



ST MARYS TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

July 2006

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART 1 – BACKGROUND.....	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
A NEW DIRECTION FOR OUR CITY CENTRES.....	3
THE PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY.....	5
OVERVIEW OF ST MARYS TOWN CENTRE.....	7
<i>Land Use Systems.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Economic Systems.....</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Social Systems.....</i>	<i>12</i>
KEY CHALLENGES FACING ST MARYS.....	16
PART 2 – STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS FOR CREATING A VIABLE AND VITAL ST MARYS TOWN CENTRE.....	17
IMAGINING THE FUTURE – THE VISION.....	17
<i>Creating a Vision for St Marys Town Centre.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>What is the Vision?.....</i>	<i>18</i>
RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS.....	19
STEP 1: BUILDING COMMUNITY SUPPORT.....	20
<i>Step 1: Strategies and actions involving the community in the short and long term.....</i>	<i>23</i>
STEP 2: ACHIEVING AN ECOLOGICALLY SUSTAINABLE CENTRE.....	24
<i>Step 2: Strategies and actions for Achieving a Sustainable Town Centre.....</i>	<i>25</i>
STEP 3: FORGING STRONG PARTNERSHIPS.....	26
<i>The role of the private sector in St Marys.....</i>	<i>Error! Bookmark not defined.</i>
<i>Strategies and actions for forging partnerships in the town centre revitalisation.....</i>	<i>27</i>
STEP 4: CREATING FRIENDLY AND ATTRACTIVE PLACES AND SPACES.....	28
<i>St Marys existing pedestrian environment.....</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Step 4: Strategies and Actions for Creating Friendly and Attractive places and spaces in St Marys:.....</i>	<i>30</i>
STEP 5: CREATING A CULTURAL/ENTERTAINMENT PRECINCT.....	33
<i>What opportunities exist to improve/enhance/expand cultural activities in St Marys?.....</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Step 5: Strategies and actions for improving provision of Cultural Services and Activities.....</i>	<i>35</i>
STEP 6: MAKING HOUSING AND MIXED USE A PRIORITY.....	37
<i>Step 6: Strategies and actions to deliver housing choice within the town centre:.....</i>	<i>38</i>
STEP 7: MANAGING PARKING AND IMPROVING ACCESS.....	39
<i>Problems with the existing transport and parking situation in St Marys.....</i>	<i>40</i>
<i>Step 7: Strategies and actions for improving car parking and access to the St Marys Town Centre.....</i>	<i>42</i>
STEP 8: FOSTERING ECONOMIC INVESTMENT.....	44
<i>Step 8: Strategies and actions to foster economic investment in St Marys.....</i>	<i>45</i>
STEP 9: ACHIEVING A QUALITY BUILT ENVIRONMENT.....	47
<i>The built form in St Marys Town Centre.....</i>	<i>47</i>
<i>Step 9: Strategies and actions to achieve a high quality built form in St Marys.....</i>	<i>48</i>
STEP 10: PROVIDING THE RIGHT PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK.....	49
<i>Step 10 Strategies and Actions to provide the right planning, development and implementation framework.....</i>	<i>51</i>

Part 1 – Background

INTRODUCTION

St Marys Town Centre is one of the two main retail/commercial districts within the Penrith Local Government Area. It is an older style district-sized commercial centre, located towards the eastern boundary of Penrith LGA with a total commercial and retail floor area of 63,600m². The main catchment area for St Marys is the suburbs of St Marys, Colyton, Oxley Park and Claremont Meadows, Erskine Park and St Clair with a wider trade area overlapping with that of Mount Druitt in neighbouring Blacktown Council Area and potential new centres at ADI and Werrington.

St Marys is uniquely positioned as a commercial and business district. It is accessible from the M4 motorway, the Main Western Railway line and the Great Western Highway. Sited on St Marys western fringe are the Penrith Campus of the University of Western Sydney and the Western Sydney Institute of TAFE.

St Marys Town Centre has traditionally served as a local or district retail centre for the nearby residential areas. Its viability has, however, come under threat in more recent times due to the growth of other district centres in the region and the range of services they are able to provide. This did result in the St Marys Town Centre becoming less attractive for shopping or conducting business. A major challenge facing St Marys is its ability to compete with centres such as Mount Druitt and the future retail and commercial developments within the Werrington Enterprise Living and Learning (WELL) Precinct and ADI.

In late 2002 Penrith City Council commenced the Our City Centres – Vitality and Viability Review. The Review aims to develop a framework and provide future direction for the role and operation of Penrith City Centre and St Marys Town Centre as vital, viable and sustainable centres.

The Review was given added impetus in 2004 when the former Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources provided funding under the Planning Reform Funding Program in recognition of the role of both Penrith and St Marys as “Centres” in the Metropolitan Strategy.

The Review is being undertaken in two stages. The first stage has comprised extensive community consultation, involving dialogue with all individuals and groups with an interest in the Centres, including users of the Centres, business owners, property owners, workers, community organisations and services, relevant government departments and authorities, community groups, identified target groups (such as the City’s younger and aged communities), visitors, and individuals in the City’s wider communities.

A community vision for the Town Centre underpinned by values and principles was also developed. The Community Visioning Process Report was completed in June 2005 and establishes a clear set of objectives for urban development, based on the strengths and opportunities within ST Marys town centre. Ensuring that growth responds to community desires and expectations for the city is a key challenge.

The first stage has also involved a review of the principal systems which bear upon the operation, development and growth of the Centres, including –

- land use systems e.g. access, public transport, parking, urban design analysis
- economic systems, e.g. economic viability, servicing constraints, existing market trends, retail, commercial, residential and tourism activities, and
- social systems e.g. existing social and cultural values, constraints to recognising/expressing the social and cultural elements of the Town’s communities, encouraging cultural diversity.

Specialist consultants were engaged to undertake an analysis of these principal systems and a number of technical studies were produced. The technical studies provide a broad analysis of the Centres' existing systems, and identify elements that constrain current activities.

The second stage of the Review has involved more focused investigations, and the development of strategies to guide the future planning directions and the development of revised planning controls for the Centres. The St Marys Town Centre Strategy is the culmination of this work and identifies the key strategies required to deliver a vital, viable and sustainable Town Centre into the future.

A NEW DIRECTION FOR OUR CITY CENTRES

The image of a great city stems largely from the quality of its public realm – its streets, boulevards, parks, squares, plazas, and waterfronts...A well-designed and well-managed public realm evokes community pride and creates a strong, positive image. The environment, in conjunction with a strong and diversified economic marketplace, attracts the development investment needed to sustain and enhance the economic and social heart of the city.¹

We certainly know those qualities which characterise an unappealing town centre – feeling unsafe, a lack of quality outdoor public spaces, empty buildings and vacant land, vast tracts of surface car parking, a lack of variety and interest, and little or no pedestrian connectivity between different areas.

By contrast, a vibrant centre contains two key elements:

- A mix and concentration of different uses which attract pedestrians and create a lively social environment, and
- Attractive, inviting and safe public spaces that make people want to visit them and generate a sense of community ownership and commitment to those spaces.

These qualities in a town centre are worth striving for because they create significant and long lasting benefits for the community. It is important to build a vital and viable centre for and with the City's residents and communities. Attractive and vibrant centres help to spur investment in commercial, retail and residential development in the area bringing with them new jobs and economic growth

The NSW Department of Planning's Metropolitan Strategy has nominated St Marys as a Town Centre within its hierarchy of centres. This has implications for the future growth of St Marys Town Centre with housing targets in the order of between 4,500 –9,000 dwellings to be provided within the town centre itself. The potential growth of St Marys will be further affected by the nomination of Penrith as a Regional City and Mount Druitt as a future potential major centre within the Metropolitan Strategy.

Apart from the economic benefits that can potentially accrue from town centre revitalisation, there are also many social and environmental benefits. A town centre, which contains a high quality public realm and a range of activities to attract visitors, creates a positive image for the region and engenders a strong sense of community pride. It also provides for a healthy lifestyle enabling people to walk or cycle to a variety of destinations thus reducing car dependency and increasing opportunities for community interaction and hence community 'connectedness'. Within the context of St Marys the revitalisation of the town to a thriving livable small town centre is expected to be the most significant opportunity and strength promoting new development.

Where public spaces are well-maintained and used both during the day and at night, people are more likely to feel safe and crime is less likely to occur. A safe and attractive town centre in turn helps to attract housing which can take advantage of the proximity to services and transport, as well as add to the vibrancy and diversity of uses in the centre.

¹ Cy Paumier, "Creating a Vibrant City Center", Urban Land Institute, Washington 2004

Town centre housing plays an integral role in helping to meet the increasingly complex housing needs of a changing population. Whereas traditionally new housing largely comprised single dwellings on greenfield sites, there is now a shift towards providing a diversity of housing types across all communities so that all households, whether there are single person households, "empty nesters", couples with children or group households etc, can access appropriate housing.

Concentrating a diverse range of activities within a town centre and within walking distance of the town centre also reduces the number of trips taken by private vehicles. Where services are concentrated in the one area, there is no need to undertake multiple car trips in order to access such services. Providing better pedestrian linkages and attractive public spaces, encourages people to walk around the centre rather than use their car. This increase in physical activity can result in improved health and well being at the same time as providing opportunities for community interaction and the development of a 'sense of community'.

Concentrating a mix of uses in town centres also enables the provision of more efficient and effective public transport. This is in stark contrast to the situation where retailing and other services are dispersed across a wide area making the provision of a viable public transport system untenable.

The benefits that can emerge from creating a vibrant and attractive town centre for St Marys are significant and long lasting. The key to achieving these benefits is critically dependent on a clear articulation of the many strategies and actions needed to achieve an appealing centre and a commitment from all those involved to their effective implementation.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

A good plan helps define the rules of the game for all the players, and, along with the tools used to implement it, provides a predictable framework for decision-making and a basis for coordinating public and private investments.²

The success of any town centre revitalisation is dependent on having a clear and workable strategy that identifies what the long-term intentions are for the centre and how these intentions are to be achieved. Town centre strategies should be comprehensive in their scope and not only focus on appropriate planning tools but consider a much wider range of measures, such as infrastructure provision, town centre management and promotion, the promotion of healthy communities to achieve longer term ambitions.

The purpose of the St Marys Town Centre Strategy is to identify the key steps that, if implemented, will achieve the long-term vision of a sustainable and vital town centre. It provides a statement of the policies that will need to be pursued and a list of actions that will need to be implemented over time if the Vision for the Town Centre as the vibrant heart of the district is to be achieved.

In keeping with Council's and the community's vision, the strategies identify the key steps to achieve vital and viable Centres. The key steps outlined are:

- **Imagining the Future** – in partnership with the community, identifying what the vision should be for the St Marys Town Centre.
- **Building Community Support** – working with the community to realise the vision.
- **Achieving an Ecologically Sustainable Centre** – ensuring that all decisions regarding the future of St Marys Town Centre are guided by the principles of sustainability.
- **Forging Strong Partnerships** – recognising that the success of the Strategy is dependent on commitment and cooperation from both the private and public sectors.
- **Creating Friendly and Attractive Places and Spaces** – focussing on the fundamental importance of human scale, street activation, high quality public realm, promotion of healthy lifestyles and pedestrian friendly environments.
- **Creating a Cultural/Entertainment Precinct** – identifying a cultural/entertainment focus as part of the centre revitalisation.
- **Making Housing and Mixed Uses a Priority** – ensuring a diversity of uses to generate activity and economic viability
- **Managing Parking and Improving Access** – providing for improved public transport, cycling and pedestrian access to and within the Town Centre and managing car parking more efficiently and in a way that supports a vibrant Town Centre.
- **Fostering Economic Investment** – creating a Town Centre which is attractive for business and which generates new job opportunities for the people of St Marys.
- **Achieving a Quality Built Environment** – promoting a high quality of development and ensuring a visually cohesive built form.
- **Providing the Right Planning, Development and Implementation Framework** – creating the right regulatory environment which facilitates redevelopment of the centre.

² Cy Paumier, op cit, p157

Informing each of these strategies is the detailed investigation and evaluation of the principal systems which have shaped the way in which the Town Centre has evolved and which potentially will need to be modified if the Vision is to be achieved.

OVERVIEW OF ST MARYS TOWN CENTRE

St Marys Town Centre is located 47km from Sydney's CBD, approximately mid way between the Penrith City Centre and the Mount Druitt town centre in neighbouring Blacktown LGA. It is approximately 800m long, with the main street, Queen Street, running in north-south direction between the Western Railway Line in the north and the Great Western Highway in the south. Generally the centre is approximately 250m wide, bound by Gidley Street in the east and Carinya Street in the west. At the location of the Village Square, the width of the centre expands to approximately 600m.

A number of institutions are located in or in close proximity to the Town Centre, including:

- Penrith City Council Service Centre and Library
- Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct and Don Bosco Youth Centre
- University of Western Sydney
- Western Sydney Institute of TAFE
- St Marys Senior High School and St Marys Primary School and other schools
- Nepean Hospital
- Ripples Leisure Centre (swimming pool complex)
- Government agencies including Centrelink and DOCS
- St Marys Band Club
- St Marys Police Station

The first precincts in the nearby former ADI site are now underway, with Council expecting the first applications for urban development in late 2006 and early 2007. A total of 3,068 new dwellings are forecast for this area within the Penrith LGA (and approximately 1900 within the Blacktown LGA), creating additional demand for services from St Marys. The forecast population for the Penrith LGA area is 7,830.

The implementation of the Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct has also commenced. Located at the south-eastern corner of Mamre Road and Great Western Highway intersection it has been identified as a multi-functional community hub, which will service existing and new user groups in existing and enhanced facilities. The precinct will also provide facilities for local and emerging artists, youth groups and vocational school studies associated with the arts.

St Marys emerged as a small urban centre in the mid-nineteenth century, keeping pace with Penrith itself until the railway was completed. St Marys became the centre of two important local industries - tanning and wagon building. Tanning continued as an important industry for about a hundred years with peak output reached in the late 19th Century. The industry flourished until the 1920s when it began to move to the Botany industrial area.

During World War II St Marys was chosen as the site for the manufacture of ammunitions. It was on a railway line, convenient to Sydney's network of industry, but removed enough to offer a measure of seclusion. There were some 3,500 people employed making explosives. The industrial area was located north of the railway and was serviced by a branch line to Dunheved and Ropes Creek Stations. A large area of land was set aside for the industry, with additional areas designated for expansion.

An area west of Queen Street was set aside for hastily built cottages on small allotments to house some of the labour force. These houses remain, and are called "Duration Cottages". The Housing Commission erected a number of houses on the eastern side of Queen Street, south of the railway line.

In the post war period, the Commonwealth-owned factory buildings were at first leased to industrial firms at cheap rentals. The industrial mix attracted was from the start noted for its

diversity, with large engineering works balanced by small manufacturers. By 1950, some 94 firms were in business at St Marys with a work force of 2,500 people.

The industrial development at St Marys was crucial to the growth and expansion of the whole Penrith local government area in the following four decades.

In the early 1990s the State Government funded the bus/rail interchange and the easy access upgrade of St Marys station. Council upgraded Queen St and sealed the adjacent car parks.

Land Use Systems

The following information regarding urban structure and urban fabric is drawn from the Urban Design Analysis for the St Marys Town Centre prepared by the Government Architects Office for Penrith City Council (June 2004).

Urban Structure

St Marys Town Centre is located east of South Creek and the topography is relatively flat, rising slightly to the east affording significant views to the Blue Mountains escarpment.

St Marys Town Centre is mostly contained between the Western Railway Line to the north and the Great Western Highway to the south. Gidley Street and Collins Street form the eastern boundary whilst Charles Hackett Drive, Kungala and Carinya Avenue form the western boundary. Swanston Street, Sainsbury Street and Princess Mary Street and the Great Western Highway bound the Town Centre to the south.

Queen Street forms the main thoroughfare for vehicular and pedestrian traffic, providing a link from the residential areas south of the Great Western Highway to St Marys Railway Station in the north. This roadway is the dominant feature of St Marys and is the central focus of the centre. Streets run predominantly north-south and east-west, with two service lanes immediately behind Queen Street.

Residential areas within the suburb of St Marys are situated directly east of the Town Centre, and east and west of Mamre Rd south of the Great Western Highway. Additional residential development is situated north of the North St Marys Industrial Area, bounded by Glossop Street, Forrester Road and Harris Street north of the railway line. The suburb of North St Marys has strong connections to the Town Centre.

St Marys is also bounded by two creeks – South Creek to the west, forming the boundary with Werrington, and Ropes Creek to the east, forming the boundary with Blacktown Local Government Area. The South Creek corridor comprises areas of open space, incorporating the Kingsway Playing Fields, a BMX Track, tennis courts and soccer fields immediately to the west of the Town Centre. Open space surrounding the Ropes Creek Corridor forms a relationship and eastern boundary with the suburb of North St Marys.

A strong avenue of street trees exists along Queen Street, and contributes to the civic quality of the street. East-west streets within and beyond the Town Centre boundary have little or no street tree planting, with the exception of Charles Hackett Drive. Kokoda and Lang Park are large parks within the centre. There are a number of smaller pocket parks, including Coachman's Park immediately adjacent to Queen Street.

Urban Fabric

Development in St Marys is generally oriented towards Queen Street and comprises fine grain, low scale buildings generally with retail at the ground floor and commercial above. The shops along the main thoroughfare retain a distinctive building setback that results in varying but significant footpath widths. These varied setbacks allow for the strong avenue of trees planted along Queen Street, outdoor dining and awnings.

Two stand-alone retail centres are located outside the main Town Centre spine. The "Station Plaza" is located towards the north of the centre, fronting Station Street, and is adjoined by an expansive surface car park to its west. It is an internalised shopping centre, containing a

supermarket and a mix of smaller specialty retail tenancies. The building provides little street activation. The "Village Centre" is located towards the south west of the Town Centre, on Charles Hackett Drive and is also surrounded by an extensive area of surface car parking. It also is an internalised shopping centre containing a supermarket, discount department store and a mix of other smaller retailing/bulky goods outlets. The shopping complex is located away from the main retail street of St Marys and does not provide a good level of interaction with the pedestrian environment.

St Marys Town Centre is generally characterised by development up to two storeys in height. It is not visually dominant from surrounding areas.

The Town Centre is surrounded by surface car parking located behind the shopfronts to Queen Street, which is highly visible from the eastern and western approaches to the Town Centre along Gidley Street and Carinya Avenue, and from the north when approaching from the railway line.

The main street of St Marys Town Centre is characterised by traditional shop fronts, overhanging awnings, and wide pedestrian footpaths. Most buildings comprise ground floor retail/offices with some second storey commercial. The two stand alone 'big box' retail stores located on the periphery of the centre draw custom away from the main street, further detracting from the appearance and viability of shops along Queen Street.

Most of the retailing and commercial activity currently occurring along Queen is located towards the centre and south of the thoroughfare. Towards the northern end of Queen Street, development is run down and dilapidated. Retailing activities create an active frontage to Queen Street however do not provide the same level of activation to the east-west running streets adjoining Queen Street.

The Council office and branch library are located on the western side of Queen Street, south of Crana Street, St Marys Occasional Care Centre is located in Carinya Avenue whilst other community facilities are located south of the Great Western Highway.

Access and Transport

An Access and Transport Analysis of Penrith City Centre and St Marys Town Centre was prepared by Sinclair Knight Merz on behalf of Penrith City Council (November 2004). The following information is largely drawn from this report.

The main vehicular links servicing St Marys from the east and west are the Great Western Highway and the Western Motorway (M4). Mamre Road provides vehicular access to the Town Centre from the south, however traffic must travel via Glossop Street from North St Marys due to the location of the railway line blocking access from Queen Street. The majority of intersections within the Town Centre operate at a good level of service, however the intersection of Great Western Highway and Mamre Road is currently over capacity and is being considered for upgrading.

St Marys is well serviced by the Main Western Rail Line, which provides relatively high frequency services during peak periods as well as a good spread of services throughout the day. The rail provides an eastern connection into Sydney city via Parramatta, and a western connection to the Blue Mountains and Central Western NSW via Penrith.

More than 2,000 passengers board the train from St Marys during the morning peak hours to other destinations, mainly for work. A significant proportion of these passengers drives to the train station in the morning and parks in the commuters' car park or makes use of local bus services.

Private bus operators under contract to the NSW Ministry of Transport provide bus services in the Penrith Local Government Area. Bus services provide for local trips, and as feeder services for rail travel. Bus service frequency is an issue, however, with there generally being a 30 minute time gap between services. Bus stops are located at the bus interchange adjacent to the railway station, and on Queen Street adjacent to the intersection with Charles Hackett Drive and King Street.

Generally, pedestrian facilities in St Marys Town Centre are considered to be good and well defined along the major streets, however connectivity between the two major shopping centres and Queen Street is poor. There is a lack of footpaths in both East and West Lanes, constraining pedestrian movement through these lanes. Access for people with disabilities between the carparks and Queen St is also limited.

No priority exists for cyclists on the road networks in St Marys Town Centre however bikeways exist in the vicinity of St Marys Town Centre at:

- Charles Hackett Drive, from Gabriels Street to Kalang Avenue
- Swanston Street, and
- Monfarville Street.

Council has planned to install bikeways along the following streets in the future:

- Queen Street, from Great Western Highway to Station Street
- Mamre Road
- Great Western Highway, westwards from Glossop Street to Kalang Avenue

Car Parking

There were a total of 2,754 parking spaces in the off-street car parks at St Marys Town Centre. Of these, 2,076 spaces are long-term parking spaces while 678 spaces are short-term (restricted) parking spaces. There are an additional 242 short-term kerbside parking spaces.

SKM undertook an assessment of the required level of car parking for St Marys Town Centre, based on the existing provision of retail and commercial floor space. In accordance with Council's parking code, a total of 1,725 spaces are required – 742 spaces fewer than are currently provided. Further, the demand for parking within the Town Centre is adequately met. A parking survey undertaken by SKM concluded that there were 309 vacant car parking spaces scattered in the various off-street carparks within the Town Centre during the weekday mid-day period.

Economic Systems

An Economic Analysis of Penrith City Centre and St Marys was prepared for Council by Hill PDA (July 2004). The following information is based on this analysis.

Existing Economic Activity

St Marys is the major centre in the eastern side of the Penrith LGA, servicing a wide range of rural and urban communities.

There is no distinct role at present for St Marys as it is typical of an older style retail centre that does not fit into the current retail categories. It cannot be classified as a destination/regional centre, a big-box retail centre or a convenience centre. The challenge for St Marys is to redefine its role. Given its location between Penrith and the sub-regional centre of Mount Druitt, its opportunity to perform a stronger retail function is limited. Despite this, it is a concentrated centre offering a reasonable level of shopper amenity and has potential for improvement which could strengthen its appeal.

The indoor components of the St Marys Town Centre include:

- Station Street Plaza, with approximately 7,500m² of retail floor space. Major tenants include a Coles Supermarket and a Fosseys store.
- Astley Centre with approximately 800m² of retail floor space.
- The Village Centre with around 15,600m² of retail floor space. Major tenants include Target and Woolworths.

The majority of strip retail is located along Queen Street, providing around 20,600m² of retail floor area.

In comparison to retail, commercial or office space is very minimal in St Marys and mainly exists in the form of first floor commercial above retail. There is approximately 16,500m² of commercial floor space in the Town Centre. The prime commercial space is found along both King and Chapel Streets, whilst remaining lower quality commercial is located along Queen Street.

The Economic Study prepared by HillPDA found that the supermarkets within the St Marys centre are trading at or below the national average, and this is a sustainable level. Following consultations with various stakeholders within St Marys it is apparent that the potential exists for the addition of a Discount Department Store within the Town Centre. This potential development could have a significantly advantageous impact on the operation of the centre through re-orientation of the shopping centres and improving the linkage of these centres to Queen Street; thereby improving pedestrian linkages within the centre. As such Council will endeavour to continue working with developers and consider using existing Council assets to facilitate such improvements.

The breakdown of retail versus commercial floor space is typical of a centre this size where office demand stems from professional services such as banks, real estate agents, accountants, lawyers and health care professionals. The amount of retail space acts as an anchor to attract customers, and as a result the amount of commercial space is a function of the provision of retail space. Therefore, if for some reason the viability of the retail is undermined, then there is likely to be a flow-on effect to the professional service providers who may consider relocating. One problem for St Marys therefore is the attraction of the range of retail offerings. As it is not necessarily as great as in a regional centre, there is potential for a loss of patronage to other centres which provide for this demand. This could then have a flow-on effect to the commercial services provided within the centre.

The St Marys trade area has been defined to include a primary sector (St Marys, St Marys North, Oxley Park, Claremont Meadows, Werrington and Colyton) and a secondary sector (St Clair and Erskine Park). Much of the expenditure in comparative goods (clothing, bulky goods and more expensive personal goods) from this trade area is escaping St Marys to the regional centres of Penrith and Blacktown. In addition to this, there is a potential future threat of competition from new centres near Werrington and ADI St Marys.

A significant area of industrial development is located immediately north of the Western Rail line in North St Marys.

St Marys commercial office space is likely to be proportional to the growth in retail space. Based on retail projections, this is likely to be in the order of 8,000m² over the next 12 years but may be retarded if competition from the proposed new centres in ADI St Marys and UWS Werrington proceed.

Economic Trends

Population growth, rising real disposable incomes, innovation and change within the retail industry have underpinned a rapid increase in the supply of retail floor space throughout Australia. Recent shifts in retailing have included the emergence of the regional and 'super-regional' centre (such as Westfield), retailing targeted at convenience and 'just-in-time' shopping to meet daily and weekly shopping needs (with quick and convenient parking and extended trading hours), category killers (eg Buntings, Harvey Norman, IKEA) and bulky goods centres.

These trends are polarising the retail hierarchy with the larger regional centres such as Westfield Penrith Plaza in Penrith CBD positioning themselves for a more dominant role in the provision of entertainment and customer services matched with increased retail floor space. The more successful smaller centres have moved towards the concept of convenience centres with greater emphasis on food retailing, just-in-time shopping, fast foods, local services and petrol. This polarisation of the retail hierarchy has been at the expense of the sub-regional centres and district centres such as St Marys.

However, the historic trends towards larger stores and centres may continue for some time, but it won't necessarily continue indefinitely. More people are juggling careers and family and increasingly must squeeze shopping in where they can, rather than adhere to a standard schedule. Busy shoppers today are less inclined to spend as much time as they once did wandering through vast shopping complexes. The trend is towards a decline in average time spent shopping and the replacement of the once-a-week shop with a series of small shopping trips.

Current threats facing the St Marys Town Centre are the potential growth of the Mount Druitt sub-regional centre which may act to hinder the expansion and vitality of St Marys. Further, the physical barrier of the Railway Line separating St Marys centre from North St Marys may mean that people living on the northern side of the line may be attracted to shop at future retail facilities developed within the ADI site.

Despite this, St Marys has the potential to redefine itself as an attractive and interesting centre, providing a shopping experience that is unique. There is an opportunity to create a dominant pedestrian oriented main street, instead of the internalised 'big box' retail space in other centres. St Marys can also draw on its proximity to the WELL Precinct, the UWS campus and the redevelopment of the ADI site north of the railway line, which will attract a wider demographic than is currently residing in St Marys. Further there are plans to redevelop the Glossop Street precinct, potentially regenerating a large and declining housing area with new well designed and denser residential development.

The centre has the opportunity to provide a range of cultural and entertainment facilities not provided elsewhere, and build on its strengths and unique identity. The considerable land holdings of Council within and around the centre allow opportunities for some significant investment and intervention to revitalise the centre. An improved public domain is likely to attract private sector investment and enhance the liveability of the town centre.

Social Systems

The following information regarding social systems is drawn from the ABS 2001 Census and a social profile prepared by Council in 2004 for the Our Centres Review.

St Marys – bounded by the main Western Railway line, South Creek, the M4 Motorway and Marsden Road/Sydney Street – is one of the oldest suburbs in the Penrith LGA.

As an established suburb the majority of housing stock is older and in some cases in poor condition. As mentioned previously there are plans to redevelop the Glossop Street precinct. This redevelopment may result in an increase in residential population within St Marys. The current population is estimated at 9,234 persons.

In 1996 the population of St Marys was 9891 persons. Thus the population of St. Marys declined by 7% between 1996-2001.

St Marys has 719 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, representing 2.4% of the population. This is a slightly higher percentage than for the Penrith LGA (2%).

In 2001 there were 3,636 occupied private dwellings in St Marys. Compared to the Penrith LGA, St Marys has a higher proportion of fully owned dwellings (35% for St Marys and 32% for the Penrith LGA), but a significantly lower percentage of dwellings being purchased (21% compared to 37% for the Penrith LGA). The suburb also has a higher percentage of public housing dwellings (9% compared to 5% for the Penrith LGA) and private rental dwellings (28% compared to 20% for the Penrith LGA).

St Marys has a greater proportion of residents born overseas in a non-English speaking country than the Penrith LGA (21% compared to 12% for the Penrith LGA). The 1893 residents in St Marys born in a non English speaking country come from many different countries with the main languages spoken at home including Arabic, Greek, Croatian, Italian and Tagalog (spoken by the Filipino community).

There are 1876 persons under the age of fifteen in St Marys or 20% of the population. This is lower than the Penrith LGA percentage of 25%. There are 1277 persons over 65 years of age in St Marys or 14% of the population. This is double the proportion of over 65's in the Penrith LGA (7%).

According to the 2001 Census there is also a significantly higher unemployment rate in St Marys, with 9.8% of the St Marys labour force unemployed, compared with 5.9% across the Penrith LGA.

The household occupancy rate in St Marys is 2.54 persons per household. This compares to Penrith LGA occupancy rate of 3.0 persons per dwelling.

A major contributing factor to the lower household occupancy ratio in St. Marys is the large number of single person households – 1037 households or 29% of all households. This compares to 17% for single person households across the Penrith LGA.

Almost 25% of families (i.e. 599 families) earn less than \$500 per week. On the other hand 809 (or 33% of families) earn more than \$1000 a week. However as noted above there are a large number of single person households in St. Marys and these are not defined as families. Given the older age profile in St Marys, many of these single person households will be aged pensioners and thus also have an income of less than \$500 per week.

At the 2001 Census the combined population of the three suburbs closest to the St Marys Town Centre, that is St Marys, Colyton and Oxley Park was 19,818 persons. This is a slight increase on the 1996 total of 19,774.

Community Services

A broad range of community services are located in St Marys. This includes government agency services such as Centrelink, the NSW Department of Community Services St Marys Community Service Centre and the St Marys Community Health Centre.

A number of non-government organisations and groups are located at the proposed Penrith Valley Cultural precinct on the corner of Mamre Road and the Great Western Highway. These include St Marys Area Community Development Organisation, Nepean Migrant Access and St Marys Senior Citizens Centre.

The St Marys branch of the Penrith City Library is located on Queen Street and is open seven days a week. The library provides information and resources for the local area.

Eight childcare centres are situated within the suburb. Council centres include Koala Corner Long Day Care Centre, St Marys Pre-School and St Marys Occasional Care Centre. Before and after school care is available at St Marys Public School. These four services are located within or adjacent to the St Marys Town Centre boundary.

Cultural Resources

The Cultural Development Analysis for the Penrith City Centre and St Marys Town Centre was prepared by Deborah Mills (March 2005) for the Our City Centres Review. This study identified that St Marys and North St Marys are comparatively well served in terms of cultural facilities and services. They provide a diversity of restaurants and 15 cultural businesses with dance, craft, and music the most strongly represented. Most of St Marys' seven pubs have live entertainment and the area includes the Westside Players Theatre Company. There are five community based cultural organisations, two craft, two music, and one heritage – the St Marys Arts and Crafts Centre.

The report recognised that although there is a reasonable provision of cultural resources in St Marys, the cultural infrastructure is fragile, under-developed, unrecognised and isolated. The analysis suggests that if Council's vision of a vibrant and active Town Centre, offering an extensive range of cultural experiences is to be achieved, there needs to be a significant shift in the understanding of the relationship of cultural development to urban design, community wellbeing, economic development and environmental sustainability.

There appears to be an opportunity to focus the development of St Marys around a cultural- and community-oriented centre, utilising the existing services and taking advantage of the large number of land parcels owned and managed by Council.

Social Values

The Community Attitudes & Aspirations Survey of Penrith City Residents was conducted as part of the PLANS for Our Future Project undertaken by Urbis Keys Young in partnership with Stratcorp Consulting for Penrith City Council in 2002. This report identified that the most important characteristics of the Penrith LGA for all residents were:

- Its quiet peaceful atmosphere
- Its convenient location and
- The friendliness of the local people.

Further documentation of community attitudes and the development of a vision specifically for St Marys is provided in the Community Visioning Process Report prepared by Village WELL (January 2005). This report found that overall respondents were very enthusiastic about their town and that the values of friendliness, public open space, and the community spirit of the town provided an alternative to the pace and scale of Penrith and other surrounding larger centres.

A significant number of people in response to the question “what three things do you like best about the area?” responded in terms of its location and access to natural features such as bushland, river and mountains or access to services and facilities rather than a specific facility or characteristic. Access to a range of locations and facilities is clearly a key advantage for residents of the Penrith LGA.

The secondary aim of the survey was to identify residents’ participation in recreation and social activities and their views about further development of services and facilities in the Penrith LGA.

Participation in informal passive recreation activities was by far the most popular activity reported with 77% of respondents noting they had participated in activities such as walking, picnicking and socialising with friends within the last 12 months. The overall importance placed on access to public open space and natural bushland reflects the high level of passive informal recreation activity.

The next most popular activities were informal active recreation such as playing a game in the local park, reported by 47%, and attending a community event or festival reported by 40% of respondents. The least popular activity reported was participation in art and craft activities with only 18 % of respondents noting they had participated in this activity within the last 12 months.

Younger age groups were more likely to participate in organised sport and active recreation while older age groups tended to participate more in community festivals, attend museums and art and craft activities. Those facilities which were seen as very important to be improved by the greatest number of respondents, were in general those which provided recreation or cultural activity to the widest groups within the community providing venues for passive or active informal recreation.

The Community Visioning Process for the Our City Centres’ Review (discussed further below) identified values and aspirations specifically related to the St Marys Town Centre. This consultation found that in the main, people liked the friendliness, warmth and down-to-earth attitude of St Marys and wanted to retain this character. There was a concern over the potential impact of new development both within the centre and on nearby subdivisions such as ADI. Also, the perceived lack of night time safety and the ‘westie’ image of the centre were identified as concerns needing to be addressed. There was a mixed response to the topic of retailing, with some commenting that there is not enough variety and others stating that there is a good variety of shops within the centre. Community services and community groups are

well supported in St Marys however there is a perception that growth in local population would affect employment.

The views expressed by the people of Penrith and particularly St Marys have implications for the St Marys Town Centre Strategy. The small-town semi-rural character of the area is highly valued by the community, who want to retain this feeling. However, there is a need to address concerns relating to safety, the range of shops, lack of disabled access, and potential threats posed by the development of the ADI site. There was however a strong level of community support for the centre identifying that St Marys has good potential and a bright future to look forward to.

KEY CHALLENGES FACING ST MARYS

The following are the key challenges that will need to be addressed if St Marys Town Centre is to become a vibrant and attractive town centre within the region. Most of these challenges have been identified in the economic analysis (Hill PDA, July 2004).

Maintaining commercial viability – St Marys Town Centre is currently vulnerable to market competition from other surrounding growth centres. Currently, the St Marys trade area overlaps with that of Mount Druitt, and the potential new centres at Werrington and ADI. St Marys therefore needs to redefine itself as a unique centre as it does not currently present the characteristics of the defined three main types of retail centre in Australia today – a ‘destination/regional centre’, a ‘convenience centre’ and a ‘big-box retail centre’.

The need for diversity – St Marys Town Centre cannot afford to retain its current dominance by retail activities and needs to promote diversity. A wide range of uses that offer people a variety of reasons to visit is characteristic of a healthy centre. This provides not only a spin off for the other uses but also activates the town throughout the day and night. The inclusion of residential, cultural and entertainment activities make the centre a living place.

Achieving a balance of activities – The Town Centre must achieve a balance of daytime and night-time activities to ensure its viability. Promotion of entertainment, cultural and residential uses will attract visitors during the night provided that these can be provided in a “safe environment”, whilst daytime activity will continue with retail and commercial services.

Encouraging compactness and development intensity – St Marys is not spread over a large area, and encouraging carefully designed higher development density in the centre will promote pedestrian activity so that people are encouraged to walk out of the offices at lunchtime and interact. The wide footpaths are utilised for outdoor cafés, florists, news stands etc which are common tools to create a sense of place. An intensity of development is needed to provide critical mass to justify public transport investment and generate street level activity.

Creating functional linkages – There needs to be a path of integrated open space, armature of parks, cycle and pedestrian networks and distinctive streetscape treatments. Development of this network will encourage physical activity and social interaction thereby improving the overall health of residents and visitors. Consideration needs to be given to a whole town plan that looks not simply at the defined Town Centre boundary but a broader boundary that encompasses the nearby WELL Precinct, ADI, North St Marys and surrounding residential areas.

Encouraging the growth of cultural activities – To be a truly vibrant Town Centre, St Marys must nurture and expand its cultural resource base. This involves establishing cultural enterprise incubators, promoting the arts and music of the region, supporting local amateur groups and providing for an integrated range of community facilities.

Building a positive identity – St Marys needs to build on its strengths and focus on its competitive advantages, particularly the smaller scale of its centre. Focusing on building a positive identity will foster business confidence and community support for the long-term strategy and vision. The public announcement of the vision and the resulting strategy is a marketing tool in itself.

Encouraging positive social interaction – A liveable city focuses on all its citizens, with a strong emphasis on caring for those less powerful and self determined than others such as children, youth and elderly people. Creating a fabric of meeting places that encourages and invites positive social interaction will contribute to enliven the city, improve the health (including the physical, mental and social well being) of residents and visitors, and make the Centre a safer and more attractive and inclusive place to be.

The following strategies provide the framework for achieving a prosperous, culturally-enriched and cosmopolitan Town Centre. A long-term commitment to their implementation is required if this vision is to be achieved.

Part 2 – Strategies and Actions for Creating a Viable and Vital St Marys Town Centre

Imagining the Future – The Vision

Having a vision for a place is fundamental if any form of large scale or long term redevelopment is to occur. The vision provides an intention for the continuing development of a place – without this intention there is little reason to begin the process in the first place. The vision should encompass what the place is to look like, how it is to operate and what it is to provide for the future. It should address market potential, urban design, community needs and aspirations – detailing what the community and stakeholders want the place to be.

Creating a vision involves the input of all stakeholders and therefore acts as a tool to measure the level of community interest and support for any proposed town centre vitalisation. It provides a sense of how the community wants a place to grow and change, identifies what is important and uncovers the emotional, economic and financial reasons for the town centre vitalisation.

The vision should be bold and innovative, drawing on history, character, and strengths of the community. However, it must also be tempered with realism to ensure that the objectives are achievable.

The vision provides the guide for the strategic plan, informing the development standards, land use policy and the many other issues required to be addressed in such a document.

Creating a Vision for St Marys Town Centre

In 2004, Penrith City Council undertook a Community Visioning and Consultation Process, as part of Stage One of the Our City Centres Review. The City Centres Review aimed to stimulate debate about the framework, direction and planning of both Penrith and St Marys.

The community visioning process was undertaken with the view that the vision, principles and values created for St Marys would build on previous Council community consultations and would complement the broader context of Council's vision for the Penrith Region which is:

Vision for the Penrith Region

Council's vision is one of a sustainable and prosperous region with a harmony of urban and rural qualities and a strong commitment to environmental protection and enhancement. It would offer both the cosmopolitan and cultural lifestyles of a mature city and the casual character of a rural community.

A broad cross section of stakeholders was consulted as part of the community visioning process for St Marys and Penrith. A number of community consultation methods were used for the St Marys Town Centre by Village Well who ran the community consultation sessions and prepared the Community Visioning Process Report. Such methods included workshops, listening posts, one-to-one interviews and focus groups. The feedback received from and discussions held within these sessions informed the creation of objectives, principles and desired characteristics for the St Marys Town Centre. These in turn enabled the crystallisation of a Vision for the Centre.

What is the Vision?

As a result of the community consultation for St Marys, the following Town Centre Vision was created. It provides the desired future character for the centre in a succinct phrase.

Vision for St Marys Town Centre

St Marys is the vibrant heart of the district, providing diverse experiences and services in a friendly atmosphere

Underpinning the overall vision for St Marys Town Centre are a number of values, principles, and objectives identified during the visioning process, which are regarded as central to achieving the vision. These value statements provide more detail as to the type of place St Marys is to become, identify what features are important to local residents and provide greater meaning to the vision for the centre.

VALUES

respect	security	diversity	beauty
integrity	community	inclusivity	sustainability

The community also identified a number of principles that should guide the future of St Marys:

- we are a safe, people-friendly place for all ages
- we engender a sense of community spirit
- we celebrate cultural diversity
- we recognise and respect our rich heritage
- we value the unique status of the original owners of the land and acknowledge their living culture and their role in the life of the region
- we protect and nourish our country quality of life
- we take care and pride in our place
- we respect our open spaces and natural environment
- we provide livelihood and opportunity for all

St Marys Town Centre will be:

- a diverse, vibrant retail business centre that meets the day-to-day needs of the district
- a cultural destination that celebrates the local character
- a community meeting place for all ages
- a major transport hub
- an attractive place to live for a variety of lifestyles
- an active night-time entertainment precinct
- a local hub for learning and creative activities
- an access point to natural surroundings

Building on these principles and values are the key objectives for the strategy:

- to celebrate what is unique about St Marys
- to maintain the friendly atmosphere of the Town Centre

- to improve the retail shopping experience to meet the needs of the growing population
- to connect the various activity centres
- to link the town to existing suburbs and growth areas
- to provide opportunities for living within the town.

Aiming for the development of a place that meets these principles, objectives and desires will help to achieve the overall vision for the Town Centre. Achieving these smaller goals is therefore the principal role of the strategic plan in order to attain the vision for the St Marys Town Centre.

Recommended Strategies and Actions

The St Marys Town Centre Strategy recommends a series of policy actions that identifies areas of responsibility for each policy action as well as a timeframe. It is intended that the policy directions included in the Strategy would provide the basis for the revitalisation of the St Marys Town Centre.

Step 1: Building Community Support

The community that works in, lives around and frequents a town centre holds an enormous wealth of knowledge about the operational intricacies of the centre and in some respects may effectively claim some form of 'ownership' over the place. This depth of knowledge of and affinity with a place provides valuable insight to a possible development strategy regarding what is 'right' or 'wrong' about a place, or what can be done to improve what is there already. Involving the community from the outset can provide insight into local attitudes about a place and can help to guide strategy or identify a problematic issue to be addressed that may not otherwise be identified.

Involvement of the community in the continuing development of a town centre promotes community ownership of the process, providing greater participation in its future growth. This then creates interest and support for the growing vitalisation, with less 'roadblocks' or problems further down the track from unsupportive or uninformed community members. Involvement of the various community stakeholders in the process from the outset results in an outcome that is welcomed by a majority of the stakeholders.

Any sort of town centre redevelopment cannot be undertaken by Council in isolation. Partnerships with the community should form the basis of any such project of this scale. Partnerships are the only way to successfully implement a town centre strategy and gain ownership for the overall product. Such partnerships should be based on community spirit and loyalty.

In March 2006 the Draft Town Centre Strategy was publicly exhibited. The exhibition period was for 30 days. 12 submissions were received specifically in relation to the St Marys Town Centre Strategy. There were six additional submissions received commenting generally on the process of the project. The submissions were overall, supportive of the project, however many provided site-specific comments and proposed amendments to the Strategy. Many comments were directed at the Activity Precinct and Building Form maps provided within the Strategy. Where appropriate, amendments have been made to the Strategy in response to the submissions made.

In addition to the formal exhibition there has been ongoing liaison with key stakeholders. There was a concerted effort made to ensure that key stakeholders were contacted and that their views in relation to the Strategy were obtained. Council staff have held numerous meetings with landowners and/or their representatives to discuss the implication of the proposed strategies for their land and potential development proposals.

Step 1: Strategies and actions involving the community in the short and long term

The St Marys community's involvement in the revitalisation of the Town Centre should not stop now. There needs to be an ongoing commitment to involving all stakeholders in not only the formulation of the vision and strategies, but also in their implementation. There needs to be continuous opportunity for input and involvement. Following the adoption of the Strategy there will be continued liaison with the community to maintain involvement and ownership of the project including the below mentioned strategies that have been identified.

Step 1	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
1.1	Improve the image of St Marys	Prepare a marketing strategy and continually market the St Marys Town Centre Strategy to inform opinion makers and the media about the revitalisation process and specific achievements.	Council	2006 and ongoing
1.2		Use the 3D model to promote development sites to potential developers and the community.	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
1.3		Investigate methods of 'branding' the Town Centre to create a unique marketable image which has relevance to the centre, its community / environment and its history and develop a marketing strategy.	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
1.4		Develop and implement a marketing plan in stages focusing initially on highly visible aspects such as implementation of branding, public domain improvements, development of key sites, investment prospectus etc.	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
1.5		Undertake ongoing marketing throughout the lifetime of the strategy, timing key initiatives to maximise opportunities to showcase achievements.	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
1.6		Prepare and implement an annual calendar of events for the town centre which increases visitation to the centre (especially out of normal business hours).	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
1.7	Establish a Stewards Group	Consider establishing a Stewards Group, terms of reference and responsibilities.	Council and Town Centre Association	2006 / 2007
1.8	Promote Public Domain Improvements	Publicise improvements through a variety of media such as posters, signage, pamphlets, newspapers and newsletters, etc.	Council	ongoing
1.9	Demonstration Projects	Give priority to key projects including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ rejuvenation of Coachman's Park and its reorientation to Queen Street ▪ improving the public domain and accessible pedestrian networks ▪ a high quality demonstration development undertaken on Council land, and ▪ advancing community and cultural projects. 	Council	2006 / 2008

Step 2: Achieving an Ecologically Sustainable Centre

Penrith City Council has adopted the principles of sustainability to guide its decisions and actions. Sustainability is changing the way we operate.. It means integrating economic, environmental and social considerations into decision-making, balancing short-term priorities with longer-term needs and engaging with people.

Council has introduced the Sustainable Penrith program which includes initiatives to reduce the City's greenhouse gas emissions, encourage a healthy local economy, ensure sustainability principles are integrated into new development, build community links and protect the natural environment.

A vibrant and vital Town Centre is also a sustainable Town Centre. A centre that is easy to walk/cycle around, that provides for intensification and diversity of uses, that manages travel demand effectively and achieves a high quality and long lasting urban fabric, is one that is sustainable into the future. It is also a centre that provides for the physical, mental and social well being of its inhabitants.

Council is committed to strive for best practice architectural and environmentally sustainable design, particularly in terms of energy efficiency, water conservation, waste minimisation and resource minimisation. It is also committed to the principles of travel demand management, reducing the reliance on private vehicles and providing for enhanced public transport, pedestrian and cycle networks to facilitate sustainable access to the Town Centre.

Many of the strategies and actions identified in this document are pivotal to achieving a sustainable centre. Concentrating land use activities, making the Town Centre more walkable, managing travel demand through better public transport and encouraging a high quality built form are all measures that will help to attain sustainability objectives.

Step 2: Strategies and actions for Achieving a Sustainable Town Centre

Step 2	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
2.1	Achieving a sustainable town centre	<p>Prepare sustainability criteria to guide development activities in the Town Centre that incorporate the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Minimise potable water demand from Sydney's mains supply and use best practice sustainable design principles, technology and management practices to conserve water. ▪ Maximise the use of renewable energy sources, reduce energy consumption and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. ▪ Incorporate energy efficient design especially in relation to lighting, heating and cooling systems. ▪ Consider whole of life impacts on the environment. ▪ Ensure buildings are adaptable, to cater for changes in use and 'whole of life' residential living needs ▪ Protect existing items and areas of cultural and heritage significance, and optimise the potential re-use of heritage buildings. ▪ Not adversely impact on water quality of adjacent creeks and the Nepean River. ▪ Minimise waste generation and ensure that opportunities for waste reduction and recycling are maximised. 	Council	Completed 2nd half 2005
2.2		Incorporate sustainability criteria into Town Centre DCP and plans of management to ensure all future development achieves sustainability objectives	Council	2006 / 2008
2.3		Implement sustainability through Council's planning controls, actions and plans of management	Council	Ongoing
2.4		Explore options for measuring the ecological footprint of the City Centre	Council	2005 / 2007 and ongoing

Step 3: Forging Strong Partnerships

Downtown revitalization requires a high degree of cooperation and is best achieved when a unique 'private public' process is used.³

A strong partnership between local government and the private sector is fundamental to the successful implementation of a town centre strategy. Whilst it is possible for the public sector to undertake improvements to the public domain and to even involve itself in catalyst development projects it is the private sector that holds the key to building the critical mass needed to spur a cycle of sustainable future growth.

A successful transformation of a town centre depends on the ability of the private and public sectors to cooperate under a partnership arrangement that engenders community support, minimises project risk and meets the interests of stakeholders. Landowners have contributed significantly to the development of this Strategy and its policy directions.

Council and others in the public sector can only do so much to promote growth and revitalisation – plans can be drawn up with the best intentions for future development, but without the support of the private sector very little will be accomplished on the ground. The private sector, as part of the community, can provide valuable insight into the formulation of a strategy for the place, and in the end it is the private sector that will provide much of the capital to enable realisation of the vision in accordance with the strategy.

It is also important that individual property owners work together with the public sector in creating a successful town centre. Individual property owners are responsible for making a myriad of decisions which influence the character of the centre such as reuse and renovation of buildings as well as ongoing maintenance. Conversely, changes in the character of the whole centre will influence the success of each individual initiative.

St Marys is an active retail and commercial centre with an involved private sector whose interests are represented by a number of different groups. Since 1998, St Marys has had a full time Town Centre Manager who has been active in promoting the town as an ideal place to live, work and shop. A major street beautification program has created an attractive tree lined main street and new shopping experience for both residents and visitors.

The St Marys Town Centre Management Inc has drafted a Business Plan for 2003-2007 to continue the growth and promotion of the Town Centre. The plan identifies that the importance of involvement from every possible source cannot be emphasised too strongly, because without this participation there would be no success.

The Chamber of Commerce supports its businesses by facilitating the interchange of information and resources for the promotion of economic development and an improved quality of life in the local community.

³ C.B. Leinberger, "Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization", The Brookings Institution Research Brief, March 2005

Step 3: Strategies and actions for forging partnerships in the town centre revitalisation

Clearly, the private sector recognises the value of a vibrant and vital Town Centre for St Marys. There are considerable benefits that will ensue for the private sector from a successful revitalisation program, not the least of which is improved returns on investment. However, given the size of St Marys and its current economic position, a strong leadership role is required by Council with co-operation from the private sector, to address issues that may affect the Town Centre's long-term viability. Without this leadership from Council these issues are unlikely to change.

Step 3	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
3.1	Develop joint partnerships	Identify Council owned land which can be redeveloped in a manner which achieves Town Centre objectives, for example, mixed uses, a very high quality built form, significant improvements to the public domain.	Council	Ongoing
3.2		Involve the private sector through the St Marys Town Centre Management Inc to progress the objectives of the strategy and identify projects which the private sector can undertake which support the achievement of the Strategy.	Council and Town Centre Association	Ongoing
3.3	Establish a Stewards Group	Through the St Marys Town Centre Management Inc identify and target business owners for involvement in the Our City Centres Stewards Group.	Council and Town Centre Association	Ongoing
3.4	Integration of Business Plan	Form a Town Centre Marketing Working Group to identify responsibilities, coordinate marketing activities and to minimise duplication.	Council and Town Centre Association	2006 / 2007
3.5	Incentives	Investigate incentives to encourage appropriate development and investment in the Town Centre.	Council	Ongoing
3.6	Investment Opportunities	Identify and promote investment opportunities through the use of 3D modelling and mapping tools.	Council	2006 / 2008

Step 4: Creating Friendly and Attractive Places and Spaces

What makes a town centre truly great is its “walkable urbanity” – the characteristic that makes people find centres so attractive and interesting that they want to walk through them and experience the sights and sounds that they have to offer. Great centres are places that encourage human activity and interaction, where people can feel safe and where the full range of human needs and aspirations can be met. They are centres that provide for the health and well being of their inhabitants.

To achieve walkable urbanity there must be:

- a logical organising structure of streets, pedestrian linkages, open spaces and uses,
- a distinctive identity of the place,
- visual variety and complexity,
- an emphasis on high quality, and
- a feeling of inclusiveness, comfort and safety.

A logical organising structure of streets, paths, open spaces and land uses is essential so that residents and visitors are able to understand how the centre is organised and how to make their way around it. A simple and clear development pattern based on a predictable and unifying sequence of similarly sized blocks and regularly spaced intersections is required, as well as a logical hierarchy of streets and pedestrian linkages. Open spaces are vital to this organising structure as they enhance the legibility of the centre by providing highly visible landmarks. Buildings also play an important role in reinforcing the overall pattern – where there are vacant lots, surface car parks or deep building setbacks the logic of the town centre structure is undermined.

A distinctive identity is also an important element in the creation of attractive town centre spaces. Elements that make up a distinctive identity include the history of the place reflected in its historic buildings and landmarks, the centre’s geography such as its topography and relationship to natural assets, its public spaces and streetscapes, public art and landmarks. New development and public improvements need to reinforce and enhance the centre’s identity as defined through these various elements.

Visual variety and complexity are needed to provide a stimulating environment for people to visit or simply ‘being there’. Architectural detailing, banners, street vendors, cafes, markets and so on all add to the visual interest of a centre. At the same time, such visual variety should not be chaotic or diminish the overall cohesive appearance of the town.

The quality of materials, landscaping, street furniture and architectural detailing all contribute to the experience of a place. The highest quality that can be afforded should be used together with a high level of maintenance. Aiming for a high quality of spaces will not only enhance the pedestrian experience and engender community pride in the place, it will also be a tangible expression of the commitment to the creation of a great centre.

Feeling safe and comfortable is particularly important if public spaces are to be well-used and successful. Spaces that are active, visible, well planned and well maintained feel safe and secure.

Public places should promote a range of activities including informal social interaction as well as allowing for the more formal use of public space by way of cafes, restaurants, cultural venues, community uses and the like. Spaces need to be provided that are not intimidating for people who only want to congregate, meet or enjoy the space without necessarily having to do so through sitting in a café, restaurant or the like. However it is important that these public spaces are located in the vicinity of more active uses so as to ensure casual surveillance and thereby increase the feeling of public safety. Consideration also needs to be given to providing appropriate amenities (seating, bubblers, toilets etc) and ensuring that

measures are in place to protect people from the climate (street trees/canopies to protect from sun, sunny/protected areas for warmth during winter).

St Marys existing pedestrian environment

Presently, pedestrian accessibility is well provided through the main spine of St Marys. Queen Street is tree-lined and the street front buildings provide awnings for weather protection. The footpaths are wide, creating a good feeling of space within the pedestrian environment.

Two main drawcards in St Marys are the decentralised retail 'big-boxes' - Station Street Plaza at the northern end, east of Queen Street and the Village Square towards the southern end, west of Queen Street, which contain supermarkets, discount department stores and other specialty retail shops.

These two internalised retail centres accommodate the majority of shopping trips to St Marys and yet are not linked by an easily accessible pedestrian route through the Town Centre. They are approximately 800m apart and are each surrounded by at-grade car parks, which promote car use to, from and between the nodes. Although they are located within walking distance of each other, the present pedestrian environment along Queen Street does not itself attract people to walk between these decentralised big-boxes or from one centre to the main street.

In addition, secondary linkages into the Town Centre from the neighbouring residential areas, are currently not well serviced. Active street frontages are provided to Queen Street, but not to the east-west running streets, or the laneways behind Queen Street. Apparent pedestrian desire lines from Queen Street to the Village Square are not formalised and are not paved or well lit at night-time.

Community feedback has identified that there is a perception of an unsafe environment within the Town Centre, particularly at night. Surveys of community members identified the potential for petty theft, the presence of drug users and a generally unsafe feeling within the centre.

Step 4: Strategies and Actions for Creating Friendly and Attractive places and spaces in St Marys:

The success of the Our City Centres initiative depends on the creation of public spaces and a pedestrian environment that encourages people to walk and experience the centre. To achieve this, a strong political commitment is required, together with a considerable upfront investment by the public sector to create these places. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that improvements in the pedestrian environment cannot be accomplished throughout the Town Centre all at once. Efforts should be focused on a core area so that there are immediate tangible results, helping to foster community support and providing impetus to expand to other areas.

Step 4	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
4.1	Improve permeability and accessibility within the centre.	Prepare a bicycle and pedestrian plan for the Town Centre which links surrounding residential, open space and car parking areas. Identify new links where required to improve accessibility and require that these be accommodated in any development proposals.	Council	2006 / 007
4.3		Create bicycle parking spaces in conjunction with/near parks, civic spaces and areas for active uses.	Council	2006 / 2007
4.4		Provide well defined and visually appealing pedestrian linkages from the surrounding residential areas to Queen Street, Coachman's Park and the shopping centres which are part of the broader legible pedestrian and cycle network.	Council	2006 / 2007
4.5		Improve the amenity and safety of existing informal pedestrian links such as that between Queen Street and the Village Square shopping centre.	Council	2006 / 2007
4.6		Incorporate pedestrian and cycle networks in town centre improvements	Council	2006 / 2007
4.7		Investigate and improve accessibility within the public domain.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.8	Enhance streetscape	Use cultural planning approaches to develop and implement high quality street furniture, landscape, lighting and signage which is coordinated and which enhances the distinctive identity of the Town Centre.	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
4.9		Implement a coordinated signage / way finding program specific to the Town Centre which incorporates city centre branding and encourages the use of the pedestrian/cycle network.	Council and Town Centre Association	Ongoing
4.10		Install banner poles throughout the town centre in strategic locations for use during promotional events, festivals, concerts etc.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.11	Provide and encourage public art, which contribute to the distinctive identity of the centre.	Prepare and adopt a Cultural Development / Public Art Policy	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
4.12		Establish a Cultural Development Advisory Committee.	Council	Ongoing
4.13		Commission art works by local artists for installation at identified locations within the Town Centre. These should reflect a connection with the centre, the St Marys community, its heritage and South Creek.	Council	Ongoing
4.14	Improve use of public domain	Encourage the use of streets, parks and civic spaces for a range of activities such as markets, kiosks, flower vendors and community and cultural events such as street theatre and musical concerts.	Council and Town Centre Association	Ongoing

Step 4	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
4.15		Ensure ongoing maintenance and management of public domain is of a high standard. Give high priority to the maintenance of public infrastructure to ensure presentation of facilities is attractive and functional.	Council	Ongoing
4.16		Investigate ways to secure funding for and management of on-going maintenance and general up-keep of the public domain to a high level	Council	Ongoing
4.17		Focus public domain improvements on improving the health and well being of residents, workers and visitors through measures such as providing for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ increased physical activity (encouraging walking/cycling), ▪ community interaction (provision of meeting places), ▪ safe environments, and ▪ equitable access. 	Council	Ongoing
4.18		Prepare and implement an annual calendar of events for the town centre which increases visitation to the centre (especially out of normal business hours).	Council	Ongoing
4.19		Publicise opportunities for community use of public spaces for community events, markets and the like. Investigate opportunities to provide space free or for nominal amount for events which meet specified criteria.	Council	Ongoing
4.20	Improve town centre planning controls	Incorporate requirements in Town Centre DCP for provision of public art, water features etc where appropriate as part of major development projects.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.21		Incorporate in Town Centre Section 94 Contributions Plan requirement for contributions from developers towards public art.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.22		Incorporate planning controls into the Town Centre DCP to require active building frontages at street level to encourage pedestrian activity.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.23		Limit the location of residential development on ground and first floors in order to ensure active and semi public land uses are retained at street and first floor levels.	LPM	2006 / 2008
4.24		Identify active streets in precinct plans.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.25		Require secure bicycle parking in major new developments for use by residents and workers.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.26		Identify new links where required to improve accessibility and require that these be accommodated in any development proposals.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.27		Require new developments to provide active frontages at street level to encourage pedestrian activity. Avoid setting back new buildings from street edges, unless the intention is to activate the setback through the provision of plazas, green spaces and the like which are part of the overall open space network.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.28	Improve safety within the town centre	Allow for short stay on street parking and vehicle circulation through the Town Centre to ensure activity and surveillance.	Council	2006 / 2008
4.29		Provide for active uses to improve casual surveillance and safety in areas surrounding the bus / rail interchange.	Council	Ongoing

Step 5: Creating a Cultural / Entertainment Precinct

Cultural and entertainment facilities help to establish the town centre as a leisure and visitor destination and to enhance its self-image and quality of life. Special events and other civic activities enhance the attraction of the locality and help to increase the number of visitors and in turn the amount of expenditure. These activities improve the town centre's appeal as an environment in which to live and work. To unlock the potential for cultural and entertainment facilities, they should be an integral part of the fabric of the town centre.

One benefit of providing entertainment and cultural opportunities within a town centre is to retain people in the centre after the daytime commercial and retailing activities have closed. Night time entertainment activities enhance the appeal of a place after dark, provide a place for people to be after hours, and help to create a new identity for the town centre, whilst activating the street and improving the perception of public safety.

...just as a crowded restaurant is the best recommendation that it is a good place, crowded sidewalks recommend downtown, signalling a safe environment, and providing an excitement and spectacle that draws people to the area.⁴

Different entertainment concepts appeal to different clientele, and these varied uses can be accommodated in close proximity to each other, creating a specific hub of activity and enabling people to walk between different venues. Attracting various people into the town centre makes the place a more diverse and interesting place to be. Popular places attract more people, and can also help attract residents into a centre, who wish to live close to or within an urban environment where they can walk to entertainment venues, restaurants and varied retail outlets.

By integrating entertainment and cultural activities within the town centre, cultural amenities can be seen not as something remote or apart from everyday life, but fundamental to people's needs.

What opportunities exist to improve/enhance/expand cultural activities in St Marys?

The Cultural Development Analysis of Penrith CBD and St Marys Town Centre by Deborah Mills (March 2005) identified that St Marys has the second highest concentration of cultural businesses in the Penrith LGA with 17 in the locality (including North St Marys).

Given the concentration of cultural services within St Marys there is considerable potential to build upon this existing situation and focus on the creation of a community/cultural precinct as the heart and defining component of the Town Centre. Council is a significant land owner within the centre, and there is a unique opportunity to take advantage of these landholdings, along with potential additional acquisitions, to focus community-oriented services around a central park/town square at the existing location of Coachman's Park. There are a number of community and cultural facilities located south of the Great Western Highway which could provide the opportunity through, for example, performance and exhibition space to activate this new 'heart' of St Marys, such as the youth centre and the arts centre. Consideration could

⁴ C.B. Leinberger, "Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization", The Brookings Institution Research Brief, March 2005

also be given to relocating the St Marys library to around Coachman's Park, creating a critical mass of community services and facilities.

The Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct, located on the south-eastern corner of Mamre Road and the Great Western Highway currently provides a multi-functional community hub for local and emerging artists, youth groups and vocational school studies with the arts. It is envisaged that this Cultural Precinct would complement a potential community and cultural precinct within Queen Street itself. There is potential for a link to be created between the Cultural Precinct and the community precinct within the Town Centre to facilitate movement between the two centres, and also possibly the railway station.

This town square/central park area could also be used for community markets, fairs and civic events, run by various community groups. It could provide the location for fresh produce markets or similar events, on a weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis, offering a unique retailing experience to its local community and potentially attracting customers from outside the existing catchment.

Workshops and visioning sessions for the Town Centre have identified the possibility of re-badging St Marys as a cultural and entertainment precinct, building upon the existing cultural services and facilities within the Centre. Council's large landholdings provide the potential for the provision of low-cost performance and cultural spaces. Retention of these spaces in Council ownership is important to ensure some regulation of rents as land prices increase as a result of development. In this way, cultural organisations will have an environment in which they can develop, and at the same time offer a wider and more diverse range of artists and cultural resources within the Town Centre. In addition, a commercial district theatre or cinema could be situated along Queen Street, supported by local restaurants and cafes which would provide places for patrons to eat before or after a performance.

Improvements in the public domain will also assist in creating a theme to the Town Centre, reinforcing its identity. The provision of public art, sculpture and other cultural design elements has the potential to tell the story of St Marys. Heightening public awareness of heritage values will contribute to the cultural richness and knowledge base of the community about its origins, which in turns helps to create identity and a sense of belonging.

The location of the University in close proximity to St Marys offers significant opportunities to enhance the cultural interest of the town. University students can provide a significant market for a range of entertainment activities - cheap and friendly restaurants, live music venues, art-house cinemas, low cost performance spaces and so on. Successfully done, this synergy could potentially help to redefine St Marys Town Centre.

Step 5: Strategies and actions for improving provision of Cultural Services and Activities

Step 5	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
5.1	Create a community 'heart' to St Marys.	Use the central space of Coachman's Park to create a location for community activities	Council	2006 / 2007
5.2		Through the precinct planning process, require sites adjacent to Coachman's Park to be reoriented to face the open space	Council	2006 / 2007
5.3		Undertake an audit of community facilities to identify those which could potentially be located closer to in the vicinity of the community / cultural precinct.	Council	2006 / 2008
5.4		Use the space within Coachman's Park for civic or cultural events such as markets and outdoor performances.	Council	2006 / 2007
5.5		Develop partnerships and collaborations with local artists, cultural and other community groups, businesses and developers to ensure input into design and refurbishment processes, particularly of the public domain and community facilities.	Council and Town Centre Association	Ongoing
5.6		Use marketing strategy to promote St Marys as a vibrant and active community focussed centre.	Council	Ongoing
5.7	Develop synergies with Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct	Investigate options of locating activities within the community/cultural precinct that would support the Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct which is currently located south of the Great Western Highway	Council	Ongoing
5.8		Investigate opportunities for providing performance spaces for the Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct around Coachman's Park or in the green space between the park and the Village Square.	Council	2006 / 2007
5.9	Redevelop strategic sites for community and cultural purposes.	Undertake an audit of Council owned property and identify potential sites that could be used or redeveloped for cultural purposes such as performance spaces or low cost cultural accommodation	Council	2006 / 2007
5.10		Investigate other sites in key locations that could be purchased by Council or acquired through a land swap, and used to accommodate appropriate cultural uses.	Council	Ongoing
5.11	Support and help to promote emerging artists.	Appoint a Cultural Development Officer whose role will be to manage community cultural facilities within the Town Centre and support emerging talent from local schools and UWS.	Council	2006 / 2007 and ongoing
5.12		Take advantage of Council's landholdings and the lower land costs in St Marys to establish incubator facilities for emerging cultural groups and artists particularly in the Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct. Investigate options for lower rental costs or subsidies to support cultural expression.	Council	Ongoing
5.13	Celebrate and learn from local history	Use cultural planning including public art to interpret the history of St Marys	Council	Ongoing
5.14		Facilitate opportunities to interpret and display St Mary's rich Indigenous and European Cultural heritage. This may be through professionally curated exhibitions and performances in collaboration with the local community development and cultural organisations. Ensure that these collaborative projects provide support to local artists and arts organisations and offer opportunities for professional development.	Council	Ongoing
5.15		Incorporate the history of St Marys into the 'branding' of the centre.	Council and Town Centre Association	Ongoing

Step 6: Making Housing and Mixed Use a Priority

Growth in housing within commercial centres has been driven by a number of changing socio demographic influences. These influences include an increase in household formation made up primarily of empty nesters and young professionals, a renewed interest in urban lifestyles and historic architecture and a shift in the preferred housing choice from suburban home to apartments – as described by Hill PDA (July 2004), a shift from “sense of space to sense of place”. In addition a concentration of cultural and entertainment activities within centres has made town centre living attractive for social interaction. Together these factors combined with accessibility to work and/or public transport and housing affordability have fuelled the growth in urban living throughout Australian cities.

Just as households are increasingly being attracted to town centres for the offers they provide, housing and mixed-use development within a town centre has become integral to its success.

Residential living in town centres is recognised as an important element of fostering the living city concept. Local residents in a centre extend the level of activity past office and shopping hours.

Housing extends the vitality of a centre and provides a market for a variety of uses and a group to lobby for high quality public services and infrastructure (ULI, 2004). Housing and mixed-use development is therefore vital to achieve a vibrant, active and interesting centre which operates, and is safe, at all hours.

While inner and middle ring areas within the Sydney Metropolitan Area have experienced significant development pressure for housing and mixed-use development within major centres over the past decade, this trend is clearly attributable to matters such as the quality of the urban environment and the price differential between apartment and detached dwelling stock in the locality. However, over the same period both St Marys suburb and the wider Penrith LGA in general have not experienced a significant increase in such demand partly attributable to the fact that “the cost saving of an apartment compared to a house in the suburbs is not as substantial as similar comparisons between apartments and detached dwellings in middle and inner ring suburbs of Sydney” (Hill PDA, July 2004). However it is anticipated that with rising land and housing costs this is likely to change over time resulting in an increased cost differential and subsequently additional demand.

The Department of Housing and Landcom together with Council are considering the redevelopment of the Glossop Street precinct to increase residential densities and to upgrade the existing social housing stock within the at locality. This project is likely to contribute to the revitalisation of St Marys town centre.

To establish St Marys Town Centre as a vital, interesting place to live it is essential that key strategies are implemented to establish housing and mixed-use development within the Centre during the early stages. Such strategies need to address the more general barriers which exist to prevent the establishment of Town Centre housing. These include:

- difficulties in assembling sites;
- greater market risk, especially in initial stages;
- negative perceptions about crime, congestion and parking;
- noise, garbage and quality of life issues.

Step 6: Strategies and actions to deliver housing choice within the town centre:

Step 6	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
6.1	Encourage a variety of housing choice and mixed use development within the city centre	Prepare precinct plans which clearly identify areas where residential and mixed use development is encouraged.	Council	2006
6.2		Investigate incentives and undertake further financial feasibility analysis with Council's consultants to encourage residential and mixed use development within the Town Centre	Council	2006 / 2007
6.3		Investigate options for the provision of affordable housing within the Town Centre as part of the city wide Residential review	Council	2007 / 2008
6.4		Prepare planning controls which encourage variety and affordability of housing types to accommodate a broad range of housing groups including "key worker" accommodation	Council	2006 / 2008
6.5		Work with public housing providers to identify opportunities for the provision, management and ongoing maintenance of low cost housing within the Town Centre	Council	Ongoing
6.6		Ensure potential land use conflicts are considered through precinct planning.	Council	2006 / 2008
6.7		Include in planning controls and guidelines detailed requirements aimed at ensuring a high quality standard of apartment development	Council	2006 / 2008
6.8	Joint Ventures/ demonstration projects	Encourage demonstration projects to clearly illustrate standard of apartment living that can be achieved in the Town Centre whilst still achieving appropriate development margins.	Council	Ongoing

Step 7: Managing Parking and Improving Access

Auto access and parking are critical to the city centre's success as a market. Nevertheless, a planning approach that consistently gives priority to efficient traffic flows and inexpensive surface car parking for individual developments will lower the quality of the pedestrian environment. All central areas should be designed with the pedestrian in mind, and on key retail streets, the pedestrian should receive top priority. While vehicular traffic and on street parking should not be excluded, cars and parking should be carefully managed to avoid overwhelming the human scale of the streets⁵.

Decisions about traffic management and car parking are among the most important in making a town centre a high quality place for people. Inevitably, there needs to be trade-offs between vehicle, public transport and pedestrian needs and difficult decisions need to be made so that an appropriate development pattern and urban environment can be created.

Vehicle access to a town centre must be based on a logical and well-defined street hierarchy. In planning for better vehicle circulation, the objectives should be to:

- provide reasonable access to the town centre,
- ensure through-traffic is guided around the central core area and local town centre traffic is directed to major parking areas,
- design the circulation system so that drivers are readily able to orient themselves.

However, in developing a good vehicle circulation system, it is important not to trade off the quality of the pedestrian environment or the integrity of the existing urban fabric in order to optimise car movements.

Car parking is another major issue that needs careful consideration. Large surface car parks break up the urban environment, increase distances between shops and services, and prevent integrated development. Sufficient car parking must be provided to encourage patronage of a centre, yet it is also crucial to minimise the land area required to do so. Open car parking lots and multi-storey car parking stations do not contribute to an attractive public domain and are therefore inappropriate in locations where active street frontages are sought. Underground car parking or the internalisation of car parking within centralised parking structures with active uses fronting streets are, in terms of the public domain, the best way to provide for vehicles within the town centre.

The difficulty in developing an appropriate car parking strategy is that different activities require different parking regimes - short stay parking of 5-15 minutes for quick shopping trips and to pick up and drop off passengers, longer stay parking of 2-3 hours for longer shopping trips and related activities, and all day parking for town centre workers who cannot access the centre by other modes of transport. In addition parking requirements may vary significantly between time periods, that is, weekdays, after hours and weekends.

Along streets, short stay parking is appropriate as it allows good accessibility for people to run quick errands and undertake single purchases while at the same time creating street activity. Priority should be given to short-term retail or business customer use, whilst longer term or all day parking can be provided in parking stations away from the main street.

⁵ Cy Paumier, op cit, p45

Car parking demand, especially for longer-stay parking, can be managed through the promotion of the use of public transport to access the centre by town centre workers. For example, the cost of long term or all-day parking in the centre could be increased to reduce affordability and encourage public transport use. Longer-term car parking for those unable to travel by other means could be provided farthest out from the town centre. Depending on the location of such a car parking station in relation to the town centre, the provision of a subsidised shuttle bus could be explored to transport workers from their cars to and from the centre.

The amount of surface level car parking can be reduced by the construction of multi-storey car parking stations away from the main street, however there are limits on the economic feasibility of these structures. Town centre parking should be designed and located so as not to interfere with the amenity of the main street or other pedestrian thoroughfares.

In addition the sharing of car parking spaces by businesses during the day and other entertainment or cultural uses at night is appropriate and should be recognised in car parking requirements.

Public transport provision, both to and within a town centre, is important to ensure an accessible and vital centre. The aim is to decrease reliance on the private vehicle and make other transport options attractive and viable. Free internal shuttle bus services help to reduce reliance on the car for trips within the centre, and encourage interaction with the public domain. These services need to be of a high frequency, reliable, clean and visible and become part of the town's identity over time. The route for this service needs to be integrated into the pedestrian network and provide for direct and quick movement around the centre.

An accessible town centre should also include a safe and legible cycleway network. Where well-planned cycle routes are available, there is potential for a significant number of trips to be undertaken by this mode rather than by cars. Bicycle use also activates the pedestrian environment and offers a more intimate town centre experience.

A successful cycleway network relies on appropriate facilities for bicycle parking. Bicycle parking should be located at street level, at major nodes and activity areas. A bicycle parking code should be developed as part of a new parking code.

The existing transport and parking situation in St Marys

The road hierarchy in St Marys is logical in that it comprises a pattern of north-south and east-west running streets. St Marys' main street, Queen Street, carries the highest volume of traffic although it does not itself provide a thoroughfare to North St Marys, across the railway line. The speed of vehicles along Queen Street is generally low which is desirable in areas of high pedestrian activity. However, the existing traffic situation in the centre provides opportunities for pedestrian-vehicle conflicts. This could be overcome by further reinforcing the primacy of pedestrian movements over vehicles.

St Marys is well serviced by car parking within its Town Centre, that is, the amount of car parking provided exceeds that required when measured against both current demand and Council's car parking code. Surface car parking comprises the majority of car parking within the centre. There are three main car parking locations – the public car parking immediately behind Queen Street along East and West Lanes; the customer car parking area surrounding Village Square; and the customer car parking area surrounding Station Street Plaza. The large expanse of car parking surrounding the two decentralised retail centres effectively acts as a barrier to their integration with Queen Street.

In terms of public transport, St Marys Railway Station is located at the northern end of Queen Street adjacent to the bus interchange which fronts Station Street. Bus services operated from the interchange link St Marys to Oxley Park, Mount Druitt via Colyton, St Clair and Erskine Park, West St Clair, UWS Werrington and Penrith. The frequency of bus services are less than optimal with most passengers having to wait for at least 30 minutes from one service to the next. In addition there are concerns that current negotiations with private bus

services regarding future contracts may not necessarily deliver a similar or improved level of service sufficient to encourage higher bus usage.

In terms of internal accessibility and legibility, St Marys has a reasonable pedestrian network with strengths such as wide footpaths with existing awnings. However, the existing car parking situation promotes reliance on the car for access to the centre and encourages customers to drive to multiple destinations within the centre rather than parking and then walking between different stores and services.

Apart from encouraging car reliance, the location of car parking in St Marys Town Centre does not present a major hindrance to the creation of a vital town centre as it is located away from the main street. The space dedicated to car parking presents good opportunities for redevelopment over time, however attention must be given to the construction of a centralised car parking facility that will enable the freeing up of the existing car parking land for redevelopment. As Council owns the majority of surface car parking within St Marys future development of this land can be managed or staged concurrently with the provision of alternative public car parking provision.

Cycle networks currently exist within St Marys however they are not currently afforded a high priority and do not provide appropriate levels of permeability throughout the centre. Upgrades and additions to the existing networks have been identified within the SKM report, and should be incorporated into the transport network to and within the St Marys Town Centre. Upgrades should also include bicycle parking provisions.

Short, medium and long term actions are required for the future provision and management of car parking in the Town Centre that will better encourage and develop public transport usage, and still meet the needs of all user groups. Better management of the travel demands of different user groups seeking to access the Centre requires an improved understanding of individual needs. Investigating the specific needs of the users of the Town Centre will enable a balanced and sustainable response to be developed to support an accessible centre.

Step 7: Strategies and actions for improving car parking and access to the St Marys Town Centre

Step 7	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
7.1	Understand access and transport issues within St Marys	Undertake detailed surveys and investigations to establish the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Different user needs ▪ Parking provision for different land use types ▪ The potential for limiting on-site parking requirements for commercial, retail and residential development within the Town Centre ▪ Appropriate time zones and future pay parking arrangements ▪ User awareness information requirements ▪ Safety and security of car parking 	Council	Initial survey undertaken October / November 2006. Report prepared March 2006, continued in 2006 / 2007
7.2	Plan for improved access to the town centre	Prepare an Accessibility Action Plan to identify appropriate short, medium and long term actions to improve access to the Town Centre based on travel demand management principles	Council	2006 / 2007
7.3		Prepare a car parking strategy and Section 94 Contributions Plan that identifies appropriate car parking requirements for residential, commercial and retail developments.	Council	Draft prepared, to be completed (+ S94 Plan) 2006 / 2008
7.4		Investigate the long-term relocation of car parking to peripheral sites in multi deck form to maximise land use efficiency with the provision of shuttle buses to transport workers and others to the Town Centre, if considered appropriate.	Council	2006 / 2007
7.5		Investigate opportunities to reduce traffic speeds along Queen Street while maintaining vehicle circulation.	Council	2006 / 2007
7.6	Review car parking provision	Manage short stay car parking to ensure availability of spaces and regular turnover.	Council	Ongoing
7.7.		Identify opportunities to relocate existing car parking spaces from surface parking areas, so that the land is available to use in ways that better contribute to the vitality and viability of the Centre.	Council	2006 / 2007
7.8		Require car parking for new development to be located within the building and buffered from the street frontages by other land uses.	Council	Ongoing
7.9		Identify opportunities for shared use of car parking by multiple users.	Council	Ongoing
7.10		Limit long-term car parking within the Centre and provide spaces for short-term parking for shoppers and visitors.	Council	2006 / 2007
7.11	Reduce reliance on private vehicular access to the town centre	Continue lobbying State Rail and private bus companies to improve public transport services.	Council	Ongoing
7.12		Encourage transit-oriented development in and around the Town Centre close to existing public transport.	Council	Ongoing
7.13	Reduce pedestrian/vehicular conflict	Prepare a bicycle plan for the Town Centre which is integrated with the overall planned network, gives a high priority to bicycle access through the Town Centre, makes provision for bike parking facilities within new development, along streets, and major nodes and activity areas.	Council	2006/2008
7.14		Provide for appropriate traffic management through the ongoing implementation of the St Marys Town Centre Traffic Management Scheme.	Council	Ongoing
7.15		Develop a pedestrian network that reduces motor vehicle conflict, encourages pedestrian access, improves amenity and enhances legibility.	Council	Ongoing

Step 8: Fostering Economic Investment

A Town Centre that is vibrant and attractive is also one that attracts economic investment and creates jobs. Most importantly, the Town Centre's character as a place plays a key role in whether it succeeds economically:

St Marys is a district-sized commercial centre which services surrounding suburbs. The centre's trade areas overlap with the trade areas of Mt Druitt Centre and potentially new centres which are planned at Werrington and the ADI site to the north. The continued commercial viability of St Marys is therefore vulnerable to market competition from surrounding growth centres. At present St Marys Town Centre is an older style retail centre that is not a destination / regional centre, not a convenience centre, nor a big box retail centre. In the face of increased competition the challenge for St Marys is therefore to redefine its role, and in turn strengthen its viability. Hill PDA suggests that an appropriate role for St Marys is as a convenience centre supported by a diversity of uses including residential development and discount department stores.

Further Hill PDA notes:

The amount of commercial floorspace at St Marys is 16,500 sqm or 25% of the total floor space. This is typical for a centre of this size where office demand stems from professional service providers such as banks, real estate agents, accountants, lawyers and health care professionals. The growth of commercial space is largely a function of the amount of retail space. The retail space acts as anchors to attract customers. If St Marys cannot expand its retail offer to compete with the surrounding competing centres then it is likely to contract with a flow on effect to the professional service providers who may consider relocating.⁶

To ensure its continued viability, it is suggested that the sustainability of St Marys needs to be protected under a 'Centres Policy' that controls the impact of retail expansion on other centres. Retail expansion is critical to the Centre's continued viability with flow on effects to office and other uses. It is critical that to attract retail development St Marys identifies a point of difference for itself and builds on this to market the Centre to future businesses, service providers and residents.

In addition St Marys needs to provide for a greater diversity of uses including residential which in turn will support the viability of expanded retail and other activities.

⁶ Hill PDA,2004A, "Penrith City Centre & St Marys Town Centre Vitality and Viability Review – Economic Analysis", p. 10.

Step 8: Strategies and actions to foster economic investment in St Marys

The various strategies identified in this document aimed at improving the viability and vitality of the St Marys Town Centre, will in themselves generate economic investment. The widespread promotion of the St Marys Town Centre Strategy together with a strong commitment to its implementation will send a clear message to the business community that investment in the Town Centre is worthwhile. The following actions have been identified to achieve the above strategies.

Step 8	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
8.1	Develop St. Marys as a Town Centre within a hierarchy of centres	Lobby the Department of Planning to attract resources to facilitate the growth of St Marys as a Town Centre in a manner that is consistent with the vision, strategies and actions identified within this Town Centre Strategy.	Council	Ongoing
8.2		Ensure City wide LEP appropriately zones town centre	Council	2006 / 2008
8.3		Review, with the Department of Planning, the potential for a Business Park in the City that complements and supports the activities of Penrith as a Regional City, and St Marys as a Town Centre.	Council	2006 / 2008
8.4		Identify businesses that serve the local area and encourage them to locate in the town centre.	Council	Ongoing
8.5		Ensure planning controls in local business precincts allow appropriate range of uses and facilitate development.	Council	2006 / 2008
8.6	Identify precincts to ensure a balance of activities	Create precincts and develop planning controls that encourage a clustering of activities and urban design responses that foster linkages between precincts within the town centre.	Council	2006 / 2008
8.7	Build a positive identity	Promote the town centre image and lifestyle (marketing an image/brand). (refer to Step 1)	Council	Ongoing
8.8		Recognise the synergy of promoting the arts and economic development (refer to Steps 4 and 5).	Council	Ongoing
8.9		Investigate opportunities for Council to enter into joint venture projects with the private sector to undertake catalyst development projects.	Council	Ongoing
8.10		Develop a 'point of difference' for St Marys Town Centre, which can be used in marketing the Centre. (The 'point of difference' could build on an existing role developed within the Centre or target a market niche, which is not currently being catered for elsewhere within the region).	Council and Town Centre Association	2006 / 2007
8.11		Identify Council properties that could be offered for lease at reduced rents to types of business targeted to develop the Centre's image based on the point of difference identified above.	Council	2006 / 2008
8.12	Facilitate economic development	Ensure parking for business is provided at appropriate levels (refer to Step 7)	Council	Ongoing
8.13		Undertake a review of development costs and recommend how future investment can be attracted to the Town Centre.	Council	2006 / 2008
8.14		Investigate opportunities with others for incubator space within the Town Centre to assist emerging businesses, and in the Penrith Valley Cultural Precinct to assist emerging cultural businesses and endeavours.	Council	2006 / 2008 and ongoing
8.15	Improving worker amenity	Improve the amenity for office workers with improved streetscape and public facilities landscape (refer to Step 4).	Council	Ongoing

Step 9: Achieving a Quality Built Environment

The architectural character and quality of buildings in a Town Centre make a significant contribution towards its overall attractiveness and identity. It is not enough just to concentrate efforts towards achieving a high quality pedestrian environment; the quality of the adjoining built form is crucial to the effectiveness of any Town Centre strategy. A high quality built environment attracts economic activity and investment and engenders pride in the community.

In trying to create a distinctive identify for a particular project, new urban architecture has tended to ignore consistency in favour of dramatic contrasts. Often, this extreme variety creates disorder and a lack of harmony in the urban environment.⁷

It is important to note that diversity in architectural styles is not inherently bad, provided that it is contained within a design framework that allows for variation in individual building styles whilst maintaining an overall coherent and identifiable theme for the place as a whole.

There are a number of related elements that contribute to visual and functional continuity:

- consistent building heights, massing, scale, overall organisation of building facades, with a clear address to the street
- a continuous developed edge along streets that gives clear definition to the street space
- continuity and rhythm at ground level, that is, similarities in quality and style of building materials, consistent relationship between solid and glazed elements, clearly defined ground and upper storeys
- functional groupings of associated activities which have similar building requirements.

The built form in St Marys Town Centre

Development along Queen Street, St Marys generally presents a uniform address to the public domain. Buildings are oriented to the street, are generally one or two storeys in height and have consistent building lines adjacent to the wide public footpaths. Awnings provide shade and shelter to pedestrians on both sides of Queen Street. However, there is no defining entry to the centre, either from the Great Western Highway at the south or from the railway station to the north.

The existing built form is generally consistent with the elements that contribute to visual and functional continuity as identified above. However, as the demand for redevelopment increases within the centre, a consistent approach will be required to ensure that the new built form will also provide for development that is coherent and provides continuity to the public domain. Good urban design aims for continuous, enclosing streetwalls, consistent building setbacks and heights, and cohesion and repetition in the architectural composition of buildings to reinforce the perception of the street as a defined space.

⁷ C. Paumier, op cit, 131

Step 9: Strategies and actions to achieve a high quality built form in St Marys

Step 9	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
9.1	Prepare detailed planning and design guidelines	Guidelines to be incorporated into a Town Centre Development Control Plan and utilise precinct control plans. (Refer to Step 4 and Step 10)	Council	2006 / 2008
9.2	Town Centre Design Review Panel	Investigate and identify preferred model for a Design Review Panel, including composition and terms of reference	Council	2006 / 2008

Step 10: Providing the Right Planning, Development and Implementation Framework

Traditional regulatory approaches to planning for town centres have struggled to deliver vibrant centres which are people centred. A planning system which is heavily based on zoning and the segregation of land uses does not provide for the creation of places that “people will find so special that they will visit them repeatedly, invest in them and choose them as residences” (ULI, 2002). Where centres have developed which exhibit a strong sense of place, this has generally been accidental rather than as a result of a clearly articulated and implemented plan. To transform town centres it is therefore essential to move from a system of segregated land uses to a focus on mixed-use development and place making.

To secure the revitalisation of the St Marys Town Centre it is critical to create the right regulatory environment which provides for and promotes the types of development which will contribute to attainment of the vision and provides for the creation of the “place” that is St Marys.

It is also vital to the success of the Strategy that regulatory controls provide for partnerships in the implementation of the vision. It is important to recognise that public commitment in the Centre through measures such as upgrading of the public domain and government investment in key projects will act as catalysts for private investment. It is similarly important to ensure that development within the centre is competitive from a regional perspective, that is, development returns are equal to, if not greater than, other similarly sized centres. In this regard it is essential that regulatory costs, such as car parking requirements or development contributions do not “price St Marys out of the market” and result in a leaking of investment to other centres.

To this effect the strategies identified which seek to achieve the vision need to be underpinned by planning controls and development guidelines which provide for a form of development that supports and drives the realisation of the vision.

The existing planning controls in the St Marys Town Centre permit a mix of commercial and residential development, however opportunities for residential development have not been taken up to date. The design controls for residential flat buildings require a large site area with generous building setbacks, which is nearly impossible to achieve in St Marys Town Centre as extensive site amalgamation would be required given the existing subdivision and ownership patterns. In addition, high development costs associated with Council’s car parking code has further restricted development potential to date.

As noted above, the implementation of a clear planning framework for achieving the vision and for coordinating changes in the Centre’s physical structure is critical. The key is to ensure that the planning controls are tested so that the resulting built form is understood and agreed upon at the outset, and so that developers can be confident that development that meets the planning parameters is also economically viable.

A new planning regulatory framework for the St Marys Town Centre should aim to achieve the following:

- Through education, prescription, guidance and example, a high quality urban environment which is consistent with the vision and which provides for flexibility and innovation.
- A mix of land uses which can respond to market demand but which also can evolve over time in response to changing community needs and which do not give primacy to one land use to the exclusion of others (that is, encourage residential development to the extent that commercial is no longer viable).
- A development and investment environment within the centre which is financially attractive when compared with other similar centres.

- Car parking requirements which adopt a traffic demand management approach based on need and accessibility while at the same time providing good accessibility for the full range of centre users (that is, shoppers, workers, commuters, visitors etc).
- A healthy environment which contributes to the physical, mental and social well being of residents, workers and visitors through equitable access, walkability, opportunities for social interaction, a safe environment and appropriate recreational opportunities, services and facilities.

Council is already streamlining its approvals process, to ensure that development applications are assessed and determined within a specified timeframe (provided adequate information is submitted). This is aimed at providing developers with a guarantee of service, to improve certainty and reduce holding costs associated with the approval process.

Step 10 Strategies and Actions to provide the right planning, development and implementation framework

Step 10	Strategy	Policy Action	Responsibility	Time Frame
10.1	Planning Controls	Prepare a plan showing the future structure of the Centre, including the hierarchy of streets, squares, laneways, parks and their character/function and future environmental qualities.	Council	2006
10.2		Prepare a draft local environmental plan which identifies appropriate zones, land uses etc.	Council	2006 / 2008
10.3		Investigate opportunities for encouraging appropriate development in the Centre, including identifying Council owned land / buildings for redevelopment	Council	2006 / 2008
10.4		Prepare a Town Centre Development Control Plan which will identify the broad development controls to apply in the Town Centre	Council	2006 / 2008
10.5		Encourage building forms, construction methods and tenure arrangements to enable building adaptation for commercial and/or residential uses.	Council	2006 / 2008
10.6		Review State Government and other relevant 'active health' policy documents, and incorporate appropriate requirements into the DCP.	Council	2006 / 2008
10.7		Prepare detailed precinct plans which: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identifies the future structure of the centre, ▪ Provides for a built form which is of a high quality, fine grained and which gives priority to the pedestrian and public domain, ▪ Details a range of planning and development controls aimed at achieving visual coherence and a unified urban structure, ▪ Ensures that buildings are able to be adapted for a range of commercial and / or residential uses over time. 	Council	2006 / 2008
10.8	Viability Analysis	Undertake a viability analysis of the proposed planning controls	Council	2006 / 2007
10.9	Town Centre Design Review Panel	Investigate and identify preferred model for a Design Review Panel, including composition and terms of reference	Council	2006 / 2008
10.10	Funding Plan	Prepare a funding plan to support the implementation of the Town Centre Strategy including investigating: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Viable transport solutions ▪ Contribution Plans ▪ Developer agreements ▪ Partnerships ▪ Grants and other funding opportunities ▪ State/Commonwealth government partnerships ▪ Council's existing programs and services 	Council	2006 / 2007
10.11	Stage Works to deliver early outcomes	Prepare a Staging Plan for Public Works that will improve the Public Domain in accordance with the recommendations of Step 4 Creating Friendly and Attractive places and spaces in Penrith.	Council and Town Centre Association	2006 / 2007

St Marys Town Centre – Activity Precincts



St Marys Town Centre – Activity Precincts

Generally the identified activity precincts acknowledge and reinforce existing patterns of use in the Town Centre. The intention is to allow for a clearly legible series of precincts that define the retail and commercial centre whilst promoting mixed use to be integrated appropriately. The inclusion of the shopping centres into the fabric of the Town Centre strikes a balance between the benefits of street retail life and the convenience of shopping centres.

Precinct 1 – Queen Street Hub (Mixed Use)

The 'hub' of activities – the focus of the town centre – active uses and a vibrant street life with cafes, restaurants and community activities locate here.

A two storey maximum height is maintained at street frontage in order to allow plenty of light into the street, providing ideal tree growth and sunny sidewalk dining conditions. Access to residential development via rear lanes. Pedestrian permeability is improved creating better connections between the town and adjacent residential areas.

Precinct 2 – Highway Entry (Mixed Use)

Development within this precinct provides a gateway statement improving the sense of arrival to the St Marys town centre. Public art and high quality architectural buildings are created and provide prominent statements.

Buildings are kept to 4 storeys adjacent to the highway in order to retain important views to the Blue Mountains. Future development options within this precinct provides for better connections with Queen Street and public open spaces within the Village Green precinct. Improved signage and pedestrian facilities result in better linkages between the town centre and the Community/ Cultural precinct.

Precinct 3 – Village Green (Mixed Use)

There is a focus on community uses within this precinct. Future redevelopment of the Shopping Village results in an improved pedestrian connection to Queen Street. Public parks (Lang Park, Kokoda Park and Coachmans Park) and car parks within the precinct are reconfigured to improve the connectivity of this precinct with Queen Street. Community uses are integrated with the shopping centre. The precinct provides for a vibrant street life and night-time activities (such as a theatre) are encouraged in this precinct.

Precinct 4 – Station Entry (Mixed Use)

This precinct provides a key focus to the revitalisation of St Marys; and becomes a safe and exciting place to be; it is well lit and heavily used by pedestrians; traffic flows are limited and upgrades to public infrastructure is provided and there is street art installed. New development incorporates residential uses that overlook the street – the shopping centre increases its active frontages and provides better connectivity to Queen Street. New buildings do not create overshadowing on the street.

Precinct 5 – Community/ Cultural (Mixed Use)

Currently this locality is the home for a variety of community and cultural uses. These activities are encouraged and consolidated with a future arts/cultural incubator locating in this precinct. New development retains important views to the Blue Mountains and all new development is sympathetic to historic buildings which are located within the vicinity.

