planning Priority: Facilitate Tourism

Rationale:

Tourism contributes approximately \$63 million to the Upper Hunter Shire economy each year. Visitors are attracted to the various events, as well as the natural environment and historical sites. It is important to ensure that tourism continues and to facilitate investment.

The main forms of tourism are tours of thoroughbred studs, art galleries, historic villages, museums, national parks, hiking, water activities at Lake Glenbawn and events, such as the Scone Horse Festival, Warbirds over Scone (and associated Warbirds attraction), Merriwa Festival of the Fleece, the Aberdeen Highland Games and the Murrurundi King of the Ranges and other sport and horse equine events throughout the year. There is also an opportunity to recognise the natural attractions, scenic landscapes, heritage and local character of towns and villages.

Policy Position:

- Improve the attractiveness of the local area through capital investment in projects to encourage tourism.
- Create a regulatory environment where the outcomes collectively assist local businesses and encourages appropriate development.
- Enrich the tourist appeal of the Upper Hunter Shire through the conservation and promotion of its natural and cultural history.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe*	Responsibility
5.3	Ensure there is adequate land zoned for appropriate business development, tourism and complementary industries.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
5.4	Create greater alignment between eco-tourist facilities and tourist and visitor accommodation to ensure conservation outcomes are being achieved.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services
5.5	Consider rezoning the existing disused Merriwa-Sandy Hollow rail corridor to RE1 Public Recreation (to facilitate a future rail-trail).	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
5.6	Working with local event organisers and Transport NSW to provide to provide high visibility public transport initiatives such as a special Horse Festival / Warbirds train or bus services.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
5.7	Partnership with Scone Chamber of Commerce, Transport NSW and other appropriate community organisations to develop signage theme to encourage the travelling public to drive into the Scone town centre.	Medium	Director Corporate Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+years

7.0.19 Planning Priority: Encourage economic diversification

Rationale:

The Upper Hunter Shire is vulnerable to global and regional economic uncertainties. The Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Action Plan (NSW Government, undated) identifies the key drivers for action are:

- *the variable trading conditions of the coal industry,*
- *the loss of jobs through robotics and automated production,*
- *the planned closure of Liddell and Bayswater power stations in 2022 and 2035*
- *water and energy security issues*
- *open cut coal mining operations are fragmenting highly productive industries and lands*
- *land use uncertainty is impacting on investment in diversified industries.*

Furthermore, in the Upper Hunter the impacts of climate change have the potential to lead to a decline in the agricultural sector as prolonged and more frequent droughts leads to water scarcity. It therefore becomes important to explore potential and emerging opportunities.

Policy Position:

- Protect cultural heritage, natural heritage and agricultural lands
- Protect critical industry clusters that are identified in the Strategic Regional Land Use Plan – Upper Hunter (NSW Government, 2012)
- Support the diversification of the energy sector.
- Encourage the establishment of employment-generating rural industries, value-adding industries and intensive agriculture in appropriate locations.

Actions:

Action No.	Action	Timeframe	Responsibility
5.8	Work with Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan partners to develop appropriate planning response.	Long	Director Corporate Services
5.9	Support the establishment of the Upper Hunter Green Energy Precinct.	Long	Director Environmental & Community Services
5.10	Review and amend the Upper Hunter Local Environment Plan 2013 to ensure it has the capacity to take advantage of a range of development types in appropriate locations.	Medium	Director Environmental & Community Services

*Timeframe: Short = 1 year (2020), Medium = 4 years (2020-2025), Long = 5+year

8. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND REPORTING

8.1 Implementation

This LSPS puts forward the vision and long-term land use strategy for the Upper Hunter Shire for the next 20 years. To realise the vision and strategy, a series of additional investigations and studies may be required and be subject to funding. Amendments to other Council plans may be required as these plans provide the delivery framework for Council's strategic planning. These plans and their functions are described below:

Local Environmental Plan (LEP)

An LEP is the principal statutory document which establishes the planning controls for an LGA. Through zoning, development standards and other local provisions, the LEP provides the legal framework to ensure development is appropriate and reflects the community's vision for land use in the LGA.

Development Control Plan (DCP)

DCPs are non-statutory plans that support the LEP by providing detailed planning and design guidelines and development controls.

Contributions Plan and VPAs

Contributions plans enable councils to collect contributions from developers toward public infrastructure required as a consequence of their development. Voluntary Planning agreements (VPAs) provide an alternative means of providing certainty and funding for the construction of local infrastructure and facilities to meet the needs of the future community generated by development.

8.2 LEP Amendments

Some proposed developments which align to strategic planning direction in the LSPS may require changes to land use zoning or principal development controls before a development application can be submitted. In these circumstances, LEP amendments would be required.

Amendments to the LEP need to be undertaken by preparing planning proposals. These proposals need to be prepared in accordance with section 3.4 of the EP&A Act 1979. Planning proposals to amend the LEP may either be prepared by Council or by applicants, depending on the circumstances of particular proposals. Alignment to the strategic direction within the LSPS will be a significant consideration when determining whether an LEP amendment will proceed.

More information about the process for amending LEPs can be found in DPE's *A Guide to Preparing Planning Proposals*.

8.3 Monitoring and Review

Council will monitor, review and report on this Local Strategic Planning Statement to ensure that its planning priorities are being achieved. Council will use the established Integrated Planning and Reporting (IP&R) framework under the Local Government Act 1993 for the purpose of monitoring implementation of the LSPS.

Council will work to ensure on-going alignment between this LSPS and the Community Strategic Plan (with its associated Delivery Program and Operational Plan) and its financial planning.

A review of the LSPS will occur again every five years to align the review period with Council's overarching community strategic planning and IP&R under the Local Government Act. In addition, if necessary, more regular updates can be made to the LSPS to reflect major changes in land use planning that will affect our city.

Regular reviews will ensure that the LSPS reflects the vision the community has for the future of Upper Hunter Shire and is aligned to the latest trends and information available about the environment and the community's social and economic needs.

8.4 Funding and Investment

The LSPS will play an important role in Council's resourcing strategy, with preparation of strategies and studies required by this plan funded in the 5-year delivery program and operational plans.

8.5 Strategic Planning Implementation

A whole of organisation approach will be required to ensure that Council is able to deliver the vision and priorities identified in this LSPS. Council is currently considering options for how best to ensure outcomes are achieved.

8.6 Existing Governance Arrangements and Partnerships

Existing governance arrangements through the Hunter Joint Organisation of Councils and other government agencies will be utilised to support effective approaches to cross local government boundary issues. The need to work effectively with other councils in the region recognises the wider role that Council's strategic planning and decision-making plays in achieving the objectives of the Hunter Regional Plan 2036.

It also recognises the potential impact that strategically important decisions taken by Council regarding critical infrastructure, environmental issues, housing, investment and a range of other topics covered in the LSPS may have on the plans of neighbouring councils.

These valued cross boundary partnerships will also support council to realise its vision by driving efficiencies in accessing government funding, attracting inward investment and accessing a wider field of expertise. The LSPS also provides a framework for the coordinated action of many other partners in delivery. Council will continue to work hard to establish effective partnerships with State government agencies and other organisations to support the realisation of the plan.

APPENDIX

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