



ARMIDALE CITY ACTIVATION PLAN

ENQUIRY BY DESIGN WORKSHOP OUTCOMES & KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Project Client: NSW Department of Planning and Environment
Project Name: Armidale Enquiry by Design
Project Number: 0682 SYD

Revision:	Status:	Date:	by:	Checked:
A	Draft Report	18.07.2018	SM	TR
B	Draft Report	20.07.2018	SM	TR
C	Draft Report	07.08.2018	JS	TR
D	Draft Report	10.08.2018	BN	TR
E	Draft Report	24.08.2018	JT	BN
F	Final Report	28.09.2018	JC	BN

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Preface

The New England North West Regional Plan 2036 was released in August 2017 by the New South Wales Minister for Planning, the Hon. Anthony Roberts. The Plan imagines a bright future for the New England North West Region, basing itself on the rich natural resources and strong communities whilst, capitalising on enhanced connectivity, porous global boundaries, and technological advancements. The Plan identifies that the main regional cities of Tamworth and Armidale will accommodate over half of the region's population by 2036, building on their existing community diversity, natural assets and their position as focal points of commerce within the region. Already the most populated settlements, the two cities are expected to continue to provide a desirable mix of housing and lifestyle opportunities, function as the regions cultural and recreation capitals, and provide the highest levels of health, education and professional services to the New England North West. The Plan expresses a strong desire for Armidale and Tamworth to be jointly prosperous cities, supported by a coherent infrastructure investment and sharing further successes with their connected centres.

The Plan identifies as a priority action the development of Activation Plans for Armidale and Tamworth to provide frameworks for identifying and reinforcing future opportunities in the cities and coordinating investment in the cities and across the region. Though aimed at generating strategic directions for Armidale and Tamworth, these Activation Plans adopt a design-led approach through an Enquiry by Design (EBD). EBD is a process of urban investigation and consultation workshopping with key stakeholders. The conceptual framings, investigative exercises and consolidated findings, derived from this process, are aimed at supporting these regional city centres as vibrant and continuously evolving focal points for their community's cultural, recreational and economic activity.



Introduction

The Activation Plan footprint applies to the Armidale settlement, however a particular focus to the city centre and surrounds prevails in response to the increased level of community and commercial activity. The secondary footprint, referred to as the CBD, contains a range of cultural, social and environmental assets servicing the Armidale community and the greater region.

The area is loosely bounded by Kirkwood Street and the Creeklands to the north, Markham Street to the west, Barney Street to the south, and Taylor Street to the east. The CBD is supplemented to the south by the Kentucky Street Precinct along Black Gully Creek, which also contains some of Armidale's (and the region's) premier cultural and open space facilities. The major north-south streets of Faulkner, Marsh and Taylor directly link the CBD to the Kentucky Precinct.

Armidale is one of the region's most significant cultural destinations: led by the New England Regional Art Museum and supported by a suite of events, local amenity and natural environment attract regional, national and international visitors throughout the year. There is a robust hospitality network of hotels, motels, restaurants and pubs which service these activities, and provide added amenity throughout the year.

The CBD area contains most of Armidale's civic institutions, and many regional offices of state agencies, along with a good deal of the town's retail offerings, in both large shopping centres and individual street-front shops. Beardy Street, running through the heart of the CBD, contains the Armidale mall, and is considered Armidale's "main street," home to some of its most established retail, hospitality and commercial institutions. Dumaresq Street, running parallel to Beardy Street and the Creek, contains a series of carparks, internalised buildings and underutilised sites, directly fronting the Creeklands and Dumaresq Creek, which contain a series of well used and much loved public spaces based around the town's original riverside playing fields and parks.

A process that brings together community and regional stakeholders to explore short and long term solutions to make the city centre and surrounds the thriving heart of the city, and of the region.

This combination of CBD, natural features and open space creates a powerful and interlinked whole, a cohesive offering that is shaping cities in Australia and around the world. These elements can also be understood as protecting natural systems & environmental considerations, fostering economic development & infrastructure frameworks, and shaping communities that are dynamic, prosperous and inclusive.

The concentrated community uses, regional activities, civic and institutional presences, and businesses operations in and around Armidale City Centre, clearly illustrate that these urban forces already co-exist in Armidale, and throughout the greater city settlement. The consolidation, integration and application of these elements and processes represent a rich opportunity to further develop the City Centre and its surroundings as a vibrant urban precinct for the community and all its members, now and into the future.

Objectives

There is keen interest from the New South Wales Department of Planning & Environment, Armidale Regional Council, local stakeholders, and members of the wider community, to explore the opportunities in the Armidale settlement and specifically its city centre, and surrounds. Among these explorations are the ways in which the settlement might be upgraded with further residential, cultural, environmental and recreational provisions, thriving in its city role and servicing the greater New England North West region.

This increased focus recognises the assets and character; however, it is also understood that additional activity will increase the stress on the physical fabric of infrastructure, amenities and open space. Future uses may also require additional social amenity within the precinct, such as enhanced social facilities, recreational equipment, playgrounds and event infrastructure.

Finally, the study area of Armidale demands consideration be given to connectivity and access issues, and also the area's potential to become an even more dense and vibrant heart within the city.

To begin to introduce and engender discussion around some of these issues, the Enquiry by Design process established some project objectives:

- Outline the contextual considerations affecting the area.
- Identify and map external opportunities that could influence the area's development.
- Describe internal opportunities and assets throughout the precinct.
- Summarise demands, deficiencies and constraints in the precinct.
- Recognise precinct stakeholders' future aspirations for the area.

Methodology

McGregor Coxall was commissioned to develop and implement a workshop program to engage with city stakeholders in formulating future directions for Armidale and its city centre. Intended to provide a foundational framework for future strategic studies and eventual project implementations based on local knowledge and internal demands, the ideas were to derive from the workshop participants, with professional staff simply facilitating the discussions. To capture as many ideas and initiatives as possible in the short time period allotted for the workshops, a collaborative and discursive program was designed to encourage rapid projective visioning and multi-criteria assessments of opportunities and demands.

The stages of the workshop comprised the following:

- Illustrative presentation framing the project and its key considerations.
- An ideas and visioning exercise, undertaken as messages on "postcards from the future," completed individually by all workshop participants.
- Cataloguing and describing significant external demands and opportunities, those local and regional factors with the potential to impact on the precinct, now and into the future – these exercises were conducted in teams, working on aerial plans of the general region.
- Locating and identifying important assets, opportunities or impediments within the site, servicing both current and anticipated future activities, events and institutions.
- Devising complex, multi-disciplinary projects that would both engender density, development and activity in the city centre while concurrently catalysing regional opportunities.

Place Vitality Criteria

To create a comprehensive assessment of the Armidale City Centre and its surrounding ecological and cultural catchments, McGregor Coxall's Place Vitality Criteria were set out at the beginning of the EBD process as the conceptual filters by which to appraise the city, its conditions, and its eventual opportunities.

The Place Vitality Criteria include:



Access & Mobility - *Traffic* | *Walkability* | *Connectivity* | *Cycle Paths* | *Parking*

Governance & Implementation - *Planning Controls* | *Regulatory Framework* | *Governance* | *Funding*

Economics & Activities - *Tourism* | *Building Vacancy* | *Armidale hospital* | *Armidale Airport* | *Impacting Developments*

Urban form & Structure - *Site Character* | *Existing Anchors* | *Precincts* | *Heritage* | *Block lengths* | *CBD gateways* | *CBD living*

Environment & Ecologies - *Seasonal transformation* | *Sustainability* | *Bushfires* | *Flooding* | *Contaminated land* | *Biodiversity* | *Climate*

Public Realm & Amenities - *Public Space* | *Shared Zones* | *Event Space* | *Utilisation* | *Convenience* |

Culture & Sociability - *Identified Community Priorities* | *Integrated uses* | *Events* | *Agriculture*

Note; The Diagram above is a representation of the relationship of the PVC criteria and does not reflect a scoring of Armidale.

Project Framing

Cities and Solutions

Cities are increasingly becoming international centres of influence, in addressing global issues of environment, development, infrastructure, and community. While cities are possibly the greatest creations of human ingenuity and endeavour, simultaneously, they are also major contributors to some of the greatest problems facing the planet: climate change, poor living conditions and social inequity. Globally, more people live in cities than do not – the problems of the world are the problems of cities, and vice versa. Cities are also uniquely placed to effectively contribute to solving the world's problems through the strong identification with place their residents have, the synergies generated by density and diversity, and their shared communality and networked resourcefulness.

The United Nations recognises the criticality of the world's cities in addressing these key global challenges: mitigating environmental impacts, providing sustainable development and creating inclusive and equitable communities. Three key initiatives developed by the UN offer cities and their communities productive ways forward in these areas: the Paris Agreement on climate change, 2015's accord on sustainable development and the 2016 New Urban Agenda, a blueprint for urbanisation designed to make cities around the world more inclusive, resilient and sustainable.

These issues and their corresponding challenges are a familiar territory through which Australia's city-makers and planners of the built environment navigate. As a framework for national investment and innovation, the UN policy initiatives are reflected in corresponding Australian Federal Government policies, also

directly addressing issues of environment, development and community-building.

Through the New South Wales Department of Planning and the Government Architects Office, the State also has put into place guidelines and programmes dedicated to understanding the opportunities and implementing schemes in these areas, especially across regional areas of New South Wales.

Finally, local projects and structures directly realising solutions to these global issues are being initiated and implemented within the Armidale Regional LGA, illustrating both the value of aspiring to solve the world's most complex issues, and the effectiveness of cities in being able to manifest energy and enthusiasm behind transformative projects.



Global

2014 Paris Agreement

2015 Sustainable Development Goals

2016 New Urban Agenda

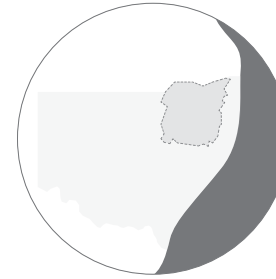


National

National Energy Productivity Plan

Regional Development Australia

Smart Cities Plan

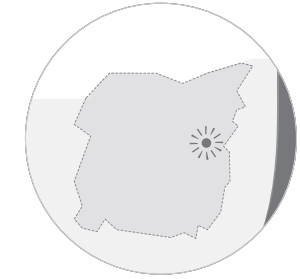


Regional

Evocities

New England North West Regional Plan

Regional Growth Fund



Local

Dumaresq Creeklands Masterplan

Armidale Regional Airport

Kentucky Street Precinct Study

Contextual Positioning

Armidale Now

As a major city centre for a region reaching towards 200,000 people, Armidale is the heart of one of most progressive and innovative regions in New South Wales. The New England North West region has a strong reputation for offering a high quality of life for residents and visitors, a supportive environment for business and industry and a growing network of opportunities for entrepreneurs and investors.

At the heart of this region, the Armidale LGA hosts a diverse and expanding economy, led by diverse enterprises, and sustained by a growing population of over 30,000 residents.

Armidale is strategically well-placed for transport logistics, located on the New England Highway. Additionally, there are three major airlines providing daily flights to Sydney and Brisbane, along with daily train and bus services. From city living to country retreats the region possesses a range of hospitality and residential offerings, while the city houses a diverse range of commercial, shopping, education, health and sporting facilities.

Offering a range of quality employment opportunities, Armidale's longstanding primary specialty involves education and training. Fostering entrepreneurial growth, research development, and continuous innovation; all supported by the University of New England, Australia's oldest inland university. Furthermore, as Australia's first mainland centre connected to the National Broadband Network, coupled with a new digital TAFE hub and a

further planned 'superschool' - with a variety of recognised private schools, all provide a robust industry that has given Armidale its primacy within the region.

Armidale and its surrounding regions make up one of Australia's major agricultural centres and a hub for small businesses. Coupled with its education and agricultural strength, the city also fosters an emerging cultural and hospitality industry through a range of offerings, events, programs and institutions such as the New England Regional Art Gallery, the Aboriginal Keeping Place, and other institutions and organisations.

Alongside formative vision-making and project execution; a desire for strategic partnerships and creative collaboration drive much of the decision-making in the New England region. The city's positive progressive attitude is reflected in their ongoing investment in strategic masterplans and infrastructure, the diversity and quality of community services provided and the encouragement of new residents moving to the region.

This civic energy, enthusiasm and support come together most comprehensively in the Armidale City Centre, which represents a key opportunity to unlock unrealised potential. The Centre is bounded on the north by Dumaresq Creek and the floodplains, areas that have developed over time as public recreation areas, but remain relatively unstructured. The City Centre remains segregated from the Creeklands itself, visually and socially. Facing an underutilised network of green space, Dumaresq Street is occupied by large scale shopping centres and development which fails to address the creeklands. Finally, the parallel transport lines of Beardy Street and Runsdon Street frame a commercial centre which also houses government offices, civic institutions and secondary businesses.

Existing Considerations

The structure of the Armidale City Centre presents a range of unique place-making opportunities. The rigorous and regular street grid provides flexibility and options in movement, for pedestrian, bicycle and vehicle traffic, while the large city blocks resulting from the grid structure offer the possibility of internal activation.

Council has completed or is undertaking a number of significant projects that will also inform its future city planning. These projects include the Mall Vibrancy Project, the Armidale CBD Parking Study, the Dumaresq Creeklands Master Plan, Kentucky Street Precinct Study, an Arts and Cultural Strategic Plan and an Economic Development Strategy.

City Centre Specific Observations

- The large blocks and wide streets can lack activation, especially when the buildings or operations are large single-use complexes.
- There is a general lack of connectivity and integration between the City Centre and significant surrounding uses such as the TAFE and hospital.
- Vehicular traffic, servicing and parking occupies large parts of the city centre blocks as well as surrounding streetscapes, minimising pedestrian activity and amenity.
- Dumaresq Street presents a series of internalised land uses and underutilised spaces to the northern aspect and Dumaresq Creek, as well as a barrier to connectivity between the City Centre and the Creeklands.
- The pedestrian and cycling connections to residential areas to the south and east, and the university district to the north-east, though regularly used, are limited, and constrained by the safety, access and amenity.
- Beardy Street, including the mall area, does not have a concentration of activity, with events and venues too spaced apart.
- The City Centre has a lack of diversity in terms of residential, retail, hospitality, commercial and cultural offerings, both in terms of content and urban scale.



UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

NEW ENGLAND HIGHWAY

GREAT NORTHERN RAIL LINE

ARMIDALE CREEKLANDS

TAFE NEW ENGLAND - ARMIDALE

ARMIDALE CITY CENTRE

HOSPITAL PRECINCT

WAR MEMORIAL MUSEUM

DUMARESQ CREEK

WATERFALL WAY

FUTURE SITE OF ARMIDALE SUPER SCHOOL

KENTUCKY STREET PRECINCT

WALLA ROAD



ARMIDALE AIRPORT

Legend

- Green Open Space
- Heritage
- Schools
- Hospital Precinct
- University of New England
- Heritage Conservation Area

City Vision

The future vision for Armidale is a connected and integrated regional city, with a vibrant and exciting centre, that embraces its cool climate and highland environment and delivers high quality amenity for future generations.

Vision

The vision, generated by way of the EBD process, evolved into considerations of the evolution of city-making: how to balance those fine-grained aspects of public space, urban amenity, civic activity and cultural activation that make places liveable, with the more expansive structural, economic and network strategies that could drive regional development.

CULTURE | COLD | BUSY | UNIQUE | VISIONARY | ENGAGING
| EXCITING | BEAUTIFUL | SEASONS | HISTORICAL | QUIET
| PROMISING | ATTRACTIVE | UNIVERSITY | COMMUNITY |
COLOURFUL | MUSICAL | AUTUMN | DIVERSE | INNOVATIVE
| CITY | FRESH | OPTIMISTIC | CREATIVE | OUTSTANDING
| PUMPING | HAPPENING | ACTIVE | FUNKY | BUSTLING |
WHOLESOME | EXCITING | INTERESTING | SUSTAINABLE |
GREEN | CONNECTED | LIVELY | VIBRANT

The textual visioning presents Armidale in one fundamental way: as a regional city, in which the exemplary qualities of life, available amenity and environmental character, are the predominant characteristics of the place. The evolution in interpretation focuses more on enhancing these qualities of Armidale, suggesting that its potential to develop into the future is contained within its current character and fabric.

It was evident, both from the exercises and the surveys, that the key element informing the evolution of place is the natural environment – those key spaces, atmospheres, ecologies and operations that link Armidale to its surroundings, generate its prosperity, and ensure the possibility of continued amenity for future generations.

Activation Principles

The primary purpose of the City Activation Plan is to provide important urban design principles that help inform Council's future planning, focus key community aspirations, and outline key development opportunities and constraints.

The workshop has focused on proposals and principles within the Armidale City Centre so that the critical considerations and demands for these sites can subsequently be incorporated into future initiatives and plans.

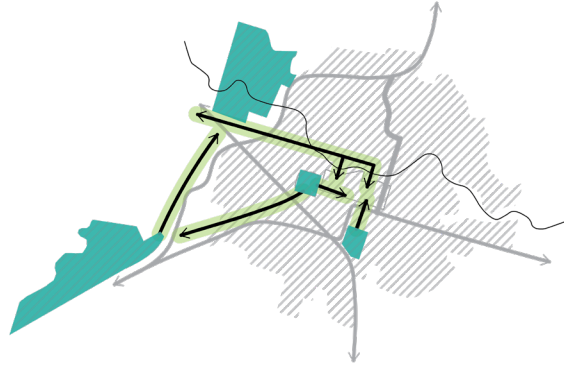
Following on from the background research, interviews held with Council staff, and the exercises conducted during the Enquiry by Design workshops, the project team synthesised the findings into a set of key strategic directions for Armidale City Centre and its surrounds.

01 Strengthen the Green Spine:



Dumaesq Creek forms Armidale's 'Green Spine', and will serve as the prime open space area for its adjoining neighbourhoods, provide an efficient, elegant and enjoyable active transport corridor for pedestrians and cyclists, connecting residential areas and university campus back to the city's heart.

02 Dissolve Distance Between Civic Anchors:



Strengthen the connection of civic anchors, such as UNE, Armidale Hospital, Schools, Airport, Train Station, Library and NERAM back to the city centre.

03 Sympathetic Density and Hidden Diversity:



Actively support housing density and diversity and expansion of housing typologies which respond to their context, both climatically and historically.

04 Create an Exploratory and Exciting City Centre:



Leverage Armidale's network of rich architectural buildings, historic places, laneways and arcades to create a destination of wonder and excitement.

05 Celebrate Sustainability:



Champion sustainable initiatives and programs that support a carbon neutral Armidale by 2050.

06 Integrate New and Old:

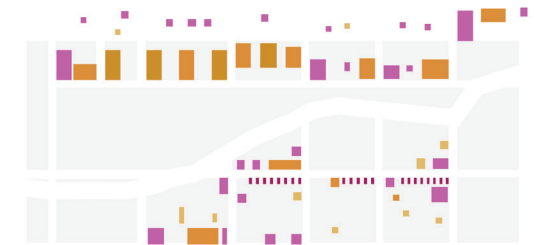
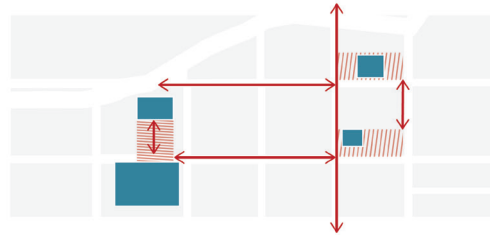
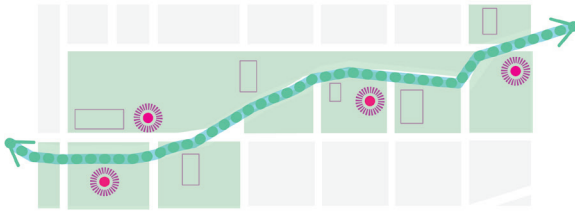


Encourage iconic new development that exhibits design excellence and incentivise the preservation and adaptive re-use of heritage buildings that underpin the city's story

Strategic Actions

Strategies

Supporting the City Activation Plan is a series of strategies that compliment the City Vision and Principles. The strategies provide the critical basis and development direction for the implementation of the City Activation Plan. These strategies will assist Armidale Council in prioritising key projects and taking subsequent steps towards implementation.



01 Strengthen the Green Spine:

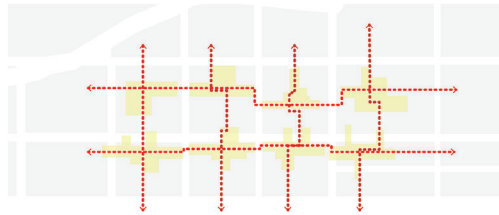
- Improve and protect the environment of the Dumaresq Creek floodplain and riparian corridor
- Enhance and refine the current uses within the active open spaces on either side of the creek
- Link the adjoining residential and university uses to the creeklands and to the city centres
- Support a network of embraced community spaces, providing recreation, connection and relaxation, dedicated to specific uses in a harmonious and efficient pattern.
- Utilise public domain and landscape architecture treatments to integrate with the city centre.

02 Dissolve Distance Between Civic Anchors:

- Utilise the major east-west and north-south streets connecting anchors to create denser spines of activity.
- Investigate opportunities for public transport, community transport, Mobility as a Service and other transport models to provide a frequent and affordable transit network.
- Increase pedestrian movement and social activation along these spines by enhancing the pedestrian environment and ensuring connecting links are available.
- Support the location of new and enhanced civic and major institutional uses and activities within the City Centre

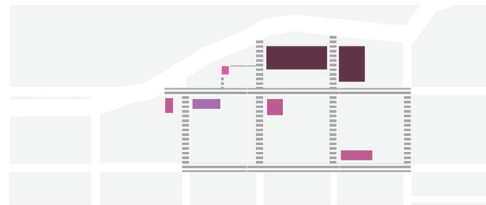
03 Sympathetic Density and Diversity:

- Create a network of interesting and distinct streets, supporting civic spaces.
- Create strategies and guidelines to promote alternate models of housing provision, particularly greater density throughout the city centre and its walkable surrounds.
- Within conservation areas, encourage a variety of 'light touch' approaches like hidden density, mews housing, adaptive re-use models and micro-housing.



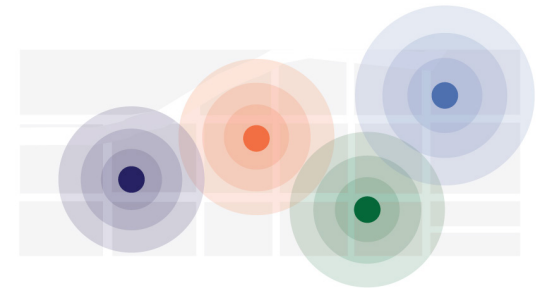
04 Create an Exploratory and Exciting City Centre:

- a. Enhance the city's natural and built environments, such as the Creeklands, Central Park and Armidale Mall.
- b. Enrich Armidale's regular street grid and large urban blocks by creating a complementary smaller-scaled urban fabric within the centre of blocks
- c. Deploy typologies such as internal courtyards, laneway connections and smaller buildings and spaces.
- d. Ensure the spaces are capable of accommodating fine grain activation: small bars, pop-up events and residential options.



05 Celebrate Sustainability:

- a. Improve natural ecologies through protection and embellishment programs.
- b. Embody passive design throughout development scales, from urban structure to individual building design.
- c. Marry the technology and innovation opportunities available through UNE and NSW TAFE to land use and infrastructure development.



06 Integrate New and Old:

- a. Support processes that reward design excellence and generate civic pride.
- b. Pursue initiatives that enable the preservation and adaptive re-use of Heritage buildings.
- c. Encourage high quality design throughout the city

Conclusion

Next Steps

The evidence of even a short-term Enquiry by Design workshop illustrates the overarching understanding that, as a leading regional city, Armidale does need to evolve, demographically as well as in the nature of activities engaged in by its changing population. There was also general agreement that growth must not come at the expense of decreased amenity for the city and its residents – on the contrary, growth was widely understood as a way to generate amenity, particularly in the city centre.

This conflation of enhanced, renewed and innovative development and infrastructure combined with increased social, cultural and environmental amenities and services creates a solid foundation for further explorations into Armidale's future. Current and future studies and plans, should synchronise with and further define these key findings, generating city-wide principles for all planning provisions, guidelines and codes.

As a means of furthering these discussions, and establishing steps toward project development and eventual realisation, we offer the following short term projects based on the outcomes of the workshop that could be undertaken by stakeholders, the community and council.

The Plan identifies as a priority action the development of frameworks for identifying and reinforcing future opportunities in the city and coordinating investment in the city and across the region. The list of long term projects were identified by the workshop participants and is intended to assist with this process.

Short Term Projects

01 Strengthen the Green Spine:

- Create a series of threshold spaces linking the city centre and UNE to the Dumaresq Creeklands, opening up businesses and operations to the park and activating the park and its edges with enhanced activities and movement.
- Investigate opportunities to increase the use of the creeklands for sport and recreational purposes.
- Reposition carparks to the benign edges and repurpose parking in the creeklands for active purposes.

02 Dissolve Distance Between Civic Anchors:

- Enhance the key collaborative possibilities and physical connections between existing and new major institutions, organisations and facilities, linked by a green active transport network.
- Relocate civic buildings and functions to CBD/connect vacant shops with start-ups and artists.
- Map the location of key civic anchors, the connecting movement spines and pursue opportunities to improve and densify land uses within the footprint.
- Create green links along the identified primary spines to support active transport.

03 Sympathetic Density and Diversity:

- Calibrate multi-dwelling housing controls by undertaking design testing on selective lot types.
- Pursue design analysis of conservation areas to provide clear guidance on acceptable design practice for alterations, additions and new buildings.
- Investigate opportunities and barriers to providing shop-top housing in the city centre and communicate opportunities to increase dwelling diversity and density with industry and community groups.

04 Create an Exploratory and Exciting City Centre:

- Utilise the secondary urban fabric within a city block (central courtyards, laneways, secondary spaces, rooftops) for fine grain activity: small bars, diverse venues, temporary events, cultural production, alternative residential.
- Encourage shop top housing throughout CBD.
- Deliver key upgrades that link up the network of streets and civic spaces throughout the city centre and its surrounds.

- Investigate options and feasibility of demolishing the multi-deck carpark at Dangar/Dumaresq Street and turning it into a new Town Square that links and integrates with the city centre, Armidale Mall and the creeklands.

05 Celebrate Sustainability:

- Pursue pilot programs to foster smarter and greener development.
- Utilise data from sustainable initiatives to advocate for wider change and government investment.

06 Integrate New and Old:

- Investigate and connect funding opportunities that support improvements and use of heritage buildings.
- Explore opportunities to incorporate design excellence within the planning framework which emphasises the value of design.
- Collaborate with industry to establish opportunities to improve the relationship of new development with Armidale's context and ensure new development contributes a desirable character legacy to the settlement, rather than anonymous neighbourhoods.

Long Term Projects

S.E.A - Showcase Environment Armidale

ALGA-wide comprehensive strategy to make Armidale Australia's exemplar in energy use and conservation. The program would start with improving existing building stock to make the city the country's most energy-efficient, beginning with 6-star green rated civic buildings, creating a focus for civic pride and a tool to attract additional investment and sector attention. A research and development hub in partnership with the university and TAFE focusing on renewable energy would bring in international students and employment opportunities, and lead to national and international collaborative possibilities. An electric transit network would link the city and its surroundings - eventually, with the region becoming New England's renewable energy centre, exporting energy to the rest of the state.

Smart Regional Cities Project

Development of a performance complex, located in the CBD, along with associated film, media and communications facilities. The centre would be dedicated to developing emerging communications technology, data transmission and remote imaging, focussed on three subjects: sustainable house design (energy efficiency, climate responsiveness, community engagement), local agriculture and horticulture (capitalising on water abundance and local industries) and regional medical services. Involving the TAFE's digital centre, UNE's communications research and an emerging IT hub, would create greater accessibility between Armidale and the region.

HEX-NE (New England Horticulture Centre of Excellence)

Establish permanent water security through the construction of the Malpas-Guyra Pipeline, attracting new business investment into the surrounding agricultural industry. Partner with industry, TAFE and the University's Cooperative Research Centres to develop technologies and training in world-leading glasshouse technology and fabrication to create a year-round growing cycle. This hub would be based in a new industrial-technology precinct located at the airport, where the new runway would allow export of local produce and manufactured goods internationally.

The Sun Train - "Your Green Route to the Future"

Develop the rail line as a transit conduit for ecological and agricultural tourism. The Armidale region would become a hub for innovation in agriculture, energy and water conservation, creating research, investment and education opportunities. These activities would be based in a central precinct located near the train station and the city centre, bringing employment and population growth to the CBD, while a multi-modal transport hub near the airport would connect with the wider region and country. Eco-tourism would be promoted, with the train bringing visitors from Sydney and Brisbane for local homestays and working holidays.

Key Recommendations

There are many potential projects, initiatives and development opportunities in and around the Armidale Regional LGA, across a wide range of sectors and serving an equally diverse set of users, existing and future – this is clearly illustrated in the outcomes of even a short-term exercise like the Enquiry by Design workshop. To further these discussions, and establish steps toward subsequent project development and eventual realisation, we offer the following recommendations that could be undertaken by stakeholders, the community and council, to investigate these matters further.

Administrative

- Council to create a small funding pool from expanded stakeholder group to back future studies, and seek other funding opportunities.

Communicative

- Solicit community ideas for their participation in the City Centre revitalisation.
- Stage a series of pop-ups and pilot projects to test feasibility of and interest in various initiatives for better integrating the City Centre and surrounds.
- Development of a comprehensive approach for design and deployment of all visual collateral throughout the City Centre and its surrounds, incorporating public art, sculpture trail, signage, interpretation and lighting.

Collaborative

- Establish a regular working group among stakeholders to continue project momentum.
- Ensure the working group includes other potential precinct stakeholders, even if externally based (airport developments, planned housing developments, local sports infrastructure, Kentucky Street precinct, etc).
- Fold the results of the other studies and projects into the larger strategic vision plans for Armidale.
- Consider the preparation of a comprehensive City Centre urban design study, outlining the structure plan for the area, that considers movement and access issues, along with ongoing and future uses and users of the precinct.

- Investigation, analysis and strategic recommendations for precinct, local and regional links and connections for enhanced pedestrian connections and cycleways.
- Establish a 20-year vision for the city incorporating the implementation and evolution of the town centre strategies and city visions outlined in this document.

Workshop Outline

Overview

The workshop exercises were designed to engender both highly considered responses and provoke wildly visionary speculation – the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The confidence generated by the establishment of local knowledge often provides the platform from which unpredictable ideas might be safely launched, while the expansive idea may only be realised through rigorous application of local techniques.

Participants worked in small groups of 4-6 members, accompanied by a group “provocateur,” either a representative from the Department of Planning & Environment, local Council or the project team. The staff member was in the group to catalyse discussion and ensure that a comprehensive analysis was undertaken for each category.

Including the addition of the conceptual interludes, the exercises started with the largest scale considerations and progressively zoomed into to specific parts of the town centre.

Workshop Exercises

Introduction – Postcard from the future. An exhortatory message (with notes on suggested imagery) from Armidale in the year 2038.

1. Identification and naming of the key factors in the urban evolution of Armidale.
2. Identification of key strategic elements in Armidale and propositions as to how these elements can contribute to greater development opportunities within the city and regionally.
3. Identification of key elements that give Armidale its distinct character and suggesting opportunities for enhancing, changing, or adding to the city.
4. Envisioning urban design strategies for Armidale's city centre.

Interlude – Canberra elevator pitch. The development of a strategic infrastructure project (in 10 minutes) to attract Federal government funding.

5. Identification of the spaces, activities and operations that best contribute to the vibrancy of the city centre and appraisal of what strategies to put in place to enhance these elements.
6. Outlining of the specific architectural and urban design strategies to reinforce activities and better connect the City, its spaces, operations, connections and surrounds.

Synthesis process

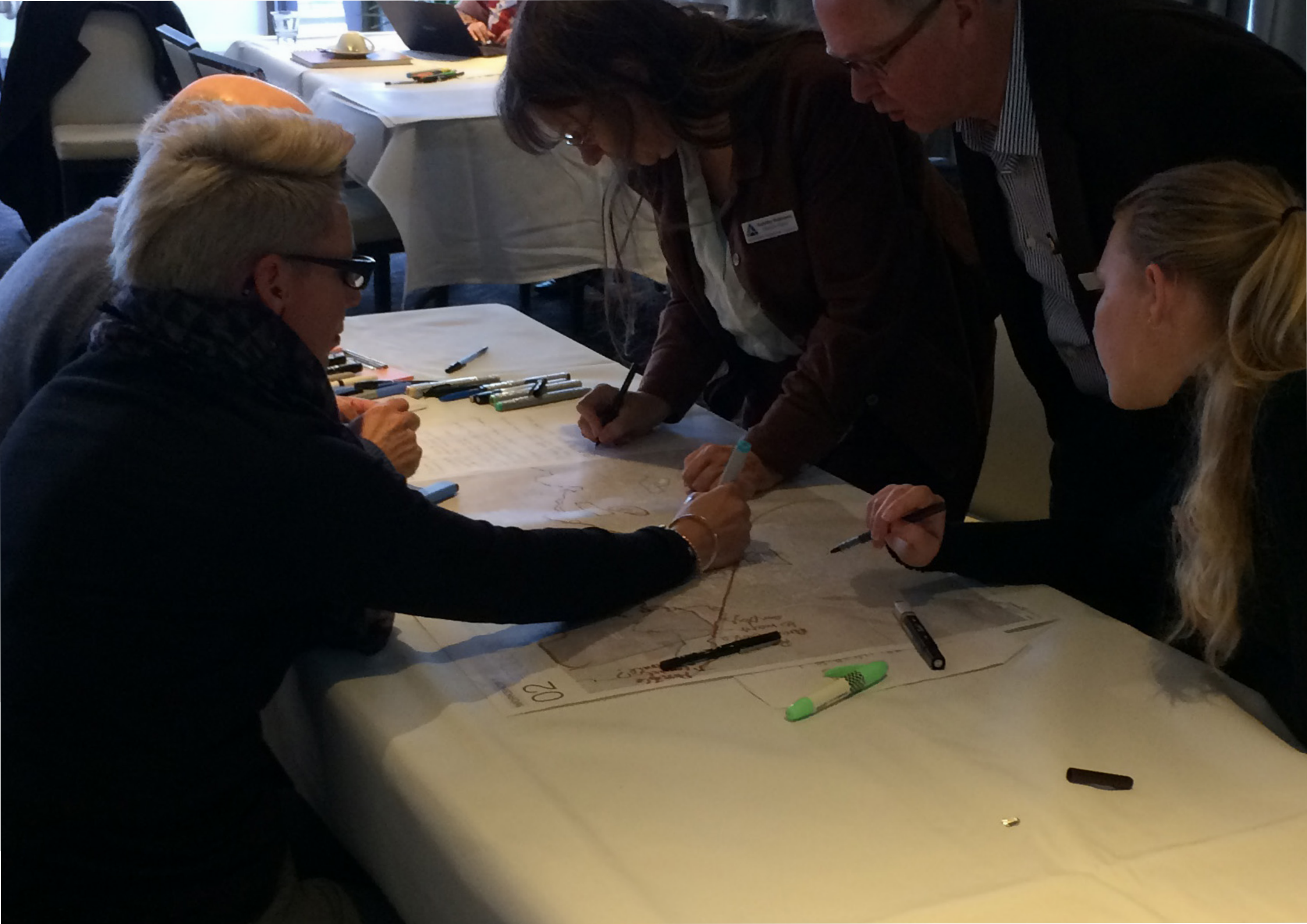
The drawn and written outcomes noted on the work sheets of each of these exercises, as shown on the pages that follow, were typed up and consolidated into key findings. The findings were then formed that basis of, and are inherently embedded in the vision, principles, strategies and key projects in the City Activation Plan report.

Conclusion

As is the nature of any project that seeks to solicit the views and sentiments of a multiplicity of participants discussing a myriad of issues and dedicating an equally distinct range of considerations to them, the Enquiry by Design workshop yielded a diversity of outcomes. However, there were strong common themes across all groups, and recurrent initiatives and considerations that regularly informed the nature and direction of propositions.

Common across the breadth of participants in the workshop was the overarching understanding that, as a leading regional city, Armidale does need to evolve, demographically as well as in the nature of activities engaged in by its changing population. There was also general agreement that growth must not come at the expense of decreased amenity for the city and its residents – on the contrary, growth was widely understood as a way to generate amenity, particularly in the city centre.

This conflation of enhanced, renewed and innovative development and infrastructure combined with increased social, cultural and environmental amenities and services creates a solid foundation for further explorations into Armidale's future. Current and future studies and plans, including the forthcoming Dumaresq Creeklands masterplan and the Kentucky Street Precinct strategic review, should synchronise with and further define these key findings, generating city-wide principles for all planning provisions, guidelines and codes.



Introduction

Postcards from the future

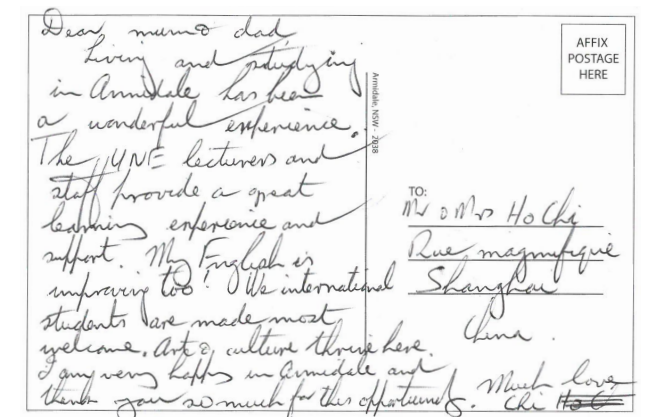
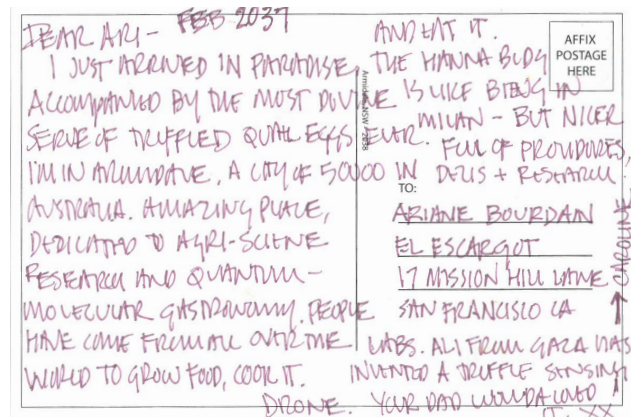
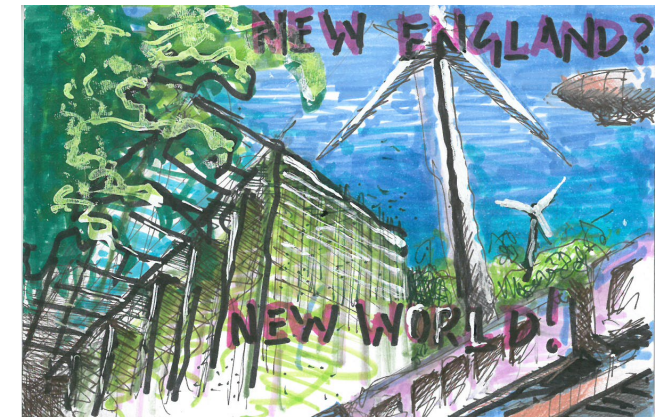
At the commencement of the workshop, participants undertook (individually) a challenging visioning exercise designed to achieve two things: engender a sense of exploration and invention at the outset of the day, and create expansive, futuristic and progressive ideas within future imaginings of Armidale. They were tasked with writing a "postcard from the future:" imagining an alternate persona, using or inhabiting Armidale at some point in the future when one or more far-sighted proposals had been realised. This future stand-in was to write a message to a friend, colleague or family member, somewhere else in the world, extolling the marvels experienced in Armidale, in the genuine spirit of every postcard: "I'm having a better time than you are."

Two of the postcards were (hand) illustrated over the course of the day, and represented to the group, along with the message that inspired the image, at the conclusion of the day's discussions. Aside from the tactical utility of the exercise in getting the group to commit to creative participation, the resulting postcards also clearly illustrated the range and depth of visions for the site, generated wholly by its own constituent stakeholders.

A City in a Word

As a conceptual break in the proceedings within the Enquiry by Design workshop sessions, two interludes were programmed in which the participating stakeholders were challenged to nominate single words that, in their minds, summed up Armidale in two ways: as it exists currently, and how it might be characterised, based on aspirations raised during the day's exercises and discussions. Words were not repeated, providing a wide-ranging glossary of terms.

The exercise proved both a discursive and cumulative exercise, with suggestions ranging from the purely descriptive or boldly aspirational, through to descriptors that clearly built on previously tabled words. The aggregate collection offers a multi-faceted interpretation of some of the findings within the workshop exercises relating to character and quality, in effect providing some shading, or specificity, to the outcomes.



Hi Jules,
 Took your advice & went to your old university town of Armidale. It's great staying in a great apartment on the 5th floor overlooking the CBD & the mall. Had visited the new ~~new~~ nuclear medicine research centre in the old teachers college for our research project. They are really leading the world. Luckily I also had some spare time & visited the touring Egyptian history play/hum at Meram

TO: Julie Lysselt
 327 Paddington Rd
 London, England
 in the mall. Having a great time

Hi Ben,
 I can't believe it's been 15 years since you left Armidale - you wouldn't believe the place now. You complained about the lack of film facilities - we now have a state of the art film studio complex, the biggest in NSW. Remember the great food you got at the markets - now at pretty much any time of day you can go to the mall which has a glazed roof, winter & get Korean, Thai, Vietnamese, Indian etc food. The CBD is buzzing on the weekend with music happening in small bars & cafes, lots of street performers & students, new markets etc for its world agricultural research programs, from all over the world.

TO: Ben Natsuo
 Saibama-cho
 Japan

Hi Carol,
 Cool! Time, no speak, trust me it's well. I came to you today from Armidale. The latest stop in my study tour on Ben's Project. ~~Chris - The Project isn't finished!~~ It's futuristic but a steep back in the most of the buildings have been here for a long time and the place has these romantic gridlocked streets - but then you step into these quiet lanes and arcades and there's a delicious blend of culture, more, casual spaces and regard to businesses, the coffee is unbelievable and the bar and green better. Make sure

TO: Charles Ross
 43 Victoria St
 Melbourne.

Hi Angela
 Have been in Armidale a month now settling into new home & get a great living who city doesn't seem what I expected but it's progressing - wish a variety of public spaces & getting around is so easy & attractive - open, easy walking precincts, public transport (shared) & no/low private vehicles - almost like Venice without the water. I've started love the architecture - best of one old & new - the public art is a surprise as well as great really. Hope you can visit

TO: Angela Smith
 8 Jones Street
 Auckland NZ.

Dear Elizabeth,
 I wish you were here! I am having the most wonderful time visiting Armidale as I travel around Australia. The biological sciences conference at the University was first class. It was great to meet so many fellow researchers from around the world. In fact, some of university staff are falling as to a beautiful restaurant tonight. I cannot wait to try one of the local produce. Love!

Tomorrow my group is heading out to the national park. You're missing out on seeing so many unique organisms. Biologists dream. I hope you get here for this evening.

TO: Elizabeth Smith
 12a James St
 Brisbane City
 Canada.
 Next time you're in with me, no questions! Hugs from Brad.

Dear Fiona,
 You'll love Armidale in 2025. We've solved our air pollution problem and everyone lives longer, healthier. Having clean air means we attract lots of retirees, who also enjoy our excellent health care precinct where you can be pampered by all sorts of therapies and activities. Our wellness make great volunteers to help out with the neighbourhood centre and help out with justice. Reinvestment so our crime rate has fallen to almost zero. There's plenty of activities - cycling and exercise stations along the extended creeklands cycleway & UWA and the university of the 3rd line are going strong. If you can get to Sydney it's a great place to live at all!

TO: Mrs Fiona Cavell
 90 Pygmal Close,
 Norway
 UK.

Hi Anne,
 So wish you were here. It's our 40th anniversary since we moved to Armidale. The great grandkids are having so much fun with their sport & music. Can't believe the quality of the facilities here now. You wouldn't recognise it. The grandkids are doing the food fest association and little Jacob is now head of an agtech company. Katie is now an artist. It's so nice to hear from you. Can you believe?

TO: Annie
 Dunbar
 Scotland.
 Lastly, we are leaving retirement & keeping well. Love you

Hi Marco
 Told you you should move here! Just finished a fantastic 5 Day Rail Trail Ride From Armidale to Tentfield and met some amazing people on the trail. Next week will be doing an overnight backpack in the Corries! Work is still great - helping with some new AG-TECH APP developments but at the moment I'm in the smart farm. The CBA in Armidale is humming with some great cafes & wine bars.

19/6/23
 SEE MAP ON THE FRONT!!
 TO: MARCO SNETIKOV
 77 - NINE NETWORK
 WILLOUGHBY NSW
 AUSTRALIA.

Dear Henry,
 Your Uncle I have arrived safe & well in Armidale. It is very cold in the mornings but beautiful sunny days & the trees are breathtaking. We have seen some very interesting street art which your mother would love. It's so bright & colour full & far better than Melbourne. Uncle Fred is enjoying the craft beer & I am enjoying the gym. The digital youth hub in town is incredible with some amazing 3D printing going on. You would love the biomechanics lab. We are venturing out to the opage country today & the wellington is being good for you.

TO: Henry Madler
 16 Star gazer Ave
 Parkes NSW

Hi James,
 I love this place, we arrived here after a short flight from Sydney. You are right this place has so much happening bars, music, restaurants, night life. The little alien that have been incorporated, the old heritage buildings there is so much to see and do we can only have three days but could stay for years.

TO: James
 12 South St
 Dunbar SA.

Dear Dad,
 Made you would love to see the progress your great grandson is making in "drought proofing" this little country town - Armidale. (How easy it was old man!) The economic benefits he has created means "beers for all". Yeah education & science & technology here means we can now "make money" out of mud - not dust. You would love this area of the world - visit soon eh!!

Walter Huxley Scott
 "Irish lards"
 IVANHOE

Hi June 2023
 Dear Lizzie, at last in beautiful blue-sky Armidale - no smog or soot here! Despite the crisp cold air, its toasty warm inside in all these wonderful every effort smart buildings. You can see the wind turbine in the distance & that PVs a smart glass in every building. It's the R&E hub of NSW, pouring half the state as well as the best comfortable city of 20,000.

TO: Lizzie King, Jr
 Buckingham Palace
 London UK.

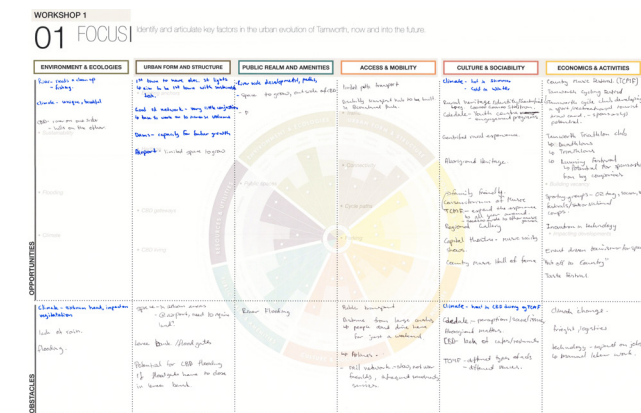
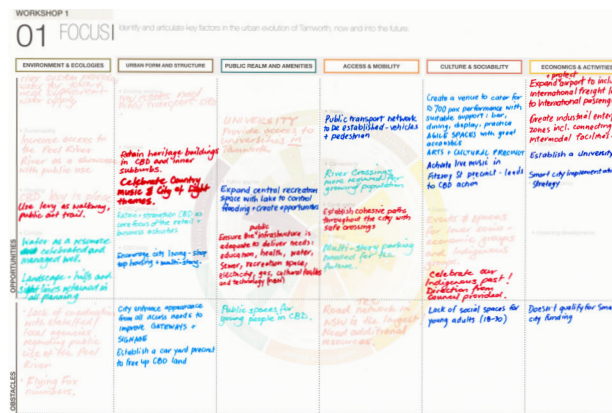
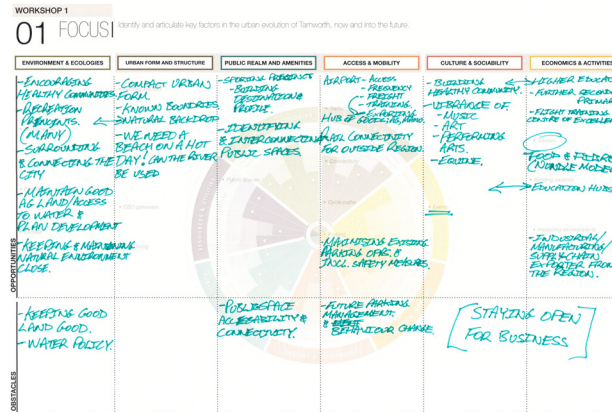
Exercise 1

Activity Description

Participants were asked to identify and articulate key factors in the urban evolution of Armidale, now and into the future.

Key Findings

- Nature based tourism embracing Armidale's national parks, seasonal change, native plantings, creeklands, mountain biking opportunities and indigenous walks.
- Creek revitalisation
- Town Square
- Iconic new modern buildings with contrast to the old along with preservation and adaptation of Heritage buildings and infill development
- Enhance usage and better connect to open space and parkland
- Physical and communicative connectivity between CBD and UNE
- Forming of a pedestrian and cycle friendly centre
- Encouragement of entertainment and events within CBD
- Airport upgrade to allow for international freight and aviation education



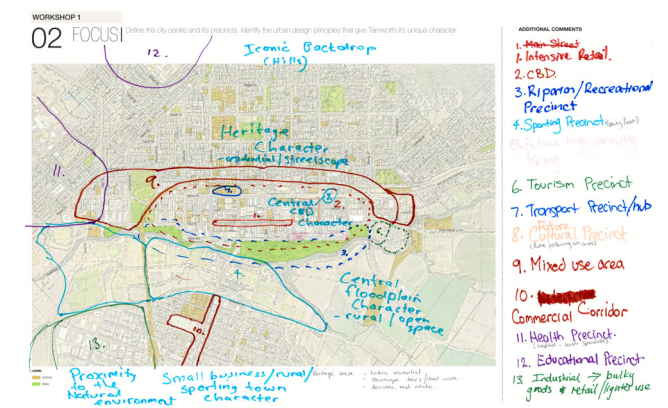
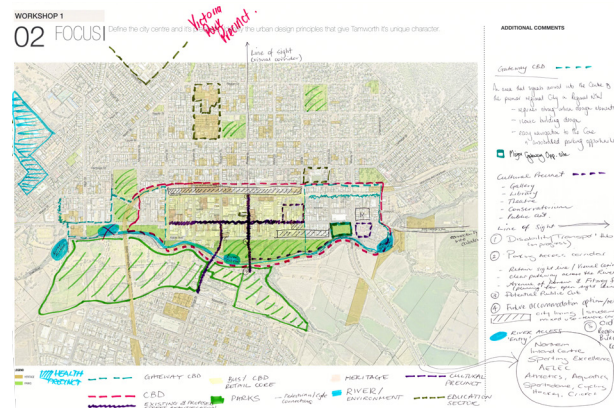
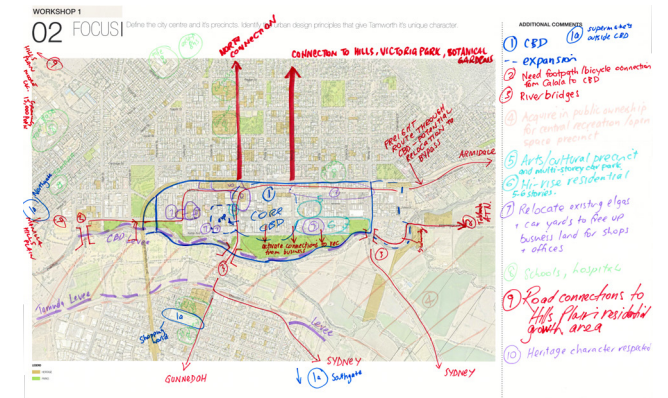
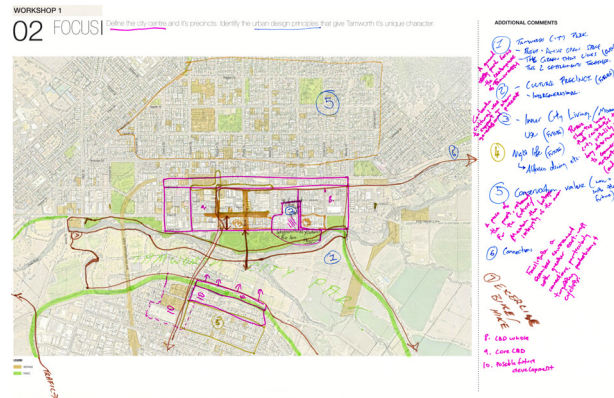
Exercise 2

Activity Description

Participants were asked to identify key strategic elements in Armidale. Propose how they could contribute to greater development opportunities in the centre and regionally.

Key Findings

- NERAM could better contribute to CBD vibrancy if moved into the CBD.
- The Creeklands could better contribute if better connected to the CBD.
- The Hospital precinct would benefit by creating new partnerships with UNE and TAFE digital
- UNE needs improved physical connection to CBD and to form working relationships with businesses and operations in the town centre.
- The Beardy Street Mall and connecting arcades and laneways need to function more as a social hub with offerings that encourage people to linger.



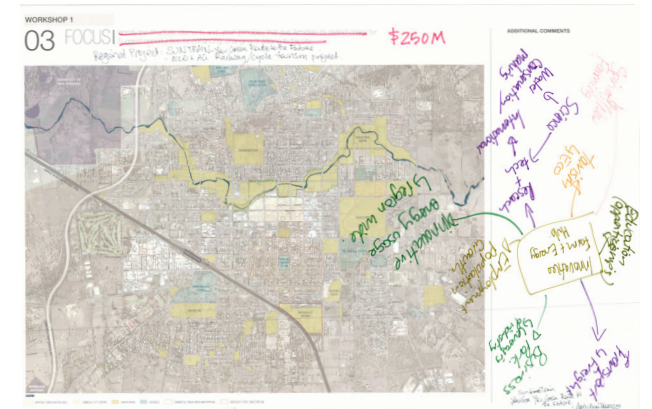
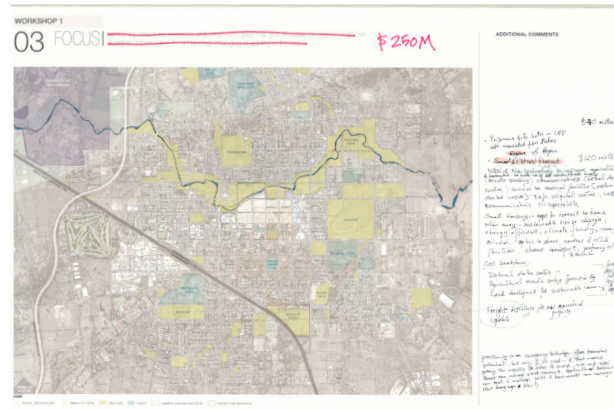
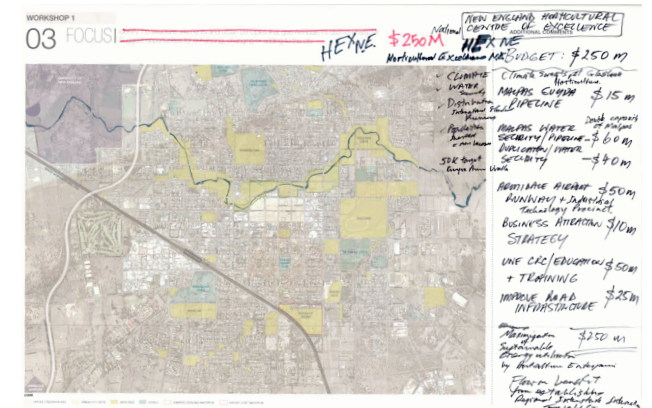
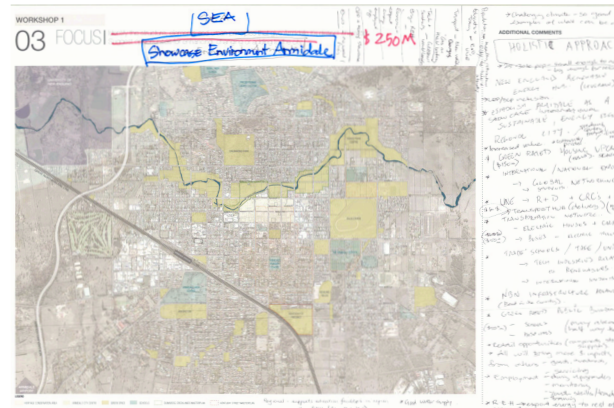
Exercise 3

Activity Description

Participants were asked to identification of key elements that give Armidale it's distinct character and suggesting opportunities for enhancing, changing, or adding to the city.

Key Findings

Exercise was adapted on the day did not proceed as a stand alone workshop item. The work sheet was instead used for the elevator pitch exercise.



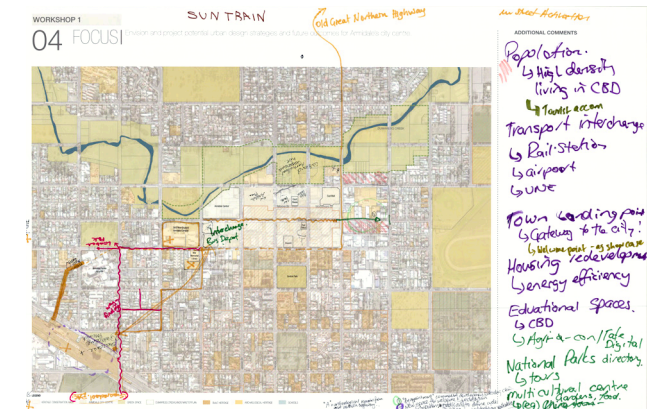
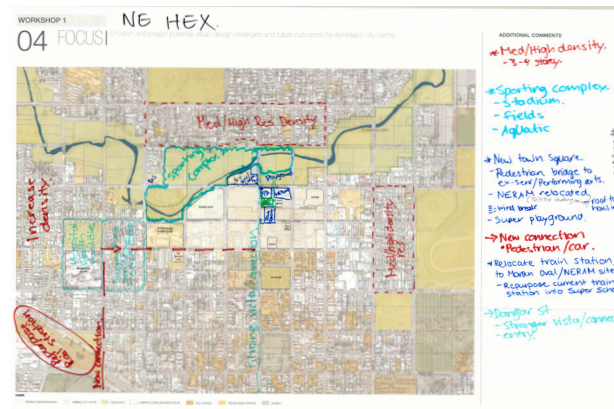
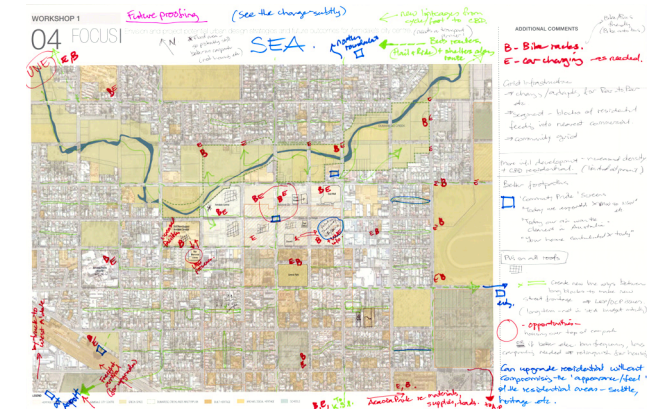
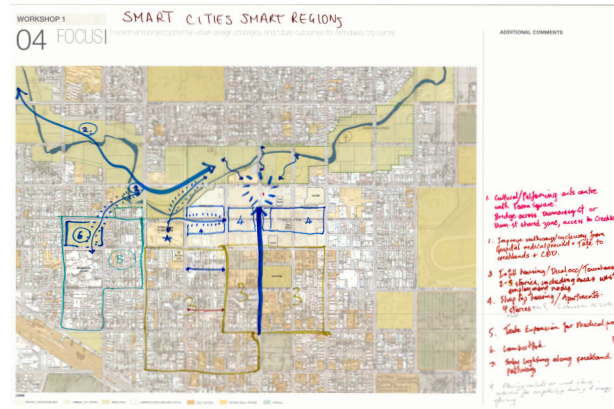
Exercise 4

Activity Description

Participants were asked to identify potential urban design strategies and future urban design outcomes for Armidale's future city centre.

Key Findings

- Enhance town centre arrival ("town landing point") and connectivity from Train station and Airport.
- Increase density including infill housing, mews housing, dual occupancy and town houses in residential areas surrounding the CBD. Form new laneways in long blocks to increase opportunity. 3-4 storey shop top housing and accommodation within the CBD.
- Strengthen Dangar Street as a significant connection between the CBD and future Kentucky Street Precinct, and relocate train station to nearby Moran Oval to better position as key corridor. Relocation will also open up the Future School to the hospital precinct and CBD.
- Improve active transport links between the Future school, Hospital precinct, TAFE, UNE and the CBD, and expand the hospital precinct towards the TAFE to better enable collaboration.



Interlude

Elevator pitch

Another conceptual break in the workshop proceedings involved a political challenge, in which the participants were tasked with developing a strategic proposal for Armidale to attract federal government funding. The proposal necessarily needed to be a multi-criteria proposition, addressing targets and objectives across the place vitality criteria. Importantly, the project needed to both establish strong economic and structural linkages to the region as well as become a catalyst for the redevelopment initiatives under consideration for the City Centre. Teams were given ten minutes to prepare the project and proposal, and a further 3 minutes to present the ideas to the group.

This exercise showed the workshop participants to be locally sensitive and strategically interconnected, with all the project proposals supportive of and dependent on the other initiatives also being realised. The aggregated collection of projects presents a heavily networked matrix of civic possibilities, affecting the entire Armidale City Centre and displaying the possibility of catalysing progress through the region.

These big picture visions re-present Armidale in two clear ways: as a progressive regional centre, in which development benefits the qualities of life, amenity and character of the city. The second depiction further reinforces the strategic intelligence of Armidale, which supports its potential to develop as the heart of the region.

Pitch 01:

S.E.A - Showcase Environment Armidale

A LGA-wide comprehensive strategy to make Armidale regional Australia's exemplar in energy use and conservation. The program would start with improving existing building stock to make the city the country's most energy-efficient, beginning with 6-star green rated civic buildings, creating a focus for civic pride and a useful marketing tool to attract additional investment and sector attention. A research and development hub in partnership with the university and TAFE focusing on renewable energy would bring in international students and employment opportunities, and lead to national and international collaborative possibilities. An electric transit network would link the city and its surroundings - eventually, Armidale would become New England's renewable energy centre, exporting energy to the rest of the state.

Pitch 02:

Smart Regional Cities Project

Development of a performance complex, located in the CBD, along with associated film, media and communications facilities. The centre would be dedicated to developing emerging communications technology, data transmission and remote imaging, focussed on three subjects: sustainable house design (energy efficiency, climate responsiveness, community engagement), local agriculture and horticulture (capitalising on water abundance and local industries) and regional medical services. Involving the TAFE's digital centre, UNE's communications research and an emerging IT hub, would create greater accessibility between Armidale and the region.

Pitch 03:

HEX-NE (New England Horticulture Centre of Excellence)

Establish permanent water security through the construction of the Malpas-Guyra Pipeline, attracting new business investment into the surrounding agricultural industry. Partner with industry, TAFE and the University's Cooperative Research Centres to develop technologies and training in world-leading glasshouse technology and fabrication to create a year-round growing cycle. This hub would be based in a new industrial-technology precinct located at the airport, where the new runway would allow export of local produce and manufactured goods internationally.

Pitch 04:

The Sun Train - "Your Green Route to the Future"

Develop the rail line as a transit conduit for ecological and agricultural tourism. The Armidale region would become a hub for innovation in agriculture, energy and water conservation, creating research, investment and education opportunities. These activities would be based in a central precinct located near the train station and the city centre, bringing employment and population growth to the CBD, while a multi-modal transport hub near the airport would connect with the wider region and country. Eco-tourism would be promoted, with the train bringing visitors from Sydney and Brisbane for local homestays and working holidays.

ARMIDALE

CITY ACTIVATION PLAN
Empty By Design

Workshop Introduction
and Activity 1

— COMMUNITY
FOCUS



Exercise 5

Activity Description

Participants were asked to identify and describe areas, activities and operations within the city centre that contribute (or could contribute better) to the vibrancy and activity of the city centre, then suggest strategies that should be put in place to enhance these elements, as well as increase urban and environmental performance and connectivity.

Key Findings

- More foot traffic through CBD brought through improved wayfinding and signage, street art and activation of store fronts. It was noted that a wind-break should be placed at the western end of the Mall to reduce wind chill through the area.
- Beardy Street Mall could be revitalised through a programme encouraging pop-up and start up occupation of vacant retail space, Outdoor café seating and alfresco dining opening onto the mall and the provision of performance spaces.
- Reduction of reliance on cars to reach the town centre. Public transport needs to be more frequent and more comfortable. Provide weather-appropriate shelters and introduce airport and train station shuttle. Provide bike paths and lanes accompanied by bike racks.
- Heritage buildings, laneways, arcades and carparks could perform more as shared-use space, allowing for events such as markets, outdoor cinemas, art exhibitions and festivals to occur.
- The Courthouse could be utilised as a performing arts and entertainment centre, housing NERAM and encouraging people into the CBD for evening performances, in turn, creating night time activation and a demand for night time hospitality offering on the Mall.
- Built form along Dumaesq Street could be enhanced to better address the Creeklands and provide shop top housing to increase pedestrian presence within the CBD and ensure passive surveillance over what is currently an undesirable area at night.
- Introduce planning controls for wooden fires and subsidies for non-polluting and energy efficient heating to improve air quality in Ammidale.
- Upgrade and expand sporting fields and facilities within the Creeklands and encourage UNE usage.

WORKSHOP 2
01 FOCUS

ACTIVE PUBLIC SPACES	CONNECTING LINKS	CULTURE	ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE	URBAN FORM & FABRIC	ECONOMICS & ACTIVITIES
Need more foot traffic throughout the city	Highly south side emphasis on foot traffic, but not great along the Mall	Extending the community about CBD is more than just the mall	Unpleasant winter conditions	CBD doesn't read network to adequately provide activity from the Mall	Open Activity Area to be created - retail shops on long side of Mall
Disconnected from business zones (through carparks)	On the road & bus, a corner lane / stall pedestrian link	Country culture to park directly at business of walk	Amidale weather in winter makes foot traffic difficult	Poor/unattractive walkway (high) sidewalks	Empty shops - commercial rents - outside property investors

WORKSHOP 2
01 FOCUS

ACTIVE PUBLIC SPACES	CONNECTING LINKS	CULTURE	ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE	URBAN FORM & FABRIC	ECONOMICS & ACTIVITIES
Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD
Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD	Open spaces and activity in the CBD

WORKSHOP 2
01 FOCUS

ACTIVE PUBLIC SPACES	CONNECTING LINKS	CULTURE	ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE	URBAN FORM & FABRIC	ECONOMICS & ACTIVITIES
Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town
Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town

WORKSHOP 2
01 FOCUS

ACTIVE PUBLIC SPACES	CONNECTING LINKS	CULTURE	ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE	URBAN FORM & FABRIC	ECONOMICS & ACTIVITIES
Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town
Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town	Central Park active / passive road to town

Place Manager/Co-ordinator for CBD

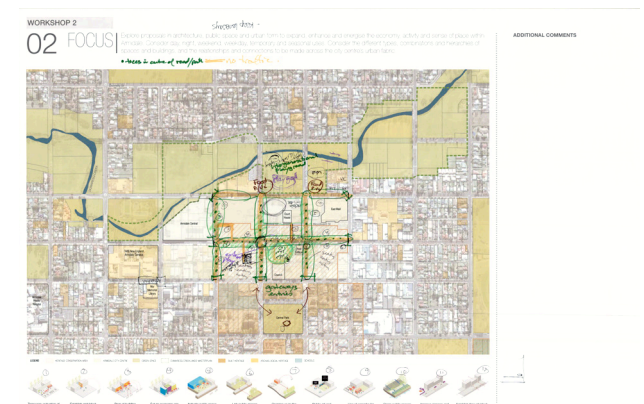
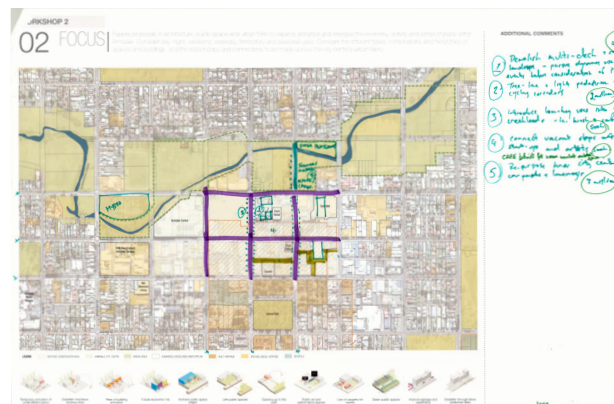
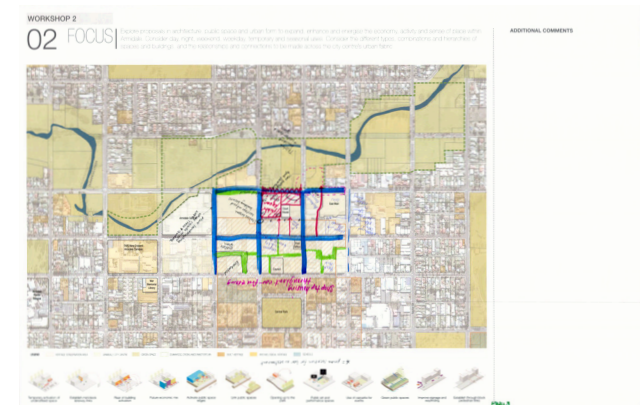
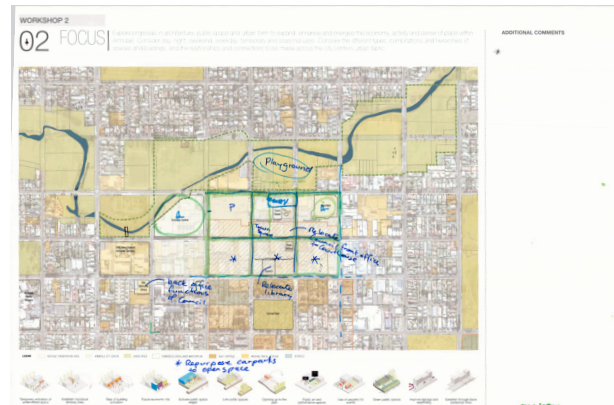
Exercise 6

Activity Description

Participants were asked to explore proposals in architecture, public space and urban form to expand, enhance and energise the economy, activity and sense of place within Armidale. They were encouraged to consider day, night, weekend, temporary and seasonal uses, along with different combinations and hierarchies of spaces and buildings, and the relationships and connections to be made across the city centre's urban fabric.

Key Findings

- Repurpose inner city carparks and laneways and demolish multi-deck carpark at Dangar/Dumaresq Street to form town square linking Beardy Street to the Creeklands.
- Create green North-South links through the CBD to better connect the Creeklands to the Centre. Link key corridors to a cycle network, clearly defined by lighting, wayfinding and corridor planting. Provide bike rack facilities.
- Relocate Library to the CBD
- Encourage shop top housing throughout the CBD and mews housing in surrounding residential areas to increase pedestrian activity and demand for retail and hospitality offering.
- More foot traffic through CBD brought through improved wayfinding and signage, street art and activation of store fronts. It was noted that a wind-break should be placed at the western end of the Mall to reduce wind chill through the area.
- Heritage buildings, laneways, arcades and carparks could perform more as shared-use space, allowing for events such as markets, outdoor cinemas, art exhibitions and festivals to occur.



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