

Coonabarabran

Community Action Plan



BUILDING OUR
Warrumbungle
COMMUNITIES
2022-2026

Foreword



The creation of the Coonabarabran Action Plan began during an extended period of drought with the recognition of a greater need to work together as a community. In 2020 Building our Warrumbungle Communities group was formed. After several Covid related delays, a series of events was held in May 2021 in every town across the Warrumbungle Shire, resulting in the development of Action Plans for each community in the Shire.

Facilitation of the community engagement process, community public events and preparation for the plan was undertaken by Peter Kenyon from the Bank of I.D.E.A.S, assisted by a group of passionate drivers who made up the Building Our Warrumbungle Communities team. More than 560 people took the opportunity to attend the 18 community gatherings across the Shire, to share ideas and collaborate, bringing together their passions and visions for the future of each community. Having identified our wealth of assets - people, physical environment, institutions, cultural, economic and social networks - we considered what we needed to retain, regain, change or create.

Now based on the richness of our community's history of working together for the betterment of all, Coonabarabran Action Plan focuses on our future. It will provide a map for short term projects, detailing goals to pursue and ideas to nurture and grow. It lays the groundwork to utilise funding and volunteer workforce to augment and commence many community projects. Our objective is to create a prosperous and attractive locality for everyone to enjoy, and to foster our vision of a welcoming, resilient, and thriving community which cares for its town, its people, and its environment and country.

Acknowledgements



Input into the Coonabarabran Action Plan came from hundreds of our community members from all age groups and backgrounds across the Coonabarabran area. This initial valuable community contribution was then refined by a core group of volunteers. We thank them all for their engagement.

We acknowledge the Gamilaroi people, the traditional custodians of the land of the Coonabarabran district. We pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging, extending our respect to all First Nations people.



Special thanks to the following organisations who sponsored and supported the development of the Coonabarabran Action Plan.



- Australian Federal Government under the Drought Communities Extension Funding
- Department of Primary Industries - Rural Resilience Program
- Warrumbungle Shire Council
- Bank of Ideas - Peter Kenyon
- The Rotary Club of Coonabarabran Inc.
- NALAG - National Association for Loss and Grief NSW Inc.
- Inland Rail Community Grants
- Printing of this document was sponsored by Rural Aid



Front cover image: Steve Chapman



Our Story



Coonabarabran - where the mountains meet the stars

Coonabarabran is located on the Castlereagh River in north-west NSW, approximately 480 kilometres from Sydney. It is the central hub for the Warrumbungle Shire, and has a population of around 2500.

Pronounced “koon-uh-barra-bran” (or Coona for short) one meaning of the name derives from Gamilaroi language as ‘inquisitive person’. First Nations people have occupied the region for thousands of years, the area providing an abundance of food and water for the Gamilaroi people who spread from the Warrumbungle Mountains to the north-west plains. Explorer John Oxley first travelled to the area in 1818, his expedition highlighting his contact with the local First Nations people.

Coonabarabran was formally gazetted as a village in 1860. The town served as a centre for already established farming enterprises, and as an important stopover point and transport hub for people and goods travelling west from the coast. Coonabarabran remains a vital connection for travellers, marking a halfway point along the Newell Highway from Melbourne to Brisbane, as well as being the start of the Oxley Highway. It is a place where everyone

can tap into the mountain of opportunities and adventures.

Widely regarded as the “Astronomy Capital of Australia” owing to its crystal-clear night skies, Coonabarabran is home to the country’s largest optical astronomy research facility at Siding Spring, along with many other telescopes throughout the area. The town is the gateway to the iconic Warrumbungle National Park and Australia’s first internationally recognised Dark Sky Park. Only a handful of locations in the world have been honoured with this title. Thus, in addition to being a perfect destination for bushwalking and camping, the area is ideal for stargazing. It has high altitude, low humidity, a non-turbulent atmosphere for viewing clarity, clean air and an average of 70% clear night skies.

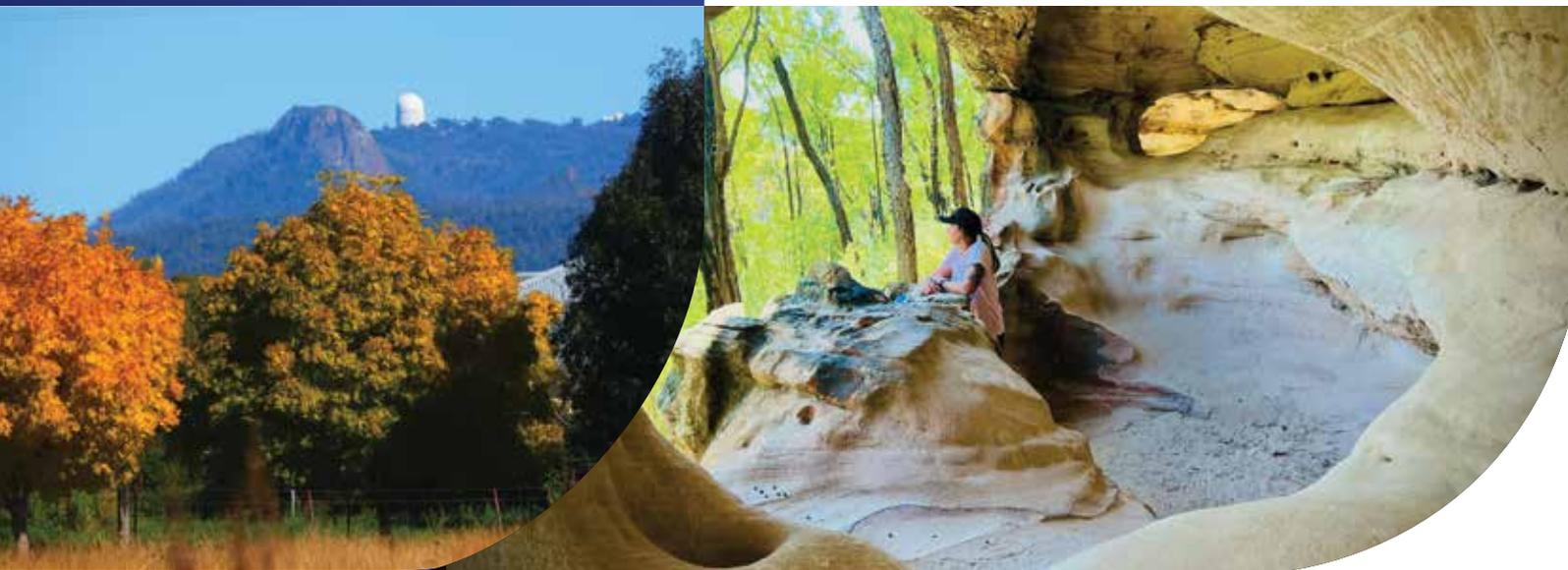
Today, Coonabarabran is a thriving agricultural district, a vibrant and caring community that celebrates art, science, and culture, and cares for its natural environment. Country charm remains strong with vibrant and innovative businesses, including numerous accommodation and dining options.

Our Vision

A welcoming, vibrant and resilient community, where we value growth and lifestyle, caring for our people, unique assets, environment and country.

Our Goals

- To value and recognise active citizenship, fostering high levels of volunteerism and participation
- To create an environment where our young people feel involved, supported and empowered, inspiring them to return to our community for work, enterprise, family and lifestyle opportunities
- Preserve and celebrate our significant Indigenous and diverse community heritage and culture
- Attract and retain a wide range of skilled people and their families who will contribute to the community
- Build and support a collaborative and innovative business community, focused on making the customer feel welcomed and valued
- Retain, develop and improve the range of available educational, health and wellbeing services
- Develop a creative, collaborative and well thought out strategy for the town and highway signage - (road, tourism, business and community)
- Actively promote and showcase Coonabarabran, the Pilliga, the Warrumbungle National Park and the broader Warrumbungle Region to grow tourism and visitation
- To keep and promote the Warrumbungle Dark Sky Park, the first in Australia to be internationally recognised
- For the community to know, value and promote its assets as a great place to stop, explore, shop, stay and live
- To have a vibrant and welcoming town, valuing the country lifestyle, with a diverse range of services to encourage innovation and creativity
- Build strong working relations with all communities within the Shire to benefit the region.
- An active hub collaborating and supporting the Warrumbungle Region through connecting events and trails etc
- Maintain and develop our swimming pool, sporting, cultural facilities and infrastructure to a high standard
- To ensure the Coonabarabran Bypass becomes an asset to achieve growth and enhance lifestyle
- Protect our unique environmental ecosystems - flora, fauna, geology, soils and water - actively contributing to the improvement of the global environment through positive actions in our community



Our Guiding Values

- Welcome and Inclusive Community
- Diversity and Mutual Respect
- Community Connection
- Collaboration
- Commitment to Innovation and Business Excellence
- Respect for Environment and Heritage
- Active Citizenship
- Celebration

Our Challenges

Key challenges are:

- The impending Newell Highway Bypass of Coonabarabran's CBD presents significant implications.
- Lack of preparation and leadership to maximise economic and social benefits
- Lack of effective and current signage on entry to town beyond the bypass

Social and Health Services are an ongoing concern

- A low socio-economic community lacking essential social and health support services including engagement for childcare, youth, disability, aged care and vulnerable communities
- Need for emergency and specialist medical services and technologies
- Ongoing shortage of qualified nurses, doctors and allied health personnel
- Maintenance and upgrading of tired aged care infrastructure
- Limited choices and waiting lists for early childhood services and childcare
- Lack of a permanent designated youth officer, youth facilities, programs and support
- Inconsistency of agencies providing human services, high turnover of people and programs with service duplication
- Poor health outcomes - high mortality rates, higher chronic illness
- Insufficient specialised staffing and services for supporting Residential Care, NDIS and My Aged packages and programs
- Gaps in services to provide support for people experiencing intergenerational trauma, poverty, unemployment, addictions, domestic violence and mental health issues

Over time, Coonabarabran has experienced problems attributed to typical rural decline with social implications

- Reduced impact of funding and budget for the Shire as a whole when split between the 6 towns of Warrumbungle Shire
- Population decline and an ageing population, with a declining youth demographic
- Proximity of larger regional centres that act as 'Sponge Towns' drawing services, employment and dollars. This poses a challenge to local businesses and demographics
- Lack of a coherent, unique, inclusive and appealing plan for the main street and public spaces of Coonabarabran
- Lack of signage consistency across the Shire
- Poor infrastructure, amenities and signage for disability access across the whole town eg. for toilets, shops and footpaths
- Lack of cohesion and support for businesses to grow and adapt. Urgent need to develop business networks across the community
- Lack of reliable and consistent internet connectivity for the whole of Coonabarabran within and beyond the town. Connectivity is vital for the town to thrive and grow into the future
- Aging community infrastructure is difficult and expensive to maintain eg swimming pool and Youth Club
- Decline in the number of community gatherings and special events
- Difficulty attracting and retaining suitably qualified staff. eg trades, health, teaching
- Lack of varied rental accommodation and real estate
- Insurance compliance and red tape for community groups and small business
- Declining levels of community engagement and volunteerism
- Residual debt and stress from Wambelong Fire, drought, floods and Covid
- Sitting on the boundary and split across government agencies and service delivery areas
- Lack of collaboration between groups in the community
- Limited tertiary education and employment opportunities for many of our young people





Our Assets

Services

Communication

Locally owned newspaper Coonabarabran Times, Community Radio - WCRFM 99.5

Education

Public and Catholic Primary Schools, Secondary School, Preschools, Daycare, Warrumbungle Environmental Education Centre, TAFE

Health - Medical centres, Dentist, Health Service (hospital), Community Health Services, Cooinda Aged Care (hostel, nursing home, Merryula dementia unit, village) cancer support, physiotherapists, optometrist, chiropractor, massage therapists, podiatrist, Community Care

Emergency Services

Police station, ambulance station (paramedics), Volunteer Rescue Association, RFS, Fire brigade, NRMA

Welfare services

Barnado's, Breakthru, Centacare, Mission Australia, Red Cross, Samaritans, Vinnies, ADRA, Dept of Community and Justice, Domestic Violence Prevention, Mirganha, Yarn Support Suicide Prevention Group

Churches

Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, Uniting Church, Christian Outreach Centre, Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah's Witness

General

Service NSW, Shire Council, Banks (Commonwealth, Regional Australia, National Australia), Post Office, Employment Agencies, National Parks and Wildlife, LLS (Local Land Services), NSW Rural Fire Control Centre, Rotary Bookshop, Court House

Economic

Retail

Woolworths, IGA, butchers, bakery, florists, clothing, gift shops, hardware, home whitegoods and electrical, rural supplies, nursery, furniture and flooring, cottage industries (candles, children's wear, sheep skin products, bush furniture, olives), monthly markets

Services

Hairdressers and barber, mechanics and tyre services, builders, carpenters, refrigeration, plumbers, electricians, computer support and repair, pubs and clubs, real estate (low cost residential area), post office, medical practitioners, panel beaters, bus services, furniture removalists, stock transport services, delivery services, solicitors, agronomy services, rural financial services, employment services, banking, accountants, herbalist, veterinarian services

Tourism sector

14 motels, hotel, cafes, restaurants, caravan parks, B&B's, Milroy Observatory, Australian Astronomical Observatory

Farming enterprises

Cattle, sheep, emus, cropping (wheat, oats, barley, canola, sorghum), hay production, goats, pigs, wool, olives, Artificial Insemination and Embryo Transfer services

Manufacturing

Steel fabrication, kitchen and bathroom joinery, farm machinery fabrication and repairs, small pumps repairs, pottery, engineering workshops

People

Coonabarabran - A diverse community of people who are resilient, caring, community-minded, supportive, inclusive, and social

Town servicing 3-4,000 residents

Rural lifestyle

Full range of services and facilities

A safe community with low crime rate

Values its indigenous elders, story tellers, language teachers

Positive attitude to volunteering

Our Assets

Culture, Stories & Sources of Pride

Local Indigenous connection and culture

Burra Bee Dee, Aboriginal Dance Group, valued elders, Aboriginal Land Council, NAIDOC Week, National Sorry Day

Site of explorations by Oxley and others in early 19th century

Display of locally discovered Diprotodon skeleton at the Tourist Information Centre

Display of geological artefacts at Crystal Kingdom

Cultural and Craft groups

WAACI, Wambelong Spinners and Weavers, Coonabarabran Men's Choir, Orbital Swing Band (a concert band), Film Society (Flix in the Stix)

Events

NW Equestrian Expo in May, Bunny Bazaar at Easter, Dark Sky Awakens Festival, Feast of Words and Slice of Pi (High School events), race meetings held three times annually (500 + visitors), Starfest/ Siding Spring Open Day in October, Agricultural Show in March, ANZAC day, Christmas Spectacular, Annual Arts Show, Community Service Expo annually, Dramatic Society performances, International Dark Sky Week, Capture the Cosmos Astrophotography Competition

Physical

Tourist attractions

Warrumbungle National Park (60-70,000 visitors annually), Dark Sky Park, Castlereagh River, Siding Spring Observatory, Pilliga Forest, World's Largest Solar System Drive, Crystal Kingdom, Baradine Discovery Centre, Sculptures in the Scrub, Sandstone Caves, Salt Caves, Pilliga Pottery, Milroy Observatory, Hickey's Falls, Emu Farm, Diprotodon exhibition, Amillary Sphere outside Court House

Key facilities

Visitor's Information Centre, Little Timor Lane Plaza, Showground, Airport, Coonabarabran Town Hall, iconic or heritage listed buildings (Clock tower, Court House, Commonwealth Bank, Savoy Theatre), Macquarie Regional Library, village halls (Purlewaugh, Bugaldie, Ulamambri, Belar)

Sporting facilities and Parks

Ovals, netball courts, tennis and squash courts, greyhound track, golf club, bowling club, race course, equestrian cross country course, Sport and Rec Centre, skate park, swimming pool, walking tracks, boxing gym, Goanna Tracks BMX and Enduro Complex, parks, Neilson, Nandi, Masters, David Bell park, Timor, Rotary Bakery parks

Accommodation

2000 beds available, Motels and Hotels, Caravan Parks, B&B's, free camping (Golf Club), farm stays

Networks

Service Groups

Rotary, CWA, Men's Shed, View Club, Riding for the Disabled, Returned Services League, Senior Citizens

Social Groups

Aero Club, Astronomy Club, Car Club, Garden Club, Coonabarabran Club, Warrumbungle Arts and Crafts Inc, Girl Guides, Arts Council, Dramatic Society, Historical Society

Sporting Groups

Soccer, rugby, NRL, tennis, netball, physical culture, dance, cyclists, jockey club, lawn bowls, golf, rifle club, gyms, little athletics, league tag, cricket, pony club, swimming, aquafit, yoga, exercise classes

Community and Support Organisations

2357 Development Group, School P&C's, Landcare, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Equestrian Expo Committee, PAI&H Show Society, NSW Farmers, Rural Fire Service, Volunteer Rescue Association, Chamber of Commerce, Lamb Jumpers Helping our Farmers, SPACE - social enterprise, gallery and creative space

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme One

Building Community Connections

ACTIONS

1

1. Provide diverse entertainment and social activities across the calendars

- family friendly
- movies/cinemas - outdoor, portable
- music, cultural, games

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

2. Develop Youth Activities

- Establish a position for a Youth Development Officer
- Establish a designated Youth Hub - e.g. PCYC, Drop In Centre, Youth Club
- Establish a Youth Action Council
- Provide more youth-focused activities and games

Timeframe: Medium-Long term

3. Strengthen Community Communications and Collaborations

- Establish one central community noticeboard
- Create online tourist and community information
- Reinvigorate 2357 Development Group and Community Development Coordinator
- Expand networking opportunities - encourage street conversations, regular community breakfasts
- Encourage positive language and support to reach out and include others
- Encourage Warrumbungle Shire Council to be more supportive of business development
- Promote more positive attitudes from Council to new developments
- Collaborate with Council to improve efficiencies, community communication and connection
- Ongoing diverse representation on Warrumbungle Shire Council

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

4. Upgrade, maintain and expand playground equipment: David Bell Park, Neilsen Park & Skate Park Precinct

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

5. Grow community pride and spirit

- Celebrate achievements
- Promote community ownership of shared spaces and resources
- Encourage community collaboration with projects, developments and events

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

LEAD GROUPS

Warrumbungle Shire Council, 2357 Development Group, Landcare, Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, Equestrian Expo Committee, PAI&H Show Society, NSW Farmers, Chamber of Commerce, SPACE - social enterprise gallery and creative space, Youth focused organisations

OTHER PARTNERS

Business NSW, Schools, School P&C's, Sporting Groups, Orbital Swing Band, Coonabarabran Men's Choir, Churches, Warrumbungle Shire Interagency, Rural Fire Service, Volunteer Rescue Association, Lamb jumpers Helping our Farmers

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Two

Innovation & Excellence in Business, Industry & Services

ACTIONS



1. Investigate viability of Star Wars Shop and Cafe

- Foster innovative business opportunities supported by council eg. pop-up shops

Timeframe: Immediate and ongoing

2. Actively retain and develop health, hospital and emergency services

- Aged care
- Patient transport
- Fully operational maternity ward
- Bring visiting services to Coonabarabran
- Dentist, Orthodontist

Timeframe: Ongoing

3. Retain and grow quality education opportunities

- Support our schools
- Lobby to provide diverse onsite and flexible TAFE Services
- Retain and enhance child care services and options

Timeframe: Ongoing

4. Consider new diverse industries and businesses e.g. frozen meal services, linen services

- Encourage and support a greater diversity of restaurants
- Investigate the viability of a 24-hour roadhouse/truck stop

Timeframe: Medium - Long-term

5. Build better connections with newly arrived professionals

- Encourage and support a greater diversity of restaurants
- Investigate the viability of a 24-hour roadhouse/truck stop

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

6. Enable a collaborative community of thriving businesses continuing to strive for excellence

- Promote local shopping
- Support and enhance family owned businesses
- Foster regular business breakfast meetings
- Support access to subsidies for businesses - to offer more apprenticeships and traineeships
- Provide opportunities for customer service training
- Provide opportunities for marketing and shop window frontage training

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

7. Improve community safety and continue to reduce crime rates

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

8. Improve IT and mobile connectivity and coverage

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

9. Utilise community spaces to display local photography or art eg. exhibition at the hospital

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Two

Innovation & Excellence in Business, Industry & Services

LEAD GROUPS

Coonabarabran Chamber of Commerce, Warrumbungle Shire Council, 2357 Development Group Inc, WSC Economic Development and Tourism Committee, Coonabarabran Rotary

OTHER PARTNERS

Schools, Coonabarabran TAFE, Preschool and Daycare providers, Coonabarabran Health Service, Coonabarabran Hospital Auxiliary, Coinda Board, Coonabarabran Health Council, Warrumbungle Shire Interagency, Health Service Providers, Coonabarabran Community Care, Business NSW

Theme Three

Development of Attractive Community Spaces & Sports Facilities

ACTIONS



1. Establish entertainment spaces that interest young people

- Kids Hang Out Cafe
- Video Arcade

Timeframe: Short-term and ongoing

2. Support and grow Sporting club and sports facilities eg gym/ Badminton/Squash/Fitness facilities

- Re-establish night basketball and other sports
- Maintain the Skate Park precinct
- Enable the participation of people with disabilities

Timeframe: Short to long-term

3. Establish a Park Run

Timeframe: Short-term and ongoing

4. Improve the quality of parks by regular maintenance

Timeframe: Ongoing

5. Install a filtered water fill station in a town park

Timeframe: Medium-term

6. Investigate the possibility of non-motorised water sports in the river

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

7. Continue to provide shaded car parking

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

8. Support the establishment of Community Gardens, eg Bushtucker community garden

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

LEAD GROUPS

All sporting clubs (eg swimming, rugby, NRL, soccer, netball, tennis, golf), Warrumbungle Shire Council, current or potential owners of Cafés, 2357 Development Group Inc, Garden Club

OTHER PARTNERS

Australian City Farms and Community Gardens Network, Disability groups, NSW sporting bodies eg NSW Cricket, NRL

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Four

Tourism & Event Development Initiatives

ACTIONS



1. Develop Cycle and Walking trails

- Form a working group to investigate and facilitate these goals
- Create mountain bike and cycle trails
- Join Central West Cycle trail
- Convert closed rail lines to rail trails
- Create a walking/bike track through the Warrumbungles
- Support the annual Tour de Warrumbungles cycle event

Timeframe: Immediate to Long-term

2. Retain Tourism icons e.g. National Park, Crystal Kingdom and Siding Spring Observatory

- Investigate ways to ensure ongoing viability of Crystal Kingdom
- Safeguard regular access of the public to AAO site and Observatory
- Promote Coonabarabran as a Night Sky destination by establishing a program to advertise the observatory and other viewing options

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

3. Attract and host large events

- Re-establish the Crooked Mountain Concert
- Support and promote music events eg Dark Sky Awakening
- Create a package to promote Coonabarabran as a place for large events eg conferences
- Ensure local agricultural show continues
- Retain and develop horse events eg NW Equestrian Expo, Pony club functions and camps

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

4. Reconsider holding Markets in the park

Timeframe: Immediate

5. Create a Dog Park to attract dog-owning travellers to stop in the town

Timeframe: Medium to Long-term

6. Establish a big playground in each town as part of a Shire-wide family destination/circuit

Timeframe: Medium to Long-term

7. Develop interesting museums that reflect our locale, culture or specialist interests eg car museum, Aboriginal heritage and culture centre, the old Police House

Timeframe: Medium to Long-term

LEAD GROUPS

Coonabarabran Chamber of Commerce, Warrumbungle Shire Council, 2357 Development Group Inc, WSC Economic Development and Tourism Committee, Coonabarabran Arts Council, local cyclists

OTHER PARTNERS

Destination NSW, Schools, local businesses

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Five

Bypass Development Strategy & Main Street Enhancement

ACTIONS



1. Improved town signage

- Develop a creative, collaborative and well-thought-out strategy for the town and highway
- Install signage on highway promoting town well before bypass turn offs
- Remove out of date signage
- Adopt consistent Shire-wide signage style and message
- Encourage clear business and community signage

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

2. Preparation and leadership to maximise economic and social benefits due to the implementation of the bypass

- Bring together a focus Group
- Support businesses to maximise opportunities

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

3. Town beautification

- Consider closing the main street to be a mall
- Maintain shade trees and plants in the mainstreet
- Centre of town mural capturing what the town is about
- Pretty gardens, lights and displays in the mainstreet
- Cleaner, tidier town - remove graffiti and rubbish
- More regular grass cutting in parks and footpaths in town

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

4. Improve public infrastructure

- Public toilets and signage

Timeframe: Immediate and Short term

LEAD GROUPS

Warrumbungle Shire Council, WSC Economic Development and Tourism Committee, 2357 Development Group Inc.

OTHER PARTNERS

Town Beautification Committee, Coonabarabran Rotary Club, Coonabarabran Garden Club, Chamber of Commerce, Roads and Maritimes Services, NSW Government.

Our Strategies & Actions

Theme Six

Creation of Aquatic & Fitness Centre & Water Theme Park of Excellence

ACTIONS

6

1. Upgrade and modernise swimming pool complex

- Consult with community and develop a plan of development to modernise and diversify the swimming pool complex
- Investigate ways to change to a 365 day swimming season
- Consider building an Indoor pool
- Encourage installation of pool of a competitive length eg. 50m

Timeframe: Short term

2. Water Theme Park

- Consider installation of a water slide, water park and splash pool
- Design theme park to be attractive to passing tourists and residents
- Encourage more activities and events to be held at the pool

Timeframe: Short term

3. Multi-purpose complex options

- Consider inclusion of a hydrotherapy pool, diving pool, gym, playground, BBQ area and games area as options to diversify and increase usage
- Encourage regular usage of new complex facilities by community groups and service providers

Timeframe: Short term

4. Plan and Host more community activities at the complex

- Regular programming for all ages
- Special events
- Investigate opportunity for Child Care

Timeframe: Immediate and Ongoing

LEAD GROUP

Warrumbungle Shire Council

OTHER PARTNERS

Coonabarabran Swimming Club, Cooinda, Breakthru Disabilities Services, Coona Aqua and Community Fitness



Commonwealth

NEW SOUTH WALES

