

PLANNING OUR FUTURE

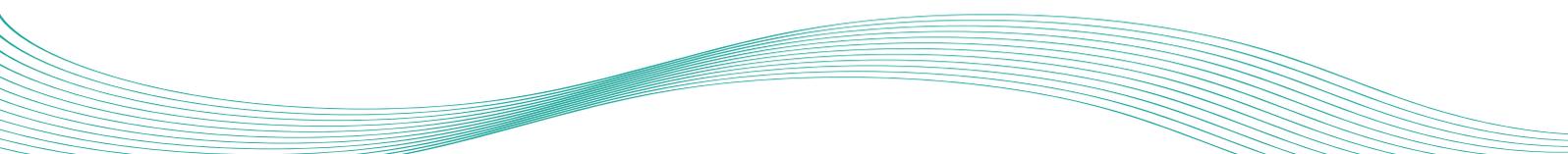
The Gympie Region Planning Scheme

Gympie Regional Council
New Planning Scheme Project

Draft

Residential Land and Housing Policy Position Paper

12 April 2023



Introduction

The Gympie region is experiencing sustained population growth and corresponding levels of urban expansion. As the region grows, so does the demand for residential land and new dwellings.

There is also a need to make sure that, there is adequate housing choice and a supply of appropriate dwellings that meet the needs of the Gympie region community in terms of affordability, accessibility, and size.

The efficient provision of housing in the right places at the right time is a priority for council and the community. Building approval statistics confirm continuing strong demand for new dwellings to be constructed.

Whilst it is undeniably important to efficiently deliver an ongoing supply of housing, it is equally important to balance immediate need with long-term outcomes. In the planning, approval and delivery processes the focus should be on ensuring that development results in a high-quality environment for those who will live with the development for decades to come, rather than compromise on good design to achieve a quick or more profitable project.

The growth of the region in a snapshot

- Around 69,968 people will call the Gympie region “home” by 2046, an increase of around 17,000 people from 2021.
- The region will require around 7,100 new dwellings to be constructed by 2046.
- The median age of residents is 48 years, compared to the Queensland State average of 38 years. The over 65 cohort represents 25.4 per cent of the population.
- Single person households make up 27.3 per cent of household composition, compared to the Queensland State average of 24.7 per cent.
- Housing affordability is becoming increasingly strained for the maintenance of rent and/or mortgage payments.
- Rental vacancy rates are currently very low with the Real Estate Institute of Queensland’s Residential Vacancy Report for the June Quarter 2022, identifying the vacancy rate at 0.3 per cent.
- Short term accommodation, (Air BNB or similar) is not having a regional impact but can be significant in a localised context such as Rainbow Beach.

Current residential land availability

Under the zoning allocation of the current planning scheme for the whole region, there is around:

- 1686 hectares of residential zoned land available for development, and
- 5053 hectares of rural residential zoned land available.

Some of this land is constrained by attributes that can make development challenging, such as high environmental values, flood risk, bushfire risk, storm surge, and erosion. In some cases, the challenge relates to the availability of infrastructure services.

When these constraints are considered, the remaining land equates to:

- 1235 hectares of potentially developable residential zoned land, and
- 4079 hectares potentially developable rural residential zoned land.

Note: High level consideration has been given to slope; however, a detailed topographical study has not been undertaken in the assessment of these land values.

The density of development will vary; however, findings confirm it is reasonable to assume an average yield for new lots or dwellings in Gympie at 10 dwellings per hectare in residential areas, and two dwellings per hectare on rural residential land.

The land that is currently zoned for residential purposes across the region has substantial capacity to supply dwellings in alignment with the growth of the region. The potential dwelling yield of the currently available land supply is summarised as follows:

Zone	Land	Dwelling Yield	Total New Dwellings
Residential Land	1235 hectares	10 dwellings per hectare	12,350 dwellings
Rural Residential Land	4079 hectares	Two dwellings per hectare	8,158 dwellings
			20,508 dwellings

Source: Land Supply and Housing Needs Assessment, Place Design Group. 2023, Supply and Demand Overview

From this broad assessment, it is apparent that Gympie has adequate land available to provide housing outcomes in response to future needs, even if a more restrictive approach to constraints is applied. Further work will be necessary in conjunction with this housing policy to undertake a detailed land assessment to develop a clear strategy to ensure that future development is facilitated in the right locations and sequence. An efficient approach to development that facilitates the orderly delivery of infrastructure will maximise cost efficiency for council and the community.

Planning strategy for robust housing supply

Housing supply can also be affected by factors outside the influence of local government including building industry trends, market variables, economic stability, and employment opportunities. A robust planning strategy needs to be flexible enough to respond to change, respect existing patterns of development, and still provide a clear way forward.

This paper examines the:

- main issues and challenges in housing development,
- current trends,
- desired outcomes, and
- potential policy settings to address the issues.

The development of strategies to deal with future residential development in the region will be based on analysis of the existing residential market and needs, in conjunction with a detailed assessment of the future capacity of the Region to facilitate the required housing.

The strategy for residential development under the new Planning Scheme needs to encourage a range of residential accommodation types to promote and supply housing choice to align with the diverse housing needs of the Gympie community.

The position paper is one of 13 position papers addressing key aspects of the future land use and development policy for Gympie Regional Council. The paper has been prepared as part of Stage 2 of the Gympie Regional Council Planning Scheme project and is intended to inform the planning scheme drafting process to occur in Stage 3.

Other position papers to be prepared as Stage 2 are as follows:

- Industrial Land
- Retail and Commercial Development
- Rural Land
- Open Space and Recreation
- Heritage
- Highway Bypass Response Strategy
- Biodiversity Conservation
- Scenic Amenity
- Flooding
- Bushfire
- Land Stability
- Coastal Hazards.

Issue 1: Residential Land Supply

Discussion

- Gympie population has been growing at an average of 1.5 per cent per annum over the past decade.
- Growth is predicted to continue at this rate until 2026 following which it is expected that the average annual growth rate will taper off to 1.0 per cent per annum for the following 20 years, delivering a 2046 population of 69,968.
- It is noted that council's forecast growth is higher than that of the Queensland Government Statisticians Office, who predict a 2046 population of 61,342.
- The planning horizon for the new planning scheme is 2046. The actual population growth will be monitored and the forecast adjusted as required.
- Based on the forecast 2046 population, a need of 7100 dwellings has been identified for the planning period to 2046. The role of the new planning scheme in this regard is to ensure that an adequate supply of residential land is available so as to not restrict the supply of land for housing or the range of dwelling types and sizes that is made available to meet the community demand for housing.

- An analysis of the land within residential and rural residential zones indicates that in excess of 5300 hectares of land is available for the development of a range of housing types with the potential to accommodate approximately 20,000 additional dwellings.
- Some challenges remain; however, with respect to the orderly sequencing of development to ensure infrastructure can be provided efficiently and in a financially sustainable manner.
- Despite surplus capacity, it is important to review the residential zones to ensure sufficient residential land supply remains for the planning period beyond 2046.
- It is important to investigate and identify where alternative housing products (such as medium density dwellings) should be located.
- There is a need to ensure that land zoned for higher density residential development is not underutilised by being developed at a lower density.

Desired outcomes

- An adequate supply of residential land is maintained.
- Development of residential land occurs in an efficient sequence to facilitate the financially sustainable delivery of infrastructure.
- Land identified as being suitable to higher density residential development is used for that purpose and not prematurely developed at lower densities.

Policy positions

- The planning scheme shall identify the location, extent and sequencing of residential land to ensure the ongoing availability of suitable land for development.
- The planning scheme will ensure residential land supply is maintained and released at a rate that supports projected housing need to 2046.
- Key sites that have opportunity to provide longer term medium density development are preserved for future need.

Actions

- Within the framework of the planning scheme review:
 - Undertake detailed assessment of the zoned residential land, along with relevant constraints and opportunities.
 - Consider scheme provisions that set minimum rather than maximum density controls.
 - Review the Local Government Infrastructure Plan to ensure the most efficient delivery of infrastructure.
 - Develop a staged approach to residential development through the new planning scheme and local government infrastructure plan which aligns the land use planning, infrastructure delivery and investment attraction efforts.

Issue 2: Residential Land Location

Discussion

- Gympie's existing residential settlement pattern is characterised by low density and rural residential development.
- Low density residential development comes with challenges, including higher infrastructure costs per dwelling.
- A sustainable settlement pattern is preferred which should promote urban consolidation, seek to minimise urban sprawl, use infrastructure efficiently, and minimise the ecological footprint.
- Careful planning for dwellings both in infill and greenfield settings will be an important step to ensure diversity in lot sizes and dwelling types.

Desired outcomes

- Residential growth is directed to areas that are, or can readily be, connected to existing infrastructure networks.

Policy positions

- Urban consolidation will be supported particularly where existing infrastructure networks can be utilised.
- Greenfield residential development will be supported where it can be serviced efficiently as a logical extension to existing networks.

Actions

- Within the framework of the planning scheme review, identify areas within the Gympie LGA that can support increased density with preference for areas in proximity to town centres.

Issue 3: Servicing of Residential Land

Discussion

- The future growth of Gympie Regional Council will require some expansion or upgrade of infrastructure and services including sewer, water, waste, and transport.
- The provision of infrastructure is dependent mainly upon the inclusion of the land within the Priority Infrastructure Area (PIA). The PIA forms part of the Local Government Infrastructure Plan (LGIP) and identifies those areas within which council proposes to provide infrastructure to support urban development. The current LGIP and PIA have a planning horizon of 2031. The new planning scheme project includes a review of the existing LGIP and PIA, including extending the planning horizon out to 2036.

- It is important that the LGIP and PIA set a clear sequence for the delivery of urban support infrastructure. It is equally important that out of sequence development does not occur or is minimised to ensure the coordinated and most efficient delivery of infrastructure is achieved.
- Of the 5314 hectares of developable land, 659 hectares is inside the PIA and 4654 hectares is located outside of the PIA. Therefore, maximising efficient access to existing or currently planned infrastructure is a consideration for where development should be promoted or intensified.

Desired outcomes

- Residential development is provided with appropriate infrastructure and servicing.
- Consolidate opportunities for infill development and streamline regulatory provisions for efficient land use outcomes (development applications) that are connected to established infrastructure services with adequate capacity.
- The region is supported by a network of infrastructure and services supplied by council and other agencies and authorities.

Policy positions

- Residential growth is located in areas well serviced by infrastructure such as sealed road access, electricity, telecommunications, reticulated water, and sewerage services.
- Developer contributions towards the funding of necessary infrastructure will be subject to the provisions of council's Local Government Infrastructure Plan (LGIP) and adopted Infrastructure Charges Resolution.

Actions

- Within the framework of the planning scheme review:
 - Review the LGIP and potential extension the PIA, to ensure that areas identified for residential development can be appropriately serviced by the full suite of infrastructure.
 - Ensure the planning scheme identifies the infrastructure to be provided by the developers of new land.
- Council continues to advocate for investment by the State and Commonwealth governments in the infrastructure necessary to support development in the Gympie region.

Issue 4: Rural Residential Development

Discussion

- Rural residential development is a popular housing choice.
- A large number of rural residential lots of various sizes have been developed under the current planning scheme provisions.
- Almost 9000 hectares of land is currently zoned for rural residential development, more than 50 per cent of this land remains undeveloped for this purpose.

- Disincentives to development include location, access constraints, limited market appeal and natural hazards such as flooding and bushfire threat.
- Though popular, rural residential development is not without some significant drawbacks:
 - it typically increases residential populations where all levels of government are least able to provide infrastructure or services,
 - it tends to occur in a multi-fronted, fragmented pattern further adding to difficulties in upgrading basic infrastructure such as roads,
 - more residents are exposed to areas of higher bushfire risk and potential isolation during flood events,
 - it has adverse impacts upon primary production by virtue of increasing land prices and generating reverse amenity effects,
 - has a significantly increased ecological footprint over other forms of residential development by reason of increased land clearing, extended car based travel and on-site sewage disposal systems,
 - has significant scenic amenity impacts where it occurs at densities greater than 0.5 dwellings per hectare,
 - rural residential lots of less than two hectares are generally less capable of supporting any rural activity and are typically more residential than rural in character,
 - it typically generates resident expectations for service and infrastructure that Council cannot meet,
 - it greatly adds to the complexity of future urban land development by virtue of multiple small holdings being a barrier to efficient urban subdivision.
- The draft Wide Bay Burnett Regional Plan cautions against an increase in the supply of rural residential land.
- The draft Regional Plan also states that rural residential development is to be contained in existing rural residential zoned areas.
- Consideration should be given to the review of current extent/location of current rural residential zonings.
- Consideration should be given to the potential opportunities for larger rural residential lots (10 hectare rural lifestyle lots) in reasonable proximity to existing rural centres and where such development could be accommodated without:
 - the need to upgrade existing infrastructure,
 - adverse impacts upon agricultural production,
 - adverse impacts upon biodiversity values, or
 - unduly increasing resident exposure to natural hazards.

Desired outcomes

- Further fragmentation of rural land is only supported where there is a demonstrated need or where subdivision improves agricultural productivity or land management outcomes.
- Contain rural residential growth within a re-defined footprint to avoid adverse impacts and to protect rural land from further encroachment.
- An appropriate supply of land for rural residential purposes is identified by the planning scheme.

Policy positions

- Accommodating subdivision of rural zoned land only where it supports the achievement of measurably improved outcomes in primary production.
- The extent and location of rural residential zonings is to be reviewed consistent with the discussion above.

Actions

- Within the framework of the planning scheme review, strengthen policy statements to identify land for subdivision for rural residential purposes, to manage future pressure points for expansion and to protect rural land from inappropriate development.
- Review the minimum lot area/subdivision sizes for rural residential development.
- Review the extent and locations of the rural residential zone.

Issue 5: Housing Design

Discussion

- Careful design is required to ensure new housing delivers high quality cost-effective buildings and an urban realm that respects current and future desired local character, green spaces, and landscaping.
- Council's planning scheme can have some impacts upon dwelling design outcomes where the dwellings are the subject of development applications as in the case of multi-unit dwellings, unfortunately, the great majority of dwellings constructed in the Gympie region are detached single family dwellings which are exempt from consideration under the planning scheme unless a specific overlay code is triggered.
- Where a planning scheme overlay code is triggered, council has some scope to influence the design of detached housing such as in the case of natural hazard, biodiversity conservation or heritage overlays by imposing additional code provisions.
- For the bulk of residential developments the application of council's planning scheme is currently limited to the subdivision stage of the residential development process.
- Schedule 12A of the Planning Regulation does require councils to have regard for urban design in the assessment of subdivision applications, in particular the Regulations set benchmarks for vehicular and pedestrian connectivity, open space, street trees/shade, the provision of footpaths and subdivision design with respect to the size of street blocks. The measures are principally intended to improve walkability but will have overall urban design benefits which could be supplemented by additional benchmarks in council's planning scheme codes.
- Subdivision design could also be enhanced by more detailed local area planning being undertaken by council early in the development process.

Desired outcomes

- Good design is achieved by incorporating the principles of urban design into local area planning and subsequent planning scheme provisions.
- Residential development creates desirable and sustainable environments for the residents of the region.

Policy position

- Urban design principals will be applied to all stages of the residential development process from local area planning through to subdivision design and dwelling construction.

Actions

- Within the framework of the planning scheme review:
 - review strategies, planning controls and policies to promote good design,
 - supplement the provisions of Schedule 12A of the Planning Regulation with additional measures to improve subdivision and dwelling design outcomes.

Issue 6: Housing Choice and Diversity

Discussion

- Detached dwellings on larger lots make up the majority proportion of housing within the Gympie LGA.
- The “pipeline” of new housing approvals indicates a continuation of this trend, notwithstanding a changing household composition which has demonstrated a decline in the number of traditional family households, and an increased number of smaller, or lone person households.
- The 2021 Census indicates that irrespective of the profile of household type across the Gympie LGA, most people are residing in detached dwellings.
- This highlights a key present-day challenge for the Gympie LGA, with the available housing type remaining largely unchanged and unresponsive to a growing proportion of ageing, and smaller households.
- A range of housing and accommodation types is required to provide housing choice to cater for the expected age, income, and household types that make up the Gympie community.
- Consistent with the jointly prepared state and council Local Housing Action Plan, strategies aimed at increasing residential densities in appropriate locations will be a key component of responding to housing needs and improving housing choice.
- The current and earlier planning schemes for the region have for many years zoned land for higher density and more diverse forms of housing. Many of these sites have been developed for detached low density housing and are no longer available for higher density housing forms.
- The fundamental challenge is that the financial feasibility of multi-unit residential developments in Gympie has proven to be elusive. This challenge is not unique to the Gympie region and can be seen in many localities outside of the Brisbane metropolitan area, particular in regional areas. There are a number of compounding factors that contribute to this situation; this will be the subject of a separate more targeted investigation.
- It is not anticipated that the present situation will change significantly in the next decade.
- There is a need however to act to protect those sites that have potential for medium density housing in the longer term from “expedient” low density development in the interim. The use of minimum density rather than maximum density controls within the planning scheme may assist in this regard.

- Effort should also be directed to encouraging other potential dwelling options in the interim period until the viability of traditional multi-unit housing improves. In this regard, secondary dwellings, including the “tiny house” option (i.e. a dwelling of no more than 50m² floor area) and dual occupancy development within existing residential areas will assist to increase both the number and diversity of dwellings. Provisions to manage the location, attributes and potential impacts of these dwellings can be introduced into the planning scheme.

Desired outcomes

- Residential development provides for a variety of housing types and densities reflective of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the Gympie region.
- Sites that are zoned for higher density residential development are actually developed for that purpose.

Policy positions

- The planning scheme supports an adequate supply and diversity of housing.
- The planning scheme incorporates measures to ensure targeted residential densities are achieved.
- The scheme will include measures to encourage a range of dwelling types and sizes within existing residential areas.

Actions

- Within the framework of the planning scheme review consider and refine how regulatory settings can facilitate the delivery of dwelling diversity.

Issue 7: Housing for Specific and Vulnerable Groups

Discussion

- There are vulnerable groups in our community who may require specific housing policy settings to address their housing needs. Council’s planning scheme provisions need to be responsive to these needs. The following areas of need have been identified:

Low income households

The 2021 census data indicates the following:

- The median weekly individual and household incomes in the Gympie region are substantially lower than both the state and national averages
- 42 per cent of renting households have rental payments in excess of 30 per cent of household income
- 15 per cent of owner households have mortgage payments in excess of 30 per cent of household income.

A household is defined as being in “housing stress” when rent or mortgage payments exceed 30 per cent of household income. In comparison, the state and national average for renting households experiencing housing stress is around 32 per cent. Recent increases in interest rates will not have improved the situation.

The statistics referred to above relate solely to the capital cost of housing acquisition, whether that be paying rent or a mortgage. It is important therefore to remember that the real cost of housing includes the operational costs of housing choices such as maintenance, heating/cooling and transport to daily activities. In any event, the cost of housing is an important consideration in council’s plan making with respect to residential development and meeting the needs of lower income households.

People with a disability or a long term health condition

At June 30, 2022, the Department of Communities Housing and Digital Economy (DCHDE) data indicated that there were 150 housing register applications for the Gympie LGA across very high, high and moderate segments of need. Just under half (44 per cent) of applications identified a person within the household as having a disability. Of these, majority (64 per cent) requested disability modifications to housing to meet their needs.

Older residents

Many of the older residents of the region are long term residents with family, social and economic ties to the communities in which they live. It is a reasonable planning objective that they should be able to maintain those connections for as long as is possible. It is also consistent with the concept of “aging in place” which has demonstrable benefits for both the individual and the broader community.

To support the aging in place concept the planning scheme review will explore land use related elements such as adaptive dwelling design to allow residents to remain in their homes for longer, subdivision design to ensure neighbourhoods are walkable, and consideration of the potential for secondary dwellings/low scale infill development to provide an ongoing income stream to, and reduce the property maintenance burden for, older residents. This later element may also have advantages with respect to improving housing supply and diversity.

Either by choice or necessity there will also be an ongoing interest in structured age care facilities. The development of such facilities will be guided by sound planning and urban design principles to ensure appropriate scale, location and amenity for residents. An Ageing in Place Strategy has been prepared by council to assist decisions concerning seniors housing.

Worker’s accommodation

Whilst not being considered a vulnerable group key workers are likely to form a significant proportion of the housing market. Key workers are typically defined as those workers in either the public or private sectors who perform essential roles – nurses and emergency worker are often cited as examples of key workers.

In the Gympie context the definition of key workers has been expanded somewhat to include those workers necessary to ensure the region’s key industries and large infrastructure projects continue to operate. Australia’s current near full employment situation has meant that a significant proportion of the workers in these industries are being sourced from overseas, adding complexity to the housing challenge. Council is aware that this is having spill over effects upon the already constrained housing supply. It is further noted that the Department of Health is building additional staff accommodation at Gympie Hospital as alternate accommodation is not available.

The planning scheme review will examine the scope for a strategic approach to the provision of key worker accommodation where appropriately located multi-unit housing forms might not only serve to address the housing need but also provide an impetus for place making and night time activation of the Gympie town centre.

Desired outcomes

- All sectors of the Gympie community are accommodated in dwellings that are appropriate to their needs and financial means.
- Dwellings for the “vulnerable” groups discussed above are evenly dispersed and not concentrated to create clusters of disadvantage.

Policy positions

- Gympie Regional Council will aim to improve housing affordability by facilitating an increased supply of diverse forms of housing.
- Council will work strategically with industry groups to address the issue of key worker accommodation.

Actions

- Ensure the new planning scheme promotes a range of housing types to improve housing choice and affordability.
- Council continues to advocate for employment of non-statutory tools to promote housing typologies that deliver genuine housing choice and meet the needs of the community, particularly for vulnerable and/or members of the community with specific needs.

Issue 8: Short Term Accommodation

Discussion

- Consistent with many other local government areas across Australia Gympie has seen a growing interest in the provision of short term accommodation in what has traditionally been regarded as being dwelling stock available for longer term rental accommodation.
- It is not accurately known how many of the Gympie region’s 22,000 plus existing dwellings are currently being used as short term accommodation.
- It is understood that in particular locations such as Rainbow Beach that the prevalence of short term accommodation is greater that might be expected across the region more generally.
- It is estimated from a review of accommodation booking websites that between 15 and 20 per cent of the existing dwelling stock at Rainbow Beach is currently available for short term accommodation for at least part of the time. This level of non-residential use could be assumed to have adverse impacts upon the availability of housing for permanent residents and/or longer term renters.
- There is potential for land use conflict to arise where short term accommodation occurs in close proximity to residential development, particularly with respect to noise, privacy, concerns over personal security, party houses and car parking.

- Currently the planning scheme identifies short term accommodation as a land use requiring the approval by council of an impact assessment development application in all zones, with the exception of one part of the tourist accommodation zone at Rainbow Beach.
- It would appear that a significant proportion of current short term accommodation facilities have commenced without development approval.
- It is noted that in some instances the providers of existing short term accommodation facilities may be able to demonstrate existing use rights that would enable them to lawfully continue the activity.
- The provision of short term accommodation is not without merit particularly where it is in the wider community interest to foster tourism development.
- The task for the planning scheme will be to establish a sustainable balance between the range of sometimes competing land uses that occur across the region.

Desired outcomes

- Short term accommodation occurs in locations and in a manner that does not compromise residential amenity.
- Short term accommodation does not adversely affect the supply of housing available to permanent residents or longer term renters.
- Short term accommodation supports the ongoing development of the Gympie region's tourism sector.

Policy positions

- The planning scheme identifies that short term accommodation could occur in Principal and District Centre zones across the Region and in selected Residential Choice zones at Rainbow Beach (to be defined as precincts under the planning scheme) as code assessable development.
- The short term accommodation use is to remain as impact assessable development in all other zones under the planning scheme and identified in the Strategic Framework element of the scheme as "not encouraged" in these zones.
- The provision of short term accommodation be managed to achieve compliance with the above policy positions.

Actions

- The new planning scheme be drafted to reflect the desired locations for short term accommodation as set out above.
- A short term accommodation code be drafted for inclusion in the new scheme; the code to include provisions to address the potential impacts of short term accommodation uses upon nearby residents.
- Council investigate the compliance issues arising from the current "stock" of short term accommodation facilities.
- A local law be drafted to support the implementation of the above policy positions.