



New England North West Regional Plan 2041



Goonoo Goonoo Station, Tamworth
Credit: Destination NSW

Published by NSW Department of Planning and Environment

dpie.nsw.gov.au

Title: New England North West Regional Plan 2041

ISBN: 978-1-76058-632-4

First published: September 2022

Cover image: Barraba Silos by artist Fintan Magee. Credit: Destination NSW.

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Acknowledgement of Country

Planning for the New England North West acknowledges the continuous Aboriginal connection to the land in the region.

The *New England North West Regional Plan* recognises that, as part of the world's oldest living culture, traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owners and custodians of the Australian continent and adjacent islands share a unique bond to Country — a bond forged through thousands of years travelling across lands and waterways for ceremony, religion, trading and seasonal migration.

The New England North West Region is on the lands of the Ngarabal, Bundjalung, Gumbainggir, Nganyaywana, Dainggatti, Biripi and Kamilaroi Nations. Aboriginal people maintain a strong belief that if we care for Country, it will care for us. This requires Country to be cared for throughout the process of design and development.

The NSW Government champions a Connecting with Country approach to give effect to statutory objectives that require Aboriginal culture and heritage to be sustainably managed in the built environment.

We also acknowledge the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their land, families and communities. We recognise the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and support the process of truth telling.

Using comprehensive and respectful approaches, planning for the New England North West can build capacity and pathways for knowledge sharing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

Image: Mural on a local store located on Heber Street in Moree. Credit Destination NSW.
Illustration: Credit Nikita Ridgeway.

Contents

Foreword	5
Introduction	7
Vision	11

Part 1

Growth, change and opportunity	14
---------------------------------------	-----------

Objective 1: Coordinate land use planning for future growth, community need and regional economic development	17
---	----

Part 2

Productive and innovative	20
----------------------------------	-----------

Objective 2: Protect the viability and integrity of rural land	23
Objective 3: Expand agribusiness and food processing sectors	27
Objective 4: Responsibly manage mineral resources	29
Objective 5: Enhance the diversity and strength of Central Business Districts and town centres	32
Objective 6: Coordinate the supply of well-located employment land	34
Objective 7: Support a diverse visitor economy	36

Part 3

Sustainable and resilient	38
----------------------------------	-----------

Objective 8: Adapt to climate change and natural hazards and increase climate resilience	40
Objective 9: Lead renewable energy technology and investment	43
Objective 10: Support a circular economy	48
Objective 11: Sustainably manage and conserve water resources	50
Objective 12: Protect regional biodiversity and areas of High Environmental Value	54

Part 4

Housing and place	60
--------------------------	-----------

Objective 13: Provide well located housing options to meet demand	63
Objective 14: Provide more affordable and low cost housing	66
Objective 15: Understand, respect and integrate Aboriginal culture and heritage	68
Objective 16: Support the aspirations of Aboriginal people and communities in local planning	70
Objective 17: Celebrate local character	73
Objective 18: Public spaces and green infrastructure support connected, inclusive and healthy communities	74

Part 5

Connected and accessible	78
---------------------------------	-----------

Objective 19: Leverage new and upgraded infrastructure	81
Objective 20: Improve state and regional freight connectivity	82
Objective 21: Improve active and public transport networks	84
Objective 22: Utilise emerging transport technology	86

Local Government Narratives	88
------------------------------------	-----------

Armidale Regional	90
Glen Innes Severn	92
Gunnedah	94
Gwydir	96
Inverell	97
Liverpool Plains	99
Moree Plains	100
Narrabri	102
Tamworth Regional	104
Tenterfield	106
Uralla	107
Walcha	108

Glossary	109
-----------------	------------

References	112
-------------------	------------

Appendix A Settlement Planning Guidelines	113
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The town of Glen Innes. Credit: Destination NSW

Foreword

From the tablelands of the Great Dividing Range in the east to the rich black soil plains in the west, the New England North West is one of Australia's most productive agricultural regions.

Located in the sweet spot halfway between Sydney and Brisbane, its main centres of Tamworth and Armidale are bustling regional cities that provide opportunities for employment, housing, education and health services. Its smaller centres from Glen Innes to Gunnedah are hubs for social and economic activity.

The region's resilient and diverse economy is on the cusp of unprecedented opportunity presented by the growing renewable energy sector, green technology and food and fibre processing to meet growing demand domestically and overseas.

The *New England North West Regional Plan* will harness these opportunities and support ongoing prosperity, growth and build-in resilience over the next 20 years. The next two decades will be an exciting period of change for the region that produces around a fifth of NSW's agricultural output and is home to 16% of all farm businesses in the State.

Our aligned strategic planning will ensure we can capitalise long-term on the region's natural resources, assets and central location to create resilient communities that are well-supported by the right homes, jobs and infrastructure.

Several milestone projects are already underway to help transform and enhance the region's economic and social wellbeing, and drive job creation. These include the Moree and Narrabri Special Activation Precincts, Namoi Regional Job Precinct, Inland Rail, Narrabri Gas Project, Renewable Energy Zone, Housing and Land Monitor and Aboriginal Heritage landscape mapping for new areas.

This plan will harness these major investments to secure a brighter future for the New England North West.

It includes strategies to support the agricultural industry, such as strengthening freight networks with better access to national and international markets.

It looks to expand the food processing sector by identifying the most suitable areas for agribusiness to benefit on-farm jobs and attract long-term investors.

The future of energy is renewable, and the New England North West is already becoming a leader in sustainable and cost-effective electricity production with the building of Australia's largest hybrid solar farm in Uralla, but that's just the start. The NSW Government has set a clear objective of halving our emissions by 2030 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050. We are securing the economic prosperity of the region for the decades to come by putting it in a strong position to achieve net zero.

As we return to post-pandemic life, visitors will once again make their annual migration to the region to enjoy stunning environments such as the artesian spas in Moree, tableland rainforests, ancient volcanoes at Mount Kaputar and cultural events such as the iconic Tamworth Country Music Festival. These places and phenomena have cemented the region as a leading tourist destination and this plan will build on that. All these measures will drive demand for housing and community services.

This plan builds on the recommendations of the Regional Housing Taskforce which was set up to investigate how we can better use the planning system to address housing needs. The final plan incorporates the recommendations from the Taskforce and will be aligned with the ongoing programmes that have arisen from it. We are also establishing the New England North West Housing Affordability Roundtable because we realise that improved housing affordability and diversity are key priorities for the region.

This plan is the product of close collaboration with councils and is informed by Local Strategic Planning Statements that set the 20-year vision for how councils use land and enhance the special character and values of communities in the region.

The past two years has seen the people of the New England North West continue to confront challenges such as the ongoing recovery from drought and bushfire, mice plagues and the global pandemic.

These challenges highlight the importance of strategic planning and the need to adapt to meet changing needs and circumstances. It's for this reason we've reviewed and updated the regional plan to reset priorities through to 2041.

This plan will help the region bounce back from challenges with greater resilience, minimise exposure to hazards, and build a platform for long-term growth for a New England North West that is a better place for people to live, work, play and visit.



The Hon. Anthony Roberts, MP
Minister for Planning
Minister for Homes

Introduction

The New England North West Region sits inland in the State's north, offering a mix of urban and rural lifestyles. People living here enjoy an enviable work-life balance.

The *New England North West Regional Plan 2041* sets a 20-year strategic land use planning framework for the region, aiming to protect and enhance the region's assets and plan for a sustainable future.

As a 20-year plan, it applies to the Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Armidale Regional, Inverell, Glen Innes Severn, Gunnedah, Gwydir, Moree, Liverpool Plains, Narrabri, Tamworth Regional, Tenterfield, Uralla and Walcha.

This Regional Plan represents a five-year review of the region's strategic planning settings and considers some of the key land use challenges and opportunities over the last five years. It covers all facets of land use planning, including employment areas, town centres, housing and related infrastructure, the natural environment and future hazards.

This past five-year period has seen prolonged drought, flooding, bushfire and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there have also been many positive developments in the region, including the declaration of the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), the continued development of the Inland Rail from Melbourne to Brisbane, Special Activation Precincts in Moree and Narrabri, the Namoi Regional Job Precinct, plus major investments in highway upgrades.

In the coming 20 years, population growth in the region is expected to be concentrated in Moree and the regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale. With an ageing population, changes in technology and new job opportunities, this Regional Plan sets out the requirements for clear and coordinated planning across all levels of government and within the community.

We have prepared this plan in consultation with councils and key stakeholders. It is designed to guide planning and decision-making by the NSW Government and councils; and inform decisions by the private sector and the wider community.

About the New England North West Region

The region's first people are the Anaiwan, Banbai, Bundjalung, Githabul, Gumbaynggirr, Kamilaroi, Kwaimbul, Ngoorabel and Dunghutti. Their rich cultural heritage is supported through 21 Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), which own local land holdings and have responsibilities for Aboriginal people living in the area.

The region's natural setting is a main attractor, and should be valued, respected and carefully managed. With the future of work changing, the region may attract more remote workers, which will see rising demand for local shops, cafes and tourism services.

Many communities are still reeling from the devastating bushfires and floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic has shown how the region's natural assets – its main streets, parks, rivers, and leafy open spaces – are key to public life.

The region is anchored by its burgeoning regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale. Armidale is the higher education heart of the region, established in 1954 as home to Australia's first regional university. Tamworth is the predominant provider for aviation, health and employment services.

The region is also home to major institutions such as the University of New England and a growing economy – up to \$13.7 billion in 2021 from \$10.8 billion in 2016. Agriculture was the main economic driver, while the growing health care and social assistance sector, along with education and training are expected to generate increasing employment opportunities.



About the Regional Plan

The New England North West region has been declared a region pursuant to Section 3.2 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

The Regional Plan is concerned with all facets of land use planning, including employment areas, town centres, housing and related infrastructure to the natural environment and future hazards such as climate change. By planning for growth, change and opportunity, the Regional Plan aims to provide a framework for decision-making, balancing social, economic and environmental objectives.

The Regional Plan provides an overarching framework to guide subsequent and more detailed land use plans, development proposals and infrastructure funding decisions.

Priorities for each council are set out in Local Government Narratives, which will guide further investigations and implementation.

Countryside Tamworth.
Credit: Destination NSW

Review process

The *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979* (EP&A Act) requires five-yearly reviews of regional plans. Since the release of the first regional plan for New England North West, the NSW Government has worked with councils, stakeholders and the community to:

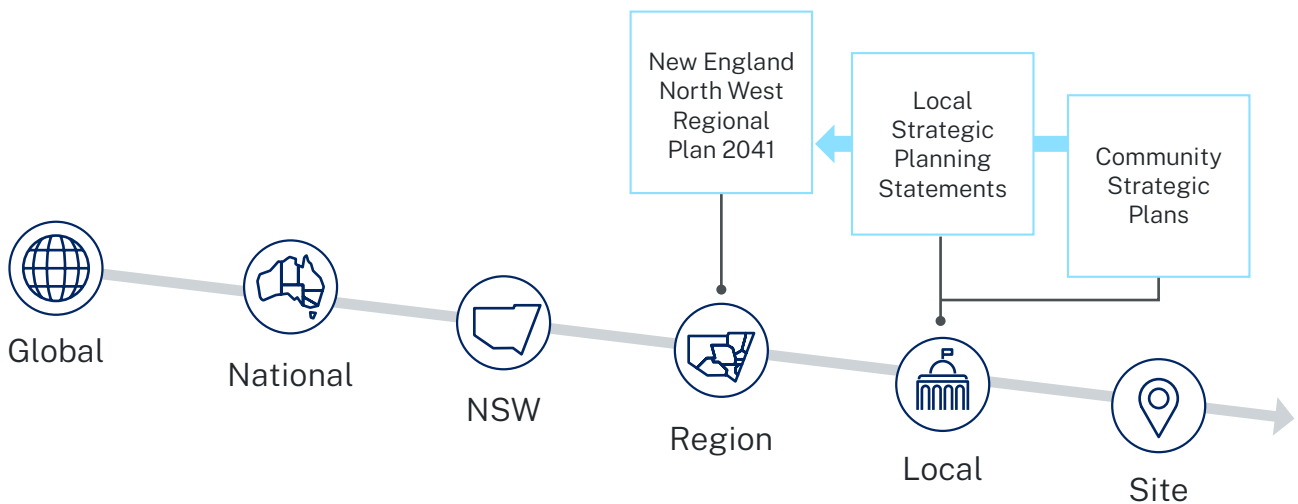
- undertake a regional intensive agribusiness data and gap analysis
- develop the *New England North West Housing and Land Monitor 2018*
- develop regional city activation plans for Tamworth and Armidale
- undertake Aboriginal heritage landscape mapping for new release areas
- develop the *Urban Design Guide for Regional NSW*
- create a local housing strategy guideline and template
- develop draft Gwydir, Namoi and Border Rivers regional water strategies.

Together with council local strategic planning statements, this review allows communities to work collaboratively to build vibrant places and protect precious landscapes.

To prepare this plan, in addition to inputs from councils, State agencies and other stakeholders, we drew from:

- local strategic planning statements and community strategic plans
- *State Infrastructure Strategy 2018-2038, Future Transport 2056* and *A 20-year Economic Vision for Regional NSW*
- regional economic development strategies for Northern New England High Country, Southern New England High Country, Lower North West, and Upper North West.

Figure 1: Strategic planning line of sight



Local strategic planning statements

Regional and local planning must work together. For this reason, the EP&A Act provides a clear line of sight from regional planning to local delivery. This includes local strategic planning statements, prepared by councils, which respond to each LGA's opportunities, changes and trends. This process establishes clear objectives to guide on-the-ground outcomes.

Local strategic planning statements, therefore, must be consistent with the relevant regional plan and a council's community strategic plan.

This framework allows different levels of government to coordinate and realise greater efficiencies as the strategies and actions in regional plans are implemented.

Implementation

The New England North West Delivery, Coordination and Monitoring Committee is responsible for the Plan's implementation. Made up of council and State agency representatives, the committee will listen and work with stakeholders to align growth with infrastructure to support growth and change in the region.

The committee will prioritise the actions needed to seize on immediate and emerging opportunities, such as supporting cities, growing the economy, protecting important farmland, capitalising on renewable energy investments and major infrastructure projects, and promoting tourism opportunities.

Over time, the committee will identify new priorities and coordinate funding for regional transport, health, education, open space, recreation, emergency services and justice infrastructure.

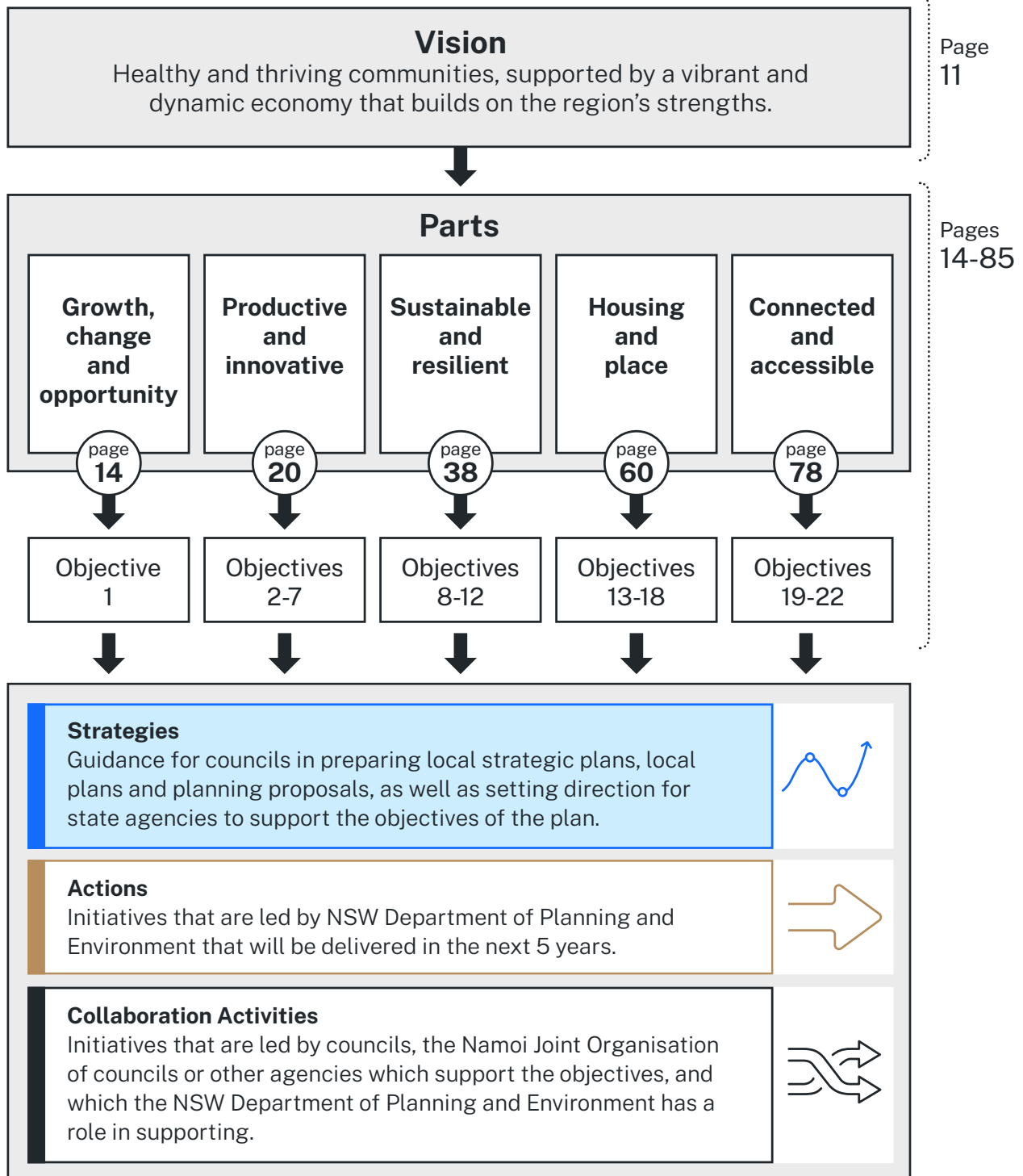
The committee will support the preparation of land use planning strategies that translate the vision and objectives into more detailed priorities for growth and change that can be applied locally.

The committee will monitor and review progress towards achieving the vision and goals for 2041 and detail indicators for housing, employment, communities and the environment, as well as provide advice to government on short-term actions in an annual report.

An Implementation Plan for 2022-24 accompanies this Plan.

Actions, strategies and collaboration activities

We've identified strategies, actions and collaboration activities. Strategies will be implemented by councils when preparing local plans, actions will be led by the Department of Planning and Environment and collaboration activities by the identified stakeholders.



Vision

In 2041, the New England North West region is one of Australia's most productive agricultural regions, extending from the cotton and grain farms on the western slopes and plains around Moree, Narrabri and Liverpool Plains, to extensive cattle and sheep farmers on the cooler and more temperate tablelands, around centres such as Walcha, Armidale and Glen Innes.

Its diverse geology and natural environment continue to attract visitors and residents alike. Protected ecosystems such as the World Heritage-listed Gondwana rainforests, internationally recognised wetlands in the Moree Plains and rare sub-alpine communities at Mount Kaputar near Narrabri are some of its most treasured features.

Communities are well connected, attractive, healthy, safe and prosperous. They are places with a strong sense of community identity, resilience and respect for Country. People can access a range of employment opportunities, housing choices, vibrant events, festivals, and supportive services, all within a beautiful natural environment. New residents are attracted to diverse employment opportunities, with flow-on benefits for local business and services.

The next 20 years will see greater global demand for food and resources. Growth opportunities include the renewable energy sector, green technology, intensive agriculture and food and fibre processing that can be supported by access to and the efficient use of water.

The region is strategically located between Sydney and Brisbane, with ready access to domestic and international markets and services

via high-quality transport networks. This access will be enhanced in coming years by the development of the inland rail and associated infrastructure. New technology and enhanced connectivity will all create new opportunities for the region.

The regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale will continue to provide a wide range of job opportunities, housing, education and health services. The success of these cities and the strategic centres of Gunnedah, Glen Innes, Narrabri, Moree and Inverell will be key to vibrancy and prosperity of the region.

Regionally significant precincts such as the Moree Special Activation Precinct, the Namoi Regional Job Precinct, Narrabri Inland Port and the New England Renewable Energy Zone will drive job creation and community benefit.

A strong education sector based around the University of New England and TAFE NSW creates collaboration and networks between business, industry and research institutions. Continued innovation and technology, led by research and development facilities in Armidale, Tamworth, Narrabri and Glen Innes will help the region continue to be recognised as a leader in higher education and regional innovation.

The region will experience challenges due to climate change, hazards and an ageing population in the next 20 years. This Plan aims to respond to these challenges in a constructive and pragmatic way, to minimise exposure to hazards, diversify the economy, build community and infrastructure resilience, safeguarding water security and plan for a sustainable future.

Pecan farm, Moree. Credit: Destination NSW

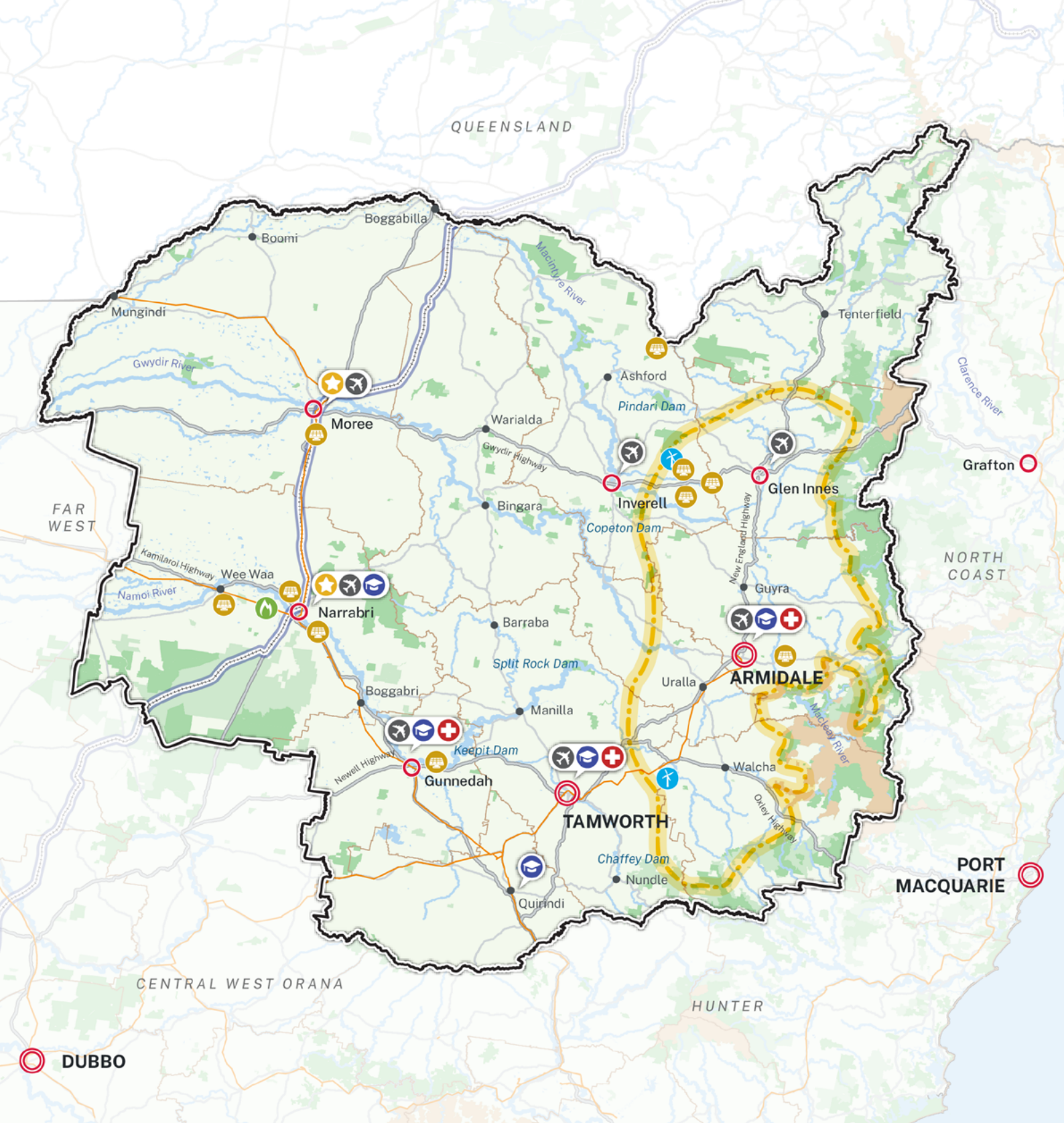


Figure 2: Vision map for New England North West



- | | | | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Regional boundary | Special Activation Precinct | Biogas facility | Road |
| Local government area boundary | Regional airport | Railway | World heritage area |
| Regional city | Education precinct | Proposed inland rail alignment | National park and reserve |
| Strategic centre | Health precinct | Renewable energy zone (indicative) | State forest |
| Centre | Solar farm | Highway | Water body |
| | Wind farm | | |

Regional cities

- Tamworth is a key population and employment centre for the region. The focus for residential growth will be in areas to the north and south of the city. Employment growth is expected in new industry and business park zones around the Tamworth Airport. The CBD of Regional Cities will be supported as the region's primary location for retail and services.
- Armidale is the key academic centre in the region with emerging agricultural and renewable energy industries. Key employment areas exist at the Armidale Airport and in the other existing industrial zones. Compact urban growth will be prioritised in Armidale's existing urban zones.

Strategic centres

- Support the function of Glen Innes, Gunnedah, Inverell, Moree and Narrabri to service the rural catchment areas surrounding each town and support growth associated with new economic initiatives in accordance with this Regional Plan.
- Support the redevelopment and primacy of the town centres as the main location for retail and services.

Towns and villages

- Reinforce the role of other towns and villages in the region to support their local populations.
- Focus development within existing towns and villages to maintain character, support the viability of town and village centres and limit conflict with surrounding agricultural uses.

Key regional connections

Inland Rail:

The Inland Rail will provide key links to Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane and improved access to national and international markets.

Major roads:

The region is well serviced by a network of highways and major roads. The function of these corridors for freight and service connectivity is key to the future economic success of the region.

Airports:

The region is served by a number of airports including regular connections to major cities via Tamworth and Armidale Airports. The future function of these airports should be considered as part of settlement planning.

Economic development

Special Activation Precinct:

The Special Activation Precinct at Moree and a Northern NSW Inland Port at Narrabri will be a focus for economic activity associated with the Inland Rail and the region's key mineral and gas resources.

Renewable energy zone:

The New England Renewable Energy Zone will be a key initiative in the coming 20 years.

Regional Job Precinct:

The Tamworth, Liverpool Plains, Gunnedah, Walcha and Gwydir LGAs will be investigated to deliver a new Regional Job Precinct, focussed on the delivery of intensive agriculture.

Environment

National Park:

The region's national parks will be sustainably managed and protected as key ecological areas and tourist attractions within the region.

Lakes and watercourses:

Lakes, reservoirs and watercourses are critical to the health and sustainability of the region.

PART

1

Growth, change and opportunity



Oxley Scenic Lookout, Tamworth. Credit: Destination NSW



PART

1

Growth, change and opportunity

Population projections

Population projections describe likely changes in the size and age profiles of communities across NSW. The projections are a scenario based on available evidence. They are not a target or a representation of Government intent. They are based on assumptions about future births, deaths and migration. They may also include the potential impact of current or announced government policy (see the glossary for further information).

In line with population projections, the population of the New England North West region is expected to grow from around 186,000 people in 2021 to over 197,500 in 2041. This growth will mainly be concentrated in Tamworth, Moree and Armidale while some parts of the region may experience a decline.

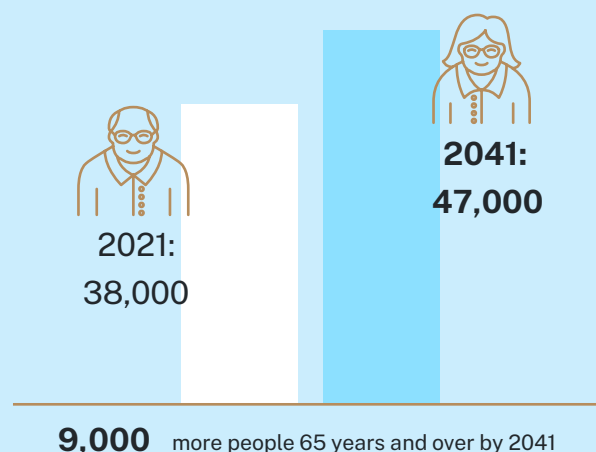
Population change

In line with our understanding, these projections assume an ageing population and a continuation of the state migration trends, which generally see population movement from rural and remote areas to major cities and regional centres and from inland areas to coastal locations.

The ageing of the population is a common factor throughout NSW, but it is exacerbated in some parts of the region which have a more elderly age profile and where there is outward migration.

We therefore need to promote economic opportunities in the region to retain or attract new residents and workers, especially younger people.

Ageing population forecast 2021-2041



Emerging industries such as renewable energy and intensive agriculture, combined with initiatives such as the Moree and Narrabri Special Activation Precincts will drive activity and prosperity throughout the region. Investment in the region through these emerging industries will need secure access to water, in a climate where water is already capped, and may decline under a drier climate. The planned growth of higher education in the region's major centres will also help to drive local employment opportunities and attract young workers and new residents to the region.

The regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale will be the focus for expected population growth and economic diversity. They offer a substantial skills and employment base and their economic success is fundamental to the success of the region as a whole. Quality in the civic realm of both centres can be attractive for those considering living and investing in the regions.

The regional cities offer:

- central business districts with large retail outlets, including department stores
- regular air or rail services and good access to the State road system
- a range of employment opportunities
- schools and higher education, sporting facilities, hospitals and other health services
- NSW Government offices
- tourist accommodation, including caravan parks
- housing choice.

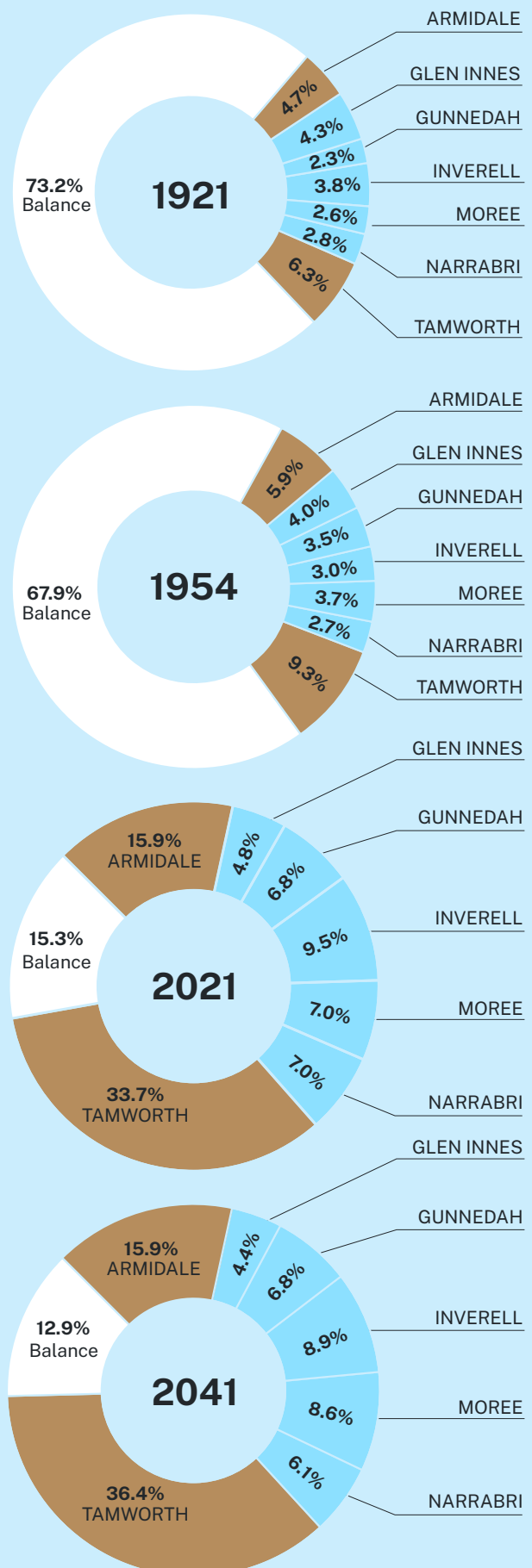
We expect Armidale and Tamworth to be home to more than 52% of the region's residents over the next 20 years.

The strategic centres of Glen Innes, Gunnedah, Inverell, Moree and Narrabri also provide major hubs for social and economic activity in the region. They service large surrounding catchments, which are critical to the economic prosperity of the region and are expected to grow in importance with the development of the inland rail and related economic precincts.

Smaller towns such as Manilla, Quirindi, Uralla, Walcha, Guyra, Barraba, Bingara and Tenterfield perform the role of district centres, servicing their surrounding rural communities and highway travellers.

The function of the key centres is of fundamental importance to the success of the region, as they will accommodate most of the housing and employment demand and growth in the next 20 years. The challenge is to accommodate this growth and secure water, whilst retaining and enhancing the character of the environment, cities and towns.

Population of Armidale and Tamworth compared to rest of region



OBJECTIVE 1:

Coordinate land use planning for future growth, community need and regional economic development



Main street in Gunnedah

A key function of this Plan is to guide the preparation of local council land use strategies. Land use strategies include local strategic planning statements which are prepared by councils under Part 3 of the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*.

Land use planning strategies play a key role to help coordinate and facilitate development and investment and generate high quality land use planning outcomes. They will be prepared in consultation with the community and relevant government agencies, prior to preparing a local environmental plan to zone land for residential, rural residential, commercial, or industrial land use.

They will reflect the Objectives and Strategies of this Plan and will be based on the following key settlement planning principles:

1. Identify growth needs and opportunities
2. Identify and direct suitable land for planned growth
3. Determine the required structure for development, and
4. Encourage locally responsive, sustainable design.

The Settlement Planning Principles are set out in more detail in the New England North West Settlement Planning Guidelines at Appendix A.

1. Identify growth needs and opportunities

As a first step, examine the demand for urban growth and change, based on population and employment projections, and an assessment of supply and demand of suitable land to accommodate future growth.

Demand for employment and housing will be generated by projected population growth in and around the Regional Cities of Tamworth and Armidale. There will also be a need to plan for change in other parts of the region, to deliver local and regional initiatives. For example, the *Moree Special Activation Precinct Master Plan*, which outlines a 40-year strategic plan for the precinct takes advantage of its location in the middle of the most productive grain region in Australia. The Precinct will create jobs across agriculture, advanced manufacturing and freight and logistics. In turn, this will drive demand for housing and community services.

Other local initiatives should be considered to raise the profile of the region and promote opportunities for employment, business development and quality of life, to foster collaboration with the business sector and to attract and retain younger people and professional and skilled workers.

2. Identify and direct suitable land to accommodate planned growth

Where planning for urban growth is needed to meet projected demand, land use strategies will need to identify where that growth should best take place from a regional, local and environmental perspective as well as looking at building resilience into communities. In the New England North West, major growth planning is expected to be concentrated in the regional cities and strategic centres.

Growth areas should generally avoid key constraints, such as flooding, bushfire, important farmland, areas of high environmental value, and steep land, to minimise the risk posed by these constraints in the long-term. Growth should take into account water availability and capped access to ground water. Conflict with existing or potential future uses should also be avoided and buffers may be required to separate incompatible uses. Green Infrastructure and open space should be utilised between hazards and developable land or critical infrastructure.

Planning for urban growth should consider the capacity for infill growth within existing urban areas and take advantage of existing infrastructure and services, to limit the long-term service and maintenance costs to the community. Where areas of high exposure to hazards has been developed, intensification should be avoided. Planning for urban growth should also consider environmental constraints such as water availability and identify how and where water will be sourced from in order to support and deliver growth.

Land use strategies will summarise when and where investigation is best undertaken to deliver coordinated planning for growth, to balance the current and future needs of the community.

3. Determine a required structure for future development

Structure and precinct plans should be considered for significant new employment and housing growth areas in the New England North West to guide and facilitate new development and infrastructure.

The structure plan should include a character analysis to ensure future development is consistent with preserving the individual character of places. High level designs should promote development that has good connectivity, environmental management builds resilience to natural hazards and the effects of climate change. It should consider the right mix of land uses and be prepared following consultation with key private and government stakeholders and the community.

4. Encourage locally responsive, sustainable design

All land use strategies in the New England North West will encourage locally responsive, sustainable design in established urban areas and in new growth areas.

This is important to enhance the unique character of the region's cities, towns and villages and to protect the key qualities that are valued by the community. Priorities for each council are set out in Local Government Narratives within this Plan.

Future development will need to respond to the challenges described in this Plan, including the challenges posed by climate change and the need for protection from bushfire, increased shade for pedestrians and best practice water management to increase community resilience.

Strategy 1.1

Land use planning strategies should consider the four key settlement planning principles outlined in the Regional Plan and be referred to the Department of Planning and Environment for endorsement.



Right: Heritage-listed building in Tamworth.
Credit: Destination NSW

Resilient and low carbon infrastructure

Resilient infrastructure withstands disruption and maintains basic integrity and function. Improving infrastructure networks can be capital-intensive, however, the benefits can be significant. The right type of infrastructure can transform communities, lower emissions, underpin water security and power homes and industry. Better linking infrastructure planning with land use planning can ensure the compatibility of future growth and development, enable demand management and efficient use of existing infrastructure, and improve the coordination of infrastructure delivery across agencies and the private sector.

Establishing the land use context for infrastructure investments can also support stronger justification for investment in upgraded or new infrastructure. Aligning government decisions about the provision of infrastructure with economic development objectives, enables the co-location of infrastructure as well as maximising effectiveness, efficiency and resilience (including hazards). Infrastructure should be able to maintain its functionality and serviceability or be restored promptly in the event of a disaster.

Urban growth should be directed to areas with capacity in existing transport and other types of infrastructure, or where upgrades or new infrastructure is cost-effective. Transport is a major contributor to carbon emissions. New development within walking or cycling distance of services can reduce the need for high-emission transport modes. Local strategies will plan for timely and economically viable infrastructure and support proposals that minimise expenditure or duplicate services. Rezoning should only occur when proposals for land release or development demonstrate that servicing can occur from existing infrastructure or that new infrastructure can be provided.

Communications infrastructure facilitates local employment opportunities and satisfies day-to-day needs. In accordance with the Australian Government's National Broadband Network, a fibre-ready pit and pipe network that allows for the installation of fibre to the premises broadband service should be considered as part of local infrastructure planning.

Infrastructure and utility providers need to identify appropriate sites and capacity to provide for water security, wastewater service capacity, electricity supply, and emergency services.

Funding and servicing models for utility infrastructure must provide sufficient flexibility to support new industries with high energy or water needs. New models for utility infrastructure, such as cost-sharing between industries, will support and stimulate growth

in agribusiness and value-added manufacturing industries, as well as other development.

To support cross-border, inter-regional and intra-regional communities, councils should collaborate across borders. This will strengthen relationships, coordinate growth and deliver infrastructure more efficiently.

Strategy 1.2



Maximise the cost-effective and efficient use of infrastructure by focusing development around existing infrastructure and promote co-location of new infrastructure.

Strategy 1.3



Undertake infrastructure service planning to establish that land can be feasibly serviced prior to rezoning.

Strategy 1.4



Foster resilience and lower emissions in infrastructure planning at a local, intra-regional and cross border scale.

Strategy 1.5



When updating an LSPS or land use strategy, councils should concurrently prepare infrastructure strategies with a schedule of the major infrastructure items for any employment or residential release area.

Armidale, NSW. Credit: Destination NSW



PART

2

Productive
and innovative



Harvesting Cotton, Narrabri, NSW



Paradise Fresh, Tamworth. Credit: Destination NSW

PART

2

Productive and innovative

The New England and North West region produces around a fifth of NSW's agricultural output¹ and is home to 16% of all farm businesses in NSW². The most important agricultural commodities are cattle, followed by cotton and wool. The region also accounts for 86% of the state's sorghum production.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing employs more than 13,000 people—or 14% of the region's workforce.

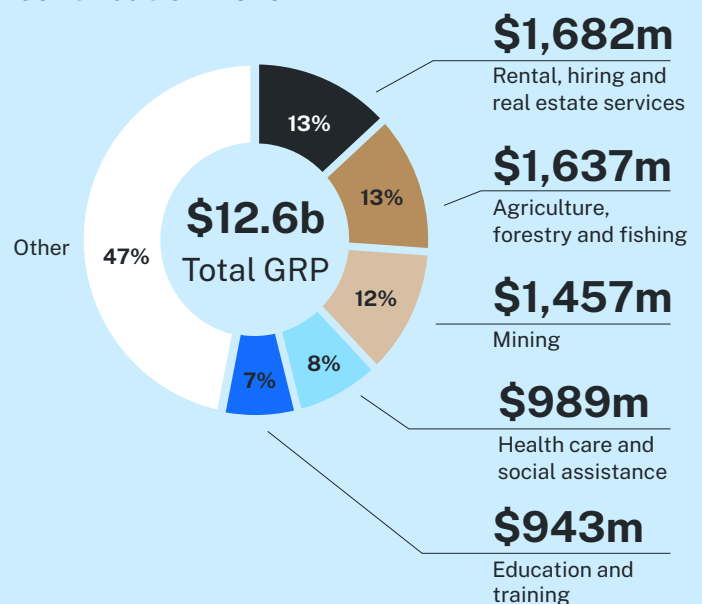
The region contributed \$1.8 billion to the NSW economy in 2018-19, predominantly through broadacre crops, meat and livestock products.³

While agriculture will remain an essential industry for the region, other sectors are expected to grow. By 2041 the region's population will have aged and the health care and social assistance sector (13% of all jobs) will have overtaken agriculture, forestry and fishing (12% of all jobs) as the largest employer in the region. Education and training (12% of jobs) will remain a significant employment generator and there will be a need for additional schools as the region grows.

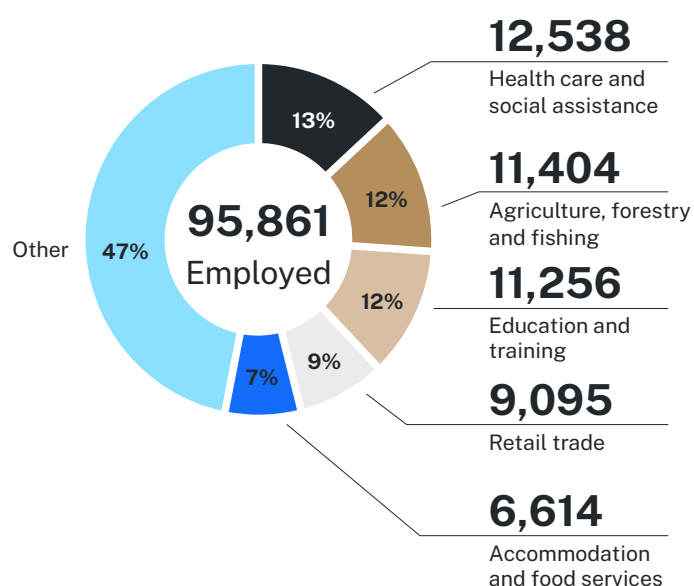
There will also be new opportunities as the economy diversifies and through investment in SAPs, the New England REZ, Inland Rail and the Namoi Regional Job Precinct.

By 2041, there will be similar levels of working age adults living in the region, however the growth in jobs is expected to be greater than the growth in the number of working age adults. We therefore need to attract young families to the region, which will also bring more vibrancy and economic activity.

Top 5 industries by economic contribution 2019



Top 5 industries by employment 2041



The *20-Year Economic Vision for Regional NSW* explains the impact that global trends such as rapid growth in Asia, growing rates of urbanisation, changing demographics and digital disruption will have on regional NSW. It reiterates the environmental uncertainty, especially given recent droughts, floods, bushfires and an unprecedented mouse plague. It is predicted under a dry climate change scenario, there could be 45% less water available in the region on average over the long-term.

This means the regional economy is vulnerable to shocks from future droughts and climate change. Using water more efficiently, investing in less climate dependant water sources, and diversifying the regional economy so it is not so dependent on water is critical in helping the region's resilience to climate change.



Working dogs on a farm in Glen Innes.
Credit: Destination NSW

Regional Economic Development Strategies (REDS)

The NSW Government has prepared Regional Economic Strategies for four areas within the New England North West Region. The areas cover the Northern New England High Country, encompassing the Tenterfield and Glen Innes local government areas, The Southern New England High Country of Armidale Regional, Uralla and Walcha, the Lower North West including Quirindi, Gunnedah and the Tamworth Regional LGAs and the Upper North West of Moree Plains, Narrabri, Gwydir and Inverell.

The four REDS identify regional specialisations and industries and economic drivers within each area and are the primary evidence base for the prioritisation of NSW Government investment and policy decisions to support regional economic development.

The REDS provide a clearly articulated economic development strategy for the region which can be used to inform and guide the economic development activity of councils and business. The strategies may also be used to support grant applications to the NSW and Commonwealth Governments. The *New England North West Regional Plan 2041* supports the strategy elements contained within each of the REDS.

OBJECTIVE 2:

Protect the viability and integrity of rural land

The New England North West is home to some of Australia's most efficient and productive farming and grazing land. The region boasts a strong diversity of agricultural production based on high quality soils, good rainfall and a temperate climate which is conducive to cropping and livestock production year-round^{4,5}.

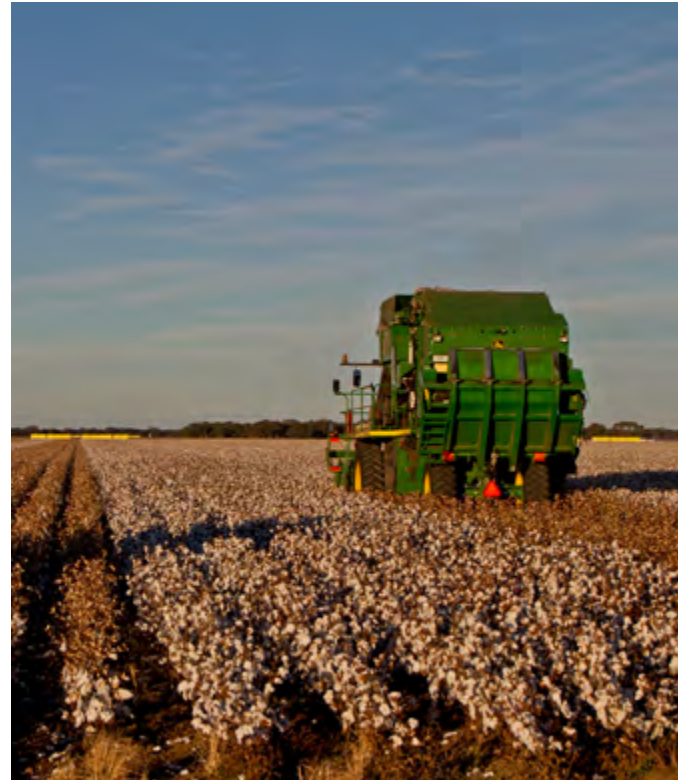
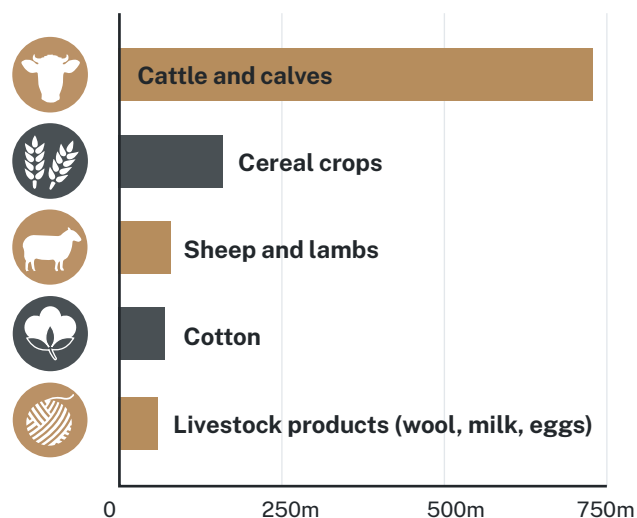
Beef, sheep and wool, poultry, broadacre crops, vegetables and fruits and nuts are produced throughout the region, with almost 50% of the State's cotton produced in the Moree and Narrabri LGAs alone⁵.

There are also several emerging agricultural industries in the New England North West, providing high quality, locally packaged food and fibre to meet increasing demand from consumers in NSW, Australia and internationally, particularly from Asia.

It is therefore not surprising that the region's economy is strongly underpinned by agriculture and related industries, from the farmer to the consumer.

Agriculture, forestry and fishing employ over 13,000 people across the region, which is 14% of the region's workforce. These industries contributed over \$1.6billion to the NSW economy in 2019/20.⁶

Top 5 agricultural commodities by value to region



Cotton Picking Machine, Narrabri, NSW

An efficient and resilient transport network is critical to facilitate market access and to keep the cost of production low. In addition to the existing highway network, the region is well positioned to take advantage of the Inland Rail, which will improve access to the major bulk shipping ports at Melbourne and Brisbane whilst maintaining the strong connections to the Port of Newcastle, Port Botany and airports in Sydney facilitating freight.

The region is also well placed to take advantage of local research and development facilities, including the University of New England and SMART Farm Innovation Centre in Armidale, and elsewhere in Narrabri, Glen Innes and Tamworth. Fostering innovation and competitiveness will be essential to nurture agricultural innovation and secure sustained growth in the agricultural sector over the next 20 years.



Pecan trees ready to be harvested in Moree. Credit: Destination NSW

Rural land uses

Rural land is primarily used for agriculture but also can contain a mix of different uses such as rural residential development, agri-tourism, renewable energy infrastructure, mining and other natural resource extraction.

These different land uses contribute to the character and productivity of the region.

Rural land should be principally planned and managed for agriculture, requiring clear consideration of potential conflicts from new development, or the need for buffers around productive agricultural lands. Sensitive land uses should be directed away from areas where a significant impact on agriculture would result.

Compatible non-agricultural land uses can be accommodated through planning controls such as minimum lot sizes, to limit land fragmentation and maintain capacity for sustainable productive agriculture. Dwellings that are not a primary residence or associated with agriculture can also conflict with agricultural activities.

Local Environmental Plans can support the agricultural sector by allowing farm boundary adjustments and subdivisions creating a lot for primary production. Such provisions can offer flexibility and opportunity while preventing the fragmentation of the rural landscape.

Identifying suitable areas for smaller agricultural holdings that can support activities such as horticulture, will minimise land use incompatibility and prevent the ad hoc fragmentation of land. Certain agricultural areas can be included in primary production small lot zones.

Forestry provides a natural resource for wood products, places for tourism and recreation and environmental benefits in terms of water quality, native habitat and connectivity with other areas, such as national parks. Planning for long-term timber supplies must balance the value and compatibility of agricultural lands with plantation forestry and protect timber supplies, processing facilities and related forestry industries from encroachment of incompatible land uses.

Important agricultural land

The NSW Government's Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land mapping identifies agricultural land that is significant to the State (see Figure 3). Regional-scale mapping could complement this mapping, reflecting regional climatic, geological and agricultural conditions.

These lands include those with the highly fertile and productive soils and areas that feature agricultural industries and other resources. These should be protected from incompatible land uses to maintain the potential for large-scale farming.

The Department of Primary Industries has developed a methodology to map the existing or future location of local or regionally important agricultural industries or agricultural resources. This will enable a better understanding of the location, pressures and opportunities for greater utilisation of the region's agricultural resources.

Strategy 2.1

Use local strategic planning to:

- protect the productive capacity of important agricultural land
- supplement State and regional mapping and policy implementation
- minimise land use conflict that may restrict the use of important agricultural land
- identify initiatives to protect and enhance the future viability of important agricultural land
- protect the integrity of existing and planned areas of intensive agriculture.



Strategy 2.2

Ensure land use planning provisions are proportionate to the quality of the land for agriculture and the scarcity of productive agricultural land in the region.



NSW Agricultural Commissioner

The NSW Agricultural Commissioner was appointed in August 2020 to advocate on behalf of the State's primary producers and work with stakeholders to understand barriers to the future success and viability of agriculture in NSW. The NSW Agriculture Commissioner's report *Improving the Prospects for Agriculture and Regional Australia in the NSW Planning System* was released in October 2021. The NSW Government is considering the recommendations of the report.

The Agriculture Commissioner is also leading a task force to review the framework for managing issues and opportunities that will arise from the growth in the renewable energy and agricultural sectors in NSW over the next 20 years.

Cotton harvest





Figure 3: Agriculture and forestry



- | | | |
|-------------------|---|---------------------------|
| Regional boundary | Proposed inland rail alignment | National park and reserve |
| Regional city | Timber plantation | State forest |
| Strategic centre | Biophysical strategic agricultural land | Water body |
| Centre | | |

OBJECTIVE 3:

Expand agribusiness and food processing sectors

The region's intensive agriculture and agribusiness helps to support on-farm employment, processing and manufacturing, as well as associated services.

Agribusiness includes food and fibre production, agrichemicals, seed supply, farm machinery wholesale and distribution, freight, logistics, processing, marketing and retail sales. Intensive agribusiness relates to agriculture activities such as horticulture, irrigated crops, glass housing, feedlots and poultry farms that rely on high levels of inputs such as water, labour and capital to increase yield.

The region accommodates food processing clusters for chicken meat and eggs around Tamworth, intensive glass housing of tomatoes near Guyra, and various cattle feedlot facilities. Chicken meat production and processing is the largest intensive agribusiness regional employer and is centred around the Baiada processing plant in Tamworth.

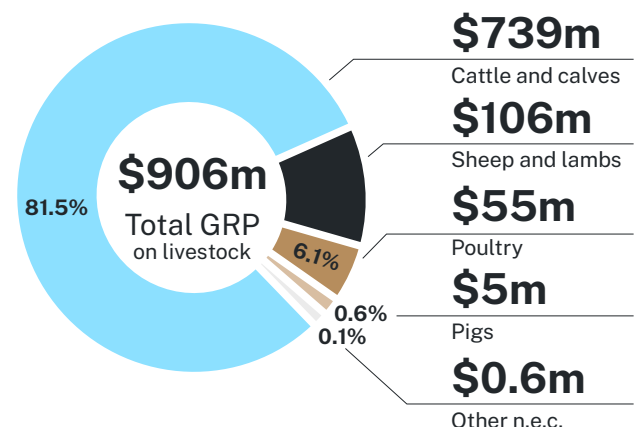
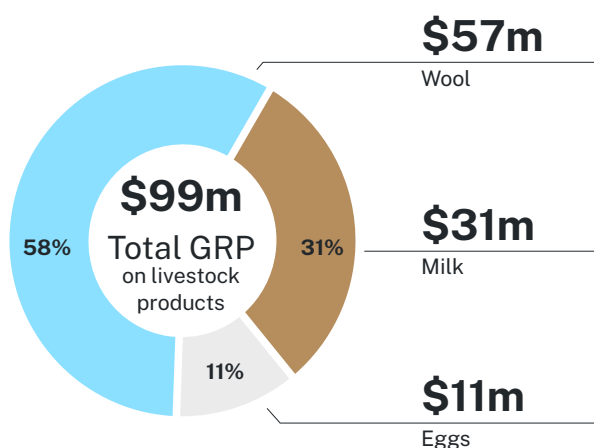
Livestock production is one of the fastest growing and emerging industries in the region, with strong growth forecast due to growing demand from domestic and export consumers. These food processing industries may also generate opportunities for further organics processing facilities to manage agricultural by-products and waste. Such facilities will require careful consideration of potential land use conflicts with existing and future uses.

To support these industries, the NSW Government has announced the Namoi Regional Job Precinct to improve planning and support the sustainable growth of intensive agriculture and livestock production. The Regional Job Precinct will focus on the region's strengths in the agriculture industry by identifying locations that will support industry growth while maintaining the region's amenity.

Cattle eat silage at a feedlot dairy in Tamworth, NSW



Gross regional value of agricultural production, 2021





Bindaree Beef, Inverell

The viability and location of intensive agribusiness generally depends on proximity to inputs such as reliable water and energy supplies, an affordable supply of grain and protein as well as access to an efficient transport systems and a stable and skilled workforce.

The New England North West region can meet these requirements, to provide economies of scale and critical mass for producers, making it an attractive place for investment in agribusiness. However, the recent drought highlighted the vulnerability of the intensive agriculture sector to extreme climatic conditions. Being able to access secure sources of water, without significantly impacting other water users or the environment will be an ever-present challenge to the agricultural sector. Maximising opportunities for agribusiness is a key priority to help diversify the region's economy, to promote employment and economic resilience.

We can support the expansion of agribusiness by identifying the most suitable areas for agribusiness and ensuring an efficient development process to provide confidence for long-term investors. This requires an understanding of key operating inputs for agribusiness and how best to minimise potential conflict with other land uses.

Agribusiness supports agricultural production, and includes professional agricultural services, storage and warehousing, machinery and equipment, transport and logistics, and food, beverage and other product outlets. These uses should be in a range of locations and existing agribusiness sites protected from the encroachment of inappropriate land uses.

Appropriate co-location of related industries will make the best use of infrastructure, decrease supply chain costs, increase economies of scale and attract investment. Industries that co-locate also have the potential to use the by-products and waste materials of other industries to create new products and services.

Strategy 3.1



Facilitate agribusiness employment and income-generating opportunities through the regular review of planning and development controls.

Strategy 3.2



Protect established agriculture clusters and identify expansion opportunities in local plans, avoiding land use conflicts, particularly with residential and rural residential land uses.

Strategy 3.3



Investigate options to access secure water resources through the Regional Water Strategies and Dungowan and Malpas Dam Business Cases.

Collaboration Activity 1



Investigate planning pathways to facilitate intensive agriculture within the Namoi Regional Job Precinct that will:

- identify intensive agribusiness clusters with fit-for-purpose planning controls supported by a streamlined assessment process
- support, diversify and activate opportunities in the intensive agriculture sector and foster collaboration between all levels of government and industry

Partners: Department of Regional NSW, in collaboration with the Department of Planning and Environment and local councils

OBJECTIVE 4:

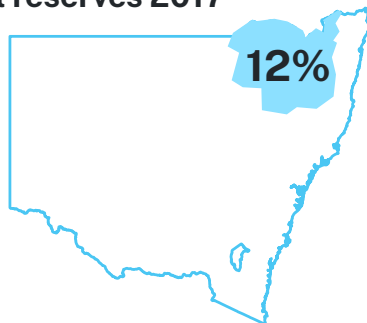
Responsibly manage mineral resources

The region has a long history of coal mining. Its diverse geology creates potential for mineral and energy exploration and production, with the Gunnedah coal basin containing the State's third largest coal reserves and coal seam gas potential.

The Independent Planning Commission has approved the Narrabri Gas Project subject to conditions to protect regional biodiversity, groundwater and local communities. This project is critical to drive regional economic development and support gas supply security. It is expected to deliver 70 petajoules of gas annually or about half of the gas used in NSW.⁷

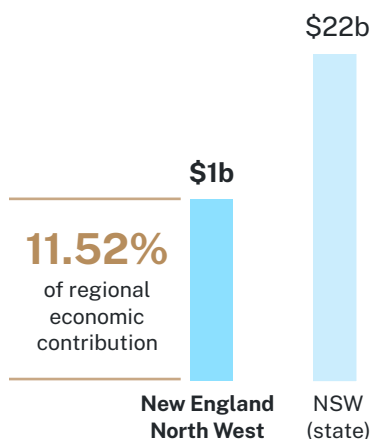
Deposits of gold include the Red River mine at Hillgrove, near Armidale, as well as reserves of copper, gemstones and critical minerals such as antimony, cobalt and scandium. Extractive resources for construction of infrastructure, housing and industry are also available.

Coal reserves 2017



of State reserves

Mining production value 2019



Mining creates both direct and indirect jobs. It delivers resources for technological innovation required for delivering renewable energy infrastructure. It helps to diversify the regional economy, sustain local communities, provide skilled jobs and produce important resources for the people of NSW. The sustainable management of mineral resources must consider and balance varying impacts to produce sustainable economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Areas with known mineral resources need to be managed carefully to ensure that the resources are not significantly affected or sterilised by the encroachment of sensitive land uses. It may be possible to identify activities in key resource areas that will enable productive use of the land without sterilising the potential of the underlying resource. The *NSW Minerals Strategy* aims to unlock the state's potential from mineral production and the NSW Critical Minerals and High-Tech Metals Strategy set a direction for our response to the global demand for key mineral resources that are found in the region.

Mining activities must also be carefully planned to consider the impacts of resource extraction on other uses, such as important agricultural land, residential development or renewable energy infrastructure.

The *Strategic Statement on Coal Exploration and Mining in NSW* sets a policy framework for coal exploration and mining in NSW. It sets out the NSW Government's responsible approach to the global transition to a low carbon future and managing impacts for coal-reliant communities. While the mining of coal for export will continue in the short to medium term due to ongoing demand from Asia, communities need to be agile and resilient to changes in their economy.

The policy recognises the importance of protecting important farmland and focuses potential areas for release for coal exploration to land south of Narrabri and adjacent to existing coal exploration or mining titles.

The *Future of Gas Statement* outlines how the NSW Government will improve certainty about future gas production and exploration; enable access to gas or affordable alternatives to unlock economic potential and job creation; use gas to secure capacity in the electricity market where it is the most economic option to ensure reliability; and enable gas-related infrastructure such as port terminals and pipelines.

The gas produced at Narrabri is intended to provide a secure energy source to replace ageing coal-fired power stations, as part of a transition to clean energy. This transition will inevitably result in new opportunities as well as challenges to local communities, particularly in areas where the economy is more heavily dependent on coal mining.

The aim in these areas is to create new economic development and employment pathways to diversify and strengthen local economies.

Strategy 4.1



Use local strategic planning and planning proposals to consider the ongoing operation of mining and resource extraction and future development of known resources by:

- identifying and protecting key areas of mineral, petroleum and energy resources potential
- protecting related infrastructure, such as road and rail freight routes, from development that could affect current or future extraction or freight efficiency.

Strategy 4.2



Consult with the NSW Division of Mining Exploration and Geoscience when assessing applications for land use changes (strategic land use planning, rezoning and planning proposals) and new developments or expansions.

Strategy 4.3



Support diversification of mining economies. Strategic planning and local plans should consider opportunities to:

- identify potential mine closure or transition timelines
- understand potential changes in water availability, economic/skill profiles and demographics
- consider land use changes and mine rehabilitation activities to maximise future economic opportunities.



Train drives through Quirindi, NSW

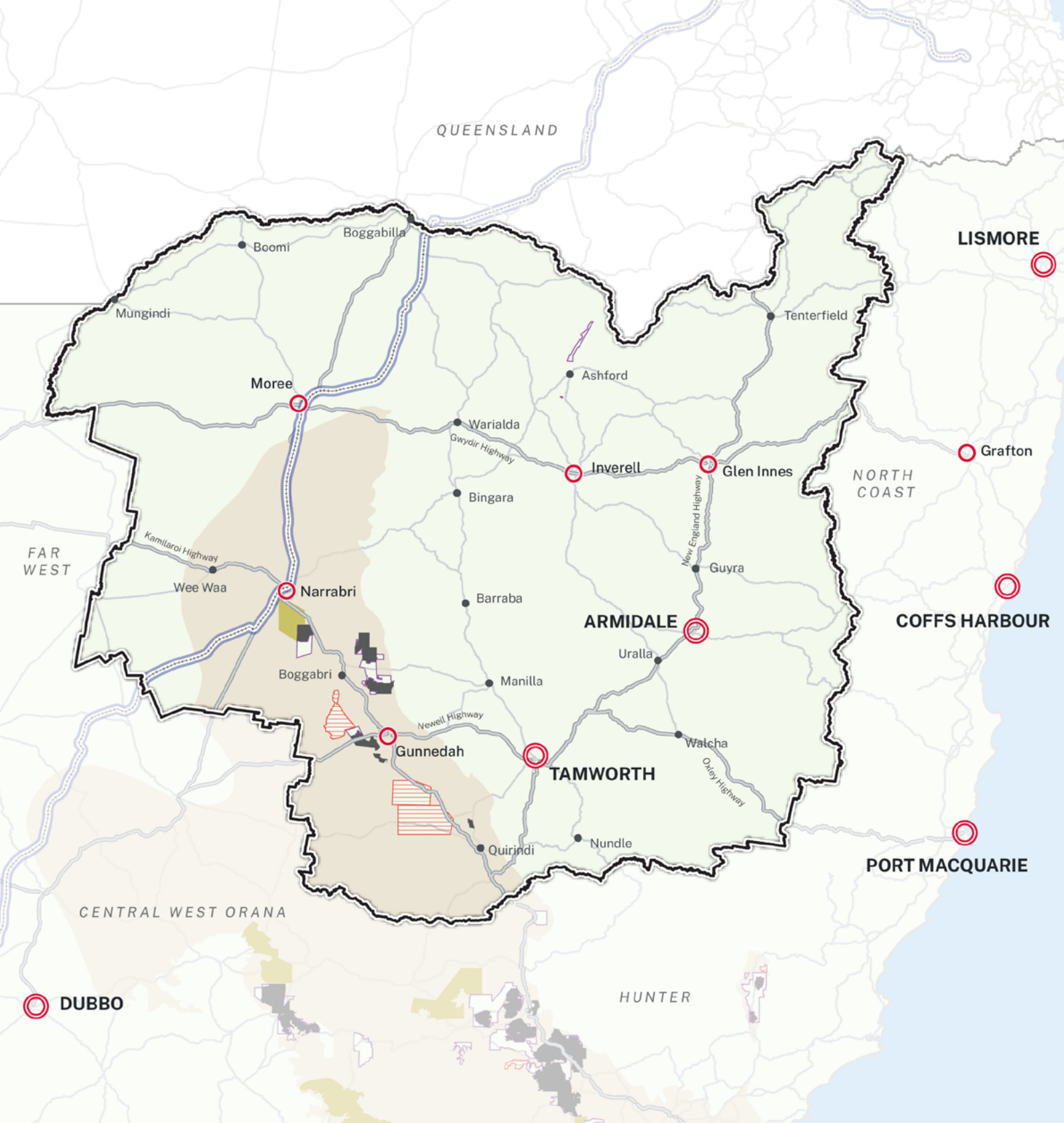


Figure 4: Coal exploration and mining



- | | | |
|-----------------------|--|---|
| Regional boundary | Road | No proactive releases for coal exploration and mining |
| Regional city | Existing coal mines | Coal exploration and mining prohibited by State Environmental Planning Policy |
| Strategic centre | Existing approved coal exploration | |
| Centre | Potential release areas for future coal mining | |
| Inland rail alignment | | |
| Highway | | |

OBJECTIVE 5:

Enhance the diversity and strength of Central Business Districts and town centres



The Central Business Districts (CBDs) of Tamworth and Armidale service the region, supported by commercial centres in Gunnedah, Glen Innes, Narrabri, Moree and Inverell. These centres accommodate retail and business activity, government offices, cultural facilities and a variety of jobs.

The major centres provide most of the region's retail trade, the fourth largest sector of employment which will provide more than 9,000 jobs by 2041⁸.

Local town centres, such as those in Tenterfield, Uralla, Guyra, Walcha, Wyallda and Quirindi, are fundamentally important to local communities, providing day to day needs and acting as a hub for surrounding communities.

The region's places offer distinctive features such as historic buildings and tree-lined streets that help to create a unique character and sense of place. This character is essential to the region's identity, tourism and regional economy. Councils should encourage the reuse of buildings that have been left vacant.

Some centres are declining as more people shop online, requiring new store formats or improved online offerings. Others are impacted by the development of new retail centres that can impact the viability and function of a place.

Planning proposals for new retail centres should demonstrate how they:

- respond to retail supply and demand, innovation and digital trends in the retail sector
- maximise existing infrastructure (including public transport and community facilities) commensurate with the scale of the proposal
- enhance public areas.

Councils should also aim to maintain the viability of existing centres by prioritising precinct planning and place making initiatives for local centres in local strategic planning statements.

Precinct planning should aim to recognise and celebrate the local character of the place and its people, to enhance the vitality of the centre and improve its economic viability.

Precinct planning and place making should be undertaken in collaboration with local communities. Initiatives may include public domain improvements, public art, community events, markets and festivals, and local housing to promote activation, dining and the night-time economy.

Local Environmental Plans should promote opportunities for the employment function of town centres to grow in order to respond to predicted demand, and flexibility to adapt to the changing retail environment. Enabling a mixture of land uses in certain areas may be appropriate to integrate suitable business, office, residential, retail, education and other uses in accessible locations, maximise public transport patronage and encourage walking and cycling.

Above: Colourful street art near traffic lights on Peel Street, Tamworth, NSW



Strategy 5.1



Use strategic planning and land use plans to maintain and enhance the function of established commercial centres by:

- simplifying planning controls
- developing active streets that retain local character
- facilitating a broad range of uses within centres in response to the changing retail environment
- maximising the transport and community facilities commensurate with the scale of the proposal.

Strategy 5.2



Strengthen the function of CBDs by focussing future commercial, civic, entertainment, and retail activity in existing commercial centres, unless:

- there is a demonstrated need
- there is a lack of suitable sites elsewhere within existing centres
- there is positive social and economic benefit to locate activity elsewhere.

Where out-of-centre commercial areas are proposed, they must be of an appropriate size for their service catchment.

Strategy 5.3



Facilitate economic activity around industry anchors, such as health and education facilities, through planning controls that encourage clusters of complementary uses and address infrastructure needs.

Strategy 5.4



Undertake place-based precinct planning for commercial centres to guide development of the area over time. A place-based precinct plan will set out the intended future land uses, open space linkages, infrastructure and built form outcomes for the area. It is prepared in consultation with local communities and Government stakeholders to improve public realm and green infrastructure including open spaces to enhance the vitality and viability of those centres.

Left: Armidale CBD

OBJECTIVE 6:

Coordinate the supply of well-located employment land

The NSW Government's review of employment zones in the Standard Instrument LEP will streamline and simplify business and industrial zones. The reform will guide how councils support their centres, manage contemporary land use conflicts, sustain employment lands and create a nexus between local strategic planning outcomes and the zoning of land.

From this review of employment zones, councils can review their LGA to identify opportunities, rationalise existing zones and develop the right planning controls as part of ongoing strategic and statutory work.

A shift towards advanced manufacturing in the region is based around existing industries such as agriculture and mining. Leveraging the existing manufacturing sector across the Region to develop more advanced manufacturing will require fewer low-skilled positions and more specialised and higher skilled roles.

Other actions to support industry specialisation include skills development and attraction that can also leverage existing research and development infrastructure and networks across the region.

Industrial land

Well-located industrial lands service the needs of urban centres with businesses such as motor mechanics, small scale manufacturing or building and garden supplies.

Industrial land also includes areas which are intended for heavy industry, such as concrete batching plants. Land for heavy industry may need to be separated from other land uses due to the nature of the processes undertaken.

A generous supply of suitable industrial land should be in locations supported by freight access, critical infrastructure and protected from encroachment by incompatible development.

Grain Handling Facility, Narrabri



Employment precincts

Special activation precincts (SAPs) across NSW will create jobs, attract businesses and investors, support local industries and fuel economic development. They bring together land use and infrastructure planning, land acquisition and investment in common-user infrastructure. SAPs aim to diversify a region's economy.

Moree SAP is centred around the region's high value agricultural produce, innovative farming and agribusinesses. Narrabri SAP is being investigated to support the Narrabri Gas Project.

Moree SAP will be a new business hub that specialises in agribusiness, logistics and food processing industries, south of Moree township. The aim is to take advantage of its location in the middle of the most productive grain region in Australia, the junction of the Newell, Gwydir and Carnarvon highways and rail access to the Port of Newcastle and Port Botany.

The SAP also takes advantage of the location of the Moree Airport, by creating opportunities for new and emerging industries that align with established land uses such as drone development and piloting. It will also enable investment opportunities associated with the airport and the integration of air and land activities.

The Moree SAP will include a 4,000ha regional enterprise zone east of the Newell Highway and adjoining Moree Regional Airport to allow for:

- industrial and commercial development
- horticulture and high value-add agriculture
- intermodal terminals
- freight and logistics
- circular economy (reuse and repurpose waste) uses.

A 300 ha rural activity zone will allow for agricultural land uses, light industry and solar farms, ensuring no new residential uses are permitted to avoid impacts on future land uses.

The main driver for the Moree SAP is the construction of the Inland Rail, which is expected to be fully operational by 2026. The site identified for the Moree SAP is on the Narrabri to North Star section of the Inland Rail, enabling efficient rail freight between Moree and key seaports, as well as the large population centres of Brisbane and Melbourne. Modelling estimates there could be in excess of 2,500 jobs created, with a majority of these coming from undercover horticulture.

Narrabri was announced as a Special Activation Precinct in November 2020. The final boundary of the Precinct will be determined following technical investigations and community consultation but will include Narrabri's Northern NSW Inland Port. The site

will be a major investment opportunity for transport and logistics operators, manufacturers, agribusiness and service providers. It will enable opportunities for energy-intensive manufacturing, like fertiliser and plastics manufacturing, located near secure and reliable gas supply and could potentially maximise the Narrabri Gas Project's downstream value for the local area through the supply of gas.

In the 2020 Budget, the Australian Government committed to \$7.75 million to support the construction of a 1.8km rail siding with slip road infrastructure to facilitate rail loading and storage capability.

Regional job precincts, such as the Namoi Regional Job Precinct, are an extension of the SAPs program.

The Regional Connectivity Program targets investment in place-based telecommunications infrastructure projects. So far, this program has funded four projects within the New England North West region, extending high-speed broadband connectivity into areas with limited coverage, enabling the uptake of new agricultural and business technologies in a high-value cotton, beef and broadacre cropping region, and improving access to telehealth and education services.

Strategy 6.1



Use strategic planning and local plans to:

- generate, retain, manage and safeguard significant employment lands
- respond to characteristics of the resident workforce and those working in the LGA and neighbouring LGAs
- identify local and subregional specialisations
- identify future employment lands and align infrastructure to support these lands
- provide flexibility in local planning controls
- respond to future changes in industry to allow a transition to new opportunities
- ensure the employment lands are supported by freight access, critical infrastructure and protected from encroachment by incompatible development
- identify measures to safeguard against impact to the environment, transport networks and sensitive uses, such as schools and housing.

Collaboration Activity 2



Investigate implementation of the Northern NSW Inland Port at Narrabri.

Partners: Department of Regional NSW, Department of Planning and Environment, Transport for NSW.

OBJECTIVE 7:

Support a diverse visitor economy



Driving through Pilliga Forest

Each year on average, more than 3.1 million visitors come to the New England North West, representing more than 3.5% of total visitors to NSW⁹. The majority of visitors to the region are domestic travellers. In 2019, the region welcomed 4 million visitors and of those, almost 1% were international travellers, 43% were domestic visitors staying overnight, and 56% were domestic day travellers. In 2019, visitors spent over \$1.1 billion in the region. From 2016-2019, there was a 30% increase in overall visitation¹⁰.

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted levels of tourism in the region. In 2020, the region welcomed over 2.8 million visitors, down 32% from 2019. NSW is aiming to get back to pre-COVID levels of total visitor expenditure by 2024/25. As the New England North West is less reliant on international visitors than other regions in the state, it is estimated that the region could reach this milestone sooner¹¹.

To 2041, there will be opportunities to leverage major investment in the region to build on the existing strengths of the region. Tourism is also an important employment generator in the region, employing over 5,000 people each year.

Natural features, gemstone fossicking, character-rich towns, historic villages and a calendar of music, sporting and cultural events are key attractors to the region. The region also has many sites of significant Aboriginal and European history. These assets will continue to play an important role in the tourism

growth in the region as will other initiatives such as the *National Geotourism Strategy*. The region has many natural and cultural assets to leverage geotourism opportunities including fossicking areas, significant geologic features and waterfalls.

Agritourism and small-scale agricultural development in the region represent a diverse and unique tourism offering, including food and wine trails, farm stays, farmers markets, and farm gate experiences, supporting the recovery and resilience of farm businesses. Amendments to the planning system are underway to better enable agritourism and small-scale agricultural development to be approved. Facilitating agritourism can give farming communities the opportunity to generate additional income through diversified offerings, while not compromising the core farming operations.

Agritourism is a growing sector of both the Australian and NSW economies, worth more than \$10.8 billion in 2018¹².

There is an opportunity to promote agritourism more widely as a way to grow the region's economy, attract tourists and promote job creation.

Over the last decade, the largest visitor group to the region have been those aged 60-69, with more than 30% of visitors aged 60 and over. Tourism facilities should be accessible and designed with age friendly considerations.



National parks

The region's national parks, such as Mount Kaputar National Park, Warrabah National Park and the Oxley Wild Rivers National Park that includes the World Heritage-listed Gondwana rainforest are home to important landscapes, plants and animals and are some of the largest tourism attractions of the region.

There is scope to support the visitor economy in neighbouring regions. An example is the Dark Sky Region of NSW. It radiates 200km from Australia's most important visible-light Observatory at Siding Spring. The Observatory attracts over 24,000 visitors each year and is a centre for scientific discovery. The Dark Sky Region includes the Narrabri, Gunnedah, Liverpool Plains Shires and parts of the Tamworth Regional, Gwydir and Moree Plains Shires. The Observatory's continued operation depends upon the night sky being free from light pollution. The *Dark Sky Planning Guideline* informs state and local government, professionals and the community about the management of light and is vital in maintaining our shared dark night sky.

Strategy 7.1



Use local plans to:

- enhance the amenity, vibrancy and safety of centres and township precincts
- create green and open spaces and enhance existing green infrastructure, such as local and regional parks, for tourist and recreation facilities
- support the development of places for artistic and cultural activities
- protect heritage, biodiversity and agriculture to enhance cultural tourism, agritourism and eco-tourism
- provide flexibility in planning controls to allow sustainable agritourism and ecotourism
- improve public access and connection to heritage through innovative interpretation.

Strategy 7.2



Support a diverse visitor economy in national parks and Crown lands through collaboration between National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), Crown Lands, Destination NSW, destination networks, councils and local tourism organisations to encourage and welcome visitors.

Left: Chaffey Dam, Tamworth

PART

3

Sustainable
and resilient





Bald Rock National Park

PART

3

Sustainable and resilient

The New England North West's landscapes and natural assets are world renowned and contribute to lifestyle and leisure opportunities and productive agriculture. World Heritage-listed rainforests (such as the Oxley Wild Rivers), internationally recognised wetlands in the Moree Plains and rare sub-alpine communities at Mount Kaputar near Narrabri occur nowhere else on the planet.

A changing climate could threaten the natural environment and local communities. Resilience to these threats requires the integration of land use planning with resilience planning to avoid, prepare for, respond to and recover from climate-induced shocks.

New climate datasets are providing a more sophisticated understanding of historic climate variability, providing a more comprehensive understanding of natural variability and potential extreme events. We can now better predict and plan for plausible future climate scenarios and better understand the climate risks to mitigate these shocks and stresses.

Adaptation actions are necessary to address impacts from climate change such as flooding, bushfires, heatwaves, drought, severe thunderstorms, extreme weather conditions, water shortages and changes to ecosystems.

Part of efforts to adapt to climate change is the need to protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and building the capacity for shared knowledge about climate change. Traditional Owners have extensive knowledge of the land and connection to Country, which is fundamental to the success of developing climate change adaptation strategies for now and into the future.

This will protect both tangible and intangible values, such as Song Lines, Dreaming stories and ceremonies passed from generation to generation, as well as physical objects and places. The Department of Planning and Environment's *Our Place on Country: Aboriginal Strategy* will help us to further grow our cultural understanding and to deliver strategic adaptation plans and pilot actions with Aboriginal landholders and their communities.

OBJECTIVE 8:

Adapt to climate change and natural hazards and increase climate resilience

The New England North West climate ranges from the cooler and more temperate Northern Tablelands through to the drier and hotter North West Slopes and Plains in the west. Temperature extremes occur infrequently but can have considerable impacts on health, infrastructure and our environment. The region currently experiences considerable rainfall variability across seasons and from year-to-year.

Temperatures in the New England North West have been increasing since about 1970, with higher temperatures experienced in recent decades. The region is projected to continue to warm on average of about 0.7°C in the near future, increasing to about 2.2°C in the far future. The number of high temperature days is projected to increase, with fewer potential frost risk nights anticipated. Although the warming trend is similar to other regions in NSW, this trend is large compared to natural variability in temperature.

The Western Enabling Regional Adaptation – New England North West region report provides a resource for state and local government and regional communities to understand how climate change will continue to impact the region and our values. Adaptation pathways for agriculture which are addressed include:

- ensuring that local planning measures support: gradual change to crop/pasture varieties;
- the development of locally grown products and regional markets; regionally specific climate adaptation integrated into disaster management and whole farm planning;
- adoption of animal welfare practices to manage natural disasters and increased predator and disease load; and
- integration of carbon farming to diversify farm incomes.

Action 1

Work with councils to continue to provide guidance and tools for councils to use for evidence-based risk-management approaches to build resilience to shocks and stresses, plan for natural hazards and transition to net zero emissions.



Carbon emission aims

The *Net Zero Plan Stage 1: 2020-2030* is the foundation for NSW's action on climate change and goal to reach net zero emissions by 2050. It outlines the NSW Government's plan to grow the economy, create jobs and reduce emissions over the next decade. It aims for a 35% cut in emissions by 2030 compared to 2005 levels. The plan will support a range of initiatives targeting electricity and energy efficiency, electric vehicles, hydrogen, primary industries, coal innovation, organic waste and carbon financing.

Through the Climate Change Fund, the NSW Government is investing \$1.4 billion between 2017 and 2022 to help households and businesses save energy and money and improve energy reliability and affordability.

The New England North West region contributes to global emissions through industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, energy, mining and transportation. The impact of these emissions will increase without planned intervention. Local governments play a key role in the shift to net zero emissions as leaders, place makers and through their connection to local communities.

Natural hazards

Natural hazards could become more severe due to likely changes in climate across north eastern NSW, such as higher temperatures, more frequent hot days and changes to the seasonality of rainfall. This means the occurrence of bushfires, severe thunderstorms, droughts, heatwaves and flooding is likely to increase.

The Department of Planning and Environment released a State-wide Natural Hazards Package to guide how natural hazard risk is considered in local land use planning. It recommends multi-disciplinary collaboration, including engagement and collective decision-making across state and local government, including risk and emergency managers and asset owners.

As part of the package, the Strategic Guide to Planning for Natural Hazards directly informs the preparation of regional plans and local strategic planning statements.

Strategic planning can help to reduce natural hazard risk and build resilience by considering the impacts of shocks and stresses early in decision-making, particularly when planning for future growth and development. This could include appropriate zoning and development controls that consider the constraints that natural hazards place on land.

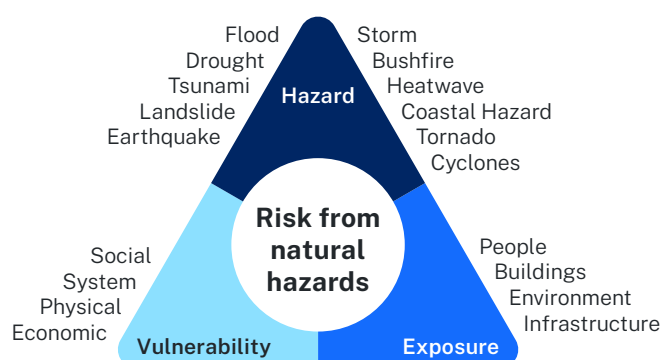
Strategy 8.1

When preparing local strategic plans, be consistent with and adopt the principles outlined in the State-wide Natural Hazards package.



Strategy 8.2

Where significant risk from natural hazard is known or presumed, complete or update hazard strategies to inform new land use strategies and consult with emergency service providers and local emergency management committees. Hazard strategies should investigate options to minimise risk such as voluntary housing buy back schemes.



Naturally occurring asbestos is found in the Great Serpentine Belt from Tamworth to Bingara. Asbestos only poses a risk to people if the fibres are inhaled, which can occur through natural weathering or if disturbed during agricultural or building activities. Relevant councils can effectively manage risks associated with naturally occurring asbestos through local risk management strategies. The Department of Planning and Environment has published mapping which identifies areas with potential for naturally occurring asbestos in rocks and sediments that are less than 10 metres below the natural surface level.

The *Model Asbestos Policy for NSW Councils* (2015) helps councils to formulate asbestos policies and promotes a consistent approach to managing asbestos.

Minimising and managing risk

Land use planning can help minimise and manage the impacts of climate change. Local Environmental Plans identify natural hazard-prone land and apply provisions to exclude these areas from development unless hazards can be managed. Appropriate hazard studies should inform new land use strategies. This will ensure a balance is met in protecting the environment, protecting development from natural hazards, and ensuring that the infrastructure is adequate to evacuate the expanding population in extreme events.

Green infrastructure and shared spaces between a hazard and residential development or critical infrastructure can be integrated where practical to enhance resilience and protect natural assets.

In 1984 the NSW government introduced its *Flood Prone Lands Policy* which aims to reduce the impact of flooding and flood liability on individual owners and occupiers, and to reduce public and private losses resulting from flooding. The Flood Prone Land Package was updated in 2021. Under this policy, councils are responsible for managing flood risks and develop flood risk management plans that use a merit-based approach to balance social, economic, environmental and flood-risk and determine the appropriate land use on flood-prone land.

With the 2019-2020 bush fire season, strategic bush fire planning is essential to help reduce the ongoing risk to property, life and the environment. Councils can use the *Planning for Bushfire Protection Guideline 2019* to give bush fire management principles appropriate consideration during strategic planning.

The NSW Government is considering the recommendations of [Final Report of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry 31 July 2020](#), including a shift to a strategic approach to planning for bushfire similar to the management of flood prone land in NSW.

2022 NSW Flood Inquiry

Following the tragic flooding on the North Coast, Hunter, Greater Sydney and the South Coast of NSW in late February and early March 2022, the NSW Government commissioned an independent expert inquiry into the preparation for, causes of, response to and recovery from the 2022 catastrophic flood events.

The [Full Report](#) has now been published and the recommendations from the inquiry will be carefully considered by the NSW Government, with some actions requiring immediate attention and others will be over the longer term. This regional plan identifies strategies to rebuild in a resilient way and to ensure the planning system adapts to build back stronger.

Strategy 8.3



Use local strategic planning and local plans to adapt to climate change and reduce exposure to natural hazards by:

- taking a risk-based-approach to determining natural hazard risk in local strategic planning by using the best available science in consultation with the NSW Government, emergency service providers, local emergency management committees and bush fire risk management committees
- locating development away from areas of known high bushfire risk and flood risk to reduce the community's exposure to natural hazards
- identifying industries and locations that would be negatively impacted as a result of climate change and natural hazards and preparing strategies to mitigate negative impacts and identify new paths for growth
- considering changes to flood hazards resulting from major infrastructure projects (such as Inland Rail and other significant road upgrades) on existing and future land use, flood mitigation options, feasibility studies and updates to floodplain risk management plans
- preparing, reviewing and implementing flood risk management plans in existing and new growth areas to improve community resilience to the impacts of flooding and to enable flood constraints to be incorporated into planning processes early for future development
- updating flood studies and flood risk management plans after a major flood event incorporating new data and lessons learnt
- communicate natural hazard risk through updated flood studies and strategic plans.

Strategy 8.4



Resilience and adaptation plans should consider opportunities to:

- encourage sustainable and resilient building design and materials (such as forest products) including the use of renewable energy to displace carbon intensive or fossil fuel intensive options
- promote sustainable land management including Ecologically Sustainable Forest Management (ESFM)
- address urban heat through building design at precinct scale that considers climate change and future climatic conditions to ensure that buildings and public spaces are designed to protect occupants in the event of heatwaves and extreme heat events
- integrate emergency management and recovery needs into new and existing urban areas including evacuation planning, safe access and egress for emergency services personnel, buffer areas, building back better, whole-of-life cycle maintenance and operation costs for critical infrastructure for emergency management
- promote economic diversity, improved environmental, health and well-being outcomes and opportunities for cultural and social connections to build more resilient places and communities
- protect vulnerable infrastructure assets and mitigate potential network failures.

The NSW Government is commencing the pilot phase of the \$3.9m Regional Drought Resilience Planning Program in FY 21/22. The program will build capacity in rural and regional communities so that they are less vulnerable to the socio-economic impacts of drought and is supported by funding from the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund and NSW Government's Regional Growth Fund. Proposed pilot regions include LGAs in the NENW and, as part of the commitment under **Action 1**, DPE will encourage and support Local Governments to participate in the pilot program as well as any future expansion of the program.

OBJECTIVE 9:

Lead renewable energy technology and investment

Sapphire windfarm, Inverell



Technical innovation is driving changes in energy generation and storage. The future of energy generation is renewable and with potential sources of solar, bio-waste, hydro, wind and geothermal across the New England North West, the region is positioned to be a leader in renewable energy. A strategic and integrated approach to renewable energy projects will leverage new opportunities and contribute to the state's net zero emissions by 2050 target.

Electricity in NSW is still predominantly generated by coal (80%) with most energy assets privately owned. NSW produces a lower percentage of its electricity from renewables than any other state or territory, despite significant investments. With four of the State's five remaining coal-fired generators set to reach the end of their technical lives by 2035, and the appetite for sustainable greener technologies increasing, a regional response to electricity generation is essential.

Approximately one in five (490,000) NSW households and small businesses have solar panels installed. This will increase to almost half of Australia's households and businesses by 2050, and many will also have battery storage and electric vehicles.¹³

Today, wind and solar are the cheapest forms of new electricity generation and the most environmentally friendly. When paired with batteries, pumped hydro or gas-fired generators, they can reliably supply electricity at all times.

The NSW Government's *Electricity Infrastructure Roadmap* is a coordinated framework for a modern electricity system for NSW. It is expected to:

- attract up to \$32 billion in private investment for regional energy infrastructure by 2030
- support an estimated 9,000 jobs, mostly in regional NSW
- help reduce NSW electricity emissions by 90 million tonnes by 2030.

The roadmap sets out a plan for five renewable energy zones (REZs) in the Central West Orana, New England, South West, Hunter Central Coast and Illawarra. The NSW Government's is in the early stages of the REZ in the New England region around Armidale on the lands of the Biripi, Dainggatti, Nganyaywana, Ngarabal, and Gumbainggir people. It has committed \$78.9 million to support development of the New England REZ. This process will be complex, taking a number of years to design and build.

The Minister for Energy will issue guidelines on consultation and negotiation with First Nations communities for energy infrastructure delivered under the Renewable Energy Zones Roadmap.

New England Renewable Energy Zone

The New England REZ is expected to deliver up to 8,000 megawatts of new transmission capacity which will be enough to power 3.5 million homes. Furthermore, it is expected to deliver \$10.7 billion in private investment, around 830 operational jobs and 1,250 construction jobs to the local economy.

There may also be opportunities to leverage the REZ and renewable energy investment elsewhere in the region to attract energy-intensive industries such as minerals processing, data centres, high value agriculture, manufacturing and food processing to maximise the benefits of access to lower-cost energy in the region.

Further opportunities include complementary technologies like energy storage technologies such as pumped hydro, an established form of long duration storage. The NSW Government's Emerging Energy Program awarded pre-investment funding to several pumped hydro projects in New England, including the critical State Significant Infrastructure Owen Mountain Pumped Hydro project.

The NSW Government has also launched a \$50 million Pumped Hydro Recoverable Grants Program that will provide recoverable grants to pumped hydro project developers to assist with the cost of early stage detailed feasibility studies for pumped hydro projects.

The region is also close to the existing high voltage power lines that connect the NSW east coast and Queensland. This provides opportunities to increase NSW's own energy resilience and to export excess energy to Queensland.

Relationships with other land uses

While wind farms have proven to be compatible with existing agricultural uses, there are concerns about the cumulative impacts of solar farms on agricultural land.

The NSW Government supports the development of a sustainable solar energy industry subject to detailed assessment and careful site selection to reduce the likelihood and extent of potential land use conflicts.

The *Large-Scale Solar Energy Guideline* aims to ensure that:

- impacts are assessed with best practice methods and in a consistent manner
- effective stakeholder engagement encourages community input on solar energy development
- there is a balance between attracting investment and considering the interests of the community.

The department recently exhibited a revised *Draft Large-scale Solar Energy Guideline* that has been developed to ensure the assessment of large-scale solar energy projects continues to be transparent, consistent and supported by better information.

In terms of land use conflicts, the guide requires an assessment of the compatibility of the solar project with the existing land uses (particularly agricultural and residential land uses) on the site and adjacent land, during construction, operation and after decommissioning. This requires reference to the zoning provisions applying to the land, and consideration of post-development site restoration and land use. Land zoning should not prohibit environmental initiatives and infrastructure.

To help support the growth of both the renewable energy and agriculture sectors, the Minister for Energy and the Minister for Agriculture and Western NSW announced in March 2022 a taskforce to review the framework for managing issues and opportunities from the forecast growth in the renewable energy and the agricultural sectors in NSW. The NSW Government will consider the recommendations of this review into future planning frameworks.

REZ Infrastructure

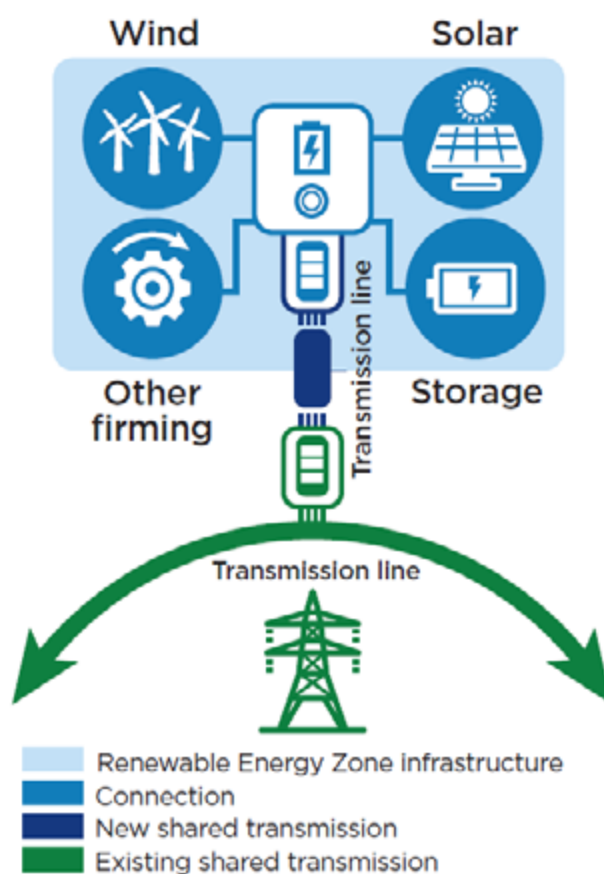




Figure 5: New England Renewable Energy Zone



Bioenergy

Bioenergy is energy derived from plants, animals, and their by-products and residues. It is the world's primary source of renewable energy, providing approximately a tenth of the world's total primary energy.¹⁴ Bioenergy is not a fossil fuel but can be used to fuel cars, for domestic and commercial heat, or to create electricity.

What is Bioenergy?

Growing plants create biomass. Human systems such as agriculture and farming have different uses for the biomass for food, feed or fuel/energy.

This produces wastes and by-products such as crop residue, animal fats and manures that can be used as a fuel to create energy.

While well used overseas, uptake has been slow in Australia. The key opportunity for the region will be to source affordable and local sustainable biomass and develop regional bioenergy industries that can stimulate regional development and employment, while reducing the demand for fossil fuels. Bioenergy projects typically created four ongoing direct jobs and two ongoing indirect jobs per MWe of capacity.

In the New England North West region, biomass industries that may, as an example, be suitable for biogas production include:

- agricultural industry waste such as dairy and meat industries, pig slurry or crop residues
- sludge from wastewater treatment plants
- general biowaste, or organic waste from households.

The NSW Government's *Biomass for Bioenergy Project* is part of the NSW Climate Change Fund (CCF). It aims to identify available and potential feedstocks for bioenergy generation at varying scales, with an understanding of technological, economic and social constraints.

Glen Innes and Tamworth are 2 of 11 active trial sites investigating biomass production for bioenergy under short rotation cycles (3-4 years). The trial targets marginal unproductive areas, such as on farming or mining land. The bioenergy could be used for electricity generation such as combustion using pelletised wood for local energy generation or to feed into the grid and heat generation such as in biomass boilers to heat hospitals, glasshouses and swimming pools.

Adoption of biomass as a dispatchable energy option for electricity generation in NSW will lower emissions, increase energy security and promote socio-economic growth.

Research undertaken by the Department of Primary Industries has determined that concentrating solar power powered by biomass can help to meet supply gaps from wind and solar power.

Strategy 9.1



When developing strategic plans:

- support the development of renewable energy storage options and distributed energy systems that are located close to their point of use
- support effective early community consultation.

Strategy 9.2



When reviewing LEPs and local strategic planning statements:

- ensure current land use zones encourage and promote new renewable energy infrastructure
- identify and mitigate impacts on views, local character and heritage where appropriate
- undertake detailed hazard studies
- encourage energy efficient buildings and use of buildings materials which have been manufactured by some degree of renewable energy.

Collaboration Activity 3



The Department of Primary Industries (Department of Regional NSW) in consultation with the Department of Planning and Environment will investigate opportunities to source affordable biomass and develop regional bioenergy industries to stimulate regional development and employment.



Cattle grazing near Sapphire Wind Farm

OBJECTIVE 10:

Support a circular economy

The circular economy can change how we produce, assemble, sell and use products to minimise waste and to reduce environmental impacts. It maximises the use of valuable resources and contributes to innovation, growth and job creation.

Over the next 20 years, NSW waste generation is projected to grow from 21 million tonnes to over 31 million tonnes. As a result, waste-related freight in NSW is expected to rise by 43% by 2036¹⁵.

The *Circular Economy Policy* aims to support the transition to a circular economy to generate jobs, diversify the economy, increase the accessibility of goods, maximise the value of resources and reduce waste.

Circular economy principles are essential, especially now that Australia faces restrictions in terms of exporting recyclable materials.

The NSW Government is developing a 20-Year Waste Strategy to provide a long-term strategic focus where communities, industry and all levels of government work together to build resilient services and markets for waste resources with a focus on sustainability, reliability and affordability.

Waste from natural disasters is an emerging issue given the increased frequency of events such as flooding and bushfires. This is both a challenge for waste management but also an opportunity for better waste capture and processing.

The New England North West region already accommodates innovative industries in manufacturing, agribusiness and rural production that can adapt to improve the whole supply chain to facilitate a circular economy. For example, the Gwydir Shire Council circular economy initiative incorporates glasshouse horticulture and poultry production.

NSW will transition towards a circular economy by focusing on seven key principles



Sustainable management of all resources



Valuing resource productivity



Design out waste and pollution



Maintain the value of products and materials



Innovate new solutions for resource efficiency



Create new circular economy jobs



Foster behaviour change through education and engagement

Gwydir Shire Council's circular economy initiative

This program aims to increase the level of disposable income for circulation within the Shire and create sustainable economic growth through developing new industry opportunities. It covers:

- Behind the Meter scheme: using power on-site without passing through a meter (e.g. rooftop solar)
- greenhouse development
- a biogas plant
- poultry cluster proposals.

These initiatives are expected to create 1,000 direct jobs and many more secondary supporting jobs.

Most councils are beginning to prioritise and demonstrate innovation and leadership in dealing with waste management. Gwydir Shire will commence a circular economy initiative around Warialda and/or Bingara townships to enable a 'closed-loop' economy, whereby all outputs become either inputs for other activities or are returned to natural systems as benign emissions rather than pollutants. Tamworth Regional Council's solid waste and energy efficient initiatives encourage and recognise sustainable practices.

Other initiatives are centred around waste minimisation through education, technology advances, high tech landfill alternatives, improving waste minimisation facilities and creating a regional recycling facility industry hub at Goddard Lane. Northern Inland Regional Waste is a regional waste group that leads a number of programs and works collaboratively for better waste management and resource recovery outcomes.

Councils will need to invest in renewable energy technologies, circular economy waste solutions and sustainable transport services in a net zero future.



Armidale Recycling Centre

Strategy 10.1



Support the development of circular economy, hubs, infrastructure and activities and consider employment opportunities that may arise from circular economies and industries that harness or develop renewable energy technologies and will aspire towards an employment profile that displays a level of economic self-reliance, and resilience to external forces.

Strategy 10.2



Use strategic planning and waste management strategies to support a circular economy, including dealing with waste from natural disasters and opportunities for new industry specialisations.

Strategy 10.3



Consider freight access, capacity and interface issues. Facilities will need to be located to accommodate required freight movements.

OBJECTIVE 11:

Sustainably manage and conserve water resources

Secure and safe drinking water is the foundation for strong communities and successful industries. The region's water sources include:

- major water storages of Glenlyon (Queensland), Pindari, Copeton, Split Rock, Keepit, Malpas, and Chaffey Dams
- Oaky and Styx Dams, which are undergoing business case investigations
- the Macintyre, Dumaresq, Severn, Gwydir, Namoi and Peel Rivers
- several groundwater sources.

Recycled water from local water utilities, local runoff captured in farm dams and water captured through floodplain harvesting are also important water sources within the region.

Changes in climate and improved evidence and information around climate has helped us to understand that regional NSW is having longer wet and dry periods and overall, less rainfall. The risk on town water and agricultural supplies is now higher than previously estimated. We need to diversify the economy and become less reliant on water.

State and regional water strategies

The *NSW Water Strategy* together with the 12 regional water strategies form the strategic planning framework for water management in NSW.

The New England North West Planning region covers four different regional water strategies –Border Rivers, Gwydir, Namoi and North Coast. These regional water strategies are due to be finalised in 2022.

The Regional Plan supports the Regional Water Strategies' initiatives to improve surface and groundwater security and reliability, by addressing regulatory barriers, improving policies and processes and investing in new infrastructure.

Water planning

The NSW Government has put in place plans for sharing water and established clear water rights and a market for trading these rights. These reforms provide for the sustainable, equitable and efficient allocation of water and for achieving better economic, cultural, social and environmental outcomes. NSW has a well-established and secure system for planning, licensing, issuing entitlements and making allocations of water to different users –but these are put to the test during extreme drought.

The NSW Government is implementing a range of significant reforms to improve water management in recent years. These include:

- improving water and sewage services for Aboriginal communities
- improving water supply and sewerage services for regional communities
- implementing the Murray–Darling Basin Plan
- improving compliance and transparency
- introducing new metering laws
- fast-tracking the NSW approvals process
- improving the management of environmental water
- recognising Aboriginal people's water rights, interests and access to water
- reforming the management of floodplain harvesting.

Lake Keepit

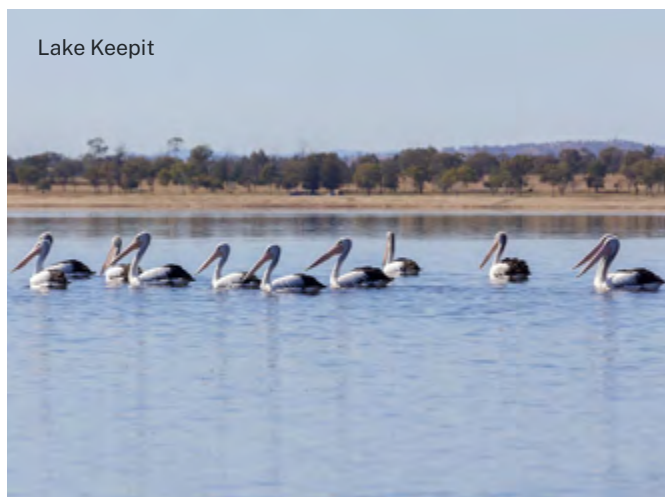




Figure 6: Water catchments



-  Regional boundary
-  Metropolitan city
-  Regional city
-  Strategic centre
-  Centre
-  Waterways

Land use and water planning

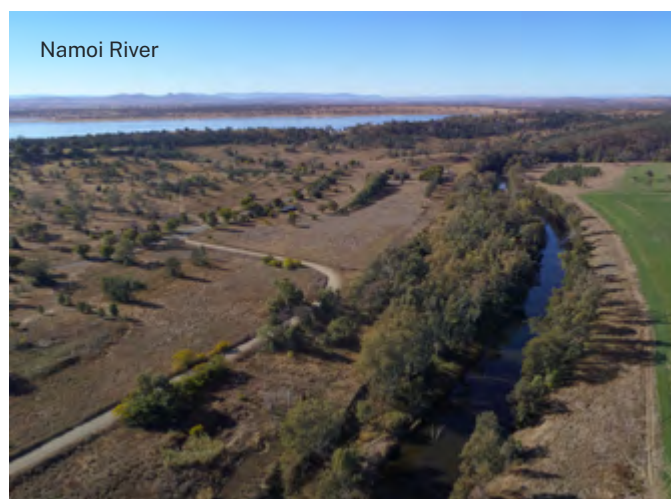
At the beginning of 2020, the entire state of NSW was in drought, with the recent drought in the Murray–Darling Basin the most intense on record, occurring in the context of rising temperature – the last 7 years in the Basin were among the 10 warmest on record (and 2019 the warmest).

Our planning for the New England North West region needs to balance different water uses as climatic conditions change. However, the region's communities and primary producers have adjusted to variable annual rainfall and river flows, and past droughts, with government and industry investment in private and public water storages, groundwater bores and water use efficiency improvements.

Despite these improvements, reliance on traditional climate-dependent water sources by towns, cities, tourism and industry needs to be reduced, and waterways protected. To meet these challenges, the types of industries suited to different parts of the region may need to be reconsidered, or technology leveraged to reduce water demand and use water more efficiently. We also need to better manage groundwater and make more use of recycled wastewater and stormwater.

Improved water reliability is critical to enable new high value industries and support economic diversification in the region, including the growing tourism industry and opportunities offered by the Moree and Narrabri SAP, Inland Rail and investment in renewable energy.

In the context of the capped and fully allocated systems, water use efficiency, water re-use and recycling measures, as well as effective sharing of existing or new water infrastructure could provide a catalyst for new high value industries and support economic diversification. For example, closures or changes to ongoing operations could allow water and water infrastructure to be beneficially re-used to support towns, the natural environment or other industries such as tourism.



Namoi River

The early consideration of water quality and supply in strategic planning is needed to ensure that the region's water supply is secure and resilient. Planning needs to consider whether adequate supply is available to support new development and that new and intensified development is designed to protect the region's water resources.

The location of development should mitigate risks to water sources and the environment while minimising negative effects on the broader catchments. The NSW Government's *Risk-Based Framework for Considering Waterway Health Outcomes in Strategic Land-use Planning Decisions* (2017) supports this process.

Councils can also develop and implement integrated water cycle management strategies (IWCM). The NSW Government's Safe and Secure Water Program allows councils to develop IWCM strategies and to deliver capital projects that address risks to town water supply, water quality and the environment across the state.

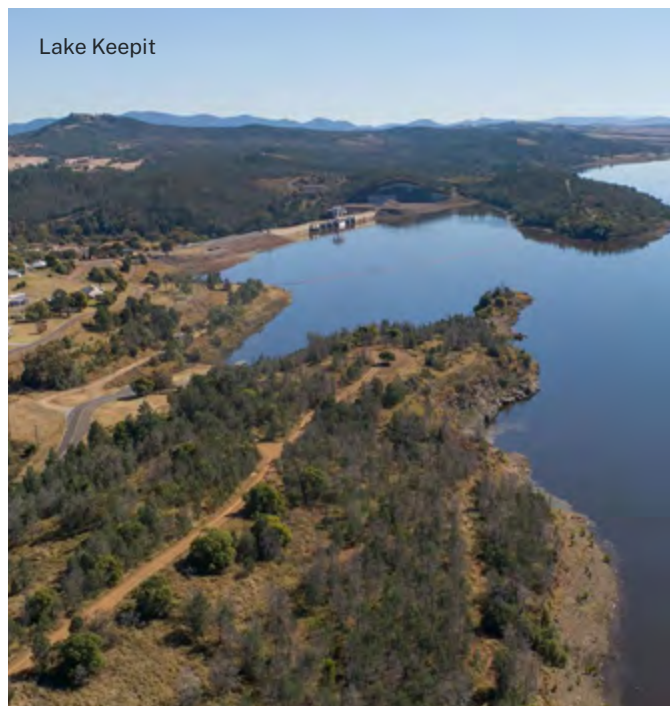
Groundwater

Many towns rely on groundwater as a primary or alternative source of water. Groundwater is also an important source of water for industries, landholders and irrigators who rely on groundwater extraction to support their activities, as well as for domestic and stock use.

Groundwater directly supports ecosystems and provides base flow to rivers which in turn support ecosystems across the region. Over-extraction or contamination of groundwater can have serious, long-term and sometimes permanent impacts on groundwater. This may ultimately reduce the volume and quality of water available for the users and ecosystems that depend on this groundwater.

Namoi Unlimited Joint Organisation (Namoi JO) developed a Water for the Future Strategy, which found there is a lack of knowledge regarding the security of water supply for the majority of towns across the Namoi JO. The region does not have large quantities of untapped or excess water that can readily be accessed and the opportunity for new large-scale dams with potential to open up new regional industries is low. The Namoi (Gunnedah Shire Council, Gwydir Shire Council, Liverpool Plains Shire Council, Tamworth Regional Council and Walcha Council) is one of the most highly used groundwater regions in NSW, therefore there is limited spare capacity available.

Locations without groundwater access or access to a regulated river water source are significantly more constrained and are likely to continue to rely on rainfall for water supply. The availability of water should be taken into account when shaping regional development to promote sustainable growth.

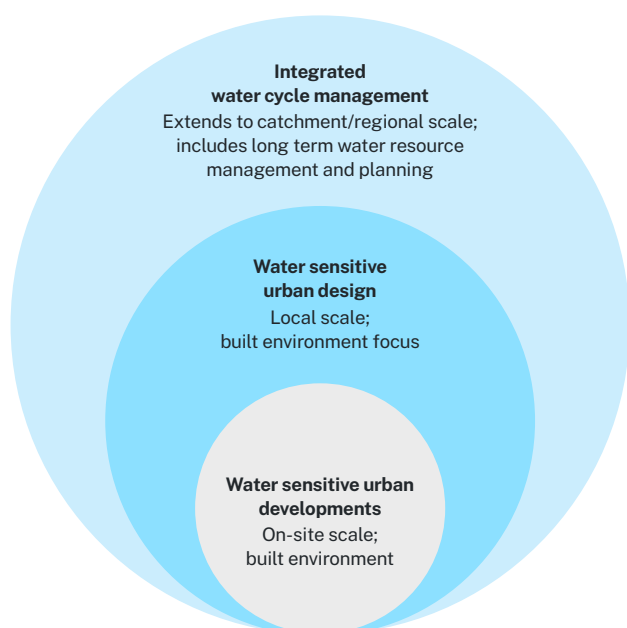


Lake Keepit

Water sensitive urban design

Water sensitive urban design is the application of integrated water cycle management principles in urban planning and design to achieve better urban water management outcomes. It can extend the life and reliability of water supplies.

Councils can improve water efficiency through building design; planning controls that avoid or mitigate impacts of development on drinking water catchments; using wastewater for council parks or in agriculture and by introducing demand management measures.



Strategy 11.1



Strategic planning and local plans should consider:

- impacts to water quality from land use change
- water supply availability and issues, constraints and opportunities early in the planning process
- partnering with local Aboriginal communities to care for Country and waterways
- locating, designing, constructing and managing new developments to minimise impacts on water catchments, including downstream waterways and groundwater resources
- possible future diversification of town water sources, including groundwater, stormwater harvesting and recycling
- promoting an integrated water cycle management approach to development
- encouraging the reuse of water in new developments for urban greening and for irrigation purposes
- improving provision for stormwater management and water sensitive urban design
- ensuring sustainable development of higher-water use industries by considering water availability and constraints, supporting more efficient water use and reuse, and locating development where water can be accessed without significantly impacting on other water users or the environment
- identifying and protecting drinking water catchments and storages in strategic planning and local plans.

Strategy 11.2



Encourage a whole of catchment approach to land use and water management across the region that considers climate change, water security, sustainable demand and growth, the natural environment and investigate options for water management through innovation.

OBJECTIVE 12:

Protect regional biodiversity and areas of High Environmental Value

The New England North West contains both nationally and internationally important areas of environmental value including the Washpool, Gibraltar Range, Oxley Wild Rivers and New England National Parks, which are part of the World Heritage-listed Gondwana Rainforests of Australia. Near Narrabri, the ancient volcano of Mount Kaputar rises 1,400m above sea level. Near Moree, the Gwydir Wetlands State Conservation Area is one of the most significant inland wetland systems in NSW.

The region also contains Montane Peatlands and Swamps of the New England Tableland, which is listed as an Endangered Ecological Community within NSW and Endangered under Commonwealth legislation.

The Aboriginal community has significant knowledge and skills in the protection of local biodiversity and natural resources and should be involved in natural resource management and planning.

The scenic and cultural landscapes of New England North West contribute to the identity and culture of the region. Preserving and enhancing natural scenic and cultural landscapes encourages an appreciation of the natural environment, protects heritage and culture, and creates economic opportunities, particularly for recreation and tourism.

Scenic and cultural landscapes can complement green infrastructure, improve sustainability, liveability and productivity of the region. It can complement green infrastructure and the protection of biodiversity and habitat, help manage natural hazards and support tourism. Protecting scenic and cultural landscapes can also help preserve links to Aboriginal cultural heritage. Acknowledging and caring for the assets and natural landscapes that represent cultural heritage while supporting community wellbeing is important in preserving their future. Careful planning and design is required to integrate all types of development sustainably and appropriately.

High Environmental Value Land

The region's environmental assets include protected reserve lands, biodiversity corridors, National Parks, Conservation Areas and dedicated Crown land. These assets make the region a great place to live and visit and provide a range of habitats for ecological diversity. However, more than 70 per cent of the biodiversity of NSW is located on private land. Therefore, private land conservation needs to play a much larger role in sustaining the region's biodiversity.

To protect, maintain and enhance biodiversity, High Environmental Value (HEV) land needs to be identified at the site scale and biodiversity corridors developed for the region to inform strategic planning, local environmental plans and planning proposals.

Strategic planning, such as preparing local growth management strategies, rural settlement and housing strategies, should ensure new or more intensive development is located in areas of least biodiversity sensitivity. Actions to identify and protect HEV land should also be included in local strategic plans and biodiversity strategies.

Using an evidence-based approach to identifying HEV land and protecting important assets will help to maintain diversity and habitat for flora and fauna to achieve the environmental objectives of the regional plan.

Avoiding impacts on, and protecting, identified HEV land at the planning proposal stage provides greater certainty and reduces the need for further biodiversity assessment and offsetting at development stage. This can drive more efficient and streamlined development processes.

At development stage, any residual biodiversity impacts are considered under the Biodiversity Offset Scheme which is based on the 'avoid, minimise and offset' hierarchy. The scheme uses a transparent, consistent and scientific approach to assessing biodiversity values and offsetting the impacts of development on biodiversity.

Criteria for mapping high environmental value lands

Potential lands with high environmental value are shown at the regional scale in the High Environmental Values map and include;

- land with high biodiversity value that is particularly sensitive to impacts from development and clearing (as shown on the NSW Government's Biodiversity Values map)
- native vegetation of high conservation value, including vegetation types that have been over cleared or occur within over cleared landscapes, threatened ecological communities, old growth forest and rainforest
- key habitat of threatened species
- important wetlands
- areas of geological significance.

The HEV map in this plan is for display at a regional scale. This mapping is not appropriate for use at a property scale. To identify HEV at the property scale for planning proposals, investigations will be required, including field work.

Strategy 12.1



Protect, maintain and restore important environmental assets in strategic planning and local plans by:

- focusing land-use intensification away from HEV land and implementing the 'avoid, minimise and offset' hierarchy in strategic plans, local environmental plans and planning proposals
- updating existing biodiversity mapping with new mapping in local environmental plans where appropriate
- identifying HEV land within the rezoning area at planning proposal stage through site investigations
- applying appropriate mechanisms such as conservation zones and Biodiversity Stewardship Agreements to protect HEV land within a rezoning area
- considering climate change risks to HEV land
- considering riparian environments, water catchment areas and groundwater sources to avoid potential development impacts.

Strategy 12.2



Support the Biodiversity Conservation Trust in delivering private land conservation programs by:

- educating landholders on conservation outcomes and financial opportunities available through conservation agreements on private land
- encouraging and supporting landholders to participate in private land conservation
- encouraging landholders to prioritise investment in biodiversity corridors and linkages
- supporting Aboriginal communities to participate.

Strategy 12.3



Protect, maintain and enhance HEV on public land by assessing council managed land for the presence of HEV to identify land suitable for conservation agreements.

Strategy 12.4



Consider the needs of climate refugia for threatened species and other key species in strategic planning including biodiversity and conservation planning.

Action 2



Facilitate the improvement and timely sharing of validated spatial data on biodiversity values via the NSW Planning Portal.

Action 3



Work with and assist councils to:

- review biodiversity mapping and related local environmental plan and development control plan provisions
- improve access to data to enable identification of protected areas including NPWS Estate, Crown Reserves and in-perpetuity private land conservation agreements to inform local planning
- ensure koala habitat values are included in land-use planning decisions through regional plans, local strategic planning statements and local environmental plans consistent with the *NSW Koala Strategy 2022* Action 1.9. This will assist to mitigate koala habitat loss and deliver long-term habitat protections for koalas.



Figure 7: Environmental assets



- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| Regional boundary | World heritage area |
| Regional city | Potential high environmental value land |
| Strategic centre | National park and reserve |
| Centre | State forest |
| | Water body |

Biodiversity corridors

Vegetated areas such as travelling stock reserves and other significant roadside vegetation can have important roles as riparian or terrestrial biodiversity corridors. These corridors can help protect waterways and aquatic environments.

Climate change can have a physical impact on biodiversity. After recent bushfires and flooding, ecological experts believe that some endangered species may have been driven to extinction. It is imperative to build resilience into the region's existing biodiversity areas, as areas of higher biodiversity are more able to adapt and respond to changes and disturbances.

Travelling Stock Reserves (TSRs) provide supplementary grazing areas in times of drought and when stock is being transported, but also contribute to important biodiversity corridors. TSRs provide corridors connecting otherwise isolated patches of vegetation and habitat. They are often located on fertile soils and in over-cleared landscapes and support a range of threatened species and ecological communities. TSRs provide important refugia and often contain the most intact and representative remnant native vegetation in that area. These reserves can contain significant biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural heritage values and must be carefully managed to balance the needs of travelling stock and the conservation.

Strategy 12.5



Councils should preserve, enhance and link existing and potential biodiversity corridors across the region and avoid further fragmentation of these linkages, by:

- including biodiversity corridor mapping in LEPs as a map overlay with associated clause
- identifying land with connectivity values and opportunities for landholders to voluntarily participate in corridor enhancement/ active rehabilitation/ restoration projects that strengthen and enhance regional connectivity
- review land zonings on land where there are opportunities to protect high priority corridor areas.

Strategy 12.6



Strategic planning and local plans should consider opportunities to:

- use available TSR mapping and categorisation methods to identify potential biodiversity corridors and linkages in the local landscape
- establish relevant partnerships with LALCs and other councils to protect and manage TSRs
- include TSRs in biodiversity corridor mapping in LEPs.



Mystery Face Rock



Identify and conserve biodiversity values when planning new communities

Terrestrial biodiversity assets must be identified and protected when planning new urban growth areas and other urban/peri-urban residential development. Understanding the general degree of biodiversity loss upfront will avoid or minimise impacts – for example, by locating future new development away from areas of HEV.

Any new housing communities must be developed in a way that protects HEV while being resilient to hazards such as bushfire and flooding. When considering future dwelling supply and the potential of strategic land for housing, a strategic conservation plan should be prepared that includes biodiversity mapping to identify and protect areas of HEV by applying appropriate land use zones and other planning controls to such areas.

Biodiversity certification provides the opportunity for strategic conservation planning at the precinct or landscape scale. Biodiversity certification improves certainty for development and streamlines biodiversity assessment and approval processes for councils.

Strategy 12.7



Protect biodiversity values in urban release areas. Strategic planning and local plans should consider opportunities to:

- incorporate validated and up-to-date environmental data
- encourage biodiversity certification by councils at the precinct scale for high growth areas and by individual landholders at the site scale, where appropriate
- focus land use intensification away from areas of identified HEV and protect HEV with planning controls
- use buffers to separate or manage incompatible land uses and thereby minimise impacts on biodiversity.

PART

4

Housing and place



Moree Bank Art Gallery



Glen Innes Town Centre

PART

4

Housing and place

Around 8,542 additional homes will be needed across the region over the period from 2021 to 2041¹⁶. The New England North West requires greater housing diversity to attract and retain younger residents while supporting people who want to stay in their local area as they get older. Affordable quality housing is required in the right locations with interesting public spaces.

Growth is expected to be focused around Moree and the regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale. Increasing proportions of older single and couple only households are expected to drive increased demand for smaller dwellings and low maintenance housing

options. This in turn, could make existing larger homes available for the next generation of families.

People should be at the heart of public realm revitalisations, with public space designed to encourage people to spend time outside by providing shade, safe places for people to walk and ride bikes, points of interest and amenities that make places feel comfortable.

Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage should be more visible in the region's cities, towns and villages. Important landscapes, places, objects, sites and stories will be preserved and celebrated.

In June 2021 the NSW Government established a Regional Housing Taskforce in response to increasing pressures on the supply and affordability of housing in regional NSW. The Regional Housing Taskforce identified 8 principles and 5 key recommendations to support regional housing delivery.

Collectively, the strategies, actions and collaboration activities contained in this Regional Plan have been informed by and are aligned to the Taskforce's recommendations and will set in place the strategic framework for localised responses.

In August 2022, the NSW Government adopted all recommendations of the Regional Housing Taskforce as part of a comprehensive response to support delivery of 127,000 new homes needed to house the growing population of the regions over the next 10 years.



Housing in Tamworth. Credit: Destination NSW

OBJECTIVE 13:

Provide well located housing options to meet demand

Glen Innes Town Centre



The most recent housing approvals data indicates that 701 dwellings were approved in 2021. It is anticipated that most of these approvals will be developed in the short term.

The theoretical or underlying demand for the number of new homes required in the region is derived from population projections. These numbers are primarily driven by migration and demographic factors. On average, 427 additional dwellings will be required annually for the region between 2021-2041, based on projections. Demand for this additional housing will be driven from Tamworth, Moree, Armidale, and Gunnedah, and Inverell LGAs. The demand will be primarily due to household formation from a growing population and lifecycle changes.

Localised supply issues may arise and will need to be carefully monitored by councils. The available supply and demand data suggest that some LGAs, such as Armidale Regional Council, could experience a housing shortage over the long term if recent trends persist. Through Local Strategic Planning Statements and Local Housing Strategies, councils are required to undertake studies to facilitate a sufficient quantity and mix of land for residential and related purposes. The Department's Local Housing Strategy Guideline and Template was prepared to support councils to develop local housing strategies.

Housing diversity

Housing diversity includes aspects such as lot sizes, the number of bedrooms, density, or whether housing is suitable for seniors, students or people with a disability or being culturally responsive for Aboriginal communities. Planning for a diversity of housing choices gives people more options at different stages of life and reduces pressure for greenfield release areas on farmland and biodiversity.

In 2021, around 90% of all dwellings in the New England North West region were lower density single detached houses¹⁷. However, this existing pattern of development is changing. Data showing council approvals from 2014-2018 indicates an increased share of multi-unit approvals, particularly in Armidale. In 2016-2017, single dwellings accounted for 78% of all residential approvals, and multi-unit housing made up 22% of the total residential approvals across the region¹⁸.

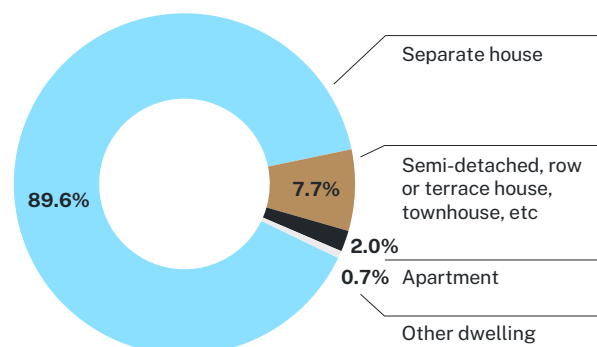
Three and four bedroom homes dominate the region's housing stock. Only around 5% of dwellings are studios or have one bedroom. Relatively high proportions of smaller dwellings are found in the Tenterfield LGA which may reflect transitory populations. The regional city of Tamworth aligns more closely with the average number of bedrooms per dwelling for the region.

Smaller homes with fewer bedrooms can provide the option of lower cost and lower maintenance lifestyles. Demand for this type of housing is expected to increase over time due to an increasing proportion of lone-person and couple households. Many of these lone people and couple households will be in older age groups. The movement of these households into new dwellings presents opportunities for younger families to move into established larger homes. On average 2.35 people live in each home in 2021. This is projected to decline to 2.26 by 2041. In Tenterfield and Glen Innes, the projected average household size at 2041 is 1.88 and 2 respectively. A mix of smaller low maintenance dwellings will be important to provide options for smaller households.

Housing diversity 2021

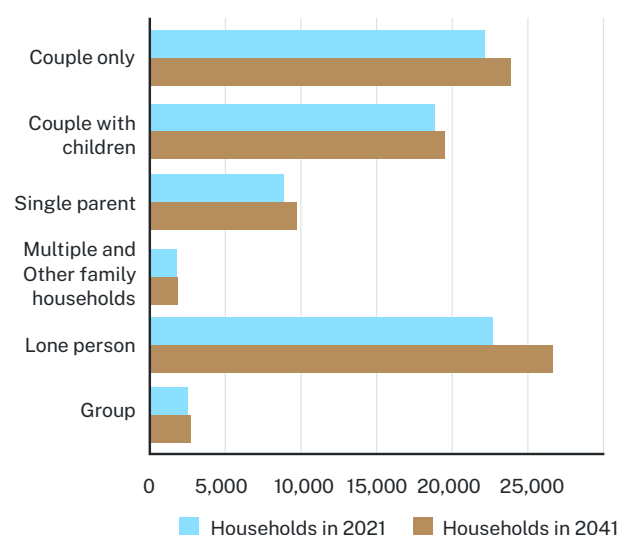
Source: ABS Census 2021.

Excluding visitor only and other non-classifiable households)



Household composition projection 2021-2041

Source: NSW 2022 Population Projections



Saddlers Estate, Tenterfield



Infill, greenfield, and rural residential development

A mix of well-planned infill, greenfield and rural residential locations will be essential. When developing local housing strategies, infill housing is to be prioritised as it takes advantage of existing infrastructure and services and is a more sustainable option. Infill development increases the viability of public and active transport and education facilities, while protecting valuable agricultural and environmental land. Local shopping centres also benefit from proximity to a larger base of customers.

Conversely, rural residential housing, can be costly to service and unsustainable and may conflict with important agricultural, urban industrial or resource lands and increase pressure for new services and infrastructure outside existing settlements. New rural residential housing must promote sustainable land use outcomes.

Housing for an ageing population

Walcha is the only LGA projected to see an increase in the working age groups as a share of its population, and a lower proportion of older people by 2041. The other LGAs are projected to see an increase in older age groups and a declining (or stable) share of working age people. By 2041, 24% of the community will be 65 and older.

Older people should have the ability to be comfortably housed as they age, whether they choose to stay in their home, downsize, or move into seniors housing. Helping older people to stay in their local area may require accessibility supports and lower maintenance homes. A greater mix of choices near easy-to-access services will also assist people seeking to downsize. It is important that suitable housing is well located and integrated into communities, so that people can retain family, community and cultural connections.

Accommodation for seasonal and itinerant workers

The region sees influxes of seasonal and itinerant workers that support agricultural industries during harvest or sowing periods. Major construction projects can also attract temporary workers. The temporary influx results in an increased demand for accommodation at different times of the year. An undersupply of accommodation options for these workers can result in upward pressure on rents and health and safety concerns from overcrowding and makeshift housing. For example, recent high demand for rentals in Moree has led to a very tight market.

While land uses such as boarding houses, hostels, backpackers' accommodation, and caravan parks are likely to attract seasonal and itinerant workers, any form of residential or tourist and visitor accommodation can be used by the workers. No single form of accommodation in the Standard Instrument LEP caters solely to seasonal or temporary workers. Councils have a range of options to plan for and manage accommodation for seasonal and itinerant workers under the NSW planning system.

The Department is currently investigating standard planning pathways for temporary worker accommodation. To complement these approval pathways, the Department will also develop an assessment guide. The assessment guide will provide direction on the preferred locations for such facilities and guidance on development assessment matters.

Strategy 13.1



Local housing strategies are to be consistent with the *Local Housing Strategy Guideline* and the regional plan.

Strategy 13.2



Ensure local plans encourage and facilitate a range of housing options in well located areas to accommodate the projected household change.

Strategy 13.3



New rural residential housing is to be located on land which has been approved in an existing strategy endorsed by the Department of Planning and Environment.

Action 4



Work with Armidale Regional Council on the preparation and implementation of a Local Housing Strategy.

Action 5



Monitor housing supply and completions in the region.

Action 6



Release a standard planning pathway and development assessment guide to help councils plan for and manage accommodation options for seasonal and itinerant workers.

OBJECTIVE 14:

Provide more affordable and low cost housing

Two key aims of the NSW planning system are the delivery and maintenance of affordable housing and the promotion of housing affordability. Affordable housing has a vital role to play in providing homes, particularly for households with low or very low incomes. Affordable housing is defined in the EP&A Act 1979 as housing for very low income households, low income households or moderate income households. Housing affordability relates to the capacity of individuals or households to enter the rental and privately owned housing markets. It is a broad concern and not limited to those on low to moderate incomes.

In the NSW planning system, affordable housing provides for rental housing that is available at discounted rates. In the New England North West region there are a number of affordable housing providers, such as Homes North.

The Housing SEPP (formerly State Environmental Planning Policy 70 Affordable Housing Revised Schemes) was expanded to include all councils across NSW in 2018. Should councils choose to utilise the SEPP, the next step in the process would be the preparation of an affordable housing contribution scheme and the amendment of their local environmental plans (LEPs).

Councils should also consider providing for low cost dwelling types in their local plans. Homes with fewer bedrooms or car parking spaces, smaller lots, or on strata title will tend to provide cheaper housing options. Low cost dwellings can complement the formally classified affordable housing. A key benefit is that this type of housing can be purchased or rented. Low-cost types of housing can also be achieved in the conventional housing market without the need for ongoing management and without impacting the financial feasibility of other development. Low cost housing types also remain relatively low cost in perpetuity, unlike some affordable housing dwellings which revert to market rates after 10 years or another period.



Right: Moree Town Centre

Improve housing affordability

The strong economy in the New England North West region is welcomed, but it does put upward pressure on house prices in some areas. Housing stress occurs when lower-income households spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent or mortgage costs. Based on 2016 Australian Bureau of Statistics data, 30 per cent of low income households in the region were experiencing purchase housing stress, while 44 per cent of low income households were experiencing rental stress¹⁹. Very low income groups experience higher levels of housing stress.

Finding homes to meet varying needs and budgets can be a challenge for households in the region. Across their lifetimes, people may need homes of a certain size, configuration, accessibility or location. Changing attitudes such as preferences for lower maintenance, energy efficiency, adaptability and places that are within walking distance of shops, services or public transport, combined with the scarcity of well-located land, are also expected to drive a need for smaller and more affordable housing types. Housing that meets the needs of residents on a range of incomes will also help reduce social disadvantage.

Planning for a diversity of housing choices gives more people more options at different stages of life, and different levels of affordability. Housing diversity extends into aspects such as lot sizes, the number of bedrooms, or whether housing is suitable for seniors, students or people with a disability.

Action 7

Establish a New England North West Housing Affordability Roundtable with councils, community housing providers, State agencies and the housing development industry to collaborate, build knowledge and identify measures to improve affordability and increase housing diversity.



Social housing

The NSW Government builds and renews social housing in the region for people who need it. Social housing is secure and affordable rental housing for people on low incomes with housing needs. It includes public, community and Aboriginal housing.

In June 2019, the region had 19 public housing dwellings, 3,327 community housing dwellings and 611 Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) dwellings. Median wait times to access social housing has slowly been dropping across NSW but more work will be needed in the future to address the anticipated growth and ageing of the population in the region.

The Department of Family and Community Services is preparing a 20-year plan to address the social housing needs, including homelessness, in the region. The plan will consider current and required social housing assets and the resources needed to meet any social housing targets. In the New England North West Region, Tamworth is likely to be a focal point for additional social housing given it is a large centre with more development opportunities compared to some smaller centres.

Housing diversity will remain important, as available housing does not always match the needs of occupants who might be better served by smaller homes or multi dwelling housing.

Strategy 14.1

Assess the potential to renew social housing to increase and diversify social housing stock.



Aboriginal Housing Office

The NSW Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO) provides quality social and affordable housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, recognising that secure, affordable housing can help to address disadvantage and provide opportunities for Aboriginal people. The AHO is jointly funded by the NSW and Australian governments to administer the State-owned Aboriginal housing assets. In 2021 the AHO owns 793 homes in the New England North West, in a mix of dwelling types.

The AHO demand model forecasts a 41% increase in Aboriginal housing demand across the New England North West over the 10-year period from 2021 to 2031. The model suggests an additional 3,923 dwellings will be required to meet the housing needs of the area's growing Aboriginal population over the period, including 1,743 social housing properties to support low income households.

Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy

Housing 2041 sets a long-term vision and objectives for better housing outcomes across NSW. *Housing 2041* will benefit people across the housing spectrum, from those temporarily without a home to those seeking housing that better suits their needs. The Strategy also acknowledges that people and households move back and forth along the spectrum depending on life events, aspirations and capacity.

OBJECTIVE 15:

Understand, respect and integrate Aboriginal culture and heritage



Gunnedah Rainbow Serpent water feature

The New England North West is rich in Aboriginal cultural heritage. Significant cultural sites and Aboriginal places include the resting place of the spiritual creature, Garriya (the rainbow serpent) at Boobera Lagoon and the Myall Creek Massacre and Memorial Site.

In 2016, just under one third (265,685 people) of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population lived in NSW. The New England North West region celebrates a diverse population, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making up 12% of the total population, a higher proportion than Regional NSW (6%) or NSW (3%).

The connection of Aboriginal communities to their ancestral country is a result of passing down histories and place awareness through generations. Conserving this heritage and respecting the Aboriginal community's right to determine how it is identified and managed, will preserve some of the

world's longest-standing spiritual, historical, social and educational values. Consultation processes on future land use planning should acknowledge, respect and consider Aboriginal interests and responsibilities through the planning process.

Engagement and partnerships can be formally established through a Reconciliation Action Plan, which sets out what organisations can do to build strong relationships, respect and opportunities within organisations and communities.

The Geographical Names Board of NSW Place Naming Policy supports dual naming for geographical features and cultural sites. The policy aims to give prominence to Aboriginal place names alongside European counterparts. Through place naming, communities can celebrate local language and provide a sense of belonging, identity and understanding.



Gunnedah Rainbow Serpent water feature

Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment

OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) is the NSW Government's community-focused plan for Aboriginal affairs. It aims to support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and participate fully in social, economic and cultural life.

The Aboriginal community in NSW is characterised by its proximity to many towns and cities, and the *OCHRE Strategy* identifies this as an opportunity to improve service delivery and to boost education and meaningful economic participation.

Caring for Country

For First Nations people, 'Country' encompasses an interdependent relationship between an individual and their ancestral lands and seas. This reciprocal relationship between the land and people is sustained by the environment and cultural knowledge.

'Caring for Country' means participating in interrelated activities on Aboriginal lands and seas with the objective of promoting ecological, spiritual and human health. It is a community driven movement towards long-term social, cultural, physical and sustainable economic development in rural and remote locations, simultaneously contributing to the conservation of globally valued environmental and cultural assets.²⁰

Connecting with Country

Case study – Gunnedah Rainbow Serpent Water Feature Project

The Gunnedah Rainbow Serpent Water Feature Project has delivered a large seating area in the shape and design that symbolises and pays respect to the traditional Kamilaroi story of the Rainbow Serpent. The water feature is located in front of Gunnedah's Cultural Precinct.

The continuum of Aboriginal history and culture should be a visible part of NSW's built and natural environment.

Government Architect NSW is working with recognised Aboriginal knowledge holders and professionals as well as the design industry, government and community to develop practical guidance about how to Design with Country.

The Connecting with Country framework recognises the clear need for tools and strategies to assist both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities to share knowledge about Aboriginal places as well as places of shared cultural and heritage significance – and to understand how we can all work to respect and protect sensitive sites and to strengthen culture. Connecting with Country has three strategic goals:

1. Impacts of natural events such as fire, drought and flooding, exacerbated by unsustainable land and water-use practices, will be reduced.
2. Aboriginal cultural knowledge will be valued and respected. Aboriginal knowledge holders will co-lead design and development of all NSW infrastructure projects.
3. Aboriginal people will have access to their homelands so they can continue their responsibility to care for Country and protect sensitive sites.

Connecting with Country calls for project teams, and their leaders in particular, to make a clear commitment to value Country, and by extension, Aboriginal culture and people.

Strategy 15.1

Consider applying dual names to important places, features or local infrastructure.



Action 8

Finalise Connecting with Country to inform the planning, design and delivery of built environment projects.



OBJECTIVE 16:

Support the aspirations of Aboriginal people and communities in local planning

The New England North West region supports the economic self-determination and aspirations of Aboriginal people and communities in local planning. This will enable Aboriginal communities to have greater choice, access and agency over land, water, housing and resources. It can also positively contribute to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap target of a 15% increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests by 2030²¹.

Local Aboriginal Land Councils in New England North West

LALCs are central to the Aboriginal land rights network. LALCs work to improve, protect and foster the best interests of all Aboriginal people within their area.

The 21 LALCs in the New England North West region are Collarenebri, Mungindi, Toomelah, Moree, Wee Waa, Narrabri, Moombahlene, Ashford, Glen Innes, Anaiwan, Guyra, Tamworth, Armidale, Red Chief, Amaroo, Nungaroo, Walhallow, Muli Muli, Jabullum, Jana Ngalee and Baryulgil Square.

The Regional Plan commits to working collaboratively with each LALC to build capacity for shared knowledge, constructive relationships, and meaningful approaches to strengthen economic self-determination.



Left: Livvi's Place Inclusive Playground, Gunnedah



Aboriginal rock paintings of the Kamilaroi people that can be explored with Len Waters Aboriginal Cultural Tours in Tamworth.
Credit: Destination NSW

Aboriginal Land Claims and Native Title

The *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* was passed by NSW Parliament to provide land rights to Aboriginal people in NSW for the historic dispossession of these people from their traditional lands. Likewise, under the *Commonwealth Native Title Act 1993*, holders are also returned land as part of settlement of native title claims. Land rights generate economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits and costs for landowners, users and managers.

LALCs are established under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* to claim land. Native Title holders and claimants can also hold land, and once granted or transferred, they both activate, utilise and manage land as an economic resource for Aboriginal communities, laying the basis for a self-reliant and more secure economic future.

Successfully claiming the ownership of land is an important precursor to LALCs and Native Title holders making use of the planning system.

The NSW Government is committed to the prompt, equitable and efficient resolution of Aboriginal Land Claims on Crown land to Aboriginal communities. This also recognises that in many circumstances native title interests may still exist in that land. Resolving land claims and negotiations will benefit Aboriginal communities and pave the way for strategic and collaborative land use opportunities.

State agencies and councils have varying levels of knowledge about the land ownership and aspirations of LALCs and Native Title holders, which impacts the ability to work collaboratively on location-specific matters. Building the capacity for shared knowledge about Aboriginal land can help to create more effective relationships between LALCs, Native Title holders, State agencies, and councils.

Aboriginal Land Planning Framework

The *Aboriginal Land Planning Framework* is a comprehensive set of planning measures to assist LALCs across NSW achieve better economic outcomes from their land and strengthen the economic self-determination of Aboriginal communities.

The *State Environmental Planning Policy (Aboriginal Land) 2019* (Aboriginal Land SEPP) and associated planning measures seek to provide LALCs with alternative options in developing their landholdings. For land where the Aboriginal Land SEPP applies, LALCs can utilise an alternative pathway for rezoning proposals. Development Delivery Plans – strategic plans for priority LALC land – can then be considered during the assessment of planning proposals and development applications.

Opportunities through strategic planning

LALCs and Native Title holders can have varying levels of knowledge about the NSW planning system, development processes, and how to utilise the system to achieve aspirations about the future use of their land.

Local and regional strategic planning can help to give Aboriginal communities a genuine voice in determining how their land is utilised and for what purpose. This provides the ability to translate potential values from returned land into real and tangible benefits for communities.

Since late-2016, the Department of Planning and Environment has held more than 20 'Introduction to the NSW Planning System' sessions in regional NSW for LALCs. An additional pilot-program was commenced to offer the services of State urban planners to LALCs. The Department will establish an interactive mapping tool, available on the NSW Planning Portal to enable LALCs to view their landholding information together with relevant planning controls.

The NSW Government will also work with Aboriginal communities to improve the alignment of strategic planning and Aboriginal community aspirations including enhanced Aboriginal economic participation, enterprise and land management. This includes partnering with LALCs to achieve land use aspirations, whether detailed in Community Land and Business plans, Planning Analysis Reports or identified through a co-designed process.

Strategy 16.1



Provide opportunities for the region's LALCs to interact with and utilise the NSW planning system and the planning pathways available to achieve development aspirations.

Strategy 16.2



Councils consider engaging Aboriginal identified staff within their planning teams to facilitate strong relationship building between councils, Aboriginal communities and key stakeholders such as Local Aboriginal Land Councils and local Native Title holders.

Strategy 16.3



Partner with Aboriginal communities to align strategic planning and community aspirations including enhanced Aboriginal economic participation, enterprise and land management.

Action 9



Prioritise the processing of unresolved Aboriginal land claims on Crown land.

Action 10



Deliver an interactive mapping tool to enable LALCs to view their landholding information together with relevant planning controls on the NSW Planning Portal.

Action 11



The Department of Planning and Environment will review its Community Participation Plan to guide consultation with Aboriginal communities in strategic land use planning.

OBJECTIVE 17:

Celebrate local character

Community values and ambitions for the future character of a place can be at the heart of creating unique, locally recognisable places. This requires an understanding of what people cherish, identify with and relate to.

The character that makes the New England North West region special has many parts, including the country music identity of Tamworth and surrounds, rich Aboriginal heritage and the historic buildings on the grand high streets of the region.

Character is the combination of things that make a place, street, village or town recognisable. It's all the things that are special and unique about a place and can help to create a sense of community.

Retaining and celebrating local character is important as places evolve. Places that develop in response to an identified local character and agreed desired future character are likely to be more sustainable, contribute to a good quality of life and attract investment.²²

Local character is also important in new development areas. An idea of the future character of a place can be established through strategic visioning.

Local character is integrated into land use planning through local character statements, Development Control Plans and Local Strategic Planning Statements.

Urban design

Urban design shapes how public areas and main streets are used and experienced. Urban design can make town centres more attractive and enable them to better accommodate public events and celebrations, to boost the vibrancy of main streets and attract locals, visitors and businesses²³.

Where possible, these improvements should reinforce the local character and complement existing significant natural features, important buildings, views and cultural assets.

This requires local planning to determine suitable building heights, setbacks and details that are appropriate for neighbouring historic and cultural assets and their characteristics, or proposing complementary uses that can help to preserve what makes the place or asset special.

Any proposed management or development activity must consider the potential impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage values.

Heritage

Heritage is distinct from local character, although there are often common elements between a conservation area and a place with a valued or distinctive local character²².

Managing heritage is not just about managing the material culture of the past, it is also about understanding how heritage influences and shapes communities today.

Residents in the region want to see heritage buildings re-used as cultural infrastructure.²⁴

Urban Design Guide for Regional NSW

The *Urban Design Guide for Regional NSW* provides guidance for the creation of healthy built environments. It recognises and celebrates the diversity of urban environments, natural landscapes, climates and communities in regional NSW. It acknowledges that unique conditions are being challenged by external factors and informs sustainable approaches to mitigate these impacts.

Strategy 17.1



Ensure strategic planning and local plans recognise and enhance local character through use of local character statements in local plans and in accordance with the NSW Government's *Local Character and Place Guideline*.

Strategy 17.2



Celebrate buildings of local heritage significance by

- retaining the existing use where possible
- establishing a common understanding of appropriate reuses
- exploring history and significance
- considering temporary uses
- designing for future change of use options

OBJECTIVE 18:

Public spaces and green infrastructure support connected, inclusive and healthy communities

Vibrant neighbourhoods have a well-distributed network of natural areas, as well as walkable and attractive public spaces. These spaces allow the community to meet, play, chat and connect.

Quality public spaces are essential for resilient communities, and deliver social, environmental, cultural and economic benefits to the community of the New England North West region.

The Premier's Priority for Greener public spaces aims to increase the proportion of homes in urban areas within 10 minutes' walk of quality green, open and public space by 10% by 2023. The importance local public spaces has been highlighted through experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**PUBLIC OPEN SPACES**

both active and passive (including parks, gardens, playgrounds, public beaches, riverbanks and waterfronts, outdoor playing fields and courts, and publicly accessible bushland)

**PUBLIC FACILITIES**

public libraries, museums, galleries, civic/community centres, showgrounds and indoor public sports facilities

**STREETS**

streets, avenues and boulevards; squares and plazas; pavements; passages and lanes, and bicycle paths.

Great places encourage people to spend time in them. They are inclusive, interesting and have amenities to allow us to feel comfortable and stay. Great places are also healthy places and allow people to be active across their lifespan. Healthy communities are more connected, participate more in community activities, are more productive, and contribute to positive environmental outcomes.

Public spaces should reflect the region and be responsive to the climate and natural features. They should be provided in areas that people already use, such as town centres or near shops, schools and other services to support their use every day and help to build a sense of community ownership.

Public open spaces

Interconnected networks of accessible open space such as creek corridors and park systems can support people's health and wellbeing. Spending time in green public open spaces is important for good mental and physical health. Visiting natural landscapes can lower stress levels, improve people's mood as well as provide opportunities to be physically active.

Public open spaces also provide opportunities for people to participate in a range of activities, including organised sport.

An Open Space and Recreation Plan or similar, can guide decisions to prioritise upgrades to existing public open spaces over the creation of new spaces to reduce pressures on maintenance budgets.

Key regional open space assets, such as Chaffey Dam and the Sport and Recreation Centre at Lake Keepit, can be enhanced and promoted as a place for children and adults to experience sport and active recreation activities.

Councils should work with the Department of Planning and Environment when reclassifying council owned public open space to ensure that the wider public open space interests are considered, and that the change is strategically justified.

Cultural infrastructure

Across the New England North West, facilities such as public libraries, museums, galleries, civic and community centres, can be the main gathering points for communities.

Cultural places can be grand and formal, as well as part of everyday life.

Myall Creek Memorial

Funding from the NSW Government has been allocated to new facilities associated with the national and state heritage listed Myall Creek Memorial. Works will provide a culturally appropriate outdoor performance space and meeting place for dance, drama and storytelling.

Public spaces can provide places for the members of the community to express themselves creatively and create drawcards to the area. Town centres and existing places of gathering should have areas which can be used creatively, which, where appropriate, could include places which are currently underutilised, such as car parks, vacant blocks or laneways.

Empty shopfronts in high streets or streets of interest can be activated with temporary uses, such as pop-up shops.

Council policies and planning mechanisms should be reviewed in conjunction with community consultation to ensure public spaces can be used for creative or temporary uses, where appropriate.

Plan for green infrastructure that responds to place

Public spaces need to be designed and managed so that they remain shaded and comfortable places to be as the region gets hotter. This includes increasing the amount of trees and other vegetation in developed areas, maximising shading and using materials with greater reflectivity, less heat capacity and (in the case of paving materials) more permeability.

Green infrastructure is the network of green space, natural systems and semi-natural systems that support sustainable communities and include waterways, bushland, tree canopy and open spaces that are strategically planned, designed and managed to support a good quality of life in an urban environment. Prioritising and integrating green infrastructure with development and the public realm is important for liveable and sustainable places.

Cooling Moree's High Street

In order to make the town centre more comfortable in the warmer months, The Moree Plains Your High Street project will create a cooler environment and safe space for the community by planting more trees, shade structures, misters, traffic calming devices and lighting along Balo Street.

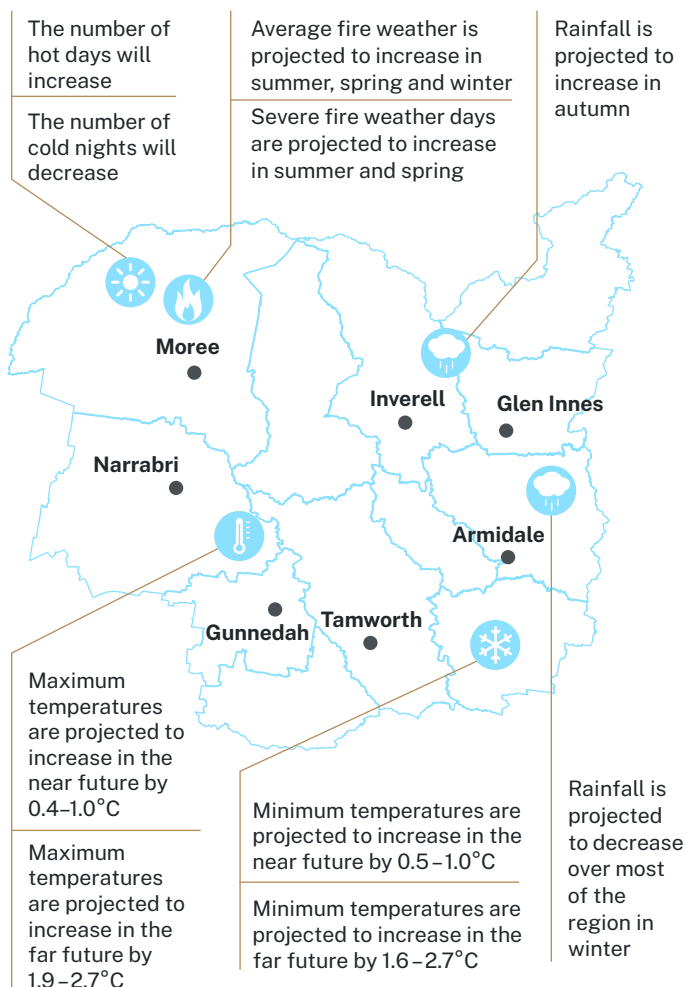
The project aims to reduce ambient temperatures by up to 15 degrees, improve social connection and improve business viability. The project is funded through the Your High Street grant program.

Strategic planning and local plans should encourage the retention of existing and planting of new street trees along the main streets of towns and centres, to provide for natural shading opportunities and to reduce urban heat.

When landscaping, there are many benefits to using local plant species which are particular to the regional area. Local species can support biodiversity, protect local flora and fauna, are well suited to the local conditions and reduce the risk of environmental weed invasions. Using local species also creates a stronger connection with place and helps to strengthen nature-based local character and identity.

Inverell Riverside Park





NSW Public Spaces Charter

The *NSW Public Spaces Charter* identifies 10 principles for quality public space. These will support everyone involved in providing advice on, making decisions about, or undertaking planning, design, management and activation of public spaces in NSW.

State agencies, councils, industry and other groups caring for and using public open space across NSW are encouraged to apply the principles in their strategies and planning.

Great public spaces

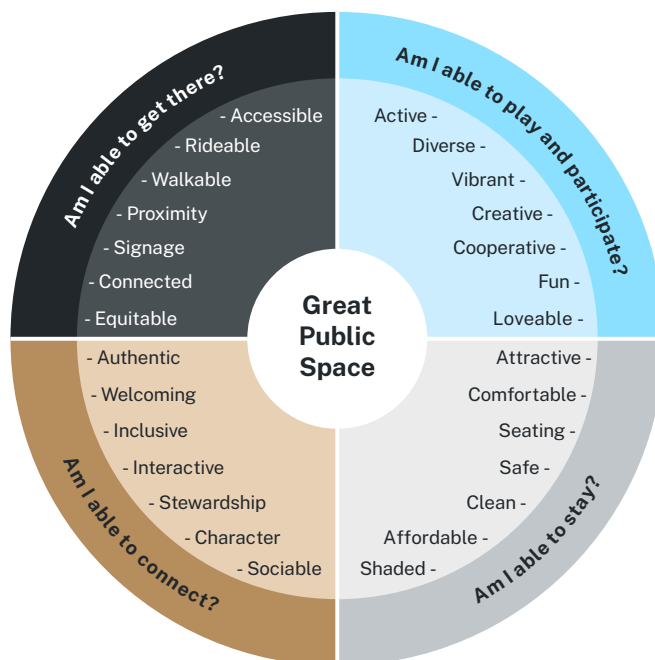
As well as being accessible, public spaces should be of a high quality, well maintained and integrated with the surrounding environment. Evaluation of the quality of public space and the identification of future improvements can be commenced by asking four questions: Am I able to get there? Am I able to play and participate? Am I able to Stay? Am I able to connect? The *NSW Great Public Spaces Guide* provides ideas and opportunities to help create great public spaces.

Play is for everyone, and our play spaces should be too. The *NSW Everyone Can Play Guideline* is an online resource and assessment tool to assist local councils and designers deliver play spaces that are more inclusive of everyone in the community, such as Livvi's Place Inclusive Playground in Gunnedah.

A changing climate

The eastern part of the region contains elevated tablelands with a cool temperate climate. The western part of the region includes slopes and plains which experience a hot, dry summer and cool winter. In the future, it is expected that across the region there will be more hot days and fewer cold nights.

Currently parts of the North West Plains experience an average of 50–60 days above 35°C each year. It is projected that an additional 10–20 hot days may become the norm in the near future. Across the rest of the region, it is projected that each year there could be an additional seven days above 35 degrees.





Tamworth Playground

Strategy 18.1



Councils should aim to undertake public space needs analysis and develop public space infrastructure strategies for improving access and quality of all public space to meet community need for public spaces.

This could include:

- planning for new and improved public space that supports the 10 principles for quality public space of the *NSW Public Spaces Charter*
- drawing on community feedback to identify the quantity, quality and the type of public space required
- prioritising the delivery of new and improved quality public space to areas of most need
- considering the needs of future and changing populations
- considering the location of existing educational facilities and their associated walking catchments
- identifying walkable connectivity improvements and quality and access requirements that would improve use and enjoyment of existing infrastructure
- consolidate, link and enhance high quality open spaces and recreational areas.

Strategy 18.2



Public space improvements should consider the local conditions and users, including embracing opportunities for greening and applying water sensitive urban design principles.

Strategy 18.3



Encourage the use of council owned land for temporary community events and creative practices where appropriate by reviewing development controls.

Strategy 18.4



Strategic planning and local plans should consider opportunities to:

- increase urban tree cover in towns and centres including main streets and pedestrian areas
- ensure new residential and urban release areas incorporate street tree plantings.
- use local plant species for tree planting as a first preference when appropriate.
- use koala feed tree species where appropriate in public open spaces, excluding roadsides.
- provide well-designed built shade in playgrounds, sports and recreation facilities and public spaces.

Strategy 18.5



Local environmental plan amendments that propose to reclassify public open space must consider the following:

- the role or potential role of the land within the open space network
- how the reclassification is strategically supported by local strategies such as open space or asset rationalisation strategies
- where land sales are proposed, details of how sale of land proceeds will be managed
- the net benefit or net gain to open space.

PART

5

Connected and
accessible



Agricultural factory, Moree



Railway near a factory outside Narrabri

PART

5

Connected and accessible

Better transport links and infrastructure will connect New England North West's diverse people and places and will help to harness the region's collective potential.

Integrated with land use planning, infrastructure can transform public areas, activate centres, renew neighbourhoods and improve the quality and character of places. Walking, cycling and public transport can achieve wider benefits from investment and encourage more desirable patterns of development that enhance the health of communities and the environment.

Transport and infrastructure also enable economic growth and innovation by transforming the way communities interact across traditional borders and offering access to new markets. Greater accessibility can facilitate cheaper and more efficient freight movements to extend the reach of local goods and services, attract new investment and enhance access to jobs, educational opportunities and key services.

Growing national and international demand for goods produced in the New England North West requires fast, efficient and agile freight and logistics infrastructure.

Recent disruptions to transport and infrastructure networks generated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and bushfire and flood events highlight the need to embed resilience in planning for infrastructure across governments.

As the region's population continues to grow and change, infrastructure and land use planning must capitalise on local place and region-shaping initiatives. This will rely on a whole-of-government approach that provides the appropriate infrastructure in the right places and builds resilience over time.

Transport for NSW will develop a Regional Transport Plan that will be aligned with the *New England North West Regional Plan*.

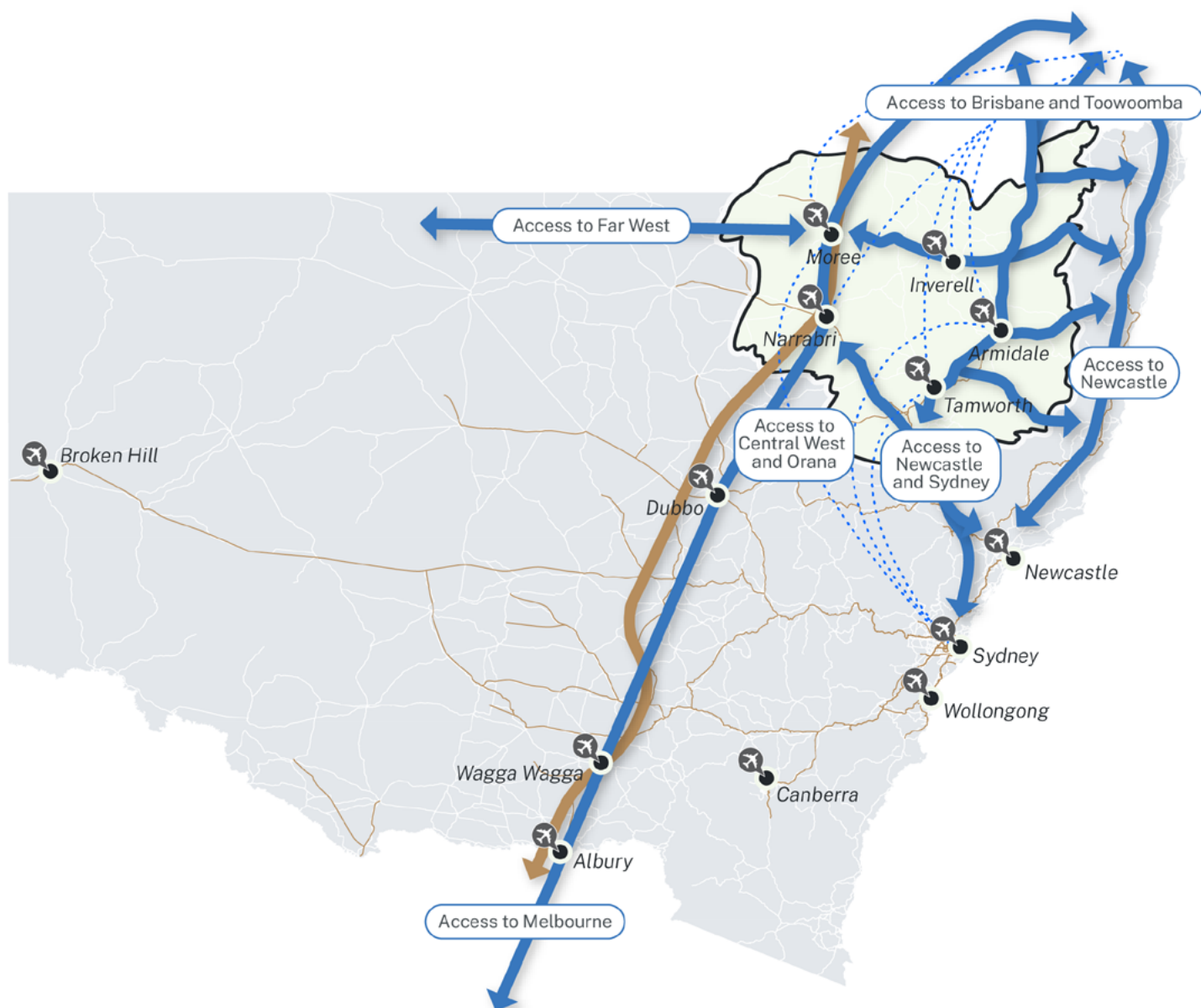


Figure 8: Regional connections

NSW

New England North West
region boundary

Cities and towns

Regional connections

Inland rail

Airport
(regular public transport)

Rail

Roads

Air transport
passenger route

0 50 100 200
km



OBJECTIVE 19:

Leverage new and upgraded infrastructure

Significant State investments in infrastructure are planned for the region including new/upgraded schools, hospitals, highways and dams in addition to Inland Rail.

This new infrastructure has the potential to provide new job opportunities during construction and operation, attracting younger workers and families.

Inland Rail is the largest infrastructure project in the region. It will transform the way producers export to domestic and international markets and access port infrastructure including Brisbane. Its completion by 2026²⁵ will be a catalyst for new and expanded regional investments in agriculture, food processing, manufacturing and packing.

The Moree SAP will leverage the transformative role of the Inland Rail. There is scope for infrastructure co-location and integration of evolving transport technologies to facilitate better connectivity with the wider transport network.

Inland Rail also creates opportunities for enhanced east-west connections and enabling smart jobs in freight and logistics, agriculture and agricultural products, manufacturing and services.

Competition with coal freight and limited north-south rail efficiency historically impeded the viability of rail freight. When the Inland Rail is operational, rail and road can share the freight load.

It is expected that 2 million tonnes of agricultural freight will switch from road to rail across Australia as a result of the project, with 8.9 million tonnes of agricultural freight more efficiently diverted to Inland Rail. Additional rail capacity is expected on the Main North Line into Newcastle and Sydney as Melbourne to Brisbane interstate volumes switch to Inland Rail. Intermodals in the region like Werris Creek, Tamworth and (once developed) Narrabri Inland Port will benefit. It will also reduce congestion and create additional capacity in Sydney. Carbon emissions will be reduced by 750,000 tonnes and truck volumes will be reduced in regional towns along the Newell Highway.

The Narrabri SAP will leverage opportunities enabled by the Narrabri Gas Project to attract investment and create new jobs. The precinct will also leverage the Inland Rail, the Narrabri West Walgett Railway line and the proposed Narrabri Industrial and Logistics Hub.

Telecommunications are critical for train control and safe working systems. The Australian Rail Track Corporation is undertaking a detailed feasibility study to explore opportunities for improved mobile telecommunications along the Inland Rail corridor from Narrabri to North Star. The study will confirm the technical approach for site upgrades, the schedule and the cost to improve coverage in a 10-15km corridor either side of the Inland Rail alignment.

Strategy 19.1



Apply zoning and development controls to:

- support the operation of Inland Rail and minimise land use conflicts which could limit network capacity.
- capitalise on growth opportunities that arise outside the SAP boundaries.

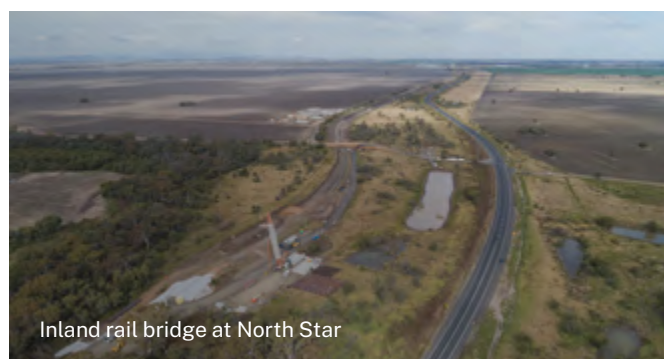
Collaboration Activity 4



Identify opportunities to leverage investment in the Inland Rail at a regional and local scale by:

- enhancing telecommunications coverage along the route
- developing a strategic freight investment approach that identifies how multi-modal infrastructure can be integrated with intermodal facilities along the Inland Rail route at Narrabri and Moree.

Partners: Transport for NSW, Department of Planning and Environment, Moree Plains Shire Council, and Narrabri Shire Council.



Inland rail bridge at North Star

OBJECTIVE 20:

Improve state and regional freight connectivity

Located between Sydney and Brisbane, with strong transport links to Newcastle and South East Queensland, the New England North West is well positioned to access domestic and international markets. The freight network's efficiency influences the productivity of agriculture, manufacturing and natural resource sectors.

Freight and logistics industries will be a focus for investment, in terms of integration and alignment with road, rail, port, utility and airport infrastructure. Protecting transport assets and expanding export-related and value-adding industries will encourage investment, attract industry and provide certainty to industries.

Aside from coal, grain and timber, most commodities in the region are transported by road²⁶, with the New England and Newell highways handling most of the regional road freight task. East-West corridors play an important role including the Kamilaroi Highway to the New England Highway and to the Far West, and the Gwydir Highway to Grafton and the Far West. With considerable increases in freight anticipated, volumes distributed on key road and rail corridors throughout NSW will also grow.

The *NSW Freight and Ports Plan 2018-2023* identifies opportunities to improve freight efficiency by shifting some commodities from road to rail, which is suited for transporting containerised freight, such as agricultural exports and construction materials, over long distances.

Efficient freight movement is linked to industry-related land use, from agricultural production and processing, to warehouse and distribution or infrastructure like airports and ports. Integration and coordination across governments and with the private sector, can lead to more efficient and coordinated infrastructure provision.

Dedicating land for freight ensures industries have the space to operate efficiently and expand if needed. The location of employment land in proximity to freight infrastructure ensures efficient access to transport linkages and trade gateways.

To maintain the competitiveness and viability of freight infrastructure, land use planning must manage growth, retain and protect land for ports, intermodal and logistics uses and associated industrial land. Protecting land from the encroachment of commercial, residential and other non-compatible uses is crucial to avoid adverse impacts on industry viability, productivity, operational capacity and long-term growth.

Early identification and protection of land for new infrastructure such as rail corridors and intermodal terminals will ensure the compatibility of future growth and development. There is also a need to maintain buffers from nearby residential areas and restrict further encroachment by residential uses to protect residential amenity near freight infrastructure.

Strategy 20.1



Optimise the efficiency and effectiveness of the freight network by:

- protecting, maintaining and improving the existing and emerging freight transport network
- balancing land use conflict with the need to support efficient freight capacity.

Strategy 20.2



Support the operation of regional airports and aerodromes in local planning to:

- manage and protect airport and aerodrome land uses and airspace to support aviation operations (including regular public and private transport, air freight and medical services) and related business
- limit the encroachment of incompatible development
- identify and activate employment lands surrounding airports and aerodromes with flexible planning controls
- provide for the future potential expansion of airports and aerodromes.

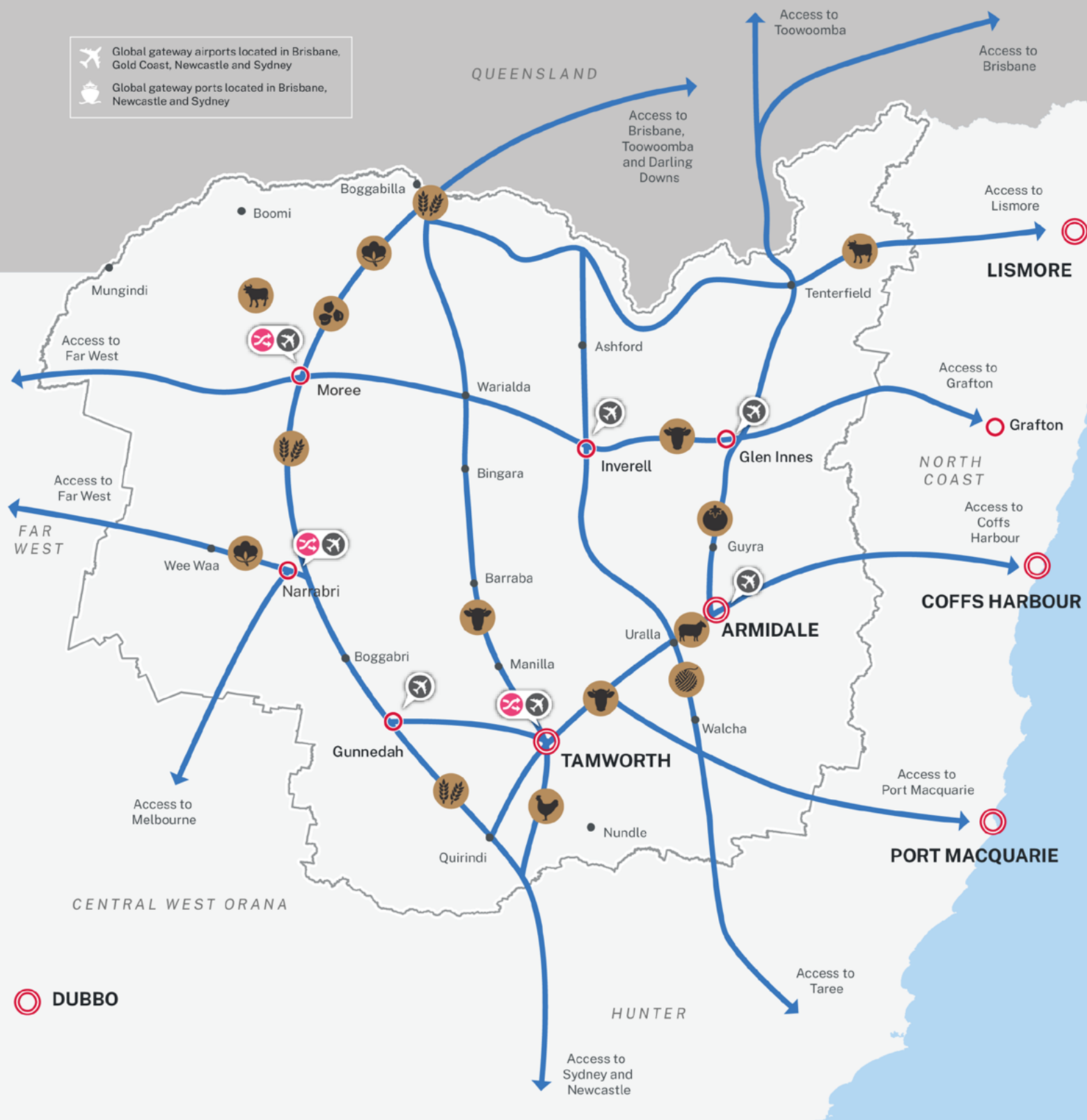
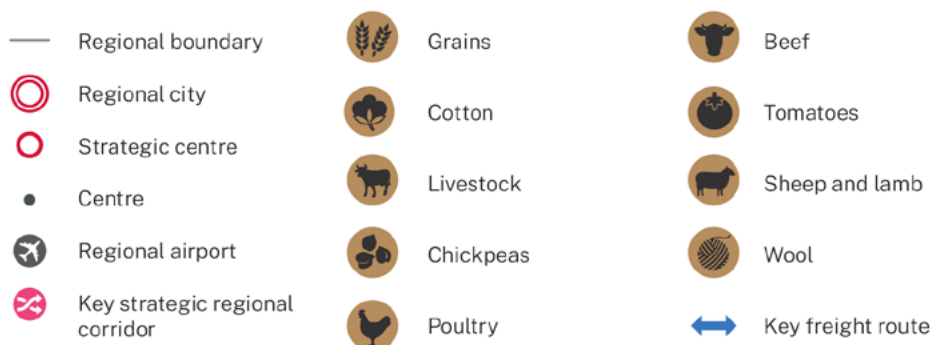


Figure 9: Agricultural freight networks



OBJECTIVE 21:

Improve active and public transport networks

Active and public transport reduces demand on the road network, encourages healthier lifestyles, supports centres, is more sustainable and offers accessibility for people who can't drive. Enhancing pedestrian amenity and increasing active and public transport use across the region, particularly in and around centres is a priority. While active transport is well positioned for replacing cars for local trips within town, public transport is better positioned to provide connectivity between towns.

The region is well placed to do this. Many towns and urban areas in the region enjoy wide streets, regular grid patterns, relatively low levels of traffic on local roads, and a gentle topography. These factors mean that while cars will continue to be the dominant mode, there are opportunities to increase the use of public and active transport.

Transport facilities need to be designed for all ages and abilities with equitable access, seating and shade. Community transport will remain important for older people and those experiencing transport disadvantage. Appropriate transport links can assist older people to continue living in their home or community. Transport routes should also factor in the serviceability for safe evacuation from areas that are exposed to natural hazards.

The *Future Transport Strategy 2056* established the Movement and Place Framework which recognises that streets are not just about moving people and goods, they are also places for people to live, work and spend time.

Streets differ in their function and character, but providing opportunities for walking, safe cycling and social interaction should be a priority. This requires allocation of road space between footpaths, cycleways, public transport and vehicles that considers people's safety needs, and balances movement and place functions in response to the type of street and local conditions.

The active transport network needs investment to link key activity nodes and other factors that encourage active transport including safe pedestrian crossings, lower traffic speeds, separated cycling paths and before and after trip facilities such as secure bicycle storage.

To encourage greater use of public transport, the reach and responsiveness of services will need to be enhanced. Encouraging infill opportunities in and around activity nodes and investing in facility enhancements at these nodes will promote the catchment densities necessary to foster a more regular public transport offering. Prioritising active and public transport to schools, libraries, hospitals and parks will encourage mode shift. Emerging transport technologies such as car sharing schemes, connected and autonomous vehicles, e-scooters, e-bikes and on demand transport can also offer compelling alternatives to regular private car use.

Strategy 21.1



Encourage active and public transport use by:

- prioritising pedestrian amenity within centres
- providing a legible, connected and accessible network of pedestrian and cycling facilities
- delivering accessible transit stops and increasing convenience at interchanges to serve an ageing customer incorporating emerging anchors and commuting catchments in bus contract renewal
- integrating the active transport network with public transport facilities
- creating opportunities for new active transport corridors and links that deliver safe pedestrian and cycle infrastructure to and from existing and future schools.

Collaboration Activity 5



Place Plans for Tamworth and Armidale will be developed in 2024.

Partners: Transport for NSW, Department of Planning and Environment, Tamworth Regional Council, Armidale Regional Council.



Byron Street, Inverell

OBJECTIVE 22:

Utilise emerging transport technology

New technology can help to better utilise existing transport infrastructure to connect communities, transform service delivery and enhance the customer experience.

The NSW government is investing in trials to understand the benefits smart technology can provide to our transport system, including road safety, efficiency and public savings. The emergence of new types of shared, flexible and on demand services will enable greater productivity for freight businesses, and have positive impacts on liveability, health and the environment.

On-demand transport options are already changing the transport landscape. Further ride sharing technologies can reduce congestion, increase convenience, and improve safety and efficiency.

Modern infrastructure will improve access for people with disabilities and those with limited mobility and will assist them to enjoy a more seamless public transport experience, particularly at interchanges.

‘Smart’ technology will also be a part of wider strategies to meet the rising demand for freight infrastructure. The freight and logistics industry

will be shaped by disruptive technologies such as autonomous vehicles and advancements in e-commerce through online stores. Sharing economy platforms are creating opportunities and productivity benefits. This will have a significant impact on how and when freight is moved (including deliveries from small business to consumers).

Similarly, the way we plan for the natural and built environment must adopt new technologies and partnerships. Already, people living in Armidale enjoy NBN fibre to the premises but there will be barriers to adoption such as telecommunications coverage in other areas and affordability.

While change will continue to occur rapidly, future technology and trends are difficult to predict. Our planning and investment must provide the flexibility to adapt new technology. The *NSW Electric Vehicle Fast Charging Master Plan* will be used to determine fast charging locations in the region. Rethinking the use of car parks or drop-off bays for electric vehicle recharging is encouraged. Alternative uses such as storage, logistics hubs, depots or community uses may be required if autonomous vehicles reduce the need for car parking.



Electric vehicle sustainability program

Case Study – Moree on-demand bus service



An on-demand bus service was launched in Moree in 2020. The service picks up passengers at or near their homes and drops them at their desired destination within Moree. The service area covers the township of Moree, including Moree Airport, Moree Artesian Aquatic Centre, Moree Golf Club, Moree town centre and more. The service operates seven days a week from 7am to 7pm and must be pre-booked.

The launch followed a 2-year pilot. During the pilot program, the service was used for over 100,000 trips, which exceeded expectations. The service is successful because it connects local residents including seniors, to key health, retail, education and social services. The service has helped offer greater independence to elderly residents and provides an alternative to conventional bus and taxi services. Customer satisfaction survey results indicate over 90% satisfaction with the service.

Strategy 22.2



Consider smart technology in the development of local plans.

Collaboration Activity 6



Foster a regional approach to the rollout of electric vehicle charging infrastructure that considers potential sites for charging stations, including council-owned land, and how these locations can be activated.

Partners: Transport for NSW, Department of Planning and Environment and councils.

Collaboration Activity 7



Investigate multimodal transport options to and between centres.

Partners: Transport for NSW, Department of Planning and Environment and councils.



Electric vehicle charging

Local Government Narratives



Glen Innes town centre

Local Government Narratives

The NSW Government will work with each council to deliver the objectives and actions set out in this Plan. Priorities for each council are detailed in the following section and will guide further investigations and implementation. The priorities build on the objectives and actions in this Plan. Regional planning encourages infrastructure delivery that targets the needs of its communities. It also encourages efficiencies in the allocation of resources and investment to improve the liveability and sustainability of the region. The NSW Government will assist councils to translate these priorities into local plans.

Figure 10: Local government area indicators





New England Regional Arts Museum (NERAM).
Credit: Destination NSW

Armidale Regional

Armidale Regional LGA is in the heart of New England. Residents and businesses enjoy a prosperous economy, diverse community, outstanding natural assets and access to high-level services.

The regional city of Armidale serves the wider New England area with higher-order health, retail and professional services. Ben Lomond, Black Mountain, Guyra, Ebor, Hillgrove, Llangothlin and Wollomombi and other smaller settlements service the communities outside of Armidale.

The largest employers are within the agricultural, health and education industries, with the focus on education founded on the University of New England, numerous public and private schools, the NSW TAFE Digital Hub and the opportunities of the NBN. Armidale Regional LGA is within the New England REZ which will play a vital role in delivering sustainable, affordable and reliable energy. The REZ will unlock a significant pipeline of large-scale renewable energy and storage projects, and new local opportunities.

The LGA is home to significant natural assets including the World Heritage-listed rainforest protected within the Oxley Wild Rivers and New England national parks and spectacular waterfalls/gorges. Cool climate vineyards, fine food and a fascinating cultural heritage attract visitors.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of housing options in Armidale and promote development that contributes to the unique character of Ben Lomond, Black Mountain, Guyra, Ebor, Hillgrove, Llangothlin and Wollomombi
- foster the growth of knowledge-based services, high-order education services and health-related industries in Armidale CBD and around the Armidale Rural Referral Hospital and University of New England
- Armidale Regional Airport as an opportunity for year-round tourism and a hub for state emergency services
- upgrade the airport to ensure full functionality for the RFS fleet
- support the development of employment lands such as the Airport Business Park and Acacia Park
- using NBN fibre to the premises to grow businesses
- support the sustainable and effective management of water resources to enable drought-proofing
- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- support the New England Regional Arts Museum and other arts organisations to position the LGA as a recognised arts and cultural centre in regional Australia
- implement place-based planning principles to build more liveable communities for residents
- leverage the REZ and to identify and promote wind, solar and other renewable energy production opportunities
- acknowledge and support new and emerging opportunities presented in the nationally significant greenhouse industry which will continue to grow and evolve at Guyra.

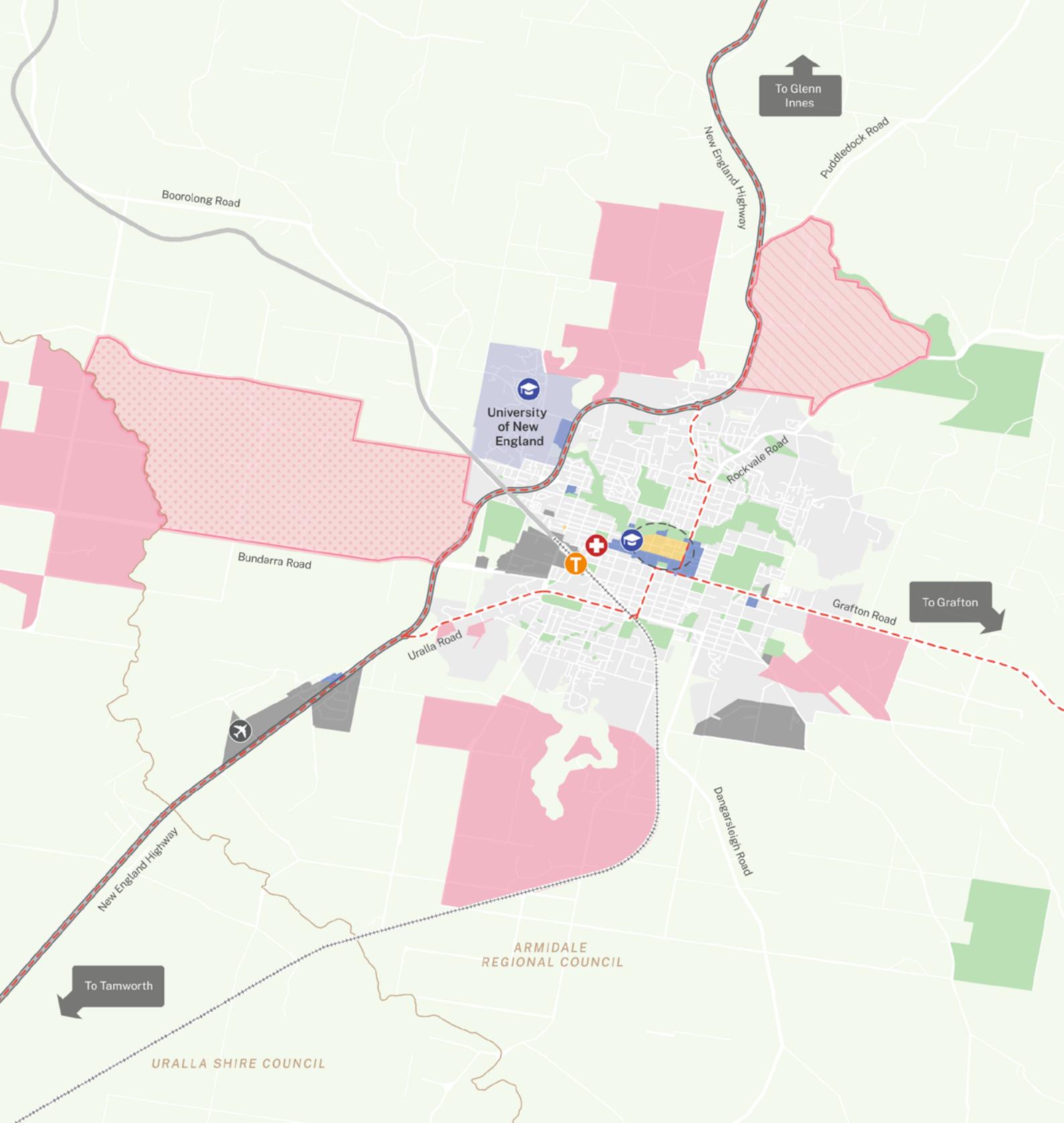
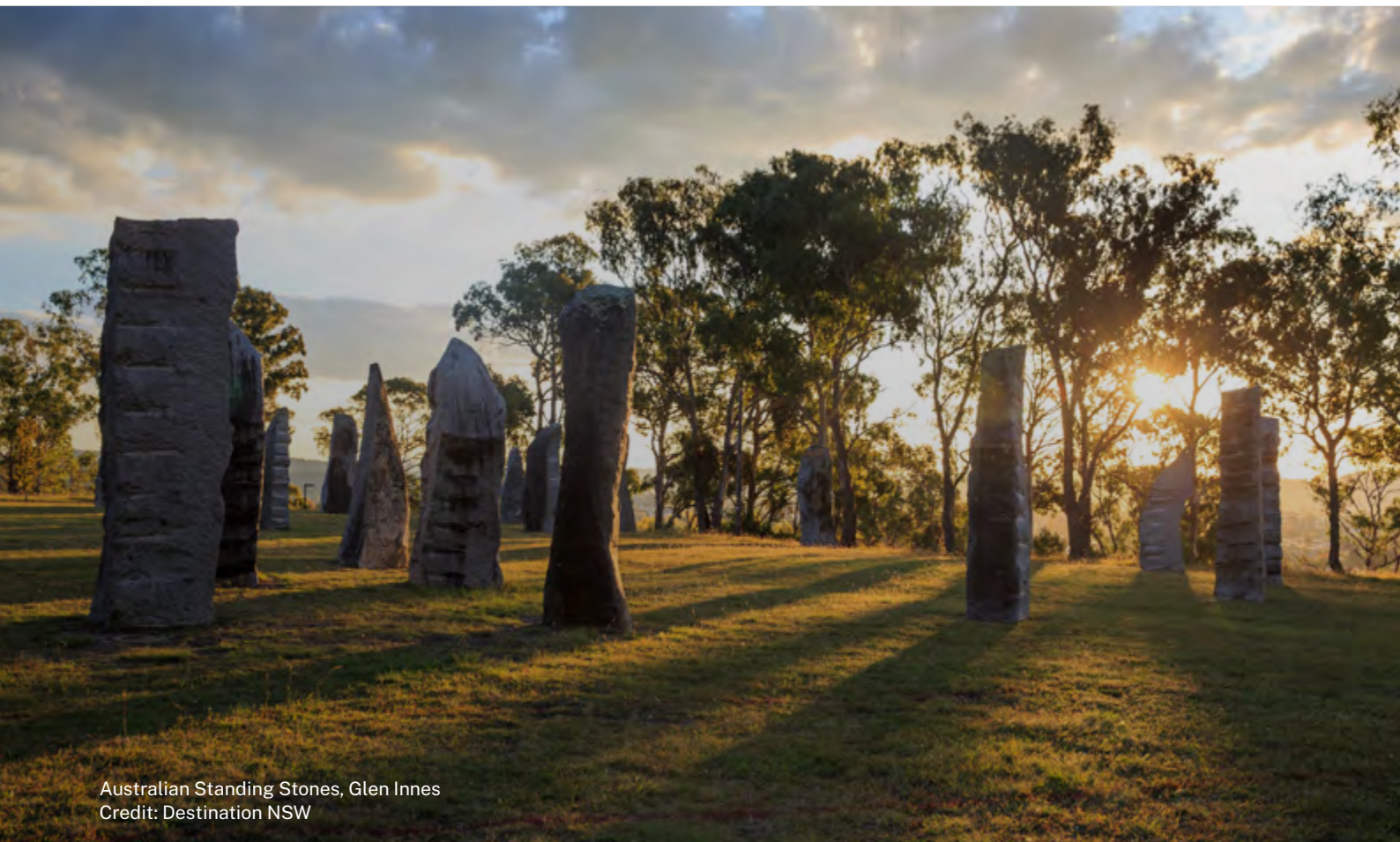


Figure 11: Armidale strategic centre



--- Armidale town centre	Education precinct	Future residential investigation area	Commercial/Business area
— Local government area boundary	--- Key transport connections	Future large lot residential investigation area	Industrial/Employment area
Armidale regional airport	----- Railway	Existing large lot residential	Urban land
Train station	— Inactive railway	Commercial core	Open space
Armidale hospital precinct	— Highway		Water body



Australian Standing Stones, Glen Innes
Credit: Destination NSW

Glen Innes Severn

Glen Innes Severn LGA is located in the north east of the New England Tablelands. Glen Innes sits at the crossroads of the New England and Gwydir highways and provides essential retail, commercial and community services. Emmaville and Deepwater fulfil local service needs and contribute to the unique local character.

Glen Innes Severn LGA provides iconic visitor experiences including the Australian Standing Stones, where the Australian Celtic Festival is celebrated each May. Abundant environmental assets include World Heritage-listed Washpool and Gibraltar Range national parks.

The area has a rich agricultural and mining history. Its location atop the Great Dividing Range has seen growth in wind farming and other renewables, with the region's first wind farm is under construction and two more planned. Several projects have been completed in recent years, with more to follow with Glen Innes Severn's inclusion in the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), which will play a vital role in delivering sustainable, affordable and reliable energy. The REZ will unlock a significant pipeline of large-scale renewable energy and storage projects, specifically associated with wind farming and other new local opportunities.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of diverse housing in Glen Innes and promote development that contributes to the unique character of Emmaville and Deepwater
- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and, harness domestic and international opportunities, and maximise innovation in the sector arising from the Glen Innes Agricultural Research and Advisory Station
- support new and emerging job opportunities associated with Glen Innes District Hospital
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites to attract new industries
- identify opportunities to expand nature-based, adventure and cultural tourism places and new visitor experiences by leveraging environmental and iconic assets such as the Australian Standing Stones and neighbouring national parks
- implement place-based planning to build more liveable communities for residents
- identify and promote wind, solar, bioenergy and other renewable energy production opportunities as part of the REZ.

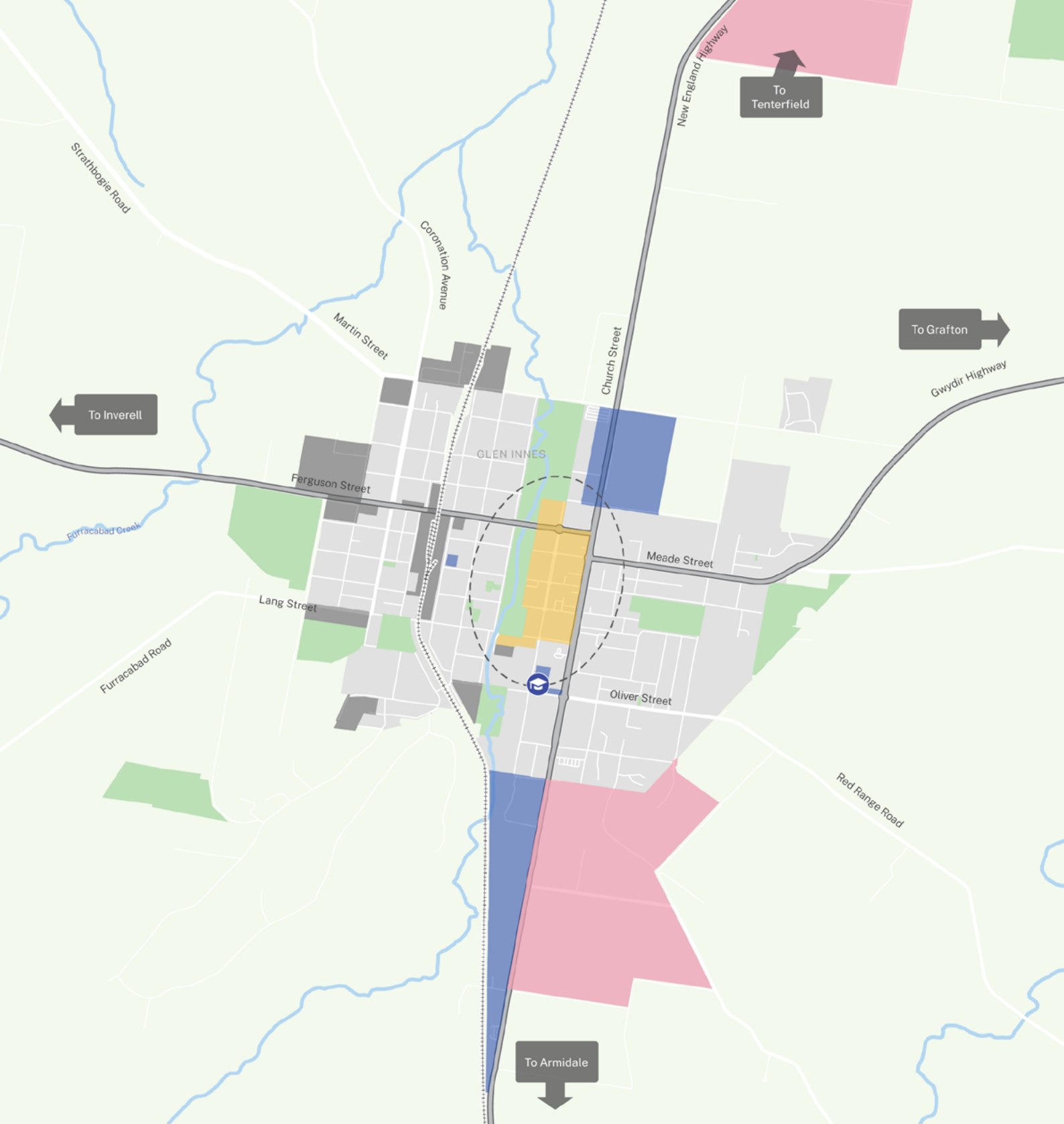


Figure 12: Glen Innes strategic centre



- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| --- Glen Innes town centre | Existing large lot residential | Urban land |
| Education precinct | Commercial core | Open space |
| +++++ Railway | Commercial/Business area | Water body |
| Highway | Industrial/Employment area | |



Gunnedah town centre

Gunnedah

Gunnedah Shire sits within the rich fertile plains of the Namoi region, which is one of the main producers of poultry, pigs, lamb and beef in NSW. At the heart of the Shire is the town of Gunnedah. Supporting villages include Breeza, Carroll, Curlewis, Emerald Hill, Kelvin, Mullaley and Tambar Springs.

Gunnedah Shire is the home of AgQuip, Australia's premier agricultural field days with more than 3,000 companies represented and more than 100,000 visitors over three days.

The Gunnedah Shire LGA has a history in agricultural production, agribusiness and mineral resource production. It contains the high yield metallurgical and thermal coal deposits of the Gunnedah Coal Basin, the State's third largest coal reserves and 12% of NSW's resources. The area also has significant potential for coal seam gas, with deposits covering over 3.4 million ha.

Agriculture and resources underpin a strong and growing economy which benefits from connections to local, national and international markets via the Oxley and Kamilaroi highways and the North-West (Mungindi) rail line.

Gunnedah's economy continues to attract and support industries including a thriving commercial, arts, cultural and retail service sector as well as value-adding industries in manufacturing and processing.

The LGA is home to one of Australia's healthiest koala colonies.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- prepare a housing strategy.
- deliver a variety of housing options, including adaptable and affordable housing, in Gunnedah and promote development that contributes to the unique character of Breeza, Carroll, Curlewis, Emerald Hill, Kelvin, Mullaley and Tambar Springs
- foster the growth of knowledge-based, education and health-related industries and related activity around Gunnedah District Hospital and Gunnedah TAFE Campus
- support the development of employment lands, through the preparation of an Employment Lands Strategy and an Economic Development Strategy
- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- continue to develop logistics, freight and transport infrastructure, such as the Gunnedah Airport, to encourage new industry opportunities throughout the region and within the Namoi Regional Job Precinct
- work with Aboriginal communities to expand nature-based and cultural tourism places and enhance visitor experiences
- promote the development of appropriately located wind, solar and other renewable energy technologies including bio-waste opportunities
- retain biodiversity through protecting the existing koala population, biobanking and increasing tree canopy coverage
- implement place-based planning principles to build more liveable communities for residents.

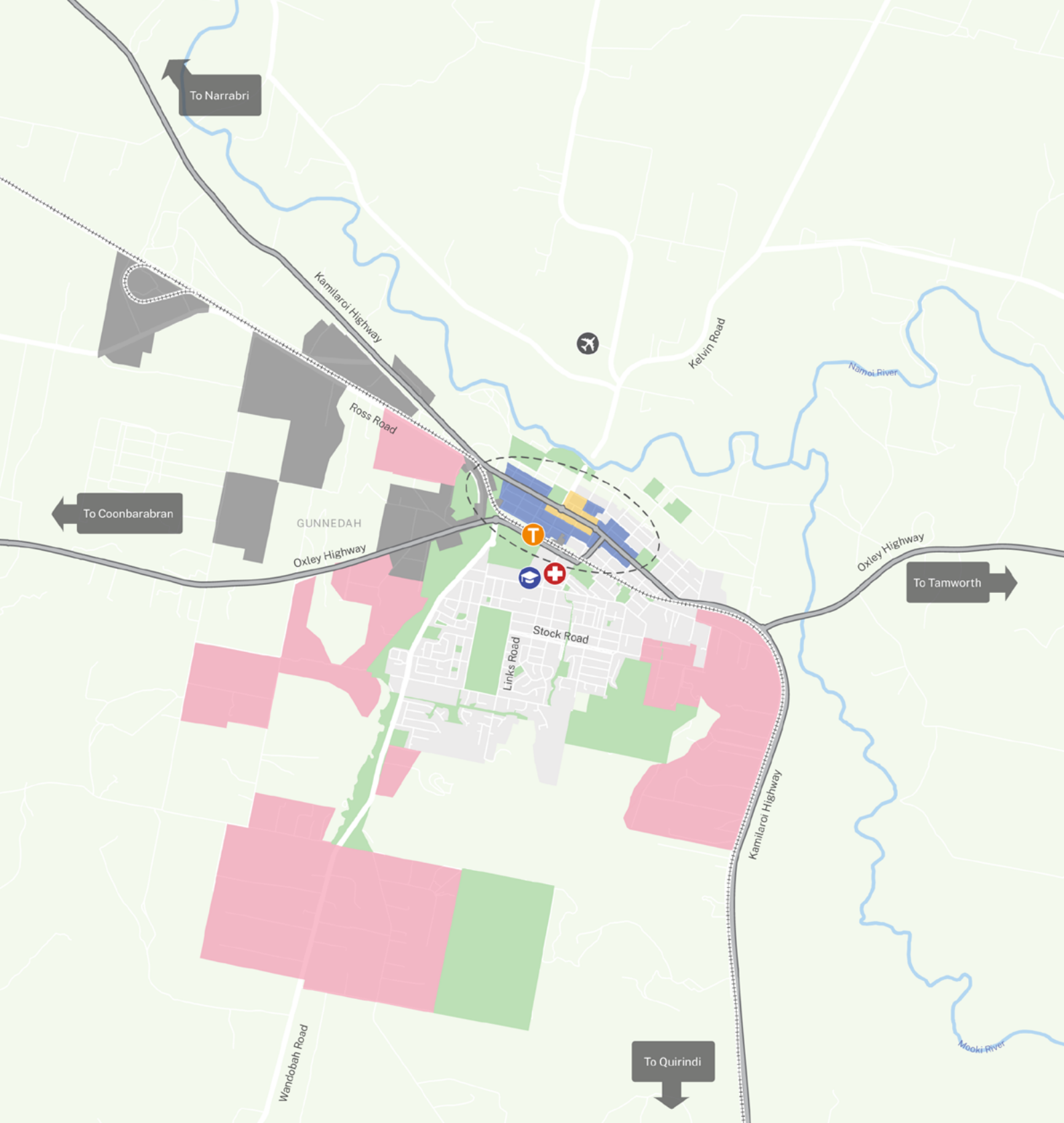


Figure 13: Gunnedah strategic centre



- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| --- Gunnedah town centre | +++++ Railway | Industrial/Employment area |
| Gunnedah airport | — Highway | Urban land |
| Train station | Existing large lot residential | Open space |
| Gunnedah hospital | Commercial core | Water body |
| Education precinct | Commercial/Business area | |



Cranky Rock, Warialda.

Gwydir

Gwydir Shire LGA stretches from the Queensland border to the Nandewar Range in the south. Its diverse landscapes of steep and undulating lands to flat open plains attract tourists seeking eco-tourism and adventure tourism experiences.

Bingara and Warialda provide local retail, commercial and community services and a high quality of life for residents and visitors. Gravesend, Cobbadah, Upper Horton, Croppa Creek, North Star, Coolatai and Warialda Rail fulfil local service needs and contribute to the unique character of the area.

Gwydir Shire LGA has a strong and growing economy based on agriculture and supports the 'Golden Triangle' around North Star, famous for its high yielding crops such as wheat, barley, sorghum, maize, chickpea peas, canola and cotton.

Gwydir Shire Council promotes circular economy initiatives, by encouraging the re-use and recycling of materials within the agricultural industry.

The LGA is located within the Namoi region, which is one of the main producers of poultry, lamb and beef in NSW. The Namoi Regional Job Precinct will strengthen Gwydir's economy, by identifying new locations that will support the growth of the agricultural industry.

Gwydir Shire LGA has abundant environmental assets, including part of Mount Kaputar National Park and Copeton Dam, and the Gwydir and Horton rivers. This rich environment underpins the area's important tourism sector.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of housing options in Bingara and Warialda, to attract young families and support the ageing population
- promote development that contributes to the unique character of Gravesend, Cobbadah, Upper Horton, Croppa Creek, North Star, Coolatai and Warialda Rail
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites to encourage new industry opportunities, throughout the region and also within the Namoi Regional Job Precinct
- promote the development of employment lands, including those associated with the Namoi Regional Job Precinct
- enhance visitor experiences and expand nature-based, adventure and cultural tourism places
- promote the region's rivers and waterways, including for tourism
- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- attract a vibrant, youthful, flexible and mobile workforce
- provide services for the ageing population
- implement place-based planning principles to build more liveable communities for residents
- identify and promote wind, solar and other renewable energy production opportunities.



Copeton Dam

Inverell

Inverell LGA is nestled alongside the Macintyre River on the western slopes of New England. Inverell is the main centre located on the Gwydir Highway and provides essential retail, commercial and community services to a range of local communities.

Ashford, Gilgai, Yetman, Tingha and Delungra fulfil local service needs and contribute to the unique local character of the area. Inverell LGA has a strong and growing economy based on agriculture, particularly beef cattle and cropping. It is the operating centre for a large beef processing company, the largest employer in Inverell.

Copeton Dam is the largest water storage in the New England North West region and provides a reliable domestic and industrial water supply for Inverell. The northern foreshores of Copeton Dam now include a 400 m concrete boat ramp and pontoon, amenities, a water park, a communal hall and concrete walking paths and viewing platforms.

While most jobs are in agriculture, a growing economy requires the development and growth of the manufacturing and transport sectors.

The LGA is also within the New England Renewable Energy Zone (REZ), which will play a vital role in delivering sustainable, affordable and reliable energy. The REZ will unlock a significant pipeline of large-scale renewable energy and storage projects, and new local opportunities.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- support the development of employment lands
- expand nature-based, adventure and cultural tourism places and enhance visitor experiences by leveraging the area's environmental and iconic assets including Copeton Dam
- support initiatives aimed at raising the profile of the area to attract younger people and business development
- deliver a diversity of housing in Inverell and promote development that contributes to the unique character of Ashford, Gilgai, Yetman, Tingha and Delungra
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites to encourage new industry opportunities, including food production
- leverage the REZ and new renewable energy projects.

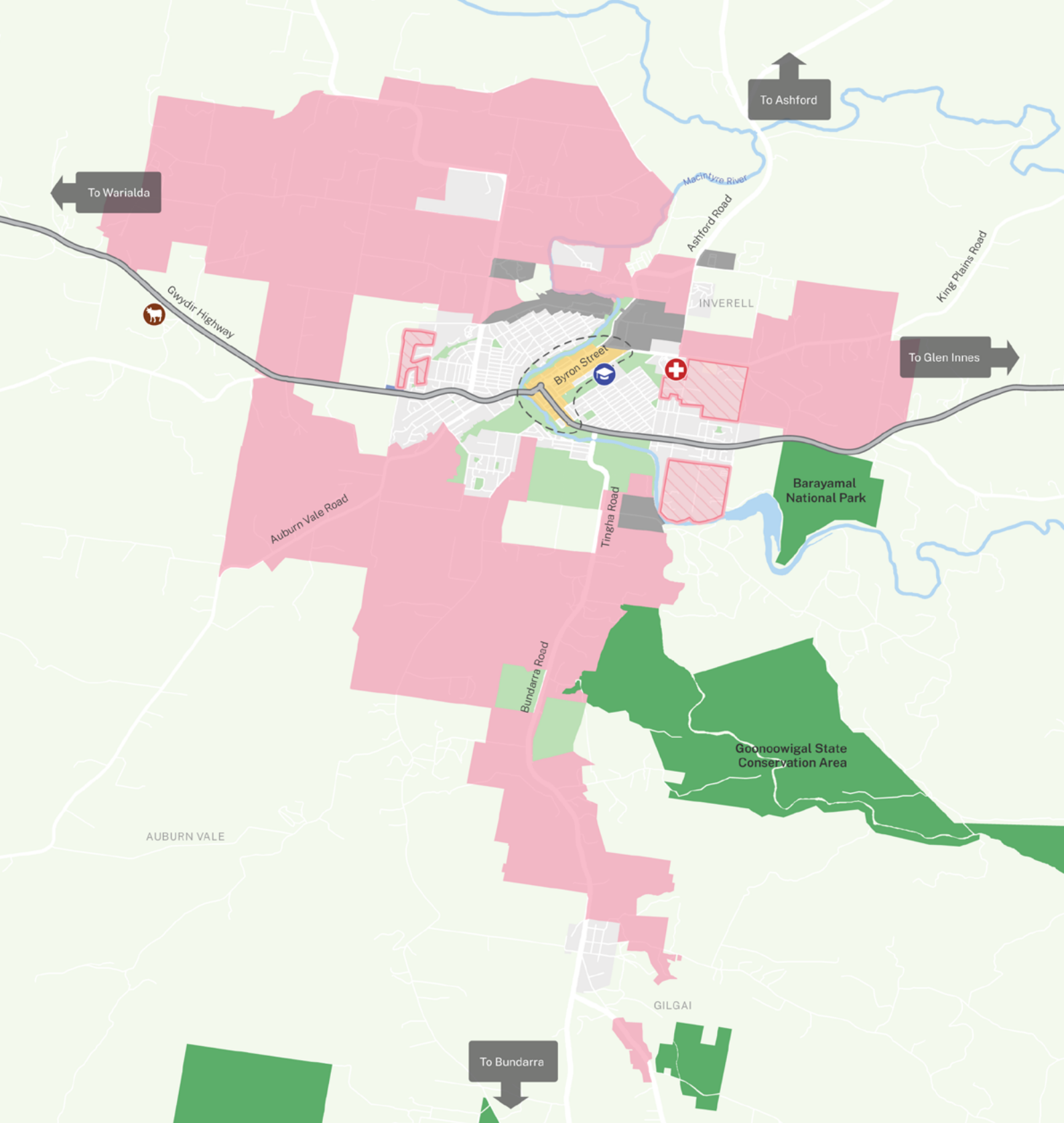


Figure 14: Inverell strategic centre



- | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|
| --- Inverell town centre | Future residential area | Industrial/Employment area |
| Inverell hospital | Existing large lot residential | Urban land |
| Education precinct | Commercial core | National park and reserve |
| Livestock processing | Commercial/Business area | Open space |
| Railway | | Water body |
| Highway | | |



Quirindi Town Clock and War Memorial

Liverpool Plains

Liverpool Plains LGA is in the south west of the region on some of the most productive agricultural land in NSW, with rich black soil plains underlain by extensive groundwater resources.

Quirindi and Werris Creek provide essential retail, commercial and community services to a range of local communities, supported by Willow Tree, Wallabadah, Carroona, Walhallow, Currabubula, Premier and Spring Ridge fulfil local service needs and contribute to the unique local character of the area.

The LGA is located within the Namoi Regional Job Precinct, which will strengthen the economy, by identifying new locations to support the growth of the agricultural industry.

Liverpool Plains LGA is easily accessible to Sydney and Newcastle. Better transport connections to Sydney and Newcastle will support future economic opportunities.

The proposed Kokoda Track Memorial Walk and other tourism projects will expand tourist opportunities.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- a diversity of housing in Quirindi and Werris Creek and development that contributes to the character of Willow Tree, Wallabadah, Carroona, Walhallow, Currabubula, Premier and Spring Ridge
- attract a vibrant, young and mobile workforce
- provide services for older people
- diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and strengthen domestic and international opportunities, including direct exports associated with local industries
- support the development of employment lands
- leverage the existing Werris Creek Intermodal Hub and the ongoing development of access and logistics infrastructure
- implement place-based planning in communities
- wind, solar and other renewable energy production opportunities
- expand nature-based, adventure and cultural tourism places and activities to enhance visitor experiences
- the sustainable and effective management of water resources to enable drought-proofing.



Moree Artesian Aquatic Centre

Moree Plains

Moree Plains LGA is in the north west of the region adjoining the Queensland border. Moree provides essential retail, commercial and community services supported by the local centres of Mungindi, Boggabilla, Ashley Biniguy, Boomi, Pallamallawa, Garah, Gurley and Weemalah fulfil local service needs and contribute to the unique local character of the area.

Moree LGA is one of the top agricultural producing areas in Australia. Large-scale cereal and chickpea crops as well as cotton are significant export and domestic industries. The area also supplies pecans, sheep, cattle, oil seeds, citrus fruits and olives.

Moree sits at the junction of the Newell, Gwydir and Carnarvon highways and will interface with Inland Rail. The Moree Special Activation Precinct (SAP) will create long-term job opportunities attract businesses and investors. The SAP will also attract new telecommunications infrastructure which will improve connectivity with the broader region.

Moree has abundant tourism assets, including artesian spa baths, art deco architecture, Aboriginal cultural heritage and a water ski park.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of housing options in Moree to attract residents, workers and tourists to the region
- implement place-based planning principles to build more liveable communities for residents and that contributes to the unique character of Moree, Mungindi, Boggabilla, Ashley, Biniguy, Boomi, Pallamallawa, Garah, Gurley and Weemalah
- leverage on new infrastructure associated with the Moree SAP, to grow and diversify agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites within the Moree SAP and surrounding areas
- support Moree as a 'Smart City' to promote innovation, reduce costs and enhance services for agribusiness, health, education and dependent business suppliers
- expand nature-based adventure and cultural tourism places such as Moree Artesian Aquatic Centre and the Moree Water Park
- promote a vibrant, young and mobile workforce
- provide services for the older population
- promote the circular economy principles and sustainable and renewable energy technologies
- encourage the sustainable commercial utilisation of groundwater.

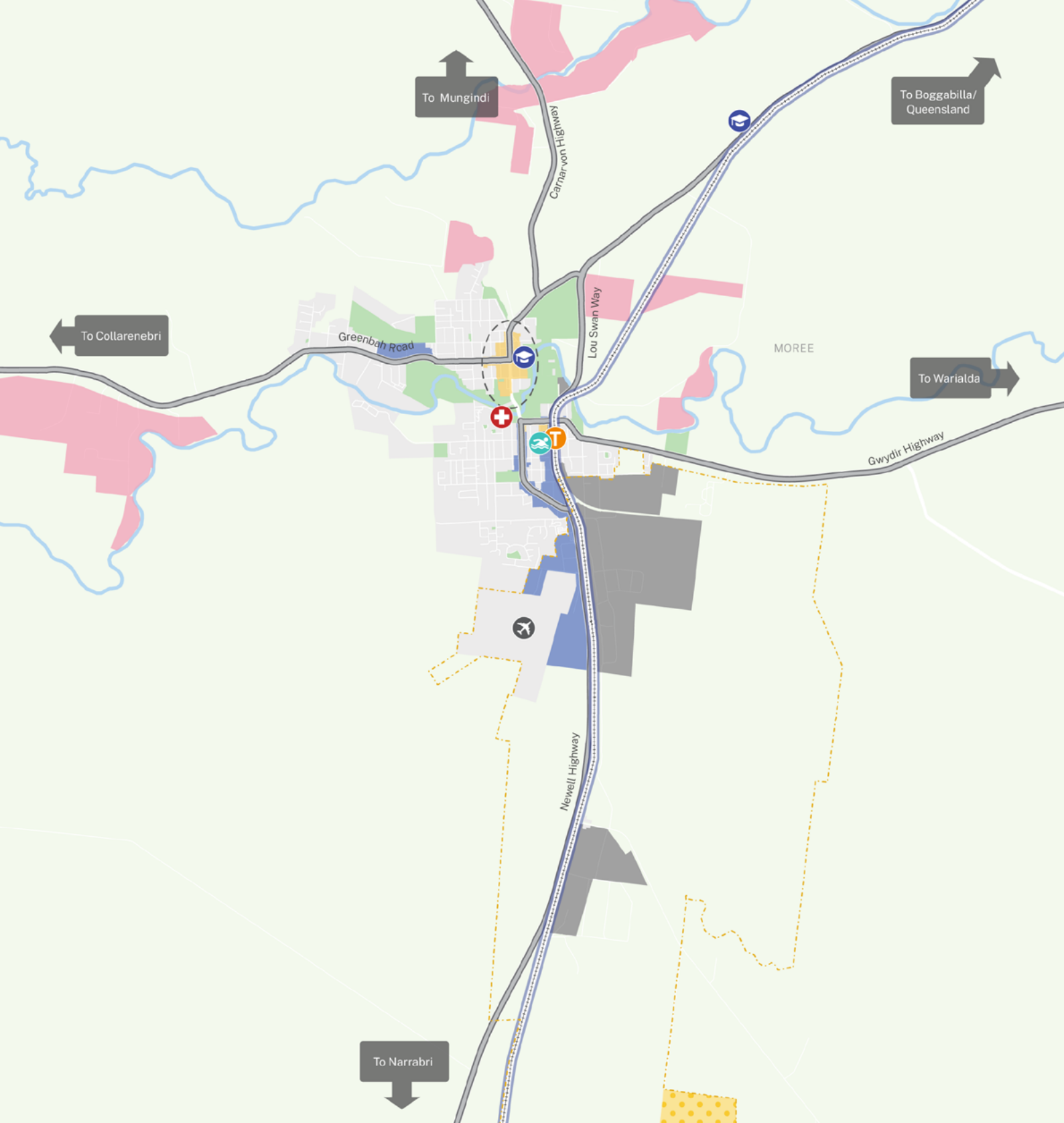


Figure 15: Moree strategic centre



--- Moree town centre	Education precinct	Commercial core	Urban land
..... Moree Special Activation Precinct	Moree Artesian Aquatic Centre	Commercial/Business area	Open space
Moree airport	Inland rail alignment	Industrial/Employment area	Water body
Train station	Highway	Solar farm	
Moree hospital	Existing large lot residential		



Narrabri

The Narrabri Shire LGA is located on the western border of the New England North West region. Its rich fertile soils support agricultural production, agribusiness and mineral resource production, as well as several research institutions.

The LGA is home to the Pilliga State Forest or Pilliga Scrub, which is the largest semi-arid woodland in the State and home to Australian Wildlife Conservancy. This rare forest type supports approximately 900 native plants and more than 100 native animal species.

Narrabri is the administrative centre of the LGA and provides essential retail, commercial and community services to all of its local communities. Wee Waa and Boggabri, and smaller settlements including Pilliga, Gwabegar, Baan Baa and Bellata, fulfil local service needs and contribute to the unique local character of the area.

Narrabri has been announced as a future Special Activation Precinct. It will utilise its proximity to national and international markets via the Inland Rail, to targeting manufacturing, value-added production, and freight and logistics industries.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of housing options in Narrabri to support the SAP and promote development that contributes to the unique character of Wee Waa, Pilliga, Bellata, Gwabegar, Baan Baa and Boggabri
- support economic diversification across the agricultural, health and education sectors through upskilling existing workers, retaining existing talent and removing barriers to training
- encourage diversification and value-add in agriculture and agribusiness, and the emerging horticulture sector, and harness domestic and international opportunities
- coordinate investment components and ancillary services for the SAP
- implement place-based planning principles to build more liveable communities for residents
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites to encourage new industry opportunities
- expand nature-based adventure and cultural tourism places
- identify and promote solar and other renewable energy opportunities, utilising the opportunities of the SAP
- support the sustainable and effective management of water resources to enable drought-proofing
- investigate opportunities to leverage benefits from the gas industry.

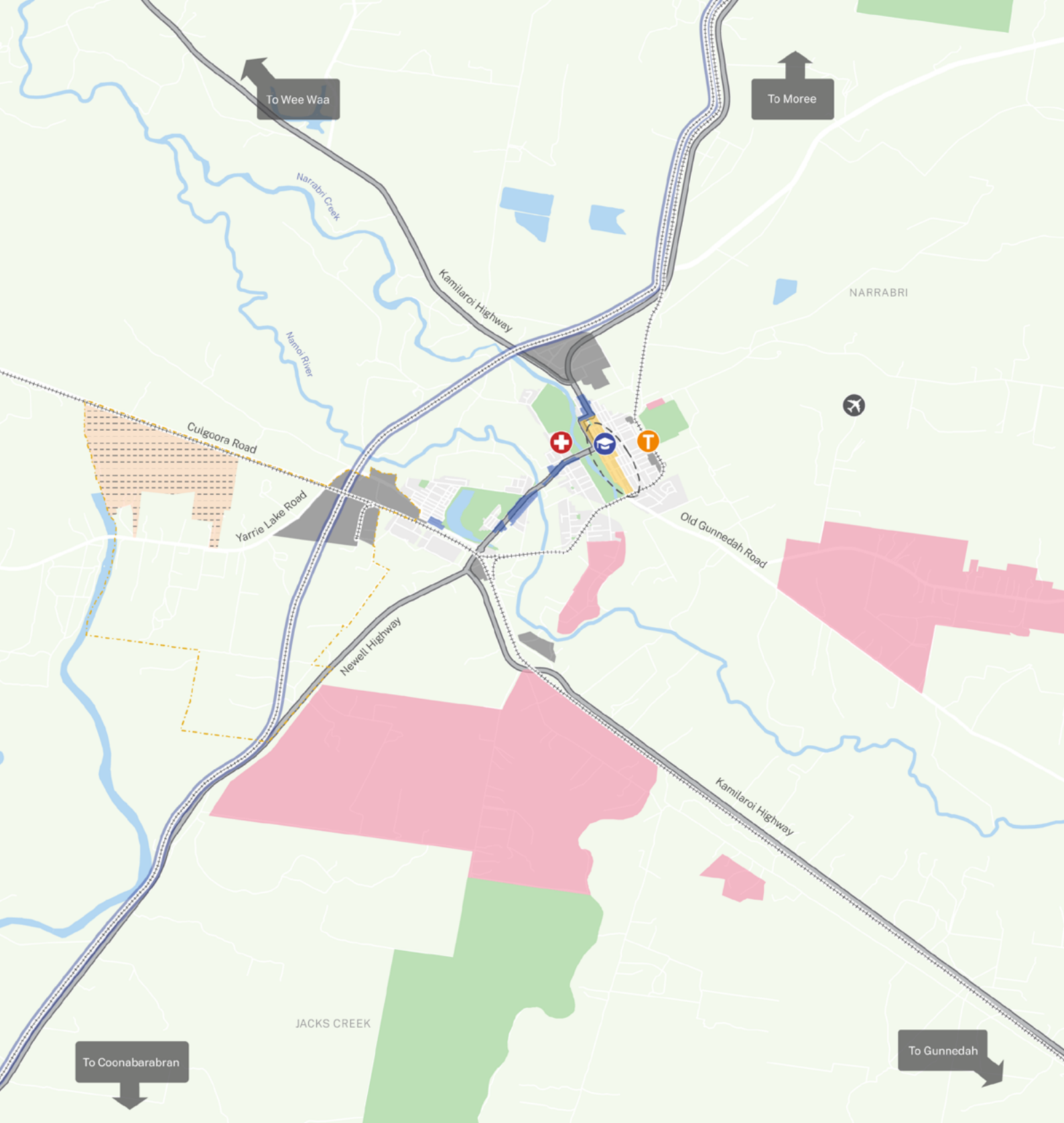


Figure 16: Narrabri strategic centre



--- Narrabri town centre	Education precinct	Commercial core	Open space
... Narrabri Special Activation Precinct	Inland rail alignment	Commercial/Business area	Water body
Narrabri airport	Railway	Industrial/Employment area	
Train station	Highway	Northern NSW inland port	
Narrabri hospital	Existing large lot residential	Urban land	



Barraba Silos by artist Fintan Magee. Credit: Destination NSW

Tamworth Regional

Tamworth Regional LGA in the south of the region is well connected to Sydney, Brisbane and Newcastle. Tamworth is a regional city that provides one in three of the region's homes and jobs and a variety of high-level services, including civic, entertainment, education and cultural venues. This includes Tamworth Base Hospital, TAFE NSW and national sporting facilities like the Australian Equine and Livestock Events Centre.

The balance of the urban population lives in surrounding smaller settlements including Manilla, Kootingal, Barraba and Nundle.

Tamworth's strong agricultural foundations in poultry, beef cattle, lamb processing and cropping are well supported by rail, road and air networks. The LGA is located in the Namoi Regional Job Precinct, which will help to grow the agricultural industry and protect it from incompatible land uses.

Manufacturing, retail and commercial services, and aviation and tourism are important economic generators. The Tamworth Country Music Festival attracts more than 50,000 festival goers each year.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of dwelling types and levels of affordability in Tamworth, including for temporary workers
- promote development that contributes to the unique character of Manilla, Kootingal, Barraba, Nundle and other areas
- foster the data-driven growth of knowledge-based, education and health-related industries around Tamworth Base Hospital, University of Newcastle's Tamworth Education Centre and TAFE NSW
- maximise the opportunities for Tamworth Regional Airport
- protect the viability of and promote intensive agriculture clusters and the opportunities of the Namoi Regional Job Precinct
- encourage opportunities for innovation in agribusiness
- expand tourism opportunities including ecotourism, agritourism, sporting and events, and Aboriginal and European cultural tourism
- support the development of the Tamworth Global Gateway Park, associated employment precincts and supporting infrastructure
- support the development of the regional recycling facility at Goddard Lane
- support appropriately located wind, solar and other renewable energy production opportunities, as well as battery storage facilities
- encourage water sustainability
- consolidate the Tamworth CBD as a thriving city centre with a night-time economy, more apartment living, and potential to house a university campus
- complete mapping of native vegetation and biodiversity, developing blue and green networks, and enhancing Aboriginal cultural heritage.

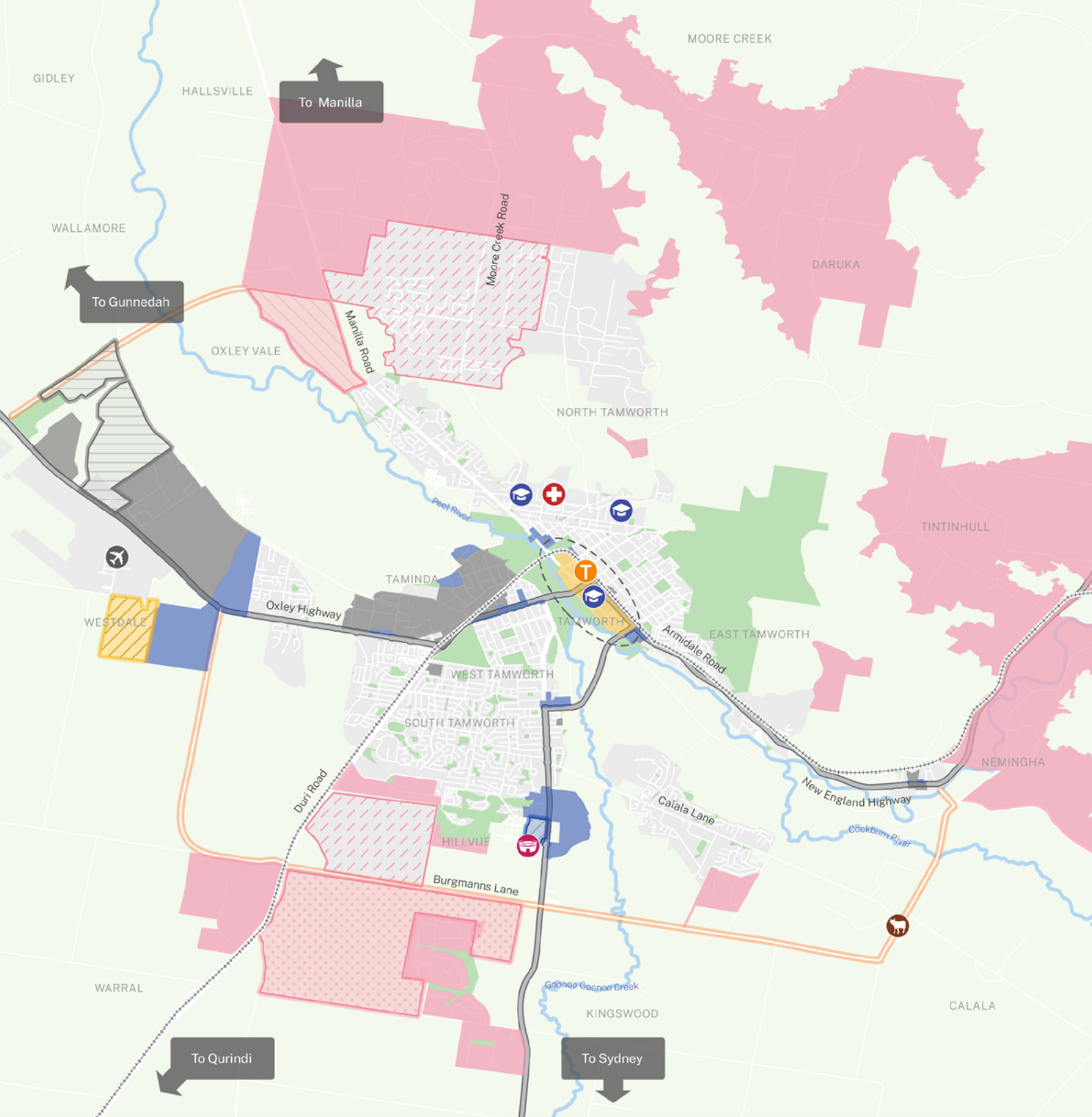


Figure 17: Tamworth regional city



- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| --- Tamworth CBD | Regional sports and entertainment precinct | Developing residential area | Commercial/Business area |
| Tamworth regional airport | Railway | Existing large lot residential | Future industrial/employment investigation area |
| Train station | — Highway | Future commercial investigation area | Industrial/Employment area |
| Tamworth hospital precinct | — Potential road upgrades | Future business investigation area | Urban land |
| Tamworth education facilities | Future residential investigation area | Commercial core | Open space |
| Tamworth Agricultural Institute | Future large lot residential investigation area | | Water body |



Tenterfield town centre

Tenterfield

Tenterfield LGA is the northern gateway to New England adjoining the Queensland border. Tenterfield provides essential retail, commercial and community services supported by Drake, Urbenville Torrington, Mingoola, Liston, Legume and Jennings.

Tenterfield LGA has a strong and growing economy based on agriculture and mineral resource production, retail trade, and the health, education and tourism industries. A small portion of the south of the Tenterfield LGA is within the New England REZ. The REZ will unlock a significant pipeline of large-scale renewable energy and storage projects, and new local opportunities.

The Tenterfield Heavy Vehicle Bypass will reduce overall travel times, improve freight efficiency and safety, and facilitate oversize heavy vehicle movements. It will also remove heavy vehicles from Tenterfield's main street.

Tenterfield has a rich historic heritage. It is known as the 'Birthplace of our Nation' - Sir Henry Parkes delivered his Federation Speech in the Tenterfield School of Arts in 1889, which ultimately led to Federation in 1901.

Tenterfield has abundant environmental assets, such as Bald Rock and Boonoo Boonoo national parks. This rich environment underpins the area's tourism sector.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of housing options and sensitive development in Tenterfield, Drake, Urbenville, Torrington, Mingoola, Liston, Legume and Jennings
- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites
- expand cultural and Aboriginal tourism and nature-based adventure, including eco-tourism and mountain bike trails
- attract a vibrant, young and mobile workforce
- provide services for the older population
- leverage cross-border opportunities with South East Queensland particularly with Brisbane West Wellcamp Airport and Brisbane
- leverage the REZ and wind, solar and other renewable energy production opportunities
- support the sustainable and effective management of water resources to enable drought-proofing
- implement place-based planning principles to build more liveable communities for residents.
- Support the maintenance and growth of Tenterfield's CBD and the rich built and natural heritage are showcased as a destination.



Uralla town centre

Uralla

Uralla LGA is located on the New England Tableland Plateau. Uralla is the main centre supported by Bundarra, Arding, Rocky River, Kingstown, Invergowrie and Kentucky. Residents are attracted to Uralla for its unique country lifestyle and heritage.

Uralla LGA enjoys strong social and economic links with Armidale LGA. Its primary rural industries are fine wool, lamb and beef production. Boutique industries include vineyards and breweries, establishing Uralla as a gastro-tourism destination.

Uralla showcases over 50 buildings of historic significance, antique stores, art galleries and specialty stores. Community-led renewable energy projects will support the town's journey to become a Zero Net Energy Town.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- support new housing in Uralla and surrounds and protecting the character Bundarra and settlement areas of Arding, Rocky River, Kingstown, Invergowrie and Kentucky
- grow and diversify the local agricultural base and opportunities for agribusiness and local processing of rural products
- support the emerging boutique food and tourism-based retail enterprises
- encourage renewable energy developments that are compatible with the LGA's lifestyle and valued environmental assets
- expand nature-based, adventure and cultural tourism
- raise the area's profile and opportunities with younger people
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure on appropriate sites.



Walcha town centre

Walcha

Walcha LGA is located on the south-eastern edge of the New England Tablelands and sits on the Oxley Highway and Thunderbolts Way.

Walcha is the main centre and provides retail, commercial and community services including a modern multipurpose health service facility and primary and secondary schools. Nowendoc fulfils local service needs.

Walcha's rich basalt soil supports some of the world's best fine wool as well as beef production and forestry. The LGA is in the Namoi Regional Job Precinct, and the New England REZ, which will unlock a significant pipeline of large-scale renewable energy and storage projects, and new local opportunities.

Walcha has abundant environmental assets, such as Oxley Wild Rivers and Werrikimbe National Parks and contains World Heritage-listed rainforest. Iconic visitor experiences such as trout streams and spectacular waterfalls will continue to draw domestic and international tourists.

Council's priorities for the LGA are:

- deliver a variety of housing in Walcha and development that contributes to the unique character of Nowendoc
- encourage diversification in agriculture, horticulture and agribusiness to grow these sectors and harness domestic and international opportunities
- investigate opportunities for social, affordable and seniors housing
- continue to develop access and logistics infrastructure within the Namoi Regional Job Precinct
- expand nature-based adventure, cultural tourism places, and food and wine opportunities
- leverage on the REZ and new wind, solar and other renewable energy production opportunities
- promote a vibrant, young and mobile workforce
- provide services for the older population
- raise the area's profile and awareness of employment, business development and lifestyle opportunities, particularly for younger people
- foster resilience and diversification in the agricultural industry
- support the sustainable and effective management of water resources to enable drought-proofing
- implement place-based planning in communities.

Glossary

Active transport

Transport that is human powered, such as walking, cycling or using a wheelchair.

Affordable housing

Housing for very low income households, low income households or moderate income households, being such households as are prescribed by the regulations or as are provided for in an environmental planning instrument.

Agribusiness

A business which earns most or all of its revenues from agriculture. An agribusiness could include food and fibre production, agrichemicals, seed supply, farm machinery wholesale and distribution, freight, logistics, processing, marketing, and retail sales.

Biodiversity

Biodiversity describes the variety of life on Earth. The life forms, the different plants, animals and microorganisms, the genes they contain and the ecosystems they form. It is usually considered at three levels: genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity.

Biodiversity corridor

An identified area of land that connects flora and fauna populations, separated by human developments and activities, for the purpose of increasing the biodiversity of an area.

Central business district

The main cluster of businesses found within a town or city.

Circular economy

The circular economy model redesigns current linear systems (take-make-waste) to a closed loop or circular system which maximises resource efficiencies, reduces waste and improves natural systems.

Circular economy activities

Circular economy activities are defined as any activities associated with the operation of Circular Economy infrastructure. Circular Economy activities may also encompass the use of materials produced from Circular Economy Infrastructure, including recovered materials, repaired goods, leased products, etc.

Circular economy hub

A circular economy hub is a collection of businesses that come together on one site: so that the by-products of business can be used as a resource (including material, energy or water) in another business closing the loop on material use.

Circular economy infrastructure can encompass facilities that store, transfer, sort, reprocess or repurpose materials and goods to retain their productive value and prevent their disposal to landfill. Examples of circular economy infrastructure includes reuse and repair facilities, sharing and leasing facilities, reverse vending machines, community recycling centres, collection points for producer responsibility schemes, water reuse schemes, material bulking, sorting, storing facilities, material reprocessing and remanufacturing, washing or pelletising facilities, reverse logistics facilities, energy from waste (thermal), anaerobic digestion and chemical treatment of waste, etc.

Circular Economy infrastructure also includes the waste and resource recovery facilities as defined in the Standard Instrument such as resource recovery facilities, transfer stations, and compost facilities.

Climate change

A change in the state of climate that can be identified by changes in the mean and/or the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer (Garnaut Review, 2008).

Climate refugia

Areas where species can retreat to and persist in under changing environmental conditions. Refugia are areas that maintain favourable climatic conditions absent in the surrounding landscape, thereby safeguarding the persistence of biodiversity. There are two key types of refugia, termed internal and external, and are determined by their spatial relationship with species' known distributions. Climate refugia data can be accessed at nswclimaterefugia.net together with associated explanatory reports.

Employment lands

Employment lands are areas zoned for industrial or similar purposes in planning instruments. They are generally lower density employment areas, and provide the essential space for the delivery of:

- utilities and urban services, including depots, repair trades and service centres,
- goods including the research, design and manufacturing of goods through to their warehousing, distribution and sale.

Existing urban areas

Land zoned for an urban purpose, excluding greenfield release areas.

Greenfield housing

Refers to new housing developments on land that has not been previously developed or used for other urban purposes. Release areas typically include greenfield housing.

Green infrastructure

The network of green spaces, natural systems, and semi-natural systems that support sustainable communities and includes waterways; bushland; tree canopy and green ground cover; parks; and open spaces that are strategically planned, designed, and managed to support a good quality of life in an urban environment.

Housing affordability

Refers to the capacity of individuals or households to enter the rental and privately owned housing markets.

Housing density

Is a measure of how intensively a residential area is developed. It is normally measured as the number of dwellings per hectare. Housing density can be low (<15dw/ha), medium (16-60 dw/ha) or high (>60dw/ha).

Housing diversity

Refers to the mix of housing types such as detached dwellings, boarding houses, dual occupancies, group homes, hostels, multi-dwelling housing, residential flat buildings, secondary dwellings, semi-detached dwellings, seniors housing and shop top housing.

New England North West Region

The Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Armidale Regional, Inverell, Glen Innes Severn, Gunnedah, Gwydir, Moree, Liverpool Plains, Narrabri, Tamworth Regional, Tenterfield, Uralla, Walcha.

Infill development

Development in areas already used for urban purposes. This includes the re-use of a site within the existing urban footprint for new housing, businesses or other urban development.

Intensive agribusiness

Relates to agriculture activities such as horticulture, irrigated crops, glass housing, feedlots, poultry farms and the like, that rely on high levels of inputs such as labour and capital to increase yield.

Knowledge-based industries

Trends and activities that increasingly depend on knowledge, information and highly skilled personnel and organisation, meeting an increasing need for ready access to all these by business and public sectors (OECD, 2005)

Local centres

Local centres provide services such as shopping, dining, health and personal services to meet the daily and weekly needs of the local community. They are smaller than the metropolitan, regional, and strategic centres.

Local Plans (Local Environmental Plans or Development Control Plans)

Statutory and non-statutory plans prepared by council for a local government area to guide planning decisions by local councils. Through the use of land zoning and other development controls, a local plan is typically the main mechanism for determining the type and amount of development which can occur on each parcel of land in NSW. Local plans are the main planning tool that shapes the future of communities and ensures local development is appropriate.

Local Strategic Planning

Includes the preparation of Local Strategic planning statements, local housing strategies, employment land or retail studies, and other activities undertaken to support the development of local plans or local strategic planning statements.

Mixed-use area

Areas that facilitate a mixture of commercial, retail, residential and other land uses.

Nature-based tourism

Tourism based on the natural attractions of an area. Examples include birdwatching, photography, stargazing, camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, scuba diving, mountain biking, wakeboard and water skiing.

Natural hazards

A natural process or phenomenon that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation.

Population projections

Population projections describe likely changes in the size and age profiles of communities across NSW.

Projections are not targets. They are based on assumptions about future births, deaths and migration. They may also include the potential impact of current or announced government policy.

These assumptions vary from place to place – for example, an area with a large university that attracts overseas students will have different assumptions to an area that attracts retired Australians.

Unexpected events and new government policy may alter the future levels of population growth. The NSW Government regularly reviews population projections to remain responsive to these changes.

Public spaces

Are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive.

Regional city

Centres with the largest commercial component of any location in the region and that provides a full range of higher-order services, including hospitals and tertiary education services. Tamworth and Armidale are the regional cities of the New England North West.

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity of individuals, communities, businesses and systems within a city to survive, adapt and thrive no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

Smart Technology

Self-Monitoring Analysis and Reporting Technology, which is technology that provides cognitive awareness to objects, by making use of advanced technologies like internet of things, artificial intelligence, machine learning and big data.

Social housing

Rental housing provided by not-for-profit, non-government or government organisations to assist people who are unable to access suitable accommodation in the private rental market. Social housing includes public and community housing, as well as other services and products.

Strategic centre

Centres with significant commercial components and a range of higher-order services. The Strategic Centres are higher order than local centres but smaller than regional cities and are Moree, Narrabri, Gunnedah, Glen Innes and Inverell.

Sustainability

Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Urban land

Land that is zoned under any of the following land use zones:

- R1 General Residential
- R2 Low Density Residential
- R3 Medium Density Residential
- R4 High Density Residential
- R5 Large Lot Residential
- RU5 Village
- B1 Neighbourhood Centre
- B2 Local Centre
- B3 Commercial Core
- B4 Mixed Use
- B5 Business Development
- B6 Enterprise Corridor
- B7 Business Park
- B8 Metropolitan Centre
- E1 Local Centre
- E2 Commercial Centre
- E3 Productivity Support
- E4 General Industrial
- E5 Heavy Industrial
- IN1 General Industrial
- IN2 Light Industrial
- IN3 Heavy Industrial
- IN4 Working Waterfront
- MU1 Mixed Use
- W4 Working Waterfront
- SP3 Tourist
- SP4 Enterprise

Agency abbreviations

DPI – NSW Department of Primary Industries

DPE – NSW Department of Planning and Environment

DRNSW – NSW Department of Regional NSW

TfNSW – Transport for NSW

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Settlement Planning Guidelines

Key Strategy Aims	Principles
Identify growth needs and opportunities	Land use strategies will: a. Establish the need for any planned areas of urban growth, based on Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) population projections to 2041. Councils may wish to use the full range of population scenarios to give an idea of the different possible futures that might arise. b. Include a land use supply and demand overview, including an estimate of supply in developed or developing areas. Rural residential development will be considered a component of residential supply. c. Provide a summary of growth options, including urban infill and no growth options. Where practical, consider growth options outside the LGA. d. Identify urban growth planning priorities based on an assessment of supply and demand and the relative suitability and serviceability of areas for urban growth.
Identify and direct suitable land to accommodate planned growth	Where urban growth is proposed: e. New greenfield areas are to be located adjacent to existing urban settlements to minimise travel and promote sustainability and resilience. f. New greenfield areas must be able to be serviced by community services and key infrastructure, including water, sewer, road and waste services. g. New greenfield areas are to avoid land that is affected by key constraints, such as areas of high environmental value, cultural, and heritage significance and/ or areas affected by natural hazards such as flooding or high bushfire risk. h. New greenfield areas should avoid and manage the potential for land use conflicts with existing and likely future adjoining use and infrastructure, including important agricultural land, and productive resource lands.
Determine the required structure for future development	Where urban growth is proposed: i. Structure Plans should be considered to provide a framework to coordinate development in new greenfield areas. j. New greenfield areas should be located to provide links to adjoining areas to ensure new areas are well integrated and maximise efficiency and shared use of services and facilities k. Planning should provide for a mix of compatible land uses and create walkable communities consistent with the settlement hierarchy. l. Planning should provide for local services that meet the day to day needs of residents, including areas for open space and recreation. m. The location and scale of new employment zones should not undermine the viability of existing centres and the maintenance of strong multi-functional central business precincts.

Key Strategy Aims	Principles
Encourage locally responsive, sustainable design	Land use strategies and plans will: n. Recognise, protect and be compatible with any unique topographic, natural or built cultural features essential to the visual setting, character, identity, or heritage significance of the area. o. Support a variety of dwelling types and a choice in location, form and affordability. p. Design and locate development to maximise total water cycle management and promote passive environmental design principles. Water sensitive urban design techniques should be incorporated into the design of dwellings, streets, parking areas, subdivisions and multi-unit, commercial and industrial developments. q. Provide for local services that meet the day to day needs of residents and areas for open space and recreation which where possible provide buffers between natural hazards and development. r. Design and locate development to minimise the need to travel, maximise the opportunity for efficient public transport and pedestrian access options, and encourage energy and resource efficiency whilst building resilience.

Planning and Environment

dpie.nsw.gov.au

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