

BLAYNEY 2020 MASTER PLAN



Rethinking and collaborating: using a broad planning approach to drive regional growth and activity

Better for community:
The Blayney 2020 Master Plan presents a shared vision for the future. A vibrant main street with thriving businesses is part of the picture, but the plan proposes strategies that go beyond physical upgrades. Image: Place Design Group.

QUICK FACTS

PROJECT TYPE:
Master planning for a regional shire, incorporating extensive community engagement

LOCATION:
Blayney Shire

REGION:
Central West and Orana

ABORIGINAL CUSTODIANS OF THIS COUNTRY:
Wiradjuri people

CLIENT:
Blayney Shire Council

PROJECT SCALE:
Large scale: 152,500 ha

PROJECT COST:
\$106,000 not including council time; funding from the NSW Department of Planning and Environment Planning Reform Fund

YEAR:
2015–16

PROJECT TEAM:
ECONOMIC PROFILING AND ANALYSIS
Western Research Institute
PLANNING
Place Design Group
PROJECT MANAGEMENT
Blayney Shire Council
TRANSPORTATION CONSULTING AND REVIEW
MRCagney

PROCUREMENT PROCESS:
Advertised request for quotation

AWARDS
2016 Planning Institute of Australia Awards: Finalist, Award for Planning Excellence

Blayney Shire has developed a realistic and exciting plan for its future – involving the community and local businesses in developing a master plan that embraces the challenges faced by many smaller regional centres in NSW.

The planning goes beyond physical improvements to look at smarter ways of using existing public assets, and extends to strategies like regional branding and capacity building for local businesses.

Blayney was facing an uncertain future as growth rates were stagnant compared to neighbouring regional centres, and Blayney Shire Council sought to be proactive. Council realised it needed to intervene and work with the community to recast Blayney's future, putting in place strategies to make it a vibrant, sustainable, and prosperous regional centre.

In common with many regional shires, Blayney is rich with community spirit, character, and history, but is challenged by having to spread a small pool of council rates and resources across a relatively large geographic area. Council engaged a team of specialist planning consultants to lead a process of research, engagement, review, analysis, and decision-making, culminating in a formal master plan that will inspire and guide Blayney's future development. The master plan focuses on the main township of Blayney, but also looks at the shire as a whole.

Starting with detailed research

Research for the project involved a tour of the shire; detailed mapping of Blayney township; compiling an inventory of photos; observing "a day in the life" of Blayney main street; studying pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular movements; analysing demographic and business trends; and analysing land supply and land use.

Proposing three different approaches

Based on research and public consultation, the master plan presents a suite of 40 doable actions, prioritising the most important outcomes, to create a vibrant, economically viable, high-quality and safe town centre.

Rather than focusing solely on capital works projects like building or landscape upgrades, the master plan proposes three types of strategy:

- **physical interventions**, resulting in improvements to the streetscape, services, and landscape, as commonly expected from a master planning process
- **governance interventions**, working out how the regulatory framework can make new actions possible – and reviewing and changing local regulations where necessary
- **branding and identity interventions**, bringing together the town's positive elements and projecting them to a broad audience, to enhance its reputation.



Better for community: During the public consultation events, people were asked to contribute their ideas using post-it notes, grouping suggestions under themes. Image: Place Design Group.

Revitalising the main street

Many of the proposed physical interventions are focused on improving Blayney's main street – this is also the Great Western Highway. Footpath upgrades and the construction of additional pedestrian crossings are proposed to make it more pedestrian-friendly. Converting angle parking to parallel parking will narrow the vehicle carriageway and create additional verge areas for landscaping. A mid-block link will provide a direct connection to the “big-box” supermarket located behind the main street. Restoration and upgrades of building facades and signage will improve the town image. Heritage Park, at the southern end of the main street, is proposed for enhancement as a major destination, with new facilities such as a skate ramp.

Improving connectivity, walkability, and cycling opportunities

Broader physical strategies include formalising the pedestrian network, creating a cycle network around town, constructing an exercise trail with fitness equipment, implementing a river remediation project, and building a truck bypass that will connect industrial land to the highway and reduce the noise and disruption of large traffic through the town centre.



Better for people:

A large map of the town presented at public events helped to engage people with the planning process. Image: Place Design Group.

Generating local business activity

One of the core governance interventions involves working with local businesses to improve main street activity. A “Blayney Traders Association” concept has been developed to champion the main street retailers and coordinate marketing initiatives. The plan also proposes employing a main street “Place Manager” to liaise with council, conducting business capacity building workshops, moving the library to the main street and reinventing it as a cultural hub for events, making wi-fi freely available in the retail precinct to attract longer visits, and incentivising a new anchor tenant to take up space in the main street and consolidate commercial activities.

Rethinking land use

Another key governance proposal is reassessing the use of publicly owned assets in town, particularly the council portfolio of land. Assets have been reviewed to determine optimal usage, and strategies put in place to make them more active and economically beneficial. Leveraging council assets can kick-start change, with council acting as landlord selecting desirable tenants, and potentially offering subsidised rents. Redevelopment of vacant land in the main street could be encouraged through rezoning opportunities.

Building a collaborative brand and identity

Branding and identity interventions include actions such as creating an “Our Town” social media campaign to amplify local pride, running a “Shop Local” campaign encouraging residents to support their main street retailers, and developing a “Blayney Traders” brand to unify businesses and enable them to advertise offerings and events collectively.

Ideas could be developed to create a stronger sense of arrival in town, enticing people to stop and spend more time in Blayney, and existing light poles could be used to display promotional banners. A shire-wide tourism program could promote a loop connection linking Blayney township with its surrounding network of heritage towns and villages, so that tourist activity can be wider spread.

Local beef production could also benefit by forming cooperatives to open up export markets for sales.

Taking consultation to the people

The strategies proposed in the master plan have been informed by extensive consultation with residents and businesses. A proactive approach to engagement took the consultation to the people, rather than people to the consultation. Two successful public events were held with high levels of participation, one as a main street public display and one as a stall at the local farmers’ market. Both used a captivating large-scale “walk-on” map of the town to attract interest and encourage the community to interact with the planning process in a creative, tactile way. “Idea boards” were used to capture inputs with post-it notes.

In addition, structured interviews were held with main street business owners and council staff, informal door-to-door interviews were held with local residents, and a community public meeting was held. These activities revealed diverse and divergent opinions that needed to be balanced so that clear expectations could be set.

Design objectives for NSW

Seven objectives define the key considerations in the design of the built environment.



Better fit
contextual, local
and of its place



Better performance
sustainable, adaptable
and durable



Better for community
inclusive, connected
and diverse



Better for people
safe, comfortable
and liveable



Better working
functional, efficient
and fit for purpose



Better value
creating and
adding value



Better look and feel
engaging, inviting
and attractive

Find out more
ga.nsw.gov.au



Better value:

Blayney's 2020 Master Plan and Implementation Strategy is a decision-making tool for council, making sure that efforts are coordinated and targeted for maximum benefit to the community. Image: Place Design Group.

Capturing an important message

A key message from the consultation was that physical works were less urgent, and that governance transformations, building business capacity, and fostering community ownership were critical outcomes. Ultimately, this engagement process has empowered council with a tool to progress change and allowed the plan's implementation to commence quickly without the need for capital works.

Good process: start with a decision-making tool

The master plan is a decision-making tool for Blayney Shire Council, helping it to align prospective works with its annual budget. The plan provides clear direction on how to implement the strategies, including who will be responsible, time frames, interrelationships with other actions, and indicative relative costs.

Actions that are considered "quick-wins" are identified for swift implementation. These are distinguished from longer term investment strategies requiring more planning and longer time frames.

Key considerations

The Blayney 2020 Master Plan responds to community demand for alternative forms of intervention such as changes in approach to governance and promotion of identity. The project shows that it can be beneficial for master planning strategies to think laterally and consider non-built outcomes as well as built ones.

A robust and positive engagement process genuinely inspired and enthused the council, businesses, and the community to initiate and follow through with the proposed actions.

MORE INFORMATION

GANSW policies:

Better Placed: An integrated design policy for the built environment of NSW

GANSW guides:

Integrating Urban Design

Urban Design for Regional NSW

Design Guide for Heritage

GANSW advisory notes:

Strategic visioning

Master plans

Implementation plans

1. Horton D (creator) & AIATSIS (1996), AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia, Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz.

This case study has been developed in conjunction with the Urban Design for Regional NSW guide.