



## LATE REPORTS TO COUNCIL

25 May 2015

Late Reports to Council

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<b>Department:</b>	<b>Community and Culture</b>
<b>Submitted by:</b>	Executive Manager – Community and Culture
<b>Reference:</b>	Item 1
<b>Subject:</b>	Uralla Tourism Services - Future Options

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### LINKAGE TO INTEGRATED PLANNING AND REPORTING FRAMEWORK

<b>Objective:</b>	An attractive environment for business, tourism and industry
<b>Strategy:</b>	Promote the New England region as a wonderful place to live, work, visit and invest
<b>Action:</b>	Tourism and VIC services delivered in Uralla Shire.

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### SUMMARY:

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with future options with regard to the model for the provision of tourism services for the Uralla Shire.

### OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATION:

#### That:

1. Council adopt the strategic approach towards visitor services of strengthened Regional collaboration, increased digital presence and less reliance on a physical Visitor Information Centre (VIC) as the connection point with visitors;
2. A Uralla Information Hub be developed using a range of digital tools;
3. The Visitor Information services be relocated to the Library building with refurbishments completed to incorporate information services into the current Library; and
4. The current VIC be refurbished and leased out commercially.

### BACKGROUND:

In 2014 a workshop was held to look at Tourism in Uralla, with the primary focus being on upgrading the current Visitor Information Centre (VIC).

In February 2015 a report was tabled to Council presenting VIC refurbishment costings. The costings included both a café upgrade and expanding the VIC without a café. Council resolved that:

*The General Manager be requested to bring back a report on future options for tourism services holistically, including a further break down of the costs associated with the refurbishment of the Visitor Information Centre.*

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Subsequently, a Councillor Workshop was held on 18 May 2015, to discuss the various options for tourism more holistically.

## REPORT:

Three possible strategic options were considered in the formation of the proposed strategic approach:

1. *Uralla Tourism is retained as is;*
2. *Regional Collaboration is strengthened and a new model developed with increased digital presence and less reliance on the physical Visitor Information Centre as the connection point with the Visitor Economy;*
3. *Uralla Shire does not continue with its own Tourism program but only contributes to a regional model.*

A review has been conducted of trends in the Visitor economy, and the results are as follows:

### Overall Trends:

- Destination NSW report (attached) indicates **26%** of visitors to regional NSW attended a VIC with the purpose of the Visit stated as:
  - 65% of visitors to a VIC were travelling for a holiday/short break
  - 23% were travelling to visit a friend or relative
  - 83% wanted to get general information on what to do in the area– speaking to local people
  - 63% wanted to get a map
- Inland NSW has commented on trends and noted that the key issues were:
  - Reducing Council budgets for Tourism
  - Visitors services need to be more than a VIC; these need to be transformed to be a reason to visit e.g. a content hub for the region (many services are combined with other services e.g. shops, )
  - The Visitor economy is not just tourists but also includes those with other reason for being in the area (visiting friends/relatives). Different strategies are required.
  - Increase in online technology and searching
  - Need to consider the regional context in small places
- Community Road Map – New England – Inland NSW plan for Regional Tourism:
  - New England High Country - now recognised as its own brand
  - New funding for touring routes with a focus on motorcycling community

### Uralla Shire Visitor Economy

Visitor numbers have been consistent over the years, not showing a marked increase or decrease in VIC visitors:

- 2011 11,325
  - 2012 10,588
  - 2013 11,328
  - 2014 11,276
- Current budget allocation for Tourism is approximately \$167,000 per year
    - Includes 50% of Community Development role in oversight of Tourism/VIC

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- Includes all VIC costs
  - Contributions to regional campaigns
  - Uralla has its own Tourism website
- USC Financial commitment to regional tourism marketing through New England High Country:
    - 2012-13- \$3,900.00 – contribution to \$100,000 Experience the Highs campaign and additional image licences
    - 2013-14 - \$2,000.00 – contribution to 2013 Winter Moments campaign
    - 2014-15 - \$5,270.00 – contributions to \$70,000 2014 Winter Moments campaign and
    - \$317,000 (all Councils + DNSW) 2015 Regional Visitors campaign

A review of the potential strategic directions reveals that Tourism is changing, with a greater focus on digital tools and that our region has a large number of visiting friends and relatives, who need to be incorporated in a new strategy. Continuing Tourism as it is currently provided, with the traditional focus on the VIC and limited technology, is not a strategy that can be pursued.

Similarly it is clear Uralla Shire Council has determined that it **does** have an ongoing role in the Visitor Economy, and that a local presence with local knowledge is required alongside greater regional collaboration and better technology.

A regional approach to Tourism is required with Uralla being a key stopping point within New England High Country is the recommended approach with the following trends and strategies be pursued and implemented by Council:

- 1. Regional Collaboration is strengthened** – as a member of Inland NSW and its sub-brand New England High Country (NEHC) Uralla Council is already working well with other partners. It is essential that this is strengthened and the brand New England High country is grown and marketed, with Uralla as a key destination stopping point within NEHC. Work is underway to solidify the relationship with these partners through the development of an Memorandum Of Understanding or the like. It is also likely regional tourism will become a function of the new Joint Organisation of Councils, so clear contribution and input by Uralla Council during these planning and inception stages will be crucial.
- 2. Digital age** – it is important that digital information be available both in Uralla and on the web. Limited investment to date sees a reliance on paper based resources that get out of date quickly after printing, and may not accessed by many Visitors or local residents of our region if they do not attend the VIC. As more people seek information in real time and rely on apps, smartphones and real time information Uralla has a role to support this and incorporate technology as part of its Tourism strategy.
- 3. Information Hub** – the current VIC focus is on Visitors to the region; however statistics show that only 26% of people in regional NSW are visiting a VIC, leaving a large section of the market with which we are not interacting. The New England region's largest visiting cohort is Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFRs), which is increasing. Only 19% of VFR visit a VIC;

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meaning the remaining 81% likely rely on information from friends/relatives or online sources.

A strategy which ensures that the local residents and visitors have access to information they need about destinations and experiences is essential. The VIC, which targets visitors and provides traditional information on tourist attractions and/or accommodation, could be expanded to include more in-depth information on a region that can target local residents as well. With the large market of VFRs in our region, broader and more in-depth information is required to entice local residents and VFRs to seek out experiences and unique regional and local attractions.

It is recommended that such an expansion be incorporated into an **Information Hub**. The hub will provide a wide variety of information for residents and visitors including information on local history (incorporating the History Hub located in the library), local associations and activities, local businesses and experiences in the region.

It is recommended that the **Uralla Information Hub** be located in the current Library foyer area. This area is currently underutilised and would make a good location for additional information on the Uralla region. Efficiencies in service delivery will be achieved through the suggested approach to the Information Hub including:

- Co-location of other services with the VIC would see synergies in place between information and Library usage and be good for both Library and Visitor services. Both services provide information and are a contact point for the community and visitors. The combination of both would be a positive outcome and provide further depth of information.
- The Library also support moves to expansion – “Public libraries bring people together from a range of backgrounds to meet, network and potentially develop relationships with other members of the community. This has been referred to as social capital, and is one of the building blocks of a strong community.” (A Guide for Public Library Buildings in New South Wales; Third Edition).
- The current history hub is underutilised and with many visitors wanting information on Uralla history. Locating the Information Hub with the History Hub will expand our locality as an “historical attraction” and a place to find historical information.
- Staff salaries – the recent Library survey saw 84% of respondents indicate that the current opening hours suited them. This, however, needs to be balanced with expenditure and the budget constraints of paying salaries for complimentary services, especially on weekends. (Uralla provides the only Library in the region that opens on both Saturday and Sunday). The move to the Information Hub in the Library could see savings on salaries through combining roles in day and weekend shifts. An information hub will also be able to utilise volunteers, who can provide insight into local experiences and heritage that is broader than just tourist experiences. Staff members are already shared between these services and overseen by the same Coordinator so the impact on staffing is considered low.
- Library hours will be significantly increased, with the VIC working hours longer than current Library hours.

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- Economic efficiencies that are realised can be used towards improving and increasing use of technology, including touch pads, apps, an improved website for both Library and Tourism services and an increased budget to contribute to regional Tourism campaigns through reduction in rent and salaries.

Consideration will need to be given to the incorporation of the gem collection into a combined space. There may not be adequate room and additional security measures for the collection in the proposed space. Alternative locations or returning the collection to the owners may be an outcome if a suitable space cannot be found.

#### 4. Visitor Information Centre

It is recommended that the current VIC space be reconfigured and the entire area be leased commercially. The benefits of this include income for Council for space, and residents and visitors have access to food, drink, information, history and cultural services within close proximity.

Interest in the space has already been received from café proprietors.

#### Financial implications:

An amount of \$180,000 has been allocated in the 2015-16 budget for the refurbishment of the VIC and the fit-out of Tourism requirements.

It is recommended that these funds be used to:

- Fit-out the Library building to accommodate the Uralla Information hub;
- Purchase and implement appropriate technological tools;
- Refurbish the existing VIC so it is suitable to be leased commercially. (Potential incoming tenants may have to contribute to this fit out).

#### Proposed Information hub and café lease.

Pros	Cons
Decrease in staff payments – especially on weekends as both sites are open Saturday and Sunday	The Library Foyer is used for occasional events and exhibitions. However, Library space could easily be reconfigured.
Expansion of VIC services to become an information hub for the region.	VIC will still require a fit out for a full size café, at some cost to Council
A café in the precinct can attract more tourist and make it a central hub for Uralla	
Can better use volunteers in the new space.	

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## COUNCIL IMPLICATIONS:

### 1. Community Engagement/ Communication (per engagement strategy)

Inland NSW Tourism

A significant percentage of respondents to the recent "Have Your Say" Survey said they would be prepared for Council to reduce expenditure on Tourism.

Library survey indicated respondents are happy with current or would like increased opening hours.

### 2. Policy and Regulation

NA

### 3. Financial (LTFP)

Reduction in expenditure on salaries

Increase in investment in technology

### 4. Asset Management (AMS)

VIC building upgrade to be leased at Commercial rates

Library incorporated VIC and becomes Uralla Information hub

### 5. Workforce (WMS)

Reduction in salaries as roles in Library and VIC are combined

### 6. Legal and Risk Management

NA

### 7. Performance Measures

NA

### 8. Project Management

NA

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Attachments:	Nil