

### **Submission to TRC regarding the Central Highfields Master Plan**

The Highfields and District Business Connections (HDBC) group, as the main representative of business in the Highfields sub-region, congratulate the Toowoomba Regional Council on the purchase of the land in the centre of Highfields and also on the quality of the community engagement they have undertaken in recent months for the development of the Central Highfields Master Plan.

In 2016, the HDBC launched the Highfields Community Heart: Project 2020 (HCHearT). In the last 18 months, the HCHearT Project 2020 has initiated broad community engagement and laid down an effective place-based planning process to capitalise on the community's assets, inspiration, and potential and to drive place-based development for both public and commercial precincts.

During this time, the HDBC has undertaken a survey of locally based businesses and encouraged small businesses to have an input to the HCHearT workshop discussions. Survey respondents indicated 44% commuted to work in Toowoomba daily, while a high proportion of those who lived and worked in the Highfields area were home-based business owner operators, 68% of all business respondents. The Highfields population demonstrates a higher than average household income and tertiary educated professionals in knowledge based industries (ABS 2014).

Findings from the HCHearT workshops in 2017 identified a need for the following business facilities and services:

- An extensive commercial area - attract a diversity of businesses and industries to give a diversity of jobs and professional services
- Biz Hub – big enough for tech, science, business training
- Pop-up shop area for small businesses, home business, serviced offices
- Co-working hub & part time jobs, a place to assist home business to transition
- High speed communications, Hi-tech facility to attract companies
- Medical, dental, specialist precinct – services and training
- Information Centre, support local region, Bunya Highway, art space etc

Employment opportunities for young people are a high priority for Highfields residents and the HDBC seeks to stimulate business growth as well as promoting facilities like a resource hub for small business within the new precinct. The fact that this area is adjacent to the two rapidly growing schools in Highfields State Secondary College and Mary Mackillop Catholic College is a plus for the involvement of young people in part-time employment and school-based traineeships.

The HCHearT workshops also identified community facilities and services that support education and learning and also support social and enterprise development opportunities:

- Library /art gallery/theatre– central position for access, undercover parking
- Library - community learning PLACE, multi-purpose, community lounge room, solar power on roof, roof gardens, green walls,
- Education precinct – Tertiary, TAFE, Training providers.
- Space for social enterprises, a place for volunteers, casual work source
- Community meeting/ activity rooms, arts/ culture incubator spaces
- a day service centre with activities and meaningful days for clients (respite care)
- Collaborative service providers: NDIS, Nursing services
- A social hub, after school activities, hang out spaces
- A weather protected space for community events

HDBC members are seeking the best long term benefits and outcomes for Highfields in the newly expanded central precinct and wish to encourage and support the TRC to give priority to a well-planned development reflecting the needs of the Highfields community. As the owner of the 20 hectare parcel of land in the centre of the master plan area, TRC has the critical responsibility to the community think in terms of a long-term vision of how the heart of Highfields will grow and develop, rather than in terms of a private developer looking for a fast turnaround profit for their shareholders.

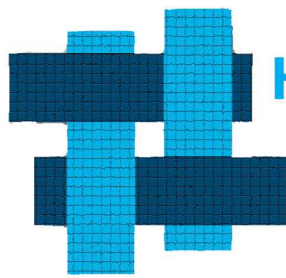
HDBC also wish to emphasise the key role the planned TRC Library facility will have in local social and commercial development. The expectation is that the role and function of this facility will include a range of business support and educational services as well as functioning as a social hub. A well-positioned facility has the potential to fulfil a strategic role in the development of new businesses and to provide a lasting legacy for the community. Placing this facility in the undeveloped land to the east of O'Brien Rd will allow this facility to become a stimulator for local business and social enterprises and catalyse complimentary development quickly. As part of our extensive discussions with federal agencies and national organisations such as SEGRA, we note that there is an ideal opportunity to leverage forecasted TRC capital expenditure on a Highfields Library into a federal funding program such as Building Better Regions Fund to create a significantly larger business and community precinct in the blank space in the heart of Highfields.

We look forward to further discussions with TRC on this critical issue for the future of Highfields and leave you with some images of how the Highfields town centre could grow.

**Regards,**

**The Executive Committee**

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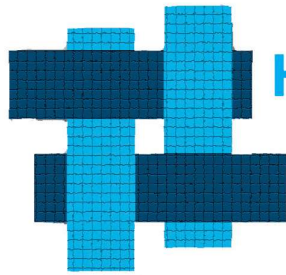
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Artists impression of Mary Street Pedestrian Plaza, Gympie







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