Aquatic Centres Network Supporting Plan Summary

2025-2035

Community Infrastructure Strategy

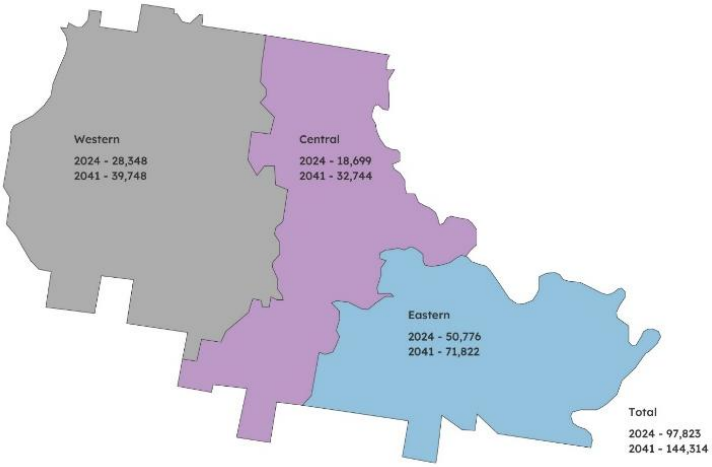
The Community Infrastructure Strategy (CIS) provides a pragmatic, feasible, achievable roadmap for the equitable long-term provision (20 years) of community infrastructure over which council has primary responsibility, plays a role in delivering, or seeks to advocate for on behalf of the community.

The CIS guides a holistic, integrated and evidence-based approach to the prioritisation, planning, design and provision of community infrastructure to meet the changing needs of a growing population efficiently, effectively and responsibly, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

The five strategic priorities from the CIS are community identity, thriving communities, partnerships, shaping a shared future and delivering quality services.

Planning precincts

To plan and manage future growth within the city, three distinct local planning precincts have been identified and used across all supporting plans. These are the central, eastern and western precincts.



The local precinct approach will be guided by walkable neighbourhood principles where our residents can access most of their daily needs locally, without using a car. This approach aims to gradually shift away from a continuously expanding urban footprint to a focus on revitalising our existing centres and neighbourhoods.

Maitland population profile

PLANNING PRECINCT	2024	2041	DIFFERENCE	COMPOUNDING ANNUAL GROWTH RATE
Central	18,699	32,744	14,045	3.4%
Eastern	50,776	71,822	21,046	2.1%
Western	28,348	39,748	11,400	2.0%
TOTAL	**97,823**	**144,314**	**46,491**	**2.3%**

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Provisioning hierarchy

Hierarchy based planning guides where and what type and scale of community infrastructure is most needed. The hierarchy typically involves levels such as Local, District, Citywide and Regional. It is used alongside industry standards and guidelines, as well as service catchment and demand analysis.

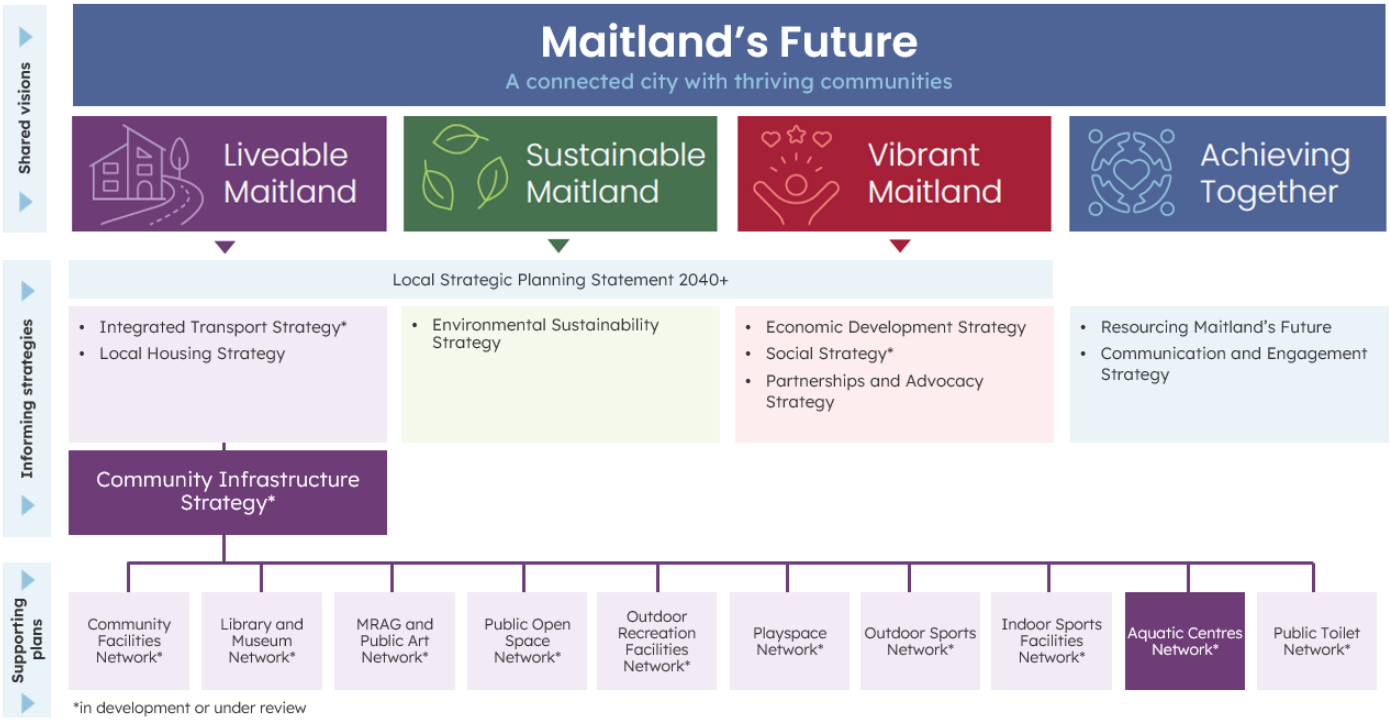
This approach ensures local facilities remain accessible whilst higher order facilities are strategically placed to meet evolving community needs. Most importantly, the hierarchy supports transparent and effective planning and serves our communities by:

- Distributing community infrastructure equitably
- Aligning provision with sound planning principles
- Meeting community expectations and demand
- Aligning current trends and guidelines
- Allowing consolidation and upgrades
- Reducing long-term asset maintenance by addressing oversupply
- Ensuring community infrastructure is sustainable and resilient long-term.

HIERARCHY LEVEL	DESCRIPTION
Local	• Located within a 5-15-minute walk of residences
District	• Located within a 3-kilometre radius or a 10-15-minute drive of most residences
Citywide	• Serves the whole Maitland Local Government Area and is a 30-45-minute drive of most residences
Regional	• Key destination spaces that serve our communities and attract visitors from outside the Maitland Local Government Area

Strategic alignment

The Aquatic Centres Network Supporting Plan underpins Council's Community Infrastructure Strategy. Its relationship within the Integrated Planning and Reporting (IPR) framework and with Maitland's Future, the Community Strategic Plan, is depicted below.



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Aquatic Centres Supporting Plan purpose

To provide an evidence-based approach to planning, prioritising, designing, delivering and managing Maitland City Council's network of aquatic centres to ensure it contributes to our shared vision of a connected city with thriving communities.

Aquatic centres play an important role in the health, wellbeing and cohesion of our community. They also provide a safe and inclusive place to build social networks and connections around water through water safety, fitness, training and education, competition and lifesaving programs.

Council's role

Council's role is to provide an accessible and inclusive network of aquatic facilities that promotes:

- essential swimming and water safety skills and education
- physical, mental, and functional health and wellbeing
- social connection and cohesion
- employment and support for the local economy.

Current state – where we are now

Council's aquatic centres network operates within a broader aquatics network distributed within and beyond the Maitland LGA and is depicted in the map.

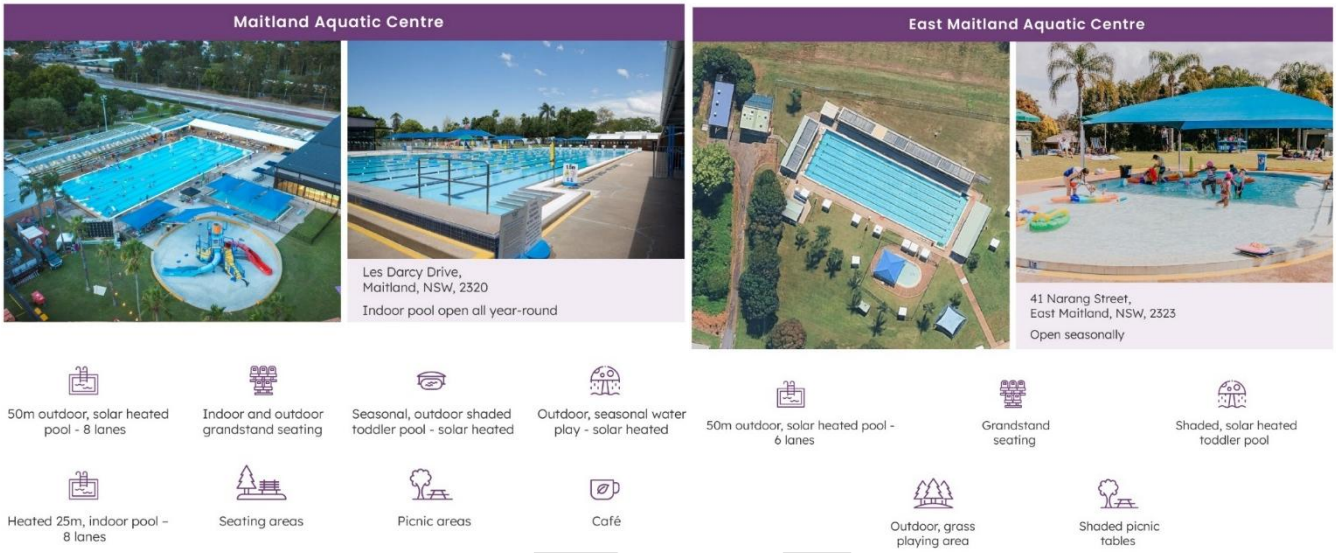
Maitland City Council currently provides one aquatic facility per 48,911 residents, which is comparatively low to the Hunter-wide provision rate of one aquatic facility per 25,315 residents.

It is also lower than the current national benchmarking for aquatic facility provisioning (regional cities), which is one facility per 12,826 residents (Royal Life Saving Society Australia, State of Australian Aquatic Facilities 2025 Report).

Provisioning rates can vary greatly and do not necessarily reflect community need, service expectations or service quality. For these reasons, a benchmark that extends beyond a quantity-only provisioning standard is a more realistic approach. Qualitative standards may include community capacity, usage, sustainability, efficiency, equity, quality, functionality and access.

Council's adopted framework comprises the following criteria which will support planning and provisioning decisions:

- equitable and needs-based investment
- safety and operational sustainability
- environmental sustainability and energy efficiency
- governance and long-term planning.



Community engagement – what we heard

Between January and May 2023, Council engaged with the community and key stakeholders about Maitland's aquatic facilities. It is important to note that, at the time, East Maitland Aquatic Centre was closed for repairs. Residents in the East Planning District were strongly represented in the 1331 survey responses who were particularly focused on East Maitland Aquatic Centre remaining open.

Consultation focused on usage, satisfaction and community and stakeholder aspirations for aquatic facilities in Maitland. Specifically, Council aimed to:

- obtain feedback about current pools, facilities and programs
- understand current and non-current usage patterns
- understand existing facility and program preferences and future inclusions
- understand the modes of transport used to access the centres
- understand accessibility barriers.

Some key findings of the community engagement were:

- Most visitors travel to aquatic centres by private motor vehicle
- Top reasons for visiting include swimming laps (29%), recreation (29%), and children's swimming lessons (13%)
- High satisfaction with water play areas (71%), programs (70%), and kiosk/café (65%)
- Key areas for improvement include amenities (31%), parking (20%), and pool variety (18%)
- Priorities identified included upgraded changerooms, water-play areas, hydrotherapy pool, improved accessibility, and enhanced access in the western area of Maitland (e.g. Rutherford).

Between May and July 2025, Council engaged with over 670 community members, generating more than 1,100 contributions across surveys, mapping tools, and face-to-face pop-ups. Key insights included:

- Aquatic centres are under pressure. Pools are overcrowded, especially in winter, with strong calls for heated, year-round facilities
- There is a desire for modern amenities, water play areas and new facilities particularly in growth areas like Rutherford and Chisholm
- Aquatic Centres ranked four in the top infrastructure needs list, particularly with the Under 14 age group, highlighting that aquatic centres are an important piece of infrastructure for the Maitland community.

Industry standards and trends – what we know

Maitland City Council adopted the Guidelines for Safe Pool Operation (GSPO) for the management and operation of its aquatic centres. The GSPO is a detailed set of specifications and recommendations, establishing best practice design and operations of aquatic locations nationwide. The guidelines were established and are maintained by Royal Life Saving Society Australia (RLSSA).

In addition, Council participates in an annual independent audit, the Aquatic Facility Safety Assessments (AFSA) audit, conducted by RLSSA. The audit is the easiest and most effective way to gain a true assessment of the level of safety and compliance and ensures aquatic centres are managed in line with current standards. The benefits of participating in AFSA audits are:

- benchmark current performance against industry standards and best practice
- gain independent and expert information and advice
- encourage continual improvement of the aquatic facility
- support the training and educational needs of key facility users
- stay current with regulatory changes
- reduce the likelihood and consequence of aquatic-related injury and death in the facility
- demonstrate the use of a formal risk management process
- maintain a working relationship with the peak industry body
- achieve recognition for safety practices
- reduce legal risk.

Emerging trends show that aquatic centres have transformed into diverse community hubs that offer more than just swimming facilities. The trend is toward a one-stop shop that combines recreation, fitness, wellness, and social connection while improving economic sustainability. Modern centres are designed to reflect local needs and demographics. Features commonly considered when prioritising inclusions for a modern aquatic facility include:

- **Leisure and Adventure:** Water parks, splash zones, and interactive play areas are increasingly popular, attracting families and tourists
- **Fitness and Education:** The integration of gyms, Pilates and yoga studios, group fitness spaces, and saunas provides consistent, year-round use of facilities. Strong learn-to-swim programs remain central, supported by purpose-built, heated pools that cater to high participation levels
- **Health and Wellness:** With growing demand for aquatic therapies, many redeveloped centres now include hydrotherapy or warm-water exercise pools. Additional spaces for allied health services, older adult fitness, and community programs promote inclusion, social interaction, and user retention
- **Hospitality and Retail:** Reception areas paired with cafés create a welcoming and efficient entry experience. The shift from simple kiosks to full cafés meets diverse dietary needs and broadens appeal. Retail outlets selling swimwear, accessories, and fitness gear complement these offerings

- **Inclusivity and Accessibility:** Modern facilities are guided by universal design, featuring gender-neutral changerooms, accessible pool entry (ramps and hoists), and compliant toilets and change facilities. These features ensure comfort, privacy, and equity for all users, including transgender and mobility-impaired patrons
- **Environmental Responsibility:** Rising energy and water costs have driven investment in environmentally sustainable design (ESD). Efficient systems reduce operational expenses and environmental impact, ensuring the long-term viability of centres.

Future state – where we want to be

The future aquatics centres network will be planned for, established and maintained based on the following classification framework.

Regional	Citywide	District
Focus on facilities that support aquatic-based event and high performance programs and services, including increased lap swimming space, fitness and deep water related facilities.	Services the entire Local Government Area and incorporates high quality and high capacity facilities, that support recreation, leisure and adventure, fitness and training, education and therapy activities.	Services a planning precinct, with a primary focus on education, group exercise and therapy activities.

AQUATIC FACILITY	STRATEGIC DIRECTION
REGIONAL	
Hunter Sports Precinct, Broadmeadow **Subject to NSW Government support*	The Hunter region lacks a contemporary, major event and high-performance aquatic facility; this could be addressed through the planned aquatic facility at Hunter Park in Broadmeadow. The inclusion of a regional standard aquatic facility at Hunter Park is consistent with other current and planned major event and high-performance facilities at the site. The investment by the NSW Government in major events and high-performance aquatic facilities will support Council's investment in community aquatic infrastructure. It is recommended aquatic facilities incorporate deep water opportunities for water polo and diving.
CITYWIDE	
Maitland Aquatic Centre	Given the central location within Council's citywide parkland, combined with its existing facility components, Maitland Aquatic Centre is well placed to be further developed as Council's citywide aquatic facility.
DISTRICT	
East Maitland West Maitland **Location to be confirmed*	Recognising existing and forecast populations for each planning precinct, Council will optimise community accessibility and use, avoid duplication and competition and improve the viability of the aquatic centres network by establishing new facilities to complement the Maitland Aquatic Centre. The complementary facilities in the east and west will be of an appropriate scale and support essential aquatic programs and services.

Indicative costs and land requirements

Cost estimates, excluding escalation, contained within this supporting plan are based on the expertise and experience of consultancy firm, Otium. The estimates should not be taken as meeting the standards applied by a quantity surveyor. For this reason, a formal cost estimate provided by a qualified quantity surveyor will be required to inform costs and the future direction of the work.

Key points relating to costs include:

- estimated investment required over 10+ years: $123,500,000
- average annual investment required: $12,350,000 per year
- a range of external funding programs provided by NSW and Australian Government agencies are likely to be required.

Funding

Royal Life Saving Society Australia's (RLSSA) analysis demonstrated that local government contributes the majority of pool infrastructure investment (64 per cent), while state and territory governments contribute 23 per cent and the federal government contributes 15 per cent.

Excluding government grants, additional funding sources for the delivery of future Maitland aquatic facilities infrastructure will include:

- council revenue
- development contributions
- voluntary planning agreements
- sale of surplus council land or assets
- establishment of a Community Infrastructure Reserve Fund.

Given the significant financial contribution by local government, RLSSA recommends the establishment of a dedicated national public pool investment program that targets regional communities and local government areas with ageing infrastructure.

How we get there

To achieve the planning objectives in the supporting plan, a staged approach will be applied over a 10-year period. An indicative schedule of works for the short (one to four years), medium (five to eight years) and long-term (nine to ten years) will be developed. It is anticipated that a number of actions or activities will be simultaneously undertaken, subject to resourcing.

The planned actions will be published in our Delivery Program and Operational Plan each year. The timeframe of actions being completed will depend on resourcing and funding availability.