Submission
Mount Barker District Council response to the development of a Regional Development Strategy - 26 July, 2019

This submission has been prepared in response to the issues and questions posed by the State Government’s Discussion Paper regarding the development of a Regional Development Strategy. The submission is subject to approval by Council on 5 August 2019.

Mount Barker is undergoing significant change and over the next 30 years, with population growth, the town of Mount Barker will become a city – the second largest in South Australia behind the City of Adelaide. By 2049, the population of the district will be more than 60,000 with 45,000 of these in Mount Barker itself and the remainder in the rest of the district – in total an additional 30,000 residents.

Mount Barker has the population growth that other regions may wish for and the conveniences of the capital city close by. However, with growth comes many challenges and it is important to have a vision for our district so that it grows in a way that provides high quality of life to our residents, an innovative place for our business community to prosper, a vibrant place for our visitors to enjoy and a much smaller environmental footprint.

We are striving for a sustainable, healthy and smart city and, as the city grows, we are also looking to increase our containment rates so that more people can work and get education and training opportunities close to home.

Mount Barker District Council has a positive relationship with the State Government and is an enthusiastic partner in the Regional Development Australia (RDA) Adelaide Hills Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island (Hills and Coast) region. Council works closely with neighbour councils and the RDA Hills and Coast on regional level projects and collaborates with Murraylands RDA on cross-regional issues.

Council has a strong track record of partnering with private and public entities for community benefit. Examples include the recycled water pipeline from Mount Barker to Callington (partnering with Hillgrove Resources) and more recently the community indoor sports centre (partnering with St Francis de Sales College).

Council has also supported the Australian Gas Networks proposal for a natural gas pipeline from Murray Bridge to Mount Barker, recognising the opportunities and benefits that this would offer to businesses and residents in the region.

Council also has a strong and evolving relationship with our First Nations people and see collaboration with the Peramangk as fundamental to the future development of the region.

Council appreciates that Government is considering what the most suitable investment model is, in order to provide an environment that supports improved business and investor confidence in regional South Australia as well as attractive and vibrant communities for people to live in.

Mount Barker District Council welcomes the opportunity to influence the development of a Regional Development Strategy within this context and with the aim of improving the delivery
of services and infrastructure for the betterment of our region and state. Our submission is based on issues faced by this Council and its surrounding region, organised under key headings.

**Regional Transport Needs**

Council was the major funding partner in the recent Adelaide Hills - Fleurieu Peninsula Regional Public Transport Study. The main findings from the study were that public transport services to the region are inadequate and, importantly, public transport is currently not supporting economic growth in the region.

The study identified the significant underfunding of public transport in SA and reviewed the potential to build a rail link from the Adelaide CBD to Mount Barker. A fast rail link would be a catalyst infrastructure development that would stimulate a myriad of regional benefits and warrants further investigation.

Other specific issues identified in the study are highlighted below:

- Except for during the peak periods to and from Adelaide CBD, the frequency of bus services is generally very low or not available, and consequently most bus services are poorly patronised.
- Network coverage is only good in the Adelaide to Mount Barker corridor, but elsewhere throughout the region, in the towns and between towns, it is very poor.
- Park n Ride capacity is significantly exceeded in the Adelaide Hills and in Mount Barker.
- There are issues with fare inequity with different metro and regional fares throughout the region and with ticketing systems that are not integrated.
- There is poor integration between service providers.
- Public transport information on the websites, signage, at visitor information centres and in tourist information is incomplete, poor quality and not integrated.
- The amenity and the access to bus stops is generally poor and not attractive.
- Population growth and changing demographics will create more issues for transport with public transport as a poor alternative for choice users.

The study can be accessed here [Adelaide Hills and Fleurieu Peninsula Regional Public Transport Study](#).

Council is also working in partnership with the State Government on the timely delivery of required transport infrastructure to cater for growth.

This includes the upgrading of portions of the arterial road network and the Adelaide Road freeway interchange at Mount Barker, the delivery of the Mount Barker growth area connector road (Heysen Boulevard), additional park and rides, addressing freeway connectivity near Hahndorf and overcoming Hahndorf Main Street congestion arising from freight and other traffic.

**Council's submission:** The Regional Development Strategy should consider how public transport infrastructure and services can better facilitate regional and economic development outcomes.
Regional action on climate change

Resilient Hills & Coast is a regional, intergovernmental partnership aiming to strengthen the climate resilience of our communities, economies and natural and built environments.

The partnership includes six councils, including Mount Barker, two Natural Resource Management Boards, the Southern and Hills LGA, and the South Australian Government. Together, we have delivered on-ground projects as well as cultural change to embed climate considerations in everyday decision-making. Two current projects are Where We Build / What We Build and Community Energy.

The objective of the **Where We Build / What We Build** project is to provide evidence for, and encourage the development of, disaster resilient and climate-ready homes for the Resilient Hills & Coasts region to encourage the development of a resilient and sustainable built environment into the future. Future proofing the built form in the face of a changing climate is essential for resilience and prosperity.

The **Community Energy** project has multiple objectives especially relevant to the economic and social wellbeing of the region. As energy prices continue to rise, communities and Councils are looking to community energy as a means of cutting living costs while taking climate action. But in the rapidly evolving energy sector, a clear path is not always visible. It can take significant investment to establish a working model that complies with market regulations and minimises exposure to financial, legal and governance risks. If successfully delivered, the proposed regional energy procurement model could provide that clear path – and be rapidly and economically replicated across the entire local government sector. We are exploring this initiative because Councils and our communities have a stake in the economic, social and environmental outcomes of energy transition.

**Council’s submission:** Climate action, including adaptation and greenhouse gas mitigation, and identifying the opportunities and risk that come from both the changing climate and a carbon constrained economy, should be deeply embedded within the regional development strategy.

Education and innovation

Council’s Strategic Plan emphasises the relevance and importance of a learning community to the future sustainability and wellbeing of the district and Council is actively pursuing opportunities that will see this vision realised. Strategies include:

− Engaging with institutions, government and the private sector to develop education and learning facilities
− Promoting a culture of positive education and learning throughout the community; and
− Providing opportunities for residents to participate in learning and engagement

A priority identified in Council’s economic development strategy is attracting a university presence in Mount Barker as the first stage in fostering an ‘innovation ecosystem’ where, ultimately, a co-created niche innovation district could establish.
As a discreet, small but growing city, close to Adelaide, there is an opportunity in Mount Barker to progress an economy that combines work, education, housing, recreation and lifestyle underpinned by a supportive and future thinking community and a collaborative approach between Council, the tertiary sector, State and Federal Government and the business community.

**Council’s submission:** Education and innovation needs to be at the forefront of the Regional Development strategy as the key to developing opportunities in the existing and emerging economy. Council seeks to partner with the State and Federal government and the private sector to achieve this goal.

**Enabling the new economy – delivery of metropolitan standard broadband services**

The future prosperity of our communities is increasingly tied to technology infrastructure, literacy and related opportunities.

The internet, smartphones, social media, information sharing, ecommerce and the roll-out of the NBN is offering significant opportunities, enabling new channels for service delivery, business process improvement, community consultation, innovation and economic development.

However, business grade broadband services in the Mount Barker CBD are limited to a small number of providers and costs are prohibitive, which is a limiting factor for the development of new business opportunities and innovation. Council is considering how it can facilitate increased capacity and infrastructure for internet services.

**Council’s submission:** Provision of high speed internet services to enable a Gig City economy is identified as a priority for Mount Barker. The Regional Development strategy must consider equitable and affordable access to these services as critical enablers to the new economy.

**Youth engagement**

The Mount Barker district is a dynamic, growing and vibrant place, home to more than 10,900 young people and this number is growing. Mount Barker District Council is committed to be a “child friendly community” in its strategic plan 2035 and will support children and young people in our district aged 0-25 years to be the best they can be and to actively engage with their community.

To deliver Council’s commitment to being a child friendly community we must listen to, engage with and respond to children and young people. Active participation is achieved when young people:
- Are authentically involved in shaping decision-making
- Are connected to their local community
- Have opportunities to participate and feel their participation is valued and considered
- Share and develop skills and knowledge

Council supports youth engagement through its Child and Youth Action Plan.

**Council’s submission:** Youth engagement through active participation is critical to the health, wellbeing and liveability of the Mount Barker district for young people. The Regional Development strategy must consider youth engagement and new options and opportunity for young people.
Mount Barker Regional Hub
To support the growth of the community, Council has made a number of strategic land purchases over the last 10 years, which seeks to address the issue that no open space was provisioned within the 2010 Ministerial rezoning of 1300HA in Mount Barker.

The largest of these sites is the Regional Hub, over 38HA of land that in time will accommodate a range of sporting, recreational, community, accommodation and commercial uses as part of a coordinated and master planned precinct.

Council’s strategy with this precinct is to leverage through sale and leasing of land, revenue that enables Council to invest in the significant upfront and on-going costs of providing significant community infrastructure.

Two examples of this infrastructure are the regional sports hub and indoor aquatic and leisure centre.

Regional sports hub
Council is embarking on a significant greenfield site development to provide regional level Cricket, Australian Rules Football, Football (soccer), Tennis and Netball facilities to address some of the existing and forecast gaps in sports facilities within the region.

Construction of stage 1 is due to commence in Spring 2019 and will include two football pitches, a full size senior oval and supporting amenity and change room facilities. This is a significant investment that establishes Mount Barker as the regional home for Cricket, Australian Rules Football and Football (soccer). Future stages will be developed as the population continues to grow, as the need for additional facilities arise and as the funding capacity of Council allows.

Mount Barker Regional Indoor Aquatic and Leisure Centre
Council’s existing aquatic facility is over 60 years old and no-longer meets the needs of the community. It fails to meet contemporary standards and expectations and is not an efficient business model, highlighted by its high costs and the fact that it is outdoors and not suited to the hills climate, resulting in relatively low attendance levels.

A new indoor facility is proposed, which will eventually service a catchment of over 100,000 and will be the regional home for aquatics for the Adelaide Hills Region. The facility will include a 25 x 10 lane pool, learn to swim and leisure pool, a warm water therapy pool and provision for future waterslides, expanded leisure facilities and outdoor 50m pool.

Aside from the physical health and safety benefits, a new aquatic facility provides valuable social engagement opportunities for community and is an essential piece of infrastructure, serving a broad cross-section of users, from toddlers through to the elderly.

Council requires the assistance of State and Federal Government to deliver this facility however will take the lead on design, community advocacy and will also seek to partner with the private sector to explore a range of alternative funding avenues.
Economic and Social Development through Recycled Water
Council has the largest local government run wastewater treatment facility in the State, currently supplying approximately 1.2 GL of recycled water to horticultural and mining activities, the Laratinga Wetlands and parks and gardens.

As the district population continues to increase, the volume of recycled water available will grow significantly. Forecast recycled water supply capacity will increase from 1.6 GL in 2020/21 to over 3.6 GL by 2045/46 and ultimately just in excess of 4 GL per annum.

Council’s objective is to maximise the productive use of recycled water to deliver economic, environmental and social benefits.

Studies undertaken have demonstrated that there is significant potential to expand the current recycled water precinct within the Callington region using the existing council owned recycled water main that runs from Mount Barker to Callington.

This expansion will require significant capital investment in new recycled water storage and augmentation infrastructure.

Council continues to work with a range of key stakeholders that include Regional Development Australia – Adelaide Hills, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island, Primary Industries and Regions SA, SA Water, Hillgrove Resources, AGL and a number of privately owned entities that operate large scale businesses such as the growing cherries and apples.

Given the favourable climatic and soil conditions, there is strong interest in developing additional production for export to overseas markets.

The proximity to Monarto is a further advantage of the Callington location, providing the opportunity for cold storage and value adding processing facilities.

The proposed pumped hydro energy storage project as announced by AGL is another exciting opportunity that would require substantial recycled water initially and subsequently in order to replace evaporation loss.
Circular economy initiatives such as these would considerably strengthen the regional economy and provide significant benefits for the community, including growth in the agriculture and horticulture industries with direct new employment (both full-time and seasonal) and flow on jobs in production and processing, including for export markets.

**Council’s submission:** Circular economy opportunities, such as those available through the treatment and reuse of wastewater, are pivotal to building a sustainable and resilient regional economy. The regional development strategy should identify and provide clear pathways in order that circular economy opportunities can be progressed including via implementation partnerships.

**Mount Barker Town Centre Catalyst Development**

An opportunity exists for Council to leverage its role as a large anchor tenant to act as a catalyst for significant mixed use and civic development within the Mount Barker City Centre, fulfilling a key objective of its Town Centre Strategy to facilitate improved civic facilities in the CBD. Council is open to partnering with the private sector and State and Federal Government to realise significant development within this precinct. From a civic perspective, this may include a new library, enterprise hub, town square and office accommodation.

Council welcomes and has received interest from the private sector in helping to realise this scale of development, recognising that Council does not have the capacity to lead and fund such a development.

Key outcomes from such a project are not limited to the development itself, but in bringing a level of confidence to the market that investment of this scale is feasible and permissible within the City Centre and that it is critical to achieving the desired employment targets set within Council’s Economic Development Strategy.

Associated with this objective comes the need to upgrade infrastructure to a level that is befitting a regional centre. Council is undertaking the preparation of a business case for the retrospective provision of a full sewer service to the town centre given the current council service is a community wastewater management system which requires on-site septic tanks.

**Council’s submission:** Council is openly engaging with the private sector to develop civic facilities, recognising this approach can limit Council’s capital expenditure, whilst leveraging private capacity to fund and develop projects of significant scale. The Regional Development strategy must consider the importance of partnerships with the private sector and how Government can leverage this to deliver community and economic outcomes.