



# Draft Armidale City Centre **Vitality Plan**

A comprehensive plan to revitalise, reimagine and reinvigorate the Armidale City Centre

August 2026

## Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of our Country and recognise their continued connection to the land. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and the contribution they make to the life of our region.



The Armidale Regional Community pays tribute to their love of land, love of people, and love of culture.





Armidale Regional Council  
135 Rusden Street Armidale, NSW 2350  
Date: June 2026

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## A plan to revitalise, reimagine and reinvogorate the Armidale City Centre

Armidale's city centre is the heart of our community. It is the place where our economy, our civic life and our identity come together, and where residents, visitors and investors form their first impressions of Armidale. When the city centre is strong, active and well cared for, it sends a clear message that Armidale believes in its future. When it is not, the consequences are felt across the entire region.

In recent years, the challenges facing our city centre have become more visible. Longterm vacancies, blank shopfronts and deteriorating buildings have too often replaced the energy and activity that once defined the heart of Armidale. Over time, these conditions have discouraged people from spending time in the city, reduced foot traffic for businesses and weakened confidence that improvement will occur. Left unaddressed, this pattern risks becoming selfreinforcing.

Importantly, this decline is not a reflection of Armidale's strength or potential. Our region remains economically resilient, supported by major institutions, a skilled workforce and a strong community. The issue is not a lack of opportunity, but a lack of coordinated action and shared commitment to the city centre as a priority.

The city centre is not just a collection of private properties and public streets. It is shared civic infrastructure that relies on collective effort to succeed. When visible neglect is allowed to persist, the impacts extend well beyond individual buildings. Business confidence declines, public investment loses impact, and Armidale's reputation as a place to invest, live and study is quietly eroded.

This Vitality Plan is founded on a clear position: accepting ongoing decline is not in the best interests of our community. Normalising lower expectations for the city centre, whether through neglected buildings, underused spaces or fragmented planning, undermines civic pride and sends the wrong message about Armidale's ambition. Our city deserves better.

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan sets a new direction. It brings together years of previous planning, community feedback and technical work into a single, coordinated

framework focused on action. The Plan applies across the entire citycentre footprint and moves beyond isolated projects to a shared vision for renewal.

It focuses on restoring activity and confidence by tackling longterm vacancy, lifting expectations for building maintenance and presentation, and improving the comfort, safety and appeal of streets and public spaces. It recognises that today's city centres must support a broader mix of living, working, learning and social activity, not rely on traditional retail alone.

Central to the Plan is the delivery of catalytic projects and the strategic redevelopment of key sites. These investments are intended to lead by example, signalling longterm commitment, stimulating surrounding investment and creating momentum for change. By aligning publicrealm improvements with private investment opportunities, the Plan establishes a pathway for incremental action to build sustained results.

Just as importantly, this Plan reinforces the need for partnership. Revitalising the city centre cannot be achieved by Council alone. It requires coordinated effort between Council, property owners, businesses, institutions and the wider community. With shared direction and visible leadership, Armidale can rebuild confidence in its city centre.

Revitalisation will not happen overnight. It demands commitment, patience and higher shared standards over time. This Plan is not about blame it is about responsibility, leadership and opportunity.

This Vitality Plan is an invitation to the entire community to help shape the future of Armidale's city centre. A stronger city centre benefits everyone. Together, through collective action and commitment, we can revitalise, reimagine and reinvogorate the heart of Armidale and ensure it reflects the pride, resilience and ambition of our city.



**Cr Sam Coupland**

# Executive Summary

The Armidale city centre was once the undisputed civic, cultural and commercial heart of the city and the wider New England region. It functioned as the place where people came to trade, govern, gather and participate in public life. Its streets, buildings and spaces reflected Armidale's status as a regional city with confidence, identity and purpose. For decades, the city centre attracted investment, activity and daily life because it was clearly the focal point of the region.

Over time, that position has been steadily eroded. Structural changes in retail, employment, travel patterns and land use have weakened the city centre's role as the natural destination for everyday activity. Foot traffic has declined, visit times have shortened, private investment has slowed and large parts of the centre are increasingly underutilised. This has not occurred suddenly, nor as a result of a single decision. It is the cumulative outcome of many years of incremental change, delayed responses and a failure to adapt the city centre to contemporary patterns of living, working and social life.

The result is a city centre that no longer clearly knows what it is for. Over time, it has lost its compelling reason to exist. In an era where retail can occur anywhere, services are decentralised, and housing choices are increasingly dispersed, a city centre cannot rely on habit or nostalgia to sustain it. If it does not deliberately offer something distinct, concentrated activity, civic life, interaction, identity and opportunity, it will continue to lose relevance, confidence and investment.

For Armidale, this is a critical issue. If the city centre is not positioned as the primary place to live, work, gather and participate in public life, activity will continue to spread outward, expectations will fall and underinvestment will persist. Without a clear purpose, decision-making becomes reactive and fragmented, and change occurs by default rather than by design. Defining a reason to exist is therefore not abstract, rather it is the foundation for aligning public action, private investment and community confidence.

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan is a direct response to this challenge. It is not a short-term recovery plan or a collection of disconnected projects. It is a place-based strategy designed to reposition the city centre for the city's next phase of growth, aligned with Council's Local Strategic Planning Statement and Local Housing Strategy, including the aspirational target of adding 10,000 people by 2043, and the objectives of the New England North West Regional Plan 2041.

Most importantly, the Plan redefines what the city centre is for. At the heart of the Plan is a simple proposition: successful city centres are shaped by everyday life. They succeed because people live in them, use them daily and see them as places to belong. The Plan therefore prioritises the reintroduction of intensity, diversity and permanence into the city centre by enabling a strong mix of housing, employment, retail, hospitality, education, culture and civic uses within a compact, walkable environment.

Increasing residential development in the city centre is fundamental to this shift. More people living in the centre means activity throughout the day and into the evening, stronger support for local businesses, and a renewed sense that the city centre is not just somewhere to visit, but somewhere to live and participate.

Equally critical is the quality of the public realm. The Plan focuses on improving how streets and spaces function, how buildings address the street, and how comfortable, visible and welcoming the city centre feels. Attractive, active public spaces are not cosmetic improvements, they are essential to restoring confidence and encouraging long-term investment.

Through clear direction, targeted projects and coordinated investment, the Vitality Plan sets out how Armidale's city centre can move from decline to purpose. It provides the framework to rebuild confidence, stimulate investment and restore the city centre as the physical and symbolic heart of Armidale. One that supports growth, celebrates identity and once again plays a central role in daily civic life.

**Jesse Dick** - Senior Strategic Planner  
Armidale Regional Council

An aerial photograph of the Armidale City Centre, showing a dense urban area with various buildings, streets, and green spaces. A large blue circular graphic is overlaid on the right side of the image, containing white text. The background shows a mix of residential and commercial buildings, with a large green park area in the foreground. The sky is clear and blue.

**A plan to  
revitalise** the  
City Centre

## iii Introduction

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The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan responds to these challenges with a clear, place-based proposition: to rebuild the city centre's competitiveness by strengthening its underlying structure, how people live in it, move through it and spend time within it, while using planning controls, public investment and catalytic redevelopment opportunities to unlock private sector confidence and investment.



# P1. Strategic Context



## 1.1 Strategic Planning Framework

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan sits within a clear hierarchy of State and Local strategic planning documents that collectively guide long-term growth, land use, housing delivery and urban design outcomes across the Armidale region. These documents establish the policy foundation for the Plan and directly inform its purpose, scope and priorities.

### New England North West Regional Plan 2041



At the State level, the New England North West Regional Plan 2041 provides the 20-year strategic land use planning framework for the region. The Regional Plan identifies Armidale as one of the region's primary regional cities, recognising its role as a major centre for employment, education, health and cultural activity serving a wide hinterland.

#### The Regional Plan emphasises:

strengthening regional cities and centres;

accommodating population growth in well-located areas;

- promoting compact settlement patterns;
- supporting housing diversity and improved liveability;
- maximising the use of existing infrastructure and services; and
- ensuring that town centres continue to function as focal points for economic and social life.

The Plan also establishes settlement planning principles that require councils to determine the structure and form of future development and encourage locally responsive, sustainable urban outcomes.

### Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS)



At the local level, the Armidale Regional Council Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS), titled Advancing our region: Toward 50,000, was adopted by Council in April 2024. The LSPS establishes Council's long-term land use vision and a clear aspirational target to grow the regional population by 10,000 people by 2043, with Armidale identified as the primary focus for growth.

#### The LSPS explicitly recognises that achieving this growth requires:

- stronger and more vibrant centres;
- a greater emphasis on infill and consolidation;
- improved liveability and place quality;
- strategic planning for housing, employment and community infrastructure; and
- targeted local strategies to implement its priorities.

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan is identified as a delivery action of the LSPS, providing the detailed, place-based framework needed to translate the LSPS vision into practical direction for the city centre.

## Local Housing Strategy (LHS)



The Local Housing Strategy (LHS), adopted by Council in August 2024, builds on the LSPS and provides a 20-year framework to guide housing supply, diversity and location across the region. The LHS identifies the need for a greater range of housing types in well-located and serviced areas, including higher-density and mixed-use housing in and around centres.

The Strategy gives effect to both the LSPS and the New England North West Regional Plan 2041 by prioritising housing that supports walkability, access to services and efficient infrastructure use.

## Local Environmental Plan (LEP)



The Armidale Regional LEP 2012 establishes an inherently permissive zoning framework for the city centre through the E2 Commercial Core and MU1 Mixed Use zones, both of which actively encourage mixed-use development, shop-top housing and increased residential intensity. Development capacity is further supported by the maximum height control of 999.126 metres AHD (above sea level), a relative height linked to St Peter's Cathedral that enables varied outcomes across the city centre, including mid-rise and higher-density development.

## Development Control Plan (DCP)



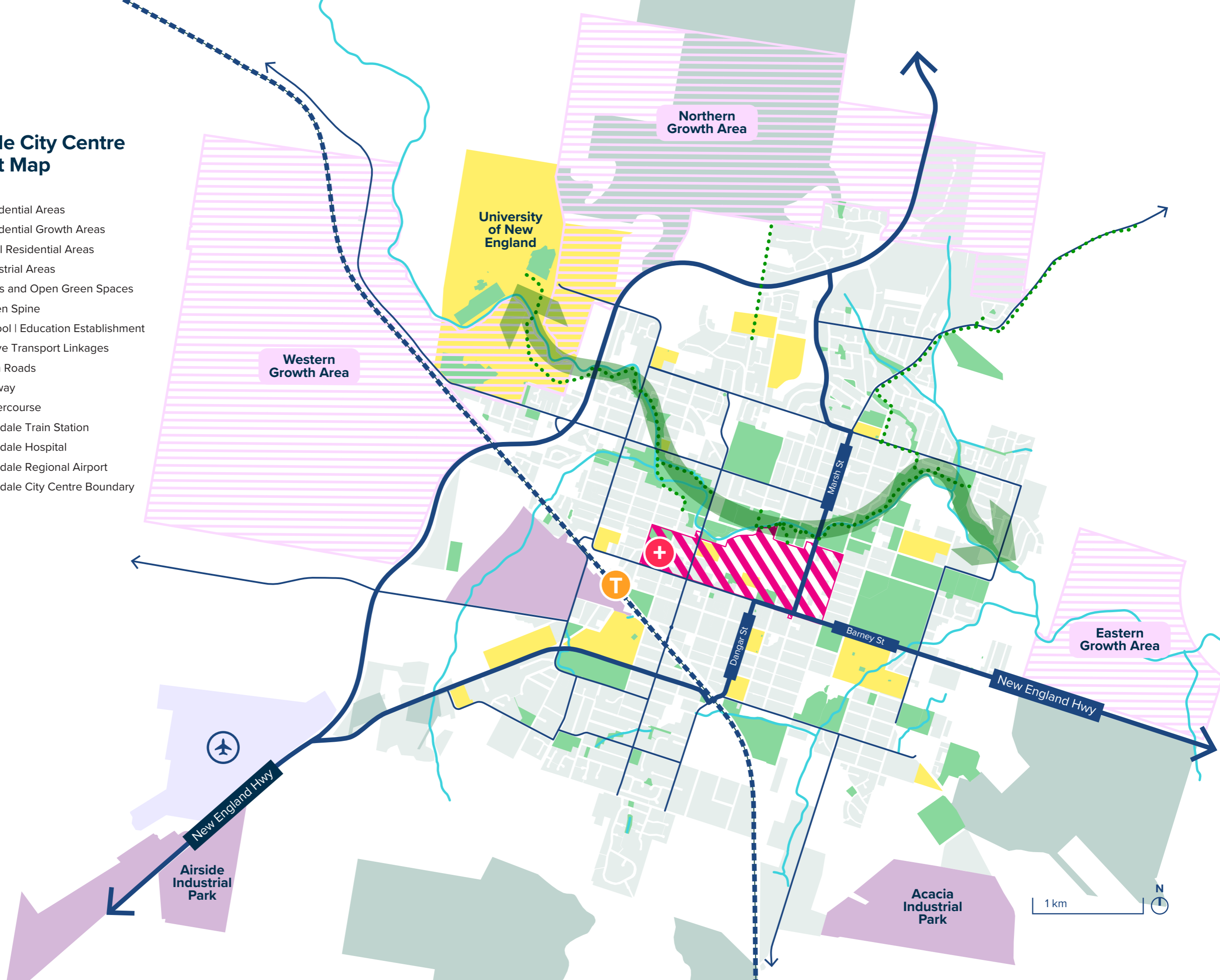
The current Development Control Plan 2024, supported by Council's Engineering Codes and Standard Drawings, provides a strong and enabling framework for city-centre development. It supports shop-top housing and medium-density residential development within E2 and MU1 zones, allows meaningful building scale without prescriptive storey limits, and manages outcomes through design performance, amenity and servicing criteria.

## Role of the Vitality Plan

Together, these strategies establish a strong policy foundation for the Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan. The Plan operates as a key implementation tool, translating regional and local strategic objectives into a coherent vision and framework for the long-term renewal of the city centre. It provides the spatial, economic and place-based guidance required to ensure the city centre evolves in a way that supports population growth, housing delivery, investment confidence and Armidale's role as the regional heart of the New England North West.

# Armidale City Centre Context Map

- Residential Areas
- Residential Growth Areas
- Rural Residential Areas
- Industrial Areas
- Parks and Open Green Spaces
- Green Spine
- School | Education Establishment
- Active Transport Linkages
- Main Roads
- Railway
- Watercourse
- + Armidale Train Station
- T Armidale Hospital
- ✈ Armidale Regional Airport
- Armidale City Centre Boundary



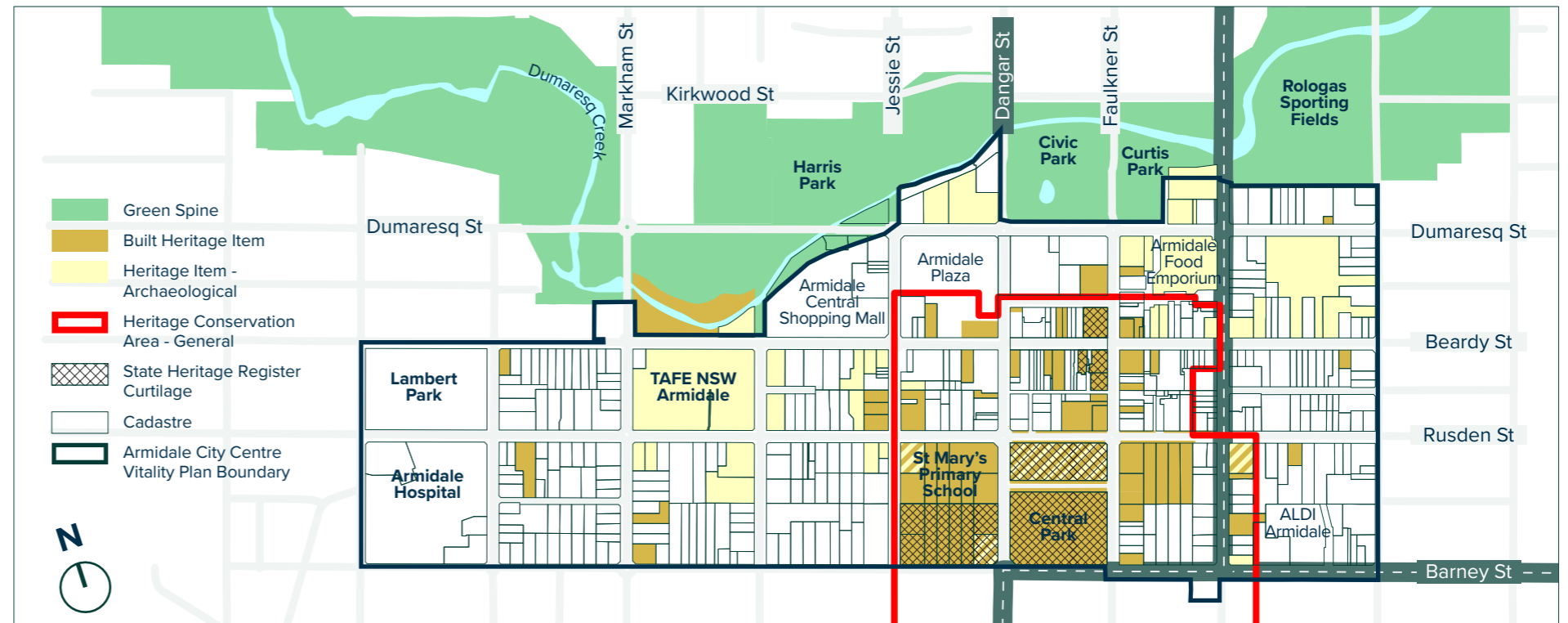
1 km



# Planning Controls and Environmental Constraints

## Heritage

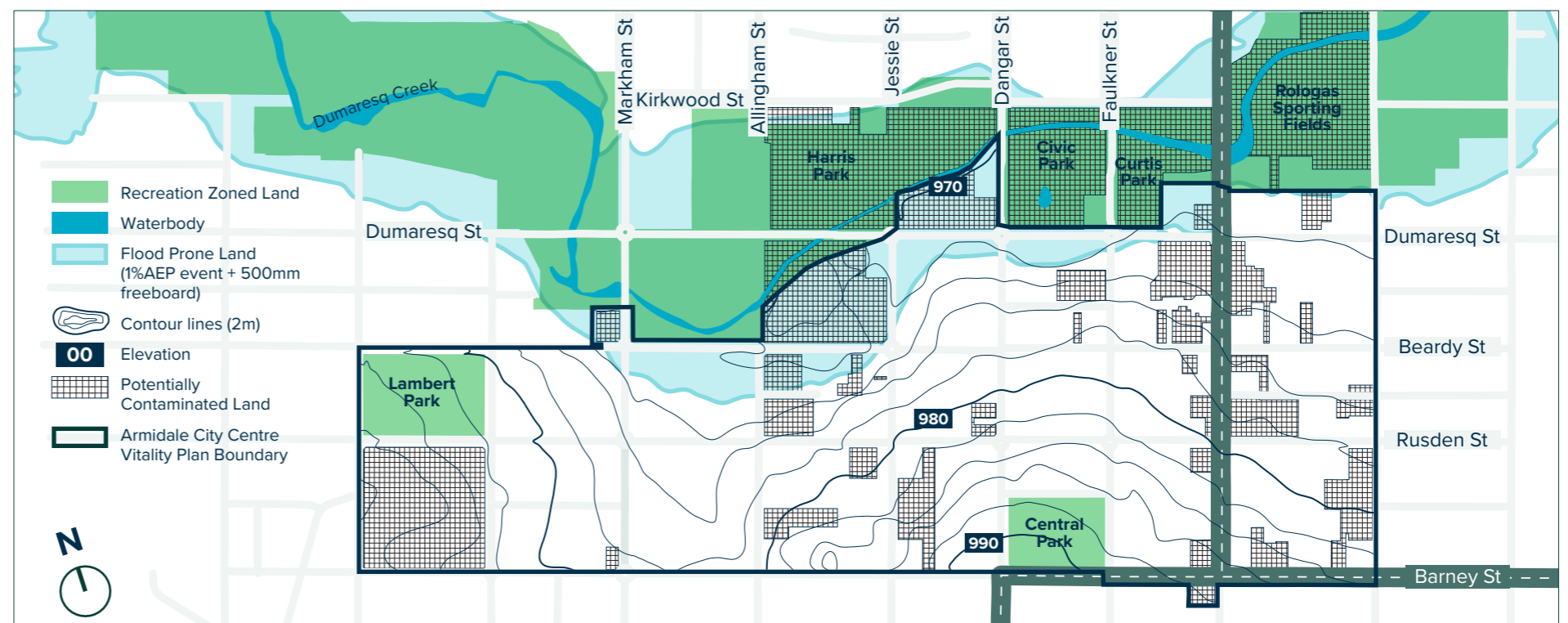
The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan boundary is partly located within a Heritage Conservation Area (General), requiring development to respond to the established historic character. Numerous Built Heritage Items are distributed across the precinct, with several State Heritage Register curtilages concentrated around Central Park, the Cathedrals and the Old Court House, Lands Building and Post office. Areas of archaeological heritage potential are also present. The northern edge interfaces with the Green Spine along Dumaresq Creek, reinforcing landscape and heritage connections.



## Environmental Constraints

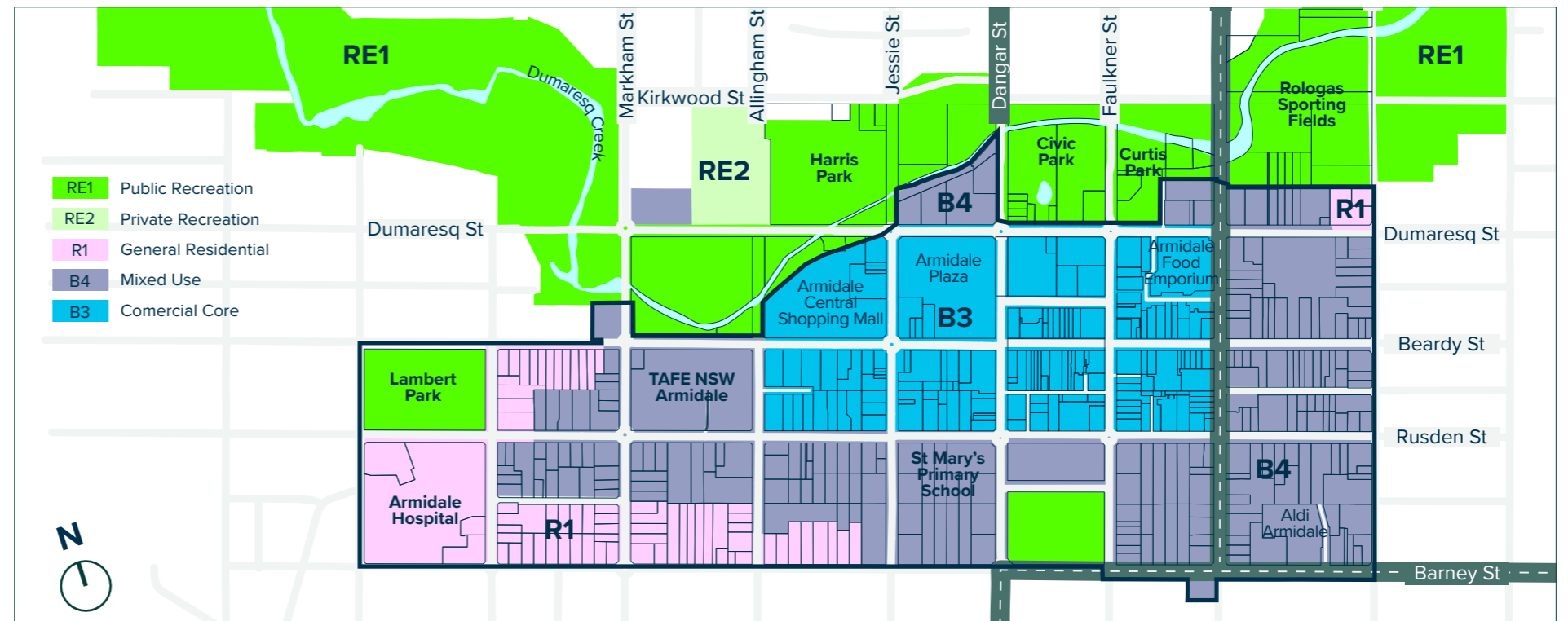
The northern portion of the site interfaces with Dumaresq Creek, with extensive areas of flood-prone land (1% AEP + 500mm freeboard) extending into the precinct. Surrounding recreation zoned land reinforces this creek corridor as a primary environmental asset. Contour lines (2m intervals) indicate a southward rise in topography, with elevations increasing from approximately 970m to 990m RL.

The other primary environmental constraint relevant to the City Centre is potentially contaminated land which reflects previous land-uses. Numerous sites within the city have been mapped as being potentially contaminated which will need to be considered whenever future development occurs on these sites.



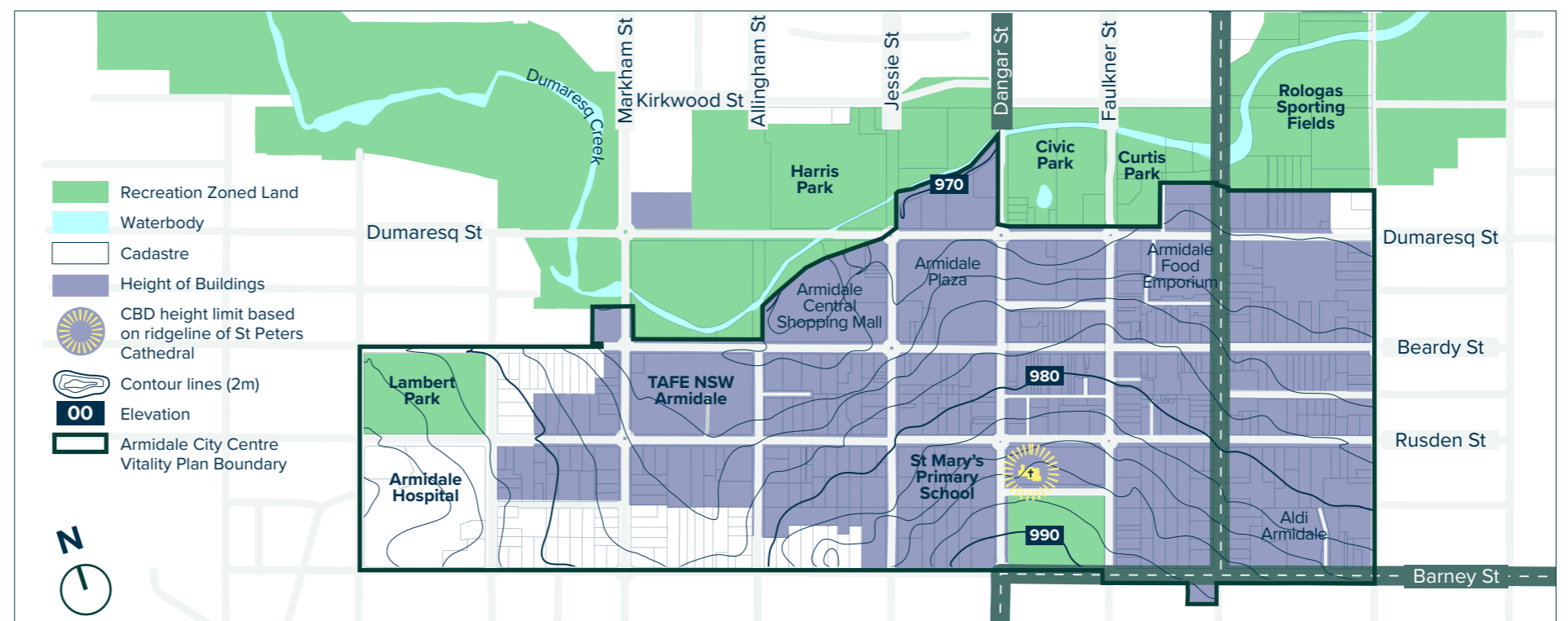
## Zoning

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan site is located predominantly within the B4 Mixed Use zone, enabling a mix of residential and commercial development. It adjoins the B3 Commercial Core to the north, which supports retail, business and active centre uses. Surrounding areas include R1 General Residential, RE2 Private Recreation near Harris Park and RE1 Public Recreation along Dumaresq Creek, establishing a transition from higher-intensity commercial uses to lower-density residential and open space areas.



## Height of Buildings

Maximum building heights are influenced by the ridgeline of St Peters Cathedral, establishing a visual benchmark that development must not exceed. Lower-lying areas near Dumaresq Creek and recreation land form a natural edge to built form intensity. Development across the site must respond to topography, maintaining view corridors and ensuring heights step appropriately with the terrain and surrounding context.





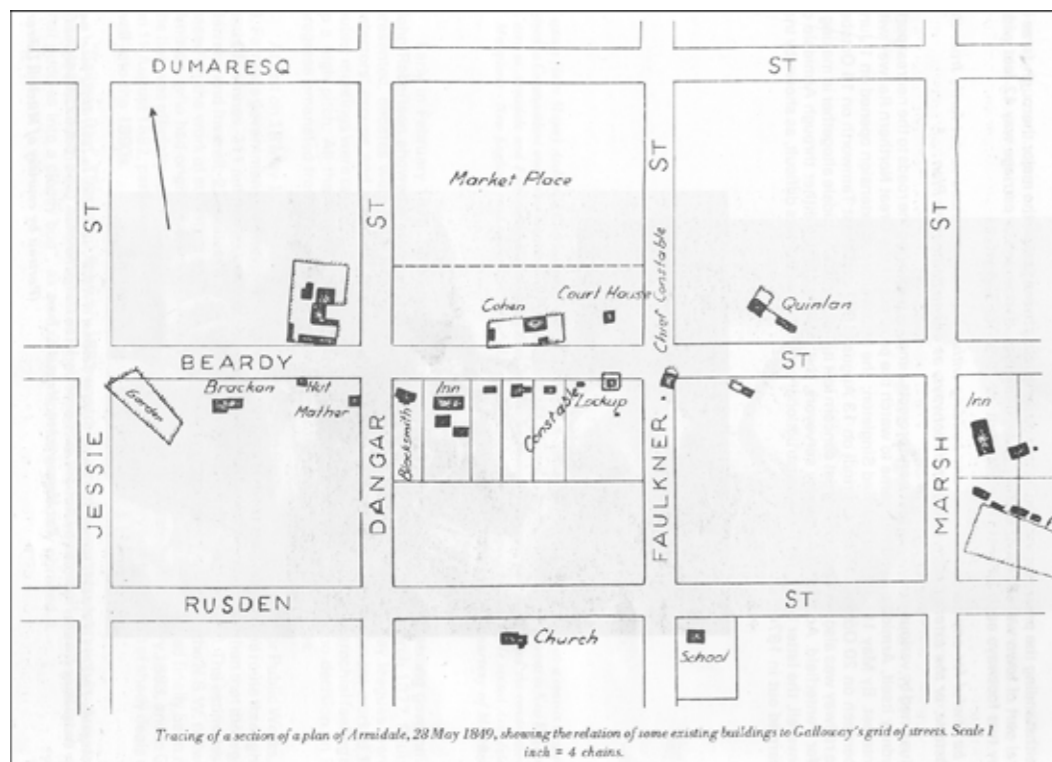
## The 1848-49 Survey and the Marking of the City

The township of Armidale was formally surveyed in 1848-49 by John James Galloway, Assistant Government Surveyor, and gazetted shortly thereafter. Importantly, the grid that defines the city centre today was not aligned to true north. Instead, it was deliberately offset to avoid the demolition of existing buildings that had already taken hold along the earlier track alignments.

At the time, there were only a few dozen buildings, but the decision to preserve them permanently shaped the city's spatial structure.

The surveyed grid—bounded broadly by Taylor, Niagara, Kentucky and Erskine Streets was laid out with streets just one chain wide (approximately 20 metres). This produced the narrow street network that still defines the older parts of the town, and certainly the city centre to this day. A system of rear lanes and laneways was also established, supporting fine-grain development, servicing, and a tight clustering of buildings that reinforced walkability and everyday interaction.

Most significantly, Galloway intentionally tightened the size of city blocks at the core of the grid. While blocks elsewhere measured approximately 220 metres by 220 metres, those within the heart of the city centre were reduced to around 180 metres by 150 metres. This tightening intensified intersections, multiplied street corners and embedded a permanent hierarchy within the city structure: the highest intensity of streets and blocks coincided with the highest concentration of civic activity. This was not incidental town-making, rather it was deliberate planning that recognised the importance of the city centre as Armidale's focal point.



1849 plan showing relationship of some existing buildings to Galloway's streets.



1896 Plan showing buildings in central Armidale.

## A Mixed and Industrious City Centre

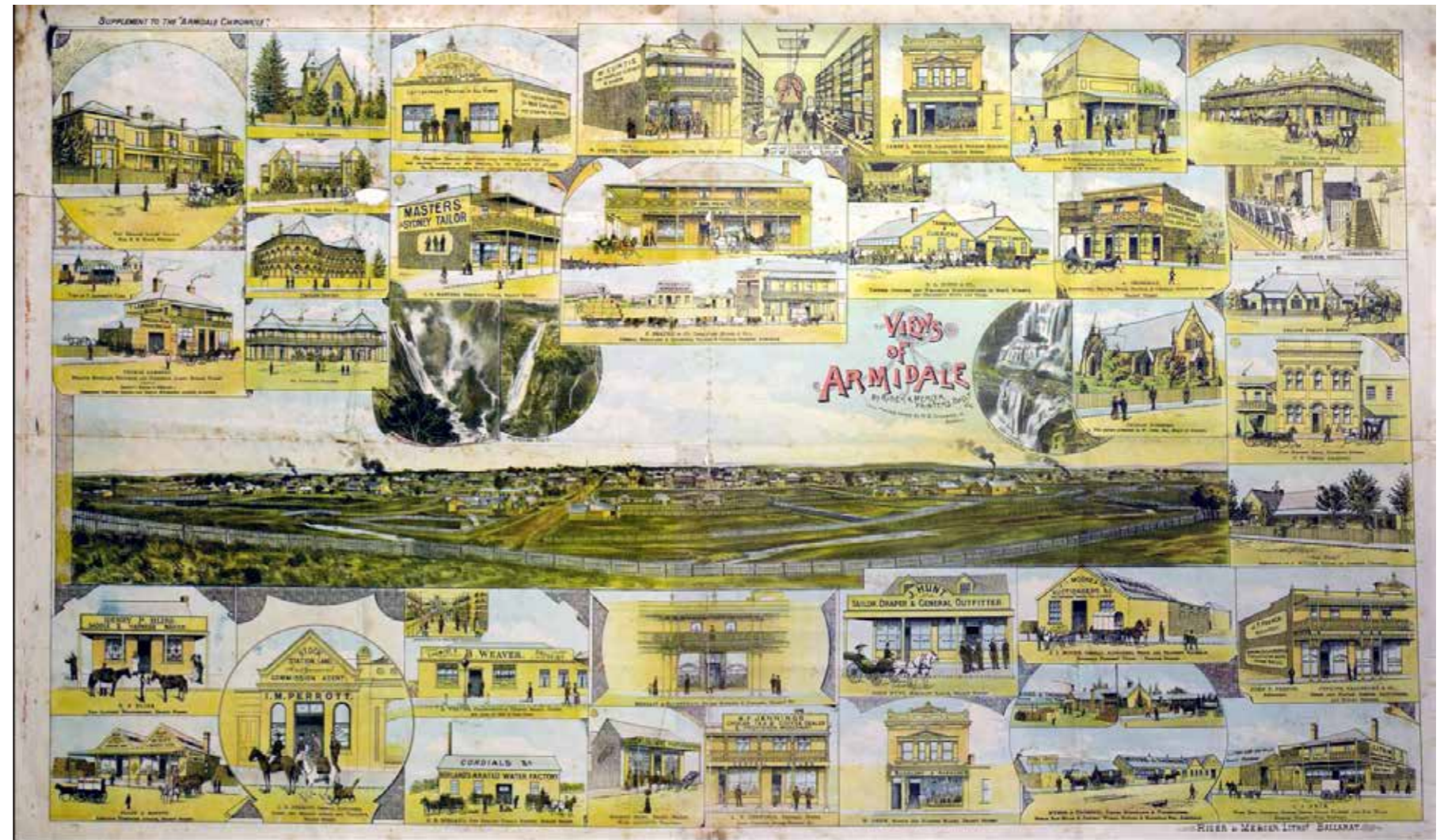
Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Armidale city centre accommodated all forms of city life. Civic, cultural, commercial and industrial uses existed side by side. Tanneries, warehouses, produce merchants and building suppliers operated alongside hotels, schools, churches and government institutions thus resulting in an arrangement that produced intensity, diversity and round-the-clock activity.

As the city expanded, more disruptive or space-intensive industrial uses gradually relocated, first to areas west of the city following the arrival of the railway in the 1880s, and later to purpose-built industrial and commercial precincts at Acacia Park and Girraween around the 1970s, and the airport industrial area in more recent decades. This decentralisation fragmented employment and production across multiple sites, reducing the functional mix that once sustained daily life in the city centre and leaving Armidale with a sprawling city centre that is far larger than other similar sized regional towns.

## Modernisation and the Loss of Heritage Character

From the 1930s through to the 1970s, Armidale underwent a prolonged period of “modernisation” that profoundly altered the form and character of the city centre. In the pursuit of a contemporary image, a large number of heritage buildings were demolished and, most significantly, the majority of street verandahs were systematically removed, often at Council direction.

At the time, verandahs were increasingly viewed as outdated, unsafe or visually cluttered, and were perceived as incompatible with modern streets and traffic environments. However, their removal had enduring consequences. The loss of verandahs stripped buildings of architectural depth and rhythm, reduced shelter and pedestrian comfort, and diminished the legibility of the streetscape.



c1900 Advertisement titled 'Views of Armidale' showing commercial buildings and businesses operating at the time.



Empire Hotel Beardy Street c1949.



Empire Hotel being demolished in 1967 to make way for Woolworths.

Just as importantly, it weakened passive surveillance: upper floors that had once overlooked and engaged with the street were visually and functionally disconnected, reducing what are now understood as “eyes on the street” and undermining the mixing of residential, commercial and civic activity across the day and evening.



Former Empire Hotel now Woolworths site, c1980s.

This period left lasting scars in the city centre, fragmenting what had previously been a continuous, fine-grained streetscape and eroding the qualities that distinguished Armidale as a regional centre with a strong sense of place.

### The Rise of the Car, Parking Provision and Urban Consequences

Running in parallel with this heritage loss was the rapid embrace of the automobile, particularly from the 1950s onwards, as private car ownership expanded, and road-based travel reshaped daily life and tourism patterns across regional Australia. Recognising the importance of vehicular access to economic participation, Council focused considerable effort on providing off-street car parking within the city centre.

These facilities played a genuine role in supporting retail, professional services and visitor access. In a practical sense, the car parks were highly successful: they made the city centre accessible to a wider catchment and reinforced Armidale’s role as a regional service hub. However, they were frequently delivered through the demolition of older buildings, compounding the erosion of built form continuity and reinforcing a pattern of freestanding structures separated by surface parking.



1967 demolition of Olympic Hall, Jessie Street for Woolworths carpark.

Ironically, the logic underpinning these decisions was internally inconsistent. Verandahs were removed to accommodate traffic and parking in the street, yet parking was increasingly being relocated off-street, meaning these defining elements of pedestrian comfort and identity could have been retained without constraining vehicle access. The cumulative outcome was a city centre that was highly accessible by car, but progressively less cohesive and less inviting as a place.

Ultimately, the success of off-street parking and vehicle access contributed to the closure of Beardy Street to traffic, removing the everyday movement and passing activity that had historically sustained street vitality. In this way, a series of well-intentioned responses to modernisation and car dominance combined to dilute the very street life they sought to protect.

### A City Shaped by its Own Success

Together, these historical decisions have produced a city centre that is, in many respects, a victim of its own success. Armidale grew during a period when heritage protection was poorly understood, and vehicular access was prioritised above all else. The cumulative effect has been visible gaps in the urban fabric, loss of architectural continuity, and streets that no longer support the intensity of use for which they were originally designed.

Yet the underlying structure of the city centre, including the tightened block pattern, narrow streets, laneways, and deliberate concentration of civic uses, all effectively remain intact. These attributes are precisely the qualities that contemporary place-led planning seeks to recover. Understanding this history is therefore essential: the Armidale City Centre was not designed to function as a mall or traffic bypass, but as a compact, mixed-use city centre embedded at the crossing of people, institutions, buildings and landscape.



Beardy Street 1973, shortly before being converted into 'The Mall' later that year.

## Lessons from Other Regional Towns

Many of Australia's most valued and successful regional town centres share a common historical trajectory: they either did not experience strong post-war growth, or grew slowly and incrementally during the 1950s, 60s and 70s, avoiding the large-scale redevelopment, public space interventions and demolition that reshaped larger regional centres. As a result, they retained logical street patterns, continuous heritage streetscapes and a close relationship between buildings and public space, all qualities that are now central to their economic and tourism success.

Many regional towns, where it once appeared as an economic disadvantage to stagnate for significant periods during the 20th century, have now inherited a structural asset by way of an 'in-tact' centre. Their centres function exactly as they were designed to: compact, legible, pedestrian-friendly places where commerce, culture and everyday life intersect closely on a daily basis.

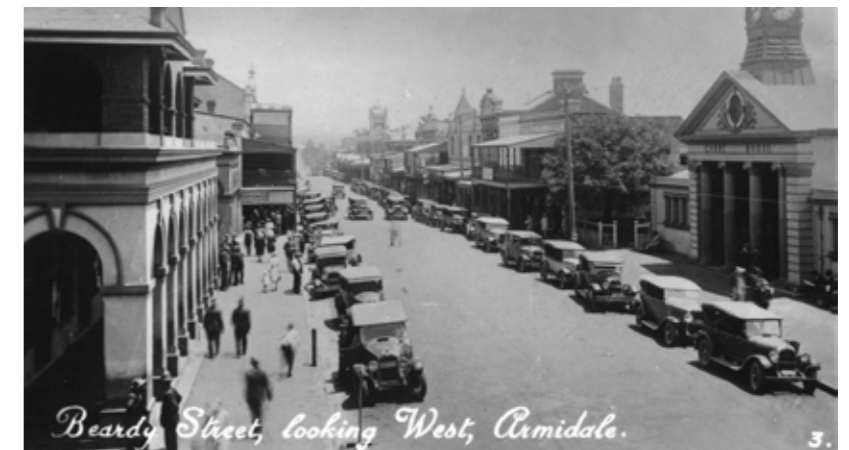
The lesson for Armidale is not that growth is undesirable, but that the timing and manner of growth matters. Armidale expanded during a period when planning orthodoxy favoured demolition, vehicle dominance and separation of uses. By contrast, towns that missed or resisted that wave retained the very attributes now most in demand. The Vitality Plan is therefore not about imitating these towns, but about recovering within Armidale the same spatial principles they never lost: coherent gridded streets, continuous built form, active building edges and a clear civic function. The Vitality Plan is not a reinvention of the city centre, but a deliberate restoration of its original civic purpose, structure and intensity.



*Beardy Street showing continual street verandahs.*



*Beardy Street showing wide, weather protected footpaths and in-tact heritage facades.*



*Beardy Street showing vehicular traffic, parking and pedestrians.*



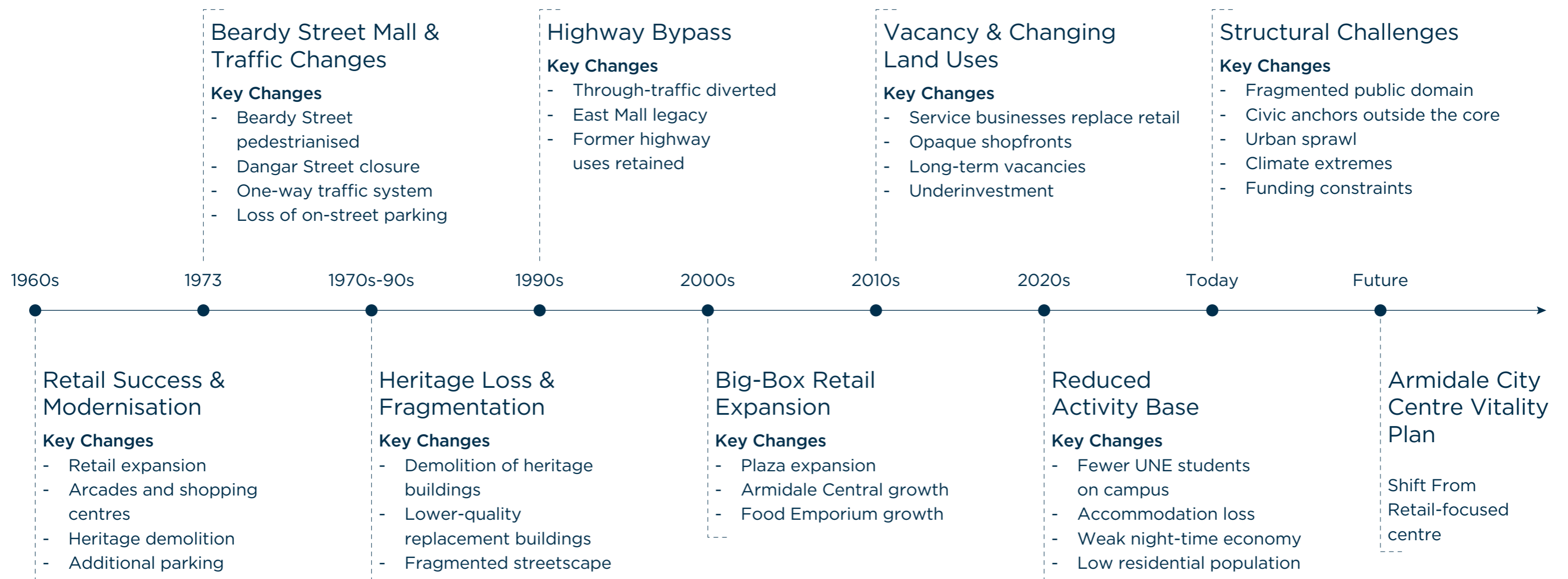
*A rainy but bustling winters afternoon. Corner Beardy and Faulkner Streets. c1950s.*



Beardy Street pedestrian mall c1973.

# 1.3 Drivers of Long-term Decline

This section presents a timeline of the key events, decisions and trends that have contributed to the Armidale City Centre’s gradual decline over multiple decades. It provides a high-level overview of the factors that have shaped the centre’s economic performance, street life, investment confidence and civic role over time. More detailed discussion and analysis of each issue is provided in the Appendix section.

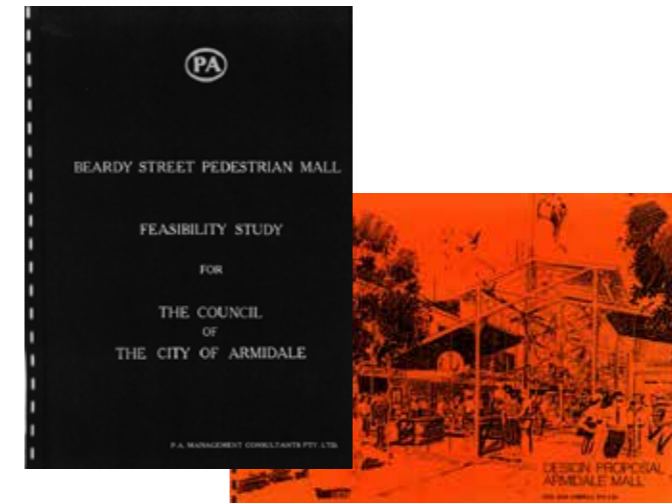


## 1.4 Technical Studies and Background Documents

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan is informed by nearly four decades of strategic planning, feasibility work and place-based studies focused on the evolution and renewal of the city centre. Rather than duplicating or replacing this body of work,

the Vitality Plan draws together, updates and consolidates the recurring themes, findings and lessons from these earlier documents into a single, integrated framework that responds to current conditions and future growth objectives.

Collectively, these documents demonstrate a long-standing and consistent recognition that the Armidale city centre requires proactive intervention to maintain its role as the civic, commercial and cultural heart of the city and the wider New England region.



### Early retail and centre feasibility work – Beardy Street Pedestrian Mall Proposal (1970) and Feasibility Study for Armidale Mall (1986)

The *Beardy Street Pedestrian Mall Proposal* (1970) represents one of the earliest formal examinations of the city centre's performance and future. While it identified a pedestrian Mall as a key retail and pedestrian focus and recognised the importance of foot traffic and accessibility, its foundational understanding of the role of traffic in supporting city centre vitality was fundamentally flawed. *The Feasibility Study for the Armidale Mall* (1986) was commissioned in response to the early shortcomings of the pedestrian mall and acknowledged that the retail context had shifted markedly since the 1970s. Importantly, the study's core observations on the relationship between pedestrian movement, street activity and commercial viability remain highly relevant.



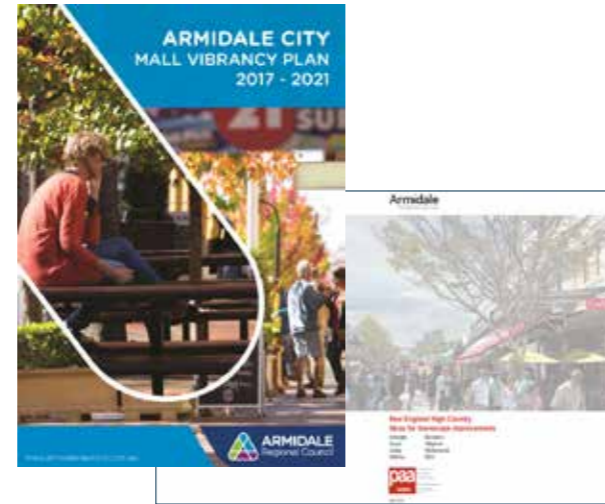
### Master planning and structural thinking - Armidale CBD Masterplan (2003)

The *Armidale CBD Masterplan* (2003) introduced a more comprehensive spatial approach, looking at circulation, land use, public spaces and the relationship between civic, retail and commercial functions. It reinforced the need for a clear centre structure, improved connectivity, and a stronger relationship between public spaces and development sites.



### Civic and cultural anchor studies - Armidale Library Redevelopment Plans (2013)

The *Armidale Library Redevelopment Plans* (2013) highlighted the role of civic and cultural uses as anchors of daily activity, learning and community life. While site-specific in nature, the concept of a central library within the city centre highlighted a broader lesson: civic facilities contribute economic and social value beyond their primary function by generating regular foot traffic and supporting adjacent activity.



### Public domain and enhancement strategies - Armidale Towns and Villages Enhancement Plans (2016)

The *Armidale Towns and Villages Enhancement Plans* (2016) and the resulting *Armidale Mall Vibrancy Plan* (2017) focused on improving public spaces, streetscapes and activation within the city centre. These documents consistently identified amenity, comfort, legibility and programming as important factors in attracting people back to town centres.



### Activation and place-based initiatives - Armidale City Activation Plan (2018)

The *Armidale City Activation Plan* (2018) provided a set of urban design principles, a shared vision, and strategic directions that can guide Council's future planning for the city centre and surrounds. It provides a design-led framework to guide future planning, prioritise projects and coordinate public and private investment to reinforce Armidale's role as a vibrant, connected regional city.



### Environmental and landscape integration - Armidale Creeklands Masterplan (2020)

The *Armidale Creeklands Masterplan* (2020) explicitly strengthened the relationship between the creek corridor and the city centre, repositioning the creek as an extension of the central city rather than a peripheral open space. It identified the Creeklands as a key environmental, recreational and place-shaping asset, forming a connected network of public spaces, landscapes and movement corridors that directly support and reinforce city centre activity, accessibility and vitality.



### Integrated long-term visioning - Armidale Plan 2040 (2020)

The *Armidale Plan 2040* (2020) brought together land use, infrastructure, economy and community objectives into a unified long-term vision. It reinforced the need for compact growth, centre strengthening and improved utilisation of existing infrastructure..



### Contemporary strategic alignment - Local Strategic Planning Statement (2023) and Local Housing Strategy (2024)

The *Local Strategic Planning Statement* (2023) and *Local Housing Strategy* (2024) provide the current policy context for the Vitality Plan. Both documents identify the city centre as a key location for accommodating growth, housing diversity and economic activity in support of the aspirational population target of 50,000 people.



### Detailed Site Plans - East Mall Plans (2024) and Old Court House Walkway Plan (2025)

More recent studies, including the *East Mall Plans* (2024) and the *Old Court House Walkway Plan* (2025), demonstrate a continued focus on improving connectivity, amenity and activation within the city centre.



## How these studies have been incorporated

Rather than repeating individual recommendations, the Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan synthesises the shared findings across these documents into a unified approach. Common themes; connectivity, amenity, civic presence, mixed uses and centre identity have been refined and reframed around current strategic priorities, particularly population growth, housing delivery and investment attraction.

The result is a Plan that honours the intent of previous studies, acknowledges what has and has not worked over time, and provides a clear, contemporary framework to guide the long-term renewal of the Armidale City Centre as the region’s physical, social and economic heart.

## Extensive Prior Consultation and Established Community Direction

Council has undertaken multiple technical studies, masterplans, background reports and precinct-specific strategies for the Armidale city centre, each accompanied by formal public exhibition, stakeholder engagement and submission processes. Collectively, these processes have generated a substantial and consistent body of community commentary about the future of the city centre. Across different plans, time periods and consultation methods, the themes have remained remarkably stable:

the community has expressed a clear desire to see the city centre revitalised through improved public spaces, better use and reuse of heritage buildings, increased residential presence, stronger after-hours activity, safer and more attractive streets, and a shift toward a more people-focused civic heart.

This accumulated feedback provides Council with a high level of confidence about what the Armidale community expects and supports in relation to city-centre renewal, and it forms a strong evidence base which has been used for the fundamental basis of the actions contained within this Vitality Plan.

### Targeted Consultation Approach for the Vitality Plan

Given the depth, breadth and consistency of consultation already undertaken, consultation for the Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan has been deliberately targeted and proportionate, rather than open-ended or repetitive. The purpose of consultation under this Plan is not to re-ask foundational questions about whether the city centre should change or what broad outcomes are desired—those matters are already well established through previous plans—but to refine and confirm implementation priorities.

#### Accordingly, consultation is focused on:

- validating the proposed direction against previously expressed community aspirations;
- testing the feasibility and staging of key interventions;
- engaging directly with affected landowners, businesses and stakeholders on delivery matters; and
- ensuring transparency around funding, timing and tradeoffs.

This approach recognises consultation fatigue and respects the significant time and effort already invested by the community. Importantly, the Vitality Plan does not abstract or reinterpret community feedback; it translates it into tangible planning outcomes, including clearer precinct roles, targeted public-domain upgrades, heritage activation initiatives, residential intensification in appropriate locations, and delivery mechanisms that address long-standing implementation gaps.

By limiting consultation to matters that genuinely benefit from further input, and by grounding the Plan firmly in what has already been said, Council is able to move decisively from discussion to delivery—responding to what the community has consistently asked for: visible change, coordinated investment and real improvements in how the city centre functions and feels.

# P2. Vision and City Shaping Framework

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## 2.1 Vision

To re-establish the city centre as the historic, civic, commercial and residential heart of Armidale—a memorable place people live in, visit often, and encourage others to discover.

The Armidale city centre will be strengthened as the civic, cultural and economic heart of Armidale and the New England region, building on its heritage as a regional service centre, agricultural hub and place of learning.

It will evolve to support emerging economic opportunities, particularly the renewable energy zone, and climate-advantaged industries, while accommodating a significant proportion of the city's future population growth through a balanced mix of housing, business, education, hospitality and civic activity within a compact and walkable urban core.

The city centre will celebrate its historic buildings, civic institutions, churches, schools, pubs and main-street character, while accommodating contemporary development that enhances quality, contributes to identity and supports long-term vitality. It will be a place people choose to return to, not simply to shop or visit, but to live, work, invest and actively participate in Armidale's civic life.

Its streets and public spaces will reflect Armidale's role as a regional capital and heritage city, supporting growth through intensity, diversity and design quality rather than outward expansion, and providing a strong physical and symbolic focus for a confident and evolving community.

## 2.2 The Draft Vitality Plan

The Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan is the primary strategic framework guiding the renewal, reinvestment and long-term function of the city centre. It establishes a clear, coordinated plan that translates strategic intent into on-the-ground change, aligning future development, public realm investment, civic uses and statutory controls around a shared direction for the centre.

The Plan sets out a deliberate program of city-shaping actions designed to re-establish the city centre as Armidale's civic, cultural and economic heart. It identifies where and how growth, activity and investment should occur, with a strong emphasis on higher-density and mixed-use development, the conservation and activation of heritage buildings, the reintroduction and creation of laneways, the delivery of a regional cultural precinct, a strengthened civic precinct, major upgrades to Civic Park, and the formation of a continuous north-south civic spine that connects these elements into a legible and active urban structure.

Rather than operating as a detailed design guide, the Vitality Plan provides the strategic logic that shapes all subsequent decisions. It defines the spatial and functional moves required to restore everyday activity, visibility and confidence in the centre — including the planned transition of the existing pedestrian mall to a shared pedestrian and vehicle street that reinstates movement and supports a broader mix of uses along the city's principal street.

Through this approach, the Vitality Plan deliberately repositions Armidale's city centre away from a single-purpose retail model and toward a mixed-use civic heart — a centre that accommodates living, working, learning, culture, events and everyday services, and that is capable of evolving over time while retaining its historic character and civic role.

## 2.3 Key Elements of the Draft Vitality Plan

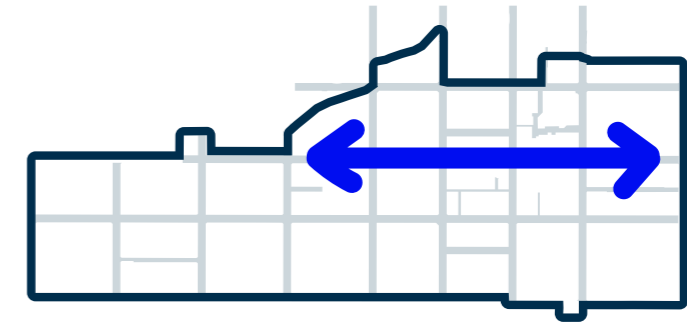
The Vitality Plan is structured around two transformational spines that establish a clear spatial and movement framework for the city centre and organise future public investment, redevelopment and civic activity.



### North-South Civic Spine

The north-south civic spine forms the primary civic and cultural backbone of the city centre. It physically and functionally links Civic Park and Creeklands through the city centre to Central Park. This spine concentrates major civic, cultural and institutional uses, strengthening pedestrian connectivity between places that already perform a public role and elevating their collective presence as a continuous civic sequence. Public-realm upgrades along this spine prioritise safe, legible pedestrian movement, enhanced landscape treatments and improved connections across barriers such as large blocks and internal car parks. Over time, this spine is intended to support increased day-to-day activity, events and visitation, reinforcing the city centre as the primary setting for civic life.

Importantly, the Vitality Plan brings forward the upgrade of Civic Park as a priority action, accelerating works previously identified for later stages of the Creeklands Masterplan. Early delivery is critical to completing the north-south civic spine and strengthening the physical and visual relationship between the city centre and Dumaresq Creek. Interventions focus on improving park quality, accessibility, activation and connections to surrounding streets and civic uses, ensuring Civic Park functions as a true city-scale public space that supports events, informal use and everyday activity.



### East-West Main Street Spine

The east-west spine is focused on Beardy Street as the city's principal heritage main street. The Plan establishes the long-term transition of Beardy Street from a disjointed pedestrian mall to a unified shared pedestrian and vehicle street, reinstating movement, visibility and short-stay parking while retaining pedestrian priority. This spine supports active ground-floor uses, restored heritage facades and reinstated verandahs and outdoor dining, restoring the functional role of Beardy Street as a working main street reinforcing its role as the symbolic and economic heart of the centre.



### Catalytic redevelopment sites:

The Vitality Plan identifies a series of catalytic redevelopment sites where change can be concentrated to establish momentum, demonstrate new development typologies and unlock broader precinct transformation.

#### 1. Visitor Information Centre / Creeklands Site

Relocates the Visitor Information Centre into the city core and redevelops the site, including neighbouring sites into a flood-sensitive commercial development addressing the Creeklands and providing consolidated off-street parking to support surrounding properties including the Wicklow Hotel.

**2. Moore Street Cultural Precinct** – Transforms a large under-utilised car park into a landmark cultural facility, supported by the reopening of Dangar Street and the redevelopment of the Telstra Exchange building to establish a cohesive cultural destination. Together, these interventions establish Moore Street as a cohesive cultural destination anchored within the north-south civic spine.

**3. Civic Redevelopment (Library) Site** – Delivers a new library on Rusden Street as a contemporary civic anchor reinforcing the north-south civic spine and surrounding activity.

**4. East Mall Redevelopment Site** – Enables higher-density development and shop-top housing through new mid-block pedestrian connections and the provision of Council-owned consolidated parking on Woodward Street alongside a transformed Beardy Street/East Mall main street.

**5. Marsh Street Car Yards and Bowling Club Site** – Reconfigures and redevelops large, consolidated low-intensity landholdings into medium-density and mixed-use development that introduces new residents and activity into the city centre. These interventions will deliver sleeved central parking, new street-facing buildings and a network of through-block pedestrian and vehicular connections.

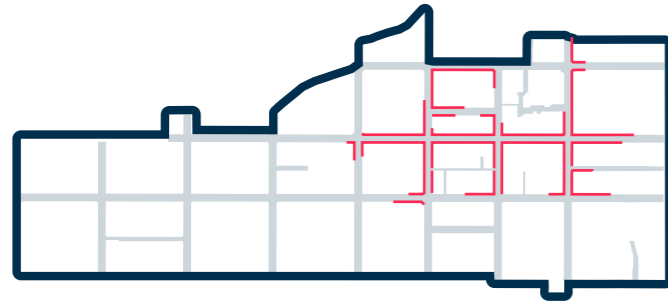
**6. Rusden Street Car Yards** - Redevelops large, consolidated low-intensity landholdings into medium-density and mixed-use development that introduces new residents and activity into the city centre via new street-facing buildings and through-block pedestrian and vehicular connections.

**7. Rusden-Jessie-Dangar Block Site** – Reconfigures this important city block to deliver sleeved central parking, new street-facing buildings, and the creation of mid-block pedestrian and vehicular connections to surrounding city blocks, namely via a new pedestrian connection directly linking internal carparking to the Beardy Street entrance of Armidale Plaza.

**8. Rusden Street West Site** – Redevelops large consolidated sites within the E2 – Commercial Core zone via the completion of Coucon Lane throughout the block and a new mid-block pedestrian and vehicular connection to the Beardy Street entrance of Armidale Central Shopping Centre.

**9. Allingham Street ‘Nightingale-Style’ Housing Site** – Transforms a Council-owned site into high-quality medium-density social and affordable housing founded on design excellence, sustainability and community-focused living.

These sites function as catalytic redevelopment opportunities, deliberately chosen to deliver visible change, establish benchmarks for built form, landuse mix and publicrealm contribution, and demonstrate how coordinated redevelopment can reshape blocks, streets and precincts over time.

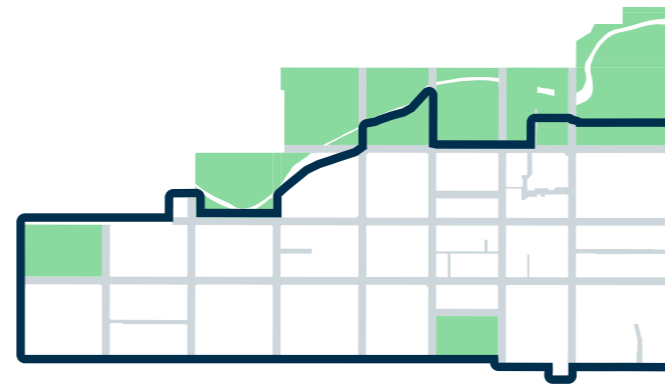


### Planning Framework Upgrades

Implementation of the Vitality Plan will be supported by two, interlinked planning focused workstreams which involves targeted updates to the Local Environmental Plan (LEP) and Development Control Plan (DCP).

In particular, the introduction of Active Street Frontages and Design Excellence Clauses into the LEP and the introduction of city block controls into the DCP will guide the form, intensity and sequencing of major redevelopment, ensuring that new development is of high quality, makes an appropriate contribution to the public realm, and aligns with the objectives of the Vitality Plan. These controls will help prevent under-development of key sites and direct inappropriate, low-intensity or auto-oriented uses to more suitable locations elsewhere in the urban area.

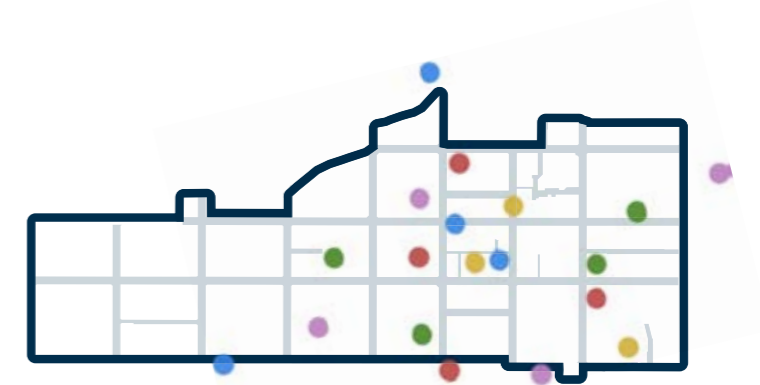
Updated DCP provisions will support a verandah reinstatement program and a broader heritage activation framework, enabling restoration, adaptive reuse and infill development that strengthens the character of the centre while accommodating growth.



The updated DCP will also establish a network of service laneways and consolidated off-street parking facilities in strategic locations. This approach reduces the cost and complexity of development by removing the requirement for each site to independently provide parking, thereby enabling smaller lots, heritage sites and multi-storey mixed-use projects to proceed more readily.

### Streetscape & Public Domain Masterplan

The preparation of a comprehensive City Centre Public Domain and Streetscape Masterplan will provide a coordinated, place-led approach to public-realm investment, setting out staged upgrades to streets, pavements and spaces across the city centre. Interventions will include road reconfiguration where appropriate, high-quality pavement treatments, increased tree planting, particularly through central medians and street alignments to improve canopy cover, and a consistent suite of materials and furnishings that reinforce the city centre's identity.

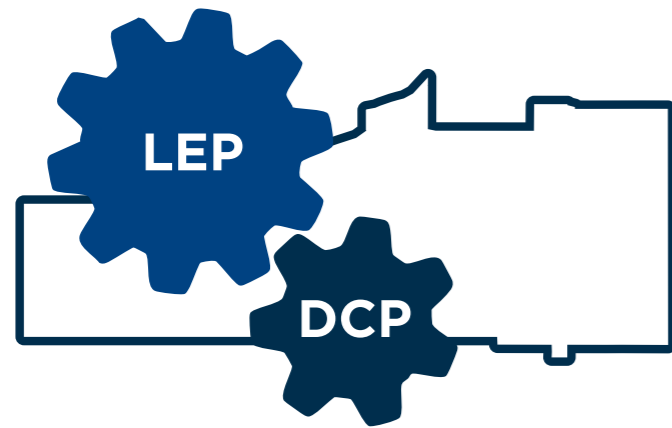


### Place Making and Activation

The preparation and implementation of a City Centre Placemaking and Activation Strategy will be critical to the day-to-day success of the Vitality Plan. A coordinated program of markets, events and cultural activities across key locations such as Beardy Street, Civic Park and the Commercial Heritage Heart will play a central role in restoring vibrancy and encouraging regular visitation.

The strategy will support outdoor dining, footpath trading and small-scale, business-led activation through streamlined approvals and targeted assistance. It will also enable temporary and pop-up uses in vacant sites to reduce inactivity, while fostering partnerships with UNE, NERAM, local schools and community groups to deliver programming and public art.

Importantly, all activation will be integrated with public domain upgrades and aligned with existing and emerging businesses to ensure new infrastructure is actively used, well maintained and contributes to a lively, engaging city centre.



### **Funding and Delivery Mechanisms**

The Vitality Plan outlines a range of funding and delivery mechanisms, recognising that transformation will occur incrementally. These mechanisms are intended to support a staged, multi-year implementation program, aligning Council investment with private development, State and Federal funding opportunities, and infrastructure sequencing.

Taken together, this framework positions the Vitality Plan as the strategic anchor for city-centre renewal: setting direction, clarifying expectations and enabling coordinated delivery without over-prescribing outcomes while ensuring that future change reinforces Armidale's role as a compact, civic, cultural and economic regional centre..



## 2.4 Placemaking and Activation

Armidale Regional Council already plays an important role in activating the city centre through a calendar of markets, festivals, cultural programming and community events. These initiatives bring people into the centre, generate foot traffic for surrounding businesses and reinforce the centre as a place of shared civic life.

Physical renewal and planning reform are necessary conditions for the revitalisation of the Armidale City Centre, but they are not sufficient on their own. Alongside the structural changes proposed in this Plan, the city centre must be actively managed and experienced as a place: somewhere people choose to visit not only because they need something, but because being there is worthwhile in itself.

Contemporary city centres no longer compete on convenience alone. The growth of online retail, car-based shopping centres and decentralised services has fundamentally changed why people come to traditional centres. Increasingly, the transaction, i.e. the purchase of a good or service, is only one component of a visit. What draws people in, and encourages them to stay longer and return more often, is the quality of the experience: lively streets, visible activity, outdoor dining, events, culture and the presence of other people.

For Armidale, this represents a fundamental shift. The city centre cannot compete directly with large-format retail or online platforms on convenience. Its competitive advantage lies in being the place where people gather to participate in social, cultural and civic life to experience something distinct, local and authentic. This includes both major programmed events and the smaller, everyday moments that collectively shape how the city centre feels.

Importantly, this approach to placemaking is not an alternative to the structural interventions set out in this Plan. Events and activation alone cannot overcome long-term vacancy, fragmented urban form or underinvestment. However, they play a critical reinforcing role. Placemaking amplifies the impact of public and private investment by increasing visitation, encouraging people to dwell longer, supporting local businesses and strengthening the community's connection to the city centre.

This Plan supports the continuation and expansion of this role, ensuring that activation is coordinated, targeted and aligned with investment in public space and redevelopment sites. Equally important are smaller-scale, everyday interventions that create a sense of activity and interest. Outdoor dining areas, street furniture, temporary installations, public art, street performance and informal gathering spaces all contribute to a city centre that feels alive. These elements encourage people to slow down, interact and explore, transforming streets from corridors of movement into places of experience.

Council's role extends to supporting businesses and community groups to contribute to the public realm. This includes enabling outdoor dining, facilitating temporary uses, supporting pop-up activities, and reducing barriers to participation in city-centre activation. Relatively modest interventions—such as assisting businesses with tables, chairs, planters or façade activation—can have a disproportionately positive impact on the street environment.

Public art and cultural programming also play a key role in expressing Armidale's identity as a regional capital. Partnerships with institutions such as the University of New England, NERAM, local schools and community organisations will be critical in embedding cultural activity within the city centre. These collaborations reinforce the centre as the primary setting for Armidale's civic and cultural life. The physical investments proposed elsewhere in this Plan—upgraded streets, reinstated verandahs, improved lighting, new public spaces, and a connected civic spine—provide the foundation for this activity. Placemaking ensures these investments are actively used, programmed and maintained as vibrant public places rather than passive infrastructure.

Ultimately, placemaking is about cultivating the conditions that allow people to develop a genuine connection to the city centre. It supports a shift from a place people pass through, to a place people choose to spend time in. By combining structural renewal with ongoing activation, Armidale Regional Council can strengthen the city centre's role as the civic, cultural and social heart of the New England region.

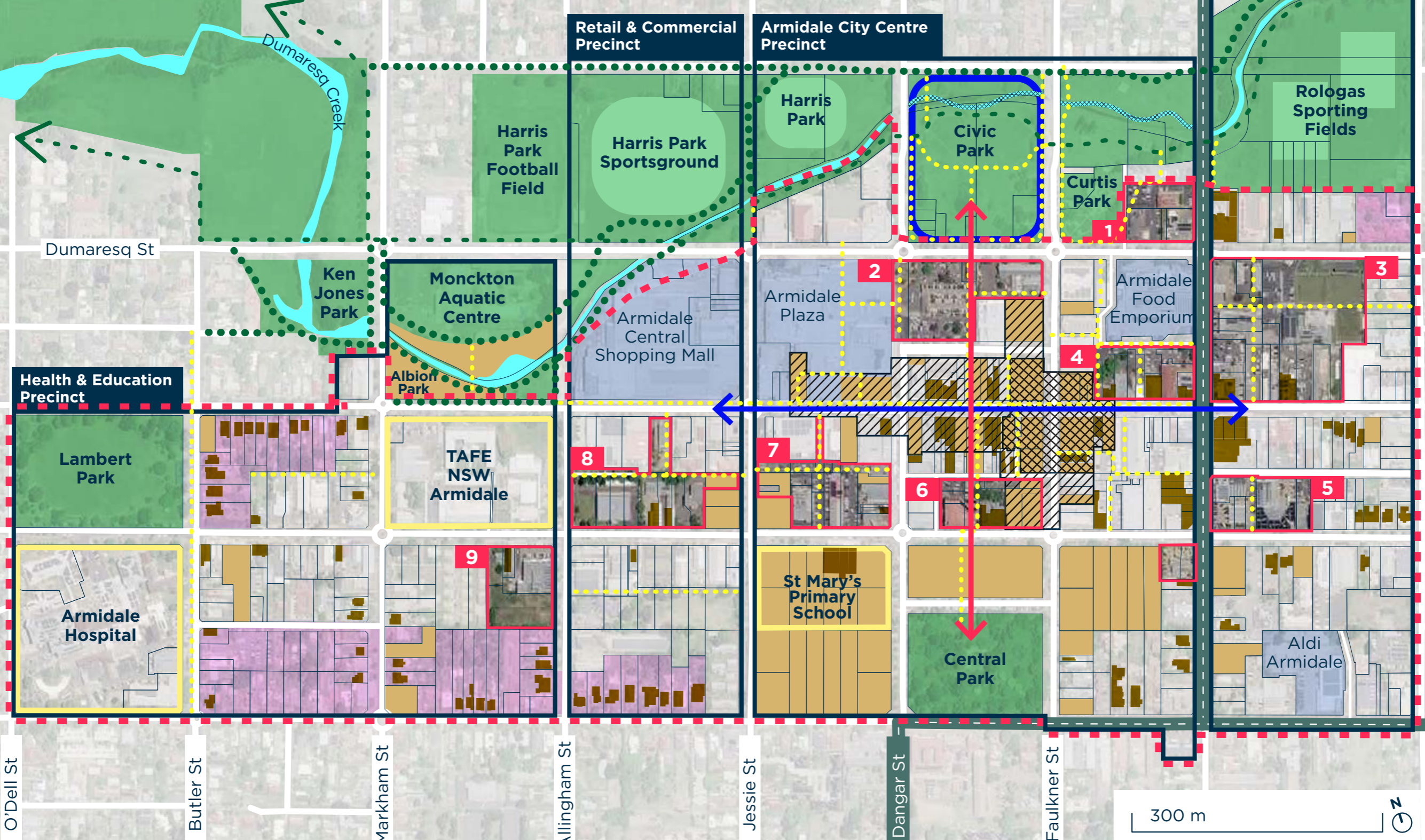


# P3. Draft Vitality Plan & Precinct Approach

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# Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan Map

- Recreation Zoned Land
- Creek
- Channelised Section of Creek
- Vitality Plan Boundary
- Key Sites
- Civic Park Redevelopment Site
- Cadastre
- Residentially Zoned Land
- Large-format Retail
- Hospital or Education Establishment
- Heritage Conservation Item
- Character / Contributory Building
- Commercial Heritage Precinct
- Commercial Heritage Heart
- Civic Park Spine
- Beardy Street Commercial Spine
- Road
- Existing Shared Path
- Proposed Shared Path
- Pedestrian Connections

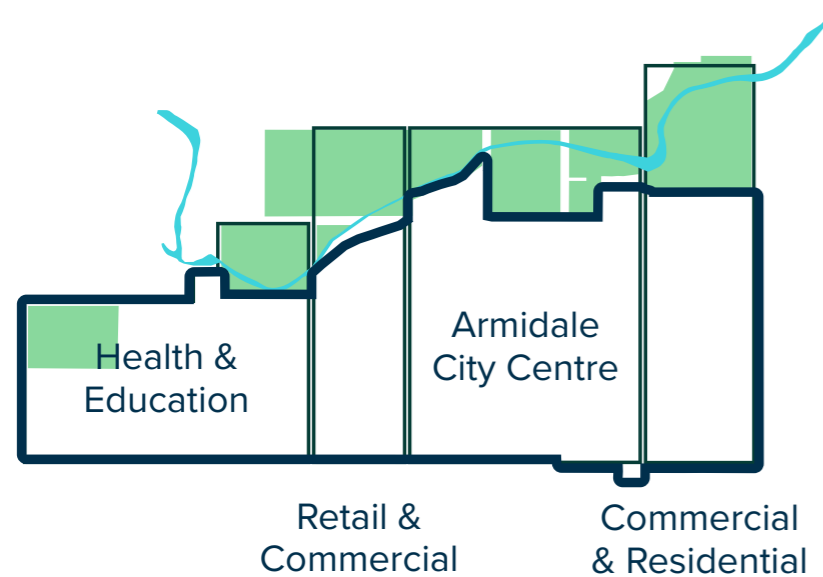


## Health and Education Precinct

Located in the western part of the city centre, this precinct encompasses low-density residential and commercial areas, the Armidale Hospital and Private Hospital, Lambert Park, the Armidale TAFE campus, Albion Park and the Monckton Aquatic Centre within the Dumaresq Creeklands. The precinct is characterised by institutional uses, open space and residential interfaces.

## Retail and Commercial Precinct

This precinct includes the Armidale Central Shopping Centre (large-format retail) and adjoining commercial uses, positioned close to the creeklands and Harris Park sports facilities. It functions as the major retail and grocery shopping destination within the city centre, courtesy of the Armidale Central Shopping Centre, which generates a large proportion of city centre trips.



## Armidale City Centre Precinct

The central precinct forms the historic and civic core of the city centre. It includes the Beardy Street shopping area, Council's Civic Administration Building (CAB), a significant concentration of heritage buildings, (most notably the city's State Heritage Listed Old Court House, Post Office, Lands Building, Telegraph Office and Cathedrals), the Large-format retail Armidale Plaza and Armidale Food Emporium (Coles) complexes, multiple public car parks, and key public open spaces. These include the State Heritage-listed Central Park and the creekland parks of Harris, Civic and Curtis Parks. This precinct is the focal point of civic activity, commerce and public life.

## Commercial and Residential Precinct

Located primarily to the east, this precinct includes the Rologas sporting fields within the creeklands, low-density residential and commercial uses, the Armidale City Bowling Club, multiple car yards and mechanical garages, the main north-south connector of Marsh Street with its concentration of pubs and hospitality venues, and the ALDI shopping complex. This precinct has a high concentration of large lots and landholdings, reflecting the low density nature of uses and activity in this area.

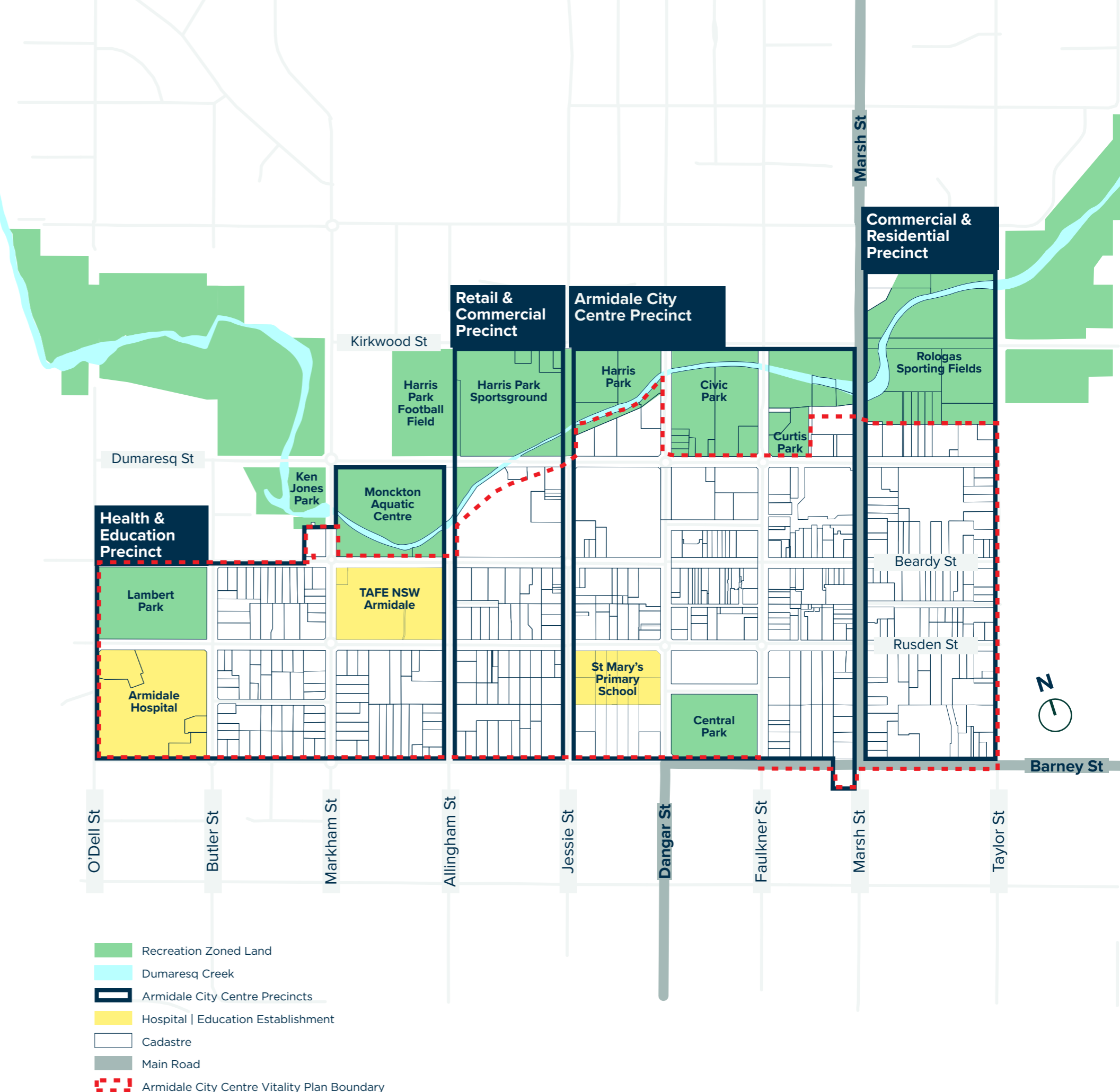
The Vitality Plan recognises that each precinct performs a distinct function within the broader city centre and will evolve in a way that builds on its existing strengths and assets. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, future improvements and investment are intended to respond to the specific character, role and opportunities of each precinct.

## 3.2 City Centre Precincts

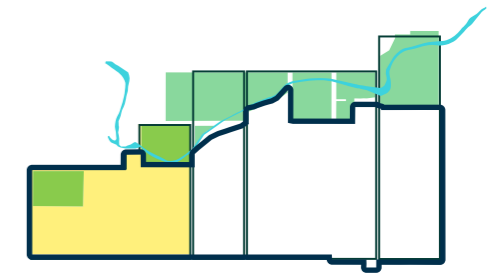
The Armidale City Centre extends over many blocks, stretching 1.5km from east to west and 800m from north to south, with the commercial zoned areas covering approximately 68ha, which for comparison is roughly 80% the size of Tamworth’s commercial core. Within this area, the land is primarily zoned MU1 – Mixed Use, with areas of E2 – Commercial Core zoning concentrated around the traditional commercial heart of the city centre and adjoining the creeklands.

For the purposes of analysis and strategic direction, the Vitality Plan divides the city centre into four distinct precincts, each with its own role and opportunities. Together, these precincts provide the spatial structure that allows the Vitality Plan to tailor interventions—public realm investment, planning controls and catalytic projects—to the specific role, capacity and constraints of each part of the city centre, rather than applying a single solution across fundamentally different urban conditions.















In essence, the precinct framework allows the Vitality Plan to align existing uses, zoning, DCP controls and public-domain investment with the functional role of each part of the city centre, ensuring that planning controls actively guide regeneration rather than simply permitting it.



# Health and Education Precinct



## LEGEND

-  Key Site
-  TAFE NSW Armidale
-  Armidale Hospital
-  Heritage Conservation Item
-  Built Heritage Item
-  Character / Contributory Building
-  Park / Sports Fields
-  Residentially Zoned Areas
-  Dumaresq Creek
-  Civic or Governmental Building
-  Armidale War Memorial Library
-  Shared Path
-  Proposed Laneway Linkages (Pedestrian/ Vehicular)
-  Precinct Boundary

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Dumaesq St

Rusden St

Lambert Park

Monckton Aquatic Centre

Armidale Central Shopping Mall

O'bell St

2

1

Beardy St

Butler St

Rusden St

Markham St

Barney St

Allingham St

1

9

# Design Principles & Key Moves

## Delivering Essential-Worker Housing Through Exemplary Public-Land Development

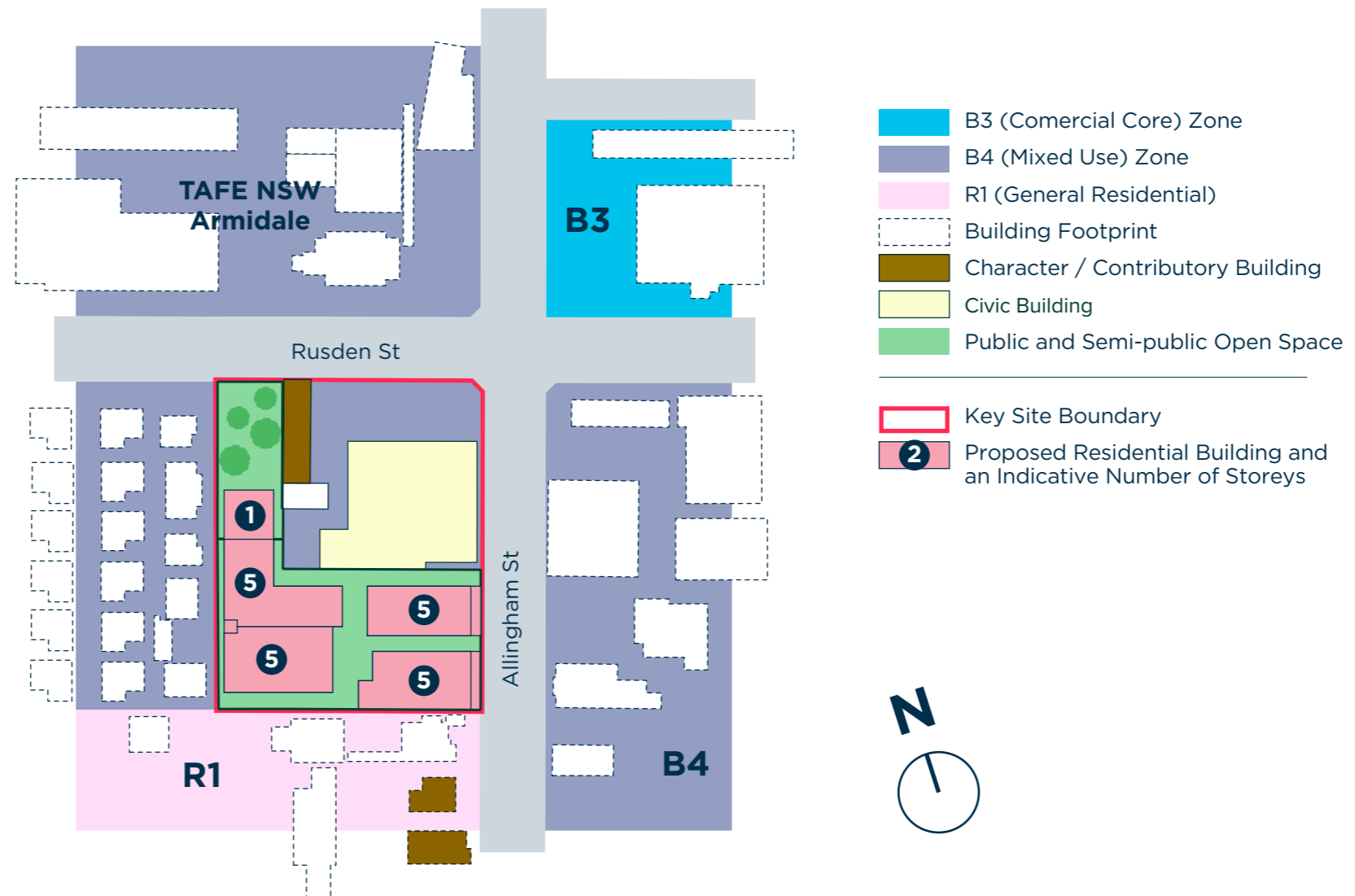
The Allingham Street site is identified for redevelopment as a multi-storey, 'Nightingale' style social and affordable housing project that directly addresses housing affordability and supports the operation of the adjoining Health and Education Precinct. The redevelopment delivers long-term affordable homes for essential workers—particularly healthcare, education and allied service staff—within walking distance of major employment, services and civic facilities.

The redevelopment framework establishes clear expectations for efficient use of centrally located land, high architectural and environmental performance, and strong streetscape and public-realm outcomes through the application of design excellence principles. The Nightingale model provides a tested approach for delivering shared amenity, reduced construction and operating costs, and durable, high-quality housing outcomes suitable for a central city location.

This action sets the future direction for the site by defining the preferred form, scale and development model, providing certainty to the market while allowing flexibility in ownership, partnerships and delivery mechanisms. Through this approach, the Vitality Plan positions the Allingham Street site as a key contributor to housing supply, workforce stability and the long-term resilience of the city centre and the Health and Education Precinct.

## Key Site 9

### Essential-Worker Housing MASTERPLAN



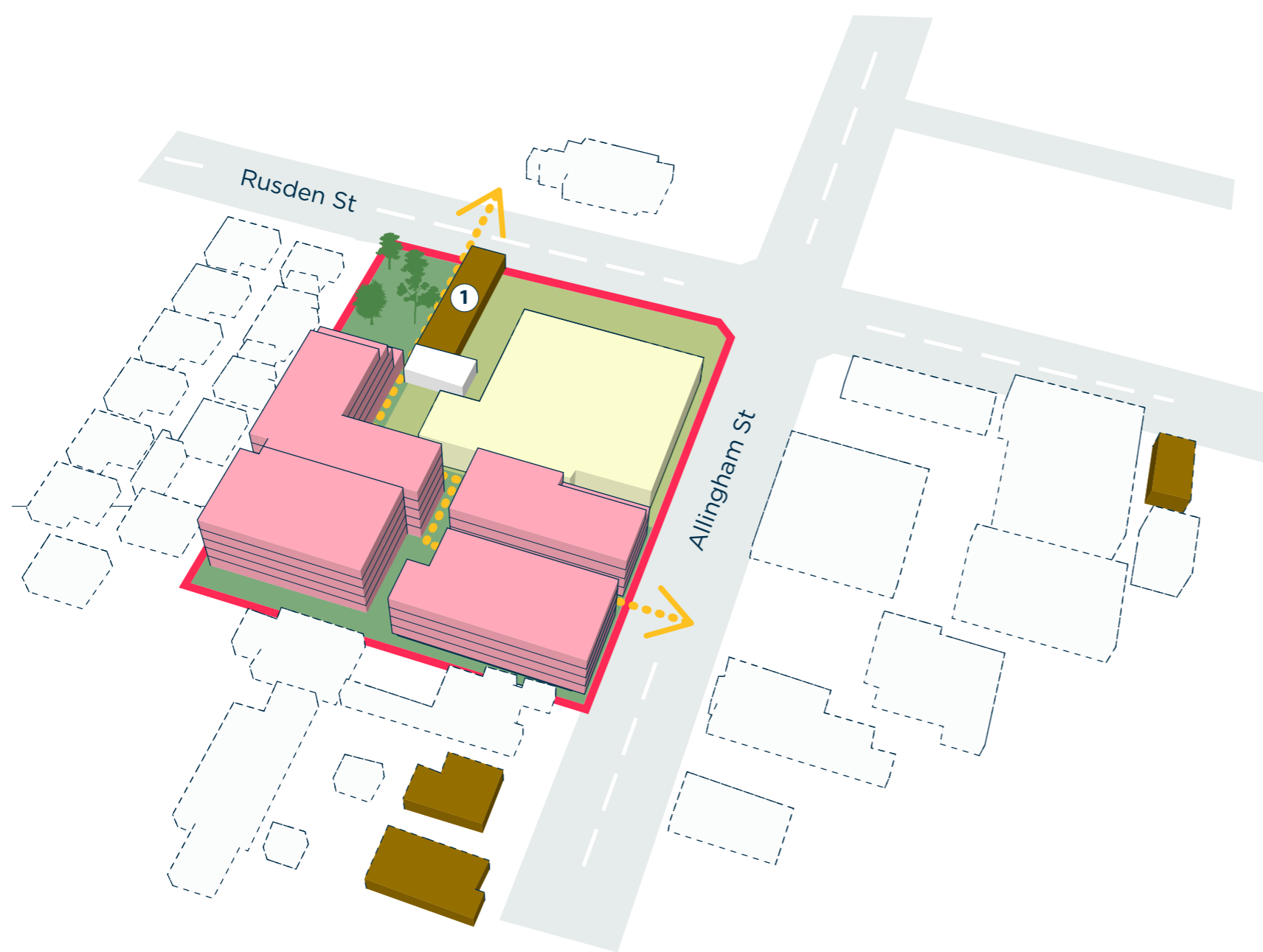
Key Site 9:  
Essential-Worker Housing  
EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS



2

1

3



**Key Site 9:  
Essential-Worker Housing**

**BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- Pedestrian Links
- Contributory/Character Building/Façade
- Proposed Residential Building
- Public and Semi-public Open Space
- Key Site Boundary



**Retaining Lambert Park as a Sporting  
Anchor While Supporting Hospital Access**

Lambert Park is a long-established and highly valued cricket facility with clear heritage, recreational and community significance. The recommended approach is its retention as a premier sporting venue, while carefully enhancing its role in supporting the adjacent Armidale Hospital and Health and Education Precinct more broadly.

Rather than intensifying development within the park itself, the strategy focuses on incremental upgrades to the surrounding street network, including increased on-street and verge-based parking. This approach improves access for weekend sport activities and hospital visitors, staff through the week, all without compromising the park’s open character or sporting function. Parking provision will be designed to be flexible, catering to peak hospital demand during weekdays and sporting demand at other times.

All upgrades must respond sensitively to the heritage character of Lambert Park, including its established exotic tree plantings, historic layout and relationship to surrounding heritage and character buildings. Streetscape works will reinforce landscape continuity, protect significant trees, and avoid over-engineering.

This principle recognises Lambert Park as both a community asset and spatial buffer, playing a quiet but essential role in the daily operation of the precinct. By enhancing access rather than sacrificing open space, the precinct can support growth while retaining the qualities of the health and education and sporting environments.

## **Creating Permeability Through New Laneways and Active Transport Connections**

The Health and Education Precinct currently suffers from poor internal permeability owing to large city blocks and long, narrow lots and a distinct lack of laneways. The internal permeability is particularly poor behind commercial premises fronting Rusden Street, where servicing, parking and rear access are fragmented and inefficient and parking has been provided on each lot often between the building and the street thus resulting in poor urban design and public amenity outcomes. A core planning solution is the introduction of new service laneways and through-block connections, transforming large blocks from barriers into connectors.

These laneways will perform multiple roles: servicing commercial and institutional uses, accommodating waste and deliveries, enabling consolidated parking, and supporting fine-grain redevelopment over time. Importantly, select laneways will also function as pedestrian-priority or shared spaces, improving walkability between the city centre, hospital, TAFE and western commercial areas.

In parallel, the precinct will be stitched into Armidale's active transport network. New and upgraded footpaths, shared paths and cycle connections, particularly links to the Dumaresq Creeklands cycleway through Ken Jones Park, Andy Park, Jack Vallance Oval and Butler Street and will enable safe, legible movement across the precinct without reliance on vehicles. These connections are especially important for shift workers, students and hospital visitors.

This planning principle re-establishes the historic logic of Armidale's fine-grain network of streets and lanes, ensuring the precinct functions as an integrated part of the city centre rather than an isolated institutional enclave.

## **Protecting Character While Consolidating Land for Functional Use**

Parts of the Health and Education Precinct contain residential-scale heritage and character buildings that contribute strongly to local identity and amenity. These buildings will be protected through character and conservation overlays, ensuring their form, scale and streetscape contribution are retained.

At the same time, many of these sites contain large rear yards that are under-utilised. A key planning solution is the selective consolidation of rear land holdings to accommodate shared parking and servicing in logical, well-connected locations. This allows parking demand to be met without eroding primary street character or forcing each site to operate in isolation.

Character buildings will be actively encouraged to be retained and adaptively reused, particularly for allied health, consulting rooms and medical suites, rather than demolished for purpose-built facilities. This approach supports small-scale practitioners, reinforces human-scaled environments for patients, and reduces development costs.

By separating heritage façades and street presence from the more utilitarian functions located behind, the precinct can evolve without losing its architectural richness. This principle balances conservation with pragmatism, ensuring heritage protection works alongside and not against the operational needs of a contemporary health precinct.

## **Reinforcing Hospital and TAFE Campuses as Long-Term Anchors**

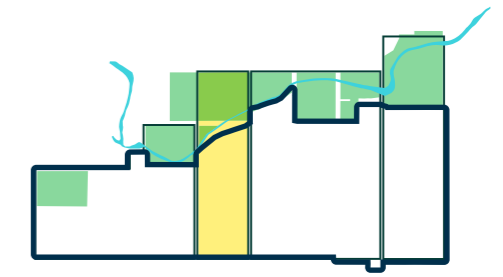
The Armidale Hospital and TAFE campuses are foundational anchors of the Health and Education Precinct and will be strongly supported to remain in their current locations. Their presence provides stability, employment, visitation and investment certainty that underpins surrounding development opportunities.

Rather than encouraging decentralisation, the preferred strategy is ongoing embellishment and incremental expansion of these campuses, improving interfaces with surrounding streets, public spaces and active transport routes. Campus improvements will see enhanced permeability, legibility and openness, reducing the visual and functional isolation that institutional sites can sometimes create.












Council will take an active coordination role, working closely with NSW Health, TAFE NSW and other relevant agencies to align investment with broader city-centre and precinct objectives. This includes integrating parking strategies, pedestrian connections, housing provision and public-realm upgrades.

Retaining these institutions within the city centre reinforces Armidale's historic role as a civic, educational and health hub, ensuring that public investment continues to support surrounding businesses, services and housing. In strategic terms, the Hospital and TAFE are not just land uses, rather they are structural pillars that give the Health and Education Precinct its long-term purpose and resilience.

# Retail and Commercial Precinct



## LEGEND

-  Key Site
  -  Heritage Conservation Item
  -  Built Heritage Item
  -  Character / Contributory Building
  -  Park / Sports Fields
  -  Residentially Zoned Areas
  -  Dumaresq Creek
- 
-  Armidale District Baptist Church
- 
-  Shared Path
  -  Proposed Laneway Linkages (Pedestrian/ Vehicular)
- 
-  Precinct Boundary

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Kirkwood St

Dumaresq St

Harris Park Sportsground

TAFE NSW Armidale

Armidale Central Shopping Mall

Armidale Plaza

8

Coucon Ln

Beardy Street Commercial Spine

Alingham St

Rusden St

Barney St

Jessie St

# Design Principles & Key Moves

## Intensifying the Western Commercial Core Through Structured Block Redevelopment

The westernmost block of the Commercial Core, bounded by Rusden, Jessie, Beardy and Allingham Streets represents one of the most strategically important yet currently under-performing areas of the city centre. Despite its E2 Commercial Core zoning, much of this block, particularly along Rusden Street, is significantly underdeveloped, with buildings set back behind open land and parking. This pattern fails to achieve the objectives of the LEP, which seek activated frontages, commercial intensity and a strong street edge.














A key redevelopment site has therefore been identified to transform this block into a high-intensity, mixed-use commercial precinct. Central to this transformation is the extension of Coucon Lane through the entire block, creating a continuous east-west connection between Allingham and Jessie Streets. This new through-block laneway will function as a rear service spine, accommodating consolidated parking, waste servicing, loading and building access. By relocating these functions away from Rusden Street, development can deliver zero-lot-line buildings with continuous active frontages and awnings along the primary street.

The heritage-listed Baptist Church will be retained, with its curtilage carefully managed to protect its setting while allowing surrounding redevelopment to proceed at appropriate scale. A new mid-block north-south pedestrian link will also provide direct access from the Rusden Street key redevelopment site into the Beardy Street entrance of Armidale Central, integrating new redevelopment with existing retail anchors and reinforcing block permeability.

## Key Site 8

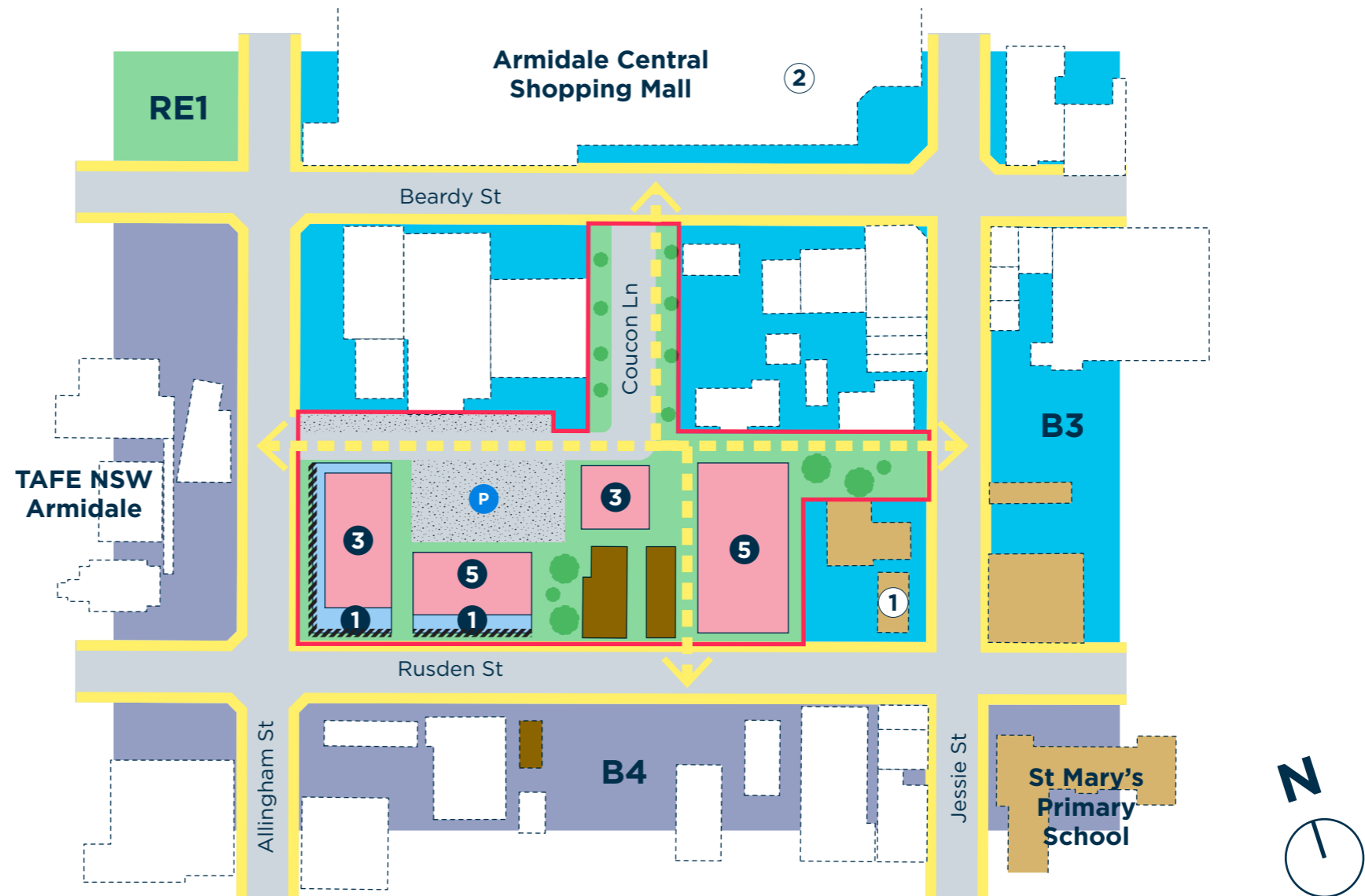
### Western Commercial Core Site

#### MASTERPLAN

- |   |                                 |   |   |
|---|---------------------------------|---|---|
|  | RE1 (Public Recreation) Zone    |  | Key Site Boundary   |
|  | B3 (Commercial Core) Zone       |  | Proposed Commercial Building and an Indicative Number of Storeys  |
|  | B4 (Mixed Use) Zone             |  | Proposed Residential Building and an Indicative Number of Storeys |
|  | Building Footprint              |  | Proposed Active Frontage  |
|  | Car Parking                     |  | Footpath / Walkway  |
|  | Character/Contributory Building |  | Pedestrian Links  |
|  | Built Heritage Item             |   |   |

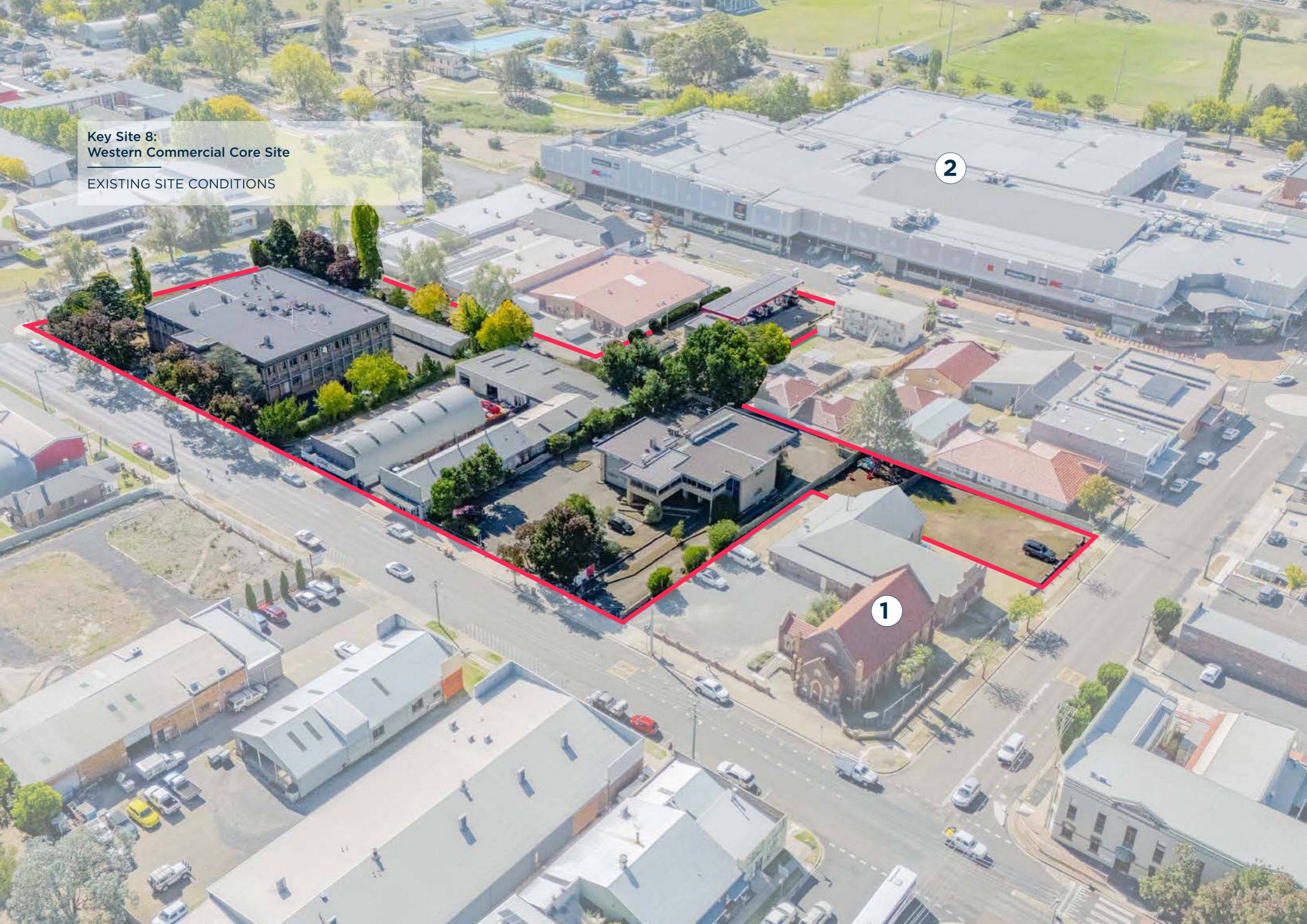
#### CIVIC SITES

-  **1** Armidale District Baptist Church
-  **2** Armidale Central Shopping Mall



**Key Site 8:  
Western Commercial Core Site**










EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

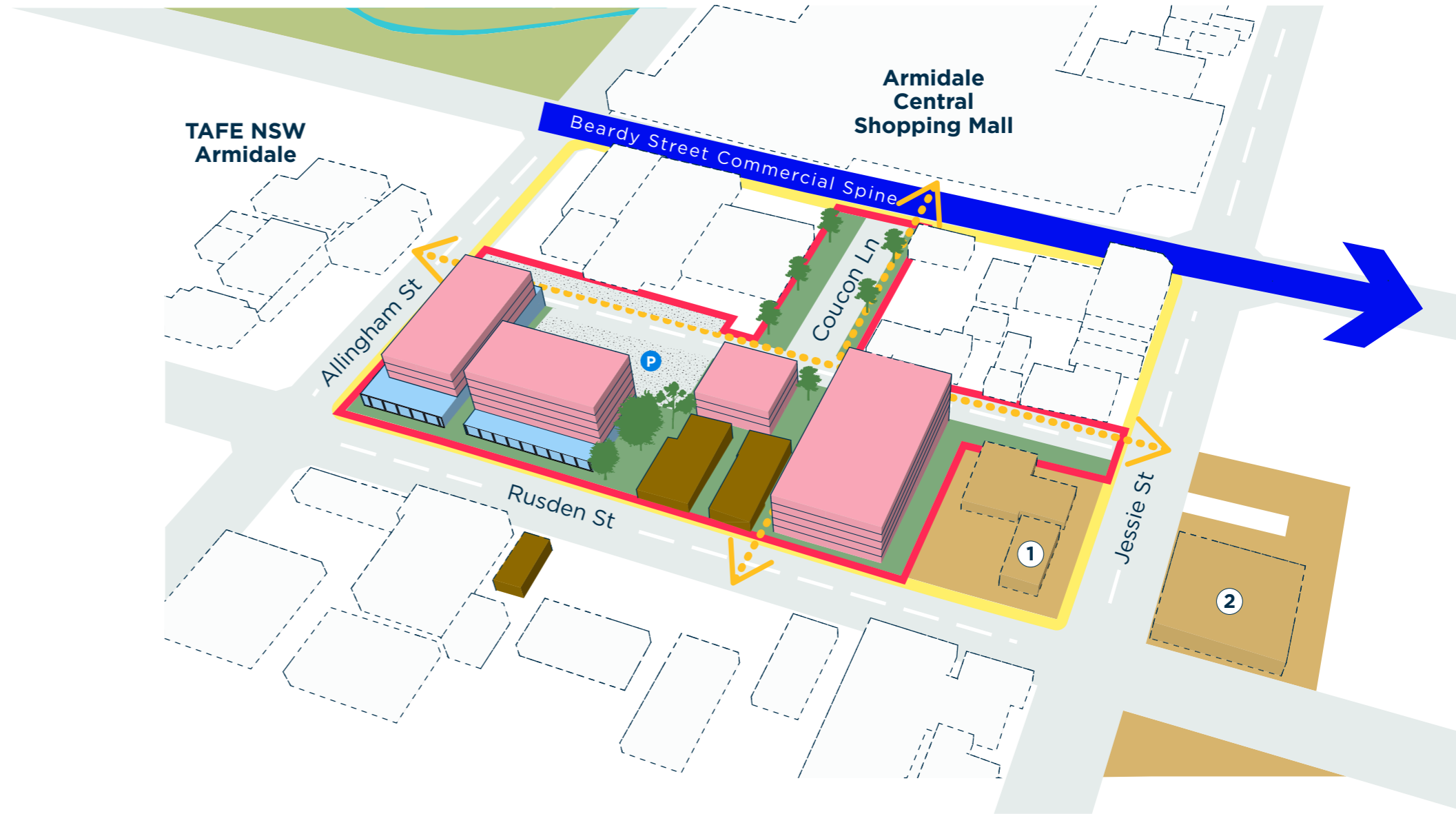


**Key Site 8:  
Western Commercial Core Site**

**BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- ① Armidale District Baptist Church
- ② Heritage Built Item

-  Built Heritage Item
-  Character/Contributory Building/Façade
-  Proposed Commercial Building
-  Proposed Residential Building
-  Proposed Active Frontage
-  Pedestrian Links
-  Footpath
-  Car Parking
-  Key Site Boundary



## **Strengthening Retail and Active Transport Connectivity Along the Creeklands Spine**

Dumaresq Creek and its associated open-space corridor form a defining edge to the Retail and Commercial Precinct, yet current connections across and along the creek are fragmented and under-performing. A core planning solution is the upgrade of the Dumaresq Street bridge to achieve higher flood immunity and significantly improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists. This upgrade will strengthen east-west movement across the creek while reinforcing the role of Dumaresq Street as a key connector between retail, civic and recreational areas.

In parallel, the Creeklands shared path network will be substantially enhanced. Council will work collaboratively with the owners of Armidale Central to deliver improved east-west cycle and pedestrian links through the site, recognising that it provides a critical connection between the creeklands, sporting fields, the city centre, TAFE, surrounding residential areas and the western parts of the precinct. These connections are essential to ensuring retail and commercial areas benefit from passing movement rather than functioning as isolated destinations.

The strategy also includes the duplication of the Creeklands cycleway on both sides of Dumaresq Creek, with a new shared path provided along the northern creek bank. This route will create a high-quality alternative movement corridor through Harris Park sportsfields and beyond, improving legibility, safety and user choice better connecting the city centre precincts together and providing a much more logical path of travel through the creeklands.

## **Using East-West Laneways to Unlock Mixed-Use Potential and Protecting Character Residential Development**

The block bounded by Barney, Jessie, Rusden and Allingham Streets includes MU1 Mixed Use land with redevelopment potential along Rusden Street and established residential development fronting Barney Street. The Vitality Plan addresses these parts of the block through distinct but coordinated actions that unlock appropriate redevelopment while protecting residential character.

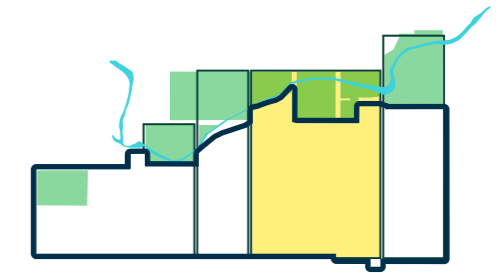
Targeted DCP block controls enable the delivery of a new east-west laneway primarily to support improved redevelopment outcomes for commercial and mixed-use buildings fronting Rusden Street. The laneway provides dedicated access for servicing, waste, parking and secondary entries, allowing future development to address Rusden Street directly with active frontages, minimal setbacks and higher-quality built-form outcomes. By consolidating back-of-house functions away from primary streets, the laneway improves development feasibility, reduces street clutter and supports the intended intensity and function of the MU1 zone. The laneway alignment is located predominantly on undeveloped or underutilised land and will be delivered progressively through redevelopment, forming a continuous and legible mid-block connection over time.

In parallel, The Vitality Plan proposes the introduction of character statements and conservation-based controls to protect heritage character buildings fronting Barney Street from incremental loss. Barney Street will be retained as a low-key residential environment, functioning as a stable interface between the city centre and surrounding neighbourhoods.



















Together, these actions ensure that redevelopment pressure is directed to appropriate locations—supporting intensified mixed-use activity along Rusden Street—while residential heritage streets such as Barney Street are protected from incremental erosion. The result is a structured block model that enables redevelopment where intended, preserves valued residential character, and reinforces the broader city-centre strategy of active main streets, permeable blocks and clearly defined interfaces.

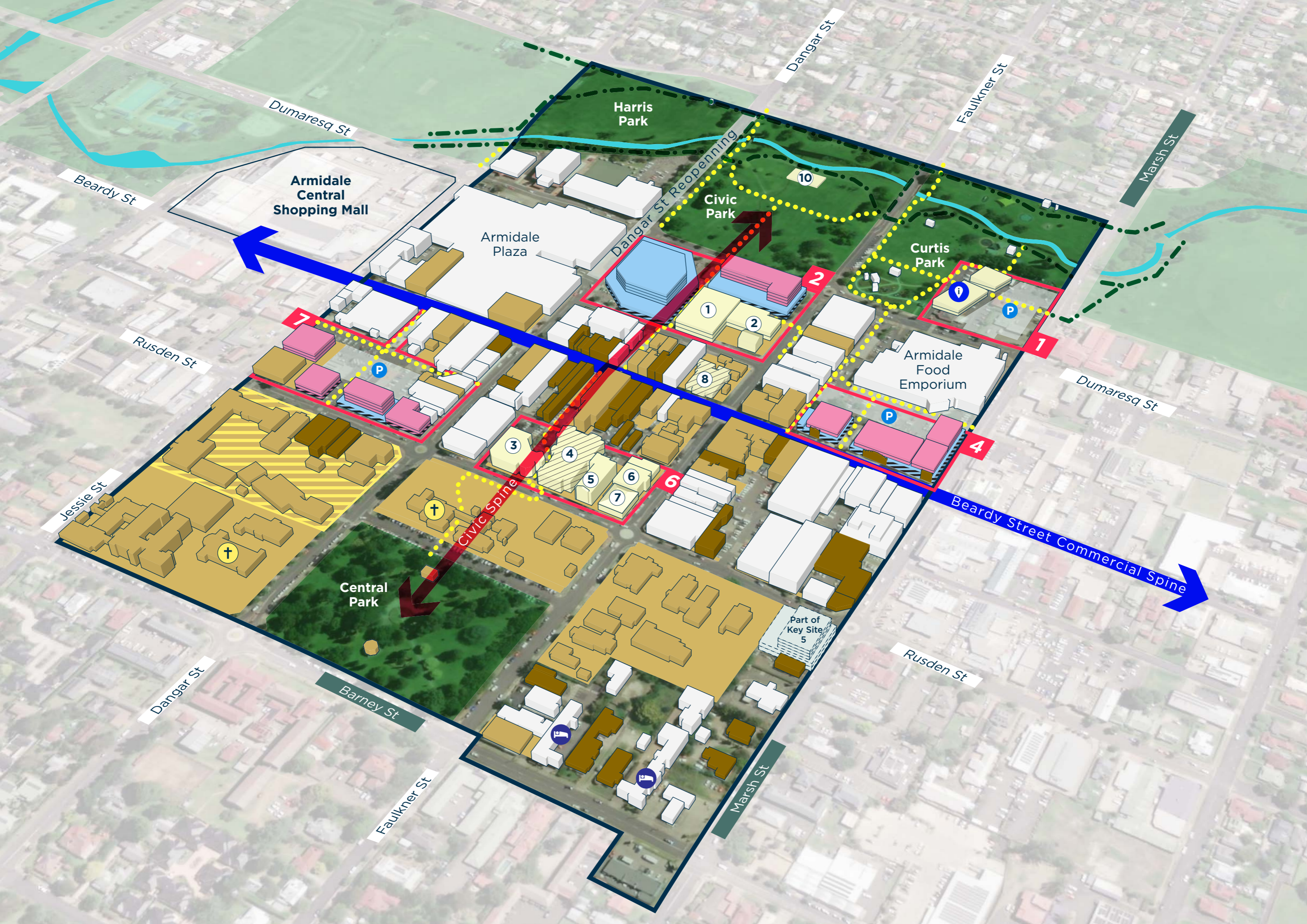
# Armidale City Centre Precinct

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## LEGEND

-  Key Site
  -  Proposed Residential Buildings
  -  St Mary's Primary School
  -  Built Heritage Item
  -  Character / Contributory Building
  -  Proposed Commercial Buildings
  -  Future Active Frontage
  -  Park / Sports Fields
  -  Dumaresq Creek
- 
-  Proposed Car Park |  Visitors Centre
  -  Hotel / Motel |  Church
- 
-  Civic or Governmental Building
    - ① Armidale Court House
    - ② Armidale Police Station
    - ③ Armidale Regional Council
    - ⑤ Historic Town Hall
    - ⑥ UNE 'NOVA' Building - 'Former Library'
    - ⑦ Folk Museum
    - ⑨ Armidale Historical Society
    - ⑩ Armidale Creeklands Masterplan Village Green with bandstand and natural amphitheatre (Proposed)
  -  Proposed Civic or Governmental Building
    - ④ Future Armidale Public Library
    - ⑧ Former Armidale Court House
- 
-  Shared Path
  -  Proposed Laneway Linkages (Pedestrian/ Vehicular)
- 
-  Precinct Boundary



Dumaresq St

Beardy St

Armidale Central Shopping Mall

Armidale Plaza

Harris Park

Civic Park

Curtis Park

Marsh St

Dangar St

Faulkner St

Rusden St

Armidale Food Emporium

Dumaresq St

Jessie St

Civic Spine

Beardy Street Commercial Spine

Central Park

Part of Key Site 5

Dangar St

Barney St

Rusden St

Faulkner St

Marsh St

# Design Principles & Key Moves

## A New North-South Civic Spine

The proposed north-south civic spine represents the most significant and transformative structural intervention within the Armidale City Centre Precinct. It re-establishes a clear, legible and inherently civic pedestrian axis linking Civic Park within the Dumaresq Creeklands, through the proposed Moore Street Cultural Precinct, into the heart of the city at The Beardy Street Mall, and onward through the civic precinct (Council Administration Building and proposed library site) to the Cathedrals and Central Park.

Numerous past studies and masterplans have consistently identified the relationship between the city centre and the creeklands as critical to Armidale's long-term vitality. Despite this, the existing physical connection between the creeklands and the commercial core is extremely poor. Access points from the creeklands into the city centre are currently dominated by loading docks, service areas, surface parking, blank and monumental walls, and back-of-house interfaces that actively deter pedestrian movement. Rather than functioning as a welcoming civic threshold, the creeklands edge currently presents as disconnected, hostile and poorly resolved urban space.

The north-south spine directly addresses this long-standing structural failure. It responds to decades of ad hoc decision-making and poorly integrated civic infrastructure, including the Moore Street car park and the closure of key streets such as Dangar and Beardy, by restoring a coherent spatial framework for the city centre. The outcome is a centre that is intuitive to navigate, comfortable to walk through, and structured around clear civic destinations rather than isolated fragments. Delivery of the spine will require targeted

demolition of detractory buildings that currently block movement, sever key desire lines and obscure important civic and heritage assets. This intervention is deliberate and strategic. By selectively removing these barriers, long-lost view corridors to heritage buildings, parkland and civic institutions will be reinstated, significantly strengthening the city centre's heritage setting and re-establishing its visual and physical relationship with the creeklands.

High-quality public domain upgrades along the spine, including paving, lighting, landscaping, seating and wayfinding will be undertaken to provide a connected sequence of civic spaces. These spaces will support everyday use, cultural activity and major events, embedding public life into the structure of the centre.

The north-south civic spine is critical because it physically and symbolically unites Armidale's most important civic, cultural and environmental assets into a single, legible structure. By linking the Dumaresq Creeklands and Civic Park, the proposed Moore Street cultural development, the Beardy Street Mall, Council's civic site and proposed library, and Central Park via the cathedrals, the spine transforms a series of disconnected destinations into a coherent, walkable civic system. It also integrates directly with the Armidale Plaza redevelopment and the regional cycleway network, ensuring seamless movement between parklands, retail, culture and everyday services.

## A Reinforced East-West Spine: Reworking Beardy Street as a Shared Heritage Main Street

*“Planned pedestrian street schemes,... can introduce more problems than they solve. Yet this is a fashionable planning idea for downtown shopping streets and for the “town centers” of renewal areas. One of the dangers of devising city traffic schemes and arterial systems without understanding, first, how cities themselves work is just this: The schemes, with the best intents behind them, can inject no end of border vacuums and discontinuities of use, and in places where these may do the greatest and most gratuitous harm.”*

– Jane Jacobs (1961)

A successful city centre depends on a clear, functioning main street—a place defined by movement, visibility and everyday life, where people and vehicles coexist rather than being artificially separated. The east-west spine centred on Beardy Street is critical because it restores this role. By reintroducing traffic through a shared-street approach, Beardy Street can once again become a place of action: vehicles moving slowly, people crossing freely, shopfronts visible, activity constantly unfolding. This mix brings visual interest, casual surveillance, rhythm and energy, qualities that pedestrian-only environments in regional cities often struggle to sustain.

The experience of comparable regional centres makes this clear. Peel Street in Tamworth, Hyde Street in Bellingen, High Street in Tenterfield, and Dean Street in Albury all function as coherent main streets where vehicles, pedestrians, retail, cafés and civic life overlap. In these places, cars do not diminish street life, they contribute to it, reinforcing movement, convenience and animation. People see activity as they pass through, make spontaneous decisions to stop, and experience the street as lively and safe throughout the day.

For Armidale, restoring Beardy Street as a continuous, legible main street is fundamental to reclaiming its role as the city's primary public space. A consistent streetscape across the East, Central and West Malls, combined with shared-space intersections and on-street parking, will re-establish Beardy Street as a place people pass through, pause within and return to. Importantly, this spine intersects directly with the new north-south civic spine, placing the city's most important movements, destinations and public life at a single, identifiable heart.

This approach recognises a basic but powerful principle: streets succeed when they feel alive, and life comes from complexity, people walking, cars passing, bikes moving, views opening and shopfronts engaging the public realm. By reclaiming Beardy Street as Armidale's true main street, and pairing movement and public-realm upgrades with a systematic program of heritage reinstatement, the city centre can once again compete with other regional towns not by exclusion or novelty, but by offering a familiar, energetic and unmistakably civic street that expresses confidence, identity, heritage and everyday relevance.

Integral to this transformation is the re-establishment of heritage verandahs and façade improvements along Beardy Street. The Vitality Plan proposes a targeted verandah reinstatement and heritage building façade program, embedded within the public-realm upgrades for the east-west spine. The scale of the proposed Beardy Street shared-space works—extending across multiple city blocks—creates a rare and timely opportunity to coordinate civil works with the restoration of historic façades and the reconstruction of heritage verandahs over the footpath. Delivering these elements concurrently enables seamless integration of structure, services, drainage and finishes, while facilitating effective collaboration between Council and private building owners. This coordinated approach ensures consistency, reduces duplication of works, and restores one of the city centre's defining architectural features as part of a single, high-quality streetscape outcome.

Given the scale of the Beardy Street shared-space works across multiple blocks, the Faulkner intersection and its heritage buildings will be treated as a priority delivery package. Civil works, awnings/verandah reconstruction, façade restoration, lighting and heritage interpretation will be coordinated to ensure seamless construction and clear collaboration between Council and private owners at the most prominent heritage gateway to the main street.



## Moore Street Cultural Precinct

The Moore Street car park and adjoining Telstra Exchange building currently represent some of the poorest urban design outcomes in the Armidale City Centre. Together, they form a large, visually hostile and inward-looking block defined by blank façades, servicing edges and exposed car storage. Rather than contributing to the city, these structures create a void in the urban fabric, breaking pedestrian movement between the heart of the city centre and the creeklands and undermining the overall amenity and identity of the historic city of Armidale.

Their redevelopment represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to correct this legacy and fundamentally reshape the spatial and civic structure of Armidale. Few sites combine this level of size, centrality and strategic importance. Stretching across an entire city block and having interfaces with the Dumaresq Creeklands, the proposed north-south civic spine, and major retail destinations (Armidale Plaza), the Moore Street site is uniquely positioned to become the cultural and symbolic heart of the New England region.

Replaced with a regionally significant cultural building, housing complementary cultural, civic and community uses, the site would shift from passive car storage to an active, people-focused destination. In doing so, it directly addresses the long-standing problem of cultural institutions being isolated from the city centre, restoring daily foot traffic, evening activity and economic spill-over to surrounding streets. The building itself would act as a clear civic marker, signalling arrival at the city centre and re-establishing Armidale's role as a regional cultural capital.













Critically, this redevelopment enables multiple strategic moves to occur at once. It allows the north-south spine to pass directly through the precinct, reconnecting Beardy Street with Civic Park and the creeklands; it enables the reopening of Dangar Street, restoring permeability and

access; and it consolidates parking into a far more efficient structure that supports, rather than dominates, the public realm. In this way, Moore and Dangar Streets are transformed from barriers into a connector, turning one of Armidale's weakest precincts into its strongest civic opportunity.

## Key Site 2

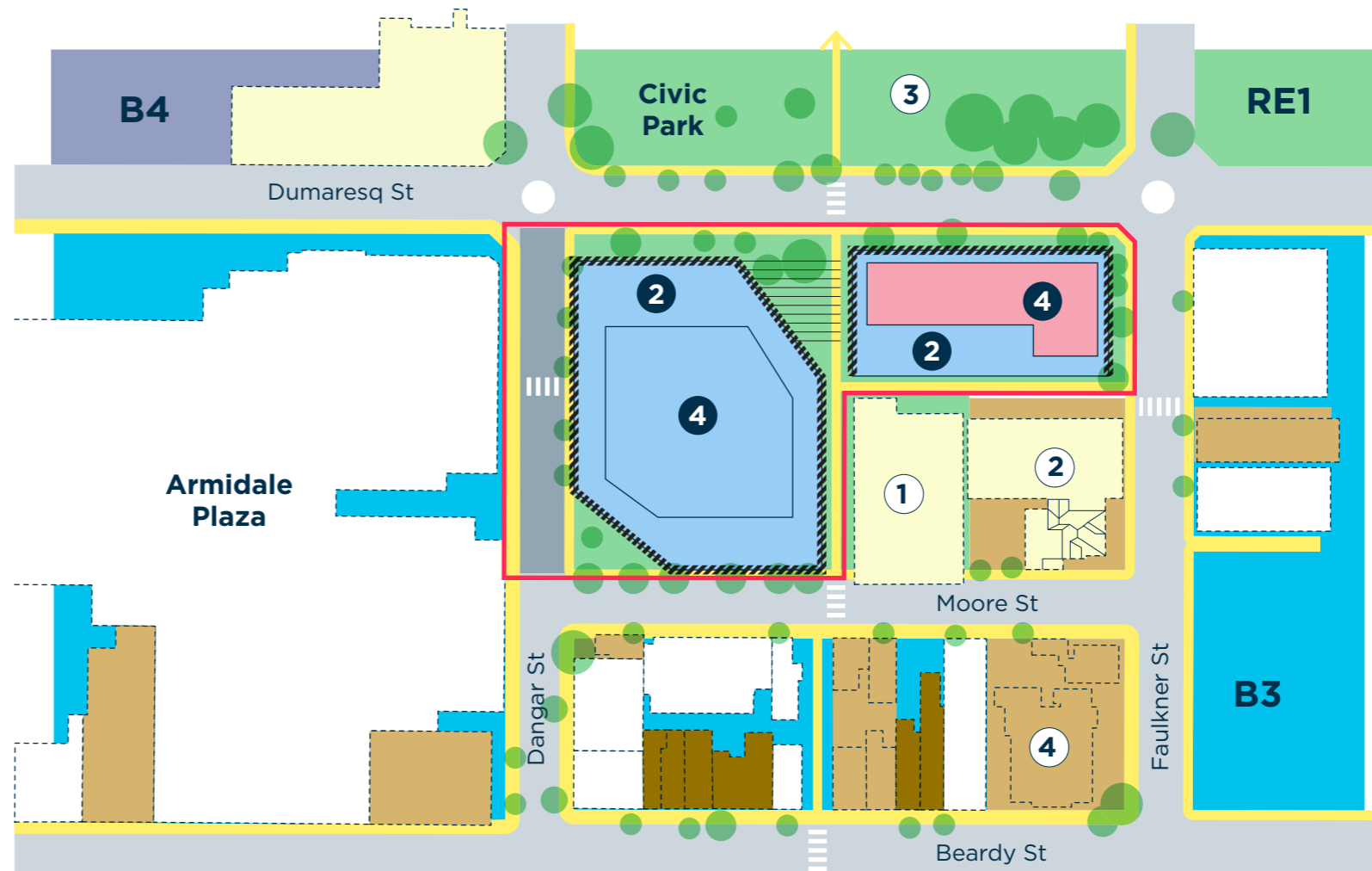
### Moore Street Cultural Precinct

#### MASTERPLAN

- |   |                                 |   |  |
|---|---------------------------------|---|--|
|    | RE1 (Public Recreation) Zone    |    | Proposed Commercial Building and Indicative Number of Storeys  |
|    | B3 (Commercial Core) Zone       |    | Proposed Residential Building and Indicative Number of Storeys |
|    | B4 (Mixed Use) Zone             |    | Proposed Active Frontage                                       |
|    | Civic or Governmental Building  |   | Reopened section of Dangar St                                  |
|    | Built Heritage Item             |  | Key Site Boundary  |
|  | Character/Contributory Building |   |  |
|  | Pedestrian Link / Footpath      |   |  |

#### CIVIC SITES

- ① **Armidale Courthouse**
- ② **Armidale Police Station**
- ③ **Civic Park**
- ④ **Old Armidale Court House**



Key Site 2:  
Moore Street Cultural Precinct  
EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS



1

2

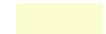











3

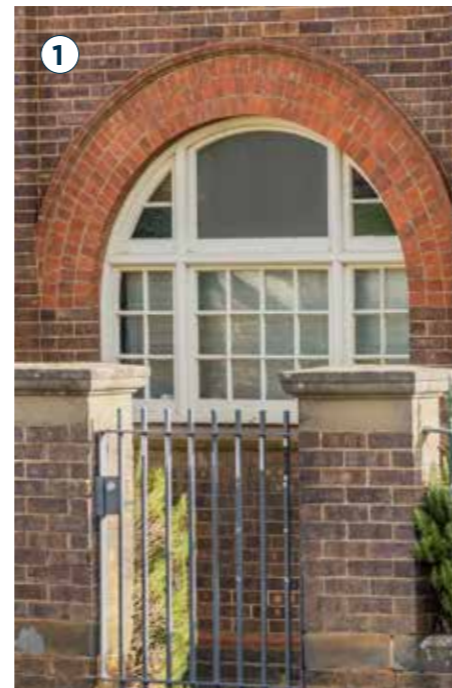
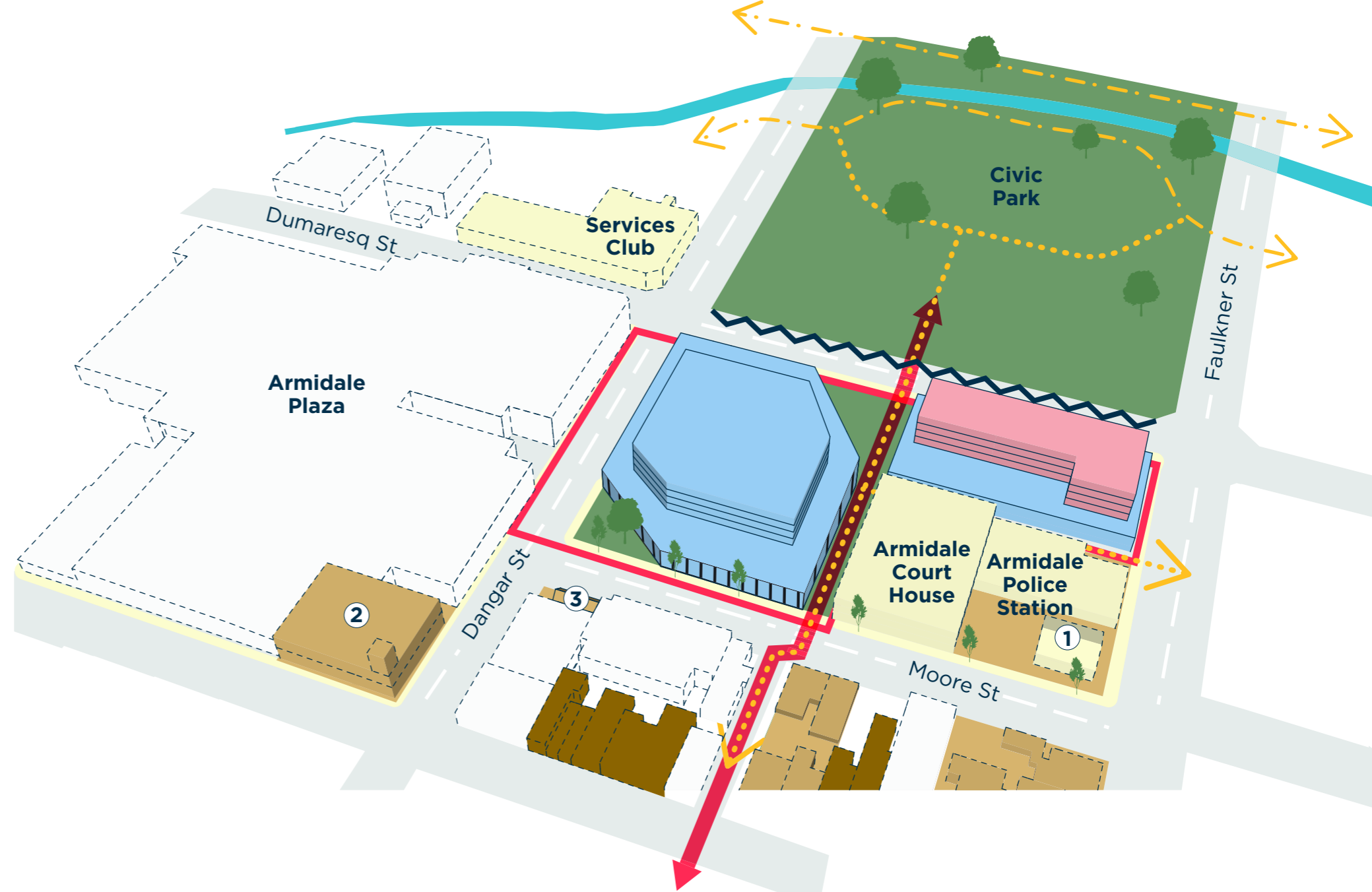
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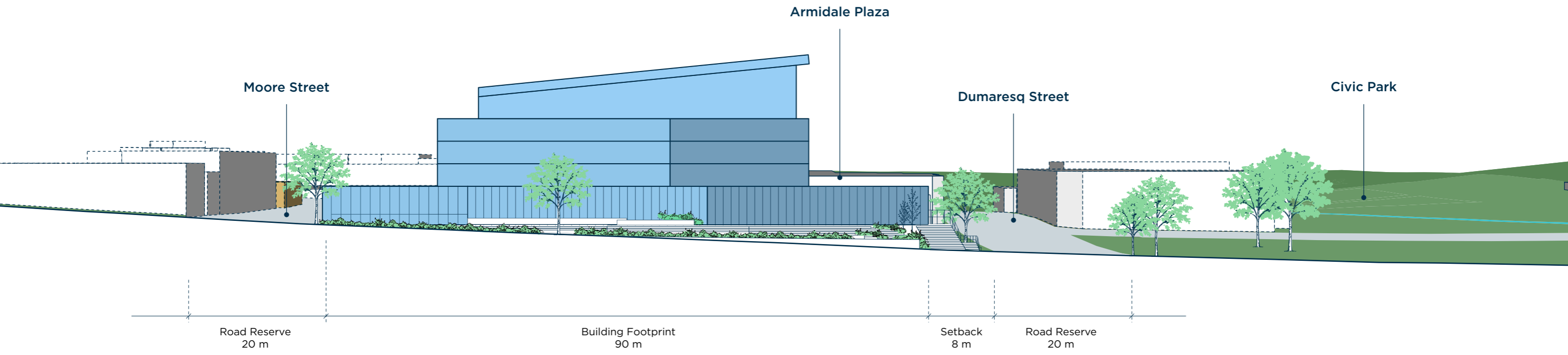
**Key Site 2:  
Moore Street Cultural Precinct**

**BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- ① Armidale Police Station
- ② Armidale Plaza
- ③ House at the corner of Dangar / Moore Streets

-  Footpath
-  Shared Path
-  Pedestrian Links
-  Built Heritage Item
-  Civic or Governmental Building
-  Character/Contributory Building
-  Proposed Commercial Building
-  Proposed Residential Building
-  Dumaresq Creek
-  Civic Spine
-  Interface with Creeklands
-  Key Site Boundary





**Key Site 2**  
**Moore Street Cultural Precinct**

**BUILT FORM AND PUBLIC**  
**DOMAIN CHARACTER**



## Civic Park and Creeklands Integration

Civic Park is the northern anchor of the new north-south civic spine, and its upgrade is essential to locking the entire structure of the Armidale City Centre into place. While identified as a later stage in the Creeklands Masterplan, the project will be brought forward as the next priority stage, rather than deferred to a distant future stage. Without this investment, the northern end of the spine remains unresolved, weakening the impact of city-centre renewal.

The upgraded Civic Park will provide a north-south tree-lined boulevard culminating in a space defined by a distinctive pavilion building capable of hosting public events, performances and regional gatherings. This establishes a strong destination at the creeklands edge and provides a clear civic counterpart to the proposed Moore Street Cultural Precinct and the new north-south civic spine.

Importantly, this project repositions the Dumaresq Creeklands from the “back” of the city to front-of-house civic landscape. The works will reintroduce natural systems and riparian elements to the creek itself, strengthening ecological function while softening what is currently a highly engineered environment. These changes restore the creek as an asset rather than a residual drainage corridor.

Supporting changes to the surrounding street network, including increased on-street parking will improve access and convenience without compromising park quality. This reinforces Civic Park as an everyday destination, not just an event space.

Upgrades to the creeklands cycleway will strengthen connections between active transport routes and the commercial core, encouraging daily movement through the city centre. Alongside other precincts, the cycleway network through Civic and Curtis Parks will be doubled up to provide shared path on the northern side of Dumaresq Creek. In parallel, Dumaresq Street between Civic Park and the Moore Street Cultural Precinct will be redesigned as a shared pedestrian-priority space while retaining traffic flow, ensuring safety, permeability and continuity along the spine.

Together, these interventions complete the northern termination of the civic spine and establish Civic Park as a true regional civic landmark—supporting daily use, major events and Armidale’s long-term identity as a city defined by its landscape as much as its streets and buildings.

## Commercial Heritage Heart program

The Commercial Heritage Heart program will restore the Beardy/Faulkner intersection as the city centre’s premier heritage and activity node. This program will retain and protect all key heritage buildings in the precinct and systematically return them to active use through adaptive reuse, façade restoration, verandah reconstruction where appropriate, and targeted activation of rear courtyards, laneways and pedestrian connections. The Post Office remains in its current use, while the former Courthouse will be transitioned into a mixed-use development, the Lands Building and former bank premises will shift from office dominance to mixed accommodation and boutique commercial uses, and the Imperial Hotel and neighbouring buildings will be repositioned as an upmarket food, drink and accommodation offering.

Works within the precinct are delivered in parallel with the wider Beardy Street heritage verandah reinstatement and façade improvement program, ensuring consistent streetscape outcomes and reinforcing Beardy Street’s role as a functioning heritage main street.

Together, these actions re-establish the precinct as the symbolic and economic heart of the city centre and set a clear benchmark for heritage-led regeneration across Beardy Street.



## Council civic site - new public library as a civic anchor

The Council Civic Site represents one of the most advanced and immediately deliverable redevelopment opportunities within the Armidale City Centre Precinct. It is earmarked to accommodate a new public library, returning a major civic institution to the commercial core. This project is already supported by Council-adopted plans and prior strategic work, making it the most shovel-ready major investment currently available to Council.

Locating the library within the city centre re-establishes an important daily-use civic destination, generating consistent foot traffic throughout the day and evening. Libraries are proven drivers of incidental activity, supporting surrounding cafés, retail and services while reinforcing the city centre's role as Armidale's civic and cultural heart. This intervention deliberately counters the historic dispersal of civic functions and sets a strong precedent for future public investment to remain anchored within the core.

## Key Site 6

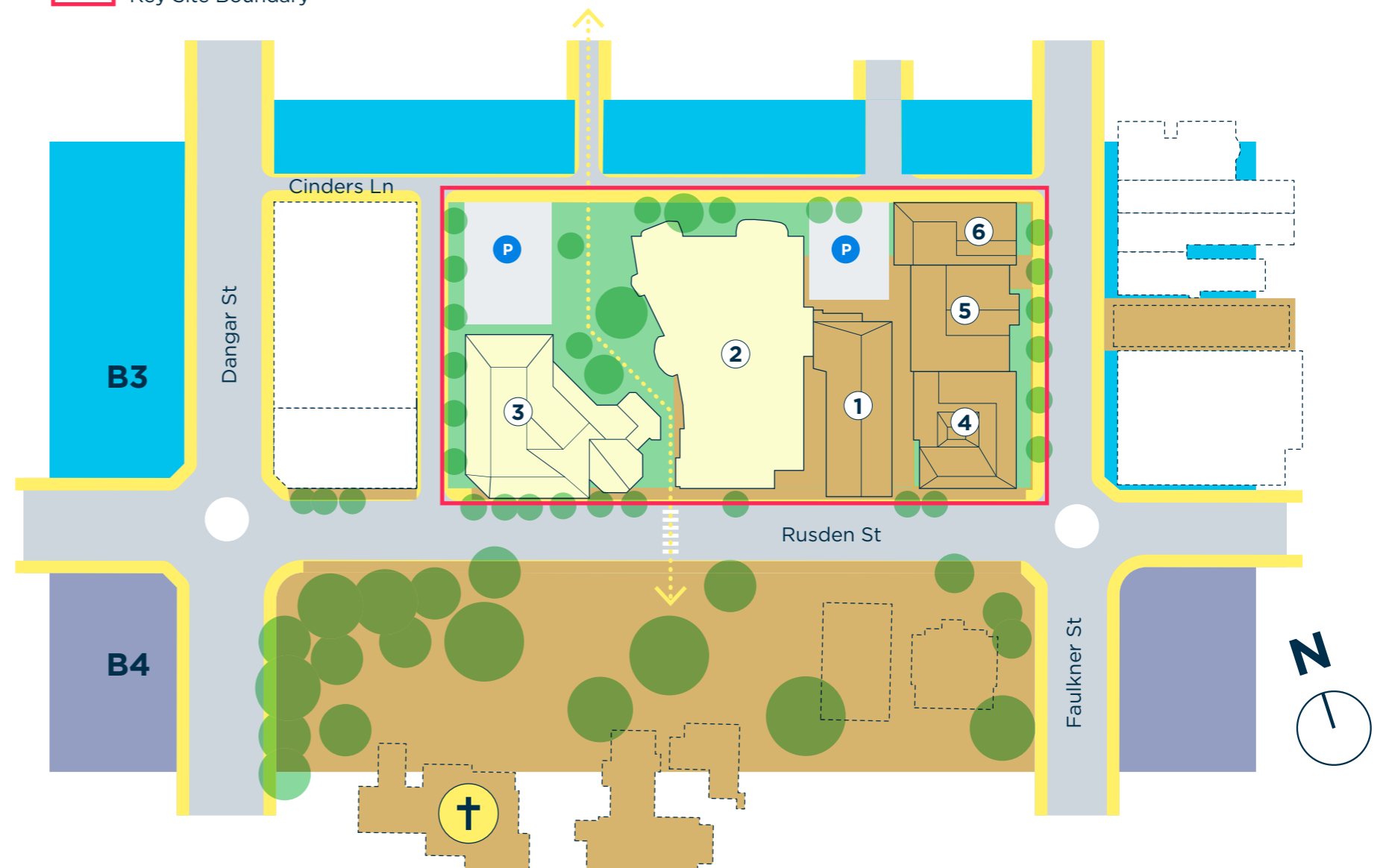
### Council Civic Site

#### MASTERPLAN

- B3 (Comercial Core) Zone
- B4 (Mixed Use) Zone
- Civic or Governmental Building
- Built Heritage Item
- + St Peter's Cathedral
- Pedestrian Link
- Footpath
- Key Site Boundary

#### CIVIC SITES

- ① Historic Town Hall
- ② Future Public Library
- ③ Armidale Council
- ④ Folk Museum
- ⑤ UNE 'NOVA' Building
- ⑥ Armidale Historical Society



**Key Site 6:  
Council Civic Site**








EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

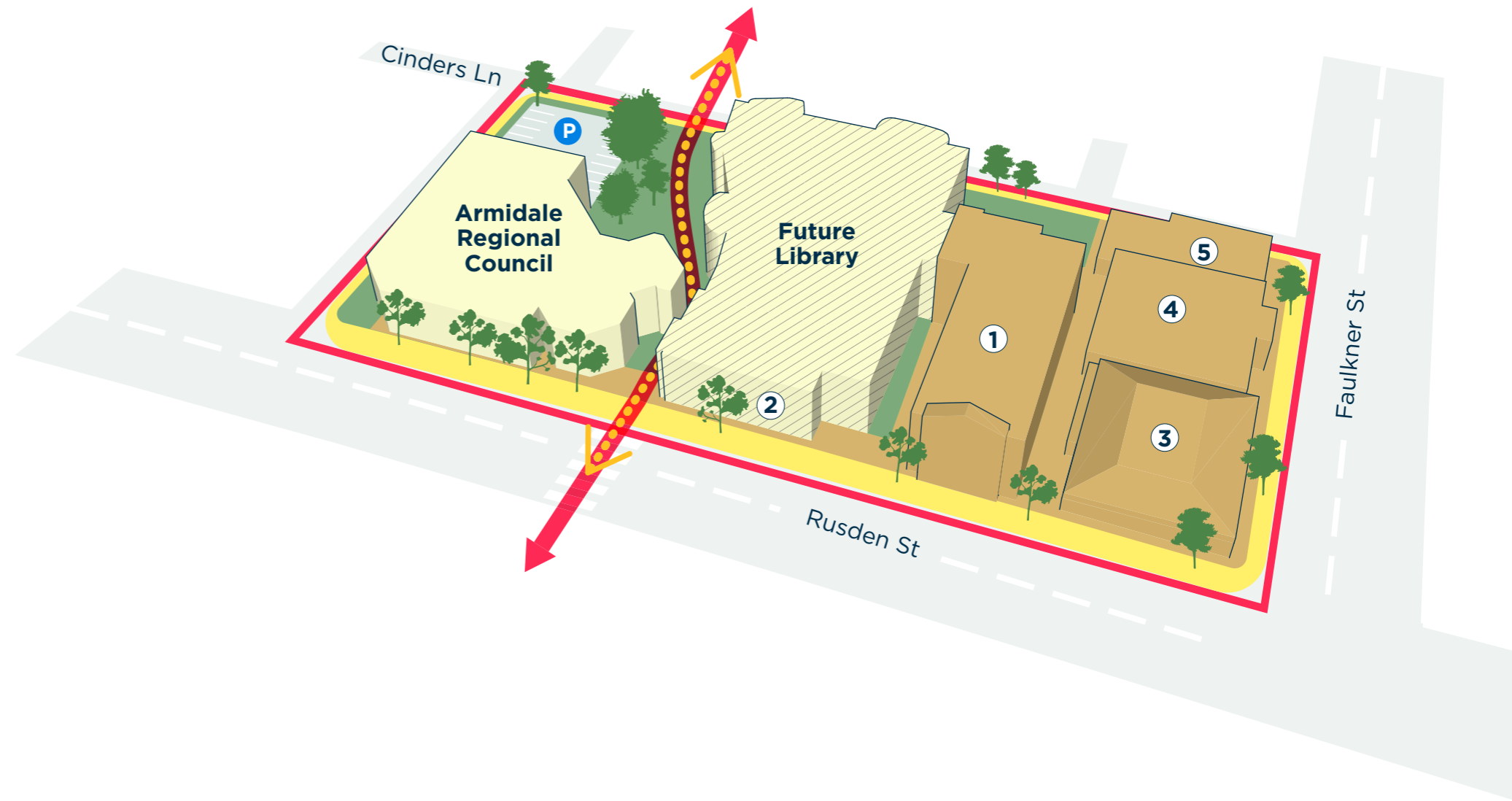


**Key Site 6:  
Council Civic Site**

**BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- ① **Armidale historic Town Hall**
- ② **Façade of future Armidale Library (The historic former Old Council Chambers building)**
- ③ **Folk Museum**
- ④ **UNE 'NOVA' Building**
- ⑤ **Armidale Historical Society**

-  Built Heritage Item
-  Civic or Governmental Building
-  Proposed Civic or Governmental Building
-  Pedestrian Links
-  Footpath
-  Civic Spine
-  Key Site Boundary





## Visitor Information Centre Site – Creek-Facing Mixed-Use Redevelopment

The Visitor Information Centre site is identified for redevelopment as a flood-aware mixed-use precinct that directly addresses and activates the Dumaresq Creeklands. The redevelopment will retain public parking in this strategically important location while introducing commercial and visitor-serving uses that complement nearby sports fields, play spaces and recreational facilities.

By turning an inward-looking site toward the creeklands, this project strengthens the interface between the city centre and one of its most significant natural assets. It supports tourism, recreation and everyday use, ensuring the creeklands function as a front-of-house civic landscape rather than a residual edge condition. This redevelopment also reinforces east-west and north-south movement through the centre, improving legibility, access and amenity.

- RE1 (Public Recreation) Zone
  - B3 (Comercial Core) Zone
  - B4 (Mixed Use) Zone
  - Dumaresq Creek
  - Channelised Creek
  - Character/Contributory Building
  - Shared Path |  Bridge
  - Pedestrian Links
- 
- Visitor Information Centre Building
  - Proposed Active Frontage
  - 2 Indicative Number of Storeys
  - 🏰 Curtis Park Playground
  - 🍽️ Outdoor Dining
  - P Parking

## Key Site 1

Visitor Information Centre  
MASTERPLAN



**Key Site 1:  
Visitor Information Centre**










EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

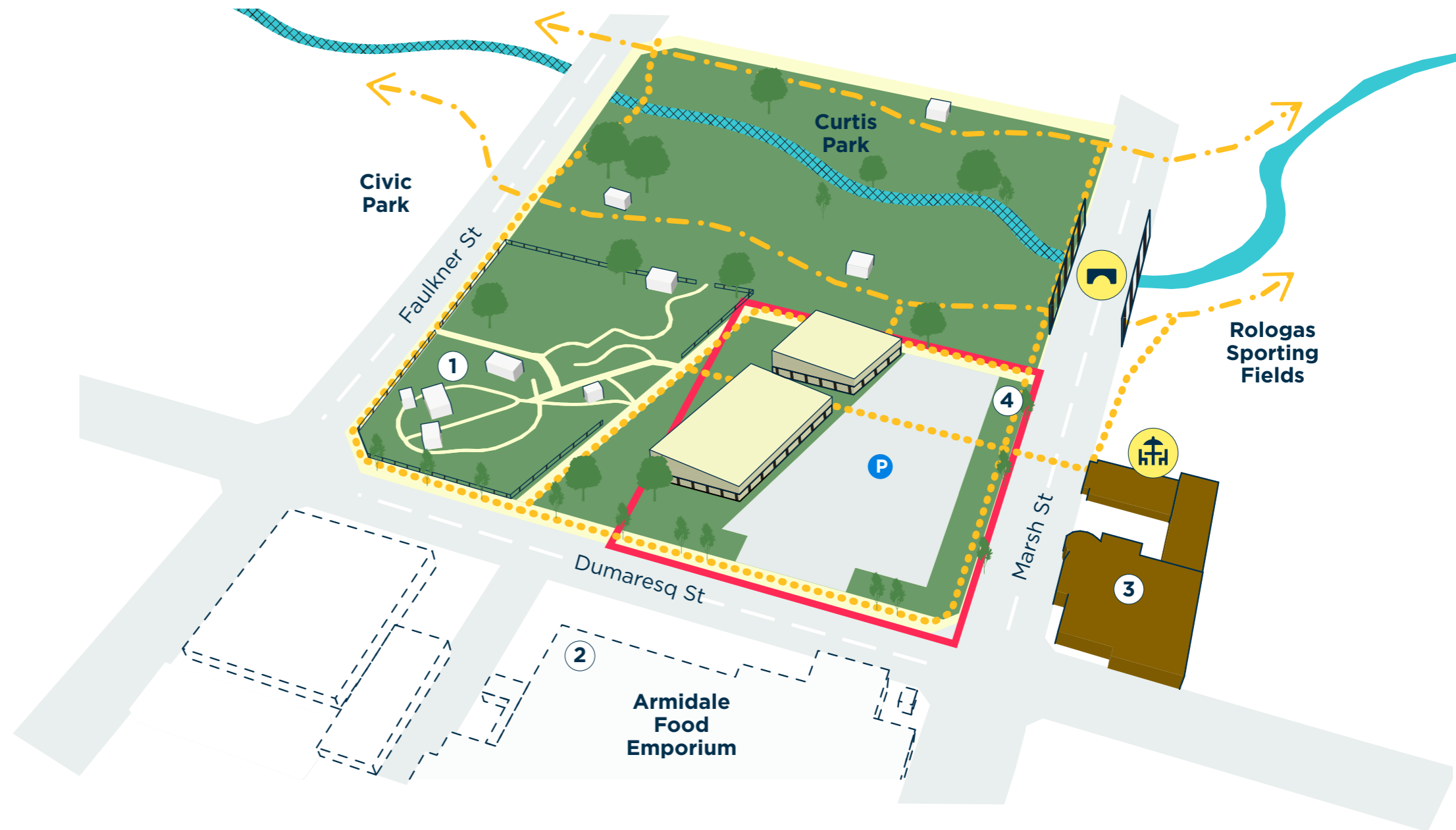


**Key Site 1:  
Visitor Information Centre**

**CIVIC SITES AND CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- ① Curtis Park
- ② Armidale Food Emporium
- ③ Character Building

-  Dumaresq Creek
-  Shared Path
-  Pedestrian Links
-  Pedestrian Underpass
-  Visitor Information Centre Building
-  Proposed Active Frontage
-  Character Building
-  Outdoor Dining Area
-  Key Site Boundary





## East Mall Precinct – Unlocking Mixed-Use and Shop-Top Housing and Strategic Parking Supply

The Vitality Plan formally incorporates the Council-endorsed East Mall upgrades into the broader East Mall key redevelopment site, recognising these works as one of Council’s most advanced and shovel-ready public-domain projects. Rather than re-proposing new concepts, the Vitality Plan embeds the approved upgrades as enabling infrastructure that directly supports redevelopment, access and parking outcomes in one of the most constrained parts of the city centre.

The endorsed East Mall upgrades replace the ageing 1993 public-realm treatments and reconfigure street space to significantly increase on-street parking capacity from 16 to more than 30 spaces, delivering additional short-stay parking within Beardy Street itself.

Further to this action is the rationalisation and consolidation of off-street parking along Woodward Street, converting approximately 100 existing spaces into consolidated car parking under Council ownership and management. This fundamentally restructures how parking is provided in the precinct, allowing parking to be delivered efficiently at a block scale rather than site-by-site, reducing duplication, and removing a major barrier to redevelopment of surrounding East Mall and Beardy Street frontages.

Together, the consolidated off-street parking and increased on-street supply provide a net improvement in access while freeing up under-utilised land for higher-order uses.

By linking these infrastructure upgrades with planning controls that support mixed-use and multi-storey shop-top housing, the Vitality Plan enables redevelopment to proceed without

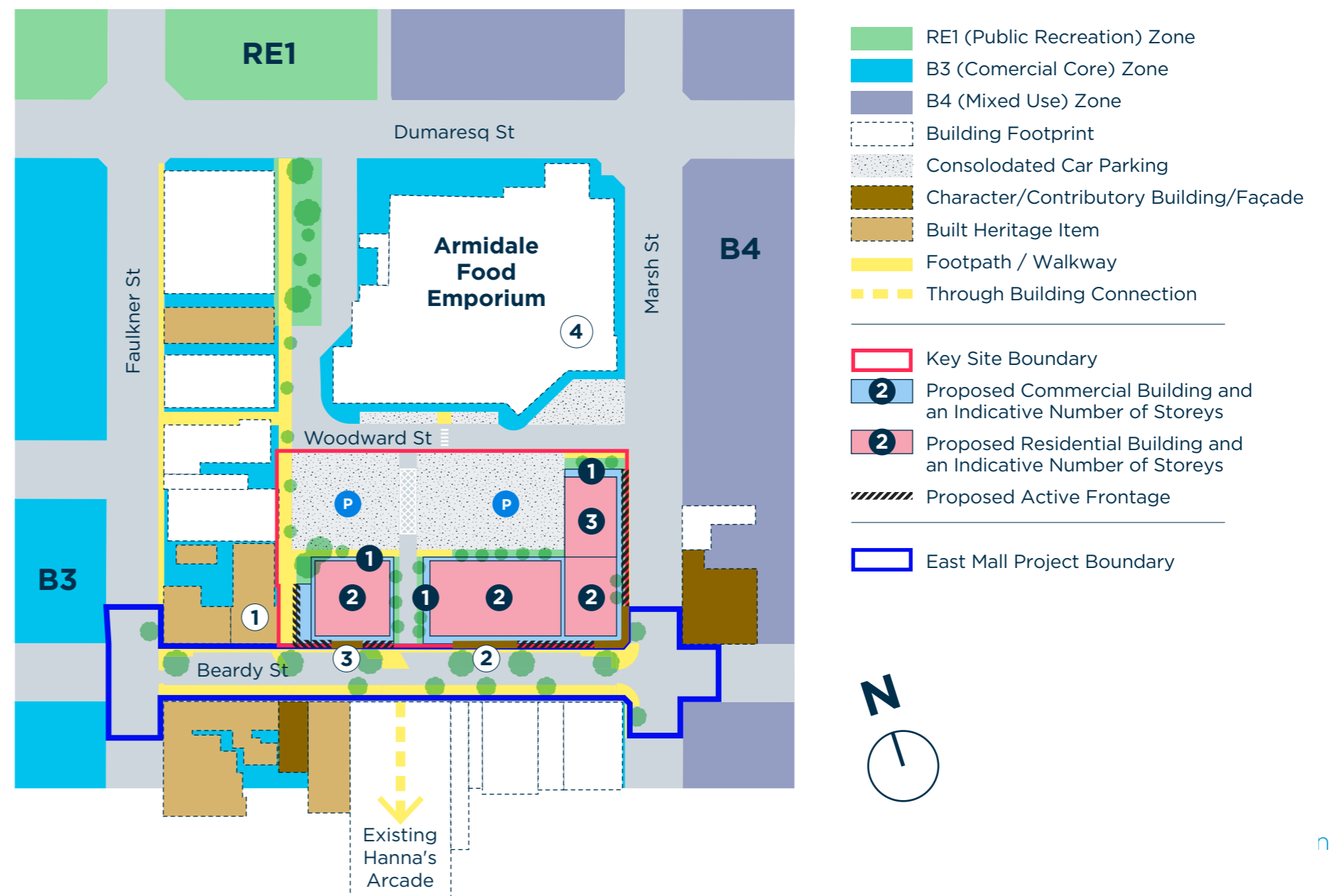
sacrificing amenity, servicing efficiency or convenience. A new direct mid-block pedestrian connection between East Mall, Woodward Street and the Armidale Food Emporium further restores permeability and reinforces East Mall’s role as a connector between Beardy Street and one of Armidale’s historic main-street shopping destinations.

Collectively, this action positions the East Mall precinct as a ready-to-proceed catalyst project where Council-controlled parking, endorsed public-domain upgrades and redevelopment potential are deliberately aligned to unlock housing, intensification and long-term city-centre vitality.

## Key Site 4

### East Mall Precinct

#### MASTERPLAN



**Key Site 4:  
East Mall Precinct**

EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS



1

3

2

4

Woodward St

Beardy St

Marsh St

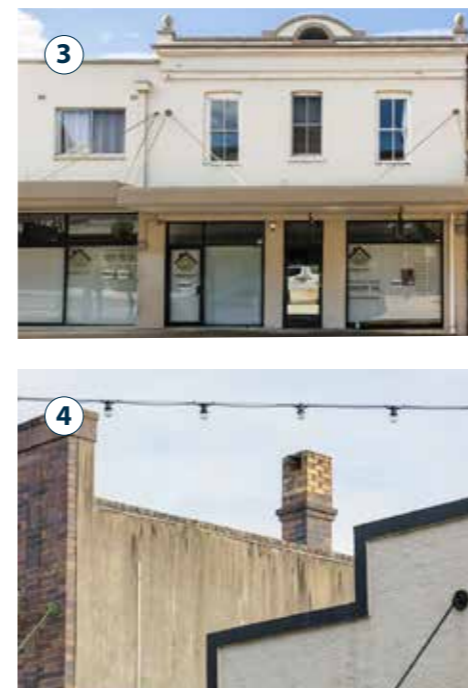
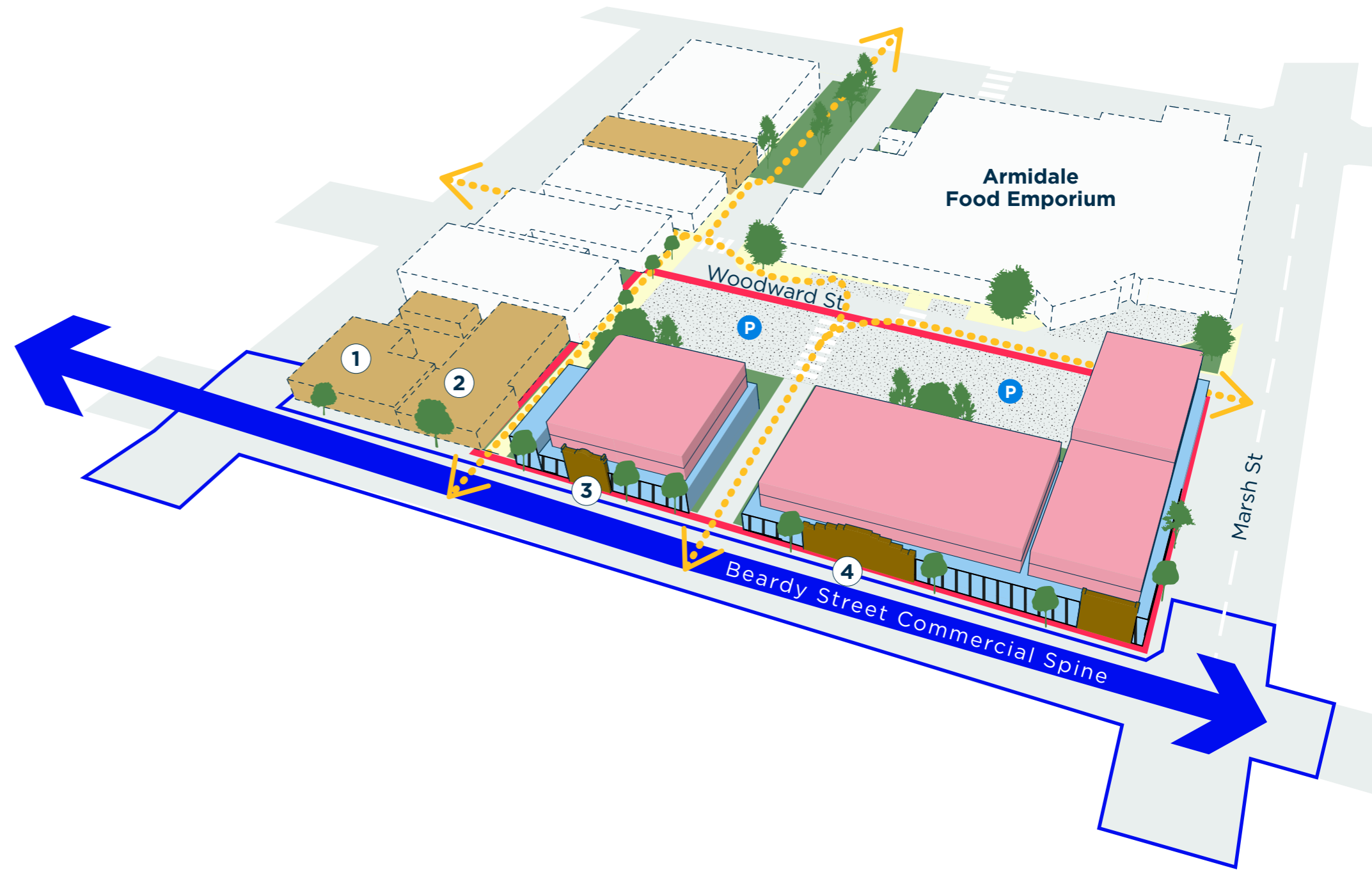
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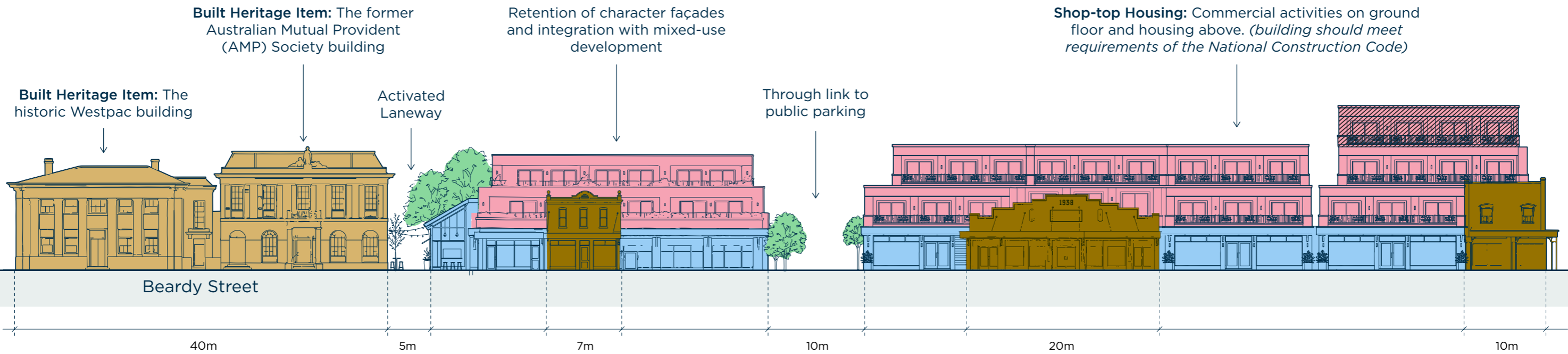
**Key Site 4:  
East Mall Precinct**

**BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- ① The historic Westpac building
- ② The former Australian Mutual Provident (AMP) Society building

-  East Mall Project Boundary
-  Consolidated Car Parking
-  Pedestrian Links
-  Built Heritage Item
-  Contributory/Character Building/Façade
-  Proposed Commercial Building
-  Proposed Residential Building
-  Proposed Active Frontage
-  Key Site Boundary





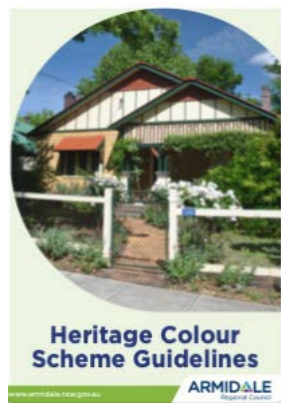
Note: Dimensions are approximate

**Key Site 4:  
East Mall Precinct**

**BUILT FORM AND PUBLIC  
DOMAIN CHARACTER**

The palette draws from the traditional earthy tones identified within *Armidale's Heritage Colour Scheme Guidelines* while avoiding fluorescent, primary and visually dominant colours. The proposed architectural character draws on Armidale City Centre's Victorian, Federation, Art Deco and Inter-war heritage buildings through the

use of face brick, masonry detailing and arched openings. Contemporary materials, including steel, glazing and timber, create a public domain that complements the historic character of the city centre while supporting modern activation and pedestrian activity.



## Rusden Street Site – Consolidated Parking and Structural Renewal

The Rusden Street site, within the block bounded by Dangar, Jessie and Beardy Streets, introduces a major structural improvement to the city centre. The proposal consolidates and sleeves parking within the block, increasing parking supply while ensuring that new development actively addresses surrounding streets.

This carefully planned approach enables higher-intensity development without compromising access. Parking is retained and improved, but its visual and spatial dominance is removed. By relocating car storage behind active frontages, the redevelopment supports commercial viability, street activity and long-term redevelopment potential in a highly strategic location.

A critical component of the Rusden Street redevelopment is the creation of a new, open pedestrian laneway providing direct, legible access between the consolidated Rusden Street car park and Beardy Street. This laneway restores permeability through the centre of the block, significantly shortening walking distances and re-establishing intuitive movement patterns into the heart of the city centre.

The laneway supports everyday convenience for residents, workers and visitors, improves wayfinding, and reinforces Beardy Street as the city’s principal east-west spine. It also enables finer-grain redevelopment over time by breaking down large blocks into walkable components consistent with Armidale’s historic urban structure.

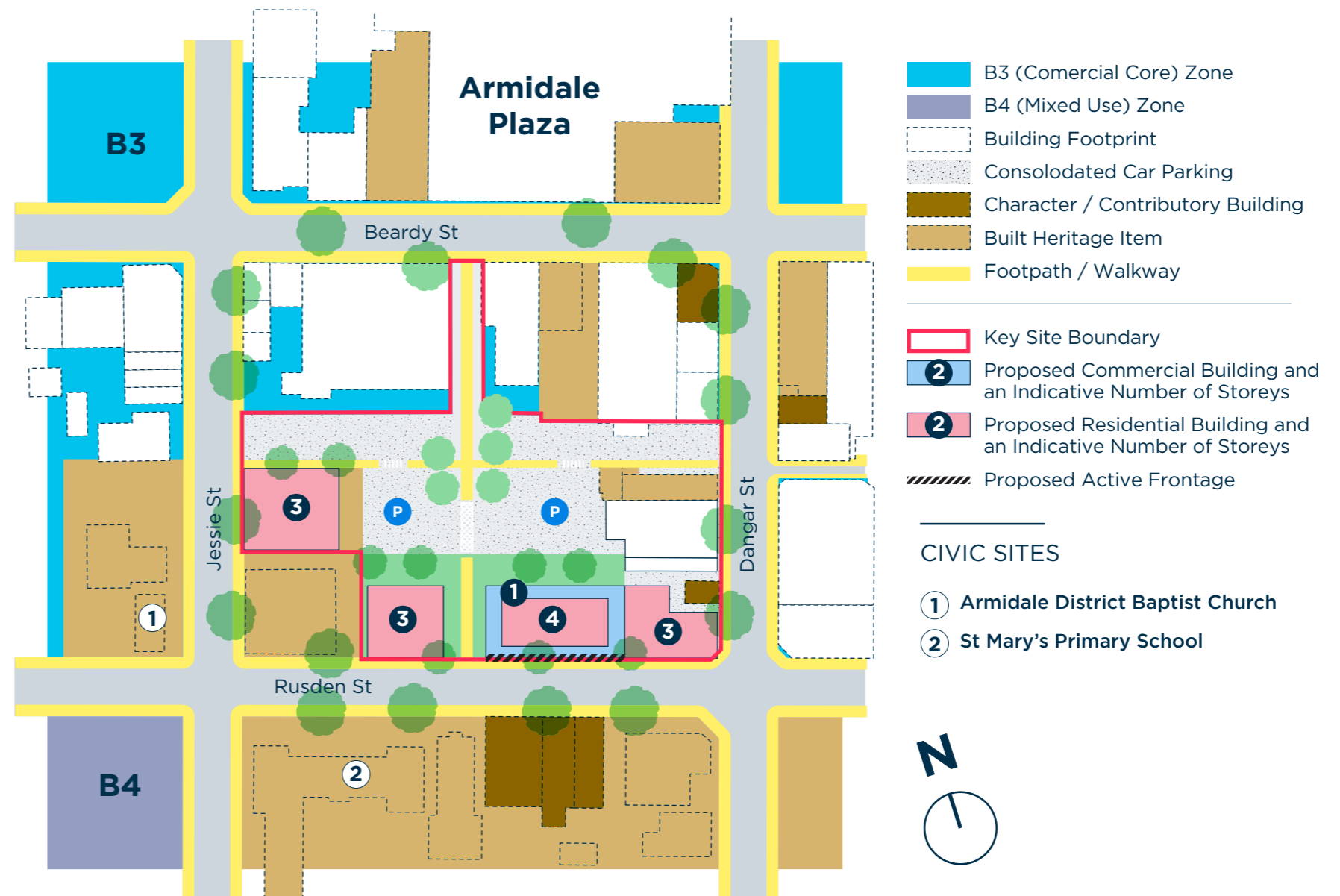
The Rusden Street car park will be fully sleeved with active development, allowing new buildings to front onto Dangar and Jessie Streets. This replaces inward-looking layouts, inactive edges and uninviting gaps with continuous built form, fine-grain frontages and improved pedestrian comfort.

By ensuring streets are defined by buildings rather than exposed car storage, the redevelopment strengthens walkability, passive surveillance and visual interest across the city centre. This approach aligns with best-practice main-street principles and restores the spatial definition necessary for vibrant public life.

## Key Site 7

### Rusden Street Site

#### MASTERPLAN



**Key Site 7:  
Rusden Street Site**

EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

1


2

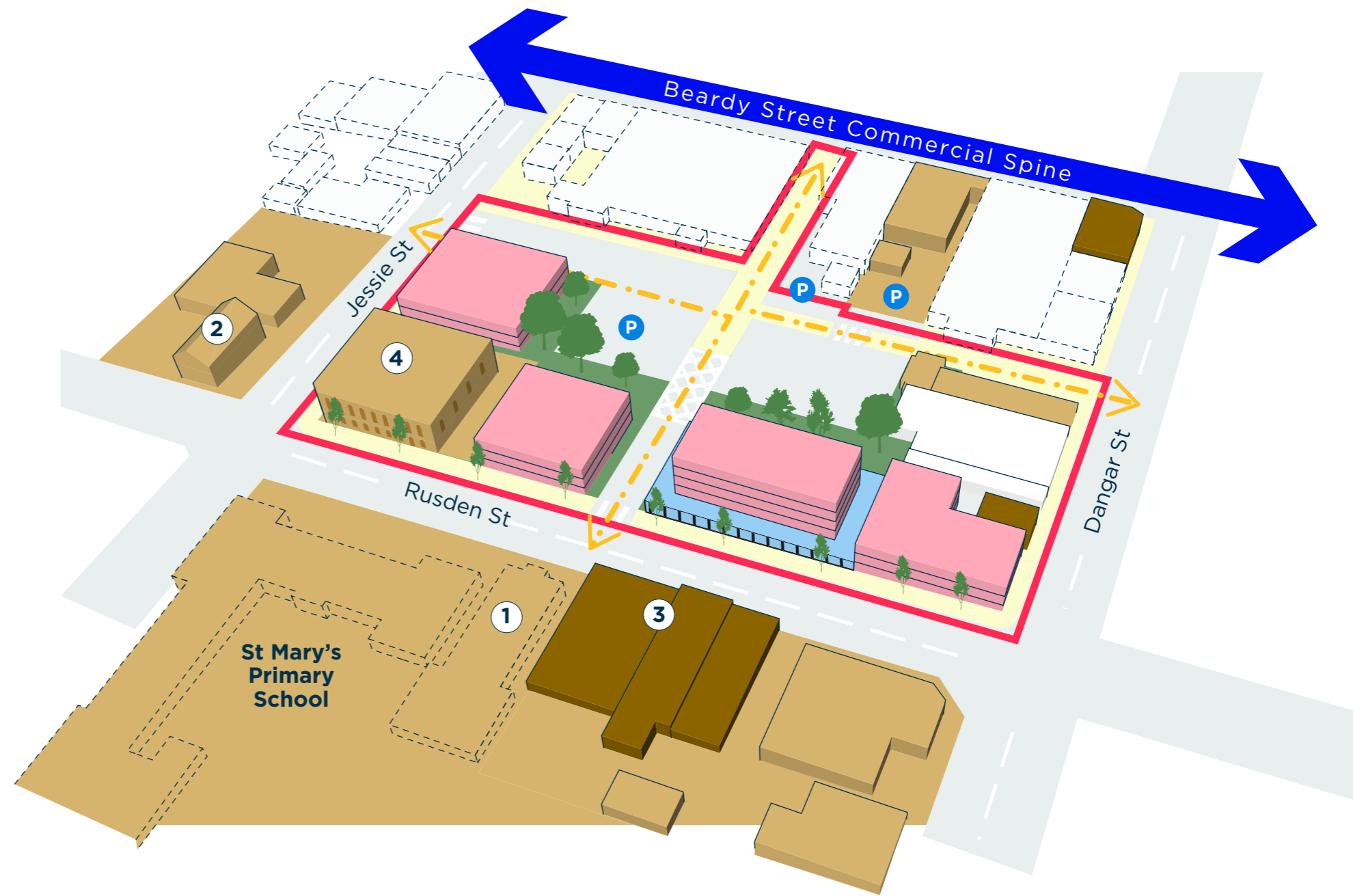


**Key Site 7:  
Rusden Street Site**

**BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS**

- ② The Armidale District Baptist Church
- ④ The Minto Building

-  Footpath
-  Shared Path
-  Built Heritage Item
-  Character Building
-  Proposed Commercial Building
-  Proposed Residential Building
-  Proposed Active Frontage
-  Key Site Boundary





1894

THE MINTO

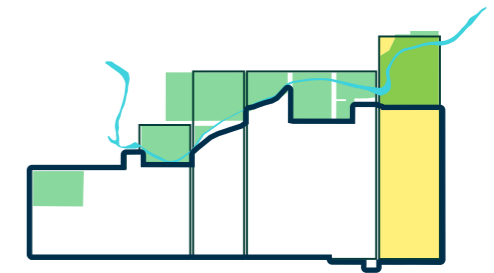
The MINTO DENTAL

Free Clinics

















1P

# Commercial and Residential Precinct



## LEGEND

-  Key Site
  -  Proposed Residential Buildings
  -  Built Heritage Item
  -  Character / Contributory Building
  -  Proposed Commercial Buildings
  -  Future Active Frontage
  -  Park / Sports Fields
  -  Residentially Zoned Areas
  -  Dumaresq Creek
- 
-  Hotel / Motel
  -  Entertainment Centre (Welder's Dog)
- 
-  Shared Path
  -  Proposed Laneway Linkages (Pedestrian/ Vehicular)
- 
-  Precinct Boundary

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Marsh St

Rologas Sporting Fields

Kirkwood St

Armidale Food Emporium

Beardy Street Commercial Spine

3

Dumaresq St

5

Beardy St

Marsh St

Naughten Ave

Barney St

Rusden St

ALDI

Taylor St

# Design Principles & Key Moves

## Re-orienting development to the Creeklands and Rologas playing fields

A defining characteristic of the Commercial and Residential Precinct is its proximity to the Dumaresq Creeklands and Rologas playing fields, yet many of the large sites between Dumaresq Street and the open space corridor currently turn their backs on these assets. Buildings are inward-looking, with fencing, rear walls, service areas and parking facing the creeklands, representing a major missed opportunity to integrate recreation, landscape and urban development.

The Vitality Plan establishes a clear principle that new development must address the creeklands, not retreat from them. Active frontages, overlooking windows, pedestrian connections and public interfaces are to be encouraged so that the creeklands function as an extension of city-centre life rather than a residual edge.

In particular, a direct mid-block connection between Dumaresq Street and the creeklands will be required, ensuring that people can move easily between open space, residential areas and the commercial core. This improves safety through passive surveillance, supports recreational use, and strengthens the relationship between everyday urban activity and the city's most significant landscape asset.

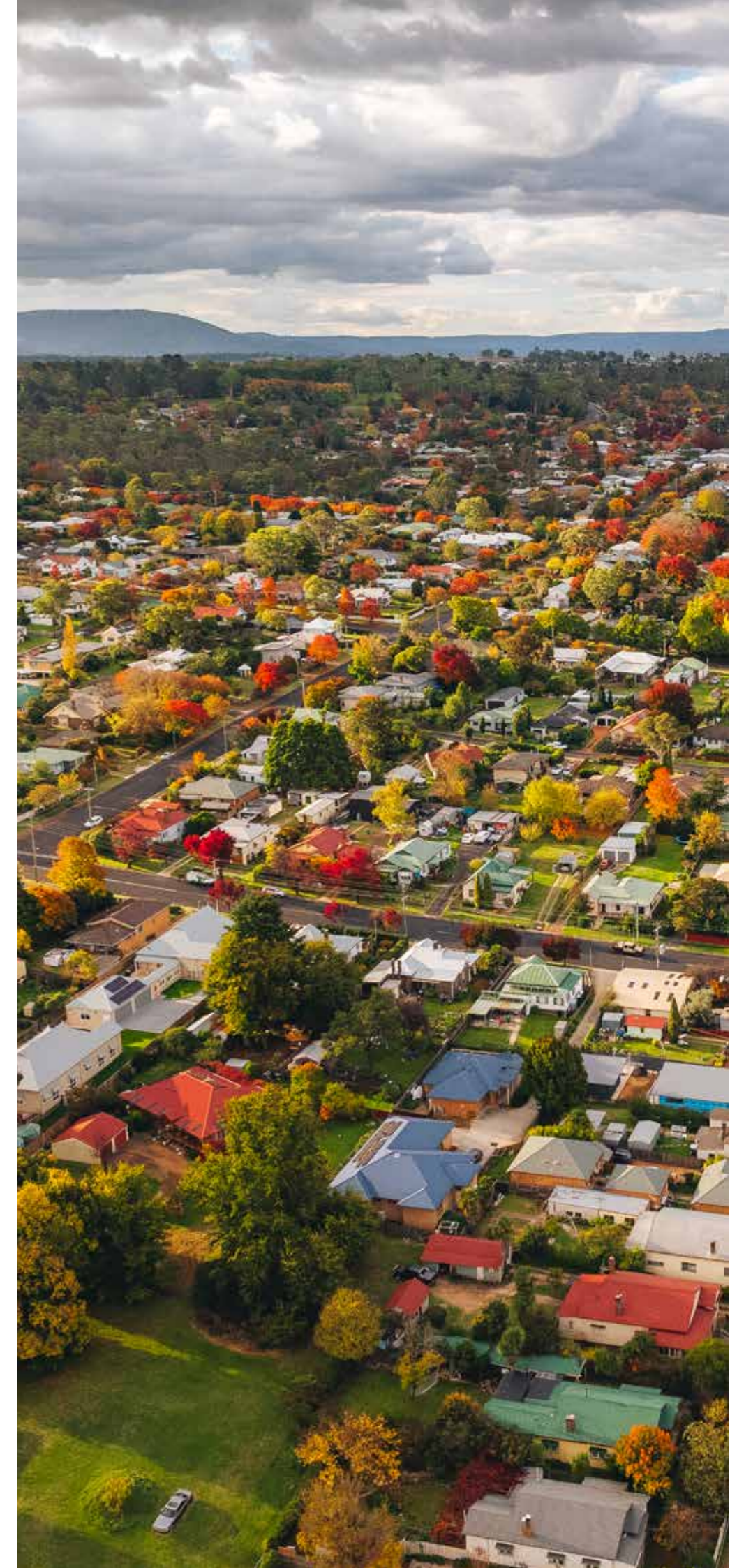
By breaking down the hard edge between commercial land and recreation space, this principle helps create a more legible, attractive and lived-in precinct that supports both urban intensity and open-space amenity.

## Protecting residential character while enabling sensitive intensification

Interspersed throughout the Commercial and Residential Precinct are clusters of low-density, single-storey dwellings that represent some of Armidale's oldest and most distinctive residential building stock. While many of these buildings are not formally heritage-listed, they contribute strongly to the character and identity of the precinct and provide an important transition between higher-intensity commercial uses and established neighbourhoods.

The Vitality Plan proposes the introduction of character statements and conservation-based controls to protect these buildings from incremental loss. Retention and adaptive reuse are to be prioritised, ensuring that residential and commercial functions can coexist without one eroding the other.

This approach ensures the precinct can accommodate growth and change while retaining the fine-grain residential fabric that gives it distinction. Rather than freezing the area or allowing unchecked redevelopment, the Plan establishes a framework where heritage character, residential amenity and urban intensification are mutually reinforcing.



## Transforming legacy car-yard sites into mixed-use urban blocks

The concentration of car yards along Marsh Street, the former New England Highway alignment, presents one of the most significant redevelopment opportunities in the Armidale City Centre. These uses occupy large sites, often under consolidated ownership, and are characterised by deep setbacks, expansive paved areas, display yards and blank façades. While historically appropriate for a highway environment, they now represent some of the poorest urban outcomes within the city centre.

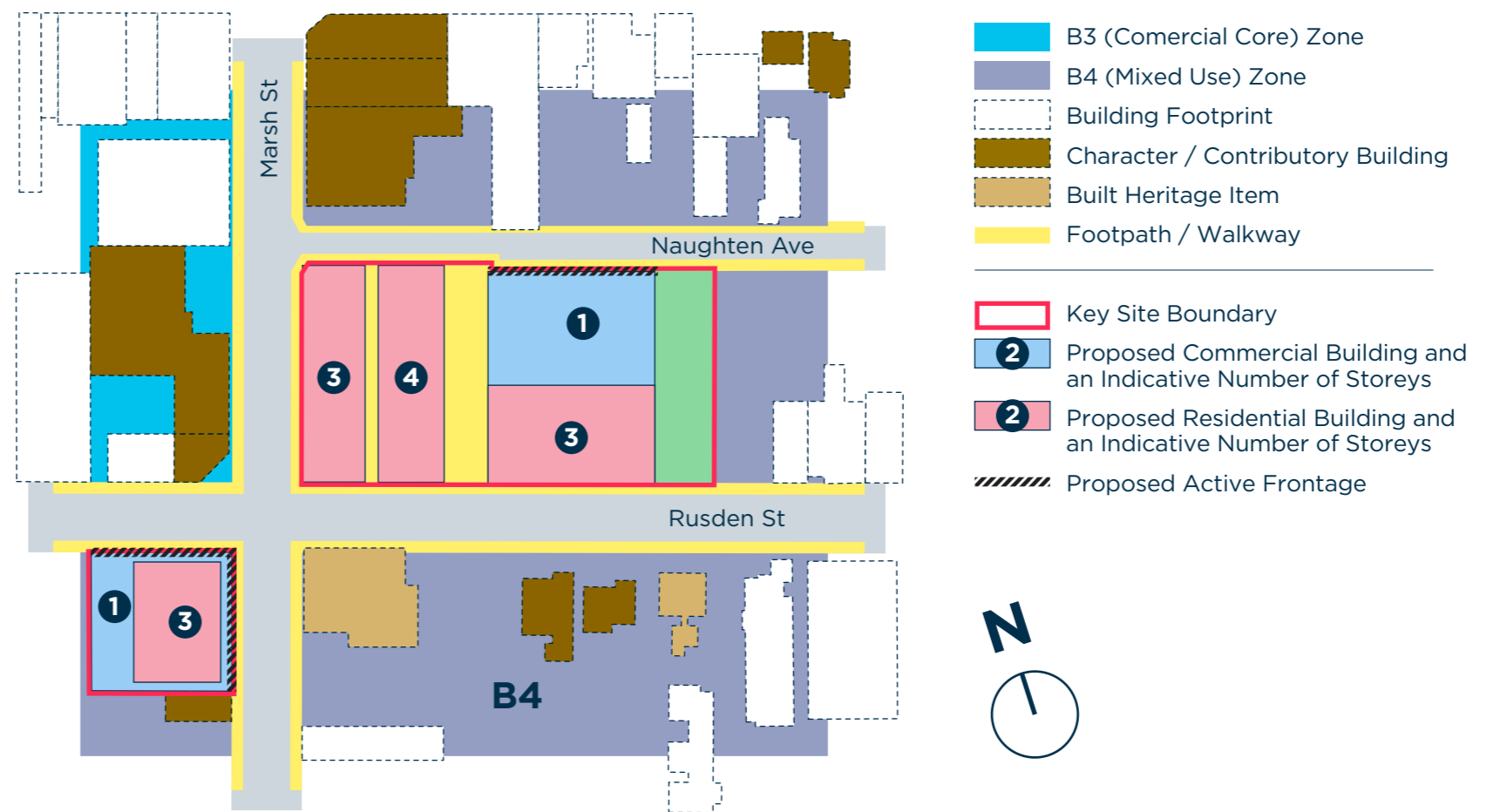
The Vitality Plan identifies these sites as priority locations for higher-density mixed-use redevelopment, capable of introducing substantial residential population, employment space and street-level activity. Importantly, these sites sit alongside a growing cluster of pubs, cafés and dining venues, which have already injected life and evening activity into Marsh Street. Redevelopment must therefore build upon this emerging vibrancy rather than displace it.

New development will be structured to address Marsh Street directly, reinforcing its role as a key cross-city connector. Rear access will be provided via new service lanes or sleeved access points, allowing Marsh Street frontages to remain active, pedestrian-friendly and continuous. Buildings will be required to incorporate awnings, fine-grain façades and active ground floors, replacing vehicle-dominated forecourts with genuine urban form. Collectively, this transition repositions Marsh Street from a leftover highway strip into a mixed-use urban boulevard that supports both movement and place.

## Key Site 5

### Legacy Car-yard Sites

#### MASTERPLAN



**Key Site 3:  
Armidale City Bowling Club Site**








EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

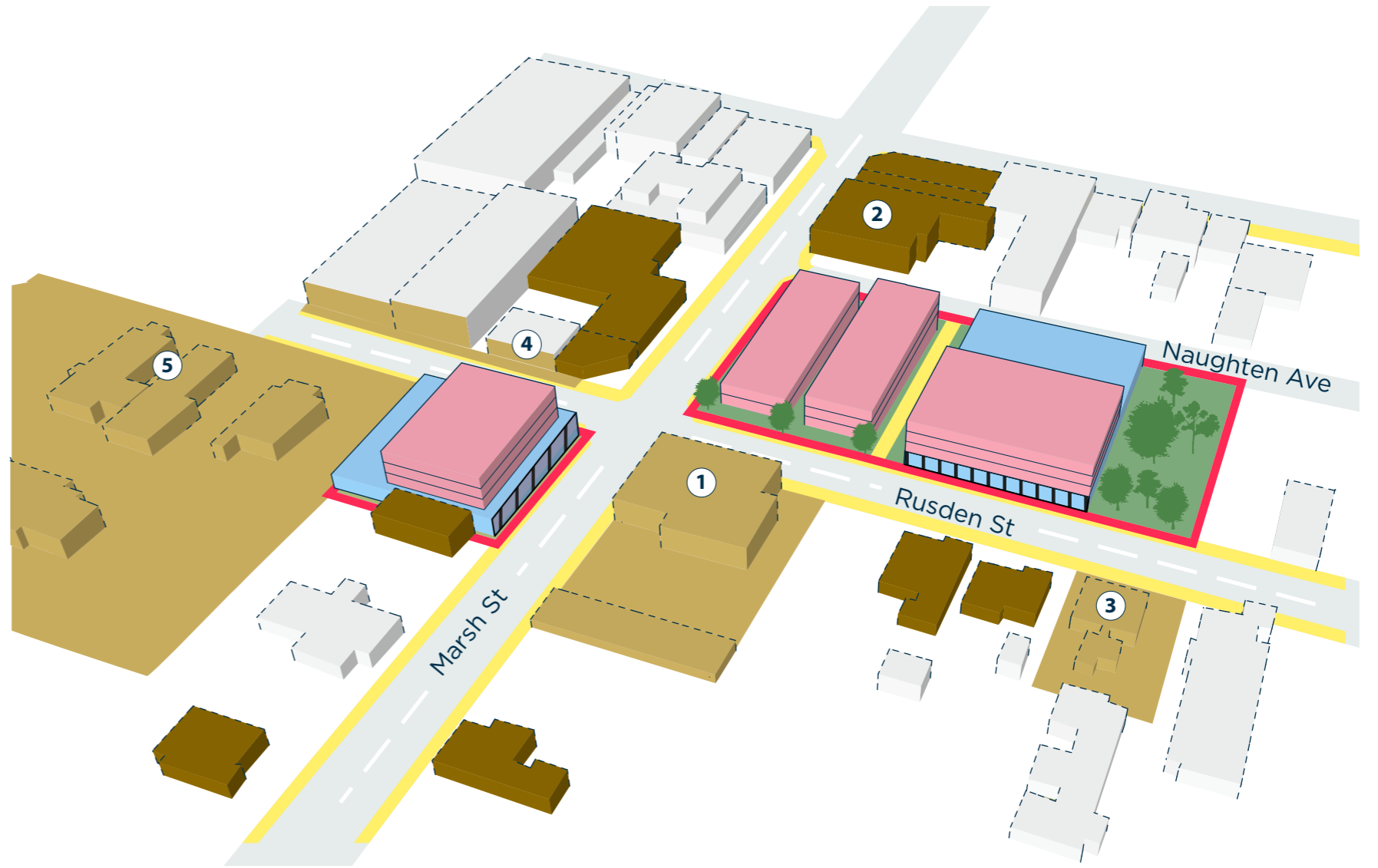


**Key Site 5:  
Legacy Car-yard Sites**

BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS

- ① St Kilda Hotel
- ② Whitebull Hotel
- ③ Heritage listed private residence
- ④ Heritage listed building façades
- ⑤ Armidale Uniting Church

-  Built Heritage Item
-  Character Building
-  Proposed Commercial Building
-  Proposed Residential Building
-  Proposed Active Frontage
-  Footpath
-  Key Site Boundary



## Armidale City Bowling Club site: a once-in-a-generation redevelopment opportunity

The Armidale City Bowling Club site is one of the largest and most strategically located landholdings in the city centre, at over 1.4 hectares, with dual street frontages and MU1 Mixed Use zoning. Comparable in size to major planned retail centres such as the Armidale Food Emporium, the site's scale, ownership structure and largely undeveloped nature make it a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to reshape this part of the city.

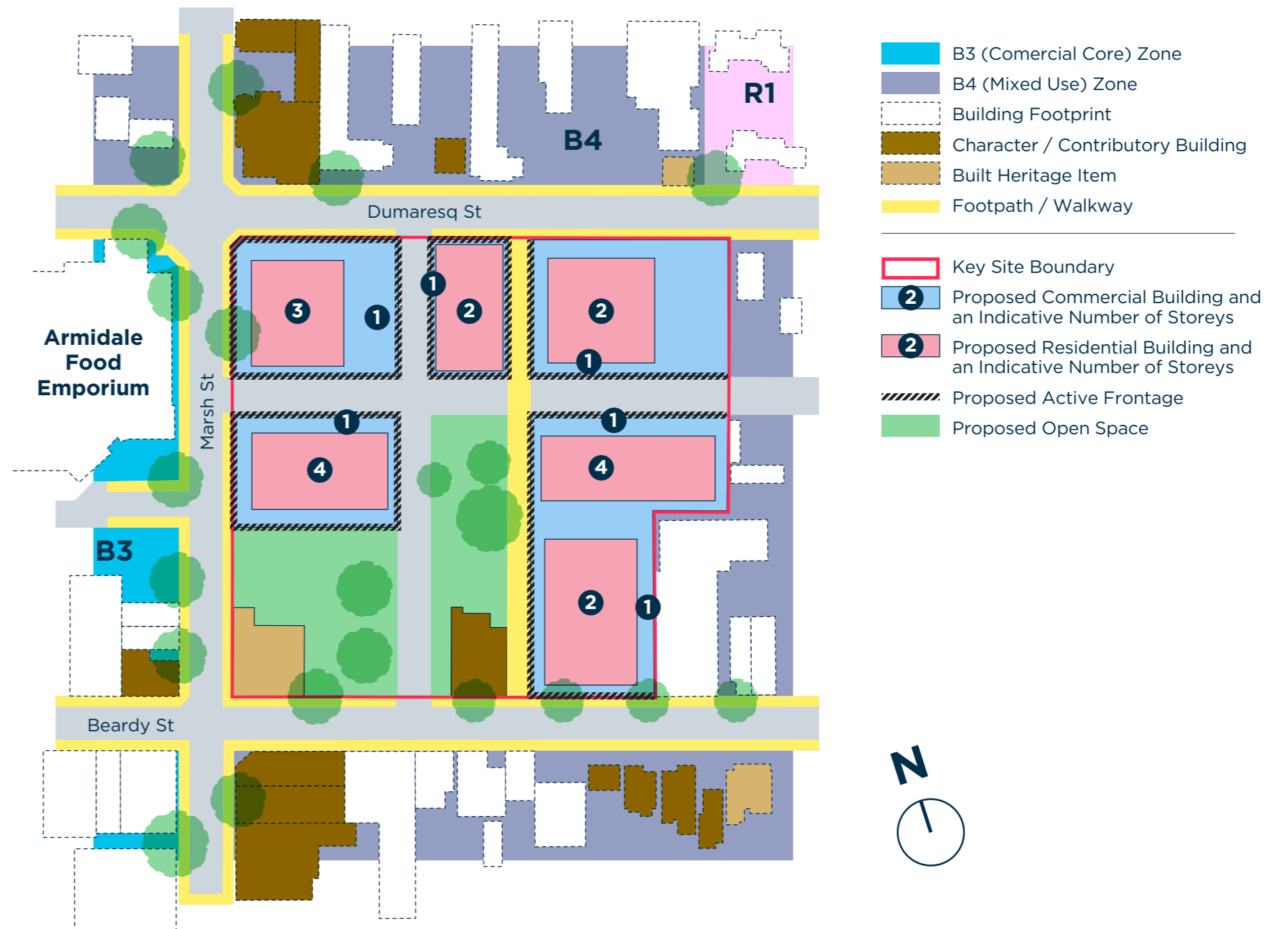
Currently dominated by bowling greens and surface parking, the site is significantly under-utilised relative to its zoning and location. The Vitality Plan identifies it as a catalyst redevelopment site capable of accommodating a diverse mix of uses, including housing, employment, hospitality and community facilities, delivered over time through a staged approach.

Critically, the site has been identified for multiple through-block connections, including east-west and north-south links. These connections have the potential to service the rear of Marsh Street redevelopment sites, relieve pressure on primary streets, and create a new mid-block pedestrian route linking Dumaresq Street to Beardy Street. By introducing permeability at the scale of the block, the redevelopment transforms what is currently a barrier into a connector, embedding the site within the wider city-centre movement network and maximising its contribution to urban life.

## Key Site 3

### Armidale City Bowling Club

#### MASTERPLAN



**Key Site 3:  
Armidale City Bowling Club Site**










EXISTING SITE CONDITIONS

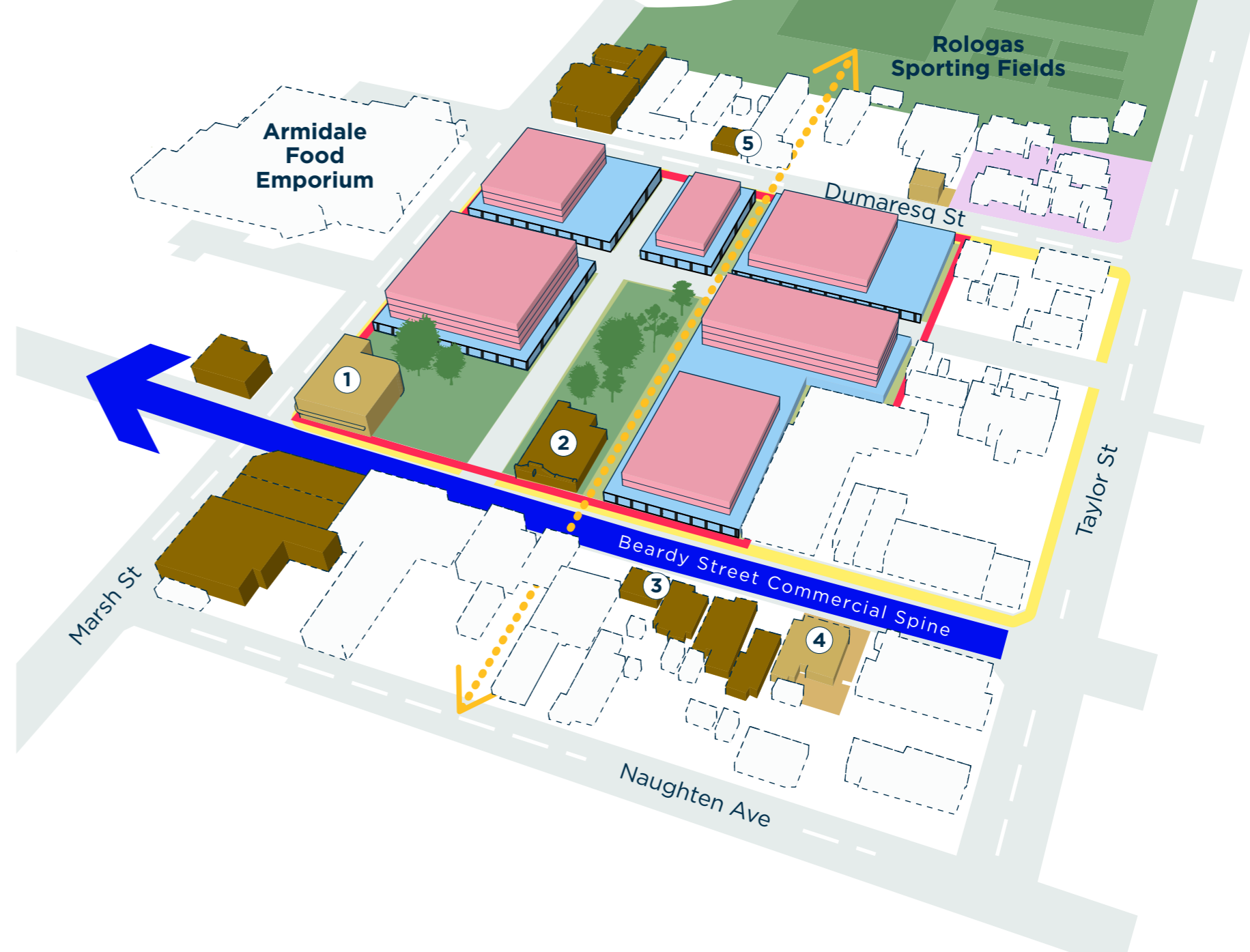


**Key Site 3:  
Armidale City Bowling Club**

BUILT HERITAGE AND  
CHARACTER BUILDINGS

- ① Royal Hotel Building
- ② The Welder's Dog

-  Built Heritage Item
-  Contributory/Character Building
-  Proposed Commercial Building
-  Proposed Residential Building
-  Proposed Active Frontage
-  Pedestrian Links
-  Footpath
-  Open Green Space
-  Key Site Boundary





ST KILDA HOTEL

TOOHEYS  
ST KILDA HOTEL

TAB

St Kilda  
HOTEL  
\$15 LUNCH  
\$20

# P4. Implementation and Delivery

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## Funding and Delivery Framework

The successful implementation of the Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan depends on securing realistic, diversified and long-term funding pathways. Without committed and clearly identified funding mechanisms, the Plan's public-realm upgrades, heritage reinvestment, planning reforms and catalytic redevelopment actions cannot be delivered at the scale, quality or pace required to restore confidence and sustain city-centre vitality.

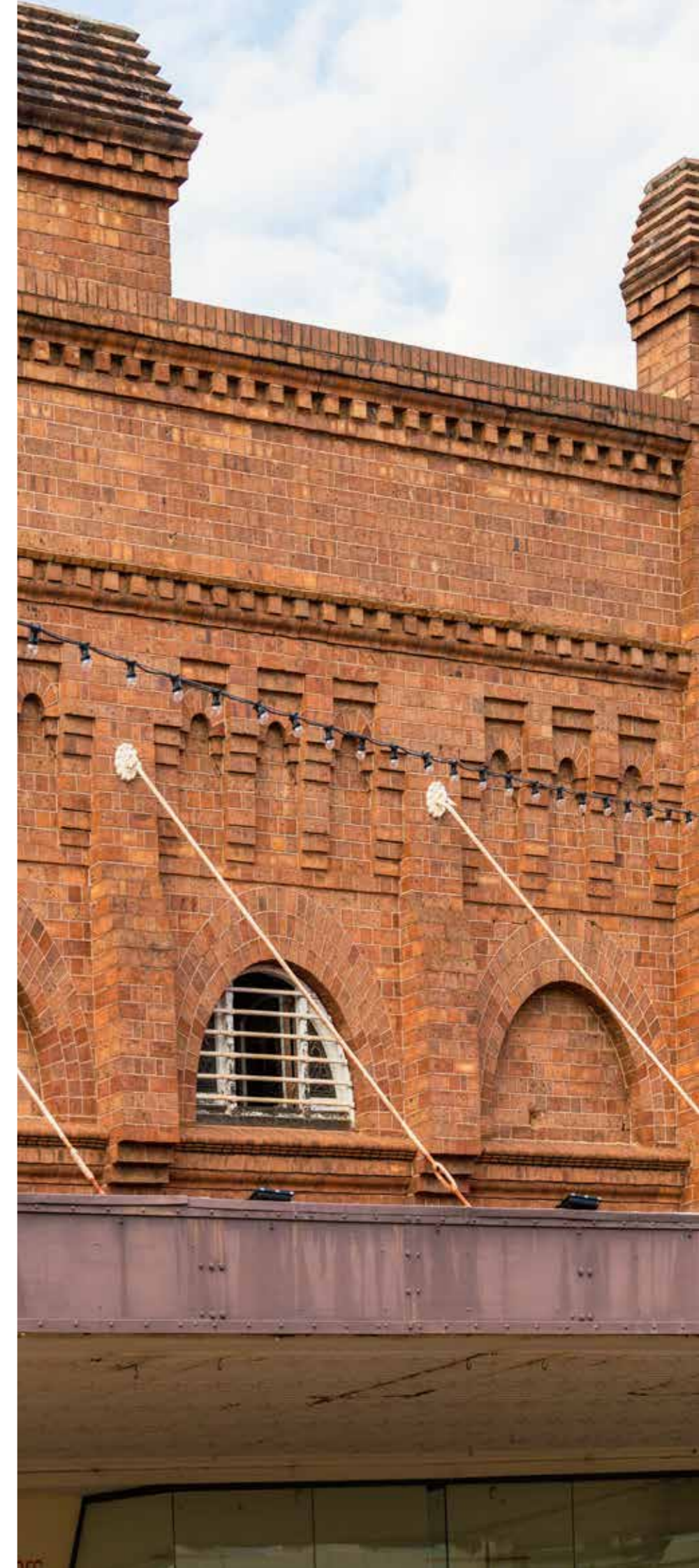
Council's base financial capacity alone is insufficient to fund the level of coordinated intervention required. Accordingly, the Vitality Plan adopts a clear and pragmatic delivery position: private investment will be the primary driver of renewal, with Council's role focused on enabling, coordinating and leveraging that investment through planning controls, targeted public works, infrastructure delivery and strategic use of Council-controlled funding mechanisms.

Private investment is expected to occur through the redevelopment of under-utilised sites, adaptive reuse of heritage buildings, shop-top housing and multi-storey mixed-use development, and new hospitality, accommodation and commercial activity. The Plan does not rely on punitive measures—Council cannot impose vacancy taxes, regulate commercial rents or compel redevelopment. Instead, it is structured to unlock investment by reducing development risk, improving certainty, aligning infrastructure delivery with redevelopment timing, and focusing incentives where high-quality, place-shaping outcomes are achieved.

At the same time, the Plan recognises that Council investment remains essential to initiate change, de-risk private development and deliver the public-domain improvements required to support revitalisation. This includes the strategic use of Council's capital works program, contributions from Council reserves where available, and targeted allocation of funds such as the Future Fund where consistent with its purpose and governance. These sources provide Council with an opportunity to demonstrate leadership, deliver early projects and signal a long-term commitment to the city centre.

In addition, the Plan identifies the investigation of a city-centre-specific Development Contributions Plan alongside other available potential funding mechanisms to support sustained renewal, subject to landowner support, detailed scoping and independent approval. If pursued, any city centre specific funding mechanisms will be geographically limited, transparently governed and explicitly directed toward agreed city-centre projects such as streetscape upgrades, heritage activation and enabling infrastructure.

Together, these funding pathways will form a balanced and credible delivery framework. This approach acknowledges funding constraints while ensuring the Vitality Plan is implementable, defensible and capable of delivering long-term change rather than aspirational intent alone.



## 4.2 Council Investment and the Future Fund

In addition to traditional grant funding and rates-based mechanisms, the Vitality Plan recognises Council's emerging opportunity to support city-centre renewal through its Future Fund, which is expected to be capitalised through planning agreements and other value-capture mechanisms associated with large-scale renewable energy projects.

Armidale Regional Council is located within the New England Renewable Energy Zone, and ongoing and future renewable energy developments have the potential to generate tens of millions of dollars in contributions to the Armidale LGA over time. The Vitality Plan establishes city-centre renewal projects as legitimate and appropriate recipients of Future Fund investment where works deliver enduring civic benefit, underpin economic resilience and strengthen Armidale's role as the region's service and employment centre.

Future Fund investment is envisaged to support:

- catalytic public-realm projects;
- enabling infrastructure such as laneways, consolidated parking and civic connections;
- heritage reinvestment and adaptive reuse aligned with broader economic outcomes; and
- co-funding of projects that leverage significant private or grant investment.

## 4.3 City Centre Specific Funding Investigations

In parallel, the Vitality Plan recognises that city centre specific funding mechanisms will need to be investigated and will be subject to landowner support and further consultation. Any future funding mechanism process will require Council to demonstrate financial need, effective community awareness and engagement, reasonable impacts on ratepayers and alignment with adopted IP&R documents. All future funding options will be publicly exhibited and subject to submissions.

Any alternative funding option mechanism will therefore need to be grounded in delivery-ready detail, including a costed Streetscape and Public Domain Masterplan, clearly defined project scopes, and adopted DCP reforms, such as block-scale controls, laneways and consolidated parking, that demonstrate what will be delivered, where investment will occur and how benefits are shared

## Key Funding and Delivery Actions

By combining private investment, Future Fund leverage, targeted grant funding and exploring other suitable investigation pathways, the Vitality Plan establishes a credible, staged and resilient funding framework capable of delivering meaningful city-centre renewal over the long term.

- Prioritise private landowner investment: implement a targeted owner engagement program for key redevelopment sites and heritage assets, supported by clear planning pathways, incentives and infrastructure alignment.
- Deliver enabling planning controls: progress City Centre-specific DCP reforms, including block-scale controls, laneway delivery, consolidated parking and design-excellence provisions, to reduce risk and unlock investment.
- Leverage the Council Future Fund: position city-centre renewal projects as priority candidates for investment from renewable energy-related planning agreement contributions and value-capture mechanisms.
- Prepare delivery-ready documentation: commission the City Centre Streetscape and Public Domain Masterplan and costed, staged project packages to underpin grant applications, Future Fund allocations and other potential funding mechanisms.
- Development Contributions investigation: determine the appropriate mechanism to levy commercial, retail, mixed-use and residential developments within the city centre. Appropriate mechanism likely to be a Section 7.12 or Section 7.11 Plan, or a hybrid of both.
- Target grants and co-investment: package priority projects—such as East Mall upgrades, Civic Park and Greeklands works, and heritage activation programs—as grant-ready initiatives aligned with State and Federal place-based funding streams.
- Develop and deliver an ongoing, Council-led placemaking and activation program to reinforce the Armidale City Centre as a vibrant civic, cultural and social destination, complementing public domain investment, heritage renewal and key redevelopment projects.



## Integrated Action Plan & Recommended Staging

### Immediate Stage (1-3 years)

1. Adopt the Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan. This phase of the process is deliberately focused on creating the conditions that allow later delivery phases to occur with confidence, speed and reduced risk. It recognises that visible construction outcomes are only possible once clear planning controls, funding pathways, governance and site control are in place.
2. Commission, exhibit and adopt a City Centre Streetscape and Public Domain Masterplan to define typologies, staging, costs and priorities across streets, parks, laneways and car parks. The Masterplan converts the Vitality Plan vision into a buildable, consistent and fundable public-domain works program.
3. Prepare, exhibit and adopt city centre specific DCP reforms, including block-based controls, laneway networks, consolidated parking, design excellence provisions and a coordinated heritage verandah and façade improvement framework. DCP controls will ensure development shifts from lot-by-lot outcomes to block-scale outcomes, providing certainty in Council requirements and developer expectations.
4. Establish City Centre Delivery governance via a City Centre Delivery Board to ensure dedicated co-ordination and delivery of public works, planning changes and private redevelopment across precincts. This action creates the governance and sequencing authority required to deliver multiple city-shaping projects with confidence and direction.
5. Confirm early funding pathways, including grant pipelines, capital works alignment, use of Council reserves/Future Fund where appropriate, and investigation of a city centre specific Development Contributions plan alongside other possible funding mechanisms to support long term delivery.
6. Deliver the Old Court House Walkway project as an early public realm catalyst.
7. Resolve the permanent civic/community use of the Old Court House building to anchor the Civic Precinct.
8. Complete detailed design for:
  - a) Beardy Street East Mall shared pedestrian and vehicular street
  - b) Civic Park / Creeklands next stage upgrades
  - c) Rusden Street Library redevelopment within the Civic Precinct
9. Acquire the Moore Street car park, City Band building and closed Dangar Street road reserve and commence urban design and feasibility investigations for the Cultural Precinct and north-south civic spine.
10. Complete concept design for redevelopment of the Council owned Allingham Street site for a Nightingale style residential demonstration project.
11. Placemaking, Activation and Public Realm Delivery
  - a) Prepare and adopt the Placemaking and Activation Strategy.
  - b) Review and streamline approval pathways for outdoor dining, events and temporary uses
  - c) Undertake continuous pilot activation projects in priority locations across the City Centre, such as the Dangar Street Parklet project and Laneway Stories project.

## Short Term (3-5 years)

1. Construct the Beardy Street East Mall shared pedestrian and vehicular street (primarily grant-funded).
2. Construct the Creeklands Civic Park upgrades as the next stage of the northern green civic spine (primarily grant-funded).
3. Deliver adaptive re-use of the Old Court House as a civic/cultural anchor (primarily grant-funded).
4. Progress the heritage façade and verandah reinstatement program, coordinated block-by-block with Beardy Street works using DCP incentives and co-investment mechanisms.
5. Secure reopening and adaptive reuse of key heritage buildings (e.g. Imperial Hotel, former Lands Board Building, former Westpac building) for hospitality, accommodation and mixed uses.
6. Finalise and operationalise the Vitality Plan funding regime to support public-domain upgrades, site acquisition and enabling infrastructure.
7. Progress priority streetscape, laneway and parking upgrades, initially focusing on:
  - a) Central and western blocks of Beardy Street and key intersections
  - b) North-south civic spine connections between Beardy Street and Moore Street
  - c) Woodward Street / East Mall consolidated off street parking
8. Commence strategic acquisition of key sites for laneway connections, consolidated parking and redevelopment opportunities.
9. Complete detailed design for Council-led key redevelopment precincts, including:
  - a) Visitor Information Centre precinct
  - b) Rusden Street car park precinct
10. Coordinated Activation and Partnership Development
  - a) Deliver a coordinated annual activation program
  - b) Expand business participation in outdoor activation and street life
  - c) Embed partnerships with cultural and educational institutions, such as NERAM and UNE.



### **Medium Term (5-10 years)**

1. Deliver the Rusden Street Library redevelopment within the Civic Precinct.
2. Deliver the Moore Street car park transformation into a Cultural Precinct, including Dangar Street reconnection and finalisation of the north-south civic spine.
3. Complete the full Beardy Street shared pedestrian and vehicular spine, including all blocks, intersections, heritage façade/verandah reinstatements.
4. See progressive delivery of major laneway and service networks and consolidated parking structures through DCP and LEP-enabled redevelopment.
5. See progressive delivery of key redevelopment sites via privately led mixed-use and medium-to-higher density projects through DCP and LEP-enabled redevelopment.

### **Long Term (10-20 years)**

1. Full realisation of all key redevelopment sites and completion of Streetscape Masterplan upgrades.
2. Completion of the laneway network, continuous north-south civic spines, creeklands upgrades and mature urban canopy.
3. Widespread mixed-use and multi-storey redevelopment across city blocks, delivering long-term population growth, economic resilience and a stable city-centre economy.

### **Monitor, Review and Adapt**

1. Establish performance indicators (vacancy, pedestrian activity, investment, heritage reuse, visitation rates).
2. Report annually to Council on progress and outcomes.
3. Review the Vitality Plan and implementation program every four years.
4. Adjust priorities in response to funding, market and community conditions. Monitoring ensures the Plan remains proactive, responsive and effective.



# Appendix A

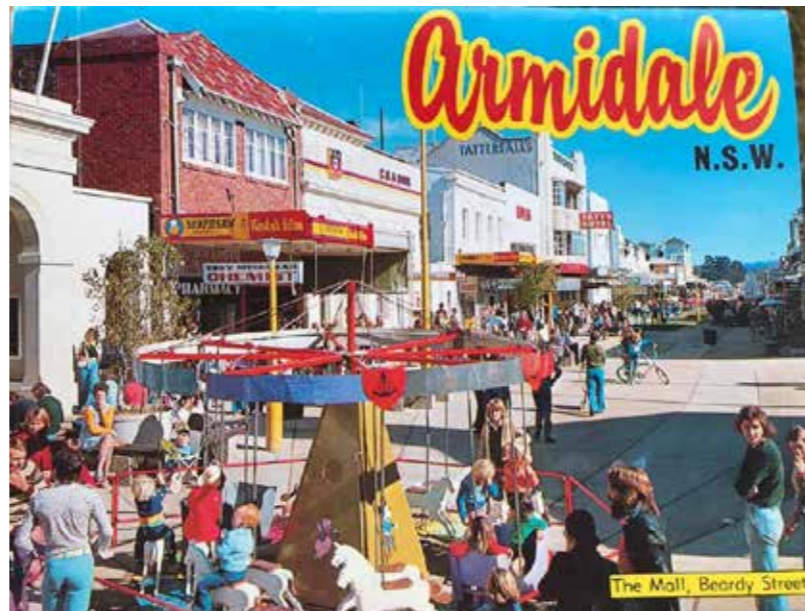
## Drivers of Long-term Decline

This section summarises the principal factors that have contributed to the Armidale City Centre’s gradual decline over multiple decades and explains, from a town-planning perspective, how each factor has directly weakened the centre’s economic performance, street life, investment confidence and civic role. The issues are interrelated: each has reduced the city centre’s capacity to function as the region’s primary destination for everyday activity and long-term investment.

### The city centre as a “victim of its own success”: adapting to changing retail competition and then being left behind

Armidale’s centre was thriving in the 1960s and it aimed to capture this success in numerous ways. Swathes of heritage buildings were demolished to make way for new supermarket shopping centres, arcades, banks, shops and off-street parking areas. Alongside this private investment, Council led interventions such as the creation of The Mall, the closure of Dangar Street and the introduction of numerous off-street parking lots were all seen as adaptations that aimed to capture and build upon the success of the city at the time.

Falling victim to its own success, the decision to close the busiest section of Beardy Street, coupled with the destruction of many old buildings and the isolation of pedestrians and motorists from not only the places where they wanted to be, but from the experience they sought to have (social, retail, experience driven) ultimately contributed to the decline in success of the city centre.



*Postcard of Armidale showing the novelty of The Mall, c1970's.*

Beardy Street has been well documented as the heart of Armidale commerce since the mid-1800s and the introduction of the Mall into this space was seen as an early national experiment with it widely known that the Mall was “the second ever built in Australia.” At the time, pedestrianisation and redevelopment were widely seen as modern interventions that could help traditional centres compete with emerging retail formats. The issue for Armidale is that the centre’s subsequent evolution remained too tied to a retail-only competitive mindset.

For several decades, the city centre has sought to anchor its success almost exclusively into retail, reshaping buildings, streets and public spaces to support a shopping-led model that reflected the thinking of the time. While this approach was initially successful, the city centre has remained structurally tied to retail even as the economic and consumer landscape has fundamentally changed.

In today’s context, retail alone is no longer a viable foundation for a regional city centre like Armidale, where online shopping, consolidated trips and enclosed shopping centres now dominate convenience-based spending. The result is a centre that has continued to chase retail performance long after the conditions that once supported it have disappeared. The key planning lesson is clear: Armidale’s city centre cannot recover by competing as a retail precinct because retail demand has structurally shifted to large, car-oriented centres and online platforms that benefit from scale and convenience. Alongside this, the city centre faces dispersed catchment demand, limited anchor capacity, high vacancy and low evening turnover thus making it uncompetitive on retail fundamentals. Instead, it needs to be repositioned as a mixed-use civic centre anchored by daily-use civic functions, education, culture, accommodation, housing, heritage activation and public realm quality rather than retail alone —principles that are central to the Vitality Plan.

## Legacy traffic changes: Beardy Street (The Mall), Dangar Street, one-way system, and loss of on-street parking

Armidale’s decision to pedestrianise the core of Beardy Street was made in an era when the prevailing planning logic was to separate cars and people. Council was granted permission in 1972 to close Beardy Street to vehicles between Dangar and Faulkner Streets, with The Mall opening for Christmas trading in 1973. Whilst this created a civic space, it also removed a core functioning through-street from Armidale’s centre grid and permanently shifted how motorists circulate and park and how people use the city’s main commercial street. Indeed, when Council commissioned a study into the possible closure of Beardy Street the report cited one of the key reasons as being the volume of traffic using the street with more vehicles using Beardy Street per day than Marsh Street, even though Marsh Street functioned as a highway at the time. This is telling as it meant that Beardy Street was a place where people wanted to be. They wanted to shop, run errands, visit café’s and milk bars, and all within a thriving, lively street setting that embraced pedestrians and vehicles alike. Historical information shows Armidale’s city centre as being one of the most popular precincts in regional NSW. It was a thriving place to be, and its success was measured in the cars and people that utilised the space at the time.

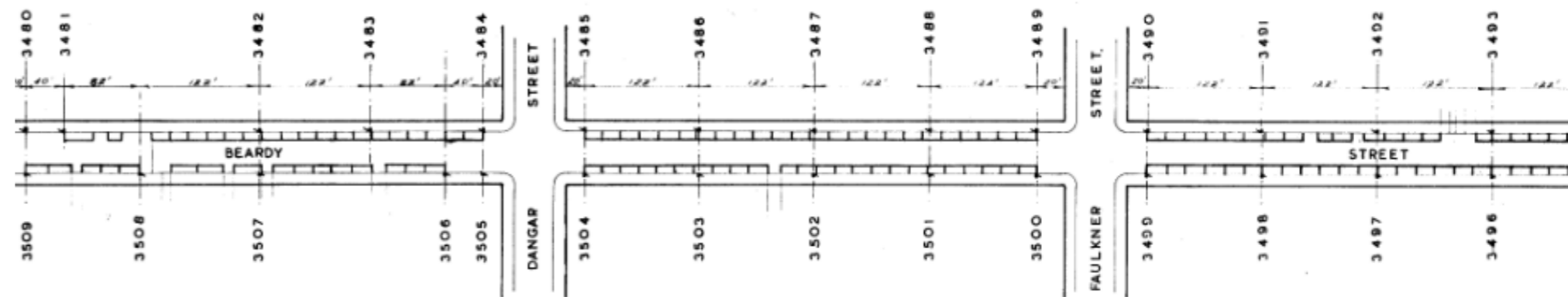


The Mall, Beardy Street, Armidale, New England District, NSW.

### Key finding from the Beardy Street Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study (1970):

*“The proposal to unify the area [Beardy Street] into a defined shopping complex by the provision of a mall to allow free movement of pedestrians up and down and across the street is sound from a retailing point of view. Without some such move traffic congestion in the street will gradually make shopping less attractive, other scattered developments in less congested areas will be encouraged and Beardy Street shopping will eventually decline.”*

For the city centre the decision to pedestrianise streets and create one-way systems has had a measurable impact in many ways, but most importantly the biggest impact has been on convenience and access. Parking audits from the late 1960s show the core three blocks of Beardy Street (from Marsh to Jessie) had 129 spaces whereas there are only 50 spaces today,



1965 Armidale City Council plan showing parking spaces in the main 3 blocks of Beardy Street. 129 spaces were available at the time.

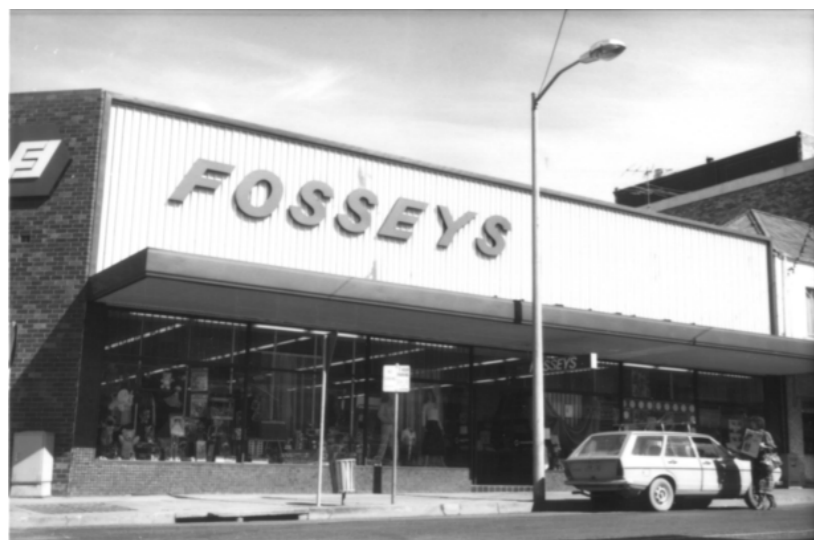
representing a loss of 79 on-street spaces. Coupling this with the loss of parking (for Taxi, Bus and Loading zones) in surrounding streets that were required because of the Mall closure further compounded the losses with an estimated 100 on-street spaces being lost in the present day, in the most critical location for them to be located.

This reduction matters immensely in a regional city where many trips are short, multi-purpose and are heavily car-dependent, and where visible, short-stay parking is a key part of whether people decide to visit the city centre or favour other more convenient alternatives. With the rise of the ‘big-box’ planned shopping centre, this is a critical factor that Armidale now needs to contend with.

Armidale’s core is now supported by an access system that is less legible, less forgiving and less inviting than it once was: fewer entry points, difficult circulation, and a perception that the most important streets are not available for the kinds of convenient trips that keep a regional main street viable. The Mall, the creation of the East Mall and the closure of Dangar Street have all become “ageing assets” in the sense that they were designed for a completely different retail and mobility era; contemporary planning practice increasingly emphasises flexible, shared and place-led street approaches that enable access while still prioritising pedestrian comfort and activity —an approach embedded as a key focus of the Vitality Plan.

## Loss of Heritage Fabric, Replacement with Lower-Quality Built Form, and Chronic Underinvestment

The progressive loss of heritage buildings within Armidale’s city centre has contributed materially to its long-term decline in two interrelated ways. First, demolition has removed distinctive architecture and streetscape continuity that, until at least the 1970s, gave the city centre a strong sense of identity, coherence and visual richness. Second, many demolished buildings have been replaced with lower-quality built form that contributes less to street life, interrupts established rhythms of façades, and weakens the overall experience of the public domain. Rather than reinforcing Armidale’s character, these replacements often detract from it.



*Fossey's building, c1960 and its 1976 replacement. Corner Marsh and Beardy Streets.*

Heritage policy and valuation literature consistently recognise that historic places hold economic as well as cultural value. High-quality heritage environments support tourism appeal, reinforce a town centre’s “brand”, encourage private investment and create places with a clear reason to exist in an increasingly competitive regional context. This is particularly important for Armidale, whose city centre cannot compete with enclosed retail centres on convenience, scale or climate control. Its competitive advantage lies instead in offering a distinctive, memorable experience grounded in authentic streets, buildings and civic spaces.

Where heritage fabric has been lost, that advantage has been eroded. The resulting urban fabric is fragmented, with gaps and visually incoherent or poorly detailed façades replacing once prominent, ornate commercial buildings. These interruptions diminish the pedestrian experience, fail to reward walking, and dilute the identity of the city centre. Over time, this weakens the centre’s capacity to attract both visitor spending and long-term business reinvestment—particularly when compared with nearby New England towns, such as Uralla, whose intact historic cores present a stronger and more coherent main-street experience. The broader planning literature reinforces this point: heritage delivers the greatest value when conserved as part of an integrated urban landscape, not as isolated or token elements.

Within Armidale, the Commercial Heritage Heart at the intersection of Beardy and Faulkner Streets is the clearest indicator of this dynamic. This precinct contains the city’s most intact concentration of commercial heritage buildings—including the Post Office, former Courthouse and Sheriff’s Cottage, Lands Board Office, Imperial Hotel, and former banks and commercial premises—and functions as the symbolic gateway to the city centre. The chronic under-use and under-investment of these assets, particularly over the past decade, is therefore not a localised issue; it is a visible signal of the overall health of the city centre. Their condition directly shapes perceptions of safety, quality, civic pride and investor confidence, reinforcing a cycle of decline that the Vitality Plan seeks to arrest and reverse.

## The mid-1990s highway bypass and the legacy land uses

The construction of the highway bypass fundamentally altered Armidale’s relationship with regional traffic movement. As most bypassed towns can attest, the dynamics of the centre are fundamentally changed overnight, however, the impacts are felt for decades after. By removing through-traffic from the city centre, countless numbers of travelling visitors no longer “arrive” in Armidale and make a conscious decision to stop. Rather, a concerted effort must be made to visit the bypassed centre. This loss of incidental visitation reduced spontaneous spending that once supported fuel, food and impulse retail along key approach streets, weakening the city centre’s role as a natural stopping point within the regional network.

In the years immediately preceding the bypass, Council and local businesses were already grappling with how to keep the eastern entry of Beardy Street commercially viable under changing traffic conditions. The solution that came to fruition in 1992, and that remains to this day, was an attempt at maintaining a pedestrian-friendly environment while still capturing vehicle-borne trade and accessibility expectations at the city centre’s eastern approach. However, once the bypass removed the city centre’s incidental passing trade, this hybrid approach was left without the conditions it was implicitly designed to manage. The East Mall legacy now provides neither a clearly vehicle-legible main-street environment nor a fully pedestrianised place of high amenity. The outcome is a compromised public domain that delivers neither the convenience motorists expect nor the quality and legibility pedestrians require, effectively leaving a legacy format that underperforms on both sets of criteria.

Further to this though, the long-term land-use legacy of the former highway route has compounded this impact. Marsh Street in particular retains vehicle-oriented uses such as car yards, mechanical workshops and service stations that were established when it functioned as a primary highway through the city centre.

Today these uses typically present large setbacks to the road, wide and numerous driveway entrances, large paved areas, display yards, blank façades and inward-facing buildings, all of which further degrade urban quality by removing visual interest and reducing passive surveillance. Streets work best when activities inside buildings are visible and when there are “eyes on the street” throughout the day. From a town-planning perspective, the existing form undermines walkability, limits passive surveillance and creates streets that people move through quickly rather than linger within.

From a strategic planning perspective, this is particularly damaging when such uses occupy gateway locations or key sites within the city

centre, as they shape first impressions and signal how a place has failed to transform even 30 years after the bypass occurred. Instead of announcing arrival into a vibrant regional centre, these built forms reinforce the perception that the city centre is stuck in time, fragmented, car-dominated and no longer focused on people. Addressing this condition typically requires a long-term transition strategy by encouraging redevelopment toward mixed-use buildings, smaller front setbacks, active frontages and pedestrian-oriented design that reconnects these streets to the life, economy and identity of the city centre; a shift that the Vitality Plan explicitly seeks to address.



*Ford mechanical workshops and showroom facing the New England Highway (Marsh Street) c1960's. The mechanical garages are still in use.*

## Loss of accommodation and the erosion of after-hours life

Residential accommodation plays a fundamentally different role in a city centre than retail or office activity. From a planning perspective, it provides continuous occupation, creating a population that is present outside standard business hours and that sustains the city centre when retail and offices are closed. Visitors staying overnight and residents living in the centre supply demand for meals, drinks, entertainment, casual shopping, events and services in the early morning, evening and night, which are precisely the times when city centres are most vulnerable to inactivity, leading to crime and undesirable behaviour.

In Armidale, the decline of accommodation within the city centre has removed this critical layer of everyday life. When hotels, pubs and boarding-style accommodation are converted to professional offices, medical suites or consulting rooms, the land use shifts from one that operates across 16–24 hours a day to one that typically vacates the centre from 5 pm to 7 am. This produces a sharp daily “cliff” in activity. Many city centre streets function reasonably well during business hours, however, they quickly empty, resulting in a centre that feels dormant for much of the day and night, particularly the Beardy Street Mall.

From an urban design and safety perspective, this loss of night-time presence has compounding effects. People are less willing to linger, meet friends after work, or attend evening events when there are fewer others around. Reduced foot traffic weakens passive surveillance with fewer “eyes on the street”, which in turn affects perceptions of safety and comfort, even if actual crime levels are low. In regional cities like Armidale, where the city centre already competes with dispersed, car-oriented alternatives, these perceptions matter greatly in shaping behaviour.

The absence of an after-hours population also undermines the viability of hospitality and cultural uses. Cafés, pubs, restaurants and small bars rely on a predictable evening market. Without residents or overnight visitors close by, these businesses are forced to rely almost entirely on special

events, weekends or seasonal peaks. This raises commercial risk, discourages new operators, and leads to shorter trading hours, reinforcing the sense that “nothing happens” in the city centre of an evening or at night.

In Armidale’s case, this issue is heightened as a large proportion of it’s remaining accommodation is located outside the city centre, such as along the old highway alignment. Consequently those visitors sleep, eat and socialise elsewhere, bypassing the very streets that need activity to remain viable. This further dilutes the city centre’s ability to operate as the social and economic heart of the region.

From a strategic planning standpoint, centres that lose accommodation lose their ability to function beyond daytime hours, weaken their night-time economy, and struggle to sustain safety, atmosphere and vitality. Reintroducing residential and visitor accommodation into the Armidale City Centre is therefore not about tourism alone; it is about restoring a permanent and visible population that supports everyday life, underpins evening activity, and rebalances the centre away from its fragile 9-to-5 model.



*Imperial Hotel 1964. At the time the building hosted a pub, numerous shows and accommodation totalling over 30 rooms.*

## **The proliferation of big-box retail and its impact on the Armidale City Centre**

In Armidale, the movement of anchor retail tenancies away from Beardy Street did not occur slowly over time, instead, it accelerated rapidly in the mid-2000s, when several major large-format retail centres expanded or consolidated almost simultaneously. During this period, The Armidale Plaza, Armidale Central and The Armidale Food Emporium all grew in scale and prominence, fundamentally reshaping where and how everyday shopping trips occurred.

This moment marked a turning point for the city centre. Rather than trips beginning on Beardy and Dangar Street and spilling outward through the surrounding grid, the new centres were designed as self-contained destinations. They concentrated supermarkets, specialty retail, services and food within inward-facing layouts, supported by extensive free parking and weather-protected access. In many cases, parking provision exceeded pragmatic demand, reinforcing the appeal of these centres as the most convenient locations for routine daily errands.

From a town-planning perspective, anchor tenants such as supermarkets are powerful generators of movement. When these anchors relocated away from Beardy and Dangar Street in quick succession, they re-oriented the geometry of daily life in Armidale. Multi-purpose trips that once passed through the traditional city centre, for example, grocery shopping combined with banking, cafés, specialty shops or casual browsing, were absorbed entirely within planned centres. As a result, Beardy Street and Dangar Street lost the incidental foot traffic that supports small-scale retail and hospitality in regional cities.

The timing was critical for Armidale which experienced probably the most profound change within a space of only a few years. Because multiple centres expanded or repositioned at the same time, the Armidale City Centre did not have the opportunity to adjust its role or diversify its function in response. The loss of anchors was not offset by increased residential density, stronger night-time activity, or new civic or institutional

generators. Retail trade was displaced without a parallel strategy to replace the underlying source of daily activity.

The physical form of these developments also compounded the impact. Large-format retail in Armidale has generally been delivered as vehicle-oriented precincts, with buildings set behind or on top of expansive car parks with primary entrances focused inward. Service docks, blank façades and utility edges often face public streets and, most disruptively, the Dumaresq Creeklands. Rather than contributing to the public realm, these edges function as back-of-house space, detracting from the city centre experience by breaking walking journeys and discouraging movement between precincts, and generally degrading the appeal of the city from the heritage centre it purports to be.

Collectively, the rapid proliferation of big-box retail in the mid-2000s did not simply compete with the Armidale City Centre, instead, it completely redefined the city’s hierarchy. Planned centres became the default locations for everyday life, while the traditional centre was left pursuing retail relevance without the structural advantages needed to compete, and instead retaining legacy infrastructure like the Beardy Street Mall that can no longer compete with the big-box shopping experience. Addressing this legacy now requires repositioning the city centre as more than a shopping precinct, restoring its role as a place for living, working, learning and everyday civic life, a fundamental a shift that the Vitality Plan explicitly seeks to address.



*Armidale Food Emporium constructed in 2002 showing internal facing ‘Big Box’ shopping centre with surrounding carparking.*

## **Growth of service uses with opaque shopfronts and its impact on city-centre vitality**

The increasing concentration of service-based uses, such as NDIS-supported providers, real estate agents, banks, financial services, and professional practices have all congregated within the Armidale city centre, which reflects a land-use economics issue expressed spatially. These uses tend to be financially resilient because they rely on appointments, referrals, contracts or government funding streams rather than walk-in trade or impulse spending. As a result, they are often able to afford higher rents and longer lease terms than cafés, small retailers or hospitality businesses, particularly in periods of economic uncertainty.

In Armidale, this dynamic has had clear spatial consequences. Prime ground-floor locations along Beardy Street and key connecting streets are increasingly occupied by uses that do not require visibility, foot traffic or street engagement to function successfully. Many of these businesses operate primarily during business hours, have limited customer turnover, and serve clients who attend by appointment rather than by browsing. From an urban perspective, these uses contribute little to the public life of the street and in some cases actively detract from the city experience.

The built form that typically accompanies these uses compounds the problem. Opaque glazing, blinds, signage-heavy windows, internal partitions and closed doors are common, resulting in shopfronts that offer minimal visual interest or invitation from the footpath. Even where buildings remain technically occupied, the street experience can feel inactive, quiet and unobserved. Over time, long runs of these frontages diminish passive surveillance, reduce perceived safety, and make streets feel less welcoming, particularly outside peak daytime hours.

This trend has a displacement effect. Small retailers, cafés and hospitality venues are inherently higher-risk and more sensitive to fluctuations in foot traffic, seasonal demand, and discretionary spending. When they are priced out of prime

locations or struggle to maintain viable trading hours due to reduced pedestrian activity, they either relocate to secondary streets, move to cheaper edge-of-centre locations, or close entirely. In Armidale's case, this has contributed to the hollowing out of core streets. Evidence of the relocation of cafés and hospitality venues from Armidale city centre is extremely obvious, with a clear pattern emerging in Armidale's café and small-hospitality scene over the past decade where many of the city's most successful venues have migrated out of the traditional retail core and into semi-residential neighbourhoods.

From a strategic planning perspective, the issue is not the presence of service uses per se, but their unchecked dominance in the most visible and valuable parts of the city centre and their ability to pay higher rents and secure longer-term leases is. Without intervention, this pattern risks locking in a low-activation equilibrium where streets remain technically occupied but lack the intensity, diversity and everyday life required for a vibrant regional city centre. Rebalancing this mix requires not just active-street frontage controls, but a broader focus on residential population, extended trading activity and land-use diversity as the foundations of long-term vitality.

## **Tightly held ownership, long-term vacancy and chronic underinvestment**

Long-term vacancy and underinvestment represent one of the most persistent and visible constraints on the vitality of the Armidale City Centre. From a town-planning perspective, this is a classic form of market failure: where buildings are held for extended periods, often for taxation, portfolio balancing or external business interests rather than being actively redeveloped, leased, sold, or reinvested. In these circumstances, vacancy becomes detached from local demand and economic conditions, allowing buildings to sit idle regardless of their strategic importance to the city centre virtually entrenches underinvestment, fragments the urban fabric and signals that the city, and the broader region is in long-term decline.

In Armidale, this issue is particularly evident in a

number of prominent, centrally located buildings developed during the 1970s that are now vacant, partially vacant or visibly under-invested. Despite occupying large key sites on primary streets and approach routes, these buildings have remained underutilised for long periods, contributing to a perception of stagnation and decline within the city centre.

The planning impacts of this condition are severe and cumulative. Many of these structures are large, inward-focused buildings from an era when architectural responses prioritised internalised layouts over engagement with the street or recognition of heritage. Today, their original design characteristics, deep floor plates, limited glazing and blank, uninteresting façades collectively make re-use more complex and costly without deliberate intervention. Importantly, these buildings do not exist in isolation: their inactivity discourages neighbouring owners from investing, reinforces conservative leasing behaviour, and suppresses confidence across the broader city centre. As a result, underinvestment becomes self-reinforcing, with buildings sitting at their "lowest ebb" for decades rather than transitioning to new roles that reflect contemporary city-centre needs.

This condition also directly undermines other revitalisation efforts. Public domain upgrades, events and activation initiatives struggle to gain traction when major sites remain visibly abandoned. The message sent to residents, investors and visitors is that the city centre is not moving forward, even when other changes are occurring.

Successfully addressing long-term vacancy in Armidale will require a coordinated and proactive response. Experience elsewhere shows that intervention is often necessary to break inertia through incentives for reinvestment, planning flexibility that supports adaptive reuse, targeted partnerships, or stronger expectations around maintenance and activation of key sites. Without this, the continued presence of long-vacant, under-invested buildings will remain a structural barrier to restoring confidence, activity and long-term vitality in the Armidale City Centre.

## Reduced on-campus UNE student and staff presence

The University of New England has long been one of Armidale's most important anchor institutions, supporting the city centre through a combination of student spending, staff employment, daily foot traffic and demand for hospitality, accommodation and services. When students and staff are physically present in Armidale, they contribute to weekday and evening activity, sustain cafés, pubs and small retailers, and help underpin a level of everyday vibrancy that extends beyond standard business hours.

In recent years, however, the scale, continuity and predictability of both student and staff presence in Armidale has declined, with direct consequences for the city centre. This shift has been driven by two reinforcing structural changes: the rapid expansion of online and flexible learning and working arrangements—accelerated during the COVID-19 period—and the transition from a traditional two-semester academic year to a three-trimester model.



*Present day Beardy Street Mall - mid week, mid summer.*

For the Armidale City Centre, the combined effect of fewer students and fewer staff is significant. Hospitality, food and entertainment venues—traditionally reliant on university-related trade—face sustained reductions in demand, especially outside peak teaching periods. Many businesses struggle to maintain extended trading hours when large sections of their core customer base are absent for weeks or months at a time. This reduces employment opportunities, discourages new operators, and reinforces perceptions that the city centre is quiet or inactive outside limited windows.

More broadly, the reduced presence of students and staff weakens Armidale's after-hours economy and removes groups that typically animate public space, support cultural activities, and contribute to informal street life. From a town-planning perspective, this loss of intensity and diversity undermines the conditions required for a successful, resilient city centre.

While UNE will remain central to Armidale's identity and future, the city centre can no longer assume a stable or continuous university population as a given. Instead, strengthening city-centre vitality, through housing, mixed-use development and a richer cultural and social offering positions Armidale as a more attractive destination for students, increasing the likelihood that they choose to live in town for the experience of Armidale, even where online learning options exist. By broadening the city centre's role and appeal, Armidale can position the experience of living in the city—its streets, culture and daily life—as a draw for students, even where online study remains an option.

## Underinvestment and a fragmented public domain

Long-term underinvestment in the public domain, combined with a fragmented legacy of past interventions, has significantly weakened the structure, legibility and competitiveness of the Armidale City Centre. Streets and public spaces across the centre reflect multiple eras of design, each responding to different planning priorities, funding conditions and assumptions about how the city centre should function. The result is a public realm that feels inconsistent, dated and difficult to interpret as a coherent whole.

From a town-planning perspective, this fragmentation matters. In contemporary place-led revitalisation practice, investment in streets and public space is not simply cosmetic “beautification”. High-quality public realm is a core economic tool: it improves comfort and accessibility, supports walking and lingering, enhances perceptions of safety, enables evening and night-time activity, and sends a strong signal of confidence to the private sector. In Armidale, the absence of a sustained, centre-wide program focused explicitly on walkability, connectivity, and day-to-night activation has limited the impact of past upgrades and reduced their ability to drive broader change.

Where earlier works have not been renewed or adapted, ageing infrastructure reinforces the perception that the city centre is no longer the region's primary destination. Surfaces, lighting, furniture and layouts in areas such as The Mall and the East Mall reflect outdated approaches to movement and street use and no longer align with how people expect town centres to function. Rather than reading as flexible, people-focused spaces, they often feel fixed in time and disconnected from surrounding streets.

Compounding this is a series of structural legacy interventions that are particularly difficult to reverse or retrofit. Decisions such as the closure of Dangar Street, the pedestrianisation of Beardy Street, the configuration of the East Mall, and the

dominance of the Moore Street car park have fundamentally reshaped movement patterns within the city centre. These were significant, high-impact changes made with the best intentions of their era, but they now constrain how the centre operates and adapts.

Critically, these legacy elements cannot be undone incrementally or opportunistically. Any attempt to modify or replace them requires significant investment and a strong, coherent planning framework. Without this, there is a real risk that piecemeal upgrades simply replace one set of urban design problems with another, further fragmenting the centre rather than strengthening it.

For a regional city like Armidale, where resources are finite, and expectations are high, public domain investment must be strategic, coordinated and grounded in clear country-town priorities: improving walkability, restoring legibility, supporting local business, and creating streets that work for everyday life as well as events. Without a unified approach, ongoing underinvestment and ad-hoc change will continue to undermine the city centre's role as the civic, commercial and social heart of the New England region.

### Relocation of civic and cultural anchors away from the city-centre core

Civic and cultural institutions are essential to the long-term success of city centres because they generate reliable, all-day visitation that is not dependent on retail cycles. Facilities such as libraries, galleries, visitor centres, cinemas and civic buildings attract a wide cross-section of the community, including students, families, older residents, professionals and visitors and do so throughout the week and across extended hours. When located in the commercial core, these uses stabilise foot traffic, support surrounding businesses, and reinforce the city centre's role as the shared civic heart of the region.

In Armidale, a series of decisions over time have weakened this foundation by dispersing major civic and cultural uses away from the city-centre core. The relocation of the Armidale Library to the edge of the city centre is a particularly clear example. This decision was made despite a long history of earlier plans and strategies that consistently identified a new or expanded library as a cornerstone civic anchor within the commercial core. Locating the library outside the core represents a short-term, site-driven response made in the absence of clear place-based judgement about how civic infrastructure supports city-centre vitality.



A similar issue applies to the Visitor Information Centre, which remains located on the former New England Highway. While this location once made sense when through-traffic passed directly through the city, the highway bypass has fundamentally changed visitor movement patterns. Today, the Visitor Information Centre would be far better placed within the city centre itself, where it could encourage exploration on foot, support local businesses and reinforce first impressions of Armidale as a walkable regional capital rather than a drive-through destination.

The New England Regional Art Museum (NERAM) presents another missed opportunity. Its current location reflects 1970s and 80s decentralisation thinking, when cultural institutions were deliberately separated from commercial centres and set within stand-alone precincts. While NERAM is a high-quality cultural asset, its real civic home is the Armidale City Centre, where it could function as a daily generator of activity, support cafes and retail, and contribute to evening and weekend life. Contemporary town-planning practice overwhelmingly supports the integration of cultural institutions into city-centre locations for precisely these reasons.

Critically, Armidale already contains multiple well-located redevelopment sites within the city centre that are ideally suited to major civic and cultural uses. Vacant or under-utilised sites in prominent core locations represent a missed opportunity to repair the urban fabric, activate streets and anchor long-term investment. When civic institutions are placed on the periphery, these opportunities are squandered, and the centre becomes increasingly reliant on discretionary retail and office use.

The lesson for Armidale is clear: civic and cultural infrastructure should be used deliberately as a city-centre-shaping tool. Without a strong commitment to locating these anchors in the commercial core, the city centre will continue to lose its ability to perform as the social, cultural and economic heart of the New England region.

## Urban sprawl, low residential catchment and increasing permeability to other towns

The Armidale City Centre operates with a limited residential catchment within walking distance, which significantly weakens its ability to sustain everyday activity. Successful city centres rely on a critical mass of people living close enough to walk to shops, cafés, services and public spaces as part of daily routines. In Armidale, residential density drops sharply near the centre, meaning there is a small natural walk-up population to support activity outside peak business hours.

This condition is reinforced by the physical form of the city centre's edges. Large areas surrounding the core are occupied by non-residential or low-activity uses, including the racecourse, sports grounds, schools, churches and extensive open space associated with the Creeklands. While some of these uses are important citywide assets, together they act as buffers rather than generators of daily foot traffic and general visitation. The result is a city centre that is functionally "islanded," disconnected from surrounding residential areas by uses that do not place people on the street throughout the day.

In this context, Armidale remains heavily car-dependent, and the effectiveness of the city centre relies on convenient, intuitive access. Where access is perceived as difficult due to street closures, reduced on-street parking, one-way traffic arrangements or unclear arrival points, people make rational choices to go elsewhere. This behaviour has intensified as car convenience has increased and regional travel times have reduced. Unlike previous generations, residents of Armidale now have the ability to easily drive to nearby towns for specific experiences or larger retail offers.

Contemporary development patterns have significantly altered how Armidale relates to its city centre. The dominant forms of modern housing growth are rural-residential and low-density lifestyle subdivisions located well beyond the urban core, meaning a growing proportion of residents now live several kilometres from the city centre. At the same time, improved roads, higher car ownership and reduced travel times have made it easier for residents to bypass the city centre entirely, choosing instead to drive to surrounding towns like Uralla for heritage and destination experiences, or to Tamworth or the coast for larger retail and leisure opportunities, rather than navigate a city centre that feels harder to access or less rewarding.

From a town-planning perspective, this represents a structural vulnerability. Without higher residential density near the core, and without an access and parking experience that competes with out-of-town alternatives, the city centre struggles to retain local spending. Addressing this issue requires more than incremental change, instead; it demands a deliberate strategy to bring people closer to the centre, reduce friction for access, and re-establish the city centre as the most convenient and compelling place to spend time and money in Armidale.

## Seasonal climate extremes and their impact on city centre use

Climate plays a critical but often under-acknowledged role in the success or failure of a city centre, because it directly shapes how people use streets, public spaces and businesses on a daily basis. In a place like Armidale—characterised by hot, dry summers and long, cold winters—climate acts as a powerful filter on public life, determining when people are willing to linger, socialise and spend time in the city centre.

In hot, dry summers, exposure becomes a major constraint. Streets and public spaces that lack shade, street trees, awnings or deep verandahs quickly become uncomfortable, particularly during the middle of the day. High temperatures discourage walking between destinations, shorten visit times and push people toward air-conditioned, car-oriented environments such as shopping centres or home. Without climate-responsive design, the city centre loses casual foot traffic, incidental spending and the spontaneous activity that supports cafés, retail and street life. Businesses become reliant on brief, purpose-driven visits rather than longer, higher-value stays.

Armidale's long, cold winters present an equally significant challenge. Cold air, frost, wind and limited winter sunlight can make streets and public spaces feel inhospitable, particularly in the early morning and evening. If footpaths, building entrances and public spaces are exposed or poorly oriented, people tend to minimise time outdoors, avoid evening activity and reduce discretionary trips into the centre. This weakens after-hours trade, shortens business operating windows and undermines the city centre as a social and cultural destination during much of the year.

The combined effect of hot summers and cold winters is a reduction in the number of “comfortable hours” when people are willing to spend time outside. In climates like Armidale’s, city centres succeed only when they are carefully designed to moderate climate extremes. Where this does not occur, activity retreats indoors or disperses to locations that offer greater thermal comfort, eroding the role of the city centre as the primary place of gathering and exchange.

However, climate can also strengthen city-centre vitality when it is explicitly addressed. In Armidale, this means prioritising strong passive climate responses: continuous street verandahs that provide summer shade and winter shelter; buildings that frame streets to block wind and capture winter sun; street trees and landscaping that cool the public realm in summer without excessively shading it in winter; and materials, seating and lighting that encourage year-round use. Well-designed streets can become comfortable microclimates even when broader conditions are harsh.

Climate also influences land-use intensity and timing. A city centre with a strong residential population is more resilient to climatic extremes, because activity is driven by local residents rather than discretionary visitors alone. Likewise, compact, walkable centres with short distances between destinations reduce exposure and make walking viable in more conditions.

For Armidale, climate is therefore not a peripheral issue—it is central to city-centre vitality. Without deliberate, climate-responsive design, public life will continue to contract to short windows and sheltered environments. With the right interventions, however, the city centre can function as a comfortable, attractive place in all seasons, supporting longer visits, stronger street life and a more resilient local economy year-round

## **Structural Local Government Reform and Fiscal Constraint**

A significant and often overlooked driver of long-term decline in the Armidale city centre has been the combined impact of State-imposed rate pegging and successive State-forced local government mergers, which together have constrained Council’s ability to sustain focused investment in its principal urban centre.

Rate pegging in New South Wales limits the annual growth of a council’s general income, primarily rates revenue. While this mechanism is intended to protect ratepayers and allow councils to broadly keep pace with operating cost increases, it does not create capacity for new, large-scale or transformational investment. In practice, rate-pegged revenue growth is largely absorbed by rising costs and the maintenance of existing assets, leaving little discretionary funding for place-based renewal such as city-centre streetscapes, public-domain upgrades or heritage activation. For city centres where renewal typically requires concentrated, multi-year capital investment, this creates a structural disadvantage, with improvement deferred unless external grant funding can be secured.

These fiscal constraints have been compounded by changes to local government boundaries. The merger of Armidale City Council with Dumaresq Shire in 2000 expanded Council’s responsibilities from a compact urban municipality to a predominantly rural area. This was followed in 2016 by the forced amalgamation with Guyra Shire, creating Armidale Regional Council—an LGA of more than 6,000 square kilometres with a highly dispersed population and extensive infrastructure obligations.

While amalgamation increased the geographical scale of the Council, it also multiplied service and asset responsibilities without a corresponding expansion in revenue-raising capacity. Armidale Regional Council is now responsible for maintaining extensive networks of regional roads,

bridges, drainage systems, villages and community facilities, alongside its urban responsibilities. Essential works, such as road maintenance, bridge safety, water and sewer upgrades and rural service delivery inevitably dominate capital programs because failure to address them carries immediate risk. By contrast, city-centre improvements, while strategically critical, are easier to postpone year-by-year.

For Armidale, the result has been a dilution of focus. Despite being the civic, economic and symbolic heart of the region, the city centre has had to compete for limited funding against an expanding range of regional priorities. Over time, this has produced fragmented and episodic investment rather than sustained renewal, contributing to visible decline and underperformance.

The Vitality Plan responds to this structural reality by explicitly recognising these constraints and by setting out mechanisms to concentrate attention, coordination and funding on the city centre, allowing it to be treated once again as a regional priority rather than one competing item among many in an enlarged and resource-constrained local government area.

## What this analysis implies for the Armidale City Centre Vitality Plan

Collectively, the issues identified in this analysis point to a city centre that has been steadily weakened by structural, spatial and economic change rather than short-term decline. Reduced convenience and legibility, over-reliance on retail, loss of residents and students, the dispersal of civic and cultural anchors, ageing public infrastructure, and competition from car-accessible destinations have all eroded the city centre's ability to function as Armidale's primary place for everyday life. In practical terms, the city centre no longer benefits from sufficient intensity, diversity or continuous presence to sustain itself through traditional market forces alone.

For the Vitality Plan, this means that incremental or single-issue responses will be inadequate. Retail-led activation, aesthetic upgrades, or isolated events cannot repair the underlying structural weaknesses identified. Instead, the planning response must be deliberate, coordinated and place-led, focused on restoring the fundamentals of how the city centre works.

Priority actions must include increasing mixed-use and residential development within the core to rebuild a permanent population; strengthening active frontages and pedestrian amenity along key streets; improving access, legibility and short-stay parking to compete with out-of-town alternatives; and reinvesting in the public realm as essential civic infrastructure rather than discretionary embellishment. Critically, civic, cultural and institutional functions must be leveraged as anchors within the commercial core, using key redevelopment sites to restore all-day reasons to visit.

The core implication is clear: confidence and competitiveness in the Armidale City Centre will only be restored by repositioning it as a compact, mixed-use, civic place. The planning response must therefore prioritise mixed-use and residential intensification, active frontages, better access and legibility, and long-term public realm reinvestment to restore confidence and competitiveness.



