

THE PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

A good plan helps define the rules of the game for all the players, and, along with the tools used to implement it, provides a predictable framework for decision-making and a basis for coordinating public and private investments.²

The success of any town centre revitalisation is dependent on having a clear and workable strategy that identifies what the long-term intentions are for the centre and how these intentions are to be achieved. Town centre strategies should be comprehensive in their scope and not only focus on appropriate planning tools but consider a much wider range of measures, such as infrastructure provision, town centre management and promotion, the promotion of healthy communities to achieve longer term ambitions.

The purpose of the St Marys Town Centre Strategy is to identify the key steps that, if implemented, will achieve the long-term vision of a sustainable and vital town centre. It provides a statement of the policies that will need to be pursued and a list of actions that will need to be implemented over time if the Vision for the Town Centre as the vibrant heart of the district is to be achieved.

In keeping with Council's and the community's vision, the strategies identify the key steps to achieve vital and viable Centres. The key steps outlined are:

- **Imagining the Future** – in partnership with the community, identifying what the vision should be for the St Marys Town Centre.
- **Building Community Support** – working with the community to realise the vision.
- **Achieving an Ecologically Sustainable Centre** – ensuring that all decisions regarding the future of St Marys Town Centre are guided by the principles of sustainability.
- **Forging Strong Partnerships** – recognising that the success of the Strategy is dependent on commitment and cooperation from both the private and public sectors.
- **Creating Friendly and Attractive Places and Spaces** – focussing on the fundamental importance of human scale, street activation, high quality public realm, promotion of healthy lifestyles and pedestrian friendly environments.
- **Creating a Cultural/Entertainment Precinct** – identifying a cultural/entertainment focus as part of the centre revitalisation.
- **Making Housing and Mixed Uses a Priority** – ensuring a diversity of uses to generate activity and economic viability
- **Managing Parking and Improving Access** – providing for improved public transport, cycling and pedestrian access to and within the Town Centre and managing car parking more efficiently and in a way that supports a vibrant Town Centre.
- **Fostering Economic Investment** – creating a Town Centre which is attractive for business and which generates new job opportunities for the people of St Marys.
- **Achieving a Quality Built Environment** – promoting a high quality of development and ensuring a visually cohesive built form.
- **Providing the Right Planning, Development and Implementation Framework** – creating the right regulatory environment which facilitates redevelopment of the centre.

² Cy Paumier, op cit, p157

Informing each of these strategies is the detailed investigation and evaluation of the principal systems which have shaped the way in which the Town Centre has evolved and which potentially will need to be modified if the Vision is to be achieved.

OVERVIEW OF ST MARYS TOWN CENTRE

St Marys Town Centre is located 47km from Sydney's CBD, approximately mid way between the Penrith City Centre and the Mount Druitt town centre in neighbouring Blacktown LGA. It is approximately 800m long, with the main street, Queen Street, running in north-south direction between the Western Railway Line in the north and the Great Western Highway in the south. Generally the centre is approximately 250m wide, bound by Gidley Street in the east and Carinya Street in the west. At the location of the Village Square, the width of the centre expands to approximately 600m.

A number of institutions are located in or in close proximity to the Town Centre, including:

- Penrith City Council Service Centre and Library
- Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct and Don Bosco Youth Centre
- University of Western Sydney
- Western Sydney Institute of TAFE
- St Marys Senior High School and St Marys Primary School and other schools
- Nepean Hospital
- Ripples Leisure Centre (swimming pool complex)
- Government agencies including Centrelink and DOCS
- St Marys Band Club
- St Marys Police Station

The first precincts in the nearby former ADI site are now underway, with Council expecting the first applications for urban development in late 2006 and early 2007. A total of 3,068 new dwellings are forecast for this area within the Penrith LGA (and approximately 1900 within the Blacktown LGA), creating additional demand for services from St Marys. The forecast population for the Penrith LGA area is 7,830.

The implementation of the Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct has also commenced. Located at the south-eastern corner of Mamre Road and Great Western Highway intersection it has been identified as a multi-functional community hub, which will service existing and new user groups in existing and enhanced facilities. The precinct will also provide facilities for local and emerging artists, youth groups and vocational school studies associated with the arts.

St Marys emerged as a small urban centre in the mid-nineteenth century, keeping pace with Penrith itself until the railway was completed. St Marys became the centre of two important local industries - tanning and wagon building. Tanning continued as an important industry for about a hundred years with peak output reached in the late 19th Century. The industry flourished until the 1920s when it began to move to the Botany industrial area.

During World War II St Marys was chosen as the site for the manufacture of ammunitions. It was on a railway line, convenient to Sydney's network of industry, but removed enough to offer a measure of seclusion. There were some 3,500 people employed making explosives. The industrial area was located north of the railway and was serviced by a branch line to Dunheved and Ropes Creek Stations. A large area of land was set aside for the industry, with additional areas designated for expansion.

An area west of Queen Street was set aside for hastily built cottages on small allotments to house some of the labour force. These houses remain, and are called "Duration Cottages". The Housing Commission erected a number of houses on the eastern side of Queen Street, south of the railway line.

In the post war period, the Commonwealth-owned factory buildings were at first leased to industrial firms at cheap rentals. The industrial mix attracted was from the start noted for its

diversity, with large engineering works balanced by small manufacturers. By 1950, some 94 firms were in business at St Marys with a work force of 2,500 people.

The industrial development at St Marys was crucial to the growth and expansion of the whole Penrith local government area in the following four decades.

In the early 1990s the State Government funded the bus/rail interchange and the easy access upgrade of St Marys station. Council upgraded Queen St and sealed the adjacent car parks.

Land Use Systems

The following information regarding urban structure and urban fabric is drawn from the Urban Design Analysis for the St Marys Town Centre prepared by the Government Architects Office for Penrith City Council (June 2004).

Urban Structure

St Marys Town Centre is located east of South Creek and the topography is relatively flat, rising slightly to the east affording significant views to the Blue Mountains escarpment.

St Marys Town Centre is mostly contained between the Western Railway Line to the north and the Great Western Highway to the south. Gidley Street and Collins Street form the eastern boundary whilst Charles Hackett Drive, Kungala and Carinya Avenue form the western boundary. Swanston Street, Sainsbury Street and Princess Mary Street and the Great Western Highway bound the Town Centre to the south.

Queen Street forms the main thoroughfare for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, providing a link from the residential areas south of the Great Western Highway to St Marys Railway Station in the north. This roadway is the dominant feature of St Marys and is the central focus of the centre. Streets run predominantly north-south and east-west, with two service lanes immediately behind Queen Street.

Residential areas within the suburb of St Marys are situated directly east of the Town Centre, and east and west of Mamre Rd south of the Great Western Highway. Additional residential development is situated north of the North St Marys Industrial Area, bounded by Glossop Street, Forrester Road and Harris Street north of the railway line. The suburb of North St Marys has strong connections to the Town Centre.

St Marys is also bounded by two creeks – South Creek to the west, forming the boundary with Werrington, and Ropes Creek to the east, forming the boundary with Blacktown Local Government Area. The South Creek corridor comprises areas of open space, incorporating the Kingsway Playing Fields, a BMX Track, tennis courts and soccer fields immediately to the west of the Town Centre. Open space surrounding the Ropes Creek Corridor forms a relationship and eastern boundary with the suburb of North St Marys.

A strong avenue of street trees exists along Queen Street, and contributes to the civic quality of the street. East-west streets within and beyond the Town Centre boundary have little or no street tree planting, with the exception of Charles Hackett Drive. Kokoda and Lang Park are large parks within the centre. There are a number of smaller pocket parks, including Coachman's Park immediately adjacent to Queen Street.

Urban Fabric

Development in St Marys is generally oriented towards Queen Street and comprises fine grain, low scale buildings generally with retail at the ground floor and commercial above. The shops along the main thoroughfare retain a distinctive building setback that results in varying but significant footpath widths. These varied setbacks allow for the strong avenue of trees planted along Queen Street, outdoor dining and awnings.

Two stand-alone retail centres are located outside the main Town Centre spine. The "Station Plaza" is located towards the north of the centre, fronting Station Street, and is adjoined by an expansive surface car park to its west. It is an internalised shopping centre, containing a

supermarket and a mix of smaller specialty retail tenancies. The building provides little street activation. The "Village Centre" is located towards the south west of the Town Centre, on Charles Hackett Drive and is also surrounded by an extensive area of surface car parking. It also is an internalised shopping centre containing a supermarket, discount department store and a mix of other smaller retailing/bulky goods outlets. The shopping complex is located away from the main retail street of St Marys and does not provide a good level of interaction with the pedestrian environment.

St Marys Town Centre is generally characterised by development up to two storeys in height. It is not visually dominant from surrounding areas.

The Town Centre is surrounded by surface car parking located behind the shopfronts to Queen Street, which is highly visible from the eastern and western approaches to the Town Centre along Gidley Street and Carinya Avenue, and from the north when approaching from the railway line.

The main street of St Marys Town Centre is characterised by traditional shop fronts, overhanging awnings, and wide pedestrian footpaths. Most buildings comprise ground floor retail/offices with some second storey commercial. The two stand alone 'big box' retail stores located on the periphery of the centre draw custom away from the main street, further detracting from the appearance and viability of shops along Queen Street.

Most of the retailing and commercial activity currently occurring along Queen is located towards the centre and south of the thoroughfare. Towards the northern end of Queen Street, development is run down and dilapidated. Retailing activities create an active frontage to Queen Street however do not provide the same level of activation to the east-west running streets adjoining Queen Street.

The Council office and branch library are located on the western side of Queen Street, south of Crana Street, St Marys Occasional Care Centre is located in Carinya Avenue whilst other community facilities are located south of the Great Western Highway.

Access and Transport

An Access and Transport Analysis of Penrith City Centre and St Marys Town Centre was prepared by Sinclair Knight Merz on behalf of Penrith City Council (November 2004). The following information is largely drawn from this report.

The main vehicular links servicing St Marys from the east and west are the Great Western Highway and the Western Motorway (M4). Mamre Road provides vehicular access to the Town Centre from the south, however traffic must travel via Glossop Street from North St Marys due to the location of the railway line blocking access from Queen Street. The majority of intersections within the Town Centre operate at a good level of service, however the intersection of Great Western Highway and Mamre Road is currently over capacity and is being considered for upgrading.

St Marys is well serviced by the Main Western Rail Line, which provides relatively high frequency services during peak periods as well as a good spread of services throughout the day. The rail provides an eastern connection into Sydney city via Parramatta, and a western connection to the Blue Mountains and Central Western NSW via Penrith.

More than 2,000 passengers board the train from St Marys during the morning peak hours to other destinations, mainly for work. A significant proportion of these passengers drives to the train station in the morning and parks in the commuters' car park or makes use of local bus services.

Private bus operators under contract to the NSW Ministry of Transport provide bus services in the Penrith Local Government Area. Bus services provide for local trips, and as feeder services for rail travel. Bus service frequency is an issue, however, with there generally being a 30 minute time gap between services. Bus stops are located at the bus interchange adjacent to the railway station, and on Queen Street adjacent to the intersection with Charles Hackett Drive and King Street.

Generally, pedestrian facilities in St Marys Town Centre are considered to be good and well defined along the major streets, however connectivity between the two major shopping centres and Queen Street is poor. There is a lack of footpaths in both East and West Lanes, constraining pedestrian movement through these lanes. Access for people with disabilities between the carparks and Queen St is also limited.

No priority exists for cyclists on the road networks in St Marys Town Centre however bikeways exist in the vicinity of St Marys Town Centre at:

- Charles Hackett Drive, from Gabriels Street to Kalang Avenue
- Swanston Street, and
- Monfarville Street.

Council has planned to install bikeways along the following streets in the future:

- Queen Street, from Great Western Highway to Station Street
- Mamre Road
- Great Western Highway, westwards from Glossop Street to Kalang Avenue

Car Parking

There were a total of 2,754 parking spaces in the off-street car parks at St Marys Town Centre. Of these, 2,076 spaces are long-term parking spaces while 678 spaces are short-term (restricted) parking spaces. There are an additional 242 short-term kerbside parking spaces.

SKM undertook an assessment of the required level of car parking for St Marys Town Centre, based on the existing provision of retail and commercial floor space. In accordance with Council's parking code, a total of 1,725 spaces are required – 742 spaces fewer than are currently provided. Further, the demand for parking within the Town Centre is adequately met. A parking survey undertaken by SKM concluded that there were 309 vacant car parking spaces scattered in the various off-street carparks within the Town Centre during the weekday mid-day period.

Economic Systems

An Economic Analysis of Penrith City Centre and St Marys was prepared for Council by Hill PDA (July 2004). The following information is based on this analysis.

Existing Economic Activity

St Marys is the major centre in the eastern side of the Penrith LGA, servicing a wide range of rural and urban communities.

There is no distinct role at present for St Marys as it is typical of an older style retail centre that does not fit into the current retail categories. It cannot be classified as a destination/regional centre, a big-box retail centre or a convenience centre. The challenge for St Marys is to redefine its role. Given its location between Penrith and the sub-regional centre of Mount Druitt, its opportunity to perform a stronger retail function is limited. Despite this, it is a concentrated centre offering a reasonable level of shopper amenity and has potential for improvement which could strengthen its appeal.

The indoor components of the St Marys Town Centre include:

- Station Street Plaza, with approximately 7,500m² of retail floor space. Major tenants include a Coles Supermarket and a Fosseys store.
- Astley Centre with approximately 800m² of retail floor space.
- The Village Centre with around 15,600m² of retail floor space. Major tenants include Target and Woolworths.

The majority of strip retail is located along Queen Street, providing around 20,600m² of retail floor area.

In comparison to retail, commercial or office space is very minimal in St Marys and mainly exists in the form of first floor commercial above retail. There is approximately 16,500m² of commercial floor space in the Town Centre. The prime commercial space is found along both King and Chapel Streets, whilst remaining lower quality commercial is located along Queen Street.

The Economic Study prepared by HillPDA found that the supermarkets within the St Marys centre are trading at or below the national average, and this is a sustainable level. Following consultations with various stakeholders within St Marys it is apparent that the potential exists for the addition of a Discount Department Store within the Town Centre. This potential development could have a significantly advantageous impact on the operation of the centre through re-orientation of the shopping centres and improving the linkage of these centres to Queen Street; thereby improving pedestrian linkages within the centre. As such Council will endeavour to continue working with developers and consider using existing Council assets to facilitate such improvements.

The breakdown of retail versus commercial floor space is typical of a centre this size where office demand stems from professional services such as banks, real estate agents, accountants, lawyers and health care professionals. The amount of retail space acts as an anchor to attract customers, and as a result the amount of commercial space is a function of the provision of retail space. Therefore, if for some reason the viability of the retail is undermined, then there is likely to be a flow-on effect to the professional service providers who may consider relocating. One problem for St Marys therefore is the attraction of the range of retail offerings. As it is not necessarily as great as in a regional centre, there is potential for a loss of patronage to other centres which provide for this demand. This could then have a flow-on effect to the commercial services provided within the centre.

The St Marys trade area has been defined to include a primary sector (St Marys, St Marys North, Oxley Park, Claremont Meadows, Werrington and Colyton) and a secondary sector (St Clair and Erskine Park). Much of the expenditure in comparative goods (clothing, bulky goods and more expensive personal goods) from this trade area is escaping St Marys to the regional centres of Penrith and Blacktown. In addition to this, there is a potential future threat of competition from new centres near Werrington and ADI St Marys.

A significant area of industrial development is located immediately north of the Western Rail line in North St Marys.

St Marys commercial office space is likely to be proportional to the growth in retail space. Based on retail projections, this is likely to be in the order of 8,000m² over the next 12 years but may be retarded if competition from the proposed new centres in ADI St Marys and UWS Werrington proceed.

Economic Trends

Population growth, rising real disposable incomes, innovation and change within the retail industry have underpinned a rapid increase in the supply of retail floor space throughout Australia. Recent shifts in retailing have included the emergence of the regional and 'super-regional' centre (such as Westfield), retailing targeted at convenience and 'just-in-time' shopping to meet daily and weekly shopping needs (with quick and convenient parking and extended trading hours), category killers (eg Buntings, Harvey Norman, IKEA) and bulky goods centres.

These trends are polarising the retail hierarchy with the larger regional centres such as Westfield Penrith Plaza in Penrith CBD positioning themselves for a more dominant role in the provision of entertainment and customer services matched with increased retail floor space. The more successful smaller centres have moved towards the concept of convenience centres with greater emphasis on food retailing, just-in-time shopping, fast foods, local services and petrol. This polarisation of the retail hierarchy has been at the expense of the sub-regional centres and district centres such as St Marys.

However, the historic trends towards larger stores and centres may continue for some time, but it won't necessarily continue indefinitely. More people are juggling careers and family and increasingly must squeeze shopping in where they can, rather than adhere to a standard schedule. Busy shoppers today are less inclined to spend as much time as they once did wandering through vast shopping complexes. The trend is towards a decline in average time spent shopping and the replacement of the once-a-week shop with a series of small shopping trips.

Current threats facing the St Marys Town Centre are the potential growth of the Mount Druitt sub-regional centre which may act to hinder the expansion and vitality of St Marys. Further, the physical barrier of the Railway Line separating St Marys centre from North St Marys may mean that people living on the northern side of the line may be attracted to shop at future retail facilities developed within the ADI site.

Despite this, St Marys has the potential to redefine itself as an attractive and interesting centre, providing a shopping experience that is unique. There is an opportunity to create a dominant pedestrian oriented main street, instead of the internalised 'big box' retail space in other centres. St Marys can also draw on its proximity to the WELL Precinct, the UWS campus and the redevelopment of the ADI site north of the railway line, which will attract a wider demographic than is currently residing in St Marys. Further there are plans to redevelop the Glossop Street precinct, potentially regenerating a large and declining housing area with new well designed and denser residential development.

The centre has the opportunity to provide a range of cultural and entertainment facilities not provided elsewhere, and build on its strengths and unique identity. The considerable land holdings of Council within and around the centre allow opportunities for some significant investment and intervention to revitalise the centre. An improved public domain is likely to attract private sector investment and enhance the liveability of the town centre.

Social Systems

The following information regarding social systems is drawn from the ABS 2001 Census and a social profile prepared by Council in 2004 for the Our Centres Review.

St Marys – bounded by the main Western Railway line, South Creek, the M4 Motorway and Marsden Road/Sydney Street – is one of the oldest suburbs in the Penrith LGA.

As an established suburb the majority of housing stock is older and in some cases in poor condition. As mentioned previously there are plans to redevelop the Glossop Street precinct. This redevelopment may result in an increase in residential population within St Marys. The current population is estimated at 9,234 persons.

In 1996 the population of St Marys was 9891 persons. Thus the population of St. Marys declined by 7% between 1996-2001.

St Marys has 719 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, representing 2.4% of the population. This is a slightly higher percentage than for the Penrith LGA (2%).

In 2001 there were 3,636 occupied private dwellings in St Marys. Compared to the Penrith LGA, St Marys has a higher proportion of fully owned dwellings (35% for St Marys and 32% for the Penrith LGA), but a significantly lower percentage of dwellings being purchased (21% compared to 37% for the Penrith LGA). The suburb also has a higher percentage of public housing dwellings (9% compared to 5% for the Penrith LGA) and private rental dwellings (28% compared to 20% for the Penrith LGA).

St Marys has a greater proportion of residents born overseas in a non-English speaking country than the Penrith LGA (21% compared to 12% for the Penrith LGA). The 1893 residents in St Marys born in a non English speaking country come from many different countries with the main languages spoken at home including Arabic, Greek, Croatian, Italian and Tagalog (spoken by the Filipino community).

There are 1876 persons under the age of fifteen in St Marys or 20% of the population. This is lower than the Penrith LGA percentage of 25%. There are 1277 persons over 65 years of age in St Marys or 14% of the population. This is double the proportion of over 65's in the Penrith LGA (7%).

According to the 2001 Census there is also a significantly higher unemployment rate in St Marys, with 9.8% of the St Marys labour force unemployed, compared with 5.9% across the Penrith LGA.

The household occupancy rate in St Marys is 2.54 persons per household. This compares to Penrith LGA occupancy rate of 3.0 persons per dwelling.

A major contributing factor to the lower household occupancy ratio in St. Marys is the large number of single person households – 1037 households or 29% of all households. This compares to 17% for single person households across the Penrith LGA.

Almost 25% of families (i.e. 599 families) earn less than \$500 per week. On the other hand 809 (or 33% of families) earn more than \$1000 a week. However as noted above there are a large number of single person households in St. Marys and these are not defined as families. Given the older age profile in St Marys, many of these single person households will be aged pensioners and thus also have an income of less than \$500 per week.

At the 2001 Census the combined population of the three suburbs closest to the St Marys Town Centre, that is St Marys, Colyton and Oxley Park was 19,818 persons. This is a slight increase on the 1996 total of 19,774.

Community Services

A broad range of community services are located in St Marys. This includes government agency services such as Centrelink, the NSW Department of Community Services St Marys Community Service Centre and the St Marys Community Health Centre.

A number of non-government organisations and groups are located at the proposed Penrith Valley Cultural precinct on the corner of Mamre Road and the Great Western Highway. These include St Marys Area Community Development Organisation, Nepean Migrant Access and St Marys Senior Citizens Centre.

The St Marys branch of the Penrith City Library is located on Queen Street and is open seven days a week. The library provides information and resources for the local area.

Eight childcare centres are situated within the suburb. Council centres include Koala Corner Long Day Care Centre, St Marys Pre-School and St Marys Occasional Care Centre. Before and after school care is available at St Marys Public School. These four services are located within or adjacent to the St Marys Town Centre boundary.

Cultural Resources

The Cultural Development Analysis for the Penrith City Centre and St Marys Town Centre was prepared by Deborah Mills (March 2005) for the Our City Centres Review. This study identified that St Marys and North St Marys are comparatively well served in terms of cultural facilities and services. They provide a diversity of restaurants and 15 cultural businesses with dance, craft, and music the most strongly represented. Most of St Marys' seven pubs have live entertainment and the area includes the Westside Players Theatre Company. There are five community based cultural organisations, two craft, two music, and one heritage – the St Marys Arts and Crafts Centre.

The report recognised that although there is a reasonable provision of cultural resources in St Marys, the cultural infrastructure is fragile, under-developed, unrecognised and isolated. The analysis suggests that if Council's vision of a vibrant and active Town Centre, offering an extensive range of cultural experiences is to be achieved, there needs to be a significant shift in the understanding of the relationship of cultural development to urban design, community wellbeing, economic development and environmental sustainability.

There appears to be an opportunity to focus the development of St Marys around a cultural- and community-oriented centre, utilising the existing services and taking advantage of the large number of land parcels owned and managed by Council.

Social Values

The Community Attitudes & Aspirations Survey of Penrith City Residents was conducted as part of the PLANS for Our Future Project undertaken by Urbis Keys Young in partnership with Stratcorp Consulting for Penrith City Council in 2002. This report identified that the most important characteristics of the Penrith LGA for all residents were:

- Its quiet peaceful atmosphere
- Its convenient location and
- The friendliness of the local people.

Further documentation of community attitudes and the development of a vision specifically for St Marys is provided in the Community Visioning Process Report prepared by Village WELL (January 2005). This report found that overall respondents were very enthusiastic about their town and that the values of friendliness, public open space, and the community spirit of the town provided an alternative to the pace and scale of Penrith and other surrounding larger centres.

A significant number of people in response to the question "what three things do you like best about the area?" responded in terms of its location and access to natural features such as bushland, river and mountains or access to services and facilities rather than a specific facility or characteristic. Access to a range of locations and facilities is clearly a key advantage for residents of the Penrith LGA.

The secondary aim of the survey was to identify residents' participation in recreation and social activities and their views about further development of services and facilities in the Penrith LGA.

Participation in informal passive recreation activities was by far the most popular activity reported with 77% of respondents noting they had participated in activities such as walking, picnicking and socialising with friends within the last 12 months. The overall importance placed on access to public open space and natural bushland reflects the high level of passive informal recreation activity.

The next most popular activities were informal active recreation such as playing a game in the local park, reported by 47%, and attending a community event or festival reported by 40% of respondents. The least popular activity reported was participation in art and craft activities with only 18 % of respondents noting they had participated in this activity within the last 12 months.

Younger age groups were more likely to participate in organised sport and active recreation while older age groups tended to participate more in community festivals, attend museums and art and craft activities. Those facilities which were seen as very important to be improved by the greatest number of respondents, were in general those which provided recreation or cultural activity to the widest groups within the community providing venues for passive or active informal recreation.

The Community Visioning Process for the Our City Centres' Review (discussed further below) identified values and aspirations specifically related to the St Marys Town Centre. This consultation found that in the main, people liked the friendliness, warmth and down-to-earth attitude of St Marys and wanted to retain this character. There was a concern over the potential impact of new development both within the centre and on nearby subdivisions such as ADI. Also, the perceived lack of night time safety and the 'westie' image of the centre were identified as concerns needing to be addressed. There was a mixed response to the topic of retailing, with some commenting that there is not enough variety and others stating that there is a good variety of shops within the centre. Community services and community groups are

well supported in St Marys however there is a perception that growth in local population would affect employment.

The views expressed by the people of Penrith and particularly St Marys have implications for the St Marys Town Centre Strategy. The small-town semi-rural character of the area is highly valued by the community, who want to retain this feeling. However, there is a need to address concerns relating to safety, the range of shops, lack of disabled access, and potential threats posed by the development of the ADI site. There was however a strong level of community support for the centre identifying that St Marys has good potential and a bright future to look forward to.

KEY CHALLENGES FACING ST MARYS

The following are the key challenges that will need to be addressed if St Marys Town Centre is to become a vibrant and attractive town centre within the region. Most of these challenges have been identified in the economic analysis (Hill PDA, July 2004).

Maintaining commercial viability – St Marys Town Centre is currently vulnerable to market competition from other surrounding growth centres. Currently, the St Marys trade area overlaps with that of Mount Druitt, and the potential new centres at Werrington and ADI. St Marys therefore needs to redefine itself as a unique centre as it does not currently present the characteristics of the defined three main types of retail centre in Australia today – a 'destination/regional centre', a 'convenience centre' and a 'big-box retail centre'.

The need for diversity – St Marys Town Centre cannot afford to retain its current dominance by retail activities and needs to promote diversity. A wide range of uses that offer people a variety of reasons to visit is characteristic of a healthy centre. This provides not only a spin off for the other uses but also activates the town throughout the day and night. The inclusion of residential, cultural and entertainment activities make the centre a living place.

Achieving a balance of activities – The Town Centre must achieve a balance of daytime and night-time activities to ensure its viability. Promotion of entertainment, cultural and residential uses will attract visitors during the night provided that these can be provided in a "safe environment", whilst daytime activity will continue with retail and commercial services.

Encouraging compactness and development intensity – St Marys is not spread over a large area, and encouraging carefully designed higher development density in the centre will promote pedestrian activity so that people are encouraged to walk out of the offices at lunchtime and interact. The wide footpaths are utilised for outdoor cafés, florists, news stands etc which are common tools to create a sense of place. An intensity of development is needed to provide critical mass to justify public transport investment and generate street level activity.

Creating functional linkages – There needs to be a path of integrated open space, armature of parks, cycle and pedestrian networks and distinctive streetscape treatments. Development of this network will encourage physical activity and social interaction thereby improving the overall health of residents and visitors. Consideration needs to be given to a whole town plan that looks not simply at the defined Town Centre boundary but a broader boundary that encompasses the nearby WELL Precinct, ADI, North St Marys and surrounding residential areas.

Encouraging the growth of cultural activities – To be a truly vibrant Town Centre, St Marys must nurture and expand its cultural resource base. This involves establishing cultural enterprise incubators, promoting the arts and music of the region, supporting local amateur groups and providing for an integrated range of community facilities.

Building a positive identity – St Marys needs to build on its strengths and focus on its competitive advantages, particularly the smaller scale of its centre. Focusing on building a positive identity will foster business confidence and community support for the long-term strategy and vision. The public announcement of the vision and the resulting strategy is a marketing tool in itself.

Encouraging positive social interaction – A liveable city focuses on all its citizens, with a strong emphasis on caring for those less powerful and self determined than others such as children, youth and elderly people. Creating a fabric of meeting places that encourages and invites positive social interaction will contribute to enliven the city, improve the health (including the physical, mental and social well being) of residents and visitors, and make the Centre a safer and more attractive and inclusive place to be.

The following strategies provide the framework for achieving a prosperous, culturally-enriched and cosmopolitan Town Centre. A long-term commitment to their implementation is required if this vision is to be achieved.

Part 2 – Strategies and Actions for Creating a Viable and Vital St Marys Town Centre

Imagining the Future – The Vision

Having a vision for a place is fundamental if any form of large scale or long term redevelopment is to occur. The vision provides an intention for the continuing development of a place – without this intention there is little reason to begin the process in the first place. The vision should encompass what the place is to look like, how it is to operate and what it is to provide for the future. It should address market potential, urban design, community needs and aspirations – detailing what the community and stakeholders want the place to be.

Creating a vision involves the input of all stakeholders and therefore acts as a tool to measure the level of community interest and support for any proposed town centre vitalisation. It provides a sense of how the community wants a place to grow and change, identifies what is important and uncovers the emotional, economic and financial reasons for the town centre vitalisation.

The vision should be bold and innovative, drawing on history, character, and strengths of the community. However, it must also be tempered with realism to ensure that the objectives are achievable.

The vision provides the guide for the strategic plan, informing the development standards, land use policy and the many other issues required to be addressed in such a document.

Creating a Vision for St Marys Town Centre

In 2004, Penrith City Council undertook a Community Visioning and Consultation Process, as part of Stage One of the Our City Centres Review. The City Centres Review aimed to stimulate debate about the framework, direction and planning of both Penrith and St Marys.

The community visioning process was undertaken with the view that the vision, principles and values created for St Marys would build on previous Council community consultations and would complement the broader context of Council's vision for the Penrith Region which is:

Vision for the Penrith Region

Council's vision is one of a sustainable and prosperous region with a harmony of urban and rural qualities and a strong commitment to environmental protection and enhancement. It would offer both the cosmopolitan and cultural lifestyles of a mature city and the casual character of a rural community.

A broad cross section of stakeholders was consulted as part of the community visioning process for St Marys and Penrith. A number of community consultation methods were used for the St Marys Town Centre by Village Well who ran the community consultation sessions and prepared the Community Visioning Process Report. Such methods included workshops, listening posts, one-to-one interviews and focus groups. The feedback received from and discussions held within these sessions informed the creation of objectives, principles and desired characteristics for the St Marys Town Centre. These in turn enabled the crystallisation of a Vision for the Centre.

What is the Vision?

As a result of the community consultation for St Marys, the following Town Centre Vision was created. It provides the desired future character for the centre in a succinct phrase.

Vision for St Marys Town Centre

St Marys is the vibrant heart of the district, providing diverse experiences and services in a friendly atmosphere

Underpinning the overall vision for St Marys Town Centre are a number of values, principles, and objectives identified during the visioning process, which are regarded as central to achieving the vision. These value statements provide more detail as to the type of place St Marys is to become, identify what features are important to local residents and provide greater meaning to the vision for the centre.

VALUES

respect	security	diversity	beauty
integrity	community	inclusivity	sustainability

The community also identified a number of principles that should guide the future of St Marys:

- we are a safe, people-friendly place for all ages
- we engender a sense of community spirit
- we celebrate cultural diversity
- we recognise and respect our rich heritage
- we value the unique status of the original owners of the land and acknowledge their living culture and their role in the life of the region
- we protect and nourish our country quality of life
- we take care and pride in our place
- we respect our open spaces and natural environment
- we provide livelihood and opportunity for all

St Marys Town Centre will be:

- a diverse, vibrant retail business centre that meets the day-to-day needs of the district
- a cultural destination that celebrates the local character
- a community meeting place for all ages
- a major transport hub
- an attractive place to live for a variety of lifestyles
- an active night-time entertainment precinct
- a local hub for learning and creative activities
- an access point to natural surroundings

Building on these principles and values are the key objectives for the strategy:

- to celebrate what is unique about St Marys
- to maintain the friendly atmosphere of the Town Centre

- to improve the retail shopping experience to meet the needs of the growing population
- to connect the various activity centres
- to link the town to existing suburbs and growth areas
- to provide opportunities for living within the town.

Aiming for the development of a place that meets these principles, objectives and desires will help to achieve the overall vision for the Town Centre. Achieving these smaller goals is therefore the principal role of the strategic plan in order to attain the vision for the St Marys Town Centre.

Recommended Strategies and Actions

The St Marys Town Centre Strategy recommends a series of policy actions that identifies areas of responsibility for each policy action as well as a timeframe. It is intended that the policy directions included in the Strategy would provide the basis for the revitalisation of the St Marys Town Centre.