



GORDONVALE

Economic Development Plan



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

1. INTRODUCTION

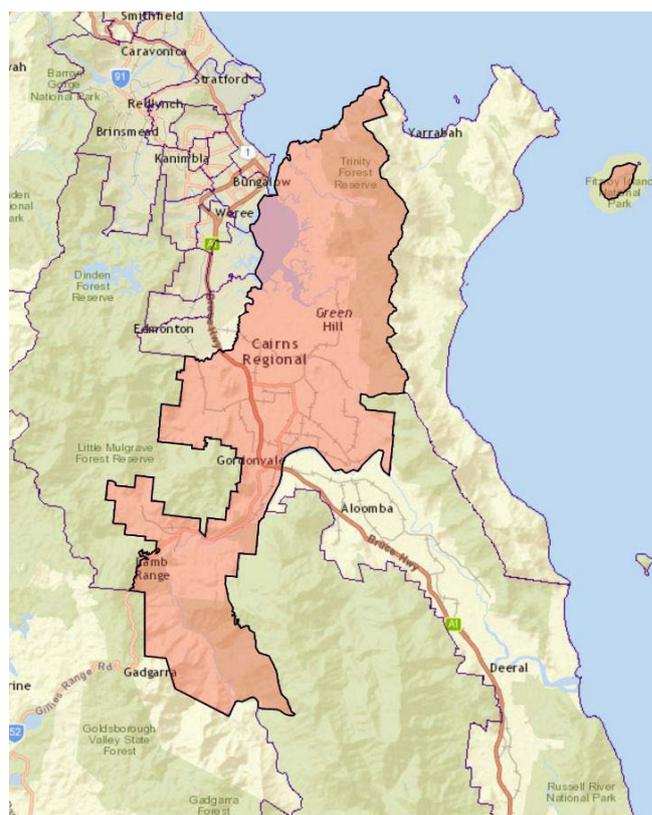
1.1. Background

Cairns Regional Council commissioned Cummings Economics to research and prepare an Economic Development Plan for Gordonvale in 2017. The following updates the Plan to 2019.

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 at 2.1% per annum since 1991. The 2018 population stands at 9,264. Between 1991 and 2019, Gordonvale has grown 77%, representing an addition of 4,023 residents. Gordonvale has an ageing population. Between 2001 and 2019, the proportion of the population in the 50yr+ age group has increased by 7.4%. In Gordonvale, between 2001 and 2015, there was 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, but 2017 figures indicate this trend has plateaued.

Gordonvale has a relatively high Indigenous population. According to the 2016 Census, 11% of the Gordonvale population is Indigenous. In comparison, 4% of the population of Queensland is Indigenous.



POPULATION

- **9,264** = Estimated Resident Population (ERP) as at 30 June 2018



GROWTH

- **+1.8%** = Average annual growth rate over five years
- **+2.2%** = Average annual growth rate over ten years



DEMOGRAPHICS

- **23.6%** aged 0–14 years as at 30 June 2017
- **63.3%** aged 15–64 years
- **13.1%** aged 65+ years
- **38 years** = Median age as at 30 June 2016 Census

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 and children 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 largely rural that can have different needs and priorities to the major urban area of Cairns as a city.

However, their population is more than 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) Public transport connectivity with Cairns.

Gordonvale's population has been growing due to an increased dormitory population related to Cairns. However in 2017, town businesses were reported to be declining. Although this appears to have slowed in the last few years, there is still a need to continue strategies aimed at reducing leakage of business and employment into Cairns at the expense of the town centre.

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.

In part, as a result of the 2017 Plan, substantial upgrades of tourism facilities in Gordonvale is taking place, especially the development of the "Greenpatch" RV park. This, plus prospective investment in new hotel facilities, the Pyramid Track and Kenrick Park upgrade, reinforces the case for stepping up marketing at this point in time.

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. Walsh's Pyramid, overlooking the town, is an iconic feature of the Cairns area landscape.

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.

National Parks are planning a substantial upgrade of tracks on the Pyramid and there is a need to develop clearly signed walking paths between the town/ RV park and the Pyramid trailhead.

3.1.5. Brochure material

A visitor guiding brochure has been produced covering the southern areas of the city, both Babinda and Gordonvale especially aimed at road visitors. This needs to be kept up to date and production continued. Recent and prospective tourism developments indicate it would be timely to produce a Gordonvale brochure and council have recently engaged the Chamber of Commerce to undertake this activity.

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.tropicalnorthqueensland.org.au (TTNQ).

IMPLICATIONS:

- **Compared with other areas along the Far North Tropical Coast, the area is relatively under developed for tourism.**
- **In part, stimulated by earlier versions of this Plan, an increasing tourism “product” is developing in the area that will need to be supported by a step up in marketing activity.**

3.2 Gordonvale's commercial and service centre integration

The 2017 Plan indicated 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. There are signs that the situation is improving but the effort needs to continue. As part of this, will be a continuing need for a marketing effort to make residents feel part of an integrated community.

Action 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 and TTNQ and other relevant organisations 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

The recommendation in the 2017 Plan that an overnight RV park be developed along the river adjacent to Gordonvale township is underway and day parking facilities established at Gordonvale.

There is now a need to develop the access from the RV park into the town area with the proposed Heritage Trail including possible relocation of the Mill Memorial Gate to this path, the development of Mill gardens along the way and identification of points of interest, including the old wartime parachute packing shed.

4.1.2. Gordonvale: Historic sugar mill town

The Mulgrave Settlers Museum needs to be relocated and expanded to fill a visitor information role as well. This could be purpose built in a suitable location in Norman Park or, if suitable, as part of a Master Plan for the area in the old state government precinct.

Gordonvale represents a prime potential location to introduce visitors and residents to the sugar industry.

It is recommended that Council:

- Liaise with Mulgrave Mill to relocate the Mulgrave Settlers Museum from its current site into the town area;
- Discuss with the sugar industry associations, expanded presentations on the sugar industry at Gordonvale;
- Investigate, based on experience elsewhere, the possibility of visitors being able to view and understand operations at the Mill without negative impacts on Mill operations.

4.1.3. Kenrick Park

It is noted that Council has approved the Kenrick Park upgrade project from a District Park to a Destination Park. This is a further opportunity to build on the promotion of Gordonvale with the opportunity for events as well as leveraging connectivity opportunities through a footpath/ bike path strategy between the town centre and Norman Park and Kenrick Park on the western side of the highway. Whilst not in the capex budget forecasts until 2022/23 Council should give consideration strategically to event opportunities and the footpath/bike path strategy formation as part of the economic development planning for Gordonvale, around the Kenrick Park upgrade.

4.1.4. Gordonvale accommodation

At present, there is no substantial accommodation available in Gordonvale apart from a few low grade 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 accommodation be highlighted.

4.1.5. 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.

The Cairns region is developing an international reputation for extreme sporting events (Ironman, the white-water rafting, cycling). It is recommended that the Council and community work with national and international "Trail Runner" groups to seek to turn the Pyramid race and possibly other like challenges from a local to a national/ international event.

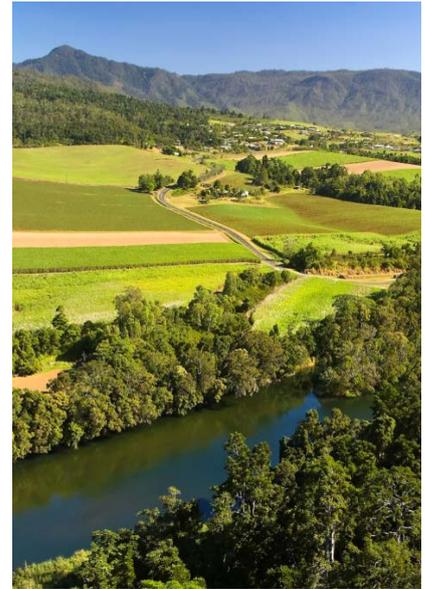
4.1.6. Walking trails and National Parks facilities

National Parks have plans for a major upgrade of walking tracks on the Pyramid and Council will need to work in with this in relation to trail head parking and signed walkway from the town/ RV park area.

4.1.7. 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.



4.1.8. 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 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.

The Queensland Government has decided to establish a major State Development Area for “regionally significant” industry on the eastern side of the railway between Gordonvale and Edmonton. This does not provide an efficient alternative to meeting the need for industrial land co-located with the Mill and Council needs to work with the State Government to ensure that provision of industrial land next to the Mill is given priority.



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. The proposed large State Development Area north of Gordonvale can meet needs for “regionally significant” industries. However, there will be a need for land for locally oriented industrial zoned land.

Land zoned “Emerging Community” is available for development that could see employment in activities like accommodation, aged care, light industries and services supporting tourism and agricultural development.

4.4. Services

It is clear that Gordonvale is developing some specialisation in health and retirement, aged care facilities and education facilities including some especially catering for indigenous population. There needs to be a review of likely future demand to ensure that adequate land is available for this type of development. Consideration should be given to extending education facilities to include TAFE.

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

The 2017 Plan identified there were a number of aspects that needed attention. The first was the better integration of residential areas with the town centre.

Historically, the construction of a bypass around the west of the main Gordonvale centre, without adequate road and footpath integration with the town centre, 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 has been leading to moves to duplicate or mislocate facilities along and on the other side of the highway.

There has been a need for a coordinated plan be developed in association with other levels of government to better integrate the new suburbs with the existing town centre.

The transfer of the fire brigade and the police station to the western side of the highway has exacerbated the problem along with the proposal to establish a Woolworths Centre on the western side of the highway. This project has not proceeded to date.

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.

Latest inquiries with traders in the town centre indicate there has been some improvements in local residents shopping in the town. There is a need to continue a "buy local" campaign especially to new residents.

A move by the Hedley Group to upgrade one of the old hotels in the town centre similar to the successful Red Beret Hotel at Redlynch and to develop accommodation in another, will further strengthen the town centre appeal.

The Council's proposal to upgrade Kenrick Park will help with some of the social problems that have been occurring in that area. There will be a need for strong walkway and cycle way links between it and the town centre that apart from having a tourism value will have a value in integrating the area with the town centre.

There has also been a need to look at 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 the land being made available for acquisition for appropriate commercial activities that complement and promote town centre development and activation. These sites present a rare opportunity to attract new commercial activities that will create employment and contribute to the continued growth and economic viability of the Gordonvale town centre. This is especially timely given the anticipated increase in visitation to the Gordonvale town centre due to factors including planned marketing efforts and the establishment of the Greenpatch reserve as a formal campground.

Any uses should be consistent with the Gordonvale Local Plan CairnsPlan 2016, which states that "the Gordonvale town centre will continue to be the administrative, commercial and industrial centre for the Gordonvale area".

It will be important to the ongoing economic viability of the Gordonvale town centre to make the best possible use of these sites for the purpose of commercial activation. For these reasons, the opportunity for Council to acquire and master plan this site will be paramount in future proofing

the Gordonvale Town Centre activation and its ability to remain a viable district centre and is a town centre development opportunity in the hands of State Government that cannot be lost for the community.



5. GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK

4.6. Incentives policy

The success of the strategy 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.

4.7. Other levels of government

The 2017 investigations leading to the initial strategy developed indicated that other levels of government, especially State Government agencies, were 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 updated 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 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.

4.8. 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 continuing 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 other relevant stakeholders.

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		
Support new developments in tourism infrastructure through support for promotion of Gordonvale to increase visitation.	2	CRC, TTNQ
Further develop and promote the Great Pyramid Race and other events.	2	CRC, GCC, TTNQ
Engage with Mill and others to investigate development of the Visitor Information Centre facilities in association with the Mulgrave Settlers Museum and develop presentation of the sugar industry's history and role in Australia.	3	CRC
Develop and promote Greenpatch camping ground and develop connections with town centre.	2	CRC
Agriculture, Manufacturing, Industry and Business		
Engagement with MSF Sugar and Queensland Government to progress co-located industrial opportunities and SDA development.	3	CRC, Mulgrave Mill
Assistance in ensuring that business education and assistance programs are extended to Gordonvale business communities.	1	CRC, CCIQ
Ongoing liaison with industry sectors to help achieve development	3	CRC, TTNQ, DSD, GCC
Liaise with the State Government in relation to the blocks of government land to the south of Norman Park with a view to the land being made available for acquisition for appropriate commercial activities that complement and promote town centre development and activation.	3	CRC

	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Partners</u>
Ongoing liaison with and support for the Gordonvale & District Chamber of Commerce.	1	CRC, GCC
Services		
Improvement of public facilities and services.	1	CRC
MARKETING		
Engage interested parties to identify key attributes and future tourism potential of Gordonvale.	3	TTNQ, GCC
Ensure Gordonvale tourism products are included in the tourism marketing and content distribution strategy for Tropical North Queensland, especially as new tourism attractions develop including Greenpatch, Pyramid tracks, Visitor Information Centre and accommodation.	1	CRC, TTNQ, DES
CONNECTIVITY		
Investigation of improved public transport services into Cairns.	3	CRC
GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK		
Proactively seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy.	1	CRC, DSD, DES
Gordonvale's Commercial and Services Integration - Develop plans in conjunction with other levels of government for necessary investment in infrastructure.	3	CRC, DSD,
Support development and economic diversification.	3	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 Environment and Science (DES)
 Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (DSD)