

# Economic Action Plan



Photo Credit: Emma Cramer



**COBAR SHIRE  
COUNCIL**  
outback nsw

# Part 1

## Background & Purpose



**COBAR SHIRE  
COUNCIL**  
outback nsw

# 2016



Department  
of Industry

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## **PART 1 BACKGROUND – CONSTANT COBAR**

### **1.1 CORPORATE VISION**

Established as a town for more than 100 years, Cobar is one of the strongest outback areas in NSW, with a population that hovers around 5,000 people and a strong mining industry that has supported its development as a service centre for the people of the Far West.

Cobar flows with the economic activity of the mines, which slightly impact population levels within the Shire. When the mines are booming, it's a Shire of opportunity, with people coming into the area to take advantage of favourable circumstances generated by the activity, including career development.

Whilst the economy is dominated by mining, Cobar has also developed as a solid service centre, with retail and health services all deemed as solid performers for a community of this size.

With a corporate vision of Cobar being “an attractive, healthy and caring environment in which to live, work and play, achieved in partnership with the community through initiative, foresight and leadership” Cobar Shire Council is committed to facilitating economic growth that engenders an environment for its residents that will improve the sustainability of the Shire whilst enhancing its liveability.

Council's Community Strategic Plan identified the need for a detailed plan for economic development. In 2016, Council approved development of this strategy.

### **STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

There are a large range of reports that indicate why local and regional economic development strategies have become a necessary, viable, and complementary alternative to traditional development strategies.

Whilst the bulk of Australia's population resides in its capital cities, the bulk of the economic activity occurs in the regions, and several Australian studies have recognised the importance of regions and Local Government Areas in their contribution to the Australian economy.

The key elements to a prosperous community are local leadership, a positive and supportive investment environment, effective utilisation of infrastructure and institutional involvement in the processes of economic development.

Local Government has a significant role in each of these factors.

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Cobar Shire Council is committed to managing the Shire in a way which ensures that actions undertaken to increase diversity in the economy also lead to improvements in living standards for residents.

The purpose of this plan is to provide a clear path toward sustainable economic development in Cobar by:

*Cultivating Cobar, its businesses and its community to achieve economic endurance.*

## **ECONOMIC PLANNING APPROACH**

Cobar Shire Council recognises its implicit charter to serve its community and its role as a key player in development of the local economy.

As such, Council has endeavoured to identify all issues relevant to creating and maintaining prosperity in Cobar. A comprehensive economic overview of Cobar was undertaken between April and October, in the lead-up to the development of this strategy. (A full copy of the report titled Cobar Economic Action Plan: Background Paper is available from the Council Chambers, or can be viewed online at [www.cobar.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cobar.nsw.gov.au)).

At the same time, a number of activities were undertaken to fill in the statistical gaps. These activities included a survey of business needs and activity levels, a SWOT analysis and several workshops with key stakeholders.

This plan is Council's response to key economic, social, environmental, political and technological trends and indicators that are not only happening in the community now, but have been anticipated through extensive research and planning.

This plan endeavours to set the stage for sustained economic development in Cobar by:

- Providing a vision for Cobar's economic future;
- Identifying key goals and objectives that Council has in the area of economic development for the Shire.

This includes an activity plan incorporating key outcomes and participants for each strategic option.

## **ROLE OF COUNCIL IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

The traditional role of Local Government has changed significantly in the last 20 years from councils only being concerned with "roads, rates and rubbish" to a stance where councils can now be involved in practically anything that may affect the welfare of the community.

More and more local governments Councils are taking an active and facilitative role in increasing employment opportunities, facilitating new business and business growth and providing a link between business and government policies to encourage local economic growth.

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Council can act as:

- A stimulator/ promoter by taking action that induces business creation and expansion;
- A facilitator to create the most favourable environment for business;
- A coordinator to manage the provision of infrastructure or services for which Council isn't necessarily responsible;
- An entrepreneur/developer to share or take the risk in the economic development process.

Cobar Shire Council has demonstrated that it understands and appreciates the changing economic environment. The council has shown its willingness to act as a stimulator on several occasions to enhance the business environment. This means an environment where it is:

- Easier and more conducive to open a business in the region; and
- Easier to then operate in the Shire and gain advantage over competitors in other regions.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PHILOSOPHY**

This plan recognises that economic development is a competitive market. Every opportunity will go to the place that best suits it - to the location that gives it the best return on investment, or gets the best outcomes for its stakeholders.

In that regard, a commercial approach to public sector activities such as Product Development has been adopted. This includes the disciplines of:

- Product Development - making sure that Cobar and partners have something to sell, through the Economic Development Strategy;
- Sales Process - from cold contacts, qualified prospects, proposals negotiations and signed deals and supported by promotion and distribution channels;
- Fulfilment Process - ensuring that Council can deliver what is promised through streamlined processes.

Flexibility is critical to hooking opportunities and Cobar needs to be the best to achieve its economic development goals.

## **CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS**

The economic development jargon most commonly bandied around by economic development practitioners includes the 'retention and expansion of existing businesses within a region', 'attraction of new investment into a region', and 'plugging income leaks and increasing export capability'. However, before these objectives can be achieved, it is important to identify the critical success factors that provide the preconditions for growth. These in turn will assist in defining the strategic options and actions presented under the heading Strategic Options.

### **Beyond your borders**

A competitive international, interstate and interregional focus is particularly important, given the limited size of the local market and its susceptibility to macroeconomic fluctuations. The strategic options will need to address "export" competitiveness and capability as well as import substitution and self-containment in services.

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## **Leadership**

Initiatives need to enhance the work of individuals and groups who are prepared to take on a leadership role in the community. In thriving communities, leadership has played a common role in the creation of vibrant, high employment economies.

## **Investment growth**

The injection of new capital is considered to be a key driver of economic expansions and job growth and should be considered in three parts:

1. Creating and maintaining the investment environment (infrastructure availability, a competitive regulatory environment and a supportive investment culture);
2. Facilitating new investment from existing firms (assisting with access to capital, business network support, financial incentives, information on market opportunities); and
3. Attracting external investment (marketing to businesses outside the region or attracting new businesses to Cobar, financial incentives, etc.).

## **Workforce capability**

As the workforce is a key input or factor of production, it is important to ensure that the workforce is able to meet the skill and knowledge requirements of current and future industry needs. Initiatives need to consider quality education and training systems that are capable of educating, training and re-training people through their working lives.

## **Strategic infrastructure**

The provision of both hard and soft infrastructure is becoming increasingly more important in the 'liveability' of a location, which aids its ability to attract the investment and population that is required for sustainable growth.

## **A competitive economic environment**

A competitive economic environment is a prerequisite to achieving economic growth. Factors such as a competitive regulatory environment, an efficient and effective public sector that supports and promotes business development, a speedy and effective culture of responding to a changing global environment, and the development of business clusters and strategic alliances can give firms in a locality a competitive edge over their competitors.

## **Partnerships, strategic alliances and networks**

It is important for initiatives to utilise the region's existing resources in the most appropriate manner. Use of collective knowledge and resources will result in an enhanced outcome for Cobar. Similarly, it is important to encourage partnerships and strategic alliances amongst firms to enable access to knowledge, to achieve economies of scale, acquire technologies and resources and have the ability to enter new markets that otherwise may be beyond reach.

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## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

As an organisation, Council is accountable to the community for its actions. Indeed, many of the strategic options and actions detailed in this plan will be funded through council taxes and government grants. For this reason, it is suggested that each of the strategic responses and action items be shaped around the following guiding principles:

### **Results orientated**

Council should focus its resources and energies on activities where there are likely to be measurable and tangible outcomes that result in positive long-term economic benefit to the community.

### **Community focus**

Council needs to support economic development initiatives that will benefit the business and residential communities and have the support of the private sector as well as other governments and/or agencies.

### **Regional focus**

Council needs to maintain a team focus by supporting regional economic development initiatives that will provide benefit to the residential and business communities.

### **Sustainability**

Council should be strategic in its decision-making process, and where appropriate, make decisions based on the long-term sustainability and viability of projects and initiatives.

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## PART 2 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT GOAL

As part of its community strategic planning process, the Cobar community defined its vision as:

*An attractive, healthy and caring environment in which to live, work and play, achieved in partnership with the community through initiative, foresight and leadership.*

During the economic development process, it was clear that economic aspirations for the Shire included the following:

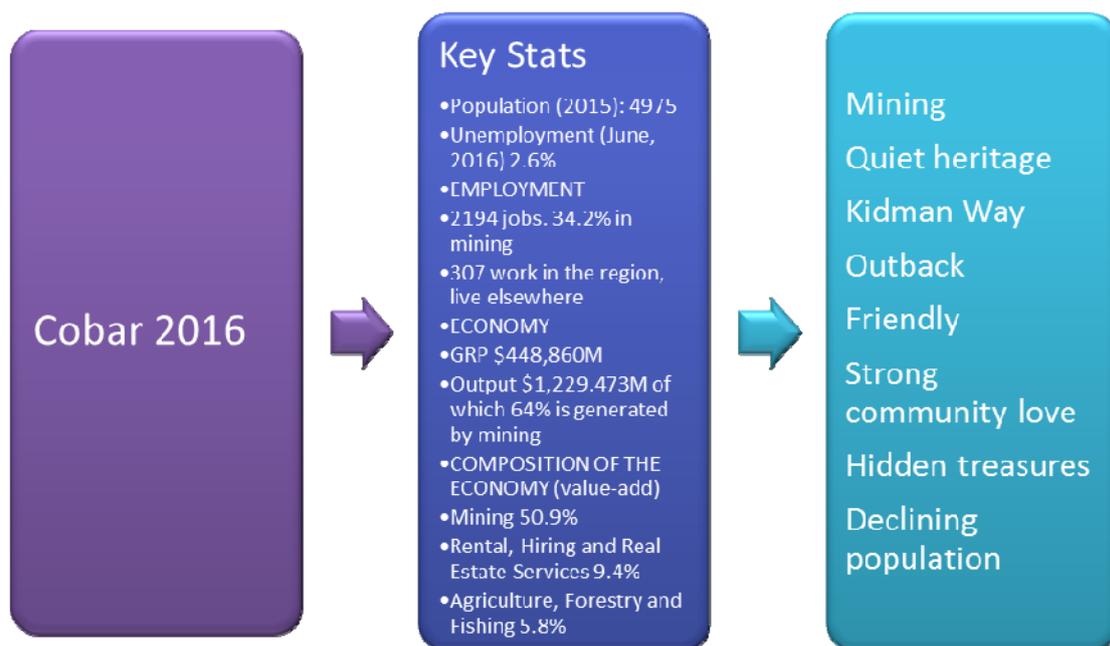
- Diversity in the economic base;
- Vibrancy beyond mining;
- Outback medical hub;
- Climate change leader;
- Desirable place to live;
- Becoming a destination instead of a stopover.

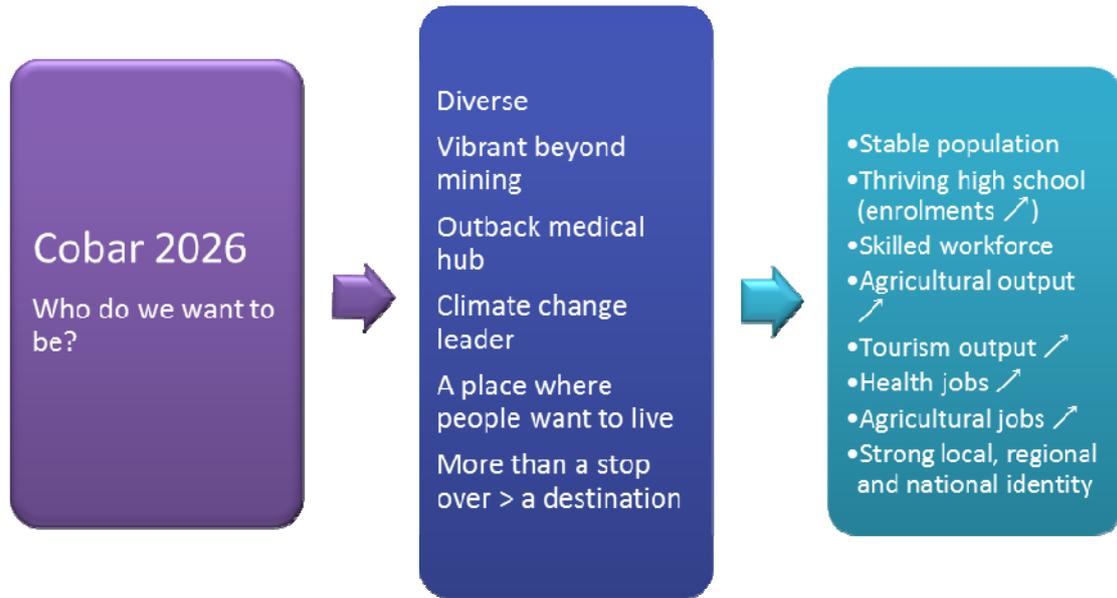
These translate into the simple economic goal of:

*Cultivate Cobar and its community to achieve economic endurance.*

Essentially this plan needs to promote economic growth that respects the natural environment, encourages a strong diversified economy that supports local employment and enhances the quality of life of the community that has chosen Cobar.

The following diagrams map Cobar's current position, followed by its 10-year vision.





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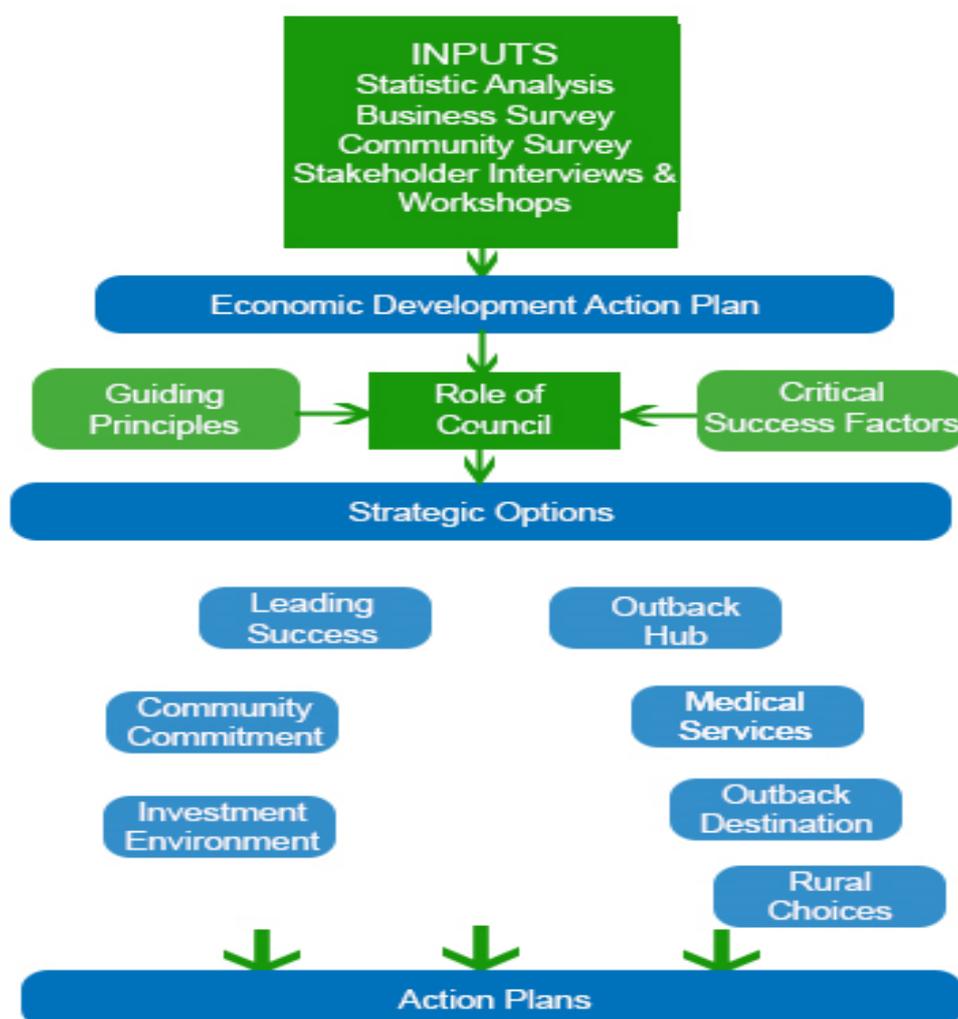
## PART 3 STRATEGIC OPTIONS

### INTRODUCTION

The process of developing this action plan has identified several strategic options that will need to be addressed to achieve the long-term economic development goals of the region. The **green leader** option is an overarching option aimed at maintaining what this Council believes will be a highly valued asset in the future: its environment. The four core or priority options are **smart, investment, progressive (business) and destination (marketing)**.

In the long-term, Council recognises that there is a need to differentiate Cobar's economic structure from Townsville's, which is heavily geared towards government services, mining and manufacturing. For this reason, under investment and the development of new core industries three (3) specific sub-options have been identified: **tourism, medical and new rural industries**.

The following diagram shows the relationship between the research and each of the options identified in this section:



# Part 2 Action Plan



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## **PART 1 STRATEGY 1: LEADING SUCCESS**

### **GOAL/OBJECTIVE**

The key purpose of the Leading Success is to achieve economic growth through existing firms in the Shire.

### **OUTCOME:**

A vibrant shire that promotes and supports business growth and retention, development and investment.

This will be measured by:

- # of businesses in Cobar;
- # of business network meetings held (aim for 3 p.a.);
- Customer satisfaction greater than the benchmark (established by the first survey).

### **RESPONSE FACTORS**

Many economic development practitioners are firm in their belief that approximately 70% of investment in a local economy will occur by existing businesses. For this reason, it is important to recognise and encourage what could be a significant opportunity for Cobar.

Besides ensuring that the preconditions for local growth have been met, local government can also play an active role in supporting local businesses and facilitating their growth. Given that a significant proportion of existing businesses in Cobar are small to medium firms, with low employment, the benefit that can be gained by assisting these firms to grow could be significant.

The types of activities that Council can play a key role in is in facilitating information and education flows, encouraging import replacement and value-adding where appropriate; developing key industry sectors; and developing business partnerships and cooperation.

All of the goals outlined in this strategy aim to foster local business growth.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Understand the needs of local businesses</b>	Continue to maintain a database of local businesses and their goods and services		
	Develop and implement a program of regular engagement with local businesses (aim for 3 network meetings p.a.)		
<b>Provide support to local businesses</b>	Maintain a good working knowledge of business support programs from the NSW and Australian government		
	Provide a regular update to local businesses about business support programs		
	Investigate the delivery of small business advisory services being delivered to Cobar businesses (leverage BEC/Orana Support Services to have a presence in Cobar)		
	Develop and implement a series of workshops and seminars with partners to assist and support small business (topics to include: understanding your customer and their needs; using the internet to build brand and markets; hiring and managing employees; employee development and retention; etc;		
<b>Provide businesses with local economic and social data</b>	Compile and distribute an annual economic update to businesses that includes some interpretation around market conditions that is meaningful to businesses. (The council subscribes to Remplan, but the information is presented in economist speak. There is a need to present the information in Remplan to businesses, in a way that they can understand it and use it to develop their business)		

Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Identify and promote regional business opportunities</b>	<p>Assist local businesses to expand their markets</p> <p>a. Showcasing successful regional businesses and their operations</p> <p>(There are good businesses operating in regional Australia: including right in Cobar. Profile the business model, showcase the success factors and encourage other businesses to think differently to expand their businesses and markets – Parisi’s is a great local example, to start with)</p> <p>b. Encouraging businesses to establish a digital presence (Google, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn)</p>		
<b>Strengthen the capability of local businesses</b>	<p>Establish a supply chain project with the local mining companies in the Cobar to raise awareness of project opportunities and build their capacity to successfully tender for projects.</p>		
	<p>Encourage the local mining companies to implement local purchasing policies that recognise Cobar based firms; or encourage businesses to establish a local presence in Cobar</p>		
	<p>Facilitate business development clusters to investigate and access local capability to pursue new business opportunities</p>		
	<p>Continue to support and participation in the Business Awards</p>		
<b>Assist local business to become more resource efficient and sustainable</b>	<p>Partner with the Department of Environment to deliver resource efficiency and sustainability programs</p>		
	<p>Deliver training programs to assist business to access and implement ESD initiatives</p>		
	<p>Promote and communicate available sustainability programs, grants and funding opportunities to local business</p>		
	<p>Provide incentives to businesses to encourage environmental sustainability</p>		

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Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Facilitating business and community uptake and participation in the “Internet of Things”</b>	Identify useful on-line software and promote these to the community and to businesses		
	Put Cobar transactions on-line and promote this as an option to the business and resident community		

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## **PART 2 COMMUNITY COMMITMENT**

### **GOAL/OBJECTIVE**

Through improved communication and coordination, people will work together to grow Cobar.

### **OUTCOME**

Improved confidence in Cobar, resulting in growth across all sectors (measured by):

- # of network meetings;
- # of people participating in network meetings;
- Population;
- # of community events;
- Participation in events.

### **RESPONSE FACTORS**

Communities are important. They provide resources, information and opportunities. In economic development there is much evidence that shows that communities can be sources of creativity and enterprise and are invaluable in the face of disaster.

Strong communities are characterised by high levels of social and economic participation. They demonstrate effective decision-making and strong networks and are attractive to people considering moving to live and work.

Cobar is an incredibly strong community made up of people that are committed to creating a better place live.

The surveys and conversations conducted through the process of developing this action plan, demonstrated the strong community commitment that exists from a wide variety of people and professions.

This strategy is about harnessing the collective power of that love and passion and using it to move Cobar forward.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Recommendation	Action	Priority
<b>Facilitate local and regional networks</b>	Advocate and support local business networking functions	
	Form and facilitate an economic development advisory/reference group to provide input and feedback on a regular basis	
<b>Sponsorship of leadership development program to develop local leadership within the business community</b>	Involve business leaders and encourage their input into the economic development plan and Cobar projects/programs.	
	Investigate the participation and support for mentor evenings for local firms to highlight best practice in various fields.	
<b>Promote Cobar and its community</b>	Develop and implement a promotion campaign aimed at highlighting business confidence and local success stories in the Australian media.	
	Become the voice for Outback Australia by developing and lobbying for regional/outback policy changes that will improve business and life in outback Australia	
	Represent the interests and economic development aspirations of Council at a regional, State and national level to influence and guide key decisions in the best interests of the local community by participating in appropriate regional, state and national networks	
<b>Implement a customer feedback program</b>	Conduct an annual business confidence and customer service survey and provide feedback to businesses so that they can implement improvement programs	
<b>Encourage community and business to buy locally</b>	Improve and continue the Cobar Quids (buy local) campaign	

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## PART 3 INVESTMENT ENVIRONMENT

### GOAL/OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Investment is to accelerate investment in the Cobar economy, with a major focus initially on self-containment in services and a long-term emphasis the attraction of new key industries.

### OUTCOMES

Create an environment that makes developing in Cobar easier and hence more competitive than developing in other locations.

### RESPONSE FACTORS

The key factors driving this strategy include globalisation and the structural changes in the economy that are occurring as a result and the need to stimulate investment and create the right market conditions (such as hard and soft infrastructure, regulatory environment) that makes development more attractive and competitive in Cobar.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Achieve best practice in Cobar processes that impact on investment by maintaining a supportive and facilitative organisation and culture</b>	Maintain and promote a best practice delivery / business process model for investment inquiries and development applications		
	Develop and promote visionary commercial development plans with key developers/landholders/stakeholders and provide support during implementation <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Town centre master plan</li><li>• Industrial zone masterplan</li><li>• Tourism precinct masterplan, focused on the Heritage Centre</li></ul>		
<b>Ensure that Cobar has key infrastructure essential for investment growth</b>	Conduct an audit of current infrastructure, investigate and identify future infrastructure requirements and develop a clear plan that integrates requirements into Cobar priorities for the provision of key infrastructure into the future		

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Priority</b>
<b>Encourage an abundance of suitably skilled labour and the supportive educational infrastructure to provide further education</b>	Work with the Cobar to High School to develop and implement a promotional plan that manages and improves the public perceptions of the school.		
	Encourage the High School to continue and expand its linkages and programs with the business sector that encourages the development of basic training competencies of school leavers (white card, RSA/RSG, barista, retail, as well as more specific VET outcomes).		
	Facilitate the implement of local training by training providers, by identifying demand across businesses and sectors to make the delivery of training locally more viable.		
<b>Actively seek external investment</b>	Continue to research and identify business gaps and develop proposals to bring targeted businesses to Cobar.		
	Undertake and promote prefeasibility studies/investment proposals in a form suitable for consideration by governments, banks, superannuation funds, and the private sector.		
<b>Strategic investigation of core industries of the future that will provide strong job and investment growth and fit the key competencies of Cobar</b>	Develop and implement industry development strategies for new key industries (ie. tourism destination management plan/strategy).		

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## PART 4 MEDICAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

### GOAL/OBJECTIVE

Implement strategies and promote outcomes that see Cobar positioned as a leader in outback medicine for remote/outback locations

### OUTCOMES

Cobar recognised as a medical hub in outback NSW, with professional recognition developed on a national scale

### RESPONSE FACTORS

The health and community services sector in Cobar is considered reasonably strong with the community having good access to front line medical and community services, including General Practitioner's, Dentist's and community services.

Health care and social services provides 6% of all jobs in the community; and with an expectation that underlying demand for services may increase as the community ages, opportunities for industry development in the sector are considerable.

Whilst the sector is quite broad, key opportunities include aged care management and healthy community outcomes with a focus on families and general wellbeing.

The opportunity lies in supporting this sector to develop and innovate, being at the forefront of "outback/remote" medicine in Australia

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Support the development of industry infrastructure</b>	Continue to support the development of infrastructure and facilities that enable growth and expansion of the sector eg: the development of the MPS is pivotal to industry development.		
	Work with providers to identify gaps and support the development of funding submissions to close gaps in viable services.		
	Pursue the implementation of internet based health services, where appropriate.		
<b>Ensure that Cobar develops and retains the skills to deliver health care and community services to its community</b>	Forecast demand in future years for healthcare, allied healthcare workers and work with the school and training providers to develop local training programs aimed at meeting demand.		
	Succession plan for key roles and develop strategies to attract key professional roles to Cobar.		

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## **PART 5 OUTBACK DESTINATION**

### **GOAL/OBJECTIVE**

Integrate the tourism attributes of Cobar into a unique experience that show cases the strengths of the place, creates a strong destination profile, complements rather than competes with the wider region, diversifies the local economy and has high appeal for the community and domestic and international visitors.

### **OUTCOMES**

Development of a sustainable tourism industry based on increased visitor numbers, nights and spend.

### **RESPONSE FACTORS**

The ultimate aim of tourism development is to develop a unique recreational and tourism profile for Cobar that supports and enhances the existing quality of lifestyle image and integrates the environment into everyday thinking. It needs to leverage community assets to provide a playground for the broader regional population whilst having strong appeal for emerging experiential markets such as eco-tourists and grey nomads which are prevalent in the wider area.

The council currently has a very good heritage centre/visitor information centre is well known as a stopover for people travelling east/west and north/south.

The key challenge is to create reasons for people to visit and stay in the region by developing new experiences (events and product development) that provide broader appeal and attract markets from the wider region.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Develop infrastructure and planning/management guidelines to support themed product development</b>	Develop and implement a tourism precinct masterplan that sees the development of the tourism precinct (centred in the Heritage Centre) to achieve the following:		
	- Creates a unique experience for visitors;		
	- Extends the stay of visitors		
	- Enhances the image of Cobar by telling the story of Cobar and its people and its development		
	- Sells the romance/heartbreak of outback mining and living		
	- Provides assets and activities that encourage a healthy lifestyle		
	Develop and implement a destination brand for Cobar, that includes guidelines and allows for use by local businesses.		
	Develop the Cobar Miners Memorial in a way that encourages visitor interaction and causes visitors to stay longer in Cobar.		
	Develop and implement a directional and awareness signage policy for themed routes and tracks through the region.		
	Develop themed awareness signage and remote markers for self-guided interpretation (Linked to heritage and points of interest).		
<b>Develop Tourism “Product”</b>	Prepare background information and develop new self-guided tour opportunities aimed at niche markets (i.e bird watching, history, nature).		
	Develop additional guided photographic and bird watching information to support this industry.		
	Develop 3 additional special events/ festivals that will provide economic benefit by attracting visitors to the region.		
	Build on existing pieces and develop a community public art programs that sees the development of significant art work on an annual basis, (include interpretation Cobar sign).		

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<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Outcome</b>	<b>Priority</b>
<b>Create awareness of Cobar and develop critical mass</b>	Develop and implement a marketing strategy for the brand that improves information about the destination in key target markets and that includes a digital strategy		
	Develop a resource package and identify training requirements of volunteers to increase knowledge of Cobar		

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## PART 6 RURAL CHOICES

### GOAL/OBJECTIVE

The over-arching objective of this theme is to achieve economic growth through the City's rural and natural resources.

### OUTCOMES

A sustainable rural sector adding value to the regional economy.

### RESPONSE FACTORS

Cobar has traditionally had a large rural economic base. This economic base has been slowly declining for a number of reasons a general decline in traditional rural industries throughout Australia.

The key factors driving this strategy include:

- A decline in traditional agriculture and a rise in intensive, low environmental impact agriculture;
- Increasing pressure to find new agricultural markets; and
- Increased environmental regulation.

While the traditional rural base has been holding steady shrinking, new rural industries have been identified as having potential to be developed in the region.

Initiatives have been identified and investigated that have the potential to provide a competitive advantage.

The Council and community values the rural economy and is keen to develop this part of the economy in areas that will lead to strong local growth and employment. This is not only important from an industry development point of view but from a view of creating and maintaining an industry capable of enhancing the economy.

The role for Council is to provide appropriate businesses with information on new trends and processes and to then encourage these to be implemented within the business organisation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTIONS

Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Facilitate uptake of new product opportunities</b>	Investigate and promote potential new products, farming innovations and practices.		
<b>Encourage and facilitate businesses interested in similar new products to assist and network with each other</b>	Facilitate seminars on new product opportunities and promote participation through appropriate organisations (i.e. Landcare).		

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Recommendation	Action	Outcome	Priority
<b>Consider ways to attract new industry</b>	Determine local interest in the establishment of a bio-hub in Cobar with a view to expanding the feasibility/bio mass feed.		
	Investigate and promote the market potential for expanded goat production.		
	Use the opportunity and cash flow provided by carbon farming to re-invest in farm productivity and improvements.		

## **PART 7 IMPLEMENTATION**

Implementation will largely depend on available resources allocated on an annual basis, allocation of which is guided by Council’s Corporate objectives, as described in the Council’s Community Plan.

The Council will have a principal role in implementing many of the initiatives described. However, it is assumed that components of this plan will be incorporated into the directions of other planning and operational documents produced by the Council as well as agencies external to the Council.

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**AMENDMENT LIST**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Date Adopted</b>	<b>Minute No.</b>	<b>Date Commenced</b>	<b>Notified in Local Paper</b>
1	DRAFT			YES
2	27.04.2017	79.4.2017	28.4.2017	N/A