



Community Strategic Plan

RICHMOND VALLEY 2040

Richmond
Valley
Council



We acknowledge the people of the Bundjalung Nation as custodians of country and recognise their continuing connection to land and waters. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

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Front Cover: *Return to the River*

This photo celebrates our community's journey of recovery and healing after the floods, as our children return to the river once more, to laugh, play and just be kids.

Photo: Adam Hourigan, Richmond Valley Council

Building our future together

The Richmond Valley is the rural heart of the Northern Rivers, with wide open spaces and room to grow. We're a down-to-earth, friendly community with a relaxed lifestyle - where you can still enjoy the welcome of a country town, a family holiday by the beach, or a campfire under an open sky

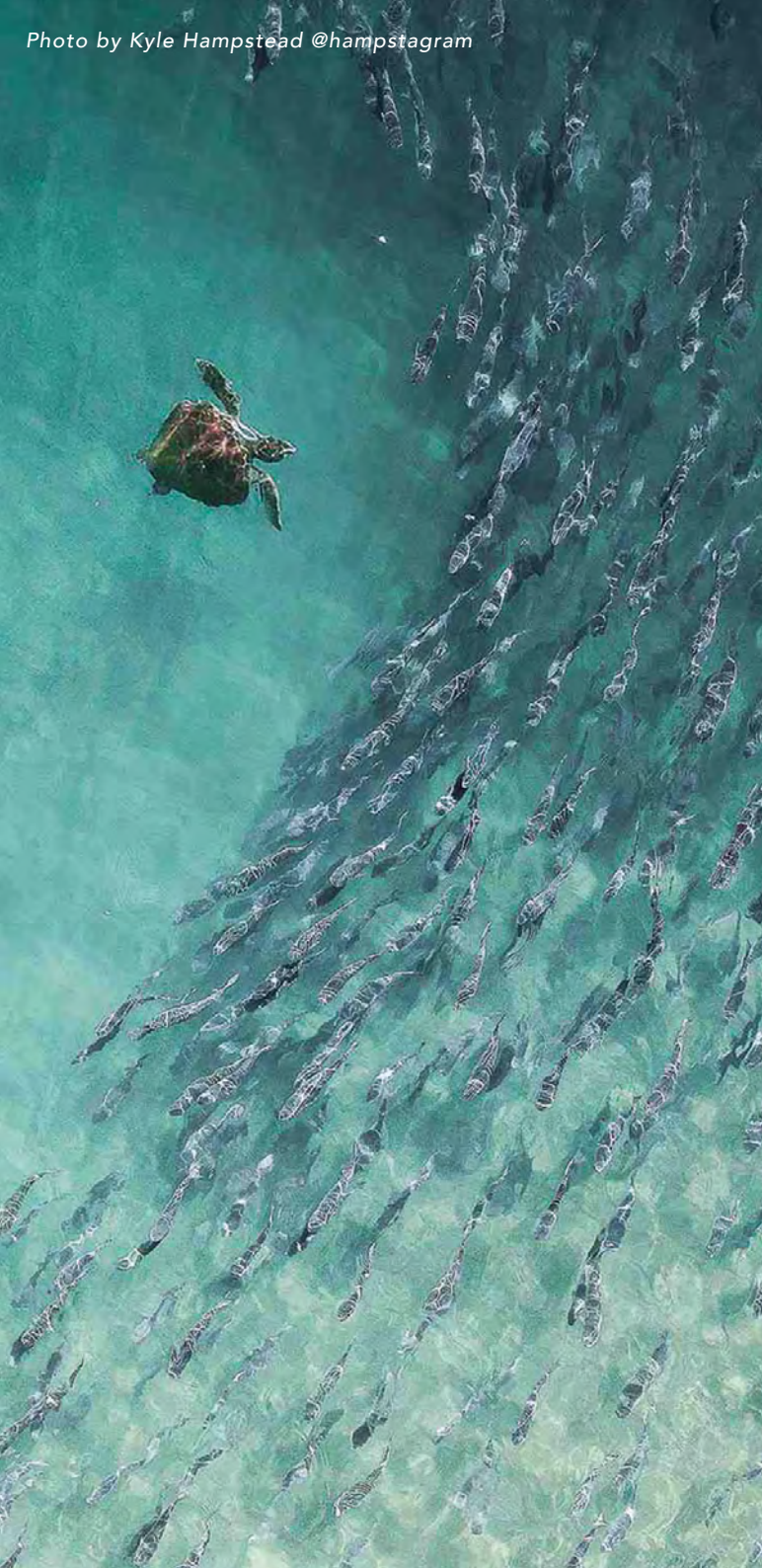
It's a place of opportunity, where you can get a start in life – build your first home, raise a family, buy your first acreage, or start your own business. And where success is earned through hard work, persistence, and the courage to get back on your feet in hard times.

Our Valley is defined by quiet determination and resilience. When challenges come, we endure, we recover, and we rise once again to rebuild. Our people are connected to the past through our stories, culture and unique identity – and we are connected to each other through a shared love of this place and our community.

But we also know that things are changing in our region, and the pace of that change is increasing. More people are being drawn to our Valley seeking its authentic way of life, more businesses will be established in the future and more homes and services will be needed.

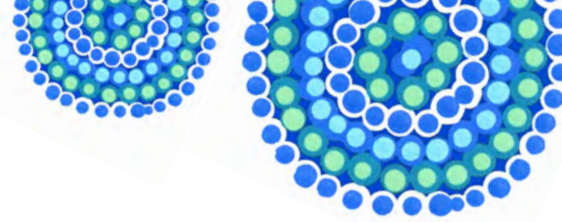
Our challenge is to welcome this growth, while still preserving the things that we value the most.

This Plan sets a pathway to achieve this, as we continue to create healthy, vibrant communities through sustainable growth to 2040.



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A PLACE TO GROW AND PROSPER

A message from the Mayor and General Manager

Over the past five years, the Richmond Valley has seen challenges on a scale we've never seen before – severe drought, devastating bushfires, a global pandemic, and catastrophic flooding across our region. Many have had their lives turned upside down by these disasters and we are still working hard to restore our towns and villages and restart our economy. Despite these difficult times, we have much to look forward to in our future. Our deep connection to this place and our sense of community remains as strong as ever. We have worked together to rebuild our Valley and we stand on the threshold of regional change and opportunities.

It is with our commitment to building back better and completing our flood recovery plan that we begin the next stage of our journey. Richmond Valley 2040, our new Community Strategic Plan, sets out how we will continue to rebuild, renew and reimagine our community's future. The Northern Rivers floods have shown us clearly that we must reshape the Richmond Valley's role in the region if we are to remain strong and adapt to the challenges of a changing climate. We cannot rely on the old ways of centralising services and resources in regional cities. We must all grow stronger together to build resilience across the whole of the Northern Rivers.

This plan sets a pathway for steady, responsible growth in the Richmond Valley – growth which will provide much-needed homes for local families, more jobs for young people and more services and facilities for our towns and villages. Our growth can also contribute to the region's recovery by providing homes, jobs and a lifestyle so many already enjoy.

There are many exciting initiatives ahead in the next 20 years as we finish the major works we've begun and open new opportunities for our valley. In the coming years we will see more than 600 new jobs created directly through the Regional Jobs Precinct, and more than 1000 jobs from associated support and service industries as the population grows. We will also deliver our plans to secure long-term water supplies, provide new and upgraded water and sewage infrastructure and enhanced community facilities across the entire Valley to support the more than 2000 new homes that can be built on flood-safe land.

We will also see a major tourism boost for the Valley through the opening of the southern section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, upgraded Casino Showground & Equine Centre and the Brisbane Olympics in 2032 will see benefits flow to our region. We have plans to continue to protect and restore our unique



Richmond Valley Mayor Robert Mustow and General Manager Vaughan Macdonald

environment, to help our communities adapt to a changing climate and to continue to build and diversify our economy.

Over the past six months, our Council has been sharing our plans with the community and we've received strong support for their key directions. People have told us what they want for the future and what they want to protect and preserve from the past and present. In the hundreds of comments we've received there is one over-riding theme: People love this place. They love our relaxed lifestyle, our beautiful rivers and beaches and the unique identity we have created together.

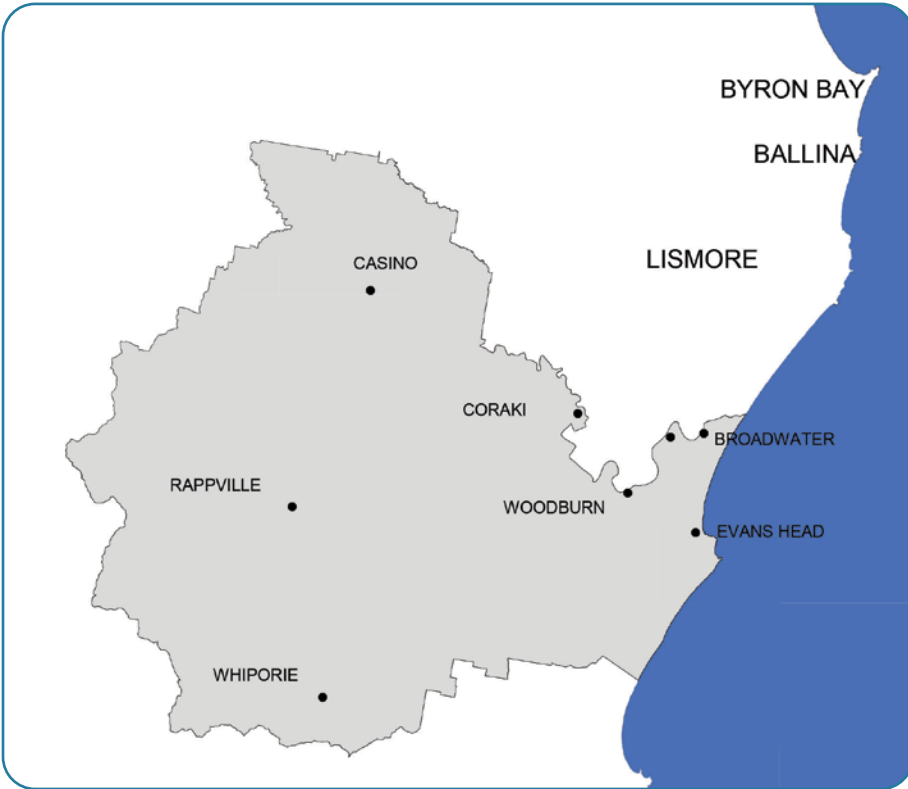
This plan continues to deliver our community's vision for the Richmond Valley as we unlock the opportunities of the next 20 years. Together, we will build our Valley back better than ever to provide places where we can all grow and prosper.

ABOUT THE RICHMOND VALLEY

The Richmond Valley Council local government area covers some 315,000 hectares and extends from the coastline at Evans Head to the foothills of the Great Dividing Range to the west. The Bundjalung People are the traditional custodians of this land.

Most of the Valley’s rolling hills and fertile river plans are devoted to agriculture, interspersed with State forests, national parks and nature reserves.

The largest town is Casino, with a population of 11,000. Other communities include Broadwater, Rileys Hill, Coraki, Evans Head, New Italy, Woodburn and Rappville, as well as rural areas.



TOTAL AREA 315,000 HECTARES
38 KM OF COASTLINE



HOUSEHOLDS

Number of houses - 10,970
Family households - 67.9%
Single person households - 29.2%



ECONOMY

Local jobs - 7922
Annual production - \$900m+



POPULATION

Population - 23, 589
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander - 7.9%
Born overseas - 6%
Under 18 yrs - 21.9%
Over 60 yrs - 32.3%
People requiring help in their daily lives due to disability - 7.9%



24,000 stories

The Richmond Valley’s population is fast approaching 24,000 and each person has their own unique story to tell and their own special place in our community. Throughout this plan, you will meet some of our locals

Over the past 18 months, Council has been talking to members of our community about their priorities for the future and the things they value. Consistently, we’ve heard the ‘top three’– our beautiful landscapes, our relaxed lifestyle, and our sense of community connection.

Preserving and enhancing these aspects over the next 20 years will take some careful planning. This document deals with the mechanics of providing for the future – such as securing our water supply and ensuring there are enough roads, footpaths, parks, houses, jobs and essential services for our Valley. All of these things will help us to thrive and prosper, but it takes a lot more than bricks and mortar to shape a place and create its unique identity. It takes people who care about each other and the place where they live.

The Richmond Valley is a place where people still know their neighbours and the people they meet on the street. It’s where the person who works at the checkout, or fixes your roof, or empties your bins is the same person who coaches your kids’ cricket team, or volunteers on the fire brigade, or helps at the school canteen. Family connections are strong in the Valley, and it’s not unusual to find the same names woven into the same place across the generations. There are many people who have lived here all their lives and a strong connection to Country still defines our Aboriginal communities.

But things are changing in our region, and the pace of that change is increasing. The post-Covid exodus of the past few years has brought new faces, cultures and perspectives to this place as more people leave the cities, looking for a new way to live. This change will continue throughout the life of this plan, as we welcome some 4000 new people to our community by the year 2040 – each bringing their own unique story to this place.

REBUILDING THE RICHMOND VALLEY

The catastrophic floods of February and March 2022 changed the face of the Richmond Valley, leaving devastation on a scale that we had not seen before.

Many watched their life's work swept away in moments - homes and livelihoods, places and memories and precious things. But not everything we value has been lost. Our deep connection to this place and its people remains as strong as ever. With courage and persistence, we have risen to rebuild and reclaim our community's future.

Making progress

One year on from the floods the Richmond Valley community can be proud of the progress that we have all made towards recovery. Many people have returned to their homes and are doing their best to get back to daily life. Council has restored services, completed emergency roadworks and repairs.

Advocating to all levels of government for funding, support and housing has also been a priority, along with restoring local halls and facilities and ensuring sports grounds, play areas and pools are brought back into service as quickly as possible. These repairs are now nearing

completion and many community activities and sports competitions have resumed. The Community Recovery Team has been working directly with local advisory groups, government agencies and emergency support groups to help resolve flood recovery issues and ensure people have access to the help they need

But there is still a long journey ahead.

Local businesses are still struggling to get back on their feet, families are still waiting for answers from the government on how they can progress with rebuilding, raising, or relocating their homes, and others remain in temporary accommodation, hoping for permanent rentals or social housing. It will take some time to help resolve these housing issues, and at least another three years to repair our damaged roads, bridges, sewerage networks and drains.

Planning for future events

We've also gained a better insight into the causes of the 2022 event through the work undertaken by the Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative (NRRI). This program will provide new flood modelling for the Richmond River by 2024, and \$150m in government funding for flood mitigation and

resilience works. The Richmond Valley has already received more than \$5m in the first allocation of funds to fix flood trouble spots on the Woodburn-Coraki Road.

Despite these studies, there are still many unknowns about how future flooding may occur and what the impacts will be. The NSW Government is yet to resolve its guidance on flood planning levels and, although Council's updated flood study has been completed, it will be at least 2024 before our floodplain risk management plan is finalised and we can confidently identify future flood mitigation works. Council will continue to advocate to all levels of government for clear direction and support on these issues.



COUNTING THE COST OF THE 2022 FLOODS



Damage to homes

3000 properties impacted by flooding
450+ homes uninhabitable
1000+ people displaced



Damage to community facilities

\$3m, including halls, sports facilities and emergency services buildings



Damage to infrastructure

\$200m – including roads, bridges, water supply, sewerage and drains



Clean-up costs

\$6m – including removal of over 80,000 tonnes of flood waste



Economic impacts

\$250m loss in local production over two years – mainly agriculture and manufacturing

Sports stadium back in action

Reopening of the Casino Indoor Sports Stadium, after major flood repairs, has been a big step forward for the town's recovery.

The Stadium floor suffered significant damage, but has now been replaced with a new type of flooring that will be much more resilient to future flooding. With the reopening of the centre, local young people can now enjoy a range of activities including basketball, netball, futsal and volleyball.



KEY STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Looking ahead to 2040, there are a number of challenges that will face our community. There are turbulent times on the regional, national and international stage and the pace of change is accelerating.

But with this change there will also be benefits and opportunities that will help to create a bright future for our Valley. Through careful planning and progressive leadership, we can build on our key strengths and harness the new possibilities presented to us.

Our Key Strengths

A great place to live

Our beautiful beaches, rivers and landscapes are a great attraction for residents and visitors alike. Combined with a relaxed lifestyle, progressive community and great sporting and recreation facilities, the Richmond Valley is a popular place to live, work and play.

A connected region, close to emerging markets

Located some two hours from Brisbane and the growing communities of South-East Queensland, the Valley is in easy reach of emerging tourism and investment markets.

We're also close to regional services, facilities and attractions, with an easy drive between the major centres of the Northern Rivers. Many people commute for work across the region

Major transport links

With direct access to the upgraded Pacific Motorway and key freight routes along the Bruxner Highway and Summerland Way, the Richmond Valley is well placed to capitalise on future investment and visitor markets. Casino's access to the northern rail line is also a key

advantage for its emerging industrial precincts, and the continued growth of the Ballina/Byron airport has improved direct access to Sydney and Melbourne.

Essential infrastructure

Key local infrastructure such as roads, health services, schools, water supply, sewerage and waste management services are already in place, but we have some upgrade work to do to cater for expected growth.

Well-established industries

We have a strong economic and employment base through well-established agricultural and manufacturing industries, with opportunities to continue to expand and value-add. These 'engine industries' will form a solid foundation as we continue to diversify our economy.

Room to grow

The Valley has room to grow on flood-safe lands north-west of Casino, with major employment centres nearby. This area can accommodate the main development demand over the next 20 years, allowing for more managed growth in our sensitive coastal and rural areas.



KEY STRENGTHS, CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Challenges

Continued flood recovery

We still have a lot of work to do to help people rebuild their lives and repair all the damaged infrastructure after the floods. This will take at least another three years and ultimately require some \$200m in infrastructure repairs.

Adapting to a changing climate

Our climate is changing and we need to adapt to a less predictable future. We know it will get warmer and there will be longer droughts and more bushfire events, along with more frequent storms and flooding. This means we need to plan, build and respond differently in the future to ensure our community is safe and sustainable.

Solving our housing crisis

The Northern Rivers was in the grip of a housing crisis before the floods arrived. In the years before the COVID pandemic, housing construction had slowed and rentals were already hard to find. Then came the great exodus from the cities, pushing housing prices higher and availability lower – and then the floods. The Northern Rivers is now facing one of its highest rates of homelessness, with the most vulnerable members of our community suffering the most.

Aging infrastructure

Like most regional communities, our major infrastructure is aging faster than our population is growing. This means we now face a big investment to replace these outdated assets and will need help from State and Federal governments to fund this reconstruction. This includes completing Stage 2 of the Evans Head STP and building a new STP for Casino to serve the community into the next century.



Opportunities

More jobs for our community

Council has been working with the NSW Government to develop the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct. This will create at least 600 new direct jobs, as well as jobs in supporting businesses. There will also be more jobs in service industries such as health, personal care and retail as our population grows. More tourism jobs are also on the way, with key attractions such as the Northern Rivers Rail Trail connecting the region and opening opportunities.

More housing on the way

Government initiatives, such as the Regional Housing Fund and the Reconstruction Corporation's Resilient Lands program have the Richmond Valley in their sights, as a key growth area, with flood-safe lands around Casino. Council is working with the government to help secure funds for essential infrastructure to activate this land.

Plans to secure more services

With a growing population, we'll need more health services, shops, schools and public transport. Council has recently completed the Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy to identify where new development can be located. The strategy identifies a new Health Precinct, centred on Casino Hospital, and plans major upgrades for our CBD areas. Council will be advocating strongly for more government-led services to be established in the Richmond Valley

Brisbane Olympics Investment

2032 may seem a long time away, but plans are already well in hand for the influx of visitors and the growth in investment, services and infrastructure to support this international event. The Northern Rivers is well placed to benefit from the flow-on effects, with Casino's new regional equine centre opening in 2023.



WHAT THE COMMUNITY SAID ...

Council conducted extensive community consultation for our new Community Strategic Plan, over a period of 18 months. The first round of “Our Big Conversation” began in 2021, with a community survey, community feedback sessions and a planning day for 200 RVC staff. But the program was interrupted by catastrophic flooding in February 2022 and all attentions turned to flood recovery. Council began consulting again in October 2022, with a second community survey, on-line feedback and ideas forums, special consultation for local primary and high school students and work with community advisory groups.

Consultation for our three Key Strategies – the Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy, the Sustainable Communities Strategy and the Key Directions in Economic Development paper – also contributed to the priorities and actions in this document.

There were two main streams in the consultation results: Foundation issues (things that have been long-standing priorities with the community) and Emerging issues (new priorities and concerns)

Foundation Issues

- Protecting the Richmond River
- Maintaining our roads and footpaths
- Community connection and local identity
- Protecting our landscapes, beaches and environment
- Providing quality services for the community
- Creating more employment
- Strengthening the local economy
- Lack of public transport

Emerging Issues

- Housing affordability and choice
- Lack of childcare places
- Access to medical services, including GPs
- Adapting to a changing climate
- Disaster preparedness
- Providing more local shops and larger retail facilities
- Increasing shade trees and public seating
- Creating a circular economy, managing waste responsibly

Community survey results

Council conducted two community surveys to help inform the new Community Strategic Plan. The first survey was taken in 2021, as part of our regular survey program. A second survey was taken in 2022, after the floods, to see if community priorities had changed. Both surveys were conducted independently by Micromex Research.

Top priorities from the July 2021 survey

1. Road maintenance and infrastructure
2. Housing – affordability and availability
3. Local employment
4. Delivery of quality services

Top priorities from the October 2022 survey

1. Road maintenance
2. Flood mitigation & management
3. Flood recovery support
4. Housing – affordability & availability

Key changes

- Although roads remained a top priority in both surveys, there was a big increase in the percentage of people listing it as a priority – 33% in 2021, 69% in 2022
- Housing affordability/availability saw its biggest change from the 2016 survey to the 2021 sample. In 2016, 53% of people thought local housing was affordable. In 2021, only 19% thought it was affordable or available.

MOST POPULAR IDEAS

From our on-line Community Forum 2023

Affordable Housing

More street trees

More medical services

Bigger retail outlets in town

Youth drop-in space

Community notice boards

Woodburn-Evans Head bike track

More activities for families

Aged care in Evans Head

More childcare places

I think we need to see more bike tracks and pathways. We don't have many that have nice scenery and we need better lighting for them – especially if you want to go for a ride or walk in the morning.

Ginger Geurts – Casino Christian School



The most important thing is teen or youth directed organisation such as PCYC or others which direct their attention to youth and youth employment. I believe the encouragement of these can help minimise or even stop youth committing crimes.

Lincoln Close – Casino High School



I'd like to see a bigger park for our area. I think it would encourage more children to go outside and play and engage with other children.

Kheva Rigg – Coraki Public School



OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE: PRINCIPLES & VALUES

Long-term strategic plans usually have aspirational vision statements with well-crafted words about the future - but these words don't always mean that much to the people on the street.

So, for this Community Strategic Plan, we asked people what they wanted the Richmond Valley to be like in the future - and this is what they told us:



Everyone in our community should feel safe, valued and respected



People should be proud of where they live



Everyone should be treated fairly and have the same opportunities in life



Everyone should have a home



People should be able to live here all their life—they shouldn't have to move away to get an education, find a home, or get a job



All of us should leave this place better than we found it for the generations to come

These words are simple, but their meaning is profound. They challenge us to think differently, to do more and to change.

The six principles form the basis for the key directions we have set in this plan and the strategies and actions that will help to deliver them.

Everyone will play a part in delivering these outcomes – Council, state and federal governments, community groups and individuals.

At the end of each council term, we will use them as the benchmark to measure our success in creating the kind of community we aspire to.

A growing, sustainable community, with a relaxed lifestyle, beautiful environment and thriving economy.



OUR VISION FOR THE FUTURE: GROWING OUR COMMUNITY



+4000 increase in population



+2000 new homes



+2000 new jobs



+15,000 community trees

Stronger, greener communities

The past five years have shown just how truly resilient our communities can be. We have endured crippling drought, bushfire, storms, floods and a global pandemic – and we are rising once again to be better and stronger than before. The drought has taught us that we must look to the future and secure our water supplies. The floods have shown us that we must take on a stronger role in the region and adapt to a changing climate. And the pandemic continues to create new social and economic challenges as people choose new ways to live and work. Over the past 18 months, Council has been talking to the community about our future – and we've also been preparing and consulting on our strategic plans, which will take us safely through the next 20 years and beyond.

This planning work and our community conversations have led to the key directions, strategies and objectives in our Community Strategic Plan. The CSP sets an ambitious growth agenda for 2040, including more people, housing, jobs and green spaces. It also sets key directions to ensure that our communities are sustainable, that we protect our environment and use natural resources wisely. Our challenge is to deliver our vision for growth while still preserving the things that we value the most about our Valley – our landscapes, local identity and sense of community connection. The 12 objectives in this Plan explain how we can achieve this and benefit from our emerging role in the region.

CREATING A THRIVING EMPLOYMENT CENTRE

CASINO & SURROUNDS



- Grow Casino's population to 15,000+ by 2040 and attract more working-age families to the area
- Create 600 direct jobs through the Regional Jobs Precinct and 1000+ jobs through growth in service and support industries.
- Provide 1700+ homes in new residential developments
- Secure Casino's long-term water supply



Upgrade Casino CBD, expand retail opportunities and connect the town centre to the river precincts



Increase street-tree planting and public green spaces



Activate the Casino Health Precinct

CASINO



Provide essential infrastructure – including a new \$60m sewage treatment plant



Open the Casino section of the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and increase tourism opportunities

SUSTAINING AND PROTECTING THE MID-RICHMOND

BROADWATER & WOODBURN

- Continue to support flood recovery
- Prepare a Place Plan for the Broadwater-Woodburn-Evans Head communities
- Support local industries to re-establish, grow and diversify
- Upgrade the Broadwater Bridge
- Revitalise Woodburn commercial precinct
- Complete the "Three Villages" cycleway



CORAKI

BROADWATER

WOODBURN

EVANS HEAD

CORAKI

- Continue the flood rebuilding and recovery program
- Prepare a Place Plan in consultation with the community
- Rebuild and upgrade Richmond Terrace
- Explore options for affordable housing
- Support community programs and youth activities



EVANS HEAD

- Manage growth to preserve local character and protect the environment
- Prepare a Place Plan in consultation with the community
- Upgrade the CBD precinct
- Increase tourism opportunities
- Provide essential infrastructure, including Stage 2 STP upgrade



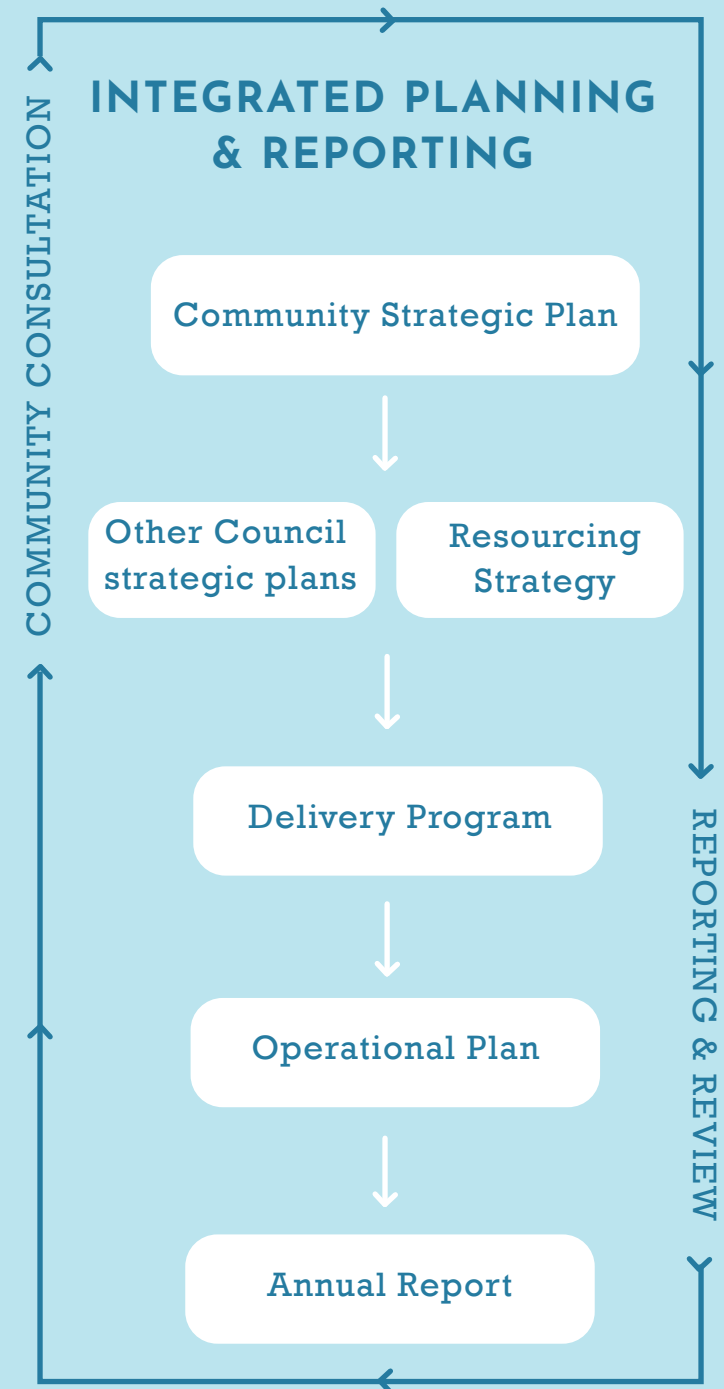
ABOUT THIS PLAN

When each new council is elected to office in NSW, one of the first things they have to do is work with their community to prepare the Community Strategic Plan (CSP). This plan identifies the community's long-term goals and priorities over at least the next 10 years. Every community is different, so every Community Strategic Plan is unique, and many people, agencies and authorities will be involved in delivering the outcomes.

Council was half-way through preparing its new CSP when the floods devastated our region in early 2022. With everyone focused on dealing with the emergency, Council decided to delay the review of its long-term plan and concentrate on the most immediate needs of recovering from the flood. We prepared a three-year Recovery Plan to help rebuild our Valley after the disaster, and we have just delivered the first year of that plan.

With recovery now progressing steadily, it's time to revisit the CSP and re-open the conversation about our future. The floods have changed our perspective on many things and it's important that we include this new understanding in our long-term plan. Council started consulting on the plan from October 2022, discussing key directions on community wellbeing, sustainability, strengthening our economy and managing future growth. From the feedback, we've identified four key directions for the future. These are explained in more detail on the next page.

The Community Strategic Plan helps to inform the Council's Delivery Program and Operational Plans (as shown in the diagram). These plans set out how Council's activities and resources will be directed towards delivering the community's priorities. Council reports on progress on the Delivery Program every six months. At the end of the Council term, a "State of the Valley" report is prepared to reflect on our progress in achieving the CSP goals.



OUR FOUR KEY DIRECTIONS

Based on the key principles and values identified by the community, the strategic planning already completed, and the feedback Council received during the consultation, we developed four key directions for the Community Strategic Plan. These directions create the framework for the objectives, strategies and actions that will help to deliver our goals and priorities.

1. Strengthening our role in the region

This direction is based on the Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy, recently adopted by Council, and the remaining actions of the Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Recovery Plan. It also includes strategies from the Key Directions in Economic Development paper recently presented to the local business community for consultation. The direction focuses on building back better after the floods, identifying opportunities for our community to grow, strengthening our economy and providing more housing, jobs and services.

3. Protecting our unique environment

This direction is based on our Sustainable Communities Strategy, recently adopted by Council after community consultation. It focuses on preserving our native bushland and biodiversity, maintaining healthy rivers, beaches and waterways, and helping our Valley transition to a circular economy in the way we manage our future resources.

2. Creating great places to live

This direction is based on direct consultation with the community, including our two community surveys and the community on-line ideas board. It focuses on creating vibrant, livable and safe communities – providing opportunities to learn, create and celebrate, enhancing our town centres and retail precincts and ensuring that our parks, playgrounds, sports fields and community facilities are well maintained. It also looks at strategies to adapt to a changing climate and build resilience against future natural disasters.

4. Delivering for our community

This direction focuses on the role that Richmond Valley Council will play in helping to deliver this plan. It includes Council's civic leadership in engaging with and advocating for our community, as well as our responsibilities for managing community resources and providing great service.

Objective #1

REBUILD & RECONNECT OUR COMMUNITIES

The Richmond Valley has been making great progress in our flood recovery journey, but there is still a long way to go. Over the next three years, we will continue to rebuild, renew and recreate our communities and advocate for further government support. Completing the remaining actions in the Rebuilding the Richmond Valley Recovery Plan will remain a top priority and Council's Recovery Team will continue to work directly with communities over the coming year. Our key strategies to support ongoing recovery are outlined below.

Repairing our roads

In the immediate aftermath of the floods, Council estimated the damage to our road network – including roads, bridges and culverts – was about \$100m. Over the past 12 months, we've had a chance to assess and inspect the network in more detail and we now know the final damage figure is nearly twice that amount, with some \$180m in works required, including the landslip repairs at Naughton's Gap and Bentley.

The first priority for road repairs has focused on keeping regional link roads and freight routes open and carrying out essential safety repairs to damaged roads. This included filling hundreds of potholes to keep traffic flowing, while we waited for saturated pavements to dry out.

As conditions improved, Council has been able to move on to major patching and repair works on key local roads, such as the Woodburn-Coraki Rd (MR145), Woodburn-Evans Head Rd, Bungawalbin-Whiporie Rd, Spring Grove Rd and Manifold Rd in north Casino. But there is still much more to be done.

A top priority for the next 12 months (2023-24) will be to begin remediation of the Naughton's Gap landslip and preliminary works to replace the Tatham Bridges on MR145. Council will continue to work with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation to access disaster recovery funding for our road repair program. We expect to see major improvements across the road network by 2025.



Repairing flood damaged water services in Broadwater



Naughton's Gap landslip repairs will soon be underway

Revitalising our towns & villages

Place Plans provide a way for local communities to work in partnership with Council to redesign and revitalise their towns and villages. Council is working on a series of three Place Plans and recently completed the Casino plan with support from Regional NSW. The plans set out where new housing development can be located and identify areas of environmental and heritage value. They also consider the social infrastructure each community will need, including green spaces, play areas, sports and cultural facilities. Revitalising commercial centres and town CBDs is another key focus of the program.

In 2023-24 Council will complete two new Place Plans for communities in the Mid-Richmond – one focusing on Woodburn, Broadwater and Evans Head and the strong connections between these centres, and another plan focusing on Coraki and the unique identity of the village. The Plans will create a list of new actions and projects for each community and Council will be working with government funding partners, the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and local owners and investors to help deliver these outcomes. High on the priority list will be revitalisation of the Woodburn commercial precinct.

Advocating for our Valley

Since the 2022 flood, Council has secured more than \$34 million in grant funding and financial support for the Richmond Valley through advocacy to all levels of government. This included \$2m in rating relief for flood-affected residents.

In the coming years, we will continue to seek funding for essential recovery projects and continued support for local business.

STRATEGIES

- Revitalise flood-affected towns and villages
- Complete repairs to flood-damaged roads and assets
- Continue to advocate for government investment to support economic recovery

Top priorities

- Place Plans for Coraki, Broadwater, Woodburn and Evans Head
- Woodburn CBD restoration
- Continued repairs to local roads, bridges and drains
- Repairs to Naughton's Gap and Bentley landslips
- Replacement of the Tatham Bridges
- Further upgrades to Richmond Terrace
- Continued advocacy for government support and funding.



Objective #2

ESTABLISH THE RICHMOND VALLEY AS A REGIONAL GROWTH CENTRE

The Richmond Valley is on the move, with major changes driving growth in population, jobs and housing over the next 20 years. These include:

- The Richmond Valley's designation as one of four Regional Jobs Precincts in Regional NSW
- The social changes brought about by the COVID pandemic
- The Northern Rivers floods, which have changed the way we think about future planning in the region.
- Record government investment in infrastructure and community facilities, following the bushfires, pandemic and the flood.

Our challenge for the future is to guide this growth in a well-measured and sustainable way. There are five key strategies to achieve this, and these are explained on the following pages.

Planning for this generation and the next

Council's Richmond Valley Growth Management Strategy identifies where sustainable growth in housing and commercial development can occur. The Growth Strategy was prepared in consultation with the community, and it is supported by a series of Place Plans. These Plans focus on the unique identity of our towns and villages to ensure they become even better places to live, with access to expanded retail, community facilities, green spaces and services. Council will also look at the Richmond Valley's long-term infrastructure needs and work with State Government agencies, such as NSW Health, the Department of Education and Transport for NSW to ensure there will be enough schools, health services and public transport for the future. When all these plans are completed, they will be drawn together into a Richmond Valley Masterplan to guide future growth and investment.



Richmond Valley Council General Manager Vaughan Macdonald (right) and Director of Projects & Business Development Bell Zeller planning Council's new industrial estate at Casino (pictured above)

Providing the services we need

More jobs will mean more opportunities for families to come to our Valley and these families will need services. Planning is already underway to provide more tertiary education and trade training opportunities so school leavers will have the best chance of finding local employment. We'll also need more childcare places to support our working families. This was a priority identified in the community consultation. Council will be working with the NSW Government, universities, TAFE and private providers to help secure these services.

Health services will also be essential for a growing population. The need for more aged care options, particularly at Evans Head, was highlighted as a priority. We'll also need more GPs and specialist medical facilities. Providing these services will require a partnership between the NSW Government, medical service providers and Richmond Valley Council. As part of the Casino Place Plan, we've identified a future Health Precinct for the town, around the existing hospital, and will be working with NSW Health to further develop this precinct. The Mid-Richmond Place Plans will also look at where future health and personal assistance services could be located.



STRATEGIES

- Plan for long-term sustainable growth
- Create new employment opportunities
- Strengthen essential services
- Provide more homes for our growing community
- Deliver regionally significant projects

Top priorities

- Richmond Valley Masterplan, housing and infrastructure strategies
- Activating the Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct
- Releasing new flood-safe housing developments
- Working with NSW Government to deliver more health, transport, affordable housing and education services
- Establishing the Woodburn-Casino Road as a major transport link
- Advocating for more aged care facilities at Evans Head
- Building a new \$60m sewage treatment plant for Casino
- Completing the Northern Rivers Rail Trail and capitalising on tourism opportunities throughout the Valley

Objective #2 Cont

Creating more jobs for our community

As the community grows, we will need more employment opportunities and there are plans to create up to 2000 additional jobs throughout the Valley in the next 20 years.

Our well-established manufacturing sector will receive a major boost from the Regional Jobs Precinct, which will provide more than 340 ha of industrial land ultimately available - enough for the next 20 years of growth - and make it easier for new industries, both large and small, to relocate to the Richmond Valley. While the Jobs Precinct is expected to create at least 600 direct jobs, there will be more than 1000 additional jobs created through the flow-on effects. This includes the various businesses that will be established to support the new industries, as well as the increased growth in service industries. The Valley has seen strong employment growth in health and social assistance services, education and construction over the past 15 years and this is expected to accelerate as the population grows. Plans to boost our retail sectors in Casino and Evans Head will create further employment, and hospitality and tourism will continue to play a strong role in job creation.

Delivering more housing

The Richmond Valley needs more housing – and a greater choice of homes for all ages, abilities and lifestyles. This plan provides for more than 2000 new homes by 2040. Over the past five years, there's been a huge change in housing availability in the Northern Rivers, and the Richmond Valley is feeling the pressure. In a recent community survey, only 19% of respondents thought housing was available or affordable in our Valley.

Council will be working with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and the Regional Housing Development Program to help boost housing numbers. Strategies include:

- **Developing more greenfield sites:** There are options for more than 1700 homes in new housing estates on flood-safe land. Most of this growth will be centred around Casino, however, there will be opportunities for smaller scale new developments in other places.
- **Providing a greater range of housing:** More than a quarter of our housing stock currently has single occupants. Providing more housing choices such as townhouses, villas and apartments for older people, young singles and professionals could

encourage a shift to smaller homes, closer to town services and entertainment. This will free up more housing for families. Most of these new options will be designed around the town centres of Evans Head and Casino.

- **Providing rural-residential opportunities:** Not everyone wants to live in a town and rural-residential is a popular option for those seeking a tree-change. Our long-term plans provide for these opportunities to be developed in a sustainable way, ensuring there is access to services and employment within a reasonable distance of rural-residential estates.



Aerial of Casino

Regional infrastructure to unlock growth

Priority investments to support sustainable growth in the Richmond Valley include:

The Woodburn-Casino Road (MR145) is a critical connection for our community. It provides an essential tourism and freight link and serves as a key evacuation route in times of flood. So far, Council has secured \$10m to fund upgrades to the Woodburn-Coraki section of the road. We've also received more than \$5m to fix some of the sections that go under in the floods. But another \$32m in upgrades is needed, including replacement of the Tatham bridges, to bring this road to the regional standard required.

Sewerage services are also essential for our growing communities. Casino's aging sewage treatment plant urgently needs replacement to open the way for the Regional Jobs Precinct and major residential growth over the next 20 years. Council is working hard to ensure this \$60m project is shovel-ready but will need funding from State and Federal Governments to get the new plant built.

The Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant has also reached its Stage One capacity and Council has secured funding to complete Stage Two. This will be constructed in 2024-25, improving the environmental performance of the plant and catering for increased tourism growth.

Northern Rivers Rail Trail on the move

Plans for the Northern Rivers Rail Trail continue to unfold, with the opening of the Tweed section in 2023 and construction of the Casino-Bentley section well underway. Funding has also been secured to extend the Casino section to Lismore and on to Eltham, creating 45 km of continuous trail.

This will be a huge boost for regional tourism, attracting up to 52,000 people each year, including 23,200 visitors. The direct spending associated with these visitors is approximately \$1.9 million per year, with further flow-on effects to the local economy. Although the 2022 floods have delayed the Rail Trail project, work will be completed on the Casino-Bentley section of the trail in 2024, with plans for an upgrade of the old Casino Station precinct to enhance the visitor experience.



INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

\$300M

Council's investment over the past 15 years in critical infrastructure

What we need now...

\$60M

to replace the Casino Sewage Treatment Plant

\$32M

to upgrade Woodburn-Casino Rd to a major transport link

Objective #3

DIVERSIFY & GROW OUR ECONOMY

The Richmond Valley has a thriving and diverse economy, which is set to grow even stronger in the next 20 years.

With a healthy \$900m in annual local production, our traditional 'engine industries', manufacturing and agriculture provide a sound economic base. But our emerging industries are also playing an increasingly important role in local employment, with health care, education, retail and hospitality all experiencing growth in recent years.

To ensure our economy is strong and sustainable in the future, we need to keep diversifying our industry and employment options, strengthening supply chains and securing new markets.

Showcasing cattle at Casino's annual Beef Week event



Tourism's \$78m boost to the economy

Tourism plays an increasingly important role in the Richmond Valley economy, contributing some \$78m per year through visitor spending. Most of our visitors (80%) come from north of the Valley, with the Brisbane market accounting for 50% of overnight stays. Our beautiful beaches, rivers and country atmosphere are major attractions and we plan to capitalise on more nature-based, and agri-tourism options in the future.

Another key focus is the Valley's Signature Events – such as Beef Week and the Casino Truck Show, which bring millions of dollars into the community. More new events are being developed for the Mid-Richmond, following the success of the first Buckin by the Beach rodeo. Providing a range of suitable tourist accommodation will also be a major focus for the future as new regional attractions, such as the Northern Rivers Rail Trail, begin to boost visitor numbers.



RICHMOND VALLEY ECONOMY

\$900M+ ANNUAL PRODUCTIVITY

Top value-add industries:

- **Manufacture - 22.1%**
- **Agriculture - 14.6%**
- **Health Care – 9.9%**

7,922 LOCAL JOBS

Top employment industries:

- **Manufacture – 16.7%**
- **Health Care – 13.5%**
- **Education – 12.0%**

Activating the Regional Jobs Precinct

The Richmond Valley Regional Jobs Precinct (RJP) will be a huge boost to our Valley, with more than 600 direct jobs created, and additional employment opportunities from service and support industries.

Council has been working with Regional NSW for the past two years to prepare the way for the precinct, with full activation planned for 2024.

The RJP includes three key precincts, with the northern precinct, centred around Reynolds Road, providing for larger industries, such as food processing, recycling and manufacturing, the central precinct housing the Casino Food Co-op development and the southern precinct providing for an expanded range of light-medium industries.

Council will continue to work with Regional NSW to explore opportunities for attracting new investment to the Valley. A key focus will be on securing funding for essential infrastructure to support the Precinct and additional housing for local workers.

NRLX on its way to Number 1

Council's Northern Rivers Livestock Exchange (NRLX) continues to go from strength to strength, with more than \$140m in annual cattle sales. The NRLX is already the leading livestock exchange in the region and aspires to be Number 1 in Northern NSW. With a new business strategy and service delivery model now in place, the NRLX is ready for its next stage of growth.

Council's NRLX facility at Casino



STRATEGIES

- Strengthen the Valley's manufacturing and industrial base
- Grow our lifestyle and tourism markets
- Support continued growth in service industries
- Support & protect agricultural enterprise

Key Directions

- Continue to grow manufacturing through the Regional Jobs Precinct, with traditional and emerging industries
- Explore new opportunities for ag-tech and value-add in agriculture
- Continue to grow the NRLX
- Expand the retail base in our major centres
- Encourage more growth in health and personal assistance employment
- Advocate for more government jobs to be based in the Richmond Valley
- Grow our visitor economy, with more accommodation, new events, and the Northern Rivers Rail Trail

Objective #4

CELEBRATE OUR LOCAL IDENTITY AND LIFESTYLE

The Richmond Valley's unique identity and sense of community is one of the things we value the most. We're a down-to-earth, friendly community that enjoys strong family ties and a connection with the land. We want to preserve and enhance these special connections as our population grows.

Providing opportunities for people of all cultures, beliefs and abilities to learn, create and celebrate together will be an important part of our community's future. The Richmond Valley has a vibrant program of events and festivals, with more than 75 activities conducted each year. Our signature events will continue to be a popular drawcard for local families, with new events to be developed for the Mid-Richmond communities. Council will also continue to support community groups to celebrate local festivals, fund-raisers and sports competitions.

Our regional library service also has great plans to keep expanding its range of programs, resources and outreach activities. Many of these programs will be delivered via the mobile library service, which provides popular activities for young families and seniors in our rural areas. The Casino Indoor Sports Stadium will also see an

expanded program of healthy activities for local young people and Council will continue to work with funding providers and community groups in Coraki and other Mid-Richmond communities to develop further youth programs.

Our town centres and community facilities are another important source of civic pride and maintenance of streets, parks, playgrounds and cemeteries is always high on the list of local priorities. Community members in Casino, Evans Head, Woodburn and Coraki will soon have the opportunity to design new amenities and expanded retail, commercial and residential options for their CBD precincts through the Richmond Valley Place Plan project.

Another top priority identified in the community consultation was the need for more family-friendly activities throughout the Valley. This includes providing more play spaces and parks, as well as affordable activities and entertainment for families. Creating these great places will require an active partnership between government funding bodies, Council, community groups and private enterprise.



Joining in the fun at Casino's Christmas Street Party



HEALTHY PLACES TO PLAY

Casino's new-look memorial pool

Stage 1 of Casino Olympic Memorial Pool's \$16.8m redevelopment is set to open in 2023, with a revitalised and heated 50m outdoor pool and children's splash area.

Stages 2 and 3 of the re-development will include a 25m indoor learn to swim and therapy pool, kiosk and food court, and a new twin tube water flume slide.

So far, Council has secured \$6.7m for Stage 1 and is actively seeking a further \$10m for stages 2 & 3.

The revitalised pool complex will be a major boost for Casino's growing population, providing a great place for families to escape the summer heat, opportunities for local children to learn to swim and much-needed therapy facilities for all ages.

Three Villages cycleway on the move

One of the top projects proposed for the Mid-Richmond in the coming years is the \$6.7m Three Villages Cycleway – a shared footpath and cycleway linking Evans Head, Broadwater and Woodburn.

The project builds on existing infrastructure to create a loop between the three communities and Council is actively seeking funding for the next stages.

Stage 1 (\$3.2m) will extend 5.65km along the Woodburn-Evans Head Road, joining the Ray Jefferey Memorial Cycleway.

Stage 2 (\$3.5m) will link on to the Broadwater shared pathway and extend an additional 7.9km to join the existing Broadwater-Evans Head Rd pathway.

The project will be a great boost for local families, cyclists and tourists, providing a healthy way to experience the natural attractions of the Mid-Richmond villages.

STRATEGIES

- Provide opportunities to learn, create and celebrate
- Enhance the unique character of towns and villages
- Encourage healthy activities, community involvement and connection

Key Directions

- Continued support for NAIDOC Week activities, Aboriginal cultural awareness and employment programs
- A new Disability Inclusion Action Plan for the Richmond Valley
- Strengthening our signature events and developing more events for the Mid-Richmond
- Expanding outreach programs for the Regional Library and Indoor Sports Centre
- New CBD Masterplans for Evans Head and Casino, with upgrades to follow
- Continued upgrades of local sporting facilities
- More family-friendly play spaces with shade areas

Objective #5

LIVE SUSTAINABLY IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

The Richmond Valley has experienced nine natural disasters in the past five years, with devastating consequences for our community. The 2019 bushfires saw 48.6% of the local government area impacted by fire. Five major storm and flood events closely followed the fires in 2020 and 2021. But nothing could prepare us for the catastrophic effects of the February/March 2022 floods. These disasters have shown us that we must change the way we prepare for, respond to, and recover from these events in the future.

The NSW Government's Independent Inquiry into the 2022 flood event made 28 recommendations which will change the face of disaster management in our region. These recommendations will be implemented over the coming years, with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation continuing to lead our region's flood recovery.

Richmond Valley Council also plays a major role in local disaster management. This includes supporting emergency planning and working

directly with communities on disaster preparedness education. When disasters occur, Council leads many of the frontline response activities, including road closures, emergency repairs and ensuring residents are up to date with the latest local information. In the recovery phase, Council supports the clean-up process and manages disaster recovery funding claims for repairs to local infrastructure. We also support local recovery centres and community advisory groups.

All these initiatives help to build resilience - but keeping our community safe is a shared responsibility and everyone will need to play their part to improve the Richmond Valley's disaster preparedness for the future. This includes the work of our local volunteer emergency agencies, Community-led Resilience Teams and the 'Get Ready' plans prepared by each household in the Valley to protect their families in bushfire and flood. Together we can put the foundations in place to be better prepared for the future.



CREATING MORE SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

The past few years have brought the realities of climate change home for many communities and there is increasing support within the Richmond Valley for a more sustainable way of life. This includes changing the way we live, build, farm, design communities and use resources in the future. Two key priorities identified in the community consultation are preserving our precious water resources, and preparing our community for increasing temperatures

Reducing our water usage

Recent studies have shown that we will need to manage our regional water supplies more carefully in the future. Climate change will see increasing temperatures and longer periods of reduced flow in our rivers. This means we will need to improve water storage and reduce the amount we use in our homes and industries. Richmond Valley Council and Rous Water will be working to improve water saving and reduce water loss across our networks, but everyone needs to play a part in preserving this precious resource.

15,000 more shade trees

We also know that average temperatures are going to increase in the coming years. The Richmond Valley currently experiences 16 days on average per year where temperatures climb above 35oC. By 2030, this is expected to increase to 19 days. Our community will need more cool, green shady places, and planting more of the right trees in the right locations will help to beat the heat. Council has an ambitious Community Greening Program that will see 1000 additional trees planted in the Valley each year. We will be relying on community support, government funding and sponsorship to help achieve at least another 15,000 healthy shade trees by 2040.

STRATEGIES

- Improve community preparedness and response to natural disasters
- Undertake long-term risk management planning for flood and bushfire
- Reduce our demand on natural resources
- Provide cool, green spaces for our community
- Promote sustainable development

Key Directions

- Richmond Valley Flood Study & Floodplain Risk Management Plan
- Regional Emergency Management Plans and RV Adverse Event Plan
- Improved flood gauges and warning systems
- Community preparedness education
- Community Greening Program
- Regional water saving initiative
- Sustainable urban design and energy efficiency

Objective #6

PROVIDE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT MEETS COMMUNITY NEEDS

The Richmond Valley is set for a massive investment in infrastructure over the next 20 years as we continue to rebuild our flood-damaged road networks, complete upgrades to community facilities and replace aging essential assets.

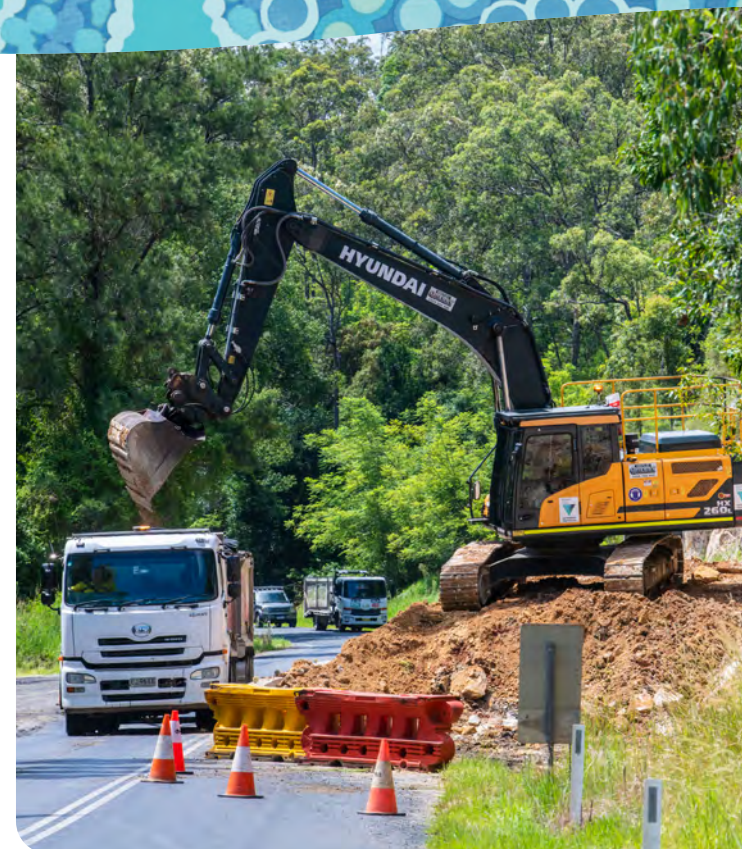
Well-planned, constructed and maintained infrastructure is essential for our community's future and there are many partners involved in providing these services for the Richmond Valley, including national and state governments, energy utilities, telecommunications providers and local government.

The NSW Government is responsible for the highways that traverse our area, and also provides funding towards regional roads, but most road construction and maintenance in the Richmond Valley is carried out by Council employees or contractors. Council is also responsible for managing water supply (in partnership with Rous Water) and sewerage and drainage networks.

The 2022 flood has left us with a \$200m damage bill to fix our road network, repair major landslips, replace bridges and repair our drainage and sewerage networks. It will take at least three years to make headway on this program, with help from government funding and additional construction crews. These works will remain a top priority for the first years of this Plan. But we will also need to keep up with regular maintenance, such as road grading and drain cleaning, to ensure our infrastructure remains in good order and is ready for the next event.

There will also be new infrastructure to build to meet the needs of our growing community, secure our water supply and unlock more housing. And there will be major investment in replacing or upgrading aging essential assets, such as sewage treatment plants.

To meet these challenges, we will rely heavily on support from national and state governments and Council will continue to advocate for further investment in our community.



Work is underway on the Bentley landslide restoration.



Completing the Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant project

Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant was originally designed to cater for a population of 11,000, with the plant being built in two stages. The first stage, completed in 2006, has now reached capacity, with steady growth in the three communities the plant serves - Evans Head, Broadwater and Woodburn – and increasing numbers of visitors in the holiday season.

Council has secured government funding through the Safe and Secure Water Program to complete Stage 2 of the plant. This will cater for residential growth well beyond the next 20 years and provide more flexibility to manage peak season demands. Building extra capacity into the plant will also help to improve its long-term environmental performance. Construction of Stage 2 is due to start in 2024.

Getting Broadwater Bridge back in action

The Broadwater Bridge is a critical link between the Richmond Valley's sugar cane growing region and the Broadwater Sugar Mill. Our Valley produces more than 776,000 tonnes of sugar cane each year, valued at \$32m.

The bridge has been progressively deteriorating over the past few years, with increasing traffic loads. It has now been reduced to a single lane and an urgent upgrade is required.

Richmond Valley Council, which shares responsibility for the bridge with Lismore City Council, has prepared designs for the upgrade, but \$4.2m is needed to complete the work. Advocating for these funds is a top priority for Council.



STRATEGIES

- Undertake whole-of-life planning for community infrastructure
- Partner with State Government to upgrade and maintain key freight links, regional roads and tourist routes
- Provide a network of safe, well-constructed local roads, bridges, footpaths and cycleways
- Manage water supply, sewerage and drainage effectively

Key Directions

- Further upgrades to key regional roads, including the links between Evans Head, Broadwater and Woodburn.
- Seek funding to repair the Broadwater Bridge
- Maintain and upgrade local road networks
- Complete Stage 2 of the Evans Head Sewage Treatment Plant
- Complete upgrades to Casino's Water Treatment Plant
- Upgrade stormwater systems in the Mid-Richmond and Casino.
- Continue to improve footpaths and cycleways in our towns and villages

Objective #7

PRESERVE NATIVE BUSHLAND AND BIODIVERSITY

The Richmond Valley's beautiful landscapes are one of the things we value the most, and it's important that we protect these unique areas for future generations. Our bushland, native plants and animals are feeling the impacts of climate change and increasing human activity. The Valley's strong agricultural heritage means that much of the land has been cleared and we have lost up to 70% of our local tree canopy. Our riparian zones along the riverbank are also feeling the pressures of land clearing and farming and it is important that we protect these areas to keep the river healthy.

A key focus for the future will be helping our community to understand the importance of habitat protection and responsible land management, and providing opportunities for people to get involved in enhancing critical habitat areas for koalas, native fish and flying foxes.

Enhancing and protecting our local wetlands is also a high priority, and Council will be looking for opportunities to expand wetland precincts and incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practices in their future care.

BUSHLAND

- 388 km2 of conservation areas (including National Parks)
- 31 km2 of wilderness area
- 5km2 of World Heritage Area
- 490 km2 State Forest
- 150 km of river riparian zone

BIODIVERSITY

- 283 threatened species of flora and fauna
- 2 threatened species of fish
- 12 threatened ecological communities

Creating a new home for our flying-foxes

Flying-foxes may not be everyone's favourite creatures, but they play a critical role in preserving our forests and sustaining habitat for native plants and animals, including koalas.

Flying-foxes help to pollinate plants and disperse seeds, ensuring that our native forests remain healthy, with a diverse gene pool of plants.

There are three species of flying fox in the Richmond Valley: The Grey-Headed Flying-Fox, the Black Flying-Fox and the nomadic Little Red Flying-Fox. When the "little reds" decide to move in each year and share our urban areas with us, they can be noisy and disruptive.

To help entice our local flying-fox populations away from these areas, Council has been working with community groups to create a new habitat area in Casino, on the banks of the Richmond River. So far more than 4000 trees have been planted in a designated area of Queen Elizabeth Park, with help from a \$300,000 government grant and a team of local volunteers.

The grant will ultimately fund an eight-year program of habitat restoration and maintenance ensuring that the flying-foxes will have a safe home and can continue to play their important role in our environment.



STRATEGIES

- Promote awareness of our natural environment and biodiversity values
- Restore & enhance local habitat zones
- Enhance and protect local wetlands

Key Directions

- Increase community awareness of local habitat protection and responsible land management
- Work with landowners and funding partners to restore riparian zones
- Continue to support North Coast Koala habitat protection
- Complete the flying fox habitat restoration project to encourage relocation from urban areas
- Work with the community to enhance native fish habitat
- Seek funding to deliver the Richmond Park Management Plan for our wetland areas
- Explore opportunities to expand wetlands and incorporate Aboriginal knowledge and cultural practices

Objective #8

MAINTAIN HEALTHY RIVERS, BEACHES & WATERWAYS

Our local river systems and waterways are the lifeblood of our Valley. The Richmond River connects our communities, sustains rich and diverse riverine landscapes, and provides essential drinking water for the Casino community. Throughout the community consultation, people identified our river systems as one of the things they valued the most. But the Richmond River catchment is under increasing threat from human activity and water quality is declining. Climate change will have further serious impacts. If we are to preserve this precious resource for the future, we must work together to restore the river and protect its catchment. A key focus will be supporting more sustainable farming practices, reducing pollution risks in the catchment, and enhancing the 150 km of riparian zones along the riverbank. Council will continue to advocate for the state government to undertake much-needed restoration of flood-damaged riverbanks throughout the Valley. We will also work closely with the community and state regulators to secure and responsibly manage Casino's long-term water supply.

Securing Casino's water supply

With Casino's population expected to grow by some 4000 over the next 20 years, we need to ensure that our water supply from the Richmond River is sustainable. The town currently uses up to 2 GL (2000 million litres) of water each year. Council is exploring three future options to improve water security in Casino, including making greater use of the water in the Jabour Weir pool, raising the weir, or constructing an off-stream storage facility. These plans will help to secure the supply for the next 20 years, but ultimately, a second water source will need to be found and Council will work with Rous Water to explore long-term options for connecting Casino. We will also ensure that Rous' supply to the Mid-Richmond communities is sustainable over the longer term.

Protecting our beautiful beaches

Summer wouldn't be summer in the Richmond Valley without the annual pilgrimage from Casino to the coast. It's a long-standing tradition in our community to gather at Evans Head for family holidays by the beach. Our beaches are also a great attraction for holiday makers from southern Queensland and the population of the town nearly doubles in peak periods. With increasing pressure on our coastal environment, it will be important to strike a balance in the way we manage recreational activities on the beach while protecting sensitive environmental areas, such as dunes, coffee rocks and bird nesting sites. Council will be working with the community to develop practical solutions, so we can all continue to share these great places.

Improving access to local waterways

One of the key themes from the community consultation was the need to improve access to our local waterways for residents and recreational users. People love to spend time near the river to fish, swim, kayak or play and there are opportunities to improve access while still protecting environmentally sensitive areas. There are also great opportunities to connect our town centres at Evans Head and Casino with the adjoining foreshore and riverbank precincts and we'll be exploring these in more detail through the Place Plan and CBD master-planning projects in 2023-24.

STRATEGIES

- Secure long-term sustainable water supplies for the Richmond Valley
- Improve catchment health and water quality
- Support a range of recreational opportunities at local rivers and beaches

Key Directions

- Identify the preferred option for Casino's long-term water security in consultation with the community and funding partners
- Work with high water consumption industries to reduce demand
- Secure the Mid-Richmond's long-term water supply in consultation with Rous Water
- Work to address water quality risks in local river systems
- Reduce water pollution risks from on-site sewerage management systems and underground petrol storage
- Work with local landowners to restore riparian zones on the Richmond River
- Improve community access and recreational opportunities at rivers and beaches

Objective #9

TRANSITION TO A CIRCULAR ECONOMY

The NSW Government has set a 20-year target for our State to transition to a circular economy and Richmond Valley Council will be following that lead over the life of this Plan. A “circular economy” aims to design out waste and keep products and materials in use, making them as productive as possible. This means we end up with less waste, fewer emissions and less harm to the environment. But we have a long way to go to achieve these goals.

Currently most of our community’s waste becomes someone else’s responsibility. Of the 9000+ tonnes of residual waste produced each year, only about 200 tonnes remains in the Valley at our Nammoona landfill site. The rest is transported to Queensland for disposal at a total cost of \$2m to our community.

Since the introduction of the three-bin system for local households, we’ve made good progress in recycling, with some 6000 tonnes of material

recovered each year. Half of this is food and garden materials (FOGO) which is processed into compost, and the other half is plastic products metals and e-waste. All recycled materials are processed outside the Valley.

If we aspire to achieve the Government’s time frame for transitioning to a circular economy, our community will need to find better long-term solutions for landfill and explore more opportunities for recycling and reusing materials.

Reducing packaging and plastics

One of the easiest ways to reduce waste is to stop creating it in the first place. The NSW Government has set a target to phase out problematic single-use plastics by 2025 and we can all help to achieve this target. Richmond Valley Council’s waste education team has been working with the community to showcase new ideas for reducing single-use plastics around the home.

Is energy from waste part of our future?

Although Energy from Waste facilities have been operating overseas for 20 years, they are new to Australia and our governments are still refining the regulatory issues around them. Two facilities are under construction in Western Australia, but there are currently none in NSW. The Regional Job Precinct site in Casino is one of four places identified by the NSW Government as a possible location. There are lots of opinions about energy from waste and Richmond Valley Council has been keeping an open mind about the issue as it works to resolve our community’s residual waste problem. These facilities are too hi-tech and expensive for Council to contemplate building, so any future proposal would come from private enterprise. A private investor would first have to determine if the idea was commercially viable, find a suitable block of land, and go through a lengthy assessment and approval process with the NSW Government. This would include extensive consultation with

the community and environmental regulators to obtain a social licence for the facility.

If the facility was approved, it would take several years to construct and commission and would then be subject to 24-hour emissions monitoring by regulators.

Because there are so many unknowns in this scenario, Council has no commitment to building an energy from waste facility and continues to consider all options for our residual waste. This includes looking at the possibility of a second landfill site within the Valley, as well as exploring other technologies and processes.



HOW MUCH GOES TO LANDFILL EACH YEAR?

9,000 TONNES

to landfill. Most is transported out of the Richmond Valley

550+ TRUCK LOADS

to Queensland disposal sites

\$2M

transport & disposal costs

STRATEGIES

- Develop long-term circular economy options
- Increase options to reduce, reuse, recycle and repurpose materials
- Manage Council waste services & facilities effectively

Key Projects

- Improve recycling recovery rates for our community
- Encourage new recycling, reuse and repurposing industries to establish in the Regional Jobs Precinct
- Use our organic waste materials more beneficially
- Complete construction of Cell 6 at the Nammoona landfill
- Develop future solutions for disposal of residual waste
- Improve the environmental performance of our waste facilities



Objective #10

LEAD AND ADVOCATE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

As the Richmond Valley prepares for the next 20 years, our community will need strong and accountable leadership to guide our progress. All levels of government will play a role in rebuilding the region and delivering our community's vision for the future, and Richmond Valley Council will be at the forefront of this change. Over the past challenging year, Council has ensured that the voice of the Richmond Valley is heard in future planning and investment decisions for regional flood recovery, and we will continue to advocate strongly for our community.

Council has also led the way in creating the plans that will guide future growth in our Valley, create more sustainable communities and strengthen our economy. We've also been working closely with Regional NSW to prepare the final plans for the Regional Jobs Precinct. The next 20 years have some exciting possibilities for the Richmond Valley, and everyone can play a part in the key decisions that will shape our future. Council's Big Conversation began with the community in 2021 to help prepare the Community Strategic Plan. But the 2022 floods

interrupted the program, with all attentions focused on immediate response and recovery. We've now resumed the conversation, gathered hundreds of responses from our community, and created our shared vision for 2040. Although Council will take the lead in delivering this vision we will also rely on other partners, including federal and state governments, local MPs, private enterprise, community groups and individuals to provide the help and resources our community needs to achieve long-term growth and renewal.

The Big Conversation goes on ...

As we deliver the community's 20-year vision, there will be lots of ways to be involved in consultation and feedback.

Our Council has seven elected Councillors who meet each month to make key decisions for our community. Anyone can be involved in open council meetings or contact their local Councillor to share their ideas or concerns.

Residents can also find out about plans, projects or proposals that are open for consultation by checking the "on exhibition" section of Council's website. The Agenda for each Council meeting is also available on-line in advance of the meeting.

Council also shares news with the community through our social media sites and community newsletters.

With each new council term, Council prepares a Community Engagement Strategy to outline how we will provide opportunities for people to have a say during the four-year term of office. We also prepare a Community Participation Plan, to explain how the community can be involved in land use planning and development decisions.



I think there should be more trees planted and more protection and preservation for national parks. National Parks are important habitat for the native animals around here. It's an important part of preserving the local environment and protecting our wildlife.

April O'Reilly – Evans River K-12 School



I'd like to see more cultural items, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, especially more murals around our CBD.

Bailey McConville – Casino Public School

STRATEGIES

- Strengthen engagement between council and the community
- Advocate for community needs & priorities
- Lead with integrity

Key Directions

- Advocating for community needs and priorities
- Exploring new ways to consult with the community on key issues
- Actively seeking government grants for community projects
- Continuing to provide accessible council meetings, with live-streaming services
- Ensuring good governance and decision-making in Council
- Working with local MPs to address community priorities
- Continuing to work with the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation and participate in the Northern Rivers Joint Organisation



Objective #11 & #12

MANAGE RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY AND PROVIDE GREAT SERVICE

The final two objectives of our Plan focus on the role that Council will play in delivering the community's vision over the next 20 years.

As the second largest employer in the Richmond Valley, Council provides a range of essential services to help sustain our community. This includes managing water supplies, road construction, maintaining drainage networks and parks and reserves, and providing important regulatory services in development assessment and public health.

Council also has stewardship of community assets worth more than \$1.06 billion and manages an annual budget of \$80 million to provide the services our community needs.

Over the first three years of this Plan, Council will concentrate on completing essential flood repairs for our road network and facilities, and careful management of resources will be required. We will need to remain flexible with our capital works program, as more opportunities for flood recovery funding become available. While these essential works are being carried out, we will also

be working with the community to redesign our urban centres through the Place Plan and CBD masterplan projects. This will ensure that we are ready to begin the next round of upgrades and new facilities for our communities.

Meanwhile Council will continue to deliver great outcomes for the Richmond Valley and provide the essential services our community needs. By the end of this Plan, 2040, we will have emptied more than 11 million bins, answered half a million phone calls from our customers, provided 34 billion litres of safe drinking water and rescued more than 6000 stray dogs – not to mention the half a million potholes that will also need to be filled! And we will keep on delivering this every day, in every town, village and rural community to help make the Richmond Valley a really great place to live.



Council's waste education team promoting eco-friendly produce bags.



Investing in local jobs for our youth

Providing opportunities for young people to get a start in the workplace is one of Council's key priorities for the future and we will continue to deliver our successful Youth Employment Scheme (YES) and women's Try a Trade programs in the coming years. Some of our trainees have gone on to win national awards, attained permanent roles with Council, or progressed to tertiary education and other job opportunities. The women's Try a Trade program has also opened many doors by encouraging local women to learn more about non-traditional roles, such as parks and gardens, waste management, mechanics and road construction. Each year, our program targets a range of participants, including school leavers, single mums and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, to provide safety training and equipment and offer hands-on experience in a variety of roles. The program has helped many women to transition back into the workforce or go on to further studies.

Reducing our carbon footprint

Council undertakes a lot of activities, operates multiple community facilities and manages a large fleet of vehicles to carry out its work for the community. This means we use a lot of energy and resources and a key focus for the future will be reducing our carbon footprint. Some of the options we're currently exploring include installing more solar systems at our facilities and including more electric vehicles in Council's fleet. We'll also be looking at improving energy efficiency in our buildings and incorporating recycled materials in our future procurement plans.

Council's open spaces team members, Thomas Walker (left) and Lachlan Troy.



STRATEGIES

- Manage finances responsibly and provide value for money
- Strengthen Council's role as a leading local employer
- Manage organisational risks responsibly
- Improve the sustainability of Council's operations
- Manage Council's commercial activities for community benefit
- Provide a high standard of customer service
- Deliver consistent regulatory and compliance services
- Provide great corporate and operational support

Key Directions

- Continuing Council's local employment schemes, including YES and Women's Try a Trade
- Improving energy efficiency at Council facilities, including options for solar installations
- Continuing Council's Development Concierge service to help local applicants
- Improving cyber-security and use of new technologies in council operations

MEASURING SUCCESS

The Community Strategic Plan provides for the next 20 years of growth and activity in our Valley. In the life of this plan, we will see five terms of office for local and state governments and many social and economic changes in our community. So how will we measure whether our plans for Richmond Valley 2040 are making a positive difference?

At the end of each term of office, Council is required to review progress in delivering the Community Strategic Plan and prepare a State of the Valley report for the in-coming council.

To help prepare this report, we will measure outcomes in a number of ways including:

- Monitoring Council's progress in delivering the 12 objectives and the activities and actions from our Delivery Program
- Listening to community feedback through surveys, listening tours and other engagement activities
- Monitoring state and regional reports, including reports from the Northern Rivers Reconstruction Corporation

- Measuring local trends in investment, development applications, productivity and employment
- Monitoring environmental health, such as water quality and habitat regeneration
- Comparing Council's financial performance against the NSW local government benchmarks

We'll also revisit our key growth targets to see if we are on track in delivering the jobs, housing and population growth envisaged in the plan and whether we are achieving our annual targets for the Community Greening Program.

Assessing our progress against the six key principals will also be important and we'll be seeking community feedback on whether these aspirations are being achieved.

Council and the community will receive regular updates on progress and each new in-coming council will lead a review of the Plan and undertake further community consultation on priorities and projects for the future.





I would like to see more communal areas for the young people in the Richmond Valley. This is important because it will create more community and create more connections within it.

Charlotte Day – St Mary's Catholic College



I'd like to see the CBD expand and have more parking space for people to come around and shop. It makes it easier if you're on a schedule or if you need to grab something quick.

Oliver Andrew – Casino Public School



I'd like to see the sporting venues upgraded. It gets people active and they're out with their friends, and they know their community better, their peers and get to make new friends.

Ella Keep – Casino High School



Richmond Valley Council would like to thank the many community members who helped to create this plan by sharing their ideas and aspirations for the future.

To those who took the time to attend consultation sessions, write submissions or participate in our on-line surveys and ideas forums - thank you for your contributions.

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