

Attachment 01 – GSC Contextual Background

Our functions:

Gundagai Shire Council provides a wide range of services and manage many assets that people in our local communities rely upon.

Section 8 of the Local Government Act 1993, provides a charter for Gundagai Council's role to:

- provide directly or on behalf of other levels of government, after due consultation, adequate, equitable and appropriate services and facilities for the community and to ensure that those services and facilities are managed efficiently and effectively
- exercise community leadership
- exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and actively promotes the multicultural principles
- promote and to provide and plan for the needs of children
- properly manage, develop, protect, restore, enhance and conserve the environment of the area for which it is responsible, in a manner that is consistent with and promotes the principles of ecologically sustainable development
- have regard to the long term and cumulative effects of its decisions
- bear in mind that it is the custodian and trustee of public assets and to effectively plan for, account for and manage the assets for which it is responsible
- engage in long-term strategic planning on behalf of the local community
- exercise its functions in a manner that is consistent with and promotes social justice principles of equity, access, participation and rights
- facilitate the involvement of councilors, members of the public, users of facilities and services and council staff in the development, improvement and co-ordination of local government
- raise funds for local purposes by the fair imposition of rates, charges and fees, by income earned from investments and, when appropriate, by borrowings and grants
- keep the local community and the State government (and through it, the wider community) informed about its activities
- ensure that, in the exercise of its regulatory functions, it acts consistently and without bias, particularly where an activity of the council is affected
- be a responsible employer.

Section 24 of the Local Government Act 1993 enables our Council to provide goods, services and facilities, and carry out activities, appropriate to the current and future needs within its local community and of the wider public, subject to this Act, the regulations and any other law.

The Gundagai Community and Council work together to make the best possible decisions for our future in providing services and infrastructure Gundagai is a strong Council that provides the services and infrastructure our community needs.

Our aim is to promote good practice and drive improvement in key areas by measuring our performance.

Accountable for our actions.

GSC has a Community Strategic Plan developed by the Council for the future of the local community covering a period from 2012 to 2022. To support the community strategic plan, GSC has a long-term resourcing strategy that includes long-term financial planning, workforce management and asset management planning. Achieving the strategic objectives in the community strategic plan involves other partners including State Government agencies, non-government organisations and other community groups and individuals.

GSC has a Delivery Program that details the principal activities to be undertaken by the Council in order to achieve the objectives in the community strategic plan that it is responsible for. A Council must establish a new delivery program after each ordinary election.

Before the beginning of each year a council must adopt an operational plan that includes a statement of the Council's revenue policy and the activities engaged in by the council during the year. Public notice is to be given by the council of its operational plan. GSC Operational Plan is adopted.

GSC has a Consolidated Fund, consisting of General Fund, Town Improvement Fund, Water Fund, Sewer Fund, and a Trust Fund including Reserves. It keeps proper accounts, which are audited annually.

Each year GSC prepares an Annual Report to its community on its work and activities.

GSC participates in alliance of Councils (Gundagai, Coolamon, Temora and Junee) for the provision of internal audit services. The methodology is compatible with, and fits within, the Professional Practices Framework as applied by the Institute of Internal Auditors Australia. Our approach to internal auditing is based on the application of the 'internal control structure' model developed by the Committee of Sponsoring Organisations (COSO) of the U.S. Treadway Commission, and endorsed by the Australian National Audit Office. Use of the COSO model ensures we consider key business risks within each assignment, either through review of management's own risk assessments where they have been undertaken, or by our own risk assessment. In either case, the consideration of risk is utilised in our preliminary planning phase to scope the assignment and focus on areas of highest 'uncontrolled' or 'residual' risk.

GSC is accountable to residents and ratepayers in our LGA. The Director-General has power to investigate a council, its work and its activities and report on the investigation to the Minister. The Minister has power to issue a performance improvement order in respect of a council, to suspend a council and to initiate a public inquiry into the operations of a council. GSC has not been the subject of an investigation by the Director-General or any subsequent orders or actions by the Minister.

Members of the general public are entitled to inspect a wide range of council documents. Members of the public are also entitled, under the Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009, to be given access to certain documents held by a council. They are also entitled, under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998, to require the correction of certain kinds of information in the event that the information is incomplete, incorrect, out of date or misleading.

GSC gives public notice of times and places of its meetings. GSC have available for the public at its office, on Council's website and at each meeting copies of the agenda and the associated business papers for the meeting.

Every Councillor, member of staff and delegate must act honestly and exercise a reasonable degree of care and diligence in carrying out their functions under the Local Government Act or any other Act. GSC has adopted a code of conduct under which members must comply. GSC has had nil breaches of the code, which includes serious corrupt conduct. Further GSC work under Duties of disclosure requirements, whereby disclosures of interest returns and disclose of pecuniary interest are made in accordance with the L G Act.

About Gundagai Council Local Government Area

While relatively small in area (2457.1 sq. kilometers) and in population (3,763 people in 2011), the Shire of Gundagai holds a significant place in the Australian psyche. Gundagai town and countryside, its characters and landmarks, from the early days of European settlement, have been immortalised in song and verse, story and plays. Through these popular poems and songs Gundagai has come to represent the authentic Australian country town.

For thousands of years before white settlers, the indigenous Wiradjuri people took advantage of the abundant natural resources of the area; living and hunting along the wide Murrumbidgee River and its tributaries, and from the wooded high country in the south-east to the hills and gentle slopes around the centre and the open pasture land in the west of the Shire. The banks of the Murrumbidgee near present-day Gundagai were a frequent meeting place of the Wiradjuri.

After the first European explorers passed through the area in the 1820s, a handful of pioneers brought their sheep to the fertile grazing land on the Murrumbidgee floodplain. Gundagai township steadily grew on the river bank around the spot chosen as the best place for crossing the Murrumbidgee River (referred to as 'The Crossing Place').

Gundagai village was officially gazetted in 1838 and the Post Office opened in 1843, but its site on the bank of the broad river was subject to flooding. In 1852 there was a major flood that destroyed the majority of the town's buildings and 75 people lost their lives. The first true reconciliation between black and white Australians occurred when four young aboriginal men, including Yarri and Jackey, risked their own lives in the floodwater by canoeing to save forty other lives. Following this the town was redeveloped on higher ground to the north and south of the river flats. The Gundagai Courthouse and Gaol, built in 1859 and still standing today, was one of the first stone buildings in the new town.

As well as swaggies, drovers, shearers, bullockies, miners, Chinese workers and other bush characters, Gundagai Shire had its share of Australia's infamous bushrangers with records of incidents going back to

1838. Members of Ben Hall's gang were active in the area in the 1860s and in 1879 Captain Moonlight was involved in a police shooting with his subsequent arraignment held at Gundagai Courthouse. From the mid 1800s to the early 1900s, Gundagai's fortunes were booming with its rich agricultural and pastoral industries, gold mining and its important location on the main route between Sydney, northern NSW, and Victoria.

In 1858 this route was known as The Great Southern Road, joining Sydney with Albury, and declared one of the three main roads in the colony of NSW. Reinforcing the road's critical role for transport, the Prince Alfred Bridge, the first iron truss bridge in NSW, was built across the river in 1867 along with a timber viaduct across the wide floodplain. At a total length of 921 metres it was the longest bridge in NSW until 1932 when the Sydney Harbour Bridge was completed. The road was renamed the Hume Highway in 1928 and in 1977, with the opening of a new concrete and steel bridge, the highway bypassed the town.

Steamers travelled the Murrumbidgee River plying their trade between Gundagai, Wagga Wagga and Hay in the 1860s and 70s. The Main Southern railway line reached Gundagai in 1886. By 1902, a 819 metre long railway bridge was built across the river to take the railway further south to Tumut.

Gundagai was declared a Municipality in 1889 and Gundagai Shire formed by amalgamation with the Municipality of Adjungbilly Shire was gazetted in 1923. In 1932 the internationally famous monument and tourist attraction, the Dog on the Tuckerbox was unveiled at Snake Gully, five miles from Gundagai, as a tribute to the area's pioneers and bullockies. Gundagai is a treasure trove of fascinating aspects of Australia's past, all in one attractive and friendly little town.

Gundagai Shire is part of the Eastern Riverina agricultural region of NSW. The Murrumbidgee River, one of NSW's most important rivers, and the Hume Highway, the main transport route between Australia's two biggest cities Sydney and Melbourne, cross the Shire running approximately from the north-east to the south-west. The river and the highway have always, and continue to play a crucial role in the development and economy of the Shire.

Gundagai's economy relies on its rural industries and more than 80% of the Shire is cleared for dryland cropping and grazing. This traditional farming area produces high quality lucerne hay, horticultural products and cereal crops on the rich alluvial river flats and from the rolling hills come wool, lambs, beef and forestry. Orchard fruits, vegetables and large amounts of honey are produced in the Shire and viticulture is becoming increasingly important.

These rural industries employ almost a quarter of the Shire workforce (23% in 2011), followed by food and accommodation employing 12%, manufacturing 11%, construction 11%, retail 6.5% and health and social care 8% of local workers. Since the 2006 census, manufacturing and construction industries have both increased by 2% (2011). Currently, the two major secondary industries in Gundagai are the Gundagai Meat Processors Plant, the Shire's largest single employer, and D J Lynch Engineering, contractors involved in major construction projects.

Gundagai township, where 60% of Shire residents live, is roughly in the middle of the Shire and half way between Sydney and Melbourne, a 2 hour drive from Canberra and less than one hour to Wagga Wagga. It is easily accessible to surrounding regional centres and its location by the Hume Highway provides for reasonable travel times on the high speed dual carriageway.

Gundagai, with its surrounding villages of Coolac, Tumblong, Muttama, Nangus and Adjungbilly, is a stable community with 67% of residents having lived in the same locality for more than 5 years (ABS 2011). Many families still living here today are descended from the early settlers. Over the decades those families have endured floods and extreme droughts, and enjoyed prosperous times as well as hard times. This resilience and pride in shared heritage is part of Gundagai's strength and its appeal.

There are, however, challenges for the future of Gundagai Shire and its community. Some of these include low population and employment growth and, like many other places in Australia, an aging population. The heavy reliance on agriculture can be a challenge for the Shire's economy, and at the same time, the Shire (and the region) is experiencing a decline in job opportunities, particularly for young people.

Gundagai Shire Council is working with its community to sustain and improve community resilience, wellbeing and the quality of life and to preserve the heritage values of the area.

Community at a glance

(Based on ABS Census data 2011)

- Gundagai Shire area covers 2,457.1 sq. kilometers
- The Shire population is 3,763
- 2,263 persons live in Gundagai town
- The median age across the Shire is 42 years
- There are 1,006 families
- 379 residents live in lone person households

- 62% households have internet connections
- 21.5% population are children less than 14 years and 28.1% are aged over 55 years
- 28.3% population currently engaged in education (school, TAFE, university etc.)
- 1754 persons in total workforce
- 60% workforce is in full time work
- 56% workforce have post school qualifications
- 4.2% of total workforce were unemployed
- 4.25% of youth (15-24 years) were unemployed
- 19.1% of total workforce are employed on sheep, beef, cattle and grain farms
- 6.5% of total workforce works in cafes, restaurants and fast food outlets
- Agriculture, construction and manufacturing are largest employers of youth
- 29% population over 15 years are involved in some sort of volunteer work
- 72% either own their homes or are paying them off
- Only 18% of natural vegetation cover remains in the Gundagai Shire

One of Gundagai's strengths is that the whole community shares the concern about keeping Gundagai's identity and unique heritage alive and strong. That shared feeling contributes to community cohesion and Gundagai's strong community spirit.

The values coincide with a very settled community, much of which has lived in the same area for many years, and they are reflected in the community's views on what kind of future they want for Gundagai.

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The Gundagai Shire Community Plan

Vision statement

Gundagai Shire is a safe and friendly thriving rural community where all residents are part of the strong community spirit and benefit from access to quality education, employment, services and facilities which meet the needs of the community. New residents and visitors are welcome to enjoy the relaxed and healthy lifestyle, scenic beauty and unique heritage and to contribute to our sustainable growth and prosperity.

Our community values

- A family friendly safe community with a strong community spirit and opportunities to engage in a healthy and active lifestyle.
- A strong commitment and connections to the area and a conviction to maintain its heritage and character.
- A rural lifestyle that is relaxed, safe and tranquil with little traffic and no pollution.

Guiding principles

The Gundagai Shire Community Plan was developed and based on two sets of guiding principles - social justice and sustainability.

The **social justice** principles of equity, rights, access and participation, reflect the Department of Local Government's Social Justice Framework 2008–2012 and state that:

- There is **equity** in the distribution of resources
- **Rights** are recognised and promoted
- People have fairer **access** to the economic resources and services essential to meet their basic needs and to improve their quality of life, and
- People have better opportunities for genuine **participation** and consultation about decisions affecting their lives.

These principles are intrinsic to the work at Gundagai Shire Council.

The **sustainability** principles, devised within the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), provide a framework to develop a consensus around a sustainable development policy and programs. The principles, listed below, cover the functioning of a sustainable place.

- Provide a long-term vision based on: sustainability; intergenerational, social, economic and political equity; and the individuality of the place.
- Achieve long-term economic and social security.
- Recognise the intrinsic value of biodiversity and natural ecosystems, and protect and restore them.
- Enable communities to minimise their ecological footprint.
- Build on characteristics of ecosystems in the development and nurturing of healthy and sustainable cities.
- Recognise and build on the distinctive characteristics of cities, including their human and cultural values, history and natural systems.
- Empower people and foster participation.
- Expand and enable cooperative networks to work towards a common, sustainable future.
- Promote sustainable production and consumption, through appropriate use of environmentally sound technologies and effective demand management.
- Enable continual improvement, based on accountability, transparency and good governance.