

# Council News

Winter 2020 edition



## Curtis Park playground construction underway

Also inside:

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Mother of Ducks facilities completed

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Artist appointed for Guyra mural

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Solar lighting for safer cycleway

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2020/21 Operational Plan adopted

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Recovering from emergencies

## Integrated planning targets strength and recovery

Strength and recovery are key focuses of the 2020/21 Operational Plan and Budget, which Council adopted last month.

Following the hardships of the previous financial year, Council is looking for every opportunity to support the local economy post the COVID-19 pandemic, drought and bushfires that have devastated our region.

The adopted Integrated Planning & Reporting Framework documents continue Council's work towards strengthening the organisation's financial position and its capacity to lead the region to growth and prosperity.

Priorities in the Operational Plan include:

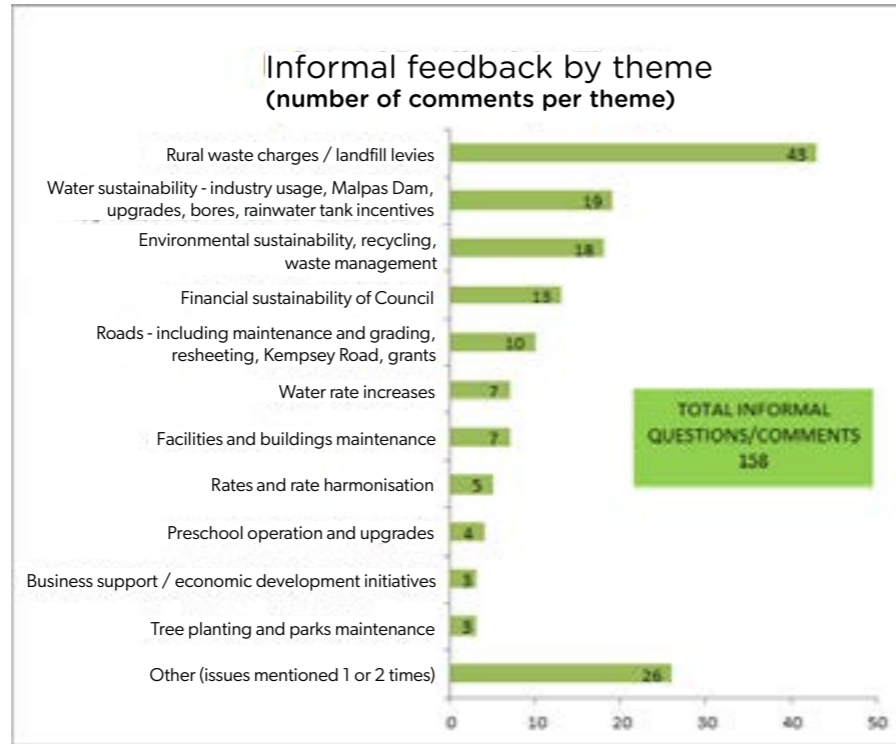
- finalising the processes of the amalgamation of the Armidale-Dumaresq and Guyra councils, to fully realise cost efficiencies and other benefits of the merger
- further implementing all possible cost-efficiencies in our organisation, through best use of technology and improvements in Council's organisational structure
- continuing to maximise our working relationships with other key stakeholders
- fast-tracking preparations for major projects to kick start the local economy.

Planned projects include replacing three bridges at Dumaresq, Pint Pot and Shingle Hut Creeks, constructing the Curtis Park playground and completion of Stage 1 of the Armidale Regional Airport Business Park. The former Armidale library building

will be repurposed to create a Business Community Exchange Facility that will serve as a one-stop service centre for investors and business operators. A new Community Educational and Early Childhood Learning Centre will be constructed in Guyra, doubling the capacity of the pre-school and offering more integrated educational services in a purpose-built facility.

A number of the actions given priority in the 2020/21 Operational Plan are

opportunities identified in Council's transformation program, ARC 2022, which began in late 2018 to ensure the organisation operates as efficiently and effectively as possible. This will strengthen Council's ability to meet the current needs of the community and bolster its capacity to take a leading role in the forthright decisions and actions needed for our region to realise its tremendous potential in the future.



### Waste charge relief for some farmers

Interim Administrator Viv May has made good his promise to provide an avenue for relief to farmers with multiple vacant farmland properties from paying the new Regional Landfill Levy and Operational Charge on each vacant farmland property.

An Extraordinary Council Meeting last month adopted Council's 2020/21 Operational Plan and Budget, with the administrator making an amendment to allow for credits to be applied for once owners of multiple farmland properties had applied and received approval from the NSW Valuer General's Department to amalgamate vacant farmland properties.

Acting General Manager David Kerr said Council has identified approximately 60 farmland ratepayers who could opt to amalgamate vacant farmland properties if they are used as the one holding for pastoral or agricultural purposes.

"This change would have an impact of about \$80,000 on Council's annual revenue but would go a long way to providing some financial relief to local farmers as they rebuild and recover after years of battling severe drought conditions," Mr Kerr said.

Farmland ratepayers who meet the NSW Valuer General's Criteria to amalgamate vacant properties should download the Amalgamation Request Form available on Council's website or on the NSW Valuer General's website. Hard copies of the form are available at Council's customer service centres in Armidale and Guyra.

The adopted Budget also included an amendment to the Rural Waste Management Charge, reducing the annual charge from \$144 to \$83 in response to community feedback. [See Council's website for other fees and charges.](#)

### COVID-19 measures

Measures to control the spread of COVID-19 remain in place for Council services and facilities. Visit the Coronavirus Response page on our website for details and updates

### Ben Lomond RFS shed

Ben Lomond's Rural Fire Service brigade will officially open its new shed on 22 August, following a joint project between the Uralla, Walcha and Armidale Regional councils to relocate two RFS buildings. A adjustment of RFS zones meant two sheds in the Walcha Shire were no longer required. The two-bay structures have replaced smaller sheds for the Kentucky brigade in Uralla Shire and the Ben Lomond brigade.

Armidale Regional Council coordinated the project, in liaison with the other local governments and the RFS New England Zone.

## Recreation



Resident Cara Andersen and her daughter Lily are excited about the start of work on the new playground, including additional equipment in response to community feedback.

### Getting to work on playground

Construction of the new Curtis Park playground began last month, with Council's updated designs to include additional play equipment in response to community feedback.

The finalised layout for the new Armidale playground now includes a Bushwood Balance Trail and Tropicana Bungalow, two top-ranking items in a recent community survey inviting residents to identify their preferred additions to the playground.

Hundreds of residents shared their opinions in the survey, ranking a shortlist of equipment for possible inclusion and giving fantastic input to the finished playground design.

Our project team has worked closely with play equipment specialists Moduplay Group to develop a design that incorporates as many features as possible within the available budget and meets the needs of children of all ages. The equipment includes a flying fox, skytower with slides, swings, a

climbing tower and sensory equipment.

Moduplay has constructed exciting, high-quality playgrounds throughout metropolitan and regional Australia. Its involvement in this project is helping to give us maximum bang for our buck in what we see an initial stage towards a revitalised family entertainment precinct in the heart of Armidale.

Council is committed to continual investment in that precinct, in line with the community's visions for Curtis Park, the surrounding creeklands and Armidale CBD.

The State Government's \$999,700 contribution to the current playground project, thanks to support from Adam Marshall, is an exciting first step towards a truly regional facility and community hub.

Residents can view the community feedback on the playground at the Your Say Armidale website [yoursay.armidale.nsw.gov.au/curtis-park-playground-equipment](https://yoursay.armidale.nsw.gov.au/curtis-park-playground-equipment)

### Smart option for easy library access

Armidale Regional Library has a new app to make it even easier and more convenient to borrow items or access online services.

The Library App is now available to download for free from the Google Play App Store and Apple App Store, enabling members to use their phones or smart devices to book items and easily access a world of free online entertainment, reference materials and other information.

A self-service feature allows library patrons to use their phones to issue items from the

collection to their library card.

The app is one of the ways the library is expanding its services to the community and making it increasingly convenient to access library resources.

Visit Armidale Regional Library's new pages on the Council website for more information.

The Library App is a key initiative in Armidale Regional Library's 21st Century Libraries Strategy, to use technology and other initiatives to make the library a more vibrant resource and social hub for the Armidale region community.

## Safer cycleway

Construction of new solar lighting on the Armidale Cycleway is underway, with a longer section to be fitted with lighting as a result of improved cost efficiencies.

Council will now install a total of 49 solar lights – 44 from Markham Street and Niagara Street and a further five lights on the western section from Niagara Street – to help improve safety for cycleway users.

The finalisation of design - in consultation with the designer, Lightning Art & Science, and the tender submission from contractor JLE – provided improved cost-efficiencies which allowed us to increase the number of solar lights and extend the section to approximately 1.3 kilometres.

Installation of the lights is expected to be completed in October and is requiring some temporary closures of sections of the cycleway.

Updates are available on the Works & Projects page of Council's website.

Council received \$450,000 in funding through Round 3 of the Safer Communities Fund, for a two-part project:

- Upgrade five CCTV analogue cameras in Armidale's Beardy Street Mall with digital cameras, including a network upgrade to include optic fibre infrastructure.
- Install and commission solar lights on the cycleway within the Armidale CBD precinct.



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## Grandstand start brings welcome cheer

Guyra Rugby League supporters finally have something to cheer about in 2020, with the start of construction of a new all-weather grandstand at the Guyra Sporting Complex.

Northern Tablelands MP Adam Marshall, Armidale Regional Council Interim Administrator Viv May and Guyra Junior Rugby League President Gina Lockyer officially kicked off construction on the \$120,000 project, turning the ceremonial first sod of soil.

The grandstand, funded by the NSW Government and Council, will seat around 300 spectators undercover, to support their teams in rain, hail or shine.

It is proposed to officially open the grandstand with the launch of the 2021 Rugby League season, after the 2019 season was abandoned because of COVID-19.



## Improved creature comforts at acclaimed wetlands habitat

An upgrade of a popular recreation area at Guyra's Mother of Ducks Lagoon Nature Reserve has left it ready for an influx of visitors eager to explore the region's hidden treasures.

Council responded to requests from the Guyra Chamber of Commerce to upgrade the outdated amenities and day use area, securing a grant of \$459,182 through the State Government's Stronger Communities program.

Upgrades to the toilet facilities, new barbecues, picnic tables and shelters, refurbishment of the caravan and RV overnight camping sites and new turf have transformed the recreation area for locals and visitors to explore the beauty of the Lagoon and Reserve.

Armidale Regional Council Director of Businesses and Services Scot MacDonald said the recreation area was well utilised by grey nomads, families and bird watchers as a base to explore the Wetland Mother of Ducks Lagoon and the wider Guyra region.

"The Lagoon is an internationally recognised and protected high altitude wetland. The Reserve is a breeding ground for several freshwater wetland bird species and a resting place for numerous migratory birds including the Japanese Snipe that lives in the Lagoon from August to April before returning to Japan. The Reserve attracts bird watchers and visitors from across Australia and the world. We welcome these visitors and flow on economic stimulus for Guyra," he said.

## Price is right for main street mural

Internationally-acclaimed artist James Price has been chosen to lead the creation of a new public mural as part of the Guyra main street upgrade.

James will work with the community to create the design and implement the public artworks, based on images devised by Guyra Central School students.

The community and installation artist, video artist, poet and animation director is proposing workshops with Guyra school students to help further the mural designs.

"The creation of the work will allow the students to develop a stronger connection to their environment and a more evolved understanding of their unique cultural identity," the artist said.

In further progress with the main street upgrade, new timber seats and bins have been installed. Stage 1 also includes further examination of groundwater and soil, after a number of disused underground fuel tanks were removed as part of reconstructing the main street. The upgrade has included measures to enhance public safety, improving the road profile and surface, and dealing with the long-standing issue of fuel-contaminated soil.

Council is continuing to liaise with Essential Energy to schedule the energy provider's relocation of powerlines away from shopfront awnings. The relocation is necessary before other planned works can be undertaken to complete the main street upgrade.

## Bushfire recovery

### Recovery officer to guide emergency response

The region's ongoing recovery from the 2019 bushfires will be bolstered by a number of new initiatives currently underway by Council.

The measures will be headed by the appointment of a Community Recovery Officer, a new 12-month role which was advertised in July and is funded by the State Government's Resilience NSW agency.

Resilience NSW identified 22 local government areas significantly impacted by the bushfires that devastated much of NSW in late 2019. It provided a grant to Council to appoint the Community Recovery Officer, to facilitate a coordinated effort by each of the local agencies and community organisations involved in disaster assistance.

The officer will play a leading hand in several measures by Council to assist in the community's recovery from the bushfires and accompanying challenges, while better preparing for future emergencies.

That includes updating Council's Emergency Plan and expanding the



document to incorporate strategies for each village and town.

"The update will draw on the region's experiences of going through the three emergencies of 2019/2020 – drought, bushfires and COVID-19 – which have helped further identify the needs of our community," Council's Coordinator – People & Community Services, Sally Schofield, said.

"The Resilience NSW funding and Council's new position were primarily prompted by the bushfires. However, the impact on the community has been compounded by those other emergencies and will also be considered by the Recovery Officer and the measures that position will oversee.

"They will consider policies and procedures to help make our region emergency-ready."

## REX Airlines resumes flights to Armidale

Negotiations between Council and Regional Express Airlines (REX) yielded a positive outcome for the region, with the re-introduction of flights between Armidale and Sydney from 21 July.

REX resumed a limited service twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday with flights departing Sydney at 11.55am and arriving in Armidale at 13.10pm. The return flight departs Armidale at 13.30pm arriving in Sydney at 2.45pm.

With Qantas and Fly Corporate already operating, the re-introduction of REX means Armidale now has weekday daily return flights to Sydney and every Wednesday and Friday to Brisbane.

Like Qantas and Fly Corporate the re-introduction of REX is being subsidised by the Australian Government.



## Apron expansion a recipe for growth

A \$3.8 million extension of the airside parking apron has equipped Armidale Regional Airport to accept more passengers and larger planes.

The project is central to a strategy to maintain the airport as one of the busiest in country NSW and grow the numbers of flights and passengers in the long term.

The upgrade included expanding and improving the existing apron pavement, enhancing the taxiway, installing new edge lighting, a new pedestrian ramp

and line marking.

Forecasts for the terminal anticipate growth in passenger numbers from current levels of approximately 120,000 a year to 175,000 a year by 2025.

The State Government contributed \$1.5 million to the apron upgrade. Its completion came as contractors made the finishing touches to infrastructure at the new Armidale Regional Airport Business Park, where landscaping and vegetation is now underway.

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## Water security

# Level 5 remains as dams recover slowly

The Armidale region will remain in Level 5 water restrictions until dam storage levels increase significantly or long-term weather forecasts indicate firm prospects for great water security, according to a report to the July Council meeting.

Restrictions will be reviewed again when the Bureau of Meteorology releases its summer rainfall outlook, which is due this month, or if dam levels rise substantially.

Dam levels and climate conditions have improved since January. But at the time of publishing this newsletter, the region's main water storage, Malpas Dam, has only recovered to 59% of capacity, compared to 41% when Level 5 restrictions were implemented and 48% in July 2019, the report says.

Water restrictions were introduced in Guyra in February 2019 and extended to Armidale the following month. They were progressively stepped up as levels in Malpas Dam and Guyra Dam continued to fall, with Level 5 implemented for the whole region in October.

Armidale's rainfall total for 2019, just 306.6mm, was the lowest since instrumental rainfall recording began 130 years ago and was

substantially less than the previous lowest total, 460mm in 1982.

"As we have stated before, this region is still officially in drought and we cannot consider ourselves to be out of the woods with our water security until there are much more positive predictions of considerable rain or until we actually see levels more significantly restored in the regional water storage," Council's Director – Business and Services, Scot MacDonald, said.

"We greatly appreciate and have acknowledged the wonderful job our households and businesses have done to reduce their consumption.

"Council's primary responsibility as the region's town water supplier is to ensure our customers continue to have a secure supply for essential needs. We are taking every viable step to achieve that goal, with Council's own activities and in working with the community to curb overall consumption."

Restrictions remain at Level 5 for all households and businesses and can be viewed on the [Water Restrictions page of Council's website](#).

## Measures pay to provide COVID safety

New measures have been introduced - and existing services have gained added importance - to help make Council officers and customers COVID-safe.

As the nation continues to grapple with controlling the spread of COVID-19, residents are urged to take advantage of Council's online payment options whenever possible to pay rates and water charges.

An increasing number of residents are using the option to pay online at [www.armidaleregional.nsw.gov.au/payments](http://www.armidaleregional.nsw.gov.au/payments), which allows them to make payments at any time of the day and wherever they have online access.

Rates can also be paid by BPay and Post BillPay.

Customer Service staff are available at Council's Guyra and Armidale offices to help familiarise customers with the online payment options.

While Council's Customer Service areas reopened to the public in June, visitors are required to comply with a few simple steps to sanitise and maintain appropriate social distancing.

Payments can also be made at Australia Post customer service areas.

## Designs begin for Puddledock pipeline



A contractor has begun designing an upgraded pipeline from Puddledock Dam, to provide a better back-up source for the Armidale town water supply.

Contractor Cardno has been appointed to design the new pipeline, which will significantly increase flows from Puddledock Dam so it can better act as an alternative supply at times when Malpas Dam is offline.

The \$11.54 million project will increase the pipeline's capacity so it exceeds Armidale's average demand of 14 megalitres (ML) per day.

"With Puddledock Dam's capacity of around 700ML, the new pipeline would enable it to meet the town water needs while we address any infrastructure or water quality issues at Malpas Dam,"

Council's Director – Businesses and Services, Scot MacDonald, said.

"Not only will that help avoid interruptions to water supplies, it can also bring operational cost savings when there is a decline in water quality at Malpas Dam that would require more intensive filtration at the water treatment plant."

Cardno conducted site inspections late last month and the design process, including liaison with landholders, is expected to be completed in early 2021.

Construction of the pipeline is expected to begin in April or May 2021.

Last April, the Member for Northern Tablelands, Adam Marshall, announced the State Government would provide \$5.77 million to the project through its Restart NSW Safe and Secure program.

## Water security



# Water reuse enables street tree planting to resume

Street tree planting by Council is returning from a two-year break, after sources of reusable water were identified to help establish the trees.

The annual program was suspended in 2018 because of the drought and accompanying water restrictions but resumed this week with plantings in Hillgrove, as the program is extended into the villages for the first time. Wollomombi is also part of the program's initial expansion into the villages, following consultation with residents in both these communities.

A total of 90 trees will be established in Hillgrove and Wollomombi during this round of planting and other villages will be progressively incorporate into the program."

The program will reuse stored water from the filtration system backflush operations at the Monckton Aquatic Centre, as well as sample water which is used for quality testing at Armidale Water Treatment Plant and is not potable at the end of that process.

They are safe, reusable water supplies that effectively drought-proof the annual tree planting program.

They will be used to water the trees for several weeks after they are planted. Once they are properly established – and after some initial pruning to shape the trees – they generally require very little maintenance.

Approximately 300 trees, ranging between one and two metres tall, will be planted during this year's program.

## New cameras for better CCTV in Armidale CBD

Security video surveillance in Armidale's Beardy Street has been enhanced by an update to digital technology.

Council's replacement of four video cameras in Beardy Street, including the mall, and a fifth camera at the intersection of Dangar Street and Moore Street has improved the clarity of video footage and reduces the time it takes to retrieve and act on footage.

It will greatly improve the capacity to identify people in the footage, particularly at times of low light.

The move to a full digital system also means that when an incident occurs, footage can be downloaded much, much quicker. Footage that would have taken an hour with the analogue system can be downloaded in a matter of minutes using digital technology.

"That will make the CCTV network a much more effective and time-efficient tool in keeping streets safe."

The \$45,000 project is replacing analogue cameras that have been in place since the Armidale central business district's CCTV system was first installed in 2005 as a City Safe Area. Their replacement, by contractor TriTech Security, brings the five cameras in line with four other digital cameras that had been added later to the CBD's CCTV network.

## Next stage for bridge replacement program

Timber bridges on Castledoyle Road, Cookes Road and Rockvale Road will be replaced in this year's instalment of Council's bridge upgrade program.

Contractor Coastal Works was this month engaged to design and construct replacements for the Shingle Hut Creek Bridge, Dumaresq Creek Bridge and Pint Pot Creek Bridge, which are nearing the end of their lifespans.

"Replacing these ageing bridges with new structures will eliminate the need for load limits," Acting Director – Organisational & Corporate Services Leah Cook said.

"That will particularly benefit primary producers and transport operators, who might otherwise have to take longer routes.

"The upgrades also ensure these bridges can accommodate

current and projected traffic volumes."

Designs for the new Shingle Hut Creek Bridge are expected to be finished in September. The \$984,000 project, funded through the Federal Government's Drought Communities Programme Extension, is scheduled to be completed in December.

Work will then progress to the \$745,000 Dumaresq Creek Bridge project and \$561,000 Pint Pot Creek Bridge project.

Pint Pot Creek Bridge and Dumaresq Creek Bridge are being upgraded as part of Council's Bridge Renewal Strategy, which receives dollar-for-dollar funding assistance through the Federal Government's Bridge Renewal Program and has identified a total of 32 timber structures for replacement or renewal.

Want to have your say? Register now at [yoursay.armidale.nsw.gov.au](http://yoursay.armidale.nsw.gov.au)

## Council meetings

The general public is welcome to attend any Armidale Regional Council meeting:

- Wednesday 19 August 2020, 4pm in Armidale
- Wednesday 23 September 2020, 4pm in Guyra
- Wednesday 28 October 2020, 4pm in Armidale

Seating is limited during COVID restrictions. Register by emailing [executiveoffice@armidale.nsw.gov.au](mailto:executiveoffice@armidale.nsw.gov.au)

Please note: workshops and closed sessions (in private) are not open to the public.



## New facility has landfill needs sorted for next half a century

The Armidale region's landfill needs for the next 50 years will be met by a Waterfall Way Regional Landfill which has been completed and will be operational in September.

The regional landfill, located 12km east of Armidale along Waterfall Way, will operate alongside Council's existing waste management facilities in Armidale and Guyra and is designed to accept up to 15,000 tonnes per annum of general solid waste.

The new landfill is not open to the public. Waste will continue to be sorted through Armidale and Guyra's waste management facilities to ensure Council maintains a high level of waste diversion from landfill through organics processing and sorting of recyclables.

That sorting process is being finalised before Council begins transferring waste to the new landfill.

Director - Businesses & Services Scot MacDonald said it has been a long road to developing the new regional landfill facility but absolutely necessary as the existing landfill cells in Armidale are at capacity and the Guyra landfill cells are in need of extensive rehabilitation to meet current environmental standards and have not been operational for many years.

"Our community expects a high standard of environmental management and Council has delivered a landfill that minimises the impact on the environment and meets current standards rigorously managed by the NSW Government.



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## COVID-19 hardship provisions

Measures to assist customers experiencing financial hardship because of the COVID-19 pandemic have been implemented by Council.

Last month's Ordinary Council meeting adopted an Interim Hardship Policy, as an extension of Council's existing hardship policy provisions.

Like many organisations, Council has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 shutdown restrictions and recognises it has also had a significant impact on many of the ratepayers, sporting clubs, community organisations and businesses that Council interacts with and collects revenue from.

In cases of genuine hardship, Council will work with customers to put affordable payment plans in place that are generally in line with Council's existing minimum payment

arrangements.

The arrangements in the Interim Hardship Policy will remain in place until 30 September 2020, when the policy will be reviewed in light of the Coronavirus shutdown restrictions that exist at that time and the associated impact that they are having on the community.

This policy contains provisions to support our community. These provisions are not intended to replace existing hardship policy provisions, but to assist individuals, businesses and community groups in the short term, pending any further guidance from Federal or State Government and while the current hibernation of the economy persists.

See Council's website for further [information about the hardship provisions](#).