



30 September 2020

Executive Director

Regions, Industry and Key Sites
Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
Locked Bag 5022, Parramatta NSW 2124

Dear Ms Sargeant

Special Activation Precinct Wagga Wagga Master Plan

Charles Sturt University has reviewed the Special Activation Precinct Wagga Wagga Draft Master Plan dated July 2020. The University supports the proposals set out in of the Master Plan.

As an important part of the Wagga Wagga community and an anchor institution for the region, Charles Sturt can be an effective, integrated and long-term partner for the Department, and help achieve the desired outcomes of the Special Activation Precinct through:

- consultancy services,
- targeted training packages,
- hosting events,
- hosting industry incubators,
- research,
- partnering or leading grant applications, and
- helping to build relationships across the Riverina region.

Charles Sturt University

Charles Sturt is a university of the land and people of our regions. We have a critical role in building strong, vibrant regional communities with infrastructure, intellectual and social capital, and skilled graduates. The University has been helping regional people improve their lives and their communities for more than 100 years.

Charles Sturt's Wagga Wagga campus is located on 640 hectares within minutes of the Wagga Wagga CBD. More than 2400 students and around 800 FTE staff work on the campus; they live in Wagga Wagga and make an important contribution to the economy and cultural life of the city and the region.

Economic modelling by the Nous Group shows that in 2018 the University's Wagga Wagga campus contributed \$236m of Real GDP, 5.1% of Real Private Consumption and 998 full-time equivalent jobs in the immediate region.

The economic benefit is only part of the University's impact on the region: our commitment to our students, staff and communities, as exemplified by our motto, 'For the public good', and our ethos,

described by the Wiradjuri phrase, *yindymarra winhanganha*, the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in.

Research and Innovation

The University undertakes research in a range of disciplines, much of it aligned to the needs of regional communities and industries. Australian Research Council evaluations of research at Charles Sturt have shown our research to be high quality, high impact, and highly engaged with industry and the community.

The University's research is above or well above world standard in disciplines including:

- physical sciences,
- environmental sciences,
- agricultural and veterinary sciences,
- data science,
- health and medical sciences,
- education, and
- social sciences.

The University's research also has a demonstrable impact on policy and practice in ecosystem management, aged care, Indigenous cultures, childhood literacy, and community resilience, among other fields.

Much of this impact is achieved through our partnerships with regional communities, government agencies, schools and industry. Within the footprint of the Wagga Wagga SAP we already collaborate with major employers like Teys and Riverina Oils and Bio Energy. The SAP will provide an opportunity for more business to partner with the University in research and innovation, ensuring more regional businesses are productive, competitive and cutting-edge.

The SAP will also help foster business creation, well understood to be critical to regional economic development. The SAP can draw on the University's capabilities and experience here, too: our Innovation Hubs and incubator programs have helped many regional entrepreneurs develop their idea into a market-ready proposal.

The combination of world-class research capability and a proven track record in business innovation in the SAP will help attract new businesses to the Wagga region, leading to more jobs and higher economic growth. Charles Sturt can also support established and new businesses in the Wagga Wagga SAP with services including problem solving, strategic foresighting, and risk assessment, as well as upskilling and training of staff.

Charles Sturt University's AgriPark

Agriculture is a vital part of the economy of the Riverina and, as an industry sector, continues to be the region's largest employer. It is essential to the growth of the region, New South Wales and the rest of the nation.

The Riverina generates 12.7% of all agricultural output in NSW including:

- one third of the state's fruit and nut production, valued at \$271 million,



- one third of states production of vegetables, valued at \$141 million, and
- half of the state's wine grape production, valued at \$81 million.

Charles Sturt will support continued growth and innovation in Australian agriculture through the AgriPark, a strategic initiative on the Charles Sturt Wagga Wagga campus. It will provide the infrastructure and the intellectual and social capital to support vibrant regional communities, and undertake high-quality research with national and international partners, including businesses.

The AgriPark will bring together the best people and ideas from industry, State and Commonwealth Government agencies, and other research organisations to create a world-leading centre for innovation, research and development which will, in turn, drive productivity growth in our agricultural and food sectors.

The AgriPark will create an innovation ecosystem to assist in the transition to the next phase of food and fibre production, embracing the potential of big data, smart systems and sensors, value-adding, and other emerging technologies and concepts.

Construction, commissioning and operating the AgriPark is expected to contribute 500 short term jobs and 700 longer term supporting roles as well as injecting \$36M in annual Gross Regional Product.

The AgriPark will also play a role in strengthening university and industry linkages and in providing opportunities for students and academics to work on commercial and applied research projects.

The vision and strategic intent of the Charles Sturt AgriPark specifically, and the University generally, aligns with the plans for the Wagga Wagga SAP and the broader Regional Growth NSW Development Corporation (RGDC). The University and the RGDC have begun discussions towards a Memorandum of Understanding to support the strategic relationship between the two. The draft MoU sets out the principles of the relationship and what the partners can contribute to the technical, commercial, business, and, most importantly, workforce development in the region.

The complementarity of the AgriPark and the SAP is demonstrated by GreatCell Solar, one of the innovative companies that has recently moved into the SAP, and which has developed a relationship with Charles Sturt to access specialised technical equipment at a fraction of what it might otherwise cost to own and operate. GreatCell Solar in turn offers the University opportunities in research engagement, internships and student sponsorship.

Charles Sturt University's Clean Energy Strategy

Climate change has a real and immediate impact on regional Australia. Rising to this challenge involves embracing new opportunities, new technologies and new ways of thinking.

For example, the University's 2030 Clean Energy Strategy sets out a pathway for the University to be energy resilient, efficient and ready for a low carbon future.

By 2030 we aim to remove all scope 1 & 2 emissions from our operations – a significant challenge as fossil fuel based natural gas supplies half of our stationary energy needs. To achieve this goal we will need to use less energy and shift to electricity from renewable sources. For Charles Sturt, this is a commitment that makes sense for the planet and for our communities, supports local jobs through local procurement, and establishes the University as an exemplar in the efficient, economical and ethical use of energy.



The University is confident that it can achieve this goal, as we have long been sector leaders in energy efficiency and sustainability. In 2016, Charles Sturt became Australia's first Carbon Neutral University, and in 2017 we had the largest rooftop PV system in Australia.

The Clean Energy Strategy will see the University maintain its role as a leader in sustainability by:

- using energy more efficiently, through better equipment and buildings,
- deriving a higher output from our energy use, through improved space management,
- increasing the use of electric vehicles,
- replacing dirty and inefficient natural gas using systems with clean electric systems,
- adding to our onsite renewable energy generation and energy storage capacity, and
- external power purchase arrangements involving solar and wind generation.

As part of the Wagga SAP, the University can draw on its experience and capabilities in sustainable energy use by providing information and advice to businesses in the precinct.

Charles Sturt can also offer opportunities for collaboration in:

- Virtual Power Plants – the University's Clean Energy Strategy and close proximity to Precinct means we have the potential to act as an anchor partner in the establishment of a VPP (either via private network distance ~4.5 km or virtual arrangements).
- Hydrogen – drawing on existing expertise and current activities, the University can contribute to the research and development of hydrogen as a viable, renewable future fuel for the Agricultural sector.
- The Circular Economy – Charles Sturt has worked with NSW DPIE, the NSW Chief Scientist and other partners on a range of circular economy projects, including a 'waste to energy' feasibility study for the Wagga Wagga City Council. Charles Sturt staff have consulted on regional industrial ecology projects across NSW, and Niall Blair, the University's Industry Professor, Food Sustainability and a former NSW Government Minister, is chair of the NSW Circular research taskforce.
- Microgrids – Charles Sturt is engaged in a research project on the deployment and management of microgrids in regional NSW, with funding from the Australian Government's Regional and Remote Communities Reliability Fund.

Education and Training

Charles Sturt is a comprehensive university with undergraduate and postgraduate programs. In 2018 we produced more than 9,500 graduates across a range of fields – a figure which includes more Indigenous graduates than any other Australian university. The University is consistently ranked number one nationally for graduate employment: the latest edition of the Good Universities Guide showed that 87% of our graduates are in full-time employment within four months of completing their course. Charles Sturt is also one of the top five universities in Australia for graduate starting salaries.

The University is able to achieve these outcomes because of a strong focus on teaching quality. Most of our courses involve work-integrated learning involving regional employers, and regular meetings with regional stakeholders mean that we are attuned to, and can respond to, regional needs.



More than 75% of the University's graduates go on to work in regional areas, showing we have a pivotal role in meeting regional workforce needs. Their skills will be more important than ever to sustain economy recovery in our regions.

Charles Sturt is therefore in the ideal position to provide businesses in the SAP with graduates equipped with the latest knowledge and skills, and committed to working in a regional area. We can also draw on our expertise to meet the education, training and professional development needs of business, through our degree programs, short courses, microcredentials or tailored packages. There are also opportunities for businesses in the SAP to participate in the University's work integrated learning program, and contribute their own knowledge and skills to the Charles Sturt through adjunct appointments or as guest lecturers.

Industry and Community Engagement

Charles Sturt is a key connector in the Wagga Wagga region, and can play a pivotal role in linking the SAP to businesses, industries and communities in the Riverina and beyond. The University has close working relationships with local governments, schools, employers and other organisations around our campuses in Albury, Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange and Port Macquarie, as well as Wagga Wagga. We can also draw on connections across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.

Our reputation and our geographic spread mean that the University can facilitate access to an extensive network of industry, education and community partners, especially in regional Australia but also more widely.

In closing, Charles Sturt University suggests that the University can continue to play an important role in the development of the Master Plan for the Wagga Wagga SAP and the achievement of its goals.

The SAP offers many opportunities for the city, the Wagga Wagga region and the University. We have been actively engaged with the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment and the Regional Growth NSW Development Corporation in work to date, and hope that both organisations will continue to consult with and provide information to Charles Sturt during the ongoing planning and approval process.

Should the Department have any queries regarding the information and suggestions offered here, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Regards,



Professor Heather Cavanagh

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research & Engagement)

