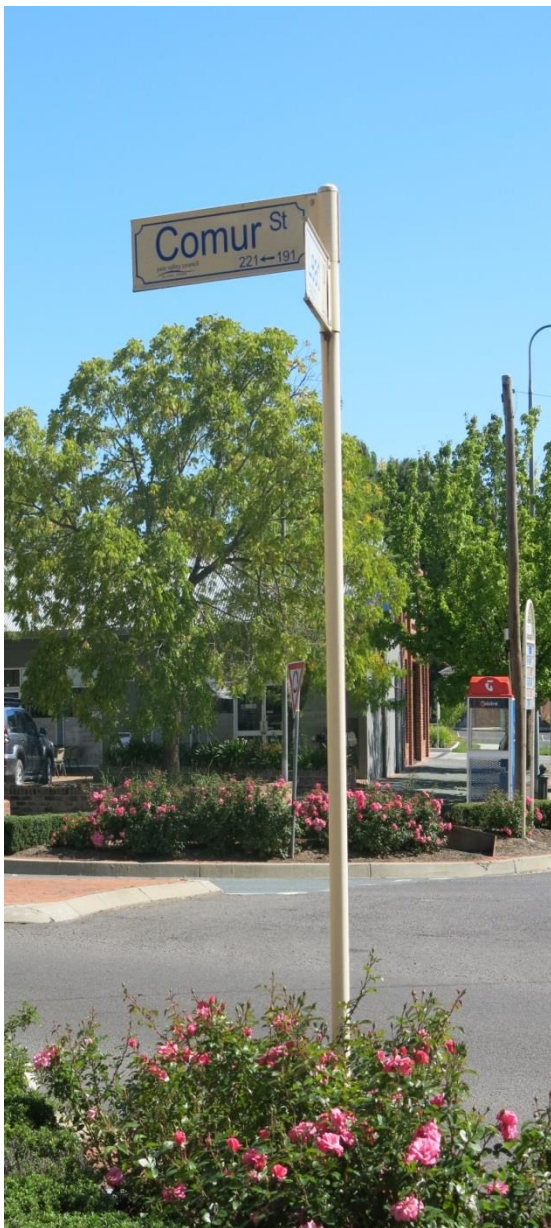


YASS MAIN STREET STRATEGY



“To create a main street that is vibrant and economically prosperous”



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Background

Prior to the construction of the bypass in 1995 Yass was unofficially known as 'the truck-stop on the highway' with a large volume of traffic passing through the town on a daily basis. The removal of highway-through traffic has changed the feeling and function of the town with a greater proportion of visitors being local residents or tourists who come to shop and do business in the town.

When the Yass bypass was built a business plan was developed to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the main street area and develop strategies to take advantage of new opportunities.

The core themes of that Plan were:

Organisation - bringing together diverse groups, including local government and community representatives

Design – improving the physical appearance of the town centre

Heritage Conservation – capitalising on the unique local character and recognising the importance of heritage as a part of everyday experiences

Business Development - strengthening existing businesses and creating new opportunities for growth

Promotion – marking the town centre to visitors and locals through special events and promotion of retail services

The key outcome from the 1995 Plan was a program of painting, installation of historical plaques and the reinstatement of several shop-front verandahs. The presentation of the main street was further improved by Council reconstructing the street surface and creating the street gardens.

Nearly 20 years later these same themes are still important in updating and improving the Yass main street.

The long term goal identified in the Community Strategic Plan 2013-2030 is to have main streets that are attractive, clean and pedestrian friendly with a range of outdoor dining options to choose from.

This strategy and the associated action plan is the first step towards meeting that goal.



Sustainability Implications

Social The enhancement of the Yass Main St will provide significant social benefits for residents and visitors to Yass Valley and will provide an improved sense of civic pride.

Economic The enhancement of the Yass Main St will provide significant economic benefits to businesses in Yass and provide a catalyst for attracting new business and residents to Yass Valley.

Environment Proposed improvements will need to be considered in the context of their long term environmental impact.

Scope of the Strategy

For the purpose of this Strategy the main street is defined as that section of Comur Street between Browne Street and Riverbank Park extending into the cross streets to the extent of existing commercial development.

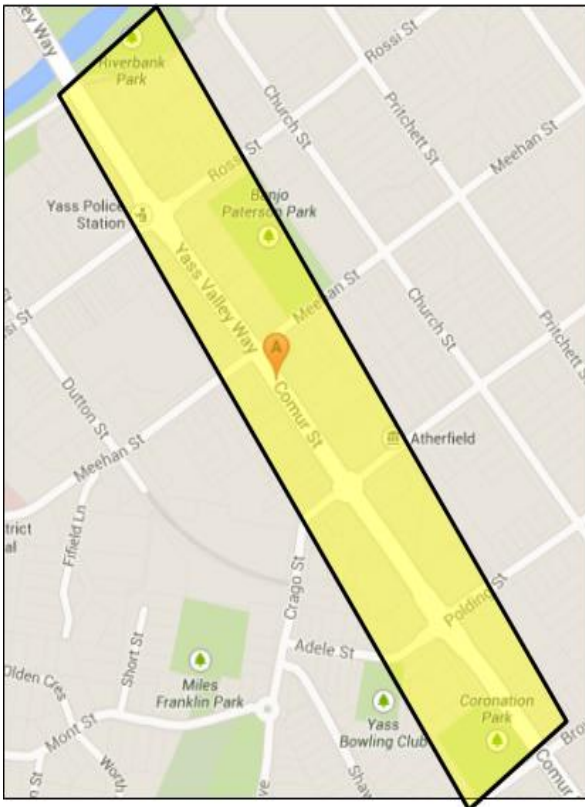


Figure 1 Scope of the Strategy

The Strategy addresses the following elements.

Functionality

- ✓ Vehicle and pedestrian traffic flows efficiently and safely
- ✓ Sufficient and accessible car parking is provided
- ✓ The 'public realm' is positive and attractive
- ✓ All sites in the main street precinct are occupied and active with a variety of shops, businesses and services
- ✓ Main street is access friendly
- ✓ Retail businesses are prosperous

Built Form and Presentation

- ✓ Building facades improve the aesthetic appeal of the main street
- ✓ Heritage buildings and features are protected and maintained
- ✓ The streetscape is attractive and well maintained



Heritage Values

Yass Town was formally gazetted in 1837. Many of the services established in Yass and its associated wealth were linked with people travelling on the Port Phillip Road between Sydney and Melbourne – later to become the Hume Highway. Buildings within the main street – particularly civic buildings such as the courthouse and post office and the numerous banks reflect the profile and prosperity of the town as a stopover en route to the goldfields at Kiandra and Lambing Flat.

Little remains of the very early 'main street' fabric, as the floods in 1870 washed away most of the original settlement around Warrambulah Street and as a result future commercial development relocated to and focussed on higher ground in Comur, Dutton and Rossi Streets. The Old Rose Inn (21 Comur St) and Cobblestone Cottage (15 Comur Street) are two of the few remaining buildings dating from this period.

The predominant building styles within the main street today are Victorian and Georgian which reflects the early wealth and status of the town. Following this period of prosperity, the Yass economy suffered during the Great Depression and World War II, and accordingly there are few examples of inter-war buildings, however the exceptions are the Soldiers Memorial Hall, Allambee Club and Liberty Theatre. The scale of the buildings is predominantly one and two storey, with the Liberty Theatre and Post Office tower being three storey in height.



The removal of many of the balconies/verandahs occurred during the 1950-60's as a result of requests both by the Chamber of Commerce and some of the Alderman on the former Municipal Council at the time. There was significant opposition from owners, the community and from the National Trust, particularly following the complete loss of verandahs in other NSW towns. In 1969 a newly elected Council resolved not to force any further removals, and thus some original balconies and verandahs remain.



Council now offers a number of heritage related services including free advice from a qualified heritage advisor, heritage grants program and local trades directory. A comprehensive development control plan (DCP) is being prepared which will include recommendations and requirements for maintenance and development related to heritage sites.

Options for installing interpretative signage and accompanying information to describe the history of the Yass main street will be explored. These signs would enhance the tourism and heritage value of the main street area.

To improve community awareness and knowledge of heritage values we will be hosting seminars on a range of topics as part of the implementation of this Strategy. Members of the community will be invited to suggest topics of interest.

Community Engagement

The development of the main street strategy involved comprehensive community engagement to ensure that community priorities and values are reflected in the actions taken to improve the main street.

Research Survey

In October 2013 a community research survey was conducted to test resident satisfaction with Council services as well as their experiences living in Yass Valley. A number of the questions were tailored to provide input to the Main St Strategy.

The key issues identified by the survey which directly relate to the main street were:

- improving aged, disability and youth services;
- balancing infrastructure with population growth.

The survey also showed that residents were generally satisfied with the aesthetics and infrastructure in the main street of Yass.

Key Stakeholders

Targeted engagement strategies were developed for a number of key stakeholder groups including:

- Yass Valley Council staff
- Yass Valley Councillors
- Business owners and managers in the main street area
- Building owners in the main street area
- Yass Valley Tourism committee
- Yass Valley Business Chamber
- Yass high school students
- Yass Valley Access committee
- Emergency services agencies

Most of these groups participated in a structured discussion which focussed on three questions:

1. *What do you like most about the main street?*
2. *What do you think needs the most improvement?*
3. *How would you like to see the main street functioning in 20 years?*

The most common responses to Question 1 were:

- Heritage features including verandahs, hitching posts and lampposts
- Gardens
- Free parking
- Wide streets
- Compact and 'walkable' design
- Variety of unique shops
- Flags

The most common responses to Question 2 were:

- Pedestrian access/crossings
- Old, outdated signage
- Run-down and empty buildings
- Inconsistency of building standards/window displays
- Public toilets

Across all sessions the most common themes were a desire to retain the heritage and 'country' feel of the town centre while upgrading and restoring old buildings to meet contemporary needs. Several groups identified that pedestrian access across Comur Street was a problem with various solutions suggested on how this could be addressed. There was also a focus on parking within the main street with various issues identified and varying opinions on what is needed.

In the long term most respondents wanted to see the Yass Main Street become a bustling social hub for the local community and visitors. The main street should provide a variety of services and shopping experiences which are unique to Yass and encourage community interaction.

Community Feedback

The broader community also had the opportunity to provide feedback through a survey which asked the same three questions as above plus questions on when and why respondents visited the main street. The survey was available electronically through the Yass Valley Council website and facebook page and hard copies were distributed to local business and community centres.

A total of 85 completed surveys were received. The majority of respondents stated that they predominantly visited the main street during the week for everyday type shopping and to use services such as banks and the post office.

Similar to the results from the workshops, survey respondents identified heritage values and gardens as being the best features of the Yass main street. The compact size of the main street was also highlighted as a key advantage.

Key areas for improvement were again:

- Availability and awareness of parking
- Pedestrian safety
- Cleanliness of the footpath
- Accessibility
- Outdoor eating facilities
- Vacant/poorly maintained buildings

Q3 When/why do you come to the main street? (please tick as many as apply)

Answered: 76 Skipped: 0



Actions & Recommendations

Based on the results of the community engagement process a series of actions and recommendations were identified across 4 priority areas:

- Streetscape
- Business mix
- Building maintenance
- Events and festivals

Streetscape

Trees and Gardens

The community consultation identified trees and gardens as one of the most popular aspects of the Yass main street.

A garden Masterplan will be created based on a mix of perennial shrubs and roses, complemented with seasonally appropriate annual plants. Options for incorporating public art into the garden design will form part of the Masterplan. These plans will provide visual definition to the main street precinct along a consistent theme.

A concept plan has been received for a large pelargonium display to be constructed in the main street. Council will consider this proposal when creating the garden masterplan.



Footpaths

Council ceased regular washing of the Comur Street footpaths when water restrictions were

implemented during the drought of 2002. The upgrade to the Yass Dam in 2013 has significantly increased the capacity of the Yass water supply thus provides an opportunity for regular cleaning options to be considered. Investigations into options for purchase, hire or contract of a footpath cleaning machine have begun and will consider the cost-effectiveness and environmental impact of cleaning alternatives.

Opportunities to incorporate artwork based on a historical theme into the footpaths will be explored with the public art committee.

A new footpath is scheduled to be built on Browne Street between Comur and Shaw streets in 2014-15. Reconstruction of the footpath on Comur Street between Browne and Polding streets is scheduled for 2016-17. These upgrades will improve pedestrian access, reduce traffic speed and enhance the main street precinct streetscape with new tree plantings and garden beds.

A review of existing and potential outdoor dining areas will be conducted and alternatives for approved use of the footpath for outdoor dining will be explored.

Public Art

Council has formed a Public Art Committee which will be consulted on public art projects that may form part of this Strategy.

Pedestrian access

Pedestrian access around and across the main street was identified as a key priority in the long term vision for the Yass main street. Based on the strength of community feedback regarding pedestrian crossings, a concept plan for a pedestrian crossing area, incorporating the impact on parking, will be developed for community consultation.

An access audit of buildings in the main street has also been conducted and the Access Committee will create a grant process to provide funding to upgrade access to priority buildings. Building owners will also be able to access heritage grant funding for improving

access where the funding will enable the protection of heritage fabric.

Parking

Many community members highlighted the ability to park close to local shops as a key attraction of the main street.

The two key concerns regarding parking were identified as business owners parking for long periods in front of their own premises and awareness of additional parking areas. The Yass Business Chamber will undertake a campaign to encourage business owners to park elsewhere. An assessment of available parking in the main street precinct is underway to identify the need and possible location for additional parking.

Options for improving signage will also be explored.

The need to provide parking can be a major economic barrier to new development in the main street precinct. The current policy on provision of off-street policy requires that off street parking be provided for new developments and if existing buildings undergo major changes. The policy will be reviewed to determine if changes are needed to clarify when parking must be provided.



Furniture

Community consultation identified the need for additional street furniture and to consider the location of furniture in regards to access for persons with disabilities.

Street furniture should be in keeping with and enhance the heritage streetscape. It should be of a consistent design and theme which is durable, graffiti-resistant and comfortable, and selected in consultation with Council's Heritage Advisor. The Access Committee will be consulted on the location of street furniture.

It has been suggested that street furniture should be located away from the building line to provide assistance for those with visual impairments.



Lighting and hitching posts

The original gas street lamps in Comur Street were replaced with electric lighting in 1927. It is understood that the lamp currently located in front of the Yass Museum was made in 1927 to celebrate the coming of electricity to the town. It was previously located in front of the Soldiers Memorial Hall until it was relocated to make way for the war memorial stone. Reproduction 'heritage style' street lamps were installed in Comur Street in 1994 following the repaving of the footpaths. It is recommended that these, along with the reproduction bollards, be refinished.

The existing overhead streetlights are operated by Essential Energy and Council has no ability to control lighting or banners using this infrastructure. Options for alternative heritage style street lights which include the ability for Council to erect banners, seasonal lighting displays and hanging flower baskets will be explored.

There are original hitching posts outside the banks and the courthouse which should be maintained and preserved. Information on the hitching posts could be included in any interpretative signage.

Business Mix

The main street area of Yass is host to a diverse mix of businesses and services including accommodation, dining establishments, hair and beauty, health, retail and government offices. Retail space in the main street is fairly tightly held with only a few vacant premises at any one time. The goal of the main street strategy is to enhance the main street with a mix of unique speciality shops which attract visitors.

Accommodation	2
Café's, Restaurants and Pubs	13
Community	1
Childcare services	1
Government services	5
Hair and Beauty	9
Health	8
Professional services (incl. banks)	20
Media	1
Retail	41

The stakeholder engagement process identified a 'wish list' of businesses which residents would like to see in the Main Street including:

- Inexpensive 'youth' clothing shops
- Kebab shop
- music store
- book store
- games store/arcade
- health food shop
- fruit and vegetable shop
- sports store
- tattoo/piercing parlour
- juice/smoothie bar
- movie theatre
- bakery
- restaurant
- speciality café

To encourage and facilitate the attraction and retention of new and existing businesses to the Yass Main Street Council will:

- Develop a business 'welcome kit' which will provide advice for new and existing business on planning and development rules, key contacts and answers to frequently asked questions.
- Seek funding to develop an 'Invest Yass' brochure
- Participate in SEROC economic development strategies such as the Capital Living website
- Explore opportunities for small business training and development program

Building Maintenance

Tie-rod awnings

There are 30 buildings in the main street precinct which have awnings commonly known as 'tie-rod' awnings. These awnings are suspended from the face of the building and are not supported from the ground. Safety issues with this type of awnings have been identified as a result of several serious awning collapses elsewhere in NSW. In response the NSW Department of Local Government has recommended that all awnings be assessed for structural soundness and that local councils implement programs to address awareness of potential safety concerns and implement strategies to avoid the risk of collapse.

Council has assessed all buildings in the main street which have these types of awnings and commissioned a report into the potential options from a heritage and engineering perspective.

Council is considering commissioning two alternative designs for verandah post style awnings to replace the existing tie-rod awnings. Council could provide pre-approved designs and engineering plans for the replacement awnings to building owners. The benefit of this solution is that a level of

consistency is achieved along the main street and building owners are saved the time and expense of commissioning their own plans.

Painting and other building renovations

There are a number of buildings in the main street which require repainting and restoration including the removal of old, redundant signage.

Council has determined that the best strategy to encourage building owners to improve their building maintenance is to demonstrate best practice to ensure Council owned assets are maintained to a high standard and other improvements to the streetscape are made. For building owners wishing to undertake painting or other maintenance works, Council will continue to offer free advice from a qualified heritage consultant. The Yass Valley Council Minor Works Policy also allows for certain building maintenance activities to be undertaken without development consent.

Building owners in the Yass main street precinct will be considered for priority funding under the Local Heritage Grants Program for 2014-15. The Heritage Advisor will design a recommended paint scheme for key buildings. Building owners will be contacted and provided with advice on how to access the grant funding, their individual recommended (but not compulsory) paint scheme, advice on the process for getting project approval and a list of qualified tradespeople in the local area. It is proposed that the fee for constructing scaffolding within a road reserve be waived for these projects.

Under-utilised buildings

Although the majority of retail and office space in the main street is occupied there are several prominent vacant or under-utilised properties.

Council will continue to provide heritage planning advice to the owners of these buildings as is currently available to all building owners. If, at the completion of Council's own works to upgrade the Main Street streetscape and Council assets it is

assessed that these buildings are in need of further renovation Council will consider whether it is appropriate to undertake these works themselves with an appropriate debt placed on the land.

Liberty Theatre

The Liberty Theatre was designed by Guy Crick and Bruce Furse who are considered Australia's most important cinema designers. The theatre was built in 1939 and was very advanced for the time with heating, cooling and even facilities for patrons with hearing aids. The theatre closed in 1974 and since then the space has primarily been used for retail and office space with occasional music and live theatre events held in a smaller area of the theatre.



The owner is currently seeking interest in the acquisition of the theatre by the community. Community ownership is supported by Council and would create more opportunity to acquire grant funding for restoration works.

Council will provide normal assistance with development queries and heritage consultation services to any proponent wishing to redevelop the Liberty Theatre.

Commercial Hotel

The largest and most prominent disused building is the Commercial Hotel which has existed since at least 1849. The hotel is one of only three remaining inns from the approximately 22 known inn and hotel sites in Yass. The building contains a number of interesting features including iron lace

columns on the upper verandah and a sandstone basement.

Due to safety and licensing concerns the hotel stopped trading in 2005 and since then has remained vacant. The site is for sale however the vendors have received limited interest. As a result the building has fallen into a state of disrepair. In 2013 a series of murals were painted to cover the front of the building which depict historical scenes from the local area. This has improved the street level impression of the building however it is still a large area of empty space in the centre of town.

The building is within the conservation area, therefore approval must be sought prior to any demolition or building works commencing.

Council will continue to encourage the owners to develop future plans for the site.

32 Comur St

This site was used as a service station from circa 1950 until 1997. Since then it has been used as office and retail space. The building also has a dwelling on the first floor. There are a number of potential contamination issues with the site due to the presence of old fuel bowsers and tanks. The current owner had previously submitted plans to repaint the site and sought funding to do so. However, this was not successful and thus the building remains in need of significant maintenance.

53-55 Comur St

This site was operated as a car dealership and workshop from at least 1953. It is now occupied by a second hand furniture store. After several years of neglect and concern from other local business owners the building has recently been repainted. However the site remains under-utilised with the furniture business occupying only a portion of the building and the concrete apron largely unused except for a small area for display of goods for sale.

A valuation carried out over 10 years ago was unable to confirm whether the site had been decommissioned. At that time, there was some surface contamination (oil) around the oil/water separator at the rear of the workshop. The valuer's recommended a full environmental audit to confirm the status of the site.

209 Comur St - Proposed Civic Precinct

Council owns 1.1 hectares between Comur Street and Adele Street including the site of the current Council offices at 209 Comur Street. At the community consultation about the main street several groups raised the issue of the poor streetscape image provided by the frontage to Comur Street of this site. The site was considered to be underutilised and redevelopment would provide the opportunity for additional commercial space and provide a stimulus for further activity in the main street.

The site is comprised of 9 allotments which have hosted a mix of uses including: commercial (restaurant, butcher, bakery and shops), a service station/car dealership, offices, carriageway, and recreation (former pool pre 1960's and tennis courts). The site also includes the heritage listed Crago's Mill building which is currently vacant.



Council has undertaken preliminary site assessments to assess the suitability of the site for redevelopment. The proposed redevelopment is likely to include new Council

offices as well as commercial and community space. Concept plans are currently being developed for consultation with the community.

Building Access and Safety

Most of the buildings in the Yass main street precinct were constructed well before mandatory building codes existed and thus often do not comply with modern fire, safety and access requirements. Currently when a change of use or development application is made on these buildings there is a requirement to upgrade fire and safety measures to meet minimum standards.

The potential conflict between historical values and modern building codes has been well recognised both within Australia and globally. To ensure a balance is achieved between these two goals, Council will compile a list of available resources including heritage advisors and fire consultants to help building

owners meet the requirements cost-effectively.

Main Street Events and Festivals

The main street area of Yass plays host to a number of festivals and special events during the year.

These events are an important part of the community and cultural identity of Yass.

Continuing and expanding these events will meet the desires of the community for the main street to be a centre of community and cultural activity.

The community consultation also identified a desire for an expanded program of festive lighting and decoration for Christmas and other celebrations. Council will consider the ability to host banners and festive lighting in the review of street lighting which is currently underway.

Strategy Implementation

The Action Plan will be finalised to identify key actions, milestones and key performance indicators to meet the objectives of the main street strategy.

