Part 7
Overall Strategy

Before considering strategies for the individual candidate areas or localities, it is appropriate to have an overarching strategy to ensure the overall objectives and guiding principals are met and the release of land is coordinated for the benefit of the whole community. The overall strategy needs to fit within the desired settlement pattern for the City and has to have regard to an appropriate density and the physical and socio-economic limitations addressed earlier. Once the overall strategic direction is given then more detailed consideration can be given for each of the candidate areas.

Settlement Pattern

The settlement pattern of cities and towns is the result of a complex interplay between the physical form provided by the natural environment and the social dynamics of the community over time. Strategic planning can guide the direction for settlement patterns to provide a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable settlement form.

The settlement pattern of Coffs Harbour has generally been formed by the topographical features of the land. The Great Dividing Range which extends along a north south axis parallel to the coastline has created a narrow meandering coastal plain fed by steep gullies. This plain sits below a dramatic forested mountainous backdrop that presents a major constraint to urban development.

These physical features and attraction base of the coastline have resulted in the majority of urban settlement extending along the coastal plain to form a lineal urban footprint. Where the floodplain broadens at Coffs Harbour, Boambee/Toormina and Woolgoolga, urban settlement has expanded to fill these areas in a concentric pattern. These urban areas accommodate the bulk (i.e. 70%) of the population of Coffs Harbour which challenges the notion of a lineal city when population densities are taken into account. Accordingly, while the City has a lineal urban footprint, the settlement pattern is generally characterised by three concentric urban areas, with the Coffs Harbour City Centre and environs being the dominant foci for urban activity and population. Table 9 below demonstrates the relative population densities across the LGA.

Table 9
Population for Coffs Harbour Localities 2006 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locality</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coffs Urban</td>
<td>25,744</td>
<td>37.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Beaches</td>
<td>19,703</td>
<td>28.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sawtell/Toormina/ East Boambee</td>
<td>15,121</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffs Rural</td>
<td>2,148</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bonville</td>
<td>2,047</td>
<td>2.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Boambee</td>
<td>1,847</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nana Glen/Bucca</td>
<td>1,544</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coramba</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>0.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ulong</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total LGA</td>
<td>68,594</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
West of the Range the settlement pattern has been dictated largely by the extent of the railway and the river systems. The villages of Coramba, Nana Glen, Ulong, Karangi, Bucca and Lowanna are all small scattered rural settlements serving their respective areas and connected by a developed rural road network (Coramba Road, Bucca Road, Orara Way and Eastern Dorrigo Way).

The Settlement Planning Guidelines by the Department of Planning for the Mid and Far North Coast Regional Strategies incorporate the following guidelines for “settlement form” and “hierarchy”:

- **Future development should:**
  - strengthen the hierarchy of settlement identified in the regional strategies, support and maintain strong multi-functional business centres, minimise urban sprawl, and maximise infrastructure and service efficiencies;
  - be planned to create communities within the hierarchy of settlement. Consideration should be given to the ultimate geographical extent and population target for each community that is to be formed or built upon, and the staging/timing by which it is proposed to reach that position;
  - provide for a mix of houses, jobs and open space;
  - be appropriately located in relation to its scale, nature or type of development; the ability to provide the necessary infrastructure and services; the need for access and to ensure effective traffic management;
  - in the case of residential development, provide for a variety of dwelling types and a choice in location, form and affordability; and
  - enable mixed uses and home-based employment in residential or village zonings where appropriate.

- **Future rural residential development should be planned so any new opportunities strengthen the settlement hierarchy identified in the regional strategies. It should be located close to existing centres and away from areas that may in the future have values for urban expansion.**

- **Future rural residential development should be clustered to encourage a sense of community and for the efficient provision of services. Fragmented development over the landscape will not be permitted.**

- **Future development, particularly at the residential/agricultural and the residential/industrial interfaces, should be planned for and managed so any potential conflict is minimised in relation to adjacent land uses.”**

It is clear from these guidelines that strengthening the settlement hierarchy identified in the Draft Regional Strategy and clustering of rural residential development close to existing centres are paramount considerations in making decisions on settlement patterns for rural residential development. This is confirmed in the statement: **Fragmented development over the landscape will not be permitted.**
As stated previously, the Regional Strategy recognised the Coffs Harbour City Centre and environs as a “Major Regional Centre” serving the subregion with several regional functions including air transport, tertiary education, high level health care and tourism. Major Regional Centres are to accommodate the majority of population growth and employment opportunities. Accordingly, it makes sense to give preference to locating housing, including rural residential housing, as close as possible to the Coffs Harbour City Centre to enable residents to benefit from access to these regional functions.

Second in the centres’ hierarchy are the “Major Towns”. In the LGA the township of Woolgoolga is the only nominated “Major Town”; major towns are to serve their subregions with outreaches of regional services. Third in the centres hierarchy are the remaining coastal and inland villages which are described as “smaller settlements which have limited local services” (Settlement Planning Guidelines: pages 12 and 13 - Department of Planning, 2007). Second and third preferencing for rural residential development should be aligned to this hierarchical tier of centres.

If a more detailed examination of the centres within Coffs Harbour is considered taking into account the commercial, retail and industrial floorspace potential; zoning and detailed planning controls; and supporting residential market (existing and proposed), a clearer picture of the settlement hierarchy of Coffs Harbour emerges. Figure 19 provides a graphical representation of the hierarchy of Coffs Harbour and the conceptual relative service thresholds for each of the centres based on their hierarchical role.

Density

As stated earlier, a strategic approach to rural residential development is required to maximise the benefits and minimise the costs of this form of settlement; this will result in more sustainable outcomes. To meet these outcomes the Strategy should:

- provide a land release that delivers an equilibrium between land supply and demand;
- give preference to land with less environmental constraints, particularly the prohibitive constraints identified;
- give preference to areas with access to higher order social and infrastructure services;
- give preference to existing partly developed areas, as opposed to greenfield areas; and
- meet the overall desired direction and settlement pattern of a more compact city as outlined in the OLC Settlement Strategy.

The demand and supply balance sheet has demonstrated that 55 lots per annum will be required to meet the demand for rural residential housing. To provide for the short to medium term supply (i.e. next 0-10 years) a total of 550 lots will need to be available for rural residential housing development. To meet the longer term demand to the year 2031 a total of 1,210 lots will be required. The actual area of land to be provided will be dependent upon the density of rural residential housing that is permitted; this is normally expressed in terms of a minimum lot size. Accordingly, it is appropriate to determine a suitable density before considering the collective social and physical opportunities and limitations to rural residential development and ultimate land supply required.
Figure 19
This map compiled by Coffs Harbour City Council GIS Section~LRM May 2009

Centres Hierarchy: Candidate Areas - LGA

Note: Locational and exclusionary criteria as detailed in Community Information Fact Sheet No. 1, yet to be applied.
Coffs Harbour has a range of existing rural residential lot sizes that reflect past planning subdivision rules. These lot sizes range from the 3,000 m$^2$ lots in Middle Boambee, created in accordance with LEP 1988 provisions, to the two hectares allotment sizes in Nana Glen and the steeper areas of Korora, created in accordance with LEP 2000 provisions. East of the range there are a range of lots of four and six hectares in area used for rural residential housing on land subdivided for the purposes of growing bananas; these were created under the provisions of LEP 1988 and LEP 2000, respectively. West of the escarpment a number of smaller lots in clusters of threes exist reflecting the early concessional lot provisions; provisions for concessional lots are now prohibited. North of the City in the areas formerly within the Ulmarra and Pristine Waters Shires there are lot sizes 6,000 m$^2$ and larger, developed in accordance with the Ulmarra Shire LEP 1992.

Under Clause 21 of the North Coast REP, a Draft LEP which permits the erection of dwellings on rural land should "in the case where only one dwelling may be erected on an allotment identify a minimum allotment size which is suitable for the erection of a dwelling". Given that this Strategy will lead to the preparation of a Draft LEP, it is appropriate to consider minimum allotment sizes under this Strategy.

The main considerations in the determination of a minimum lot size are effluent disposal, visual amenity, desired future character for an area, environmental constraints and ease of implementation.

Currently the minimum lot size for the majority of rural residential areas in Coffs Harbour is one hectare and is set by the provisions of Clause 18 of LEP 2000. This lot size was based on the advice of the Department of Health for land requirements for effluent disposal. Advancements in effluent disposal systems suggest that much smaller lot sizes could satisfactorily sustain effluent disposal from rural residential dwellings. Accordingly, any generic minimum lot size should now be based on other considerations relating to visual amenity and character, environmental constraints and ease of implementation.

The suggestion in the community consultations of a lot size determined on the ability of land to support the sustainable food needs of a household cannot be determined because of the vagaries of produce production and the varying land conditions within the candidate areas. Similarly, the suggestion of setting an average lot size in the community consultations, as opposed to a minimum lot size, would not meet the requirements for setting minimum lot sizes under Clause 21 of the REP.

In terms of amenity and character, a one hectare lot size provides a semi-rural ambience compared to smaller lot sizes which have a more suburban character. The photos below of Emerald Heights, with a lot size of 3,000 m$^2$ (0.3 hectare), and Heritage Park, with a lot size of one hectare (10,000 m$^2$), demonstrate this point. If the amenity of rural residential areas is to be differentiated from suburban areas, a larger lot size of at least one hectare is warranted.
A minimum lot size of one hectare will allow for a wide variety of environmental constraints to be managed and will be easier to implement as it maintains the status quo. A one hectare lot size is easily conveyed to the community and development industry and simplifies administrative processes for determining lot yield projections, monitoring of take up rates and setting staging and sequencing programs required under the Settlement Guidelines. If a minimum lot size of one hectare is adopted for rural residential development, a total of 550 hectares of land is required to meet the expected demand over the next 10 years and 1,210 hectares is required to meet the demand to the year 2031.

Physical Limitations and Opportunities

The Catchment Assessment has revealed a number of environmental constraints that prohibit and limit development of land for rural residential purposes. Preferencing for rural residential development on land free of environmental constraints should be given to meet the Settlement Guidelines and deliver the following benefits:

- lower development costs;
- lower risk of negative environmental impacts;
- greater likelihood of development proceeding; and
- reduced resources (i.e. Council and other agencies) in planning for release areas and ultimately determining development applications.

The following “hard” land constraints are considered to be prohibitive to the sensible development of rural residential housing:

- land identified in the OLC Settlement Strategy for urban purposes;
- land mapped as regionally significant farmland;
- land within the 1 in 100 year flood extent;
- land with Class 1 and 2 acid sulphate soils;
- land on the prominent ridgelines of Korora;
- land of ecological significance; and
- land with a slope in excess of 20%.

Land with multiple limiting or “soft” constraints should not necessarily be excluded from the candidate areas, but should be given a lower preference to areas with less overlapping constraints.

Some priority should be given to areas where environmental repair works will benefit the natural environment as rural residential demand can provide environmental benefits in disturbed landscapes. These benefits can include rehabilitation of drainage lines, enhancing wildlife corridors and better management of stock and weeds; planning controls on rural residential development can help deliver these benefits.
Socio-Economic Limitations and Opportunities

As demonstrated earlier, the LGA has a clear hierarchy of centres providing various levels of economic, social, recreation and service facilities. Rural residential development that is located as close as possible to the higher order centres will provide the greatest benefits to both the wider community and individual rural residential households. The benefits include:

- reduced journey times to work, recreation entertainment, health, education and community facilities;
- reduced cost for infrastructure services (i.e. garbage, transport, telecommunications, etc.);
- reduced impact upon road network (i.e. road maintenance costs, safety, road upgrading costs);
- better response times in cases of emergency;
- more efficient delivery of social and community services;
- lower reliance on fossil fuels and reduced greenhouse gas emissions; and
- opportunity to strengthen business centres.

Accordingly, the candidate areas with the best accessibility in terms of socio-economic limitations and opportunities are the areas closest to the City Centre and Town Centres. In this regard the candidate areas would have the following ranking for preference from a purely socio-economic accessibility point of view:

- Korora, Moonee and Sapphire;
- Bonville;
- Coramba (including Upper Orara) and Karangi;
- Corindi Beach; and
- Nana Glen

This preferencing takes into account the accessibility to the City Centre for higher order, goods and services and accessibility to a Town Centre for middle order weekly goods and services. All the candidate areas have access to lower order daily goods and services provided by village centres.
Snapshots

The existing Strategy produced in 1999 requires updating to include the areas of Red Rock, Corindi and Corindi Plateau which were amalgamated into the City in 2005 and to take into account contemporary planning rules, strategies, information and changes in community expectations.

The Coffs Harbour City’s central location between Sydney and Brisbane, subtropical climate and relatively low costs for land, make it a prime destination for ‘sea’ and ‘tree’ changers.

For many ‘sea’ and ‘tree changers’, a small rural lot close to a major regional centre provides the ideal start for a lifestyle change.

This Strategy has a planning horizon of 22 years to the year 2031 and over this time an additional population of 30,200 people housed in approximately 12,000 dwellings is expected; between 5-10% of this new housing will be in the form of rural residential housing.

This demand, which creates pressure for land, and ultimately housing, needs to be strategically managed to ensure more sustainable outcomes are realised.