



# Central Highfields Master Plan

## Stage 2 Community Engagement Report

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## Executive summary

Between October 2017 and July 2018, Toowoomba Regional Council will develop a Master Plan for Central Highfields which will ultimately inform an amendment to the Planning Scheme.

(An Overview of the engagement process is presented on the following page.)

Stage 2 Community Engagement, conducted in February and March 2018, sought to gather feedback on three Master Plan design options that had been prepared by Council.

During Stage 2 Community Engagement, the Project Team engaged with 115 people at three public workshops, plus several dozen by other mechanisms as well as 100+ via a dedicated Facebook page.

**Of the three options presented, there was a clear preference for Option 1, although it was widely felt that Option 1 would be improved by incorporating identified elements from Options 2 and 3.**

This report presents the consolidated feedback on each of the three options, as well as feedback that applied to all options. The feedback ranges from general preferences and concerns, through to specific and practical suggestions that will be valuable in informing development of the final Master Plan for presentation back to the community in Stage 3.

## Engagement overview



Stage 1 of this process was successfully completed during October-November 2017. During this stage, Council engaged with more than 200 people to elicit their views on two key considerations:

- Values, and
- Vision for the future of Central Highfields.

The first stage concluded with the Stage 1 Community Engagement Report, which was presented to Council and made available to the public via Council's website and other means. That report included details about the project team, and the intent of the engagement process.

During December 2017 and January 2018, the TRC Project Team worked to translate the data collected in Stage 1 into three different master plan options for Central Highfields. The Stage 2 community engagement process was held February-March 2018. The intent of the Stage 2 process was to:

1. present and foster understanding about the three Master Plan options;
2. gather feedback about how well (or otherwise) the options reflect the values identified during Stage 1; and
3. begin to understand what the final and preferred option might look like.

This report presents the findings of Stage 2 engagement. It also delivers on Council's commitment to provide feedback to those who participated in the engagement process, as well as other interested stakeholders. The information in this report will now be used by Council to work towards a preferred Master Plan option, which will be presented to the community and other stakeholders for further input during April and May 2018, as part of Stage 3 Engagement.



## Engagement approach

The Stage 2 engagement process sought to engage with members of the Highfields community who had participated during Stage 1; and also provided the opportunity for additional members of the community to join in.

Council sent individualised correspondence (via letter/email) to all people on the Stage 1 engagement database inviting them to participate in the Stage 2 process. Awareness about the Stage 2 engagement process was also helped by:

1. An invitation on the Central Highfields Master Plan dedicated Facebook page (which at the conclusion of Stage 2 has 115 members);
2. Advertisements over the four weeks of consultation in the Saturday edition of the Toowoomba Chronicle;
3. Advertisement in the Highfields Herald;
4. Media Briefing session and subsequent news items.

Stage 2 Engagement occurred in the four-week period between Monday 19 February and Friday 16 March, 2018. Feedback from the Highfields Community was obtained via workshops and other methods as detailed below.

### Workshops

Workshop	Registered	Attended	Walk-ins	No-Shows
<b>Workshop 1</b> <i>Highfields Cultural Centre 6 March 2018, 6pm – 8pm</i>	63	50	8	21
<b>Workshop 2</b> <i>Highfields Cultural Centre 7 March 2018, 10am – 12pm</i>	40	32	3	11
<b>Workshop 3</b> <i>Highfields Cultural Centre 6 March 2018, 10am – 12pm</i>	39	33	6	12

### Other Feedback

Stakeholders were also invited to provide their feedback via meeting, telephone or written submission. Feedback was received from:

- 5 x community members/community groups
- Highfields District Business Connections
- Qld Fire and Rescue Service
- Qld Police Service
- Highfields RSL

## Suggested Preparation

Given the complexity and volume of consultation material, stakeholders were encouraged to prepare in advance for the engagement workshops by reviewing a package which included:

- The community values from Stage 1;
- The design principles, which underpin the designs;
- A site analysis; and
- The 3 Master Plan design options

The package was available for download on Council's website and printed copies were also made available for collection at the Highfields Cultural Centre.

## Facebook

The dedicated Facebook page was active during Stage 2 consultation, and at the conclusion of the consultation period had 115 members. The page operated most successfully as a promotion and awareness-raising tool, providing the community with information and updates on the engagement process.

## Workshop Process

Each of the three workshops was facilitated over a 2-hour period and began with a review of the Stage 1 process and of the seven community values which emerged from that consultation, namely:

- 1) **Belonging, Family, Community, Neighbours**
- 2) **Distinct Identity**
- 3) **Space**
- 4) **Trees and Nature**
- 5) **Accessibility and Connectivity**
- 6) **Safety and Security**
- 7) **Economy and Growth**



Participants were then introduced to the work that had been done by Council since Stage 1, namely:

- (1) The Design Principles that underpin each of the options;
- (2) An analysis of the Master Plan site;
- (3) An introduction to the pieces of the Master Plan: Land Use Areas (commercial/retail, mixed-used, residential, open space, community/civic); and The Movement Network (roads, new streets, pedestrian paths and bike ways); and
- (3) An overview of the key elements of the 3 Master Plan design options.

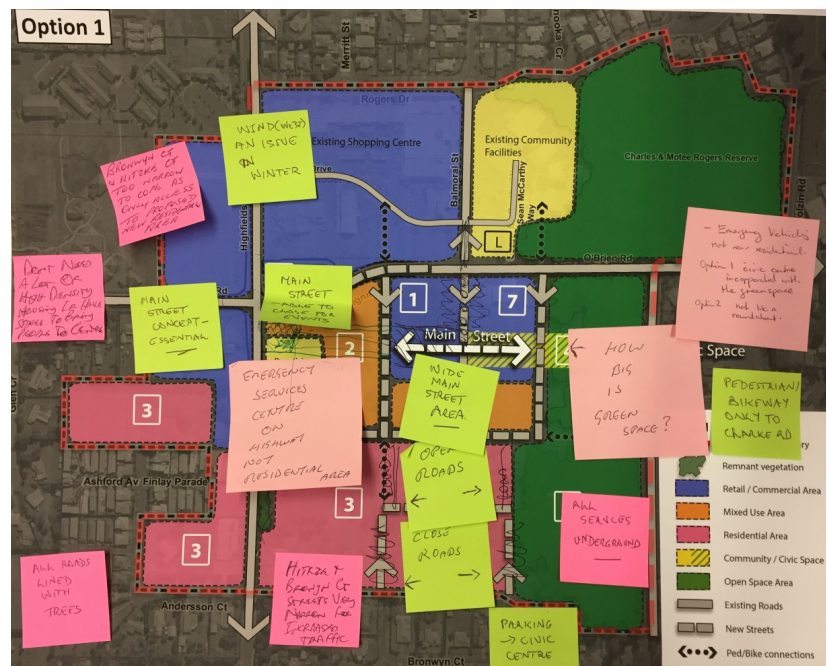
After a whole group introduction, participants spent the remainder of the workshop in small groups with a table facilitator whose intent was to understand:

- how the design options aligned with the seven community values identified in Stage 1; and
- the preferences and feedback about each option.

The global intent of the workshops was to build an understanding of how the three options might be combined and/or refined into a final plan that has broad support amongst the community.



*Groups at a facilitated workshop, and an example of a group's feedback on one of the options.*



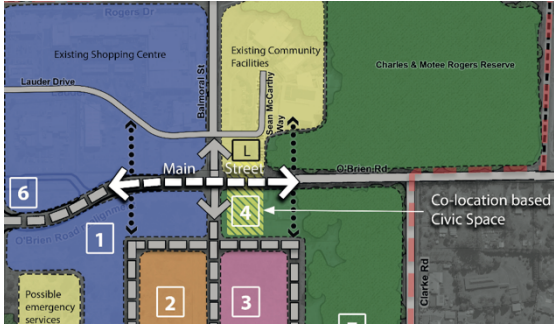


## What we heard

The sections below outline what we heard from the Highfields community about the three Master Plan options.

In total, 21 groups of up to seven participants each considered the three design options across three facilitated workshops.

The table below highlights at a global level the preferences expressed by groups for each of the three design options. It is important to note, however, that the expression of preference was not about choosing an option; but rather generating understanding of how the pieces of the master plan might best fit together to reflect what is important to the community.

Master Plan Design Option	Preference
<p><b>Option 1 –</b> Characterised by a Street and Park Based Civic Space</p> 	<p><b>52% of groups (11 out of 21)</b> preferred the street and park option – with improvements</p>
<p><b>Option 2 –</b> Characterised by a Central Park Based Civic Space</p> 	<p><b>19% of groups (4 out of 21)</b> preferred the central park option – with improvements</p>
<p><b>Option 3 –</b> Characterised by a Co-location based Civic Space</p> 	<p><b>24% of groups (5 out of 21)</b> preferred the co-location option – with improvements</p>
<p><b>1 group was not able to express a preference</b></p>	

# Global Master Plan Issues

The issues in this section were raised by groups during Stage 2 engagement and they relate equally to each of the three design options.

Consideration of the issues below, which link clearly with Highfields' community values, will be important in achieving broad support for the refined Master Plan.

- (1) **Green Buffers/Open Space:** Highfields' values about space, trees and nature again revealed themselves strongly in Stage 2 engagement. In the final Master Plan option, residents are generally eager to see:
  - the creation of more integrated internal green spaces within the central precinct – not just blocks of open space as in the three options now;
  - a green buffer zone along the eastern boundary of the central area – potentially retaining existing trees there to help preserve amenity for Hitzke Crescent and Bronwyn Court residents;
  - maintenance of the Buffer zone on the southern boundary on Highfields Road – as drawn on the design options;
  - buffer zones between new residential and commercial/mixed use areas;
  - Council retain its plan to protect remnant vegetation on the new land;
  - tree-lined streets/boulevards – green spines and green gateways to the central area;
  - Public and open space along Clarke Road maximised for community use;
  - A sense of open space – not cramming – wide tree lined streets, views, vistas down boulevards etc. The Avenues is cited as the example of what is not desired for Central Highfields;
  - No road connection through the greenspace and wildlife corridor onto Clarke Road (walkway only)
- (2) **Land Use Balance:** Residents have expressed a desire to increase the commercial/retail and mixed use components of the Master Plan to allow for future economic growth of the area. A strong theme from this engagement was to reduce the proposed quantity of residentially zoned land (particularly in Options 1 and 2). The concept of a Commercial/Retail Land Bank was also supported for inclusion in the final plan.
- (3) **Integration of Land Use Areas:** People would like to see more integration of land use in the final masterplan option. The primary suggestion for this integration was the inclusion of open space (green) areas within the central site, however, other recommendations included the integration of the civic, mixed use and residential space with the green “park” space.



- (4) **Height of Development:** As in Stage 1, sensitivity remains about the height of development in the central area and there is a range of views about how high is too high. There is general support for the concept of 'transitions' between existing residential and the more built up areas, meaning that:
- there is a green buffer between existing and new areas;
  - development around the edges of the central area (particularly on the eastern boundary) begins low, building in height and density towards the middle of the central area.
- (5) **Integration of Community Use Areas:** There is a strong sense about the desirability of co-located community and "belonging" infrastructure. Preferences for integration of community land use areas link strongly back to the community value of Belonging, Family, Community and Neighbours. In both stages of engagement people have expressed a preference for an integration of focal areas that allow people to gather every day as well as for special occasions. The refined Master Plan will ideally create strong links between the Civic Space, Main Street and the Open Space/Park. Connection to the Library and other cultural facilities is also preferred.
- (6) **Connecting Existing Facilities with New Development:** Providing workable links between existing infrastructure (west of O'Brien Road) with new developments (east of O'Brien Road) are seen as critically important by Highfields stakeholders. Most realise, however, that this is a complex issue, made difficult by O'Brien Road's role as an arterial thoroughfare. The refined Master Plan will give thoughtful consideration to feasible ways to maximise connectivity, maintain pedestrian safety and not compromise traffic flow. Stage 2 groups have discussed overpasses, underpasses (for people and wildlife), traffic lights, prominent pedestrian crossings (as in Ruthven Street), pedestrian islands and slowed traffic zones.
- (7) **Civic Space:** As noted above, residents are eager for there to be a direct connection between the civic space and the park/open space area and have expressed strongly a wish for the civic space to be larger than marked on the three design options. Participants discussed the current (large) number of people attending ANZAC day ceremonies as well as attendances at community market days. The civic space, people said, needs to be able to cater for these events both now but most importantly with its significantly increased population in the future. One of the reasons participants gave for preferring option 1 was that it allows for community events to 'spill' into the reserve/park area.
- (8) **Master Plan Principles:** The Master Plan principles for design were viewed positively for their promise to:
- capitalise on views, including of existing trees/treelines;
  - integrate new and existing vegetation into the built environment;
  - protect remnant vegetation;

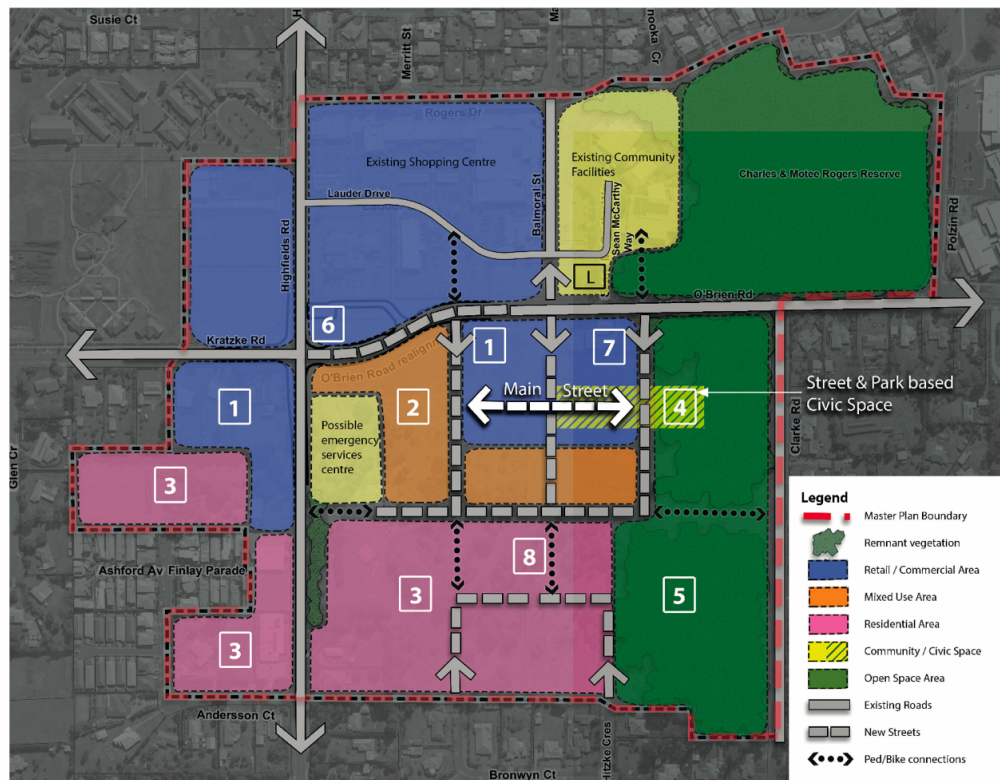
- protect privacy;

Some residents noted their concerns about Council's capacity to control/influence development in accordance with these principles saying, "they have seen planning schemes fail before with developers succeeding in doing as they wish".

- (9) **Accessibility – Active Transport:** As was highlighted in Stage 1 engagement, the Highfields community is eager to see the Master Plan make active transport links where possible. In particular people would like to see more pathways in the open space areas, linkages to existing paths and to new developed areas.
- (10) **Accessibility – Public Transport:** The community would like to see a public transport hub (or interchange) within the Central Highfields area. The area marked as Emergency Services was suggested multiple times as an option.
- (11) **Accessibility & Safety – Traffic:** There is acknowledgement that both O'Brien and Highfields Roads are busy – particularly at peak times. Stage 2 participants are concerned about the width of these (and other roads) and their ability to handle the traffic produced by increasing future population.  
  
Safe crossing points on both Highfields Road and O'Brien Road are a major concern for residents with many saying, "it is not if a pedestrian will be hit by a car, it is when".
- (12) **Building Design:** People would like to see a design theme for buildings in the Central area to ensure Highfields maintains its village atmosphere.
- (13) **Emergency Services:** While the concept of emergency services being co-located was well received by participants, they have strongly stated this co-location should be outside of the Central Highfields area. People feel this area will be too congested; that it is too close to town; and too close to the intersection of Highfields and O'Brien/Kratzke Roads.
- (14) **Library Location:** Many groups expressed frustration about the location of the new library. There is a feeling that community opinion on this issue has not been adequately heard and the library would be better located within the new area east of O'Brien Road.
- (15) **Rogers Reserve:** As in Stage 1 there is a range of views about the utilisation or otherwise of this asset. Some believe it should not be touched; others believe it requires cleaning up; and others still believe it has potential for integration with cycling and walking tracks.
- (16) **Infrastructure:** Concerns were raised about drainage for the new area. Others would like to see all infrastructure underground.

## Feedback about Option 1

### MASTER PLAN OPTION 1



This design option, characterised by a Street and Park Based Civic Space, was the most preferred by workshop participants.

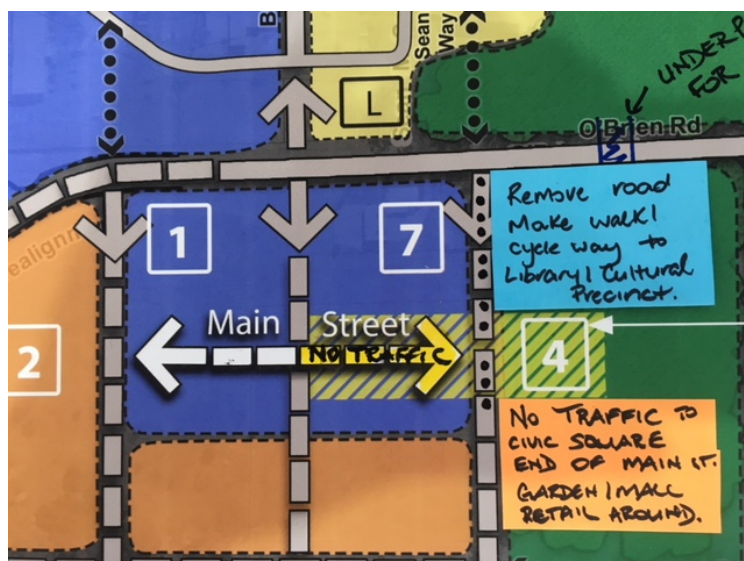
**Integration of Community Use Areas (Civic Space, Open Space and Main Street):** Groups expressed a strong preference for this option because of its integration of three key community land use areas: main street; the civic space and the open space area. Participants liked that the civic space would be both visible and easy to get to for all ages and life stages. Many also liked the idea that the civic space could be expanded by closing off a part of main street for larger events.

**Civic Space:** Groups liked the location of the civic space at the end of Main Street and in the park, feeling it served to blend the central area with the natural environment. People also liked the flexibility of the Civic area - a space that could be expanded when needed into both Main Street and into the park.

Creating better integration between the Civic Space, the new library (and existing community facilities) was seen as a way to improve Option 1. A suggested way to improve the link (access) between the Civic Space and new Library was to make the road on the park-end of Main Street pedestrian/bike only access – and join this to the walk way on the other side of O'Brien Road.



The picture below shows one workshop groups' view of this improved link.



A small contingent worried that the civic space would lead to the removal of major tree specimens.

**Main Street:** A wide Main Street with clear views along its length was a commonly expressed preference and one which groups felt would help maintain a 'distinctively Highfields' atmosphere. There is an interest in creating something that is visually appealing and spacious - a boulevard or avenue that has visibility from one end to the other.

There was a strong preference in option 1 that Main Street was desirably located off O'Brien Road and not on an arterial thoroughfare. And people liked the north-south orientation of the Option 1 Main Street.

Safety on Main Street concerned many of the groups with a number expressing a desire to have Main street (or even the northern part of Main Street) a traffic free, pedestrian only zone. Again, the strong preference is for integration of these key land use areas (civic space, main street and park) and people felt that their values of safety and accessibility would be improved if traffic is limited in quantity and speed or eliminated altogether. And, in keeping with this, some groups suggested that the road along the park and open space area in Option 1 should be removed completely in order to reduce the potential for 'traffic-pedestrian conflicts'.

Other improvements to Main Street in Option 1 included extending Main Street south towards Highfields Road (but not joining it) to create an appealing end to end visibility – a boulevard or avenue that had visibility from Highfields Road down to the park.

**O'Brien Road:** O'Brien Road provides the only access to the Main Street (CBD) precinct. This concerned some groups who feared increased traffic and a reduction of the arterial efficiency of O'Brien Road with three more intersections. Safe crossing of O'Brien road was also a concern.

**New Streets:** Improvements suggested included a new street connecting the Main Street precinct to Highfields Road (as in Option 2) and/or connecting the road shown on Option 1 to Highfields Road (i.e. the connection currently shown as walkway).

The Bronwyn Court, Hitzke Crescent connector into the residential zone of Option 1 was strongly disliked– although it is worth noting that it was favoured by some. Those opposed felt the safety and amenity of residents in these areas would be adversely affected and that the narrowness of these ‘already busy’ existing streets would not cope with the influx of traffic from the new residential areas. Those in support liked that the new loop could not be accessed from the main street precinct, other than by a walkway; and that having existing residences abutting other residential yards provided a reasonable solution given the circumstances. There were a number of suggestions to “flip” this road around so that it links to the Main Street Precinct instead of to Bronwyn Court and Hitzke Crescent.

**Connecting Existing Facilities with New Development:** Balmoral Street is seen as an important “joiner” between the existing and new parts of Central Highfields. Groups commented that they would like to see Balmoral Street as a wide and spacious boulevard that creates views from the existing cultural precinct to the new Main Street. Another submission suggested that Sean McCarthy Way could be used in a similar way (as an alternative to Balmoral Street) to create a walkway from the Cultural Centre to Main Street. Other groups felt that the area between O’Brien Road and the Main Street would work well as a shared zone.

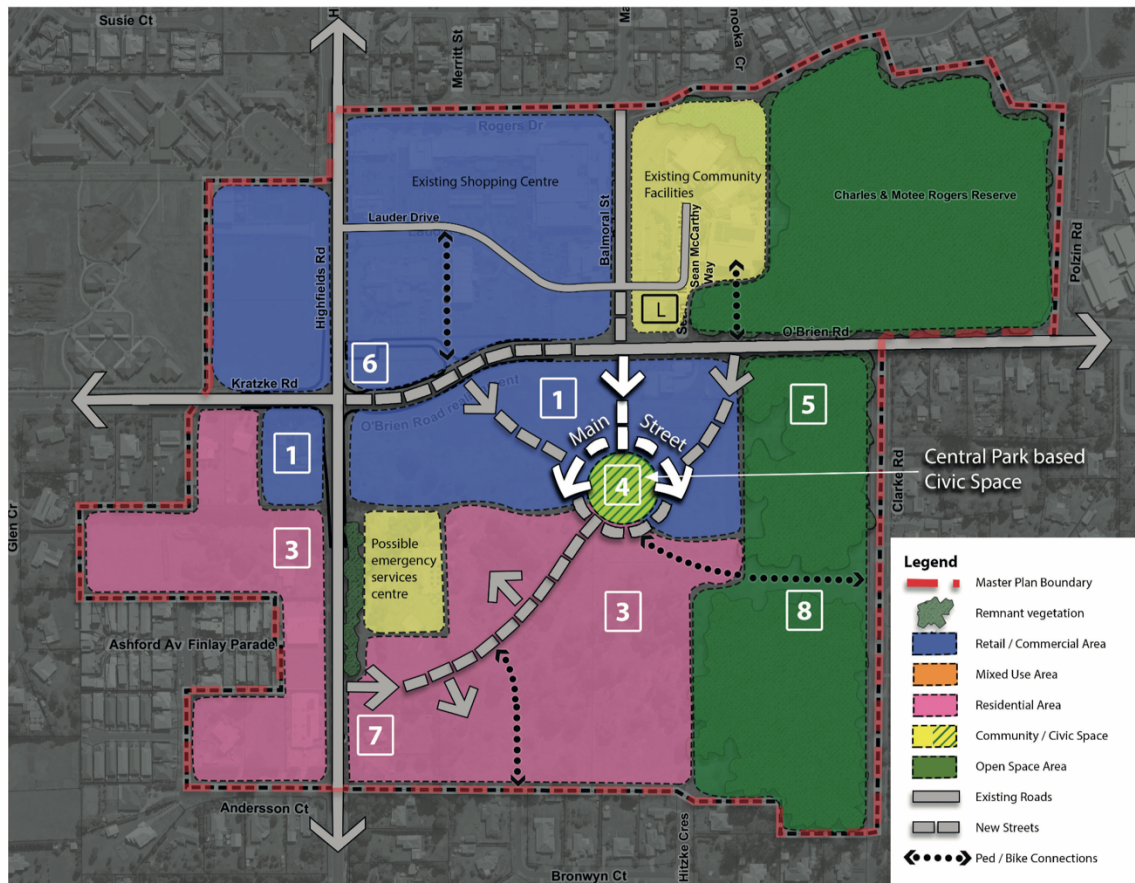
**Land Use Combinations:** There was strong agreement that the land use mix shown in Option 1 provides for too much Residential zoning and not enough Commercial/Retail or Mixed Use. Some groups suggested cutting the residential zoning by half while others suggested that Option 3 contained the right balance for residential.

**Pedestrian Paths:** The provision of pedestrian and cycle ways were seen to positively support the community value of accessibility and connectivity. In this design option people particularly liked pathway connection to Clarke Road.

**South of Highfields Road:** Feedback from groups about the area to the south of Highfields road was mixed. There was concern from some groups about the commercial zoning of land on the corner of Highfields and Kratzke Roads. These groups felt that corner was better left a residential zone. Other groups suggested creating a more commercial zone in that area (as in Option 2), and others again thought the mix provided within Option 1 was good. One group suggested that the residential area that backs onto the town houses on Ashford Avenue and Finlay Parade should be an open/green space area to support the surrounding residential areas.

## Feedback about Option 2

### MASTER PLAN OPTION 2



This design option, characterised by a Central Park Based Civic Space, was the least preferred overall by workshop participants. This said, option 2 received favourable feedback for being the most *unique* of the three options and one which had strong appeal for its capacity to support Highfields' value of *Distinct Identity*. People felt this design had potential to be very visually appealing and that it would act as a strong entry point to Central Highfields - pulling people towards the central area.

**Civic Space:** As already noted, many people found the circular civic space in Option 2 unique and visually appealing. They also believed that its location surrounded by a condensed area of commercial and retail business would create a vibrant civic hub - good for co-location.

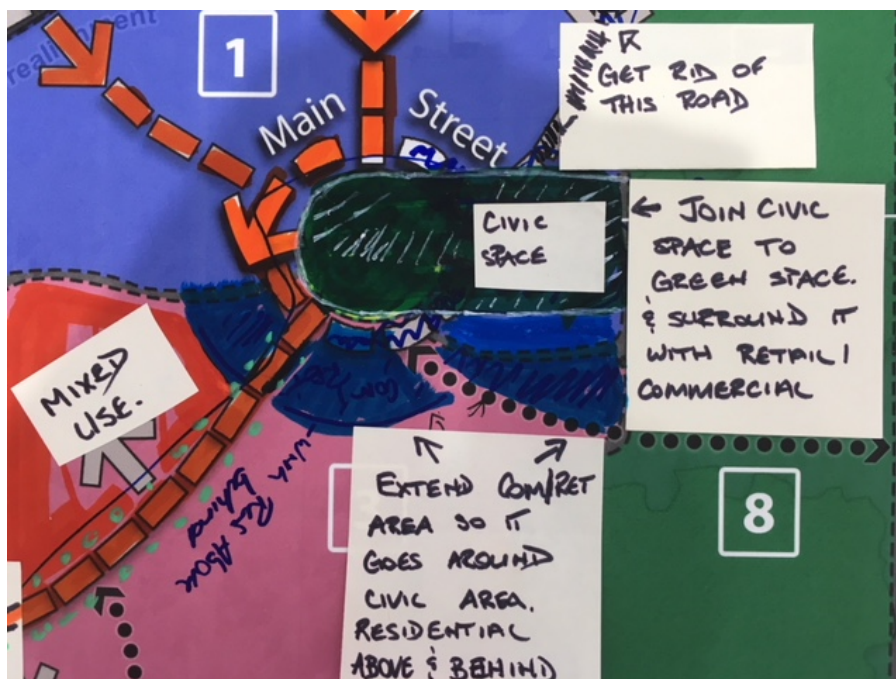
There were, however, two important issues that detracted from this option's appeal:

1. the separation of the civic and open space areas, which was seen to lack the *integration of community use areas* that were highly favoured in Option 1; and
2. the boundary created by the surrounding road and traffic which was perceived both as an impediment to safety and to the functionality of the civic space – cutting it off and isolating it from the rest of the CBD precinct.

Almost universally groups suggested that this option would be improved by moving or extending the civic space so it abuts the park; and as for option 1 that the civic space needs to be larger to allow room for an expanding population.

A common theme for groups was to improve this option by extending the civic space in a u-shape to meet the open space. The vision here being a civic space and mall concept (with paved areas outside retail shops but with a wide grassed community space in the middle) surrounded by commercial and retail zoned businesses.

*The map extract below illustrates the ideas of one workshop group for a u-shaped civic space surrounded by retail/commercial*



**Main Street:** Main Street in Option 2 was desirably located off O'Brien Road which, as for option 1, was a strong preference amongst the groups.

**O'Brien Road:** The three new streets connecting to O'Brien Road received a mixed response. There was a concern about creating more entry points to O'Brien Road, however, others felt this would channel activity (and students after school) into the central area.



**New Streets:** the new street off Highfields Road to the central area was largely well received. People liked its curved and sweeping line and its potential as a tree-lined boulevard and strong entry point for the Central Highfields area. There was also a perception that it could help traffic flow in and out of the central area as well as providing a connection between O'Brien Road and Highfields Road.

This new road, did however, prompt some concern about the practicality of a new road onto an already busy arterial like Highfields Road.

Other improvements for new streets in this option included:

- Having the road sweep around the southern end of the civic space and link to O'Brien Road (this suggestion aligns with the u-shaped civic space preferred by some groups and outlined above);
- Making a curved street that follows the tree horizon;
- Including the Bronwyn Court and Hitzke Crescent link from Option 1 into this road configuration.

**Land Use Combinations:** People felt this option contained too much residential zoning and suggested reducing the quantity in favour of Commercial/Retail and Mixed Use Zones.

It was strongly agreed that Mixed Use zoning should be included in this and any final option. A number of groups suggested converting the area of option 2 currently marked residential (beside the possible emergency services centre) to a mixed-use zone.

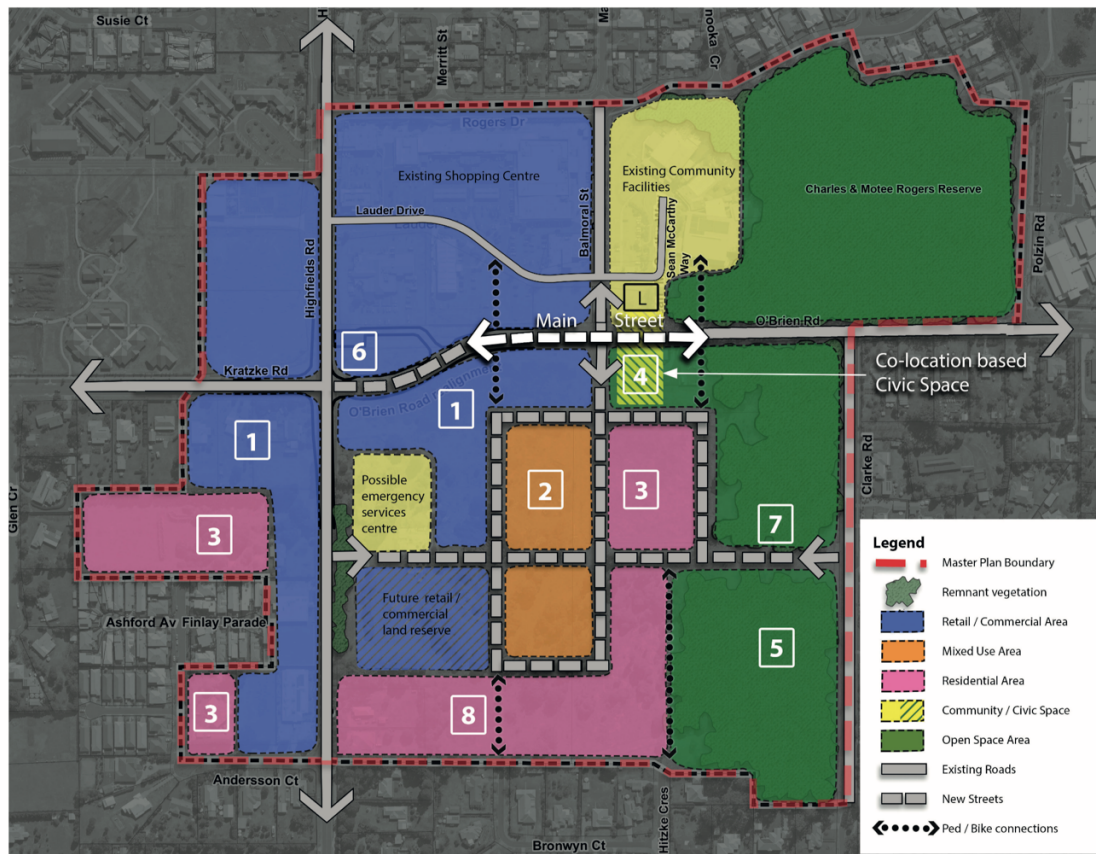
**Pedestrian Paths:** As for Option 1, groups liked the inclusion of pedestrian paths and cycle ways – particularly the walkway through green space to Clarke Road; the connection to the centre from Bronwyn Court/Hitzke Crescent and the access across O'Brien Road to the Cultural precinct (which people felt will keep children/people out of the car park).

**South of Highfields Road:** Again, no clear preference has emerged in consideration of this option. People's views ranged from:

- Option 2 having the best configuration because of its high proportion of residential zoning; to
- the opposite view that this land should all be zoned commercial and mixed use; to
- preferring the mix of use in option 1.

## Feedback about Option 3

### MASTER PLAN OPTION 3



This design option, characterised by a Co-Located Civic Space, was preferred considerably less than Option 1 and marginally more than Option 2.

#### ***Integration of Community Use Areas (Civic Space, Park/Open Space, Library and Main Street):***

Option 3, was favoured largely for its integration of community use areas. People liked:

- The civic space, library interface;
- The civic space having direct extension onto the park;
- The library and the civic space being strongly connected to the main street and therefore to the town centre;
- The library having more presence when it is located on the main street.

**Civic Space:** Integration with the library, main street and the park, was the primary reason for positive perceptions about the Civic Space. Otherwise groups were concerned that the location of the Civic Space on O'Brien Road:

- was not optimal because of the arterial nature of the road;
- would not create a distinct identity for Highfields;
- would not allow it to interact well with the open space it adjoins; and
- would be impacted (and delayed) by the existence of the Fire Station.

**Main Street:** Groups who liked this option liked the central location of main street and its strong connection to existing (and new) facilities. Some worried that it would impact on access to the two secondary schools within its proximity.

Overwhelming though, groups agreed that having the Main Street off O'Brien Road was preferred. This prompted groups to suggest Main Street was better located as in Option 1; or that it could run east/west along Balmoral Street (and be pedestrian only); or that it could run down the edge of the open space area.

**New Streets:** There was a very strong dislike for the new street between Clarke and Highfields Road in this option. People worried about the impact on the residents of Clarke Road; others worried about putting traffic through an open space wildlife corridor. Others though saw the benefits of this road citing that it will provide improved access and connectivity through the area and an alternative route around the Main Street.

Improvement suggestions for accessibility included:

- creating a street from Highfields Road to connect to O'Brien Road (north of Main Street);
- creating a 'dog-leg' in the road running between Clarke and Highfields roads to reduce the propensity for people to use it as a connector road (to prevent 'rat-running');
- removing the street that runs along the open space area;

**Land Use Combination:** This option received most support of all 3 options for its quantity of residentially zoned land. Many, however, still felt that the quantity of residential land (even the smaller amount in this option) should be reduced.

There was also resistance to the residential land along the open space corridor/park area. People felt this area was better zoned commercial/retail or mixed use. Groups also felt that residential land adjoining the civic space was not ideal.

**Pedestrian Pathways:** Pedestrian paths and bike ways are strongly supported. Groups suggested changing the new road joining Clarke Road should be pedestrian/bike access only through the green space.

**South of Highfields Road:** As in Options 1 and 2 there is no clear preference for this area. Some residents are worried about how access might be created to the long residential area behind commercially zoned land on Highfields Road. Others feel that the commercial land on this side of the road is disconnected and should be zoned residential.

## What's next?

Stage 2 Community Engagement provided further highly valuable input from the Highfields community and key stakeholders regarding the Master Plan.

There are several clear and recurring themes, which echo the seven Highfields community values identified during Stage 1. There is a clear link between these values and most of the feedback provided on the design options.

As an example, a recurring theme from Stage 1 engagement was the view that a 'central area that blends with the natural environment' is important in creating the Highfields value of Distinct Identity; this view was presented again many times during Stage 2, as participants considered how each of the three options reflected this value.

Consideration and – where possible – incorporation of the ideas and feedback garnered during Stage 2 will be important in achieving broad support for the refined Master Plan.

The illustration below depicts the timeline for the finalisation of the Central Highfields Master Plan.

Council will now refine a Master Plan based on the feedback within this report and more detailed analysis of the site. The refined Master Plan will be presented back to the community during Stage 3 Engagement in April-May 2018.

Participants in Stages 1 & 2 will be notified about Stage 3 engagement and will be encouraged to continue their involvement during Stage 3.

In addition, the Facebook group established for Stages 1 & 2 has been kept open; while it will not be regularly monitored by the Project Team until Stage 3, it has been kept open as a forum for Highfields residents and other interested stakeholders to continue to share ideas and views.

Interested stakeholders can also stay up to date via Council's 'Your Say' website <http://yoursay.tr.qld.gov.au/HTC>.

