



GORDONVALE

Economic Development Plan



Prepared for Cairns Regional Council by
Cummings Economics
www.cummings.net.au

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Cairns Regional Council commissioned Cummings Economics to research and prepare an Economic Development Plan for Gordonvale.

1.2. Geographical background

Gordonvale has some of the most spectacular scenery in Australia. High mountains rise up above ordered sugarcane fields. Beautiful creeks and rivers come down from the mountains, wind their way through the cane fields and join in a great waterway that breaks through the coast hills to the sea.

For the purposes of this study the area covered is represented by Statistical Area Level 2 Gordonvale-Trinity. The Gordonvale - Trinity Area has a total area of 328.2 km², with an average daily temperature range of 19.5 °C to 27.7 °C and an average rainfall of 1,874 mm each year.

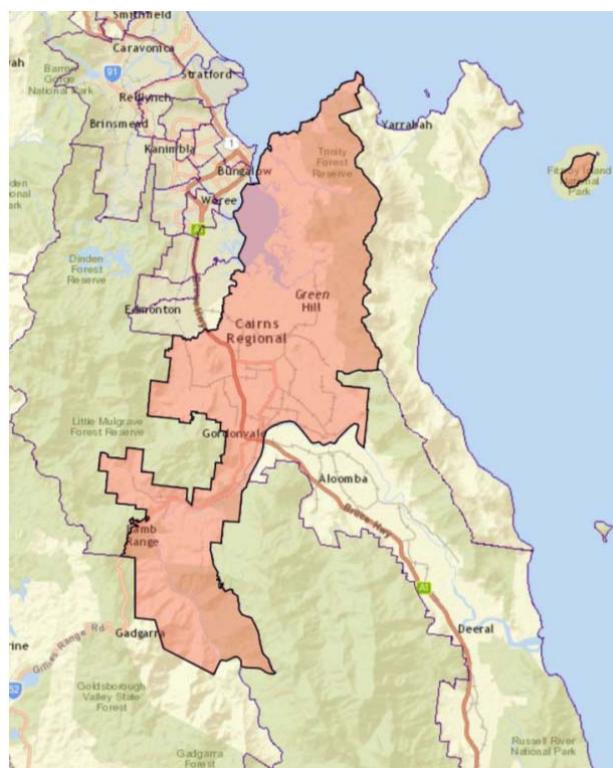
1.3. Economic background

The foundation industry in the area, the sugar industry, has achieved great productivity gains in recent decades but bringing with it strong rationalisation and loss of workforce.

More recent growth influences have been the spread of Cairns' dormitory suburbs and some types of urban fringe activities into the Gordonvale area.

Like many rural towns Gordonvale has town facilities that can service a greater population than the present population.

Gordonvale has experienced strong population growth, growing at 3.8% per annum since 1991. The current population stands at 8,847. Between 1991 and 2015, Gordonvale has grown 69%, representing an addition of 3,600 residents. Gordonvale has an ageing population. Between 2001 and 2015, the proportion of the population in the 50yr+ age group has increased by 7.9%. In Gordonvale there has been a rise in the number of late teens/young adults (aged 15 to 24 years) of about 460 and children (aged 0 to 4 years) of about 180.



Gordonvale has a relatively high Indigenous population. According to the 2011 Census, 11.8% of the Gordonvale population is Indigenous. In comparison, 3.6% of the population of Queensland is Indigenous.



POPULATION

- **8,847** = Estimated Resident Population (ERP) as at 30 June 2015



GROWTH

- **1.6%** = Average annual growth rate over five years
- **2.7%** = Average annual growth rate of over ten years



DEMOGRAPHICS

- **23.5%** aged 0–14 years as at 30 June 2015
- **63.5%** aged 15–64 years
- **13.0%** aged 65+ years
- **37.6 years** = Median age as at 30 June 2015

IMPLICATIONS:

- Gordonvale's population is growing and the economic development issues that have emerged are more to do with the roles of the town's commercial area in that development and the availability of local jobs.
- There is a special need for catering for late teens/young adults; children aged 0-4 years and a general increase in ageing population.
- Past underlying factors shaping the area's economy are likely to continue into the future including continuing spread of urban Cairns into the Gordonvale/Trinity area.
- There is opportunity to incorporate indigenous aspects into tourism.

1.4. Why is it important

The Gordonvale district, along with the Babinda district, is essentially a rural area attached for local government administrative purposes to the major regional city of Cairns. These rural areas can have different needs and priorities to the urban area.

However their population is equivalent to Douglas Shire and other shires that devote substantial resources to promotion of tourism and economic development.

2. STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

2.1. Three levels of strategy

The strategy has three levels:

- 1) Stimulation of activities that earn income from outside the area like agriculture, tourism and some other industry and services;
- 2) Improvement of the service structure of the towns; and
- 3) Connectivity with Cairns.

Gordonvale's population has been growing due to an increased dormitory population related to Cairns. However, town businesses are reported to be declining. The key need is for strategies aimed at reducing leakage of business and employment into Cairns at the expense of the town centre. This involves resolving social, town planning and infrastructure issues.

For Gordonvale, the tourism strategy especially aims to insert the classic historic sugar mill town into tourism and develop facilities to cater for a role in inter-regional sports.

Mulgrave Sugar Mill is already a major operation in manufacturing in the region. A main opportunity and issue for Gordonvale relates to expansion of that role and development of associated industrial land.

2.2. Three broad fields of action

There are three broad fields of action:

- A need for marketing of the area – not just to tourists but as a place to invest, to do business and to live.
- A need for investment in product development:
 - In tourism, in agriculture, industry and services that earn income from outside the region,
 - In services that impinge on investing and doing business and living in the area.
- A need for a governmental framework – local, state and federal that encourages economic progress.

3. MARKETING

3.1. General and Tourism

3.1.1. Role of Council

While much marketing relating to economic development of an area is undertaken by non-government entities, there is a need for Council, on behalf of the community:

- To play a strategic role in its own right;
- To assist business and local efforts;
- To use its influence with other levels of government to achieve plans and objectives.

3.1.2. Need to lift area's "presence"

There are substantial fields in which the 'presence' of the Council area south of the city (in tourism, for investment, for doing business, for residence), is below what could be expected given the area's location, potential and also its level of population compared with many other similar towns/areas. The marketing element of the strategy and plan aims to lift that presence.

Council should work with local tourist operators, key stakeholders and Tourism Tropical North Queensland to identify Gordonvale tourism product (existing and potential) and provide input to and recommendations on marketing activities.

It is important to ensure that Gordonvale and surrounding regions are included in the tourism marketing and content distribution strategy for Tropical North Queensland. Content should be delivered across all relevant tourism assets including websites, blog, social media platforms, and domestic and international campaign activity.



3.1.3. Marketing names

It is suggested to adopt a name for the Council area south of the city around which images can be built for tourism, investment, business and residence. Having selected a name, slogans or marketing tag lines could be adopted.

There is a need to consider slogans/names/tag lines to be developed that help residents in the new areas identify with Gordonvale and take pride in its progress, shop local and feel part of the community. For tourism, the key marketable product for Gordonvale is the ambience surrounding the mill, the town and Norman Park as a classic historic sugar mill town.

3.1.4. Signage

There is a need to improve basic signage through the area with Cairns Regional Council to play a key role, but also to influence applicable Queensland Government departments.

3.1.5. Brochure material

This part of the strategy involves production of brochures and visitor guiding material. It is suggested that a visitor guide to cover the southern areas of the city, both Babinda and Gordonvale, could be put together with advertising support, especially aimed at road-borne visitors that comprehensively covers the area.

3.1.6. Websites

It is suggested that any brochure and visitor guiding material that is developed be reflected where possible in the Council website and other applicable promotional websites, such as the region's official tourism website www.cairnsgreatbarrierreef.org.au (TTNQ).

3.1.7. Visitor Information Centres

Consideration could be given to establishing a Visitor Information Centre in Gordonvale and there is a need to improve direction signage around the township, such as a visitor information board. Discussions will need to be held with TTNQ in relation to this proposed initiative.

IMPLICATIONS:

- **Compared with other areas along the Far North Tropical Coast, the area is relatively under developed for tourism.**
- **Tourism trends will make the area increasingly attractive to some tourism market segments seeking a non-urban more natural environment less crowded by visitors and less commercialised.**

3.2 Gordonvale's commercial and service centre integration

There is a need for an all-out effort to integrate the new dormitory areas with Gordonvale's main town area as the commercial and service centre.

Infrastructure development and town planning aspects are dealt with in following sections. As part of this however, will be a need for a substantial marketing effort to make residents feel part of an integrated community.

This will need to be implemented in association with the Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce, the business community and other key organisations in Gordonvale.

3.3 Business and Industry – information material

It is proposed that the sections of Council's website and/or printed materials that deal with investment, business and residence be upgraded to include special references and information on Gordonvale.

3.4 Media

It is proposed that Cairns Regional Council, TTNQ and Advance Cairns take opportunities to build up the “presence” of the area in the media in relation to tourism, investment, business and residence.

4. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

4.1. Tourism

4.1.1. RV parking

It is recommended that an overnight RV park be developed along the river adjacent to Gordonvale township. In the meantime, day parking facilities at Gordonvale could be further promoted. The development of a RV dump site in Gordonvale should also be considered.

4.1.2. Walking trails and National Parks facilities

A long-term plan needs to be developed to enhance or extend existing walking trails in the area. However, most of these are in National Parks and it would be necessary to work with the Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing on this. This should include developing plans to cater for expanding need for mountain bike trails.

4.1.3. Waterways

There is already substantial recreational boating and fishing activity in the area that can be promoted and encouraged further.

Before the Daintree River was developed strongly for crocodile viewing and river tours, there was a cruise on the Russell River – the old “*Valetta*”. Part of the Frankland Island cruise is along the Mulgrave River. It is proposed that as part of the concerted campaign to raise tourism in the area, information be gathered with a view to raise interest for the potential operation



of river cruises similar to those that operate on the Daintree River.

4.1.4. Gordonvale: Historic sugar mill town

The Mulgrave Settlers Museum has a key role to play and its presentations could well be expanded. There is a need to more clearly define how a Heritage Townscape can be retained in a growing town centre.

4.1.5. Gordonvale accommodation

At present, there is no substantial accommodation available in Gordonvale apart from a few hotel rooms.

The development of Gordonvale, and especially Alley Park as a regional sporting facility, is leading to increased visitation from around the region for sporting events. The racecourse and golf links in the town also attract visitors.

It is recommended that as part of tourism development initiatives, the case for developing motel type accommodation be highlighted.

4.1.6. Festivals and events

Festivals and events are an important driver of economic growth. There is potential to build on existing events, the Pyramid Race and the Gordonvale Turf Club race meets. Consideration could also be given to developing another major event for Gordonvale.

4.1.7. Sports tourism

Sports tourism is developing as a special category. The facilities at Gordonvale and Alley Park present an opportunity to attract regional activities that will bring visitors who will stay overnight.

4.2. Agricultural Development and Diversification

4.2.1. General

The strategy in relation to agriculture is:

- 1) To hold on to the sugar industry and encourage additional processing and use of its biomass production resources;
- 2) To encourage other diversified agricultural production and processing;
- 3) To maximise cross linkages of the agricultural sector with tourism, including nurseries and gardens.

4.2.2. Sugar Production and Processing

The sugar milling industry is moving into a major new phase where it will produce more than raw sugar and molasses and invest in a range of other income earning streams including co-generation, biofuels, bioplastics and act as a centre for processing other crops. There are possibilities of locating on adjacent industrial land, activities that will benefit from close location to the Mill.

There will be competition from other mills as to where some of this activity is located. For Mulgrave Mill, proximity to the port is an advantage.

It is proposed that Council adopt a strategy of working closely with the Mill along with other key organisations such as Ports North and Advance Cairns to maximise location of activities, jobs and associated development at Gordonvale.

A key need is to ensure the Mulgrave Mill has enough land for expansion of processing including green power and other products and that land is available for co-located industrial activity. It is recommended that existing town planning provisions in relation to industrial land around Gordonvale be reviewed.



4.2.3. Development of other crops and processing

It is proposed that Council assist, where possible, the continuation and further development of other crops and processing:

- Highlighting the range of crops produced in the area;
- Supporting the development of new crops and their processing;
- Encouraging linkages with tourism with a special emphasis on nurseries and gardens.

As part of development of diversified production in the area, special attention will need to be given to transportation, including opportunities to ship overseas via airfreight facilities at Cairns Airport and through container shipping.

It is proposed that Cairns Regional Council stand ready to provide suitable incentives, where there is a substantial economic benefit to the community relative to costs and where assistance is likely to help tip the balance to enable projects to proceed.

4.3. Manufacturing and Industry

Encouragement for manufacturing and other activity located on industrial land will be mainly through ensuring a plentiful supply of properly zoned industrial land. Provision of support and incentives that stimulate industry and employment should be considered. This should include on-going liaison with other levels of government.

4.4. Services

It is clear that Gordonvale is developing some specialisation in health and retirement and aged care facilities. There needs to be a review of likely future demand to ensure that adequate land is available for this type of development.

It is believed that much of the staff for these facilities travel out from Cairns. It is also likely that there will be a need for more “in-home” aged care and again, this is often serviced out of Cairns. There is an opportunity for development of local workforce to meet these needs. There would also seem to be an opportunity for commercial kitchens and laundry to service these facilities.

4.5. Gordonvale’s commercial centre

There are a number of aspects that need attention. The first is the better integration of residential areas with the town centre.

The construction of a bypass around the west of the main Gordonvale centre, without adequate road and footpath integration with the town centre, has led to a raft of unfortunate economic inefficiencies and social consequences.



Most of the Gordonvale area’s business, education, sporting and social facilities lie to the east of the highway. This disconnect is now leading to a move to duplicate or mislocate facilities along and on the other side of the highway.

It is proposed that a coordinated plan be developed in association with other levels of government to better integrate the new suburbs with the existing town centre.

As part of this plan, there is a need for the State Government to liaise with Cairns Regional Council more closely about location of State Government activities in the area and to invest in works that will help integrate Gordonvale as a viable functioning town. In the process, this will help reduce leakage and revitalise business in the town centre. It will also help reduce some of the social problems that have developed in the western area.

The second relates to land tenure, usage and town planning in the main town centre.

It is recommended that Council liaise with the State Government in relation to the blocks of government land to the south of Norman Park with a view to Council acquiring the land and promoting its development for town centre functions including for appropriate State Government facilities as well as commercial facilities.

4.6. Connectivity with Cairns

From Council's "Our Cairns" survey (2016), the most common response to the question of "Mayor for a Day" related to improving public transport. In Gordonvale, this was added to by calls for upgrading the highway and more cycle ways. Council will soon develop a Discussion Paper on the Future Sustainable Public Transport Options for Cairns Regional Council Area. This Paper will consider long-term public transport solutions for the Cairns Region including Gordonvale.

4.7. Business development

It is proposed that an effort be made to ensure services available in Cairns to assist businesses in their management are extended through to the business communities in Gordonvale, eg Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland programs currently being offered, and Council's Urban Spaces Program.



5. GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK

4.8. Incentives policy

The delivery of the strategy outlined will, in part, depend on a willingness to flexibly incentivise desirable developments where economic benefits very clearly outweigh costs and where incentives will make a difference.

4.9. Other levels of government

The investigations leading to this strategy indicate that other levels of government, especially State Government agencies, are acting independently and without regard to Council policies and community preferences.

It is proposed that Cairns Regional Council take a proactive approach in relation to such matters and that this Economic Development Strategy and Plan, as part of its implementation process, be workshopped with the State Government.

In relation to Gordonvale, this should especially be in reference to issues such as the relocation of the Fire Brigade and Police Station from the town centre, lack of connectivity of the western side of the highway, the resulting vacuum being left in the town centre and the future of government land.

4.10. Future population and economic growth

In the light of the likely future growth of population and economic activity in the Gordonvale area and a range of issues raised in research and strategy formulation, there is a need to consider a review of town planning in the Gordonvale area.

6. IMPLEMENTATION

It is recommended that a special committee / working group be set up to meet regularly to oversee the implementation of this Plan including representatives of Cairns Regional Council, the Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce and community organisations.

Priorities

- 1.** Short term (within 6 months)
- 2.** Medium term (within 18 months)
- 3.** Long term (within 24 months)

	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Partners</u>
PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT		
Tourism		
Promote RV day parking at Gordonvale. Consider establishment of a RV dump point.	1	CRC, TTNQ
Further develop and promote the Great Pyramid Race and Gordonvale Turf Club Races.	2	CRC, TTNQ, GCC
Highlight opportunities for motel type development at Gordonvale in association with sporting events development.	3	CRC
Initiate a proposal to develop a RV Park adjacent to the river at Gordonvale	3	CRC
Agriculture, Manufacturing and Industry		
Strong engagement and assistance to bring about plans for major investment in Mulgrave Mill power generation and further processing and development of co-located industrial opportunities.	1	CRC, Mulgrave Mill
Assistance in ensuring that business education and assistance programs are extended to Gordonvale business communities.	1	CRC, CCIQ
Ongoing liaison with agriculture, processing and industry sectors to help achieve development.	2	CRC, TTNQ, DSD, GCC
Review town planning provisions for industrial land around Gordonvale	3	CRC
Services		
Initiate with health sector, review of Gordonvale's potential in the provision of health service facilities with a view to informing town planning infrastructure needs, workforce and service development opportunities.	3	CRC
MARKETING		
Host a workshop with tourism operators and interested parties to identify key attributes and future tourism potential of Gordonvale.	1	TTNQ, GCC
Ensure Gordonvale tourism products are included in the tourism marketing and content distribution strategy for Tropical North Queensland.	2	CRC, TTNQ
CONNECTIVITY		
Investigation of public transport services into Cairns.	2	CRC
GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK		
Proactively seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy.	1	CRC, DSD, DNPSR
Gordonvale's Commercial and Services Integration - Develop plans in conjunction with other levels of government for necessary investment in infrastructure to	1	CRC, DSD,

solve the current economic inefficiencies.

Provide suitable incentives to support development.

2

CRC

Partners:

Cairns Regional Council (CRC)

Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ)

Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland (CCIQ)

Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce (GCC)

Department of National Parks, Sport and Racing (DNPSR)

Department of State Development (DSD)