

Morpeth Business  
Review &  
Development Plan

Developed for  
Maitland City Council

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# Executive Summary

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This Morpeth Business Review and Development project was commissioned by Maitland City Council to identify key issues that have, and will have, a future impact on the marketing and business landscape in Morpeth. The aim of this project was also to develop strategies to encourage a robust business foundation which effectively grows commercial activity, supports long term economic viability and is a value proposition for new businesses.

Based on consultant observation, feedback from the business community and visitation research, the situational analysis identified primary geographic target markets for Morpeth in the short term, as Maitland City residents and the Hunter Region. Sydney and Regional NSW (outside the Hunter region) were identified as a secondary market. In addition, it was recommended that Morpeth target a younger demographic and destination/attitudinal subset markets including recreational shoppers, overnight visitors, wedding visitors, existing destination shoppers and destination tourists.

The situational analysis also identified:

- ▶ Potential to redefine the business mix to become a shopping and food destination that focuses on a younger, more affluent market
- ▶ Potential to build on the It Must Be Morpeth branding to overcome perceptions of the business mix as old fashioned or out of date
- ▶ The potential for individual business owners to capitalise on the pulling power of **Campbell's Store**
- ▶ The ongoing issue of inconsistent trading hours and lack of promotion of trading hours
- ▶ Lack of online visibility in some areas
- ▶ The need for the Morpeth business community to work together

The Morpeth business community must work together to maximise revenue from visitors. A **"do nothing" strategy may maintain the status quo as day trippers continue** to visit the town but is more likely to see visitation drop. It will also have significant ramifications down the track, as visitors who find shops closed, out of date retail **experiences, or food and coffee that doesn't live up to expectations will not visit again, or worse, won't recommend Morpeth to others.**

Recommended initiatives in this report include:

- ▶ Revitalising the product mix by
  - Differentiating and improving the food offering to create interesting and unique modern dining experiences
  - Building the mix to include well merchandised lifestyle retailers
  - Improving the coffee offering focusing on boutique and local roasters
- ▶ Increasing the active promotion of trading hours to set realistic expectations and avoid visitor confusion and disappointment
- ▶ Setting up a representative body or working committee and creating a business community campaign to engage local business owners, promote and implement initiatives
- ▶ Developing a project to actively develop and improve the business mix by setting up a committee to identify gaps, nominate possible usage for vacancies and work with real estate agents to promote vacancies
- ▶ Increasing online visibility and interaction with potential visitors through Search Engine Optimisation, Facebook marketing, mobile friendly websites and skills development of individual business owners
- ▶ Developing a Trip Advisor campaign to build reviews and profile of Morpeth online

- ▶ Increasing promotion of the It Must Be Morpeth brand
- ▶ Publicity campaign to reach secondary geographic markets in the longer term
- ▶ Joint promotion of wedding suppliers through accommodation providers and local wedding venues

In conclusion, there is potential for Morpeth to become the benchmark for heritage villages in Australia and build a reputation as a destination which is truly unique, delicious and boutique but also a business community that thinks outside the square, takes concepts to the next level and where there is always something different and unusual to be seen or to try.

# 1 Situational Analysis

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## 1.1 Background

Information for the development of this plan has been gathered during three site visits to Morpeth, a review of the 2007 Township Marketing Plan, feedback from Morpeth businesses including two focus groups and a review of documents provided by Maitland City Council.

### Site Visits

- ▶ Wednesday 20/1/2016
  - Site visit to Morpeth to meet City Economy Officer
  - This was not part of the commissioned project but an opportunity to reacquaint with the main street and take reference photos
- ▶ Thursday 31/3/2016
  - Site visit to Morpeth for initial briefing with Manager Marketing and Communications; Coordinator City and Visitor Economy and City Economy Officer
- ▶ Friday 1/4/2016
  - Site visit to conduct a focus group, conduct a business review and develop a business mix for Morpeth
- ▶ Saturday 2/4/2016
  - Site visit to observe the main street on a busy weekend
- ▶ Tuesday 12/4/2016
  - Site visits to meet with Visitor Economy Support Officer; Visitor Information Officer; Team Leader Marketing and Visitor Economy Team Leader
- ▶ Wednesday 13/4/2016
  - Site visit to conduct a focus group and undertake further business mix review

The City Economy Officer from Maitland City Council acted as my guide during the onsite visits.

### Follow Up

Informal and anecdotal information was also gathered through conversations with retailers and accommodation providers and follow up phone calls to a number of business owners.

### Documents Review

Additional information was gathered from documents supplied by Maitland City Council

- ▶ Maitland City Centres Study – 2009
- ▶ High Street Masterplan & Laneways Action Plan – 2013
- ▶ Maitland Community Strategic Plan - 2013
- ▶ Visitor Economy Marketing Activity Plan - 2016

### Objectives

The aim of the business review was to identify the key issues that will have an impact on the future development and marketing of Morpeth.

The review encompassed:

- ▶ Approaches to main street
- ▶ Traffic in main street
- ▶ Parking
- ▶ Pedestrian access
- ▶ Business precincts
- ▶ Town identity and branding
- ▶ Streetscaping
  - Signage
  - Architecture and heritage values
- ▶ Business mix and vacancies
  - Product stock levels
  - Product ranges in stores
  - Traditional versus innovative products
- ▶ Retailer skill levels
  - Merchandising
- ▶ Customer service
- ▶ Tourist attractions
  - Retail clusters
  - Destination businesses
- ▶ Trading hours
- ▶ Advertising and marketing
- ▶ Online visibility
- ▶ Representative bodies

## 1.2 Key Observations

As a part of this project a business review was conducted over two days. Below is a **summary of the consultant's observations. The full review can be found under Appendices.**

- ▶ Morpeth is a charming, historic river town in the Hunter region. It is located 2 hours north of Sydney, 45 minutes northwest of Newcastle and ten minutes from Maitland CBD
- ▶ Unlike many NSW heritage towns, Morpeth is not located on a major highway **and has not been "bypassed,"** nor is it adjacent to a major road
  - **Morpeth would attract "destination" visitors rather than relying** solely on passing traffic
- ▶ **There is a strong "ahhh" factor and first impressions include charming, pretty,** historic, quaint and village
- ▶ Heritage architecture and the sense of history is the major asset for the Morpeth main street
- ▶ Despite its quiet, rural location there is a significant amount of vehicle traffic through the main street of Morpeth including trucks and trade vehicles
- ▶ Parking signage was a grab bag of different time limits including ¼ hr, ½ hr, 1hr, 2hr and 4hr limits in a 500 metre stretch
- ▶ There is no pedestrian crossing in the main street which can make it difficult to visit businesses on both sides of the street especially for the elderly, disabled or families with prams or younger children
- ▶ It is clear there are lots of interesting browsing shops as you drive through the main street
  - Local businesses have made an effort to catch the visitors eye with colourful planter boxes, product displays and decorative awnings which make you want to stop and explore
- ▶ Morpeth has a browsing mix that would be the envy of most small towns with browsing, fashion and lifestyle retailers comprising 45% of the mix. When you add restaurants/pubs and cafés, 65% of businesses will appeal to visitors

- ▶ **Morpeth also has the advantage of a “major” retailer in Campbell’s Store** which pulls visitors into Morpeth
  - Since 2007 there seems to have been a significant move away from craft and handmade to more design and modern products
- ▶ Recent vacancies are an opportunity to strengthen the business mix
- ▶ The accommodation offering in Morpeth has improved significantly and has become a real asset with high quality boutique accommodation attracting high end visitors, destination tourists and the wedding market
- ▶ Inconsistent trading hours has been identified as a major issue for Morpeth with many businesses not open early in the week, businesses closing early or not trading as advertised all causing confusion for locals and visitors alike
  - An analysis of trading days conducted as a part of the business review has identified the percentage of businesses open each day. Monday - 51%, Tuesday - 63%, Wednesday - 68%, Thursday & Friday - 98%, Saturday - 100%, Sunday - 85%
- ▶ **Morpeth has an established brand under “It Must Be Morpeth”** based around three key words boutique, delicious and unique
- ▶ Online visibility for Morpeth is strong when the word Morpeth is used but when using more general searches such as “heritage” or “historic” towns NSW, “things to do around the Hunter” Morpeth does not appear in searches and appears to have slipped under the radar when it comes to state-wide and national tourism

### 1.3 Business Community Feedback

As a part of the Morpeth Review, focus groups were facilitated with business owners representing different aspects of the business community including established and newer businesses in accommodation, retail, food and fashion. Below is a summary of responses to two of the questions asked during the focus groups. The complete feedback is detailed in Appendices. Please note that these are the opinions of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the consultant.

What attracts people to Morpeth?

- ▶ Morpeth passes the 2-hour test, **it’s an easy drive**
- ▶ Fantastic street appeal
- ▶ History, heritage and architecture
- ▶ Sense of history
- ▶ Jazz Festival, Chapel Jazz, Teapot Festival
- ▶ **It’s a nice day out**
- ▶ Coffee
- ▶ Hunter River
- ▶ Museum
- ▶ Heritage Wharf
- ▶ **It’s surrounded by a Green Belt**
- ▶ Fabulous scenery
- ▶ The bridge
  - Fresh produce over the bridge
- ▶ Family oriented community
- ▶ The area is safe
- ▶ 2 fabulous churches
- ▶ St James has a pipe organ
- ▶ The Common
  - Development to this area is a risk

What are the key challenges and opportunities for Morpeth?

- ▶ We need to increase the number of return visitors
- ▶ Inconsistent trading hours
- ▶ Public toilets need an upgrade
- ▶ No pedestrian crossings
  - These would take out more parking spaces
- ▶ Barricades in the park have been there for ages and are unattractive
- ▶ No off street parking
  - No enforcement of parking times
- ▶ The number of trucks travelling through the main street
- ▶ Lack of loading zones in the main street
- ▶ Lack of attractions other than shopping
- ▶ The business community is divided
- ▶ The Business Association is working hard to promote the town but has a lack of support from businesses
- ▶ Retail opening hours are inconsistent and not published anywhere
- ▶ The village community have expectations and think of Morpeth as their town
  - **They don't always like tourists**
- ▶ Is it possible to put power lines underground?
- ▶ Poor public transport
- ▶ Potential for more festivals and events e.g. Heritage Festival
- ▶ Morpeth Village is looking shabby
  - Building owners need to improve appearance of buildings
  - Council should improve seating, bins etc.

## 1.4 Visitation Research

Research undertaken by Micromex Research as a part of the Community Leisure and Levee Concept Study in December 2014 included results of 400 phone surveys conducted throughout the Maitland LGA. Some of the responses included data which is relevant to Morpeth. This included:

- ▶ Visitation of locations in the Hunter Region in the last 12 months
  - Morpeth ranked third with 77% behind Green Hills Shopping Centre 93% and Central Maitland 90%. Next ranking destinations were Charlestown and Westfield Kotara.
  - Morpeth was the **only location which isn't a major shopping centre or mall**
- ▶ Average 3-month visitation of locations
  - Morpeth ranked third with 3.1 visits compared to Green Hills Shopping Centre 18.3 and Central Maitland 10
  - This was consistent across all age groups surveyed
- ▶ Spend on last leisure visit
  - Morpeth ranked 8<sup>th</sup> out of 14 with a spend of \$136
  - This was below the average spend overall of \$172
  - Top spend was Charlestown Square \$313, lowest spend The Junction Newcastle with \$45
- ▶ Reasons that encourage choice of location
  - All of the 15 responses ranked from 97% (free parking) to 79% learn **about history but Morpeth "ticked the boxes" on a number of reasons** including
    - Accessibility by car
    - Atmosphere
    - Restaurants/cafés/pubs
    - Variety of products

- Small independent shops (83%)

Maitland City Council conducted informal visitor surveys in November/December 2015 and March/April 2016 to identify how consumers were hearing about Morpeth and where they came from. The Morpeth Research Survey was conducted and collated by Maitland City Council staff. Key findings to date include:

- ▶ More than 50% of visitors are local/repeat/regular customers to Morpeth
- ▶ Tourist and visiting friends and relatives (VFR) market make up another 16% of visitors
- ▶ The Maitland Local Government Area comprises the largest percentage of visitors to Morpeth, making up 36% of customers (Maitland and Morpeth)
- ▶ The wider Hunter Region including Maitland, Dungog/Port Stephens, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie and Cessnock make up the next largest percentage of visitors at 62%
- ▶ 11% of visitors are from the Sydney market, dominated by Sydney North and Sydney West regions
- ▶ Sydney in the lead up to Christmas (Nov/Dec) attracted more from Sydney West while the Easter/school holiday (Mar/Apr) attracted Sydney North areas.
- ▶ Of those that completed the survey, more identified as tourists in the Nov/Dec period than in Mar/Apr

## 2 Strategic Direction

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### 2.1 Vision

The Morpeth business community faces a unique set of opportunities and challenges in the months and years ahead. The economic climate, tourism trends, online shopping and changing demographics of the area will all impact on the retail and business community.

Morpeth already has a very strong positioning statement but it is now time for the **business community to come up with a "vision" of where they want the town to be in 2, 5, and even 10 years.**

There is potential for Morpeth to become the benchmark for heritage villages in Australia and build a reputation as a destination which is truly unique, delicious and boutique but also a business community that thinks outside the square, takes concepts to the next level and where there is always something different and unusual to be seen or to try.

With the optimum retail mix Morpeth can become not just a destination in itself, but a location where individual retailers are also destinations.

To make this happen Morpeth needs to become a cohesive business community where businesses work together to have fun, raise the bar, cross promote events, promotions and each other.

Key factors for Morpeth will be

- ▶ Building their core markets of locals and visitors from the Maitland LGA
- ▶ Targeting of a younger, more affluent market
- ▶ Creating unique product mixes and benefits for each outlet
- ▶ Keeping core stock in the mid price range

### 2.2 Target Markets and Marketing Strategies

#### Primary Geographic Target Markets

In the short to medium term Morpeth should focus its energy on markets where it has a strong following and demonstrated success. Based on visitation research primary geographic target markets should be:

#### **Maitland City Residents**

The recent Morpeth Visitor Survey has shown that 52% of visitors are local, repeat or regular customers. This is backed up by the 2014 research that showed that Morpeth is the number 3 destination with residents of the LGA.

This local market should be the key focus for marketing. As repeat visitation is high, regular introduction and promotion of new products and menu items will be key to building this market and maintaining visitor interest.

Morpeth already enjoys high recognition and visibility with the local LGA as a result of promotion and advertising funded by Maitland City Council, Morpeth Business **Association and local businesses such as Campbell's Store.** Improving the retail and product mix along with developing new concepts in food and retail will encourage repeat visits and referrals.

Morpeth village and surrounds including Morpeth Manor represents 16% of the Maitland City market. It is a growing area in terms of local residents and should be a primary target for the Morpeth business community.

Information from Swan Realty indicates that the majority of new residents in the area **are aged 25 to 40 with one or two children and although they won't do their weekly**

shopping at Morpeth, they should be targets for daily needs, great food experiences including dining out, fresh and gourmet foods, fashion and modern homewares.

Based on the popularity of craft breweries in other regional locations there is potential for the craft brewery at the Commercial Hotel to become a major drawcard for locals.

Anecdotal evidence from business owners and local residents also suggests that there is growing demand for weekend breakfast and brunch for Morpeth residents who want to eat out locally and enjoy the heritage streetscape.

In terms of older new residents, only 2 sales in 2016 have been to over 60's. Business feedback suggests Closebourne residents are already supporting local businesses.

A subset of the Maitland LGA market is the Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR) market.

**Destination NSW report "Travel to NSW to Visit Friends and Relatives Year Ended December 2015"** showed the strength of the VFR market with 37.2% of visitors to NSW in this category. VFR domestic daytrips in NSW represented 31% of all daytrips.

The Maitland LGA Profile (four-year annual average to year ending September 2014) shows that the Maitland LGA performs exceptionally well with 55% of overnight visitors and 32% of domestic daytrips visiting friends and relatives. VFR is also the top listed activity at 60% and the top accommodation type with 59% of overnight stays at a friends or **relative's property**.

The mix of heritage appeal, local history and a unique shopping experience is a powerful attraction for the VFR market as locals share this historic destination with friends and family.

## Marketing Strategies

### Media

The Maitland LGA will continue to generate the majority of growth as locals come to soak up some of the charm of Morpeth. The Morpeth retail mix is particularly appealing to this market as it offers a range of outlets which is very different to larger shopping centres.

These markets are currently being reached by mainstream media including television, radio and press.

As the spend is quite significant and only 3% of those surveyed identified they had heard about Morpeth from TV, radio or social media, it would be interesting to conduct further research on whether an advertising campaign does increase visitation and if it does, what is the profile of the visitor that responds to advertising?

If the result shows that advertising is not increasing visitation or attracting predominantly non target or low spending visitors there may be an opportunity to funnel some advertising funds into on-site promotions, implementing marketing initiatives or developing an event.

Promoting the It Must Be Morpeth website in upcoming campaigns could also be a way of gauging response as you will be able to monitor responses.

### Local Promotions

There is an opportunity to promote the strengths of the retail mix from a local perspective, encourage lapsed shoppers to return and increase the numbers of locals eating and shopping in the main street.

Develop a campaign around a specific innovation or reason for revisiting e.g. new retail outlets, breakfast eating options, **dining options, Campbell's event**, relaunch of the retail mix or **local's** open day to actively market to the Morpeth community and Maitland LGA to attract publicity and create a buzz in the town. Low cost initiatives could include:

- ▶ A launch function or event in the main street

- This will also generate local publicity
- ▶ Distributing marketing collateral such as DLs to surrounding areas or publicity in local press providing a reason to visit
- ▶ Launch posters in all businesses
- ▶ Handout of promotional flyers by retailers during peak periods
  - Retailers could also place the postcard or promotional flyer in all bags or hand to customers over a 2 - 4 week period
  - Cafés and takeaways could place flyers on tables for a 2 - 4 week period
- ▶ Signage in vacant shops
- ▶ Promotion via website and Facebook

### Facebook - Shop Local First

The MBA already promotes a local Privilege Card and runs a Christmas Promotion designed to engage the Morpeth market. Individual businesses including The Commercial Hotel also actively market to locals through their Facebook Page.

Realistically, locals will continue to travel away from Morpeth for their weekly shopping but should be attracted by the cafés, fashion and gift ranges.

Given the growing number of younger families moving into the village and Morpeth Manor and the growing emphasis on renovating and decorating, homewares and lifestyle stores should attract the local market.

If the local assumption is that Morpeth product ranges are old fashioned, too expensive or not aimed at the 25 – 40 year olds, more active promotion of what is in each outlet through It Must Be Morpeth Facebook page will help locals to reconnect.

## Hunter Region

Morpeth offers the Hunter region an experience unlike any other place in the region with its combination of heritage architecture, boutique shopping and food offering. For holiday makers in the area it provides an alternative to beach locations and is ideally situated for a day trip or half day visit. For residents, the business mix offers boutiques featuring carefully selected products and brands that are not found in local shopping malls and centres.

In the medium term, Morpeth should focus its energy on geographic markets that are within an hours drive. This would include existing markets of Dungog/Port Stephens and Newcastle/Lake Macquarie. Target visitors are likely to include locals, VFR visitors and tourists from those areas.

### Marketing Strategies

- ▶ Existing marketing initiatives such as TV are already reaching this target market
- ▶ In terms of online visibility, the most important marketing tool is a website that is Search Engine Optimised for surrounding areas and tourism search terms so the website is easy for potential visitors to find.
- ▶ A strong presence on Trip Advisor and similar sites along with social media such **as a Facebook page, blogging and twitter will also help the “findability” of Morpeth**
- ▶ A visible presence through booklets such as The Meander Guide, brochures in Visitor Information Centres and accommodation providers **up to a day’s drive** away can also convince tourists to visit Morpeth.
  - Ideally the content of these should all set realistic expectations regarding trading days.

## Secondary Geographic Target Markets

### **Sydney and Regional NSW (outside Hunter Region)**

Accommodation providers are reporting some success with the Sydney and regional NSW markets which they are targeting through online visibility and websites such as Stayz. However, feedback from Morpeth businesses in general suggests that Morpeth has seen visitation from tourism markets such as Sydney drop over the past few years. It can be expensive and difficult for individual businesses to reach these markets so it is recommended that Sydney, along with regional NSW (outside the Hunter region) and interstate are secondary target markets in the short to medium term.

## Marketing Strategies

Data from the Morpeth Visitor Survey shows that 7% of visitors are from interstate, and 11% from Sydney. Further research **should be undertaken to see if they are "day trippers"**, visiting friends or relatives or actually staying in the region. If it eventuates that they are staying in the Hunter wine region, Morpeth could support increased marketing in the Hunter wine region in the future.

However, as the wine region is so close to Morpeth and lacks shopping experiences it makes sense to continue to market to visitors through distribution of marketing material through relevant Visitor Information Centres. In addition, marketing material could be distributed through key locations for visitors such as wineries, tourist attractions, accommodation providers and service stations.

As a strong online presence is important for reaching these visitors, initiatives can include:

- ▶ Research into likely search terms where there is potential for Morpeth to increase its rankings
- ▶ An updated Search Engine Optimisation campaign

Morpeth would also benefit from a publicity campaign based around the positioning statement highlighting the unique experiences in Morpeth. Ideally this should target mainstream travel supplements e.g. SMH and Daily Telegraph in capital cities along with tourism publications.

## Demographic Target Markets

To ensure the sustainability of target markets, Morpeth needs to focus on a younger market with higher disposable income rather than the traditional low spending retiree market. Primary targets include

- ▶ The Maitland LGA family market predominantly 25 – 45
- ▶ Morpeth township and Morpeth manor predominantly young families
- ▶ Baby boomers who, although older have much stronger buying habits than the existing retiree market
  - Many are self-funded retirees who spend on travel, accommodation, food, fashion, homewares and grandchildren

## Destination (Attitudinal) Target Markets

In addition to geographic and demographic target markets there is potential for Morpeth businesses to actively target specific markets who are travelling to Morpeth or surrounds for specific products or experiences.

## **Food and Wine Travellers**

Although it could be argued Sydney (and other) visitors to the Hunter Valley visitors are only interested in wine, research suggests wine visitors are interested in a much broader experience.

The 2015 Tourism Research Australia/Destination NSW Report on Food and Wine Tourism in NSW has identified that 39% of food and wine visitors head for the Hunter Valley. **They also note that "people are becoming increasingly knowledgeable about and engaged in food and wine". Their research has shown that tourists are seeking**

**“authentic” experiences and products and want to be able to eat locally grown food.**  
The report identified four elements that make up a good food and wine experience:

- ▶ Eat fresh, locally grown produce for breakfast, lunch and dinner
- ▶ Buy local in all its various forms
- ▶ Take short drives to places of interest near the main destination
- ▶ Make the journey part of the break with interest stops on the way there and back home
- ▶ 26% of survey respondents were keen to visit local arts/craft shops and markets.

## Marketing Strategies

Morpeth is a short drive from the Hunter Wine Region and has potential to appeal to these visitors if it increases its focus on local produce and diverse dining experiences. **Morpeth has the Morpeth Gallery in the Campbell’s complex which will appeal to these** visitors along with several other outlets that include artworks in their product mix. **Campbell’s has a similar appeal to markets** as shoppers hunt for bargains in the various departments and concessions. Other opportunities for markets which would dramatically increase visitor numbers could also be explored.

## Recreational Shoppers

Recreational shoppers are an important subset of destination (attitudinal) visitors for Morpeth as it is now recognised that shoppers differentiate between day to day and recreational shopping. For day to day shopping, it is all about familiarity and routine, visiting a mall or centre with a large supermarket and chain stores. Shoppers have a set period of time to purchase everything on their list. They become creatures of habit; parking in the same area, following the same route through the supermarket and visiting fresh food and specialty outlets in a certain order.

**On the other hand, recreational shopping is all about “new and different”.** Although shoppers visit the area less often, they have usually budgeted to indulge themselves and spend on wants rather than needs. They are looking for independent retailers, a range of choice in their chosen category e.g. gifts, fashion, hobbies, homewares, interesting stock and most importantly a range of eating options because lunch or coffee is an important part of the experience. Recreational shoppers are predominantly women, often generational, and shop in pairs and small groups.

## Marketing Strategies

**Morpeth’s retail mix makes it an ideal destination for recreational shoppers.** Promotion to this market shouldn’t be based on price and item or discount but should be designed to lead them from business to business and provide insights, tips and tricks of the trade that make shoppers feel a part of a community or “club”. Initiatives can include:

- ▶ General fashion, browsing and homeware itineraries promoted on Facebook and the website. These can be themed to appeal to different markets e.g.
  - Formal season including hair and beauty, formal outfits, portrait photographer, jewellery and accessories
  - Christmas shopping for all ages
  - Antique and interesting
  - History and mystery
  - Itineraries should include a mix of retail, food and where possible experience e.g. river, park, museum, tasting
- ▶ Pictures on the website that highlight recreational shopping
  - These may come from a professional photographer
- ▶ Fashion and food blogs, ideally including contributions from retailers and restaurants/cafés
- ▶ Eating out guide

- Menu updates, dish of the day
- Promotions
- ▶ Progressive sales or launch events where each outlet's clients are invited to a VIP night held outside normal trading hours.
  - Often held in the evening, customers can progress from one outlet to another to enjoy first pick of new seasons stock or pre sale bargains.
  - One group of businesses in a regional town consisting of a shoe shop, 2 fashion outlets and an upmarket gift and jewellery retailer made this an annual event using a busker to lead shoppers from one venue to another and providing a glass of champagne at each stop
  - This cluster also joins with local hairdressers and beauticians to **run "Girls Night Out" events or formal season events for mothers and daughters.** In addition to providing dress advice they would also provide hair and beauty demonstrations or consultations.

## Overnight Visitors

Morpeth has experienced an increase in overnight visitors due to the growing number of accommodation providers in Morpeth. Local operators are reporting increased occupancy rates and already actively marketing their properties online through Expedia, Stayz etc. and are receiving excellent reviews on Trip Advisor.

The visitors staying in town are valuable to the Morpeth business community as they spend on food and recreational shopping as well as accommodation. Most are also keen to stay in the local vicinity.

### Marketing Strategies

For local businesses this is an opportunity to tap into this market by working closely with accommodation providers to supply useful information for inclusion in room compendiums or as handouts. Information can include:

- ▶ **Details of food outlets and who's open when**
- ▶ Dinner options including dinner packs, breakfast packs for self-catering premises
- ▶ Things to do while in town
- ▶ Shopping guide and opening hours
- ▶ Special offers
- ▶ Local walks

## Wedding Visitors

The growing number of reception centres and accommodation providers in the Maitland area means there is potential to grow the Morpeth wedding market in the short to medium term. In the past five years there has been growing interest in destination weddings where couples choose to marry in a pretty town or village. Often they do not live in the area but are motivated by the scenic surroundings and the distance from both families and their guests.

Given that Morpeth has some excellent accommodation, a number of attractive churches, a pretty village atmosphere, a range of eateries and great parks including The Common there is an opportunity to bring this whole offering together and actively promote to this market

### Marketing Strategies

Accommodation providers are already tapping into this lucrative market along with the florist and local make-up artist. There is also potential for local businesses to tap into this market by liaising with local venues and accommodation providers to identify opportunities such as catering for wedding rehearsals, grocery or gourmet food packs for accommodation providers, venues for family dinners, last minute fashion and jewellery purchases. Marketing initiatives can include:

- ▶ A brochure/PDF that promotes all aspects of the wedding offering including all local suppliers such as accommodation, hair and make-up, caterers, photographers, video services, florists, transport providers such as veteran, classic and vintage cars or horse drawn vehicles
  - This can be distributed via accommodation providers
  - This can also be supplied to local wedding venues to send to their clients
- ▶ A dedicated Weddings section on the existing website
- ▶ Publicity campaign to wedding websites and publications
  - Paid advertising on these sites may also be viable
- ▶ Individual operators or groups can also attend Bridal Fairs in the Maitland LGA to be seen as a part of the wider bridal offering

## Destination Shoppers

A number of businesses in Morpeth have a dedicated customer following and are attracting repeat visits to their outlet. It is likely that some of these businesses have established mail lists and will blog, send e-newsletters or produce mail outs for their clients or customers. This is an opportunity for pairs or groups of business owners to work together to extend the stay and spend of these visitors by cross promoting other retailers and businesses in Morpeth.

### Marketing Strategies

The success of this strategy very much depends on how willing businesses are to work together but they can be very cost effective ways of marketing.

- ▶ Informal agreements to send shoppers to other outlets if stock not available or if they **can't help**
  - This strategy is already used with fashion retailers and accommodation providers
- ▶ Displaying business cards or brochures for other outlets at the counter
- ▶ Campaigns to cross promote other outlets in existing newsletters, Facebook Pages or on Instagram
  - This introduces businesses to a well-qualified list of shoppers
- ▶ Joint promotions for events such as fashion parades, pre sales VIP evenings, shopping trails e.g.
  - In one regional community a blind retailer, kitchen supply company, mortgage broker, lighting store and homewares store got together to cross promote a joint weekend sale

## Destination Tourists

During the project it was identified that there may be potential to actively target destination tourists visiting other attractions or being brought to the area by a third party. In the past there has been discussion about targeting

- ▶ Cruise Ship visitors
  - These have not proved a lucrative market in the past but may become an opportunity as the Newcastle cruise market grows
- ▶ People visiting the Maitland Gaol which is only 5 kilometres away

Neither of these are seen as major markets in the short to medium term.

### Marketing Strategies

- ▶ Pursue discussions with Maitland Gaol to explore the potential for cross promotion through websites, distribution of existing marketing material, Facebook posts and cross promotion on marketing material for specific events
- ▶ Liaise with Cruise Hunter to identify which cruise companies are planning to dock at Newcastle and to identify opportunities to add Morpeth to shore excursions

## 2.3 Retail & Product Mix Opportunities

There are a range of business concepts that are currently enjoying popularity in regional tourist destinations. Trends in both food and retail will create opportunities for individual Morpeth businesses to update and modify their product ranges to ensure their outlet stands out from any competition and capitalises on customer needs and wants.

### Lifestyle Concept Stores

**The current focus on home renovations and decorating shows such as “The Block” and “House Rules” has raised expectations that every home should look like a show home.**

Visitors and local residents, especially those moving into new homes or first homes will be attracted to affordable homewares paired with lifestyle items ranging from candles to clothing. This has led to the development of lifestyle concept stores which blur the line between gifts, homewares and fashion to create a mix of products.

Characteristics of these concepts include:

- ▶ These are usually very individual concepts and are the vision of the owner. They focus on a curated range of products sourced locally and from smaller suppliers (often on-line micro businesses)
  - Pricing is usually mid-range but stock often looks more expensive than it is
  - These outlets have a distinctive look and overall feel which is reinforced with fixtures and fittings e.g. use of timber crates, theatrical props, ladders or character furniture
    - **The character of Morpeth’s heritage buildings should provide great opportunities to create atmospheric fit outs and displays**
  - Merchandising is a key factor in the success of these concepts as stock and display needs to take customers on a journey of discovery
  - These concept stores are already appearing in Maitland developments like The Levee, and villages like Berry have a growing number of these outlets but there is potential for Morpeth to make this category their signature. Recently spotted concepts include:
    - The Bead Bar of Berry – colour coded displays of beads along with jewellery, scarves and homewares in a rustic setting
    - Candleberries – candles, fabrics and paint
    - Cabana Joes – quirky collections of homewares
    - Few and Far – furniture and decorator items displayed in room settings – pieces made by creative minds, artisans and craftsmen
    - Barbara Storehouse – rustic homewares, soft furnishings and furniture
    - Zjoosh - Casual jewellery, handbags, scarves, accessories and gifts
    - Hamptons décor with an emphasis on natural colours including clothing
    - Bright retro décor with an emphasis on homewares and quirky collectibles
    - Shady Fig – florist, homewares, gifts and floristry classes
- ▶ Options for Morpeth could include
  - Garden/Outdoor enjoyment store – this concept includes everything you need to enjoy your balcony, indoor/outdoor space from candles to small pieces of furniture and garden sculptures
  - Handmade recycled timber furniture displayed with pottery, paintings and soft sculptures by local artists
  - Fashion with a younger focus that did not copy the existing retailers
  - **Collectibles that are compatible with the mix at Campbell’s**

### Innovative and Delicious Food

### Food will become increasingly important in Morpeth's retail mix with a buyer

expectation of sensational coffee, fresh local produce and innovative menus that go beyond the traditional suburban mall or retail strip.

Even more traditional offerings such as scones and cream or burgers are expected to be presented with a twist or innovation e.g. scones and cream flavoured ice creams, salads in a mason jar, burgers with fried pickles, cakes or pulled pork sliders presented on timber boards.

- ▶ Craft beer is becoming a huge drawcard for both the tourism and local markets with venues in Sydney providing entertainment, food and workshops along with child friendly activities and a safe environment for families. This is an obvious opportunity for the Commercial Hotel with further development which could be extended to menu items e.g. pulled **meat burgers, fried chicken and "dude food"**
- ▶ Locally sourced or made on site gelato and ice-cream
  - Although traditionally thought of as summer food, these are proving exceptionally popular in winter. Williamstown in Melbourne have three ice-cream shops which were packed on a June Sunday afternoon and Berry now has a gelato outlet which was full on a July Sunday
- ▶ Gourmet pies and pasties
  - With an emphasis on interesting and unusual fillings, think cauliflower and pecorino or beef and sweet potato, these are backed up with pastries and sweet treats and see queues down the street on a winters day. An example of this is Milkwood Bakery in Berry
- ▶ Add to existing menus, products that tap into broader trends such as cold brew coffees, healthy juice bars, monster foods such as cronuts
- ▶ Innovative food offerings that showcase local produce e.g. doorstep sandwiches using local bread rather than thin white breads
- ▶ Picnic packs or meal packs for the overnight visitor
- ▶ A replacement patisserie as this seemed to be a real drawcard for locals
- ▶ The suggestion by a local business owner of a high tea service would also fit the Morpeth mix very well
- ▶ Paddock to plate
  - This trend continues to grow and Hunter Valley Slow Foods with Morpeth Farmers may provide opportunities for food outlets to feature local produce in their menus

### Two in One Concepts

Also popular in tourist destinations, these outlets take advantage of retail space and create two reasons for people to walk in the door. Concepts spotted recently include:

- ▶ Florist and artisan gifts from natural products including hemp, wool, timber
- ▶ Hairdresser and costume jewellery targeted at a younger market
- ▶ Homewares outlet and hole in the wall coffee bar featuring organic and single blend coffee
- ▶ Candleberries – two concepts in one – homewares and decorating including cushions, fabrics in neutrals and a range of chalk paint. The other side of the store featured candles and collectibles in soft shades
- ▶ Coffee roasting on site plus coffee cart or mini café

### Pop Up Shops

In regional centres there is a growing demand for short term retail rentals that can be used for pop up shops. There may be potential to identify properties suitable for pop up concepts as a part of the vacancy strategy. These short term leases are ideal for local artisans, Christmas shops, people trialling new products and appropriate businesses who need to sell excess stock.

## 2.4 Threats

Despite the attractiveness and appeal of Morpeth, anecdotal evidence suggests that the business community is struggling and retail and food outlets in Morpeth are not the **"goldmine" business owners expected**. Threats facing Morpeth in 2017 will include

- ▶ The **lingering perception of Morpeth as a "craft" village**
- ▶ The overall retail mix is at risk of becoming dated, old fashioned and less relevant to **today's** target markets
  - **Not living up to the "Delicious, Boutique, and Unique" positioning**
- ▶ The product mix in some retail outlets needs to be revised to capitalise on target markets and attract a higher spending customer
- ▶ There are **a number of eateries offering "me too" or "suburban shopping centre" style menu items** rather than more interesting and unique offerings
- ▶ The coffee offering is below standard for a tourism destination
- ▶ Traditional target markets for Morpeth have been low spenders and there is still an assumption by some business owners that current markets are also price focused
- ▶ Business community feedback suggests there has been a drop off in visitation from Hunter Valley visitors
- ▶ **Businesses aren't working together** and there are still divisions in the business community
- ▶ **The Morpeth Business Association doesn't appear to have the support of the majority of business owners**
- ▶ Inconsistent opening hours and promotion of trading hours
  - Promotion of the town has led visitors to expect that retail outlets will be open seven days. They are therefore disappointed when they find a number of shops are closed when they arrive in town
- ▶ The town lacks on line visibility in terms of tourism searches
  - Very few businesses in Morpeth have a strong online presence
- ▶ Maintaining the heritage appeal of the area as façades and facilities become run down

## 2.5 Opportunities

Morpeth is ideally positioned for a bright and profitable future as a major tourism village. Since 2007 the retail mix has changed significantly with a move away from **"craft" stores to more lifestyle and boutique offerings**. **There is much less duplication of stock** and some retailers have developed concepts more in keeping with the expectations of 2016 shoppers

- ▶ Morpeth **"ticks the boxes" for almost every attribute required to be a destination for day trippers and weekend visitors**.
  - It is an easy drive from Sydney, Newcastle and Port Stephens and is a **stone's** throw from the attractions of the Hunter Valley wine region.
- ▶ Charming streetscape
- ▶ Excellent heritage appeal and an attractive river scape
- ▶ A large number of browsing shops
- ▶ A large number of places to eat
- ▶ The pulling power of the well-known business, **Campbell's Store which acts as a major attraction**
  - This pulling power is supplemented with a high number of specialist and destination outlets which also attract shoppers to their specific retail outlets
- ▶ The local Morpeth population is growing with the majority of new residents in the 25 – 40 bracket (based on information from Swan Real Estate)

- ▶ The revitalised and expanded accommodation mix offering a range of 3-star through to upmarket 5-star accommodation will increase appeal to overnight visitors and wedding parties
- ▶ Postcode research shows a high number of repeat visitors
- ▶ Potential to set expectations with accurate promotion of trading days
- ▶ Potential to increase online visibility
- ▶ There is a growing number of business owners who are keen to revitalise Morpeth and work together to capitalise on its unique assets and attractions.

## 2.6 Key Issues

The Morpeth business community has the option to work together to maximise revenue from visitors and the local community or stay divided, sit back and do nothing.

The “do nothing” strategy may maintain the status quo as day trippers continue to visit the town but is more likely to see visitation drop. **The “do nothing” strategy will also have significant ramifications down the track as visitors who find out of date retail experiences, or food and coffee that doesn’t live up to expectations will not visit again, or worse, won’t recommend Morpeth to others.**

If the Morpeth business community does decide to move to the next stage it will need to consider and address the key issues identified during this project:

### Defining the Business Mix and Future Direction of Morpeth

**It is no longer feasible to apply a “build it and they will come” philosophy to township marketing and Morpeth businesses need a clear vision for the future.**

The heritage buildings are the lynchpin of the Morpeth experience but they should not dictate the product mix or type of retail which would **create a “theme park” experience** like Sovereign Hill in Ballarat which only offers products that fit the era of the buildings in the park.

There are currently only a few retail vacancies in Morpeth which will impact on the opportunity to change the mix in the short term, but there is still the need for a wider vision, especially if the old bank is tenanted, the vacant lot in Swan Street is developed and other businesses close or change hands.

There is however, potential to tap into the more sophisticated tastes of wine and food tourists and turbo charge the food offering without necessarily adding new outlets or changing ownership of businesses.

Opportunities for Morpeth include

- ▶ Becoming a shopping and food destination that actively taps into current tourism and lifestyle trends, and focuses on a younger, more affluent market
- ▶ Focusing on lifestyle retail with curated product ranges and well merchandised outlets that look inviting and unique
  - **This doesn’t preclude outlets with a vintage or period feel**
- ▶ Adding experiences to the retail mix that make a visit fun and exciting e.g.
  - Sampling, trying, tasting - similar to a produce market where there are lots of opportunities to sample produce and talk to growers
  - Using entertainment such as performers and buskers to pull people through the town
- ▶ Collaborating with food outlets to create interesting and unique experiences in terms of modern casual dining
  - This could be in the form of interesting menu items, farm gate to plate dining, dude food to go with craft brews, modern presentation of food, coffee bars that highlight heritage architecture or simply promoting links between primary producers and cafés

- ▶ Improving the coffee offering, focusing on boutique and local roasters to create a point of difference

## Building on the Current Market Positioning

The “It Must Be Morpeth” branding has been in place for four years and during that time has built awareness especially in the local area marketplace as shown in the shopper surveys which indicated that 36% of visitors came from the Maitland LGA and 62% from the wider Hunter Region including Maitland, Dungog/Port Stephens, Newcastle/Lake Macquarie and Cessnock. There is now potential to build on that brand with more specific marketing that will expand on the three positioning statements Boutique, Delicious and Unique.

To overcome any misconceptions that the retail mix is old fashioned or out of date there is an opportunity to actively promote individual businesses, products and attractions that demonstrate just how the Morpeth business mix stands out from the crowd.

Although this can be a contentious approach as some businesses are more “promotable” than others this is a real opportunity to create a strong point of difference for Morpeth.

## Enhancing the Visitor Experience

Although not covered in the brief for this project, it is worth noting that there are a number of ways Council may be able to work with business and property owners to improve the visitor experience. These include:

- ▶ Reviewing the parking signage and removing or replacing confusing or unnecessary signs
- ▶ Replacing worn or damaged bins and seating
- ▶ Investigating the potential to create a pedestrian crossing in Swan Street
- ▶ Reviewing the **Morpeth Sourdough’s proposed** local museum which could enhance the experience mix in Morpeth
- ▶ Replacing temporary fencing in park to give more visual access to the river and provide a main street location for wedding pictures
  - Access to a river picnic spot would also add to the visitor experience
- ▶ Updating or replace existing gateway signage
- ▶ Working with building owners to maintain run down and shabby façades, awnings and signs

## Recognising the “Pulling Power” of Campbell’s Store

**Campbell’s** Store is a major attraction for Morpeth as a destination outlet that attracts locals and visitors to the town. As a department store that is different and unique, it acts just like the major tenant in a shopping mall. On the four days that it is open it also drives shoppers into the rest of the main street as it highly unlikely that **Campbell’s** Store visitors would not be attracted to the rest of the street. **Campbell’s** Store also spend a significant amount on advertising and promotion which draws people into town.

It is time for the local business community to move on from expecting **Campbell’s** Store to open more days and look for ways to capitalise on the additional trade they bring to town from Thursday to Sunday.

**There is also potential for local businesses to leverage off Campbell’s seasonal events** to build the impact and create reasons for visitors to shop the whole of the main street. This can be done by individual businesses adopting the theme of the event through creative window displays, specials, merchandising or even naming menu items to tie in with the event.

## Realistic (and active) Promotion of Opening Hours

The summary of Morpeth opening days shows that more than 50% of businesses are open every day. A total of 33 retail outlets and accommodation providers are actually open on a Monday and 18 of these are shops or cafés that will have direct appeal to visitors.



Although this issue has been a source of consternation for local business owners, based on the consultant's observations working with more than 80 regional communities, the number of browsing shops open is still significantly more than many other heritage villages or small towns.

Business feedback identified some retailers trade well on Mondays when there is less competition from other outlets.

For various reasons some Morpeth business owners have stopped promoting their business hours which is no doubt frustrating and annoying for visitors. It is time for Morpeth business owners to actively market their opening hours on shop front doors, websites, **google business pages, on the "It Must Be Morpeth" website, in press releases and their own advertising.**

There is also potential for businesses open on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays to cross promote and develop a trail (and offers) for visitors on those days.

## Increasing Online Visibility and Interaction with Potential Visitors

There is potential to boost **Morpeth's' online visibility with SEO of the It Must Be Morpeth website** aimed at the wider tourism market and Hunter Valley visitors.

A skills development program to encourage businesses to increase their visibility through Google Business Pages and websites will improve rankings and also give some businesses an opportunity to increase revenue through online sales.

Ensuring websites are mobile responsive will be an important part of improving online interaction. If, in the future, the market determines the Morpeth experience requires an App then this could be considered as another avenue for local businesses.

## Creating a Representative Body with Widespread Support

With 65 businesses, Morpeth will need all hands on deck and shared goals to make their vision for the future happen.

Business owners and managers will need an incorporated body or working group to take responsibility for implementation.

Ideally, this body should be the Morpeth Business Association as it is already incorporated, set up and has a marketing and development plan in place. However, although the Morpeth Business Association is well established, like many similar organisations, it is struggling to maintain membership and funding. There also seems to be general resistance to the MBA fees and the members only focus.

Recently a key volunteer resigned and there may be potential to revitalise the MBA with new membership and structure to act as the peak body for the business community.

The Council City Economy team members may be able to assist by facilitating a meeting of members and the rest of the business community to see if there is enough support and new volunteers to make this viable.

If not, it is recommended that an incorporated working group is set up which represents and is supported by the majority of the business community.

The Charter of this working group may include:

- ▶ Seeking feedback from key members of the business community on recommendations from the Business Review and Development Plan
  - Identifying who would be responsible for implementing specific recommendations
- ▶ Investigate potential to employ a part time co-ordinator funded by the group
  - As most business owners already have extensive business, family and community commitments it is unlikely they will be able to find the time to actively participate in the day to day tasks associated with implementation.
- ▶ Sending a monthly or regular e-newsletter using a third party provider such as Constant Contact or Mail Chimp
- ▶ Setting up a private Facebook page or hidden page on the website to update on progress weekly or fortnightly
  - This can also include a discussion board for comments and feedback
- ▶ Inviting businesses to attend regular meetings for an update

In terms of implementation of initiatives in this plan it is unlikely to be successful unless there is ownership and involvement by the business community.

It would be more effective if the working group or MBA would take responsibility for implementation and Council provide guidance and support where relevant. Forthwith, to avoid confusion, the representative body in Morpeth will be referred to as the **'Working Group'**.

## Motivating the Business Community

In a small community it is very easy for business owners to become disillusioned and feel powerless to make changes in the face of changing markets, new tourism trends, online competition and natural disasters. The Morpeth business community has proved resilient but has not recaptured the success of its heyday in the 1980s.

Realistically, most small towns have had to reinvent themselves to appeal to changing local and visitor markets.

Although there is a growing number of enthusiastic and proactive business owners in Morpeth there is still a need to get as many business owners as possible in agreement with the future direction and committed to implementing key initiatives.

The Morpeth Review and Business Development Plan should provide insights and guidance about this direction and practical recommendations regarding initiatives that can be adopted by individual businesses, groups of businesses, the Working Group, the Morpeth Business Association and Council.

## 3 Implementation

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There are a number of initiatives that will help Morpeth build a stronger business community and improve awareness, visibility and popularity of Morpeth Village.

### 3.1 Maintaining and Building the Retail Mix

Successful retail malls spend a lot of time and energy creating the right mix of businesses for their surrounding residents and visitors. Small towns like Morpeth tend to grow more organically and the mix is dictated by the businesses interested in setting up in the area.

Morpeth currently has a limited number of retail vacancies but there is still an opportunity to actively improve and develop the retail mix. If change is left to take its course it can take a number of years to strengthen a retail mix but a proactive approach can make a significant difference to the look and feel of a main street in a shorter time frame.

This could be a project for the Council's City Economy team and the Working Group along with a committee of local business and property owners. It should be noted that **there are a number of business owners who have already identified "gaps" or possible improvements** in the retail mix and are taking steps to introduce new concepts.

This project involves developing a **retail mix "wish list" and** working with local real estate agents to develop a strategy for improving the retail mix. This approach would involve:

- ▶ Setting up a sub-committee to develop a hit list of businesses that will fill gaps and fit the future positioning of the township e.g.
  - Restaurant, barber/**men's** grooming for wedding market, lifestyle homewares, patisserie, deli
- ▶ Reviewing main street vacancies to identify properties available
- ▶ Contacting real estate agents and/or property owners to see if they would agree to proactive marketing of their property
- ▶ Working with real estate agents to identify appropriate or preferred use for premises
  - Working with real estate agents to develop property profiles for each vacancy including the business community recommendations for usage
  - These profiles could also be available in window displays, **as PDF's or "slide shows" on** real estate websites
  - Placing card sized messages regarding retail gaps in local real estate **agent's** windows
  - Using signs or displays in the windows of vacant shops to identify possible usages

This approach has the added benefit of giving potential owners or **tenant's** confidence that they are meeting a need in the town and will have the support of other businesses.

**It is important to note that new businesses may already have a "link" with Morpeth.** Potential business owners could be partners of people relocating to the area for work, someone with family members in the area or people on holidays in the region. For this reason, it is important to promote the fact that Morpeth is looking for new businesses in as many areas as possible. Tactics might include:

- ▶ Adding business and retail opportunities to any existing material focused on attracting new residents

There may also be an opportunity to actively source new businesses; this would involve:

- ▶ Approaching service businesses or retailers in other areas who may wish to open a second store or business in Morpeth e.g. two members of a Chamber

from a town on the North Coast of Victoria went on a three-day road trip to find a café that would fit their existing mix and then approached owners to see if they were interested in opening a second outlet

- ▶ Actively marketing to business owners in specific areas of regional and metropolitan NSW or Qld through advertising or publicity in local papers e.g. a town on the Central Coast of NSW advertised in the fast growing suburbs of western Sydney for deli and gift shop retailers **who were looking for a “sea change”**.

## 3.2 Building Façades

Morpeth has a reputation for fine heritage buildings but the street appeal is lost in some places where buildings are run down, need painting or repairs and display faded signage. There may be potential to work with building owners in Morpeth to introduce a building façade project to upgrade façades to emphasise the historic and cultural value of the area and create a more pleasant shopping environment.

This initiative would maintain the appeal of the main street and ensure Morpeth continues to attract visitors and hold shoppers in the main street.

## 3.3 Developing a Business Community Campaign

To unite and motivate the business community **there is potential to take a “campaign”** approach and build a promotion around the implementation of recommended initiatives in the Morpeth Review and Development Plan.

This approach has proven very effective in communities where there has been resistance to the Council, Chamber or a representative body because of past management or political issues as it demonstrates a fresh approach and creates opportunities for business owners to work together.

Typically, **the Campaign is given a name such as “Get Morpeth Moving” or “Morpeth Moving Forward” to motivate business owners** to get involved.

The Campaign can be run by a sub-committee or under the auspices of the Working Group.

A number of business groups have adopted this campaign approach and some of their campaign names include:

- ▶ Lismore Unlimited
- ▶ Nambour Futures
- ▶ Coffs Streets Ahead
- ▶ Karuah Working Together
- ▶ Lifestyle Dookie
- ▶ Woodburn – Stop, Shop and Play

In some instances, townships have adopted a program name to fit in with Council or township branding, which can also build the Council profile and position them as **innovative, progressive “champions” for the business community**.

In addition to a name the campaign can also include

- ▶ A logo and positioning statement
- ▶ Private Facebook page for communication

## 3.4 Building on the Morpeth Brand

Morpeth is fortunate to have a well-established brand and marketing material which will be key to promoting the town to potential target markets.

Feedback from business owners suggests that Morpeth is still attracting lower spending shoppers and the perception of Morpeth as a craft village still lingers so there is an opportunity to expand on the positioning statements Boutique, Delicious and Unique with more reasons and examples why It Must Be Morpeth. There are a number of ways this can be achieved:

- ▶ Encouraging every business and concession store to identify what makes them Unique, Delicious or Boutique with 3 or 4 specific examples for each e.g.
  - Butcher grows their own beef, award winning small goods or sausages, secret recipe lamb marinade
  - Accommodation furnished with specific antiques, double shower
  - Craft Brewery serving Old Black Tractor Ale
  - Fashion outlets detailing specific brands that are stocked
  - Upcycled furniture designed and made by owner, emerging local artist on display
  - Famous blueberry pancakes, after school waffle treat
  - **Owner operators who handpick stock you won't find anywhere else**
- ▶ It may be easier to use a copywriter to put together this initial information
  - This can be supplemented with photos from a professional photographer
- ▶ Once these competitive advantages have been developed, they can be featured instore, on menus and in window displays by individual business owners
  - They can also form part of the retailers own marketing
- ▶ These examples of Boutique, Delicious and Unique can also be used
  - To supplement current generic copy and add more character to general marketing material when reprinted
  - In the voice over for TV advertising
  - On It Must Be Morpeth website listings and in website copy
  - On the It Must Be Morpeth Facebook page
  - As a basis for press releases to the local and general tourism press
- ▶ The Facebook page (and website if feasible) can also feature different profiles of a business and business owners on a weekly basis.
- ▶ The website and Facebook page can be used to promote themed trails or groups of activities for specific target markets. These can be time specific e.g. half a day, overnight stays and should include a mix of things to do, shopping, dining and leisure activities e.g.
  - Fashion and food
  - Men in Morpeth
  - Day out with the kids
  - Local secrets
- ▶ Although in reality most people will shop both sides of the street these itineraries are ideal for setting expectations before a visitor arrives

### 3.5 Improving Online Visibility

Morpeth and local businesses can significantly build their visibility through social media which will also improve search engine optimisation and findability.

Initially this could be achieved by increasing the posts and promotion on It Must Be Morpeth Facebook page and encouraging local businesses to share their posts. There is also potential to add more information and pictures to the Morpeth Google Place Page which appears on most Morpeth searches.

As a tourist focused town, Morpeth would also benefit from greater visibility on Trip Advisor.

Accommodation providers and some cafés/eateries are already ranking well but businesses such as **Campbell's** Store, Ghost Tour and the Commercial Hotel would also be great additions to the mix along with other businesses who provide tourist activities.

An initial campaign to encourage visitors to review cafés, restaurants and the hotel can be promoted on Facebook and with flyers placed on table tops or in bags with takeaway purchases. This could be followed with similar campaigns through the Museum, Campbell's and retailers in general.

Ensuring local businesses have Google Business pages (which are free), Facebook pages and websites will also help build the overall awareness of Morpeth.

A skills development program to encourage businesses to increase their visibility through Google Business Pages and websites will give some businesses an opportunity to increase revenue through online sales.

## 3.6 Building Local Visibility

### Branding

The existing street flags promote the Morpeth positioning statement and will be supplemented with new generic flags and Christmas flags. There is also potential to bring the branding down to street level with:

- ▶ Window stickers or signs promoting Morpeth initiatives
- ▶ In store signs or blackboards that retailers could use to place on stock that is boutique or unique
- ▶ Stickers or artwork for cafés, hotel or restaurant's menus

### Vacant Premises

- ▶ Improving the look of the vacant outlets in the short term is an easy way to improve the look of the streetscape. Depending on the owner or agent it may be possible to use the windows to promote Morpeth positioning or upcoming events. Initiatives could include:
  - Local school project e.g. murals or displays
  - Display pictures from photographic shoots
  - Promotion of recommended usage for potential tenants
  - Displays by local artists
  - Displays promoting mobile phone app, Facebook page or website

## 3.7 Events

Although Morpeth have had mixed results with events, they are an excellent way of drawing in visitors and positioning the town. In keeping with the suggested vision, creating more hands on experiences with entertainment, events and promotions will help position the town. Suggestions below include ideas from local business owners

- ▶ Buskers in the main street
- ▶ Finding ways of getting involved and supporting the major **Campbell's** events e.g.
  - In one community all the retailers supported a local art collective with window displays that had an arty theme with their own take on art in their windows
  - The Fiery Food event could be an opportunity for food operators to **feature "red hot" menu items or themed cooking stalls**
    - Other retailers can feature any stock that is red
- ▶ Exploring potential for a new event that will profile the Boutique, Delicious Unique positioning

## 3.8 Promoting Trading Hours

It is important that Morpeth stops hiding its trading hours in the hope that no will be deterred from visiting early in the week. Feedback in the Focus Groups identified that

some businesses have strong trading days on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday as there is not as much competition from other retailers. Currently It Must Be Morpeth Facebook page uses the term Always Open which is misleading and some business owners do not promote their trading days.

Realistically, the retail mix on a Monday and Tuesday is still strong enough to easily hold visitors for 1 – 2 hours. It is recommended that:

- ▶ The It Must be Morpeth website and Facebook page prominently promote the number and type of businesses open each day
  - They can also promote the advantages of early in the week visits such as easy parking, no queues in cafés and a relaxed friendly atmosphere
- ▶ Businesses display their trading days and hours in their windows or on doors
- ▶ A flyer is produced for distribution at VICs (Visitor Information Centres), accommodation providers, service stations, wineries and other tourist attractions promoting competitive advantages along with trading days
- ▶ A list of trading days/hours be compiled and distributed to the business community, Tourism and City Economy staff and other tourist attractions

## 3.9 Building a Stronger Business Community

### Skills Development

Many Morpeth businesses are well established and run by very experienced operators, however there are a number of areas where businesses would benefit from practical support and advice through workshops or one on one advice.

#### Trends

- ▶ Retailers would benefit from more insights into trends in both food and retail industries. This could be addressed through a workshop or distribution of reports and overviews from tourism and retail bodies.
  - Retailers would benefit from sharing information. This could be facilitated as a social event through the proposed Working Group
  - Retailers would also gain insights into best practice by visiting other destinations with well performing operators

#### Food Retailing

- ▶ To create more differentiation between the food offerings, the food and beverage operators would benefit from a town visit from a consultant who can assist them with:
  - Creating a distinct positioning for each outlet through menus and pricing
  - Developing profitable menus
  - Skills to help kitchen and wait staff cope with increased volume
- ▶ This consultant may be sourced from Sydney or Newcastle
- ▶ The food consultant visit could also generate a meeting of local operators to discuss key issues such as:
  - Consistent opening hours
  - Menu ranges
  - Opportunities from any gaps in the market

#### Coffee

- ▶ Coffee has become an important part of Australian culture and Morpeth must improve its coffee to meet market expectations
  - Most major coffee suppliers offer barista training and some coffee schools will conduct onsite visits to train multiple cafés in their own premises

#### Online presence

- ▶ Most businesses would benefit from access to workshops and one on one advice to assist them build their online visibility through

- Google Business Pages
- Websites
- Facebook
- General Social Media
- Offering free Wi-Fi in store to meet contemporary expectations

## Online Sales

- ▶ A number of businesses in Morpeth have unique product ranges that would be ideally suited to an online shop. Workshops or one on one advice regarding supplementing revenue and profit through online sales would be invaluable for their ongoing success

## Cross Promotion and Referral

Morpeth has the potential to be a much more united business community and although relations are improving, the business community now needs to work together. It was common in the Focus Groups or during informal conversations to **hear business owners and employees to say "Oh, I haven't been in there in ages" or "I didn't know they did or stocked that". To help with cross promotion there is potential for all retailers to get to know who stocks what in the town.**

The more retailers recommend other businesses the longer people will stay in town and the more revenue everyone will generate.

A business famil program for retailers incorporated into the launch of the Business Development Plan can also act as a first step to encourage business owners and staff to work together whilst generating revenue from this often overlooked market segment.

- ▶ In store famils or an open day or week where retailers get to check out their neighbours and sample food from cafés and fresh food operators
  - This can also be conducted as a more formal program with business owners briefing fellow retailers during planning or review meetings
  - This can be facilitated by the Working Group with support of Council

## Maximising Revenue

There is also potential for businesses to maximise revenue from the retail community

- ▶ **A "Local Retailer" club card or** informal arrangement can be an effective way to encourage staff to shop locally. These cards can entitle staff to special offers or discounts in relevant outlets.
  - One retail community selects five special offers a month and promotes them in an email blast to all businesses in their business directory. These offers are spread across the range of businesses and services and do not have to be discount focused. Offers can include anything from a 24-hour head start on an advertised special, a value add such as a free sample shampoo with a cut and colour to a free consultation at a professional practice.
- ▶ There are also opportunities for individual outlets to market directly to retail staff in the area. For instance, direct marketing of specials or distribution of catalogues. Most retail staff take lunch and tea breaks outside peak times so cafés and takeaways can provide off peak specials or deliveries to nearby outlets.
  - One regional business community sourced sponsorship for a mug campaign where all retail staff were given a branded coffee mug as a part of the campaign. As many staff cannot afford the time to take sit down coffee breaks outside their retail outlet, but hate drinking out of disposable takeaway cups their own coffee mug was a welcome gift. Cafés joined in the spirit of the promotion and filled the larger takeaway mug for the lesser cost of a cup of coffee.

In some communities it helps to demonstrate the value of retailer spending. There is a simple initiative that can help convince business owners of the value of supporting each other.

- ▶ This exercise gives each retail outlet a jar of coloured tokens or poker chips. Every time a retailer purchases a product from another retailer they hand over an equivalent number of tokens with their cash. These go into a separate jar. It is then easy to calculate the dollar value of retailers and staff. This exercise only needs to run for a week or two for businesses to see results. It has the added benefit of encouraging the business community to work together for a common goal.

### 3.10 Conclusion

The Morpeth Business Review and Development Plan provides the Morpeth business community with clear target markets for future growth and practical strategies for overall development of the business community and individual businesses.

The proposed initiatives have been developed to help Morpeth build a stronger business community and improve awareness, visibility and popularity of Morpeth.

Successful implementation of the recommended initiatives will rely on the business community **finding “champions”** to embrace the idea of change and take ownership of the plan through the consultation, consolidation and implementation phases.

The launch and implementation process should also aim to give the business community ownership and bring them together for informal meetings, small group discussions, social events and celebrations of success.

# 4 Summary of Recommended Initiatives

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## 4.1 Target Markets

Action Plan	Priority	Page
▶ Maitland LGA Residents	High	10
– Media		
– Ongoing media campaigns		
– Research response to media		
– Local Promotions		
– Launch function		
– Letterbox drop postcard		
– Local publicity		
– In store promotion		
– Vacant shop signage		
– Website and Facebook		
– Facebook Shop local first		
– Capitalise on MBA initiatives		
– Increased Facebook activity targeting locals		
▶ Hunter Region	Medium	12
– Ongoing media		
– SEO campaign		
– Trip Advisor campaign		
– Continued presence in the market		
– Promotion of trading days		
▶ Sydney and Regional NSW	Low	12
– Add to existing research to identify overnight location		
– Distribution of existing marketing material		
– SEO Campaign		
– Publicity campaign - travel publications		
▶ Demographic Target Markets	Medium	13
– Individual businesses to review product mix, merchandising, positioning for younger demographic		
▶ Destination (Attitudinal) Markets	Low	13

Action Plan	Priority	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Food and Wine Travellers               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual businesses to review product mix, menus, merchandising, positioning for food and wine</li> </ul> </li> </ul>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Recreational Shoppers               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Develop "itineraries" that showcase the retail mix</b></li> <li>- Promote on social media and website (pictures)</li> <li>- Fashion and food blogs</li> <li>- Eating out guide</li> <li>- Progressive sales or launch events, joint marketing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	14
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Overnight Visitors               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Information packs for accommodation providers</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Wedding Visitors               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Brochure or PDF for joint promotion and distribution via accommodation and venues</li> <li>- Wedding section on website</li> <li>- Publicity campaign</li> <li>- Attend Bridal Fairs</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	15
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destination Shoppers               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Identify opportunities for cross promotion through existing databases</li> <li>- Cross promotion campaigns through databases/newsletters/inst ore</li> <li>- Joint promotions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Destination Tourists               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liaise with Maitland Gaol</li> <li>- Liaise with Newcastle Tourism and cruise lines re cruise market opportunities</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Retail and Product Mix               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Individual businesses to review product mixes – add products to tap into broader trends</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	High	17

## 4.2 Implementation

Action Plan	Priority	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Business Mix               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Set up business mix committee                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– This may be a sub-committee of the Working Group</li> </ul> </li> <li>– Develop business mix hit list</li> <li>– Contact real estate agents</li> <li>– Liaise with real estate agents</li> <li>– Contact property owners</li> <li>– Develop property profiles</li> <li>– Program to source new businesses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	High	24
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Building Façades               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Explore potential for program to upgrade façades</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Low	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Business Community Campaign               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Set up working committee</li> <li>– Developing a campaign name</li> <li>– Positioning (if relevant)</li> <li>– Decide on actions to be implemented</li> <li>– Set up Facebook Page</li> <li>– Set up Google Place Page</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	High	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Building on Morpeth Brand               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Develop list of Boutique, Delicious, Unique products etc. for every business</li> <li>– Write descriptions, source copywriter</li> <li>– Source photographs</li> <li>– Develop themed itineraries for use on Facebook and website</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Low	25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Online Visibility and social media               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Skills development workshops or one on ones for businesses to develop social media skills, websites, FB pages and Google Business ages</li> <li>– Facebook campaign It Must Be Morpeth</li> <li>– Trip Advisor campaign                   <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Review program</li> </ul> </li> <li>– Google Business Pages</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	26
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Building Local Visibility               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Additional street flags</li> <li>– It Must Be Morpeth branding</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Low	27

Action Plan	Priority	Page
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>instore               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Vacant shop program</li> </ul> </li> <li>▶ Events               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Add experience to main street with buskers</li> <li>– <b>Support Campbell’s event</b></li> <li>– Develop event profiling Boutique, Delicious, Unique positioning</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	27
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Trading Hours               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Campaign to publish hours</li> <li>– Website and Facebook</li> <li>– Stores</li> <li>– <b>Flyer for distribution to VIC’s etc.</b></li> <li>– Info for distribution to relevant Council staff</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	High	27
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Skills Development               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Facilitated meeting for business owners/managers to share information</li> <li>– Food consultant training and advice</li> <li>– Barista training</li> <li>– Online marketing workshops re setting up Facebook, Google Business Pages, Websites, Wi Fi</li> <li>– Online marketing workshops regarding generating online sales</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	High	28
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Cross Promotion and Referral               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– In store famils, open day for businesses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	29
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Retail Community               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Information sharing sessions re product mixes – in store famils</li> <li>– Local retailer promotion or “Club”</li> <li>– Exercise to demonstrate the value of retailer spending</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Medium	29

# Appendices

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## Appendix 1 - Key Observations

### Location

- ▶ Morpeth is a charming, historic river town in the Hunter region. It is located 2 hours north of Sydney, 45 **minutes'** northwest of Newcastle and ten minutes from Maitland CBD
- ▶ Unlike many NSW heritage towns, Morpeth is not located on a major highway **and has not been "bypassed," nor is it adjacent to a major road**
- ▶ **Morpeth would attract "destination" visitors rather than relying solely on passing traffic**
- ▶ An interesting aspect of the town is its containment in a specific geographic area surrounded by a rural green belt
- ▶ Although there are developments such as Morpeth Manor relatively close to the town, the town itself has clear boundaries defined by the river and open fields
- ▶ Morpeth is also very close to the Maitland Gaol which is a popular local tourist attraction

### Local Market

- ▶ The Morpeth community consists of three main areas
  - The village or township of Morpeth
    - Families and older generation residents
    - This area is very popular with new residents
  - Morpeth Manor (which has expanded considerably since the 2007 site visit)
    - An area of newer homes with predominantly young families, some trades and business owners.
    - A late afternoon drive around the area showed
      - Lots of utes and boats outside homes
      - Homes ranging from smaller developments to quite large and grand houses
      - All are generally neat, tidy and well kept
      - A lot of children playing outdoors after school
      - Also teenagers hanging out together
  - Closebourne Village
    - Attracts an older population who are seeking retirement living
    - Appear to be a relatively affluent community
    - Groups gathered in common areas early evening enjoying a wine or beer
    - Very friendly and happy to wave to passers-by in the development

### Approaches

- ▶ There are four main approaches to Morpeth. Across the river from the North, along the river from Maitland, from the highway on either Metford Road or Duckenfield Road.
  - All approaches are scenic and attractive.

- ▶ **There is a sense that "suburbia" disappears** and you are stepping back in time to a quieter, more rural, environment.
- ▶ The river crossing is particularly interesting as you arrive via the old timber bridge.
- ▶ There is standard heritage style signage at all town entries. These signs give the date of settlement and denote Morpeth as an Historic River Port
  - These signs appear old fashioned and dated in terms of gateway signage and do not necessarily signify the tourism importance of the township
- ▶ Unlike many small regional towns there is little or no visual pollution from old or indiscriminate signage on the approaches to the town

## Traffic

- ▶ **Despite it's quiet, rural location there is a significant amount of vehicle traffic** through the main street of Morpeth including trucks and trade vehicles
  - This results in a lot of traffic noise starting around 5am and continuing throughout the day
  - During the first focus group, held on the upstairs veranda at the Commercial Hotel from 8.30 - 10.30am, it was difficult to hear conversations due to truck noise
- ▶ Large vans and delivery trucks also caused interruption to traffic and parking as they double parked in the main street while making deliveries

## Arrival

- ▶ **For a visitor, there is a real sense of "arrival" in Morpeth, it is clear where the town begins** and that you have completed your journey
- ▶ **There is a strong "ahhh" factor and first impressions include charming, pretty, historic, quaint and village**
- ▶ It is clear there are lots of interesting browsing shops as you drive through the main street
  - Local businesses have made an effort to catch your eye with colourful planter boxes, product displays and decorative awnings which make you want to stop and explore
- ▶ **For first time visitors, the traffic flow almost dictates you drive a "lap of honour" before deciding where to park**
- ▶ The Stop sign at the intersection of Swan and Northumberland Street can be easy to miss as you concentrate on looking at the town
- ▶ Once you cross Northumberland Street the business development peters out but the row of terraces and Savannah on Swan tend to draw visitors across the intersection
- ▶ As you drive into Morpeth from Maitland, Newcastle or Sydney the river is not immediately apparent as the main street is oriented with the retail precinct facing away from the river banks.
  - Once you are out of the car the river is easier to see with glimpses behind some of the shops
- ▶ On the Wednesday site visits there were relatively few visitors in town and there was a sleepy, quiet feel. Although a number of shops were closed it was still easy to think you had happened upon an undiscovered gem
- ▶ On the Thursday and Friday site visits there were noticeably more businesses open and more shoppers and tourists in the main street
- ▶ On the Saturday visit the feel was completely different. It was bustling and crowded; and you felt like you were visiting a touristy town

## Parking

- ▶ Parking in the main street was very easy to find on the Wednesday site visits with many vacant spots up and down the main street

- ▶ On the Thursday and Friday visits, parking was still readily available although there were fewer vacancies
- ▶ On the Saturday visit there were no parking spaces available in the main street and parking was filling up in side streets including Tank Street next to **Campbell's Store**
- ▶ Parking signage was a grab bag of different time limits including ¼ hr, ½ hr, 1hr, 2hr and 4hr limits in a 500 metre stretch!
  - This will no doubt be confusing for visitors
  - Anecdotal evidence suggests that locals ignore the time limits as parking inspectors only visit sporadically
  - Anecdotal evidence also suggests that local business owners and staff consistently park in the main street reducing availability for visitors
  - Therefore, it appears this signage is only impacting on visitors and may be reducing the amount of time they spend in Morpeth

## Pedestrian Access

- ▶ There is no pedestrian crossing in the main street which can make it difficult and dangerous to visit businesses on both sides of the street especially for the elderly, disabled or families with prams or younger children. This lack of access is compounded by:
  - The Stop signs at the intersection of Swan and Northumberland Streets which causes traffic to bank up around this area
    - This may have been primarily due to road works during site visits
  - Steady traffic through the town especially during commuter hours
  - Large parked trucks blocking views of traffic
  - High kerbs in some areas
  - The need to cross between parked cars in most areas

## Business Precincts

- ▶ Morpeth main street has businesses located on both sides of the street bounded by **Campbell's Store** and The Commercial Hotel on one side and Morpeth Florist and Savannah on Swan on the other side
  - It is assumed most visitors will make a round tour of the main street walking up one side and down the other
  - **Although there are a number of private houses and "gaps"** the retail mix flows well and easily draws people from one business to another
- ▶ **In addition to the main street businesses, Campbell's Store is a distinct** precinct in itself with an array of niche outlets ranging from antiques and teddy bears to collectibles and gourmet food items
  - **The Campbell's Store** experience is unique and a strong attraction for tourists
- ▶ The only other precinct in Morpeth is the charming Central Inn Mews Arcade which houses long term business The Alpaca Barn, a jewellery and gift store, garden store and outdoor eating area for **the Cupz'n'Crepes café**
  - Apart from the Alpaca Barn, most of these businesses were closed during the site visits

- The signage at the entrance of the Central Inn Mews Arcade seems to be out of date and promotes businesses and products that no longer exist
  - It also promotes 7 days a week trading

## Heritage Values

- ▶ Heritage architecture and the sense of history is the major asset for the Morpeth main street
- ▶ Morpeth is an architecturally interesting town with a very attractive streetscape.
  - The overall impression is of **"stepping back in time"**
- ▶ Unlike many towns, Morpeth seems to have escaped the red brick plague and most modern buildings do not dominate the heritage style of the area
- ▶ The building architecture is enhanced with wide awnings, first story verandahs and wrought iron lace balconies
- ▶ A number of business owners have enhanced the heritage appeal of their buildings with appropriate colour schemes and decor

## Streetscaping

- ▶ The first impression of Morpeth is very positive with heritage architecture and lots of colourful street plantings, established trees, outdoor dining areas, displays and umbrellas
- ▶ Illalung Park, near the bridge is very pretty with brightly planted garden beds, seating, historic information about the founder of Morpeth and the heritage walk and a view of the bridge and river
  - It has often been used as a setting for local wedding photographs
  - This is the main area for the public to view the river (apart from in riverside cafés )
  - Unattractive temporary fencing (which has been in place for approx. 18 months) detracts from the appeal of the park
- ▶ There are Morpeth promotional banners at either end of the main street
- ▶ There are timber clad/framed rubbish bins along both sides of the road
  - These are quite dominant and some are worn and rusted
- ▶ There are a number of timber/iron benches along the main street
  - These are quite utilitarian and do not necessarily reflect the heritage nature of the town
  - It appears some retailers have provided seating outside their outlets
- ▶ The pavement is uneven in places but generally in character with the town
- ▶ There is a range of outdoor seating for cafés which adds colour and character to the streetscape
- ▶ Pavements in the main shopping area around The Terraces are wide and generally easily accessed
- ▶ On the opposite side of the road and at either end of the main street pavements tend to be narrower but most are edged with lawn
  - Retailers at both ends have made a real effort to enhance the streetscape with colourful planters, displays, manicured hedges, outdoor seating and even water bowls for passing dogs.
  - This creates a wonderful ambience and point of difference
- ▶ A feature of the Morpeth streetscape is the planters and small garden beds, which appear to be maintained or planted by the individual business owners
  - These range from riots of colour to trimmed hedges and give each area an individual look and feel

- However, a number of these feature no plants or dead and dying plants
- ▶ The vacant block which is overgrown and run down is a real gap in the smile of the main street
- ▶ Some of the buildings have faded or damaged façades
- ▶ Shop signage is generally of a good standard but there are some prominent signs which are faded, out of date or damaged
- ▶ Many of the Morpeth businesses use A Boards which add colour and character to the streetscape
  - Some, such as Le Beau Café have also introduced a fun element offering river views, all day breakfast, sweet treats and free smiles!
  - Generally speaking, Morpeth retailers use A Boards well to position themselves and attract visitors although they could be used more to promote competitive advantages and points of difference

## Business Mix

- ▶ Since 2007 the business mix has changed significantly
  - Loss of long term retailers such as The Trading Post
  - Drop in numbers of food outlets
  - Loss of County Dining restaurant which was well reviewed and featured in food guides
  - Newcomers have come and gone failing to make an impact
- ▶ The business mix review (see attached) identified businesses within the main street area. For a more accurate representation of **Campbell's Stores'** contribution to the retail mix, main departments and concession outlets have been included as separate entities.
  - **It should be noted that this is a "mud map" to assist analysis rather than a definitive study**
- ▶ An analysis of the business mix review in 2016 identified
  - 65 outlets in total
    - 51 in Swan Street
    - **14 in Campbell's**
  - 12 cafés and restaurants
  - 8 fresh food and gourmet
    - This is a strong mix
  - 7 accommodation providers (including Morpeth Motel)
  - 6 fashion outlets
  - 6 lifestyle product retailers
    - This category has been included to reflect the growing number of businesses carrying a mix of lifestyle themed products which blur the line between traditional gifts, homewares and fashion outlets to create a mix of products
  - 17 browsing outlets
    - These are outlets carrying more traditional ranges of products e.g. all fashion or all gifts or a mix without the lifestyle theme
  - 9 daily needs providers
  - Of the 65 businesses only 9 are primarily aimed at Morpeth residents
    - Although a number of these such as the pharmacy will also service visitors it is likely that local residents from the village

and Morpeth Manor would visit for last minute and top up shopping

- ▶ It is likely that the majority of Morpeth residents will travel to Stockland Greenhill Shopping Centre or Maitland for their weekly shopping
  - It should be noted that the local supermarket caters very well for both locals and visitors. It stocks and promotes local products along with a broad range of stock for the locals including a limited range of fresh meat and vegetables
- ▶ Anecdotal evidence suggests that Morpeth is a growing weekend breakfast/brunch market for locals especially during quieter months
- ▶ Morpeth has a browsing mix that would be the envy of most small towns with browsing, fashion and lifestyle retailers comprising 45% of the mix
  - When you add restaurants/pubs and cafés, 65% of businesses will appeal to visitors
- ▶ The browsing mix is complemented by a large number of cafés which enhance the shopping experience
  - This sector is currently lacking dining out/restaurant options with the Commercial Hotel and Indian/pizza café the only 7 nights a week options for guests
  - Lillies and Limes café have a dinner service on Friday nights
    - This is mainly targeted at the local market
  - The new El Panadero bar in the Morpeth Sourdough premises has been successfully operating for a number of weeks during the day
    - It will eventually trade Thursday to Sunday daytime and evening
  - The owner of Bronte Guesthouse has identified a gap in the market and is planning to open a restaurant **at the guesthouse and also offer "high teas" on the upstairs balcony**
- ▶ Fresh and gourmet food
  - This appears to be a growing sector with fine wines, cheeses, gourmet jams, chutneys etc., ginger beer, lollies, local farmers produce (across the bridge), patisserie, craft beer and Morpeth Sourdough forming a **range of food "experiences"**
    - **Cupz'n'Crepes, although in the café category, also offer a different experience**
- ▶ Accommodation
  - The accommodation offering in Morpeth has improved significantly and has become a real asset with high quality boutique accommodation attracting high end visitors, destination tourists and the wedding market
    - There are currently a total of 54 beds (excluding Morpeth Motel) in Morpeth
- ▶ **Morpeth also has the advantage of a "major" retailer in Campbell's Store** which pulls visitors into Morpeth
  - In some ways this means the retail mix in Morpeth more closely represents a shopping mall or complex where independent retailers can benefit from the pull of a major
- ▶ Vacancies

- At the time of the site visit there were almost no retail vacancies in Morpeth which meant it would be difficult to radically change the retail mix in the short to medium term
  - A number of businesses were on sale at the time of the site visit
  - Since the site visit in April three retail businesses have closed
  - Potential sales and vacancies provide an opportunity to strengthen the retail mix in the short term

## Destination Tourism

- ▶ Morpeth is a well-established and recognised heritage tourism destination with shopping and dining as key attractions
  - Much of the shopping and dining is already experiential as visitors can interact with the heritage buildings
    - This also applies to some of the accommodation offerings which are in heritage buildings or have been decorated in heritage style
- ▶ **The river is a hidden gem which unfortunately can't be easily accessed** or viewed from the main street
- ▶ The self-guided Heritage Walk has potential to become a larger attraction with the current development of an app which will make it accessible to more visitors
  - The heritage walk has the added advantage of **"pulling" people through** the main retail area
- ▶ The Morpeth Museum is an important part of the tourism product mix but is only open Thursday to Sunday from 11am till 2pm
- ▶ Morpeth is also a short distance from Maitland Gaol which is also a significant tourist attraction for the area
  - It would be interesting to see if the Gaol had a similar visitation profile to Morpeth
- ▶ Local retailer, Apparitions runs evening Morpeth Ghost and Heritage Tours twice a month
- ▶ Local business owners Stephen and Allison Arnott of Morpeth Sourdough have recently proposed a museum detailing the history of their site in Swan Street. This would focus on **"Mr Chapman"** the entrepreneurial owner of the site, the industrial complex of Morpeth and The Arnott baking family.
  - This would no doubt enhance the heritage offering
  - This development application has not been granted due to parking concerns
- ▶ Already catering for destination visitors, the accommodation mix in Morpeth along with the opening of wedding venues at Mindaribba Weddings and Tocal Homestead have created a growing market for wedding parties staying in Morpeth
  - The local florist and newly opened Make Up and Hair operator, Refined Make Up are also signs that weddings is a growing market

## Product Mix

- ▶ A review of product ranges within retail outlets can help identify who the retail community see as their target markets. It is clear in Morpeth that the majority of businesses are focused on the visitor market.

- ▶ Since 2007 there seems to have been a significant move away from craft and handmade to more design and modern products.
  - This is in line with general product trends and changing demands from tourism profiles
- ▶ The majority of Morpeth retail outlets have a range of core products which are pitched at the middle of the market.
  - Some outlets are also targeting higher end
- ▶ There are a number of proactive retailers who are filling the gaps in the overall product mix carrying small ranges of stock where there is no **dedicated retailer e.g. children's wear**
- ▶ Product mixes have improved dramatically in the majority of outlets
- ▶ Unlike many regional business communities there did not seem to be an assumption that all shoppers are price focused and although shops were offering competitive prices there was no feeling of desperate retailing
- ▶ Some businesses in Morpeth **have taken the "all things to all people"** approach to their product ranging but most outlets are making every effort to tailor their product ranges to suit their target customers
  - There were a number of businesses that have unique or different product ranges that would not be out of place in an urban designer cluster or high end retail strip
- ▶ There are also a number of outlets with very strong, consistent product mixes and a very clear position in the marketplace
  - These outlets did not have stock or stock categories that jarred with **the overall theme or "promise" of the outlet**
- ▶ In a few outlets, there were product ranges that lacked consistency or a clear position in the retail mix so it is not easy to work out who their target markets are or anticipate what stock you might find inside the shop. This type of muddled positioning can be the result of:
  - An inexperienced business owner
  - A retail outlet changing hands once or twice and subsequent owners diluting the original positioning of the outlet as new stock is purchased
  - A retail outlet changing hands and the new owner actively changing the positioning but still retaining stock from the previous owner
  - A depressed period of trading where the retailer has bought in low price stock in an attempt to generate sales
- ▶ Overall, stock levels in most outlets were high and there were no signs of low stock which can be an indicator of struggling businesses
- ▶ In 2007 a key weakness of the Morpeth product mix was significant duplication of stock and styles of stock in the browsing outlets. This can be due to
  - Retailers all purchasing from agents or travellers vesting the town
  - Retailers all purchasing at the same major gift fairs
  - Deliberate copying of stock by individual business owners
  - This duplication can lead to the impression that there is nothing different or new in town
- ▶ This issue seems to have been addressed and there is much less duplication of product which means the perception of wide range and variety is much stronger for shoppers

- This was particularly noticeable with the fashion retailers who all seemed to carry distinctive and unique labels for their specific target markets
- It should also be noted that the range of fashion labels was extensive and in some cases unusual and hard to get labels were stocked in Morpeth
- The lifestyle retailers such as Muffet Tuffet and Bliss Collections have also enhanced the retail product mix with distinctive and curated ranges of products
- ▶ **In the browsing category, the addition of antiques to the Campbell's Store** range of products adds another dimension to the mix, filling a gap in the market and also providing a product range that is of interest to both men and women
- ▶ Accommodation has increased with a new focus on upmarket, boutique accommodation with several properties being repurposed as accommodation or renovated to a high standard
  - This accommodation is proving very popular with wedding parties and groups of weekend visitors
  - This accommodation market is currently underserved with evening dining options for their guests
  - It is likely that the growing popularity of Airbnb will also see some locals adding to the accommodation mix
    - There are already listings in Maitland which refer to Morpeth as a local attraction
- ▶ The product mix is much less differentiated in the café sector with a number of outlets offering standard café fare or similar menus
  - Given the high number of operators there is potential for much more differentiation in menus and development of signature dishes
  - There is also potential for more use and promotion of local produce in local eateries

## Retail Skills

- ▶ Levels of general retailing skills vary greatly with some very professional outlets standing out from the pack
- ▶ There are some excellent examples of professional window displays, however, there are also some who are not maximising the opportunities to attract customers. Typical problems include:
  - Windows filled with posters and notices blocking the view into the shop
  - Dirty windows or outdated window displays
  - Non-existent window displays or stock facing inwards only
  - Faded or old stock in the window
  - Poor lighting or lights turned off in window displays
- ▶ Merchandising also varied amongst outlets. Typical problems included:
  - Displays outside the retail outlet not reflecting the stock or mix inside the outlet
  - Cluttered displays that are hard to navigate
  - Fixtures and fittings screening the view of stock
  - Stock not arranged in a logical or easy to find way
  - Messy shelves

- Overloaded racks that make it difficult to see stock
- ▶ Lack of directional signage and branding for the outlet within the shop

## Customer Service

- ▶ It is hard to judge customer service overall but I was greeted in most retail outlets and customer service seemed friendly and generally proactive. Specific instances include:
  - **In one outlet the sales assistant seemed to be in “shop mind” mode** and was happy to sit behind the counter, greet, but make no attempt to engage or help
  - In a couple of outlets locals or regulars were looked after and visitors ignored
  - Accommodation owners were particularly helpful, knowledgeable and keen to promote other businesses in Morpeth
  - **The Indian restaurant offered to “deliver” when they found out I was staying at accommodation next door**
  - The supermarket staff were very helpful and happy

## Opening Hours

- ▶ Inconsistent trading hours were identified as a major issue for Morpeth during the 2007 review with many businesses not open early in the week, businesses closing early or not trading as advertised all causing confusion for locals and visitors alike
- ▶ Based on feedback from local businesses and personal observation, in 2016 it seems little has changed
  - Many businesses do not promote their opening hours on their premises
  - **Even the “It Must Be Morpeth” Facebook page states “Always Open” at the top of the page**
  - Some businesses still close early or do not operate on consistent days
  - Anecdotal evidence suggests that cafés and restaurants are also not consistent in their opening hours which can create problems for overnight visitors to town as they are not sure where to find a meal
- ▶ An analysis of trading days conducted as a part of the business review has quantified the current situation. This review is general in nature and is based on observation of **opening hours’ signage, online review of websites** and Google Business Pages to ascertain trading days. The analysis revealed
- ▶ 51% of businesses open on Monday
  - 50% of cafés /pubs/restaurants
  - 37.5% of fresh and gourmet food outlets
  - 66.7% of fashion outlets
  - 33.3% of lifestyle retailers
  - 17.6% of browsing shops
  - 88.9% of daily needs outlets
  - 100% of accommodation
  - This means that the majority of categories are represented on a Monday with 9 retailers that would appeal to visitors along with 6 restaurants/pubs/cafés
  - Although this is higher numbers than expected it does mean a reduced experience for visitors

- ▶ 63% open on Tuesday
  - This is a significant jump from Monday with 11 restaurants/pubs/cafés now open, and one additional fashion retailer, lifestyle store and browsing shop
- ▶ 68% open on Wednesday
  - This is similar to the Tuesday mix of businesses open and still represents a positive experience for visitors
- ▶ 98% open on Thursday and Friday
  - These days, along with Saturday, offer the optimum Morpeth experience with 13 restaurants now open, an additional fashion outlet, 3 extra lifestyle stores and the complete mix of **Campbell's Store'** outlets open for business
  - There are four businesses all focused on the tourist market that align their opening hours with **Campbell's Store**
- ▶ 100% open on Saturday
- ▶ 85% open on Sunday
  - This reflects the number of daily needs and service businesses that **don't traditionally operate on a Sunday**

## Branding

- ▶ Morpeth has strong branding and positioning statements but apart from the banners at the ends of Swan Street there is no branding visible at street level so visitors may be missing out on the promise of boutique, delicious and unique
- ▶ This branding does not appear on the gateway signs or in individual retail outlets

## Marketing

- ▶ **In 2007 Morpeth was positioned as "The Craft Village"**
- ▶ **Morpeth now has an established brand under "It Must Be Morpeth" based around three key words boutique, delicious and unique**
- ▶ This branding has been in place since 2012 and is associated with:
  - Website – It Must Be Morpeth
  - TV and radio advertisements
  - Facebook page
    - This includes regular posts from the My Maitland Facebook page
  - Street banners
  - Brochures
- ▶ Collateral available at the Visitor Information Centre includes
  - It Must Be Morpeth A5 Specials flyer
  - It Must Be Morpeth DL Store Directory
  - Heritage Wall DL flyer
    - Not on display but by request
  - Morpeth Museum DL Flyer
  - Meander – Directory
  - Meander Lifestyle Magazine
- ▶ As a part of the 2016 Visitor Economy Marketing Plan developed by Maitland City Council

- New Christmas banners will be developed
- Facebook page will be upgraded
- TV commercials will be updated
- There will be opportunities for joint and subsidised marketing through the Morpeth Business Association
- ▶ The Morpeth Business Association also has a marketing budget and traditionally run a series of programs and initiatives including
  - Privilege Card
  - Christmas Competition
  - Facebook Page
  - Radio Advertising
  - Publication Advertising
- ▶ **Anecdotal evidence also suggests that privately owned business, Campbell's Store, contributes a significant amount to advertising that attracts visitors and locals to Morpeth with regular TV advertising, tourism advertising and direct mail-outs to their large data base**
- ▶ **The combined efforts of Council, the MBA and Campbell's suggests that Morpeth has a much larger marketing spend than most small towns in New South Wales**

## Online Visibility

- ▶ Online visibility for Morpeth is strong when the word Morpeth is used
  - **"Morpeth NSW" brings up It Must Be Morpeth at the top of the page** with Wikipedia, visitnsw, the Close, Bronte House and Closebourne Village also ranking on the first page
  - **"Shops and shopping" brings up results from Campbell's, Bliss Collections and Morpeth Emporium**
    - It Must Be Morpeth heads the free listings along with **Campbell's, visitnsw and true local**
  - **"Heritage town" brings up Closebourne Village, Morpeth Lodge Hotel, Morpeth Museum with It Must Be Morpeth, Visit NSW and Maitland Council ranking highest**
  - Accommodation brings up Stayz, Trivago along with private operators **including The Close, Bronte House and Surgeon's Cottage**
- ▶ When using more general searches such as "heritage" or "historic" towns NSW, "things to do around the Hunter" etc. Morpeth does not appear in searches and appears to have slipped under the radar when it comes to statewide and national tourism
- ▶ Morpeth does not appear under Tourism on the Maitland City Council website
- ▶ The My Maitland website features Morpeth under most categories and included a separate section for Morpeth which will tap into visitors to the Maitland area who are not specifically looking for Morpeth

## Festivals and Events

- ▶ Morpeth has a chequered history in terms of festivals and events with lack of support leading to the Bitter and Twisted being relocated to Maitland City Gaol

- Currently the major festival is Chapel Jazz organized by local churches and regular events organised by **Campbell's** Store such as the Teapot Festival, Fiery Food and Two Palettes

## Representative Bodies and Support

- ▶ The Morpeth Business Association is a long established body that currently has 17 financial members. It is run by volunteers from the business community with paid administration support
  - Fees are \$35 per week which has met with some resistance from business owners
  - **There has also been some dissent over Campbell's involvement in the association and the perception that activities do not benefit all businesses**
  - Since the site visits the voluntary coordinator of MBA has resigned
- ▶ Initiatives developed by the MBA include
  - Privilege Card
    - Which is distributed to new residents
  - Christmas competition with a draw
  - Database of businesses
    - Monthly or fortnightly e-blasts
  - Co-Op radio advertising
  - Co-Op print advertising in Hunter Blackboard and in Touch Magazine
  - Facebook Page

## Appendix 2 - Business Community Feedback

As a part of the Morpeth Review, Focus Groups were facilitated with business owners representing different aspects of the business community including established and newer businesses in accommodation, retail, food and fashion. These focus groups were held on April 1st and 13th and were well attended with 9 participants at Group One and 15 at Group Two.

These sessions provided valuable insights into the profile of locals and visitors to the area and helped identify key issues that may affect the development and success of the business community. They were also an opportunity for local business operators to have their say about Morpeth and its future.

Each group was asked a series of questions in relation to Morpeth; responses to the questions are detailed below.

Business owners who were not invited due to limited numbers or did not attend were also given the opportunity to review the Focus Group findings and contribute their feedback via email. These responses are also included below.

**Please note that these are the opinions of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the consultant.**

### Focus Group One

How would you describe the local market?

- ▶ Self-funded retirees living in Closebourne and Morpeth Manor
- ▶ Fixed income pensioners
  - Mainly living in town
- ▶ Morpeth has traditionally been a working class town
- ▶ We are seeing increasing numbers of young families
- ▶ Maitland is one of inland Australia's **fastest growing towns**
  - 1 new family every day
  - A lot of these live in the village
- ▶ Tree change and lifestyle downshifters looking for a better quality of life
- ▶ There are more Sydney dollars coming into the town
- ▶ Locals from satellite villages Chisholm and Huntley shop in Morpeth
- ▶ The planned hospital will bring new people into the area
  - This is probably 5 years away
- ▶ There is a lot of development going on e.g. Greenhills which indicates a growing area
  - David Jones is going into the Greenhills development
- ▶ Locals often commute to work in Newcastle, Hunter Valley and up the valley

How would you describe the visitor market?

- ▶ Recreational shoppers
- ▶ Hens parties and groups of women staying in the Hunter
- ▶ People attending concerts in the Hunter
  - Seems to be much less people since the Expressway opened
- ▶ Generational shoppers e.g. mother, daughter, granddaughter
- ▶ A lot of visiting friends and relatives (VFR) visitors
  - International – Dutch, Irish, UK

- ▶ Interstate visitors
- ▶ People attending weddings, family events and reunions
  - Often staying locally
- ▶ Former priests visiting the seminary
- ▶ People tracing their family history
  - Morpeth was a point of migration
- ▶ **Museums' limited opening hours are an issue**
- ▶ School excursions
- ▶ Cruise ship visitors
- ▶ Older people
- ▶ Bowling Clubs, groups etc.

How would you describe the retail mix and are there any gaps?

- ▶ The retail mix is very female oriented
  - There are too many frock shops
  - Dress shops are a key attraction
  - There is a perception that there is no fashion for younger women
- ▶ **There is no longer children's wear** in Morpeth
- ▶ The retail mix seems to be attracting non spenders e.g.
  - Locals
  - Pensioners
- ▶ We need a restaurant
  - There is nowhere to celebrate a special occasion
  - One is opening in 3 weeks
- ▶ We need a more diverse range of food, everything is the same
  - The range is excellent
  - We have great food shops
- ▶ People like to eat and shop
- ▶ Needs things other than shopping

What are the key attractions?

- ▶ Morpeth passes the 2-hour test
  - An easy drive
- ▶ Fantastic street appeal
- ▶ Sense of history
- ▶ Jazz Festival, Chapel Jazz
  - There has been a lack of support from local businesses
- ▶ Teapot festival
- ▶ **It's a nice day out**

What do you think are the key opportunities and challenges?

- ▶ We need to increase the number of return visitors
- ▶ Inconsistent trading hours
- ▶ No off street parking
- ▶ Public toilets need an upgrade
- ▶ No pedestrian crossings

- These would take out more parking spaces
- ▶ The number of trucks travelling through the main street
- ▶ Lack of loading zones in the main street
- ▶ No enforcement of parking times
- ▶ Lack of attractions other than shopping
- ▶ The business community is divided
- ▶ The Business Association is working hard to promote the town but has a lack of support from businesses
  - Reluctant to contribute \$\$ to promotions
  - Reluctance to participate in promotions
  - Only 16 – 17 active members
- ▶ Barricades in the park have been there for ages and are unattractive

## Focus Group Two

### How would you describe the local market?

- ▶ There is an assumption that older people are moving into Morpeth but the majority of new people are actually 27 – 35
  - This has been observed over the past 3 or 4 years
- ▶ The Morpeth Village is very desirable for young people
  - It has a real sense of community
  - There is real pride in the village name
- ▶ Morpeth Manor is more of a family market
- ▶ There are not a lot of 18 – 27 year olds
  - The pub is seeing more young people but not in large numbers
  - A lot of the younger population tend to work during the day
- ▶ A lot of locals are lifestylers who tend to eat but not shop in the town
- ▶ Residents from Closebourne do tend to do a lot of their shopping in town
- ▶ Locals tend to shop out of town and head for
  - Greenhills
  - Pender Place (Maitland)
  - Thornton
- ▶ There has been a significant turnover of businesses in the town
- ▶ We used to get more Woodville residents shopping in Morpeth
  - We still get shoppers from Hinton

### How would you describe the visitor market?

- ▶ Morpeth is more of a destination than a “drive through” town
- ▶ People travelling to holiday destinations and back – young families
- ▶ Morpeth has missed out on Singleton stopovers due to the bypass
- ▶ Visitors from Newcastle
- ▶ Recreational shoppers
- ▶ Older visitors
- ▶ Bus trip visitors
- ▶ Some people make the day trip from Sydney on the train but there are no toilet facilities on the train

- ▶ We now have a lot of wedding visitors
- ▶ Groups of friends often book out local accommodation
- ▶ Visitors on the high tide boat trip from Newcastle to Morpeth
  - Once a month but no way to get back
- ▶ Cruise ship visitors but they only stay an hour
- ▶ The visitor market has changed
  - There used to be a lot of Sydney visitors
- ▶ Sydney and Melbourne visitors are looking for good food
  - Hunter Concerts used to attract visitors
- ▶ Morpeth is facing much more competition with entertainment somewhere every weekend
  - Morpeth is always quiet when there is a Newcastle football game on
  - Also more choice of destinations
- ▶ Travel to Morpeth is often weather related
- ▶ **On hot days' visitors head to the beach not Morpeth**
- ▶ After floods people assumed Morpeth was closed

### How would you describe the retail mix and are there any gaps?

- ▶ The retail mix has changed from art and craft to more handmade
- ▶ There are now more businesses open Monday to Saturday
- ▶ Some of the destination shops have gone e.g.
  - **Trading Post and "Juliet" the horse**
- ▶ Morpeth has maintained many of its specialty and niche retailers e.g.
  - Craft beer
  - Teddy bears
  - Cheese shop
- ▶ There is not much to appeal to men
  - **Antiques at Campbell's should appeal**
  - Craft beer?
- ▶ There are no restaurants
- ▶ We have great local artisans e.g. the Leatherman
- ▶ **Feel it's family not female**

### What attracts people to Morpeth?

- ▶ For visitors
  - History, heritage and architecture
  - Ghost /Heritage tours
  - Coffee
  - Hunter River
  - Museum
    - Only has limited opening hours
  - Heritage Wharf
  - **It's surrounded by a Green Belt**
  - Fabulous scenery
  - The bridge
  - Fresh produce over the bridge

- ▶ For residents
  - Family oriented community
  - You can walk to school
  - The area is safe
  - Has an interesting main street
  - 2 fabulous churches
  - St James has a pipe organ
  - The Common
    - Development to this area is a risk

## What do you think are the Challenges and Opportunities for Morpeth?

- ▶ Retail opening hours are inconsistent and not published anywhere
  - Confusing for visitors
- ▶ Parking signs are confusing, too many different categories
  - Shop owners park in front of their shop all day
  - People park all day
- ▶ The village community have expectations and think of Morpeth as their town
  - **They don't always like tourists**
- ▶ Desperately need a pedestrian crossing
  - Morpeth is the only tourism town in NSW without one
- ▶ Heavy trucks and traffic down main street are noisy, disruptive and dangerous
  - Need a diversion
  - Need a third river crossing
  - Need speed humps or calming devices and illuminated signs
- ▶ Is it possible to put power lines underground?
- ▶ Poor public transport
  - **Bus doesn't run often enough**
  - Inconvenient for staff who work in Morpeth
- ▶ Need more festivals and events e.g. Heritage Festival
- ▶ Need more support for Chapel Jazz
  - Organised by local churches
- ▶ There is a strong feeling that Council has taken away good events from Morpeth
- ▶ Morpeth Village is looking shabby
  - Building owners need to improve appearance of buildings
  - Council should improve seating, bins etc.

## Appendix 3 - Comparisons Report

This was included in the 2007 Report and with updates is still relevant today.

Morpeth is one of very few villages in Australia that has an opportunity to position itself as a town with a genuine difference.

There are many small towns in regional NSW that have heritage appeal. Most of these have a few outstanding buildings which are surrounded by more modern developments. There are only a few which have a streetscape that is dominated by **heritage buildings and have a "village" feel**. **Uralla and Mogo** are examples of heritage villages.

However, the majority of these are primarily service towns located on busy highways and have few additional natural attractions.

The combination of village setting, heritage architecture and river give Morpeth a unique selling point.

Obvious comparisons to Morpeth would be tourist destinations Berry and Berrima which have both built strong reputations as day trip destinations from Sydney.

Berry is a larger town than Morpeth while Berrima is much smaller with fewer retail outlets.

Both of these towns are more established in the marketplace as day trip destinations so it is likely that Morpeth may be able to find some parallels and benefit from some of the lessons Berry learned in a similar situation.

A past Main Street coordinator and business owner in Berry identified that until the business community embraced change the growth of the town was never steady and tended to come in spurts. Research showed that growth was driven by several factors including

- ▶ The increase of boutique accommodation particularly B&Bs
- ▶ Travel time from Sydney approx. 2 hours
- ▶ The influx of new residents who were keen to support local businesses and invest in their new town
  - The number of new residents who started telecommuting and became full time residents over a number of years
- ▶ Realisation that a significant percentage of visitors were in fact from the Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas.
  - In 2011 postcode research conducted by a leading retailer showed that 38% of visitors to their giftware outlet were from surrounding areas
- ▶ A change in the type of business owner in Berry
  - Initially the majority of retail businesses were lifestyle businesses owned by people moving into the area or people with little experience in retail. Although this saw innovative and creative retail concepts introduced to the town many were not financially viable or focused on too small a market segment. This resulted in closure or resale within eighteen months.
  - Over the years the lifestyle operators have been replaced with more experienced operators with a focus on profitability. This has improved the retail mix and because these operators are more skilled, customer service, merchandising and window displays have also improved.
- ▶ A changing attitude towards the markets and major events
  - The monthly weekend markets held in Berry were long believed to bring **the "wrong" kind of shopper to Berry and retailers saw the influx of lower spending visitors as a nuisance**. The local Chamber worked with the markets to review the product mix in the markets to attract higher spending visitors. The two committees have also worked together to develop strategies that pull market visitors into the town centre. There are now three markets, The Country Fair, Berry Produce Market and a Flea Market

**The coordinator attributed Berry's success to several factors:**

- ▶ Berry has never discounted
- ▶ A major project to improve coffee quality and upgrade the range of food choices for visitors
- ▶ The business community has pulled together to overcome hurdles such as new developments behind the main street which it was feared would spread the available dollar too thin
- ▶ They are currently focused on the planned bypass which is scheduled for 2016 - 2017
- ▶ A very strong Chamber which has lobbied for change and improvement
  - Individuals within the Chamber were willing to donate time and energy
  - A commitment to seeking funding wherever possible
- ▶ A part time coordinator who held projects together
- ▶ A willingness to share information and identify new markets for the town. In some cases, this has meant changing the perception of a target market e.g. Berry had always seen caravanners as a problem because they took up valuable parking space in the main street and were perceived as grey nomads who spent little in the town. Shared information showed that the new breed of motor home traveller were great customers. The Showground was upgraded to become a motor home park which generates ground fees for the local council.
- ▶ The Berry website

There are less parallels between Morpeth and Berrima as the retail precinct is much smaller and the town was affected by a by-pass in 1995. Despite a drastic downturn after the bypass Berrima fought back due to a very strong Business Chamber which met weekly in the early days to develop stronger tourism product. Initiatives such as an historic town map and walking trail including retailers both boosted visitation. Although the town is relatively quiet on weekdays it trades strongly at weekends.

