

Narara Ecovillage: Economic Impact Considerations

Prepared for: Narara Ecovillage

Prepared by: Tony Dimasi

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1. Proposed development and context

The Narara Ecovillage (NEV) project comprises a range of land uses proposed for the approximately 63 hectares site which was previously the Gosford Primary Industries Institute. Ecovillages are intentional communities whose goal is to become more socially, economically and ecologically sustainable. Villages range in size depending on their location and their founding community.

Kosha Anja Joubert, former Executive Director of the Global Eco Village Network, has defined an Ecovillage as an intentional or traditional community consciously designed by its inhabitants, in which people consciously value what they have and integrate this with innovative technologies to make their lives more sustainable, and the whole process is owned by the people living there.

Ecovillagers are united by shared ecological, social, economic and cultural values. Many see the breakdown of traditional forms of community, wasteful consumerist lifestyles, the destruction of natural habitat, urban sprawl, factory farming, and an overreliance on fossil fuels as trends that must change to avert ecological disasters and create richer and more fulfilling ways of life.

The indicative masterplan for the NEV proposal is shown on the following page. The bulk of the site is proposed for residential development, providing a range of housing types. A total of 167 dwellings is illustrated in the indicative masterplan, expected to accommodate some 450-500 residents on completion.

The location and context of NEV are shown on Map 1 following. The village site is nestled at the western edge of the Narara Valley, surrounded by forest in all directions other than east/south-east. The elements of the indicative masterplan, shown on the subsequent page, that are the focus of this assessment are the proposed retail/commercial facilities, which include:

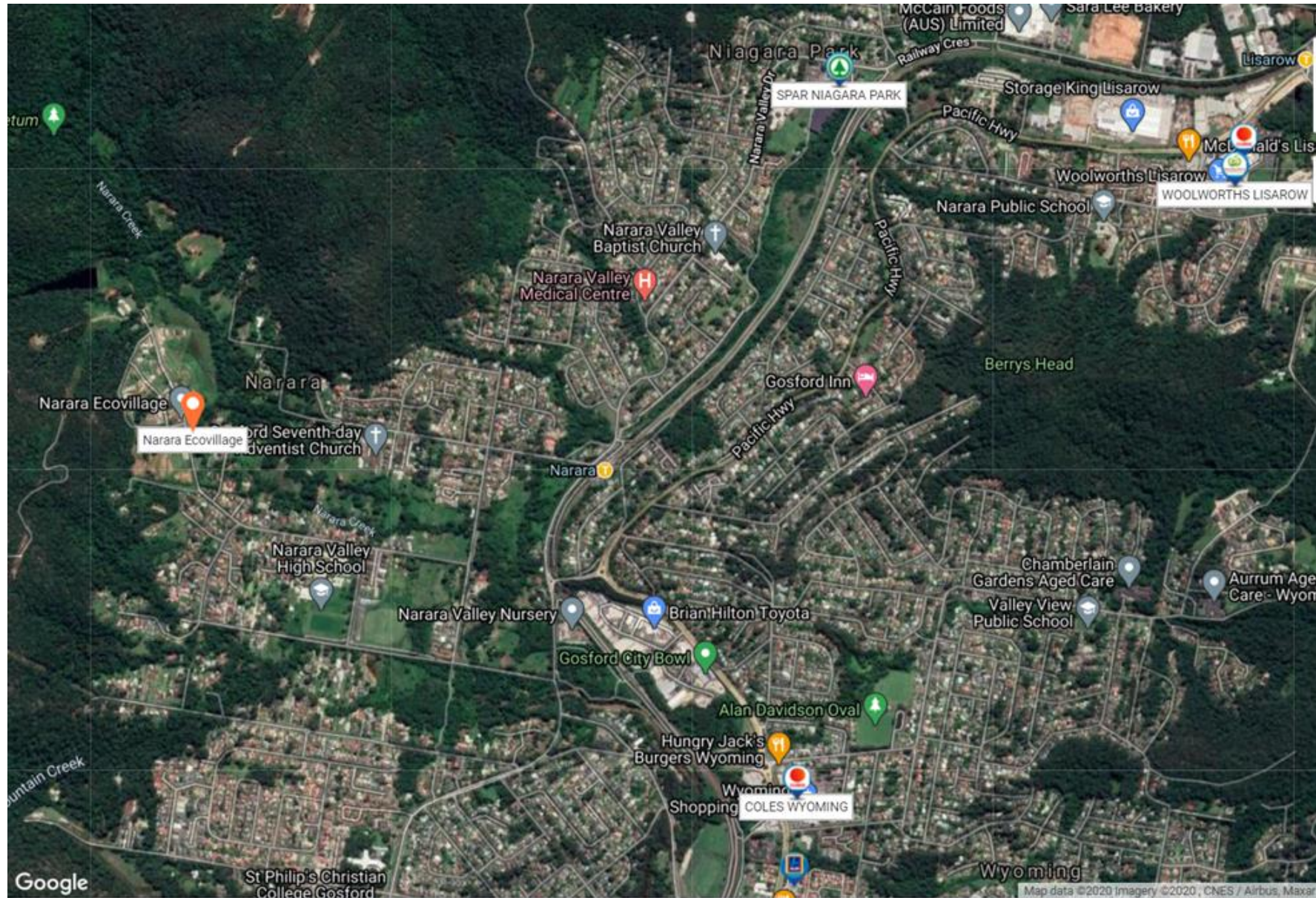
- i. A limited total Gross Floor Area (GFA) of 1,200m² of Commercial or Information and Education Facilities uses, within the former Gosford Horticultural Institute buildings.
- ii. Neighbourhood Shops and Shop Top (Retail) - 650 square metres

Dimasi & Co

ABN 62 687 106 105

PO Box 47, Riddells Creek VIC 3431

Phone: 0409 216 450 Email: dimasi@bigpond.com



Map 1: Narara Ecovillage location and context (Source: GapMaps)

NEV Development Stage	RESIDENTIAL LOTS					
Type of Lot	Total Number of residential lots	Single dwelling lots (+550sqm)	Additional Single dwelling lots (+450sqm)	Shop top housing lots	Multi dwelling or attached housing lots	Estimated no. of lots w/ dual occupancies or secondary dwellings
notes	(ie. includes re-subdivision and changes to layout permissible as if PP controls approved)	(this figure does not include dual occupancy / secondary dwellings)	(these lots may be created from larger lots in stage 2 with 450sqm provision)	residential dwelling above	(ie. on lots over 750sqm) (these lots may be subdivided on completion of development)	(the Dual Occs may be subdivided on completion of development. Secondary Dwellings cannot be subdivided)
Stage 1	45 <small>(figure includes admin bldg. residential conversion)</small>	44			1 <small>cluster housing, 18 no. 3&2 bedroom strata title on one lot</small>	11 <small>(25% of lots assumed to have secondary dwellings)</small>
Stage 2	46	33	8	1	4 <small>assumed 3 dwellings per lot</small>	22 <small>(50% of lots assumed dual occs or secondary dwellings)</small>
Stage 3	7	3	2	2	0 <small>assumed 4 dwellings per lot</small>	2 <small>(66% of 550m2 lots assumed dual occs or secondary dwellings)</small>
TOTAL LOTS	98	80	10	3	5	35
% of TOTAL LOTS based on Indicative Masterplan	100%	82%	10%	3%	5%	36%
Proposed distribution of lots as a %		min. 75%	max. 10%	max. 5%	max. 10%	

Stage	Business premises (m2)	Neighbourhood shop (m2)
Stage 1		
Stage 2		138
Stage 3		240
Admin	841	
Grafting shed		113
Visitor centre	341	
Current (m2) based on Indicative Masterplan	841	490
Proposed maximum floorspace distribution within Ecovillage (m2)	1,200	650

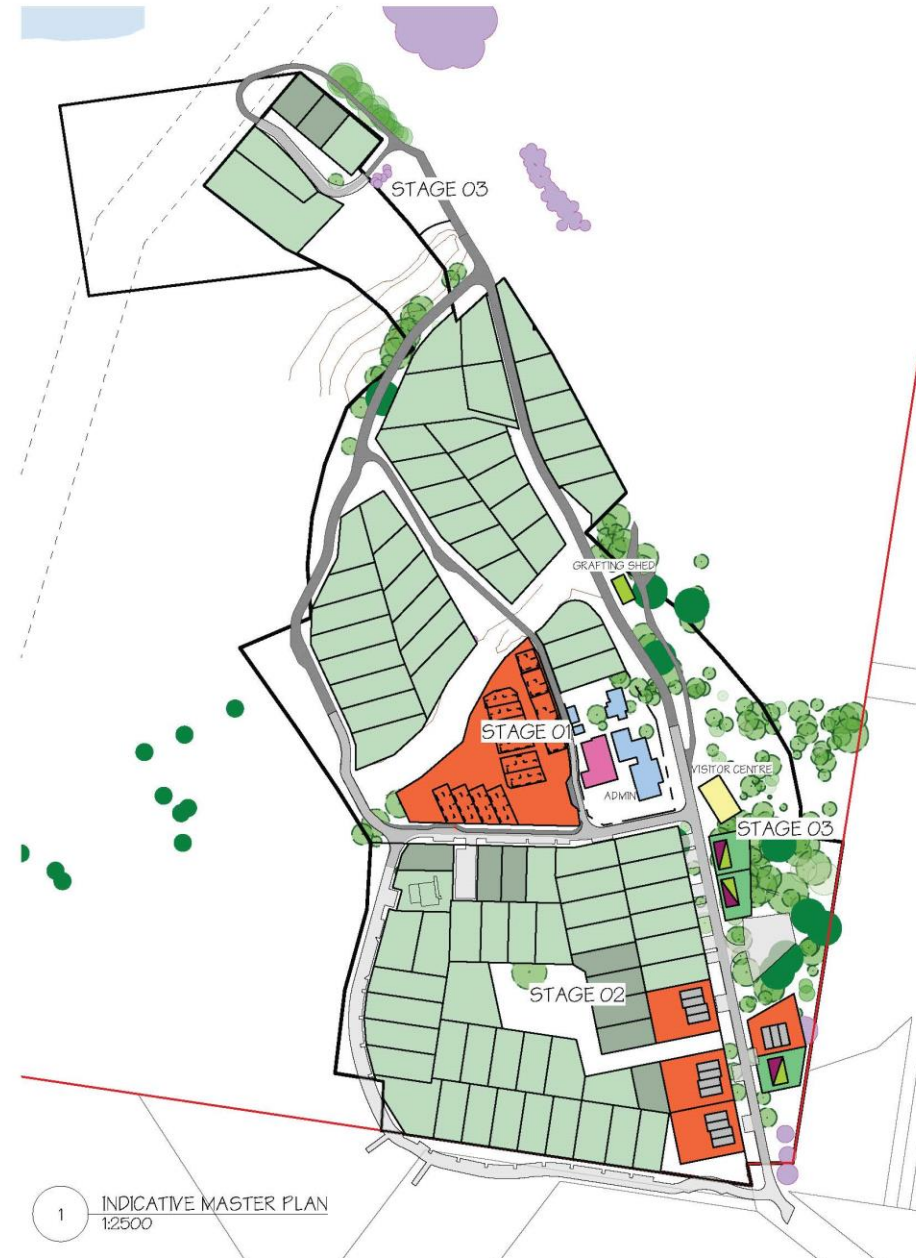
LEGEND:

- SINGLE DWELLING (MIN. LOT SIZE 450M2)
- SINGLE DWELLING / SECONDARY DWELLING / DUAL OCCUPANCY LOT (MIN. LOT SIZE 550M2)
- MULTI DWELLING HOUSING LOT
- SHOP TOP HOUSING LOT
- SHOP TOP HOUSING
- NEIGHBOURHOOD SHOP
- BUSINESS PREMISES
- INFORMATION & EDUCATION
- ADMIN BUILDING DWELLING CONVERSION
- DWELLING (MULTI/ATTACHED/SEMI)



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2. Previous Economic Impact Assessment

An economic impact assessment (EIA) for NEV was prepared in February 2016 by ADW Johnson and submitted as supporting material with an earlier planning application. That EIA addressed the following:

- the overall philosophy and intent of providing employment opportunities and services within the project;
- the likely uses to be accommodated within the village;
- the economic and jobs value of the construction phase of the development;
- the strategic economic and social benefits for residents and the wider community;
- the demand for local retail space derived by the local community; and
- consistency with wider strategic planning objectives and documents.

The previous EIA noted that *“The economic base upon which an Ecovillage is established has its foundation in desires to create a community that values wellness, holistic health care, work life balance, nurturing relationships and diverse communities. Many of the micro businesses that may establish in the village would be about providing the services within their own community as well as attracting business from outside the village. This suggestion relates to businesses that might provide wellness and health services which people would very genuinely associate Ecovillage community, such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, yoga and compound pharmacy.”*

Referring to the businesses likely to operate within NEV, the previous EIA also made the following observations *“These business sectors are typically small floor space uses, can be home-based and benefit from locations in shared spaces including in the village centre/heart. With an underlying agenda to minimise the impact on the environment, Ecovillages are highly efficient space uses for emerging businesses.”*

A key economic benefit resulting from the NEV was identified and quantified in the EIA, namely employment creation as a result of the project's construction. A total of **2,442 job years** was estimated to result, both directly and indirectly, from that construction. The context for this job creation is a local government area where approximately half of the workforce leave the area each day for employment.

The economic philosophy behind the project was summarised in the EIA, as follows:

- It is possible to live more lightly on the planet and achieve a sustainable lifestyle without compromising standards and quality of life;
- As much as possible the project should not be encumbered by debt or borrowings as this increases not only capital cost but ongoing costs and the burden of ongoing relationships with the banking sector;
- High levels of self-funding also reduce the impacts of fluctuations in interest rates providing a more consistent understanding of costs over time;
- This preference for self-funding also helps make the project less vulnerable to changes in the market;
- By minimising lot and dwellings size both capital and ongoing costs of living within the village are reduced;
- Spending wisely on domestic and community infrastructure at the development stage, in a manner that minimises waste and power usage and recycles as much as possible, is a sound investment; and
- Ensuring high levels of environmentally sensitive design and the inclusion of water and energy saving devices reduces the community's reliance and the cost of externally provided services over time.

3. Proposed Retail and Commercial land uses

In keeping with the Ecovillage ethos, the proposed commercial use, which will include significant elements of education and some retail uses, will be modest in physical scale and designed to enable the Ecovillage objective of sustainable community living. The primary purpose is to provide some level of employment on-site for village residents. A related objective is to provide amenity and convenience both for the residents of the village and visitors to the village.

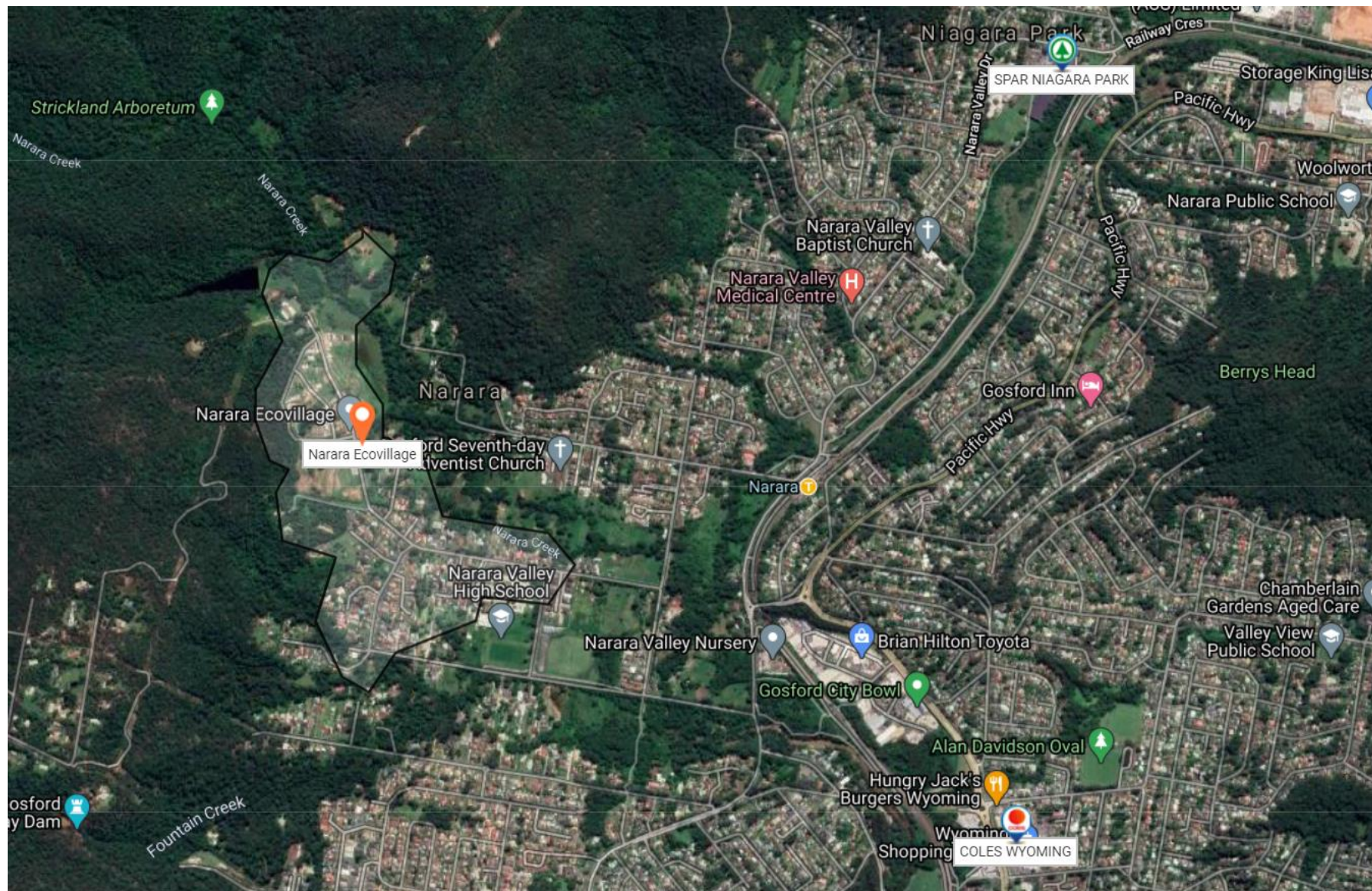
As detailed in the EIA, while a number of the Ecovillage residents will find employment outside the village, there is expressed desire to provide opportunities for those who wish to be employed within the village to do so. These employment opportunities will very largely not be found in the traditional format nor be provided by large-scale employers. Many residents will establish micro businesses to derive their incomes. Some of these will be accommodated in home offices, home-based workspaces and will be largely focused on the maker and craft market, small-scale market gardening, online service provision, sales and professional services. There is an expectation that shared spaces can be provided where those producing goods can be accommodated in a collective environment both helping to offset costs and overheads as well as to optimise the creative value of collaborative work.

Much of the growth in these micro businesses will be organic and stem from the nature of those who choose to live within the village, their skills, their life experiences, their connections and their business acumen. These will likely evolve over time as both scale and mix of people within the village develops to an optimal level. The village itself and its members and their micro businesses will generate a virtuous cycle of growth, collaboration and business development.

Thus, the proposed 650 square metres of neighbourhood shop floorspace are proposed to accommodate uses such as a small convenience store; food co-op store, which would also sell food produced within the village; a café/restaurant; and premises from which to sell crafts (e.g. pottery) produced on site.

The average provision of retail floorspace per resident in Australia is approximately 2.3 square metres. Viewed in these terms, the proposed shop floorspace at NEV is equivalent to the total retail floorspace demand for a population of about 300 people – hence the reason why it can be defined as modest. The total amount of retail floorspace shown in the indicative masterplan is less than the demand that will be generated by the planned NEV population alone. The location of NEV does not allow any retail facilities to be contemplated with a view to serving a large neighbourhood or district population, as is evident from Map 1. The site is not easily accessible to a large surrounding population – unlike, for example, the supermarkets located at Wyoming and Lisarow, or even the Spar supermarket at Niagara Park – and it is not the intention of NEV to contemplate any such role for its small neighbourhood shop facilities.

That said, Map 1 also makes clear the relative isolation of the NEV site in relation to convenience retail facilities, especially for those, such as Ecovillage residents, who would prefer to walk to such facilities. Thus, the proposed facilities at NEV will be able to fulfil that role for the 450-500 future village residents at the same time as creating localised employment opportunities for residents. The facilities will also offer convenience for a walkable population to the immediate south-east of NEV, i.e. the Treeline Park neighbourhood. Map 2 below shows the 10-minutes' walkable catchment around the site for the proposed shop facilities – at present the walkable catchment population is approximately 600, when the NEV is completed that population will exceed 1,000.



Map 2: Narara Ecovillage 10-minutes' walk-time contour (Source: GapMaps)

From any broader perspective, the availability of up to 650 square metres of Neighbourhood shop floorspace at NEV will have no implications for any existing or planned future retail facilities within the surrounding areas/suburbs since the proposed addition would result in less floorspace than the NEV population alone will require. By way of comparison, the retail floorspace provision at Wyoming is in excess of 10,000 square metres, i.e. in floorspace terms about twenty times the scale of the NEV proposal.

The proposed commercial premises (1,200 square metres) will comprise primarily business premises (offices) and information and education uses re-utilising the existing administration areas within the site. Those spaces will offer the opportunity for those residents who wish to work from home utilising co-shared spaces or to create new micro businesses and cottage industries. Much of the growth will be organic, stemming from the various skills and experiences of villagers as the on-site population grows.

The Information and Education use is proposed to offer a range of educational experiences both to ecovillage residents and visitors. The experiences will include lectures, workshops, and short-term courses on topics such as sustainability, alternative building techniques, environmental living and art and craft.

The mix of uses across the three categories – Shop, Business and Education – will also feed off each other. For example, those working in the Business premises or attending the Education facilities will be able to benefit from the amenity provided by the shop facilities and will in turn help to sustain those shop elements.

A number of jobs will be created on site – additional to the jobs resulting from construction – as a result of the proposed mix of uses. The Shop floorspace could potentially create employment for 25-30 people at 4-5 jobs per 100 metres of floorspace, and possibly more, while the commercial (business premises) floorspace could potentially accommodate 80-100 jobs and the Education facilities potentially 10-20 jobs. In total, these estimated 100-150 jobs would go a long way to making the NEV self-sufficient in terms of employment creation. They would of course also be of broader economic benefit to the Central Coast community, generating income which would, in part, be spent at locations throughout the Central Coast other than the NEV.

4. Consistency with Strategic Plans

The NEV proposal aligns closely with the stated objectives and strategies of One Central Coast (OCC), the Central Coast's Community Strategic Plan, 2018 -2028. At the outset OCC stresses the importance of community life. The Mayor's message at page 7, for example, states:

"We live in a special place here on the coast, one in which we want all members of our community to feel safe and valued, and to have access to a range of opportunities to participate in the richness of community life." This is precisely what NEV is aiming to provide for its residents.

The Community Vision expressed at page 11 in OCC states *"We are One Central Coast. A smart, green and liveable region with a shared sense of belonging and responsibility."* Again, those sentiments are driving forces behind the NEV vision. And finally, the objectives of NEV also align very well with the Themes and Focus Areas of OCC, which are reproduced on the following page.

The NEV also fits particularly comfortably with the vision, aims and objectives of the Central Coast Local Strategic Planning Statement, August 2020 (LSPS). The Mayor's message introducing the LSPS describes the LSPS as *"Council's vision for growing the Central Coast in a manner that **enhances its character, preserves its natural attributes and improves our quality of life**"* and further states *"This strategic vision aims to create the Central Coast of tomorrow - showing leadership in **place-making, environmental protection, sustainability, infrastructure and community resilience**. A region where our town centres will thrive with **more living and working opportunities** and provide key services to surrounding communities. Importantly, a region with **physically connected communities through appropriate infrastructure and socially connected through strong relationships and a sense of unity**"* (p. 6; my emphasis). The alignment between these sentiments set out in the LSPS and the NEV proposal could hardly be closer.

In similar vein the NEV will deliver an outcome that is in accordance with the identified opportunities and risks in the Central Coast Long Term: Economic Development Strategy, March 2020. The strategy identifies as an opportunity "Green and Sustainability Industries", acknowledging *"The global economy continues to transition towards greener and more sustainable patterns of production and consumption"* (p. 16). On the other hand, the strategy identifies as a risk the challenge of "Mortgage Stress and Affordable Housing" noting that *"With one in ten households with mortgages facing mortgage stress, and over a third of renters suffering from rental stress, housing costs threaten to undermine the wellbeing of those on the Central Coast. As the population continues to increase the upward pressure on prices will likely exacerbate this threat."* (p. 17)

THEMES AND FOCUS AREAS

THE PEOPLE OF THE CENTRAL COAST IDENTIFIED WHAT THEY LOVE ABOUT THEIR SUBURB AND THE CENTRAL COAST. THE THEMES AND FOCUS AREAS OF ONE - CENTRAL COAST RESPOND TO THESE IDEAS AND VALUES:

BELONGING



OUR COMMUNITY
SPIRIT IS OUR
STRENGTH



CREATIVITY,
CONNECTION AND
LOCAL IDENTITY

SMART



A GROWING AND
COMPETITIVE
REGION



A PLACE OF
OPPORTUNITY FOR
PEOPLE

GREEN



ENVIRONMENTAL
RESOURCES FOR
THE FUTURE



CHERISHED AND
PROTECTED
NATURAL BEAUTY

RESPONSIBLE



GOOD GOVERNANCE
AND GREAT
PARTNERSHIPS



DELIVERING
ESSENTIAL
INFRASTRUCTURE



BALANCED AND
SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT

LIVEABLE



RELIABLE PUBLIC
TRANSPORT AND
CONNECTIONS



OUT AND ABOUT IN
THE FRESH AIR



HEALTHY LIFESTYLES
FOR A GROWING
COMMUNITY

5. Conclusions

The NEV is a community-led initiative to create an Ecovillage that will ideally provide a home and a holistic community living and working experience for some 500 people, including an estimated 100-150 on-site employment opportunities that will develop organically from the community.

The proposed retail, commercial and education facilities at NEV are modest in scale and essential elements to help deliver the total Ecovillage vision. In economic terms the proposal will add to the well-being of the Central Coast region and there is no risk of negative economic impacts or consequences for any existing or planned activity centres on the Central Coast.

The NEV will accommodate a community focussed on shared ecological, social, economic and cultural values which is committed to making a difference by living those values every day. The NEV vision and objectives also align closely with the Central Coast Community Strategic Plan; the Local Strategic Planning Statement; and the Economic Development Strategy.

The development and construction of the NEV will also deliver significant broader economic benefits for the Central Coast region, not least an estimated 2,400+ job years from its construction.

TONY DIMASI

Managing Director, Dimasi & Co.

Dimasi
& CO



Contact

+61 409 216 450

contact number

dimasi@bigpond.com

Email

 [linkedin.com/in/tony-dimasi](https://www.linkedin.com/in/tony-dimasi)

Qualifications

- Bachelor of Arts (Hons.),
University of Melbourne
- Master of Arts,
University of Melbourne

Tony graduated with Honours and Masters Degrees in Economics and Mathematics from the University of Melbourne, where he also taught Economics and Statistical Methods for a number of years.

In 1982 he commenced work as a consultant in the then emerging field of retail and property economics, and for the past 35 years he has provided independent analysis and advice to shopping centre owners and developers, retailers, service providers and public authorities. Over that time Tony has had the opportunity to work extensively with most of Australia's shopping centres and retail precincts, and also most of the country's major retailers, participating first hand in the development and evolution of the Australian retail sector, and particularly the shopping centre industry.

As a micro-economist, Tony's emphasis in his work over the past four decades has been on the ever changing needs and wants of the consumer, which philosophically he has always regarded as being the essential underpinning of economic analysis for the retail sector.

Tony has worked across all parts of Australia and New Zealand, and has provided advice in relation to virtually every significant activity centre location in both countries. The range of projects has included CBD properties; super regional centres; regional and sub-regional centres; district and neighbourhood centres; homemaker retail facilities; freestanding stores; and all other retail formats, as well as commercial and industrial precincts.

Tony has also advised extensively on optimal retail and related services provisions to support major education and health facilities, including universities and hospital/health precincts. He has also advised widely on non-retail development projects, including residential and industrial projects, dairy processing, cattle export facilities, and poultry farming.

Tony appears regularly as an independent expert in state planning courts and tribunals across all states of Australia and in New Zealand, including:

- The Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) of Australia;
- Independent Ministerial Panels and VCAT in Victoria;
- The Land and Environment Court of New South Wales;
- The Planning and Environment Court of Queensland;
- The State Administrative Tribunal in Western Australia;
- The Environment, Resources and Development Court of South Australia;
- The Liquor Licensing Court of South Australia;
- The Petroleum Products Retail Outlets Board of South Australia;
- The Resource Development Planning Commission in Tasmania; and
- The Environment Court of New Zealand.

He has also appeared regularly as an independent expert in federal parliamentary inquiries, including the Joint Parliamentary Inquiry into the Australian Retail Sector (Baird Inquiry); in ACCC hearings, including the Inquiry into the Competitiveness of Retail Prices for Standard Groceries in 2008; as well as Federal and County Court hearings.

He is also a regular conference speaker and columnist in retail industry publications.