



# CESSNOCK VINEYARDS DISTRICT

## PLACE STRATEGY





*Journey Through Time*, created by local school students and artist Steven Campbell.

### Acknowledgement of Country

Cessnock City Council acknowledges that within its local government area boundaries are the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people, the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung people. We acknowledge these Aboriginal peoples as the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices and operations are located, and pay our respects to Elders past and present. We also acknowledge all other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now live within the Cessnock Local Government Area.

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# INTRODUCTION

# Introduction

This Place Strategy relates to the Cessnock Local Government Area (LGA) Vineyards District and is a requirement of the Hunter Regional Plan 2041 (HRP 2041). The Strategy has been prepared to establish land use principles to guide future planning proposals and development and encourage a harmonious balance between agriculture, scenic amenity, biodiversity, and tourist and other non-agricultural development in the Cessnock Vineyards District.

This Place Strategy is informed by a range of local and state planning strategies and plans, together with community and stakeholder consultation carried out over several years. The principal strategies considered are mentioned within the Strategic and Legislative Context chapter of this document. However, various other plans are relevant to the Cessnock Vineyards District and have also been considered in the development of the Strategy, including Council's Cycling Strategy, Trails Strategy, Urban Growth Management Plan, Housing Strategy and Jobs Strategy. The strategic directions of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan (HVDMP) have also been considered and applied where appropriate, noting that this Place Strategy is not exclusively tourism focused and that the HVDMP is a more appropriate document to encourage and drive economic investment in tourist land uses in the Cessnock LGA. The Draft Vineyards District Place Strategy is not intended to duplicate the HVDMP or its actions. Instead, it offers guidance on how agricultural, tourism, and other non-agricultural developments can generally coexist within the Cessnock Vineyards District.

Cessnock is situated in the Lower Hunter area of NSW, which ranks as the sixth largest urban region in Australia. The Cessnock Vineyards District encompasses a 13,260 hectare area of land to the north west of

the Cessnock township, predominantly zoned RU4 Primary Production Small Lots. The Vineyards District contains Cessnock Airport, zoned SP2 Infrastructure, and an area of land, presently zoned SP3 Tourist, containing integrated tourist development. The Cessnock Vineyards District also contains an area of land to the west of McDonalds Road zoned RE1 Public Recreation, comprising Pokolbin Park.

The Cessnock Vineyards District is the major component of the broader Hunter Valley Wine Region, which is the nation's oldest, continuous wine growing area and which is internationally recognised for producing premium wines. The Hunter Valley Wine Region includes land at Broke Fordwich and Belford in the Singleton LGA and land in the Upper Hunter Valley. The Hunter Valley Wine Region is especially renowned for growing premium Semillon, Chardonnay, Verdelho, Shiraz and Cabernet Sauvignon grapes for dry table wine production. Hunter Shiraz and Semillon wines have world class standing.

Agriculture occurring within the Cessnock Vineyards District is presently supported by a diverse range of tourist development, including cellar door premises, wineries, tourist and visitor accommodation, restaurants and a variety of cultural and recreational facilities, functions and events. The relationship between viticulture and tourist development is highly interdependent and is often described as being 'symbiotic'. The landscape of the Cessnock Vineyards District, together with its heritage, product offering and proximity to major centres and ports, makes it a unique and popular choice for domestic and international tourists.

While the viticulture land use has primacy in the Cessnock Vineyards District, this Place



Strategy acknowledges the importance of wine tourism as the major economic driver in the Cessnock Vineyards District. Wine tourism contributes significantly to the Gross Regional Product of the Cessnock LGA. Over time, key nodes within the Vineyards District have developed as major hubs for tourism, infrastructure, and related non-agricultural uses, creating opportunities to diversify the local economy and enhance the visitor experience.

To support sustainable tourism growth, the Strategy encourages larger-scale, non-agricultural development to be directed towards these established nodes. This approach helps to protect the Vineyards District's productive agricultural areas by minimising land use conflict, managing biosecurity risks, and preserving the scenic and environmental qualities that define the rural landscape. When appropriately managed, tourism and other non-agricultural activities complement the core agricultural objectives of the

RU4 Primary Production Small Lots Zone without compromising the area's rural and viticultural character.

Outside the major tourist nodes, smaller-scale tourist developments play an important role in supporting the long-term viability of agriculture. These lower-intensity uses provide valuable supplementary income for landowners, helping to sustain primary production while offering visitors authentic opportunities to experience the rural character, scenic amenity, and locally produced food, wine, and goods of the Vineyards District. Land outside the major tourist nodes allows for this type of sensitively scaled development, provided it is well planned and remains compatible with the area's rural values. Careful management is essential to ensure these developments do not compromise the productive potential of agricultural land, but instead contribute to a resilient and diverse economy.



# OBJECTIVES

## Objectives

This Place Strategy addresses the requirements of the HRP 2041 to investigate and inform changes to the local policy framework for the Cessnock Vineyards District. Most importantly, this Place Strategy establishes future land use principles to encourage a harmonious balance between agricultural and non-agricultural development within the Cessnock Vineyards District, and provide guidance to developers, members of the community and Council regarding what constitutes a compatible development outcome in the future.

The objectives of this Place Strategy are to:

- Reflect the various principles, priorities and actions of local and state planning strategies relevant to the Cessnock Vineyards District;
- Provide direction for possible land use planning amendments;
- Ensure tourist and other non-agricultural proposals avoid land use conflict with agriculture occurring on land in the Cessnock Vineyards District;
- Protect and manage environmentally sensitive areas, including native vegetation, waterways, and vegetation/wildlife corridors, to maintain biodiversity and ecological integrity within the Cessnock Vineyards District.
- Place limitations on residential subdivision and other development, which is not compatible with the vineyards' rural landscape and scenic amenity;
- Ensure development in areas, including native vegetation, waterways, and vegetation/wildlife corridors, to maintain biodiversity and ecological integrity within the sympathetic to the rural amenity and local character of the area.
- Identify walking and cycling networks from the major tourist nodes to activities and landscape features within the broader vineyards area and beyond.
- Support appropriately located, non-agricultural development with suitable infrastructure and accommodate it within the landscape setting.
- Ensure the siting, bulk, scale and built form of non-agricultural development is suitable for the setting.
- Ensure development on land within visually sensitive areas is sympathetic to landscape values and view corridors from the vineyards.

# STRATEGIC AND LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

## Strategic and legislative context

### Hunter Regional Plan 2041

The Hunter Regional Plan 2041 (HRP 2041) is a 20-year land use plan for the Hunter. The HRP 2041 was prepared by the Department of Planning and Environment (now the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure) and draws from each Hunter council's local strategic planning statement (LSPS). The HRP 2041 sets the strategic land use framework for continued economic growth and diversification in the Hunter and aims to unlock sustainable growth opportunities and investments, as well as housing choice and lifestyle opportunities for the community.

The HRP 2041 recognises the Cessnock Vineyards District as a 'Regionally Significant Growth Area', primarily to acknowledge the ongoing pressure in the area for non-agricultural development, the tension between agriculture and tourist development, and the need for stronger mechanisms to manage that pressure and tension to bring about a harmonious balance between working vineyards, tourist and other non-agricultural development.

The HRP 2041 identifies the following Place Strategy outcomes for the Cessnock Vineyards District:

#### 1. Strategic agricultural land

- Ensure non-agricultural development avoids land use conflict with existing and future agricultural uses.
- Locate residential subdivision and other development incompatible with the vineyards' rural landscape and scenic amenity in centres.

#### 2. Tourism node investigation area

- Identify a tourism node and consolidate larger scale tourism developments in this location.
- Development is sympathetic to the rural amenity and the local character of the area.
- Connect walking and cycling networks from the tourism node to tourism activities and landscape features.

#### 3. Visually significant areas

- Support non-agricultural development with suitable infrastructure and accommodate it in the landscape setting.
- Ensure the siting, bulk, scale and built form of non-agricultural development is suitable for the setting.
- Ensure development on land adjoining scenic areas is sympathetic to landscape values and view corridors from the vineyards.



# Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036

The Greater Newcastle Metropolitan Plan 2036 (GNMP 2036) sets out strategies and actions that will drive sustainable growth across Cessnock City, Lake Macquarie City, Maitland City, Newcastle City and Port Stephens, which together make up Greater Newcastle. The plan also helps to achieve the vision for the Hunter to be the leading regional economy in Australia with a vibrant new metropolitan city at its heart. The GNMP 2036 recognises the Cessnock Vineyards District as an iconic tourism destination within the metro frame, where careful management is required to ensure a balance between rural landscape, tourism and viticulture.

## Cessnock Local Strategic Planning Statement 2036

The Cessnock Local Strategic Planning Statement (LSPS) sets the strategic planning direction for the Cessnock LGA to 2036. The Cessnock LSPS implements relevant actions from the HRP 2041 and GNMP 2036 as well as Council’s own priorities as set out in the Cessnock Community Strategic Plan 2027 (CSP) and other Council adopted plans and strategies.

The LSPS provides the following local planning priorities relevant to the Cessnock Vineyards District and this Place Strategy:

- Rural land is protected from incompatible development.
- Land with environmental value is protected and enhanced.
- The scenic and rural landscape of our Vineyards District is preserved.
- Wine tourism is supported and enhanced.
- Biodiversity corridors are enhanced and protected.
- Heritage-based tourism is facilitated and promoted.
- A variety of niche tourism opportunities are encouraged.
- Developments minimise environmental impacts and respond to site environmental characteristics.
- Our region is internationally acclaimed for its events, festivals and hosting functions.



# Community Strategic Plan

The Cessnock Community Strategic Plan 2036 (CSP) identifies the community’s main priorities and expectations for the future and ways to achieve these goals. The document outlines a range of high level strategic directions to improve social, environmental and economic prosperity within the Cessnock LGA.

## Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011

The Cessnock Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2011 delivers the statutory framework for the Cessnock LGA, including land use objectives, permissibility, zoning and minimum lot sizes within the Vineyards District.

## Cessnock Development Control Plan 2010

The Cessnock Development Control Plan (DCP) 2010 delivers specific controls to guide built form outcomes, including within the Cessnock Vineyards District.

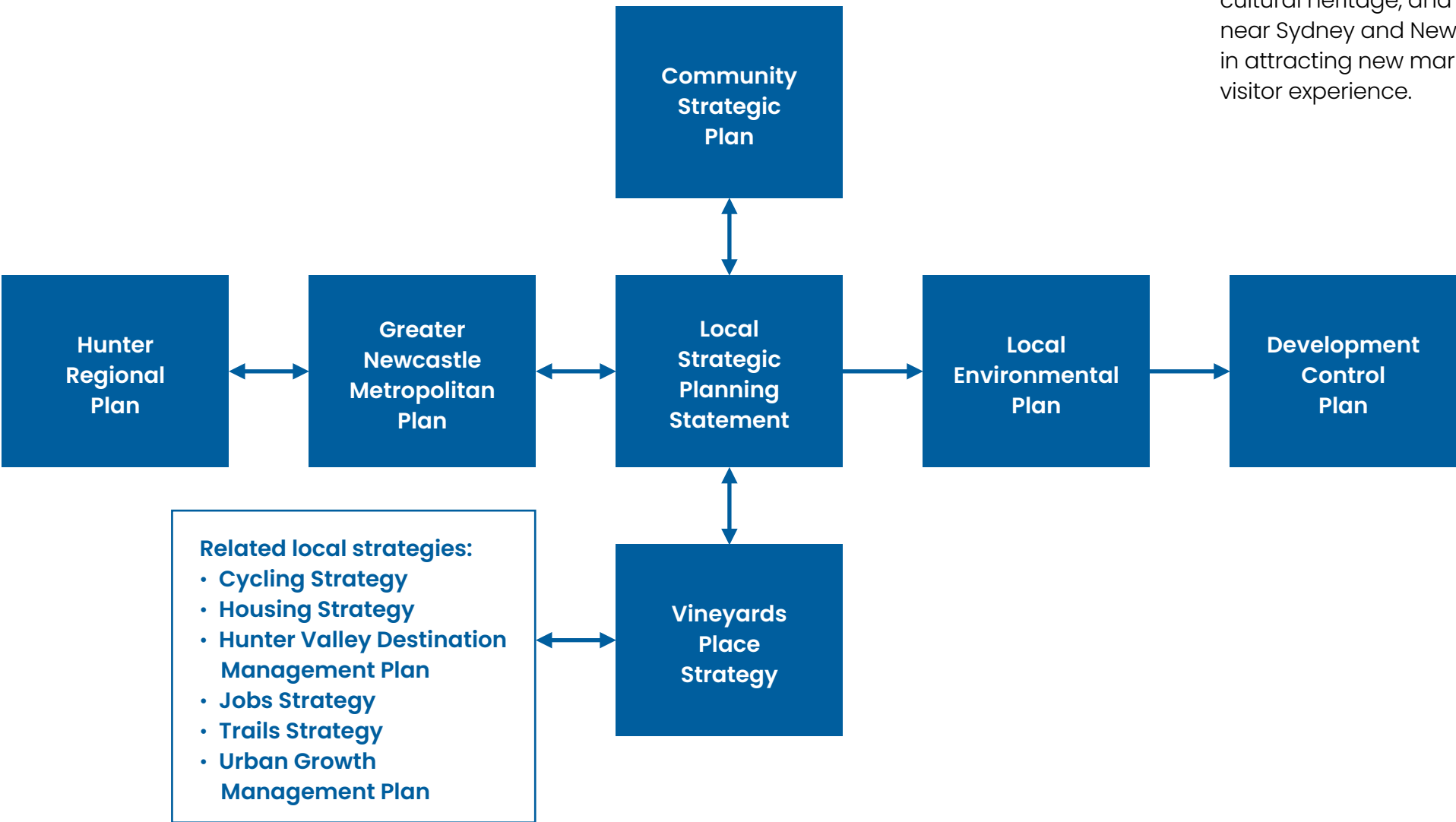


Figure 1: Strategic framework

# Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan 2022–30

The Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan (HVDMP) sets a vision and strategic framework to guide the sustainable growth of the visitor economy within the Cessnock and Singleton local government areas. Developed in consultation with industry stakeholders, government, and community members, and informed by global tourism trends, the HVDMP aims to grow the Hunter Valley’s visitor economy from \$641 million in 2020 to \$958 million by 2030. This aligns with the NSW Visitor Economy Strategy 2030 and addresses the region’s recovery following the bushfires, floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The HVDMP recognises the Hunter Valley’s core strengths, being internationally renowned wine and food, rich Aboriginal cultural heritage, and strategic location near Sydney and Newcastle, as key assets in attracting new markets and enriching the visitor experience.

To capitalise on these strengths and ensure benefits for the broader community, the HVDMP sets ambitious but achievable goals: increasing visitor spend by 25%, lengthening stays to meet the NSW average, boosting mid-week visitation by 20%, expanding accommodation capacity by 10%, and doubling both international visitation and bookable experiences. Priority actions will showcase food, wine, and events, diversify tourism offerings across culture, wellness, nature, and heritage, and position the Hunter Valley as a vibrant, resilient, and diverse destination. Ultimately, the plan provides a roadmap for coordinated action across Cessnock and Singleton councils, industry bodies, and government to build a thriving visitor economy that supports jobs, enhances liveability, and delivers exceptional experiences.





**CONSULTATION**

# Consultation

In April 2019, a Vineyards District Community Reference Group (CRG) was established by Cessnock City Council to provide local knowledge and advice regarding possible changes to the local planning framework relating to the Cessnock Vineyards District. The CRG includes representation from Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Association, Parish of Pokolbin, Around Hermitage, Lovedale Chamber of Commerce, NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Industry, NSW Department of Primary Industries, Property Council of Australia, Singleton Council, landowners, vignerons, property developers, wine tourism professionals and town planning consultants. The CRG achieves a broad representation of views relating to the Cessnock Vineyards District. Together with the various studies and community consultation carried out in relation to the Cessnock Vineyards District, the CRG has provided local knowledge and advice that was in part relied upon to prepare this Place Strategy. However, it is acknowledged that it is not always possible to achieve consensus among groups containing members from such varied backgrounds.

For a period of six weeks in August and September of 2019, Council conducted a community survey regarding the Cessnock Vineyards District. The survey focused on two principal questions:

- What things presently add value to the character and amenity of the Vineyards District?
- What things should there be more or less of in the Vineyards District?

In answering these questions, respondents were able to select from a predetermined list of features relevant to the Vineyards District. Respondents were also provided an opportunity to identify additional features. A total of 454 people responded to the survey questions. The features most highly valued by respondents were grape vines, cellar doors and scenic views. The least valued features were residential housing estates, short-term rental accommodation and shops.

## Vineyards District Community Survey Outcomes Report

### Age Demographics

The 454 people who responded to the survey are broken down into the following age ranges.

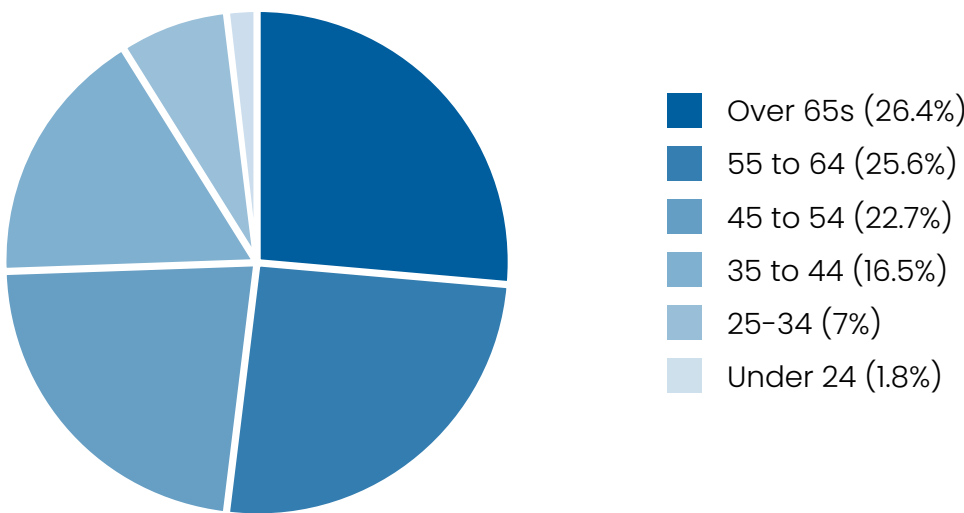


Figure 2: Age demographics of survey respondents..

### Relationship with the Cessnock Vineyards District

Respondents were able to select one or more options to describe their relationship with the Cessnock Vineyards District when answering this question.

Almost half the respondents noted that they own land and/or live in the Cessnock Vineyards District. 'Other' responses included people who live outside the Cessnock Vineyards District, real estate agents, tour operators, former residents, government agencies and other agriculturalists

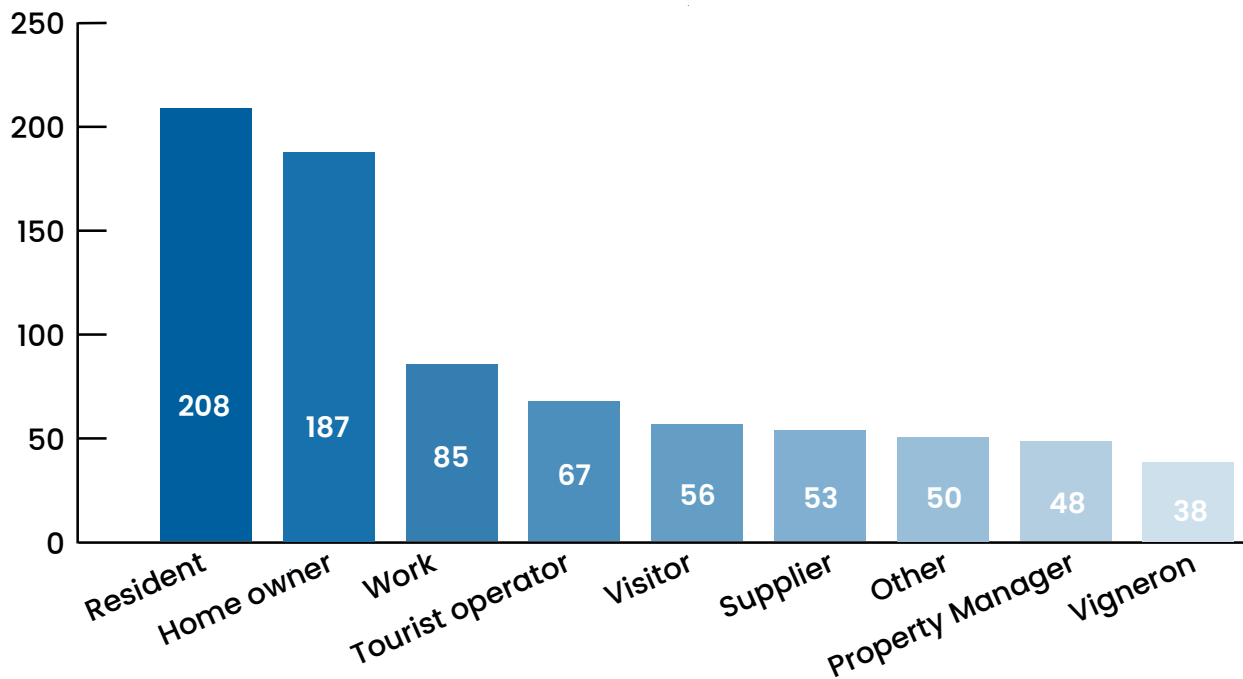


Figure 3: Relationship of survey respondents to Cessnock Vineyards District.

# Priorities

Respondants were asked to rate a variety of landscape or built features in the Vineyards District by importance and need, ranging from ‘not at all important’ to ‘extremely important’ and ‘need less of this’ to ‘we need more of this’. Responses were given a numerical value between 1 and 5 for importance and 1 and 3 for need.

The graph below plots the average score of total responses on the importance of the landscape or visual element on the x axis, and the average score of need on the y axis. For example, ‘tree-lined rural roads’ and ‘events and festivals’ shared similar total average scores for importance, however on average a higher number of respondents indicated that the Vineyards District needed more ‘tree-lined rural roads’.

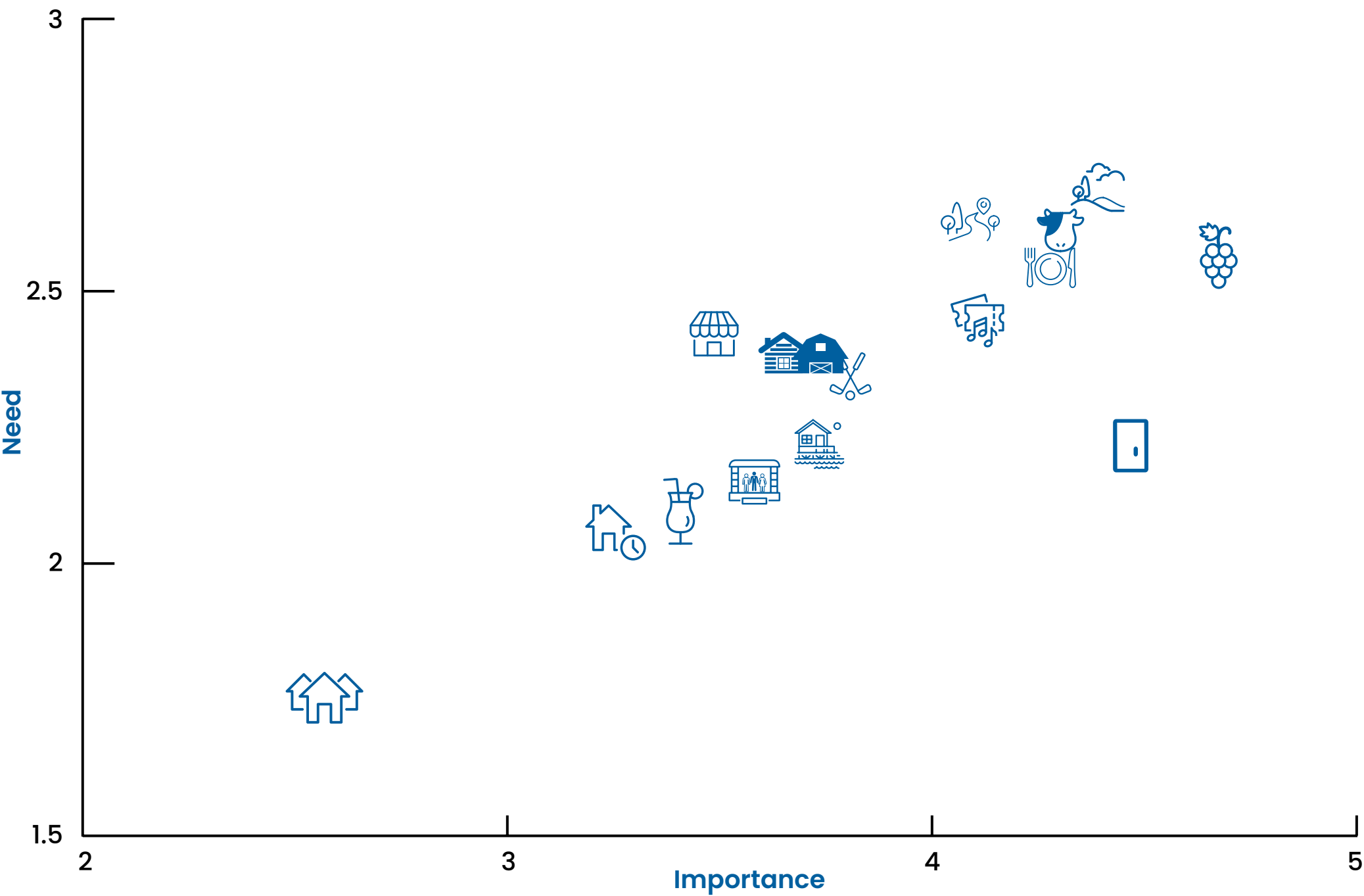


Figure 4: Importance vs Need of various landscape and build elements in the Cessnock Vineyards District.

Legend

Grape vines

Scenic views

Agriculture

Restaurants and cafes

Tree-lined rural roads

Cellar doors

Events and Festivals

Recreation facilities

Farm Houses

Smaller scale tourist accommodation (cabins)

Lifestyle estates

Shops

Function centres

Tourist resorts

Short-term rentals

Residential housing estates



# THE CESSNOCK LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

# The Cessnock Local Government Area

Situated in the Lower Hunter Region, the Cessnock LGA is located across the traditional lands of the Wonnarua people, the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung People. The LGA covers approximately 1,950 square kilometres.

European settlement in the Cessnock LGA commenced in the 1820s with the establishment of pastoral lands, the coal mining industry, the viticulture industry and more recently a thriving tourism industry. While mining was the principal industrial base and source of employment in the Cessnock LGA for the first half of the twentieth century, changes in the mining industry, including deepening coal seams and automation has led to the closure of the vast majority of mines in the area.

The character, heritage and distribution of towns and villages throughout the LGA is a legacy of the LGA's coal mining past. The decline of mining in the Cessnock LGA is in contrast to the success of the Hunter Region's viticulture industry. The Hunter Valley is Australia's oldest wine region and is internationally acclaimed, particularly for the shiraz and semillon varieties. The presence of established viticulture clusters around Cessnock, Denman, and Broke-Fordwich, as represented by the Viticulture Critical Industry Cluster, presents an opportunity for further growth in the viticulture sector.

With over 150 wineries, the Hunter region is home to more cellar doors than any other wine region in Australia. The viticultural industry gives rise to a thriving tourism industry that includes restaurants, accommodation, events, galleries and specialty shops. The Hunter Tourism Region attracts approximately 2.3 million visitors annually, with a significant portion visiting the Hunter Valley Wine Country, particularly Pokolbin, known for its wine tourism. The area also hosts various entertainment events and attractions, attracting non-wine visitors as well.

The Cessnock LGA is presently home to approximately 70,000 people, concentrated in an urban belt between Cessnock and Kurri Kurri. The balance of the population resides within the village and rural areas of the LGA. The Cessnock LGA is currently witnessing substantial growth, with urban development rapidly expanding within a growth corridor between Cessnock, Kurri Kurri and Maitland, at Bellbird, and between Branxton, Greta and Rutherford. The LGA population is forecast to grow to 85,000 by 2031 and 107,000 by 2041.



**Figure 5:** Cessnock LGA in Context



# THE CESSNOCK VINEYARDS DISTRICT



# The Cessnock Vineyards District

The Cessnock Vineyards District (see Figure 7) encompasses a 13,260 hectare area of land in the vicinity of Pokolbin, Lovedale, Nulkaba, and Mount View, zoned predominantly RU4 Primary Production Small Lots. The Vineyards District is characterised by the gently undulating hills surrounding central and northern Pokolbin, transitioning to the more elevated and rugged terrain of the Broken Back Range. Narrow, tree-lined rural roads, sparse and unobtrusive rural and tourist development, along with regular and unobstructed views across the viticultural landscape, all contribute to the widely regarded character and amenity of the Vineyards District.

Viticulture and other forms of primary production are fundamental to the identity of the Cessnock Vineyards District. The presence of over 150 wineries across the Hunter Valley Region, many located in the Cessnock LGA, distinguishes the Vineyards District from other rural land within the LGA. The combined activities of grape cultivation, winemaking, cellar doors, accommodation, food services and entertainment venues, contribute significantly to total regional sales and to the local economy. These interconnected industries form a dense web of economic interdependence, with winemaking and wine tourism being the principal economic drivers in the Vineyards District.

The iconic imagery of vines against the backdrop of the Broken Back Range reinforces the Cessnock Vineyards District's strong regional branding. The vast majority of the Vineyards District is identified as Viticulture Strategic Agricultural Land, with approximately 80% of the viticulture in the LGA, occurring within the Pokolbin Sub-region (RMCG, 2017). The Pokolbin region's resilience and success are closely tied to its established reputation as a premium wine producer, direct cellar door sales model, and robust wine tourism offerings, all of which continue to draw domestic and international visitors. Tourism associated with the wine industry significantly enhances its economic impact, contributing to the region's Gross Regional Product.

The history of European land use has resulted in a layered and enduring pattern of development that is primarily centered on viticulture, wine production, and the scenic qualities of the region. This is evident in the structured network of narrow carriageways, the ordered rows of vines and pastures, and the gently undulating terrain that has been extensively cleared for agriculture. These physical and cultural landscapes contribute strongly to the district's visual identity and rural heritage.

The wine and tourism sector is a major source of employment in the Cessnock LGA. This includes jobs in grape growing, winemaking, food services, accommodation, tours, retail, freight and logistics, real estate,



marketing, and arts and entertainment. Much of this employment is concentrated in Pokolbin and surrounding areas. The sector’s performance also directly influences ancillary industries through indirect economic flow-on effects, reinforcing its importance to the broader local economy.

Not all property owners within the Vineyards District are engaged in viticulture, and there is a diverse range of land use aspirations. Many landowners have established small-scale tourism operations such as cafés, restaurants, boutique accommodation, and agritourism ventures. Others engage in alternative forms of agriculture or simply value the rural lifestyle and scenic amenity of the area. Low-scale, tourism focused land uses contribute to the sustainability of the viticulture sector by offering additional revenue streams and enhancing the visitor

experience. The relationship between viticulture and tourism is widely considered symbiotic and contributes to the unique mix of agriculture and built form that characterises the Vineyards District. Emerging industries within the Vineyards District reflect evolving consumer preferences and regional development goals. Agritourism is expanding, offering immersive, place-based experiences that link local produce and wine to the visitor experience. Creative industries, including arts, music, and boutique events, are diversifying tourism offerings, while wellness tourism, such as spas and health retreats, is gaining traction as a complementary sector. The growing prevalence of short-term rental accommodation further supports tourism activity and aligns with the objectives of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan, which emphasises economic diversification,

regional branding, and sustainable development.

While the wine and tourism sector remains strong, the District is experiencing increasing development pressures from non-agricultural land uses, including tourism operations that are not always aligned with viticultural objectives, as well as growing demand for rural lifestyle allotments. These pressures extend across the RU4 zone and, if not appropriately managed, have the potential to gradually erode the integrity of the viticultural landscape. Given the Vineyards District is relatively small compared to other wine regions in Australia, it is particularly important that planning controls guide the scale, form, and location of future non-agricultural development. Managing this growth carefully will ensure that new uses are compatible with the Vineyards District’s rural and scenic

qualities and that viticulture remains the dominant land use.

Planning policies and land use controls should continue to emphasise viticulture as the foundation of the Vineyards District’s identity and economic value. As set out in the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan, promoting the Hunter Valley tourism experience, including local wine and food, remains essential to sustaining the region’s appeal. However, future development should harmonise with existing rural land uses, protecting the visual landscape and rural character that underpin the Cessnock Vineyards District’s tourism appeal and long-term sustainability.

**Reference**

RMCG, (2017, June), *Vineyards District Study*

# Age structure of Cessnock Vineyards District residents

Compared to the Cessnock LGA, there is a lower proportion of people in the younger age groups (under 15) and a higher proportion of people in the older age groups (65+) that live within the Cessnock Vineyards District. Overall, 12.5% of the population was aged between 0 and 15, and 28.7% were aged 65 years and over, compared with 20.2% and 17.0% respectively for Cessnock City.

The major differences between the age structure of Cessnock Vineyards District, when compared to the Cessnock LGA are:

- A larger percentage of persons aged 65 to 69 (11.1% compared to 5.5%)
- A larger percentage of persons aged 70 to 74 (9.4% compared to 4.8%)

- A larger percentage of persons aged 60 to 64 (10.6% compared to 6.2%)
- A smaller percentage of persons aged 30 to 34 (3.2% compared to 7.1%)

The population of the Cessnock Vineyards District is expected to grow from approximately 1,600 people in 2021 to 3,100 by 2041.

The expected population growth within the Cessnock Vineyards District is expected to give rise to an additional 400 dwellings. The majority of these new dwellings will occur within the Major Integrated Tourist Development nodes.

12

10

8

6

4

2

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0 to 4 5 to 9 10 to 14 15 to 19 20 to 24 25 to 29 30 to 34 35 to 39 40 to 44 45 to 49 50 to 54 55 to 59 60 to 64 65 to 69 70 to 74 75 to 79 80 to 84 85 and over

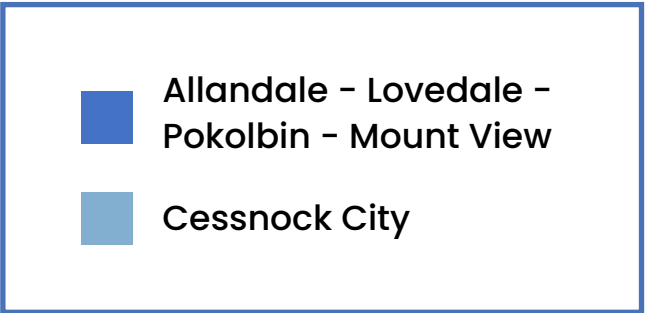


Figure 6: Age Structure of Cessnock Vineyards District residents



# ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION OF THE WINE AND TOURISM SECTOR

## Economic contribution of the wine and tourism sector

### Economic structure and regional contribution

The Cessnock Vineyards District is an important part of the Hunter Valley economy, with its structure deeply embedded in the wine and tourism industry and its associated sectors. The Vineyards District local economy is largely built on three interconnected industries: grape growing and winemaking, food and events, and accommodation. These industries are mutually dependent (symbiotic) and have strong linkages to supporting sectors such as retail, transport, logistics, professional services, and the broader supply chain. This interconnectivity means that the impact of wine and tourism on the local economy extends far beyond direct employment and output, but has significant indirect flow-on effects within the local and regional economy.

Grape growing makes a substantial contribution to the Hunter Valley economy. The tonnage of grapes crushed in the Hunter Region has fluctuated significantly in recent years, reflecting varying seasonal conditions and environmental challenges. From a low of just 2,158 tonnes in 2020, a year marked by drought, bushfires, and poor fruit set, production has rebounded to 5,635 tonnes in 2025. Correspondingly, the estimated wholesale value of grapes

crushed in the Hunter Region rose from \$3 million in 2020 to \$10.3 million in 2025 (Wine Australia, n.d.). While annual yields have varied, the overall trajectory signals a reasonably resilient and adaptive industry, with growth supported by improved market conditions, and demand for regionally branded wines.

With over 150 wineries operating in the Hunter Valley Region, the winemaking sector generates approximately \$256.8 million in total sales. Wine tourism in the Region further enhances the economic impact, contributing \$360 million in domestic visitor expenditure and an additional \$9.7 million from international visitors. When accounting for both direct and indirect effects, the wine tourism sector in the Hunter Valley supports an estimated \$631 million in annual regional output (business turnover), \$336 million in value-added activity, and \$122 million in household income. Therefore, the contribution of the wine and tourism sector to the region's Gross Regional Product is significant, and particularly so for Cessnock, given that the majority of wine tourism occurs within the Cessnock LGA (Gillespie Economics, 2020, as cited in Edge Land Planning, 2022).

# Employment

The wine and tourism sector is a major source of employment in the Cessnock Local Government Area, with 2,563 people employed in the wine and tourism cluster, centred around Pokolbin. The food and tourism sector accounts for 37.8 percent of these jobs, followed by the wine sector at 32.4 percent and accommodation at 29 percent. It is important to note that these figures do not fully capture the additional employment generated in related services such as retail, freight, building maintenance, personal services, and arts and entertainment. The wine and tourism sector accounts for 17.5 percent of all jobs across the Cessnock LGA and, when considering the components embedded in other employment categories, such as accommodation and food services, retail, and manufacturing, this figure grows significantly. When broken down, the data shows that the Vineyards District accounts for the vast majority of tourism-related

employment in the Cessnock LGA, including 93.1% of all accommodation jobs, 86% of wine sector jobs, and 38.7% of food and tourism jobs (ABS, 2021, as cited in Edge Land Planning, 2022).

The principal economic drivers within the Cessnock Vineyards District are overwhelmingly winemaking and wine tourism. The combined activities of wineries, cellar doors, accommodation providers, specialty food outlets, tour operators, and entertainment venues create a dense web of economic interdependence. The performance of the wine and tourism sector has a direct influence on the prosperity of other industries, from freight and wholesale to marketing, retail, and real estate. Agriculture, accommodation, food services, and manufacturing (wine production) dominate employment in the Vineyards District and drive both economic output and regional identity.



## Key activities, visitor economy, and agritourism growth

Within the Cessnock Vineyard’s District, each sector contributes uniquely. Grape growing, while yielding relatively low wholesale returns in some years, plays an essential foundational role. The true value of viticulture lies in the transformation of grapes into high-value wine products and the sale of this product to tourists and visitors to the area, together with the experiential offerings built around vineyards. Wine production itself is a major revenue stream, generating \$256.8 million annually and anchoring the region’s manufacturing base (Gillespie Economics, 2020, as cited in Edge Land Planning, 2022). Tourism is the largest economic contributor, with over \$369 million in visitor spending each year, supporting a wide variety of jobs and services (Gillespie Economics, 2020, as cited in Edge Land Planning, 2022). Hospitality services, including restaurants, catering, food shops, and cafés, are closely tied to tourism and employ the largest share of workers in the sector. Events, weddings and concerts, are known to drive seasonal peaks in visitation, boosting occupancy rates and spending. Agritourism, which includes experiences such as vineyard tours, farm-to-table dining, and wine education, is a growing segment aligned with broader

visitor trends (Cessnock City Council and Singleton Council, 2022).

Hospitality and tourism businesses across the Vineyards District face an ongoing workforce challenge. Although training is provided at TAFE Kurri Kurri, businesses frequently report difficulties in finding and retaining skilled staff. This workforce shortage is a constraint on growth and service quality, particularly in high-demand seasons. Addressing these challenges will require greater coordination between education providers, industry, and government to build a robust regional workforce.

Visitor numbers are generally higher on weekends and during special events, with a noticeable decline mid-week. While most visitors stay only for short periods, they make a significant contribution to the regional economy through spending on accommodation, dining, and local purchases (RMCG, 2017). \$122 million in annual household income is attributable to the Hunter’s wine and tourism sector. The sector enhances the region’s economic resilience, and supports a wide distribution of community livelihoods (Edge Land Planning, 2022).

## Trends, challenges, and future directions

Emerging industries in the Vineyards District are reflective of changing consumer preferences and broader regional development goals. Agritourism continues to expand, offering authentic, place-based experiences that tie local produce and wine to immersive activities. Creative industries such as arts, music, and boutique event venues are diversifying the visitor offer. Wellness tourism, including spas, retreats, and health-focused accommodation, is also emerging as a complementary growth area. Short-term rental accommodation is also becoming more popular within the Cessnock Vineyards District, offering unique experiences that allow visitors to retreat from their usual surroundings. These tourism operations align with the objectives of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan, aimed at economic diversification, regional branding, and sustainable growth (Cessnock City Council and Singleton Council, 2022).

Viticulture trends show a contraction in planted area in the Hunter, with vineyard coverage declining from 4,500 hectares in 2007 to 2,320 hectares in 2015. This decline reflects broader challenges in the Australian wine industry, including low grape prices, weak export performance, and high production costs. In the Hunter, small vineyard sizes, labour-intensive practices (like hand pruning and picking), high land costs, and low yields have made viticulture particularly expensive, making it difficult for many growers to remain viable (RMCG, 2017).

While the overall area under vine remains below historic levels, recent data suggests a modest recovery. From 2015, renewed investment and a shift toward premium and boutique wine production have driven cautious expansion, with planted area rising to 2,499 hectares in 2018 and 2,609 hectares in 2020 (Wine Australia, n.d.). Despite ongoing challenges, such as weather variability, changing consumer demand

and supply chain issues, the region is showing signs of stabilisation, with a focus on wine quality over quantity.

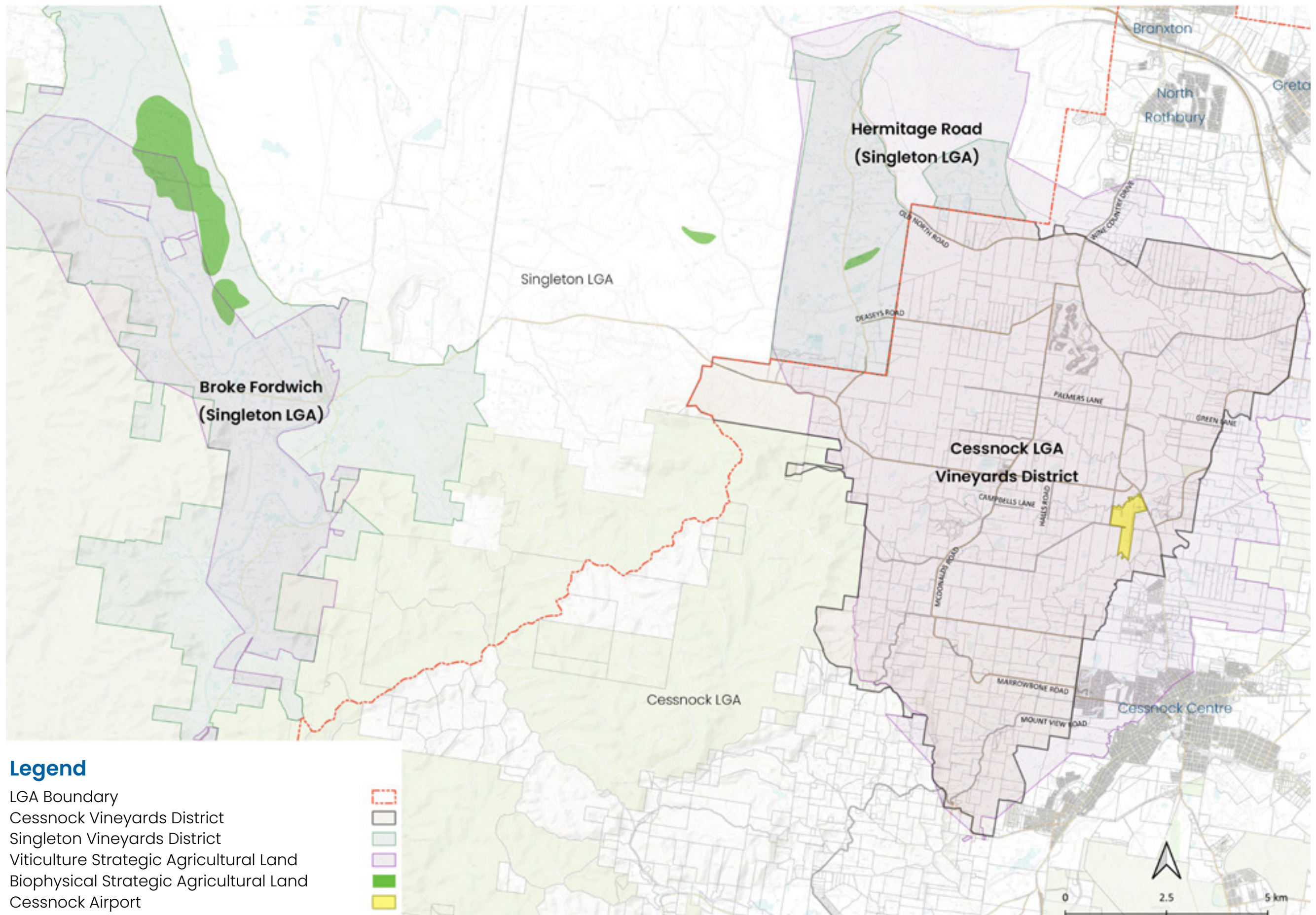
Wine production is undertaken by a diverse mix of over 150 wineries, ranging from small, family-run estates to large-scale producers (Cessnock City Council and Singleton Council, 2022). Economic returns have remained strong through direct-to-consumer sales, especially via cellar doors, wine clubs, and online platforms. While the use of grapes sourced from outside the Hunter region in wines marketed under the 'Hunter' label is acknowledged, data on the extent of this practice remains limited. Nevertheless, this raises questions around branding integrity and regional authenticity. Available figures indicate that the share of the annual grape crush comprising Hunter-grown grapes has fluctuated between 54 and 61 percent from 2019 to 2024, before increasing sharply to 70 percent in 2025 (Wine Australia, n.d.). This trend highlights both the ongoing reliance on external grape sources and a recent shift toward greater use of locally grown fruit.

Demographic trends among vignerons show an aging cohort, with many vineyard owners and operators aged over 55 (.id, n.d.). This demographic profile has implications for industry sustainability, as younger generations are not consistently taking over family operations. Challenges related to land values, capital access, and the seasonal nature of viticulture make succession planning difficult. Without targeted support, the sector risks losing traditional knowledge and continuity.



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**Figure 7:** Cessnock and Singleton vineyards districts and Strategic Agricultural and Biophysical Land in context



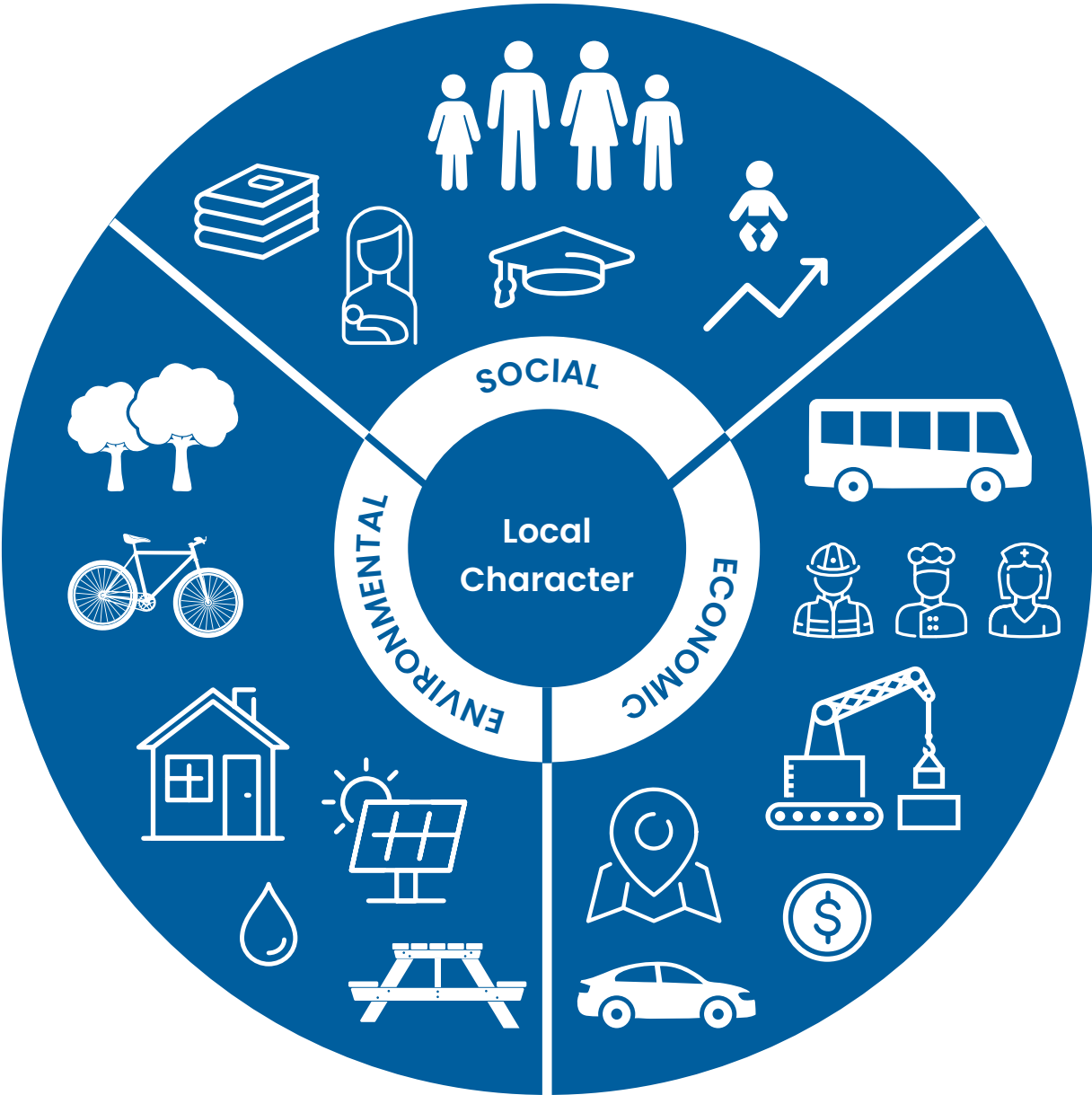
**EXISTING  
CHARACTER  
OF THE CESSNOCK  
VINEYARDS DISTRICT**

# Existing character of the Cessnock Vineyards District

## What is local character?

Local character is what makes a place or area distinctive or unique. Local character is the combination of multiple factors, which relate to an area’s history, built form, public and private spaces, community values, and how they connect to a place.

Local character is influenced by social, economic, and environmental factors.



**Figure 8:** Wheel of Local Character (modified from DPIE Local Character and Place Guideline, 2019)

## Natural and built environment

The interaction of the natural and built environment also informs the character of a place. The built environment refers to the type of development in an area, including land uses, subdivision pattern, building setbacks, streetscapes/types, architectural styles, density and building height.

The natural environment includes bushland, open spaces (including public parks), watercourses, topography (including landforms and views), vegetation cover and the opportunities it provides for recreation and refuge. The natural environment is also critical component of connection to country for traditional landowners.

## Social environment

The social environment relates to the local population, being the people who live, work and/or visit a place. The existing and predicted, or forecasted, demography (e.g. age, gender, dwelling types, family and household composition, education, employment etc.) can influence how a place feels and functions, and can help determine what is needed to support the existing and growing community.

## Economic environment

The economic environment relates to how an area forms part of a local or broader economic framework. A place can be defined by the type of businesses it supports, what types of employment is available for its residents, retail activity and the local road network to move people, goods and services.

## Local character of the Cessnock Vineyards District

The Cessnock Vineyards District has a unique combination of land uses, native vegetation, topography and waterways, which together create a landscape setting which is the main reason for people visiting the vineyards. It is the combination of these elements that make up the local character. The topography of the Cessnock Vineyards District is one of low-rolling hills in the north and east, increasing to steep land of the Broken Back Range in the west to Mount View in the south. It is the interplay of the low hills set amongst the backdrop of the Broken Back Range which gives the area such a distinctive landscape setting.

For the purpose of this Place Strategy, the local character of the Cessnock Vineyards District is embodied by the following major aspects of the natural and built environment:

1. Important Agricultural Land;
2. Important environmental land;
3. Visually sensitive land; and
4. The Tourist Centre and nodes.

# Important Agricultural Land

The Cessnock Vineyards District Important Agricultural Land is identified by the RU4 Primary Production Small Lot Zone (see Figure 9). The RU4 Zone encourages agricultural land uses, while enabling complementary tourist and other non-agricultural uses, which are compatible with the area’s viticultural and rural character.

## Objectives of the RU4 Primary Production Small Lots Zone:

- Enable sustainable primary industry and other compatible land uses.
- Encourage and promote diversity and employment opportunities in relation to primary industry enterprises, particularly those that require smaller lots or that are more intensive in nature.
- Minimise conflict between land uses within this zone and land uses within adjoining zones.
- Maintain prime viticultural land and enhance the economic and ecological sustainability of the Vineyards District.
- Encourage appropriate tourist development (including tourist-related retail) that is consistent with the rural and viticultural character of the Vineyards District.
- Enable the continued rural use of land that is complementary to the viticultural character of the land.

The vast majority of the Cessnock Vineyards District is identified as Strategic Agricultural Land in state planning legislation, and is dominated by vineyards and other low impact horticultural uses, and horse and cattle grazing. The established vineyards are a mixture of production vineyards and vineyards with cellar doors and restaurants located on them. Some vineyards have supporting tourist uses, such as accommodation, artisan food and drink premises, farm gate premises, or gardens, and are typically of a scale that is compatible with the principal agricultural use of the land.

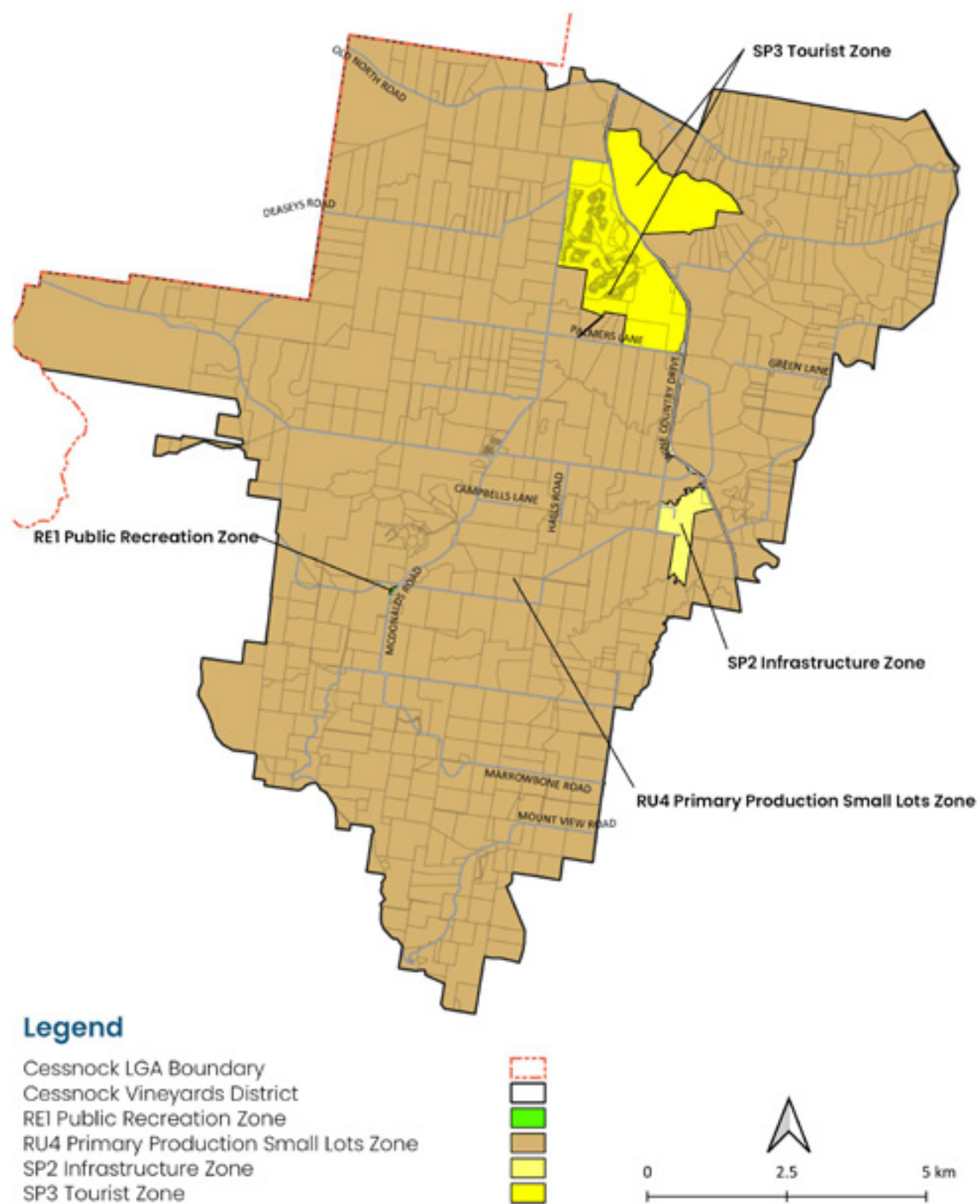
Smaller scale tourist developments are vital to the overall economic viability of agriculture that occurs on Important Agricultural Land in the Cessnock Vineyards District. These less intense tourist related developments provide additional revenue for property owners and opportunities for tourists to experience the unique character and amenity of the Vineyards District and locally produced food, wine and goods, outside the major tourist nodes. However, some tourist and other non-agricultural developments that have occurred within the Cessnock Vineyards District are less compatible with primary production and, in some instances, comprise the principal commercial use of the land. These more intense developments on land outside the established Tourist Centre and integrated tourist and accommodation nodes reduce the availability of land for genuine agricultural activities, and have the potential to impact the long-term viability of viticulture on Important Agricultural Land.

## Existing character statement

The history of European land use in the Cessnock Vineyards District has resulted in a layering of development focused on viticulture, wine production, low impact horticultural uses, and horse and cattle grazing. The imprint of early European occupation of the land is visible in the ordered pattern of narrow, tree lined carriageways, vines and pastures and is clearly demonstrated in undulating land that has been extensively cleared for agricultural and viticultural activities.

Some vineyards contain supporting tourist uses, such as a cellar door, tourist and visitor accommodation, a restaurant or cafe, an artisan food and drink premises, a farm gate premises, or gardens. These smaller-scale tourist related developments are vital to the overall economic viability of agriculture, which occurs within the Cessnock Vineyards District.

The majority of supporting tourist uses that occur on Important Agricultural Land do not dominate the overall use of the land and are of a scale and density that is proportionate and compatible with the principal agricultural use of the land. However, some tourist developments that have occurred within the Cessnock Vineyards District are less compatible with agriculture and in some instances comprise the principal commercial use of the land, reducing the availability of land in the Cessnock Vineyards District for agricultural activities.



**Figure 9:** Existing land use zones



# Important Environmental Land

The Cessnock Vineyards District lies within the highly diverse Cessnock-Kurri vegetation region, home to nearly 800 native plant species across 37 vegetation communities. Notably, areas such as Lovedale and Around Hermitage provide potential habitat for the threatened Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater, both under significant pressure from urban, industrial, and infrastructure development in the Lower Hunter.

Despite the broader region’s ecological richness, native vegetation within the Vineyards District is fragmented and has been significantly impacted by decades of agricultural use. A number of creek lines in vineyard and farming areas have been cleared and overrun by fast-growing species like *Casuarina glauca*, resulting in dense, single-species stands.

Remnant patches of native vegetation still support local biodiversity and contribute to the district’s environmental character. However, these pockets are mostly isolated from each other and from larger ecological assets like Werakata National Park and Pokolbin State Forest. Vegetated waterways and corridors throughout the district vary in ecological health, function, and visual appeal, but remain important for sustaining biodiversity.

The areas containing important biodiversity are shown in Figure 10, and were identified using a combination of data sources, including the corridor connectivity analysis and watercourse/streambank layers from the Environmental Lands Study for the Cessnock LGA, prepared by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW)..

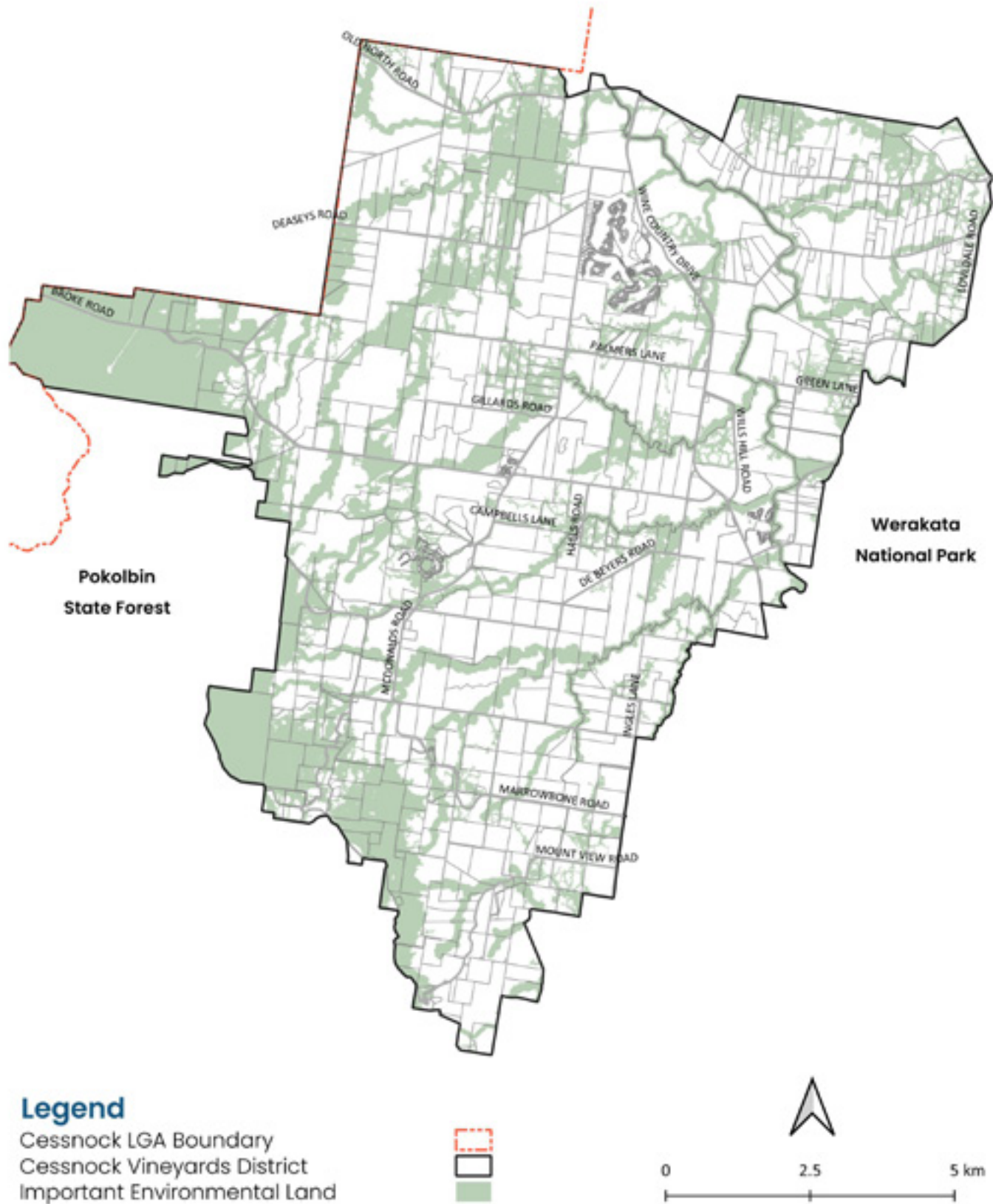
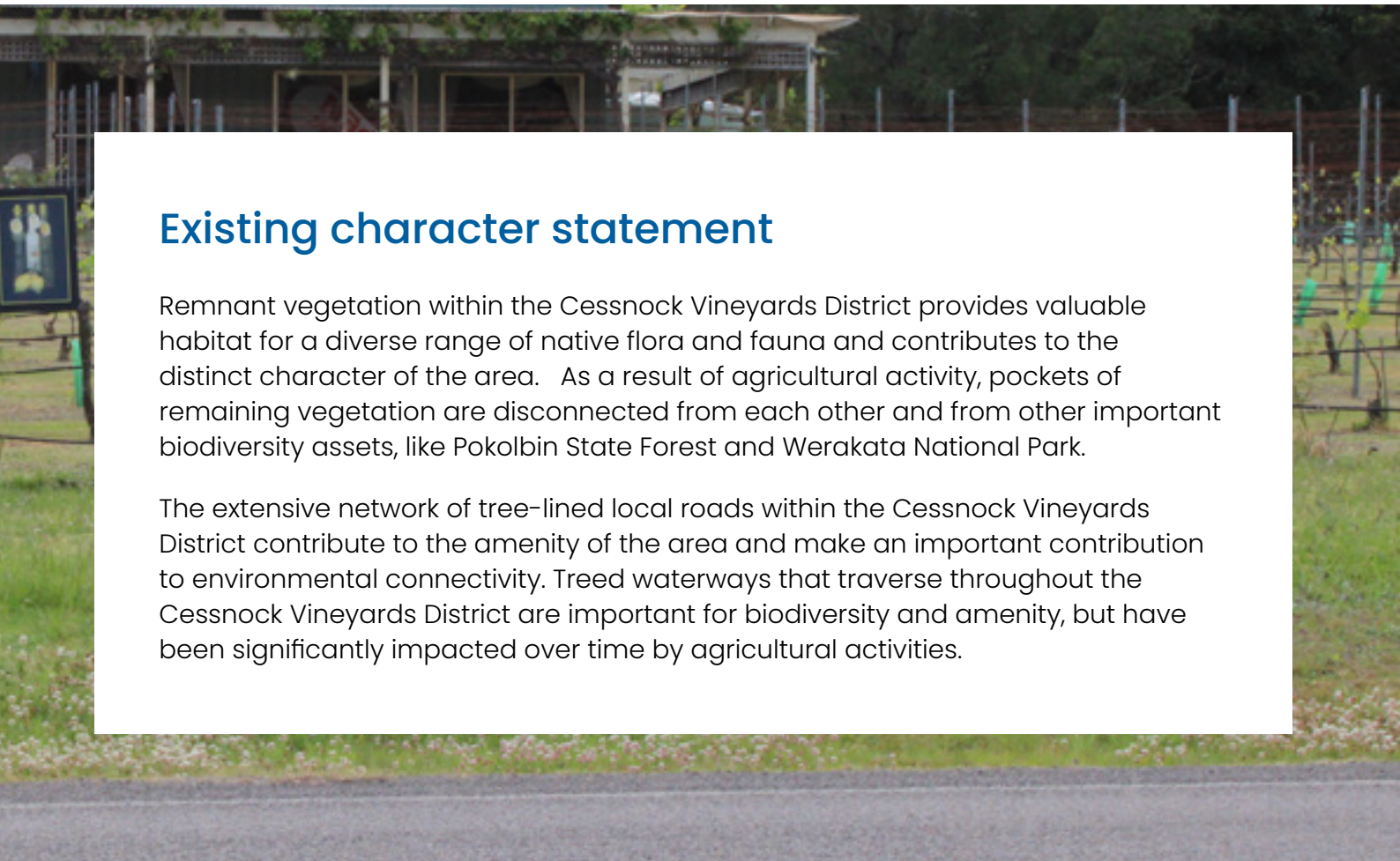


Figure 10: Important environmental land



## Existing character statement

Remnant vegetation within the Cessnock Vineyards District provides valuable habitat for a diverse range of native flora and fauna and contributes to the distinct character of the area. As a result of agricultural activity, pockets of remaining vegetation are disconnected from each other and from other important biodiversity assets, like Pokolbin State Forest and Werakata National Park.

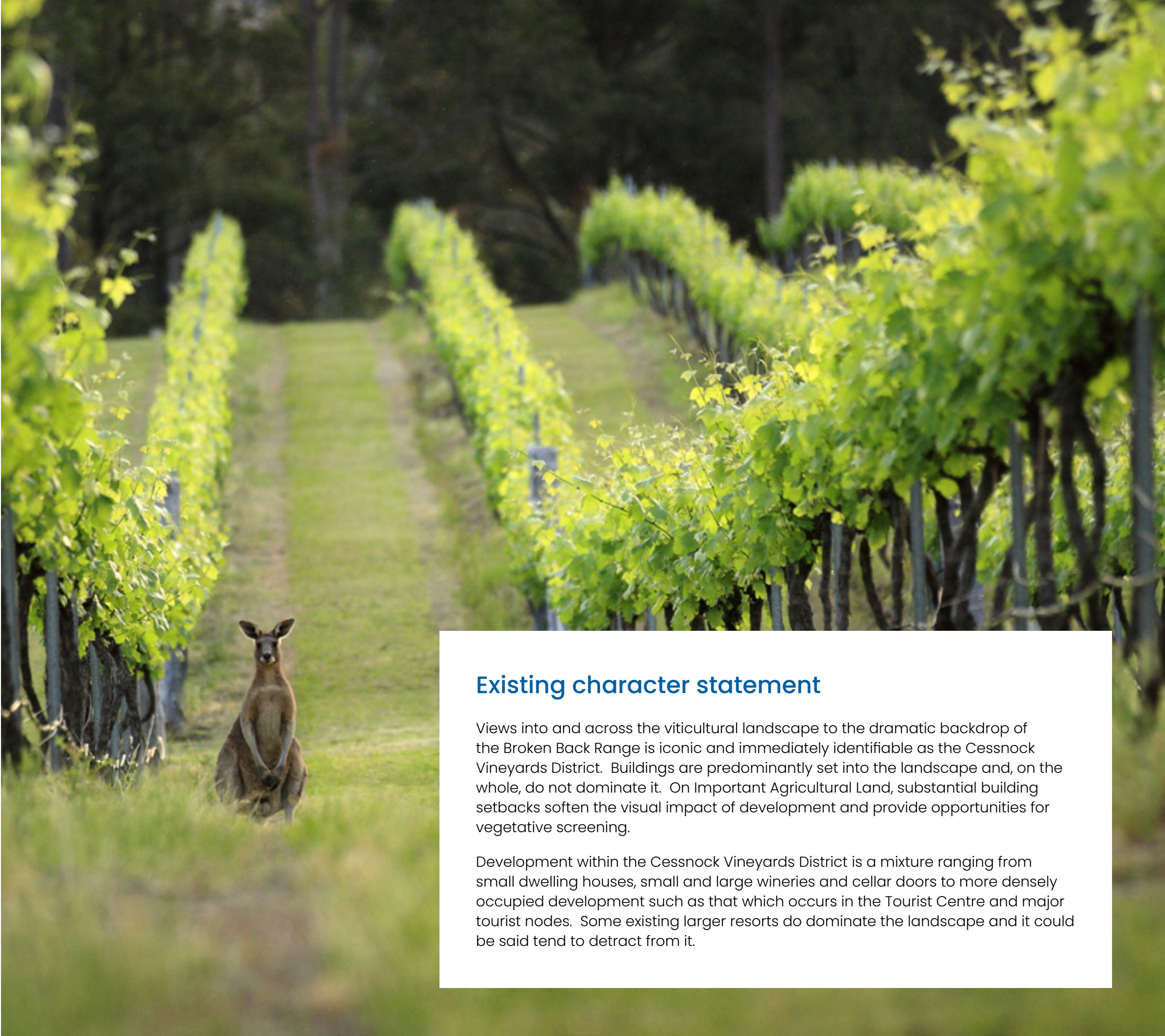
The extensive network of tree-lined local roads within the Cessnock Vineyards District contribute to the amenity of the area and make an important contribution to environmental connectivity. Treed waterways that traverse throughout the Cessnock Vineyards District are important for biodiversity and amenity, but have been significantly impacted over time by agricultural activities.

## Visually Sensitive Land

The density of operational vineyards makes the Cessnock Vineyards District quite distinct to other rural land in the Hunter region. Views into and across the viticultural landscape to the dramatic backdrop of the Broken Back Range is iconic and is immediately identifiable as the Cessnock Vineyards District. The visually sensitive land of the Vineyards District is composed of the topography, the agricultural land, the native vegetation, the dramatic and iconic ranges, and the mix of historic and modern buildings and structures.

Visually, the built form in the Vineyards District is a mixture ranging from small dwelling houses, small and large wineries and cellar doors, to more densely occupied development, such as that which occurs within the Tourist Centre and within the established major tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes. Overwhelmingly, the built form is set into the landscape and, on the whole, does not dominate it.

Buildings of the early to late 19th century and early 20th century, which are usually associated with mixed farming, remain and are important reminders of early settlement and vineyards. These buildings are of increasing interest to visitors and the community alike and are also important landmark structures throughout the Cessnock Vineyards District.



### Existing character statement

Views into and across the viticultural landscape to the dramatic backdrop of the Broken Back Range is iconic and immediately identifiable as the Cessnock Vineyards District. Buildings are predominantly set into the landscape and, on the whole, do not dominate it. On Important Agricultural Land, substantial building setbacks soften the visual impact of development and provide opportunities for vegetative screening.

Development within the Cessnock Vineyards District is a mixture ranging from small dwelling houses, small and large wineries and cellar doors to more densely occupied development such as that which occurs in the Tourist Centre and major tourist nodes. Some existing larger resorts do dominate the landscape and it could be said tend to detract from it.

# Tourist Centre and Major Integrated Tourist and Accommodation Nodes

Several areas within the Cessnock Vineyards District contain a scale and density of development that constitutes a major tourist, infrastructure or accommodation node. The extent of non-agricultural development within these major nodes has largely rendered them unusable for any commercial scale, intensive plant agriculture.

Presently, there are four major tourist nodes in the Cessnock Vineyards District, as described below. These major tourist nodes can be characterised as being predominantly an integrated tourist node, an accommodation node, or a tourist retail node.

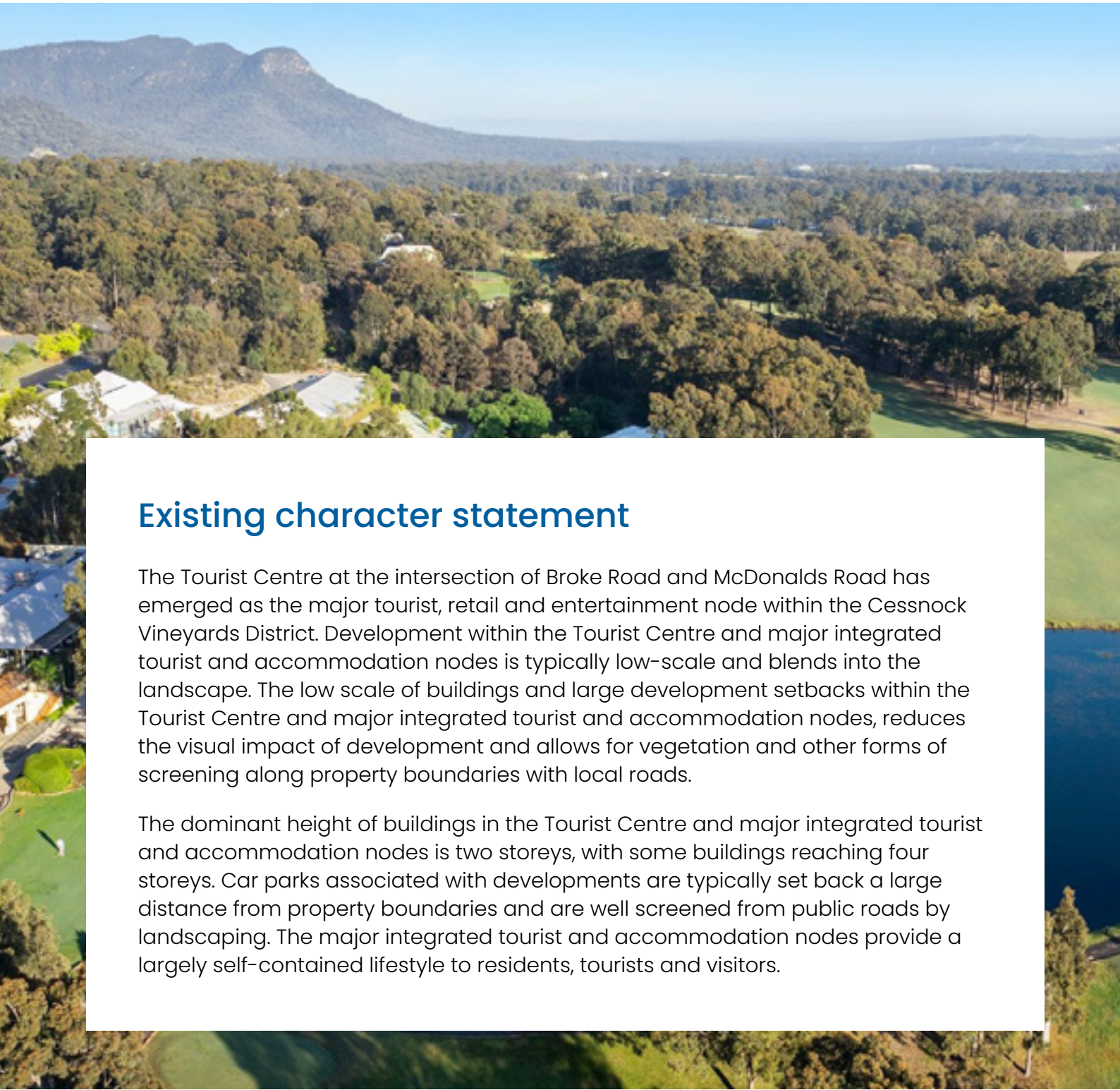
- The Vintage development comprises a major integrated tourist node in the north of the Cessnock Vineyards District. This node contains a combination of tourist accommodation, associated facilities, and small lot housing, planned around a substantial recreation development. The Vintage has served the broader Vineyards District as a focal point for tourism infrastructure and small-lot residential development. This node has played a critical role in concentrating non-agricultural land uses within well-serviced precincts, thereby alleviating development pressure elsewhere in the District. By enabling appropriately scaled small-lot housing and tourism-related activities in defined areas, they contribute to preserving the rural character and agricultural viability of the surrounding landscape. The Vintage Development is subject to site-specific development controls in the Cessnock Development Control Plan 2010, and certain additional permitted uses may be carried out in accordance with the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011*.

- Rydges Resort and Cypress Lakes Resort are considered major accommodation nodes within the context of the Cessnock Vineyards District. These major accommodation nodes provide a self-contained lifestyle to residents, tourists and visitors and have limited additional development capacity. Development within these major accommodation nodes is subject to development controls that apply more broadly to the Cessnock Vineyards District.. Certain additional permitted uses may be carried out within Rydges Resort and Cypress Lakes Resort in accordance with the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011*.
- Land at the intersection of Broke and McDonalds roads has evolved as a major Tourist Centre in its own right. As opposed to the other major nodes within the Cessnock Vineyards District, which are singular developments, the Tourist Centre has emerged as a result of multiple, complex, private developments in relatively close proximity to one another. The Tourist Centre is serviced by reticulated water, is located at the crossroads of two of the principal north-south and east west local road corridors, and is located at the heart of the Cessnock Vineyards District. Uses occurring in the Tourist Centre are predominantly tourist retail oriented, but other uses include accommodation, restaurants, cafés, a pub and wineries. From time-to-time, several properties within the Tourist Centre host major functions or major events. Development within the Tourist Centre is subject to controls that apply more broadly to the Cessnock Vineyards District. Some sites within the Tourist Centre are permitted to carry out additional permitted uses in accordance with the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011*.

Lovedale Farm is an emerging major integrated tourist node in the north of the Cessnock Vineyards District. Lovedale Farm is anticipated to contain a combination of tourist accommodation, associated facilities and small lot housing set about a substantial recreation development. Lovedale Farm is to be carried out in

accordance with the Concept Master Plan for the site. Certain additional permitted uses may be carried out within Lovedale Farm in accordance with the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011*.

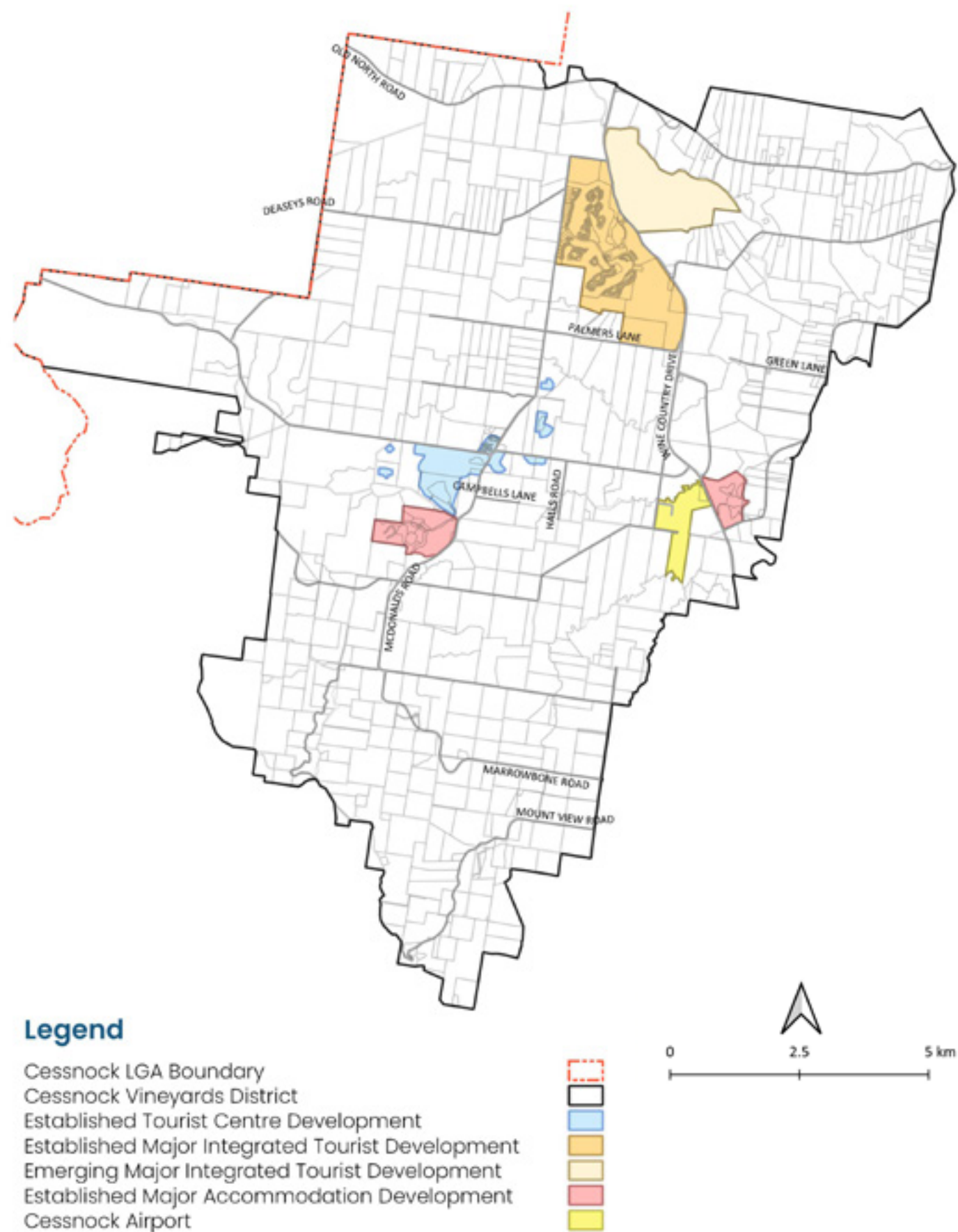
The location of the Tourist Centre and major integrated tourist, accommodation and infrastructure nodes is shown in Figure 11.



## Existing character statement

The Tourist Centre at the intersection of Broke Road and McDonalds Road has emerged as the major tourist, retail and entertainment node within the Cessnock Vineyards District. Development within the Tourist Centre and major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes is typically low-scale and blends into the landscape. The low scale of buildings and large development setbacks within the Tourist Centre and major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes, reduces the visual impact of development and allows for vegetation and other forms of screening along property boundaries with local roads.

The dominant height of buildings in the Tourist Centre and major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes is two storeys, with some buildings reaching four storeys. Car parks associated with developments are typically set back a large distance from property boundaries and are well screened from public roads by landscaping. The major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes provide a largely self-contained lifestyle to residents, tourists and visitors.



**Figure 11:** Existing Tourist Centre development and major tourist nodes





# CESSNOCK AIRPORT



## Cessnock Airport

Cessnock Airport is a registered aerodrome owned and operated by Cessnock City Council. As a significant community asset, it plays a vital role as a transport infrastructure node within the Local Government Area, contributing to regional connectivity and economic activity. Originally constructed on Commonwealth-controlled land and formally known as Pokolbin Aerodrome, the site was referred to as RAAF Base Pokolbin during the Second World War. At that time, it featured two runways, one running north-south and the other east-west—with a connecting grass strip. The Airport was renamed in 1948 to Cessnock Airport, and in 1992, the Airport was gifted to Cessnock City Council by the Commonwealth Government.

Cessnock Airport supports a wide range of aviation uses, including flying schools, adventure and scenic flights, charter services, airport and medical transfers, recreational flying, and aircraft maintenance. The Airport also houses the Cessnock Visitor Information Centre. In the 2024/2025 financial year, the

Airport recorded its highest-ever levels of passenger activity for scheduled charter and helicopter operations. A total of 2,587 passengers were carried on standard charter services, including Little Wings and Angel Flight. Helicopter operations accounted for 2,490 passengers. While private flight activity is not routinely recorded for passenger numbers, Council recorded 1,430 flight arrivals in this category. Using a conservative estimate of 1.5 persons per aircraft, this equates to approximately 2,145 individuals. In total, an estimated 7,222 passengers and pilots passed through the Airport during the year, excluding student pilot training flights. In the same period, Cessnock Airport recorded 59,764 aircraft movements, a notable increase in activity compared to previous years.

Cessnock Airport is available 24/7 and features a sealed runway aligned in a 17/35 direction, measuring 1,097 metres in length and 23-metre-wide sealed centre section. Required Navigation Performance (RNP) instrument approach procedures are available for both Runway 17 and Runway

35. The runway has a strength rating of PCRI34/F/C/X/T and is equipped with pilot-activated lighting, including Precision Approach Path Indicator (PAPI) lighting and a VHF aviation weather information service.

A full-length parallel taxiway, TWY A, 8.5 metres wide, runs along the western side of the runway and connects via four runway intersections. TWY C is also accessed from TWY A which provides access to the southern hangars. The primary operations apron is located on the eastern side and is equipped with floodlighting, as well as taxiway and apron edge lighting. The eastern apron measures 100 metres in width and 83 metres in depth, and includes three dedicated Code B aircraft parking bays and two Code B helicopter landing pads. Helicopter and fixed wing bush fire operations are conducted from the Western Side of the Airport, utilising the Western apron and natural grass surfaces.

Jet A-1 and Avgas refueling bowzers are also located on the eastern apron. Additional parking is available on both sealed and natural surface aprons on the eastern and western sides of the Airport.

Access to the Airport is available from both the eastern and western sides. The main

eastern access is shared with the Visitor Information Centre off Wine Country Drive, while western access is provided via De Beyers Road, off Broke Road. Both sides of the Airport are now serviced by water, sewerage, and power, following the \$8.8 million Cessnock Airport Upgrade Project completed in 2023. Prior to this upgrade, the western precinct relied on water tanks and on-site sewerage management systems. The Airport currently accommodates 26 buildings, including two terminal structures, with a variety of hangar styles.

In 2020, Cessnock City Council adopted a Strategic Plan for the Airport to guide its development as an aerodrome business hub contributing to regional economic growth. The Airport's central location within the Vineyards District and its existing diverse user base give it a strong competitive advantage. To ensure sustainable growth, Planning Directions have been developed for the Cessnock Airport Precinct as part of this Vineyards District Strategy. These Directions aim to safeguard and prioritise aviation operations, support compatible commercial and light industrial uses, and prevent conflicts with aviation activities. A key objective is to encourage development that aligns with the long-term viability of the

Airport and its future expansion potential.

Land surrounding the Airport is subject to planning and noise exposure constraints. Development within the 20 to 25 ANEF (Australian Noise Exposure Forecast) contour must meet the requirements of Australian Standard 2021–2000 for aircraft noise intrusion, including interior noise level compliance. Where the ANEF contour reaches 20 or more, development such as educational establishments, childcare centres, hospitals, residential accommodation, places of worship, libraries, and similar uses must be carefully assessed against the Australian Standard. For areas with an ANEF of 25 or higher, restrictions extend to hotels, motels, hostels, office premises, business premises, and retail uses. Residential encroachment must be strictly controlled on land immediately adjoining the Airport Precinct, and subdivision for residential purposes will not be permitted within the precinct to prevent land use conflict.

The Hunter Regional Plan 2041 recognises the strategic importance of local airports in supporting tourism and broader economic development across the region. While these outcomes are encouraged, land use proposals within one kilometre of the Airport boundary must be carefully assessed to ensure alignment with the Airport's long-term strategic directions and to avoid potential conflicts with its current or future operations. This includes the need to protect airspace and the RNAV 17/35 flight paths, in consultation with CASA and Airservices Australia, with appropriate building height restrictions applied as necessary.

A Master Plan will be prepared for the Cessnock Airport Precinct, which is broadly considered to be the existing Airport land and properties adjoining the Airport to the south (see Figure 12). Land to the north-west of the existing Airport, which has important



environmental and scenic amenity values, has been excluded from the indicative precinct area, noting that the precise extent of the Airport Precinct will be defined through the master planning process and will include both the existing core operational area and adjoining influence areas critical for strategic growth.

The Master Plan will guide land use, infrastructure investment, zoning, and development sequencing while incorporating aviation safeguarding measures and supporting compatible economic uses. It will reflect the Airport's role as a gateway to Wine Country, with particular consideration given to its interface with Wine Country Drive. In the future, key transport infrastructure, such as the Lovedale Link, will improve access to the Airport and reinforce its regional gateway function. Connectivity to surrounding centres, such as Huntlee and Cessnock, and the Vineyards District will also be enhanced through improved active and public transport links.

The Master Plan is to explore opportunities to levy new development to fairly contribute to the upgrade, maintenance and profitability of Cessnock Airport. It will establish an equitable framework for the provision and funding of supporting infrastructure, ensuring that development contributions are proportionate to the benefits derived and that infrastructure delivery aligns with the logical staging of development. Opportunities for public-private partnerships in infrastructure provision will also be explored. The Master Plan will ensure that neither Council nor the community is placed at economic loss due to new development within the Airport Precinct, and that all new development contributes appropriately to shared infrastructure and Airport operations through an equitable and profitable charging system.

## Future land use directions for the Cessnock Airport Precinct

### 1. Prioritise Aviation Operations

Aviation-related uses must have primacy within the Airport Precinct. All land use planning must protect and support the ongoing operation and potential expansion of aviation activities, including general aviation, emergency services, and events.

### 2. Protect Airspace and Flight Path Operations

Collaborate with CASA and Airservices Australia to establish and enforce height restrictions aligned with mapped RNAV 17 and 35 flight paths. Ensure all developments maintain safe and obstruction-free airspace for current and future Airport operations.

### 3. Enable Strategic Expansion of Airport Infrastructure

The Master Plan for the Airport should specifically include analysis and investigation of proposed runway lengthening and other infrastructure enhancements to ensure long-term operational efficiency and capacity. No development shall inhibit the potential to intensify or expand aviation infrastructure within the 'operational area' to be defined by the Master Plan.

### 4. No Residential Subdivision

Prohibit subdivision of the Airport Precinct for residential purposes to avoid residential encroachment on Airport operations and preserve the long-term operational integrity of the Airport Precinct.

### 5. Encourage Security in Land Tenure for Airport Business Development

The Master Plan for the Airport Precinct should explore opportunities to provide greater security in land tenure for aviation-compatible uses (e.g. hangars, aviation workshops), generating revenue for Council and enhancing precinct efficiency.

### 6. Diversify Economic and Employment Uses

The Master Plan for the Airport should explore and enhance the implied nexus between the Airport, the Visitor Centre, heritage vineyards, and key tourism accommodation nodes in the immediate area, leveraging their collective appeal and the Airport's role as a gateway. Aviation education and training institutions should continue to be encouraged and facilitated as a key economic driver within the Airport Precinct. In addition, complementary additional permitted uses, such as aviation-related light industries, specialised retail, tourism, accommodation, and wine tourism should be explored as a component of the master planning exercise, subject to their alignment with the overall directions for the Airport Precinct.

### 7. Enhance Regional Connectivity and Transport Access

Improve active transport and public transport connections between the Airport Precinct, Huntlee, Anvil Creek, Cessnock town centre, and the Vineyards District. Leverage strategic infrastructure such as the Lovedale Link to boost airport accessibility and its role as a regional gateway, recognising the strategic connection of Lovedale and Wine Country Drive and the implications of future enhanced links from the south and their effects on the precinct.

### 8. Maintain and Expand Visitor Centre Uses

Retain the Council's Visitor Centre and expand its functions to support food and drink, retail, accommodation, and tourism services that promote the Vineyards District and generate revenue for Council.

### 9. Establish Gateway Identity and Rural Interface Design

The land between the Airport and Wine Country Drive is identified as a key nodal point, providing an anchoring activity that unifies the Airport, Visitor Centre, and other attractions. This strategic positioning will draw visitors and fully leverage existing infrastructure and Council's investment. In master planning this key nodal point, rural interface areas should be developed in a way that mitigates impact on the rural character, while maintaining aviation compliance and scenic amenity.

### 10. Protect and Value Key Heritage and Landscape Assets

Ensure the Master Plan recognises the importance, value, and retention of the adjoining heritage vineyard and other significant landscape features within and adjacent to the Airport Precinct, ensuring their integration into future planning.

### 11. Provide Certainty and Enable Development Pathways

Establish clear and consistent planning pathways for development within the Airport Precinct and its surrounding strategic influence area. This will support future compliance, reduce planning risks, and provide greater certainty for investment. This will include applying appropriate zoning, setting development standards, and defining assessment criteria that are proportionate to the scale and type of proposed land uses.

### 12. Equitable Contribution and Infrastructure Provision

Establish with the Master Plan an equitable framework for the provision and funding of supporting infrastructure, ensuring that development contributions are proportionate to the benefits derived and that infrastructure delivery aligns with the logical staging of development. Opportunities for public-private partnerships in infrastructure provision should be explored.

The following strategic actions have been identified to enhance economic opportunities for the Cessnock Airport Precinct and manage development on adjoining land to minimise conflict and potential encroachment on Airport operations.

### Action 1: Prepare a Master Plan for the Cessnock Airport Precinct

Council will prepare a Master Plan for the Cessnock Airport Precinct that aligns with the Planning Directions outlined in this Strategy. The Plan will recognise the Airport's strategic role as a regional gateway to Wine Country and will guide future development to support this function.

Development between the Airport and Wine Country Drive should be sensitively sited and scaled to maintain the area's rural character and protect important view corridors to the Broken Back Mountain Range. This area also presents an opportunity to establish a strategic activity node that unifies and strengthens connections between key assets, including the Airport, the Visitor Information Centre, major tourism accommodation, heritage vineyards, and surrounding land uses. Leveraging these assets in a coordinated way will support tourism, stimulate economic activity, and enhance the region's identity as a premium visitor destination.

The Master Plan will explore opportunities to levy development to fairly contribute to the upgrade, maintenance, and long-term financial sustainability of Cessnock Airport. An equitable framework will be established for the provision and funding of supporting infrastructure, ensuring contributions are proportionate to the benefits derived, with infrastructure delivery aligned to the logical staging of development. The Plan will seek to ensure that development delivers a net economic benefit to Council, the Airport, and the broader Cessnock community, and will consider opportunities for public-private partnerships in infrastructure provision.

Future upgrades, including the Lovedale Link

and improved active and public transport connections, will enhance access to the Airport and strengthen links with nearby centres such as Huntlee, the Cessnock Centre, and the broader Vineyards District.

### Action 2: Review local planning provisions to support future Airport growth and investment potential

To support the future growth and investment potential of Cessnock Airport, a review of the Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011 and the Cessnock Development Control Plan 2010 should be undertaken. The review should focus on facilitating additional, aviation-compatible uses that align with the Planning Directions for the Cessnock Airport Precinct, outlined in this Strategy. Ideally, the review should be supported by an economic or land use feasibility analysis.

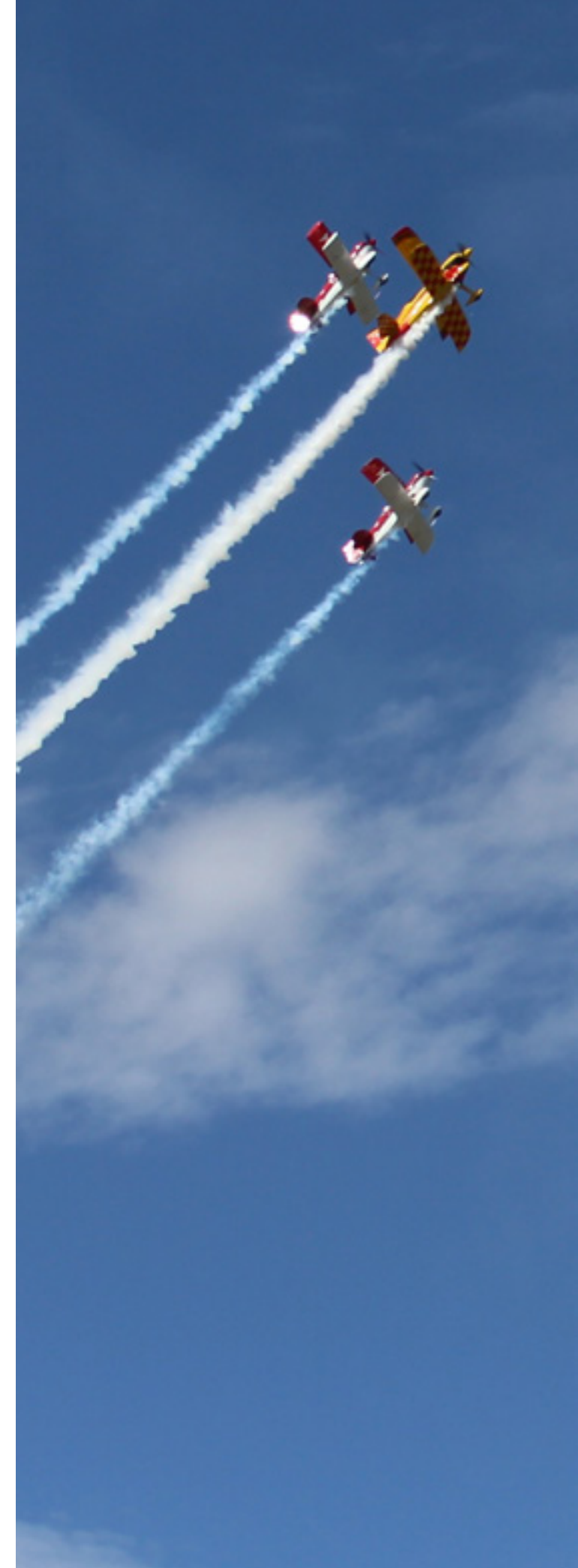
The review should enable the inclusion of complementary uses within the Airport Precinct, such as light industrial, specialised retail, tourism, accommodation, and wine tourism, provided they align with the vision for the Airport Precinct and are subject to master planning. These uses should be carefully considered to ensure they enhance economic activity while not compromising the core aviation functions of the Airport.

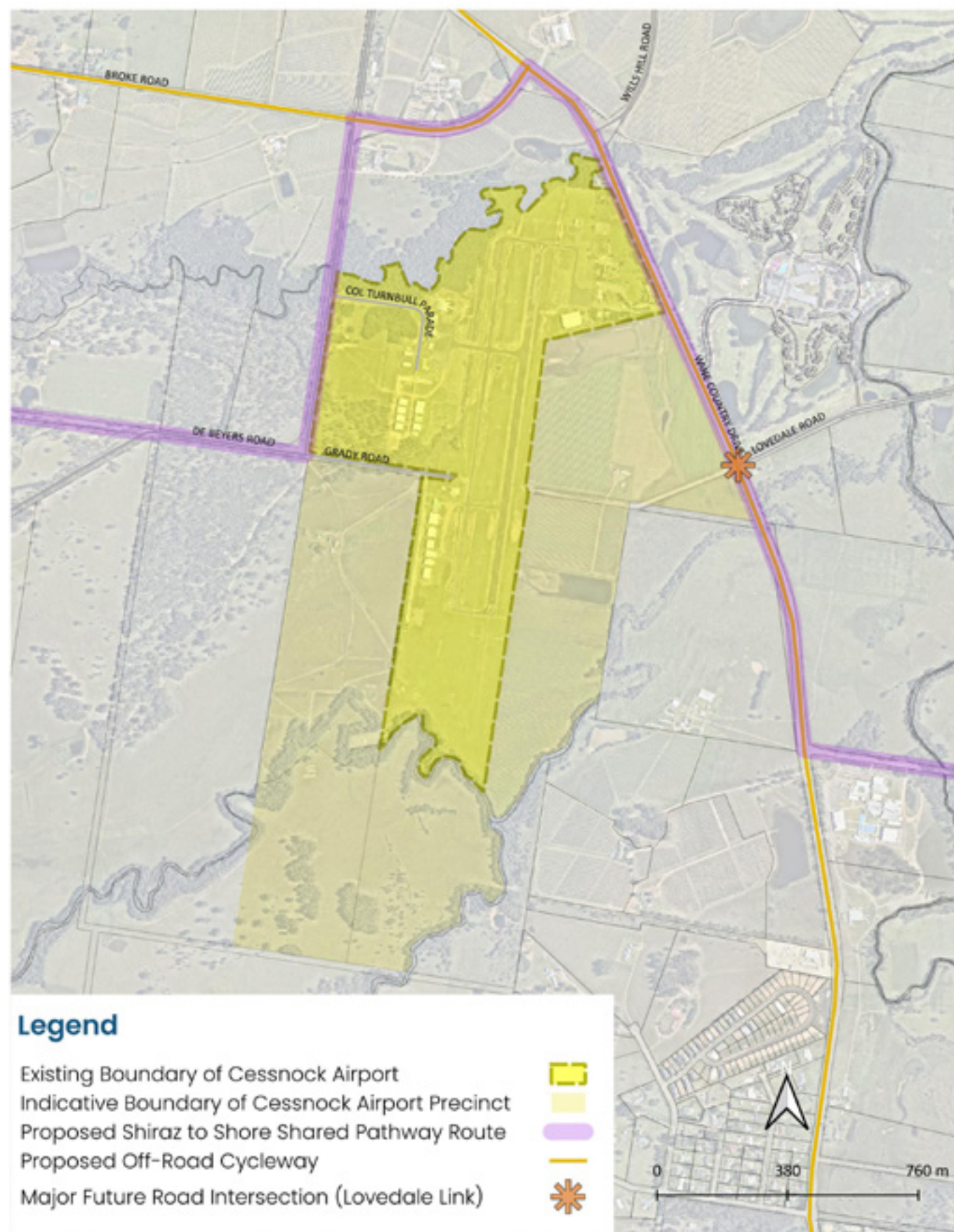
The review should also establish clear planning pathways for development within the Airport Precinct and its strategic influence area. This includes setting appropriate zoning, land use and development standards that allow for an appropriate scale of development. These measures will minimise planning risk, provide investment certainty, and encourage development that supports both aviation and broader regional economic growth.

### Action 3: Establish a development buffer to the Cessnock Airport Precinct

The HRP2041 recognises the strategic importance of local airports in supporting tourism and regional economic development. To protect this function and ensure the continued viability of Cessnock Airport, land use proposals within one kilometre of the Airport boundary must be carefully assessed. This is to ensure that any new development does not conflict with current Airport operations or limit future expansion opportunities. In particular, proposals that do not principally support aviation activities, such as permanent residential development or incompatible commercial uses, will not be supported.

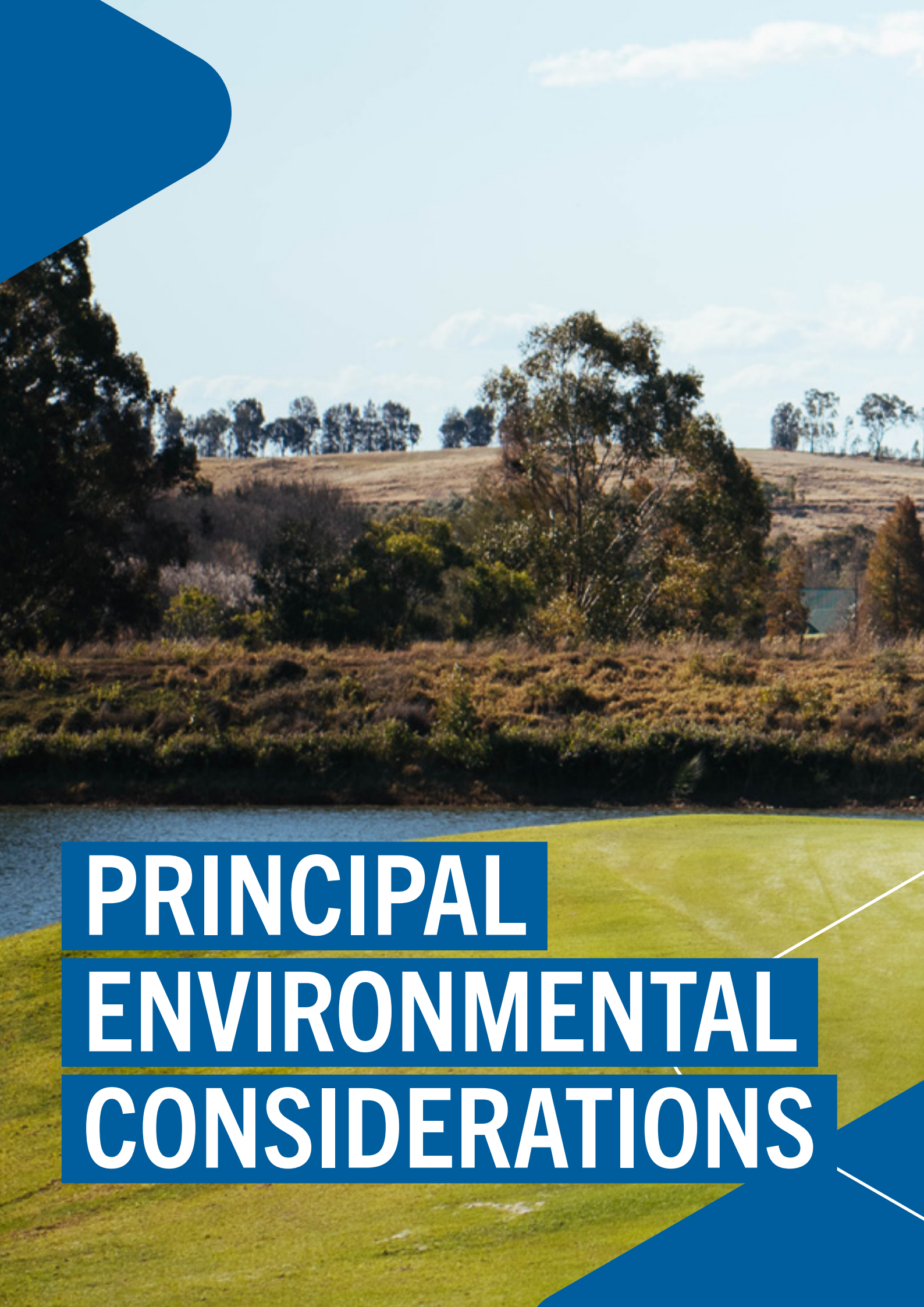
A Development Control Plan for the Cessnock Vineyards District should be prepared, preserving land immediately adjoining the existing Airport boundary for potential Airport expansion in line with the Airport Planning Directions and forthcoming masterplan. To this end, development within the Airport Precinct will be strictly regulated to safeguard the Airport's future operations. In addition, planning proposals and development within one kilometre of the Airport boundary must be carefully assessed to ensure they do not impede current or future Airport related uses, minimise noise impacts, and avoid potential encroachment. This will help to maintain the Airport's functionality while preventing conflict between aviation activities and incompatible land uses.





**Figure 12:** Cessnock Airport





# PRINCIPAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

## Principal environmental considerations

The principal environmental considerations relevant to the Cessnock Vineyards District are discussed below. However, a more comprehensive assessment of environmental constraints will need to be investigated should a planning proposal be received by Council in relation to land in the Cessnock Vineyards District.

### Biodiversity

The Cessnock Vineyards District is situated within the ecologically significant Cessnock-Kurri vegetation region, which supports nearly 800 native plant species across 37 distinct vegetation communities. This landscape forms part of a broader network of high conservation value in the Lower Hunter and contributes to regional ecological diversity and resilience. Local areas such as Lovedale and Around Hermitage are particularly important as they offer potentially recoverable habitat for the critically endangered Swift Parrot and Regent Honeyeater; two species that have experienced substantial population decline due to urban expansion, infrastructure development, and habitat fragmentation. These species rely on the preservation and restoration of native vegetation to survive, making their presence a key consideration in future land use planning.

While the broader region retains ecological diversity, the native vegetation within the Vineyards District itself has been significantly altered by decades of agricultural use. Much of the landscape is now fragmented, with remnant patches of native vegetation scattered across the district, often disconnected from each other and from key biodiversity areas like Werakata National Park and Pokolbin State Forest. Creek lines in intensively farmed areas have been heavily cleared, with fast-growing, low-diversity vegetation such as *Casuarina glauca* establishing dense stands that reduce habitat quality. Despite these impacts, the

remaining vegetation provides vital refuge for native flora and fauna and plays a role in preserving the district's environmental character. Tree-lined rural roads, vegetated waterways, and existing landscape corridors contribute to environmental connectivity and present valuable opportunities for targeted rehabilitation and biodiversity enhancement.

Future planning within the Vineyards District should give due consideration to the protection of land with high environmental value. While development pressures will continue, it is important that planning proposals seek to balance growth with the preservation of biodiversity and natural systems. The use of environmental conservation zones may assist in achieving this balance, and should be considered where appropriate, in line with the HRP2041, State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs) and relevant Ministerial Directions. These tools can help ensure that ecological values are maintained alongside evolving land use.

In addition, planning and land use change in the Vineyards District must align with the NSW Water Quality Objectives (WQOs), which set benchmarks for the environmental values and long-term health of NSW's surface waters. Future planning proposals should support improvements in catchment health and contribute to achieving these objectives over time, with particular attention to key watercourses such as Black Creek and its tributaries.



## Bushfire

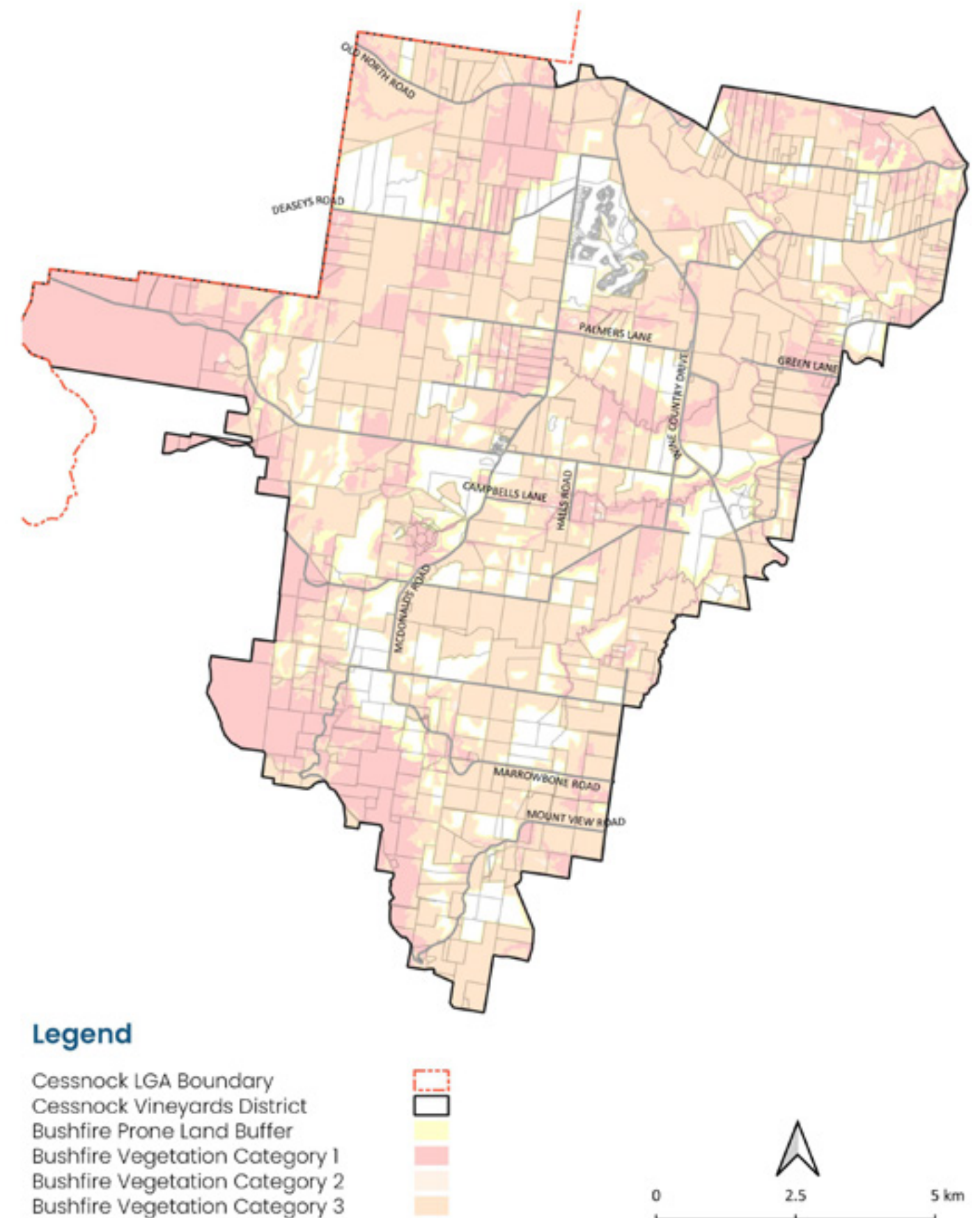
The majority of land within the Cessnock Vineyards District is categorised as bushfire prone. While the predominant bushfire risk is associated with Category 3 Vegetation (grassland), pockets of heavily treed areas comprising Category 1 Vegetation pose the greatest risk to life and property. Areas of planted vineyards and cleared areas containing tourist development typically present no bushfire risk at all. All new development on bushfire prone land is required to address the NSW Rural Fire Service guidelines, Planning for Bushfire Protection.

The capacity of land in the Cessnock Vineyards District and of existing public services and infrastructure to support development on bushfire prone land is an important planning consideration. Some examples of inappropriate development on bushfire prone land are developments that:

- Require substantial public infrastructure upgrades; or
- Will place additional, substantial pressure on emergency services; or
- Are likely to result in substantial environmental and/or scenic impacts due to land clearing for associated infrastructure or asset protection zones.

Development for tourist and other non-agricultural forms of development should not occur on land designated bushfire Vegetation Category 1, and must be carefully planned if proposed on land containing Category 2 or 3 Vegetation or on land within a Bushfire Prone Land Buffer.

Proposals will be required to demonstrate that bush fire risk is capable of being addressed without the need for land clearing or public infrastructure upgrades or augmentation. Future proposals will also need to demonstrate that the land is capable of supporting the scale and density of the land uses without impacts to scenic amenity or additional pressure on emergency services in the event of a natural disaster.



**Figure 13:** Bushfire prone land

# Flooding

Substantial areas within the Cessnock Vineyards District are subject to flooding during significant events, such as the 1 in 100-year flood or greater. Development in these areas is tightly regulated under the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011* and the Cessnock Development Control Plan 2010.

The *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011* establishes that development consent must not be granted to development on land within the Flood Planning Area unless the consent authority is satisfied the development:

- Is compatible with the flood function and behaviour on the land, and
- Will not adversely affect flood behaviour in a way that results in detrimental increases in the potential flood affectation of other development or properties, and
- Will not adversely affect the safe occupation and efficient evacuation of people or exceed the capacity of existing evacuation routes for the surrounding area in the event of a flood, and
- Incorporates appropriate measures to manage risk to life in the event of a flood, and
- Will not adversely affect the environment or cause avoidable erosion, siltation, destruction of riparian vegetation or a reduction in the stability of river banks or watercourses.

Additional special provisions in the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011* apply to sensitive and hazardous development proposed between the Flood Planning Level and the Probable Maximum Flood. To prevent additional risk to life and property, future proposals that seek to intensify the use of land within the flood planning area for non-agricultural purposes will not be supported.

The *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011* also includes Special Flood Considerations, specifying that development consent must not be granted unless the consent authority is satisfied that the proposal will not adversely affect flood behaviour, people’s safety or their ability to evacuate. The Special Flood Considerations apply to all development within flood-prone land that may pose a particular risk to life or require evacuation, regardless of location or type.

This broader application of the Special Flood Considerations is particularly important for the Vineyards District, where future residential and employment development may place vulnerable populations at risk, even outside the mapped FPA. Risks arise not only from inundation but also from flood-affected access routes, limited evacuation options, and the potential disruption of critical infrastructure and emergency services. Vulnerable groups, including the elderly, children, and those with limited mobility, are especially at risk where flood warning times are short or non-existent. Notably, the Vineyards District lacks formal flood warning gauges, and rapid flooding within the Black Creek catchment may leave little time for effective emergency response or evacuation.

Given these risks, all development proposals, whether sensitive, hazardous, or otherwise, must consider flood risk and the direct and indirect risks to life and evacuation. Intensification of land use in flood-affected or flood-access-dependent areas will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that people’s safety and their ability to evacuate, and environmental protections meet the strict standards of the *Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011*. This approach will ensure that flood risk management within the Vineyards District is both comprehensive and consistent with state and local planning objectives.

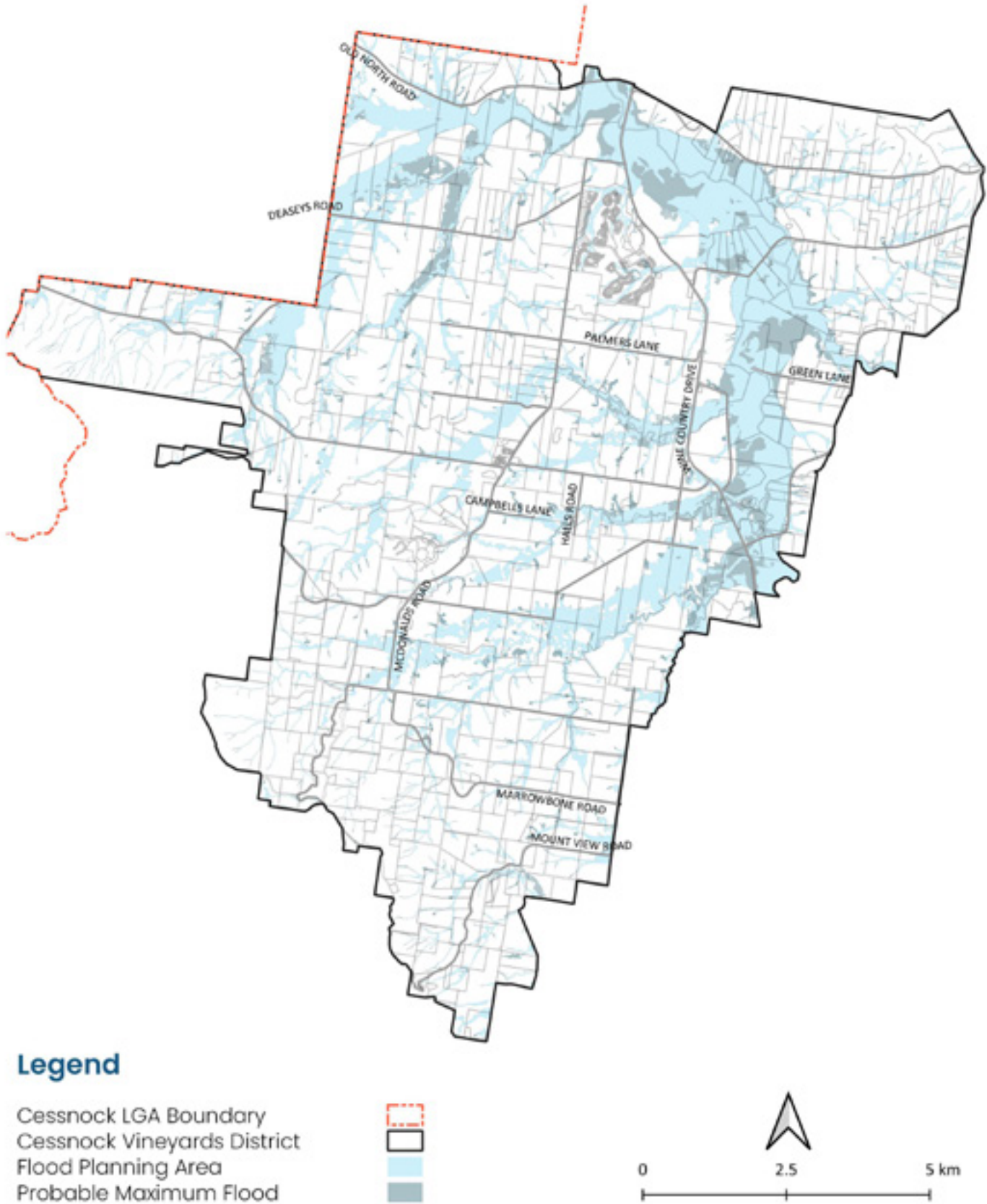


Figure 14: Flood prone land

# Contamination

Several potential sources of contamination have been identified within the Cessnock Vineyards District with risk ratings of low to moderate. The sources and risks are not considered to be a substantial constraint to future development within the area. The following potential sources of contamination have been identified:

- Fill that may have been imported to the site, including fill of unknown origin, for the development of historic and existing structures, dam construction and earthen contour banks.
- Contemporary and/or historic application of pesticides, herbicides and fungicides to vineyards and/or gardens.
- Aboveground fuel storage tanks and associated pipework / infrastructure. It was established that ASTs are present at the several site allotments for refueling of maintenance vehicles.

- Opportunistic dumping of fill and/or anthropogenic materials on roadsides and/or site allotments.
- Importation of fill and possible coal tar for existing public and private surfaced roads.
- Demolition of former site structures.
- Reuse and irrigation of treated effluent water.

Further investigations will be required where there is a proposed change of land use or activity, such as a new development, and should be undertaken in accordance with NEPC (2013) and the requirements of State Environmental Planning Policy (Resilience and Hazards) 2021.



# Heritage

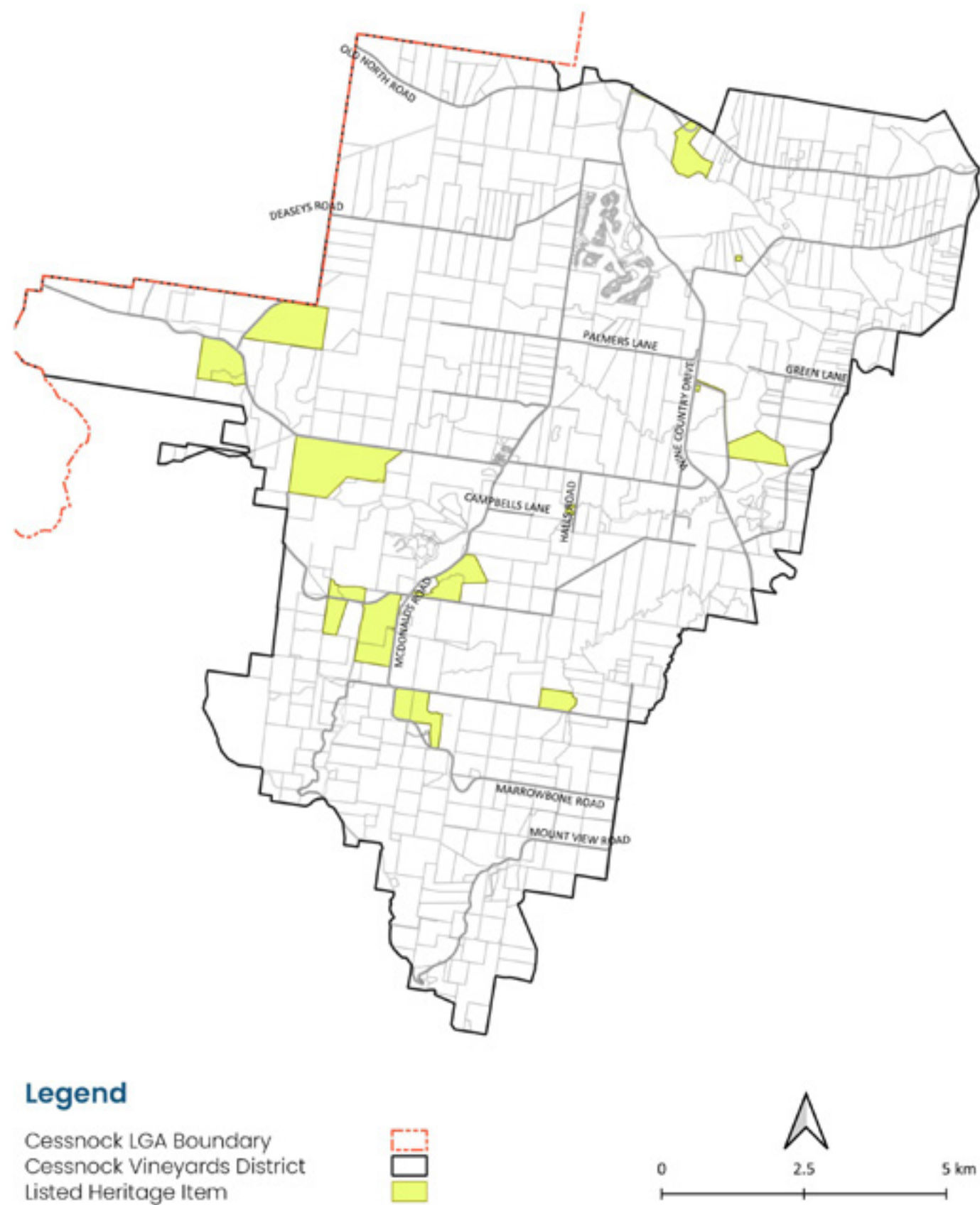
The Cessnock Vineyards District is a diverse yet cohesive cultural landscape that is predominantly characterised and defined by viticultural uses. The region is of historical, cultural, natural and biodiversity importance and significance not only to the Hunter region, but New South Wales and Australia.

Many of the vineyards have been in continuous production since the inception of NSW's wine industry, making the heritage vineyards and cultural landscapes of particular rarity. By the end of the 19th century, viticultural pursuits had migrated from the flood-prone plains of the Hunter River westwards towards the foothills of the Broken Back Range. The entire region was one of few locations in the world that escaped the phylloxera (vine louse) epidemic in the late 1800s, making the Cessnock Vineyards District of exceptional historical and biodiversity importance.

This importance and significance is recognised through the numerous individual heritage listings of vineyards and

interconnecting elements, which reflect the early historical development and viticultural use of the area. However, there are several significant vines and structures within the Cessnock Vineyards District, which are not adequately recognised in the existing legislative framework. Further work will be undertaken to identify the extent of these potential items and, where appropriate, those items will be acknowledged in Council's Local Environmental Plan.

The region is also recognised as having Indigenous cultural importance and significance, demonstrated in the density and frequency of recorded sites and places of Aboriginal cultural significance. In order to elevate and champion cultural tourism, greater emphasis is required on supporting and improving awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage and tourism potential within the Vineyards District. This will involve collaboration across stakeholders to support the development of cultural tourism and stronger networks between tourism and indigenous communities.



**Figure 15:** Listed heritage





# **PUBLIC OPEN SPACE, ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND TRANSPORT**

# Public open space, essential services and transport

## Recreation and open space

The vast majority of publicly accessible open space in the Cessnock Vineyards District is associated with privately-operated tourist developments, such as cellar door premises, wineries, tourist and visitor accommodation, taverns, restaurants and cafés. Pokolbin Park and land surrounding Pokolbin Community Hall, off McDonalds Road, are the only open spaces that are owned by Council in the Vineyards District. Council will not be seeking to expand the number of public parks within the Vineyards District, but instead will focus on improving walking and cycling connectivity within the Vineyards District and in particular connections to and from the Tourist Centre and other major tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes.

## Sewerage and water

The major tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes in the Cessnock Vineyards District are well serviced by public water infrastructure, and in some cases public sewer infrastructure. Land outside the major tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes is predominantly unserved.

A trunk sewer main extends from the Cessnock centre along Wine Country Drive to the major integrated tourist node north of Palmers Lane, containing The Vintage and proposed LITD. The water network carries on to Branxton (and beyond), and along Broke Road, from Wine Country Drive to the Broke and McDonalds Road Tourist Centre and Cypress Lakes Resort off McDonalds Road.

The public sewer and water network is not anticipated to expanded or upgraded in the

short or medium term. This means the scale and density of new development will need to consider the capacity of the existing network infrastructure. Alternatively new development will need to consider private onsite systems, where they are compatible with the agricultural character of the land, the scenic amenity, and where they do not introduce new land use conflicts.

The lack of public sewer and water infrastructure within the broader Vineyards District is a barrier to more intense forms of development. However, when viewed through a positive lens, this constraint reduces the potential for overdevelopment. Future proposals are required to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and should not require major upgrades or augmentation.

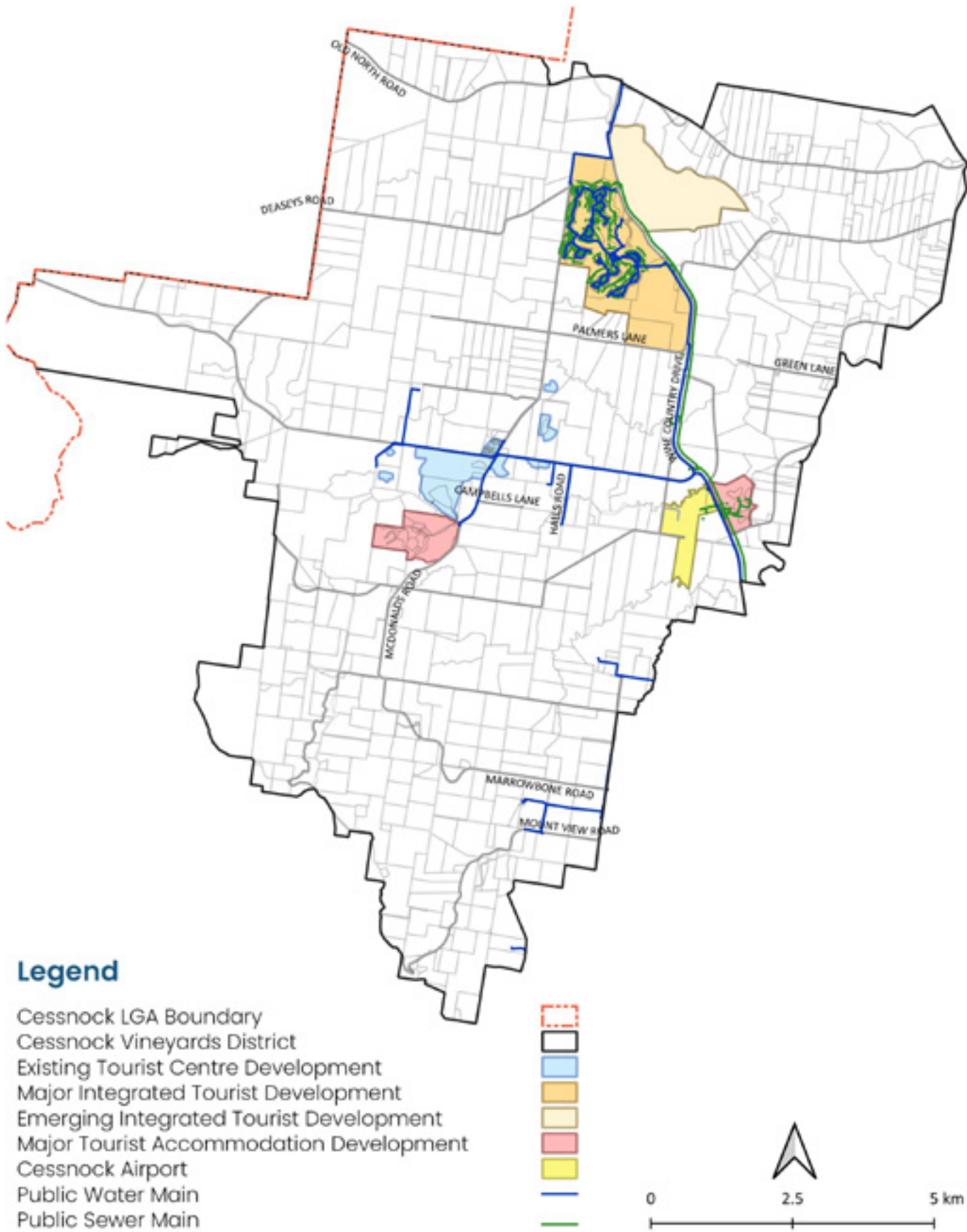


Figure 16: Water and sewerage



## Transport and connectivity

The Cessnock Vineyards District is well serviced by local and regional roads, although the condition of roads varies. Wine Country Drive is the principal north-south transport corridor within the Cessnock Vineyards District and connects the wine region to the Cessnock, Huntlee and Branxton centres, and to the broader region via the Hunter Expressway. Wine Country Drive is also an important scenic corridor, offering middling and long-distance views across the agricultural and environmental landscapes of the Vineyards District.

McDonalds Road and Broke Road are important local corridors connecting the Central Pokolbin, Mount View and Hermitage Road districts. Deasys Road and Broke Road are critical east-west transport corridors connecting the wine regions within the Cessnock and Singleton local government areas. Lovedale Road traverses the eastern boundary of the Vineyards District and in the future will be an important component of the City's Northern CBD Bypass (Lovedale Link).

The network of tree-lined local roads

contributes significantly to the character and amenity of the Cessnock Vineyards District. In the future, efforts to improve the quality and safety of the road infrastructure will need to be balanced with the need to preserve the scenic and ecological benefits the corridors provide.

Currently, the Cessnock Vineyards District is poorly serviced by active transport opportunities. The delivery of a network of shared off- and on-road pathways is critical and will improve access and connectivity within the Vineyards District, while presenting opportunities to explore and appreciate the unique character and heritage of the area.

Council is proposing to extend the existing cycleway (active transport) network along Wine Country Drive to create a continuous, safe and accessible link between Cessnock and Branxton. This proposed extension will enhance the north-south connectivity for cyclists and pedestrians and provide a direct link to the future Shiraz to Shore Cycleway—a major regional active

transport project that will traverse the Cessnock Vineyards District via Broke Road. This strategic extension not only promotes sustainable and recreational transport options but also encourages greater visitation to and from the Vineyards District and strengthens connections between the established and future urban areas of Cessnock. It also provides an important active transport alternative that complements the region's tourism appeal and natural landscape.

In parallel, the proposed Lovedale Link Road project represents a key piece of future transport infrastructure for the region. The link will provide a new connection from Bellbird—starting at Abbotsford Street, through Mount View Road and Oakey Creek Road—and continue north, linking the Ingles Lane/O'Connor's Road intersection with the Lovedale Road/Wine Country Drive intersection. This infrastructure will support the upgrade of Lovedale Road to arterial road standard and include necessary upgrades at the Hunter Expressway interchange. The Lovedale Link Road

has been identified as a critical route to enable more efficient east-west vehicle movements, allowing traffic from Bellbird and areas west of Cessnock to access the Hunter Expressway without travelling through the urban centre. This will reduce congestion on Wollombi Road and Wine Country Drive, particularly during peak tourist and holiday periods.

Future proposals within the Vineyards District will be required to maximise the use of existing infrastructure and avoid the need for significant new augmentation. Furthermore, these proposals must enhance the walking and cycling network, particularly connections to and from the Tourist Centre and other major tourist infrastructure and accommodation nodes.

Together, the investment in both active and vehicular transport infrastructure will significantly enhance the functionality, accessibility, and sustainability of the Cessnock Vineyards District while preserving the region's visual, ecological and cultural values.



# **BALANCING TOURISM GROWTH AND AGRICULTURAL PRESERVATION: THE ECONOMIC, LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES**

# Balancing tourism growth and agricultural preservation: The Economic, land use and environmental challenges

## Sustaining viticulture and agricultural identity

The Cessnock Vineyards District is one of Australia's most iconic wine regions, defined by its longstanding tradition of winemaking, rural charm, and scenic vistas of the Broken Back Range. Its vineyards, heritage estates, and scenic landscapes underpin both its economy and visual identity. However, viticulture in the region faces significant structural pressures.

A key demographic concern is the aging profile of vineyard owners and operators, many of whom are over 55. With limited generational succession occurring, the industry faces the loss of traditional knowledge and continuity. Succession is hampered by high land values, capital barriers, and the seasonal and labour-intensive nature of grape growing, all of which deter younger generations from taking over family businesses. Without targeted support mechanisms, such as economic incentives, business transition services, and training programs, the sustainability of viticulture is at risk.

Additionally, rising production costs are impacting the viability of vineyards. Factors such as small planted vineyard sizes, high labour requirements for hand pruning and picking, escalating land costs, and relatively low yields make wine grape growing in the

Hunter Valley one of the more expensive agricultural pursuits in the region. These economic pressures contribute to the removal of vines in favour of tourism-related land uses or lifestyle properties, threatening the visual landscape and core agricultural identity of the Vineyards District.

Preserving viticulture is essential not only for the economy, but also to maintain the authenticity and appeal of the district's tourism brand. Supporting vineyard continuity, particularly through flexible planning tools and strategic investment, must remain a priority.

## Managing growth, land use, and legacy developments

The Vineyards District's success depends on maintaining a careful balance between tourism growth and the preservation of rural amenity. The district's key tourism nodes, home to major events, wineries, and hospitality experiences, are critical to accommodating high visitor numbers while limiting pressures on more sensitive rural areas. Continued investment in these hubs, and the renewal of ageing infrastructure within them, is essential for their competitiveness. However, this must be matched with support for small-scale, dispersed tourism that complements the rural setting without eroding its character.

Planning challenges are compounded by historic development approvals that have "physically commenced," granting them an indefinite lifespan despite being potentially misaligned with contemporary land use objectives. These legacy approvals may disrupt the landscape character and viticultural viability of the Vineyards District as they are activated many years after approval was originally granted. There is no planning mechanism to prevent legacy developments once they are deemed to have physically commenced.

Within this context, the RU4 Primary Production Small Lots Zone provides a sufficiently flexible planning framework to support low-impact tourist development in the Vineyards District. Permissible uses include cellar doors, restaurants, accommodation and agritourism, being activities that align well with the District's agricultural and experiential tourism focus. Permitting additional, smaller scale and boutique tourism opportunities in the Vineyards District, such as artisan food and drink premises, should be explored. Calls to further expand residential uses, such as dual occupancies, risk setting precedents for subdivision and fragmentation of agricultural land. This would directly undermine viticulture and increase pressure on Council for services and infrastructure in rural areas. Notably, secondary dwellings are already permitted with consent in the Vineyards District, providing an avenue for generational succession without enabling land fragmentation.

## Economic diversification and emerging opportunities

As visitor preferences shift, the Vineyards District is seeing the rise of new and complementary industries that support economic diversification. Agritourism is expanding rapidly, offering immersive, place-based experiences that combine

food, wine, and rural activities. This evolution aligns with the objectives of the Hunter Valley Destination Management Plan, which seeks to position the region as a diverse and sustainable tourism destination.

Creative industries, ranging from art galleries and live music to boutique event spaces, are becoming more prominent, adding vibrancy and cultural depth to the visitor experience. Wellness tourism, including spas, retreats, and health-focused accommodation, is also growing, appealing to a new generation of health-conscious travellers.

These emerging industries offer opportunities for landholders to diversify income and adapt to changing market conditions. However, they also require careful planning to ensure they complement, rather than compete with, viticulture and the rural landscape.

Hospitality and tourism businesses across the Vineyards District face an ongoing workforce challenge. Although training is provided at TAFE Kurri Kurri, businesses frequently report difficulties in finding and retaining skilled staff. This workforce shortage is a constraint on growth and service quality, particularly in high-demand seasons. Addressing these challenges will require greater coordination between education providers, industry, and government to build a robust regional workforce.

## Environmental and infrastructure considerations

Environmental assets remain central to the identity and sustainability of the Vineyards District. Preserving tree-lined rural roads, remnant vegetation, and native corridors enhances both biodiversity and scenic quality, while contributing to the region's brand. Environmental protection must remain a parallel priority alongside

economic development, particularly in relation to vineyard continuity, tourism expansion, and infrastructure upgrades.

Transport connectivity remains limited, with few public transport options connecting the Vineyards District to surrounding centres. This creates reliance on private vehicles and restricts workforce mobility. While major public transport investments are unlikely in the short to medium term, future planning should focus on improving road networks, signage, and transport linkages between key tourism and viticultural sites.

A coordinated servicing strategy is required to support sustainable growth within the Vineyards District Tourist Centre, which is anticipated to accommodate a higher concentration of visitor infrastructure. Inadequate or inconsistent wastewater treatment systems, combined with limited servicing capacity, pose risks to environmental quality and constrain future development potential. A focused approach to servicing, especially wastewater management, is essential to maintain the functionality, attractiveness, and environmental integrity of the region's core tourism precincts.

## A coordinated future for the Vineyards District

The Cessnock Vineyards District stands at a pivotal point. The interplay between tourism growth, the preservation of viticulture, environmental stewardship, and economic diversification will define its future character. A coordinated, place-based strategy is essential—one that supports vineyard succession and viability, revitalises aging tourism infrastructure and embraces emerging industries that reflect contemporary visitor trends. By doing so, the Vineyards District can ensure it remains a productive, authentic, and celebrated wine region for generations to come.





**FUTURE CHARACTER  
OF THE CESSNOCK  
VINEYARDS DISTRICT**

# Future character of the Cessnock Vineyards District

## Important Agricultural Land

The Cessnock Vineyards District Important Agricultural Land is described in Figure 17. Viticulture and other low impact horticultural uses, as well as horse and cattle grazing, will continue to dominate Important Agricultural Land. Non-agricultural development on Important Agricultural Land will be required to demonstrate compatibility with agriculture occurring on the property and on adjoining land. Such development must be carefully designed and sited, and maintained at a scale that is proportionate to the size and environmental characteristics of the property.

While tourist and other non-agricultural development will continue to offer valuable opportunities to reinforce and diversify the region's product offerings and income streams, these uses will be held to a high standard to ensure they remain compatible with the core agricultural objectives of the RU4 Primary Production Small Lots Zone. These developments must also be consistent with the rural and viticultural character and amenity of the area. It is essential that tourist and non-agricultural developments do not dominate the use of Important Agricultural Land or diminish future opportunities to expand viticulture or the operations of Cessnock Airport.

To support the ongoing implementation, monitoring and adaptability of the strategy

and associated development controls, Council should retain a local stakeholder reference group. This group, comprising representatives from the viticulture industry, rural landholders, tourism operators, environmental interests, and planning professionals, would provide an ongoing platform for feedback, collaboration, and transparency. The reference group could play a vital advisory role in key decision-making processes, such as the periodic review and refinement of the Important Agricultural Land mapping. Engaging local stakeholders in this way ensures that the strategy remains responsive to emerging issues, industry needs, and community expectations.

The group's continued involvement would enhance Council's ability to monitor the effectiveness of land use policies over time, identify unintended consequences or areas for improvement, and adapt regulatory responses accordingly. This inclusive governance approach will help ensure that future development aligns with the district's long-term vision for sustainable agriculture, compatible rural diversification, and protection of the area's unique landscape and economic assets.

Future development on Important Agricultural Land is to be consistent with the future desired character statement on page 97.

## Future desired character

The principal objective of the Cessnock Vineyards District Important Agricultural Land is to encourage viticulture, wine production, low impact horticultural uses, and horse and cattle grazing. Development that has the potential to conflict with these uses is to be minimised on Important Agricultural Land.

Non-agricultural development on Important Agricultural Land should avoid areas of the property used for viticulture or horticulture, or that contain mature trees. New development should not reduce opportunities for primary production to be carried out within the property in the future.

Agriculture on Important Agricultural Land may be supported by complementary tourist related development and other non-agricultural development that:

- Does not conflict with agriculture occurring on the property, or on adjoining land;
- Is proportionate to the size and environmental characteristics of the property;
- Does not significantly reduce opportunities to carry out agriculture within the property in the future;
- Incorporates adequate design and operational measures to address natural hazards and any potential land use conflict with agriculture; and
- Is consistent with, and proportionate to, the scale of agriculture or rural residential development occurring within the property;
- Does not require any major infrastructure upgrades or augmentation.

Tourist Related Development does not dominate the use of Important Agricultural Land, but supports the agricultural and/or rural residential development already occurring within the property. Tourist Related Development provides additional revenue for rural property owners, while enabling opportunities for tourists and visitors to experience the unique character and amenity of the Vineyards District and locally produced food, wine and goods. Tourist Related Development is carried out in a manner that protects and strengthens the agricultural uses occurring on the land, and is carefully designed, sited and clustered to minimise land use conflict.

Development in the vicinity of Cessnock Airport should not reduce opportunities for the expansion or intensification of the facility for airport related infrastructure or hours of operation in the future.



To ensure consistency with the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land, new planning proposals relating to Important Agricultural Land will be required to address the following planning principles:

- Proposals relating to Important Agricultural Land affirm the primacy of viticulture and strengthen the integrity of the area for agricultural activities.
- Proposals do not increase opportunities for residential intensification, such as residential subdivision.
- Land containing important biodiversity, heritage or agricultural value is protected from development.
- Proposals do not increase the potential for land use conflict with viticulture, horticulture or agricultural produce industries.
- Proposals do not reduce opportunities for the expansion or intensification of Cessnock Airport for airport infrastructure or hours of operation.
- Proposals encourage improved walking and cycling connectivity from the Tourist Centre to key destinations and important landscape features in the area.
- Proposals maximise the use of existing infrastructure and do not require major infrastructure upgrades or augmentation.
- Proposals avoid land significantly impacted by natural hazards.

The following actions have been identified to ensure Important Agricultural Land is appropriately managed in accordance with the future desired character statement.

#### Action 4: Review land use zones to align with the Cessnock Vineyards District's desired future character statements

The review should focus on aligning the zoning and land use clauses with the desired future character statements for the Cessnock Vineyards District. It should assess whether the current land uses permitted in the RU4 Primary Production Small Lots Zone align with the objectives of the zone. A key consideration will be whether Clause 7.6 of the Cessnock Local Environmental Plan 2011, particularly as it applies to properties under 10 hectares in the Cessnock Vineyards District, is overly restrictive on tourist development. By removing or amending this clause, owners of smaller properties may be able to diversify their income streams through smaller-scale tourist development. This could open up tourism opportunities while maintaining the integrity of viticulture. Ideally, the review should be supported by an economic study and the specialist viticulture and rural land studies carried out by Council to inform its Local Strategic Planning Statement and more recent rural land planning work.

A significant initiative in this review is to rezone the Major Integrated Tourist nodes from SP3 Tourist to a more appropriate zone that better reflects those unique and 'special activities' that occur within those nodes. This change will also allow the SP3 Tourist Zone to be utilised for the Vineyards District Tourist Centre, which is intended to be a focus for larger-scale tourist and non-agricultural development. The review should also explore permissible land use within the SP3 Zone, encouraging higher-intensity tourism activities and creating a distinct area for tourist retail. Additionally, changes to the RU4 Zone should seek to preserve the scenic rural landscape while allowing for smaller-scale tourist development that complements viticulture, ensuring the ongoing primacy

of viticulture within the broader Vineyards District.

#### Action 5: Retain a Vineyards District Reference Group

Retaining a Vineyards District Reference Group to ensure the effective implementation of this Place Strategy and refinement of the associated development controls should be considered. This Group could support ongoing monitoring, responsiveness to emerging issues, and refinement of key planning principles and controls. This includes the review of the Important Agricultural Land Map (Figure 17) and Visually Sensitive Land Map (Figure 19), which is to be refined to better identify the most productive land for viticulture and horticulture in the Vineyards District. Until that review occurs, all land within the Cessnock Vineyards District that lies outside the proposed Tourist Centre, recreation land, and major integrated tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes will be considered Important Agricultural Land for the purpose of this Place Strategy. Development within this land will continue to be guided by the future desired character statement and planning principles relating to Important Agricultural Land.

#### Action 6: Investigate an appropriate land use zone to preserve areas of Important Agricultural Land

Consideration will be given as to whether Important Agricultural Land in the Cessnock Vineyards District (as refined by a future rural lands study) should be afforded additional protection within the Cessnock *Local Environmental Plan 2011*. This may include the establishment of an alternative primary production land use zone, such as the RU1 Primary Production Zone, or the introduction of additional development standards.

Further detailed investigations are likely to be required to justify the creation of any alternative rural zone for Important Agricultural Land. These investigations should include, but not be limited to, consideration of appropriate lot size controls (see Action 10), permitted land uses, and zone objectives, to ensure that any proposed zone supports the continuation of sustainable agricultural practices and aligns with broader community needs.

The interrelated issue of vineyard land being converted to large residential lifestyle holdings and tourist development is acknowledged as a potential concern that warrants further discussion in conjunction with this action. This discussion will include the potential role of zoning in preserving Important Agricultural Land and minimising its conversion for non-agricultural development.

### **Action 7: Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land**

Land use conflicts are emerging in the Cessnock Vineyards District as a result of increasing development pressure, particularly from non-agricultural uses that can impact the productivity, character, and viability of Important Agricultural Land. Incompatible development, such as tourism uses that are disproportionate to the size of the property or available infrastructure, or buildings that are visually intrusive, can erode the rural and viticultural character of the area and compromise its long-term agricultural potential.

To address these issues, a Development Control Plan should be prepared for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land. The DCP should establish

development setback requirements to minimise land use conflict, controls to manage the scale of non-agricultural development relative to property size, and guidelines to ensure built form is sympathetic to the rural landscape. The DCP should also support the objectives of the RU4 Primary Production Small Lots Zone and ensure that infrastructure capacity is sufficient to accommodate any tourism-related development without compromising agricultural operations. A review of the development standards for events and festivals is also required to ensure the planning framework actively supports these activities.

### **Action 8: Investigate the extent of historically significant vines, structures and landscapes, and mechanisms to protect these items and areas**

In conjunction with relevant stakeholders, for example the Hunter Valley Wine and Tourism Association, further investigation will be carried out to identify the extent of historically significant vines, structures and landscapes within the Cessnock Vineyards District, as many of these historical features are not adequately recognised in the existing legislative framework and afforded appropriate protection. Where relevant, a Statement of Heritage Significance will be prepared for these potential items or conservation areas for possible inclusion in Council's Local Environmental Plan.

### **Action 9: Improve awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage**

In order to elevate and champion Aboriginal heritage in the Cessnock Vineyards District, opportunities for cultural tourism will be explored in collaboration with indigenous communities and relevant property owners.

### **Action 10: Review minimum lot sizes in the Cessnock Vineyards District to ensure productive viticulture**

Maintaining the 40-hectare minimum lot size in the Cessnock Vineyards District is essential to prevent further fragmentation of agricultural land for rural lifestyle purposes and protect the long-term viability of viticulture. The area already contains many small lots due to past planning decisions, with several carrying existing dwelling entitlements. Allowing potential for further dwellings on undersized lots would heighten land use conflicts, particularly between residential and agricultural uses. Moreover, there is no current need for additional rural residential land, given the scale of approved developments such as The Vintage, Lovedale Farm and Huntlee, which will deliver substantial housing and accommodation without further compromising agricultural land.

Subject to a review of Important Agricultural Land in the Vineyards District, it may be necessary to retain, or where appropriate, increase the minimum lot size to protect land critical to viticulture. Rising land values due to land fragmentation and increasing pressure for non-agricultural development pose long-term risks to the wine industry and to the rural character and amenity of the land. Identifying and safeguarding key viticultural land will help ensure the ongoing sustainability of the region's wine

sector and landscape. Ideally, the review should be supported by an the specialist viticulture and rural land studies carried out by Council to inform its Local Strategic Planning Statement and more recent rural land planning work.

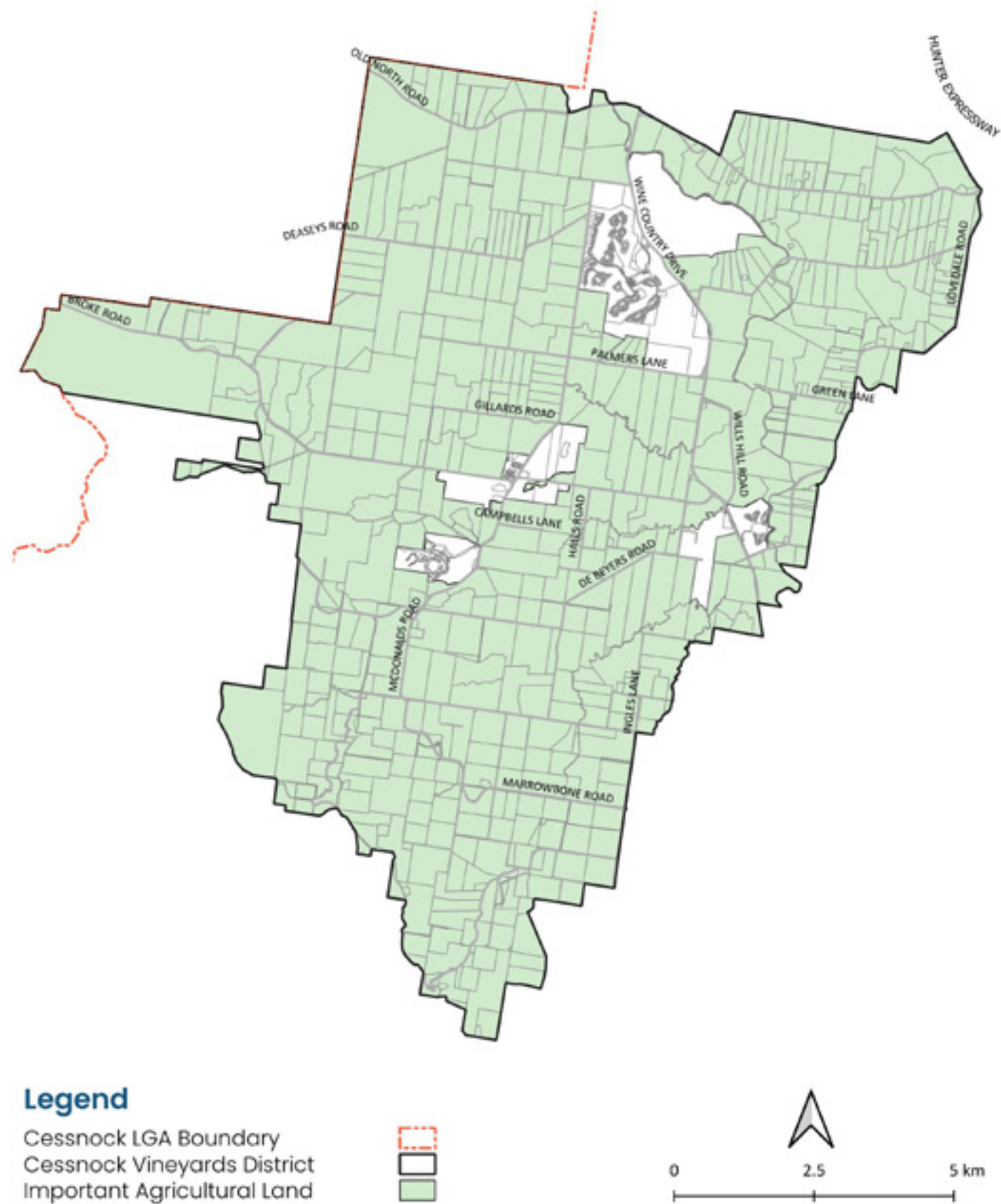
In relation to the proposed Vineyards Tourist Centre, any future rezoning and subdivision should consider the implementation of a minimum lot size. A 10-hectare minimum was previously supported by Council as part of an earlier Council-led Planning Proposal for the Vineyards District. The Planning Proposal sought to mitigate land fragmentation and minimise the potential for overdevelopment within the proposed Centre.

A minimum lot size may also be appropriate for the Cessnock Airport Precinct, and this should be investigated as part of future master planning for that site to ensure orderly development and avoid unintended land use conflicts.

### **Action 11: Review local policy relating to dwelling entitlements**

Residential development adjacent to and within the Cessnock Vineyards District has the potential to cause land use conflict and disrupt vineyard operations. Residential development also has the potential to impact the scenic qualities of the landscape. A review of Council's dwelling entitlement policy will be carried out as a component of a broader LGA wide dwelling entitlement review.





**Figure 17:** Important agricultural land



# Important Environmental Land

The Cessnock Vineyards District Important Environmental Land is described in Figure 18. The Important Environmental Land focuses on enhancing vegetation connectivity by utilising existing remnant vegetation and incentivising improvements and widening of native vegetation and wildlife corridors.

The Important Environmental Land map included in this Place Strategy (See Figure 18) was developed using multiple data sources, including corridor connectivity analysis and watercourse/streambank layers from the Environmental Lands Study for the Cessnock LGA, prepared by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW).

Important Environmental Land will continue to contribute to the amenity and distinctiveness of the Cessnock Vineyards District while providing positive environmental outcomes. Pockets of native vegetation within the Cessnock Vineyards District will be reconnected to one another and to important regional environmental assets, such as Werakata National Park and Pokolbin State Forest. The health, function, and aesthetic qualities of vegetated waterways within the Vineyards District will be enhanced alongside new development occurring in the area.

Future development on Important Environmental Land is to be consistent with the future desired character statement.

To ensure consistency with the future desired character of Important Environmental Land and to secure positive environmental outcomes, new planning proposals relating to properties containing Important Environmental Land will be required to address the following planning principles.

- Proposals do not increase opportunities for residential intensification, such as residential subdivision.
- Land containing important biodiversity, heritage, or agricultural value is protected and enhanced.

The following actions have been identified to ensure Important Environmental Land is appropriately managed in accordance with the future desired character statement.

## Future desired character

Native tree removal is avoided on properties containing Important Environmental Land. There is to be no net loss of native vegetation as a result of new development. Buildings and structures, roads, driveways, fences, dams, infrastructure, drainage and asset protection zones are located outside of areas containing native habitat or priority and connecting vegetation/wildlife corridors.

Development sites are carefully chosen to minimise impacts on areas containing existing native flora and fauna and appropriate buffer distances are adopted to protect these areas.

Additional plantings of native and endemic species on areas of private land not suitable for agriculture is encouraged and increases primary habitat and the integrity of primary and connecting vegetation/wildlife corridors. Additional planting also connects fragmented vegetation communities throughout the Vineyards District.

Attention is given to improving biodiversity along watercourses and rehabilitating and enhancing vegetation/wildlife corridors between the Pokolbin State Forest and Werakata National Park. Particular attention is given to improving biodiversity within the Black Creek riparian area and its tributaries.

Where possible, site landscaping is adopted that enhances Important Environmental Land within the property. Larger scale development has a higher potential for environmental impacts and therefore, the scope of required site landscaping within the property will be proportionate to the scale of the development and may include requirements to rehabilitate and maintain degraded areas of native vegetation within the property.

**Action 12: Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Environmental Land**

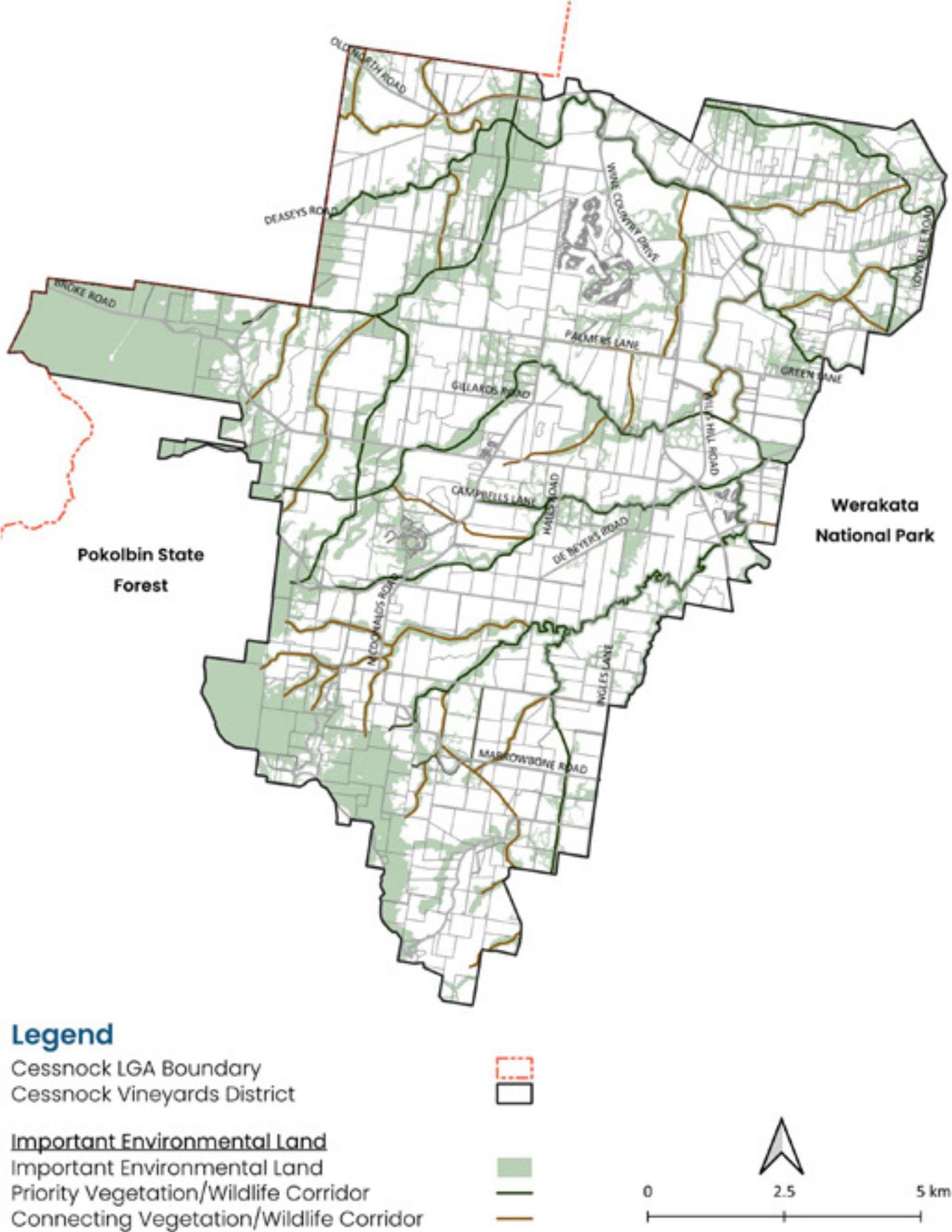
Unmanaged development within the Cessnock Vineyards District presents a threat to the integrity of Important Environmental Land, including native vegetation, wildlife habitat, and ecological corridors, leading to biodiversity loss, habitat fragmentation, and long-term environmental degradation.

To protect these sensitive areas, development on Important Environmental Land will be strictly controlled. New developments must avoid impacting these areas and provide appropriate buffers. Where clearing cannot be avoided, there must be no net loss of native vegetation within the site. Any required replanting must be carried out to reinforce and improve the quality of Important Environmental Land on the property.

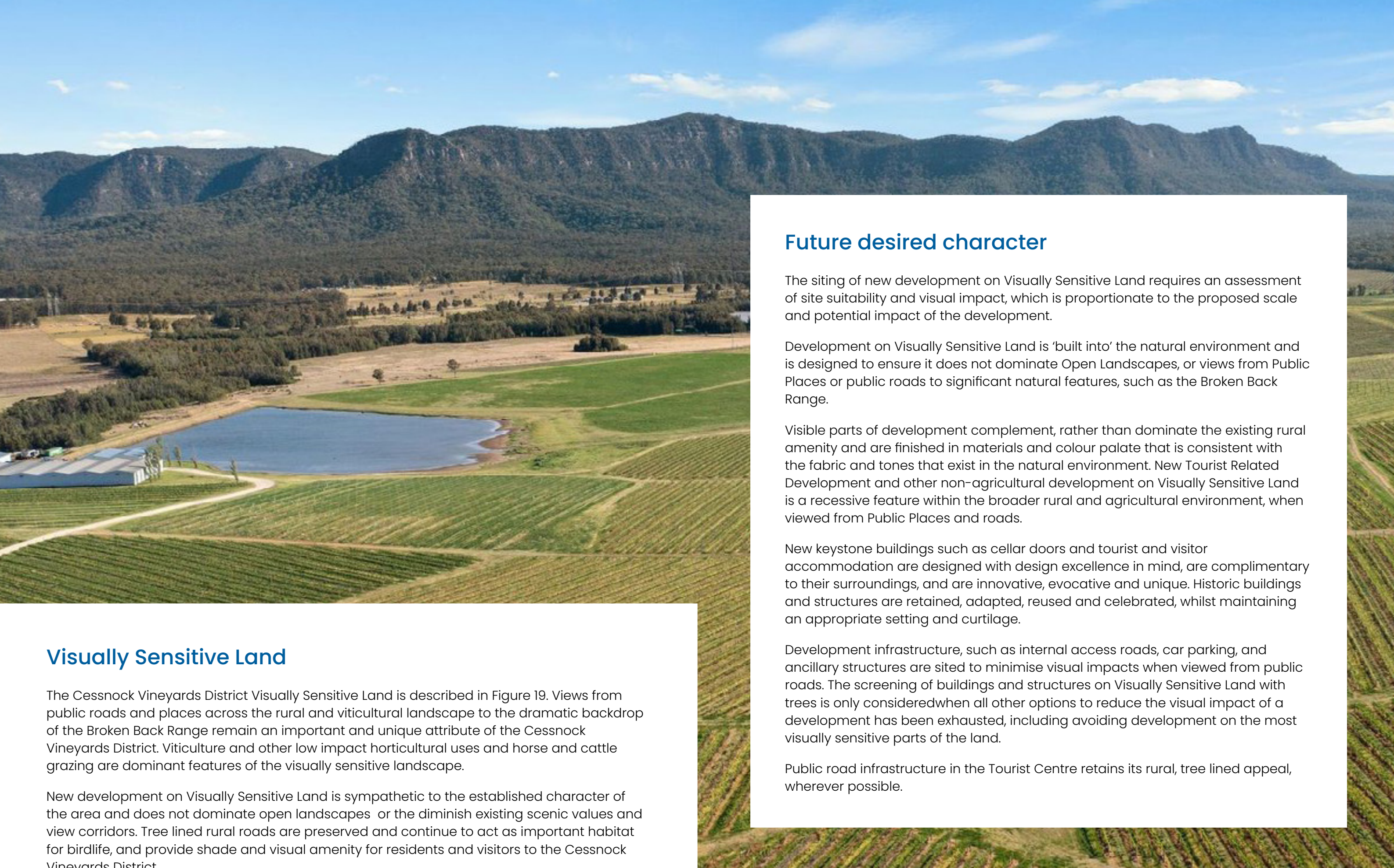
A Development Control Plan (DCP) will be prepared for the Cessnock Vineyards District to guide future development in line with the desired character of Important Environmental Land. The DCP will include measures to prevent impacts on native flora and fauna, reduce environmental harm, and protect or enhance ecological linkages. It will also ensure no net loss of vegetation and encourage landowners to rehabilitate degraded areas through appropriate incentives. These planning controls will help preserve the Vineyards District’s environmental values while enabling sustainable land use.

**Action 13: Investigate a suitable land use zone to acknowledge areas of Important Environmental Land**

The application of a conservation land use zone to areas of Important Environmental Land will be considered as part of Council’s LGA wide Environmental Zoning Framework project. In determining the appropriate land use zone for these areas, it will be necessary to establish the environmental values of the land through the use of reliable data and thorough analysis, ensuring a robust strategic basis for identifying where such zones should apply.



**Figure 18:** Biodiversity corridors for rehabilitation



## Visually Sensitive Land

The Cessnock Vineyards District Visually Sensitive Land is described in Figure 19. Views from public roads and places across the rural and viticultural landscape to the dramatic backdrop of the Broken Back Range remain an important and unique attribute of the Cessnock Vineyards District. Viticulture and other low impact horticultural uses and horse and cattle grazing are dominant features of the visually sensitive landscape.

New development on Visually Sensitive Land is sympathetic to the established character of the area and does not dominate open landscapes or the diminish existing scenic values and view corridors. Tree lined rural roads are preserved and continue to act as important habitat for birdlife, and provide shade and visual amenity for residents and visitors to the Cessnock Vineyards District.

Future development on Visually Sensitive Land is to be consistent with the future desired character statement on page 109.

## Future desired character

The siting of new development on Visually Sensitive Land requires an assessment of site suitability and visual impact, which is proportionate to the proposed scale and potential impact of the development.

Development on Visually Sensitive Land is 'built into' the natural environment and is designed to ensure it does not dominate Open Landscapes, or views from Public Places or public roads to significant natural features, such as the Broken Back Range.

Visible parts of development complement, rather than dominate the existing rural amenity and are finished in materials and colour palate that is consistent with the fabric and tones that exist in the natural environment. New Tourist Related Development and other non-agricultural development on Visually Sensitive Land is a recessive feature within the broader rural and agricultural environment, when viewed from Public Places and roads.

New keystone buildings such as cellar doors and tourist and visitor accommodation are designed with design excellence in mind, are complimentary to their surroundings, and are innovative, evocative and unique. Historic buildings and structures are retained, adapted, reused and celebrated, whilst maintaining an appropriate setting and curtilage.

Development infrastructure, such as internal access roads, car parking, and ancillary structures are sited to minimise visual impacts when viewed from public roads. The screening of buildings and structures on Visually Sensitive Land with trees is only considered when all other options to reduce the visual impact of a development has been exhausted, including avoiding development on the most visually sensitive parts of the land.

Public road infrastructure in the Tourist Centre retains its rural, tree lined appeal, wherever possible.

<sup>1</sup> An open landscape means land that is predominantly cleared of trees and on which development is highly visible when viewed from a public place or road.

To ensure consistency with the future desired character of Visually Sensitive Land, new planning proposals relating to Visually Sensitive Land will be required to address the following planning principles:

- Proposals do not increase opportunities for residential intensification, such as residential subdivision.
- Proposals are sympathetic to the established viticultural character of the area and will not give rise to land uses that have the potential to dominate open landscapes or diminish existing scenic values and view corridors.
- Proposals encourage improved walking and cycling connectivity from the Tourist Centre to key destinations and important landscape features in the area.

The following actions have been identified to ensure Important Environmental Land is appropriately managed in accordance with the future character statement.

**Action 14: Review the Visually Sensitive Land Map**

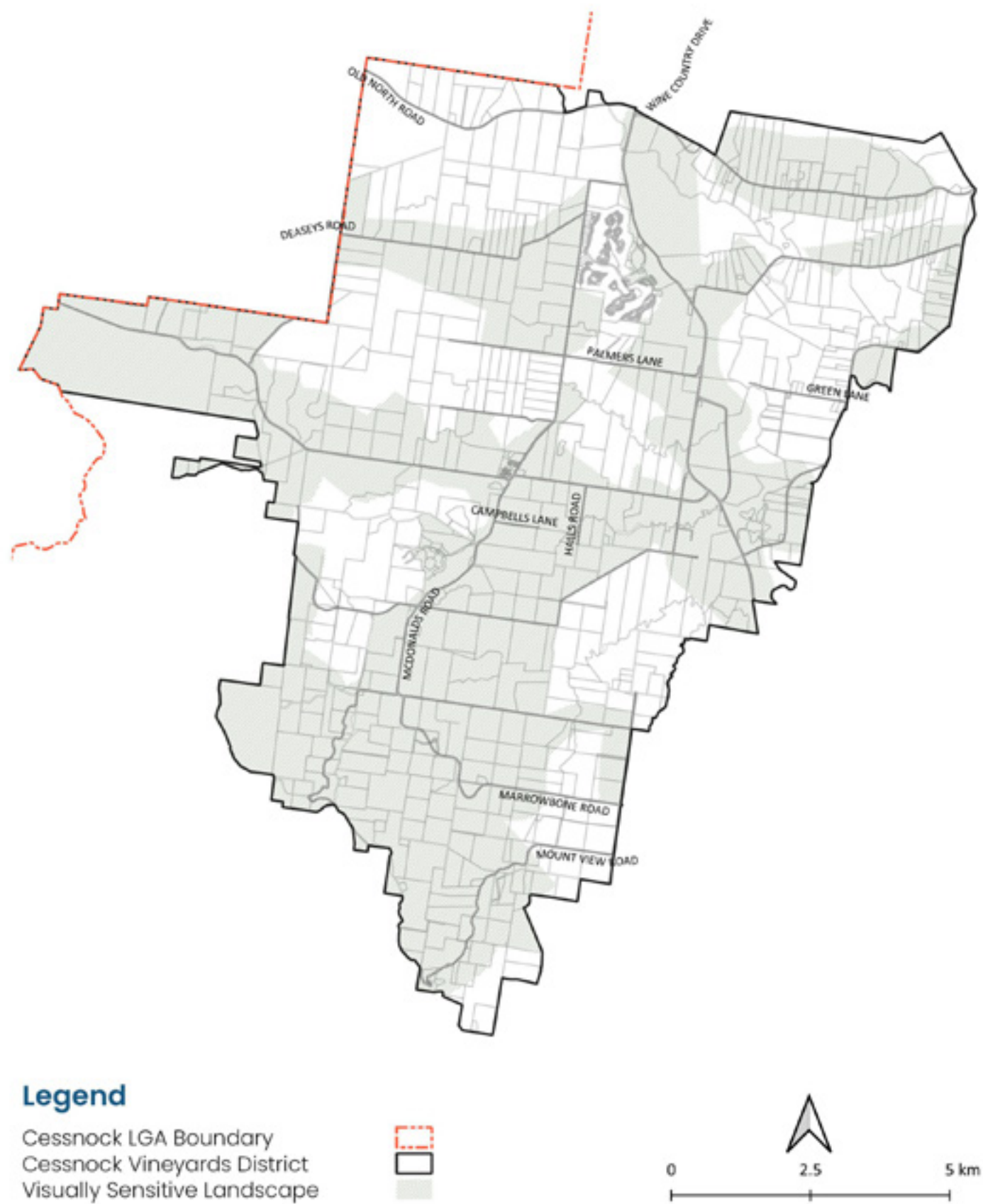
The Visually Sensitive Land Map (see Figure 19) will be reviewed to ensure it accurately identifies land with high visual significance. To support this, a study should be undertaken with input from the Vineyards Reference Group to help Council identify and confirm areas of visually sensitive land within the Cessnock Vineyards District. The Stakeholder Reference Group will play an important advisory role in this process, with ongoing engagement to ensure the mapping remains responsive to emerging issues, industry needs, and community expectations, while supporting the district’s long-term vision for sustainable agriculture, compatible tourism development, and protection of the area’s unique landscape and land-based economic assets.

**Action 15: Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Visually Sensitive Land**

Increasing development pressure in the Cessnock Vineyards District has the potential to erode the area’s distinctive rural and viticultural character, particularly where development is visually prominent or poorly integrated with the landscape. Visually Sensitive Land, which is highly visible from public roads and spaces, is especially at risk of being dominated by large structures, inappropriate building materials, or intrusive fencing and entry features.

To address these risks, a Development Control Plan should be prepared to ensure new development respects and enhances the visual character of the Vineyards District. The DCP should include controls to manage building height, scale, materials, and finishes so that development does not detract from the rural setting. It should require buildings and structures on Visually Sensitive Land to blend into the natural landscape, promote landscaping that delivers visual and environmental benefits, and ensure fencing and entry structures are unobtrusive. In tourist centres and nodes, built form should reflect the future local character of the area and achieve high architectural quality, contributing positively to the area’s identity.





**Figure 19:** Visually sensitive landscape





## Tourist Centre and Major Integrated Tourist and Accommodation Nodes

### Tourist Centre and Major Integrated Tourist and Accommodation Nodes

The number and density of tourist developments in the area at the intersection of Broke Road and McDonalds Road warrant the area being categorised as a major tourist node and managed accordingly in the local planning framework. The indicative extent of the proposed Tourist Centre is identified in Figure 20 and broadly covers the existing tourist-related development at the intersection of Broke Road and McDonalds Road, while allowing some land for future expansion and growth of the centre. The extent of the Tourist Centre has been determined following a multi-faceted analysis, including an assessment of future economic demand for larger scale tourist and visitor accommodation development within the Cessnock Vineyards District, together with an analysis of environmental

constraints, the location of established vineyards, and the potential for land use conflict between larger scale tourist development and existing agriculture.

In the future, the Tourist Centre will be the focus for additional 'larger scale' tourist and non-agricultural development in the Vineyards District. In this context, larger scale development is considered any development that requires land to be rezoned to establish permissibility. A proposal to rezone land at the intersection of Broke and McDonalds roads to an appropriate zone for the purpose of tourist development may be supported in accordance with the principles of this Place Strategy. The final extent of the Tourist Centre will need to be detailed and justified within a planning proposal for the Tourist Centre.

To guide and coordinate future

development and ensure consistency with the strategic intent of the Place Strategy, a Master Plan should be prepared for the Tourist Centre as part of any landowner-led rezoning proposal. The Master Plan should define the spatial layout, land use distribution, infrastructure needs, access and movement networks, public realm improvements, and landscape integration. A site-specific Development Control Plan, incorporating design guidelines for buildings and structures, should also be developed to ensure that the built form responds sensitively to the rural landscape setting, maintains visual harmony with established development, and reinforces the area's distinctive character.

In addition, a planning proposal to rezone land to an appropriate zone, e.g. Zone SP3 Tourist, will need to be supported by detailed technical studies to address site-specific constraints and considerations. These include, but are not limited to:

- Natural hazards, such as bushfire, flooding and stormwater management;

- Prevalence and protection of native vegetation and biodiversity values;
- Traffic and access impacts associated with increased tourist visitation;
- Servicing strategy, including wastewater treatment and servicing capacity;
- Potential contamination from previous land uses;
- Management of noise and lighting impacts; and
- Scenic amenity and protection of significant views and rural vistas.

Fragmentation of land for residential development is not compatible with the intent of the Vineyards Tourist Centre to provide facilities and accommodation for tourists and visitors. Any new residential subdivision is to occur outside the Cessnock Vineyards District and in accordance with Council's Urban Growth Management Plan and Housing Strategy, or within one of the established major integrated tourist nodes



described in Figure 20.

Development controls will be prepared for new development within the Tourist Centre to ensure it is sympathetic with the established pattern and scale of development, including being set into the landscape and not dominating it.

The existing major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes are expected to operate largely as they have been, and possibly intensify in accordance with the development standards that underpin them. To preserve the rural amenity and the agricultural potential of the land surrounding the major nodes, there will be no further opportunity for the expansion of the major nodes onto adjoining land.

The existing major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes, including 'The Vintage' and the 'Lovedale Farm'

developments, should continue to serve the broader Vineyards District as the focus for major integrated tourist developments. These nodes have played a critical role in concentrating tourism infrastructure and small-lot residential development in designated, well-serviced areas, thereby alleviating development pressure across the remainder of the Vineyards District. By providing opportunities for small-lot housing and associated tourism-related land uses within defined precincts, they help to preserve the rural character and agricultural integrity of the surrounding landscape.

Looking ahead, planned urban release areas such as Huntlee and Anvil Creek—anticipated to accommodate several thousand small housing lots—will further assist in reducing demand for small lot residential development within the

Vineyards District. These future growth areas, which are part of the larger Anambah to Branxton Urban Investigation Area, are expected to absorb a substantial portion of the region's population and housing demand, thereby supporting a more strategic and sustainable settlement pattern.

The ongoing role of The Vintage and Lovedale Farm as major integrated tourist nodes is essential. These areas should continue to provide outward-facing services and amenities that attract visitation and tourism, while maintaining strong visual, functional, and economic connections to the broader Vineyards District. It is important that development within these nodes continues to demonstrate a clear nexus to the region's agricultural base, reinforcing the identity and appeal of the Hunter Valley as a

premium wine and food destination.

Walking and cycling infrastructure will be improved between the Tourist Centre and major nodes, local centres and other important tourist sites within the Vineyards District, while maintaining the agricultural and environmental amenity of the Important Agricultural Land. In order to deliver the proposed improvements to the walking and cycling network in the Cessnock Vineyards District, items of infrastructure will need to be included in the Works Schedule that accompanies Council's s.7.12 Levy Contribution Plan. The total cost of the infrastructure is significant and may warrant consideration of a plan levy rate above 1%.

Future development within the Tourist Centre and major accommodation nodes is to be consistent with the future desired character statement on page 118.

# Future desired character

The Vineyards District Tourist Centre and major tourist accommodation nodes are the primary focus for larger scale Tourist Related Development in the area. The number and density of development within these areas, warrant them being classified as major tourist nodes and managed accordingly.

New development within the Vineyards District Tourist Centre and major tourist accommodation nodes compliments the established pattern, scale and typology of development that already exists those areas. Where opportunities are available for more intense Tourist Related Development, these opportunities are to be balanced with a requirement to achieve design excellence and minimisation of development and environmental impacts, such as traffic and roadside tree removal.

Fragmentation of land for permanent residential development is not consistent with the objective of the Tourist Centre to provide a range of larger-scale facilities, services, and accommodation for the benefit of tourists and visitors to the Cessnock Vineyards District. Instead, the focus is on enhancing the visitor experience and reinforcing the tourism economy, while maintaining clear boundaries between the Centre and surrounding agricultural or rural areas.

Development within the Tourist Centre and major tourist accommodation nodes does not detract from the landscape, but enhances it. Visible parts of development complement, rather than intrude on the roadside environment and are finished in materials and colour palate that is consistent with the fabric and tones that exist in the natural environment.

Development infrastructure, such as internal access roads, car parking, lighting and ancillary structures are sited and landscaped to minimise visual impacts when viewed from public roads. Development infrastructure is sensitively screened, wherever possible.

The ongoing role of The Vintage and Lovedale Farm as major integrated tourist nodes is essential. These areas should continue to provide outward-facing services and amenities that attract visitation and tourism, while maintaining strong visual, functional, and economic connections to the broader Vineyards District. Development within these nodes should continue to demonstrate a clear nexus to the region’s agricultural base, reinforcing the identity and appeal of the Hunter Valley as a premium wine and food destination.

Public road infrastructure in the Tourist Centre retains its rural, tree-lined appeal, contributing to the scenic and immersive nature of the visitor journey through the Vineyards District.

To ensure consistency with the Tourist Centre and major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes future desired character, new planning proposals will be required to address the following planning principles.

- The Tourist Centre and existing major tourist, accommodation and infrastructure nodes are the focus for larger scale tourist and non-agricultural development.
- Proposals do not increase opportunities for residential intensification, such as residential subdivision.
- Proposals encourage improved walking and cycling connectivity from the Tourist Centre to key destinations and important landscape features in the area.
- Proposals maximise the use of existing infrastructure and do not require major infrastructure upgrades or augmentation.
- Proposals avoid land significantly impacted by natural hazards.

The following actions have been identified to ensure the Tourist Centre and major tourist accommodation nodes are appropriately managed in accordance with the future character statement.

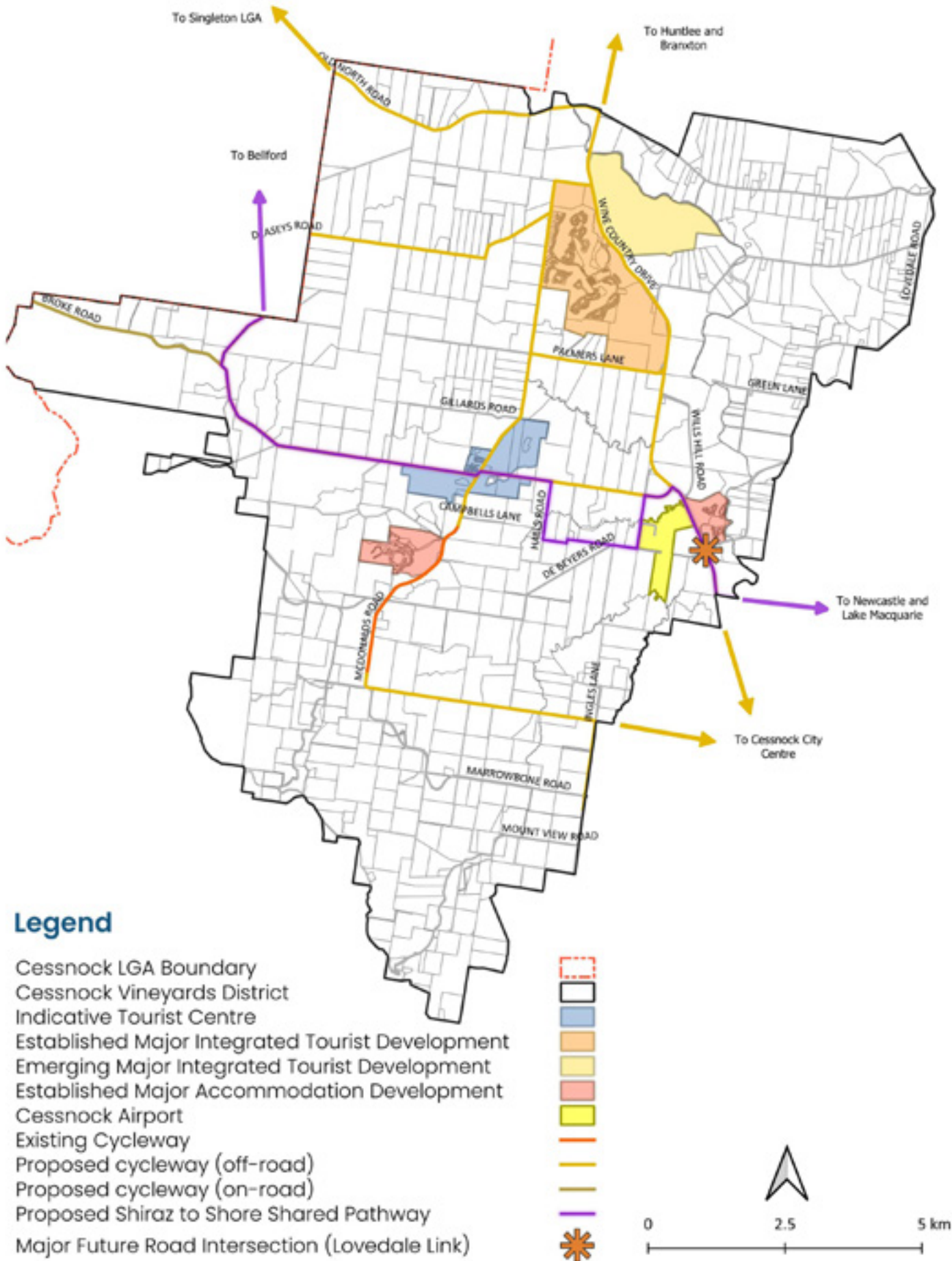


**Action 16: Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of the Tourist Centre and major accommodation nodes**

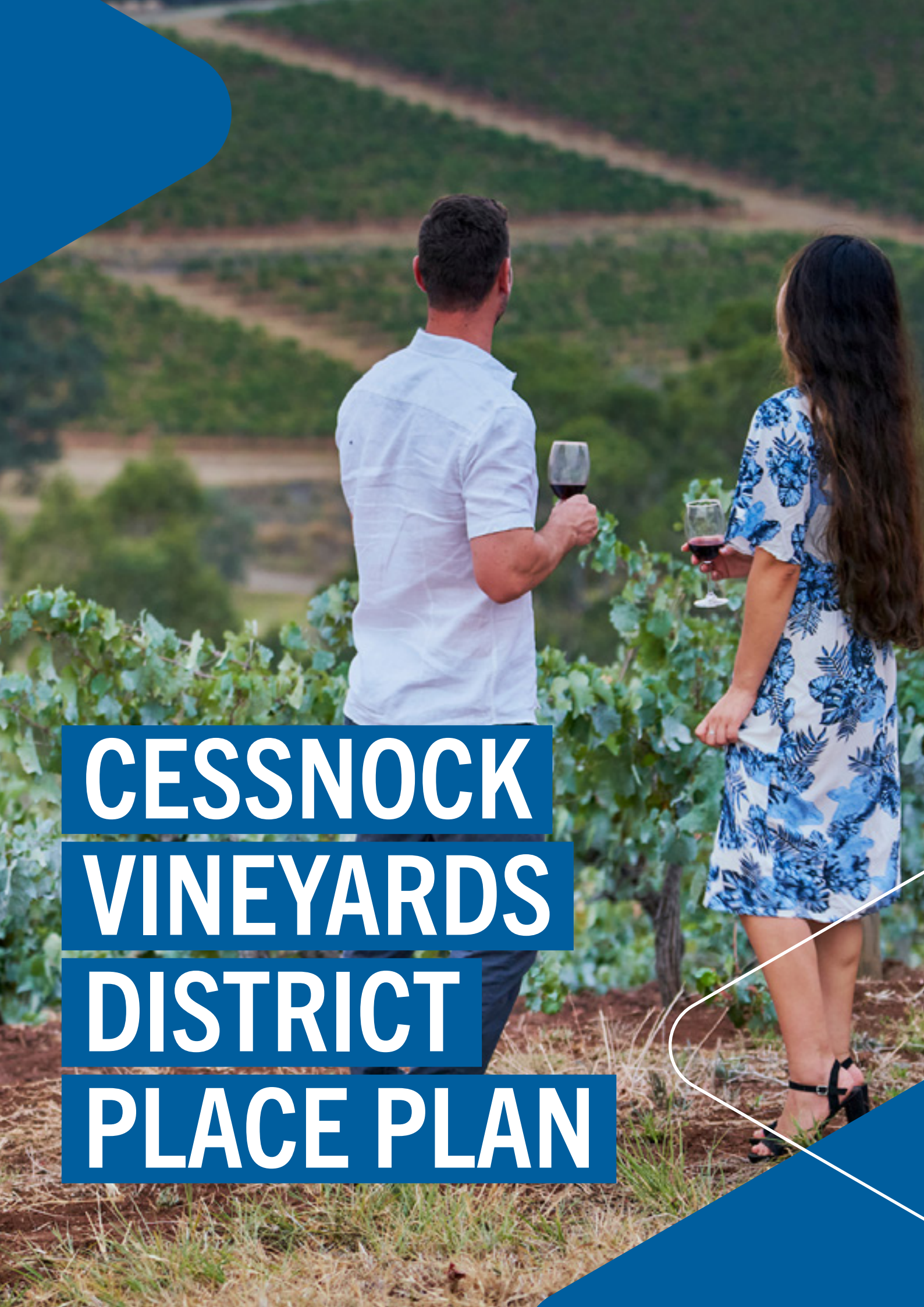
A Development Control Plan should be prepared to guide future development in the Vineyards District Tourist Centre. New development should complement the established pattern, scale, and typology of existing uses, and where opportunities for more intensive tourist development arise, they must be balanced with requirements for design excellence and minimal environmental and infrastructure impacts, including traffic and roadside tree removal. The focus for the Vineyards Tourist Centre should remain on enhancing the visitor experience and reinforcing the tourism economy, while maintaining distinct boundaries between the Centre and surrounding rural and agricultural areas. Development should also protect the rural, tree-lined character of key roads such as Broke Road and McDonalds Road, which contribute to the district's scenic qualities. If the Tourist Centre is rezoned to SP3 in the future, the DCP will need to be updated to respond to the objectives of the zone and any new permissible land uses.

**Action 17: Review Council’s Section 7.11 and Section 7.12 development contributions plans to identify opportunities to fund future active transport links within the Cessnock Vineyards District**

To support the wine and tourism sector prosper in the Cessnock Vineyards District, a renewed focus on improving active and road transport infrastructure is required. This includes bridging gaps in the cycleway network, between the major tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes, along key transport routes and from the Tourist Centre to other tourist activities and landscape features in the area and beyond. In order to deliver the proposed improvements to the walking and cycling network in the Cessnock Vineyards District, items of infrastructure will need to be included in the Works Schedule that accompanies Council’s existing s.7.12 Levy Contribution Plan. The total cost of the infrastructure is significant and may warrant consideration of a plan levy rate above 1%.



**Figure 20:** Tourist Centre and major tourist nodes



# CESSNOCK VINEYARDS DISTRICT PLACE PLAN

## Cessnock Vineyards District place plan

### Place Plan

The Vineyards District Place Plan is a high-level summary of the strategic directions and planning principles that will guide future land use and development across the Vineyards District. Consistent with the Hunter Regional Plan 2041, the Place Plan supports the continued evolution of the area as a leading wine and tourism destination while protecting its rural character, scenic landscape, and agricultural productivity. The Vineyards District Place Plan comprises the following key elements:

### Important Agricultural Land and Visually Significant Landscape

The Place Plan acknowledges the significance of Important Agricultural Land in the Cessnock Vineyards District, where viticulture, low-impact horticulture, and horse and cattle grazing are expected to remain the dominant land uses. While tourism and other non-agricultural development can provide valuable economic and product diversification opportunities, such development must be compatible with agricultural uses on the subject land and surrounding properties. Proposals must be appropriately scaled, designed, and sited in response to the environmental and rural characteristics of the land.

The District's visually sensitive landscapes, including scenic views toward the Broken Back Range, are a defining feature of the area and must be protected. Development

on Visually Sensitive Land must be sympathetic to the established rural character and must not dominate the landscape or interrupt key view corridors. Tree-lined rural roads should be preserved for their habitat value, contribution to scenic quality, and role in defining the area's unique rural and viticultural identity. Development must not compromise the ongoing or future use of Important Agricultural Land, including potential expansion of viticulture or operations associated with Cessnock Airport.

### Important Environmental Land

The Place Plan recognises the value of environmental lands within the Cessnock-Kurri Kurri vegetation region, which supports threatened species and contributes to regional ecological connectivity. Planning proposals must consider the application of Environmental Conservation zones in accordance with the Hunter Regional Plan 2041, relevant State Environmental Planning Policies (SEPPs), and Ministerial Directions to protect biodiversity, native vegetation, and ecological processes.

Land use planning must also align with the NSW Water Quality Objectives to support catchment health and protect riparian areas such as the Black Creek catchment. Environmental considerations should be integrated into all stages of planning and development to ensure the long-term protection of natural values and the resilience of the Vineyards District's ecological systems.



### Vineyards District Tourist Centre

The Place Plan proposes land at the intersection of Broke and McDonalds roads for the purpose of a Tourist Centre. The number and density of existing larger scale tourist developments in this area warrant its identification as a major tourist node, which should be managed accordingly through the local planning framework. The Tourist Centre will support a range of facilities, services, and accommodation for visitors to the Cessnock Vineyards District. It will also accommodate events and festivals, tourist retail, and wine tourism. The final extent of the Tourist Centre will be determined through a landowner-initiated planning proposal.

Any rezoning proposal should be supported by a Master Plan that includes a spatial analysis of landform, landscape and environmental constraints, as well as infrastructure requirements, access and movement networks, public realm improvements, and landscape integration. The Master Plan should also outline how built form outcomes will be managed to ensure they are compatible with the rural setting and reinforce the distinctive character of the area.

### Major Integrated Tourist, Infrastructure and Accommodation Nodes

The Place Plan acknowledges the existing major integrated tourist and accommodation nodes, including The Vintage and Lovedale Farm developments. These nodes are expected to continue operating largely as they have been, with some capacity for intensification in accordance with the planning controls that apply to them. These nodes have played an important role in accommodating tourism infrastructure and small-lot residential development within defined, well-serviced areas, relieving development pressure across the broader Vineyards District.

To preserve rural amenity and the agricultural potential of land surrounding these major nodes, there will be no further opportunity for their expansion onto adjoining land. Over time, planned urban release areas such as Huntlee and the broader Anambah to Branxton Urban Investigation Area, are expected to accommodate significant new housing supply. These areas will assist in

reducing demand for small-lot residential development within the Vineyards District and support the long-term preservation of rural character and agricultural uses.

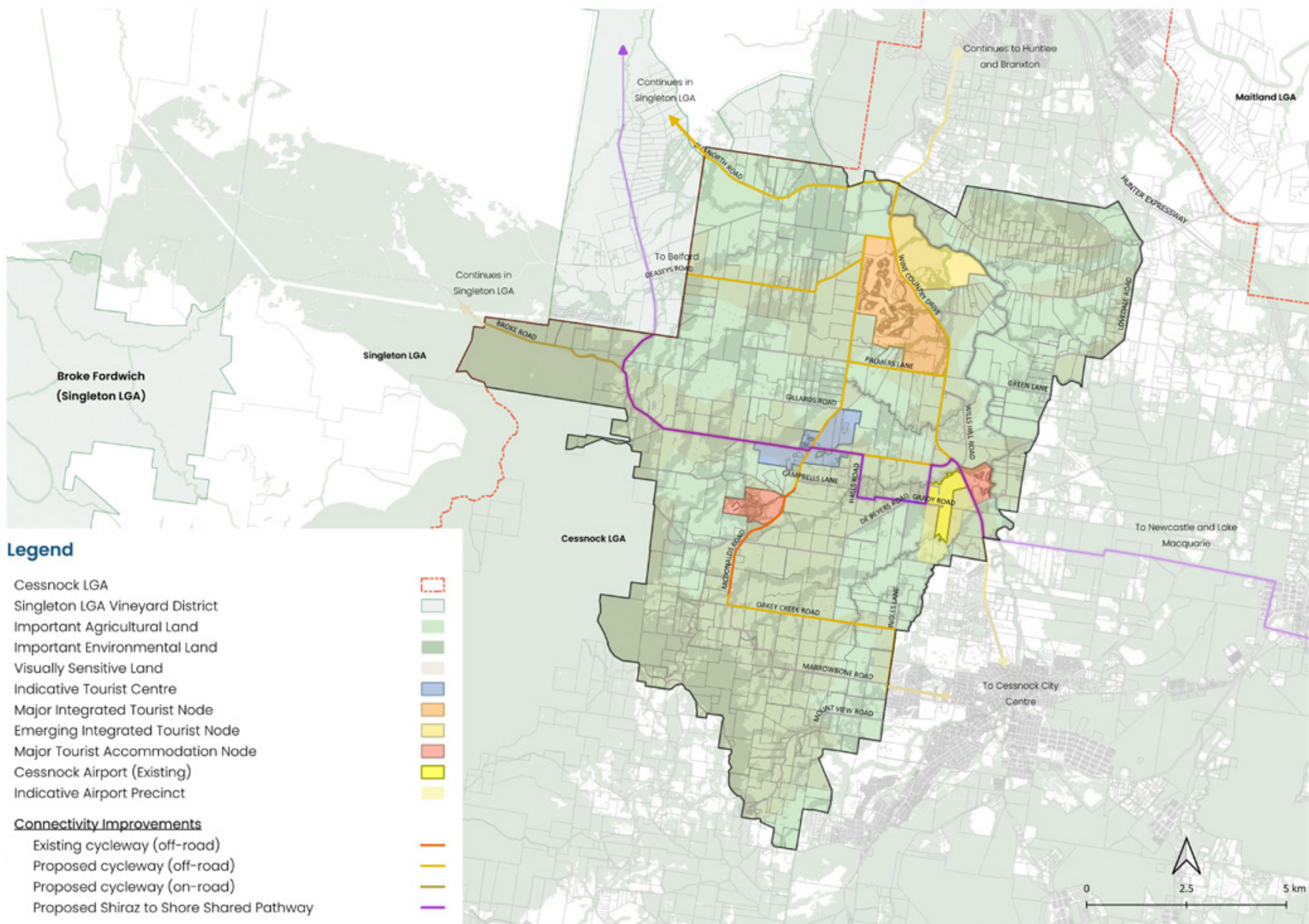
### Traffic and Transport Improvements

To support the ongoing success of the wine and tourism sector, a renewed focus on improving road and active transport infrastructure is required. Priority should be given to bridging gaps in the cycleway network, particularly between the major tourist, infrastructure and accommodation nodes, along key transport routes, and connecting the Tourist Centre with other key destinations and landscape features in the region.

Upgrades to transport infrastructure must be carefully planned and delivered to ensure they do not diminish the rural amenity or character of the Vineyards District. Tree-lined rural roads, which serve as important ecological corridors and contribute to visual amenity and the visitor experience, should be preserved and enhanced as part of any future improvements.

### Cessnock Airport Precinct

The Place Plan proposes the Cessnock Airport Precinct as a key regional aviation, transport, and economic hub within the Vineyards District, recognising its potential to support expanded and diversified aviation operations alongside compatible economic and tourism uses. The proposed planning principles for the precinct prioritise aviation as the primary land use, safeguarding airspace and infrastructure to enable future growth, including runway extensions and intensified aviation activities, while preventing residential encroachment and incompatible development. Infrastructure improvements and a future Master Plan will guide coordinated land use, infrastructure investment, and design outcomes that reinforce the Airport's gateway role to Wine Country, enhance connectivity with Huntlee and Cessnock town centre, and the Vineyards District, and promote sustainable economic development aligned with the region's strategic objectives.



**Figure 21:** Place Plan

## Land Use Principles, consistency measures and actions

The table below outlines land use principles for the Cessnock Vineyards District, along with consistency measures to ensure planning proposals align with these principles. It also identifies key actions needed to implement the Place Strategy within the local planning framework.

| LAND USE PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE PLANNING PROPOSALS                                                                                                              | CONSISTENCY MEASURES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | ACTIONS                                                                                                                                          | TIMEFRAME |
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| Proposals relating to Important Agricultural Land affirm the primacy of viticulture and strengthen the integrity of the area for agricultural activities.      | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it is able to demonstrate that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It will not intensify land use conflict with agricultural activities, including agricultural produce industries, occurring on the land, or adjacent land;</li><li>It will not reduce opportunities to carry out agriculture on the land in the future; and</li><li>It will support and strengthen the agricultural and/or tourist industry in the broader Cessnock Vineyards District.</li></ul> | Review land use zones to align with the Cessnock Vineyards District’s desired future character statements                                        | Long      |
|                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Retain a Vineyards Reference Group to support strategy implementation and refinement                                                             | Long      |
|                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Investigate an appropriate land use zone to preserve areas of Important Agricultural Land                                                        | Long      |
|                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land                      | Immediate |
|                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Review minimum lot sizes in the Cessnock Vineyards District to ensure productive viticulture                                                     | Long      |
| The Tourist Centre and existing major tourist, accommodation and infrastructure nodes are the focus for larger scale tourist and non-agricultural development. | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it is able to demonstrate that it is in keeping with the objective of the Place Strategy to focus larger scale tourist and non-agricultural development within the proposed Broke/McDonalds Road Tourist Centre, or an established major tourist, infrastructure or accommodation node (as identified in this Place Strategy).</p>                                                                                                                                         | Review land use zones to align with the Cessnock Vineyards District’s desired future character statements                                        | Long      |
|                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of the Tourist Centre and major accommodation nodes | Immediate |

**Immediate Short** Action carried out in conjunction with this Place Strategy. Carried out within the next year.

**Medium Long** Carried out within the next two years. Carried out within the next five years.

| LAND USE PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE PLANNING PROPOSALS                                                                                                                                                                              | CONSISTENCY MEASURES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | ACTIONS                                                                                                                                                                               | TIMEFRAME |
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| Proposals do not increase opportunities for residential intensification, such as residential subdivision.                                                                                                                      | A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it does not increase opportunities for residential development or residential subdivision in the Cessnock Vineyards District.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Review local policy relating to dwelling entitlements.                                                                                                                                | Medium    |
| Proposals are sympathetic to the established viticultural character of the area and will not give rise to land uses that have the potential to dominate open landscapes or diminish existing scenic values and view corridors. | A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it is supported by a Visual Impact Analysis demonstrating future land uses will not diminish the existing scenic values or view corridors.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Review the Visually Sensitive Land Map.                                                                                                                                               | Long      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Visually Sensitive Land.                                                              | Immediate |
| Proposals encourage improved walking and cycling connectivity from the Tourist Centre to key destinations and important landscape features in the area.                                                                        | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops successful transport connections by applying the TfNSW Movement and Place Framework; and</li> <li>Supports sustainable and active transport opportunities, which connects open space, tourist nodes and important landscape features.</li> <li>Is consistent with the objectives and outcomes of Council's Cycling Strategy, Trails Strategy and Traffic and Transport Strategy.</li> </ul> | Review Council's Section 7.11 and Section 7.12 development contributions plans to identify opportunities to fund future active transport links within the Cessnock Vineyards District | Medium    |

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| <b>Immediate Short</b> | Action carried out in conjunction with this Place Strategy. Carried out within the next year. | <b>Medium Long</b> | Carried out within the next two years. Carried out within the next five years. |
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| LAND USE PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE PLANNING PROPOSALS                                                                       | CONSISTENCY MEASURES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | ACTIONS                                                                                                                              | TIMEFRAME |
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| Land containing important biodiversity, heritage or agricultural value is protected and enhanced.                       | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Protects, retains and enhances biodiversity corridors, high environmental value areas and riparian corridors (as set out in this Place Strategy) to create regional green linkages;</li> <li>Demonstrates consistency with the hierarchy principles under the Biodiversity Conservation Act;</li> <li>Protects and conserves items and places of Aboriginal and European cultural significance;</li> <li>Protects and enhances important agricultural land.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                 | Investigate the extent of historically significant vines, structures and landscapes, and mechanisms to protect these items and areas | Long      |
|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Improve awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage.                                                                                   | Long      |
|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Environmental Land         | Immediate |
|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Investigate a suitable land use zone to acknowledge areas of Important Environmental Land                                            | Long      |
|                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Review minimum lot sizes in the Cessnock Vineyards District to ensure productive viticulture                                         | Long      |
| Proposals maximise the use of existing infrastructure and do not require major infrastructure upgrades or augmentation. | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Is supported by appropriate modelling (transport, infrastructure, services and utilities) to understand ultimate capacities, cumulative growth and infrastructure thresholds;</li> <li>Considers infrastructure staging and sequencing required to support growth and minimise the need for redundant infrastructure; and</li> <li>Considers the use of interim infrastructure solutions to align infrastructure requirements with growth.</li> <li>Does not negatively impact on green corridors within the Vineyards District, including vegetation corridors and tree lined rural roads.</li> </ul> | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land          | Immediate |

**Immediate Short** Action carried out in conjunction with this Place Strategy. Carried out within the next year.

**Medium Long** Carried out within the next two years. Carried out within the next five years.

| LAND USE PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE PLANNING PROPOSALS                                                                                | CONSISTENCY MEASURES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | ACTIONS                                                                                                                      | TIMEFRAME |
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| Proposals do not increase the potential for land use conflict with viticulture, horticulture or agricultural produce industries. | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses the Land Use Conflict Risk Assessment Guide to demonstrate land use compatibility and minimise rural amenity issues (of both existing and future uses); and</li> <li>Identifies land use conflicts and develops appropriate strategies, such as complementary development controls and/or buffer and transition requirements.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land. | Immediate |
| Proposals avoid land significantly impacted by natural hazards.                                                                  | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Addresses the Flood Risk Management Manual 2023 and the flood risk management toolkit. This includes how risks can be appropriately managed, including evacuation requirements.</li> <li>Addresses the RFS Planning for Bushfire Protection to ensure protection to human life and minimise risk to property and the environment. This includes being able to demonstrate appropriate evacuation routes and access to emergency service infrastructure.</li> <li>Minimises the impacts of urban heat and demonstrates opportunities to co-locate uses (i.e., active transport connections and open space).</li> <li>Considers the impacts of climate change, including climate responsiveness and resilience.</li> </ul> | Prepare a DCP for the Cessnock Vineyards District that reflects the future desired character of Important Agricultural Land. | Immediate |

**Immediate Short** Action carried out in conjunction with this Place Strategy. Carried out within the next year.

**Medium Long** Carried out within the next two years. Carried out within the next five years.

| LAND USE PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE PLANNING PROPOSALS                                                                                                | CONSISTENCY MEASURES                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | ACTIONS                                                                                    | TIMEFRAME |
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| Proposals do not reduce opportunities for the expansion or intensification of Cessnock Airport for airport infrastructure or hours of operation. | <p>A planning proposal is consistent with this principle if it is able to demonstrate that it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Will not intensify land use conflict with Airport activities;</li><li>• Will not reduce opportunities to expand or intensify Airport infrastructure or hours of operation; and</li><li>• Will support and strengthen the agricultural and/or tourist industry in the broader Vineyards District.</li></ul> | Prepare a Master Plan for the Cessnock Airport Precinct                                    | Medium    |
|                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Review local planning provisions to support future Airport growth and investment potential | Long      |
|                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Establish a development buffer to the Cessnock Airport Precinct                            | Medium    |

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**Medium Long** Carried out within the next two years. Carried out within the next five years.



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