



## **Singleton Council**

### **Economic Development Strategy**

**2015-2018**



Prepared by  
Strategic Economic Solutions  
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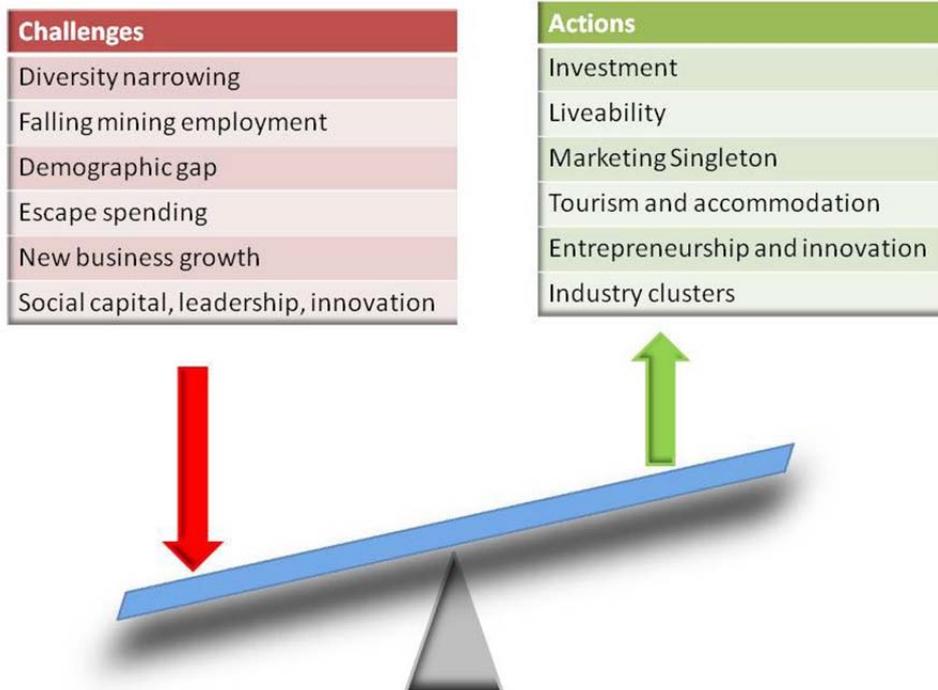
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## 2. Executive Summary

The mining boom's employment peak has passed, and through this *Economic Development Strategy Council* aims to play a major role in strengthening Singleton's economy in the new business environment.



The main challenges will be:

- Turning around the trend that has seen employment diversity narrowing as Singleton grew around mining and mining services, with little growth in employment in other industries.
- Limiting the fallout from reduced employment in mining operations, helping locally-based mining services businesses continue on.
- Plugging a 'demographic gap' that will see fewer residents aged 30-40 settling in Singleton – and plugging this gap before the workforce shrinks.
- Reducing the volume of retail escape spending by re-invigorating the Town Centre
- Helping new business formation and business growth.
- Strengthening social capital, leadership and innovation to underpin greater vibrancy and diversification.

A set of actions has been prepared to address these challenges and respond to community priorities for Singleton's economic future.

### **Investment**

Council will drive, support and actively chase investment: High return prospects include:

- Iconic tourism attractor
- Bulky goods retail
- Warehousing and distribution
- Specialty retail
- Boutique accommodation (linked with wine tourism trails)
- Co-working space and small or home based business hub

Council will review these potential prospects and prepare an outline of a business case for each to help attract capital. Council will prepare an investment prospectus to highlight the opportunities available.

### **Liveability**

Council will deliver the Town Centre Revitalisation investment package, and continue to work to enhance the quality of community and social services in Singleton. Revitalisation of the Town Centre to improve attractiveness will help 'Put Singleton CBD on the map' as a regional shopping destination. Activities to bring a cultural change emphasising Singleton's arts, heritage and streetscape vibrancy will make Singleton a more popular destination.

### **Marketing the Singleton package**

Council will take the lead with preparing a package of promotional material highlighting the attributes and attractiveness of 'the Singleton lifestyle package'. Marketing efforts will promote the package to targeted potential new residents.

### **Tourism and accommodation**

Council will continue to promote Singleton's tourism offerings and enhance visitor experiences. Council will also work with the tourism and accommodation sector to support refocusing away from reliance on mining-related business travel towards services for targeted tourism segments.

### **Entrepreneurship and innovation**

Council will create a role for Singleton as a hub for entrepreneurship and innovation by promoting the values of locating in Singleton to new businesses, and sponsoring workshops and programs that promote entrepreneurship and innovation. Council will also consider providing suitable accommodation and services to support new start businesses – through low cost accommodation and/or a small/home based business service centre.

### **Industry clusters**

Council will investigate approaches to bring compatible businesses together in small industry cluster groups. There is potential in many industry sectors – including mining services – which Council will evaluate and then run suitable activities that reflect the needs of participants.

The Strategy document contains a detailed implementation workplan identifying tasks, resources and timelines and milestones which will guide Council's economic development activities for the next three years.

# 3. Introduction

## 1.1 Preparing the Economic Development Strategy

Singleton Council is taking a strategic approach to economic development, identifying market and information gaps that are inhibiting economic growth and taking the leading role in addressing these issues through the development of an Economic Development Strategy. The Strategy will provide a clear and concise framework for economic development activities identified as critical to the future economy of Singleton.

This action is timely as Singleton's local economy is at a critical point as a decade of expansion based around increased labour needs in the coal mines comes to a close. With the investment-heavy capacity expansion phase now winding up for the main coal mines, labour needs are starting to fall rapidly, and this will accentuate in the short and medium-term future as lower coal prices drive further improvements in efficiency and the related loss of direct employment. This is the core of the down side. But there is an upside as well, which is steady population growth and gradual growth in non-mining related businesses in the area. Development in the next 2-3 years will determine the health of the Singleton economy for many years to come.

This *Economic Development Strategy* and the accompanying *Singleton Economic Context* assess Singleton's economic strengths, weaknesses and potential, and set out an active Workplan covering short, medium and long term priorities. The Workplan sets out actions for Singleton Council's Economic Development Team in terms of economic development initiatives that are within Council's ability to influence.

The Strategy has been prepared following quantitative assessment of Singleton's economy, extensive consultation with business and other stakeholders, and several forums to review emerging directions and recommendations. The analysis and consultations addressed a series of important questions:

- 1) Where is the Singleton economy up to, and how does it compare with others?
- 2) Where can the local economy evolve to?
- 3) How can it get there?
- 4) What impediments are there to growth and how do we overcome them?
- 5) What external forces may influence growth?
- 6) How should Singleton Council lead or stimulate this?

The results of these lines of enquiry were compiled into a draft *Economic Development Strategy*, the implications and recommendations were discussed with Council, and then a comprehensive set of achievable actions developed in the form of a Workplan for Council staff. This Workplan forms the last section of this Strategy document.

# 4. Key issues facing Singleton

This chapter summarises the views of residents, business and community leaders gathered through the consultation process.

Singleton is a vibrant country town in a rural setting situated in the centre of the Hunter Valley, north of Newcastle with a population of approximately 23,500 people. For the past 20 years Singleton has enjoyed the benefits of a growing mining industry, which has brought prosperity to the town. There are approximately 24 mining companies that are working in the area employing over 5,000 people.

Singleton is also home to Lone Pine Army Base which can take up to 2,000 recruits at any given time who are stationed here for up to 14 weeks as part of their training. The town is also home to up to 500 permanent army personnel.

Many local businesses are focused on servicing the mining sector and are largely reliant on the sector for their survival. They include companies that repair and maintain mining equipment. As a result of the dependence in mining the Singleton economy has not diversified in the way many of their rural counterparts have. In that sense the mining industry has been a double edged sword, bringing wealth and prosperity, but with the subsequent downturn, an uncertain future for those who are completely reliant on the mines. People understand the sector is cyclic and currently going through a downturn.

Originally settled in 1824, Singleton had an agricultural base predominately in dairy and cattle. The dairy industry has shrunk but is still producing similar levels to what it was previously and beef cattle production is still high but with far fewer producers along with some lucerne for cattle feed grown. The broader agricultural sector has all but disappeared where there were previously 400 dairies, now there are only 5 although just as productive as the total used to be. Additionally there were previously 15 market gardeners, now there is only one left. There are some vineyards which are doing quite well.

Singleton is a mixed bag with many interviewed stating there is a two tiered community with many transient people moving through in a couple of years and then the longer term residents.

While most people consulted believe that Singleton is a good place to live they are worried about the environmental degradation, dust and pollution caused by the mines. They are also of the belief that Council needs to provide a solid and unified vision for the future and strong good leadership in order for the town to move forward.

## 2.1 First impressions of Singleton

Singleton has some wonderful old buildings with heritage value in the town, unfortunately most buildings have not been renovated in a way that highlights their heritage value, so you have search for them as they are not immediately apparent. The town doesn't reflect its agricultural history and heritage at all.

The main street is long and drawn out and local shoppers tend to drive between locations in the main street. I had to search for a cup of coffee, however upon closer inspection I found many coffee shops were tucked away in arcades or in the new Gowrie St Mall. There is no footpath dining or advertising on the footpath due to Council restrictions. The main street offers few opportunities to sit and rest with very few benches and little shade.

Signage is good on the approach to town directing people into the main street and shopping area and the Tourism Information Centre is well positioned at the entrance to town on the New England Hwy.

There is little or no sign of vandalism or graffiti in the city centre and the majority of areas are clean, tidy and well maintained. There is a blend of modern and heritage buildings in the main street but with no obvious theme. There are a large number of pubs, with the majority of them targeting “workers” (predominately men) and not many of them providing a comfortable and relaxing experience, for women. In fact some pubs even advertised “Lingerie girls” starting as early as breakfast.

There are a number of take away food shops, cafes and a handful of restaurants. Many appear to be serving the same kind of fare, ie hamburgers, sandwiches, etc with only a couple standing out from the rest. The shops don’t appear to be targeting the tourist market with what they provide and cater only to the local market. There are very few unique interesting shops to attract visitors looking for a different and interesting shopping experience. The mall is tucked away behind a large carpark and offers the usual array of chain stores you would find in any mall in Australia.

Many of these issues will be resolved or alleviated with the Town Centre Revitalisation scheduled to commence in 2015.

## 2.2 Issues

### 2.2.1 Community / Population / Services

Many people interviewed felt that the Singleton Community is somewhat fragmented and has little to bind it together. Many commented that it is a two tiered economy and community, made up of long term residents and newcomers. This has been brought about by years of dominance by two major industry sectors bringing a series of transient workers to town; mining and defence.

Associated issues accompany this situation including the lack of employment opportunities for spouses of military personnel and those employed by the mines. This along with a range of other issues makes Singleton a less attractive place to relocate families. There is reportedly a shortage of childcare facilities and as many of the people moving into Singleton are young families there is a high level of need for childcare. This presents difficulties for those young families along with the scarcity of public transport making it difficult for people, especially young and aged people to get around. While there are some aged care services available there are no independent living facilities for the elderly.

Many people are concerned about the drain of young people from town. This is an issue for many regional towns; young people leave in order to pursue their education or discover the world. Many of the consultations raised concerns about how to attract

these people back to Singleton once they are ready to settle down and raise their own families.

### 2.2.2 Business / Industry

According to the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan 2011, there are major industry issues in the region.

“Structure of industry - a reliance on a narrow industry base with the major sectors linked to local resources nexus (mining and agriculture). Ongoing pressures of a dual speed economy, with the growth in mining and its impacts on other sectors and on communities.

Competing land use and resource issues - the growth of existing key sectors (agriculture) and diversification options are dependent on maintaining critical mass in these sectors (eg. equine, wine).<sup>1</sup>

Broadly, those interviewed felt there had been a downsizing of the Hunter economy generally. Many felt there was a lack of opportunities for people with ideas which has come about by the town being too singularly focused on mining without planning for the future. Most people were of the view that Singleton is badly in need of diversification.

While previously money was perceived as flowing out of the economy with the drive in drive out mining sector, many people are now of the view that accompanying the mining job loses the consumer confidence is gone. People remain hopeful that with a change of attitude and perspective, skills and expertise which are demonstrated in Singleton such as engineering and innovation will be transferrable to areas other than the mining sector.

### 2.2.3 Workforce

The mining sector has been experiencing a downturn in the last two years and with that downturn approximately 5,000 jobs in the Hunter have been lost or will be going soon.

#### *Regional Workforce Issues*

“The Upper Hunter is a region with industries that rely heavily on trades and skills, particularly in engineering, automotive, electro technology and construction. An increase in the number of residents commuting to jobs in adjacent LGAs; limited jobs growth; a narrow range of job opportunities in the non-mining LGAs; and an ageing workforce are all issues affecting the Upper Hunter Region.

Youth unemployment is a major issue in the region, with limited availability of entry level positions for young people and evidence of some youth disengaging from education and training.

The LGAs that make up the Upper Hunter Region differ in their industry structure but experience some common workforce issues:

- Difficulties in recruiting professionals in local government and other service industries
- Competition for skilled labour and tradespersons with mining
- A need to improve the local delivery of VET programs and higher education

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<sup>1</sup> Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan 2011

- Difficulties in recruiting childcare workers and securing a sustainable workforce in the aged care sector, and
- The impacts of the volatility in the coal sector<sup>2</sup>

Locally it was reported that it is difficult to find good staff especially in the hospitality and tourism sector. Local businesses also have difficulty with talent and skills retention. Many people interviewed reported that they could not compete with the mines in regard to salary. The difficulty arose when employers spend time, money and skills in training their staff only to find they can't resist the lure of higher wages for relatively unskilled work in the mines such as driving trucks.

#### 2.2.4 Lifestyle / Hospitality / Tourism

One of the challenges for Singleton's tourism sector raised in consultations is that the LGA has no major tourist attraction which is a year-round destination in its own right.

"The initial main challenge for the Hunter Valley is that the message of a sophisticated yet authentic, immersing visitor experience, based on quality wines and food, is not yet fully understood by the high potential visitor target markets. The destination needs to be able to put some significant industry and government support behind the brand to substantially change what is a relatively static market situation. However, research also shows there is a strong link between the image of Hunter Valley wines and the motivation and intention to visit the Hunter Valley for a food/wine experience. The brand marketing needs to work on both challenges.

The other main challenge to growing its visitor economy is how best to increase the number and length of stay of its overnight visitors (both domestic and international) - the markets which provide the best return for the destination economy. The immediate opportunity is to further develop a range of highly motivational visitor experiences that will help encourage overnight visitation and length of stay lie in extending the food and wine experience, developing more nature experiences (particularly soft adventure) and also capitalising on the strong colonial, indigenous and industrial heritage of both Cessnock and Singleton."<sup>3</sup>

Many people feel that Singleton could focus on the conference market if a good convention centre was available, as well as the 'grey nomad market' and the sporting market. In order to achieve this the accommodation providers need to broaden their focus from the mining sector and work together in targeting new markets

Many of those interviewed also recommended upgrading Lake St Clair to enable camping, walking trails, picnics, boating and fishing. Singleton has a high standard of existing sporting facilities in the areas of tennis, swimming, playing fields and netball however, in order to attract large sporting events such as the Masters Games a consolidation of sporting facilities and buy in from the accommodation providers would be necessary.

The Lone Pine Military Museum has potential as a tourism attractor as has the wine industry. Many people felt that working together with "Wine Country" tourism marketing to include Singleton and its wine tourism offerings was essential in order to capture some of the tourism market further south in Cessnock.

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<sup>2</sup> Upper Hunter Regional Workforce Plan 2014

<sup>3</sup> Hunter Valley Visitor Economy Destination Management Plan 2014

## 2.2.5 Main Street

Many people interviewed felt that the main street revitalisation project was long overdue. Most people were of the view that the main street was dreary, not attractive to potential employees, and that the retail offer was boring having lost many unique and interesting shops. While people were very pleased to have the new Gowrie St Mall they indicated that it has the same shops as offered all over Australia. Many felt that Singleton needed a retail offer that reflects the local culture and was unique and interesting.

People felt the lack of café culture and footpath dining and realised that if Singleton is to attract tourists and visitors and new settlers to live it needs to provide those things that people expect. Good food, good coffee, a comfortable relaxing main street and interesting shopping as well as services such as education, health and jobs.

Many people were of the view that the Main Street Revitalisation needs to be themed paying homage to Singleton's history, heritage and rural background. The things mentioned most were that people want to slow down the traffic, make the main street more vibrant with places to sit with shade trees provided. They would like to see the main street opened up to Ryan Ave where possible and more outdoor dining options.

## 2.2.6 Mining

Singleton has had an over reliance on the mining industry for many years which has impacted on the town in both positive and negative ways. Many people believe that mining industry is cyclic and that it will be another 2 – 3 years before mining picks up again. In the meantime the outcomes of the sharp employment losses in recent months due to the mining downturn have led to the loss of jobs and therefore the loss of income in the local economy. With less average spend some businesses are feeling the impact and that has led to measures to ensure business survivability such as cutting employees hours and laying off excess staff. While the degree of severity is reported to have reduced recently, it is still an issue that needs addressing.

In the medium term, the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan identified the role of mining and mining services as a major issue:

“One of the major industry issues in the region is the long-term future horizon of coal mining and the levels and location of employment over the next 20-30 years. There will be a number of local jobs to replace over longer term horizons (although mobile workforces are largely covering the current rapid jobs growth)..... Over time there is potential for cyclical variations in demand levels. At the same time new coal technologies will reduce emissions and extend market horizons.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.2.7 Environment

Environmental degradation is a major downside of the mining industry's presence in Singleton and surrounds. People interviewed commonly complained about the enormous holes in the ground left by mining activities, the dust, and the level of pollution caused. Many were of the view that the pollution is one of the reasons stopping people from wanting to move to Singleton.

Increased traffic as a result of mine workers, contractors working on the expressway and a range of other contributing factors has also resulted in more pollution.

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<sup>4</sup> Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan 2011

The major environmental issues highlighted in the Hunter Diversification Plan were:

- Environmental Issues including the potential impact of climate change on regions and sub-regions (on agriculture, and tourism); any impacts of a proposed carbon tax and an ETS on the mining sector and the power generation sector; and future opportunities for carbon trading and carbon sequestration.
- Availability of water to service growing populations, regional industries and agriculture.
- Maintenance of productive land for agriculture and ensuring appropriate buffers.”<sup>5</sup>

Along with the negative aspects, the level of degradation does provide an opportunity for rehabilitation.

### 2.2.8 Housing / Aged Care

According to the NSW Minerals Council I Upper Hunter Mining Dialogue: Housing Research Scoping Study – Stage 1, the major driver for growth in the upper Hunter region has been mining activity driving jobs growth in mining operations and support services.

The demand for housing drove prices up for many years and this lack of housing affordability impacted upon the ability of businesses and service agencies to attract skilled workers. However the impact of the current downturn in mining has caused a reduction in housing costs bringing a temporary reprieve to the housing affordability issues.

Real estate agents have reported an unpredicted turnaround from high rents and low vacancies 12 months ago, to a surplus of rental stock, reductions in weekly rents in the order of \$100- \$200 / week and a reduction in house sale prices.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the rental housing vacancy rate has gone from 0% to 15%. Previously Singleton suffered a lack of housing and now that is not the case, however it still suffers from a lack of affordable housing although prices have dropped considerably. Previously a renter could pay \$500 – \$600 per week to rent a 3brdm house, now one would expect to pay in the order of \$300 - \$350 per week.

Along with the rest of Australia, Singleton has an aging population. The ageing population is driving demand for accommodation and services for seniors. Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan 2011 has identified the ageing of the population and a need to develop accommodation and services for seniors as major issues facing Singleton.

Of the current population there are 2,450 people aged 65 years and over. Over the next 20 years, numbers of people aged 65 and over are expected to double within the Singleton LGA.

The following table is reproduced from the Singleton Lifestyle Plan for Older People (June 2014) and is based on the 2006 Census data and shows the projected increase in the older population for the Singleton local government area between 2011 and 2036. The age group 55 – 64 is not included in the total.

*Table 1: Increase in older population for Singleton LGA*

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<sup>5</sup> Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan 2011

Age Group	Forecast increase		
	2006 to 2011	2006 to 2021	2006 to 2036
55 – 64	1410	1610	1760
65 – 74	1370	2190	2740
75 - 84	780	1060	2010
85 +	300	410	900
Total	2450	3660	5650

This increase in population in people aged 65 and over equates to:

- 2011, an increase of 10.1%
- 2021, an increase of 13.4%
- 2036, an increase of 17.7%

Public transport is virtually non-existent in Singleton and people are reliant on their vehicles. This limits access to health and community services especially for the elderly. Many people interviewed commented on the need for improved public transport.

In accordance with the Singleton Lifestyle Plan for Older People a number of Actions resulting from the Plan outline Council's intentions with the aging population, they include;

- Work with appropriate bodies to facilitate the development of an independent living retirement village.
- Develop parks and gardens with interest and destination points that will attract and appeal to older people (such as public art, heritage items, landscaped gardens, seating, shading, water features, outdoor fitness areas).

# 5. Strengths and Weaknesses

According to the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan 2011

“The Upper Hunter has a number of major advantages including: access to a major port, national road and rail networks, well located industrial land; a growing population; workforce skills; access to a major regional airport; a significant defence presence; access to a large regional market and proximity to the Sydney market. Improvements in regional highways are having impacts and will make the Upper Hunter Region more accessible as an industry location. “Major constraints include: slow population growth in some areas; ageing populations; competing land use; perceptions of location and access; availability of developed industrial estates; and competition with other regions (eg. Lower Hunter, Mid North Coast, Central Coast, and Western New South Wales (eg. Dubbo, Tamworth, and Parkes).”

This table draws together the wide range of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified during the consultations undertaken for this Economic Development Strategy.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural environment, attractive place to live</li> <li>• First town off the Expressway</li> <li>• Friendly, sense of community</li> <li>• Good sporting facilities &amp; organisations</li> <li>• Proximity to Newcastle &amp; Sydney</li> <li>• Heritage/History – Buildings, stories &amp; characters</li> <li>• Good family environment-great place to raise a family</li> <li>• Good educational facilities</li> <li>• Generations of Traditional Owners still here</li> <li>• Good Health/Medical services here</li> <li>• The Hunter Expressway</li> <li>• Plenty of land &amp; potential for large mining land use in future</li> <li>• Good roads, bridges etc</li> <li>• Good shopping centre &amp; Town Centre(when finished)</li> <li>• Army Base</li> <li>• Strong Mining Industry</li> <li>• Strong Agriculture/Viticulture/ Equine Industry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor passenger rail and public transport generally</li> <li>• Some environmental issues from mining (dust, flora/fauna, water , ground disturbance etc)</li> <li>• Transient population – mining and Army</li> <li>• 2 tired community due to mining wages</li> <li>• Reliance on Mining – too many eggs in one basket</li> <li>• Lack of affordable housing</li> <li>• Some retail lacking – eg bulky goods, Fruit &amp; Veg</li> <li>• General business continues to lose their trained staff to (higher) mining wages</li> <li>• Childcare shortages</li> <li>• Lack of jobs for partners of Miners and Army personnel</li> <li>• Lack of telecommunications infrastructure, mobile blackspots in many areas, very poor internet coverage/speeds in some areas</li> </ul>
Opportunities/Gaps	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tourism – offer something else for Wine Country visitors</li> <li>• Branding for the area</li> <li>• Rehabilitated &amp; Offset Mine lands</li> <li>• Lowish business running costs</li> <li>• Value add to agricultural/horticultural products</li> <li>• Make Singleton a Regional Centre – come from all surrounding towns for services/shopping</li> <li>• Aged Care/Independent living apartments</li> <li>• Health opportunities</li> <li>• Education – University campus, new TAFE courses, private enterprise</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not sufficient diversification – too high a reliance on the ups &amp; downs of Mining</li> <li>• Not sufficient diversity in the housing market offerings (to cater for transient workforce)</li> <li>• If no pick up in coal price – then expect further job losses and reduction in population</li> <li>• Poor telecommunication infrastructure threatens the viability of businesses and</li> </ul>

# 6. Community priorities for a sustainable economy

This Chapter builds on the previous chapters and outlines opportunities community members see as viable options to assist in dealing with the issues they perceive as facing them. As expected their suggestions are not only about economics but reflect interest in a much broader platform of community wellbeing. In that sense it is difficult to look at these issues in isolation as they are intertwined and the community priorities reflect initiatives that the community would like to see happen over the next five years to address the issues raised.

Many of these issues have been raised in the consultation processes for the development of other plans, and accordingly actions are in train by both State and Local Governments to address these issues.

While Chapter 2 outlines what the community sees as issues facing them, this short Chapter summarises these community desires – which relate to economic issues as well as broader social and environmental issues. Deeper analysis of economic strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are set out in Chapters 5 and 6. And the two streams (community priorities and economic analysis) are brought together in Chapters 7 and 8 to recommend a set of actions for Council to improve economic growth and job creation prospects in Singleton.

## 4.1 Community priorities for a sustainable economy

These priorities listed below represent the views of people consulted in Singleton. They are not all appropriate activities for Council to get involved with, as some are outside Council's area of responsibility and are the responsibility of State or Federal Government, however they are a good indication of actions and strategies the broader community believes will assist Singleton to continue to grow and prosper.

Singleton's economy, while reasonably robust, is suffering from a lack of diversity as a result of many years of dependency on mining, a slow decline in the agricultural sector and not taking advantage of the wine industry explosion in the south. According to the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan, future development and diversification involves a number of elements.

- “Building on areas of clear competitive strengths in the region (equine industry; mining support/engineering; power generation; renewables; tourism; and agriculture and processing). A key focus is on building on advantages through a supply chain approach that captures value adding and support activities.
- Encouraging innovation - there is potential for innovation in the region including: low emissions coal initiatives; clean energy technologies (gas and renewables);
- Agriculture (eg. wine, cattle, equine, intensive horticulture). Much of this involves the development of industry/university research and development linkages and partnerships; and
- The increasing skill levels in most sectors and the need to deliver vocational education and training in the region, with stronger business involvement in skills development.

As outlined in the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan;

### **Medium Term Opportunities**

- Mining support
- Mining services
- Power Generation and support
- Tourism
- Logistics hub
- Engineering training centre
- Government services
- Business services

### **Long Term Opportunities**

- Engineering
- Agriculture – intensive horticulture, wine , beef
- Food processing
- Renewable energy and support
- Aged care
- Industry Clusters: this involves developing active industry clusters (involving businesses and industry organisations (chambers and specialist associations – eg equine sector, wine sector).<sup>6</sup>

### **What needs to be done**

While the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan nominates mining support and mining services as medium term opportunities, this economic development strategy emphasises building on the region's other strengths and diversifying the economy to enable it to prosper regardless of mining.

There will be no one panacea for Singleton's problems, rather it will need a series of initiatives spread over a range of sectors in order to bolster the existing economy. The community priorities identified during the consultations are:

**Population** Many in the community are concerned that a slowdown in population growth will follow from shrinking mining industry employment, and are looking for ways to encourage people to still come to live in Singleton. Priorities include:

- More aggressive selling of the 'Singleton Lifestyle Package' and
- Creation of more employment opportunities for spouses of skilled people who move to Singleton

### **Strengthen existing businesses**

There is concern that businesses that have had a good run during the mining boom will be finding trading conditions particularly tough over the next few years. Many of those consulted would like to see activities to help strengthen Singleton's businesses such as:

- Business training and workshops around service ie Aussie Host or the like, Future options workshops, Improving your business culture – focusing on issues such as valuing your employees, ensuring a suitable work life balance,

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<sup>6</sup> Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan

and other mechanisms to ensure employers don't lose employees to the mines after significant investment in training.

- Business Networking – business breakfasts etc
- Diversify the business base
- Co-workspace in town for business

### **Improving hospitality and lifestyle offerings**

Most people want a number of things available to convince them to move to a new town, they include; education, health services, jobs and lifestyle activities. In order to attract people to live in any community it is critical that the activities they enjoy are available. People have an expectation that they will be able to buy a good cup of coffee and find good quality restaurants.

- Tourism / hospitality training – none currently offered at TAFE
- Need to grow the hospitality sector need to train baristas
- Footpath dining
- Build on hospitality leveraging off Wine Country
- Enhance liveability and lifestyle features

### **Cultural Change in the community**

People will not come to live in Singleton for the long term without the high wages that mining offers, they need more. There needs to be a shift in thinking to make Singleton a great place to live with many aspects that people desire made available. In order to ensure this happens, Council needs to drive that lifestyle, cultural and attitudinal change. While many places in town cater to the mining industry, they actively dissuade other market sectors, for example, lingerie girls in the pubs don't attract outsiders and make it uncomfortable for women to participate.

### **Growing the Arts Sector**

Arts equates with money, luxury and leisure time and brings a diverse range of views, attitudes and people into town. Often the Arts Sector is dismissed as a fringe activity not for the mainstream, but there are links between a thriving creative sector and attractiveness of a town for new business, visitors and residents. Singleton would benefit from the development of an Arts Strategy, and working towards the construction of an Art Gallery.

- Grow the Art and creative sector especially Aboriginal art
- Art Gallery space for creative people, new ideas, new business
- Artist in residence – in the old convent
- Incorporate and grow modern art, film, photography, and music
- Annual Art Festival
- Focus on Functional Art ie iron working

### **Heritage**

Singleton has some fine old buildings which tend to be lost amongst the main street and other areas. Often they are obscured by other buildings, painted in lurid or non-descript colours, neglected and overlooked. This is a major part of Singleton's history and needs to be acknowledged as such.

- Heritage walks could be part of the tourism offering.

### **Agriculture**

- Singleton has a long agricultural history and while the sector is declining apart from cattle dairy, horses and vines, this also needs to be acknowledged and

built upon. Priorities include: Food sector development / niche marketing / value adding (driven by local government and business)

- Community gardens (driven by local government and community)
- Wine sector - build on gaining more cellar door and accommodation market share (driven by business)
- Diffusion of ideas and practices that demonstrate Innovation in Agriculture – eg new crop types or growing/harvesting processes

### **Tourism**

It is unlikely that Singleton will ever be an iconic tourist destination in its own right, unless a major unique draw can be developed, however there is a range of tourism offerings that could attract visitors to town. There is a major tourism destination to the south and if Singleton has the right mix of offerings it may be able to attract a market share of that destination by a systematic push to upgrade its tourism offerings and launch the 'Stay Another Day' campaign.

- Wine Tourism – collaborate with Wine Country to become involved. There are approximately 75 cellar doors interacting with customers directly, the Hunter is the oldest wine region in Australia
- Upgrade Lake St Clair – ie picnic areas, toilets, camping, recreational fishing, boating, water skiing, walking trails, provision of shelter
- Good convention centre
- Incorporate Singleton into the 'Grey Nomad' path
- Build on the current strong sporting culture within the town and build a market for Sports tourism eg Masters Games, State and National championship events
- Market mining tourism like Broken Hill, Kalgoorlie
- Stay another day campaign
- Heritage walks
- More footpath dining

### **Assist the accommodation sector to refocus**

- Networking and diversifying the accommodation providers sector
- Move away from the mining sector booking out accommodation enmasse and try and attract a share of the wine tourism sector happening to the south

### **Upgrade of the Main St**

- Need to be themed – look to Singleton's history, heritage and rural background,
- Slow down the traffic
- Streetscaping - places to sit with shade trees provided
- More footpath dining
- Finish the ANZAC walk
- Establish a Heritage walk
- Make more of the river, open up Ryan Ave
- Department Store
- Good fruit and vegetable shop

### **Health and Aged Services**

- Grow the Aged Care Sector. Already have good existing health and aged care services, which is already one of the largest employers

- The population is aging, and its proximity to Newcastle all advantageous to the sector
- There has been huge growth in community care but Singleton still doesn't have nursing home facilities
- More aged accommodation
- Vacant land at back of hospital – good site for aged care facility, independent living facility

### **Education**

- Greater education opportunities - University satellite campus in Singleton (Local Government to lobby universities)
- TAFE Need more variety of courses in TAFE (Local Government to lobby State Government)
- Large catering facility – attached to the high school

### **Planning and Infrastructure**

- Thermal Rehabilitation pool
- Community garden
- Showground – an underutilised asset, could revitalise the kitchens and use as a venue for conferences
- Need to utilise existing facilities, assets and partnerships
- Heritage and history – spruce up the old buildings, walks etc
- Improve telecommunications
- Soft infrastructure – NBN
- Build on the library as a major asset

### **Transport**

- More public transport (State and Local Government)
- Lobby for return of the rail service (Local Government and Community)
- Upgrade the rail system – increase services

### **Environment**

- Centre of excellence for land rehabilitation –requires and draws lots of skills, regeneration work needs to be aligned with community aspirations
- The mines have left a huge amount of infrastructure, sewerage, electricity, sheds, IT etc which could be used by other sectors
- Potential for many lakes

## **4.2 Research findings**

### **A: Retail and the Shopping Precinct Attitudes Survey**

(Findings from the Survey undertaken at the Singleton Show)

Patrons attending the annual Singleton Show were asked a series of questions regarding their views on the retail mix in Singleton, and what types of jobs and new businesses they would like to see in Singleton. Sixty three completed surveys were used to provide the following glimpse of people's views on these issues. Not all respondents answered every question and in some questions multiple answers were acceptable.

The responses for the Retail Survey indicate that generally people would like to see improvements in the retail offering in Singleton. The Retail sector is seen as a litmus of the health of the local economy, and many see it as a potential place of employment if they lose their current job. Respondents' biggest area of concern was in regard to the variety of products available and their inability to purchase goods locally. The items most people indicated they would like to have more choice in purchasing were predominately electrical and white goods, men's and women's clothing and furniture. A very slim majority (51%) of respondents thought Singleton residents gave new businesses 'a fair go' when they started out, indicating that local attitudes may be inhibiting retail business diversification.

Clearly the results of the consultations and survey indicate there is a gap to be filled in 'big box' retail. This gap could provide Council with an opportunity to attract a new retail store such as Harvey Norman or the Good Guys.

**1. Other than mining, what types of jobs would you like to have available to you in Singleton?**

The highest number of jobs available people would like to see occurred in retail at 21% followed by agriculture at 19%.

<b>Jobs</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Retail	12	21%
Agriculture	11	19%
Trades	6	10.5%
Professional	6	10.5%
Tourism	5	9%
Manufacturing	5	9%
Health / Aged Care	3	5%
Arts	2	3%
Other	7	12%
Total	57	100%

## 2. What new businesses would you like to see in Singleton?

Many respondents were interested in seeing new retail, businesses with variety, menswear women's wear and furniture shops being the most popular. 6 or 5% of respondents reported they would like to see more kid's activities.

New Business	Number	%
Variety	12	9%
Menswear	11	8.6%
Women's wear	9	7%
Furniture	9	7%
Kid's activities	6	5%
Appliance	5	4%
Children's wear	5	4%
Home wares	5	4%
Shoe store	3	2%
Nursery	3	2%
Electrical	3	2%
Entertainment	3	2%
Restaurants	3	2%
Health care	3	2%
Fruit and veg	2	1.5%
Health food	1	.75%
IT	1	.75%
Toy shop	1	.75%
Craft shop	1	.75%
Hardware	1	.75%
Fishing store	1	.75%
Youth venue	1	.75%
Parks	1	.75%
Krispy Crème Donuts	1	.75%
Aged Care Services	1	.75%
Handy man lawn care	1	.75%
Swimming pool	1	.75%
Short stay accommodation	1	.75%
Child care	1	.75%
Art Gallery	1	.75%
Total	127	

### 3. What items do you buy outside of Singleton and why?

The highest percentage of respondents at 21 or 24% reported they buy electrical and white good outside of Singleton. This was followed by clothing at 17 or 20% and furniture at 16 or 19%.

Item	Number	%
Electrical & white goods	21	24%
Clothes	17	20%
Furniture	16	19%
Home wares	4	5%
Shoes	4	5%
Nothing / not much	3	3.5%
Variety	3	3.5%
Manchester	2	2.3%
Health services	2	2.3%
Baby items	2	2.3%
Make up	2	2.3%
Toys	2	2.3%
Appliance	2	2.3%
Bedding	1	
Craft shop	1	
Groceries	1	
Pet food	1	
Professional services	1	
Cars	1	
Total	86	

Some comments received regarding Question 3.

*“There is not a good enough range of clothes & shoes which are good quality at decent prices, for anyone apart from teens, and there is nowhere that has a good range of quality children’s clothing & furniture at decent prices either. The same goes for regular household furniture, such as bookcases, wardrobes, etc.”*

*“Having no toy shop apart from Big W, whose range is quite meek for most ages, we go elsewhere for most toys. “*

*“Due to Betta electrical closing down there is now nowhere with a good range of appliances at a decent price.”*

*“Singleton has bad customer service.”*

*“I buy a lot of clothes and fashion items out of town or online as the variety in town is limited.”*

*“Furniture and electrical due to the better price and competitive edge.”*

**4. Do you think the Singleton community supports and gives new businesses a fair go?**

Yes	32	51%
No	25	40%
No answer	6	9%

**5. If you could improve one thing about the existing businesses in Singleton, what would that be?**

The highest number of respondents at 24 or 28% reported that they would like to see more variety or range of goods available, this was followed by an improvement in customer service at 17 or 20% and then trading hours at 16 or 18%.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Variety or Range	24	28%
Customer Service	17	20%
Trading hours	16	18%
Price competitiveness	15	17%
Accessibility and/or parking	12	14%
Other	3	3%
Total	87	

**B: Mining Adjustment Review Business Discussions Outcomes**

SES conducted a series of discussions with mining related businesses and businesses servicing the mining sector to provide a snapshot about their plans for the future and what support they may require to ease the transition of the mining sector downsizing. The interviews were designed as a scoping study to assess whether or not there is a role for Council in providing active assistance to help mining industry adjustment. The discussions provided insights into industry perceptions of prospects and competition, and the potential for greater collaboration amongst complementary businesses in Singleton.

Five significant local businesses were interviewed with employee numbers ranging from 20 to 90 people. All are based in Singleton and provide specialist services or specialist technical materials to the mining sector, or to businesses that service the mining sector. Products and services vary from labour hire and technical expertise, to supply and service of specialised products.

Most businesses interviewed dealt with mining companies in Singleton but also in Mudgee, Gunnedah, and some in Queensland.

Most businesses interviewed have been affected by the mining sector downturn. The main ways in which the downturn has impacted up them is that the level of demand for their products or services has been diminishing as the mining sector slows its operations and reduced their spending and as a result the workload for those businesses has dropped.

Accordingly they have seen a reduction in employment numbers resulting from mine closures, productivity improvement measures and changing mining methods. This has affected all operations, not just those in the Singleton.

All businesses were reasonably optimistic about their future prospects and understood that mining is a cyclic industry and would eventually come back although most felt sure it would not be to the levels previous seen in the last 10 years. Following is a summary of the outcomes of these discussion and select quotes from business operators.

### **Steps Taken**

Most successful businesses were looking at a range of changes in order to minimise the effects of the mining down turn.

### **Staffing**

Unfortunately some business interviewed had to undertake measures such as decreasing staffing levels and reduction of staff hours. Some businesses had laid off as many as twenty employees, while others found staff numbers were reduced due to natural attrition. Others have become more flexible in the work hours to accommodate staff.

### **Retraining Staff**

*“We have trained staff in other skill sets to be used in other areas of the businesses we are moving into such as e-learning.”*

### **New markets**

Many businesses interviewed have developed new sides to the business and retrained staff to operate in these areas. Other businesses have targeted new and niche markets and have become more responsive to the needs of their client base.

*“We have targeted new and niche markets, improved our level of responsiveness and developed new products and services.”*

*“We looked for and secured other contracts, in areas other than mining”*

*“We diversified the service side of the business”*

*“We are on-selling our services to companies external to Singleton. The mining sector is tight so we had a push to extend our services broader than mining.”*

### **Reducing costs and increasing efficiencies**

Many businesses are trying to absorb and or reduce costs and creating or increasing efficiencies in order to survive.

*“We conducted a review process, to identify inefficiencies and drive cost reduction”*

*“We have lost market share so now we are absorbing costs”*

*“We looked at ways of reducing costs as we were struggling with cash flow”*

*“We have improved our systems and processes to drive efficiencies”*

### **New Product Development**

Many successful businesses have or are in the process of developing new products and services for a wider application to a range of different markets other than the mining sector.

One company has successfully introduced a survey drone and have become a licensed CASA operator. This service will also be useful in the wine industry and broad acre farming. Another company has developed new software comprising a tracking system which has application in a range of industries and are currently introducing the software into the UK.

*“We have undertaken a process of new product and service development in response to industry needs”*

*“We conducted a review of existing supply chain arrangements and contractual agreements”*

### **Relationship Building and Maintenance**

*“We are working together with the mining companies to integrate the changes we have made. We have developed three new proposals for in-service support. We are improving our communication and working together with our clients.”*

*“Our business strategy in recent years has been to consolidate our share through relationship development to drive natural growth of market share. We are also focusing on developing services based on anticipated future needs of the industry.”*

### **Opportunities for collaboration**

A major opportunity for collaboration is planned with The Hunter Coal Festival 2015, an initiative of Singleton Business Chamber in partnership with the Mining Industry and Community. The aim is to highlight the value of the coal industry in the Hunter region and to the broader Australian community and will bring the region together to celebrate the mining industry’s contribution to the Hunter Valley.

Working with local councils, business chambers, community groups and industry organisations, the festival will provide opportunities for stakeholders and participants to gain insight, interact and get the chance to know and understand the region’s diverse interests. It will provide an opportunity to learn, connect, communicate and come together to build stronger, more meaningful business ties.

Businesses interviewed expect to take an active part in the Festival and to use it to build more collaborative working relationships with each other, and to explore ways in which they can work collaboratively with the mining sector in developing initiatives that will support local businesses and strengthen local business prospects.

### **Role for Council**

Many business operators had suggestions about the role Council could play to help local mining services businesses manage the downturn and reduce the flow-on impacts throughout the Singleton economy. . All agreed that the foundation is for Council to have a good understanding of the nature and extent of the downturn and its impact on local mining services businesses. All agreed that Council needs to build and maintain good working relationships with mining services business and mining communities.

*“Council could purchase more products and services locally, and when tendering ensure they provide the opportunity for local businesses to participate in the tender process.”*

*“Council needs to better understand the mining industry. Singleton has had a major income source in mining for many years and Council needs to work together with the mining industry for the betterment of the local area.”*

*“Council could be more proactive in easing the path for development. In the past they have often been obstructive whereas they need to work with developers to assist them through the process.”*

*“Council is doing a great job in making Singleton a better place to live but more could be done in the areas of housing and the bypass.”*

*“We would encourage Council to remain engaged with local business community”*

*“Council needs to attempt to keep operating costs in the Singleton LGA as low as possible to assist local business sustainability.”*

Generally speaking the businesses interviewed felt abandoned by Council and had had no contact with any Council staff regarding the downturn and its impact. Interviewees perceive that Council hasn't previously engaged with the business sector or played a role with business facilitation and assistance. Many would like to see that change.

Most were of the view that Council needs to develop relationships with business and look to improve their communication with business by listening to what business has to say.

Ideally business would like to see Council start working together with and resourcing appropriate organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce to facilitate business development, growth and survivability.

### **C: Business Leaders Lunch Economic Development Strategy Workshop**

A workshop was held with Singleton's business leaders to review priorities and discuss actions to stimulate economic development. The main questions and suggestions are summarised below:

#### **What is needed in Singleton to create more jobs?**

- Mine sites redeveloped, and regeneration works undertaken ie revegetation, sculptures, parks, golf courses, swimming pools, lakes
- Need to return the land back to the community and or grazing land
- This is an important job which shouldn't be left to the mining companies
- We need to look to the leading developer of mines sites in Australia and develop a Synoptic Plan of Mining lands
- Need a University campus to focus on rehabilitation of land, and land regeneration and community energy efficiency

#### **What is the next project / initiative needed to improve the localeconomy?**

- Analysis of existing business ie assets, machinery, support to the mines etc. Look at joint strengths, skills are transferrable
- Greater education opportunities through TAFE and Uni of Newcastle

- Singleton needs smart jobs ie in technology, innovation, need investment
- The skills here in mining are transferrable
- Need to bolster rural communities – serious trends in the last couple of years, more needs to be done to support rural communities
- Freeway is a double edged sword
- We are underutilising resources in agriculture and horticulture eg mushroom farm, aquaculture

**What new businesses would you like to see in Singleton?**

- Could have more accommodation businesses to compliment the B & B sector
- Singleton needs to support local tourism
- Council to be more flexible and supportive of development, especially in Broke Fordwich
- Need dialogue between Council and the community re planning

**Would you like to see more tourism and hospitality businesses in Singleton?**

- Destination marketing - Singleton could be part of the Hunter Valley Way

**Does the community give new businesses a fair go?**

- If business supports what people want then yes they get a fair go
- Some people don't like change
- A few years ago it was difficult for small business but its changing now. People don't have to leave Singleton to shop any more except for men's wear, bulky goods and women's wear
- Need clustering of business – Main St redevelopment

**How do we strengthen and increase the role of Agriculture in Singleton?**

- People need to pay more for food
- Need Australian owned sections in shops
- Don't buy imports
- Establish a farmers market to support local growers
- Food sector development
- Look at export of Agricultural produce

Singleton needs a branding Strategy which encompasses its diversity such as "Singleton – Open for Business".

# 7. Economic Context

Singleton is a vibrant and diverse regional town, located at the centre of the Hunter Valley, 200km North West of Sydney and 75km from Newcastle via the Hunter Expressway.

The Singleton Local Government Area is 4893km<sup>2</sup> encompassing Singleton and its surrounding villages

With a population nearing 24,000, the local economy of Singleton is supported by a diverse industrial base, skilled labour force and industry access to vital infrastructure. Singleton is also surrounded by the natural beauty of Lake St Clair, Mt Royal, Yengo and Wollemi National Parks.

Major Current Economic Drivers (Key Sectors) in Singleton in order of importance according to the Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan are:

1. Coal Mining
2. Mining Support
3. Power Generation
4. Population Services – retail/services
5. Defence
6. Wine
7. Tourism
8. Education

## 5.1 Singleton Economic Context

Local Government Area includes the town of Singleton and the villages of Broke Fordwich, Bulga, Jerrys Plains, Putty and other rural localities such as Whittingham, Mount Olive and Elderslie. First settled by Europeans in the 1820s, the Singleton region has undergone many transformations. Today, its vision is to be a 'progressive community of excellence and sustainability'.

Singleton's local economy is supported by diverse industries—originating in a dominant agricultural base and, later, vast coal resources. Wine making is one long-term industry for which the region is renowned; other industries that have persisted include timber, flour-milling, electricity generation, horse breeding, cattle, dairy and meat production. Tourism is another major industry sector, and attractions of the region include wineries, national parks and one of the world's largest sundials.

When electricity became a standard commodity for Australians after World War Two, the coal industry in Singleton's vicinity became revitalised. In 1947 the town had a population of 2,996; by 1976 it had grown to 12,359, and since then it has almost doubled. Over the past 10 years its population has increased steadily, although for some age groups numbers have declined, while others have increased. The population is ageing, but numbers of school children are higher than the NSW average. The indigenous population is also higher than average, at 2.2 percent.

There has been steady immigration and emigration within Singleton between 2001 and 2011, with the majority of arrivals being young families from elsewhere in New

South Wales and the majority of emigrants being those between the ages of 20 and 30.

The town's residents have a higher than average median income, due to proximity to the nearby coal mines. Defence is another major employment sector. However, the recent downturn in mining activity and its impact on employment and population has been a timely reminder that Council and the business community need to look at ways to diversify and foster resilience in its economy.

As the largest town in the Upper Hunter Valley, Singleton is an important commercial centre. Its town centre boasts modern sports amenities, shopping centres, a cinema complex, major retail stores as well as a traditional 'main street' with conventional high street stores. Residents will also travel regularly to nearby Maitland and Newcastle to visit their large regional shopping centres. The community can access eight public schools and two private schools, a TAFE campus and a community college that offers courses in community services such as disability and palliative care. The town is also within proximity to the University of Newcastle.

## 5.2 Key points emerging from analysis:

**Singleton's population is increasing gradually, and ageing, so its working age population is projected to be fairly static to 2031, increasing by only 1,000 over 20 years**

- Across all age groups an overall increase of 3,800 people is projected for Singleton's population through to 2031. The largest increases will occur in the youngest (0 to 10 yrs), middle (30 to 50) and older (65+) age groups.
- For Singleton's working age population, a projected total increase of only 1,100 people is expected through to 2031. As a percentage of the total population, the working age sector will decrease from 67.9 percent (2011) to 62.5 percent in 2031. This will make it harder for employers to find local workers as their businesses expand in the future.
- The proportion of people aged over 65 is projected to increase, from 10.4 percent (2011) to 16.8 percent in 2031.

**There were high numbers of workers earning top level weekly wages in 2011, in the 25 to 55 year age groups**

- Relatively high numbers of workers aged between 25 and 55 earned a weekly income of \$1600 and over.
- Amongst those in the top income bracket (over \$2000pw), 66% were employees in the mining industry – signifying one of the distortions rapid growth in this industry has brought to Singleton's economy.

**Mining industry growth has limited growth in other industries**

- Singleton's economic diversity index score worsened over the decade to 2011 as employment in the mining industry grew faster than all other industries.
- This has led to further consolidation in Singleton's employment base around this one industry, hampering economic diversification.

**Unemployment rates in Singleton dropped markedly for a sustained period over 2010–2011, before increasing to former levels in 2012**

- Singleton's unemployment rate was above three percent from March 2008 until the beginning of 2010, when it declined rapidly. By December 2010, it was around one percent and stayed at this rate until 2012, when it climbed back up to above three percent.

### **A close correlation is evident between the age groups where peak out-migration and in-migration levels occur**

- The peak age group for people leaving Singleton between 2006 and 2011 was between 20 to 35 years—the same age group peak as for those coming in.
- Overall, from 2006 to 2011, more people moved to Singleton than left; 5,379 and 3,973 respectively.
- In some age groups up to 50% of 2011 residents were new arrivals (since 2006).

### **New business formation is quite strong**

- Each year some 240 new businesses start in Singleton, most of them starting very small (with just 1 or 2 employees).
- With under 200 businesses ceasing each year there is usually net growth in the number of businesses in Singleton – a healthy sign supporting diversification.

## **7.3 Keys to a vibrant economy – lessons from Goulburn and Orange**

The Regional Australia Institute (RAI) has recently released a new study; *Prosperous Futures: Understanding the Potential of Australia's Regional Cities, a case study of Goulburn and Orange*<sup>7</sup>. The study seeks to better understand the differences between competitive advantage and successful regional development outcomes through the use of qualitative research methods. Their work has some important lessons for Singleton in this time of transition and change. Both Goulburn and Orange are good comparators for Singleton being mid-sized (20-30,000 people) regional cities going through significant economic transitions.

The study demonstrates that without focus, a region is unlikely to identify or realise its potential and without confidence regions are less likely to take the risks that often stimulate regional development. The study notes that skills to achieve a community vision can be learnt and shared, but the vision itself needs to be created by the community. It found that Orange excelled at engaging its community to develop its vision for success. In Orange, discussion of issues was usually carried out in a controlled way. Orange leaders take an active and positive approach to getting in and fixing problems, using experts as needed.

In contrast, the Goulburn community often raised its problems 'loudly' and in the local newspaper, council forums and committees and there has been disagreement about the future vision for the town.

The study makes clear that communities must support and empower those who are stepping up to lead their local economies if they want to be successful and this is just as important as issues such as industry structure and location:

“Goulburn and Orange have been cities in transition over the past two decades. Both have been subject to changes in the economic arena with

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<sup>7</sup> Available at [http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FINAL\\_Prosporous-Futures\\_Understanding-the-Potential-of-Australias-Regional-Cities.pdf](http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FINAL_Prosporous-Futures_Understanding-the-Potential-of-Australias-Regional-Cities.pdf)

structural adjustment playing out in the decline of agricultural employment and closure of manufacturing businesses.

Orange has emerged with a strong profile in tourism, generally aimed at a wealthier, metropolitan based market, but utilising local advantages in wine-making and food-growing enterprises. The coordination of effort in promoting 'Taste Orange' has been notable. Orange also benefits from the local gold mine and the development of regional health sector facilities and the head office location of the NSW Department of Primary Industries.

Goulburn has grown slowly but steadily during the past decade which reflects a relatively strong and resilient local economy. The city is adjusting to social and economic change. The combined pressure of environmental and economic change created conflict in the late 2000s and there was fragmentation of business groups within the city.”<sup>8</sup>

A lack of focus and confident leadership limits communities, particularly the local economy. Without this confidence, organisations and individuals are significantly less likely to take the risks that often spur regional development. Without focus, they are unlikely to identify or realise their potential. Without a clear need, they may be unwilling to look for alternative opportunities. The study notes that: “Comfortable circumstances can lead to complacency and external pressures then become a greater threat to economic viability.”<sup>9</sup>

The study highlighted four recommendations for regional cities seeking to maintain and enhance their economic potential:

1. Make informed decisions;
2. Understand your community;
3. Identify common factors with other regions, and
4. Have confidence.

“Having the confidence to pursue a region’s potential is critical to success. The skills to achieve a community vision can be learnt and shared, but the vision itself needs to be influenced by the community. Aspiration is the most difficult factor in achieving a region’s potential.

“All regional cities need to have an understanding of what success is for their region. Before pursuing development, it is important for communities to understand the benefit to the region (jobs, wealth creation or community skills development). Understanding a region’s nuances and interactions is likely to bring about outcomes that are better aligned to regional circumstances, capacity and community aspirations.

“The divergent outcomes for Orange and Goulburn reinforce the role of unique local factors in any region’s development and the importance of capable local leadership and entrepreneurialism in translating opportunity into prosperity.”<sup>10</sup>

The study is an excellent example of different approaches taken by the two cities and the lessons and recommendations are quite relevant for Singleton.

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<sup>8</sup> Prosperous Futures: Understanding the Potential of Australia’s Regional Cities, Page 69

<sup>9</sup> Prosperous Futures: Understanding the Potential of Australia’s Regional Cities, Page 70

<sup>10</sup> Prosperous Futures: Understanding the Potential of Australia’s Regional Cities, Page 7

## 5.4 Implications for Economic Development in Singleton

The economic analysis has important implications for the Singleton's economic development.

1. Mining expansion brought growth in mining servicing industries as well as in employment in the mines themselves – and this includes professional services as well as manufacturing. Mining employment decline will deflate businesses in these industries too.

What are the prospects for the first tier and second tier mining services businesses? Will employment numbers change? Will businesses close? What are their business strategies – and do these include finding alternative markets outside the district? How deep are the local supply chains, and how much of an impact will flow through the local economy?

2. Employment diversity reduced in the decade to 2011 as Singleton became a 'muscle town' growing around its strength in mining employment.

What can be done to foster employment growth in other industries?

3. High incomes and high population mobility have both been a plus for the community and could either help or hinder future adaptation. Two-thirds of high incomes are associated with people employed in mining directly – and as this number drops so will the income they brought to the community.

Singleton needs to retain more workers in the 30-40 age bracket (currently these are the most likely to leave) as the share of residents working will decline over the next decade – leaving fewer workers to 'support' non-workers in the community – especially given the projected growth in the number of retirees. Lifestyle and liveability factors are almost as important to this group as jobs.

How effective is the Singleton lifestyle 'package' and what needs to happen to strengthen the offer?

4. There are some signs of higher than usual escape spending – eg fewer retail and hospitality jobs per thousand residents in Singleton compared with Goulburn and Orange.

Does the business mix match the needs and expectations of residents – both long term residents and newcomers with different desires?

5. New business formation has been strong, and in non-mining related industries.

Are their potential mini clusters of businesses that can build critical mass – either within a sector or along a supply chain? What can Singleton do to foster more entrepreneurs? Do new businesses 'get a fair go' from the community? Are they celebrated?

6. Many high value services businesses are located outside Singleton's CBD and are invisible.

Is the community aware of their existence, capability and importance?

7. The hospitality industry has shown some growth in recent years, but still lags in comparison to other regions.

Is Singleton embracing the sector, and how can its growth be supported? Is there enough critical mass emerging for tourism to play a more important role in Singleton's economy?

8. Diversification seems to flourish where social capital is strong, leadership is clear and inclusive, and innovation is encouraged.

How does Singleton rate on these attributes, and how can they be fostered?

Recommendations designed to address these issues are set out in the next two Chapters, and detailed actions are included in the Workplan at the end of this Strategy.

# 8. Council's role in economic development

In delivering its Economic Development Strategy, Council is focusing on a manageable number of initiatives, and strategies in key industry sectors that are achievable and which provide significant outcomes that are both tangible and measurable.

In order to do this, a range of community consultation has been undertaken. The feedback provided through community workshops and conversations with industry has been taken into consideration when developing strategies for action. In setting out the recommendations for Council action this Strategy combines this local-led information with comparisons with the wider Region and review of best practices and examples of successful interventions conducted in other parts of Australia.

There are several factors which impact on the future success of particular projects and these have been used as filters to determine the priority project areas for the Workplan for Singleton. In identifying the most important activities that Council will drive, we have used the following four selection criteria:

1. Fit with Council's vision for the future;
2. Likelihood of Council-led action yielding results;
3. Likelihood of some funding for the activity should that be required;
4. A local champion – either on the Council or in the wider community.

## **Singleton Council Vision**

- A progressive community of excellence and sustainability

## **Singleton Council Mission**

- To provide quality services to the community in an efficient and friendly manner encouraging responsible development.

While each one of these criteria is important, the role of Council, and its ability to achieve a tangible result, is particularly significant. Council's roles in economic development stretch from lobbying, encouragement and support, through to more active roles like providing staff time, or funding, or changing internal processes to support particular initiatives.

Council is quite active in many areas which have a direct influence on economic development, even though some of these may not be formally tied to its Economic Development Team.

Singleton has a range of strategic documents relevant to economic development, which include:

- Place Making Strategy Draft
- Housing and Accommodation Strategy
- Upper Hunter Economic Diversification Plan
- Destination Management Plan
- Upper Hunter Workforce Plan

- Community Strategic Plan
- Singleton Town Centre Master Plan
- Economic Assessment of Mine Affected Communities 2013
- Strategic Regional Land Use Plan Upper Hunter
- Town Centre Streetscape Master Plan Stage 1

Most of these documents include policies, procedures and actions which have an impact on economic development through social infrastructure, land use planning and tourism support. The importance of these issues has been flagged by the community and discussed in Chapter 4, and recommended actions to enhance the impact on economic development from these related policies and procedures are included in the following Chapters.

# 9. Seven strategies for economic growth and job creation

## Seven strategies for economic growth and job creation

In a changed business environment, seven strategies set out an active role for Singleton Council designed to tip the balance towards a prosperous future.



### 1. Attract investment

*Initiative: Investment prospectus and marketing of opportunities*

### 2. Enhancing liveability and lifestyle, and marketing Singleton's lifestyle package

*Initiative: Continue to build Singleton's community value and infrastructure and market these benefits to people looking to move into the area.*

### 3. Enhance and strengthen the tourism and accommodation sector

*Initiatives: Refocus the accommodation sector on tourists, pursue investment for an iconic attractor, promote "Stay Another Day" Campaign, target sporting, convention and grey nomad markets*

### 4. Cultural change and town beautification and enhancement

*Initiative: Enhance the town's visual impact through Town Centre Revitalisation work, leveraging town heritage and growing the Arts Sector*

### 5. Fostering innovation and entrepreneurship

*Initiative: Activities to stimulate and support innovation and entrepreneurship*

### 6. Active industry clusters

*Initiative: Cluster feasibility assessments*

## **7. Mining adjustment**

*Initiative: Asses scope to ease the transition of mining sector downsizing and provide necessary support*

### **1. Attract investment**

*Initiative 1: Create a 'spatial economic vision'*

A clear economic direction for Singleton town in particular must have a clear spatial aspect – ie what kinds of businesses will the LGA see growing and where will they be located and serviced? The vision will take the current land use and zonings map of Singleton and make provisions for growth in retail, services and manufacturing. In particular, in terms of meeting the needs of its aging population Singleton is expected to require a significant expansion of independent living facilities.

*Initiative 2: Investment prospectus*

In order to attract business and people to town an investment prospectus would outline the benefits of settling in Singleton. It would set out the broad business case for investments including delineating the nature of high-yielding opportunities, strengths, risks, costs and provide a broad understanding of the LGA and its people. It would set out the business case for locating or expanding in Singleton – such as the lower costs of doing business, and Singleton's superior facilities, amenities and services. It would outline Council's achievements and future direction as well as being the first point of contact for anyone wishing to investigate opportunities in Singleton.

First steps include identifying potential growth industries and their needs, and opportunities for establishment, relocation or expansion in the LGA. The prospectus process then takes this information and lays it against the availability of suitable sites in Singleton, to prepare a proactive approach to marketing based on opportunity identification and an indicative business case/rationale, alongside profiles of suitable locations in the LGA.

High return prospects include:

- Iconic tourism attractor
- Bulky goods retail
- Warehousing and distribution
- Specialty retail
- Boutique accommodation (linked with wine tourism trails)
- Co-working space and small or home based business hub

The business case requirements for each of these are broadly similar, though the details vary and are quite specific. Broadly the business case depends on:

- Size of local market (readily available from population, income and resident spending data for consumer products, or from visitor number/spend data or business numbers)
- Establishment costs (local land cost, development cost, cost of capital)
- Running costs
- Return on investment
- Flow on benefits to wider business/community

Council's role is in setting out the base business case for the items it has information on such as local market size and establishment costs. Private sector investors will complete the business case using their own knowledge of the other items like cost of capital and running costs. Public sector investors (State and Federal Government) will require a detailed business case covering all aspects and setting out

assessments of a range of options to ensure that the recommended business case is that preferred from a range of investment options<sup>11</sup>.

The activities recommended for Council under Strategy 1 are to engage resources across Council departments to:

1. Develop a 'spatial economic vision' over 1, 5 and 20 years
2. Develop an investment prospectus for Singleton Council
  - Including profiles of business opportunities and indications of the strength of the business case for each

## 2. Enhancing liveability and lifestyle, and marketing Singleton's lifestyle package

*Initiative: Continue to build Singleton's community value and infrastructure and highlight these benefits to people looking to move into the area.*

Singleton has a very attractive lifestyle package combining the depth of services and facilities available at a regional centre, with increasingly affordable housing, a rural setting, good work availability and proximity to the Hunter Valley wine trails. New residents are crucial for Singleton's future, to address emerging demographic and economic challenges, and strong and sophisticated marketing of the Singleton lifestyle package is a central feature of future economic development activities.

For marketing to be effective, the positive attributes of Singleton as a place to live and work need to be continuously strengthened and recognised. People need access to a range of services available to convince them to move to a new town, including; education, health services, transport, jobs, amenity and lifestyle activities. These efforts will have the added bonus of attracting additional visitors some of whom will find Singleton appealing and if it meets their needs will consider moving to the area. Council must ensure these services are readily available and widely appreciated.

As the population ages Singleton will need more facilities to cater to the needs of the population and that includes Aged Care. Singleton is well positioned to grow its Aged Care Sector. While Singleton already has good existing health and aged care services, there is a need for independent living as well as nursing home facilities. There has been huge growth in community care which is already one of the largest employers in Singleton and its proximity to Newcastle is advantageous to the sector in terms of job creation.

This is an area is where economic development crosses over with community development and Council is very active in providing and lobbying for these services. Council should continue to undertake these activities which have a major impact on the town.

Council's promotion of Singleton needs to highlight the way Singleton's liveability and social infrastructure is presented in its marketing process to emphasise the amenity value of the community.

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<sup>11</sup> See for example NSW Treasury Guidelines on Economic Appraisal of investment proposals ([http://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/7414/tpp07-5.pdf](http://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/7414/tpp07-5.pdf)).

## **Activities for Council**

### *Marketing, Packaging and Promoting*

- Prepare collateral to support a campaign marketing Singleton's lifestyle attributes (great social and community infrastructure, proximity to Newcastle airport, good telecoms, great base for home-based professional services, great sporting infrastructure etc), and promote this through strategic marketing activities
- Widely promote the positive aspects of Singleton emphasising good schools, health services, youth services and childcare
- Prepare a Singleton 'lifestyle living' marketing campaign targeting suitable channels to reach potential new residents and returning ex-residents
- Continue to build on the good work already undertaken by Council and the community

### *Health and Aged Services*

- Seek provision of more aged accommodation to actively grow Aged Services in the area to meet the growing need. (Federal and State Government and business)
- Investigate the vacant land at back of hospital – good site for aged care facility, independent living facility

### *Education*

- Greater education opportunities - University Satellite campus in Singleton (Local Government to lobby universities)
- TAFE Need more variety of courses in TAFE (Local Government to lobby State Government)

### *Planning and Infrastructure*

- Thermal Rehabilitation pool – Gym and Swim underway
- Community Garden Network
- Need to utilise existing facilities, assets and partnerships
- Heritage and history – spruce up the old buildings, walks etc
- Improve telecommunications
- Soft infrastructure – NBN
- Build on the library as a major asset

### *Transport*

- More public transport (State and Local Government)
- Lobby for return of the rail service (Local Government and Community)
- Upgrade the rail system – increase services

### *Environment*

- Develop and support a cluster group of environmental and rehabilitation businesses
- Centre of excellence for land rehabilitation – requires and draws lots of skills, regeneration work needs to be aligned with community aspirations
- The mines have left a huge amount of infrastructure, sewerage, electricity, sheds, IT etc which could be used by other sectors
- Potential for many lakes

### *Home Based Business Strategy*

- Secure the NBN to encourage the growth of HBB

- Promotion of availability, take-up and demonstrations/case studies of business-enhancing applications
- Promote Singleton as a great place to live and work and run a service business from home.

### 3. Enhance and strengthen the tourism and accommodation sector

*Initiatives: Refocus the accommodation sector on tourists, pursue investment for an iconic attraction for Singleton to attract market share and increase visitation rate*  
*“Stay Another Day” Campaign – target; sporting, convention and grey nomad target markets*

These activities all build on the existing strengths of Singleton, and there is significant potential to capitalise on the thousands of people who flock to the area for wine tourism. Once in town, there is potential to expand enhance the visitor experience, based on quality wines and food, and extend its visitor experiences in the areas of nature, soft adventure, sports tourism, culture and heritage to provide a reason for visitors to extend their stay.

It is unlikely that Singleton will become a distinct tourism destination, without significant investment in a new attractor of sufficient scale and interest that it will be a destination in its own right. Many such investments have come and gone from regional Australia, including various ‘Halls of Fame’, historical experiences and theme parks. Without the critical mass of the Gold Coast theme parks it is challenging to maintain an attraction over a long period, and the most enduring of these are the community-owned Sovereign Hill complex and the Western Plains Zoo.

Singleton’s accommodation offering is currently limited, which will restrict opportunities for long term stays and large-scale events (such as sporting championships). The tourism sector will not grow without the co-operation of the accommodation sector. In partnership with local accommodation providers, Council can work together to build on high yielding midweek Conference market opportunities. Council can also play a role in supporting a refocus amongst accommodation providers away from mine-related business travel and towards tourist visitors.

Singleton needs the right mix of offerings to be able to attract a market share with the ‘Stay Another Day’ campaign. The lake could be promoted as a great stopping off point for visitors and is also close to the city centre. There is sufficient tourism product to increase the length of stay by 1 to 1.5 hours and more if the food offering can also be actively promoted to visitors and tourists.

#### **Activities for Council**

##### *Tourism*

- Build on the current strong sporting culture within the town and build a market for Sports tourism eg Masters Games
- Investigate opportunities for further sporting tourism events including cricket, netball, swimming, tennis, football, cycling etc
- Wine Tourism – collaborate with Wine Country to become involved
- Undertake signage strategy to better connect Broke and Hermitage road to wine country (Local Government and State Government)

- Upgrade Lake St Clair – ie picnic areas, toilets, camping, recreational fishing, boating, water skiing, walking trails, provision of shelter
- Investigate the development of a good convention centre (
- Incorporate Singleton into the 'Grey Nomad' path
- Investigate Tourism / hospitality training – none currently offered at TAFE
- Enable footpath dining
- Investigate upgrading of the Showground and its kitchens – an underutilised asset – to use as a venue for conferences and sporting events (Local Government)

### **Activities for Council and the Chamber of Commerce**

*Assist the accommodation sector to refocus*

- Investigate ways to move away from the mining sector booking out accommodation enmasse and develop strategies to attract a share of the wine tourism sector, conference and convention, and sport tourism markets
- Barista training
- Review role of accommodation in Singleton tourism development
- Convene informal cluster groups of accommodation sector business owners with a view to networking and diversifying the accommodation providers sector
- Convene a working party to manage the process

## **4. Cultural change and town beautification and enhancement**

*Initiative: Enhance the town's visual impact through Town Centre Revitalisation work, leveraging town heritage and growing the Arts Sector*

### **Cultural change in the community**

The high wages that mining offers have brought many new long term residents to Singleton, and as these jobs reduce in number other factors will need to drive attraction and retention of new residents. There needs to be a shift in thinking to make Singleton a great place to live with many aspects that people desire made available. In order to ensure this happens, Council needs to drive that lifestyle, cultural and attitudinal change. While many places in town cater to the mining industry, they actively dissuade other market sectors, for example, lingerie girls in the pubs don't attract outsiders and make it uncomfortable for women to participate.

The Town Centre Revitalisation work is one of the largest single investments in Singleton in the last 20 years. It will re-shape the town centre and make it a more attractive destination for recreational shopping. The key to long term success will be attracting the right mix of franchise, chain and independent retailers and hospitality businesses to lift the shopping experience in Singleton town centre to a new level. In practice Council has few levers to influence the retail mix. One of the most immediate levers is enabling space to be made available at low cost to innovative start-ups – perhaps through low cost short-term occupancy of publicly owned buildings, or a portion of privately owned buildings – to give these new businesses a chance to prove their business model and establish a solid commercial footing.

Arts equates with money, luxury and leisure time and brings a diverse range of views, attitudes and people into town. Often the Arts Sector is dismissed as a fringe activity not for the mainstream, but Singleton would benefit from the development of an Arts Strategy, working towards the construction of an Art Gallery and activating exhibitions and festivals to showcase regional artists.

Singleton has some fine old buildings which tend to be lost amongst the main street and other areas. Often they are obscured by other buildings, painted lurid or non-descript colours, neglected and overlooked. This is a major part of Singleton's history and needs to be acknowledged as such.

Streetscape maintenance and upgrades are a very important part of economic development for main street retailers and service providers in Singleton. With the Town Centre Revitalisation underway, it would be of great strategic benefit for Council to set out its streetscape program for Singleton over 1 and 5 year horizons. This initiative could extend to providing a timetable for rollout of major infrastructure as well.

### **Activities for Council**

#### *Upgrade of the Main St*

- Town Centre Revitalisation work
- Seek to build on and reflect Singleton's history, heritage and rural background
- Slow down the traffic
- Streetscaping - places to sit with shade trees provided
- More footpath dining
- Finish the ANZAC walk
- Establish a Heritage walk
- Make more of the river, open up Ryan Ave
- Department Store
- Good fruit and vegetable shop

#### *Art Sector*

- Grow the Art and creative sector especially Aboriginal art
- Art Gallery space for creative people, new ideas, new business
- Artist in residence – in the old convent
- Incorporate and grow modern art, film, photography, and music
- Annual Art Festival

#### *Heritage*

- Enhance the Heritage walks as be part of the tourism offering.
- The heritage architecture has a strong visual impact on the CBD and along with streetscaping in keeping with the traditional feel of the area, provides an attractive retail setting with a welcoming ambience.

#### *CBD infrastructure program*

- Set out the 1 and 5 year programs of anticipated infrastructure investment in Singleton's CBD

## **5. Fostering innovation and entrepreneurship**

### *Initiative: Activities to stimulate and support entrepreneurship*

Singleton is well-placed to be an attractive location for new innovative businesses, and to stimulate innovation amongst its existing businesses. For new businesses, Singleton's low entry (real estate) costs and high quality amenity (including fast broadband via NBN) complements its proximity to Newcastle City and Newcastle airport. This enables quick access to customers in major cities, while retaining the low costs and lifestyle benefits of a regional base.

Fostering innovation in IT will require active promotion and demonstration of the benefits of high speed broadband – and Council should consider support through seminars, guest speakers, case studies and demonstrations of local business applications. A climate of innovation can be nurtured through widespread recognition and celebration of innovative activities (be they in IT, or in products/services, or in processes, or new markets). The cluster initiatives outlined below are a well-recognised conduit for sharing and spreading innovation experiences and messages.

There is scope for innovation in agriculture as rehabilitation of mine sites brings tangible opportunities to include investments in infrastructure and soil restoration which could mean that ‘next generation’ agricultural activities can leap frog over costly restructuring into new more sophisticated approaches. “Future crops” such as those identified by CSIRO and NSW DPI are one example, alongside more business focused and capital intensive approaches to dairy – taking a traditional strength of the region into a more modern context. Council may not need to take a strong role in this field as there are many agencies tasked with this responsibility and it is not really considered Council’s role to actively facilitate these initiatives but rather to promote, support and encourage them. Proximity to local expertise at Tocal Agricultural College is another key strength.

Several existing programs are ‘ready to roll’ in helping local businesses improve their entrepreneurial capacity, management, strategy and performance. Five programs in particular are relevant to Singleton:

- Energizing Entrepreneurs
- Economic Gardening
- Springboard Business Development Program
- Women in Business Mentoring Program
- Small Business Workshops
  - Export
  - Innovation
  - Service Sector
  - Online economy
  - E-commerce
  - Business Mapping

These programs and workshops are innovative approaches to supporting business growth and fostering entrepreneurship. These approaches have been designed to appeal to growth-oriented small and medium business owners, and to catalyse their strategic business development capabilities.

The Energizing Entrepreneurs Program is a structured approach to identifying, mapping and working with entrepreneurial business operators. It offers a suite of high-relevance services to help entrepreneurs grow their businesses – including networking, referrals, marketing and business strategy.

Economic Gardening is package of business services offered to businesses interested in growth. The package includes customer market intelligence and mapping, e-business assistance, marketing assistance and one-to-one mentoring or advice.

The *Springboard Business Development Program* was designed over eight years ago and it has now evolved to be a stand-alone program with a great track record in servicing its target client group. Springboard is a peer-coaching program designed to

appeal to and work with the strengths of its target market – growth-oriented small and medium businesses with 2-5 years business experience. The Program is based not on ‘chalk and talk’ or workshops, but on groups of 8-12 selected participants combined with a trained facilitator who takes them through a 9-week participant-driven program.

Women do business differently to men and are an important part of Singleton’s economy. The Department of Industry and Investment’s ‘Women in Business Mentoring Program’ encourages co-operative learning between business people through structured mentoring, practical workshops and networking and has proven to be very successful in its approach.

The Department’s small business workshops have been designed to appeal specifically to small and medium business owners with an interest in growth, and to get them thinking tactically and strategically.

The activities recommended for Council are to task the Economic Development Team to:

1. Investigate suitability of:
  - Energizing Entrepreneurs
  - Economic Gardening
  - Springboard Business Development Program
  - Women in Business Mentoring Program
  - Small Business Workshops
    - Export
    - Innovation
    - Service Sector
2. Liaise with DI&I, RDA Hunter and Hunter Region Business Enterprise Centre.
3. Investigate the concept of a Co-workspace for business in Singleton
4. Pursue and create opportunities from the NBN including promotion of Home Based Business

## 6. Active industry clusters

*Initiative: Cluster feasibility assessments*

Clusters can assist in capitalising on economic strengths by accelerating the development of local business/industry clusters. An in-depth inquiry into the status and potential for cluster development in three or four specific sectors would be appropriate for Singleton. These could include food value-adding, wine, tourism, businesses with a mining industry focus, beef cattle sector, or human services. The approach would involve further discussions with the key players in each selected industry on their perceptions of the industry’s prospects and competitors, and the potential for greater collaboration amongst complementary businesses in the LGA. The inquiry net would then be extended to include potential collaborators and review their needs and interests in strengthening the potential cluster, and identify the next steps.

The activities recommended for Council are to task the Economic Development Team to:

1. Conduct discussions with the key players in each selected industry on their perceptions of the industry’s prospects and competitors, and the potential for greater collaboration amongst complementary businesses in the LGA.
2. Conduct discussions with potential collaborators.

3. Review their needs and interests in strengthening the potential cluster, and identify the next steps, including seeking funding from State and Federal Governments.

Chamber of Commerce can play a strong role by facilitating the establishment of informal cluster/network groups.

## 7. Mining adjustment

*Initiative: Assess scope to ease the transition of mining sector downsizing and provide necessary support*

Demand for labour and services from the large mining companies has fallen rapidly in recent months and there may be scope for Council to facilitate adjustment to a very different business environment by many of the local mining supply businesses.

A partnership approach between relinquishing employers, job serves providers and training organisations will be required to assess the scope of business needs to redeploy redundant mining sector workers in other areas so they don't leave Singleton.

It is vital to assess the scope and nature of this support, and preliminary discussion with mining services businesses are an essential foundation. These discussions need to review their plans for the future and determine the scope for any assistance required.

Preliminary work interviewing 5 businesses which rely on the mining sector found that there may be a valuable role for Council in ...

Suggested ways in which Council can assist business to make the transition to a downsizing of the mining industry:

- Clustering and diversification
- Strengthening existing business
- Business training and workshops around service ie Aussie Host
- Future options workshops
- Improving your business culture – focusing on issues such as valuing your employees, ensuring a suitable work life balance, and other mechanisms to ensure employers don't lose employees to the mines after significant investment in training
- Business Networking – business breakfasts etc
- Diversify the business base



# 10. Action Plan

Note: Action Plan is currently being developed and will be reported to Council as part of the Delivery Plan and Operational Program

# Appendix 1: People consulted

Todd Williams	Hunter RDA
Taasha Layer	Ungaroo
Marcus Constable	Defence Lone Pine Army Base
David Williams	David Williams Real Estate
Martin Fielding	Environmental Planner
Lesleigh Aide	OurCare
Gill Eason	Chamber of Commerce
Wayne Deimar	HunterNet
Lisa Margan	Margan's Wines
Andrew Margan	Margan's Wines
Kate Simmons	Coal and Allied
Shannon Garcia	Coal and Allied
Wendy Mason Jones	Singleton Hospital and Arts Sector
David Flynn	Flynn's Glass
David Stibbard	Stibbard Homes
Tony Sansom	Dept of Trade and Investment
Suzette Gaff	Dept of Trade and Investment
Stephen Galilee	Minerals Council
Clair Doherty	Minerals Council
Roger Stephan	Hunter Councils
Brook Dermody	The Grainery
Barbara Brown	Ascella Estate Wine
Eden Anthony	Broke Fordwich Wine Tourism Association
Steve Newman	Survey and Drafting Resources
Ryan Fitzpatrick	HVL Group
Peter Eason	Pegasus
Katrina Stair	Coal Services Health