As a resident of the Burdekin Shire, you are invited to participate in the development of our Community Plan.

Please take this opportunity to contribute to our shared vision for the Burdekin as we move forward over the next 10 years.
The Local Government Act 2009 requires that all local governments in Queensland prepare a long-term community plan that:

- outlines the local government’s goals, strategies and policies for implementing the local government’s vision for the future of the local government area, during the period covered by the plan
- covers a period of at least 10 years after the commencement of the plan

Minimum requirements for the community plan and the community planning process are established in the Local Government (Finance, Plans and Reporting) Regulation 2010 (‘the Regulation’).

The community plan is developed in accordance with a comprehensive community engagement process and expresses the community’s vision, its aspirations and key priority areas.

The community plan provides the basis and context for:

- Council’s input to the regional planning process
- Council’s strategic land use planning and priority infrastructure planning in accordance with the Sustainable Planning Act 2009
- Council’s corporate plan
- Council’s long-term financial plan and sustainability strategy.

To develop the Burdekin Shire Community Plan, Council is undertaking the five phases described in the Regulation. The phases are:

- Intelligence Gathering
- Community Input
- Community Visioning
- Community Validation
- Council Policy

This summary paper is the result of the first phase - Intelligence Gathering - and, in addition to a series of focus group meetings and the formation of a Community Reference Group, the attached survey represents the second phase - Community Input. Council will use the feedback received during this phase to develop the Community Vision and a draft Community Plan, which will be made available for further feedback in the Community Validation phase. The final phase involves checking the community plan against Council’s other long-term planning documents and formal adoption of the final plan by Council.

Council’s planning framework, including the Community Plan, is shown below.
The Burdekin region is located in the heart of the Gudjuda nation – the largest nation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in North Queensland. Burdekin Shire acknowledges the traditional owners of the land, and pays respect to their past, present and future involvement in the development of the region.

First settled by Europeans in 1882, the town of Ayr was named by then Premier of Queensland, Sir Thomas McIlwraith, after his Scottish birthplace.

Large numbers of Italians migrated to the region to work in the sugar industry in the period following World War I to the 1930s, and again after World War II. Residents with Italian ancestry currently represent 17.6% of our population - a significantly higher percentage than Queensland (2.7%) and North Queensland (6.0%). The region is also home to Scottish, German, Greek and Spanish communities.

The Burdekin region is centred on the rich Burdekin River delta. Our water supply includes a huge underground aquifer, the mighty Burdekin River and the Burdekin Falls Dam, which holds four times more water than Sydney Harbour. This abundant, year-round supply of good quality water - the region’s number one asset - underpins the confidence that local farmers, business people, residents and investors have in this community. In addition to our vast water supplies, fertile soils and an average of 300 days of sunshine per year have resulted in the Burdekin becoming one of the strongest agricultural regions in Australia.

The main commercial centres of the region are the towns of Ayr and Home Hill with smaller centres of Brandon, Giru, Jerona, Alva, Wunjunga, Clare, Millaroo and Dalbeg.
Economic Development

Strengths

The Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing sector is the biggest employer in the Burdekin (21.8% of the workforce) and cropping represents 96.7% of all agricultural production (by value) in the Burdekin region.

The Burdekin is the most productive sugarcane growing area in Australia, with about 80,000 hectares of land dedicated to the crop. Burdekin farmers produce an average of 120 tonnes of cane per hectare – well above the national average of 80 tonnes per hectare.

The Burdekin also boasts strong fruit, vegetable, beef, commercial fishing and aquaculture industries with well established producers of mangoes, capsicums, zucchinis, corn, melons and prawns and emerging sectors including grains, cotton, legumes, achacha, grapes and cassava. Around 2500 hectares of land in the Burdekin is devoted to the commercial production of mangoes, with approximately 400,000 trees harvested each year and an estimated income of $40 million.

The Burdekin is also well situated in relation to nearby large scale mining and infrastructure projects.

Challenges

The top five key challenges for the Burdekin Shire were identified in the NQ3 Report, prepared in 2008.

They were:

- attracting more people to live locally
- an aging population
- retention of skilled workers
- retaining youth, and
- increasing community services and controlling costs.

The Burdekin has a higher average age than the Northern Statistical Division (NSD) and the population in the 45 to 85 age group is increasing at a faster rate than the NSD. The population in the 15 to 34 age group is declining significantly.

In 2020, for the first time ever, it is predicted that there will be less youth (residents aged <25) than residents aged 65+ in the Burdekin community. In order to maintain our current economic base and lifestyle (as at 2008), we need the 25 to 64 age group to grow by 9.7% over the next 20 years, however this age group is predicted to decline by 23.9% over that time period.

Opportunities

Several emerging investment opportunities have been recognised for the Burdekin Shire, including:

- sugar cane value adding (ethanol, fibre, juice),
- aquaculture,
- lifestyle business and industry,
- nature based tourism,
- agriculture (diversification and horticultural processing), and
- a regional farmers’ market

Council has recently approved a development application from a local cane grower for the construction of a $200 million ethanol and cogeneration plant.

Threats

Natural disasters, such as Tropical Cyclone Yasi (February 2011) and unseasonal record rainfalls in the summer of 2010/2011, can have a significant impact upon the agricultural production of the Burdekin. Lower than expected returns in the Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing industry will be reflected in other industries, particularly manufacturing and retail.

The Burdekin is heavily reliant upon the Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing industry (and downstream manufacturing associated with this primary industry) for employment and economic output. With the majority of the region’s personal incomes either directly or indirectly derived from these industries, the first priority for economic development in the region needs to be to broaden and deepen these industries and to retain a larger proportion of their economic value within the regional economy.

The mining boom has caused a shortage of skilled workers in the region. Many farmers are now reliant upon unskilled, short-term workers (including backpackers) to complete planting and harvesting. The resulting increases in recruitment and training costs, along with the decline in the price of sugar, have an impact on the profitability of the industry.
Environmental Management

Strengths

Bowling Green Bay, including more than half of the Shire’s coastline, is included on the Ramsar Convention List of Wetlands of International Importance, which lists sites containing representative, rare or unique wetlands, or that are important for conserving biological diversity. These wetland systems are managed through riparian agreements with landowners and a commitment to reducing the impact of development on our coastal ecosystems.

Involvement in the Reef Guardian Program, implementation of a three-bin waste management system, support for cogeneration and the in-house manufacturing of solar-powered lights for Council facilities, are just some examples of Council’s commitment to environmental stewardship and implementation of environmental policy at a local level.

Challenges

Stormwater and groundwater management is challenging in some parts of the Shire due to:

- Lack of grade limits - it is difficult to manage stormwater drainage effectively as land in the region is generally very flat.
- Lack of pollution control on existing stormwater systems
- Lack of secondary or tertiary sewage treatment in some coastal settlements

Environmental management in the region is complicated by the following factors:

- Difficulty in attracting skilled environmental professionals to the area
- Lack of State government environmental representatives in the area
- State government control over major Environmentally Relevant Activities, e.g. sugar mills
- Two independent water authorities – Lower Burdekin Water and Sunwater -- manage 99.8% of the water usage in the region
- General apathy in the community about climate change and other environmental issues

Opportunities

The environmental performance of Burdekin Shire could be improved by taking advantage of the following:

- 300 days of sunshine each year makes the region an excellent candidate for large-scale solar energy projects
- Utilisation of additional water resources
- Production of a water balance model for our aquifer
- Sustainability rating scheme for infrastructure, which is being developed by Australian Green Infrastructure Council
- Protecting, preserving and providing appropriate access to high-value environmental assets
- Implementation of new waste legislation – encouragement for industry and community to reduce waste and improve practices
- Innovative farming practices to reduce environmental impacts
- Implementation of Water Sensitive Urban Design in new developments

Threats

The health of the environment within the Burdekin Shire is threatened by:

- The rising aquifer and potential salt intrusion of the aquifer
- Blanket State legislation that is not applicable to our unique area
- A lack of control over our entire water catchment
- Foreshore erosion and other effects of natural disasters
- Rising sea levels, climate change and storm surge
- Risk of detrimental impact of incompatible land uses on the natural environment
- The potential for illegal dumping as a result of the implementation of new waste legislation
- Managing stormwater runoff – intensity of Summer rainfall events
- Invasive species of plants and animals in our waterways
Social Wellbeing

Strengths

Burdekin Shire is complemented by a variety of educational, health and sporting resources. The Shire has three high schools, numerous primary schools, and day care centres, as well as a TAFE College and the proposed North Queensland Centre for Tropical Agriculture (Burdekin).

The Shire is home to the Burdekin Theatre - a well recognised cultural venue in Queensland; the Burdekin Memorial Hall; a modern well-equipped Library; and active local arts and cultural associations. The Shire also offers fabulous restaurants and night time entertainment for all ages.

A major redevelopment of the Ayr Hospital was completed in 2005, providing the region with a modern facility offering a range of general and specialist medical services.

A new Burdekin Youth Centre has recently been constructed in Ayr. The new purpose-built facility brings together the Burdekin’s existing youth support organisations under one roof, as well as several visiting youth services. The centre is managed by the PCYC.

Additional specialty stores surrounding Coles and an expansion of the Woolworths supermarket are providing additional shopping choice.

General Strengths

- Multiculturalism – large indigenous, Italian, Greek, Scottish, Spanish and South Sea Islander communities
- BAYWatch Program – community support for indigenous youth
- Good broadband access for the majority of the population
- New community housing development
- Inspection program in place for high risk premises to ensure appropriate health standards are met
- Building Safer Communities Action Team (BSCAT) – “a collaborative community partnership...utilising an evidence-based approach for early intervention to prevent crime and to build a safer community for all.”

Education

- Wide range of public and private schools within the region
- Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE campus in Home Hill
- Proximity to higher education (James Cook University - Townsville)
- Shalom Christian College – a new rural education facility for indigenous youth opening in January 2012 at what was previously the Australian Agricultural College site in Clare with an initial intake of 60 students
- Australian Agricultural College - now located just outside of Ayr

Sport & Recreation

- Anzac Park All Abilities Playground
- Burdekin River, creeks, tributaries, reef and beaches – fishing and other recreation
- Developing network of cycle and walking pathways
- Variety of recreational groups – Burdekin Road Runners, craft groups, CWA, etc
- Wide variety of sporting opportunities. Strong sporting community.
- Burdekin Be Active Committee – provides facilities and programs that promote physical activity and individual and community wellbeing.

Challenges

- Access to specialist / alternative medical care
- Shortage of aged-care facilities, limited high-care facilities
- Age and condition of public swimming pools
- Lack of local sports psychology / nutrition and dietician services
- Lack of police presence after hours – inability to respond to community expectations
Opportunities

- Need to change focus of public facilities (i.e. pools, show grounds, old junior soccer grounds) to make them more economically sustainable
- Strong multicultural and sugar industry history could be used as the basis for tourist attractions
- Large blocks in close proximity to town centre provide opportunities for in-fill development – medium density development would provide better access to services
- Seasonal employment opportunities
- Room for more integrated / coordinated / preventative health programs

Threats

- Natural disasters
- High maintenance costs for public facilities, i.e. public pools
- Closure of small schools within the region
- High incidence of vector-borne disease
- High incidence of skin and other cancers
- Loss of youth to major cities

Governance

Strengths

Retaining its independence in the 2008 local government amalgamations, Burdekin Shire Council is in a good financial position and implementation of our asset management system is well advanced.

Council has cooperative relationships with the other North Queensland councils as well as our State and Federal members and has a strong record in disaster management due to:

- an experienced Council and Local Disaster Management Group
- a resilient and well-educated community

Challenges

Meeting the expectations of the community while complying with the statutory requirements of State and federal governments is an ongoing challenge for all local governments.

In addition to this, being a small regional shire presents its own challenges including:

- Limited resources - this limits the improvements that Council can make in the region
- Difficulty retaining technical personnel with experienced staff members retiring and younger staff members being lured away by “big city” living and private sector salaries
- The lack of population growth in the region results in a static revenue base, which can only be increased through increases in rates, fees and charges

Opportunities

In 2008 the Queensland Government prepared an Industry Development Strategy for horticulture processing in the Burdekin. Council is currently working with the newly-formed Strategy Working Group to complete the actions identified in the strategy, including identification of potential bottlenecks in the development approval process for new processing facilities.

Other opportunities that Council could take advantage of include:

- Regional partnerships with other councils to take advantage of economies of scale.
- Partnerships with local community groups and other levels of government to improve services and facilities within the Shire.

Threats

The cost to Council of compliance is increasing as new and amended State government legislation is adopted. Each change or additional regulation has an impact on Council’s policies, procedures and practices, i.e. how we do business, and resource management.

Difficulty in filling key technical positions, particularly in Environmental Health, puts Council at risk of not complying with legislative requirements and extends approval processes for new businesses, which has a detrimental impact on the economic development of the region.
Burdekin Shire Council wants to hear from you!

Every stakeholder — be they resident, ratepayer, business, government or community group — is encouraged to provide input into the Community Planning process.

To be involved in guiding the future of the region, you can:

- Complete the attached survey and return it to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Post: Burdekin Shire Council</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PO Box 947</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayr QLD 4807</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drop in: 145 Young Street, Ayr</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fax: 07 4783 9999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>email: <a href="mailto:burdekinsc@burdekin.qld.gov.au">burdekinsc@burdekin.qld.gov.au</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OR

- Complete the survey online. A link to the survey can be found on our web site:

  www.burdekin.qld.gov.au