ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR BABINDA AND GORDONVALE - PROGRESS REPORT AND UPDATE OF PLANS

Belinda Hutchinson | 1/8/4 | #6158550

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Notes progress made in implementing the Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda for the period July 2018 to June 2019; and

2. Endorses the update of the Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The Gordonvale and Babinda Economic Development Plans (the Plans) were adopted by Council on 14 June 2017. This report sets out the significant progress made in implementing the plans during the period July 2018 to June 2019. Highlights include:

- Funding in the amount of $12,000 (ex GST) plus in-kind support, including premises and maintenance, provided to the Babinda Visitor Information Centre to support visitor information services.
- Funding in the amount of $7,500 (ex GST) provided to the Babinda District Community Association Inc. (Babinda Taskforce) to support provision of services to the community and local businesses.
- Funding of $3,000 (ex GST) provided to the Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce for the production of a Gordonvale tourist brochure.
- $2.38 million project to develop Greenpatch into a formal campground, including a new amenities block, dump point, internal pathways and lighting.
- Council was successful in obtaining $600,000 (ex GST) in funding for the Gordonvale Heritage Trail.
- Council endorsed the $8.7 million Kenrick Street Park and Fisher Road Park Improvement Plan in Gordonvale.
- Over $58,000 (ex GST) in financial and in-kind support was provided for the Great Pyramid Race 2018, Babinda Harvest Festival 2018, Animal Education Day 2018 and Christmas events in both communities.
- Advocacy efforts resulted in the rezoning of Babinda Creek for better crocodile management.
- Permitting and liaison with commercial film/photography operators for filming of TV series and advertisements in Babinda.
- Submission provided on the Draft Far North Regional Transport Plan regarding public transport for Babinda and Gordonvale.
- “Cairns Business Disaster Preparedness Survey” pilot program was undertaken in
Gordonvale.

- $4,300 (ex GST) in Community Sustainability Grants provided to encourage sustainable practices.
- Works to improve resident and visitor experience such as culvert replacement, footpath construction and renewal works and road resealing.

The timeframe for implementation of the 2017 plans was two years. As such, it was considered beneficial to update the Plans with current data and to highlight new opportunities which have arisen. Cummings Economics undertook a review and Plan update in June 2019, in consultation with key stakeholders, to:

- Provide an up-to-date source of information for use by Council and other organisations;
- Identify new opportunities and include corresponding actions;
- Provide additional time to address ongoing or more complex actions;
- Continue to reinforce advocacy efforts; and
- Demonstrate Council’s ongoing commitment to the economic development of Gordonvale and Babinda.

**BACKGROUND:**

Council is committed to supporting sustainable economic growth in Gordonvale and Babinda. Economic Development Plans have been prepared for each community with the aim of increasing economic activity and employment opportunities, encouraging investment, attracting visitation, improving liveability and supporting population growth.

The Plans were developed by independent consultant Cummings Economics, in consultation with Council staff and key stakeholders. The Plans complement existing reports and strategies and build on work which has previously been undertaken or commissioned by Council. Council endorsed the Economic Development Plans for Babinda and Gordonvale in June 2017 and they are publicly available on the Council website.

The Plans outline a strategic framework and corresponding action plan related to:

1. Marketing and promotion;
2. Business and industry development; and
3. Cooperation between all levels of Government.

Although the plans do not have a defined end date, it was originally intended that all actions in the plans would be addressed within a two-year timeframe, concluding in June 2019. Recommended actions were assigned a short, medium or long term priority. In November 2018 a progress report was provided to Council for the first year of the Plans’ implementation covering the period from June 2017 to June 2018.

**COMMENT:**

**Progress update for 2018/19**

As at June 2019, the majority of actions have been completed, whilst a number of the actions require additional time to achieve an optimal outcome. From July 2018 to June 2019, activities focused mostly on tourism product development and marketing, support
of local business groups and events. A description of these activities is provided in the following sections of this report. A summary of progress made against each action identified in the Plans since the previous progress report until June 2019 is provided in Attachment 1 and Attachment 2.

Gordonvale

A key project identified in the Gordonvale Economic Development Plan was the development of the area on the banks of the Mulgrave River, commonly known as Greenpatch. Greenpatch is a popular, informal camping spot and day use area. Following public consultation, a concept plan was endorsed by Council’s Sport and Community Services Committee in April 2018 to enable the site to become a legitimate, free short-stay campground. The concept plan includes a dump point and features upgrades to amenities, picnic shelters, footpaths, landscaping and addition of wayfinding signage. Improvement works commenced in March 2019, with completion expected in September 2019. Formalising the campgrounds will encourage increased visitation through self-drive tourists enabling them to stay longer in Gordonvale and spend more in the township.

Walsh’s Pyramid is a significant natural attraction in Gordonvale, and has been promoted by Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ) via social media. Walsh’s Pyramid featured in a TTNQ editorial piece on “10 Instagram locations near Cairns”, which has had over 2,000 visits. Behana Gorge featured in an editorial piece, “20 Waterfalls near Cairns”, which was the top performing article on the TNQ website in terms of organic visitors to the site. Eleven TTNQ Instagram posts, about Walsh’s Pyramid and Behana Gorge, received over 28,000 views.

Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service have undertaken works including the opening of a new walking track off the main Goldfield Track and installing new trail head and safety signage located at both ends of the Goldfield Track and at Walsh’s Pyramid.

Walsh’s Pyramid is the location for the most important event on the Gordonvale calendar, the Great Pyramid Race. Council has a three-year agreement in place, for 2017 to 2019, to provide financial and in-kind support for this event.

Council also provided funding for the following:

- $3,000 (ex GST) for the production of a Gordonvale tourist map, to be coordinated by the Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce.
- Community Sustainability Grant in the amount of $3,200 (ex GST) provided to Gordonvale Community Gardens;
- Local Event Grant for Animal Education Day, held in September 2018; and
- Community Grant for Carols in the Park, held in December 2018.

In June 2019, Council endorsed an $8.7 million park development in Gordonvale to create a multi-use recreational and community space. The Kenrick Street Park and Fisher Road Park Improvement Plan, to initially be developed in three stages, will rejuvenate and enhance this space. A regional arboretum is one of the features of the multi-million dollar proposal, along with pathways, a boardwalk, play areas, skate bowl and BMX track, fenced dog off leash area, two carparks, an artificial lake and potentially a neighbourhood centre. The proposed development has been provisioned in the current ten-year capital budget for the years 2022/2023 to 2024/2025.

Other Council activities include:
A pilot “Cairns Business Disaster Preparedness Survey” was undertaken in Gordonvale with assistance from the Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce. This was the first step in creating awareness and will guide future actions.

Computer equipment was donated to the Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce.

The Southern Trail brochure, produced by Council, has been popular. It has been reprinted and continues to be distributed through Babinda VIC.

Gordonvale Heritage Trail – Council was successful in obtaining $600,000 (ex GST) in grant funding under the Queensland Government “Works for Queensland” program. Works to commence in 2020.

Council provided a submission to the Department of Transport and Main Roads on the Draft Far North Regional Transport Plan, requesting review of public transport services to/from Gordonvale.

Shade sail renewal completed in Johnson Park.

Works to improve resident and visitor experience such as kerb and channel renewal, pavement rehabilitation and road resealing.

Two school presentations given about water and waste.

Great Northern Clean-up undertaken at Greenpatch.

An important factor which will impact the future development of Gordonvale is the State Development Area (SDA), which was declared by the Queensland Government in November 2018. Council provided a submission to the Queensland Government which resulted in further site investigation and engagement between Council and the State regarding the SDA is ongoing.

Babinda

Council supports the Babinda Taskforce through the provision of $7,500 (ex GST) in funding each year through a Resource and Performance Agreement (1 July 2018 – 30 June 2021). In 2018/19 the Taskforce also received a $1,100 (ex GST) Community Sustainability Grant to produce Boomerang Bags for the local shops. Records show 450 bags have been distributed to local customers by three shopfronts. Council also provided financial support for the Christmas in Babinda Festival.

The Taskforce is a member based organisation with three part-time staff, supported by approximately 20 volunteers, not including volunteers who assist with events. There are currently 167 members, which is an increase of 24 members on the previous year. The Taskforce provides a wide variety of services to the community and local businesses. Projects and activities in 2018/19 include:

- Babinda Museum Project - interior refurbishments almost completed and a diverse collection of museum items compiled.
- Babinda Heritage Walk - a new project promoting streetscape revitalisation.
- Meeting with Hon Kate Jones, Minister for Innovation and Tourism Industry Development and Minister for the Commonwealth Games, regarding the Babinda Walking Trails Project.
- Cooperation with the running of community events including the Babinda RSL Art Show, Chamber of Commerce Employee of the Month and Babinda Harvest Festival and delivery of the Christmas in Babinda Festival.
- Collaboration with the Wet Tropics Biodiversity Foundation and Jaragun Natural Resource Management regarding reserves, parks and sanctuaries providing employment opportunities for Indigenous people.
• Operation of the new Babinda website.

The Babinda Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is the only accredited Visitor Information Centre operating in the Cairns Local Government Area. The VIC is operated by a team of 26 volunteers, providing visitor information services to almost 9,000 visitors each year either face-to-face, over the telephone or online. The VIC maintains a website listing local attractions and businesses. By providing independent information, the VIC encourages visitors to lengthen their stay and use local businesses. The management team coordinates with other accredited VICs to promote the wider area, and in turn have them promote our area. The VIC also works with the museum committee, the Babinda Chamber of Commerce and the Babinda Taskforce to develop tourism potential.

Council supports the Babinda VIC financially and in-kind. Council owns the building where the Babinda VIC operates. The Babinda Depot provides support with gardening work, maintenance and supplies for the public toilet. Operations of the Babinda VIC are funded by Cairns Regional Council via a Resource and Performance Agreement. The three-year agreement (1 July 2018 – 30 June 2021) provides $12,000 (ex GST) in funding on an annual basis.

TTNQ has been promoting Babinda based attractions on social media platforms to increase visitation from domestic and international visitors. For the year to June 2019, Babinda-based Instagram posts received over 43,000 views. The posts with the second and third highest levels of engagement, of all TTNQ posts for that time period, both featured photographs of the Babinda Boulders. The Southern Trail brochure, produced by Council, has been reprinted and continues to be distributed with assistance from the Babinda VIC.

Appearance in commercial films and photographs is a positive way to increase recognition and interest in a location. Council issued five permits for commercial filming or photography in the Babinda area. This included two TV series, one TV commercial, one online commercial and filming and photography for TTNQ marketing collateral.

Babinda Creek is a popular swimming area for residents and visitors. To improve safety, Cr Brett Moller, in collaboration with MP Shane Knuth, approached the State Government to reconsider the management zoning for crocodiles. The Queensland Government agreed to upgrade the area’s zoning under its Crocodile Management Plan from Zone E to Zone C, so now any crocodile of two metres length or greater will be targeted for removal.

The Babinda Harvest Festival is the major community event held in Babinda in October each year. The event, first held in 1962, celebrated the start of the cane crushing season. The festival has grown over the years, and now includes a Grand Street Parade, tractor pull competition, live entertainment, rides, children’s activities, market and food stalls and fireworks. Council is the major supporter of this iconic event, providing financial and in-kind support via a three-year Resource and Performance Agreement (1 July 2017 to 1 July 2020).
Council also undertook the following activities:

- Council provided a submission to the Department of Transport and Main Roads on the Draft Far North Regional Transport Plan, requesting consideration of extension of public transport services to include Babinda.
- Maintenance work at RV sites including mulching of garden areas, surface grading, mowing, road sweeping and cleaning of amenities.
- Provided letters of support for sporting organisation’s grant applications.
- Water quality monitoring program at Bramston Beach.
- Works to improve resident and visitor experience such as Munro Street culvert replacement, footpath construction and renewal works, pavement rehabilitation and numerous road reseals.

**Update of Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda**

The Plans have been effective in guiding economic development activities in Gordonvale and Babinda, giving impetus to projects and activities which otherwise would have occurred later, to a lesser extent, or not at all. This includes projects led by Council and external organisations. The Plans have supported advocacy efforts and acted as a point of reference for Council, external organisations and media.

It was considered beneficial to update the Plans with current data and to highlight new opportunities which have arisen in Babinda and Gordonvale since the original Plans were released. 2016 Census data was not available at the time the Plans were drafted, which has now been included. Changes which will impact the economies of Gordonvale and Babinda have occurred, which warranted a review of actions to identify which actions should continue and any new actions that should be added. Completed actions have been removed. The update of the Plans extends the timeframe for implementation of ongoing and new actions for a further two years, to June 2021. The update was undertaken by Cummings Economics, the author of the original Plans. As part of this process, consultation was undertaken with organisations identified in each Plan as implementation partners. Copies of the updated Plans are provided in Attachment 3 and Attachment 4.

**OPTIONS:**

**Option 1 (Recommended):**

That Council:

1. Notes progress made in implementing the Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda for the period July 2018 to June 2019; and
2. Endorses the update of the Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda.

**Option 2:**

That Council:

1. Notes progress made in implementing the Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda for the period July 2018 to June 2019; and
2. Does not endorse the update of the Economic Development Plans for Gordonvale and Babinda and requests further information from Council Officers before reconsidering this matter.
CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

The ability to effectively implement the Economic Development Plans relies on cooperation and input from identified stakeholders. Changes in capacity of stakeholders to contribute to the process may impact outcomes.

Some actions identified in the Economic Development Plans fall outside Council’s areas of responsibility and control. Effective stakeholder engagement and advocacy efforts will be especially important to address these matters.

Council staff and the Divisional Councillor have been working in collaboration with identified partners including: Tourism Tropical North Queensland; Department of Environment and Science; Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning; Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce; Babinda Chamber of Commerce; Babinda Taskforce and Babinda Visitor Information Centre.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

The implementation of the Gordonvale and Babinda Economic Development Plans in 2018/19 was carried out within the allocated Council budget. Allowances have been made within Council’s approved 2019/20 OPEX and CAPEX budgets for the implementation of initiatives included in the updated Plans, including the Resource and Performance Agreements with the Babinda VIC and the Babinda Taskforce.

The purpose of the Economic Development Plans is to stimulate economic activity, increase employment, encourage investment and support population growth in Gordonvale and Babinda.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

Whilst the Plans have an economic focus, there are direct and indirect benefits which flow to the broader community, such as through support of local events.

The Babinda Taskforce and Babinda VIC are central organisations in the community of Babinda. They play an important role in connecting the community and leading and supporting community and cultural initiatives. Engagement of volunteers within both organisations creates opportunity for local residents to advance skills, engage socially, improve health and wellbeing and make a positive contribution to the community. Financial support from Council enables these organisations to continue to provide services to residents and visitors.

Natural Environment:

The Corporate Plan provides the context and framework within which the Economic Development Plans were developed and are implemented, including the overarching vision of valuing our natural environment, lifestyle and surroundings.
Corporate and Operational Plans:

The Economy is one of five central pillars of Council’s Corporate Plan 2017-2022. The Gordonvale and Babinda Economic Development Plans align directly with Council’s Corporate Plan in this regard.

The implementation of the Gordonvale and Babinda Economic Development Plans was identified as a key action in Council’s Economic Development Strategy 2018-2022, as well as being an operational initiative within Council’s Operational Plan 2018/19. Update and implementation of the Plans is included as an operational initiative in the 2019/20 Operational Plan.

CONSULTATION:

Division One Councillor, Cr Brett Moller
Council’s Finance Team

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Gordonvale Progress Summary
Attachment 2: Babinda Progress Summary
Attachment 3: Gordonvale Economic Development Plan, updated June 2019 (#61567903)
Attachment 4: Babinda Economic Development Plan, updated June 2019 (#6156408)

Belinda Hutchinson
Economic Development Officer

Nick Masasso
Executive Project Officer
## ATTACHMENT 1: GORDONVALE PROGRESS SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>PARTNERS</th>
<th>PROGRESS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Promote RV day parking at Gordonvale. Consider establishment of a RV dump point.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Dump point included in plans for Greenpatch. Promoted on Council website.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further develop and promote the Great Pyramid Race and Gordonvale Turf Club Races.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ, GCC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Council provided funding for the Great Pyramid Race 2018. Three-year agreement in place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highlight opportunities for motel type development at Gordonvale in association with sporting events development.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Industry initiated development planned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiate a proposal to develop a RV Park adjacent to the river at Gordonvale</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Works to transform Greenpatch into an official, free, short-stay campground are nearing completion. This includes upgrades to amenities, picnic shelters, footpaths, landscaping and addition of wayfinding signage.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Agriculture, Manufacturing, Business and Industry</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC, Mulgrave Mill</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Engagement ongoing, especially in relation to the proposed State Development Area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance in ensuring that business education and assistance programs are extended to the Gordonvale business community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC, CCIQ, GCC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>GCC informed of relevant workshops and programs. Met with new ASBAS advisor to request program be delivered in Gordonvale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing liaison with agriculture, processing and industry sectors to help achieve development.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ, DSD, GCC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Engagement focused on proposed State Development Area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review town planning provisions for industrial land around Gordonvale</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Submission provided to Queensland Government regarding State Development Area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Services</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>Long-term action to continue to be investigated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marketing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Host a workshop with tourism operators and interested parties to identify key attributes and future tourism potential of Gordonvale.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TTNQ, GCC</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure Gordonvale tourism products are included in the tourism marketing and content distribution strategy for Tropical North Queensland.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Initial workshop cancelled due to insufficient registrations. Participated in regional Eco Arts Tourism focus group. Other options under consideration following focus group.</td>
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<tr>
<td>TTNQ posted 11 Instagram posts, which received over 28,000 views. Behana Gorge featured in the top-performing TTNQ article. Cairns Southern Trail drive brochure reprinted and continues to be distributed.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Connectivity</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Investigation of public transport services into Cairns.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Submission provided to TMR for Draft Far North Regional Transport Plan, requested consideration of review of public transport services to Gordonvale.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Government Framework</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proactively seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC, DSD, DES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing engagement by Divisional Councillor and Council staff.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordonvale’s Commercial and Services Integration - Develop plans in conjunction with other levels of government for necessary investment in infrastructure to solve the current economic inefficiencies.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC, DSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities in relation to Queensland Government land continue to be progressed.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide suitable incentives to support development.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No projects have been presented for consideration during the reporting period.</td>
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</table>

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

**Progress:**
- complete
- on target
- behind schedule
- at risk/not proceeding

**Partners:**
- CRC Cairns Regional Council
- TTNQ Tourism Tropical North Queensland
- GCC Gordonvale Chamber of Commerce
- CCIQ Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland
- DSD Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
- DES Department of Environment and Science
## ATTACHMENT 2: BABINDA PROGRESS SUMMARY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTION</th>
<th>PRIORITY</th>
<th>PARTNERS</th>
<th>PROGRESS</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tourism</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Execute the remaining elements of the Master Plan for the Boulders.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Scheduled improvement works completed in November 2017.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing improvements are undertaken at existing RV sites.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Ongoing maintenance undertaken by Council staff including gardening, surface grading, mowing, road sweeping and amenity cleaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seek with Queensland National Parks, the development of a trail development strategy for the Babinda area.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, DES, TTNQ</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Continuing to liaise with DES on development of Council’s Walking and Cycling Strategy. Supported BT in advocacy efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further develop and promote the Babinda Harvest Festival and other events.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Council provided financial and in-kind support for the Babinda Harvest Festival under an R&amp;P Agreement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In association with Queensland National Parks and traditional owners, develop long-term coordinated Development Plan for the Boulders.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC, DES, TTNQ, BCC</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Considered under Babinda Boulders Master Plan. No further action to be considered within the timeframe of this Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explore opportunities for a cableway in the Babinda area.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>BCC</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Discussions were undertaken and options considered with owner of cableway and identified stakeholders. No avenue to progress at this time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider options to support further tourism development of coastline, including Bramston Beach.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ, BCC, BVIC</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>Current constraints to development identified. No further actions within the timeframe of this plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agriculture, Manufacturing , Business and Industry</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistance in ensuring that business education and assistance programs are extended to the Babinda community.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>CRC, CCIQ, BCC, BT</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>BT and BCC informed of relevant workshops and programs. Grant provided to produce Boomerang Bags for local shops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing liaison with agriculture, processing and industry sectors to help achieve development.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ, DSD, BCC, BT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ongoing engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider roll out of Councils Urban Spaces of program in Babinda.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, BCC, BT</td>
<td></td>
<td>Potential sites identified. To be progressed pending roll out of revised program in Cairns CBD.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Services</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Incentivise development, where appropriate e.g. retirement village/aged care facilities Babinda.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>CRC, DSD</td>
<td></td>
<td>Letter of support provided for grant application for retirement village business case.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marketing</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Host a workshop with tourism operators and interested parties to identify key attributes, possible names and future tourism potential of the Region.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>TTNQ, BCC, BT, BVIC</td>
<td>Initial workshop cancelled due to insufficient registrations. Participated in regional Eco Arts Tourism focus group. Other options under consideration following focus group.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure Babinda and surrounding regions are included in the marketing and content distribution strategy for Tropical North Queensland.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ</td>
<td>TTNQ Instagram posts received over 43,000 views. Babinda Boulders photos 2nd and 3rd most &quot;liked&quot; photos for 2018/19. Cairns Southern Trail drive brochure reprinted and continues to be distributed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Connectivity** | | |
| Investigate rail or bus public transport services from Babinda into Cairns. | 2 | CRC | Submission provided to TMR for Draft Far North Regional Transport Plan, requested consideration of extension of public transport services to include Babinda. |

| **Government Framework** | | |
| Proactively seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy. | 1 | CRC, DSD, DES | Ongoing engagement by Divisional Councillor and Council staff. |
| Review development fees and charges | 1 | CRC | Completed with introduction of LGIP. |
| Provide suitable incentives to support industry development | 2 | CRC, DSD | Support provided to local business. |
| Investigate possibilities of rural residential development | 3 | CRC | Long-term action - investigations undertaken. |

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

**Progress:**
- complete
- on target
- behind schedule
- at risk/not proceeding

**Partners:**
- CRC Cairns Regional Council
- TTNQ Tourism Tropical North Queensland
- BCC Babinda Chamber of Commerce
- BVIC Babinda Visitor Information Centre
- BT Babinda Taskforce
- CCIQ Chamber of Commerce and Industry Queensland
- DSD Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning
- DES Department of Environment and Science
GORDONVALE
Economic Development Plan
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 in 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. Broad 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.
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.
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)

### PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

**Tourism**

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<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Partners</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>CRC, TTNQ</td>
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Support new developments in tourism infrastructure through support for promotion of Gordonvale to increase visitation.

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<th>Priority</th>
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Further develop and promote the Great Pyramid Race and other events.

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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.

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<th>Priority</th>
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Develop and promote Greenpatch camping ground and develop connections with town centre.

### Agriculture, Manufacturing, Industry and Business

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<th>Priority</th>
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<td>3</td>
<td>CRC, Mulgrave Mill</td>
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Engagement with MSF Sugar and Queensland Government to progress co-located industrial opportunities and SDA development.

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<th>Priority</th>
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<td>CRC, CCIQ</td>
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Assistance in ensuring that business education and assistance programs are extended to Gordonvale business communities.

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Ongoing liaison with industry sectors to help achieve development

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<th>Priority</th>
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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.
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<th>Priority</th>
<th>Partners</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Services</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ongoing liaison with and support for the Gordonvale &amp; District Chamber of Commerce.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>MARKETING</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Improvement of public facilities and services.</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage interested parties to identify key attributes and future tourism potential of Gordonvale.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>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.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>CONNECTIVITY</strong></td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investigation of improved public transport services into Cairns.</td>
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<td><strong>GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactively seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gordonvale’s Commercial and Services Integration - Develop plans in conjunction with other levels of government for necessary investment in infrastructure.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support development and economic diversification.</td>
<td>3</td>
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**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)
BABINDA
Economic Development Plan
1. INTRODUCTION

Background

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

Geographical Background

The Babinda district covers the coastal valley from Deeral South to the Russell River and the Woopen Creek area, the coastal range south of Russell Heads and the Bramston Beach area.

Babinda has some of the most spectacular scenery in Australia. This is Australia’s highest rainfall area – an area of great botanical diversity. Beautiful creeks and rivers come down from the mountains, wind their way through the cane fields and join in a broad waterway that breaks through the coast hills to the sea. Offshore are the Frankland Islands and Great Barrier Reef.

For the purposes of this study, the area covered is represented by Statistical Area Level 2 Babinda. The Babinda Statistical Area Level 2 (SA2) has a total area of 671.4 km², with an average daily temperature range of 20.2 °C to 28.1 °C and an average rainfall of 4,014 mm each year.

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, loss of workforce needed and in 2011, closure of the Babinda Sugar Mill.

The area’s cane was assigned partially to Mulgrave Mill and partially to South Johnstone Mill. The district appears to have held its population remarkably well following the mill closure. However, a drop in money circulating in the town has been observed, with a number of long standing businesses under economic stress and a local charity reporting reductions in donations received.

In the Babinda area, in more recent decades, some diversification into other cropping, especially bananas, has taken place and some rise in tourism earnings that are still quite small.

Unfortunately for the area, it is cut off from the coast by the coastal hills (only Bramston Beach is accessible by road), and missed out on participating in the major uplift in the region’s economy brought by tourism from the 1970s onwards. In fact, competition from the Mossman/Daintree /Cape Tribulation area saw some aspects decline since the 1990s.

Like many rural towns, Babinda has town facilities that can service a greater population than the present population.
In 1996, the population in Babinda peaked at 4,507. The population then declined, dropping to 4,213 in 2014. Australian Bureau of Statistics data indicates that since then, it has recovered marginally to 4,304 in 2018.

The population in Babinda has been ageing. Between 2001 and 2018, the proportion of people in the 50yr+ age group has increased by 15.9%. Numbers in the 75yr+ age group have increased strongly from 189 in 2001 to 327 in 2017.

Babinda has a relatively high Indigenous population. According to the 2016 Census, 7% of the Babinda population is Indigenous. In comparison, 4% of the population of Queensland is Indigenous.

**Why Is It Important**

The Babinda district, along with the Gordonvale 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.

**IMPLICATIONS**

- Babinda has declined in population over time and been almost stagnant in recent years. The challenge is to maintain and grow population.
- In terms of community social facilities, there is a need for catering for an increase in ageing population. In Babinda, there is a special need to cater for those aged 75 plus.
- Apart from developing local employment, Babinda’s need for population growth can be accelerated by actions like provision of public transport.
- 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 and progressively with effects on Babinda.
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.

Stimulation of activities that earn income from outside the area is paramount along with locating population in the area.

For tourism, the strategy in the Babinda area is aimed at raising awareness of existing, mainly rainforest and town-related attractions and their development in the short run, but in the long run, also bringing the potential of the coast, waterways and proximity to the Great Barrier Reef more into focus.

Strategies are needed to support potential for further agricultural development.

Strategies for improving connectivity with Cairns are heavily focused on public transport.

2.2 Three Broad Fields of Action

There are three broad fields of action:

- The need for marketing of the area – not just to tourists but as a place to invest, to do business and to live.
- The 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.
- The need for a governmental framework involvement and cooperation - 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 areas in which the ‘presence’ of the area in various fields (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 rural areas. The marketing element of the strategy and plan aims to lift that presence.

Council should work with local stakeholders and Tourism Tropical North Queensland to identify Babinda tourism product (existing and potential) and provide input to and recommendations on marketing activities. Qantas has recently developed and is playing on its flights, a video relating to its carbon offset support for tree planting in the area by Jaragun. Consideration needs to be given to how to leverage this initiative.

It is important to ensure that Babinda 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 would need to be adopted. There is a need to consider names/slogans/tag lines to be developed identifying that Babinda is also a good place to visit and live.

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 relevant Queensland Government departments.

3.1.5. Brochure material

Council has produced a Babinda brochure. A visitor guiding brochure has been produced covering the southern areas of the city, both Babinda and Gordonvale especially aimed at road visitors. These brochures need to be kept up to date and production continued.

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).
3.1.7. Visitor Information Centres

Visitor Information Centres are vital to marketing the region. The council has long provided financial and in-kind support for the operation of the Babinda Visitor Information Centre and this should continue. The Babinda Information Centre is working well. In recent times, there has been an increase and upgrading of accommodation availability in Babinda. A proposal has been developed by the Babinda Visitor Information Centre and local businesses to encourage short stays in Babinda. This will need to be considered in development of marketing material.

3.2 Business and Industry

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

3.3 Media

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

3.4 Film Industry

The Babinda area provides locations for various types of film productions such as the recent Qantas feature. There is a need to encourage and promote this activity.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

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

4.1 Tourism

4.1.1. Boulders

The critical strategy here is to keep investing in safety and presentational experiences at the Boulders as the number one recreational/tourism product in the area.

A recent meeting of Council and community representatives with Tourism Minister, Kate Jones, has indicated that special funding may become available for a substantial expansion of track and other infrastructure at the Boulders.

There is a need for Council to assist with two levels of action:

1) The preparation, in cooperation with Queensland National Parks, of a viable plan for expansion of the tracks and facilities at the Boulders;

2) The development of proposals to attract outside funding for the purpose.

The Plan

The development of the Plan will need to include National Parks and the local community representatives. Discussions indicate that it would include:

- The existing track
- The short circuit Wonga trail – 1 km
- A crossing of Babinda Creek and improved trail to give access to the waterfalls – 3 km
- An upgrade of the Goldfields Track
- Extension of the recreation area to Double Barrell Creek
- A kiosk and base for guides to conduct walks including to cave art locations in the vicinity.

National Parks Interface

The main Boulders area is under Council control. The National Parks area is to the immediate west but the Wonga Trail could include parts into the National Parks area. There would appear to be no issues with this upgrading.

There is an issue with National Parks in relation to the trail to the waterfalls. National Parks reject the idea of stepping stones across Babinda Creek because of costs of rescue if the creek rises. This will need to be resolved.

National Parks have on their program an upgrading of the Goldfields Track through to the Ranger Station at Kearneys Falls.

This includes upgrading the section from the Ranger Station to the East Mulgrave Causeway to mountain bike standard and improvement of the Causeway to Boulders section as a walking track.

It is further proposed to extend the track system by about 4km from the causeway area to include an old ‘stampers’ mining field relic. These improvements will increase the attraction of the area.
Extension of the Boulders area to Double Barrel Creek has been suggested that would appear to be outside the National Parks area.

**The Case**

The case for special tourism funding should include the following.

1) The suitability of the area as an outstanding point to experience the Wet Tropics closer to Cairns than Mossman Gorge and the Daintree, including for day trips from cruise ships.

2) The area is experiencing increased visitation. The track system envisaged will spread visitors out over three pools on Babinda Creek and more on Double Barrel Creek allowing the area to cope with greater numbers without congestion to retain its current natural, not commercialised, atmosphere.

3) A kiosk and Aboriginal guides will link in with the Jaragun carbon credits and Qantas promotion.

The Plan will be complimentary to the National Parks’ initiatives of improving the Goldfields Track and access to the old goldfields relics.

4.1.2. Babinda township attractions

The Visitor Information Centre continues to operate well and needs to be continued.

The Babinda Creek RV park continues to prove a valuable source of business for the town but with some reported problems of some visitors overstaying and degrading the experience for others. Arrangements to administer need to be reviewed.

There is an opportunity to make an entrance statement for the town. There seems to be some measure of agreement that a special symbol for the town (equivalent to Tully’s “Golden Gumboot”), should be a “Big Umbrella” including shade and a rain gauge. A desire has been expressed to have a “streetscape” plan with street furniture, ornaments, wall art, historical and indigenous markers and better treatment of powerlines. There is a need for Council to liaise with the community on these matters.

Limited museum development is underway as a start and is being assisted by the Cairns Historical Museum. Some assistance may be needed in applying for grants to support further development.

4.1.3. Other district attractions

National Parks are installing safety warnings at Josephine Falls and have plans to improve the Bartle Frere Track including lookouts along the way and at the top.

Signage on the Bramston Beach road directing to the Eubenangee Swamp lookout needs improvement and National Parks are aware of this.

There are no National Parks’ plans to upgrade the track up Bellenden Ker.

The potential for tours on the Mulgrave/ Russell Rivers (including crocodile spotting) remains untapped and can be promoted.

In the past, there has been a number of excellent award winning/ television featured private gardens in the area but this seems to have declined. The area’s rainfall conditions make it highly suitable for development of outstanding gardens.

4.1.4. Festivals and events

Festivals and events can be a contributor to economic growth. There is potential to build on the Babinda Harvest Festival to increase promotion and attendance. Consideration could be given to develop a second major event for Babinda.
The Babinda Information Centre would like to see a “Break in Babinda” promotion launched, including attendance at one of the few old picture theatres left in the region. The theatre operates on Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights and greater audiences would help secure its ongoing viability.

4.1.5. Sports tourism

Sports tourism is developing as an opportunity in the region. Where possible, support should be provided to grow this opportunity.

4.2 Agricultural Development and Diversification

4.2.1. General

Plentiful rainfall and year-round warmth means that the area has one of the highest levels of ‘plant growth potential’ in Australia.

The strategy in relation to agriculture is to:

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

4.2.2. Carbon Offsets and tree planting

Carbon offset tree planting organised by Jaragun has become a significant activity in the district. Jaragun needs to establish a nursery for planting material and needs about two hectares for this. The question of helping find two hectares for a nursery should be considered. Another alternative would be to approach MSF to provide some of their land under suitable arrangements. It is possible that if set up in a suitable way, the nursery could become a point of visitor interest in its own right.

4.2.3. Bio industries

There have been suggestions in the past that Babinda could be a suitable location for establishment of facilities that treat green waste for various outputs. This has included bio digesters to produce bio gas, ethanol and other related products.

A study is about to be commissioned by Regional Development Australia Far North Queensland and Torres Strait to explore possibility of extending the production of fertilisers from green waste. The MSF land at Babinda might provide a suitable site location and this should be brought to the attention of those carrying out the studies.
4.2.4. Development of other crops and processing

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

- 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 Other Industry

Encouragement for other industry activity located on industrial land will be mainly through ensuring a plentiful supply of properly zoned industrial land. The former mill land at Babinda provides this, but MSF reports little interest. It is recommended that Council liaise with MSF about possible future use of this land for a range of purposes including residential.

The water bottling plant at Babinda is seeking to expand and employ more.

4.4 Services

The Abbeyfield Centre offers limited retirement living units. However, the community aged care group is keen for a full aged care facility to be developed. Council has already indicated that it has land that could be available. In association with Cootharinga Gardens, grant funding is being sought for a feasibility study to attract investment. Council should stand ready to assist if needed in this process.

4.5 Connectivity with Cairns

Council’s “Our Cairns” survey indicated connectivity as a high priority for Babinda and smaller centres through to Aloomba. There is a need for public transport access to city services for residents without their own transport.

It is recommended Council continue to pursue this matter.
4.6 Property Development to attract population

Babinda needs additional population to sustain and grow the level of services available.

Babinda offers lifestyle and cost of living advantages including lower Council rates and charges than Cassowary Coast.

There is reported to be a good demand for house allotments if the price is below $100,000. Council has land along Pollard Road that could be made available for lot development in a location where water, power and telecommunication services could be easily extended. It was reported that builders had shown interest in building spec houses for sale and a good rental market was reported. It is recommended that in the interests of achieving population growth, Council investigate the availability of private and council land for residential development.

Opportunities for rural residential sales were reported with demand for 2 and 5 ha lots. It is recommended that the possibility be investigated to amend town planning in future regional planning reviews:

a) To allow existing rural properties to split off a separate residential lot, especially to accommodate family members or property workers.

b) To allow rural residential allotments in suitable areas not likely to affect viability of local rural industries and too small for viable agricultural production.

MSF Sugar could also be encouraged to look at staged development of the old mill site starting with a residential component.

5. GOVERNMENT FRAMEWORK

5.1 Development and Investment Incentives

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. Development fees and charges will be reviewed to further incentivise development.

5.2 Other Levels of Government

It is proposed that Cairns Regional Council take a proactive approach and seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy.

5.3 Rural residential

To help increase population in the Babinda area, it is recommended that the possibility be investigated of allowing rural residential development in appropriate areas not endangering the viability of cropping, or where the size of the lot is not conducive to viable agricultural production and use.
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 Babinda Chamber of Commerce, Babinda Taskforce and other relevant stakeholders.

Priorities

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

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<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Partners</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Tourism</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support operations of the Babinda Visitor Information Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ongoing development of the Boulders area and related National Parks areas including development of proposals for outside funding.</td>
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<td>Ongoing promotion and improvements as required at existing RV sites.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaise with Queensland National Parks regarding ongoing improvement of trails in the Babinda area.</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Further develop and promote the Babinda Harvest Festival and other events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider options to support further tourism development of coastline.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support the development of an entrance statement that reflects community aspirations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Liaise with community to improve town attractiveness to visitors including streetscapes, feature structures, museum development and entrance statements.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Agriculture, Business, Industry and Services</strong></td>
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<td>Assistance in ensuring that business education and assistance programs are extended to the Babinda community.</td>
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<td>Ongoing liaison with industry sectors to help achieve development.</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Ongoing liaison with and support for the Babinda Taskforce and the Babinda Chamber of Commerce.</td>
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## Services

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Support feasibility investigations and industry development eg. new retirement or aged care facilities.

Improvement of public facilities and services.

## Marketing

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Engage interested parties to identify key attributes and future tourism potential of the Region including consideration of leveraging recent Qantas promotional material relating to the area.

Ensure Babinda and surrounding regions are included in the marketing and content distribution strategy for Tropical North Queensland.

Encourage and support film and photography activities.

## Connectivity

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Investigate public transport services from Babinda into Cairns.

## Government Framework

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Proactively seek State Government involvement in implementation of the Strategy.

Provide suitable support for industry development.

Investigate possibilities of further residential allotment development in the area including urban and where appropriate, currently zoned rural land.

Investigate and support opportunities in relation to carbon offset programs.

## Partners:

- Cairns Regional Council (CRC)
- Tourism Tropical North Queensland (TTNQ)
- Babinda Chamber of Commerce (BCC)
- Babinda Taskforce (BT)
- Babinda Visitor Information Centre (BVIC)
- Department of Environment and Science (DES)
- Department of State Development, Manufacturing, Infrastructure and Planning (DSD)