



## ADDENDUM 17 JUNE 2024

### **The following additional parts provide helpful information to support the Belling Shire Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2022-2026**

In recognition of the dynamic nature of economic landscapes and the evolving needs of our community, this addendum is presented to the Economic Development and Tourism Plan 2022 – 2026 (the Plan). This document serves as a supplement to the original plan, aiming to address some of the emerging opportunities and challenges that have evolved since its inception. Specifically, the Great Koala National Park; Gumbaynggirr culture; housing affordability and availability; and opportunities around the green economy.

#### **Great Koala National Park**

Further to the aforementioned Great Koala National Park (p.19; p.27), the NSW Government 2023–24 State Budget has now committed \$80 million in funding over four (4) years to support the development of the park on the Mid North Coast.<sup>1</sup> A commitment has been made to undertake an independent economic and social assessment, expert environmental and cultural heritage assessment and the establishment of industry, community and Aboriginal advisory panels to provide input throughout the assessment process. Council is a member of the Community Advisory Panel. As outlined in the Plan, and in line with our Biodiversity Strategy, Council will continue to support the development and promotion of the Great Koala National Park.

#### Historical context of the Great Koala National Park

Environment groups and conservationists local to the Shire and Mid-North Coast came together as early as 2012, identifying significant koala populations in the region and concern about dramatically declining koala numbers across northeast NSW.<sup>2</sup> In June 2019, an inquiry was established to investigate and report on koala populations and habitat in New South Wales.<sup>3</sup> The Koala Inquiry concluded that, without major changes to how koala populations and their habitats are protected, the species will become functionally extinct in NSW by 2050. One of the inquiry's key recommendations was that the NSW Government investigate the establishment of the Great Koala National Park. The Government also developed a new NSW Koala Strategy (2021-2026) focussed on targeted conservation efforts and investment where the most effective outcomes will be delivered and in line with the best available science and expertise.<sup>4</sup> In 2021, a parliamentary Bill was introduced in the Legislative Council of NSW to introduce an Act to establish the Great Koala Protected Area to promote the conservation and growth of the koala population and habitat in certain land; and for related purposes. The Bill was rejected by the NSW Government and Opposition. In March 2023, the Labor party came into power in NSW with a policy to create a Great Koala National Park on the state's Mid-North Coast.

#### **Gumbaynggirr Culture**

Council is committed to contributing to reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australian's. Council continues to support Native Title and Land Right's claims that are within the Shire by collaborating with Gumbaynggirr communities, recognising the desire of Gumbaynggirr peoples to own their traditional lands and waters, and incorporating Gumbaynggirr perspectives in decision-making

<sup>1</sup> NSW Government (2023) Great Koala National Park: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/parks-reserves-and-protected-areas/establishing-new-parks-and-protected-areas/new-parks-and-changes-to-parks/great-koala-national-park>

<sup>2</sup> The Great Koala National Park: <https://www.koalapark.org.au/history>

<sup>3</sup> Parliament of New South Wales: <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/committees/inquiries/Pages/inquiry-details.aspx?pk=2536>

<sup>4</sup> The NSW Koala Strategy: <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/topics/animals-and-plants/threatened-species/programs-legislation-and-framework/nsw-koala-strategy>



processes. As it stands, the Gumbaynggirr peoples have native title rights and interests over an area of land and waters at Wenonah Head.

Council's Biodiversity Strategy commits to regular consultation with all relevant Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Traditional Custodians regarding environmental planning, biodiversity and culture as well as building a living agreement with Gumbaynggirr peoples and working towards peace together through building mutual understanding and respect (*Key Focus Area 1: Caring for Country: building a living agreement with Gumbaynggirr Custodians*).<sup>5</sup> Council also consults with the Gumbaynggirr community when developing Plans of Management, such as the Gleniffer Reserves, to incorporate Aboriginal cultural and heritage values and knowledge regarding biodiversity. Council has recently entered into a contract for Traditional Custodians to provide commentary into our Vegetation Management Plans – including cultural burning recommendations and identification of sensitive floristic features & cultural knowledge regarding the management of those. As referenced throughout the Plan, there is an opportunity for generating employment through arts and culture, particularly cultural experiences in a growing tourism destination, and with the development of the Dorriggo Escarpment Great Walk and Arc Rainforest Centre. With recently announced significant investments from both the Commonwealth and State Governments to boost regional events (e.g., Vibrancy Reforms, Regional Events Fund) and the arts and cultural industries (e.g., NSW Creative Communities 10-year Policy, Protecting Places funding) with a strong emphasis on First Nations culture, Council will continue to support our local Gumbaynggirr individuals, groups and businesses to benefit from these opportunities.

## **Housing affordability and availability roles and responsibilities**

Council recognises the local housing market is becoming out of reach for some residents and is an ongoing challenge for communities across Australia. Housing affordability and availability challenges are affecting a broad sector of Belling Shire's population, including low and moderate-income households; young people and pensioners; renters and purchasers; single person households and families with children.

Ways that Council is influencing housing outcomes:

- Council has a clear action plan with a set of priorities within the Belling Shire Local Housing Strategy (LHS).<sup>6</sup> The key objective of the LHS is to provide a variety of housing types in different sizes and configurations, with varied features and characteristics. This recognises the dominant 3+ bedroom home typology across the Shire and the need to deliver other types, including smaller dwellings for residents to age in place. The LHS actions do this in a range of ways and, subject to funding and other external factors like market forces, will be delivered over a number of years.
- Council currently waives the levying of development contributions for secondary dwellings. As a result, this reduces the development cost of secondary dwellings. A secondary dwelling means a *self-contained dwelling that— (a) is established in conjunction with another dwelling (the principal dwelling), and (b) is on the same lot of land as the principal dwelling, and (c) is located within, or is attached to, or is separate from, the principal dwelling.*
- Key officers', including Council's General Manager, use a range of opportunities to advocate for greater housing delivery outcomes.
- The Council Planning team have been innovative in working with groups that promote alternative growth options, including the Eco Villa Pilot Project. This pilot aims to test the concept of designing a community from the outset in such a way as to minimise energy and ecological footprints by maximising the re-use of energy and resources and integrating housing, food, waste and other systems into the basic design and operations of the village.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Belling Shire Council Biodiversity Strategy: [www.belling.nsw.gov.au/Services/Our-Natural-Environment/Biodiversity](http://www.belling.nsw.gov.au/Services/Our-Natural-Environment/Biodiversity)

<sup>6</sup> Belling Shire Council Local Housing Strategy 2020-2040: [www.belling.nsw.gov.au/Development/Local-Housing-Strategy](http://www.belling.nsw.gov.au/Development/Local-Housing-Strategy)

<sup>7</sup> Housing Strategy Implementation – Eco Village Pilot Project: <https://www.belling.nsw.gov.au/Development/Planning-Controls/Housing-Strategy-Implementation-Eco-Village-Pilot-Project>



- The Council Planning team have improved planning processes and streamlined planning approvals by redesigning the information available on Council's website including the provision of a very detailed Development Application Guide to support applicants.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, a key goal of the LHS is for growth to provide at least 50% of new homes (built 2020-2040) to be diverse housing types. This means providing a wide range of homes of different sizes and types at different price points to cater for the diverse needs of people in our community.

Belling Shire, like many regional communities, requires greater State and Commonwealth Government investment in social and affordable housing to meet the housing needs of our current and future population, and support our workforce. Council will continue to advocate for government investment and more social and affordable (subsidised) housing.

Locally, the Housing Matters Action Group Inc (HMAG) is an active group working on innovative and practical ways to grow affordable and well-designed homes and facilitating community responses and solutions to the local housing challenges, including establishing a Community Land Trust (CLT). Along with two other local government areas, Belling Shire Council joined the Mid-North Coast Joint Organisation (MNCJO) to undertake a proof-of-concept study into the development of a local CLT, formally adopted by MNCJO in March 2023. Council continues to liaise with HMAG on the issues and opportunities within the Shire for improving housing accessibility and affordability.

## **Opportunities around the Green Economy including rural landowners**

With over 50% of Belling Shire's 160,000 ha classified as National Park or State Forest, economic prosperity opportunities tie heavily to this, now and into the future. Support for green economies that aim to reduce environmental risks and ecological scarcities while promoting economic growth and sustainable development are important to the Shire's community and sustainable economies. The region is blessed with abundant natural resources, including lush forests, clean rivers, and fertile agricultural land. These resources provide a strong foundation for sustainable industries such as eco-tourism, organic farming, and renewable energy production. Significant Government and private investment support will be required for enabling infrastructure needs and challenges, mitigation of potential social and economic disruptions as well as skills development to realise these opportunities.

### Eco-tourism

Belling Shire is one of a growing number of regions currently undertaking policy efforts to leverage and create natural endowments that underpin new economic opportunities within the visitor economy, through the internationally recognised Ecotourism Australia Destination Certification<sup>9</sup>. This certification is independently assessed, verified and audited on an annual basis and involves meeting a set of 90 criteria against the four pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, economic and cultural. Leveraging these points of difference to encourage and support investment from other sources will enable local businesses to take advantage of these opportunities and build their own capacity around sustainable management particularly in the tourism sector. As a destination, the aim is to attract tourism with the same values. Our Destination Eco Certification is one way to reiterate and re-enforce this message.

### Circular Economy

By implementing a comprehensive circular economy framework and optimising waste services, Council and community aim to minimise resource depletion, maximise value extraction from materials, and foster sustainable practices throughout the Shire. Belling Shire Council is part of the Joint Organisation of Council's Centre of Excellence project to explore suitable sites and processes to provide the Mid-North

<sup>8</sup> Development Application & Construction Certificate – Documentation Guide:

[www.belling.nsw.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/files/development-website/bsc-da-document-guide-2023-008.pdf](http://www.belling.nsw.gov.au/files/sharedassets/public/v/1/files/development-website/bsc-da-document-guide-2023-008.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Belling Shire Achieves Prestigious Eco Destination Certification (April 2024): <https://www.ecotourism.org.au/blog/belling-shire-achieves-prestigious-eco-destination-certification>



Coast region with a large-scale waste facility that houses waste diversion and processing activities to provide waste solutions to much of the region's problems and currently unrecycled waste streams. This includes construction and demolition waste processing, upcycling and repair and large-scale resource recovery. The Bowerhouse reuse shop accepts unwanted items from the community, as well as goods retrieved from the landfill and other waste streams. The shop offers a wide range of items for sale, including electronics (tested and tagged), furniture, toys, tools, sports equipment, and building materials. It also repurposes old bridge timbers from replacements, which have been particularly popular. The Bowerhouse reuse shop diverts between 13 to 61 tonnes of waste per month, significantly reducing landfill contributions. Council has recently commenced construction work on a purpose built shed at the Raleigh Waste Management Facility to house more upcycling and repair workshops including a space for circular economy focused workshops and activities for the community.

### Community Environment Grants

Council established the Environment Levy Community Fund in 2005, after gaining approval from the NSW Minister for Local Government for a special rate variation of 4% to the General Income for environmental projects. The purpose of the fund is to support projects which achieve environmental or sustainability outcomes and is open to community groups. Council has an ongoing commitment to contribute approximately \$30,000 year on year to environmental projects through the Environmental Levy Community Fund.

### Rural Landowners

There is a focus on local food growing across the Shire, as well as alternative farming systems and environmental sustainability in farming and food production. Data tell us that the Shire's economy is diversifying with the largest employment industries being health care and social assistance (15%), accommodation and food services (11.6%), education and training (10.9%) and construction (10.7%).<sup>10</sup> Agriculture is in the top three industries in terms of value add, showing highest productivity by industry at 9.5%, after construction (16%) and health care and social assistance (12.6%).<sup>11</sup> Community appetite for a food producers' cooperative is complemented by research and innovation happening in the broader region via the Future Food Systems *Coffs food innovation ecosystem*<sup>12</sup> project with Queensland University of Technology. Council is actively engaging our rural landowners, farmers and food producers to explore opportunities in agrifood production and manufacturing.

Council will continue to encourage value-adding opportunities such as organic certification, agritourism, farm-to-table dining experiences, and specialty product lines to support farmers to diversify revenue streams. In 2022, the NSW Government reformed planning regulations to make it easier for farmers to use their land for agritourism to complement their existing agricultural businesses.<sup>13</sup> In 2024, Council delivered four agritourism information sessions to help rural landowners and farmers understand the five key agritourism activities and the streamlined approval processes for these activities.

[ENDS]

<sup>10</sup> .idcommunity, Belling Shire Economic Profile: <https://economy.id.com.au/belling/employment-by-industry-fte>

<sup>11</sup> .idcommunity, Belling Shire Economic Profile: <https://economy.id.com.au/belling/value-add-by-industry>

<sup>12</sup> Future Food Systems (2022), Video and final report: Coffs Harbour food ecosystem project wrap-up:

<https://www.futurefoodsystems.com.au/video-and-final-report-coffs-harbour-food-ecosystem-project-wrap-up/>

<sup>13</sup> NSW Government, Agritourism planning changes: <https://www.planning.nsw.gov.au/policy-and-legislation/under-review-and-new-policy-and-legislation/agritourism/agritourism-planning-changes>