PLANNING SCHEME REVIEW
COMMUNITY DISCUSSION BOOKLET

Building Our Future
BUILDING OUR FUTURE

Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme Review

Message from the Mayor

The Toowoomba Region is undergoing rapid and transformative change. We have been fortunate to secure unprecedented investment into the region that is delivering tangible lifestyle and employment benefits to the community. Our current population of 166,045 residents is continuing to grow with forecasts telling us that by 2036 more than 196,218 people could call our region home, representing an average annual growth rate of around 0.96% per year.

The Toowoomba Region is truly an economic success story of regional Australia. Our diverse economy, low unemployment rate, continued economic growth and business confidence are the envy of other regional economies across Australia. Our regional economic growth has averaged 4% per year over the last decade, far exceeding the state average.

We are one of the most productive agricultural areas in Australia, with an internationally capable airport, tremendous road connectivity and the potential of a soon to be constructed national rail line finding new markets for the goods that go to the Port of Brisbane. Additionally, the Toowoomba Enterprise Hub has the potential to be one of the most significant transport, logistics and business hubs in Australia.

New technologies, such as the NBN, are changing the way we run our businesses, find information and communicate with each other. Our Region is becoming a communications hub with the recent construction of the only accredited Tier III data centre outside an Australian capital city.

In recent years, Toowoomba has experienced extremes in climate variability. Since the year 2000, we have had arguably one of the worst droughts recorded since European Settlement with dams at risk of running dry, and yet in early 2011 Toowoomba City suffered a tragic flash flood. Today we again find ourselves in the fifth year of yet another drought.

It is the responsibility of local government to provide a framework for our communities and enterprises to prosper. The tremendous change in our region has given us the opportunity to review how our planning scheme informs land use in our region. It is timely that we look forward and together prepare for the opportunities and challenges that the future will bring. This is where we need your help.

Changes to the planning scheme will decide where we reserve land for urban expansion, it determines the energy needs to fuel our community as well as the water, waste and road infrastructure required to service our community.

I would encourage you to share your ideas that will help inform the review of our Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme. It is important that the community have a say on the planning that guides the way our region will look like in the future.

Paul Antonio
Mayor

166,045
residents
2017

0.96%
per year

2036

196,218+
residents

Our regional economic growth has averaged 4% per year over the last decade, far exceeding the state average.
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Overview of The Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme

The Planning Scheme identifies which land uses (e.g. units, shops and industry) and which types of development (e.g. construction of a new building and subdividing land) require development approval and the standards that new development must meet, (e.g. building setbacks and height, privacy of neighbours and addressing natural hazards such as flooding).

All land within the Toowoomba Regional Council is covered by the Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme which came into effect in July 2012, replacing the planning schemes that applied to each of the eight local government areas that now make up the Toowoomba Regional Council area.

The Planning Scheme will apply to land that you own or rent, and to the land around you and will, therefore, affect what you can do with your land and what your neighbour can do with theirs.

Local governments are the key enablers of planning and development across Queensland. As the Toowoomba region continues to transform, with huge investments in infrastructure, and new technologies changing the way its people connect, live and do business it is important to clearly establish what the Council would like to achieve to meet its growing needs.

The Toowoomba Region has an extensive land area of 12,973km² and a population of 166,045 diverse residents. The Council is seeking community input from everyone in the Toowoomba Region to shape positive development solutions over the next 15 years. With particular focus on planning for sustainable rural communities and understanding regional identities and values.

The Toowoomba Regional Council Planning Scheme is a statutory document which sets out a vision, policies and provisions for the use, development and protection of land in the Toowoomba Region. As stated above, the current Planning Scheme was established in 2012 with different sections being amended, to date, 26 times to respond to community concerns and different planning applications.

The Queensland Government’s Planning Act requires a planning scheme to be reviewed every 10 years, which means that the Toowoomba Regional Council must complete a review of the priorities and intentions of its Regional Planning Scheme by 2022. This includes the policy framework, zoning, rural identity, how development applications will be assessed and overall workability. Feedback from the community is being sought on these five key areas to inform the planning scheme review and the next iteration of the planning scheme.
Introduction of The Five Themes

The Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme contains a great deal of complex information spread across many different elements and sections. This information has been broken down into five broad themes, which also reflect the same five themes that are identified within the State Planning Policy for Queensland. These theme headings are not meant to be exclusive of other theme areas or to stand alone as discrete elements. Rather, we recognise that there is a great deal of overlap between the different theme areas which may become apparent upon further reading. Put simply, the five theme areas are a way to organise and give structure to this discussion paper.

Planning for Liveable Communities And Housing
Planning for Infrastructure
Planning for Economic Growth
Planning for Environment And Heritage
Planning for Safety And Resilience To Hazards

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

Each themed chapter includes a description of challenges and some possible solutions with target questions to stimulate discussion. Scenarios and examples have been offered to help illustrate some of the issues and to generate discussion and possible new solutions and future policy within the Toowoomba Region Planning Scheme. The questions and scenarios posed in each chapter are not designed to limit other possibilities and suggestions but to create a starting point for conversation. Council welcomes all feedback from the reader which will be reviewed for consideration to inform the Planning Scheme review project.
1 Planning for Liveable Communities And Housing

1.1 Overview

As the population of the Toowoomba region grows and socioeconomic and demographic profiles change over time, the importance of attractive, healthy, safe, accessible and inclusive places and spaces increases. Liveable communities are those that are vibrant, prosperous, diverse, inclusive, accessible, attractive, healthy and safe. The provision of sustainable, equitable and efficient access to a wide range of services and facilities are considered in the development of the Planning Scheme. The considerations include community health, safety, access and employment. Planning for growth needs to ensure that our urban areas are liveable, well designed and serviced, supporting wellbeing and enhancing community quality of life.

1.2 Challenges for the Planning Scheme (scenario – housing affordability)

Housing affordability refers to the relationship between incomes and housing costs where macroeconomic factors often play a role. There are a wide range of existing strategies and initiatives that are coordinated across federal, state and local governments and the community sector which aim to address homelessness and housing affordability within Australia.

There are a number of factors that impact housing affordability across Australia thereby limiting Toowoomba Regional Council’s ability to influence all related issues. For example, growth in the resource extraction sector and how housing is provided to cater for these workers is relative to the approvals given to mining and resource companies at the State level.

While it is acknowledged that there are a range of factors that affect housing affordability, local government planning schemes play an important role in guiding the provision of suitable housing supply. Planning schemes can help ensure that the housing market delivers on objectives of affordability, diversity and certainty in the supply of housing for the projected demand in all sectors of the market. This role is crucial in ensuring there is suitable housing for those sectors of the community who are less advantaged and in greater need of affordable housing in appropriate locations. It plays no active role in setting market prices for buying or renting housing.

In 2013, the Toowoomba Regional Council commissioned a study into affordable housing in the region and some of the key findings were:

- the demand for social and affordable housing in Toowoomba is not currently being met
- there are growing numbers of homeless people in Toowoomba
- significant changes in State planning and policy regimes are moving towards a greater reliance on the private sector to provide affordable housing.

1.3 Possible new policy solutions (scenario – Responsive housing choices)

The current Toowoomba Planning Scheme provides a clear intent and policy position to support improved housing choice and affordability in the region. These mechanisms include:

- reduced assessment levels for dual occupancy (exempt);
- no minimum lot size for subdivision in infill areas; and
- units within infill areas code assessable (no public notification).

These have been reviewed and a current amendment is proposing to make changes:

- dual occupancy proposed to be accepted development subject to requirements (previously called self-assessable; and
- 300m² minimum lot size in infill areas.

These are some of the considerations the Planning Scheme can influence to achieve responsive housing choices which are reflective of the communities they serve.
2 Planning for Infrastructure

2.1 Overview

State and local governments as well as with the private sector plan, deliver and facilitate a wide range of infrastructure for transport, energy, water, roads, airports, ports and public utilities. The provision of infrastructure plays a fundamental role in creating and sustaining our built environment and providing for growth in Toowoomba, and in our towns, villages and rural areas. It influences urban form, access to employment and services, community connectivity and recreational opportunities. It also drives economic growth by supporting productive and sustainable industries and businesses that are important to the region. Infrastructure represents a significant physical resource and requires careful planning and development.

The State Infrastructure Plan (SIP) sets the priorities for state infrastructure delivery across Queensland by considering future infrastructure needs and providing infrastructure in a timely, sensible and cost-effective way. The SIP helps to coordinate infrastructure across all tiers of government and align national, state, regional and local infrastructure planning.

The Toowoomba region has adopted a Local Government Infrastructure Plan which covers five key infrastructure areas. These are water supply, sewerage, stormwater, transport, parks and land for community facilities. One of its key aims is to integrate infrastructure and land use planning. The basis for this planning is built on projections for population and employment growth together with the type, scale, location and timing of development, including the demand for each type of infrastructure network.

2.2 Challenges for the Planning Scheme (scenario – climate change)

Recent climate change modelling for the Eastern Downs region reveals the region can expect in the future, higher temperatures, hotter and more frequent hot days, harsher fire weather, more intense downpours and less annual rainfall. Against this backdrop and based on current trends, the Toowoomba region’s population is projected to double in around 64 years and the economy will double in about 19 years. The planning scheme for the next 15 years will continue to address the key areas of concern outlined above with considerations of the impacts these have on climate change.

2.3 Possible new policy solutions (scenario – renewable energy)

The State Government recently articulated its policy on addressing climate change through announcing the
state’s carbon emissions reduction targets which includes a goal of achieving 50% renewable energy generation within Queensland by 2030. Accordingly, Toowoomba’s economic development strategy (Bold Ambitions 2038, May 2018) identifies the renewable energy sector as an economic development opportunity for the region and has an intent for Toowoomba to position itself as a national energy hub and to boost investment.

For example, the Lismore Community Solar initiative was launched in January 2018 and won a national Local Government Professionals Federation Award. As part of the Lismore Community Solar initiative, Lismore Council built Australia’s first Council-owned and community-funded solar farms – a 100kW solar farm at Goonellabah Sports and Aquatic Centre and a 100kW floating solar farm at the East Lismore Sewerage Treatment Plant (the largest floating solar farm in Australia). The project has plans to expand and has been received positively by the community. This could be explored in the Toowoomba region as rooftop and floating solar farms could resolve community opposition to using agricultural land for solar farms. A picture of a floating solar farm is below.

![Figure 1: Example of a floating solar farm](image)

2.4 Discussion Questions

1. Is our current Local Government Infrastructure Plan responding adequately to the demands of growth across the region? This would be infrastructure provision for water, sewer, transport, parks, stormwater and land for community purposes?

2. There is a tension between protecting rural land for food production versus using it for energy production. How should the planning scheme change to better accommodate this industry while also protecting our other assets? Is there anything we could learn from the experiences of elsewhere?

3. What do you think is the most appropriate type of renewable energy that Council could pursue to combat climate change and why? For example - floating solar farms, wind farms.
3  Planning for Economic Growth

3.1 Overview

The Toowoomba region’s economic role as an agricultural centre, knowledge and research region, and freight and logistics hub, provides enormous strengths and competitive advantages. This role will be pivotal in the region positioning itself to utilise growth from industry, employment and investment opportunities.

Council’s local policies, planning scheme and regulatory frameworks are important enablers of economic development supporting business innovation, investment and industry growth. Planning plays a critical role in achieving economic growth by encouraging traditionally strong primary industries, and construction and tourism sectors, while also supporting new and emerging sectors to grow and prosper. Effective and responsive planning will help to provide the right conditions for growth across all parts of our economy. It can facilitate the availability of well-located and serviced land for business and industry that has access to suitable infrastructure networks.

There are numerous factors which influence the local economy in the region. These include considerations from the agriculture, development and construction, mining and extractive resources and tourism industries.

3.2 Challenges for the Planning Scheme (scenario – capitalising on major investments)

The Toowoomba region is on an upward spiral of economic development with significant infrastructure set to transform productivity, accessibility and amenity. This includes major investments in the Toowoomba CBD, Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport, and Second Range Crossing and the Brisbane to Melbourne Inland Rail Project. These developments have the potential to enhance the region’s agriculture industry supply chain – including food product manufacturing, machine manufacturing and freight and logistics - to increase the competitiveness of Toowoomba’s agricultural industry on a domestic and international level.

Council wants to ensure that the opportunities this significant investment in infrastructure will create are fully realised. The planning scheme will need to recognise and facilitate those opportunities. It will also need to guide them to ensure they meet the desired outcomes of the community, Council and private sector for a prosperous and sustainable region.
3.3 Possible new policy solutions
(scenario – food processing industry thresholds)

It has been recognised that the food processing thresholds identified within the Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme are a hindrance to attracting new food manufacturing enterprises to the region. Food processing enterprises must have a threshold of producing less than 200 tonnes per year to stay within the medium impact industry definition. Likewise, vegetable oil or oilseed processors need to have a design production capacity of 1000 tonnes per year. Anything above these thresholds forces these enterprises into the heavy impact industry category thereby requiring them to be located in the heavy impact industry zone. This severely limits where they can locate within the region as well as increases levels of regulation. Other industries put into the medium impact industry category are metal foundries producing less than 10 tonnes of metal castings per year, boiler making or engineering works producing less than 10 000 tonnes of metal product per year, and sawmilling, wood chipping and kiln drying timber and logs with a threshold of 500 tonnes per year.

A case could be made that many food processing activities have far smaller impacts on the environment, traffic generation or residential amenity than do metal foundries, engineering works, and sawmilling or wood chipping uses at the above thresholds. Technologies are now available to mitigate or manage many potential off-site impacts from these uses within the site before they cause nuisance. Given this reality, the Planning Scheme review process could seek to review these definitions in dealing with food and vegetable oil processing facilities from annual production thresholds to a new approach which measures levels of emissions, traffic generation and environmental impacts by each proposal. This would then allow food manufacturers to be in areas that may be better placed to benefit their operations.

3.4 Discussion Questions

1. This is an exciting time for the region with major infrastructure and investment projects including the Toowoomba CBD, the Toowoomba Wellcamp Airport, the Toowoomba Second Range Crossing and the Inland Rail Project. What type of opportunities do you see being created by these significant pieces of infrastructure?

2. Do you think creating industrial hubs which place energy facilities, intensive agricultural and food process activities in close proximity is a good idea? If not, why?

3. What other economic development challenges do we need to address? What other solutions could be applied to encouraging economic growth in the region?
4 Planning for Environment And Heritage

4.1 Overview

The natural and built environments within the Toowoomba region have international, national, state and local significance. The recognition of these significant places through the Planning Scheme strengthens the connection to environment, history and culture. Biodiversity, including plants, animals and the ecosystems of which they are a part, is integral to achieving healthy and liveable communities. The natural environment underpins many parts of our economy including tourism, mining and the agricultural sector. Natural and built heritage landscapes also offer sites for cultural activities, recreation and enjoyment.

Places recognised for their cultural heritage significance include historic buildings, memorials, structures, gardens, cemeteries, archaeological sites, streets, townscapes, and culturally significant natural landscapes. These places are important because of their intrinsic aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social and spiritual values. In particular, places of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and areas containing objects or evidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander occupation are significant.

Planning has a critical role to play in supporting the protection of environment and heritage for current and future generations. It will need to be responsive to and offer mitigation strategies on future development which threaten these values, whilst enhancing the sustainability and liveability of the region. Effective planning can balance the conservation of important environmental and cultural values (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage) with economic growth, job creation and social wellbeing.

4.2 Challenges for the Planning Scheme (scenario – regional environmental significance)

It is believed that existing Council policies have yet to reach community expectations articulated within the South East Queensland Regional Plan. This plan identifies Matters of State Environmental Significance (MSES) that are critical for the environment, society and the economy. It also identifies a regional biodiversity network which includes corridors that are important for regional landscape resilience. It articulates a need to identify climate change adaptation zones and refuges for important habitats and the species they support.

Local governments within the SEQ Region are encouraged to investigate and further refine regional biodiversity values and corridors for protection as Matters of Local Environmental Significance (MLES) within their planning schemes to influence the design and location of new development.
4.3 Possible new policy solutions (scenario – local environmental significance)

In 2018, the Gold Coast City Council initiated a city-wide policy approach for Matters of Local Environmental Significance. They identified the following categories of environmental significance:

- Biodiversity areas overlay with four sub-categories
- Priority species with one sub-category
- Vegetation management with three sub-categories and
- Wetlands and waterways with three sub-categories.

Two examples of the general outcomes the Gold Coast City Council aim to achieve in the biodiversity areas overlay are:

1. An Environmental significance overlay code, the purpose of which is to identify and protect matters of environmental significance and ensure that development is consistent with, and contributes to, the achievement of the objectives of the Nature Conservation Strategy.

2. For areas outside of Biodiversity Areas: the quality or connectivity of habitat for State and local significant species (including the koala) is improved.

Another example comes from Brisbane City Council which developed a policy to protect locally significant vegetation in newly developing areas within the urban fringe. The Doolandella Local Plan identified areas containing locally significant vegetation and that any residential lots in these areas had significantly larger sizes than those located in other areas. In addition, the plan required future houses and buildings on these lots to only being able to be built within a specified building location envelope.

Toowoomba Regional Council can integrate and possibly adopt some of the policy frameworks contained within these examples as part of the Planning Scheme review process as a strategy to protect key areas of local environmental significance.

4.4 Discussion Questions

1. Would you like to see more heritage trails or Indigenous art installations in public areas which reflect the region’s diverse cultures especially in new developments?

2. What do you see as a priority for environmental protection within the Toowoomba region? For example - does the Planning Scheme need to protect vegetative cover, specific species and their habitat, landscape corridors and climate refuges or address the spread of weeds and pests?

3. What other environmental and heritage challenges does the Planning Scheme need to address?
5 Planning for Safety And Resilience To Hazards

5.1 Overview

The Queensland Government requires that the risks associated with natural hazards, including the projected impacts of climate change, are avoided or mitigated to protect people and property, and to enhance the community's resilience.

Similarly, hazardous human activities (such as the use and storage of chemicals and certain types of industrial development) can pose a risk to people, and the built and natural environment. The Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme is required to effectively plan for safety and resilience to these hazards by using an evidence-based risk management approach.

5.2 Challenges for the Planning Scheme (scenario – extreme weather events)

Scientists from CSIRO and Bureau of Meteorology have recently modelled what the future climate may look like for the Eastern Downs region. Their climate projections under a high emissions scenario suggest that in 2030, the climate of Toowoomba will be more like the current climate of Kingaroy. This modelling also reveals that the temperature for the region in 2070 is projected to rise between 2.00 and 3.80°C.

Flooding from extreme weather conditions affects the water, sewerage, stormwater, transport and communications infrastructure which impacts on local resilience. Council has released flood maps which community members are encouraged to view either at local service centres or online. Alternatively, a flood engineer or surveyor are recommended for more detailed investigations. The Planning Scheme includes consideration of flooding in the development approval design stage.

5.3 Possible new policy solutions (scenario – sponge city)

A policy directive that could be investigated by Council is the concept of a sponge city. A sponge city is the process of various developments incorporating urban design principles which capture water from extreme rainfall events and storing it into the ground or other water storage devices. The design of the city will focus on passively absorbing, cleaning and using rainfall in an ecologically friendly way that reduces dangerous and polluted runoff as well as stores the water for reuse. Associated techniques of a sponge city include permeable roads, rooftop gardens, rainwater harvesting, rain gardens, green space and blue space such as ponds and lakes.

In Australia, individual elements of the concept have been used for decades and range from designing stormwater flood detention ponds with reeds to simple rain gardens. The term has gained a huge amount of support, especially in China with 16 pilot cities being allocated between 400 and 600 million yuan for their transformation into ‘Sponge Cities’.

Properly implemented, a sponge city can reduce the frequency and severity of floods, improve water quality and allow cities to use less water per person. Associated strategies such as green space can also improve quality of life, improve air quality and reduce urban heat islands.

Figure 3: Diagram of Sponge City
### 5.4 Discussion Questions

1. What are some examples of places in Toowoomba that get significantly damaged in an extreme weather event? Could there be better awareness of hazard zones on these sites by using online mapping tools or signage?

2. If you had the opportunity to live on land that was in a known bushfire area, what precautions would you expect to be placed on this property to ensure you could get to safety in an emergency?

3. What other safety and resilience to hazards challenges do we need to address?

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### Trends for Consideration In The Planning Scheme Review Project

In addition to the five key themes considered above, there are many trends that are being experienced elsewhere in Australia and around the world that will eventually start to appear in the Toowoomba region. The Planning Scheme over the next 15 years will need to be responsive to these emerging trends and the subsequent considerations which are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trend</th>
<th>Considerations for the Planning Scheme</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transportation</strong></td>
<td><strong>Electric and autonomous vehicles and the need for a network of charging stations:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Where would it be appropriate to include public charging stations within new developments?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• How many charging stations should be provided at public car parks?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is specific lane marking needed for automated vehicles?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Use of drones for deliveries and recreational use:</strong></td>
<td>• How do we manage the privacy and safety needs of the public with drones in use?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Are there impacts such as noise that need to be considered in a policy?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What policies are needed to manage drone operations in dense forest areas?</td>
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</tbody>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Active Transport</strong></th>
<th><strong>There is the likely increased use of electric bicycles and scooters, mobility scooters, Segway’s and skateboards:</strong></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• What provisions should be made for dedicated cycle streets and lanes?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Will there be an increased need for end of trip facilities such as showers and secure parking on key routes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of drones for deliveries and recreational use:</strong></td>
<td>• How do we manage the privacy and safety needs of the public with drones in use?</td>
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<td>• Are there impacts such as noise that need to be considered in a policy?</td>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Ageing in Neighbourhoods</strong></th>
<th><strong>There is a preference of baby-boomers is to live in urban locations with access to services, public transport, education, entertainment and employment:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Do you like the idea of senior’s hubs that include a range of seniors housing around urban community infrastructure?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Would you like to see more seniors stay in their home longer through utilizing technology such as TeleHealth and Skype?</td>
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It is acknowledged that some of the above trends are now beyond ‘emerging’ and are well established within some areas of Australia however they are yet to be incorporated into the Toowoomba Region Planning Scheme. As such, these and many other trends which haven’t emerged for consideration yet, will be monitored and reflected in the longer term and strategic aspirations of the new Planning Scheme.
To find out more please visit yoursay.tr.qld.gov.au/buildingourfuture, email yoursay@tr.qld.gov.au or call 131 872.