

**1. Singleton Central Business District (CBD) Streetscape Improvement Project**  
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**Executive Summary:**

The Singleton CBD Streetscape Improvement Project Concept Plan Report, April 2008, has been provided to all Councillors.

The Report espouses a new vision for the CBD of Singleton that will ensure that the CBD will be a place of vibrancy and positive social interaction for the community and visitors of Singleton for many years to come. It is considered that the benefits to the community of Singleton far outweigh the costs.

The Report considers a practical project and details a way forward for the progression of the concept.

**Background:**

**History**

In the late 1990's Singleton Council and the Singleton Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc. agreed to enter into a partnership to improve the aesthetic appeal of Singleton's Central Business District (CBD).

The object of the CBD Streetscape Improvement Project at the time was to beautify Singleton's commercial environs enhancing the appeal of the streets for the business community of Singleton, shoppers, the residents of Singleton, visitors and tourists.

A great deal of feedback was obtained from the public and it was evident from data gathered that the public was behind the beautification of the Singleton CBD area.

Council received the CBD Streetscape Improvement Project Steering Committee Report in 1998.

However, due to a number of reasons the full beautification proposal was not instigated and a subsequent project of footpath replacement by paving was commenced. This project has now involved six stages of paving work to the value of approximately \$1.6 M.

In March 2007 Council considered a report concerning provision of an appropriate level of funding for future Singleton CBD Streetscape Improvements to allow for a process of review, scoping, prioritisation and facilitation of the future project and for continuation of the actual physical work in 2007/08.

Council subsequently resolved as follows:

*That:*

- 1. Council consider providing, subject to availability of funds, the amount of \$75,000 in the Draft 2007/08 Budget and Management Plan process for a review, scoping, prioritisation process and business planning of the Central Business District Streetscape Project.*
- 2. Council consider providing subject to availability of funds the amount of \$325,000 in the Draft 2007/08 Budget and Management Plan process for Central Business District Streetscape Stage 7.*
- 3. If funds proposed in Item 1 are insufficient, the additional funding requirement be taken from item 2 and alternatively if there are any savings in item 1 the savings be added to the funds available in Item 2.*

Council was subsequently able to fund the \$400,000 detailed above in the 2007/08 Budget.

It was hoped that with a new process developed for the project the following would be instigated:

- Review and improvement of the initial concept plans and design;
- Scoping;
- Prioritisation and staging of the project;
- Consultation;
- Definite plan including financials that the community can commit to;
- Professional facilitation of the whole process.

The Singleton Streetscape Sub Committee has instigated the process to commence the above and produced the Singleton CBD Streetscape Improvement Project Concept Plan Report, April 2008. This Report has been provided to each Councillor under separate cover.

#### ***Streetscape Sub Committee***

Council's Streetscape Sub Committee consists of the following:

#### *Singleton Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc.*

- Gill Eason (President)
- Bruce Whatham
- Jim Gauld
- Darren Hill

#### *Singleton Small Business Group (Association now has ceased to operate)*

- Gail Thompson

#### *Council Staff*

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|--------------------|---|
| ▪ Gary Woodman     | Director Operations                         |
| ▪ Greg McTaggart   | Manager Works                               |
| ▪ Chris Martin     | Manager Design and Contracts                |
| ▪ Alan Fletcher    | Manager Parks and Facilities                |
| ▪ Belinda Charlton | Director Corporate and Development Services |
| ▪ Mark Ihlein      | Manager Planning and Development Services   |
| ▪ Anthony Egan     | Manager Finance                             |
| ▪ John Waghorn     | Executive Manager Strategy and Governance   |
| ▪ Don Gray         | Economic Development Officer                |

Numerous other relevant staff members such as the Senior Town Planner, Development Engineer, Coordinator Strategic Landuse Planning, Manager Community Services, Parks Technicians, Management Accountant etc. have been consulted on various aspects of the Project Concept.

#### *Consultants*

In September 2007 APP Corporation, Newcastle in conjunction with Andrews Neil Urban Design Group, Gosford were engaged to provide an appropriate investigation report on the Streetscape Concept.

APP's brief was as follows:

- Identify the urban and public domain quality objectives to be achieved.
- Build and maintain an effective partnership and communication lines with Council and local business stakeholders.
- Develop and deliver a compelling vision based on a clear understanding of Council's and the business community's economic, social and environmental objectives.
- Carry out a review of the 1990's Concept Plan to ensure its principles will deliver optimum value to Council and the business community, and
- Define, program and manage the process from initiation through to delivery of the Streetscape Improvement Strategy.

APP Corporation is one of Australia's largest and most respected project management companies. Andrews Neil's expertise is in high quality landscape and urban design.

The Streetscape Sub Committee met with the Consultants numerous times in the form of workshops, presentations and individual meetings and interviews. A full CBD area inspection was also undertaken.

In formulating and improving on the final Concept Plan Report the Consultants also met with all relevant internal stakeholder staff (Planners, Development Engineers, Community Services, Finance, Parks and Facilities, etc) and the Executive Management Team. Full presentations were provided to obtain feedback.

On 17 March 2008, the Consultants in conjunction with the Director Operations and the community members of the Streetscape Sub Committee presented the Singleton CBD Streetscape Improvement Project Concept Plan to Councillors in a confidential Workshop.

At the time of writing this report the full Streetscape Sub Committee has programmed a further workshop with Councillors on Monday 30 June, 2008 on the Concept Plan to ensure that all relevant information is provided, explained and understood including the thinking behind the concept in preparation for this Report.

#### ***Community and Business Survey Results***

In late 2007 Council conducted a Community and Business Survey.

In regard to the Business Survey, opinion was sought on the current level of satisfaction with the CBD Streetscape works. Of the businesses surveyed, 48% had a high level of satisfaction with the improvement works and a large majority (97%) agreed that the improvement works should continue and 96% of those believed that the works should involve a significant enhancement of the current improvement scheme.

There was also a high degree of support for financial contribution by businesses to the required works.

#### ***Project Vision and Approach***

The need to create a vision for the Singleton Central Business District was recognised by all stakeholders involved in the review process as the first and most important action.

Council's vision is "Singleton; A progressive community of excellence and sustainability". The Streetscape Concept builds on this vision.

The Streetscape Concept Plan reflects and supports Singleton's will and need to become a modern and vibrant regional centre sympathetic to the town's country feel and values.

The importance of the local place has been identified as a key driver providing direction and purpose for change and improvement of the public realm. The creation of intimate places, pocket parks and wider footpaths are control elements to the realisation of a vision with a "sense of place". It will be safer and more user friendly and will connect land use with economic and social/cultural needs.

The Concept Plan that has been presented to Council will:

- Encourage the active involvement of all stakeholders, particularly the business community;
- Set standards of excellence that reflect high ideals and a sense of place;
- Inspire local residents and businesses and encourage their commitment;
- Challenge people and organisations to align their efforts in a common direction;
- Embrace Singleton's unique culture and values.

The new CBD Streetscape Concept Plan is not merely beautification, it is proactive redevelopment of the Singleton Business District, and it is a look into a positive future for Singleton. It is visionary and will attract and retain shoppers and tourists in the long term to ensure that the whole CBD is vibrant and the whole community benefits.

***The Concept Plan***

The revised Concept Plan transforms the CBD by providing a local identity owned by the community. The Plan aims to encourage growth and sustainability of business activity within the area. The Plan's objectives are to:

- Improve the quality of the public domain and environment;
- Strengthen community identity by fostering Singleton's "Sense of Place" and respect for landscape and culture;
- Strengthening a civic pride;
- Enhance business opportunities especially in regard to dining and entertainment;
- Engage the community in the process of change; and
- Act as a catalyst in the revitalisation of the CBD, attracting investment opportunities and improving employment prospects.

The Concept Plan principle is to establish an aesthetically pleasing environment with a "sense of place" that has a distinctive character, a consistent design/theme, clearly defines the town, integrates built form with hard and soft landscape and allows efficient and easy access and use of public assets.

The theme integrates heritage values whilst allowing for contemporary infill development. It will create a statement that acknowledges future direction based on a firm foundation of history and civic pride.

***Precincts***

The Concept Plan allows for the development and creation of a sequence of precincts which have been designed to manage outcomes in particular areas. However they are by no means boundaries or isolated zones.

The creation of precincts has evolved through looking at the particular businesses and functions unique to each area and how their integration can start defining opportunities and constraints and create a structure for future planning.

The six vision Precincts are as follows:

- Station Vision Precinct;
- John Street CBD Vision Precinct – southern end;
- John Street CBD Vision Precinct – central hub;
- John Street CBD vision Precinct – northern end;
- Northern Approach Vision Precinct; and
- New England Highway Vision Precinct.

These Precincts are further detailed on Cover Sheet 01 within the Concept Report.

***Station Vision Precinct***

This is the lower portion of the CBD near Singleton's railway station. The area is an outstanding opportunity for new residential, commercial and retail development.

The streetscape proposed for the area is consistent with other precincts but should be given special treatment for encouraging evening vibrancy and a suburb like quality.

A central medium strip is proposed and the wider streets will enable increased parking near Pritchard Park and along "old John Street".

Pritchard Park will form part of the gateway into the Singleton CBD from the south.

***John Street CBD Vision Precinct – Southern End***

The redevelopment of the Gowrie Shopping Centre will be the catalyst for this precinct. Ease of movement and connectivity to the town's other anchors are extremely important and pedestrian movement is clarified by the introduction of well defined links to and from the Central Hub from John Street.

Feature paving, custom street furniture, lighting, trees and low mass planted pockets create a safe and friendly street character.

The Gowrie Street Mall developers propose a forecourt to the Shopping Centre that will allow breathing space to John Street.

***John Street CBD Vision Precinct – Central Hub***

This precinct has a food/eatery presence and a cluster of hotels that allows a vision for dining and entertainment to be established.

The vision is a widening of footpaths, introduction of street trees, mass planning of low hedges on the footpath and a portion of the road raised to create a seamless boulevard that will be a key ingredient to a successful and thriving entertainment and dining precinct that draws movement to and from the retail precinct.

Overhead structures that will be like quasi sub gateways into the dining precinct will serve to compress the space and direct pedestrians sightlines to shopfronts; as well as creating an identify for Singleton that centres on a contemporary take on a town known for its industrial capacity.

Bollards, the flagstone strip of paving and the use of our heritage sandstone combine to provide a unified vision for the entire project.

Lost car parking will be accommodated within a reconfigured William Street car park.

Annes Lane will be turned into a pedestrian only plaza that will lend itself to festivals, busking and future events.

Alfresco dining will be encouraged; the area will be a centre of social activity.

***John Street CBD Vision Precinct – Northern Hub***

A consistent and uniform streetscape is proposed that will funnel attention toward the CBD but not detract from businesses nestled in a revitalised tree lined precinct.

***Northern Approach Vision precinct***

The streetscape vision is to encourage presentation of the built form with the parks at the location showcasing the area.

***New England Highway Vision Precinct***

The vision is to use this precinct to be the gateway into the main CBD. It is to ensure there is a strong sense of arrival and to direct people into the CBD.

***Catalysts***

The success of the Concept Plan will be enhanced by the creation of "catalyst projects".

The principle behind the catalyst projects is to create "show cases" where the Concept Plan's positive impacts can be displayed early in the process, encouraging local and business support for other components of the Concept Plan.

Within the concept Plan three catalyst projects have been identified:

- Catalyst project 1; Annes Lane closure, footpath widening, landscaping and raised section of John Street, between Hunter and Pitt Streets (Area 7);

- Catalyst project 2: Streetscape improvements along Campbell Street (Areas 10, 12 and 13);
- Catalyst Project 3; Streetscape improvements in Area 5 of the Station Vision Precinct.

### ***Catalyst Project 1***

Focuses on the economic and social benefits expected from the creation of a design to encourage pedestrian activity and on street/alfresco social interaction in the John Street CBD Vision Precinct – Central Hub. The vision is for an attractive and accessible place for gathering before and after shopping and in the evening that is strongly connected to Singleton's character rather than the homogenous and bland experience of a modern enclosed shopping centre.

### ***Catalyst Project 2***

Provides the establishment of a sense of arrival by improving streetscape along Campbell Street that becomes the gateway to Singleton's CBD.

### ***Catalyst Project 3***

Revitalises the southern end of John Street near Pritchard Park.

### ***Benefits***

The Streetscape Concept Plan has been designed to create social and economic value through the development of an integrated retail and social experience. The aim is to achieve the development of suitable gateways between the CBD Shopping Centres and street shopping and dining.

The core benefits are:

- Building the attractiveness of the CBD to provide movement of people between a balanced and integrated retail and social interaction and leisure area;
- Improving the visual attractiveness and competitiveness of businesses in the CBD.
- Reduction of business leakage from Singleton.
- Decreased likelihood of transferring current local expenditure to major retail developments in the local area.

Overall the benefits of the Streetscape Concept can be summarised as follows:

### ***Design***

- Provision of an environment for pedestrian activity;
- A precinct focus that embellishes existing and desired character;
- Provides improved parking that maximises numbers and improves circulation;
- Adopts safety by design principles;
- Provides a consistent design approach to materials and furnishings.

### ***Economics***

- Develops a series of magnets or activity attractions;
- Provides a balance between vehicle and pedestrian movement;
- Expands on the desirable retail hub;
- Allows for mixed residential, commercial and retail use;
- Targets appropriate live and work opportunities.

### ***Social***

- Allows on-street alfresco social interaction;
- Enhances aesthetics and refreshes the town's appearance;
- Provides for the cultural background of the town (agricultural and industrial);
- Allows opportunities for partnership between business, government and the community;
- Provides an extension to Hunter Valley Tourism destinations.

The Concept Plan Report expands further on a Regional Benefits Analysis.

**Practical Project****Capital Costs**

The total estimated project cost is \$8.092M exclusive of GST. Councillors need to be aware that this is indicative only as the project is only at design concept stage and it would only be when further detailed design documentation becomes available that estimates can be further confirmed.

Appendix B of the Concept Report details the estimates of costs.

However funding will always be limited.

The Streetscape Sub Committee after determining the level of funding that may be made available from Council resources and loans have determined that a "Practical Project" for Streetscape will amount to a cost of \$6.68M with the following make-up and program:

Year	Area	Base Case Estimated Capital Cost	Estimated Supplementary Items Cost	Beautification Works Allowance	Estimated Total Costs
1	7	1.257M	925 k	1.255 M	3.437 M
2	8 - 13	1.533 M	80 k	-	1.613 M
3	5,6 & 14-16	1.630 M	-	-	1.630 M
<b>Total</b>		<b>4.420 M</b>	<b>1.005 M</b>	<b>1.255 M</b>	<b>6.680 M</b>

**Operational Costs**

At the present time Council's CBD Caretaking Service has a budget of approximately \$80,000 per annum made up of \$50,000 collected from CBD businesses using a Section 608 Charge and \$30,000 from General Funds.

It has been estimated that operational costs for works related to the proposed CBD Concept Plan covering maintenance and equipment would add a further \$80,000 per annum to CBD Caretaking Services Costs ie. \$160,000 total from approximately end of year 1 of the capital project commencement.

**Project Timelines**

Figure 6 of the Concept Report details the indicative funding timeline.

Relevant work progresses the project to construction commencement in 2009/2010.

**Management Plan:**

Council's 2007/2008 – 2011/2012 Management Plan provided for the review, scoping, prioritisation process, business planning and facilitation for future streetscape work including construction of Streetscape Stage 7.

This report on the Concept Plan will provide the catalyst for the future direction of the project.

The Draft 2008/2009 – 2011/12 Council Management Plan, adopted by Council in June 2008, details as a major strategic item the implementation of the approved streetscape improvement program.

**Council Policy:**

The current Streetscape Project standard is that adopted by Council in the early 2000's where the project involved the replacement of the mostly asphalt footpath with pavers. This has now been adjusted to include the typical signature pavers of Streetscape Stage 6 with beautification such as bollards, rubbish bins, burgundy sign posts and tree surrounds rubber matting.

Council resolved at its meeting on 5 March 2007 to fund a process for a review, scoping, prioritisation and business planning for the CBD Streetscape Project and to provide for Stage 7 of the project.

**Legislation:**

Relevant legislation is:

- Local Government Act, 1993
- Roads Act, 1993
- Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, 1979

**Sustainability:**

**Social:**

Detailed within the Section "Background".

**Environmental:**

Detailed within the Section "Background".

**Financial:**

The complete Streetscape Concept Project Plan capital cost amounts to \$8.092 M.

The practical project that is a compromise between realistic costs and its funding and important design elements within the concept amounts to \$6.68 M.

A Construction Program of 3 years would be expected for the "Practical Project".

Increased maintenance and operational costs for an enhanced streetscape amounts to a further \$80,000 per annum than present from the end of the first year of construction.

Funding of the \$6.68 M capital outlay would be by internal resources (\$2 M over 3 years) and \$4.68 M bank loan that could be paid for by an increase in rates of the whole community (approximately 5%).

Alternatively the complete capital project could be funded by a loan (\$6.68 M) with the loan payments being made by both a mix of internal resources and rate increase on the whole community.

Alternative sources of capital funding also need to be investigated.

The increase in maintenance and operational costs of a further \$80,000 per annum could be funded by an increase in the CBD Caretaking Service Charge that is charged to CBD Businesses under Section 608 of the Local Government Act, 1993.

At the present time of the \$400,000 2007/08 Budget for streetscape, \$100,000 has been expended on the investigation and reporting for the Concept Plan.

It is considered that it would be appropriate for the rest of the \$300,000 program budget to be allocated to complete the investigation, design and community engagement for the future streetscape project contained within the Streetscape Concept Plan.

The Manager Finance has also advised that there is a need for an appropriate resolution of Council in regard to the \$400,000 2007/08 Streetscape allocation to draw down the loan funds required for this project which was identified in the 2007/08- 2011/12 Management Plan.

**Consultation:**

The Streetscape Concept Plan has come to fruition following consultation with Streetscape Sub Committee members that included Singleton Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc Executives, Singleton Small Business Group and Senior Council Staff.

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Internal consultation has also been undertaken with Council Staff from Planning and Development Services, Community Services, Works, Finance, Parks and Facilities, Water and Waste, Tourism and the Executive Management Team.

It was the Streetscape Sub Committee's intention to ensure that the Streetscape Project Concept Plan vision was appropriately communicated to the current Council and the new Council elected in September 2008.

If the Concept Plan Vision is to be progressed further consultation with all stakeholders needs to be undertaken. There is a need to ensure that the whole Singleton community is informed regarding the process to date and the conceptual nature of the Plan. Stakeholders are envisaged to be at least the following:

- General Community;
- Singleton Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc. members;
- Non Chamber members;
- Shopping Centre owners and major retailers;
- Hoteliers;
- Energy Australia;
- Dining Businesses;
- Singleton & Districts Disability Advisory Committee;
- Community Safety Committee;
- Singleton Tidy Towns Committee;
- Heritage Advisory Committee;
- Cultural Development Committee;
- Singleton Tourism Advisory Group;
- Council Internal Program areas.

The above list is not exhaustive and a project of this importance and magnitude would require the implementation of its own Consultation Strategy and Plan.

**Risk Management:**

The replacement and renewal of the older footpath areas within the Singleton CBD will reduce the potential for slip and trip hazards and associated liability claims.

**Options:**

Council has a number of feasible options, however the simple options are as follows:

1. Provide no commitment to continuation of the CBD Streetscape Improvement Project;
2. Commit to the vision detailed in the Streetscape Concept Plan Report and commit to that Project;
3. Detail a new vision for the Streetscape Improvement Project that differs to that in the Concept Plan Report and commit to that changed Project.

**Progression of Project**

Contained within the Concept Plan Report are a number of recommendations relating to general planning, operational and financial issues.

If Council is to progress the project many of those recommendations would need to be considered and eventually reported on, however to initially commence the progress the following would need to be done by Council:

- Adoption of the Concept;
- Determination of the project timelines;
- Establishment of the Project Control Group (PCG) (Streetscape Sub Committee Community Members, Council Staff and Councillors);
- Direction in the instigation of a detailed Consultation Strategy and Plan;
- Adoption of a Practical Project Budget;
- Direction in the instigation of a detailed investigation into the funding sources for both the capital works and maintenance and operational costs;

- Formal resolution of Council to take up the 2007/08 loan funds for the Streetscape Project.
- Allocation of 2007/2008 funding (approximately \$300,000) for continuation of the investigation, design, consultation and reporting phase of the Streetscape Concept Plan Project.

**Conclusions:**

Development of the new Concept that is contained within the Singleton CBD Streetscape Improvement Project Concept Plan Report, April 2008 has come about following extensive work with Council's consultants. It has involved obtaining the vision and thoughts of many Council staff and community members interested in improving the Singleton CBD.

The Concept Plan is no longer only "beautification", it is a plan to enable Council to proactively redevelop the Singleton Central Business District. It is a look into a positive future and vision for Singleton that will ensure the long term viability of all businesses of the CBD and create a town centre the whole community of Singleton will benefit from.

**RECOMMENDED** that:

1. Council adopt the Streetscape Concept Plan as proposed within the Singleton CBD Streetscape Improvement Project Concept Plan Report April, 2008.
2. The Streetscape Improvement Project Timeline be as per Figure 6 of the Concept Plan Report for indicative funding timeline and Figure 3 of the Concept Plan Report being a 3 year construction period where practical commencing in 2009/2010.
3. Council establish the Singleton Streetscape Project Control Group consisting of the Streetscape Sub Committee Community Members and Council staff as detailed within this report and three (3) Councillors, to be the Advisory Committee on the Streetscape Project.
4. Council determine which Councillors are to be members of the Singleton Streetscape Project Control Group for the Streetscape Project.
5. A detailed Consultation Strategy and Plan be instigated to fully inform and consult with the community and stakeholders in regard to the Singleton Streetscape Project.
6. Council adopt the figure of \$6.68 M exclusive of GST for the practical project budget for the Singleton Streetscape Project.
7. Council receive a further report on funding sources for both the capital works and operational and maintenance costs contained within the Streetscape Improvement Project.
8. The Mayor and General Manager be authorised to sign and seal loan documents for the 2007/08 loan funds of \$400,000 for the Streetscape Improvement Project.
9. Streetscape Project Funding available from 2007/2008 be allocated for continuation of the investigation, design, consultation and reporting phase of the Streetscape Improvement Project.

**Attachments**

There are no attachments for this report.