

1.5 The process to date and what we heard

Our process is focused on people and place, to maximise opportunity and provide Gosford with a competitive advantage. It aims to make Gosford a more desirable regional capital that attracts people to live, work, visit and invest in the centre.

In bringing together many voices with different points of view, we fostered a shared understanding and created a common ambition better suited to people and place.

Concurrently, it was important to review the previous plans produced to understand their vision and undertake urban analysis (please see appendices for more detail).

To build momentum and collective understanding, a series of workshops and surveys sought to identify commonly held aspirations and the strategic steps the community, industry and agencies will need to take to achieve them.

Design-led workshops are the fairest and fastest way of understanding the needs and objectives of different groups of people belonging to a community. These workshops, their methods and key findings informed the UDF and will help to achieve a better, future Gosford.

Feedback from a range of stakeholders has been invaluable in forming the final document.

Some of the key issues and opportunities raised include:

With significant public investment underway (hospital expansion, Australian Tax Office and Finance building, regional library, Performing Arts Complex) there is potential for rejuvenated market confidence.

There is great potential for Gosford to offer a high quality lifestyle with good links to Sydney, good transport and a strong sense of community.

An inconsistent approach to planning and development over time.

Public domain upgrades are needed to provide more trees, and improve parks and gardens, streetscapes, and public art to attract people and further investment.

There is an opportunity to rethink Gosford Station Interchange, upgrade Kibble Park and William Street Plaza, connect the station to the hospital, and to link the stadium to the water.

An improved precinct transport network is needed to reduce car dependency in Gosford for better pedestrian access/footpaths, reduce impact from traffic, provide bike paths/hire, and better linkages over the station and rail line.

There is the need to encourage a greater diversity of activity and people into the centre.

We should encourage active usages, night-time economy, diverse users (youth, aging population) and uses, space for sports and outdoor recreation/family areas with shelter throughout the centre and along the water.

Support Gosford as a cultural capital with diverse arts and music, with an active, public waterfront.

Revitalisation of Gosford should support the development of a distinctive commercial centre that can compete with other centres, offering a greater variety of retail shops, food and beverage, events, but there has not been significant investment in the public domain.

Many development approvals (DAs) have been lodged however only a small proportion are progressing.



Images: Salty Dingo

1.6 Building on previous work

Our City, Our Destiny

The result of extensive community consultation, ‘Our City, Our Destiny’ was a high-level master plan which articulated the community vision for the Gosford City Centre with five key precincts.

Our City, Our Destiny forms the most comprehensive master plan to date for the city centre and was the basis for further detailed urban studies on transport, movement and street upgrades. Strategies and precincts identified in the master plan have built a strong base for the UDF. The UDF will update the master plan and provides recommendations to support implementation of the urban design framework.

What has happened since Our City, Our Destiny?

1. The early recommendations to start in the centre did not take place, and the waterfront development was put out to the market to come forward with proposals (The Landing). The waterfront development proposals failed to get off the ground and were poorly received by the community, leading to the market process being cancelled. Community critique ranged from the scale of development proposed, blocking views to the water from the city and privatisation of waterfront. Given the scale and design proposed, there was risk that the development may have soaked up the limited demand and activation away from the city.

Lessons Learnt

There is a need to test and define in detail what can be achieved in terms of public outcomes with commercial feasibility and delivery scenarios. Socialise this with community before going to market to help manage community expectations as well as reduce development risk for proponents.

2. In an attempt to encourage development and generate s94 funds to invest in public realm, a series of bonuses were introduced. This included bonus floor space ratios (FSR), lifting of heights and reduced s94 contributions.

A number of development applications have been submitted and approved but only a smaller number of project have been completed, or received construction certificates. This resulted in limited development or improvements on the ground and therefore limited developer contributions. There have been signs of stagnation with big projects being put on hold, but also lack of investment in existing properties in the short term with the hope of a big windfall when the market turns. A number of major development approval have now lapsed and others may do so shortly. In addition, research for this UDF by HillPDA has evidenced that residential development alone will not be enough to revitalise Gosford and that investment in regional facilities is also required.

In general, it is not the approval process or development envelope capacity that is limiting growth within Gosford, but demand is limiting development. The solution isn't about improving market confidence for developers to participate, but about increasing sales price to make the development feasible. Simply put, banks aren't sentimental, they need evidence of significant percentage of pre-sale at a price point high enough to finance the development. The scale of individual development proposals with the very large numbers of units in each stage make this very difficult.

Lessons Learnt

Establish city growth scenarios in line with demand forecast. In the short term, strengthening Gosford as a regional capital is unlikely to be driven solely by the market and S94 contributions will not be sufficient. Hence forward public investment is needed to drive change.

Messaging needs to be managed regarding city growth. Both the UDF and Our City, Our Destiny reports highlight that the fundamental components that can help shape and make a significant regional city are there for the taking in Gosford but demand is likely to build slowly.

Government-led renewal should focus on strengthening Gosford's offer as a regional centre in addition to providing housing and employment to meet the goal to make Gosford a regional capital.

'The 'life' of the city is not just from the people who live and work there but broad range of visitors who come from the region and beyond that come to satisfy different needs and desires.'

What is different about the UDF?

The broad objectives, principles and city framework in the UDF are essentially the same as Our City, Our Destiny. What is different is a recognition of the physical scale of the city, market demand, Gosford's specific role as a regional capital and how this impacts on recommendations for implementation.

1. Physical scale of the city

Gosford city is physically large. It has similar footprint to Sydney central business district with the length of Mann Street from Etna Street to the waterfront is equivalent to the distance between Sydney Town Hall to Circular Quay.

2. Market demand

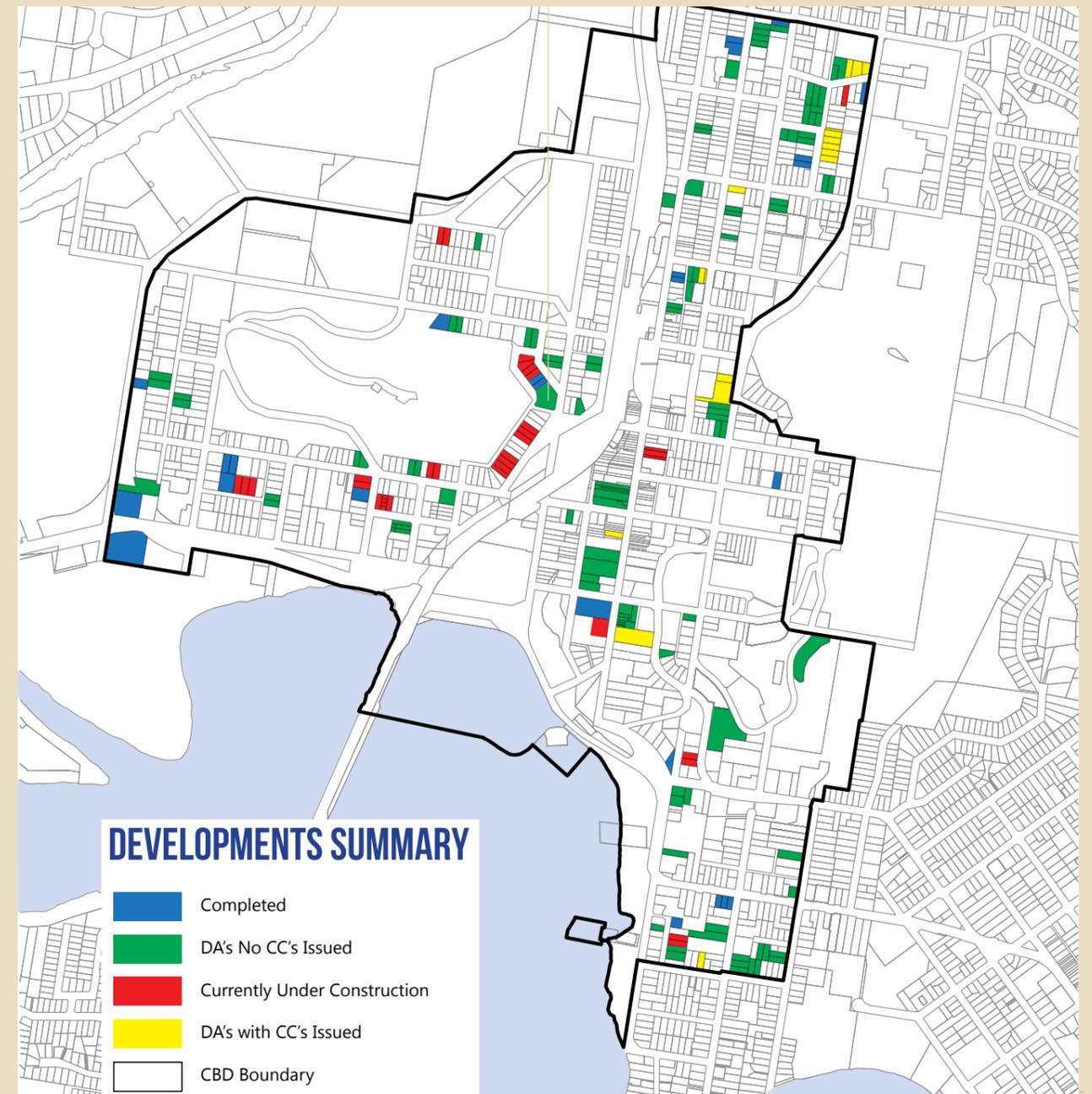
The projections for dwelling and employment is limited relative to scale of the city and current planning envelope. The dwelling projections are 120 - 200 units per year. The commercial floor space projections are 40,000 sqm over 20 years. This is in line with Gosford city's share of Regional Plan targets.

3. Regional capital

Regional capitals need to offer functions and attractions of type, scale and quality not available in a local centre, to draw users from the broader regional catchment.

Examples are:

- Public services: Regional hospitals, and courts
- Educational: TAFE and University
- Cultural: Museums, galleries, and library
- Public space: Regional parks, playgrounds, public squares, and pools
- Professional services: Regional scale and specialisation of services not available locally
- Retail, food and beverage: Regional scale and quality of retail, dining and night offering
- Events: Regional scale sports, community and visitor events
- Movement and access: Improved walkability, choice of transport options, regional rail and bus services and improved accessed to other regional centres and airports
- Accommodation and housing: Range of accommodation and housing for tourists, students, patients and their visitors and key worker housing.



*Data Source: Central Coast Council March 2018

Key projects underway: Overview

Council's statutory controls for height and FSR allowed for a variety of building typologies to be constructed. The development industry as well as the former Gosford Council recognised that the controls did little to promote development. As a result, the Council formed a strategy of 'bonus scheme': development-stimulating incentives.

The principal scheme (2012-2016) encouraged development in the short-term; with 30% bonus for height and floorspace and reduced developer contributions from 4% to 1%, under Section 94A.

The scheme was extended for a further year with 30% bonus for height and floorspace and reduced developer contributions from 4% to 2%. The bonus expired on 2 April 2016.

Since the introduction of the 30% Bonus in 2012 there have been:

- 83 development approvals in Gosford City Centre
 - 17 developments completed*
 - 13 under construction (out of ground)*
 - 7 DAs with Construction Certificate Issued
 - 46 DAs with no Construction Certificate Issued – Developers not acting on development consent
- * the vast majority of these are residential buildings

Source: Central Coast Council March 2017