



MERRIWA DISTRICT PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

Merriwa and District Community Forum Report

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report sets out the results of the Community Forum – an event held to gather ideas for the future of Merriwa and the surrounding district. The event was hosted by the Merriwa District Progress Association on 5 November 2022.

INTRODUCTION

In mid-2022 the Merriwa District Progress Association (MDPA) met with the Cassilis District Development Group (CDDG) to discuss projects and possible synergies between the two groups. During that meeting the CDDG shared their long-term plan for their district. This was an impressive plan based on community consultation and it planted the seed for the MDPA to embark on a similar planning process.

Inspired by the CDDG, the MDPA held a community forum planning event at the Merriwa RSL Auditorium on 5 November 2022. The goal was to gather ideas for a long-term plan for Merriwa and the surrounding district (five years and beyond). In the lead up to the forum the community was also invited to provide ideas via phone, via an online suggestion form and via a suggestion box at the Merriwa Pharmacy (thanks to Rob Smith for accommodating us). This meant that for those who were unable to attend the forum, alternative options were available.

The Community Forum event was advertised through a letterbox drop to all households in the Merriwa district and via Facebook posts on Merriwa Connect. Aside from inviting recipients and readers to attend the Community Forum in person (no RSVP required), the flyer and posts also invited suggestions via phone, via the online suggestion form and via the suggestion box.

An astounding 45 people attended the Community Forum half-day event and they really had their thinking caps on. This was an excellent turnout for a town the size of Merriwa.

This report documents the themes that emerged during the Community Forum – all aimed at improving and facilitating the social, economic, cultural and economic development of Merriwa and the surrounding district.

RESULTS

For full transparency, and to provide a complete picture of the ideas and comments submitted, all written suggestions have been listed at the end of this report. To better consolidate the ideas, they have been grouped into very broad themes.

Brighten and Beautify Merriwa's Central Business District

Quite a few of the attendees at the public forum thought it would be a good idea to brighten and beautify the main Merriwa Central Business District (CBD) by painting and enhancing the shopfronts and their facades, improving street lighting, planting trees and flowers, removing litter and resolving the issue of overflowing rubbish bins remaining on the footpaths for days until collected.

Some specific ideas include:

- a sepia mural on the Bow Street wall of the Merriwa RSL Club
- replacing the mobile kiosk that is used for street stalls
- displaying flags and posters.

General Improvements of the Township of Merriwa

To improve the amenity of the Merriwa township generally, it was suggested that trees under power lines be pruned more sympathetically (and / or laying of electricity cables underground), that more focus be placed on the Merriwa river, and that residents (especially those adjoining the Golden Highway) be encouraged to tidy their yards of rubbish, old cars and unwanted paraphernalia.

Food, Produce Markets and Outdoor Lifestyle

Although many espoused the attraction of Merriwa as a friendly rural community, there were suggestions to improve the lifestyles by holding regular food and produce markets, holding music and healthy outdoor exercise activity events. The creation of a dedicated dog park and increased swimming pool opening hours was recommended.

To improve the experience of both visitors and locals, it was suggested that more focus be placed on improving access to the Merriwa River for picnics, walks and water activities. It was determined there is a need to increase the availability of dining outlets and accommodation facilities.

Community Communication and Group Activities

Many would like to see the return of The Ringer or similar regularly printed news publication. Others hoped to see a range of public events.

Education, Training and Employment

There were suggestions for improved training opportunities in topics such as cooking, community group administration, and grant applications for all levels of the community.

Roads and Traffic

Road maintenance was a significant issue. The need to slow traffic through the CBD was raised, suggesting that a bypass around Merriwa (esp. for heavy vehicles) would be a potential solution.

Services (Shopping, Fuel and Medical)

There was a significant call-out for improved doctor services in Merriwa, especially those who could attend the Merriwa MPS. Respondee also asked for more outlets for fuel and groceries.

Tourism

Suggestions to encourage tourism in the district included improved signage, developing activities and attractions for tourists and locals alike, especially around the Merriwa River.

Upgrade to Silo Area

A concept (currently in an embryonic stage), for a proposed settlers' museum and pioneer garden around the silo / railway precinct was presented on the day and was received by attendees with a great deal of enthusiasm.

Shared Cycleway and Walking Path

Attendees suggested ideas for enhancing the cycleway and walking path by adding a mural under the Merriwa River bridge, a native plant and animal theme, sculptures and QR codes for information websites.

More Council Attention to the Merriwa District

Attendees identified the need for the Upper Hunter Shire Council to be more focussed toward Merriwa, with more equitable allocation of resources and the location of senior management in Merriwa.

HOW WILL THE RESULTS BE USED?

The MDPA would like to see the Upper Hunter Shire Council use the results of this community forum to identify worthwhile projects in the district that are important to the community, to apply for funding from an appropriate organisation and to include those projects in their annual operational plan.

The MDPA will use the results to help develop a long-term plan.

It is also hoped that the community, governments and investors will use the results to identify social needs and potential business opportunities in the district.

The MDPA would welcome any volunteers to take on these themes (or part of any theme) and develop them as a project, either independently or under the guidance of the MDPA.

CONCLUSION

Whilst many of these suggestions require long-term implementation, there are some worthwhile projects that can be implemented in the short term. For example: uplighting trees in the main street; dog park near the silos; extending pool opening hours; training for meeting procedures etc; obtaining defibrillators around town; illuminating the mural in the Rotary playground; and painting a mural under the Merriwa River bridge and the RSL wall. It's time to get started.

SUGGESTIONS

Listed below are the actual suggestions made by attendees and the community through the open forum process.

Brighten and Beautify Merriwa's Central Business District	
Update (paint) shopfront facades	Refresh and brighten the town centre
Uplight trees in the main street	Fruit trees and herbs in main street
Distinctive overhead lights in the main street	A few flower pots in the main street
Paint or render the Civic Centre	Lighting in the street
Paint a sepia mural on the Bow Street wall of the RSL Club	Gardens with flowers
Improved streetscape	Streetscape
Paint shopfronts	Christmas tree decorations (lights, flags, posters)
Brighten main street	Shop fronts painted
Need a new unit (kiosk) for street stalls (that is easier for volunteers to transport)	Beautification of main street - trees; gardens; remove ugly cement in middle of road; paint building awnings; lighting; more seating along main street; utilise local sculpture talent in main street
Trees and plants in main shop area	
Need Christmas decorations	
Make the town more attractive - facades are disgusting - planter boxes are awful	
General Improvements to the Township of Merriwa	
Bus stop seating and shade (for school bus)	Trees under power lines to be cut decently - now very ugly
Clean up rubbish on roads	Town tidy-up -- remove cars in backyards viewed from the road
Beautification and regeneration	Tree planting campaigns
Inter town transport links	Chocolate factory
Utilise existing facilities, like the racecourse	Powerlines underground
More native trees	Plant fruit trees (citrus)
Keep its quintessential value as a country town with pride	Look for solutions to what we want to do rather than problems with doing something so we end up not doing it.
Solar powered lighting to illuminate the new mural in the Rotary playgrounds	Look for solutions to issues than always identifying why it can't be done.
Beautify the Merriwa River	Electricity underground
Safe river access	
Revisit the proposed damming of the Goulburn River at Kerrabee	
Food, Produce Markets and Outdoor Lifestyle	
Need more coffee places, now that Santos and Twisted Takeaway have closed	Walk / cycle path
Need more eating places	Exercise stopping points (with equipment)
Selling herbs	Water activities - river, pool, heated
Cafe outdoor street eating areas	Heated pool
Monthly farmers (and other) markets	Pool open more hours
Swimming pool hours to open in November and close in April / May	Increased pool attendance
Street stall at least once per month, with homemade and home grown produce	Pool opening hours
Better river frontage areas	Heated pool
Town markets	Music events
Food share / swap meets	Market local events, activities and natural beauty
Markets	External eating at night (not a lot available in town)
Park run	Excess vegetable distribution
	Community gardens

Community Communication and Group Activities	
There is nothing here for families. Community vegetable garden Fenced in dog park within town, so the dogs can run free A bike track Dog park near the silo tourist hub Encourage more social events utilising local halls Indigenous heritage Need better communication for town events - The Ringer Music days Community garden Fishing competition Sculpture competition Dog training classes Inter-town competitions - eg: skateboard riding	Family venues (pubs, clubs) Sporting gala days for families Billy cart race Events in Merriwa - yearly rodeo Better seating at the showground, and potentially a covered arena such as that at White Park, Scone Greater use of Instagram, Facebook and MyMerriwa Need another Ringer paper. Please!!! Advertise local events more, as not everyone has Facebook A letterbox drop is better than on-line, as it can be read anytime Greater acknowledgement of early Aboriginal presence in the district Bring back local newspaper
Education, Training and Employment	
TAFE and further learning opportunities Better job opportunities Make kitchen building at High School available to the general public Improve literacy by holding courses in: running committees; insurance literacy; etc. TAFE for cooking (building)	Understanding heritage regulations, and how to manage streamlining planning proposals Understanding pathways to funding and vision / project ??????? Short course centre for citizens Uni / TAFE centre for teaching Training people on meeting procedures and insurance for public events
Roads and Traffic	
Better roads. We need our cars to be roadworthy yet our roads are undriveable in some parts. Traffic is too fast through town - needs to be slowed down Speed limit through town needs to be set at 40 kph - don't wait for an accident to happen	Traffic is too fast to 'smell the roses' Roads need to be improved Better road maintenance Safe roads and travel Road maintenance - need to be able to access town Bypass for heavy vehicles
Services (Shopping, Fuel and Medical)	
We need a shopping centre so we don't need to leave town, which would also help generate jobs It's expensive to live in Merriwa. There is no competition and limited options. It is expensive to travel in order to obtain things that are not in this town. Living in Merriwa for a family is unaffordable. Better shopping opportunities and affordability for families. Shops are closing due to expensive rental prices. Another petrol station to get cheaper fuel Second service station Full-time doctor with hospital rights Medical services around the clock Locate defibrillators around Merriwa with 24 hour access (such as the showground and caravan park)	We need more doctors Doctor in town and hospital Permanent doctor in town Availability of a doctor at the hospital Wanting and needing a doctor on call for the hospital for emergencies and also for local people instead of having phone consults with Muswellbrook or Maitland Resident doctor Doctor in town Services - doctors, dentists, physios More doctors Visiting specialists Full-time doctor Doctor in town Better health facilities and services. Our hospital is a nursing home

Tourism	
<p>Promote the local history of Merriwa and surrounds. There is much more than people realise: rabbit cannery during WWI; Jimmy Governor; Murdering Hut Gully.</p> <p>More art murals and sculptures</p> <p>We need to promote the district more. Council does not seem to do any promotion of Merriwa, Cassilis or the surrounding area.</p> <p>More attractive caravan park. Maybe the main road is not the best place for it because of noise.</p> <p>Open the bottle museum to the public.</p> <p>Toilet signs</p> <p>Toilets in the main street</p> <p>Upper Hunter Snail Trail - bike packing (Modelled on Central West Cycle Trail)</p>	<p>Merriwa should be more like Denman</p> <p>Events are needed to bring people into Merriwa</p> <p>Better signs to welcome people to Merriwa</p> <p>More accommodation</p> <p>Make Merriwa River the centrepiece - outdoor / indoor cafe, beaches, parks, umbrellas</p> <p>Accommodation - bottom pub opened</p> <p>Camping - town visit and on farms</p> <p>Local woolshed visits</p> <p>Accommodation - better range of types (BNB, Airbnb, Farmstays)</p> <p>Accommodation</p> <p>Make the river part of the town</p> <p>Keep up the good eateries (cafes)</p> <p>Both the pubs up and running with good pricing</p> <p>River more of a centrepiece</p>
Upgrade to Silo Area	
<p>Showcase the natural history of the area - plants and animals</p>	<p>Aboriginal history of the area</p> <p>Early European history</p>
Shared Cycleway and Walking Path	
<p>Paint a mural under the Merriwa River bridge (similar to the painted honeyeater)</p> <p>Adopt a native plant / animal theme</p> <p>Install QR codes to link information websites</p> <p>Sculptures (as at Walcha)</p>	<p>Fundraising night for footpath contribution</p> <p>More community ownership of opportunities in community - not bound by so much red tape - eg: volunteer to pay \$100 on rate notice</p>
More Council Attention to the Merriwa District	
<p>Do all grants that Council receives get spent on what they are supposed to, or is a portion siphoned off and spent on the Scone Racecourse or Scone Airport?</p> <p>Rates paid spent in Merriwa</p> <p>UHSC negotiate with power company to get a better deal for all customers in the Shire</p>	<p>We need to have our Council back to Merriwa only, with local employees and our own equipment</p> <p>Management personnel in UHSC located in Merriwa</p> <p>Rates</p> <p>Make sure our rates are spent in Merriwa</p>