

Connecting the Past to the Future



Maitland Street provides a snapshot of a country town over time. There are good quality buildings from many periods and they work together to make up an excellent main street. Whilst other towns have seen more growth, their modernisation has robbed them of their traditional clothes, and they have lost the fabric and character of their past.

Bingara was designed with wide avenues set into a country town grid. Even in the early days Maitland Street was planted out with rows of broad spreading shade trees in generous medians. This pattern of shady avenues extended outwards and today we still see old avenues of trees such as on Finch and Keera Streets.





- 01

North East corner Maitland & Heber Street: Lyons Royal Hotel
- 02

Druids Hall, Maitland Street: Was Harold Batterham’s first shop, late1920s early 1930s
- 03

Andersons store Maitland Street, early 1900s. Now site of Whifeld Place
- 04

Elkingtons store circa 1914. Now site of Bingara Medical Centre
- 05

Finkernagels garage Maitland Street. Now site of Toy Library
- 06

Finkernagels store, South West corner Maitland & Cunningham Streets 1880s.
Now site of Café owned by Gwydir Shire Council, as part of Roxy Theater complex
- 07

M.U.I.O.O.F. Lodge on Cunningham Street. Now site of Scots Presbyterian Church
- 08

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- 09

Bingara School of Arts 1907
Soldiers War Memorial Hall from 1922
With additions, is now Gwydir Shite Council, Bingara Office
- 10

Bingara Courthouse South West corner Maitland & Finch Streets: Built 1879.
Now Site used by the library and government services
- 11

Bingara Post Office early 1900s
- 12

Bingara Police Station Finch Street 1889. Now home of senior local police officer
- 13

Post Office hotel, build circa 1860, 16-18 Maitland Street.
Now site of Bingara and district Historical Society Museum
- 14

Connolly family store, mail exchange and coach stop in 1880s.
7 Maitland Street. Site was also Harry Fay’s first shop
- 15

Riverview Hotel: Was on North West corner of Maitland & Keera Streets.
- 16

Ceremonial avenue of orange trees (World War II memorial)

Courtesy: Bob Kirk, resident and local historian

The Set-Up Shop Process

Over the week long consultation process in June 2008 the community produced an extensive list expressing their visions and ideas for Bingara in the long term. These visions were listed on the walls of the shop adjacent to Rivercare on Maitland Street. One hundred and fifty seven residents and visitors contributed ideas over the week. Whilst residents were asked to think about the long term future of the town, they found it easier to visualise shorter-term improvements. The strategy combines both large and small actions for positive change.

Ongoing Ideas and Consultations

Over the last couple of years, the Bingara community has participated in a number of workshops and consultations focussed on future thinking. In February 2010 “Our Place” Country Town Living 2025 A Forum for the Future was held by Gwydir Shire Council and Vision 20/20 which involved workshops and guest speakers including John Mongard. A shopfront and public workshop and community interviews, held in August 2010, were all part of further consultation which led to The Bingara & District Community Economic Development Plan 2010-2011. The Bingara Town Strategy Report reflects the issues, ideas and views that have come out of all these ongoing consultation / futuring processes.

In a 2005 community survey of Bingara by Elton Consulting, the most important thing that people valued and felt proud about the Bingara area was overwhelmingly its sense of community.

Recurring themes included maintaining the appearance of the town with shady trees, clean rivers and a tidy town centre. Sustainable resource usage and capitalising on natural assets and the friendliness of people were other important themes. These same themes have been reinforced in the town future consultations as part of this strategy.



Small Things to Fix

There is a high level of contentment in Bingara. Community members had ideas for small, easy improvements such as:

- Some footpath areas such as outside Fay's need to be made more even for older people.
- Signage to public toilets needs to be improved.
- Residential street trees need to be protected and road surfaces should not dominate.
- Shady footpaths and bikeway/gopher lanes need to be established.
- A trail of stories and historical markers and signs could be built
- The entry near the service station needs to be tidied up.

Key Consultation Points

- People are extremely positive in Bingara. They see that the town can prosper even in uncertain times. This attitude needs to be nurtured.
- There are strong community feelings about the place and its identity.
- People love Bingara's warm and friendly town.
- Most are happy with their lifestyle and their town, and with diversification, they see more housing and work opportunities.
- Its a great place for older people and many people wander into town and stay forever. Both visitors and residents need to be catered for better so that they do stay in town.
- People are worried about losing the younger population and want to make sure young people have things to do and places to go.
- To maintain and increase the economy and vitality of Bingara, tourism needs to be encouraged and this can be achieved by implementing forward looking projects which use the natural assets of the area such as The Living Classroom and Bingara Riverscapes and with town streetscape improvements.
- Provide for improvements to infrastructure such as roads, public spaces and communications.

What People Want for Bingara

Support Local Work

“Try to get as many things locally.”

“Get back to agricultural roots.”

More business enterprises need to be created. Key health services such as a local dentist are needed in town. Local businesses and produce should be supported. A local meat butchering facility, for example, would support the local stock industries. A truck stop designed close to shops with adequate parking would support local business.

Better Transport and Linkages

“In ten years time there will need to be a local public transport system in place.”

Public transport will become an increasing priority to link Bingara within itself and to neighbouring towns. As Bingara ages, facilities such as a community bus will become important.

Tourism and Attractions

“Utilise the need for facilities to bring the people in.”

Better tourism facilities are needed in Bingara. Tourists need a place to stay and more facilities to host visitors in town. More signage, information and trails could be established which interpret the history and geology of the area. Bikeways, pathways with seating and maps, toilet facilities and connected nodes and destinations will improve the visitor experience. The lookout should be upgraded at All Nations Hill. A van parking area with amenities would encourage travellers to stay.

Utilising the River

“Most visitors are looking to go fishing in the river.”

The characteristics of Bingara’s setting are the hills in the backdrop and the river. Works could be carried out in the river to encourage water recreation and improve water sport opportunities. The Riverscapes Park is an important element to link the town to the river. The Riverscapes Park should be designed for good surveillance and to keep views open.

Better Facilities for Elderly People

A central community centre could also cater for senior citizens. A multi-purpose centre possibly near the hospital could include attractions such as a hydrotherapy pool.

Reflecting History

“Preserve the history of the whole Gwydir Shire.”

People like Bingara the way it is. There is a sense of the history of Bingara that people want to retain. People would like tourism to be linked to key old buildings and places in the manner of The Roxy Theatre.

Housing Diversity

“The old people feel safe in Bingara.”

People feel that Bingara does not fully cater for the needs of all its residents and workers. For example, the elderly need more options for cared living, and the town could provide more affordable housing and options for renters, temporary works and low income residents. There needs to be more diversity of both temporary and long term housing options, particularly for young workers and the elderly.

More Things for Young People

“Many homes up for sale but not many homes up for rent.”

Young people need more things to do and more leisure and recreation activities. They also need more work and more reasons to stay as they become older, for example, people suggested providing new youth recreation facilities such as a skate park, a BMX track and a high ropes course. All these activities could be in one complex. There is a perceived opportunity for learning at all levels which is now being addressed by the work of The Gwydir Learning Region.

More Trees and Shaded Walkways

The main street needs to be ‘softened’ and made more amenable to pedestrians. More trees and shade spots will encourage both residents and visitors to gather and linger.

Local Food / Local Resources

Both young and old are concerned about the cost of living and a big part of this is the cost of food. Ideas about local produce, local food, community gardens and tapping into Gwydir Shire’s Agricultural Skills and Excellence are mentioned in all community consultations. Bingara has the people, skills and produce to be able to be much more self-sufficient in the future. This relates to many needs

References:

JMLA Set-up Shop, June 2008 and August 2010

“Our Place” Country Town Living 2025 A Forum for the Future, February 2010

Gwydir Sustainability Strategy - Elton Consulting, August 2005

A Recipe for the Future

The Bingara Town Strategy needs to incorporate all the creativity and resourcefulness of the community, local council and the business community.

The following key elements and town projects form the plan:

- 1. **A Strong Town Plan and Town Strategy**
- 2. **Key Sites to Stimulate Growth**
 - 2.1 **Council's Depot Site**
 - 2.2 **The Town Market and Car Park Precinct**
 - 2.3 **Future Housing Sites**
- 3. **A New Spine for the Town**
- 4. **Riverscapes: Opening the Town to the River**
- 5. **The Living Classroom**
- 6. **Ten Actions for Resilience**



1. A Strong Town Plan and Town Strategy

The Gwydir Shire is currently reviewing its planning schemes and the Bingara Town Plan has been reviewed as part of the Bingara Town Planning process.

The town plan can both control and encourage appropriate change and development in Bingara. Currently, the town plan gives very little guidance. It merely distinguishes the town from the rural areas.

A strong town plan for Bingara is envisaged which promotes sustainable growth within walking distance of the main street. Bingara needs to encourage a diverse range of people to come and live in town so that its services and business remain local and active, and so that there is enough work to keep the town sustainable.

A more diverse range of housing options are required if all these things are to be achieved. Aside from the standard house and lot, and a couple of duplexes, there are not other housing options for living currently in town. In the future, Bingara should have more variety to suit the elderly, single parents, transient youth and workers and people with no time to maintain a yard. More attached dwellings, townhouses and multiple story terrace housing will be needed for these 'lifestyle' demands. This housing needs to be planned cleverly so that the excellent country town and historic character of Bingara is not destroyed.

It is important that Bingara holds onto its country town feel and does not become a suburban place like the cities. Indiscriminate development in Inverell for example, has seen the excellent mixed use historic centre surrounded by some poor quality industrial strips and some new housing areas which have poor country town qualities.

So whilst development must be stimulated so that Bingara will not decline, this development needs to positively encapsulate the town's character and its community spirit. The town plan is the mechanism to ensure this, however, Bingara may not have the luxury of time, waiting for the right people to come along and invest in its future. It may need to be more pro-active to bring people and work into the town. The Bingara Town Strategy is the catalyst for making change happen in town.

2. Key Sites to Stimulate Growth

Bingara has managed to keep all of its key town centre functions on its main street. This is now a rarity. The pattern in other country towns is for towns to lose their centre as soon as they get large enough for a 'big box' shopping centre, or for bulky goods establishments, commercial franchises and light industry. These invariably go to the periphery where large and cheap blocks occur. The town gets an ugly entrance of showrooms and a competing retail centre which draws money away from the town and destroys the main street. This is the story of rural Australia's recent past, and it is not the way to plan for the future.

All future retail and business in Bingara should stay on the main street if the town is to survive. By staying compact, developing more intensely in the underutilized back areas of the main street, Bingara can be future-proofed. It will have the vitality of an active town, it will be walkable, and it will retain its outstanding social and liveable amenity.

An assessment of underutilized land within the town centre has identified some strategic sites to create development and growth opportunities that are sustainable and main street oriented. This land can be used to infill the town rather than to further encroach on its periphery, thus allowing the town to stay within a walking distance to all services and shops.



2.1 Council's Depot Site

Behind the Council Chambers and the Landcare shopfront is a large area of Council land with parking and a depot which at some point will need to be relocated to a new light industrial area.

Council can create a development control plan for this large site which would retain the main street buildings and functions, creating a new shopfront to the side of the large shed as well as a linkage leading to a set-back village-style housing development. This development could incorporate a range of living options including studio terraces, retirement living and affordable housing.

This housing precinct could include a building of three storeys, with stairwells and a central lift for the elderly/infirm. It could provide one, two and three bedroom homes in apartment or terrace style buildings which would cluster around excellent gardens and a central green space. Concept plans and sketches could then be built into an expression of interest for developers and investors, similar to processes in mainland cities. By attracting national/international investors seeking the 'tree change' opportunities, Bingara can fast-track its town centre growth. The civic centre building could be re-used with some shopfronts, retention of the hall and toilets for the mixed use precinct. The arts building could be re-used as an arts and crafts centre and activity area.

2.2 The Town Market and Car Park Precinct

Across the main street and behind the shopfronts lies an equally large combination of land parcels which could also be better utilized. Currently, shop tenants park ad-hoc in a large dirt car park area, however, the ‘back-of-shop’ area has good character, with historic brick structures and some good shade trees. The owners of all the land parcels on this block could negotiate a shared use agreement with Council which would allow better parking to be developed which could have direct access to the main street. This car park could be brick paved and landscaped to create a dual use market square, a place where a new town farmers market could attract visitors to buy local craft, goods and farm produce. This would attract more local spending and support local business by providing a town centre attraction. This rear lot area also has opportunity to develop three storey, walk-up mixed use facilities with offices, homes above, and capacity to accommodate some of the smaller light commercial tenants that usually migrate to the edges of towns. If these businesses can be clustered around a market square, then they would have parking, visibility and proximity. In the longer term, the SES sheds would move to light industrial land to cater for further housing needs within the town.



2.3 Future Housing Sites

Like most country towns facing declining populations in Australia, Bingara faces the pressure of allowing any kind of development in order to maintain growth. The challenge is to create smaller homes on smaller lots in order to provide affordability and diversity. These homes should be built as a priority within the town grid so that as the population ages, the town can better service its community without a ballooning infrastructure impost.

In the future the sustainable way to provide for a range of living places would focus on creating desirable housing within the walkable footprint of the township grid. Within this area, the council owns at least seven large lots which have the possibility to provide most of the housing demand into the next twenty years. Ideas for how these lots could accommodate a diversity of housing to fulfil the next unmet needs of particular parts of the community have been explored in this report.



3. A New Spine for the Town

Cunningham Street, running from the east to the west of Bingara, is an extremely wide sealed street. It is too wide for pedestrian amenity, has too much asphalt to maintain, and creates a heat sink and glare zone in the town centre. A new spine is proposed to allow residents to walk, bike and ride electric gophers more easily across town.

The present kerb and channel, with parallel parking can be retained on both sides of the street. A single carriageway divided by a boulevard of fruit and nut trees would create a continuum of the memorial orange trees along Finch Street and a central two lane mobility corridor for cyclists, pedestrians and gophers would link Halls Creek and The Centre for Regenerative Agriculture. This visual corridor would increase the amenity of the street with shade and a break in hard surfaces. Services would not be affected and stormwater could be directed towards the avenue. Sections of parallel parking nearer the shops could be designated suitable for motorhome overnight use, thus creating more visitor activity near the town's heart.

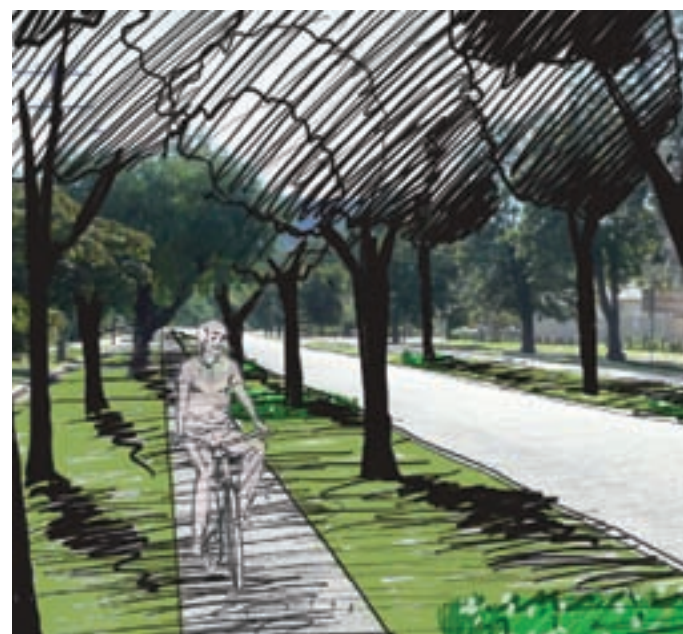
4. Riverscapes : Opening the Town to the River

The Riverscapes Project is a community idea to improve the riverfront land adjacent to the northern end of the main street. In prior centuries, rivers were often treated as adversaries, since they occasionally flooded unprepared towns. Bingara town also turned its back on the Gwydir River so Riverscapes is a project to create a great public space where the main street meets the water. This will benefit both residents and visitors, and will be the template for the gradual improvement of the broader Riverscapes, including the eroded banks of Halls Creek which meanders along the eastern part of Bingara. A community led design has been developed and was exhibited and discussed during the set-up shop in June 2008. A number of positive ideas were added to the Riverscapes plan and have been incorporated in the concepts. The community is very positive about the Riverscapes Project, the only issues raised were from a few residents who would like to retain views and are concerned about maintaining natural surveillance. The park is the first part of the Bingara Town Strategy to be implemented.

5. The Living Classroom

Another community-led idea in Bingara is to rehabilitate the old common public grazing land to the western edge of town into The Centre for Regenerative Agriculture which features the district's agricultural stock and produce. This has the opportunity to create an international visitor destination unlike any other in regional Australia. It can bring fresh produce closer to town, thus making Bingara more sustainable in food and tourism. The concepts and details are described in detail further in the report.

During the consultation, plans of The Living Classroom were favourably received by the community. Once the ideas were explained, people felt it was a good future-looking proposal to help Bingara attract visitors and become more self-sufficient. Some people felt the facility should aim to be self-supporting in the long run. People thought it would be great for school camps, tourists, woofers and grey nomads, and would promote jobs and the viability of local fruit markets. It was considered a great opportunity to educate locals and tourists about sustainable living and to celebrate Bingara's excellent agricultural roots. It would also become a place to innovate and experiment with new crops and technologies. The idea of a visitor centre/interpretive centre has the potential to draw many people to the region.



Things to Fix



Traffic Calming:

Discourage heavy vehicle speed and passing through the town centre. Create a 40 km speed limit and some country town style traffic calming.



Rear Car Parks:

These areas are unresolved and inefficient. Better lighting, walkways and organised parking as well as future infill development with housing could occur.



Pedestrian Friendly Streets:

Provide shaded walkways and bikeways throughout the town centre. Reduce ambient heat in town by a reduction of sealed surfaces.

Town Park Improvement:

Fays Park opposite the Roxy Theatre is underutilised. It needs renovation to provide more shade, amenity and soft space.



Roxy Theatre Surrounds:

The courtyard requires more shade. A vine trellis/arbour would assist. The fronting footpaths need renovation to encourage sitting and gathering in the cultural heart of town.



Apex Park Improved:

This park needs renovation. The information sign needs updating and the planting needs alteration to encourage usage.

