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On 9 March 2005, Lake Macquarie City Council organised the Charlestown Forum to generate ideas for the future form of Charlestown town centre. This forum discussed how Charlestown could be transformed from the centre it is today, to an efficient, lively urban centre that serves the many needs of its catchment population.

One of the conclusions of the Forum was that a Master Plan be produced for the town centre, to guide the development and growth of the town centre. The Master Plan would be supported by an Implementation Plan, to ensure the delivery of the Master Plan ideas.

HASSELL, a multi-disciplinary design and planning firm, is working with Lake Macquarie City Council, key stakeholders and the community to develop this Master Plan.

**WHAT A MASTER PLAN IS**

A Master Plan is a strategic plan to guide the long-term development and growth of an area. It is a document that creates a vision for a place, imagining the possibilities for change and rejuvenation. Importantly, a Master Plan sets urban design objectives that balance the various space, land use, landscape and infrastructure needs of the area, with a concern for responsible, sustainable and compatible growth. These ideas then require detailed analysis, testing and further investigation to ensure that they can be practically implemented.

Master Plans typically include diagrams, drawings and statements that describe the type, location, scale and character of future buildings and spaces.

The Master Plan for the Charlestown town centre will:

- guide the development of private and public land over the next 15 years;
- respond to the current and future needs of residents;
- address public domain, open space and transportation requirements; and
- assist in defining the regional role and identity of Charlestown

**FUNDING**

The development of the Master Plan is being jointly funded by Lake Macquarie City Council and the NSW Government, through planning reform funding contributed by the Department of Planning.
The Master Plan for the Charlestown town centre is being developed by a process of Enquiry by Design, which involves the local community, council staff and councillors, and other stakeholders in a series of interactive and design-focused workshops. During workshops process, urban design options are investigated interactively through debate and are illustrated to much preferred outcomes. Actions needed to achieve the implementation of the Master Plan will be identified in an implementation framework.

Enquiry by Design Workshops are typically non-binding, to encourage participants to think creatively and go beyond their normal (sometimes self imposed) roles, and to provide the flexibility to consider and debate a wide range of options.

Workshop One was held in October 2006 and focused on:
- developing a VISION to guide the development of the Master Plan; and
- identifying the key ISSUES including opportunities and challenges that will influence the design and delivery of the Master Plan.

At a second workshop, held in December 2006, participants:
- defined OBJECTIVES that arise from the issues; and
- discussed and reviewed a number of design STRATEGIES with the objectives used as a means of measuring the relative effectiveness of each design strategy.

During the second workshop, three preliminary Master Plan schemes were presented and discussed, then assessed against a number of objectives. A preferred Master Plan direction - a combination of ideas and principles from different schemes - was identified. A report of both workshops has been prepared previously.

The draft Master Plan Concept report was then produced, incorporating the ideas and discussions from each workshop, as well as additional research and studies conducted by the design team. This report was exhibited for public comment for 42 days from 28 May 2007 to 7 July 2007. A range of responses were received from local residents, business and community organisations, authorities and government departments, and other interested parties.

A third workshop was held during August 2007 to discuss the feedback received and specific revisions to the draft Master Plan. Additionally, a conceptual Implementation Plan was developed, to identify and prioritise a number of key projects and initiatives for Council to consider. This plan has been incorporated into this revised Master Plan document as Section 4.
The workshop process, discussion and outcomes are summarised in two reports prepared at the completion of the workshops. The reports are:

- Charlestown Town Centre Master Plan Workshop One Report, November 2006
- Charlestown Town Centre Master Plan Workshop Two Report, February 2007

Key information from these reports, including the Vision for Charlestown and Master Plan objectives, is shown below.

**INTRODUCTION**

**WORKSHOP OUTCOMES**

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**THE MASTER PLAN VISION**

A single Vision Statement was agreed upon – that Charlestown would be:

“The heartland of the Hunter, an accessible, vibrant, healthy, beautiful and sustainable place to live, work and play”

**MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES**

**OPEN SPACE**

- Ensure parks have a diverse range of recreation opportunities.
- Provide a diversity of park types with a range of facilities (example toilets, BBQs etc).
- Link open space within town centre and extend the open space network with regional open space (such as Great North Walls).
- Locate parks that are easily accessible for all people using the town centre.
- Ensure open space meets current and future population needs.
- Provide for flexible and adaptable open space.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

- Provide a clearly defined road hierarchy to retain vehicular access for local and regional traffic.
- Provide accessible public transport with supporting infrastructure.
- Ensure the town centre is walkable for all levels of mobility.
- Promote good opportunities for cyclists.
- Provide for convenient and efficient parking.

**COMMUNITY**

- Provide significant facilities to promote a cultural and community centre in Charlestown.
- Provide community facilities that will meet the demand of the local and regional population.
- Provide community facilities for diverse demographic and interest groups.
- Provide facilities for a range of formal and informal community events (including indoor and outdoor).
- Allow opportunities for living, working and recreation within town centre.

**CHARACTER**

- To promote landscape in the public domain.
- Ensure there is a positive, recognisable, and memorable identity for Charlestown town centre.
- Recognise Charlestown’s heritage.
- Provide identifiable transitions or gateways that identify the town centre.
- Encourage vibrancy within the town centre’s overall character.
- Ensure access to views at street level and provide appropriate vistas to and from Charlestown.
- To provide an identifiable and legible landscape character.

**AMENITY**

- Provide comfort in the public domain.
- Ensure convenient pedestrian access throughout town centre.
- Provide a sense of safety in the public domain.
- Provide legible wayfinding in the public domain.
- Provide amenity for public transport access.
- Encourage safe night time uses.
- To provide for compatible land uses.
- Increase amenity of pedestrian experience.

**URBAN FORM**

- Create public spaces that suit the needs of the people who live, work and visit Charlestown.
- Establish desired future character that respects the character, topography and scale of Charlestown.
- Provide diverse array of built form to cater for residential, commercial and retail uses.
- Ensure ecological sustainability of all proposed developments (in public domain and buildings).
- Promote and develop Charlestown as a major centre.
- Activate street frontages and urban streetscapes.

**ECONOMIC**

- Encourage diversity in economic activities.
- Encourage and increase diversity of business to locate within Charlestown.
- Promote and increase quality, adaptability and affordability of housing.
- Promote sufficient, quantity and density of housing to provide effective public transport and other community facilities.
CHARLESTOWN TOWN CENTRE

ANALYSIS

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Charlestown is identified as a major centre in a number of strategic planning documents, guidelines and policies. The Master Plan must respond to the strategic directions set in the following documents:

- Lower Hunter Regional Strategy (LHRS);
- Hunter Regional Environmental Plan (HREP); and
- Strategic Plan - Lifestyle 2020 Strategy (L2020).

Details on the key strategic directions in these documents are set out below.

**Lower Hunter Regional Strategy**

Adopted in October 2006, the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy is the NSW Government’s 25-year land use strategy for the Hunter Region, to ensure the region develops in a strong and sustainable way. The strategy is based upon a population growth scenario of an additional 125,000 persons by 2031, and promotes a hierarchy of centres, ranging from Newcastle City Centre as a regional City of national and international importance to six major regional centres, at Charlestown, Glendale/Cardiff, Maitland, Cessnock, Raymond Terrace and Morisset. These centres are described as ‘concentration of business, higher order retailing, employment, professional services and generally including civic functions’. In order to meet the requirements of the Strategy, the Master Plan for Charlestown should accommodate a gain of 4,400 jobs and 3,200 new dwellings over the next 25 years, as well as:

- increase concentration of employment and residential development in proximity to public transport, in order to maximise transport access and allow for a better use of existing infrastructure;
- maximise opportunities for higher density development within walking distance of the centre, with access to health, community and personal services, education, leisure and entertainment;
- increase housing choice within Charlestown in order to reduce pressure on established suburban housing, (based on the principle of accommodating 40% of new dwellings in existing urban areas);
- increased commercial/retail floor space;
- protect the region’s environmental assets, natural resources and landscape amenity;
- create strong public domain and urban design themes that drive the renewal and revitalisation of centres; and
- acknowledge the importance of historic cultural landscapes and ensure that all places, precincts and landscapes of cultural heritage are identified and protected.

**Hunter Regional Environmental Plan 1989**

The Hunter Regional Environmental Plan (HREP) is the overarching strategic plan for the Hunter Region and applies to 14 local government areas including Lake Macquarie, and covers issues such as urban growth, commercial centres, extractive industries, recreational needs, rural lands, and heritage and conservation. The HREP is supplemented by the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy.
In addition to these strategic documents, there are a number of other planning instruments and policies that influence and define the type, scale and character of public and private development in Charlestown. They also influence the provision of community facilities, car parking and open space. These documents are likely to need revision when the Master Plan is completed to ensure implementation of the Master Plan. A summary of these documents follows:

**Lake Macquarie Local Environmental Plan 2004 (LEP 2004)**
The Lake Macquarie LEP is the statutory planning document that sets the framework for the land use structure of Charlestown. The plan includes a set of land use zones and provides detailed requirements for development. The plan is to achieve development of land in accordance with the principles of ecologically sustainable development by:
- promoting balanced development of that land, and
- implementing the Lifestyle 2020 Strategy.

**Lake Macquarie Development Control Plan No. 1 - Principles of Development**
The Lake Macquarie DCP provides guidelines and controls for all development within Charlestown town centre. Part 4 of the DCP contains a number of Area Plans which have detailed place-based requirements for various areas of the City, including Section 4.1 that focuses on the Charlestown Sub-Regional Centre Area. The DCP details a preferred future distribution of land uses within the centre, outlining precincts, each with a particular focus on certain types of development. The aim of each precinct is to allow a number of land uses and types within them in order to encourage mixed-use development. The DCP goes into greater detail, with diagrams detailing building heights and setbacks, building design and the various design elements that the Council supports. Additionally, it proposes a number of strategies for Charlestown, including paths and nodes, landmark sites, and preferred active frontages and gathering places.

**Lake Macquarie City Council Contributions Plan No. 1- Citywide (2004 as amended)**
Identifies development subject to payment of contributions toward the provision of open space and community facilities across the city. Includes a works schedule that details additional services and amenities currently proposed for Charlestown and other locations in the City.

**Lake Macquarie City Council Contributions Plan No. 4- Commercial Centres (1998 as amended)**
Provides for development contributions to be collected for public car parking, vehicle access facilities and pedestrian facilities in Belmont, Cardiff, Charlestown, Morisset, Swansea and Warners Bay. The plan identifies a future need to construct a multi-level car parking structure at the location of existing public car parks off Tallara Street and Smart Street in Charlestown.
The Charlestown town centre is the major commercial centre in Lake Macquarie and provides high order retail, commercial and community facilities for the City and Region.

Charlestown is located in the north eastern corner of the Lake Macquarie Local Government Area (LGA) and is relatively close to the shopping centre at Kotara and the Newcastle City Centre.

The landscape is deeply incised by creek lines that are vegetated with remnant vegetation. The natural vegetation forms threads that link major natural resources (Glen Rock, Watagan Mountains, Lake Macquarie) with the areas of urban development. The steep topography offers dramatic views throughout the region.

Although highly urbanised there are clear physical and visual links to the natural surrounds.
The Charlestown town centre is defined by two areas:

**The Town Centre Core** is defined by a concentration of retail and commercial uses along the Pacific Highway, as well as Pearson and Smith Streets that run parallel to it. This area is the historic centre of Charlestown. The Master Plan will propose specific design solutions and projects for the Town Centre Core to ensure the provision of high-quality public domain, compatible building uses, form and scale, and the efficient and convenient movement of people and vehicles.

Key elements of the core area include:

- the Pacific Highway corridor including traditional street-front shops as well as contemporary car-based retailing;
- Pearson Street, currently pedestrianised for half of its length, and also the main bus interchange for Charlestown town centre;
- Smith Street, a mix of commercial, civic, community and residential uses;
- Charlestown Square, an internalised shopping centre that accommodates the majority of Charlestown’s retail floor space; and
- Charlestown Oval and Ferris Oval, the largest area of parkland within the town centre.

Council are currently considering a Development Application (DA No. 231/2007) submitted in February 2007 to expand the existing Charlestown Square shopping centre. This application also seeks to amend the current open space and recreational facilities located to the south of the shopping centre. Those works are part of a larger Land and Works Agreement, signed by Council and the shopping centre operator, to upgrade a number of parks, sporting and community facilities within Charlestown.

**The Town Centre Periphery** consists of a mix of uses, including commercial, specialty services (such as health and medical), civic, community and residential uses, including detached dwellings, townhouses and walk-up apartments. The periphery of the town centre provides a transition - in both scale and uses - between the core area and the surrounding low density residential areas of Charlestown, Whitebridge and Kahibah Town. In this area, the Master Plan will consider design strategies and principles that support the proposals for the Town Centre Core.

The extent of the Town Centre and Town Centre periphery is shown in Figure Two.
Wodolah Coal Co. was formed to mine in the Wodolah district. It bought 2,600 acres to the south of Waratah. The mine opened and coal was taken along the “Gully Line” to Waratah.

First subdivision of the Charlestown area was surveyed on 29 April and formed Ida, Pearson, Milson and Frederick Streets. D.P.216, “Plan of Wodolah Coal Co’s New Township Charlestown South Wodolah on the Company’s purchased property”. The Wodolah Coal Co. held a land auction in 1876, and the first lot was sold to Mr. Harry Wright.

Charlestown was included in the Municipality of Wodolah and had thirty to forty houses, which housed miners from Gully Pit and shopkeepers such as the Pickrings and Pascoes. The First Post Office was opened - mail was brought from Newcastle three times a week on horseback.

The Charlestown Literary Institute was founded and the first school opened as did Charlestown’s first school.

Charlestown had a Post Office, 3 hotels, a School of Arts and several stores. Government Savings Bank opened on the Company’s purchased property.

1883
Charlestown had a Mechanics Institute and two churches.

1885
The town people advertised for a doctor

1889
Charlestown Evening School opened and operated until 1911

1911
Charlestown had 120 homes

1921
Charlestown had 158 homes

1925
Telephone exchange opened. Alignment of the Pacific Highway from Sydney to Newcastle was decided, which improved the road network inside Lake Macquarie and opened its potential for dormitory purposes for Newcastle workers.

1927
Water supply main to Charlestown by Hunter District Water Board.

1928
The first picture theatre was the Renown, built by Mrs Nelson.

1931
Private buses ran to meet the trams at Broadmeadow, not being allowed to compete by running all the way to Newcastle.

1933
Charlestown had 318 homes

1937
The government took over the private bus routes and extended them to Newcastle. Charlestown was on Route 24 to Speers Point via Mr. Hutson. Its position on the road linking Newcastle to the southern townships probably assisted in its commercial success.

1940s
Mine closed. “Mountford Bay Gardens” is built on the site of the manager’s residence.

1959
Sewerage was extended to Charlestown. Charlestown East school opened in James Street

1963
Charlestown South school opening in Patricia Avenue

1979
Charlestown Square opened and since enlarged. Charlestown Square was the first shopping centre to develop in the Lake region. Employing large numbers and generating huge increases in traffic, its impact on the City is enormous. Commercial development on this scale in contrast to the history of the region, which is characterised by smaller scale retailing.

**A TIMELINE OF CHARLESTOWN**

**ANALYSIS**

**HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT**

The Lake Macquarie area is the traditional land of the Awabakal Aboriginal people.

Charlestown’s more recent history has resulted from its geographic position, connections within the region and early mine operations. The first mining operations (by the Wodolah Mining Company) were begun in 1873 at Raspberry Gully north of the town centre, with the emerging settlement probably taking its name from Charles Smith, the company manager.

The company created the town’s first subdivision in 1876, including original street alignments along the current Pacific Highway and Pearson, Smith and Ridley Streets. The Charlestown Oval was also established at this time, and bequeathed by the mining industry to the community of Charlestown. Within several years, the settlement had rapidly developed, with 50 houses, a post office, three hotels, a school of arts and several stores.

Charlestown’s position on the road to Newcastle created and has sustained commercial activity and contributed to its growth, particularly as a residential area. As traffic flows increased, the highway has become a barrier between the two sides of the town centre.

Charlestown Square, opened in 1979, has had significant impact on the town centre, shifting the retail focus to the west and becoming a major employer in the region.

**Master Plan Considerations**

The character of a place often results from the way in which it has developed over time, responding to influences such as the natural environment and climate, regional development and connections, and shifts in society. Understanding, meaning and celebrating the history of Charlestown will encourage a rich and meaningful identity for the town centre.

The Master Plan should consider the historic patterns of development in Charlestown, including:

- the original street grid, the way in which it relates to the natural topography and possibilities for re-establishing traditional alignments
- historic open spaces and parks, around which development has occurred
- specific items of heritage, such as historic houses, which should be preserved and upgraded, with weaknesses toward these items maintained
- opportunities for buildings and spaces to present and interpret the history of Charlestown, for example, a “walk through history” along a particular street

The indigenous history of Charlestown must also be considered in future development.
A number of buildings in the town centre have been identified as having historic significance or value, within the City of Lake Macquarie’s LEP and Heritage Study (undertaken in 1993). Further information has been collected from the State Heritage Inventory provided by the Heritage Office of NSW.

1. **Brick Cottage - 36 Smith Street, Charlestown**
   (LEP Local List and Heritage Study list)

   This brick cottage is unusual in a district where timber structures prevail. Although it is small, the various elements are more finely made and sophisticated than the typical miner’s cottages and indicate some more complex, possibly official or institutional function such as a police station or the home of Registrar of Births or even a post office.

2. **Cottage - 32 Smith Street, Charlestown**
   (LEP Local List and Heritage Study list)

   Smith Street was the first “main street” of Charlestown, containing a school, police station, bank and other businesses. This cottage could have been part of this development, or may have been a miner’s cottage like the Miners’ Cottages Group on Charlestown Road. The cottage is representative of the prevailing style of building in the coal fields of the 19th century. Comparable cottages, in equally good condition and intact, are now rare.

3. **Miners’ Cottages Group - 300, 304, 306, 308 Charlestown Road**
   (LEP Local List and Heritage Study list)

   Built by the Waratah Coal Company in the 1880s. Originally 8 were built, and the 4 remaining cottages are essentially the same in form as when they were built, with only some changes to materials (windows and cladding). The cottages were for the strike-breaking mine workers brought in from Sydney - the cottages are known as Scab Row. They are the only remaining obvious relics of the Waratah Coal Company, the founders of Charlestown.

4. **Federation Bungalow - 23 Smith Street, Charlestown**
   (Heritage Study List)

   This bungalow is thought to have been built by a pioneer Charlestown family. It was used as a private maternity hospital in the 1930s, as a Presbyterian Manse (up to 1987) and was the office of former local member of parliament, Richard Face. While the building itself is a relatively rare example of its type in Charlestown, it was originally located on the Pacific Highway and was relocated to its current site in the mid-twentieth century.

5. **Presbyterian Kindergarten - 16 Smart Street, Charlestown**
   (Heritage Study List)

   This building is a former Church, which has been converted to a kindergarten and a new church has been built in front of it on the street. This original church is mostly obscured by a newer church building facing Smart Street.

6. **House - 309 Charlestown Road, Charlestown**
   (Heritage Study List)
Charlestown is located on a ridge that runs north-south through the region - this ridge is defined primarily by the path of highway as it passes through the town centre. The landform falls away from the highway into a number of valleys, which contain remnant vegetation. Charlestown is at the top of the catchment of four local creek systems. Changes to the original environment, through vegetation clearing and the construction of roads and buildings, has altered the quantity and quality of water entering these creeks.

Charlestown’s prominent ridgeline position provides the opportunities for views towards the natural environment, including distant views east (to the Pacific Ocean) and west (mountain ranges), and especially along streets and across open spaces such as Charlestown and Ferris Ovals.

The town centre’s built form sits clearly on the skyline when viewed from surrounding areas, and two knolls at either end of the town centre reinforce this topography. Some of the best views occur from car parking areas associated with Charlestown Square and Hill Top Plaza and Council’s car park off Tallara Street.

Charlestown Road marks the highest point of the town centre, around which, there is a number of taller commercial and residential buildings. This area has access to expansive views over Raspberry Gully and the Hunter region to the north. The southern approach to Charlestown occurs at the top of a steep rise at the intersection of the highway and Warner’s Bay Road. Unlike the northern junction, this area comprises low density urban development and contains dense vegetation.

**Master Plan Considerations**

Built form should reinforce the strategic location of the town centre, enhancing its quality as a hill top town and providing a “built” landmark for the region that complements the abundant “natural” character.

The town centre’s “skyline” is an important consideration as it will be able to be viewed from many vantage points of the district. At the workshops there was discussion on the possible built form of the town centre in the future. Options ranged from a uniform, relatively low scale of four to five storeys to locating taller buildings at the two gateways to the centre. Emphasising the entries and high points with tall buildings received the most community support.

Existing view corridors, especially along east-west streets, should be maintained to visually connect the town centre with the natural environment. If possible new view lines and viewing points should be created:

- from new open space areas
- from within new buildings and roof top areas of existing and new buildings
- by re-establishing the original street grid
- by defining and protecting key view corridors from inappropriately located and scaled development.

As density of development increases, these vistas will provide visual relief, as well as physical connection to natural green spaces.

**ANALYSIS**

**TOPOGRAPHY AND VIEWS**

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**ANALYSIS**

**TOPOGRAPHY AND VIEWS**

Charlestown is located on a ridge that runs north-south through the region - this ridge is defined primarily by the path of highway as it passes through the town centre. The landform falls away from the highway into a number of valleys, which contain remnant vegetation. Charlestown is at the top of the catchment of four local creek systems. Changes to the original environment, through vegetation clearing and the construction of roads and buildings, has altered the quantity and quality of water entering these creeks.

Charlestown’s prominent ridgeline position provides the opportunities for views towards the natural environment, including distant views east (to the Pacific Ocean) and west (mountain ranges), and especially along streets and across open spaces such as Charlestown and Ferris Ovals.

The town centre’s built form sits clearly on the skyline when viewed from surrounding areas, and two knolls at either end of the town centre reinforce this topography. Some of the best views occur from car parking areas associated with Charlestown Square and Hill Top Plaza and Council’s car park off Tallara Street.

Charlestown Road marks the highest point of the town centre, around which, there is a number of taller commercial and residential buildings. This area has access to expansive views over Raspberry Gully and the Hunter region to the north. The southern approach to Charlestown occurs at the top of a steep rise at the intersection of the highway and Warner’s Bay Road. Unlike the northern junction, this area comprises low density urban development and contains dense vegetation.

**Master Plan Considerations**

Built form should reinforce the strategic location of the town centre, enhancing its quality as a hill top town and providing a “built” landmark for the region that complements the abundant “natural” character.

The town centre’s “skyline” is an important consideration as it will be able to be viewed from many vantage points of the district. At the workshops there was discussion on the possible built form of the town centre in the future. Options ranged from a uniform, relatively low scale of four to five storeys to locating taller buildings at the two gateways to the centre. Emphasising the entries and high points with tall buildings received the most community support.

Existing view corridors, especially along east-west streets, should be maintained to visually connect the town centre with the natural environment. If possible new view lines and viewing points should be created:

- from new open space areas
- from within new buildings and roof top areas of existing and new buildings
- by re-establishing the original street grid
- by defining and protecting key view corridors from inappropriately located and scaled development.

As density of development increases, these vistas will provide visual relief, as well as physical connection to natural green spaces.
There are two primary types of green space in and around Charlestown town centre: natural areas of landscape and constructed parks and open space.

Remnant bushland is located mostly along creek lines and within valleys, such as those adjacent to Hallvert Crescent, Daisley Crescent and Griffiths Street. These areas of vegetation connect to the regional green space network, notably at the southern end of the town centre, which is traversed by the Great North Walk. Raspbery Gully, located to the north of the town centre, is steep sided and heavily vegetated valley. Currently, there is limited visual connection between the town centre and this natural feature, with development along Charlestown Road creating a physical barrier. To the south of the town centre, there is an area of natural bushland near the junction of the highway and Warners Bay Road. Again, access to this area is limited.

There are two significant areas of park in the town centre - Charlestown/Ferris Ovals and parks adjacent to the Charlestown Swim Centre.

Charlestown/Ferris Ovals

Charlestown and Ferris Ovals are located to the south of the centre along the highway. These form part of the historic Charlestown Park, created in the mid-nineteenth century. The Charlestown Bowling Club occupies the north west corner of the original park. There are pockets of dense vegetation within the park, but generally it is used for sporting ovals. While this large area of green space is an important recreation and activity area, it is under-utilised, due to its relative inaccessibility from the town centre, concerns regarding personal safety and lack of embellishment with pathways, furniture and amenities. The surrounding buildings do not define the edges of the park, lack active uses at their ground floor and do not offer passive surveillance over the open space.

The proposal to expand Charlestown Square includes construction over the bowling club site, and the club’s relocation further south to Ferris Oval. Should Council approve this application, Charlestown Oval will be upgraded, and a new park located adjacent to the bowling club. To compensate for the loss of open space in the town centre, the redevelopment also includes a new park to the west of Carl Close and a public plaza on the corner of Pearson and Frederick Streets.

As this application has not been assessed, the Master Plan will propose principles and objectives that are based upon the existing context, but with consideration of the possible form this will take in the future. If the Charlestown Square proposal proceeds, the Master Plan may be updated to reflect the new arrangement of buildings and open space.

Charlestown Swim Centre

There is a cluster of green spaces around the existing Charlestown Swim Centre, within a valley that connects eastwards with the Great North Walk. These green spaces suffer from a lack of definition and activity at their edges (in some cases, adjoining the rear fences of houses), diminishing their sense of legibility, character and safety.

Previous Council studies, most recently the Draft Indoor Sport and Recreation Facilities Strategy, recommend two basic options regarding the Charlestown Swim Centre. One is to retain and upgrade the existing centre and provide additional wet and dry facilities. The alternate option is to develop a new indoor centre near the southern end of the West Charlestown bypass at Windale, and decommission the Charlestown Swim Centre.

Participants at the workshops identified a preference to retain and upgrade facilities at Charlestown for the following reasons:

- The Charlestown Swim Centre currently has a larger population within a walkable catchment than the Windale site, and this population is predicted to grow.
- Charlestown is better served by public transport.

ANALYSIS

LANDSCAPE SETTING AND OPEN SPACE

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- The Charlestown Swim Centre currently has a larger population within a walkable catchment than the Windale site, and this population is predicted to grow.
- Charlestown is better served by public transport.
Both the Lower Hunter Strategy and Lifestyle 2020 identify Charlestown as a Major Regional Centre. Facilities of a regional nature should be provided to support Charlestown, to provide the amenity required to attract people to live in the centre, and investment by the private sector.

The local community jointly funded Charlestown Swim Centre prior to its opening in 1976, and as such, there is a sense of community ownership of the facility.

Achieving a decision on this issue is beyond the scope for the Master Plan process, but it is an issue that Council needs to address. If a decision is made to retain and upgrade the existing swim centre, there is the potential to purchase private properties adjoining the swim centre to add to the area available for development associated with the upgrade.

Street Landscaping

Generally, there is limited landscaping within the streets of the town centre. While there are some established street trees and areas of vegetation – for example, within the pedestrianised areas of Pearson and Ridley Streets, and along Frederick and Smith Streets – these exhibit a lack of consistency in terms of species and location. A number of streets, such as Smart Street, have very little vegetation, diminishing the character and comfort of these streets.

Master Plan Considerations

Remnant bushland is characteristically part of the creek line topography and should be considered and dealt with as part of the Master Plan. These areas can be linked across the town centre to draw the natural landscape into the denser areas of Charlestown, creating a more pleasant and attractive public domain in the town centre. This also provides the possibility to incorporate water-sensitive urban design principles into the Master Plan, so that natural ecological systems help to retain and process urban water run-off.

With the projected increase in residential and working population, the retention of green space within the centre of Charlestown is critical. More importantly, there needs to be a clear strategy for improving the quality of the existing parks, through rationalising their extents, defining and activating edges, and enhancing accessibility and usability. The Master Plan needs to identify the potential for new areas of open space, including parks, urban plazas and recreation areas.

Constructive parks and open spaces should be distinct from bushland to reinforce the urban nature of their location. Better development is best located around parks and open space to provide the greatest number of residents with outdoor and physical access to places of recreation and leisure. This also improves the safety of people using open space, through increased activity and natural surveillance from surrounding buildings.

Landscape plays an important role in defining the character and identity of streets, and the Master Plan will identify key streets for landscape improvement.
A figure-ground analysis of the town centre provides an indication of building footprints and shows setbacks and spaces between them. The density of development of the town centre, intensifies around the highway (particularly to the north).

Some of the building types evident in this study are:

- **Attached retail shops and commercial spaces** - concentrated along much of the highway and with no setback to the street, creating a consistent and readable edge to the street.
- **Detached retail buildings** (e.g., service stations and bulky goods retail) - located mostly at the southern end of the town centre are generally larger in scale and inconsistent in terms of their placement on the site (often set back from the street to accommodate parking) which diminishes the definition and activation of the street and footpath.
- **Enclosed retail centre** (Charlestown Square) - by far, the largest single building in the town centre, covering several street blocks and resulting in the removal/disconnection of original streets.
- **Larger footprint buildings** mostly in the east and north of the town centre including a range of freestanding commercial and specialty services (e.g., health and medical) buildings along Smith Street, and large commercial offices around the junction of the highway and Charlestown Road.
- **Multi-unit housing** (e.g., townhouses and apartment buildings) - closer to the town centre, such as along Smith and Chapman Streets, with relatively consistent setback to the street and between buildings to provide for private open space.
- **Single houses** - located further from the town centre, with generally consistent setbacks, and private open space for each dwelling at the rear of the house.
- **Community buildings** (e.g., school, library, and bowling club) - usually free-standing buildings, surrounded by landscape/open space which supports the function housed on the site (e.g., school playground, bowling green).

Building forms contribute to the definition of streets and open space in the town centre. For example, the consistent placement of older retail buildings along the highway delineate the edge of the street, creating a space which is clearly ‘read’. Further south, where building forms are located at varying distances from the highway’s edge, the streetscape lacks order and legibility.

Similarly, parks and open spaces benefit from the clear definition of their edges, so that people using them can readily perceive their scale and proportion, thus promoting a sense of comfort and safety. Currently, the areas of green space in the town centre – Charlestown/Fenris Oval and the area around Charlestown Swim Centre – lack clear definition, due to their irregular shape and the disorderly placement of building forms around their edges.

**Master Plan Considerations**

Based on the existing range of building footprints, the Master Plan will need to allow for a diversity of building sizes. Generally, larger floor plates will be required for new retail and commercial buildings, leading to the amalgamation of smaller lots. Denser residential buildings will also require larger lots, with provision to be made for private and communal open space.

The Master Plan will define areas where buildings of similar scale are to be located, but must also ensure the compatible arrangement of buildings of different scales, especially between the core and periphery of the town centre.

Consistency of urban form along streets and open spaces is important, especially within established urban areas such as the retail ‘main street’ of the highway. Extending this pattern further south will reinforce the historic importance and character of the Pacific Highway.
Traditionally, the town centre has consisted of commercial/retail buildings up to 3 storeys, surrounded by detached residential buildings of 1 or 2 storeys. More recent developments within the core of the town centre have significantly increased these heights, up to 10 storeys.

Although the buildings along the highway differ in age and style, there is a consistency in height of 1-2 storeys. This reinforces the traditional "main street" appearance of the Pacific Highway. Pearson and Smith Streets, while less consistent, do not contain buildings greater than 3-4 storeys.

Taller buildings have tended to develop at the northern end of the highway, although there are current proposals for 5-8 storey buildings in different parts of the town centre. At present, there is no clear pattern or rationale for the placement of these taller structures.

**Master Plan Considerations**

As a regional commercial centre, it is expected that a greater number of taller buildings will need to be accommodated in Charlestown to provide the floor space required for future job and housing targets in the LHRS. These need to be arranged in a logical and logical hierarchy, to promote an identity for the town centre and to minimise potential impact on other buildings and open spaces.

The placement of taller development at either end of the town centre will emphasise the natural landform of Charlestown, while creating landmarks or gateways that mark entry to the town centre. This profile of buildings creates a memorable identity for Charlestown, within the town centre but as it is viewed from the surrounding district. By limiting the extent of higher development to specific areas of the town centre, the Master Plan lessens the potential for overshadowing and physical dominance by new buildings. The issue was discussed during the workshops and received community support.

It is important that taller buildings, with greater numbers of occupants are in close proximity to public transport, community services and facilities, and open space. Maintaining a consistent building height along the Pacific Highway and Charlestown Road will provide better definition of these roads and more harmony in the streetscape than buildings of random heights.

**ANALYSIS**

**BUILDING HEIGHTS**

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Existing land uses in Charlestown, which include retail, commercial, civic, community, educational and residential uses, are currently grouped into precincts within the town centre.

For most of its length, the Pacific Highway is addressed on both sides by retail frontages, with some commercial spaces on ground and upper levels. This mix of uses also extends along Charlestown Road, with this street and the highway forming the original commercial hub of the town centre.

Smith Street accommodates a range of uses, from retail and commercial buildings, to community, civic, educational and residential buildings. This diversity also reflects the historic formation of Charlestown, with Smith Street one of the earliest streets established. This mix of uses creates a more gradual transition between the town centre core and low density residential areas to the east.

Charlestown Square has shifted the focus of retail uses to the western side of the town centre, with much of Pearson Street lined with retail, and some commercial, buildings. The enclosed nature of this shopping centre creates a physical and visual barrier along Chapman Street and sections of Pearson Street, resulting in an abrupt change from retail to older residential uses on the western side of the town centre and a lack of activity along the southern end of Pearson Street.

Outside the town centre core, single residences predominate. There are a number of community uses spread throughout the study area, with no distinct focus for these facilities.

**Master Plan Considerations**

The Master Plan should generally support the established pattern of land uses in the town centre, which contains defined concentrations of residential, commercial and retail uses.

A mix of uses (primarily retail and commercial) is already evident on a number of streets, including the highway, Pearson and Smith Streets. Multiple uses can be accommodated along streets (from building to building) as well as within each building (for example, shop-top housing). Ground floor retail uses along these streets will improve their vibrancy and safety.

Currently, there is no clear focus for community uses in the town centre. There was discussion during the workshops about the benefits of building on current facilities and recreation areas to create consolidated ‘hubs’ for community activity and interaction. Access to consolidated facilities could then be improved through the introduction of a bus route around the town centre. Potential sites include Charlestown/Ferris Oval, Charlestown Swim Centre and the northern site currently occupied by the council car park. Changes to current facilities and development of consolidated hubs would be dependent on further analysis of community needs and sources of funding.
Traditionally, building lots in the town centre were relatively small, accommodating single dwellings, shops, factories and community buildings. Changing patterns of employment, shopping and housing have led to the need for larger buildings—this can be seen along the Pacific Highway, many buildings are constructed over several lots, or upon lots that have been combined. Similarly, a large number of lots, as well as streets, have been amalgamated to create the single lot occupied by Charlestown Square. Higher density residential development usually requires larger sites, with examples evident on Smith and Dickinson Streets.

Lake Macquarie City Council owns several large sites in the town centre, used for car parking and the current library, commercial and retail purposes. Some of Council’s holdings are vacant, such as the former public school site.

Master Plan Considerations
As demand for larger lots is likely to continue, the Master Plan should guide the process of amalgamation to ensure that an equitable and compatible range of lots can be provided. Following the adoption of the Plan, development guidelines will be required to control the scale, density, height and articulation of future development.

Lake Macquarie City Council will play a critical role in initiating the implementation of the Master Plan. Council’s existing land holdings can be redeveloped as areas of community infrastructure and mixed use retail, commercial and residential development. These ‘seedling projects’ would stimulate interest and investment in Charlestown, and ensure that the town centre can cater for the projected growth in residential, employment and visitor populations.

Figure 9
Lot patterns, including large and amalgamated lots.
Pedestrian Movement

Charlestown has well-established pedestrian flows, including pedestrianised areas on Pearson and Smart Streets. These malls create generous space for pedestrian movement, but complicate the servicing of retail and commercial buildings, and are generally perceived to be unsafe places at night.

The volume and speed of traffic along the highway conflicts with the comfort and safety of pedestrians. There are only limited opportunities to cross the Highway (at Smart, Ridley and Frederick Streets). There is a current proposal to include a footbridge in the redevelopment of sites on the corner of Smart Street. Pedestrian arcades create additional pedestrian connections within the town centre.

Traffic roundabouts are located on streets with heavier traffic flow, including Charlestown Road and Chapman Street. These can adversely affect pedestrian safety. There are a number of marked pedestrian crossings.

While there is a network of pedestrian paths and malls, their materials and detailing vary across the town centre, creating an inconsistency in the character of Charlestown’s public domain.

The pool fencing along the centre of the Highway has discouraged unsafe pedestrian crossing of the street, but has also created an unsightly visual barrier and encourages a higher traffic speed along the Highway. Participants at the workshop requested that the master plan identify options to allow the removal of the pool fencing and reduction in traffic speeds to 50km/h along the highway.

Vehicular Movement

The primary streets of Charlestown town centre - the Pacific Highway and Charlestown, Warners Bay and Dudley Roads - are regional connectors and relate to the historical development of Charlestown and surrounding areas. The original town centre grid of streets (including Smith, Ridley, Smart and Frederick Streets) has been primarily retained, with some streets pedestrianised, or disconnected by the Charlestown Square redevelopment. There are a number of laneways on the eastern side of the highway, providing access for servicing and deliveries.

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Traffic Volumes

As State roads, the Pacific Highway and Charlestown Road carry the heaviest traffic flows through the town centre - up to 32,000 cars per day along the highway. The West Charlestown Bypass, opened in 2003, has resulted in a 25% reduction in traffic along these streets, although volumes are increasing. The heavy flow of traffic along the Pacific Highway creates a barrier to pedestrian movement between the two sides of the town centre, and has amenity impacts on adjacent retail uses, especially noise and safety.

Apart from the heavy-traffic State and Regional roads, much of the town centre has what is considered a medium level of traffic movement. Traffic movements in the town centre are restricted by pedestrianised streets, and the one-way system through Smart and Pearson Streets.
Parking Facilities

There is a range of car parking options within the town centre, including private and public, timed and unrestricted parking. By far the largest parking facility (2,600 spaces) is within Charlestown Square, with the proposed expansion increasing this number to 3,600. The largest public parking area is the on grade car park on Tallara Street, owned by council and containing almost 300 parking spaces.

While car parking provides access to the town centre, it also has impacts on amenity and personal safety, as well as the visual character of the town centre. Often, parking facilities are located on sites that could accommodate important commercial or community uses. The Tallara Street car park, in particular, dominates a significant site in the town centre with expansive views over the natural environment.

Contributions Plan No 4 - Commercial Centres provides a mechanism to collect levies from developments to provide additional public car parking. The plan identifies construction of decked parking at Tallara Street and Smith Street.

Many of the older commercial and retail premises in Charlestown were constructed with no on-site parking provision. In other instances, access to private parking has mostly been gained from laneways at the rear of premises. This creates a safer pedestrian environment and a more unified streetscape.

Master Plan Considerations

The existing street network should be preserved, upgraded and rationalised to create safe and efficient movement of people and vehicles. The Master Plan should consider the re-opening and re-connection of streets to improve permeability.

While the Pacific Highway and Charlestown Road will remain primary connectors, the Master Plan should consider methods of improving pedestrian safety and comfort. East-west movement across the town centre, and particularly the highway, will improve the integration of the two sides of the town centre and promote an overall identity for Charlestown.

Pedestrian connectivity and safety can also be improved through the upgrade of lanes, additional arcades and pathways, and ground level activation of buildings. A consistency of materials, street furniture and landscaping will add character and legibility to the public domain.

Parking facilities should be located to provide convenient access to all parts of the town centre, while not dominating their surroundings. Parking for new buildings, especially commercial and residential developments, must also be considered.

The Master Plan needs to minimise the possible impacts that the provision of parking, associated with new development, may have on pedestrian safety and the streetscape.

Car parks provide access to the town centre, but do not contribute to its character or amenity - alternative facilities may be considered in the Master Plan.

The existing pedestrian mall creates more space for pedestrians, but makes servicing of buildings, especially retail spaces, difficult.

A range of parking is available in the town centre, including on street and within large car parks.

Figure 11 Existing traffic volumes and parking areas
The Charlestown town centre is strategically located as a focus of the regional bus transport network, and is serviced by a number of bus routes. Fifteen Newcastle Bus services connect Charlestown to the Newcastle centre, Wallsend, Dudley, Warners Bay and Swansea. Additionally, there are 3 private bus routes and 4 long-distance coach routes that stop in the town centre.

The bus terminus is located in Pearson/Smart Streets, adjacent to Charlestown Square, accommodates bus stops as well as a lay-over area. Although buses run along Smith and Frederick Streets, the location of the terminus favours the western half of the town centre, a bias emphasised by the barrier of the Pacific Highway. The terminus consists of free-standing shelters on the footpath in Pearson Street and shop awnings in Smart Street. These facilities are inadequate to accommodate the number of patrons waiting, provide minimal shelter and have poor security. In current transport strategies, Charlestown has been identified as the location for a new regional bus interchange.

Bus services also stop along the highway, although this currently conflicts with the movement of traffic along the street. The current footpaths along the highway are also too narrow to allow the assembly of bus users, creating problems with safety around bus stops.

Taxis also use Smart Street as a pick-up area.

Master Plan Considerations

Safe and convenient access to public transport services is a critical consideration of the Master Plan. On-street bus stops require wide footpaths and adequate shelter, and should ideally be located adjacent to retail or other active uses to provide safety and convenience for bus patrons.

A location for a new transport interchange is to be included in the Master Plan. This interchange must be well connected to all parts of the town centre, especially the two sides of the highway.

Additional transport initiatives, such as light rail and community transport services, should be considered as part of the Master Plan.
Mine subsidence can be described as the lowering or settling down of the land’s surface as a result of mining of the earth. The extent to which subsidence occurs in a particular location depends upon the width and height of the earth extracted, its depth from the surface, and the rock types found in the overlying strata. The NSW Mine Subsidence Board (MSB) monitors the condition of mined areas and development proposals that may be affected by subsidence.

Most of the Hunter region, including Charlestown, has been mined. Under the Charlestown town centre, there are several levels of mine workings, ranging from approximately 40 to 150 metres below the ground surface. Mine subsidence risk will depend on the area and depth of the mine, proximity to other excavations and the number of seams that have been mined, and is classified into ‘higher’, ‘moderate’ and ‘lower’ levels of risk.

Much of the Charlestown town centre is classified as being of moderate risk, with an area of higher risk at the junction of the Pacific Highway and Charlestown Road. Lower risk conditions are limited to half of Charlestown Park and some areas to its east. Further explanation of mine subsidence and risk classifications is found in Appendix 5 of this report.

Generally, subsidence risk will limit the height of new buildings to 2 storeys for load-bearing and 4 storeys for concrete framed buildings. Additional work, such as grouting of mine workings, may increase the allowable heights of buildings.

Master Plan Considerations
The risk of mine subsidence will need to be considered in all development proposals within the town centre, especially in areas of moderate and higher risk. Mine subsidence does not necessarily prevent development from occurring, but may significantly increase the expense of site preparation and building construction. Further information is included in Appendix 5.

The Master Plan should recognise that, given the expense of structural work required to limit mine subsidence risk, areas of taller buildings should be contained, and where possible, restricted to areas of moderate and lower subsidence risk.