

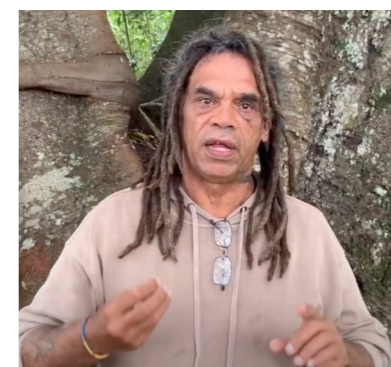
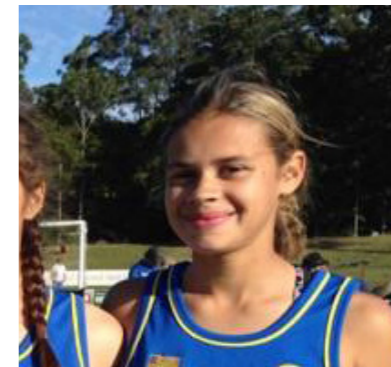
# BELLINGEN SHIRE TOURISM BRAND PROJECT DEFINING OUR SPIRIT OF PLACE: BRAND STRATEGY

PREPARED BY FISHER DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE | AUGUST 2021



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BELLINGEN SHIRE TOURISM BRAND PROJECT  
 BRAND STRATEGY & IDENTITY DESIGN  
 AUGUST 2021 | PREPARED BY FISHER DESIGN +  
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 CRICHTON & LISA DALEY

WE ARE GRATEFUL TO THE MANY PEOPLE ACROSS  
 THE BELLINGEN SHIRE WHO GAVE THEIR TIME AND  
 ENERGY TO TALK TO THE TEAM DURING  
 CONSULTATION STAGE.

A BIG THANK YOU TO THE ALL THE WONDERFULLY  
 CREATIVE INDIGENOUS STUDENTS FROM BELLINGEN  
 AND DORRIGO HIGH SCHOOLS WHOSE FANTASTIC  
 ARTWORK HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE TOURISM BRAND  
 IDENTITY DESIGN.

TOURISM PHOTOGRAPHY: ST IMAGES  
 COMMUNITY IMAGES: FUCHSIA SIMS, BRUCE MILLER

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## The Bellingen Shire Branding Project - Defining our spirit of place

The Bellingen Shire Tourism Branding Project is an important project for Bellingen Shire. The project aim is to create a destination brand that is 100% Bellingen Shire, one that defines the essence of our Shire, developed through meaningful discussion with the community. The brand encapsulates who we are, reveals something about our special 'place', and reflects our cultural, social and environmental values. It will help to frame the future of our Shire, for the community, business and tourism.

The project has been funded by the Federal Government's Bushfire Recovery and Economic Resilience Grants Program.

In 2019, Bellingen Shire Council withdrew from their tourism marketing relationship with Coffs Harbour City Council, meaning that the Bellingen Shire was no longer branded under the Coffs Coast brand. This was a decision that Council made in consultation with the three Chambers of Commerce (Urunga/Mylestom, Dorrigo

and Bellingen). The Bellingen Shire Tourism Branding Project came about as a result of that change in tourism management.

In November 2020, Fisher Design + Architecture was engaged by Council to undertake the branding project. Fisher Design + Architecture partner Anna Fisher led a team of local design and tourism professionals that included John Morse AM, artist Brentyn Lugnan, and designers Lisa Daley and Dee Crichton.

The first part of the development of the brand involved extensive engagement with the community and stakeholders throughout January, February and March of 2021, and included in-depth discussions with the following groups:

- The Bellingen Shire Community
- Environmental groups and individuals
- National Parks & Wildlife Services
- Festival and Market Organisers
- Indigenous Elders, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and other Indigenous community members
- Visitor Information Centre staff
- Chambers of Commerce
- Tourism operators and other business owners
- Youth and school students
- Bellingen Shire Councillors and Mayor

## TOURISM IN BELLINGEN SHIRE

According to ABS Figures, the tourism industry in Bellingen Shire contributes around \$65.7 million to the local economy each year. Tourism is part of the economic and social fabric of the Shire, adding value to the local community by supporting a wide range of retail facilities, supply of goods and services, providing employment (especially for young people - a critical issue in our regional area), facilities that locals can enjoy such as markets, festivals, restaurants, cafés, and creating opportunities for sharing of culture.

As of March 2021, the Bellingen Shire has a vibrant visitor economy. This is measured through accommodation properties having above regional average occupancy rates, increased investment in new accommodation properties and observational research. Tourist attractions across the Shire are attracting a greater number of visitors each year. Business operators are reporting that they have never been busier. Covid-19 has boosted domestic tourism and the Bellingen Shire visitor economy has benefited considerably.

The Shire has experienced two major natural disasters in the last 12 months, and managed through a global pandemic. These events represent major shocks for tourism with Covid-19 creating a perfect storm for domestic tourism. International travel was cancelled, there was restricted and uncertain interstate travel and urban residents were wanting to connect with nature and escape crowded places. Visitation in the Bellingen Shire peaked in late 2020 which caused a heightened level of concern from members of the community.

Even prior to the increase in domestic tourism due to Covid-19, the past few years has seen growing public concern about the rapid pace of tourism growth and development within the Bellingen Shire. This concern has been reflected in the Tourism Branding Project consultation feedback, with many people fearing the serious, negative social and cultural impacts on our community if tourism is not effectively managed, with Byron Bay being a frequently cited example of a destination that has been 'loved-to-death'.

# PROJECT OVERVIEW

‘That which we seek to find, we can so easily destroy, simply by finding it.’

‘Over Tourism’ is a term being applied to an increasing number of destinations across the world. This is a level of visitation that is threatening the social and environmental carrying capacity of a destination. It can present as unbridled growth in visitation that threatens the community’s sense of place. It can extend to the physical infrastructure being overloaded with negative environmental and socio-cultural impacts occurring.

Bellingen Shire Council has seen areas within its LGA suffer, with the most prominent example being The Promised Land, which has become increasingly popular over recent years due partly to the publicity generated on social media. The level of visitation has had negative impacts on the environment and the local community. The scope of promotion via social media can be exponential and uncontrollable. This can be a blessing for a destination that is aiming to attract visitors and a nightmare for a destination that wants to reduce volume.

## COUNCIL’S ROLE IN TOURISM MANAGEMENT

Bellingen Shire Council are currently preparing a new Economic Development and Tourism Plan for the 2020 – 2025 period. Of major importance is the Shire’s rate of growth from a tourism perspective. The Economic Development and Tourism Plan will guide the policy framework and factors for Council and the corporate sector to consider in developing strategic management plans for tourism in the Shire.

Council needs to have a central, active role in tourism management and marketing in order to guide sustainable development. There is no Shire-wide industry association to drive and coordinate marketing campaigns. Council has ownership or management rights over most of the visitor economy infrastructure. It provides a regulatory function for new business development and the staging of events and festivals, it undertakes economic and tourism planning, works with regional stakeholders and undertakes service delivery – like the cleaning of public amenities and waste services. Council supports three tourist information centres including recruitment and training of volunteers. It also maintains and invests in sports infrastructure, roads, footpaths, parks and reserves.

Potential and existing negative impacts of tourism in the Bellingen Shire include seasonal over-crowding, over-development, environmental impacts, and the erosion of local culture. Good management of tourism is critical to preserve both the local culture and the very reason people want to visit.

Bellingen Shire Council advocates a tourism management approach using community ideals as a framework, that is - tourism that doesn’t compromise sense of place, doesn’t have a negative impact on the environment or the community, and attracts visitors with similar ideals to the host community.

‘Tourism should complement the local economy and culture rather than dominate it.’

## CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

It was recognised from the beginning of the Branding Project that the success of the Bellingen Shire Tourism Brand would be dependent on authentic and genuine consultation with the community and stakeholders. Community engagement was essential to inspire community confidence and custodianship, and was a crucial first step toward the development of the Bellingen Shire Tourism Brand.

The primary goal of the consultation for the Bellingen Shire Tourism Brand was to ensure that relevant community concerns, aspirations and values were heard, acknowledged and considered. This enabled a deeper understanding of community opinion and allowed the project team to move forward with confidence to the design and strategy stages of the brand development.

Consultation involved extensive engagement with the community and stakeholders throughout January to March of 2021.

There was an extremely high level of interest from the community around developing a tourism brand for Bellingen Shire. When the project and community workshops were advertised on Facebook,

# CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

social media generated extensive passionate conversation. Whilst there was a level of misunderstanding and mistrust in some online conversation about the creation and need for a tourism brand, the intensive level of interest ensured that many people sought out further information via Council's Create website, and that all of the four community workshops were booked out. This allowed the project team the opportunity to effectively engage with a greater number of community members, and the project received a very high level of community feedback overall (for further detail refer to Bellingen Shire Tourism Brand Consultation Report).

## WHO DID WE TALK TO?

Community engagement began in December 2020, with press and online notifications and flyers posted around the main towns. Social media notifications were posted in early January.

An online feedback survey via Council's Create website was used as one of the primary methods for collecting feedback. Workshops and meetings were undertaken with a wide range of community and stakeholders, with ongoing communication continuing throughout the consultation period.

**341**  
PEOPLE CONTRIBUTED TO  
CONSULTATION FEEDBACK



## WHAT DID WE ASK PEOPLE ABOUT?

A total of 341 people from a wide range of groups, organisations and individuals participated in the consultation, either via survey or other digital submissions, or through attendance at a workshop or other meetings, or via phone.

The online survey sought feedback around the character and attributes of Bellingen Shire, and the values that were important to the community.

Community workshops and face-to-face meetings allowed the project team the opportunity to inform and discuss with people about what a brand is and why it is important, and talk about the process behind developing a brand.

Some of the questions discussed were:

- What aspects of Bellingen Shire are the most important to you?
- What do you love about living in or visiting Bellingen Shire?
- What values are important to convey to visitors to our Shire?
- What do you want to see for the future of the Shire?
- What is the 'Personality' of Bellingen Shire?

The following page highlights some of the concerns, aspirations and values that the community raised during consultation.

# CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

## CONCERNS

“First contact with European settlers needs to be addressed. When that is addressed, and that is acknowledged, then everything else will fall into place.”

“Back in the 2000’s Bellingen was like a cultural hub... There is less of a perception that that is the way now.”

“We have a ‘feel’, but the more people come here, the less of that feeling there is.”

“I just think that these tourists are just ruining our culture, and our river. And the pollution is just ruining this town. And I just am sick of it.”

“We don’t need branding, we need to drop off the radar.”

“I’m in Year 12 at Bellingen High School and more than half of my peers wish to leave the Shire in the next 5 years... If there is aim to have green or progressive values as part of the Shire there needs to be people here to appreciate that.”

“We need to bring back harmonious balance between humans and land.”

“There’s no infrastructure for tourists. We are a community, not a resort. There’s no bike tracks, no walking tracks. We are not set up to be a tourist town.”

“The beauty of Bellingen is that it is not branded, reflecting the diversity of the people which make up it’s community.”

“Large numbers of visitors result in increased rubbish dumping, traffic, dangerous driving and no available parking in town or popular swimming spots.”

“Less focus on tourism until housing solutions can be found for homeless in the community.”

“Tourists to our shire won’t care about our ‘brand’. They will be here to see the beautiful, natural things our shire has to offer.”

## ASPIRATIONS

“We need to capture the Gumbaynggirr spirit, learn from First Nation’s people’s connection to country. Everything starts and stops with the land.”

“It’s about managing the people and sending the right message. If we can manage tourism in a sustainable, authentic way that is a great outcome for our towns.”

“How do we NOT increase visitor numbers, but create a better experience?”

“There’s an opportunity for us as a community to take an active role in educating people.”

We could be a sustainable, green tourist hub.”

“A greater emphasis on overall planning... with a vision of the entire Shire”

Keep the shire simple - It is unique!”

“To grow so it’s sustainable for the businesses, but not to lose the community feel ... it has to be a healthy balance.”

“Regenerative tourism.”

“We’re diverse within towns, but also each of our towns has its own culture and its own sense of identity.”

“Educate people that this is a special place, to use wisely and in a proper way.”

“We really need a sustainability pledge. Written up, so these are the rules, this is what we want when you come into our shire.”

“... the Bellingen ‘brand’ should focus heavily on our conservation values. Tourism should only be encouraged with a heavy emphasis on sustainable eco-tourism.”

“This is an opportunity for us to have input into how we see ourselves, and how we want to present ourselves, not just for tourism, but in general.”

“Create a culture of caring and love. Contributions that care for the river. Be involved in caring, replanting trees.”

## VALUES

“... highlight those values which were shared by the hippies and farmers: family, community, land, love, health, wealth.”

“The beautiful unique environment, the close-knit community and the quirky style of the towns.”

“There’s some quality here which is hard to grasp, certainly around the river, there’s a kind of a magical feel here. And it’s healing as well.”

“Sustainable practice in any future development.”

“Acceptance of diversity and belief in the community spirit.”

“This place is very spiritual. The land envelopes you.”

“this is a place to slow down, connect, learn and then take it back to your own community.”

“The blend of the past, the new and the ancient. Industry sharing the space with Artisans, Vegetarians with Omnivores; peacefully... side by side.”

“I love the sense of belonging in a small friendly nurturing community.”

“Respectfulness toward traditional custodians and land, water, wildlife.”

“Take nothing but photos, leave nothing but footprints, kill nothing but time.”

The clean and gorgeous environment, the quirky and artistic community, the amazing food quality, the high level of community awareness about social issues and willingness to dive in and do something to help, the strong Gumbaynggirr community.”

“Be respectful of people who need to live here permanently.”

“Protect our natural places, respect our Gumbaynggirr culture.”

“I’d like to magically attract like-hearted people and repel the ones who don’t care.”

“How grateful I am for this earth, and so much want others who come here to have the same pleasure and awe for it.”

# CONSULTATION OVERVIEW

All the feedback that was received during the consultation period was examined carefully as part of the development of the tourism brand strategy and identity design.

Some broad conclusions can be drawn:

- Just under 50% of respondents stated that recognition and celebration of our unique natural environment was important.
- Support for education initiatives for both tourists and locals was raised by around 27% of respondents, in order to encourage more respectful treatment of both the environment and of our community.
- Respect for Gumbaynggirr culture was also supported by around 27% of respondents, with an additional 22% of people identifying the need or desire for implementing several measures that would increase Gumbaynggirr cultural awareness.
- The three issues raised more than any others were frustration with Council, degradation of the environment, and the housing crisis in the Shire.
- Recognition and respect for a number of different community values was a strong theme overall, as was support for the development of educational or 'regenerative' tourism, and nature-based activities.

<b>FEEDBACK: TOP 20 MOST RAISED THEMES</b>	<b>No. of responses</b>
SUPPORT Environment - Celebration of, and connection with our unique natural environment	167
SUPPORT Education - Clear and consistent education initiatives and messaging to 'respect our place', aimed at both visitors and locals	93
SUPPORT Gumbaynggirr Culture - Recognition and respect for the unique custodians of this land and their connection to country	92
SUPPORT Gumbaynggirr Culture - Increase cultural awareness through development of education programs, tours, products and events for both community and tourists	75
SUPPORT Economy - Support and development of sustainable responsible tourism and other businesses	61
ISSUE Council - Poor communication, lack of action, mismanagement or lack of support by Council (on a range of issues)	59
ISSUE Environment - Lack of respect and damage to the environment by visitors and/or locals	59
ISSUE Housing - Concern around the housing crisis and/or tourism's contribution to this	56
SUPPORT Values - Recognition and respect for our friendly, laid-back culture, and relaxed small-town character	56
SUPPORT Values - Recognition and respect for diversity, promoting inclusivity and offering welcome to all visitors	53
SUPPORT Experiences - Support and development of educational, regenerative, eco-tourism and nature-based activities	48
SUPPORT Creative Culture - Recognition, celebration and promotion of our rich and authentic creative culture	47
SUPPORT Values - Recognition and respect for social well-being, and our community-oriented and family-friendly values	45
SUPPORT Values - Recognition and respect for our progressive and alternative values, and our socially and environmentally conscious community	43
ISSUE Infrastructure - Lack of/need for improved facilities and infrastructure for both locals and visitors (e.g. toilets, footpaths, walking and bike tracks, playgrounds, sporting facilities etc)	42
ISSUE Over-tourism	41
SUPPORT Tourism Management - Support for development of initiatives by Council (e.g. parking regulations, increased ranger presence, car permits, controlled access, visitor limits to Never Never)	40
ISSUE Gumbaynggirr Culture - The need for shire-wide truth-telling and/or addressing land-rights and reconciliation	31
ISSUE Brand - The difficulty and/or danger in creating, maintaining and protecting an authentic and/or pristine brand (e.g. avoiding Byron Bay style outcomes)	29
ISSUE Infrastructure - Roads, parking and traffic issues	26

# REVIEW OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

Various policies, strategies and plans prepared by Council, or on behalf of council have been reviewed.

The following is a summary of documents that are relevant to the development of the Tourism Brand Strategy and Identity.

## **GUIDE FOR TOURISM IN THE BELLINGEN SHIRE**

Council are currently undertaking development of an Economic Development & Tourism Strategy 2020–2025. A precursor for the new plan can be found in the Guide for Tourism in the Bellinggen Shire.

This Guide advocates a tourism management approach using community ideals as a framework.

Effective management is dependent on recognising that external push factors can have a strong influence on how tourism can evolve. Council plays an important and impartial role in how tourism is serviced and supported. This role is limited by the resources Council has available. Strategies have been offered which can influence the future development of the sector and support Council to fund a specialised approach to tourism management. Market segments have been identified that can increase compatibility between visitor and

community ideals. The Tourism Guide forms a reference for consultation and would inform the development of future destination and marketing plans for the Shire, and outlines a number of options & opportunities for council to consider in relation to tourism and tourism management:

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM STRATEGY 2015 – 2020**

### ***Strategies***

- Actively work to ensure arts and culture are recognised as key primary tourism assets for the Shire
- Develop plans and projects to support town beautification.
- Develop tourism packages to encourage length of stay and greater dispersion of tourists across the Shire.
- Enhance Visitor Information Services through integrated technology
- Improve road signage and interpretation of tourist attractions
- Create incentives to attract new tour operators to the Shire.

The Community Vision, the Arts and Cultural Plan and the Arts Policy all provide policy guidance with respect to community and culture as it relates to tourism signage. The themes are:

- The importance of Gumbaynggirr place, language, art and culture
- The importance of counter-culture, frontier, timber and forestry and maritime heritage themes
- A sense of connection between and across the communities of the Bellinggen Shire.

## **BELLINGEN SHIRE ARTS & CULTURAL PLAN**

### ***Objectives***

- Assisting local economic growth through arts and cultural facilities and programs.
- Enhancing the local cultural experience for visitors.
- Support indigenous arts, arts festivals and cultural exhibitions.

## **BELLINGEN SHIRE PUBLIC ART PLAN**

The Public Art Plan has been created with the aim of enhancing the Shire's overall identity and sense of place. This is an inclusive philosophy which recognizes cultural diversity including its indigenous heritage.

### ***Recommendations***

- Integrate public art into tourism and town centre improvements
- Unique public art solutions for the different townships of Dorriggo, Bellinggen and Urunga. Artworks which reflect each town's unique personality, designed to enhance local identity and enrich the cultural life of each community, contributing to economic development and tourism objectives.
- Artwork elements to improve the visibility of the Shire's main towns and link them together using common design elements and visual art language.



# REVIEW OF RELEVANT DOCUMENTS

## **BELLINGEN SHIRE COMMUNITY VISION 2030**

The Bellingen Shire Community Vision 2030 identifies tourism as an economic priority for the shire, and generally focuses on the need for appropriate tourism infrastructure, particularly those which enhance tourism assets or assist with improving dispersion, visitation and overnight stays.

The Gumbaynggirr Community Vision: “A place where there is genuine respect for the land and the original people of this country. A place where the ancestors’ way of holding country is recognised. A place where there is respect for custodial people who carry this tradition today and for Elders and the children of the future. A place where we all walk together....be here in harmony with the land and all life. The land around here has a great capacity to do that, to heal... in a way that’s not separating.”

### ***Strategic Directions***

- Provide and influence development of balanced, sustainable tourism
- Provide and influence enhancement of regional tourism assets
- Encourage tourism providers to strive for sustainable operations

- Provide and influence promotion of our creative communities

### ***Priorities***

Community wellbeing:  
Identifying, celebrating, and protecting our indigenous cultural heritage

Places for people:  
Providing cycleways and shared pathways

Our living environment:  
The importance and management of our local biodiversity, natural resources and affiliated industries

## **BELLINGEN SHIRE SIGNAGE STRATEGY**

### ***Recommendations***

- Establish the “Bellingen Shire” brand identity.
- Develop shire and town entry signage designs in line with the Signage Style Guide
- Council to explore opportunities with local community, Indigenous, cultural and heritage groups, to showcase Bellingen Shire history, culture and the natural environment through the development of interpretive experiences for Indigenous, nature-based and heritage attractions.

## **GLENIFFER RESERVES MASTER PLAN**

### ***Recommendations:***

- Increased ranger presence to ensure regulation and compliance
- Traffic management
- Bellingen Chamber of Commerce / Gleniffer Stewardship Advisory Group to lead & develop information for local businesses on sustainable use of Gleniffer Reserves
- New toilet facility building
- Consultation and planning with Forestry Corporation of NSW
- Walking trail through arboretum
- Environmental ambassador program

## **NORTH COAST DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### ***Strategic Priorities***

- Identify opportunities and strategies to coordinate and encourage nature-based tourism product and experience development across the North Coast
- Work with local food groups and the private sector to identify, create and promote new and existing food/ beverage/produce trails to connect visitors to North Coast food, beverage and agri-tourism experiences

- Work with the Destination NSW Aboriginal Tourism Specialist and other relevant government departments and agencies to identify ways to enhance existing, and promote Aboriginal tourism experiences
- Develop a bike tourism strategy for the North Coast
- Work with Arts organisations and local galleries, local government and local venues to identify strategies to support local arts and cultural attractions to develop and promote distinctive arts, cultural and heritage experiences
- Identify and support the development of tourism products and experiences related to health, well-being and alternate lifestyles

# BRAND STRATEGY

## WHAT IS A BRAND?

Countries, cities and regions have been undertaking brand studies and strategies since the 90s, and Australia was a world leader in creating a specific brand for an entire country.

A brand refers to the physical, emotional and spiritual elements which identify a place in people's minds. It is what visitors think of a place, and importantly, what we think of ourselves – the relationship between the Bellinghen Shire and visitors, as well as the locals. Defining this relationship was something that needed to be strongly driven by the vision of the community through a comprehensive consultation process.

Many destination brands focus on the same descriptors, for example - mountains, rivers and beaches. Bellinghen Shire has an opportunity to define who and what we are in a way that sets us apart from others, in a way that has been directed by the values and aspirations of the community. Without taking on the development of a brand, we run the risk of it being done for us by outsiders.

A brand is not just a logo. A logo is just one part of the brand identity, and should reflect the brand values. The Bellinghen Shire brand identity should be a unique and compelling reflection of our Shire – one that embodies the diversity of our people and place. It should allow for incorporation of distinctive visual components that reflect the varying characteristics of our towns and locations, and our diverse people and culture, whilst still presenting a unified and identifiable Bellinghen Shire brand.

Developing a Bellinghen Shire 'brand' is NOT about big marketing campaigns, or unlimited growth and maximum numbers - it's about looking at the optimum combination of economic yield and visitor numbers. It's about managing the development of tourism which is sustainable and responsible.

Creating a brand that reflects our 'Spirit of Place' will appeal to visitors who are sensitive to the social, cultural and environmental values of this place and our people - visitors who want to tread gently on the land, and leave a place better than when they arrived. What if we could get every visitor to our Shire to plant a tree? Or be inspired to start a community garden in their city suburb, or eat only locally sourced organic produce?

## WHY IS A BRAND IMPORTANT?

Many places around the world are concerned about 'over-tourism', which can damage culture, turn it into a commodity, cause local stress, create pollution and have other negative influences. For example, Barcelona, Mt Everest, and Machu Picchu are all victims of over-tourism. The prime example of this in Bellinghen Shire is at The Promised Land in peak holiday season.

To not determine your own brand on a long-term basis gives permission to others to do it for you - just look at Byron Bay and Bali.

A well-developed brand for the Shire can achieve many things:

- Increased community cohesion, understanding and respect for each other
- Enhanced connections between people and our culture, heritage and local environment
- Encourage a greater sense of belonging - positively influence growth and responsible tourism
- Attract like-minded visitors
- Provide a vehicle for business to grow, and attract new sustainable business to the Shire.

- Help prevent 'over-tourism'
- Maintain the strong existing Bellinghen shire culture from being overtaken by visitors
- Create social and economic benefits via partnerships.

Encouraging people to explore more, take a slower pace, and enjoy longer stays, will benefit all the towns and outer areas of our Shire – not just Bellinghen township itself. The plateau and the coastal seaboard need not be seen as just day trips, but as places to take the time to stay and enjoy. This can also help take the pressure off over-visited areas by encouraging dispersal.



# BRAND STRATEGY

## TARGET AUDIENCES

Defining visitors who are like-minded and have similar values to the community is an important part of the brand process.

People travel for difference motivations and attractants. The number one motivator for travel is to connect with other people. This explains why over thirty percent of visitation to the Bellingen Shire is the 'Visitor Friends and Relatives' (VFR) market. Travelling isn't just about the destination, it's a means to escape the home environment, relax, reconnect and recharge.

The traditional way of determining target audiences by demographic measures (e.g. age, income etc) is no longer relevant in the new age of travel. The world has changed, with people shifting between different segments, and a new group is emerging, called 'Aspirational Travellers'.

### *Aspirational Travellers:*

- Are defined by their passion for the acquisition of knowledge
- Use knowledge to make more informed decisions and become better versions of themselves
- Spend more on travel, wellbeing and education than on material or luxury goods

- Have a high expectation of sustainability in all areas
- Are not defined by age, gender or income bracket
- Are leaders by example and key drivers of social change
- Aspire to leave a place in better condition than before they arrived
- Are socially responsible and environmentally aware
- Seek authenticity, and look for adventure and immersion in new experiences and culture.

Council aims to support and influence a focus on market segments over the next ten years that are compatible with community ideals. A marketing plan will be developed in partnership with stakeholders in the visitor economy with a focus on the following areas:

### *Regenerative Tourism*

Attract visitors who want to make a net positive contribution to our local environment and culture.

### *Indigenous Tourism*

Led by the Gumbaynggirr Community, and supported by or partnered with Council and other organisations, to develop authentic local indigenous experiences and products, that will protect, nurture and celebrate indigenous culture.

### *Inclusive Tourism*

Develop better access to natural attractions, accessible accommodation and improvements to signage, tourism publications and posts.

### *Visiting Friends & Relatives (VFR)*

Develop promotional strategies that target this segment, aiming to increase length of stay, dispersion and visitor spend.

### *Day Tripper Market*

Focus on regional promotion to encourage day trippers to support local attractions, events and festivals, markets and the retail sector.

### *Nature Based Tourism*

Place a significant focus on nature-based assets in any tourism promotion, and sustainably increase product development around natural attractions.

### *Cultural Tourism*

Support and promote festivals and events, develop artistic product and public art across the Shire, and encourage local sports clubs to develop regional competitions.

### *Business Tourism*

Work with industry partners and Destination North Coast to attract small scale business meetings, events and conferences.

### *Waterfall Way Touring Route*

Collaborate with Armidale City Council in developing and promoting Waterfall Way, including development of new product and attractions.

### *Wellness Tourism*

Attract travellers who are seeking connective experiences that help them maintain a healthy lifestyle, reduce stress, and enhance well-being.

The Bellingen Shire has the potential to be a leader and role model in the development of responsible, sustainable tourism.

# BRAND STRATEGY

## THE BELLINGEN SHIRE BRAND

The Bellinghen Shire 'brand architecture' was developed during the three months of intense conversations with the community during the consultation period. The ideas and comments that emerged from the community engagement were overwhelmingly perceptive, imaginative, surprising and, for the most part, delightful.

The key findings from the community was clear, with overwhelming support for the following three themes:

Celebration and protection of our unique natural environment

Respect and acknowledgment for Gumbaynggirr culture, and support for a voice for the traditional custodians of this land

Preservation and recognition of our unique, diverse community and culture

The components of the brand architecture that were discussed, debated and developed in the consultation stage included:

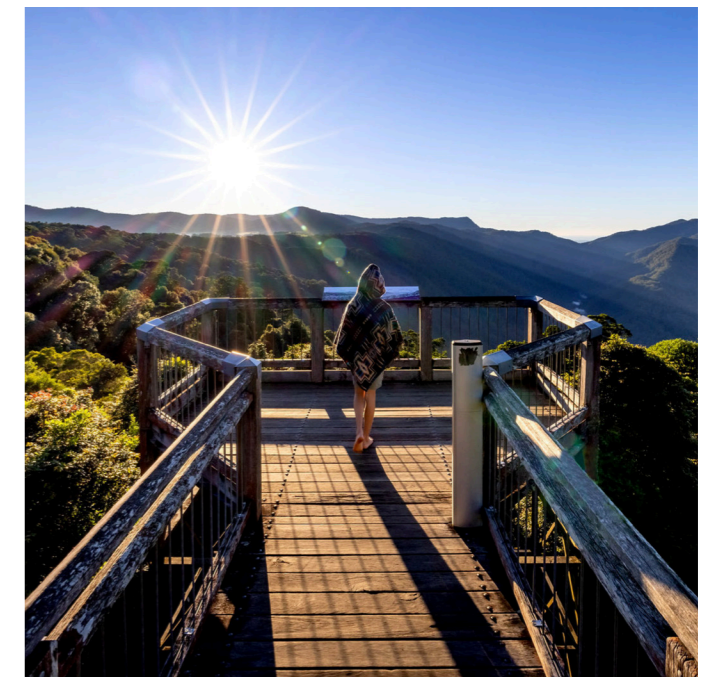
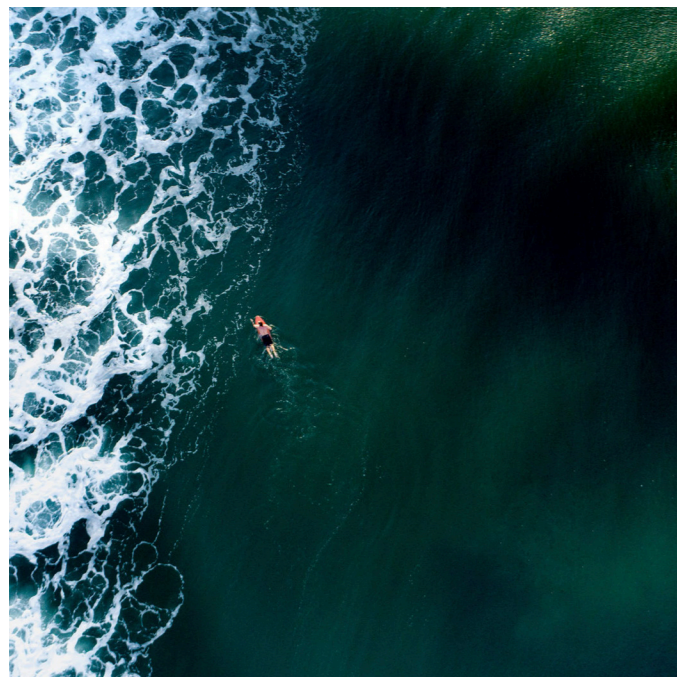
*Guiding principles*

*Key attributes*

*Brand benefits*

*Brand personality*

*Brand essence*



# BRAND STRATEGY

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

These are the principles which determine Council, visitor and local responsibilities in building a sustainable, economically beneficial tourism industry in the Bellingen Shire.

They provide a framework for the appropriate development of any tourism related experiences or activities in Bellingen Shire.

- 1. Tourism must recognise and respect the traditional custodians of this land and Gumbaynggirr culture*
- 2. Tourism should contribute to increased awareness and understanding of Gumbaynggirr culture for locals as well as visitors*
- 3. The Bellingen community and visitors should support Gumbaynggirr People in the process of healing and truth-telling, and advocate for opportunities for the indigenous voice to be heard.*
- 4. Tourism must foster respect and care for our natural environment*
- 5. Tourism should take a slow and gentle approach, and nurture connection to the land and waters of Bellingen Shire*

- 6. Tourism should actively promote environmental education for visitors*
- 7. Tourism should respect the local community and understand that the Bellingen Shire is our home and not just a tourist destination*
- 8. Tourism should respect our community values, social diversity and inclusivity*
- 9. Tourism welcomes all those that are willing to listen, learn and respect this place.*
- 10. Tourism should promote an environmentally conscious and socially sustainable balance between the economy, local culture and the environment*
- 11. Tourism should support local enterprise, and benefit the prosperity of the community*
- 12. Tourism should support the growth and development of local creative culture*

## KEY ATTRIBUTES

The Bellingen Shire is blessed with beautiful natural assets. The region resonates with visitors who want to explore nature, engage with the local community, enjoy a location that is underdeveloped, is rich in cultural diversity and is in close proximity to major visitor infrastructure and population centres. Urunga and Dorrigo complement the experiences that Bellingen provides, offering incredible diversity in the form of unique coastal and rural experiences.

Bellingen Shire's diverse attributes ensure a strong level of product differentiation. These characteristics are unique and therefore must be protected. They provide the Bellingen Shire with a key point of difference and positioning with respect to tourism marketing and product development.

The attributes are the reasons why people should or would want to visit Bellingen Shire, and importantly, the reasons that the locals connect so strongly with this place.

Drawn from the voice of the community in the consultation process, the Bellingen Shire Key attributes are:

*The beauty and biodiversity of the natural land, waters and wildlife*

*Gumbaynggirr culture*

*Creative and cultural attractions*

*Cultural and social diversity and inclusivity*

*Community spirit*

*Not just a tourist destination*

*A showcase of diverse lifestyles and unique towns*

*Organic, sustainable produce and delicious food*

*Leaders in environmental sustainability practices*

*Peace, quiet and a slower pace*

# BRAND STRATEGY

## BRAND BENEFITS

This aspect of the brand architecture centred around the question of “What are the benefits for both people visiting the Bellingen Shire, and the locals?”

What makes people feel so passionately connected to this place? How does this place positively contribute to our well-being? The following themes encapsulate the responses from the community:

*Immersion in nature*

*Connection to culture*

*Lifestyle re-evaluation and transformation*

*Healing, nurturing and cleansing*

*Uplifting and energising*

*Inspiring and creative*

*Learning and discovery*

*Adventure and wonder*

## BRAND PERSONALITY

We asked the community: If Bellingen Shire was a person, who would that person be, and why?

Some very interesting and insightful answers came from the community in response to this question (as well as some very entertaining ones):

**Carl Foster** – a widely loved and respected character who bridged the divide between red-necks, farmers, hippies and newbies.

**King Bennelong** – spiritual, strong, healthy, wise, progressive, resilient.

**Mother Earth** – caring, healing, spiritual, connected.

**Old Man Dreaming** – ever-present, going back to the land, timeless.

**Archie Roach** – truth teller, authentic, wise, resilient, inspirational, kind, vulnerable.

**Greta Thunberg** – brave, passionate, young, environmentally aware, role model, inspiring.

**The Muurrbay Tree** – a tree of plenty, a story of sharing, a spirit of openness.

**Costa Georgiadis** – an educator, strong identity, funny, connected to Aboriginal culture.

**“I can’t think of anyone - who’s an absolute famous hippie?”**

One person summed up the distinctive regional nature of the Bellingen Shire so perfectly:

**“It’s three different people”**

Community feedback also provided us with the personality traits of the Bellingen Shire:

*Environmentally aware*

*Inclusive, diverse and accepting*

*Multi-faceted*

*Innovative, creative & talented*

*Friendly, welcoming and sharing*

*Community minded and supportive*

*Spiritual and connected*

*Relaxed and laid-back*

*Hippy bohemian*

*Traditional values*

*Interesting and curious*

*Adventurous and free-spirited*

*Healthy, strong and resilient*

*Progressive and wise*

# BRAND STRATEGY

## BRAND ESSENCE

The brand essence is a description of what Bellingen Shire is and what makes it different from other places - a distillation of all of the elements of the brand architecture in as few words as possible.

The Bellingen Shire brand is a diverse, eclectic and multi-layered character, and the words “Bellingen Shire” represent a range of different things to the people who live here, as well as to visitors.

The Bellingen Shire brand is both young and old, creative and conservative, progressive and traditional, crazy and wise, proud of its Gumbaynggirr culture as well as its European heritage... yet we are all connected.

### *Our approach to a brand tagline*

The brand essence that emerged from the consultation process reflects the multi-faceted character of Bellingen Shire - as one person put it, we are “different yet connected”. So rather than creating a one-size-fits-all brand essence, or ‘tagline’, the brand identity design has taken a different approach - utilising a suite of phrases that come straight from the community, reflecting our values and our diversity.

This approach allows the brand to be adapted perfectly to fit any purpose or occasion, provides for development of future taglines, and offers versatility without compromising the overarching brand essence of CONNECTION.

The brand essence taglines include:

*Back where you belong*

*Feels like coming home*

*Connect with our country*

*Find your happy place*

*Respect, unity, love*

*A different light*

*A different way of being*

*Walk slowly, tread lightly*

*Slow down, breathe deeply*

*Small is beautiful*

*Live simple, live well*

*Deeper adventures*

*Spirited away*

*Be inspired*



# IDEAS & OPPORTUNITIES

Council are currently preparing a new Economic Development and Tourism Plan for the 2020 – 2025 period, with a focus on addressing the impacts of the Shire’s rate of growth from a tourism perspective. Additionally, Council has an ongoing commitment to resourcing of other existing plans, strategies and initiatives around management of tourism and visitor infrastructure, including the Gleniffer Reserves Master Plan.

The future of sustainable responsible tourism lies in strong partnerships between federal, state and local government, tourism authorities and associations, the tourism industry and local communities including indigenous and environmental stakeholders.

With this in mind, a number of suggestions have emerged from the consultation stage of the Tourism Branding Project. Whilst some of these ideas and opportunities do not sit strictly within the bounds of the Tourism Branding Project brief, they should be considered in the continued development of this important industry in the Bellingen Shire.

The opportunities outlined in the following pages have emanated from the multitude of discussions around the community’s

values, aspirations and concerns that were gathered during consultation. Some of these ideas fall outside the auspices of a Tourism Brand, however they are an integral part of the perceived ‘brand’ of Bellingen Shire, and highlight what the community felt as important considerations in terms of how tourism affects our Shire, now and into the future.

Many of the suggestions outlined in the following pages are outside the control and/or budgetary constraints of Council. However, where possible Council can take a leadership role in encouraging and supporting development by the private sector and other stakeholder groups as indicated.

The ideas and opportunities are intended as a direction for Council and the community, and would require development of partnerships, funding, input and collaboration from a range of sources including state or federal government bodies, the private sector, environmental and community groups, and Gumbaynggirr stakeholders.

## 1 ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVES & EDUCATION

### **1A. Bellingen Visitor Promise**

Work with industry/private enterprise to encourage development of a ‘Bellingen Promise’, a conscious tourism pledge encouraging every visitor to the Shire to treat the people and the environment with respect. The promise would be distributed via VIC’s, retail, tourism and hospitality businesses. Council to support Chambers of Commerce, environmental, business and community groups and locals to promote these positive environmental messages to visitors.

### **1B. Environmental Ambassador Program**

Continue to explore opportunities to develop a community volunteer guide initiative such as the ‘environmental ambassador’ program (*refer Gleniffer Reserves Master Plan*). Council to partner with Landcare to train volunteers in interpretation tour guiding for ‘Ambassadors’ to lead nature-based tours with biodiversity protection and sustainability education themes and messages.

### **1C. Environmental Group Network**

Encourage and support development of a network of environmental groups and land-holders in Bellingen Shire to facilitate and support environmental programs and increase access to funding opportunities, e.g. regenerative farming networks, and a national environmental conference to held in Bellingen Shire.

### **1D. Tree-planting Initiative**

Encourage and support development of a voluntary donation tourism initiative to fund a tree-planting program, in-conjunction with environmental groups such as Landcare, OzGreen or others. Online donation boxes advertised across tourism and hospitality digital platforms, social media and shop-front outlets, encouraging tourists to make a quick and easy positive contribution to Bellingen Shire’s natural environment.



# IDEAS & OPPORTUNITIES

The ideas and opportunities outlined on this page (sections 2, 3 & 4) are intended to be led by Gumbaynggirr people and local Aboriginal organisations, working in partnership or supported by Council and other government agencies, the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community, private enterprise and tourism organisations.

## 2 GUMBAYNGGIRR CULTURE

**2A. Gumbaynggirr Festival** Support development of a Gumbaynggirr Festival showcasing local artists, musicians, dancers, storytellers, bush-tucker, Gumbaynggirr culture and language, including First Nations performers from around Australia.

**2B. Cultural Initiative for Festivals & Events** Support development of protocols with all festival organisers in Bellingen Shire to incorporate Gumbaynggirr component, e.g. first performance at each festival by Gumbaynggirr artist.

**2C. Gumbaynggirr Arts & Cultural Space** Support development of a dedicated Gumbaynggirr arts & cultural space with a studio/workshop facility, and a mentoring program to foster local indigenous talent, located within a Council owned premise.

**2D. Interpretive signage and public art** Support development of interpretive signage, public art and sculpture, recognising and celebrating Gumbaynggirr heritage throughout the Shire. Council to continue to source opportunities for grant funding for signage and public art, and assist community groups in grant applications.

**2E. Indigenous Artwork Initiative** Aim to commission artwork from Gumbaynggirr artists to be incorporated into signage and digital material for Council and local businesses with cultural message e.g. 'I'm proud to be on Gumbaynggirr Country'.

## 3 CULTURAL AWARENESS / EDUCATION

**3A. Cultural Awareness Officer & Indigenous Council Staff** Explore opportunities for recruitment of Indigenous staff including a Cultural Awareness Officer. Benefits include improved relationships and communication between Council and the Gumbaynggirr Community, as well as indigenous community well-being and tourism development, and assistance in developing and implementing cultural awareness training and education programs. Explore opportunities for an Indigenous traineeship program to increase employment opportunities within private enterprise in Bellingen Shire.

**3B. Cultural Protocol & Consultation Guidelines** Develop an agreement to be adopted by Council, between Council, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Knowledge Holders, establishing protocol and guidelines for consultation and engagement with the Gumbaynggirr community. Establish local cultural protocols for Council, community groups and locals and an effective and appropriate consultation process for tourism planning, marketing and cultural product and service development.

### 3C. Cultural Experience Hubs

Support development of Visitor Information Centres, the Art Space and/or Historic Museums as tourist hubs for Gumbaynggirr culture, education and experiences for visitors as well as locals.

### 3D. Indigenous Youth Rangers

Explore opportunities to engage Indigenous youth tourism guides/rangers through partnerships between Council, high schools, NSW National Parks & Wildlife, Indigenous tourism or other tourism providers.

### 3E. Dual-naming

Adopt dual English/Gumbaynggirr language signage as protocol throughout the Shire for places, streets, bridges, etc (*refer Bellingen Shire Signage Strategy*). Explore opportunities for dual-naming of Bellingen Shire and other areas throughout the Shire (e.g. The Promised Land) to Gumbaynggirr language names.

### 3F. Shire Entry / Airport welcome and acknowledgment signage

Where possible, work with RMS, Coffs Harbour City Council, Coffs Harbour Airport operators and Coffs Harbour & District Aboriginal Land Council to develop Gumbaynggirr language welcome and acknowledgment signage at Pacific Highway Shire entry points and Coffs Harbour Airport.

### 3G. Fly the Aboriginal flag

Fly the Aboriginal flag alongside the Australian Flag wherever it is flown in the Shire.

## 4 RECONCILIATION

### 4A. Reconciliation Action Plan

Work to establish a strategic Reconciliation Action Plan that includes practical actions that will drive Council's contribution to reconciliation both internally and throughout the Bellingen Shire community.

### 4B. Truth-telling

Explore opportunities to engage in a local truth-telling process, guided by and reflecting the voice and needs of the Gumbaynggirr community.

# IDEAS & OPPORTUNITIES

## 5 TOURISM EXPERIENCE

### **5A. Regenerative Tourism**

Strive to specialise in the development of sustainable, regenerative eco-tourism experiences and passive recreation offerings that 'care for country' and benefit our community and environment, through partnerships between Council and organisations such as National Parks & Wildlife, Landcare, Jaaligir, OzGreen and other environmental or community groups. Aim to develop Bellingen Shire as an economic and social prototype for a modern, sustainable rural community, including opportunities for visitors to learn and participate in land regeneration, permaculture, organic food production, off-grid living and more. Include youth and Gumbaynggirr community to support training and employment opportunities.

### **5B. Indigenous Tourism**

In collaboration with the Gumbaynggirr community, support development of authentic local indigenous experiences, tours and products that celebrate, protect and nurture indigenous culture, and establish Bellingen Shire as a cultural tourist destination with well-managed low-impact tourism. Explore the potential to transition the Shire's tourist information centres into Welcome to Country Centres, showcasing culture and exchange between traditional owners and visitors to the Shire, and providing a platform for indigenous employment and business opportunities.

### **5C. Nature-based Tourism**

Where funding opportunities allow, Council to develop nature-based infrastructure such as walking tracks, bicycle trails, kayaking etc throughout the Shire, and support local private enterprise in establishing new sustainable tourism experiences.

**5D. Great Koala National Park** Continue to advocate for the Great Koala National Park and the value it poses for the region, both from a regenerative and nature-based tourism perspective.

**5E. Tourism Collateral Website** Establish a digital platform to host the new tourism brand identity collateral and associated material including user-guide.

## 6 TOURISM MANAGEMENT

### **6A. Tourism Management in Gleniffer**

Continue to review, support and implement the recommendations adopted in the Gleniffer Reserves Master Plan to address environmental and social impacts.

### **6B. Partnerships with Government Agencies**

Explore opportunities for collaboration in planning, infrastructure and product development with agencies like Crown Lands and Forestry Corporation, e.g mountain bike / walking track infrastructure.

### **6C. Visitor Information Centres**

Continue to explore innovative, collaborative and relevant tourism models in the ongoing operation of the Visitor Information Centres.

### **6D. Visitor Services**

Build on tourism management initiatives that will improve service delivery, product quality, industry resilience, maintenance of infrastructure and communication throughout the visitor economy.

### **6E. Rubbish Facilities**

Aim to increase additional rubbish collection services at highly visited locations during peak holiday periods.

BELLINGEN SHIRE  
TOURISM BRAND PROJECT  
DEFINING OUR SPIRIT OF PLACE:  
IDENTITY DESIGN

PREPARED BY FISHER DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE | AUGUST 2021



The Bellingen Shire brand identity design began with listening and talking with our community.

For three months the brand project team listened to what people had to say – we heard about their thoughts, their aspirations and their concerns for this place where we all live: the incredible Bellingen Shire.

We spoke to a diverse range of people - young and old, farmers and environmental crusaders, business people and creatives, recent arrivals and Gumbaynggirr custodians.

The message from the community was overwhelming, with the following themes being raised most often:

Celebration and protection of our  
unique natural environment

Respect and acknowledgment for  
Gumbaynggirr culture, and giving a voice  
to the traditional custodians of this land

Preservation and recognition of our unique,  
diverse community and culture

As one person described it so well:

“What makes the Bellingen Shire so special  
is it’s connection to community,  
connection to culture,  
and connection to country.”

The brand identity design process has distilled  
these conversations into a visual representation  
of what the community cares about.

“What makes the Bellingen Shire so special is it’s community, culture, and country.”

“... a place which is rare in the world and as such, worth of very special treatment by all of us far beyond popular culture and activity.”

“This place is very spiritual. The land envelopes you.”

Acknowledging this Gumbaynggirr country and language and peoples of these lands are an important part of our local culture.

“We need to reflect the Gumbaynggirr spirit, learn from First Nation’s people’s connection to country. Everything starts and stops with the land.”

“There’s some quality here which is hard to grasp, certainly around the river, there’s a kind of a magical feel here. And it’s healing as well.”

“The beautiful unique environment, the close-knit community and the quirky style of the towns.”

“It’s not about insta - this is a place to slow down, connect, learn and then take it back to your own community.”

“Respectfulness toward traditional custodians and land, water, wildlife.”

“Acceptance of diversity and belief in the community spirit.”

“I’d like to see everyone speaking Gumbaynggirr language in the streets.”

We could be a sustainable, green tourist hub.”

“Respectfulness toward traditional custodians and land, water, wildlife.”

“The blend of the past, the new and the ancient. Industry sharing the space with Artisans, Vegetarians with Omnivores; peacefully... side by side.”

“I love the sense of belonging in a small friendly nurturing community.”

“The people, the artists, the farmers, the hippies, the newies, and just a good sense of community.”

The brand essence that emerged from the consultation process reflects the multi-faceted character of Bellingen Shire - as one person put it, we are “different yet connected”.

Rather than creating a one-size-fits-all brand essence, or ‘tagline’, we’ve taken a different approach - a suite of phrases that come straight from the community, reflecting our diversity.

This approach allows the brand to be adapted perfectly to fit any purpose or occasion, provides for development of future ‘taglines’, and offers versatility without compromising the overarching brand essence of CONNECTION.



## CONNECTION...

Back where you belong

Feels like coming home

Connect with our country

Find your happy place

Respect, unity, love

A different light

A different way of being

Walk slowly, tread lightly

Slow down, breathe deeply

Small is beautiful

Live simple, live well

Deeper adventures

Spirited away

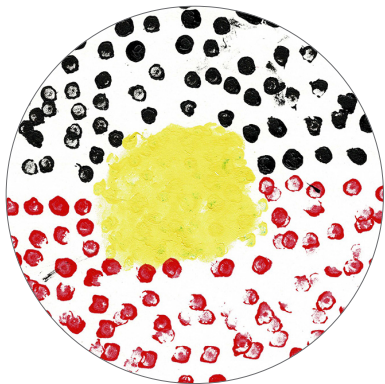
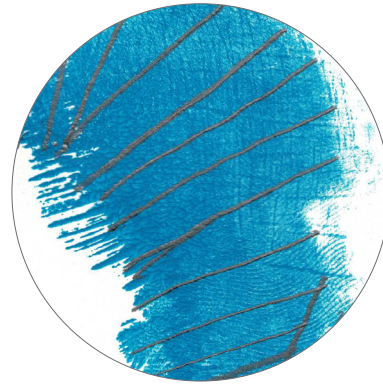
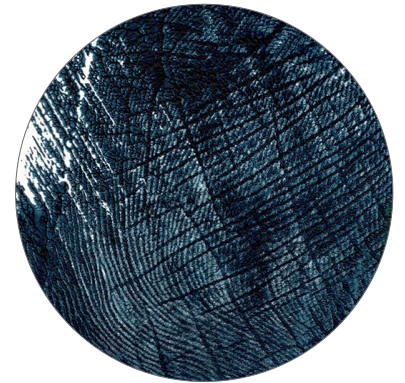
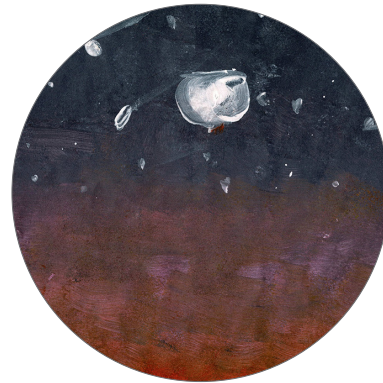
Be inspired

The starting point for the design stage of the brand identity began with art workshops held in April 2021. Indigenous students from Bellingren and Dorrigo High Schools were invited to contribute their ideas and designs at two workshops, where the students created paintings, drawings and sketches – impressions of the Bellingren Shire from their imagination.

The artwork developed at the workshops provided a wealth of creative resources for the design team, strongly guiding the development of the concept designs in a unique direction.

Within each of the three brand identity concepts can be seen design elements drawn from this rich source of visual inspiration – pattern, texture, colour and storylines – the artworks of our local indigenous children. This bestows a sense of generational connection to the area – after all, they will be our future leaders and custodians of the Shire.

BELLINGEN SHIRE BRAND IDENTITY | THE INSPIRATION



The Bellingen Shire area was traditionally a place of plenty for the Gumbaynggirr people. The rivers, forests, coastline, flora and fauna provided all that was needed to sustain a perfect symbiotic relationship between the people and their lands, for untold generations since time immemorial.

The identity design represents the leaves of the Wiigulga (Black Apple Tree), a traditional food source found in the lush rainforests of our region.

The Black Apple provided not only vitamins and minerals essential to health but also tastes lovely. These are our medicines, our food, our ancestors.

The leaves represent the connection between the three main areas of the Shire, each different but part of one growing, evolving, connected community, like the leaves of the tree, all part of one harmonious living organism.



# BELLINGEN SHIRE BRAND IDENTITY | INSPIRATION

URUNGA



BELLINGEN



DORRIGO







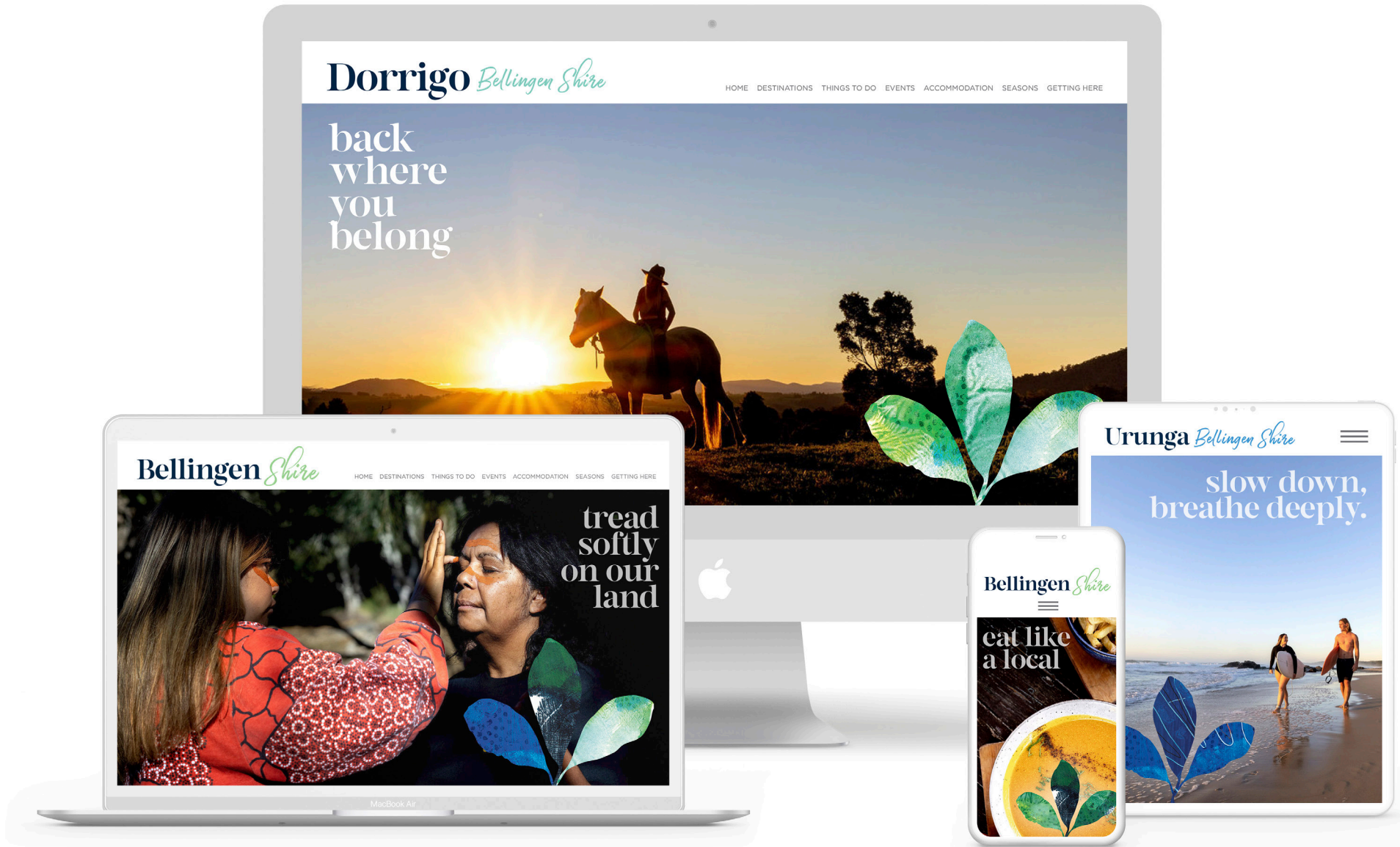
**Urunga**



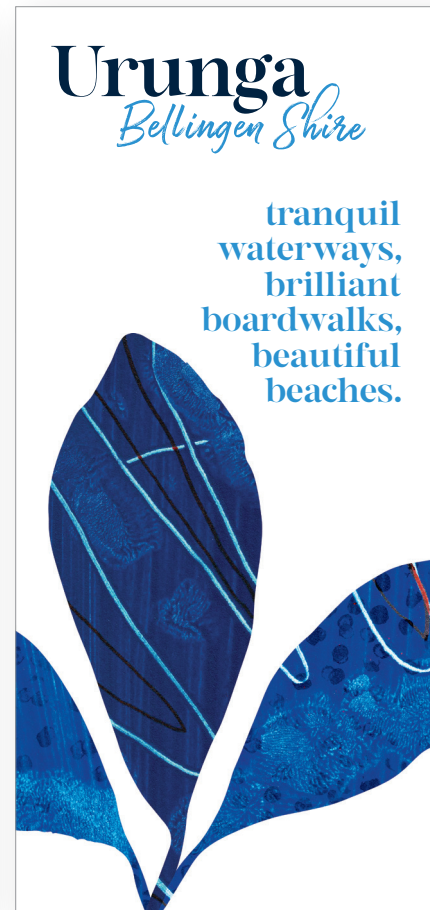
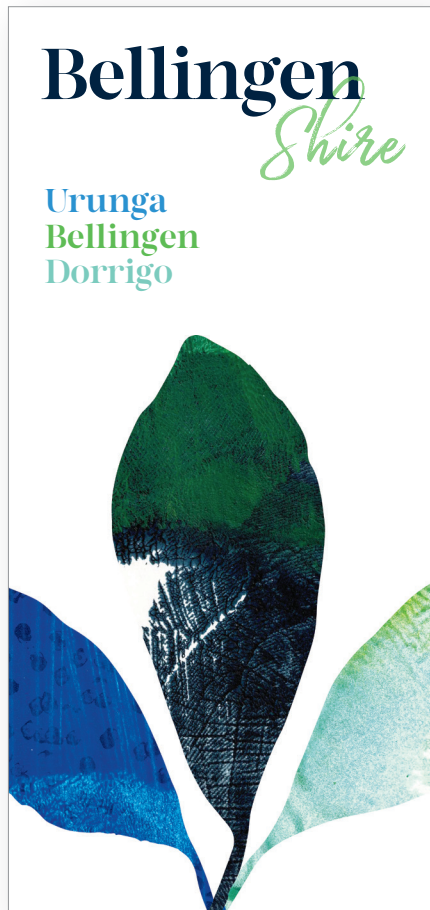
**Bellingen**



**Dorrigo**











BELLINGEN SHIRE BRAND IDENTITY | T-SHIRT







Local stone wall structure with steel signage panels

Artwork examples shown are indicative designs only. Gumbaynggirr artists to be engaged in signage design development stage. Designs to reflect unique township features and characteristics.

INDICATIVE CONCEPTS ONLY - structural and graphic design to be developed in signage design development stage.

“You’ve got to capture the spirit of this place.  
The spirit of this place is in the land.  
We come from the land.  
I come from this land... of this environment.  
The land speaks through me.  
The land speaks through us all.”

COMMENT MADE AT A COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

