



BUSINESS ACTIVATION PLAN

Revitalising and promoting Lismore
and Nimbin town centres
2021-2023



APPENDIX 1: SUMMARY OF RESEARCH INSIGHTS INFORMING BUSINESS ACTIVATION PLAN

A review of key documents was undertaken with Astrolabe Group consultants to inform development of the Lismore and Nimbin Business Activation Plan. The horizon scan considered:

- Previous work in the region looking to promote business activation
- Examples of initiatives that have worked previously in Lismore City Council or elsewhere
- Challenges and opportunities presented by the impact of COVID-19
- Challenges and opportunities for business activation with a particular focus on Lismore and Nimbin town centres.

This Appendix summarises priority insights for development of the Plan under three headings:

1. Ensuring integration and alignment: guiding policy and strategy framework
2. Capturing what is already in place
1. Practical guidance: high level guidance for business activation from local and international authorities.

A bibliography of documents referred to for this review is also listed below.

Ensuring integration and alignment

There is existing strategic intent and direction for CBD activation (especially in Lismore) across Lismore City Council strategies and policies, but has been some slippage in the delivery of initiatives. Strategically, Lismore is positioned as the capital of the Northern Rivers – Lismore can market itself to better reflect this higher-level city centre function.

Strategies and reports of particular relevance to this Plan include:-

- The *Lismore City Council Economic Development Strategy 2019-2024*, addressing priorities focused on enabling the agri-economy, an innovative and connected Lismore town centre, village activation, and tourism culture and sport. It recognises the opportunities arising from environmental sustainability, natural assets and a rich event calendar alongside traffic and parking challenging, red tape and needing to activate the night time economy.
- The 2019 *Shaping the Lismore CBD Hip v Hype* report for Lismore CBD activation recommends nine initiatives which inform current infrastructure projects (including the Lismore Laneways revitalisation project completing 2021, and a pedestrian spine linking NORPA to the River commencing late 2021), underpinned by five guiding principles that have been adopted within this Plan. It identifies CBD precincts and opportunities to connect these, and is a good base for any business activation
- Enabling technology in Lismore CBD would enable people to work from anywhere and could attract and retain professionals, a goal identified in the *Northern Rivers Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022*. Engagement with the creative industry is a big opportunity and a recognised regional strength of the Northern Rivers
- There has been a Business Promotion Program in place for Lismore for almost 10 years – with a good track record of event support and a recognisable brand ('Come to the heart')

- Nimbin has a history of being viewed as a destination for backpackers, however, as demonstrated by the Sustainable Nimbin Community Plan 2016-2021, the centre has strong vision and opportunity to be recognised for pioneering support for sustainable practices and servicing a diverse catchment of community members and visitors.
- There is Regional Economic Development Strategy (REDS) alignment based on the growth of nature-based tourism opportunities beyond the coastline.
- For leveraging tourism and activation opportunities, connections between (approx. 30 min drive) Lismore and Nimbin are important, along with links to neighbouring centres and attractions.

Capturing what is already in place

- Existing successful place activation initiatives - including the Lismore Lantern Parade, Eat the Street, Lismore Masters Games, Nimbin Mardigrass, Tropical Fruits Festival, creative programming at The Quad, and regular markets calendar in Lismore and Nimbin.
- Opportunities underway to elevate and promote - revitalised Lismore Laneways, new SHINE light art festival, CBD Parklets; and emerging activation projects led by businesses and community stakeholders across various precincts.
- Opportunities to increase day visitors, leveraging connectivity and proximity to other attractions in Northern Rivers and North Coast, and boosting promotions using existing events calendar to attract return visitors and extend day trips over weekends.
- Opportunity to connect residents and visitors to Indigenous history and heritage – Lismore City Council on the traditional lands of the Widjabul Wia-bal people of Bundjalung nation.
- Lismore and Nimbin town centres have ‘good bones’ – main streets, heritage streetscape.
- Nimbin is recognised as one of the world’s alternative lifestyle capitals and leaders in sustainability, as seen at the Rainbow Power Company, 7 Sibley Street, and Djanbung Gardens Permaculture Farm.
- Council supported actions to stimulate business in response to the economic impact of COVID-19, including backing a grassroots advertising campaign to support local small businesses and the removal and reduction of certain fees, including no fees for the commercial use of footpaths from 1 April 2020 to 30 June 2021.
- Demographic analysis shows Lismore City Council has a “double dependency” age profile with relatively large older and young age groups supported by smaller cohorts of mid to older aged workers. Most common household types are small (single person/couple) with no children. Business activation needs to respond to the demands of this population.

Practical guidance

- Business and place activation needs to be based on trying new ideas and changing things when they do not work. This is done by using a try, test, and experiment approach. Any experiments need to be monitored and data captured to help inform decisions on what to do next.
- There is a notable focus on populating empty shops to keep main streets vibrant. Ways to do this when there are no tenants include pop-up shops, arts and culture, co-working or dual business spaces and shop front decoration. Government-owned venues are a useful way for Councils to showcase what is possible.
- Placemaking in rural and regional communities focuses on the need for the whole community to be involved in creating new places and linking smaller towns and villages to larger centres along drive, bike or walking trails.
- Successful economic development in small cities and towns is highly focused with clear definitions of the focus area (e.g. one part of town) and context (e.g. explicit budget, environmental and heritage constraints). Ideas on how to meet policy goals may be small (e.g. promoting biking or walking around a place) which maintains focus.

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APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF ENGAGEMENT OUTCOMES INFORMING BUSINESS ACTIVATION PLAN

Engagement activities were undertaken with Astrolabe Group consultants in April 2021 to support development of the Lismore and Nimbin Business Activation Plan. Engagement focused on the following three areas:

1. Place: identifying places that are working and those that have areas for improvements
2. Events: identifying existing and emerging events and ways to activate them so businesses can benefit
3. Actions: discussion of those actions that should be prioritised and what could make them happen under four themes: excitement, promotion, experience and support.

These areas reflect key issues important to the people of Lismore as identified in the *Imagine Lismore Community Strategic Plan*, and showcase the priority activities for business activation identified through preliminary meetings with the project working group and via the horizon scan summarised in Appendix 1.

Engagement included two workshops, one held each in Lismore (n=24) and Nimbin (n=12), one-on-one conversations with two key local stakeholders, and an community survey via Lismore City Council 'Your Say Lismore' website. The workshops were the main tool of engagement, bringing together business and community stakeholders of different ages and interests to share their insights and ideas for the Business Activation Plan, with discussions structured around the themes of place, events and supporting actions.

Synthesising many suggestions and views shared by business and community stakeholders, engagement highlighted the following strengths for Lismore and Nimbin:

- Health and university facilities
- Exceptional food and agricultural offerings
- Desirable climate and natural attractions
- Great streetscapes and many activation opportunities
- Range of art and sustainability based industries and activities.

There were also some common challenges identified:

- A need to freshen up tired buildings and signs
- Improved lighting for movement between places and perceptions of safety
- Perceptions of Council red tape creating barriers
- Poor pavements and roads creating barriers for access.

The following table highlights some of the ideas put forward for Nimbin and Lismore regarding what is working well and what could be built on, and those ideas put forward by participants as priority actions for town centre activation under the headings of Places, Events and Actions. Some of these ideas are addressed in the Business Activation Plan, and those beyond the scope of this Plan have been shared across Council to inform implementation of other strategic priorities.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS – LISMORE WORKSHOP	SUMMARY OF IDEAS – NIMBIN WORKSHOP
PLACES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A central block with intersecting laneways • More spaces like the Quad • Make the most of the river, walkways and easy access • Amazing food options that are competitive - link branding to food and agribusiness • More shade, grass and tables in places that people gather • Some buildings and facades look shabby • Lighting and pathways to connect different parts of the town • More art including pop-ups and at events • Pop-up and extended footpath dining 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bush Theatre – proposed site for new visitor information centre, opportunity to rent e-bikes from the centre • Increase support for Wai:bal Aboriginal Cultural Centre • Toilets and change rooms for Peace Park and existing public toilets need an upgrade • Footpath and bridge at corner of Sibley St and Alternative Way, and footpaths in general • Rainbow Road implementation • Development of fire site in main street • Trimmed vegetation • Sensor lighting along walkways
EVENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to better leverage significant number of sporting events • Opportunity for night markets at key locations and focus on late night shopping • Micro events or activities that give people an excuse to go for a walk • Leverage the ‘rainbow’ branding with more LGBTQI+ events • Lantern Parade a key event • Centralised contact point at Council for applications and exploration of barriers linked to cost or processing times • Micro-grants to support people to create new events or activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2023 50th anniversary of Aquarius Festival and Tuntable Falls Co-op • Need an annual calendar to show everything that’s happening in Nimbin • Address costs for event applications • Develop visits or tours for key sites including Candle Factory, Rainbow Power, walking tracks, A&I Hall, Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Bush Theatre, farm and food tours, behind the scenes visits, open house tours of alternative building • Range of markets and local activities such as open mic at the bowling club
ACTIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Destination marketing • Online newsletters and updates – everyone has to know what’s happening • Tools to support wayfinding • Regreening the town centre and shade • Local businesses first procurement model • Leverage the population and business growth happening across the Region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Huge local support for the Rainbow Road and the benefits it would bring • Integrate website on local activities with Council communications • Footpaths, lighting and signage priorities • Grant writing advice and support • Mechanisms to support sustainable development

There were also suggestions for linking Nimbin and Lismore as follows:

- **Places:** Bus tour operators travelling through Lismore and Nimbin to stop in both places
- **Events:** Both Lismore and Nimbin focus group residents talked about ‘clean up’ Lismore or Nimbin events, creating an opportunity for shared planning and communication channels to residents;
 - Opportunity to tour Shine Festival from Lismore to Nimbin, or have concurrent events in both places; Greater co-operation between Nimbin and Lismore Business Chambers.
- **Actions:** Both Lismore and Nimbin participants talked about having physical visitor information centres, as well as ways for all visitors to know about things to see and do via QR codes, Google business information, and websites that are kept up to date; and suggested renaming Lismore Airport, Lismore and Nimbin Airport.