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CENTRAL HIGHFIELDS MASTER PLAN

July 2018



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1. Introduction

Highfields, located approximately 12 kilometres north of Toowoomba, is a significant urban growth area within the Toowoomba Region. The Highfields population, which in 2016 was 9,474 people, grew by 1,500 people between 2011 and 2016 and it projected to grow by a further 7,000 people by 2031¹. This population growth will generate demand for an additional 27,000m² of retail, commercial and civic floorspace², most of which will be located within the Central Highfields area (see figure 1).



Figure 1 Central Highfields Area

The *Central Highfields Master Plan* has been prepared in consultation with the Highfields community based on best practice land use planning and urban design principles, to guide the development of Central Highfields in a manner that is consistent with the community's vision and values.

Council's commitment to the development of this area lead to the acquisition of 20 hectares of vacant land on the south-east side of O'Brien Road in 2017 (see figure 1). This area represents the primary development opportunity within Central Highfields as well as containing a significant area of bushland that is highly valued by the community, linking the Charles and Motee Rogers Reserve and Klein Creek.

¹ RPS Australia. (2014). *Toowoomba Regional Council - Demographic Projections*. Brisbane: RPS Australia.

² Humphreys Reynolds Perkins. (2009). *Toowoomba Regional Planning Project - Activity Centres Study*. Brisbane: Humphreys Reynolds Perkins.

2. Central Highfields

Located within the heart of Highfields, Central Highfields is a 45 hectare area centred on the Highfields Village Shopping Centre, Highfields Cultural Precinct and the Charles and Motee Rogers Reserve. It comprises a mix of retail/commercial, residential, community and open space activities, with almost half of the area being undeveloped.

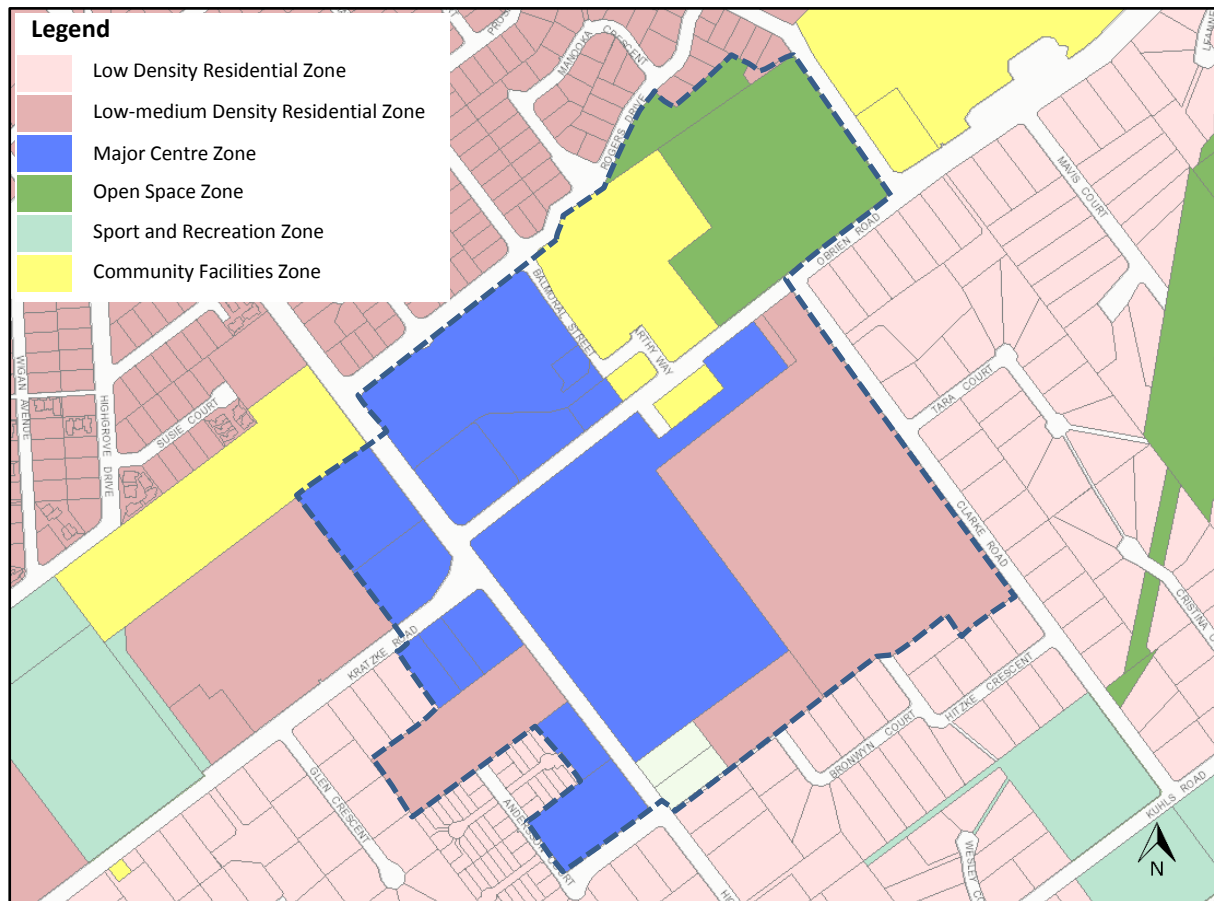


Figure 2 Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme Zoning

A large proportion of the Central Highfields Area is included within the *Major Centre Zone* under the *Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme* (see figure 2). The planning scheme establishes a hierarchy of activity centres with **Major Centres** being second in the hierarchy, below the **Principal Centre**, which is the Toowoomba City Centre.

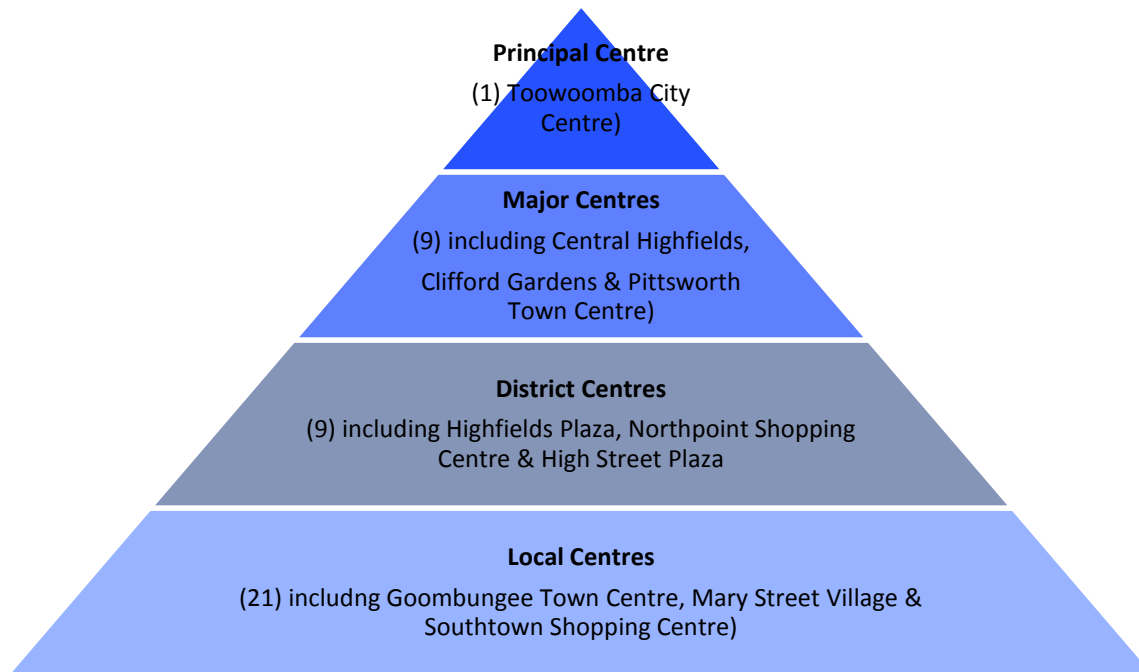


Figure 3 Hierarchy of Activity Centres

The purpose of Major Centres is to accommodate a wide mix of uses and activities that complement the Principal Centre by serving catchments of sub-regional significance. They include key concentrations of higher order retail, commercial, offices, administrative and health services, community, cultural and entertainment facilities and other uses, but at a scale and intensity which do not compromise the role and function of the Principal Centre. In particular:

- Large offices and other regionally significant businesses are encouraged to locate in the Principal Centre rather than in the Major Centres, to retain the commercial dominance of the Toowoomba City Centre. Small to medium scale office developments are encouraged in Major Centres.
- Retail facilities of the highest order, such as department stores, are encouraged to locate in the Principal Centre so as to retain the retail primacy of the Toowoomba City Centre. All other retail activities, including discount department stores, may be located in Major Centres.
- Major entertainment institutions should be located in the Principal Centre. Small entertainment facilities, such as cinemas with a limited number of screens, may locate in Major Centres to provide the array of functions that encourages diversity and vitality of the Centre.

Major Centres should also provide some large format (showrooms) retailing on the centre fringe, to provide a diversity of retail facilities to service its catchment.

Community and recreation uses that serve the surrounding neighbourhoods are encouraged.

Residential development is encouraged and may form part of a mixed use or as stand-alone development. Residential development densities should be around 40 dwellings per hectare (net) or greater.

Major Centres should be highly accessible and well connected to the whole of the TRC area. They should be clustered around existing and new public transport facilities to promote public transport use. Development in Major Centres is compact and supported by pedestrian and cycle routes to promote walking and cycling. Roads provide sufficient capacity to allow efficient private access to Major Centres.

This provides the policy setting within which the Central Highfields Master Plan has been developed. A key element of this policy setting is that the Toowoomba City Centre is the Principal Centre within the Toowoomba Region and development of Central Highfields (a Major Centre) should not undermine the viability, role or function of the Principal Centre.

3. What is a Master Plan?

A *Master Plan* is a high level strategic document that provides guidance to the development of an area, primarily in relation to:

- How land will be used;
- The form development will take; and
- How people will move through and within the area (by car, walking, cycling and public transport).

A *Master Plan* guides future more detailed levels of planning and the application of development controls through a planning scheme.

The *Central Highfields Master Plan* comprises two main components:

- A set of *Development Principles* (see part 6); and
- A *Land Use and Movement Network Plan* (see part 7).

Information included in a master plan is indicative only with lines and colours on plans showing the general location of the main elements of development, including land use areas and primary roads.

A *Master Plan* does not deal with matters of finer detail such as:

- The location of lower order roads;
- Road design;
- The location of parking;
- The timing of development; and
- The provision of infrastructure.

4. The Master Planning Process

The master plan has been developed using a three stage process with extensive stakeholder consultation included in each stage (see figure 4).

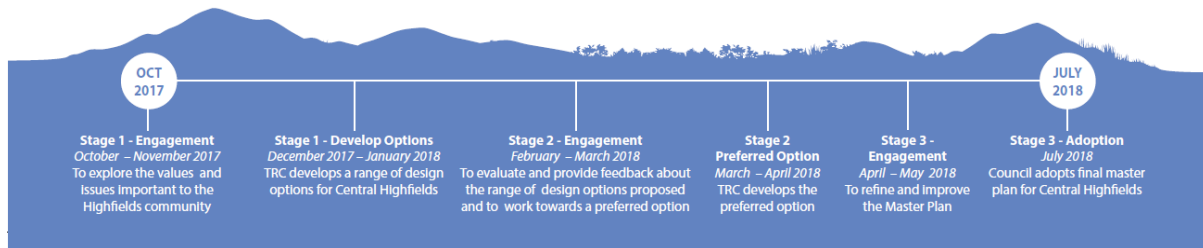


Figure 4 The Master Planning Process

Stage One was undertaken between October and November 2017 and involved the identification of the values that the community consider should be reflected in the master plan.

Eight (8) major stakeholder groups were consulted in one on one meetings, community workshops and via social media with over 250 people engaged. Full details of the stage one consultation are included in the *Stage 1 Community Engagement Report*.

The feedback received during consultation establish seven values (see part 6) that were used to prepare a set of development principles and three master plan options (see figures 5, 6 and 7) demonstrating how the community values and various land use areas and movement network elements could be brought together in different ways.

Stage Two was undertaken between December 2017 and April 2018 and involved stakeholder review of the development principles and master plan options and the preparation of a final, preferred option.

Stakeholders were invited to review the development principles and three master plan options within community workshops and via social media and identify what they liked and didn't like.

Over 200 people were engaged during stage two consultation through a series of community workshops and social media. Full details are included in the *Stage 2 Community Engagement Report*.

There was a clear preference for option 1 with a desire to see some of the elements of options 2 and 3 incorporated.

This feedback was used to refine the development principles and prepare the preferred master plan option (see parts 7 and 8).

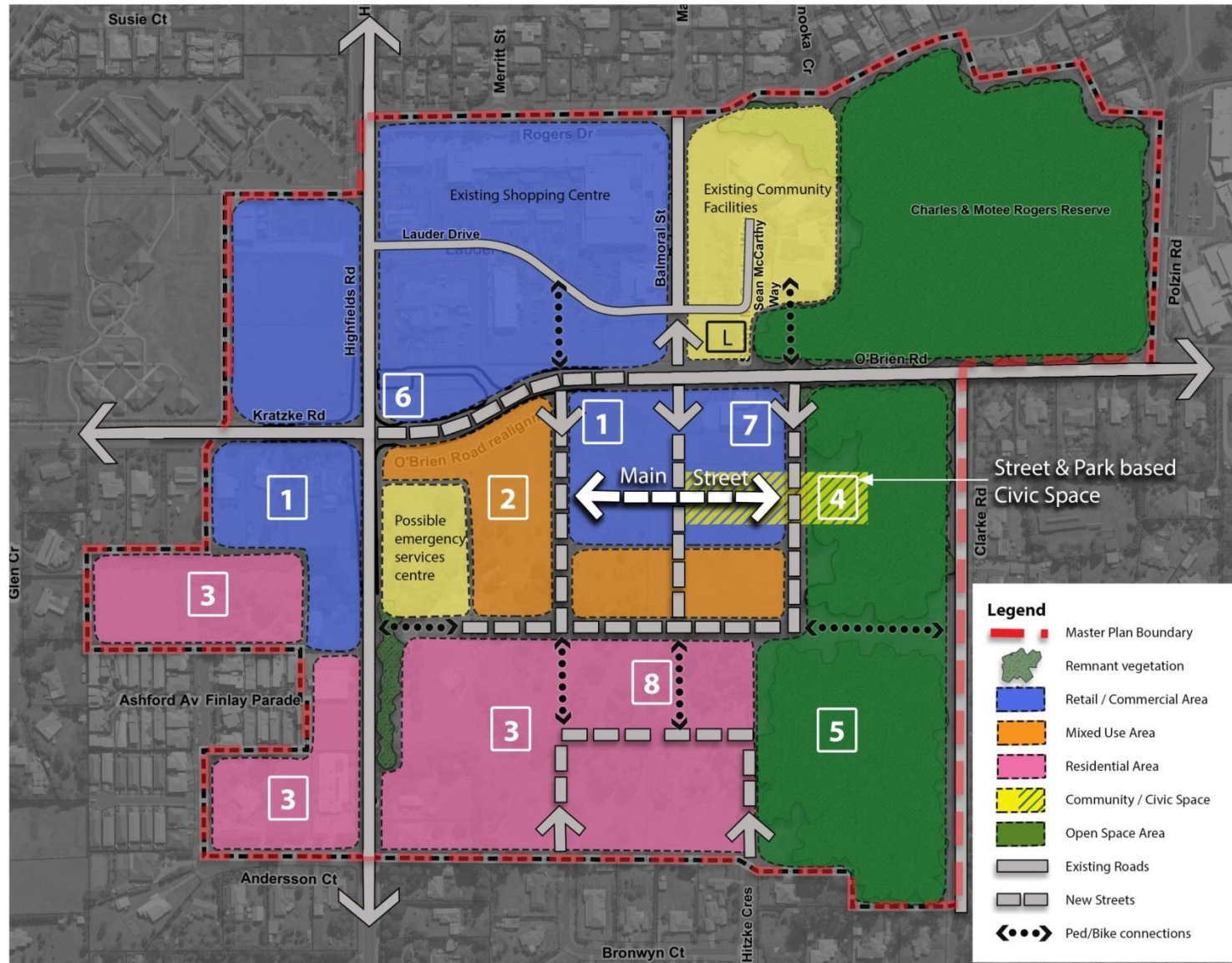


Figure 5 Master Plan Option 1

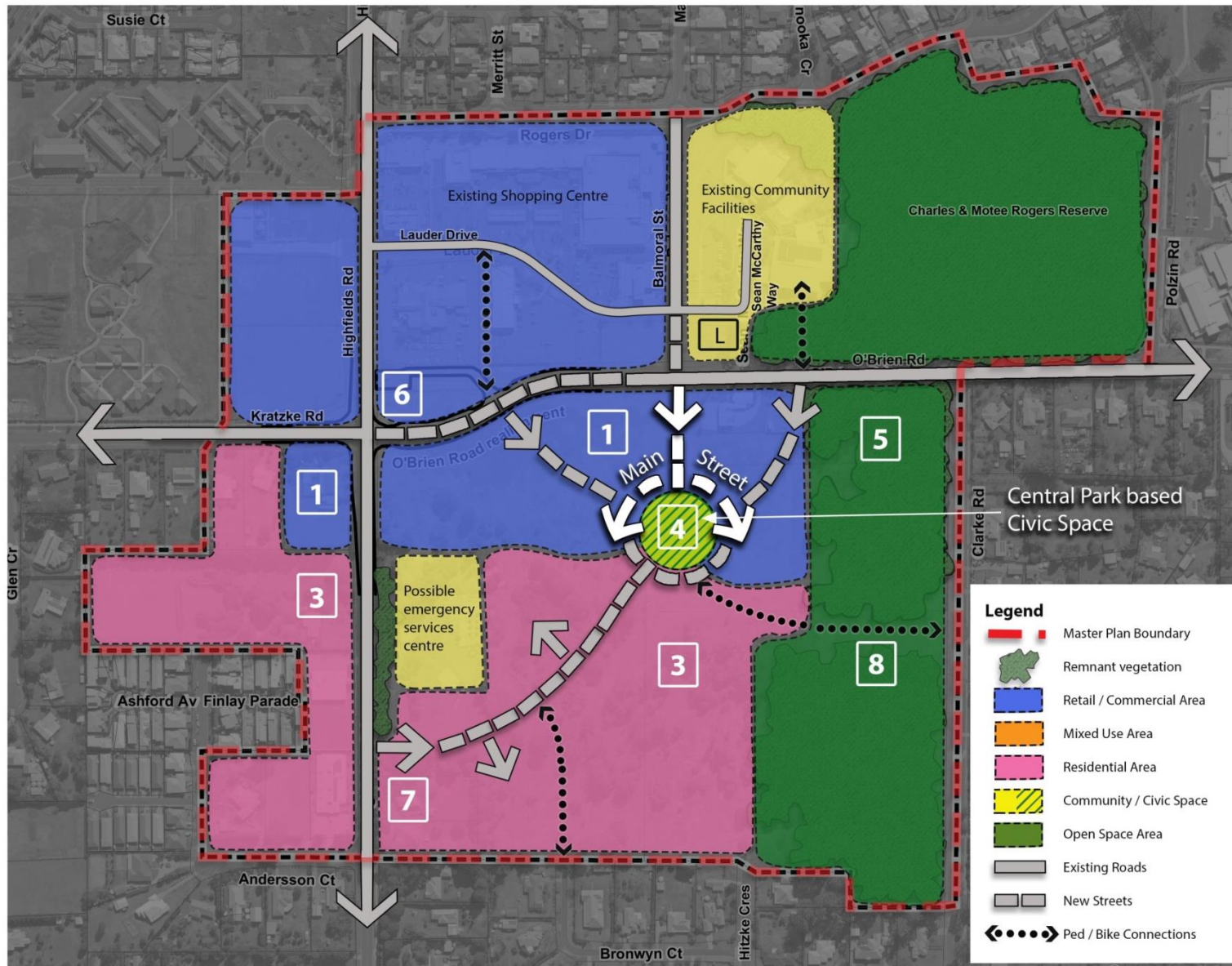


Figure 6 Master Plan Option 2

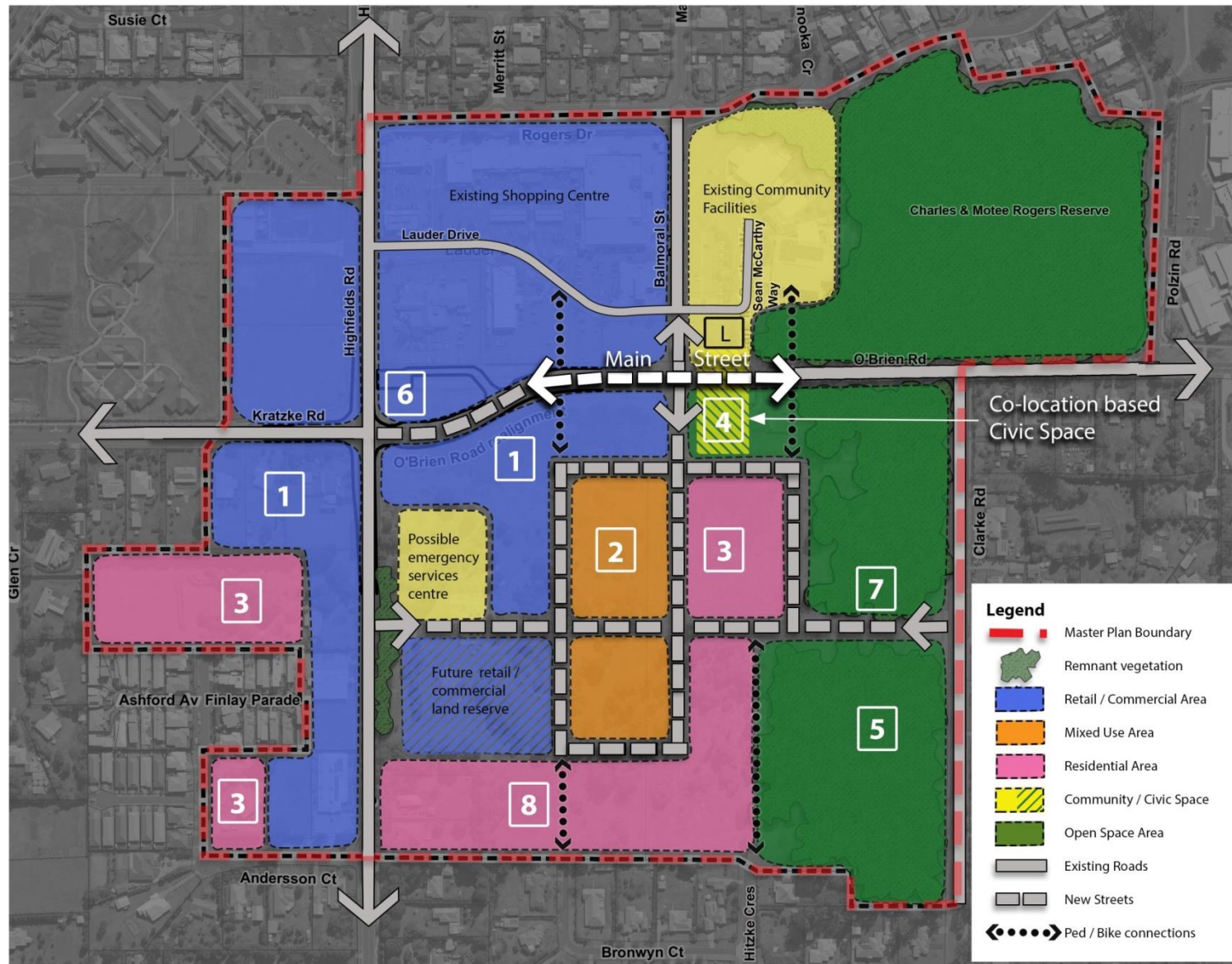


Figure 7 Master Plan Option 3

Stage Three was undertaken in May/June 2018 and involved stakeholder review of the draft final master plan.

Stakeholders were invited to review the draft master plan (see figure 8) to identify any refinements that should be made in finalising the plan and matters that needed to be addressed in the next stage of planning (structure planning and built form guidelines).

Over 100 people were engaged during stage three consultation through a series of community workshops. Full details are included in the *Stage 3 Community Engagement Report*.

Feedback demonstrated a high level of stakeholder acceptance of the final master plan and acknowledgement that Council has listened to and responded to the community throughout the process.

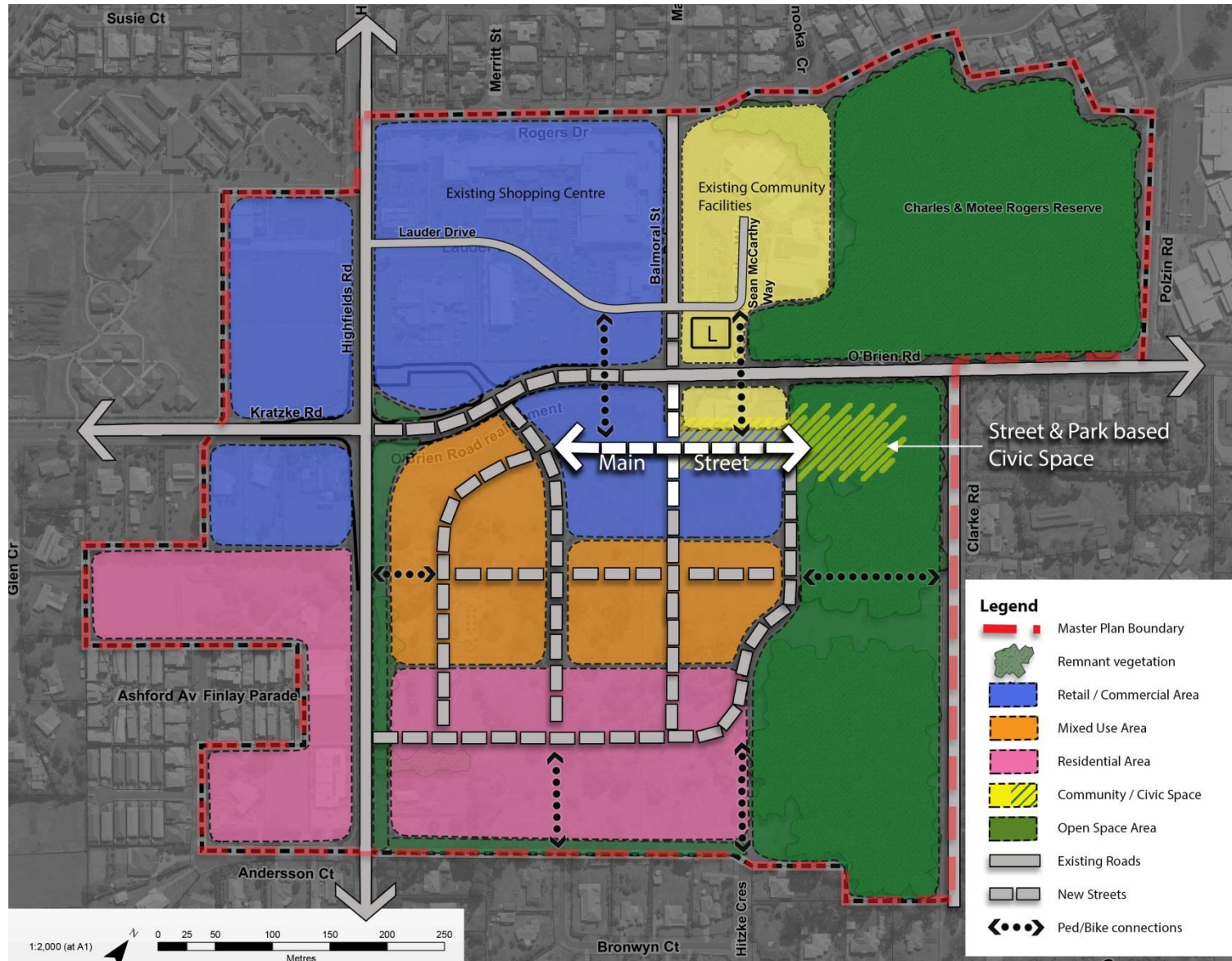


Figure 8 Draft Final Master Plan

5. Site Analysis

It is essential that the Central Highfields master plan recognises and responds to the characteristics of the area. A detailed analysis of the Central Highfields area was therefore undertaken following the completion of stage one consultation and prior to commencing the preparation of the three master plan options.

The site analysis provided a detailed understanding the characteristics of the area, highlighting a number of opportunities and constraints.

The *Site Analysis Plan* (figure 6) and *Site Context Plan* (figure 7) provide an overview of the characteristics of the area.

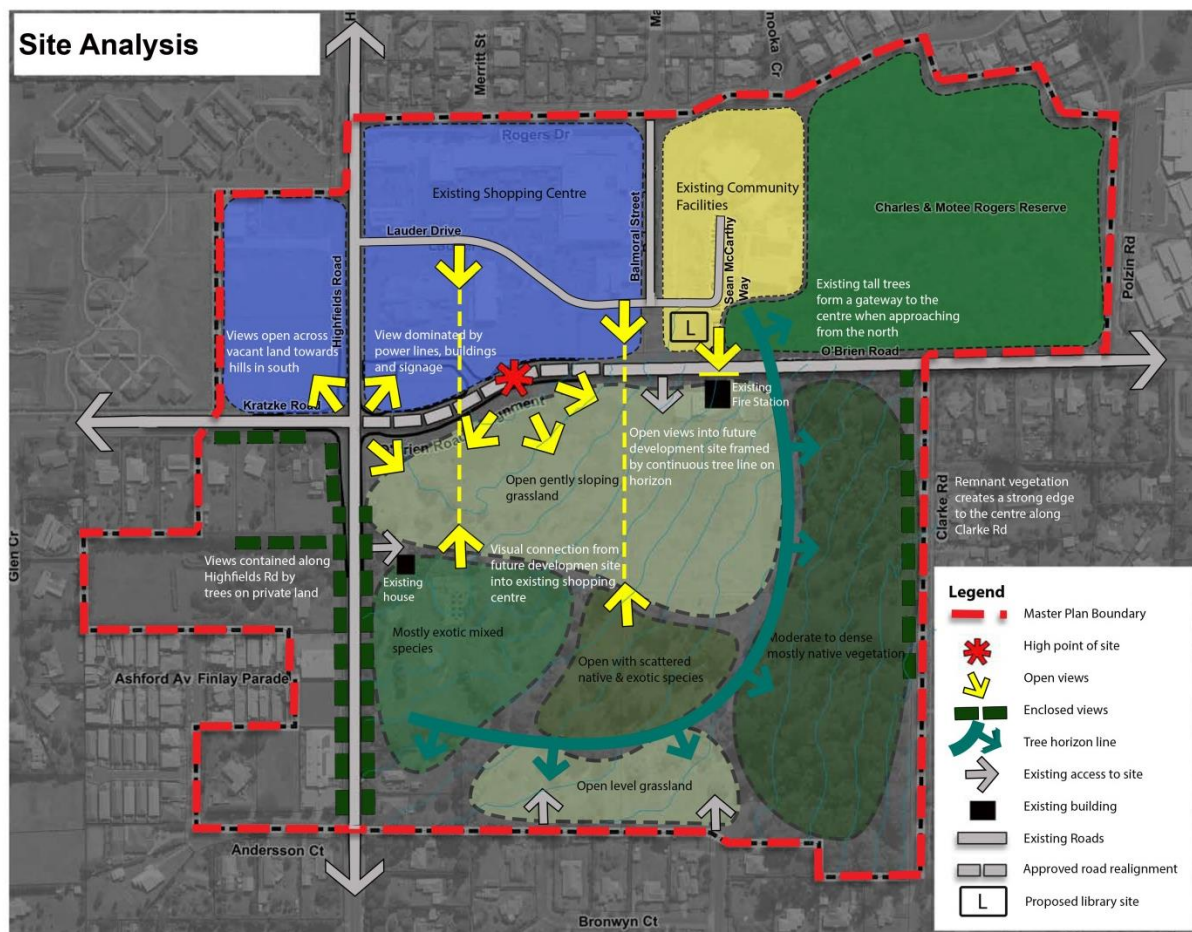


Figure 9 Site Analysis Plan

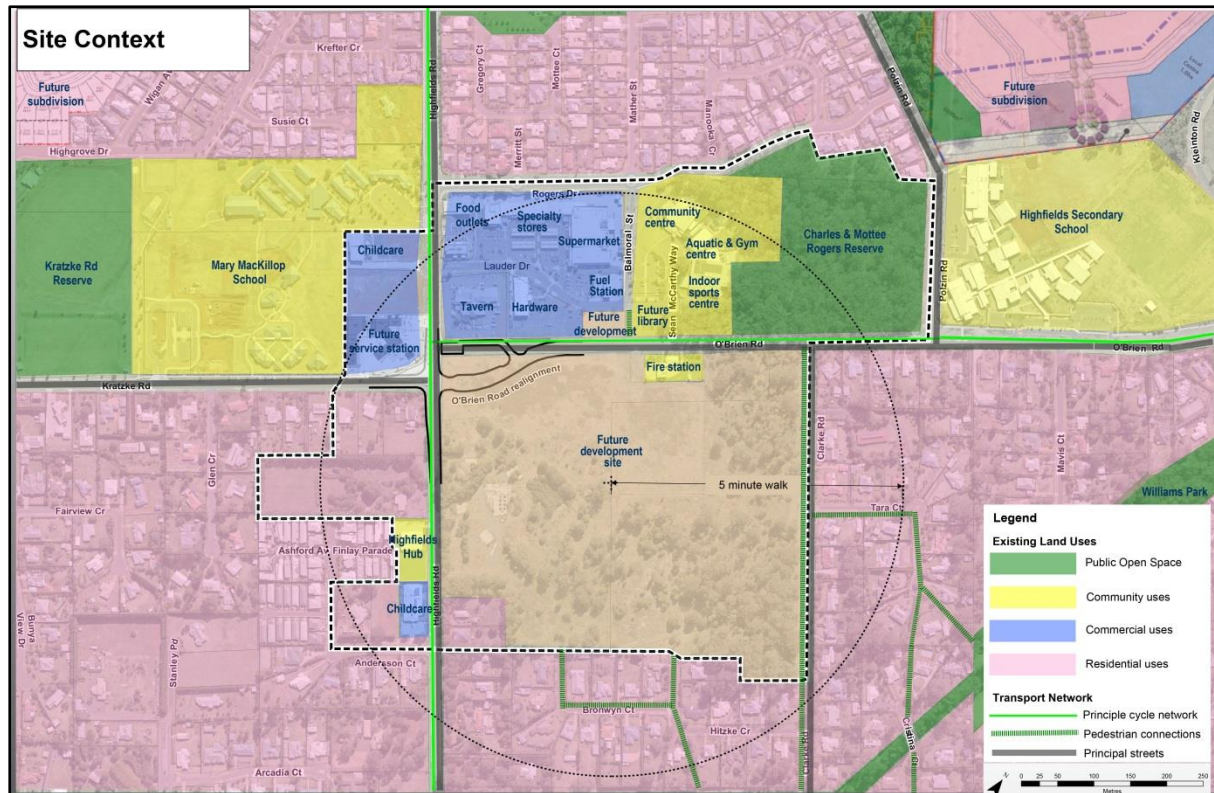


Figure 10 Site Context Plan

5.1 Land form and views

The town centre area slopes gently from the south west and becomes slightly steeper towards the north eastern corner at Clarke Road. There is a high point on O'Brien Road which affords open views across the future development site and back into the existing shopping centre and community facilities.

Views from the north west around to the south west are contained by a continuous tree line on the horizon which gives a strong edge to the town centre and contributes to the sense of place. The edge to the south and west is less clearly defined but allows for some longer range views to the hills beyond Highfields.

5.2 Existing Vegetation

The tall timber in the Charles & Mottee Rogers Reserve is a significant landmark and visible from all areas of the town centre. It is a strong contributor to the character of the area and many people identify this landscape as being distinctive of Highfields.

In contrast vegetation within the existing shopping centre is sparse and of small scale exotic species and the adjacent section of O'Brien Road lacks any street trees making this area very open and exposed to the elements.

Vegetation within the future development site is mixed with moderate to dense remnant trees and scrub along Clarke Rd, open woodland through the centre and mostly exotic species, some of large scale around the existing house and along Highfields Road.

The existing native stands along Clarke Rd form an important visual and environmental link between the Reserve and William Park and Klein Creek. These stands are recommended for retention in open space due to the scale, age and species which can take only minimal root disturbance. Other species on site including Oak, Silky Oak, Jacaranda and Conifer may suit integration within the new development.

5.3 Existing Roads

The site is bounded by Highfields Road, O'Brien Road and Clarke Road which are informal bitumen streets the majority without kerb and guttering giving quite a rustic feel. The verges are wide with generous grassed table drains along some sides.

Vegetation along the eastern end of Highfields Road gives a strong sense of containment to the road which opens out to a more urban vista close to the intersection with Kratzke Road.

The existing vegetation flanking the northern part of O'Brien Road and along Clarke Road create a strong visual boundary which defines the town centre from the adjoining land uses. The vegetation therefore creates two natural gateways to the town centre area which strongly contribute to the perceived "natural" character of Highfields.

5.4 Access

There is ample easy access to future development areas from Highfields and O'Brien Roads. There is one clearing in the existing trees to allow access from Clarke Road and both Bronwyn Court and Hitzke Crescent end at the site boundary. The sloping nature of the land may influence future road layouts in order to minimise cut and fill requirements.

5.5 Constraints

1. New street access points from Highfields Road are dictated by minimum distances from existing intersections.
2. Large mature native species are sensitive to disturbance and some species are prone to limb drop limiting the land uses that are compatible for their retention.
3. The existing Fire Station is an essential service which would require State Government investment in order to allow alternative land uses to occur in that location.
4. Complementary land uses are desirable adjacent to existing residences to minimise any impact on existing amenity.
5. Redevelopment on privately owned land is dependent on investment by external parties outside the control of Council.

6. Street networks must accommodate service, emergency and public transport vehicles.

5.6 Opportunities

1. Existing visual connections across O'Brien may be strengthened by aligning movement paths to link visible destinations.
2. Tall timber within and beyond the town centre create a strong visual edge and it may be possible to extend this scale and character of planting to define the western and southern town centre edges.
3. Extension of Bronwyn Court and Hitzke Crescent into the site could provide vehicular access to future development areas.
4. Realignment of O'Brien Road to intersect with Kratzke Road creates additional land on the western side which could create a significant landscape entrance feature to the town centre.
5. Wide road reserves allow for large scale street tree planting to create leafy boulevards around and within the town centre.
6. Existing mature trees may be used to create focal points and landmarks within the new town centre area.
7. Redevelopment of the site may improve pedestrian and cycle connectivity between eastern, western, northern and southern areas of central Highfields.
8. The strong visual connection from within the future development area back to the existing shopping centre may form paths linking the two sides of Obrien Road improving integration of the centre.

6. Community Values

During stage one consultation stakeholders were asked about the values that they want to see inform the development of the master plan. They told us they valued:

Belonging, Family, Community , Neighbours

Characterised by:

- A strong sense of **community** and **belonging** – close knit;
- People know each other (know their **neighbours**) and have shared experiences and values;
- People look after one another;
- Inclusive, welcoming;
- A place to live, work and play;
- Having places for people to connect and things to do outside of family home – entertainment, parks, shopping, sport, education, health and fitness;
- Easy links for community to connect – cul-de-sacs, bike and walking tracks;
- Family friendly/Family oriented- a place for families to grow up; and a place for extended families to gather;

Distinct Identity

Characterised by:

- Being **separate** and **independent** from Toowoomba;
- Self-contained and convenient;
- A hinterland village atmosphere – that is different from Toowoomba;
- More relaxed and peaceful;
- Slower pace and smaller;
- More family friendly;
- Greater connection to rural landscape;
- More trees;
- More open;
- Smaller country feel – rural;
- Quieter;

Space

Characterised by:

- Highfields physical character being **open**, **spacious** and quiet;
- **Green trees** and green **spaces open** grassed areas and parks;
- Large blocks with big backyards, gardens;
- Privacy – provided by space and low rise - no one able to see into your backyard;
- Clean air;
- Natural street scapes;

Trees and Nature

Characterised by:

- Green trees and a tall timber feel;
- Large established trees;
- Wildlife (birds, koalas);
- Nature is close to homes;
- Complex vegetation;
- Natural corridors;
- Remnant vegetation;
- Habitat preservation;
- Old gums established trees;
- Sustainability of environment;
- Closely related to the concept of Space.

Accessibility and Connectivity

Characterised by:

- Easy access to services and facilities using a range of modes – in particular walking access and bikes;
- Access for all ages and abilities;
- Connectivity to technology – internet;
- Public Transport;
- Traffic – cars;
- Parking;
- Walkability;
- Cycling tracks and pathways;
- Connecting through easements and cul-de-sacs;
- Safe places to connect.

Safety and Security

Characterised by:

- Being a safe and secure place to live, work and play, low crime;
- Safe for children to ride bikes and cross roads;
- Safe to move around for all ages;
- Safe for walkers/cyclists;
- Safe to be outside;
- Lighting and security.

Economy and Growth

Characterised by:

- A desire to live, WORK and play in Highfields;
- A recognition of the need for a stronger commercial focus to attract investment and jobs;
- A passionate small business community;
- A strong desire to support and encourage local business development;
- A desire to foster Highfields' distinct identity through economic growth.

7. Development Principles

The community values have guided the development of the following principles that will work in partnership with the *Land Use and Movement Network Plan* to guide development within the master plan area:

General

1. A place that is based on community values.
2. A place where people will want to spend time.

Accessibility and Movement

3. Buildings, paths and roads are designed to be accessible to people of all ages and ability.
4. Development is designed to encourage equitable movement in and through the area by creating:
 - a) a low speed traffic environment; and
 - b) a high quality walking and cycling environment.
5. Central Highfields is connected and integrated into the existing movement network.
6. A safe environment for pedestrians to cross all roads.
7. Infrastructure to support walking and cycling.

Land Use

8. A mix of uses/activities catering for the needs of people at all stages of life.
9. Opportunities to live within and around the commercial area.

Design

10. Capitalise on views to the sky and existing trees and treeline.
11. Building and street design reflect a sense of place.
12. Spaces that are flexible and offer a wide range of opportunities.
13. Existing and new vegetation is integrated into the built environment.
14. Planting design compliments the existing native vegetation.
15. Construction techniques prevent damage to vegetation.
16. Existing remnant native vegetation is retained and appropriately managed, including where it links to natural areas.

17. Active frontages and public access to open space.
18. Development is based on a Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) approach:
 - (a) crimes against people and property are less likely to occur if other people are around;
 - (b) people in adjoining buildings and spaces are able to see what is happening; and
 - (c) people have safe choices available to them about where to be and how to anticipate and respond to problems.
19. New development integrates with existing development, both within and surrounding the master plan area, ensuring that the existing development doesn't experience a loss of privacy or amenity.

Other

20. Infrastructure to support current and future telecommunications is in place.

8. Land Use and Movement Network Plan

The *Land Use and Movement Network Plan* (see figure 8) establishes broad land use areas and identifies key elements of the movement network, facilitating driving, walking, cycling and public transport circulation in and throughout the Central Highfields area.

8.1 Land Use Areas

(a) Retail / Commercial

This area has a range of activities including retail, office, health, dining, entertainment and community services. It would also have a residential component that is located above non-residential activities located at ground level. There is a high interaction between the public and the activities within this area creating a vibrant heart to Highfields with a 'Main Street' running parallel with O'Brien Road at its core.

Approximately 15 hectares (34% of the total area) has been designated for retail/commercial activities with two thirds of that area currently used for that purpose and the balance being vacant or used for other purposes (primarily residential). Eleven hectares of retail/commercial land is required to meet demand to 2031. This allocation will meet that demand while providing for additional growth beyond 2031.

(b) Mixed Use

This area has a range of non-residential activities but not with the same level of public interaction as those within the **Retail/Commercial** area. It may also include medium density forms of residential development integrated with the non-residential activities.

It's primarily an employment area where there are a range of jobs that might be related to one another or that are very different but are able to exist side by side. Jobs within this area might be in the fields of information and communications technology, research and development, health, defence (related to the activities at the Borneo Barracks), finance and high tech manufacturing.

Approximately 6 hectares (14% of the total area) has been designated for mixed use activities with all of that area currently being vacant. This area could potentially accommodate in the order of 30,000m² non-residential floorspace and 1000 jobs.

(c) Residential

This area includes a range of housing that takes advantage of its location within the heart of Highfields. Housing would be in a variety of primarily low set (1-4 storeys) medium density forms including detached houses on small lots (300 – 450m²), terrace houses and apartments.

Approximately 5.5 hectares (12% of the total area) has been designated primarily for residential use, noting that land within the **retail/commercial** and **mixed use** areas can also be used for residential purposes. The **residential** area would accommodate between 100 and 150 dwellings and 250 to 350 people.

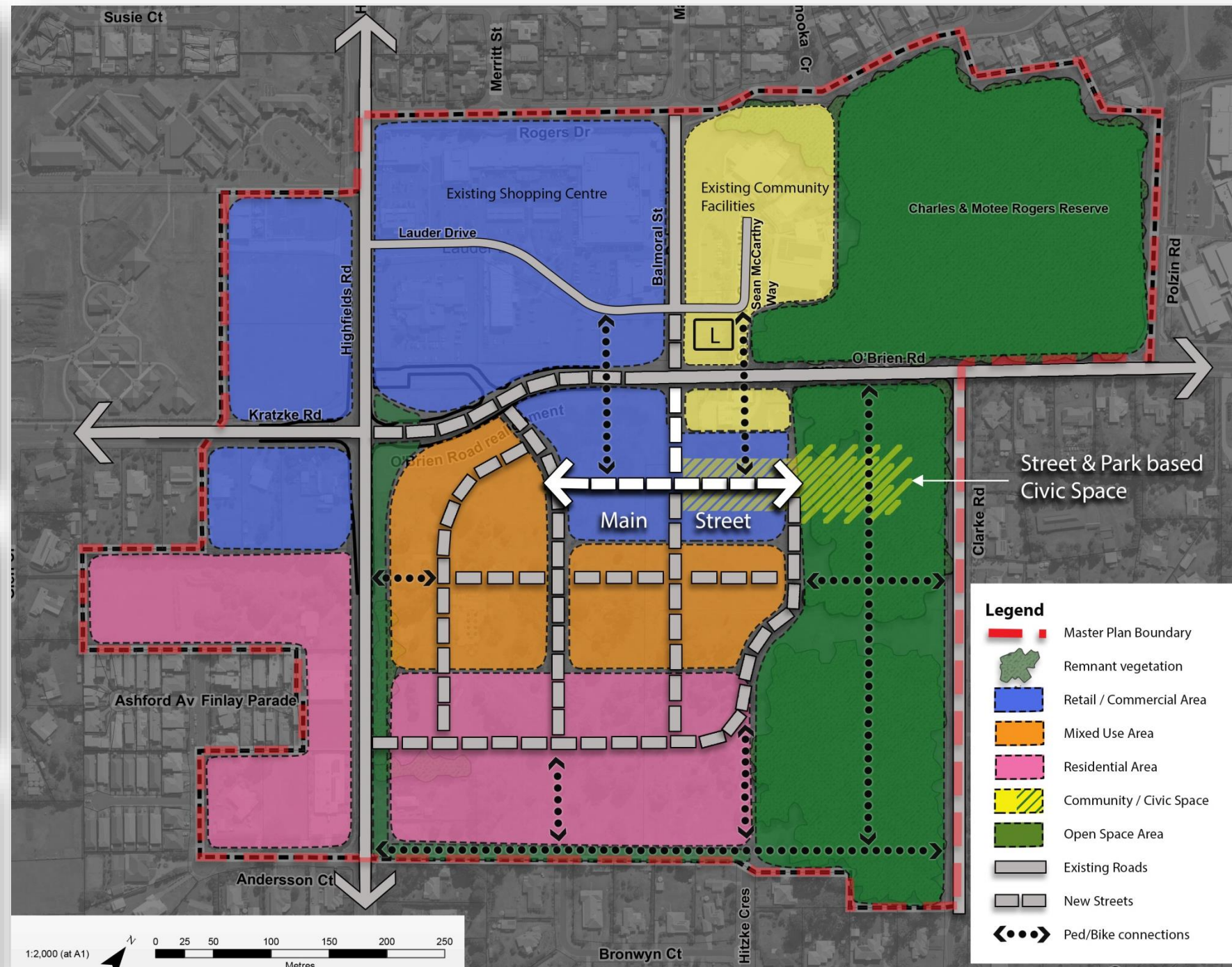




Figure 12 View from the intersection of Highfields and O'Brien Roads looking east



Figure 13 View from the Civic / Events space looking down the Main Street

(d) Community

This is an area containing community facilities such as a library, sports facilities and Council customer service centre.

A civic space provides a location for community gatherings such as markets and Anzac Day ceremonies. This space would be made of up two areas consisting of (a) land within the Clarke Road Open Space where permanent infrastructure such as power, water and hardstand areas would be provided and (b) the 'north-eastern' end of the 'Main Street' which would be designed in a manner that would allow it to be easily closed to vehicle traffic when events are being held. The positioning of the civic space partly within the open space area provides it with the flexibility to expand into the open space for large events.

Approximately 3.5 hectares (8% of the total area) has been designated for community purposes with two thirds of that area currently used for that purpose.

(e) Open Space

This area comprises formal and informal parkland.

Approximately 14.5 hectares (33% of the total area) has been designated as open space. This area consists of three main parts:

- (a) the existing Charles and Motee Rogers Reserve (7ha);
- (b) a new open space area on the south-western side of Clarke Road (6.5ha); and
- (c) an open space connection between Highfields Road and the Clarke Road open space and an open space buffer along the north-eastern side of Highfields Road (1ha).

8.2 The Movement Network**(a) Existing Roads**

The existing roads within the master plan area are:

- Highfields Road,
- O'Brien Road,
- Clarke Road,
- Kratzke Road,
- Rogers Drive,
- Balmoral Drive,
- Sean McCarthy Way,

- Andersson Court, and
- Lauder Drive (which is a private road).

The only change proposed to the existing road network is the realignment of O'Brien Road to create a four way signalised intersection with Highfields and Kratzke Roads.

(b) New Streets

The following new streets provide vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist access to land use areas within the master plan area:

- (a) The extension of Balmoral Street from Lauder Drive to O'Brien Road; and
- (b) A grid of streets within the land bounded by Highfields, O'Brien and Clarke Roads.

The grid of streets would have two connections onto O'Brien Road and one connection onto Highfields Road. It would not connect with Clarke Road or with Bronwyn Court or Hitzke Crescent, which terminate at the boundary of the master plan area.

Note: Only primary streets are shown. Lower order streets will also be required to ensure that all development has appropriate access.

(c) Pedestrian Paths

Pedestrian Paths provide pedestrian only links into the master plan area, connecting with existing pedestrian paths within the surrounding area. Pedestrian paths may also provide for the off road movement of cyclists.

Six primary pedestrian paths are identified in the master plan connecting the proposed grid of streets with:

- (a) Clarke Road, through the Clarke Road Open Space;
- (b) Bronwyn Court and Hitzke Crescent;
- (c) Highfields Road with the proposed grid of streets;
- (d) the Cultural Precinct; and
- (e) Highfields Village Shopping Centre.

9. Next Steps

The *Central Highfields Master Plan* was adopted by Toowoomba Regional Council on [INSERT DATE OF ADOPTION].

The next step in the planning for the Central Highfields area is the preparation of a structure plan and urban design framework.

The structure plan will build on the high level detail in the master plan, identifying:

- Location of new roads, streets and paths, including pedestrian crossing points;
- Design of roads/streets;
- Infrastructure requirements, e.g. sewer, water, drainage;
- The elements of the plan that Council will deliver;
- How car parking needs will be met;
- Land use areas (to a higher level of refinement than the master plan);
- Existing vegetation to be retained (based on a detailed vegetation survey); and
- Development staging.

The urban design framework that will build on the development principles within the master plan, establishing guidelines articulating the desired built form outcomes (e.g., build heights, setbacks, landscaping treatments, public interface) and placemaking opportunities (specific elements of the design that contribute to giving Central Highfields a 'Highfields' character).

Ultimately the master plan, structure plan and urban design framework will inform an amendment to the *Toowoomba Regional Planning Scheme*, which is the document through which Council regulates the use and development of land. This will give these documents statutory weight, ensuring that future development within Central Highfields is consistent with the master plan.



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