

BEGA VALLEY COMMERCIAL LAND STRATEGY

INTERIM REPORT - FINDINGS OF STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

BEGA, 28 AUGUST 2019

1. *What are the natural advantages and strengths of the commercial centre?*

- Bega is the administrative and service hub of the valley and has built its commercial character around this. There is clear identification that Bega is the local and regional centre and is a focus and attractor for new activities and provides employment for a wider area. The network of businesses and communication between stakeholders
- The central geographic location in Bega Valley and positioning relative to Sydney and Canberra. The lifestyle offerings with no commuting time and that is affordable
- The unique global branding through location, landscape, lifestyle and specialities such as Bega Cheese
- The availability of land and services, e.g. education and medical facilities, regional hospital, council, Bega Cheese, the rural catchment and farming community, the regional gallery, green spaces and infrastructure such as water, sewerage, electricity, car parking
- The stable population and united community comprising skilled, friendly people. There is also a strong volunteer sector and a safe community
- The grid pattern of the township and the consequent ease of manoeuvring and good parking with an attractive streetscape. The core is small and intimate and centred around open space
- The rural setting, natural amenity and heritage values, e.g. old hospital
- There is a diverse range of retailers and creative enterprises that are not dependent on tourism and are therefore more economically stable. This includes galleries, cafes, bookshop, giftshops combined with practical offerings such as food and hardware
- Recent strong residential growth and land available for future residential expansion
- People returning to establish business after moving away to gain skills and experience

2. *What, if anything, is challenging development of the commercial centre?*

- The high expense of developing commercial land, the need to relocate bulky goods and the like to outside the centre. There is a lack of available commercial and industrial land that restricts some businesses, such as farm supplies and car sales, from relocating outside the town centre. No land is available for new businesses, and the fragmentation of land holdings and small size of lots makes it difficult for new market entrants

- Vacant shops due to on-line sales, declining retail sales, technological change, the slowdown in the world economy and competition between same business types. Businesses are not upskilling regarding technology and systems
- Perception that Bega attracts more Council support, resource allocation and funding which is evidence of strong parochialism across the Shire
- Perception of low socio-economic background character of workers and residents. Status as a dairy community creates a negative perception. Residents have low self-esteem and need to increase confidence
- Concern about the loss of administrative functions and regional centre status due to the potential threat of other centres such as Tura Beach. The creation of a de facto regional centre through Bunnings at Tura and Aldi at Merimbula has caused retailing in Bega to decrease. Rezoning of Tura Beach for bulky goods has undermined Bega's primacy, major developments occurring outside Bega
- Council is reactive not proactive and does not provide clear direction for business. There is uncertainty about costs, timelines and the outcomes of development applications which deters investment and the purchase of land. The high costs associated with business establishment
- The sprawl of commercial uses beyond the core across the surrounding B4 Mixed Use zone. Land and development regulations and decision-making is causing sprawl. The undeveloped B4 and industrial land in town and south of Bega adds to sprawl although much of the B4 Mixed Use zone is flood affected and a risk to develop
- Distance from major markets is problematic. There is a lack of transport infrastructure and connectivity to centres outside the Shire
- Restricted business opening hours, i.e. closure from noon Saturday, lack of night-time economy,
- Offices taking up retail space in the centre. There is an oversupply of developed office space, 10 to 15 supply of office and retail space
- Requirements of technology-based industries, future proofing to provide jobs
- Dependence on few ways to generate income, tax and rates. The loss of the dairying industry, high proportion of part-time employment due to seasonality of tourism and the focus on the importance of Bega Cheese to the local economy and social fabric makes Bega vulnerable

3. *Given the natural advantages and strengths, how could growth of the commercial centre be encouraged?*

- Promote heritage values, agriculture and the Mediterranean climate. Retain heritage character to appeal to residents and tourists. Focus on strengths – access to beaches, housing, diversity of business
- Diversify business, e.g. focus on galleries and promote as a technology hub for the south coast

- Promote Bega as part of the regional tourism experience. Maintain the flow-on effects of tourists to the coast visiting Bega during bad weather and attract day to day visitors to the Shire's central shopping centre to assist to overcome the seasonality of tourism
- Make more commercial land available by creating a separate zone for medium sized business requirements, e.g. tyre repairs. Relocate car yards, tyre repairs, etc to outside the commercial core to free land for office and retail uses. At the same time ensure that new business does not duplicate declining industries
- Encourage steady growth of the population and employment, by providing land for housing, and land for eth development of mid-sized commercial development

4. *What development principles or approaches are necessary to underpin growth of the commercial centre?*

- Co-ordination and collaboration of businesses to develop a clear and integrated vision. Develop a common vision for future development with common advocate
- Diversification of business – consider creative industries and new technologies
- Consolidate the town centre without sprawl and maintain rural setting
- Maintain heritage and protect the heritage character. Control architectural design to maintain heritage

5. *What are some incentives to stimulate development of the commercial centre?*

- Need to boost the economic development role of Council to one of that is a mix of advocacy and leadership. This would address the current tensions created by council as the regulator which acts as a barrier to change and tourism promotion. Council should be the partner in delivering a collective vision
- Council should discount setup costs to establish a new business in the fields of creative art, new technology and culture. Position Bega for the types of new businesses that are coming
- Stabilise the location and amount of existing retail and office space
- Provide opportunities for new mid-sized businesses to establish through making a range of lot sizes of commercial land available