

TOWARDS AN AREA PLAN FOR THE HOWARD SPRINGS RURAL ACTIVITY CENTRE



Stage 1 Consultation Report

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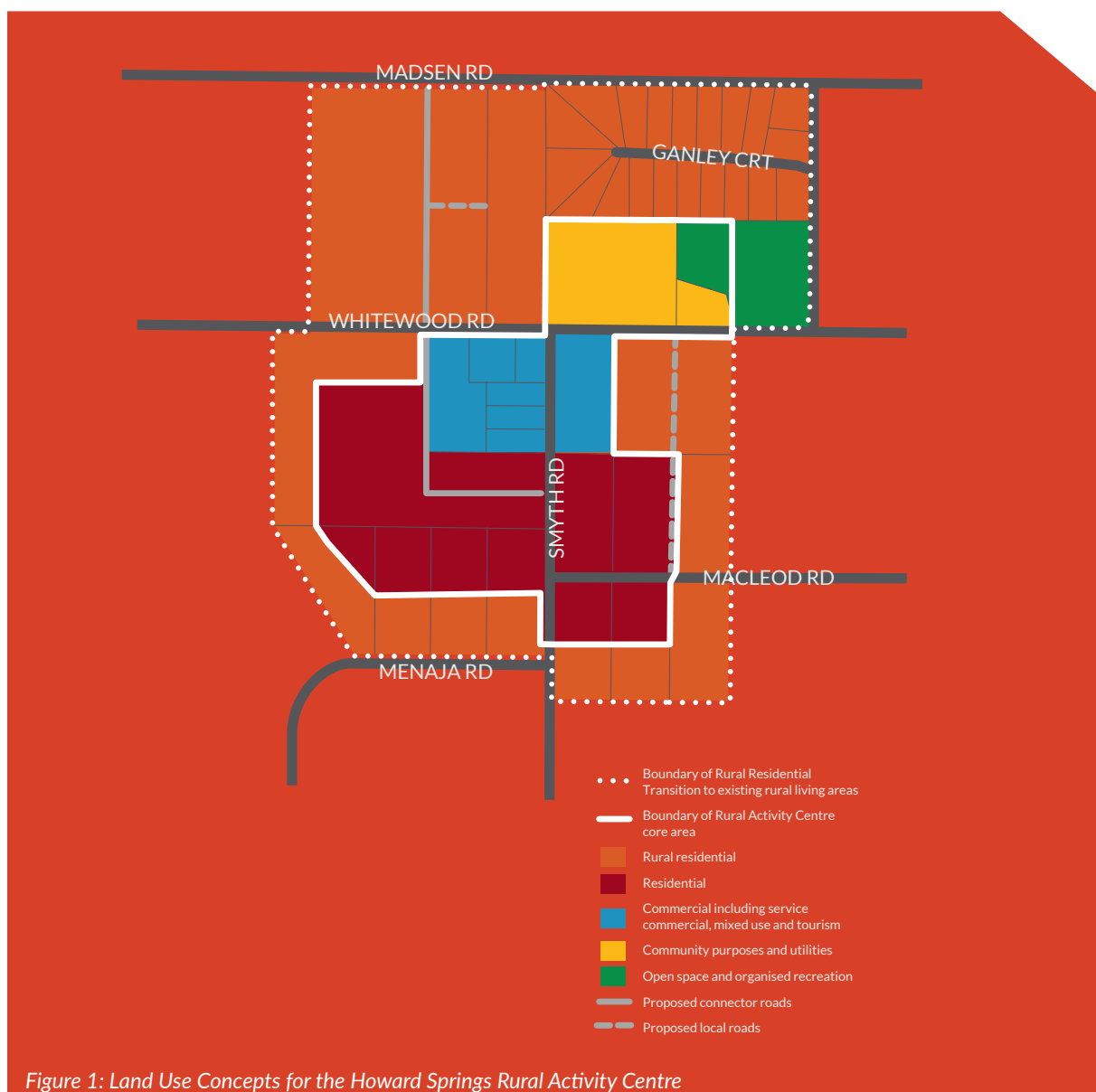
1. INTRODUCTION

The Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan was introduced into the Northern Territory Planning Scheme in July 2016. The Subregional Plan introduced Land Use Concept Plans for Litchfield's four Rural Activity Centres, including Howard Springs (Figure 1). The Northern Territory Planning Commission is now continuing the work of developing a planning framework for Howard Springs by preparing an Area Plan for the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre.

To assist in the preparation of draft options for the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre Area Plan, the Northern Territory Planning Commission endorsed a Community Engagement Strategy. The Community Engagement Strategy identified that the Area Plan would be prepared in three Stages.

Stage 1 Community Consultation commenced on Thursday 10 November 2016 and closed on Friday 16 December 2016. Stage 1 was an opportunity for the community to participate in the planning process by contributing to the development of a vision to meet the future needs of Howard Springs.

The purpose of this report is to summarise key themes that were identified by the community during the consultation. The feedback received will assist the Northern Territory Planning Commission in its consideration for drafting options for the Howard Springs Area Plan.



1.1 The Study Area

Howard Springs has a population of 4 959 people (ABS 2014). The study area (Figure 2) serves this population as a local commercial and community centre, while nearby Palmerston and Coolalinga provide for more specialist needs. The proximity of these larger centres will limit the degree of growth within the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre; however there is an opportunity for a moderate increase in the range of local commercial and housing options with the support of reticulated water and sewerage services.

In addition to infrastructure provision and upgrades, growth in the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre will require mosquito breeding sites at Wadham Lagoon and Dutchies Lagoon to be managed. Development will need to be avoided on land at risk of flooding or with waterlogged soils, and given that all developable land is privately owned, realisation of the Area Plan will need to be driven by landowners and the community, with a funded plan for infrastructure.

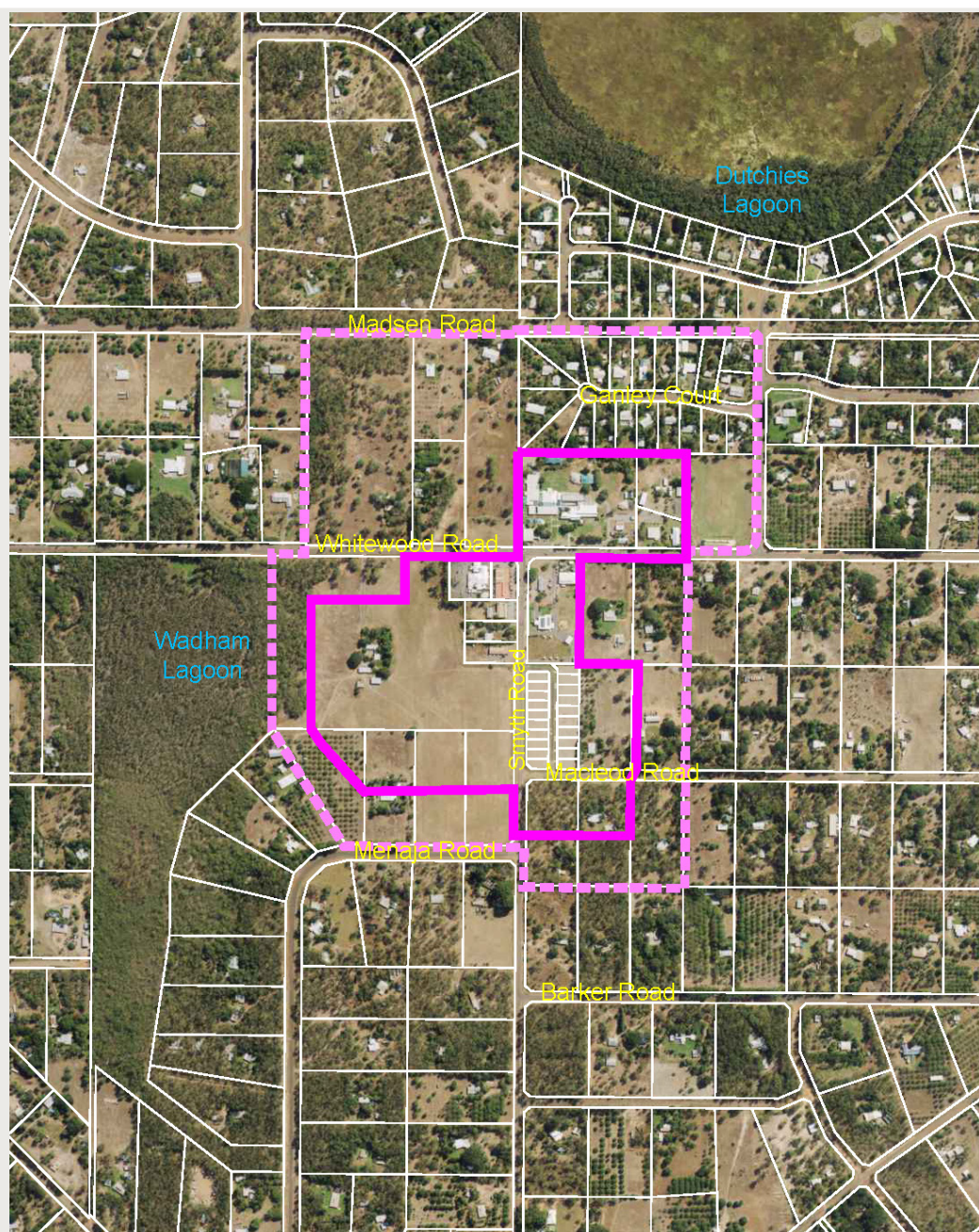


Figure 2: Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre study area

2. CONSULTATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Stage 1 Community Consultation was undertaken by the Northern Territory Planning Commission over a six week period from Thursday 10 November 2016 through to Friday 16 December 2016. The engagement activities sought to:

- Provide clear, balanced and consistent consultation by delivering engagement opportunities to encourage involvement from all stakeholders
- Build upon the work of the Litchfield Subregional Land Use Plan to create a greater understanding of stakeholder issues and sensitivities
- Promote improved knowledge and understanding of the land use planning process and its role in the delivery of community aspirations for the future of Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre



Figure 3: Stage 1 Engagement

The first stage of consultation was focused on gathering information, building an understanding of stakeholder issues and sensitivities and providing sufficient opportunities for community feedback. Stakeholders included:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Howard Springs residents• Local businesses• Litchfield Council• Local members• Special interest groups and community groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Government agencies and departments• Industry associations and representative bodies• Howard Springs Community Advisory Group
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2.1 Land Owners / Residents

Flyers were sent to all land owners in the Howard Springs post code to inform them that work on the Area Plan had commenced and to encourage involvement in the area planning process.

Land owners identified as being in the transition or core areas of the Land Use Concept Plan, also received a letter from the Chairman of the Northern Territory Planning Commission inviting them to attend the community workshop.

Letters and flyers were also hand delivered to residences and businesses within the transition and core areas of the Land Use Concept Plan to ensure those people most affected received the information.

A copy of the flyer is included at **Attachment A**.

Distribution of information and involvement of the community was also encouraged through the following community engagement activities:

- Print advertising in the NT News and the Sun Newspaper
- A dedicated page on the NT Planning Commission website including times and dates of public displays, contact details to receive submissions and answer enquiries, and an online feedback form
- Pop up stalls at the Howard Springs Shopping Centre
- Community Information Sessions
- A Community Workshop

2.2 Litchfield Council

Howard Springs is located within the municipality of Litchfield Council.

The Chairman of the Northern Territory Planning Commission briefed the Mayor, the CEO and other senior staff of Litchfield Council on Tuesday 13 September 2016. Key department staff also presented the project to the full Council on Wednesday 16 November 2016.

On Thursday 6 October 2016, key department staff met with Litchfield Council staff and Tonkin Consulting. This initial meeting was to brief Council staff on the engineering investigations that would be undertaken by Tonkin Consulting for the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics, and to establish contacts for information sharing between Litchfield Council and the engineering consultant.

In addition, the Northern Territory Planning Commission sends regular email updates to nominated Council staff on the progress of the project, the Council has representatives on the Community Advisory Group, and Council staff are included within the Project Control Group.

2.3 Community Advisory Group

The Northern Territory Planning Commission received confirmation from the Litchfield Council on Friday 11 November 2016 of the nominated members of the Howard Springs Community Advisory Group.

Departmental staff have since contacted each of the Howard Springs Community Advisory Group members and briefed them about the project and their expected role. In addition to attending one of the two information sessions, members attended and contributed to the community workshop held on Saturday 3 December 2016.

2.4 Project Control Group

The Project Control Group (PCG) which consists of staff from Litchfield Council and key Government stakeholders has met fortnightly on five occasions starting on 12 October 2016. PCG meetings have primarily involved the update of attendees on the progress of Tonkin Consulting's investigations on power, water, sewerage and stormwater drainage infrastructure, and the Traffic Impact Assessment, as well as stakeholder engagement activities. PCG members also had the opportunity to give feedback on the assumptions and results of these investigations, and to raise any questions relevant to their respective agency.

2.5 Others

NT Government Departments, industry and community groups identified as stakeholders in the endorsed Communications Engagement Strategy were provided with the consultation materials, and invited to attend one of the two information sessions.

The Member for Nelson, Gerry Wood, was also briefed on the project on Thursday 10 November 2016.



Community Workshop 3 December 2016

3. SUBMISSIONS AND FEEDBACK

3.1 Residents / Land Owners

Howard Springs land owners and residents have responded to various opportunities to provide verbal and written feedback to the Northern Territory Planning Commission.

3.1.1 Submissions/Feedback received from Information Stalls and Information Sessions

Over 64 residents visited the pop up stalls at the Howard Springs Shopping Centre to contribute their ideas for the area. 45 residents and affected stakeholders attended the community information sessions held on Tuesday 29 November 2016 and Wednesday 30 November 2016. Comments received from interested residents are summarised below.

• Growth within the Activity Centre

Most people who engaged at the pop up stalls were supportive of some growth around the Howard Springs Shopping Centre. Some residents oppose development of the Activity Centre because people choose to live in the rural area and don't want more people in close proximity to where they live. Some were also concerned about how quickly development might occur after the Area Plan is introduced, and wanted more detail about the timeframe of development and what changes could be expected in the short and medium term.

Among those who supported some growth, there were a broad range of opinions about what an appropriate level of development would be. Where specified, the following recommendations were made for minimum lots sizes:

- lots should be in excess of the minimum size requirements of the SL11 zone on Smyth Road (larger than 750m²)
- lots with an area of 800m² within the boundary are acceptable; however, lots less than 400m² are not
- lot sizes should be kept over 1 000m²
- lots should be not be less than 2 000m² with the "transitional" blocks being 10 000m² (1 ha)
- lots should be no less than 4 000m² with lots of similar sizes to those in Ganley, Thornbill and Currawong

A number of people did not specify minimum lot sizes but most agreed that appropriate development should be compatible with the rural character of Howard Springs. The multistorey apartments at Coolalinga were frequently used as an example of what to avoid.

It is also noted that some residents believed that growth should be directed to Berrimah Farm and Weddell or, depending on the end use of the Inpex facility, low density could occur around this facility.

• Growth outside the Activity Centre

There was a mixture of opinions about increasing growth outside the Activity Centre. On one hand, there was a view that people move to the rural area to be left alone and that in order to maintain 'rural amenity' lots should not be subdivided. On the other hand, a number of land owners were interested in potentially subdividing their land so that they could accommodate family members or downsize as lots were too big to maintain.

- **Traffic**

There was a general interest in roads and road usage by the community due to concerns with current traffic management in the area, particularly on Whitewood Road around the Activity Centre and the Howard Springs Primary School. A number of residents were concerned that increasing the density around the Activity Centre would place more pressure on the road network, which may compromise the safety of road users and pedestrians.

Residents were generally supportive of extending Madsen Road to connect to Whitewood Road and Smyth Road to Coolalinga through Girraween Road. However, concerns were also raised about the amount of traffic that would use this connection, and how a new intersection on Whitewood Road could be made to function safely. The need to connect Sitella Road to Whitewood Road was also raised.

- **Infrastructure**

There was a general interest in sewerage and water infrastructure. Concerns were raised about the impact of bores and water wastage on the water level of the aquifer. Concerns were also raised about the impact of septic systems on the quality of ground water.

With regard to community infrastructure, most people would be happy to see community facilities developed in the area. It is noted that one person said that they do not want additional community services or infrastructure as it would attract more people to the area. Another person suggested that community infrastructure and services should be for Howard Springs residents only.

Community facilities should include open space in new residential areas and retention of environmental features in order to protect the unique character of Howard Springs.

- **Environment**

Concerns were raised that, with increasing density around the Activity Centre, changes to the landscape may have a negative impact on the environment and the natural flow of watercourses.

There were also a number of suggestions by residents that Wadham and Dutchies Lagoons could be transformed into places where the community can walk, sit and enjoy the natural environment which could assist in the preservation of the lagoons.

3.1.2 Submissions/Feedback received from the Workshop

31 residents, including members from the Community Advisory Group, attended the Community Workshop held on Saturday 3 December 2016. The Chairman of the Northern Territory Planning Commission opened the workshop with a brief background of the project. Participants worked in small groups, facilitated by Departmental staff with assistance from other key stakeholders. Groups considered the following topics:

- Housing choice and aging in place
- Mosquito management
- Traffic management
- Extent of the Rural Activity Centre
- Vision for the Rural Activity Centre

Representatives from each group presented a summary of their discussions.

A summary of feedback from the workshop is at **Attachment B**.

3.2 Government Agencies

A number of Government agencies and service authorities provided feedback to the Planning Commission during the consultation period. Overall, the agencies and service authorities welcomed the development of an Area Plan as a positive initiative towards improved planning and development outcomes and ensuring that the character and rural amenity of Howard Springs is maintained. The comments received are summarised below.

3.2.1 Infrastructure

Reticulated water and sewerage services are key requirements for future development in the Howard Springs area. One of the main issues raised by Government agencies and service authorities was the lack of water. The Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre overlies the Whites Formation which is already over allocated. It was made clear that any future development in the Howard Springs area will be dependent on connection to a reticulated water supply.

It is noted that Howard Springs is currently not serviced by reticulated sewerage; rather, each lot is serviced by onsite waste water treatment systems. The concern raised by Government agencies is that poorly managed onsite waste water systems have the potential to pollute groundwater especially when a number of systems are located within a small area. For this reason the Area Plan should prioritise the location and installation of a reticulated sewage system.

In terms of reticulated electricity services, the proposed Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre will require additional infrastructure to secure power supply for future development.

In regard to road infrastructure there was consensus that as Howard Springs develops, enhanced road connections will be an important factor in promoting road safety, and there was support for the provision of a variety of routes to spread traffic throughout the area to create lesser conflict. There was also support for shared walking/cycling paths which would connect to existing paths.

3.2.2 Social Infrastructure

A number of agencies emphasised the importance of social infrastructure such as usable green space, civic spaces and schools. While no demand for more recreational facilities was identified at this stage, it was recommended that future infrastructure within the organised recreation zone could include hockey or netball facilities with accessible and functional walking and cycling trails encouraged by the Area Plan. It was also recommended that a mechanism be developed for redeveloped land within the Activity Centre to contribute to one large identified public open space area which would ideally be linked to walking and cycling trails.

Furthermore, potential for arts and cultural activities could be supported within public spaces if the community sees this as a priority.

3.2.3 Environment

Wadham and Dutchies Lagoons are important features of Howard Springs. Preliminary studies by the NT Department of Health show seasonally high levels of mosquitos in the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre, coming from Dutchies Lagoon in the north and Wadham Lagoon in the west. The extent and methods for managing mosquito breeding sites will need to maintain the drainage function and amenity of the natural lagoons.

In addition, there are numerous records of declared weeds in residential and recreational areas of the Howard Springs area. Future developments and specific land uses would require further detailed weed assessment and management.

3.2.4 Accommodation

Social and affordable housing opportunities should be encouraged as part of future land development. The increase in population will also increase demand for short-stay accommodation in the area and appropriately zoned land should be set aside for this purpose.

In regards to incorporating housing choice, there was support for smaller lot sizes within the Activity Centre. Suggestions indicated that 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. Changes in lot sizes should be separated by roadways, rather than back of fences.

4 SUMMARY

Through pop up stalls, information sessions and the community workshop, Stage 1 consultation has allowed the Northern Territory Planning Commission to engage with the community on the future of the Howard Springs Rural Activity Centre. Listening to the views of all stakeholders, the aspirations, opportunities and concerns associated with future development within the Activity Centre have been recorded. Responses to the consultation process have been very positive, particularly with regard to the community workshop.

Throughout consultation, the community has expressed a strong desire to maintain the rural character and amenity of Howard Springs and to protect environmental features. Concerns also focused on the potential impacts of increased traffic, especially along Whitewood Road, and how groundwater could be affected.

The prospect of growth immediately around the commercial area was generally supported provided that measures are included to manage traffic and maintain the rural character of the Activity Centre. Some residents expressed the hope that growth within the centre would deliver opportunities for improved community facilities, public open space and a venue for local arts or cultural activities.

The key message from service authorities and Government agencies is that reticulated water and sewerage will be required for any future development in the locality in order to protect the aquifer underlying Howard Springs. Support was also expressed for the provision of community facilities and public open spaces to meet future need.

The development of an Area Plan for Howard Springs is broadly viewed as a positive initiative that will allow Government agencies to plan for the future.

5 NEXT STEPS

This report covers Stage 1 community consultation and engagement to consider the development of options for a draft Howard Springs Area Plan. Stage 2 consultation is due to commence in February 2017.

STAGE 1

Information gathering and analysis, including community engagement

COMPLETED

STAGE 2

Preparation of options for a draft Area Plan informed by initial community feedback and other information obtained during Stage 1, and undertake further consultation on the options

NOW

STAGE 3

Finalise a draft Area Plan and associated planning principles and recommend it to the Minister for exhibition as a proposed Planning Scheme Amendment

MID 2017



For more information

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The Northern Territory Planning Commission is an independent and advisory statutory authority that prepares strategic land use plans to manage growth in anticipation rather than response.

The Planning Commission proactively sets the strategic framework for better integrated land use, transport and infrastructure planning, delivering more sustainable and cost-effective outcomes for the community, with sensitivity to environmental and heritage values.