

14. THE STRATEGY – RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CENTRES

Building on the discussion provided in earlier Chapters and the subsequent results of our floorspace and land demand modelling, this Chapter discusses the potential implications to Bellingen’s centres. The Chapter commences with a review of some of the key principles that should be applied when determining a suitable location or quantum of land to be rezoned for employment generating purposes in centres.

Building on the principles established, in accordance with the Project Brief, this Chapter then reviews opportunities for additional land to accommodate a range of employment generating uses in the Shire. Particular regard is had to:

1. Bellingen Major Centre;
2. Dorrigo Town Centre; and
3. Urunga Coastal Village.

14.1 Recommendations: Principles for Bellingen’s Centres

Chapter 10 identified demand for an additional 14,931sqm of floorspace (2.99ha of land) within Bellingen Shire’s Centres by 2036. In planning for the provision of this forecast demand, a number of important factors should be considered and are therefore discussed below.

Firstly, it is often the case that some additional demand for floorspace within centres can be accommodated by existing vacant floorspace. In the case of Bellingen, Dorrigo and Urunga existing vacancy levels are very low (2.7%, 1.6% and 2.7% respectively). This not only indicates that there is notable demand by businesses to locate within the centres but that there is minimal scope to accommodate the full extent of demand over the Strategy period without expansion or redevelopment at greater densities.

As demand grows, there will be increasing demand for additional land and space, leading to pressures to rezone and expand the boundaries of the centres. This pressure will be particularly acute for larger tenants who require sites of a sufficient size to accommodate a bigger building footprint and car parking.

Secondly it will be important to facilitate this demand and plan ahead for this need so as to attract additional businesses to Bellingen’s centres to serve its resident and tourist populations as opposed to alternative surrounding LGA’s. Furthermore, in order to protect Bellingen Major Centre’s role as the main centre within the Shire, it is recommended that the greatest share of floorspace growth is directed to this centre. To achieve this however it will be important to ensure that Bellingen Major Centre provides attractive and financially viable opportunities for redevelopment and investment. Recommendations with respect to achieving this are discussed further under Section 14.2 below.

To assist in guiding the subsequent recommendations regarding each centre below, the following table distributes the estimated growth in demand for floorspace and land across each of the three centres. The analysis has been

based on three key factors being:

1. The role of each centre in the Region’s centre hierarchy;
2. The character of each centre and the role it plays in supporting the Shire i.e. Bellingen is the civic and commercial focus of the Shire and therefore should have the greatest concentration of commercial and service based businesses; and
3. The scale of the centre and its likely trade area.

Table 48 - Provision of Floorspace and Land by Centre

	Floorspace 2016	Floorspace 2026	Floorspace 2036	Land 2016	Land 2026	Land 2036	Land 2036 (ha)	
Bellingen	1,538	3,223	3,558	3,023	9,328	16,352	1.64	55%
Dorrigo	887	1,853	2,059	1,807	5,565	9,775	0.98	33%
Urunga	335	698	779	701	2,155	3,791	0.38	13%
Total	2,760	5,775	6,396	5,531	17,048	29,919	2.99	100%

The key findings shown in Table 48 and their implications to each centre are discussed further below.

14.2 Recommendations: Bellingen Major Centre

As discussed in Chapter 5 of this Strategy, Bellingen is the main centre for the Shire and is categorised as a Major Centre within the Mid North Coast Subregion. It provides an important array of retail, commercial, civic and community uses for the local resident and working population. The centre is also well placed geographically (i.e. in the centre of the Shire) to service the bulk of the resident, worker and tourist population.

On account of the Centre’s role within the hierarchy and geographic location, this Strategy identifies its suitability for the bulk of additional floorspace (+3,558sqm or 1.64 Ha) of land. The key challenge for the Centre is where this additional floorspace could be accommodated.

Accommodating Additional Retail floorspace including a Supermarket

Breaking the demand forecasts for Bellingen Centre down further, just over 50% (approximately 1,800sqm) relates to retail floorspace. As retail uses tend to choose ground floor / shop front locations, this could translate into demand for the equivalent of 18 new specialty stores at 100sqm each or say 8 - 10 specialty stores and a new small supermarket of 800sqm – 1000sqm.

With respect to supermarket floorspace, Bellingen Centre presently has one small (approximately 540sqm) supermarket. The modest scale of the supermarket limits the range of goods it can offer to the local community (i.e. fresh food, deli and dry goods) requiring residents to travel out of Bellingen to larger centres in surrounding LGA’s that offer ‘full line’ supermarkets. This results in lost trade for the Centre (directly through supermarket spending and indirectly through spin off trade to other retailers). It also results in additional traffic and environmental impacts as well as lifestyle pressures (i.e. having to travel greater distances for grocery goods).

Our analysis of retail demand across the Shire found that by 2036 there would be a net increase in demand for close to 1,320sqm of supermarket floorspace alone. As the Major Centre for the Shire, it is recommended that the majority of this demand (i.e. 800-1000sqm) be located within Bellingen Centre to address the key issues outlined above.

With respect to location, it is important to identify a site / locality that would:

- Reinforce the centre as the key retail hub by acting as an anchor for the centre and providing spin off benefits to surrounding uses;
- Not detract from the centre and its fine grain / boutique character;
- Not create a significant traffic and transport impact; and
- Provide greater retail choice and competition.

In light of the last objective, it may be considered appropriate that a new supermarket be encouraged for the centre to provide a retail alternative / choice. The new supermarket could be located at the eastern end of the Major Centre to act as an alternative anchor or attractor to the centre, balancing the effect of the existing supermarket located at the western end of Hyde Street. A range of sites could come forward over the Strategy period to facilitate this including the site at 10 Ford Street / 25 Hyde Street which currently provides a smaller grocery store and service station. Other options relate to an amalgamation of land and existing uses at 15 and 17 Hyde Street, adjacent to the Fire Station.

A second supermarket at this end of the Centre could strengthen its attraction to local shoppers and visitors, creating the “barbell effect” whereby two anchors are located at either end of the centre supporting the patronage of specialty stores in between.

It is important to note however that the smaller scale of demand i.e. for something in the 1,000sqm range limits the types of supermarket retailers that would be interested in locating in the Centre to the smaller, less main stream providers. Alternatively the existing supermarket could be extended to the size of a Super IGA thereby increasing its range of goods on offer to include a greater variety of fresh produce, bakery and deli goods.

One opportunity to facilitate the expansion of the existing supermarket, whilst retaining it in its general locality is through the relocation of the existing light industrial uses occupying space between Hyde Street and Short Street Lane. At present there are urban support services (vehicle repair) workshops occupying units at the end of the retail strip and rear of shop front premises which is an unusual arrangement in the middle of a cluster of prime retail space. The occupation of this space by such a use is in part historic and in part a result of the lack of alternative suitable land surrounding the Centre. As will be discussed further in Chapter 15, Bellingen Centre would benefit from the creation of an urban support zone (industrial land) to enable the relocation of these businesses out of the centre, yet still close to the resident population and passing trade in order to service them.

The relocation of the existing urban support uses out of the centre would reduce the convenience of using them to a small degree and the convenience of workers in accessing services (i.e. lunch and other amenities) in the Centre. As a positive however, the relocation of these uses could reduce some traffic congestion and amenity disruption (particularly for properties in the residential zone along Short Street Lane) and provide opportunities for new larger format stores, such as a larger supermarket. The extension of a supermarket in this location could also provide additional opportunities for traffic circulation and parking around the back of the centre along Short Street Lane thereby improving shopper access and convenience.

A similar opportunity exists in relation to the sizeable site at 84 - 90 Hyde Street, presently occupied by a service station and mechanical repairs. Over the medium to long term, larger parcels of land such as this site could come to the market presenting a central opportunity for a new supermarket. Additional opportunities at the western end of the centre relate to the consolidation of smaller existing retailers and landowners for redevelopment (i.e.

properties from 87 to 101 Hyde Street or 107 to 105 Hyde Street). This is however a longer term and less attractive option for prospective supermarket operators and tenants owing to the potential risk associated with site acquisition and amalgamation.

Accommodating Additional Commercial, Education and Health Floorspace

With respect to the remaining portion of demand, just over one quarter (approximately 900sqm) of the forecast floorspace requirement relates to commercial uses with the remaining quarter relating to health (i.e. medical centres, pathologists, dentists etc.) and education floorspace (i.e. training centres etc.). These uses may be suited to ground floor shop front units as well as first level locations.

The centre would benefit from the clustering of these uses in close proximity to the existing heart of the centre to add vitality through additional pedestrian traffic, demand for goods and services. It is therefore considered desirable for commercial uses, where possible, to be encouraged to locate above ground floor retail along Hyde Street.

Owing to the low vacancy rate of the Centre at the time of survey, there is however relatively limited scope at present for additional uses without the redevelopment of existing shop fronts to include commercial floorspace at first floor level. Whilst this would be an efficient use of space within the existing centre, it is not always desirable for commercial and health uses that may seek a more prominent street front location and that may require disabled access to be provided to the first floor.

This trend is evidenced by the commercial uses that have occupied former residential dwellings, or redeveloped corner sites to commercial suites along William Street. This Street provides a natural extension of the existing Centre to the south, is visually appealing, with parking and wide streets whilst remaining within walking distance of the Centre. The properties along the northern side of William Street also benefit from rear lane access along Halpin Street for parking and servicing. As a result of these characteristics it has attracted a mix of uses including employment and training services and some health related uses. The projected demand for these services could therefore cluster with these existing uses in William Street.

This Strategy therefore identifies the short to medium term opportunity to rezone the northern side of William Street to allow for a range of commercial uses. This could be achieved through the extension of the B2 Local Centre Zone that would also create opportunities for community facilities, educational establishments and office premises whilst retaining opportunities for dwelling houses.