

Council Report

Agenda Item Number:	14.6
Report Title:	Development of Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan
Meeting Date:	18/01/2017
Attachments:	Attachment A: Letter of Comment on Development of Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan

Purpose

To seek Council endorsement of a letter sent to Lands Planning: Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics and staff of the NT Planning Commission on 16 January 2017 as a response to a request for comment on the development of the Area Plan for the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre.

Summary

The NT Planning Commission has commenced its consultation process for the development of an Area Plan for the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre. Community information sessions and a workshop were held across late November and early December 2016. In early 2017, the Planning Commission asked Council if it would like to make a formal submission regarding the Area Plan development.

Recommendation

THAT Council endorse Attachment A, Council's Letter of Comment on the development of the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan.

Background

The NT Planning Commission held community information sessions on 29 and 30 November 2016 and a community workshop on 3 December 2016 to assist with the development of an Area Plan for the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre.

Litchfield Council has attended these events and participated in the discussions and activities. Council has also been represented on the Infrastructure Project Control Group for the development of the Area Plan for Howard Springs since October 2016. Further, Council is represented by the Mayor and Councillors Wright and Osborn on the Planning Commission's Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan Community Engagement Advisory Group.

In early 2017, the NT Planning Commission invited Council to make a formal submission to the Planning Commission regarding the direction and content of the Area Plan. A letter was sent 16 January 2017 to the NT Planning Commission that set out Council's viewpoint on the key planning and land use principles relevant to the future planning requirements in the Area Plan. The Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan was called upon to provide guidance to Council's submission.

This report seeks Council's formal endorsement of the letter to the NT Planning Commission.

Links with Strategic Plan

Priority # 2 – A Great Place to Live

Legislative and Policy Implications

Nil.

Risks

Nil.

Financial Implications

Nil.

Community Engagement

Council attended the Planning Commission's consultation sessions along with the appointed Community Advisory Group members for Howard Springs.

Recommending Officer: David Kingston, Director Infrastructure and Operations

Any queries on this report may be directed to the Recommending Officer on telephone (08) 8983 0600.
Any member of Council who may have a conflict of interest, or a possible conflict of interest in regard to any item of business to be discussed at a Council meeting of a Committee meeting should declare that conflict of interest to enable Council to manage the conflict and resolve it in accordance with its obligations under the Local Government Act and its policies regarding the same.



Lands Planning
Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics
GPO Box 1680
Darwin NT 0801

16 January 2017

RE: Letter of Comment Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan information sessions, community workshop, and Infrastructure Project Control Group.

Litchfield Council provides the following comments for consideration in the development of the Area Plan.

a) Area Plan Scope

The Area Plan should address the potential for surrounding existing and planned future development to impact Activity Centre development. There are existing businesses and large community uses in the near vicinity that are outside the Activity Centre's current boundary. In particular, the Howard Springs Holiday Park, Good Shepherd Lutheran School, and Inpex site are all large influential uses in the area that can be expected to influence the development of Howard Springs in the coming years. There are two options for addressing these uses:

- expansion of the Activity Centre boundaries to include these uses and address all of Howard Springs holistically; or
- include a clear reference within the Area Plan to these uses and the influence their existence and potential redevelopment will have on the core existing Activity Centre area.

If these areas are not included within the Area Plan, then the Area Plan should clearly reference the preservation of viable future connections to these uses, including the ability to upgrade physical connections and/or modify land uses between the different activity points in the future.

The Area Plan should also envisage the possible timing of new development and/or any relevant staging of development expected as a result of infrastructure requirements. If some elements of the Area Plan are dependent upon other elements happening first, this reliance should be clearly recognised. Likewise, if improvements are reliant on new infrastructure features, the expected or required timing should be noted for community assurance.

b) Vision

An important element of developing Howard Springs is to ensure a point of difference between this activity centre and the nearly adjacent and larger Coolalinga Activity Centre. There must be a point of distinction between the two areas to ensure that the Howard Springs Activity Centre does not become overlooked or irrelevant as increasing development occurs in Coolalinga.

One opportunity to be considered could be capitalising on the natural features present in Howard Springs, such as the lagoons and the ability to incorporate walking trails. The importance of the natural environment in Howard Springs is discussed further below.

c) Natural Environment

The natural environment, in particular the lagoons, is an important feature of Howard Springs. The incorporation of accessible and functional walking and cycling trails should be encouraged by the Area Plan. The NT Planning Commission is also encouraged to work with the private owners of the lagoon spaces to incorporate boardwalks and walking trails that would allow the lagoons to be enjoyed by the entire community. This use may require a joint venture between the government and landowners or could involve the government acquiring portions of land to enhance the public's experience of these areas. It should be a goal of the plan to link Wadham Lagoon, Duchies Lagoon and Howard Park Reserve. Further walking and cycling connections to and from these features to the caravan park and to the future redevelopment of the Inpex Village would also serve the Area Plan well.

Useful public open space within the Activity Centre is of significant interest to Litchfield Council. Given the already small lot sizes in single ownership within the Activity Centre boundary, Council foresees that the NT Planning Scheme requirements for 10% public open space for each new development could lead to the development of numerous small public open space lots that would not be able to provide useable open space. For example, if each 2-hectare lot is subdivided individually, that would leave several 2,000m² lots that would need to be developed individually as parks. These spaces on their own would be unlikely to be robustly developed due to size and their functionality would be limited. It would be more beneficial for the NT Government to develop a mechanism for redeveloped land within the Activity Centre boundary to contribute to one larger identified public open space area, ideally linked to the walking and cycling trails mentioned earlier. The area should be identified on the Area Plan for clarity in the future and Litchfield Council considers that the area would be most feasibly be located between the Activity Centre and Wadham Lagoon. The joint development of a large area of public open space may require a contribution plan to be developed by the NT Government, as Council is prevented by the NT Planning Act from taking contributions for such a space. Council is open to eventually owning and managing such a joint space and would consider this option preferable to a series of smaller, less useable park spaces.

d) Sewerage

Litchfield Council is aware that the future development of Howard Springs Activity Centre relies on the incorporation of a new sewer pump station to remove pressure on septic systems and the threat these have on groundwater quality and availability. In regard to the siting of the pump station, the social infrastructure study completed for the Rural Activity Centres indicates that Howard Springs is already low on park space for a couple of different sporting activities. As such, Council is not in favour of locating a sewer pump station within Howard Park Reserve; instead Council prefers that a sewer station be located on land that is subject to future subdivision development.

e) Lot Size and Development Type

Council is aware that the sewerage upgrades will influence the final lot sizes/densities noted within the Area Plan. Council notes that many people at the community workshop had strong opinions that lot sizes should not be below 4,000m², a size at which

individual septic systems could be accommodated on private properties. Conversely, Council also supports the incorporation of housing choice, with smaller lot sizes encouraged around an activity centre. There may be some middle ground with the opportunity for some smaller lots immediately adjacent existing and proposed commercial uses and larger lots in the remainder of the activity centre. Council recommends that changes in lot sizes be separated by roadways, rather than back fences, to provide a better natural barrier between housing types and associated noise. Residents at the community workshop rightly noted that once the property next door is divided into 20 smaller lots, the amenity of the adjacent 2-hectare lot is immediately altered, even if that landowner chooses not to subdivide at the same time and these conflicts in amenity should be avoided.

Council supports a two-storey height limit for the Howard Springs Activity Centre.

f) Roads and Traffic

As Howard Springs develops, enhanced road connections will be an important factor in the success of the development. Council supports the provision of a variety of routes to spread traffic throughout an area and create fewer conflicts. Consequently, Council supports keeping Whitewood Road open to Howard Springs Road while adding a new connection to Howard Springs Road from an extension of Madsen Road. Whitewood Road can be used to provide a direct path to the two schools, the commercial centre, and the reserve, while Madsen Road can provide a quicker bypass route for individuals located east and south—east of Howard Springs who do not wish to visit those other uses.

The location of any links between Madsen Road and Whitewood Road is also important. Council considers that the future link shown on existing Area Plan documents being west of the Activity Centre should be a lower speed environment link to reflect the entry/exit of users to the activity centre and Council believes this road should be carefully sited to best connect with the existing and proposed uses on the southern side of Whitewood Road. To achieve this, co-ordination should occur with the relevant property owner(s) on the northern side of Whitewood Road.

This link should also be complemented by a higher speed environment link further east which can act as a bypass feature and Hamilton Road could feasibly serve this purpose.

Council also supports the central portion of the Activity Centre being a fixed year-round low speed environment that accommodates school speed requirements. A low-speed activity centre would encourage pedestrian and cycle transport to and within the activity centre and help to sustain an open and high-amenity mix of land uses within the centre. Having in place the above-mentioned links between Whitewood and Madsen Roads will help to maintain the desired low speed environment. Similarly, there are a variety of measures that Council can impose to ensure that Whitewood Road carries mainly local traffic to specific destinations and Madsen Road carries other bypassing traffic; these features will be employed closer to the time Madsen Road is improved and extended.

Beyond that, Council considers that specific streetscape upgrades and exact street geometry of roads should not be part of the Area Plan; these items will be concurrently addressed in Council's revised Development Guidelines and Council will work with the NT Government on appropriate timing for improvements and upgrades to Council roads.

Given the wider road reserve available on Madsen Road, the Area Plan should identify Madsen Road as containing a future shared walking/cycling path with connectors to existing bicycle paths. Council considers that Whitewood Road is not a safe width and profile for that activity.

The extension of Smyth Road to connect the Howard Springs Activity Centre to the Coolalinga Activity Centre would likely benefit the residents of Howard Springs in being able to access Coolalinga as the growing major commercial centre of the rural area, although as noted earlier, having complementary rather than duplicated services at each activity centre will serve to ensure they do not compete against each other in an unsustainable manner. The extension of Smyth Road would be a major investment and Council encourages the maximum use of such an investment for the benefit of the entire community. As such, Council prefers that this road be open to all traffic and not be restricted to public transport only. Cycling paths between the activity centres should also be included to encourage alternative transportation options. The design of any extension of the road should be wide enough to appropriately accommodate these features as well as appropriate rural streetscape features. However, Council acknowledges that existing residents along Smyth Road may be resistant to a major through route adjacent their properties and upgrades to Smyth Road should incorporate streetscape features that appreciate this view.

Council looks forward to working with the NT Government on the timing of and funding for the upgrades and improvements to all roads within the Activity Centre.

g) Mosquitos

Council supports the use of appropriate mosquito mitigation measures while supporting the expressed community view that the presence of mosquitos in a known lagoon area should not be an overly restrictive factor in development of the area.

If you require any further discussion in relation to the above information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 08 8983 0600.

Yours faithfully



David Kingston
Director Infrastructure and Operations