

Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy Land Use Strategy and Structure Plan

Report Revision History

Revision	Date Issued	Prepared by	Reviewed by	Verified by
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This document is preliminary unless approved by a Director of City Plan Strategy & Development

CERTIFICATION

This report has been authorised by City Plan Strategy & Development, with input from a number of other expert consultants, on behalf of the Client. The accuracy of the information contained herein is to the best of our knowledge not false or misleading. The comments have been based upon information and facts that were correct at the time of writing this report.

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A Joint Forward by Mayors

For example...

A long lens is needed to look forward to 2041. This vision for the future of the Branxton Subregion is a 25+ year view of the future land uses and infrastructure needed and demanded by the community. This plan has been written to continue to engage the community and provide a basis for thoughtful consultation.

It is a “living plan” that will evolve and be updated over time.

These principles take advantage of existing settlement patterns and current investments in transport, utilities and social facilities. The Strategy aims to achieve the following benefits by concentrating new housing on existing zoned land in the Branxton Subregion:

- *Improving access for more residents to shops, health, education, leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities*
- *Facilitating better use of existing infrastructure*
- *Encouraging greater clustering of local businesses, services and facilities*
- *Promoting healthier communities by giving more people the option of walking and cycling*
- *Establishing safe, accessible and connected neighbourhoods that provide social infrastructure and that promote physical and social health*
- *Respecting the Subregion’s environmental constraints and rural landscape*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The Hunter Expressway, completed in March 2014 and the proposed Huntlee New Town, accommodating 21,000 additional residents are two significant projects that will dramatically influence the physical and economic growth of the Branxton Subregion as well as redefine its places and people. A land use strategy, structure plan and masterplan have been identified as the most suitable tools to establish a strategic framework to guide the future development of the Subregion, capitalising on the opportunities offered by the Hunter Expressway and Huntlee New Town, and minimising any adverse impacts resulting from future development.

This is a joint project between Cessnock City Council and Singleton Council, funded by the NSW Department of Planning and Environment and is the first subregional strategy in the Hunter region to be prepared in collaboration between two Councils and the State government.

This document contains the Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy and Structure Plan.

1.2 Purpose

This Subregional Land Use Strategy and Structure Plan has been prepared to provide direction for future land use and development in the Branxton Subregion to 2041. The study area extends over the Cessnock and Singleton Local Government Areas (LGAs), and comprises the settlement areas of Greta, East Branxton, Branxton, North Rothbury and the future township of Huntlee.

In order to effectively manage the anticipated growth of the Subregion and provide housing, employment services and facilities to support this growth, an integrated approach to guide land use decisions across the two LGAs is needed. The Branxton Land Use Strategy and Structure Plan will be part of a suite of comprehensive studies by State and local government to guide future planning decisions, addressing cross boundary issues and implement a series of recommendations to achieve the vision and objectives for the Branxton Subregion over the next 25 years.

1.3 Scope of the Project

The scope of the project was prepared in collaboration between Cessnock and Singleton Councils, Department of Planning and Environment, with input from the Branxton Project Working Group. There are three parts to this project: a Subregional Land Use Strategy, a Structure Plan, and a Town Centre Masterplan. They are an interconnected suite of documents, providing the strategic framework to guide the future planning, delivery and management of actions that support the future growth and evolution of the Subregion.

Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy

Establishes the vision, objectives and future initiatives to guide future planning decisions and support the long term growth and change of the Branxton Subregion. It provides a snapshot of the strategic planning context, description of the subregion, its places and people now and what it can be in the future. This document provides the strategic basis for the preparation and ongoing review of the Structure Plan, place-specific masterplans, local strategies and planning proposals. The Strategy addresses opportunities and constraints to development, as well as objectives and actions for housing, employment, open space, infrastructure and environmental improvements.

Branxton Subregional Structure Plan

Provides the detailed guidance and recommendations to achieve the vision and objectives established in the Strategy and the development sequencing over the next 25 years. It outlines the existing attributes of the subregion and identifies:

- How many dwellings and jobs are needed in each stage
- Where the future dwellings and jobs need to be located
- What infrastructure – both physical and social – is required to support the subregion and its residents
- The biodiversity and natural features that need to be protected and enhanced
- What initiatives and actions are required to create great places and liveable communities
- How can the recommendation and actions ensure that the existing and future development and communities within the subregion become better integrated over time.

The Structure Plan also provides an overview of the governance and funding mechanisms that must be considered through the implementation of recommendations and actions to achieve the vision. The comprehensive implementation program is organised over three periods – 2021, 2033 and 2041 – identifying the delivery mechanism, who is responsible and who are the partners; timing, cost and funding source, and the monitoring and key performance indicators.

Branxton Town Centre Masterplan

Provides the first place-specific plan for one of the local centres within the subregion. The Masterplan details the fine grain planning and design guidelines for the Branxton Town Centre and Main Street, directed by the strategic planning framework established in the Branxton Subregional Strategy and Structure Plan.

1.4 Implementation and Review

The Strategy, Structure Plan and place-specific Masterplans are not statutory documents. Once adopted, this suite of documents will inform potential amendments to Cessnock and Singleton Council's Local Environmental Plans (LEPs) and Development Control Plans (DCPs), Section 94 Developer Contribution Plans and other documents prepared by State Government and infrastructure agencies.

The strategic planning process and preparation of the documents relies on a variety of inputs, some of which are yet to be completed. It is critical that the strategic planning process is underpinned by ongoing community and stakeholder engagement as well as continuous monitoring and review.

The implementation of the Strategy and Structure Plan is not just limited to the planning tools and mechanisms. Its success relies on all stakeholders and partners understanding their roles and taking responsibility for the coordination, delivery and funding of recommendations and actions.

The ongoing monitoring and review of the planning directions and implementation of recommendations is critical. Over the twenty-five years and beyond, new information and factors that influence the growth and evolution of the sub-region will present a variety of challenges, risks and opportunities.

Key to building resilience in both the sub-region and its people, decision makers, both at a local and state level must be responsive to change and be willing to engage the existing and future communities to ensure the future place reflects the local needs, stories and aspirations.

1.5 Methodology

An evidence-based methodological approach was applied to the preparation of the Strategy and Structure Plan. New and existing evidence from studies, policies and community views were collated into background reports that informed the land evaluation and recommendations about short, medium and long term recommendations for Housing, Employment, Open Space, Infrastructure and the Environment.

The steps in this process were:

1. Desktop review of available data of relevance to the Subregion
 - GIS data held by Cessnock and Singleton Councils on physical and environmental features
 - State and local policies and planning instruments that set strategic directions for growth
 - Other reports and plans prepared by State and local government, with specific relevance to the Subregion and a Land Use Strategy

- Demographic information from the national census as well as population projections for the Branxton Subregion prepared by the State government for land use and transport planning purposes

The complete list of documents reviewed are included in the attached Reference list.

2. Community engagement

- All households and businesses in the study area were invited to complete a survey about their opinions about the Subregion now, and what the future place might look like.
- Responses to the survey were reviewed and used to inform the Visions and Objectives for the Land Use Strategy.
- A Branxton Project Working Group (BPWG) comprising representatives of the community was established to inform the preparation of the Strategy. Community representatives were selected to represent various sections of the study area community. The BPWG met with the Project team to give more detailed feedback on the Visions and Objectives.

More detail about the community engagement processes and results are detailed in **Section 2.4.**

3. New research into issues that will affect the future of the Subregion

- An audit of existing employment land to review the condition and supply of zoned industrial and business land (**Section 3.4.4**)
- Preparation of localised housing and employment projections and recommendations to accommodate growth and change (**Section 3.3.3**)
- Identification and analysis of constraints and opportunities for development, including mapping to demonstrate the spatial extent of these constraints and opportunities (**Section 3.2**).

4. Preparation of Land Use Strategy and Structure Plan

- Consideration of all the information from Steps 1 – 3, and analysis of the information to inform a land use strategy comprising housing, employment, infrastructure, open space and environmental recommendations (**Sections 3.3.6, 3.4.5, 3.5.1**).
- Illustration of future development and subdivision intentions in the form of a Structure Plan, which provides a framework for the coordinated release of land over the period to 2041 (**Section 4.5**).

The detailed strategy and structure plan are in **Parts B and C**.

PART A

STATE OF THE SUB-REGION

2.1 Purpose of this Section

The purpose of this this Section is to provide an assessment of the current state of land use, both natural and built environments in the Branxton Subregion. This has been used as the basis for preparing the Land Use Strategy and Structure Plan to provide for sustainable development. The majority of information contained in this Section has been extracted from the existing strategic planning and policy documents that have been prepared to date which apply to the Branxton Subregion, following consideration of their relevance to the current land use investigations.

2.2 Snapshot of the Branxton Subregion

The purpose of this section is to provide a snapshot assessment of the current state of land use within the Branxton subregion, including both natural and built environments.

Description of the Subregion

The Branxton Subregion is located approximately 50 kilometres west of Newcastle, in the middle of the Hunter Region of New South Wales. It straddles two local government areas (Cessnock and Singleton). It is characterised by a scenic backdrop of mountain peaks and the Belford National Park, with the Hunter River floodplains adjoining the local settlement areas. There are major inter-regional transport corridors bisecting the subregion, which supports commuting to major employment areas in the Upper and Lower Hunter, as well as encouraging tourist visitors to the adjoining, internationally-recognised, Hunter Valley vineyards. Freight, particularly in the form of black coal, is transported by rail through the subregion from the Hunter minefields to the Port of Newcastle.

Branxton is the largest urban settlement in the subregion, and up until the completion of the Hunter Expressway as a bypass, was a significant service stop along main inland highway route. Greta, East Branxton and North Rothbury are the other settlements, with Huntlee expected to develop around North Rothbury as a major town over the next 25+ years.

The rural areas of the subregion include some intensive agricultural activities (poultry farming, viticulture) but are mostly of low intensity rural use and lifestyle opportunities afforded by the attractive rural landscape. Significant environmental areas include the Belford National Park, as well as new conservation areas adjoining the Hunter River at Greta and Huntlee, including Persoonia Park, a conservation reserve for the critically endangered plant, *Persoonia pauciflora*.

The subregion has a total area of approximately 150 square kilometres, and a population at 2011 of 8,215 people.

A brief history

The Branxton Subregion is within the Wonnarua country, which has been occupied from around 11,000 BP¹. Colonial settlement began from the early 1820s, when the area was

¹ Cessnock LGA Aboriginal Study (complete reference)

opened for farming, including the planting of vineyards by George Wyndham in the 1830s on the west bank of the Hunter River at Dalwood Estate (now Dalwood House is a State heritage item), which grew to be the second largest vineyard in the world by 1853².

The first subdivision was in Greta in 1842, when it was established as a service centre for a scattering of settlers and timber getters. Land subdivision in Branxton began in 1849, straddling the New England Highway. Settlement continued at a rapid pace as mines and rail lines opened in the late 1860s. Development in the Subregion has ever since been significantly influenced by the boom and bust of mining.

The history of coal mining the Subregion includes a memorial on Wine Country Drive to the Rothbury Colliery riot that took place in 1929, when police and miners clashed over the use of scab labour at the colliery during the Northern Coal Lockout. One miner was killed, and a number of miners and police were injured.

The Greta Army Camp (on Camp Rd) was established in 1941 and was one of the largest in New South Wales. It was the training site for thousands of recruits, including those that served on the Kokoda Track, but was later converted to a migrant camp. Up to 10,000 European migrants lived on the site at any one time. The camp closed in the early 1960s, however many migrants chose to settle permanently in the local area, and are still strong family connections to European countries including Poland and Italy.

Development in the Subregion has remained steady. Major employment opportunities moved to the north (Upper Hunter coal fields) and south (industrial estates and town centres in Lower Hunter). Good access to the New England Highway was beneficial for the journey to work, and this, coupled with an attractive rural landscape, encouraged new housing estates at East Branxton and rural residential estates to the north in Singleton LGA.

The decision in 2013 to rezone land for the Huntlee New Town and the \$2billion investment in the Hunter Expressway, opened in 2014, will have a greatest change on the Subregion for the next 25+ years.

Urban Form

Built form within the towns and village settlements in the Branxton Subregion is characterised by single and two storey development, including housing, business, retail and industrial development. There are relatively clear boundaries to the urban footprints of Branxton, Greta, East Branxton and North Rothbury, generally aligning with the natural landscape (escarpment or floodplain) and there are open or vegetated areas between the settlements. Where these natural landscape are less well defined, there some rural residential development. The low-scale character of the area is reflective of the rural lifestyle which exists in the area.

² State heritage register listing (complete reference)

Branxton functions as the larger centre in the Subregion, with a small town centre including grocery, medical, café and take away food, and other retail and service businesses. There is pre-school and two primary schools in Branxton, plus a police station, volunteer ambulance location and fire station. Miller Park is a regional sportsfield, including a swimming pool, and adjoins the Branxton golf course. There are two small areas of light industrial development in Branxton.

Greta has a smaller commercial area that is contained to a small area fronting the highway. There is one primary school in Greta and a multi-purpose community centre. Greta Oval is a regional sportsfield. On the outskirts of Greta is a waste transfer station.

There is no established centre at North Rothbury, East Branxton or Huntlee. A major town centre has been planned within Stage 1 of the Huntlee development.

Population characteristics

In 2011, the Branxton Subregion had an estimated resident population of 8,215 people. There is a young age profile when compared with the rest of NSW (32% aged younger than 20 yrs, compared to 25% for NSW; 9% over 65 years, compared to 14.7% for NSW). This is reflected in a large household size (2.8 people), family groups (80% of households) and high median household income (30% higher than NSW ave.). The large lot sizes, availability of land for new housing, and good school and sporting facilities has encouraged families to come to the area.

Economic influences

A large portion of the Subregion's workforce (16%, or 525 people) were employed in the coal mining industry in 2011, with other major industries of employment being food services, retail, civil engineers and education. These jobs are largely located outside of the Subregion, either in the Upper Hunter coal fields or Pokolbin vineyards or larger town centres at Cessnock, Singleton or Maitland.

The Hunter Region has been significantly affected by a winding back of mining investment, as the Australian economy generally responds to new economic investments (especially in residential construction). The implications for the Subregion is equally significant, with evidence presented in December 2014 that suggests the Cessnock LGA has seen the fastest fall in employment of any the mid-Hunter LGAs. Construction associated with new residential development in the Subregion may assist to provide new job opportunities.

Infrastructure availability

Road and rail

The major road in the Subregion is the Hunter Expressway, which is a 40 kilometre freeway link that provides an additional east-west connection between Newcastle and the Lower Hunter, and is one of the biggest road infrastructure projects to be built in the Hunter. It opened in 2014 and provides significant improvements in travel time and safety for motorists

travelling in this part of the Hunter Region. There are six interchanges where motorists can access the expressway, including two in the Subregion (Allandale/ Camp Rd and Branxton).

Allandale interchange is a half interchange with east-facing ramps. This exit gives access to Camp Road, Lovedale Road and the wineries, accommodation and dining in the Lovedale area. Traveling north, this exit also gives access to areas towards Harpers Hill.

Branxton interchange is the most westerly interchange on the Hunter Expressway. It is a full interchange and allows movements in all directions. New roads link the Branxton interchange to Wine Country Drive and to the New England Highway. It is a bypass of the Branxton town centre.

Preliminary traffic data published by the RMS shows around 20,000 vehicles per day using the Hunter Expressway on weekdays and weekends.

There are also State funded road connections to Maitland, Singleton and Cessnock.

There are train stations at Branxton and Greta, with limited daily passenger services on the Hunter line towards Maitland/ Newcastle and Singleton/ Scone.

Sewer and Water infrastructure

Hunter Water Corporation (HWC) is the water and sewer authority in the Subregion. All residential areas are connected to sewer, and the regional network has no capacity constraint to supply in the short-term. HWC are currently preparing a subregional servicing strategy to accommodate growth demands imposed by Huntlee for the period beyond 2017/2019.

There is a wastewater treatment plant at Branxton, adjoining Miller Park. It has recently been updated to improve effluent quality and ensure that the plant meets environmental protection standards. The plant provides treatment for approximately 13,000 people.

Projected Population

The purpose of this section is to analyse current demographic features and trends relevant to population and land use. Further detail on demographic data relating to specific issues such as housing and employment are provided in **Section 3.3.2 and 3.4.2**).

The NSW Government through the Department of Planning & Environment, releases population, household and dwelling projections on a regular basis, to provide a detailed assessment on how the population is expected to change. The projections are published for regions and local government area populations.

For the purpose of this Strategy, the State Government projections have been used, they take a statewide view of migration and population trends, whilst providing small area detail to see what is happening in the Branxton Subregion.

Historically, population growth rates within the Subregion have been relatively low and the impacts of the Huntlee new urban release area and Hunter Expressway (HEX) on population

growth within the Subregion are not yet fully known in terms of the interest and demand for a new urban location.

Therefore, it was considered necessary to provide two separate population projections - one for the Huntlee catchment and one for the balance of the Sub-region (which includes the existing urban areas of Branxton and Greta).

Accordingly, population projections for the study area are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Projected Population - Branxton Sub-region

Projected Population at year	2011	2021	2031	2041
Huntlee	0	3,326	6,370	7,772
	0%	27.7%	40.5%	44.0%
Balance of Sub-region	8,215	8,721	9,343	9,877
	100%	72.3%	59.5%	56.0%
TOTAL	8,215	12,047	15,713	17,649

SOURCE: BTS, 2014 using Department of Planning & Environment 2014 NSW population, household and dwelling projections, and ABS 2011 Census data

In this forecast, the population of the Subregion will almost double in the 20 years between 2011 and 2031. The Huntlee development is expected to account for 44% of the population and 82% of the population growth of the subregion by 2041.

The housing demands generated by this population is explained in **Section 3.3**.

The State government has also prepared forecasts for the future workforce for residents aged over 15 years, and the likely number of jobs that will be located within the subregion. These are summarised in Tables 2 and 3.

The demand for employment land to provide for these jobs is explained in **Section 3.4**.

These forecasts follow a steady growth in line with population growth and demographic changes of an ageing population slowly increasing the dependency ratio of workers to retirees. The stand-out figure is the increase in the proportion of jobs to be located within the Branxton subregion between 2031 and 2041. This increase is based on an assumption that 1,316 new jobs will be created in the Huntlee town centre over this 10-year period, as shown in Table 3.

Table 2: Workforce 2011 - 2041: Branxton Sub-region

	2011	2021	2031	2041
Number of residents employed	4,265	6,027	7,758	8,542
- Huntlee	0	1,506	1,904	2,356
- Balance of subregion	4,265	4,521	5,854	6,186
% of population employed	52%	50%	49%	48%

Table 3: Employment 2011 - 2041: Branxton Sub-region

	2011	2021	2031	2041
Number of jobs within Subregion	1,511	2,138	2,817	4,180
- Huntlee	0	591	1,217	2,533
- Balance of subregion	1,511	1,547	1,600	1,647
% of sub-region population (containment rate)	35%	35%	36%	49%

2.3 Strategic Planning Context

There is a series of regional and local strategies and statutory plans that apply to the Branxton subregion. The most relevant of these are outlined below, and the key matters that will influence the planning framework for the subregion are listed.

Regional land use strategies

Lower Hunter Regional Strategy 2006

The Lower Hunter Regional Strategy identified three proposed urban areas in the study area, being the Huntlee urban release area, Wyndham Street Greta residential extension, and the Anvil Creek/ Greta Migrant Camp development site (as detailed in Table 4). Each of these sites has been zoned for urban development (with a specific recreation focus for the Greta Migrant Camp). In 2015, development activity has started on the Huntlee site, but there has been no development on the two others.

Table 4: Lower Hunter Regional Strategy Proposed Urban Areas

Huntlee New Town	7,500 dwellings, including 7,200 standard residential and 300 rural residential.
Wyndham Street Greta	316 standard residential dwellings.
Anvil Creek/Greta Migrant Camp	1,364 residential dwellings, plus an 18 hole golf course and other tourist facilities.

Upper Hunter Strategic Regional Land Use Plan

This strategic plan applies to land in the Study Area in the Singleton LGA and part of the Cessnock LGA (west of Huntlee). It is a strategy that focusses on managing coal and coal seam gas issues and the conflict with adjoining land uses.

The Strategic Regional Land Use Plan (SRLUP) includes maps of the region's mineral resources and areas of strategic agricultural land. In the Study Area there are some areas of biophysical strategic agricultural land and a critical industry cluster of viticultural activity in the Pokolbin district as well as some sites in Belford (see **Figure 2**). Mining and coal seam gas proposals that are located on strategic agricultural land must go through a Gateway process before a development application is lodged. This process is intended to deliver greater balance and rigour to the assessment process and ensure that the impacts of mining and coal seam gas proposals on agriculture and water resources are assessed at a much earlier stage.

In addition to the agricultural and resource issues, the SRLUP also outlines actions to address challenges facing the Upper Hunter region in relation to infrastructure, economic development and employment, housing and settlement, community health and amenity, natural environment, natural hazards and climate change, and cultural heritage.

Relevant actions in relation to the Study Area are:

- Protect strategic agricultural land through zoning and LEP provisions
- Housing and employment development in areas which can be serviced
- Ensure an adequate supply of employment land
- Ensure an adequate supply of land for residential development and facilitate a range of housing types
- Ensure that new residential development makes a positive contribution to liveability and character in accordance with the SRLUP's settlement planning principles
- Monitor the supply of residential land and the delivery of new housing, and establish the priorities for the delivery of housing

- Zone areas subject to natural hazards appropriate to reflect the risk and limitations of the land

These are addressed in this report.

Lower Hunter Regional Conservation Plan

The Regional Conservation Plan sets out a 25 year program to direct and drive conservation planning and conservation efforts in the Lower Hunter Valley. It is a partner document to the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy.

Stage 1 of the Plan was the establishment of new conservation reserves to be managed by the State government, and form the backbone of major new conservation corridors including the Watagan to Stockton Green Corridor and new conservation areas at Karuah and additions to Werakta National Park near Cessnock.

Other areas of regional conservation priorities are identified, and it is recommended that these lands be the focus for voluntary conservation initiatives and areas for future offsetting of development impacts.

The Plan also identifies tools and mechanisms to secure lands and complete corridors in the medium to long term.

Issues relevant to the Branxton subregion are:

- Significant areas of dry forest and woodland, and the enhancement of an east-west habitat linkage for species that uses these communities for refuge during times of inland drought. These communities are very poorly conserved in the Lower Hunter and are under increasing threat from new urban development. Lower Hunter forests around Branxton are of state significance for the nationally endangered Swift Parrot as well as supporting a suite of typically western avifauna.
- A high priority regional conservation area is identified at Branxton (part of the Huntlee urban release area). This land is intended to be transferred to public ownership as part of the planning approvals for Huntlee, and is a biodiversity offset for the balance of the Huntlee urban development. (extract from Map 2)
- Application of planning principles to create liveable communities whilst conserving biodiversity values. A maintain or improve principle is the benchmark for considering the adequacy of the conservation outcome.

State statutory planning controls and directions

State Environmental Planning Policies

Two State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) are particularly relevant to the Branxton subregion: SEPP Rural Land and SEPP Mining. These SEPPs generally apply to the rural areas of the subregion being the lands in rural and environmental zones.

SEPP Rural Land aims to facilitate the orderly and economic use and development of rural lands for rural and related purposes and reduce land use conflicts. Principles for rural land planning are established and there is a statutory requirement for councils to address these during the preparation of LEP amendments. These principles will be considered in the land use strategy for the rural and environmental land in the subregion.

SEPP Mining, Petroleum Protection and Extractive Industries aims to facilitate the orderly and economic use and development of land containing mineral resources. Relevantly to the Branxton subregion, this SEPP establishes a gateway assessment process for certain resource extraction to recognise the importance to agricultural resources and to ensure a balanced use of land by potentially completing primary industries. The strategically important agricultural lands are identified on maps in the SEPP, and are shown in **Figure 2**.

Section 117 Directions

A series of directions have been issued by the Minister for Planning that must be considered in the preparation of LEP amendments. These directions are relevant to the Branxton subregional strategic planning framework, because a planning proposal can be inconsistent with the terms of the direction if there is justification for the inconsistency by a local or subregional strategy. Therefore, these directions will be considered in the preparation of the Land Use Strategy.

Local land use strategies

Cessnock Citywide Settlement Strategy 2010

The Cessnock Citywide Settlement Strategy (CWSS) is soon to undergo a significant review. It identifies the new release areas in Branxton consistent with the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy (LHRS), as listed in Table 4.

There was also infill housing opportunities identified at Branxton town centre (50 dwellings), and Huntlee new town centre (100 dwellings), which was to be met through a combination of redevelopment, urban consolidation and the rezoning of small areas of land within the urban footprint. These opportunities may be difficult to achieve given the extent of flooding in the Branxton Town Centre and the detailed planning and yield analysis that has occurred for Huntlee.

The CWSS identified that Branxton could have the opportunity to increase dwelling densities in the area between the rail line and highway (the area zoned R3 Medium Density Residential). The CWSS made a rough estimate that less than 50% of existing lots would be suitable for redevelopment, equating to an estimated 100 additional dwellings in Branxton over the 25 year planning horizon of the strategy.

Opportunities for growth in the Greta and North Rothbury areas was considered under Section 6 Village Growth in the CWSS. It was considered that North Rothbury would be part of the Huntlee new town proposal, and that Greta would become part of the growth corridor between Newcastle and Singleton. It was recommended that the existing village areas of Greta be rezoned to R2 Low Density Residential to reflect its connection to a growing urban area, but that it is separated from a commercial centre. The CWSS recommended that the R2 zone prohibit all forms of multiple dwelling housing (including dual occupancies) in recognition of separate from supporting commercial centre, however there is opportunity to re-consider this position when reviewing the role of the Greta commercial area.

There are also opportunities for additional development on the serviced R5 Large Lot Residential areas in Greta that are not quantified, but are acknowledged in Section 7 of the CWSS. These opportunities are that increased development yield in these areas will make a more efficient use of the existing zoned land and infrastructure..

Singleton Land Use Strategy

Singleton Council has identified land suitable for future rural residential development around Branxton. The areas identified in the Singleton Land Use Strategy (SLUS) 2008 are Branxton North-West, Branxton North-East and Branxton South-West.

These three candidate areas adjoin existing rural residential estates to the north of the East Branxton urban area and will, it is estimated, provide for an additional 670 rural residential dwellings, which, based on a projected demand of 75 rural residential dwellings per annum, would provide approximately 10 years supply. The SLUS suggests that there is potential for further expansion of the identified candidate areas and/or increasing lot densities to increase the potential yield of these areas, so that there would be no need to consider additional areas for rural residential over the 25 year period to 2031.

Three parcels of land within the study area that were identified for rural residential development in the Singleton Land Use Strategy (2008) remain zoned RU1 Primary Production (refer **Figure 3**). These sites are each located within and/or adjoining existing rural residential zoned land and represent a logical and appropriate location for rural residential rezoning. A full description of each the areas, and estimated development yield is included in the Singleton Land Use Strategy.

In summary:

- Only one site remains unzoned from the Branxton North West candidate area. It has limited potential to provide rural residential lots. The remainder of the candidate area (Radford Park) is subject to a detailed masterplanning.
- One site remains unzoned from the Branxton South West candidate area (off McMullins Rd). The site is currently used for agricultural activities, and may provide for a small number of rural residential lots.

- Two lots remain unzoned from the Lower Belford candidate area, immediately north of the Murray's Rise site that is subject to detailed masterplanning. A limited number of environmental living/ rural residential lots could be achieved from the remaining land.

Therefore there is potentially a small increase in the supply of rural residential land from these locations.

Branxton Urban Design Framework

The Branxton Urban Design Framework was adopted by Council in 2010, and applies to the urban area of Branxton. It sets out an integrated design vision for the desired future development of Branxton, which is an attractive centre with a strong village atmosphere following construction of the Hunter Expressway.

Four precincts of distinct and individual character are identified (see exert in **Plate 1** below) and there are specific principles for each. There are also principles for future access and movement, gateway sites, and a richer public realm. The recommendations in this report are considered, especially to inform the Branxton Town Centre Masterplan.

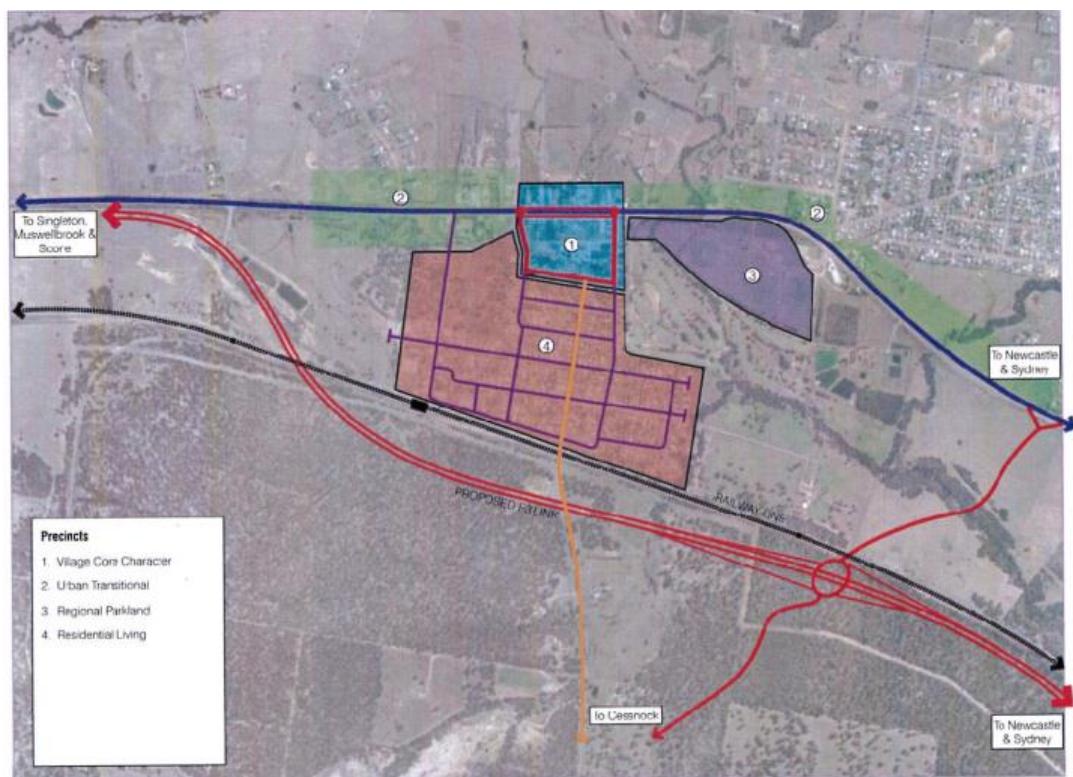


Plate 1 Branxton Urban Design Framework Precincts

Local statutory planning controls

Local environmental plans

Two local environmental plans (LEPs) apply to the subregion; *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011* and *Singleton Local Environmental Plan 2013*. These plans contain broad objectives and aims for the entire LGA, as well as zoning, tables of permitted land uses, subdivision and built form controls, as well as local provisions in relation to environmental, natural hazard and infrastructure requirements.

The zoning plan for the subregion is shown in **Figure 4**.

Until recently (March 2015), the Huntlee urban release area zoning and local provisions were included in SEPP Major Projects. These controls have now been added to the Cessnock and Singleton LEPs.

One of the issues from having two LEPs and previous SEPP Major Project controls, is that there are a number of different zones, land use tables and local provisions that apply to the subregion. Even within the same standard zone (for example R5 Large Lot Residential), there are differences in the permitted land uses between the Cessnock and Singleton LEPs.

There is an opportunity through the planning framework to achieve improvements through harmonisation of the LEP provisions that apply to subregion.

Development control plans

There are three development control plans (DCPs) that apply to the subregion; Cessnock Development Control Plan 2010, Singleton Development Control Plan 2014 and Huntlee Development Control Plan 2013. Each of these plans aim to give effect to the LEP controls, and they provide guidance on the minimum requirements for building, subdivision and land development.

Singleton DCP includes a staging plan for a number of rural residential sites in the subregion (Branxton and Belford), otherwise there are no very specific controls for the subregion except for the Huntlee area. The Huntlee DCP is specific to the urban release area, but also draws on certain requirements in the Cessnock and Singleton DCPs.

Like the LEPs, the DCPs have different planning requirements for building, subdivision and land development, as well as heritage conservation and environmental protection.

There is also an opportunity through the planning framework to achieve an improved and consistent set of DCP provisions that apply to the subregion as a whole and/or for certain precincts like urban release areas, main streets and rural residential subdivision.

2.4 Community Engagement Results

This section provides an overview of community consultation undertaken in relation to the Land Use Strategy, Structure Plan and Masterplan.

Community Survey

A project survey was established online, with a link provided from the Council websites. The survey was open from 2nd April 2015 till 20th April 2015.

Letters were sent to 2,000 dwellings in Cessnock and 640 dwellings in Singleton notifying them of the project and requesting their involvement in completing the survey (refer Appendix A).

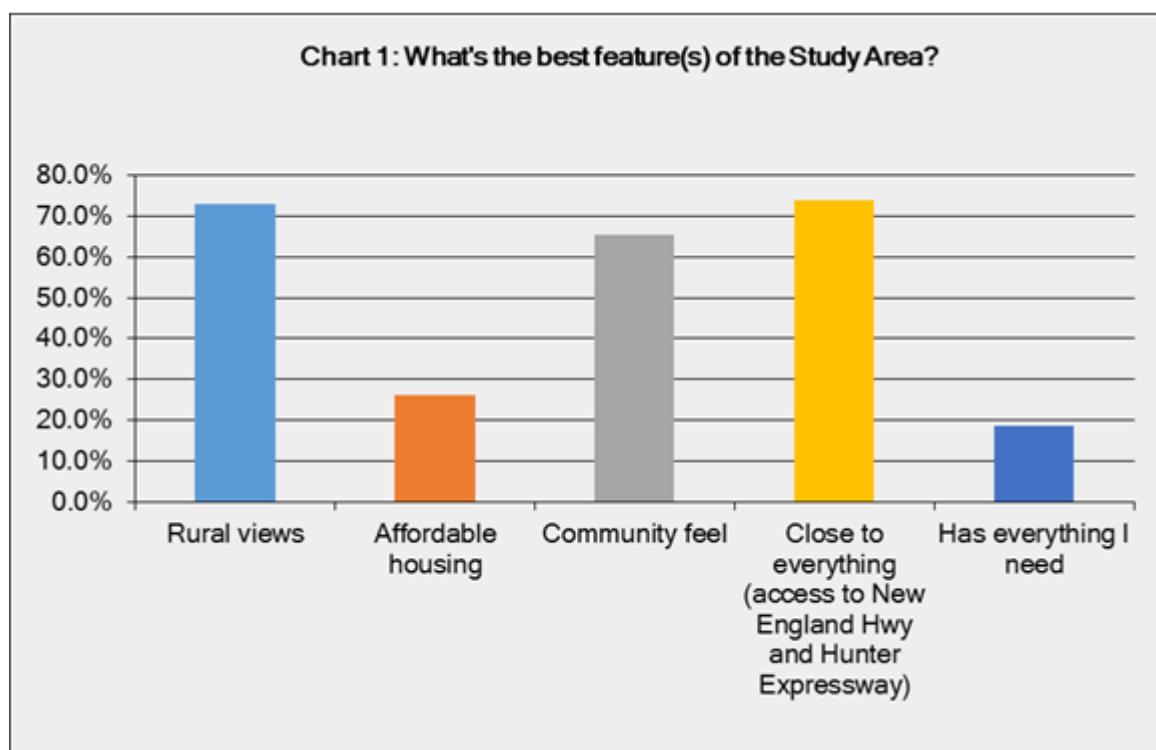
300 hard copies of the survey were printed and placed at Miller Park Sport and Rec Club, Royal Federal Hotel and Branxton Newsagency.

A Project Control Group comprising 10 community representatives and representation from Council, Department of Planning and Environment, Resource and Energy, Hunter Water, Rural Fire Service, Hunter Local Land Services and LWP Property Group.

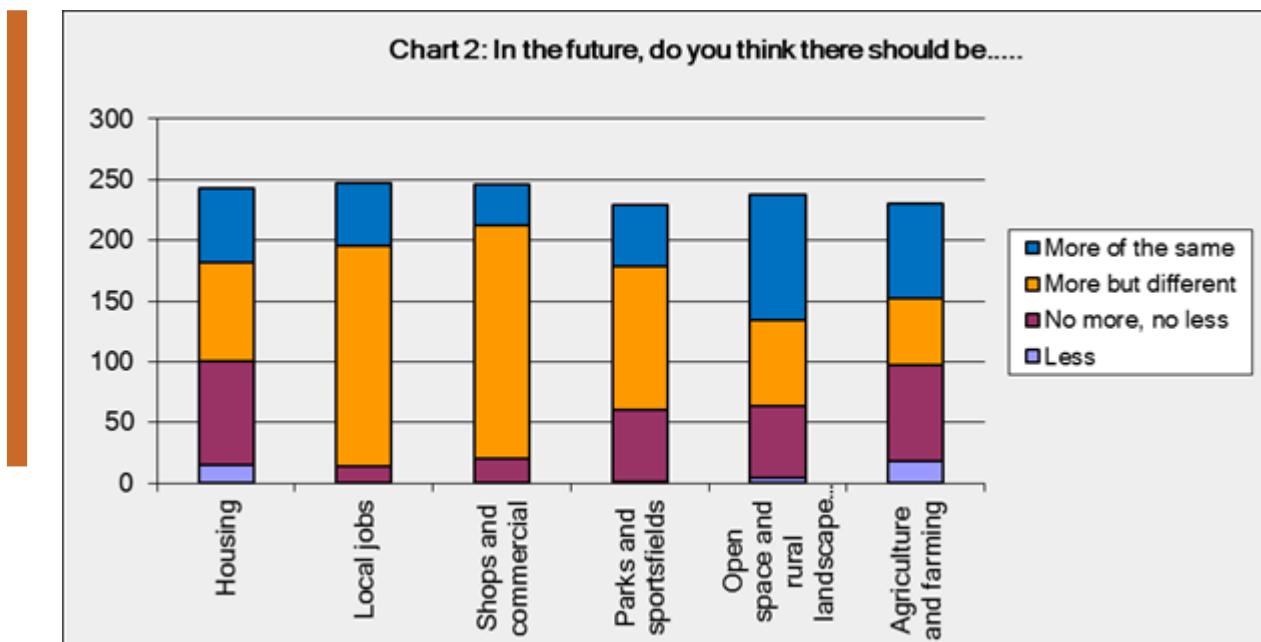
Summary of Feedback

275 responses were received to the survey. A copy of the survey and summary of all responses is provided in Appendix A.

Survey respondents identified the rural view (73% of respondents) and the close proximity to everything (74%) as being the best features of the area (refer Chart 1). Rural character, country living, large lots, heritage, trees and the absence of large industry were commonly raised. These key assets must be protected in determining future land uses within the study area.



While 85% of respondents live in the study area, only 24% work in the study area. Consequently there was a clear preference for more but different local jobs (78%) and shops and commercial activities (74%) for Branxton in the future (refer Chart 2).

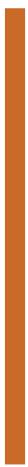


The focus of commercial growth is preferred at Branxton Main Street and Huntlee, while any industrial development should be focussed around the railway at Branxton and Greta. The dominant vision for the future of Branxton main street, is of small boutique retail, and businesses of local focus that reinforce the heritage character akin to Morpeth and Dungog main streets, in preference to larger retail and entertainment centres.

The greatest risk to the sub-regions future was considered to be the loss of village character (75%) and rural landscape (64%). Over-reliance on Huntlee for all future housing and a lack of progress and development in Branxton was also a common sentiment in responses. Priority areas for residential growth were identified as Huntlee, East Branxton and Elderslie Road.

The community feedback is key in informing the land use strategy. Priority themes arising from the survey:

- Retain rural character
- Revitalise Branxton Main Street commercial area
- New employment and residential opportunities are required in addition to Huntlee.



PART B

LAND USE STRATEGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to identify major state, regional and local issues, discuss general opportunities and constraints for development within the Branxton Subregion, and make recommendations for each settlement area. This section will specifically:

- Review the existing land use planning scheme, land use constraints and opportunities
- Identify potential growth and development opportunities to support the identified population growth as discussed in Part A of this Stage for the next 25 years
- Support the settlement hierarchy and assist in facilitating an identity, future vision and boundary for all settlement areas in the Branxton Subregion
- Discuss employment opportunities and economic growth potential in the business and industrial sectors
- Provide for recreation and open space opportunities in line with agreed levels of service
- Make recommendations for amendments to the Cessnock and Singleton land use planning schemes

Part A of this Report contains a summary of the demographics of the Branxton Subregion, identifies the state of the area and describes local, regional and state issues which will guide future growth and development.

In Part B, the principles for growth are summarised based on an analysis of constraints, background studies and consultation. Further, potential sites or areas for land use growth have been identified.

3.2 Constraints affecting the Study Area

Constraints to development of the study area are summarised in **Figure 2** and described below. Constraints are limits to development and yet often present opportunities for improvement and growth.

Environmental conservation

‘Environmental conservation land’ shown in **Figure 2**, includes land mapped as:

- Endangered Ecological Community (EEC) under the LHCCREMS REM Vegetation GIS dataset
- National Parks
- Conservation land proposed to be dedicated under the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1974* (including “Persoonia Park”) as part of the Voluntary Planning Agreement between Huntlee, the (then) Minister for Environmental and Climate Change and the Minister for Planning.

A large portion of the study area contains vegetation listed as 'Endangered Ecology Community' (EEC) under the *Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995*. Any clearing of listed EEC requires extensive environmental assessment and may need approval from State and/ or local government. Other vegetation communities or locations within the study area may also require protection because of their ecological value (e.g. vegetation corridors, riparian land). Development that impacts on these ecological values should be avoided as a first principle. Mechanisms for managing the impacts on threatened species are contained in State legislation and include on-site conservation (through zoning or other property restrictions) but also enable off-site conservation in certain circumstances.

National Parks are present within the study area. These areas contribute to the ecological value, rural character and recreational assets for the Subregion, and are not suitable for urban development.

The conservation lands in the Huntlee area are similar to the National Parks. These lands protected from development and will ultimately be dedicated to the National Park estate.

Not all areas requiring environmental protection are shown on **Figure 2**, and more detailed field and desktop assessment is required prior to rezoning or development applications.

Flooding

Flooding in the study area occurs from the Hunter River, Black Creek and other local creeks, as well as from overland flows during storm events.

In 2014, Cessnock Council adopted a flood planning level of 34.2m AHD for Branxton (applying to the suburbs of Branxton, East Branxton and Huntlee), which is a 0.7m freeboard above a 1% AEP flood level of 33.5m AHD. This was adopted as an interim flood planning level for residential development. A higher than normal freeboard (usually 0.5m) was adopted because there are higher than usual uncertainties about flooding at Branxton arising from lack of local flood gauges, amongst other factors.

For the purposes of this report, the 34.2m AHD flood planning level has been mapped to show the area where the flood planning controls apply, noting that this is an interim flood planning level.

Not all of the study area has been subject to a flood study, so there are areas in Subregion (parts of Huntlee and Greta) where the impact and extent of channel or overland flooding is not fully known. Further assessment of flood hazards may be required prior to rezoning or development applications. It is expected that the flood planning levels for residential, commercial and industrial development will be reviewed and determined as part of a future floodplain risk management study.

Cessnock City Council are currently in the final stages of completing the "Black Creek Stage 2 - Flood Study" covering flood areas within the Branxton study area south of the New

England Railway line, including the Huntlee New Town Urban Release Area, North Rothbury and South Branxton. Recently exhibited in July/August 2015, the study is expected to be reported to Cessnock City Council for adoption late in 2015.

Potential Contamination

Potential for land contamination presents cost implications for redevelopment. Areas of potential contamination within the study area include, but are not limited to:

- Poultry sheds and other intensive agricultural activities
- Quarry and mine sites
- Industrial land
- Landfill, waste management and waste transfer areas
- Disused service stations

The presence of contamination does not outright preclude development, but it does impose a cost to redevelopment. The viability of redevelopment for urban uses must consider the financial implications of remediation required for the proposed land use. Future developments must assess and manage the potential for contamination, and there is a statutory requirement for the potential for contamination to be considered at any rezoning or development application stage.

Slope

Slope exceeding 18 degrees increases erosion potential and will generally be a highly exposed location with visual sensitivity. Land of slope greater than 18 degrees is shown in **Figure 2** as a 'no go' constraint. Clearing of vegetation from steep slopes is also restricted by the *Native Vegetation Act 1993*.

Conflicting land uses

Siting of future urban development must consider the nature of the existing and future land use of adjoining and surrounding land. Poultry sheds, rail line, industry, wastewater treatment plant and the Hunter Expressway (HEX) produce offsite impacts that affect the amenity and suitability of surrounding land for certain uses.

Land within 500m of poultry sheds is generally considered unsuitable for residential development due to odours, noise and biological hazards. Intensified residential development within these buffers is not considered appropriate. However, the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) advise that existing poultry sheds within the study area are considered likely to be phased out over the next 10 years. Subject to environmental assessment, this may open up those areas for future residential development potential. In the interim, proposals for residential or alike development within the 500m poultry farm buffer

is not recommended without further investigation, consideration of the impact on the poultry farm and Council consideration.

The sewerage treatment plant located on the New England Highway near Miller Park prevents residential development within a 400m radius of the site. Land that is sterilised by this constraint may otherwise be suitable for urban development. Changes to the operation of the treatment plan (technology, capacity, location of ponds) may reduce the buffer requirements.

Noise associated with the rail line, industry and HEX also affects the density and design of any new residential development. No specific setbacks or buffers have been established to these areas. Best practice guidelines outline noise standards for different types of land uses. Construction of dwellings and other noise sensitive development such as churches, hospitals and schools on land adjacent to HEX triggers the need to consider noise mitigation measures under the Infrastructure SEPP. In addition, dwellings must meet specific internal noise levels for habitable rooms such as bedrooms and other living areas. The NSW Road Noise Policy (RNP) (DECCW, 2011) assigns applicable noise criteria for sensitive receivers within “600 metres from the centerline of the outermost traffic land on each side of the subject road”. Specific mitigation measures must be considered on a case by case basis in response to local topography and building siting and design. Costs associated with architectural treatment and/or noise walls required to achieve RNP levels may prove cost prohibitive in some circumstances.

Significant Agricultural Land

Areas mapped as Biophysical Strategic Agricultural Land (BSAL) or Critical industry Cluster (CIC) in the Upper Hunter Strategic Land Use Plan (DP&I; 2012) are considered high quality agricultural land to be protected. In the study area, the BSAL partly corresponds with flood prone land. Vineyards in Belford and near Hermitage Road are part of the CIC.

Future urban development should avoid BSAL and CIC areas in order to protect the agricultural production value (current or future) of rural land.

Visual landscape

Key parts of the visual environment are shown in **Figure 5** and require special consideration be given to any proposed future development in terms of:

- Town centres and key approaches – maintain existing character and scale, and manage so that appropriate development occurs and an attractive entrance is ensured

- View corridors to and from Branxton – these should have no or minimal development, including the area north of Branxton that can be viewed from the town, and the area to the south seen from the HEX entry road
- Significant natural landscape features – these should be preserved, including areas such as the Belford National Park, Belford Dome and Harpers/Walkers Hills
- Existing ‘greenbelt’ that separates Greta and Branxton – minimal development that retains a rural character.

Beautiful vistas exist throughout the study area that warrant preservation. Development in visually sensitive areas must consider the impact on view corridors and landscape areas identified as visually sensitive. The Community Survey also illustrated that the community values the rural setting of Branxton and the surrounding environs.

The visual environment is defined by a rural character varying from flat to rolling grassed hills, dense patches of native vegetation and interspersed with rural housing. Into this landscape are placed the townships of Branxton, and the smaller village of Greta, with both located in a traditional way along the regional transport corridor of the New England Highway (NEH) and the railway.

The settings of the two townships are integral to the visual experience, when both travelling between and within them, with frequent views available to the surrounding rural landscape (refer Photos 1 and 2). Of particular prominence to the rural landscape setting of Branxton are the rolling hills and distant mountain views to the north of Branxton (refer **Figure 5**).



Photo 1: Rural views seen around Branxton when approaching from south (northern view corridor from Bridge Street)



Photo 2: Rural views corridors from within Branxton are integral to town's setting (northern view corridor shown from Cessnock Road near Police Station)

The rural views possible from the NEH and HEX are also important in establishing a desirable and scenic travel route through this part of the Hunter Valley (refer Photo 3). Critical visually-sensitive areas, including the northern view corridor that is important to Branxton's town setting (refer **Figure 5**), should be appropriately managed to acknowledge the heritage of the townships and to protect the attractive rural setting that is valued by both the local community and visitors to the area.



Photo 3: Branxton, nestled in the landscape, as seen from the entry from the Hunter Expressway (near railway overbridge)

Greta and Branxton have historically developed as two distinct, yet closely related destinations, with a strong visual separation created by a combination of landform, distance and intervening rural land uses. It is therefore important to maintain a visual separation that gives both settlements a different character and role in the wider region, rather than strip development being allowed to erode what is essentially a 'green belt' between the two. This visual break also allows residents to identify with one or other settlements, strengthening the 'sense of place' and community identity. Sensitively designed and low scale development may achieve these objectives, whilst providing incentive for improvements to landscaping and built form. This may need to be addressed with more detailed masterplanning or a development policy for this area.

The approaches to the two townships along the NEH, and the new access from the HEX, need to be protected from inappropriate development. Most particularly, any development on the outskirts should respect the small scale nature of the existing buildings and lots, and not be of a type such a 'box style' large commercial premises, which are likely to overwhelm the urban form and detract from the attractive, and special settings, of Branxton and Greta (refer Photos 4 and 5).

As the assessment of the visual environment has been relatively broad, **Figure 5** also indicates an approximate area within 2km of Greta and Branxton where the detailed planning of any future development should consider the relationship to the townships and the compatibility with the desired scale and character.



Photo 4: The approach along Greta's main street showing its traditional low scale



Photo 5: Branxton's main street comprised of small lots and heritage buildings

Rural character

The existing development within the study area is of a density and style that has maintained the rural character of the area. Future urban growth must avoid overdevelopment to ensure the rural character is retained. Larger lots, tree retention and street setbacks are all design controls that can assist in retaining the character.

Indigenous Heritage

Cessnock Council has endorsed the Cessnock Local Government Area Wide Aboriginal Heritage Study (AHMS,2014). This study identifies portions of land within the study area as having very high Aboriginal archaeological potential (see extract from report below). Areas identified as 'moderate', 'high' or 'very high' sensitivity in the predictive model maps require detailed Aboriginal heritage assessment prior to any development. A search of the Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) reports in excess of 100 known Aboriginal sites having previously been recorded within the study area.

Source: Cessnock LGA Heritage Study, AHMS, March 2014. Predictive Model of Aboriginal Archaeological Sensitivity in Branxton Sub-region (Cessnock LGA)

Extensive investigations and consultation with Aboriginal groups was undertaken for some locations in the study area including HEX (Umwelt 2005), and various studies undertaken for the Huntlee planning assessments and approvals (Biosis, 2003; Myall Coast Archaeological Services, 2005/ 2010). As part of these investigations, Aboriginal Heritage Management Plan (AHMP) were prepared for the impacted Aboriginal items and included ongoing investigations, liaison and salvage. Therefore, the presence of indigenous heritage is not considered a 'no go' constraint, but a matter for more detailed investigation and impact assessment.

Roads

Future developments fronting NEH and HEX are likely to have access restrictions imposed, thereby constraining the density of growth on these lands.

Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) advise the following in relation to the study area:

- RMS has commenced a corridor strategy for the New England Highway from Beresfield to the Qld border. This corridor strategy will look at the vision/objectives of the corridor, its function, current performance (and projected performance), and make future recommendations on the development of the corridor. RMS is likely to go to consultation next year on this planning study.

- The NSW Government has committed to the duplication of the New England Highway from Belford to the Golden Highway, and a grade separation of the Golden and New England highways.
- RMS is liaising with Cessnock LGA regarding connections from the Hunter Expressway to Cessnock.
- RMS has active projects in the area including works on the Wine Country Drive.
- RMS has other projects in development including minor intersection works. Some of these are developed as a result of short-term safety concerns.
- The highway classification of the NEH has been removed, increasing the opportunity for changes in terms of street tree planting, parking, traffic movements and signage.

Given RMS plans for the sub-region, it is likely Branxton will become even more accessible to a broader catchment, increasing the demand for housing and employment and the importance of infrastructure and service provision.

Water Infrastructure

Hunter Water advise their regional water supply network has residual capacity for water supply to accommodate the projected population growth till 2017/19 depending on growth scenarios. The projected growth rates used by Hunter Water include consideration of population rates, Section 50 applications, strategic land use plans and Huntlee. Beyond this period upgrades to trunk infrastructure will be required to accommodate any new large development.

Hunter Water is working with Huntlee to prepare a Sub-regional Servicing Strategy to accommodate growth demands imposed by Huntlee beyond 2017/19. This Strategy is expected for release mid-2015. The Strategy will detail timing and staging of infrastructure upgrades required to service Huntlee and the broader sub-region beyond 2017/19.

The regional network has no capacity constraint to supply, however the trunk reticulation network will need upgrading beyond 2017/19 to accommodate any new major development. The 2015 Strategy will address upgrade plans to meet future needs. It is not expected that water supply will constrain future development.

Sewer Infrastructure

Hunter Water advise there is no capacity constraint to the local or regional sewerage network or treatment plants servicing the study area. Therefore, any new development is capable of being serviced by sewer, but may require localised extensions to the reticulation network for connection.

Bushfire

Large areas of study area are mapped as bushfire prone. The presence of bushfire prone land does not preclude all development, but rather affects development yield, necessitating un-developed buffers to be provided within developments.

Mineral resources and extraction

Exploration licenses have been granted for coal seam gas opportunities in the Study Area, however, there are no active applications or titles for minerals, coal, petroleum or gas in the Study Area.

The North Rothbury Quarry remains operational with an expected life of at least six years (NSW Department of Industry – Geological Survey of New South Wales; 2015). Geological Survey of NSW (GSNSW) identifies a 'transition' area around the quarry for land use planning purposes, to 'flag' the possibility of not only potential impacts from active operations (Mineral Resources Audit identified resource area), but also potential impacts from proposed development close to (and possibly encroaching on) the identified resource area (refer **Figure 2**).

There is a long history of mining in the study area, and whilst there is no proclaimed mine subsidence district within the Study Area, there could be potential for isolated areas of mine subsidence.

Detailed investigations undertaken for the Huntlee state significant planning assessed the subsidence issues for the Ayrfield/ Maitland Extended area where mining occurred from 1908 to 1974. The Mine Subsidence Board (MSB) has given advice on restrictions to development in the Huntlee and the remediation processes are required prior to development in this area.

For locations, especially around Greta, specific investigations into the potential for mine subsidence should be undertaken at a rezoning stage.

Governance

The study area straddles the border of Cessnock City and Singleton local government areas and the Upper Hunter and Lower Hunter Strategy regions. This geographic location presents difficulties in apportioning community services and infrastructure, as well as presenting a challenge in achieving support for development direction and change across the broad political and community landscape.

3.3 Housing Strategy

This Housing Strategy, a component of the Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy, identifies areas suitable for the provision of additional housing to assist meet the housing needs for the Branxton Subregion to 2041.

In order to undertake an analysis of residentially zoned land within the Subregion and prepare a strategy to meet the existing and future housing needs, the following methodology has been used:

1. Identification of the role of each settlement in subregion
2. Analysis of the demand for dwellings based on projected population demands
3. Analysis of the demand for different types of dwellings (residential and rural residential)
4. Analysis of the area of land zoned for residential and rural residential housing
5. Analysis and identification of potential land for rezoning

3.3.1 Role of each Settlement

This section identifies each of the suburbs and villages in the Subregion, and discusses their role in the provision of existing and future housing.

Greta

Greta is mostly within the Cessnock LGA, with Orient Street forming the boundary with Maitland City Council.

With the extension of the Lower Hunter growth corridor west from Maitland along the New England Highway, Greta has been going through a transformation from an unserviced village, into a small town. This has implications for the re-development of existing housing with demand for more dual occupancy and multi-unit residential housing, on larger lots that can now be serviced. Increased dwelling density may also have an effect on stormwater drainage and other flooding, footpaths and local commercial and community services.

Residential land in Greta is partly zoned R2 Low Density Residential and R5 Large Lot Residential. There are also a number of disconnected residential areas, including areas separated by the rail line, highway and drainage corridors. The Greta Migrant Camp site is also zoned R2 Low Density Residential.

East Branxton

East Branxton is within the Cessnock LGA, with Hillview Road and Spring St forming the boundary with Singleton Council.

East Branxton has grown to be a larger urban settlement area than Branxton (approximately 85ha compared to 61ha). Due to constraints such as flooding, access and buffers to agricultural and services, East Branxton is disconnected from the commercial centres in

Branxton and Greta but is located close to regional sporting facilities and is at the gateway to the new HEX access point. Changes to constraints, especially in relation to the potential re-location of the poultry farms, would be an opportunity to review urban expansion at the fringes of East Branxton.

Residential land in East Branxton is zoned R2 Low Density Residential.

Branxton

Branxton is wholly within the Cessnock LGA.

Branxton is a small town and the current service centre for the Subregion, however this will change with the development of a large town centre and large urban area at Huntlee which will become the service centre for the Subregion. Residential streets in Branxton are characterised by single dwellings and a regular grid pattern. It has attractive views long-distant views to rural areas, and a scattering of heritage items.

Residential land in Branxton is zoned R3 Medium Density Residential.

North Rothbury

The village of North Rothbury is in the Cessnock LGA. It is surrounded by the Huntlee development, and the first stage of the Huntlee development directly adjoins dwellings in North Rothbury. Provision has been made for local road connections between the village and the new urban area, which will provide good access to new services (parks, sportsfields, commercial, community).

There are about 200 dwellings in the village, and they are not connected to sewer.

Residential land in North Rothbury is zoned RU5 Village. However, pending connection to the new urban area, it is likely that the village zoning will need to be re-considered.

Huntlee

Huntlee New Town is a State significant development proposal for 7,500 new dwellings and a town centre. Land was zoned to facilitate the development in December 2010, and the Minister for Planning granted approval for Stage 1 in April 2013. Stage 1 includes the subdivision of land for 1,473 residential lots (potential for 2,345 dwellings), part of the Core Town Centre and infrastructure services.

As shown in the developer's staging plan (see **Plate 2** below), this commences on the land adjoining North Rothbury village. The Stage 1 residential area then extends to the east. The rural residential area (potential for 266 dwellings) is also in Stage 1.

Future stages are subject to planning approval, and include land in the Singleton LGA (some of which is flood prone) and expansion of the commercial area.

Residential land in Huntlee Stage 1 is zoned R1 General Residential and R5 Large Lot Residential.

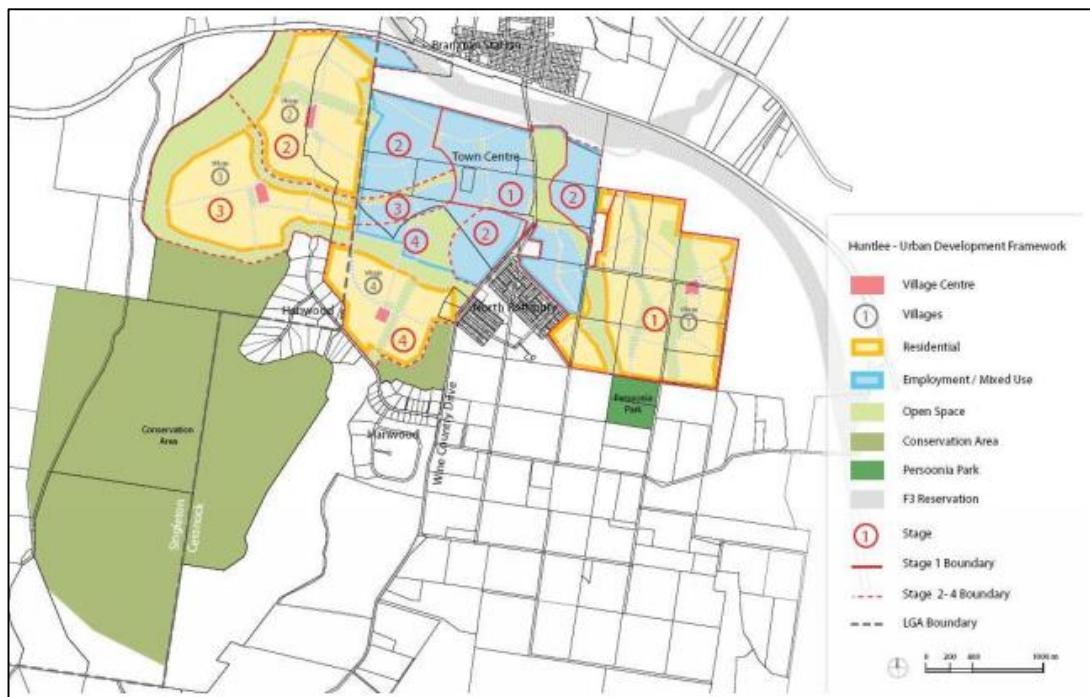


Plate 2 Huntlee Indicative Staging Plan

Branxton North Rural Residential Area

A large rural residential area extends north of East Branxton. It is generally bound by Elderslie Road, Rusty Lane and Dalwood Road, and is wholly located in the Singleton LGA.

This area has developed in stages over a long period of time, but there is a reasonable degree of connected roads (including the boundary roads plus McMullins Rd and Brokenback Rd). Lot sizes are generally around 8,000sqm to 1 hectare, however in the Radford Park Estate (west of Elderslie Rd) lots are as small as 2,000sqm with connection to sewer.

The area has a high degree of scenic quality and connected patches of native vegetation. Pressure to add to the rural residential estate, or increase the density of development will likely impact on these features.

Rural residential land in the Branxton North area is zoned R5 Large Lot Residential, with a small area of E4 Environmental Living.

Standen Drive Environmental Living Area

Land adjoining the Belford National Park and extending along Standen Drive has been zoned for environmental living purposes. This area is within the Singleton LGA. It is planned that lots will vary between 1ha and 4ha. Development has not yet occurred in these areas.

The E4 Environmental Living zone is used in this area, due to the remote location from a residential area and the environmental significance of the area (National Park, visually prominent Belford Dome).

Dwelling projections in Regional and Local Strategies

A detailed description of the dwelling projections in the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy, the local settlement strategies for Cessnock and Singleton LGA is provided in **Section 2.2** of this report. The estimated dwelling yields from the identified development areas are:

- Huntlee: 7,500 dwellings (300 rural residential)
- Anvil Creek: 1,364 dwellings
- Wyndham St: 316 dwellings
- Branxton infill: 150 dwellings (including 50 dwellings in town centre)
- Huntlee infill: 100 dwellings
- Additional dwellings in Greta and North Rothbury: not quantified
- Branxton North rural residential: 670 dwellings

Rezoning has occurred in these areas, with the exception of small areas in Branxton North, to enable residential development to occur.

3.3.2 Drivers of Change

The influences on development in the residential areas of the Branxton subregion are:

- Population and household demographic changes
- Housing demand and supply
- Lifestyle choices
- Changes resulting from the opening of the Hunter Expressway
- Nearby employment opportunities, including preferences for working from home and home businesses

The extent of these influences is described in detail below.

Demographics

Key important statistics relating to future housing development are summarised below.

- Total population is 8,215 in 2011
- Population skews younger than the NSW average
- 80% of households have children, with 2.8 persons occupancy rate
- 93% of dwellings are separate houses
- Projected population of 17,649 by 2041, with 80% of the increase to be in Huntlee

The implications of these characteristics is that there is a high demand for housing in Huntlee, which is likely to be more family housing (separate dwellings, households with children, young population). This has implications for access to education and child care facilities and services. There are also opportunities to increase the diversity of housing to enable residents

to “age-in-place” without having to relocate from the Subregion if they want to down-size to a smaller house or villa.

Housing demand

The forecast for projected dwellings in the Branxton Subregion that has been used for this report comes from the NSW Government projections, using the small area forecasts prepared by the Bureau of Transport Statistics. This has been preferred instead of the LHRS or local strategies because it is the most recent forecast (last updated in September 2014), it takes a Statewide view of population and demographic characteristics, and it provides fine detail to more easily identify the areas of the Subregion.

Dwelling forecasts have been prepared by the State government for the Branxton subregion, and have been separated in Table 5 for the projected dwellings associated with Huntlee and for the balance of the subregion. Table 6 shows the projected net increase in dwellings for each decade by precinct.

Table 5: Total Projected Dwelling Demand 2011 - 2041

	2011	2021	2031	2041
Huntlee	0	1,236	2,389	2,928
Balance of Sub-region	2,971	3,160	3,395	3,600
TOTAL	2,971	4,396	5,784	6,528

Table 6: Projected Increase in Dwellings 2011 - 2041

	2011 - 2021	2021- 2031	2031 - 2041	TOTAL for precinct
Huntlee	1,236	1,153	539	2,928
Balance of Sub-region	189	236	205	629
TOTAL	1,425	1,389	744	3,558

These forecasts show fast growth for Huntlee during 2011 - 2031, so that approximately one-third of the planned dwellings are constructed during this period, followed by a sharp tapering off over the next 10 years³. There is steady and regular dwelling constructions in the balance of the subregion throughout the forecast period (approximately 0.7%pa over 30 years).

³ In the employment forecasts, the period 2031- 2041 is a period of sharp increase in jobs located in Huntlee

Lifestyle choices and changes in demand

Given that the Hunter Expressway has been open for a short period of time, it is difficult to fully understand its implications for land use planning, both within the Subregion but also on the wider Hunter Region. In relation to housing demand, it is possible that the reductions in travel times in the Lower Hunter will increase housing demand in the Subregion. There may also be other run-on effects from other land use changes outside the Subregion, such as establishment of new employment areas near interchanges (for example, Hydro site) which could increase demand for housing close to the expressway. Within the Subregion, it is likely that Huntlee, rather than Greta or Branxton, will experience the greatest demand growth from the Hunter Expressway.

Improvements in information and technology communications is creating an emergence of interest in live/ work opportunities, with telecommuting replacing the drive to work. Lifestyle areas, with good amenities such as attractive settings, housing choice, education and entertainment options, have been able to attract “tree-changers”. The rural residential areas in North Branxton, and some areas in Branxton close to the main street, may be well placed to provide this lifestyle choice.

3.3.3 Demand for different types of dwellings

This section discusses the demands for residential and rural residential housing the Subregion, and makes recommendations for the distribution of these housing types across the settlement areas.

Discussion about rural residential land

The Branxton Subregion contains one of the largest clusters of rural residential development in the Hunter area, and it is especially notable because of the lot size within the catchment of the Branxton and Greta village centres, close proximity to education services and the highway/ expressway corridors. Coupled with an attractive mountain and forested backdrop and relatively constraint free land, rural residential development is strongly established in Branxton.

It becomes very difficult to re-develop rural residential land to transform it to urban land with smaller lot sizes, logical road pattern and reduced building setbacks and servicing. Therefore, it is most likely that the existing rural residential areas north of the NEH in Branxton will remain for rural residential housing.

This has created a land use plan where there is an urban centre (Branxton main street), higher to lower residential zones and expected densities, extending outwards to a band of rural residential development (R5 zone). The northern extension of the rural residential land use band from East Branxton is so wide that it is illogical to establish a residential zone north of the rural residential zone. Whilst there are some infill areas closer to Branxton and Greta

(including along Dalwood Road) that may be suitable for urban/ residential development, it would not be sound planning to introduce a new residential zone north of the established rural residential areas.

Therefore, whilst new rural residential development is generally not encouraged in State planning directions, there is a case to be made for considering expansion of the rural residential areas in the Branxton Subregion, where the land is suitable and there is demonstrated demand.

Recommendations about dwelling type

Table 7 forecasts a split between residential and rural residential dwelling demand, based on existing planning for Huntlee (all rural residential land zoned in Stage 1), as well as maintain a high ratio of rural residential development for the balance of the subregion. The ratio of residential to rural residential is applied to the total number of additional dwellings forecast for each 10-year period (2021, 2031, 2041).

No specific recommendations are made for village or environmental living areas. Village areas would be considered in the residential land supply (for the Huntlee catchment) and environmental living would be considered in the rural residential land supply.

Table 7: Additional Dwelling Required by Type

Housing Type		Additional Dwellings Required			
		2021	2031	2041	TOTAL
Huntlee	Residential (90%)	1,113	1,038	485	2,636
	Rural Residential (10%)	123	115	54	292
Balance of subregion	Residential (60%)	113	142	123	378
	Rural Residential (40%)	76	94	82	252
	TOTAL	1,425	1,389	744	3,558

There has also been a long history of rural residential development in the Branxton subregion, and it is expected that this will continue over the period of the Strategy because of the relative availability of land, the existing and planned rural residential estates, lifestyle opportunities in the Subregion and limited supplies of rural residential land in other parts of the Lower Hunter.

3.3.4 Review of existing zoned land

This section explains how existing zoned areas can accommodate forecast residential demand.

For the purposes of this report, residential land within the subregion includes land within the following zones (shown in **Figure 4**):

- R1 General Residential
- R2 Low Density Residential
- R3 Medium Density Residential
- R5 Large Lot Residential
- E4 Environmental Living
- RU5 Village

In addition to these zones, approximately 90ha of B4 Mixed Use zone in Huntlee is planned to accommodate residential development in a combination of seniors housing and medium density housing types.

There is more than 1,800 hectares of land zoned for residential purposes across the subregion, and an estimated yield from these areas is shown in Table 8. The estimated dwellings per hectares are calculated from a combination of:

- Permitted minimum lot size
- Permitted types of housing
- Provision of road and drainage infrastructure
- Planning approvals for Huntlee
- Comparable yields in other Hunter urban development sites
- Proposed yields in regional and local strategies

Table 8: Estimated dwelling yield from zoned land

	Zone	Total area (ha)	Estimated dwellings/ ha	Potential number of dwellings
Residential	R1 General Residential & R2 Low Density	669 ha	10 dwellings/ ha	6,690
	R3 Medium Density	61 ha	15 dwellings/ ha	915
	RU5 Rural Village	38 ha	7 dwellings/ ha	266
Rural Residential	R5 Large Lot Residential & E4 Environmental Living	980 ha	2 dwellings/ ha	1,960
Huntlee Mixed Use	B4 Mixed Use	80 ha ⁴	20 dwellings/ ha	1,600
TOTAL		1,828 ha		11,431

The R1, R2 and R3 zones have been applied in Branxton, East Branxton, Greta and Huntlee. There are a range of different development standards (minimum lot size, building height, floor space ratio, setbacks) that apply to these zones, and are contained in a suite of separate

⁴ Area of B4 Mixed Use zone to be set aside for residential purposes, as advised by LWP during interview on 29 May 2015

planning documents (two LEPs, three DCPs). With the exclusion of Huntlee where development activity has only just commenced, there have been similar housing outcomes in each of these areas in terms of housing yield, types of housing (most separate dwellings, some attached/ multi-unit housing in each location), and types of non-residential development (child care centres, home businesses). This indicates that the different zones and planning controls may not be creating different housing outcomes.

Land capability and impact on yield

At the time of the 2011 census, there were 2,971 private dwellings in the Branxton subregion. Therefore, based on the estimated dwelling yield from the residential and rural residential land, there is a theoretical capacity within the existing zoned land for an additional 8,460 dwelling houses. Achieving this yield within the existing zoned land is constrained by physical limits such as flooding, drainage, slopes, bushfire hazards, ecological conservation and protection of agricultural land.

Figure 6 shows where these constraints affect zoned residential and rural residential land in the subregion.

- Areas of the fringe of Greta and East Branxton are affected by proximity to agricultural land, and these impacts may be possible to mitigate or will change over time.
- Flooding issues in Branxton affect some residential land near the town centre, which could potentially be managed with built form controls (raised habitable floor levels, with ground floor garages/ storage areas).
- Within the Huntlee area, there are some flooding constraints to be resolved (on the land in the Singleton LGA) which may affect the realisation of the proposed yield (predominantly for the later stages).
- Environmental conservation areas are present in the rural residential and environmental living areas. Land subdivision and lot sizes have been planned to retain this vegetation.

Therefore, these constraints can generally be addressed and are expected to have a limited impact on the potential number of dwellings from these areas.

Demand and matching supply

There is more than adequate supply of land within the existing areas zoned for residential purposes to meet these dwelling forecasts, as demonstrated in Table 9. No changes to increase densities or housing types is required at this stage to achieve greater housing yields.

Table 9: Demand on matching supply of residential land

Housing Type		Additional Dwellings Required	Estimated yield of new dwellings from existing zoned land
Huntlee	Residential	2,636	7,200
	Rural Residential	292	300
Balance of subregion	Residential	378	> 400, including Wyndham St Greta
	Rural Residential	252	> 500
	TOTAL	3,558	>8,400

Whilst higher the existing housing densities could be achieved in parts of Branxton (i.e. R3 Medium Density Residential zone), the forecast demand for residential development outside of Huntlee can largely be achieved within the recently rezoned land at Wyndham St Greta. A small number of infill dwellings (78 dwellings over 30 years) would need to be accommodated in other parts of Branxton and Greta, which could be accommodated by a combination of existing vacant lots or some limited re-development of single dwellings into dual occupancies. Table 9 also includes that there is a large amount of surplus capacity within the existing zoned residential land in Huntlee, which could meet higher demands.

3.3.5 Potential new areas for housing development

This section considers the opportunities for residential and rural residential development, which includes sites identified in land use strategies, sites subject to planning proposals and sites not identified in a land use strategy.

Sites in land use strategies

As noted earlier, land to meet the dwelling projections in the local and regional strategy has been zoned, and whilst there are some constraints, Table 9 demonstrates that there is a large potential dwelling yield.

There are three sites (two in Branxton North, one in Standen Drive) in the Singleton Land Use Strategy (2008) that have not been zoned. These sites are each located within or adjoining existing zoned land and represent a logical extension of development. Site specific investigation is needed to determine if these sites should be rezoned, however, it is expected that they would only create a very small increase in dwelling capacity.

Increasing housing yield with infill housing in Branxton and Huntlee is recommended in the Cessnock Citywide Settlement Strategy (2010) (CWSS). This was to be met through a combination of redevelopment, urban consolidation and the rezoning of small areas of land within the urban footprint. These opportunities may be difficult to achieve given the extent of flooding in the Branxton Town Centre and the detailed planning and yield analysis that has occurred for Huntlee.

The R2 Low Density Residential zone in Greta is intended to reflect its connection to a growing urban area, but that it is separated from a commercial centre. The CWSS recommended that the R2 zone prohibit all forms of multiple dwelling housing (including dual occupancies) in recognition of separate from supporting commercial centre, however there is opportunity to re-consider this position when reviewing the role of the Greta commercial area. The R2 zone currently permits multiple dwelling housing, and some of this form of development has been occurring in the last 5 years (Wyndham St, Devon Street).

There are also opportunities for additional development on the serviced R5 Large Lot Residential areas in Greta that are not quantified, but are acknowledged in the CWSS. These opportunities are that increased development yield in these areas will make a more efficient use of the existing zoned land and infrastructure.

Current Planning Proposal

Singleton Council is currently assessing a Planning Proposal for residential and conservation uses on land off Dalwood Road, Leconfield - refer to **Figure 3**. The Planning Proposal has been publicly exhibited and Singleton Council, at its meeting on 3 August 2015, has deferred its decision to finalise the Planning Proposal until this Strategy is further progressed.

The site adjoins existing residential and rural residential land, but is partly affected by flooding and the proximity of nearby poultry farms. The opportunity exists for some development on the site, however, the development density needs to be considered in the context of the wider strategy for land use zones and minimum lot sizes across the study area.

Sites not identified in land use strategies

Unsolicited Expressions of Interest (EOI) for new development sites have been received by Cessnock and Singleton Councils during the preparation period of the Land Use Strategy. These sites (26 lots in total) are shown in **Figure 3**, and listed in Appendix A. Most sites adjoin existing residential areas, however detailed environmental assessment, consideration of subdivision layout and dwelling densities, and assessment of the sensitivity of the visual aspect and rural character needs to be undertaken. There is also a requirement to consider infrastructure servicing, supply and demand for additional residential land, and timing of land use change.

Given the large supply of existing zoned land, it is unlikely that additional land needs to be identified in the short-term. This should be regularly monitored and re-considered in future reviews of this strategy.

3.3.6 Principles and Growth Area Recommendations

This section outlines the criteria which will influence the selection of sites for residential and rural residential zones and development. It also provides specific recommendations for the location of housing growth to meet projected dwelling demand.

Principles for identifying future residential land

The primary guiding principle to support the growth of the Branxton Subregion is to direct population growth to planned and serviced areas, to more efficiently utilise existing infrastructure and reduce the sprawl associated with rezoning of rural land.

Table 9 above demonstrates that there should be sufficient capacity within the existing rural residential and residential areas to cater for the forecast dwelling increase to 2041. On the face of this assessment, no additional land needs to be rezoned in the Subregion in the short-term.

Whilst no additional land should be required, it is important to provide a wide range of housing choices to cater for different needs and different incomes, such as infill, medium density housing and affordable housing, which are not always catered for in new release areas or in rural residential estates. Planning for these types of housing choices should include reviewing the opportunities within existing zoned land, which may require planning control changes (to reduce minimum lot size) or provide incentives for affordable housing (reduced s94 contributions).

Some principles have been established to assist in the identification of future residential land if it is required because of higher than expected new housing demand. It is intended that the Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy adopt these principles and apply them to the suitable land referencing known constraints and opportunities of the Subregion.

New rural residential land⁵ should be:

- Located to sustain and enhance the natural environment, protect the natural waterways, bushland and habitat links, protect views, landscapes and the visual character and preserve local heritage.
- Connected to reticulated water and sewer, and local infrastructure contributions subject to section 94 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 (EP&A Act) should be less than \$20,000/ lot⁶.
- At least 1km from mapped BSAL and CIC areas, and 1km from clusters of intensive agricultural activities.
- Less than 15km by road from Huntlee town centre or another major town.

⁵ For the purposes of this report, rural residential land is defined as having a minimum lot size less than 2ha.

⁶ The IPART can consider local contributions up to \$30,000 per lot for urban release areas, however, no large urban release areas are expected beyond those already zoned.

New residential land should be:

- Located to sustain and enhance the natural environment, protect the natural waterways, bushland and habitat links, protect views, landscapes and the visual character and preserve and enhance local heritage.
- Planned to create a community “heart” and have places where people can gather and socialise, be easy and safe to get around, have a range of facilities, services and experiences, and have a mix of land uses.
- Developed so that there is a mix of housing types, including different densities and affordability, which responds to the changing demographics.
- Connected to reticulated water and sewer, and located so that the augmentation of local infrastructure as required by s94 of the EP&A Act (roads, open space, drainage, community facilities) does not cost more than \$20,000/ lot⁷.
- Sited so that all residential development is built above the flood planning level and avoids urban stormwater hazards.

Growth Area Recommendations

In determining future requirements for residential development, the quantity of available zoned land is one mechanism by which the demand for housing can be addressed. However, there is a need to determine whether the type, location and size of residential lots/ dwellings is adequately meeting the demands of various sectors of the community. Hence, the following recommendations specific both the quantity of land which should be provided for housing over a 25+ year period, in addition to providing recommended actions pertaining to the type of housing and siting of growth areas.

Urban Areas:

- In relation to Greta, East Branxton and Branxton; provide an additional 378 dwellings (to 2041) from the existing zoned land and Dalwood Road Planning Proposal site. There should be sufficient capacity on vacant/ underutilised sites in the short-term, until services are extended to Wyndham Street and Dalwood Road.
- In relation to North Rothbury and Huntlee, provide an additional 2,636 dwellings (to 2041) from the existing zoned land. This can largely be accommodated within the Stage 1 approval of Huntlee (estimated 2,079 residential dwellings).
- Review the residential zoning scheme and consider applying two zones, with a medium density zone around commercial centres, and a low density zone for the balance of the residential area. Achieve an average density of around 10 dwellings/ ha for low density and 15 dwellings/ ha for medium density.

⁷ See note above about IPART

- Allow dual occupancy and multi-dwelling housing in the low density zone, but limit residential flat buildings (and development taller than 2 storeys) to the medium density zone.
- Review the extent of the R5 zone at Greta, and consider applying a low density residential zone where the land can be serviced.
- Review the zoning of the Greta Migrant Camp site, and consider applying the SP3 Tourist zone, which would be consistent with sites in the Pokolbin area.
- Review the RU5 zoning at North Rothbury, and consider applying a low density residential zone where the land can be serviced.
- Allow shop top housing in the commercial areas of Greta, Branxton and Huntlee.
- Encourage housing for seniors within a 400m walking radius of Branxton and Huntlee town centres.

Rural Residential and Environmental Living Areas:

- In relation to North Branxton and Standen Drive, and any balance of R5 land in Greta; provide an additional 252 dwellings (to 2041) from the existing zoned land, and the Investigation Areas in the adopted Singleton Land Use Strategy (subject to Planning Proposal).
- In relation to Huntlee; provide 292 dwellings (to 2041) from the existing zoned land. This can largely be accommodated within the Stage 1 approval of Huntlee (266 rural residential dwellings).

General Housing Recommendations:

- Buildings in sensitive rural locations to be of materials which will blend with the surrounding landscape in terms of external colours.
- Prepare Design Guidelines for incorporation within the planning scheme (DCP) to address the siting, access, form and scale buildings in areas of high scenic value, including the area between Branxton and Greta, and the Radford Park estate.

3.4 Employment Strategy

This Employment Strategy, a component of the Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy, identifies a hierarchy of centres, land to accommodate a growing local workforce and land for additional employment generating development to 2041.

This Strategy addresses the following sites in the Subregion:

- Land zoned B1 Neighbourhood Centre, B2 Local Centre, B4 Mixed Use zone and IN2 Light Industrial zone; and
- Land where significant employment activity is occurring which may be adjacent to an employment zone or in a rural area.

In order to undertake an analysis of employment land within the Subregion and prepare a strategy to meet the needs of the existing and future community, the following methodology has been used:

1. Identification of the role of each centre in the subregion
2. Analysis of the demand for employment land based on projected population demands and other factors
3. Analysis of the demand for different types of employment land (business and industrial)
4. Analysis of the area of land zoned for business and industrial uses

3.4.1 Role of each Centre

The purpose of this section is to identify each of the activity centres in the Subregion, and discuss their role in the provision of existing and future jobs.

Greta

Greta has a small village centre, which is located within the Cessnock LGA. It is a small area of land (approximately 1.8 hectares) zoned *B1 Neighbourhood Centre* in the centre of town, which is currently occupied by a number of retail and community uses including a bakery, butcher and newsagent, McDonalds restaurant and the Greta Arts and Sports Community Hall (refer **Figures 7 and 8**). The retail floor spaces are similar in average size to Branxton (around 310m² of gross floor area). Several dwellings currently occupy B1 zoned land, whilst a service station development, Greta Workers Club and three other isolated retail uses occupy land zoned *R2 Low Density Residential*.

An isolated pocket (approximately 4.7ha) of B1 zoned land also exists on the southern outskirts of town, as part of the Greta Migrant Camp Golf Course site (yet to be developed). This B1 zoned land is proposed for the local retail needs of the tourist development, and as a specialised centre it will not likely service a broader catchment. This development has not yet proceeded and the B1 land remains vacant.

There is no industrial zoned land in the Greta catchment.

Branxton

Branxton has a small town centre, which is located within the Cessnock LGA. There is approximately 7 hectares of *B2 Local Centre* zoned land within the Branxton town centre, comprising a mix of retail, commercial, residential, tourist and community uses (refer **Figures 9 and 10**). Approximately 2 hectares of this land is currently vacant and 1.57ha is underutilised for commercial purposes (used as dwellings or vacant buildings). Some commercial uses are located on residential zoned land (e.g. medical centre in the *R3 Medium Density Residential* zone, takeaway shop and hotel in *RU2 Rural Landscape* zone). The business/retail town centre is characterised by fine grain development of predominately small shops of around 330m² of gross floor area (refer **Figure 11**). The fine grain built form lends itself to smaller boutique retail uses.

There are two small pockets of land zoned *IN2 Light Industrial*, with a combined total area of approximately 13 hectares i.e. one area located north of the main street and the other south of the main street, adjacent to the railway line (refer **Figure 12**). Both areas are located adjacent to existing residential areas and are occupied by a range of light industrial uses including earthmoving and haulage, nursery, motor vehicle repairs and prefabricated steel building manufacturers (refer **Figure 13**). There are a number of dwelling-houses scattered throughout these areas. The majority of lots are occupied, leaving only about 4 hectares of vacant land available for future development. Isolated small lots remain vacant to the south, while one large parcel of industrial zoned land is vacant north of the New England Highway (NEH) (refer **Figure 14**).

Huntlee

Located just south of Branxton, Huntlee has been planned to be a major urban area with a total population of approximately 21,000 people. Approximately 276 hectares is zoned *B4 Mixed Use* land (refer **Figure 4**), which permits a range of commercial, retail and residential uses, such as boarding houses, educational establishments, hotel or motel accommodation, medical centres, recreation facilities (indoor), registered clubs and shop-top housing. Of this large B4 area, about 130ha is identified for business uses in the approved development plans. The balance will be for residential and community uses. The new town centre will be zoned B4, and is wholly within the Cessnock LGA.

Subdivision approval for Stage 1 of the Huntlee town centre was granted in April 2013. The land is currently vacant and servicing (roads, utilities) is underway at the time of this report. Within the Huntlee development, the proposed sewerage treatment works and electricity generating works are zoned *SP2 Infrastructure* zone.

Within the master-planned Huntlee town centre, 4ha of employment land has been purchased by Coles for a supermarket and other specialty retail shops. Expressions of Interest are currently being called for other employment uses for the town centre

development including childcare, medical centre, shops and retirement village. However, it is expected to take between 2 - 3 years to service and develop the town centre for the commercial activities to occupy the land. Therefore, the first shops and businesses are predicted to open in 2017/2018.

The remaining employment land will be progressively available in response to demand.

There is no industrial zoned land in Huntlee.

Other employment areas

The existing railway line, the Hunter Expressway and main roads are zoned *SP2 Infrastructure*. There is also an area of *SP2 Infrastructure* zoned land to the west of the existing residential area, located between the main street and the railway line (refer **Figure 4**). This irregular shaped parcel has an area of approximately 250 hectares and was originally zoned for the Hunter Expressway but was not needed for this purpose. RMS currently own this land and have expressed interest with Singleton Council to rezone and subdivide this land for sale. The land could potentially be rezoned for employment or residential uses.

Singleton Council have also identified a 1 hectare parcel of *RU1 Primary Production* zoned land located on Standen Drive, Branxton as having an existing industrial use and being subject of a current development application (DA) for a new concrete batching plant.

3.4.2 Drivers of Change

Population and household demographic changes have an influence on development in the employment areas of the Branxton subregion.

Demand for industrial land within the Subregion is also affected by the extensive availability of industrial land nearby, but broader market influences such as the Global Financial Crisis, China trade agreements, coal mining down turn and export market diversification. Light industrial land for local services (auto repairs, storage, rural supplies) is generally not provided in the larger estates and there will continue to be demand for these activities in the Subregion.

Demand for local business land has been influenced by the growing resident population and the volumes of passing traffic on the NEH. The opening of the HEX and the decision to create a large town centre (and large area of mixed business/ residential land) in Huntlee will reduce the demand for local business land in Branxton and Greta. However, there may be new opportunities that could be explored to encourage new enterprises and maintain the vitality of these main streets.

The extent of these influences is described in detail below.

Demographics

Key important statistics relating to employment areas are summarised below.

- In 2011, there were 3,306 residents who had full-time or part-time jobs. There were 1,511 jobs in the Subregion.
- A large proportion (15.9%) were employed in the coal mining industry, with other jobs in retailing, engineering and education.
- 95% of employed residents commute to work by car, predominantly travelling within the Cessnock and Singleton LGAs.
- Project workforce of 8,542 by 2041, with 4,180 jobs located in the Subregion (of which 60% would be in the Huntlee town centre).

The implications of these characteristics is that there is a high dependency on successful job creation in the Huntlee town centre (only 136 additional jobs to 2041 outside of Huntlee, compared to 2,533 within Huntlee). Downturn in the mining industry is already having an effect on employment rates, however, it is expected that many of these jobs could be replaced locally in the construction industry associated with new urban development. More local jobs will also reduce the journey to work.

Demand for Jobs and Growth in Huntlee

The employment forecasts in the Branxton Subregion that has been used for this report comes from the NSW Government projections, using the small area forecasts prepared by the Bureau of Transport Statistics. This has been preferred instead of the LHRs or local strategies because it is the most recent forecast (last updated in September 2014), it takes a Statewide view of population and demographic characteristics, and it provides fine detail to more easily identify the areas of the Subregion.

The forecasts consider the future workforce from residents aged 15 years and over, and the likely number of jobs that will be located within the subregion. These are summarised in Tables 10 and 11. Similar to the dwelling forecasts, forecasts for Huntlee are separated from the remainder of the Subregion to illustrate the amount of change attributed to Huntlee.

Table 10: Workforce 2011 - 2041

	2011	2021	2031	2041
Number of residents employed	4,265	6,027	7,758	8,542
- Huntlee	0	1,506	1,904	2,356
- Balance of subregion	4,265	4,521	5,854	6,186
% of population employed	52%	50%	49%	48%

Table 11: Employment 2011 - 2041

2011	2021	2031	2041

Number of jobs within Subregion	1,511	2,138	2,817	4,180
- Huntlee	0	591	1,217	2,533
- Balance of subregion	1,511	1,547	1,600	1,647
% of sub-region population (containment rate)	35%	35%	36%	49%

Over the period of this Strategy, there is expected to be a significant increase in population, arising from the development of the Huntlee estate and the provision of new services, and the improvement in travel times from the completion of the Hunter Expressway. This population will generate demand for local goods and services, and will also generate demand for more jobs, as suggested by the increase in employment and workforce in Tables 10 and 11.

More detailed interrogation of the workforce and employment projections is needed to determine what job categories are forecast to grow, however it is a reasonable assumption that service jobs (food, personal services, retailing) and businesses (finance, professional services, administration) will increase with the development of a new town centre in Huntlee and 2,533 jobs to be created.

The stand-out figure is the increase in the proportion of jobs to be located within the Branxton subregion between 2031 and 2041. This increase is based on an assumption that 1,316 new jobs will be created in the Huntlee town centre over this 10-year period, as shown in Table 11.

Outside of Huntlee, there is a very small increase (only 136 jobs over 30 years) in the total of new jobs for the balance of the subregion. These jobs may be in the commercial or industrial areas, but could also be on rural properties or home based businesses.

Regional employment areas

In addition to existing employment lands within the study area, there are significant large industrial estates within close proximity of the Branxton sub-region (refer to **Figure 15**). The implication for this Strategy is that the demand for major industrial employment land can be met outside of the Subregion. New jobs in these areas will be in close commuting distance for residents of the Branxton subregion.

Hunter Expressway

The opening of the Hunter Expressway may also affect demand for employment land in the Subregion. Given that the Hunter Expressway has been open for a short period of time, it is difficult to fully understand its implications for land use planning, both within the Subregion but also on the wider Hunter Region.

In relation to the demand for light industrial land, it is possible that the reductions in travel times in the Lower Hunter will reduce demand in the Subregion, because it is a small industrial area and not well located in relation to the HEX interchanges.

In relation to the reduction in traffic on the New England Highway, traffic counts by the RMS before and after the opening of the HEX indicate that there has been a massive 90% reduction in the number of vehicles passing along the main street of Branxton. Whilst there has not been a quantification of the subsequent reduction in trade for the business owners in Branxton, it is a reasonable assumption supported by evidence from other by-pass towns, that there is a change in trade.

Research from Australia (BTCE, 1994; RMS, 2012) and the United States of America (Economic Development Research Group, 2000) indicated that there are consistent impacts on town centres arising from highway bypasses. The common themes in the research are:

- There will be turn over or relocation of existing businesses, especially traffic-servicing businesses.
- Communities and town centres with a strong identity as a destination or for local shopping are most likely to be economically stronger due to reduced traffic delays.
- Adequate signage to the by-passed town centre is needed to "remind" vehicle drivers.
- Tourism and visitor benefits are felt in the long term, after towns have had time to exploit new opportunities.
- Quality of life factors (i.e. better place to live, quieter, no traffic congestion) are commonly experienced.
- Investment and intervention by government can assist to soften the immediate impacts of the loss in through traffic.
- The effect of the impacts depends on the characteristics of the bypassed town (for example, tourism-based towns fare better than those focussed on freight services).

The most recent study commissioned by the RMS and published in 2012, concludes that:

"in the longer term highway bypasses do not have adverse economic impacts on town that are bypassed and that in most cases bypasses have resulted in economic development benefits for the towns which have been bypassed" (pg. v)

Therefore, the constraint from the loss of passing and through traffic, might become an opportunity for the longer term economic benefit for Branxton Town Centre. The mechanisms to exploit this change will be presented in the Town Centre Masterplan.

3.4.3 Demand for different types of employment land

This section discusses the demands for business and industrial jobs in the Subregion.

For the purposes of this report, 'take-up' is defined as the quantity (in hectares) of vacant zoned employment land that has been developed for retail, commercial or industrial uses over a 12 month period.

Cessnock Council development application records provided for the 10 year period from December 2004 to December 2014, reported that whilst there was nearly 100 applications made for development approval for employment purposes, only a small area of land was taken-up for employment purposes (see Table 12).

The majority of the applications were for changes of use (14 applications), additions to existing buildings (12 applications), subdivision of land/ buildings (6 applications) and demolition of buildings (5 applications). No new areas of employment land were released during this period (with the exception of the rezoned land at Huntlee and Greta Migrant Camp).

At Huntlee, a large area of business zoned land has recently been approved to be developed as a residential exhibition village. This area has not been included in the take-up of employment land as it was planned that this land would have a residential function and not an employment purpose.

Table 12 below summarises take-up of zoned employment lands within the Study Area over the 10 year period from 2004 to 2014.

Table 12: Take-up of Commercial v Industrial Land by Precinct (2004 - 2014)¹

Precinct	Area of land	
	Local business	Light industrial
Branxton	0.33ha	0.10ha
Greta	0.45ha	0.00ha
TOTAL	0.78ha	0.10ha

¹ excluding exhibition village on B4 land at Huntlee

The 0.1ha of industrial land take-up over the ten years from 2004 was limited to one site being developed for storage sheds in 2011.

This rate of take-up is expected to change in response to the significant population growth, however, as reflected in the forecast location of jobs (Table 11), the take up of land is predominately going to be in Huntlee town centre.

3.4.4 Review of existing zoned land

This section explains how existing zoned areas can accommodate forecast jobs growth.

There are some 302.5 hectares of existing zoned employment lands within the Branxton Subregion, including:

- 13.5 hectares of local business land (B1 and B2 zone)
- 276 hectares of mixed use business/residential land (B4 zone) of which 130 hectares is set aside for business only purposes
- 13 hectares of light industrial land (IN2 zone).

Of the local business land, about two-thirds is underutilised (vacant land or buildings, or non-commercial uses) and there are sites with good street access and suitable size for new commercial development to take place.

Light industrial land in Branxton more than 75% occupied, with only a three vacant lots remaining. Part of the industrial land is constrained by flooding, but new development and new industrial activities are also limited by the interface with residential development and the located between the rail line and residential areas. There is further detail in the Employment Land Audit in Appendix B.

The mixed use business/ residential land is all in Huntlee, and has been concept planned to be developed in the following ways⁸:

- Employment purposes - 130Ha
- Retirement living purposes - 10Ha
- Educational purposes - 20Ha
- Residential purposes - 80Ha
- Open Space / sports fields - 36Ha

⁸ Verbal advice from LWP, during interview on 29 May 2015

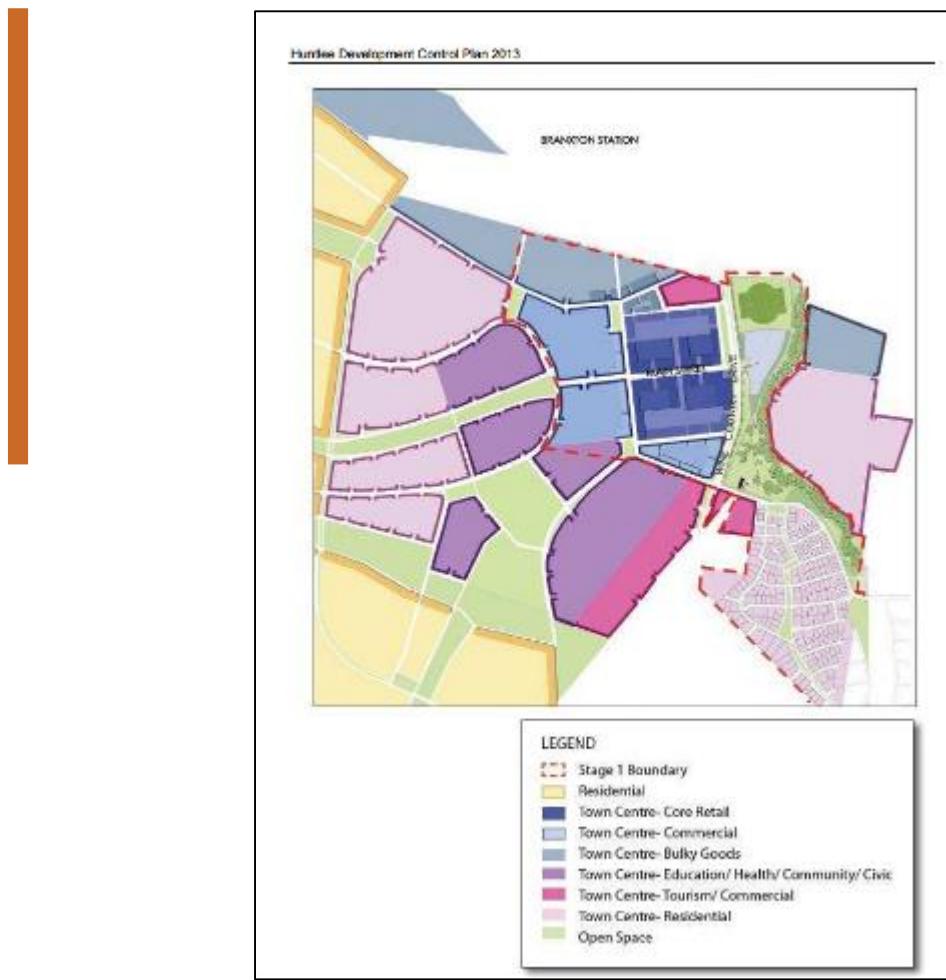


Plate 3: Huntlee DCP – Town Centre Plan

Constraints

Some employment lands in the Subregion are more constrained than others. Constraints include land ownership (e.g. multiple ownership and/or unwilling sellers), insufficient infrastructure provision or servicing difficulties, physical constraints such as flooding or slope, potential land use conflicts and distance from major transport routes or markets. These constraints are shown in detail in **Figures 16, 17 and 18**, and are discussed below.

- Flooding has a significant effect on the vacant business and industrial land (north of Maitland Street) in Branxton, and more detailed flood mitigation planning is needed to address the required elevated floor level.
- The close proximity of houses to the IN2 land (north of Maitland Street Branxton) could potentially pose constraints on industrial uses that interfere with residential amenity by way of noise, odour, etc, thus limiting the type of industrial/employment uses for those.
- In the business zones, the size of the existing lots (as shown in **Figure 11**) and the cost to amalgamate land holdings may limit the development of large floor plate commercial uses like supermarkets, which generally require a minimum

of 3,000 sqm of gross floor area, plus carparking. The exception to this is the nearly 8,000m² parcel between Bowen and Clift Streets, Branxton. This site has previously been approved for a supermarket development, but this has since lapsed.

- Huntlee will be establishing their own water supply and sewerage treatment plant onsite to service both business and residential developments. Services will be online by 2017. Therefore, the employment zoned land is not available for occupation until 2017.

These constraints are generally well understood, and rather than prohibit the use of the zoned land, they modify types of activities that can occur, i.e. a number of smaller shops in Branxton rather than a single large development, or storage premises in the light industrial estate rather than smash repairs.

Demand and matching supply

Supplies of local business and light industrial land are currently meeting demand, as evidenced by the amount and location of vacant and underutilised land in the Subregion as described in **Section 3.4.4**. However, in order to maintain the local servicing and main street places, further commercial development is expected in the Branxton and Greta commercial zones.

This could include infill uses within the existing zoned sites in both centres and some minor expansions of the centres where there are existing commercial activities immediately outside the centre (as is currently occurring in both Branxton and Greta). From an urban design perspective, there may also be advantages from expanding the commercial areas to create defined edges to the development and encourage better circulation.

The commercial land zoned at the Greta Migrant Camp site is planned to provide for the new population within that site. There is no need for this land to be developed for local business services (in the same way as Greta or Branxton main streets), but to provide the business services that may be associated with the specific activities on the site.

Part of the 130ha employment area will be the new town centre, and as shown in the extract from the Huntlee DCP there are other commercial and bulky good precincts adjoining the core retail area. It is expected that this part of Huntlee will be more than adequate to accommodate the forecast 2,533 jobs, when the existing 1,511 local jobs are accommodated on less than 30ha of combined business and industrial land in Branxton and Greta.

In relation to industrial land, the NSW Employment Lands Taskforce has established best-practice benchmarks in relation to the supply of land. An assessment of current stocks of industrial lands against these benchmarks in Table 13 reveals that there is enough zoned vacant/ underutilised employment lands within the Branxton Subregion to last at least 5

years, which is close to the benchmark. However, there is no zoned and un-serviced land to provide an adequate buffer to the demand for new industrial development.

Table 13: Projected Industrial Land Supply

Category	Current Supply	Number of Years Estimated Supply*	Best Practice Benchmark Supply
Vacant/underutilised	2.8 ha	5.5 years	8.5 years
Unserviced	0ha	nil	nil

*High take-up (0.51ha pa). Low take-up (0.33ha pa)

Regional industrial lands at Whittingham Industrial Estate, Rutherford and HEZ have significant supplies of zoned unserviced industrial lands (approximately 1,155 hectares in total). It is likely that these areas will help meet the demand for larger industrial activities, but are unlikely to provide for the local service industries for the Branxton population (i.e. motor vehicle repairs, farm supplies, storage sheds).

Therefore the required supply of industrial land can be delivered in stages during the life of the strategy. It is recommended that there should be an immediate focus on identification of approximately 2.6 - 5.1 ha of additional local industrial land to meet the short-medium term demands for zoned and unserviced industrial land. Steps to release the underutilised zoned land should also be progressed.

3.4.5 Principles and Growth Area Recommendations

This section outlines the criteria which will influence the selection of sites for business and industrial zones and development. It also provides specific recommendations for the location of housing growth to meet projected job demand.

Principles for identifying future employment land

As outlined for residential land, the primary guiding principle to support the growth of the Branxton Subregion is to direct population growth to planned and serviced areas, to more efficiently utilise existing infrastructure and reduce the sprawl associated with the rezoning of rural land.

When considering the requirements for future demand, there are a number of principles that need to be met. These include not only the amount of land, but also the location, readiness for development (i.e. servicing, zoning) and the land value.

New employment land should be:

- located within or adjacent to an existing urban area on relatively flat land which is not visually prominent.
- Close to major roads, but not have direct access to a classified road.
- Able to be connected to essential infrastructure such as water, sewer, electricity, sealed road access.
- Located so as to not have any adverse environmental impacts (e.g. visual impacts, odour, noise).
- Not currently subject to development constraints such as flooding, bushfire hazard, or biodiversity issues, except where there is evidence that these matters can be adequately resolved.
- Located to avoid heavy vehicle traffic in residential areas.

Growth Area Recommendations

In determining future requirements for employment land, the quantity of available zoned land is one mechanism by which the demand for jobs can be addressed. The selection of sites for business and industrial zones are also influenced by the identification of centres within a hierarchy, population to support growth within centres and proximity to more major centres.

Business zone recommendations:

- No additional land is needed in the short-term to accommodate employment growth. Growth to be accommodated in the new Huntlee commercial area, or through more efficient use of existing zoned sites in Greta and Branxton.
- In conjunction with the residential recommendations, review the zoning of the Greta Migrant Camp site, and consider applying the SP3 Tourist zone.
- Review the business zoning scheme (B1, B2 and B4) and consider applying two zones, with a neighbourhood business zone for Greta and Branxton, and town centre zone for Huntlee (in combination with a medium density housing zone).
- Review the extent of the B1 and B2 zones at Greta and Branxton in relation to existing commercial activities on rural zoned land. Consider rezoning where the businesses reinforce the centre and main street.
- Encourage shop top housing in the commercial areas of Greta, Branxton and Huntlee.
- Complete floodplain risk management plans for Branxton, and consider a commercial and industrial flood planning level.

Industrial zone recommendations

- Identify and zone up to 5.1ha of land to meet the short-medium demand for zoned and unserviced light industrial land.
- Identify potential industrial lands to cater for forecast demand to 2041.

3.5 Open Space Strategy

This Open Space Strategy, a component of the Branxton Subregional Land Use Strategy, identifies the existing and required supply of open space and recreation facilities. It is informed by the strategies prepared by Cessnock and Singleton Council for their local government areas.

A component of creating well-planned and liveable residential areas is the provision of open space. These areas and services need to be appropriately located, suitably sized, and delivered to provide for the existing and planned population.

Existing Supply

The current provision of open space is described in Table 14.

Singleton LGA does not have any public open space within the study area. Council considers the prevalence of rural-residential development within the study area reduces the need for public open space in this locality. The population of the study area is within close proximity to the regional facilities in Branxton/Greta and Singleton. Extensive upgrade work has been undertaken since the "*Singleton Council Open space and recreation needs study*" (Ross Planning; 2013).

Singleton Council identified the need for a cycleway/pedestrian pathway connecting the Radford Park development on Elderslie Rd to Branxton. Based on the LGA wide population projections of the 2013 Study, Council has identified the need for a new major sporting facility in the LGA by 2020. This facility is unlikely to be located within the study area.

Significant upgrades and consolidations have been undertaken on social infrastructure since the 2009 *Recreation and Open Space Strategic Plan* (Cessnock City Council) with all existing parks, playgrounds and facilities now in good working order. The existing open space and recreation facilities within the sub-region provide an adequate level of functionality and quality with sufficient capacity to meet the current population needs.

Based on the existing population of 8,213, the current provision of open space in the sub-region is approximately 7.5ha per 1,000 persons. This rate far exceeds the benchmark standard adopted by the Department of Planning & Environment of 2.83 ha per 1,000 people.

Table 14: Existing Open Space Provision

Open Space Type	Hierarchy	Approximate Land Area (m ²)	Existing Facilities	
Recreation	Local	11,865	Norman Brown, Greta	
		5,575	North Rothbury	
		2,150	Oxford Street, Greta	
	District	-	Nil	
	Regional	83,000	Hunter River Reserve, Greta	
subtotal		236,590 m²		
Sportsgrounds and courts	Local	33,465	Branxton Oval	
		990	Greta Art and Sports Community Hall: Indoor basketball Indoor netball	
	District	-	Nil	
	Regional	134,000	Miller Park, Branxton: Cricket practice net x 1 Tennis court x 2 Netball court x 2 Swimming Pool	
		207,800	Greta Central Oval: Tennis court x 2	
subtotal		376,255 m²		
Combined Total		612,845 m² (61.3ha)		

The concept plans for the Huntlee urban area and the infrastructure agreements between the developer, State and local government have addressed the open space needs and provision of land and facilities. These facilities include:

- A multi-purpose community building,
- two sporting fields,
- two district parks,
- eight local parks
- embellishment of other public spaces.

Planning for these facilities has been undertaken with consideration of the required level of service for the new community, and the capacity of other facilities in the Subregion.

Required Supply

Singleton Council Open Space And Recreation Needs Study (Ross Planning; 2013) establishes separate 'locally appropriate provision standards' for small towns and villages including Branxton, rather than apply a standard per person rate. The Study identifies the future need for a regional park, village sports facilities and other open space in Branxton. Provision of open space for the sub-region is currently met by Cessnock Council. Singleton Council currently does not have any public open space within the sub-region, and the open space requirements for the projected population at Huntlee will be provided within the existing development. Therefore, no additional open space is to be provided in the sub-region for this population.

Therefore the amount of open space required for the projected population (excluding Huntlee) is shown in Table 15 below.

Table 15: Projected Open Space Requirements

	2011	2021	2031	2041
TOTAL area ¹	23.24 ha	24.68 ha	26.44 ha	27.95 ha

¹ based on Department of Planning Standard of 2.83 ha per 1,000 people

Based on the projected population the current provision of approximately 61.3ha is still far in excess of the standard provision required for the population at 2041. Therefore, no additional open space is required to be provided within the sub-region to support the increased population growth.

Travelling stock reserve

A 140ha parcel of crown land (Lot 7001 DP1109380) located between the HEX and NEH just west of Branxton town centre is the Branxton Travelling Stock Reserve (TSR) Number R54172- see **Figure 3**. The site is currently fenced off, being used for grazing cattle under a three year private lease that ends in December 2015. The lease does not confer exclusive use of the site, however the site has been fenced due to antisocial behaviour and vandalism. NSW Local Land Services (LLS) will call for tenders to re-lease the site when it expires.

Clause 62 of the *Local Land Services Regulation 2014* permits the following recreational uses of the TSR:

- walking, running and other kinds of individual physical exercise,
- horse riding,
- camel riding,
- picnicking,

- fishing,
- swimming,
- pedal cycling.

LLS is currently reviewing all TSRs across the state with a view to identify surplus land holdings for possible sell off. It is noted that a blanked claim has been made Aboriginal Land Councils for all Crown TSRs that are proposed for sale.

Opportunity exists under the *Local Land Services Act 2013* to utilise a portion of this land for a formal cycle path. This site also presents opportunities to offer better services and activities for the community. Subject to further investigation, these services could be passive public recreation uses (such as bushwalking and cycling), active recreation uses, tourist and visitor services, or other public uses such as a regional cemetery.

3.5.1 Recommendations

No additional open space is required in the Subregion because of there is sufficient existing supply and proposed new facilities to accommodate the expected growth.

PART C

STRUCTURE PLAN

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this Section is to address each of the settlement areas within the Branxton Subregion, and indicate how they will grow and change over time. A logical sequence of land release and development is outlined, and this will form the basis of the structure plan for the Subregion.

Structure planning, including urban growth area boundaries and a land release program, shows a range of locations where residential and employment growth can be expected to occur. This report does not rezone the land, and Planning Proposals will be required to amend the Cessnock and Singleton Local Environmental Plans.

4.2 Vision

A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world. — Proverb

A Vision Statement is need to define the optimal desired future state – the mental picture – of what the Branxton Subregion wants to achieve over time. These three vision statements are provided to give guidance and inspiration as to what can be achieved in five, ten, twenty or more years, and inform the principles for growth and the recommendations for land use change.

There is Flourishing Development

Growth is high. A new major centre is a hive of business activity. Housing options are diverse. It is a place for investment and prosperity. Local jobs are in new business sectors like education and professional services.

There is a Strong Sense of Community Wellbeing

Infrastructure supports the needs of its communities. There is a high level of active and healthy activities like walking, cycling and playgrounds. The environment is clean and safe. Roads and bridges are connected and people can travel to and through the Subregion efficiently.

There is a Vibrant and Distinctive Character

Culture and history are acknowledged and respected. Main streets are busy, and there are many reasons to visit. It is a place that is distinctive and well-recognised beyond the Hunter Region. People of all ages are in the Subregion because the services are there. It is an attractive place to live.

4.3 Principles for Growth

The analysis of the land use patterns and constraints with the Branxton Subregion, the outcomes of the background research and a vision of future development, together with consultation has identified a number of key principles for growth, being:

- Provide for suitably located land for dwellings, centres and employment activities to meet forecast population and employment growth of the Branxton Subregion
- Coordinate development and infrastructure and ensure appropriate provision and equitable access to community facilities, open space areas and employment centres for future residents
- Provide for key transport links throughout the subregion, including intraregional transport, and encourage create active movement connections between the urban areas
- Recognise the importance of environmentally sensitive and important agricultural areas and avoid land use conflicts
- Establish a hierarchy of activity centres and support the sense of place for existing communities
- Promote a range of residential densities to suit the needs of the community whilst maintaining the rural setting and character of the subregion.

Specific principles for housing, employment and open space are provided in the previous section of this strategy, which should be read together with a detailed structure plan to guide development release.

4.4 Subregional Settlement Pattern and Hierarchy

This strategy recognises the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy settlement hierarchy, but provides more detail for the future vision and boundary of all settlement areas in the Branxton Subregion. The purpose of this strategy is to consider all forms and levels of growth in the Subregion, therefore the settlement hierarchy recognises smaller settlement areas than addressed in the Regional Strategy.

Based on existing settlement patterns, consideration of population change and opportunities within the Subregion, the following Settlement Hierarchy should be adopted.

Table 16: Settlement Hierarchy

Settlement Type		Description and key functions
Major Regional Centre	Cessnock and Singleton	Concentration of business, higher order retailing, employment, professional services and generally including civic functions and facilities. A focal point for subregional road and transport networks and may service a number of districts.
Emerging town centre	Huntlee	Emerging shopping and business centre for the district, including health and professional serviced mixed with medium and higher density residential.
Village centre	Branxton (including East Branxton), Greta	Predominantly residential settlements with a small, often mixed use centre that provide for basic services and daily needs, and is the focus for day-to-day life within a community. Includes a mix of small scale retail, community and health services. Limited office based employment. Includes a supermarket.
Specialised commercial (tourism)	Greta Migrant Camp	Provides for activity of a specialist nature as defined through specific local area planning. Broader retailing is limited to servicing the specialist function.
Rural settlement	North Branxton, Standen Drive	No identified centre or commercial activities. A cluster of low density housing, with services provided at a higher order centre.

4.5 Urban Growth Area Boundaries

Based on the analysis undertaken as part of the Land Use Strategy and the recommended potential opportunities for land use changes in 2021, 2031 and 2041, urban growth area boundaries have been identified. It is recommended as part of this Strategy that these boundaries are endorsed for inclusion in local and regional strategies, and enforced to ensure the sustainable and efficient use of land.

A growth area plan has been prepared for each of these locations:

- Huntlee (**Figure 19**)
- Branxton (**Figure 20**)
- East Branxton (**Figure 21**)
- North Branxton (**Figure 22**)
- Greta (**Figure 23**)
- Greta Migrant Camp (**Figure 24**)

4.5.1 Huntlee

Desired Future Character by 2041

Huntlee will evolve to provide the majority of new housing and employment opportunities in the Subregion. Coordination of infrastructure and services in line with population growth will occur with strong partnership between the land developer and council. New sporting and community facilities are well established. The Town Centre is a vibrant shopping and business area. There are good connections to Branxton and Greta.

Opportunities and Staging

- Staged release of land for residential development, in keeping with approved staging plan. This should culminate in 2,636 residential dwellings and 292 rural residential dwellings by 2041 from the existing zoned land, including 2,345 from the Stage 1 approval.
- Staged development of the town centre, in keeping with the approved staging plan. This should culminate in employment opportunities for 2,533 new jobs by 2041.
- Protect significant environmental lands in an E2 Environmental Conservation zone
- Maintain appropriate setbacks to the significant interregional transport corridors and maintain the SP2 Special Purpose Infrastructure zone.
- Review the residential and business zoning schemes, for consistency across the urban areas.
- Bring reticulated sewer to North Rothbury and consider a low density residential rezoning and limited infill.
- Investigate the RMS site for inclusion in the Huntlee area
- Address flooding issues affecting the western part of Huntlee.

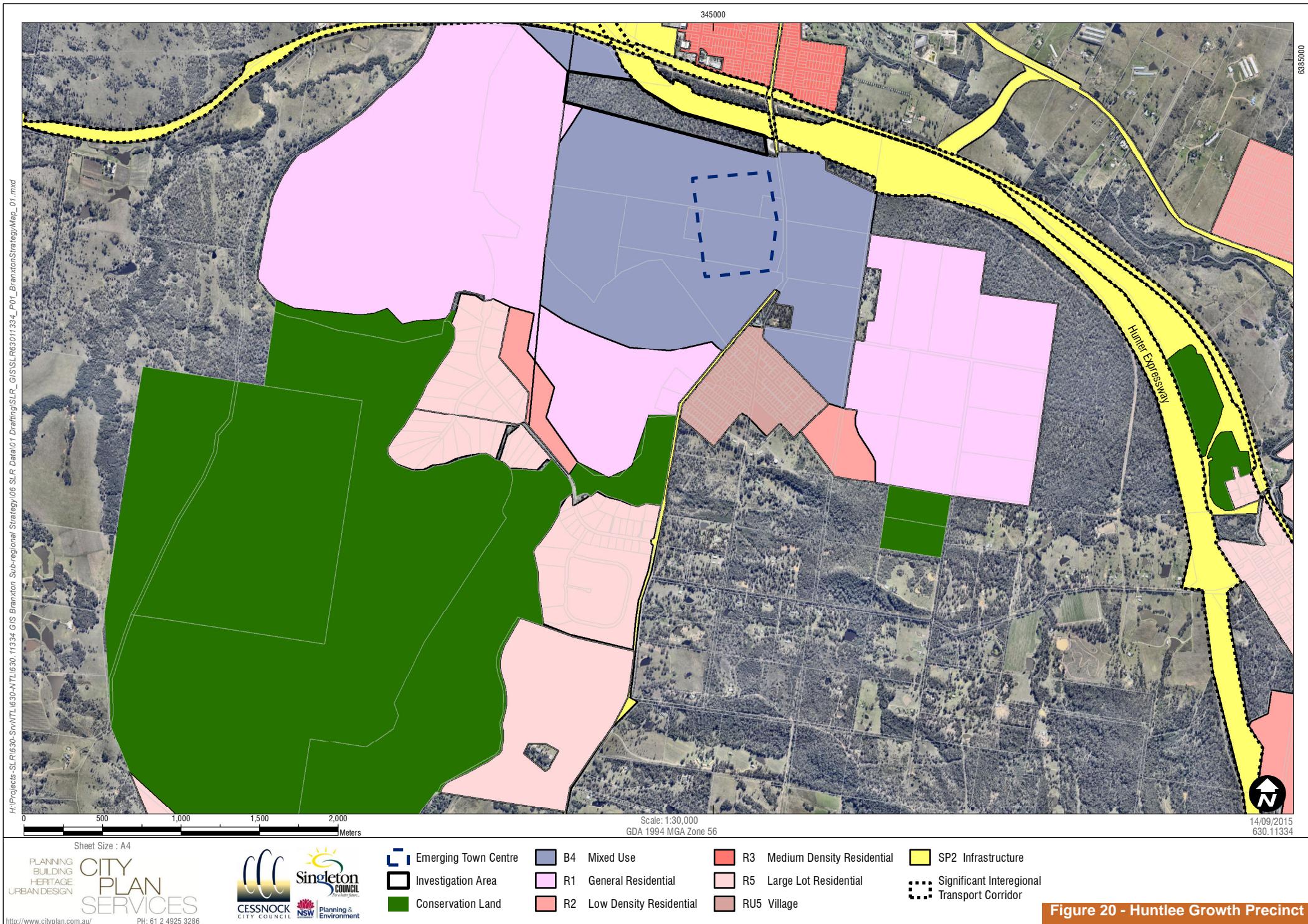


Figure 20 - Huntlee Growth Precinct

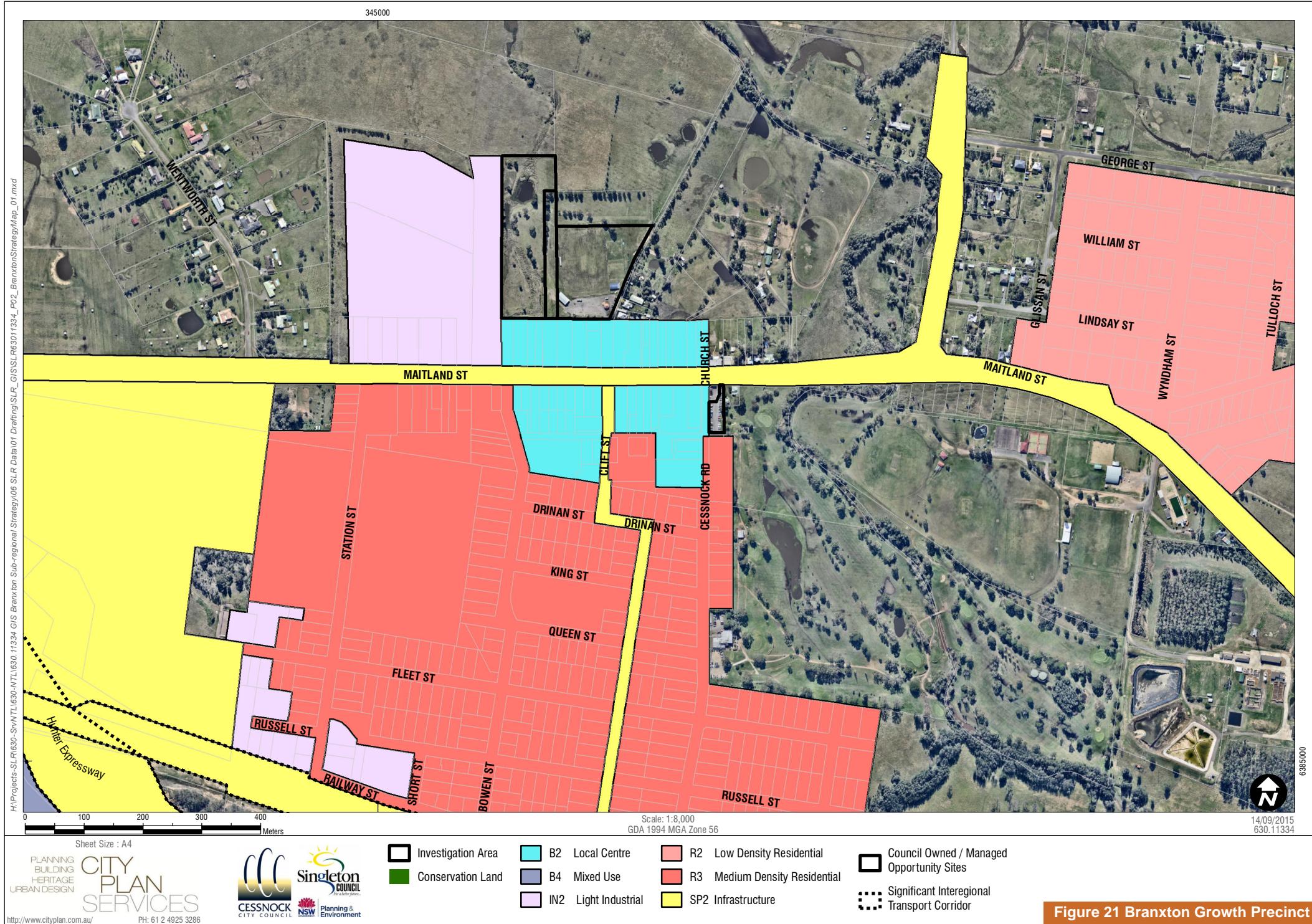
4.5.2 Branxton

Desired Future Character by 2041

Branxton will be a vibrant and attractive village, with an interesting main street that provides the day-to-day needs of the local community, as well as attracting visitors to its cafes and shops. There are opportunities to live in the village centre, and people of all ages appreciate the range of educational, health and community services. It is easy to get around in Branxton, with connected paths to the adjoining recreation and sporting areas.

Opportunities and Staging

- Strengthen the business area as a centre with a distinct heritage character (see recommendations in Branxton Town Centre Masterplan).
- Encourage seniors housing within 400 metres walking radius of the commercial area
- Allow shop top housing in the commercial area
- Investigate opportunities for Branxton Oval to be used for additional recreational and tourist functions that will support the business area
- Review the residential and business zoning schemes, for consistency across the urban areas Review zoning scheme for low density (10 dwellings/ ha) and medium density housing (15 dwellings/ ha).
- Review business zoning in relation commercial activities on rural zoned land.
- Complete floodplain risk management plans, and consider a commercial and industrial flood planning level.
- Maintain appropriate setbacks to the significant interregional transport corridors and maintain the SP2 Special Purpose Infrastructure zone.
- Identify and zone up to 5.1 hectares of land to meet the short-medium demand for light industrial land, and review need for longer term industrial investigation areas. Two potential investigation areas have been identified.



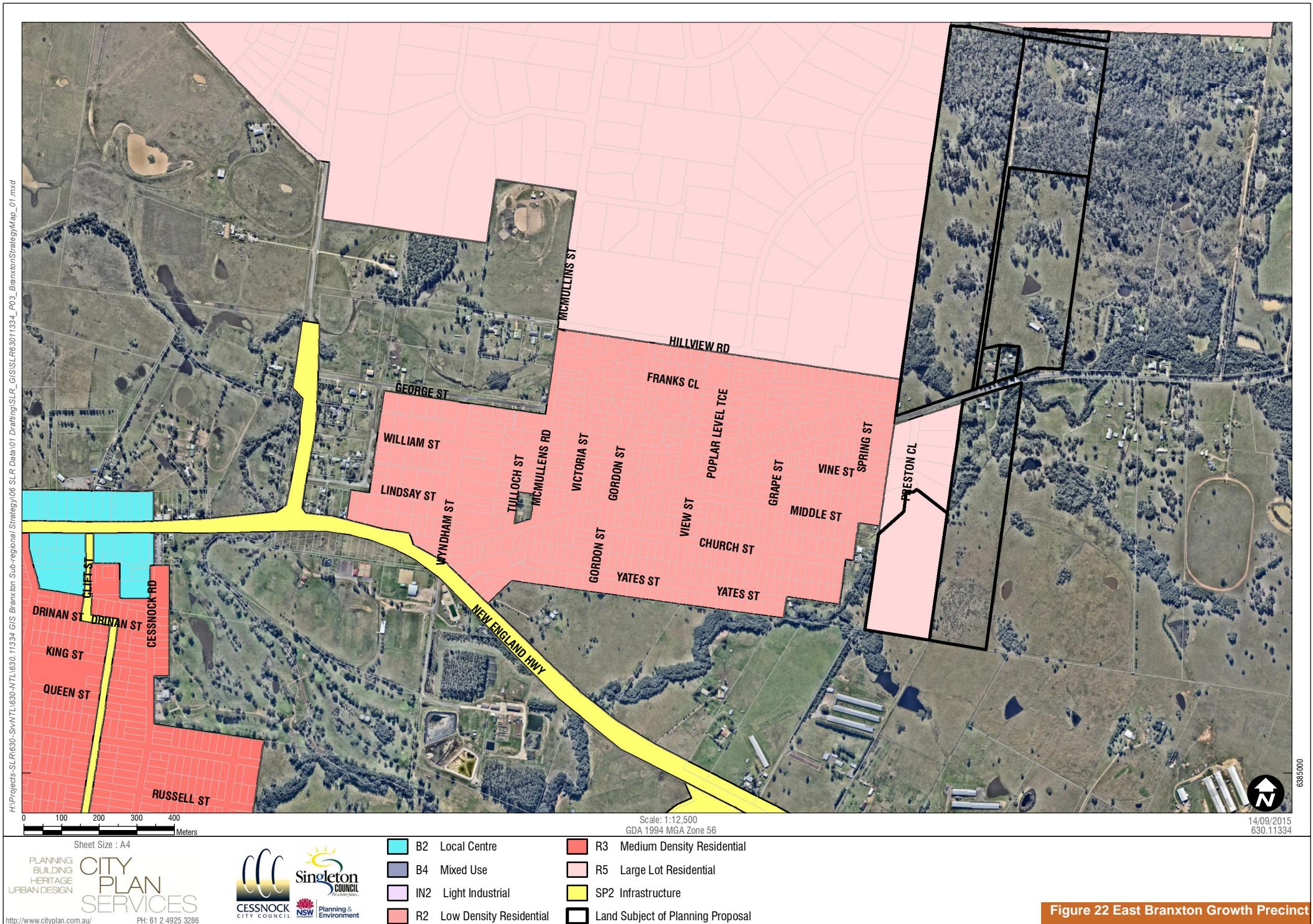
4.5.3 East Branxton

Desired Future Character by 2041

East Branxton is a safe and connected residential area, with improved walking and road connections to Miller Park, Branxton main street and the Hunter Expressway. Visually sensitive areas are appropriately developed and landscaping creates an attractive gateway to Branxton.

Opportunities and Staging

- Review the residential zoning schemes for consistency across the urban areas. Recommend low density (10 dwellings/ ha) residential zone, with larger lots at the interface with rural residential areas or other environmentally sensitive locations.
- Enable lower density residential development within the Dalwood Road Planning Proposal, with a development pattern that is compatible with the adjoining development.
- Review the buffers required for the Branxton wastewater treatment works, in partnership with Hunter Water Corporation.
- Investigate the opportunities for land fronting the New England Highway, with the objective of protecting the rural character and creating attractive main road landscaping. This is a long-term development opportunity.



4.5.4 Greta Migrant Camp

Desired Future Character by 2041

The Greta Migrant Camp site is a tourist destination with quality housing and recreation facilities that is easy to access and acknowledges the history associated with its location.

Opportunities and Staging

- Review the zoning and consider applying the SP3 Tourist zone across the site, to be consistent with the zoning approach for other tourist developments in the Cessnock LGA.
- Maintain the E2 Environmental Conservation zoning over the sensitive environmental areas.
- Maintain separation between the tourist development and the urban fringes of Greta.

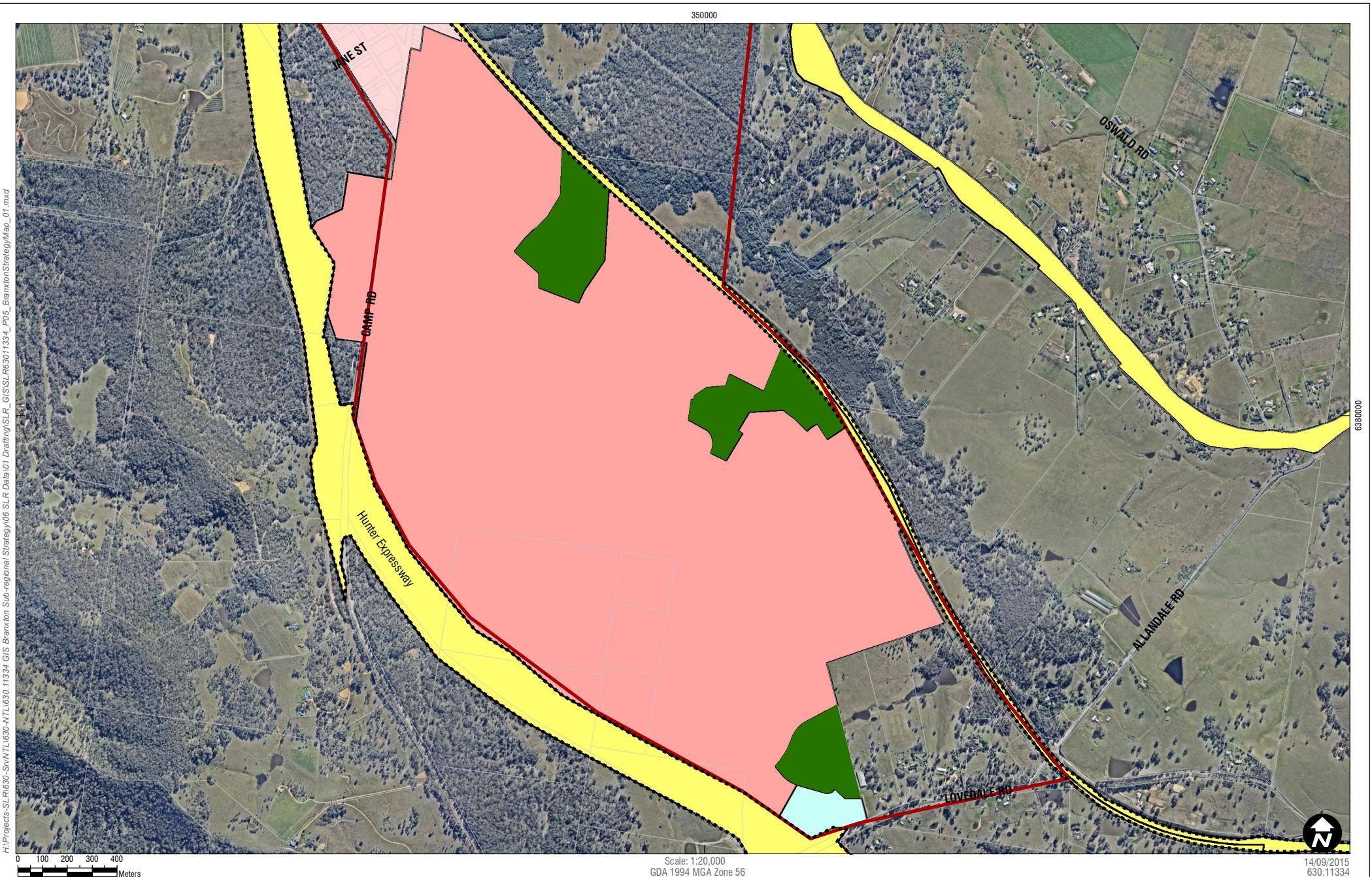


Figure 25 Greta Camp Growth Precinct

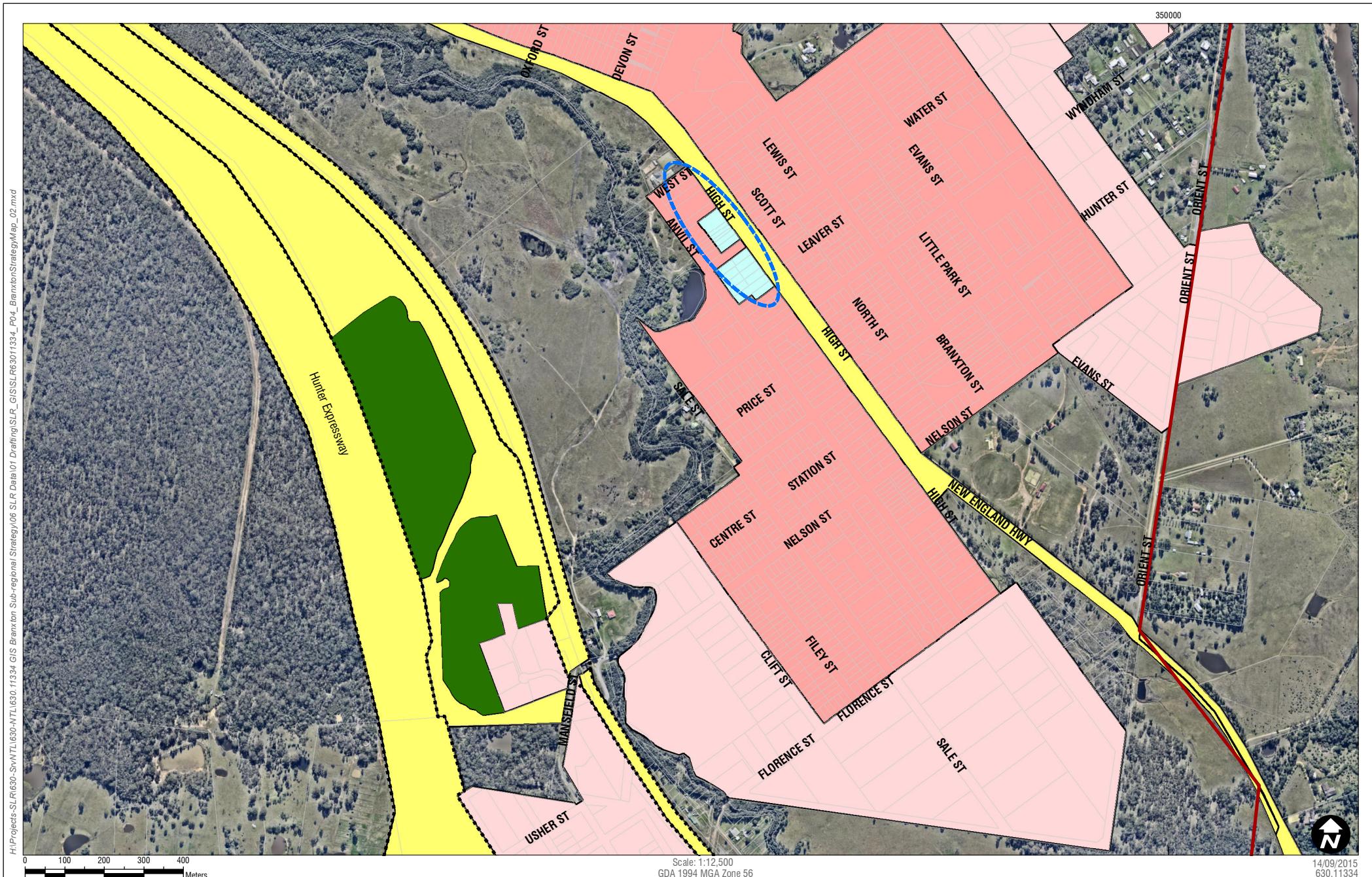
4.5.6 Greta

Desired Future Character by 2041

Greta is a diverse village, with a growing population boosting the local business area. Shops provide convenience goods, and there is activity around parks, sportsgrounds and community centres. Improved connections with Branxton and East Branxton encourage better integration between these communities.

Opportunities and Staging

- Review the residential and business zoning schemes, for consistency across the urban areas Review zoning scheme for low density (10 dwellings/ ha) and medium density housing (15 dwellings/ ha).
- Review the extent of the R5 zone, and consider applying a low density residential zone where the land can be serviced.
- Improve the connections between the neighbourhoods of Greta.
- Allow shop top housing in the commercial area
- Review business zoning in relation commercial activities on rural zoned land.
- Complete floodplain risk management plans, and consider a commercial and industrial flood planning level, as well as stormwater management.
- Protect the visually sensitive locations at the edges of the urban settlement, including Harpers Hill and the rural character area along the New England Highway.



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4.5.5 North Branxton

Desired Future Character by 2041

Lifestyle housing is provided in an attractive rural setting. There are improved connections between rural areas and direct paths to the Branxton centre.

Opportunities and Staging

- Maintain the R5 Large Lot Residential zone for the area.
- Investigate rural residential potential in the Investigation Areas.
- Enable lower density residential development within the Dalwood Road Planning Proposal, with a development pattern that is compatible with the adjoining development.
- Limit any other expansion of the rural residential area in the short term.

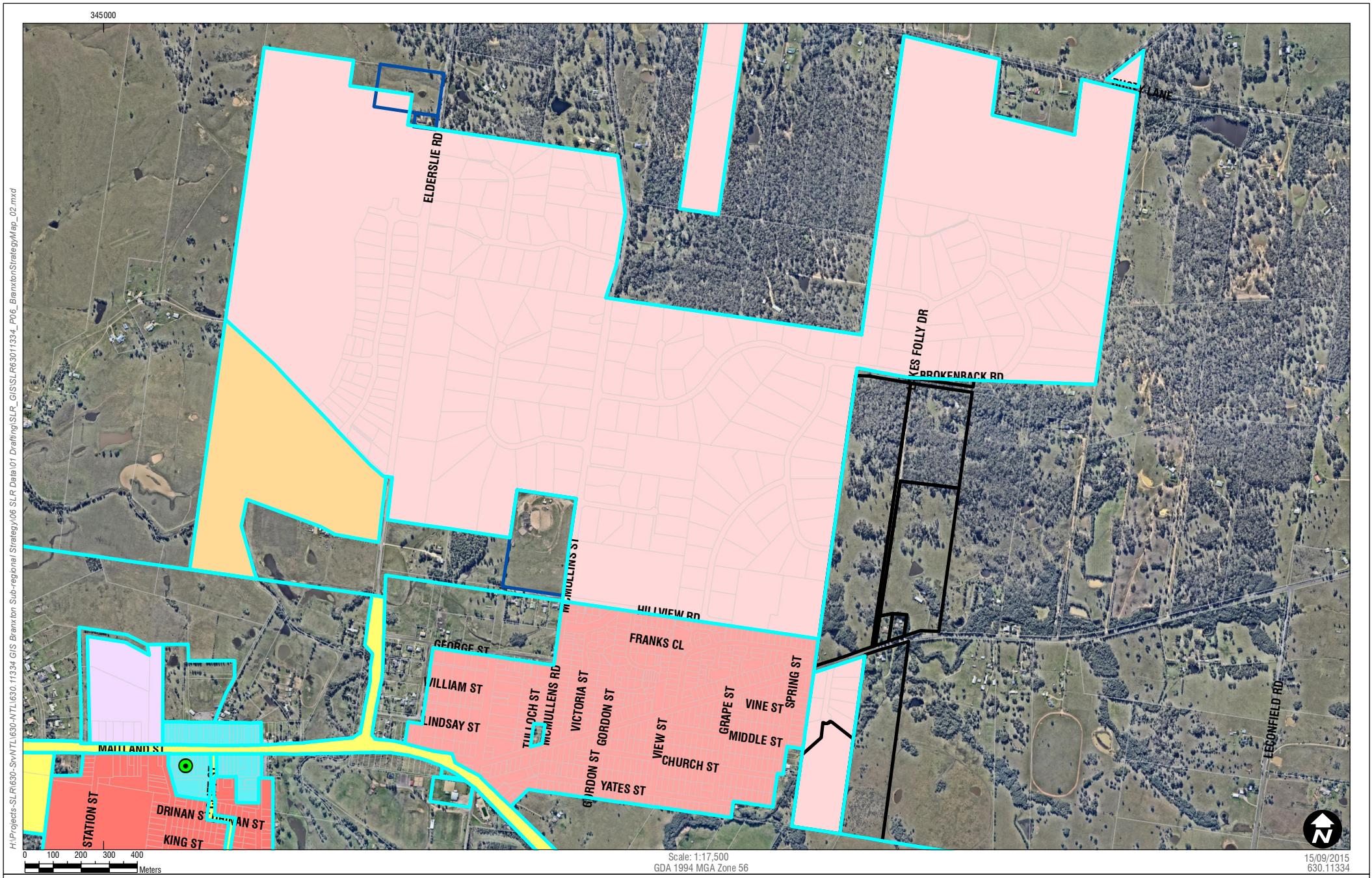


Figure 23 North Branxton Growth Precinct

4.6 Land Release Program

The purpose of this section is to identify the locations for the supply and release of land, taking account of factors such as forecast population changes, household changes, demand for land, and the availability of key infrastructure and services.

The proposed land releases in Tables 17, 18 and 19 are indicative, subject to change following strategy review and development assessment.

Table 17: Indicative Land Release Program: 2015 – 2021

Location	Residential Dwellings	Rural Residential dwellings	Commercial Land	Industrial Land	Comments
Huntlee – Stage 1 area	1,113	123	Town Centre site (591 jobs)		Community and recreation facilities to be provided in line with infrastructure planning agreements
Branxton – town centre infill	23		Village Centre site (25 jobs)		Encourage seniors housing or other small lot housing
Branxton - industrial				Light industrial sites (11 jobs) 5.1 hectares rezoned	To be rezoned, pending servicing
Greta – general infill	10	10			No specific sites identified
East Branxton – Dalwood Road	80	10			Subject to rezoning and development assessment
North Branxton – Radford Park estate		56			Following adopted staging plan

Key planning actions to support 2015 – 2021 land release

- Implementation of Branxton Town Centre Masterplan to support jobs growth and infill housing in/ near town centre
- Investigation and rezoning for industrial land at Branxton
- Rezoning of Dalwood Road site, and development assessment
- Preparation of DCP Staging Plan for Dalwood Road

- Preparation of joint Section 94 Plan for Branxton, to address local infrastructure requirements from new development in Singleton LGA (North Branxton and East Branxton) as well as within Cessnock LGA (Greta and Branxton)
- Implementation of infrastructure works associated with Huntlee Stage 1 VPA
- Implementation of infrastructure works associated with other residential/ rural residential land release (forecast of 158 dwellings)

Table 18: Indicative Land Release Program: 2021 - 2031

Location	Residential Dwellings	Rural Residential dwellings	Commercial Land	Industrial Land	Comments
Huntlee - Stage 1 area	1,038 Approved Stage 1 residential dwellings completed	115	Town Centre site (626 jobs)		Community and recreation facilities to be provided in line with infrastructure planning agreements
Branxton – town centre infill	12		Village Centre site (20 jobs)		Encourage seniors housing or other small lot housing
Branxton - industrial				New industrial site (33 jobs)	To be rezoned, pending servicing
Greta – general infill	10	40			No specific sites identified
Greta – Wyndham Street	120				Subject to servicing
North Branxton – Radford Park estate		54			Following adopted staging plan

Key planning actions to support 2021-2031 land release

- Continued implementation of Branxton Town Centre Masterplan to support jobs growth and infill housing in near town centre
- Complete the rezoning and servicing for the Branxton industrial expansion
- Preparation of DCP Staging Plan for Wyndham Street and development assessment
- Implementation of infrastructure works associated with Huntlee Stage 1 VPA

- Implementation of infrastructure works associated with other residential/ rural residential land release (forecast of 236 dwellings)

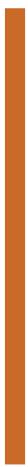
Table 19: Indicative Land Release Program: 2031 – 2041

Location	Residential Dwellings	Rural Residential dwellings	Commercial Land	Industrial Land	Comments
Huntlee – Stage 2 area	485	54	Town Centre site (1,316 jobs)		New infrastructure agreement needed
Branxton – town centre infill	13		Village Centre site (20 jobs)		Encourage seniors housing or other small lot housing
Branxton - industrial				New industrial site (27 jobs)	Subject to rezoning and servicing
Greta – general infill	10	22			No specific sites identified
Greta – Wyndham Street	100				Subject to servicing
North Branxton – Rusty Lane		30			No specific sites identified
Standen Drive		30			Subject to development assessment

Key planning actions to support 2031-2041 land release

- Development assessment for Huntlee Stage 2, and preparation of a new local infrastructure agreement (or inclusion in Section 94 plan).
- Continued implementation of Branxton Town Centre Masterplan to support jobs growth and infill housing in near town centre
- Implementation of infrastructure works associated with other residential/ rural residential land release (forecast of 205 dwellings)

The land release program should be subject to regular review. Catalysts for the review of the program include delays to servicing or owners ability to bring land to market, changes to demand (as indicated by annual approval monitoring), or every 5 years as the strategy is regularly reviewed.



Appendix A – Review of Unsolicited Expressions of Interest

Locations are shown on **Figure 3**.

Address	Lot and DP	Current Zoning	Strategy Response
2042 New England Highway, Branxton	Lot 6 DP238139 Lot 8 DP238139	RU2 – Rural Landscape	Long term potential for large lot rural residential development following closure of the existing poultry sheds. Visually sensitive location. Avoid linear development.
211 Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 141 DP1166071	R5 – Large Lot Residential	4000m2 minimum remains appropriate. No further lot reduction appropriate.
181 Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 140 DP1166071		
137 Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 13 DP595347		
103 Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 22 DP861508		
103C Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 1 DP1124566	RU1 - Primary Production	Not required in the long term. Visually sensitive and distant from infrastructure and services.
285 Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 11 DP850244	RU1 - Primary Production	Long term potential for large lot rural residential development. Visually sensitive location.
Lot 7 Bull Street, Belford	Lot 45 DP755209	RU1 - Primary Production	Outside sub-region study area.
256 Elderslie Rd, Branxton	Lot 4, DP539087	RU1 - Primary Production	Mostly unconstrained. Not required short term. Potential for long term large lot residential.
215 McMullins Rd, Branxton	Lot 2, DP609838		
227A Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 111 DP590103	RU1 - Primary Production	Long term potential for large lot residential expansion.
245 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 1 DP1030313		
249 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 5, DP239188		
265 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 4, DP239188		
267 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 3, DP239188		
188 Standen Dr, Belford	Lot 2, DP849939	RU1 - Primary Production	Not required in the long term. Visually sensitive, flood affected and distant from infrastructure and services.

2540 New England Highway, Branxton	Lot 131, DP 1051210	RU1 - Primary Production	Not required in the long term. Visually sensitive, flood affected and distant from infrastructure and services.
	Lot 132, DP 1051210		
Lot 2 New England Highway, Greta	Lot 1010, DP1141530	RU2 - Rural Landscape	Not without merit but needs further investigation regarding constraints and hazards, view sheds, infrastructure servicing etc. Not required in the short term.
167 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 31, DP571275	RU1 – Primary Production Zone	Dalwood Road Planning Proposal (Gateway Determination PP_2012_SINGL_003_00).
169 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 32, DP571275		Lot size to provide a transition to the adjoining rural land. Flooding and ecology impacts need to be clarified to confirm suitable development footprint and density.
181 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 33, DP571275		
163 Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Part of Lot 34, DP571275		
Dalwood Rd, Leconfield	Lot 2, DP533318		
6 Preston Close, Leconfield	Lot 6, DP827226		

Appendix B – Employment Land Use Audit

Tables B1 – B3 provide details about the land uses on the zoned land and estimated amount of gross floor area, from the land use inventories (**Figures 8, 10, 13**). The B4 land in Huntlee and the B1 zoned land in the Greta Migrant Camp has not been included as it is largely vacant and unsubdivided.

Table B.1: Land use in B4 zoned land in Branxton

Land Use	Number of uses	Area of land (m ²)	Estimate of total gross floor space (m ²)
Business premises	5	5,792	1,660
Motel accommodation	1	2,057	725
Community facilities & seniors housing	4	10,480	n/a
Retail	11	15,813	4,329
Dwelling house	12	12,980	n/a
Vacant building	3	2,846	1,296

Note 1. An additional 1,546m² of retail floorspace exists on adjoining non-business zoned land

Table B.2: Land uses in B1 zoned land in Greta

Land Use	Number of uses	Area of land (m ²)	Estimate of total gross floor space (m ²)
Retail	10	10,056	3,110
Community facilities	3	4,024	n/a
Dwelling house	3	2,443	n/a

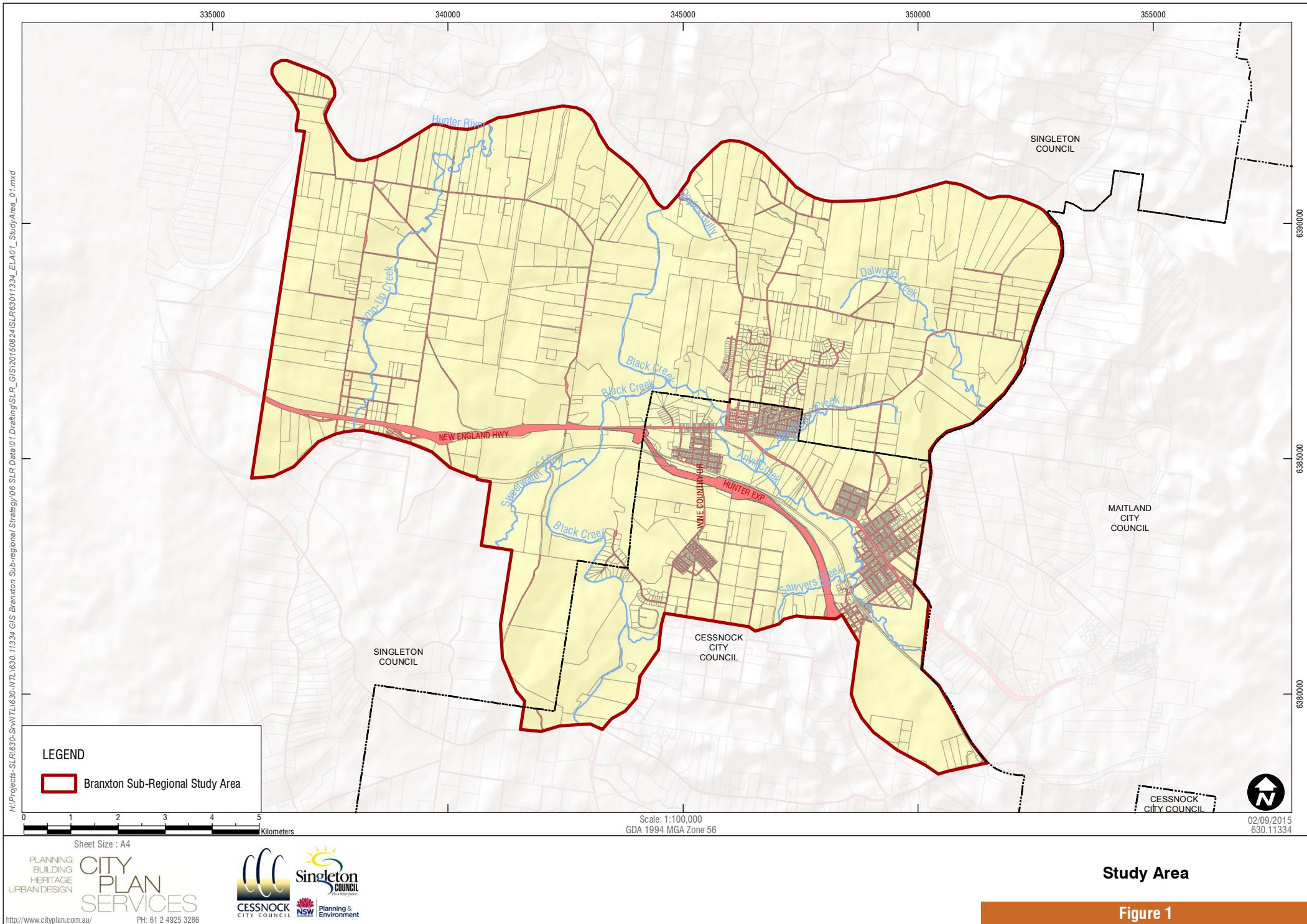
Note 1: Does not include B1 zoned land at Greta Migrant Camp

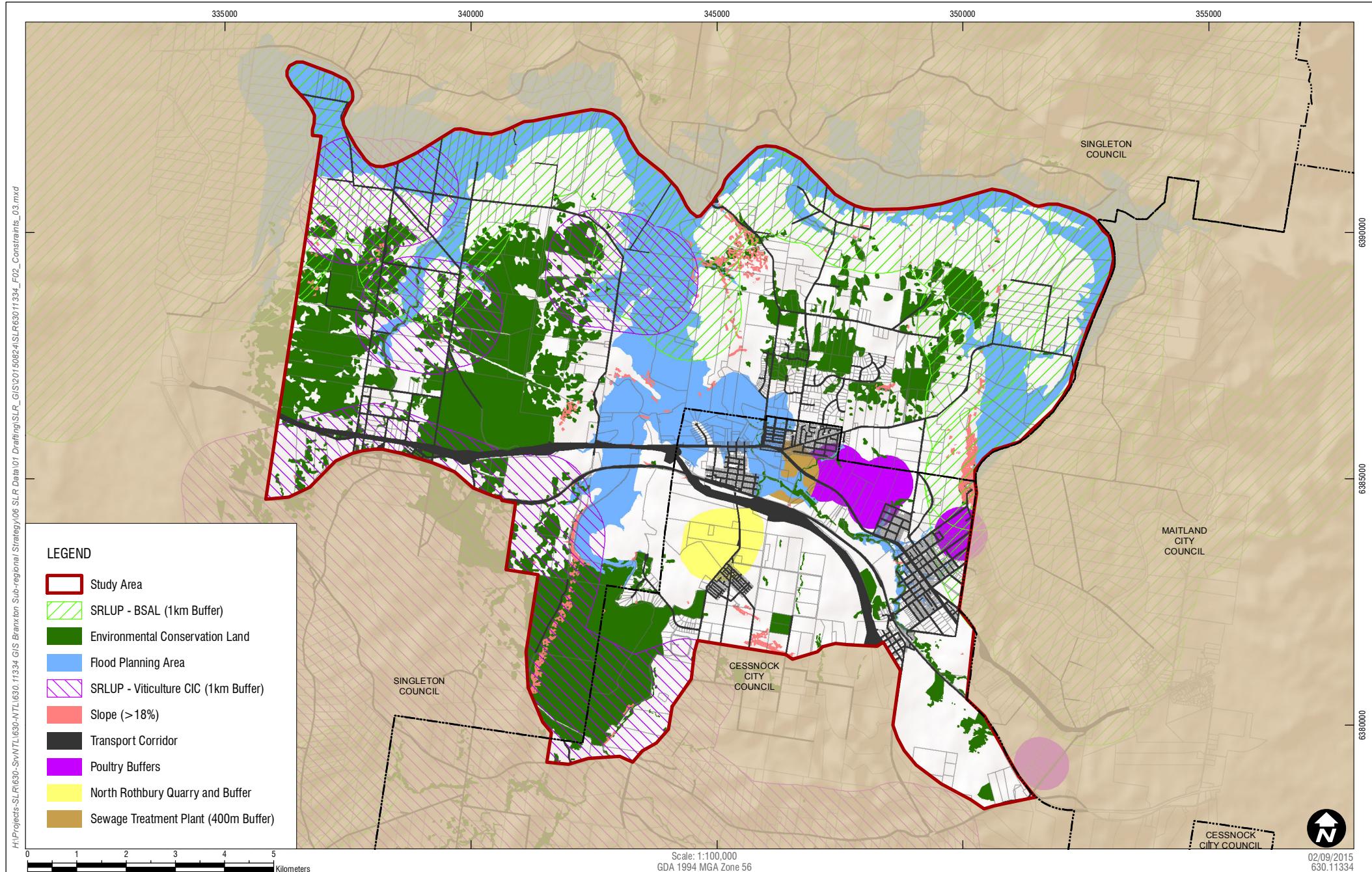
Note 2: An additional 3,047m² of retail floorspace exists on adjoining non-business zoned land

Table B.3: Land use in IN2 zoned land in Branxton

Land use	Number of uses	Area of land (m ²)	Estimate of total gross floor space (m ²)
Light industrial	14	102,217	9,667
Dwelling houses	2	2,633	n/a
Vacant building	1	3,042	770

Appendix C – Document Figures





Combined Constraints

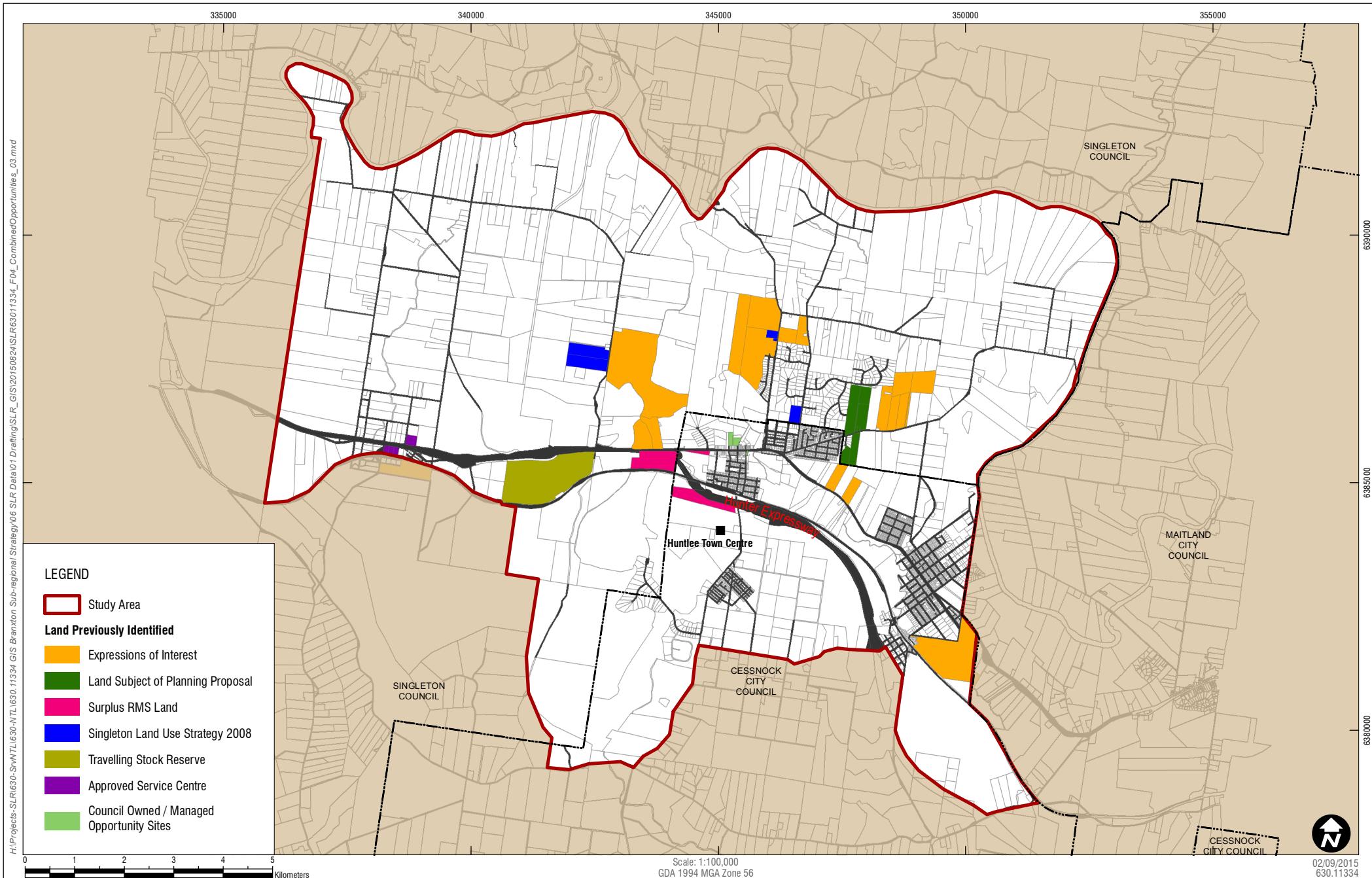
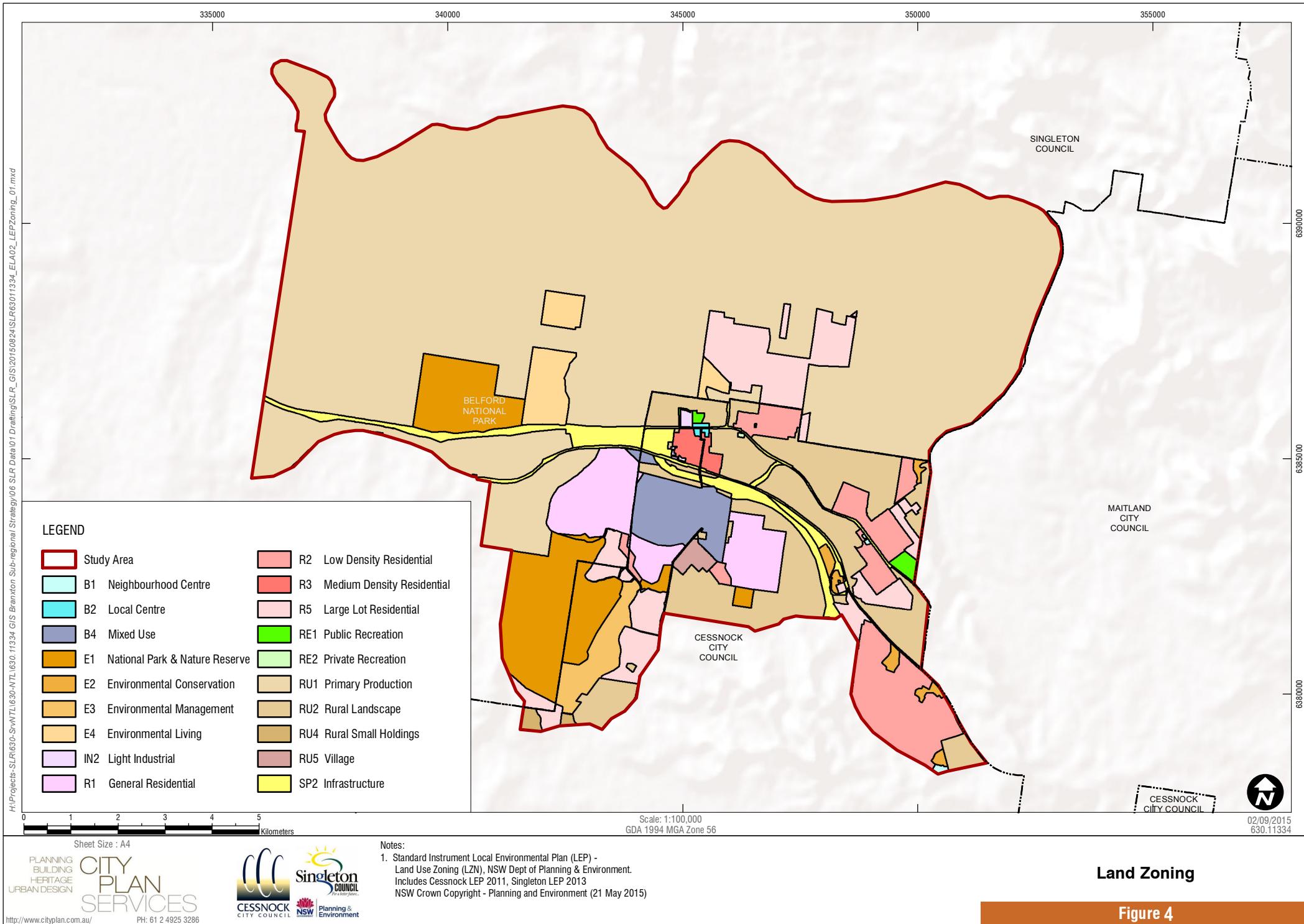
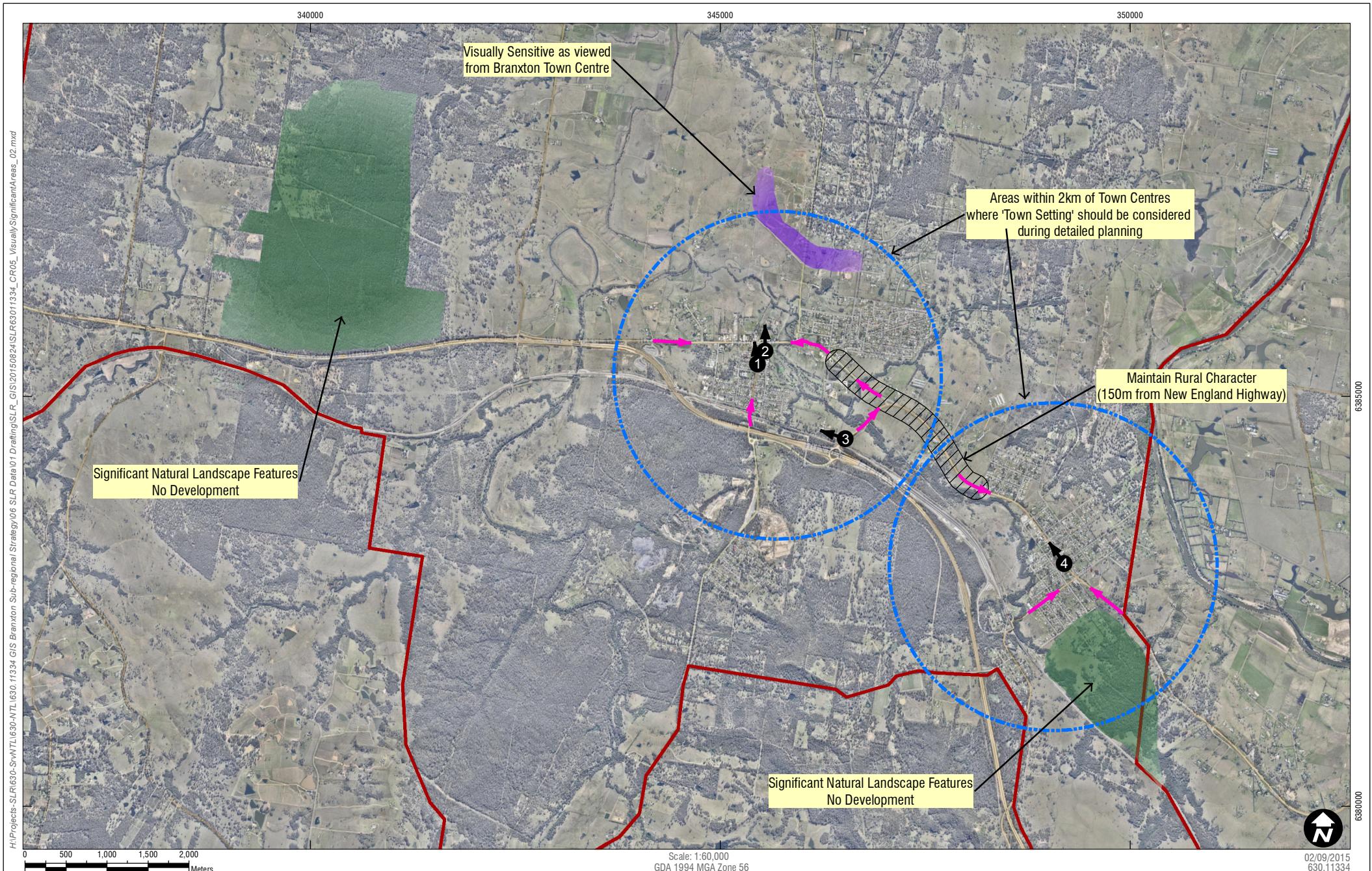


Figure 3





Visually Significant Areas

Figure 5

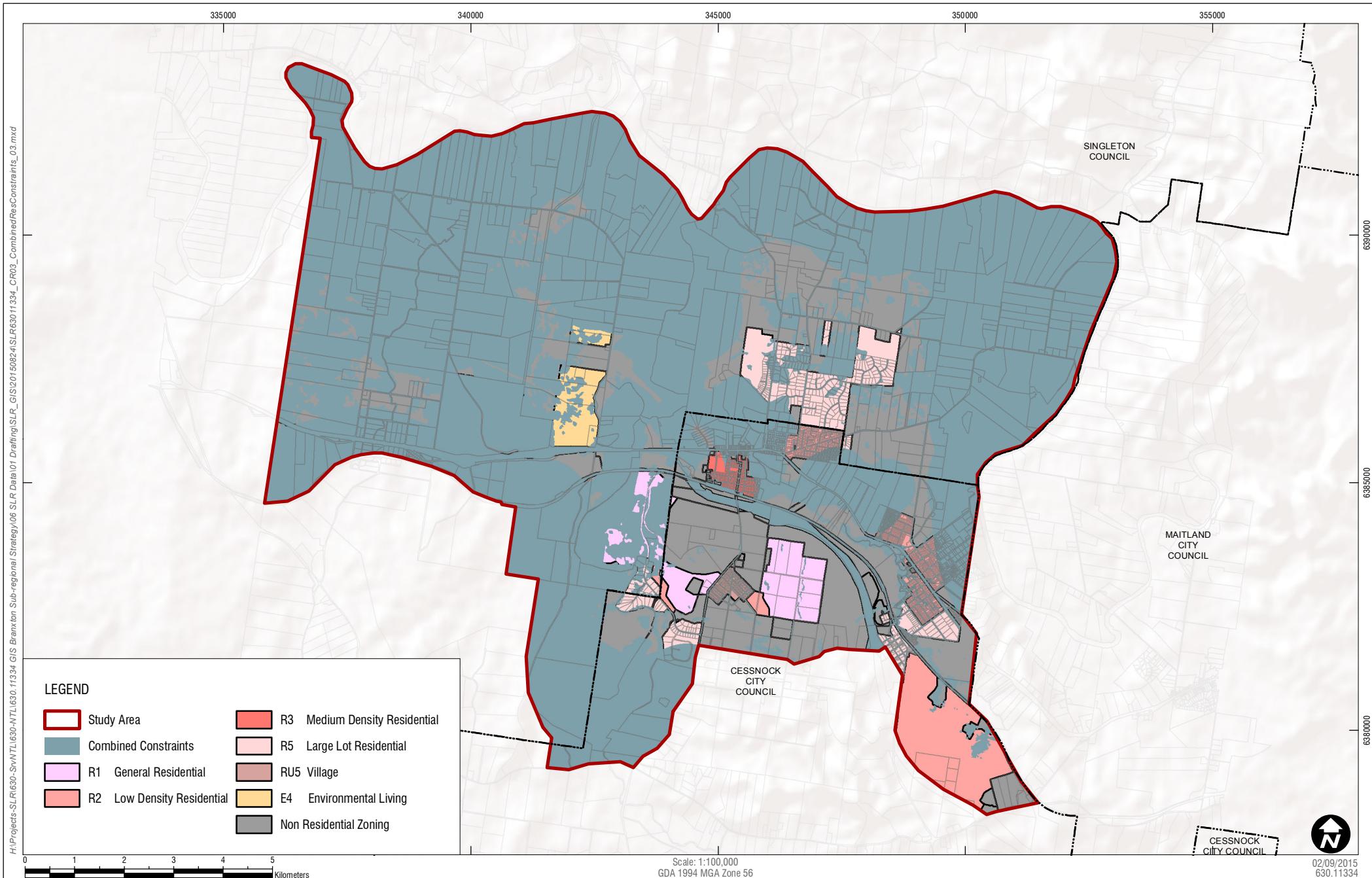
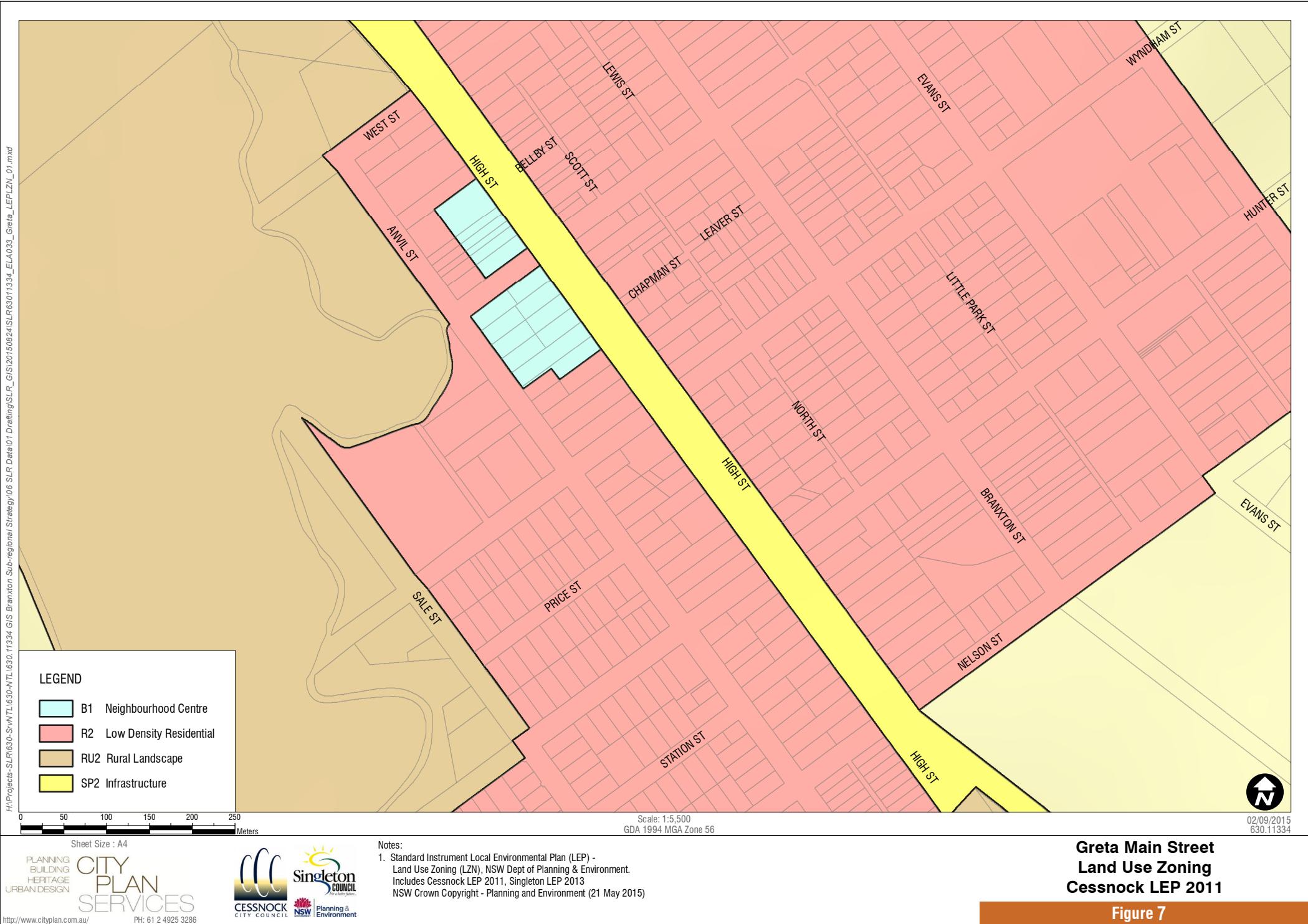
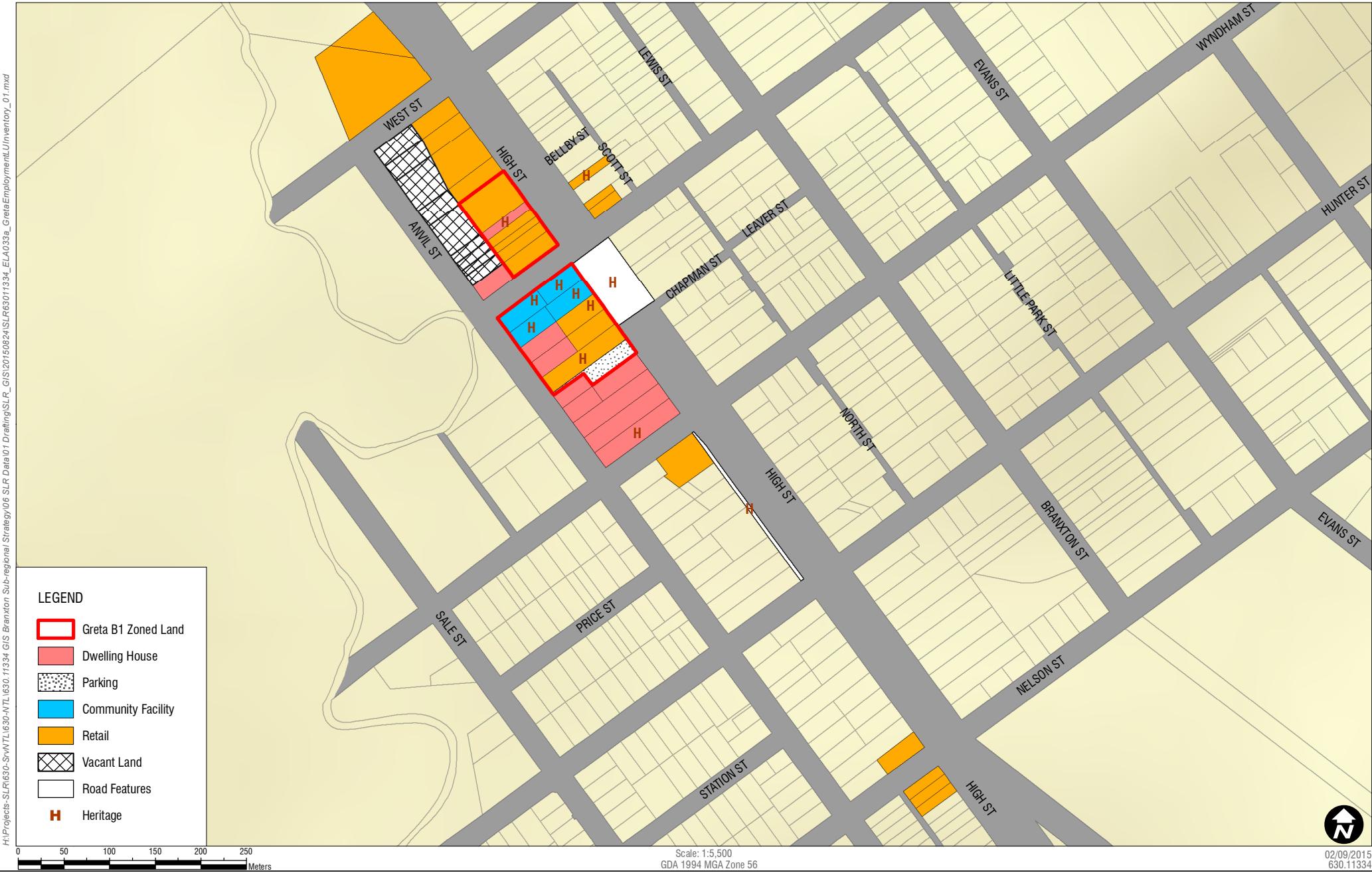
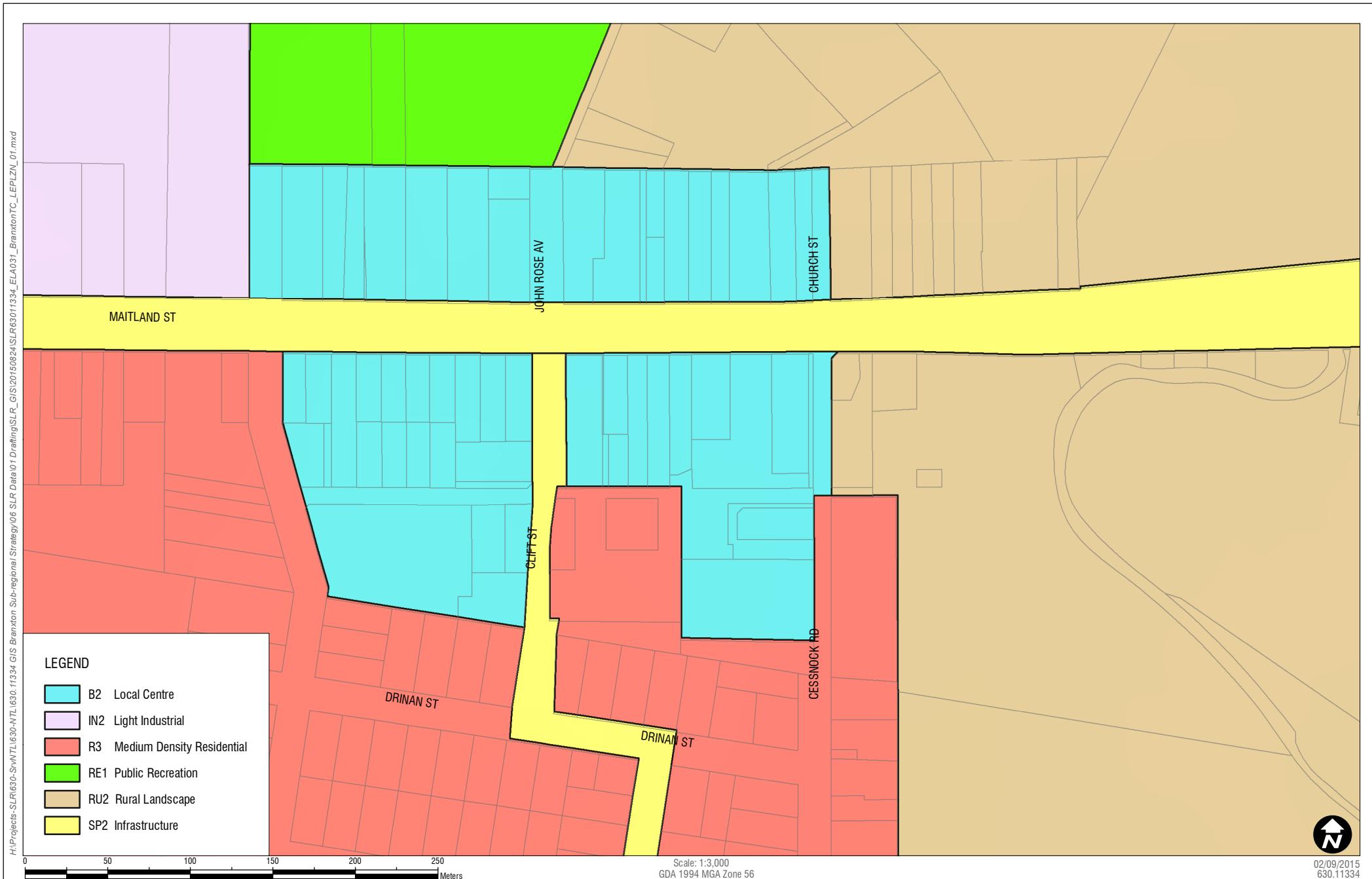
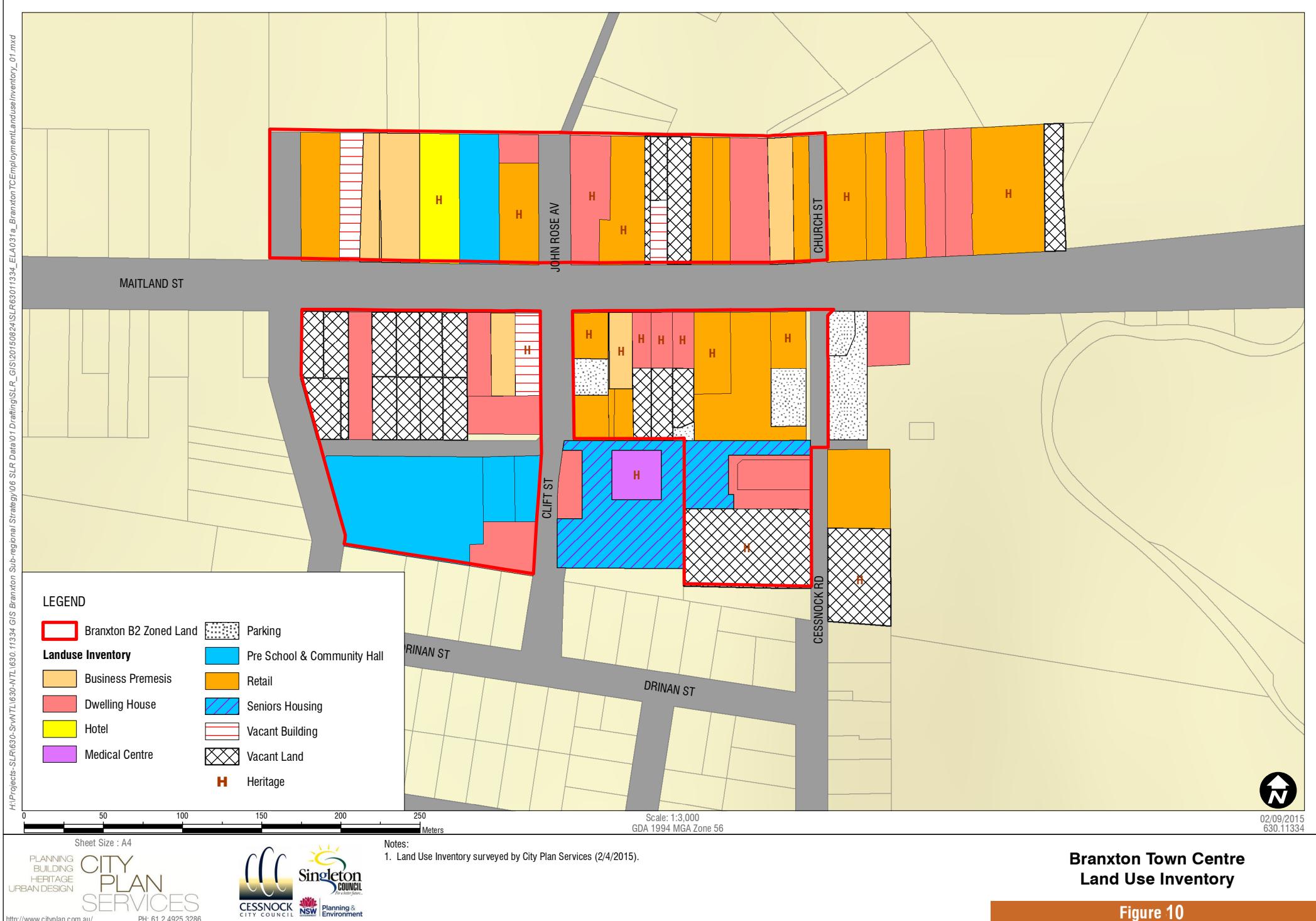


Figure 6









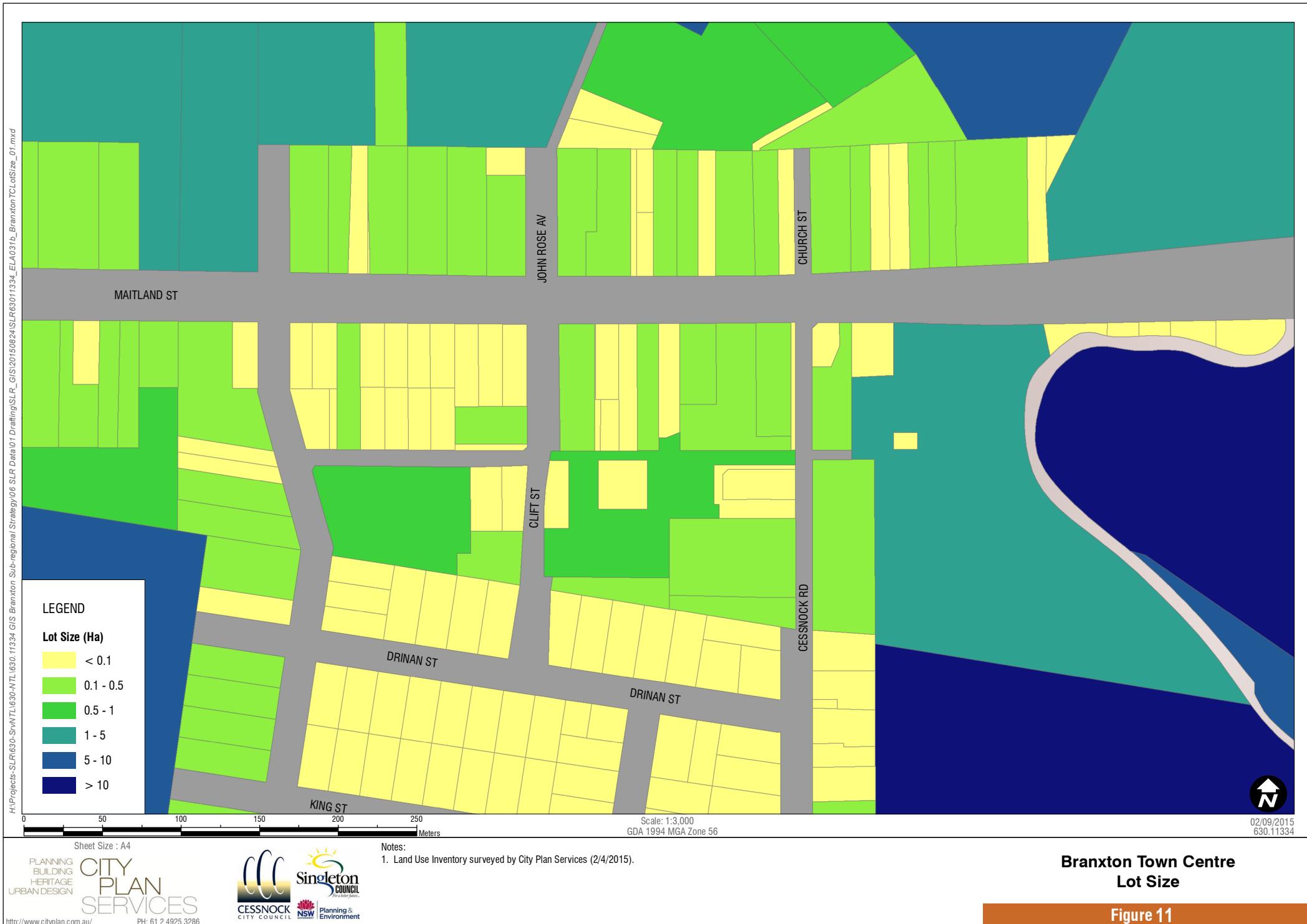
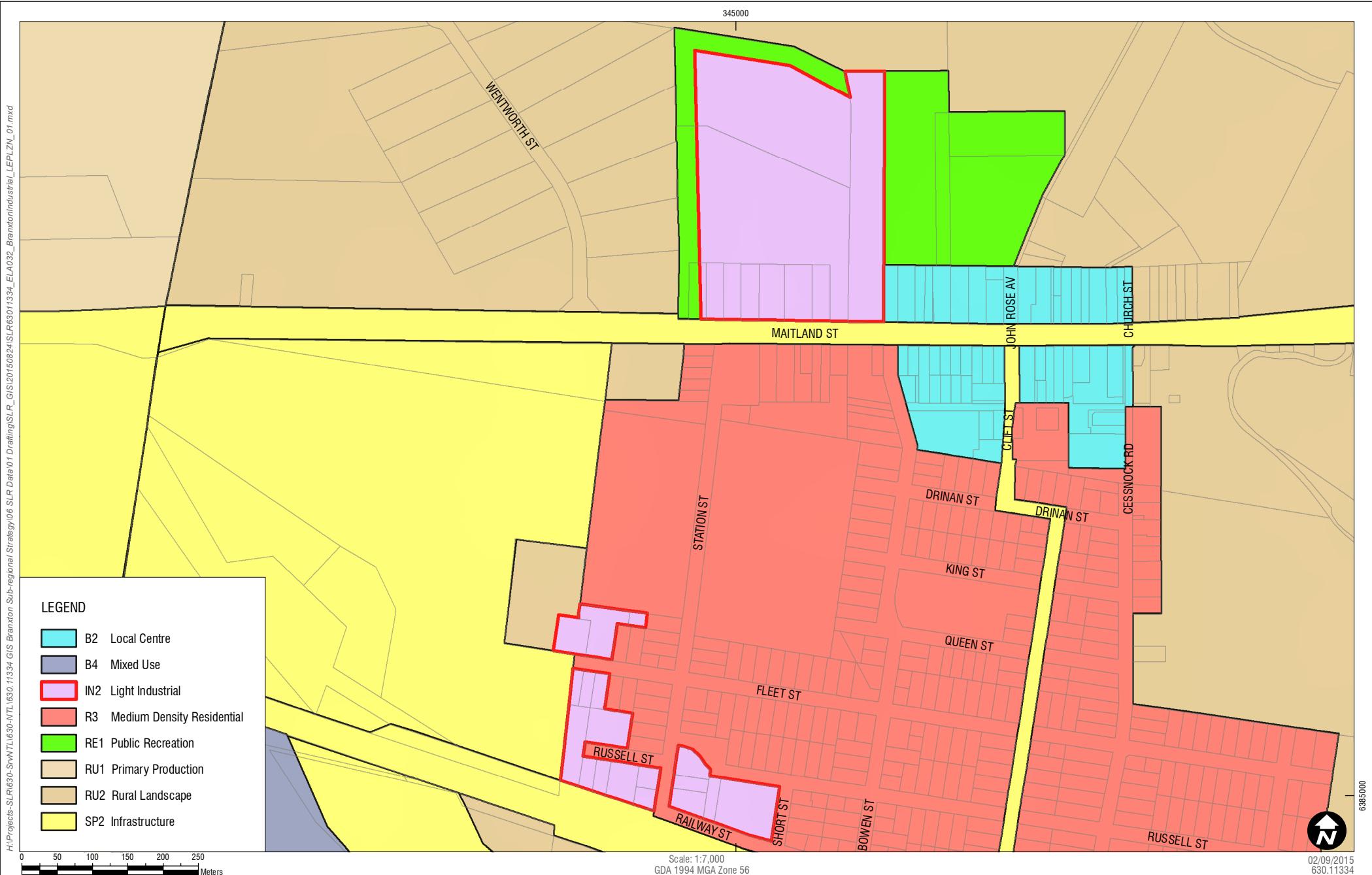
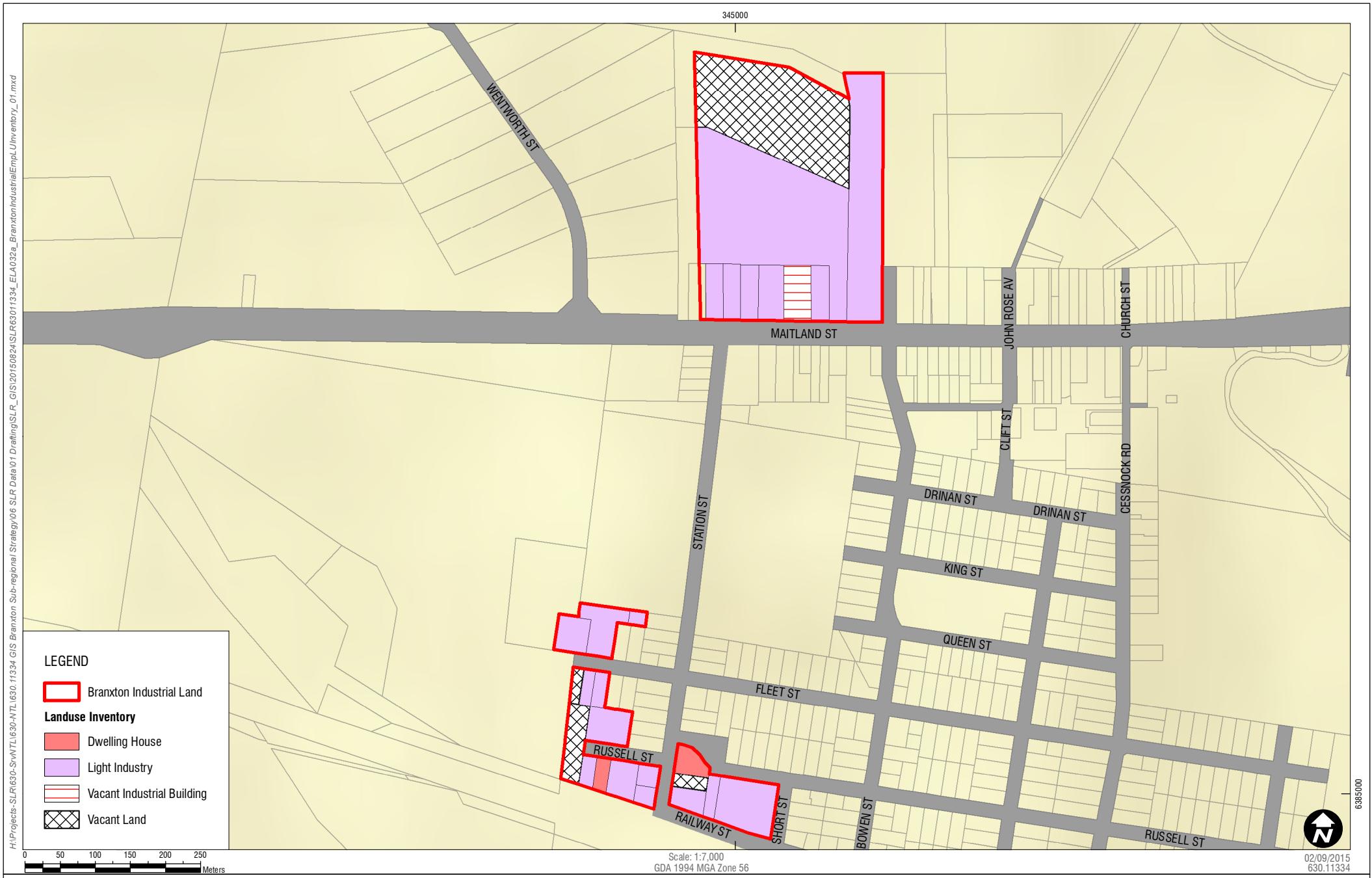


Figure 11



Notes:

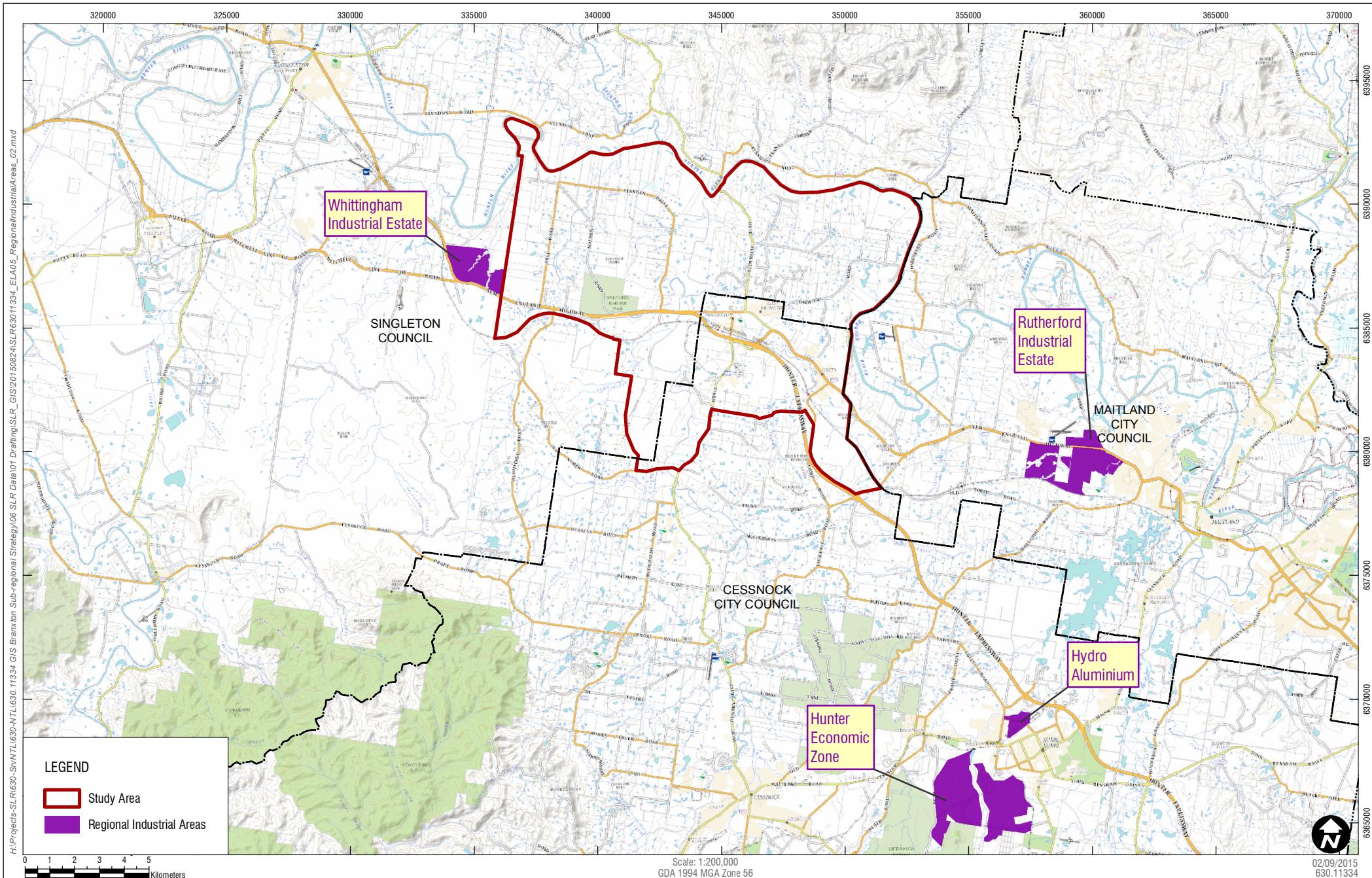
1. Standard Instrument Local Environmental Plan (LEP) - Land Use Zoning (LZN), NSW Dept of Planning & Environment. Includes Cessnock LEP 2011, Singleton LEP 2013
NSW Crown Copyright - Planning and Environment (21 May 2015)

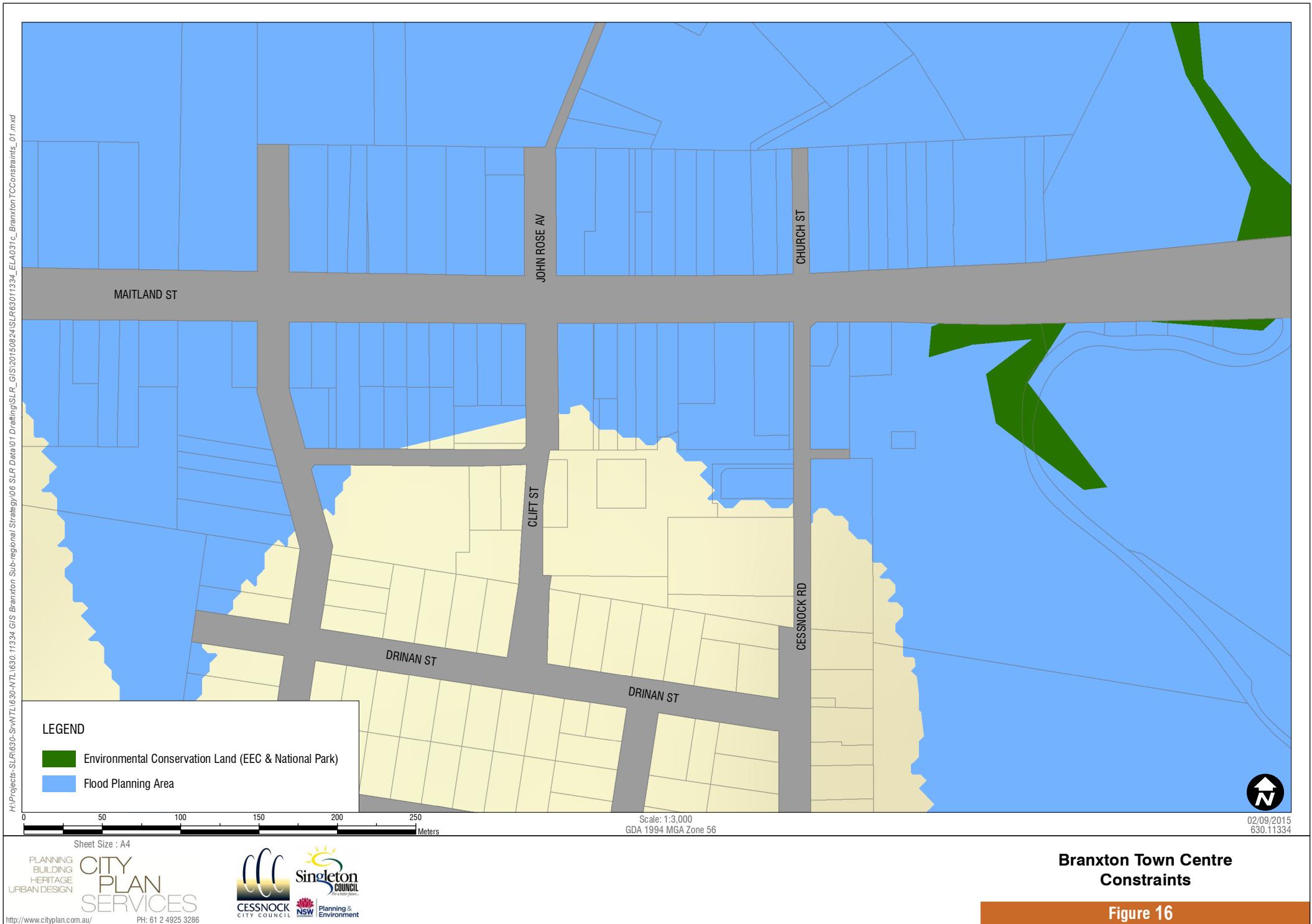


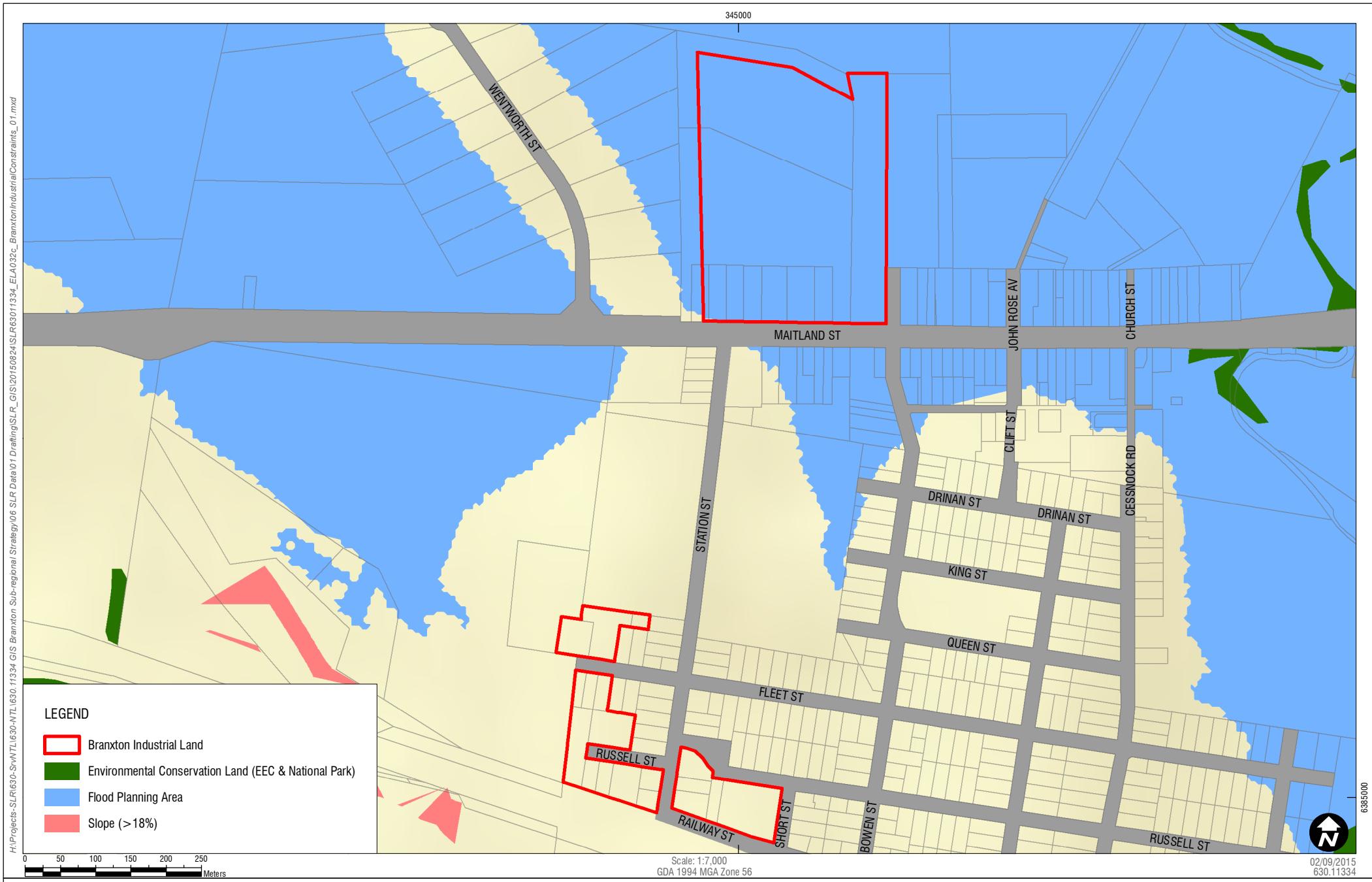


**Branxton Industrial Land
Lot Size**

Figure 14







Branxton Industrial Land Constraints

Figure 17

