



CESSNOCK

CBD MASTERPLAN

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Figure 1. Artist's impression of the potential future look & feel of Vincent Street



Figure 2. Artist's impression of the potential future look & feel of the TAFE parklands

A 20-YEAR TIME HORIZON

The Cessnock CBD Masterplan is a long-term strategy based on a collaborative process between Council, a multi-disciplinary consultant team and the Cessnock community. Its aim is to help position the CBD as a place that is safe, connected and inclusive, celebrates its history, has a strong community heart and promotes a healthy lifestyle.

The Masterplan process discovered that the centre's spatial issues predominantly relate to infrastructure (roads and drainage), which hinders the renewal potential of the western CBD in particular. At a social level, the key is to create better connections and more public spaces for both locals and visitors in the centre of town.

REALISTIC AND ASPIRATIONAL

There are 65 potential initiatives outlined within this Masterplan. About half of these are associated to framework layers, the other half to key projects. To instigate positive change for the Cessnock CBD and attract more visitors, residents and investment, a balance of aspiration and realism is required. The masterplan provides a tool to deliver on this balance.

To aid the implementation, there is a need to review and/or prepare further planning documents such as design guidelines, development strategies, traffic studies and a public domain section 94 contributions plan. However, there are plans in place that allow the implementation to commence as soon as funding is available.



The revitalisation of the Cessnock CBD will occur through physical changes as well as activities, events and governance initiatives, and from bold changes to smaller interventions.

This Masterplan proposes a framework which identifies where changes should occur in order to maximise their positive impact. The fundamental and simple idea behind this is that a place that increases its desirability attracts people and investment.



01 - INTRODUCTION

- Background
- Context & Study Area
- Masterplan Process
- Document Structure





Cessnock CBD plays an important role as the focus of civic, health, education, cultural life and local identity for many people in the Hunter region.

This Masterplan strategy outlines the path towards a revitalised CBD that offers improved liveability, aesthetics and increased opportunities for investment.

BACKGROUND

Cessnock City Council recognised the importance of a holistic strategy that would tie together various existing ideas, visions and plans for the CBD into one masterplan. In 2012, Council engaged Arup consultants to help deliver a draft Masterplan that would address a wide variety of issues as well as identify the steps needed to move towards a revitalised CBD, one which offers improved liveability, aesthetics and opportunities for investment.

The revitalisation of the Cessnock CBD will occur through physical changes (hard infrastructure) as well as activities, events and governance initiatives (soft infrastructure), and from bold changes to smaller interventions. This Masterplan proposes a framework which identifies where changes should occur in order to maximise their positive impact. The fundamental and simple idea behind this is that a place that increases its desirability attracts people and investment.

The Cessnock CBD Masterplan is based on community consultation, a site and background analysis, reviews of existing studies and Council strategies and national design guidance. The draft Masterplan will be exhibited for public consultation and comment before being finalised and adopted by Council.

A GUIDING VISION

With significant population growth anticipated in the region, Cessnock has the opportunity to rebrand itself from a gateway to a destination. The anticipated opening of the Hunter Expressway provides a further reason to rethink the 'look and feel' of the CBD.

The vision contained in the LGA-wide Cessnock 2020 Community Plan has formed the base for this strategic CBD Masterplan. 'Attractive, thriving, welcoming' is an effective vision statement (or branding) that can be applied to many initiatives by Council and the community.

The masterplan identifies various possibilities of how different elements of Cessnock can be designed to fit better together. Opportunities considered include the upgrade and/or potential relocation of the Council Administration building and the optimal location of community parklands for the CBD.

It is important that the Cessnock CBD continues to be a vibrant, economically sustainable commercial hub and that the centre unearths its identity in anticipation of the changes that are likely to occur due to predicted urban growth and development.

AIMS (PROJECT SCOPE)

Improve the liveability of the CBD, including safety, convenience, comfort and aesthetics.
Increase opportunities for social interaction and provide an employment focus for the community.
Attract new business, investment and employment opportunities and contribute to the economic competitiveness of the CBD which will provide wider community benefit.
Promote a wide diversity of uses supported by facilities and make these more accessible to all.
Relate well to surrounding development, land uses and landscapes.
Promote reduced reliance on transportation by improving links between activity nodes.
Improve the efficiency of infrastructure provision and transportation.



OBJECTIVES

To undertake a community engagement process that ensures that all stakeholders are provided with an opportunity to actively participate; resulting in a Masterplan that is truly representative of the whole of community interests and goals.
To provide a high quality, inclusive and realistic Masterplan for the revitalisation of the Cessnock CBD.
To ensure the economic sustainability and viability of the Cessnock CBD.
To provide a clear implementation plan to effect the Masterplan.



Located 120km north of Sydney and 40km west of Newcastle, Cessnock features a historic core and easy access to the Hunter Valley's growing tourism.

The CBD study area includes the main street, Vincent Street, and a number of significant buildings that date back to the early 1900s when Cessnock was the centre of the mining boom in the region.

CONTEXT



Figure 4. Regional context diagram

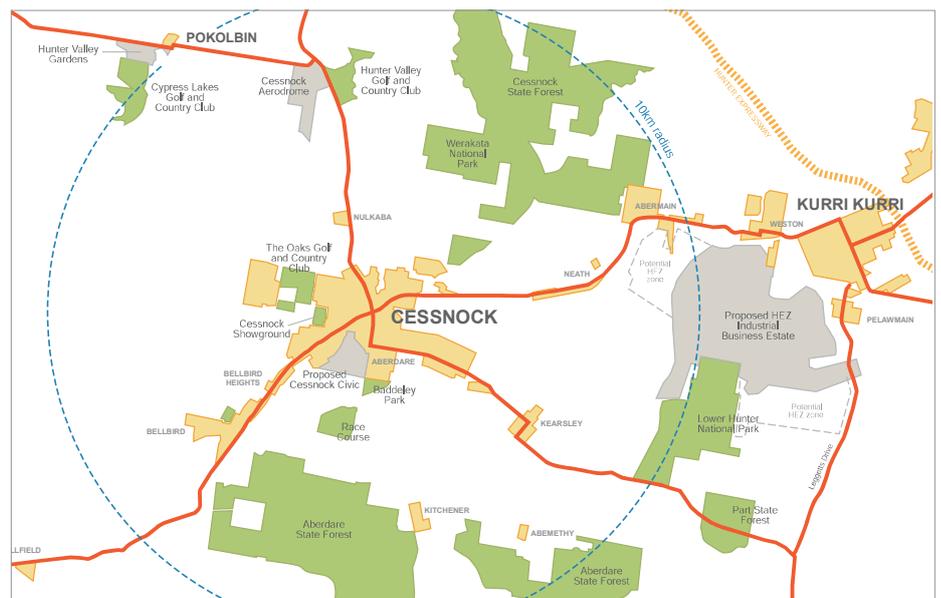


Figure 5. Local context diagram

The Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA) is 120 kilometres north of Sydney and 40 kilometres west of Newcastle. Almost 2,000 square kilometres in size, the area is home to approximately 52,000 people and bounded by Maitland in the north, Newcastle and Lake Macquarie in the east, Wyong Shire, Gosford and Hawkesbury LGAs to the south and the Singleton Council area to the west.

The Cessnock region extends south to the Hawkesbury and Hunter Rivers and west to include the Watagan State Forest and the Brokenback Range. The region around Cessnock is expecting expanding growth and a shift from primary and secondary industries (such as mining and rural industries) to an increased range of service industries.

THE STUDY AREA

The study area of the Cessnock CBD Masterplan comprises approximately 70 hectares, incorporating the town centre and adjoining areas. The boundary extends one block north of Wollombi Road to the north, Railway Street to the south, Miller Street to the west and mid-block between Cumberland Street and King Street to the east.

The 'Cessnock Civic' area to the south of the CBD is approximately 40 hectares in size and will be developed into a business park mainly for bulky goods. In the core of the study area is Vincent Street, Cessnock's historic main street, which features a number of significant historic buildings that date back to the early 1900s when Cessnock

was the centre of the mining boom in the Hunter region. The CBD comprises a range of retail, civic, community and entertainment facilities including the TAFE, Cessnock City Library, the Council Administration building, the Art Gallery and the Cessnock Community Performing Arts Centre (CCPAC).



Figure 6. Aerial photograph showing the study area of the Cessnock CBD Masterplan



Figure 7. Poster advertising the upcoming consultation phases

MASTERPLAN PROCESS

A key part of the development of the draft Masterplan for the Cessnock CBD was the engagement strategy which included two main phases.

Stage one introduced the project to the community, raised awareness and encouraged participation to ensure valuable input could be captured and fed into the masterplanning process.

Stage two ensured early feedback from community members on draft strategies that emerged. Various activities during both phases involved stakeholders and the broader community in planning for the future of their CBD.

ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

The consultation program aimed to build upon engagement undertaken for previous planning projects (including the Cessnock 2020 Community Plan).

A key focus was to provide information in suitable formats for non-technical experts to use in their decision making process, crucial for the successful development of any masterplan.

A number of individuals, groups and organisations were identified and grouped into decision makers, people with an interest in the CBD, people who work/live/use the area daily and people who are in town as required.



Figure 8. Masterplan Program

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

A variety of engagement activities ensured that a broad range of stakeholders and the wider community were provided with the opportunity to input into the planning process. In addition to letters, postcards, advertisements and updates on Council's website, these included:

Stakeholder Workshops

Two half-day stakeholder workshops were held at the Cessnock Community Performing Arts Centre. The 40+ participants included community representatives and stakeholders such as the TAFE, NSW Police, Councillors, Council staff and interested landowners. The workshops were key to establishing priorities and aspirations for the Cessnock CBD.

Community Information Sessions

Overall, two half-day community information sessions welcomed 80+ community members who talked to the project team about the Masterplan. A1-sized information boards explained findings of the site analysis, the overall planning process and emerging strategies and showed how potential changes in the CBD could look using photorealistic visualisations.

Collaborative Mapping Website

The online collaborative mapping tool was launched in April 2012 as part of the first stage of engagement and re-opened for comment again during the second stage. Overall 250 comments were submitted via this public online tool. The local knowledge captured provided great insight into the challenges and opportunities Cessnock CBD faces and shaped many of the proposed initiatives in the Masterplan.

Further detail can be found in the Engagement & Consultation section of the Background report.



Photo 1. Impressions of the engagement phase during the development of the draft masterplan (Index: 01 and 03 first stakeholder workshop; 02, 07 and 08 second stakeholder workshop, 04 and 05 community information sessions, 06 online interface of phase 2 collaborative map website)

The Cessnock CBD Masterplan is based on site studies and analysis, review of background information and relevant studies provided by Council and an extensive consultation process with key stakeholders, Council staff and the community.

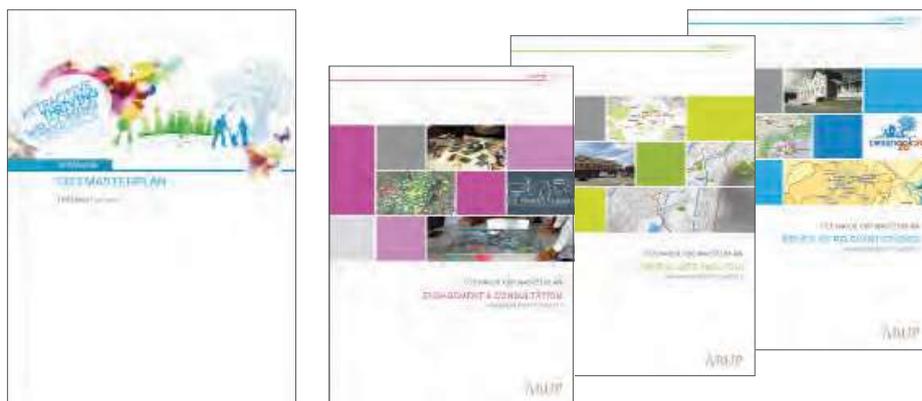


Figure 9. Cover of the Masterplan document and the suite of background studies

BACKGROUND REPORT

Consultation Report

The consultation report outlines the consultation and engagement strategy that identified a framework and goals for community consultation. The report also includes a summary of each of the workshops facilitated by Arup during the preparation of the draft Masterplan, the open community information sessions and the outcomes of the online collaborative mapping tool.

Spatial Site Analysis

The spatial site analysis report identifies the physical context of the study area and its key characteristics. It includes a brief overview of the settlement history of Cessnock, its landform characteristics, access and movement, land ownership and zoning, built form, heritage and photographic observations.

Relevant Studies Review

This report comprises a review of 17 existing studies that were seen of high relevance to the CBD Masterplan. Each review provides a brief summary on 1-2 pages and a schedule which outlines key matters and considerations. The review helped to gain insights into previous and current aspirations, opportunities, constraints, successes and challenges of the Cessnock CBD.

MASTERPLAN DOCUMENT

Chapter structure

The Masterplan document provides a framework that links the different areas of the CBD together, identifies vision objectives and details the key initiatives and strategies to enable implementation.

The introduction provides a background as to why the Masterplan was prepared, introduces the study area and describes the masterplan process. The second chapter outlines the key aspirations that transpired during the consultation and analysis phase. Nine vision objectives link the CBD into the overarching vision from the Cessnock 2020 Community Plan: Attractive, thriving, welcoming.

The framework chapter identifies four interrelated masterplan 'layers': Access and Movement, Public Domain, Urban Form and Aesthetics, and Economic Opportunities. Each layer outlines initiatives and actions, from physical changes to activities, events and/or policy making.

Key projects are investigated further in chapter four, including a suggested upgrade of the 'walls' of Vincent Street, a central open space in the CBD and potential improvements to the drainage channels.

RELEVANT STUDIES

The following provides an overview of some of the documents reviewed by Arup during the development of this CBD Masterplan. A more detailed review can be found in the CBD Masterplan Background report.

Cessnock 2020 Community Plan

The Cessnock 2020 Community Strategic Plan is a 10-year plan for the sustainable development of the Cessnock local government area (LGA). A community vision was developed and its shorter tagline: “Cessnock - Attractive, Thriving, Welcoming” has been fundamental for the development of this CBD Masterplan and its overarching vision objectives. (Author: CCC, 2010)

CBD Business and Marketing Plan

The Cessnock CBD Business and Marketing Plan identifies a series of priorities to focus on in order to improve the CBD. The key themes are: Tourism, Business Development, Infrastructure and Marketing. (Author: Cessnock Chamber of Commerce and CCC, 2009)

CBD Parking and Traffic Study

The CBD Parking and Traffic study investigated existing parking conditions, future parking requirements, pedestrian requirements and existing and future traffic conditions. It proposes a 10 year parking and traffic strategy for the CBD. (Genaoui Consulting for CCC, 2006)

City Wide Settlement Strategy

The City Wide Settlement Strategy sets out the strategic directions that informed the preparation of the current LEP. The Strategy also outlines the changing demographics within the LGA, additional dwellings required by 2031, and the potential for redevelopment of land. (Author: CCC, 2010).

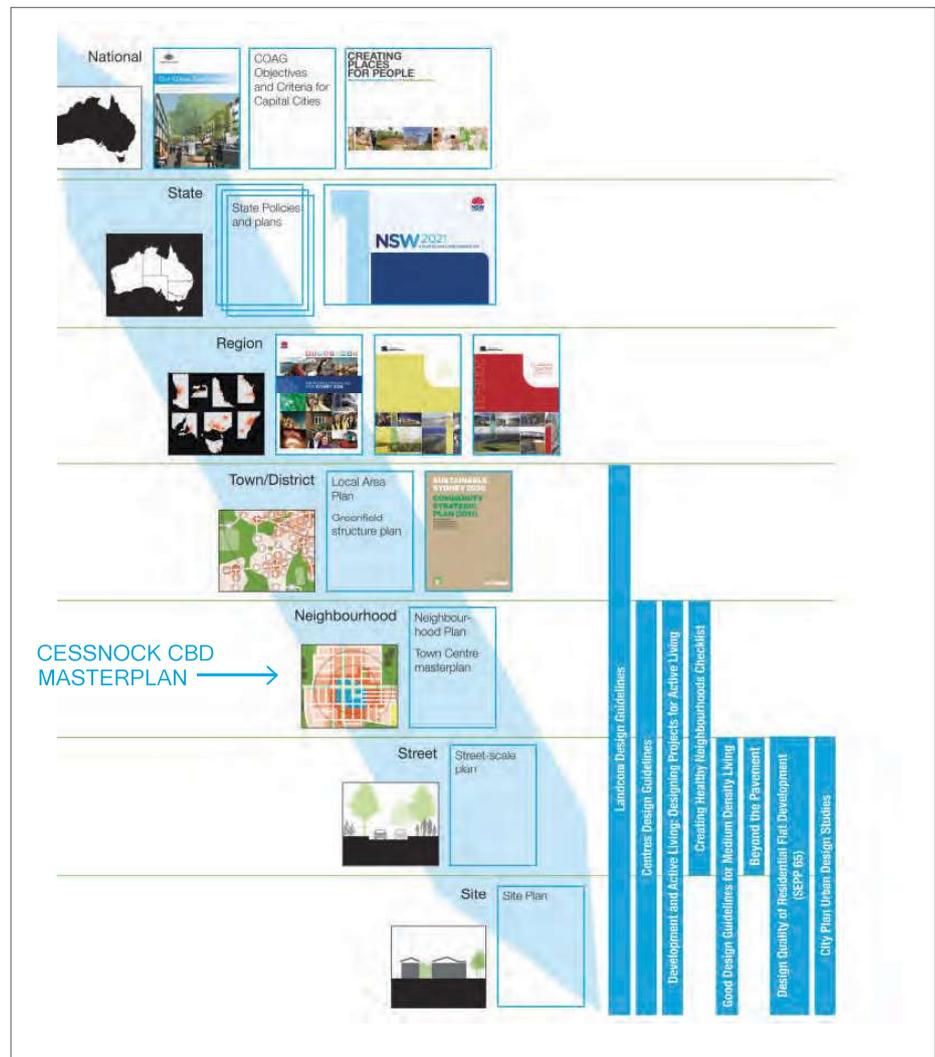


Figure 10. Diagram showing different scales of planning and corresponding urban design documents. (Source: National Urban design Protocol (see below); concept adopted from Next Generation Planning, Council of Mayors (SEQ), 2011)

Cessnock Local Environmental Plan

For the core of the CBD, a height limit of 12 metres and a maximum floor space ratio (FSR) of 1.5 to 1 applies. The two predominant land use zones in the CBD are Zone B3: Commercial Core and Zone B4: Mixed Use. The Commercial Core is intended to encourage employment in accessible locations while the mixed use zone applies to the outer area of the CBD and encourages a wide range of land uses including commercial, residential, tourist and visitor and community uses. (Author: CCC, 2010; adopted 2011).

National Urban Design Protocol

The urban design protocol for Australian Cities ‘Creating Places for People’ is a collective commitment to best practice urban design by a wide range of government, community and industry bodies. It outlines that quality urban design helps local businesses to thrive; attracts people to visit, live and work in a place; encourages biodiversity; and provides opportunities for healthy lifestyles and community interaction. (Author: Australian Department of Infrastructure and Transport, Major Cities Unit, 2011).



This chapter outlines the key objectives and aspirations that transpired during the analysis phase and the parallel consultation process.

Vision objectives link the CBD into the overarching vision of the Cessnock 2020 Community Plan:

“Attractive, thriving, welcoming.”

02 - OBJECTIVES

Vision Objectives: Attractive - Thriving - Welcoming
Community Aspirations





“Cessnock will be a cohesive and welcoming community living in an attractive and sustainable rural environment with a diversity of business and employment opportunities supported by accessible infrastructure and services which effectively meet community need.”

Source: Cessnock City Community Plan 2020, Cessnock LGA

ATTRACTIVE

A place that celebrates its history

Cessnock demonstrates its connections to the past through conserving and highlighting items of heritage significance. Vincent Street is strengthened as the historic spine through the CBD. Interpretive signage educates people about the town’s history and enhances Cessnock’s existing heritage walk.

A safe environment

The Cessnock CBD feels safe, particularly after hours, thanks to good lighting and a night-time economy that attracts a range of people and demographics, evening courses at TAFE, late opening hours for the library, events at CCPAC and the establishment of more restaurants, small bars and al-fresco dining.

A healthy place to live and work

Active transport modes, such as walking and cycling are encouraged and communities linked via a network of footpaths and bike tracks, with increased safety, amenity and activity. The Hunter Expressway should reduce the number of trucks along Vincent Street, which would greatly improve pedestrian amenity.



THRIVING

An inclusive CBD for everyone

The CBD provides for a range of business, education, entertainment and employment opportunities to meet the needs of all ages including families, young adults and the elderly. This supports a cohesive community and a place that is resilient, has a thriving economy and is able to adapt to change.

A vibrant main street

Vincent Street is reinvigorated as the “Heart of Cessnock” and is a lively place supporting a range of cultural, entertainment, retail, business, residential and service options. The street promotes its strong regional association with food and wine, and its local significance for community and heritage.

A CBD built on its strengths

Cessnock reinforces its importance as a regional centre, building upon its wide range of community, civic, retail and entertainment services. The public library, Council chambers, TAFE, regional art gallery, CCPAC, cinema, supermarkets, pubs and clubs all add to the vital diversity of the CBD.



WELCOMING

A strong community heart

The strong sense of community is supported by improvements along key pedestrian connections and the establishment of central parklands, providing places for social engagement and recreation. Events, concerts and gatherings encourage the community to get involved, participate and celebrate diversity.

A connected and accessible place

The CBD is connected, both physically and socially, through a range of reliable transport options, fast internet access and active transport facilities. Walking and cycling routes, improved public transport and efficient vehicular access offer convenient links to the surrounds and other centres.

A friendly destination

Cessnock has transformed into a desirable destination within the Hunter region. The CBD has acquired an identifiable ‘historic town’ image and offers a whole range of services and attractions. Well-designed signage welcomes visitors to the CBD and helps find parking areas and key facilities.



COMMUNITY ASPIRATIONS

The consultation process during the development of the CBD Masterplan captured valuable insights into the aspirations and ideas shared by the Cessnock community.



Provide food and wine markets on weekends

Remove trucks from main street

Increase operation hours

Overhaul of carparks and open drains



Convert drains into "linear parks"



Beautify canal edges

Specific ideas that are most supported include the establishment of a historical museum in Cessnock, food and wine markets on weekends, ‘trendy’ wine bars and coffee shops with outdoor tables and chairs and increased tree planting and landscape features along Vincent Street.

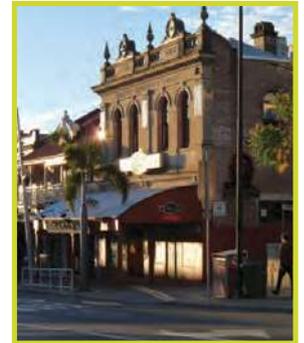
Improving the signage to local features, landmarks and carparking is also seen as crucial for the successful future of Cessnock, in particular to attract more visitors into town. Another shared aspiration is highlighting Cessnock’s heritage and its historic buildings.

The need for improved pedestrian connectivity via the laneways off Vincent Street and a general overhaul of carpark areas is a common view shared by many community members. There is also a strong feeling that it is time to tackle the drainage channels by establishing landscaped edges and using their alignment for walking and cycling.

These themes are addressed in the vision objectives and many of the ideas brought forward during the consultation process are captured in the initiatives of the masterplan framework layers and key projects.



Highlight building facades



Renovate shops in line with traditional facades



Celebration of iconic history and emphasis on heritage



Improve signage to local features and landmarks

More activity in Vincent Street



Mixed use buildings along main street



Better signage for visitors



Improve laneways that connect car parks



Establish a Cessnock historical museum



Trendy wine bars and coffee shops



Improve cafe & arts culture



Improve connectivity to reduce car use



Adventure playground for kids



More green, trees and landscape features



Easy and equitable access



This chapter identifies four layered strategies - or themes. Each theme is interrelated and together, they form a robust framework that seeks to set a clear direction while allowing enough flexibility to adapt to change over time.

Initiatives for each theme range from physical changes to activities, events and/or policy making.

03 - FRAMEWORK

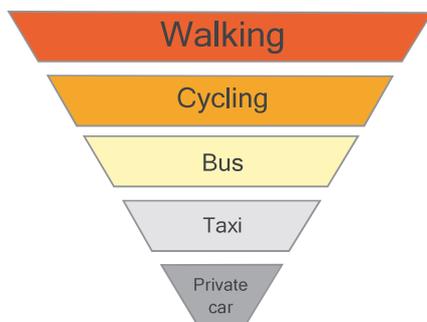
- Access and Movement
- Public Domain
- Urban Form and Aesthetics
- Economic Opportunities



ACCESS AND MOVEMENT



The Access and Movement layer is based on a hierarchy of travel modes where priority is given to active forms of transport: walking and cycling.



The major focus of this masterplan layer lies on improving the CBD's pedestrian environment and connectivity. Proposed initiatives include an urgently needed upgrade of the laneways off Vincent Street, improvements to the walking path to Bridges Hill Park and a redesign of intersections where pedestrian numbers are high.

The issue of pedestrian-vehicle conflict points is most evident at the intersection of Cooper and Charlton Streets. It is proposed that the existing roundabout will be replaced by a safer, more pedestrian-friendly intersection treatment, taking on board suggestions of creating a slow-speed shared zone for parts of Charlton Street.

Increased pedestrian activity means more trade, better safety and health, more social contacts and exchange and a higher community spirit. Visitors and locals should be invited to walk, explore the area and enjoy what Cessnock has to offer at a slow pace, rather than driving through. For this to happen, the CBD has to become an attractive, accessible and safe place for pedestrians to move around.

The hierarchy diagram shows that the lowest priority is given to private vehicles and parking, however, that does not mean it will be made unattractive for people to drive or park in the CBD. The current provision of car parking is considered adequate and the CBD's road structure on the whole generally copes well with traffic numbers. However, some congestion does occur during events which needs to be managed. The location and number of accessible parking spaces should be reviewed and there is an opportunity to consolidate car parking by reorganising existing or developing multi-level car parks in strategic locations.

Another major issue is the dis-connect- edness of the access network within the western CBD. Roads end in cul-de-sacs or carparks, predominantly due to drainage channels that meander through the area. The adjacent diagram shows three proposed new links that would mend the urban structure and create a more permeable, robust network. One of these proposed new links is Charlton Street between Hall Street and Aberdare Road which is currently interrupted by an open drainage channel.

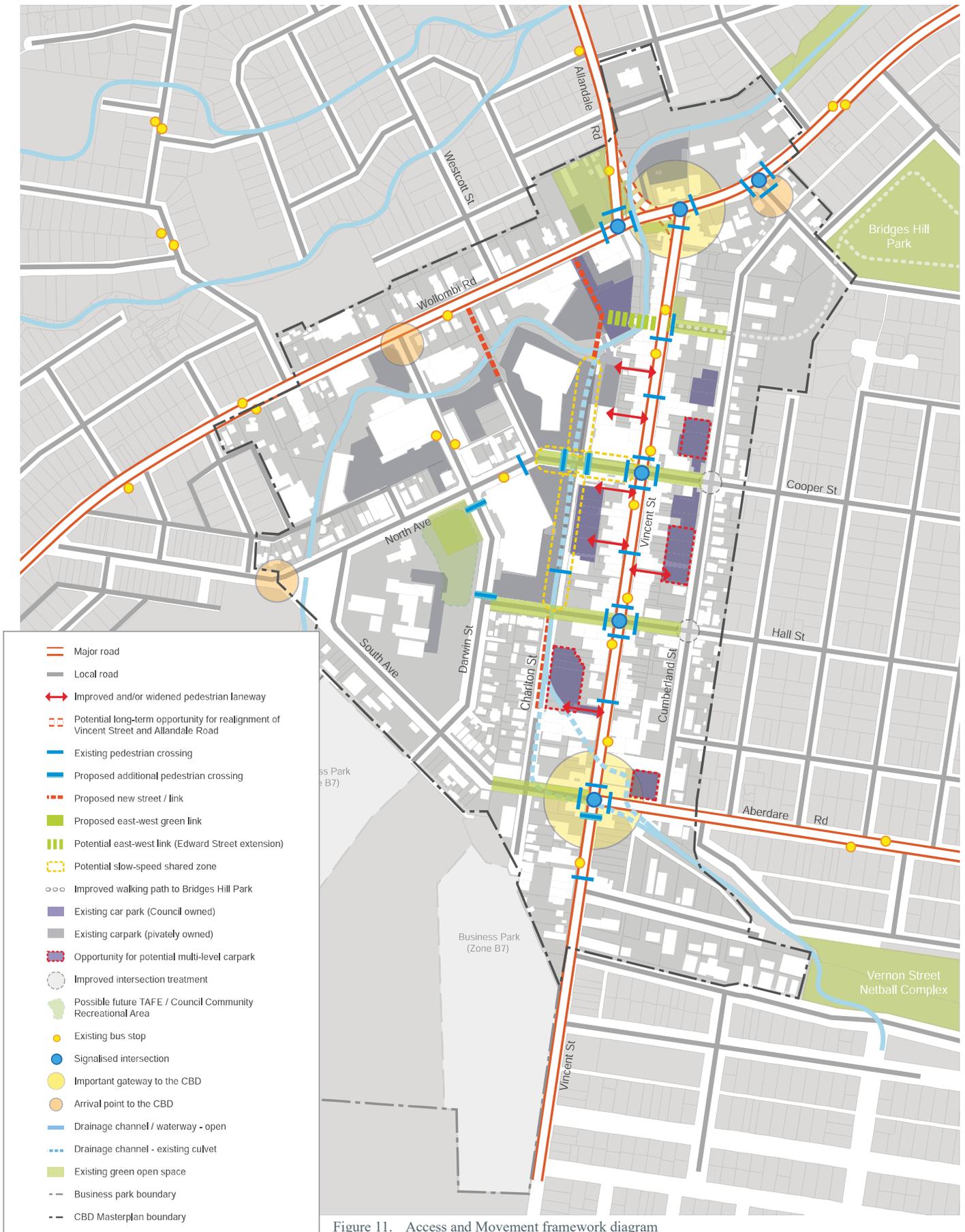


Figure 11. Access and Movement framework diagram



Focusing on pedestrians

Facilitating the movement of pedestrians is crucial to the long term success of towns and cities. In Cessnock, the car is currently the primary mode of transport and often takes priority where vehicles and pedestrians share the space.

By gradually shifting the priority away from vehicular transport to active modes, Cessnock's streetscapes will become an environment for people, which will improve the liveability and long-term sustainability of the CBD.

Encouraging cycling

Cycling promotes a healthy and active community, reduces carparking requirements and provides increased mobility and independence for those without a car.

Cycling levels in Cessnock are currently low due to a number of factors including a lack of safe cycling infrastructure. Council's 1995 Bicycle Plan is currently being revised and will address how to develop a connected bicycle path network to encourage cycling within the community.

Healing the urban structure

Successful centres rely on a robust access network that offers maximum permeability and can facilitate efficient movement of all transport modes. While the area to the east of Vincent Street offers a regular and highly permeable grid structure, connectivity within the western area of the CBD is more difficult due to the drainage channels and the odd angle dictated by Wollombi Road to the north.

As a consequence, land parcels throughout this area are often triangular in shape, resulting in many 'forgotten left-over spaces' (see public domain layer) and an inefficient use of developable and carpark land (see economic opportunities layer). Creating and/or extending public links between Cooper Street/North Avenue and Wollombi Road will have to overcome the challenge of crossing the channels which may have impacts on flooding. Despite this, however, creating these links is seen as crucial to increase the appeal, safety and viability of this important area of the CBD.

Improving public transport

Public transport options in Cessnock are limited to a few public bus routes, school buses and privately operated coach services. Studies suggest that only 4% of people travelling to the CBD use public transport. Increasing the frequency of existing services would make it more convenient to catch a bus and encourage higher patronage.

For access to trains, people have to take a bus to either Morisset or Maitland station since the railway station at the southern end of the CBD ceased operation in the 1970s. The Cessnock 2020 Community Plan suggests that Council works together with State and Federal Government to investigate the potential of re-instating train services to and from Cessnock.

ALTERNATIVE CAR PARKING

Geelong, Victoria

The City of Geelong is considering to waive formal carparking requirements where a developer is seeking to convert an existing Central Geelong property into a residential apartment.

The aim of the waiver is to encourage the reuse of Central Geelong properties, and in particular the development of residential conversions in locations where there is physically no space to provide the required off street parking.



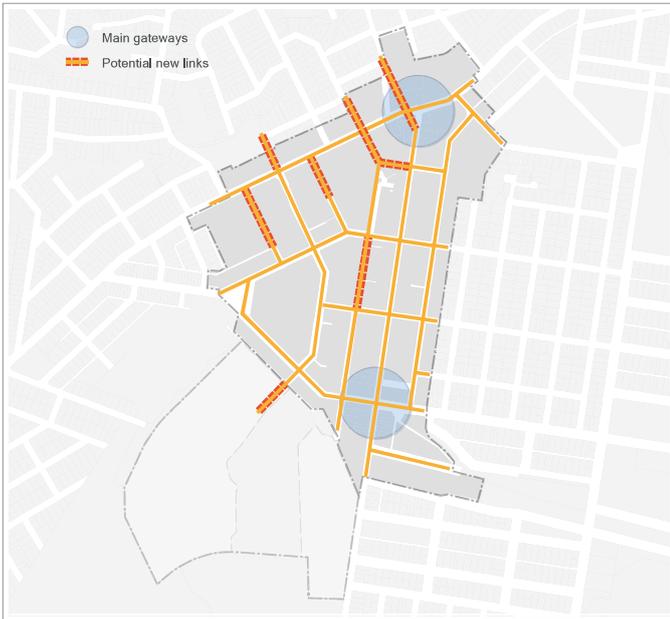


Figure 12. New links would create a more permeable access network. There may also be potential to realign Vincent St and Allandale Rd in the long-term.



Figure 13. Upgraded laneways, cycle paths and pedestrian-priority areas would encourage use of active transport modes (walking and cycling).

	PROPOSED INITIATIVES
AM1	Create low speed environments in the CBD and identify streets which have the potential to become 40 km/h high pedestrian activity zones and/or shared zones, e.g. Cooper Street and parts of Charlton Street.
AM2	Create a robust access network throughout the western CBD area, e.g. connecting Charlton Street between Hall Street and Aberdare Road, formalising the link to Wollombi Road through the Council-owned carpark and creating new links across the drainage channels.
AM3	Investigate and liaise with RMS regarding the potential to realign Vincent Street and Allandale Road.
AM4	Increase the number of safe pedestrian crossing points on Council roads throughout the CBD. Liaise with RMS to identify opportunities for additional crossing points along Wollombi Road.
AM5	Investigate existing intersection treatments and roundabouts, which are often hazardous for pedestrians, e.g. at Charlton/Cooper Streets and along Cumberland Street. (Links to KP2.1)
AM6	Identify locations with poor footpath pavement and upgrade pavement quality to improve access for less mobile people, e.g. laneways off Vincent Street and southern side of Cooper Street between Vincent and Cumberland Streets.
AM7	Improve and maintain the walking path to Bridges Hill Park.
AM8	Improve public transport options, e.g. increase frequency of existing bus services and work with state/federal government to investigate potential of train services (see Cessnock 2020 Community Plan).
AM9	Review / update the 1995 Bicycle Plan to coordinate investment in a network of safe and coherent bicycle routes (both on- and off-road), link into regional (tourist) bike routes.
AM10	Provide basic secure bicycle lock-up rings across the CBD and establish highly visible bike parking spots at key locations, e.g. the library, the Art Gallery and major retailers.
AM11	Consolidate carparking to free up valuable development land and to increase the attractiveness of the CBD, e.g. through provision of carparking on regular shaped land parcels or the establishment of multi-level carparks.
AM12	Investigate optimal location and number of accessible car parking spaces in the CBD.

PUBLIC DOMAIN



The public domain includes the streets and lanes, the squares and the parks - and is the 'glue' that binds cities and towns together.

The Cessnock LGA offers an impressive number of high-quality green open spaces and recreation areas. However, within the CBD area, open space is rare and in urgent need of improvement and activation.

A typical rule of thumb is that people attract more people. A public domain that provides places where children can play, friends can meet for a coffee and workers can have lunch will signal that Cessnock is lively, buzzing, successful - in short: a place desirable to be at.

The upgrade of Vincent Street in 2004, in particular the high-quality paving and numerous pedestrian crossings, has greatly improved its accessibility.

With the opening of the Hunter Expressway, it is likely that the number of heavy trucks driving through town will be reduced which would further increase the main street's amenity. It is proposed that outdoor cafes and dining will be encouraged and opportunities for additional trees and landscape features be maximised. There is also an opportunity to develop a 'busker policy' to attract street performers.

While Vincent Street is the 'address' of the CBD, Cessnock has much more to offer which is often not evident to the visitor. Major retail facilities, clubs, the TAFE and convenient ample carparking are 'hidden' to the east and west of the main street. A comprehensive signage strategy is seen as essential to ensure the diversity of facilities is clear and people discover that there is more to Cessnock than one main street.

ATTRACTION: FESTIVALS

Castlemaine, Victoria

Castlemaine is home to the biennial State Festival, a ten day multi-arts celebration that draws inspiration from the culture of the central Victorian goldfields region and attracts crowds of up to 50,000 and has helped establish the town as a popular tourist destination in the wider region.



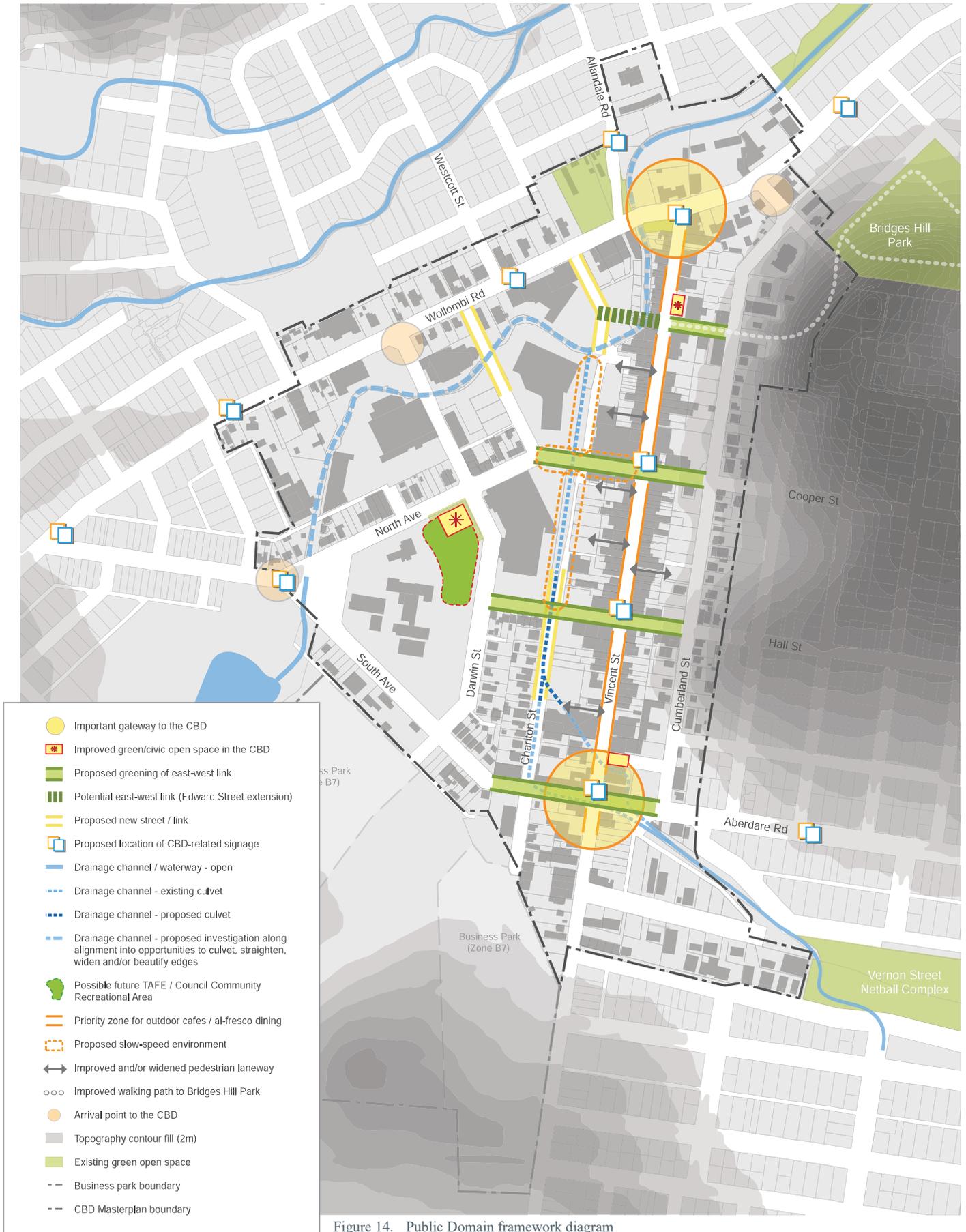


Figure 14. Public Domain framework diagram

Investing in (public) art

Public art plays an important role in establishing and reinforcing a centre's local character and sense of place. With a few exceptions, public art in Cessnock is comparably rare, however, there is a strong recognition of the importance of Arts, evident in facilities such as Cessnock's Regional Art Gallery and Performing Arts Centre. A public art strategy would increase community pride, recognise local history and provide an opportunity for the local artist community to engage. This strategy would also link into the idea of creating an arts precinct as previously outlined in various Council documents.



ATTRACTION: ART

Bendigo, Victoria

A strong artistic community in this regional centre has led to proposals for the establishment of additional community art spaces in the city and there are a number of small artist studios and galleries. The city is also home to one of the oldest and largest regional art galleries in Australia which has had great success. The recent Grace Kelly Style Icon exhibition attracted over 125,000 visitors.



CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

Gold Coast, QLD

Gold Coast City Council has partnered with the Gold Coast Music Industry Association to provide a new space for up-and-coming artists to hone their talent as part of the 'Big Music Project', supporting the city's creative industries and up-and-coming artists.



Safety and security

A centre's success is linked to an individual's sense of safety and security. Improving natural surveillance, limiting access to areas with poor surveillance and clearly identifying the difference between public and private spaces will help to increase the perceived level of safety in Cessnock. An effective way to increase surveillance is to eradicate 'dead-ends' and create a permeable and connected access network as outlined in the Access and Movement layer.

Other spatial measures include 'active edges' (see Urban Form and Aesthetics layer), adequate lighting after dark in particular along pedestrian routes and unobstructed sight lines. As a result of a more attractive CBD, increased residential use and a thriving evening/night time economy that caters for a wide range of people will further enhance safety levels.

Greening the east-west links

High-quality green links assist in wayfinding by signalling that a route is important and may lead somewhere interesting. They encourage a 'journey of discovery' and are proposed for the important east-west linkages that connect Vincent Street with the western CBD and its numerous facilities.

Arriving experience

Gateways are important for centres as they provide a sense of arrival and welcome visitors. They encourage people passing through to break their journey and spend time in a place.

Cessnock CBD has two main gateways, the northern gateway at the intersection of Wollombi Road and Vincent Street and the southern gateway at the Performing Arts Centre. The northern arrival point in particular offers an opportunity to welcome visitors and guide them into the CBD.



Figure 15. Public spaces such as a new central park at the TAFE would attract visitors and the Cessnock community to spend more time in the CBD.

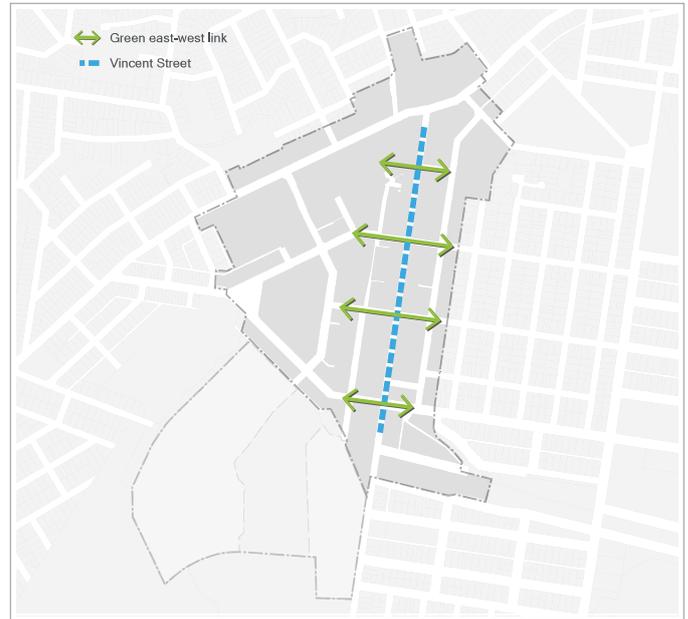


Figure 16. Greening of the east-west linkages would encourage people to walk between the various places of interest in the CBD.

	PROPOSED INITIATIVES
PD1	Investigate the opportunity to partner with the TAFE to develop central parklands, which could incorporate a playground, water sensitive urban design measures and opportunities for community gardens. (Links to KP4.1)
PD2	Establish Vincent Street as an ‘eat-street’ where people can enjoy outdoor cafes and al-fresco dining.
PD3	Upgrade important public open spaces such as H.J Sternbeck Lions Park, e.g. by investigating tenure of the Telstra building, adding a temporary cafe/coffee cart, a small water feature and/or public art and redesign the park so it feels more comfortable to be/sit in.
PD4	Investigate how to deal with the open drainage channels that meander through the western area of the CBD, e.g. investigate beautification of channel edges, opportunities for walking/cycle links, widening of sections to establish green open space, realignment of sections and/or culverts to enable improved connections and new links. (Links to KP3.1, 3.2, 3.3).
PD5	Improve surveillance of the public domain, e.g. by creating a more permeable access network, consolidating large areas of carparking into multi-level carparks (AM11), attracting more residents that live in the CBD and encouraging a night-time economy that attracts a wide range of people.
PD6	Provide high levels of lighting throughout the CBD, in particular along key pedestrian routes such as the laneways off Vincent Street.
PD7	Investigate the benefits of expanding the number of people living in and using the CBD and develop mechanisms for implementation.
PD8	Develop a public art strategy, which links into the idea of an Arts Precinct in the CBD outlined in the Cessnock 2020 Community Plan and the Social and Cultural Plan 2009-2014. Identify key locations, e.g. the northern gateway, and commission artists, seek funding and consider temporary, interactive and light installations.
PD9	Develop a signage and interpretive strategy that aids wayfinding to enables visitors to discover the ‘hidden’ facilities of Cessnock including the shopping precincts and carparks. Integrate with the signage/branding strategy.
PD10	Continue a coordinated approach to street furniture and elements, creating a constancy of style and ‘brand’ of the CBD, while reducing visual clutter.

URBAN FORM & AESTHETICS



Cessnock CBD's most distinctive feature is the significant number of historic buildings which create its charm and local character.

The relationship between built form and the public domain is critical to the character of a place. Building setbacks, heights and built-to alignments are key elements that define spaces, while facades, materials, colours and textures add the character and 'feel' that people admire and respond to.

The CBD's most distinctive feature is the significant number of historic buildings which create charm and local character. Preserving and restoring these assets will not only celebrate local heritage but increase the CBD's image and provide a differentiator to other places in the region.

Long-distance views, particularly down Aberdare Road, Hall Street and Cooper Street, provide strong links to the natural surroundings and hills and are proposed to be framed by new street tree planting.

Landmarks and prominent reference points within the CBD include the School of Arts at the northern gateway, the Council Administration building with its clock-tower in the centre of Vincent Street, and the popular Cessnock Community Performing Arts Centre located at the southern gateway.

Other key buildings that terminate views are the Cessnock Hotel, prominently placed at the end of Vincent Street to the north, the former ambulance station at the end of Cooper Street, the TAFE main building prominent from Hall Street and the Royal Oak Hotel which terminates views when travelling west on Aberdare Road.

For the image and character of the Cessnock CBD, it is vital that these buildings are maintained and improved over time.

ATTRACTION: HERITAGE

Castlemaine, Victoria

In Castlemaine's streetscape the gold mining era is evident with a large number of well-preserved heritage buildings still in use for retail and commercial enterprises. The preservation of these heritage buildings and their style (Georgian) is unique in the area and provides an attractive aesthetic for visitors to the town.



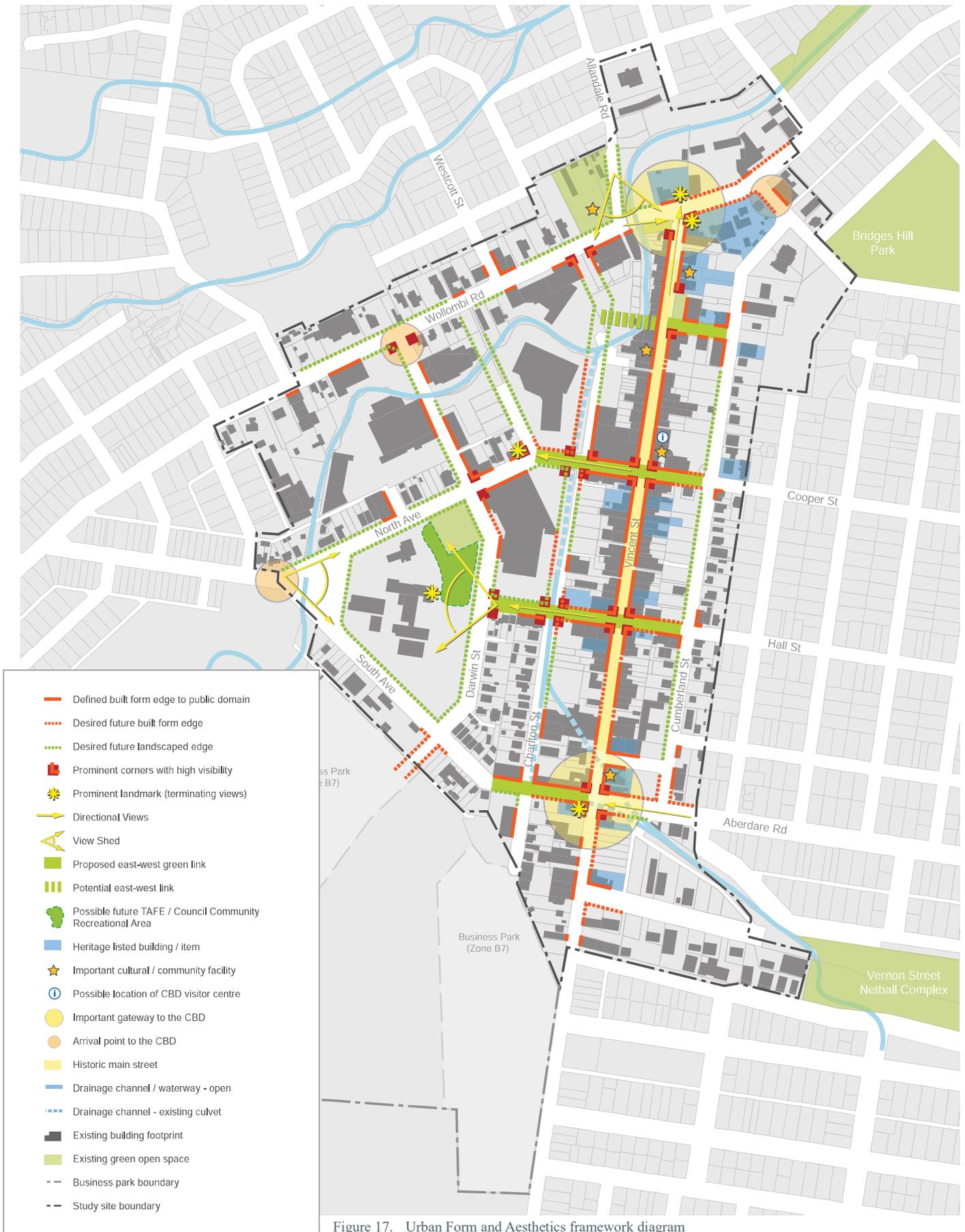


Figure 17. Urban Form and Aesthetics framework diagram



An ideal street proportion

The maximum building height of the CBD core is set at 12m. This limit accommodates buildings up to three storeys and facilitates a street proportion of approximately 2:1 (ratio of street-width to wall height) which is reasonable for a regional centre.

The height limit allows for medium-density built form typologies which tend to have a low energy demand, low construction costs and the ability to accommodate a wide range of uses, including mixed-use terraces, shop-top offices/housing and walk-up apartments (were permissible under the zoning).

Active frontages

Buildings in a centre should be built to the street alignment to give streets, lanes and parks definition and reinforce an urban character. How these edges, in particular the ground floor, are designed in more detail and interface with the public domain directly impacts on the pedestrian activity and surveillance that can be achieved in a centre.

This important spatial enclosure is lacking in some areas, particularly in the western area of the Cessnock CBD, where large setbacks to shopping facilities are occupied by visually intrusive carparking rather than an interesting building edge.

Future redevelopment should focus on providing a continuing built form edge where possible.

A Central Council Hub

The Council Administration building is an important anchor of the CBD. Its central location at the corner of Vincent and Cooper Street is vital for the activity in the main street. The building is at the end of its lifespan and in urgent need of being redeveloped in the next years. During the redevelopment phase, there may be an opportunity to temporarily relocate Council offices into currently under-utilised buildings along Vincent Street.

This would create the opportunity to refurbish a number of Cessnock’s historic buildings into valuable assets ‘fit for purpose’ for private commercial/office use once the Central Council Hub is completed. It would also maintain employment in the CBD during construction. In addition to Council services, the hub could include a larger Cessnock City Library, offices/meeting rooms for NGOs/community groups and a small visitor information centre.

PLACE MANAGEMENT

Liverpool, UK

Liverpool City Council has established a CBD Place Manager whose role is to provide a direct link between Council and the community including local business people, retailers and residents.

The role includes managing projects such as streetscape improvements, the ‘Shopfront Façade’ program (which encourages businesses to paint the exterior of their premises funded by a Council subsidy), installation of new interpretative signage and improvements to green open spaces.



A CULTURAL HUB

Geelong, Victoria

The Central Geelong Cultural Precinct Plan seeks to enliven the cultural life of the people of Greater Geelong and its visitors. A key project of the proposed precinct is the replacement of the current out-dated and inefficient central library and separate heritage centre with an integrated cultural facility.



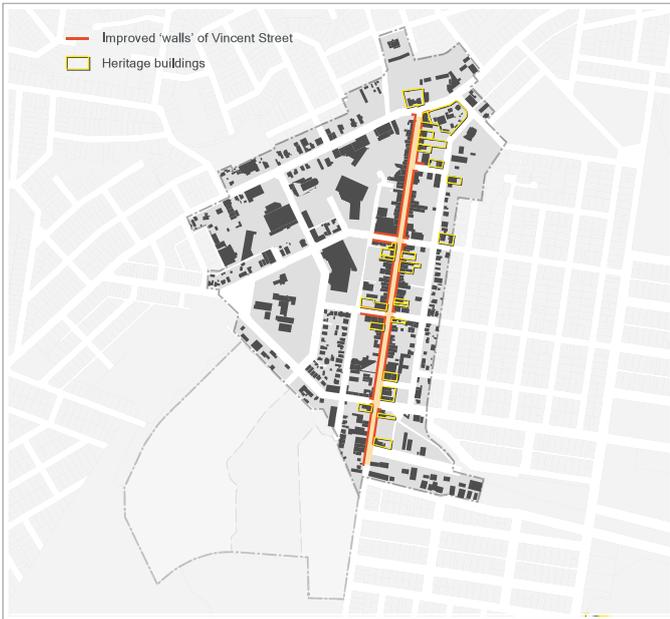


Figure 18. A 'historic main street' place-making strategy would focus on 'repairing the walls' and help improve the look and feel of Vincent Street.

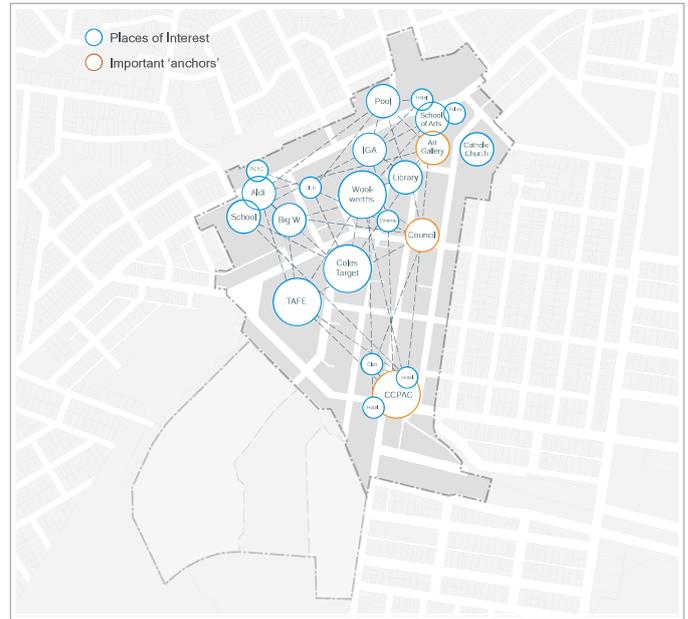


Figure 19. Expanding the Art Gallery and reinforcing a Central Council Hub would strengthen the main street and provide important anchors.

	PROPOSED INITIATIVES
UF1	Review the DCP to ensure that building facades located on terminating vistas are well designed. Maintain and frame important vistas along streets to buildings and places of heritage, architectural and/or landscape significance, i.e. long-distance views along east-west streets towards the rural surrounds.
UF2	Review the DCP to maintain and reinforce a consistent height limit throughout the CBD of 2-3 levels. Consider heights that would not impact on the visual curtilage of heritage buildings.
UF3	Develop a detailed brief/study for redevelopment of the Council Administration building into a 2-3 level Council Hub. Investigate the inclusion of a larger Cessnock City Library (2,000-2,500sqm) with 'active' frontages to Vincent and Cooper Streets and access to quality open space.
UF4	Investigate the opportunity to temporarily relocate some of Councils services during a potential redevelopment of the Council Chambers into under-utilised buildings (with a preference to preserve historic building stock) along Vincent Street to lift their value/useability in the future.
UF5	Develop a heritage colour and material palette for buildings along the main street which integrates with the street furniture and signage strategy (PD9, PD10).
UF6	Develop a 'historic main street' place-making strategy with the aim to 'repair the walls' of Vincent Street (provision of high quality and distinctive shopfronts and signage) and make the CBD more attractive for tourists, e.g. by subsidising free paint to shop/property owners (consistent with the heritage palette).

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES



A strong 'sense of place' will help promote the Cessnock CBD as a destination in the Hunter region and provide a competitive edge.

There has been limited development activity in the CBD in recent years and the demand for apartments, commercial and 'strip' retail is low compared to other regional centres. A sign of this trend is the number of shopfronts along Vincent Street that are vacant or under-utilised.

High lot fragmentation, a trend often associated with traditional main streets (i.e. narrow lots in multiple ownership), can hinder amalgamation and redevelopment opportunities. However, the existing fine grain urban structure of Vincent Street supports a variety of service offerings and a loyal group of local business owners.

The western CBD and the 'Cessnock Civic' business park to the south generally cater for larger retailers, commercial operations and bulky goods. Combined, these areas can appeal to a broad range of potential and new occupants and businesses.

Development also favours regular shaped development blocks. This is an issue throughout the west of the CBD due to the angle of Wollombi Road and the drainage channel alignment. Blocks are often triangular in shape and used inefficiently. Creation of more regular blocks and improvements to access and connectivity in this area would have a positive impact on the ability of lots to be redeveloped and be done so viably.

MARKETING & BRANDING

Wollongong, NSW

NSW Tourism and Wollongong City Council have developed "Brand Wollongong" - initiatives include a city centre marketing strategy and an integrated online events calendar. Local businesses have the chance to tap into a range of tools, share resources, spread costs and access marketing materials.



A common strategy which has shown to strengthen centres is to focus on creating a stronger local character and unique 'sense of place' e.g. by fostering Cessnock's heritage and historical attributes. Another factor in promoting economic opportunities is good governance, integrated decision making and community participation, which in combination has proven to ensure the benefits of good design are realised.

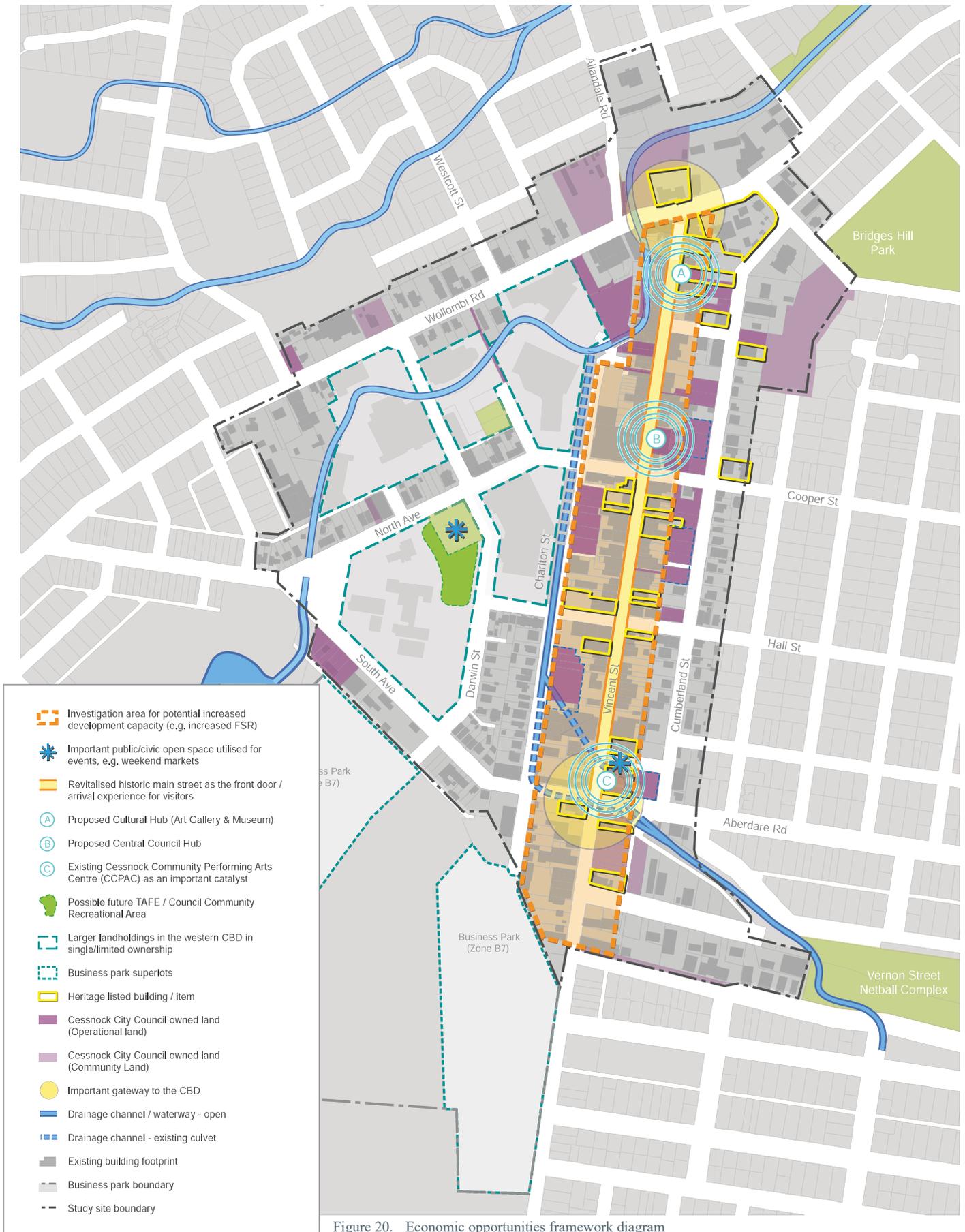


Figure 20. Economic opportunities framework diagram

A high-quality public domain

Research evidence shows there are many positive financial benefits to local economies by improving walking and cycling accessibility in city centres. Successful strategies to enhancing the amenity and attractiveness for such activities include activated frontages, reduced traffic speed, street tree planting, improved signage and lighting.



Strategic public spending

Projects that had a significant positive impact on the CBD include the Vincent Street upgrade in 2004 and the Cessnock Community Performing Arts Centre (CCPAC) completed in 2008. Focussing public spending on key projects that act as catalysts for the ongoing revitalisation of a centre is good practice and, as the CCPAC proves, help attract private investment and redevelopment of surrounding properties.

Attracting entrepreneurs

Employment generation is no longer simply a matter of attracting large companies, but also mobile workers who run their own businesses or subcontract their labour from home. Based on successful approaches implemented in other regional centres, an appropriate strategy for Cessnock would be to support start-up enterprises within their first year of operation by providing affordable or subsidised accommodation. Sites to focus on are under-utilised shopfronts and upper levels of properties along Vincent Street.

Incentives for development

There are a range of incentives which can positively encourage redevelopment and/or businesses to relocate or expand. Consideration could be given to increasing the allowable floor-space-ratio (the measure of development density of a site) in appropriate locations, which may improve the viability of development. Decreasing the carparking requirements for smaller lots is another common way in improving development feasibility, particularly on smaller lots.

Marketing and tourism

Cessnock has a number of advantages over other regional centres, as it is located within a popular wine region with good access to local food produce and in easy reach of a capital city. The CBD also offers an impressive local history that should be a leverage to new tourism opportunities.

Investing in a comprehensive marketing or branding strategy that focuses on why people should visit and increase their length of stay in Cessnock is a low-cost initiative. The strategy should address improved relationships between the CBD and vineyards, link into the proposed signage strategy, and provide guidance on branding opportunities and an extended events calendar for the CBD.

EVO-CITIES

Regional Cities, New South Wales

Seven regional cities in NSW have united to form the Evocities campaign. The main objective is to encourage capital city residents to make the move to an Evocity and live, work and invest. The campaign outlines advantages of regional centres, i.e. lower cost of living, strong career and business opportunities and enhanced lifestyle.

Each of the seven cities (Albury, Armidale, Bathurst, Dubbo, Orange, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga) has dedicated resources and funding to the campaign, and has in turn secured Australian Government funding, as well as support from the NSW State Government and corporate sponsors.





Figure 21. Central parklands at the TAFE strengthen the western CBD and improved pedestrian links along Cooper Street connect to Vincent Street.



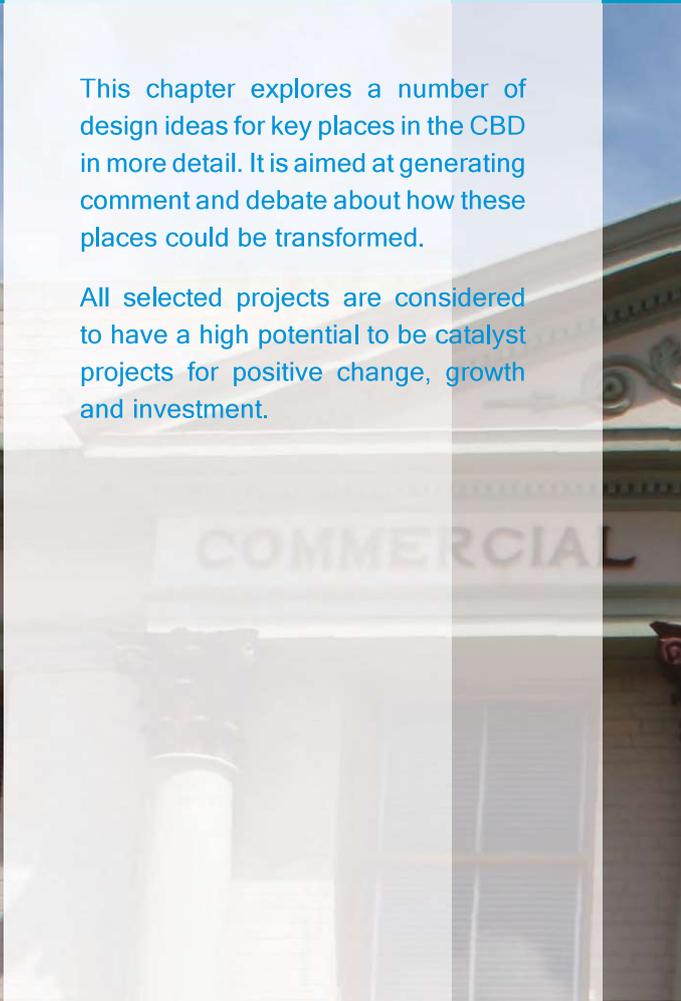
Figure 22. The western CBD and the ‘Cessnock Civic’ business park to the south offer large lots suitable for major retailers and/or bulky goods.

	PROPOSED INITIATIVES
EO1	Provide incentives for existing businesses in the CBD to expand or reinvest, e.g. reduced Council rates for a set period of time for desirable businesses or businesses looking to contribute to training and apprentice programs for local residents.
EO2	Focus on creating a stronger local character by retaining historic and ‘character’ buildings. Investigate incentives such as exemptions (eg from rates and utilities during construction) as well as appropriate planning controls as a means to either reduce the cost of maintenance or reduce the ‘opportunity cost’ of retaining a building (rather than demolishing and rebuilding).
EO3	Develop a comprehensive and integrated marketing strategy to attract new industries and entrepreneurs into the CBD with a focus on targeting artists/craftsmen, green/sustainable, knowledge, food & wine, tourism and creative industries, e.g. rental subsidies or grant systems for start-up businesses, sponsored benefits and/or through links with the TAFE.
EO4	Encourage alternative types of retail, e.g. fresh food markets and wine bars.
EO5	Identify and implement events within the CBD that reactivate the centre both at night and during the day, e.g. buskers, evening street markets, weekend food markets, concerts, swap markets, street fairs and art events.
EO6	Investigate opportunities within the western CBD area to improve access and create rectangular shaped blocks that can be used more efficiently (linked to AM2, PD4, PD5 initiatives). Investigate opportunities for potential land-swaps and/or amalgamation to facilitate this and focus on identifying win-win solutions.
EO7	Continue to work closely with local businesses, organisations and the community to foster integrated decision making and participation in shaping the future of the Cessnock CBD.
EO8	Investigate the opportunity to expand the Cessnock Regional Art Gallery and consider to include a local heritage museum and a cafe/restaurant. Combining/co-locating multiple uses in this ‘cultural hub’ or ‘heritage centre’ would create a stronger destination/attraction for tourist and increase revenue sources.



This chapter explores a number of design ideas for key places in the CBD in more detail. It is aimed at generating comment and debate about how these places could be transformed.

All selected projects are considered to have a high potential to be catalyst projects for positive change, growth and investment.



05 - KEY PROJECTS

- Historic Vincent Street
- Green East-West Linkages
- Channel Improvements
- Central Parklands
- Northern Gateway



HISTORIC VINCENT STREET



Figure 23. Vincent Street - Existing Situation

Traditional 'strip' retail in regional centres can struggle to be viable and Cessnock is no exception. There are ways, however, to strengthen a traditional main street. Research has shown that for a street-based centre to be successful, it needs to be well integrated with the transport network

while offering a range of local services that complement, not compete, with any nearby shopping centres. In addition, main streets have two main advantages: they can co-locate a diverse range of uses, including civic, recreational, residential and commercial - and they can be memorable, a place of identity, enjoyment and civic pride. Centres such as Orange, Berri or Mudgee in NSW have focused on achieving this memorable identity and attract thousands of visitors each year.

TEMPORARY USES

Newcastle, NSW

The 'Renew Newcastle' project was established to find short and medium term uses for buildings in Newcastle's CBD that are vacant, disused or awaiting redevelopment. The initiative concentrated on artists and cultural/community groups to use and maintain buildings until they become commercially viable or are redeveloped. The project is a low budget community driven initiative supported by Council, the Department of Trade & Investment and various local developers, land owners and businesses.



The idea for the future of Cessnock's main street is to concentrate on repairing its 'walls' and creating a pleasant environment focused on pedestrians and cyclists. A variety of initiatives should be considered, such as restoring heritage buildings, finding uses for under-utilised buildings, extending opening hours, applying coherent material and colour palettes, reducing security screens and re-developing key catalyst sites such as the Council Chambers.



Figure 24. Vincent Street - Artist's impression of the potential future look & feel

STEPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Develop a 'placemaking' strategy (see UF6 initiative) and identify buildings that add to the local historic character of the centre in addition to heritage listed properties. This would also link into/inform the development of a sympathetic heritage colour and material palette.

Redevelop Council Chambers (see UF3 initiative).

Exploit opportunities to reduce the number of trucks using Vincent Street and consult with RMS on the likely impact of the future Hunter Expressway and other ways to reduce number/impact of large vehicles.

Attract more cyclists by reducing vehicular traffic speeds and providing bicycle infrastructure, i.e. bike parking.

Consult with building and shop owners and subsidise paint and/or other services such as equipment hire. Investigate opportunities to work with volunteer/youth groups to paint/repair properties as part of a skills development program (e.g. in partnership with TAFE, RTO's and others)

Prepare and implement design guidelines for assessing development applications and incorporate into the DCP. This will inform the detailed design of the streetscape (street furniture, landscaping, fencing, bollards, banners) and how ground floor facades are designed to relate to the street, quality of materials (brick, timber), lighting inside and outside, awnings, other facade details and signage.

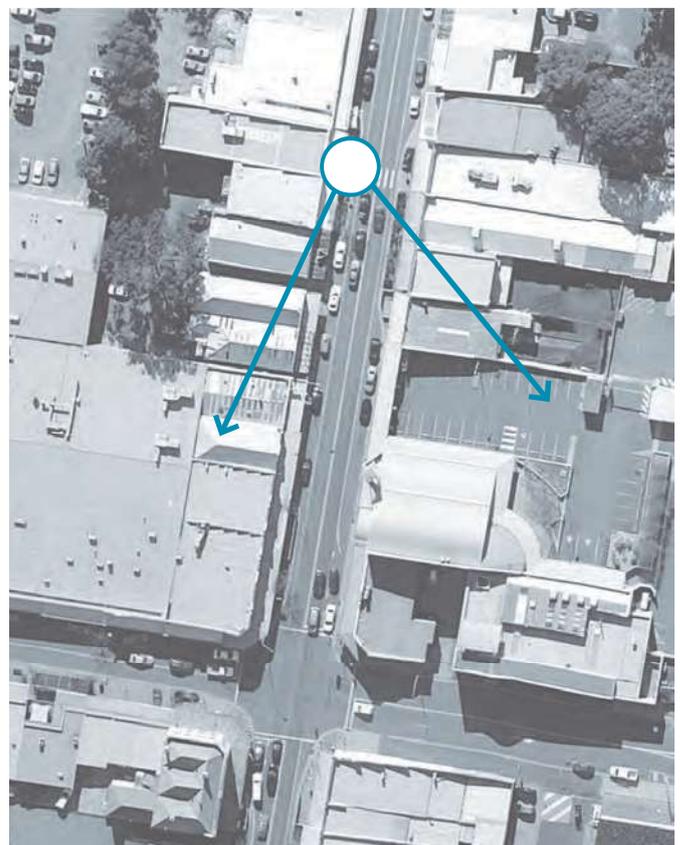


Figure 25. View location

GREEN EAST-WEST LINKAGES



Figure 26. Cooper Street - existing situation

The quality of the pedestrian environment has a direct link with how many people decide to walk instead of driving their car, particularly for short trips within the CBD. At a slow pace, pedestrians take in the sights, shopfronts and services a place has to offer. Increasing the number of people who walk will also enhance activity and

surveillance in the CBD, activate retail and improve health outcomes and social connections. The Vincent Street upgrade in 2004 has greatly improved the walkability of Cessnock's main street. As a next step, the east-west links from Vincent Street to the shopping precincts in the west should be enhanced.

Cooper Street is considered the most important east-west connection and a key pedestrian route in the CBD. It is proposed to redesign the intersection of Charlton and Cooper Streets with a focus on improving pedestrian safety at this crossing point.

Consideration should also be given to slow traffic speeds on both streets and introduce traffic calming devices such as speed humps. Widening the footpaths and improving the built form and landscape interface of adjoining land would further enhance the pedestrian quality and convenience of the street environment.

STEP-BY-STEP

Chippendale Sydney, NSW

This inner suburb of Sydney is an example of a street environment that has been improved incrementally over the last decades. Widening of footpaths, traffic calming measures and attention to detailed public domain design have created convenient walking routes and transformed the suburb into a highly sought-after neighbourhood that is connected, legible and encourages a healthy, active lifestyle.





Figure 27. Cooper Street - artist's impression of the potential future look & feel

STEPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

<p>Replace the roundabout at the Charlton and Cooper Street intersection, e.g. with a more pedestrian-friendly four-way intersection treatment. (see AM5 initiative)</p>
<p>Remove the existing landscaped median on Cooper Street and use space gained to widen pedestrian footpaths on one or both sides of Cooper Street south of Charlton Street.</p>
<p>Lower vehicular speed along Charlton and Cooper Streets, e.g. by changing surface material, introducing traffic-calming devices and establishing pedestrian activity zones and/or shared zones (see AM1 initiative).</p>
<p>Consolidate carpark entries and locate exist/entries away from the area around the intersection of Charlton and Cooper Street to reduce pedestrian/vehicle conflict points.</p>
<p>Use development guidelines to promote active frontages along Cooper Street using design guidelines for assessing development applications and incorporate into the DCP.</p>
<p>Prepare a 'Public Domain Contributions Plan' to levy developments for facilities that promote walkability and accessibility, i.e. footpaths, seating, drinking fountains, bicycle racks, street trees and shade structures.</p>

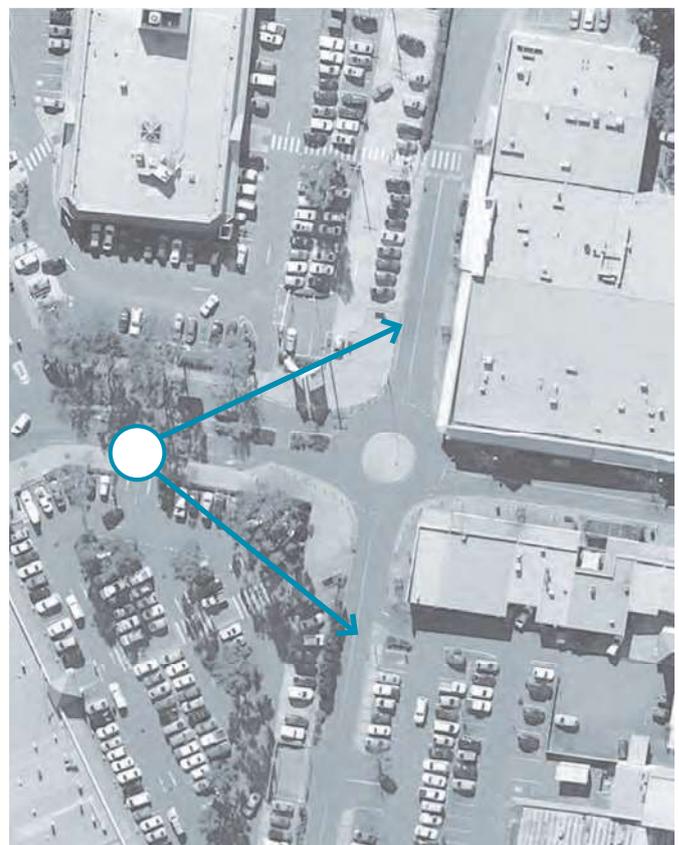


Figure 28. View location

CHANNEL IMPROVEMENTS



Figure 29. Drainage channel at the northern gateway - existing situation

The drainage channel infrastructure that meanders through the CBD is arguably the centre's most significant physical challenge. The channels throughout the western CBD form a 2.5km long linear barrier restricting access and reducing connectivity; and while concrete-lined, open drains are efficient at moving water, they do not provide any improvements to water quality.

In addition, the look of the concrete channels creates a significant visual impact that reflects negatively on the CBD's image and perception.

To start tackling these challenges, viable options are needed to transform the drainage system into an asset for Cessnock and at the same time improve water quality, flood resilience and wildlife habitat. Some of the ideas captured during the Masterplan process were to provide linear walking and cycling links, widen sections to establish native vegetation, 'naturalise' the channels by replacing the concrete lining with river rocks and allow for stormwater basins.

It should be noted that flood impacts can be severe and improving the channels in the CBD is no easy task. Any change to the drainage system will require detailed flood studies and modelling to ensure there are no adverse flooding effects upstream or downstream.

RIVERBANK NATURALISATION

Cooks River, Sydney

The Cooks River Urban Water Initiative aims to improve the Cooks River by partnering with the local community and land managers in stormwater and wetland improvement projects. One of the key initiatives is to convert deteriorated concrete channels into natural riverbanks environments, creating a more gently sloping bank, improving the health of the waterway and enhancing the natural character.

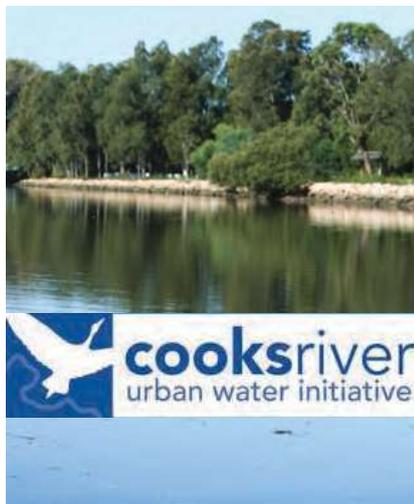




Figure 30. Drainage channel at the northern gateway - artist's impression of the potential future look & feel

STEPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Identify 'priority' sections of the drainage system that create a high visual impact, have sufficient land available for potential widening and/or are in need of repair/upgrade. Consider that any changes to the channels may require increased landtake and that there could be maintenance and additional infrastructure issues, i.e. sewer, electricity lines.

Investigate opportunities to beautify and/or naturalise priority sections first, within a wider improvement strategy for the whole CBD drainage system.

Work closely with Hunter Water and other community/environmental groups to discuss ideas, develop strategies and form partnerships for delivering and/or managing improvement projects.

Undertake studies and flood modelling to ensure that there will be no adverse flooding issues up or downstream.

Use development guidelines to ensure that any new development within overflow/flood areas is flood-resilient and does not reduce flood storage, i.e. non-residential uses on ground floor such as carparking.

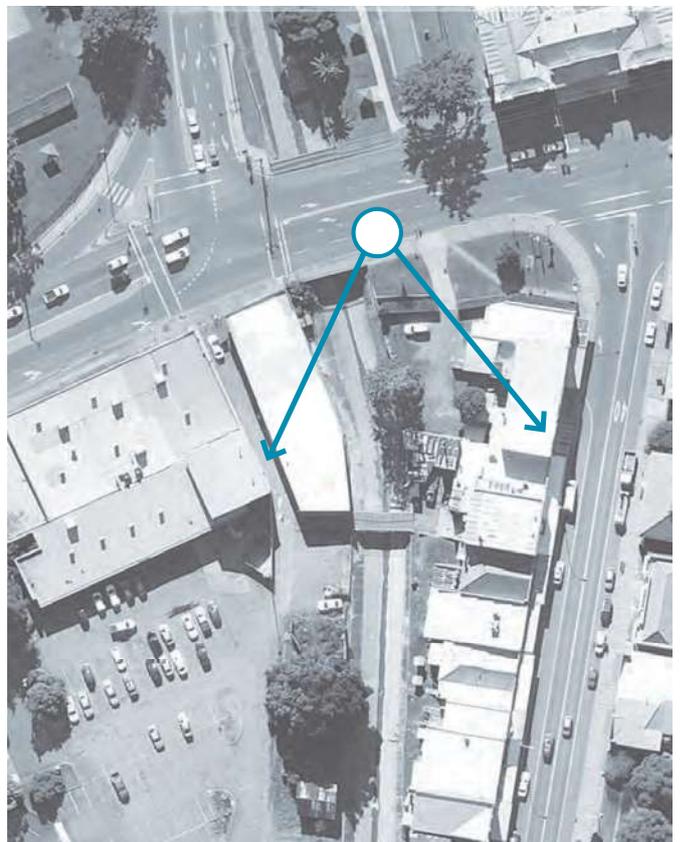


Figure 31. View location

CENTRAL PARKLANDS



Figure 32. Central parklands - existing situation

The idea of a central green open space in the centre of the CBD is a long-held community aspiration and is included as a key objective in the Cessnock 2020 Community Plan. In the last years, two possible sites were identified and the CBD Masterplan process offered a timely opportunity to investigate both locations from a strategic point of view within the wider context of the CBD.

One option considered was the 'Civic Park' site on Vincent Street south of Aberdare Road. The other option was to extend the existing TAFE park at the end of Cooper Street at the intersection of Darwin Street and North Avenue.

The main advantage of the TAFE site is its central location. Walking distances to key facilities in the CBD are short and the proposed upgrade of Cooper Street into a green pedestrian-friendly link would provide for safe access to and from shopping precincts and Vincent Street. There is also a unique opportunity for a 'win-win' partnership between the TAFE and Council.

As a result, the Masterplan recommends to pursue transforming the TAFE park into a central 'community heart' and destination for visitors. The park's main objectives are to be family-friendly, cater for a wide range of outdoor activities, offer a place for larger gatherings and provide facilities such as playgrounds, shade structures, BBQs, benches, tables and public toilets.

A PARK FOR EVERYONE

Speers Point Park, Lake Macquarie

The new playground in the Speers Point Park has recently been awarded 'Best Play Space in Australia'. While the central cafe is under construction, a mobile coffee van looks after visitors on weekends. In addition to spacious grassy areas, the park features entertainment stages, tables, benches and barbecues for parties, picnics and weddings and is a popular location for community events such as Australia Day and ANZAC ceremonies.





Figure 33. Central parklands - artist's impression of the potential future look & feel

STEPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Continue conversations with the TAFE and work towards an agreement to deliver and maintain central community parklands on TAFE land. Collaborate with TAFE to find/access funding sources, e.g. workplace development fund. (see PD1 initiative)

Consult with the community, in particular with children and teenagers, on the activities and facilities that should be provided in the park, e.g. war memorial, playgrounds, shade structures, BBQs, benches, tables, training equipment, an entertainment stage, community gardens, public toilets etc.

Consult with the community on the desired future location of the town Christmas Tree

Use synergies between Council and TAFE e.g. skills development of TAFE students in hospitality (potential co-location of a cafe/restaurant in the park) and/or horticulture skills (e.g. water-sensitive design).

Develop a Masterplan for the central parklands that addresses how the park is connected to its context and links into surrounding walking and cycling routes.

Investigate the potential for further co-located uses, such as a childcare centre and/or a tourist information board/kiosk.

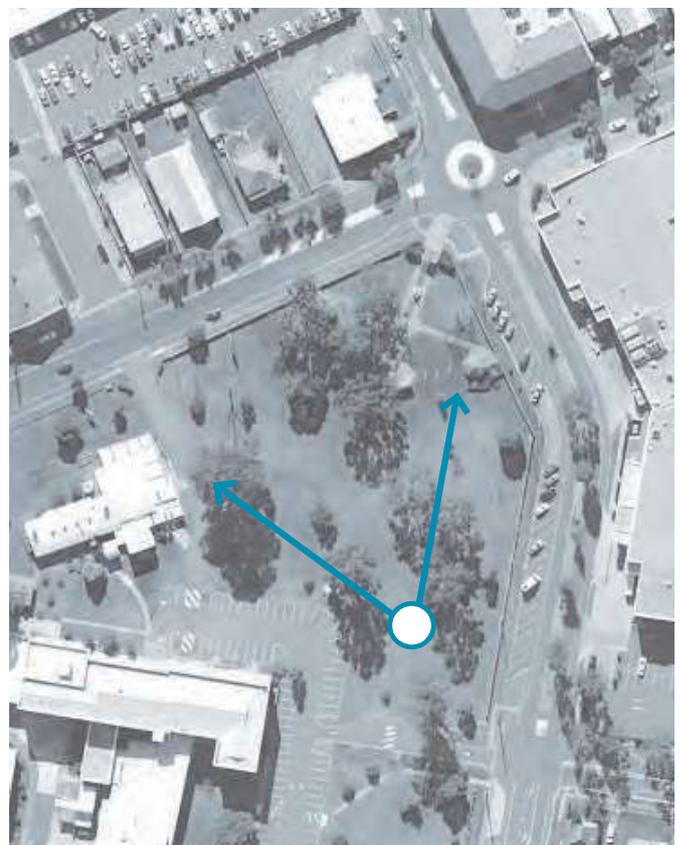


Figure 34. View location

NORTHERN GATEWAY



Figure 35. Northern Gateway - existing situation

The northern gateway at the intersection of Wollombi Road and Vincent Street is of historic local significance. The Cessnock Inn was established here in 1856 (today the site of the Cessnock Hotel) and the township grew from this location. Further significant buildings were constructed nearby during the mining boom, the most prominent being the School of Arts built in 1924.

Over recent years, the northern arrival point had decreased in importance as the majority of visitors would arrive via Aberdare Road to the south. With the opening of the Hunter Expressway it will be increasingly important for the future viability of the CBD to also entice visitors into the centre from this northern point of Vincent Street.

Two strategies for the gateway have transpired. The first one is to improve the arrival experience in the short to medium term, utilising a prominent opportunity site on the corner opposite the School of Arts. A gateway park in this location would provide a welcoming gesture to the CBD and could feature trees, signage, lighting, banners, public art and potentially a cafe and/or tourist information. The second idea is to potentially realign Allandale Road and Vincent Street in the long-term, creating a single four-way intersection. This opportunity will require further in-depth investigation by Council and other authorities such as Hunter Water and RMS.

ARTIST INITIATED PROJECTS

Wagga Wagga, NSW

The Public Art Plan 2010-12 identifies 'Artist Initiated Projects' as an opportunity to allow innovation and different perspectives to be brought forward. Wagga Wagga Council seeks to commission artworks that reveal, surprise, challenge and celebrate their centre and that will remain a legacy to the city. Key criteria include artistic quality and innovation, uniqueness and identity and respect for heritage. The Council funds projects up to \$20,000.





Figure 36. Northern Gateway - artist's impression of the potential future look & feel

STEPS TOWARDS IMPLEMENTATION

Deliver a gateway park at the intersection of Wollombi Road and Vincent Street on Council-owned land opposite the School of Arts to improve the arrival experience to the CBD.

Consult with the community, particularly the local artist community, tourist groups and landowners on their vision and aspirations for the gateway.

Develop a concept landscape design for the gateway park which considers tree planting and landscape features, inclusion of public art as a landmark/welcoming gesture, lighting design, seating facilities, signage and the potential for a tourist kiosk/information and/or a cafe which may be incorporated into the existing building to the south.

Integrate the gateway with the proposed signage/wayfinding and public art strategy (see PD8 and PD9 initiatives).

Improve building facades of landmark and gateway buildings (see UF1 initiative).

Investigate the long-term opportunity to realign Vincent Street and Allandale Road to create one four-way intersection. Consult with RMS, Hunter Water and landowners and develop preliminary options for the potential alignment of the road and drainage infrastructure.

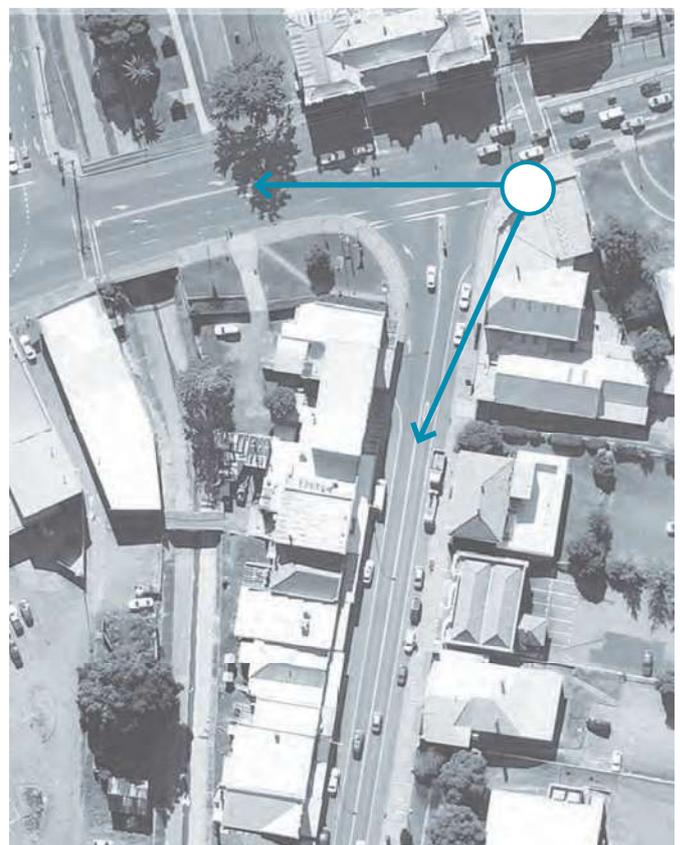


Figure 37. View location

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