

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A how-to guide of the latest thinking and ideas to deliver economic prosperity, stability and future strategies for Regional Australian Towns and Cities.

Discussion Paper

place
design
group.

**DROUGHT, FLOODS AND
LOW COMMODITY PRICES +
CONTINUED URBANISATION OF
OUR CITIES,**

**HAS LED TO A POPULATION
DRAIN FROM REGIONAL
TOWNS + GROWTH IN ONLINE
SHOPPING AND INFLUX OF 'BIG
BOX' SHOPS TO TOWNS,**

**CAUSING DECLINE OF TOWN
MAINSTREETS + AGING
POPULATIONS IN REGIONAL
AREAS COUPLED WITH
CHALLENGES ATTRACTING
NEW YOUNG FAMILIES**

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**REGIONAL
AUSTRALIA IS
DOING IT TOUGH.**

YOU HAVE TWO OPTIONS:

OPTION

1

Watch your town slowly struggle and sadly decline from its past and potential future glory and success.

OPTION

2

Tackle the decline head on by using the tricks, techniques, technology, and emerging 'smart thinking'.

If Option 1 is for you, then there is no need to read any further. As you were.

But if Option 2, sounds like it's up your alley, then read on. You might learn a bit about the dark arts, techniques and technology being used by cities and shopping centres to steal your people and businesses, and learn how to take the fight to them head on.

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



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INTRODUCTION

It can't be denied, urbanisation around the nation is on the increase and it's affecting regional towns more than ever. Beyond the population drain, global challenges around on-line shopping, 'brain drain', aging population, climate change and fluctuating commodity pricing, it is making it hard for regional towns. Hanging on to their populations and keeping towns as thriving and vibrant places is the number one challenge.

Slow-growing and shrinking rural areas might find that their policies are not bringing the prosperity they seek, while fast-growing rural areas at the edge of metropolitan regions face metropolitan-style development pressures. Over time, all communities experience changes that affect the foundation of their local economies. Economically resilient towns, cities, and regions adapt to changing conditions and even reinvent their economic bases as necessary. Even if the community has lost its original or main economic driver, it has other assets that it can use to spur the local economy.

Unfortunately, it can be a vicious cycle, with struggling town centres, with high vacancies and reduced retail and service offerings, making it even harder to keep the stalwarts of regional towns and all but impossible to then attract new young families and people to those towns.

Town centres and main streets are traditionally the heart of a community, and yet today they are often affected by new, alternative and competitive retail opportunities.

Town centres and main streets identify, service, engage and celebrate the towns, the communities, the economies and the histories of a place. Keeping vitality in town centres and main streets should be a goal for every council, planner, and project manager. Understanding the links between policy, town plans, design and commercial activity needs to be the starting point for the revitalisation of centres aiming for vital growth.

In many instances town centres are dying because stand alone, big box retailing was introduced in the 1970's into many regions, which offers a more convenient form of shopping, and more than anything pulls people out of the main-street, providing one less reason to spend money with local businesses, run by local people.

So how do you break that cycle?

How do you undertake economic development and economic retention in this new age?

How do you reverse (or at least halt) the brain-drain and youth-drain of rural areas?

How do you make rural towns resilient not to just climate change and natural challenges, but resilient to technology and retail pressures?

How do you find and create new tourism / attraction opportunities for your regions?

Bernard Salt, the highly respected demographer from KPMG has long been a commentator and some would argue ‘oracle’ of all things people and trends here in Australia. He famously observed and coined the ‘sea change’ and ‘tree change’ population phenomena.

He noted in a recent article in *The Australian* newspaper, that the suburban, sea change and tree change phenomena have risen and subsided as driving forces behind Australian lifestyle preferences and we have now returned to an inner city living preference. But, he believes that people’s love and preference for city living will persist into the 2020’s.

“Technology improvements such as universal access to the NBN, a shift in values (eg, the inner city is regarded as threatening and harsh as opposed to chic and sophisticated), and the emergence of a culture that celebrates small business start-ups, will see knowledge workers and small businesses return. Streaming out of the city in pursuit of lifestyle locations offering housing affordability”

- Bernard Salt



Pictured: Bernard Salt, KPMG Partner
Image Credit: Curtin University

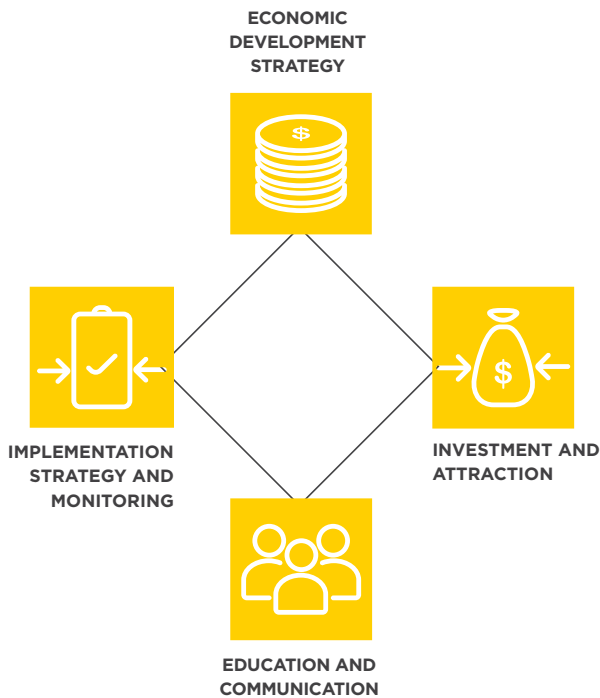
His proposition is that our city living preference will persist whilst we run through our ‘knowledge cluster’ phase of our economy. However, after that and within the next decade, this is where rural Australia has so much opportunity. Because the lifestyle and simple living of rural Australia is held in such high regard.

So, we arrive at an interesting point. The technology that once was argued to have been the root cause of the decline in rural areas, might in the long term be it’s savior. Whilst this return to the regions might be a few years off, now is the time to put in the ground work to make your town, city and region attractive for when this projected ‘bush change’ occurs.

This discussion paper serves to identify ways in which smart city thinking, solutions, technology and data can be utilised to effectively measure commercial performance, how towns can use these numbers in a real-world context, and apply this data analysis to planning and urban design to lay the economic development groundwork to make your town as attractive as possible for future residents and businesses.

Understanding that commercial vitality is important for long-term success, now is the time to put some long-term strategies in place.

INGREDIENTS TO AN EFFECTIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY



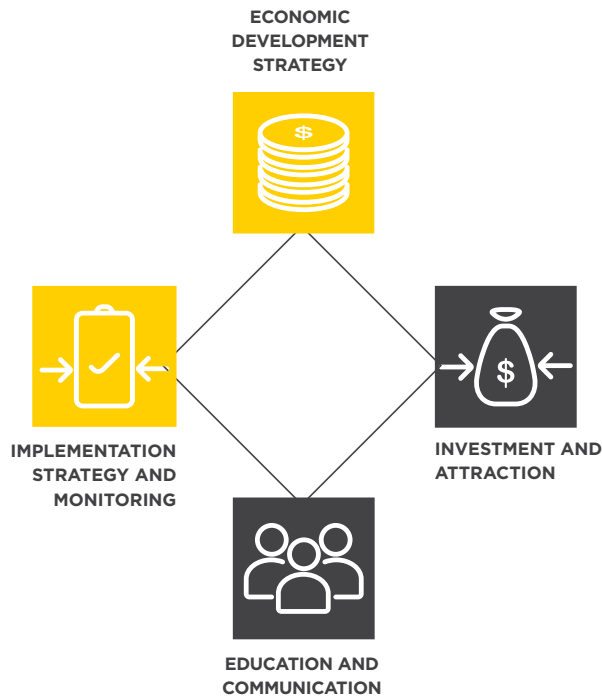
An effective economic development strategy should have a number of elements, which all work together to drive strategy, implementation, education and monitoring.

Local governments across the country face an ever growing challenging environment. The list of things that the community expects local governments to do for them keeps growing, whilst the rate revenue to fund such things is either shrinking or at best not growing.

In many instances, the physical and tangible work and programs are often undertaken over and above the less tangible and forward-looking things like economic development strategies. When budget allows for economic development strategies to be prepared they are often drafted from the same 'templates' with the outcome being pretty consistent and formulised approaches to economic development.

<p>ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY</p> 	<p>A STRATEGY TO IDENTIFY WHAT OTHER STRATEGIES NEED TO BE PREPARED</p> <p>A traditional strategy which picks up the high level macro economic growth opportunities for the region and identifies further strategies, studies and programs required to respond to the opportunities.</p>
<p>INVESTMENT & ATTRACTION</p> 	<p>A TOOL TO COMMUNICATE WITH POTENTIAL NEW INBOUND INVESTORS</p> <p>An opportunity to develop a web portal to contain key investment and development data. It is suggested this could be kept 'live' with key data and project deliverables as they happen. So investors can see what is happening.</p>
<p>EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION</p> 	<p>"WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR ME?"</p> <p>Successful use of the economic development strategy by the wider business community, will only occur if they are able to understand, 'what the strategy means for them'. Having easily understood and accessible information on how individual businesses can tap into the opportunities being created by the economic development strategy is critical to overall success.</p>
<p>IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY AND MONITORING</p> 	<p>A STRATEGY WITHOUT AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN ISN'T A STRATEGY AT ALL!</p> <p>Having a strategy is important, but knowing how and when to implement the elements of the economic development strategy is arguably more important. Knowing how to attack it in manageable projects or tasks is critical. Equally monitoring impacts and benefits of projects being implemented is useful to feedback information into the investment and attraction element.</p>

THE CHALLENGE



The challenge is most economic development strategies only deal with two parts of the 4 segments.

The vast majority of economic development strategies being produced or already in place, really only seek, and perhaps expect, a traditional economic development strategy, with nominal implementation and monitoring components as part of it. There has been little, if any, expansion and innovation into the opportunities that might come from education, investment, and attraction.

Only focusing on the two core components will present challenges for councils and towns, as it leaves little scope to then implement any of the investment, attraction, education and communication elements down the track, as they are not connected to the strategy elements themselves.

Certainly the strategy can (and should) document what investment and attraction and communication actions should be undertaken, but we don't really see the point in preparing a strategy to inform what other strategies need to then be prepared.

What we can tell you, is that these can't be achieved with a status quo approach of sitting on the sideline and a 'she'll be right' type of thinking. Equally, we know these can't be solved with traditional approaches of main street upgrades that seek to throw in some new pavers, park benches and a zebra crossing or two.

Having done a literature and best practice review of town centre design guidelines, controls, policies, theory and delivery from around Australia and the world, the vast majority of examples were, all theory or focused around 'design' elements such as building design, street design, place making, connectivity etc.

Not once did those documents make a tangible link to commercial or the operations side of the commercial equation. We became concerned that 'designers' were setting the direction of our CBD's and town centres, without really looking at the commercial performance.

We questioned why 'designers' were setting the strategic direction of planning main streets and town centres, without looking at the commercial performance nor understanding the emerging 'smart principles' and technology that can be applied to far greater effect and return on investment.

EMERGING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT APPROACHES

Whilst Economic Development Strategies are complicated documents to prepare, we believe that their preparation evolves from asking and answering the 10 below questions.

- 1. Who are we?**
- 2. What makes up our economy?**
- 3. What are our problems and opportunities?**
- 4. What are our strengths?**
- 5. What do we want to be - our future vision?**
- 6. How do we get there?**
- 7. What resources do we have and need?**
- 8. Who is responsible?**
- 9. How much does it cost?**
- 10. How do we know when we get there?**

EMERGING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Place Design Group has identified seven emerging areas for research, investigation, consideration and responses when it comes to economic development for rural economies.

	1 MEASUREMENT AND USE OF DATA	The simple collection of data about your towns. This doesn't need to be fancy, you just need to know more about your town so you can monitor changes over time, be they good or bad.
	2 LEADERSHIP AND THINKING BEYOND DESIGNERS	A physical makeover probably won't be the solution for your town. Look beyond the physical and engage with different thinkers and professions on the future solutions for your town.
	3 SMART CITY PRINCIPLES AND TECHNOLOGY	Smart City thinking and solutions can be used at a small rural town level to balance out your competitive edge and leverage the rural lifestyle benefits with technology.
	4 TOURISM AND ATTRACTION	A need to think beyond the 'grey nomad' tourism trade and explore innovative tourism and event opportunities that leverage unique qualities of your towns, even if they don't seem 'sexy' or 'tourism-like' to you.
	5 GOVERNANCE AND BRANDING	We believe 75% of the solutions and opportunities will sit in the areas of governance and policy changes, branding and community led ground up strategies and solutions.
	6 LOCAL BUSINESS CAPACITYBUILDING	To level the playing field, it might be necessary to build up the capacity of the local business community to make them regionally and globally competitive or at least resilient to change.
	7 MEGA TRENDS AND THEIR MICRO IMPACTS	Research into the mega trends affecting your town or region and then development of responses to the opportunities and potential challenges created. The development of micro response strategies of the mega trends to your town.

OPPORTUNITY #1 MEASUREMENT AND USE OF DATA

The simple collection of data about your towns. This doesn't need to be fancy. But the more you know the more you can monitor changes over time, be they good or bad.

It is critical we are designing places that people want. Too often the basic product development principles of research, market testing and prototyping have been overlooked. Planners have tended to assume and guess, rather than using science or evidence. We have the future of cities and towns in our hands, yet is that responsibility deserved?

So if we are planning for people:

Do we know what kind of people we are planning for?

Do we know what drives them?

Do we know what they want from life and where they want to be?

And then the follow up question is: If you did know the answer how would you respond or respond differently to today?

Cities and towns are not what they used to be. It can't be assumed old design and planning thinking will suit cities and towns of the future. Why? Simply because they will not be occupied by generations of the past.

Cities and towns are for people - we need to look at how people will live their lives in the cities and towns, not just how cities and towns will work around us. We need to use technology and smart city thinking to create the cities and towns residents want - rather

than letting the city and town planning agenda be driven by technology.

Data helps you make decisions.

Data is often automatically associated with technology, however data in this instance, is not just referring to tech. It's not excluding it, as data from technology sources is invaluable and has a place. It's more pointing out that other sources of data, tactile data, if quantifiable and measurable and mapped out visually, really tells the story of how your town operates, which can inform future plans.

If you knew where vacancy exists before and after improvement works, you could monitor the success of those works.

If you knew what business types were strategically absent from your town centre you could target these specifically.

If you knew that the car parks on the main street were actually mostly used by business employees and not customers, you would know those spaces might be better given to the footpath.

Ways in which you can collect tactile data might include:

- Take a walk down your main street – take note of vacancies, tenancy types, parking availability. If you plot these onto a town plan, you will get a map of useful information that will help guide planning.
- Spend time in your main street taking note of what a typical day looks like, what a typical week looks like, when are the busy periods, who is using the street, for what purpose and at what time.
- Engage with the community for insights, they'll often be happy to talk about their “town” not “planning”, and while they are the same topic, by making language more personable when engaging with the community, and engaging with them where they naturally spend time (i.e. local farmers market), you will be gathering more meaningful data in a more relaxed way and you'll find people are more open to sharing information in this forum.

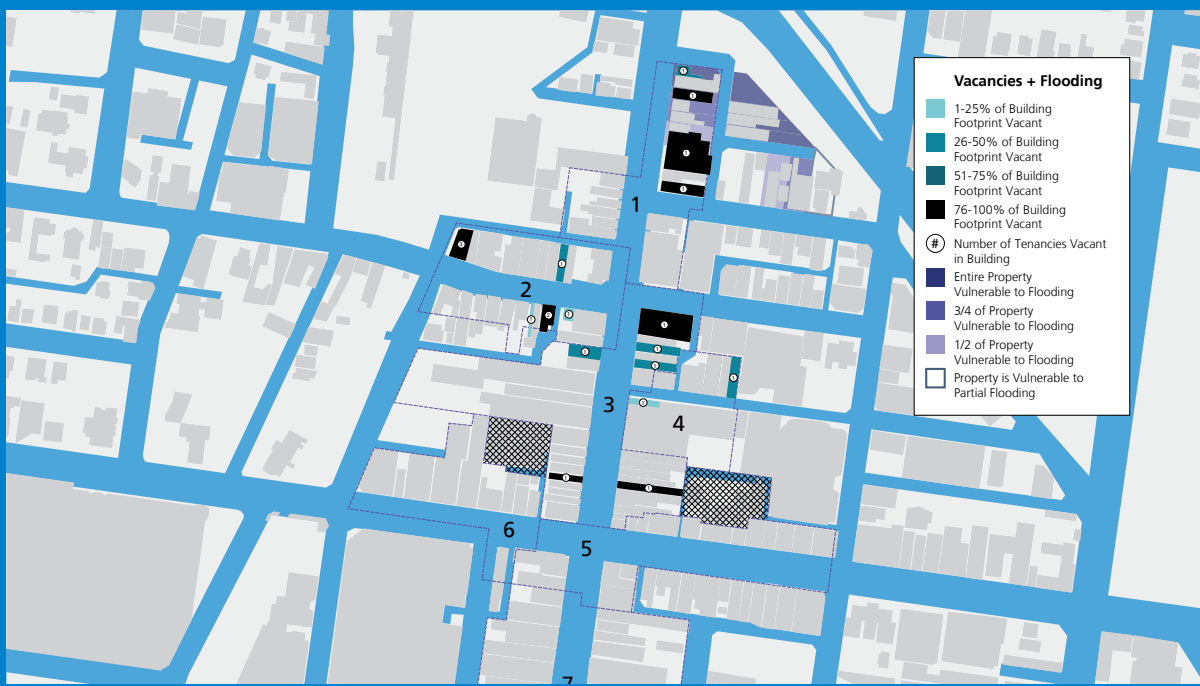
**CASE STUDY
TOOWOOMBA CBD METRICS FRAMEWORK**

The framework is a new approach to strategic town centre planning, consciously embedding commercial and property elements into otherwise design based planning approaches.

As part of Toowoomba Regional Council's commitment to the ongoing economic development of their CBD, Place Design Group was commissioned, in partnership with JLL, to develop a CBD performance measurement framework.

The works were commissioned as a response to changes in retail demand in the city centre core and frame; and apply a comparable metric base as an effective tool to analyse and monitor centre performance.

The metrics framework is an information database and educational tool enabling strategic interventions to be created for effective and commercially invigorating development.



TOOWOOMBA CBD METRICS FRAMEWORK

OPPORTUNITY #2 LEADERSHIP AND THINKING BEYOND DESIGNERS

Look beyond the physical and engage with different thinkers and professions on the future solutions for your town.

Town Centre health checks that are more than a superficial design appraisal are not a simple quantifiable measure. Instead, the measure of centre success can be influenced by individual perspective and underpinned by a conglomerate of variables that make the centre unique.

Centres are defined by their context, core qualities and many intrinsic components that can be analysed and assessed to measure a centre's level of performance. To do this however, it is important to consider the most influential features that define performance level and determine areas for improvement.

Based on considerable literature, research and review, Place Design Group determined a series of five core qualities by which to consider centre performance:

- 1. COMMERCIAL VITALITY**
- 2. COMFORTABLE PEDESTRIAN REALM**
- 3. SENSE OF PLACE**
- 4. SAFETY**
- 5. EASE OF ACCESS**

In any appraisal of centre performance the underlying judgement will be on the quality of its Commercial Vitality – its ability to sustain commercial activity that meets the needs of the community.

The other core qualities have an important role in supporting the commercial vitality of a centre through facilitating a physical environment in which the centre can function as a commercial asset, a convenient location, and a competitive business location. All other core qualities must have a presence in a centre to balance all aspects of good performance. These elements are further outlined in the table to the right.

Understanding, measuring, and tracking the above over time will give insight into the changes in your town that you might not see each day. They will also give a far richer ability to map and analyse these for your town and region and develop response strategies to deal with issues and opportunities.

QUALITY	DESCRIPTION	PRIMARY CRITERIA AND SUB-CRITERIA
Commercial Vitality	Sustained commercial vitality is the fundamental objective of any centre, and is as paramount to local identity, and community needs and amenity, as it is to trader and stakeholder interests. Commercial vitality requires careful alignment of planning, design, economic strategy and governance; and is acknowledged as being subject to cycles over time and through the life of a centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Commercial identity measure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversity of Tenancy Mix Relative to Function Quality of mix Iconic Retailers / Strong Brand Recognition On-street car parking Traffic and pedestrian activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic speed Pedestrian connectivity Density <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dwellings per hectare (400m) Dwellings per hectare (800m) Retail function performance index Centre trading performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Daytime activity Night time activity Vacancy rates
Comfortable Pedestrian Realm	Centres need to operate at the human scale and pedestrianisation is the most natural manifestation of human interaction with a space. A comfortable pedestrian experience encourages ease of movement and social behaviour, and assists in activating a centre by circulating users to improve trade potential and the likelihood of revisitation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human scale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of human scale Street furniture Protection from natural elements <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awnings Street trees Traffic calming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Devices Traffic speed
Sense of Place	A strong sense of place creates an image of a centre, relaying a story and recognition; familiarity and authentication. It is important in creating cohesive domains through built form, branding, connection with local values and community ownership. It improves the experience of a centre and encourages visitation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outdoor dining Community ownership <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Useful public spaces Community facilities Interest and identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Views and vistas Public Art Heritage and character Continuous built form to street interface
Safety	Safety and security are important to the function of a centre where risk may occur in a number of contexts. Centres are targets for opportunistic crime and the potential for conflict in busy centres needs to be mitigated through planning design and implementation. Safety and security for patrons and businesses removes anxiety cues that may diminish the positive experience of a centre and discourage patronage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extended operating hours Active frontages Active pedestrian spaces Lighting Pedestrian prioritisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Traffic calming devices Vehicle crossovers Safe pedestrian crossings and visual connectivity
Ease of Access	A centre needs to be accessible and well connected. Perceived inaccessibility can discourage patronage of the centre. Regardless of what other qualities a centre may exhibit, ease of access for users, traders, services and all of the local community is imperative for visitation to, and function of, any centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centre connectivity to surrounds <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connectivity Topography Car parking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Off street parking On street parking Equitable and universal access

OPPORTUNITY #3

TOURISM AND ATTRACTION



There is a need to think beyond the 'grey nomad' tourism trade and explore innovative tourism and event opportunities that leverage unique qualities of your town. Many rural towns can offer unique experiences that are unmatched anywhere else in the world.

Most rural tourism products and services revolve around activities, experiences, and specialist accommodation such as home-stays, which is why rural tourism has many labels ranging from “ecotourism” to “community-based tourism”.

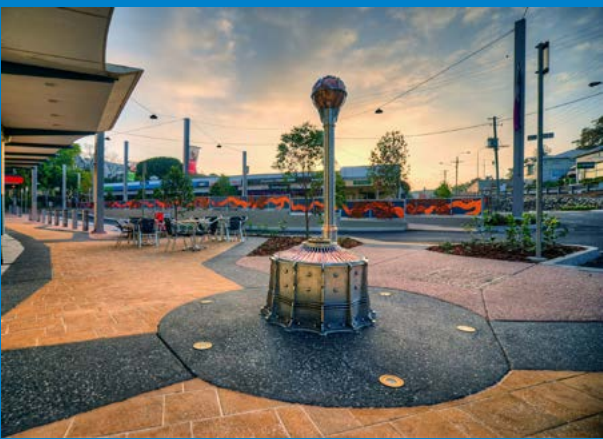
By offering authentic encounters and participation in traditional ‘day to day’ activities like mustering, harvesting and milking, rural tourism can serve as a reprieve from the stresses of modern day living. Indeed, from a demand perspective, the appeal of rural tourism is nature, scenery, peace, clean air, recreation and adventure. Simply stated, rural tourism is about experiencing rurality and all that it encompasses in relation to authenticity, tradition, culture, and nature.

Rural tourism is increasingly receiving attention as tourism initiatives combine aspects of community development, economic development, cultural heritage, and conservation. The positives of this form of tourism are – community ownership, livelihood security, more dollars staying in the local economy, greater community support of local tourism initiatives, increases in the local population social carrying capacity, and improved conservation.

But beyond agri and experiential tourism, are emerging trends of ‘work-at-ions’, meaning people whose jobs are not necessarily office based or fixed, choosing to travel and work at the same time. After all, if you don’t have a fixed desk and all you need is internet, why wouldn’t you chose to do that in a beautiful location or cross it over with touring and seeing Australia.

Drive tourism represents a major opportunity for many businesses in rural and regional communities to leverage income from drive tourists (on stopovers). These tourists often buy local tourism products and services, and basic travel necessities like fuel, food and other supplies. Drive tourism provides many benefits to businesses, including opportunities for new business start-ups and increased demand for new products and services, whilst also potentially addressing skills shortages in other sectors by tapping into the skills of temporary visitors.

Tapping into rural tourism will be crucial for the future of rural areas. If you are lucky enough to be on one of the grey nomad routes, or have some amazing natural assets, then drive tourism will be for you. But if you don’t have those opportunities, you should explore the development of new products and offerings in agri-tourism, adventure-tourism and experience tourism.



SMITHFIELD STREET REVITALISATION

CASE STUDY Smithfield Street Revitalisation

Delivery of a comprehensive planning and design strategy to drive the revitalisation of Gympie's town centre.

Gympie Regional Council took on an ambitious plan to improve the vibrancy of their town centre in order to drive economic development for the region. To achieve this a comprehensive design strategy was developed by Place Design Group identifying key action plans across concept design, consultation, and design development for Smithfield Street and Upper Mary Street. As a result of the strategy, Council was successful in gaining state funding for implementation of key action plans, one of which was the streetscape revitalisation of Smithfield Street. Place Design Group was lucky enough to then also be selected to undertake the detailed design of the space that we had identified as a future project some 3 years earlier.

By considered consultation Council was able to develop a strong narrative owned by the community, entwining interpretive themes about its past, present and future. This narrative was used throughout the revitalisation, including through the commissioning of public artists to deliver bespoke artwork outcomes which drove tourism initiatives for the town centre.

The 'on-ground' project delivery, from strategy to action plan outcomes, has driven increasing tourism and local patronage by reshaping how the main street is accessed and used through initiatives such as alfresco dining and an 'eat street' atmosphere.

OPPORTUNITY #4 GOVERNANCE AND BRANDING

75% of the solutions and opportunities will sit in the areas of governance and policy changes, branding and community led ground up strategies and solutions. Too often we believe that a planning scheme is the sole mechanism open to councils to influence development and deliver economic stimulus.

There are so many more mechanisms and 'levers' available for Government to explore and utilise. This includes:

- **Council owned land and assets and ability to leverage them**
- **Rates and fee concessions to attract or retain businesses**
- **Footpath dining incentives**
- **Car park provision, costs and duration controls**
- **Marketing and communication**

Shops in small towns are often bypassed by residents, because it is easier or more attractive to go to other bigger, nearby towns or cities, particularly when local centres do not have a large supermarket or similar anchor tenants, complementary services and infrastructure. As you would know in many instances people are prepared to drive for several hours on a return trip to access higher quality and more diverse services and shops, to the detriment of the local town and often their friends running those businesses.

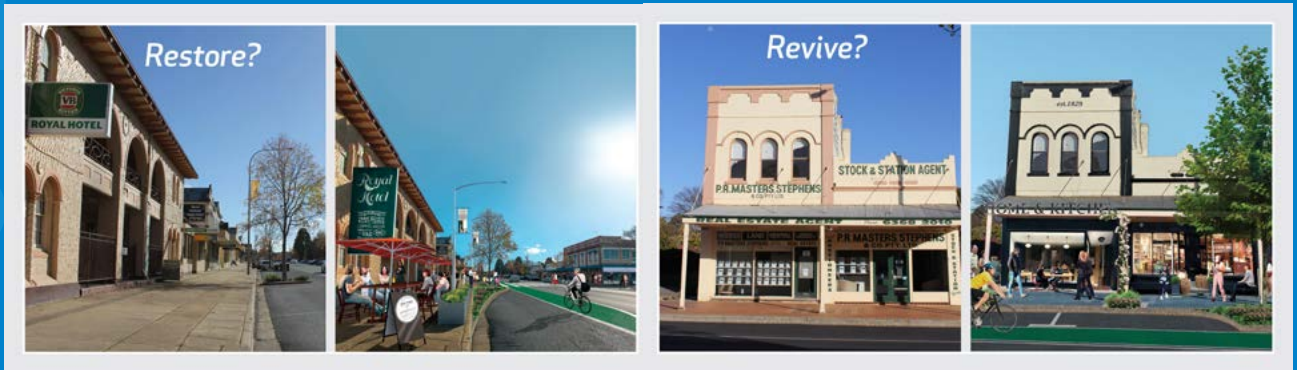
There are many ways, both physical and market based interventions, that could be undertaken to assist in encouraging residents to shop locally to help support local retailers and services.

By diversifying shops and improving access, residents may be more inclined to shop locally. This can also be encouraged through a promotional campaign to support local businesses. Such ground up strategies can be executed as simply as the 'bumper stickers' of old reminding people that "money spent in town X stays in town X".

To create liveable centres that are 'places for people', centres need to provide lifestyle, and social and recreational opportunities. To create a liveable centre, land use types need to be diverse and generate demand over long parts of the day, so that the centre is busy, safe and inviting. For example, this may be achieved by accommodating early opening businesses such as cafes, later opening businesses such as restaurants, and weekend activities such as recreational related uses.

But they need to be commercially viable and understand their role, niche or opportunity within their wider catchment and market, and focus on those opportunities, rather than trying to apply a retail centre formula that may otherwise perpetuate the under-performance of the centre.

We would suggest that council engages with the local business chamber (or creates one if one doesn't exist) and helps them identify and find their niche and diversity of offering to help locals become more inclined to shop locally.



BLAYNEY BEFORE AND AFTER VISUALS

CASE STUDY

Blayney 2020 Master Plan

Delivery of an innovative master plan through expert collaboration and unique community engagement.

THE CHALLENGE

The regional NSW town of Blayney had, like many regional towns, suffered economically from decline within the town centre and was facing significant challenges to attract and retain businesses and activities within Blayney. Blayney Shire Council developed their 2020 Master Plan to address some of these challenges, which included being divided by a State Highway, declining commercial activity and land use inefficiency. Partnering with MRCagney and the Western Research Institute, Place Design Group developed a smart suite of strategies to reinvigorate the Blayney Town Centre, acknowledging regional values and shire-wide cohesion.

MEASURING SUCCESS

1. A robust engagement process empowered Council with a critical tool for decision making.
2. A concise and legible strategy for short, medium and long term growth supporting diversity of actions and projects that Council could tailor.

3. A community and Council genuinely inspired and enthused to initiate proposed actions.

4. Clear actions for Council to implement with their own land/resources.

5. A range of non-physical tasks, such as community support and strength of local business trade.

METHODOLGY FOR SUCCESS

Success was measured via the following outcomes:

- Flexible structure of targeted forums to allow the right kinds of information and conversations to take place - with messaging clear, in scope and on point.
- Innovative methods for on-ground, face to face consultation attracted a high degree of participation. Council was seen to be actively engaging the community on the project.
- Intensive Charrette style design and issue identification approach, allowed the team to immerse and get a very good understanding of the issues and problems facing the town.

OPPORTUNITY #5 LOCAL BUSINESS CAPACITY BUILDING



To level the playing field, it might be necessary to build up the capacity of the local business community to make them regionally and globally competitive or at least resilient to change.

When it comes to helping out, a top-down approach to development and management is not conducive to the evolution of rural businesses. Rather, it is best done in an organic fashion in which State and local governments play the role of facilitator by encouraging and supporting locally-inspired initiatives and actions. Governments can also support the establishment of rural tourism demonstration projects, which illustrate the good practices and opportunities that others can see and learn from and then replicate.

In relation to supply of products and services in rural areas, there is likely to be a need to capacity build the skills and delivery models of those businesses to make them more attractive, resilient and globally relevant. To achieve this there is a need to support local communities in innovation, micro- and small-enterprise financing, business planning, business skills, and standards.

This capacity building should also extend beyond typical fiscal and 'business' skills into emerging areas of interior design, facade and shop front, IT, web and social media skills. We are aware and have participated in programs in rural towns that have provided paid for or low-cost access to professionals to provide training and insights into shop design and web development.

We have equally seen grant programs for shop owners to install and update signage, facades and shop entries to make them more engaging with their street environment.

Supporting and expanding existing businesses and attracting new businesses contributes to economic development in several key ways, including helping businesses create jobs, encouraging entrepreneurship, enhancing fiscal sustainability by expanding and diversifying the rate base, and improving quality of life with new services and amenities.

We would encourage Councils to think outside of the box on alternate solutions and opportunities, as \$100,000 spent directly to capacity build businesses and residents within your community is likely to have a much higher return on investment and 'town dividend' than spending \$100,000 on new pavers, a few trees and a new zebra crossing in your mainstreet.



BLAYNEY 2020 MASTER PLAN

OPPORTUNITY # 6

MEGA TRENDS AND THEIR MICRO IMPACTS

Don't let the name fool you into thinking that this is something that only affects big cities in big places. Mega Trends affect us all, and rural economies are already feeling the effects of some of the world's leading catalysts for change.

Mega Trends are large, social, economic, political and environmental changes that impact business, economy, society, culture... even our personal lives. Mega Trends occur at the intersection of multiple, smaller trends, such a demographic, technological change and regional economic changes. They are the underlying forces that drive smaller trends (such as an aging population).

Mega Trends are connected or intertwined in a number of ways, which suggests that there are “synergetic” opportunities between them. If you add this crossing-over of Mega Trends, to a further convergence of multiple Mega Trends, and go even further, you will discover that large scale, world changes are filtering down to all levels, and are occurring at a faster and more furious rate than ever before.

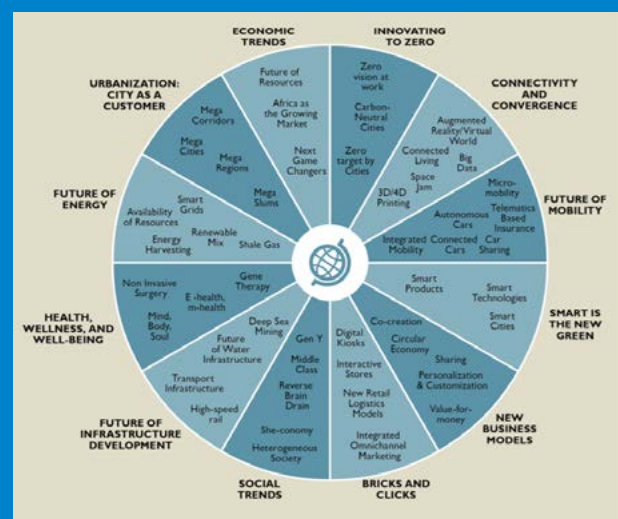
In some cases, the impact of one Mega Trend will create opportunities for another and as global urbanisation continues, this will require and create opportunities for new approaches to city living, transport, energy and food production. So all in all, Mega Trends illustrate a world in motion, with everyone living and breathing in this complex web of world change.

For regional economies, the key discussion is not so much about the Mega Trends themselves, but rather the potential, positive or negative impacts these mega trends may present. And, more importantly, what economic strategies, Councils, businesses and the community alike should do (or not) with this knowledge once we have it.

So, which Mega Trends are facing your communities? And what are their micro implications?

Which trends do you need to plan a defensive strategy for to mitigate the impacts?

And which ones are opportunities for you to get in front of, and leverage for the wider benefit of your town or region?



Mega Trends & Social Innovation
Source: Frost & Sullivan Analysis

OPPORTUNITY #7 SMART CITY PRINCIPLES AND TECHNOLOGY



The notion of the “smart city” has been gaining attention around the world, particularly in 2017. Other names have included “wired”, “networked” or “ubiquitous” city, and “smart city” all of which are referring to the development of technology-based urban systems for driving efficient city management and economic growth.

Whilst the smart city revolution is only just getting started in Australia, it certainly has a ‘technology’ focus and foundation, many of which may not be obviously necessary or needed in rural towns. But here is the opportunity!

It is likely that most of the focus of the smart city revolution and providers will be in the large and medium sized cities of Australia - unfortunately, the small cities and towns may be overlooked. But we believe there is also a wealth of opportunity in applying smart city solutions to smaller cities and towns, particularly in rural areas of Australia.

Smart city thinking and solutions can be used at a small rural town level to balance out your competitive edge and leverage the rural lifestyle benefits with technology. The ongoing roll out of the NBN and high-speed internet, will really connect rural Australia with the world. It will become easier and possible to live, work and run businesses from rural towns for which the majority, if not all your customers may not actually live in the town.

A great example of this online retail success, is ‘Birdsnest’, which is an online fashion and accessories store based in small-town Cooma, in the Snowy Mountains of NSW. Here the Birdsnest team, a family owned business employs 100+ Cooma locals, but sells their wares to the world and all around Australia, this is all possible because of the internet.



BIRDSNEST TEAM | Image Credit: Birdsnest.com.au

Rather than being at a disadvantage in the smart city world, small areas have numerous advantages when it comes to planning, implementing and operating smart city infrastructure and service projects.

- **Potential for easier planning, approval, and funding decisions.** Decision making is often far less complex in smaller towns than in cities with large, silo-ed bureaucracies.
- **More social cohesion and sense of local identity.** Social cohesion and feelings of being more connected to the community are stronger in rural communities and smaller cities than in larger cities, which have more diverse populations. This will assist in the development, approval and implementation of smart city programs and initiatives.
- **Remoteness leads to a greater need for access.** The isolation of smaller towns and the distance of our towns from larger cities and urban areas, often means rural areas suffer from lesser access to social, medical and education services that are readily enjoyed by more urban and bigger city residents. There is a strong need to bring these services to remote areas and this may be more possible now with remote and 'over the net' functionality and services.

- **Stronger need to outsource extended capabilities.** Smaller rural towns and councils have fewer internal technical capabilities. This leads to both a need and opportunity to outsource projects to third parties. The smart city programs and infrastructure is digitally enabled, meaning it can often be deployed remotely, without needing 'on-site' staff.

Ultimately, the success of a smart city isn't in the technology, but in the concrete differences it makes in the lives of its citizens. "Small" can be big – we only need the right lens to see it.

But in times of tight financial government budgets, the opportunity to transition council infrastructure and facilities to new generation smart city infrastructure should be heavily considered. For example whilst initially a 'cost' to retrofit or replace old infrastructure, new lighting technology alone has proven to use a fraction of the power and energy to run them, providing the opportunity to save significant money in the longer term.

AND WHAT ABOUT THE F WORD - FUNDING?

To support planning recommendations, interventions are often designed as actions that connect, promote and support intended outcomes. We believe too often an 'ultimate' and 'gold plated' solution is sort out, which may take years to afford or need a large grant or funding from the State Government.

Permanent:

- Moderate/higher cost items intended as a permanent physical installation
- Prior to any physical implementation a phase of design, approval, tender and budgetary/financial commitment is required
- May be a more permanent adaptation of a temporary activity or installation

Temporary:

Temporary solutions are sometimes the best way to proceed as you get people used to it before investing. Place Activation is a good example of this. Call it what you will, Place Activation, Pop Up Activation, Tactical Urbanism, Guerrilla Urbanism, Urban Interventions - Place Activation is about low fuss, low cost, high impact changes within an urban environment to improve and enhance spaces and places.

There isn't a rule book to Place Activation. Ideas and events should be tailored to the characteristics of each urban environment. In particular setting, activation objective, climate and demographic or target audience.

That being said, Place Activation in its various forms has become an increasingly popular practice. There are various forms of theory, delivered by various practitioners, that can always be refined to fit a local context. Activation is most effective when it is part of the place story, and celebrates those things that make a place unique.

In one project, which was ultimately going to be a 'grand boulevard' with a double row of large shade trees, it was determined that the cost and works would take many years to facilitate. So, we suggested that they place trees in large relocatable planters along the street, along with signage, to explain stage 1 of the ultimate. When undertaking temporary interventions, it is important to communicate via signage the ultimate plan, vision and staging. In other words, don't be distracted by doing nothing because of funding.

Our experience has told us that councils can achieve so much, and often have the same behavioral change impacts with temporary interventions, whilst working towards funding the permanent interventions.

We think conscious delivery of temporary or staged interventions will be critical. Examples of these include:

- Low cost items or activities that can be mobilised and implemented quickly
- May be able to be delivered within general operational budgets or labour force
- Provided as an interim measure that will achieve a more immediate, similar desired effect/outcome or longer term solution
- May be used to test concepts and ideas with the desire to obtain community response and feedback
- May be a physical installation with a consistent or ongoing presence, but not designed or constructed as the ultimate built outcome (i.e. pop up landscaping)
- May be a temporary or movable physical installation with an irregular presence (i.e. markets or food trucks)

ACTION PLAN AND WHERE TO START

In the report 'the evolution of Australian towns' by the Australian Government, it concludes that a stronger focus on amenity and services are likely potential success factors for modern towns. This report has noted how through smarter planning supported by data and analysis, councils can plan for success.

Intuitively, locals and local councils and governments know their own areas, and know when something is wrong. We've provided a checklist below that identifies some actionable steps you can take.

1. Funding opportunities – Check with State Government to see if you're eligible for funding opportunities.
2. What can you do now? Assess opportunities that don't require copious amounts of money to implement, in other words, don't be distracted by doing nothing because of lack of funds. Think about what you can do now with what you have available. Permanent vs. Temporary solutions – get people used to it before you spend the money.
3. Start measuring and recording things about your town. Start with mapping vacancies and do this every few months to see if it is getting better or worse. Map shops by tenants and service offerings to see if the nature of services in a town is changing, and map extent of awnings, shade and foot path dining. That way you can more accurately determine where to next spend your money, based on mapped deficiencies.
4. Bring in some external consultants and business experts (but not designers). Start by better understanding your town and its competitive advantages, research unique or emerging tourism opportunities, engage with IT consultants to capacity build your businesses.
5. Explore Smart City solutions for your town and perhaps more importantly, where you have the NBN, make sure you and your businesses are exploiting and fully leveraging the opportunities that this will provide to not only existing businesses but also to attract new residents willing to work remotely or with 'online businesses' that can then enjoy the rural life.
6. Rethink your tourism strategy and if you have the benefit of being on a 'grey nomad route' leverage that. But if not, explore innovative tourism and event opportunities that leverage unique qualities of your towns, even if they don't seem 'sexy' or 'tourism-like' to you.
7. Explore new and different levers that council can pull. Be they governance and policy changes or branding and community led ground up strategies and solutions.
8. Research into the mega trends affecting your town or region and then develop responses to the opportunities and potential challenges created.

ABOUT US



Place Design Group is a leader in planning and design with a reputation for creative and commercial solutions. Australian owned and managed, our teams throughout Australia, China and South East Asia are dedicated to creating great places through service excellence, inspired leadership, and innovation. Through collaboration we emphasise an integrated approach for our clients, utilising services including landscape architecture, urban design, master planning, strategic planning, and development services. We recognize that by combining our creative talents with solid application and industry relationships, we can optimize our client offerings to deliver exceptional outcomes.

Our strategies provide an insight for authorities to establish commercially relevant priorities and provide an additional level of understanding and confidence for local governments to be implemented through planning and policy frameworks.

We can assist you with:

- Town centre strategies
- Mainstreet upgrades
- Economic development strategies
- Smart city/town projects
- Sport and recreation strategies
- Planning scheme reviews
- Master planning
- Grant and funding applications

Our dedicated strategic planning team are driven through industry partnerships, inspired leadership and innovation. We have developed research and practice in a niche area of planning, such as town centre revitalisation, big data, smart cities and future streets, bringing analytical and defensible consideration of data and metrics, along with commercial relativities, to strategic planning, master planning, and policy projects.

Our research of literature and best practice in the specific area of town centre revitalisation (strategies, controls, policies or theory) found a general focus on 'design' elements - building design, street design, place making and connectivity. Our work in centre analysis has provided leading advice for many local governments, both in metropolitan and regional contexts.

PEOPLE



CHRIS ISLES
NATIONAL EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF PLANNING

National Executive Director for Planning at Place Design Group, Chris Isles is a trusted advisor to the Australian government at all levels and private developers alike, and leads Urban Planning internationally across 8 offices throughout Australia, China and South East Asia. Chris Isles works at the intersection of planning, urban design, commercial viability and data science with his driving energy being the progression and recognition of the critical role that planners have in the cities of the future.

Awarded Australian Planner of the Year in 2015, and current member of the World Cities Summit Young Leaders Program, Chris is recognised for his work exploring and facilitating the relationships between commercial feasibility, big data, crowd sourcing and new technology uses within planning and cities. His focus is guided by the global imperative for the planning profession to respond, and keep ahead of the global urbanisation trend to ensure that the future of cities for people is not lost during rapid urbanisation.

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RUTH FRETTINGHAM
PRINCIPAL,
STRATEGIC PLANNING

Ruth is the Principal (Strategic Planning) at Place Design Group and has over 20 years' experience in all aspects of urban and regional planning for NSW. She has held senior positions in the NSW Government, including five years providing advice to regional councils, and brings an in-depth understanding of policy-making, metropolitan planning and government processes. A highly-experienced leader and strategic thinker, Ruth has specialist knowledge and skills relating to the Sydney Harbour and precinct planning of significant

state foreshores. Ruth is an effective communicator and thinks creatively to develop solutions for challenging planning issues. Ruth's ability to clearly articulate technical and complex planning information has had a pivotal role in preparation of visionary, place-based strategies and delivery programs. She is passionate about influencing public policy for better outcomes through her involvement in the Committee for Sydney and the NSW Policy Subcommittee of the Planning Institute of Australia.

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AMANDA TAYLOR
PLANNING LEAD

Amanda is a Planning Lead at Place Design Group with 9 years' of experience across a variety of statutory and strategic planning projects. She is a proficient project manager with a demonstrated track record in all aspects of project delivery and execution. As a capable and effective communicator she has specific skills in developing and managing communication strategies, project implementation and various forms of facilitating stakeholder engagement.

Amanda is a strategist and regularly applies her extensive knowledge of environmental and planning legislation in the development of statutory policy, preparation and execution of approval pathways and obtaining legislative approvals and compliance on behalf of her clients.

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STEPHEN SMITH
PRINCIPAL

A planner, urban designer and rugby coach, Stephen has experience in both Australia and the United Kingdom in master planning, urban design and strategic planning. He combines this with his extensive history in statutory planning in both the public and private sectors. Regional development has become a focus for Stephen particularly in the last few years. He has been engaged in a range of projects across Australia ranging

from city centre public realm guidelines, structure planning of large growth areas, preparation of planning scheme policies and guidelines for centres and infill development and development of building typologies.

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APPROACH

Our services can be compiled according to your budget and specific needs, and include:

1

Baseline Survey

- » Establish criteria
- » Demographic analysis
- » Location survey
- » Tenancy log and monitoring capacity building

2

Benchmarking

- » Best practice review
- » Scoring
- » Weighting

3

Economic Gaps and Opportunities Analysis

- » Economic drivers
- » Opportunities and gaps
- » Market forecasting
- » Retail competition assessment (partnered task)

Our strategic planning and intelligent design services are based on a simple process, that delivers highly effective, sustainable, integrated growth solutions for your town centre and main streets.

4

Analysis

- » Survey information
- » Scoring analysis
- » Spatial mapping
- » Findings and recommendations
- » Optional spatial mapping analysis

5

Implementation and intervention

- » Strategy / prioritisation
- » Criteria guidelines
- » Governance and funding models

6

Urban Design/ Landscape Architecture Implementation

- » Public realm improvements
- » Street scape works
- » Art and identity

7

Activation events

- » Innovative engagement activities to promote and activate your space
- » Capacity building for on-going facilitation

**YOU MIGHT HAVE WORKED
OUT BY NOW, WE LIKE TO
THINK A LITTLE OUTSIDE THE
SQUARE**

**MAYBE IT'S NOT JUST
THE STRATEGY AND
IMPLEMENTATION PLAN
THAT'S IMPORTANT?**

**WE BELIEVE THAT
THE STRATEGY AND
IMPLEMENTATION PLANS MAY
BE A RACE HALF RUN.**

**THE FINAL LEG, IS TURNING A
STRATEGY INTO OUTCOMES,
GETTING TRACTION IN THE
MARKET AND BUILDING REAL
MOMENTUM.**

**THIS REQUIRES EDUCATION,
COMMUNICATION,
DECISION MAKING AND
IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS.**

THIS IS WHERE ALL GOOD RACES ARE WON.



If you would like to know more about how Place Design Group can assist you in revitalising your town centre or main streets, we invite you to contact our dedicated teams:

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design
group.

Australia
China
South East Asia

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